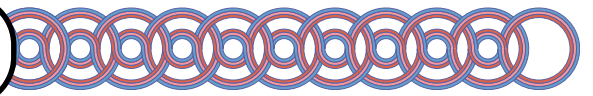


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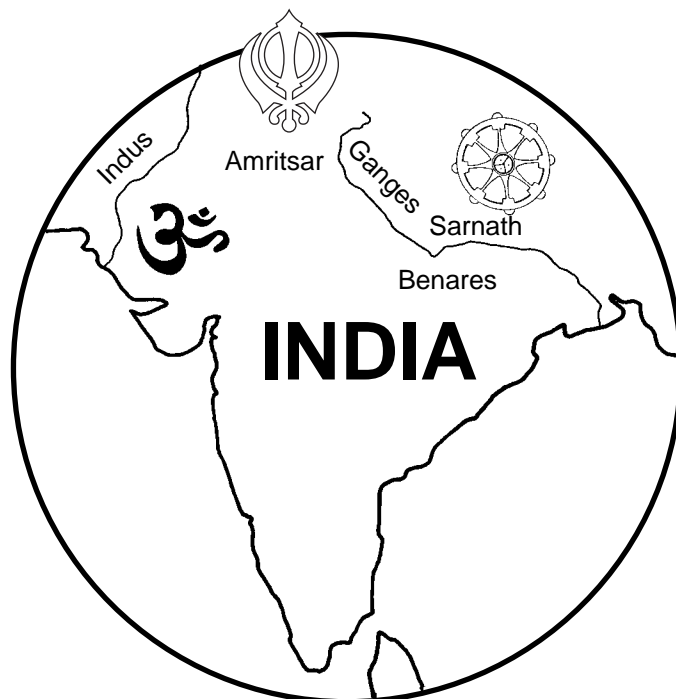
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Introduction

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 Story of Buddha's Enlightenment

Buddhism began over 2500 years ago. The foundation of Buddhism rests on the life of one teacher, an Indian prince named Siddhartha Gotama. Prince Siddhartha grew up in a small kingdom in northeast India, an area which now rests in Nepal. His father, King Sudhodana, ruled over the Shakya people. Although the King hoped his son would carry on his legacy, the prince had a very different calling, one which made him one of history's most famous and influential figures.

In order to understand the principles of Buddhism, one must begin with the life of its founder. The deeds and words of Lord Buddha are the source and inspiration behind this popular faith. As you read the story of Buddha's enlightenment, note the place names on the map on page 11.

A Prince Is Born

Prince Siddhartha, son of King Sudhodana and Queen Maya, was born around 563 BCE. Even before the birth, the queen had premonitions of great happenings. Legend tells that in her dreams a radiant white elephant descended from the sky. As the elephant descended, its six large tusks pierced the queen's womb, and she was filled with light.

That morning, the king and queen sought the counsel of the wise, for this was no ordinary dream. The fortune tellers explained that the queen would give birth to a son, and he would be a great leader. The couple was overjoyed at hearing this. King Sudhodana was thrilled, for now he would have a successor.

About ten months later, on the full moon night, in the Indian month of Vaisakha (May–June), Queen Maya was on her way to her father's house in the town of Lumbini.

The Story of Buddha

A Prince is Born (cont.)

Suddenly, she halted her escorts, descended from her carriage, and entered a lush, beautiful garden. There she gave birth to a son. Legends tell of the sacred silence which anointed the garden that night and of a peace which flowed throughout the land.

The royal couple decided to name the baby Siddhartha, which means 'the one who brings all good'. News of the prince's birth spread, and there was much celebration. Many visitors came to pay tribute to Siddhartha. One of these visitors was the holy sage, Asita. Asita told the parents that the prince would be either a great king or a great saint. Then something strange happened. When Asita's eyes met the infant's, the sage began to weep. This worried the king and queen, but Asita explained that these were bittersweet tears he shed for himself, for he saw that this indeed was a special child, one who could lead others to peace. Now the holy man wept because, after a lifetime of searching, he would not live to hear Siddhartha's teachings.

Both the king and queen were happy, but Sudhodana wanted to be certain that his son became a great emperor, not a saint. Therefore, he set out to give Siddhartha all he could desire.

But the couple's joy was quickly ended when Queen Maya shortly became seriously ill. Within seven days of giving birth, she lay on her bed dying. She asked her sister, Prajapati, to mother her son. Prajapati consented. Soon afterwards, the queen passed away.

Young Prince Siddhartha

Prajapati raised Siddhartha as though he were her own son, and the prince lived a carefree childhood within the palace walls. King Sudhodana made certain that the boy received the finest education, for Asita's prophecy remained with him. The prince learned quickly. In fact, legend has it that after only a few lessons he had no need of teachers – he had learned all they could teach him.

Young Prince Siddhartha (cont.)

As Siddhartha grew, his intelligence was matched with a compassionate gentleness. Unlike his peers, he spent a great deal of time alone, wandering the palace gardens. He did not participate in the common games of boys but sought the company of animals and nature.

It was on one of these garden days that the prince came upon a wounded white swan, an arrow still piercing its wing. He removed the arrow and comforted the bird, tending to its wounds. Shortly thereafter, Devadatta, Siddhartha's cousin, came running. Adorned with bow and arrow, Devadatta demanded the swan he had hunted. But the prince refused. The boys argued until they agreed to settle their dispute in the palace's court.

When Devadatta came before the judges, he claimed that because he shot the bird, it should belong to him. When Siddhartha spoke, he said that he had saved the swan's life, and therefore it belonged to him. The judges sided with the prince, agreeing that the bird's saviour has a greater right.

Siddhartha the Suitor

Years went by, and as the prince became a young man he continued in his gentle, quiet ways. This disturbed his father, who wanted his son more involved in worldly matters. But the king's worries were allayed when Siddhartha met Princess Yasodhara, daughter of King Suprabuddha. The young couple wanted to be married, but the neighbouring king needed proof of Siddhartha's bravery and skills. Only then would he give his daughter in marriage. Although he had little experience in warrior games, the prince gladly agreed to take part in a contest against other suitors. Now even Siddhartha's father was worried. How could the prince compete against the other young men who had spent years in training?