Chapter 6 India
• The first civilization in India was located in the Indus valley. Its two main cities were Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Their writing, however, has never been deciphered, so little is known about this civilization.
• Aryan invaders came into India after 1500 BC, and settled in the North around the Ganges River. They spoke an Indo-European language, and they came originally from Central Asia or Russia.
• The invaders had lighter skin than the natives. The invaders created a social hierarchy, which would be justified by their religion, known as the caste system (varna). Each caste is known as a jati, and each caste had its own occupation. Your membership was set at birth, and it determined your occupation and spouse.
• The caste system is a very rigid and inflexible hierarchy. From top to bottom: priests (brahmins), warriors and rulers, merchants, farmers, servants, and "untouchables." Untouchables do the dirtiest work.
• Belief in **reincarnation** justifies the hierarchy. During your life you build up karma, good or bad. **Karma** is the moral balance of the universe, and all living creatures' souls are interconnected. Life was seen as cyclical: birth, death, and rebirth.
• Marriage is typically arranged by parents when the husband and wife were still children, since one cannot marry outside the caste. Child brides were often sent to live with their husbands' families.
• Hindus cremate their dead. It was expected that upper-caste widows throw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres. **Sati**: widow burning.
Hinduism

- Hinduism developed from the religion of India's Aryan invaders. It is polytheistic. There are millions of gods which are versions (avatars) of a few main gods. The main gods are considered to be manifestations of the same universal, divine force. The main gods, like Vishnu or Shiva, stand for creation, preservation, and destruction.
- Gods are worshipped in temples, where their idols are housed. Hindus visit idols and leave gifts for them. Pilgrimages to particular temples and to the Ganges River, which is sacred, are very important in Hindu practice.
- The earliest written source for Hinduism is the Vedas, which are the oldest sacred scripture in the world. They contain stories of the gods and of ancient battles and heroes, and are written in Sanskrit (the ancestor of most modern Indian languages)
- Certain Hindus seek to deepen their spiritual life through meditation, exercise (yoga), fasting, and discipline. The ultimate goal of these techniques is to be freed from worldly distractions and be liberated from reincarnation through an understanding of deeper spiritual truths.
- Hinduism became the official religion of India during the Gupta Empire and is still the religion of the vast majority of Indians. Indian merchants spread Hinduism through trading networks across Southeast Asia. It is still followed in Bali.
• For most of India's history, India was divided politically. India is also very
diverse geographically and culturally. Multiple languages are spoken
there, it has many different climates, and its social barriers (the caste
system) were very strong. Despite its usual political divisions, Indian
civilization retained a coherent character. Indian math was advanced.
Indians invented our numerals. India was only unified twice in its early
history.
• **Maurya Empire** (324 BC-184 BC): Established by Chandragupta Maurya,
who was probably inspired by Alexander the Great. The empire's greatest
leader was his grandson Ashoka (r.269 BC-232 BC), who took the empire
to its greatest size. He converted to Buddhism and he became a pacifist.
The empire fell as local rulers reestablished control over their territories.
• **Gupta Empire** (320-550): Established by Chandra Gupta. It was smaller
and less centralized than the Maurya Empire. It was officially Hindu. It was
brought down by an invasion of Huns.
• Indian merchants, who enjoyed a relatively high status, were very active
in trade beyond India, along the Silk Road and across the Indian Ocean.
India is a major source of gems, spices, and textiles. Indian sailors relied
on the predictable **monsoon** winds to sail around the Indian Ocean.
Buddhism

- Siddhartha Gautama (563 BC - 483 BC) was an Indian prince who wandered and meditated, looking to discover the meaning of life. Once he achieved enlightenment, he discovered:
  - The Four Noble Truths
    1) Life is suffering
    2) Suffering arises from desire
    3) The solution to suffering is to curb your desires
    4) Curb your desires by following the Eightfold Path (meditation, and leading a moderate, simple, peaceful life)
- Siddhartha was known to his followers as the Buddha, "the Enlightened One." After his death, his followers spread his teaching and wrote his life's story.
- Buddhists believe in the soul and in reincarnation, but they reject the Hindu caste system. Buddhists are equal, even by gender. If the Buddhist achieves enlightenment, the soul will not be reincarnated, but rather achieve nirvana: a state of perfect peace in union with the universe.
- Monasticism: Some Buddhists abandon worldly life and live in isolated communities, monasteries, where they devote themselves to meditation in order to achieve enlightenment. Both men and women can do this. Monks and nuns live and dress simply, own nothing, and remain celibate.
• Buddhism spread along trade routes beyond India. Monks traveling along the Silk Road helped spread Buddhism into Central Asia, China, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan, and Korea. Buddhism spread through the Indian Ocean trading network to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar) and the East Indies. Ironically, there are almost no Buddhists in India.
• Buddhism was flexible when it came to the concept of God. People who became Buddhists could continue worshipping their local gods in addition to following Buddhism. Many also worship the Buddha himself. Buddhists can be monotheistic or polytheistic, or not worship any god at all.