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Art AND **CULTURE**

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6th - 9th STD



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NCERT has not yet released Volume 2 for Class 9 - the compilation will be updated immediately once it is published.

India's Cultural Roots

That which cannot be stolen; that which cannot be confiscated by rulers; ... that which is not a burden as it does not weigh anything; that which, though it is used, only grows every day — that is the greatest wealth of all, the wealth of true knowledge.”

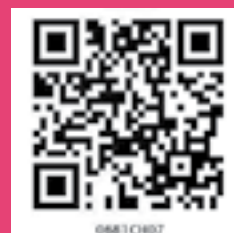
— Subhāṣita (Wise Saying)

A rishi (from Hampi, Karnataka) | The Buddha (from Bhutan) | Mahāvīra (from Bihar)



The **Big**
Questions ?

1. What are the Vedas? What is their message?
2. What new schools of thought emerged in India in the 1st millennium BCE? What are their core principles?
3. What is the contribution of folk and tribal traditions to Indian culture?



Spiritual:
Concerned with the spirit or soul (*ātman* in Sanskrit and many Indian languages). Spirituality is the search for a deeper or higher dimension beyond our current personality.

Seeker:
Someone who seeks the truths of this world. This could be a sage, a saint, a yogi, a philosopher, etc.

Indian culture, by any estimate, is several millenniums old. Like any ancient tree, it has many roots and many branches. The roots nurture a common trunk. And from the trunk emerge many branches, which are different manifestations of Indian culture, yet united by a common trunk.

Some of these branches are about art, literature, science, medicine, religion, the art of governance, martial arts, and so on. There are also ‘schools of thought’, by which we mean groups of thinkers or **spiritual seekers** who share similar ideas about human life, the world, etc.

Many archaeologists and scholars have pointed out that some of India’s cultural roots go all the way to the Indus or Harappan or Sindhu-Sarasvatī civilisation (which we visit in Chapter 6). Later on, over time, hundreds of schools of thought emerged in India. We will see here a few early schools, which have shaped India into a country with a unique personality. By understanding them and their roots, we can understand ‘India, that is Bharat’ better.

The Vedas and Vedic Culture

a. What are the Vedas?

The word “Veda” comes from the Sanskrit *vid* which means ‘knowledge’ (hence *vidyā*, for instance). We briefly mentioned the Ṛig Veda in earlier chapters. In fact, there are four Vedas — the Ṛig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sāma Veda and the Atharva Veda. They are the most ancient texts of India, and indeed among the most ancient in the world.

The Vedas consist of thousands of hymns — prayers in the form of poems and songs — that were recited orally, not written. Those hymns were composed in the Sapta Sindhava region (which we visit in Chapter 5). It is difficult to say when exactly the Ṛig Veda, the most ancient of the four, was composed; experts have proposed dates ranging from

the 5th to the 2nd millennium BCE. So, for anything between 100 and 200 generations, these texts have been committed to memory through rigorous training and passed on orally with hardly any alterations!



DON'T MISS OUT

This meticulous transmission over thousands of years explains why, in 2008, **UNESCO** recognised Vedic chanting as 'a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity'.

The Vedic hymns were composed by rishis (male seers or sages) and rishikas (female ones) in an early form of the Sanskrit language. They were addressed in poetical form to many deities (gods or goddesses), such as Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, Mitra, Sarasvatī, Uṣhas, and many more. Together with the seers, these deities sustained *ṛitam*, or truth and order in human life and in the '**cosmos**'.

The early rishis and rishikas saw those gods and goddesses as one, not separate beings. As one famous hymn puts it,

ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti ...

The Existent [that is, the supreme reality] is one,
but sages give it many names.

In this **worldview**, some values were especially important, beginning with 'Truth', which was often another name for God. The last mantras (verses) of the Ṛig Veda also call for unity among people:

UNESCO:
UNESCO stands for 'United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization'. It promotes dialogue between people and nations through education, science and culture.

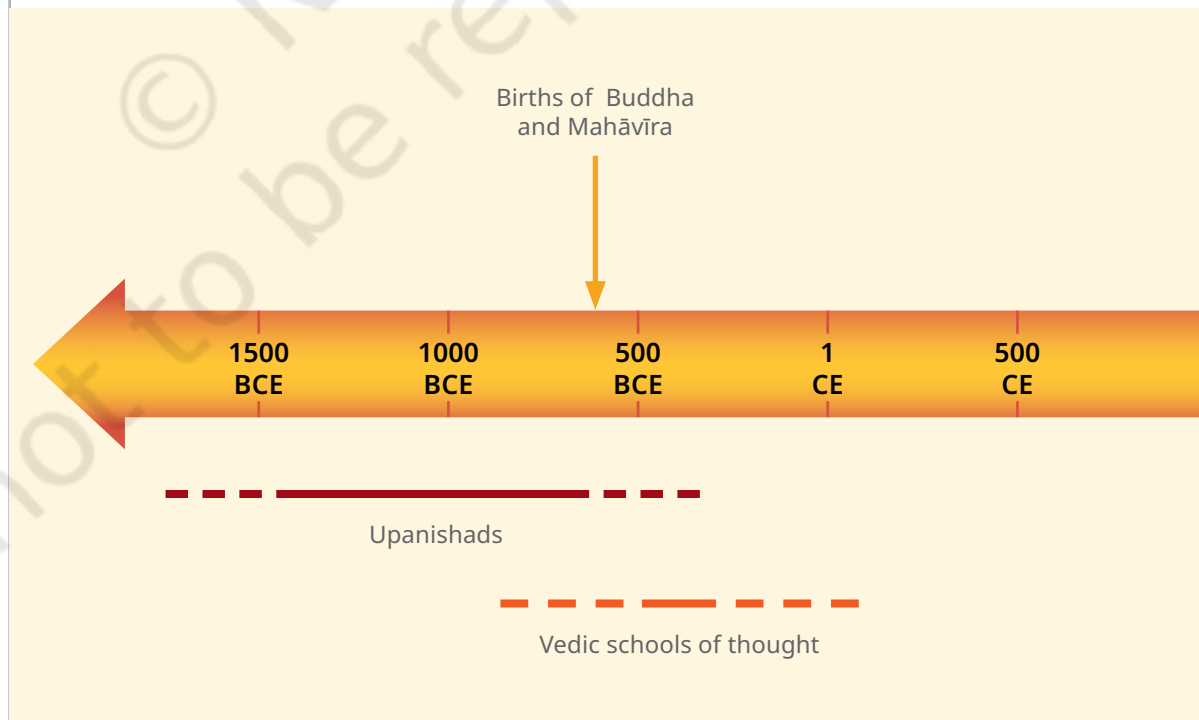
Cosmos:
The world or the universe as an ordered and harmonious system.

Worldview:
A certain view or understanding of the world, its origin, or its workings.

Come together, speak together;
common be your mind, may your thoughts agree ...
United be your purpose, united your heart ...
may your thoughts be united, so all may agree!

b. Vedic society

Early Vedic society was organised in different *janas* or 'clans', that is, larger groups of people. The R̥g Veda alone lists over 30 such *janas* — for instance, the Bharatas, the Purus, the Kurus, the Yadus, the Turvaśhas etc. Each clan was associated with a particular region of the northwest part of the Subcontinent.



Not much is known of how these *janas* governed their society. The Vedas only give us a few clues through words like *rājā* (a king or ruler), *sabhā* and *samiti*, both of which refer to a collective gathering or assembly.

Many professions are mentioned in the Vedic texts, such as agriculturist, weaver, potter, builder, carpenter, **healer**, dancer, barber, priest, etc.

LET'S EXPLORE

Do you know the term for a society where people select their leaders? How do you think people can benefit from such a situation? What could happen if they live under leaders that they did not choose? (*Hint: Think back to what you're learning in the theme 'Governance and Democracy'!*) Write your thoughts in a paragraph of 100–150 words.

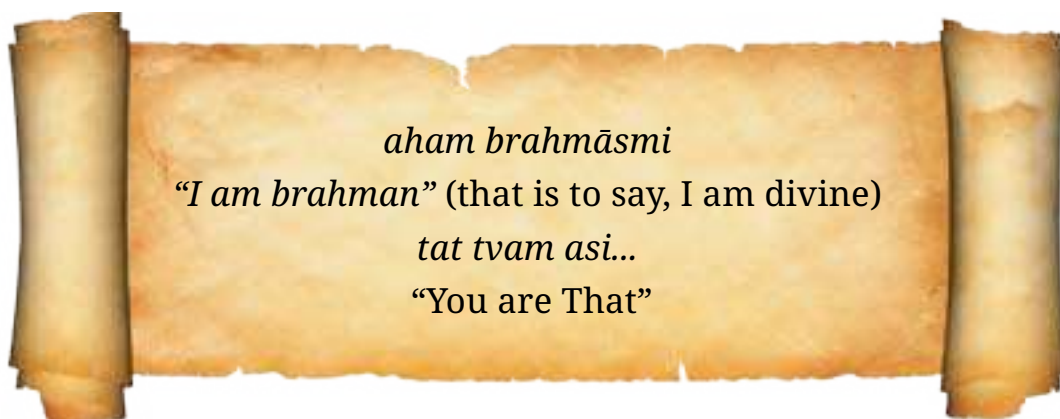
c. Vedic schools of thought

Vedic culture also developed many rituals (*yajña*, often read as 'yagya') directed towards various deities (gods or goddesses) for individual or collective benefit and wellbeing. Daily rituals were generally in the form of prayers and offerings to Agni, the deity associated with fire, but those rituals became more and more complex in the course of time.

A group of texts known as 'Upanishads' built upon Vedic concepts and introduced new ones, such as rebirth (taking birth again and again) and karma (our actions or their results). According to one school of thought, generally known as 'Vedanta', everything — human life, nature and the universe — is one divine essence called *brahman* (not to be confused with the god *Brahmā*) or sometimes just *tat* ('that'). Two well-known mantras express this in a simple but profound way:

Healer:
Someone who uses traditional practices to relieve or heal diseases.





aham brahmāsmi

“I am brahman” (that is to say, I am divine)

tat tvam asi...

“You are That”

The Upaniṣhads also introduced the concept of *ātman* or Self — the divine essence that resides in every being but is ultimately one with *brahman*. It follows that everything in this world is connected and interdependent. This explains a common prayer that begins with *sarve bhavantu sukhinah*, or “May all creatures be happy”, and goes on to wish them all to be free from disease and sorrow.



THINK ABOUT IT

Have you heard or read any other story that conveyed an important message? What values did it teach you?

Consciousness:

The quality or state of being aware, for instance of something within oneself.

Early in the 1st millennium BCE, several more schools of thought grew out of the Vedas. One of them was Yoga, which developed methods intended to achieve the realisation of *brahman* in one’s **consciousness**. Together, these schools of thought became the foundations for what we call ‘Hinduism’ today.

Buddhism

Other schools of thought also emerged, which did not accept the authority of the Vedas and developed their own systems. One of them is Buddhism.

About two-and-a-half millennia ago, a young prince named Siddhārtha Gautama was born in Lumbini (today in

Many stories from the Upaniṣhads tell us the importance of asking questions, whether these questions come from men, women or children.

Śhvetaketu and the seed of reality (*Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad*)

Rishi Uddālaka Āruṇi sent his son, Śhvetaketu, to a gurukula to learn the Vedas. When Śhvetaketu returned 12 years later, his father realised he had become very proud of his learning. So Uddālaka tested him with questions on the nature of *brahman*, which Śhvetaketu could not answer.



Uddālaka proceeded to explain how *brahman*, though invisible, is everywhere, just as the seed of a banyan fruit seems empty when you open it, but already contains the future banyan tree; or just as all kinds of different pots can be made out of the same clay. Similarly, everything around us has emerged from the same essence — *brahman*. He concluded his teaching with these words, “Everything consists of this subtle essence. ... You are That, Śhvetaketu.”

Nachiketa and his quest (*Kaṭha Upaniṣhad*)

Once, a man was giving away all his possessions in a ritual. As his son Nachiketa kept asking him which god he would be offered to, the father became angry and answered, “I give you to Yama” — that is, to the god of death.

Nachiketa, then, proceeded to Yama’s world and, after a long wait, met the mighty god. One question was on his mind — “What

happens after the death of the body?” Yama tried to avoid answering, but the boy persisted. Pleased, Yama explained that the *ātman*, or self, is hidden within all creatures. It is neither born, nor does it die; it is immortal. Having acquired this profound knowledge, Nachiketa returned to his father, who welcomed him joyfully.



The debate of Gārgī and Yājñavalkya (*Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣhad*)

Once, the wise king Janaka announced a prize for the winner of a philosophical debate. Yājñavalkya, a renowned rishi, came to the king's court and defeated many scholars until Gārgī, a rishika, asked him a series of questions on the nature of



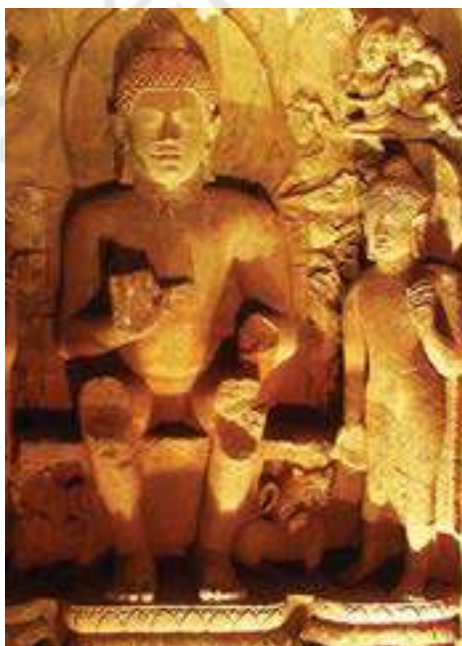
the world, and finally on the nature of *brahman*. At that point, Yājñavalkya asked her to stop asking further questions. Later, however, Gārgī resumed her questions and Yājñavalkya went on to explain how *brahman* is what makes the world, the seasons, the rivers and everything else possible.

Nepal). Depending on the sources they use, scholars have come up with widely different conclusions as regards the precise year of his birth. In Chapter 4, we chose 560 BCE as an approximate year. In any case, it makes no difference to our story here.

As the story goes, then, Siddhārtha Gautama grew up living a protected life in the palace. One day, at the age of 29, he asked to be driven through the city in a chariot, and for the first time in his life came across an old man, a sick man, and a dead body. He also saw an **ascetic**, who appeared to be happy and at peace. Following this experience, Siddhārtha decided to give up his palace life, leaving behind his wife and son. Travelling on foot as an ascetic, meeting other ascetics and scholars, he searched for the root cause of suffering in human life. After meditating for many days under a pipal tree at Bodh Gaya (today in Bihar), he attained enlightenment; he realised that *avidyā* (ignorance) and **attachment** are the source of human suffering and conceived a method to remove these two causes.

Siddhārtha, then, became known as the 'Buddha', which means the 'enlightened' or 'awakened' one.

The Buddha started teaching what he had realised, including the idea of ahimsa, which is generally translated as 'non-violence', but originally means 'non-hurting' or 'non-injuring'. He also insisted on a sincere inner discipline. The following saying of his expresses this simply:



*The Buddha teaching
(Ajanta caves)*

Ascetic:
Someone who engages in a rigorous discipline to attain a higher consciousness.

Attachment:
The condition of having a bond with someone or something, usually through sentiment or habit.

Monk:
A man who, giving up the usual life in the world, dedicates himself to religious or spiritual pursuits. A monk usually takes vows, that is, commits himself to follow strict rules for a disciplined life.

Nun:
The female equivalent of a monk.

Exploring Society: India and Beyond
Our Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions

“Not by water is one made pure, though many people may bathe here [in sacred rivers]. But one is pure in whom truth and dharma reside.

Conquering oneself is greater than conquering a thousand men on the battlefield a thousand times.”

The Buddha founded the Sangha, a community of *bhikṣhus* or **monks** (and, later, *bhikṣhunīs* or **nuns**) who dedicated themselves to practising and spreading his teachings. His influence on India, and indeed the whole of Asia, was enormous, as we will discover later; it is still perceptible today.



This stone panel, some 1,800 years old, shows the Buddha teaching.

LET'S EXPLORE

- Discuss the way the Buddha is depicted in the above panel.
- Can you name some states of India or some other countries where Buddhism is a major religion even today? Try to plot these on a world map.



Jainism

Jainism is another important school of thought that became widespread at the same time, although its roots are said to be much more ancient. Just like Siddhārtha Gautama, Prince Vardhamāna was born into a royal family in the early 6th century BCE. His birthplace was near the city of Vaiśhālī, in modern-day Bihar. At the age of 30, he decided to leave his home and go in search of spiritual knowledge. He practised an ascetic discipline and, after 12 years, achieved 'infinite knowledge' or supreme wisdom. He became known as 'Mahāvīra', or 'great hero', and started preaching what he had realised.



A traditional painting of Mahāvīra

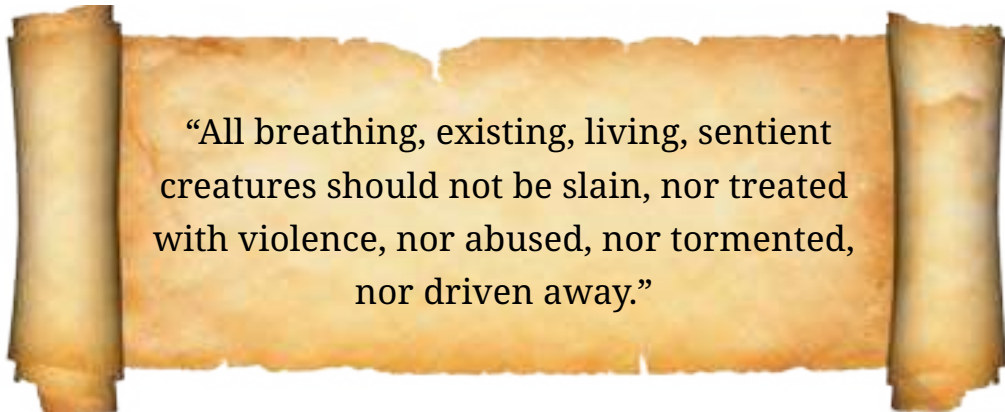


DON'T MISS OUT

The word 'Jain' or *jaina* comes from *jina*, meaning 'conqueror'. This does not refer to the conquest of territory or enemies, but to the conquest of ignorance and attachments, so as to reach enlightenment.

Jain teachings include *ahimsa*, *anekāntavāda* and *aparigraha*. These ideas, shared to a large extent with Buddhism and the Vedantic school of thought, are central

to Indian culture. The first may be illustrated by this saying of Mahāvīra:

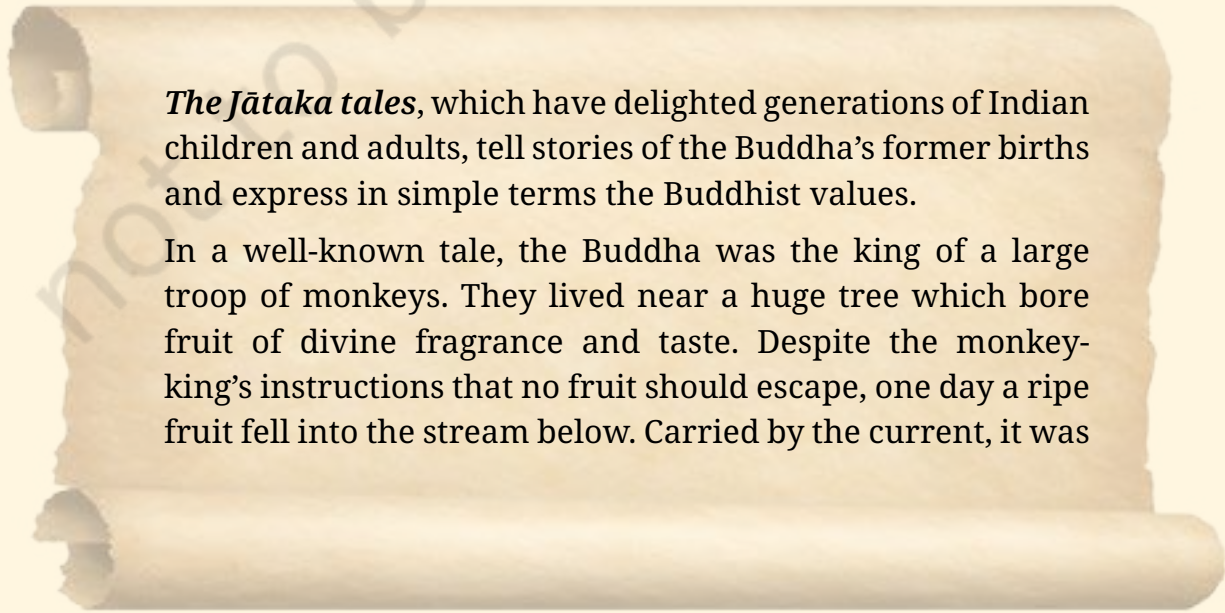


“All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away.”

Let us define the last two in simple terms:

- *Anekāntavāda* means ‘not just one’ aspect or perspective. That is, the truth has many aspects and cannot be fully described by any single statement.
- *Aparigraha* means ‘non-possession’ and advises detachment from material possessions, limiting oneself to what is truly necessary in life.

Jainism also insists on the interconnectedness and interdependence of all creatures, from humans to invisible organisms, as they support each other and cannot live without one another. Scientists studying nature, flora and fauna, have again and again confirmed this deep truth.



The Jātaka tales, which have delighted generations of Indian children and adults, tell stories of the Buddha’s former births and express in simple terms the Buddhist values.

In a well-known tale, the Buddha was the king of a large troop of monkeys. They lived near a huge tree which bore fruit of divine fragrance and taste. Despite the monkey-king’s instructions that no fruit should escape, one day a ripe fruit fell into the stream below. Carried by the current, it was

caught in a net and taken to the palace. The king was so enchanted by its taste that he ordered his soldiers to locate the tree it came from.

After a long search, they found the tree — and the monkeys enjoying the tree's fruits. The soldiers attacked the monkeys. The only way for the monkey-king to save his monkeys was to help them cross the stream, but they could not do so on their own. Being much larger than them, the monkey-king caught hold of a tree on the other bank and let them use his body as a bridge to cross the stream, although he was severely bruised in the process and eventually died.

The king, who watched the scene from a distance, was greatly moved by the monkey-king's selfless sacrifice. He thought about the role of a king with respect to his subjects.



A stone panel (at Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh) depicting the story of the monkey-king

A Jain story

Rohineya was an extraordinarily skilled burglar who evaded all attempts to catch him. On his way to a city, he accidentally heard a few sentences from a sermon that Mahāvīra was giving about achieving liberation from the ordinary life of ignorance. Reaching the city, Rohineya was recognised and arrested. He pretended to be a simple farmer. A minister devised a clever plan to force him to confess his identity. But Rohineya, remembering Mahāvīra's words, was able to detect the minister's plan and defeat it.

Feeling remorseful, Rohineya approached Mahāvīra, confessed his crimes, returned the stolen treasures, and asked for forgiveness. He became a monk, realised the illusion he was living in and focused on acquiring higher knowledge.

The story illustrates the importance of right action and right thinking, and also illustrates the fact that everyone should have a second chance.



LET'S EXPLORE

Observe the above panel (from a Jain temple in New Delhi). What is striking about it? What messages does it carry?



THINK ABOUT IT

In both Buddhism and Jainism, ahimsa means much more than refraining from physical violence against a person or an animal. It also means refraining from violence in thought, such as having ill feelings towards anyone. If we observe ourselves carefully, we may notice such negative thoughts and learn to turn them into positive ones. Sometimes such negative thoughts are even directed at ourselves!

In both Buddhism and Jainism, monks, and sometimes nuns too, began travelling across the land to spread their respective teachings far and wide. Some of them created new monasteries in faraway places, while others led ascetic lives in caves cut in the rock. Archaeological findings have revealed many traces of those monasteries, sometimes even the names of the monks who lived in the rock-cut caves and slept on the stone beds!



Caves cut into the rock at Ellora (Maharashtra) between the 6th and the 10th centuries CE. Some of the caves are Hindu, others are Buddhist and Jain.



THINK ABOUT IT

In English, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are often labelled ‘religions’. You may notice that we have avoided this term, preferring ‘schools of thought’ and (later in this chapter) ‘belief systems’. This is because there are many aspects to those schools and systems, which we will explore gradually — a philosophical aspect, a spiritual aspect, a religious aspect, an ethical aspect, a social aspect, to name a few. Many scholars agree that the word ‘religion’ is too limiting in the context of the Indian civilisation.

There were yet other schools of thought at the time. For example, one of them, known as the ‘Chārvāka’ school (sometimes also ‘Lokāyata’), believed that this material world is the only thing that exists, and therefore there can be no life after death. This school does not seem to have gained much popularity and it disappeared with time. We mention it to show that there was a wide diversity of intellectual or spiritual belief systems; people were free to choose what suited them.

Although the Vedic, Buddhist and Jain schools had important differences, they also shared some common concepts, such as dharma, karma, rebirth, the search for an end to suffering and ignorance, and many important values. This is the ‘trunk’ of the tree we started this chapter with.

Folk and Tribal Roots

The cultural roots we have seen so far are well documented in many texts. India has also had rich ‘oral traditions’, that is, teachings or practices transmitted through everyday practice, without written texts (this is the case of the Vedas). Among them are numerous folk traditions, that is, transmitted by common people, and tribal traditions, transmitted by tribes.

What is a tribe?

There are many definitions for this social entity. Today, anthropologists usually consider a tribe to be a group of families or clans sharing a tradition of common descent, a culture and a language, living as a close-knit community under a chief and holding no private property.

Interestingly, ancient India did not have a word for ‘tribe’ — tribes were just different *janas* that lived in a specific environment, such as forests or mountains. The Constitution of India uses the terms ‘tribes’ and ‘tribal communities’ in English, and *janjāti* in Hindi.

According to official figures, in 2011 India had 705 tribes spread over most States, amounting to a population of about 104 million people — more than the populations of Australia and the United Kingdom together!

In the 19th century, anthropologists studying tribes often described them as ‘primitive’ or ‘inferior’ to civilised people. With deeper studies of tribal communities and their rich and complex cultures, such biased judgments have been mostly abandoned.

There has been a constant interaction between folk and tribal traditions, and the leading schools of thought such as those we mentioned in this chapter. Deities, concepts, legends and rituals have been freely exchanged in both directions. For instance, according to tradition, Jagannath, worshipped at Puri (Odisha), was originally a tribal deity; this is also the case with various forms of the mother-goddess worshipped across India. Some tribes, on the other hand, adopted Hindu deities long ago, and possess their own versions of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa — this has been well documented from India's northeastern States, all the way to Tamil Nadu.



How have such interactions taken place for so long and so naturally? It is, in the end, because folk, tribal and Hindu belief systems have many similar concepts. For instance, in all three, elements of nature such as mountains, rivers, trees, plants and animals, and some stones too, are regarded as sacred, because there is consciousness behind all of them. Indeed, tribes generally worship many deities associated with those natural elements. For the Toda tribals of the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu, for instance (one of them is pictured in the image on the right), over thirty peaks of this mountain range are residences of a god or a goddess; those peaks are so sacred that the Todas avoid pointing to them with a finger.



But despite this multiplicity of deities, as with Hinduism, many tribal groups have a concept of a higher divinity or supreme being. For example, several tribes of Arunachal Pradesh worship Donyipolo, a combined form of the Sun and

the Moon who later rose to the higher status of a supreme god. This is also the case of the god Khandoba in parts of central India. In eastern India, the Munda and Santhal tribals, among others, worship Singbonga, a supreme deity who created this whole world. There are many more such examples.

The Indian sociologist André Beteille summed up this situation in these words:

“

“The thousands of castes and tribes on the Indian subcontinent have influenced each other in their religious beliefs and practices since the beginning of history and before. That the tribal religions have been influenced by Hinduism is widely accepted, but it is equally true that Hinduism, not only in its formative phase but throughout its evolution, has been influenced by tribal religions.”

Clearly, the result of this long interaction has been mutual enrichment. In this manner, folk and tribal beliefs and practices also count among India's cultural roots. We will further develop this point in the next chapter.



Before we move on ...

- The Vedas, India's earliest texts, gave rise to several schools of thought. Vedanta and Yoga are among the best known.
- Buddhism and Jainism departed from the authority of the Vedas and laid emphasis on some specific values and practices.
- Although these schools had different principles and methods, they also shared some important concepts; they were all looking for the cause of suffering and the means of removing ignorance.
- Tribal belief systems and art have interacted for millennia with Hinduism. There was free borrowing and giving from every side. Tribal belief systems generally regard the land and its features as sacred; they often have, at the same time, a higher concept of divinity.

Questions, activities and projects

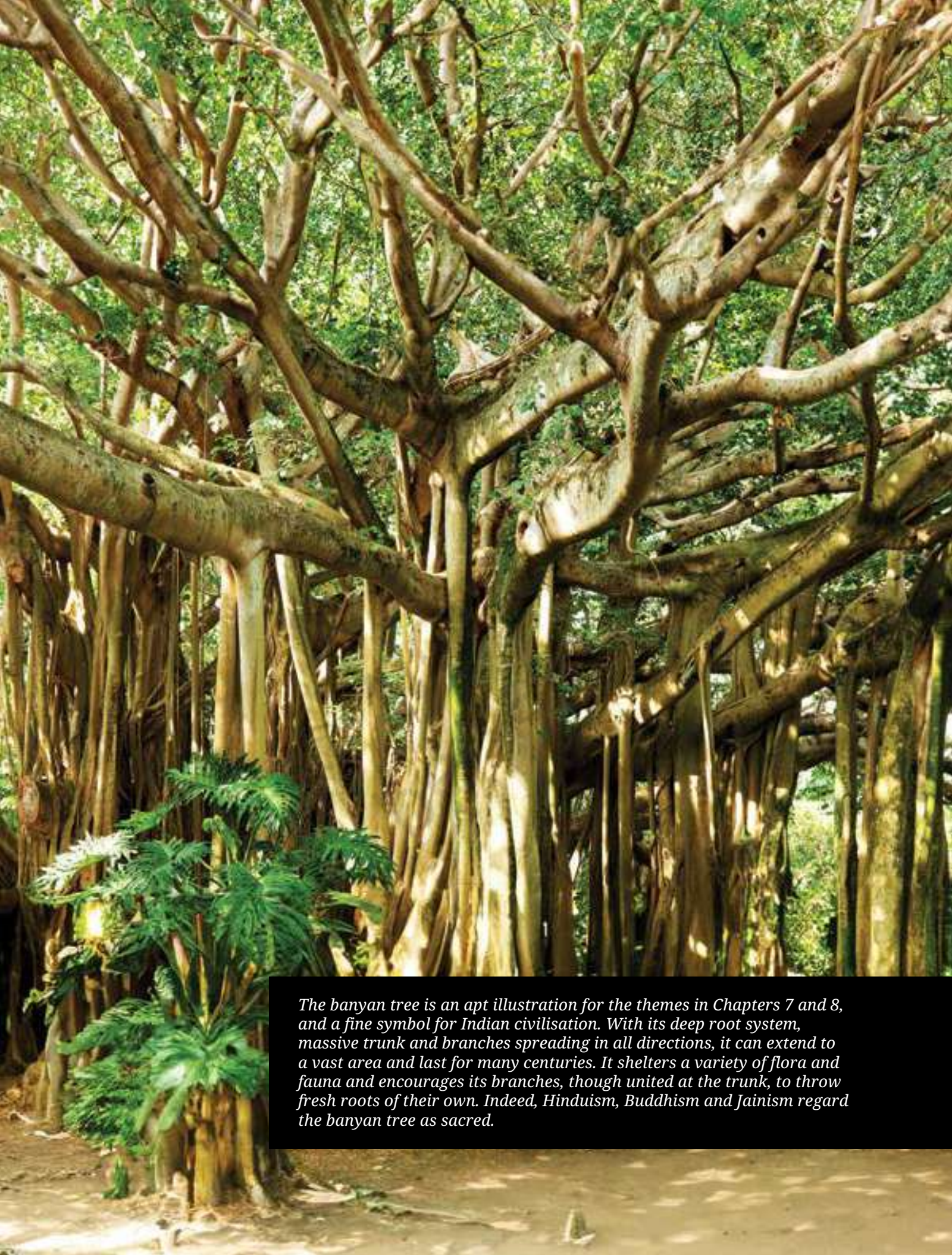
1. If you were Nachiketa, what questions would you like to ask Yama? Write them down in 100-150 words.
2. Explain a few central ideas of Buddhism. Briefly comment upon them.
3. Discuss in class the quotation of the Buddha which begins with “Not by water is one made pure, though many people may bathe here [in sacred rivers]” to make sure that its meaning has been understood by all.
4. Explain a few central ideas of Jainism. Briefly comment upon them.
5. Consider and discuss in class André Bételle’s thought (see page 122).
6. Make a list of popular gods and goddesses in your region and the festivals they are associated with.
7. As a class activity, list two or three tribal groups from your region or State. Document some of their art and belief systems.

True or false

1. The Vedic hymns were written on palm-leaf manuscripts.
2. The Vedas are India’s oldest texts.
3. The Vedic statement *ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti* reflects a belief in the unity of cosmic powers.
4. Buddhism is older than the Vedas.
5. Jainism emerged as a branch of Buddhism.
6. Both Buddhism and Jainism advocated for peaceful coexistence and the avoidance of harm to all living beings.
7. Tribal belief systems are limited to belief in spirits and minor deities.

Class activity

1. Stage a small play with Yama, god of death, surrounded by several Nachiketas asking him questions about life.



The banyan tree is an apt illustration for the themes in Chapters 7 and 8, and a fine symbol for Indian civilisation. With its deep root system, massive trunk and branches spreading in all directions, it can extend to a vast area and last for many centuries. It shelters a variety of flora and fauna and encourages its branches, though united at the trunk, to throw fresh roots of their own. Indeed, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism regard the banyan tree as sacred.

Unity in Diversity, or 'Many in the One'

Oh, grant me my prayer, that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many.

— Rabindranath Tagore

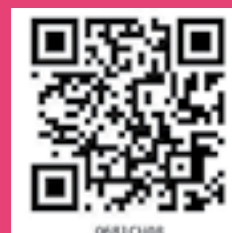
... The principle of unity in diversity which has always been normal to [India] and its fulfilment the fundamental course of her being and its very nature, the Many in the One, would place her on the sure foundation of her Swabhava and Swadharma.

— Sri Aurobindo



The Big Questions ?

1. What is meant by 'unity in diversity' in the Indian scenario?
2. What aspects of India's diversity are the most striking?
3. How do we make out the unity underlying the diversity?



A Rich Diversity

If you travel through India by train, you will notice not only changing landscapes but also many different types of dresses and food; you will hear different languages, familiar and unfamiliar, and see different scripts on the way. Even within your own region, you will often come across people from other parts of India with different customs and traditions. This is India's rich diversity, and it is usually the first thing that strikes visitors to our country.

With over 1.4 billion inhabitants (about 18 percent of the world's population), such diversity is not surprising! In the late 20th century, the Anthropological Survey of India, a national organisation, conducted a massive survey called 'People of India project' of 4,635 communities across all States of the country. It counted 325 languages using 25 scripts; it also observed that many Indians may be called migrants, in the sense of people not living near their birthplace or with their original community.

LET'S EXPLORE



As a class activity, make lists of (1) the birthplaces of at least 5 classmates and the birthplaces of their parents; (2) the students' mother tongues and other languages known to them. Discuss the results in terms of diversity.

While diversity is indeed beautiful, making sense of it is not so easy. Over a century ago, the British historian Vincent Smith wondered,



“How, in the face of such bewildering diversity, can a history of India be written? ... The answer to the query is found in the fact that India offers **unity in diversity**.”

What is meant by 'unity in diversity'? How shall we perceive and express this unity, or the 'Many in the One'? To answer this question, we will explore a few dimensions of Indian life.

Food for All

Some of you will have eaten food from different regions of India. The number of different dishes and preparations you can taste in India must be in their thousands, if not lakhs! Yet certain food grains are common to almost every part of the country — cereals such as rice, barley and wheat; millets such as pearl millet (bajra), sorghum (jowar), finger millet (ragi); and pulses such as various kinds of dals and

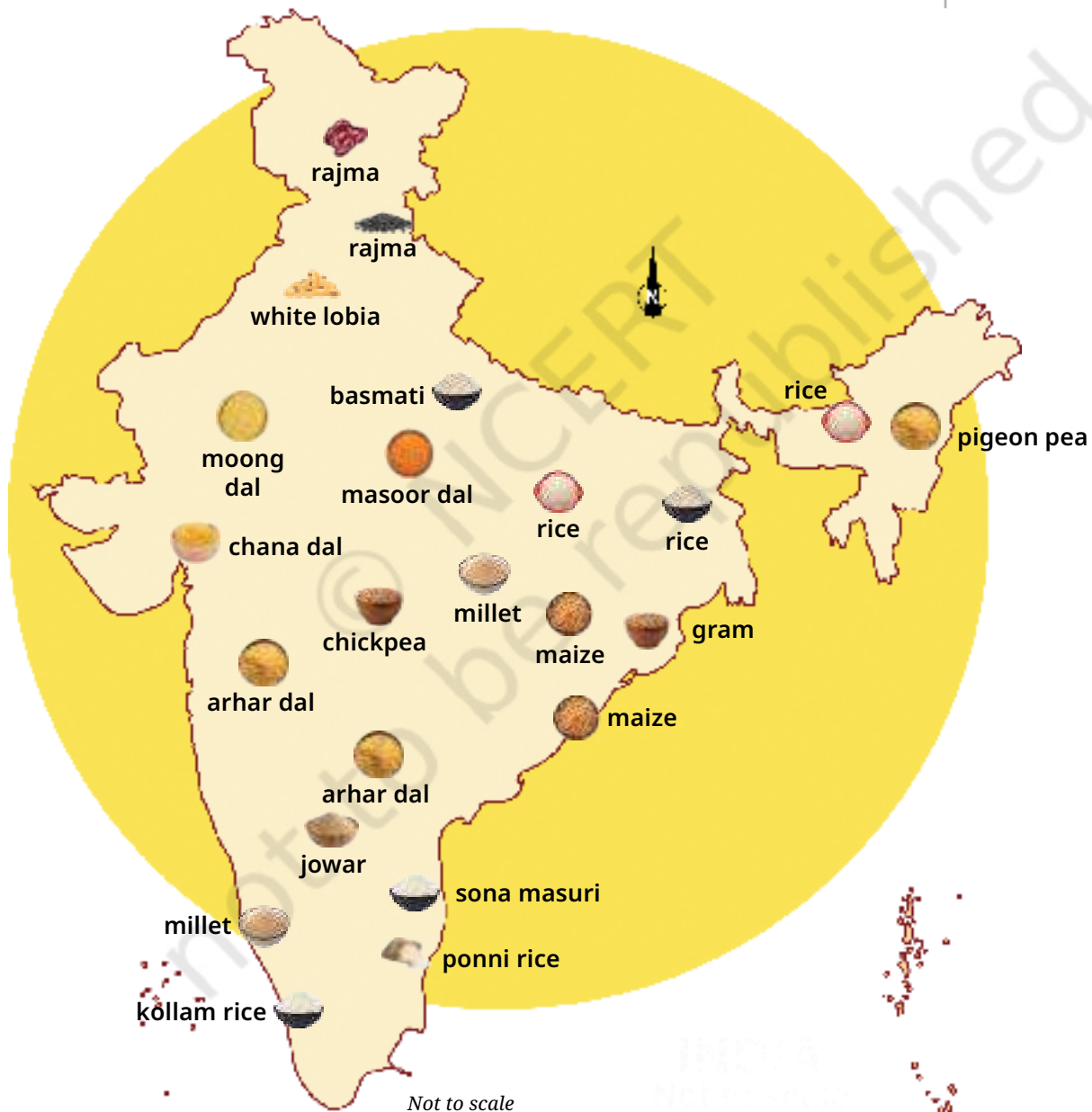


Fig. 8.1. A few examples of cereals and pulses from different regions of India

8 - Unity in Diversity, or 'Many in the One'

grams. All these are called 'staple grains' because they are the basic food for most Indians (Fig. 8.1 on page 127). Similarly, some common spices such as turmeric, cumin, cardamom and ginger, are also used throughout the country. We could continue this list with some common vegetables, common oils etc.

So we see how the same ingredients (*unity*) can be used in a number of combinations (*diversity*) to prepare an endless variety of dishes!

LET'S EXPLORE



- As a class activity, make a list of ingredients (grains, spices, etc.) that are used in your home.
- Take any one vegetable and think of the number of different dishes you can prepare with it.

Textiles and Clothing



Fig. 8.2. Stone relief of a woman in a sari from Vaiśhali (today in Bihar)

Every region and community in India has developed its own styles of clothing and dresses. Yet, we notice a commonality in some traditional Indian dresses, irrespective of the material used. An obvious example is the plain length of cloth called the sari, a type of clothing worn in most parts of India and made from different fabrics — mostly cotton or silk, but nowadays synthetic fabrics too. Banarasi, Kanjivaram, Paithani, Patan Patola, Muga or Mysore are some of the famous types of silk saris. There are many more kinds of cotton saris. Altogether, this unstitched piece of cloth comes in hundreds of varieties. They are

produced by different methods of weaving (Fig. 8.3 on the right) and designing. Some designs are part of the cloth, while others are printed after the cloth is woven. Finally, there are endless variations in the colours, which are produced from many kinds of pigments.

The sari has a long history. This stone **relief** (Fig. 8.2 on page 128) from Vaiśhali (today in Bihar) goes back a few centuries BCE.

LET'S EXPLORE

Explain how the example of the sari reflects both unity and diversity (in 100-150 words).



Fig. 8.3. A few specimens of colourful traditional Indian textiles.



DON'T MISS OUT

For a very long time, India produced the finest cotton in the world and Indian textiles were exported as far away as Europe. One beautiful type of printed cotton called 'chintz' became so popular in 17th-century Europe that the sale of some European dresses dropped sharply. Eventually, to protect their own products, England and France decided to ban the import of chintz from India!

There are many ways of wearing the sari, as they vary from one region to another or from one community to another. In fact, new ways of draping it are still being invented. But in the end, it is a single dress — the sari. In past centuries,

Relief:

A design that stands out from the surface of a panel (which may be of stone, wood, ceramic or another material).

8 - Unity in Diversity, or 'Many in the One'



Fig. 8.4. Women often put the sari to many uses beyond that of a dress (pictures from south India).



several travellers to India marvelled at its simplicity, economy, and the diverse ways in which it is worn. In addition, women often put the sari to many uses beyond that of a dress; the six pictures in Fig. 8.4 above illustrate a few such creative uses.

LET'S EXPLORE

- In the above pictures, can you recognise what a sari has been used for?
- Are you aware of, or can you imagine, more uses for the sari?



- Following the example of the sari, make a list of different styles you have seen for the dhoti — both as regards the fabric and the uses the dhoti can be put to. What conclusion can you draw?

Festivals Galore

There is an immense variety of festivals in India. You may have noticed that a few common ones are celebrated across India almost at the same time, though they have different names. We will take just one example — Makara Sankranti, which marks the beginning of the harvest season in many

parts of India on or around January 14. The map shows the different names of similar festivals across India about the same date.

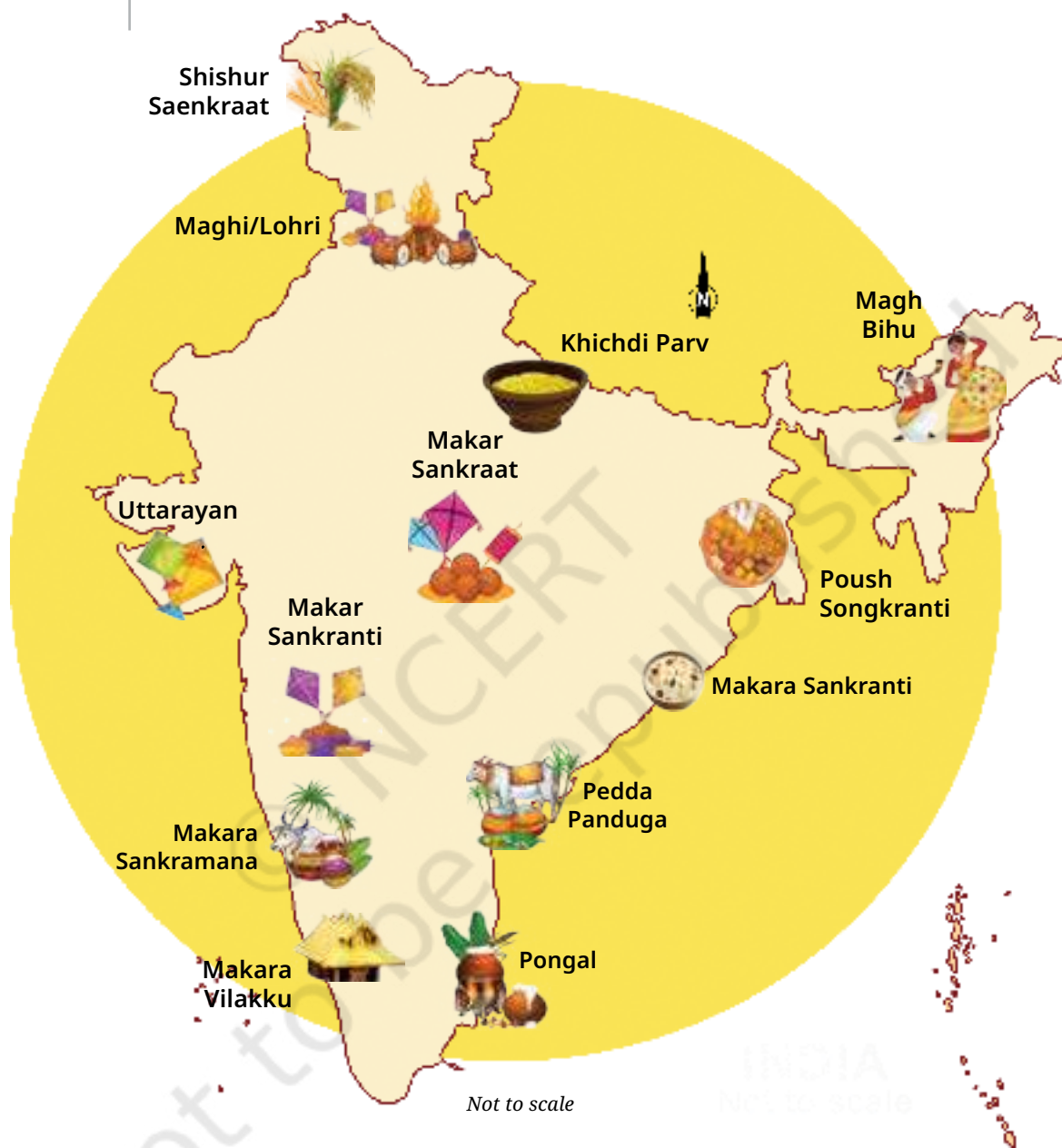


Fig. 8.5. Different names of similar festivals across India about the same date

LET'S EXPLORE

→ What is your favourite festival and how is it celebrated in your region? Do you know whether it is celebrated in any other part of India, maybe under a different name?

→ During October–November, many major festivals take place in India. Make a list of the few main ones and their various names in different parts of the country.

An Epic Spread

Literature offers us another fine illustration of unity in diversity. Indian literatures are extremely diverse (and among the most abundant in the world). Over centuries, despite differences in language, technique, etc., they have shared important themes and concerns. Who has not heard of the *Pañchatantra*, for example? This collection of delightful stories, with animals as the main characters, teaches us important life skills. The original Sanskrit text is at least 2,200 years old, but its stories have been adapted in almost every Indian language. In fact, they have travelled well beyond India, all the way to Southeast Asia, the Arab world and Europe, inspiring new collections of stories on the way — it is estimated that about 200 adaptations of the *Pañchatantra* exist in more than 50 languages! This illustrates how ‘one’ collection of stories has become ‘many’.

The most striking case, however, is that of India’s two **epics** — the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata.

These two Sanskrit epics, which together might fill some 7,000 pages in their original versions, narrate the stories of heroes who fight to re-establish dharma. In the Mahābhārata, the Pāṇḍavas, with Kṛiṣṇa’s help, fight their own cousins, the Kauravas, to recover their kingdom. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma, with the help of his brother Lakṣhmaṇa and of Hanuman, defeats the demon Rāvaṇa, who had kidnapped his wife Sītā. These stories contain many shorter ones that focus on values, and constantly ask questions about what is right and what is wrong.

Epic:

A long poem generally narrating the adventures of heroes and other great figures of the past.



Fig. 8.6. Yuddha Kanda of Ramayana, Sahibdin, Mewar, 1652, India
Office Library, London

LET'S EXPLORE

In a class discussion, try to identify the episode depicted in the painting shown in Fig. 8.6 above and important details associated with it.

For more than two millenniums, these two epics have been translated or adapted into regional literatures in India and beyond. In addition, there are countless folk versions of them. A few years ago, a scholar conducted a survey in Tamil Nadu alone and counted “about a hundred versions [of the Mahābhārata] that have come down to us in folklore forms.” Imagine what the number might be for the whole of India!

In fact, many communities have their own versions of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. They have also preserved legends connecting their own history with these epics. This is especially true of tribal communities in many parts of

India, such as the Bhils, the Gonds, the Mundas and many more. Most tribes of India's northeast and Himalayan regions, including Kashmir, have had their own version of one or the other of the two epics, or both. These tribal adaptations are transmitted orally, along with legends on how the heroes of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata (generally any or all of the five Pāṇḍavas, their wife Draupadī, but also sometimes their cousin and adversary Duryodhana) visited the tribes' respective regions.

The anthropologist K.S. Singh directed the 'People of India' project we referred to earlier (see page 126). In the case of the Mahābhārata, he observed, "There is hardly a place in the country which the epic heroes such as the Pandavas, did not visit according to folklores." And the same may be said of the Rāmāyaṇa. Over the centuries, perhaps more than any other texts, these two epics created a dense web of cultural interactions across India and many parts of Asia. Another example of unity in diversity.

To further illustrate the theme of this chapter, we could have continued our journey and turned to more facets of Indian culture. For instance, in India's classical arts, including classical architecture, both diversity and unity are easily noticeable. (You will study these fields through the Art Curricular Area.)

In the end, we should remember that Indian culture celebrates diversity as an enrichment, but never loses sight of the underlying unity which nourishes that diversity.



Fig. 8.7. 'Pañcha Pāṇḍavar', a carved stone in a forest of the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, depicting the five Pāṇḍava brothers. The shrine containing this stone is maintained by Irula tribals to commemorate the Pāṇḍavas' passing through the area.



Before we move on ...

- India offers immense diversity in its landscapes, people, languages, dresses, foods, festivals and customs.
- Diversity is easy to perceive in many fields, but there is also an underlying unity.
- India's unity celebrates diversity because diversity does not divide — it enriches.

Questions, activities and projects

1. Conduct a class discussion on the two quotations at the start of the chapter.
2. Select a few stories from the *Pañchatantra* and discuss how their message is still valid today. Do you know of any similar stories from your region?
3. Collect a few folk tales from your region and discuss their message.
4. Is there any ancient story that you have seen being depicted through a form of art? It could be a sculpture, a painting, a dance performance, a movie ... Discuss with your classmates.
5. Discuss in class the following quotation by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, when he travelled to many parts of India before Independence:



“Everywhere I found a cultural background which had exerted a powerful influence on their lives. ... The old epics of India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and other books, in popular translations and paraphrases, were widely known among the masses, and every incident and story and moral in them was engraved on the popular mind and gave a richness and content to it. Illiterate villagers would know hundreds of verses by heart and their conversation would be full of references to them or to some story with a moral, enshrined in some old classic.”

How the Land Becomes Sacred

CHAPTER

8

Ether, air, fire, water, earth, planets, all creatures, directions, trees and plants, rivers and seas, are organs of the supreme Lord's body.

– *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*



Fig. 8.1

The Big Questions ?

1. What is 'sacredness'?
2. How does the land become sacred?
3. How do sacred sites and pilgrimage networks connect with the life and culture of the people?
4. What role did sacred geography play in the cultural integration of the Indian Subcontinent?





LET'S EXPLORE

Do any of the pictures look familiar to you? Can you name similar places found in your neighbourhood?

What is 'Sacredness'?

Sacredness can have many meanings. In the limited context of this chapter, sacredness is finding something of deep religious or spiritual significance, worthy of respect and reverence, holy or divine. But what is this 'something'? It can be a special location or shrine that evokes such deep feelings, high thoughts or emotions. It can also be, as we will see in this chapter, a journey of a special kind (often called a 'pilgrimage'), the route the journey takes, or even the very land covered.

Sacredness, therefore, is not just connected with religion and spirituality, but also with geography, all sorts of traditions, and, in the case of India, with something more that we will discover soon.

Let us focus on sacred places first. You will find that almost every school of thought and religion in India has its own sacred places.



Fig. 8.2

The places in these pictures are revered by followers of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism — religions that originated outside India. People visit or congregate in these places for prayer and worship. Followers from other faiths also visit them, as can be seen at the Dargah Sharif of Ajmer (Rajasthan) or the Velankanni Church in Tamil Nadu. People go on **pilgrimages** to these **shrines** on special occasions.

Naturally, when we turn to religions that originated in India, we find that they have many more sacred sites. In the case of Buddhism, those are often places that were visited by the Buddha or where his relics are kept. Among them is the Great Stūpa at Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh), which is a **relic stūpa** (you saw this in the chapter on ‘The Rise of Empires’), and the Mahabodhi Stūpa in Bodh Gaya (Bihar), where, according to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha attained enlightenment. They are important sites for pilgrims; Bodh Gaya, for instance, receives more than four million visitors every year.

In Sikhism, *takhts* are seats or centres of spiritual authority — for example, the Takht Sri Patna Sahib (in Patna), the Akal Takht (part of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, see Fig. 8.3), and Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib (at Anandpur). Sikhs aspire to undertake pilgrimages to these



Fig. 8.3

places at least once in their lifetimes, as they are associated with important Sikh Gurus and therefore have special significance. In addition, Sikh tradition records pilgrimages conducted by several Gurus, such as Guru Nanak, to places like Haridwar, Prayag, Mathura, Varanasi, Ayodhya, Puri and many more, besides a few Muslim shrines.

Pilgrimage:
A journey to a sacred place that is significant within a religion or belief system.

Shrine:
A place regarded as holy because of its associations with the divine, a sacred relic, or a spiritual figure.

Relic:
A part of a saint's or other spiritual figure's body or sometimes to one of their belongings kept as an object of reverence.

Tīrtha:
Literally, a place where one can cross a river or other body of water. Symbolically, it becomes a place where one can cross from the ordinary worldly life to a higher, spiritual life. Such places are held in high reverence and regarded as sacred.

India has, for ages past, been a country of pilgrimages. All over the country, you find these ancient places, from Badrinath, Kedarnath and Amarnath, high up in the snowy Himalayas down to Kanyakumari in the south. What has drawn our people from the south to the north and from the north to the south in these great pilgrimages? It is the feeling of one country and one culture.

—Jawaharlal Nehru, 1961

Pilgrimages

Many Indians undertake *tīrthayātrās* or pilgrimages to various sacred sites (**tīrthas**) during their lifetime. This ancient and continuous tradition of pilgrimage is not just a physical journey but also an inner journey that requires a specified code of conduct.

For at least 3,000 years, and with no modern means of transportation available, Indians have been crisscrossing the Subcontinent, resulting in its entire geography being considered sacred. We will return to this soon.

Here's an excerpt from the writings of Dharampal, a historian and thinker:

"I was travelling from Gwalior to Delhi ... when I met a group of people ... about twelve of them, some three or four women and seven or eight men ... They said that they had been on a pilgrimage, three months long, up to Rameswaram, among other places. They came from two different villages north of Lucknow. They had various bundles of things and some earthen pots with them ... They had taken all the necessities for their food—atta, ghee, sugar—with them ... I asked them, "You are going to Delhi now?" "Yes!", they replied. "You will stop in Delhi?" "No, we only have to change trains there. We're going to Haridwar! ... We don't have time ... We have to go to Haridwar. And then we have to get back home."

LET'S EXPLORE

- Read the excerpt. What are your observations? Locate the route the group must have taken from Rameswaram to Haridwar. Why do you think the group was going straight to Haridwar instead of stopping at Delhi?
- In ancient times, when people were travelling from Madurai in Tamil Nadu to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, what languages would they come across? How would they communicate with people in those places? Where would they stay? What food would they eat?



In the Jain tradition, the *tīrthas* are associated with places where the **Tīrthankaras** attained liberation or where significant events of their lives occurred. Trees, ponds, hills and mountains that the Tīrthankaras visited or meditated at are also considered sacred. Examples of such places include Mount Abu, Girnar and the Śhatruñjaya hill in Saurashtra (Gujarat).

Another example is the pilgrimage to Sabarimala temple (Kerala), dedicated to the deity Ayyappa, which draws over ten million devotees every year. This hilltop shrine was traditionally

reached by an immensely difficult trek through hills and forests. Such a challenging approach, common to many hilltop or mountain shrines all over the country, symbolises the difficulties of the inner path, with natural landmarks along the route being considered sacred.

Fig. 8.4. Pandharpur wārī, an 800-year-old tradition in Maharashtra. Wārī means a pilgrimage that is held regularly, in this case annually. Pilgrims walk in large groups for 21 days to the famous Vithoba temple in Pandharpur.



Tīrthankara:
Literally, someone who makes a tīrtha, that is, who guides the crossing from ordinary to higher life. In Jainism, the Tīrthankaras are the supreme preachers of dharma.

Our Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions
8 – How the Land Becomes Sacred

More sacred sites

Hindu and many folk and tribal belief systems go further. In Grade 6 we learnt that in such belief systems, people regard elements of Nature, such as mountains, rivers, trees, plants and animals, and sometimes stones too, as sacred. In Hinduism, for instance, this includes countless geographical sites or features of Nature, such as specific mountains, rivers and forests, which are regarded as particularly divine and are worshipped as deities; many rivers are regarded as *devīs*, while some species of trees, animals and plants are particularly holy. This tradition comes from the perception of a divine presence in all of Nature. Ultimately, the whole of planet Earth is considered sacred—she is Mother Earth or Bhūdevī.



Fig. 8.5. In this image, Viṣṇu in the form of his boar avatar crushes a demon and saves Bhūdevī (Mother Earth), shown here sitting on his elbow (from the Belur temple, Karnataka)

Here are a few more examples of such traditions:

- The Niyam Dongar hill in the Niyamgiri Range of Odisha is sacred to the Dongria Khond tribe. They believe that the hill is the abode of Niyam Raja, the supreme deity who provides everything they need for sustenance. Cutting trees here is prohibited and considered a sign of disrespect to the deity.
- In the early 2000s, the Government of Sikkim identified several sacred mountains, caves, lakes, rocks and hot springs that were to be protected against all forms of damage.
- In the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu, the Todas, a tribal community, regard many mountain peaks as sacred and associate them with their gods. To them, this sense of sacredness extends to many plants (which often become part of their rituals), Shola forests, wetlands, and even specific stones and individual trees.

Becoming Aware of Sacred Geography

Some sacred places are marked on the map (Fig. 8.6) given on the next page. Though spread all over India, they are also interconnected. For example, some Hindus aspire to do the *chār dhām yātrā*, and those four sites appear to have been deliberately located in the southern, northern, eastern and western corners of India! A similar aspiration exists with respect to the 12 *jyotirlingas*, which are considered highly auspicious. The 51 *Shakti pīṭhas*, too, cover the entire map of India (even parts of present-day Bangladesh and Pakistan). And there are many more regional networks.

These networks crisscross India's length and breadth, creating a sacred geography. As a result, the land itself becomes sacred.

There is a story about the 51 *Shakti pīṭhas*. Shakti, the divine mother in the form of Satī, and her consort, Śhiva, were insulted by her father. An angry Satī immolated herself. Shiva was so livid that he took her body and refused to allow the last rites. Śhiva's anger was dangerous for the world and the cosmos. So Viṣṇu used his chakra to cut up Satī's body. The *Shakti pīṭhas* are the places across the Subcontinent where the body parts of the divine mother fell one by one. The symbol behind the story is clear: the whole land becomes the body of the divine mother.

LET'S EXPLORE

Note the locations of the *chār dhām*. What do you think it implied for the people when they travelled north-south and east-west?

While visiting the major sacred places connected to their respective faiths, pilgrims would naturally cover the geography of India. They would come across diverse languages, customs, clothing and foods along the way, but would notice the commonalities too.

The 12 *jyotirlingas* are sacred shrines dedicated to Śhiva, a major deity of Hinduism. Each shrine has its own unique mythology and name.



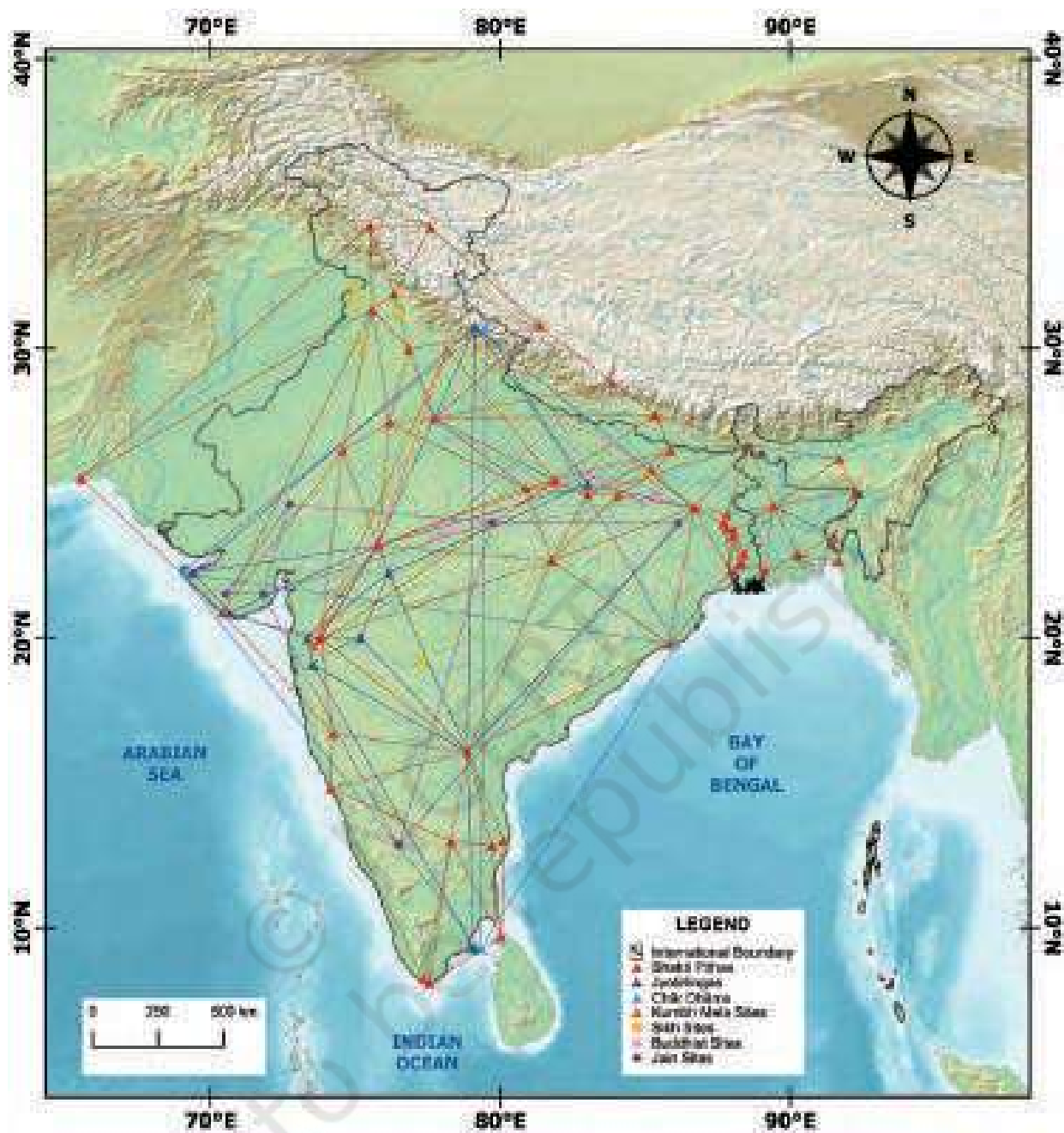


Fig. 8.6. A map showing a few networks of traditional *tirthas*.



LET'S EXPLORE

Can you identify the names of a few traditional *tirthas* given in the map above? You can refer to the political map at the end of the book for help.

Why did people travel such long distances? Apart from religious motivations, some, like merchants and traders, travelled to exchange goods; others travelled to discuss, debate and popularise their beliefs or to learn and study from eminent teachers in different parts of the country. However, though they were travelling for different purposes, their routes often converged. Discussions and debates, sharing of goods, experiences, and tales, enriched everyone. New ideas emerged, and old ones were adapted. This complex process became a major factor in the cultural integration of the Indian Subcontinent.

Sacred Ecology

Tīrthas are usually located on the banks of a river or a lake, in a forest or on a mountain. As we saw above, the natural landscape itself is thus seen or perceived as sacred space, or *pūṇyakṣhetra*. This perception has helped us to protect and preserve Nature, since we are not distinct from her. So geography, culture and spirituality fuse together in these *kṣhetras*.

Rivers and *sangams* (confluence of rivers)

Rivers have been worshipped in India since Vedic times. The *naḍistuti sūkta* of the Ṛigveda is a hymn (*sūkta*) in praise of (*stuti*) rivers (*naḍī*) that invokes 19 major rivers of ancient northwest India. Even today, many rituals involving water invoke the presence of some of the most important rivers of India:

*gange cha yamune chaiva godāvarī sarasvatī
narmade sindhu kāverī jalesmin sannidhiṃ kuru*

Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaveri, may you manifest in this water.

Those rivers have been lifelines for the Indian civilisation. Their sources, tributaries and the places they flow through are often regarded as sacred too, and are visited by many pilgrims. In local languages, these rivers are referred to with respect—for instance, ‘Ganga ji’ or ‘Yamuna ji’.

DON'T MISS OUT



- ❖ Prayagraj hosts the **Kumbh Mela** every six years. Prayag is located at the confluence of three rivers — Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Sarasvati. A few years ago, UNESCO listed the Kumbh Mela as an ‘intangible heritage of the world’.
- ❖ An estimated 660 million people participated in the Kumbh Mela of 2025. What proportion of the population of India is this?

Kumbh Mela

The *Kumbh Mela* originates in the legend of *amṛita manthana*. The *devas* and *asuras* (i.e., more or less, gods and demons), traditional enemies, for once joined forces in churning the cosmic ocean to extract *amṛita*, the divine nectar that would give them immortality. To prevent the *asuras* from getting the *amṛita*, Viṣṇu, in the form of Mohini, a beautiful lady, snatched the pitcher or *kumbha* which contained the *amṛita*. In the process, a few drops fell over four places — Haridwar, Prayagraj, Nashik, and Ujjain. These are the places where the Kumbh Mela has been held, and a dip in the rivers there during a prescribed period is considered most auspicious.



Fig. 8.7



THINK ABOUT IT

How do you think these sacred places are connected with the people's economic lives and activities? Draw a mind map to trace these connections. (*Hint: The pictures above can provide some clues.*)



Fig. 8.8

Mountains and Forests

All over the world, mountains are often associated with legends, deities or heroes. Also mountains are seen as a symbolic gateway from earth to heaven because of their height. That is why many *tīrthas* and temples in India are located on hilltops, as the physical journey to these peaks is seen as a symbolic journey to reach the divine. People would undertake arduous walks through mountain trails to those sites and shrines, which tested not only their physical abilities but also their mental strength. Today, such places are often accessible through roads and other modes of transport.



Mount Kailash



Vaishno Devi Temple, Katra



Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu



Lord Balaji, Tirumala hills

Fig. 8.9

Trees, Forests and Sacred Groves

In many parts of India, trees are adorned with offerings like turmeric and *kumkum*. One species of fig tree commonly called ‘peepul’ (or ‘pipal’), ‘bo tree’ or ‘bodhi tree’ (*aśvattha* in Sanskrit) is sacred to Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism. In fact, its botanical name is *Ficus religiosa* (literally, in Latin, the ‘religious’ or sacred fig tree).



Fig. 8.10. The tree in the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya is often cited as a direct descendant of the original tree under which, according to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha attained enlightenment — hence the names ‘bodhi tree’ and ‘Bodh Gaya’.

In Grade 6 we read about the two epics of India, the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. These texts have vivid descriptions of pilgrimages undertaken and places visited, and of sacred rivers, forests and mountains. In almost every region of India, numerous rural and tribal traditions claim that the heroes of these texts passed through their locality, with shrines often marking such passages. Such legends allowed a wide diversity of communities to make the two epics their own.



Fig. 8.11. A shrine in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, celebrating Rāma's passing through the area



Fig. 8.12. A seal from Mohenjo-daro

Observe this seal from Mohenjo-daro. Can you recognise the leaves at the top? As you can see, the peepul tree has been an important part of India's cultural geography for millennia.



THINK ABOUT IT

Many parts of the peepul tree have medical uses: the leaves are used to treat some skin ailments while the bark is useful for stomach ailments. Since it stays green almost through the year, it provides food and shelter to many types of birds and other animals.

Over time, many rural and tribal communities across India decided to protect and preserve some natural forests from harmful activities such as hunting, tree felling or mining. They saw those forests as the abodes of deities—for example, Ryngkew or Basa in Meghalaya. Such special forests are called 'sacred groves' in English (see the table below for a few names in regional languages) and, thanks to their sacred status, have come to shelter great biodiversity of flora and fauna. Many sacred groves are also home to small water bodies and thus help in water conservation.

There were many thousands of sacred groves in India. Sadly, these numbers have been shrinking as people have started encroaching on them for various purposes, from agriculture to industry. Still, sacred groves continue to be protected in many regions of India.



Fig. 8.13. Kalkai temple, Mulshi, Maharashtra



Fig. 8.14. Mawphlong, Shillong



Fig. 8.15. From the sacred groves of the Bhils



Fig. 8.16. Udaiyankudukadu
Karumbayiramkondan, Tamil Nadu

Given below are the names of a few sacred groves in a few regional languages of India. Can you add to this?

Malayalam	<i>kāvu</i>
Tamil	<i>kovilkādu</i>
Kannada	<i>devare kādu</i>
Marathi	<i>devarāī</i>
Khasi (Meghalaya)	<i>khlaw kyntang</i>
Hindi (Himachal Pradesh)	<i>dev van</i>
Jharkhand	<i>sarnā</i>
Chhattisgarh	<i>devgudi</i>
Rajasthan	<i>oraṇ</i>

In Tamil Nadu, local chronicles highlight the relationship between the deity of a sacred grove, Nature and humans. One such chronicle in the Thanjavur District states that the groves' deities protect fruit bats, which are regarded as sacred – spotting one of them is considered auspicious. Besides, bats play a critical role in the pollination of flowers and in the dispersal of seeds. Sacred groves thus evolve a harmonious relationship between the deity, the ecosystem, and humans.

From pilgrimage to trade

Pilgrims encounter traders and merchants along their journey. This interaction benefits both groups. Pilgrims need various items, which traders can provide. As a result, the pilgrimage routes and the trade routes often overlap. Some traders might also double as pilgrims, taking their wares to distant towns and cities while visiting sacred sites and shrines.



Fig. 8.17

What routes did those traders use in ancient India? Revisit the map of trade routes (Fig. 5.5) in the chapter 'The Rise of Empires'. Uttarapatha was a major trade route connecting the north-western and eastern parts of the Subcontinent; the Dakṣhinapātha went from Kaushāmbī through Ujjayinī (Ujjain) to Pratiṣṭhāna (Paithan). As you know, some of the goods traded along these routes included precious stones like shells and pearls, coins, gold and diamonds, as well as cotton, spices, and sandalwood.

LET'S EXPLORE

Take a sheet of transparent paper that can be used for tracing. Trace a map of the trade routes from the chapter 'The Rise of Empires'. Place it on top of the map of the important *tīrthas*. What do you observe?



Sacred Geography beyond India

The concept and practice of sacred geography are not unique to India. Ancient Greece had many sacred landmarks, from mountains to sacred groves. The Native Americans used to have a special bond with Nature, which they viewed as sacred. The Maoris, the indigenous people of New Zealand, regard the Taranaki Maunga mountain as their ancestor and therefore as sacred; after many representations by the Maoris, a law recently granted this mountain the rights and responsibilities of a human being — an acknowledgement of the Maori worldview. The elders of the community represent the voice of the mountain or river threatened with destruction. This ensures that the sacred places are not exploited and degenerated.

Restoring and conserving the sacred



THINK ABOUT IT



Fig. 8.18

Look carefully at these pictures of places and animals that are considered sacred. The Yamuna in the north, the Mahanadi in the east or the Kaveri in the south are all sacred rivers. How come they have become so polluted? Are there sacred places in your locality or region that have been similarly polluted or degraded by human activity? Whose responsibility is it to preserve the sanctity of our sacred places? Discuss in class.

A harmonious relationship that once existed between people and the sacred geography sustained Indian civilisation over millennia, creating values that were shared all over the Subcontinent. But today it is under great strain.

Sacred geography continues to be relevant today. When there is a conflict in our relationship with Nature, when a river is overexploited to the point of disappearance, or a sacred mountain is challenged with competing ideas of development, people have spoken up to protect their environment, their deities and values. At a time when sustainability has become a global issue, a worldview that embeds sacred geography has a significant contribution to make.

Before we move on ...

- All religions in India have their sacred places dotted over the landscape. In Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, such places are usually associated with some of the great figures in these belief systems.
- Hinduism has dense networks of pilgrimage sites, covering the entire geography of India. The practice of pilgrimage is interwoven with the lives of people, as it serves the individual development and spiritual growth, but also the socio-economic purposes of trade expansion and pan-Indian cultural integration.
- In many Hindu, tribal and folk traditions, the very land is perceived as sacred.
- Our sacred places are being polluted owing to widespread neglect and a lack of concern. It is our duty to protect our national heritage, as our Constitution also reminds us.



Questions and activities

1. Read the following statement by a well-known environmental thinker, David Suzuki:
“The way we see the world shapes the way we treat it. If a mountain is a deity, not a pile of ore; if a river is one of the veins of the land, not potential irrigation water; if a forest

is a sacred grove, not timber; if other species are biological kin, not resources; or if the planet is our mother, not an opportunity—then we will treat each other with greater respect. Thus is the challenge, to look at the world from a different perspective.”

Discuss in small groups. What do you think this statement means? What implication does it have for our actions with respect to the air, water, land, trees and mountains around us?

2. List the sacred sites in your region. Enquire into why they are considered sacred. Are there stories connected with these sacred places? Write a short essay of 150 words. (*Hint: You could speak to elders in your family and community, discuss with your teacher, read books and articles, etc., to gather relevant information.*)
3. Why do you think natural elements like rivers, mountains and forests are considered sacred for the people? How do they contribute to our lives?
4. Why do people visit a tīrtha or other sacred sites?
5. How did the ancient pilgrimage routes help in fostering trade during those times? Do you think the sacred sites help in developing the economy of the region?
6. How do sacred places influence the culture and traditions of the people living near them?
7. From the various sacred sites of India, select two of your choice and create a project explaining their significance.
8. What is the two-fold significance of a tīrthayātrā or a pilgrimage?

India, a Home to Many

*ayam nijah paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām
udāracharitānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam*
“This is mine, that is not mine,” so think the narrow-minded.
For the noble-minded, the whole world is family.

— Hitopadeśha

*Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger,
my child; the whole world is your own.*

— Last message of Sri Sarada Devi
(spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa)

The Big Questions ?

1. What has made India a home for people from different parts of the world?
2. Why did oppressed or persecuted people from other countries seek refuge in India?
3. What is it about the nature of Indian society that enables people to assimilate here?



Jews:
Jews are members of the people and the cultural community originating from the ancient Hebrews of Israel and traditionally linked to the religion of Judaism. A Jew may be identified either by descent from Jewish ancestry or through conversion. Jewish identity may therefore be defined on the basis of religion, culture, history, or ethnicity.

In the chapter “Unity in Diversity, or ‘Many in the One’ ” (Grade 6 Social Science textbook), we read that “many Indians may be called migrants, in the sense of people not living near their birthplace or with their original community.” In this chapter, we will explore another type of migrants — people who came to India from other parts of the world and settled here, adding another dimension to the diversity. There have been many such migrant communities in India’s history, up to recent times. We cannot cover them all in this chapter and have selected only a few representative examples.



THINK ABOUT IT

- Imagine this scenario — A stranger knocks at your door at midnight. It is raining heavily outside, and the stranger seeks shelter for the night claiming that his car broke down while he was driving in the vicinity. Your family goes into a huddle to discuss the pros and cons of letting a stranger into the house at night. Form two groups to discuss the arguments for and against in this scenario.
- Now extend this scenario to a country like India — when refugees seek shelter in India, will similar arguments apply?

The Story of Indian Jews

Jews sought sanctuary in India in several waves. The persecution of **Jews** in various countries led to them having to flee their homes. India has proved to be a safe haven where they can practise their faith without fear.

The Bene Israel are a Jewish community that lived on the Konkan coast, just south of Mumbai. According to some scholars, they came around 175 BCE, from the ancient Kingdom of Israel. On their journey, their ship was caught in a storm and shipwrecked near the coast. The survivors

settled in India and started a new life. Although they lost their holy books, they remembered their prayer, which says there is only one God. Over time, the Bene Israel grew to become the largest Jewish community in India, numbering over 25,000 shortly after India gained independence.

Several groups arrived much later, between the 12th and 19th centuries, again facing persecution in their respective countries. Some Jews settled near Cochin (present-day Kochi). The Raja of Kochi granted them land free of cost “as long as the world, sun, and moon endure.” The Jews built a **synagogue**, which enabled them to practise their faith even as they became part of the Indian society.

Synagogue:
A place of worship for Jews where religious services and special ceremonies like weddings are held.

Swami Vivekananda, in his speech delivered at the World Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893, had these memorable words:

I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the Earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation.



Fig. 5.1. Swami Vivekananda



LET'S EXPLORE

Look at the two pictures below. Is the place shown in both the photographs the same? Why is the Maharaja of Travancore (the name of the kingdom in and around Kochi at that time) giving such an expensive gift to the Jewish synagogue for the Torah (religious book of the Jews)?



Fig. 5.2. A plaque in the Kochi synagogue.



Fig. 5.3. The interior of the synagogue at Kochi.

LET'S EXPLORE

Observe the picture Fig. 5.4. What clues do you get about the integration of the Jewish community into Indian society over time?



Fig. 5.4. A Jewish family in Mumbai, late 19th century.

The Syriac Christian Community

From the 4th centuries CE, some Christian groups who used the ancient Syriac language in their worship and traditions faced difficulties in West Asia. Under the Roman Empire, they were sometimes treated as **heretics** because some of their beliefs about Christ were different from those of the official Church. In the Persian Empire, they were suspected of secretly helping the Romans, who were enemies of Persia, and were persecuted as a result. To escape such **persecutions**, some Syriac Christians travelled eastward along trade routes and reached the Malabar coast of India (present-day Kerala), where they could live and worship freely. In India, Syriac Christians are also called 'Syrian Christians'; they are divided into several sects.

Heretic:

A person considered to be holding beliefs (especially religious ones) contrary to those of the dominant view.

Persecution:

Hostility, generally arising from religious, ethnic, social or political motives, often accompanied by harassment or violence.

Our Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions
5 - India, a Home to Many



LET'S EXPLORE

Observe the pictures below. What are the clues you get about the integration of the Syriac Christian community into Indian society?



Fig. 5.5. A Syriac (Syrian) Christian wedding ceremony.

Zoroastrianism:

Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions, was founded by the prophet Zarathushtra in Central Asia.

It is based on the worship of one God, Ahurā Mazdā. Choosing good over evil is an important aspect of this faith.

The Legend of the Parsi Wise Man, Milk, and Sugar

The Parsis (followers of **Zoroastrianism**) came to India primarily to escape religious persecution in Persia (modern-day Iran) after the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century CE. Zoroastrianism was the state religion of the mighty Sassanid Empire (3rd to 7th centuries). After the empire fell to Arab Muslim forces in the middle of the 7th century, Zoroastrians faced religious persecution in many forms — forced conversions to Islam, religious taxes (*jizya*), destruction of their sacred fire temples, as well as social and legal marginalisation. They were, therefore, forced to flee Persia. Unable to freely practise their faith, groups of Zoroastrians made the courageous choice to leave their homeland and sail across the Arabian Sea. Several groups of them reached India's western coast (in present-day Gujarat) between the 8th and 10th centuries.

The Parsis carried little with them — their sacred fire and some hope to make a home in a place they had heard was safe, India. Raja Jadi Rāṇā was the king of Sanjān, in coastal Gujarat. According to a legend, the Parsis approached the Raja for a safe place to stay. Since they were unfamiliar with each other's languages, the Raja showed them a jug full of milk, indicating that the kingdom was full and could not accommodate more people. A wise man among the Parsis took a spoon of sugar and dissolved it into the milk without allowing the milk to spill over. Jadi Rāṇā was pleased and provided a secure place for them to settle in his kingdom.



Fig. 5.6. An 18th-century Parsi fire temple in Udvarda (south Gujarat), close to the place where the Parsis first reached India.



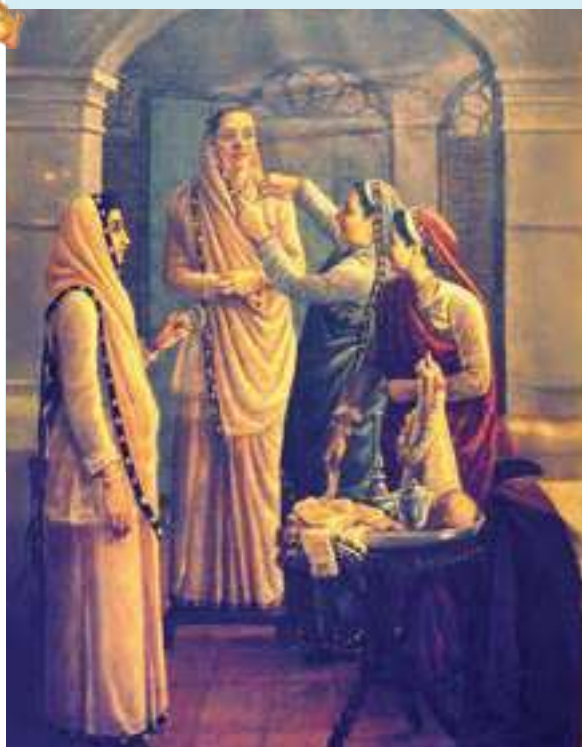
THINK ABOUT IT

What do you think dissolving the sugar in the milk without spilling it meant?

The ancient sacred fire continues to burn in Udvarda, a short distance from where the Parsis first arrived. They combined their ancient traditions with those of the local culture. Today India has the largest population of followers of Zoroastrianism in the world. The Parsis continue to live in India and enrich various aspects of its society.



LET'S EXPLORE



This painting of a Parsi bride getting ready for her wedding shows many aspects of Indian culture. Do any of them seem familiar to you? Based on what you see, can you draw any conclusions about the integration of Parsi culture in India?

Fig. 5.7. *Decking the Bride*, a painting by Raja Ravi Varma

There are deep connections between the philosophy of Zoroastrianism and India's ancient Vedic schools of thought. For example, they share the same concept of a cosmic order holding the universe together. Their

rituals also show similarities, since both give much importance to fire worship.

There are also interesting differences: in the Vedas, the *devas* are beneficial gods; in the *Avesta*, the Parsis' ancient sacred text, *daevas* are evil gods who drive towards chaos; the *Avesta*'s chief god is Ahurā, but in India (after the Vedic period), *asuras* are seen as harmful powers or demons.

As you can see, there are also similarities between the two languages. Indeed, Old Avestan (the language of the *Avesta*) and Vedic Sanskrit share many word roots and also grammatical features. A few more examples (with the Vedic word on the left and the Avestan word on the right):

- *soma* (a divine drink) = *haoma*
- *hotar* (a priest) = *haotar*
- *yajña* (sacrifice) = *yasna*.

There is much more to show that there are deep spiritual and linguistic ties between ancient Iran and ancient India.

The Arab Merchant Community

Arab merchants came to India from the 7th century onward, and many of them settled along the west coast in places like Kerala, Gujarat, and Karnataka. They traded spices and other goods, married local women, and formed new communities. In Kerala, they became part of the Mappila Muslim community, and helped build India's oldest mosque, the Cheraman Juma Masjid. These early Arab settlers in India came as peaceful traders, not as conquerors. They brought new ideas, culture, and religion, and played an important role in India's history of trade and cultural exchange.



Fig. 5.8. Cheraman Juma Mosque, Kerala

The African Connection

We have a different kind of story with the Siddis. The Siddis are of African origin; enslaved there, they were brought to India as slaves of Arab, Portuguese, and British traders between the 7th and 19th centuries. In the 18th century, some Siddis gained prominence in Muslim rulers' armies and briefly controlled



Fig. 5.9. Young Siddi girl from Karnataka



Fig. 5.10. Siddi woman from Karnataka

parts of Bengal. Their cultural identity represents a fusion of African and Indian traditions. The Siddis have a distinctive dance accompanied by African-style drumming. Over time, they have adapted their language to regional influences and integrated African religious practices with adopted faiths of Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity. The Siddis are designated as a scheduled tribe. However, the Siddis' overall economic condition remains poor and efforts are being made to provide them with better access to education and livelihood options.

LET'S EXPLORE



What clues do you get about African and Indian cultural integration from the pictures here and above? Identify and name a few features that are distinctly Indian.



Fig. 5.11. Siddi dancers



Fig. 5.12. Hirabai Lobi

Hirabai Lobi was from the Siddi community that settled in Gujarat. She worked hard for the upliftment of the women of her community, connecting them with banking services, educating them on organic farming and other livelihood options. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 2023 for her selfless service to the community.

The Armenians in India

Armenia is a relatively small, mountainous country located between Turkey and Azerbaijan, just north of Iran. Centuries ago, Armenian merchants traded in Indian spices and fine muslins. There is some historical evidence of them establishing a first settlement on the Malabar coast in the 8th century. During the time of the Mughals in the



Fig. 5.13. Armenian Christmas at Armenian church, Kolkata.

16th century (you will meet them in Grade 8) many Armenians from Persia gained patronage from the emperors and began developing settlements in India.

The earliest such Armenian settlement was in Agra where the Mughal emperor, Akbar, gave them permission to build a church and follow their Christian religious practices. Armenians began to play important roles in the Mughal royal household, the army, as well as the administration during the time of several Mughal emperors. For example, Abdul Hai was Chief Justice in Akbar's court while Lady Juliana was a doctor in the royal palace.

The Armenians also settled in Surat, Kolkata, and Chennai, building schools, churches, and cemeteries, and creating a lasting cultural impact. Kolkata became a major Armenian hub. The 18th-century Armenian College and Mother Mary Church continue to be active. Their story reflects India's tradition of embracing diverse communities seeking refuge and prosperity.

The thriving trade routes of Madras (present-day Chennai), drew Armenian merchants who settled there around the mid-17th century. They became influential in commerce, especially dealing in silk, spices, and precious stones, and left a lasting mark on the

city's economic and cultural history. Armenian Street in George Town memorialises their presence, while the St. Mary's Armenian Church, built in the mid-18th century, stands as a symbol of their faith. Though the once-flourishing Armenian population has dwindled over the centuries, a handful of families and heritage groups continue to preserve their architectural, mercantile, and spiritual legacy in Chennai.

The Baha'i Community in India

In the mid-1800s, a new religion called the Baha'i began in Persia (modern-day Iran), led by a man named Baha'u'llah. His teachings spoke of unity among all people and harmony between

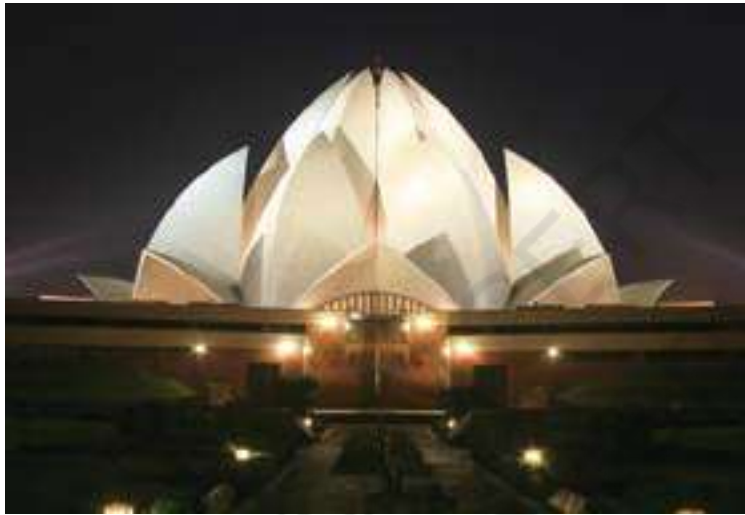


Fig. 5.14. The Baha'i Lotus Temple in New Delhi

religions. The ruling religious leadership in Iran, however, branded them as heretics because of their different beliefs, and they were treated badly. Some Baha'is looked for safer places to live, and one of the first places they came to was India. Baha'is had started arriving in India during the late 19th century. Over

the years, many Indians joined the faith. The Baha'is welcome people of all religions and backgrounds. Though Iranian Baha'is came to India to escape danger, most Baha'is here today are Indians who believe in the faith's message of unity and love.

The 'Good Maharaja' and the Polish Children

If you happen to visit the Good Maharaja Square in Warsaw, Poland, you may be surprised to see this monument (Fig. 5.15).

There is an inspiring story behind this. Poland was invaded during the Second World War, which took place between 1939

and 1945. Thousands of families were torn apart, and many children were orphaned. Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jadeja, the Maharaja of Nawanagar State (present-day Jamnagar), was touched by this tragedy. He mobilised the Red Cross and other organisations to help him rescue the children and take them to Jamnagar, and provided them with a safe place to stay, food to eat and cared for them. He is credited with saving the lives of around a thousand Polish orphans between 1942 and 1946. Several thousand Polish refugees fleeing from other areas were also welcomed to stay in the safety of his state. The children and others returned home safely after the war ended.

In the early 21st century, his service to the people of Poland was recognised by the President of Poland and the monument was constructed in the Maharaja's honour. India was a home away from home, even if for a brief period, for the orphaned children.



Fig. 5.15. Memorial in Warsaw: A tribute to Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji in recognition of his help to Polish refugees during World War II.

Tibetan Refugees in India

Located on the other side of the Himalayan range, Tibet is India's northern neighbour. In the 7th century, the 'Land of Snows', as Tibet is sometimes called, became a centre of Buddhism when its king embraced the Buddha's teachings. Gradually, despite a few setbacks, Buddhism expanded in Tibet.

During the 12th and 13th centuries, Turko-Afghan military invasions in eastern India led to the destruction of Nālandā and other Buddhist centres of learning (see 'Turning Tides: 11th and 12th Centuries' in this textbook). Many monks left for Tibet, often taking precious manuscripts of Sanskrit texts with them. From the 15th century onward, the Dalai Lamas, each one said

to be his predecessor's reincarnation, assumed a greater role, eventually becoming spiritual heads and (from the mid-17th century) Tibet's rulers.

DON'T MISS OUT



Tibetans, soon after taking refuge in India in 1959, started propagating their traditional system of medicine called Sowa Rigpa (also known as 'Art of Healing'); it was codified in the 8th century CE by a medical council held near Lhasa in Tibet, and blends ancient principles and practices of Ayurveda with inputs from China, Central Asia, Persia and even Greece.

Today, Tibetan medicine remains popular in Himalayan regions, including Nepal and Bhutan. In India, institutions like Men-Tsee-Khang in Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh) practise this system to treat chronic diseases and manage epidemics. It has also been integrated in the Government of India's AYUSH programme, which supports traditional and indigenous systems of medicine, including Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa, and Homoeopathy.



Fig. 5.16. A Tibetan market in Goa

From 1950 onward, the People's Republic of China overran Tibet in several waves, eventually annexing it. In 1959, following a popular uprising in Lhasa (the religious and administrative capital of Tibet at the time) against the Chinese presence, the 14th Dalai Lama was advised to flee across the Himalaya and take refuge in India, where



Fig. 5.17. Tibetan monastery at Bylakuppe, Karnataka

the government granted him asylum. Since then, he has been an 'honoured guest' in India and lives in Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh), from where the Central Tibetan Administration functions as a government-in-exile. The Dalai Lama is known for his 'Four Commitments', namely the promotion of human values like compassion, forgiveness, tolerance; the promotion of religious harmony; the preservation of Tibetan culture; and the revival of India's civilisational heritage, particularly Indian values like *karuṇā* (compassion) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence).

The Indian government rehabilitated the Tibetan refugees, provided education to their children, and facilitated the creation of Tibetan settlements to enable this community to make India a second home and preserve and promote its language, culture and heritage. The establishment in India, particularly in Karnataka, of many Tibetan monasteries patterned on the original ones in Tibet, created a space for Tibetan Buddhists to pursue their way of life and spiritual practices without fear or hindrance. Many non-government organisations have also supported the community by providing livelihood options. Over time, Tibetan refugees in India have become part of the society.

“The Whole World is Family”

These are a few examples of people making India their home, either seeking refuge or seeing opportunities for prosperity and a good life. These stories give us a glimpse of the culture of acceptance and inclusion that is a part of the Indian ethos. The idea of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, “the whole world is family”, is not just a slogan but has been a practice for millennia.



LET'S EXPLORE

Are there communities in your neighbourhood whose ancestors might have come to India centuries ago and made it their home? Have a class discussion on what their experience may have been.

How did India develop a reputation for being a compassionate country that welcomed people from different parts of the world and provided them with a place to call home? As we saw in earlier chapters in ‘Tapestry of the Past’, India had developed many schools of thought. Their core teachings included ideas like *sarve bhavantu sukhinah* or “may all creatures be happy”, *atithi devo bhava* or “a guest is like God”, and the value of compassion. The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* (‘The Buddha’s Words on Loving-Kindness’) expresses the same sentiment beautifully in these words: “Even as a mother protects with her life her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings; radiating kindness over the entire world...”



LET'S EXPLORE

Identify similar values in any story or local tradition etc. known to you. You could ask your guardians or relatives too. Collect these stories and create a class manuscript. You could include illustrations.

Indian Values Beyond India

It is also striking to see how the Indian expatriate community has carried and practised similar values abroad. Wherever there is a sizeable community of Indians living today, it has been perceived as a peaceful, law-abiding, progressive and prosperous minority that contributes to the economy and integrates well in the society of the respective country.

While religious persecution has been experienced for centuries in many parts of the world, India developed a culture of peaceful coexistence and acceptance of various diverse faiths and schools of thought. This innate character of its people and culture has created a haven for the persecuted.

There are also many cases where people came intending to conquer India but were conquered instead by our diverse culture, rich philosophy and knowledge traditions, unique geography and climate, and thriving economy. We saw earlier ('The Age of Reorganisation' in Part 1 of this textbook) the cases of the Indo-Greeks and the Kuṣhāṇas, and there are more.

The idea of the fundamental unity of humankind is one of the core civilisational values of India, which can help the world resolve some of the crises we face today — wars, climate change, increasing inequality and discrimination.

Before we move on ...

- India has been a haven for people persecuted in their respective homelands, or simply looking for a new land with new opportunities.
- India's cultural values such as *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, *atithi devo bhava*, or *sarve bhavantu sukhinah* are the basis for the sense of inclusion and acceptance that have enabled even small communities to find India a secure place and maintain here their traditions over centuries.
- These values have universal relevance at a time when there are multiple crises facing the world.



Questions and activities

1. On the outline of a world map, try to trace the routes that the communities mentioned in this chapter may have used to reach India. What types of physical geographies did they have to negotiate?
2. What are the key values intrinsic to Indian culture that enable it to welcome people of different backgrounds?
3. Homi Bhabha, Sam Maneckshaw, Ratan Tata, Fali Nariman, Nani Palkivala, and Cornelia Sorabji are a few names of Parsis who excelled in their respective fields. Find out more about people from other communities that made India their home and their contributions.
4. Take up a class project. Divide the class into groups. Each group takes up a small project to study a little more about the communities that we have been listed here. Share what you have gathered with your classmates through one of these ways — drama, posters, song, painting, etc.

A Journey Through Indian Architecture

The craftsman is not an individual expressing individual whims, but a part of the universe, giving expression to ideals of eternal beauty and unchanging laws, even as do the trees and flowers whose natural and less ordered beauty is no less God-given.

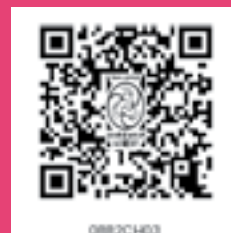
— Ananda Coomaraswamy



A group of temples at Pattadakal, Karnataka

The Big Questions?

1. What role has architecture played in the Indian civilisation?
2. What are some of the key concepts and developments behind Indian architecture?
3. How is the heritage of Indian architecture of relevance today?



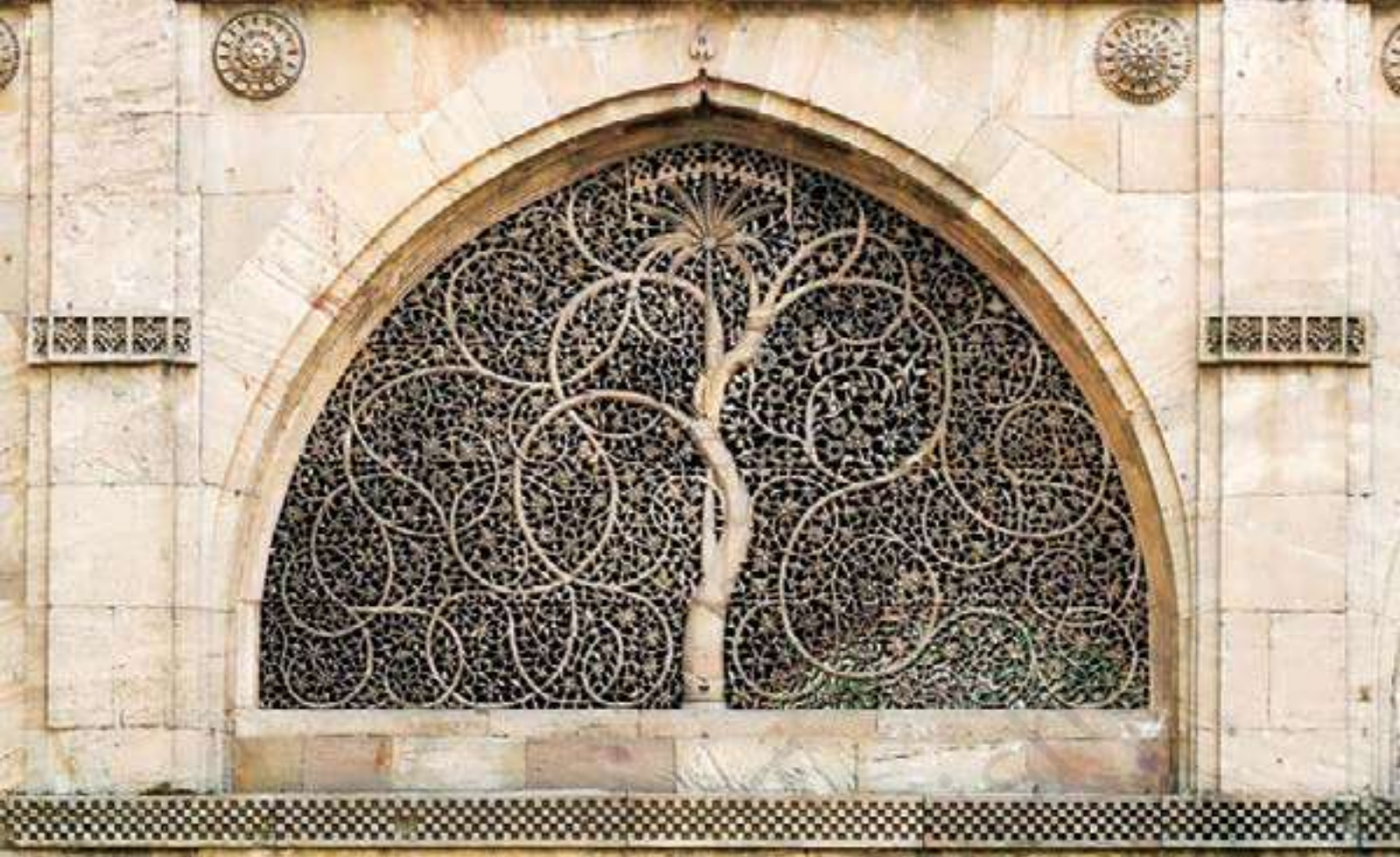


Fig. 3.1. A large window of carved stone latticework in Ahmedabad's Sidi Saiyyed mosque. It is known as 'Sidi Saiyyed Jāli'.

‘Architecture’—the art and techniques of design and construction, which combine functional and aesthetic aspects—is not only an art but also a highly technical field, in which India has excelled for several millennia. As with any other Indian art, these accomplishments have evolved in time and developed great geographical diversity.

Exploring it all—the evolution of forms, their endless diversity and technicalities—cannot be done in a brief chapter. Instead, we will go on a journey, visiting a few representative structures or monuments grouped in a few categories. We hope that you will be tempted to take detours on the way and explore more.

Earlier textbooks of the Middle Stage (Grades 6 to 8) have briefly highlighted quite a few such structures or monuments—those were just teasers! Let us now begin our journey, guided by two illustrations: the map in Fig. 3.3 shows the geographical locations of the structures we will visit, and Fig. 3.2 places them in the river of time.



Fig. 3.2. A timeline of the structures and monuments visited in this chapter

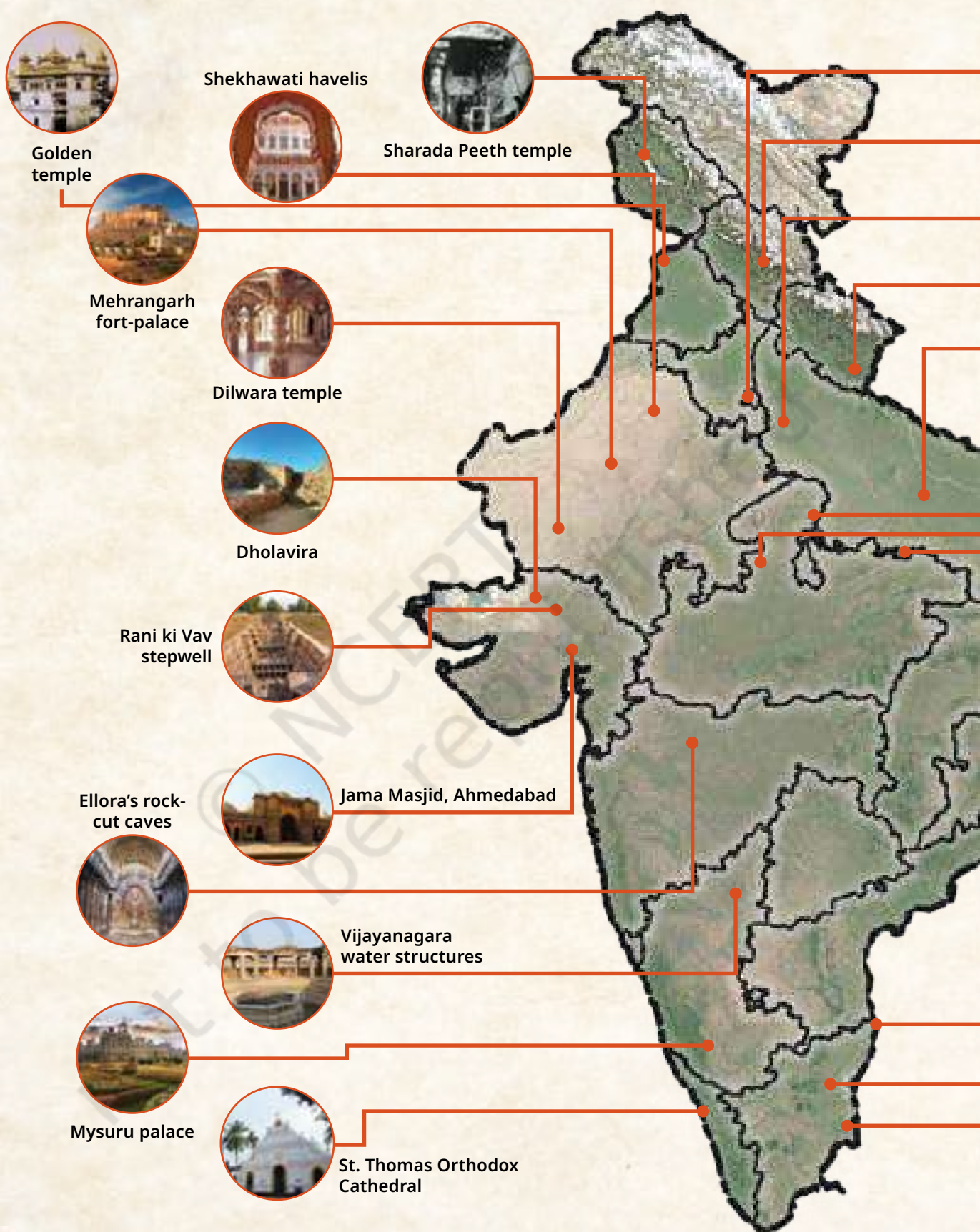
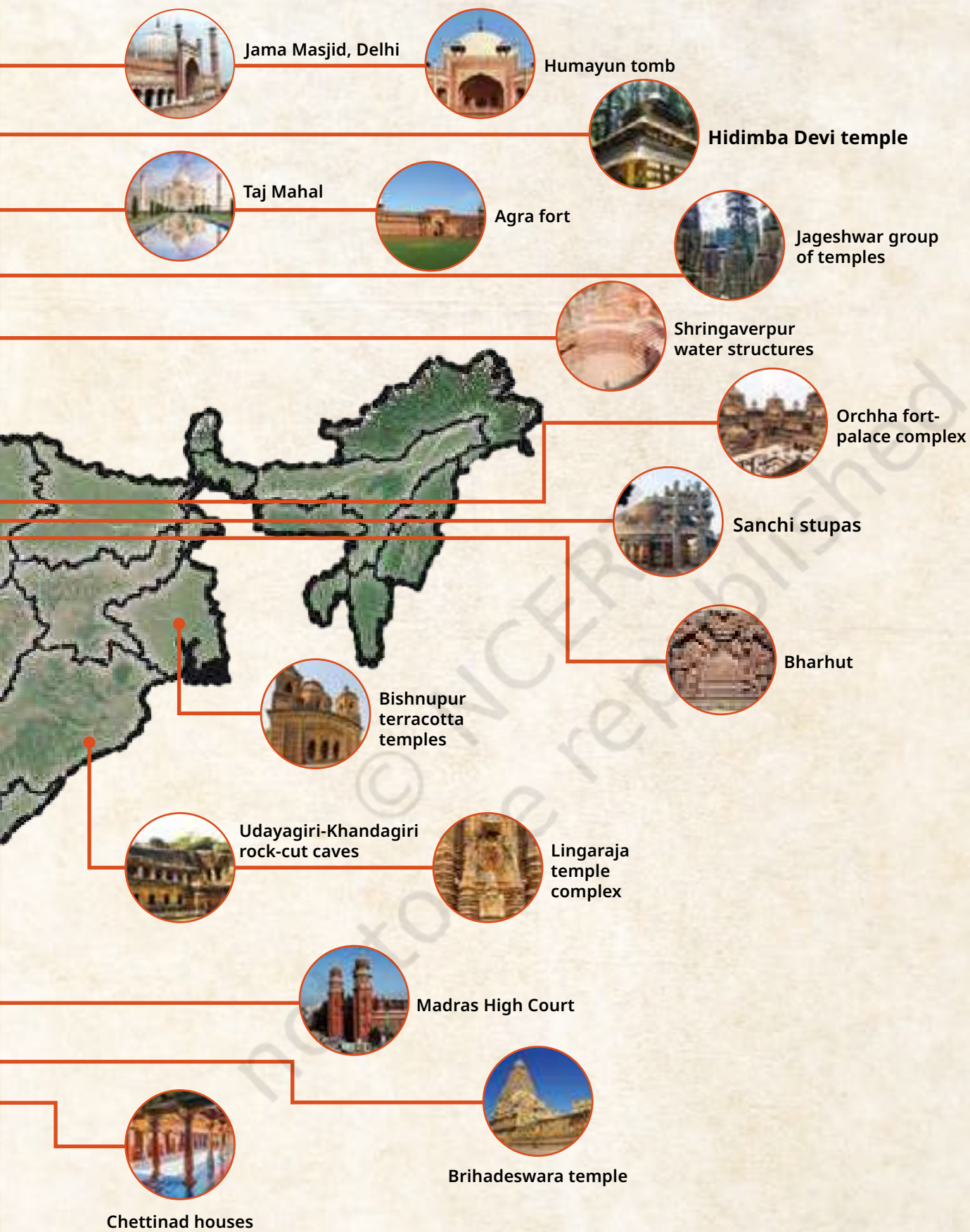


Fig. 3.3. Locations of the structures and monuments visited in this chapter



THE BEGINNINGS ...

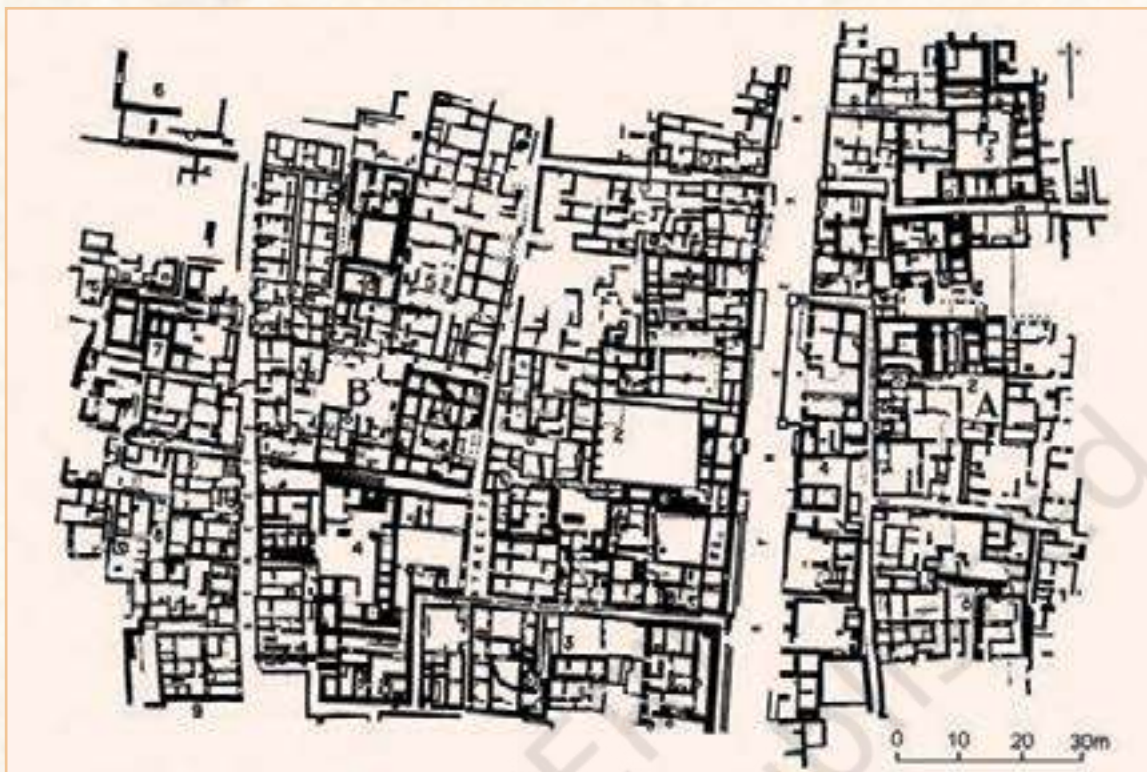


Fig. 3.4. The dense network of streets and lanes in an area of Mohenjo-daro's lower town.

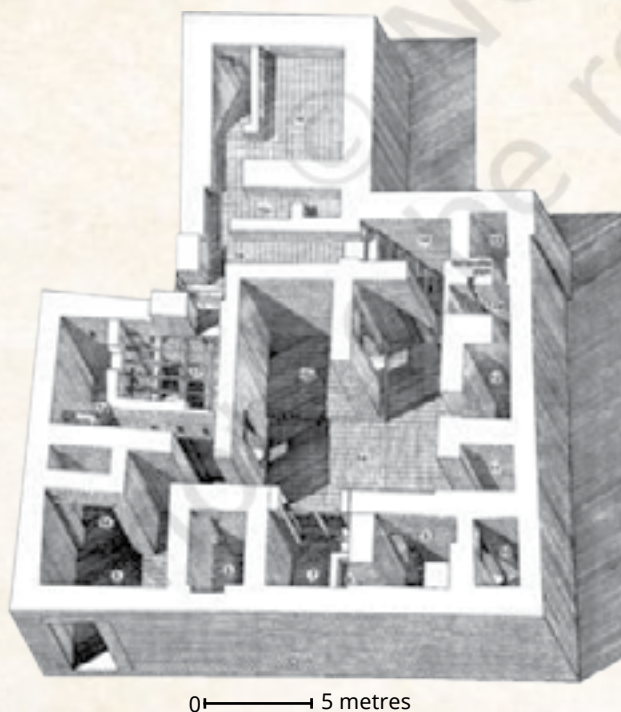


Fig. 3.5. Plan of a large house in Mohenjo-daro

We visited the Indus/Harappan/Indus-Sarasvati civilisation in Grade 6 (chapter 'The Beginnings of Indian Civilisation'). Harappan architecture represents the earliest known tradition of urban planning and construction in the Indian subcontinent. It is characterised by carefully laid-out cities, standardised urban concepts, and an emphasis on drainage, water management, and civic organisation. Most Harappan cities were constructed with bricks, as they were located in alluvial plains where clay is abundant.



Fig. 3.6. The eastern entrance to Dholavira's Castle area

Mohenjo-daro (in present-day Sindh, Pakistan) was an extensive city. Fig. 3.4 shows a densely inhabited area, with wide streets and narrow lanes roughly oriented to the cardinal directions. Almost every home had a bathing area; used waters were taken out of the city through an efficient network of drains. The plan of a large house (Fig. 3.5) hints that while the servants lived downstairs, the owners probably lived upstairs, where they would be less exposed to the dust and noise from the streets around.



Fig. 3.7. A plan of Dholavira, with different fortified areas, streets and reservoirs.

Noted for its precise urban planning (Fig. 3.7), **Dholavira** in the Rann of Kachchh is another large Harappan city. Unlike most others, it made extensive use of stone, as it was locally available. In Fig. 3.6, you can picture yourself entering the city's highest and most fortified area (named 'Castle'). Notice the smooth surface of the blocks of stone and the large sentinel room on the left, where guards would have screened people moving in or out. Two highly polished segments of a stone pillar remain visible in the centre.

STRUCTURAL STUPA ARCHITECTURE



Fig. 3.8. A view of the main stupa at Sanchi, with toraṇas and an enclosure of railings.



Fig. 3.9. A panel at Bharhut depicting people worshipping the stupa there.

From the 4th or 3rd century BCE onward, with the rise of Buddhism several new architectural forms emerged in north India, slowly spreading to other regions. Thousands of stupas (dome-shaped structures housing relics of the Buddha or revered monks) were constructed with bricks or stone. The larger ones became complex ritual centres with railings, gateways, and elaborate panels often narrating episodes in the Buddha's life.

At this early stage, the Buddha was represented symbolically—through objects such as footprints, the wheel of dharma, or the stupa itself—rather than in human form.

Originally commissioned or patronised by Aśhoka, the main stupa at **Sanchi** (Figs. 3.8 and 3.10) in Madhya Pradesh represents the earliest phase of monumental religious stone architecture in India. Entering through one of its massive toraṇas (ornamental

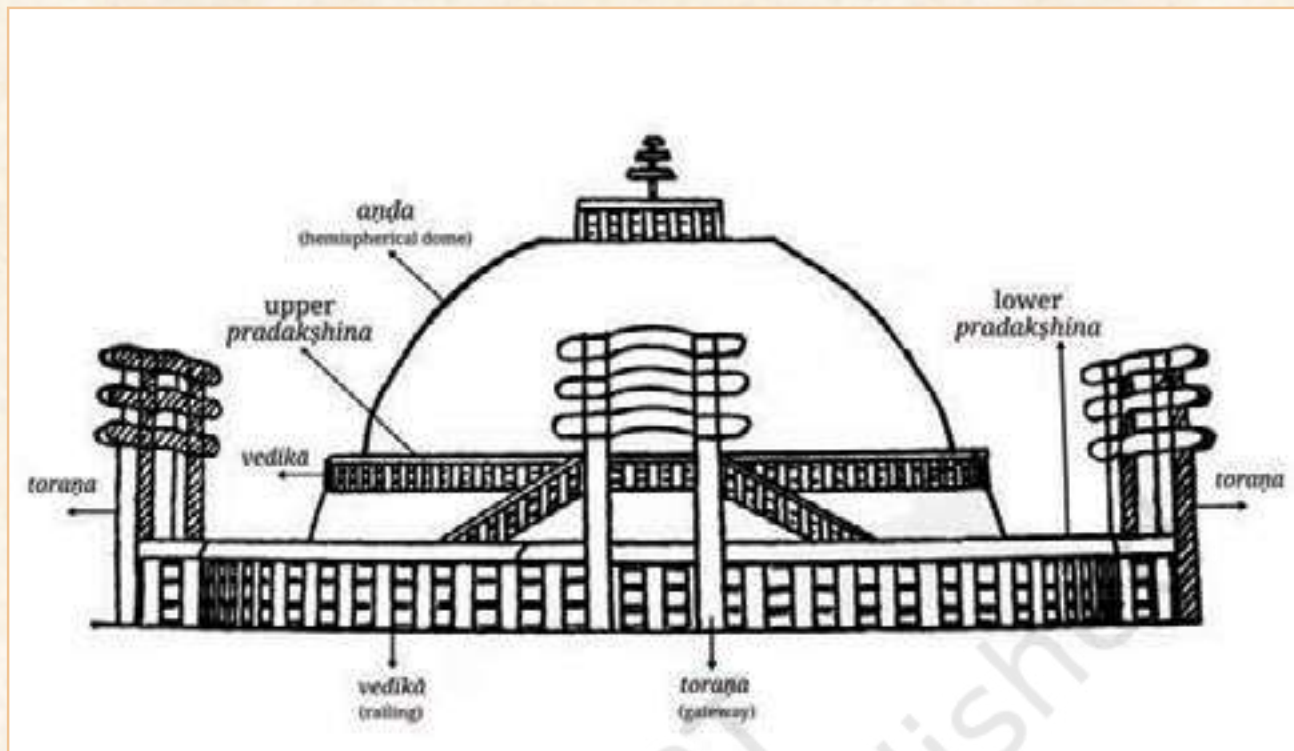


Fig. 3.10. A plan of the Sanchi Stupa

gateways depicting many scenes of urban as well as village life), a worshipper would circumambulate (i.e., walk around) the stupa inside the enclosure of railings (*vedikā*). The worship of stupas is explicitly depicted at **Bharhut** (Fig. 3.9), also in Madhya Pradesh; there, the stupa was similarly enclosed by richly carved stone railings and bore numerous inscriptions recording the names of donors.

Stupas are common in Jainism too. With diverse dimensions and shapes, this form of religious architecture will spread across India and beyond (remember Borobudur in the Grade 7 textbook).

LET'S REMEMBER



You will find several depictions of beautiful panels of the Sanchi Stupa in textbooks of Grade 6 (check out chapter 'India, That Is Bharat') and Grade 7 (chapters 'New Beginnings: Cities and States', 'The Rise of Empires', 'From the Rulers to the Ruled: Types of Government').

ROCK-CUT ARCHITECTURE



Fig. 3.11. A general view of the Udayagiri-Khandagiri caves



Fig. 3.12. A view of cave no. 10 at Ellora depicting a seated Buddha in the posture of teaching, emerging from a stupa.

Rock-cut architecture developed as an efficient and durable mode of construction for religious communities. By carving directly into the rock, builders created caves for worship, residence or assembly. These complexes often evolved over centuries, reflecting changing religious needs and patronage.

The **Udayagiri-Khandagiri cave complex** (Fig. 3.11) near Bhubaneswar in Odisha, whose carving began in the 2nd century BCE under royal patronage, are among India's first; most of them served as dwellings for Jain monks. One cave shelters Khāravela's famous inscription (see the textbook for Grade 7, chapter 'The Age of Reorganisation').

Maharashtra boasts several magnificent rock-cut cave complexes. Those at **Ajanta** and **Ellora** are renowned for their

massive scale, exquisite craftsmanship and the mind-boggling technologies involved in their carving. Many thousands of tonnes of rock had to be chipped away to leave the colossal monolithic **Kailāśha Temple** at Ellora (see the Grade 7 textbook, chapter ‘Empires and Kingdoms: 6th to 10th Centuries’) and the many Buddhist, Hindu and Jain caves there. Ellora’s cave no. 10 (Fig. 3.12) is of enormous proportions; leaning against a stupa is a massive statue of a seated Buddha in a teaching pose. The cave’s arched roof imitates beams of timber that existed in some of the urban buildings; in its aisle (Fig. 3.13), that is, the corridor outside the row of pillars, monks would circumambulate the stupa. This custom of *pradakṣhiṇa* (which means ‘going around in a clockwise direction’) will persist in later classical temples).

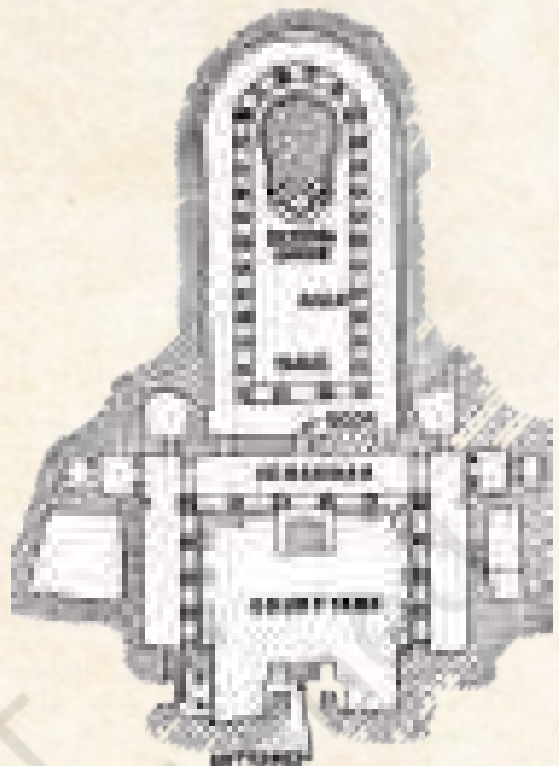


Fig. 3.13. A ground plan of cave no. 10 at Ellora

LET'S EXPLORE

- Form groups in the class to discuss the following: Imagine you have only hammers and iron chisels. How will you plan the carving of such a huge cave? What challenges might the hillside offer? And once you reach the nave (Fig. 3.13), how will you manage to carve arched beams into its ceiling?
- In classical temples, what Indian words would we use instead of ‘nave’?



LET'S REMEMBER

You will find pictures of the Ellora caves in the Grade 6 textbook (chapter ‘India’s Cultural Roots’), of the Udayagiri-Khandagiri caves in the Grade 7 textbook (chapters ‘The Age of Reorganisation’ and ‘The Gupta Era: An Age of Tireless Creativity’), and the Ajanta caves in the Grade 6 textbook (chapter ‘The Gupta Era: An Age of Tireless Creativity’).

DON'T MISS OUT

→ **Sharada Peetha Temple, Jammu and Kashmir**

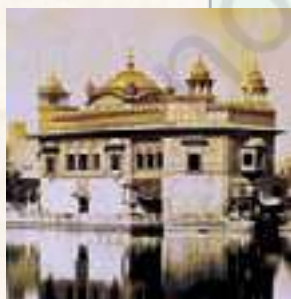
Dedicated to Goddess Śhāradā (a form of Sarasvatī), Sharada Peetha was a renowned centre of learning and a key site in the development of the Sharada script. Attracting scholars from different parts of India and the world, it flourished between the 6th and 12th centuries CE, and its legacy earned Kashmir the name *Śhāradā Deśh* (the land of Śhāradā). Though now in ruins, it remains an important part of India's archaeological and cultural heritage.

→ **Hidimba Devi Temple, Himachal Pradesh**

Located in Manali amid the cedar forests of Dhungiri Van Vihar, the Hidimba Devi Temple is one of the oldest religious sites in the Kullu Valley. Built in the 16th century CE, the shrine is dedicated to Hidimbā (Hirama), the wife of Bhīma from the *Mahābhārata*. A nearby temple dedicated to their son, Ghaṭotkacha, further reflects the site's close association with the epic tradition.

→ **Jageshwar Group of Temples, Uttarakhand**

The Jageshwar Group of Temples, located in the Jatāgangā Valley of Uttarakhand's Almora district, is an ancient temple complex associated with the Katyūrī, Chand, and Gurjara-Pratihāra dynasties (8th-18th centuries). Comprising about 124 stone temples, it is renowned for its *Swayambhu Linga*, known as Nāgeśh Dārūkāvane. The *garbha griha* houses Jāgeśhwara Mahādeva, who is locally revered as Bāla Jāgeśhwara ("Child Shiva").

→ **The Golden Temple, Punjab**

The gurudwara is the place of worship of the Sikhs. The Harmandir Sahib or Golden Temple in Punjab is considered to be the holiest of the Sikh Shrines. The temple was founded by Guru Ramdas Sahib the 4th of the 10th Sikh Gurus. The construction of the temple and its sarovar was continued by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru in 1588.

WATER STRUCTURES



Fig. 3.14. A simplified sketch of a typical Harappan well built with trapezoid-shaped bricks.



Fig. 3.15. One of the tanks at Shringaverpur

For several millennia, India's monsoon-driven climate has led people to develop a great variety of structures for the harvesting, storage and distribution of water. These structures, whether simple (such as a humble village pond) or highly sophisticated (such as the Grand Anicut, see chapter 'The Age of Reorganisation' in the Grade 7 textbook), have been very diverse owing to the different geological, climatic and environmental conditions of the land, from the Himalayan foothills, the Thar Desert, the Gangetic plains, the Western Ghats, to the Deccan plateau or the Northeast. This tradition goes all the way back to the Harappan civilisation; remember Dholavira's large reservoirs, for instance. Besides, the Harappans invented wells that cannot collapse inward under the pressure of underground infiltration, thanks to their trapezoid-shaped bricks that lock together (Fig. 3.14). In later periods, we find networks of reservoirs in many parts of India. Shringaverpur in Uttar Pradesh was known as **Śhringaverapura** in the Rāmayaṇa (which describes it as the place where Rāmā, Sītā and Lakṣhmaṇa crossed the Ganga while starting on their exile). Excavations there brought to light a series of large interconnected reservoirs (Fig. 3.15) fed by a channel from the Ganga during the river's seasonal flooding. The first reservoir or two allowed the



Fig. 3.16. The Rani ki Vav stepwell

and Rajasthan, many of them engineering marvels as well as spectacular works of art. The stepwell at **Rani ki Vav** (Fig. 3.16) has multiple pillared levels and hundreds of magnificent statues. Besides harvesting and storing rainwater,

silt suspended in water to settle down—a fairly common design. Yet the precise working of the entire complex remains to be figured out.

Wells have been constructed in many sizes and shapes from bricks, stones, or terracotta ring. In classical times, a tradition of stepwells (*vāvs* or *bāorīs*) developed in Gujarat

stepwells offered a social space where people could sit together, enjoy cooler temperatures and exchange all the news.

Temples often had water reservoirs or *puṣhkariṇīs* attached to them, which were used for water harvesting as well as water-based rituals. Many of them were also works of art, with numerous stairways built into them (Fig. 3.17).



Fig. 3.17. A *puṣhkariṇī* at Vijayanagara

Many of these traditional water structures suffer today from depleted water sources, maintenance issues, pollution, waste dumping, etc. Environmentalists, locals, and NGOs sometimes join hands to preserve them, but much remains to be done.

CLASSICAL TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

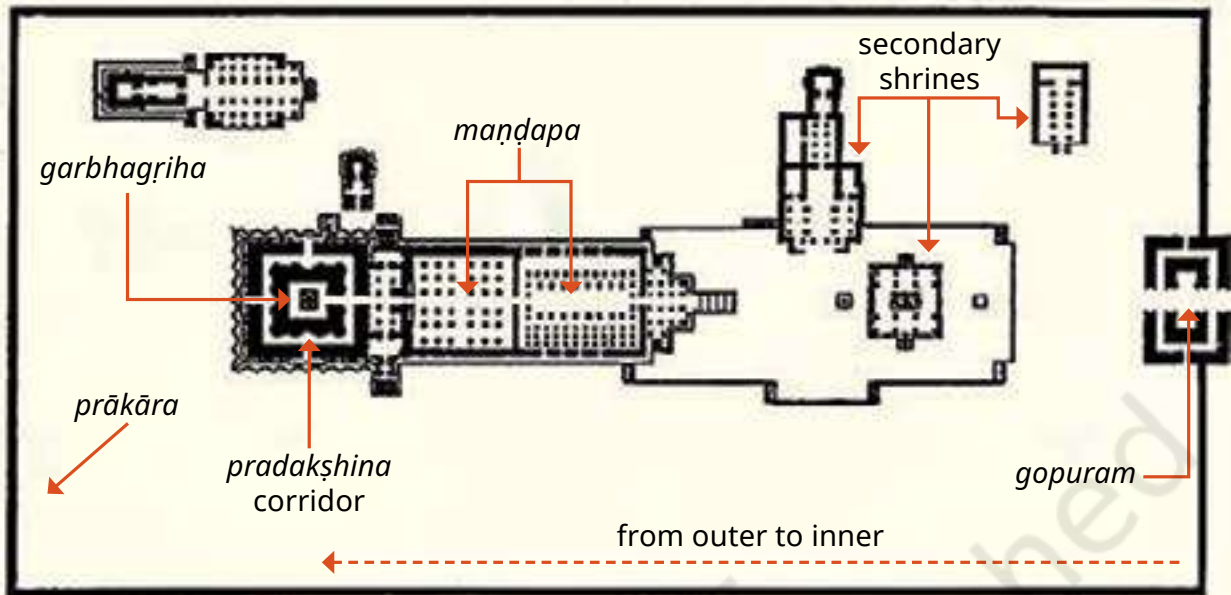


Fig. 3.18. Simplified ground plan of the Brihadiśhvara Temple

With antecedents in the stupa and rock-cut types of architecture, temples have been central to India's cultural life for many centuries. Whether Buddhist, Jain or Hindu, temples have been places of worship, but also of learning, literature, art (sculpture, dance, music, painting among others). Besides, they were centres of social intercourse and economic life. Architecturally, they evolved into works of art that celebrate life and encourage bhakti as well as quiet contemplation.

Classical temples emerged during the Gupta era. Many were built thanks to royal patronage, as evidenced by inscriptions, but also by endowments from various donors. Temple construction followed principles and techniques spelt out in treatises of *śilpashāstra*—the discipline of arts and crafts, largely dedicated to architecture and sculpture. A temple's main elements are shown in Fig. 3.18: a ceremonial entrance (*gopuram* in south India; *torana* in some north Indian temples), one or several *mandapas* (pillared halls), and the *garbhagriha*, the innermost chamber where the image (*mūrti*) of the deity is kept. Above the *garbhagriha* is a tower called *śikhara* (in north Indian temples) or *vimāna* (in south Indian temples). The main alignment is generally east-west, with the *garbhagriha* facing east.

Temple architecture is also based on certain philosophical concepts. For instance, both horizontally and vertically, a temple is planned as a representation of the human body—that of *Puruṣha* or the cosmic being. Fig. 3.19 shows the vertical equivalence: from the top of the *śikhara* or *vimāna*, which corresponds to the head, down to the platform on which the temple rests, which corresponds to the feet (you need not remember the technical terms for the *śikhara*'s different parts shown in Fig. 3.19). The temple thus becomes a symbol of our own being and also of the cosmos.

Temple worship can be understood as a journey from the outer world (left behind once one crosses the entrance) to the inner world awaiting the worshipper in the *garbhagriha*, mirroring our own spiritual journey.

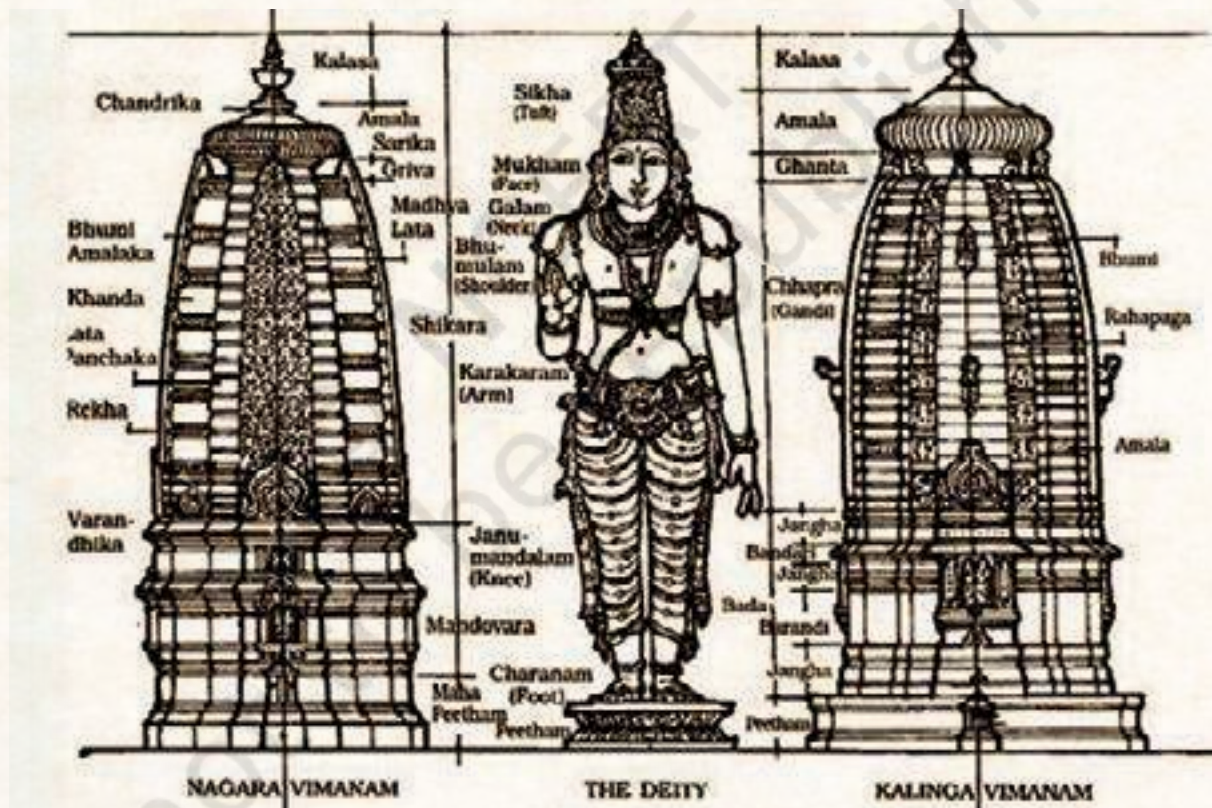


Fig. 3.19. The temple as 'Puruṣha'

LET'S EXPLORE

Looking at Fig. 3.18, can you work out the horizontal equivalence between a temple and the cosmic being?



Fig. 3.20. The *Bṛihadiśhvara Temple* at Thanjavur

Until the 8th or 9th century, temples were modest in size. From the 10th century onward, in different parts of India they grew in scale and began incorporating multiple shrines, amenities, and enclosures (*prākāras*), culminating in vast complexes. In the grade 7 textbook (chapter ‘Turning Tides: 11th and 12th Centuries’), we saw the magnificent **Kandāriyā Mahādeva Temple** of Khajuraho and Cambodia’s colossal **Angkor Wat Temple**. In Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, the imposing **Bṛihadiśhvara Temple** (Fig. 3.20) was built by Rājārāja Chola I around 1010. It is renowned for its vast *maṇḍapas*, a huge *vimāna*, over 60 metres high, and a massive Nandi (sacred bull) statue carved from a single stone, which sits in a pavilion facing the main shrine. The entire



Fig. 3.21. A panel depicting *Mahālakṣmī*, attendants and minor deities



Fig. 3.22. The Lingarāja Temple complex at Bhubaneswar



Fig. 3.23. A detail of the Lingarāja Temple's shikhara

structure showcases exquisite craftsmanship, with intricate granite carvings and sculptures adorning its walls (Fig. 3.21).

Both the Bṛihadīśhvara Temple and the **Lingarāja Temple** in Bhubaneswar, Odisha (Fig. 3.22), are dedicated to Śhiva, with several secondary shrines dedicated to goddess Pārvati and other deities. Built in the early 11th century, the Lingarāja Temple has three large *maṇḍapas* used for different purposes. It is built from locally available sandstone and laterite stone and is rich in ornate carvings (Fig. 3.23).

LET'S EXPLORE

India's classical temples come in distinct regional styles. For instance, note the pyramidal shape of Bṛihadīśhvara Temple's *vimāna* and compare with the shapes in Fig. 3.19. Revisit the pictures of the Angkor Wat and Kandāriyā Mahādeva Temples and note the chief differences you can observe.



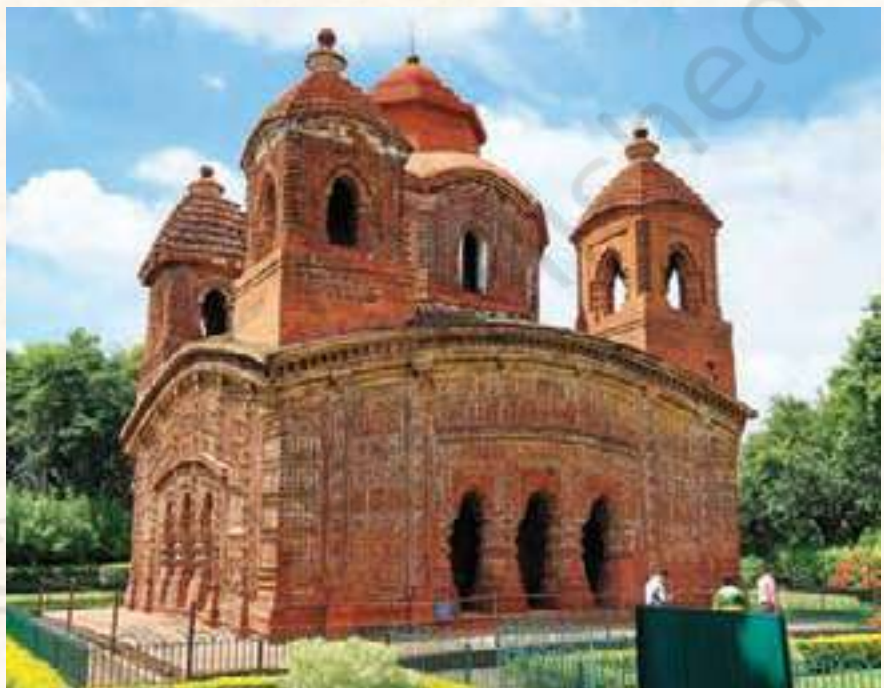
Fig. 3.24. Dilwara Temple at Mount Abu

The **Dilwara Temples** at Mount Abu, Rajasthan, are a group of five exquisitely carved Jain temples built between the 11th and 13th centuries by the Solanki or Chaulukya dynasty. Made of white marble procured from the nearby Aravalli hills, they feature delicate carvings of the Jain *tirthankaras*, deities, dancers, musicians, and ornamental patterns that cover every surface.

Built in the 17th and 18th centuries, the **terracotta temples of Bishnupur** in West Bengal are of a very different style. They are brick structures with elaborate surface decorations on square panels, many of which depict themes associated with Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa or Rāma, as well as, scenes from everyday life. Terracotta panels such as those seen in Fig. 3.27 were first carved by hand and then fired in a kiln in a precise manner.



Fig. 3.25. A pillared hall inside the Dilwara Temple (top),
Fig. 3.26. Terracotta temple at Bishnupur, West Bengal (right).



LET'S EXPLORE

- Make a list of all the materials we have encountered so far in the carving or construction of structures; make a list of pros and cons for each of them. Did you notice that none of the structures discussed so far use any cement mortar?
- Observe the pictures of the four temples featured here. What common features and what differences can you notice?
- Identify a temple in your location. Based on what you have read here, what architectural details can you make out?



Fig. 3.27. Detail of the temple's facade (front portion), showing intricate terracotta work.

Apart from a large manpower and accomplished sculptors, the architecture of classical temples required highly skilled architects, engineers and craftsmen, as it involved elaborate construction techniques. Recent studies have shown that their planning involved a good deal of mathematics, especially some advanced geometry. All this, of course, is also true of many large sacred structures in other parts of the world, whether Egypt's pyramids and temples, Athens' Parthenon or medieval Europe's **gothic** cathedrals.

Gothic:
A European style of architecture prevalent from the 13th to the 18th centuries; key features include pointed arches and large windows decorated with stained glass.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF MOSQUES



Fig. 3.28. The Jama Masjid in Ahmedabad

Mosques are places of worship where followers of Islam gather for prayer. They also serve as centres for religious education, community gatherings, and venues for lectures and discussions. Mosques have a prayer hall oriented towards Mecca (the most sacred site in Islam, located in Saudi Arabia). The larger ones often include one or several domes, and minarets (towers) on either side of the domes, from where the muezzin makes his call to prayer.



Fig. 3.29. A sketch made in 1809 by a British army officer shows the mosque's full-size minarets.

The Friday prayers are especially important in Islam; large mosques where these prayers are held are often called 'Jama Masjid'—*jama* means 'gathering' or 'assembly', while *masjid* means 'mosque'.

The **Jama Masjid in Ahmedabad** (Gujarat) was built by Sultan Ahmed Shah I in the 15th century.

Architectural developments in Gujarat took on regional flavours, and this structure of yellow sandstone (Fig. 3.28) has a blend of Hindu and Islamic architectural elements. Its facade (front portion) displays elegant arches and the bases of two minarets (their top portions, which were destroyed in earthquakes, can be seen in a sketch in Fig. 3.29). The presence of intricate stone *jālis* (latticed screens,



Fig. 3.30. A section of the Jama Masjid's large prayer hall



Fig. 3.31. A view of Delhi's Jama Masjid

Corbelled:
Constructed
by stacking
blocks as in
a staircase
pattern

see an example in Fig. 3.1), pillars of the same style as found in some temples (but without decorations, Fig. 3.30), and some detailed carvings have led scholars to suggest that the mosque was constructed with the help of local Hindu and Jain artisans, masons and stone carvers. This is not uncommon in what has been called 'Indo-Islamic architecture', which blends Islamic building traditions with Indian craftsmanship. Some of its features are domes, arches (both pointed and **corbelled**), *jālis*, and floral motifs. In Rajasthan, local architectural features such as ornate *jharokhās* (overhanging balconies) and *chhatrīs* (pavilion domes) were often integrated.

The **Jama Masjid in Delhi** (Figs. 3.31 and 3.32) is India's largest mosque. Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan built it in the mid-17th century, after he moved his capital from Agra to Shahjahanabad

(now Old Delhi). He had a vision for a grand mosque where the city's Muslims could gather for prayer. About 5,000 workers were pressed into service for its construction.

The mosque is made from red sandstone with white marble decorations, and has three large entrances. Two 40-metre tall minarets stand on either side. The main prayer hall has three large domes and the red-stone courtyard can accommodate up to 25,000 people. The walls and arches are decorated with calligraphy (decorative writing) of verses from the Qur'an.



<< Fig. 3.32. A man praying facing the 'mihrab', i.e., the niche in the wall that points to the direction of Mecca.

FORTS AND PALACES



Fig. 3.33. A general view of the Mehrangarh Fort, with the Jaswant Thada in the foreground.

As we already saw in a few earlier chapters of ‘Tapestry of the Past’, forts played an important role in Indian history—that of protecting a kingdom from the onslaught of invaders. They were therefore strategically located near important land or sea routes, and often atop a hill so as to command a view of the plains below. Forts also accommodated the residences of the ruling and military classes, and in some cases even an entire city, depending on their size. Since some forts also sheltered a royal palace, we have clubbed these two categories together.

LET'S REMEMBER



Try to remember where earlier textbooks showed pictures of the forts of Jaisalmer, Kumbhalgarh, Raigad, and Sindhudurg. Can you point to their approximate locations on India's map?



Fig. 3.34. One of the facades of the palace inside the Mehrangarh Fort; note the intricate carving and the stone **latticework** around the balconies.

Latticework: Open framework with criss-crossing or decorative designs. Here, it is both functional (allowing ventilation) and aesthetic in design.

and stables and barracks. Today, many parts of the fort have been converted into a museum to preserve and showcase the fort's and Rajasthan's cultural heritage.

DON'T MISS OUT



- **Jaswant Thada** in Fig. 3.33 is a more recent building, a memorial to Maharaja Jaswant Singh II built by his son Maharaja Sardar Singh; it has served as the cremation ground for Jodhpur's royal family. Such monuments in the memory of a historical figure are called 'cenotaphs'; they are not tombs, as the deceased person remembered is not buried at the spot.
- Jodhpur is also noted for the blue colour of traditional houses close to the fort. This is due to the application of a solution of copper sulphate mixed with lime on the walls, which is said to repel termites. Other features of Jodhpur include meandering streets, open courtyards, *jāli* windows for ventilation, thick walls and balconies, all of which work together to keep houses cool.



Fig. 3.35. A view of the Agra Red Fort's ramparts (defensive walls)

The historical **Red Fort at Agra** (not be mistaken for Delhi's Red Fort) was originally made of brick, and had fallen to ruin when Akbar decided to make his capital there and rebuild the fort. It was designed to include palaces and gardens, living quarters, halls for public and private audiences, and living quarters for the maids and other servants. The fort's name comes from the red sandstone (Fig. 3.35) that was mined from Dholpur in Rajasthan, some 60 km away. However, Akbar's grandson, Shah Jahan was fond of marble and replaced many of the sandstone buildings with marble ones, in particular the palaces (Figs. 3.36 and 3.37); he was imprisoned until his death in one of them (Fig. 3.36) by his son, Aurangzeb. He also had three mosques built within the



Fig. 3.36. The marble-built Musamman Burj in Agra's Red Fort, with an octagonal tower on top and the Taj Mahal in the distance.



Fig. 3.37. Adjoining the Musamman Burj is the Khas Mahal; note the floral patterns inlaid in the marble.

fort complex. Many of those buildings were destroyed by British troops of the East India Company in the 19th century.



DON'T MISS OUT

The Agra Fort had many fountains. Water from the Yamuna was lifted using Persian wheels (see chapter 'Reshaping India's Political Map' in the Grade 8 Part 1 textbook) into overhead tanks on the walls of the fort. From the tanks, water flowing down through terracotta pipes created fountains, which worked as eco-friendly 'air-conditioners', helping to keep the area cool.

The **Orchha Fort-Palace complex** (Fig. 3.38) was built in the mid-16th century by the Bundela Rajput kings on the banks of the river Betwa in Madhya Pradesh. The complex features three main palaces—Raja Mahal, Jahangir Mahal, and Rai Praveen Mahal. The Jahangir Mahal (Fig. 3.39), built to commemorate Emperor Jahangir's visit, showcases a blend of Rajput and Mughal architectural styles. It has ornate chambers, intricate stone carvings, and beautiful courtyards. The complex also includes elegant *chhatrīs* (cenotaphs in the shape of a parasol) on the riverbank, and is connected to the town's famous Ram Raja Temple.



Fig. 3.38. A view of the Orchha Fort-Palace complex



Fig. 3.39. A view of the Jahangir Mahal palace in the Orchha complex

The **Mysuru Palace**, also known as Amba Vilas Palace (Fig. 3.40), is a magnificent example of Indo-Saracenic architecture (see further below the section under that name). It is the residence of the Wadiyar dynasty, and a symbol of Mysuru's royal heritage. The present structure was built early in the 20th century after the previous wooden palace was destroyed by fire. The palace is renowned for its intricately carved wooden doors, ornate ceiling paintings, stained-glass windows, and the spectacular golden throne (*singhāsana*) displayed during the Dasara festival. The palace is illuminated by nearly 100,000 lights every Sunday evening and during festivals.



Fig. 3.40. A view of the Mysuru Palace

TOMBS AND MAUSOLEUMS



Fig. 3.41. A general view of Humayun's Tomb complex in Delhi



Fig. 3.42. A closer view of the upper level; note the marble domes, arches and stars.

For religious reasons, in Islam and Christianity the dead are buried. In the Islamic world, mausoleums—grand buildings housing a tomb or a group of them—were often built for prominent rulers, members of the royal household, or for some renowned mystics. They were also a political statement, as they stood as a testament to the greatness of the royalty or their dynasty. This is not a common practice among

people of other faiths; in Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism, the dead are generally cremated; as a result, no tombs of rulers of such faiths exist in India in ancient times. In the medieval era,

cenotaphs appeared, especially in Rajasthan and central India, but they only marked the places where a king or his family member was cremated (we saw an example in Fig. 3.33).

As the few examples below make clear, these monuments' elegant architecture embedded strict concepts of symmetry, which extended to the gardens around. Common features (also found in some of the larger mosques, as we saw) included arches, floral motifs, latticework, and calligraphy of verses from the Qur'an.

The renowned **Humayun's Tomb** (Figs. 3.41 and 3.42) is a significant landmark of Delhi. It was commissioned by Humayun's chief wife, Bega Begum, in 1558, and designed by Persian architects, who brought with them Persian aesthetics that became part of the Mughal architectural tradition. The complex also houses the tombs of several Mughals, including that of Dara Shikoh (whom we met in Part 1 of this textbook).



DON'T MISS OUT

Did you notice the six-pointed star on Humayun's tomb? This geometric symbol is found in several religious traditions. In Judaism, it is known as the 'Star of David', named after David, a king of the Hebrews mentioned in the Bible. In Islam, the same symbol is called the 'Seal of Solomon'; Solomon (Sulaymān), David's son, is regarded in Islam as both a model king and a prophet endowed with divine wisdom. In Hinduism, the six-pointed star appears in tantric symbolism, where it represents the fusion of *puruṣha* or consciousness (the upward-pointing triangle) with *prakṛiti* or *śhakti* (the downward-pointing triangle), that is, the harmony of spirit and matter.

In the mid 17th century, Shah Jahan built the **Taj Mahal** (Figs. 3.43 to 3.45) as a mausoleum for his queen Mumtaz Mahal's tomb. Entirely decorated with marble, the Taj Mahal is an example of the confluence of architectural styles from three cultures: the *charbagh* gardens (i.e., divided into four sections) and the large arched doorways are of Persian inspiration; Arabic calligraphy from the Qur'an and intricate geometric patterns



Fig. 3.43. The Taj Mahal at Agra

adorn the walls; Indian architecture added *chhatris*, lotus flower designs, and marble screens with detailed cutout patterns. The walls feature delicate inlay work where craftsmen embedded colourful semi-precious stones into the marble to create floral designs. The white marble appears to change colours as the sunlight shifts through the day.



Fig. 3.44. A detail of the upper floor; note the arch, the inlaid marble floral motifs and the calligraphy on both sides.



Fig. 3.45. The tombs of Mumtaz (in the centre) and Shah Jahan (on the left)



DON'T MISS OUT

In the 1970s, the effect of air pollution on the monument began to be noticed. It was caused by local industries using coal and other fossil fuels, which left a yellowish tinge on the marble. Following the recommendations of an expert committee and a PIL in the Supreme Court, a ban was imposed in the mid-1990s to prevent industrial pollution in the area.

TRADITIONAL HOUSES



Fig. 3.46. The inside of a Shekhawati haveli; notice the arches and extensive decorations.

The design and architecture of houses in India have been as varied as the geography. Many have developed distinct features that stand out. A general design commonly found in traditional houses for the richer classes, both in urban and rural contexts, is based on a central courtyard with the rooms organised around it, whether over one or several storeys. Some archaeologists have remarked that such a design was already in use in some of the larger Harappan houses some 4,500 years ago.

LET'S EXPLORE

What could be the advantages of the above design? (Hint: Think in terms of privacy, convenience, rainfall and cooling.)

Havelis (traditional mansions) in Rajasthan's Shekhawati region have a central courtyard and elaborate decorations, including intricate painted frescoes (Fig. 3.46). Those were the homes of the region's nobility and rich merchant class. Partly because they are difficult to maintain nowadays, or are too large for today's families, many havelis have been converted into hotels or museums.



Fig. 3.47. The central courtyard of a Chettinadu house; notice the woodwork, including the decorated pillars.

The **Chettinadu houses** of Tamil Nadu (Fig. 3.47) belong to a community of merchants who traded in rice, spices and gems with Southeast Asia. Materials for the construction were sourced from several parts of the world, including teakwood from Burma and marble from Italy; craftsmen from all over India worked on the frescoes and other artistic elements. As with havelis, some of these houses are almost like palaces. Their artistry apart, they are known for being well adapted to the local climate and environment. The central courtyard served as a place for rituals and community gatherings, as well as for sun-drying *pāpads* and chillies.

CHURCHES IN INDIA



Fig. 3.48. The iconic St. Philomena's Cathedral in Mysuru was built in the Gothic style during the colonial period, with the then Maharaja of Mysore, Krishnarajendra Wadiyar, laying the foundation stone.

As we saw in the chapter 'India, a Home to Many', some Christian communities have been living in India for many centuries. According to tradition, the first churches were built in the coastal areas of Kerala. Over time, different types of churches were built, sometimes imitating classic European styles (Fig. 3.48), at other times (especially in Kerala) incorporating local architectural traditions (Figs. 3.49 to 3.51).



Fig. 3.49. The St. Thomas Orthodox church at Mulanthuruthy near Kochi, Kerala, with a stambha (flag post) in front, a feature borrowed from temple architecture.



Fig. 3.50. The Kalloopara church in Travancore, rebuilt in the 18th century, with a sloped tiled roof typical of Kerala architecture.



Fig. 3.51. The interior of the Kalloopara church with oil lamps and a traditional wooden roof.

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE



Fig. 3.52. A general view of the Madras High Court, completed in 1892. The red sandstone facade features Islamic arches and intricate screens alongside carvings and pillars in Hindu temple style.



Fig. 3.53. A close-up of some of its domes and towers.



Fig. 3.54. The imposing Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata—now a museum. Note the central arch and dome, the balconies and the chhatrīs.

Indo-Saracenic architecture is a distinctive colonial style that flourished in India during the British Raj (mid-19th to early 20th century). It blended Islamic, Hindu, and Gothic elements, featuring domes, pointed arches, minarets, and intricate decorative patterns inspired by Mughal and Rajput traditions (Figs. 3.52 to 3.54).

Before we move on ...

- India's architectural heritage is among the richest and most diverse in the world. Our selection here necessarily leaves out thousands of astonishing monuments of diverse styles.
- There is much thought and spirituality behind those bricks and stones. Classical Buddhist, Jain and Hindu architectures seek to connect the human and the cosmic, or the human and the divine; they aim at expressing beauty and order. And as with Islamic architecture, they involve advanced construction techniques.
- Anyone travelling through India and visiting some of the lesser-known monuments will notice that many are in a state of neglect. Preserving this heritage is indeed very challenging: how to adequately conserve India's thousands of monuments, many of them centuries-old? Government



bodies are theoretically responsible for this huge task, but in practice, much will be lost unless citizens feel equally responsible and, to begin with, learn to appreciate and admire this labour of our ancestors. If you revisit our Constitution's 'Fundamental Duties', you will now understand the wisdom of one of them: "... to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture".

Questions and activities

1. In Fig. 3.5, calculate the full width of the house; compare with the length of your classroom. How many staircases can you make out? If the house owners lived upstairs, what might the rooms downstairs be used for?
2. Form groups of four or five students and imagine you are artisans with just simple tools. Looking at Fig. 3.8, how would you go about building a dome of bricks? Looking at Fig. 3.12, how would you carve such a ceiling? Discuss and compare the different groups' conclusions.
3. Why should there be so many stairways in Fig. 3.15? And in Fig. 3.17?
4. Which pillars are easier to sculpt in your opinion—those in Fig. 3.25 or 3.27? Justify your answer.
5. What are some common features across the different types of temples you have visited in this chapter? What are some of the differences?
6. In the houses shown in Fig. 3.46 and 3.47, the central courtyard will receive a lot of water during rains. Will this not flood the house?
7. If you had to create a Pan-India Architecture Museum, which ten monuments would you select to represent India's diversity and why?
8. Choose an ancient monument in your region. Identify what type of architecture it belongs to and the markers you used to classify it.
9. Different groups in the class take up examples of different types of architecture in your region. Prepare a small exhibition with brief descriptions. (*Hints: Use different sources to get more information. Request your teacher to invite a scholar or expert from your region to interact with you.*)
10. Highlight the biggest threats to our architectural heritage today and discuss how can we protect it.

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