

Classical India

1

**STATE, SOCIETY, AND THE QUEST FOR
SALVATION IN INDIA**

The Mauryan and Gupta empires

321 B.C.E.-550 C.E.

2



India Before the Mauryan Dynasty

3

- 520 BCE Persian Emperor Darius conquers north-west India
- Introduces Persian ruling pattern
- 327 Alexander of Macedon destroys Persian Empire in India
- Troops mutiny, departs after 2 years
 - Political power vacuum

Kingdom of Magadha

4

- Most significant remaining kingdom after Alexander's departure
- Central Ganges plain
- Economic strength
 - Agriculture
 - Trade in Ganges valley, Bay of Bengal
- Dominated surrounding regions in north-eastern India

Chandragupta Maurya

5

- Took advantage of power vacuum left by Alexander
- Overthrew Magadha rulers
- Expanded kingdom to create 1st unified Indian empire
 - Mauryan Dynasty

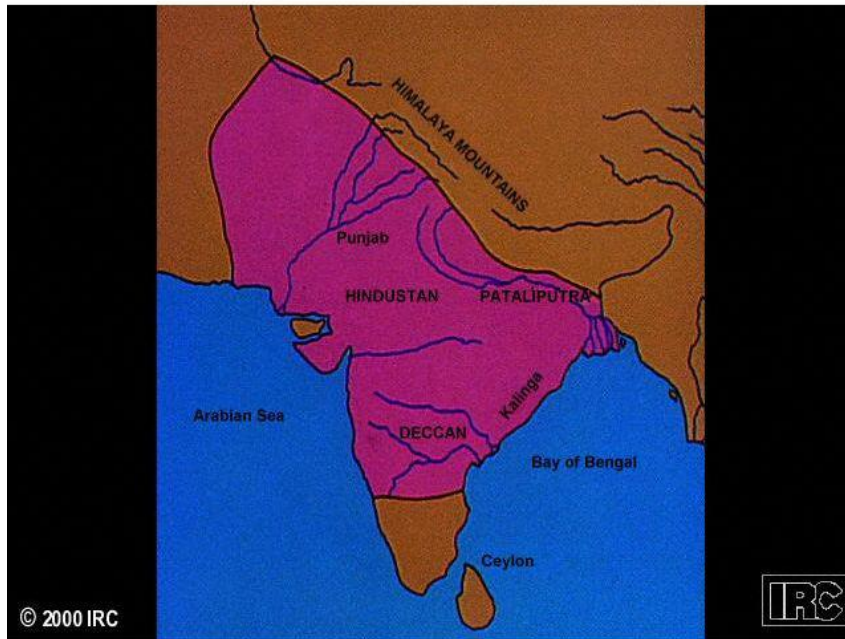
Chandragupta's Government

6

- Advisor Kautilya
- Recorded in *Arthashastra*, manual of political statecraft
- Foreign policies, economics
- Domestic policies
 - Network of spies
- Legend: Chandragupta retires to become a monk, starves himself to death

Ashoka Maurya

- Grandson of Chandragupta
- Represents high point of Mauryan Empire, r. 268-232 BCE
- Expanded empire to include all of Indian subcontinent except for south
- Positive rulership integrated Indian society



A map of Asoka's empire

Decline of the Mauryan Empire

8

- Economic crisis follows death of Ashoka
- High costs of bureaucracy, military not supported by tax revenue
- Frequent devaluations of currency to pay salaries
- Regions begin to abandon Mauryan Empire
 - Disappears by 185 BCE

Regional Kingdom: Bactria

9

- Northwestern India
- Ruled by Greek-speaking descendants of Alexander's campaigns
- Intense cultural activity accompanies active trade

Regional Kingdom: Kush

10

- Northern India/Central Asia
- C. 1-300 CE
- Maintained silk road network

The Gupta Dynasty

11

- Based in Magadha
- Founded by Chandra Gupta (no relation to Chandragupta Maurya), c. 320 CE
- Slightly smaller than Mauryan Empire
- Highly decentralized leadership

Gupta Decline

12

- Frequent invasions of White Huns, 5th c. CE
- Gupta Dynasty disintegrates along regional fault lines
- Smaller local kingdoms dominate until Mughal Empire founded in 16th c.

Economy: Towns and Manufacturing

13

- Manufactured goods in big demand
- Developed in dense network of small workshops
- Trade intense, capitalizes on trade routes across India

Long-Distance Trade

14

- Persian connection since Cyrus, Darius
- Massive road-building projects under Persian rule
- Alexander extends trade west to Macedon
- Trade routes through Kush mountains, the silk roads

Trade in the Indian Ocean Basin

15

- Seasonal sea trade expands
 - Spring/winter winds blow from south-west, fall/winter winds blow from north-west
- Trade from Asia to Persian Gulf and Red Sea, Mediterranean

Society: Gender Relations

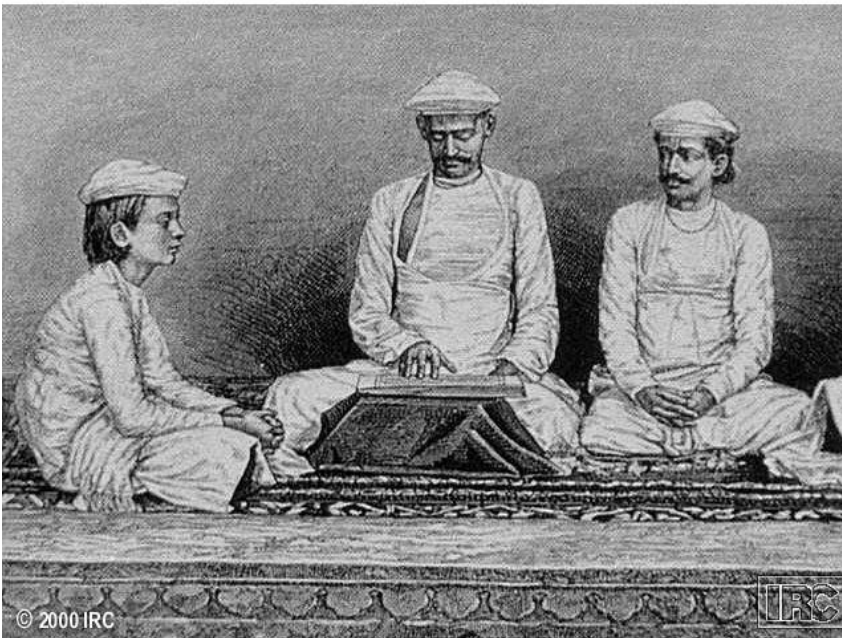
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- Patriarchy entrenched
- Child marriage common (8 year old girls married to men in 20s)
- Women encouraged to remain in private sphere

Social Order

- Caste system from Aryan times

- Brahmins (priests)
- Kshatriyas (warriors, aristocrats)
- Vaishyas (Peasants, merchants)
- Shudras (serfs)



Brahmins from Bengal

Castes and Guilds

18

- Increasing economic diversification challenges simplistic caste system
- Jatis formed: guilds that acted as sub-castes
- Enforced social order
 - “outcastes” forced into low-status employment

Wealth and the Social Order

19

- Upward social mobility possible for Vaishyas, Shudras
- Wealth challenges varna for status

Religions of Salvation in Classical India

20

- Social change generated resentment of caste privilege
 - e.g. Brahmins free from taxation
- 6th-5th c. BCE new religions and philosophies challenge status quo
- Charvakas: atheists
- Jainists, Buddhists

Jainism

21

- Vardhamana Mahavira, 540-468 BCE
- Abandoned privileged family to lead ascetic life
- Promotes 7th c. movement based on Upanishads
- Emphasis on selfless living, concern for all beings

Ahimsa

22

- Principle of extreme non-violence
- Jainists sweep earth, strain water, use slow movements to avoid killing insects
- Ahimsa continues to inspire modern movements (Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr.)

Appeal of Jainism

23

- Rejected caste, jati distinctions
- Obvious appeal to underprivileged groups
- But asceticism too extreme to become a mass movement

Early Buddhism

24

- Siddhartha Gautama, c. 563-483 BCE
- Encountered age, sickness, death, then monastic life
- Abandoned comfortable life to become a monk

Gautama's Search for Enlightenment

25

- Intense meditation, extreme asceticism
- 49 days of meditation under bo tree to finally achieve enlightenment
- Attained title Buddha: “the enlightened one”

The Buddha and his Followers

26

- Begins teaching new doctrine c. 528 BCE
- Followers owned only robes, food bowls
- Life of wandering, begging, meditation
- Establishment of monastic communities

Buddha and his Disciples

27



Gautama Buddha with devotees

Buddhist Doctrine: The Dharma

28

- The Four Noble Truths
 - all life is suffering
 - there is an end to suffering
 - removing desire removes suffering
 - this may be done through the eight-fold path
 - (right views, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration)

Appeal of Buddhism

29

- Less dependence on Brahmins for ritual activities
- No recognition of caste, jati status
- Philosophy of moderate consumption
- Public service through lay teaching
- Use of vernacular, not Sanskrit

A Buddhist Monastery

30



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Buddhist monks and their students at Pali

Ashoka's Support of Buddhism

31

- Personal conversion to Buddhism
- Disillusioned after violent war with Kalinga
- Banned animal sacrifices, mandated vegetarianism in court
- Material support for Buddhist institutions, missionary activities

Changes in Buddhist thought

32

- 3rd c. BCE – 1st c. CE
 - Buddha considered divine
 - Institution of *Bodhisattvas* (“saints”)
 - Charitable donations to monasteries regarded as pious activity

Spread of Mahayana Buddhism

33

- Mahayana (“greater vehicle”), newer development
 - India, China, Japan, Korea, central Asia
- Hinayana (“lesser vehicle,” also Theravada), earlier version
 - Ceylon, Burma, Thailand

Nalanda

34

- Buddhist Monastery
- Quasi-university: Buddhism, Hindu texts, philosophy, astronomy, medicine
- Peak at end of Gupta dynasty
- Helped spread Indian thought
 - E.g. mathematical number zero

Emergence of Popular Hinduism

35

- Composition of epics from older oral traditions
 - *Mahabharata*
 - *Ramayana*
- Emphasis on god Vishnu and his incarnations

The *Bhagavad Gita*

36

- “Song of the Lord”
- Centuries of revisions, final form c. 400 CE
- Dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna during civil war

Hindu Ethics

37

- Emphasis on meeting class obligations (*dharma*)
- Pursuit of economic well-being and honesty (*artha*)
- Enjoyment of social, physical and sexual pleasure (*kama*)
- Salvation of the soul (*moksha*)

Popularity of Hinduism

38

- Gradually replaced Buddhism in India
- Gupta dynastic leaders extend considerable support