

## CHAPTER 9-STATE, SOCIETY, AND THE QUEST FOR SALVATION IN INDIA

The beginning of this chapter is a little confusing because Alexander the Great and the Greeks are mentioned, but they are not really discussed until Chapter 10. Alexander is important to discuss here because his takeover of the older Indian kingdoms and subsequent departure creates a power vacuum that will be filled by the Mauryan Empire. In 320 B.C.E. Chandragupta Maurya began his conquest of the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. However, the main figure of this dynasty was Ashoka, who ruled from 268 B.C.E. until 232 B.C.E. using a highly organized bureaucracy, not unlike the Chinese emperors. Following his death the empire went into decline, due in large part to financial problems. It eventually disappeared in 185 B.C.E.

Northwest India was ruled by for two centuries by the Greek-speaking Bactrians. They were followed by the Kushan Empire and then the Gupta Dynasty, founded by Chandra Gupta (375-415 C.E.).

India has a complex economic and religious history. Economically India consisted of large numbers of towns that provided not only manufactured goods, but that also established markets that fostered trade from China to the Mediterranean. In many ways economics was linked to the expansion of the caste system. Although there were originally only four main castes, the sub-castes, or *jati*, which number into the thousands, were often based on occupations. This rigid system led to the development of other religions. Founded by Vardhamana Mahavira, Jainism put forth the ideas of ridding oneself of selfish behavior. It also promoted nonviolence toward all living things. Jainism's appeal was that it did not recognize the caste system, which resulted in greater equality for people, but eventually almost completely disappeared. The religion that closely followed however, Buddhism, is still practiced today.

This religion started in the sixth century B.C.E. when Siddhartha Gautama, a young, rich Indian prince, gave up all of his wealth and went in search of enlightenment, and became known as the Buddha. The Buddha taught that by following the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold path one could end human suffering. Buddhism eventually spread in one of several forms to all of Asia. Ironically, for various reasons, it disappeared in India. Buddhism had great appeal because it was less demanding than Jainism while still not recognizing the caste system. It also used common vernacular (everyday) language. Buddhism was eventually replaced in India by Hinduism, which stressed the Bhagavad Gita and salvation by meeting caste responsibilities.

### Key Concept 2.1. The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

- I. Codifications and further developments of existing religious traditions provided a bond among the people and an ethical code to live by.

- II. New belief systems and cultural traditions emerged and spread, often asserting universal truths.

### Key Concept 2.2. The Development of States and Empires

- II. Empires and states developed new techniques of imperial administration based, in part, on the success of earlier political forms.
- IV. The Roman, Han, Maurya and Gupta empires created political, cultural and administrative difficulties that they could not manage, which eventually led to their decline, collapse and transformation into successor empires or states.

### Key Concept 2.3. Emergence of Transregional Networks of Communication and Exchange

- I. Land and water routes created transregional trade, communication and exchange networks in the Eastern Hemisphere, while separate networks connected the peoples and societies of the Americas somewhat later.