

**World History**  
**Objective 2.04**  
**Enrichment**

Objective: 2.04: Enrichment:

Examine the importance of India as a hub of world trade and as a cultural and religious center during its Golden Age.

India's location has played an important part in its development. Monsoon winds coming from the north and the south bring moisture to the farmers who live there. As in Mesopotamia, India's earliest civilizations developed in its river valleys, especially along the Indus River. After the earliest civilizations declined, major changes took place in Indian culture. A system of varnas, or social groups ranked people from high to low and this developed into the social system known as the caste system.

The caste system determined from a person's birth, what job people could have, who they could marry and with whom they could socialize.

Two of the world's great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, began in India. Hinduism, the principal religion of India today, believes that individual souls are reborn in a different form after death. After a number of existences in the earthly world, the soul reaches its final goal in a union with Brahman.

Buddhism teaches that all human beings can reach nivana, or ultimate reality, as a result of their behavior in this life and rejected the idea of castes.

Three Indian empires, the Mauryan, Kushan, and Gupta Empires eventually brought India trade with China, Southeast Asia and the Mediterranean and also encouraged domestic trade in cloth, salt and iron.

Enrichment:

How important was the strict caste system in India in terms of successes by other religions in India, namely Islam and Buddhism? You must research this in detail and give specific information on the role of the lower castes in the Hindu religion and how these people were treated in Islam and Buddhism.