

Explore More—Indian Aesthetic and Intellectual Traditions

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about important Indian aesthetic and intellectual traditions. You will learn about Sanskrit literature, including the Bhagavad Gita, medicine, metallurgy, and mathematics. Refer to the maps in your Explore Geography Picture Dictionary to locate the places your teacher mentions. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

Sanskrit Literature

After the Aryans arrived in the Indus Valley, Sanskrit became the language of the upper classes in India.

Locate India and the Indus Valley on the world map.

Sanskrit literature is an important tradition that developed as a result of the Aryan influence in India. The earliest written accounts of Hindu beliefs, including the *Rig-Veda*, were written in Sanskrit.

Hinduism is also discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a part of one of India's greatest epic poems. The poem tells the story of five brothers who try to conquer an Indian kingdom. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Indian god Krishna encourages one of the brothers before he leaves for a battle. Krishna talks about important Hindu beliefs. For generations, people told this story orally before it was written down during India's golden ages. The *Bhagavad Gita* is considered one of the most important Hindu writings.

During India's golden ages, people also enjoyed drama. One play, called *Shakuntala*, tells of a love story that is complicated by many twists and turns. This play is considered one of the best examples of Sanskrit drama.

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Indian Medicine, Metallurgy, and Mathematics

Indian doctors gained advanced knowledge about medicine during India's golden ages. They learned how to use plants to make various kinds of medicines. They knew how to fix broken bones and heal wounds. They even had a general understanding of the importance of the spinal cord in the human body. Many of the ideas about medicine that developed during this period are still important in India today.

During this same period, Indians made new discoveries in mathematics. For example, they developed the idea and symbol for zero. An Indian mathematician began using a number system that consisted of zero and nine digits. Over time, this system was passed on to the Europeans. Today, we call these Indian numbers Arabic numerals and the Indian number system the decimal system. Indians also developed algebra and geometry.

Indian scientists learned how to combine metals to make new metals that were very strong and resisted rusting. Indians used this knowledge to build columns, strong swords and tools, and to make parts in rockets. Indian scientists also became very interested in astronomy. They studied the heavens and observed the movements of the stars. Using the advancements made in mathematics, scientists made many new discoveries. In the 400s, long before Europeans made the discovery, an Indian scientist and mathematician wrote that the earth was round and rotated around the sun. ❖

YOUR TURN!

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. Why is the *Bhagavad Gita* important?

2. Describe Indian achievements in medicine, metallurgy, and mathematics.

Questions for further discussion:

- What would you like to know more about in terms of Indian aesthetic and intellectual traditions? Frame questions that you can answer by historical study and research. Conduct this research and discuss your findings.
- Reread the excerpts from the *Rig-Veda* in your historical anthology and also think about what you know about the *Rig-Veda* and *Bhagavad Gita*. What information is a primary source? What is a secondary source? Is this information credible? What conclusions about Indian culture can you draw from these sources?
- The numbers we use today were developed in India, were passed on to Europeans, and are now called Arabic numerals. Think about and discuss the cause, effect, sequence, and correlation in historical events that might have led to the use of Arabic numerals in the United States.