

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

Ancient India

(3000-1500 B.C.E.)

India is one of the oldest civilizations. It began more than 4,000 years ago, in an area known as the **Indus River Valley**. The main cities were **Mohenjo-Daro** and **Harappa**, and they were very much alike, even though they were 350 miles apart. Evidence of these ancient cities was found by archeologists (people who study the life of ancient peoples) in the 1920s. They uncovered drainage and sewer systems, homes with bathrooms, large farms with irrigation canals, and many artifacts including jewelry, pottery, woven cloth, and tools and implements of copper and bronze.



Indian civilization is believed to have begun in the Indus River Valley

What happened is a great mystery. They were gone by about 1500 B.C.E. Archaeologists are not sure, but a drought or flood may have wiped them out. Or people may have scattered after an invasion. The people who replaced them were nomads who herded animals. Hundreds of years went by before anyone built new cities in India.

Hinduism

The nomadic people who entered northern India and the remaining scattered peoples of the Indus River cities formed a new culture in northern India. It was from this culture that the religion of Hinduism developed, beginning about 1500 B.C.E. Its special language was Sanskrit.

Hindus had thousands of gods and goddesses, and their priests sang from memory many long and complicated hymns to them. More than a thousand hymns were collected in the Hindu sacred text **Rig-Veda**.

Another sacred Hindu text, the **Upanishads**, was written about 400 B.C.E. In it, the basic ideas of Hinduism were collected.

- **Brahman** is the one great spirit, or supreme being.
- The Self, or Soul, called **Atman**, is a part of Brahman.
- Nothing living ever truly dies, and the spirit passes from one living thing to another. This is called **reincarnation**.
- All Hindus must seek perfect understanding, called **moksha**. In moksha, the self disappears and become one with Brahman.

POLYTHEISAM

Hinduism is a **polytheistic** (the belief in more than one god) religion that acknowledges literally thousands of gods.

All these gods are believed to be part of the main god, **Brahma**.



Closely tied to Hinduism was the caste system.

People who did not belong to any group were called **untouchables**, and they were the lowest group of all. Indian Nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi called them Harijan, which means “children of god.” the caste system was outlawed in India in 1950, but many people still mix only with people of their caste.

Buddhism

A young man named **Siddhartha Gautama** was born near the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal about 563 B.C.E. Just before he became thirty years old, he left his wife and son and went away to find the meaning of life. After fasting and disciplining himself harshly, he was not satisfied. Finally, he meditated deeply under a tree. When he finished, he believed that the truth had been made known to him. He gave his first sermon to the five wisdom seekers who had journeyed with him, and from then on was known as the **Buddha**, or “the enlightened one.” He taught that suffering is brought on by people’s desires, and that suffering can be ended—and complete happiness can be found—by ending all desires.

Buddha taught his followers to treat all living things with loving-kindness. Buddha taught his followers to treat all living things with loving-kindness. Buddhism appealed to people because it rejected the caste system and treated everyone—women and men, rich and poor—with respect. It was taught in the everyday language of the people, not in Sanskrit.



Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha)

Later, Buddhism spread to China and Japan but nearly died out in India.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE ANCIENT INDIANS

1. They founded the Hindu religion. Hinduism is one of the chief religions in India today.
2. They originated the Buddhist religion. Buddhism rejected the caste system promoted by Hinduism.
3. They further developed art and architecture, especially of temples.
4. They wrote fine literature, particularly in Sanskrit, including fables, stories, and poems. Sacred texts include the Rig-Veda.

The Mauryan Empire

The Mauryan Empire, from about 321 to 185 B.C.E., was the first to unite most of India under a central government. Its center was along the Ganges River and its capital was Pataliputra. Great rulers of the Mauryan Empire were **Chandragupta** and **Asoka**.

Chandragupta came to power in 322 B.C.E. and ruled until 298 B.C.E. With his army of 70,000 soldiers, 9,000 elephants, and 10,000 chariots, he conquered northern and central India, as well as what is today western Pakistan and part of Afghanistan. He was a stern ruler, but his empire prospered.

Asoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, ruled from about 264 to 223 B.C.E. He guided India into a period of peace. A religious ruler, Asoka sent missionaries into other countries to spread the message of Buddha. He also established hospitals, forbade animal sacrifices, and urged vegetarianism. Asoka was regarded as a kind and noble ruler.



Asoka the Great

The Gupta Empire

Hundreds of years after the first Chandragupta dies another Indian ruler took his name. The Gupta Empire was begun by **Chandra Gupta I** in 320 C.E. He was the first of many rulers in his family who reigned over the empire until 500 C.E. The Guptas originally ruled a small kingdom in northeast India, but eventually their empire came to include all of northern India and parts of central and southern India. Like the Mauryan Empire before it, the capital was Pataliputra on the Ganges River.



Nalanda University

After the Guptas took control, they restored law and order and people began to prosper again. The Gupta reign came to be known as the **Golden Age of India**.

Under the Gupta Empire, people followed both the Buddhist and Hindu religions. The Gupta Empire ended when Muslim Turks invaded from Central Asia. The Golden Age of India had come to an end, and a new religion was brought to India.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF INDIA

1. Medical doctors set broken bones, used plastic surgery to repair ears and noses, and gave the first shots to prevent diseases.
2. Mathematicians invented the decimal (base-ten) number system and the Arabic numerals that are still in use today (1 to 9). They also developed the idea of zero and the concept of infinity, or endlessness, represented by the symbol ∞ .
3. Great books and epics (stories told in long poems) were created, such as the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*.
4. Artists, musicians, and dancers flourished. They developed classical dances and music still enjoyed today.
5. Textiles were created from slender threads, including cashmere, calico, and chintz.

