

India's Past and Present

Urban-type civilization began in India around 2600 B.C. in the Indus valley, with the coming of the Aryans (Iranians). The history of India can then be divided into three phases: The Prehistoric up to 700 A.D., The Mediaeval, 700 – 1857 A.D. and The Modern, 1857 – now.

By 1500 B.C., Indo-Aryan culture began to dominate the region and the Rigveda (one of the oldest Sanskrit books of the Hindu religion) described the seeds of India's religious and philosophical development including the Caste system. From 250 B.C. to 185 B.C. India was the home of some of the greatest empires, the Mauryan, extending to 5 million square kilometres was largest.

The next significant change was the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498 at Calicut, establishing the colony of Goa. He made the first contact between India and western Europe by sea. He became the first Viceroy. The Mughals arrived later in 1600 when the annual revenue of the emperor was £17.5 million rising to £100 million. This compares with Britain at this time with an income of £16 million. Ancient India was known for its Gurukul educational system, advances in surgery, including plastic surgery where procedures were described in the Sushruta Sanhita, authored by Sushruta an early plastic surgeon. Mathematics was well established, with the invention of the zero as we write it now. The number 270 is inscribed on an ancient 9th century temple in Gurdior, although the concept of "nothingness" was a long-held tenet of the Hindu religion. Astronomy was also well developed as was the use of kiln-dried bricks as we know them today. Large brick-built astronomical sighting instruments of ca. 1700 can be seen in New Delhi. These preceded our astronomers e.g. Herschel, by 100 years. By this time India had a well-developed social infrastructure including drainage systems for each house. India had abundant natural resources and its industry was noted for the production of cotton cloth and exotic spices. This prosperity attracted the British who paid in gold bullion, encouraging a thriving economy. However, soon India was exporting raw cotton and other materials and industrial Britain produced the goods cheaper. This led to a decline in the Indian economy.

Now modern India lives alongside the older culture and we see Porsche cars passing bullock carts on the flyovers, farmers checking the weather reports on their cell phones, before ploughing the field with bullocks, priests using autocues on tablets for performing ancient ceremonies and stone grinders next to electric mixers in kitchens.

By 1960, crops were being bred to improve yields and, in 1962, the ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) was established under P.M. Nehru. By 1970, India was self-sufficient in milk. By 1974, the Nuclear Programme was underway and by 1975 satellites had been launched. A complete communication satellite network is now established.

India is now the fourth largest military power in the world with its own missile systems and sophisticated weaponry. India practices religious tolerance there being nine major religions as well as twenty-two main languages supporting 1500 dialects. Increasingly, India is becoming a secular state. India has sent its own explorers to the moon and to the sun. It manufactured 22 billion doses of Covid vaccine for its population and has completely eradicated polio.

India grows apace, being the fifth largest economy in the world with manufacturing rising by 4.7% annually. It is forecast to become the third largest world economy in the near future and hosted the G20 Summit.