

South Asia

Lesson 2: History of South Asia

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do governments change?

Terms to Know

caste social class into which a person is born and cannot change

reincarnation the belief that after a person dies, his or her soul is reborn into another body

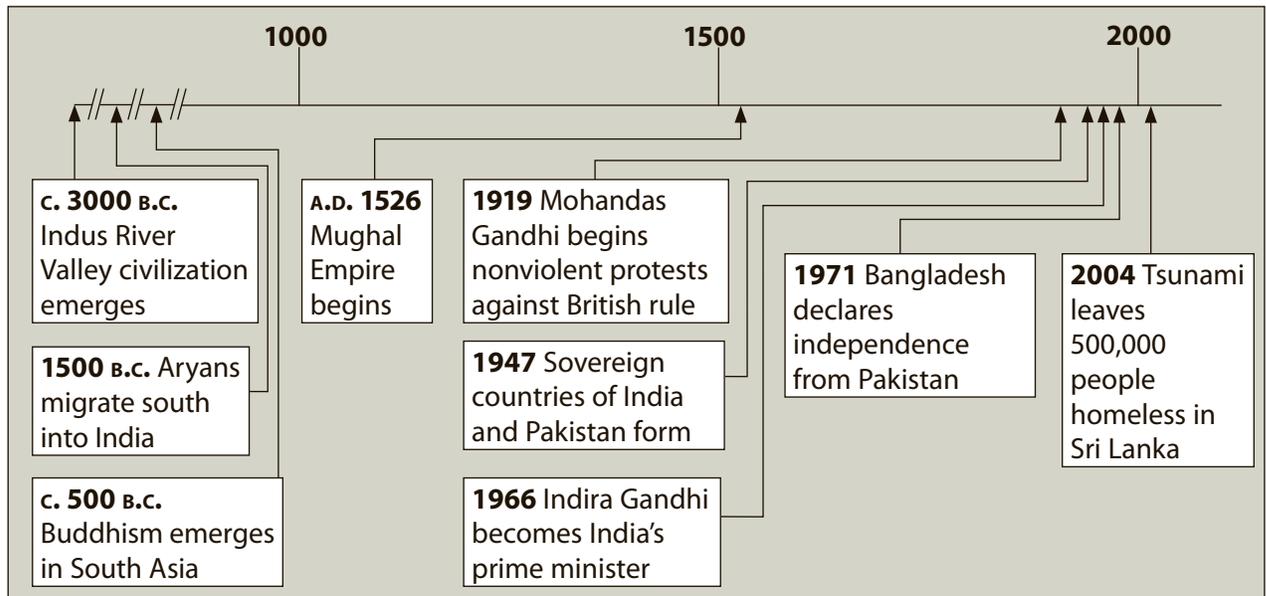
Raj the period of time in which Great Britain controlled India as a part of the British Empire

boycott to refuse to buy items from a particular country or company

civil disobedience the use of nonviolent protests to challenge a government or its laws

nuclear proliferation the spread of powerful nuclear weapons among nations

When did it happen?



Early South Asia

Guiding Question *How did South Asia's early history lay the foundation for modern life in the region?*

One of the oldest known civilizations was located near the Indus River. Called the Indus Valley civilization, it dates back to 3500 B.C. It formed at about the same time as other river-valley civilizations around the world. Archaeologists have discovered two large cities and dozens of smaller settlements. The people of this culture left written records. Most were farmers, but crafts also flourished.



Describing

1. What was the Indus Valley civilization like?

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Lesson 2: History of South Asia, *continued*

ABC Defining

2. How did the *caste* system affect life in South Asia?

? Explaining

3. Why was the literary legacy of the Aryan civilization important?

Pencil Marking the Text

4. Read the text on the right. Underline the sentence that describes Hinduism.

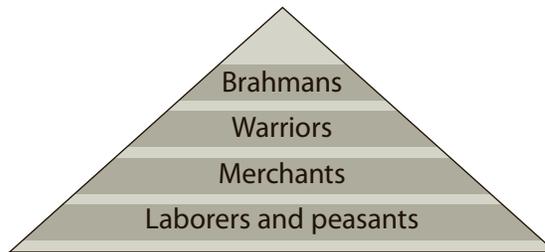
? Identifying

5. Who was the Buddha?

Evidence shows that people traded over long distances. The Indus Valley culture lasted about 1,000 years. No one knows why it ended. Natural disasters or enemy invasions are possible causes.

About 1500 B.C., the Aryans swept into what is now India. They probably came from Russia or central Asia. Once in India, they settled down to become farmers. The Aryan civilization lasted about 1,000 years. It left behind two important legacies.

One legacy was the caste system, shown below. **Castes** were social classes. At the top were priests, called Brahmins. At the bottom were laborers and peasants. The caste system had a deep impact for thousands of years and caused great inequality. People born into a lower class could not move up in society. Only after India won independence in 1947 was the caste system outlawed.



The second major legacy of the Aryans was literary. They composed long, poetic texts called Vedas in the ancient Sanskrit language. Sanskrit is the parent of modern Hindi, one of the major languages of modern India. Sanskrit also influenced the development of ancient Greek and Latin.

The Vedas were religious hymns handed down orally for centuries before being written down. The *Rig Veda* probably took shape around 1200 B.C. It is a series of hymns honoring Aryan gods. The hymns are full of imagery and philosophical ideas. This poem laid the foundation for the growth of Hinduism. Hinduism is a way of life with no founder, no holy book, and no central core of beliefs. Hindus pay respect to the Vedas and take part in religious rituals. Hindus believe in **reincarnation**, or the rebirth of the soul in another body.

Around 500 B.C., two new religions arose in response to Hinduism and the caste system. One was Jainism, based on the Hindu principle of noninjury. Jains turned from farming to trade so they would not have to kill or injure any living creature.

The other new religion was founded by a prince named Siddhārtha Gautama. He gave up his wealthy lifestyle and traveled in poverty, seeking spiritual truth. When he reached his goal, he became known as "the Buddha," or "the enlightened one." He passed on what he believed to be the Four Noble Truths.

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Lesson 2: History of South Asia, *continued*

- 1 Life is full of suffering.
- 2 Suffering is caused by selfish desire.
- 3 Conquering desire can stop suffering.
- 4 Desire can be conquered by the Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right way of living, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Like the Jains, Buddhists largely rejected the caste system. Today, Hinduism remains the major religion of India. Buddhism has spread to other Asian countries, while Jainism remains a minor religion in India.

Around 200 years after the Aryan civilization faded, the Mauryas conquered much of South Asia. Their most famous ruler was Ashoka. He was a warrior who turned to nonviolence after converting to Buddhism around 260 B.C. His conversion influenced many people. Trade and culture thrived under his rule.

Hundreds of years later, the Gupta Empire unified much of northern India. Under Chandragupta I, science, medicine, mathematics, and the arts flourished. Gupta scholars developed the decimal system in mathematics that we still use today.

During the 1500s and 1600s, the Mughal Empire flowered in India. The Mughals were Muslim and the first rulers to be members of a minority religion. During this era, many South Asians converted to Islam. Some of the Mughals were tolerant. Akbar the Great encouraged freedom of religion. Culture, science, and the arts flourished under the Mughals. A Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, built the Taj Mahal, an architectural monument in memory of his beloved wife.

Modern South Asia

Guiding Question *How has conflict in South Asia led to change?*

Beginning in the 1600s, British traders established settlements in India. As the Mughal Empire declined, the traders became more powerful in the region. The British were especially interested in textiles, timber, and tea. After a bloody rebellion in 1857, the British government took direct control of most of South Asia.



Comparing and Contrasting

6. How are the religions of Jainism and Buddhism alike? How are they different?



Activating Prior Knowledge

7. What is the decimal system?



Marking the Text

8. Read the text on the left. Highlight the names of South Asian civilizations or empires.



Reading Progress Check

9. What two important legacies did the Aryans leave behind?

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Lesson 2: History of South Asia, *continued*



Marking the Text

10. Highlight the names of two leaders of the Indian independence movement.



Reading Progress Check

11. How did Mohandas K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru approach the challenge of gaining independence from British rule?

India became a British colony. Although the British built railways, schools, and ports, the Indians resented a foreign presence in their land. In the late 1800s, an independence movement began.

In 1885 Indian supporters of independence formed the Indian National Congress. But the British did not want to give up the **Raj**, as their imperialist rule of India was called. The National Congress responded by encouraging a **boycott**, refusing to buy or use imported British goods.

In the early 1900s, two members of the Congress became leaders. Mohandas K. Gandhi was opposed to violence. His most powerful weapon was **civil disobedience**, or nonviolent resistance, to British rule. He was joined by a younger leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. Together, they finally persuaded the British to leave South Asia in 1947.

South Asia has been troubled by religious and cultural divisions between Hindus and Muslims. As part of the independence settlement, the subcontinent was split into two countries. India was mainly Hindu. Pakistan was mainly Muslim. Tensions between the two countries developed. They have fought several wars and are involved in a dispute over the Kashmir region. In the late 1990s, both countries developed nuclear weapons. This **nuclear proliferation**, or spread of powerful atomic weapons, could make conflict between the two nations dangerous.

Writing

Check for Understanding

1. Informative/Explanatory Who were the Guptas, and what did they accomplish?

2. Informative/Explanatory Why are Hindu-Muslim conflicts in South Asia so significant to the history of the region?
