

India: Quick Overview of Indian History – Outline

I. FYI:

- a. Historically, India's geographic boundaries were bigger than they are today
 - i. Bangladesh + India + Pakistan = India
- b. Bangladesh and Pakistan did not exist as separate countries until after India gained independence from Great Britain in 1947
- c. "Northwest India" generally means Pakistan
- d. Ancient Indian cities, such as Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, were located in what is now Pakistan

II. India's geography

- a. As large as Europe, minus Russia
- b. Population: 1.15 billion (2010 estimate)
 - i. Second only to China
- c. Himalayan Mountains (northeast)
 - i. Separate India from Tibet and western China
- d. Northwest
 - i. Historic route of land invasions
 - 1. Alexander the Great
 - 2. Mughals (or Moguls)
- e. Indian Ocean
 - i. Route of British conquest
- f. Climate
 - i. Hot (except in highlands)
 - ii. Land – very fertile to semi-desert

III. Ganges and Indus river valleys

- a. Northern India
- b. Early 1900s
 - i. Archaeologists uncovered ruins of Mohenjo-Daro (circa 2600 BCE) and Harappa (circa 2600 BCE)
- c. Bronze and copper
- d. Fired brick
- e. Picture writing (undeciphered)
- f. Farming, jewelry-making, and woven cloth
- g. Engineering – drainage systems
- h. Civilization ended circa 1900 BCE

IV. Aryan invasion (circa 1700-1300 BCE)

- a. Invaders came from Europe
 - i. Traced through Indo-European language roots
- b. Ruled India for hundreds of years
- c. Set up small kingdoms ruled by rajahs
- d. Conquered native Dravidians
- e. Created modern Hinduism from Dravidian religious traditions and their own ideas
- f. Established India's caste system

V. Vedic Age (circa 1500-500 BCE)

- a. *Vedas* written in Sanskrit (India's literary language)
- b. *Mahabharata*
- c. *Ramayana*

VI. Alexander the Great (ruled India circa 327-326 BCE)

- a. Macedonian (Greek) who led conquering forces across northern India
- b. Ruled briefly
- c. Greeks expelled from most of India after Alexander's death
- d. Continued contact with Alexandrian successor state, the Seleucid empire, with the west

VII. Maurya Empire (322-185 BCE)

- a. Dynasty begun by Chandragupta Maurya
- b. Asoka (grandson), 273-232 BCE
 - i. Ruled all of India
 - ii. Converted to Buddhism
 - iii. Religious tolerance, generosity, wisdom, and kindness
 - iv. Spread Buddhism – Burma, Ceylon, Siam, Tibet
 - v. War and disunity after his death

VIII. Gupta dynasty (320-467 CE)

- a. Northern India reunited
- b. Trade
 - i. With west
 - ii. Burma, Indochina, Java, Sumatra
 - iii. Buddhism and Hinduism spread out
 1. Cultural diffusion

IX. Mughal empire (1526-1858)

- a. 12th century – Muslim invasion
- b. 1500 – Central Asians, led by Mughals (Moguls), established a kingdom in northern India
- c. Akbar (1556-1605)
 - i. Conquest of central India
 - ii. Efficient and strong government
 - iii. Religious tolerance
 - iv. Business and commerce encouraged

- d. Architecture
 - i. Forts, mosques, palaces, tombs
 - 1. Taj Mahal – Agra, India – tomb for a Mughal emperor’s favorite wife

X. End of the Mughal empire

- a. 17th century – empire crumbled
 - i. Fighting between smaller kingdoms
 - ii. English, French, and Portuguese traders gained influence
- b. 1763 – Seven Years’ War
 - i. Fight in North America known as the French and Indian War
 - ii. English (British East India Company) won control of India from the French
 - iii. Taken over by the British government under Queen Victoria (British Raj, 1858-1947)
 - 1. Independent after World War II (1947)

XI. Hinduism

- a. Escape sins of life by attaining purity and perfection of the soul
- b. Caste system
 - i. Process starts in lowest caste (Untouchables)
 - ii. Soul reincarnated in person of higher caste
 - iii. Must carry out duties of the caste
 - iv. Repeated rebirths
 - v. Soul ultimately becomes perfect and merges with the soul of Brahma (principal god)

XII. Castes

- a. Original castes
 - i. Brahmin (priests)
 - ii. Warriors
 - iii. Farmers and traders
 - iv. Sudra (servants)
- b. Eventually divided by occupation into thousands of castes
 - i. Lowest – the Untouchables
 - 1. Strict purification rituals if others contact them
 - 2. Today – legal protections under Indian law, but prejudice still exists

XIII. Hinduism (continued)

- a. All life is sacred
 - i. Animals respected
 - ii. Cow is sacred
 - iii. Most Hindus are vegetarians
- b. Basic beliefs
 - i. World is evil
 - ii. Reincarnation after death (animal or human)
 - iii. Soul purified by completion of caste duties
 - iv. Reverence for animals
 - v. Escape world’s evils through prayer

XIV. Buddhism

- a. Founded by Gautama (563-483 BCE)
 - i. Age 30 – gave up position and wealth to study the right way to live
 - ii. Called Buddha (“the enlightened one”)
- b. Life is evil and suffering
 - i. Can be avoided by good desires
- c. Eightfold Path
 - i. Do not gossip, have impure thoughts, hate, lie, or steal
- d. Rare in India today, but spread through eastern Asia

XV. Culture

- a. Kalidasa (6th century CE)
 - i. Playwright and poet
 - ii. Fairy stories and animal fables
- b. Art and architecture
 - i. Temples covered with designs and figures

XVI. Science and math

- a. Mathematics
 - i. Zero
 - ii. Decimal point
 - iii. Minus sign
 - iv. “Arabic” numerals (Europe got them from Arab traders, who got them from India)
- b. Gupta period (320-467 CE)
 - i. Leaders in dyeing, tanning leather, soap and glass making
- c. Textiles
 - i. Cotton, cashmere, calico, chintz – all originally Indian terms

XVII. Review questions

- a. After 1947, India split into what three separate countries?
- b. What two ancient Indus River Valley civilizations were discovered by archaeologists in the early 1900s?
- c. The *Vedas* were written in what language?
- d. What religion was practiced by the Mughal emperors?
- e. Describe India’s caste system.
- f. What is the origin of the term “Arabic numerals”?