

AROUND THE WORLD



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Welcome to India

Practices and beliefs that are passed down through generations are called traditions, and they can be found in every society. India, the 7th largest country and one of the most populous in the world, has many different traditions. What makes India's traditions so interesting is that they are rooted in the different backgrounds of its people. Today, there are many different languages spoken in India: Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu to name a few; and several different religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity,

Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Bahá'í.

Most of India's traditions come from its oldest religion, called Hinduism. However, some Hindu traditions have become controversial in modern times. For many years, the British Empire ruled India and played a key role in the elimination of some inhumane traditions that had been practiced there. Even today, while India is an independent country, its people commonly debate whether or not some traditions are still appropriate.



Meet Priya

Meet Priya. She lives with her family in India's capital, Delhi. Priya's father and mother, Arjun and Aparna, along with her older sister, Rani, and younger brother, Dev, share a small apartment — called a "flat" in India — together. In a month, though, Rani is getting married and moving out. Priya still won't have her own room, but for the first time in her life, she will no longer have to share a bed. Priya is excited about this because she usually wakes up much earlier than anyone else in the family.

On school days, Priya gets up at 5:30 am, three hours before her first class begins. She attends a special private school across the city, and her

journey each morning requires her to take two different buses. The commute from her family's flat to the bus station is usually quick, but buses in Delhi can be packed and unpredictable. She often has to wait a while for the second bus to arrive and take her to campus.

While waiting, Priya usually takes out her sketchpad and makes drawings inspired by the people rushing through the busy station. She pays special attention to their clothes. Priya has loved drawing clothing for as long as she can remember, and it's actually the reason she wakes up so early. She dreams of someday working as a costume designer in Mumbai, home to the Bollywood film industry; and her private school, which has a special arts program, could help make that dream come true.

In recent decades, Bollywood films have achieved worldwide popularity. They are famous for their dance scenes and elaborate costumes. Indian fashion is bold, bright, and beautiful, and Priya loves it. As she has gotten older, Priya has developed her own fashion style and regularly receives compliments for the design ideas she shows family and friends. Rani even allowed her to design a special **sari** that she plans to wear during her upcoming wedding ceremony.

Like the rest of her classmates, Priya was accepted into the art program after applying and submitting a portfolio of her best work. However, because of her family's status, she has additional obstacles to overcome in order to be successful within her new school.

Sari - A long piece of rectangular fabric, with any accompanying blouse and petticoat, that is worn draped around the body. They are usually very colorful.





The Caste System

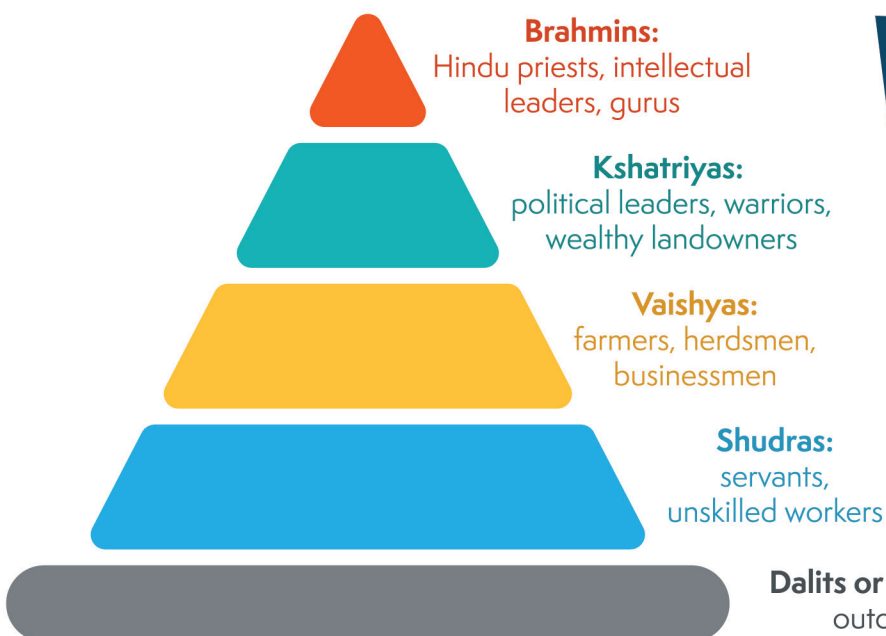
Religions have spiritual traditions that guide how followers worship. Many also have practical traditions that provide directions on things like which foods to eat or how to conduct business deals. Hinduism is no different, and along with traditions about their many gods and goddesses, Hindus also have traditions for how people should live and be organized in society. Beginning thousands of years ago, Hinduism divided its members into different groups called **varnas**. Eventually these groups became known throughout India as **castes**.

There were four castes, each with their own roles and responsibilities. The different castes were ordered from top to bottom and ranked by what was believed to be their importance to society. At the top were the Brahmins, traditionally the Hindu priests, intellectual leaders, and advisors called **gurus**. The second level was the Kshatriyas, traditionally the political leaders, warriors, and wealthy landowners. Next came the Vaishyas, traditionally the farmers, herdsmen, and businessmen. The bottom caste was the Shudras, traditionally the servants and unskilled workers. Which caste an Indian belonged to depended not on merit, strengths or interests, but only on family status; and the caste someone was born into was their caste until they died. It was not permitted for anyone to

move up or try a new caste.

There were also people not included in the caste system, and this is the group to which Priya's family belonged. They were literal outcasts. This group was the Dalits, and because they were viewed as unclean, they were commonly called "Untouchables." For most of history, Dalits were forced to live outside of villages, and their role in society was to deal with messy jobs no one else wanted to do.

Inside the caste system, those at the top almost always enjoyed more wealth and privilege than those beneath them, and there was a long history of discrimination towards the lower castes. Indians were encouraged not to mix or associate with people from different castes, and marriages between castes were usually forbidden. However, none of the mistreatment inside the castes compared to the oppression forced upon the Dalit people, who according to tradition, were born "bad" and "dirty." Until recently, whenever a member of the castes accidentally touched an "Untouchable," the law required that member to say prayers and clean themselves thoroughly as soon as possible. Some Indians even believed that a Dalit's shadow was unclean and could cause harm.



Caste - A hereditary system which groups and divides people into social classes with privileges and limitations.

Guru - A person considered to be a mentor, guide, or expert.

Colonialism and Christianity: Impact on Indian Women's Rights



Historians endlessly debate whether British colonialism had a positive or negative impact on India. Even some Indian scholars, however, recognize that it brought one profoundly positive force into their country: Christianity. The influence of Christianity that came through the British played a huge role in increasing respect for human rights in India – especially the rights and economic status of women.

In India, many felt that a person's value was tied to the caste they belonged to. This led to the mistreatment of those in the lower castes and, especially, of women. In addition, many Indians believe in karma, which is the belief that your actions (including those in your previous life) affect your current and future life conditions. This concept led its believers to accept their circumstances, assuming they did something to deserve it.

Prior to British rule in India, women were at a dangerous disadvantage to men even from birth. Because male babies were more highly prized within families, females were often abandoned or denied basic medical care, which led to a higher infant death rate. As girls grew into young women, they would be married at as young as 13 years of age. When married, disputes with the groom's

family over the dowry (money or property brought by a bride into her marriage) often led to violence toward brides or even their deaths, by murder or suicide. In her later years, when a woman's husband would die, she was culturally expected or even forced to throw herself on his burning funeral pyre, a horrific act known as sati.

Much of this began to change in India, though, with the influence of Christianity. The Bible teaches that all human beings – including women – are made in God's image, are fundamentally equal before God, and are accountable to Him. Each person's value was defined, not by their caste, but by their value as a child of God. As such, people no longer had to be trapped by their caste or the karma they reaped in the previous life.

This Christian view of the world, brought to India by the British, was very different from the Hindu one. It helped introduce ideas about human equality and dignity into Indian culture to which many of its greatest leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, frequently appealed.

While people continue to debate the legacy of British colonialism, it cannot be denied that the missionaries who came to India helped improve millions of Indians' lives.

Consider for yourself the legacy of the British in India by making a list of the pros and cons of British colonialism below.

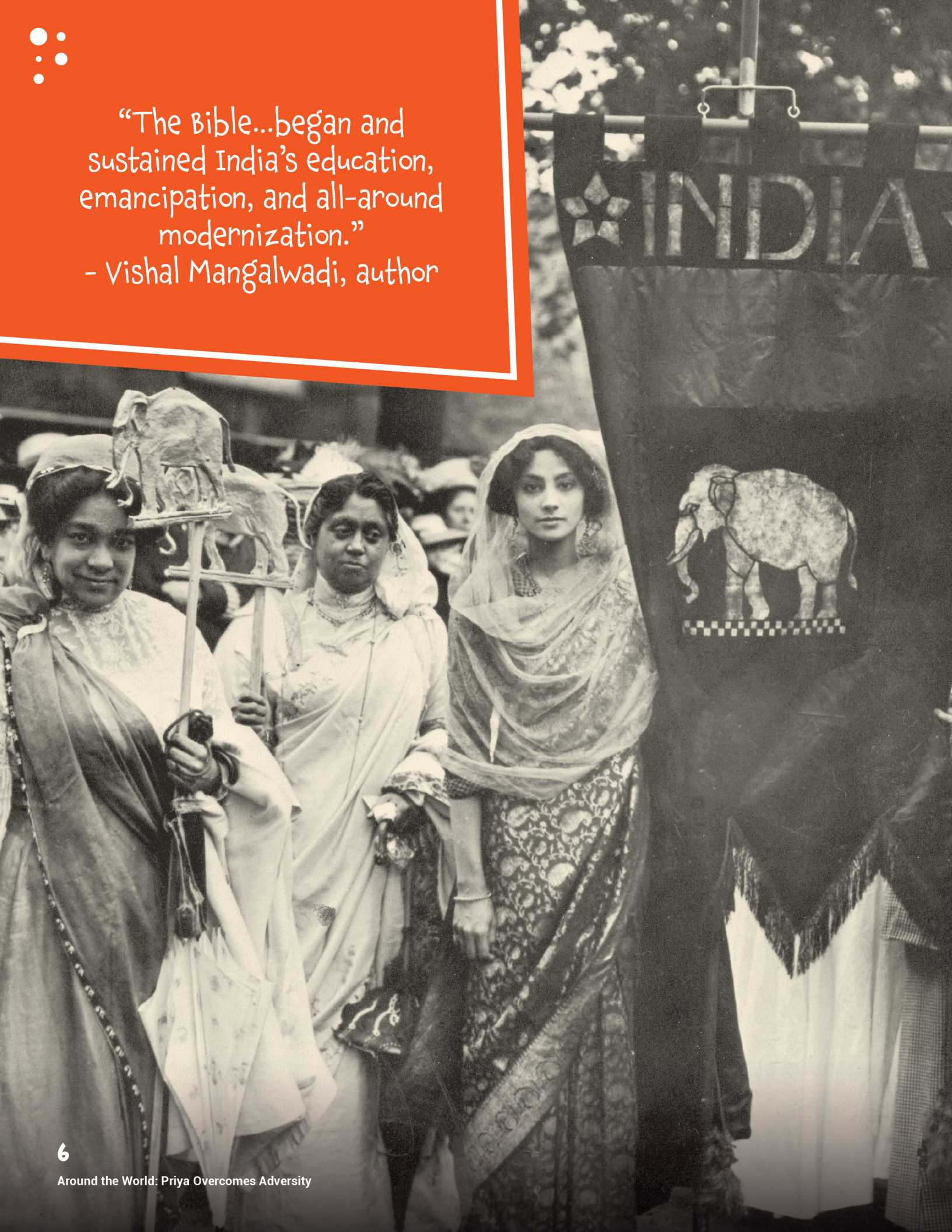
Pros

Cons



“The Bible...began and sustained India’s education, emancipation, and all-around modernization.”

- Vishal Mangalwadi, author



Independence and Government Interference




For centuries, the Dalit people were denied basic rights given to members of the other castes. This began to change, however, in 1858 when the British Empire took over all of India. When a country or kingdom takes control of other places, they have what is called an empire. This process of gaining authority over people in other regions is called imperialism or colonization, and the outside areas being ruled over are called colonies. From the 18th century on, India was a colony of Great Britain and part of its global empire. Throughout their rule, the British profited mightily from having India as a colony and greatly increased their wealth and power. However, the colonial relationship was not one-sided, and many of the positive results from being a British colony remain with India even today.

When the British took control of India, they brought with them many of their practices, customs, and technological advancements. Thousands of miles of roads, railways, and canals were built, and Indian

people were free to travel and trade like never before. The British introduced new farming practices that increased farmland, allowed the Indian people to have more nutritious and varied diets, and provided the ability to grow more than what was needed and sell extra for profit. Many schools and hospitals were also built, and the British brought with them advanced education and healthcare methods that continue being used today.

But perhaps most importantly, the British introduced Western ideas for government and how to treat one another. The British introduced democracy, and now, instead of a collection of warring kingdoms, India has become a united country, choosing its leaders through elections. Western ideas like rational thinking, individuality, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech, have also paved the way for India to examine traditions like the caste system and seek a more fair and peaceful society.





In 1947, after decades of Indians campaigning for the right to govern themselves, Great Britain allowed India to become a free and independent republic. In the midst of all the excitement, millions of Indians hoped for a more fair and equal society, like what they had seen modeled by Great Britain. The new government decided it was time to make serious changes to the caste tradition, so they wrote a **constitution** that attempted to improve the lives of those who had been mistreated for so long. The new constitution outlawed the practice of “untouchability” and caste discrimination, but changing culture requires more than simply changing the law.

The goal was to provide opportunities for all people, but this would be extremely difficult. Since so many people believed Dalits were beneath them, how were they to get hired for jobs or be accepted into schools? The constitution made it illegal to call a Dalit “Untouchable,” to publicly hurt them, or to refuse welcoming them inside towns; but with all the hateful and prejudiced beliefs towards them, lawmakers believed official assistance was needed. Many Indians had come to believe that the Hindu caste system was outdated in the modern world, and they welcomed the new changes. However, others worried the changes might have unintended consequences that could lead to new problems without truly solving the issue of discrimination.

Constitution -

A body of principles or laws by which a body, group of people, or a nation acknowledges to be governed.



Cultural Connections: India and Britain Cultural Exchange

Despite British rule ending in 1947, there are many examples that show how India and the United Kingdom (UK) remain culturally linked today:



Immigration: The UK is a multicultural country that has immigrants from all over the world, but the largest non-white ethnic minority group are British-Indians.



Travel: Each year, over a million British tourists visit India.



Cricket: The British brought the game of cricket to India and it has become by far the most popular sport in the country. India has hosted and won many international cricket competitions and has the most popular professional league in the world.



Polo: Polo is a popular sport in the UK often enjoyed by the British Royal family. It was taught to Brits who were living in India during the time of their colonial rule.



Curry: Indian style curries are the most popular thing to eat across the United Kingdom. It is even rumored that a specific type favored around the world, Chicken Tikka Masala, was invented at an Indian restaurant in Scotland.



Vegetables: Many traditional Indian dishes, including many curries, use potatoes, tomatoes, and carrots. These vegetables are not native to India, and were brought there by British settlers during colonial time.



Tea: British people are famous for drinking tea and enjoying a daily tea time. In the 19th century, India became one of the leading growers and exporters of tea, especially Britain's favorites: Darjeeling and Assam.



Priya's Family Benefits

Dharma - The Hindu belief that an individual's duty is fulfilled by observing and obeying the law.

At the time of Indian independence, Priya's grandfather Sanjay was a teenager about the same age she is now. Like almost all Dalits at the time, he was poor and uneducated. He did not know how to read, had never worn a pair of shoes, and rarely owned a shirt. He spent most of his time working, and his job was to remove the bodies of dead animals from roadways and clean up afterwards.

Life was hard for Sanjay, but he believed strongly in his Hindu faith and practiced **dharma**, so even though he was viewed as unclean by many of his neighbors, he worked hard at his job, and always tried to be cheerful. Once "untouchability" was made illegal, he was still not permitted to enter the village school, but he was allowed to sit outside the open window and listen to the lessons. He listened as carefully as possible and never missed a day. Children inside often made fun of him, called him names, and even threw things at him when he tried to answer teachers' questions, but he didn't care.

For five years, Priya's grandfather sat outside those classrooms listening, and when it was time for him to take the entrance exams to attend a university, he was ready. Compared to his classmates who had started school years before him (and who had been permitted inside), his reading, writing, and math levels were not as high; but, given his situation, they were remarkable. He was overjoyed to be awarded a spot in a nearby university.

Some Things Change, but Others Stay the Same

Sanjay had a wonderful time during his university years. He was among the first Dalits to pursue these new opportunities, and many people celebrated how much he had overcome and accomplished. After graduating, he returned to his village and began working for the local government. He married a nice Dalit woman, bought a small home, and started a family. He named his firstborn son, Priya's dad, after **Prince Arjuna** — the brave main character in his favorite Hindu scripture. Sanjay's life had changed a lot over the years, but unfortunately, attitudes towards Dalits hadn't changed much.

Once old enough to attend the village school, Arjun and the other Dalit children were now permitted inside; but they had to sit separately,

were not given textbooks, and had to go outside to eat lunch. This was because most villagers still believed Dalits to be less important than them and naturally dirty. When children from inside the castes required discipline, they were given verbal corrections. Dalit students, on the other hand, were hit with sticks when they acted out, and sometimes just for wrongly answering questions.

Despite consistently being treated worse than his caste member classmates, like his father, Arjun was a dedicated student, and when the time came to take the university entrance exams, his scores were the highest of any student who had attended the village school. He went off to university, but unfortunately, his college experience was very different from his father's.



Prince Arjuna - A warrior hero of the Indian epic poem *Mahābhārata*, known for his bravery and archery abilities in battle.



Transition Extended

When the government changes began in 1947, many felt the official assistance should be temporary. The Indian government hoped that a decade of intervention would give the Dalit community enough time to catch up and achieve equality with the other castes, but those wishes were far from realistic. Laws and regulations can change quickly, but traditions that are tied to beliefs held for thousands of years can require generations to shift even a little. Dalits like Sanjay did indeed benefit from new opportunities, but Dalits across India continued to be mistreated, so the government decided to extend their assistance programs.

By the time Arjun arrived at his university, many Indians began questioning whether these interventions were still a good idea, and opponents of it spoke out across the country. Some believed that privileges should be open to anyone from disadvantaged circumstances — not just one group. India has an enormous number of people who live in poverty, and many come from the lower castes.

Another major argument against these interventions was in response to how many places

went unfilled. Universities were having a difficult time attracting Dalits to accept their openings, and unfortunately this gave fuel to the prejudiced beliefs, held by many, that Dalits were too lazy, and not intelligent enough to take assistance. They asked, why waste openings on people who won't, or can't, help themselves?

Through his time in college, Arjun often heard and faced these questions, and it always made him uncomfortable. His childhood was modest and filled with adversity, but thanks to his father's success, they had lived as well-off or even better than many of their neighbors, especially those from lower castes. And despite having exam scores that were high enough to get him into a university without assistance, as soon as a fellow student or professor learned his last name (and therefore knew he was a Dalit), it was usually followed with laughs and insults about Dalit work ethic and intelligence. "You're only here because they lowered the standards for you!" they mocked. "Your brain is so small, they have to give you easy exams." Arjun hated that his people were known for receiving assistance. All he wanted was to be viewed and treated equally.



Changes Bring New Hopes

Arjun mostly blocked out the insults and graduated with honors. He returned to his village and worked with his father where he met a young lady named Aparna, who became his wife.

Arjun and Aparna were happy in the village, but soon after Priya was born, Arjun desired a change for the sake of his children. Rani was already being teased at her school for being a Dalit, and Arjun believed that moving to a larger city would provide her with a better education and spare her from the usual discrimination Dalits face in small communities like theirs. Aparna had never been far from the village and was reluctant to leave, but Arjun eventually convinced her that it was time to move their young family to the nearest big city — Delhi.



A Better Life in the City

The couple saved their money and moved with their two young girls and baby boy to the capital as soon as they could. In Delhi, they hoped to find a community where traditions like the caste system, and “untouchability,” were less prevalent than in their home village. In cities where thousands, if not millions, of residents live closely together, people are less prone to following tradition. Indian cities often feature a lively mix of people with different beliefs, backgrounds, and lifestyles living right next to each other.

Today, Priya’s family lives in a modest Delhi neighborhood, where colorful shops and apartment buildings are packed tightly together. During the

day, the streets are crowded with pedestrians, carts, cars, and even the occasional cow. Some of the family’s neighbors are also Dalits, but many come from the lower castes too. No one can be considered wealthy, and it is usually noisy and hectic, but the community lives in harmony, and talk of castes is rarely heard. Priya and her siblings choose their friends based on personalities and interests, not family name. Rani is even breaking with Hindu tradition by getting engaged to a young man who isn’t a Dalit. Despite this, everyone in the family is pleased and has welcomed him in. Life is good in Delhi, and Arjun and Aparna are happy they moved to the capital, but unfortunately not everyone in the family has escaped being thought of as untouchable.



Priya's Struggle



Priya was excited when she started her new school. Most schools in India focus on the academic basics, but this one has a special extra-curricular program for art, and some of the city's best artists have studied there. She was looking forward to having classmates who shared her passion for drawing, and Priya couldn't wait to receive instruction in painting and sculpture. However, it didn't take long for her excitement to be challenged.

From the beginning of her first day, Priya was classified as a Dalit, and treated differently by her classmates and all but one teacher. Only Mrs. Tagore will call on Priya, or give her direct instruction during class. Priya's tuition, books, and uniform are all provided for her through government funds; but while most students gladly share art supplies like brushes, paints, charcoals, and clay, the Dalit students are often excluded.

Some kids giggle when Priya walks through the hallways, and she often hears comments about Dalits not deserving places in prestigious schools. One day, her second bus was very late arriving at the station, which made her late to class, and Priya was ridiculed by classmates for being a "lazy Dalit girl." This is why she now wakes up extra early, to allow plenty of time for tardy buses. She has never been late to class again.

During those first months at the private school, Priya spent many nights in tears, and often wondered if she had the skills as an artist to deserve a place there. Her parents had warned her about what she would face, and had tried to prepare her for the negative way many of her peers and teachers would treat her, but it

was worse than Priya had expected. She longs for her classmates to see her for who she truly is, and not just the group which she was born into. All Priya wants is to be treated equally — not better and not worse.

She began wondering if it would be better to leave and go to a public school in her neighborhood where there are more kids like her. In India, it is very common for the children, particularly girls, from disadvantaged backgrounds to drop out well before graduating. Priya hated the way she was being treated, began doubting her talent, and thought she would add to the Dalit dropout rate. She was on the verge of quitting; but suddenly, thanks to a special teacher, everything changed.





One of Priya's teachers, Mrs. Tagore, is a member of the Brahmin caste. She teaches painting at Priya's school, and despite coming from the highest caste, she believes in equality. In fact, her passion for merit-based opportunity is what led her to become a teacher. Mrs. Tagore was once a professional artist who sold enough paintings to make a living, but now she puts most of her energy towards her students, no matter what caste they are from.

At the end of the first grading period, Mrs. Tagore issued a special assignment to all her students. She gave them all the same-sized canvas and instructed them to paint it at home. When finished, they were to bring their work to school wrapped in a covering, and their names were only to be on the back of the work. The finished products would then be displayed, and the entire student body would vote on their favorites without knowing the artists.

The day of presentation came, and one painting stood out above the rest. The color combinations were vibrant, and its details were crisp and spectacular. The painting was of a busy bus station, and students were amazed by the beautiful clothing on the people in it. There were even comments that it looked like a scene in a Bollywood movie.

Priya no longer wonders if she's good enough or skilled enough. She won first prize in Mrs. Tagore's painting contest, and while she still faces taunts and isn't always treated equally, she no longer thinks of quitting the school. It isn't easy being a Dalit or a girl, but Priya has big dreams, is full of talent, and no one is going to stop her. Any time a negative thought creeps into her head, she thinks of her family's tradition of hard work and determination — her grandfather having to sit outside his classes or her dad being hit by his teachers — and she knows she can handle any adversity she faces.

Quick and Easy After-School Snack:

Make Your Own Naan

When Priya comes home from school, she loves to mix up simple snacks to enjoy while she sketches her designs. One of her favorite snacks is naan bread dipped into her homemade hummus. To make this simple bread, you will need the following:

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup Greek yogurt, plain
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. salt

Instructions:

With your parent's help, heat a frying pan (with no oil) over medium-high heat until hot.

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl, using your hands to knead the dough until it forms a sticky ball. Divide the ball into 6 portions.

With a floured rolling pin, on your floured countertop, roll one portion into a circle.

Place your naan circle into the frying pan for a few minutes on each side until golden-brown spots appear and the naan puffs up slightly.

Roll each circle, one at a time, repeating the same steps.

Naan is delicious dipped in hummus, dipped into soups as flatbread, or rolled up with sandwich fillings like meat and cheese. If you would like to flavor your naan, try brushing it with a mixture of melted butter and minced garlic, or experiment with flavoring your naan dough with spices like coriander and fresh cilantro before frying it up. Delicious!



Bollywood Movie Night

Do you enjoy watching movies?
Try hosting a
Bollywood-themed movie night
with your family!

The Hindi cinema, popularly referred to as “Bollywood” (similar to “Hollywood”), refers to the distinctive cinema style of India. Known for their vibrant costuming, spectacular dancing, and recurring themes, Bollywood films are a beautiful, visual celebration of Indian culture on screen.

The most popular style of Bollywood film is known as the “masala” film. Just as the term “masala” is the Hindi word for “mixture of spices,” masala films are sprinkled with a variety of themes, including action, comedy, dance, drama, romance, and melodrama; there is truly something for everyone in your family to enjoy.

While watching your film, keep an eye out for the dance numbers and have fun recreating some moves with your family, too!

The following Indian-born actors and actresses have appeared in both Hollywood and Bollywood films:



Priya's Design: Castes in Costume

Priya enjoys filling her sketchpads with costume ideas for movies. This sketch contains one of her favorite designs, and she has labeled each portion of the model with names of the various castes in India. Read more to discover the history behind each, then help Priya by adding colorful patterns to the fabric.

Brahmin (head):

Usually priests, teachers, or scholars. Deemed to be intelligent and claimed to originate from the head (or mouth) of Brahma, the Hindu creator god.

Kshatriyas (arms):

Warriors or rulers. Typically associated with strength. Involved with government, law and order, or defense.

Vaishyas (thighs):

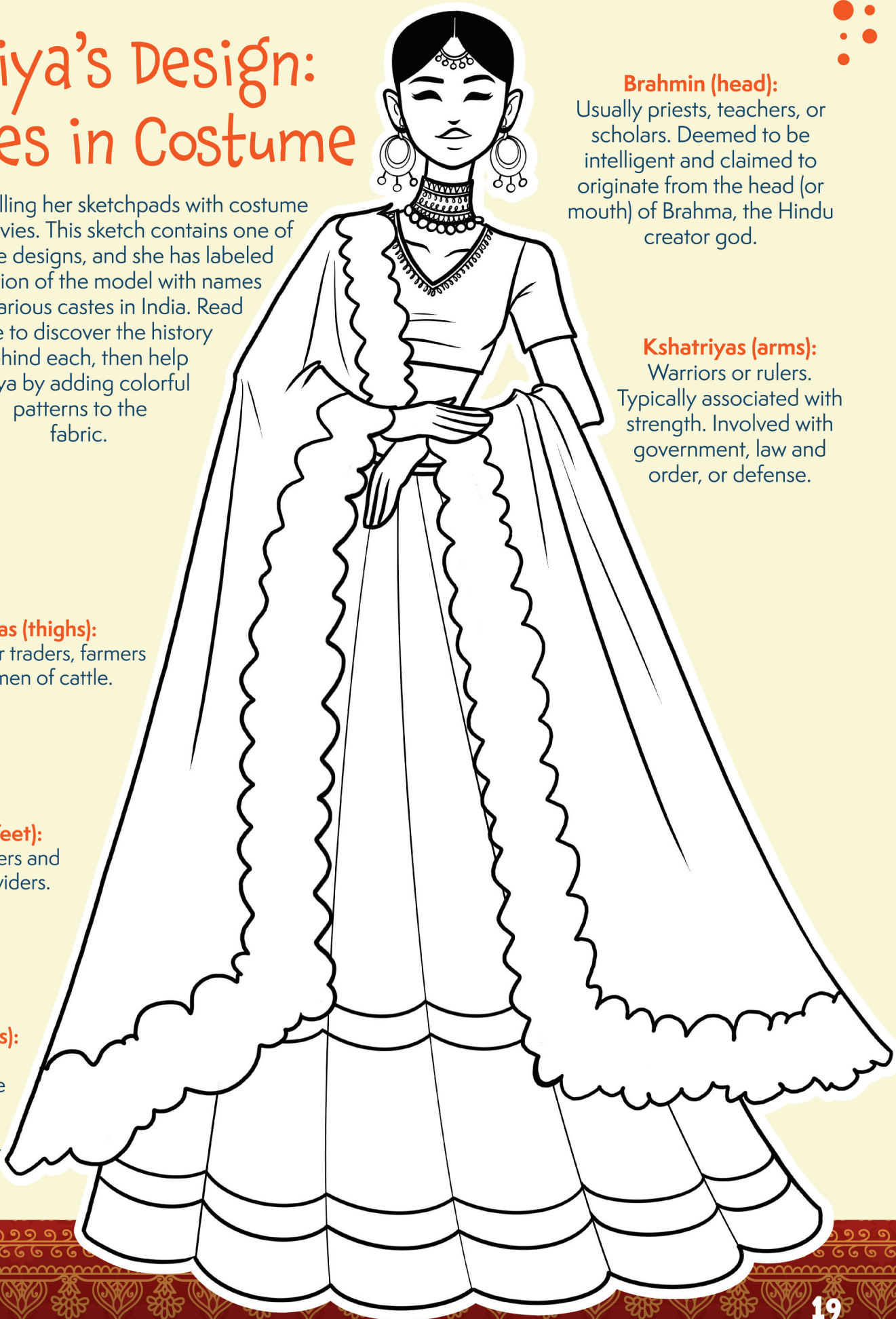
Merchants or traders, farmers or herdsmen of cattle.

Shudras (feet):

Menial workers and service providers.

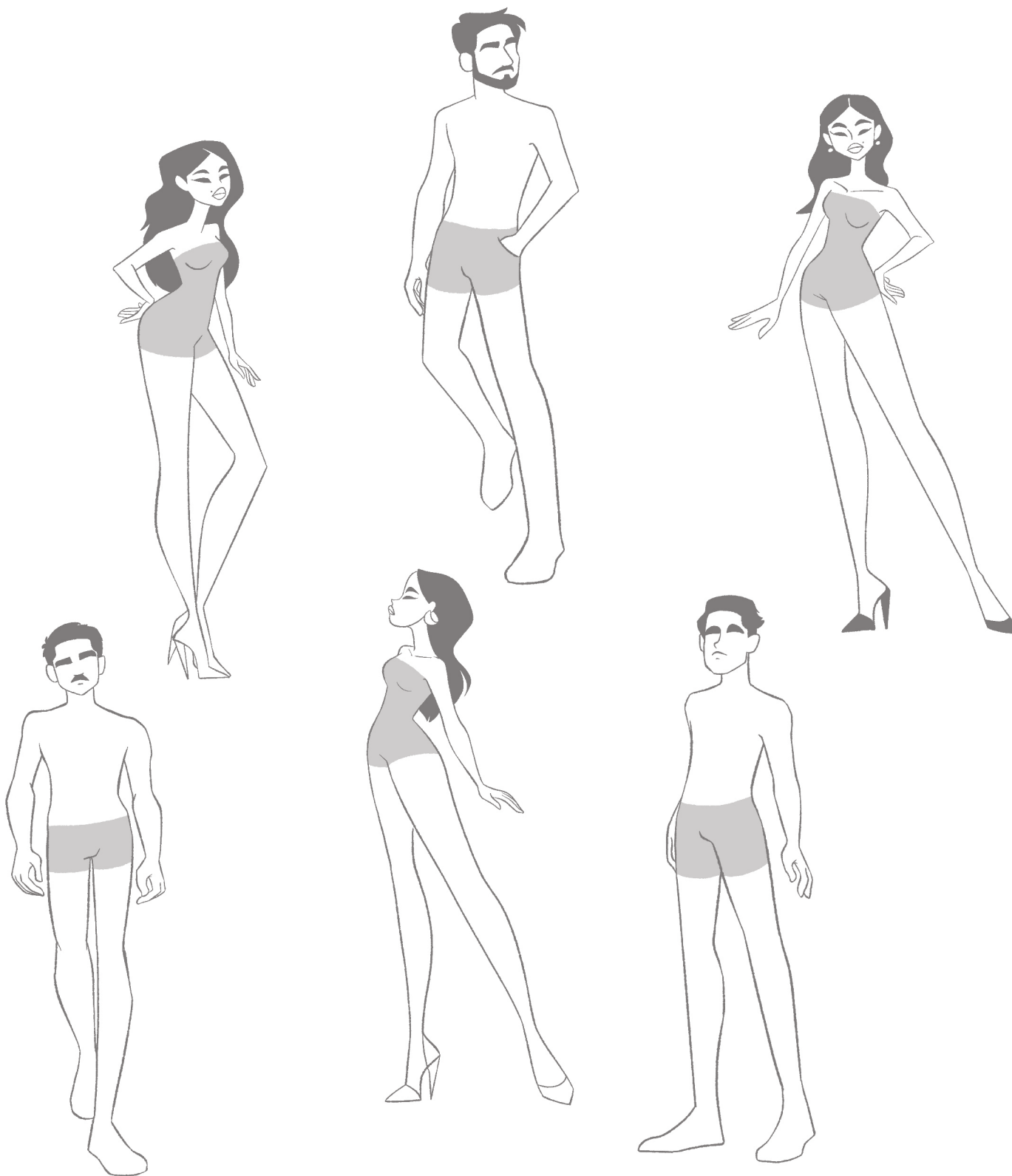
Dalits (untouchables):

Forced to complete the worst jobs, translates to "oppressed."



Create Your Own Designs

Try designing costumes for your favorite movie or book.
You might research Indian fashion and incorporate it in your designs.





Put Yourself in Priya's Shoes

Take a minute to consider Priya and her life in India. Consider the caste system and the discrimination she and many face. How would you feel if you were Priya? How would you react to a caste society?



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An illustration of five diverse cartoon children standing in front of a stylized world map. From left to right: a boy in a grey military uniform with a peaked cap and medals; a boy in a blue and white soccer jersey with the number 30, holding an orange basketball; a girl with long brown hair in a blue top and yellow skirt; a girl with dark skin and braided hair in a yellow top and patterned skirt; and a boy in an orange t-shirt and dark shorts. The background is a solid blue color with white outlines of the world's continents.

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