

Chapter Four: Early Societies in South Asia

Beginnings of agriculture in South Asia (8000-7000 B.C.E.):

- The agricultural villages quickly started to evolve into thriving cities and bigger populations.
- The Indus, a river much like the Nile, received its water from rain and melted snow from mountain tops.
- The Indus made agriculture reliable and possible in northern India. This allowed the Indus River Valley societies to live and inhabit in that location.
- Inhabitants harvested crops such as barley and wheat along with sheep and goats.
- Cultivators in the Valley were considered the world's first domesticated chickens.
- They also developed cotton for materials and trade (before 5000 B.C.E.).
- As agriculture continues to thrive and populations continue to grow, the valley splits into two cities: Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

High point of Harappan society (2500-2000 B.C.E.):

- Within the Indus Valley, the two cities Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, thrived greatly. The cities included trade, an organized city (in a grid like form), and many civilians. The population of Harappa consisted of about 35,000 people, and most civilians contributed to the economy by decorating and creating trinkets, artifacts and tools to sell on the streets as well as trade with various other societies. They obtained copper, gold, silver, lead, and gems which became very popular and valuable at the time.
- The Harappan society was almost 932 miles (1,500 kilometers) long which reflected the power and authority they had on that much land and through this, the Harappan society became very wealthy.
- Although wealth was raging through the city, the distinction in class among the people pushed certain groups to poorer life styles.

Beginning of Harappan decline (1900 B.C.E.):

- A prominent theory holds the ecological degradation was a major cause of decline.
- Harappans deforested the Indus valley for cultivation and to obtain firewood.
 - ❑ Deforestation led to erosion of topsoil and reduced the amount of rainfall.
 - ❑ Indus valley became a desert.
- The Harappan society faced a subsistence crisis during the centuries after 1900 B.C.E..
- Also its likely natural catastrophes—periodic flooding of the Indus river or earthquakes—weakened the Harappan Society.
- By 1700 B.C.E, the populations of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro had abandoned the cities.
 - ❑ By about 1500 B.C.E, Harappan cities had almost entirely collapsed.
- The declining of the cities didn't mean a total disappearance of the Harappan society.
 - ❑ People from other societies adopted to Harappan ways for their own purposes.
- Harappan deities and religious beliefs intrigued migrants to India.
- Harappan may have inspired the establishment of new cities.

Beginning of Aryan migration to India (1500 B.C.E.):

- Bands of foreigners migrated into the Indus Valley.
 - ❑ The most prominent were nomadic and pastoral people speaking Indo-European languages who called themselves Aryans.
 - *Aryans* - “noble people.”
 - ❑ By 1500 B.C.E, they have began to establish small herdings and agricultural communities.
- When the Aryans entered India, they practiced a limited amount of agriculture but depended on a pastoral economy more.

- ❑ They kept sheep and goats and they prized their horses and herds of cattles since horses do not breed well in India.
- ❑ It was necessary for Aryans to replenish their supplies of horseflesh by importing animals from Asia.
- ❑ They harnessed horses to wagons and cattle for transportation. They also hitched them to chariots which proved to be devastating war machines.
- ❑ Cattle became the principal measure of wealth in the Aryan society.
- Early Aryans did not use writing, they composed poems and songs.
 - ❑ There are orally transmitted works called Vedas, a collection of songs and rituals honoring the various Aryan gods.
 - ❑ The Vedas represent a priestly perspective on affairs, and also shed considerable light on early Aryan society in India.

Vedic Age (1500-500 B.C.E.):

- The term “*vedic*” comes from the word vedas, which were orally transmitted works in a collection of hymns, songs, prayers, and rituals honoring Aryan gods.
 - ❑ The word *veda* means “knowledge” or “wisdom,” and relates to the knowledge that priests and religious figures must have in order to carry out their duties.
- In total there are four Vedas, the first and most important being the Rig Veda, which was a collection of 1,028 hymns addressed to Aryan gods. These hymns were compiled from between 1400 and 900 B.C.E. and finally transferred to writing around 600 B.C.E. along with the three other vedas.
- The Vedas discuss a rambunctious society were the Aryans had many issues with the Dravidians and other people living in India and refer to with indigenous people often.

❑ **Dasas**: “enemies” or “subject people”

❑ **Raja**: (Sanskrit term related to Latin word rex) “king.”

- Aryans had friendly encounters with the Dravidian people as well, and adopted Dravidian agricultural techniques after settling into villages. Aryans were known for fighting terribly amongst themselves. There was no solid state or form of Aryan government, instead they opted to for for hundreds of “*chiefdoms*” around herding communities and agricultural villages. These chiefdoms had rajas who reported to and collaborated with a council of village elders.
- **Social Distinctions in Late Vedic Age**
 - ❑ After 1000 B.C.E. Aryans recognized four main varnas, and a later hymn of the Rig Veda was also composed and offered a “priestly perspective” on varna distinctions.
 - According to the hymn, the Aryan gods created the four varnas during the beginning of the world and designated brahmins and kshatriyas as the most honorable human groups to lead the societies.
- **Origins of the Caste System**
 - ❑ The Aryans were also known for constructing a well-defined social order that stabilized political structures and states. Aryan social structure relied on noticeable hereditary distinctions between groups and individuals according to their corresponding occupations and roles within society; this system of social status became known as the caste system.
 - ❑ **Caste**: from the Portuguese word *casta*, refers to social class of hereditary and permanent status.
 - ❑ Castes were referred to as “inherited distinctions between social groups” in the 16th century.
 - ❑ **Varna**: referred to the major social classes, meaning “color” in Sanskrit.

Composition of the Rig Veda (1400-900 B.C.E.):

The Rig Veda on Hindu God Indra

- During the Vedic Age, the most prominent deity of the Indian people was the god Indra. He was portrayed as a “boisterous and powerful god” who was prone to fighting and over-indulging on Soma. As the god of war, Aryan stories about him portrayed him flinging thundervolts and leading his people into glorious and victorious battle against their enemies. Indra also had a domestic side to be worshipped, as in the Rig-Vedas, he is listed as the creator and protector of all agricultural produce, more specifically; grain and cattle, which were the Aryans’ primary source of income and trade. The Rig Veda reflects sixteen dimensions of the god Indra.

Early Aryan migrations into the Ganges River Valley (1000 B.C.E.):

- Once Aryan groups were settled in Punjab, the migrants began to spread east and south and began to establish communities throughout much of the Indian subcontinent.
- After 1000 B.C.E. they began to settle into the area between the Himalayan foothills and the Ganges River.
 - ❑ Enabled them to cultivate more land, produce more food, and support larger communities.
- They began to cultivate one of the world’s most staple crops; rice.
 - ❑ Rice is a highly productive crop, it provided food for rapidly expanding populations.
- By 750 B.C.E. , populations had increased causing Aryan to establish the first small cities in the Ganges River valley.

Emergence of Varna distinctions (1000 B.C.E.):

- Varna: a Sanskrit word meaning “color” to refer to the major social classes.

- The four main Varnas:
 - ❑ *Brahmins*: priests.
 - ❑ *Kshatriyas*: warriors and aristocrats.
 - ❑ *Vaishyas*: cultivators, artisans, and merchants.
 - ❑ *Shudras*: landless peasants and serfs
 - ❑ Centuries later, the caste system had a final layer; the *Untouchables*;
 - ❑ people who performed dirty or unpleasant tasks.
- During the late Vedic age the recognition of varnas and theories of their origins had the effect of enhancing the status and power of priestly and aristocratic classes.

Formation of regional kingdoms in northern India (1000-500 B.C.E.):

- After the decline of the Harappan society, Aryans started to take over through the northern India.
- The Aryans migrated to the Punjab which is located in the upper Indus River Valley.
- Populations were so dense in the Ganges River Valley that some migrated into the northern Deccan Plateau which is south of Punjab by 500 B.C.E.

Composition of the principal Upanishads (800-400 B.C.E.):

- Upanishads appeared in the late Vedic age which men mainly gather around the sage for religious discussions.
- Upanishads taught that looks are not always what they seem. Villagers participate in what is called **Brahman**. They believed in reincarnation so a person is born into the physical world, their goal in life is to be reborn in the world of union with Brahman.

- **Samsara** is a doctrine (a belief) of when a person is about to die, for a moment their soul goes to the World of the Fathers and after that, they return back as a new person, animal, plant, or insect on Earth.
- **Karma** is another doctrine which when a person is doing a good deed, they get something good in return while when a person is doing a bad deed, they get something bad in return. If someone holds a accountable of many bad karma, that person would be reincarnated into an animal, or insects or in a harsh life.

Establishment of the first Aryan cities in the Ganges Valley (750 B.C.E.):

- The first cities were established due to the increasing of population.
- Population became too dense that the Aryans decided to move on and continue migrating.

Early Aryan migrations to the Deccan Plateau (500 B.C.E.):

- Aryans migrated south towards the northern Deccan.
- Northern Deccan- a plateau region in the southern cone of the Indian subcontinent 1,500km south of the Punjab.

Chronology

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(1500 B.C.E.)	Beginning of Aryan migration to India
(1500-500 B.C.E.)	Vedic Age
(1400-900 B.C.E.)	Composition of the Rig Veda
(1000 B.C.E.)	Early Aryan migrations into the Ganges River Valley
(1000 B.C.E.)	Emergence of Varna distinctions
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