

India as an Empire

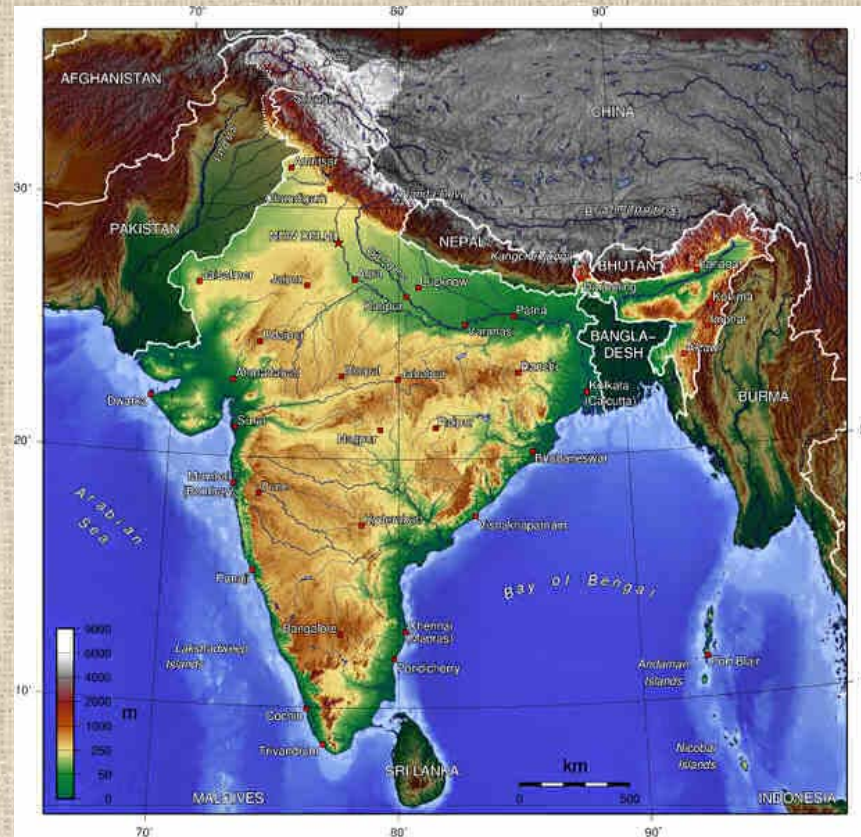
REORGANIZING HUMAN SOCIETIES (600 B.C.E. – 600 C.E.)



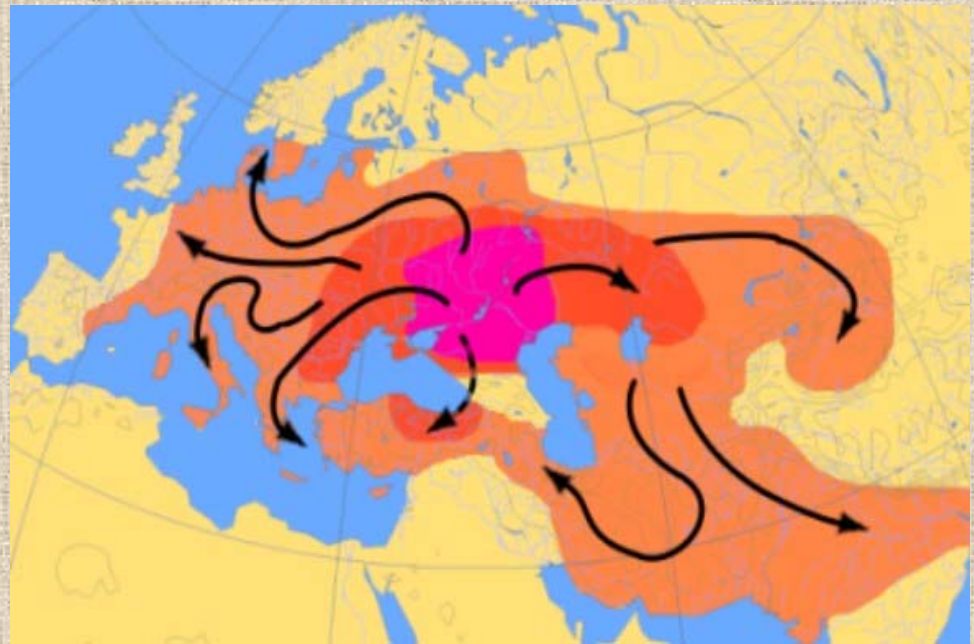
Instructions . . .

- It is your job to read and take note of what you deem important from this file. Since you are doing this, you are NOT required to read these sections from the textbook. However, feel free to do so if you wish.
- As you read over the slides you will notice there is a video section at the end. Please watch this not so much for specific information to take notes on, but rather as a video summary of the concepts from the PowerPoint.

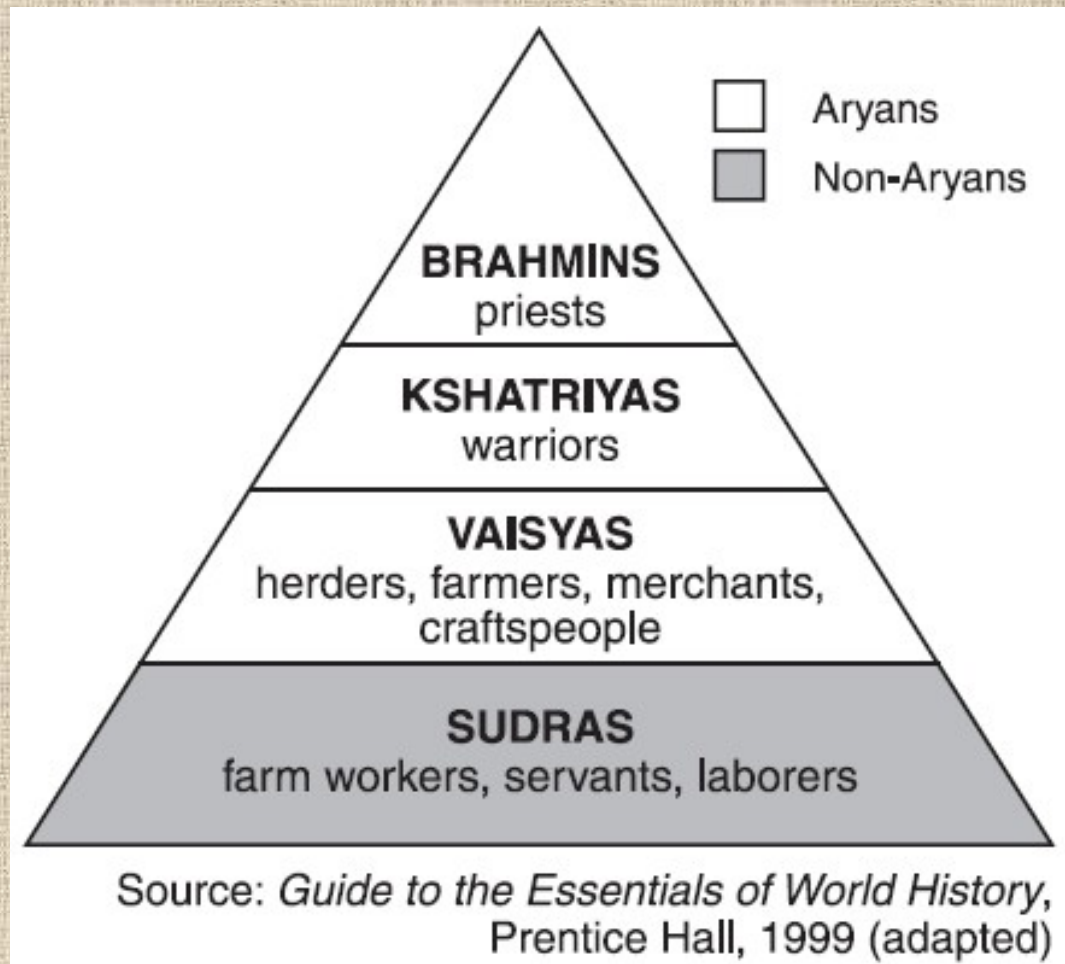
- The history of the Indian subcontinent has been affected by its geography and climate. For example, it is mostly isolated due to the Himalayas in the North and large bodies of water everywhere else. Also, seasonal winds (monsoons) have affected sea trade.



- Following the times of the early Indus civilization, historians refer to the period 1500 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E. as the Vedic Age. (Because most of what we know about India at this time comes from the religious texts called the Vedas.)
- A group of light skinned Indo-Europeans called the Aryans arrived. They came into conflict with darker skinned Indians and set up a caste system based on skin color.



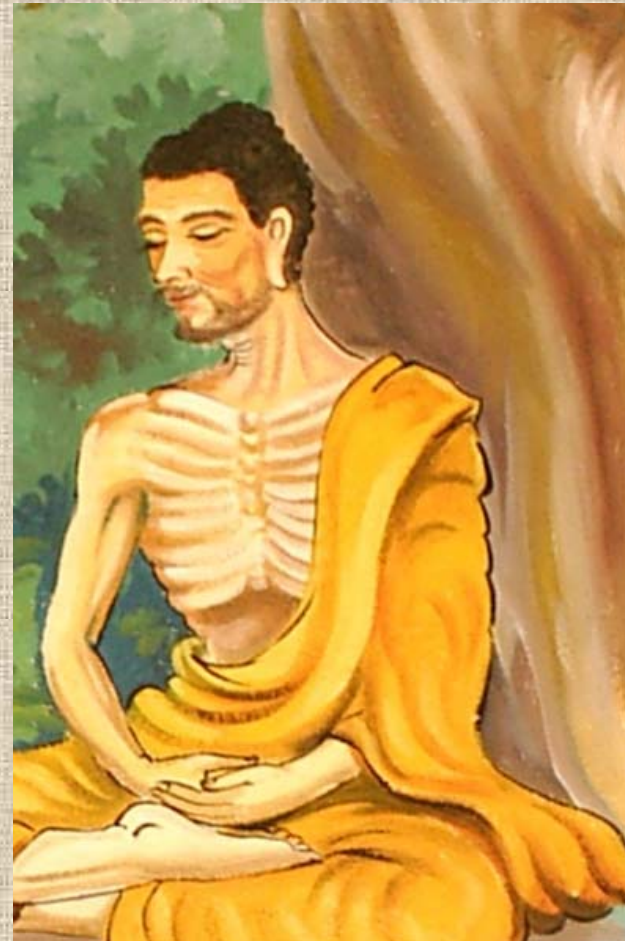
- The caste system that was implemented defined India society, and even today still has an influence over modern Indians.



- The caste system came to be connected to a widespread belief in reincarnation. As a result one reinforced the other. Whether or not one was reborn a bug, a dog, or a priest depended on karma, or the good deeds of one's life.



- The rise of Buddhism challenged the early Vedic faith and the Brahmin priests.
- The Buddha (563 – 483 B.C.E.) was Siddhartha Gautama. According to legend he came from a princely family and was sheltered from the horrors of the real world (death, sickness, old age).
- Once Siddhartha came across these things he began to see that life was about suffering and the only way to escape suffering (and reincarnation) was a path of moderation.



- Hinduism is often called the world's oldest religion, but in reality Hinduism was the Vedic religion's response to Buddhism. (In other words, the Vedic faith was slightly updated).
- Hinduism is polytheistic in nature, with individuals worshipping personal deities out of thousands of gods.



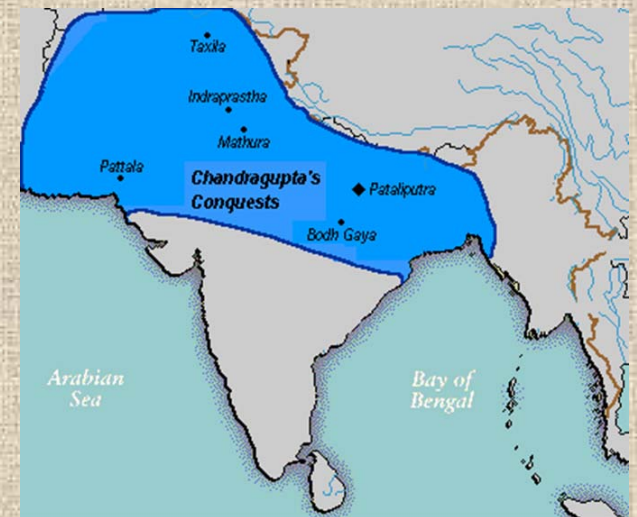
- Buddhism centers on the individual and does not preach the existence of a deity.
- In contrast, Hinduism allows a worshipper a variety of ways to approach god and obtain divine favor (as a result, Hinduism will become the dominant faith of India).



- The unification of the Indian subcontinent is a rare occurrence in history, and Indians typically identified themselves in terms of their caste as opposed to some other nation.

- **Mauryan Empire, (324 – 184 B.C.E.)**

- Chandragupta created India's first unified empire by gaining control of lands in eastern India and trading 500 elephants to one of Alexander the Great's generals for control of a province in northern India.



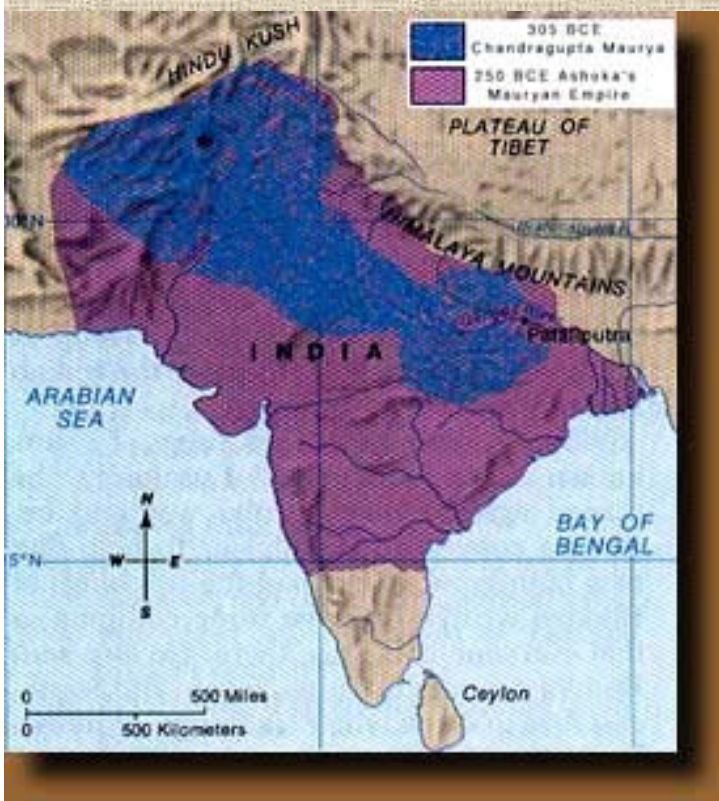
- During the Mauryan Empire . . .
 - rulers were generally harsh
 - a network of spies existed
 - assassinations were carried out
 - heavy taxes were levied to build large armies
 - there was an elaborate civil service with officials specialized in everything from tax collection, public works, and to a military office dedicated to the use of elephants in war.
- Similar to other world leaders Chandragupta had advisors. His advisor Kautilya even wrote a pragmatic treatise (article / paper) on government and how to succeed in politics (*This is rather similar to Machiavelli during the European Renaissance – who wrote “The Prince.”*)





- **Ashoka** (Chandragupta's grandson) further extended the Mauryan Empire through military campaigns.
- He is remembered mostly for his conversion to Buddhism.

– The conversion signaled a transition in his life. For the once cruel and amoral leader became peaceful. He constructed moral precepts / guidelines for his subjects – urging them to take care of the sick and helpless.



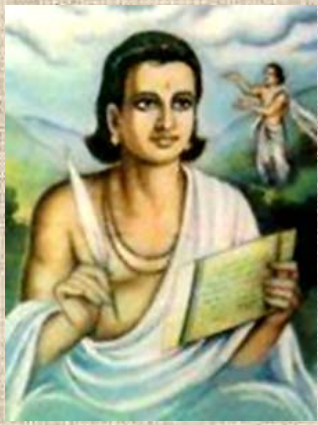
- For a short time the empire continued to prosper after Ashoka's death (232 B.C.E.), but due to dynastic disputes political unity in India was lost and the subcontinent returned to a patchwork of small principalities.
- Commerce did continue along a long network of roads as well as in surrounding seas.



- The next ruler to unify India was Chandra Gupta more than 500 years later. The **Gupta Empire** (320 – 550 C.E.) sat upon important trade routes and exploited the area's agricultural productivity.
- Under the Gupta . . .
 - there was a 25% tax on agriculture. *There were also taxes on commodities and those who used the irrigation network.*
 - the government monopolized key metal and salt mines.
 - demanded subjects perform a number of days of labor.
 - a number of cultural achievements took place.



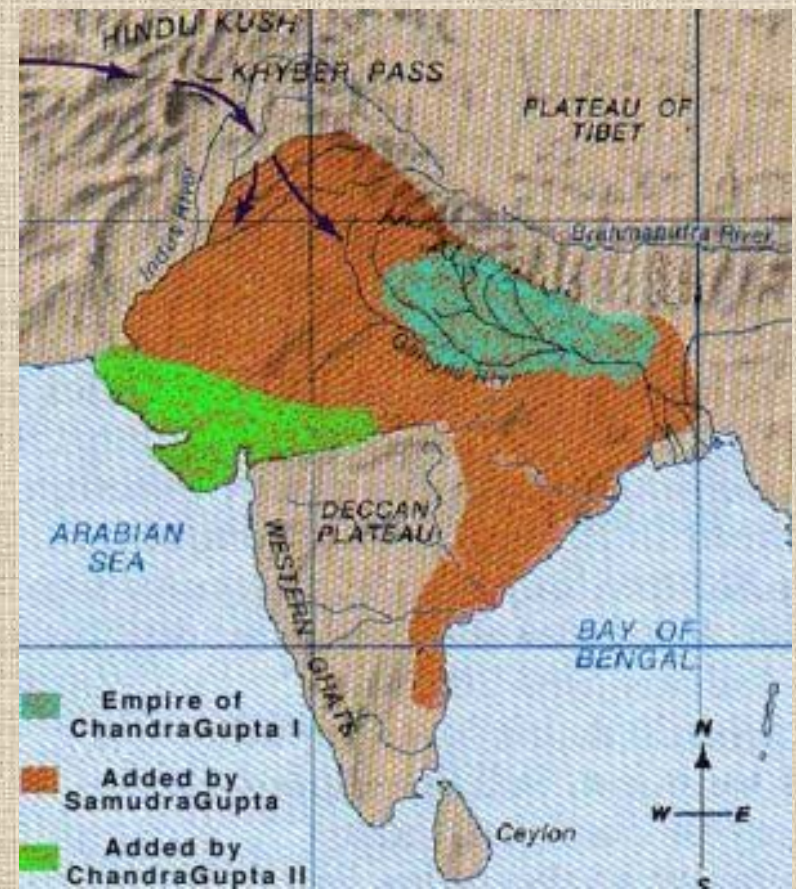
- The cultural achievements of the Guptas include . . .



- The works of Kalidasa, an Indian playwright and poet who would later influence European writers.
 - Scientist calculating the world as round.
 - Hindu physicians compiling medical guides about disease and medicine (even plastic surgery was performed)
 - developments in mathematics such as the decimal system and “Arabic” numerals.
- Furthermore, even though Gupta rulers were generally Hindu, this was the “heyday” of Buddhism in India – for travelers from as far away as China came to study at Buddhist monasteries.

- However, the Gupta Empire was not as extensive in size or effective in terms of control as the Mauryan.

- The bureaucracy and intelligence network was less intrusive, and governors had a free hand in organizing outlying areas (However, distant kingdoms were expected to make tribute).



- Since the Gupta Empire was less “forceful” they attempted to enforce its will through “persuasion.”
- The center of the empire would collect luxury goods and profits from its trade and redistribute them to subjects / princes who emulated Gupta’s central governance.



- As in other areas, the formation of political and social structures in India led to a decline in the status of women.
- Girls were married off at an early age (sometimes as early as 6) to ensure her virginity and that she could be brought up to suit her husband's purposes.
- In some parts of India, widows were expected to cremate themselves on their husband's funeral pyre (those who didn't were shunned socially).

- The Gupta Empire came to end with the arrival of the Huns (nomadic invaders from the steppes of Central Asia).
- Defense of the distant frontier exhausted Gupta's treasury, and the empire collapsed by 550. *(Similar to Rome & Han China?)*



Southeast Asia

- Buddhism made inroads in Southeast Asia because traders would ride the monsoon winds to the region and stay for long periods of time (until the next monsoons came and blew them back).

▼ The 1st century AD witnessed a schism in Buddhism: the resultant Mahayana Buddhism offered universal salvation and spread through Central Asia and China, while the more conservative Theravada Buddhism became influential in Southeast Asia.

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Source: Philip's Atlas of World History



Quick Video



Buddha and Ashoka: Crash Course World History #6

- Below is a *Crash Course* video on India at this time. You may use it as a summary of the PowerPoint and as additional details on Buddhism and Ashoka.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Nn5uqE3C9w&list=PLBDA2E52FB1EF80C9>