Beliefs and Empires

Read how religion shaped power and culture in classical India.

WH.2.6 "Examine the origins, developments, and major achievements of civilizations in India, such as the Mauryan and Gupta empires. Compare and contrast the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on the civilizations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one origin of a tradition or empire, circle two achievements, and write 1 beside a passage detail about support for Buddhism and 2 beside one about support for Hinduism.

From Northern Towns to Empires

1 Along the Ganges River, growing towns and trade routes helped larger states rise in northern India. Vedic traditions shaped Hindu beliefs about dharma, or duty, and rebirth. In the fifth century BCE, Siddhartha Gautama taught a path to end suffering; his teachings became Buddhism. Both traditions spread through teaching and travel, but they offered different guides for how people should live.

2 Around 322 BCE, Chandragupta Maurya built an empire across much of northern India. His grandson Ashoka later embraced Buddhism after a brutal war. Ashoka carved messages urging nonviolence and respect for different beliefs onto rocks and pillars. He also supported Buddhist communities. Yet his empire included people of many faiths, showing that a ruler's beliefs did not erase other traditions.

3 Centuries later, Gupta rulers governed northern India, beginning around 320 CE. Many supported Hindu temples and Sanskrit learning, while Buddhist monasteries remained active. Scholars advanced mathematics and astronomy, and artists created religious images. Unlike Ashoka's public support for Buddhism, Gupta court support often favored Hindu traditions. Both periods linked political power with religion and cultural achievement.

TWO EMPIRES AT A GLANCE

Empire	Approximate start	Religious influence
Mauryan	322 BCE	Ashoka promoted Buddhist ethics
Gupta	320 CE	Rulers often supported Hindu temples

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did towns, trade routes, and new teachings help shape early northern India?

2. How did Ashoka turn his beliefs into a Mauryan achievement while showing respect for other faiths?

3. How did both Hinduism and Buddhism appear in Gupta society? Name one Gupta achievement beyond religious life.

4. What was one similarity and one difference in the influence of religion on the Mauryan and Gupta empires?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence caption for an exhibit on beliefs and power in classical India. Explain one way the Mauryan and Gupta empires differed, one way they were alike, and how a cultural achievement helps tell their story.

ANSWER KEY

Beliefs and Empires

HIGH SCHOOL · WH.2.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one origin of a tradition or empire, circle two achievements, and write 1 beside a passage detail about support for Buddhism and 2 beside one about support for Hinduism. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did towns, trade routes, and new teachings help shape early northern India?	**Growing towns and trade routes helped larger states rise. Hindu and Buddhist teachings offered guides for living and spread through teaching and travel.**
2	How did Ashoka turn his beliefs into a Mauryan achievement while showing respect for other faiths?	**He had messages urging nonviolence and respect for different beliefs carved onto rocks and pillars.**
3	How did both Hinduism and Buddhism appear in Gupta society? Name one Gupta achievement beyond religious life.	**Rulers supported Hindu temples, while Buddhist monasteries remained active. Gupta scholars advanced mathematics or astronomy.**
4	What was one similarity and one difference in the influence of religion on the Mauryan and Gupta empires?	**Both linked political power with religion. Ashoka publicly supported Buddhism, while Gupta rulers often supported Hindu traditions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ashoka's Mauryan government spread messages about Buddhist ethics on rocks and pillars. Gupta rulers, in contrast, often supported Hindu temples. Both empires connected a ruler's power to religious life while other beliefs continued to exist. The Gupta temples show how that connection could shape what people built.

Accept supported contrasts in religious patronage and similarities in the presence of more than one tradition. For the caption, the cultural achievement should be clearly connected to its claim.