

12:1 Indian Culture and History

History of India Overview

- Dating back to 2500 BCE, the Indus Valley Civilization is one of the oldest civilizations known to man
- People immigrated to India from Sumer
- In 2000 BCE Aryans brought early Hinduism to India
- The resource rich region allowed for population growth and the development of fortified cities some 2000 years before the Romans
- In 566 BCE, Gautama Buddha was born in Lumbini, Kapilavastu, (Nepal)
- Buddha spread his four noble truths to the people of northern India
- In the 3rd century CE, Emperor Ashoka spread Buddhism throughout India and the world
- By the end of the 7th century, Muslims had entered India
- In 11th and 12th centuries Muslim invaders from Afghanistan invaded India and defeated the Hindu leaders
- Between the 15th – 18th centuries the Moguls ruled India
- As Mughal Empire declined, regional states emerged and the British East India Company began to exert more power



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Religion in India



- Over 80% of India is Hindu – despite centuries of Muslim rule
- About 10-12% of India is Muslim, Muslim leaders generally were from foreign lands
- Most Muslim converts were from the poorest classes of Indian society
- Christian missionaries began converting Indians during the 15th century – about 2.5% of the Indian population is Christian

Tensions between Muslim and Hindus

- In the latter years of the Mughal Empire, leaders cracked down on Hindus
- Hindus suffered special taxes, destruction of temples, and forced conversions to Islam
- Tensions eased as the two religions united to fight British colonization
- As independence approached in the 1940s, Muslim fears of the overwhelming Hindu majority would cause Muslim leaders to seek the independence Muslim nation of Pakistan



Caste System

- Hindu society was divided into major castes or classes
- There are four major castes, but thousands of sub-castes
- People are born into a caste and upward mobility is next to impossible – people only married within their caste

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Caste System, continued

- Part of a complex system of job division – each caste had a role within the community
- Strict rules dictated behavior
- Hindu idea of reincarnation played into the system – to advance you must live well and then you will be reborn into a higher caste

Major Hindu Castes

- Brahmins – Priests and scholars
- Kshatriyas – Warriors
- Vaishyas – Farmers and merchants
- Shudras – Laborers and serfs
- Untouchables – People who were below the caste system and completed the most undesirable of jobs