

Lesson 4 Reading

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, and 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 4500 B.C.E. By 3000 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.

In this lesson, you will read about how the Mauryan family unified India. Then you will discover how King Ashoka chose to give up wars of conquest to instead spread Buddhist values throughout his empire. These Buddhist teachings led to India's unification.

Ashoka's Rule

The Mauryan Empire reached its height during the reign of King Ashoka who 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. However, 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 and 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. To maintain a peaceful land, Ashoka eliminated wars of conquest and never again fought another kingdom for its land.

Since 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 viewed himself as a wise and loving father figure, often referring to the people he ruled as his children.

Not all of Ashoka's actions reflected Buddhist values. For example, under his rule 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 previously conquered.

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 well-being. 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.



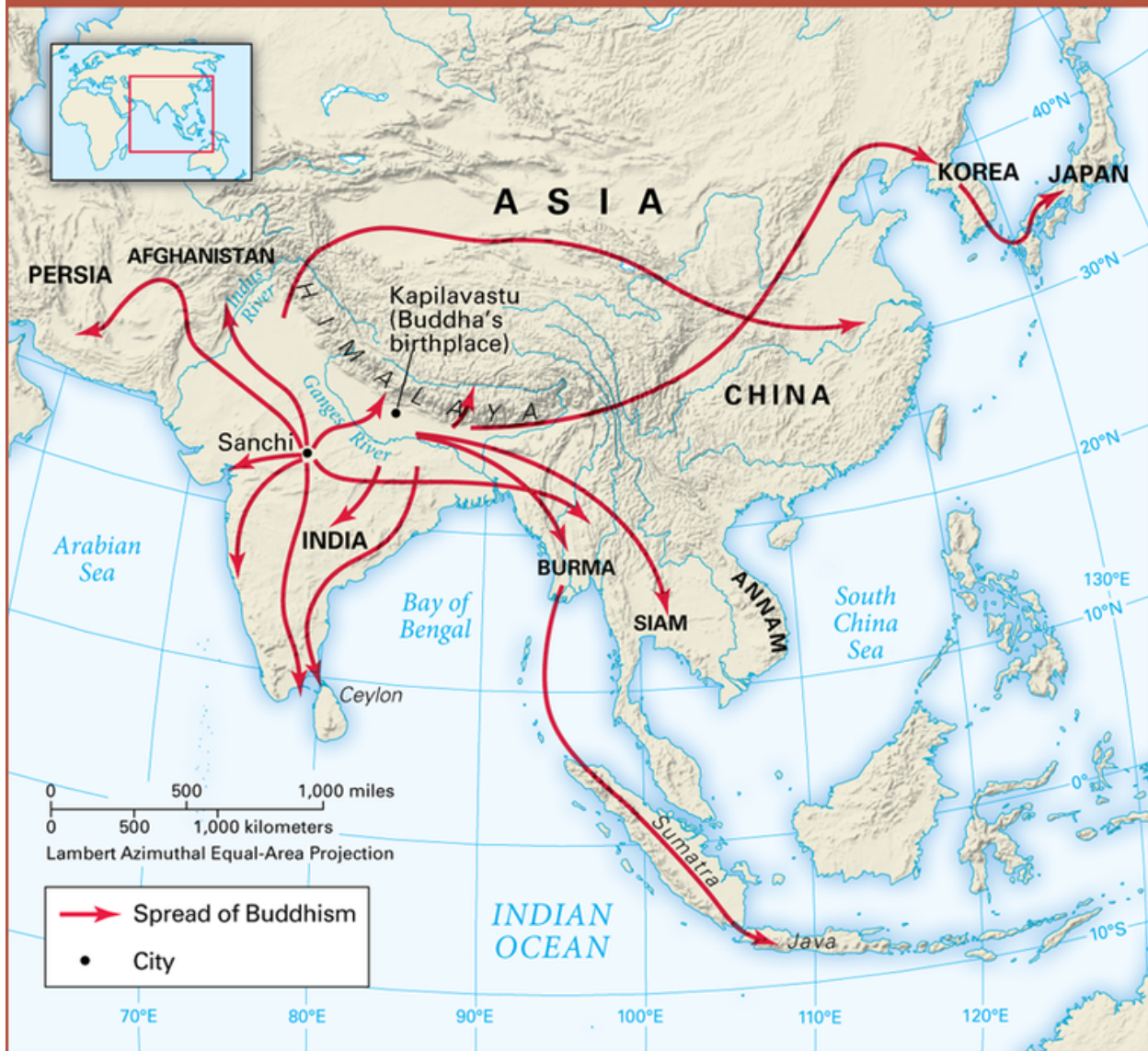
Ashoka's four goals were intended to give his empire a strong foundation. His reign is still remembered in India as a time of great achievements and progress, but the united empire he dreamed of did not last. About 45 years after his death, the empire broke apart into separate kingdoms.

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.



The Spread of Buddhism



The Achievements of the Gupta Empire

Under the Mauryan Empire, India was unified for the first time and Buddhist beliefs became widespread. The next

great empire to unite India was called the **Gupta (GOOP-tuh) Empire.**

The Guptas were a line of rulers, beginning in the mid-200s, 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.

However, 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.

Literature was one of several areas of major accomplishment during India's golden age. In this lesson, 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.

The Rise of the Gupta Empire

After the Mauryan Empire fell around 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, conquered and united the northern kingdoms. Arranged marriages between members of the Gupta family and the sons and daughters of other rulers helped this new kingdom form alliances.

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.

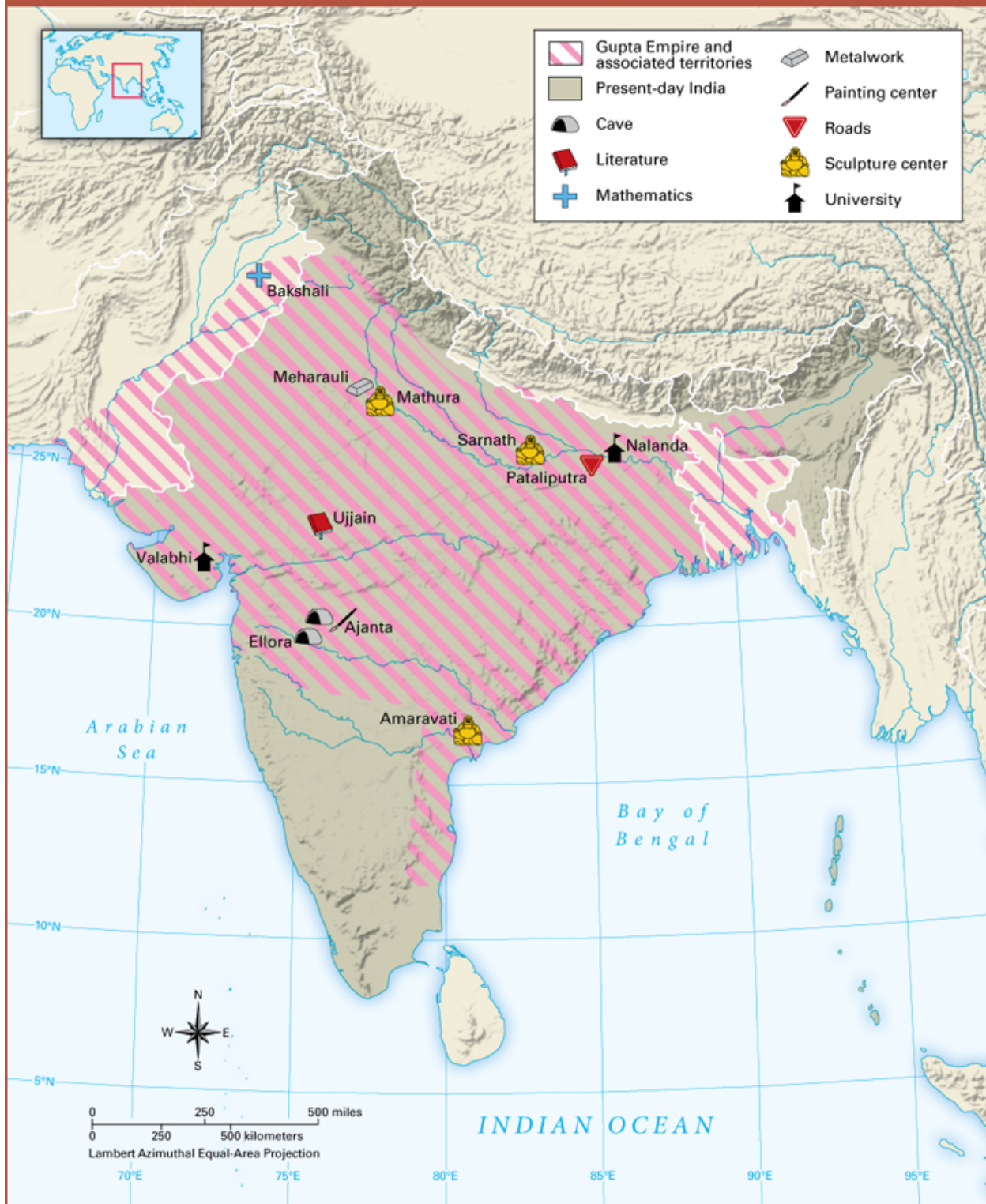
In some ways, the Gupta Empire was similar to the Mauryan Empire. The Guptas set up a central government to oversee the empire. A council, made up of advisers and members of the royal family, helped the king make decisions.

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.



Achievements of the Gupta Empire, About 320–550 C.E.



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.

These universities often provided people 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 and treatments of the time and 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.



Sculpture

One 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 here. The statue's lines are curved and elegant, and curved details form her dress, hair, and jewelry.

The temple statue of the Buddha's head shown here demonstrates the same attention to clean lines and detail. Notice the defined curls in his hair, as well as the detail in his lips. His expression is calm and peaceful. The sculptor used lowered eyes and a calm face to portray the Buddha's wisdom.



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, engraving them 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, 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.



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** (AR-ee-ah-bah-tah), who combined mathematics and astronomy to make important discoveries. He figured out that a year was exactly 365.258 days long. He also calculated the approximate size of Earth and proposed that planets were spheres. Aryabhata 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 here.



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.

Designed for safety and comfort, the roadways were lifted a few feet off the ground. Ditches, or canals, ran along either side, which helped prevent flooding during the rainy monsoon season since water would run off the road and into the ditches.

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

The empire's roads greatly benefited trade since busy traders could 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.