**Chapter 21: Section 2**

**Early Civilizations and Empires**

India, the largest country on the Indian Subcontinent, is one of the world’s oldest civilizations. Early civilizations and empires greatly influenced the history of the Indian Subcontinent.

**Ancient Civilizations**

The first urban civilization in the Indian Subcontinent was centered around the Indus River Valley in present-day Pakistan. We call this ancient Indian civilization the Harappan (huh-RA-puhn) civilization after one of its main cities. Historians believe that the Harappan civilization flourished between 2300 and 1700 BC. By about 1700 BC, however, this civilization began to decline. No one is certain what led to its decline. Perhaps invaders or natural disasters destroyed the Harappan civilization.

     Not long after the Harappan civilization ended, a new group rose to power. Around 1500 BC the Aryans (AIR-ee-uhnz), a group of people from Central Asia, entered the Indian Subcontinent. Powerful warriors, the Aryans eventually conquered and settled the fertile plains along the Indus and Ganges rivers.

     The Aryans greatly **influenced** Indian culture. Their language, called Sanskrit, served as the basis for several languages in South Asia. For example, Hindi, the official language of India, is related to Sanskrit. As the Aryans settled in India, they mixed with Indian groups already living there. Their religious beliefs and customs mixed as well, forming the beginnings of India’s social system and Hindu religion.

**Early Empires**

Over time, powerful kingdoms began to emerge in northern India. One kingdom, the Mauryan Empire, dominated the region by about 320 BC. Strong Mauryan rulers raised huge armies and conquered almost the entire subcontinent. Asoka (uh-SOH-kuh), one of the greatest Mauryan emperors, helped expand the empire and improve trade. Asoka also encouraged the acceptance of other religions. After his death, however, the empire slowly crumbled. Power struggles and invasions destroyed the Mauryan Empire.

     After the fall of the Mauryan Empire, India split into many small kingdoms. Eventually, however, a strong new empire rose to power. In the AD 300s, the Gupta (GOOP-tuh) Empire united much of northern India. Under Gupta rulers, trade and culture thrived. Scholars made important advances in math, medicine, and astronomy. Indian mathematicians, for example, first introduced the concept of zero.

     Gradually, the Gupta Empire also declined. Attacks by invaders from Asia weakened the empire. By about 550, India was once again divided.

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| Photograph of a statue of a man Credit: cNational Museum Karachi / Dagli Orti/Art Archive

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Harappan artifact | https://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Illustration of Mauryan warriors

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Mauryan troops atop a war elephant |
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| **Ancient Civilizations**

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|   | Around 2300 BC the Harappan civilization begins in the Indus River Valley. |
|   | The Aryans, invaders from Central Asia, enter India around 1500 BC. |
|   | Aryan culture helps shape the languages, religion, and caste system of India. |

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|   | By 233 BC the Mauryan Empire controls most of the Indian Subcontinent. |
|   | Emperor Asoka helps spread Buddhism in India. |
|   | Indian trade and culture flourish during the Gupta Empire. |

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| Babur

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The first Mughal emperor, Babur | https://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Illustration of an Indian soldier in the British Army

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Indian troop in the British Army |
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| **The Mughal Empire**

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|   | Babur establishes the Mughal Empire in northern India in 1526. |
|   | Indian trade, culture, and religion thrive under the rule of Akbar the Great. |
|   | By 1700 the Mughal Empire rules almost all of the Indian Subcontinent. |

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|   | The British East India Company establishes trade in northern India in the early 1600s. |
|   | Indian troops trigger a massive revolt against the East India Company. |
|   | The British government takes direct control of India in 1858. |
|   | India and Pakistan gain independence in 1947. |

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| Photograph of Mohandas Gandhi | https://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | **Mohandas Gandhi**(1869–1948)

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Considered by many to be the father of modern India, Mohandas Gandhi led the struggle for Indian independence. As a leading member of the Indian National Congress, Gandhi introduced a policy of nonviolent resistance to British rule. He led millions in fasts, peaceful protest marches, and boycotts of British goods. His devotion to nonviolence earned him the name Mahatma, or “Great Soul.” Gandhi’s efforts proved successful. In 1947 India won its independence from Britain. |

**Powerful Empires**

Powerful empires controlled India for much of its history. First the Mughal Empire and then the British Empire ruled India for hundreds of years.

**The Mughal Empire**

In the late 600s Muslim armies began launching raids into India. Some Muslims tried to take over Indian kingdoms. Turkish Muslims, for example, established a powerful kingdom at **Delhi** in northern India. In the 1500s a new group of Muslim invaders swept into the subcontinent. Led by the great warrior Babur (BAH-boohr), they conquered much of India. In 1526 Babur established the Mughal (MOO-guhl) Empire.

     Babur’s grandson, Akbar, was one of India’s greatest rulers. Under Akbar’s rule, trade flourished. Demand for Indian goods like spices and tea grew. The Mughal Empire grew rich from trade.

     Akbar and other Mughal rulers also promoted culture. Although the Mughals were Muslim, most Indians continued to practice Hinduism. Akbar’s policy of religious tolerance, or acceptance, encouraged peace throughout his empire. Architecture also thrived in the Mughal Empire. One of India’s most spectacular buildings, the Taj Mahal, was built during Mughal rule.

**The British Empire**

The Mughals were not the only powerful empire in India. As early as the 1500s Europeans had tried to control parts of India. One European country, England, rose to power as the Mughal Empire declined.

     The English presence in India began in the 1600s. At the time, European demand for Indian goods, such as cotton and sugar, was very high. Mughal rulers granted the East India Company, a British trading company, valuable trading rights.

     At first, the East India Company controlled small trading posts. However, the British presence in India gradually grew. The East India Company expanded its territory and its power. By the mid-1800s the company controlled more than half of the Indian Subcontinent. India had become a British **colony****, a territory inhabited and** **controlled by people from a foreign land**.

     British rule angered and frightened many Indians. The East India Company controlled India with the help of an army made up mostly of Indian troops commanded by British officers. In 1857 Indian troops revolted, triggering violence all across India. The British government crushed the rebellion and took control of India away from the East India Company. With that, the British government began to rule India directly.

**Independence and Division**

By the late 1800s many Indians had begun to question British rule. Upset by their position as second-class citizens, a group of Indians created the Indian National Congress. Their goal was to gain more rights and opportunities.

 As more and more Indians became dissatisfied with British rule, they began to demand independence. Mohandas Gandhi was the most important leader of this Indian independence movement. During the 1920s and 1930s his strategy of nonviolent protest convinced millions of Indians to support independence.

 Finally, Great Britain agreed to make India independent. However, tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities caused a crisis. Fearing they would have little say in the new government, India’s Muslims called for a separate nation.

 To avoid a civil war, the British government agreed to the partition, or division, of India. In 1947 two independent countries were formed. India was mostly Hindu. Pakistan, which included the area that is now Bangladesh, was mostly Muslim. As a result, some 10 million people rushed to cross the border. Muslims and Hindus wanted to live in the country where their religion held a majority. Focus on Reading

 Soon after India and Pakistan won their independence, other countries in the region gradually did too. Sri Lanka and Maldives gained their independence from Great Britain. In 1971, after a bloody civil war that killed almost 1 million people, East Pakistan broke away to form the country of Bangladesh.

**Indian Culture**

As you might imagine, the rich and unique history of the Indian Subcontinent has created an equally unique culture. Two aspects of that culture are religion and a strict social class system.

**Religion**

Religion has played a very important role in Indian history. In fact, India is the birthplace of several major religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism.

**Hinduism** One of the world’s oldest religions is **Hinduism****, the dominant religion** **of India**. According to Hindu beliefs, everything in the universe is part of a single spirit called Brahman. Hindus believe that their ultimate goal is to reunite their souls with that spirit. Hinduism teaches that souls are reincarnated, or reborn, many times before they join with Brahman.

**Buddhism** Another Indian religion is Buddhism, which began in northern India in the late 500s BC. **Buddhism** **is a religion based on the teachings of Siddhartha** **Gautama—the Buddha**. According to the Buddha’s teachings, people can rise above their desire for material goods and reach nirvana. Nirvana is a state of perfect peace in which suffering and reincarnation end.

**Caste System**

Thousands of years ago, the Aryans organized Indian society into a unique social class system known as the caste system. **The** **caste system** **divided Indian society** **into groups based on a person’s birth or** **occupation**.

     The caste system features four main classes, or castes, originally based on occupations. Below these four castes are the Dalits, members of India’s lowest class. Many rules guided interaction between the classes. For example, people from different castes were not allowed to eat together.

**Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places**

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| **a. Identify** What different peoples ruled India?

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| **b. Analyze** How did these early civilizations and empires influence Indian culture? |
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| **a. Describe** What were some accomplishments of the Mughal Empire?

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| **b. Predict** How might Indian history have been different if the British had not ruled India?

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| **a. Recall** Who was the leader of India’s independence movement? |

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