

## Cultural Cues and Clues for the American in India

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Newcomers to India, however extensive their previous study about the country, are likely at times to find themselves in baffling or embarrassing situations as a result of their ignorance of local attitudes and customs. Patterns of behavior that were perfectly acceptable at home may arouse responses of indignation, derision or even anger. Adults accustomed to handling social relationships with poise and satisfaction may become disturbed when they are forced in the role of children who are not quite sure how to get things done or how to deal effectively with people. Not until they go abroad do many people realize how much they are a product of their own national culture.

A part of the pleasure of living in a new country comes in learning to understand and adapt to its culture. The great variety of people and customs which any visitor encounters means that he inevitably learns most effectively through his own experience. No one can prepare or orient him entirely. Americans coming to India, however, will perhaps feel more comfortable if they at least know how to avoid the most obvious social errors, those actions and attitudes almost certain to arouse embarrassment or resentment.

The following comments and suggestions have been collected with the help of American Fulbright students and Indian friends living in different parts of the country. The recommendations are of course subject to modification. Some of them may be inappropriate in relationships with highly urbanized Indians or with those who have grown up outside the traditional Hindu culture. A visitor who remains in the major cities, meeting primarily professional people, may spend most of his time in sophisticated circles where he feels quite at home. Even here, though, the newcomer is likely to be more readily welcomed if he is sensitive to the traditions of the country, and if he wants to discover something of the India in which the majority of the population live, he will need to seek contacts where communication is more difficult and where a greater understanding of local customs is desirable.

The visitor will gradually learn which suggestions need to be ignored or modified because of regional, religious, class and individual differences. Until that time, however, it is probably good that he err on the side of local customs. This is not meant to suggest that a newcomer needs to feel intimidated, or worry that he will always be making mistakes. He will not be expected to know or follow all the traditional Indian customs; and humor, tact and good will can go a long way in making his initial experiences in India happy and rewarding. The following comments will perhaps help him, though, to be more sensitive, understanding and effective in his relations with Indian people.

## Purity and Pollution

Both Americans and Indians generally feel that they have a highly developed regard for individual cleanliness, but convention plays a large part in determining the implementation of that ideal. A number of Western habits seem unsanitary to many Indians - shaking hands, sitting in the dirty water of a bathtub, using dry toilet paper, carrying around a used handkerchief, and eating without having taken an early morning bath. The Indian alternatives will be mentioned later.

The question of purity, however, where more than cleanliness is involved, is likely to be a more sensitive matter than that of sanitation. The avoidance of contamination or pollution affects many areas of Indian life.

Reverence for animal life has traditionally relegated butchers, tanners and shoemakers to a very low social position in India, and contact with shoes is generally considered defiling or degrading. A shoe-beating, therefore, is one of the most humiliating forms of punishment; and people of status may not want to polish their own shoes or be seen carrying them to a repair shop. For foreigners, an extremely important recommendation is that they keep their shoes on the floor or the ground. If putting your feet up on chairs, tables, beds or train benches, first take off your shoes. Always remove them before entering a temple, mosque or tomb. Shoes are worn inside many Indian homes, but it is safest to follow the example of your hosts. Some people leave their shoes at the door; others remove them before entering certain parts of the home such as the kitchen, dining area and worship room. If you accidentally touch anyone with your shoes, be sure to apologize profusely. Be especially careful in climbing down from an upper bunk on a train, as to touch a person's head with your shoes is a very serious offence.

Hindus are particularly sensitive about the pollution of food when it is touched by anyone outside their caste or religion. So when in a bazaar, do not touch any cooked foods such as sweets which are on display. Fruit and raw vegetables, though, can usually be handled without causing offence. When drinking from a water container used by others, avoid touching your lips to it. In an Indian home it is best not to help yourself from a water jug or common dish of food, waiting instead for it to be served to you. Don't serve leftovers to guests or offer a person anything from which you have taken a bite or a sip. Other suggestions about serving food will be discussed later.

It is wise not to handle or sniff garlands of flowers displayed in a bazaar. These are usually intended as offerings to deities and may be polluted by your touch.

Indians usually avoid licking postage stamps, since these have been handled by other people. Water for moistening stamps is found at most post-office windows.

The left hand is another source of pollution, understandably so since it is used for toilet purposes. When eating with your fingers, use only the right hand. Whenever possible, you should also use the right hand for giving and accepting things, and for making the salaam gesture of greeting and farewell. If a gift is too big for one hand, both may be used, but never the left hand alone. And by the way, a gift accidentally dropped in giving is often thought to be grudgingly given and to be bad luck for the receiver.

Sweepers are generally considered unclean, usually being the only people who will clean toilets or touch dead animals. So don't be surprised if your cook does not want the sweeper to enter the kitchen. And don't ask the sweeper to help in buying or preparing food, especially if you are having guests. Many people feel that handling a broom is demeaning, and to be struck by one is a great insult.

Women during their periods are also considered unclean in much of Indian society. They usually do not take part in social gatherings or in preparing food, and avoid touching plants or other living things. So a Western woman should make no mention of her "condition", and one should not press a man for details if he says his wife is "not well."

Muslims consider the pig unclean, and do not eat ham, pork or bacon. They are not supposed to eat other kinds of meat unless the animal has been slaughtered according to a particular ritual.

Most Indians, and especially Hindus, do not eat beef, because of their special reverence for the cow. Other animals with special sanctity are snakes, monkeys and peacocks. Many Hindus are complete vegetarians, which means that fish and egg dishes (including baked goods containing eggs) are precluded. Some high caste Hindus also avoid onions and garlic.

The ears are traditionally considered as sacred appendages. To pull or box someone's ears is a severe insult or punishment. You may see a person grasp his own earlobes, though, in a gesture of absolution which may express repentance or imply something like "I swear to God . . ."

High caste Hindus often wear a "sacred thread" of nine strands across the chest and one shoulder. This is placed over the ear to avoid contamination when going to the latrine. Other objects of special sanctity are the tulsi plant, the pipal tree, and the purifying waters of the Ganges.

#### Women in India

Generalizations about women in India, like all generalizations about the country, are full of exceptions. In urbanized Indian society one can find many women as active, independent and forthright as their

Western counterparts, and many Indians have come to accept and even admire the position of women in the West. But in general, the qualities traditionally most admired in women of India are modesty of manner, shyness, and self-effacement.

American women, especially if unmarried, should be aware that their appearance and behavior may be misinterpreted. Just living and traveling alone is unusual. Inviting a man to enter your room, or smoking or drinking in public, may be interpreted as a sign of moral laxity. Talking freely to men with whom you are unacquainted might be thought of as an invitation for advances.

At places such as ticket counters, a woman will often be given preferential treatment in India. At meals, though, the men are sometimes expected to go first.

Many American women report that they attract fewer stares in Indian than in American dress. A sari needs to be draped with great care, though, and the accompanying blouse and footwear should be appropriate. When wearing Western dress, you can create a more modest impression by using a headcovering, sleeves, and skirts below the knee. Girls should not wear shorts in public, and should wear full skirts or Indian dress when invited to a place where they might have to sit on the floor.

Silver jewelry is worn chiefly by village and lower class women in most parts of India at the present time, though there are signs that this is changing. Upper class ladies usually prefer gold, plastic or glass ornaments. Married Indian women almost always wear some jewelry, usually including glass bangles, when they go out. But widows wear no make-up or jewelry. The dot on the forehead of a woman is not an indication of religion. It is used for decoration, and in some parts of India shows that the woman is married. In north India, a red line down the part of a woman's hair indicates that she is married.

Relations in public between men and women are usually much more restrained in India than in the West. American men should be careful to avoid touching members of the opposite sex - unless, of course, in a situation that obviously calls for it! Especially with ladies, one usually uses the namaste form of greeting - pressing the palms of the hands together and bowing the head slightly. Men usually do not speak to ladies unless they are well acquainted, nor do they ask to be introduced to a woman. Staring at a lady is considered improper, though American women will find this usually does not apply to them. At most social gatherings except in the largest cities, one can expect formal or informal segregation of the sexes.

After knocking at a door, men will sometimes step to the side so that when the door is opened they will not unwittingly see any ladies of the household who are in seclusion. Orthodox Muslim women

are usually kept from the view of all men outside their immediate families, and this custom is also observed in some orthodox Hindu households.

When visiting in a traditional home, men should not expect or ask to meet the women of the house. They will appear when and if it is proper for them to do so. The wife (and sometimes the host also) frequently eats only after the guests have finished their meal. If women are present in a group, you need not worry if they are not speaking or seem to be left out of the conversation. Except among very urbanized Indians, do not comment on or praise a wife's beauty you may be suggesting an improper interest in her.

Any public display of affection between the sexes is likely to be frowned on in India, and Westerners would do well to show discretion in that regard. Even married couples here would ordinarily not hold hands in public, and kissing in public (even kissing goodbye at a railway station) would be out of the question. Indian men, however, frequently hold hands with each other. Men do not undress fully in front of each other, though, even in swimming-pool dressing rooms.

Whistling under any circumstances is generally considered impolite, but especially in front of elders or at a girl. A wink may also be considered an insult, or as a proposition rather than as a sign that one is joking.

Since even talking to a lone girl in public is likely to cause comment, it is obviously difficult to date single Indian girls except in some very atypical circles.

### Friendship and Hospitality

Americans should be aware that Indians have strongly defined concepts of friendship and hospitality, and to be a friend or a guest here is a less casual matter than is often true at home.

The routine forms that Americans associate with politeness and friendliness may seem less in evidence at times in India. But when someone feels that friendship has been established, he is likely to assume what are considered the privileges of a friend - to drop in at any time without advance notice, to sit around at length and talk or read your books and magazines, to stay for meals, and to ask for occasional favors such as advice and assistance in getting to the United States for a visit or study. If you consider such behavior to be an imposition, great tact will be required in order to avoid misunderstandings. As a result of differences in custom, Indians may feel that Americans are insincere in their initial friendliness.

A visitor may be embarrassed at the generous hospitality offered by people who are obviously going beyond their means. Indian tradition puts great stress on the respect due to guests. When visiting Indian friends, one should be aware that his hosts will probably feel obligated to pay all expenses. For a long visit, one should offer to pay for things whenever possible, and not take the first refusal as final. If you are on a scholarship and can say that your government is paying for it, your hosts may accept a contribution that they would otherwise refuse. Generally, though, you will find it almost impossible to pay cash for expenses incurred while staying with an Indian family. Only in the largest cities has the idea of a paying guest begun to be adopted. But contributions can be made in other ways than cash. . . by purchasing food supplies, for example. When going from one city or region to visit people in another, you can please your hosts by taking them fruit and sweets which are specialties of the place from which you have come.

One should be cautious, then, in accepting hospitality which would put a severe financial burden on his host. This does not mean, of course, that you should deny people the pleasure of extending simple hospitality to you. When refreshments are offered in someone's home, it is impolite to refuse. Eating and drinking together are the traditional test of social acceptance, and to refuse for fear of incurring expense to your hosts, or because you question whether the food is sanitary, would be a definite social slight.

If you suggest a movie, meal or trip, don't later put your friends in an awkward situation by expecting them to "go Dutch." The person who makes a proposal is usually expected to pay.

When staying with a foreign resident, American student, or missionary, you should offer to pay for your meals. Missionaries usually have established rates which they charge visitors, since their salaries are low and their hospitality is in great demand, especially in towns where adequate hotel accommodations are not available.

Some Indian people will find it difficult to invite you to their homes because of religious complications, financial difficulties, or because they live in a large joint family; but you can feel free to invite them to your home. If you move into a new area, don't sit around waiting for the neighbors to call. The responsibility usually falls on you to initiate and follow up a contact - to make the first call or offer the first invitation. Making courtesy calls, whether for friendship or business purposes, is on the whole more important in India than in the United States.

Repeat invitations several times, being as specific as possible, and getting a specific response. People may be too polite to say bluntly that they are not able to come. If someone says only "I'll try," he usually means "No." Feel free to ask a man if his wife would like to come along, but don't make it obligatory for her to do so. Indian men are more accustomed than Americans to attending social functions without their wives.

A visitor may announce his arrival at your door with a cough or by ringing his cycle bell; or he may just walk inside, if the front door is unlocked. When someone drops in unexpectedly, always invite him in and offer a seat, no matter how busy you are, unless you are deliberately trying to break off relations with the person. Remember that it is difficult to give advance notice with the scarcity of phones and the difficulties of transportation.

Always offer your visitor something to eat or drink. If nothing else is available, provide at least a glass of water - with apologies. Tea is generally served, always accompanied with milk and sugar, which are usually added and stirred by the host. Indians always serve the milk heated, so as not to cool the drink. Other things that can be kept on hand easily for unexpected visitors are lemon squash (concentrated lemon), dāl mōt (or other salty snacks), anise and cardamom seeds, nuts, biscuits and sweets.

One should never ask how long a guest is planning to stay. If you need to know, use some indirect means of eliciting the information, so as not to suggest that the visitor is unwelcome.

Don't be surprised if your guests arrive late. In India people live less by the clock than in America, but generalizations in this matter are dangerous and until you learn to predict expectations it is probably best to be punctual in most of your own engagements.

In arranging food for visitors, one needs to remember the great variety of dietary customs, some of which have been mentioned previously. You need to know not only what your guests will eat, but also what the cook is willing to prepare. He may also have some religious restrictions which should be ascertained at the time of hiring. Don't hesitate to ask people in advance about their food preferences, but when in doubt, prepare a strictly vegetarian meal. Don't insist that a guest eat your food if he declines repeatedly. Some aspect of your diet or kitchen may make it impossible for him. Orthodox Brahmans can only eat food prepared by Brahmans, and some will not eat or drink from crockery utensils, using only brass. Many vegetarians will not eat anything if a meat dish is present on the table.

When you offer refreshments to a visitor, never take the first refusal as final. Many people feel that courtesy requires them to say no the first time, and sometimes a second time. A third refusal can be taken seriously.

For people with very strict dietary regulations, you will find it easier to offer an invitation to tea in the afternoon. Indians do a lot of their entertaining at that hour, often reserving lunch and dinner invitations for very special friends. Both salty and sweet refreshments are usually served with tea. When food taboos are a problem, you can safely serve fresh and dried fruits, wrapped sweets, and nuts. The tea is usually served after the food, rather than with it.

Many Indians feel that eating hot and cold foods together injures the health. So coffee or tea is almost never served along with ice cream. And ice water would not be served with a hot meal. Coffee and tea are not usually served with lunch or dinner, but there would be no objection to your doing so.

Because of the custom of afternoon tea, evening meals in India usually served later than in the United States. In timing your meals, note that in India conversation usually precedes dining, and guests generally leave soon after they have eaten.

If your guests smoke, it is customary to provide cigarettes for them, but never offer cigarettes to a Sikh or a Parsi unless you are sure that he does not follow the injunctions of his religion. Except in very sophisticated circles, cigarettes should not be offered to ladies either. Don't be surprised if guests flick their cigarette ashes on the floor. This is not a problem where carpets are uncommon and where floors are usually cleaned by sweepers a couple of times a day.

Indians often expect your permission, and may ask for it, to leave your presence. If someone says "May I have your permission?" he is inquiring whether he may go. People of servant status may wait around for you to tell them they can leave.

When guests are leaving, the host should make sure that they have transportation home. If they arrived by rickshaw or taxi, you should offer to call one yourself or send a servant to fetch one. The guests should then be escorted to their transportation, or at least to the gate if they are walking. An Indian host may even offer to accompany you all the way home (to "reach you" there, as the local expression goes).

In visiting others, you are free to drop in without advance notice, particularly if they do not have a phone. The best visiting hours are usually between 8 and 10 a.m. (Indians are usually up by 6) and between 4 and 6 p.m. Naps are usually taken between 12 and 4 p.m. so those hours should be avoided.

If people suggest a meal "some time," you might assure them that you are willing to eat Indian food, and, if this family would probably not have cutlery, that you can eat with your hands. Otherwise they may hesitate to issue a direct invitation, not being sure whether they can provide the food and utensils they think you will require. Sometimes a person will avoid being too specific in an invitation, feeling that to state a time and place would infringe on the right of a guest to choose when he will come. So you can take the initiative in making definite arrangements. Ask whether your wife is also invited; don't assume that she is.

When visiting an Indian home for a meal, you are not expected to take a gift to the hostess. Nor are you usually expected to write a note of thanks afterwards, though there would of course be no harm in doing so. Appreciation is expressed at the time, but in showing that appreciation it is best not to gush over every dish or every act of courtesy. People expect you to have anticipated cordial hospitality and good food. Excessive praise or wonder may sound insincere or make your hosts feel that you had not expected to be served properly. Indians usually express thanks less frequently than Americans, saving it for real favors rather than for routine courtesies. A certain amount of flattery about the home, clothes, and such things, though, is as common as in the United States.

As a guest, you should not expect to tour the house or ask to do so. Wait for the host and hostess to make any such offer. Be particularly careful not to enter the kitchen unless you are specifically invited to do so.

The use of the right hand for eating has already been mentioned. Your hosts will be happy to demonstrate proper techniques. Except in parts of South India, people try to keep food above the middle joints of the fingers. The left hand may be used for picking up a glass of water or for holding a serving spoon. Of course in many homes the hosts will be using cutlery, in which case you would follow suit. Chapaties, however, which resemble tortillas, are always eaten with the fingers. Unless you are absolutely sure that you are expected to help yourself, it is best to wait for the food to be placed on your plate or in your hand. Remember that others may not be able to eat food that you have touched.

Americans may at first be astonished by the huge quantities of food that appear on their plates, and the urgency with which further helpings are pressed. The assumption is that you will be bashful or hesitant to take as much as you really want. Eating liberally is of course a compliment to your hostess, but don't feel that you are obliged to finish everything. When you have had enough, or if there is some particular thing that you would rather not eat, the most firm and gracious form of refusal is the namaste gesture.

As was suggested before, it is best not to refuse refreshments if they are vehemently offered. Unless you can quote doctor's orders, take at least something to show your appreciation. To express concern over whether food is safe to eat will probably offend your hosts. Home kitchens are usually kept very clean, and by avoiding fresh salads and taking it easy at first on the most highly spiced foods, there should be little difficulty. Assume that water is unboiled unless you are told otherwise.

Most Indians take both milk and sugar in their tea or coffee, frequently adding them during the preparation of the beverage. You can save yourself and your hosts a lot of trouble by learning to drink these with milk and sugar.

If someone belches during a meal, don't be taken aback - in unsophisticated circles this is generally regarded as a tribute to the meal. People may also rinse their mouths while at the table or wash their fingers in the drinking water. After eating with your fingers, you will be offered a place to wash your hands and rinse your mouth. If nothing seems forthcoming, feel free to inquire.

As was previously mentioned, Indians usually do their visiting before, rather than during a meal. So there is no need to feel you must keep up a conversation while eating.

A guest should of course ask permission to smoke unless others are doing so. Many Indians consider it a sign of respect not to smoke in front of their elders or superiors. If the host offers cigarettes, smoke those rather than your own. To say that you prefer your own brand may suggest that the host has been negligent in his duties.

At the end of a meal or a visit, you may be served pān, a rather stringent combination of nuts, lime and spices wrapped in betel leaves. Many Westerners learn to enjoy pān, but there is no obligation to take it. If you are experimenting, make sure that the pān contains no tobacco. If given a choice, you would probably prefer the sweet variety, and with somewhat less lime than usual. Guests are usually offered two rolls of pān. The whole thing is put into the mouth simultaneously. Once pān has been served, you are generally free to take leave, asking permission to do so. An American who says "Well, I guess I'll be going" is likely to sound boorish.

If you are a house-guest, there are a few other Indian customs with which you should be familiar. Most Indians at least brush their teeth before having anything to eat or drink in the morning, and bathe before their first meal. You will usually be expected to do the same. In most bathrooms you will not find tubs or showers. A bucket or open faucet indicates the bathing place, which may or may not be divided off from the rest of the bathroom. Water will drain out through a hole in the floor.

For toilet purposes, one should either carry tissue with him or adjust to the use of the left hand and water. In villages it is wise to carry a jug of water to the latrine or field with you so your hosts will not worry. An empty tin or a small jug (lota) of water next to the toilet in your own house would be a convenience for some visitors. Public facilities are less common than at home, but hotels, large restaurants and movie theaters are the most likely places to look. Ask for the lavatory, toilet, latrine or w.c., not for the bathroom, washroom, restroom or men's/ladies room.

As a house-guest, one should not expect much privacy or think that he will be left alone much of the time. The code of hospitality requires that the host take care of all your needs, one of which is often assumed to be that of having constant company.

At social gatherings, it might be wise for you to be prepared to sing a song, whether you have any vocal talent or not. Community singing is uncommon in India, but an individual or group of Westerners may be called on to sing without advance notice. Enthusiasm is more important than the quality of the performance. At public ceremonies and performances, including ones at which you may be speaking, don't be offended by the casual attitude shown by the audience. Strict silence is seldom demanded at such functions, and members of the audience often feel free to walk in and out during the program. Hand-clapping has been adopted relatively recently as a sign of appreciation. If garlanded at a public function, the guest usually removes the garland from his neck at once as a sign of humility. Of course he does not throw it away!

### Respect and Status

Attitudes and behavior tend to differ more according to age, status and profession in India than in the United States. Visitors who wish to live "in the Indian manner" may find it difficult to decide just what that "manner" is, even in a particular region. In questions of housing and dress, the most satisfactory solution is usually to follow the pattern of your Indian peers. If your **appearance** and behavior is completely inappropriate to your presumed status, the respect given to you may suffer accordingly.

Age, university degrees and professional ranking are among the factors that determine status, and degree and titles are mentioned more frequently than in America. The ranking of occupations differs somewhat from American ideas. Government service is usually at the top of the list. Private business is usually considerably lower. Being foreign may give the newcomer unexpected status at times, but one should not count on that. A young person with few tangible credentials will probably have to earn any place of authority by serious work, friendliness, patience and cooperation.

It is not surprising that Americans sometimes find themselves treated as important persons. For one thing, they are usually far wealthier than their Indian counterparts, and can afford to stay in better hotels, eat in more expensive restaurants, and travel in more luxurious style. Conveniences that you expect as a matter of course may be largely unknown in India. Your relative standard of living is likely to be considerably above what it was at home. This can become a source of difficulty if you start automatically expecting special treatment, or if your attitudes reflect any condescension. After years under foreign rule, most Indians can quickly spot behavior and attitudes that suggest a feeling of white superiority. Expecting VIP treatment, even if you sometimes get it or if you seem to get "results" that way is an easy way to arouse resentment, though it may not be immediately evident. Appearances are deceptive at times, but the Gandhian ideal of modesty, humility and self-denial is highly respected in India.

As a result of the attention given to status, one is likely to find less give and take between employers and employees, teachers and students, parents and children, than is found in the United States. People of high status are not used to being openly challenged or opposed by those of lower position. This doesn't mean that an American's equalitarian attitudes won't be appreciated, but it does mean that one can't expect to make much change in those accustomed to a different approach.

### Communication

More subtle than some of the patterns of behavior that have been discussed are problems of communication. A few things are quite obvious though, such as the likelihood that Indians will appreciate your learning at least a little of the local language even if you could get by with English. Learn the polite forms of expression first, and don't hesitate to use them even if you think you're making a fool of yourself. Common courtesy suggests that you learn to pronounce the names of people and places correctly. One should be aware that many Indians understand English even though they may be speaking in their own languages. So be very judicious in your comments wherever anyone - including servants - might be listening.

Indians, like most people, tend to be extremely sensitive to criticism or ridicule. Generally you will find people here even more aware of their country's problems than you are, so little is gained by pointing these out to people with whom you are only casually acquainted. Criticism, even when asked for, is generally not appreciated. Many Indians are very self-critical themselves, but until they are sure of your friendship and goodwill, they may resent any agreement with their critical comments. Newcomers frequently underestimate the complexity of local problems and give advice without realizing how difficult it is to implement change. What works in America is often not feasible in India, and an attitude of listening and learning is generally more helpful than one of advising or reforming.

Although you may be asked all kinds of personal questions, it is best not to ask such questions yourself until you know a person well. There are differences, of course, in the American and Indian concepts of personal topics. Indians will frequently ask the amount of your salary and the price of your possessions, but they will not usually inquire directly about your wife. Children and family matters are freely discussed, but a married couple who are childless are likely to be sensitive about the fact. An American woman without children, though, is likely to receive sympathy, and in some cases suggestions for remedying the unfortunate situation. A traditional wife does not refer to her husband by name, speaking of him as "Sita's father" or just "He."

One should be cautious about praising the looks or health of young children, as there is a common belief that such compliments invite calamity. Fear of the evil eye is quite common in Indian society, and a mother may put a black spot on her child's forehead or tie a string around his wrist to help avert it. The black eye-shadow used on children, though, is for health and decorative purposes.

Sex is not a subject of banter in most polite Indian society, though the topic as such is not taboo. Great caution is advisable in discussing hunting or meateating. Many Indians are sensitive about having attention drawn to the caste system, and especially in educated circles, the subject should be treated with delicacy and tact. Other sensitive subjects are interpersonal power relationships, poverty, corruption and inefficiency, and controversial international questions such as Kashmir and Goa. A person doing research on such topics (and perhaps on any topic) should get the advice of Indians on the scene before making surveys or distributing questionnaires.

Very interesting discussions can often be had about astrology, palmistry, psychic phenomena, unusual health remedies, charms and omens. But one should be aware that these matters are often taken very seriously, and not make fun of them. Be especially careful about kidding, or making sarcastic comments where you say the reverse of what you mean. People who do not understand all the nuances of American English are likely to take you literally.

People will naturally be pleased if you are generous in praising the things you like about their country, and especially if you appreciate their cultural achievements, food, clothing and traditions. Embarrassing apologies for the lack of conveniences in India may be answered by pointing out that there are certain amenities, such as servants, which are less available in America. Comment on high salaries in the U.S. can be tempered with examples of the high cost of living there.

Since most Indians have not learned their English from Americans, they may have difficulty in understanding your accent and some of your vocabulary. It is helpful to speak slowly, distinctly, and with a standard vocabulary that avoids idiomatic usages, until you know the proficiency of your listener.

In spelling and vocabulary, the British example is usually followed in India. You will gradually learn the differences. Here are a few examples: the word lorry is used for truck, tram for streetcar, bogie for railway car, taxi for cab, petrol for gasoline, lift for elevator, flat for apartment, and compound for the yard of a house. The word shop is used for store, chemist for pharmacist or druggist, cash-memo for receipt, torch cell for flashlight battery, waterproof for raincoat, dressing gown for bathrobe, bush shirt for sport shirt, frock for dress, counterpane for bedspread, serviette for napkin, and napkin for diaper. People speak of a reel of cotton rather than a spool of thread, and use bottle rather than jar, tin for can, parcel for package, pocketbook or purse for wallet or billfold, biscuit for cookie, sweets for candy, duster for dish-towel, elastic band for rubber band, rubber for eraser, and drawing-pin for thumb-tack. The first floor of a house is what we call the second, the bottom being the ground floor. The adjective "dear" is commonly used to mean "expensive," and "homely" is a complimentary term, describing a person with domestic skills or a place that is homey. Indians frequently interchange "too" and "very," as these words are not clearly distinguished in some of the Indian languages. Keep this in mind if someone says "I am too educated" or "You are too rich." Numerical dates are written in India with the day preceding the month, as in 25/4/65.

Certain words have acquired a derogatory connotation, so speak of Indians or nationals, never natives. "Asian" is preferred to "Asiatic." And speak of developing, rather than backward countries.

Introductions are usually not made as thoroughly in social gatherings here as in the United States (which, by the way, is generally known as America. Feel free to introduce yourself. People desiring to meet you may ask, "What is your good name?" or "May I have your introduction?" - phrases translated from vernacular expressions. Since titles are valued highly, remember and use such ones as Professor and Doctor. People are usually not referred to by just their last names. Use "Mr," "Shri," or the suffix "-ji" to indicate respect.

Gestures vary widely in India. One of the most confusing at first is the toss of the head indicating "yes," which resembles the American headshake meaning "no." Nodding the head to mean "yes" is usually not understood. Beckoning is done with the palm of the hand turned down rather than up, and pointing is often done with the chin. Snapping the fingers is likely to produce a servant. Back-slapping is not usually regarded as a sign of affection.

The word "no" has harsh implications in India. Evasive refusals, being more polite, are common. So people may say "yes" in order to please you, but have no intention of performing any corresponding action. This should be interpreted as polite refusal, rather than as a sign of unreliability. When giving instructions to servants or shopkeepers, it is wise to repeat them several times, preferably step by step, and then check to see that the instructions have been really understood. Otherwise the person may say he understands, out of politeness, and leave you with false expectations.

Cultural differences about expressing gratitude have already been mentioned ... that thankfulness is not usually expressed for what are considered one's rights, being reserved for special favors. You should not assume that a person is ungrateful just because he receives courtesies or gifts silently or with a simple namaste gesture.

#### Sightseeing and Shopping

Travelers in India can wander through bazaars and alleys with little fear of any physical danger. There is usually less likelihood of being molested than in similar situations at home. They will, though, be stared at openly, and perhaps followed by people who are curious. Try to accept this as a sign of interest and curiosity rather than rudeness.

Bargaining is the common practice, both for goods and services. The details can be learned only by experience. One usually bargains, though, for a ride in any vehicle without a meter before engaging the vehicle. In other matters too, it is wise to settle the price of services in advance and pay only after the service has been rendered.

In almost all curio shops except government ones, it is best not to accept the initial price. Special bargains can sometimes be obtained early in the morning, as the first customer of the day is considered auspicious by many shopkeepers, and for him to go away without buying is a bad omen. Avoid displaying any large sums of money - many Indians already have an exaggerated opinion of the wealth of Americans.

For labor services, such as porters (coolies) and shoeshines, you can usually consider a rupee as equal to a dollar. If you would pay a quarter at home, give 25 paise here. Some prices may still be quoted in annas (4 annas = 25p.; 8 annas = 50 p., etc.) although anna coins are no longer in circulation. It is not customary to tip taxi drivers, but a small extra charge may be made for heavy baggage. In restaurants, ten percent of the bill is generally a good tip, though one seldom leaves more than one rupee. Even at hotels where a charge is made for service, servants are likely to expect a cash tip, as does the boy who calls your taxi and the priest or doorman at the temple you visit. Count your change, and don't accept even slightly torn bills. In preparing for travel or sightseeing, collect loose change and small bills. Taxi and rickshaw drivers and coolies should not be expected to provide change, though occasionally they will do so.

When visiting temples or shrines, leave your shoes at the entrance. You may also be asked to leave leather bags and even belts outside. Ladies should cover their heads. Ask permission before entering places of worship. Some are closed to people of other religions, and the "inner sanctum" is likely to be out of bounds. Ask permission before taking any photographs inside a temple. To be offered prasad (food presented to the deity) in a temple is an honor. If you wish to show your appreciation, take some and either eat it or pretend to do so.

Most of the above suggestions also apply when visiting a mosque or tomb. Ladies are occasionally not admitted to mosques. When they are, they should definitely cover their heads - a hankie will do. No music is permitted inside a mosque, so don't sing, hum or whistle. In a Sikh gurudwara, men and women must have their heads covered, and cigarettes must be left outside.

If you are on the street when a funeral is passing by, you can show respect by standing still until it goes by you. Women show respect by covering their heads.

Although Indians generally like to be photographed, some discretion is advisable. Remember that you might resent foreigners taking pictures only in the slum sections of American cities - and you would probably be startled or suspicious if a group suddenly appeared and began taking pictures while you were mowing your lawn or sunbathing in the patio. People here may be offended if they see you photographing unpleasant scenes. Particular caution should be taken in photographing burning ghats, bathing scenes, altercations, women, sadhus, and some festivals and processions. Security precautions have been tightened recently, with bridges, dams, railway stations and airports being among the forbidden subjects. If you have any doubts, ask permission from the person you are photographing, or from the police if they are in the vicinity.

Encounters with beggars may be very disturbing to newcomers. Begging is being discouraged in India, but it is not generally considered as reprehensible here as in the U. S. When accompanied by sincere ascetic renunciation, begging has traditionally been highly respectable, and the giving of alms is a way of obtaining religious merit. The common beggar, though, has made a business of haranguing people, and the most ingenious or urgent pleas do not necessarily indicate the greatest need. Whether you give or not is entirely up to you, and you can be as firm as you wish in refusing.

#### Household and Business

Though this paper has been intended primarily for giving suggestions on cultural matters, a few practical comments on business and household dealings may also help the newcomer avoid misunderstandings.

Servants - Most upper middle class Indians, and most Westerners staying for some time in the country, find it necessary to employ one or more servants. Evaluating the letters of recommendation brought by applicants is often a difficult task, but you might give particular attention to the person's most recent experience. There is a complicated division of labor among servants, and it is well to find out as fully as possible what an individual will and will not do. The employer should be aware that a servant is likely to expect more than a businesslike financial arrangement. You are likely, therefore, to become involved in housing arrangements, family problems, marriage plans, etc. Certain specific side benefits are usually expected. The cook, for example, will probably consider it his right to inflate shopping accounts somewhat. Advice from Indian housewives can help you to exercise some control in the matter. Payment by the hour, even for such services as tutoring, is relatively unknown and may be considered humiliating. If you wish to contract for work by the hour, elaborate and tactful explanations may be necessary.

To leave money around the house is only asking for trouble. No embarrassment is necessary about keeping things of value, including some food supplies, under lock and key. Absolute honesty is a lot to expect from people living a borderline existence, so don't put unnecessary temptation in their way. Many objects for which you have no further use, such as newspapers, empty bottles and scrap paper, still have some value here. Tear up personal letters before putting them in the wastebasket, as anything you throw away may be salvaged and sold or put to use by your servants.

Most servants are anxious to get a good letter of recommendation from their employers. By writing that letter only when you are on the verge of departure, you are less likely to have difficulties during your last week.

The post-office - There are some differences in American and Indian postal regulations and practices which may be useful to know. It is illegal, for example, to send money in an ordinary letter. A money-order is usually the simplest method, and the cash will then be delivered

right to the door of the recipient. Any important letters, unless written on local "inland forms" or foreign "airgram forms" should be registered, a relatively inexpensive procedure. Registration is essential if photographs or checks are enclosed in a letter. Letters with high denomination stamps (over 50 paise) should be cancelled in your presence at the post office. For a small fee, an "acknowledgment due" card can be obtained and attached to a letter. This will be returned to the sender as proof of delivery. Magazines, postcards and packages can be redirected (forwarded) without extra charge.

Parcels should be wrapped in cloth and sewed shut. A letter can be enclosed. Foreign parcels are automatically registered without extra charge. Parcels within India should be registered, and an extra fee is charged for this. On parcels which are to be insured, the post-office usually requires that the edges be sealed with sealing wax. Books, papers, manuscripts, bills, films and slides can be sent by "book post." But book post packages must not be sewed or sealed shut. They can be tied with string instead.

There is not a separate fee for airmail within India. All letters go by air where practicable. For quicker service, and for delivery on Sundays and holidays, you can mark a letter "Express," add a small extra charge in regular stamps, and drop it in an ordinary mailbox.

The post-office sells special "registered envelopes" made of cloth with minimum postage already embossed. These are useful for sending small gifts such as scarves and for mailing films to be processed.

Telegrams - Postal and telegraph offices are often located in the same building. A standard rate is charged for telegrams regardless of distance. The recipient's name and address are charged for, so these should be abbreviated when possible. Sunday, holiday and night rates are double the daytime charges. "Express telegrams" cost twice as much as "ordinary telegrams," but reach their destination more quickly. It is best to count on a day for delivery of express telegrams.

For foreign telegrams of more than eleven words, including address and signature, ask about the "letter telegram," which is less expensive but subject to one day's delay.

Banking - Bank accounts must be approved by the Reserve Bank of India. So don't deposit all your money when you first apply for an account, as it may be a few weeks before you can make withdrawals. Even after the account is established, a deposited check (spelled "cheque" here) must be cleared before the money can be withdrawn. A commission is charged for depositing or cashing out of town checks.

You should not expect to cash personal checks at branches or banks other than your own. Outside of the largest cities, you will probably need to go to a bank to cash travelers checks.

A "crossed check" has two lines drawn diagonally across it. This means that the check must be deposited to an account rather than cashed. Checks should be crossed before mailing.

Banks do not return checks to you with the monthly statement.

Travel - The details of travel can best be learned after you reach India, but a couple of suggestions may help in planning your first rail journey. If you are traveling overnight in any class except Air-conditioned, you will need to take your own bedding, towel, soap, toilet-tissue and drinking water. Reservations for overnight travel can be made up to twenty days in advance for Air-conditioned and First Class, and ten days in advance for a Third Class Sleeper.

Rates for coolies are usually posted in railway stations. The charge is generally about 25 paisee per head load (up to 80 pounds), with extra charges made if you keep the coolie more than half an hour.

Business Contacts - For getting work done, it is usually best, when possible, to see the top man first in an office or organization. Make use of any contacts you have in order to obtain an introduction, or use calling cards mentioning your name, position and degrees.

Make appointments for that day or the next, rather than for the distant future. When phoning, 8 a.m. or 6-9 p.m. is usually a good time to find people at home. Many businesses, however, do not open until 10 a.m.

The main point to remember in all business dealings, and especially at the post-office, bank, and government offices, is that everything is likely to take a lot more time than you expect. It will often take two trips to accomplish what you hoped to get done in one. Service is less likely to be on a first-come first-served basis than in the U.S. Status, strength and persistence may also come into the picture, and it is here that Westerners are often most tempted to ask for or take advantage of special favors.

These "cues and clues" are likely to sound long, involved and intimidating to a newcomer to India. It is not necessary, though, to keep all these recommendations in mind when you first arrive. People on the spot will be happy to give you advice and help. Moreover, the sensitive person who sees people as individuals, respects their feelings, and tries to understand why people feel and act as they do, and why conditions are as they are, will soon find adjustments occurring quite naturally in his speech and behavior. Remember that visitors coming to the United States have to make many adaptations also. Although people do not expect foreigners to imitate them exactly, they naturally appreciate interest in and consideration for their way of life. Some Americans in India, when faced with particularly awkward situations, have found it helpful to say, "I'm sorry, that's not our custom." Indians appreciate the importance of custom. In general, however, your stay will be happier if some of these patterns of behavior do become your custom while you are in India.