

2

# Trade Spreads Indian Religions and Culture

## TERMS & NAMES

- Mahayana
- Theravada
- Brahma
- Vishnu
- Shiva
- Kalidasa
- Silk Roads

### MAIN IDEA

Indian religions, culture, and science evolved and spread to other regions through trade.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The influence of Indian culture and religions is very evident throughout Southeast Asia today.

**SETTING THE STAGE** The 500 years between the Mauryan and Gupta empires was a time of upheaval. Invaders poured into India, bringing new ideas and customs. In response, Indians began to change their own culture.

## Changes in Religious Thought

By 250 B.C., Hinduism and Buddhism were India's two main faiths. (See Chapter 3.) Hinduism is a complex polytheistic religion that blended Aryan and pre-Aryan beliefs. Buddhism teaches that desire causes suffering and that humans should overcome desire by following the Eightfold Path. Over the centuries, both religions had become increasingly removed from the people. Hinduism became dominated by priests, while the Buddhist ideal of self-denial was difficult to follow.

**A More Popular Form of Buddhism** The Buddha had stressed that each person could reach a state of peace called nirvana. Nirvana was achieved by rejecting the sensory world and embracing spiritual discipline. After the Buddha died, his followers developed many different interpretations of his teachings.

Although the Buddha had forbidden people to worship him, some began to teach that he was a god. Some Buddhists also began to believe that many people could become Buddhas. These potential Buddhas, called bodhisattvas (BOH-dih-SUHT-vuhs), could choose to give up nirvana and work to save humanity through good works and self-sacrifice. The new ideas changed Buddhism from a religion that emphasized individual discipline. It became a mass religion that offered salvation to all and allowed popular worship. By the first century A.D., Buddhists had divided over the new doctrines. Those who accepted them belonged to the **Mahayana** (MAH-huh-YAH-nuh) sect. Those who held to the Buddha's stricter, original teachings belonged to the **Theravada** (THEHR-uh-VAH-duh) sect. This is also called the Hinayana (HEE-nuh-YAH-nuh) sect, but *Theravada* is preferred.

These new trends in Buddhism inspired Indian art. For example, artists carved huge statues of the Buddha for people to worship. Wealthy Buddhist merchants who were eager to do good deeds paid for the construction of stupas—mounded stone structures built over holy relics. Buddhists walked the paths circling the stupas as a part of their meditation. Merchants also commissioned the carving of cave temples out of solid rock. Artists then adorned these temples with beautiful sculptures and paintings.

**A Hindu Rebirth** Like Buddhism, Hinduism had become remote from the people. By the time of the Mauryan Empire, Hinduism had developed a complex set of sacrifices that could be performed only by the priests. People who weren't priests had less and less direct connection with the religion.

Gradually, through exposure to other cultures and in response to the popularity of Buddhism, Hinduism changed. Although the religion continued to

This Buddha is carved in the Gandharan artistic style—a blend of Greco-Roman and Indian styles. For example, the flowing robes are similar to those seen on Roman imperial statues.



### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### A. Making

**Inferences** Would the Buddha have approved of the new art? Explain.



embrace hundreds of gods, a trend toward monotheism was growing. Many people began to believe that there was only one divine force in the universe. The various gods represented parts of that force. The three most important gods were **Brahma** (BRAH-muh), creator of the world; **Vishnu** (VIHSH-noo), preserver of the world; and **Shiva** (SHEE-vuh), destroyer of the world. Of the three, Vishnu and Shiva were by far the favorites. Many Indians began to devote themselves to these two gods. As Hinduism evolved to a more personal religion, its appeal to the masses grew.

#### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

##### B. Drawing Conclusions

Why did the changes in Buddhism and Hinduism make them more popular?

## Flowering of Indian Culture

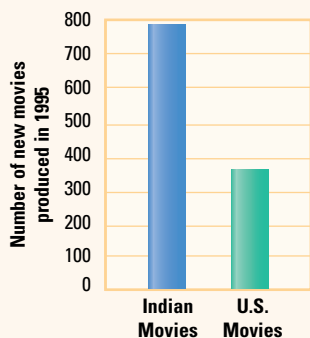
Just as Hinduism and Buddhism underwent changes, so did Indian culture and learning. India entered a highly productive period in literature, art, science, and mathematics that continued until roughly A.D. 500.

### CONNECT to TODAY

#### Entertainment in India

Today, drama remains hugely popular in India. India has the largest movie industry in the world. About twice as many full-length feature films are released yearly in India as in the United States.

India produces both popular and serious films. Indian popular films are often love stories that blend music, dance, drama, and action adventure. India's serious films have received worldwide critical praise. In 1992, the Indian director Satyajit Ray received a lifetime achievement Academy Award for making artistic films. His films brought Indian culture to a worldwide audience.



Source: *International Motion Picture Almanac*, 1997

**Literature and the Performing Arts** One of India's greatest writers, **Kalidasa** (KAHL-ee-DAHS-uh), may have been the court poet for Chandra Gupta II, who reigned from A.D. 375 to 415. Kalidasa's most famous play is *Shakuntala*. It tells the story of a beautiful girl who falls in love with and marries a middle-aged king. After Shakuntala and her husband are separated, they suffer tragically because of a curse that prevents the king from recognizing his wife when they meet again. Generations of Indians have continued to admire Kalidasa's plays because they are skillfully written and emotionally stirring.

Southern India also has a rich literary tradition. In the second century A.D., the city of Madurai in southern India became a site of writing academies. More than 2,000 Tamil poems from this period still exist. In the following excerpt from a third-century poem, a young man describes his sweetheart cooking him a meal:

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

There dwells my sweetheart, curving and lovely,  
languid of gaze, with big round earrings,  
and little rings on her tiny fingers.

She has cut the leaves of the garden plantain  
and split them in pieces down the stalk  
to serve as platters for the meal.  
Her eyes are filled with the smoke of cooking.  
Her brow, as fair as the crescent moon,  
is covered now with drops of sweat.

She wipes it away with the hem of her garment  
and stands in the kitchen, and thinks of me.

ANONYMOUS TAMIL POET, quoted in *The Wonder That Was India*

In addition to literature, drama was very popular. In southern India, traveling acting troupes put on performances in cities across the region. Women as well as men took part in these shows that combined drama and dance. Many of the classical dance forms

in India today are based on techniques explained in a book written between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D.

**Astronomy, Mathematics, and Medicine** The expansion of trade spurred the advance of science. Because sailors on trading ships used the stars to help them figure their position at sea, knowledge of astronomy increased. From Greek invaders, Indians adapted Western methods of keeping time. They began to use a calendar based on the cycles of the sun rather than the moon, adopted a seven-day week, and divided each day into hours.

During the Gupta Empire (A.D. 320 to about 500), knowledge of astronomy increased further. Almost 1,000 years before Columbus, Indian astronomers proved



that the earth was round by observing a lunar eclipse. During the eclipse, the earth's shadow fell across the face of the moon. The astronomers noted that the earth's shadow was curved, indicating that the earth itself was round.

Indian mathematics was among the most advanced in the world. Modern numerals, the zero, and the decimal system, were invented in India. Around A.D. 500, an Indian named Aryabhata (AHR-yuh·BUHT-uh) calculated the value of pi (π) to four decimal places. He also calculated the length of the solar year as 365.3586805 days. This figure is very close to modern calculations made with an atomic clock.

In medicine, two important medical guides were compiled. These works classified more than 1,000 diseases and described more than 500 medicinal plants. Hindu physicians knew how to perform surgery—including plastic surgery—and possibly gave inoculations.

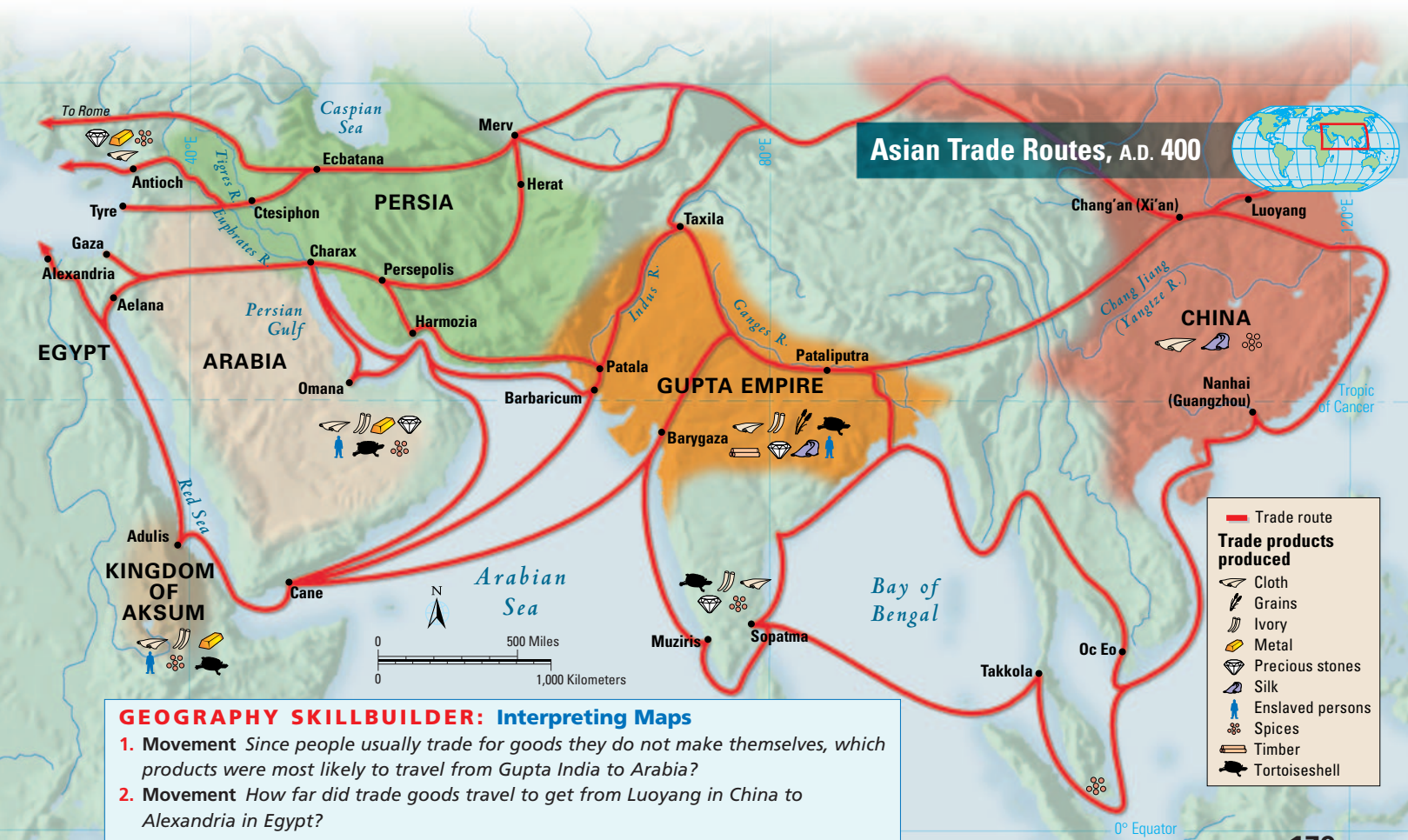
## The Spread of Indian Trade

In addition to knowledge, India has always been rich in precious resources. Spices, diamonds, sapphires, gold, pearls, and beautiful woods—including ebony, teak, and fragrant sandalwood—have always been valuable items of exchange. Trade between India and regions as distant as Africa and Sumeria began more than 4,000 years ago. Trade continued to expand even after the Mauryan Empire ended around 185 B.C.

**Overland Trade, East and West** The groups who invaded India after the end of Mauryan rule helped to expand India's trade to new regions. For example, Central Asian nomads brought Indians information about the caravan routes that crisscrossed central Asia.

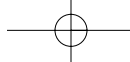
These caravan routes were known as **Silk Roads** because traders used them to bring silk from China to Western Asia and on to Rome. Once Indians learned of the Silk Roads, they realized that they could make great profits by acting as middlemen.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY**  
**C. Hypothesizing**  
 How might the Asian trade routes have spread Indian sciences and math to other civilizations?



**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps**

- 1. Movement** Since people usually trade for goods they do not make themselves, which products were most likely to travel from Gupta India to Arabia?
- 2. Movement** How far did trade goods travel to get from Luoyang in China to Alexandria in Egypt?



Middlemen are go-betweens in business transactions. For example, Indian traders would buy goods from traders coming out of China and sell those goods to traders who were traveling to Rome. To aid their role as middlemen, Indians built trading stations at oases all along the Silk Roads.

**Sea Trade, East and West** Sea trade also increased. Traders used coastal routes around the rim of the Arabian Sea and up the Persian Gulf to bring goods from India to Rome. In addition, traders from southern India would sail to Southeast Asia to collect spices. They bought the spices back to India and sold them to merchants from Rome.

Archaeologists have found hoards of Roman gold coins in southern India. Records show that some Romans were upset about the amount of gold their countrymen spent on Indian luxuries. They believed that a state with a healthy economy must collect gold rather than spend it.

Rome wasn't India's only trading partner. India imported African ivory and gold and exported cotton cloth. Rice and wheat went to Arabia in exchange for dates and horses. After trade with Rome declined around the third century A.D., India's sea trade with China increased. The Chinese imported Indian cotton cloth, monkeys, parrots, and elephants and sent India silk.

**Effects of Indian Trade** Increased trade led to the rise of banking in India. Commerce was quite profitable. Bankers were willing to lend money to merchants and charge them interest on the loans. Interest rates varied, depending on how risky business was. During Mauryan times, the annual interest rate on loans used for overseas trade had been 240 percent! During the Gupta Empire, bankers no longer considered sea trade so dangerous, so they charged only 15 to 20 percent interest a year.

A number of Indian merchants went to live abroad and brought Indian culture with them. As a result, people throughout Asia picked up and adapted a variety of Indian traditions. For example, Indian culture affected styles in art, architecture, and dance throughout Southeast Asia. Indian influence was especially strong in Thailand, Cambodia, and on the Indonesian island of Java.

Traders also brought Indian religions to new regions. Hinduism spread to Nepal, a region northeast of India; to Sri Lanka, an island off southeastern India; and to Borneo, an island in Indonesia. Buddhism spread because of traveling Buddhist merchants and monks. In time, Buddhism even influenced China. You will learn about this in Section 3.

**Vocabulary**

**oases:** plural of oasis, which is a watering place in a desert.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY**

**D. Analyzing**

**Causes** Why would dangerous conditions make bankers charge higher interest on loans for trade?



**The Spread of Buddhism**

Buddhism became a missionary religion during Asoka's reign. From his capital city (1), Asoka sent out Buddhist missionaries. After Indians began trading along the Silk Roads, Buddhist monks travelled these routes and converted people on the way.

Buddhist monks from India established their first monastery in China (2) in A.D. 65, and many Chinese became Buddhists. From China, Buddhism reached Korea in the fourth century and Japan in the sixth century.

Today, Buddhism is a major religion throughout East and Southeast Asia. The Theravada school is strong in Myanmar, Cambodia (3), Sri Lanka (4), and Thailand. The Mahayana school is strong in Japan and Korea.

**Section 2 Assessment**

**1. TERMS & NAMES**

Identify

- Mahayana
- Theravada
- Brahma
- Vishnu
- Shiva
- Kalidasa
- Silk Roads

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Create a diagram like the one shown. For each category, list one or more specific developments in Indian culture.

Indian Culture	
Religion	
Literature/Arts	
Science/Math	
Trade	

**3. RECOGNIZING EFFECTS**

What do you think was the most significant effect of the changes in Buddhism and Hinduism? Explain.

**THINK ABOUT**

- the effect on people who practiced the religion
- the effect on art and culture
- the effect on other countries

**4. ANALYZING THEMES**

**Cultural Interaction** Cite three of the cultures that interacted with India. Explain the result of each cultural interaction.

**THINK ABOUT**

- interaction because of trade
- the influence of art, science, religion