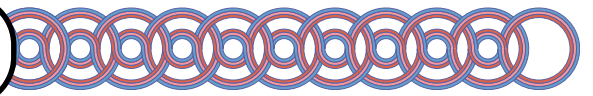


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# Introduction

## Religions Originating in South Asia

Share with students the following information:

The Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh religions originated in the South Asian subcontinent comprising India and Pakistan, beginning with Hinduism as early as 2000 BCE. These three religions differ from the Semitic faiths in some of their most basic beliefs. Hinduism, for example, is a polytheistic religion, meaning that Hindus may believe in various forms of God. (*Poly* means many, while *theism* means belief in God or gods.) Buddhists, on the other hand, do not necessarily believe in God at all. The Sikh religion, the youngest of these faiths, is monotheistic (believing in one God) like the Semitic faiths.



The Indus valley, nurtured by the Indus River, is the birthplace of Hinduism. The Buddha delivered his first sermon at the city of Sarnath near the sacred Hindu city of Benares. To the North is Amritsar, the spiritual centre of the Sikh religion. As you can see, this area of the world was the starting point for many religions. Hindus number over 800 million worldwide and make up a large majority of the one billion population of the present day India. There are about 20 million Sikhs with about 80 per cent living in India. Buddhism expanded into the rest of Asia to become the dominant faith in China, Japan and many countries of South-East Asia. In India, Buddhists are now a small minority.

## About Date References

The abbreviations BCE, BC, AD and CE are common terms used to reference time. (In this series, BCE and CE are used.) Some students may not be familiar with one or more of these terms. Use page 47 to introduce or review the abbreviations with students.

## Suggestions for the Teacher

The books in this series present content that introduces students to several world beliefs. Various terms, phrases and general content may, at times, be difficult for students to comprehend. It is suggested that segments containing intense factual content be read and discussed together. Have students keep a journal in which they outline important information and maintain a glossary of new terms and their meanings.

## The Indus Valley Civilisation

Look at the map of the Indus Valley on page 6. This area, now shared largely by Pakistan and a portion by India, is the birthplace of Hinduism. Hinduism is a complex faith with a history that can be traced back five thousand years to the people of the Indus Valley.

Most of what we know of the Indus people comes from archaeological findings. Surveys done with the help of satellites using modern technology such as infrared photography, and artefacts and relics dating back as early as 4000 BCE, tell the story of a civilisation flourishing with craftsmanship, agriculture and religious life. As you will see, many of these early practices and beliefs still shape Hinduism.

One such example is the Indus people's emphasis on cleanliness or ritual bathing. Mohenjo Daro, one of the major Indus cities, contained a huge water tank for public bathing. Old and famous Hindu temples are usually found in the places where water is naturally available.

Another lasting legacy of Hinduism is found in the abundance of terracotta figurines unearthed in the Indus Valley. Popular among these small ceramic statuettes were depictions of women. Among them is the Mother Goddess, which has many forms in the Hindu faith and thus plays many roles. She is viewed as the ultimate source of strength and as a symbol of fertility. The concepts of rebirth and continuity that the Mother Goddess represents are still very important to the Hindu religion. According to the teachings of Hinduism, when a person dies, it is only the body that dies while the Atma, the soul, is immortal.

Ceramic seals also tell us something about the Indus' religious beliefs. Among the most common designs is that of the bull. The bull is the means of transport of Lord Shiva, one of the most revered Hindu gods.

The inhabitants of the Indus Valley were an agricultural people, growing crops and raising animals. Living on the banks of the Indus River, dependent on its nourishment and renewal, there was a deep reverence for water. Water still remains sacred to Hindus.

# The Origins of Hinduism

## Comprehension Questions

1. How did researchers discover most of the information about the Indus people?

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2. List two findings and briefly explain their links to Hinduism.

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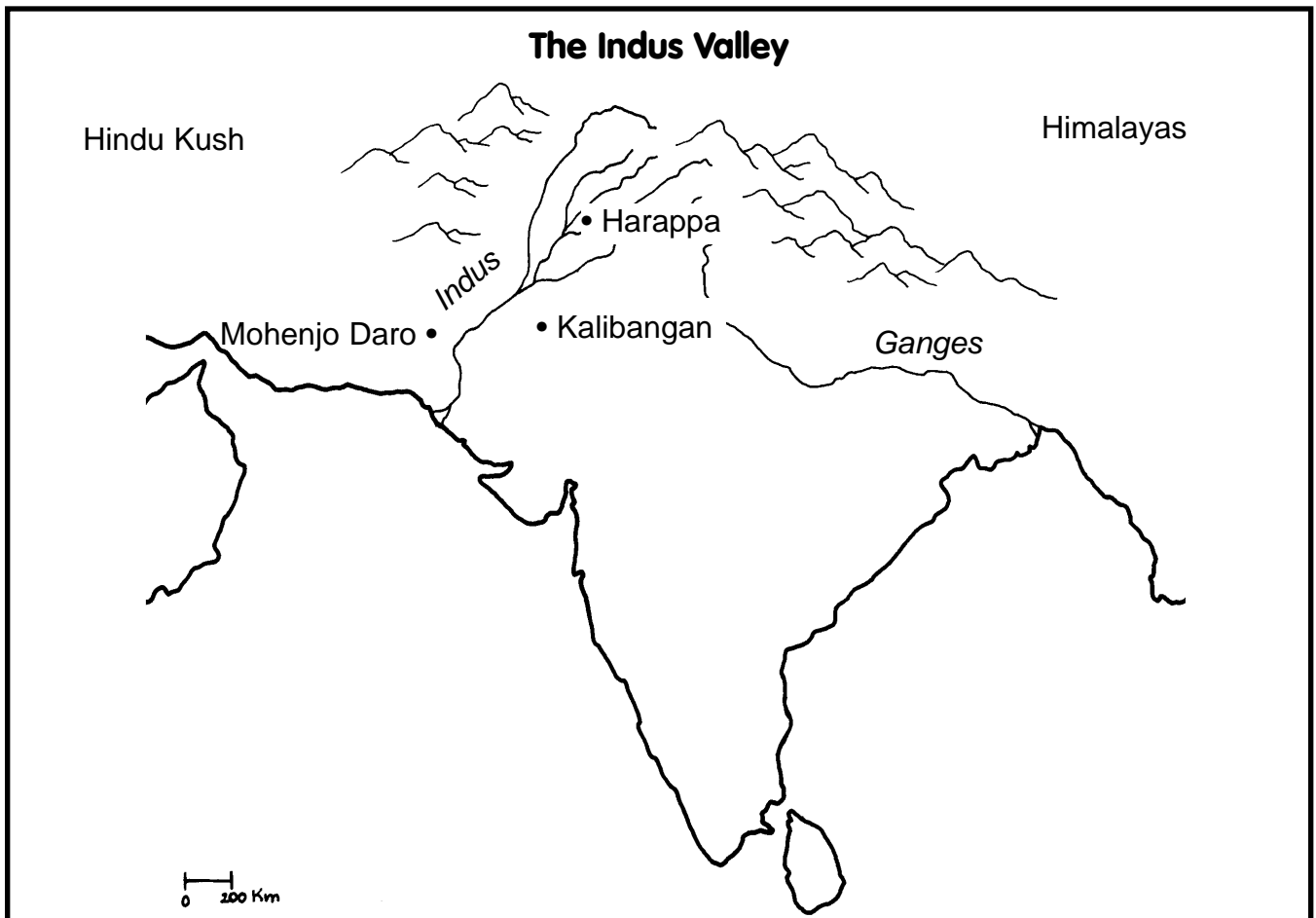
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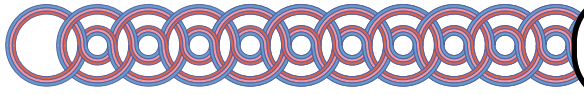
3. How did the Indus people survive? How does it relate to their religious worship?

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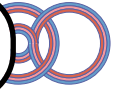
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# The Origins of Hinduism



## Background Information for the Teacher

Presented below and on page 8 are historical highlights of the origins of Hinduism. Share some of this information with students. Discuss the following questions: Who are the Aryans? Where did they settle? What are the Vedas? Who are the Brahmins? What is an ascetic? What is the importance of the ascetics in Hindu life?

### ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● **The Aryan Invasion** ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Although there is evidence that the Indus Valley civilisation may already have been struggling, its collapse began with the migration of the Aryan tribes around 3000 BCE. The Aryans, a powerful race, travelled through Europe and Asia, descending from the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas into the Indus Valley. They brought with them a very different belief system and way of life.

To begin with, the Aryans were not agricultural people. Rather than fertility symbols, they crafted beautiful bronze weaponry. Another major contrast was their religious focus. The Aryans were patriarchal, worshipping only male gods. Their central god was a 'sky father', probably an influence of the Greek and Roman gods, Zeus and Jupiter. Their principal deities, such as Agni and Indra, were associated with the sun. Aryan priests composed verses to these gods which were recited during fire sacrifices.

The Aryans settled the lush Indus Valley and maintained their rituals. However, much of the Indus' religious culture remained alive in villages and was adopted by the Aryans. From this mixture of beliefs and practices, Hinduism was born.

### ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● **The Vedas** ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

With the Aryans arrived the bedrock of the Hindu thought system, the *Vedas*. Considered the world's oldest writings, these scriptures originated before the Aryans migrated to the Indus Valley, later evolving into four scriptures: the *Rig-Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama-Veda*, and the *Atharva-Veda*. The oldest and most popular of these is the *Rig-Veda*, a collection of hymns which may date back as early as 5000 BCE. It is important to note, however, that the historical sweep of Vedic writing reflects deep shifts in spiritual interest and ways of worship.

Interestingly, for centuries the Vedas were only transmitted orally, through memorisation and recital. Eventually, however, they were transcribed into Sanskrit, the sacred Hindu language developed by the Aryans of the Indus Valley.

The *Rig-Veda* tells of thirty-three gods, all of whom are born of one creator, Brahman. Complementing Brahman are Vishnu and Shiva. These three gods form the Hindu trinity. The principal goddesses, Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Kali are also part of the *Rig-Veda*. This variety of deities – many of whom take on different personalities and names – are very much alive in everyday Hindu life.