

# Culture Wise **INDIA**

The Essential Guide to Culture,  
Customs & Business Etiquette

Noël Gama





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& Business Etiquette


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## THE AUTHOR

Noël Gama trained as a copywriter and is also an HR professional with over 25 years’ experience. He has authored corporate manuals and edited corporate newsletters, besides being a columnist for a national news magazine in India, where he lives in the former Portuguese enclave of Daman. Noël’s passion is the study of cultures and his trademark Blog2Book projects caught the attention of a Consul General of Portugal in India, who recently launched one of his projects on Indo-Portuguese culture, which is now being turned into four books. Noël was the winner of the ‘Writer of the Year 2007’ award from the Writers Bureau (UK) and the American Writers & Artists Institute (USA). Culture Wise India is his first book.

## What readers & reviewers have said about Survival Books:

‘If you need to find out how France works then this book is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions.’

**Living France**

‘It’s everything you always wanted to ask but didn’t for fear of the contemptuous put down. The best English-language guide. Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to compliment the traditional guidebook.’

**Swiss News**

‘Rarely has a ‘survival guide’ contained such useful advice – This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters. – In a word, if you’re planning to move to the US or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.’

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**The Riviera Reporter**

‘A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended.’

**Reader**

‘In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it.’

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‘The amount of information covered is not short of incredible. I thought I knew enough about my birth country. This book has proved me wrong. Don’t go to France without it. Big mistake if you do. Absolutely priceless!’

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‘When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading ‘Read Me First’, or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying ‘IMPORTANT - follow the instructions carefully’. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. – It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. – Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.’

#### **Living France**

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

#### **The Times**

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

#### **France in Print**

A concise, thorough account of the Do’s and DON’T’s for a foreigner in Switzerland – Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

#### **American Citizens Abroad**

‘I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what’s involved. Gets my vote!’

#### **Reader**

‘A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don’t even think of buying without reading this book first!’

#### **Everything Spain**

‘We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.’

#### **ICI (Switzerland) AG**



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Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab

# INTRODUCTION

If you're planning a trip to India or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in *Culture Wise India* invaluable. Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few days or planning to stay for a lifetime, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and India is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions and discover the Indian way of doing things - whether it's sharing the afternoon *chai* and *samosa* with neighbours or toasting a work colleague's success with Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL), learning Hindi or deciphering Hinglish, dancing the Dandya Ras or performing a graceful *namaste*, your personal experience of 'Incredible India' will be unique.

India is a land of contrasts and contradictions: where foreigners are welcomed as honoured guests despite the huge cultural divide; where people are prejudiced against the West yet obsessed with it; where there's drought and floods simultaneously in different parts of the country; where people are spiritual yet materialistic; where bovine traffic enjoys right of way while luxury cars totter over potholes; where the obscenely rich minority flaunt their wealth and flout the rules, while the impoverished majority stoically trust in fate. The 'India Shining' reflects all this and shines on.

*Culture Wise India* is essential reading for anyone planning to visit India, including tourists (particularly travellers planning to stay a number of weeks or months), business people, migrants, retirees, holiday homeowners and transferees. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance your understanding of Indian and the Indian people. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a fish out of water. It isn't, however, simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life in India.

A period spent in India is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in India and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.

**Shubh Kaamna! (good luck!)**

*Noël Gama*  
February 2009



peacock, India's national bird



## 1.

## A CHANGE OF CULTURE

**W**ith almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad has never been more accessible, and current migration patterns suggest that it has never been more popular. However, although globalisation means the world has in effect ‘shrunk’, every country is still a ‘world’ of its own with a unique culture – and India is certainly no exception.

‘There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.’

Robert Louis Stevenson  
(Scottish writer)

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons which are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause, as non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country and sometimes with little to do other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns – which may include the children’s education and worries about loved ones at home – can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture – for example, your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic conditions, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change and bring balance and meaning to your life is the principal indicator of how well you’ll adjust to a

different country, culture and business environment.

### INDIA IS DIFFERENT

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. Even in a country where you speak the language fluently you’ll find that many aspects of the culture are surprisingly foreign, despite the cosy familiarity engendered by cinema, television and books. India is perceived by many foreigners – particularly the British – as a relatively easy option because English is widely spoken, it has traditional links with Britain, it’s a multicultural society, and there are well established foreign communities in the major cities.

However, when you move to India you’ll be faced with a host of challenges

– possibly including a new job, a new home and a new physical environment – which can be overwhelming – and all this before you even encounter the local culture! You may have left a job in your home country where you held a senior position, were extremely competent and knew everyone. In India, you may be virtually a trainee and not know any of your colleagues, and the sensation that you’re starting from scratch can be demoralising.

India has many extremes of climate and weather, and you mustn’t underestimate the effects that this can have on you. Extreme conditions of heat (and humidity) can lead to a lack of energy, poor sleep and dehydration. In the summer in most parts of India, 24-hour air-conditioning is common and if you aren’t used to this it can be draining.

Even if you move to a major city, many things that you’re used to and take for granted in your home country may not be available in India, e.g. certain kinds of food, opportunities to enjoy your favourite hobby or sport, books and television programmes in your language. Even ‘Indian English’ takes some getting used to. This lack of ‘home comforts’ can wear you down. You’ll also have to contend with the lack of a local support network. At home you had a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and relatives you could rely on for help and support. In India there’s no such network, which can leave you feeling lost.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in India and what you’ll be doing there. If you’re simply going on a short holiday you may not even be aware of many of the cultural differences, although if you are, it will enhance

your enjoyment and may save you from a few embarrassing or confusing moments. However, if you’re planning a business trip or intend to spend an extended period in India – perhaps working, studying or even living there permanently – **it’s essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.**

**‘If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay at home.’**

James A. Michener (American writer)

## CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country or even moving to a new environment in their home country (where the culture, and in some cases language, may vary considerably by region and social class). Culture shock is a common experience among those who travel, live, work or study abroad, when in addition to adapting to new social rules and values, they may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress. It manifests itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what’s appropriate or inappropriate. You literally feel like a ‘fish out of water’.

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar rules of behaviour and cues to social intercourse: when to shake hands and what to say when you meet people; how to buy goods and services; when and how much to tip; how to use

an ATM or the telephone; when to accept and refuse invitations; and when to take statements seriously and when not to.

These cues, which may be words, gestures or facial expressions, are acquired over a lifetime and are as much a part of our culture and customs as the language we speak and our beliefs. Our peace of mind and social efficiency depend on these cues, most of which are unconsciously recognised.

The symptoms of culture shock are essentially psychological. However, there are also physical symptoms including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (e.g. colds and headaches) and more serious psychosomatic illnesses brought on by depression. Culture shock can even cause physical pain. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.

### Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock – often experienced when moving to a country with a different language – usually follows a number of stages. The names of these may vary, as may the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. **Honeymoon stage** – The first stage, commonly known as the 'honeymoon' stage, usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks after arrival (although it can last longer, particularly if you're



insulated from the usual pressures of life). This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when you find everything an exciting and interesting novelty. The feeling is similar to being on holiday or a short trip abroad, when you generally experience only the positive effects of a change of culture (although this depends very much on where you're from and the country you're visiting – see box).

2. **Rejection or distress stage** – The second stage is usually completely opposite to the first and is essentially negative and a period of crisis, as the initial excitement and 'holiday' feeling wears off and you start to cope with the real conditions of daily life – except of course that life is nothing like anything you've previously experienced. This can happen after only a few weeks and is characterised by a general feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness. Physical exhaustion, brought on by a change of time zone, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish, is a symptom of this stage.



You may also experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television and reading newspapers from your home country, eating food from home and socialising with expatriates who speak your language. You may also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture. Your home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered.

- 3. Flight stage** – The third stage is often known as the ‘flight’ stage (because of the overwhelming desire to escape) and is usually the one that lasts the longest and is the most difficult to cope with. During this period you

may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people. You may experience impatience and frustration at not being understood and discontentment, sadness and incompetence. These feelings are inevitable when you’re trying to adapt to a new culture that’s very different from that of your home country, and they’re exacerbated by the fact that you can see nothing positive or good about the new country, but focus exclusively on the negative aspects.

You may become hostile and develop an aggressive attitude towards the country. Other people will sense this and in some cases either respond in a confrontational manner or try to avoid you. You may have difficulties with the language, your house, job or children’s school, transportation ... even simple tasks such as shopping



may be fraught with problems, and the fact that local people are largely indifferent to these problems only makes matters worse. Even if they try to help, they may be unable to understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic to you and your problems.

Transition between your old culture and customs and those of your new country is a difficult process and takes time, during which there can be strong feelings of dissatisfaction. The period of adjustment can last as long as six months, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and (although rare) those who never get over the 'flight' stage and are forced to return home.

#### 4. **Recovery or autonomy stage**—

The fourth stage is where you begin to integrate and adjust to the new culture, and accept the customs of the country as simply another way of living. The environment doesn't change – what changes is your attitude towards it. You become more competent with the language and you also feel more comfortable with the customs of the host country and can move around without anxiety. However, you still have problems with some of the social cues and you don't understand everything people say (particularly colloquialisms and idioms). Nevertheless, you've largely adjusted to the new culture and start to feel more at home and familiar with the country and your place in it, realising that it has its good as well as bad points.

5. **Reverse culture shock stage** – The fifth stage occurs when you return to your home country. You may find that many things have changed (you'll also have changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your own country. If you've been away for a long time and have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your homeland. Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

The above stages occur at different times depending on the individual and his circumstances, and everyone has his own way of reacting to them, with the result that some stages last longer and are more difficult to cope with than others, while others are shorter and easier to overcome.

**The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land.'**

G. K. Chesterton (English writer)

#### **Reducing the Effects**

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there's no escaping the phenomenon; however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably and there are a number of things you can do before leaving home and immediately on arrival:

- **Positive attitude** – The key to reducing the negative effects of

culture shock is to have a positive attitude towards India (whether you're visiting or planning to live there). If you don't look forward to a trip or relocation, you should question why you're going. There's no greater guarantee of unhappiness in a foreign environment than taking your prejudices with you.

It's important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals' feelings, and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible, which will help you understand why they react as they do. Bear in mind that they have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'programmed' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour, the chances are that your attitudes or behaviour will be equally puzzling to the natives.

**'Travellers never think that THEY are the foreigners.'**

Mason Cooley (American aphorist)

- **Research** – Discover as much as possible about India before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many surprises as it might otherwise.

Reading up on India and its culture before leaving home will help you familiarise yourself with the local customs and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. Being aware of many of the differences will make you better prepared to deal with them. You're less likely to be upset

by real or imaginary cultural slights, or to offend the locals by making cultural gaffes. Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion (or worse) makes it easier to cope with it.

- There are literally hundreds of publications about India as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see **Appendices B and C**). Many sites provide access to expatriates already living in India who can answer questions and provide useful advice. There are also 'notice boards' on many websites where you can post messages or questions. Try to find people in your area who have visited India and talk to them about it. Some companies organise briefings for families who are about to relocate abroad.
- **Visit India first** – If you're planning to live or work in India for a number of years or even permanently, it's important to visit the country before making the leap to see whether you think you'll enjoy living there and be able to cope with the culture. Rent a property before buying a home and don't burn your bridges until you're certain that you've made the right decision.
- **Learn Hindi** – As well as adopting a positive attitude, overcoming the language barrier will be your greatest weapon in combating culture shock and making your time in India enjoyable. The ability to speak Hindi (or local language) and understand the local vernacular (see **Chapter 5**) isn't just a useful tool that will allow you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc., but the key to understanding India and its culture. If you can speak Hindi, even at a basic

level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened. You may not be a natural linguist, and learning Hindi can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance virtually anyone can learn enough Hindi to participate in the local culture.

- **Be proactive** – Join in the activities of the local people, which could be a carnival, a religious festival or some sporting activity. There are often local clubs where you can play sport or keep fit, be artistic, learn to cook local dishes, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll also meet new people and make friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club – perhaps because your Hindi isn't good enough – you can always participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the major cities.

Look upon a period spent in India as an opportunity to acquire new skills, attitudes and perspectives. A change



of culture can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.

- **Talk to other expatriates** – Although they may deny it, many expatriates have been through exactly what you're experiencing, and faced the same feelings of disorientation. Even if they cannot provide you with advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone and that it gets better over time.

However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates, as this will alienate you from the local culture and make it much harder to integrate.

- **Keep in touch with home** – Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email and letters will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock.

- **Be happy** – Don't rely on others to make you happy, or you won't find true and lasting happiness. There are things in life which only you can change. Every day we're affected negatively by things over which we have little or no control, but to complain about them only makes us unhappier. So be your own best friend and nurture your own capacity for happiness.

Culture shock is an unavoidable part of travelling, living and working abroad, but if you're aware of it and take steps to lessen its effects before you go and while you're abroad, the period of adjustment will be shortened and its negative and depressing consequences reduced.



## FAMILIES IN INDIA

Family life may be completely different in India and relationships can become strained under the stress of adapting to culture shock. Your family may find itself in a completely new and possibly alien environment, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be much more luxurious or significantly smaller) and the climate may differ dramatically from that of your home country. If possible, you should prepare your family for as many aspects of the new situation as you can, and explain to your children the differences they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.

**'And that's the wonderful thing about family travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked forever in the scar tissue of your mind.'**

Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)

Culture shock can affect non-working spouses and children more than working

spouses. The husband (the breadwinner is usually the husband) has his work to occupy him, and his activities may not differ much from what he had been accustomed to at home. On the other hand, the wife has to operate in an environment that differs considerably from what she's used to. She will find herself alone more often – a solitude intensified by the fact that there are no

relatives or friends on hand. However, if you're aware that this may arise beforehand, you can act on it and reduce its effects.

Working spouses should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, as the success of a family relocation depends on the ability of the wife and children to adapt to the new culture.

Good communication between family members is vital and you should make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and as a family. Questions should always be invited and, if possible, answered, particularly when asked by children. However difficult the situation may appear at the beginning, it helps to bear in mind you're by no means unique, and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems, and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad.

## MULTICULTURALISM

Coined in Canada in the '70s, multiculturalism is the term used for an

ideology advocating that immigrants integrate into society while retaining and valuing the most important elements of their own culture (including speaking their own language and teaching it to their children).

India is a tolerant, multicultural society, where people from over 100 nationalities live, work and play together in harmony. This has not only greatly enriched the Indian way of life and added to its range of foods, religions, businesses and ideas, but makes it much easier for immigrants to integrate into society. Virtually all ethnic groups in India maintain clubs and societies to which newcomers are warmly welcomed.

In India, migrants are encouraged to maintain their culture and ties with their homeland – rather than abandon them – while being urged to embrace Indian values. Consequently, the country has a low level of inter-ethnic conflict and high levels of cooperation. However, marriage between different ethnic groups isn't common.

## A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living abroad have been highlighted simply in order to help you prepare for and adjust to a new life. The vast majority of people who travel and live abroad naturally experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **but most never suffer the most debilitating effects of culture shock.**

As with settling in and making friends anywhere, even in your home

country, the most important thing is to be considerate, kind, open, humble and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere in India – or any other country. Treat India and its people with respect and they will reciprocate.

The majority of foreigners in India would agree that, all things considered, they love living there – and are in no hurry to return home. A period spent in India is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager. We trust that this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of life in India and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

**'Twenty years from now you'll be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.'**

Mark Twain (American writer)





Sadhu (holy man)

## 2.

# WHO ARE THE INDIANS?

**D**isembark at any airport, railway station, bus station or dock in India, and it hits you. No, not the heat or dust, but the mass of humanity – homogeneous yet unimaginably diverse: seven religions, at least 30 ethnic groups and over 300 languages, the result of millennia of migration and invasion.

The world's largest democracy, with a population – rapidly growing – of over a billion, is a major player in the global economy, ranking fourth in terms of purchasing power, according to the IMF and the World Bank, with an annual GDP of US\$3.8 trillion. This call-centre superpower carries out back-office processing for over 40 per cent of the world's top 500 corporations.

With a middle class as numerous as the population of the US and degree-holders outnumbering that of France, India, currently the world's twelfth-largest consumer market, is predicted to be the fifth-largest by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute). According to Visa, the world's largest retail electronic payment network, annual commercial spending in India was US\$2.3 trillion in 2007, an increase of almost 25 per cent over 2006.

However, despite the economic and technological advances of recent decades, the world's oldest civilisation (albeit with the youngest population) has remained culturally little changed for thousands of years, enticing today's sophisticated travellers as it once did intrepid explorers and conquerors such as Alexander the Great, Marco Polo and Vasco da Gama.

'I had no shoes and complained, until I met a man who had no feet'

Indian Proverb

To help you familiarise yourself with India and the Indians, this chapter provides information about its history, the Indian character and the country's cultural icons.

### TIMELINE

The history of India is as colourful as its women's clothing and food. Listed below are the important events that not only shaped its history but also had a profound impact on Indian culture.

#### First Arrivals

**400,000 years ago** – *Homo sapiens* began to spread throughout a large part of the Indian subcontinent (which now includes Bangladesh and Pakistan as well as India) in wave after wave of migration from what is now Iran. Archaeological excavations have unearthed Mesolithic sites in the Chotta Nagpur area of central



### Demographics

**Population:** 1.15bn.

**Population density:** 349 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (903 per mi<sup>2</sup>), but Delhi has a density of 9,340 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (24,172 per mi<sup>2</sup>), Mumbai (Bombay) 21,880 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (56,645 per mi<sup>2</sup>) and Kolkata (Calcutta) a huge 24,760 per km<sup>2</sup> (64,100 per mi<sup>2</sup>).

**Largest cities:** Mumbai (18mn), Kolkata (12.9mn), Delhi (11.7mn), Hyderabad (6.8mn), Chennai/Madras (6.6mn), Bangalore (5.5mn).

**Foreign population:** 335,000.

**Largest expatriate groups:** Americans, British, Germans, French, Swedish.

**State religion:** India is a secular country.

**Most followed religions:** Hinduism (81.3%), Islam (12%), Christianity (2.3%).

India and south of the Krishna River. The Bhimbetka caves near Bhopal are famous for their Mesolithic paintings.

**2500BC** – Excavated tablets and pottery depicting animals and ornately coiffed women, as well as elaborate jewellery, indicate a sophisticated artisan society in the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in the Indus River valley, regarded as the cradle of Indian civilisation.

**1700BC** – The Indus valley civilisation falls to tectonic upheavals, which cause a series of floods.

**1700-200BC** – Aryan (or Vedic) warriors sweep in from the northern Steppes to conquer India (as they have Persia and elsewhere) but end up mixing with the indigenous population.

**326BC** – Alexander of Macedon ('Alexander the Great') crosses the Indus and wins the epic Battle of Hydaspes against local ruler Raja Puru (Porus). Two years later he withdraws from India, his soldiers pleading to return home.

### Empires & Dynasties

**321BC** – Chandragupta Maurya creates an empire in the vacuum left by Alexander's retreating army, ruling (by force) over the whole of the Indus Valley.

**273BC** – Emperor Ashoka (Chandragupta Maurya's grandson) leads the Mauryans in their occupation of most of what is modern India. For the next 37 years Ashoka governs the largest area under a single 'ruler' until the British occupation, etching his principles on magnificently sculpted pillars and boulders – the first written language in India since that of the ancient city of Harappa – before dying in 232BC.

**155-130BC** – After the brief rule of the Maurya dynasty, the Greeks return and expand their power into the Punjab, resulting in greater contact between India and the Mediterranean world.

**320AD** – The Gupta dynasty revives many of Ashoka's principles and makes vast leaps in architecture, sculpture, painting and poetry. The period is considered a Golden Age in Indian history.

**Fifth century** – Huns, Turks and Mongols begin infiltrating India via Afghanistan.

**800** – Arabs begin settling (for trading purposes) on the Malabar Coast in the south of India.

**1210-1526** – There's continuous Muslim rule, known as the Delhi



Jai Mahal 'Water Palace', Jaipur

Sultanate, mostly in the south of the country.

**1398** – The Turkish army under Timor invades India from Samarqand and plunders Delhi.

**1497** – The Portuguese come to Goa (now a state) and remain until 1961, integrating into the life of the state, including its enclaves in Daman and Diu (now union territories), with the result that the culture of these areas is quite different from that of the rest of the country.

**1526** – The Delhi Sultanate is overcome by Zahiruddin Babur. He establishes the Moghul Empire, the greatest of its rulers being Akbar the Great, who fosters the arts. In the 17th century, the Marathas, led by Shivaji, weaken Moghul rule, the Rajputs openly revolt and by the end of the century, the Moghul Empire collapses.

### The British

**1600** – Queen Elizabeth I grants a charter to the East India Company (originally intended to trade with the East Indies) to trade with India. The Company (later to merge with its principal rival and, in 1708, renamed

the United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies, but known as the Honourable East India Company) creates a network of roads, canals and railways, introduces a legal system, administrative procedures and an education system, whereby knowledge of English literature and science is to be imparted to the native population through the medium of the English language. The indigenous mercantile capitalist economy is restructured to serve the interests of the British, and many local religious, cultural and military centres are dismantled, thereby reducing levels of literacy.

**1757** – Although the British have ruled the areas surrounding the East India Company's factories since 1600, Robert Clive's ('Clive of India') victory at the Battle of Plassey is often regarded as the beginning of British rule.

**1857** – The 'Indian mutiny' is triggered by the rumour that rifle cartridges were greased with cow and pig fat (abhorrent to Hindus and Muslims respectively) but is suppressed by the British.

**1858** – The mutiny prompts the British to buy out the East India