

Chapter 6 Notes – *India and Southeast Asia, 1500 B.C.E. – 600 C.E.*

Chapter Thesis: The history of India can be described by its diversity: from its ethnic and lingual groups and social stratification to its political fragmentation, geographical variation, and polytheistic religion.

- I. *Foundations of Indian Civilization: 1500 B.C. – 300 A.D.:* The large Indian subcontinent is physically isolated by the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean, spanning about 2000 miles in length and width.
 - Most open channel into India through the northwest, used by both invaders and migrant peoples
 - A. The Indian Subcontinent: The climate of the massive Indian subcontinent is determined by its relative position to both its ocean to the south and the mountain ranges to its north; these sheltering bodies along with monsoons produce subtropical weather and seasonal precipitation that also allow for agriculture in India's river basins.
 - Entire subcontinent includes modern states of India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, and Nepal
 - Northern mountains with forested areas and high meadows, shields the subcontinent from Arctic winds and causes a subtropical climate
 - **Monsoons**, or seasonal winds, cause for moisture and precipitation, affected by Indian Ocean
 - River basins at the Indus and Ganges Rivers
 - B. The Vedic Age: From 1500 – 500 B.C. a period of history described by the Vedas religious texts reveal a time in which Indian society was developing and taking hold, beginning with societal class systems centered around the Vedic religion and the reincarnation ideology.
 - Time between 1500 – 500 B.C. is called the Vedic Age after religious text called the **Vedas** that tell us about the history of this era
 - Indo-European groups dominated northern India during this time
 - Fall of Indus River Valley civilization gave rise to scattered patriarchal kinship groups, some of which moved east to the Ganges Plain (aided by technology development)
 - Early system of social classes developed, called **varna**, made up of four groups: “Brahmin” who were priests and scholars, “Kshatriya” who were officials or warriors, “Vaishya” who were artisans or tradespeople, and “Shudra” who were manual laborers
 - Population further divided into **jati** or “castes” that described one's occupation and rituals, as well as who they married or lived with
 - Sacrifice essential to Vedic religion, reincarnation and **karma** also stem from the beliefs in the class and caste system

- C. Changes to the Old Order: Jainism and Buddhism: Those dissatisfied with the state of the caste system decided to pursue spiritual matters in a way that focused on self-improvement, resulting in two major beliefs within India that would affect its culture: Jainism, which emphasized the sanctity of nature, and Buddhism, which emphasized the importance of self-discipline.
- Objections against the traditional system of a rigid social hierarchy led to individuals attracting followers of people to question the Vedic religion
 - Jainism was started by one such individual named Mahavira, who emphasized animism and the belief in holiness of living creatures, and to extremists resulted in starving to death and nudity
 - Buddhism began as an internal quest by a princely young man named Siddhartha Gautama, who found both his luxurious life from his family's social position and the opposite extreme of asceticism too polar, adopting a "moderation" of the two
 - "Four Noble Truths" and "Eightfold Path" emerged from the core thinking of Gautama, but he left no central instruction to his followers before his death, leading to many beliefs under the Buddhist religion and values
- D. The Evolution of Hinduism: In response to the increase of individualistic religions such as Jainism and Buddhism, the Vedic religion underwent adjustments that led to Hinduism, which synthesized beliefs from Aryan and Dravidian cultures as well as Buddhist ideas to create a religion that the common people could still follow, allowing them to have personal connections to traditional deities.
- Vedic religion adjusted due to the rise in popularity of alternate religions and evolved into modern **Hinduism**, which is still practiced
 - Lessened focus on sacrifice and more direct communication with gods, combines beliefs from core Aryan Vedic religion as well as Dravidian culture and Buddhism
 - Hinduism provides many ways for followers to serve the gods and grow in their favor, including mental meditation and discipline, extreme devotion, knowledge of the truths
 - Famous shrines and Hindu festivals are scattered throughout all of the Indian subcontinent, often sites of pilgrimage for its worshippers
- II. *Imperial Expansion and Collapse, 324 B.C.E. – 550 C.E.*: Political fragmentation has been an almost constant in India, although in cases such as the Mauryan and Gupta Empires, political unity was achieved and formed the basis for Indian civilization.
- A. The Mauryan Empire, 324 – 184 B.C.: Beginning as an offshoot of one of the many early kinship groups of north India in the sixth century B.C., Chandragupta Maurya assumed the throne for a kingdom in the Ganges Valley in the late fourth century B.C. and founded the Mauryan Empire, which would famously become Buddhist under his grandson Ashoka.
- Kingship group/kingdom of Magadha in the Ganges during 600 B.C. accrued influence and wealth through agriculture and iron mines

- Chandragupta Maurya gained control of this kingdom in the late fourth century B.C. and expanded it to become India's first centralized empire
 - Mauryan Empire governed by six committees for trade, taxes, sales and commerce, foreigners, birth and death registration, and manufacturing
 - Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka began military campaigns that expanded the boundaries of the empire even further, but converted to Buddhism after witnessing his victory over Kalinga and subscribed to nonviolence for the rest of his life in government
- B. Commerce and Culture in an Era of Political Fragmentation: After the fall of the Mauryan Empire attributed to a weakened, disputing government, five hundred years of foreign invaders in India saw a surprisingly significant cultural and economic boom, with networks of trade and developments in literature, science, and technology.
- Mauryan Empire fell after Ashoka's death in 232 B.C. and was a result of disputes for power and the cost of the army and administration, collapsed from foreign invaders in 184 B.C.
 - 500 years passed before another centralized empire rose again
 - During the interim, India was dominated by different foreign invaders: the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, nomadic groups from Central Asia, the Shakas, and the Kushans
 - Economy and culture flourished despite political fragmentation: networks of roads and towns hosted busy commerce with China, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa
 - Advances in literature: works of Mahabharata and Bhagavad-Gita
 - Advances in science and technology: herbal medicines, Sanskrit language, iron metallurgy
 - Tamil Kingdoms of southern India also made advances in the arts, poetry, and performance while remaining in frequent conflict
- C. The Gupta Empire, 320 – 550 A.D.: Beginning in a model similar to the Mauryan Empire, even having a king named Chandra Gupta, the Gupta Empire began in the Ganges Plain with all of its natural resources and developed a state of complex society and a government that used propaganda and dramatic ceremony to convince people to follow the law.
- Gupta Empire emerged from the Ganges Plain at Pataliputra, founder modeling himself as the first Mauryan king by calling himself "Chandra Gupta"
 - Strategic advantages of this empire similar to the Mauryans: agriculture in the Ganges Plain, relative location to trade routes, and iron ores
 - "Theater state" described the Gupta empire, using methods of persuasion of its people through splendor of capital and dramatic ceremonial traditions
 - Gupta empire supported astronomers, scientists, poets, and mathematicians

- Urbanization and development of political structure led to a loss of women's rights
- Gupta monarchs identified as Hindu, reviving ancient practices of the Vedic religion and restoring the roles of the priests in society
- Other religions were tolerated, however, and Buddhist monasteries coexisted with the Hindu era of the Gupta Empire
- Arts and commerce developed during this time as well
- Decline of Gupta Empire was due to pressure of invasion by the Huns, who came through the weak point of the natural barrier of the northern Himalayas, through the steppes of Central Asia
- Defense of this region far from administrative center led to the lack of resources for the government and collapse

III. *Southeast Asia, 50 – 600 A.D.*: Between the ancient civilizations of China and India, the three geographical zones of Southeast Asia (including the thousands of islands across the Pacific Ocean, the Indochina mainland, and the Malay peninsula) and the respective societies that developed within them were influenced by both of these cultures. The natural resources of this region include agriculturally rich plains caused by volcanoes and a tropical climate.

- A. Early Civilization: Migrants from southern China mixed with the indigenous people of southeast Asia to become the dominant population of the Malay, who developed communities along this region near riverbanks or volcanic plains.