

# Government in Ancient India

# Political Disunity

By 500 B.C., we see the end of the Vedic Age.

It had been 1,000 years since beginning of Aryan rule.

Regionalism

No single ruler had united India's many kingdoms.

Warring states and principalities in the Ganges River Valley.

# Persian Rule

In 512, Darius I sends **Persian** army through Khyber pass and conquers NW India.

People feel the benefits and burdens of centralized rule.

Unity and Order

But also heavy taxes!

# Alexander

326 B.C. – **Alexander the Great** invades northwestern India but his rule lasts until his death five years later.

# Chandragupta Maurya

322 B.C.

Warrior – ruler of largest kingdom on the Ganges;

Rules 24 years; 322-298 B.C.;

Unites all of northern India (Indus, Ganges, and southern Himalayas);  
Mauryan Dynasty

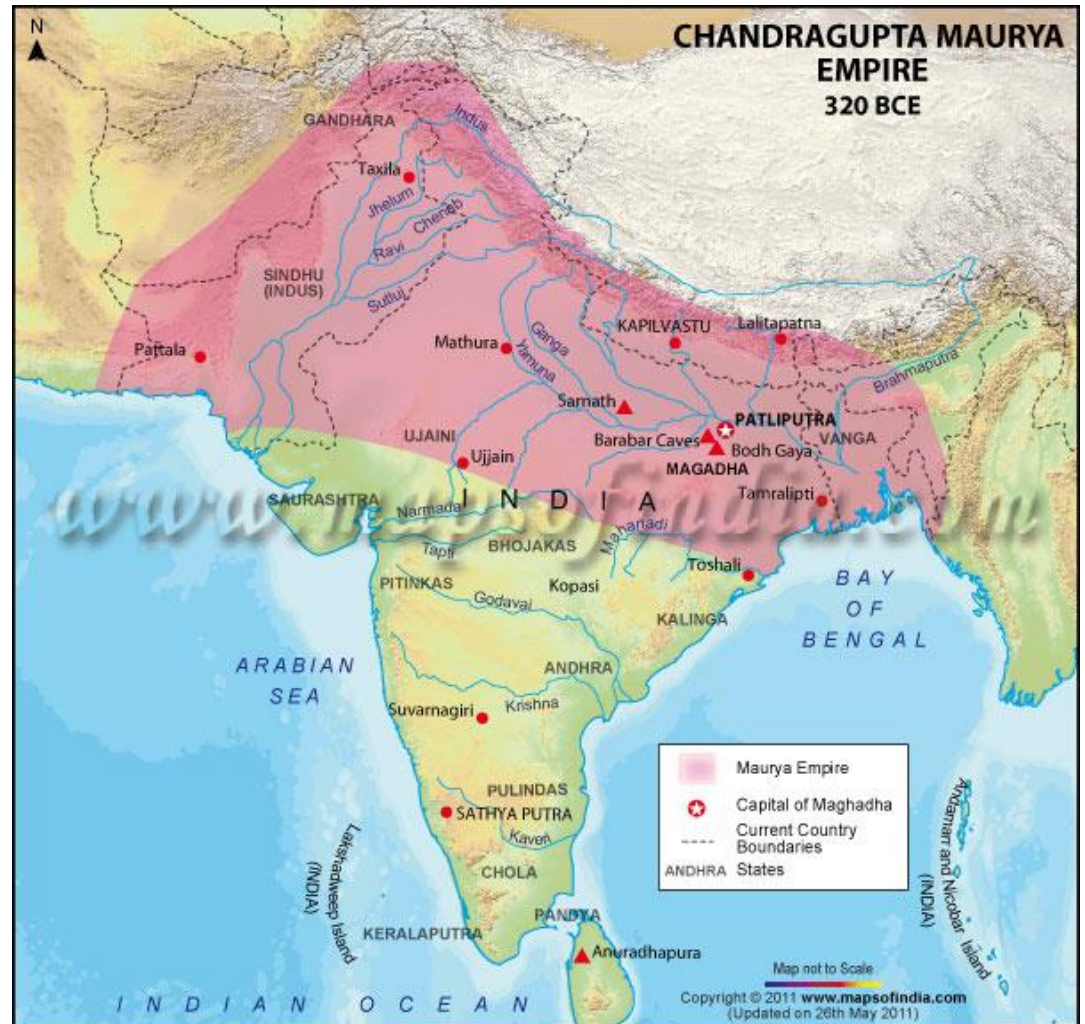
Used government spies

Trusted nobody; fear of assassination;

Political Philosophy:

Ruled by force and fear

Gov't is the science of punishment;



# Ashoka

A study in righteous leadership;

273 B.C.;

Warrior king, brutality; continued Mauryan conquests until ruled 2/3 of India;

\*remorse and conversion to Buddhism;

Stone pillars-edicts, urging people to righteous living;

Benevolent emperor;

Emphasized truth, justice, charity, religious tolerance, and nonviolence;

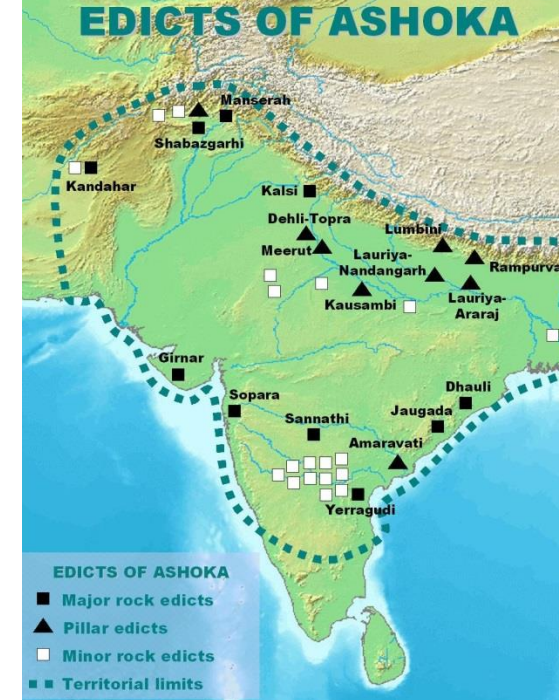
Restricted slaughter of animals; urged vegetarianism

Officials of righteousness to look out for welfare of the people;

Disaster aid, unjust imprisonment, abuse of power;

Sends missionaries to spread the message of Buddhism;

Regarded as one of the world's noblest rulers;



# Questions:

- Asoka was successful as both a violent, conquering warrior and as a peace-loving convert to Buddhism. Which traits do you consider to be more desirable in a leader: compassion and kindness, or ruthlessness and aggression?
- Do any compassionate leaders come to mind?
- Should it be a quality we look for in a political candidate?
- Can you be both compassionate and aggressive?

# Family Life

The family is the basic social unit, not the individual.

Three generations

Patriarchal

- a. women could not be priests
- b. only males educated
- c. only males inherit property
- d. under law, woman a minor
- e. married young
- f. sati

Children

- a. expected to take care of parents
- b. arranged child marriage for young girls
- c. boys valued over girls; girls require dowry for marriage; girl joins husband's family



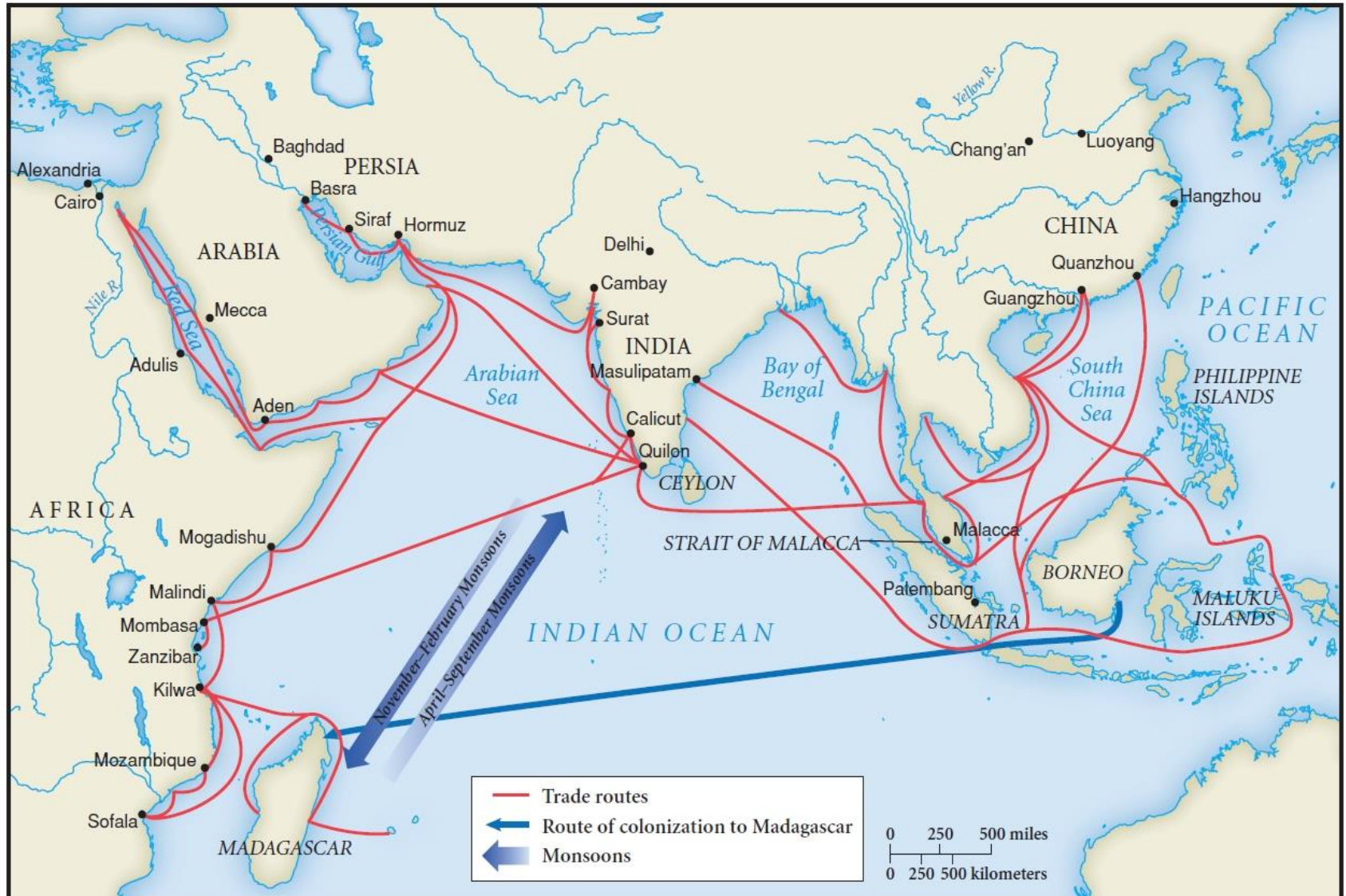
# Economy

- agricultural society
  - a. survival; one of most densely populated regions on earth;
  - b. basic crops: wheat, barley, millet, rice  
in south: cotton and spices(pepper, ginger, cinnamon)
  - c. many sharecroppers
  - d. Uncertain climate-late monsoons  
hunger, famine

# Trade

- Over time – one of the most advanced trading civilizations in the world;
- With Mauryan empire – trade expands; merchant class;
- At crossroads in a vast commercial network
- By sea and by camel caravan
- Indian Ocean to Mediterranean; also Silk Road;
- Exported to west: spices, salt, perfumes, jewels, precious stones, textiles(cloth), ivory;
- Imported gold, tin, lead and wine;

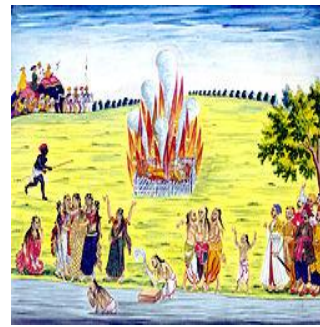
# Ancient India's Trade Routes



# Spices of India: a valuable product



# Two Issues:



- Sati- wife required to throw herself on her dead husband's funeral pyre.

What is this tradition saying?

Some accounts describe women going gladly. What do you think?

The British outlawed sati. Was this a humane and noble law or simply imperialist interference with a nation's culture?

- Untouchables: Gandhi fought against untouchability, calling them "Harijans" or children of God. In modern day India, untouchability is officially illegal, but...