

UNIT 122 – UPSC - Ancient India

The Indus Valley Civilization existed in between 3000-1500 BC while the earlier Kot Diji cultures, of the pre-Indus period, existed in the period of approximately 3300-2800 BC. Harappa and the city of Mohenjo-Daro were the greatest achievements of the Indus valley civilization. These cities are well known for their impressive, organized and regular layout.

Then came Aryans who composed these evocative hymns to nature and celebrated life exuberantly referred to themselves as Aryas usually anglicised as Aryan meaning 'noble'. The 6th Century B.C. was the period of Magadh Kingdom. Chandragupta Maurya ousted the oppressive ruler of Magadh to find his own dynasty that existed from 322 - 298 B.C.

The most famous Maurya King Ashoka the Great ruled from 273 - 232 B.C over a large kingdom stretching from Kashmir and Peshawar in the North and Northwest to Mysore in the South and Orissa in the East. He after witnessing the carnage at the battle field of Kalinga (269 B.C.) in Orissa, dedicated himself to Dharmma (righteousness).

In the subsequent centuries, after the Ashoka empire disintegrated, India suffered a series of invasions, and often fell under the spell of foreign rulers - Indo Bactrians, the Sakas and others. After the next 400 years of instability the Guptas established their kingdom.

Kalidas, the famous Sanskrit poet and dramatist, author of Abhijnana Shankuntalam, Kumarsambhavam and Meghadutam is believed to have adorned the Gupta court. Also the great mathematicians like Aryabhatta and astronomers like Varahmihir lived during this period. The dazzling wall paintings of the Ajanta caves too are traced back to this era.

Cholas, Pandayas and Pallavas ruled over the southern part of India during the medieval period of India's history. Cholas ruled the territory of Deccan (today the districts of Thanjavur and Tiruchirapally) while the Pandyas reined around present day Tirunelveli and Madurai.

Pallavas of Kanchi rose to prominence in the 4th Century A.D. and ruled unchallenged for about four hundred years. The Nayanar and Alvar saint poets belong to this period. The gemlike shore temples at Mahabalipuram date to this period. The Cholas overthrew the Pallavas were in the 9th Century and regained political primacy in south India. The 15th Century saw the decline of the Pandyas.