



## Chapter 4

# Central Asia and India's Beginnings

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# Chapter Chronology

c. 2500–1900 B.C.E.

*Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa flourish*

c. 1500 B.C.E.

*Invasion of Aryans*

c. 1500–500 B.C.E.

*The Vedic Epoch*

563–483 B.C.E.

*Life of the Buddha*

326 B.C.E.

*Invasion by Alexander the Great*

320–232 B.C.E.

*Mauryan Dynasty*



# Indus Valley Civilization and Early Trade

- Earliest Indian civilization found in plains of Indus and Saraswati Rivers
- Trade with north and west before agriculture
- Farming began 6000 BCE
- By 4000 BCE, region had dense population and fortified farming villages
- 3000 BCE, explosive growth - towns became cities
- Huge trade network linking eastern Mediterranean, East Africa, Arabia, Asia





# Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa (Slide 1 of 2)

- 2 cities on Indus River with over 100,000 people
- Many smaller towns
- Physical layout
  - Fired brick structures
  - Wide streets at right angles
  - Buildings 2 to 3 stories high
  - Sewage canals from houses to larger canal
  - Citadel with granary, Great Bath
- Regularity suggests powerful government



# Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa (Slide 2 of 2)

- Both cities constitute one civilization: Dravidian
- Writing not yet been deciphered
- Know almost nothing about religion, government, society, scientific and intellectual accomplishments
- Prosperous from at least 2500 BCE to about 1900 BCE
- Decline:
  - Abandonment of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa
  - Natural catastrophes made land nonproductive
  - Migrations of Aryan nomads



# Central Asian Steppe Lands (Slide 1 of 2)

- Nomadic pastoralists inhabited **Steppe Land** (Prairie grasslands not suitable for farming)
  - Mutual dependence / trade between farmers and herders
  - Periodic raids or conquest into settled areas
  - Pastoralists benefited from domestication of horse and Bactrian camel and invention of chariot & bridle
  - Warriors on horseback often effective over infantries
- Major ethnic groups
  - Indo-Iranians
  - Turko-Mongols





# Central Asian Steppe Lands (Slide 2 of 2)

## Bactria (Gandhara)

- Region in Central Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan)
- Key cities: Taxila, Balkh, Peshawar
- **Taxila**
  - Commercial center linking caravan routes
  - Center of Buddhist scholarship
- Attracted migrants and conquerors (Aryans, Kushans)

# The Vedic Epoch (Slide 1 of 2)

## Aryans

- Early Indo-European nomadic, horse-breeding people of ancient Asia
- Use of the chariot allowed them to take over Indus area
  - Aryan warriors dominated Indian agriculturalists
- In time, Aryans ruled all northern India (but never southern India)
- Gradually settled down as farmers, townspeople
  - Preferred fertile, well-watered Ganges area
  - New iron technology led to better tools
  - New rice cultivation from east led to better diets



# The Vedic Epoch (Slide 2 of 2)

- **Vedas**, ancient oral epics in Sanskrit, written after invasion, best source on Aryans
- Vedas say that Aryans
  - Worshiped gods of sky and storm
  - Used bronze weaponry and horse-drawn chariots
  - Assumed their superiority over Indians
- **Rigveda**, oldest Veda, says **Raja** (chieftain) led his war-loving, violent folk and magic-working priests

# Beginnings of Caste System (Slide 1 of 2)

- Caste system evolved during **Vedic Epoch** (1500-500 BCE) under Aryan dominance
  - Four main castes:
    - **Brahmins** – priests, highest rank
    - **Kshatrija** – warriors
    - **Vaishya** – freemen, farmers, traders
    - **Shudra** – non-free serf
- Pariahs** – untouchables – denied any caste standing whatsoever

# Beginnings of Caste System (Slide 2 of 2)

- **Caste** is a social unit; people are born into it
- Caste determines
  - Employment
  - Marriage
  - Dietary Restrictions
- System evolved into thousands of separate subcastes called **jatis**
- System inhibits individual social mobility
- Indian society became highly stratified, immobile



# Hinduism (Slide 1 of 3)

- Fourth largest religion in the world – one billion
- A way of life, philosophical system, inspiration for art, basis of all Indian political theory
- Earliest form called **Brahmanism**
  - Vedic rituals important to society
  - Brahmins (priests) knew Vedas; had power

# Hinduism (Slide 2 of 3)

- Aryan social structure (caste) remains
  - **Laws of Manu** – rights and duties of sexes, castes
- Basic principles and beliefs of Hinduism
  - Non-material unseen world is the real and permanent
  - Universe works as a Great Wheel (**samsara**) in which the individual soul is born and reborn
  - **Karma**: deeds determine the quality of the next life
  - **Dharma**: code of morals (duty) based on one's caste and station
  - **Moksha**: Ultimate goal of freedom from birth and rebirth

# Hinduism (Slide 3 of 3)

- Hindu deities
  - **Brahman** – impersonal life force
  - **Shiva** – creator and destroyer
  - **Vishnu** – preserver
  - Countless other deities
- By 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE reform movements arose
  - **Jainism** – emphasizes sacredness of all life
  - **Buddhism** – separated from Hinduism
  - **Bhakti Hinduism** – gods have more personal attributes, more approachable, spiritual fulfillment by devotion to individual gods



# Daily Life and the Position of Women

- Rural misery today is recent phenomenon
- Laws of Manu established “proper relations” between sexes:
  - **Sati** (suicide of widows)
  - **Purdah** (isolation from non-family males)
  - Woman’s dharma was to obey, serve husband and sons

# Buddhism's Founder

## **Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BCE)**

- The Buddha, or Enlightened One
- Indian aristocrat wandered a long time in search of answers to riddle of life and suffering
- Became a teacher of large group of disciples after extensive meditation
- His teachings eventually were more important in China and Japan
- In India, Buddhism was practically extinct by 1000 CE

# Teachings of the Buddha (Slide 1 of 2)

- **Four Noble Truths**

- All life is permeated by suffering
- All suffering is caused by desire
- Desire can only be overcome by attaining nirvana
- Way to **nirvana** (spiritual bliss) is guided by eight principles

- **Eightfold Path**

- Right (righteousness) ideas
- Right thought
- Right speech
- Right action
- Right living
- Right effort
- Right consciousness
- Right meditation



# Teachings of the Buddha (Slide 2 of 2)

- Anyone who follows these steps – Eightfold Path – will conquer desire, be released from suffering
- Suffering and loss are caused by desire for illusory power and happiness
- Once one sees these are not desirable, temptation will vanish
- Then will find serenity of the soul, harmony with nature and people

# Buddhism's Major Branches

- Buddhism spread among Indians of all backgrounds
  - Popularity from its democracy of spirit
  - Everyone can discover path to nirvana – no caste restrictions
- After his death, Buddhism split
  - **Theravada** (Narrower Vehicle)
    - Stricter version
    - Claims to be the pure form of his teachings
    - Emphasizes life in a monastery (sangha)
  - **Mahayana** (Greater Vehicle)
    - More liberal, sees doctrines as initial step, not the ultimate word
    - Many ways to salvation
    - There are many Buddhas, many more will appear
    - Followers far outnumber stricter adherents

# The Mauryan Dynasty

- Political vacuum with retreat of Alexander the Great
- Founded by Chandragupta Maurya - political unity
- **Ashoka** (ruled 269-232 BCE) – 3<sup>rd</sup> emperor
  - Founding spirit of Indian unity and nationhood
  - Spread Buddhism in India, encouraged religious tolerance
  - Period of internal prosperity, external peace
  - Became a devout Buddhist and pacifist
- **Decline:**
  - Successors were weak, conquered by invaders
  - New peoples became sedentary, adopted Buddhism
  - Political unity disintegrated





# Trade And The Spread Of Buddhism

## Buddhism

- Pastoralist tribes adopt Mahayana Buddhism
- Export of Buddhism to China through Silk Road trade
- Buddhism entered Chinese cultural life, blended new ideas with traditional Confucian practice and ethics

## Trade

- Buddhists taught that trade contributed to everyone's welfare
- Extension of trade along sea-lanes to Southeast Asia: port of Tamluk, and monsoon winds