

**Ancient India**

Module 5

**Lesson 2**



**MAIN IDEA**

1. The Aryan migration to India changed the region's civilization.
2. The Aryans practiced a religion known as Brahmanism.
3. Indian society divided into distinct groups under the Aryans.

**Key Terms and People**

**Sanskrit** ancient India's most important language, on which the Hindi language is based

**caste system** a division of Indian society into groups based on a person's birth, wealth, or occupation

**Lesson Summary**

**ARYAN MIGRATION**

Following the Harappan civilization, the Aryans (AIR-ee-uhnz), nomads from Central Asia, moved into the Indus Valley in the 2000s BC. Aryans were originally from the Caspian Sea in Central Asia, and over the centuries they became the dominant group in India. Unlike the Harappans, they did not build big cities but lived in small communities based on family ties, each run by a local leader, or raja.

The Aryans spoke **Sanskrit** and developed a rich tradition of poems and hymns, but they did not have a writing system. Instead, their works survived from generation to generation by word of mouth. Aryans eventually figured out how to write Sanskrit to keep records. The lasting influence of these early written works made Sanskrit the most important language of ancient India. Much of what we know about the early Aryans comes to us through Sanskrit works. Sanskrit is no longer spoken today, but it is the root of many modern South Asian languages, including Hindi.

**The early Aryans had a rich and expressive language, but they did not write. How did they preserve their poems and their history without writing?**

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Lesson 2, *continued***BRAHMANISM**

The religion practiced by the Aryan priests became known as Brahmanism. Their religion was based on the Vedas, first passed down orally and then written. They contained ancient sacred hymns and poems. Over time, Aryan Brahmins and scholars wrote their thoughts about the Vedas, which were compiled into Vedic texts. The texts described rituals, explained how to perform sacrifices, and offered reflections from religious scholars.

In the later Vedic period between 800 BC and 500 BC, communities switched from a focus on family identity to identifying themselves by where they lived. Rajas became more like powerful chiefs. Chiefs gave sacrifices of wealth to priests to be more powerful and to be close to the gods.

Underline what the Vedic texts contained.

**INDIAN SOCIETY DIVIDES**

Aryan society was divided into social classes. There were four main groups called *varnas*. The Brahmins (BRAH-muhns) were priests and were the highest ranking *varna*. The Kshatriyas (KSHA-tree-uhs) were rulers and warriors. The Vaisyas (VYSH-yuhs) were farmers, craftspeople, and traders. The Sudras (SOO-drahs) were laborers and non-Aryans.

The **caste system** became more complex, dividing Indian society into groups based on birth, wealth, or occupation, and it determined people's place in society. Castes increased in number and the Aryans created sutras, or guides, listing rules of behavior. One group did not belong to any caste and was called the untouchables.

Number the Aryan *varnas* in order of their social rank, with one (1) being highest and four (4) being the lowest.

- \_\_\_ Brahmins
- \_\_\_ Sudras
- \_\_\_ Kshatriyas
- \_\_\_ Vaisyas

In ancient India, how was a person's caste determined?

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**Lesson 2, continued**

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**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Interpret** The caste system in Indian society became more complex over time. Why did this happen? Write a letter to a friend explaining why you believe this may have happened.

**DIRECTIONS** On the line provided before each statement, write **T** if a statement is true and **F** if a statement is false. If the statement is false, write the correct term on the line after each sentence that makes the sentence a true statement.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Ancient writings known as the Sanskrit include poems, hymns, myths, and rituals.  
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\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The leader of each village was given the title of raja.  
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\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Sanskrit was the language of the Harappan civilization.  
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\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Today Sanskrit is no longer a spoken language, but the modern Hindi language is based on it.  
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\_\_\_\_\_ 5. The early caste system divided Aryan society into four social classes called Sudras.  
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\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Brahmanism was practiced by Harappan priests who based their religion on the Vedas.  
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\_\_\_\_\_ 7. The caste system came to divide Indian society into groups based on birth, wealth, or occupation.  
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\_\_\_\_\_ 8. To keep the social classes distinct, the Aryans wrote guides called Vaisyas that listed all the rules for the caste system.  
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