

Name _____

ANCIENT INDIA



Two ancient civilizations arose in Asia to the east of Mesopotamia and Egypt. One of those civilizations began in India. The other civilization began in China.

The civilizations of ancient India and China are important to the modern world. The cultures of present-day India, China, Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries are built on those earlier civilizations.

Key Words

Descendant

Plateau

Dynasty

Reincarnation

India is located in southern Asia. On a map, India looks like a huge triangle of land pushing into the Indian Ocean. Natural barriers separate India from the rest of Asia. The Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea lie to the east and west of India. The Himalayan and Hindu Kush Mountains lie across northern India.

There are passes (openings) through the Hindu Kush Mountains. People probably came to India

through those passes. Later, traders and invaders reached India through the passes.

The Land and the Climate

India can be divided into two regions. Much of northern India is made up of a large plain called the northern plain. Three great rivers flow through the northern plain: the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra. Those rivers create valleys of fertile farmland. Much of southern India is made up of a huge plateau, called the Deccan Plateau. Frequent droughts made farming difficult for ancient peoples on the Deccan Plateau.

There are three seasons in India: a cool season, a hot season, and a rainy season. During the cool season and the hot season, India gets little rain. But from June through September, winds called monsoons blow in from the Indian Ocean. Those winds usually bring much-needed rain to India.

Looking Back

1. What natural barriers separate India from the rest of Asia?
2. What are the two regions of India?
3. Thinking Deeper: In what region of India do you think civilization began? Why?

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The Indus Valley Civilization

Civilization began in India around 2500 B.C., about 1000 years after the start of civilization in Sumer.

The first Indian civilization arose on the northern plain in the valley of the Indus River. Historians call that civilization the Indus Valley, civilization.

Civilization developed in the Indus Valley much as it had in Sumer and Egypt. Thousands of years ago nomads moved into the valley. The rich soil and plentiful supply of water made the valley a good place to live. The nomads settled into villages and began to plant crops, such as wheat and barley. In time, their tiny farm villages grew into towns and cities.

Indus Valley Cities

The Indus Valley civilization had two chief cities: Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Both cities were carefully planned.



Both were laid out in blocks like a modern city. The streets of the cities were wide, straight, and paved.

The people of the Indus Valley built their cities out of mud bricks. They learned to bake the bricks in ovens. Those bricks were almost as hard as stone.

Indus Valley people also built sewer systems for their cities. They laid large sewer pipes under their streets. Each house was connected to the sewer by drain pipes. The pipes carried waste water away from the houses.

Indus Valley Achievements

The Indus Valley civilization lasted over 1000 years. Like the peoples of the ancient Middle East, Indus Valley people developed their own systems of writing and counting. They also developed a system of weights and measures.

Indus Valley people were skilled crafts workers. They made jewelry and other objects of gold, bronze, and copper. Weavers wove cotton thread into cloth. (Indus Valley people were probably the first people to grow cotton.)

Sailors from the Indus Valley crossed the Arabian Sea to trade cotton cloth and other goods with Mesopotamia. Sailors took crows with them on their ships. If the sailors lost sight of land, they set a crow free and followed it. They knew that a crow always flies toward land.

Indus Valley civilization began to decline about 1800 B.C. No one knows why. Floods may have forced people to leave the valley. Or invaders may have destroyed towns and cities. By 1500 B.C the Indus Valley civilization had disappeared.

Looking Back

1. Where did civilization begin in India?
2. How did Indus Valley people build their cities?
3. What were some achievements of the Indus Valley people?

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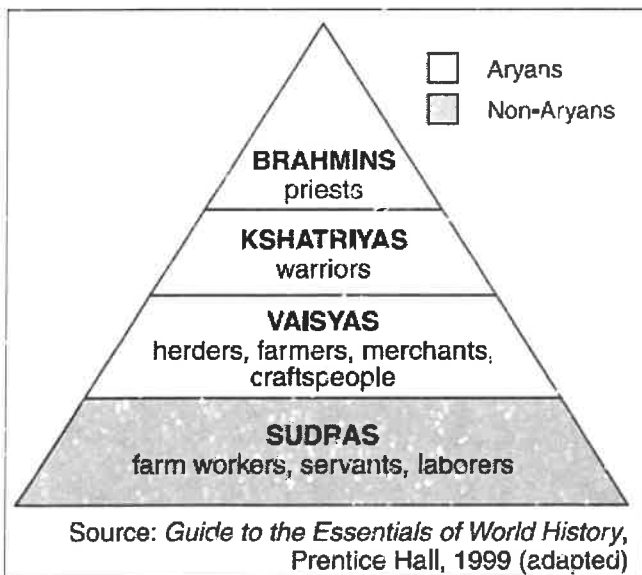
The Aryans

About 1500 B.C., people from central Asia crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains and invaded India. Those people were called Aryans. The Aryans conquered the people living in northern India. (Those people were probably the *descendants* of the Indus Valley people.) The Aryans built an important civilization in India. At first, they were nomadic herders who raised cattle and sheep. But gradually the Aryans settled in into villages and began to farm. By about 700 B.C., the Aryans were living in cities and had developed a written language called *Sanskrit*.

The Caste System

The Aryans developed a system of social classes known as the caste system. Under the caste system, Aryans divided people, into *castes*, or groups, according to their occupation.

Aryans created four main castes. The top castes were made up of priests, kings, and warriors. The lowest caste was made up of workers who served the higher castes.



Under the caste system, people could not rise to a higher caste. People remained in their caste for life. Children became members of their parents' caste. Each caste had strict rules of conduct for caste members to follow. People in a caste could not eat with people of other castes. They could not marry people from other castes.

The caste system has been a part of Indian life for thousands of years. Today, the caste system is not as strong as in the past. But it still affects the way many Indians live.

Ancient Indians developed one of the world's great religions, Hinduism. Today, it is still the religion of most Indians.

The followers of Hinduism are called Hindus. Hindus worship many gods. But they believe those gods are all part of one *supreme* or highest, spirit. That spirit is called *Brahman*. Hindus believe the spirit of Brahman is in all living things.

Reincarnation

Hindus believe that each person has a soul. The soul does not die with the body. After one life is over, the soul is *reborn* or born again, in another body. That belief is called *reincarnation*.

Reincarnation is closely tied to the caste system. You read that each caste has strict rules. Hindus believe that people who obey the rules of their caste are reborn into higher caste. But people who fail to obey the rules are reborn into a lower caste. They might even be reborn as an animal or an insect. Hindus believe that after many rebirths, some people reach the highest caste. Their souls become pure and clean. Hindus believe that such people are ready to leave the earth. Their souls join forever with the spirit of Brahman.

Looking Back

1. Who were the Aryans?
2. What is the caste system?
3. What do Hindus believe about Brahman?
4. How do Hindus believe people become joined forever with Brahman?

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India and Buddhism

You read that by 700 B.C. the Aryans had built a civilization in India. They set up several kingdoms across northern India. During the next 400 years, invaders, including Alexander the Great, often attacked the Aryan kingdoms.

Around 300 B.C., an Indian ruler named Chandragupta Maurya united the Aryan kingdoms into a large empire. He brought a long period of peace and prosperity to India. During that time, a new religion spread across India. That religion was Buddhism.

Key Words

Literature
Spy
Monastery
Toleration

The Beginnings of Buddhism

Siddhartha Gautama was born in India around 563 B.C. He began his search for the truth about human suffering around 534 B.C. (You read about the beginning of that search.) That was a time of new beginnings in many parts of the world.



In Greece, philosophers were asking new questions about the world. In Italy, the Romans were about to set up the first republic. In India, a new religion called **Buddhism** was about to be born.

The Search for the Truth

Much of what we know about Siddhartha comes from Buddhist writings. They say that Siddhartha first searched for the truth by studying with teachers of Hinduism. (Hinduism was the major religion of ancient India.) But Siddhartha did not find his answers in Hinduism.

Siddhartha then went to live in a forest. For six years, he ate only weeds and berries. He went without clean clothes and other comforts. He believed that such *self-denial* (doing without comforts) would bring wisdom. But still he found no answers.

Finally, Siddhartha decided he would *meditate* until he found the answers he was seeking. (People meditate by relaxing and clearing their minds of thoughts.) He meditated beneath a tree for hours. Then he saw his answers clearly. After that, he was known as the **Buddha**, or the one who has seen the truth.

Looking Back

1. How did Siddhartha begin his search for the truth? What did he do next?
2. How did he finally find the answers he was seeking?

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The Teachings of Buddhism

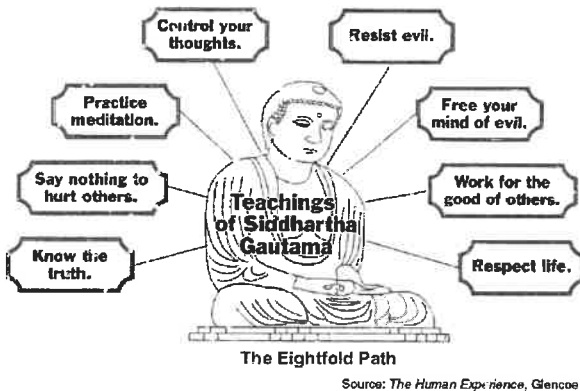
After finding the truths he was seeking, the Buddha became a teacher. He wandered across northern India sharing his truths with people.

The Buddha died around 483 B.C. After his death, his followers continued to spread his teachings. Out of those teachings came Buddhism.

The Four Noble Truths

At the center of Buddhism are the **Four Noble Truths**. Those are the truths the Buddha discovered as he meditated beneath the tree. These are the four truths: From birth to death, life is filled with suffering.

- People suffer because they *desire* (seek after) things that do not last, such as pleasure and wealth.
- The way to end suffering is to get rid of desire.
- The way to get rid of desire is to follow the **Eightfold Path**.



The Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is a guide to a good life. Those who follow the path are freed from suffering and find happiness. These are the steps on the Eightfold Path:

- **Right understanding** Be sure you understand the Buddha's teachings.
- **Right thought** Think pure thoughts.

- **Right speech** Speak the truth. Do not say bad things about other people.
- **Right action** Do not steal. Be careful not to hurt any living thing. Treat others well, even your enemies.
- **Right work** Earn a living in a way that does not harm others.
- **Right effort** Make an effort to become a better person. Work hard to end bad thoughts and actions.
- **Right mindfulness** Be *mindful of*, or think about, how you live each day. Notice what is happening around you. Do not go through life half asleep.
- **Right meditation** Spend time meditating each day. Clear your mind of feelings and desires. Only then will you see the truth and find peace.

Reaching Nirvana

Like the Hindus, the Buddha believed that people are reborn again and again. In each life, people suffer because of their desires.

The Buddha taught that those who follow the Eightfold Path can end the *cycle*, or circle, of rebirth and suffering. They can reach **nirvana**, a feeling of complete peace and happiness. Those who reach nirvana are not born again. For them, all suffering is ended.

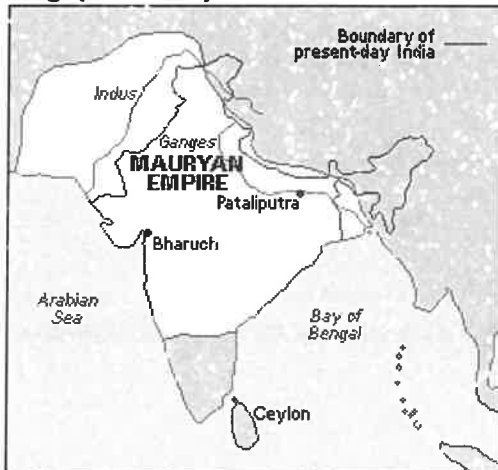
Looking Back

1. What are the Four Noble Truths?
2. What is the Eightfold Path?
3. What happens when people reach nirvana?

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The Mauryan Empire

At the time of the Buddha's death, India was divided into many small kingdoms. One of those kingdoms was Magadha in eastern India. About 322 B.C., a young warrior led a rebellion against the king of Magadha. His name was **Chandragupta Maurya**.



Chandragupta won control of Magadha. In time, he built an empire that included most of India. It was called the **Mauryan Empire**. Chandragupta began a dynasty, or ruling family, that governed the empire until about 185 B.C.

The Rule of Chandragupta

Chandragupta set up a strong central government for the empire. Still, he worried about rebellions. Chandragupta placed spies everywhere. (A spy is someone who secretly watches others.) Anyone suspected of working against the government was killed.

Chandragupta built thousands of miles of roads across the empire. Posts were placed along the roads at every mile. The posts showed directions and distances to towns and villages along the way. Inns were also built along the roads for the comfort of travelers.

The Rule of Asoka

In 273 B.C., Chandragupta's grandson became emperor. His name was Asoka. Asoka went to war with a kingdom called Kalinga in southern India. During the fighting, over 100,000 Kalingans were killed. The loss of life horrified Asoka.

After that, Asoka converted to Buddhism. Asoka called for religious **toleration** in his empire. That is, he asked Indians to *tolerate*, or accept, all religions. But for the rest of his life, Asoka lived by the Buddha's teachings.

Asoka never went to war again. He traveled across his empire, encouraging Indians to live together in peace. He asked Indians to be honest and truthful and to treat each other kindly.

The Spread of Buddhism

Asoka spread Buddhism across India. He built thousands of Buddhist **monasteries**. There Buddhists studied and meditated.

Asoka also sent Buddhist missionaries to other lands. From India, Buddhism spread across most of Asia. Today, Buddhism is still a major religion in Tibet, Japan, Korea, and much of Southeast Asia.

Looking Back

1. Describe the rule of Chandragupta Maurya.

2. Why did Asoka convert to Buddhism?

3. How did Asoka help spread Buddhism?

4. *Thinking Deeper:* Why do you think Asoka is remembered as one of India's greatest leaders?

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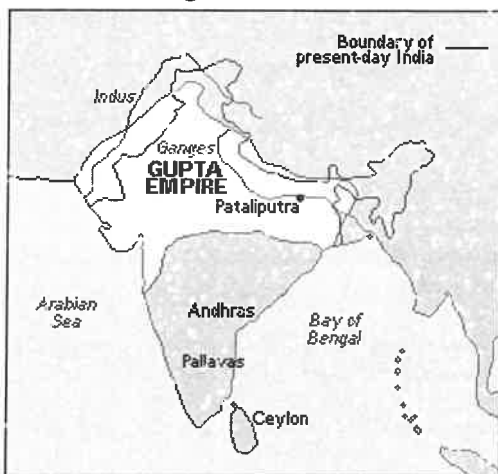
After Asoka died in 232 B.C., the Mauryan Empire fell apart. First, civil wars weakened the empire. Then, peoples from Persia and central Asia invaded India.

For 500 years, India was again divided into many small kingdoms. During that time, trade grew between the Indian kingdoms and other lands. Indians traded spices, ivory, and jewels for Roman glassware and wine. They traded with China for silk.

The Gupta Empire

Around A.D. 320, during the decline of the Roman Empire, a new empire arose in northern India. It was built by a warrior, named Chandragupta I. His empire is known as the Gupta Empire.

The Gupta Empire lasted for over 200 years. That was a time of peace and prosperity in India. It was also a time of achievements in art and mathematics. For that reason, historians call the period the Golden Age of India.



Art and Literature in the Golden Age

Indian artists produced great works during the Golden Age. Many paintings and statues from that time show Hindu gods. Others show scenes from the Buddha's life.

The Golden Age was also a time of great *literature*. Indian writers wrote many poems and plays. They also wrote down legends and other *tales*, or stories, from the past. Those tales were carried to other lands by traders and missionaries.

Many Indian tales are still enjoyed around the world today. The stories of Sinbad the Sailor and Cinderella come from old Indian tales.

Mathematics

During the Golden Age, the Indians created new number system. In their system, they used the symbols 0 to 9 to write numbers.

Indian merchants and traders found the new number system quick and easy to use. The Indians taught the system to Arab traders from the Middle East. In time, the Indian numbers became known as Arabic numerals. Today, Arabic numerals are used around the world.

The Fall of the Gupta Empire

During the A.D. 400s, the Gupta Empire began to decline. Invaders from central Asia called the Huns attacked India. They took over much of northwestern India.

By A.D. 600, the central government of the empire had broken down. India was once more divided into many separate kingdoms. The Gupta Empire was gone.

Looking Back

1. Why is the time of the Gupta Empire called the Golden Age of India?
2. What contribution did the Indians make in mathematics?
3. What happened to the Gupta Empire?