**Harappa**

Around 40,000 BCE a group of hunter/gathers migrated from Africa and eventually settled in the Hindus River Valley of India. By 4000 BC, these people had begun [farming](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/economy/farming/) and developed a system of [irrigation](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/economy/farming/irrigation.htm) to water their fields. By 2500 BCE the city of Harappa became a major ancient city.

Harappa was very advanced for its time. The people lived in stone houses with a sewage system, they used bronze tools which they learned how to make from the Sumerians, and they used an early form of writing similar to hieroglyphs, like the Egyptians.

By around 1700 BCE, The Indus River began to move due to a warming trend and as a result the Harappan civilization collapsed.

**Monsoon**

In the summer, when India becomes very hot, winds(monsoon) from over the Indian Ocean blows towards this hot region. On their way these winds absorb a lot of water from the Indian Ocean. So now imagine this wind carrying infinite number of tiny water balloons with it.

What happens when water balloons hit a hard surface? They burst into a splash of water! That is exactly what happens when the water laden wind hits the Indian mountains. The infinite tiny water balloons burst, releasing water and resulting in rains.

**Ayrians**

Between the years 2500 and 2000 BCE a new mass migration took place originating in the area between the Black and Caspian Sea and spread throughout Eurasia. Some went to Europe and became the ancestors to the [Romans](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/romans/history/bronzeage.htm) and the [Greeks](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/history/middlebronze.htm), some settled in Turkey and became the [Hittites](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/westasia/history/hittites.htm), while others continued south to India. The slow migration did not arrive in northern India until about 1500 BC. In India, these Indo-Europeans were called Aryans.

The Aryans first moved into the Indus River after defeating what was left of the Harappan people. Once they learned how to use iron, they used their new weapons to conquer more of India and settled into the Ganges river valley around 800 BCE.

Evidence of this mass migration can be found in their written records, Sanskrit. We can read Sanskrit, and we can easily see that many words in Sanskrit are basically the same as in other Indo-European languages. In addition to their language, the Aryans brought their polytheistic religion with them to India. These gods form the basis of the Rig Veda and other sagas which were first written down in Sanskrit.

**The Vedas**

There are four Vedas, the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. The Vedas are the primary texts of Hinduism.

Scholars have determined that the Rig Veda, the oldest of the four Vedas, was composed about 1500 BCE It is unknown when it was finally committed to writing, but this probably was at some point after 300 BCE. Some of its verses are still recited as Hindu prayers, at religious functions and other occasions, putting these among the world's oldest religious texts in continued use. The Rigveda contains several mythological and poetical accounts of the origin of the world, hymns praising the gods, and ancient prayers for life.

**The Caste System**

In ancient India, society was organized so that each specialized job was performed by a specific group, or caste. The interdependence of all of the various castes was recognized, and each one was considered necessary to the society as a whole.

The word caste comes from the Portuguese word castas, meaning "pure." This Portuguese word expresses one of the most central values of Indian society: the idea of ritual purity. In India, however, the word varna, or "color," denotes the fourfold division of Indian society. The word varna may have been used because each of the four castes was assigned a specific color as its emblem. These four castes—brahman, kshatriya, vaishya, and sudra—are the classical four divisions of Hindu society.

In Hindu religious texts, the dharma—the law, or duty—of each varna is described. It was thought that this dharma was an inherited, or inborn, quality. Consequently, people thought that if intermarriages took place, there would be much confusion as to the dharma of the next generation of children. As a result of such concerns, marriages between different castes were strictly prohibited.

**The Brahman**

The brahman caste is assigned the highest status of the four varnas but also must live by the strictest rules. In their very name, brahmans are identified with the supreme being, and so are expected to uphold this high honor by their conduct. In addition, they must observe many detailed rules concerning ritual purity in their personal lives. They must avoid contact with dirt, for instance, and may not eat foods such as meat that are considered to be polluted. Because of the strict rules that the brahmans observe, they cannot perform many of the tasks necessary to everyday life. They cannot obtain their own food, for instance, or use violence to defend themselves. Thus, they must depend on other castes to perform these essential services. This is one way in which the interdependence of the castes is evident. Without the other castes, there could be no Brahmans. In terms of occupation, the first duty of a brahman is to study the Vedas, the ancient scriptures of India. A young brahman boy begins this period of study after going through a special ceremony marking his spiritual rebirth. Kshatriya and vaishya boys also go through this ceremony of "rebirth" at age 10 or 11. After the ceremony, each boy is given a sacred thread to wear around his neck as a symbol of membership in the "twice-born" castes. After ten or more years of study, a brahman may become a priest of a temple, or he may instruct boys of the twice-born castes in Sanskrit and the Vedas.

**Kshatriya**

The kshatriya caste includes soldiers, generals, and kings. Their traditional role is to defend the society from invaders and robbers, and they are expected to be both brave and high-minded. The kshatriyas must study the ancient Hindu scriptures under the guidance of a Brahman teacher and are expected to follow many of the same rules of ritual purity that the brahman caste observes.

**Vaishya**

The job specialties of the vaishya caste are agriculture and cattle raising. The vaishyas also carry on trading activities; for example, they bring farm products to market and lend money to keep various enterprises going. Like the brahmans and the kshatriyas, the vaishyas are a twice-born caste.

The top three varnas have a status that excludes the fourth; this is the status of being "Twice-born" This means that the religion described in the Vedas applies to them only. The designation "twice-born" refers to the rite of initiation that the members of this caste go through upon reaching maturity. This rite brings them into the religion; they are reborn as a Hindu and not just as a caste member. The sudras, therefore, are excluded from worship in the Vedic religion, and are not even permitted to hear the Vedas read outloud. They therefore have their own priests and religious rites.

**Sudra**

In ancient law, the sudras were given only one occupation: to serve the members of the twice-born castes. As servants to the other three castes, the sudras performed many of the tasks that involve "pollution," such as agricultural labor, leather working, disposing of garbage, and laundering. In time, however, many sudras became wealthy farmers or artisans in their own right. When a sudrajati, or subcaste, improved its status in this way, it was also able to adopt many of the rituals and habits of the twice-born castes. Menial tasks then became the dharma of the "out-casts" of society—the untouchables, or harijans.

**Untouchables**

Inevitably, there were certain people who failed to live up to their caste dharma or who violated the rules concerning marriage between castes. Such people and their children were considered outcasts from Hindu society. They had to live apart from other castes and were given the jobs that no one else wanted to perform. Because of their contact with things considered unclean or polluted, the outcasts were believed to be deeply tainted. They came to be thought of as "untouchable" because people believed that their touch—or even the sight of them—would compromise a brahman's purity.

**Caste Dharma**

In Hindu society, caste dharma is considered to be a divine law. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, caste dharma is "the duty one has to perform" and "the law of one's being." Many Hindus believe that this obligation tends to enhance the spiritual development of the individual. Because of it, each person learns from an early age to overcome selfish desires and instead focus on group goals and ideals.

**Karma**

Because one's caste membership is thought to be a result of actions in a previous life, a person tends to accept this status rather than complain about it. By the same token, a successful performance of caste duty will improve one's karma and perhaps lead to improved status in the next life.

**Reincarnation**

The Hindus believed that the soul went through a series of rebirths as it strived to obtain a oneness with the universal spirit. They believed that when a person died, they would be reborn again, living many lives, until they perfected themselves. This state of perfection was called **Moksha.**

**Mauryian Empire**

The Mauryan period of Indian history began with the conquest of Alexander the Great, in 326 BCE. The political situation amongst the Aryan states in the region began to fall apart and it opened the door for the first great conqueror in Indian history, **Chandragupta** to rise to power.

Chandragupta conquered all of northern India. He drove out Alexander's successors from the Indian subcontinent, and went on to conquer the easternmost provinces of Alexander's former empire, reaching into Afghanistan and eastern Iran.

One of the big reasons for Chandragupta's success was his chief minister, Chanakya. He is the author of a political essay called the Arthashastra, a manual on how to rule. Chanakya also organized an efficient military and civil administration, on which the Mauryan kings could build a solid power.

Chandragupta was succeeded by his son, Bindusara. He continued his father's conquests by extending Mauryan power down into central India.

Bindusara was followed by his son. Asoka proved to be one of the greatest rulers in Indian history.

After a bloody war to conquer eastern India, Asoka renounced warfare and converted to Buddhism. He stated that for the rest of his life he would reign in peace. He actively promoted the spread of Buddhism; and sent missionaries throughout Southeast Asia. As a result Buddhism became one of the predominant faiths. Even today you can still see the pillars Asoka erected around his empire, on which were inscribed royal edicts and encouragements to his subjects to live in harmony with one another.

**Buddhism**

Siddhartha Gautama was a Indian prince born around 553 BCE. Siddhartha was greatly troubled by all the suffering he witnessed. He decided to leave his family and life of luxury and travelled around India as a monk. One day while meditating under a tree, a way to end all the world’s suffering occurred to him. The other monks began to call Siddhartha the “Buddha” or “the awakened one”. What Buddha realized, is that life is ruled by four truths, truths that the Buddha called the **Four Noble Truths**:

* **The first of the noble truths was that all people, no matter rich or poor, suffer pains and afflictions**
* **People suffer these afflictions because they travel through an endless cycle of births and rebirths. These rebirths cause mans desires for different things.**
* **People could end their desire for rebirths, and thus their suffering by ending their desire for things**
* **A person can eliminate their desires for thing by following the** **Eightfold Path:**
* **1. *Right Views:* To keep ourselves free of prejudice and superstition, and to see the true nature of life.**

**2. *Right Thoughts:* To turn our minds away from the violence and hatred in this world.**

**3. *Right Speech:* To refrain from harmful talk and to use our words wisely.**

**4. *Right Conduct:* To see that our deeds come from peace and goodwill. To grow every day in the Buddha's Teachings.**

**5. *Right Livelihood:* To try to earn our living in such a way that we avoid evil karma.**

**6. *Right Energy:* To use our energies to promote the overcoming ignorance and destructive desires.**

**7. *Right Mindfulness:* To cherish a good mind, for all that we think and do have their roots in the mind.**

**8. *Right Meditation:* To study the Teachings of the Buddha and to practice them to the best of our abilities.**

By following the eightfold path, and avoiding evil extremes, the Buddha taught that an individual could achieve nirvana. He taught that nirvana, which in their language meant to blow out a candle, was a state of non-existence.  
It was not a place, like heaven, but rather an actual state of non-existence. When someone reached nirvana, their soul was in harmony with the universe and they would cease to exist.