

Classical Civilization: India
Chapter 3
EQ: How does Indian civilization progress during its first 2000 year

The Importance of Geography

- Major theme: Isolation
 - India is a “subcontinent”
 - Mountains and other physical landforms ring the subcontinent providing little access via land
- Interaction
 - From the west, either you came through the Khyber Pass in the north or traversed the rough deserts to the south
 - The north and east are ringed by the Himalayas and rugged hills in Myanmar
 - Later interaction came to India via the sea

Early Civilizations that Framed India

- Indus River Valley
- began around 3000-2500 BC
- highly urban culture - Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro
- Well developed cities with high, “skyscraper-like” structures, indoor plumbing
- Origin of cow veneration
- Disappearance under debate
 - Aryans invasions or natural disaster



Early Civilizations that Framed India

- ARYANS
- Between c. 1700-1200 BC Aryans arrive and destroy remnants of Indus Valley culture
- Invaders brought with them Vedic oral tradition which was eventually written in Sanskrit.
- Eventually this becomes the Vedic literature of the Vedic Era, 1200-1000 BC. (Mahabharata, Ramayana, Upanishads)
- Sacred texts, Rig Veda, consists of 1028 sacred hymns dedicated to Aryan gods and composed by various priests, some are religious in nature, some are epic stories of history (basis for Hinduism)
- Early caste system with priests on top found in Vedas

Patterns in Classical India

- By 600 BC, India was beyond its formative stage, with several organized cultures developing
- Unlike China, India did not organize dynasties, instead, several small kingdoms fought for dominance of the subcontinent
- Most areas were subject to constant invasion from the NW (Alexander 327-325 BC)
- Only 2 major empires emerged in India between 300 BC and 500 AD - Mauryan and Gupta

The Mauryan Empire

- Founded in 322 BC by Chandragupta Maurya, a warrior who fought off Alexander's armies and conquered the kingdoms left by him
- Asoka, his grandson, was another great ruler (video clip)



Gupta Empire

Ruled 500 years after Maurya, 320 CE until around 550 CE

- No well known leaders
- India's Golden Age, noted for peace and prosperity
- Developed decimal system and concept of zero
- Had herbal remedies and vaccination
- Buddhism expanded...many temples were built and a major university was established
- However, Gupta rulers promoted Hindu beliefs



Indian Political Institutions

- Despite having kingdoms and empires, India did not develop solid political and cultural institutions like China, nor any real interest in politics like in Greece and Rome
- Reasons include cultural and regional diversity and caste differences
- The caste system (more this week on this) dominated and dictated all aspects of life in India
- Loyalty to caste superseded loyalty to a ruler

RELIGION: Hinduism

- Hinduism is unique in that no central figure founded the religion nor is any figure central to its beliefs
- First real texts explaining Hinduism are the Upanishads which are part of the Vedas
- The Upanishads hold information on basic Hindu beliefs, including belief in a world soul, a universal spirit, the Brahman, and an individual soul, the Atman
- Other principle beliefs include dharma (ethics, sense of duty), karma (actions) and moksha (salvation)
- ALL ACTIONS IN TURN LEAD TO REINCARNATION
 - People reincarnate until they achieve salvation and become one with the Brahman

RELIGION: Buddhism

- Prince Siddhartha Gautama, warrior of the Kshatriya class, was unhappy with the ritualistic nature and caste system in Hinduism
- Set out on a journey of self exploration and physical torment
- Buddha discovered 3 things
 - There is no individual self, no soul (unlike Hinduism)
 - Pain is a part of life
 - Impermanence, nothing stays the same, you do not reincarnate

RELIGION: Buddhism

- The Four Noble Truths
 - Life is pain and suffering
 - The cause of pain and suffering is desire
 - Avoiding desire means avoiding pain
 - The way to end suffering is the 8 Fold Path
- The Eight Fold Path
 - Accept the 4 Noble Truths
 - Right intention (commitment to mental growth)
 - Right speech (no lying, be honest, say nothing wrong)
 - Right action (do no harm)
 - Right livelihood (your work helps others)
 - Right effort (constant self improvement)
 - Right mindfulness (clear conscience)
 - Right concentration (focus)

Economy and Society

- India took advantage of its position (overland and sea) to trade extensively with neighboring societies and even rival China during some periods
- India had superior innovations (Gupta era) in science and steel production
- Despite the importance of trade, agriculture remained the firm base of economy in India
- As for gender, women began to see their rights decrease immensely as civilization developed, though male domination over women was largely theoretic...some women maintained roles of power in certain parts of India
- None-the-less, women would still be arranged for marriage (no choice!) and be subordinate to their husbands, even, to some extremes, being required to DIE when they DIE!
