

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Legacies
Subject: Vishal Ramani & Shri Krupa Dance Foundation
Disciplines: Dance & Music

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Vishal Ramani performing Bharata Natyam,
a North Indian traditional dance form.
Still image from SPARK story, May 2004.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Legacies

SUBJECT

Shri Krupa Dance Company

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Dance, Music & Social Studies

OBJECTIVE

To introduce educators to the art of Bharata Natyam Indian dance through the work of Vishal Ramani and the Shri Krupa Dance Foundation, and to recognize and appreciate the growing presence of Indian culture in the Bay Area.

STORY SYNOPSIS



Dancer, teacher and choreographer Vishal Ramani discusses her 30 years in the Bay Area developing the Shri Krupa Dance Foundation, a non-profit center that offers daily classes on the complex tradition of Bharata Natyam. We follow Ramani as she teaches her classes, grooms her students to be confident and disciplined human beings, and brings together the larger Indian community through her activities at the center and a weekly television show.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Individual and group research
Individual and group exercises
Written research materials
Group discussions

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the Indian dance tradition of Bharata Natyam
- To illustrate the presence and role of traditional arts within the Bay Area Indian community
- To explore traditional dance as a medium for self-expression
- To provide a positive example of a traditional artist making a career for herself in the face of life changes

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- SPARK story “Shri Krupa” about Bharata Natyam dancer and teacher Vishal Ramani on DVD or VHS and appropriate player
- Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sounds card, printer
- Cassette player, CD player, or computer audio program

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Different examples of traditional Bharata Natyam dance (see *Resource* section)
- Access to the Internet

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

- Intrapersonal - awareness of one’s own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
- Visual-Spatial - the ability to manipulate and create mental images to solve problems
- Bodily-Kinesthetic - the ability to use one’s mind to control one’s bodily movements
- Logical-Mathematical - the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on
Multiple Intelligences at
www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

In the SPARK story “Shri Krupa,” dancer and teacher Vishal Ramani details how she came to the United States from India 30 years ago and has since fostered a creative environment in which Indian traditions have taken root in the Silicon Valley. Ramani is the founder of Shri Krupa, a dance foundation, company, and educational center where students go to learn the traditional art form of Bharata Natyam 7 days a week, year-round. The center is the first of its kind in the Bay Area.

Born in India, Vishal Ramani was a child prodigy. At 7 years of age, she made her dance debut, or “*arangetram*,” in Bombay, performing the dance art of Bharata Natyam. However, her dream of becoming a professional dancer in India ended when she came to the United States with her husband in 1974, at that time finding only a small Indian community in the Bay Area. Ramani soon found a new passion – being a teacher. Today, after teaching for more than 30 years Ramani runs a successful performance dance studio and foundation that is an important cultural center for one of the largest (and fastest growing) Indian communities in the country.



Vishal Ramani works with students in the South Bay on various movements of Bharata Natyam, one of India’s oldest classical dance forms.

Still image from SPARK story, May 2004.

Dating back centuries, Bharata Natyam is the oldest dance form in India. The dance is a storytelling art form based on Hindu mythology and executed through a complex series of body gestures, facial expressions, music and rhythmic movement. Students learn how to contact the earth with their bare feet and use 28 single-handed gestures, 24 double-handed gestures, and many more body and facial expressions to portray virtually any dramatic event and emotion.

Of Ramani’s guiding principles as a teacher, the two most important are to instill dedication and devotion in her students. These two elements, she says are the most significant in order to master any great art form. However, she emphasizes that Indian dance teaches about much more than just dance. Movement, confidence, charisma and poise as well as an entire value system are embedded within the process of learning Bharata Natyam, and students carry these skills with them for a lifetime, regardless of what career they pursue.

Ramani’s success as a teacher is seen through her students, one of which at 8 years of age has traveled back to India to perform and received much acclaim for her skill, especially as a student learning the tradition outside of India.

In addition to her skill as a teacher, Ramani has been co-hosting a weekly local television show that presents a wide range of subjects of local interest to the local Indian community, including the forms of music and dance being practiced locally by students and other community members. The show is one more indication of how much the community has grown and how cultural vibrant it is. And, as the community grows, Ramani’s students are being called upon to perform for weekly events and religious holidays and at the Hindu temples.

Ramani often feels like a cultural ambassador, sharing her knowledge and experience and preserving the traditions of her culture by passing them on to thousands of young students. Her work has inspired them to succeed not just as dancers but as doctors and engineers, and has helped to bring together many people from all over India in the rapidly growing community.

THE BIG PICTURE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BHARATA NATYAM

Bharata Natyam is the oldest of the South Indian classical dances, dating back as far as 2000 years. It is a solo dance, and like most classical Indian dance, devotional in nature, originally performed in the Hindu temples of the Tamil Nadu in Southern India.

Bharata Natyam is a highly stylized dance that tells different stories and themes of love and devotion from Hindu mythology, such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and is expressed through three different elements: *nritya*, or dance of pure aesthetic value, utilizes a vocabulary of codified steps to create complex rhythmic patterns; *nritya*, or expressive dance, utilizes the language of gesture, called *abhinaya*, through which moods and emotions are expressed; and *natya*, or narrative dance that expresses a dramatic element. The name can be broken down like this: BHAVA (meaning expression) + RAGA (melody or music) + TALA (rhythm) + NATYAM (dance) = Bharata Natyam

Traditionally, a Bharata Natyam performance follows a particular sequence of seven items: *alarippu*, *jatisvaram*, *sabda*, *varnam*, *padam*, *tillana* and a concluding *sloka*.

Alarippu – An invocation to the god Ganesh, who removes obstacles, that helps prepare the dancer and the audience for the performance.

Jatisvaram – Emphasizes rhythm, consisting of *nritya*.

Sabda – Begins with *nritya*, but *nritya* is introduced as the dancer responds to the content of the song.

Varnam – The most complicated part of the performance, *varnam* alternates between *nritya* and *nritya*, featuring rhythm, melody, mood and movement.

Padam – A slightly slower dance, interpretative of the poetry being spoken, allowing for *abhinaya* to be expressed.

Tillana – A dance of joy, featuring sculpture-like poses and movements.

Sloka – A recitation of a short Sanskrit verse, featuring *abhinaya* to demonstrate the meaning of the words.



Vishal Ramani coaches a student in correct form during class. Still image from SPARK story, April/May 2004.

Like most other classical art forms in India, Bharata Natyam has its origins in the manuscript called the *Natya Shastra* written by Bharata Muni between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D., before the Ramayana was written. This treatise was the first document that described in detail the art of stagecraft including music and dance. It served as a means for codifying scales, ornaments, instruments, techniques and styles, as well as their relationship to expression and devotion to the Hindu gods. Thus, dance became a medium for common man to connect with the spiritual world.

Initially, Bharata Natyam was performed only in temples, representing a visual embodiment of devotional music. Later it moved into the courts of kings but only in the 1800's did it experience a major change in its presentation, to date its most modern form. The innovations are attributed to four brothers, known today as the Tanjore Quartet, who organized the basic dance movements of *nritya* into a series of lessons, creating a choreographed sequence of movements that corresponded with the rhythmic contour and shape of the music. They also created new musical compositions that are still performed today.

However, Bharata Natyam almost fell into oblivion in the 19th century and only in the last hundred years has experienced a revitalization credited to dancer and scholar Rukmini Devi Arundale, who kept its basic structure and stylistics but designed it to be a performance medium for the stage.

Today, there are many different regional styles of Bharata Natyam and teachers such as Guru Vishal Ramani are the tradition-bearers who pass them on.

As the Founder-Director of the Shri Krupa Dance Foundation of San Jose, Ramani has taught the Bharata Natyam art form since 1977. Ramani received rigorous training in the Thanjavur style of Bharatha Natyam from Guru Mahalingam Pillai and Guru Govinda Raj Pillai of Shri Raja Rajeshwari Bharata Natya Kala Mandir of Bombay.

Like those before her, Ramani is dedicated to preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of India. She continues to respect the traditions of the dance but is able to keep it alive through her artistic interpretations and innovative contributions in the field of dance, music and drama.

RESOURCES – TEXTS

Bhagyalekshmy, Dr.S. Approach To Bharatanatyam. (2nd Edition), 1998.

Higgins, Jon Borthwick. The Music of Bharatanatyam (The AIIS-ARCE Series on Ethnomusicology). Asia Publishing House, 1994.

Kothari, Sunil. Bharata Natyam Marg Publications; 2nd Edition, 2001.

Sadasivan, Dr. K. Devadasi System in Medieval Tamil Nadu. , 1993. – This study covers the historical and cultural aspects of the Devadasi system (300 BC to 1800 AD) from its first development in Tamil Nadu, India.

Suresh, Vidya Bhavani. What is Bharatanatyam? Chennai, Skanda Publications, 2002. From “Demystifying Fine Arts” Volume-11

The following books are available from:
Vedams eBooks (P) Limited, Vardhaman Charve Plaza IV, Building # 9, K.P Block, Pitampura,

New Delhi 110 088, India, Fax: 91-11-27310613

E-mail: vedams@vedamsbooks.com

Rao, U.S. Krishna. A Dictionary of Bharata Natya. Reprint. New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1998. ISBN 81-250-1456-X.

Sahai, Krishna. The Story of a Dance : Bharata Natyam New Delhi, Indialog Publications, 2003. ISBN 81-87981-51-2.

Venkateswaran, Chhaya (compiler). Handbook for Beginners on Bharatha Natyam (Basic Moodhras and Adavos). Ambernath, Suneet Cultural Research Centre, 2002.

RESOURCES – AUDIO & VIDEO

The Art of Bharata Natyam, Indian Classical Dance CD-Rom. Sunil Kothari. Includes a historical perspective, photos, dance notation and more. Purchase through: <http://www.matchless-gifts.com>

Bharathanatyam Essence and Essentials. - CD ROM. Adavus, Mudras, Navarasas and more. <http://swathigroup.com/shopping/>

Kanchana Productions hosts a website that sells a variety of instructional dance videos on Bharata Natyam as well Indian movies. <http://www.ranidevi.com/dancetapes.htm>

Karnatic Music Book Center – The Center has everything one could want regarding Karnatic music (Indian Classical Music). Karnatic Music Book Center, 14 Sripuram First Street, Madras 600014 .

Madurai R. Muralidaran has several volumes of Karnatic music recordings called Salangai Nadam. Available through the Shri Krupa Dance Foundation: <http://www.shrikrupa.org>

Kalavardhini Music (Nrthopasana) series from Revathi Enterprises is an excellent audio resource including all types of dances.

Recommended Artists:

Sudharani Raghupathi - The sounds of Bharatanatyam Krishnaveni

MLVasantakumari - [Bharatanatyam Songs](#),
Bharatkalanjali – Dhananjayans [Kameshwaran](#),
[Music for Bharatanatyam](#)
Guru Narmada/Naadanta Rajarathnam
Pillai/Natya Geetamritham
The Bombay Sisters

SPARK – See the SPARK Educator Guide on master North Indian classical musician Ali Akbar Khan at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/aliakbarkh.jsp>, including an explanation of the form of Indian (Karnatic) music as well as resources.

South Asian Women’s Forum (The) – A Web site with a host of information on India and resources for Indian traditional and classical music – <http://www.sawf.org>

RESOURCES – INTERNET

Art India Website – A performing artists’ network with a listing of teachers, institutions and performers worldwide of all different kinds of classical Indian dance and music, including Bharata Natyam. Links to other informational websites.
<http://www.artindia.net/bharata.html>

Eknezar – National Indian network with specific information on Bay Area Indian communities, including a community calendar of Indian cultural events, articles, and more. - <http://bayarea.eknazar.com/Events/events.shtml?5182>

India4World– An informational Web site about India with a section on culture and dance, including Bharata Natyam. - <http://www.india4world.com/indian-culture/indian-dance/BHARATANATYAM1.shtml>

Things Indian – A Web site that contains a listing of all the teaching studios for Indian dance in the Bay Area - <http://www.thingsindian.com/dance.htm>

Vedams Books – An internet bookstore listing a number of books on Bharata Natyam as well as many other Indian texts.
<https://www.vedamsbooks.com/bharatanatyam.htm>

Web India 123 – General information Web site on all things Indian, with a section on classical dance

including Bharata Natyam and interesting links to performers and articles - <http://www.webindia123.com/dances/bharatanatyam/>

Music India - This site is rather helpful to listen to typical Bharatanatyam repertoire items like: Alarippu Jathiswaram Varnam Padams Thillana - <http://www.musicindiaonline.com/music/l/0X01050203>

BAY AREA OPPORTUNITIES

Ashkenaz – A music venue in Berkeley with ongoing classes for children, including Bharata Natyam.
http://www.ashkenaz.com/html/about_programs.html

Lasya Dance Company – A Cupertino based non-profit teaching Bharata Natyam under Guru Vidhya Subramanian.
- <http://www.lasya.org/index.html>

ODC Theater – San Francisco-based theatre hosting a variety of performing arts experiences, including traditional Indian music and dance.
<http://www.odcdance.org>

San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival & People Like Me - Produced by World Arts West, the annual festival celebrate diverse cultural traditions from all over the world, featuring Bay Area groups. – <http://www.worldartswest.org>

Shri Krupa Dance Foundation – A non-profit foundation, offering daily classes and events, preserving the tradition of Bharata Natyam. Their website has information on the history of the company and its founder, Guru Vishal Ramani, plus a listing of dance classes and upcoming events. – <http://www.shrikrupa.org>

Kalaikoil (Trivalley School of Dance & Arts of India) in Dublin, CA offers a summer dance camp as well as year-round classes at studios in Dublin and in Livermore in the following: Hindu Vedic Chanting with Yejur Veda Pandit Ravichandran, Natya Shastra with Smt Maragatham Sundaresan (summer workshop), Carnatic Vocals with Smt Vidya Ananth and Smt Kalpagam Kowshik Yoga with Ms Carol Atkinson as well as classes in Rangoli, Bharatanatyam, folk dances, and other traditional arts of India. Classes are also periodically held in Bhangra, Dhol, and Tabla. Contact: swethadixit@comcast.net

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Abhinaya

In Bharata Natyam, a vocabulary of gestures that express moods and emotions

Aesthetic treatise

A formal account or narrative based on the philosophy behind beauty and fine arts, in this case of the Bharata Natyam

Arangetram

A graduation performance or debut

Bharata Natyam

An ancient storytelling art form of dance and music from India

Charisma

A quality or power attributed to individuals who have a special ability to charm others, or who have a divinely inspired gift

Customs

The characteristics and traditions of a particular culture and its people

Devotion

An act of religious observance or prayer, or the secular act of complete and ardent attachment, commitment and affection

Discipline

Dedicated training with the goal of achieving controlled behavior, mental or physical skills, or a strong character

Foster

To nurture or promote the development or growth of something or someone

Gestures

A motion or movement of the body or its limbs as an expression of a thought, emotion, or event

Grammar

The basic principles of an area of knowledge, i.e., language grammar or the grammar of music

Hinduism

A religion, philosophy, and cultural practice native to India, characterized by a belief in reincarnation and a supreme being of many forms and natures; also characterized by the view that opposing theories are aspects of one eternal truth, and by a desire for liberation from earthly evils.

Immigrant

Someone who leaves their country of origin to settle and live permanently in another

Mother-land

The country of birth of any given person

Mythological characters

Fabulous or imaginary deities, humans, ancestors and heroes within the origin stories and history of a people

Natya

Meaning a narrative dance that expresses a dramatic element

Nritta

Means a dance of pure aesthetic value, utilizing a vocabulary of codified steps to create complex rhythmic patterns

Nritya

Means expressive dance, utilizing the language of gesture, called *abhinaya*, through which moods and emotions are expressed

Philosophy

A system of values by which one lives, or the love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means and moral self-discipline

Poise

The way a person carries themselves or the quality of having composure

Prodigy

Someone who is proficient at an art form from an early age

Value system

The set of principles or standards by which each individual or culture uses to set a basis for moral or behavioral conduct.

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Social Function of Dance

Using the internet or your local library as a resource, challenge students to write an historical analysis on the history of Bharata Natyam dance. Consider its origins and original functions, beginning with the sacred temple dances and later the more secular royal courts, and today the main stage. Include the idea of how Bharata Natyam was considered to be a means for one to reach divinity, and also served to express important themes and morals through Hindu mythology.

Discussion of World Traditions

In the SPARK story, Vishal Ramani states that her students realize that Indian art forms are not that different from other world traditions – they are all forms of cultural expression. Divide students into three or four different groups and assign each group a different world culture to research. One could be South Indian culture or Bharata Natyam or Kathak dance in particular. Another could be on Polynesia, or Thai or Mexican or a Native American people.

Challenge students to look at the cultural traditions of the people, their music, dance, religions, storytelling traditions, regalia, languages and food. Each group then presents its findings to the rest of the class. Discuss the similarities and differences as a class. Even though the means of expression may be completely different, how are they related? Which are the sacred verses secular traditions? When are certain dances or music played? What meaning lies behind the traditions and what mythology or value systems are expressed through the traditions? Do some cultures share the same stories or mythologies?

In case in which the dance and music are intertwined, consider the dance and how it relates to the music? How does the structure of the music inform the movements?

RELATED STANDARDS

DANCE

Grade 4

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

5.4 Analyze the choreographic process and its relation to the writing process (e.g., brainstorming, exploring and developing ideas, putting ideas into a form, sequencing)

Grade 8

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Explain the variety of roles dance plays among different socioeconomic groups in selected countries (e.g., royalty and peasants).

Grade 9-12 Proficient

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Describe ways in which folk/traditional, social, and theatrical dances reflect their specific cultural context.

Grade 9-12 Advanced

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Explain how dancers and choreographers reflect roles, work, and values in selected cultures, countries and historical periods.

RELATED STANDARDS

MUSIC

Grade 6

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Listen to and describe the role of music in ancient civilizations (e.g., Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, Indian, and Roman).

Grades 9-12 Proficient

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.6 Analyze the use of form in a varied repertoire of music representing diverse genres, styles, and cultures.

RELATED STANDARDS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Grade 6

6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of India.

Create Your Own Dance

Bharata Natyam is a dance that, as Shri Krupa founder and guru Vishal Ramani says, can express virtually any dramatic event. In the SPARK story viewers see how Bharata Natyam has very specific hand gestures, almost like sign language, as well as facial expressions and movements that represent actions or emotions. Using the story or other video or Internet resources as a guide, challenge students to recreate some of the Bharata Natyam gestures. These might include, picking up a baby, rocking the baby to sleep, as well as gestures for emotions such as anger, pride, and fear.

Have students select a story they would like to turn into a dramatic dance piece. This could be anything from a nursery rhyme to traditional folk tale. Students should read through the story and define the major events that take place. Then have them create tableaux using specific gestures or movements that they create. They can use some of the gestures seen in the SPARK story and if possible other movements from the Bharata Natyam tradition. Music would be an essential feature of the dance as well, so have them think about the kind of music they would expect to hear for the different parts of the story. See if you can use some music from the South Indian Karnatic tradition, as many different emotions, rhythms and tempos are represented in the music. Present to the rest of the class.

Another possibility is to have each student prepare a short 3-minute piece that describes a day in their life. This could be directly autobiographical or made up. First have students write their "scripts" and develop common gestures to indicate emotions. Leave a few things open to the individual to create that might be a specific representation of something that happened to them that day, and see if the other students can identify those moments. Have each student begin by presenting their dance, then read their experience, and then perform it again.

Bring a traditional artist to your school!

Look through the Young Audiences Program Guide and see which artists might be able to come to your school to perform Bharata Natyam or other traditional dances. Many artists also offer residency programs which take students deeper into a specific cultural tradition.

RELATED STANDARDS

DANCE

Kindergarten

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Build the range and capacity to move in a variety of ways.

Grade 1

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.3 Create a short movement sequence with a beginning, middle and an end.

Grade 2

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.1 Name and perform social and traditional dances from various cultures.

Grade 3

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.3 Explain how a performer's dance skills contribute to communication of ideas and moods when performing a dance. (e.g., focus, strength, coordination).

Grade 5

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.5 Convey a wide range of feeling and expression through gestures, posture, and movement.

Grade 6

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Demonstrate focus, physical control, coordination, and accurate reproduction in performing locomotor and axial movement.

Grade 7

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.5 Use appropriate dance vocabulary to describe everyday gestures and other movements observed in viewing live or recorded dance performances.

RELATED STANDARDS

MUSIC

Grade 4

5.0 CONNECTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

5.2 Integrate several art disciplines (dance, music, theatre, or the visual arts) into a well-organized presentation or

RELATED STANDARDS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Grade 6

6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of India.

Create a Television Story

In the SPARK story, Ramani expresses the fact that music and dance has helped to unify an entire community of Indians, which is partly expressed in the weekly local television broadcast. Have students create a half-hour production celebrating the diversity in the classroom using a hand-held video camera (on a tripod). Design it so that there is a host, a music feature, a dance feature, a story, interviews and a list of upcoming events. To prepare, students interview each other and find out what each of them has to offer, not only from their diverse cultural backgrounds, but also what they may be learning outside of school. It might be piano, clarinet, accordion or violin, or ballet or folk dance, or photography and visual arts. Once the interviews are completed, students can then select a theme for the program and determine what roles each person will play. Rehearse and record.

Advanced Discussion

In a culture without a written language, history and value systems are passed down through oral traditions maintained through storytelling, theatre, music and dance. Read sections of the epic tale Ramayana or the Mahabharata. Explore how the specific deities of the Hindu are expressed through Bharata Natyam and other Indian dance such as Kathak. Additionally, how an entire value system may be embedded in a dance and through devotion and dedication to an art form, one finds inner strength that is applicable to other areas in life.

RELATED STANDARDS

DANCE

Grade 4

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

5.4 Analyze the choreographic process and its relation to the writing process (e.g., brainstorming, exploring and developing ideas, putting ideas into a form, sequencing)

Grade 8

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Explain the variety of roles dance plays among different socioeconomic groups in selected countries (e.g., royalty and peasants).

Grade 9-12 Proficient

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Describe ways in which folk/traditional, social, and theatrical dances reflect their specific cultural context.

Grade 9-12 Advanced

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Explain how dancers and choreographers reflect roles, work, and values in selected cultures, countries and historical periods.

RELATED STANDARDS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Grade 6

6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of India.