Chapter 3

Classical Civilization: India
(1000 B.C.E. – 500 C.E.)

Harappa Seal
Visual Primary Source Documents 1 - 2

Document 1

Document 2

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Geography of the Indian Subcontinent

- The Indus Valley is located on the **subcontinent** of India.
- The mountains in the north limited contact with other lands and helped India to develop a distinct culture.
- Steep passes through the Hindu Kush allowed for occasional migrations and invasions.
- The subcontinent is divided into three major zones: northern plain, Deccan, and coastal plains.
- The rivers of India, particularly the Ganges, are considered sacred.
- The **monsoon**, or seasonal wind, is a defining feature of Indian life.
Indus Valley Civilizations

- India’s first civilization emerged in the Indus River valley.
- Its two main cities, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, were carefully planned with roads laid out on a grid pattern, large storage bins, and massive hilltop fortress or temple.
Indus Valley Civilizations (Cont.)

- The earliest Indian civilization flourished for about 1,000 years, then vanished without a trace. Archaeologists have only recently begun to uncover evidence of these early people.

- The civilizations of the Indus River Valley included the following characteristics:
  - Well-organized government
  - Modern plumbing and sewer system
  - Carefully planned cities
  - Most people were farmers
  - First people to cultivate cotton
  - Covered largest area of any civilization until the rise of Persia 1,000 years later
  - Traded with distant lands, including Sumer
  - Polytheistic; honored mother goddess; worship of sacred animals influenced the later *veneration* of cattle
Archeological Site at Mohenjo-Daro
Decline and Disappearance of Indus Valley Civilization

No one knows for certain why the cities were abandoned and forgotten. Scholars have proposed a number of theories:

- Too many trees were cut down.
- A devastating earthquake destroyed the region.
- A volcanic eruption caused the Indus to flood the city.
- Aryan invaders overran the region.
Kingdoms of the Ganges

- Aryan warriors invaded India and developed a new civilization based on castes, and developing Hinduism and Buddhism.

- They called themselves the “noble ones” or the “superior ones.”

- They were a hostile nomadic people from the Euro-Asian steppes.
Aryan Civilization

The Aryans destroyed and looted the civilization of the Indus Valley and built a new Indian civilization, which reflected the following characteristics:

- **Nomadic warriors**
  - Built no cities and left no statues
  - Felt superior to the people they conquered

- **Polytheistic**
  - Religious teachings from the Vedas
  - People born into castes, or social groups, which they could not change
Aryan Civilization

Expansion led to change in Aryan civilization because they:

- mingled with the people they conquered;
- gave up their nomadic ways and settled into villages to farm and breed cattle;
- learned such skills as iron-making and developed crafts of their own;
- fought to control trade and territory;
- moved toward the idea of a single spiritual power;
- some rajas, or tribal chiefs, became hereditary rulers;
- developed the written language of Sanskrit.
The Vedas and two great epic poems, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, tell us about Aryan life and values.

- The *Vedas* are the primary sacred texts of Hinduism.
- The *Mahabharata* celebrates battle and reflects important Indian beliefs about the immortality of the soul.
- The *Ramayana* celebrates a daring and adventurous hero and portrays the ideal woman as loyal and obedient to her husband.
Document 3
The Granger Collection, New York

Document 4
Indian Dynasties

- Under the **Maurya** and **Gupta** dynasties, India developed into a center of trade and had contacts with civilizations in Africa, the Middle East, Central and Southeast Asia.
- The **caste system**, the village, and the family influenced many aspects of Indian life.

**Brahmans** = priests  
**Kshatriya** = warriors, nobles  
**Vaishya** = craftspeople & merchants  
**Shudra** = servants

Tigawa Temple, example of Gupta Architecture
Empires of India

Maurya empire about 250 B.C.
Gupta empire about A.D. 400

Map showing the extent of the Maurya and Gupta empires in India, with major cities and geographical features labeled.
The Maurya Empire

The Mauryan empires was founded by Chandragupta Maurya.

Maurya rulers created a strong central government. These rulers:

- supervised the building of roads and harbors.
- collected taxes and managed state-owned factories.
- created royal courts.
- created a secret police force to report on corruption, crime, and dissent, or opposing ideas.
- trained warriors to guard the royal palace.
Chandragupta Maurya
Asoka

- **Asoka** (272 – 232) kept careful records of his edicts, making him the king for which the most is known.
- He began an aggressive campaign to conquer the rest of the subcontinent.
- Asoka became so troubled by massive bloodshed of his conquests, that he converted to Buddhism.
- The spread of Buddhism under Asoka greatly influenced the religious history of Asia.
- It also produced the first written literature in India.

Chakravatin or possibly **Asoka**
Kingdoms of the Deccan

- People were Dravidians with different languages and traditions.
- Each kingdom had its own capital and magnificent temples.
- Rulers improved harbors to support overseas trade.
- Merchants traded with the Roman Empire and China.
- Women enjoyed high status and economic power.
- Deccan writers left a rich and diverse literature.
- Rulers were tolerant of all religions and foreign settlers.
The Gupta Empire

- The last of the Mauryan kings was assassinated in 184 B.C.
- India again became a collection of unfederated kingdoms.
- Chandragupta I (320-335) revived the empire in the north.
- He revived many of Asoka’s principals of government.
- Later, his grandson, Chandragupta II (376-415) extended the kingdom to an empire.
# Golden Age of the Guptas

Under the Guptas, India enjoyed a period of great cultural achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING</th>
<th>MEDICINE</th>
<th>MATHEMATICS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholars taught many subjects at Hindu and Buddhist schools.</td>
<td>Doctors treated illnesses with herbs, performed surgery, set broken bones, and vaccinated against smallpox.</td>
<td>Mathematicians invented system of numbers we use today and developed decimal system and concept of zero.</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>ARCHITECTURE</th>
<th>CARVING &amp; PAINTING</th>
<th>LITERATURE</th>
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<td>Builders designed magnificent stone temples and dome-shaped shrines called stupas.</td>
<td>Artists painted <strong>murals</strong>, or wall paintings and created carvings telling the story of the life of the Buddha.</td>
<td>Writers collected and recorded fables and folk tales. Kalidasa wrote classical plays.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
From *The Gospel of Buddha*

“Destroy illusions and the contact with things will cease to beget misconception. Destroy misconception and you do away with thirst. Destroy thirst and you will be free of all morbid cleaving. Remove the cleaving and you destroy the selfishness of selfhood.”

- Translations of Buddhist texts use English words that may not always make the meanings clear. For instance, what do you think the phrase “contact with things” means here?
- What is meant by “thirst” and “morbid cleaving,” and why would destroying “misconception” do away with them?
- Why do you think Buddha regards “selfhood” as “selfish”?
The Caste System and Daily Life

- Caste rules governed every aspect of life—where people lived, what they ate, how they dressed, and what work they did.

- Life for the lowest ranking caste, the “Untouchables,” was harsh and restricted.

- People knew that they could not change their status in this life. However, they believed that they could reach a higher state in a future life by fulfilling the duties of their present caste.

- Each caste had its own leaders and its own occupation, and caste members cooperated to help one another.
Family Life

- The ideal was the **joint family**, in which extended family all lived under one roof.

- The family was patriarchal. The father or oldest male had absolute authority.

- Family wishes came before individual wishes.

- Early on, children learned family duties, such as obedience of caste rules. This was called **filial piety**.

- Parents had a duty to arrange good marriages for their children, based on caste and family interests.

- The status and freedom of women decreased over time. A woman’s duties were to marry, obey her husband, and raise children.

- **Suttee** was the practice in which wives of prominent men who died, would throw themselves into the funeral pyre. If they failed to kill themselves, they would be scorned.
## Village Life

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<th>POLITICS</th>
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<td>Villages were self-sufficient, producing most of the food and goods needed.</td>
<td>Each village ran its own affairs facing little interference as long as it paid its share of taxes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes villagers traded at regional markets.</td>
<td>A village headman and council made decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Fall of the Gupta Empire, 550 C.E.

- The Gupta Empire was invaded by the White Huns in the 5th century.
- They held them off, but at a tremendous cost, which weakened the state.
- Taxes were insufficient to pay for adequate military defense.
- Land divisions increased the power of provincial officials.
- The empire finally fell to the Huns by the end of the 5th century.
Indian Religious Beliefs

Hinduism grew out of many varied beliefs of different peoples who settled in India. It has many gods and goddesses and many forms of worship. Despite this diversity, all Hindus share certain basic beliefs:

- All the universe is part of the unchanging, all-powerful spiritual force called **brahman**.
- The ultimate goal of existence is to achieve **moksha**, or union with brahman.
- To achieve moksha, people must free themselves from selfish desires.
- One must obey the law of **karma**.
- **Reincarnation** allows people to continue working toward moksha through several lifetimes.

**Vishnu**, a major Hindu god, the preserver of the universe.
Indian Religious Beliefs (cont.)

- Siddhartha Gautama, a religious reformer, sought spiritual enlightenment.
- His teachings gave rise to a new religion, Buddhism, that spread through Southeast and East Asia.
The Teachings of Buddha

The Four Noble Truths:

1. Life is full of suffering.
2. The only cure for suffering is to follow the Eightfold Path, a middle road between a life devoted to pleasure and a life of harsh self-denial.
3. It is important to live a moral life.
4. Enlightenment is achieved through meditation.

The ultimate goal is nirvana, union with the universe and release from the cycle of rebirth.

Buddhist artwork, Ajanta Caves
The Spread of Buddhism

Followers accompanied the Buddha as he preached across Northern India.

Some Buddhists set up monasteries and convents that grew into centers of learning.

Missionaries and traders spread Buddhism across India to many parts of Asia.
From The Pure Land Sutra

“Good men and good women of pure faith who hear Amitayus Buddha’s name of inconceivable merits and also learn of the pure Buddha-land of Utmost Bliss should all receive [the teaching] in faith, arouse aspiration, practice the method as prescribed, and attain birth in that Buddhahland.”

- According to the Pure Land Sutra, what exactly must one do to be reborn in the “Buddha-land of Utmost Bliss”?

- Some see Pure Land Buddhism as less demanding than other, earlier forms of Buddhism. How does this passage support or fail to support that view?