*Classical Civilizations: India*

Chapter 3 Syllabus

**Introduction**:

Important reasons for India’s distinctive path lie in geography and early historical experience. India’s topography shaped a number of vital features of its civilization. While this is true for any people, for India it mattered more. The vast Indian sub-continent is partially separated from the rest of Asia (and particularly from east Asia) by northern mountain ranges. Nevertheless, mountain passes linked India to civilizations in the Middle East and served as avenues for invasion (Aryans, even Greeks!). And though it was not as isolated as China, it was still set apart within Asia. Got that? It was too open to prevent invasions, but isolated enough to be separate.

The most important agricultural regions are along the two great rivers, the Ganges and the Indus. We don’t know much about India’s River Valley Civilization because it was wiped out by an undetermined catastrophe, most likely string of natural disasters. During its formative period, called the Vedic and Epic ages, the Aryans (Indo-Europeans), originally from central Asia, impressed their own stamp on Indian culture. During these ages, Hinduism, the caste system, Sanskrit, and various belief systems developed.

By 600 B.C.E., India had passed through its formative stage. It’s classical era did not take on the structure of rising and falling dynasties, as in China. Patterns in Indian history were irregular and often consisted of invasions through the northwestern mountain passes (Kyber and Hindu-Kush). As a result, classical India alternated between widespread empires (Mauryan and Gupta) and a loose network of smaller kingdoms. Even during the rule of the smaller kingdoms, both economic and cultural life advanced. The Maurya and Gupta dynasties were the most successful in India, run entirely by Indians and not by outside rulers. The greatest of the Mauryan emperors, Ashoka (269-232 B.C.E.), will make an interesting case study. The Guptas did not produce as dynamic a leader as Ashoka, but they did provide classical India with its greatest period of stability.

**Chapter Outline:**

The Framework for Indian History

Patterns in Classical India

Political Institutions

Religion and Culture

Economy and Society

In Depth: Inequality as the Social Norm

Indian Influence

China and India

Global Connections: India and the Wider World

**Key Terms**:

Caste system Alexander the Great Maurya Dynasty Himalayas

Untouchables Aryans Gupta Empire Hindu-Kush

Hinduism Huns Ashoka Kyber Pass

Dharma Kushans Chandragupta Maurya Sri Lanka

Vishnu and Shiva Indus and Ganges Rivers

Indra

Are you able to make sense of how I grouped these terms? Can you imagine a different grouping?

Buddhism

Buddha

Sanskrit

Tamils

Varnas

Gurus

Reincarnation

Nirvana

Brahmans

**Other Terminology:**

Kautilya

*Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*

*Panchatantra*

Upanishads

Stupas

Yoga

Brahma

Jati

Vedas

Bhagavad Gita



**Small Group Discussion Suggestions**

1. Assess the impact of the Aryan Invasion.
2. Trace the development of the caste system.
3. Compare Buddhism and Hinduism.
4. What features of Indian and Chinese geography help explain each area’s social patterns?
5. Compare the caste system with the organization of Chinese and Greek society.
6. Compare the political implications of Hinduism and Confucianism.
7. Compare the family structures of India and China.
8. Trace the development of Ashoka’s leadership approach.
9. Trace the patterns of early Indian history.
10. Discuss “Inequality as the Social Norm.”
11. Asses the influence of Indian culture on the rest of the world.

**Tentative Pacing Schedule:**

**2A:**

**Friday SGD**

**Tuesday Q & A; AbD; SCRIPTED; Primary Sources**

**Thursday Review**

**Monday Test**

**2B:**

**Monday SGD**

**Wednesday Q & A; AbD; SCRIPTED; Primary Sources**

**Friday Review**

**Tuesday Test**

