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INDIA
A Quick Overview of Indian History



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FYI:

- Historically, India's geographic boundaries were bigger than they are today
 - Bangladesh + India + Pakistan = India
- Bangladesh and Pakistan did not exist as separate countries until after India gained independence from Great Britain in 1947
- "Northwest India" generally means Pakistan
- Ancient Indian cities, such as Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, are located in what is now Pakistan

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India's Geography

- As large as Europe, minus Russia
- Population: 1.15 billion (2010 estimate)
 - Second only to China
- Himalayan Mountains (northeast)
 - Separate India from Tibet and western China
- Northwest
 - Historic route of land invasions
 - Alexander the Great, Mughals
- Indian Ocean (route of British conquest)
- Climate
 - Hot (except in highlands)
 - Land – very fertile to semi-desert

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Ganges and Indus River Valleys

- Northern India
- Early 1900s
 - Archaeologists discovered ruins of Mohenjo-daro (circa 2600 BCE) and Harappa (circa 2600 BCE)
- Bronze and copper
- Fired brick
- Picture writing (undeciphered)
- Farming, jewelry-making, and woven cloth
- Engineering – drainage systems
- Civilization ended circa 1900 BCE

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Aryan Invasion (ca. 1700-1300 BCE)

- Invaders came from Europe
 - Traced through Indo-European language roots
- Ruled India for hundreds of years
- Set up small kingdoms ruled by rajahs
- Conquered native Dravidians
- Created modern Hinduism from Dravidian religious traditions and their own ideas
- Established India's caste system

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Vedic Age (circa 1500-500 BCE)

- Vedas written in Sanskrit (India's literary language)
- *Mahabharata*
- *Ramayana*

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Alexander the Great
(ca. 327/326 BCE)

- Macedonian (Greek) who led conquering forces across northern India
- Ruled briefly
- Greeks expelled from most of India after Alexander's death
- Continued contact with Alexandrian successor state, the Seleucid empire, to the west

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Maurya Empire (322-185 BCE)

- Dynasty begun by Chandragupta Maurya
- Asoka (grandson), 273-232 BCE
 - Ruled all of India
 - Converted to Buddhism
 - Religious tolerance, generosity, wisdom, and kindness
 - Spread Buddhism – Burma, Ceylon, Siam, Tibet
 - War and disunity after his death

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Gupta Dynasty (320-467 CE)

- Northern India reunited
- Trade
 - With West
 - Burma, Indochina, Java, Sumatra
 - Buddhism and Hinduism spread out
 - Cultural diffusion

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Mughal Empire (1526-1858)

- 12th century – Muslim invasion
- 1500 – Central Asians, led by Mughals (Moguls), established a kingdom in northern India
- Akbar (1556-1605)
 - Conquest of central India
 - Efficient and strong government
 - Religious tolerance
 - Business and commerce encouraged
- Architecture
 - Forts, mosques, palaces, tombs
 - Taj Mahal – Agra, India – Tomb for a Mughal emperor's favorite wife

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End of the Mughal Empire

- 17th century – empire crumbled
 - Fighting between smaller kingdoms
 - English, French, and Portuguese traders gained influence
- 1763 – Seven Years' War
 - English (British East India Company) won control of India from the French
 - Taken over by the British government under Queen Victoria (British Raj, 1858-1947)
 - Independent after World War II (1947)

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Hinduism

- Escape sins of life by attaining purity and perfection of the soul
- Caste system
 - Process starts in lowest caste (Untouchables)
 - Soul reincarnated in person of higher caste
 - Must carry out duties of the caste
 - Repeated rebirths
 - Soul ultimately becomes perfect and merges with the soul of Brahma (principal god)

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Culture

- Kalidasa (6th century CE)
 - Playwright and poet
 - Fairy stories and animal fables

- Art and architecture
 - Temples covered with designs and figures

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Science

- Mathematics
 - Zero
 - Decimal point
 - Minus sign
 - “Arabic” numerals (Europe got them from Arab traders, who got them from India)
- Gupta Period (320–467 CE)
 - Leaders in dyeing, tanning leather, soap and glass making
- Textiles
 - Cotton, cashmere, calico, chintz – all originally Indian terms

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Review Questions

1. After 1947, India split into what three separate countries?
2. What two ancient Indus River Valley civilizations were discovered by archaeologists in the early 1900s?
3. The *Vedas* were written in what language?
4. What religion was practiced by the Mughal emperors?
5. Describe India’s caste system.
6. What is the origin of the term “Arabic numerals”?
