

Indian History Till 1857

India is a large country with a very interesting and ancient history.

Early Age

The earliest historical evidence from Mehrgarh in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent shows the beginnings of civilisation in our country around 6500 BCE. It is the earliest and largest urban site of the period in the world, yielding evidence for the earliest domestication of animals, evolution of agriculture, as well as arts and crafts. The horse was first domesticated here in 6500 BCE. A progressive domestication of animals, particularly cattle, the development of agriculture, beginning with barley and then wheat and rice, and the use of metal, beginning with copper and culminating in iron, along with the development of villages and towns.

It has been suggested by some historians that an 'Aryan Invasion' of the Indian subcontinent took place around 1500-1000 BCE. However, current archaeological data does not support the existence of such an Indo Aryan or European invasion into South Asia at any time in the pre-historic or proto-historic periods.

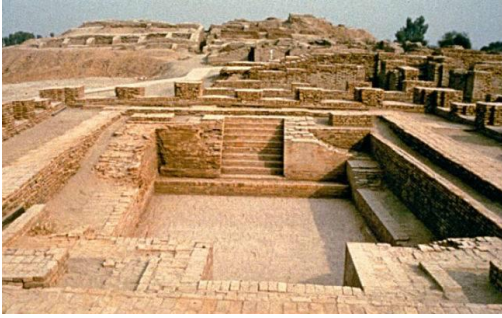
Indus Valley Civilisation: Harappa and Mohenjodaro

The Bronze Age in the Indian sub-continent began around 3300 BCE with the early Indus Valley Civilisation and was centred on the Indus river and its tributaries.

Two important cities were discovered during excavations in 1920: Harappa on the Ravi River, and Mohenjodaro on the Indus. The remains of these two cities were part of a large civilisation and well developed ancient civilisation, which is now known as the 'Harappan' or 'Indus Valley', or 'Saraswati civilisation'.

Later Harappan civilisation (3100-1900 BCE) shows sprawling cities, complex agriculture and metallurgy, evolution of arts and crafts, and precision in weights and measures. They built large buildings, which were mathematically-planned. City planning in those ancient cities is comparable to the best of our modern cities. This civilisation had a written language and was highly sophisticated. The ancient municipalities had granaries, citadels, and even household toilets. Trading ships sailed as far as Mesopotamia, as is evidenced by the seals found in both places.

During the late period of this civilisation, signs of a gradual decline began to emerge, and by around 1700 BCE, most of the cities were abandoned. However, the Harappan Civilisation did not disappear suddenly, and some elements of the Harappan Civilisation may have survived, especially in the smaller villages and isolated hamlets.



The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro

This Harappan civilisation was a centre of trading and for the diffusion of civilisation throughout south and west Asia, which often dominated the Mesopotamian region. Mehrgarh, Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan and Lothal are peripheral cities of the great Harappan civilisation with more than 500 sites along its banks awaiting excavation.

Dravidian Origins

Linguists have put forth the argument that Dravidian-speaking people were spread throughout the Indian sub-continent before a series of Indo-Aryan migrations. Cultural and linguistic similarities have been cited by some researchers as being strong evidence for a proto-Dravidian origin of the ancient Harappan Civilisation.

Vedic Period

The Vedic Period is named after the Indo-Aryan culture of north-west India, although other parts of India had a distinct cultural identity during this period. The Vedic culture is described in the texts of Vedas, still sacred to Hindus, which were orally composed in Sanskrit. The Vedas are some of the oldest extant texts in India. The Vedic period, lasting from about 1500 to 500 BCE, contributed the foundations of several cultural aspects of the Indian subcontinent. In terms of culture, many regions of the subcontinent transitioned from the Chalcolithic (Copper) to the Iron Age in this period.

Iron Age Kingdoms

The Iron Age in the Indian sub-continent lasted from about 1200 BCE to the 6th century BCE and was characterised by the rise of Janapadas which included both kingdoms like Magadha, Koshala and Videha as well as republics like Vaishali.

Mahajanapadas

From the 6th to the 4th century BCE, there existed in ancient India 14 great kingdoms and 2 great republics, all referred to as Mahajanapadas. Texts of the time made frequent references to these sixteen great kingdoms and republics which flourished in a belt stretching

from Gandhara in the northwest to Anga (modern Bengal) in the eastern part of India and included parts of the region south of the Vindhyas as well. This period saw the emergence of India's first large cities after the demise of the Saraswati civilisation.

Buddhism and Jainism

In the 5th century BCE, around the same time, Gautama Buddha founded Buddhism, while Jainism was founded by Lord Mahavira.



Gautam Buddha

lord Mahavira

Golden Period of Indian History: The Mauryan Empire

Chandragupta Maurya

North India's political landscape was transformed by the dominance of Magadha in the eastern Indo-Gangetic Plain. Chandragupta Maurya, with the help of his minister Chanakya swept through the country from Magadha (Bihar) and conquered his way well into modern day Afghanistan. This was the beginning of the Maurya dynasty. In 322 BCE, Magadha, under the rule of Chandragupta Maurya, began to assert its hegemony over neighboring areas.

Magadha's capital was Pataliputra, (now within the city limits of modern-day Patna in Bihar). Magadha was at the centre of bustling commerce and trade. The capital was a city of magnificent palaces, temples, a university, a library, gardens, and parks, as reported by Megasthenes, the third-century BCE Greek historian and ambassador to the Mauryan court.

Legend states that Chandragupta's success was due in large measure to his adviser Kautilya, popularly known as Chanakya, to whom is attributed the authorship of the treatise *Arthashastra* (or 'Science of Material Gain'), a textbook that outlined governmental administration and political strategy. There was a highly centralised and hierarchical government, which regulated tax collection, trade and commerce, industrial arts, mining, vital statistics, welfare of foreigners, maintenance of public places including markets and temples. A large standing army and a well-developed espionage system were maintained. The empire was divided into provinces, districts, and villages governed by a host of centrally appointed local officials, who replicated the functions of the central administration.

Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded to the throne by his son Bindusara, who in turn was succeeded by one of his many sons, Ashoka. During his father's reign, he was the governor of Ujjain and Taxila. Having ruthlessly sidelined all claims to the throne from his brothers, Ashoka was crowned Emperor. He ruled from 269 to 232 BCE and was one of India's most illustrious rulers. Under this great king, the Mauryan empire dominated nearly the entire subcontinent, except the far south. Ashoka's inscriptions chiselled on rocks and stone pillars located at strategic locations throughout his empire such as Lampaka (Laghman in modern Afghanistan), Mahasthan (in modern Bangladesh), and Brahmagiri (in Karnataka) constitute one of the largest sources of datable historical records of the time. According to some of the inscriptions, in the aftermath of the carnage resulting from his campaign against the powerful kingdom of Kalinga (modern Odisha), Ashoka renounced bloodshed and pursued a policy of nonviolence or ahimsa.

His rule marked the height of the Maurya empire, and it collapsed barely 100 years after his death. Under his reign, Buddhism spread to Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Central Asia, Burma. For the propagation of Buddhism, he started inscribing edicts on rocks and pillars at places where people could easily read them. These pillars and rocks are still found in India, spreading their message of love and peace for the last two thousand years. To his ideas he gave the name Dharma. Ashoka died in 232 BCE.



The lion capital of Ashoka has since been adopted as India's Emblem.

The Lion Capital of the Ashokan pillar at Sarnath has been adopted by India as its national emblem. The “Dharma Chakra” on the Ashokan Pillar adorns our National Flag.

Kushana Dynasty

After the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire in the second century BCE, South Asia became a collage of regional powers with overlapping boundaries. India's unguarded northwestern border again attracted a series of invaders between 200 BCE and CE 300. The invaders became ‘Indianised’ in the process of their conquest and settlement. Also, this period witnessed remarkable intellectual and artistic achievements. In fact up until the British arrived in India, this absorption of invaders into existing Indian society was a feature that was unique to India.

The Yuezhi, who were forced out of the Inner Asian steppes of Mongolia, drove the Shakas out of northwestern India and established the Kushana Kingdom (first century BCE-third century CE). The Kushana Kingdom controlled parts of Afghanistan and Iran, and in India the realm stretched from Purushapura (modern Peshawar, Pakistan) in the northwest, to Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) in the east, and to Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh) in the south.

For a short period, the kingdom reached still farther east, to Pataliputra. The Kushana Kingdom was the crucible of trade among the Indian, Persian, Chinese, and Roman empires and controlled a critical part of the legendary Silk Road. Kanishka, who reigned for two decades starting around CE 78, was the most noteworthy Kushana ruler. He converted to Buddhism and convened a great Buddhist council in Kashmir. The Kushanas initiated a new era called Shaka in CE 78, and their calendar, which was formally recognised by India for civil purposes starting on March 22, 1957, is still in use.

Gupta Empire: The Classical Age of India

Under Chandragupta I (320-335), a new Empire was revived in the north. Like Chandragupta Maurya, he first conquered Magadha, set up his capital where the Mauryan capital had stood (Patna), and from this base consolidated a kingdom over the eastern portion of northern India. In addition, Chandragupta revived many of Asoka’s principles of government. It was his son, however, Samudragupta (335-376), and later his grandson, Chandragupta II (376-415), who extended the kingdom into an empire over the whole of the north and the western Deccan.

Chandragupta II, the best-known of the Gupta kings, was given the title of Vikramaditya. He presided over the greatest cultural age in India. From Pataliputra, their capital, he sought to retain political preeminence as much by pragmatism and judicious marriage alliances as by military strength. The greatest writer of the time was Kalidasa. Poetry in the Gupta age tended towards a few genres: religious and meditative poetry, lyric poetry, narrative histories (the

most popular of the secular literatures), and drama. Aryabhata's expositions on astronomy in the 5th century gave remarkably accurate calculations of the solar year and the shape and movement of astral bodies with remarkable accuracy. In medicine, Charaka and Sushruta wrote about a fully evolved medical system.

Harshavardhana

After the fall of the Gupta Empire, the northern and western regions of India passed into the hands of a dozen or more feudatories. Gradually, one of them, the ruler of Thanesar, Prabhakara Vardhana, who belonged to the Pushabhukti family, extended his control over all other feudatories. Prabhakar Vardhana was the first king of the Vardhana dynasty with his capital at Thanesar, now a small town in the vicinity of Kurukshetra in the state of Haryana.

After the death of Prabhakara Vardhana in 606 CE, his eldest son Rajyavardhana became King of Kannauj. Harshavardhana ascended the throne at the age of 16 after his brother Rajyavardhana was killed. Harsha then put together the last great empire in North India before the Muslim conquests. From 606-647 CE, he ruled over an empire in northern India. Harsha was perhaps one of the greatest conquerors of Indian history, and unlike all of his conquering predecessors, he was a brilliant administrator. He was also a great patron of culture. His capital city, Kannauj, extended for four or five miles along the Ganges River and was filled with magnificent buildings.

A fourth of the taxes that were collected were used for the government administration. The remainder went to charity, rewards, and especially propagation of culture: art, literature, music, and religion.

North India Post-Harsha

The Pala and Sena (730-1197 CE) Pratiharas (750-920 CE), Rashtrakutas (753-973 CE) ruled India in this time, though they did not cause any significant changes but kings like Dharmapala, Mihira Bhoja, Amoghavarsha were the greatest rulers of their time.

South India

During the Kushana Dynasty, an indigenous power, the Satavahana Kingdom (first century BCE-third century CE) rose in the Deccan in southern India. The Satavahana, or Andhra, Kingdom was considerably influenced by the Mauryan political model, although power was decentralised in the hands of local chieftains, who used the symbols of Vedic religion and upheld the Varnashramadharma.

The Cholas and the Pandyas were frequently involved in internecine warfare to gain regional supremacy. South India was involved in an eighth-century tripartite power struggle among the Chalukyas (556-757) of Vatapi, the Pallavas (300-888) of Kanchipuram, and the Pandyas (of Madurai) from the seventh through the tenth centuries. Their subordinates, the Rashtrakutas, who ruled from 753 till 973 CE, overthrew the Chalukya rulers. Although both the Pallava and Pandya kingdoms were enemies, the real struggle for political domination was between the Pallava and Chalukya realms.

Muslim period in India: Rise of medieval India

The very first Muslim attack on India in Sindh in the year 715 CE was by an Arab army led by Mohammad Bin Qasim. After this invasion, which was limited to Sindh, for a period of 300 years, kings like Raja Bhoja and other Gurjara Kings thwarted further Muslim attacks. The next invasion was by the Turk Sabuktigin. His son, Mahmud of Ghazni assumed the throne in 997 CE. Mahmud is said to have invaded India seventeen times between 1001 and 1027 CE. King Jaipal and later his son Anandpal resisted Mahmud but were defeated. Between 1009 CE and 1026 CE he invaded Kangra, Thaneshwar, Kannauj, Mathura, Gwalior, Kashmir and Punjab.

In 1025 CE, Mahmud invaded Somnath and looted its temple on the coast of Saurashtra or Kathiwar. The enormous treasure of the fortified temple was looted. His last invasion was in about 1027 CE. The next important Muslim ruler who had made his influence in Indian history known was Mohammad Ghori. In 1191 CE Mohammad Ghori met Prithviraj Chauhan in the first battle of Tarain. Mohammad Ghori was severely wounded and outnumbered. He was defeated and left the battlefield. In the very next year in 1192 CE both the armies met again at Tarain. This time Mohammad defeated Prithviraj Chauhan. In 1194 CE Mohammad Ghori invaded, defeated and killed the ruler of Kannauj, Jaichand and captured Benares as well. Gwalior, Gujarat and Ajmer were also occupied by 1197 CE by him. Mohammad Ghori died in 1206 CE.

The Slave Dynasty

Mohammad Ghori left his slave, Qutub-ud-din Aibak, in charge of his Indian dominions. In 1211 CE, Aibak's son-in-law, Iltutmish, ascended the throne of Delhi. During this period, the Qutub Minar in Delhi was completed. Iltutmish's daughter Razia Sultan came to power in 1236 CE after a brief power struggle and ruled till 1240 CE when she was killed.

Nasir-ud-din Mahmud the youngest son of Iltutmish came into power after another power struggle. He ruled for twenty-five years. After the death of Nasir-ud-din Mahmud in 1226 CE, power was taken over by Balban. He was one of the greatest military rulers of the Slave dynasty. Balban died in 1287 CE.

Khilji Dynasty

Following the death of Balban, the Sultanate became weak and there were number of revolts. This was the period when the nobles placed Jalaluddin Khilji on the throne. This marked the beginning of the Khilji dynasty. Alauddin Khilji, nephew of Jalaluddin Khilji, hatched a conspiracy and deposed and killed Sultan Jalaluddin after which he proclaimed himself Sultan in 1296. In 1297 CE, Alauddin Khilji set off to conquer Gujarat. Ranthambore was captured in 1301 CE. Four years later, in 1305 CE, Alauddin Khilji captured Malwa, Ujjain, Mandu, Dhar and Chanderi but failed to capture Bengal. By 1311 CE he had captured nearly the whole of North India.

His general Malik Kafur meanwhile captured a large part of South India. During his reign, Mongols invaded the country several times but were successfully repulsed. Mubarak Khan, the third son of Alauddin Khilji, ascended the throne as Qutub-ud-din Mubarak in the year 1316 CE. He was murdered by Khusru Khan, thus marking the end of the Khilji dynasty.

The Tughlaq Dynasty

In 1320, Ghazi Tughlaq, Governor of the North-Western provinces ascended the throne with the title Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq after killing Khusru Khan. In 1325 the Sultan had an accidental death and was succeeded by his son Muhammad bin Tughlaq. During his reign, the territorial expansion of the Delhi Sultanate reached its farthest limits.

His empire covered the regions from Peshawar in the north and Madurai in the South, and from Sindh in the west to Assam in the east. The capital was transferred from Delhi to Devagiri (Daulatabad) as it was in the Deccan plateau and far safer from the danger of Mongol invasions. However, it had to be shifted back within two years, as there were no adequate arrangements in the new capital. Tughlaq also introduced copper and brass coins as "token coins", a very forward-thinking move, which was, however, rendered a failure by the fact that fake coinage made the official currency worthless very soon.

Administrative blunders, military failures and revolts weakened Muhammad bin Tughlaq. He died in 1351 CE, and was succeeded by his cousin Feroz Tughlaq. The last Tughlaq ruler Mahmud Nasiruddin ruled from 1395-1413 CE. In 1398 CE, the invasion of India by Mongol ruler Timur ultimately sealed the fate of the Tughlaq dynasty.

Lodi Dynasty

Behlol Lodi, who was in Khizr Khan's service, founded the Lodi dynasty. Behlol Lodi was proclaimed the Sultan in 1451 CE. After his death, his son Sikandar Lodi proved to be a capable ruler. Sikandar Lodi was succeeded by Ibrahim Lodi, who was the last great ruler of the dynasty. Ibrahim Lodi came to the throne in 1517 CE. He conquered Gwalior, and came into conflict with Rana Sanga, the ruler of Mewar, who defeated him twice. The Central Asian marauder, Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the first battle of Panipat in 1526. Ibrahim Lodi was killed in a fierce fight. This defeat brought the curtain down on the Delhi Sultanate.

Mughal Dynasty

The Mughal dynasty started with Babur ascending the throne of Agra in 1526 CE. Babur died in 1530 CE. Humayun, the eldest of his four sons, succeeded him and ascended to the throne of Agra in 1530. He was, however, defeated by Sher Shah Suri, the Afghan ruler of Bengal, in the battle of Chausa in 1539 CE and again in 1540 CE at Kannauj, and lost Delhi and Agra. Thus, Sher Shah Suri briefly re-established Afghan rule in Delhi.

Sher Shah's reign barely spanned five years (1540 – 1545), but is a landmark in the history of the subcontinent. Sher Shah was a capable military and civilian administrator. He set up reforms in various areas including those of army and revenue administration. Numerous civil works were carried out during his short reign. After the death of Sher Shah in 1545, his son Islam Shah ruled up to 1553 CE. Then Muhammad Adil Shah came to power. He was not a capable ruler, and his empire was virtually controlled by his Hindu minister, Hemu.

Humayun and the return to power of the Mughals

In the meantime, with the help of the Shah of Persia, Humayun occupied Lahore and Dipalpur in 1555 CE. By July 1555 Humayun had occupied Delhi again, but he died in an accidental fall in 1556. After the death of Humayun, the history of India saw the rule of the greatest of the Mughal rulers, Akbar (1556-1605), who inherited the throne of the Mughal Empire at the age of 14. In 1556 Akbar met Hemu (who by now held the title of Raja Vikramaditya) on the battlefield of Panipat (second battle of Panipat) and defeated his large army. With the defeat and death of Hemu, the Mughals now held sway over Delhi and Agra.



Akbar, Emperor of one of India's largest and most peaceful empires, with his witty and clever Minister Birbal. Tales of Akbar and Birbal have become legendary.

Akbar followed a policy of reconciliation with the Rajputs and won their loyalty by establishing matrimonial alliances. In 1562, he married the eldest daughter of Raja Bharmal of Amber. In 1584 his son Salim was married to the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das. In 1567, he marched

against Chittor and captured it in 1568. By 1569, Ranthambhore and Kalinjar was also taken. He met the Rajput ruler Maharana Pratap in the fierce battle of Haldighati in 1576. In 1605, Akbar proclaimed his son Jahangir, also known as Salim, as the ruler. Jahangir died in 1627 CE and was succeeded by his son Shah Jahan, who ruled from 1627 to 1658 CE.

Shahjahan's period is best known for the construction of the matchless Taj Mahal and other great monuments. The last great Mughal ruler was Aurangzeb, who took the Mughal Empire to its greatest glory. After his long reign the empire began weakening, and in 1737 Nadir Shah of Persia sacked Delhi. In 1761 Ahmad Shah Abdali attacked India and laid waste to Northern India. The subsequent erosion of Mughal power and almost simultaneous rise of British power changed the dynamics of power in India forever, so much so that by the time Bahadur Shah II became the Mughal Emperor in 1837, the post was titular in name, with his 'empire' being limited to Delhi and some adjoining territory.

Regional Kingdoms and powers

Chola Empire

The Cholas were probably the longest-ruling dynasty in the history of India. The earliest datable references to this dynasty are in inscriptions from the 3rd century BCE left by Ashoka. The heartland of the Cholas was the fertile valley of the river Kaveri, but they ruled a significantly greater area at the height of their power from the mid 9th century till the beginning of the 13th century. Under Rajaraja Chola I and his successors Rajendra Chola I, Rajadhiraja Chola, Virarajendra Chola and Kulothunga Chola I the dynasty became a military, economic and cultural power in South Asia and South-East Asia. The Chola fleet represented the zenith of ancient Indian marine prowess.

Vijayanagara

The Vijayanagara Empire was established in 1336 by Harihara I and his brother Bukka Raya I. The empire rose to prominence by the end of the 13th century. It lasted until 1646, although its power declined after a major military defeat in 1565 by the combined armies of the five Deccan Sultanates. The empire was named after its capital city of Vijayanagara, whose ruins surround present day Hampi. Its most powerful ruler was Krishnadeva Raya I who ruled from 1509-1529 CE.

Maratha Empire

Shivaji Bhonsle, founder of the Maratha Empire, was born in 1630 CE, in Shivneri Fort, 40 miles north of Pune. Shivaji used guerilla tactics and brilliant military strategies to lead a series of successful assaults in the 1660s against Mughal strongholds, including the major port of Surat. At the behest of Aurangzeb's General Jai Singh, he was forced to visit the Mughal Court at Agra,

where he was placed under house arrest in 1666, but he made a daring escape and regained his lost territory and glory.

He died in 1680, and was succeeded by his son Sambhaji, who, in turn, was taken prisoner and executed by Aurangzeb, in 1689. Power then passed into the hands of a series of prime ministers, who ruled under the title Peshwa. Balaji Vishwanath (1713 to 1721), Bajirao Peshwa I (1721 to 1740), Balaji Bajirao (1740 to 1761), Madhav Rao (1761 to 1772), Narayanrao Peshwa (1772 to 1773) were the leading Peshwas.



Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

Kingdoms in the North-Eastern India

Kamarupa

This kingdom existed during the Classical period; and is considered the first historical kingdom of Assam. It existed from 350 CE to 1140 CE and covered the entire Brahmaputra Valley, North Bengal, parts of present-day Bhutan and Bangladesh. The kingdom broke up into smaller political entities after the 12th century but the notion of Kamarupa persisted and ancient and medieval chroniclers continued to use the name for the region.

The earliest mention of Kamarupa is in the 4th century Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta. The governance followed the classical 'saptanga' structure of state. The kingdom was ruled by three major dynasties, all of which drew lineage from the legendary king Naraka. The earliest known dynasty to rule this kingdom was 'Varman' dynasty, which was established by Pushyavarman. The last ruler of the Varman dynasty was 'Bhaskarvarman' who died without an heir.

The next dynasty to rule 'Kamarupa' was 'Mlechcha', under the leadership of 'Salasthamba'. They ruled for about 250 years with its last ruler, Tyaga Singha, leading the dynasty till 900CE. The last dynasty was Pala dynasty, which ruled for around 200 years. The first king under this dynasty was 'Brahmapala', who ruled from 900-920 CE. The last Pala king was Jayapala, who ruled from 1075 CE to 1100 AD.

The Kamarupa kingdom, after the fall of these three dynasties, was ruled by independent kings. We find mention of a certain 'Lunar dynasty', which had four rulers between 1120-1200 CE.

Sutiya Kingdom

The kingdom was established by Birpal in 1187 consisting of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The kingdom absorbed the ancient Pal dynasty of Kamarupa and ruled for over 400 years with its capital at Sadiya. They had their domain from 'Parashuram Kund' in Arunachal Pradesh to Vishwanath in Assam; in the process of its expansion, many local communities and tribes were absorbed.

The most renowned king of the Sutiya dynasty was Gaurinarayan, son of Birpal. He defeated many great kings in the region and formed many crucial political alliances. When the Sutiya kingdom began expanding to the south, the hostilities with the Ahom began and Suteuphaa, one of the Ahom kings, was killed by the Sutiya king.

This conflict triggered a number of battles between the two sides, which saw great loss of men and money. The simmering dispute often flared till 1524 when the Ahoms struck the Sutiya Kingdom at its weakest state, took Sadiya and killed the then king Nityapal. The Ahoms established their rule by instituting the position of Sadiyakhowa Gohain, a newly constituted position of frontier-governor in charge of Sadiya. But the Sutiya had dispersed to frontier regions, and continued raids against the Ahoms. It finally ended in 1673 when they fall under the domination of the Ahoms.

Ahom Dynasty

The Ahom dynasty ruled the Ahom kingdom (modern Assam) for nearly 600 years (1228-1826). It was established by Sukaphaa, a Shan prince of Mong Mao, who came to Assam after crossing the Patkai mountains. The kings of this dynasty were called 'Asam Raja', while the subjects called them 'Chaopha', or as 'Swargadeo'.

The leadership was inherited from father to son, and this tradition lasted till the end of the dynasty. According to Ahom tradition, Sukaphaa was a descendant of Khunlung, who had come down from the heavens and ruled Mong-Ri-Mong-Ram. During the reign of Suhungmung (1497–1539) which saw the composition of the first Assamese Buranji and increased Hindu influence, the Ahom kings were declared Indravamsa kshatriyas, a lineage created for the Ahoms. Suhungmung adopted the title Swarganarayan, and the later kings were called Swargadeos (Lord of the heavens).

In the nearly 600-years of the Ahom dynasty, there were three progenitor kings (all subsequent kings were their descendants). They were Sukaphaa, who established the kingdom; Suhungmung, during whose rule the Ahom kingdom saw its greatest territorial and political expansion; and Supaatphaa, who established the House of Tungkhugian kings that reigned over the kingdom during its political and cultural zenith.

Punjab and the rise of Sikhism



Guru Nanak Dev was the founder of Sikhism

Sikhism was founded in the Punjab region during late the 15th century by Guru Nanak, and led by succession of nine other Gurus. By the time of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, Sikhism was well established. He completed the establishment of Amritsar as the capital of the Sikh world, and compiled the first authorised book of the Sikh scripture, the Adi Granth. Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, started to organise the community to strengthen it in the military sense, thus preparing it to resist possible oppression.

Guru Gobind Singh became Guru after the death of his father, the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. According to Sikh tradition, Guru Gobind Singh took a test to identify the followers most loyal to him; this resulted in the formation of Panj Piare or the 'Cherished Five'. Guru Gobind Singh, along with the 'Panj Piare', started a new order, the Khalsa in 1699. The intention was that the Sikhs should forever be able to defend their faith. The Khalsa rose up against the economic and political repressions in Punjab during the rule of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Guru Gobind Singh was assassinated in 1708 by the agents of the Governor of Sirhind, who was in league with the Mughals.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Singh Bahadur took over the mantle of leadership of the Sikhs and led a successful campaign against the Mughals until he was captured and executed in 1716.

In the 1750s, the Sikhs rose again and over a period of 50 years, captured more and more territory. In 1799, Ranjit Singh captured Lahore, and established himself as the Maharaja of Punjab in 1801.

Ranjit Singh employed European officers and introduced strict military discipline into his army. His rule was called the 'golden period of Punjab'. After his death, there was a power vacuum and infighting amongst his successors. In 1846, Sikh forces were defeated in the first Anglo-Sikh war at Mudki. Thereafter, the British power became dominant in Punjab and in 1849, after another Anglo-Sikh war, Punjab was formally annexed to the British Empire.

European Colonialism in India

In 1498, a Portuguese fleet under Vasco da Gama successfully discovered a new sea route from Europe to India, which paved the way for direct Indo-European commerce. The Portuguese soon set up trading posts in Goa, Daman, Diu and Bombay (now Mumbai). Goa was to remain under Portuguese control till 1961.

The next to arrive were the Dutch, with their main base in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). They established ports on the Malabar coast (Kerala). However, their expansion into India was halted, after their defeat in the Battle of Colachel by the armies of Travancore. They never recovered from this setback, and soon withdrew from India.

The internal conflicts among Indian kingdoms gave opportunities to the European traders to gradually establish political influence and appropriate lands. Following the Dutch, the British—who set up in the west coast port of Surat in 1619—and the French both established trading outposts in India. Although these continental European powers controlled various coastal regions of southern and eastern India during the ensuing century, they eventually lost all their territories in India to the British, with the exception of the French outposts of Pondicherry and Chandernagore and the Portuguese colonies of Goa, Daman and Diu.

Growth of British power in India

The English East India Company (referred to as the 'Company') was founded in 1600, as The Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies. It was a private company owned by stockholders and reporting to a board of directors in London.

It gained a foothold in India with the establishment of a factory in Masulipatnam on the eastern coast of India in 1611 and the grant of the rights to establish a factory in Surat in 1612 by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. In 1640, after receiving similar permission from the last ruler of Vijayanagara, further south, a second factory was established at Madraspatnam (Madras, now Chennai). The 7 islands of Bombay, not far from Surat, a former Portuguese outpost, was gifted to England as part of the dowry of that accompanied Catherine of Braganza when she got married to Charles II of England. These were leased to the East India Company in 1668. Two decades later, the Company established a presence on the eastern coast as well; by setting up a factory at Calcutta (now Kolkata).

Originally formed as a monopoly on trade, it increasingly took on governmental powers with its own army and judiciary. It seldom turned a profit, as employees diverted funds into their own pockets. The Company's move from trader to ruler was marked by the victory in the Battle of Plassey in 1757, followed very swiftly by another victory in the Battle of Buxar in 1764. This led to the Company becoming the de facto ruler of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It also proceeded by degrees to expand its dominions around Bombay and Madras through the Anglo-Maratha and Anglo-Mysore Wars.

With the defeat of the Marathas in 1818, no native power represented a threat for the Company any longer.

The expansion of the Company's power chiefly took two forms. The first of these was the outright annexation of Indian states and subsequent direct governance of the underlying regions, which collectively came to comprise British India. The second form of asserting power involved treaties in which Indian rulers acknowledged the Company's dominance in return for limited internal autonomy.

By these expedients, and in this manner, the East India Company found itself ruling the whole of the Indian sub-continent by 1857.