**Classical India**

***Stearns, World Civilizations, pp. 56-75***

* Harappan civilization falls around 1500 BCE, leading to a new civilization in India
  + Foundation laid by nomadic Aryan invaders who moved into the peninsula between 1500 and 500 BCE
  + By the end of this period, large states ruled by kings who claimed divine descent controlled most farmland of the Ganges river plain
    - Settlement after clearing of great forests
      * Leads to climate change
* Increasingly complex social hierarchy emerges
  + Leads to ritual divisions and restrictions on intermarriage between social groups
  + Vedic priests (Brahmans) emerge as dominant force
* In south Asia, philosophers begin to move beyond rituals and materialism
  + Example: the Buddha
* Mauryan empire emerges in 300s BCE
  + After its collapse, nomadic invasions fragment subcontinent
* Gupta empire emerges in 300s CE
  + Dedicated to reasserting authority of Brahman class
  + Use Hinduism to reaffirm position of Brahmin (as priests)
    - Leads to era of achievements in architecture, painting, sculpture, philosophy, literature, science
* Contrasts between classical India and China
  + China: focus on politics and social structures that support Confucianism
  + India: religion and social structures that would support Hinduism
    - Politics are less cohesive and less important
* Similarities between classical India and China
  + Both are agricultural societies
    - India has a majority peasant class whose lives shaped around acquiring food for families
    - Families cluster in villages for protection and survival
    - Patriarchal societies
    - Extensive trade

Framework for Indian History: Geography and a Formative Period

* India is more centrally located (than China), and as a result, was more open to influences of surrounding civilizations (from the Middle East and Mediterranean)
  + Persian culture influences artistic styles and political concepts
  + Alexander the Great made possible important contacts with Hellenistic culture
* Physical geography of India influenced culture as well
  + Indian empire separated from rest of Asia (especially east Asia) by northern mountain ranges (especially the Himalayas)
    - Mountain passes connect India to other cultures
  + Divisions within subcontinent make political unity difficult
    - Agricultural regions along Indus and Ganges rivers
    - Herding economy takes root in northern mountain regions
    - Trading and seafaring economy arises on southern coastal rim, which is separated from rest of subcontinent by mountains and the Deccan plateau
      * Because of separation, the south has economic, racial, and language differences from the rest of the empire
  + Climate of India
    - Subtropical (120 degrees in early summer)
    - Monsoon rains
      * Unpredictable
      * Sometimes too much or too little rain
* India shaped by period between empires
  + Vedic/Epic ages (1500-1000 BCE)
    - Aryan (Indo-European) migrants (hunting/herding peoples) settle along Indus and Ganges valleys
    - Establishment of agriculture and use of iron tools to clear dense vegetation
    - History taken from literary epics developed by Aryans (Vedas)
      * Written in Sanskrit
      * Veda=knowledge
      * Series of books/epics
      * First: Rig Veda, consisting of 1028 hymns dedicated to Aryan gods
      * Mahabharata and Ramayana (1000-600 BCE) are epic poems that describe real and mythical battles and reflect settled agricultural societies with better organized political units
      * Upanishads: epic poems with more mystical religious flavor
    - Aryan ideas and social/family forms
      * Encouraged tight village organization
        + Chiefs organize defenses and regulate property relationships
      * Family=patriarchal in nature, include grandparents, parents, and children
      * Caste system (varnas)
        + Establish relationships between Aryan conquerors and indigenous people (inferior)?
        + Kshatriyas (warrior/governor) and Brahmins (priests) at top

Initially Kshatriyas at top, but eventually Brahmins becomes the top of the varna

Signifies importance of religion

* + - * + Vaisyas (traders and farmers) and Sudras (common laborers)
        + Untouchables: confined to few jobs (transporting dead bodies, hauling refuse)

Touching these people would defile anyone from a superior class

* + - * + Eventually, social classes become hereditary

Marriage between castes forbidden and punishable by death

* + - * + Each caste has sub-castes (jati), each with own distinctive occupations and tied to social station by birth
        + Rig Veda attributed castes to the gods
    - Aryan religion
      * Polytheistic
      * Gods and goddesses regulated natural forces, possessed human qualities
        + Indra: god of thunder, strength
        + Similar system to that of Greeks

Greek and Aryan cultures both derived from Indo-European backgrounds

* + - * Aryans offer hymns and sacrifices to gods
      * Certain animals regarded as sacred, embodying divine spirit (monkeys, cattle)
      * Aryan religion has direct influence on later Hindu beliefs

Patterns in Classical India

* By 600 BCE, regional political units had grown, cities and trade expanded, development of Sanskrit furthered literary culture
* India is not defined by dynasties like China, but rather by invasions from the mountain passes of the North
* 600-300s BCE: India divided into powerful regional states (16 states in 600 BCE)
  + States ruled as monarchies, republics ruled by priests and warriors
  + Warfare occurred on regular basis
* In 327 BCE, Alexander the Great arrives in NW India, establishing border state of Bactria
* 322 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya seizes power along Ganges
  + First of dynasty of Mauryan rulers
    - Mauryan rulers unify most of subcontinent
  + Chandragupta and future rulers maintain large armies and extensive governmental bureaucracy
    - Thousands of elephant-borne troops and chariots
  + Autocratic ruler (reliance on ruler’s personal and military power)
  + Chandragupta’s life was heavily guarded and always threatened
  + Eventually hands power over to a son and retires as a religious ascetic
* 269-232 BCE: Ashoka (Chandragupta’s grandson)
  + Served as governor of two provinces, living lavish lifestyle
  + Intensely spiritual, focuses on Brahmin religion and Buddhism
  + Extended Mauryan conquests
    - Gained control of all of India except southern tip
    - Bloodthirsty fighter
  + Ruthlessness is quelled when he converts to Buddhism
    - Believed in dharma (law of moral consequences) as an ethical guide that would unite and discipline the diverse people under his rule
    - Propagated Buddhism to his people, honors Hinduism
    - Sends Buddhist missionaries to Hellenistic kingdoms of Middle East and Sri Lanka
    - Belief in Buddhism causes Ashoka to encourage humane behavior and the moral welfare of his empire
  + Worked to improve trade and communication
    - Sponsored extensive road network with wells and rest stops
  + After Ashoka, empire begins to fall apart
    - Empire did not have strong enough roots under the actions of Ashoka
    - Leads to reemergence of regional kingdoms
* Eventually, a new nomadic group invades, the Kushans, and rule for a period, falling apart in 220 CE
  + Leads to political instability
* 320-535 CE: Gupta Empire emerges
  + Did not produce great individual rulers like the Mauryans, but likely had a greater overall impact
  + Rulers preferred to negotiate with local princes and intermarry with their families
    - Expanded influence without fighting
  + India’s greatest period of political stability
    - Guptas did not hold as big an empire as the Mauryans
  + Gupta empire is overturned when Huns invade in 535 CE

Political Institutions

* Indian government is characterized by regionalism and considerable diversity in political forms
  + Autocratic kings and emperors, aristocratic assemblies
* Sometimes Indian government was shaky
  + Early Mauryan governors relied on power of armies
    - Often feared betrayal and attack
  + Rulers claimed divine appointment
    - Favored Hinduism over Buddhism, as Hinduism confirmed belief of ruling priestly class
  + Guptas did not create extensive bureaucracy
    - Allowed local defeated rulers to maintain regional control as long as they deferred to Gupta dominance
      * “Eliminated” resistance to empire by allowing them to maintain some control of previously-held lands
      * Guptas stationed personal representative at each ruler’s court to ensure loyalty
  + No single language imposed
    - Promotion of Sanskrit (language of educated people) among diversity of popular, regional languages
* Gupta as golden age in Indian history
  + Promoted uniform law codes
  + Sponsored general services (road building)
  + Patrons of cultural activity
    - Universities
    - Art and literature
* Little political culture
  + Not much political theory
  + Few institutions other than regionalism
  + Similar ideas of China’s legalism
  + Indian religion did not stress importance of politics
    - Instead asserted authority of priestly class (Brahmins)
* Caste system
  + Lack of political culture explained partly by importance of regional politics and social relationships under caste system
    - Caste rules (interpreted by priests) regulated social relationships and work roles
    - Caste rules did for the people what government institutions did in other empires
  + Becomes increasingly complex
    - Five initial classes eventually divided into 300 jati (livings) which became further divided into more sub-castes
      * Defined who could marry who or eat with
    - Virtually impossible to rive above the caste into which one was born or marry someone of a higher caste
      * Possible to fall into lower caste by marrying outside one’s caste or taking work deemed inappropriate for one’s caste
      * Upward mobility possible within a caste
        + Gain greater wealth through success in economic activities appropriate to the caste
  + Castes provide a way for India’s various races (conquerors and conquered) to live together without perpetual conflict and without full integration of cultures and values
    - Different people could live together in a city
    - Castes promoted tolerance
    - Outright slavery was avoided
      * Untouchables were scorned, confined to poverty and degrading work, but not outright owned by others
  + Political consequences outlined by detailed rules for each caste
    - Governed marriages and permissible jobs
    - Social habits like eating and drinking
      * One could not eat or drink with lower class individual
      * One could not perform a service for lower class individual
  + Castes did not command political loyalty
    - One’s loyalty was first to one’s caste

Culture

* Interested in spontaneity and imagination
  + Sometimes in fleshly pleasures or mystical union with divine essence
* Thinkers wrote about many different things
  + Legal writing
  + Theme of love
    - Kamasutra (“laws of love”) discusses relationships between men and women
  + Literature
    - Took themes from epic poems and military adventure tales
    - Adventure stories
      * Sinbad the Sailor, Jack the Giant Killer, Seven League Boots
    - Stories had tendency to be secular, but occasionally included gods
* Science and mathematics
  + One of world’s first universities (Nalanda)
    - Religion, philosophy, medicine, architecture, agriculture
  + Astronomy
    - Length of solar year
    - Improvement of mathematical measurements
    - Calculation of Earth’s circumference (*He thought the Earth was round!!!*)
    - Predicted and explained eclipses
    - Developed theory of gravity
    - Used a telescope and identified seven planets
  + Medicine
    - Hampered by religious prohibition of dissection
    - Bone setting, plastic surgery
    - Inoculation against smallpox
    - Sterilization of wounds
  + Mathematics
    - Numbering system is what we use today
    - Invention of concept of zero
    - Development of decimal system
    - Development of concept of negative numbers
    - Calculated square roots and table of sines
    - Computed value of pi more accurately than Greeks
* Art
  + Sponsorship of stupas (spherical shrines devoted to Buddha) and statues honoring Buddha
  + Under Gupta, sculpture and painting move away from realistic portrayals of man to more stylization
  + Paintings on walls of buildings and caves depict man and animals in lively color, keen appreciation of nature

Economy and Society

* Caste system assigned people to occupations and regulated marriages
  + Low-caste individuals had few legal rights
  + Servants abused by masters
    - Restrained only by ethical promptings of religion toward kindness
      * Brahmin who killed servant had same penalty as if he had killed an animal
    - Abuse was uncommon
  + Those living in villages had limited interaction with those in high castes
* Family Life
  + Dominance of husbands and fathers
    - Wives worshipped husbands as gods
    - Women increasingly lost rights as Indian civilization progressed
  + Women still deemed as important to society
    - Agricultural importance
  + Could women advance spiritually without first being reincarnated as a man?
  + Arranged marriages where parents contracted unions for children
    - Girls at early age engaged or married to much older men they had never met
    - Ensure solid economic links, brides contributing dowries of land or domestic animals to family estates
    - Husbands and wives expected to provide mutual emotional support
  + Family as an economic unit
    - Children expected to work hard to contribute to family economy
    - Adults to support older relatives
* Economy
  + Manufacturing
    - New uses for chemistry
    - Steel was best in the world
    - Iron making outdistanced Europeans
    - Advanced textiles
      * First to manufacture cotton cloth, calico, cashmere
    - Guilds
  + Trade and merchant activity
    - Merchants were high on caste system
    - Traveled widely both by land and sea
    - Tamils of south became very wealthy by trading cotton, silks, dyes, drugs, gold, ivory
    - Traded with Romans and Middle East for pottery, wine, metals, slaves, gold
  + Economy remained firmly agricultural
    - Most people lived at margins of subsistence

Indian Influence

* Indian Ocean dominated by Indian merchants and mercenaries
  + Most active linkage point among cultures followed by Mediterranean Sea
* Spread ideas and culture (not political domination) to Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam
  + Merchants married into local royal families
  + Indian-style temples constructed and art spread
  + Buddhism spread from India to SE Asia
  + Hinduism converted upper-class people (especially in Indonesia)
* India affecting China through spread of Buddhism and art
* Buddhism spread to Middle East by emissaries
  + Influences Greek and Roman ethical groups like Stoics and Christians

China and India

* Differences
  + Culture
    - Restraint of Chinese art and poetry vs. dynamic sensual styles of India
    - Primary religion in India (Hinduism) with minority religions vs. distinct religious and philosophical systems in China
    - Practical science in China vs. India mathematics
    - Hindu peasants in India place less emphasis on emotional restraint and detailed etiquette, expected different emotional interactions with family members
  + Politics and economics
    - Autocratic China (under Qin Shi Huangdi) vs. social order under Caste system in India
    - More sea trade and commercial vitality in India than China
    - Indian expansion due to merchant activity whereas Chinese expansion involved government initiative in gaining new territory
* Similarities
  + Both relied on large peasant classes organized in close-knit villages with mutual cooperation in agriculture
  + Cities and merchants played secondary role in both civilizations
  + Political power rested with those who controlled land primarily through ownership of large estates and ability to tax peasantry
  + Patriarchal societies

India and the Wider World

* India as most open to outside influences and more central to cross-cultural exchanges in the Common Era
* India as one of world history’s richest cultural periods other than China
* Indian merchants played key role in trade with other regions and, as a result, influenced other areas heavily
  + Angkor Wat (Cambodia) and Majapahit (Java)
  + Influences on Stoicism and Christianity
  + Indian commodities become some key luxuries
    - Cotton textiles, bronze statuary

Decline in India

* Ability of Gupta emperors to control local princes in decline by 400s CE
* Invasions by nomadic peoples (probably the Huns) affected n. India by 500 CE
  + Destroy Gupta empire
  + Integrated into warrior caste, forming new group of regional princes
* Regional princes (collectively, Rajput) control small states, emphasize military prowess
* Buddhism declines, Hinduism increases
  + Worship of mother goddess, Devi
* After 600 CE, Arab armies fighting for Allah reach India’s NW frontier
* Hindu texts written in vernacular, Sanskrit declines
  + Attempt to encourage Indians to not abandon Hinduism
* Muslims take trade and economic benefits from India

***Strayer, Ways of the World, pp. 165-167, 197-202, 242-246***

India, the Intermittent Empire

* Harappan civilization declined in 1500 BCE
  + Lack of organized political system
* New civilization emerged more east along the Ganges River
* Aryan nomads (Indo-Europeans) arrive in the Indian subcontinent and begin to establish a new civilization in the ruins of Harappa
  + Civilization emerged from fragmented collection of towns and cities, small republics governed by public assemblies, regional states ruled by kings
* Huge range of ethnic, cultural, linguistic diversity
  + Large amounts of people migrated into India from Central Asia from mountain passes in northwest
* India characterized by distinctive religious tradition (Hinduism) and social organization (castes), not by imperial government or ethnolinguistic tradition
* Mauryan empire (326-184 BCE) influenced by Persian and Greek influence
  + Population of 50 million
  + Large military force
    - 600,000 infantry
    - 30,000 cavalry
    - 8000 chariots
    - 9000 elephants
  + Civilian bureaucracy with various ministries and spies to provide ruler with information
  + Industrial state
    - Spinning, weaving, mining, shipbuilding, armaments
  + Financed by taxes, trade, herds of animals, land
    - Ruler claimed 1/4th crops
  + Ashoka (268-232 BCE)
    - Left record of activities in series of edicts carved on rocks and pillars throughout kingdom
    - Converted to Buddhism, took moralistic approach to governance
    - Enlightened ruler who sought to govern in accord with religious values and moral teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism
    - Policies broke apart after Ashoka’s death
* Gupta Empire (320-550 CE)
* After Ashoka, India had neither imperial nor regional states commanding loyalty or exercising influence like had been done in Mauryan rule
  + Cultural diversity
  + Invasions from central Asia which shattered states that could unite India
  + Caste system creates more class loyalty than Indian loyalty
* Vibrant Indian economy
  + Focal point of trade in Indian Ocean
  + Cotton textile industry
  + Wealth used to build temples, public buildings, regional festivals

Cultural Traditions of Classical India

* Indian cultural elite embraced divine and all things spiritual, generated philosophical visions about nature of ultimate reality
* Religion grew over numerous generations, no central founder
* Religious texts provide commonality to differing people of India
  + Vedas: collection of poems, hymns, prayers, rituals
    - Compiled by Brahmins (priests)
    - For centuries transferred orally, written in Sanskrit around 600 BCE
    - Tell about small competing chiefdoms or kingdoms, sacred sounds and fires, numerous gods, elaborate ritual sacrifices
    - Ritual sacrifices give immense power and wealth to Brahmins
      * Leads to criticism as ceremony becomes ritualized and mechanical and begins to cost too much
  + Upanishads
    - Springs from dissent against Brahmins and the Vedas
    - Composed by anonymous thinkers between 800-400 BCE
    - Mystical and highly philosophical works seeking to probe inner meaning of sacrifices of the Vedas
    - External ritual becomes introspective thinking
      * Leads to ideas of Hinduism
        + Idea of Brahman (World Soul) as the final and ultimate reality

Infuses and encompassing all things

“The immense diversity of existence that human beings perceived with their senses was but an illusion.”

Class and Caste in India

* Similar to China’s social structure
  + Birth determines social status
  + Little social mobility available
  + Distinctions and great inequalities characterized social life
  + Religion and cultural traditions define inequalities as natural, eternal, ordained by the gods
* Caste system
  + From Portuguese “casta”, race or purity of blood
* Caste as Varna
  + Caste system evolved from racially defined encounter between light-skinned Aryan invaders and darker-skinned native peoples?
    - Most likely developed due to massive differences between people in terms of race, culture, location, economics
      * Less likely race as a factor
  + Caste system embedded in Indian culture by about 500 BCE
    - Brahmins: priests whose rituals and sacrifices alone ensured proper functioning of the world
    - Kshatriya: warriors and rulers charged with protecting and governing society
    - Vaisya: commoners who cultivated land
    - Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaisya considered pure Aryans, considered “twice-born”
      * Experienced physical birth but formal initiation into respective varnas (classes) and status as people of Aryan descent
    - Below the twice born, the Sudras: native peoples incorporated into margins of Aryan society in very subordinate positions (servants)
      * Not allowed to hear or repeat the Vedas, take part in Aryan ritual
      * If a Brahmin killed a Sudra, there was no punishment
  + According to legend, castes formed from body of god Purusha and therefore eternal and changeless
    - Argument between Brahmin and Kshatriya groups over who was supposed to be on top, Brahmins win
  + Changing castes
    - Tribal medicine men and sorcerers merge with Brahmins
    - Warrior groups entered Kshatriya
    - Business class emerges into Vaisya
    - Peasant farmers transition from Sudras
    - Untouchable class emerges below Sudras
      * People who did work considered most unclean and polluting
        + Cremating corpses, dealing with skins of dead animals, serving as executioners
* Caste as Jati
  + Specialized occupations organized in guilds (jatis) merge with varna system to create classical India’s unique caste society
  + Thousands of jati groups
    - Jati/occupations become associated with caste varnas
      * Brahmins broken up into jatis (subcastes) as were other varnas even down to the untouchables
  + In villages, each jati was ranked into hierarchy known to all
    - Jati associated with set of duties, rules, obligations
      * Brahmins forbidden to eat meat, but Kshatriyas could
      * Upper-caste women required to cover breasts, lower caste women forbidden to do so as sign of lower rank
    - High-caste people who came into contact with lower caste people had danger of being polluted or made ritually unclean
      * Untouchables forbidden to use same wells or enter temples of upper caste people
        + Required to wear wooden clapper to warn others of their approach
  + Support for inequality and permanent difference derived from Hindu notions of karma, dharma and rebirth
    - Being born into particular caste regarded as reflecting good or bad deeds (karma)
    - Hope to be reborn into higher caste depended on one’s present duties (dharma) in this life
    - Anyone who does not fulfill his duties had threat to be expelled from his jati
  + Virtually impossible to raise social status (caste) within their lifetime
    - Could raise jati by acquiring land and wealth, adopt behaviors of higher caste groups, finding previously overlooked “ancestor” of higher caste
  + Differences between India and China
    - Priority to religious status and racial purity in India vs. Chinese elevation of political officials to highest elite positions
    - Caste system divided Indian society into vast numbers of distinct social groups vs. China with fewer, broader categories of society
    - Indian caste society defining social groups more rigidly and less opportunity for social mobility than China
* Functions of Caste
  + Focused loyalties on restricted territory, weakened appeal or authority of larger all-Indian states
    - Likely the reason India had an empire encompassing entire subcontinent
    - Caste provided substitute for state as integrative mechanism for Indian civilization
      * Offered distinct and socially recognized place for almost everyone
      * Jatis provide modest measure of social security and support
        + Look after widows, orphans, destitute
  + Caste represented means of accommodating migrating or invading peoples who entered subcontinent
    - Honeycomb/ cellular structure of caste society allowed various people, culture, tradition to find place within larger Indian civilization while retaining unique identity
  + Caste facilitated exploitation of poor by wealthy and powerful
    - Made class consciousness and organized resistance across caste lines more difficult to achieve