

Framework for Indian History: Geography and a Formative Period: Important reasons for India's distinctive path lie in geography and early historical experience. India's topography shaped a number of vital features. Vast Indian subcontinent is partially separated from rest of Asia by northern mountain ranges. Mountain passes linked India to civilizations in Middle East. Not as isolated as China, subcontinent was nevertheless set apart within Asia. Most important agricultural regions are along the 2 great rivers, Ganges and Indus. During its period, Vedic and Epic ages, Aryans (Indo-Europeans), originally from central Asia, impressed their own stamp on Indian culture. During these ages, the caste system, Sanskrit, and various belief systems were introduced.

Patterns in Classical India: 600 B.C.E., India had passed through its formative stage. Indian development during its classical era did not take on the structure of rising and falling dynasties, as in China. Patterns in Indian history were irregular and often consisted of invasions through subcontinent's northwestern mountain passes. As a result, classical India alternated between widespread empires and a network of smaller kingdoms. Even during rule of smaller kingdoms, both economic and cultural life advanced. Maurya and Gupta dynasties were most successful in India, run entirely by Indians. Greatest of the Mauryan emperors was Ashoka (269-232 B.C.E.). The Guptas did not produce as dynamic a leader as Ashoka, but they did provide classical India with its greatest period of stability.

Political Institutions: Classical India did not develop solid political and cultural institutions the Chinese experienced, nor high level of political interest of Greece and Rome. Greatest features political diversity and regionalism. Guptas, for example, did not require single language for all their subjects. Development of rigid caste system lies at heart of this characteristic. In its own way, caste system promoted tolerance, allowing widely different social classes to live next to each other, separated by social strictures. Loyalty to caste superseded loyalty to any overall ruler. Religion, particularly Hinduism, was the only uniting influence in Indian culture.

Religion and Culture: 2 major religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, marked classical India. Hinduism, religion of India's majority, unique among world religions in that no central figure is credited for developing it. Encouraged both worldly and mystical pursuits and highly adaptable to varying groups. Buddhism founded on teachings of an Indian prince, Gautama, later Buddha, or enlightened one. Buddha accepted many Hindu beliefs, rejected priests and caste system it supported. Buddhism spread through missionaries into Sri Lanka, China, Korea, and Japan. Classical India produced important work in science and mathematics. Gupta-supported university at Nalanda taught religion, medicine, and architecture, other disciplines. Indian scientists, borrowing ideas from Greek learning provided by Alexander the Great, made important discoveries. More important were mathematical advancements, including concept of zero, Arabic numerals, and decimal system. Indian artists created shrines to Buddha called stupas and painted in lively colors.

Economy and Society: India developed extensive trade both within subcontinent and on ocean to its south. Caste system described many key features of Indian society and its economy. Rights

of women became increasingly limited as Indian civilization developed; male dominance over women was usually greater in theory than in practice. Economy was extremely vigorous, especially in trade, surpassing China and Mediterranean world. Merchants traded from the Roman Empire to Indonesia to China.

Indian Influence: Because of its extensive trading network, Indian cultural influence spread, especially in Southeast Asia. Buddhism was leading cultural export. Indian merchants often married into royal families in other areas. Political dominance of outside peoples not characteristic of Indian governments.

China and India: Offer important contrasts in politics and society, they resembled each other in that built stable structures over large areas and used culture to justify social inequality. Restraint of Chinese art contrasted with the more dynamic style of India. The latter developed a primary religion, Hinduism, while the former opted for separate religious and philosophical systems. Chinese technological advancements stressed practicality, while Indians ventured into mathematics for its own sake. Indian merchants played a greater societal role than their Chinese counterparts. Both, however, relied on large peasant classes in agrarian settings; both accepted political power based on land ownership.

Buddhism

Four Noble Truths: His journey to find the meaning of life had concluded. Buddha realized that life is ruled by 4 Noble Truths.

1. Life is filled with suffering
2. Suffering is caused by people's want
3. Suffering can be ended if people stop wanting things, like more pleasure and more power
4. To stop wanting things, people must follow 8 basic laws

Eightfold Path

1. To know the truth
2. To intend to resist evil
3. To not say anything to hurt others
4. To respect life, property and morality
5. To work at a job that does not injure others
6. To try to free one's mind from evil
7. To be in control of one's feeling and thoughts
8. To practice appropriate forms of concentration

The Middle Way: The Eightfold Path was designed to guide people without making life too strict or too easy. The Middle Way is the name Buddhists call lives guided by the Eightfold Path. After the Buddha's death in 483 BCE, Buddhism spread rapidly throughout Southern and Eastern Asia.

