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A brief account of History of India

“As the light goes out with the exhaustion of the oil, so fortune fails with the cessation of human endeavor.”—

Mahabharata

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Abstract:

This review of literature is based on Indian History. It highlights the famous events that took place in the history of India from the era of Indus Valley Civilization (3300 BCE) to Independence (20th Century). We have tried to cover very concisely the major important and influential events from the Mauryan Dynasty to the Mughals and British Raj with apt information.

Keywords: History; Civilization; Empire; Reign; Conquest

Dawn of Civilization: 35th to 15th Century BCE:

In 3300 BCE, the Indus Valley Civilization covered a region more than one million square miles obscuring both the contemporary Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations. Its primary centers were Harappa and Mohenjo Daro.

The Harappan civilization covered the vast areas of modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northwestern India. The culture was highly sophisticated, including bronze age metallurgy, precious gemstone carvings, urban planning, as well as drainage and irrigation systems.

Mohenjo Daro, also known as Mound of the Dead, was built around 2600 to 2500 BCE. Kukkutarma, the city of the cockerel, was one of the most advanced cities at the time. The location of the Great Bath, the city's excavation has shown sophisticated urban planning. But, in all the excavations there has been no sign of warfare or weaponry. This leads us to believe that the culture and people that built and inhabited this region were peace-loving and had no need for armaments (Giosan, et al., 2012).

Vedic Period: 15th to 6th Century BCE:

A legion of Indo-Aryans migrated from central Asia around 1500 BCE into the once inhabited Indus Valley. The Iron Age society, also known as the Vedic period is attributed to the creation of the oldest known scriptures of Hinduism.

The most influential and crucial event that occurred during this period was the formation of social stratification. The Harappan culture strongly believed in Egalitarianism, where all people deserve equal rights and opportunities. However, the Vedic people that came to inhabit the same area had a very different ideology of how the society should roll (Keay, J.,2011).

The nomadic tribes began to settle down in pastoral communities along the Gangetic plain. The Varna system was enforced. It was a system of social stratification to divide the labor pools into four classes. These four classes were responsible for the onset of the social caste system that prevailed in India until the twentieth century. The Vedic Period is considered to be one of the most influential eras in Indian history because the birth of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism occurred during this time.

The composition of the Rig Veda (world's oldest religious text in continuous use) between 1500 to 1000 BCE included the collection of hymns encapsulating the religious and social ideology of the Vedic tribes that came to inhabit the

Indus Valley. The collection of over 1000 hymns and 10,000 verses were made to praise their old Indian deities. Chief among the gods were the valiant Indra, the thunder and rain deity who is praised for the destruction of evil set against mankind (Bloomfield, M., 1908).

The Upanishads came into existence around 6th and 7th century and are attributed to sages and men of extraordinarily superhuman intellect. Unlike the hymnal Rig Vedas, the Upanishads describe major principles in Hindu thought and ideas like Maya and Moksha. Among the ideas were the concepts of non-violence, charity, truth and honesty, compassion, and temperance (Keith, A. B., 1925).

Around the 6th century, 16 great realms emerged. The rise in urbanization gave ways to make changes in governance. A shift in governance by a monarch or ruling body called a Gana- sangha was made the custom. The Mahajanapadas or Great Realms began to secure their positions, building enormous walls of brick to protect their resources and tax revenue. The kingdoms relied steadily on the Varna system initiated in the Vedic Period. Kings were appointed by the ways of ritual and were given the power to rule the kingdom. The Gana-sangha rejected the Vedic orthodoxy and were open to new ideas, which may have given rise to the formation of Buddhism and Jainism. Although the Gana-sangha were not democracies, they functioned under the theory of equality, and thus their ruling bodies were elected by the public for a term of service. One other major difference was social stratification in the Gana-sangha which shifted the four-fold division of the Varna system into a two-fold division- the rulers and laborers (Sinha, S., & Sinha, M., 2013).

In 599 BCE, the birth and life of Mahavira uplifted the ideas of Jainism. He renounced his wealthy noble life in search of spiritual awakening. After 12 years of rigorous penance and abstinence from materialistic worldly pleasures, he achieved 'kevala-gyan', or infinite wisdom and omniscience. Mahavira became the 24th and final “ford-maker” or Tirthankara of the Jain religion, upraising him to the status of demi-god or limited godhood. The Tirthankara is a term used for a spiritual leader in Jainism who acquires passage from the eternal cycle of birth and death. Mahavira died in 527 BCE after he had significantly influenced the religion through his dogma of the five vows of nonviolence, truthfulness, anti-theft, chastity, and non-attachment. Among these, his doctrine of nonviolence was the most widespread and influential (Tulsī, Ā., 1974)

In the prominent Vedic period, the Brahmins acted as mediates between the laymen and the gods. A practice called Asceticism gained popularity, particularly among the young nobility. The enlightenment of Siddharth, who was born into the noble family of the Shakya clan granted him the title of Buddha and later became the founder of Buddhism.

Somewhere between 500-200 BCE, the second most important epic text in Indian history, The Ramayana was composed by Rishi Valmiki and it consists of 96,000 verses.

Mauryan Empire and Gupta Empire: 4th Century BCE to 8th Century CE:

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, The Indian empire was found by Chandragupta Maurya. This Mauryan Empire began in the kingdom of Magadha. After the overthrow of the monarchy in Magadha, Maurya turned his eye towards the larger kingdom of Nanda. From 320 BCE to 305 BCE, Chandragupta Maurya expanded the Mauryan Empire significantly through conquests into the northwestern satrapies. Chandragupta at the end of his reign renounced the throne to his son and became a Jain monk (Dikshitar, V. R., 1993).

Ashoka's story (273-232 BCE) is as fascinating as his reign over the Mauryan Empire. His grandfather and father left him with a massive dynasty that covered nearly the entire Indian subcontinent and extended east and west further than any empire had before. It is certain that Ashoka, "the one without sorrow," came to power through his vicious ambitions. He was coronated in 268 BCE. His reign is often divided into two designated parts: His conquests and his conversion to Buddhism. It is assumed that he was raised as a Jain, due to his grandfather's and father's faith, but their policies of no violence did not seem to carry much weight as Ashoka had a desire to rule over all of India. Ashoka followed in his ancestors' footsteps and conquered farther east and west, but his crowning achievement in conquest was the kingdom of Kalinga. This kingdom was one that both of his predecessors wanted but was unsuccessful. But Ashoka succeeded. It was because of this conquest that a major shift occurred in his policy, governance, and lifestyle. Though his reign was long and just, his death caused a schism in the great Mauryan Empire from which it would never recover (Lahiri, N., 2015).

Sometime between 800-300 BCE, The Mahabharata, the greatest epic of Indian history was composed by sage Vyasa. The 200,000-verse epic poem is the longest ever written and stands alone as a magnificent feat. It follows the story of the Kurukshetra War between the two families of Kauravas and Pandavas for the succession of the throne of the

kingdom of Kuru. This extensive work contains versions of the Ramayana as well as the Bhagavad Gita. As the story is composed of over 1.8 million words, the gravitas of its message cannot be aptly or concisely put. The saga ends with the death of Krishna, the eighth and last avatar of Vishnu, and the supreme deity of Hinduism. His death signified the birth of the Kali Yuga or the dark period of dissension into humanity's basest forms and the degradation of noble values and deeds. This significant event shows how the world was beginning to crumble from the greatness of myth into a darker age. Tucked away in the 200,000 verses of the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita's 700 verses follow the specific story of Prince Arjuna as well as his guide and charioteer Lord Krishna (Buck, W., 2019).

Chandragupta- I became the first ruler of the Gupta Empire. By 321 CE he had already conquered lands stretching along the Ganges River. His reign was relatively short, spanning only 15 years giving way to his son Samudragupta. Through conquest after conquest, Samudragupta nearly tripled the empire that he inherited. He crowned himself the King of Kings and King of the World, this Indian Napoleon did not focus his attention solely on the martial arts. During Samudragupta's kingship of approximately 45 years, the Gupta Empire strikingly transformed Indian culture. The Empire spread the love of arts and science and created the Golden Age of India. Throughout this period, astronomy, mathematics, art, and literature solidified the Hindu and Indian culture into a national identity (Hawting, G. R, 2002). The subcontinent fall of the Mauryan Empire and the later Gupta Empire by 550 CE resulted in crumbled and culminating end of the Classical Age of India and also made way for the Muslim invasions of the Medieval Period.

Medieval India: 8th to 15th Century CE:

With the fall of the Gupta Empire and the weak rival kingdoms through disunity, the entire subcontinent of India was ripe for the picking.

From 622 CE to 632 CE, the rise of Islam and Muhammad's Caliphate began to consolidate power in the east. By 700 CE the Umayyad Caliphate, the second caliphate to rule over Muhammad's empire since his death, was in power. In 711 CE Muhammad bin Qasim, a general and conqueror of the Caliphate, launched an invasion into the Sindh and Punjab regions of the northwest India.

Power rose in the east to confront the Abbasid Caliphate, who had dethroned the Umayyads a few centuries back. This power was the Ghaznavid Empire led by Mahmud of Ghazni. After consolidating power in Ghazni, Mahmud took up

arms to conquer territories into Afghanistan, the Sindh, and Punjab. His raids plagued the northwestern areas of the Indian subcontinent for nearly 20 years (Hawting, G. R., 2002).

With the collapse of the Ghaznavid Empire due to the death of Mahmud of Ghazni and his inept sons, Muhammad of Ghor also known as Mu'izz ad-Din set his sights on invading the territories in Punjab and the Indus Valley (Raza, S. J., 2010)

In 1191, Muhammad proceeded into the Indian subcontinent by the Khyber Pass and successfully reached Punjab where he took the fortress of Bhatinda under the rule of Prithviraj Chauhan. While Muhammad conquered the fortress, he was soon challenged by Prithviraj Chauhan and his men. Rather than retreat, Muhammad met Prithviraj in battle and was wounded by the king's brother and was forced to flee back to his territories. This was the first battle of Tarain (Somani, R. V., 1981).

After the failure a year before, Muhammad of Ghor planned his second battle more carefully. The army of Prithviraj was larger and better trained. With 120,000 fully armored men, Muhammad organized his army into five sub-armies and attacked the flanks of the Rajput forces. At first, this maneuver was ineffective, but after faking retreat, he managed to lead the Rajput army out of position and exploit the break in the lines. Shortly after their lines were broken, Prithviraj was captured and promptly executed. This was the second battle of Tarain.

Issues in Ghazni and other territories in the east called Muhammad back to deal with the pressing matters. Muhammad of Ghor left his conquest in India in the hands of Qutb al-Din Aibak, his slave. With the death of Muhammad in 1206 by the hands of assassins, Qutb al-Din Aibak was left in control of the newly formed Delhi Sultanate. His rule was short, and a number of exchanges of power led the Delhi Sultanate to rest in the control of Iltutmish. This marked the period known as the Mamluk or Slave Dynasty that ruled over Delhi and various other regions including Bengal (Michell, G., 2018).

Almost all the parts of Asia were affected by the sudden emergence of the Mongolian horde, India was no exception. The Delhi Sultanate had become the premier power in the northern regions of India. Naturally, as the Mongol Empire expanded, the two powers came into conflict. Pursuing the remnants of Jalal al-Din of the Khwarezmid Empire, Genghis Khan led a force of 200,000 men against the 30,000 remaining men of Jalal al-Din at the Battle of the Indus.

Age of Exploration and Colonialism: 16th to 20th Century CE:

After the discovery of the New World or West Indies by the Spanish in 1492, the entirety of Europe set sail. Sailing from Portugal, the neighboring nation of Spain, The first European to sail around the Cape of Africa and reach the East Indies, Vasco De Gama became a famous man. In total, Vasco De Gama made three expeditions to India and other ports in the Indian Ocean. His primary berth was in the city of Calicut, where he and the Portuguese attempted to set up trade and a factory.

By 1502 the Portuguese established the first European trading post in Kerala. In 1505 a formal viceroy to India was installed, and five years later, the appointed Viceroy Afonso de Albuquerque sacked and conquered the city of Goa. It marked the beginning of Portuguese dominance in the coastal areas until the emergence of the East India Companies of both the Dutch and the English emerged.

Simultaneous to the European expansion into India, the successes of the Mongols in the north, the ambitious son of Timur (founder of the Timurid Empire), Babur set his eyes upon India. Following the footsteps of his father and Genghis Khan via his mother's side, Babur formed an army and marched through the Khyber Pass from Kabul in Afghanistan into northern India.

The famed battle of Panipat in 1526 marked the first warfare that included gunpowder and artillery units.

Humayun was able to retake what he had lost, he died by way of an accident and left the empire in the child hands of Akbar. When he grew of the age, By way of warfare and diplomacy, Akbar was able to extend the border of the empire to envelope the majority of the subcontinent north of the Godavari River. He was named Akbar the Great because, under his rule of nearly 50 years, the Mughal Empire presided over major expansions in technological advancements, science, and trade. Industry became a major point of focus. Akbar's reign is marked by a legacy of compromise and secular acceptance, which helped the Mughal Empire to achieve a status of the second-largest empire in Indian history, second to the Mauryans (Albuquerque, A. D.,1875).

The Mughal Empire traced its heritage to the Turks and Mongols, and the Europeans controlled large portions of the coastal regions. This left the Hindu or Indian people with little to call their own.

From 1658 to 1707, Aurangzeb ruled over the final phase of the Mughal Empire. Though his reign was long its end would signify the end of the Mughal Empire. A series of wars and battles between the two would be the deciding factor of power in India. Aurangzeb went on fighting a slow battle of attrition against the Marathan rebels, and he eventually died fighting them at the age of 88 in 1707 (Siddiqui, I. H., 2003).

The Bengal nawab allied with the French. Though the French were well situated in North America, their holdings and trade in the East Indies were meager when compared to the Anglo or Dutch trading companies. In 1757 the British East India Company launched a mission against the Bengali leader and his French allies. The French were engaged with the English in the Seven Years War at the time, and the loss of Bengal to the English would be a crucial blow. The British East India Company lay siege to Palashi, also known as Plassey, and the result of the battle was an English victory that would signal a power shift of gargantuan proportions in India. This Battle of Plassey marked the beginning of British dominance in India.

Mysore was the crown jewel of India. The British East India Company allied with the Maratha Confederacy and the Nizam of Hyderabad to take Mysore from the Wodeyar family that had ruled Mysore for over three centuries. In a series of four different wars, the Anglo-Mysore conflict was split with two victories culminating in British defeat in the first and second wars, followed by British victory and the establishment of a princely state under the direction of the British Empire at the end of the third and fourth war.

Treaty of Surat was the initial event that caused the first of the Anglo-Maratha Wars. The Maratha Empire won the first war with the signing of the Treaty of Salbai. However, the second and third Anglo-Maratha Wars were won by the British who by way of victory provided themselves with dominion over India in 1818. And so began the full rule of the British Empire in India, known as the British Raj.

Under the direction of the British East India Company, British rule of India was maintained until the Indian Rebellion of 1857 also called the Great Mutiny. The first war of Indian Independence. In 1876, Queen Victoria has crowned the Empress of India. This rule lasted until 1947 when the formation of two distinct nation-states would emerge after the end of World War II (Gupta, B. K., 1962).

Mahatma Gandhi, known first as Karamchand Gandhi began his career as a nonviolent leader of the Indian people in South Africa. His return to India in 1915 would shape the future of the nation. Though Gandhi received the unofficial title of the Father of the Indian Nation, the work of liberating India from British Rule cannot be fully attributed to one man. That being said, Gandhi's influence among the Indians, specifically the Hindu portion of the population made a noticeable difference in the nonviolent fight for Indian independence (Gandhi, M. K., 1927).

Independence and the Modern Age: 20th to 21st Century CE:

Through negotiations with Germans in The United States and Germany, this group among others in the southeast of Asia began to cause problems for their British rulers. With plans carefully laid out from cells across the world, the attempted Pan-Indian Mutiny began in 1915.

The “two-nation theory” was posited by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, because although the Indian independence movement claimed that Muslims and Hindus in India were of the same nation, the Muslims insisted that their religious difference was too great. Ultimately the partition of the two countries fell along religious lines, as Pakistan wished to be ruled as an Islamic nations and India preferred a secular government. In 1948 the two states were partitioned and a period of chaos ensued. While the two major states were formed, many of the smaller princely states were left to decide their own fate, either with Pakistan or with the Republic of India. This struggle for territories brought the first Pakistan-India conflict in 1947, also called the First Kashmir War. The conflict ended in 1949 where India maintained two-thirds of the state of Kashmir and Pakistan maintained one-third (Naidu, S.,1912).

In 1948, the death of Mahatma Gandhi by assassination undoubtedly affected the outcome of the abolishment of the caste system. In 1949, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar drafted the Constitution of the Republic of India and among its provisions was the abolishment of the caste system. With the abolishment of the caste system and the Laws of Manu, India launched itself into the modern industrial giant that it is today (Ambedkar, B. R. (1970).

On January 26, 1950, India was declared an independent republic.

In clashes with the Pakistani army, the population of East Pakistan in the former region of Kashmir rose in revolt. This area, which had been contested by both the Pakistani and the Indian powers, wanted its own independence. Under the

direction of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Republic of India intervened on behalf of the Bangladesh independence movement and assured a swift victory over Pakistan, creating the independent nation of Bangladesh.

Shortly after the second conflict with Pakistan, India became entangled in the Cold War, signing a 20-year treaty with the Soviet Union. India moved to procure its defense against Pakistan and China by acquiring nuclear power from the Soviet Union. In 1974, using a plutonium bomb fashioned in a Canadian-built CIRUS reactor, the Republic of India detonated its first nuclear weapon code-named the Smiling Buddha. India remains as one of only a handful of nations with nuclear capabilities, though they have a strict no-first-use policy, meaning their nuclear weapons are strictly retaliatory.

Through economic advancement and a heavy emphasis on technological development, the Republic of India fostered an environment of scientific and mathematic greatness. In 2013 the Indian Space Agency became the fourth country to send a probe and robot to the surface of Mars.

Since the beginning, India has proved to be a country that flourishes both economically and culturally.

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