

Lesson 3 Buddhism and India's Golden Age

MAIN IDEAS

Belief System A teacher called the Buddha developed a new religion that focused on helping people to escape suffering.

Government The Maurya rulers united northern India into the first great Indian empire.

Culture About 500 years after Asoka's death, a new ruler united northern India and began a golden age of culture.

The Rise of Buddhism

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What are the main teachings of the religion of Buddhism?

Jainism

- Jainism also began in India; religion teaches **ahimsa**—“nonviolence”
 - Jains believe all living things have souls and should not be hurt

The Buddha's Life and Teachings

- **Buddhism** began in India, based on teachings of **Siddhartha Gautama**
- Siddhartha was 5th-century B.C. Hindu prince, born in wealth, luxury
 - gave up wealth when he saw suffering; began a search for peace
- Siddhartha starved self for six years, then meditated under fig tree
- Found understanding, insight into reality called Four Noble Truths:
 - people suffer because minds are not at ease
 - unease, suffering come from wanting things or a different life
 - people can stop suffering by not wanting
 - people can stop wanting by following Eightfold Path
- Eightfold Path means having correct opinions, desires, speech
 - also having right actions, job, effort, concentration, meditation
- Eightfold Path can lead to **nirvana**—the end of suffering
 - nirvana breaks cycle of reincarnation, which Buddhists believe in
- As a teacher, Siddhartha was called the Buddha, or “enlightened one”
 - believed in ahimsa, but not Hindu gods, goddesses, caste system

Buddhism Changes

- After Buddha's death, followers collected teachings, called the dharma
 - **dharma** means true nature of things, often symbolized by wheel
- Monks, nuns in religious communities made Buddhism a formal religion
- Some Buddhists became wandering holy men, tried to live like Buddha
- Buddhism later split into branches—most worshiped Buddha as a god
 - different branches stressed different approaches to enlightenment

REVIEW QUESTION

How could a Buddhist achieve an end to suffering?

The Maurya Empire

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the Maurya rulers unite northern India into the first great Indian empire?

A United India

- Separate Aryan kingdoms battled each other for centuries
- Around 550 B.C., northeastern Magadha kingdom gained strength
- Chandragupta Maurya became king of Magadha around 321 B.C.
 - conquered land, spread Maurya Empire over much of subcontinent
 - kept control with spies, army; taxed land, crops to pay officials
 - legend says he became nonviolent Jainist monk at end of life

Asoka, the Buddhist King

- **Asoka**—Chandragupta’s grandson, greatest Maurya king
 - began rule in 269 B.C., fought bloody war to take nearby kingdom
 - later gave up warfare, ruled peacefully by Buddhist teachings, law
- Carved policies of nonviolence, truth, kindness on rocks, pillars
- Sent missionaries to spread Buddhism, but allowed other religions
- Improved travel by building wells, hospitals, rest houses by roads

Changes to Hinduism

- Priests conducted early Hinduism’s complex sacrifices in Sanskrit
 - few people spoke Sanskrit; felt distant from gods; turned to Buddhism
- Hindu thought changed in A.D. 600s; hymns written in common languages
 - poems of joy, love became popular and renewed love for Hindu gods
- Buddhism declined in India as Hinduism underwent revival
 - however, Buddhism had already spread to other Asian countries

REVIEW QUESTION

What were some of Asoka’s accomplishments?

The Golden Age of the Guptas

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Who were the Guptas, and when did they rule India?

The Gupta Empire

- After Asoka, collapse of Maurya Empire led to 500 years of conflict
- Magadha's Gupta family took over—Chandra Gupta I began rule A.D. 320
 - Gupta I gained lands through marriage; son conquered lands for empire
- India had golden age during reign of Chandra Gupta II, A.D. 375-415

Art and Literature

- Arts (architecture, murals, statues) thrived under Chandra Gupta II
- Kalidasa's famed Sanskrit plays, poems include Sakuntala love story

Mathematics, Science, and Metallurgy

- Indians invented our numeral and decimal systems, symbol for zero
- A mathematician figured length of year, value of pi
- Doctors expanded Ayurvedic medicine, world's oldest medical system
- Artisans developed advanced metallurgy (metal working)
 - included 23-foot iron pillar over Delhi in A.D. 400
 - no others made a piece of iron as large until 1,000 years later

Trade Spreads Indian Culture

- Gupta India profited from foreign trade by selling cotton, ivory
 - bought items such as silk from China; resold to traders going west
- Traders and missionaries spread Indian culture, beliefs
 - Hinduism spread to parts of Southeast Asia
 - Buddhism spread to Central Asia, Sri Lanka, China, Southeast Asia

REVIEW QUESTION

Why was the period of Gupta rule a golden age for India?

Lesson Summary

- A new religion called Buddhism taught people to escape suffering by following a path of right living.
- Influenced by Buddhism, King Asoka tried to rule with peace, law, and good works.
- Under Gupta rule, India had a golden age. The arts, science, metallurgy, and trade prospered.

Why It Matters Now . . .

The spread of Hinduism and Buddhism shaped Asian cultures. Many Asian people still practice those religions today.