

# Foundations of Indian Civilization

1500 B.C.E.-300 C.E.



# The Indian Subcontinent

- India has 3 topographical zones: 1.) the northern mountainous zone,
- 2.) the Indus and Ganges Basins, and
- 3.) the peninsula.
- The Vindhya Mountains and the Deccan plateau divide the peninsula from the other two zones.



# Peninsular India

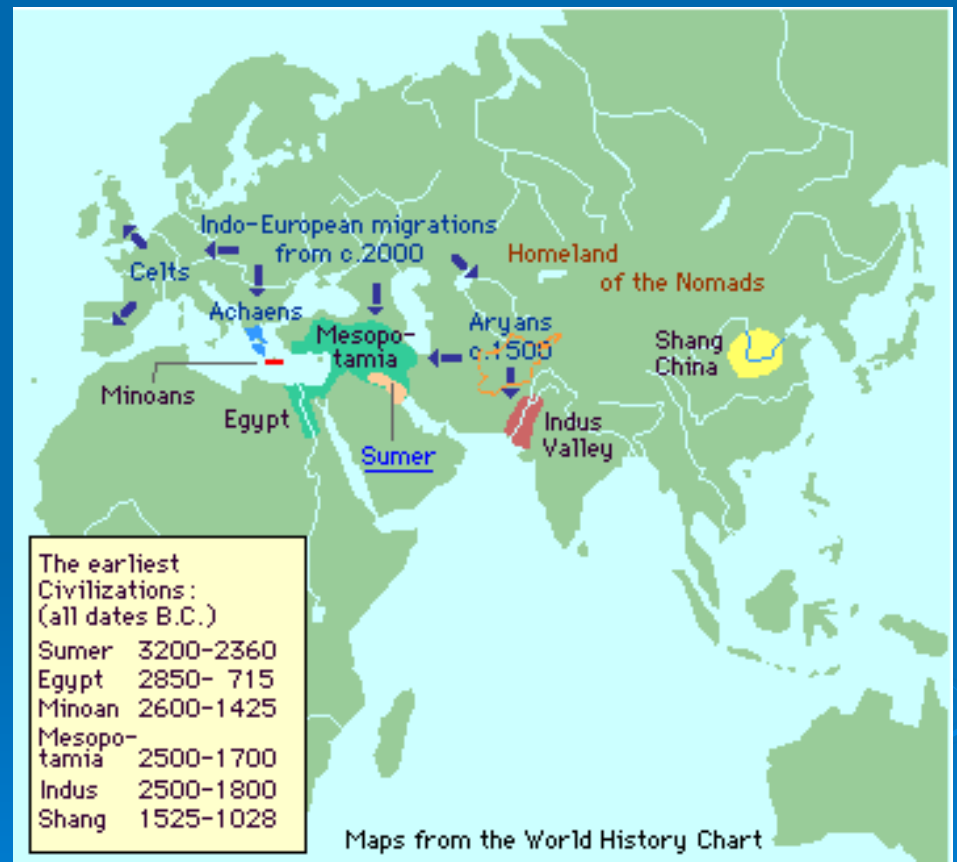
- Peninsular India and the Ganges Valley have a subtropical climate and plentiful rainfall.
- The Indus Valley is dry and agriculture there relies on irrigation.
- The staple crop of the Ganges Delta is rice; elsewhere, the staple crops are wheat, millet, and barley.
- ***This geographical diversity has made it difficult for any political power to unify all of India for any great length of time.***

# The Vedic Age

- After the demise of the Indus Valley civilization, Indo-Europeans warriors migrated into India.
- They were organized in patriarchal families and kinship groups, and at first, they herded cattle in the northwest.
- After 1000 B.C.E. some of them began to push into the Ganges Valley, using iron tools to fell trees and cultivate the land.

# The Vedic Age

- The oral tradition of these light-skinned Arya tribes tells of a violent struggle between themselves and the darker-skinned Dravidian-speaking Dasas, whom they evidently pushed into southern India.

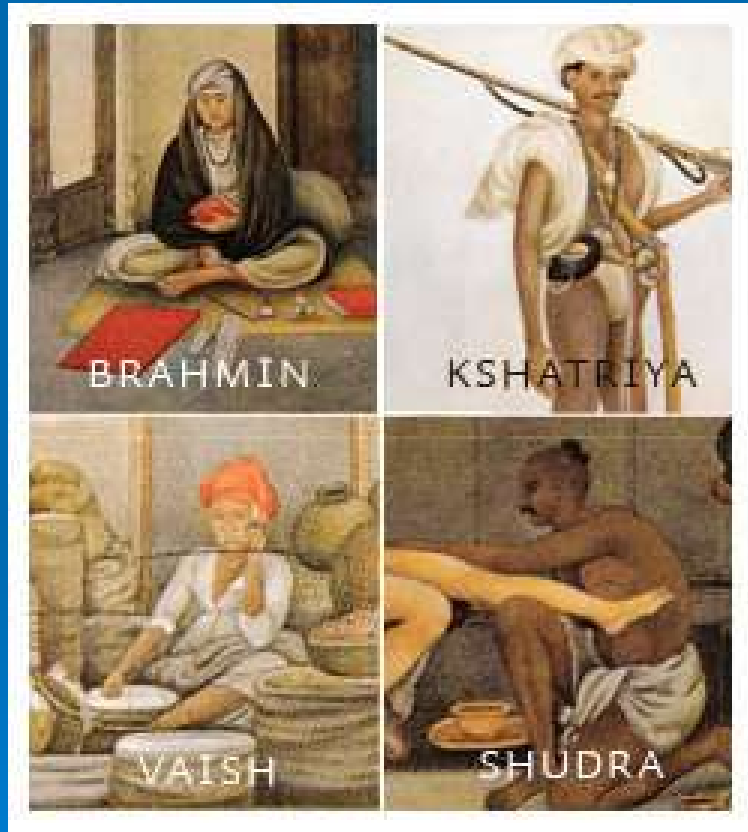


# Varna: “color”

- The struggle between Aryas and Dasas led to the development of the system of *varna*, meaning “color” but equivalent to “class.”
- Under this system, people were born into one of four varna:
  - 1.) Brahmin (priests/scholars)



# Varna



- 2.) Kshatriya (warriors)
- 3. Vaishya (merchants)
- 4. Shudra (peasant/labor)
- 5. Untouchables, was outside the system and consisted of persons who did demeaning or ritually polluting work such as work that involved contact with the dead bodies of animals or humans.

# Varna

- The four varna were subdivided into hereditary occupational groups called *jati* (also known by the Portuguese word caste.)
- Jati were also arranged in order of hierarchy; complex rules governed the appropriate occupation, duties, and rituals of each jati and laid forth regulations concerning interaction between people of different jati.



# Reincarnation

- The systems of varna and jati were rationalized by the belief in reincarnation.
- According to this belief, each individual has an immortal spirit (atman) that will be reborn in another body after death.
- One's station in the next life depends on one's actions (karma) in this and previous lives.



# Vedic Religion

- Vedic religion emphasized the worship of male deities through sacrifice.
- Religious knowledge and practice was the monopoly of the Brahmin priestly varna who memorized the rituals, prayers, and hymns and may have opposed the introduction of writing in order to maintain their monopoly in religious knowledge.

# Women: Vedic period



- Not much is known about the status or roles of women in the Vedic period.
- They could study lore and participate in rituals, they could own land, and they married in their middle or late teens.

# Challenges to the Old Order: Jainism and Buddhism

- During the Vedic period, people who reacted against the rigid social hierarchy and against the religious monopoly of the Brahmins would withdraw into the forests where they pursued salvation through yoga (spiritual and mental discipline), special diets, or meditation.
- Their goal was to achieve *moksha*-liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.
- The ideas of these religious dissidents are reflected in the *Upanishads*.

# Jainism

- Jainism was founded by Mahavira (540-468 B.C.E.).
- Jains practiced nonviolence and went to extremes in their attempts not to kill any living thing.
- The most extreme went naked and starved themselves to death.
- The less extreme devoted themselves to commerce and banking-occupations that, unlike agriculture, do not require one to kill.



# Siddhartha Gautama



- Siddhartha Gautama founded Buddhism.
- His title, “Buddha,” means “Enlightened One.”
- Alienated by both the extremes of a wealthy youth and six years of asceticism, Siddhartha set forth his teaching of the “Four Noble Truths” and of the Eightfold Path that would lead the individual to enlightenment.
- Some of his followers took vows of celibacy, nonviolence, and poverty.

# Buddhism

- The original form of Buddhism centered on the individual's attempts to gain enlightenment through moderate living, self-discipline, and meditation.
- Their goal was to achieve *nirvana*-release from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.
- According to Buddhist teachings, all things are composite, including the individual.
- This stands in contrast to the Vedic belief in the existence of an eternal soul (atman).



# Buddhism

- After the death of the Buddha, reverence for *bodhisattvas*, and artistic representations of the Buddha.
- The religion broke into two major schools; ***Mahayana*** and ***Theravada***.
- Mahayana incorporated the new beliefs, while Theravada followed the original teachings of the Buddha more closely.



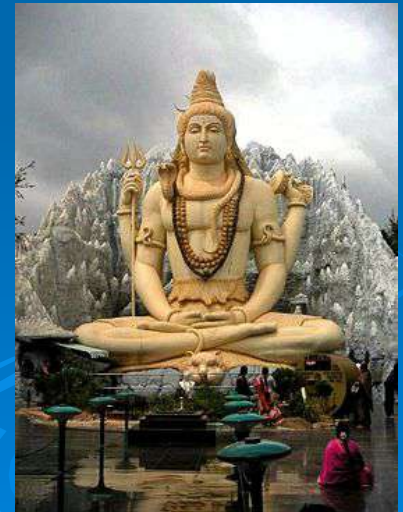
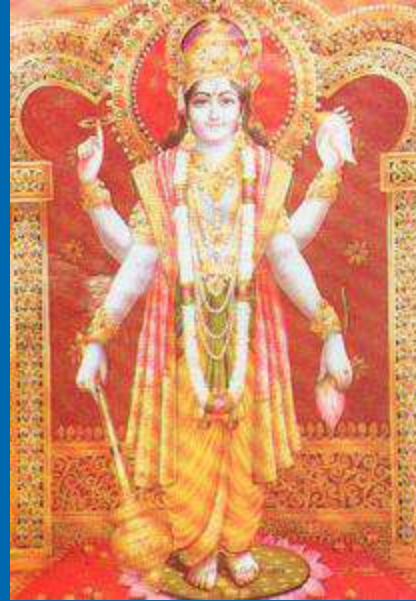


# The Rise of Hinduism

- Pressure from new religious movements like Jainism and Buddhism led to a reform of the Old Vedic religion.
- As a result of this reform, the foundational elements of Vedic religion incorporated the intense personal religious devotion, fertility rituals, symbolism of the southern Dravidian cultures, and elements of Buddhism.
- Sacrifice became less important while the role of personal devotion to the gods increased.

# Hinduism

- As a part of the reform, two formerly minor Vedic deities took the place of honor in the Hindu pantheon.
- These deities were ***Vishnu***, the preserver and ***Shiva***, the destroyer.



# Hinduism



- Also prominent in the new religious tradition was the goddess Devi.
- These and all the other countless gods and goddesses were understood to be manifestations of a single divine force.

# Hindu worship



- Hindu worship centered on temples and shrines and included puja (service to a deity) and pilgrimage.
- The Ganges River became one of the most popular pilgrimage sites.



# Vedic/Hinduism

- The transformation from Vedic religion to Hinduism was so successful that Hinduism became the dominant religion of India.
- Hinduism appealed to common people's need for personal deities with whom they could have a direct connection.
- Theravada Buddhism was too austere to have popular appeal, and Mahayana Buddhism was so close to Hinduism that its beliefs could easily be absorbed by the larger religion.

# Imperialism Expansion and Collapse 324 B.C.E.-184 B.C.E.

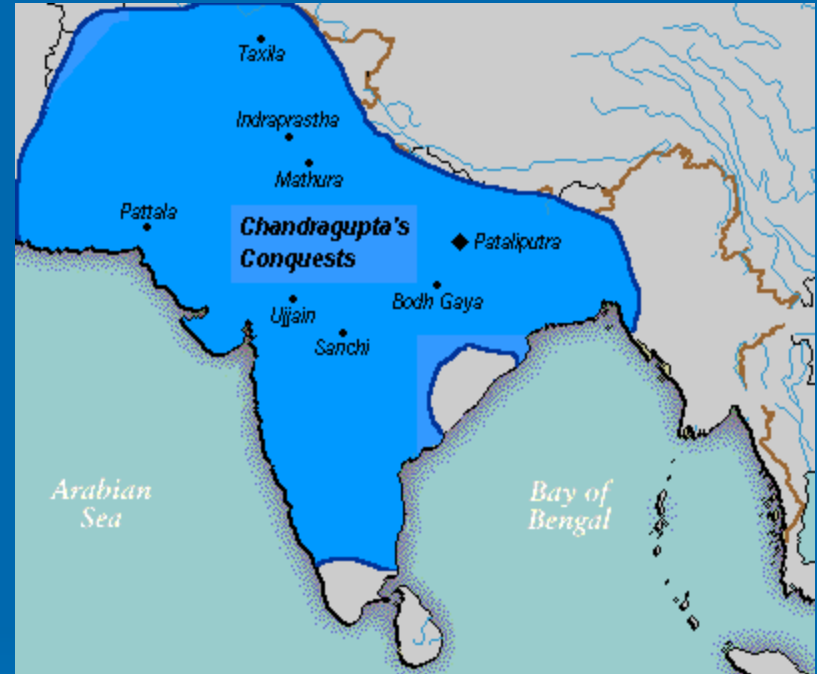
- **The Mauryan Empire**
- The core of the Mauryan Empire was the kingdom of Magadha, which benefited from its strategic location and plentiful agricultural and iron resources.





# Mauryan

- The Mauryan Empire was founded by Chandragupta and expanded by himself and his successors Bindusara and **Ashoka** until it included almost of the entire subcontinent.



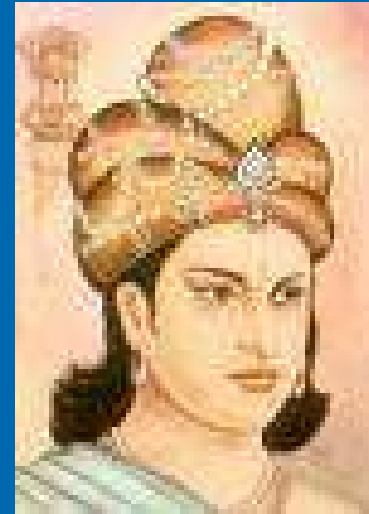
# The Mauryan

- The Mauryan government made its capital at the walled and moated city of Pataliputra.
- The imperial establishment, including a large army, was supported by a 25% tax on the agricultural products of the empire and by state monopolies on mines, shipbuilding, and armaments.



# Ashoka

- The most famous Mauryan emperor is Ashoka (Chandragupta's grandson) (269-232 B.C.E.).
- Ashoka, shaken by the carnage in a brutal war of expansion in the south, converted to Buddhism.
- His Buddhist policies of government are preserved in edicts that were inscribed on rocks and pillars at various points throughout his empire.



# Commerce and Culture in an Era of Political Fragmentation

- The Mauryan empire collapsed in 184 B.C.E.
- Northern India fell into a period of political fragmentation that included rule of the northwest by the Shakas and the Kushans.
- Political fragmentation in northern India was accompanied by economic development in which guilds of artisans and merchants played a dominant role.

# Political Fragmentation

- The period of political fragmentation was also characterized by cultural development that included the writing of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.
- The latter includes the famous *Bhagavad-Gita*, which addresses the contradiction between duty to society and duty to one's own soul.

*The Bhagavad-Gitans* suggests that this contradiction can be resolved when one is aware that any form of disciplined action taken without regard for personal benefit is a service to the gods.

The period also saw development in herbal medicine and linguistics.

# Political Fragmentation

- During the period of political fragmentation in the north, central and south India experienced different patterns of development.
- The Andhra dynasty established an independent state in the Deccan.
- Southern India was divided among three Tamil kingdoms and this was a period of great artistic achievement.