

# Trade Spreads Indian Religions and Culture

## MAIN IDEA

### CULTURAL INTERACTION

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 South Asia today.

## TERMS & NAMES

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

**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.

## Buddhism and Hinduism Change

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 beliefs with the many gods and cults of the diverse peoples who preceded them. 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 proved difficult for many 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•vuhz), 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 to 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

## TAKING NOTES

**Categorizing** Use a chart to list one or more specific developments of Indian culture.

Religion	
Arts	
Science/ Math	
Trade	



▲ This Buddha is carved in the Gandharan artistic style, a blend of Greco-Roman and Indian styles.

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 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 Hindu 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 into a more personal religion, its popular appeal grew. **A**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Drawing Conclusions**

**A** Why did the changes in Buddhism and Hinduism make these religions more popular?

## Achievements 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.

**Literature and the Performing Arts** One of India's greatest writers was **Kalidasa** (KAH•lee•DAH•suh). He may have been the court poet for Chandra Gupta II. 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:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

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.

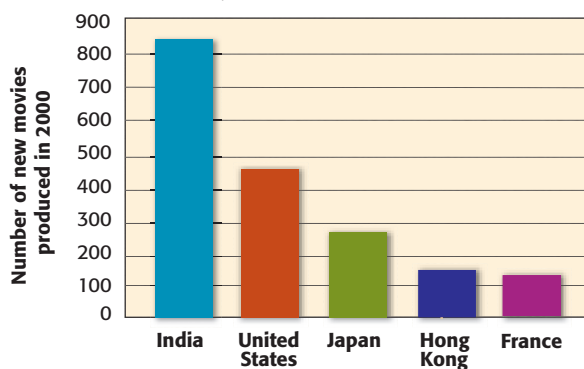
**ANONYMOUS TAMIL POET**, quoted in *The Wonder That Was India*

In addition to literature, drama was very popular. In southern India, traveling troupes of actors put on performances in cities across the region. Women as well as men took part in these shows, which 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.

### Entertainment in India: Bollywood

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, such as *aśoka*, 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 global audience.

Major Movie Producers, 2000



Source: Focus 2002: World Film Market Trends

**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. They also 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 ( $\pi$ ) to four decimal places. He also calculated the length of the solar year as 365.3586805 days. This is very close to modern calculations made with an atomic clock. In medicine, two important medical guides were compiled. They described more than 1,000 diseases and more than 500 medicinal plants. Hindu physicians performed surgery—including plastic surgery—and possibly gave injections. **B**

#### MAIN IDEA

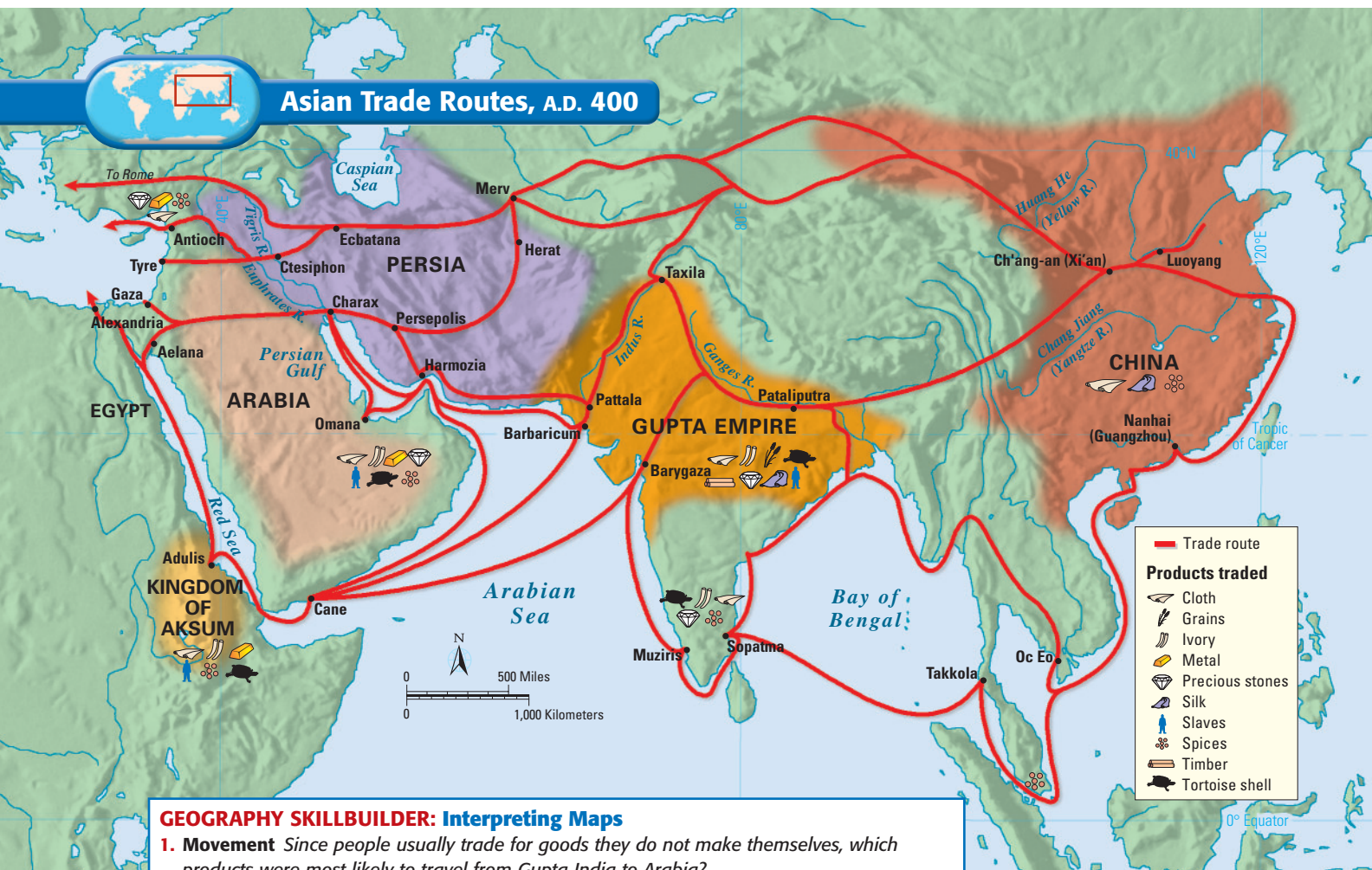
#### Drawing Conclusions

**B** What achievements by Indian mathematicians are used today?

### 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 been valuable items of exchange. Trade between





**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?

India and regions as distant as Africa and Sumeria began more than 4,000 years ago. Trade expanded even after the Mauryan Empire ended around 185 B.C.

**Overland Trade, East and West** Groups who invaded India after Mauryan rule ended helped to expand India’s trade to new regions. For example, Central Asian nomads told Indians about a vast network of caravan routes known as Silk Roads. These routes were called the **Silk Roads** because traders used them to bring silk from China to western Asia and then on to Rome.

Once Indians learned of the Silk Roads, they realized that they could make great profits by acting as middlemen. Middlemen are go-betweens in business transactions. For example, Indian traders would buy Chinese goods and sell them to traders traveling to Rome. To aid their role as middlemen, Indians built trading stations along the Silk Roads. They were located at oases, which are fertile spots in desert areas. **C**

**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 brought 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 to foster a healthy economy, a state must collect gold rather than spend it.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Hypothesizing**

**C** How might the Asian trade routes have spread Indian sciences and math to other civilizations?

Rome was not India's only sea-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 and the islands of southeast Asia increased. The Chinese, for example, 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. **D**

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 South and 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 northeast to Nepal and southeast to Sri Lanka and Borneo. Buddhism spread because of traveling Buddhist merchants and monks. In time, Buddhism even influenced China, as discussed in Section 3.



### 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 traveled the roads and converted people along 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 in 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.

### MAIN IDEA Analyzing Causes

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

## SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

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

### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which of the developments listed had the most lasting impact?

Religion	
Arts	
Science/ Math	
Trade	

### MAIN IDEA

3. How did Buddhism change after the Buddha's death?
4. What were India's main trade goods in the fifth century?
5. What were some of India's contributions to science during the Gupta period?

### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **RECOGNIZING EFFECTS** What do you think was the most significant effect of the changes in Buddhism and Hinduism during this period? Explain.
7. **MAKING INFERENCES** Why did Indian culture flourish during the Gupta Empire?
8. **FORMING AND SUPPORTING OPINIONS** Which do you think was more important to India's economy, overland trade or sea trade? Provide details to support your answer.
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **CULTURAL INTERACTION** Cite three of the cultures that interacted with India. Explain in a brief **expository essay** the result of each cultural interaction.

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY INTERNET ACTIVITY

Use the Internet to research Indian trade today. Then prepare a **chart** listing the type of goods bought and sold and the trading partner for each type.

### INTERNET KEYWORD

*India trade*