CHAPTER 5

India, That Is Bharat

In India at a very early time the spiritual and cultural unity was made complete and became the very stuff of the life of all this great surge of humanity between the Himalayas and the two seas.

— Sri Aurobindo

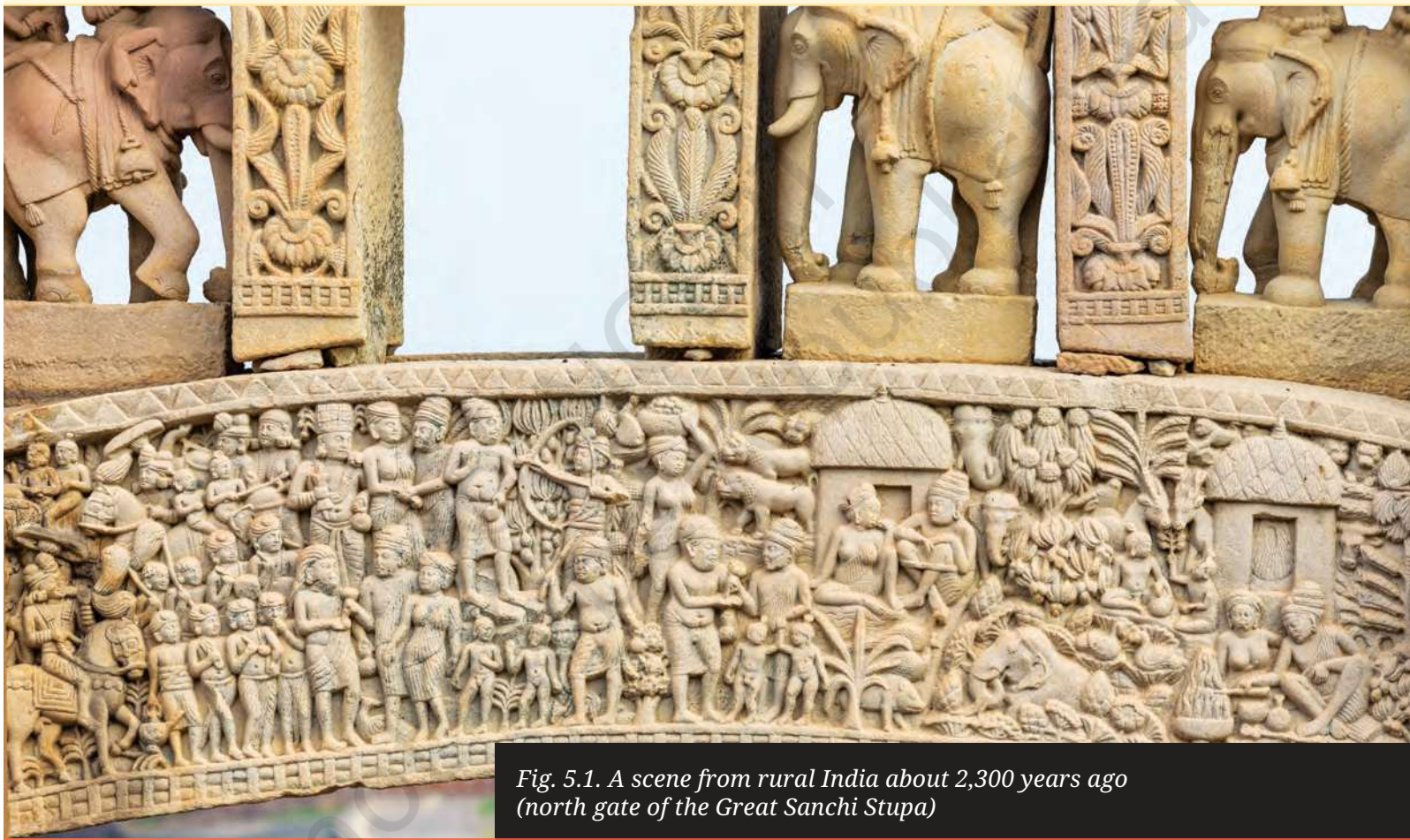


Fig. 5.1. A scene from rural India about 2,300 years ago (north gate of the Great Sanchi Stupa)

The Big Questions

1. *How do we define India?*
2. *What were the ancient names for India?*

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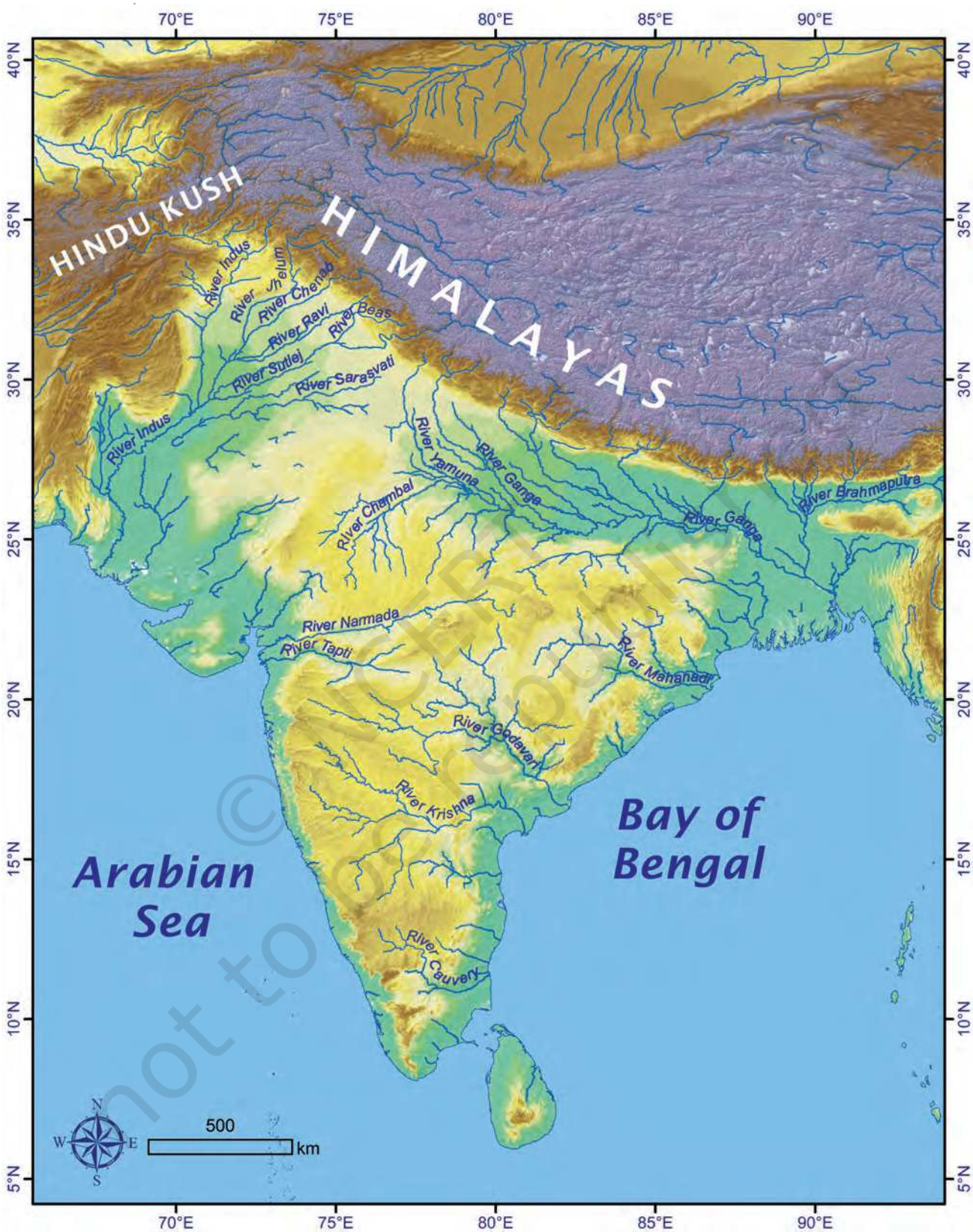


Fig. 5.2. A physical map of the Indian Subcontinent, with some of its rivers.

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Today, the India we know is a modern nation, with defined borders, defined states and a known population. However, it was very different 500 years ago, 2,000 years ago or even 5,000 years ago. This region of the world, which we often call the 'Indian Subcontinent', has had many different names and shifting boundaries. We can learn about India's past and evolution from many different sources. Let us explore.

THINK ABOUT IT

Consider the physical map of the Indian Subcontinent at the start of the chapter. What are its natural boundaries that you can make out?

In the course of history, India has been called by many names — both by its **inhabitants** and by visitors from outside. These names come to us from ancient texts, accounts of travellers and pilgrims, and inscriptions.

Inhabitants: People who live in a particular place.

How Indians Named India

The Ṛig Veda is India's most ancient text; as we will see in Chapter 7, it is several thousand years old. It gives the northwest region of the Subcontinent the name 'Sapta Sindhava', that is, the 'land of the seven rivers'. The word 'Sindhava' comes from 'Sindhu', which refers to the Indus River, or at times to a river in general.

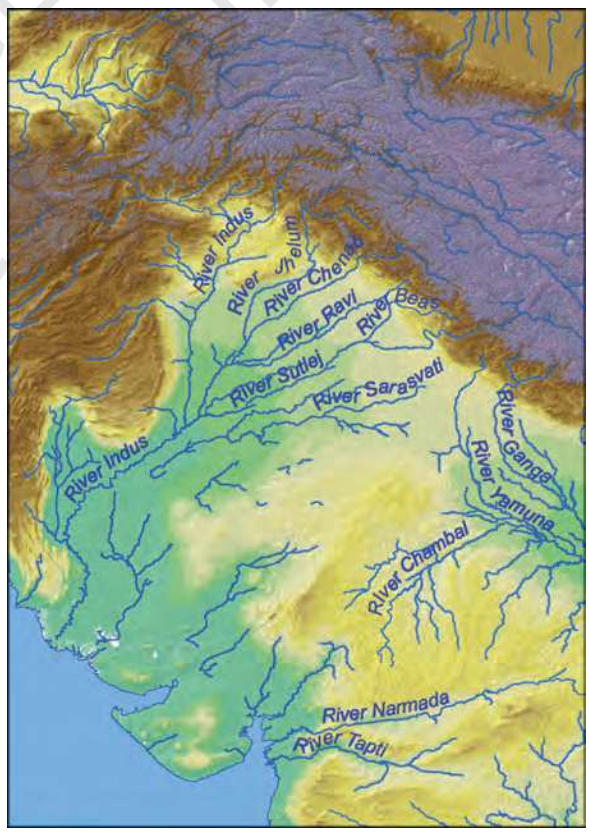


Fig. 5.3. The northwest region of the Indian Subcontinent

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Moving on in time, we see names for other parts of India appear in the literature. The Mahābhārata is one of India's most famous texts (we read about it in the theme 'Our Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions'). Interestingly, it lists many regions, such as Kāshmīra (more or less today's Kashmir), Kurukṣhetra (parts of Haryana today), Vanga (parts of Bengal), Prāgjyotiṣha (roughly today's Assam), Kaccha (today's Kutch), Kerala (more or less today's Kerala), and so on.

LET'S EXPLORE



Do you recognise the names of any regions given in the map (Fig. 5.4) on page 79? List the ones that you have heard of.

But when do we come across a name for the entire Indian Subcontinent? Because ancient Indian texts are difficult to date, this is not an easy question to answer. The Mahābhārata uses the terms 'Bhāratavarṣha' and 'Jambudvīpa', and scholars generally agree that this long poem was written from a few centuries BCE onward.

The first term, 'Bhāratavarṣha', clearly extends to the entire Subcontinent, and the text includes the names of numerous rivers and peoples. 'Bhāratavarṣha' means 'the country of the Bharatas'. 'Bharata' is a name that first appears in the Ṛig Veda, where it refers to one of the main Vedic groups of people. In later literature, several kings named 'Bharata' are mentioned.

The second term, 'Jambudvīpa', means 'the island of the fruit of the jamun tree'. This is indeed a common tree native to India, also called 'jambul tree', 'Malabar plum tree', etc. 'Jambudvīpa' came to mean the Indian Subcontinent.

In fact, we get a good clue from an Indian emperor — his name is Aśhoka and we will meet him later; for now, we can take his date to be about 250 BCE. As we will see, he left us many inscriptions. In one of them, he used the same

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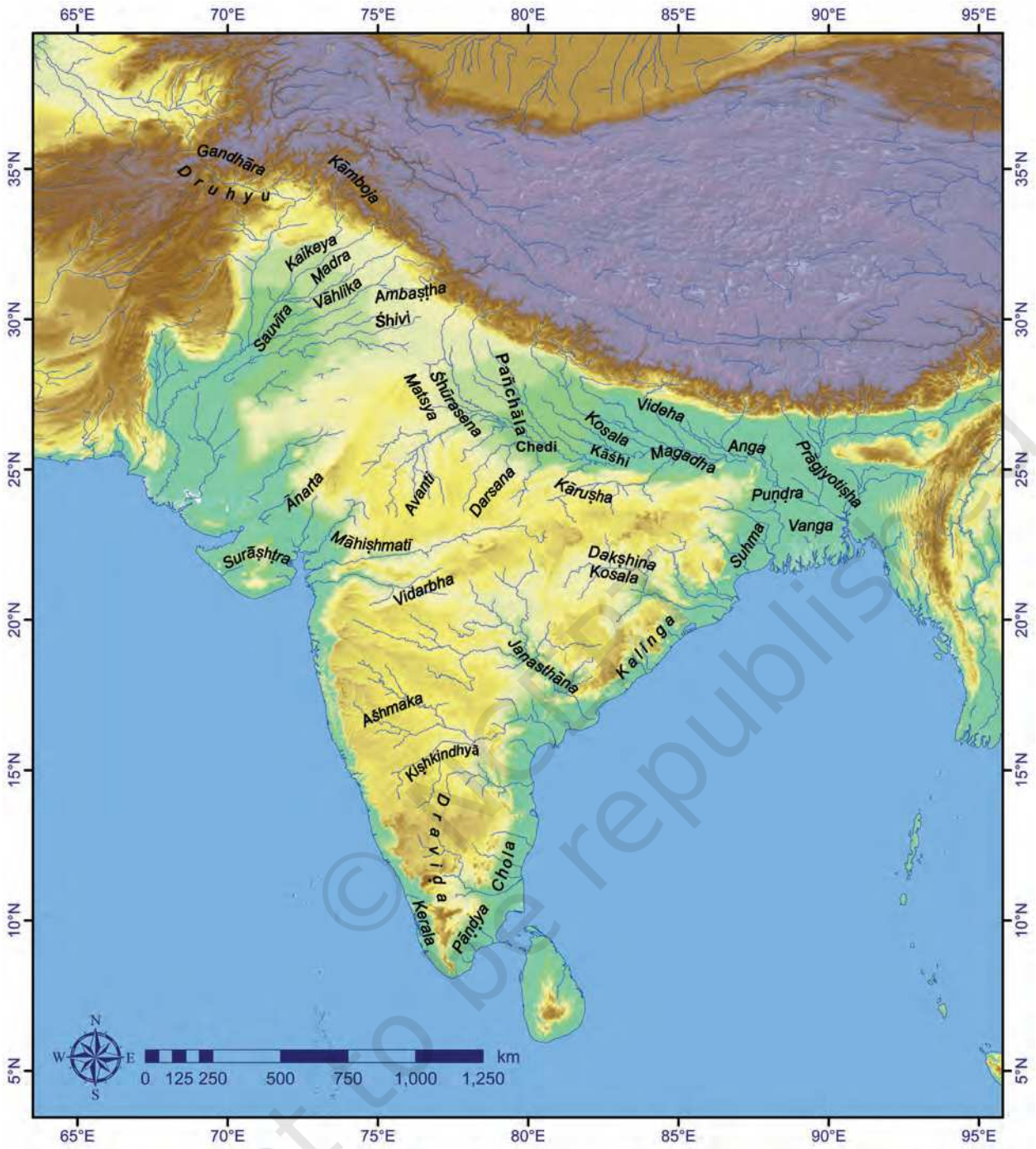


Fig. 5.4. Map of a few regions listed in the Mahābhārata. (Many of them are also mentioned in the text as kingdoms.) You do not need to remember those regions, but notice how they cover the entire geography of the Subcontinent.

name 'Jambudvīpa' to describe the whole of India, which at the time included what is today Bangladesh, Pakistan, as well as parts of Afghanistan.

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A few centuries later, 'Bhārata' became the name generally used for the Indian Subcontinent. For instance, in an ancient text called the *Viṣhṇu Purāṇa*, we read:

> *uttaram yat samudrasya himādreścaiva dakṣiṇam varṣam tad bhāratam nāma ...*
> "The country that lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bhārata."

This name, 'Bhārata' remains in use even today. In north India, it is generally written as 'Bharat', while in south India, it is often 'Bharatam'.



THINK ABOUT IT

Have you identified the 'snowy mountains'? Do you think this brief description of Bhārata is correct?

It is interesting to note that different parts of the country adopted a similar definition for India. For instance, a poem of ancient Tamil literature, from about 2,000 years ago, praises a king whose name is known "from [Cape] Kumari in the south, from the great mountain in the north, from the oceans on the east and on the west..." You can now recognise 'the great mountain in the north', and it should not be difficult to identify 'Cape Kumari'. It looks like ancient Indians knew their geography well!

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DON'T MISS OUT

The Indian **Constitution**, which was first written in English, uses the phrase 'India, that is Bharat' right at the beginning. Similarly, the Hindi version of the Constitution mentions the same as *'Bhārat arthāth India'*.

Constitution:
A document that spells out the basic principles and laws of a nation. The Indian Constitution, which will be studied in Grade 7, came into force in 1950.

LET'S EXPLORE

In this reproduction of the first page of the original Constitution of India in Fig. 5.5 (page 82), can you make out the phrase 'India, that is Bharat'?

How Foreigners Named India

The first foreigners to mention India were the Persians, the ancient inhabitants of Iran. In the 6th century BCE, a Persian emperor launched a military campaign and gained control of the region of the Indus River, which, as we saw, was earlier called 'Sindhu'. So, it is no surprise that in their earliest records and stone inscriptions, the Persians referred to India as 'Hind', 'Hidu' or 'Hindu', which are adaptations in their language of 'Sindhu'. (Note that in ancient Persian, 'Hindu' is a purely geographical term; it does not refer here to the Hindu religion.)

Based on these Persian sources, the ancient Greeks named the region 'Indoi' or 'Indike'. They dropped the initial letter 'h' of 'Hindu' because this letter did not exist in their Greek language.

Sindhu → Hindhu → Indoi/Indike

The ancient Chinese also interacted with India. In several texts, they refer to India as 'Yintu' or 'Yindu'. This word also originally comes from 'Sindhu', in the following manner:

Sindhu → Hindhu → Indu → Yindu

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Part I

The Union and its Territory

Name and territory of the Union.

1. (1) India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.

(2) The States and the territories thereof shall be the States and their territories specified in Parts A, B and C of the First Schedule.

(3) The territory of India shall comprise—

(a) the territories of the States;

(b) the territories specified in Part D of the First Schedule; and

(c) such other territories as may be acquired.

Admission or establishment of new States.

2. Parliament may by law admit into the Union, or establish, new States on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit.

Formation of new States and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing States.

3. Parliament may by law—

(a) form a new State by separation of territory from any State or by uniting two or more States or parts of States or by uniting any territory to a part of any State;

(b) increase the area of any State;

(c) diminish the area of any State;

(d) alter the boundaries of any State;

(e) alter the name of any State:

Provided that no Bill for the purpose shall be introduced in either House of Parliament except on the recommendation of the President and unless, where the proposal contained in the Bill affects

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Fig. 5.5. First page of the Constitution of India (source: Reprint of the original Constitution of India, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, 2000)

DON'T MISS OUT

Xuanzang (formerly spelt Hiuen Tsang, Hsuan Tsang, etc.) travelled from China to India in the 7th century CE. He visited many parts of India, met scholars, collected Buddhist texts, and returned to China after 17 years. There, he translated the manuscripts he took back with him from Sanskrit into Chinese. Several other Chinese scholars visited India over the centuries.



Another Chinese word, also derived from 'Sindhu', was 'Tianzhu'; but this word could also be understood as 'heavenly master'. This reflects the respect the ancient Chinese had for India as the land of the Buddha.

You are probably quite familiar with a more recent term, 'Hindustān', but you may not know that it was first used in a Persian inscription some 1,800 years ago! Later on, this became the term used by most invaders of India to describe the Indian Subcontinent.

LET'S EXPLORE

Can you complete this table of the many names of India?

Persian	
Greek	
Latin	India
Chinese	
Arabic & Persian	
English	India
French	Inde

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Before we move on ...

- India is an ancient land, which has had many names in the course of its history.
- The names given by the ancient inhabitants of India include 'Jambudvīpa' and 'Bhārata'. The latter became widespread in time and is the name of India in most Indian languages.
- Foreign visitors to, or invaders of, India mostly adopted names derived from the Sindhu or Indus River; this resulted in names like 'Hindu', 'Indoi', and eventually 'India'.

Questions, activities and projects

1. Discuss what could be the meaning of the quotation at the start of the chapter.
2. True or false?
   - The Ṛig Veda describes the entire geography of India.
   - The *Viṣhṇu Purāṇa* describes the entire Subcontinent.
   - In Aśhoka's time, 'Jambudvīpa' included what is today India, parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.
   - The Mahābhārata lists many regions, including Kashmir, Kutch, and Kerala.
   - The term 'Hindustān' first appeared in a Greek inscription more than 2,000 years ago.
   - In ancient Persian, the word 'Hindu' refers to the Hindu religion.
   - 'Bhārata' is a name given to India by foreign travellers.
3. If you were born some 2,000 years ago and had the chance to name our country, what name or names might you have chosen, and why? Use your imagination!
4. Why did people travel to India from various parts of the world in ancient times? What could be their motivations in undertaking such long journeys? (*Hint: There could be at least four or five motivations*)

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