

golden age, particularly because Greek thought, government, and culture have influenced civilization directly or indirectly for nearly 2,500 years.

Africa. Next we turn to the African continent, where we study a second important African civilization. Nubia, Egypt's southern neighbor, developed its own way of life and culture, and it both influenced and was influenced by Egypt. It gave birth to the kingdom of Kush (southern Nubia), which flourished from 500 B.C. well into the Christian era. We will see that Kush was a center for one of the most important advances in human technology: the development of iron tools and weapons. Kush was also an important trading link between Africa and the civilizations of the Middle East and Asia.

Middle East. In the Middle East, we will observe the rise and fall of several civilizations. The Babylonians endured for many centuries, then declined. Other civilizations arose among them the Assyrians and the Persians. The Persians later tried but failed to conquer the Greeks.

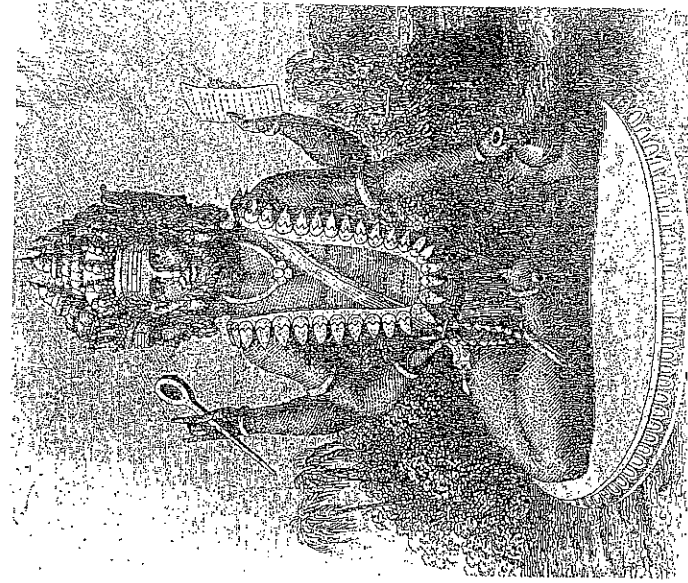
The Hebrews, a small group of people originally from Mesopotamia, settled on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The major contributions of the Hebrew people were their religious and ethical teachings and the writing of the Bible. We will see how they fought for and gained the freedom to practice their religious beliefs.

Mesoamerica. Our final story takes us to the Americas, where the civilization of the Maya developed in Mesoamerica (middle, or central, America). Gifted mathematicians and astronomers, the Maya built great cities, invented a written language, and left fascinating and puzzling art and monuments.

I. Looking Forward to the Next Life

Around the year 1500 B.C., people known as Aryans invaded India from the north and conquered the Indus Valley. The Aryans had powerful weapons and easily overthrew the peaceful cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. The Aryans also brought with them a system of social class. They established the *caste system*, which grouped people according to their professions. Members of each caste were required to associate only with people of their own caste. They could marry only people in the same caste.

The Brahmins were (and are) the highest social class. Brahmins worshiped Brahman, the supreme, or highest, Hindu god. (Hinduism has many gods.) The high-caste Brahmins included priests, teachers, and thinkers. Next in order of rank came the rulers and military class



Brahman, the highest-ranking god of the Hindu religion.

(*Kshatriyas*), followed by business and professional people (*Vaisyas*). Members of the lowest caste (*Sudras*) were servants and laborers. The casteless Untouchables performed jobs that members of the castes were forbidden to do. Pariahs were people who had committed serious crimes such as murder, and were expelled from society.

The Aryan invaders of India brought with them their language, which was called Sanskrit. This language was the ancestor of many modern languages, including English. Sanskrit was closely related to the language of the ancient Greeks, whom we shall study later in this unit, and to Latin, the language of the ancient Romans, whom we shall study in Unit III.

The Aryans wrote the earliest known Indian literature, the Vedas, in Sanskrit. The Vedas are mostly hymns to the gods, but they also tell about life in the period from about 1500 B.C. to 450 B.C., especially the book known as the *Rig-Veda*.

Later Aryan literature includes the Upanishads, which are sacred books somewhat similar to the Bible. They recount the teachings of certain sages (wise persons). The Upanishads contain the doctrine that after a person dies, the human soul is reborn on earth in human or animal form. This is called *reincarnation*. And the soul will have a happy or an unhappy rebirth, depending upon the person's life and works in the previous life.

Other Aryan works of literature include the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which are long and detailed narrative-epic poems about gods and human beings. The latter tells of the conquest of a land that may be modern-day Sri Lanka.

The Aryans also continued to settle northern India. By the late fourth century B.C., the first great Indian Empire, that of Chandragupta Maurya, had been founded at Magadha in northern India (322 B.C.).

Hinduism is both the major religion and the way of life of the people of India, and has been so for several thousand years. Unlike Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (which we shall study in Unit III), Hinduism was not founded on the teachings of one person. Rather, it evolved (grew) from the writings of many spiritual leaders and thinkers over a long period of time. Elements of Hinduism have been found in the civilization of the Indus Valley, which we studied in Unit I.

In the Hindu religion, everything that a person does affects the future of his or her soul. No deed is ever forgotten. A person thus builds a future life through action, or *karma*.

Hinduism allows a guide to behavior called *dharma* (the right way). Dharma may mean—divine law, individual duty, the principles of universal and individual existence. Dharma tells the Hindu how to act each

day at home and at work. The members of each Hindu caste have different duties and responsibilities.

In our story, a Brahman woman is instructing her daughter in the proper behavior of people of their caste, and in the duties she is expected to perform as a Hindu.

Bombay 500 B.C.

"Mother, I don't understand why I am not permitted to talk to young people from other castes," said Chandra.

"Are you forgetting that you are a Brahman?" replied her mother angrily. "You must stay away from people of the lower castes. And never get close to or speak to an Untouchable! Besides, why would you want to talk to strangers?"

"Mother, I should have the right to talk to anyone I please, Brahman or non-Brahman. If I can't do that, I don't want to be a Brahman!"

Her mother shook her head. "You don't understand how well off you are as a Brahman."

"Why are we favored over all the other castes?" asked Chandra.

Her mother replied, "To begin with, we Brahmans are granted the opportunity to study and learn many things. We are better educated, and we know more about the Hindu religion and customs than the people of other castes do."

"But why can't a non-Brahman be as educated as we are?"

"Chandra, the members of each caste must work at the same jobs or professions as their parents. We Brahmans are well educated because we must teach our Hindu religion and values to the members of the other castes. If a man or woman's parents are lawyers, he or she must be a lawyer. If the parents are farmers, the children must be farmers too. In this way, the social order is preserved. Everyone knows his or her rightful place in society. By associating with our own kind, we pass along our knowledge and experience to those who will make the best use of them."

"Mother, I understand what you mean. Suppose—just suppose—that I meet and wish to marry a man who is not a Brahman. Isn't that my decision to make?" asked Chandra.

"No, it is not, Chandra. If you marry a man from a lower caste, you will become a member of his caste—and so will your parents! Your father and I will never permit this to happen. Besides, you will never choose your own husband. It is our duty to choose him for you."

"But why must everything be this way?" asked Chandra.

"It is the way of the world," replied her mother. "You were not born into the Brahman caste by accident, Chandra. You were born a Brahman because of the way you lived and performed your duties in your past lives. The gods reward those of us who have lived a virtuous life by making sure that our souls are reborn in the bodies of people in a higher caste. But if we have lived a wicked life, the gods see to it that our souls are reborn in the bodies of lower-caste people, or animals!

"You must try to live the best life you can. Listen carefully to the priests' teachings and do exactly as they say. Observe all the rules of our caste," said the mother.

"If you socialize with people of other castes, or marry out of your caste, you tamper with the natural order of things. The people of your caste will turn away from you in this life, and your soul will be punished severely in your next life. Now can you understand why I must forbid such behavior?"

"But, Mother, now that I am a Brahman, a member of the highest caste, what is there for me to look forward to in the next life?"

"Your soul may be released from the wheel of life. Then it will never have to return to the earth. But most souls will continue to be reborn life after life, and our way of life will go on in the same way—forever," her mother said.

Postscript

Great empires arose in India in the centuries that followed. Another

remained the dominant spiritual and cultural force. The Indian way of life continued, much as the mother predicted, for many centuries.

In our time, however, much has changed. Contacts among the castes are now encouraged, and there have been intercaste marriages. In education, attempts are being made to offer equal opportunities to men and women. Thanks to the efforts of people like Mohandas Gandhi in our time (see Unit VIII), untouchability is no longer legal, although it still exists in some areas.

Members of the lower castes can improve themselves only by changing their trades. People who deal with animal hides (leather goods), sweep the streets, or care for the dead must change to higher status occupations.

A person's caste is no longer a guarantee of his or her occupation. A Hindu priest is still a Brahman. But many Brahmans have entered other professions. They have become soldiers, police officers, and farmers.

Changes in Indian law have improved women's rights. Wives and husbands now own family possessions jointly. Women have won the right to inherit property, and widows may remarry.