

# Classical Civilization: India

## The Framework for Indian History: Geography and a Formative Period

- Geography (including the **mountainous northern region** and **agricultural regions** along the **Indus** and **Ganges** rivers) and climate were major influences on Indian civilization.
- The **Aryan** culture, which dominated India after the fall of the Indus River Valley civilization, also played a formative role. Among other things, the Aryans brought the rudiments of the **caste system**.
- The **Vedas**, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Upanishads* formed the basis of a great Aryan literary tradition.

## Patterns in Classical India

- Two major empires formed at the crucial periods in classical Indian history, the **Mauryan** and, later, the **Gupta**.
- The Greek conquest of the Indus and the exchange of ideas with the Mediterranean basin and southwest Asia influenced the rise of the Mauryan dynasty.
- **Chandragupta Maurya** was the first Mauryan ruler, and **Ashoka** the greatest. Ashoka expanded the empire and promoted **Buddhism**.
- The Guptas arose after a period of nomadic invasions, and created a long period of political stability.

## Political Institutions

- **Regionalism** and **political diversity** dominated classical Indian political life, so central authority was relatively weak.
- The increasingly complex caste system promoted public order the way more conventional government structures did in many other cultures.

## Religion and Culture

- **Hinduism** and Buddhism were integral parts of classical Indian life. They had great influence on the arts and sciences, and both tended to promote religious tolerance.
- Hinduism is a **polytheistic** faith that gradually became more complex. It stresses **reincarnation**, the shallowness of worldly concerns, and *dharmā*, the moral path.
- Buddhism, founded by **Siddhartha Gautama** in the 6th century B.C.E., scorned caste and the material world in favor of self control and the Eightfold Path to **nirvana**.

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- By the last centuries B.C.E., the Indian civilization developed a written language, built cities, and produced art and literature, and nurtured two of the great world religions. Artistic patterns linked to religion and a significant scientific tradition developed.

### **Economy and Society**

- Dominated by the caste system, India developed extensive internal commercial and international maritime trade. However, India's economy remained essentially agricultural.
- Family life combined patriarchy with an emphasis on mutual emotional support.

### **Indian Influence**

- Classical India had an enormous effect on other parts of the world. India emerged as the **center of a Eurasian trade system**, a source of great wealth and a means of exporting Indian culture abroad.

### **China and India**

- **China and India offer important contrasts** in political emphases, social systems, and cultures.
- **They also resembled each other** in seeking to build stable structures over large areas and in using culture to justify social inequality.

### **Multiple-Choice Questions**

1. The highest Hindu caste members in India after the Epic Age were the
3. A central message of the Bhagavad Gita is that (A) great crises should warrant breaking caste rules.