

Module 3: Classical Civilizations and Religious Traditions

Topic 2 Content: India

Introduction

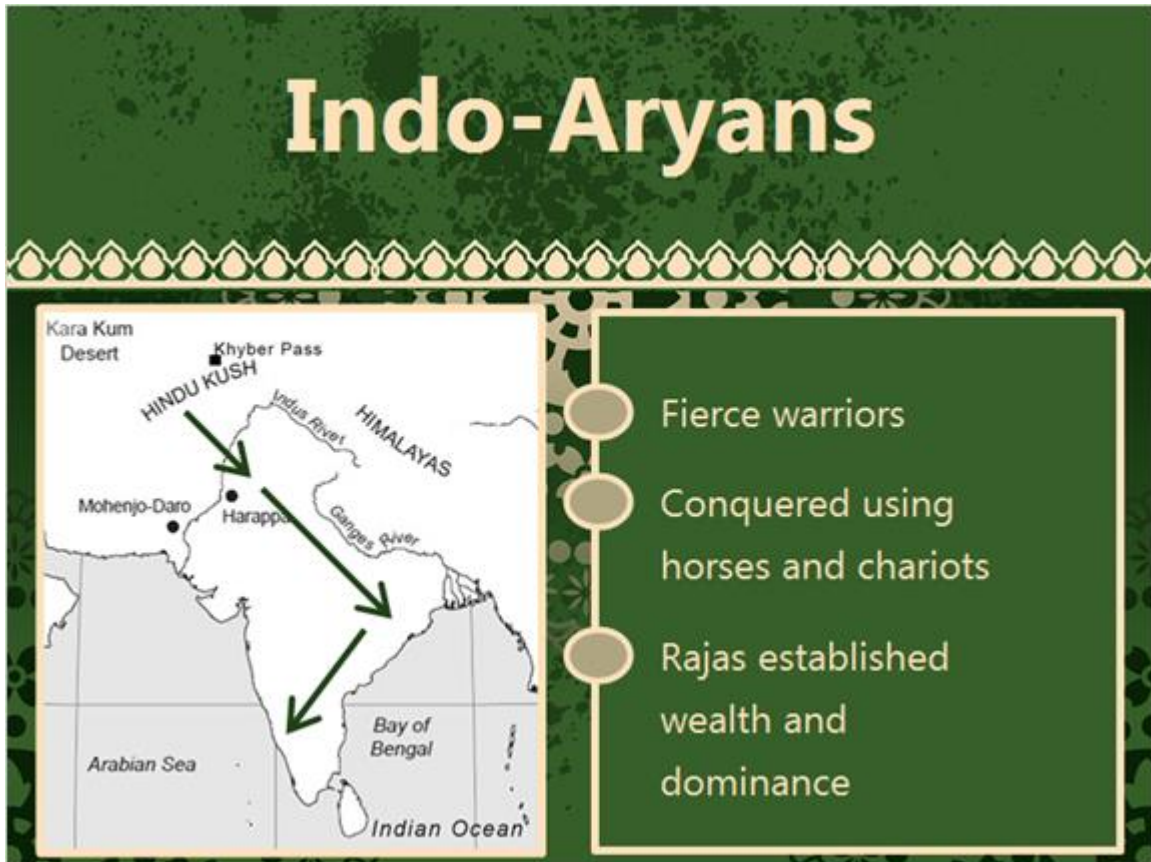


Click NEXT to learn about the Indo-Aryans, Mauryans, and Guptas.

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Indo-Aryans



As the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were in decline, a group of Indo-Europeans known as Aryans, or Indo-Aryans, migrated over the Khyber Pass and into the Indus River Valley. Between 1500 and 1000 B.C. (B.C.E.), this group spread east to take over the Ganges Plain. Later, they moved into the southern portion of India, taking control of the majority of the area.


The Indo-Aryans were fierce warriors who took control of indigenous populations. While the indigenous populations were more advanced technologically, with complex cities and government infrastructures, the Indo-Aryans conquered them using horses and chariots. Once in India, the Indo-Aryan rajas, or princes, established individual regions that warred with one another to establish wealth and dominance.

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Transition to Farming

Transition to Farming



- Herded animals
- Adopted the farming lifestyle
- Multigenerational families
- Patriarchal

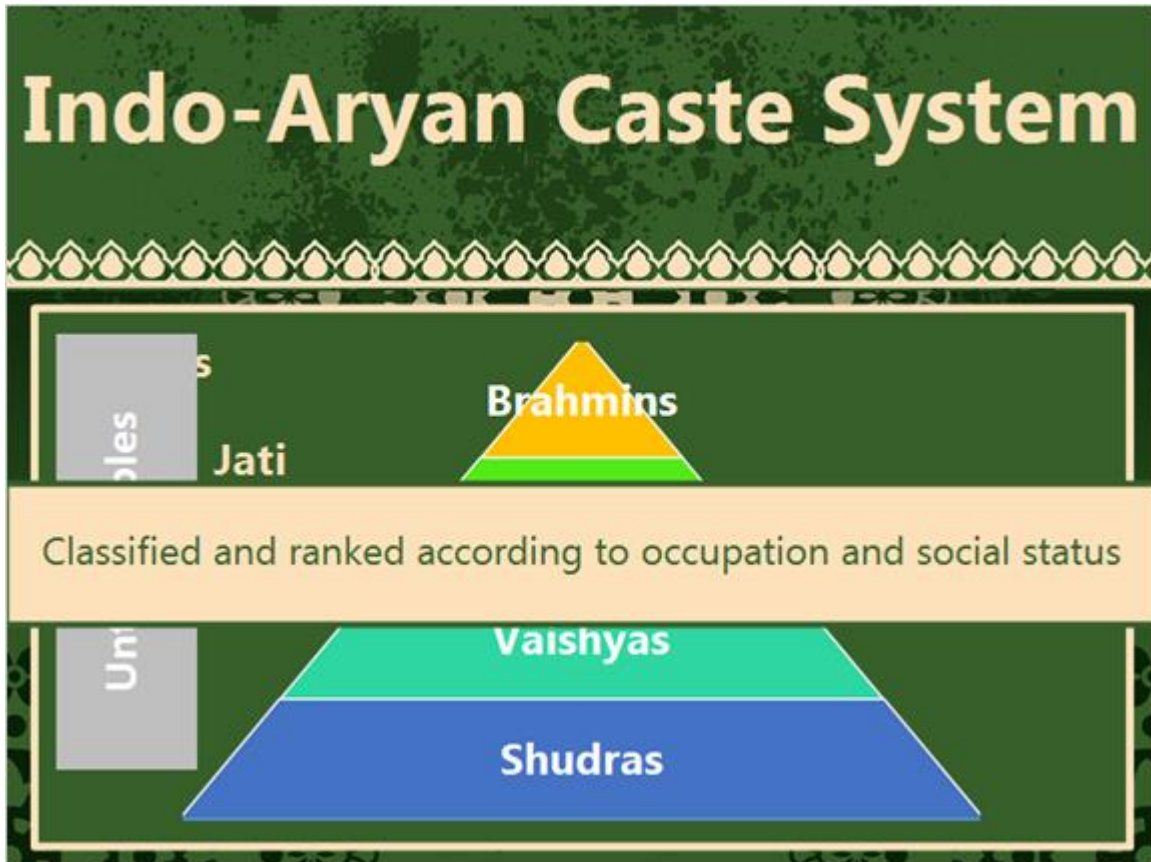
Initially, the Indo-Aryans were pastoral, meaning they herded domesticated animals through areas of land based on the seasons and the availability of water and food. As these populations settled across India, they adopted the farming lifestyle of the Indus River Valley civilization, becoming farmers and growing things like wheat, rice, cotton, and spices.

Ancient Indian families were multigenerational, meaning that grandparents, parents, and children often lived together. In addition, ancient Indian society was patriarchal, and women had very few rights. Usually, only males from wealthy families received an education.

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Indo-Aryan Caste System



The relationship between the conquering Indo-Aryans and the indigenous peoples led to a caste system, which is a system in which people are classified and ranked according to their occupation and social status. A person's job determined his or her living conditions, personal relationships, and food and clothing choices. People in ancient India were born into a particular caste, and the only way to get out was to die and be reborn into a different caste.

Four classifications, or "varnas," existed in the Indo-Aryan caste system. Sub-classifications within each varna, called jati, developed much later in history. Over many centuries, varnas and jatis merged to become the caste system known today as a top-down, birth-based class system. At the top were the Brahmins, or priestly families. They were responsible for sacrificial rituals and acted as religious authorities. Next were the Kshatriyas, who were the warriors and governing families. Like the Brahmins, they were wealthy. Below the Kshatriyas were the Vaishyas, or commoners, who had occupations as farmers, merchants, and artisans. Last were the Shudras, or indigenous people. They were usually responsible for manual labor and had limited rights.

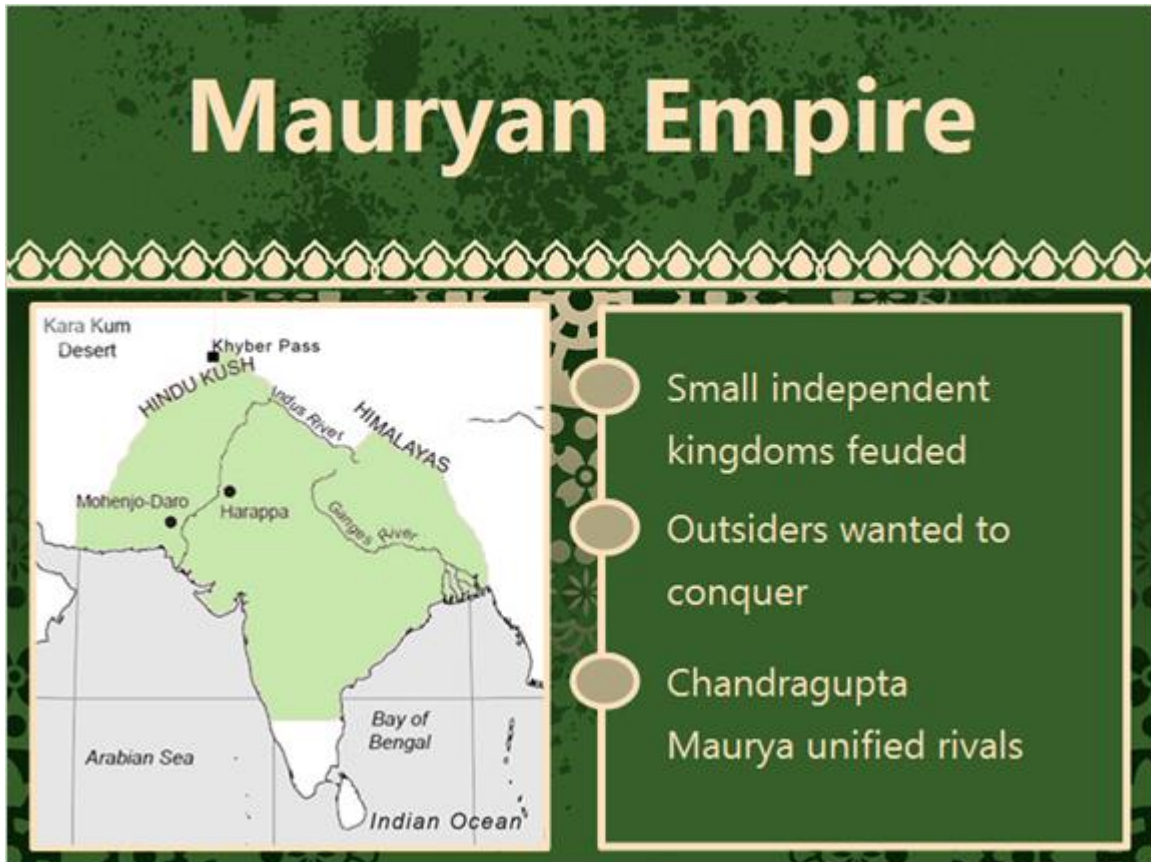
Another social level existed that was not considered part of the caste system. This group was called outcasts, or untouchables, and occupied roughly five percent of the population. The untouchables were not considered human beings. They were given jobs like trash collecting and removal of dead bodies. In addition, their food preparation and housing were completely separate from the other social levels. In fact, untouchables were completely avoided by other members of society.

This caste system has existed throughout India for more than two thousand years. Although it became illegal in India in 1950, a year after India became independent from British rule, the caste system still persists in some areas of the country.

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Mauryan Empire

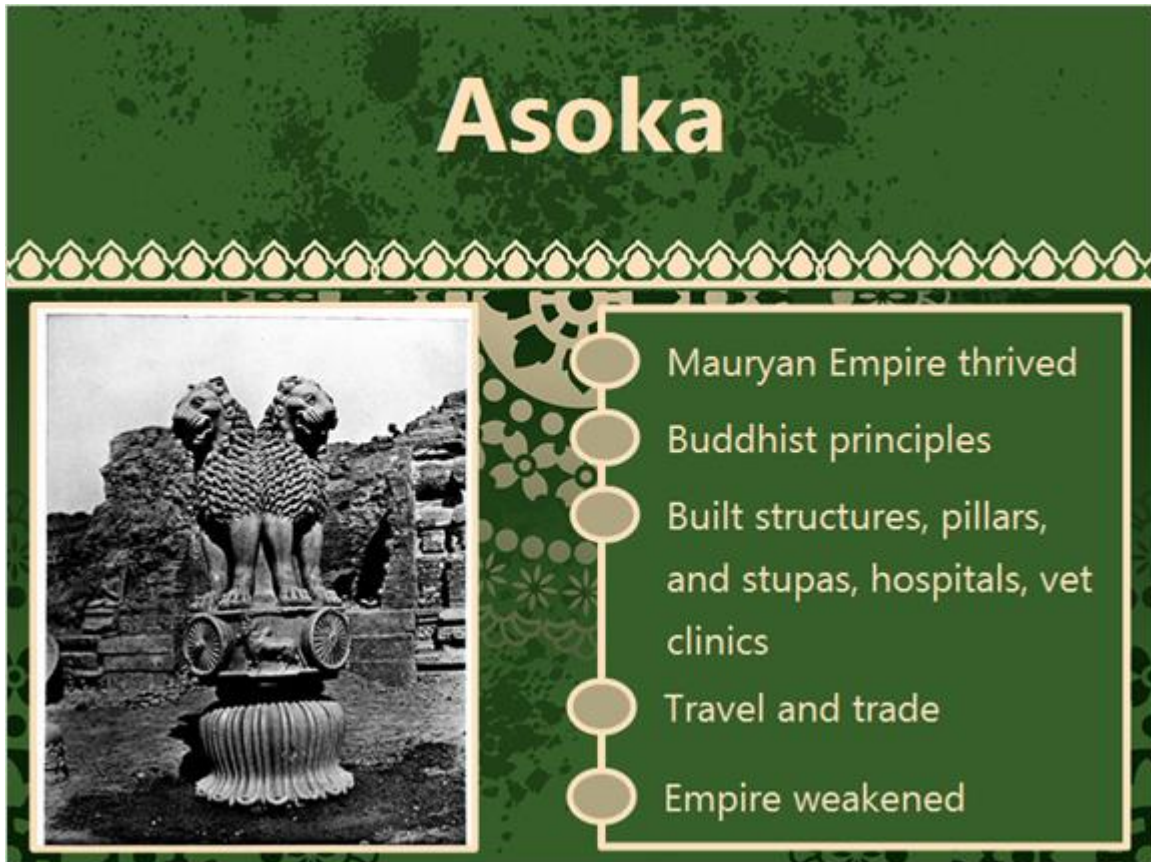


For roughly a thousand years after the Indo-Aryan migration and settlement, small independent kingdoms existed throughout the Indian sub-continent. As feuds between rival kingdoms arose in India, outsiders like the Persians, Greeks, and Macedonians eagerly sought an opportunity to conquer what appeared to be a weak India. In 324 B.C. (B.C.E.), a new leader, Chandragupta Maurya, raised an army and began the process of unifying the rival factions. This newly unified Mauryan Empire, shown in green on the map, grew strong and prosperous. It was able to defend itself against potential foreign invaders.

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Asoka



The infographic features a dark green background with a decorative border of small white and yellow teardrop shapes. At the top, the word "Asoka" is written in a large, bold, yellow font. Below the title, there is a central image of a stone lion capital with four lions, set on a pedestal. To the right of the image is a vertical list of five items, each preceded by a small yellow circle. The items are: "Mauryan Empire thrived", "Buddhist principles", "Built structures, pillars, and stupas, hospitals, vet clinics", "Travel and trade", and "Empire weakened".

Asoka

- Mauryan Empire thrived
- Buddhist principles
- Built structures, pillars, and stupas, hospitals, vet clinics
- Travel and trade
- Empire weakened

Under the rule of Asoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, the Mauryan Empire thrived. Early in his rule, Asoka converted to Buddhism. He used Buddhist principles of nonviolence and tolerance to guide his decisions and his rule. Asoka is responsible for sending missionaries throughout India and even into China. He also built many pillars (like the one shown in the image) and other structures throughout the ancient world, including lions, which were a symbol of his rule and the kingship of the Buddha. Asoka was responsible for building thousands of stupas, or burial mounds, that housed Buddhist artifacts.

Asoka also oversaw the creation of free hospitals and veterinary clinics, along with other public works. He improved roads throughout the empire, which encouraged travel and widespread trade. Accessible by land and by sea, India became an intersection for many trade routes in the ancient world. India exported items like textiles, spices, minerals, animal goods, and timber. It imported glassware, metal, and slaves.


Although Asoka's policies and actions were noble, they failed to keep the empire unified. Once Asoka died, the Mauryan Empire weakened and collapsed.

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Gupta Empire

Gupta Empire



The map shows the Gupta Empire in blue, covering northern and central India. Key locations marked include Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. The Arabian Sea is to the west and the Bay of Bengal is to the east.

- Chandra Gupta reduced violence and gained control of the north
- Trade and wealth
- Collapse from invasions starting in 5th century

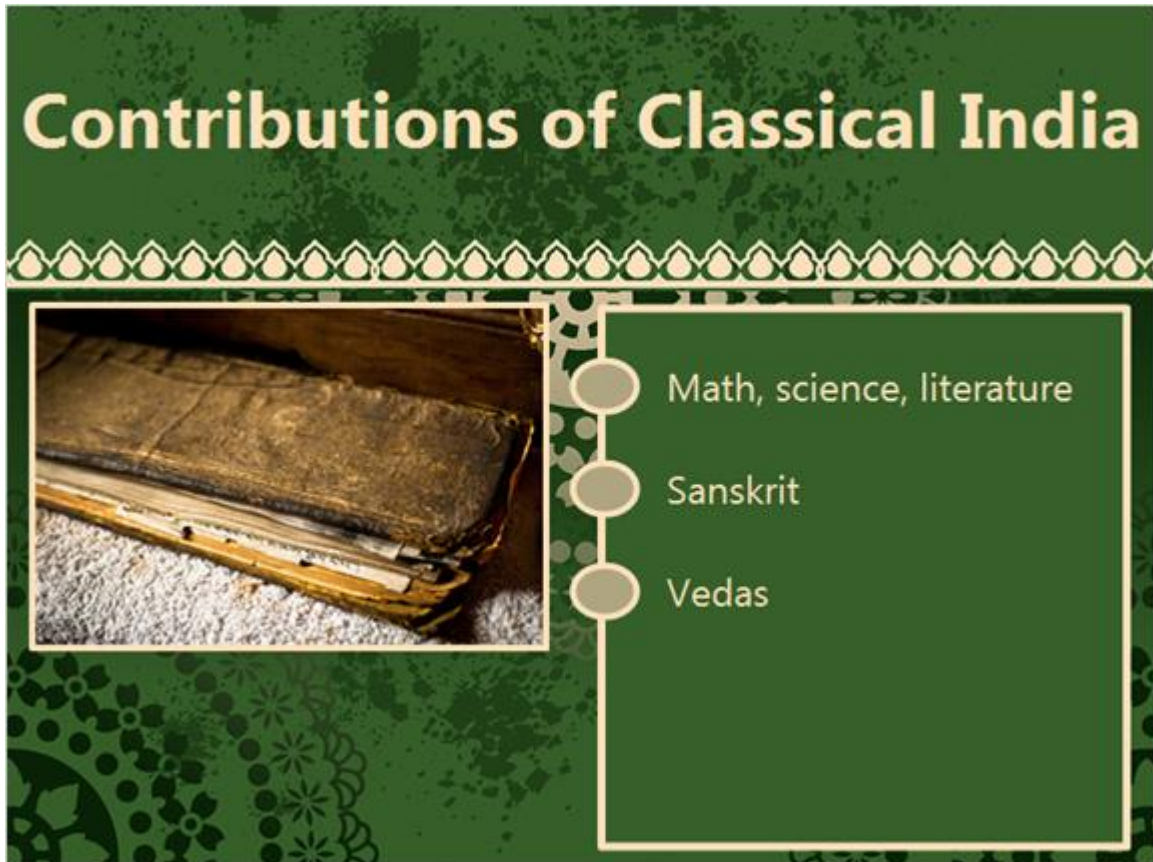
After years of civil wars and foreign invasions, a strong leader by the name of Chandra Gupta emerged. Gupta eventually reduced the country's violence, and gained control of northern India. Chandra Gupta's son, Samudra Gupta, developed schools and universities to teach astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and science. This promoted a very educated society. Samudra Gupta also established a central government surrounded by independently run states; this marked one of the first political unions. The Gupta Empire, India's second empire, lasted from 320 A.D. (C.E.) into the 6th century, the time of classical India's Golden Age. A *golden age* is a period of time when a population is prosperous, and makes many contributions to world civilization. In what ways do you think the Gupta Empire impacts your life today?

The Gupta Empire continued the tradition of trade that was established by its predecessors. The extensive trade networks with other parts of Asia and Europe allowed for the exchange of goods and ideas. Trade made the Gupta kings very wealthy. However, invasions from outside forces began in the later 5th century, and led to the eventual collapse of the empire.

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Contributions of Classical India



Contributions of Classical India

- Math, science, literature
- Sanskrit
- Vedas

During the Golden Age of classical India, the civilization prospered in mathematics, science, and literature. Indians during this time period formalized the concept of zero, and used it in calculations. Also, these were some of the first people known to use algebra. In the area of science, Indians mapped celestial occurrences, and hypothesized that the Earth was round. They made medical advancements like setting broken bones, creating medical instruments, and performing operations.

From the time of the Indo-Aryans, Indians wrote sophisticated literature, particularly after the advent of their written language, Sanskrit. The Indo-Aryans used Sanskrit to record the Vedas, which were ancient Hindu religious texts. Other important works of literature include heroic epics and plays.

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Conclusion



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