

# Chapter Three

## Classical India



Ms. Sheets

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# Geography of India

- Most of India separated from rest of Asia; subcontinent.
- Himalayas in N and NE linked India to the Middle East.
- 2 important agricultural regions: Indus and Ganges River regions.

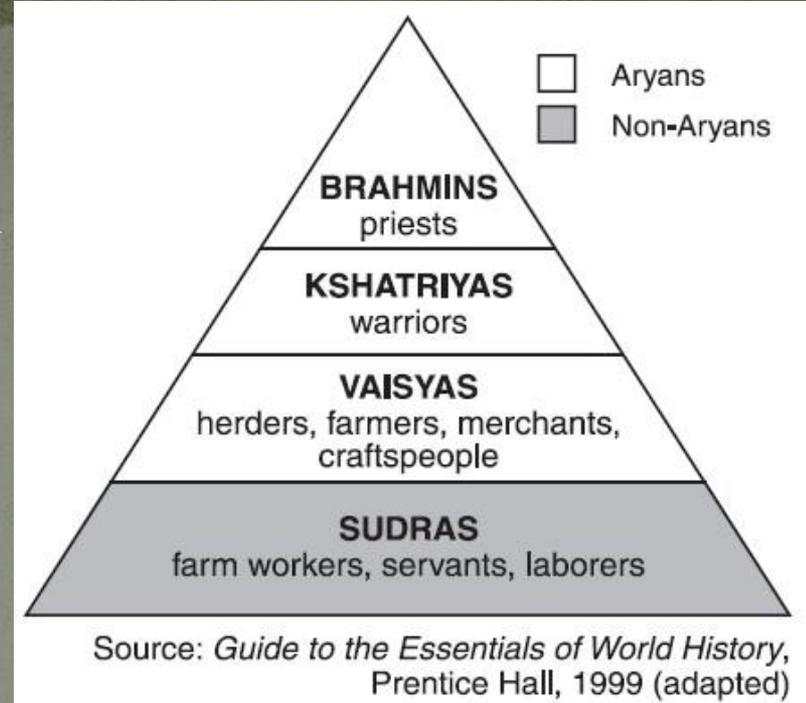


# Aryans and the Vedic Age

- Aryan (Indo-European) hunter-gatherer migrants came from central Asia to India.
- Vedic Age (1500-1000 BCE) = Indian agriculture flourishes in Indus and Ganges Rivers.
- Epic Age (1000 BCE – 600 BCE): Ramayana, Mahabharata and Upanishads created
- 600 BCE: India divided into 16 states
- Sanskrit: literary language of Vedic culture
- Religious texts: Vedas
- Indian Caste System: began as Indian social classes

# Indian Caste System

- Brahmins - priests
- Kshatriyas - warriors
- Vaisyas - merchants, traders
- Sudras - artisans, farmers
- Harijan – Untouchables, “outside” of the caste system,
- Castes were hereditary; only marry within castes, and could not move out of your caste in your lifetime.
  - Hindu process of reincarnation moves the physical body up or down
- Aryans developed caste systems because they saw themselves as superior, and wanted to distinguish themselves from non-Aryans.

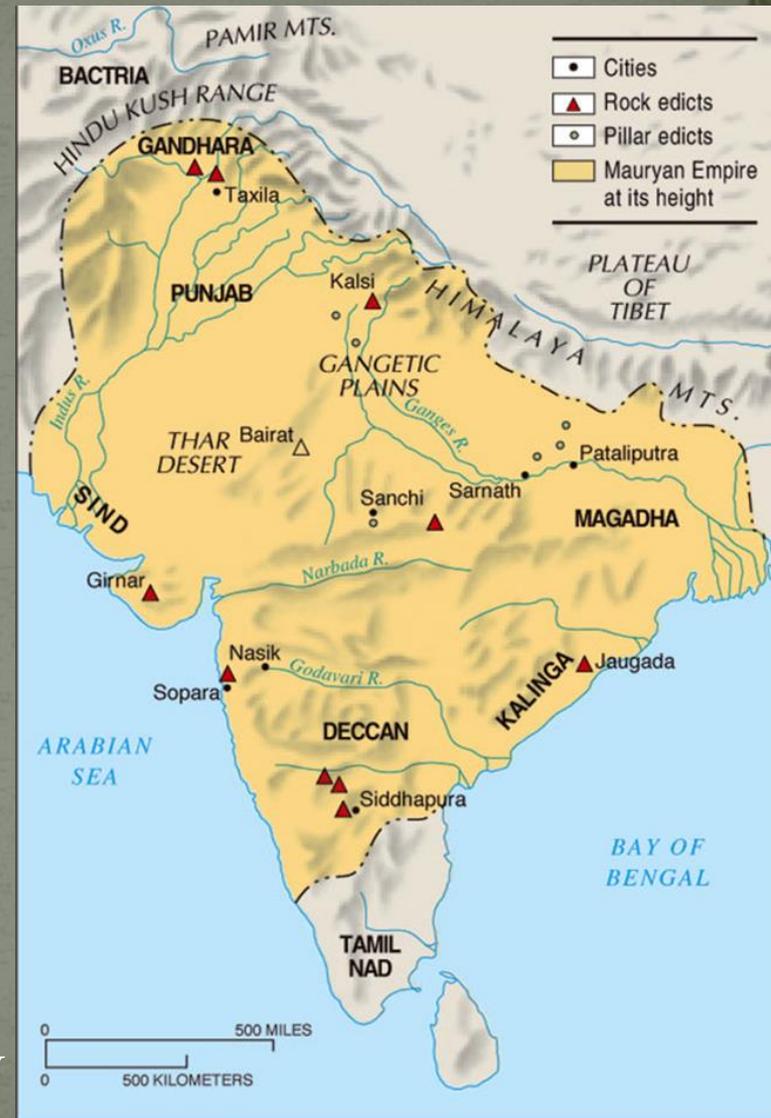


# Mauryan Empire (322 BCE-185 BCE)

- 327 BCE: Alexander the Great of Macedonia expanded to the Indus River Valley, where he set up a state named Bactria.
  - Threatens Indian communities (Aryans + non-Aryans)
- 322 BCE: Mauryan Empire founded by a soldier named Chandragupta Maurya to protect Indian territory.
  - Unify much of India by developing a large bureaucracy and a large army.
  - Promoted trade and communication.
- Mauryan rulers were the first to unify most of the Indian subcontinent.
- Mauryans rule using political centralization

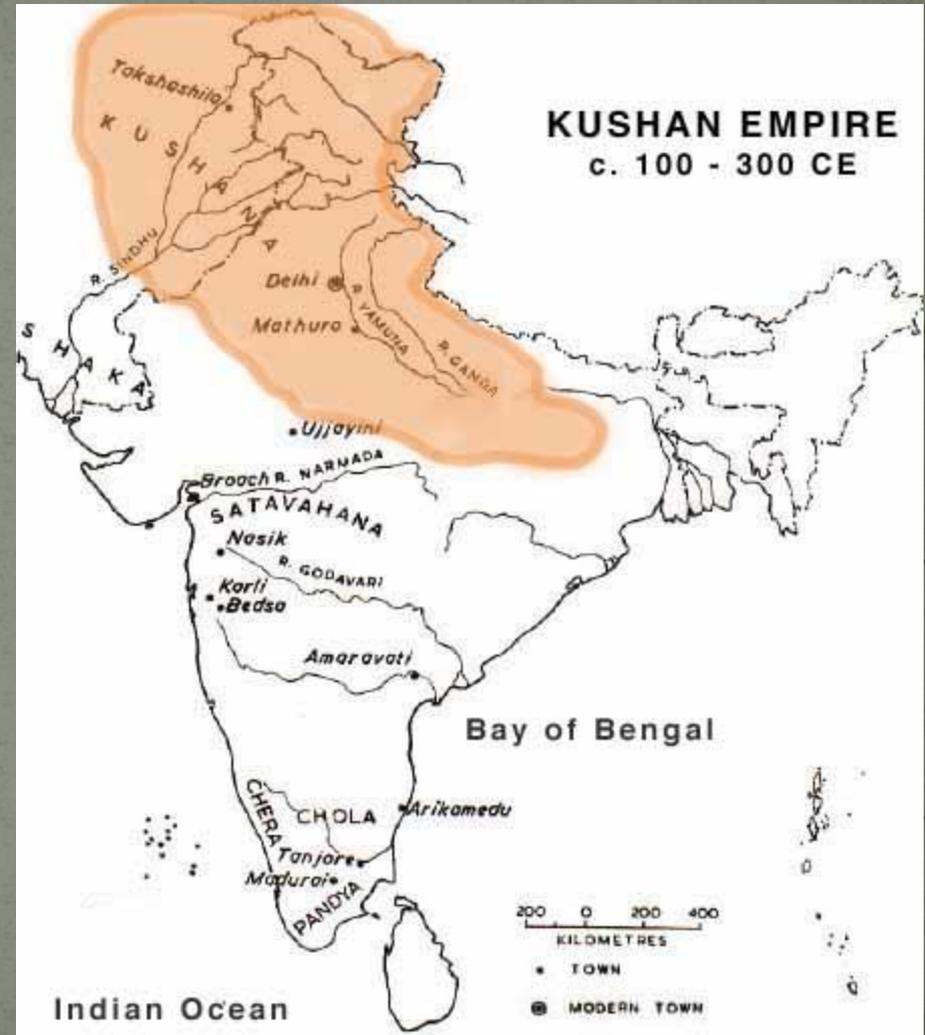
# Ashoka's Rule

- Ashoka was the most prominent Mauryan ruler (269-232 BCE)
- Extended Mauryan territory, gaining control of all but southern tip of India.
- Known for brutality, but later converts to Buddhism and becomes peaceful.
  - Spreads Buddhism throughout the subcontinent; continued to tolerate Hinduism.
- Improved trade routes that connected India to Silk Roads; constructed extensive road system
- Indian cultural influence spread widely because of trade and Buddhism, especially in Southeast Asia.



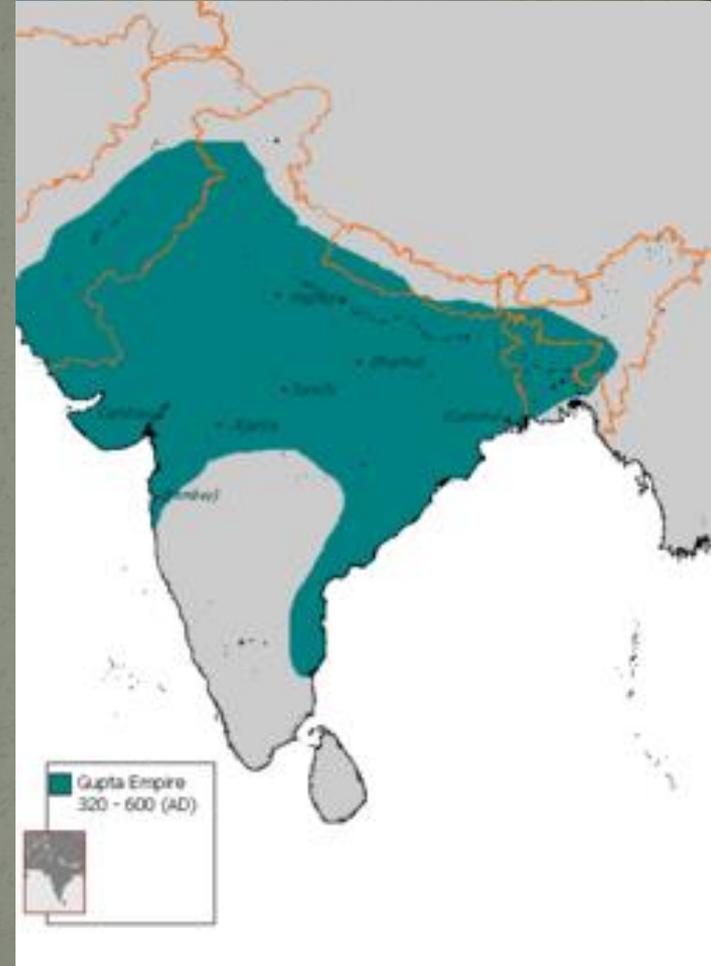
# Kushans (30 CE – 375 CE)

- After Ashoka's death, Mauryan empire began to fall apart
  - Regional kingdoms surfaced.
- Kushans invade central India from NW
- Greatest Kushan king, Kanishka, converted to Buddhism but this hurt Buddhism's popularity in India by associating it with foreign rule.



# Guptas (320 CE – 550 CE)

- Guptas established a large empire in 320 CE; an era of political stability.
- Guptas are Hindus; caste system and influence of Brahmins spread.
- Buddhism was still tolerated; Buddhist monks and nuns spread religion beyond India through monasteries and trade routes.
- Gupta political system was decentralized: local rulers could maintain authority in their respective territories if they ultimately submitted to Guptas.



# Gupta Golden Age

- Religion
  - Stupas in honor of Buddha; courtyards, paintings, sculptures
  - Lavish Hindu wall paintings and carving in caves (Ajanta)
- Literature
  - Growth of Sanskrit as the language of the educated
  - Huge output of epic poems



# Gupta Golden Age, cont.

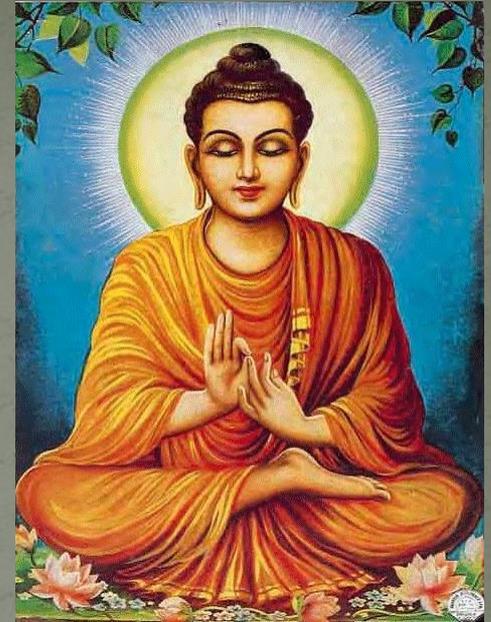
- Education
  - University at Nalanda: lecture halls, library, observatory
- Math
  - Discovery of zero and development of “Arabic” numerals
  - Decimal system; negative numbers; square roots
- Science
  - Indian scientists borrowed from Greek learning via contact with Alexander the Great’s Bactria.
  - Sterilization during surgery and in treatment of wounds.
  - Knowledge of plastic surgery and setting of bones.
  - Advances in astronomy (eclipses, identification of planets)
  - Circumference of the earth; theory of gravity
- Strengthening of trade, especially between E and SE Asia

# Gupta Decline

- By 500, Gupta India were invaded by the White Huns.
  - Other nomads drove further into central India.
- Simultaneously, the influence of Gupta rulers was in decline as local princes became more powerful.
  - Similar to what occurred within Zhou China
- 600 CE, India fragmented into regional states ruled by princes (Rajput).
- Although political decline occurred as a result of invasions, traditional Indian culture continued.
  - Buddhism became less popular, while Hinduism added to its followers.



# Hinduism and Buddhism



- Hinduism (religion of majority)
  - Developed gradually over many centuries
  - Sacred texts: Vedas
  - No founder, no central holy figure
- Buddhism
  - Developed in 563 BCE after Siddhartha Gautama, who becomes the Buddha (“enlightened one”)
  - Buddha accepted many Hindu beliefs but rejected its priests and the caste system it supported.
  - Buddhism didn’t “stick” in India despite Ashoka’s conversion, but spread throughout Asia

# Art in India



- Stupas: spherical Buddhist shrines
- Art was less realistic, and more stylistic
- Art was very colorful and was inspired by religion.

# Economy and Society in India

- Caste system
  - Created social order by regulating marriages and dictating rights (lower caste members had fewer rights)
- Family life
  - Patriarchal society; rights of women limited; sati
  - System of arranged marriages
- Economy
  - Extensive trade both within the subcontinent and in Indian Ocean trade.
    - Emphasis on trade (cinnamon, elephants, salt, fish)
  - Excelled in iron-making
  - Produce textiles, cotton
  - Agriculturally based