

Week I: Brief Historical Overview

- A. Indus Valley civilization (3,000-1,500 B.C.)
1. 3,000-2,000 B.C.: high civilization, urban, literate, settled agriculture; Harappa/Mohenjo Daro (first grid plan cities)
 2. 2,000-1,500 B.C.: Indo-Aryan migration which subsequently pushed Dravidians south, and brought an Aryan group which had a strong hierarchical division between priests, warriors and nomads, and a language similar to Sanskrit (an Indo-Aryan/Indo-European language)
- B. Vedic Age - 1500 – 1000 BC
1. Vedas: poetic Sanskrit hymns passed down orally for thousands of years (mostly fire sacrifices, chants, and spells)
 2. Rig Veda: 1028 Hymns of praise to Aryan gods (personified forces of nature).
- C. Classical period (600 B.C. to 600 A.D.): Articulation of Hinduism (Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita); establishment of *varna* system (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras) - which provided the foundation of the present *jajmani* system (to be discussed later, on Wednesday)
- D. Islamic period: invasion by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1057 A.D., from Afghanistan; followed by the Sultanate of Delhi (1206-1526); the great Mughal empire (1527-1857): best known emperors were Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jehan (builder of the Taj Mahal); effective rule ended in 1748. Akbar created a political system which provided a synthesis of the great diversities in India, which provides a model for accommodation between groups today.
- E. The British Raj
1. First entered as the British East India Company in Bengal.
 2. Established various kinds of taxation and land tenure systems, and organized groups (e.g., tribes, *zamindars*) into new forms. [Note issues associated with this in *Ghare Baire*, *Lagaan* and *Mirch Masala* about how the British were going to – unilaterally – just raise the tax.]
 3. After 1857 war, established infrastructure of rail lines, roads, postal services, printing & newspapers, developed four major port cities, and governing bureaucracy. [Note how often trains are significant in most of the films we will view.]
 4. Underdevelopment of Indian cotton industry as the British introduced their own English-made cotton (helping their own economic development but harming India's) and hence transforming the economic infrastructure. The legacy of economic underdevelopment persists.
 5. Elaboration of Hindu culture: Orientalism - India became "the brightest jewel in England's crown" and the British began translating sacred texts and codifying traditions which they perceived as Hinduism; therefore, the formal, codified "traditions" were representations of what the British had felt were important in Indian culture, not what the Indians saw. [Remember this when we watch *A Passage to India*.]
 6. Developed a dependent, elite, English-speaking class of clerks, who largely sided with the British against the old elites in 1857. However, their education made communication possible and them knowledgeable about basic rights. Lord Macauley, in his famous "Minute on Education" asserted that education was going to cause students to remain physically Indian but turn them mentally into Englishmen. British contribution to linguistic unification is English,

which is still used to overcome identification with regional cultures by language usage. [Note that many references to this can be found in *Ghare Baire*, *Lagaan* and *A Passage to India*.]

E. Independence: 14 August 1947 (Pakistan); 15 August 1947 (India). The some 600 'princely states' that had never been fully incorporated into British India (for example, the Bengali state in *Ghare Baire*, the Punjabi state in *Lagaan*, and the Muslim state in *A Passage to India*) now had to choose to become a part of India or Pakistan. The difficult legacy of this is the dispute over Kashmir, where the Hindu prince, Maharaja Hari Singh, opted for his Muslim-majority state to join India.