The Attempted Unification of India

1. Outsiders started this process
   1. Darius introduced Persian administration to N. India (remember that Persia at its peak incorporated the Indus River)
   2. Alexander destroyed whatever governments were there as he reached India.
      1. Alex’s exit created a power vacuum in which others attempted to fill.
2. The Mauryan Empire (332-185 BCE)
   1. Chandragupta Maurya stepped into the vacuum and conquered one of the more important regional kingdoms, Magadha, and the majority of the Indian Subcontinent in the 320s BCE.
   2. Highly centralized government with Maurya’s bureaucrats overseeing trade, communications and tax collection
   3. High point of the Mauryan Empire came under Ashoka (C.M’s grandson) (268-232 BCE)
      1. Like Darius, an important administrator (although he was also an important military leader)
      2. Issued decrees on rocks and pillars (aka rock and pillar decrees)
         1. Quickly send his laws around the empire in a permanent manner
      3. Spread Buddhism (more on that later)
      4. Built roads and irrigation canals (like Achaemenids and Qin/Han)
      5. Debased the currency (increased inflation) to keep up with costs
   4. The Mauryan Empire declined shortly after Ashoka’s death.
      1. There was a series of less successful leaders which ultimately lead to the collapse of the empire.
      2. These leaders could not control the empire and pieces of seceded and became independent.
      3. By 185 BCE, the Mauryans were gone.
3. The Mauryans gave way to the Bactrians and then the Kushans
   1. These empires promoted and taxed trade, making them wealthy
   2. They also promoted Buddhism
   3. Neither of these kingdoms were as large or powerful as the Mauryans.
4. The last major group to unify India was the Gupta Empire (320-550 CE)
   1. Founded by Chandra Gupta (no relation)
   2. Gupta formed a large, decentralized empire by forming alliances with regional kingdoms (the Mauryans were highly centralized)
   3. The Gupta Empire collapsed with the invasion of the White Huns (other nomadic pastoralists from Central Asia)
5. Indian Science and Math
   1. Indians developed the concept of zero (before this, math was simple arithmetic with complex operations impossible)
      1. They also developed decimal places
      2. These mathematical terms were spread through the other Eurasian societies by trade routes
   2. Indian trade routes were very extensive, both by land and sea (Indian Ocean routes were becoming very important and drove exploration)
      1. They traded things that were not found elsewhere and highly sought after, especially spices
         1. The Indians were after horses and gold
6. Indian social order
   1. Patriarchy reinforced
      1. Reinforced by epic Indian poems, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which showed women as weak-willed and needing male domination
      2. Arranged marriages often put young women (often children) in the the control of much older men.
         1. The families of the girls often paid dowries to the families of the men in order for the men to accept the marriage.
         2. Sati (ritual suicide for widows) existed, but not as widespread as once imaged. It was something that widows SHOULD do, but often didn’t.
   2. Castes reinforced
      1. Jati (subcastes) were guilds - organizations of those within the same occupation within the same caste
         1. For example, those that made metal tools organized themselves into jati (guilds)
         2. Jati further controlled social order, but also disciplined members, helped with community affairs (taking care of members that are sick or dying, taking care of their families), setting wages, etc.
      2. As a result of jati, vaishas (merchants and farmers) and shudras (small farmers and laborers) became more wealthy than brahmins (priests) or kshatriyas (soldiers) and thus became more socially influential.
         1. This began to upset the social order of the caste system.
7. Indian Religions as challenges to the cultural order
   1. Jainism - central tenets arose out of Upanishads (early Indian religious texts from the period of Aryan migration to India)
      1. Vardhamana Mahavira is considered to be the founder of this religion
         1. A nobleman who left his comfortable life to seek enlightenment and escape reincarnation
         2. Removed himself from society, gave up his material things and taught an ascetic lifestyle of detachment
         3. His followers called him *jina* and themselves Jainists
      2. Central idea was *ahimsa* - non-violence towards anything
         1. Everything had a soul - this idea taken from Upanishads
         2. Very difficult to maintain this lifestyle - jainists often swept a broom in front of them in order to sweep aside anything that might be living from their path.
         3. Average Jainists supported the efforts of Jainist monks because most work was against *ahimsa.*
            1. Average Jainists did their best not to hurt people or other living things and appreciated the spiritual work the monks did
         4. Even so, Jainism did not recognize social hierarchies, so it was popular among the lower castes.
      3. Jainism was hard to adhere to, so it wasn’t very popular, but it was the only real alternative at the time to the caste system
   2. Buddhism
      1. Like Jainism, Buddhism starts with a sheltered nobleman, named Siddharta Gautama
      2. Gautama escaped from his sheltered life and for the first time witnessed suffering and death - realized that it was inevitable.
         1. Renounced his former lifestyle and became a monk in order to understand and overcome suffering
         2. Meditated under a tree for 49 days until he finally figured it out.
      3. Buddhist doctrine is called *Dharma*
         1. Life is suffering, desire causes suffering, elimination of desire will eliminate suffering and a disciplined life will bring out an elimination of suffering (noble eightfold path)
         2. NEP - right - belief, resolve, speech, behavior, occupation, effort, contemplation, meditation
         3. Reach *nirvana* - nothingness, end of reincarnation cycle
      4. Popularity of Buddhism
         1. No social hierarchy - no castes or jati
         2. Used vernacular instead of sanskrit, the language of the brahmin (priests) - easier to reach everyone this way
         3. Buddhist temples became early community centers, where buddhist monks preached and lived off the gifts and grants of rich, generous lay individuals (lower castes were becoming wealthier, remember)
            1. These temples also became important community centers that served as banks and distributors of land for farming
      5. Despite the popularity, Buddhism was still a difficult religion to adhere to and required considerable sacrifice of material well-being
   3. Mahayana Buddhism
      1. Between 300 BCE and 100 CE, new developments to Buddhism made it easier for adherents and to reach salvation
         1. Worship Buddha as a god
         2. Emergence of Bodhisattvas - those that earned nirvana, but held off to help others achieve it (similar to Christian saints)
         3. Giving donations or grants to monasteries helps gain salvation
   4. Popular Hinduism
      1. Solidified through epic poems like Ramayana and Mahabharata
      2. Bhagavad Gita told story of Arjuna and Krishna
         1. Importance of caste duties and detachment regarding the consequences of those duties will lead to salvation - joining with Brahma (the universal soul) after death
      3. Hindu Ethics
         1. *Dharma* - Obedience to religious and moral laws
         2. *Artha* - Pursuit of economic well-being and honest prosperity
         3. *Kama* - Enjoyment of pleasure
         4. The proper balance of these things will lead to *moksha* - salvation
      4. Hinduism eventually became the dominant religion in India
         1. Achieved official support of Gupta leaders
         2. Buddhist monks became more interested in the wealth of their monasteries and less interested in spreading their religion.
         3. However, pilgrims from China and other far away places visited important Buddhist places in India and brought the religion and its ideas home with them.
            1. Buddhism eventually finds a home in East Asia because of this.