

Indian History:  
320-1990

I. Gupta Kings:

A cultural flowering ensued under the Gupta kings, ending a period of several hundred years of unrest and chaos. The demise of the post-Ashokan Mauryan kings led to fragmentation and domination by outside forces. The Gupta's beginning in 320 under Chandragupta and Samudragupta will reinstall a lineage of Indian kings to rule over the subcontinent. Their rule was modeled very closely after the bureaucratic and federalist success of Ashoka's Mauryans. The empire established by uniting northern India and receiving tribute from Indus Valley and Nepalese states. Samudragupta brought much of southern India into the fold and made alliances with the frontier states to act as a buffer against foreign invaders, a problem long plaguing the Indians. Invaders from China and central Asia were thwarted however eventually the ferocity of the Huns was too much for India to handle as they turned back the mighty nomads, however in the process dealt themselves a fatal blow. By 500 the invasion of the Huns only 50 years old the Guptas had lost control to localities.

II. Gupta cultural resurgence:

The Gupta emphasis on Sanskrit and the literature of the Aryans sparked a cultural renaissance in India. Epic poetry, art, and religion flourished. Buddhism was in a state of total decline as the Gupta's supported Hinduism. The Gupta also rejuvenated Science and learning.

III. Daily Life in India:

Indian society during the Gupta age illustrated India's relenting reliance on custom and values. Farming the key to Indian daily life. Bad weather and taxes made this life as difficult as it was for Northern European farmers. Water supply crucial, famine is common, until they mastered deep earth irrigation India struggled vis-à-vis farming. Cereals, beans, and rice the most common products. Livestock were used for what they could produce in life and not in death. Markets, towns, and cities the center of commerce with merchants holding a high place in society. Towns often divided up on the basis of profession with many constituting the outcaste role. Most villages were enclosed by walls and divided up into quarters. The Caste system by the fifth century was crystallized into four distinct castes. Marriage was a key institution with the sole purpose being the production and raising of kids. Women had a vital place in society but were not treated in the same fashion as men. Upon death, in a situation still practiced in certain areas, women were forced to commit Sati the practice of a widow immolating herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.

IV. India's regional impact: Southeast Asian History

Given India's active trading culture it was no surprise that many facets of Indian culture were going to spread to the world of Southeast Asia. Sanskrit became a common mode of expression in the region and the demands of trade led to small Indian settlements throughout the region. This created not only the cultural diffusion of ideas but also led to a blending and assimilation of the different cultural groups. India did not rule the region but certainly exerted tremendous cultural impacts upon the peoples of Vietnam, Khmer, Burma and Micronesia. Stories like the Ramayana were modified and architecture embraced. Vietnamese were the least influenced living south of China from whom they gained independence from in 939. The Thai lived to the west, conquering parts of China eventually falling to the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Khmers were the most important of the SE Asian mini-empires. They were indigenous to the region of modern Cambodia and controlled the region. The maritime empire of Srivijaya (Java) originated on the island of Sumatra their wealth based on piracy and trade eventually falling to the Chinese traders of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. India's greatest cultural export to the region was the religion of Buddhism, which has been in a great state of decline but spread rapidly in the regions of Southeast Asia.

V. India under siege:

Between 650 and 1400 India experienced turmoil and invasion as wave after wave of invaders swept into the subcontinent. The invasions came in four distinct phases. Muslim Arabs attack on Sind (636-713), Afghanistan (643-870). Muslims into the Punjab (870-1030) and the Ganges Valley (1175-1206). Muslim Turks recently converted to Islam will eventually conquer Northern India. Under a series of powerful rulers the Muslims will begin to dominate parts of India. Some of these leaders such as Mahmud showed little respect or tolerance of Indian polytheism and destroyed Hindu holy places and Buddhist temples. Upon the death of Mahmud India enjoyed a period of peace for roughly 150 years when a new lineage of Turks had arisen in Afghanistan and re-established control of Northern India. Buddhists were hit particularly hard during this time as the Turks besieged their stupas and universities, driving many into the Himalayan regions of Tibet and Nepal. Turks began to avoid assimilating by bringing in outside Muslims to aid them in their rule, from as far away as Turkey, and Iran. These groups yielded a tremendous cultural influence on the Indians. The greatest impact of the time period was the establishment and penetration of Islam as an Indian religion in the Indus Valley region of present-day Pakistan.

VI. The Rule of the Mughals:

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century India had been dominated by foreign powers for nearly a millennium. Islamic sultanates had ruled northern India and central Asian hordes led by swept in and looted India. As time passed in the wake of Tamerlane and Babur the rule of foreigners had become destructive as India was conquered, looted, and besieged by foreign invaders. Akbar will establish Mughal greatness and bring with him the greatest leadership since the days of Ashoka and perhaps India's greatest leadership. He was a superb intellect, creative force, military strategist, and

personality. He added territory and effectively governed those territories that he controlled. His methods included federalism, efficient bureaucracy and well trained government officials. Finances will controlled explicitly by the Diwan and taxation was fair and equitable. Perhaps most startling about his reign was his ability to exploit the religious diversity within his empire, bringing together Islamic, Christian, and Hindu forces in a time of cooperation, peace and prosperity. Akbar understood the great power of each faith as well as their diverse divisions and attempted to bridge those gaps through *sulahkul*. His religious beliefs extended into the different branches of Islam as well as Hinduism, yet he was a devout Muslim.

## VI: Post Akbar Dynasties

Akbar's son brought about a long line of able yet unspectacular emperors who fought Muslim insurgence and European expansion. Each built a capital to attempt to out do their predecessor, attempting to create great Islamic cities. This period also saw an amazing surge in the quality and quantity of Islamic art and architecture in India including the Taj Mahal built for the deceased wife of Shah Jahan (Mumtaz Jahan). Imperial succession was never solved by the Mughals who struggled with competition amongst sons, this was evident after the death of Shah Jahan. His son Aurangzeb eventually wins the power struggle after executing his father and locking his father away until death came in 1666. He was a ruthless skillful general who conquered more of India than any prior Mughal emperor. He introduced reforms to strengthen Islamic law and forbid the long held practice of *Suttee*. His reign saw the destruction of Hindu idols and unequal taxation for religious groups. His intolerance and piety extended so far to criticize the eternal tomb of his mother for being against Islam and too extravagant. Spent his entire reign attempting to bring down Hindu militants resisting his rule (Maratha). It was the problems created by the great Aurangzeb that eventually will sink his followers.

## VII. European Rivalry for the Indian Trade

Europe had long since been interested in Indian trade for its wide array of mineral wealth and incredible diversification of spices. Portugal is the first to get involved as they arrived at Goa in 1510 and established a headquarters for trade and missionary activity. The Dutch will follow the lead and attempt to rustle the trade routes from the Portuguese. The British will then organize the British East India Company, the British will be granted concessions by the Indians in exchange for British concessions (Bribes). These trading forts will eventually become modern cities such as Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Eventually these trading centers will grab the attention of the rest of the European world, namely the British rival-France. The French and British began battling over control of India during their period of extensive rivalry that ended with the Treaty of Paris 1763. Britain will gradually emerge as the leading force in India evolving from economic leadership to commercial leadership to political and social leadership. Britain began enforcing changes through its own parliament such as the Regulating Act of 1773, which established political authority over the territory. Gradually the goal will become to "Anglonize" the Indian

populace through educational reforms designed to socialize them in an English manner. The hope was a joint Anglo-Indian civil service that would ensure political stability in India. Authors like Rudyard Kipling portrayed the relationship in a paternal fashion examining the role of Britain in the same way one might examine a father, someone you need. Gradually India becomes Anglized with the establishment of regiments called "Sepoys" or British trained/Indian born members of the military designed to combat Indian militancy. The problem with this type of relationship is evident in the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 during which the musket balls that the Sepoys were forced to bite the ends off were later learned to be made of Cow fat! An obvious encroachment on the rights of devout Hindu's, cooperation does not mean understanding. A rebellion ensues, which the English crush.

#### VIII. The British Perception of India:

The English viewed India as their jewel, the perfect colony one that is easy to govern and extraordinarily profitable. They had established some rudimentary forms of cooperation between the groups, which made governance easier. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century India is totally controlled by the British. Troubles began in 1857 with the aforementioned Sepoy Rebellion or "Mutiny" as the English call it. Ironically enough the movement was crushed by Dravidian forces from India's southern half. This insurrection actually caused India to be ruled absolutely by Britain and limited cooperation. Discrimination and prejudice became common. Picture on 904 tells it all. British superiority actually had some positive impacts as they insisted on higher quality roads, schools and other engineering issues. The government was well organized with an English speaking bureaucracy. This education in a certain sense backfired on England as the Indians began to experience a political enlightenment and desire for independence grew leading to such institutions as the Indian National Congress.

#### IX. Toward Self-Rule in India:

The nationalist movement in India grew out of the clash in cultures that was Hindu/Muslim India vs. Christian England. The conflict had been brewing since 1800 but with the advent of WWI, matters took a decided turn for the worse. The English had feared India would take advantage of the crisis in Europe to advance their own nationalist desires, however the Indians responded to British promises that Independence (enhanced independence) would be in order following the war should India cooperate. The cooperation of Indians was more than the British could have expected as they fought ferociously side-by-side England and sent large supplies of food and money to the British war effort. The English had promised cooperation and gradual independence but those dreams ended in 1919 when the English instigated the Rowlatt acts, which severely curtailed Indian civil liberties. The result of these conflicts was the Amritsar massacre that took the lives of hundreds of innocent nationalists in a bloodbath and sparking a movement led by Mahatma Gandhi.

#### X. Gandhi and non-violence: Roots

Born in 1869 in an area of India largely insulated from European ideas and the world's economy. Maharaja's princes ruled the regions with indirect loyalty and direct ties to English viceroys. Grew up in a wealthy family with political ties, however it was mother whom he viewed with respect and reverence as his greatest influence. In his eyes she was the perfect Hindu woman, a woman of remarkable skill, restraint, control, talent and intelligence. Gandhi was married at 13 and remained loyal to her his entire existence, it was her along with his mother that supported his entrance into an English law school-an unprecedented move for someone in his situation. After obtaining his law degree and experiencing commercial failure in the law, he moved to South Africa to work for Indian merchants. Witnessing first hand the oppression and racial tensions in South Africa he used his law practice and success to remedy the problems of South Africa's racial injustice to Indians. The forced labor and attrition of Indians in the wake of the liberation of black slaves was appalling. The De-Facto segregation of the region was an atrocity to poor hard working Indians in the region. He turned to Hindu ascetics as well as Christian theology for an answer to the oppression of the innocent, the result non-violent militancy. In a sense the "soul force" that he revered, became the philosophy—love your enemies, the basis of his non-violent militancy. The policy is quite harsh, as their peaceful protests often incur beatings, gassings, and shootings. The result of his labors was acceptance of the Indians as equal in the eyes of the law vis-à-vis taxation and social practices/social mobility.

XI. Gandhi leads the way:

Gandhi returned to India a hero, hailed with a new name Mahatma-great soul. He emerged slowly on to the Indian scene dealing with economic issues such as the plight of sharecroppers and mill workers. However the Amristar massacre had given him a stage of unprecedented size to work with. Understanding the scope of the problem, he realized how potent non-violent resistance would be against a foe that had now demonstrated the potential for military action against the innocent. Acts such as marches, strikes, boycotts, and non-payment of taxes he rallied the nation. The movement had reached the masses with the power of his words and actions rallying the masses from the ghettos of Calcutta to the splendor of Delhi. He had trumpeted the soul and spirit of the Hindu as superior to the selfish and violent British occupiers, rallying and motivating all he touched. He transformed the Indian National Congress into a full-fledged political force welcoming all Hindu and Muslim alike. Jailed after Indians turned to violence, he became even more powerful in jail than on the streets. His focus on strengthening Indian moral character including outcasts was the key to his movement. When in 1927 Indian self-rule was to be discussed the committee included no Indian members the writing was on the wall. As India grew closer to independence under radicals like Jawaharlal Nehru the British seemed to tighten their grip. It was then that Gandhi rose to the challenge fearing violence he united with the radicals taking a more aggressive approach while ensuring Non-Violence be the method of action. The march to the sea to make salt without paying a tax was a turning point, amidst beatings, the marchers at Gandhi's insistence remained peaceful not even raising their arms to protect themselves. The masses followed him to his jail cell as he was incarcerated for his role in the march. Frustrated the British released him and agreed to negotiate with him over the independence of India.

## XII. Towards Independence:

The Second World War was the catalyst for the independence of India. Independence came for reasons less related to India itself but more related to the conditions of post war Europe. Great Britain declared war on behalf of India, humiliating the Indians. Gandhi demanded independence or another non-violent attack would be launched. He was jailed immediately for the duration of the war. India supported the British albeit not enthusiastically. The Congress-Gandhi's party suffered during his imprisonment with the rise of Muhammad Ali Jannah's Muslim League. It was during Gandhi's absence that he and other Islamic leaders urged the world on the necessity of a partition of India based on religious lines calling for a separate Islamic state to be carved out of India. Gandhi was mortified, his reconstruction of the Indian moral state included harmony not division. By 1945 Gandhi's dream appeared to be just that a dream, unification of India based on moral unity and harmony of her people was not possible. The Northwest corner remained largely Islamic while her South/Dravidian routes were steadfastly Hindu. The new state would become Pakistan, tensions ran high and still do so today. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1947 India became an independent state flanked by her new neighbor Pakistan. However the independence was marred by religious bloodshed and chaos. Gandhi announced a fast to protest Hindu persecution of innocent Muslims, hoping to restore friendship. His efforts were fruitless and in 1948 his dreams are shattered as he is gunned down by a Hindu fanatic for his acceptance of Muslims.

## XIII. Pakistan a new nation:

Pakistan began its nationhood behind the 8 ball, struggling with its identity, infrastructure and economics...it has had difficulty adjusting to its role in the world, partly because of the conditions it was born in. Its two borders (East and West) were separated by 1000 miles of unfriendly Indian Territory. These two territories/nations were never able to develop as a result of their distance both economically and geographically. The differences between these people lead to East Pakistan demanding independence from the harsh rule of the much larger West Pakistan. The Bengali Muslims gained independence in 1973 becoming the nation-state of Bangladesh. The area of the Kashmir (1142) is an area that has led to terrorism and violence as its ownership is disputed (Jammu-Pakistani, Kashmir-India)

## XIV. India on the road to democracy:

Indian democracy has at times marveled its western observers for the devotion and dedication of its followers. The brainchild of British/INC forces it is a parliamentary system that has fluctuated in its actual level of democratization. India was fouled for 25 years by its founder Jawaharlal Nehru and his INC party. Introduced were major political and social reforms. Legal equality was granted to women, caste system was clarified and loosened, social welfare became a reality, untouchables freed from legal bondage. This has been a slow evolution in the Indian nation-state which is largely village based meaning that change will occur at a much slower pace. The Nehru lineage will continue almost uninterrupted until 1984 with his daughter

Indira Gandhi, and her son Rajiv Gandhi holding power with the exception of one brief 4-year term. Indira, may be the toughest female ruler in the history of democracy-a dynamic force who imposed her will on India for decades. She instilled family planning and social democracy initiatives while threatening democracy by absorbing power and attempting to silence her enemies, moves viewed by her enemies as threats to Indian stability and democracy. Forced sterilization of men is not democracy. Her handling of the 1975 emergency in eliminating parliamentary influence threatened the nation. She was defeated in the election of 1976, but was re-elected in 1980 only to be assassinated by angry Sikh's. Sikh's became a volatile force in India, a religious group that blends Islam and Hinduism they were a persecuted group in India during the age of Indira Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi crushed their radical uprisings in the Punjab. Her assassination in 1984 opened the door for her son Rajiv to assume power only to be voted out office for economic reasons.

XV. India today:

India with the worlds 2<sup>nd</sup> largest population remains an enigma, a billion Indians are attempting to transform a nation of poor villagers into a modern democratic nation based on the ideals of Western thinkers while not compromising their Eastern philosophical and religious basis. The transition has not always been smooth as India has suffered under the weight of her population, geographical problems, regional political conflicts with Pakistan and economic transition to the modern world. She is definitely a work in progress.