

Geography and the Early Settlement of India

Overview and Objectives

Overview

In a Response Group activity, groups identify physical features of the Indian subcontinent and explain how geography influenced the location of early settlement in India.

Objectives

In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will

Social Studies

- locate and describe eight key physical features of the Indian subcontinent, including the major river systems.
- explain how geography affected the location of early settlement in India and supported the rise of civilization there.
- predict and map the location of early human settlement in India.

Language Arts

- deliver oral communications using detailed evidence.
- write an expository paragraph using persuasive evidence.

Social Studies Vocabulary

Key Content Terms subcontinent, monsoon, plateau

Academic Vocabulary fertile, elevate, brief, intense

Lesson 13 - Geography and the Early Settlement of India

Section 1 - Introduction

In this unit, you will learn about the civilization of ancient India. First, in this chapter, you will explore the geography of the area, including its rivers, mountains, plains, plateaus, deserts, and valleys. These physical features influenced where ancient India's civilization arose.

Early towns began to appear in India in about 2500 B.C.E. Over the next 2,000 years, a unique civilization developed in India.

According to an ancient Indian story, a river god and a river goddess once lived in the snow-covered Himalayas (him-uh-LAY-uhz), a mountain range extending through northern India. One day, the two decided to race down the mountains to the plains below. The river goddess sped straight down and won the race. But her joy soon turned to worry. Where was the river god?

The river god had slowed down to admire the snowcapped mountains and the rich brown earth in the valleys. In time, he flowed down to meet his goddess. The two rivers became one, joined forever on India's plains. The rivers made the land good for farming.

In this chapter, you will learn about India's rivers and other physical features. You'll explore eight key features and their effects on the settlement of ancient India.

Section 2 - Brahmaputra River

The land of India is a **subcontinent** of Asia. Looking at a map of Asia, you can see that India is attached to this continent. Many geographers call this part of Asia the Indian subcontinent. It is a large, triangular landmass that juts out from the southern part of Asia. Mountain ranges separate much of the Indian subcontinent from the rest of Asia.

Our exploration of India begins with the Brahmaputra (brah-muh-POO-truh) River. This river runs through the steep Himalayas, the mountains along the northern border of India. From there, the Brahmaputra winds through snowcapped mountains and narrow canyons. The water is clear and cold as it rushes over the sharp rocks.

The river becomes slower and deeper as it flows into its valley. Every summer, this part of the river receives added water from heavy **monsoon** rains. A monsoon is a strong wind that often brings huge amounts of rain. These rains can cause the river to overflow its banks. As the river recedes, the rich minerals that have been carried down from the Himalayas remain in the soil of the valley.

Eventually, the Brahmaputra River joins another river, the Ganges (GAN-jeez), on the plains. The land where the two rivers meet is very **fertile**

Section 3 - Deccan Plateau

The Deccan (DEH-kuhn) Plateau is a triangle-shaped area that lies between two mountain ranges in southern India. A **plateau** is an **elevated**, or raised, area of land that is flatter than a mountain. The Deccan Plateau has several kinds of land. In the flatter parts, large granite rocks formed by volcanoes cover the land. These rocks are among the world's oldest, dating back more than six hundred million years. The hillier parts of the plateau have thin forests and low, scrubby bushes.

The plateau is fairly dry. There are a few rivers, but the monsoon rains provide most of the water. The soil on the plateau is black, yellow, or red. The black soil is rich in iron and good for growing cotton. The yellow and red soils lack key minerals. This makes it harder for farmers to grow plants in those areas

Section 4 - Eastern and Western Ghats

The Eastern and Western Ghats (ghats) are long mountain chains near the coasts of India. The Eastern Ghats extend along India's east coast. The Western Ghats extend along the west coast. When seen from above, the Ghats form a large "V." The Deccan Plateau lies between these two mountain ranges.

The Western Ghats are higher than the Eastern Ghats. The Western Ghats have steep slopes; narrow valleys; thick, hardwood forests; and extremely heavy rains. The wet climate encourages the growth of tropical plants.

The Eastern Ghats are not as wet as the Western Ghats. Several rivers flow through these green mountains, which are dotted with hardwood trees. The rivers rarely flood, but they are unsafe for travel. They move rapidly, contain many rocks, and often plunge suddenly over cliffs

Section 5 - Ganges River

The Ganges River flows across most of northern India. It starts in the Himalaya Mountains. The river makes its way south through ice, rocks, and magnificent mountains and valleys.

The river carries silt from the Himalayas to the northern plains. As the river passes through the plains, it leaves the rich sediment behind. As a result, the northern plains contain some of the most fertile farmland in the world.

Melted ice carried down from the Himalayas provides the Ganges River plains with a good supply of water. During the rainy season, the river can flood and destroy crops planted along its banks

Section 6 - Himalaya Mountains

The Himalaya Mountains are located along India's northern border. This mountain range is the highest in the world. Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain, is part of the Himalayas. It reaches more than five and a half miles into the sky. The Himalayas form a natural border between the Indian subcontinent and most of the rest of Asia.

The Himalayas live up to their name, which means "home of snows." The highest peaks are always covered in snow and ice. Fierce storms can dump 10 feet of snow on the area at one time. Water from glaciers in the Himalaya Mountains feeds northern India's major rivers.

Underneath the Himalaya Mountains, the Earth is always moving. This movement causes Mount Everest to rise slightly every year. It also makes earthquakes and landslides common in the area.

Section 7 - Hindu Kush Mountains

The Hindu Kush mountains form a rugged barrier between the Indus (IN-duhs) River valley and Afghanistan. This mountain range is not as tall as the Himalayas, but it is still one of the highest in the world. Some of its peaks are almost five miles high. Many parts of the mountain range are unlivable. Snow and ice permanently cover the steep slopes and peaks.

The Khyber (KIE-ber) Pass forms a gap about 30 miles long in the mountains on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The pass connects central Asia to the Indian subcontinent. For thousands of years, traders used the pass to enter the Indus River valley. Invaders also used the pass. But many died in the mountains' unforgiving landscape

Section 8 - Indus River

The Indus River begins in the Himalaya Mountains. It gets water from snow melting in the Hindu Kush mountains and other mountain ranges. This runoff of melting snow and ice from the mountains keeps the river's water level high. Eventually, the river flows through present-day Pakistan and empties into the Arabian Sea.

The Indus River valley contains some of the best farmland in the world. Like the Ganges River, the Indus River carries silt from the mountains to the plains. The silt leaves the surrounding soil rich and fertile.

The Indus River has often been compared to Egypt's Nile River. Like the Nile, the Indus is an important source of water for the farmland that lies along its banks.

Section 9 - Thar Desert

The massive Thar (tahr) Desert in northern India is mostly sand and stone. Huge, rolling sand dunes stretch for hundreds of miles. The landscape is littered with rocks. There is very little plant life except for grass and low, hardy shrubs. Most of the time, the heat is unbearable.

Water is a very precious resource in the desert. Rain is rare, although the monsoons may occasionally bring a **brief** but **intense** storm. The dry conditions make dust storms common.

Many animals and birds make their home in the desert. There are more than forty-five kinds of lizards and snakes. Gazelles lope across the sand. Birds include quail, ducks, and geese.

Section 10 - Early Settlements in India

Like many ancient peoples, the first people in India most likely chose to settle near rivers. The rivers provided plenty of water. The fertile soil was ideal for farming. The rivers could also be used for travel and trade.

The first known settlements in ancient India were in the Indus River valley. There were farming communities in this valley as early as 6500 B.C.E. By 5000 B.C.E., people also lived near the Ganges River. By 2500 B.C.E., there were walled settlements in the Indus River valley.

The geography of India greatly influenced the location of early settlements on the subcontinent. Both the Indus and the Ganges rivers carried rich silt from the mountains to the plains. When the rivers flooded, the silt spread over the plains and made the soil in the river valleys fertile for farming. Over time, an ancient civilization developed and flourished in these settlements.

Summary

In this chapter, you explored eight physical features of the Indian subcontinent and how they affected early settlement in India.

Major Rivers In northern India, the Brahmaputra, the Ganges, and the Indus rivers carry rich silt from the mountains to the plains. India's early settlers farmed and later built walled settlements in the river valleys. This was the start of civilization in India.

Deccan Plateau In some parts of this raised area between two mountain ranges in southern India, rich black soil is good for growing cotton.

Mountain Ranges The Eastern and Western Ghats are near India's coasts. Between them lies the Deccan Plateau. The Western Ghats are higher and wetter than the Eastern Ghats. The Himalayas along India's northern border are the highest mountains in the world. The Hindu Kush range runs through present-day Pakistan. It provides access through the Khyber Pass to the Indian subcontinent.

Thar Desert This vast desert in northern India has huge sand dunes, little plant life, and extreme heat. Dust storms are common. Animals, such as lizards, snakes, gazelles, and a variety of birds, live here

Unlocking the Secrets of Mohenjodaro

Overview and Objectives

Overview

In an Experiential Exercise, students act as archaeologists and examine artifacts from Mohenjodaro to learn about daily life in the Indus valley civilization.

Objectives

In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will

Social Studies

- form hypotheses about the function of artifacts and ruins from an ancient city in the Indus Valley.
- analyze artifacts to draw conclusions about daily life in the Indus valley civilization.
- explain why Mohenjodaro is an important archaeological site.

Language Arts

- demonstrate an understanding of text by creating logical notes.
- connect and clarify main ideas by using other sources.

Social Studies Vocabulary

Key Content Terms Mohenjodaro, citadel, Indus valley civilization, granary

Academic Vocabulary reveal, function, drain, channel, transport

Lesson 14 - Unlocking the Secrets of Mohenjodaro

Section 1 - Introduction

The geography of the Indian subcontinent affected where early people lived. Early settlements in this region were in fertile river valleys. In this chapter, you will visit one of those settlements, the city of Mohenjodaro (moh-HEN-joh-dahr-oh).

Mohenjodaro was one of many settlements that were located in the Indus River valley. These settlements became known as the Indus valley civilization. It is also called the Harappan (huh- RAP-pen) civilization, after another city at that time, Harappa. The civilization flourished for about 800 years, from about 2700 B.C.E. to 1900 B.C.E.

The cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro were the two great centers of the Indus valley civilization. Mohenjodaro means “place or hill of the dead.” In 1922, archaeologists found the ruins of Mohenjodaro. Carefully, they excavated the city. They discovered that it had two main parts. The first part was a raised area that was used as a citadel, or fortress. The citadel was surrounded by a wall. In times of danger or trouble, people may have gathered in this area for safety. The second part of Mohenjodaro was below the citadel. The lower city had many houses and workshops. This is likely the area where most people lived their daily lives.

What was daily life like in Mohenjodaro? In this chapter, you will unlock some secrets of this ancient city. You’ll explore its ruins and study its artifacts. What do these clues **reveal** about the city’s people and their civilization?

Section 2 - The Mystery of Mohenjodaro

Mohenjodaro was on the banks of the Indus River in present-day Pakistan. By studying the city's ruins, we see that the city was carefully planned. To the west, a citadel sat on a platform of mud and brick. Below the citadel, nine streets divided the lower city into blocks, like those of a modern city. The streets were lined with houses and workshops made of mud bricks.

Mohenjodaro was a large city. At one time, as many as 50,000 people may have lived there. Similar to other settlements of the Indus valley civilization, Mohenjodaro had an advanced culture. But one great mystery remains. What happened to this civilization?

No one knows for sure. After about 1900 B.C.E., the great cities of the Indus River valley disappeared. Some scientists believe that hostile invaders were to blame. According to this idea, fierce warriors swept in from central Asia and destroyed the local civilization. But with a lack of evidence to support it, this idea has been rejected in recent years by many scholars.

Other scientists think that natural events may have caused the decline of the Indus valley civilization. They point to floods and earthquakes that are known to have struck the region around 1900 B.C.E.

All that remains today of the Indus valley people are the buildings and artifacts they left behind. These clues can tell us a great deal about how they lived. Let's explore the ruins of Mohenjodaro and see what we can find out.

Section 3 - Weights and Scale

Inside the walls of Mohenjodaro's citadel, a scale and several kinds of stone weights were found near a large building. Some archaeologists believed that the design of this building suggested that it was used as a **granary**. Later studies, however, showed no evidence for this idea. Many archaeologists now agree that the building was probably a large public structure, but its specific **function** remains unknown. It may have been used as a storehouse, a temple, or for some other purpose. Perhaps rulers and state officials met there.

The scale and weights found near the building are interesting artifacts. Similar to those found in other parts of the city, these objects suggest to archaeologists that ancient Indians used standard weights as they traded goods. Most of the small weights were cube shaped. They were made of a stone called chert. Chert could be chipped and ground to a certain weight but was hard enough to last. The weights were consistent and accurate. The smallest weights were found in jewelers' shops. Also found were marked rods. These suggest that the ancient Indians also had a uniform way to measure length.

Section 4 - The Great Bath

The most dramatic feature of Mohenjodaro's citadel was the Great Bath. The Great Bath was a pool built of waterproofed brick. It was 39 feet long and 8 feet deep. Small dressing rooms circled the pool. One of the rooms contained a well that supplied the bath with water. Dirty water was removed through a **drain** that ran along one side of the bath.

It seems likely that the people of Mohenjodaro used the pool to bathe. On a hot, clear day, they might have enjoyed washing themselves in the bath's cooling waters. Some archaeologists think that the Great Bath might have been used for religious rituals. They point out that bathing rituals are important in India's major religion, Hinduism. Ancient Hindu temples often featured bathing pools

Section 5 - Statue and Beads

In the lower city, archaeologists found a stone statue, 7 inches high. It shows how men in Mohenjodaro might have looked and dressed. As you can see in the photograph, the figure has a short, tidy beard and a clean upper lip. His hair is tied back with a band. He is wearing a patterned robe draped over his left shoulder. His expression is calm and noble. Archaeologists wonder who the figure is. Some scientists think that he may have been both a priest and a king.

Beautiful stone beads, in many shapes and colors, have been found throughout Mohenjodaro. Women may have worn them in necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and rings. Bead makers also made beads of clay and baked them in hot ovens called kilns. These artisans then drilled holes in the beads for stringing into necklaces

Section 6 - Seals

Small stone seals, found in large numbers throughout the ruins, are among the most mysterious of Mohenjodaro's artifacts. The seals are carved with pictographs, an ancient form of drawing that uses pictures to stand for objects, sounds, or ideas. More than four hundred pictographs have been discovered, but archaeologists know little of their meaning. Many seals show animals such as buffalo, bulls, tigers, elephants, rhinoceroses, fish, and crocodiles.

No one knows how the seals were used, but scientists have made some educated guesses. Many of the seals have a small loop on the back. Perhaps people wore them as charms to keep away evil. The seals may also have been pressed into wax to make a kind of tag. Merchants might have placed the wax tags on their goods to show who owned them.

Section 7 - Sewer System

A great achievement of Mohenjodaro was its advanced sewer system. A sewer system carries waste water away from houses. Mohenjodaro's complex system of drains, pipes, wells, and bathrooms set the city apart from other settlements of its time. Two thousand years would pass before the world would see another system like it, in ancient Rome.

A network of clay pipes connected Mohenjodaro's buildings and homes to the main sewer system. Dirty water and waste flowed in **channels** along the streets. This sewage then emptied into the Indus River. Archaeologists think that the sewer system made it possible for all residents of the city, rich or poor, to have had bathrooms in their homes.

Deep wells made of brick were located throughout the city. People stored water, including rainfall, in these wells

Section 8 - Homes

Most of Mohenjodaro's people lived in the lower city, which was three times the size of the citadel. Rows of houses lined the streets. The houses had flat roofs and were two stories high. Like most of the city's buildings, they were made of mud bricks.

The houses faced narrow alleys. The backs of the houses opened onto courtyards where families could gather. The houses had narrow windows on the second floor. Screens for these windows were made of either a hard clay called terra-cotta or a see-through mineral called alabaster.

Homes had from one to a dozen rooms. Scientists believe that the poorer citizens may have lived in the smaller homes. The larger homes most likely belonged to the wealthy.

Section 9 - Games

Evidence from Mohenjodaro suggests that the people who lived there enjoyed playing games. Many objects appear to be crafted for use as toys and parts of game sets. Archaeologists have uncovered dice, stone balls, grooved clay tracks, and stone game boards.

The game of chess may have originated in India. An ancient Indian book describes a war game played with dice and with pieces called pawns. Although modern chess is not played with dice, historians believe that the war game is an early form of chess. The small, carved game pieces found at Mohenjodaro may have been used to play this game.

The children of Mohenjodaro likely played simpler games. Some of the objects found by archaeologists look like children's toys. For example, children may have enjoyed rolling stone balls along clay mazes and tracks.

Section 10 - Clay Models

Archaeologists have found small clay models throughout Mohenjodaro. Most of these models are made of terra-cotta. In one model, shown here, two bulls are attached to a yoke, or wooden harness. The bulls are pulling a person in a two-wheeled cart. This model may be a form of ancient toy, but archaeologists believe that it also shows how people **transported** farm goods to the city's market. It is likely that on market day, farmers loaded their crops into carts. The crops may have included barley, cotton, dates, melons, peas, rice, sesame seeds, and wheat. Then the farmers hitched their bulls to the carts and headed to market, where they sold or traded their goods with other farmers.

Summary

In this chapter, you explored artifacts from the ruins of the two parts of the city of Mohenjodaro to learn about daily life in the Indus valley civilization.

The Mystery of Mohenjodaro Historians and archaeologists continue to investigate what happened to this remarkable civilization.

Weights and Scale The discovery of standard weights, a scale, and marked rods suggest that the ancient Indians had a uniform way to measure weight and length.

The Great Bath The remains of a brick pool, well, and drain system, lead archaeologists to believe that people may have bathed in and used the pool in religious rituals.

Statue, Beads, and Seals Other interesting artifacts include a small statue of a man, a variety of stone beads, and stone seals carved with pictographs.

Sewer System A sewer system carried waste away from the city's buildings and into the Indus River. Both rich and poor people likely had homes with indoor bathrooms.

Homes Most people lived in the lower city in rows of 2-story houses made of mud bricks. These homes had between one and a dozen rooms.

Games As the discovery of game pieces and toys suggests, the people had time to play. Adults may have played an early form of chess.

Clay Models Archaeologists have found clay models that may have been toys. Some models reveal information about ways of farming and transporting goods to market.

Learning About World Religions: Hinduism

Overview and Objectives

Overview

In a Response Group activity, students analyze images representing important beliefs in Hinduism to discover the religion's origins in ancient traditions and discuss how these beliefs affect life in ancient India and today.

Objectives

In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will

Social Studies

- explain the relationship among Vedic religion, Brahmanism, and Hinduism.
- outline the social structure of the caste system.
- describe important beliefs in Hinduism and discuss their influence on daily life.
- assess the impact of ancient beliefs and practices on life in modern India.

Language Arts

- deliver oral communications using detailed evidence.
- compose an acrostic poem.

Social Studies Vocabulary

Key Content Terms Hinduism, Vedas, Sanskrit, Brahmanism, caste, dharma, karma, reincarnation, pilgrimage

Academic Vocabulary affect, specific, interpret, divine, cycle

Lesson 15 - Learning About World Religions: Hinduism

Section 1 - Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about the origins and beliefs of Hinduism. Hinduism is the most influential set of religious beliefs in modern India.

The ancient traditions that gave rise to Hinduism have shaped Indian life in countless ways. This cultural heritage has **affected** how people worship, what jobs they do, and even what they eat. It has inspired great art and literature. And it has helped determine the status of people in Indian society.

One of the basic beliefs of Hinduism and some other Indian religions is dharma. Dharma refers to law, duty, and obligation. To follow one's dharma means to dedicate oneself to performing one's duties and to living by **specific** sets of rules.

The *Ramayana*, one of the most famous ancient literary texts, is sacred to many Hindus. It tells about life in ancient India and offers role models in dharma. For example, one of the central figures of the *Ramayana*, Rama, lives by the rules of dharma. When Rama is a young boy, he is a loyal son. When he grows up, he is a loving husband and a responsible ruler.

In this chapter, you will explore the origins of Hinduism. Then you will learn about dharma and a number of other Hindu beliefs: Brahman, deities, karma, and samsara.

Section 2 - The Origins of Hinduism

No single person founded **Hinduism**. It developed slowly, over a long period of time, growing out of centuries of older traditions.

In the second millennium B.C.E., nomadic people speaking Indo-European languages migrated into northern India. These nomads, sometimes called Aryans (AIR-ee-uhnz), brought to India their gods and rituals, some of which eventually became part of Hinduism. Other aspects of Hinduism drew on local traditions, which, over thousands of years, allowed a wide range of practices and beliefs to arise in different parts of India.

The oldest roots of Hinduism are found in Vedic religion, which is named for the earliest Indian texts. The **Vedas** (VAYduhz) are a collection of sacred texts, including verses, hymns, prayers, and teachings composed in **Sanskrit** (SAN-skrit). (Veda is Sanskrit for “knowledge.”) The earliest of the Vedas grew out of traditions brought into India by the Aryans. These traditions expanded over centuries in India, as the teachings of the Vedas were handed down orally from generation to generation, before India had a written form of Sanskrit.

Vedic rituals and sacrifices honored a number of deities (gods and goddesses) associated with nature and social order. Over time, these rituals became more complex. A class of priests and religious scholars, called Brahmins (BRAH-minz), grew increasingly important. They were responsible for correctly **interpreting** the Vedas and performing the required rituals. Brahmins eventually became the dominant class in India. Later Vedic religion is often called **Brahmanism**. The word *Hinduism*, the term for the traditions that grew out of later Vedic religion or Brahmanism, came much later.

Modern-day Hinduism is a very complex religion. Many beliefs, forms of worship, and deities exist side by side, and often differ from place to place. The Vedas, to which Hinduism traces its early roots, remain sacred to many Hindus today. Along with later sacred texts, the Vedas lay out some of the basic beliefs of Hinduism. As you will see, these beliefs have influenced every aspect of life in India.

Section 3 - Hinduism and the Caste System

Brahmanism was more than a religion in ancient India. It was a way of life. It affected how Indians lived, what they believed, and even the way they organized their society. Many of those ideas live on in modern Hinduism.

Brahmanism taught that a well-organized society was divided into different social classes. Today, we call this practice of social organization, developed in India, the **caste** system. The Vedas describe four main social classes, or *varnas*:

- Brahmins (priests and religious scholars)
- Kshatriyas (KSHA-tree-uhs) (rulers and warriors)
- Vaishyas (VIESH-yuhs) (herders and merchants)
- Shudras (SHOO-druhs) (servants, farmers, and laborers)

According to the Vedas, each class, or *varna*, had its own duties. For example, Brahmins had a duty to study and teach the Vedas. Warriors had a duty to become skilled with weapons. But the caste system meant that some people were favored much more than others. Brahmins held the highest place in society, while Shudras held the lowest.

Over the centuries, the caste system in India grew very complex. By medieval times, there were thousands of castes. The people in the lowest caste were known as Untouchables. Their descendants today often call themselves *Dalits*, from a word meaning “suppressed” or “crushed.” This group had jobs or ways of life that involved activities that high-caste Indians considered lowly or “dirty,” such as handling garbage and dead animals. Untouchables often had to live in their own villages or neighborhoods. They could not enter many temples or attend most schools. Other Hindus avoided touching, and in many cases, even looking at this group of people. Some of these rules separating the lowest caste remain today.

The caste system affected all aspects of people’s lives. Indians were born into a certain caste, and they could not change it. They could only marry within their own caste. Today, caste discrimination is outlawed in India. But despite the laws, caste status continues to affect many parts of Indian life. This way of organizing society is just one example of how ancient religion affected daily life in India. Let’s look now at other aspects of Hinduism and how they helped shape Indian life and culture.

Section 4 - Hindu Beliefs About Brahman

Brahman is the name of a supreme power, or a **divine** force, that some Hindus believe is greater than all other deities. To these Hindus, only Brahman exists forever. Everything else in the world changes, from the passing seasons to all living things that eventually die.

In many Indian traditions, including Hinduism, time moves forward in a circle, like a great wheel. The same events return, just as the sun rises each morning, and spring follows winter. Some Hindus see this **cycle** as the work of Brahman, who is constantly creating, destroying, and re-creating the universe. The cycle never ends.

According to Hindus following these traditions, everything in the world is a part of Brahman, including the human soul. Ancient Hindus called the soul *atman*. In certain traditions, Hindus view the soul as part of Brahman, just as a drop of water is part of the ocean. Through their souls, people are therefore connected to Brahman. In these traditions, the other deities worshipped in Hinduism are simply different forms of Brahman. Other Hindus have different beliefs about Hindu gods, such as Vishnu (VISH-noo) and Shiva (SHIH-vuh).

To communicate with their deities, followers of the ancient Vedic religion and Brahmanism held their elaborate rites and sacrifices outdoors. In later Hindu times, as Indian civilization developed and cities grew, people began to build massive temples for worship. Today, many modern Hindu temples are modeled after the ancient principles used to design those early temples.

Many Hindu temples are magnificent in size and design. Their doors often face east, toward the rising sun. The buildings are covered with beautiful carvings and sculptures. These works of art usually show deities from Hindu sacred texts. The temple interiors usually contain a tower and a small shrine.

Section 5 - Hindu Beliefs About Deities

There are many deities in Hindu sacred texts and worship rituals. Over time, as we learned earlier, some Hindus came to believe that all the deities were different faces of a supreme force, Brahman. For these Hindus, each god represented a power or quality of Brahman.

Today, in some Hindu traditions, there are three important deities. They are Brahma (BRAH-mah) (not Brahman), Vishnu, and Shiva. Each deity controls one aspect of the universe. Brahma creates it, Vishnu preserves it, and Shiva destroys it. In other Indian traditions, another goddess named Devi (DAY-vee) embodies the female powers of the universe.

Ancient Hindu sacred texts often describe heroic deities battling evil. One famous story is found in the *Ramayana*. It tells of Rama's fierce battle with Ravana, a demon (evil spirit). Such tales present in an entertaining way some of what later became Hindu beliefs. Many Hindu children have learned about their religion by listening to readings of the *Ramayana*, or in recent years, by seeing the stories dramatized on television.

Ancient literary texts like the *Ramayana*, which some Hindus view as sacred, have inspired many Hindu holidays and festivals. The Hindu New Year is celebrated at the Diwali (dih-VAH-lee) festival. *Diwali* means "row of lamps." The lamps are symbols of good (light) winning over evil (darkness). They are often said to represent Rama's triumph over the evil Ravana, and the start of the Hindu New Year.

Section 6 - Hindu Beliefs About Dharma

Dharma is an important belief in Hinduism and other Indian traditions. Dharma stands for law, obligation, and duty. To follow one's dharma means to perform one's duties and to live in an honorable way.

As you have already read, according to the Vedas, each social class, or varna, had its own duties. These duties usually involved a certain type of work. Duties might include studying religious texts, herding animals, trading goods, or serving as a warrior. Therefore, each class was seen as having its own dharma. In fact, early Hindus called their system of social classes varna dharma, or "the way of one's kind." Early Hindus believed that when everyone followed the dharma of their varna, society would be in harmony.

Brahmins, for example, were ancient Hindu society's priests and religious scholars. Their duties included performing rituals and teaching the Vedas. This was quite an accomplishment, since ancient scholars had passed down this knowledge through word of mouth. To recite the Vedas orally, Brahmins had to memorize tens of thousands of verses!

In addition to following the dharma of their own varna, Hindus are expected to follow a common dharma, or set of values. This is often said to include the importance of marriage, sharing food with others, and caring for one's soul.

Another basic value is nonviolence. Many Hindus, as well as followers of other Indian traditions, have a respect for life that stems from their belief that all life forms have a soul. In Hindu traditions, reverence for life is symbolized by the cow. Hindus were taught not to kill them, perhaps because cows provided people with things they needed, such as milk and butter. Even in death, cows provided hides that could be made into clothing

Section 7 - Hindu Beliefs About Karma

The belief in dharma expresses much of what Hindus believe about the right way to live. **Karma** is another belief Hindus share with other Indian traditions. It explains the importance of living according to dharma.

In Hindu belief, the law of karma governs what happens to people's souls after death. From ancient times, many Indians believed that souls had many lives. When a person died, his or her soul was reborn in a new body. The type of body the reborn soul received depended on the soul's karma. Karma was made up of all the good and evil that a person had done in past lives. If people lived good lives, they might be born into a higher social class in their next life. If they lived badly, they could expect to be reborn into a lower class. They might even be reborn as animals.

For Hindus, the law of karma meant that the universe was just, or fair. Souls were rewarded or punished for the good and evil they had done. Karma was also used to explain why people had a certain status in society. You may recall that in the caste system, people could not escape the social class of their birth. According to karma, this judgment was fair, because it was thought that people's social class reflected what they had done in their past lives.

Over the centuries, many Indian scholars disapproved of the caste system. They thought that all people, including the Untouchables, should be treated equally. In the 20th century, the chief architect of India's first constitution, B. R. Ambedkar, sharply criticized the caste system. He, himself, came from the Untouchable caste.

Today, Indian law makes caste discrimination illegal, but caste ideas continue to affect daily life. Other ancient ideas, like karma and rebirth, which are tied to views of caste, also remain central to Indian beliefs.

Section 8 - Hindu Beliefs About Samsara

As you have learned, Hindus and many other Indians believe in a continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. They call this cycle samsara. As long as people are part of samsara, they will know pain and death. Samsara ends when the soul escapes from the cycle of rebirth, the time when some Hindus believe that they are united with Brahman, the supreme force in the universe.

It takes many lifetimes before a person can be released from samsara. People escape the cycle of rebirth, or **reincarnation**, by following their dharma. They behave correctly and perform their social duties. They worship faithfully according to prescribed rules. In these ways, they balance their karma with good actions.

The Indians of ancient times went on holy journeys called **pilgrimages**. People would travel to sacred places like the Ganges River. Such pilgrims believed that the difficulty of the journey would cleanse them of their sins.

Faithful Hindus still make pilgrimages today. Pilgrims travel for days over difficult land, including mountains. At each holy site and temple they encounter, they often lie facedown in worship. The Ganges River is still one of the most holy places in India. Like the ancient Indians, modern Hindus bathe in its waters as an act of devotion and purification

Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the major beliefs of Hinduism, which grew out of ancient religious traditions, such as the Vedic religion and Brahmanism.

Hinduism and the Caste System Brahmanism followed a social organization that was described in the Vedas. There were four main classes, or varnas. Each class had certain duties. This caste system became more complex over time.

Hindu Beliefs About Brahman and Other Deities Some Hindus believe that Brahman is a divine force and the greatest deity. They believe he exists forever, creating, destroying, and re-creating the universe in an endless cycle. Their many deities are different faces of Brahman. Some traditions worship three key deities who control aspects of the universe: Brahma creates, Vishnu preserves, and Shiva destroys. One text held sacred by some Hindus is the *Ramayana*, which contains stories about deities battling evil.

Dharma According to these beliefs, held by Hindus and other Indian traditions, people must live honorably, by performing duties. Each class has its own dharma, as well as a common set of values.

Karma According to these beliefs, shared by Hindus and other traditions, the good and evil done in a past life determine what happens to one's soul in the next life. Karma was used to explain why people were in particular castes.

Samsara Hindus and other Indians believe in this cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The cycle ends after many lifetimes, when the soul is reunited with Brahman and is no longer reborn. Hindu beliefs continue to affect daily life in India. Hindus still worship in temples, make pilgrimages, and celebrate religious festivals.

Learning About World Religions: Buddhism

Overview and Objectives

Overview

In a Visual Discovery activity, students analyze images to learn about the life of Siddhartha Gautama and how his teachings became the basis of Buddhism.

Objectives

In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will

Social Studies

- describe the life of Siddhartha Gautama and explain how he became the Buddha.
- analyze paintings to clarify information presented in a historical narrative.
- summarize the main teachings of Buddhism.

Language Arts

- connect and clarify main ideas by using other sources.
- use verbal and nonverbal elements to sustain audience interest and attention.

Social Studies Vocabulary

Key Content Terms Buddha, ascetic, enlightenment, alms, nirvana, Buddhism, Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path

Academic Vocabulary embrace, prediction, transform, deny, seek

Lesson 16 - Learning About World Religions: Buddhism

Section 1 - Introduction

Hinduism, which developed in ancient India, is the oldest of the world's major religions. In this chapter, you will learn about Buddhism, another religion with roots in ancient India.

Buddhism is a religion based on the teachings of the Buddha (BOO-duh), which means "Awakened One." The Buddha was a man who lived in India from about 563 to 483 B.C.E. Before he became known as the Buddha, he was a young prince named Siddhartha Gautama (si-DAHR-tuh GOW-tuh-muh).

Prince Siddhartha grew up surrounded by wealth in the palaces of his father. At the age of 29, Siddhartha left his royal life to go in search of spiritual peace. During his journeys, he learned great truths that changed his life. By sharing these truths with others, he began the religion of Buddhism.

Buddhism was different from Hinduism in several ways. Whereas Hinduism was based on complicated rituals and beliefs in many gods, Buddhism was a way of life based on simple teachings. Unlike ancient Hinduism, Buddhism **embraced** all people regardless of their caste. It taught people how to reach enlightenment, or happiness that comes from the knowledge of deep truth. Buddhists believed that once they reached the level of enlightenment, they would escape from the cycle of rebirth.

In this chapter, you will learn about Buddhism through stories that are told about the Buddha's life. You will find out what Prince Siddhartha discovered during his life and how his teachings became the basis of Buddhism.

Section 2 - Prince Siddhartha's Birth

Prince Siddhartha was born about 563 B.C.E. in the northern part of India, near the Himalayas. His father, Suddhodana, was a powerful king. His mother was Queen Maya.

According to Buddhist tradition, before her son was born, the queen had a dream. In the dream, she was carried high over the Himalayas to a silver mountain and set on a silver couch. A white elephant with six tusks walked around her and then struck her in the right side.

The king and queen asked the Brahmins, or Hindu priests, to explain her dream. "You are carrying a child who will be a great man," they told the queen. The Brahmins declared that the prince's future held two possible paths. As a prince, he could rule the universe. But if he left his royal life to see the suffering in the world, he would become the **Buddha**, one who is enlightened.

The queen gave birth to Prince Siddhartha in a garden. Stories say that after the prince's birth, a soft, warm rain of heavenly flowers fell on the baby and his mother. According to Buddhist tradition, the infant prince already looked a few years old and could walk and talk. Siddhartha began his remarkable life by taking a few steps and declaring, "I am the leader of the world and the guide to the world."

Section 3 - The Prince's Royal Life

Prince Siddhartha's father wanted his son to be a great and powerful ruler. The king was worried about the **predictions** made by the Brahmins. If the prince saw the world's suffering, he might give up his royal duties to seek a spiritual path.

The king decided to protect his son from all of the horrors of the world. He raised the prince in a world of perfect wealth and beauty. He provided Siddhartha with only the finest gardens, houses, education, and food. Servants took care of the prince's every need, from washing his clothes to playing music for his amusement.

The prince enjoyed his life filled with lavish pleasures, yet he always felt curious about the world outside the palace walls. Some days, he would sit under a rose apple tree and think and wonder about the world beyond his reach.

At the age of 16, Prince Siddhartha married a beautiful young noblewoman. The wedding feast lasted seven days and seven nights. For 12 years, the couple lived together in perfect peace, enjoying the prince's many palaces. When Siddhartha turned 29, they had a son.

Section 4 - The Prince Discovers Three Forms of Suffering

After Siddhartha became a father himself, the king gave him more freedom to travel outside the royal palaces. According to Buddhist tradition, during his journeys, the prince discovered three forms of suffering.

On his first trip, the prince and his chariot driver saw a thin man who walked with the aid of a stick. "Why does that man look so terrible?" the prince asked. His driver replied that the man was old. He told the prince that everyone's body weakens as it ages.

On the second trip, the prince and his driver saw a man lying on the ground and crying out in pain. "What is the matter with that poor man?" the prince asked. The driver explained that the man was sick.

On the third trip, the prince saw a group of people walking slowly down the road. The group carried a figure wrapped in white cloth. "Death came for that man," Siddhartha's driver said quietly. "One day, it will come for you, too."

The prince was deeply troubled by his discovery of aging, sickness, and death. Unable to sit at home with his thoughts, he set out a fourth time. This time, he met a man who glowed with inner peace and calm. The man was an **ascetic** (uh-SEH-tik). An ascetic is someone who gives up worldly pleasures such as possessions, fine clothes, money, and even shelter.

"How can you sit there so peacefully when there is so much suffering in the world around you?" the prince asked the man. The ascetic replied, "To be free of suffering, one must give up the desires, pleasures, and comforts of the world. I find peace by helping others find peace."

Section 5 - The Prince Becomes an Ascetic

Prince Siddhartha's experiences with suffering **transformed** him. Suddenly, his royal life seemed empty. He wanted to find the happiness and peace that the ascetic had found.

Siddhartha decided to give up his old life and search for **enlightenment**. Becoming enlightened would mean finding deep truth and freedom from suffering.

One night, the prince asked his driver to take him to the forest. At the edge of the dark woods, Siddhartha removed his royal robes, sandals, and jewels. He cut off his hair with a knife. He put on a simple robe and carried only a small bowl for **alms**, or gifts of food. Wishing his driver farewell, Siddhartha began his life as an ascetic.

Siddhartha met other ascetics as he wandered the forests and fields. Like him, they wanted to understand the nature of the world. They believed that they could reach enlightenment through meditation. While meditating, the ascetics sat quietly and focused their minds on spiritual questions. Siddhartha quickly became an expert at meditation.

The ascetics also **denied** themselves many basic needs. For example, they stayed up all night without sleeping. They sat in the hot sun without shelter. They held their breath for several minutes. They also fasted, or stopped eating, for many days at a time. They hoped to find spiritual truth through self-denial.

Siddhartha continued to follow the way of the ascetics for some time. He became terribly thin from lack of food. According to Buddhist tradition, he became so thin that he could touch his stomach and feel his backbone. Eventually, he became unhappy with this extreme way of living. And he had not yet found the key to enlightenment.

Section 6 - The Prince Becomes the Buddha

Siddhartha had learned that giving up bodily pleasures did not bring enlightenment. He decided to find a balance between the extremes of pleasure and pain. He would be neither a prince nor an ascetic. Instead, he would seek a “middle way” as a path to enlightenment.

The prince’s new way of thinking caused the other ascetics to abandon him. But he was content to be alone. Although he had not yet found enlightenment, he believed that he was now on the right path.

A full moon rose on Siddhartha’s 35th birthday. He bathed in the river and rested quietly in a grove of trees. When he awoke, he had a strong feeling that he would soon become enlightened. Then a grass cutter gave him eight handfuls of soft grass as a present. Siddhartha walked until he reached a tree that would become known as the Bodhi (BOH-dee), or Enlightenment tree. He placed the grass at the foot of the tree and sat down. He vowed to meditate under the tree until he reached enlightenment.

According to Buddhist tradition, while Siddhartha was meditating, a wicked god named Mara tried to frighten him. Then Mara sent his three daughters—Discontent (unhappiness), Delight, and Desire—to try to tempt Siddhartha. But Siddhartha resisted them all. He then meditated through the rest of the night about the nature of reality and the way to reach nirvana, or true happiness and peace. During the night, his mind filled with the truths he had been seeking. He saw his past lives and the great cycle of rebirth. He saw the importance of karma. Eventually, he saw how to gain freedom from the continuous cycle, and therefore end all suffering.

By morning, the young prince had become the Buddha, the Awakened One. He had reached enlightenment.

The truths that the Buddha discovered under the Bodhi tree are the basic principles of Buddhism. They are often called the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha would spend the rest of his life sharing these truths with the people of India.

The Four Noble Truths

1. Suffering is present in all things, and nothing lasts forever.
2. Suffering is caused by cravings (desires and wants).
3. The way to end suffering is to give up all cravings.
4. The way to give up all cravings is to live life according to the **Eightfold Path**.

Section 7 - The Buddha's Teachings

The Eightfold Path



The Buddha said that one could end suffering and find enlightenment by following these eight teachings.

1. Right understanding
Develop a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

2. Right purpose
Live a life of selflessness (not selfishness), love, and nonviolence.

3. Right speech
Be careful and truthful in what you say. Do not lie or gossip.

4. Right action
Do not kill, steal, or lie. Be honest.

5. Right way to earn a living
Do not work at a job that causes harm to people or living creatures.

6. Right effort
Promote good actions and prevent evil actions.

7. Right mindfulness
Be aware of but not attached to your emotions, thoughts, and feelings.

8. Right concentration
Focus your mind with such practices as meditation.

Behind Buddhism's Four Noble Truths is the idea that all things change. The Buddha saw that even when one finds pleasure, it does not last forever, and one suffers when it is lost. To end suffering, he taught, people should travel the Eightfold Path. This path follows the "middle way."

The Buddha could have selfishly escaped into enlightenment. Instead, he chose to teach others the path that he had found. In time, his followers spread his teachings throughout India and other parts of Asia.

Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the beliefs and teachings of Buddhism, a religion that developed in ancient India.

Siddhartha Gautama Buddhism is based on Siddhartha's teachings. Born a prince, he became an ascetic to find enlightenment. Later, he followed a middle way to reach nirvana. He became the Buddha and taught others how to seek enlightenment.

Buddha's Teachings Buddha shared his discovery of the Four Noble Truths about the state of suffering and the ways to end it. He believed that people could reach enlightenment by living according to the teachings of the Eightfold Path.

The First Unification of India

Overview and Objectives

Overview

In a Social Studies Skill Builder, students interpret excerpts from King Ashoka's edicts to analyze how he unified the Mauryan Empire during his rule.

Objectives

In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will

Social Studies

- describe the expansion of the Mauryan Empire and the political and moral achievements of King Ashoka.
- explain how King Ashoka and his edicts contributed to the spread of Buddhism in India, Ceylon, and Central Asia.
- interpret excerpts from Ashoka's edicts to create visual representations.
- classify Ashoka's edicts into categories representing various ways Ashoka promoted unity in India.

Language Arts

- determine meanings of words using word, sentence, and paragraph clues.
- identify and use structural features to communicate an understanding.

Social Studies Vocabulary

Key Content Terms Mauryan Empire, Ashoka, edict

Academic Vocabulary horror, vast, reject, execute, promote

Lesson 17 - The First Unification of India

Section 1 - Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about an Indian leader named King Ashoka (uh-SHOHKE-uh). He gave up wars of conquest and instead began to spread Buddhist values to unify India.

King Ashoka was a member of the Maurya (MOW-ree-yuh) family, the first leaders to unite the various kingdoms of India. The Mauryan Empire flourished from about 322 to 187 B.C.E. The Mauryas, including Ashoka, fought wars of conquest to build their empire. Then a great change came over Ashoka, and he turned to peaceful ways of keeping India united.

It is said that the change came about in this way. When King Ashoka was a young man, he was sitting on his horse one day, looking out over a bloody battlefield. Men and animals lay dying under the hot sun. Ashoka could hear the wounded groaning in pain. With growing **horror**, he thought of the thousands of people who had been killed or enslaved in his family's ongoing quest for land. In that moment, the king swore to give up the ways of violence.

Ashoka's promise led him to the Buddhist religion. Rather than rule by war, he chose to create an empire based on Buddhist values. He spread Buddhist beliefs through edicts, official orders or messages, carved on walls, rocks, and tall pillars.

In this chapter, you will read about how the Mauryan family unified India. Then you will see how King Ashoka used Buddhist values to rule his empire.

Section 2 - The Mauryas Unify India

The Mauryas were the first leaders to unify India. The Indian subcontinent, once divided into many small kingdoms, covered more than one million square miles. Because India was huge and diverse, the unification of this vast land by the Mauryas was a major accomplishment.

Chandragupta (chun-druh-GOOP-tuh) Maurya began to build the Mauryan Empire in the 320s B.C.E. He saw that the kingdoms of northern India were weak. Fighting among themselves, they had wasted too much money and lost too many soldiers. Chandragupta used his great army of 700,000 soldiers, with 9,000 elephants, to overthrow the rulers of these kingdoms. He conquered and united all of northern India.

Chandragupta Maurya kept his empire strong by using force whenever necessary. He was deeply afraid of enemies. He used his powerful army, a network of spies, and torture to keep his subjects in line.

Chandragupta's rule was harsh, but it was successful in some ways. He created a strong central government. He wrote laws. He made sure farmers had water for their crops. To help connect the parts of his empire, he built a royal road more than one thousand miles long.

Toward the end of his life, Chandragupta gave up his power. Tradition says that he became an ascetic, or a person who has given up worldly pleasures. He lived in poverty and traveled with monks (simple holy men). Meanwhile, the empire grew even larger. Under the rule of Chandragupta's grandson, King Ashoka, it included nearly all of the Indian subcontinent

Section 3 - Ashoka's Rule

The Mauryan Empire reached its height during the reign of King Ashoka. He ruled the empire from about 269 to 232 B.C.E.

During the early part of his reign, Ashoka expanded the empire to the south and east through a series of wars. Then, after one very brutal battle, he made his decision to **reject** violence and find a more peaceful way to rule.

Ashoka decided to embrace Buddhism. He supported the Buddhist values of love, peace, and nonviolence. As a Buddhist, he respected all living things. He gave up hunting and became a strict vegetarian. (A vegetarian is someone who does not eat meat.) He visited holy Buddhist sites. Perhaps most surprisingly, Ashoka gave up wars of conquest. Never again would he fight another kingdom for its land.

Ashoka wanted his people to follow the Buddhist path. He urged them to be respectful, kind, and moral, which means to know right from wrong ways of behavior. He told the people to treat their servants well, to respect their elders, and to tolerate those who practiced different religions. Ashoka saw himself as a wise and loving father figure. He often referred to the people he ruled as his children.

Ashoka spread Buddhism beyond India. According to tradition, he sent Mahinda, his son, to Ceylon, a large island south of India. (Today, it is called Sri Lanka.) Mahinda converted Ceylon's king to Buddhism, which became the official faith of the kingdom.

Not all of Ashoka's actions reflected Buddhist values. For example, under his rule, the practice of slavery was allowed, and people could be **executed** for serious crimes. Ashoka also continued to maintain a strong army. Although he gave up battles of conquest, he did not return any of the lands the Mauryas had already conquered

Section 4 - Ashoka's Edicts

Ashoka wanted a strong, united empire guided by Buddhist values. To spread those values to his people, he had **edicts** carved into walls, rocks, and tall pillars throughout the empire, in places where the greatest number of people could see them.

Ashoka's edicts were designed to **promote** four main goals:

- **Buddhist Values** These edicts encouraged the Buddha's teachings. They asked people to be loving and respectful, and to practice nonviolence. They said people should not get attached to worldly things, such as money. They also told people to act morally (do right rather than wrong).
- **General Welfare** These edicts promoted people's wellbeing. They were intended to make sure people had good health, shelter, clean water, and enough food.
- **Justice** These edicts were in regard to fair laws. They also described the way people were to be treated in the empire's courts and jails.
- **Security** These edicts were concerned with enemies of the Mauryan Empire and people who were not citizens. They often dealt with issues of peace and conquest.

Ashoka's four goals were intended to give his empire a strong foundation. His reign is still remembered in India as a time of great achievements and progress. But his dream of a united empire did not last. About 45 years after his death, the empire broke apart into separate kingdoms.

A more lasting legacy was Ashoka's support of Buddhism. As you have read, Ashoka sent his son to introduce Buddhism to Ceylon. Later, around the start of the Common Era, Buddhism spread from northwestern India to Central Asia. From there, it traveled to China, Korea, and Japan

Summary

In this chapter, you learned how the Maurya family unified and ruled India, first through the use of force, and later by spreading the ideas of Buddhism.

The Mauryas Unify India The Mauryas were a family of powerful rulers who created an empire through a series of wars and conquests. They reigned over a unified India for several generations, from about 322 to 187 B.C.E.

Ashoka's Rule King Ashoka first expanded his empire through war. Then he embraced Buddhist values of love and nonviolence and spread these ideas. However, he allowed slavery and executions for serious crimes. He also maintained a strong army.

Ashoka's Edicts Ashoka carved edicts into walls and pillars throughout the empire. These edicts promoted Buddhist values, general welfare, justice, and security. The spread of Buddhism in Asia was Ashoka's most lasting legacy.

The Achievements of the Gupta Empire

Overview and Objectives

Overview

In a Writing for Understanding activity, students “visit” seven sites around the Gupta Empire that highlight important cultural and intellectual achievements and explain in writing why this period was a “golden age” in ancient India.

Objectives

In the course of reading this chapter and participating in the classroom activity, students will

Social Studies

- identify the Gupta Empire on a map and locate its key cities.
- define what characteristics classify a historical time period as a “golden age.”
- describe the important aesthetic and intellectual traditions of ancient India, including literature, medicine, metallurgy, and mathematics.
- explain why the period during the Gupta Empire is known as a “golden age.”

Language Arts

- create a multi-paragraph expository composition.
- revise writing to improve organization and clarity.

Social Studies Vocabulary

Key Content Terms Gupta Empire, alliance, province, golden age, philosophy

Academic Vocabulary prosperity, achievement, mathematics, astronomy, axis

Lesson 18 - The Achievements of the Gupta Empire

Section 1 - Introduction

Under the Mauryan Empire, India was unified for the first time and Buddhist beliefs became widespread. In this chapter, you will explore the next great empire to unite India. It was called the Gupta (GOOP-tuh) Empire.

The Guptas were a line of rulers who controlled much of India from 320 to 550 C.E. Many historians have called this period a golden age, which is a time of great **prosperity** and **achievement**. In unstable times, people are likely to be busy meeting their immediate needs for food, shelter, and safety. But in times of peace and prosperity, people can turn their attention to more creative activities. For this reason, a number of advances in the arts and sciences occurred during the peaceful golden age of the Gupta Empire. Many of these achievements have left a lasting mark on the world.

Archaeologists have made some notable discoveries that have helped us learn about the accomplishments of the Gupta Empire. For example, they have unearthed palm-leaf books that were created about 550 C.E. Sacred texts often appeared in palm-leaf books. These sacred texts are just one of many kinds of literature that Indians created during the Guptas' reign.

Literature was one of several areas of major accomplishment during India's golden age. In this chapter, you will learn more about the rise of the Gupta Empire. Then you will take a close look at seven achievements that came out of this rich period in India's history.

Section 2 - The Rise of the Gupta Empire

After the Mauryan Empire fell in about 187 B.C.E., India broke apart into separate kingdoms. For about 500 years, these smaller kingdoms fought each other for land and power. Beginning around 320 C.E., a second great empire arose in India: the **Gupta Empire**.

The empire began under a ruler named Chandragupta I. He and his family, the Guptas, united the northern kingdoms by conquering them through war. The Guptas also formed some **alliances** by arranging marriages between members of their family and the sons and daughters of other rulers. The Gupta line of kings lasted until about 550 C.E. At the height of their power, the Guptas ruled most of northern India. Their empire was the largest that India had known since the days of the Mauryas.

In some ways, the Gupta Empire was similar to the Mauryan Empire. The Guptas set up a central government to oversee the empire. A council, made up of advisers and members of the royal family, helped the king make decisions.

Unlike the Mauryas, the Guptas gave local areas a great deal of independence. They divided the empire into large sections called **provinces**. Each of these provinces was ruled by a royal governor. Within the provinces, town leaders could make many of their own decisions.

The Guptas' ruling strategy helped them stay in power for nearly 230 years. The relatively peaceful times, as well as the empire's stability, encouraged growth in both the arts and the sciences. The result was a **golden age** that produced some of the greatest advances in Indian history. Let's look at seven areas of achievement for the Gupta Empire.

Section 3 - Universities

The period of the Gupta Empire was a time of learning. The Guptas built many colleges and universities throughout the empire. Some universities were Hindu; others were Buddhist. The schools were open primarily to males. However, teachers' daughters were allowed to attend.

Hindu universities provided the upper classes with religious training. Students attended classes in religion, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, and Sanskrit. They could also study sculpture, painting, music, and dancing.

The most famous university was the Buddhist school at Nalanda, in northern India. The school had eight colleges and three libraries. It also had a hospital and a monastery. Students were instructed in Buddhist and Hindu philosophy. They also studied logic, grammar, and medicine.

Students of medicine learned the practices of the day. They were trained in how to question patients about their physical problems. Students were taught how to make cures from bark, roots, leaves, and minerals. They also learned how to use the front claws of giant ants to stitch up wounds. Hindu doctors were especially skilled at performing surgery.

Section 4 - Literature

Gupta writers created many kinds of literary works. They wrote poetry, fables, and folktales. They also created plays, including both comedies and dramas. Some of the plays were about historical and political subjects. Large audiences gathered to watch the performances.

There were other forms of writing as well. Scholars and lawyers wrote about Hindu law and religion. Some of the great Sanskrit literature took shape during this time. The *Puranas* ("Ancient Lore") was a collection of Hindu legends that taught the lessons of the Vedas, or sacred Hindu texts, through tales of sages and kings. These stories had been passed down orally for generations. The Guptas were the first to gather these stories together and record them. The *Mahabharata* ("Great Work"), a poem composed over hundreds of years, reached its final form during the Gupta era. Its themes relate to Hindu values and the battle between good and evil.

The *Bhagavad Gita* (BAH-guh-vahd GHEE-tuh) is part of the *Mahabharata*. Its name means "Song of the Lord." The *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the most beloved works of Hinduism. In this poem, Prince Arjuna is taught basic truths of Hinduism by Krishna, an earthly form of the deity Vishnu.

Some Gupta literature spread beyond India. Gupta sacred texts influenced cultures of countries as far away as Greece and Persia (present-day Iran). The famous Arabian tale about Aladdin and his magic lamp was inspired by a Gupta folktale.

Section 5 - Painting

The Gupta Empire is known for its paintings. This art form was an important part of life for noble families. These families were wealthy people of high birth. No home was complete without a painting board or an easel. Popular subjects included deities and other religious topics. Nobles and members of the royalty also hired artists to create works of art. Some paintings highlighted the luxury of noble life. They were often done on long scrolls.

Perhaps the greatest ancient Indian paintings are those known as the Ajanta (uh-JUHN-tuh) cave murals. The murals cover the walls of the 30 caves that make up an ancient Buddhist monastery in central India. The paintings are done in rich, bright colors including red, purple, and green. Artists made the paints from minerals and clay.

Some of the Ajanta murals show scenes from the Buddha's life. Some murals portray stories that reflect Buddhist values, such as love and understanding. Many of the scenes include graceful images of kings, queens, musicians, and dancers. Other scenes show animals and hunters in the forest. These woodland scenes are decorated with flowers, trees, and complex patterns. Gupta artists were skilled painters

Section 6 - Sculpture

Another art form in the Gupta Empire was sculpture. Sculptors created statues out of stone, wood, bronze, and terra-cotta clay. Many of these statues portrayed the Buddha or Hindu deities. Some sculptures showed scenes from important people's lives. Many sculptures were created to stand on their own foundations. Others were carved into the walls of temples and caves.

Gupta sculptures portrayed the human form simply and gracefully. One example is the sculpture of the river deity, Ganga, shown on this page. She is riding on the back of a sea monster. The statue's lines are curved and elegant. Her dress and hair are carved in much detail.

The temple statue of the Buddha shown below reflects the same attention to clean lines and detail. The Buddha sits on a highly decorated seat. His hands and legs are smoothly crossed. His expression is calm and peaceful. The sculptor used lowered eyes and a calm face to portray the Buddha's wisdom.

Section 7 - Metalwork

One remarkable accomplishment of the Gupta Empire was its metalwork. Gupta kings controlled huge mines of gold, copper, and iron. Metalworkers made gold and copper coins. They engraved the coins with pictures honoring Gupta rulers. The coins often highlighted the rulers' wealth and their achievements in art, politics, and war.

Gupta metalworkers were also famous for their ironwork. An iron pillar at a place called Mehrauli is one example of these artisans' unusual skill. The pillar is made of solid iron. It stands 25 feet tall and weighs about 13,000 pounds. The sides are engraved with a story that describes the achievements of a Gupta emperor. The iron is nearly rust free after 1,600 years in the rain and sun. No one knows how Gupta ironworkers acquired such advanced metalworking skills.

Section 8 - Mathematics

Earlier Hindu mathematicians had created a way of writing whole numbers using the numerals 1 through 9. Some Gupta mathematicians made further advances, one of which was developing the decimal system.

The decimal system uses ten basic numerals that have different values depending on their “place.” In the number 105, for instance, 1 is in the “hundreds place” and means 100. The system also works for fractions. In the decimal 0.10, 1 means one-tenth. Note the zeros in these examples. Hindu mathematicians were the first to treat zero as a number. Many calculations are impossible without the zero.

In later centuries, Arab peoples learned the Indian system of numbers and spread it to Europe. As a result, Europeans called this way of writing numbers “Arabic numerals.” A more accurate name would be “Hindu-Arabic numerals,” because the system actually originated with the ancient Indians. We still use this system today.

One of the most famous Gupta mathematicians was a man named Aryabhata. He combined mathematics and astronomy to make important discoveries. He figured out that a year was exactly 365.258 days long. He calculated the approximate size of Earth. He proposed that planets were spheres. He was one of the earliest scientists to suggest that Earth spins on its axis, an imaginary line through Earth’s center.

Mathematics had immediate practical uses as well. For example, Gupta builders applied their knowledge of mathematics to design complex structures like the one shown above.

Section 9 - Roads

Gupta rulers encouraged trade by creating a system of well-built roads. Care and precision were used to build these roads. First engineers cleared the roadway of plants, trees, and rocks. Then, holes were filled in. Finally, workers smoothed the ground until it was level. The finished roads were made of hard-packed dirt.

The roadways were designed for safety and comfort. They were built a few feet off the ground. Ditches, or canals, ran along either side. These features helped prevent flooding during the rainy monsoon season. Water would run off the road and into the ditches.

Signs along the roadway told travelers where they were. Signs also marked off the distances so people could calculate how far they had traveled. Rest houses gave travelers a place to relax or spend the night. Wells provided water for drinking and cooking.

The empire's roads greatly benefited trade. They enabled busy traders to move easily from city to city within the large empire. Traders could also move goods from the middle of the country to important waterways. From there, traders could ship their goods and sell them in other countries. The roads also connected India to China and the lands east of the Mediterranean Sea

Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the many advances made in ancient India during a golden age under the rule of the Gupta Empire.

The Rise of the Gupta Empire The Gupta Empire arose around 320 C.E. under Chandragupta I. Like the Mauryas, the Guptas created a strong central government, while also giving significant independence to local leaders. This strategy helped create an era of stability and prosperity. India experienced a surge of learning and artistic growth in many areas.

Universities The Guptas built many Hindu and Buddhist universities attended by students from the upper classes. Nalanda was the most famous school.

Literature Writers created poetry, fables, folktales, and plays. Scholars wrote about law and religion. Great works of Sanskrit literature, including the Puranas and the Mahabharata, were recorded. Some of this work spread beyond India and continues to be influential today.

Painting and Sculpture Artists and members of noble families created paintings depicting religious values and noble life. The Ajanta cave murals are among the greatest ancient Indian paintings. Sculptors worked in stone, wood, bronze, and terra-cotta clay. Their work showed Hindu deities, the Buddha, and scenes from important people's lives.

Metalwork Skilled metalworkers engraved gold and copper coins. Artisans were famous for their ironwork, including engravings on iron pillars.

Mathematics Gupta mathematicians developed a decimal system and were the first to treat zero as a number. One astronomer, named Aryabhata, calculated the length of a year and estimated the size of Earth. We still use their advances today.

Roads Engineers designed and built a system of roads that helped improve trade and prosperity.