

# Introduction

India is one of the world's great civilizations. An ancient land, vast and complex, with a full and diverse cultural heritage that has enriched the world. Extending back to the time of the world's earliest civilizations in an unbroken tradition, Indian history has seen the mingling of numerous peoples, the founding of great religions and the flourishing of science and philosophy under the patronage of grand empires. With a great reluctance to abandon traditions, India has grown a culture that is vast and rich, with an enormous body of history, legend, theology, and philosophy.

With such breadth, India offers a multitude of adventuring options. Many settings are available such as the high fantasy Hindu epics or the refined British Empire in India. In these settings India allows many genres. Espionage is an example, chasing stolen nuclear material in modern India or foiling Russian imperialism in the 19th century. War is an option; one could play a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great or a proud Rajput knight willing to die before surrender. Or horror in a dangerous and alien land with ancient multi-armed gods and bloodthirsty Tantric sorcerers. Also, many styles are available, from high intrigue in the court of the Mogul Emperors to earnest quests for spiritual purity to the silliness of Mumbai "*masala*" movies.

*GURPS India* presents India in all its glory. It covers the whole of Indian history, with particular emphasis on the Gupta Empire, the Moghul Empire, and the British Empire. It also details Indian mythology and the Hindu epics allowing for authentic Indian fantasy to be played. *GURPS India* provides a full introduction to Indian culture, describing the unique Indian customs and lifestyle. India's religions are presented including details on the difficult concepts of *karma* and reincarnation. This book is all you need to open up the exciting and fascinating land that is India.

## About the Author

In 1993 Ben Chapman took up a scholarship to study physics at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in India -- thereby reconciling the two disparate threads of his life, a love of India and a career in the physical sciences.

In 1995 he took the "second birth" and became a Hindu, adopting the Hindu name "Baldev."

# India

"So far as I am able to judge, nothing has been left undone, either by man or Nature, to make India the most extraordinary country that the sun visits on his round . Always when you think you have come to the end of her tremendous specialties and have finished hanging tags on her . another specialty crops up and another tag is required. Perhaps it would be simplest to throw away all the tags and generalize her with one all-comprehensive name, as the Land of Wonders."

--<#208> Mark Twain

The Indies, the vast and ancient land across the Indus river, has become, as testified by Mark Twain, synonymous with wonder, both magnificent and bizarre. Separated from the rest of the world by giant mountain ranges, expanses of ocean, and walls of incomprehension, India has forever been a foreign land of plenty, either a land of riches or a land of spiritual wealth.

India is one of the world's great cultures and it wears its antiquity with pride. The 5,000 years of India's history has littered the landscape with ruins of forts, palaces, and temples that have been home to magnificent emperors, pious heroes, and even gods. With an unbroken evolution from its earliest days, the culture of India is rich beyond easy comprehension. India's many religions, arts, and philosophies have depth born of millennia of contemplation and growth and have such complexity and diversity as to be positively labyrinthine. Indian society too, with its untold customs and ponderous caste system, has a complexity that can only come from great age.

In India, number seems to have a different meaning, such is the scale of things in this land. India the country now has a population of over a billion people who speak 1,652 languages and worship as many as 330 million gods. India it seems is only able to do things to excess. The wealth of India is legendary, it has given the English language the word "mogul" to refer to people of extreme wealth. Yet, India also has a wealth of poverty, India's impoverished outnumber the entire population of the United States.

A land that contains so much is not easy to understand; nor should it be any surprise that India contains great inconsistencies -- in fact India is a land of veritable contradictions. This is the land of Gandhi and non-violence, with a nuclear arsenal and that once featured the savage cults of *thagi*. It is a space-age country with an economy based on peasant farming, where pastoral, and often savage, traditions coexist with the highest technological capacity. A worldly land with the most complex of spiritual traditions. A staidly conservative land whose literature includes the *Kamasutra*, the famous treatise on the arts of love.

It is little wonder that this land of paradoxes is such a mystery to outsiders. In the past, India was viewed as a distant land of riches, the treasures of India were legendary; from India came gold, diamonds, spices, exotic beasts, and the strangest of customs. Today, India is seen by many as being a land of intractable spiritual philosophies. However, these philosophies are nearly as esoteric to the average Indian as they are to interested foreigners. Indians, for their part, are rather less interested in the rest of the world (at least they were until the advent of satellite TV and its visions of plenty). To an Indian, this land has produced a culture so complete, as to need no imports.

## The Regions of India

For the purposes of this book, India refers not just to the modern county of India or Bharat (see *Names of India*), but to the whole region often known as the Subcontinent or South Asia. Crowned by the Himalayas in the north, this region ranges roughly from the Hindu Kush Mountains in the west to the Patkai Hills in the east, encompassing the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan, as well as the islands of Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Combined, these countries cover an area of 1,730,000 sq. miles, encompassing the widest range of geographies; from the Himalayas, the worlds highest mountain range to the flatness of the Gangetic plain; from the arid Thar Desert to Cherrapunji, one of the wettest places in the world; from the glaciers at the heights of Kashmir to the baking Deccan plateau.

## **The Indus and Punjab**

One of the great rivers of India, the Indus flows from its source in the Himalayas through the provinces of Punjab and Sind to the Arabian Sea. All but the uppermost parts of the river now lie in Pakistan. It was on the banks of this great river that the ancient Indus Valley Civilization flourished (see p. xx). At that time the land was semi-arid but fertile enough to support an urban civilization. However, since then, the southern regions of the river basin have become dry and barren. In A.D. 644 an Arab invasion force turned back from this land finding that the "water is scarce, the fruits are poor, and the robbers are bold; if a few troops are sent they will be slain, if many, they will starve." Karachi is the main city of the southern Indus basin.

The Punjab lies up the Indus River. The name means "five rivers," referring to the rivers Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, and Sutlej. With the waters of these five rivers and the climate of the hills, Punjab is the breadbasket of India and Pakistan, between whom the region is divided. As the entry point to India from the west, Punjab has been the first to see most of India's invaders. It was here that the Aryans first lived in India (see *Aryans*, p. xx) and since then it has been fought over by Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Kushans, Hunas, Turks, and Moghuls -- only the British and Portuguese entered India from other directions. The Punjab is the birthplace of Sikhism (see *Sikhism*, pp. xx-yy) and for periods during the 19th century was home to a Sikh kingdom. However, when the region was divided during Partition (see *Independence and Partition*, p. xx), a large number of Sikhs left Pakistani Punjab to move to India (along with many Hindus and also many Muslims relocated west to Pakistan). Some Sikhs call for Punjab to become a Sikh homeland, "Khalistan." Before 1966 the states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana were part of the state and region of Punjab. Lahore is the largest city of Punjab, now in Pakistan. Amritsar in India is the home of the Golden Temple.

The western fringes of this region, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier, where the country of Pakistan meets Afghanistan, has long been home to warrior tribes. Today it is home to Afghans and Pathans but the dry, rocky hills have also been defended by Turks, Kushans, and Bactrian Greeks.

## **Ganga River Valley**

The mighty Ganga flows from the sacred town of Hardwar, running out of the Himalayas into the vast Gangetic river basin. It absorbs the Jamuna at Allahabad and flows east to empty into the Bay of Bengal, catching the Brahmaputra on the way. The Ganga River Valley cuts a deep trough between the Himalayas to the north and the Vidhya Hills to the south. Largely flat plains, the valley, heartland of modern India, has been the most populated and farmed region of India since the Aryans cleared the impenetrable jungle. However, it has been inhabited for so long the soil is all but exhausted and precious little of the former jungle remains. In classical times this was the center of Hindu glory. It was from the city of Pataliputra (modern day Patna) that the great Hindu empires of the Mauryas and Guptas had their capitals. However, in modern day India, the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have become the poorest and most backward, excepting maybe only Orissa. The literacy rate of this region is about 40% and poverty has turned some desperates to banditry.

Up the Jamuna is Delhi, the site of the modern capital of India, New Delhi. Other important cities of the region are Varanasi, India's most holy city; Ayodhya, Rama's birthplace (see *Ramayana*, pp. xx-yy); Allahabad (known as Prayag before 1584), the site of the Kumbha Mela; and Agra, the home of the Taj Mahal.

At the Delta end of the Ganga is Bengal. Rather more tropical than the rest of the river valley,

Bengal is considerably more humid. It too is largely devoid of jungle except for the man-eating-tiger-infested Sundaban mangrove swamps at the mouths of the Ganga. Bengal has usually been part of a larger empire but at times was also an independent kingdom. It was here that the British began their empire, building their early capital Calcutta down the Hooghly, a tributary of the Ganga. Bengal was divided by the British along religious lines and after Partition, the western half became the Indian state of West Bengal and the eastern province became East Pakistan and later the independent country of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a pitifully poor country, frequently flooded during the monsoon.

## **Rajasthan and the West**

The rugged lands of Rajasthan, the Land of Kings, are dominated by the Thar desert. The whole region is mostly arid and even the relatively verdant hills in the south and east of the region contain little vegetation. This desert land, formally called Rajputana, is the home of the Rajputs, a proud people, inhabitants of the region since about the first century A.D., who developed a singular warrior culture. In stark contrast to the drab countryside, Rajasthani culture is vibrant and delights in the use of all the colors God did not put in the desert. The land is dotted with Rajput fortresses and palaces including the incomparably romantic lake palace at Udaipur, giving the region a decidedly Arabian Nights feel, though of a Hindu flavor rather than Muslim. Rajasthan has long been divided into several princely states, nominally under the Maharana of Marwar but independent in practice. Important cities and princely states in Rajasthan are Jaipur, Jodhpur, Marwar in the southern hills with its capital at Udaipur, and Jaisalmer in the center of the Thar desert. Rajasthan is the westernmost state of modern India and the Thar Desert forms the border with Pakistan. It is an important military area and it was at Pokaran that India tested its nuclear devices (Pakistan incidentally tested theirs in the Chagai Hills of Baluchistan).

To the south of Rajasthan is Gujarat, home state of Mahatma Gandhi. The culture of Gujarat is reminiscent of Rajasthan but the region has had quite a different political history to its northern neighbor; Gujarat has often been unified in a kingdom or sultanate but regularly part of a larger empire. As the entry-point to northern India for sea-based trade, Gujarat has always been a major trading center of India and Gujaratis are renowned for being great traders. This aptitude for commerce has made Gujarat one of the wealthiest and most industrialized states, in contrast to Rajasthan, which is amongst the poorest. In Saurashtra, is the temple of Somnath and in the far west is Dwarka, the kingdom ruled over by Krishna in his time.

## **Kashmir and The Himalayas**

The northern reaches of India are bounded by the Himalayas, the Home of the Clouds, where can be found Shiva's home Mt Kailesh. Without this huge mountain range it is likely that India would be uninhabitable as the mountains and the Tibetan plateau cause the rain-bringing weather system known as the Monsoon. Furthermore, the great rivers of northern India are all sourced in the Himalayas.

The foothills of the Himalayas are blessedly cooler than the baking heat of the lowlands of India. For this reason, the British built summer towns in the hills. Shimla and Darjeeling are the two most important hill stations in the Himalayas, one on either end of the range. The mountains were home to two important kingdoms. One, the Gurkha kingdom, became modern-day Nepal. The other, centered on the spectacular Vale of Kashmir, is a highly coveted land. The Moghul emperors (see *Moghul Empire*, pp. xx-yy) loved Kashmir and used it as their summer retreat, building beautiful gardens by Dal Lake. Another interesting feature of Dal Lake are the "houseboats" of the British; forbidden to build on the land, they resorted to building their homes on the water. Kashmir has become a byword for alpine paradise in India and is used to compare other beautiful places in the world; for example, Switzerland is the "Kashmir of Europe" and New Zealand the "Kashmir of the South." Today Kashmir is coveted by both India and Pakistan, more for strategic and political than aesthetic

reasons.

## **The Deccan Plateau**

Peninsula India is separated from continental India by a series of forests and ranges of hills, the chief range being the Vidhya Hills. This barrier has worked to keep the culture of north and south distinct, even though they are quite similar. This boundary region is home to the greatest number of Adivasi tribes (see sidebar and *People of India* below). Bounded by the two mountain ranges, the Western and Eastern Ghats, the hilly Deccan plateau is dry and hot. The plateau slopes slightly from west to east and all the major rivers run from the west to the Bay of Bengal. The great rivers that run through it, notably the Narmada and the Godavari, are barely sufficient to keep the area watered and the inhabitants rely far more on wells and reservoirs than the northerners who rely mainly on river water. On either side of the Ghats are narrow coastal plains.

The western end of the state of Madhya Pradesh was formally known as Malwa. Ujjain is an important city here, often important in history (e.g. it was Chandra Gupta II's capital) but important also because the Kumbha Mela takes place here every 12 years. The west of the Deccan is the state of Maharashtra, home to the Marathas, a warrior people. Mumbai, India's commercial center, is the capital of Maharashtra. To the east of the Deccan is the state of Orissa, containing Puri, one of the most important Hindu holy sites.

## **The Eastern Hills**

The hilly region to the east of Bangladesh was known as Assam under British administration but is now divided into seven states and provinces, consistent with the great diversity in the region with scores of distinct tribes living here, chief amongst them being the head hunting Nagas. This region is largely forested and receives great rainfall during the monsoon. The northern parts of the region are claimed by China.

## **Deep South**

The southern-most reaches of India are a continuation of the Deccan. In climate the south is considerably more tropical than the north, being consistently hot and humid, rather than scorching and predominantly dry. As noted above, the culture of the south is distinct from that of the north. For most periods of India's history, events in the south have occurred independently of the north. While empires rose and fell in the Gangetic plain, the south's dynasties made their own sport over the plains of Tamil Nadu, the Land of the Tamils. A significant difference is the fact that the northern Islamic empires never conquered the deep south, meaning it remained strongly Hindu in culture. One striking difference between north and south is language. The Tamil derived "Dravidian" languages of the south are of a different language family from the Sanskrit derived "Indo-Aryan" languages of the north. Some use this as a flimsy pretext for seeing the southerners as a different race of Dravidians and push for independence for the south as Dravidistan. The difference in language has become particularly pertinent since India gained independence as the south is reluctant to accept Hindi, a northern tongue, as the national language. Important cities in the South are Chennai (formally Madras), Bangalore the technical city, Hyderabad, and Mysore the sandalwood city. The main river of the south is the Kaveri. The southern most tip of the peninsula is called Kanya Kumari, or Cape Comorin to the British.

## **Sri Lanka**

The tear shaped island of Sri Lanka shares some of the culture of India but has most had its own history. However, Buddhism and Tamils have infiltrated the island from India. Sri Lanka is tropical, particular the south west which is quite wet. The interior of the island is mountainous.

## The Weather

"Hot" is almost sufficient to describe the weather of most of India. Together with the Monsoon, the heat dominates India's climate. In May, at the height of summer, temperatures inland can exceed 100°F -- vegetation withers, rivers dry up, and homeless unfortunates bake to death. The land shuts down in summer with most people retreating to their homes and the security of the ubiquitous ceiling fans. Most activity takes place at night when the temperature is merely oppressive rather than debilitating.

At the beginning of June the Monsoon arrives in the south of India like a primal force, building slowly as black rain clouds and electrical storms. Then it breaks with a fury, sending down torrents of rain. The Monsoon spreads north east across India, reaching Bengal a week after its arrival at Kanya Kumari, and Mumbai some days later. By July, the Monsoon has covered all of India. It rains heavily during the Monsoon but intermittently; each Monsoon day would see a small number of downpours of short duration but great intensity. Outside of the Monsoon, most parts of India get very little rainfall.

Immediately after the arrival of the Monsoon, India is regenerated -- plants grow again and innumerable frogs come out of hibernation. The temperature begins dropping after the coming of the rains, a drop of 20°F in a month is possible in the hottest parts of the country. The temperature then continues to drop steadily as winter approaches. Winter in India remains hot; most parts of India will still see temperatures of 70°F during January. Coastal regions and the south do not see a great variation in temperature during the year but inland areas can get cool, particularly at night.

## Wildlife and Vegetation

India teems with wildlife; an extraordinary number of animal species can be found in the subcontinent. A number of great cats live in India, notably tigers but also leopards and Asiatic lions. Once thousands of these cats roamed India but now they are measured in hundreds, mostly in sanctuaries, with lions now found only in the Sasan Gir Lion Sanctuary in Saurashtra. Indian Elephants too once lived throughout India but wild populations are now very low, confined mostly to Assam and northern Bengal. There are many domestic elephants throughout India however. The open lands and jungles of India see many different species of deer. There are still considerable wild populations of monkeys, of which India has several species, the most common being the langur and macaque. India has many species of reptiles including crocodiles and snakes such as the king cobra and species of python. The wilderness is home to goats, pigs, wolves, foxes, and wild dogs. Bears live in the foothills of the Himalayas and a few are scattered through the mainland.

India sports great populations of birds, which share the air with numerous species of bat. The variety of birds in India is extremely broad but the most impressive of them all is the peacock, the national bird.

India too swarms and crawls with insects. The malaria carrying mosquito being the most conspicuous.

Until recently, animals ruled India, not humans. Humans preyed on animals, it is true, but most of the animal population was free to live its animal life. The jungle extended right up to the doorstep (and was an ever-present motif in Indian literature and thought); it was possible to see herds of elephants living within sight of major cities and nervous sleepers would be kept awake at night by the howling of jackals.

As the population of humans has grown the natural habitats of many animals are being lost and populations of many animals have dwindled. However some species have adapted to living with

humans, in fact, cities contain a greater density of wildlife than the wilderness. Ubiquitous in Indian cities is the pariah or "pi" dog, emaciated, lice-ridden, and sometimes rabid mongrels that share the cities rubbish heaps with wire-haired pigs. Troupes of monkeys also live in the cities, generally making nuisances of themselves, thieving and vandalizing. Cows and water buffalo proliferate in cities nearly as much as they do in the countryside, lying where they wish and grazing any open grass they can get to, such as cricket fields and the gardens of palaces or office blocks. Camels are another domestic animal often seen in Indian cities. Many different types of birds can also be found, scavenging vultures and kite hawks notably. Snakes are less commonly found in cities but there are many small lizards (about 1/2' long). The other animals that live in Indian cities in huge numbers are rats and cockroaches.

India was once covered in jungles of teak and sal trees, but the forest covering has reduced to about 10% of the land. The amount of forest covering has decreased over India's history but particularly so in the last few decades, and even the last generation. There are a number of trees in India worth noting. The mango tree is important in India, not only because its fruit, which comes in so many different varieties, is so loved, but also because it is so important to social life. Mango trees are often found at the center of many villages. Neem and tulsi trees are two of the more sacred trees. Tulsi is looked after by the women of a household. Banyan trees are one of the most impressive plants one is likely to see. A fully-grown tree stands about 20' tall with a twisted and corded trunk and a thick canopy. Thick vines grow down from the canopy and when they reach the ground they sprout roots and become secondary trunks. A mature tree then has a thick trunk and a ring of secondary trunks about 20' out from the central trunk. The banyan tree is a greedy plant and sucks up all the goodness from around it -- nothing grows under a banyan tree.

The huge variety of plants in India has been made use of by Indians in food and medicine. All Indians know a myriad of folk remedies using spices and other plants.

## **The People of India**

"Unity through diversity" is the catch-cry of modern India -- and India certainly is diverse. The variety in the peoples of the four corners of India is huge; that this might not be so obvious to an outsider is paralleled in the Indian view of Europe as being homogeneous.

While the variety across the land is undeniably impressive, it is the variety *within* regions that is a standout feature of India. In any region one finds people of different religions, castes, and tribes intermingling yet keeping themselves distinct. This communalism is a driving force of India. It is expressed most strongly in the caste system (see below), but also works to keep religions and ethnic groups distinct. The most evident difference in communities is between the religions. However, this is rivaled by the differences between the more dissimilar Hindu castes. The different communities within a region are distinguished by having different customs, differences that extend beyond religious customs to include differences in dowry traditions for example, and even differences in dress, the way a woman wears her shawl for instance. This makes the different communities easily identifiable; one's religion and caste are reasonably apparent to others, though there is plenty of scope for error and anyone sufficiently clued up could disguise themselves as a members of another community.

The greatest separation between communities is physical; in a city or village the different religions will, by tradition, largely live in separate districts of the city. This is true of castes in villages but since caste consciousness has begun to decrease, separation of castes has become less evident in the cities.

It is scarcely worth mentioning that the vast majority of Indians are brown skinned with black hair and dark brown eyes. However, it must be said that the fact that all Indians share this general complexion does not imply in the slightest that they look alike. To compare a Rajasthani, say, with a

Bengali, would make this abundantly clear. In general, those in the north-west (such as Rajasthanis) are fairer than those in the south and east (such as Benjalis). Also, it is often possible to detect Persian ancestry in some north Indians. India is vast enough to include several different racial types, including Tibetans in the eastern parts of Jammu and Kashmir, and other Asian types in the north-west.

One remarkable fact about India is that throughout its history, many different tech levels have existed alongside each other. Even today, TL0 stone-age hunter-gatherer tribes live in a TL7 India that contributes to the cutting edge of the information age. These tribes, called Adivasi or, slightly derogatorily, junglis live a relatively simple existence in the wildernesses of India.

## **Language**

An abundance of language is one of India's prime attributes. Modern India has an uncountable number of languages, but one estimate puts the number at 1,652. These languages come from a number of language families, the most prevalent being Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, and Persian. (Ignoring English, which is widespread during and after the British rule, but known only by a small fraction of the population.)

The oldest language of India is the untranslated language of the Indus Valley Civilization. It is assumed to be Dravidian. Dravidian languages are now largely found only in the south of India. The four main Dravidian languages are Tamil, Malayam, Telugu, and Kanada, spoken respectively in the modern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.

Indo-Aryan languages entered India in about 1500 B.C. and are now the main languages of North India. Hindi is the most widespread, its dialects being spoken in the states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. Other Indo-European languages are Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengali, Sindhi, Marathi, and Oriya, spoken respectively in the states of Gujarat, Punjab (both in India and Pakistan), Bengal, Sind, Maharashtra, and Orissa. Also included in this language family is the dead language Sanskrit (see below).

The arrival of Islam to India brought new languages to the land. Muslim rulers generally spoke Persian, or less commonly Afghani. Persian therefore became a popular language for the ruling class. Persian fused with local languages to become Urdu, a language used initially by the army. Urdu takes the grammar of Hindi but uses the vocabulary of Persian. There was a greater melding of languages in time with Hindi and Urdu converging to create Hindustani. With partition, efforts were made to purify languages with Hindustani being Sanskritized in India to form a pure Hindi, and in Pakistan Persianized into Urdu, the official language of that country.

The script of Indian languages has evolved through the centuries. The contemporary script for Sanskrit, Hindi, and a number of other Indo-Aryan languages, looking like washing hanging out to dry, is called Devanagari, the "language of the city of the gods," and dates back to about 100-200 AD. Indo-Aryan and Dravidian scripts are phonetic, including symbols for all possible sounds in the language, and read from left to right. They are not alphabets, it should be noted, but rather are syllabaries. Persian, Urdu, Kashmiri, and other Persian based languages use Arabic script, read from right to left.

## **Sanskrit**

The language of religious and classical Hindu literature is Sanskrit. It has long stopped being used by the common populace and is to Indian vernaculars (known as *prakrits*) as Latin is to European languages. It is the language of priests and scholars and only sometimes of the ruling class.

Sanskrit is a very complex language with an elaborate grammar a massive vocabulary. It has a



tendency to create enormous compound words, with as many as 20 elements.

It is also a holy language, with each syllable, provided it is pronounced properly, being a powerful invocation.

## Society and Lifestyle

### Caste

In theory, Hindu society is divided into four classes called *varna*. These classes determine one's role as well as position in society. The classes are *brahmins* (priests, teachers), *kshatriyas* (warriors), *vaishyas* (merchants, tradesmen), and *shudras* (peasants). The first three are so-called "twice-born" classes, referring to the *upanayana* coming of age ceremony celebrated by people of these classes wherein the celebrant receives a sacred thread (worn looped over one shoulder and across the torso). The *varna* system is an incontrovertible and undeniable divinely ordained division of society. It is not just a classification, however, as the *varna* are exclusive divisions, expressed most strongly in rules of "pollution," which as well as contact with spiritually polluting objects such as dead bodies, also refers to certain types of contact with other *varna*. *Brahmins* face the strictest of pollution restrictions to the extent that a *brahmin* can only eat food prepared by another *brahmin*.

This system of *varna* is often referred to the "caste system." However, caste, as the term is used in India, refers to the related system of "*jati*," ("birth"), and is what is referred to when "caste" is used in this book. With thousands of different castes, *jati* is a far more precise classification than *varna*. At its simplest level, *jati* is one's occupation. It is what one's father did, and his father, and his father. An example *jati* might be "fisherman." However, there are a number of "fisherman" castes as *jati* is in fact more than just occupation. Each *jati* can be seen as a miniature nation imbedded within greater Indian society, with its own community and inviolate traditions. In some ways a *jati* is like an enormous extended family, one is obliged to one's fellow *jati* members as if they were distant relatives; one can normally expect hospitality from a fellow *jati* member (though it may be given grudgingly) and members of a *jati* will look after less fortunate members by finding them jobs for example (nepotism being a vilified but firmly established institution in India). However, members of a *jati* are not necessarily related, or are related so distantly that connections cannot be traced. In fact, when arranging a marriage (endogamy being one of the salient aspects of the caste system), great pains are made to ensure there can be no possible ties of blood between the bride and groom.

*Jatis* are identified by surnames, "Patel" for example, the ubiquitous non-resident Indian name, is a name of a Gujarati farming caste. One *jati* might have half a dozen different family names. This helps in identifying a person's caste, but is not a certain identification as *jatis* can have names in common. (This sharing of surnames can be simply coincidence but might also have some history behind it. For example, the Rohit caste shares Rajput names and there is a belief within the caste that the community was once Rajput but "lost" caste for some forgotten reason.) *Jatis* vary in size but can extend over wide areas; the Yadav farming caste (descendents of the Yadu tribe) for example, extends across north India and is so large as to be the main political power-bloc in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

There is great variety in the organization within a *jati*. Most are tribal in some respects, having its own customs and local headmen. A well organized *jati* provides facilities for its members; guest houses throughout the country, for example. It is vitally important to maintain good contacts with one's *jati* community, particularly by the head of the household. Of the main benefits of having strong caste contacts is in finding matches for one's children, as not only is arranging good marriages for one's children an important responsibility of a father, it also brings respect to the family to have arranged fortuitous matches.

The two types of "caste," *varna* and *jati*, are different but not separate as every *jati* fits into a *varna*, with *jati* being in some sense a subdivision of *varna*. The two castes have different origins and different effects. One's *jati* determines where one is in society whereas one's *varna* determines how one interacts with others; most significantly it determines what one finds "polluting." Just like the *varnas*, the different *jatis* are ranked hierarchically, but there are innumerable complications as certain *jatis* have particular relations with some *jatis* and *jatis* have subdivisions which are also ranked.

Without a religious basis, non-Hindus have caste as well that works in a similar manner to the Hindu *jati* system.

### **Caste in Society**

The two biggest effects on society of the caste system is to give every person a broad community to which they belong and to a pigeonhole into which they fit.

Having a community means that everyone has a bunch of people they can rely on and are obliged to succor. Foremost in most Indian's minds when making decisions is how their caste will react.

Caste is used as a way of measuring a person. One of the first questions asked of a stranger is commonly, "What is your caste?" Knowing a person's caste, an (entirely preconceived) estimate of their personality might be made, with those of "high" caste being expected to be "better" people. It is also of interest to know that a person comes from a caste similar to your own as they might be expected to be similar in character to you.

Caste is also a way of segregating society, with higher castes tending not to associate with those of lower castes. In pre-modern times this was observed more rigorously.

### **Untouchability**

Beyond the four *varnas* there is a fifth division of Hindu society, known variously as "untouchables," "*harijans*" ("children of God," a name given to the caste by Mahatma Gandhi), "*dalits*" ("disadvantaged"), and "B.C.'s" ("backward castes," a bureaucratic term that along with "scheduled castes" and "scheduled tribes" refers to the groups for which government quotas are reserved).

Untouchables have all the appearance of a fifth *varna*, for example, there are innumerable untouchable *jatis*, however, untouchables are in fact *outside* the *varna* system (though still Hindu and part of Hindu society). For this reason Hindus of the four *varnas* must minimize, or preferably completely avoid, contact with untouchables. The worst "pollution" comes from contact with untouchables, particularly for *brahmins*, where the contact even with the shadow of an untouchable is enough to require ritual ablutions to wash away the pollution.

Untouchables have traditionally had jobs too debased for good Hindus to perform, such as leather working and cleaning human waste.

Avoiding pollution of *varna* Hindus by untouchables is the responsibility of the untouchables, not of those who would be polluted. Untouchables have traditionally lived on the outskirts of towns or villages. They have had to live under a great list of restrictions so that they are less likely to pollute *varna* Hindus. These include taking water downstream and not sharing wells with *varna* Hindus, being forbidden to enter Hindu temples, beating a gong when entering a town to alert others, and spitting into a pouch tied around their neck so as not to leave their polluting sputum for others to accidentally touch (voiding one's rheum being a right of all Indians, even untouchables).

Outcast from normal society, restricted to menial poorly-paid jobs, prejudiced against in law, and subject to degrading and humiliating prohibitions, the life of an untouchable is cruel and harsh and often abjectly wretched. For those not party to the intricacies of the caste system or the mechanics of *karma* and *samsara* (see *Universal Truths*, p. xx), untouchability seems inhuman and unjust. However, a Hindu would defend the practice by pointing out that the unfortunate untouchable had brought their lowly status upon themselves through sins in a former life.

Though a devout Hindu, Mahatma Gandhi did not take to this theory. He made it one of his life's works to abolish untouchability. He referred to untouchables as "*harijans*" ("children of God"), and attempted to reform Hinduism's treatment of untouchables. Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the writer of the Indian constitution and an untouchable himself, worked harder to emancipate untouchables by refusing to consider the unity of Hinduism as a necessity. In fact, he advocated conversion to Buddhism as an escape from inequitable treatment in Hinduism.

The work of Gandhi, Ambedkar, and other social reformers has done much to improve the position of untouchables in Indian society, and indeed to break down caste prejudices in general and bring the castes closer together. However, despite it being illegal in modern India, discrimination against untouchables is still evident and in parts of the country it continues unchecked. In order to promote a social uplifting of "backward castes," the Indian government assigns quotas in government jobs and university seats. Now, rather than looking for historical justification for not being classified as untouchable or recognition as a martial caste (see *Martial Races*, p. xx), castes argue to be classified as "backward" in order to qualify for quotas, scholarships, and other such benefits.

## **Slavery**

Slavery is an ancient tradition in India, dating back to the enslavement of *dasas* by the Aryans (see *Aryans*, p. xx), if not earlier, and lasting until the modern day in the practice of bonded debt labor. Enslavement could come about through war, punishment for crime, bondage for debt non-payment, a family selling its members during times of famine, a person unable to support themselves selling their labor and freedom, or any number of less common manners such as losing one's freedom in a wager. Furthermore, children born to slaves are themselves slaves unless the master decides otherwise.

Though prevalent in India, slavery was never a vital industry as it was in other civilizations, Rome for instance. However, it formed an institution fully knitted into Indian society; slaves in a household were treated like family and slaves of rich landholders were often given their own land at a reduced rent. Slavery played a somewhat important role in Indian society as it was an alternative to other forms of punishment including death. Also, it was a rather tragic way for a family to buy off starvation.

Slavery was abolished by the British in 1843 after much consternation over interfering with entrenched local customs. However, slavery of a sort continues in parts of India where heavily indebted peasants are forced into bonded labor when their debts cannot be paid.

## **Misogyny**

The position of women in Indian society has changed considerably over the years but women have consistently been considered inferior to men.

In the earliest times of ancient India, women were afforded considerable freedoms, which they are not now. Before marriage, young women were permitted as much independence as young men and married women were not excessively restricted. A number of important sacrifices required the presence of a woman or had to be performed by a woman alone. However, early into the classical period, women lost status. The law books of this time, being as much social instructions as legal

decrees, acclaimed the status of a woman under law to be no greater than that of a *shudra*.

Throughout her life a woman is considered property, or at best, is under guardianship. Before she is married she is under the guardianship of her father and after marriage under that of her husband -- even as a widow she is not free, being in this case the responsibility of her sons. Before marriage it is the duty of a young woman to prepare for marriage. After marriage it is the duty of a woman to serve her husband and bear sons, a point made repeatedly in classical literature.

According to the ancient Hindu law books, a girl should be married before her first menstruation. If not, being licentious (according to these books), she will find a lover. Child marriage therefore, though unknown in the early times, became common. In marriage, a woman is given a dowry from her father, which is an amount of wealth for her upkeep should things go wrong in her marriage. However, the dowry often included a generous gift for the husband. Adding the cost of hosting the wedding, the responsibility of the bride's family, to the dowry makes girls expensive burdens. For this reason it is considered quite unfortunate to give birth to a girl. It is not unknown for unborn girls to be aborted or even for female infants to be murdered when their sex is discovered after birth. There are villages in parts of India where no girl has officially been born for many years.

Dowry payouts do not necessarily stop when the woman is married. Often the husband will demand that his wife's family supply more money and if not he will sometimes take revenge on his wife, which in the worst case could lead to what is known as a "dowry death." There are, tragically, an unfeasibly large number of deaths or near deaths supposedly caused by clothes catching fire.

The liberty of women was impaired further in Muslim times. During this time developed the system of *pardah*, wherein women are forbidden to be seen outside their home. Even inside the home it was common for a section of the house to be demarcated for the use of the women of the household, called the *zenana*. The restrictions are greater in general for Muslim women but it is only the most strict of Muslims that demand a woman cover herself from head to foot, a tradition called *burqa*. All Indian women must always be modest in dressing and will often try to cover their faces with shawls or their *sari* (see below for a description of this item of clothing) if one is likely to look at their faces.

Queens and concubines of a royal household were confined to the harem, a huge *zenana* of sorts where only women and their children are permitted to enter other than their husband. These were guarded by eunuchs.

Quite possibly the most abject person in India is the widow. It is almost as if a widow is considered responsible for her husband's death. A widow must wear white and no jewelry, she will eat only a small meal everyday, and is excluded from religious ceremonies. The practice of *sati* was the most appalling fate of a widow. This custom involved the widow throwing herself on her husband's funeral pyre. *Sati* was once considered the most noble act a woman could perform but is now no longer practiced, the last recorded *sati* having taken place with much alarm and controversy in 1987.

All told, the life of a woman in India could be harsh and unfair. In no way can a woman have been said to be equally as advantaged as a man. In truth though, few women must suffer all of these deprivations. In fact, women sometimes exhibited surprising freedoms, for example, it was not unknown for women to join men on the battle field.

## Marriage

Marriage remains a sacred institution in India and is perhaps the pivotal event of an Indian's life. It is taken very seriously and the prospective bride and groom are not given the critical responsibility of finding their future partner; almost all marriages in India are arranged by the parents.

In arranging the marriage, the father of the prospective bride or groom will make known his

intention to marry off his child within his caste. The prospective groom and his father will then visit prospective bride's home and the two families will size each other up. Sometimes the boy or girl will have no say as to whether or not the other is appropriate, but usually if they violently disapprove of a suitor then a marriage with them will not be arranged.

It has been common in India for children to be married when they are very young. The optimum ages were 16 for the groom and 13 for the bride though it was common for girls to be married off before they are 12. Children can be betrothed even before they are born. Modern Indian law prohibits child marriage.

"Love marriages" are not unknown but are deeply shameful to a family. Children reckless enough to marry for love rather than family loyalty are sometimes disowned (at least until they have their first child).

An Indian marriage is a staggeringly overwrought affair. The full ritual takes several days. It includes preliminary rites and sacrifices, the arrival of the groom's family, the convoluted ceremony itself (including most importantly a circumambulation of a fire by the couple and seven steps taken together), a reception, and the farewells to the bride as she goes to her new home.

Divorce is now possible in India but is a scandal of the highest order.

India has some traditions of polygamy and polyandry. Under Islamic law, a man may take as many as four wives, if he may support them equally. Hinduism also once allowed for multiple married partners; famously, Draupadi of the epic tale the Mahabharata married the five Pandava heroes. In modern India a Muslim man may take more than one wife if he chooses but it is extraordinarily rare.

## **Life in the Cities**

India has a grand urban tradition, having one of the earliest urban civilizations and in many way the most sophisticated of early times. However, this fine tradition has not been maintained to the same high standards and while Indian cities of later times, particularly during Gupta and Moghul times, could be every bit as fine as cities in contemporary civilizations, the unique planning and concern for civic sanitation of the Indus Valley civilization (see p. xx) has been lost.

Many cities in India began as trading posts, though they might also have grown up around fortresses or important temples. They will usually still have an identifiable "old city" consistent with their origins, e.g. the old section of trading cities will typically consist of a large crossroads. As the city grows, the old city walls may be demolished but often still leaving the old city gates as useful landmarks. Later additions to the city are usually haphazard aggregations, differing to the old city in that its roads will be larger carriageways rather than narrow lanes. Often cities will feature a massive tank or artificial lake to supply the city with water; though in modern times reservoirs are located outside cities (and may be natural or artificial but will almost certainly contain crocodiles), with the water being piped to the city. Trading cities will sport a caravanserai on the city's verge. Important cities will inevitably acquire a *maharaja* (king) and therefore a palace. In British times the city will gain a train station, maybe a residency (the "resident" being the British governor/envoy of the region), and a cantonment for the British army. Industry, which will range from textile mills to petrochemical refineries, is built closer to the city proper than is common in other countries.

The different communities live apart in Indian cities (by tradition, not law) and during times of inter-communal friction areas of the city are fortified by its residents. This is true even in modern India, though there is now far more mixing of the communities. A recent urban feature of Indian cities is the dedicated residential neighborhood, called a "society." They are often built by a company or government department to house its workers and may include a school and subsidized shops. The most conspicuous residential section in Indian cities is the slum. Inhabited mostly by refugees from

the countryside, the burgeoning Indian slums can be vast. Slum houses are normally built initially from scrap iron but as they become more permanent they are usually rebuilt from wattle. Slums are rife with violent crime and unsanitary diseases.

Indian cities have for long been populated beyond their ability to manage themselves. In modern times, the overpopulation has become positively comical, demonstrated most vividly by passengers clinging to the outside of overflowing commuter train carriages in Mumbai. A rundown in civic amenities is a hallmark of the Indian city. Garbage collection is usually inadequate. Water and sewage services regularly fail, but not as often as the electricity supply, particularly during summer when daily failures are not uncommon; in fact, most Indian cities have voluntary "load shedding" half days.

Spending time in an Indian city, one is certain to have to deal with two salient themes of urban India, corrupt officialdom and gangsterism.

## **Life in the Villages**

Despite having some of the world's largest cities, India is largely a rural country. However, despite being the backbone of the country's economy, Indian farming is rudimentary and Indian villages are poor. In times gone by when the population was smaller and the soil more fertile, Indians of the villages were better off and could almost be called proud. Basically however, Indian farming has not advanced much through the centuries.

Houses in Indian villages typically have one or two rooms with a kitchen. The floors of older houses are made from packed cow dung. Richer houses may have a second story used for storage and keeping the lower story cooler. Even though there is more space available, houses in Indian villages are packed together as in the cities and with no drainage the streets turn to mud in the rainy periods.

Communities in villages are even more insular than in cities. Only a limited number of castes will live in a particular village and each caste restricts itself to a certain section of the village.

People in villages are always more traditional in culture than those in cities. They are also more superstitious; the population of people in villages is outnumbered by ghosts, spirits, and gods.

## **Everyday Life**

### **Food**

Generalizing outrageously, an Indian meal consists of a curry dish and a serving of a lentil curry (*dhal*), accompanied by rice (and also unleavened bread in the north) and any number of accompaniments such as pickles and curd. This dietary tradition has held in India for millennia.

"Curry" is not an Indian word and as it is used describes a wide range of dishes, all of them spiced. India is renowned for its love of hot food, but this was less the case before chilli was first imported from the New World. A great number of spices are native to India and still more are imported. A dish is likely to have a good number of spices added to it and mixtures of spices, called *masalas*, are prepared beforehand. As well as their use in flavoring, spices are used for their health properties, of which there is considerable lore in India relating also to which food should be eaten at which times of the year (based on *ayurveda* in part, see sidebar). Almost all food in India is seasoned in some way, even fruit is likely to be sprinkled with *masala* before eating.

Beyond the staple meals, the various regions of India have many, many types of snacks and sweets -- far too many to detail here.

From the earliest times cooking has been an art in India and given the name of *supashastra*. While the most masterly of culinary ability is found in chefing castes (*brahmins* typically -- one reason being that one should never eat food cooked by a caste lower than oneself), any worker in an Indian kitchen, including housewives, is extraordinarily knowledgeable about spices and preparation techniques; with every kitchen looking like an apothecary's laboratory. The Muslims brought their own culinary traditions to India and wedded them with local cuisine to create what became known as Mughlai cuisine.

Eating meat is now uncommon in India but the practice of vegetarianism only dates from Buddhist times when Buddha, Mahavira, and certain Upanishads advocated extreme nonviolence (see *History of Religions in India*, p. xx). There is perhaps more eating of meat in India than most Hindus would like to believe, but it is undeniable that vegetarianism is a fundamental Indian custom. Muslims in India eat meat and consider with some pride that it distinguishes them from Hindus -- interestingly this was the same attitude Hindus had in early Buddhist times.

Tea is the most common beverage in India since it was stolen from China by the British. In India it is generally drunk with milk, and will certainly be highly sweetened. Yogurt drinks called *lassi* and sugarcane, coconut, and mango juice are other popular drinks. Drinking alcohol, once an important part of India culture, is now frowned upon by Hindu and Muslim alike. Some states of India, Gujarat notably, prohibit the buying of alcohol.

Sharing food that has touched another's mouth is considered unsanitary in India and when drinking from a shared glass an Indian will pour the liquid into their mouth without letting it touch their lips. Some people will not eat in the presence of others, particular those of high caste.

## **Clothing**

Indians don't always wear a lot of clothes, it being hot and all. It is no surprise then that the oldest costume in India consisted of little more than a single cloth hung from the waist, for both men and women. From this simple garment was developed the range of non-tailored outfits peculiar to India. For women, the *sari* became by far the most common apparel. The *sari* consists of several yards of cloth worn wrapped around the waist several times then tossed over the shoulder. There are numerous regional differences; the Gujarati *sari* for example differs from the "cosmopolitan" style in that it tosses the last length of cloth over the shoulder from the back to the front. The *sari* is typically worn with a tight, cropped blouse. Traditional men's clothing are various types of loin cloth, ranging from a simple *lungi* where a length of cloth is simply wrapped around the waist to cover most of the legs, to the more elaborate styles of *dhoti* where the cloth is looped and tucked around the loins.

Turbans also have a long tradition of use in India, though they are now only seen on villagers and Sikhs. Many different styles of turban are in use in India ranging in complexity and length of cloth used. Different castes will often have their own styles of wearing turbans.

Cotton was first woven in India though wool was also worn in the colder months. Silk was imported and in time also woven.

Over time, Indian began to wear tailored clothes such as trousers and skirts and adopted a great number of foreign clothing styles.

The simplest Muslim costume adopted in India is the *kurta-pyjama* consisting of loose trousers, the *pyjamas*, and a long shirt, the *kurta*, which is often worn longer by women and with a shawl. Formal clothes adopted in India include the button up collarless coat and tight breeches.

Western style clothes are now most common for men in India. Indian men dress semi-formally for all occasions, the difference being that for a formal occasion newer or more colorful clothes will be

worn. A suit is worn only for marriage. Women are still expected to wear traditional Indian clothes, *kurta-pajama* before marriage and a *sari* for married women.

## Indian Values

Like other Asian cultures, India is more sympathetic to the group than to the individual. The greatest loyalty an Indian feels is towards their family. An Indian is in principle as close to the members of their extended family as to their nuclear family -- first cousins are in fact referred to as if they were siblings. Beyond the family there is a hierarchy of loyalty, beginning with the caste and ending with the nation.

Tied up with this favoring of groups over individuals, Indians have a sharp sense of respect. Those belonging to one's group or of a perceived higher status are given respect that their character might not necessarily warrant. This is manifest in the family with the father being the overlord of the house. Similar to this is the great respect Indians give to their teachers, or *gurus*. An Indian simply cannot question his teacher. Religious teachers are respected beyond even this and are practically worshipped.

Religion is more important to an Indian than it is in many other countries. There is no secular tradition in India; all activity is considered a religious pursuit. Secularism, as the term is known in India, is simply the right not to have other's beliefs forced on one; the right to worship in one's own way. It has nothing explicitly to do with separation of religion and other institutions.

Many of India's views of the world come from its religions. To wit:

From Hinduism comes the concept of *dharma*, that everyone is born to fill a particular niche and has a personal responsibility to fulfill one's role in life. Also Hindu is the idea of spiritual pollution, wherein it is more important for a Hindu to avoid contact with those things that will contaminate the soul than those things that pollute the body.

Muslims see the world differently as they see every action of theirs as being some worship of God.

Buddhism and Jainism, along with Hinduism, devised ideas of extreme nonviolence, or *ahimsa*. This nonviolence and respect for life, expressed most clearly in vegetarianism, has become a defining trait of India. Indian history has shown that this attitude has become deeply ingrained into the Indian ethos. Despite seeing as much war, invasion, and depravity as any other land, India has seen far fewer tyrants and far more benevolence in its rulers. India has produced some of the world's greatest advocates of nonviolence and charity, notably Ashoka and Mahatma Gandhi.

## A Fulfilled Indian Life

According to Hindu teaching, there are four goals in life: *artha*, the acquisition of material wealth; *kama*, the enjoyment of physical pleasure; *dharma*, a righteous life; and *moksha*, the eventual deliverance from the material world. A fulfilled life then includes both the worldly and the spiritual.

In theory, a complete life for a twice-born Hindu goes through four stages, called *ashramas*. In the *brahmacharya ashrama* the Hindu is a student, beholden to their *guru*. This stage of life lasts typically 12 years but may be longer. The *grihastha ashrama* is the homemaker phase when one marries and raises a family. In the *vanaprastha ashrama* or forest stage, the Hindu retires to the forest to meditate. This phase typically begins at 50 or when the first grandchild is born. In the *sannyasa ashrama*, the Hindu gives up their old life entirely and becomes a wandering mendicant.

The *ashramas* are rarely followed, apart from the first two naturally enough. However, they are still considered one of the pillars of Hinduism. In modern times they are almost entirely irrelevant and



don't fit into modern life. It has been known, however, for an old couple to live in a tent on the back lawn of their children's house, thus fulfilling in part the requirements of the *vanaprastha ashrama*.

## Religious Devotion

Indian religion is treated in full in the next chapter. It is important to note however just how important religion is in the everyday life of Indians.

The day of every good religious Indian is a cycle of devotions. After morning ablutions prayers are said. For the Hindu this is done at the household shrine, for the Muslim it involves genuflections towards Mecca. During the day, further acts of devotion are required. For the Muslim there are another four prayers to be said. For the Hindu, small rituals are required throughout the day. The shop-owner must seek the blessing of his god before opening his business and a prayer is said over the first money received for the day. The food-stall-owner offers the first meal from his stove to his god. In the evening a Hindu may choose to make a visit to the local shrine (which is likely to be advertising itself by the loud and incessant ringing of a bell) and make a small offering.

Note that although a Hindu will have a preferred deity, their religious rituals will not be confined to that particular god, and may be directed at any of the gods, depending on the context, or may simply be to God.

The year too is a cycle, with religious observances arriving with regularity. All religions having reason to fast for a period. For Muslims, Ramadan is the most important religious time of the year when no food can be eaten during the day, lasting a month until broken by the Id moon. Hindus fast for a number of reasons, one well-observed fast being Karva Chouth where a dutiful wife fasts for a day for her husband's well-being.

Hindu religious festivals come in many varieties, some moderate and some extravagant; including Kite-Flying Day; Holi, where mischievousness is mandatory; and Ganesh Chaturti, where colorful statues of the elephant-headed god Ganesh are paraded.

Hindu temples are equally as varied. They range from giant city-sized complexes through grand buildings and humble shrine to the simplest of altars, consisting perhaps of no more than a shapeless rock painted saffron. Temples are typically devoted to just one deity or a couple.

## Philosophy and Culture

### Philosophy

Thought is India's forte. India is famous for its philosophy. Through the thousands of years of India's civilization, Indians have speculated and conjectured themselves into a frenzy, amassing a corpus of philosophy of such bulk, such complexity, that the initial simple concepts are hidden beneath convoluted accretions and commentaries and a melange of contradicting points of view compete to answer the same questions. However, within this farrago can be seen a unique Indian worldview that runs through all its branches of philosophy, including amongst other topics, metaphysics, logic, ethics, theology, aesthetics, and epistemology.

A considerable amount of Indian philosophy deals directly with metaphysical and eschatological issues and is reflected in their religion (considered in great depth in the chapter *Religious India*, p. xx); the Hindu religious texts, the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* in particular, are highly philosophical works. Although it lost favor in time, non-religious philosophy, or *nastika* philosophies (as opposed to orthodox *astika* thought), flourished before the time of Buddha -- and in fact Buddhism and Jainism (see *Religious India*) are born from *nastika* thought. The period before and during the time of

the Buddha is one of India's two most productive philosophical periods; the other coincides with the great period of Greek thought.

Hinduism has conceived of six orthodox philosophies (and any number of non-orthodox systems), called *darshanas* (views). These six *darshanas* are not complementary and are often irreconcilable but all six are simultaneously valid regardless. (Those who believe that only one view can be valid will be further appalled by Jains who hold that 353 points of view are valid.) They were all developed in their final forms in the period between Buddha and Ashoka and in some ways were a reaction to Buddhism. The six, detailed below, are generally grouped in pairs, *nyaya* and *vaisheshika*, *sankhya* and *yoga*, and *mimamsa* and *vedanta*. In recent times some of the *darshanas* have decreased in relevance and only *sankhya*, *yoga*, and *vedanta* are living philosophies.

The *darshanas* have a greater importance than philosophy might in other cultures. Their study is a path to knowledge, but far more than that their study and mastery is a path to deliverance from the tortuous cycle of birth and rebirth (see *Universal Truths*, p. xx).

## Nyaya

*Nyaya*, founded sometime between 450 B.C. and A.D. 100 by the sage Gautama, is largely concerned with analysis and debate; it is a science of logic. Important in *nyaya* is eliminating error, hence a heavy emphasis on logic. Included in the philosophy of *nyaya* is a system of logic, 16 categories of reasoning, a means to avoid fallacies, and a list of common fallacies.

Indian logic has five deductive steps (*avayava*): (1) proposition, (2) reasoning, (3) example, (4) application (casting the example to the case in question), and (5) conclusion. The typically quoted example considers a fire on a hill. The five steps in this example are then: (1) There is a fire on the hill because (2) there is smoke coming from the hill; (3) when there is a fire in the hearth it smokes so since (4) the hill is smoking, (5) there is a fire on the hill. (Other systems of logic have as few as 3 steps or as many as 10.)

*Nyaya* is a spiritual system as well as a science in that it is believed that enlightenment can be achieved through a complete eradication of error. However, it is hard to find a place for God in *nyaya* philosophy and it is essentially atheistic.

## Vaisheshika

Established by the sage Kanada some time between 250 B.C. and A.D. 100, *vaisheshika* is essentially a system of physics, based largely on the Indian atomic theory. Under *vaisheshika* there are four atoms of matter, earth, fire, water, and air, and five other realities, ether, time, space, soul, and mind. Combined with the 24 possible attributes or *gunas*, all substances can be produced. As in *nyaya*, the philosophy is complete without requiring a god except as the creator of the world from the atoms.

## Sankhya

*Sankhya* is probably the oldest of the *darshanas* (ignoring the more ancient traditions of *yoga*) having been founded by Kapila in 500 B.C.

The metaphysical system of *sankhya* divides the world into 25 principles or *tattva*.

Firstly there are two prime realities, (1) *purusha*, soul and (2) *prakriti*, matter. Each *purusha* is equal and distinguished only in how it interacts with *prakriti*. *Prakriti* on the other hand comes in myriad forms depending on its constituent "qualities" or *gunas*. There are three *gunas* and *prakriti* can have any amount of each of them, their proportions determining its nature. *Sattva* is the *guna* of goodness;

it is the manifestation of light, virtue, and wisdom. Furthermore it is the manifestation of reality as opposed to illusion, *maya*. *Rajas* is passion and is the *guna* of activity and force. *Tamas* is darkness, inertia, and ignorance.

From the interactions of the three *gunas* and *prakriti* the remaining principles are formed, (3) *mahat*, intelligence, (4) *ahankara*, self-consciousness, (5) *manas*, mind, (6-10) the five subtle or potential elements, ether, air, fire, water, and earth, (11-15) the five senses, (16-20) the five actions of the senses, and (21-25) the five manifest elements (the manifest elements are the combination of the subtle elements, senses, and actions; see *Elements*, p. xx in the *Magical India* chapter).

*Sankhya* is similar to *vaisheshika* in its description of the physical world being made up from elements but does not predicate the existence of atoms and has a different number of elements, adding the ether to the list of physical elements. The system is also atheistic as it describes a method wherein reality is manifest without an external agency.

## Yoga

The philosophical school of *yoga* is in some respects a way of realizing the philosophy of *sankhya* though it takes the form of system of physical training and meditation, identified by the practice of complex and demanding bodily postures. *Yoga* in this form was outlined by the sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* in the 2nd century B.C. Patanjali outlined what is now generally known as *raja yoga*, a system of spiritual development through mental and physical discipline. There are eight techniques in *raja-yoga*: (1) *Yama*, restraint: non-violence, honesty, chastity, no stealing, freedom from greed. (2) *Niyama*, control: actually realizing *yama* and achieving inner tranquillity. (3) *Asanas*, body positions. (4) *Pranayama*, breath control. (5) *Pratyahara*, sense control. (6) *Dharana*, concentration: a step toward meditation. (7) *Dhyana*, meditation: when one's concentration fills the whole mind. (8) *Samadhi*, realization: when one is super-aware and merged with God.

A variant form of *yoga* is *hatha yoga*, which consists only of the physical part of *raja yoga*, up to technique 5. Practitioners of *hatha yoga* believe that by becoming master over the body, the mind and spirit are freed without the need to seek enlightenment through meditation. By perfecting the physical exercises of *yoga*, great physical and mental abilities can be trained or activated.

A mystical development of *yoga* is *laya yoga* where one's spiritual awakening is manifest as a serpent-like *kundalini* that is induced to rise through the body from the base of the spine through a series of critical points or *chakra*. As one progresses in *laya yoga*, magical abilities become available to the *yogi*. It is described in detail in the chapter *Magical India*.

Although *raja yoga* was established by Patanjali, the exercises of *yoga* were practiced as long ago as the Indus Valley civilization. As well as the *hatha* and *laya* traditions, *yoga* has developed in many different directions and in fact the word is now applied to any path towards spiritual enlightenment.

## Purva-mimansa

The "early enquiry" -- the study of the *Vedas* (see *Sources of Hinduism*, p. xx).

## Vedanta

*Vedanta*, also called *uttara-mimansa*, the "later inquiry," means the end of the *Vedas* and is the study of the *Upanishads* (see *Sources of Hinduism*). As *vedanta* is a religious philosophy it is dealt with in greater detail in the *Religious India* chapter.

## Science

Many bold claims have been made about ancient Indian science, and while many of the examples do not hold up, it is true that India was a fertile scientific think-tank. Indians are naturally speculative, with a love of categorizing and systematizing, and also possess considerable technical aptitude, exhibited in the modern day in India's information technology industry.

Ancient Indian science is most famed for its mathematics, which is renowned for inventing the use of a numerical symbol for zero and the place-value system. It is a matter of debate as to where these concepts were in fact invented, but it is true that India adopted them early. India was using a great many mathematical concepts early in its history, well before the lives of those to whom they are attributed, Pascal and his triangle for example. Scriptures from India's earliest times include descriptions of domestic altars, the construction of which required knowledge of geometry. Aryabhata, writing in the early 5th century, was one of history's great mathematicians. He was already working with algebra and calculated pi to impressive accuracy, 3.1416. The Jains, lovers of absurdly huge numbers, were particularly good mathematicians.

A good deal of Indian science was related to religion, as in the geometry example above. Astronomy was an active science because of the need to calculate the dates of religious ceremonies. With their mathematical knowledge, Indians were able to develop the astronomy that came to India from the west and improved its accuracy considerably. A heliocentric model was known in India since Aryabhata (who was able to explain solar and lunar eclipses), but the received view was geocentric. Astronomy was reinvigorated in India by Jai Singh of Jaipur in the early 18th century. He built a series of observatories, notably in Jaipur and Delhi. These observatories consist of a number of giant observational apparatuses including a massive gnomon, charts of the heavens, and maps of all 12 zodiacal signs.

In metallurgy India is justly famous; Indian metallurgists were greatly proficient. They were smelting gold, silver, bronze, and lead from the earliest times, iron by 900 B.C., and steel by 500 B.C. India's skill in and capacity for producing high quality metals is demonstrated by the Iron Pillar of Mehrauli at Delhi. This 23 foot high pillar has stood without rusting since the 4th century. Though it is good quality iron, its lack of rust is due largely to Delhi's dry atmosphere. Even so, it is remarkable for the fact that it is such a huge mass of iron, some 6 tons, a great quantity of refined metal. Indian techniques for producing hardened steel were superior and the so-called "Damascus steel" used Indian techniques for its production.

Other fields produced interesting and/or unique sciences, such as medicine (see sidebar), atomic theory, and alchemy (see *Magical India*, p. xx).

## **The Arts**

India's culture is rich and deep, and likewise is India's artistic heritage. It is far beyond the capacity of this book to treat in any detail the arts of India, so rich are they and so varied across time and geographical region. India's literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, music, drama, jewelry, and dance were all developed to be rich and uniquely Indian. All of these arts are distinguished in their Indian manifestations by being underpinned by complex theories of form and aesthetics, the appreciation of which reveals new layers of meaning and beauty. The arts in India have a great religious content and performance is a form of prayer.

Sculpture and architecture, with the Taj Mahal its greatest monument, were two arts developed to the highest order in India. Dance, with each state having its own tradition, is particularly alive in India.

## **Names of India**

The name India given in English to the largest country of the subcontinent comes from the Persian name for the land of the Indus river; unable to pronounce the Indian name for the river, "Sindhu," they called their neighbor "Hindu." The ancient Indians knew of their land as "Bharatavarsha," the land of the descendants of Bharat an ancient ruler in India, and from this comes the official name of the country of India, " Republic of Bharat." Another ancient name of India is "Jambudvipa," the continent of the jambu tree. Muslims, since their first contact of the land, have known India as Hindustan, originally the land of the Indus River, but now the land of Hindus. The names of the other modern day countries of the region are Bangladesh, the Country of Bengalis; Pakistan, the Land of the Pure; and Sri Lanka, "Lanka" being the most ancient name of the island and "Sri" being an exaltation.

## **Holy Rivers**

Rivers, vitally important to civilization, are all sacred in India and are treated as living gods. Seven rivers are particularly holy.

### **Ganga**

The Ganga, known as the Ganges in the West, is the most holy of rivers. Its waters are a magical elixir that bring purity to those who drink it and heaven to those that drown in it or are interred in its waters. The holy cities of Hardwar, Allahabad, and Varanasi are on its banks.

Ganga the river and goddess was once confined to the heavens but was enticed to flow over the earth. In her flow from heaven she passes through Shiva's hair to soften her impact on the earth.

### **Jamuna**

Second only to the Ganga.

### **Saraswati**

The Saraswati once flowed through Rajasthan but has dried up leaving the land a desert. It is believed by some that the river flows underground, emerging from the ground at Allahabad. Alternatively it is believed to exist only in the spiritual plane.

### **Narmada**

The Narmada is generally not considered as sacred in itself as the above three rivers, but its waters are the most potent. Bathing in the waters of the Ganga removes sin as soon as one bathes in or drinks it, the waters of the Saraswati do the same in three days and the waters of the Jamuna in seven days, but the mere sight of the waters of the Narmada are purifying.

## **Indus, Godaveri, and Kaveri**

### **Delhi**

Delhi is a city with a load of history. Indraprastha, the Pandava city of the Mahabharata (see *Mahabharata*, p. xx) was the first Delhi. A series of cities have been built on this site. The latest, New Delhi, federal capital of India, was built by the British as their capital, completed in 1931, abutting Old Delhi or Shahjahanabad.

Since the time of Qutb-ud-din Aibak (see *Delhi Sultanate*, p. xx), Delhi has been the political center of north India, with the Delhi Sultanate, the Moghuls, and the British having Delhi, at least intermittently, as their capital.

Delhi is situated on the Jamuna river. Being perpetually an important city for one dynasty or another, Delhi is a sumptuous city full of palaces and rich bazaars, particularly under the Moghuls when it was the city of cities of the wealthiest empire. New Delhi today is a bustling metropolis, a city of scheming politics, high finance, and deluxe international hotels as well as an unequal share of beggars and India's worst air pollution.

## **Varanasi**

Varanasi is India's most holy city. Here a string of temples line the west bank of the Ganga and a series of steps lead down to the river where the faithful bathe and have their sins washed away by the holy waters. It is said that any one who dies at Varanasi achieves *moksha* and is released from the cycle of birth and rebirth (see *Univeral Truths*, p. xx).

The city is one of the world's oldest continually inhabited settlements. It was formally known as Kashi and called Benares by the British. It has long been the site of Hindu schools and *brahmin* students would come from all over India to study here. The city is filled with all manner of Hindu spectacles, including marvels and banalities. *Yogis* and *sadhus* flock to Varanasi.

Nearby to the north is Sarnath where Buddha gave his first sermon.

## **Calcutta**

Calcutta is a young city in a land of ancient cities. Calcutta was built by the British and became their first capital when they acquired an empire in India. They built a cute little city on the banks of the Hooghly, a tributary of the Ganga. However, as the city gained importance, its population grew sharply, beyond its ability to absorb increases. This is Kipling's "City of the Dreadful Night," where he observed the grossest extremes of wealth and poverty. After partition, refugees swelled the city even further, turning it into an urban nightmare. The population of Calcutta far outstrips the capacity of the municipality to run the place; the power is intermittent at best, the water is poor, and sanitation is near disastrous. Despair lives on the buckled streets of Calcutta. Here the beggars howl, a practice they have given up in the rest of the country.

To be fair, all cities in India suffer the same problems as Calcutta, but none of them to the same catastrophic extent. For all this, Calcutta is the home to Indian intellectualism. The Indian Coffee House on College Street can ring to the sound of intellectual discussion. It is also home to Indian communism. A landmark of Calcutta is the Kali temple, which now sacrifices great numbers of goats, having given up human sacrifice.

## **Mumbai**

In 1996 the city of Bombay was renamed Mumbai. To the Portuguese it was known as "Buan Bahia," the "Good Bay," an inappropriate name for the marshy and malarial islands they acquired from the Sultan of Gujarat in 1543. The islands were given to the British in 1662 as part of the dowry of Charles II's marriage to Catherine of Braganza. In 1668 they were leased to the East India Company to make something of. In time the islands were turned into a peninsula by an extensive reclamation project. Since the time of the East India Company, Mumbai has been an important business center, now it is India's financial powerhouse. The economic success of Mumbai has drawn millions of immigrants from across the country. Mumbai is now India's largest city, with a population mixed like no other city in India. The majority of Mumbaitees are Maharashtrian or Gujarati but all groups are represented in Mumbai's population, including most of India's Parsis.

Mumbai was once celebrated for its cosmopolitan friendliness, but this has been marred somewhat by sectarian riots in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and Muslim retaliatory terrorist bombings (see *India Today*, p. xx).

## **Kumbha Mela**

The Kumbha Mela is India's largest religious festival. Occurring every 3 years at Allahabad, Hardwar, Ujjain, and Nasik in turn, the festival attracts millions upon millions of devotees. The largest *mela* is at Allahabad where the Ganga, Jamuna, and Saraswati join. Most of India's Hindu religious leaders and teachers gather for a giant religious conference.

The festival celebrates a battle between the gods and demons over *amrit*, the elixir of immortality (see *Amrit*, p. xx), four drops of which landed at each of the locations of the *mela* during the battle.

## **Bangalore**

Bangalore is home to India's modestly impressive software industry and the leader in the rush to Westernization. Long an important research city, Bangalore has attracted several foreign companies to establish offices. Here the mathematical proficiency of the Indian mind is exercised in the name of commerce. While America sleeps, Bangalore solves its computing problems.

## **Sacred Sites of India**

One thing India is more than it is anything else is holy. The land of India itself is the body of the goddess Bharat Mata. To say that India abounds in sacred sites understates their profusion. Every city or town has a pilgrimage site within a day's journey.

Some sites are more holy than others and here are a few examples.

### **Varanasi**

See above.

### **The Four Dhams**

Representing the four corners of India, Dwarka in the west, Puri in the east, Badrinath in the north, and Rameswaram in the south are some of India's most holy Hindu temples.

### **Somnath**

In the 10th century, the temple city of Somnath was the grandest of Hindu temples. The temple itself was of a massive size with a giant steeple surrounded by fourteen golden domes. At the temple's heart was a huge stone *lingam* (graven phallus), over seven feet tall. The temple was managed by over 1,000 *brahmins* and more than 1,000 other attendants, with 10,000 villages providing revenue for the temple's support.

In 1025 Mahmud of Ghazni sacked the fortified city, massacred thousands of devotees, destroyed the temple, and carried away tons of gold and riches in a huge train of camels and elephants. According to Al Kazwini, a Muslim historian, the *lingam* that Mahmud discovered in the core of the temple was of iron, levitated by magnets above and below. The wonder of this was not enough to dissuade Mahmud from destroying the *lingam*.

After Mahmud's razing, the temple was rebuilt four more times, with three of those temples being

destroyed by zealous Muslims, making the tally of temples to stand at the sight rather large. The first temple was built by Somnath, the God of the Moon, at the dawn of creation out of gold. It was rebuilt in silver by Rawana, in wood by Krishna, and in stone by Bhimdev.

### **Golden Temple**

In the city of Amritsar is Sikhism's most holy temple. The temple itself, called Hari Mandir, is a two story decorated marble building with a roof gilded with 100kg of gold sits in the center of a square pool and is reached by the Gurus' Bridge. The Sikh holy book, the *Granth* (see *Sikhism*, p. xx) is kept in the Hari Mandir during the day, being carried there at 4 a.m. (5 a.m. in winter) and returned to the Sikh parliament building at 10 p.m.

### **Jagganath**

At the temple of Jagganath at Puri is said to reside the last benevolent incarnation of Vishnu. In an annual festival, the idol that is Vishnu is installed into a giant chariot (from whence comes the English word "juggernaut") and transported across the city, requiring over 4000 men to pull the chariot. It has been known for faithful to throw themselves to their deaths under the wheels of the chariot.

### **Amarnath**

In the coldest period of winter, an ice *lingam* grows in a cave above Kashmir. Amarnath is a pilgrimage destination without equal. Every year hundreds of pilgrims travel thousands of miles from their homes to brave the snows of the Himalayas to see a miracle.

### **Shatrunjaya**

On the hill of Shatrunjaya there are 863 Jain temples. This is not the only hill overladen with Jain temples and demonstrates the extent to which Jains take the creed wherein merit is acquired through building ornate temples.

### **Bodhgaya**

The four most holy Buddhist sites in India are Lumbini (in Nepal), where the Buddha was born; Bodhgaya, where he reached enlightenment; Sarnath, where he first preached the truth; and Kushinagar, where he died.

At Bodhgaya there is a descendent of the original tree under which Buddha found enlightenment.

### **Basilica of Bom Jesus**

The Basilica is home to the body of St Francis Xavier, patron saint of Goa. A Portuguese Jesuit missionary, St Francis spent 10 years spreading Christianity through India and South-East Asia. When he died in 1552 his body was transported back to Goa. Miraculously it was found to not have decomposed even though the journey to Goa had taken a year, and had still not decayed when examined for the church's department of canonization. In 1622 he was canonized.

Within the Basilica, which was completed in 1605, the saint's body lies in an airtight glass casket. Despite the miracle, all that is left of the body is a skeleton. Parts of the body had earlier been scavenged and scattered through Jesuit communities through Asia. The body is put on public display for pilgrims every 10 years.



## Mad Dogs and Englishmen

It is said that only mad dogs and Englishmen would go out in the midday sun -- and for good reason. In summer the temperature is generally hot enough to cause fatigue (see *Heat*, p. B130 and *Extreme Heat*, p. CII140) and prolonged exposure to the direct sun can kill.

Avoiding the dangerous effects of excessive temperatures is a constant concern in India. It is an over-riding priority for military commanders to avoid conducting campaigns in the hot season; if forced to do so they will certainly lose men to the heat.

## Adivasi

There are many different Adivasi tribes, each having cultures that differ from each other as much as from the culture of mainstream India. They may practice a local form of Hinduism with their own gods but they may also worship in their own peculiar way.

At some times, Adivasi would practice banditry or be recruited by gangs of brigands.

## Language in Play

Tracking the history of language in India is more effort than it is worth for gaming purposes. Therefore the following guidelines are suggested for using language in a campaign set in India. (Note, one should perhaps read the chapters on India's history before trying to understand the rest of what follows.)

In pre-Aryan times, the whole of India speaks various Dravidian languages or other, now fringe, languages. After the Aryans come to dominate north India the spread of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages should follow that of the modern languages as described in the main text, though the actual languages in use will be ancestral tongues of the modern languages. Priests and some rulers will know Sanskrit.

The Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages do not change after the arrival of the Muslims but now Persian, Urdu, and later Hindustani are available over most of the subcontinent. After the British consolidate their rule of India, English becomes widespread, remaining even after the British leave.

## Language in GURPS India

With some 40 different characters, *devanagari* does not translate directly into English. Standard transliterations often make use of various dialectical marks, such as dots above or below letters. These add little of use for our purposes and a simplified transliteration approach has been used.

Indian words in GURPS India should be pronounced as they are written, but a few possible difficulties ought to be noted. The letter combinations "ch" and "sh" are pronounced as they are in English, e.g. "**ch**urlish." However, "h"'s appearing in any other combinations (including "chh"), e.g. "kh," must be pronounced (these consonants are known as *aspirated* consonants). Hence "th" and "ph" are not pronounced as in "**t**heatre" and "**p**hysics," but rather as in "outhouse" and "flo**ph**ouse." One non-obvious pronunciation is the consonant combination "jn," which should be pronounced "gy"; hence "*jnana*" is pronounced "gyana." The vowel "a" should be pronounced as the vowel in "pun," and never as that in "cat." The vowel "u" is pronounced as in "shoe" (note however that the entrenched customary spelling "Punjab" has been used though the pronunciation should be as if it had been spelt "Panjab"). The vowel "i" is pronounced as in "plea."

Each syllable in an Indian word should be given an equal emphasis and a fair pronunciation of even

the most formidable Indian word should be achieved by simply chanting each syllable.

Names of cities and most other locations in India follow the usage in India today, hence "Mumbai" and "Varanasi" rather than "Bombay" and "Benares." However, efforts have been made to note the alternative names and when they were in use.

## **Panini**

Sanskrit is a sacred language; it is the language spoken by the gods. It is essential that it be pronounced and intoned properly during religious rites. For this reason a good amount of work has gone into defining the grammar of Sanskrit. The most complete grammar for Sanskrit, and indeed for any language, was compiled by Panini around 300 B.C. His work consists of some 4000 rules for the grammatical construction of Sanskrit. Panini's grammar is a masterpiece and a wonder of ancient Indian scholarship. After Panini Sanskrit was forever stabilized, the very name of the language means "refined."

## **Varna**

In the primordial sacrifice the body of Purusha, the primal man, was divided into quarters and from them were made the four *varnas*. From his mouth came the *brahmins*, from his arms the *kshatriyas*, from his thighs the *vaishyas*, and from his feet the *shudras*.

The word *varna* means "color" and may refer to the difference in complexion between the Aryans, who formed the upper three classes, and the indigenous Indians who make up the fourth (see *Aryans*, p. xx).

## **The Bazaar**

India's color, vibrancy, bustle, and gaudiness all find their greatest expression in the Indian bazaar.

The bazaar is the main market place of a city. Most likely found in the oldest section of the city, it invariably features narrow lanes, crowded by hawkers and food-sellers.

Different sections of the bazaar are dedicated to certain products (as a general rule). Hence, there is a spice bazaar, a clothing bazaar, a silver bazaar, etc. It is hard to tell whether any shop is superior, so shop-owners call out to potential customers to entice them into their shop.

## **Calendar**

The Hindu calendar is based on the moon rather than the sun (though the solar calendar has been known in India since Gupta times). In fact it is based on the lunar day (*tithi*), thirty of which make up a lunar month (one complete cycle of moon phases) of 29 1/2 solar days. The beginning of the month is reckoned differently in the north and south, with the full and new moons respectively beginning the month. The twelve lunar months, beginning in March-April are Chaitra, Vaishakha, Jyeshtha, Ashadha, Shravana, Bhadrpada, Ashvina, Kartika, Margashirsha, Pausha, Magha, and Phalguna. The lunar year is 354 days long so to keep it in line with the solar calendar an extra month is added every 30 months (after Ashadha or Shravana).

It is now more common to keep track of dates by the solar calendar but the lunar calendar is still used for religious reckoning and all religious holidays are tracked by the lunar calendar and hence fall on a different day every solar year.

There are a number of systems of reckoning the year, though dates are now generally recorded in

A.D. The most common is the Vikrama system which begins in 58 B.C. It reputedly dates from the reign of Chandra Gupta II though he in fact reigned some 400 years after the Vikrama year 0.

## The Ancient Land

Indians have a tendency for fulsome exaggeration and have a great attachment to extremes, evidenced by their interest in the Guinness Book of Records.

In India there appears to be a diminished sense of time and history. Large parts of India's history are simply not documented and accounts of ancient India have to be constructed from the writings of foreigners. Paradoxically, Indians do have a powerful perception of the importance of ancientness. The value of antiquity is encapsulated in the word *sanatva*. Traditions are not defended by their intrinsic merit but by their age. This explains the Indian tendency to exaggeration. It is undeniable that India is one of the world's oldest civilizations; the civilization's origins in the Indus Valley are not predated by any other and during the Gupta Empire, Hindu India's cultural golden age, the cultural peak of Islam was centuries off and the Anglo-Saxons were living in the northern forests. However, Indians are not content in believing that their civilization is merely thousands of years old and measure ancientness instead in millions of years. The Ramayana, one of Hinduism two epics believed to have been written no earlier than 200 B.C., has been claimed to be 60 million years old, and the Surya Siddhanta, a mathematical work of the 6th century A.D. is believed to be 2 million years old.

This tendency to exaggerate ancientness is most often encountered by common Indians confusing A.D. and B.C. For example, the Elephanta Caves near Mumbai, were crafted in A.D. 600 (or thereabouts), but one is likely to be told 600 B.C. instead. Another common error, quaint in a way, is a tendency to ascribe ruins to mythical stories. For example, the ruins of a fortress are liable to be claimed to be the homes of the Pandava heroes from the Mahabharata (the other of the two epics) rather than more recent constructions.

Being so incredibly old, Indian civilization has enriched the world. Many great advances in science and philosophy were formulated first in India, then spread to the world. While India has given the world much, an equal amount of knowledge has come to India from China, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, and later Islam and the West, of which no debt is acknowledged by Indian sources.

## Medicine

Indian medicine, known as the science of *ayurveda*, "life knowledge," is a mixture of primitive herbalism, imported Greek humourific physic, *yoga*, mysticism, *sankhya*, and *vashaisheka*.

The body is believed to be made up of seven substances. The first, chyle (*rasa*), is produced by the digestion of food. This then transforms into the other six substances, in order, blood (*rakta*), flesh (*mansa*), fat (*meda*), bone (*asthi*), marrow (*majja*), and semen (*shukra*), in a process that takes 30 days. It is then transmuted into energy (*oja*) which powers the body.

Health is maintained by the balance of three "humours" ("*dosha*"), each of which has an associated *guna*. They are bile (*pitta*), being *sattvic* in character and produced in the liver; wind (*vayu*), being *rajasic* and produced in the heart; and phlegm (*kapha*), which is *tamasic* and produced in the lungs. The amount of a particular humour in the body is affected by one's activity and excess or surfeit of any humour causes disease. Hence, one method of diagnosis and treatment of illness is to examine and modify lifestyle.

At its best, *ayurveda* is holistic and sympathetic; at its worst it is superstitious and dangerous.

A sample of other methods of disease treatment common in India include herbal therapy, prayer,

exercise (particularly *yoga*), aromatherapy, sauna, massage, and purging. In recent times Indians have been ready converts to homeopathy.

Indian surgery has always been particularly advanced. One area Indian surgeons have been particularly good at is rhinoplasty and otoplasty.

# Indians

## Beginning Point Levels

In an Indian campaign, regardless of the level of realism or magic, the average person has a point value of about 25 points. Player characters, as exceptional people, a notch or two above the commonality, might have any amount of points.

For a realistic historical or modern-day campaign or a campaign with magic but played at a level not too removed from reality, 100 would be a good average number of character points for a beginning player character (but see next section), with a maximum of 40 points spent on disadvantages and 5 on quirks. This makes player characters superior to regular people but not excessively so -- gifted but not extraordinary. However, Indians generally consider their heroes to be larger than life; celebrated individuals are usually taken as being paragons and stories of famous historical figures are often rather exaggerated. In a campaign conforming to this point of view it would be appropriate for player characters to have more points to spend, perhaps 150 to 200 (an amount usually found only in cinematic style campaigns, though the campaign needn't be run in such a style). A good amount of these points ought to be spent on attributes and skills rather than advantages and players are encouraged to tend towards immoderation in generating their characters, for example, codes of honor and the like should be stricter than usual.

In fantasy or epic campaigns, the GM should not be hesitant in giving players a large number of points with which to create their characters. While campaigns can be run with modest point levels, authentic Indian fantasy is highly powered. In a campaign where the PCs are expected to lock swords, wits, and *dharma* with *rakshasa*, 400 might be a reasonable starting value. With so many points to be spent the GM should pay due attention during character generation to ensure balance and consistency with the campaign background, but is encouraged to be liberal. Players, for their part, are encouraged to spend a good amount on advantages, the more esoteric the better as a general rule. Skills and attributes should not be neglected however and it is highly recommended that a character have at least one ability or characteristic for which they are exceedingly good, peerless if possible.

## Inequity

In GURPS it is normal to assume that all characters are created equal, or equivalent at any rate, i.e. all players have the same number of points to spend on designing their characters. For a campaign in India there are reasons why this strategy might not be entirely appropriate.

The modern Indian constitution aside, equality does not feature prominently in India, in practice or in theory. The ineffable wheel of *dharma* engenders people who are demonstrably better or less fortunate than others. The system is not arbitrary it is true, one's birth is a consequence of one's karmic cache, but someone whose karma warrants a lowly birth is undeniably a lesser person.

There is a huge variety of privilege in India. Contrast the illiterate low-caste street urchin with the young son of a *maharaja*. The one: starved and crippled by polio; streetsmart for sure, but illiterate and with no prospects of getting anything better from life. The other: wealthy and respected; a cultured aesthete, learned in Persian poetry, with access to the best education and a horde of fawning retainers. A campaign might very well see such a range. Consider this example: one character, an Eton educated British officer, distinguished member of the Ballygunge Club, possessed of great soldiering and leadership skills, and with access to the resources and edification British Empire, has it over the next character, the officer's manservant, who's acute organizational skills, photographic memory, and skill at mimicry, do not make up for his lack of status and his army of querulous dependents <@208> there is not the same variance between an English lord and his butler, an

analogous comparison.

While it is still recommended that starting characters begin with the same number of points, as this is the GURPS way, a brave GM might want to consider options where characters begin with a random number of points, to model the vagaries of karma. For example, in a campaign with an average of 100 points per player character, the actual number of points available to a character might be determined by the equation  $65+2d--5$ , giving a range of 75-125 points. An even greater range, 50 to 150 points, about the same average is achieved through  $30+4d--5$ . A concomitant option would be to relax the 40 point limitation on disadvantages and instead make a character's limit be determined by the number of character points rolled up, perhaps equal to 40 plus or minus the difference from the average. For example, a character unfortunate enough to roll up only 80 points in a campaign where 100 is the standard would be permitted to spend 60 points on disadvantages.

## Appearance

While brown or blond hair and even blue eyes are not unknown in India, particularly in the far north, the vast majority of Indians have black hair and brown skin. Many different hues of brown skin are possible, in particular there are a regional differences in skin color, people from the south and east are somewhat darker than those in the north and west, and there is variety even within a region. Fair skin is generally thought to be attractive and some even resort to using herbal and chemical concoctions to lighten their skin. (The desirability of fair skin only applies to Indians. Caucasians are not necessarily considered more attractive for their pale skin.)

Beauty can be important in India; Indians are quite candid about judging people on their appearance. Indians make efforts to appear neat and are very conservative about dressing; it is not considered desirable to be different. Ostentation is seen as being handsome and both men and women try to wear a good amount of gold and silver, though for men this is pretty much restricted to gold rings (it is no longer fashionable for men to wear earrings). Women's jewelry reserved for special occasions is particularly ornate; a woman at her wedding or a princess in her finery will wear a number of elaborately carved bangles, ear-rings, and nose-rings of grand size, a nose-ring, for example, could be 3 inches in diameter. Women are also conscientious about wearing make-up and there are a number of make-up customs, some which distinguish married and unmarried women. A very common fashion is the *bindi*, a spot, teardrop, or tiny design worn on the brow. On special occasions or when feeling extravagant, a woman will decorate her hands or feet with henna stains. Other make-up fashions for women go in and out of vogue and might encountered at any time, such as a tattooed dot on the chin or red-colored teeth. Hindu men might also wear a *bindi* though this is very uncommon and will be for religious purposes. The *tilak*, a smear of paste on the brow, is more clearly a Hindu religious mark and is often made during a *puja*, but might also be worn as make-up in an effort to appear more pious. The truly devout will on occasion wear more elaborate sect marks, of which there are several designs, two common examples being an elongated "U" with a dot inside for Vaishnavites and three horizontal lines for a Shaivite.

Even in modern times, Indians are fairly short on average and 3" should be subtracted from the average height given in the Height/Weight table on page B15, as for pre-19th-century characters. It is possible for characters to be quite a bit taller than average, Punjabis for example are renown for being larger than average. Typically poorer Indians are slighter than average, as might be expected, and richer Indians are quite often fatter than average, sometimes deliberately so in order to emphasize their wealth. It was once the case that plumpness was seen as being attractive, but this is less the case now, though the desire to be slim is by no means great.

## Background and Status

Character creation in GURPS is an involved process; far more than just deciding on a character's

abilities, creating a character requires deciding on a character's background. For any GURPS character this is essential as a character's background determines almost all other aspects of the character, what advantages, disadvantages, and skills are available or appropriate, where in the social hierarchy the character sits, and what sort of personality the character is likely to have formed. A character's background has influence beyond character generation however, it determines how others see the character, in a more specific way than social status and a more general way than reputation, and also how the character sees their place in the world and what ambitions they have. This is so very true in India where a person's birth is as much a consequence of their nature as the reverse. In generating a character in an Indian campaign, one must always be aware that the choices made regarding the character's origins and personal history have great weight and enduring consequences.

Perhaps the first choice that must be made when drafting a background for an Indian character is what religion the character belongs to. This is an important decision as it determines, to a greater or lesser extent, the ethical code of the character. Far more than that however, a character's religion, even if the character has no faith in it and does not follow its tenets, pigeonholes the character into a community. Pretty much all religions in India have sub-sects and it is necessary to decide which sect the character was born into. For a Hindu the possibilities are Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism (including Left Hand Tantrism, though this background is highly unusual and should not be chosen lightly and requires an Unusual Background Advantage), or any of the innumerable minor sects. A Muslim should decide whether they are a Sunni or a Shia. A Buddhist might be of the Greater or Lesser Vehicle and Jains may be White or Sky Clad. Most Christians in India will be Syrian or Anglican but almost all Christian faiths can be found due to the work of missionaries.

Once the character's religion has been chosen, the player should decide on a caste for the character. While caste is an institution only in Hinduism, all other religions have de facto castes, as it is more a social tradition than a religious one. Caste is based on vocation, so choosing a caste might mean as little as deciding on what occupation one's father had. However, a caste is more than simply a vocational tradition down a family line, a caste is a clan, the members of which share more traditions than just their occupation. In putting a character into a caste a player may wish, or the GM may demand, to devise fully the character's caste.

Generating a caste requires deciding which occupational niche the caste fills in society and devising a suite of traditions and customs particular to the caste. A caste's occupation may be very specific, particularly if the caste is small, or it can be more general, though there may be a list of jobs a caste will not do for some reason or another, even if they are in the general purview of their occupation. Some of the traditions of a caste are expressed as advantages and disadvantages if they significantly impact on the character during play. One might also think up a history of the caste and explanations as to why certain customs are held, particularly if these customs are out of sync with other castes in the area.

Hindus must also decide on a *varna*, into which their caste fits. Belonging to a particular *varna* costs a number of character points as the *varna* include a number of advantages or disadvantages. Also listed are a number of common advantages and disadvantages that a caste of the *varna* may likely have. The advantages or disadvantages of a *varna* apply to every member of the castes of that *varna* and therefore do not include those which will apply only to individuals. For example, there are a number of ecclesiastic *brahmin* castes, but Clerical Investment is not listed as a common advantage as not every member of the caste would be a priest. Any of the advantages and disadvantages can be bought off for particular castes if it can be justified.

### **Brahmin 14, 4, -1 points**

*Brahmin* castes are traditionally the priestly and professorial castes. Certainly in the past they largely worked as priests, performers of rituals, and in other religiously based jobs (e.g. ministrating to pilgrims). Over time, the range of occupations undertaken by *brahmins* has broadened, though they

will never perform menial occupations, agriculture being the occupation of lowest status they will perform. However, regardless of their vocation, *brahmin* castes are invariably relatively better off; agricultural *brahmin* castes will have better irrigation facilities etc., *brahmin* office working castes will hold the higher posts in an office, and *brahmin* artisans will work as religious sculptors or similar noble crafts.

In Vedic thought, *brahmins* are the most pure of the *varnas*. They must therefore avoid contact with the lower *varnas*, particularly *shudras* and untouchables. The onus is on the other *varnas* not to pollute *brahmins* but it is still a restriction *brahmins* must live under. This is manifest in the Taboo disadvantage, a -10 point disadvantage in the past, but a -5 point disadvantage in liberal post-Gandhian times. The exaltation of *brahmins* can also give them legal privileges. According to the *Laws of Manu*, *brahmins* are punished far less severely for their crimes, e.g. the murder of a *shudra* by a *brahmin* was a crime no more serious than the killing of an animal. In classical times (and only classical times), a 10 point Legal Immunity is gained.

The point cost of being from a *brahmin* caste is 10 points in classical times, -5 points in modern times, and 0 points at all other times.

### **Advantages**

Legal Immunity [10/0]; Literacy [10/0]; Status 1 [5]

### **Disadvantages**

Taboo (Social Aloofness) [-10/-5]; Taboo (Vegetarianism) [-1]

### **Other Common Advantages**

Wealth

### **Other Common Disadvantages**

Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism), Taboos of various types

## **Kshatriya 10 points**

The *kshatriyas* are the warriors and rulers of society. As with *brahmins*, the range of occupations performed has increased greatly and now many *kshatriyas* are agriculturists (and many agricultural castes claim *kshatriya* descent), though a good number of land owning castes are *kshatriyas*. Regardless of their caste occupation, *kshatriyas* are respected.

### **Advantages**

Status 1 [5]; Adventuring Background [5]

### **Other Common Advantages**

Status, Wealth

### **Common Disadvantages**

Code of Honor



## **Vaishya 0 points**

In the early history of the *varna* system, the *vaishyas* were the commoners of society, serfs essentially. As the *shudra varna* began to encroach on the territory of the *vaishyas*, the *varna* is now associated more with mercantile and artisan occupations.

### **Common Advantages**

Wealth

## **Shudra -5 points**

The *shudras* are the servants of society. They fill the less affluent and less privileged strata of society, quite often in menial positions and certainly low in status and wealth.

Some *shudra* castes could have occupations that give them some measure of respect or connections with the upper castes, e.g. one that traditionally serves the military. Other castes are even lower in status for some reason or another, e.g. a caste whose traditional trade has dried up may turn to dishonorable pursuits such as prostitution.

### **Disadvantages**

Status -1 [-5]

### **Other Common Disadvantages**

Status, Poverty, Uneducated

## **Untouchable -30, -15 points**

In truth the untouchable castes lie outside of the *varna* system as they perform those tasks considered too debased and spiritually polluting for a Hindu to perform, including disposing of dead bodies and working with leather. Some castes that were traditionally separate from society in some way, such as bandit castes or non-Hindu tribes now integrated into mainstream society, are often untouchable. There are a number of untouchable beggar castes.

As they are outside the *varna* system, their presence is a source of pollution. This is the basis for their Social Stigma disadvantage, which is a -15 point disadvantage before Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to reform the caste system, and -5 afterwards. Their status rises slightly in modern times (from Status -3 to Status -2) but they still occupy the lowest levels of the social hierarchy. The boundary between *shudra* and untouchable is sometimes blurred; a number of beggar and criminal castes claim to be *shudras* and refuse to associate with untouchables.

### **Disadvantages**

Status -3/-2 [-15/-10]; Social Stigma -3/-1 [-15/-5]

### **Other Common Disadvantages**

Illiterate, Poverty, Uneducated

## **Example Caste: Sikligar 0 points**

The Sikligar caste is a Rajasthani *vaishya* caste of steelworkers specializing in the making and sharpening of swords and other instruments of war, and more recently of knives and scissors. Weapons and armor made by the Sikligar are recognizable by their elaborate engraved designs. They have close relationships with warrior castes (and in fact claim *kshatriya* descent) and an enhanced status due to their reputation as skilled swordsmiths -- they claim the caste name came from the praise of a *raja* who said he could see the reflection of his face in his sword, so good was its polish. They consider themselves superior to the iron working Lohar caste.

The caste worships the goddess Jagdamba Mata.

Disputes within the caste are dealt with by the caste council, with an hereditary head, though the council has little influence. The caste is in general poor and uneducated.

### **Advantages**

Allied Caste (Rajasthani warrior castes) [10]; Status +1 [5]

### **Disadvantages**

Struggling [-5]; Uneducated [-5]

### **Example Caste: Pathyam 15 points (classical times)**

The *brahmin* Pathyam caste is based in Hyderabad. Their traditional caste duty is to advise the Andhra kings and they jealously guard the tradition wherein the king's prime minister must be a Pathyam. Other members of the caste hold positions in the royal court and bureaucracy or are landholders.

The caste is small and insular but marriages are allowed between Pathyam and a parcel of other local *brahmin* castes.

Perhaps arising from an ancient responsibility as royal bards, the Pathyam caste has a strong tradition of storytelling. This skill is used extensively within the caste with speeches at gatherings such as weddings being ridden with stories.

### **Advantages**

Status 1 [5] (in addition to that gained from the *brahmin varna*)

Choosing a caste means more to a character than simply supplying a number of advantages and disadvantages, a caste is a community and a vocation. As a community, a caste gives a character kinship to other caste members as well as forming a slight barrier to non-caste-members. As a vocation, a caste determines what a character ought to be doing for an occupation and almost certainly determines what a character was brought up to do. Of course, a character need not follow the caste's profession, but not conforming may have significant dharmic ramifications or may elicit negative reactions, particularly if one is seen to be trying to rise above one's caste.

In creating and playing a character, it is possible to take a poor, underprivileged character and make them rich and famous -- some of the most dramatic and heroic stories are those of the poor boy or girl made good. This is not entirely without precedent in India, a powerful example is the number of great dynasties founded by *shudras*, but to an Indian, such a character would seem unnatural. In the Indian mindset, one is born into one's destiny. Thus if a poor character is to succeed, they must in fact have an auspicious birth somehow hidden by their apparent poor origins. For example, Krishna was bought up as a cow-herd, but his *shudra* parents were only his foster parents as he was in fact

the son of a king. (His brother, Baldev, more extremely, was magically transplanted to his foster mother's womb before birth.) One shouldn't be discouraged in playing disadvantaged characters with the intention of gaining fame and fortune beyond that warranted by their birth, but one should be aware that one is fighting not only people's expectations but also the Indian dramatic tradition.

## Social Status

Few things are more important to an Indian than status, both his own and that of others. An Indian in a position of standing pays ceaseless attention to the amount of respect he receives and guards his status fast. Even Indians of low status are greatly concerned with who has a status lower than their own. Inversely, an Indian understands well who they must pay deference too and will generally pay their superiors due respect, even if it is feigned.

India understands hierarchy, so the GURPS social level system goes a long way towards modeling society. In theory the stratified caste system is the backbone onto which all of society is cast, with each living person occupying a rung on the vast ladder of status. Every Indian is well aware of who sits above or below them on the ladder. However, GURPS does not capture the intricacies and confusions inherent in the relationships between and within castes, religions, families, government departments, wealth levels, etc. One's status is determined by a number of factors including, among many others, temporal power and the prestige of one's caste, all of which cumulatively add to form one's final status.

For all its appropriateness to the Indian social landscape, the GURPS status system is not fine enough to capture the more commonly encountered effects of status. Most of society is clustered around social levels -1, 0, and 1, yet within these levels are an untold number of lesser divisions of as much importance at this level as the differences between the different social levels. This matter is treated in the next section on reaction rolls but the GM is advised to always be mindful of the dynamics of status in any situation and to be ready to let their judgement supercede any rules.

Note that although religion may have an impact on one's status, it is treated as being neutral for status. The relative statuses of the different religions vary so greatly over the years. For example, Islam was the religion of the ruling class for a portion of India's history, but now Muslims are generally poorer in India and treated as outsiders by some Hindus, whereas in Pakistan they are the vast majority and subject to positive discrimination. If the effects of religion are important in a campaign or isolated situation, they can be factored in by the GM.

### Status Table

#### Status Example Descriptions of Social Position Monthly Cost of Living

8 Moghul, British, Gupta, and Maurya Emperors \$200,000

7 Emperor of smaller realm and other great rulers, e.g. Nizam of Hyderabad, Andhra Emperors \$50,000

6 *Maharaja* of important land, e.g. Maharana of Mewar \$15,000

5 *Maharaja* of smaller land, e.g. Maharaja of Baroda \$8,000

4 *Raja* of small domain, governor of important province \$4,000

3 Governor of minor province, official of royal court, senior army officer \$1,000

2 Rajput, senior priest, army officer \$500

1 *Kshatriya, brahmin*, local priest, policeman, senior bureaucrat \$300

0 *Vaishya*, shopkeeper, clerk, artisan, respected *shudra* \$150

-1 *Shudra*, auto-rikshaw driver \$50

-2 Rikshaw puller \$40

-3 Untouchable, slave \$30

-4 Contemptible untouchable, beggar, garbage scavenger \$25

High status attracts respect, almost always genuine, but affected at worst. A difference in status will modify reaction rolls in most circumstances. Higher status will also be a positive bonus in most influence rolls. With increased status also comes greater opportunity to make money through profiteering, though this is related more closely to the power inherent in any particular position than to the respect it draws. A character in a position of status might consider taking a level of Wealth (or buying off a level of Poverty) to simulate the making of money through bribes, and also a Secret disadvantage which represents not that the character has a secret to hide as such (as it will be clear to all that the character taking bribes), but that they might eventually get their come-uppance. Another advantage of status is a measure of license; status does not give one any legal immunity, but those of high status can get away with indiscretions of greater severity. Misdeeds and crimes of the high in status might not be actioned on, even by the police, and will not be spoken of. At the highest status, one can even get away with murder if it can be justified in some way, e.g. killing someone who has their eyes on one's throne is admissible in practice for a great emperor.

## Reaction Rolls

India's communalism adds factors to reaction rolls. Generally, a -1 penalty to reaction rolls is applied if the NPC is of a different community to the PC, which will generally simply mean religion, though it might also apply for regional affiliations, e.g. two Bengalis in Delhi will be of the same community regardless of religion. Hinduism is far too broad a community for this bonus to apply generally between Hindus, though Hindus of the same *varna* should avoid the penalty. (Note though, that this penalty should not be seen as a prejudice against other communities. Rather it is a manifestation of the fact that the ties that bind within a community weaken those between communities.) This penalty should also be applied if the PC is clearly acting contrary to his community, e.g. a *brahmin* associating with *shudra*. In a situation where community is of particular relevance (a communal riot being the most extreme example), the penalty might be greater. Conversely, a bonus of +1 is gained if the NPC is of the same exact caste as the PC (or any closely related or expressly friendly castes). These bonuses will apply for general reactions, potential combat situations (but not morale checks), requests for aid or information, and loyalty checks. Indians are far too canny as merchants to allow these influences to enter their commercial transactions (though they might give the impression that they do). However, if the same-caste bonuses would change a commercial transaction reaction from disastrous to very bad or very bad to bad, then it should be applied.

This -1 penalty for interactions between different communities would be a very heavy handicap for Indian society were it not for the fact that most interactions will in fact be *within* communities. All the same, the GM should always be willing to offset the penalty if given any good reason to.

Status will usually be a factor in reaction rolls. If there is a difference in social level, the effect is clear, but even between characters of the same social level, there is likely to be some influence due to differences in status. On a case-by-case basis the GM should decide whether the NPC has a higher fractional status than the PC, perhaps due to seniority or belonging to a more prestigious sub-caste. If

so the PC suffers a -1 penalty to reaction rolls; otherwise they gain a +1 bonus.

## Female Characters

India's discrimination against women is infamous, exhibited most strikingly in the practice of female infanticide, but the practices of *sati* (albeit now extinct) and dowry murder are further symptoms of a zealous antipathy towards the whole of the female sex. The only period of India's history when women were not treated as being inferior to men, with harshly restricted freedoms, was possibly during the Vedic age, and even then their place in society as homekeepers was entrenched. After the Vedic age, the status of women declined sharply and by the early classical age it had reached its lowest point. Far more than being treated as second-class citizens, women were actively vilified and even despised by the sages of the time, Manu and the compilers of the *Mahabharata* being ardent misogynists. The arrival of Islam dealt a further blow to women's prestige.

Girls are seen as being a burden on a family. One significant reason for the low consideration given to girls is their status as property that is entirely given away in marriage. There is little point in educating them or helping them to find employment as they eventually leave to join their future husband's family. In fact, some authorities consider it a sin to educate women or leave them unmarried after they have their first period. In truth, Indian families love their daughters as much as their sons and an educated woman could attract a better husband, thereby benefiting her family. On balance, a young woman is very likely to be less educated, treated with less respect, trusted less, considered less competent, and discouraged in having ambitions.

As adults, women bear considerable restrictions. Married, as they most certainly will be, they are the property of their husbands. Women from richer families will be confined to *pardah*.

Playing a female character in India is therefore a challenge. A woman's upbringing is likely to be disadvantaged and she will constantly be battling a society that will aggressively take offense at her impertinence in following paths reserved for men. All women must take -5 point Social Stigma disadvantage. They must also take a Status -1 disadvantage before any more character points are spent on Status as an advantage or disadvantage, i.e. putting them one social level lower than a man from an equivalent background. All female characters have the Uneducated disadvantage but may buy it off if they take a 10 point Unusual Background, which also allows the character to take up employment. Similarly, a female character cannot acquire advanced levels in athletic, combat, or outdoor skills, or any other skills clearly the domain of men, e.g. gambling, without taking a 10 point Unusual Background. This particular Unusual Background would cost more except that the character must also take an additional -5 point Social Stigma disadvantage and the background is likely to be one of diminished status, e.g. banditry. On the positive side, women gain +1 to reaction rolls for requests for help, provided they are confirming to society's conventions for women.

Playing a female character might seem simply hopeless given all the restrictions they must suffer. However, it is possible to play an interesting and successful female character. A woman of ability with enough resolution can overcome the constraints that society places on her, offsetting her low status with favorable reputations and setting her will against societies attempts to make her conform. If the character operates outside of society, as many adventuring women will, many of the limitations disappear. In the end, the challenge of playing a character under heavy restrictions may require some shifting of expectations, but might prove more satisfying. Some illustrative examples may encourage: Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, whose biography appears in the chapter *British and Modern India*, p. xx, was India's Joan of Arc. An outstanding military leader, after her husband's death she led the troops of Jhansi from horseback against the British in the Anglo-Indian War and had many successes before falling in battle, sword in hand. Phoolan Devi, the Bandit Queen, forced into banditry through the deprivations and injustices of her untouchability, became one of India's foremost bandit leaders. She evaded capture so adroitly and caused so much trouble the government was forced to offer her amnesty to get her to leave the hills of Uttar Pradesh. Jahanara, Shah Jahan's

favorite daughter and ally of her brother Dara Shikoh, formulated court intrigues and fought off the attacks to her court influence by her brothers and sisters, all without leaving the harem.

## British Characters

The British are so removed from mainstream Indian society, even when they were ruling the country, that their integration into an Indian campaign is slightly problematic.

In the early years of European contact with India, the British presence made so little difference to Indian society. In this period of Indian history being British carries with it a -5 point Social Stigma disadvantage to account for their foreignness. As untouchables, their level of Social Stigma might be worse, but they were afforded a fair measure of respect, as sources of trade wealth if nothing else. In later years, after the British come to rule the country (approximately the beginning of the 19th century after they depose the King of Oudh), the British had a separate social scale. All British take a Status 1 advantage, putting them 1 social level above an Indian nominally of the same social class.

The British form a community for the purposes of reaction rolls. Coupling the -1 reaction to non-British with the higher status of a Briton effectively makes, to British eyes, the average Briton superior to all of ordinary Indian society.

The British do not have castes as such though British society is every bit as prejudicial as Indian society. Many occupations could carry a decrease in Status, private mercantile pursuits for example, and an over familiarity with locals could attract a Social Stigma disadvantage.

## Non-human Characters

(Refer to the Bestiary chapter for details on the various non-human races.)

Non-human heroes in Indian myth are uncommon, but not unknown -- Hanuman, the monkey champion of the *Ramayana*, is the most prominent example. *Vanara* and *nishada* are two races that could fit into a human-centered campaign with minimal difficulty. In a more uncommon fantasy campaign, *apsaras*, *gandharvas*, *hatakas*, *kimpurashas*, *kinnaras*, and possibly even *pramantha* might be playable as PC races but will suffer considerable discrimination among human society. Any campaign which allows any of the other supernatural beings as PC races, *rakshasa* for example, departs wildly from what would be acceptable in Indian myth.

## Advantages

### Administrative Rank see p. CI19

India has for long been a bureaucratic society; certainly as early as Mauryan times. Although a job in the civil service is considered rather common, it is a source of a good deal of influence, both through the authority of the administrative post itself and through the contacts and intelligence the post has access to. In India, each 3 points of administrative rank gives the equivalent of a point of Status.

### Autotrance see p. CI20

An ability to autotrance might manifest itself as a tendency to experience religious rapture. In this case a character will need to work themselves up into some level of religious frenzy induce the trance. This should not be difficult; it may require simply repeating "God is great," or reciting the *Gita*. In moments of intense religious activity, such a religious festival, a character with such an Autotrance advantage might enter a trance involuntarily if a Will roll is failed.

## **Bardic Immunity see p. CI21**

There is no bardic immunity in India. Satirists must be careful that they do not offend powerful, choleric magnates.

## **Charisma see p. B19**

Charisma, as an innate personal magnetism, is unrecognized in India; respect and veneration are largely given on the basis of status. Many who might be expected to have Charisma, such as religious *gurus*, do not necessarily. Charisma is an effective facility all the same, either in combination with or instead of status-based esteem. As natural charisma is not a recognized source of esteem, it less enduring than legitimate sources such as status or tangible reputations and will not be effective unless the character is in the presence of those he is trying to impress (or at least able to interact with them in some way).

## **Claim to Hospitality see p. CI21**

Most castes look after their members by providing shelter and assistance. Claim to Hospitality is a common advantage, but some castes are better at looking after their members than others.

Members of the same caste will often, but not always, be of about the same level of wealth. The bare fact is that if one is rather poor, one won't get as much hospitality as one ability to reciprocate is less.

Other groups will also offer hospitality, such as *shreni* guilds (see p. xx).

## **Clerical Investment 10 points/level of rank; see p. CI22**

Clerical Investment is a required advantage for practicing priests.

Indians revere their religious ministers highly, a statement that applies between religions as well as within them, hence a Hindu will respect a Muslim *imam*, knowing that the *imam* is a highly learned and devoted sage. Hence, the effect of Clerical Investment is to raise status rather than just attract a bonus to reaction rolls.

Being candidly general, it is possible to define two types of Hindu priests, those with the responsibility to minister over the general populace, and those that work only within their caste. There is quite a difference in the amount of respect each receives but both types are more highly respected than the general populace. The caste priest has a Clerical Investment of rank 1-3 and gain a bonus to their Status amongst all Indians of 1 level and a bonus to reaction rolls within their caste equal to their rank. The generalist priest (always of the *brahmin varna*) is of rank 4-6 and gains a bonus to their Status of 2 levels and a bonus equal to their rank to reaction rolls from *all* Indians.

Religions other than Hinduism have analogous divisions within their clergy, for example the difference between Christian parish priests and metropolitan bishops. Note though that Hindu Clerical Investment is genuinely different; a caste priest cannot become a general priest by purchasing a higher rank. In fact, a Hindu or Jain can only take Clerical Investment during initial character generation, as it requires a childhood of apprenticeship. A Christian or Muslim can take Clerical Investment later in life, though it still requires extensive training.

Note that there are no ordained Muslims clerics, though *imams* can be considered the equivalent. The closest Buddhism has to clerics are its monks, for whom Clerical Investment is an inappropriate advantage. Buddhist monks attract a measured respect compared to the priests of other religions and do not perform ceremonies for the laity. Use Monastic Rank (see below) instead.

## **Extra Life see p. CI36**

Despite the fact that one is reincarnated when one dies, it is not unknown for people to get resurrected. However, once the appropriate rituals are performed to send you to the next world (be that heaven or your next incarnation), you cannot be brought back to life.

## **Legal Enforcement Powers see p. B21**

In the less enlightened periods of India's history (including the modern day), the law does not have the right to disregard civil rights, but can easily get away with it. The law is often underequipped but makes up for it by often being able to draw on the community that is the police force (for personal vendettas, etc.).

Police are generally feared in India and get a bonus of +1 to attempts to intimidate due to this.

## **Legal Immunity 10 points; see p. CI27**

At periods of India's history, specifically those where the *Laws of Manu* are followed, *brahims* have a measure of legal immunity. Characters with Legal Immunity *can* be tried by the temporal authorities, but they are punished far less seriously for any crimes that they commit.

## **Lightning Calculator see p. B21**

India has a long tradition of supernumeracy.

## **Literacy see p. B21 and B17**

At no time in India's history is literacy a prevailing skill. In modern India, the literacy rate is not much more than 50% and in Pakistan it is less than 50%. Literacy is a 10 point advantage in all pre-modern historical settings. In modern campaigns, although literacy is not universal, as most PC are likely to come from backgrounds where literacy is common, it is a free advantage for modern campaigns.

It is generally common for the privileged to be literate, including the middle class of modern India. The exceedingly privileged might get away with being illiterate; Akbar the Great, who was as privileged as it is possible to get, was allegedly illiterate.

## **Luck see p. B21**

Good luck is often ascribed to a surfeit of good karma from one's last birth.

## **Mathematical Ability see p. B22**

Indians are remarkably good at mathematics and this advantage is relatively more common in India.

## **Merchant Rank 5 points/level of rank; see Rank, p. CI29**

There are as many as 4 merchant ranks. Rank may translate into a position within a *shreni* guild, or it may simply represent wealth and trade contacts.

Each 3 levels of rank translates into a point of Status.



## **Military Rank see p. B22**

In the British Indian army, officer ranks were not open to Indians. As explained on page xx, there were special ranks for Indians. These ranks were not parallel to the ranking of the rest of the army but instead were all inferior to each of the British ranks, hence a lieutenant was superior even to a subedar-major or rissaldar-major, the highest of the native ranks.

An additional hierarchy of military ranks, called Native Ranks, fit in within the "standard" Military Ranks (as described below). In the following the infantry rank is listed first, followed by the cavalry rank.

Native Rank 7: Subedar-major or rissaldar-major

Native Rank 6: Subedar or rissaldar

Native Rank 5: Jemadar

Native Rank 4: Havildar-major or daffadar-major

Native Rank 3: Havildar or daffadar

Native Rank 2: Naik or lance daffadar

Native Rank 1: Lance naik or unpaid lance daffadar

Native Rank 0: Sepoy or sowar

Native ranks 1 to 4 are inferior to a Military Rank 1 and Native Ranks 5 to 7 are inferior to a Military Rank 3.

Military Rank confers status at a rate of 1 level of status for every 3 military ranks, applying equally to Native and standard Military Ranks, hence a subedar gains two levels of status.

In the 19th century, the British army abandoned the selling of commissions, so the rules pertaining to bought ranks given on page B22 should be followed for times prior to this.

## **Pitiable see p. CI29**

Even the most abject of characters are unlikely to be pitied as one's situation is a consequence of *karma* and hence deserved.

## **Power Investiture see p. CI42**

Note that the magic wielding characters outlined in the next chapter are "self-made" and require specifically the Magic Affinity advantage. In epic campaigns characters might be granted magical abilities by their deities, Power Investiture is the appropriate advantage for this situation.

## **Semi-Literacy 5 points in pre-modern campaigns; see p. CI29**

In pre-modern campaigns, where illiteracy is the norm, semi-literacy is a 5 point advantage. In modern campaigns, where literacy is typical for PCs, it is a -5 point disadvantage.

Semi-literacy is quite uncommon in India; people are either educated or not, rarely are they partially

educated.

## **Shapeshifter see p. CI43**

Shapeshifting is generally only possible through spell-casting. However, an idea that is original but not out of place is a caste of shapeshifters.

## **New Advantages**

### **Adventuring Background 5 points**

You belong to a caste whose duties are consistent with "adventuring," i.e. during the course of play, the character is unlikely to lose experience points for activities contrary to their *dharma*.

Exactly what "adventuring" means will vary between campaigns, as will the awarding of experience points. Hence, the GM should consider whether and how to use this advantage after deciding the theme of the campaign how experience points are to be awarded during play.

### **Allied Caste 5 points**

Your caste has a close relationship with another caste (or castes, in which case the advantage is worth 10 points). You gain the bonus to reaction rolls that normally apply only within a caste. If your allied caste also has Claim to Hospitality, it is extended to your caste.

### **Avatara 20, 40 points**

You are a god incarnate on Earth or the offspring of gods or *rakshasas*. However, you are not generally aware of this fact. You may purchase a suite of supernatural powers at half point cost. However, these powers are not available to you except under special circumstances and after a successful Will roll. For example, you may only be aware of your supernatural origins when you are in view of an idol of your divine incarnation.

If others can become aware of your true identity this advantage cost 40 points. This awareness is only ever short-lived but temporarily elevates your status off the scale.

This advantage simulates the divine natures of Hanuman and Balarama but is a pale shadow of the avatic nature of Krishna, who is fully aware of his divinity but chooses not to or is unable to draw on its full power. Ambitious GMs might wish to tinker with this advantage to allow characters with potentially overwhelming powers, but severe checks on their use.

### **Detached 20 points**

You have come to realize the transitory nature of human life and the futility of its struggle. You now understand your place in the universe and no longer feel bound by ties of society, being bound only by your unity with the divine.

You do not fear death (as Imperturbable, CI 26), as death is only a transition, and feel no remorse, as your morality is based on *dharma* rather than worldly human expectations.

It may be the case that you have seen right through the veil of *maya*, experienced the *turiya* state of consciousness, or simply become comfortable with the idea of the unity of your self with God. You are well on your way towards enlightenment.

## Monastic Ranks 5 points/level of rank

Monasteries and orders of monks have ranks, as have some orders of *sadhus* (holy men). Often they will be informal and based on seniority, but may be official gradations. For the purposes of GURPS India, each order or monastery has 6 levels of rank. These ranks hold within a religion, not just within a sect, hence the rank of a Mahayana monk is recognized by a Theravada monk, and vice versa.

There are many, many different Shiva worshipping *sadhu* sects in India, some are tiny but some range across all of India and command considerable political and social power. Members of a sects will typically wear robes, have a forehead mark, such as three horizontal lines, and may carry a staff or trident. The different sects can be identified by their raiments.

Each 3 levels of rank is equivalent to a level of status.

## Acquiring advantages

Indians can be incredibly devoted, and this devotion extends to the acquiring of extraordinary abilities. Ascetics willing to put themselves through egregious hardships are an example, but this level of dedication is not limited to religious fanatics; even the desire to get into the Guinness Book of World Records motivates Indians to exceptional levels of exertion. This level of discipline and a lower sense of human limitation, mean that Indians are capable of training themselves to perform superhuman feats. In game terms, Indians should be permitted to purchase advantages during play that might normally only be available to beginning characters, advantages that might be seen as being innate. Examples include Double-Jointed and Lightning Calculator.

These advantages may be purchased through "study" (practice in fact) at a rate of 1 points per 200 hours devoted to its increase, just as with skills.

They study of *yoga* and the practice of intense asceticism, if followed strictly, lead to the acquisition of great abilities. *Yogis* and ascetics (including ascetic *sadhus*) may acquire exceptional advantages through their practice; when a *yogi* increases their Yoga skill by a level they may acquire one of the following advantages: Autotrance, Breath Holding, Double-Jointed, Extra Fatigue, High Pain Threshold, and Less Sleep. The same is allowed of an ascetic who has satisfied the GM that they have punished themselves sufficiently (which might perhaps require taking on a disadvantage as a consequence of the austerities, e.g. Skinny or Reduced Move). In a cinematic campaign were the claims of supernatural powers by *yogis* and *sadhus* are genuine, the following advantages might be available for purchase: Disease-Resistant, Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, Faith Healing, Immortality, Immunity to Disease, Immunity to Poison, Longevity, Metabolism Control, and Unaging. The GM may also rule that other mythical advantages are available. (Note also that *yogis* and *sadhus* may be able to use magic. See Magical India chapter.)

Characters devoting themselves to the path of enlightenment or *moksha* may acquire some advantages if they are successfully keeping to their regimen. These advantages are bestowed upon the character either by God or simply by *dharma*. If the GM accepts that the character is worthy of them, the following advantages might be purchased if they are appropriate for the campaign: Blessed, Detached, Divine Favor, Extraordinary Luck, Harmony with the Tao (Dharma), Illuminated, Intuition, Luck, Reawakened, Sanctity, and True Faith. The state known as enlightenment is not known, simply because it is not able to be understood by unenlightened minds. Depending on how enlightenment is treated in a campaign, Being of Pure Thought may be an approximation to this state. Characters who conscientiously follow their path may achieve this *moksha* at death by making a successful roll of the skill appropriate to the character's path (e.g. philosophy for *jnana yoga*) and by expending the requisite amount of character points *gained in a*

*manner consistent with the path* (requiring a little bit of extra bookwork), which may be earned subsequent to purchasing of the advantage (GMs discretion).

## Disadvantages

### Code of Honor

While Indian society has established codes of conduct, including honesty and deference to those of higher status, they are as often as not observed in the breach and do not amount to true codes of honor. However, Indian society is broad and diverse and certain communities or castes may have codes of honor of various levels of strictness. Furthermore, some individuals can develop very strong principles, often in response to a perceived lack of morals in society. Players and GM should feel free to define Codes of Honor for castes or communities as they feel fit.

*Kshatriya Code of Honor:* Willingly meet any challenge on the battlefield. Always maintain one's dignity and avenge any insult to one's honor in kind. Protect one's vassals as one would protect oneself. Assert the status of the *kshatriya varna*. -5 points.

The Kshatriya Code of Honor is only encountered in India's early history (it will only be encountered amongst intensely principled *kshatriya* during and after Gupta times) or epic times.

*Rajput Code of Honor:* Never accept defeat. Suffer the greatest of losses, including the death of one's family and people, rather than surrender. Avenge insults with death. -10 points.

The Rajput Code of Honor was widely held by Rajput warrior during the Rajput ascendancy (i.e. during the time of Muslim incursions into India). Even Rajputs in the modern day may have this Code of Honor, though it is now uncommon and largely confined to the military. Even if a Rajput does not hold to this extreme code, they are likely to be proud and vengeful of insults to the level of a -5 point disadvantage.

### Disciplines of Faith see p. CI89

Disciplines of Faith are commonly adhered to by Indians. Even a common, secular Indian is likely to have the Ritualism discipline.

In addition to the disciplines listed in Compendium I (all of which are available except Shinto Priest), the following are followed in India.

*Devout Jain (-10 points):* A devout Jain has both a deep respect for life and a suspicion of attachments, particularly to possessions. A Jain must refrain from killing anything deliberately, including insects, and must only eat vegetarian food cultivated with little risk of killing even microscopic life (which in practice excludes any vegetable taken from the ground). A devout Jain must be honest, faithful in marriage, and not delight in accumulating personal possessions.

To use this discipline to an advantage, for example, in gaining magical powers (see *Magical India* chapter) or practicing as a priest, the Pacifism (Total Non-violence), Honesty, Mendicant (see below), and Vow (Chastity) disadvantages must be taken. Monastic or Religious Ranks can then be acquired.

*Strict Brahmin (-5 points):* *Brahmins* must avoid contact with all things spiritually polluting. Dead bodies and human waste are examples of spiritually pollutants that must be avoided. Contact allowed with lower castes is proportional to the difference in caste, i.e. a *brahmin* can be in the company of a *kshatriya* but cannot eat food prepared by a *kshatriya*, but cannot even be in the company of an

untouchable.

*Satyagrahi* (-30 points): The followers of Gandhian non-violent assertiveness must practice a form of Pacifism that requires never lifting a hand in violence against another person, even if being attacked. A *satyagrahi* will willingly submit to oppression, including imprisonment, no matter how unjust it seems. It requires an absolute commitment to a cause, as the cause is the Truth, which has a reparative force. *Satyagrahis* should also take the Honesty disadvantage.

### **Semi-Literacy -5 in modern campaigns, see p. CI29**

See under *Advantages*.

### **Vow see p. B37**

Indians will often make covenants with God to behave in a certain way. For the purposes of *GURPS India*, vows are personal oaths, whereas Taboos (see below) are restrictions common to one's community or caste.

A common vow to take is the performance of a small sacrifice, such as the offering of a coconut at a particular temple.

## **New Disadvantages**

### **Mendicant -5 points**

You have made a great vow to rid yourself of attachments to material objects. You own nothing except maybe a set of clothes and a walking stick; hence you must also take the Dead Broke disadvantage.

You live only on alms and cannot take anything that is not given to you. Note however, that Indians are very accepting of mendicants and will willingly give them food or other necessities. A mendicant is unlikely to starve.

### **More Daughters Than Sons -5 points**

You are due at some point in the not too distant future to spend a large sum of money (one year's income) arranging marriages for your daughters.

### **Rank Limitation -5, -10 points**

You are not able to achieve a rank greater than 3. If this limitation applies to each of Administrative, Academic, Mercantile, Military, Monastic, and Native Ranks and Clerical Investment it is worth -10 points. If it applies only to some of these, it is worth -5 points.

This limitation is due to a prejudice, is usually directed against a group rather than an individual, and is often a tacit limitation rather than official. It is typical for *shudras* and untouchables to have it at -10 points. During British times, Indians were limited as to their Administrative Rank as well as Military Rank (though Native Ranks were open to them).

Ranks Limitation can be bought off but it requires an appropriate Reputation.

### **Semi-Albinism -5 points**

(C.f. Albinism, B27.) Some Indians have patches of pigment deficiency. This is seen as being unattractive so must be combined with at least Unattractive. Characters with this condition are fairly distinctive but are not unique and are not particularly susceptible to sunburn.

This disadvantage may be taken at a level of -10 points where the skin is more white than brown, being functionally the same as the Albinism disadvantage.

### **Taboo Varies**

This disadvantage is very broad, covering any prohibitions a character may have for personal, religious, or caste reasons. It covers restrictions on behavior, diet, and relationships. The point cost of the particular instance of the disadvantage depending on its strictness and its impact on a character's life.

Vegetarianism is included as a taboo. Vegetarianism as practiced by Hindus, i.e. not eating meat or eggs, is worth -1 points. Jain vegetarianism (outside of the Discipline of Faith), which also prohibits eating vegetables taken from the ground such as onion and garlic, is worth -5 points.

## **Skills**

### **Body Control see p. CI138**

This skill covers the practice of *yoga* and the asceticism of *sadhus*.

### **Astrology see p. Astronomy, B60**

This skill is not the same as Astronomy and both skills exist at all tech levels (defaulting to each other at -2). Up until modern times astrology remains a somewhat respectable science and astrologers are often consulted. At low tech levels (TL4 and below) Astronomy is used alongside Astrology for the precise calculation of dates and to form models for the physical universe.

### **Chess see p. CI145**

Chess (which incidentally originated in India) in India differs slightly from that played in the West. In Indian chess the queen (actually the prime minister) can only move one step in any direction.

The difference changes tactics significantly enough that when the skill is taken seriously a -1 penalty to the skill is applied when playing the less familiar version.

### **Dancing see p. B47**

Each region of India has its own style of dancing. In modern times each state has an associated dance, such as *bangra* in Punjab and *kathkali* in Kerala. Each dance itself must be learned separately but the Dancing skill need only be learnt once and allows a character to pick up different dances.

Some dances began as performances for prostitutes, either *nautch* girls (professional courtesans) or temple prostitutes. In time however, dances gain respectability. However, not everyone thinks dance is the most modest of arts.

### **Heraldry see p. B58**

While Indians are known to use banners and devices, no science of heraldry was ever developed. The

skill therefore is of no use and IQ (as a substitute for common knowledge) should be used instead.

### **Kite Flying see p. CI146**

In India the strings of kites are coated in dye containing powdered glass. The skill in flying these kites is not only to get them to rise but also to make them swoop and to rasp one's string against another's in an effort to cut their kite free.

### **Mathematics see p. B61**

With India's strong tradition in this science, it defaults to IQ-4.

### **Mechanic see p. B54**

It is worth noting that Indian mechanics are accustomed to working with meager materials and hence are experts at jerry-rigging. At the same time, workmanship is often less than perfect.

### **Philosophy see p. CI157**

As well as the six *darshana* systems of philosophy (see *Philosophy*, p. xx), India has all possible variations on philosophy, including any imported systems. Philosophy and Theology are closely related or even indistinguishable (as in the case of *vedanta*), and should be considered two arms of one knowledge.

### **Physician see p. B56**

As there different sciences of medicine in India, it is necessary for physicians to specialize. Three systems are in use in India, *ayurveda*, allopathy (traditional "Western" medicine), and homeopathy. The first of which is available from the earliest times, the second from approximately British times, and the latter only recently.

Each specialization defaults to the others at -5.

It is up to the GM to decide whether all three systems of medicine are fully effective.

### **Poetry**

India has a great variety of poetry styles including native styles, often deriving from classical Sanskrit forms, as well as Persian styles.

Indians are generally quite receptive to poetry and a critical success at poetry composition or recitation will incite strong emotions in an audience.

### **Snake Charming see p. CI128**

While snake charming is often performed with a musical pipe, snakes are in fact deaf. The "charming" of the snake is effected by movement. Snakes are easily distracted by movement and will ignore one movement if they are concentrating on another.

### **Swimming**

Swimming is not seen as being an important skill. It is not a difficult skill to acquire for those living

near bodies of water but is uncommon outside of those occupations that make use of it.

## **Theology see p. B62**

In taking the theology skill, a character must specialize in a particular *sect*, not just a religion. However, sects or denominations of the same religion (e.g. Skyclad or Whiteclad Jainism) default to the other sects at -2.

## **Wrestling see p. 136**

Wrestling is a popular form of unarmed combat and sport practiced in India since antiquity. Skill in wrestling is widespread amongst the warrior castes and there are some that make a career out of it.

India has a number of forms of wrestling, some of which can be quite brutal, such as *vajra musti*, in which strikes with *cestus* armed fists are permitted.

## **New Skills**

### **Driving (Rickshaw) (Physical/Easy) see p. B68**

The ability to drive one of the several types of rickshaw.

The man-powered rickshaw is a two-person buggy, with two wheels and two long poles sticking out the front to be held by the "diver." The driver, or "puller," physically drags the rickshaw. This particular specialization uses HT rather than DX and defaults to IQ-5 or HT-5.

The cycle rickshaw replaces the puller with the front half of a bicycle, which the driver uses to pull the buggy. This specialization also uses HT and defaults to IQ-5, HT-5, or Bicycle-2.

The autorickshaw is a motorized version. They are typically three-wheeled and with a covered interior. Driving an autorickshaw is based on DX and defaults to IQ-5 or DX-5.

A rickshaw holds two passengers comfortably, three uncomfortably, and more with difficulty.

### **Genealogy Lore (Mental/Average) Defaults to IQ-7**

This is the knowledge of the ancestry and descent of a particular family. It is not a difficult skill but without any research, one is unlikely to know much about a family (hence the low default). For exalted families, such as royal houses, bonuses may be applied for those with no specific skill.

### **Laya Yoga (Mental/Hard) No default; Prerequisite: Yoga**

The skill of Laya Yoga covers the theory behind this form of *yoga*, with the physical application of it being covered by the Yoga skill (see below).

### **Regurgitate (Physical/Hard) Defaults to Will-4**

You are able to disgorge objects you have recently swallowed. This skill is HT based rather than DX. The difficulty of success in this skill depends on the objects swallowed, liquids being the easiest.

### **Stenography (Mental/Average) No default**



Writing and understanding shorthand.

### **Tantra (Mental/Hard) No default**

This skill covers the understanding of the teachings of the Tantric sect.

### **Hidden Lore (Vedic) (Mental/Very Hard) No default; Prerequisite: Language (Sanskrit)**

If one is willing to accept that the *Vedas* contain more than just hymns and ritual, then the Vedic Lore skill is required. A specialization of Hidden Lore with a difficulty of Very Hard rather than Average as it requires decoding the *Vedas*.

Note that this skill is very different from the Vedic Sacrifice skill, which is knowledge of the *Vedas* as religious texts.

### **Vedic Sacrifice (Mental/Very Hard) No default; Prerequisite: Language (Sanskrit)**

Knowledge of the teachings of the *Vedas* for use in religion.

The great difficulty in learning this skill is firstly that it is not simply the theology and philosophy of the *Vedas*, but also the ability to recall hymns from the books, and secondly because the teaching is always done orally.

Vedic Sacrifice is a form of ritual magic but is not a specialization of the Ritual Magic skill as it does not default to any of the other specializations and has Sanskrit as a prerequisite.

### **Yoga (Mental/Hard) No default**

The practice of *yoga* is a combination of eight different techniques as detailed on page xx. To proceed in the practice of *yoga* requires developing these techniques. For the purposes of GURPS, *yoga* is formed of a combination of the skills of Body Control, Breath Control, and Meditation. As a character raises these skills, their understanding of Yoga can increase. A character cannot invest more skill points into Yoga than they have in the lowest of the three above skills.

## **Languages**

See India, p. xx, for a discussion on languages in India.

The languages of North India, being those of Sanskrit or Persian descent, are of average difficulty, though Sanskrit itself is hard. The Dravidian languages of the south are hard. The languages of the same family do not default to each other, however, learning another language from the same family as one you already know is of only easy difficulty until you learn it to an equal level. For example, knowing Malyalam makes Tamil an easy language to learn, even though it is hard for those who do not know a Dravidian language.

Indians are generally polyglots, particularly in modern times. An Indian is likely to know their native language, Hindi (or Hindustani), at least a bit of English, and smatterings of other languages they may have heard their neighbors speak when they were young. For example, a Gujarati may have Gujarati 13, Hindi 10, English 6, and Punjabi 3.

## **Character Development**

It is through the awarding of bonus character points that the GM can reward players that are able to understand and role-play Indian themes. A highly important consideration is how the character played their *dharma*, that is, how they fulfilled their role as dictated by their caste. For example, a member of any servile caste ought to be penalized should their character presume too much leadership authority. Equally, a character who should be leading, a *kshatriya* for example, should be penalized if they allow a servile character to take over their role.

## Character Types

Professions in India tend to be very specific. A character can therefore be based around a single skill, take the wrestler character type below as an example. Just as common are professions based around a particular specialization of a skill, vets for example, who specialize in the treatment of a particular type of animal.

The following list of character types concentrates on those that are more suited as PCs or NPCs and are not a representative cross-section of Indian society. In a land where there are professional suicides, it is not feasible to list all possible professions.

### Barbarian

Playing a foreigner to India or a person not of the dominant culture requires some consideration about how they fit into society. Before a people are assimilated into Indian society and adopt the caste system they are considered pariahs, even if they are politically dominant in areas. Examples include the British, Muslims, Kushans, Bactrian Greeks, and Shakas.

The Indian word for foreigner is "*mlechchha*," though the word "barbarian" is related to the Sanskrit *barbara*, meaning "stammerer."

*Typical disadvantages:* Social Stigma

### Bard

Keeping track of lineage is important to Indian castes and very important for royal families. As well as this duty, bards of rajas would keep alive story telling traditions. Often the raja's bard would also be his chariot driver.

*Typical advantages:* Patron, Claim to Hospitality, Voice

*Typical skills:* Bard, Bardic Lore, Genealogy Lore, History, Oral Literature, Poetry. A bard might be a fixture in a royal court, in which case a number of courtly skills will come in handy, *Savoir-Faire* before any others. These royals bards may also require the Charioteer skill (see *GURPS Low Tech*, p. xx).

### Beggar

The beggars in India are numberless. They are a miserable and pitiful lot and are envied by none. However, in some perverse way, they perform a noble task, giving people an easy way to accrue good *karma*.

Young urchin beggars might make good NPCs.

*Typical advantages:* Few. Beggars can be more easily defined by the advantages they may not take. Any form of above average wealth, naturally, and any level of elevated status.

They may have developed a number of hardy abilities however, such as Deep Sleeper.

*Typical disadvantages:* Poverty is required, as is a low Status. Uneducated. A beggar is very likely to have acquired unpleasant physical disfigurements of some sort, some of which, polio for example, are reasons why people may have become beggars. Disadvantages such as Lameness are therefore appropriate choices, as is a low Appearance. These illnesses will typically lead to low ST and HT scores.

*Typical skills:* Area Knowledge, Panhandling, Scrounging, Streetwise, Survival (Urban). It is not typical for beggars to thieve, but they certainly might pick up such skills as Pickpocket and Holdout.

### **Bhisti**

Servile characters offer a challenge to role-play, and this is particularly true in an Indian setting. One must lower one's ambitions. However, a minor character can have a disproportionate impact on an adventure, quite often because no one expects it of them. A good example is the eponymous *bhisti* (water carrier) of the movie *Gunga Din*.

*Typical advantages:* Patron.

*Typical disadvantages:* Low Self Image, Status, Poverty, Uneducated.

*Typical skills:* Depending entirely on profession.

### **Brigand**

Bandits and desperadoes in India might be from a caste that traditionally supports itself through robbery, or they might have suffered some misfortune that has driven them from society. It is common for bandits to band together and such bands may make bases out of abandoned forts. The *thags* (see page xx) were a fascinating class of assassin brigand.

Freedom fighters (e.g. Kashmiri separatists) and militant Marxists might resemble bandits, though they themselves would deny they are criminals.

*Typical advantages:* Ally Group.

*Typical disadvantages:* Secret, Uneducated.

*Typical skills:* As a typically violent profession, banditry requires combat skills. Area Knowledge, Camouflage, Carousing, Hiking, Orienteering, Survival (including urban specialization if city based, e.g. gangsters).

### **Charlatan**

India has a great tradition of illusionists; to many the "rope trick" is brought to mind when India is mentioned. The least impressive charlatan will have a handful of transparent tricks, such as levitating when covered by a sheet. The best however are masters at escape, deft contortionists, nimble with sleight of hand, and proficient chemists, knowledgeable about color changing, fire resistant, and explosive chemicals.

*Typical advantages:* Charisma, Double-Jointed, High Pain Threshold, Resistant to Poison, Versatile, Visualization.

*Typical skills:* Acting, Autohypnosis, Bard, Body Control, Chemistry, Enthrallment, Escape, Fire Eating, Fireworks, Holdout, Hypnotism, Pickpocket, Regurgitate, Sleight of Hand, Snake Charming.

### **Entertainer**

India has a tradition of traveling entertainers and many Indian's make their livings in this way. This can range from children able to contort themselves through small hoops for the edification of train passengers, to full circuses. (And might also include charlatans though they are so specialized as to deserve their own entry.)

*Typical advantages:* Ally Group, Charisma, Double-Jointed, Musical Ability, Voice.

*Typical skills:* Acrobatics, Acting, Artist, Bard, Dancing, Directing, Enthrallment, Juggling, Mimicry, Oral Literature, Performance, Singing, Snake Charming, Wrestling.

### **Eunuch**

As in the Middle East, Muslim rulers in India used eunuchs to guard their harems. These eunuchs might make interesting characters. They are likely to have fair combat skills, as they are armed guards, and have a good coterie of contacts.

Another type of eunuch in India are the transvestite *hijra*. This is a peculiar class of person castrated when young so that they may join this society. They dress as women and are considered auspicious. They unfailingly appear at weddings and offer blessings in return for money. They also get money by threatening to expose themselves or otherwise intimidating people. They for what is almost a secret society and have a web of contacts through the city so they know when marriages are taking place. They are generally too antisocial to be PCs but may be NPCs.

*Typical advantages:* Ally Group, Contacts.

*Typical disadvantages:* Eunuch, Odious Personal Habits (as pariahs of society, they have less use for social mores).

*Typical skills:* Intimidation, Panhandling, Streetwise.

### **Exiles**

Adventuring is a highly unusual profession in India; there is no adventurer caste. Therefore, characters that do take up itinerant thrill-seeking are likely to be outcasts in some way. Rama and the Pandavas are good examples, they were all forced into unsettled lives of adventure by being exiled.

*Typical advantages:* Unusual Background.

### **Farmer**

The vast majority of Indians are peasant farmers and they offer the greatest population available for adventurers. However, they are likely to be reluctant adventurers.

*Typical advantages:* None really. One might make a case for Disease Resistance due to hardiness of years of manual labor.

*Typical disadvantages:* Low Self Image, Status, Poverty, Primitive, Uneducated.

*Typical skills:* Agronomy, Animal Handling, Area Knowledge, Naturalist, Survival.

## **Guru**

Teachers are highly respected in India. Every character is likely to have had a teacher in the past to whom they feel a great affection which is certainly reciprocated. If they are still in contact then they many turn to their *guru* for practical advise.

One class of *guru* is the religious teacher.

*Typical advantages:* Ally Group, Charisma, Sanctity, Status, Tenure.

*Typical disadvantages:* Dependents.

*Typical skills:* Teaching and a particularly high skill in the area of expertise.

## **Holy Man**

There are a number of types of mystics in India.

There are *sanyassis* who have foregone a comfortable life to search for wisdom through meditation or gain favor with the gods through pilgrimage. Their aim is to better themselves spiritually. A *sadhu* is more aggressive about chasing mystical secrets. Often they will practice asceticism, searching out the truth that lies beyond the material world through self-inflicted abuse. By putting themselves through hardships they obtain a release from considerations of this world. Their search for truth typically takes them away from civilization, into the jungles and on pilgrimages.

Also removing themselves from civilization are the *shrmanas* who conduct rigorous debate and meditation on religious mysteries in forest retreats. The term *shramana* really only applies to non-*brahmin* religious seekers of Vedic times.

The *yogi* is similar to the ascetic, but rather than subject themselves to hardships, they put their bodies through the demanding disciplines of *yoga*. Some combine the two approaches, *yoga* and asceticism.

The Muslim mystic is the Sufi, though one who takes up the mendicant approach, as practiced by Hindu mystics, is called a "dervish."

Ascetics and *yogis* who gain magical powers through their deprivations are considered in the *Magical India* chapter under *Sadhu* and *Yogi*.

*Typical advantages:* Autotrance, Decreased Life Support, Double-Jointed, High Pain Threshold, Strong Will, True Faith. See also section above, *Acquiring Advantages*.

*Typical disadvantages:* Compulsive Vowing, Mendicant, Pacifism, Reclusive, Skinny, Vow.

*Typical skills:* Body Control, Meditation, Mental Strength, Nei Tan, Panhandling, Theology, Yoga. A holy man is likely to have given up a former profession so will have skills appropriate to their old profession.

## **Jungli**

The *adivasi* tribals of India live a fairly harsh life. They are generally poor. They are therefore often

available for mercenary work. Such a character is likely to have little contact with civilized society so much fun can be had playing up their ignorance and lack of concern for mores.

*Typical advantages:* Fit.

*Typical disadvantages:* Poverty, Primitive, Social Stigma.

*Typical skills:* Fishing, Naturalist, Survival, Tracking.

## **Magician**

The next chapter lists the various magic workers of India.

## **Mahout**

The caste of elephant handlers, *mahouts*, guard its secrets closely. As well they might, as their skills make them their services very valuable.

Elephants are not the easiest of animals to domesticate, but when they are tamed they form strong bonds with their masters.

*Typical advantages:* Ally (elephant).

*Typical skills:* Animal Handling, Packing, Riding (Elephant), Veterinary (Elephant).

## **Merchant**

The attraction of playing a merchant character is because of the wealth. They also have contacts with other lands. They generally do not travel themselves. For a non-sedentary adventure, they may pose difficulties as they generally do not travel.

During classical times the character may belong to a *shreni* guild.

In modern times, this character type includes those who make their money on the stock market and other forms of speculation.

*Typical advantages:* Ally Group, Contacts, Merchant Rank, Wealth

*Typical disadvantages:* Overweight, Unfit.

*Typical skills:* Accounting, Diplomacy, Economics, Fast-Talk, Gambling, Merchant.

## **Official**

India has been a bureaucratic country for the better part of its history. The Mauryan Empire was known to be overly official and likely did not institute the practice. In Muslim India, Delhi maintained a large officialdom and to be an imperial administrator was a coveted position. British India too was notorious for its bureaucracy. So over-official is India that it has given the English language the phrase "red tape" (folders were wrapped in a wide red band before being tied up with string).

The bureaucracy of India hold considerable power. The bureaucratic process is a powerful and indomitable force; little happens in India because of the maze of red tape between the initiation of an

official action and its conclusion. Also bureaucrats themselves hold excessive influence as they can stop or hurry a procedure. They are famous for being extremely condescending to patrons and the unscrupulous make a good deal of black money.

A peculiarity of Indian offices is the specialization of tasks. Many clerk perform only one task, such as short-hand note taking or typing, and refuse to do any other.

Officials also include British district officers, who, in addition to their administration skills, must also know the relevant languages and Area Knowledge. Cultural Adaptability is a useful advantage for such a character.

Note that Computer Operation is a rare skill.

*Typical advantages:* Administrative Rank, Claim to Hospitality (the public service looks after its own), Contacts, Literacy, Tenure (or the equivalent of, for modern day clerks who cannot be fired), Wealth (through corrupt monies, but must also take the Secret disadvantage in this case)

*Typical disadvantages:* Duty.

*Typical skills:* Accounting, Administration, Diplomacy, Stenography, Typing, Writing.

## **Physician**

Knowledge of medicine is such an in demand skill that the physician is a highly respected professional. There is a great range of doctors in India, from those with permanent practices, to those who perform ambitious surgery on the side of the road.

An Indian physician might specialize in one of the branches of medicine followed in India, but many combine them.

*Typical skills:* All medical skills, even Chi Treatment and Yin/Yang Healing, though an Unusual Background must be taken to explain how these skill were learnt.

## **Priest**

See under Clerical Investment for a discussion of the different types of priests.

*Typical advantages:* Charisma, Clerical Investment.

*Typical skills:* Bardic Lore, Performance/Ritual, Theology.

## **Raja**

Playing a member of the nobility is attractive as few classes in India have the necessary freedom to be adventurers. *Rajas* themselves are likely not available as PCs (though certainly not out of the question) as they are too tied up with their responsibilities to their lands, but sons of *rajas* are likely options.

Rajas are most likely to be of a *kshatriya* caste, though this is not strictly necessary.

*Typical advantages:* Ally Group, Literacy, Status, Wealth.

*Typical disadvantages:* Code of Honor, Dependents, Sense of Duty.

*Typical skills:* Administration, Diplomacy, Leadership, Politics, Savoir-Faire. Various combat skills, including perhaps Strategy.

## **Saint**

Saints are religious *gurus* who claim to have divine powers granted to them by God, either through their birth, holiness, or because they have discovered the way to enlightenment. There are loads of them in India and most of them are just tricksters (perhaps using charlatan skills to feign magical powers). Some are sincere, if they are not truly possessing these powers, they may believe they do, even if they have to fake them. They regularly attract followers and soon thereafter, great wealth.

Saint characters with true magical abilities are dealt with in the *Magical India* chapter under *Godmen*.

*Typical advantages:* Ally Group (followers), Charisma, Higher Purpose, Illuminated, Pious, Reawakened, Reputation, Sanctity, True Faith, Voice.

*Typical disadvantages:* Disciplines of Faith, Vows. Corrupt "saints" might have Greed, Lecherousness, and Megalomania.

*Typical skills:* Bard, Enthrallment, Meditation, Theology (perhaps with new, unique specializations).

## **Slave**

Playing a slave is a viable option. Although a slave does not have complete freedom, they are looked after better than many other menial strata of society.

*Typical advantages:* Patron.

*Typical disadvantages:* Duties, Status.

*Typical skills:* Depending on duties.

## **Spy**

Indian rulers have long made use of official informants, as the Arthashastra shows. These spies were little more than public servants charged with secretly informed on their colleagues and others they came into contact with; the better ones would go out and seek that knowledge.

In British times, espionage against the other imperial powers was an important business. In India, espionage was directed against the Russians in Central Asia. Spying for the British was normally conducted by the armed forces and the agents dispatched to Central Asia were largely army officers (as well as natives).

*Typical advantages:* Administrative Rank, Charisma, Contacts, Cultural Adaptability, Legal Immunity, Luck, Military Rank, Patron, Security Clearance.

*Typical disadvantages:* Duty, Secret, Sense of Duty.

*Typical skills:* Acting, Cartography, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, Orienteering, Shadowing.

## **Warrior**



This character type is extremely broad. It ranges from the conscripted farmer to the British officer, including within its scope Rajput knights, Muslim slave soldiers, and sepoys. All they have in common is some skill in combat. However, the range in skill is as vast a range as it is possible to encounter. Those trained in the use of weapons can be *very* skillful.

## Wrestler

The wrestler can do one thing well, but that is enough to make a profession. Wrestlers, some of which may come from wrestling castes (the *brahmin* Jethi caste is an example), make a living from appearing in tournaments or being a salaried wrestler with a patron.

*Typical advantages:* High physical attributes are a must; the training for Indian wrestling is excruciatingly intense. The Fit advantage is a natural consequence of training but a wrestler unlikely to be successful unless they have the Very Fit advantage.

*Typical skills:* Wrestling.

## Equipment

The Fantasy/Medieval Equipment list as given on p. B212 can be used for the Indian settings prior to the 20th century. During the 20th and 21st centuries the Modern Equipment list on p. B213 can be used. Even in these later times the items from the Fantasy/Medieval list are still available. As well as those items listed, items of very poor quality equal to half the listed price are available, but these items are of *very poor quality* and are likely to fail in some way. For example, a very low-quality meal is available for \$3.25, but could quite likely make the consumer sick. (Some items quite obviously cannot have a very poor quality complement, fancy new car for example. A little judgement is required.)

## Money

Many different currencies have been used in India. The most recent is the *rupee*. Currently 100 new *paisas* make a *rupee*, but previous to the adoption of the *paisa*, 16 *annas* made a *rupee*.

## Job Table

Job (Requirements), Monthly Income Success Roll Critical Failure

Poor Jobs

Beggar\* (Poor), \$25 11, Panhandling, or Scrounging 2d

Errand Boy/Girl (Youth), \$30 11 -2i/LJ, -1i, 1d

Laborer (ST and HT 9+), \$30 ST 2d/4d

Peasant Farmer (Agronomy 11+), \$25 PR 2d/-2i

Peddler\* (Merchant 10+), \$35 PR -1i/-1i, 2d

Porter\*\* (ST 12+), \$35 PR -1i/1d, -2i

Scrounger\* (Poor, Scrounging 9+), \$25 PR 2d

## Struggling Jobs

Apprentice (Craft skill 9+), \$40 PR -1i, 1d/LJ, -1i, 1d

Ascetic/*Sadhu*/Monk (none), \$40 Panhandling 2d/4d

Bandit\* (Survival 11+, one weapon skill 10+), \$60 best PR 3d/3d, caught (imprisoned or fine of -4i)

Courtesan\*\* (Attractive or better, Sex Appeal 12+), \$60 PR -1i/-1i, 1d

Entertainer\*\* (Acrobatics, Artist, Bard, Dancing, Juggling, Mimicry, Musical Instrument, Oral Literature, Performance, Poet, Singing, Snake Charming, or Wrestling 11+), \$40 PR 2d/-1i, 2d

Fisherman\* (Fishing 11+), \$40 PR 1d/-2i, 1d

Herdsman\* (HT 11+, Animal Handling 12+), \$35 Animal Handling 2d/-1i, 2d

Hunter\* (Survival 11+, Tracking 11+), \$50 Best PR 2d/3d, -1i

Peon (Administrative Rank <2), \$50 11 -1i/LJ, -2i

Rickshaw Driver\* (own rickshaw, Driving (Rickshaw/Autorickshaw) 12+), \$60 PR 2d/-2i, 4d

Sailor (Seamanship 11+), \$40 PR+1 2d/LJ, 2d

Servant (Savoir-Faire 11+), \$50 PR 1d/LJ, -1i, 2d

Thief\* (Four Thief skills at 13+, or three at 15+), \$65 Best PR 2d/2d, caught (imprisoned or fine of -4i)

## Average Jobs

Alchemist\* (Alchemy 14+), \$120 PR-1 -2i, 1d/-4i, 3d

Artisan\*\* (any craft skill 13+), \$90 PR -1i/LJ, -2i

Artist\*\* (Artist 13+), \$75 PR -1i/-2i

Caste Priest (Clerical Investment 1-3, Performance/Ritual 13+, Theology 11+, Genealogy Lore 11+), \$100 Best PR -1i/ -2i

Constable (Legal Enforcement Powers, Intimidation 11+), \$80 PR 2d/3d

Fortune-Teller\*\* (Astrology, Divination Spell, or Fast-Talk 13+), \$100 PR -2i/-3i, 1d

Petty Official (Administrative Rank 2-3, Literacy, Administration 11+), \$80 PR -2i/LJ, -2i

Scholar (Literacy, Suitable Patron, IQ 13+, and two scientific skills at 13+), \$150 IQ-2 -2i/LJ, -2i, 1d

Scribe\*\* (Literacy, Writing 12+), \$100 PR -1i/-2i

Shopkeeper (shop, Merchant 12+), \$150 PR -2i/-4i

Smuggler\* (Merchant 12+, Streetwise 11+), \$120 Best PR -1i, 1d/2d, caught (imprisoned or fine of -4i)

Soldier/Bodyguard\*\* (combat skills totaling at least 40), \$120 best weapon 2d/LJ, 4d

Comfortable Jobs

Charioteer (Driving (Chariot) 11+), \$220 PR 2d/3d

Official (Administrative Rank 4-5, Literacy, Administration 11+), \$300 PR -1i/-2i

Court Functionary (Savoir-Faire 14+), \$400 PR -2i, 1d/LJ, -1i, 1d

Eunuch (Eunuch, Savoir-Faire 11+), \$400 PR -2i/LJ, -2i, 3d

Jeweler\*\* (Jeweler 12+), \$300 PR or Merchant -2i/-5i

Landholder\* (land, Agronomy 12+, Area Knowledge 13+), \$250 Agronomy -3i/-6i

Magistrate (Administrative Rank 5, Law 14+), \$1,000 PR -1i/-2i, intrigue

Merchant\* (Merchant 12+), \$300 PR -2i/-5i

Military Officer\*\* (combat skills totaling 50+, Military Rank 2+, Leadership 12+), \$230 IQ or Strategy -2i, 3d/LJ, -2i, 5d

Physician\*\* (Physician 13+), \$350 PR -1i/LJ, -2i

Professional\*\* (e.g. Lawyer) (appropriate skill at 12+), \$250 PR -2i/LJ, -4i

Saint\* (Fast-Talk 12+), \$300 PR 2d/6d

Spy (Total from Acting, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Intelligence Analysis, and Interrogation of 30+), \$400 worst PR 3d/LJ, -1i, 5d

Teacher\*\* (Literacy, +2 Reputation, Teaching 12+, total scientific skills totaling at least 30), \$300 Teaching -2i/-4i

Temple Priest (Clerical Investment 4+, Performance/Ritual 14+, Theology 12+), \$200 Performance/Ritual -1i/-2i

Wealthy Jobs

City or Provincial Governor (Status 3, Administration 13+, Area Knowledge 13+ Law 11+, Politics 11+), \$2,500 Worst PR -2i/-4i, intrigue

High Temple Priest/Abbot (Status 3, Administration 13+, Politics 11+, Theology 13+), \$3,500 Worst PR -2i/-2i, intrigue

*Raja*\* (Inherited kingdom, Status 4+, total from Administration, Area Knowledge, Diplomacy, Politics, Savoir-Faire, and Strategy of at least 30), \$15,000 Best PR-4 -2i/-4i, intrigue

Minister (Status 3, Administration 11+, Politics 11+, Savoir-Faire 12+), \$8,00 Worst PR -1i/-2i,

intrigue

Key to Table

PR = prerequisite, LJ = lose job, "i" = months of income lost, "d" = dice of damage suffered, "\*" = a freelance job, and "\*\*\*" = a job that may be freelance or regular employment.

# Ancient and Classical India

## Indus Valley Civilization

History in India stretches back to the time of the world's earliest urban civilizations. At the time of the Old Kingdom in Egypt and the early dynasties of Mesopotamia, India was home to a remarkable civilization of unparalleled cultural unity and civic sophistication.

Growing out of a diverse village culture in the 3rd millennium B.C., the Indus Valley Civilization covered some 500,000 square miles at its peak centered on the lush and frequently flooded Indus and ancient Saraswati Rivers and their tributaries. The civilization consisted of numerous cities and villages, the largest being Mahenjo Daro on the Indus River (detailed on pp. 63-64 of *GURPS Places of Mystery*; though the reference in that book to the *Rig Veda* as an "epic" should be ignored) and Harrapa on the Ravi, after which the civilization is often known as "Harrapan."

The Indus Valley cities were wonders of civic planning, unprecedented in the ancient world. Each was built entirely from identical baked mud bricks and defended by massive brick walls, protecting the cities from river floods as much as from attackers. The streets ran north-south and east-west, with main streets dividing the city into blocks containing networks of smaller lanes. The cities were divided into districts based on social level. The western quarter of the two main cities was taken up by a raised "citadel" containing public buildings, such as the city's granary. A city-wide covered drainage system connected every house, the best of which were two-storied with courtyards.

The Indus Valley Civilization demonstrated a remarkable harmonization over a vast area. The civilization was twice as big as either Egypt or Mesopotamia, yet maintained a high level of standardization amongst its centers. Trade was of great importance, both within the civilization and the rest of India and with the civilizations to the west. The sophistication of the civilization and its extraordinary unity suggest a strong imperial or theocratic government. Surprisingly, the rulers of the "empire" left no direct evidence of themselves -- the Harrapans built no monuments to kings, priests, or gods.

This homogeneity lasted through the long lifetime of the civilization with successive levels of cities being built to the same plan. However, after about a thousand years it came to an end. Mahenjo Daro was abandoned in haste but in general the end seems to have come about through a more gradual civic decline. This was likely brought on by stresses caused by environmental changes such as shifts in the course of the Indus and a drying up of the Saraswati. As the region became less fertile due to desertification, there was a definite loss of cohesion and organization until about 1500 B.C. when the Indus Valley Civilization was eclipsed.

## Aryans

In the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C., the priestly caste of the people who called themselves the Arya, whose culture would come to dominate India, began compiling their hymns into the work of oral tradition called the *Rig Veda*.

The Aryans were the eastern-most branch of the Indo-European language-speaking people. As part of a great migration that took the Hittites to Anatolia and the Iranians to Persia, the Aryans migrated from their ancestral home in the central Asian steppes to settle in the northern Indus Valley. At this stage in their history the Aryans were a martial people, vigorous and fun-loving, delighting in music, drink, and gaming.

## Aryan Society

The society of the Aryans at the time of the compilation of the *Vedas* was pastoral as they had no cities. This is not to suggest that they were primitive however, they were a sophisticated tribal culture. The early Aryans were bronze-users and more technically accomplished than the Indus Valley culture (though still only tech level 1). Their warcraft in particular was superior (including the use of chariots and hafted axes) and their religion and poesy were very sophisticated.

After their related western cultures, Aryan society was initially divided into three classes, the noble *kshatra* and the common *vish*, with a corps of priestly *brahmins*. This organization was to evolve with the incorporation of non-Aryan Indians into the hierarchy and the *brahmins* becoming a stratum of society themselves. Hence was born the four-fold *varna* system with priestly *brahmins*, warrior *kshatriyas*, peasant *vaishyas*, and serf *shudras*. The *jati* system of castes dates from this time if not earlier, developing from endogamous subtribes or communities based on profession -- not, as proposed by Vedic theorists, through inter-*varna* marriage.

Early Aryan political organization was clan-based. A tribe was ruled by a *raja* (see *Kingship*), a position that was often hereditary, with a retinue of royal courtiers. It was a qualified kingship however, as the *raja* was beholden to a tribal council, either a council of important tribal men, called a *sabha* and/or a council of family heads, *samiti*. It was even possible for a tribe to have no paramount chief; a republic in some sense.

## Vedic Religion

Vedic religion is a young Hinduism, the evolution of which is detailed in *Hinduism Through the Ages*, p. xx.

The be all and end all of Vedic religion was sacrifice, *yajna*, the most common purpose of which was to gain success in some venture -- battle, marriage, etc. The sacrifice consisted of a complex and ritualized ceremony and was directed to a particular god who was enticed by praise to the site of the sacrifice to drink and eat with the congregation. The Vedic gods were generous, particularly Indra, the Aryan's favorite god, and would readily grant boons requested in this way. Other less amiable gods such as Varuna and Rudra were sacrificed to in order to appease their wrath.

Fire, was essential in the sacrifice, its heat, "*tapas*," provided creative energy. The narcotic drink *soma* was equally important. Fire and *soma* were incarnate as gods (Agni and Soma respectively).

The importance of sacrifice was not only in its placatory function; it had a moment that was far more primal. The world itself was created from a sacrifice (see *The Primordial Sacrifice and the Golden Egg*, p. xx) and as the manifest world is a projection of the divine world and a correspondence must be maintained between the two, the performing of sacrifice ensured nothing less than the perpetual creation and regeneration of the world. The greatest Vedic sacrifice was the ritual re-enactment of the sacrifice of Purusha. This most important and ritualistically involved of sacrifices was performed by seventeen *brahmins*.

In the Vedic world-view, *brahmins*, whose rites ensured the continuance of the world, were more crucial to existence than even the gods. The words used in a sacrificial rite were sacred and had to be recited *perfectly*. It took years of training for *brahmins*, guardians of the sacred utterances, to obtain faultless pronunciation, inflection, and intonation. For these reasons *brahmins* were highly esteemed in Vedic society.

However, *brahmins* were not the only class of religious practitioners in ancient India. Nonconformist and non-Aryan savants looked for answers outside the pedagogy of the *brahmins*. Often employing pre-Aryan ascetic methods, these mavericks were known as *shramanas*, strivers, and their discoveries, often found from solitary contemplation in the wilderness, would reform Hinduism in time.

## Advance Down the Ganga

The Aryan's first home in India was the Punjab, based between the Sutlej and the Yamuna. This was their Aryavarta. Here they settled into tribes and tended their herds of cattle and sheep. As well as their celebrated rivalry with the Dasas, tribe competed with tribe for territory and cattle. Two early tribes of importance were the Bharatas and the Purus. The *Rig Veda* tells how Sudas, the *raja* of the Bharatas, vanquished Purukutsa, the *raja* of the Purus who lead an alliance of ten tribes.

In the period approximately 1000-500 B.C., the Aryans moved their center out of Punjab and into the Gangetic basin. Their first base outside Punjab was the land between the Ganga and Yamuna. At about this time they acquired iron, bringing them to tech level 2. With this new material, but mainly with fire, they were able to clear the jungle from the banks of the great rivers and spread their domains down the Ganga all the way to Bengal. They became less pastoral and more agricultural with land becoming important as well as cattle wealth and primitive cities were founded, though not at all like those of the Indus Valley Civilization.

During this time, the nature of the tribes was changing. By the 8th century B.C., the smaller tribes had begun to consolidate into sixteen much larger tribal nations, called *mahajanapadas* (see map). The battle of Kurukshetra from the *Mahabharata* was fought between factions of the Kuru *mahajanapada*, formed from a unity of the Bharata and Puru tribes. The *mahajanapadas* were proto-kingdoms and from them were formed the first real monarchical states in the 6th century; Koshala, Rama's kingdom based at Ayodhya, Vatsa, Avanti (Malwa), Videha, and Varanasi were the first real kingdoms in India. Magadha, another early kingdom, is notable not only for its later importance (see below), but because it was founded by a *vaishya* rather than a *kshatriya*.

Now that lands were beholden to an individual king their fates depended on the character and competence of that king. A good example is Bimbisara of Magadha, an enlightened ruler who was patron to both Buddha and Mahavira. Bimbisara was resolute and energetic, constantly touring his lands, improving his kingdom, and making use of village councils. His kingdom expanded, absorbing Anga and unifying by marriage with Koshala (itself having absorbed Varanasi), in a general 5th century process that saw the kingdoms building themselves up at the expense of their neighbors. Through this process Magadha would come to control most of the Gangetic basin and extend its influence into Kalinga (Orissa) and the Deccan.

## Cultural Advance

With the rise of stable dynastic kingdoms and the growth of urban life, Indian society evolved. One notable effect of this social progress was the birth of new *jati* castes to fill new roles. In fact, the whole *vaishya varna* grew in status to become more of a mercantile caste. As a consequence of the ascent of the *vaishyas*, the *shudras* too became better off. The vacancy left at the bottom of the hierarchy was filled by the *varna*-less untouchables.

*Brahmins* also faced changes to their standing, but it was a decline in status rather than an improvement. The sixth century B.C. was marked by social and intellectual ferment. *Brahmins* had trouble fulfilling their roles in the new diffuse urban society and discoveries of non-*brahmin shramanas* were infusing popular religion, challenging the *brahmin* monopoly. The findings of the sages were compiled into the Upanishads and set Hinduism on a new path, outlined in *Universal Truths*, p. xx. It was as part of this *kshatriya* religious backlash that Mahavira founded the Jain religion and Gautama Buddha preached his path to spiritual liberation (see *Jainism*, p. xx and *Buddhism*, p. xx). The two great religions, Jainism and Buddhism, preached non-violence to all living creatures, tolerance, and self-discipline, values that were becoming vogue in India at the time and which became cornerstones of the Indian ethos. The teachings of these faiths won immediate popular acceptance owing to their simplicity and practicality. The sermons of both were preached in commonly spoken languages.

*Kshatriyas* for their part lost their position of divine right to kingship to a new precept wherein suitability to rule was not determined by birth but through the *rajasuya* and *ashvamedha* ceremonies. The great empires that would inherit political authority from the *mahajanapadas* were all *shudra* dynasties.

## **Mauryan Empire**

In about 360 B.C. Mahapadma Nanda a soldier with a *shudra* mother usurped the throne of Magadha. The Nanda Empire had its capital at Pataliputra and conquered the rest of the Gangetic plain. On his death his many sons were not able to hold on to the empire. The turmoil following the end of the Nanda Empire coincided with the arrival of India's most famous visitor, Alexander the Great.

### **Alexander**

In 331 B.C. Alexander of Macedon defeated the Persian king Darius III at the battle of Gaugamela and was proclaimed King of Persia. He crossed the Hindu Kush in 327 B.C. to occupy Kabul (then a Persian holding) and crossed the Indus into India proper in 326 B.C. Across the Jhelum, Alexander met one of his most formidable challenges in Raja Porus. The battle against Porus was not the first time Alexander had met Indian troops at the battle of Gaugamela where Indians had formed part of the Persian army. With this prior experience, Alexander dealt with Porus's 200 elephants in defeating the *raja*. Brought before Alexander, Porus so impressed the general with his regal bearing he was made governor of Punjab.

The battle against Porus was hard fought and although no other Indian *raja* offered Alexander comparable opposition in his push east across Punjab, his men were exhausted by the battle and unnerved by the alien land. They did not have the heart to travel further. So Alexander did not cross the Beas (but what if?) and instead headed down the Indus in 324 B.C. intending to travel home along the coast. However, even after Alexander's death in 323 B.C., Greek generals governed parts of north west India.

Alexander left a significant mark on India in breaking the power of the Punjab *rajyas* and leaving a population of Greeks in eastern Persia and north west India. However, the weight of his legacy was not recognized by native historians and he was quickly forgotten.

### **Chandragupta Maurya**

Greek legend has it that Chandragupta Maurya (referred to as Sandrocottus) met Alexander and was imprisoned and sentenced to death for impertinence. However, he escaped and inspired by the great general overthrew the Nanda emperor and took Pataliputra in 324 B.C. He spent nearly his whole reign expanding his empire to the west and in 305 B.C., shortly before the end of his reign, he signed a treaty with Alexander's general Seleucus Nicator, restricting the Greeks to the distant side of the Hindu Kush (in exchange for 500 elephants). In 301 B.C. Chandragupta left his throne (died, abdicated to become Jaina monk, who really knows?) to his son Bindusara.

The empire of the Maurya (Peacock) Dynasty was truly great. By the end of Chandragupta's reign it extended from Bengal to the Hindu Kush and during the reign of his grandson, Ashoka, it extended south to beyond the Krishna River. The population of this empire was in the tens of millions, made up of diverse cultures, languages, and religions, the heterodoxies being at their height. The treaty with Nicator spread the Mauryan fame to the west and ambassadors were sent to Pataliputra from Syria and Egypt. They reported back on India's prosperity and order. The invasion by Alexander had brought greater trade ties with the west and under imperial stability the state-owned farms prospered and the empire instigated the cultivation of previously untilled land.



The Empire was remarkable not only for its size and prosperity, but also for its administration. Chandragupta was reputedly aided in running his empire by his *brahmin* advisor Chanakya (also known as Kautilya), the alleged author of the *Arthashastra*. The Mauryan government was highly organized and efficient for its time. A high level of uniformity throughout the Empire was achieved with weights and measures standardized and a universal coinage instituted. The state controlled many important industries including the mines, shipbuilding, and weaving and included sanitation and famine relief in its responsibilities, all requiring a burgeoning bureaucracy. The Emperor was an integral part of the administration; the Mauryan system was hierarchical with no member of the bureaucracy doing anything without the knowledge of his superior. In his capital, the Emperor governed with his municipal boards (viz. industry, commerce, taxation, foreigners, vital statistics, and civic amenities), each made up of five elders. One arm of the emperor's state control policy was a vast army of hundreds of thousands of infantry, tens of thousands of cavalry, and thousands of chariots and elephants. The other arm was the secret service. The emperor maintained a great legion of spies which, as well as providing intelligence, was an important method of maintaining efficiency and controlling corruption. Administration outside the Emperor's demesne was delegated to viceroys of the imperial provinces (Taxila, Malwa, Suvarnagiri in Karnataka, and Kalinga after its conquest by Ashoka) with district governors under them. The hierarchy extended to the village, which had a headman, a tax collector, and other officials. The emperor also toured outside his home domains, holding court in smaller centers.

An additional system of administration was the private interest guilds called *shreni*. The *shreni* were veritable communities, controlled by councils with a measure of judicial control over their members. The organization of some *shreni* was so complete that they were sometimes given the responsibility of colonizing new areas or administering towns they had an overwhelming commercial interest in. *Shreni* had four ranks, apprentices were entitled to 1/4 of the profits of their work, senior apprentices 1/2, and journeymen 3/4. Masters were entitled to all of their profits. Financial relations between *shreni* was commonly on a barter system.

## Ashoka

Bindusara extended the empire south to the borders of the friendly southern kingdoms. However, he left the unfriendly Kalinga nation (modern day Orissa) for his son Ashoka to tackle.

Ashoka succeeded his father in 269 B.C. and followed his forebear's example of expanding his empire by subduing his neighbors. In 261 B.C. he conquered mighty Kalinga. 100,000 were killed and 150,000 enslaved in the bloody conquest, a massacre that shocked Ashoka and left him deeply moved. He felt great remorse for the horror he inflicted in Kalinga and thenceforth eschewed force as a method of conquest, taking up the course of righteousness and *ahimsa*. He became a vegetarian, gave up hunting, outlawed animal sacrifice, and renounced the state's use of torture and capital punishment. He used himself as an example for his subjects to improve themselves. To this end he instituted a new class of "officers of righteousness" (*dharma-mahamatra*) and had his proclamations on *dharma* inscribed on rocks and pillars throughout his realm. He traveled his empire personally on *dharma yatras* (tours of righteousness) in order to personally spread the *dharma*. He built roads through his empire (the Grand Trunk Road linking Pataliputra with Taxila is used to this day) with rest-houses for travelers and fruit trees for shade. He arranged the digging of wells and promoted the cultivation of medical herbs.

Ashoka Devanampiya ("Beloved of the Gods") was a great emperor, both temporarily and spiritually, a genuine *chakravartin*. Not only did he rule India's largest ever pre-British empire magnanimously, efficiently, and peacefully, he took it upon himself to improve the morality of his subjects as a father. The world has not seen his like since. If he had not left such enduring evidence of his own existence with his inscriptions he would seem like a myth.

## After Ashoka

The empire that Ashoka had fashioned from his inheritance could not survive the loss of his personality. Following his death in 232 B.C. Ashoka's empire started disintegrating. As many as ten emperors followed Ashoka in the 50 years till Brihadratha was killed by his *brahmin* general Pushyamitra Shunga and a new dynasty was begun. The Shungas did not have the authority of the Mauryas but their reign is notable for the revival of the *asvamedha*. In 72 B.C. after ten Shunga emperors, what remained of the empire was usurped by the Kanvayana dynasty who lasted through four emperors until they were overcome by the Andhras in 27 B.C. (see *Andhra*, p. xx).

Remnants of Alexander's settlers, the Bactrian Greeks declared their independence from Persian Seleucid rule in the 3rd century and by 180 B.C. had wrested Punjab from the feeble imperial hold and were able to raid as far as Pataliputra. Their king Menander, who ruled around 150 B.C., became famous for having converted to Buddhism. The Greek control of Punjab was a time of increased intellectual traffic between India and the West, notably in the sharing of medical knowledge. Western astronomy was imported into India, as was the astrological zodiac.

The five century interregnum between the Empires of the Mauryas and the Guptas was a time of foreign invasion as wave after wave of tribes crossed the north west mountains. The Han dynasty in China was most powerful at this time and in expanding its borders set off a chain of migrations as one tribe after another forced their neighbors to make space for them.

The Greeks were conquered by the first of these tribes, the Scythians who were known in India as Shakas. The Shakas held Punjab for about 100 years before the arrival of the Kushans (Yueh-chih), themselves forced to migrate by the Hunas (Hsiang nu, White Huns). The Shakas relocated south into Rajasthan and Malwa.

The most famous of the Kushan kings was Kanishka who around A.D. 100 ruled Afghanistan, Punjab, Sind, and the Ganga down to Varanasi. He too converted to Buddhism (possibly from Zoroastrianism) and patronized the Fourth Great Buddhist Council which started the Greater Vehicle-Lesser Vehicle schism. The Kushan dominion lasted until A.D. 240, only to be ended by the Persian Sassanians from the west.

## **Gupta Empire**

After centuries of disunity, an enduring successor to the Maurya Empire finally emerged in the fourth century A.D. The Gupta Empire was never as extensive as the Maurya Empire, nor was its political control as strong, but the Guptas reigned during the apogee of Hindu cultural energy, India's "Golden Age."

### **The Emperors**

#### **Chandra Gupta I (r. A.D. 320-335)**

Chandra Gupta of Magadha could clearly see greatness in his future when he adopted the name of the founder of the glorious Maurya Empire and proclaimed himself "Maharajadhiraja" (Great King of Kings) at his coronation. It was not from his own humble origins that he felt the audacity to make this claim but rather because of his marriage into the Lichchavi clan of Vaishali which gave him Pataliputra as a dowry and made him the most important monarch of the Gangetic plains.

#### **Samudra Gupta (A.D. 335-376)**

From his father Samudra Gupta inherited a kingdom stretching from Pataliputra to Prayag (Allahabad). Following his father's deathbed instructions to rule the whole world, he expanded the empire as far as Kashmir and Assam. An inscription boldly carved into one of Ashoka's pillars in

Prayag tells how Samudra conquered nine *rajās*, humbled eleven others, and exacted tribute from five of his neighbors including Kalinga, the *rajās* of Rajputana, and the Shakas of Malwa/Gujarat, now known as the "Western Satraps." He conducted a great invasion of South India and subdued the southern *rajās*, though without incorporating any of the south into his empire.

The territories he conquered were vast and though he did not extend his territories into the Deccan and the Western Satraps defied him, he was strong enough to perform the *asvamedha*. As well he might, as Samudra Gupta was a conquering emperor of the highest order -- an Indian Napoleon.

### **Chandra Gupta II (A.D. 376-415)**

Chandra Gupta II ruled over the empire at its most glorious and earned for himself the title of "Vikramaditya" (Splendid as the Sun). After defeating Rudrasena III, king of the Shakas in A.D. 409 after 6 years of fighting, his dominions extended from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal. He brought the Deccan under his direct influence by marrying his daughter Prabhavati to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka Dynasty whose lands south of the empire covered much of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and north-west Andhra Pradesh. When Rudrasena died young, Chandra Gupta was effectively overlord of the lands in the Deccan while his daughter was steward to the Vakataka heirs. Chandra Gupta himself married Kuvera of the Nagas, strengthening Gupta control of the east.

After capturing it from the Western Satraps, Chandra Gupta moved his capital to Ujjain and it was here at Chandra Gupta's court that Gupta culture truly flowered.

### **Kumara Gupta (A.D. 415-455)**

The glory of the Guptas continued through the rule of Kumara Gupta. However, the empire was threatened near the end of his reign by invasions from the Hunas barbarians. Kumara was able to keep the invaders out and celebrated his victories by performing the *ashvamedha*.

### **Skanda Gupta (A.D. 455-467)**

Despite presiding over the beginning of the decline of the empire, Skanda Gupta was as great an emperor as his forefathers. His misfortune was having to repel the increased invasions of the Hunas at the same time as putting down rebellions in the hill tribes of Vidhya. Skanda's brave efforts kept the empire intact and to celebrate his successes Skanda Gupta took the title Vikramaditya. However, the constant warfare weakened the empire, draining the royal treasury and starting the empire on its slide.

### **Later Guptas**

The Gupta Empire was to last until A.D. 550, by which time the Guptas had become no more than minor kings. Known later Guptas were Kumara Gupta (A.D. 473-474), Buddha Gupta (476-495), Vainya Gupta (495-508), Bhanu Gupta (510-511), Narsimha Gupta (?), and Vishnu Gupta (d. 550). They were unable to hold the empire together which had begun to disintegrate shortly after Skanda Gupta. By A.D. 484 the Hunas were ruling in Bactria under Toramana and by A.D. 500 he had gained Punjab as well. Toramana was succeeded by his son, the tyrant Mihirakula who ruled an extensive kingdom. The Hunas came to dominate Rajasthan and likely formed the Rajput tribe (who procured *brahmin* endorsement of a specious Aryan *kshatriya* background).

The collapse of the empire saw the outlying provinces, Kashmir, Assam, Kalinga, Nepal, and Bengal, gain their independence. Successor states arising during the Gupta atrophy included a separate Gupta line at the former western capital of Ujjain, the Maukharis of Valabhi, the Gurjaras at Jodhpur, and the Maitrakas, former Gupta feudatories in Gujarat.

## The Empire

The Gupta Empire was remarkably stable from the time of Chandra Gupta I to Skanda Gupta. The reigns of the emperors were long and they had ample time to see in fully matured regimes. Furthermore, when their successors came to rule themselves, they were well prepared, having spent the better part of their lives being primed for rule.

The Guptas did not attempt to rule their empire as absolute monarchs. Instead, local authorities ran the provinces of the empire to local customs. These authorities might be subject kings or guilds or communities. Several conquered kings were reinstated, crowned by emperor himself, as imperial subjects. Imperial control was passed on to the provinces by governors who ensured that peace was maintained and the imperial taxes paid. The role of the emperor was to ministrate over the local authorities and arbitrate between them. He also was a moral figurehead, his existence, as the *chakravartin*, infused the realm with a measure of morality.

The government of the Guptas was less centralized than that of the Mauryas and a smaller bureaucracy was required. However, the Guptas still maintained a large intelligence service and army. Even while delegating responsibility for administration to subordinate communities, the state ran several industries itself, including the mines and munitions production.

A significant amount of the imperial revenue came from land taxes, which amounted to 1/4 of a land's product. Additional taxes were paid for irrigated land and taxes were imposed on wealth. Citizens were obliged to work one day a month on public works such as building roads and irrigation.

Despite the fairly heavy tax burden, agricultural production flourished. This supported strong trade within India and with foreign lands such as China, South-east Asia (see *Cultural Colonialism*, p. xx), and Rome, though the trade with Rome dried up as the trade with India exhausted the gold of the Mediterranean empire.

The brisk commerce of the Gupta Empire built strong *shreni* guilds. The *shreni* were well treated by the emperor and were granted tax breaks similar to those enjoyed by temple *brahmins*. They developed quite a culture with each *shreni* having a distinctive insignia including colored banners used on festival carnivals.

The Empire was a successor to the empire of Ashoka not only because it covered a similar area. Ashoka established precedents of munificence and paternity in imperial rule, which the Guptas followed. The Gupta Empire was demonstrably peaceful. Crime was generally low and punishment for crime was mild; there was no capital punishment in the Gupta Empire. The relative harmony of the Empire was due to a number of factors. Buddhism and Jainism were still strong religions and their influence had become part of the Indian spirit. The prosperity of the Empire was a great force for harmony.

## Culture

The pinnacle of classical Indian culture was reached during the reign of Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya. During his reign art, literature, music, dance, sculpture, temple building, and science flourished under imperial patronage. The Gupta age saw authoritative treatises written on a multitude of subjects including grammar, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and the *Kamasutra*, the famous discourse on the art of love. The most outstanding literary figure of the Gupta period was Kalidasa, the "Shakespeare of India," Vikramaditya's court dramatist. The astronomer Aryabhatta too lived in Gupta times, composing his *Aryabhitiya* in A.D. 499.

By the time of the Gupta Empire, India was well within tech level 3.

This era saw Hinduism, evolved into its classic form, reassert itself. Gupta Hinduism and the culture of the Hindus was essentially that outlined in the *India* and *Religious India* chapters, i.e. little different from modern Hinduism; its overriding principle was *varnashramadharma*. This culture and religion was a culmination of all that had come before it and contained Vedic and Upanishadic Hinduism as well as undeniable influences of Buddhism and Jainism. Further, Hinduism had moved into its Puranic age with the old gods superseded by the sects of Shiva and Vishnu (who had incorporated Buddha into his pantheon).

Behind the renewed vigor of Hinduism was the *bhakti yoga* of the *Gita*, a definite swing from the philosophical Upanishadic approach to a more experiential, creative mode. In time greater expressions of *bhakti* would make their way from the south. Important in regaining ground from the heterodoxies was imperial patronage of Hinduism, it became a tenet that kings were responsible for the *brahmin* priesthood. The Guptas were Hindus themselves and provided tax relief to temples. Despite competing for adherents, the major religions coexisted peacefully in north India. In fact, the Gupta period was a strong one for Buddhism as it was at this time that the Ajanta and Ellora Caves were created.

## Harsha

The Gupta Empire was restored briefly by Harsha Vardhana who in A.D. 606 at the age of 16 became *maharaja* of Thanesar on the Sutlej and Yamuna. He subjugated the kingdoms that had previously paid homage to the Guptas. Harsha was an emperor of great energy, if he were not he could not have held the fractious empire together. He traveled constantly, sitting in court throughout his empire adjudicating on disputes and hearing petitions. Despite his efforts he could not build an empire that would endure beyond his death.

Harsha restored the Gupta Empire not just in land, but also in character. Harsha himself was liberal, mild, enlightened, and erudite. For a brief time north India again experienced something of the peace of the Guptas. However, the Golden Age was turning sour. Law and order were beginning to fail; *sati* was on the rise, and in Hinduism Tantric sects were appearing. As impressed as Hsuan-Tsang was with Harsha's empire, he was twice attacked by bandits and was nearly sacrificed to Durga, misfortunes the like of which Fa-Hsien did not experience when visiting Chandra Gupta II's Empire.

After Harsha's reign there was disunity again in northern India as dynasty after dynasty tried to capture Kannauj, the new political center of northern India.

## Southern Kingdoms

While kingdoms rose and fell in the north of India, the south moved to its own rhythms. The Dravidian-language-speaking natives of south India were not Aryans and had a distinct culture, expressed clearly in their matriarchal customs and traditions of cousin marriage. Culture diffused between north and south and over time the southerners took up Aryan practices, becoming patriarchal and exogamous. The Aryanization of the south inevitably produced a caste system. The caste system of the south however was almost free of *kshatriya* and *vaishya* (true in Bengal also as it happens). The southern *brahmins* were the keepers of Aryan culture, whereas the *shudras* were the original Dravidians. Division within the southern *shudra varna* was along regional lines as much as vocation with five secondary castes, hill, forest, coast, desert, and plains people, intermediary between *varna* and *jati*. Outside the caste system there were untouchables who in the south were divided into two groups, "left hand" (*idangai*) agriculturists and "right hand" (*valangai*) pastoralists.

The spread south of Jainism and Buddhism, which lit bonfires of enthusiasm in the north, created communities in the south. However, the heterodoxies did not have the same impact on local Hinduism as they did in the north. They remained separate communities occasionally subject to

persecution. Hinduism in the south was notably different from the north. Devotion had always played an important part in religion and infused all aspects of culture; southern poetry, music, and dance were bedded in religious devotion. The south in return exported its devotional Hinduism to the north beginning in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. chiefly through its devotional poetry, which flourished in the Pandyan court of Madurai where the *sangam* poetry college reputedly held 500 poets.

The prosperity in the southern parts of the country was based upon the long-established trade links of India with other civilizations. The Egyptians and Romans had trade relations with southern India through sea routes and links were also established with Southeast Asia. The contact with the West brought Christianity to south India. Legend has it that it was introduced by Saint Thomas to Kerala in 52 AD (see *Saint Thomas*, p. xx).

## **Tamil Nadu**

In the far south of the peninsula, south of the Krishna River, three Tamil kingdoms coexisted. To the west was Chera, in the center Pandya with its capital at Madurai, and to the east Chola with its capital at Tanjore.

The Cheras prospered under trade links with Arabs who had learnt to make use of the monsoon winds. Many Arabs took up residence in Kerala. The Cholas benefited from equally profitable trade with Southeast Asia and exported their culture to that region.

The three kingdoms were constantly at each other's throats with the Pandya's alliances alternating between Chera and Chola, but when threatened by an outside threat as they were by Kharavela of Kalinga in 165 B.C., they banded together. This unity did not last and they soon went back to bickering. This left them vulnerable to the new force of the Pallavas, a successor to the Deccan kingdom of Andhra.

## **Andhra**

Originating in the heartland of modern Andhra Pradesh (funnily enough) in about 230 B.C., the *brahmin* Andhra dyansty (also known as the Satvahana (Seven Horse) Dynasty) became a huge force in the Deccan. They conquered pretty much all of central India as well as Magadha in 27 B.C. The capture of Magadha was accomplished by Satakarni I who reigned from about 40 or 30 B.C. He secured many allies amongst the Marathas and performed the *ashvamedha*.

Contemporaneous with the Andhra kingdom was a resurgent Kalinga under the Jaina Maharaja Kharavela.

The most glorious of the Andhra maharajas was Gautamiputra who reigned from A.D. 80 to 104. He conquered the Shakas of Malwa, extended the empire into Saurashtra, and subdued the Yavanas and Pahlavas of Punjab. The Krishna River marked the southern boundary of the kingdom. Later rulers could not hold on to this large area and the empire shrank and in A.D. 220 broke into small kingdoms.

## **Pallava, Calukya, and Later Cholas**

The Pallava Dynasty, an Andhra noble family, which rose in the fourth century A.D. at Kanchipuram in Chola region came to dominate the deep south, having the three older kingdoms, Chera, Chola, and Pandya, under its thumb. The Pallava height was from the sixth to the ninth century A.D.

The Chalukya Dynasty came to power at Vatapi (Badami) in the sixth century under Pulakesin I. He

used the *ashvamedha* to extend his domains. His grandson Pulakesin II, inheriting an even further expanded kingdom from his father, was the greatest king of the Chalukyas. He ruled from A.D. 608 to 642. During his reign he repulsed an invasion by Harsha, defeated the armies of Kalinga, and defeated also the forces of Pallava, the sworn enemies of the Chalukyas. Despite creating one of India's strongest states of the time he was defeated by Narasimha Varman of the Pallavas who then destroyed Vatapi. The Chalukyas continued to dominate southwestern India until overthrown in A.D. 753 by Dantidurga of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty.

In A.D. 850, Vijayalaya of Chola recaptured Tanjore from the Pallavas. This began a period of Chola hegemony of South India. The later Chola kingdom had its height under Rajaraja (A.D. 985-1018) and his son Rajendra (A.D. 1018-1048). Rajaraja conquered most of South India and Sri Lanka. Rajendra raided as far north as Bengal and captured lands overseas in Malaya and Sumatra. This "Golden Age" did not outlast Rajendra's reign but the Chola kingdom lasted until the 14th century.

## Campaigns in Ancient and Classical India

In designing a campaign in Ancient or Classical India, available settings range from the pastoralism of the early Aryan tribes to the Golden Age of Chandra Gupta II and Ashoka Maurya's empire of righteousness. The political scope of Ancient India runs from the early clan-based societies and tribal republics through the autocratic despotism of the *Arthashastra* to the enlightened benevolence of Ashoka. Religiously the range is from the nature-based gods of the *Rig Veda* to the cosmic systematics of *dharma* and *samsara*, but the breadth of Ancient and Classical India also includes the splinter religions of Jainism, Buddhism, and their kin. A great amount of variety can be found in Ancient India giving the campaign designer many options, but perhaps the salient aspect of India's early history is its sparseness. The fact that so much of India's past is unknown allows great latitude in tuning a setting to one's liking.

The same freedom allows any level of magic to be added into a historical setting. To an Indian, the world is filled with magic, the ancient world to a greater extent than the modern world. The archetypal magical setting is that of the Hindu epics detailed in the chapter *Epic India* and it would not be inappropriate for such a high level of magic, or a lesser level, to appear in a campaign set in "historical" India.

Ancient and Classical India is a rich source for home-made settings. Room can be found in an invented world for a tropical land with intractable customs and a spiritual tradition of such volume that it overflows the land's boundaries. Alternatively, aspects of Ancient and Classical India can be incorporated piecemeal into other settings.

### Crossovers

#### GURPS Egypt

The Indus Valley Civilization is contemporaneous with the earlier dynasties of Egypt. The urban civilization in India lasted until around the beginning of the Egyptian New Kingdom (from 1570 B.C.). During this time the Harrapans had considerable contact with the West, chiefly with Mesopotamia but also to an extent with Egypt. It may even be the case that Punt (see *GURPS Egypt* p. 30) can be identified with the Indus Valley.

The civilization of Egypt outlasted that of the Indus Valley and existed right through the time of the Mauryan Empire, the last Pharaoh, Ptolemy XVI, dying in 39 B.C.

Alexander conquered Egypt in 332 B.C. before invading the heart of the Persian Empire. Egyptian soldiers joining Alexander's army would be likely to be part of his invasion of India.

## **GURPS Greece**

Perhaps the most direct contact of India with the Greeks (known in India as Yavana, probably from Ionian) was during Alexander's invasion. However, there was some contact before this through the Persian Empire (which, on occasion, exiled troublesome Greeks to Bactria). In fact, a tribe known as Nysa, living between Kabul and the Indus, claim Greek descent, believing that Heracles and Dionysus conquered north-west India.

Prior to Alexander's invasion opening up greater contacts, Greeks had some funny theories about India. Including tales of one-legged creatures who use their feet as sun-umbrellas and wrap themselves in their huge ears to keep warm. Herodotus (see sidebar) managed to get a few things right, such as his descriptions of "wool"-bearing cotton trees and fanatically life-respecting Jains, wonders no less fantastical than the giant gold-hoarding ants.

After Alexander, Greeks colonized Bactria in greater numbers. Settlers in northwest India made true Greek cities, the citizenship of which was coveted. As the Indian inhabitants of Bactrian Greek cities were Hellenized, so were the Yavanas Indianized.

The increased contact between the two civilizations, particularly through the exchange of ambassadors, lead to a greater respect of their respective culture and learning. A story about Bindusara Maurya has him attempting to purchase wine, figs, and a philosopher from Antiochus I, and willing to pay a high price for the sophist. Antiochus sent the wine and figs as requested but his philosophers were not for sale. However, Bindusara apparently did obtain a Greek philosopher, one Iamboulos.

There are possibilities that some important Indians, including Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka, might have Greek blood.

## **GURPS Imperial Rome**

Rome had considerable contact with India, mainly through trade with the south. As a fantastic land of enormous wealth, India could figure in an *Imperial Rome* campaign where adventurers are willing to travel far afield.

Romans, or Romaka as they were known to Indians, established a number of trading stations in cities along India's west coast. They even built temples and stadia there. In India, Romans were sometimes taken on as mercenaries. Professional Roman soldiers cut quite a figure and would often be employed as elite troops or guards.

Alternatively, Romans might encounter Indians outside of India. Indian rulers sent ambassadors to Augustus and devoted Indians occasionally brought Indian religion to Europe -- there are a number of stories of Indians immolating themselves to demonstrate their faith in reincarnation. During Rome's struggles with the Parthians, many envoys were sent from India to collaborate against the common foe.

## **GURPS China**

Of the great civilizations, India had the greatest contact with China. Separated by the Himalayas, trade in goods and philosophies traveled largely through Central Asia but also to the east of the great mountains and over the seas. Towns along the Silk Road became vibrant confluences of the two heavyweight civilizations.

As the homeland of Buddhism India attracted the Chinese as a pilgrimage destination. The two famous Chinese Buddhists, Fa-hsien and Hsuan-Tsang (with or without his monkey companion, see



*Foreign Correspondents*, p. xx), traveled to India in search of Buddhist texts. Many took up residence in the land of Buddha's birth, as many Indians made China their home for various reasons.

### **GURPS Time Travel**

One attraction of ancient India to time travelers is the fact that so much of India's history is unknown. Serious scholars of history would love to know more about the mysterious Indus Valley Civilization or where the Aryans came from. While it might not seem terribly exciting to travel back to the beginning of history to observe the world's first urban drainage experts, one never knows what secrets are waiting to be discovered in this most poorly recorded period of history or what things could go wrong to the best prepared of expeditions.

Another attraction of travelling through time is to see important events or famous historical people. Alexander, Buddha, and Ashoka all stand out as the most impressive personages of the period. Of these three, Buddha probably had the greatest impact on history, his sermon at Sarnath being his most important moment. (Cases can be made for Alexander and Ashoka's importance over Buddha. However, Alexander had done all he was going to do by the time he reached India and Ashoka would have been nothing if it weren't for Buddha.) As well as these and other historical figures, legendary or apocryphal characters such as Krishna or Rama could be sought out in their historical setting.

## The Mysteries of Harrapa

It is an irony that a country with so much history has left so little record of it. This problem confounds all of India's ancient or classical history but particularly so for the Indus Valley Civilization. So very little is known about the Civilization and there is so much that intrigues. The script of the Harrapan language has not been deciphered and so very little is known about the Harrapans themselves. The Harrapans did not leave grand tombs that have been so informative in other civilizations, so nothing is known about who ruled.

The great unanswered questions about the Indus Valley Civilization are: How did the civilization end? What sort of government did it have? Were the inhabitants Dravidians? Are they related to the South Indians?

## Indus Religion

Although very modest about it, the citizens of the Indus Valley Civilization were religious. The Mother Goddess was widely worshipped. Also worshipped was the phallus as a symbol of the "Horned God." This god, maybe a proto-Shiva, is represented in a yogic pose, surrounded by animals wearing a horned headdress (or having horns himself). Yogic discipline and asceticism seem to have been a feature of Harrapan religious practice along with ritual bathing and were passed on to Hinduism in time.

## Aryan Invasion Myth

The idea of the noble barbarian Aryan hordes riding over the Kyber pass on their chariots with Indra at their shoulder, destroying the cities of the Indus Valley Civilization, makes a good adventure setting . but not good history. Historians have abandoned the Aryan invasion theory because of a lack of reliable proof of violent invasion in the archaeological record.

However, the *Rig Veda* talks about the conflict between the Aryans and the Dasas. Rich in cattle, the Dasas were a civilized and formidable people despite not having *brahmins* and eschewing *soma*. To the disgust of the Aryans, the Dasas worshipped the phallus, as did the dwellers of the Indus Valley cities, suggesting they may be the remnants of that civilization.

They do not perform sacrifices; they do not believe in anything; their rites are different; they are not men. O destroyer of foes, kill them! Destroy the whole race!

--<#208> *Rig Veda*. Appeal to Indra to destroy the Dasas.

## GURPS Aryavarta

The Vedic period of India's history is a ripe one for campaigning. The *kshatriya* chiefs, leading their clans into a strange but plentiful land, face the Dasas entrenched in their towns and savage tribes in the hills as well as fearsome alien beasts in the jungles.

The Aryan warrior is bold and vigorous. The fruits of this land are his through his own efforts but is aided by the *brahmins* and their powerful sacrifices. Essential as they are, the *brahmins* are nonetheless subject to suspicion by the *kshatriyas* for their efforts to claim the top of the caste hierarchy.

The *brahmin* is the priest of the very best of gods but the foes of his people use a strange magic of their own, able to draw on power from a peculiar inner source by contemplation and austerities.

Young Aryan culture, as yet uncorrupted by Indian thought, draws heavily on Indo-European tradition. *GURPS Celtic Myth* or *GURPS Vikings* might be used as inspiration.

## Indian Kingship

Initially seen only as a war leader, in time the *raja* developed greater prestige, becoming semi-divine. This status was formalized by the year long *rajasuya* sacrifice, which on one hand was a consecration ceremony, but on the other hand it imbued the *raja* with the divine power of Indra, Prajapati, and Vishnu. The *vajapeya* sacrifice undertaken later in his reign reinvigorated the *raja* and his sovereignty. It was not an Indian idea that the *raja* himself was a god however, a *raja* might be "Beloved of the Gods," but not "Son of Heaven."

The author of the *Arthashastra* (see p. xx) held no illusions about the *raja's* divinity. The *raja* described in this manual on statecraft was no more than the head of a system of government; he may be exceptionally hard-working, but not divine. It does benefit such a *raja* for his subjects to think of him as a god however and he might consider spending time with actors dressed as gods to give people the impression he is their equal.

The Mauryan Empire introduced the reality of a new concept to India, that of a Universal Emperor or *Chakravartin* (One For Whom the Wheel Turns), an idea known of from Persia. In Buddhist belief, like *buddhas*, *chakravartins* are periodically born during cycles of the world. Hinduism too recognized the concept of *chakravartin*, Rama for example was a *chakravartin*.

After the Mauryan Empire, tribes migrated from the frontier of the Chinese Empire, bringing with them excessively exalted royal monikers. This and the Persian influence led to Indian *rajas* seeing themselves as gods and adopting more flattering titles. Even minor kings took to calling themselves "*maharaja*" (great king). The truly great kings, such as the Gupta Emperors used "Great King of Kings, Supreme Lord," "Maharajadhiraja-Paramabhataraka."

## Ashvamedha

The *ashvamedha* horse sacrifice was a grand ritual performed by mighty a *raja* to demonstrate and extend his might. In this sacrifice a consecrated royal horse was set free to wander where it will for a year. A band of the *raja's* soldiers followed and claimed suzerainty for the *raja* over any lands it entered. If it were to wander into any enemy territory the local *raja* would be forced to pay homage or repel the trespassers. At the end of the year the horse was sacrificed in a grand ceremony.

When shall I be close to Varuna? Will he enjoy my offering and not be provoked to anger? When shall I see his mercy and rejoice?

--<#208> *Rig Veda*

## Soma

The drink of choice of the Aryans was the narcotic *soma*. *Soma* drink was prepared from the *soma* plant by a ceremonial crushing with stones and mixing with milk. It is not known what the *soma* plant was except that its extract gave the drinker vivid hallucinations and feeling of greatness and courage. It has been speculated that it could have been marijuana.

We have drunk the Soma; we have become immortal; we have gone to the light; we have found the gods.

--<#208> *Rig Veda*

## **GURPS Lost Soldiers**

In 324 B.C. Alexander turned his army about and left India; but what if he had sent an exploratory detachment down the Yamuna and forgotten about it? Deep in enemy lands the detachment finds its route back to the Greek holdings on the Indus blocked by a hostile Indian army. Forced to find another way out with no knowledge of local language or customs they are just as likely to end up wandering deeper into this unknown land of bewildering, frightening, and amusing customs filled with wonder and weirdness.

## **Ancient Armies**

The ancient army was based on a four-fold division, with the army made up of four "limbs." The limbs were war elephants, chariots, cavalry, and infantry, ideally proportioned 1:1:3:5.

This quadripartite division of the army is manifested on the chessboard. The pawns are the foot soldiers, the knights the cavalry, the bishops the chariots, and the rooks are the elephants.

## **Pataliputra**

Capital of the Mauryan Empire, Pataliputra was greatest city of India at the time. The city was built from brick and timber and was defended by a moat and ten miles of walls with 64 gates and 520 towers. The Mauryan palace in the city was lavishly carved in stone and teak.

## **Arthashastra**

The *Arthashastra* is a treatise on government attributed to Chanakya, Chandragupta Maurya's advisor. Treating statecraft unsentimentally, the book is an extensive treatment of running a kingdom including how to acquire power, how to exercise it through an effective bureaucracy and spy network, and how to defend it through military activity, acquiring allies, and undermining enemies. It has been compared to Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

In truth, the *Arthashastra*, or some of it at least, was not written by Chanakya. Its likely date of composition is A.D. 250. The state it describes never existed except in theory, though in some aspects such as bureaucracy, the Mauryan Empire resemble the state of the *Arthashastra*. Nonetheless, campaigning in such a state with an oppressive bureaucracy and a menacing secret service yet only tech level 1 could be an intriguing option (GURPS Arthashastra). Alternatively, such a state could form part of an invented world.

## **GURPS Devanampiya**

Ashoka attempted to create an empire of *dharma*, with all his subjects acting according to Buddha's teaching. More than that in fact, he tried to spread *dharma* to foreign lands. India under Ashoka was a more humanitarian and peaceful land than it might have been without his efforts, but still fell far short of being a perfectly righteous realm. Such a perfect realm would make a fascinating but challenging campaign setting. Characters would be motivated by charity rather than greed and their actions would be rooted in *ahimsa*.

## **Ashoka's Missionary Efforts**

Ashoka certainly acted like a Buddhist, he did much to boost the religion including holding the Third Great Council of Buddhism, however he may not have ever actually converted. He certainly did not try to convert his subjects to any religion, just to a path of righteousness. The *dharma* he pushed was general enough at the time and he supported Jains and Ajivikas as much as he did Buddhists. As well

as trying to convince his subjects to take up his *dharma*, he exported it to his neighbors. He sent missionaries to the realms of Antiochus II of Syria, Ptolemy II of Egypt, Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia, Magas of Cyrene, and Alexander of Epirus. These missionary efforts had far less success than legend ascribes to his attempts to convert Sri Lanka where he is alleged to have sent his son Mahendra. King Devanampiyā Tissa was converted and Sri Lanka has been Buddhist ever since.

### **Thomas the Apostle**

Thomas was reluctant to travel to India to spread the Gospel as he considered it too far and himself too old. Even after being visited by a vision of Jesus he refused. However, he was compelled to travel to India either after hearing that the Parthian ruler in India Gondopernes (known as Gudnaphar in the apocryphal Acts) needed a skilled carpenter, or after being purchased as a slave by an Indian merchant and sold to Gondopernes. He converted the Parthian king and many of his people.

He traveled to Kerala in A.D. 52 and established a community of Syrian Christians and churches at Palur, Cranganore, Parur, Gokkamangalam, Chayal, Niranam, and Quilon. He was martyred in Madras in A.D. 68 or 72 and his remains were transported to Edessa in the third century and to Ortona in Italy in the thirteenth century.

### **The Queen and Chandra Gupta**

Chandra Gupta II was preceded to the throne by his elder brother Rama Gupta. Rama did not last long as emperor after being humbled by the Shakas, prompting Chandra's ascension. An interesting version of this story was made into a play by the Sanskrit dramatist Vishakhadatta, likely written in the 6th century. In this play the weak and cowardly Rama was asked to give up his wife to the Shaka king who had defeated Rama in battle. Chandra volunteered to save the queen by dressing like a woman and taking her place. The scheme went to plan and Chandra was admitted to the harem where he threw off his disguise and killed the Shaka king. He then returned to the royal court, killed his brother, and married his widow.

### **GURPS Vikramaditya**

As the high-water mark of Hindu culture and the culmination of the classical forms of Hindu society and religion, the reign of Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya stands proud as a setting for campaigns. The Gupta Empire is as grand as any the ancient world has seen and has a culture of incredible vitality.

Two features dominate this setting, the imperial regime and the Hindu culture. The empire maintains its cohesion with a strong state bureaucracy, a ubiquitous espionage wing, and a loose controlling hand on its provinces. The strong secularity of this government is in contrast to the prevailing culture. Hindu culture is overbearingly religious and devotionally expressive at that. The ordering of society into castes and the *dharma* controlling people's lives are the salient features of Gupta culture.

### **Foreign Correspondents**

Megasthenes was ambassador to Chandragupta Maurya's court from Seleucus Nicator. He reported back the strength of the Mauryan bureaucracy and the social stratification of Indian society. His details on the caste system were a little awry; he counted seven castes, farmers, herdsmen, craftsmen, soldiers, spies, *brahmins*, and officials -- an interesting observation but not corresponding to either *varna* or *jati*.

During the reign of Chandra Gupta II, the Chinese Buddhist Fa-hsien visited and traveled India

between A.D. 399 and 414 collecting Buddhist texts and writing home about India. Fa-hsien was greatly impressed by the pacifism and vegetarianism of the population of the empire. He commented also on the liberalism of the Emperor and the fraternity amongst the population. He describes Pataliputra as a city of palaces, affluence, and public hospitals. He did note however the inhumanity of untouchability.

Hsuan-Tsang was another Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who traveled to India and noted the peacefulness of the land (though it was in decline). According to history he visited India in A.D. 630, staying until 644, spending time at Harsha's court. Literature however makes more of his anthropomorphic monkey companion and their fantastic adventures in travelling to India recounted in the 16th century Chinese novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Ch'Eng-En and *Monkey*, the cult Japanese television series.

## **Cultural Colonialism**

So dynamic was India's culture during its Golden Age that it was imported by India's neighbors. Great Hindu states rose in Southeast Asia, including the kingdoms of Funan, Chenla, and Champa on the Indo-Chinese peninsula, small kingdoms on the Malay peninsula, Malayu on Sumatra, and the islands of Bali and Java.

## **Herodotus on India**

"It would seem to be a fact that the remotest parts of the world have the finest products, whereas Greece has far the best and most temperate climate. The most easterly country in the inhabited world is India; and here both animals and birds are much bigger than elsewhere -- if we except the Indian horse, which is inferior in size to the Median breed known as the Nisaeon. Gold, too, is found here in immense quality, either mined, or washed down by rivers, or stolen from the ants in the manner I have described [*see below*]; and there are trees growing wild which produce a kind of wool better than sheep's wool in beauty and quality, which the Indians use for making their clothes."

"There are many tribes of Indians, speaking different languages, some pastoral and nomadic, others not. Some live in the marsh-country by the river and eat raw fish. Another tribe further to the east is nomadic, known as the Padaei; they live on raw meat. Among their customs, it is said that when a man falls sick, his closest companions kill him, because, as they put it, their meat would be spoilt if he were allowed to waste away with disease. There is another tribe which behaves very differently: they will not take life in any form; they sow no seed, and have no houses and live on a vegetable diet. There are other Indians further north, round the city of Caspatyrus and in the country of Pactyca, who in their mode of life resemble the Bactrians. These are the most warlike of the Indian tribes, and it is they who go out to fetch the gold."

"I will say something of the method by which Indians get their large supplies of gold. Eastwards of India lies a desert of sand. There is found in this desert a kind of ant of great size -- bigger than a fox, though not so big as a dog. These creatures as they burrow underground throw up the sand in heaps, just as our own ants throw up the earth, and they are very like ours in shape. The sand has a rich content of gold, and this it is that the Indians are after when they make their expeditions into the desert. Each man harnesses three camels abreast, a female, on which he rides, and a male on each side. They plan their time-table so as actually to get their hands on the gold during the hottest part of the day, when the heat will have driven the ants underground. When the Indians reach the place where the gold is, they fill the bags they have brought with them with sand, and start for home again as fast as they can go; for the ants (if we can believe the Persians' story) smell them and at once give chase; nothing in the world can touch these ants for speed, so not one of the Indians would get home alive, if they did not make sure of a good start while the ants were mustering their forces. The male camels who are slower movers than the females, soon begin to drag and are left behind, one after the other, while the females are kept going by the memory of their young, who are left at home."

--<#208> Abridged from the Penguin version of Herdotus' *The Histories*

# Muslim India

## First Invasions

Islam was born in A.D. 622 and quickly spread from its home in Arabia as the Islamic armies carried the religion at a breakneck pace to east and west, reaching India's borders by 644. (For more details of the early history of Islam see *GURPS Arabian Nights*.) The western deserts of India were a discouraging barrier to the Muslim armies and the planned invasion of 644 turned back. However, in order to gain greater control over shipping lanes, the governor of Iraq invaded Sind in 711. Hence Sind became the first Muslim province of India, and the only one for over 200 years.

Islam now spread from the Atlantic to the Indus under the Umayyad Caliph at Damascus. It was preferred that the conquered people of these lands convert to Islam but the methods of dealing with non-believers varied. It was recognized that Jews and Christians were brothers to Muslims who simply had not accepted the final revelations of Mohammed. The proof of this was that they too kept their scriptures in books like the Koran. Jews and Christians were therefore known as "people of the book" (*dhimmis*) and could continue to worship in their own way provided they pay a tax known as *jizya*, about 6% of their income. Pagans or infidels (*kaffirs*) however were forced to convert or lose their life. This was far too demanding a necessity for India where the infidels were simply too numerous to convert or execute. Fortunately it was discovered that Hindus have sacred writings, the *Vedas*, and by bending the rules could be considered *dhimmis* in a similar way as was done for the Zoroastrians.

When the Abbasid dynasty replaced the Umayyads the center of Islam shifted east to Baghdad and Persian succeeded Arabic as the dominant culture of the Islamic world. The Caliphate became simply too large and a new development was the appearance of independent "sultanates" at the fringes of the Caliphate and it was these sultans who came to rule lands in India.

## Mahmoud of Ghazni

The capture of Sind in 711 was not the trigger for further Muslim incursions into India. It was in fact the expansion of China into Turkistan in the 10th century, pushing the Turks into Afghanistan, that was the impetus for the bloody raids of Mahmoud of Ghazni that were to bring Islam to India. In 962 the slave warrior Alptigin took Ghazni in Afghanistan. His grandson Mahmoud became India's premier raider, invading 17 times beginning in 997. The Hindu kingdoms at this time had exhausted itself in their wars to control the western Gangetic plain. Mahmoud's fierce central Asian horsemen looted Indian cities, tore down Hindu temples (including the famed temple at Somnath), and carried back slaves and huge amounts of booty to make Ghazni one of the wealthiest and most cultured cities of the time.

The raids were ferocious and the invaders forced their religion on their victims, but their most lasting effect was to engender deep bitterness between Hindu and Muslim. The only lands captured permanently by Mahmoud, whose raids were always for more for plunder than conquest or *jihad*, was Punjab, and that was taken only shortly before his death in 1030.

Ghazni was later captured in 1151 by the Ghurids, themselves hardy central Asian nomads like the Ghaznivids. Sultan Mohammed of Ghur and his lieutenant, the slave warrior Qutb-ud-din Ayybak, raided India in 1175. With more intent than Mahmoud's armies, they captured Peshawar in 1179, Lahore in 1186, and Delhi in 1193. While Qutb-ud-din pacified northern India (easily in the case of the Gangetic plain, with difficulty and measured success in Rajasthan), Mohammed returned to Ghazni. Mohammed was assassinated in Lahore in 1206 and Qutb-ud-din declared himself Sultan of Delhi, founding the slave dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate.



## **Delhi Sultanate**

The Delhi Sultanate lasted more than 300 years, passing through 5 dynasties. It dominated the politics of northern India and during its time it saw monarchs both cruel and liberal (including a woman sultan and a transvestite ruler), intrigue, usurpations, coups, invasions of Rajasthan and the Deccan, religious extremism, tolerant mildness, threats of Mongol raids, and a disastrous attempt to move the capital.

The Sultanate had its height in early 14th century under the Khalji dynasty. During this period, Alau-din Khalji (also known as Sikander Sani, "Second Alexander"), r. 1296-1316, defeated armies of his enemies throughout the land, including the Rajputs, Gujaratis, and Tamils of the deep South, taking the city of Madurai in 1310. He also set about reforming the administration of the Sultanate and hence increasing both the royal revenue and the strength of the central administration.

The last powerful sultan was Firuz Tughluq (1351-1388), by whose reign the sultanate was already falling apart; Madurai became an independent sultanate in 1335, the Hindu Vijayanagar Empire (see p. xx) took much of south India from Delhi in 1336, Bengal gained independence in 1338, the Deccan became the independent Bahmani Sultanate in 1347. However, it was the invasion by Timur (Tamerlane) that brought the glory of Delhi to an end. Timur entered Delhi in 1398 and built towers out of the city's dead. So absolute was Timur's sacking of Delhi that nothing stirred in the city for months after he turned his army around and left a trail of blood on his way out as savage as the one he had blazed on his way in. The Delhi Sultanate was effectively finished, Gujarat and Malwa extracting themselves in 1401 to join the other independent sultanates, and though it lasted another 130 odd years through two more dynasties, northern India remained fragmented until the Moghul Empire was to unify it once again.

## **Moghul Empire**

Under the Moghul Empire, Muslim civilization in India reached its greatest splendor. The Moghul Empire was grand beyond reckoning, the treasury at Agra was humanly impossible to count, and under the patronage of the Moghuls art and culture reached heights of magnificence, the crowning specimen being the incomparable Taj Mahal. However the most impressive feature of the Empire was the Emperor himself. Each of the great Moghuls was a giant among men; their personalities, achievements, and failures were of legendary proportions. They stood over their empire like colossuses and to understand the Empire at any time, one needs to understand the Emperor.

### **Babur (1526-30)**

Babur, the architect of the Moghul Empire, was not the first of his family to invade India; Timur, the terror of Delhi, was Babur's great-great-great-grandfather. Timur though did not stay to build an empire, instead he returned to his home in Samarkand, taking the citizens of Delhi as slaves and their goods as booty.

Babur's ancestral land was Ferghana to the east of Samarkand in modern day Uzbekistan. Losing these lands in the ebb and flow of the region's politics he traveled south to take Kabul and in 1525 he invaded India. At the time, North India was shared between the Lodi dynasty at Delhi and the Rajput princes, led by Rana Sanga of Mewar. At Paniput, Babur overthrew Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, his army of 25,000 overcoming the Lodi army of 100,000 including 1,000 elephants, and was proclaimed Emperor of India. After defeating Rana Sanga at Khanua, Babur was the undisputed ruler of North India. He expanded his territories by granting lands he did not own to his supporters and letting them conquer it for him.

Babur was a military genius; his skills cultivated by a youth spent warring in Ferghana and

Samarkand. He beat the numerically superior armies of Hindustan through a fine understanding of artillery and charismatic leadership. Babur was an exceedingly cultured man and quite intelligent. He was a fine poet and had a great appreciation for art, particularly designing gardens. As a ruler, he was liberal, knowing not to earn his subjects hate; however, he was not an administrator and chose not to make changes to the running of the empire. Hence his administration was much the same as under the Delhi Sultanate.

Although emperor of one of the worlds greatest empires, Babur did not like India terribly. He liked the green valley of Ferghana most of all but he considered Kabul to be his "home" where he felt the climate was better for him. Even so, he valued his Indian possessions and built a new capital at Delhi.

## **Humayun (1530-44, 1554-6)**

The Moghul Empire was not safely established in India until Akbar, Babur's grandson. Humayun, Babur's son and successor nearly undid much of what his father had wrought. Humayun is not a bad ruler and was brave in battle, but did not have the necessary ruthlessness to deal with dissent and allowed his eccentricities and superstitions to impair his government of the empire.

Following Timurid tradition, Humayun appointed his three brothers, Kamran, Askari, and Hindal, as administrators to large parts of the Empire. However, they were troublesome, their crimes including declaring independence and murdering Humayun's advisers. His brothers' waywardness caused the empire stress, but it was Humayun's reluctance to punish them that weakened the empire, coupled with his personal problems such as his debilitating addiction to opium and wine and allowing his fascination for astrology to influence the running of his court. He divided his administration into four departments based on the elements; the earth department was responsible for agriculture and architecture, the water department was responsible for irrigation and his wine-cellar, the fire department controlled the military, and the air department looked after everything else. Worse, he assigned a planet to every day and used this as a basis for what business he conducted on that day as well as what color clothes he wore and how he acted. Tuesday, for example, was given over to Mars and he wore red and exercised ruthlessness in his judgement.

After his father's death it was left to Humayun to consolidate the empire. He had two main adversaries; Sher Khan in the north-east (Bihar and Bengal), the most powerful Afghan lord in India, and Bahadur Shah of Gujarat, whose court was full of Lodi exiles. Humayun came to blows with both . unsuccessfully. In 1535 Bahadur fought Humayun to a standstill in Gujarat -- it was left to the Portuguese to kill Bahadur. The war with Sher Khan was worse. Humayun was decisively defeated at Chausa and Kanauj (in 1540) and was forced to flee to Lahore. Unable to gain sufficient support from his subject chiefs, Humayun fled to exile in 1544 at the court of Shah Tahmasp, the Safavid ruler of Persia.

During Humayun's absence, Sher Khan (now Sher Shah) abolished Humayun's fanciful administration and ran the kingdom well. Humayun, meanwhile, managed to obtain Shah Tahmasp's support after becoming a Shia. He returned to India with an army bolstered by Persian troops and after defeating his brother, Kamran and Sikandar Shah Sur of Punjab, he was able to reclaim his empire, which had disintegrated after the death of Sher Shah's son, Islam Shah.

Humayun was emperor in India for only sixteen years, as he died two years after retaking the empire. He lost the empire for a full ten years while in exile and fighting his brother. However, by his death, the empire was restored to its glory and he left his son a platform for greater fame.

## **Akbar (1556-1605)**

Akbar is not only one of India's greatest rulers, he is also one of the greatest rulers the world has known. Under his rule India became one of the pre-eminent states in the world, comparable only to the Ming Empire in China. Of the Great Moghuls, Jalal-ud-din Mohammed Akbar stands head and shoulders above an already distinguished company. Through his political acumen, skill at warcraft, and sympathy with his subjects, Akbar built an empire of great unity, prosperity, and contentment. He expanded the borders of his realm to include all of North India and brought together the disparate communities of his empire. It was the figure of Akbar that elevated the Moghul Empire above its predecessor, the Delhi Sultanate; starting with Akbar the Moghul Emperors were treated with reverence normally reserved for gods.

Akbar took the throne at the age of 13 in 1555 when his father died from falling down the stairs of his library, no doubt light headed from opium. His early years as emperor were fraught as descendants of the Sur dynasty laid claim to the throne. The greatest threat though was from the Sur prime minister the diminutive Hindu Hemu, who, when he heard of Humayun's death, raised an army and captured Delhi, declaring himself Raja Vikramaditya. This challenge to Akbar's ascension was dealt with by general Bairam Khan on the battle field of Paniput. Hemu, leading from his elephant, received an arrow through the eye and his army, as was the way when the leader of an Indian army was killed, quit the battle and fled.

Once firmly established as the only contender for emperor, Akbar set about consolidating his kingdom. While he did achieve much by force in the traditional manner (for details of his military honors see below), he worked to improve the empire by creating internal strength and cohesion. Akbar's most telling achievement was to win the trust and loyalty of his Hindu subjects. In 1562 he married the daughter of Raja Bharmal of Jaipur. Marrying a Rajput princess had two ends; the marriage tied one of the most powerful of the Rajput houses to the emperor and taking a Hindu wife proved to Hindus throughout the empire the true respect Akbar had for their religion. Moghul Emperors marrying Hindu wives was not without precedence but Akbar was the first to allow his Hindu wives to continue being a practicing Hindu while in his harem. He further appeased Hindus by revoking the unjust tax on Hindu pilgrims in 1563 and then did so much more by rescinding the *jizya* that had been such a sore point to Hindus -- an act that was received with great Hindu gratitude.

In Raja Bharmal, Akbar had a good ally amongst the Rajputs. However, many of the other rajas of Rajasthan were not inclined to join alliances. Akbar realized the importance of controlling Rajasthan and set about nibbling away at its borders by seizing small bits of territory and procuring treaties and marriage ties. In 1567 he made a more concerted push to grab Rajasthan by tackling the Rana of Mewar Udai Singh, nominal leader of the Rajputs and the figurehead of Hindu resistance to Moghul dominance of India. Akbar's Rajasthani campaigns began with the capture of the Rana's fort at Chitor through a long and bloody siege and a massacre of the fort's inhabitants when it fell. The victory was palpable but the Rana had flown the fort before the siege had begun and managed to evade capture during Akbar's pacification of Rajasthan which lasted until about 1570 by which time most of the Rajput rajas were made allies of Akbar. Udai Singh defied Akbar from the hills of Mewar and founded the city of Udaipur on the banks of an easily defended lake. Despite bringing his sovereignty to Rajasthan emphatically, the land remained rebellious and poorly integrated into the empire, the rajas of Rajasthan paid little more than nominal homage to the emperor.

Akbar followed the conquest of Rajasthan with Gujarat in 1572, Bengal in 1574-6, Kabul in 1581, Orissa in 1592, and Baluchistan in 1595. He also put great effort into obtaining territories in the Deccan and at some time held the sultanates of Ahmadnagar, Khandesh, and Berar, successors to the Bahmani sultanate (the sultanate having dissolved into five sultanates including also Bijapur and Golconda). However, these were never fully integrated into the empire due to difficulties in maintaining decent communications and travel across the Vidhyas and the fact that the son to whom he had entrusted the conquest -- Murad, his second -- was an alcoholic, a weakness that was to kill him while on campaign in 1599. (The same vice was to cause the death of Akbar's third, Daniyal, in 1603, again on campaign in the Deccan.)

As well as these major conquests, Akbar was constantly putting down small rebellions and making smaller acquisitions. He would often go about these by traveling to the area with his army under the pretext of going hunting. His presence in the area invariably bought peace or submission.

As well as enlarging his empire by expanding its borders, Akbar also strengthened it by reforming his administration and domestic revenue collection. He divided his officialdom into 33 ranks or *mansabs* (the holders of *mansabs* being *mansabdars*), delimited by the number of horse commanded (everyone in imperial service had a military rank, even artists), from the highest rank commanding 10,000 (the higher ranks also being hand-picked) to the lowest commanding 10. He divided his empire into 12 provinces ruled by governors with districts and subdistricts. He set the rate of tax at about 1/3 of an annual harvest, the exact value being determined by the lands worth, a rate rather lower than typically raised and its collection was markedly more sympathetic and lenient in times of want than any other period of Muslim rule. Through this efficient administration and the spoils of conquest, the economy of Akbar's empire flourished; the wealth of the empire was conspicuous in the imperial and provincial courts. The governors and officials lived like kings, knowing that their posting was only for their own life, they lived extravagantly, often beyond their means.

Akbar was able to build an empire of such harmony and prosperity because of his singularly forceful personality. After Maham Anga's death (see *Bairam Khan*, p. xx) Akbar ran the empire alone and was able to impose on it his firm will and progressive beliefs about rule. In character Akbar was a warrior emperor; he was happiest in battle at the front of his army and was a warrior of the highest skill. His bravery was astounding and he showed little regard for the value of his life as the emperor. Even away from battle he enjoyed dangerous pursuits such as fighting elephants and hunting, once bringing down a tiger with just a sword. As a ruler he was perhaps less gifted, for example he never learnt to read. However, he understood the benefits of treating his subjects with justice and benevolence and in recognizing the importance of reconciling Hindu and Muslim. This came in large part because of his great sympathy for Hinduism, and in fact for all religions and their offshoots such as Sufism. Akbar, despite being at heart a reckless adventurer, was in some respects a sophisticated thinker, much given to metaphysical speculation.

India is without doubt the best place to exercise an interest in religion. Akbar invited Muslim theologians and Sufi mystics to debate within his *ibadat-khana* (house of worship). Long and heated debates ensued in which Akbar too would participate. Akbar was disappointed with the undignified arguments of the Muslim thinkers and invited members of other religions, Hindu, Jain, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jew, to join. Fears of the *mullas* and hopes of the Jesuits that Akbar might be thinking of converting were exaggerated -- but not entirely wide of the mark. His response to all this theological inquiry was to create his own religion in 1582, called Din-i-Ilahi, the "Divine Faith," with himself as its figurehead (exactly to what extent he was to be seen as divine is debatable). Din-i-Ilahi was a mystical, syncretic religion but only ever vaguely outlined and never strongly pushed.

Akbar reigned for nearly 50 years and was to pass on to his successor a remarkable empire. At the end of his reign, he had only one son left, Salim his eldest, who dabbled in rebellion. However, he had grandsons who showed promise as rulers, particularly Salim's eldest son Khusrau. Salim had the support of most of his nobles so it was he and not Khusrau who succeeded the great Akbar after he died of an illness that caused him to bleed internally (and might very well have been due to a poison administered by Salim).

### **Jahangir (1605-27)**

On becoming emperor, Salim took the title Jahangir (World Seizer). His son Khusrau made a bid for the throne but after quashing this rebellion, Jahangir had him blinded and imprisoned.

Jahangir made the most of the wealthy empire he inherited by spending up big on opulence. He turned

Agra into a magnificent capital, changing Akbar's Agra Fort from a beautiful fortress into a magnificent fortified palace. While Jahangir enjoyed the luxuries of the empire, his Persian wife Nur Jahan (whom he married in 1611) ran the empire to her own ends. Jahangir's reign is marked by the competition between Nur Jahan and Prince Khurram, Jahangir's third son and heir apparent, given the title Shah Jahan (Emperor of the World). Initially Nur Jahan's favorite, Shah Jahan was entrusted with the army and sent to capture the lands of the Rana of Mewar and the sultanates of the Deccan. When it was clear that he had been replaced in his step-mother's affection by his younger brother Shahriyar, whose marriage to Nur Jahan's daughter was arranged, Shah Jahan used the army to rebel in 1623, marching on Delhi. He was turned away by general Mahabat Khan and fugitive in the south for three years before being accepted back. He was soon rebelling again however and was fighting Mahabat Khan (who was lucky to be alive having staged a coup but lacking the courage to carry it through) in the Deccan when Jahangir died. Shahriyar, Nur Jahan's hope for the empire, was not fit to run the empire and when Shah Jahan reached Agra he had him put to death along with his closest relatives who might claim the throne -- a novel way of taking the Moghul crown but one which was to become almost quintessentially Moghlai.

### **Shah Jahan (1628-58)**

Shah Jahan continued his father's tradition of opulence, but rather than his father's addiction to earthly pleasures and scientific inquiry, Shah Jahan was seemingly addicted to building. His crowning glory was the Taj Mahal, a jewel carved in white marble, erected as a tomb and monument to his most loved wife Mumtaz Mahal who died in childbirth in 1631. (As a monument to Shah Jahan's love for Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj is a symbol of love for both Hindus and Muslims and a favorite honeymoon destination. More about the Taj Mahal is given in *GURPS Places of Mystery*, pp. 60-61.) However, other constructions of Shah Jahan's are also magnificent, such as the perfect Pearl Mosque at Agra, the huge Red Fort at his new capital Shahjahanabad at Delhi, and the Peacock Throne, a solid gold throne encrusted with the largest precious gems Shah Jahan could find.

From the time of Akbar to that of Shah Jahan, the imperial revenues trebled, turning a hideously wealthy empire into a monstrously wealthy one. However, the increase in imperial expenditure over this time outstripped the increase in revenue. While Shah Jahan's reign was the most grand of all the Great Moghuls, it was also the beginning of the decline -- this was not at all evident, such was the obvious magnificence of the empire, and it would remain magnificent until at least the reign of the next emperor, but it was doomed. While Shah Jahan spent millions on building projects, peasants in his Deccani lands suffered through a horrible famine and were saved only through relief from the emperor. Campaigns to conquer the rest of the Deccan, though largely successful (including adding Berar and Ahmadnagar to the empire and concluding a treaty with Bijapur), cost more than they brought in through captured wealth. Furthermore, in 1649 the city and fort of Kandahar was again captured by the Persians (who had previously conquered it in 1623 and returned it in 1638). Attempts by Shah Jahan's sons Aurangzeb in 1652 and Dara Shikoh in 1653, were dishearteningly unsuccessful, as had been the ambitious 1646-7 campaigns to capture Samarkand. With the Persians perched at Kandahar, the western border of the empire was no longer secure. The empire was also in danger from inland threats as Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's eldest son and clearly his favorite, and Aurangzeb, the third son, acted out their enmity for each other. The two brothers were as different as it was possible to get. Dara Shikoh was a cultivated philosopher, much taken by Sufism and having something of an affection for Hinduism, having personally translated the Upanishads into Persian. Aurangzeb on the other hand was very much an orthodox Muslim with a near fanatical devotion and a deep hatred of Hinduism. Aurangzeb despised Dara Shikoh for his religious infidelity and Dara Shikoh feared Aurangzeb gaining too much power. It was this fear that motivated Dara Shikoh's machinations in thwarting Aurangzeb's conquests of the Deccani sultanates of Golconda and Bijapur, whereby Dara Shikoh would accept peace treaties from the sultanates when Aurangzeb was on the verge of defeating them. The hostility between the brothers would fuel a bitter war of succession.

### **War of Succession**

The war of Shah Jahan's succession was fought while he was still alive. In 1657 he took ill and was unable to appear for morning *darshan* (see *A Moghul Day*, p. xx). His four sons then began jostling to divide the empire. Dara Shikoh was viceroy of Punjab but stayed at his father's side. Aurangzeb, in the Deccan since 1652, was at the head of the Deccan army when he heard of Shah Jahan's debility. He immediately considered his chances of taking the throne and conspired with Murad, his younger brother, to deal with Dara Shikoh. However, it was the second son, Shah Shuja, governor of Bengal, who made the first move, proclaiming himself emperor in 1657. Shuja marched on Agra but was defeated by the imperial army under Dara Shikoh's son Suleiman Shikoh and Raja Jai Singh of Jaipur.

Murad followed his brother by proclaiming the empire for himself in Gujarat in 1658, killing Shah Jahan's finance minister of Gujarat and plundering Surat for cash to build his army. Then together Aurangzeb and Murad marched on Agra, meeting and defeating the Rajput general Raja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur on the way. (Jaswant Singh returned to Jodhpur after this defeat but was not welcomed. His wife would not sleep with him as punishment for not dying in battle.) Dara Shikoh then mobilized what was left of Agra's army, the better part of it still under Suleiman Shikoh, and met his brothers on the fields outside Agra (his attempts to prevent them crossing the River Chambal while waiting for reinforcements foiled by Aurangzeb using a little-known ford down-river). Dara Shikoh was defeated and anticipating a dire fate at the hands of Aurangzeb, fled Agra for Delhi, leaving his father, now fully recovered, to face Aurangzeb alone.

Agra Fort was strong enough to withstand a siege but Aurangzeb captured it easily by cutting off access to the fort's access to the waters of the Jamuna. Shah Jahan capitulated and Aurangzeb imprisoned him in the Agra Fort. He then had Murad arrested and proclaimed himself emperor, taking the title Alamgir (Seizer of the Universe).

Having captured the Peacock Throne, it remained for Aurangzeb to remove the threat of his two remaining brothers. Dara, the people's favorite and nearby with the resources of Delhi at his disposal, was Aurangzeb's first target. Rather than face his advancing brother, Dara fled to Lahore, and when threatened here fled again down the Indus to Sind. At this point Aurangzeb let him fly and returned to Agra to face Shah Shuja.

Aurangzeb met Shuja at Khajwah on the Ganga. As emperor, Aurangzeb now had Jaswant Singh in his army rather than as an opponent. However, Jaswant turned his army against Aurangzeb and if Shuja had joined battle at that moment, Aurangzeb might have been defeated. As it was, Aurangzeb was able to defeat Shah Shuja without the Rajputs and Shuja fled down the Ganga and was chased right out of India to Burma where, though likely soon dead, he remained an imagined threat to Aurangzeb's empire. (Aurangzeb's son Mohammed Sultan also turned and joined Shah Shuja. A crime for which he was punished by being sent to Gwalior prison.)

By this time Dara Shikoh had returned. He had crossed the salt deserts of Kutch in western Gujarat and arrived in Ahmedabad. Receiving an offer of alliance from Jaswant Singh he marched towards Agra where they were to join their armies. However, hearing of this new alliance, Aurangzeb offered Jaswant a pardon and so the mercurial Rajput king turned-coat again leaving Dara to face Aurangzeb near Ajmer alone. Outnumbered, Dara was defeated and fled once more with his son Sapihr Shikoh and his harem to Ahmedabad.

At Ahmedabad the prince was turned away and Dara was forced to once again cross the Rann of Kutch. In Sind his flight came to an end when he was treacherously turned over to Aurangzeb by Malik Jiwan. Dara was then paraded in shame at Delhi before being killed by assassins (Aurangzeb claiming to prefer exile as punishment for his religious waywardness). Not content to have done as much as kill his brothers and imprisoning his father, he sent Dara's head to Shah Jahan.

By 1659, the war of succession was over. Dara's two sons, Suleiman (turned over to Aurangzeb by

the Punjabi raja he was hiding out with) and Sipihir were sent to Gwalior, where Murad was incarcerated. Murad was put to death in 1661 for the crime of murdering the finance minister.

### **Aurangzeb (1658-1707)**

Aurangzeb's empire was quite different to that of his immediate forebears. A strong Muslim, he worked to run his empire by the strict guidelines of the Shariat and Mohammed's proclamations. This worked to stifle creativity in the imperial court as Aurangzeb forbade music and portraiture and expected more religious content in literature. The strongest effect of his insistence that Islam should be the chief religion of India was naturally to antagonize Hindus. According to the Koran, infidels should not be permitted to build new temples and must pay the *jizya*, two laws Aurangzeb reimposed to the anger of his Hindu subjects and contrary to the misgiving of his counselors. He also antagonized Sikhs, who had been enemies of the Moghul's since Guru Arjun was executed by Jahangir for supporting Prince Khusrau. Aurangzeb had Guru Tegh Bahadur beheaded and tried to capture Guru Govind Singh.

The empire did not respond well to Aurangzeb, who after all had imprisoned both his father and his own son and killed all three of his brothers. Aurangzeb's religious bigotry created great discontent and he had to put down several rebellions within his lands. Aurangzeb was able to maintain his empire and reign for 49 years through the harsh application of his iron hand. This damaged the empire that Akbar had established. No longer did the people or the court have faith in the emperor and all that held it together was fear.

While Aurangzeb ruled, Shah Jahan was kept imprisoned in his harem. For eight years until his death he was at odds with his detested son who constantly made life difficult for him, denying him access to writing materials for example, and demanding he turn over his personal wealth.

In 1680, the Rajput rajas, furious at Aurangzeb's 1679 invasion of Jodhpur following Raja Jaswant Singh's death (with his only heir still being carried by his widow), offered their assistance to Prince Akbar, then leading the Moghul army, in rebellion. The rebellion might have succeeded to had Aurangzeb not tricked the Rajputs into deserting by convincing them Akbar was going to turn against them. Defeated on the battle field, Akbar fled to the Deccan (fleeing to Persia in 1686 and dying there in 1704). Acknowledging his own unpopularity and fearing a wider rebellion forming under Akbar, Aurangzeb followed his son south in 1681. He would remain there for the rest of his reign, a full 26 years of campaigning.

Still aggrieved at not being permitted to capture Bijapur and Golconda, he now did so in 1686 and 1687 respectively. He further triumphed by capturing and torturing to death Shambhuji, Shivaji's son (see *Marathas* below). The Moghul Empire now extended to within 200 miles of Kanya Kumari. However, the south could not be subdued, particularly the Marathas, who held pockets of resistance across the Deccan and the south. It was in trying to fully crush the Marathas and local rebellions that kept Aurangzeb in the south. In 1705 Aurangzeb fell sick and in 1707 he died.

### **Later Moghuls**

The seven Great Moghuls up to Aurangzeb were each exceptional men, not necessarily the best of men, but of such stature that even their flaws and failures were as heroic as their successes and virtues. Aurangzeb's death began a new round of fratricidal carnage as his many sons and grandsons fought for the throne (his second son Muzzam became Emperor Bahadur Shah at the end of this fighting, if it really matters), however, his death also marked the end of the glory of the Moghul Empire. The emperors that were to follow him were mere shadows and the tussles and wars between claimants to the throne were farcical compared to those of the earlier Moghuls whose similar exploits, even in their depravity, were almost noble. In truth the later Moghul court were simply puppets of plotting court factions that enthroned and deposed a succession of emperors. The empire

went through six emperors between Aurangzeb's death and 1739 when the Persians marched on Delhi, slaughtered its inhabitants and carried off the Peacock Throne. Although the empire continued past this event, it was now clearly broken by this humiliation.

Without a competent helmsman, the empire fell to pieces. The former Sultanate of Golconda became a new quasi-independent "kingdom" when the Moghul prime minister Nizam-ul-Mulk moved to Hyderabad in 1723. The rulers of Hyderabad were to be called Nizams after the founder of the dynasty. The provinces of Oudh (centered on Lucknow) and Bengal were to become similarly quasi-independent kingdoms.

The unconquerable Hindu Marathas, whom Aurangzeb had spent so much effort and so many years trying to crush, were to form the subcontinent's most powerful state.

## Marathas

During Shah Jahan's reign as emperor appeared a Hindu successor to Moghul dominion in central India that would come to challenge Islamic rule during Aurangzeb's bigoted reign. Shivaji Bhonsle, the father of the Maratha state, was born in Pune in 1627. By the age of 20, the devout Hindu had taken a band of warriors into the hills to fight as guerrillas against the Moghuls, rulers of Pune since 1633, and the Muslims of Bijapur.

So expert in mountain guerrilla warfare was Shivaji's band that they were taken to be superhuman. In truth, they simply employed tactics that were the perfect counter to the heavy cavalry and artillery of the Moghul army and were executed with great skill. Not only was he successful against Muslims, but he was able to extend rule over other Maratha chiefs and gained control over many mountain fortresses. Using overwhelming force, the Bijapuri general Afzal Khan was able to bring him to the table to discuss surrender by 1659. However, Shivaji took concealed "tiger's claws" to the meeting and used them to kill Afzal Khan as his army ambushed the Bijapuris. Shivaji was then the terror of Maharashtra and it took the great Rajput Jai Singh to finally force him to surrender in earnest and accept a *mansab* of 5,000 horse. However, when at Delhi to accept his reward he felt so poorly respected he escaped by hiding in a basket of sweetmeats and returned to his guerrilla ways in Maharashtra.

By 1670 he had recaptured most of his mountain fortresses and crowned himself Chatrapti (Lord of the Universe), with the intention of ruling the Marathas as a devout Hindu monarch. Shivaji died in 1680 but he had set in motion Hindu resistance to Moghul rule that would not be quashed by years of effort.

In 1708 Shivaji's grandson Shahu became king of the Marathas and now free from Aurangzeb's attacks built a stable administration and set about expanding the borders of the kingdom. In complete fairness it is proper to attribute this to Baji Rao, Shahu's Brahmin prime minister or "Peshwa." Succeeding his father to the position in 1720, Baji Rao began a campaign of conquest of Moghul lands that led to Gujarat and Malwa being ceded to the Marathas and the army raiding as far as the city of Delhi. Further successes against the Nizam led to Shahu being declared king of all of Maharashtra.

On Shahu's death in 1749, such was the power of the Peshwa that Baji Rao was able to choose the royal successor and then run the kingdom as de facto, though not titular, ruler.

At this time the Marathas were undoubtedly the most powerful force in India and might have gone on to form a true empire in India. However, defeat by the Afghan king Ahmad Shah Abdali at Paniput in 1761 put an end to any ideas that the Marathas might inherit hegemony of northern India from the Moghuls.



The defeat at Paniput also dealt a blow to the position of the Peshwa and accelerated a decentralization shifting power away from the Peshwa to the more powerful Maratha families. Hence by the beginning of the 19th century the greater Maratha kingdom had dissolved into a confederation of smaller kingdoms: the Peshwas at Pune, the Bhonsle descendants of Shivaji at Nagpur, west of Pune, the Gaekwads at Vadodara (known as Baroda to the British) in Gujarat, the Holkars at Indore in Malwa, and the Sindhias at Gwalior.

## Vijayanagar

The deep south of India was too far away for the Delhi Sultanate to extend its rule over the Tamil kingdoms, though in 1335 Ahsan Khan founded the Sultanate of Madurai. The greatest impact on the south of the Delhi Sultanate was to push Hindus south out of the Deccan. Two such refugees were the brothers Harihara and Bukka who founded a new kingdom in the south at Vijayanagar (City of Victory), an apt name as they conquered all of India south of the Bahmani Sultanate (itself established in 1347), including the Madurai Sultanate.

Harihara and Bukka were likely to have been converted Muslims in the service of the Tughluq Sultan, but they soon converted back to Hinduism and Vijayanagar was to become a shining light of Hindu culture in a subcontinent well under the heel of Muslim dominance. Made incredibly wealthy by the spice trade that has always supported South India, Vijayanagar at its peak under King Krishnadevaraya was comparable to Muslim Delhi.

Krishnadevaraya reigned from 1509 and 1529 and was victorious over the ex-Bahmani sultanates, the only significant success either side had had in all the years of fighting. Krishnadevaraya defeated each of the sultanates but reinstalled them on their thrones rather than add them to his own kingdom.

However, the Deccani sultanates would have the last laugh as in 1565 they banded together and captured Vijayanagar and destroyed the city.

## Campaigns in Muslim India

Muslim India, with its bicultural society, eccentric rulers, harem intrigue, dissident Rajput kingdoms, and indomitable mountain rebels, is a choice setting for role-playing campaigns. The areas of greatest drama are Delhi, Agra, Rajasthan, and the Deccan, but adventure can be found all over India.

It is important to note that though this chapter is titled "*Muslim* India," Islam and its culture is only one aspect of the Indian setting in this period of history. The majority of India remains Hindu, and Hindu culture, while not as fresh and as vibrant as it was in Gupta times, has not been diminished by in encroachment of Islam. Most of what applied to Classical India applies equally to Hindus in "Muslim" India.

However, Islam was brought to India with the intention of converting Indians. While this task was impossible given India's large population of Hindus and the Hindu practice of absorbing and adapting new customs, rather than abandoning the old, headway was made and many Hindus did convert. Discord between Islam and Hinduism was to be an ever-present feature of Indian society. Hinduism could not adapt to the new religion in the same way as it did with Buddhism and Jainism; the status of Muslims in the Hindu caste system was ambiguous and to the modern day, no solution has been found. Hence Islam and Hinduism were to be separate communities sharing the same country but mixing as poorly as oil and water. Muslims came to dominate the politics of India and there was considerable discrimination against the Hindu royal and noble families, but Islam was never to dominate India's overall culture in the same way.

## Crossovers

### GURPS Arabian Nights

GMs running campaigns in Muslim India are strongly advised to also have a copy of *GURPS Arabian Nights* close at hand. *Arabian Nights* contains a fuller description of the Muslim religion culture than *India* can provide. Muslims assimilated only partly into Indian society, leaving Muslim culture largely unchanged and much of the content of *Arabian Nights* is still valid.

The purview of *Arabian Nights* reaches Persia, India's neighbor, so *India* is the next logical extension of the Muslim setting. The two books make a good pair for a campaign set during the Muslim ascendancy in India as they describe a good deal of the Muslim world at the time. Campaigns concentrated on one of the two settings might still make use of the other. For the case of an *Arabian Nights* campaign it is easy to envisage India as a land a questing Arab hero might visit and it offers a whole new suite of fantastic beasts and adventures to be experienced. For an Indian hero, Arabia is similarly exotic and for Muslim characters it has the attraction of being the homeland of Islam and the destination of a *hajj* pilgrimage.

In making use of crossovers between the two settings there are two points of view; either the Arabian and Indian settings are two poles, linked only due to the spread of Islam across the intervening lands, or they are ends of a spectrum. The difference between these views can be illustrated by considering *rakshasas* and *djinns*; these two classes of beings can either be entirely separate races, or they can be the same creatures, any differences simply being regional variations.

### GURPS Fantasy

The Banestorm that populates the world of *GURPS Fantasy* occurs between 1050 and 1200. At this time there were still few Muslims in India. Most Indians snatched are likely to be Hindu, with a few Jains and Buddhists (though the Muslims raids had begun to diminish the number of Buddhists).

There are very few Indians on the continent of Yttaria, though it is entirely possible that other continents have greater populations of Indians. These continents would no doubt have kingdoms based on Indian models rather than medieval European or Arabic.

The Hinduism of Yttaria differs from mainstream Hinduism somewhat. Yttarian Hinduism has elevated the war between *devas* and *asuras* to be a dominant theme. Clearly the Hinduism of Yttaria is descended from a sect that believes the war in heaven has not yet been concluded. The fact that a triad of goddesses is revered along with a triad of gods suggests the cult is Shaktic.

### GURPS Time Travel

Time travelers to this period of India's history are likely to be drawn there initially for the same reasons European travelers were, to see and experience the grandeur of India. Also, a few outstanding personalities could be encountered in India at this time, such as Timur and Akbar.

Ambitious cross-time thieves may have their eyes on the Peacock Throne. More pragmatic collectors might covet the Koh-i-Noor (and might this have been the fate of the lost Great Moghul diamond?), which remains available in India in the early parts of British India as well.

There are few critical historical moments in this period of India's history. Most of the historical changes were far more gradual, such as the infiltration of Islam into India; if the Ghurids had not brought Muslim rule to Delhi, another Muslim dynasty would most assuredly have eventually. Those events, the outcomes of which could be changed, such as battles, would likely scarcely change the overall history of India. For example, if Babur was prevented from founding the Moghul Empire, the

Lodi Empire (or the Sher Empire if Humayun is prevented from recapturing the empire) might well have turned out quite similar to the Moghul Empire. One interesting possibility is for happenstance to be manipulated in such a way that a Hindu dynasty, such as the Rajputs or Marathas, to gain political dominance of India. This might very well have changed the character of India significantly. However, it is unlikely to have much impact on World history, as the influence of India outside its borders in this period of history is, frankly, minimal.

## **Slave Soldiers of Islam**

The Muslim practice of inducting slaves into the armies gave the sultans of Islam greater fighting forces to face the Mongols and allowed larger families a method of releasing sons who were not needed to support the family.

The slave soldiers, or *mamluks*, who were often African or Central-Asian, were bought as children and trained as soldiers from their youth. Islam did not discriminate against the *mamluk* social class and there was no limit to the amount of glory and status a young Muslim slave soldier could acquire for himself through his skill at arms; Mahmoud's grandfather made himself Sultan of Ghazni and the first major Muslim dynasty of India was established by a slave, Qutb-ud-din.

## **GURPS Jihad**

A horde of devout Muslim holy warriors bringing the Koran to India will find an infidel land overwhelming in the intensity of its idolatry and resolute in its blasphemies. The marvels of Indian culture and learning are less objects of wonder, but are rather features to be scorned and destroyed if possible.

## **Dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate**

Mamluk, 1206-90

Khalji, 1290-1320

Tughluq, 1320-1413

Sayyid, 1414-51

Lodi (Afghani), 1451-1526.

## **Mongols**

Delhi was spared the heavy raids by the Mongols of Ghenghiz Khan through the diplomacy of Shams-ud-din Iltutmish (r. 1211-36), the son of Qutb-ud-din. The Mongols did raid India, but did little more than harry Punjab. Being of the same central Asian extraction as the Mongols, the Turks of northern India were more capable of countering the Mongol military tactics than were the Europeans, who suffered badly at the hands of the Mongols.

The Mongols returned in 1303-6 and threatened to flatten northern India. However, under Ala-ud-din Khalji the Delhi Sultanate was rich and powerful enough to build an army large enough to hold them back.

In 1398 the Mongols finally wrecked the destruction on India they had threatened for so long (see main text).

## **Bairam Khan**

The fate of Bairam Khan, Akbar's guardian and first chief minister, demonstrates the effects of the debilitating intrigues in the Moghul court. It was through Bairam Khan's great military and political acumen that Akbar was able to hold on to his throne when challenged by Islam Shah's successors and during the emperor's young years Bairam Khan took up the slack of Akbar's reluctance to grasp firmly the reins of power. Bairam Khan managed the empire with consummate skill, not only

managing affairs but actively enlarging the empire.

However, his arrogance, ostentation, and the fact that he was a Shia amongst Sunnis, generated resentment in the court. In the end it was Akbar's nurse Maham Anga who convinced the emperor to dismiss Bairam, as a step in advancing her son Adham Khan, a most unworthy man. Bairam Khan was sent to Mecca, only to be murdered in 1561 in Gujarat by a vengeful soldier whose father he had killed.

Maham Anga's influence on Akbar was short-lived. In 1561 Akbar ordered Adham Khan killed after he tried to assassinate Akbar's prime minister Atkah Khan. After hearing of her son's death, Maham Anga soon died herself.

## **The Moghul Harem**

Like any Indian ruler, the Moghuls kept large harems -- large as in several thousand. Though this included not only the emperor's wives and mistresses, but also the family and servants of the women. All the same, an emperor would have many wives, Akbar had 300. That this was more than the Koran allowed (four wives is the maximum for a Muslim man) was a concern but use was made of a suggestion in the Koran that "lesser" marriages of convenience, or *muta*, were allowed.

The women of the harem were of course in *pardah* and could neither be seen by men in the harem (apart from their husbands), or leave it. This was an inconvenience for sure, but one which could be overcome. A woman of the harem could travel in covered carriages and some Moghul empresses went hunting and even to war in a covered howdah. Contact with the outside world could be conducted through the harem eunuchs. It was through these eunuchs that women in the harem could conduct their intrigues, the level and sharpness of which put to shame even the hive of conspiracy that was the body of nobles of the Moghul court.

## **A Moghul Day**

The Moghul Emperors, though some of them having the reputation of being indolent, had busy days. The daily routine and duties to be performed was determined by the particular emperor's personality but once set was followed as religiously as circumstances would allow.

The day would start before dawn (with morning prayers for those devout emperors), the first important duty of the emperor was to appear on the special balcony called the *gharoka-i-darshan* at sunrise so his people could see that he was alive and well. Emperors would take this time to receive petitions from the common people and to watch elephant parades or combats, though some emperors would watch these in the afternoon. To miss this *darshan* (viewing), as Shah Jahan did in 1657 would invite panicked turmoil in the empire. Aurangzeb abolished this practice as it seemed too much like human worship, a blasphemy in Islam.

Some portion in the day (the morning for some emperors, early afternoon for others) would be spent in the hall of public audience or *diwan-i-am* where public state business would be conducted by the emperor and his officials. The court would also be entertained during this time by acrobats and musicians.

After some time adjudicating in the *diwan-i-am*, the emperor would move to the hall of private audience, *diwan-i-khas*, where the more important or private matters of state were dealt with. A day may include more than one session in the *diwan-i-khas*, with perhaps as much as twelve hours a day being spent on administration. Some emperors held court in their *diwan-i-khas* at the end of the day and allow the meeting to spill into the serving of the evening meal.

A good part of the day would be spent in the harem having meals and being entertained by

musicians, storytellers, or dancing girls. The emperor would also hold a court of sorts in the harem, hearing petitions from its members.

## **Rajputs**

The Rajputs of Rajasthan were likely to be descendants of India's Central-Asian invaders, the Shakas, Kushans, and Hunas. Over time the Rajputs developed a unique martial culture and by the arrival of the Muslim invaders were the strongest military force in India.

For the warriors of Rajputana, who would sometimes enter battle emboldened by opium, surrender was the greatest of offenses. When defeat was certain, the warriors would enter their last battle with undiminished bravery, while their wives built pyres on which to immolate themselves and their children -- a grim ritual known as *jauhar*.

This fearsome bravery might have made the Rajputs lords of North India were it not for the fact that the many Rajput *raj*as spent all their energy fighting amongst themselves. It was because of this disunity that the Rajputs finally lost their independence to the Moghuls.

The Rajputs are treated as a caste in India with four subcastes, Pratihara, Paramara, Chauhan, and Chalukya. All Rajputs claim descendent from either the sun or the moon.

## **Sabat**

The fort of Chitor was taken through the use of a rather elaborate siege technique known as the *sabat*. The *sabat* consisted of temporary fortifications which began some distance from the besieged fort but were continually being added until it reached the walls of the fort a breach could be made. Furthermore, riflemen and cannon could fire from positions closer to the enemy.

The builders of the *sabat* were protected while they worked by the already constructed fortifications as well as leather screens, sufficient to protect against the low velocity musket shot. However, building a *sabat* was dangerous work, in besieging Chitor, Akbar lost 200 workers a day.

Another method of attacking a besieged fort was to dig mines under the walls and lay gunpowder. A defense against this was to dig a mine from inside the fort to join the attacking tunnel, although this required locating the mine by listening for sounds of digging.

## **Fatehpur Sikri**

In 1565 Akbar moved his capital from Agra to the site of the village of Sikri, 25 miles west of Agra. Here Akbar constructed a new city, Fatehpur Sikri. Akbar chose this site as it was the home of the holy man Shaikh Salim Chisthi who had prophesized that Akbar, then childless, would have three heirs, a prediction that would come true with the birth of Daniyal in 1569.

The city had to be abandoned in 1585 due to a lack of water.

## **Koh-i-noor**

The most famous of India's gems is the diamond known as the Koh-i-Noor (Mountain of Light). It appeared in history in 1304 when it was acquired by Ala-ud-din, though legends claim a great antiquity for it. It was believed that whoever owned the diamond would rule the world. It passed from the Delhi Sultanate to the Moghul Empire, was temporarily lost to India when Delhi was captured by the Persian, but returned in 1813 when it passed to the Sikh king Ranjit Singh shortly before the British annexed Punjab (see *Sikh Wars*, p. xx). It is now part of the crown jewels of the

British monarch.

Other famous diamonds of India include: the Great Moghul, possessed by Aurangzeb but now lost; the Pitt diamond, which ended up in Napoleon's hands and was made into the pommel of his sword; and the Orloff diamond, which was the eye of a Hindu statue, stolen by a French grenadier disguised as a *brahmin*, sold on to a number of owners and eventually gifted to Catherine II of Russia by Prince Orloff. The unlucky Hope diamond (now in the Smithsonian), was stolen from a Hindu temple by Tavernier, who died penniless, eaten by a pack of mad dogs. Other owners of the Hope have been executed, lost their wives or husbands, gone bankrupt, gone insane, fallen off cliffs, died and committed suicide in various manners, and many other tragedies.

## Foreign Correspondents

**Ibn Battuta**, (see *GURPS Who's Who 1*, pp. xx-yy) the great Muslim traveler who toured the world between 1325 and 1354 spent time in India during the reign of Mohammed Tughluq, even serving as the Sultan's chief Judge and noted the sincere yet fruitless attempts to increase the piety of his subjects.

**Sir Thomas Roe** was the English ambassador to the Moghul court from 1615 to 1619 while Jahangir was emperor. Greatly impressed by the splendor and extravagance of the Indian empire while being ashamed of the paltry gifts his own fledgling empire could present the Great Moghul. Roe's brief was to obtain trading concessions for English merchants in India.

A number of European adventurers traveled to India and wrote about their experiences, such as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier and Francois Bernier, but **Niccolao Manucci** was the most interesting. A charlatan and quack he served under many Indian princes after arriving in India in 1656 until he died there in 1717.

## On the Road

A traveling Moghul Emperor, prince, or princess left none of their luxuries behind. Everything that made their lives so sumptuous and opulent in their home was loaded onto a train of richly decorated elephants. The grandeur of a Moghul leaving with their convoy for a summer in the hills or a military campaign was one of the most majestic spectacles ever to be seen.

When the caravan came to set up camp, it would unravel from its packings on elephants and camels and assemble itself into a whole city. Centered on the make-shift portable palace (complete with *jharoka-i-darshan*), the city-camp was complete with streets, shops, and workman's stalls to serve a city-sized population.

If there be Paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here!

--<#208> Inscription on Shah Jahan's private hall at the Red Fort of Delhi

## GURPS Peacock Throne

To set a campaign in the Moghul Empire is to experience Muslim India at the high point of its culture and opulence. The Moghul Empire is of a size not seen in India since the reign of Ashoka; yet the empire never outgrows the emperor, and his personality, in all its vigor, charm, and hubris, is the cast from which the realm is forged.

The empire of the Moghuls exerts staunch control over most of India under a stable administration. This gives the Moghul and his family considerable power at the center of the empire. This stability,

however, affords ample elbowroom for power struggles at the heart of the empire. When the Great Moghul is strong, no one can challenge him, and machinations in the court serve to build blocs and win favor with the emperor himself. This is in preparation for the time when power succeeds from the emperor. One aspect of a Moghul campaign then is the intrigue at the highest level, which percolates down through the empire so that every level of society is touched by politics in some way.

Another aspect of a Moghul campaign is the constant warfare at the fringes of the empire, a mirror to the conflicts at the center. For the empire to maintain its great wealth, it was necessary for it to constantly expand. During the life of the Moghul Empire, there was constant fighting at its borders. Military adventures were conducted in Rajasthan, Afghanistan, and the Deccan.

The pomp and wealth of the empire obscure the constant currents of activity within the court, on the fields of war, and in the occasional rebellions and petty banditry.



# British and Modern India

## Early Traders

To Europe, India and the Far East were perennial wellsprings of riches. The Roman Empire paid premium prices for India's wonders and luxuries such as exotic beasts, spices, and silks.

In theory the Portuguese had a monopoly on trade with the East, granted to them by Papal decree through the European Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494. However, with the continent of Africa barring their way, the Portuguese were unable to reach the East by sea and had to leave the Indian Ocean trade to the Arabs. In 1498, however, Vasco da Gama made his way round the Cape of Good Hope, landing in Calicut. The goods he brought back home netted him a 3,000% profit, despite having lost two ships. Da Gama returned to India in 1502 to avenge the destruction of the Portuguese trading depot established in 1500 at Calicut. He flattened the town and slaughtered several hundred local seamen, thereby ensuring the continued respect of the natives. Goa, captured by Albuquerque, viceroy in India from 1509 to 1515, was made the capital of Portuguese India in 1510 and remained Portuguese until 1961 (when it was "liberated" by the Indian Army). Portugal's trade with India suffered somewhat by the capitulation of the friendly Vijayanagar Empire in 1565 (see *Vijayanagar*, p. xx). All the same, trade with the Orient remained dominated by the Portuguese -- and Spanish since 1580 when Iberia was unified under Philip II -- until 1588 when the Spanish Armada was lost in the English Channel. This freed up the seas for the Dutch and English (see *Indian Ocean Piracy*, p. xx).

During the 17th century, Europeans, flush with gold from their adventures in the New World, filled the seas with their trading ships. In the Asian courts also, Europeans became a fixture. Ambassadors from the distant West, with their brash confidence and alien customs, pressed the Indian monarchs, the Great Moghul in particular, for greater trading rights. Sir Joshua Child, a director of the East India Company, attempted to bypass this petitioning procedure by blockading Bombay in 1685 and demanding exclusive rights for the European trade with India. However, Moghul power could scarcely have been more strong and Aurangzeb suspended English rights until they surrendered. The English were lucky not to suffer further for their arrogance.

## East India Company

The East India Company was formed as "The Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies" in 1600 by a group of 218 London merchants keen to share in the huge profits being gathered by the Dutch. A modest beginning to an enterprise that would ultimately build an empire. Queen Elizabeth supported the merchant's petition by granting them a monopoly on all trade between India and England.

The Company was initially very successful, making 25% profit on investments in the early half of the 17th century, dropping to 10% in the latter, a rate Adam Smith would recognize as healthy. Unfortunately, England had few goods of interest to trade with India and resorted to trading mostly with bullion (a problem Rome also experienced in its time). This was a serious problem, as to be allowed to export so much gold and silver required such extensive conciliatory gifts to commercial rivals and royal courtiers that the Company was brought near insolvency. The Company was rescued by the 1657 Charter of Cromwell wherein a permanent stock option was inaugurated, giving the Company capital raising power. Cromwell also helped the Company by negotiating in 1654 an end to the -- admittedly near meaningless -- trade monopoly of Portugal (independent from Spain since 1640). After the Restoration, Charles II granted the Company more privileges through charters giving the Company the ability to coin money, jurisdiction over English subjects in its factories, and the right to wage war with non-Christians.

The Company's presence in India was based around three centers of trade, each constituting a "presidency" (see *The Honourable Company*, p. xx). The oldest was based initially in the town of Surat. The English arrived here in 1612 and were given leave to establish a factory by the Emperor in 1619. In 1687 the capital of the presidency was moved to Bombay. Francis Dray purchased land on the Coromandal in 1639 from the ghost of Vijayanagar. Fort St George was built here in 1642 to be the capital of the Madras Presidency, named after the nearby village. Madras was the most important presidency early on as it benefited from the trade with South East Asia (see *Triangular Trade*). The third presidency was established at Calcutta in 1690 -- a concession from Emperor Aurangzeb. Fort William was built on the future sight of Calcutta.

The young presidencies were very successful, working as they were isolated from local politics (bank-handing aside). When the necessity arose to expand their concerns beyond their compounds it was due to the French rather than the Indians. Madras was captured by the French in 1746 as part of the Austrian War of Succession. Dupleix (see sidebar) then put greater pressure on the Madras Presidency by installing his two puppets on the most important thrones of the South, Chanda Sahib as Nawab of the Carnatic and Salabat Jang as Nizam of Hyderabad. The British position was rescued by Robert Clive who in 1751 captured and held Arcot, capital of the Carnatic and thereafter installing the British puppet, Mohammed Ali as Nawab, making Britain a serious power in the South. (See *GURPS Who's Who 1*, p. 90-91 for more information on Clive.)

This leap in influence on the Indian political scene was to be overshadowed in Bengal where Nawab Siraj-ud-daula, fearful of Fort William down the Hooghly, seized the fort in 1756. Sixty-four British including one woman and a number of wounded soldiers were locked in the Fort William dungeon, the "Black Hole" of Calcutta. Only twenty-one survived. (Though the numbers were exaggerated in British accounts, it was still a tragedy.) Concerned to reassert their position in Bengal and incensed at the fate of the internees of the Black Hole, the British sent Clive to salvage the presidency. Fort William was recaptured in 1757 (and the French expelled from Bengal as a side action). He then went on to oust Siraj from Bengal by joining an intrigue with Jagat Seth, a hugely wealthy Calcutta banker and Mir Jafar, Siraj's great uncle. Siraj was defeated at Plassay despite having a huge numerical advantage and Jafar was crowned Nawab, putting the wealthiest province of India in British hands -- an event that inexorably set rolling the Juggernaut of the British Indian Empire.

With the wealth of Bengal, India's richest province, at their feet, the British merchants could not restrain their greed. Mir Kasim, successor to the unpopular Jafar, unable to tolerate the avarice of the British and their artless governance, fled Bengal and took his revenge on the British inhabitants of Patna, ordering every one of them killed. He then banded with the Nawab of Oudh, Shuja-ud-Daula, and the Emperor Shah Alam. Their army was defeated by Major Hector Munro at Buxar. In defeating all that remained of the Moghul army, the British showed that they had North India at their mercy. They might have gone on to take Delhi and restore to the domains of the Moghul Empire a stability they had not seen since Delhi was sacked by the Persians, but they were prudent enough not to as the responsibility would have overstretched their naive administrative capabilities.

Clive, governor of Bengal for a second term from 1765, demanded from Shah Alam the revenues of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa for the Company as imperial collector. In return the Company supported him at Allahabad, paying him £260,000 for his imperial upkeep.

The presidency of Bombay was also involved in local conflicts but with much less success. The council aided their ally Raghunathrao, a contender for the Maratha throne during a war of succession from 1775 to 1778 but were unable to challenge his rival Nana Phadnis and the Council of Twelve Brothers. India's first governor-general, Warren Hastings, sent troops to protect Bombay and in 1782 the treaty of Salbai brought peace for the Presidency for some twenty years.

Madras too had its share of conflict and Hastings had to send men to counter invasions by the usurper Nawab of Mysore, Hydar Ali. Ali, an ally of the French, was taking advantage of the

confusion and corruption of the Presidency. The war with Mysore simmered under Ali's son Tipu Sultan and was intensified by Lord Richard Wellesley, governor-general 1798-1805, despite instructions from Prime-Minister Pitt to refrain from armed conflict. Wellesley (older brother of the Duke of Wellington) was an imperialist and gravely concerned about Napoleon's designs on British India. Mysore was conquered in 1799 with Tipu Sultan dying in battle. Half the Nawabship was annexed to the Company, the rest was returned to the child heir of the family deposed by Hydar Ali.

During Wellesley's governorship, numerous princely states were subdued and forced to sign "subsidiary alliances." These treaties usually included a facility for the state to be taken over by the British should the ruler die without an heir, i.e. should the line of succession "lapse" (and in 1848 this was specified to mean that only a *natural* heir could prevent lapse). Udaipur was annexed in this manner in 1852, as were Jhansi in 1853 and Nagpur in 1854. The most significant alliances Wellesley obtained were with the Nawab of Oudh, who in 1801 was forced to give up his army and relinquish his western provinces, and the Nizam, who likewise was required to give up the province of Berar to the Company.

The Marathas, however, remained enemies of the British and had to be subdued by force. The Maratha Confederacy was riven by civil war and the Company made the most of this conflict, defeating and exiling Baji Rao II in 1818 bringing the Maratha domains under the British umbrella.

This left only the Sikhs in opposition (see *Ranjit Singh*, p. xx).

## The Great Game

"England and Russia will divide Asia between them, and the two empires will enlarge like circles in the water till they are lost in nothing; and future generations will search for both of us in these regions, as we now seek for the remains of Alexander and his Greeks."

--<#208> Alexander Burnes

In the 19th century, the British were terrified of Russia -- almost hysterical. The Russia Bear was a savage behemoth perched ominously on the fringes of civilized Europe and within striking distance also of the newly acquired dominions in India. It was seen as inevitable that the armies of Russia, with their modern artillery and Cossack cavalry, would storm across Central Asia encountering as little resistance as the British had in India; the advance of the Russian Empire had been as fast as 55 square miles per day. A confrontation at India's frontier was unavoidable. In preparation of this was conducted the "Great Game" of espionage in the Afghani and Central Asian courts and the exploring and surveying of the Transoxanian hinterland -- the future battlegrounds.

In order to bolster the buffer state of Afghanistan before Russia got there the British planned to reinstall the ousted Shah Shuja to Kabul and overthrow the popular usurper Mohammed Dost. After dragging their armies up the Indus the British found Shuja had no supporters in Afghanistan and worked alone to capture Kabul in 1839. The British found the Afghani opposition to their presence extremely troublesome. The locals harassed them at every corner. The British found Kabul indefensible from the Afghani guerrilla warriors and the decision was made to retreat. In 1841 the army of 16,000 marched towards the Kyber Pass but all were slaughtered over the journey with only one man, Dr William Brydon, surviving. (The unreliable memoirs of Harry Flashman claim there was one other survivor -- see *Bibliography*.)

The British took solace in capturing Sind, taking possession of the Indus. The conquest of Sind, the emirs of which were largely allied to Britain, conducted by Charles Napier during 1843 looked like an act of churlish petulance. Mountstuart Elphinstone likened the campaign to "a bully who has been kicked in the streets and goes home to beat his wife in revenge."

The Russian adventures in Central Asia, though not the disaster suffered by the British, were also unsuccessful. An attack on Khiva was abandoned in 1840 and hard times were suffered in the Caucasus.

## **The Sikh Wars**

The head-to-head with Russia never eventuated but an encounter with the Khalsa of Punjab would not be avoided. Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in 1839 leaving the kingdom in chaos, the Khalsa generals assassinated each other to gain control of the army and Ranjit's relatives, heirs, and courtiers did the same to control the throne. Finally when the knives were sheathed, Dulip Singh, the infant son of Ranjit's widow Rani Jindan, was king. (Dulip's paternity was highly suspect as his mother's promiscuity was legendary -- she was known as the Messalina of the Punjab.)

The kingdom was not safe however; the Khalsa was restless and dangerously oversized. Jindan's plan was to let it attack the British. If the Khalsa was defeated it was to be expected that the British would then allow Jindan to rule through her lover Lal Singh. If the Khalsa were to beat the English, Jindan would then rule an empire rather than a kingdom.

This was a confrontation greatly feared by the British. Punjab had the only modern army in India. The Khalsa at this time consisted of 45,000 infantry and 26,000 cavalry supported by 376 cannon. This equaled about 1/5 of the British army in India but in defending the border, Britain could spare a force no greater than that of the Khalsa. It was disciplined, well trained and well equipped. Its soldiers were fearsome, passionately nationalistic, and had a martial religion. If the British were to lose, all of North India would be open to the Khalsa -- it was not alarmist to see that the fate of British India hung balanced on this conflict.

Rani Jandin encouraged the Khalsa to attack Gulab Singh of Jammu, a British ally. Then permitted the army to plunder British lands across the Sutlej. After an incursion across the border in 1844, Governor-General Hardinge declared war. The Battle of Ferozeshah was a victory for the British, outnumbered 4 to 1 and outgunned though they were; yet it could easily have gone the other way. The return exchange at Sobroan was also a British victory. The brutal battle lasted for two days with the Khalsa losing 10,000 of their 30,000 and the British 2,000 of their 15,000. The British then marched into Lahore. The treaty of 1845 kept Dalip as maharaja with Jandin as regent but the Khalsa was disbanded. The British were granted territory up to the Beas and Kashmir was returned to Gulab Singh.

The Second Sikh War began in 1848 with an uprising around Mul Singh, the deposed governor of Multan. The crushing of the rebellion was hard fought but Multan was retaken in 1849. After suffering a reverse at Chillianwala, the British forces, bolstered by the troops from Multan, defeated the Punjabis at Gujrat. Punjab was then directly annexed to British rule.

## **The Honourable Company**

At its height the East India Company was an enterprise of inordinate wealth and influence, not only as a speculative business, but as an administration. Its like was not to be seen again, not even in the age of multi-national corporations. By the mid-18th century, fully one half of world trade was conducted by the Company, its profits accounting for 10% of Britain's public revenue. It was responsible for near on 200 million dependents and it administered lands dwarfing the domains of its country's own monarch, including having the Moghul Empire as subject, an empire whose affluence would once have put the Company's own wealth to shame.

Control of the Company was in the hands of the General Court (later the Court of Proprietors) consisting of all shareholders having more than a specified minimum holding, usually set at £200. The General Court numbered several hundred. The "Court of Committees" was elected by the

General Court to run the Company. It was made up of a Governor, a Deputy-Governor, and twenty-four Directors. As well as their huge fleet of East Indiamen ships, the Company held much property in Britain, including London dockyards at Deptford and Blackwall as well as numerous foundries and warehouses. In 1726 the administration of the Company was brought together in beautiful new headquarters specially built in Leadenhall St.

The three presidencies were overseen by a president or governor with an advising council of 10 senior merchants. The presidencies were organized in a hierarchy. The lowest on the ladder were "writers" (clerks), who would become "factors" after five years of service. Factors served for three years to become "junior merchants," then another three years to become "senior merchants." In the early days of the Company, the employees of the factories were paid poorly by British standards (but like princes by Indian standards) and supplemented their income with "country trade," trade within India. This was strictly a violation of the Company's monopoly but was allowed by the Directors to provide for their employees. Company trade was abolished by 1773 and Company wages increased to prevent the abuse that occurred in Bengal and to counter corruption.

The governorship of all three provinces was unified under the Governor of Bengal in 1773 with the institution of the position of "governor-general" with a auxiliary council of four. This was part of the Regulating Act, an act of parliament that allowed for government intervention into the running of the Company. The act also required that one quarter of the company directors must retire each year, thereby restricting them to a three year term; however, after one year of stand-down, they may be re-elected.

The debacle following the annexation of Bengal, where the province was nearly ruined by the company squeezing it for the last rupee, the British Government passed the India Act 1784, which established a Board of Control over the Company (officially the "Parliamentary Commissioners for the Affairs of India"). The Board consisted of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for India and four privy councilors. It was to oversee the actions of the Board of Directors with regards to politics, having no jurisdiction over the Company's business concerns. In this way, the governor-general, ostensibly an employee of the Company, became to an extent, an instrument of the Government.

## **Company India**

When John Company was forced to involve itself in local politics in 1746, India was a continent in disarray. The Moghul Empire was in sharp decline and the major provinces of Oudh, Bengal, Hyderabad, and the Carnatic, were all but independent of imperial control, paying little more than homage. The Maratha Confederacy, the other major power in the subcontinent, was an unruly, disorganized confederation of dynasties ruling over a bandit-ridden land. Under Company hegemony, India experienced a new unity and a measure of peace.

After the British took formal control of Bengal in 1765, a dual government was established with a puppet on the throne administering the justice and military of the state while the British collected the revenue. Under this arrangement the British became incredibly rich but the state had no money to run itself. Hastings reorganized things in 1773 taking over direct administrative responsibilities, a model used for the rest of British India. Law was standardized under the British system. Having acquired an empire, the Company set about modernizing it. A railway network was built in the 1850s as was a telegraph network and a postal service was instituted. The building of bridges, irrigation canals, and other civil works were undertaken.

A corps of civil servants was trained to administer the burgeoning empire (to be known in time as the Indian Civil Service) and the Company established Haileybury College in Hertfordshire to train its officers. For administrative purposes, Company India was divided into districts, each of about 4,430 square miles in size. A civil servant administered this district as the district officer, a position

subsuming the roles of magistrate and revenue collector. Much was expected of a district officer as he effectively had final command over his district and often had to make judgments about issues far beyond those normally encountered by a young public servant just out of college, requests to be permitted to perform a human sacrifice, for example. For his work he was required to have an exemplary knowledge of his district including the language and an in depth understanding of local customs. He was required to tour his district for a good part of the year (90 days for a small district, 120 for a large one). At the early stages of the British occupancy, district officers such as these were often isolated, perhaps not seeing another European for months. Many had the requisite adventurous spirit and took to the country with gusto, often taking a native bride. However, as intimate contact with the natives became unseemly to polite British sensibilities, the practice of "going native" became less popular.

Britain was in possession of a good portion of India, but a third of the country was still ruled by a local princes, the so-called princely states, of which there were over six hundred, the largest, Hyderabad covered an area of nearly 100,000 sq. miles, whilst the smallest was no more than a town and a handful of villages. The five most important (with princes entitled to a 21 gun salute) were Hyderabad, Baroda (Vadodara in the vernacular), Gwalior, Jammu and Kashmir, and Mysore. The princely states were in fact part of the Empire as their independence was little more than nominal. Although they were entitled to an army, it would often be armed by the British. The railroad and telegraph passed through these states as if they were integral provinces of the Empire. A "resident" would stay in the state's capital to oversee British interests and a British garrison (called a "cantonment") would be established near the railway station.

In time, the population of British grew and a community developed. This community was quite dismissive of the natives and insulated itself from unnecessary contact with Indian society. It was a common attitude that Europeans were unquestionably superior to Indians and even born to rule the heathens. However, many British understood the depth of Indian culture and the field of orientalism flourished at Fort William College and Haileybury. Further, it was acknowledged by some that the imposition of British legal and social institutions was not necessarily the best thing for Indians who already had equivalent systems.

## **Anglo-Indian War**

For the oppressed masses of India, after seeing a procession of rulers the British were generally no worse than any other, better in some cases as they taxed fairly and cared for the maintenance of their domains. However, the fact that they were foreigners and chose to rule as foreigners was a cause of disquiet. The British meddling in civil institutions became a real source of concern when it began to look like they were undermining the native *religious* traditions. The interdict against *sati*, a religious practice, began to look like more than just a humanitarian decree when the remarriage of widows was sanctioned by law. A definite fear of Christian proselytism emerged.

In 1857, the sepoys of the Indian Army rose up against their rulers. The event and the civil war it engendered is known by British historians as the "Great Indian Mutiny" and by Indians as the "First War of Independence."

Seeds of unrest were sown in the army by the General Service Enlistment Act requiring sepoys to serve anywhere within the British Empire if called on. This was unpopular as the sepoys were not keen to serve so far from home and Hindus were worried that they might be required to serve overseas and hence lose caste for crossing the "black water." Indian discontent was heightened by the deposing of the decadent King of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah in 1856. Oudh was the last independent province in the heartland of the Moghul Empire and though Bahadur Shah II still reigned in name at Delhi, the loss of Oudh looked like the end of the Empire. The King had a treaty with the British that should have protected him and the annexation of Oudh served little purpose for the British. However, by this time the British had become very distant from their subjects, both socially and in

respecting their concerns. The uprising itself was sparked by the introduction of the new breech-loading Enfield rifle, the cartridge of which was lubricated with animal fat. As the tearing of the cartridge paper would normally be done with the teeth, the fat was an affront to both Hindu and Muslim as it would contain cow or pig, the consumption of which is anathema to these religions.

The revolt against the new cartridges began with the sepoy of Meerut in 1857 who refusing to use them during drills. Those that refused were ejected from the army in disgrace. The men of the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry, jailed for refusing to use the cartridges, were freed by their compadres. The sepoy and sowars rioted, killing British officers and marching to Delhi. At Delhi they called on the emperor Bahadur Shah II to be their patron. (Shah had no choice but to accede though it was all beyond his ken. He had no experience of ruling, only of living the good life of a pensioner.) Mutiny was then raised over north India.

At Cawnpore the British surrendered after 18 days of siege by rebels led by Nana Sahib, adopted son of the former Maratha Peshwa. The British were allowed to leave by river boat but as they were embarking, the mutineers slaughtered them and imprisoned the survivors. These survivors too were slaughtered before Cawnpore was liberated by Sir Henry Havelock and egregious vengeance was taken on the city.

In Lucknow the residency compound was besieged. The British of Lucknow held out for 4 1/2 months suffering constant barrage from the besiegers and the exhaustion of food and medical supplies. Finally Sir Colin Campbell's army reached Lucknow and the survivors were relieved.

Before the end of 1857 Delhi was retaken and the back of the rebellion was broken. Bahadur Shah was exiled to Burma and his three young sons executed -- a most ignominious end to one of the world's most magnificent dynasties.

The war continued through 1858 as the Rani of Jhansi and the rebel general Tantia Topi evaded British pursuit. Both were eventually killed and Lord Canning declared the war over a year after the Meerut uprising.

The uprising against British rule was essentially confined to north India, and then only to Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore, Jhansi, and their neighbors. Calcutta was not threatened, nor were there significant revolts outside the Bengal presidency.

Both sides of the conflict were shamefully brutal. Mass murder, rape, and religious desecration were used as methods of terrorism. The mutineers, believing they were chasing every Briton from India, murdered them to a man and destroyed their Christian churches. Enraged to the point of fanaticism, the British in retaliation sent anyone to the gallows who were no more than suspected of aiding the rebellion. A favored method of execution was to be blown up at the end of a cannon, often after being smeared with and forced to eat cow or pig fat. The Mutiny opened a breach between British and Indian that would not be healed.

## **Empire Raj**

### **Imperial India**

The mutiny brought Company rule in India to an end. It was believed that the incongruity of a company ruling a land led to the mutiny. On August 2 1858, the Government of India Act passed the rule of India to the crown. In truth however, Company rule of India was a practical fiction as the British parliament had assumed political control of India through a succession of acts and charters. The Board of Control was the true government of India. The Company had not even traded since 1833. The governor-general became a "viceroy" but very little of the machinery of administration

was changed. However, in deference to the Indian concerns the policy of "lapse" was abandoned and a commitment to preserving the independence of the princely states was affirmed.

Under the crown the modernization of India increased in pace. The telegraph and railway had proven their worth during the mutiny and were extended; in the ten years following the beginning of crown rule the amount of track laid increased four-fold. Industry in India also improved apace but could not keep up with the revolution in Britain and the commercial relationship between India and Britain changed. Aided by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, India now became a market for British produce, textiles, coal, etc., a reverse of the earlier relationship.

Despite the fear of another mutiny, the population of British in India did not stop growing. In fact, in some ways the fear prompted an increase in the British population; now many British were weary of having too many Indians in the house and took British wives rather than have Indian servants. In this way a large society of British grew up. However, the mutiny had produced a palpable gulf between white and brown based on mistrust and aversion. This caused the British to form a separate stratum of society with very little social contact with Indians other than the upper echelons of Indian society. Separate city quarters grew up in the main centers, the "civil lines" where British officials had their bungalows.

## **Sahibs and Memsahibs**

British social life was based around the "club," membership of which was exclusive. Natives certainly were excluded from most clubs but club exclusivity also worked to separate the British classes. An independent trader, a so-called "box-wallah," a most unworthy occupation in British eyes, would be hard-pressed to win membership to the more desirable clubs. Smaller cities could often support only one club and, while one could scarcely be totally excluded unless one was a renowned scoundrel, one could be kept on the waiting list for some long time and be required to attend only as a guest of a member.

British society in India is marked by a tendency to hold on to Victorian modes of etiquette long after they had gone out of fashion in Britain. Peculiar customs also grew amongst the British of India. For example, it was considered necessary to leave one's card with another household before one could ever be invited to visit. Some customs were held on to in India, to the ridicule of British at home, because they were more suited to India. The practice of changing for dinner became a frivolous practice in Britain but in the tropics frequent changes of clothes was appropriate and at any rate would be arranged (and even manually performed) by one's manservant.

## **Second Afghan War**

In 1863 Dost Mohammed died and Afghanistan collapsed into war for 5 years. The British were still greatly concerned about possible Russian interference in their Indian sphere of influence but while there was no ruler in Afghanistan to ally with the Russians they were content to practice "masterly inactivity."

Eventually Sher Ali emerged victorious and wished to be an ally of Russia at the same time as being an ally of Britain. Concerned at Russian advances to Samarkand in Turkistan, Britain appealed to Ali to cut ties with Russia and accept a British resident. In 1878 the British-Indian army was sent to secure Afghanistan as a safe buffer. Ali was chased from Kabul and died a year later. As before, the British encountered enormous resistance to their occupation. However, the resident, Major Louis Cavagnari was determined to hold Afghanistan, being quite blind to the pervasive opposition amongst the locals. On September 2, 1879 he cabled Viceroy Lyttleton the message, "All well." On September 3 he and all his staff were assassinated in the residency. The army retaliated with such brutality that Britain was appalled enough to send the government out of power and Lyttleton lost his post.



In 1887 the boundary between Britain and Afghanistan was drawn by Sir Mortimer Durand (the "Durand Line"). Even so, the Great Game on the frontier of India and Central Asia continued to be played by Britain and Russia with the respective spheres of influence not being recognized until the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907.

## The Nationalist Movement

The intellectual movement of the 19th century produced societies and movements in India as it did in the rest of the world. Many of these movements reinforced ancient ideas about Indian glory (with as many fanciful ideas as reasonable ones) and with this came an increased awareness of the right of self-determination and ultimately independence for India at the same time as the mutiny and British arrogance turned the populous away from their colonial masters.

The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 by 73 men throughout India. This body was to be the backbone of the independence movement. It quickly increased its numbers, swelling to 300 by its third annual meeting. One point however is that few of those members were Muslim. Eventually the Muslims of India pushing for independence (in this case, for a separate homeland for Indian Muslims) formed an association of their own, the Muslim League.

An important early defiance of the nationalism movement was the *swadeshi* (home country) movement, a boycott of British products and preference for Indian produce. The revolution became more serious with terrorism and murder being employed.

## Gandhiji

The Indian nationalism movement was a huge popular movement involving a great number of distinguished activists -- it had to be this strong to oppose the imperialistic power and economic weight of Imperial Britain. It is undeniable however that one name stands proud, that of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Gandhi was born in the princely state of Porbandar in 1869, the son of the *raja's* revenue minister. After completing his studies in law at London he tried unsuccessfully to establish a practice in Bombay and in 1893 traveled to Durban in Natal, South Africa to work as a lawyer for Indian merchants.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi first began to work for the enfranchisement of the underprivileged. The Natal Government of white colonials imposed harsh restrictions and taxes on its Indian residents in order to handicap the Indian community which outnumbered whites. In opposing this discrimination, Gandhi developed his ideology of nonviolent resistance, which he called *satyagraha* (truth force). So clear was it that the policies of the Natal Government were unjust, that by simply holding on to their principles, Gandhi and his associates were certain to triumph. Through nonviolent opposition, Gandhi was able to convince the Natal Legislature to soften some its racist laws.

In 1915 Gandhi returned to India. His reputation was already so strong that he was expected to join the independence movement. His first activities back in India were to help the oppressed poor in India, indigo planters, cloth mill workers, and farming peasants. Building up a great following amongst the poor in India, a community ignored by other activists, Gandhi became the "Mahatama" (Great Heart). Gandhi involvement with the independence movement increased after the "Dyer incident" in 1919, where, under the orders of General Dyer, troops opened fire without warning on a group of peaceful protestors in Jallianwala Gardens in Amritsar, killing nearly four hundred and wounding thousands. Gandhi championed self-rule and exercised it through nonviolent non-cooperation. This involved not only *swadeshi*, but also blatant defiance of unjust British laws, expressed most flagrantly in his 1930 "salt-march" to the sea to make salt to protest against the steep

salt-tax.

Gandhi's *satyagraha* movement was taken up with great enthusiasm throughout the country. In protesting against British rule and persecution, Gandhi's protestors were to never take violent action; they were to peacefully submit to arrest or even flogging. This was to be absolutely followed and Gandhi suspended the movement for a full seven years after the murder in 1922 of 22 Indian police constables by a provoked crowd of protestors. The civil disobedience movement became "Quit India" in 1942, a far more rebellious movement.

Mahatma Gandhi led the independence movement in India for over two decades. He was feared and respected by the British and revered by Indians. His impact on history is profound, not only was he the main engineer of India's independence, he is the hero of the modern notions of anti-colonialism, nonviolence, and tolerance. As a defender of the disadvantaged and persecuted his credentials are impeccable. Not only did he work for India's independence, he fought hard to end persecution of untouchables (while still maintaining the integrity of Hinduism) and railed against Hindu-Muslim mistrust and violence. He lived his philosophy like few other revolutionaries have. A champion of the rural poor, Gandhi's utopia was the unsophisticated Indian village and he attempted to live that lifestyle himself. He was enormously idealistic and demanded much from his followers. In personally enacting his *satyagraha* philosophy, Gandhi acted like an ascetic, practicing celibacy and fasting. This small, bespectacled, man dressed in homespun robes might have appeared quaint if it wasn't for the fact that the power of his personality moved an empire.

## Modern India

### Independence and Partition

The decades of campaigning for nationalism finally brought about a victory for the proponents of freedom for India. Exhausted by World War II, Britain no longer wanted to be responsible for India. When Churchill's Tories were replaced in government by the Labour Party in 1945, a plan for India's independence was drafted.

In 1945-6, elections to a representative parliament were held. The Muslim League won all of the Muslim seats and the Congress won 90% of the general seats. The League and Congress could not agree on a process of liberation for India, but Britain was determined to transfer the government of India to an Indian assembly as soon as possible. Ultimately it was decided to divide India and create two new countries, India and Pakistan, as demanded by the Muslim League.

The division of the old land of India was to give 82.5% of the territory to India and 17.5% to Pakistan, made up of east and west wings. While much of the division of land was straight-forward (noting however that the division of the infrastructure was diabolical), the partitioning of the states of Punjab and Bengal was most certainly not. India and Pakistan quibbled down to the mile. The division itself, done by a British appointee, was made on outdated maps in offices and courts miles away from the lands in question.

"Partition," as this most monumental of cartographic amputations is known, turned from an organizational nightmare into a human tragedy of cataclysmic proportions. Ten million people packed up and moved to their new "homelands," the biggest human exodus in history, and as many as one million of them never reached their new homes, being murdered in transit. In the chaos of this huge migration, murder, rape, and looting became endemic; trains arrived at stations with every passenger murdered and left in their carriages to complete their journey.

On midnight, August 14, 1947, India and Pakistan became independent of Britain.

## India and Pakistan

Friction between Hindu and Muslim had long been a feature of the Indian landscape, but now it became the basis for the division into two countries. Pakistan was created as a homeland for Indian Muslims, overtly partisan in nature. India however, was to be secular, with no religion favored. This difference of outlook has been the cause of the greatest disagreements between the two countries. It was also the cause of trouble *within* the countries, with suspicion between the religions being greatly exacerbated. The most tragic example being the assassination on January 10, 1948, of Gandhi, whose great heart had been broken by seeing his countrymen killing each other, shot dead by a Hindu fanatic.

Part of the agreement to partition India dealt with the problem of the princely states. The accession of these states was to be the prerogative of the princes. This was problematic in a number of cases. The Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Junagadh wished to accede to Pakistan as they were Muslim personally, though their states were surrounded by India and their subjects largely Hindu. Both these states were forcibly acquired by India. Kashmir was to be a greater problem. Wishing to become independent, the Hindu maharaja held out on accession for his state with a population 75% Muslim. In October 1947, Pakistan moved in to take the state, leading the maharaja to accede to India, who quickly moved its own forces in -- barely two months old and the two new infant nations were at war. By the year's end a "line of control" divided Pakistani Azad (Free) Kashmir (approximately 1/4 of Kashmir) and the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

To this day, the problem of Kashmir has not been solved and India and Pakistan fought further a war in the state in 1965 and exchanged substantial hostilities 1999. Every year when the snow melts, heavy fire is exchanged over the line of control. The two countries fought again in 1971 when East Pakistan became independent Bangladesh. India has had the best of all these conflicts.

India and Pakistan remain bitter enemies. Even off the battlefield, they have competed fiercely, from the courts of the United Nations to the cricket ground. During the Cold War the two were in opposite camps. Pakistan was favored by the United States and India formed a friendship with the Soviet Union. In 1998 both countries tested nuclear weaponry (India had first tested a device in 1974 but did not go on to become openly nuclear armed), making South Asia an ominous nuclear hotspot. Both countries have the ready means to deliver nuclear payloads, either using their fleets of jet bombers, or with domestically developed missiles, the Indian long-range Agni or medium-range Prithvi and the Pakistani medium-range Ghauri.

After independence, India went on to form the world's largest democracy, which it has held on to even after suffering a period of despotic rule, with a largely socialist government. Pakistan has not managed to maintain its democracy, suffering a number of military coups in its history.

## India Today

50 years of independence has seen as much stay the same in India, as it has seen change. India's Fabian socialist government and Pakistan's military dictatorships have failed to produce economies strong enough to benefit their most disadvantaged. Both countries have made great strides in industrialization, but have not been able to alleviate the abundance of social ills. Depending on how it is measured, the rate of poverty in South Asia runs from 40-50%, and the level of literacy is scarcely better.

A particularly troubling development in India has been the rise of militant Hinduism, or *hindutva*. In 1992 a mob of Hindus tore down a mosque in Ayodhya, the Babri Masjid, that professedly stood on the sight of Rama's birthplace. This incendiary act prompted a murderous cycle of riot and counter-riot and spread into Pakistan and Bangladesh, leaving thousands dead. This has divided the communities of Hindu and Muslim even further though it has incited anti-sectarian passions in

moderate, secular Hindus and Muslims.

The land of India has one of the longest histories of civilization, but the modern nations of this land are a mere 50 years old. There is great optimism for the future, since the opening of the Indian economy to globalization, its economy has grown at a fair pace, and the country has leap-frogged into the information age. However, the land is encumbered by its intransigent traditions harking back to its agrarian and tribal origins; the caste system still disunites society and religious superstition puts checks on progress. Maybe some things in India will never change.

## Campaigns in British and Modern India

British India: an ancient complex civilization, fractious under the rule of a foreign assertive empire -- a truly fascinating setting. Conflict and adventure is innate to British India, the empire had to be maintained through force and threats to its borders constantly held back. Modern India too is an intensely interesting setting: a pluralist community bursting at the seams with all its diversity.

As was the case with Muslim India, the transition to a new historical era with the arrival of a new ruling class with a new culture does little to change the extant culture. All that applied regarding the culture of Muslim India is true also in large part in British and modern India, as is the culture of pre-Muslim India.

A dominant theme of British India as a setting is the culture clash between the British and the native Indians. This cultural discord in itself makes the setting interesting but also fuels conflict and presents challenges.

A dominant theme of modern India is the youngness of the nations. For the fifty odd years of their independence, the countries of South Asia have struggled to incorporate their ancient traditions into modern civilization; all their growing-pains can be attributed to the them discovering their true identities in the modern world.

### Crossovers

#### **GURPS Swashbucklers**

The early period of European contact with India is perfect for *GURPS Swashbucklers*. In the Eastern sphere, merchants and privateers must suffer not only contests between the European sea powers, the English, the Dutch, and the Portuguese/Spanish, but also with the Arabs and locals, who, particularly in the Indonesian Spice Islands, are master pirates themselves.

Enormous profits can be gained by traders in spice but there are other riches to be gained, not the least is the treasure of wild stories of lands of alien customs. The coast of India is ripe for raids but ventures into the interior of the land is equally if not more profitable for it is inland that the amazing realms of Vijayanagar and the Moghuls can be found. The European factories are havens, though they are ever at the threat of attacks and depend on keeping good relations with their patrons.

#### **GURPS Cliffhangers**

India has the requisites of an outstanding setting for pulp adventures. It has tracts of unexplored wilderness, treacherous topography, lost civilizations, exotic customs, ferocious wildlife, and fabulous wealth. An adventurer might stock up on supplies at Madras before trekking inland in search of rumored storehouses of the Vijayanagars. Or, disguised in a loincloth, turban, and boot polish, he might infiltrate a Tantric cult to get close to its villainous high priest.

## **GURPS Horror**

As a setting India has atmosphere (howling jackals, sinister idols to outlandish gods), the menagerie of monsters (a preponderance of ghosts, malignant *rakshasa*, *thags*), and the alienation (impenetrable bizarre, grotesque, and sometimes savage customs) for quite disturbing horror.

## **GURPS Espionage**

One only need view the movie *Octopussy* to see the potential of India as an exotic location for intercontinental espionage adventures.

## **GURPS Special Ops**

There are a number of situations that might necessitate a special op. in the countries of South Asia. The possession of ready nuclear devices and nuclear material in India and Pakistan is potentially dangerous. An op. may be required to rectify circumstances that might lead to the use (or misuse) of these weapons. Another danger is in these weapons or material falling into the wrong hands. Religious extremism is a fuel for incendiary situations. Aside from the homegrown extremism in the region, India or Pakistan might harbor terrorists from other countries who may be the target of a special op.

## **GURPS Illuminati**

Illumination. India has spent millennia searching for this prize among prizes. The vast secrets uncovered by these centuries of investigation are contained in the innumerable religious texts, most notably the Vedas. Knowledge of the Vedas (read in their original Sanskrit) is practically a necessity for searchers after the arcane mysteries of the ancients. However, the wisdom of these venerable works are not accessible to the uninitiated and it is necessary to have them decoded by a master (to say nothing of the secrets the master himself knows).

These texts might include not only the metaphysical secrets of India's ancient philosophers, but also details of life in an ancient India that was more enlightened and technologically advanced (see *High Tech Hindu*, p. xx) than the modern day.

India's most well known limb of the worldwide conspiracy is the Theosophical Society. Founded by Madam H.P Blavatsky in 1875 in New York, the Society moved its headquarters to Madras in 1878 where it could be closer to the rich source of theosophical knowledge in India. The goal of the Theosophical Society is to bring together humanity under a unified religion through which everyone will be illuminated and join the Great Masters who now govern our spiritual evolution.

## **GURPS Supers**

Hindu mythology or Buddhist belief might be used as inspiration for a Supers character. Maybe the character is an avatar of Vishnu, or has tapped into superpowers through meditation and yoga.

## **GURPS Cyberpunk**

India will always be at the cutting edge of technology. However, as has always been the case, the advance of the country towards the future is staggered through society and India will see a much greater disparity between rich and poor than the already inequitable standard of a cyberpunk setting. An Indian netrunner might sit at his jerry-rigged console in a rat-infested, dilapidated building with a homeless family huddling in its entranceway to escape the monsoon rain.

With competence but not resources, Indian cybernetics, sold by street vendors in tiny stalls, will be

cheap and functional but crude and error-prone.

### **GURPS Space**

Indian elements might very well find themselves in a science fiction setting. This might be as minimal as having certain planets with a majority Indian population. At the other extreme, a science fiction campaign might revolve around Indian motifs. Roger Zelazny's award winning novel *Lord of Light* is an example of this (though admittedly only tangentially space related). In this novel, on a lost colonized planet a small cartel use extremely advanced technology to lord over the rest of the colonists as "gods." This technology also effects reincarnation of a sort. In a way, *Lord of Light* is an interpretation of the story of the Buddha. Other Indian tales might also be rendered in a futuristic setting, the *Mahabharata* for example.

### **GURPS Time Travel**

Time travelers with an interest in the British Empire would do well to visit India during the British Raj; India practically *was* the British Empire. From its inception at Plassay to the Last Post at Mumbai's Gateway to India, the Raj is a tale writ large in history and its narrative shaped the Age of Imperialism internationally. The Raj evolved slowly and a list of the critical moments would be Arcot, Plassay, Mysore (British vs. Tipu Sultan), the retreat to Khyber Pass, the 1st Sikh War, the annexation of Oudh, the Anglo-Indian War, the massacre at Jallianwala Gardens, the salt march (and Gandhi's other protest actions), and the granting of independence to India and Pakistan.

After the 1st Sikh War, the course of India's history could scarcely be altered, the British were unassailable in their rule of India, but ultimately, rule from Britain was unsustainable and unacceptable and independence inevitable. However, if the British had lost at Ferozeshah or any of the battles previous to this, history might have been quite different and may not have featured a British Raj or even a British Empire of any distinction. Similarly, if Russia had had more success in breaking through Central Asia and Afghanistan, might they have wrested India from the British?

## **Indian Ocean Piracy**

The trade between India and the West (and indeed the East) has always been brisk. Never a great maritime country itself, India's seas were filled with foreign vessels. Piracy was often more profitable than trade and the Arabs were masters of piracy. The Portuguese trade in the Indian Ocean was almost institutionalized piracy, wherein a warrant to trade was no more than a guarantee of protection from official corsairs.

With the Spanish Armada destroyed, Spanish hegemony was broken and could no longer keep Dutch and British ships from its previously exclusive trade routes. This period then saw frigates and man'o wars of the English East India Company and the Dutch United East India Company running Spanish blockades and capturing Spanish fortresses on Indian Ocean islands and ports. The Calvinist Dutch, recently having gained independence from Catholic Spain, were particularly vigorous in their fight with the Spanish and managed to wrest control of all of the Spice Islands. The British, unable to keep up with the surging Dutch, took India for their sphere of interest.

## **Triangular Trade**

The only thing of interest to the Asians that the Europeans could trade was gold and silver. It could not be sustainable to simply trade all of this away on eastern produce. Hence the English and Dutch established a triangle of trade where cotton was purchased in southern India and traded for spice in South East Asia which was then taken back to Europe to be sold for cash, giving more bullion with which to trade with India.

## **The English Become British**

In 1707 the Act of Union between England and Scotland was consummated, thus bringing into being the United Kingdom. Hence the change in nomenclature, where before there were English, there were now *British*.

The term "Anglo-Indian" was initially used to refer to Britons living in India. This term in time came to be used to for those of mixed British and Indian descent. These Anglo-Indian were shunned by both British and Indian and formed a community of their own.

## **Joseph François Dupleix**

An interesting "what if" comes from speculating on what would have come to pass if Joseph Dupleix, president of Pondicherry (established 1674) from 1741, had not meet his foil in Robert Clive. Dupleix was a master conspirator; he had south eastern India eating from his hand. He understood better than any other European the moods and ambitions of Indian princes but most importantly how to make use of political forces without exposing himself. He was offered the Nawabship of the Carnatic personally but knew better than to accept.

Robert Clive however, more of a general but less of a politician than Dupleix, simply could not be denied -- no one, not even Dupleix, could oppose his fierce energy. In 1754 Dupleix, who but for the indomitable determination of Robert Clive might have been emperor of India, was recalled to France as a failure.

## **Rivals to John Company**

United East India Company of the Netherlands (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie), established 1601 and the French East India Company (Compagnie des Indes Orientales), established 1664 where the chief European rivals of the English East India Company.

Courten's Association of Sir William Courten and associates managed to wrangle royal permission to trade with India alongside John Co. in 1635. However, when Charles I was beheaded, the unsuccessful Courten's Assoc. was finished.

The Muscovy Company, founded 1554, had the monopoly of trade with Persia through Russia. Trading with India until 18th century, the Muscovy Company was never a troublesome rival to John Company.

The Levant Company could not compete with the trade with India and ended up *exporting* spices from Britain to the Middle East.

## **The British Conquest**

Three great foreign incursions have helped to shape India: the Aryan migration, the Muslim invasion, and finally the British conquest of India. Hardly an invasion or annexation, the British acquisition of India was an odd process. It was an unplanned subjugation initially simply for the purpose of securing elbowroom for British trade stations. From the time of the establishment of the trading station ("factory" in the parlance of the time) at Surat to the annexation of Punjab, a full 230 years passed, near on ten generations.

## **Indian Army**

One of Charles II concessions to the company was the freedom to raise an army. It wasn't until 1748 that Major Stringer Lawrence formed the first military units in Madras to form the Madras Army. Bengal soon too formed its army, consisting initially of only 30 men plus an officer supported by a gunner with crew. In Bombay a detachment of the King's men sent to look after the colony became the Bombay Army. These young armies were rather rag-tag, formed as they were from those who could find no occupation elsewhere and included many foreigners including French sailors. The Indian Army was reinforced by men of the Royal Army; in 1754, the 39th Foot were sent to India on loan to the Company.

In time, Indians were also to join the Indian Army. The Indian Army was to become the largest mercenary army in the world. It was entirely made up of volunteers and never needed to conscript. The Indian Army was very well disciplined, as was the way for European armies of the time. Even the native members of the India army were expected to be as disciplined as a European member. This discipline was the great advantage of the British over the native armies, which were distinguished by their lack of discipline. Greater access to artillery and advanced European military science also contributed greatly to British military superiority.

After the institution of the post of Governor-General, the position of Commander-in-Chief India was also initiated. The C-C India in theory had authority over the whole Indian army. In truth he had little control outside Bengal; the Commanders-in-Chief of Madras and Bombay looked after their own corps. Until 1886, the C-C India did not have authority over the Punjab Irregular Field Force who were looked after by the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab. The C-C India was answerable to the Governor-General rather than the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, and was the second most powerful man in India.

The administration of each of the three arms of the army was looked after by the Quartermaster General and the Adjutant-General, both usually major-generals. The former looked after the vitals of the army (supplies, barracks, etc.), the latter discipline and administration. Both had deputies (usually colonels) and deputy assistants (usually majors).

There was considerable prejudice against the officers of the Indian Army; in particular, Lord Fitzroy Somerset Raglan, leader of the army at Crimea, had great contempt for the "Indian" officers. They



were seen as adventurers and mercenaries -- and not without justification, as many might not have made it into the British Army and were there only to make their fortune. Still, they had the combat experience that might have served well at Crimea, where the prestige units of the Life Guards and Hussars suffered in their dress uniforms under ill-experienced officers.

After the crown took over the Raj the Indian Army was integrated with the British Army. The British officers were incorporated into the Queen's army. The European troops were also to be transferred leaving the Indian Army entirely native. However, many transferees were unhappy, having so much loyalty to their old regiments, and when given the opportunity, most took discharge.

### **Native Officer Ranks**

The officers of the Indian Army were all British. However the Indian Army had an extra level of officers, called "natives" before the crown took over the Raj and Viceroy's Commissioned Officers afterwards (referring to the fact that the commission comes from the viceroy rather than the crown). The native ranks were inferior to British officers but were saluted. The three native ranks were Subedar-Major, Subedar, and Jemadar for the infantry and Rissaldar-Major, Rissaldar, and Jemadar for the cavalry. These ranks exist still in the modern Indian army known as junior commissioned officers.

The non-commissioned and warrant officer ranks were equivalent to the British ranks of Sergeant-Major, Sergeant, Corporal, and Lance Corporal but were called Havildar-Major, Havildar, Naik, and Lance Naik for the infantry and Daffadar-Major, Daffadar, Lance Daffadar, and Unpaid Lance Daffadar in the cavalry. The native names for private and trooper were sepoy and sowar respectively.

### **Martial Races**

The British took race very seriously. While a regiment could be made up of me of all races, religions, and castes, it was ensured that individual squadrons were homogeneous.

It was noted that during the Mutiny it was chiefly the Bengalis who revolted while the Sikhs remained loyal. Hence the British hit on their specious "martial races" theory. After the Mutiny no more Bengalis were recruited and recruitment from the lower Hindu castes was also stopped. Southern regiments were disbanded. The Gurkhas were considered the best recruits with the Sikhs (who were assuredly not a race) not far behind. In fact, the Sikhs came to make up 1/5 of the Indian Army. Men from the foothills of the Himalayas were also preferred as it was assumed that the heat of the plains produced cowardly poltroons. Rajputs, Baluchis, Pathans, Dogras, and Mers were also considered appropriate for the army.

Although they are not allowed to be selective, the modern Indian Army has a composition not remarkably different from that of the British Indian Army.

### **GURPS Great Game**

The need to check the advance of Russia through Central Asia to India offers great adventuring opportunities for loyal British officers willing to brave the no-mans-land between the two empires to map, gather intelligence, and to make allies of the khans and emirs of the region. It was a hazardous undertaking and many young officers lost their lives, executed by suspicious locals or the Russians themselves. Often this work would be done in disguise and sometimes with the help of Indians. The Great Game was a time of adventure, and, known as the Tournament of Shadows by the Russians, a time of intrigue.

### **Ranjit Singh**

Perhaps the greatest beneficiary of the collapse of the Moghul Empire was the nation of the Sikhs. However, once freed from the oppression of the Moghuls they were for a long time unable to achieve any unity. This was to come under Ranjit Singh, the self-declared Maharaja of Punjab from 1801 (when he was only 21). Ranjit was an inspirational leader. He was illiterate but shrewdly intelligent. Although he was a drunkard womanizer and only had one eye (the other lost in childhood), he had an undeniable charisma and his shortcoming only endeared him to his followers.

Ranjit realized that two things would help his Punjab, friendship with the British and a decent army. He secured the first with the treaty of 1809, which recognized his kingship but seceded to the British suzerainty over Malwa to the east of the Sutlej. To build his army he enlisted foreign advisors. He had a Frenchman train his cavalry, an Italian his infantry, and an American his artillery. The great Khalsa of the Punjab was organized into brigades on the French plan, each with three or four battalions of infantry, an artillery battery and between two and six thousand cavalry.

With this great army Ranjit captured Kashmir, Multan, and Peshawar.

He died in 1839.

## **Rani of Jhansi**

In 1853, the Raja of Jhansi, Gangadhar Rao, died. He had been unable to father an heir on his wife, Lakshmibai, and had adopted a son, Damodar, shortly before his death. Nevertheless, in accordance with their established protocol, the British declared the Jhansi line to have lapsed and annexed the kingdom, depriving the Rani her regency and her adopted son his kingdom.

The Rani had no opportunity to act upon her grudge against the British until 1857 when revolt was raised. Initially the rebels at Jhansi intended to elevate a distant relative to the throne, but through bribery the Rani convinced them that she could rule. It was well that she did as she proved a highly able commander during the time of strife. Along with her skills of government she had learnt in the royal court, she proved herself a natural tactician and the other leaders of the rebellion, such as Tantia Topi, consulted her constantly. On the battlefield too she showed her instinct for war. She died in battle in 1858 leading her troops in a cavalry charge against General Hugh Rose's 8th Hussars; her death precipitating the beginning of the end of the mutiny.

## **Hill Stations**

At the height of summer the administration of British India simply could not be conducted in the unbearable heat. The British solution to this was to move the administration to cooler climates in the hills until the temperatures in the plains became tolerable. Thus were built the many hill stations. Even the imperial capitals would be moved en masse to a temporary base in the hills. The administration of Delhi had Shimla as its summer double, Bombay had Pune, and Calcutta Darjeeling. The more important hill stations were too expensive for some who had to be content to summer in less fashionable hill towns.

The British were not the first to make use of hill towns to escape the summer heat. Most rulers in India did the same, the Moghuls most notably, with their love of Kashmir. The British hill stations were unique however in that they recreated little pieces of "home." The hill stations were definitely more British than any town in the plains. British civil servants and army personnel posted in the plains would sometimes leave their wives and children in the hills year round. The stations had a far livelier social scene than plains cities.

## **Cricket**

Any account of British or modern India would be incomplete without a mention of cricket, the sport introduced by the British and adopted wholeheartedly by the Indian population. Cricket is the second most popular spectator sport in the world today (after soccer), due in large part to its loyal following on the Subcontinent. It also remains a major sport in England and nations of the British Commonwealth around the world.

Cricket is a bat and ball sport with a long and illustrious history. A full description of the game is beyond the scope of this book, suffice it so say that it is characterized by its elegance, its propensity for coinage of quaint terms, the length of a game -- from several hours up to five days of six hours play each -- and scores typically running into multiples of hundreds of runs. Readers interested in the rules are encouraged to look up library books or web sites (there are thousands of them).

Cricket was first played in India by the early British colonials, but by 1892 the locals had become so enamored of the game that the first championship matches between the Europeans and the Parsis were held. The first Test match (the highest level of the game, played between national teams) featuring India was played against England in London in 1932, and was followed the next year by the first Test on Indian soil, in Mumbai. In the present, India is a strong cricket nation, competing regularly against England, Australia, South Africa, the West Indies, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, and their arch-rivals Pakistan.

Cricket has so penetrated Indian culture that to most Indians it is not merely a sport, but a way of life. Poor children spend what little leisure time they have playing in the dusty streets of Delhi with makeshift equipment. Professional players are admired and worshipped as stars, and form a rich and even politically powerful elite. Almost every Indian boy's dream is to grow up and represent his country at the game he loves so much.

On the shady side, betting on cricket forms the core of India's illegal gambling network, and thus finances much of the nation's organized crime. Big matches in India, especially between India and Pakistan, have also led to incidents of crowd violence rivaling European soccer riots. In the current age of nuclear weapons and political tension on the subcontinent, cricket fanaticism is a dangerous wildcard in the mix.

## **Thagi**

Sinister worshippers of Kali, the *thags* (thugs, in English) honored their patron goddess by murder. On the one hand, they were simple, though crafty bandits who would gull innocent travelers, only to do them in and steal their belongings. On the other hand, they were the Black Goddess' instruments on earth. Their brutal customs were preformed only in proscribed ways and involved rites to Kali to whom they sacrificed sugar and venerated through sanctified pickaxes. Their main weapon was the garrote (though they were known to make use of poison, drowning, and burning alive), employed with two jerks with orisons to Kali after each, and then a slow strangulation.

Muslim *thags* were also known, though in worshipping Kali they were most assuredly heretics.

The cult existed in India for many hundreds of years, dating back at least to the 12th century. At any time the cult numbered several thousand. Members communicated through a secret cant known as Ramasi. The cult was believed to have been broken by about 1837 after Captain William Sleeman's six year war against them. Lesser bands of *thags* were exterminated by 1861 and in 1882 the last known *thag* was executed.

Needless to say, remnants of the cult may surface to trouble adventurers in later times or the cult might be reborn under a charismatic and evil follower of Kali.

The light has gone out and there is darkness everywhere.

--<#208> Nehru on Gandhi's murder

## **GURPS Bollywood**

India's film industry churns out hundreds of movies a year, Mumbai (formerly Bombay, hence Bollywood) and Chennai being the most prolific sources. They can be produced in such numbers because quality is not valued by Indian audiences, so every expense can be spared. These films are lurid spectacles that without fail are packed to the brim with romance, violence, heroism, villainy, singing, and dancing all as ostentatious and unsubtle as can be managed. Being such a mixture, they are known as "*masala* movies."

An adventure that captures the spirit of Bollywood (singing and dancing optional), while something of a challenge, is an opportunity to abandon all restraint and taste.

## **Use 'Em Or Lose 'Em**

India's testing of its nuclear capabilities in 1998 and Pakistan's retaliatory test shortly after, greatly enhanced the danger of nuclear war in the subcontinent. While both were threshold states, they had the capability of assembling nuclear weapons and could in principle have used them should hostilities have broken out, however there was actually less chance then than now when the "deterrent" exists.

While the two enemies are armed below mutually assured destruction levels, each is in danger of having their nuclear arsenal destroyed by a surprise attack, thereby leaving them open to nuclear blackmail. Both nuclear artilleries must now be on "launch-on-warning" status so they won't get caught by such a surprise attack.

Another significant change to the defense landscape is that under the situation outlined above, it is now possible for Pakistan to win a war against India.

## **GURPS Kali Yuga**

The Puranic account of the cycles of time do not predict the end of the world until some time in the 4,340th century A.D., when the *kali yuga* comes to an end. However, some traditions do not give a length for the *kali yuga*. What if the end was imminent? In this case, society will degenerate and knowledge will be used against, rather than for, humanity -- a cyberpunk setting but with a supernatural aspect.

Concomitant with the growth in corruption and amorality is firstly an increase in the practice of Tantrism, and secondly in the population of *rakshasa*. Modern *rakshasa* are far more subtle than their legendary relatives; possessed of an evil intelligence, they use their powers of shape-changing to pass as humans and their powers of magic to their nefarious ends (including, as always, the consumption of human flesh).

# Epic India

History is not India's only tradition of recording the past; through the epics and the myths of the Puranas, Indians look back to a time of greater glory and righteousness, the now defunct heroic age when the land was ruled by well-born *chakravartins* beholden to goodly *brahmins*. In fact, history gets short shrift, historical figures and events are forgotten while legendary figures, who may once have been historical, are aggrandized and their legends become vehicles for parables and fables. In this chapter the great epics of Hinduism are detailed (oh so briefly) as well as myths from other sources.

The epic age existed in another time, a whole other era of human history, the *treta* and *dvapara yugas* (see *The Cycle of Time*, p. xx), when *dharma* itself was more pure. In the epics the heroes are greater men than will be known in this age; their motives were purer, their passions more intense, and their destinies more deeply etched into their characters. The heroes of the epics fought and quested for love, honor, and above all *dharma*, and the whole of India was their stage. They were helped in their endeavors by powerful magicians, races of anthropomorphic animals, and by the gods, who, if they weren't as much as the begetters of the heroes, were at least their patrons.

That epic India is a fine campaign setting in and of itself is abundantly clear. However, the stories and teachings of the epics are pertinent for campaigns set in historical settings also, because, despite their ahistoricity, they form part of the historical legacy of Hindus. That the events of the epics might not have in fact occurred (though many do believe in them completely) or that the world it describes might not have existed, is immaterial and misses the point.

## Cosmology

### In the Beginning .

"There was neither aught nor naught, nor air, nor sky beyond.

What covered all? Where rested all? In watery gulf profound?

Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor change of night and day.

The One breathed calmly, self-sustained; naught else beyond it lay.

.

Who knows, who ever told, from whence this vast creation rose?

No gods had then been born -- who can e'er the truth disclose?

Whence sprang this world, and whether framed by hand divine or no

-- Its lord in heaven alone can tell, if even He can show."

--<#208> *Rig Veda*

### The Primordial Sacrifice and the Golden Egg

Despite the pessimism regarding the knowability of the creation in the quote above, several accounts of it exist in the Hindu literature.

An influential account from the *Rig Veda* describes how the universe was created from the sacrifice of Purusha, the primal man, by the gods. Purusha, with a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet, enveloped the universe. From his sacrifice was formed all of existence as the gods divided his body into pieces -- the four Vedas, the animals, the four *varnas*, the four quarters of this world, the sky, and the heavens.

The *Puranas* and the *Laws of Manu* give a very different account. In these books, the world is brought into being from the will of God. God, the Self-existent, desired to create the world. He created the waters and cast upon them a seed formed of the five elements and the three *gunas*. From the seed was born a golden egg, the Brahmanda, and inside this egg He created Himself as Brahma, the creator. Within the egg Brahma created the world from his body and after dwelling there for a year, he split the egg into two halves, one gold from which he created the heavens, the other silver from which he created the earth. Then to populate the world he created himself as two, a man, Manu, and a woman, Swayambhu.

## The Universe

The egg-shaped universe created by Brahma is divided into 21 levels. The upper seven levels, known as *lokas*, are the 5 heavens, the middle air, and this world. The next seven levels are the *talas* and are home to mythical beings. (Hindu myth repeatedly refers to the "three worlds," they are the earth, the heavens, and the nether regions, or *talas*.) The bottom seven are the hells or *narakas*.

(Exactly how these realms are separated is a question that must be answered for a particular campaign. Are they completely different planes, accessible only by Gate Magic? Or are they all on the same plane, with the *talas* being subterranean realms, with the hells presumably deeper below them?)

Brahmanda floats alone in the firmament, which may contain other universes.

## This World

This world is flat and circular and lies below the heavens, the abode of the gods, the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars, with the middle air, *antariksha*, the abode of birds and the spirits of the ancestors, between. A one-legged goat, Aja-ekapad, keeps the earth and sky separate. The earth sits on the head of the giant serpent Seshnag who stands on the back of the tortoise Akupara whose four feet stand on four elephants who stand on the shell of Brahmanda.

At the center of the world is Mt Meru, upon which is Svar-loka, the heavens of the gods. Meru is also the center of the continent Jambudvipa, called for a giant jambu tree that grows on the mountain. The continent of Jambudvipa is surrounded by six further continents arranged in concentric rings. Jambudvipa is separated from the next continent, Plaksha, by an ocean of treacle. The oceans separating the other continents are oceans of wine, clarified butter, curds, and milk. The last of the continents is surrounded by an ocean of fresh water, beyond which is the land of Lokaloka on which is a giant mountain range some 100,000 miles high and 100,000 miles wide. Beyond Lokaloka is darkness and then the shell of Brahmanda.

India is located on the southernmost verge of Jambudvipa, separated from the rest of the continent by the Himalayas.

Another scheme has Mt Meru as an island surrounded by four continents. The southernmost of these continents, is Jambudvipa after the jambu tree growing on the shore opposite Meru, and is the home of humans.

The India of the epics corresponds to the historical period where India is divided into

*mahajanapadas*, which in the epics are true kingdoms, rather than the tribal kingdoms of history.

## The Epics

Most cultures make do with one epic, Hinduism needs two. Both tales, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, started their lives as fairly straightforward stories, respectively the quest of Rama for his wife Sita and the civil war between two lines of the Kuru tribe. Over the centuries additional legends and religious or social essays have been added (particularly in the case of the *Mahabharata*) and were given a greater religious spirit. The epics now work not only as stories, but as paragonic tales.

Legend puts the date of the battle of Kurukshetra (see below under *The Mahabharata*) in the year 3128 B.C. though if it did occur it was likely to have been between 850 and 650 B.C. The *Ramayana* precedes the *Mahabharata* (and abbreviated appears as a section in the later epic), by perhaps 200 years historically, or 2 million years according to the legend.

### The Ramayana

The *Ramayana* is the story of Ramachandra, the king of Ayodhya, and his quest to reclaim his wife from the *rakshasa* king of Lanka.

Rama was the eldest son of Dasharatha, king of Ayodhya, who had three other sons, Bharata and the twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna, on two other of his wives. From a young age, Rama was destined for greatness; when he was sixteen he had powers bestowed on him by the great sage Vishvamitra and slayed several *rakshasa*. He married Sita, daughter of Janaka, the king of Mithila, after proving his strength by breaking Shiva's bow, which had previously proved to be unstringable.

Rama was naturally to inherit the kingdom and Dasaratha was keen to abdicate in his favor. However, Bharata's mother tricked Dasharatha into promising naming Bharata as regent and to exile Rama for fourteen years. Dasaratha had no choice but to fulfill his promise and Rama left in exile to the jungle, accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana. Bharata was reluctant to take reign and kept one of Rama's sandals on the throne to emphasize that he ruled as regent only.

During the first ten years of exile Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana defeated several troublesome *rakshasas*. One female *rakshasa*, Shurpanakha, fell in love with Rama and had her nose and ears cut off by Lakshmana, appealed to her brothers for help. Two of her brothers, Khara and Dushana, were defeated along with their army of *rakshasas* by Rama and Lakshmana. However her older brother, Ravana, ten-headed *rakshasa* king of Lanka, was persuaded to abduct Sita, carrying her away without Rama's knowledge.

Rama and Lakshman searched for Sita. Unable to find her they went to Sugriva, the king of the monkey people, the *vanara*. After the heroes helped Sugriva reclaim his kingdom from his usurper brother Bali, the monkey king raised an army and lent it to Rama under the control of his general, Hanuman.

In time they found out that Sita was at Ravana's city in Lanka and Hanuman leapt across the Pali Straight to locate her and wrecked a little havoc in the city. When he returned his army constructed a bridge and joined battle against Ravana's army of *rakshasa*. The battle was fierce but Rama ultimately won and Ravana was killed.

The story of the *Ramayana* now takes a rather less than heroic turn as Rama, rather than rejoicing at having rescued his wife from Ravana, he instead spurns her on account of her having been touched by another man, albeit involuntarily and non-sexually. Even her passing an ordeal of fire does not

sway him and it is only the pleas of the gods that finally make him change his mind.

Rama now returns to Ayodhya and institutes a glorious reign of such dharmic righteousness that all his subjects are destined to heaven on account of his holiness. However, one blot remains, his accepting back of his Sita. Discontent in his kingdom and his own jealousy forces him to exile her. So Sita, pregnant with Rama's twin sons, leaves for the jungle and bears and there raises her sons, Lava and Kusha. In the year that Lava and Kusha turn fifteen, Rama chooses to do the *ashvamedha*. His horse is captured by the boys and Rama's army is defeated. Rama recognizes the boys and calls Sita to Ayodhya. He accepts her innocence and wishes her to return. However, she does not accept and calls for the earth to open up and swallow her. Rama is overwrought by sadness and leaves this earth to re-enter Vishnu, of whom he is an *avatara*.

## Heroes and Villians of the Ramayana

### Rama

In the current version of the *Ramayana*, Rama is incontestably a god, the seventh *avatara* of Vishnu. However, in earlier versions of the story he is not divine and it is the more recently written first and seventh books of the epic that make him out to be a god. Vishnu takes on the incarnation as a mortal in order to defeat Ravana who had been granted the boon by Brahma that he not be able to be killed by god, demon, or spirit.

Rama is a great king, not only temporally, but also great in *dharma*. He is loyal to his father when he is just a prince, and forces the king to keep his promise to his queen even if the king was reluctant, even if it means living in the jungle for 14 years. By rescuing Sita from Ravana he proves himself able to defend his honor. He further demonstrates his respect for dharmic law rather harshly by rejecting Sita after rescuing her.

He is of course a great warrior, particularly an archer, being able to pull a bow such that his arrow can pierce not only several trees and a hill, but also six subterranean worlds, and so good was his aim that this arrow would then land back in his quiver a trick he performed to impress the monkey king. Though in truth a good deal of this was achieved through *mantras* (spells) he cast over his arrows.

### Sita

Rama's wife Sita gets little opportunity for action in standard versions of the *Ramayana*. She is essentially a good, loyal wife, and as such easily slips into her husband's shadow. However, she demonstrates some strength of character at the end of the epic in convincing Rama to accept her back even though legally/ethically he shouldn't and in refusing to be taken back after being exiled.

Sita is an incarnation of Lakshmi, just as Rama is an *avatara* of Vishnu. She also has the aspects of an agricultural goddess as she was born from her father's plowed furrow and is accepting by the earth when she chooses to leave.

### Hanuman

That Hanuman, a monkey, has become one of Hinduism's most celebrated heroes attests to the imagination of the religion.

As Rama's loyal companion, Hanuman has become a patron of the quality of loyalty. As well as his deeds in the *Ramayana*, Hanuman has a bevy of legends of his own. He is an offspring of Shiva and Vayu (the god of the winds) and was possessed of great powers. However, due to a curse by the sage Trinabindu, he loses his powers until reminded of them.



## Ravana

The *rakshasa* king of Lanka was born with ten heads and obtained his kingdom from Kubera by defeating him and taking his aerial chariot, the Pushpaka. By performing a great austerity and offering all of his ten heads to Brahma, Ravana was granted the boon that he should never be killed by a mortal.

When Kubera lived at Lanka (the city built by Maya on Mt Meru for Indra), he was the lord of the universe and Lanka was the world's greatest city. In his gem encrusted palace Kubera was attended to by thousands of women and was served by the Yakshas, Kinnaras, etc. Ravana took control of this most magnificent of cities (which was then cut from Mt Meru and ended up an island).

## The Mahabharata

Within its labyrinth of myths, fables, and parables, the *Mahabharata* tells the story of the conflict between two sets of cousins, the Pandavas and Kauravas, and the great war they fought on the field of Kurukshetra.

The five Pandavas were the sons of Pandu, though they were actually fathered by gods. The 100 Kauravas were sons of Pandu's elder brother Dhritarashtra. When Santanu the king of Bharata (with its capital at Hastinapura, now Delhi), died, his grandson, Pandu, became king as his eldest, Dhritarashtra, was forbidden to succeed by tradition on account of his being blind. Upon Pandu's death, Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava becomes king. However, the eldest of the Kauravas, Duryodhana wishes to be king, instead. Duryodhana builds a palace out of wax for the Pandavas. When they have moved into the palace, Duryodhana burns it down and, with the Pandavas believed dead, is crowned king. However, the Pandavas (with their common wife) return and Yudhishtira assumes kingship over half the kingdom. Duryodhana convinces Yudhishtira to play him in a game of dice, gambling being Yudhishtira's vice. Yudhishtira loses his own freedom and that of his brothers and Draupadi. The Pandavas are forced into exile for 12 years, and then an extra year in society where they would have to conceal their identity. After passing this ordeal and returning Duryodhana refuses to give back half of the kingdom and they were forced to go to war.

All the kingdoms of India gather themselves at the fields of Kurukshetra and array themselves either the Pandava or Kaurava side. After 18 days the Pandavas are victorious. However, the war and the victory are extremely troublesome for the Pandavas. They did not wish to enter the war in the first place, being convinced to by Krishna. During the war, their worst predictions are realized and many of their family are killed, including a number of their most loved relatives and their own sons. Also troubling were some of the dishonorable tactics used (all suggested by Krishna). However, despite the war being incomparably destructive, it was just, it being part of the duty of a king to mete out great violence.

After the war Yudhishtira rules as a just and benevolent king but is still haunted by Kurukshetra. He performs the *ashvamedha* in penance. Learning of Krishna's death, the Pandavas and Draupadi decide it is time for them to leave this world and they travel to the Himalayas (the intention being that the journey will be so harsh that it will kill them and they will then enter heaven). A dog follows them as they leave on their pilgrimage. As they climb the mountains each of them falls and dies, until only Yudhishtira is left with the dog. He reaches the gates of heaven but refuses to enter without his brothers and wife. The dog reveals itself to be Dharma and he transports Yudhishtira to heaven where his family is waiting for him.

## Heroes and Villians of the Mahabharata

The characters the *Mahabharata*, their stories, and their instructions on *dharma* are legion, and it is

not possible to mention all but a small fraction of them -- those around whom the story revolves.

## **The Pandavas**

The mothers of the Pandavas, Kunti and Madri, could not have children by Pandu because of his curse. However, once when the sage Durvasas visited the home of Kunti, he was well cared for during his stay that he gave a Kunti a great *mantra*, which she could use five times. Using this *mantra* would bring a god to Earth and conceive a son upon her. Kunti first used this when she was young, calling Surya, the sun, and having a son, called Karna who she set afloat on a river in a box. (Though a brother to the Pandavas, Karna was to become a member of the camp of the Kauravas. He was born fully armored and was trained in archery by Parushurama. He became Arjuna's enemy and was killed by him at Kurukshetra.)

Under instruction by Pandu, Kunti begat Yudhishtira, Bhimasena, and Arjuna by the gods Dharma, Vayu, and Indra. Kunti gave one of her boons to Madri who bore Nakula and Sahadeva by the twin Ashvins.

The brothers were given the best of educations and trained in warfare as *kshatriyas*.

### **Yudhishtira**

The son of the god of righteousness, Yudhishtira himself was supremely righteous, as well as being extremely generous, astute, and devout. As the eldest of the Pandavas he was the paternal leader of the fellowship.

Yudhishtira's poorer qualities included an irresistible liking for gambling and a love of religion over kingship.

### **Bhima**

Bhima is the son of the wind god, Vayu. From birth he had a superhuman strength (when dropped onto a rock when a child, crushing the rock to powder but leaving Bhima unharmed). He increased in strength even further when, having been poisoned and thrown into the Ganga by the Kauravas, he visited Patala (see *The Netherworld*, p. xx) where the king of the *nagas* gave him a drink that would make him as strong as 1,000 elephants.

Bhima killed a number of *rakshasa* but also married a female *rakshasi*.

His greatest vice was his voracious appetite.

### **Arjuna**

Arjuna is the greatest warrior of the Pandavas. In his youth he had an insatiable desire to learn the science of combat and became a master of archery, teaching himself how to use his bow in complete darkness. He was given the arrow known as Brahmashirastra, a weapon of such power that it could only be used against non-humans -- to use it against humans would destroy the three worlds.

In the war of Kurukshetra, Krishna was Arjuna's charioteer. Arjuna and Krishna were in fact the reincarnations of Nara and Narayana, two sages that were inseparable companions in every birth.

### **Nakula and Sahadeva**

The youngest of the Pandavas were great heroes in their own rights, but were rather overshadowed

by their elder siblings. The twins were both exceptionally handsome, in fact, Nakula was the most handsome of men. This was a difficulty in the time of their exile and they had to cover their faces in dirt so as not to be recognized or desired by women.

### **Draupadi**

The daughter of Drupada was offered for marriage to the winner of a contest of strength and archery skill. In the contest a steel arrow must be fired by a steel bow through a hole in a revolving disc hanging from the ceiling to hit a target above. It was Arjuna that won the contest and was to marry Draupadi. However, when the Pandavas returned to their house where their mother was waiting for them, she called out to them that they must share whatever it was that they had obtained from their days work. Hence it was that Draupadi became the common wife of the Pandavas. In order to avoid conflict between the brothers sharing a wife, she was to be the partner of each the five brothers for a year at a time.

### **Krishna**

The story of Krishna's friendship with the Pandavas is only a small part of the story of his extraordinary life. It is a significant part however, as the *Mahabharata* is the tale of the end of the *krita yuga* and the beginning of the *kali yuga*, and is therefore the tale of how Krishna, as God, shepherds in the new eon.

Krishna was a companion of the Pandavas through most of their exiles from Hastinapura. When the time of the battle of Kurukshetra came he had promised aid to both Arjuna and Duryodhana so he gave his army to the Kauravas and accompanied Arjuna as his charioteer though he would not fight himself.

His greatest advice for Arjuna was that lecture on *dharma* that is contained in the *Gita*. However, he gave a load of advice through the battle. Curiously, much of the advice involved trickery, consistent though with the imminent beginning of the corrupt *kali yuga*.

### **The Kauravas**

The Kauravas are the sons of Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. Gandhari asked of the sage Vyasa the boon of having one hundred sons. She soon became pregnant but carried her centuplets for two years without giving birth. When she heard that Kunti had given birth she was enraged and hit herself on her stomach, inducing the birth of a shapeless lump of flesh. Vyasa instructed her to cut the mass into a hundred and one thumb-sized pieces and put them into pots. In time the pots burst open and one hundred sons and one daughter emerged.

### **Durhodhana**

Duryodhana was the leader of the Kauravas. It is his greed and evil that brings about the war of Kurukshetra.

### **Dashshasana**

Dashshasana was perhaps the most despicable of the Kauravas (who as a group were not necessarily all that evil). When Yudhishtira lost Draupadi to Duryodhana at dice, Dashshasana dragged her to the assembly by her hair and attempted to pull off her clothes (though Krishna made her sari infinitely long so it could not be removed, no matter how much it was unwound). However, Dashshasana obtained heaven after his death at Kurukshetra, consistent with villainy being as much a part of *dharma* as heroism.

## Campaigns in Epic India

A faithful Epic India campaign is high fantasy at its most extravagant and most camp, all performed in the utmost sincerity. Adventures should be heavy with brutal combat with *rakshasas* and tests of skills and virtue (and tests of skill that prove virtue). They should be adorned with lavish embellishments and symbolism, such as showers of petals or voices from heaven. Epic heroes and villains are characters of profound destiny, it is a rare hero indeed that is not in some way engendered by a god or a god themselves, and those rare heroes will certainly have some unusual background. Heroes should have excessively strong personalities (but not one-dimensional, mind you, they should be a balance of strengths and weaknesses, just excessive). Adventures may have relatively simple bases, no more complicated than the stories of rescue and internecine war in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, but are wrung for every drop of significance. Then a convoluted series of lateral adventures can be entwined about this simple focus.

By moderating this template, a GM can find a comfortable setting in which to run fantasy campaigns in a mythical India.

## The Cycle of Time

According to the Puranas, the current cycle of the latest incarnation of the world is in its 38,885th millennium. This puts us early in the *kali yuga*, the last and most corrupt of the four ages with a mere 432 millennia until the world is destroyed and righteousness returns in a new *krita yuga*.

The four ages, or *yugas* that make up a *mahayuga* are the *krita*, *treta*, *dvapara*, and *kali yugas* lasting 4,800, 3,600, 2,400, and 1,200 divine years respectively -- each divine year being 360 mortal years, making a *mahayuga* 4,320,000 mortal years long.

In the *krita yuga*, people are as gods and their needs come to them as they wish. There is no evil in the world, there is only one caste and all worship one *Veda*. In each of the three following *yugas*, goodness decreases by one quarter as people fall away from proper worship and sacrifice and diseases and calamities are inflicted on the world.

One thousand *mahayugas* make a *kalpa* or "day of Brahma." At the end of a *kalpa*, Brahma sleeps and the world is dissolved into him. Brahma sleeps for a night as long as his day and recreates the world again on his waking. Brahma lives for one hundred of his years, each of 360 days of Brahma. To herald his death, Rudra or Kalki comes to destroy the world. It stays destroyed for 100 years, at the end of which another creator is born.

The events of the *Mahabharata* mark the end of the *dvapara yuga*, with the *kali yuga* beginning in 3102 B.C when Krishna, *avatara* of Vishnu, left this world.

## Asuras

The gods of Hinduism are called the *devas* or *suras*. The *asuras* are another class of gods who are opposed to the *devas* (the reasons for which are not clear). In Vedic times they were equal in power and prestige (Varuna, the fear-inspiring god of *rita*, was an *asura*) and fought each other constantly. At times the *asuras* would have the upper hand, but eventually the *devas* were victorious and now rule supreme in heaven.

The *asuras*, who are often referred to as demons, are not evil and, as a class of beings, are similar to the *devas*. They were simply outwitted by the *devas* in the divine contest.

The *daityas* are another class of divine beings who were defeated by the *devas*. Often referred to as titans, the *daityas* were giants who rode flying horses and lived on the moon.

## Ahuras

The Aryans and ancient Persians were once kindred peoples whose migrations left them separated by the Hindu Kush mountains. They share the same culture and mythology, but the different branches began to diverge once they parted company. In a fascinating circumstance, in Persia, the heavenly battle was *won* by the *asuras*, who were known to the Persians as *ahuras*. Hence the *devas*, known as *daevas* in Persia, are the demons.

## Amrit

The gods, losing the war against the *asuras*, contrived a plan to gain greater strength by producing *amrit*, the water of life. Taking the help of the *asuras* they mixed special herbs in the sea of milk and churned it using Mt Mandara as a churning-stick, Vishnu in his tortoise *avatara* as a pivot, and the great snake Vasuki as a rope. (The *asuras* insisted on holding Vasuki head end; but, distressed by the churning, the snake vomited on the *asuras*, leaving them forever bereft of their physical glory.)

From the sea were produced many treasures, including the *apsaras* (nymphs) and the moon, as well as poison, which Shiva drank to save the others, turning his neck blue. Finally emerged the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, holding a cup full of *amrit*.

In order to that the *asuras* might not share in the *amrit*, Vishnu took on the form of a beautiful woman, distracting them while the gods drank all of the *amrit*.

*Amrit*, if it can be obtained, makes the drinker immortal and gives them strength. The effect is equivalent to the Immortality advantage, i.e. the imbiber no longer grows old and will not die of disease or poison, and also regenerates damage at an accelerated rate (see p. CI58). The effects of drinking *amrit* do not last, and more must be consumed if one is to truly live forever. How often *amrit* must be drunk should be decided by the GM and may range from daily to some length of time, 100 years say, longer than the scale of the adventure or campaign.

## Heaven

The five levels of heaven located above the earth are known as *anand-lokas* (regions of bliss). It is here that the particularly meritorious are reborn as reward for their good *karma*.

1. **Brahma-loka** The highest heaven where Brahma lives meditating.
2. **Tapo-loka** Home of Viraj, the protean daughter of Brahma.
3. **Janar-loka** Home of Brahma's sons, called the Kumara.
4. **Mahar-loka** Home of the Prajapatis, great sages born from Brahma's mind. Any soul reborn in any of the 4 highest heavens will not be reborn and will live in heaven until the end of the current *yuga*.
5. **Svar-loka** The realm of light. The paradisiacal home of the gods. Svar-loka is centered around the golden Mt Meru in a region known as Ilavrira, and has a number of different sub-heavens.

**Indra-loka or Svarga** On the north slopes of Meru, Indra has his capital, Amaravati, and his magnificent palace, Vaijayanta.

**Vaikuntha** Vishnu's heaven is on the southern slopes of Meru where he has built his city with buildings of gems and roads of gold.

**Goloka** The realm of cows. Krishna's heaven.

**Alaka** The wealthiest of heavens. Home of Kubera and his attendants.

**Mt Kailasa** Home of Shiva.

**Maruta** Heaven of the Maruts, Shiva's storm gods.

**Vaivasvati** City of the Sun.

**Vasudha-nagara** Heaven of Varuna.

**Gana-parvata** Heaven of the lesser gods, the *devatas*.

**Soma-loka** Home of the moon.

## The Netherworld

The *talas*, the middle seven strata of the universe, are home to many mythological beings, many of them evil. However, these realms are not hells as such and are not any more unpleasant than our world.

1. **Patala** Home of the *nagas*. Said to be the most beautiful realm in the whole universe, containing every possible luxury. The capital, Bhogavati, is built of jewels and the most impressive of its buildings is the Mani-mandapa, the palace of jewels, home to the *naga* king.
2. **Atala** Land of the *yakshas*.
3. **Rasatala or Nitala** Where live the *asuras*, *daityas* and *davanas*.
4. **Gabhastala** Kingdom of the *raksashas*.
5. **Vitala** Home to the *hatakas*, ruled by Shiva.
6. **Sutala** Ruled by Bali the *daitya*.
7. **Mahatala** Land of ghosts and the *kumbhanda*.

## Hell

Those who die with an excess of sin on their soul are sent to live a birth in one of the seven layers of hell (*naraka*).

1. **Put** The lowest level of hell is for men who do not bear sons.
2. **Avici** A mild hell devoid of sensual pleasure.
3. **Sanhata** For common evilness.
4. **Tamisra** An unpleasantly dismal and stinking hell.
5. **Rijisha** A hell wherein the guilty conscience manifests as snakes, vultures, and poisonous insects to torment the sinner.
6. **Kudmala** Featuring a river of blood and putrescence.
7. **Kakola or Talatala** The bottomless hell. Here the most extreme tortures are inflicted on the worst of sinners, the utter evil. Every limb and organ of the body has its own torture and the senses are enhanced to deepen the pain. The most horrible aspect of this hell is that there is to be no rebirth from it -- the unfortunates who end up here are doomed to stay until the end of the world.

## Venerable, But Cranky

Magician sages were ubiquitous in epic India, particularly in the time of the *Mahabharata* when the skies fair teemed with flying *rishis*. These learned and powerful men could be convinced to interrupt their arcane pursuits to dispense wisdom, training in all sorts of arts, blessings, or curses. Often, should they happen on some predicament by chance (which happened curiously often), they might offer their aid unbidden and secretly.

The learning, training, and austere hardship that goes into becoming a sage of such power is considerable. It is little wonder then that a sage interrupted in his studies or austerities is likely to react in anger and fire off curses. Indeed, so harsh is the training that most sages seem to have permanently lost their patience and are likely to react with in anger if interrupted in any of their activities, as Pandu's example given below will show. To be fair, they are as likely to reward politeness, generosity, and integrity with blessings.

### **Pandu's Curse**

One day, while walking through the forest with his wives Kunti and Madri, Pandu saw two deer frolicking. He dispatched one of them skillfully with an arrow. However, the deer was in fact the sage Kindama who had turned himself and his lover into deer. Kindama cursed Pandu that he should die if he ever touched his wives amorously.

Later in his life, Pandu was living in the wilderness with his wives and stepchildren. Spring came and the atmosphere became so romantic that Pandu could not restrain himself and grabbed Madri in an embrace, bringing Kindama's curse and death upon himself.

Under the tradition of *sati*, Pandu's wives were to throw themselves on his pyre. Madri insisted that only she commit *sati* so that Kunti could look after their children.

### **The Epics as Historical Parables**

Historians have difficulty identifying the reign of Rama and the battle of Kurukshetra. Despite possibly not recounting real historical events, the epics are still of historical importance as their stories have been interpreted by some as relating critical historical matters through parable.

The *Ramayana*, in telling the story of Rama's victory over the kingdom of Ravana in the deep south, is a commemoration of the triumph of the Aryans over the non-Aryan natives -- a conquest that took place over centuries. The pious kingdom of Ayodhya under Rama is the Aryan rule over India. If any victory over a non-Aryan king by a historical Rama did occur, it certainly did not involve the island of Sri Lanka, but was more likely fought in a land just south of Ayodhya.

The *Mahabharata* is the story of a civil war within the Kuru tribe. As a parable it is far more than this however. The kingdom ruled over by Yudhishtira after Kurukshetra was the last great kingdom of the *dvapara yuga* and Yudhishtira was the last great *kshatriya* king. With the shuffling in of the *kali yuga*, the exclusive right to rule by the *kshatriyas* was usurped. The *Mahabharata* is a poignant ode to kingship and a farewell to better, less corrupted age.

### **GURPS High-Tech Hindu**

The *Vedas* are founts of knowledge like no other; it is said that they contain *all* knowledge. This knowledge is not accessible to most however as it is coded. To those that can decode the *Vedas*, limitless wisdom and science is available.

In earlier times, when the *Vedas* were better understood, more of their secrets were available. Some have found evidence in the *Vedas* and epics for a number of highly advanced technologies in use, from the flying chariot of Ravana to the cloning of the hundred Kauravas, as well as DNA fingerprinting and nuclear weaponry. Who knows what yet undiscovered technology has yet to be recognized. Some might claim that all the magic evident in the epics, is merely the advanced technology available during that time.

### **Moral Tests**



An extremely important purpose of the epics is to enlighten its readers on Hindu morality. Hence the heroes of the epics face quite a number of tests. These come in many forms. In some tests, a god will contrive a situation to see how the hero reacts. Other tests arise through chance encounters, the consequences of which depend on how the hero acted.

A moral test in the epics is generally not about doing what would be described as "good," rather they are about what is "right." To pass a moral test, one must understand one's place in the world, given one's caste. One must also be proactive in asserting one's rights. As much as it can be organized in this way, the precedence of correct behavior is, uphold promises, serve God, serve *varnashramadharma*, serve one's family, serve one's self-interest.

# Religious India

The spirituality of India can scarcely be exaggerated. From India come two of the world's great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as Jainism, Sikhism, and any number of lesser religious traditions, born from the ceaseless speculation of Indian sages. Further, the capacity of the Indian mind to devise religious traditions is matched only by its openness to foreign religious thought, whether that be the welcoming of full-blown religions or the blending of new points of view into existing Indian religious philosophy. Islam in particular has many adherents in India and modest numbers of Christians and Jews can also be found. India is also one of the last homes of Zoroastrianism.

The importance of religion to India is not measured by the number of its religions however, but by the influence of religion on the culture and way of life of Indians, and by this measure religion is of singular importance. Religion touches on every aspect of life in India. Its influence can be seen in India's culture, outlook, and society. For an Indian, religion is an identity as much as a doctrine. Everyone in India has a religion; even if one is not active in one's religion or even has no belief in it, one's religion determines one's community in India.

## History of Religion in India

The abundance of religions in India is confusing enough, but their evolution and their influences on each other muddy the waters so much further. In order to put the religions in context, a review of the religious history of India is presented before surveying the religions themselves.

### Pre-Aryan Religions

Little is known of the religion of the Indus Valley Civilization (see p. xx), though it appears that a Mother Goddess was worshipped as well as a horned god, a "lord of the beasts," with a penchant for *yoga* poses. It has been suggested that the horned god was a proto-Shiva, who was merged with the god Rudra of the *Vedas* (see below) to become the Shiva of Hinduism (see below).

It has been proposed that asceticism and *yoga* were pre-Aryan practices and reincarnation a pre-Aryan philosophy. The eventual appearance of these ideas in Hinduism as well as many non-Aryan gods are these nascent but not forgotten practices reasserting themselves.

### Vedic period

The Vedic period of India's religious history began with the arrival of the Aryans in Northern India in about the sixteenth century B.C. (see *Aryans*, p. xx) and the composition of their religious books of knowledge, the *Vedas*. These books are the root of Hinduism; however, over time Hinduism developed far away from the sacrifice based religion of the *Vedas* and the nature-based Vedic gods lost their popularity to younger gods. In order to distinguish this early faith from later Hinduism, the names "Vedism" or "Brahmanism" are often given to this older religion.

### The Upanishads and the Heterodoxies

Even as the *Vedas* were being compiled, Hinduism (or Brahmanism) was evolving; some of the later hymns of the *Vedas* contain quite different outlooks to the earlier hymns and new gods appear. Outside the *brahmin* priesthood who compiled the *Vedas*, ascetics and non-*brahmin* sages were making significant discoveries in their jungle retreats, adopting and adapting non-Vedic traditions. These new theories were compiled in the *Upanishads*, dating from the period about 700-300 B.C., taking Hinduism in a new direction (see *Sources of Hinduism*, p. xx).

This slow revolution also produced whole new religions. The heterodox religions of Buddhism and Jainism and other splinter faiths such as that of the Ajivikas, arrived in India in the 5th century B.C. Growing out of Hinduism, these new religions challenged further the brahminic hold on religious authority and were enthusiastically taken up by the people of India, seriously challenging Hinduism as the dominant religion of India.

## **Hindu Revival**

Hinduism reasserted itself over the heterodoxies partly because of its own strength and a great ability to absorb new traditions, but also because of a new dedication to devotion, the so-called *bhakti* movement. From the time of the Gupta Empire (see p. xx), the unflinching love and devotion to one's patron god became a very popular form of worship. From about 900 B.C. *bhakti* as a philosophy developed in the south and percolated to the north, bringing a freshness to Hinduism challenging the heterodoxies.

## **Arrival of Islam**

Islam spread widely from its home in Arabia. The first Muslims to visit India were Arab traders of the Indian Ocean. Islam did not gain significant adherents until the invasions of Muslim raiders turned to invasions of conquest, starting with Mohammed of Ghur in the 12th century.

From about the time of the Delhi Sultanate until the ascendancy of the British, Islam dominated India politically. The religion gained many converts due to political patronage and persecution of the other religions, though Hinduism remained the religion of the majority.

## **Hindu-Islam Symbiosis**

Two religions could scarcely be more different than Islam and Hinduism. Finding any common ground between the two therefore required getting beyond the trappings of the religions to find the shared truth that they express in their own ways. An example of this approach is that of the poet Kabir (A.D. 1440-1518) who preached the existence of a supreme God that may be worshipped as Shiva, Allah, or Krishna.

This speculation led to new strains of thought in Hinduism with a "back to basics" emphasis and a challenging of the caste system. The most significant result of the religious speculation of this time was Sikhism, a whole new religion that fused the two faiths.

## **Hinduism**

Hinduism is a vast and complex religious system, cobbled together over centuries from uncountable sources, traditions, and faiths, incorporating theology, philosophy, science, and social organization. Hinduism is more than a religion, it is a whole culture. In this melange of beliefs, Hinduism accommodates different perspectives regarding God and the universe, allows for a number of different paths to salvation, and supports numerous seemingly contradictory ideas. Finding consistency in this conglomeration of philosophies and traditions is fruitless, not the less so because consistency is not greatly respected in Hinduism, the best one is likely to do is observe that all Hindus worship cows. It must suffice then to summarize Hinduism as the worship of the Hindu pantheon (either as gods, manifestations of the Ultimate, or metaphors for the Inconceivable) and a belief in reincarnation driven by one's earthly deeds.

## **Sources of Hinduism**

Unlike most religions, Hinduism has no founder, no exalted revealer of the holy word. All the same,

the sacred literature of Hinduism is treated with total reverence.

## Vedas

The oldest works of Hindu literature are the *Vedas*, the "books of knowledge." Compiled as oral literature in 1500-600 B.C. (or even earlier) with content of the greatest antiquity, the *Rig Veda*, the earliest of the four *Vedas*, is a collection of over a thousand hymns of great power and reverence for use at sacrifices. Most of the hymns are praises to the gods, Indra chiefly, but also about such topics as the preparation of the narcotic drink *soma* and the perils of gambling.

The *Sama Veda* is a collection of *Rig Veda* hymns adapted for singing. The *Yajur Veda* contains directions for the sacrifice and exists in two redactions, a "black" and a "white" version.

Clearly more recent than the other three *Vedas*, the *Atharva Veda* is different again, being a collection of spells and incantations of a rather unsophisticated animistic type of sympathetic magic (see *Magic of the Atharva Veda*, p. xx).

The hymnal part of the *Vedas*, called the *Samhitas* (collections), are often what is referred to when one speaks of the *Vedas*. However, the Vedic literature includes appendices to the *Samhitas*. The huge *Brahmana* (sacred utterance) texts are a commentary on the sacrifice and the *Aranyakas* (forest texts) are further commentaries of a more mystical nature likely written by *sannyasis*. Both collections were composed around 1000-700 B.C.

As appendices to both the *Brahmanas* and *Samhitas* are the *Upanishads* (lit. "sitting close to" the teacher). Composed around 700-300 B.C. as the culmination of centuries of speculation, they are the final and most influential of the Vedic texts and constitute the *vedanta* or end of the *Vedas* (hence the *vedanta* philosophy is based on interpreting the *Upanishads*). The *Upanishads* are esoteric works detailing a new approach to spirituality, moving away from the sacrifice to a quest for the self. They contain the first speculation on reincarnation and the Universal Essence (see *Brahman and Atman*). Orthodox Hinduism, as described in the *Universal Truths* section below is based on the *Upanishads* far more so than on the *Samhitas*.

## Sutras

As the *Vedas* are so voluminous and hard to understand without training, the *Sutras* deal with the topics in a more straightforward manner. There are *Sutras* describing public ceremonies (the *Shrautasutras*), domestic ceremonies (the *Grihyasutras*), and proper conduct in life (the *Dharmasutras*).

The most important of the *Sutras* are the books of law or *Dharmashastras*, the most important of which is the *Manava Dharmashastra* or *Laws of Manu*, also known as the *Manusmriti*, written from about 200 B.C. This book has the clearest explanation of the structure of society into *varnas* and *ashramas* as well as commandments regarding how violations of these should be punished.

## Epics

The most loved source of Hindu teaching are the two great epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Ostensibly tales of heroes (in which respect they are discussed in *Epic India* pp. xx-yy), centuries of retelling (500 B.C.-A.D. 500 for the *Mahabharata* and 200 B.C.-A.D. 200 for the *Ramayana*) have added supplementary myths and diversions into doctrine, metaphysics, ethics, et cetera, as well as secular theories of king-craft, etc. The *Mahabharata* has become particularly convoluted, consisting of over 200,000 lines of verse. The more popularly liked *Ramayana*, with nearly 100,000 lines of verse, is straightforward in comparison.

Buried amongst the stories of the Hindu heroes, the epics contain practically all of orthodox Hinduism, both religious doctrine and mythology. All Hindu households have a copy of the epics in their local language and most Hindus get a good deal of their religion from these books. In 1987-8 the *Ramayana* was televised in an extremely popular year-length weekly serial. This was followed by the *Mahabharata*.

## **Puranas**

The *Puranas* are collections of myths and religious teachings composed between A.D. 300-900 but containing traditions from all ages. The content of the *Puranas* are varied but most tell of the creation of the world and its eventual destruction, myths of the gods and their most famous worshippers, and the histories and genealogies of gods, kings, and sages.

The *Puranas* are sectarian literature, each exalting one particular god above all others. Eighteen of the *Puranas* are the most important, the so-called *Mahapuranas*, six of which deal with each of the three gods of the Hindu trinity, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. There are eighteen lesser *Upapuranas* and a number of even lesser *Sthalapuranas*.

## **Tantras**

The *Tantras* (looms) were composed in the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., quite late in the history of Hinduism. The *Tantras* are manuals on Shaktism, the worship of the feminine as divine energy (see *Devi* below), and include rites leading to spiritual development and the attainment of magical powers. The *Tantras* largely lie outside the orthodox.

## **The Universal Truths**

From the *Upanishads* can be derived a unified metaphysics describing the universe of individual lives and souls.

## **Dharma**

At one level, *dharma* is the immutable cosmic law that sustains the universe. It is a power and a process that cannot be opposed, not by human or god. The word *rita* is often used as a synonym for this cosmic clockwork.

An extension of the concept of *dharma* encompasses the laws of nature such as the passing of the seasons.

A further extension of *dharma* is the individual's place within the cosmic order. In this sense it means one's duty, not so much religious duty, but *natural* duty. *Rita* divides Hindus into *varnas* and an individual's life into *ashramas* and it is one's *dharma* to act within the duties of one's *varna* and *ashrama*. The *Manusmriti* outlines the requirements of *dharma* in specific terms, for example a man's responsibilities to his family as part of the *dharma* of the *grihya ashrama*.

## **Reincarnation**

The *atman* (see *Brahman and Atman*), is only a temporary inhabitant of any individual. Upon death the ego is extinguished and the physical body dies. The indestructible *atman* however migrates to a new home. This new home is not only a new physical body, but a new self with a new ego. This happens at every death in a process called *samsara*.

One's new self upon rebirth has nothing to do with who one was in a previous birth and the new self may bear no resemblance to the old; it may be as a person in higher or lower caste or even an animal.

In fact, the rebirth may not even be on this earth, one may be reborn in any of the heavens or hells. The determinant in one's rebirth is one's *karma*.

## **Karma**

The consequence the actions of one's life is *karma*. A sort of spiritual balance sheet, *karma* measures the number and quality of one's good and bad actions, *punya* and *papa*. Every action of one's life accumulates *karma* of some kind, leaving impressions on the soul. It is *karma* that determines into what new life one will be reborn. If one's karmic balance is on the meritorious side, one will be born into a higher caste. If the balance is on the sinful side one will slide down the caste hierarchy or maybe even born as an animal.

*Karma* is a manifestation of *dharma* and whether a particular action attracts good or bad *karma* depends on one's *varna* and *ashrama*.

Strictly, the effect of *karma* is only apparent after death -- there is no "instant *karma*." Sinners are generally punished and the good rewarded in this life however, but that has nothing to do with *karma*. (Nevertheless, it is a popular practice to ascribe misfortune to *karma*, as if it was having an effect in the present life. There is, therefore, a precedent for using instant karmic ramifications in an adventure, as a player is unlikely to play their character's reincarnation, so will not suffer the effects of the character's *karma*.)

## **Release**

In the Hindu view, the eternal birth and rebirth of *samsara* is a miserable fate. Even if one accumulates a load of meritorious *karma*, one is still reborn and must grunt and sweat under another weary life with nothing but yet another birth to look forward to. A desirable goal is to gain release of the *atman* from *samsara*. This release is called *moksha*, the practical effect of which is the unifying of the *atman* with Brahman.

*Moksha* is not at all easy. Any action in life gains *karma*, even the slightest thought, and anyone dying with *karma* on their soul must be reborn. There are a number of methods of achieving *moksha* however.

## **The Path**

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (see sidebar) Krishna explains the path to liberation. Magnanimously he presents a number of different paths, some easier than others, some preferred by some, that all lead to the same end.

Note that in this context the word for path, *marga* is used less commonly than the term *yoga* meaning yoke, referring to the yoking of the *atman* to Brahman. This should not be confused with the name of the *darshana*.

*Jnana yoga* is the path of knowledge. This path is followed by studying the *Upanishads* and the Vedanta in an effort to come to an understanding of the self beyond what one perceives of oneself. The goal is to reach the fourth state of consciousness, the *turiya* state (see *States of Consciousness*). In this state no *karma* is acquired.

*Jnana yoga* is a very difficult path, considered to be too arduous and beyond the intellectual capabilities of most people.

*Karma yoga* is the path of work. In this path one follows one's caste restrictions and does one's own occupation and duties without attachment to or enjoyment of the consequences. It is important that

one follows one's own calling -- it is better to do one's own job poorly than another's well. If one does not delight in nor is disappointed by the fruits of one's actions, whether good or bad, then no *karma* is accrued for those actions.

**Bhakti yoga** is the path of devotion, wherein one achieves unity with God through complete devotion to God. By always (and always means *always*) having God in one's mind one is able to cut through *karma* and reach god directly.

Krishna strongly advocates this path in the Gita. This is a popular path as it is accessible to all.

**Raja yoga** or royal yoga, a specialized branch of *jnana yoga*, is release through physical, mental, and spiritual discipline. *Raja yoga* combines the physical exercises of *hatha yoga* with meditation. This yoga is hard and dangerous, one should not practice *raja yoga* without a *guru*. Mastery of raja yogic techniques can give on magical powers (detailed in *Magical India* p. xx).

## Gods of the Hindus

Like monsoon frogs, gods are everywhere in India. An official calculation has them at 330 million, a huge number even considering the Hindu habit of deifying anything they find sacred.

Most Hindus worship one god above all others, in fact, ever since the *bhakti* movement made worship quite personal, Hinduism has been divided into three giant sects Vaishnism, Shaivism, and Shaktism, focusing their worship on Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi respectively. These are distinct sects only because they clearly choose to exalt one particular god. Each of the three is equally legitimate, simply a different approach, and they exist side-by-side with little antagonism between them. Members of one sect may happily call on or honor any Hindu god when appropriate.

## The Supreme Brahman

The Universal Essence, Brahman, is in some scriptures treated more like a god than an imponderable absolute. As a god, Brahman is the Supreme God, of whom all other gods are emanations.

When personified but not manifest, the supreme god is often known as Ishvar (Lord). When manifest, God takes the form of one of the gods of the pantheon; Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, and Krishna all take on manifestations at some time where they represent the supreme "One Without a Second."

## Brahma

The creator branch of the Trinity (see sidebar). He is associated with Prajapati, the Lord of Beings, and Purusha, the Primal Man sacrificed to create the universe (see *The Primordial Sacrifice ad the Golden Egg*, p. xx).

Brahma is usually represented with four heads, his fifth having been severed by Shiva. Brahma's mount is a goose and his consort is Saraswati.

The worship of Brahma is uncommon in modern India, his popularity having waned since the *Mahabharata* and the rise of sectarianism. Brahma has only one temple devoted to him, found in Pushkar. According to legend this is his punishment for a falsehood he committed.

## Vishnu

The sustainer arm of the Trinity. A very important god in modern Hinduism, particularly to the

Vaishnavite sect, he started as a minor god in the Vedas. Vishnu's nature is unreservedly beneficial and he has manifested himself as an *avatara* (incarnation) several times to help the world when it is in need. He has taken on nine main incarnations (and any number of lesser *avataras*) and will take on one more, Kalki, when it is time for the world to be destroyed.

Vishnu is usually depicted with four arms riding Garuda, his man-bird mount. His wife is Lakshmi. Although he is worshipped simply as Vishnu he is more often worshipped as one of his *avataras*. Rama and Krishna are by far the most popularly worshipped of his *avataras*, both of whom are worshipped as gods in their own rights, their avataric natures being secondary to their worship.

## Shiva

Shiva, the great god of the Shaivite sect, is a very complex god with many aspects and powers. He is the Destroyer of the Trinity, but is considered a generous and merciful god -- rather different to his appearance in the Vedas as Rudra, the fearsome howling storm god. He is also the god of fertility and is often worshipped with the *lingam*, (phallus), or the *yoni-lingam*, (womb-phallus). Shiva is the patron of ascetics and the lord of the dance, in which aspect he is known as Nataraja.

As a master ascetic, Shiva is often depicted dressed only in an antelope skin loincloth with matted hair and a snake wound around his neck. In the center of Shiva's forehead is his third eye, symbol of his wisdom, which when opened causes destruction. Thankfully he keeps it closed. He lives alternatively on Mount Kailesh and at Varanasi, his favorite city. However, he is also to found in graveyards in the company of goblins and spirits. Smoking marijuana is one of his vices.

Although Shiva appears to lead an odd lifestyle, he is in no way a figure of ridicule or amusement -- he is the Supreme Being after all.

Shiva's wife is Parvati and his mount is Nanda the bull.

## Devi

India has always worshipped the Mother Goddess; she was given particular importance in the Indus Valley Civilization. However, beginning with the patriarchal Vedic times, worship of the Goddess, or Devi, was fairly modest when compared to the worship of the major gods. The rise of *bhakti* during the Gupta period was accompanied by a renewed reverence for the feminine principle as a source of divine energy, called Shakti. As the principal holy texts of Shaktism are the Tantras, this sect is often called Tantrism.

While the male gods have always had wives who deserved a good deal of affection from worshippers and contributed to the legends of their husbands, Shaktism sees the female half as the *active* aspect of these partnerships. As examples; when the god is meaning, the goddess is speech; when he is understanding, she is intellect; when he is righteousness, she is devotion.

Shakti is most often worshipped as Shiva's wife, Parvati. However, she has different aspects, which have come to the fore when needed. Durga the warrior goddess is her forceful manifestation. A far more sinister aspect of Shakti is Kali, the black goddess.

Shaktism is most popular in Bengal and Assam.

## Lesser Gods

**Saraswati** Goddess of knowledge and learning. Books are a symbol of Saraswati and hence are considered holy objects.



**Lakshmi** Goddess of wealth and good fortune. Reborn as Vishnu's wife through his incarnations, Sita for Rama, Rukmini for Krishna, etc.

Money is a symbol of Lakshmi in the same way as books are for Saraswati.

**Durga** Demon killing, tiger riding, multi-armed warrior goddess babe.

**Kali** A goddess of quite frightful nature. Kali is represented with a black body, besmeared with blood, four arms, and a long red tongue. She wears nothing but a skirt made of human hands and a garland of skulls.

When Devi takes the form of Kali, she loses herself in a dangerous rage, drinking blood and celebrating her victories with a dance that would shatter the earth.

Despite her fearsome character, Kali is widely worshipped by otherwise reasonable devotees. However, her followers include the murderous *thagi* cult (see p. xx).

**Ganesh** Elephant-headed, pot-bellied son of Shiva and Parvati. The remover of obstacles prayed to at the outset of any undertaking.

**Indra** Great god of the Vedic Aryans.

**Agni** God of fire.

**Surya** The Sun.

**Varuna** All seeing controller of *rita*. Held in awe and fear. Also god of the oceans.

*Kartikeya* God of war. Son of Shiva.

**Kubera** The lord of riches. Kubera was formally an ugly demon (*rakshasa*) but was made an ugly god by a thousand years of austerities. He is now an immensely wealthy god with more treasures than he can keep in his capital. He is attended to by a number of races of creatures, namely *guhyakas*, *kinnaras*, and *yakshas*.

**Yama** God of the underworld and judge of the dead. Since the development of the theory of reincarnation his role has become ambiguous.

## **Hinduism in Practice**

There are two faces to Hinduism. The Hinduism of the scriptures presents a vastly complex system of philosophy that reveals truths of greater depth the more it is studied. This philosophy is as vital as it is profound, as an understanding of it leads to a divine enlightenment. However it is simply too complex for the common believer. The magnitude of the Vedas is overwhelming and intimidating. Few are trained to understand them and few of the uninitiated have the effrontery to believe they can understand them. The average Hindu has the greatest respect for the *Upanishads* and those who study them are practically saints, however they acknowledge that their path is different. For the vast majority of Hindus, Hinduism is the worship of God.

Practical Hinduism is following the directions of one's family priest, doing the necessary rituals and devotions, and respecting God in order to keep Him happy. Occasionally it is necessary to visit the temple for a particular ritual and God looks favorably on devotion beyond what is necessary. Living to one's caste obligations and doing good deeds are also a type of devotion.

## Hinduism Through the Ages

Hinduism changed radically from when the Rig Veda was composed. The early Hinduism of the Vedas was based on the sacrifice, or *yajna*. Every religious rite was a sacrifice to the gods, from the smallest domestic ceremony to the grand sacrifices using numerous *brahmin yagnis*. The sacrifice involved an incarnation to bring the god to the ceremony and an offering of some sort, normally clarified butter (*ghi*) or foodstuffs, but sometimes animals and in extreme cases humans.

The gods of the *Vedas* were nature gods, led by Indra the boisterous warrior storm god. The Vedic pantheon was large, including old gods such as Dyaus, the sky father (Zeus to the Greeks and Jupiter (Dyaus-pitr) to the Romans), who had lost their importance but were not forgotten. However, early Hinduism was not strictly pantheistic. While not monotheistic like modern Hinduism, Vedism was henotheistic, where one god was temporarily elevated to become the one and only for the rite in which the god is invoked.

As Hinduism became more sophisticated philosophically and dominated by the *brahmin* sages, the Vedic gods lost their popularity and power to the new pantheon of Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi, and their relations. Indra for example, once a brave and incomparably puissant warrior, beloved of the warlike nomads, was not favored by the *brahmins* and in the epics and *Puranas* is constantly being bested by Krishna and other gods.

The *Vedas* make no mention of reincarnation. The dead are judged by Yama, the good going to the Land of the Fathers, the bad to the House of Clay.

As a challenge to the sacrifice, the practice of asceticism gained ground. Possibly based on a pre-Vedic practice, asceticism involved an introspective search for truth through meditation and self-denial. It was equated with sacrifice with the internal "heat" (*tapas*) produced by austerities being equated with the sacrificial fire. The acceptance of asceticism into orthodox Hinduism opened up new avenues of speculation which produced the *Upanishads* and "standard" Hinduism as detailed above.

## Jainism

In the Jain religion the Indian concepts of asceticism and non-violence found their greatest expressions. Jainism, in its ideal, advocates total detachment from the material world.

Jainism was the product of the religious revolution of the late Vedic period that produced Buddhism and the *Upanishads*. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism never spread beyond India but has outlasted Buddhism in its homeland. Never a huge religion, Jainism had its height in the Mauryan Empire (see p. xx). In modern India about 5 million people call themselves Jain, most living in state of Gujarat and the city of Mumbai.

### Jain Practice

As a daughter religion of Hinduism, Jainism shares many of the same beliefs such as reincarnation and *karma*, but with its own twists. Gone however is the idea of an individual *dharma*, and as a consequence Jainism does not support a *varna* system.

Jainism, at its most strict, is a very demanding religion. A Jaina monk, called a *nigrantha* (free from bonds), strives towards release from this world by complete detachment. Ideally, the *nigrantha* should take neither delight nor dissatisfaction with anything in this world. To this end, harsh asceticism is performed, frequent fasting, meditating, and suffering in uncomfortable bodily poses are practiced. A Jaina monk takes five vows; no killing, either deliberately or by accident; no lying;

no stealing; no sex; and no attachment to this world, which ultimately means detachment but includes having no possessions. Not killing (or more strictly, non-violence), a practice known as *ahimsa*, is taken to an extreme in Jainism, even to the extent of breathing through a cloth and sweeping the ground in front of one's path when walking.

The extreme demands required of monks are not necessary for all Jains. The expectations for the laity are not so strict as regular Jains are not expected to be striving for release, as it is acknowledged that this is simply too hard. However, there are still rules that every Jain must live by. A Jain must try to live simply, minimizing attachment to material objects and the material world. Lying and stealing are prohibited and one must endeavor to be pure in thought and faithful to one's spouse. Taking life by design is prohibited, which includes a strict vegetarian diet including restrictions on all food taken from the ground such as onions, which are presumed to harbor microbes. One's work must not let one take life either so professions such as tilling the soil or fishing are prohibited. This last requirement has led Jains to take up work that has ultimately ended up very profitable, such as trading and finance. This has tended to make the religion wealthy and coupled with the requirement for lay Jains to support the monkhood explains why Jain temples are often very lavish, elaborate, and beautiful.

## **Mahavira**

The Jain religion was discovered by Nataputta Vardhamana, who was to become known as Mahavira, the Great Hero. He was born in 540 B.C. in Vaishali (tradition has him born in 599 B.C), the son of a *raja* (king) of the Jnatrika clan. Though not the first son he was brought up to be a prince. However this was not the life he wanted for himself. When he was 30, after his parents died, he left his wife and daughter to join the followers of Parshva, an ascetic who had lived and preached 200 years previously.

Vardhamana pulled out his hair in five handfuls and gave away everything he owned and wandered naked for 12 years begging for food, arguing religion, and performing austerities. His hardships were rewarded with enlightenment and he became Jina, the Over-comer. He gathered followers and took his message through north India for about 30 years. His end came, appropriately, when he starved himself to death in Pava near Rajagriha in 468 B.C. (though tradition has him dying in 527 B.C).

Jainism was not a large religion at the time of Mahavira's death but flourished under the Mauryas. A famine at the end of Chandragupta's reign led to an exodus of Jain monks to the Deccan, taking the religion to the south. Jainism could not seriously compete with resurgent Hinduism and remained a minor religion, shrinking further over the centuries. However, Jainism survived where Buddhism disappeared because it involved the laity more in the community. The laity were charged with supporting the monks and occasionally spending time as a monk themselves. Furthermore, as mentioned, Jains became rich and their ethical lifestyle gave them much respect in general Indian society.

Modern Jainism has taken on the appearance of Hinduism. The Jain heavens are populated with saints as if they were gods and Jain priests perform rituals in Jain temples and households. Jaina society has even become divided along caste lines. The resemblance to Hinduism leads some to consider Jainism a peculiar caste of Hindus.

## **The Jaina Soul**

The Jain abhorrence of violence and rejection of material possessions are not arbitrary ideas, but are derived from a logical system of metaphysics. When Mahavira reached enlightenment he understood this system and from it he developed the strictures of the Jain religion. Central to Jain belief is the soul (*jiva*). The soul is a thing (for want of a better word) of pure brilliance; it is naturally buoyant and blissful. It exists outside the physical world and beyond even the spiritual world, but it is linked

to them through *karma*. To a Jain, *karma* is more of a physical substance than it is to a Hindu. *Karma* sticks to the surface of the soul, weighing it down and hiding its brilliance. A soul encased with *karma* takes on a spiritual and physical body. There are an infinite number of souls in the universe and all things that exist are souls with karmic forms, including inanimate objects.

*Karma* is attracted to the soul by passion born of action. There are eight different types of *karma*, attracted by different actions, some *karma* is "thicker" than others, but the effect is the same -- *karma* "dirties" the soul. Hence, action must be avoided, particularly those actions that attract the worse kinds of *karma*. Killing attracts particularly bad *karma* and careful Jains will avoid killing even microscopic insects, hence the practices of breathing through cotton masks and sweeping the ground while walking. Attachment to material objects, even one's own body, is also to be avoided as this is an attachment only with the imperfect world formed by *karma*.

The soul is not attacked or lessened by *karma*, simply covered. *Karma* is removed by a natural evaporation process provided no more is deposited. By practicing extreme inaction and performing austerities a Jain is able to halt the build up of karmic residue and actually reduce the amount clinging to their soul. This is very difficult and is attempted only by the most devout Jains. When the soul is freed from *karma* it is free to rise through the firmament to heaven where it exists in a state of bliss -- the Jain *nirvana*.

## Jain Cosmology

The Jaina universe is maintained by an eternal order to which gods as well as humans are slave.

To the Jains, the universe is endless. The universe goes through cycles but is not destroyed between them. The first half of the cycle is a time of improvement, *utsarpini*, and the second half is a time of decline, *avasarpini*. At the height of the *utsarpini* humans are giants and live extraordinarily long lives, getting all they could want from wishing trees (*kalpa-vriksha*). However, we are currently in the *avarsarpini* with 40,000 years until the cycle turns. The world is currently irredeemably corrupt, even the sky-clad (see sidebar) wear clothes and no one will gain release in this period of decline. Things will get worse before they get better; at the depths of the cycle humans will be dwarfs living in caves and not even able to use fire.

In each cycle, there live 24 Tirthankaras ("ford-finders"), great teachers who show the way. Mahavira was the 24th of this cycle and Parshva, his inspiration, was the 23rd. Each cycle also has 12 universal emperors (*chakravartins*) as well as another 27 great men.

## Buddhism

Along with Jainism, Buddhism developed in the late Vedic period as a response to the brahmanic domination of religion, answering Indian questions with Indian answers. Even so, Buddhism did not survive in India but went on to become one of the world's great religions.

### Life of the Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama was born to the king of the Shakyas in 563 B.C. At his birth the fortune teller predicted greatness for him as a ruler and *kshatriya* or, if he were to witness the misery of the world, he would become a great religious teacher. His father, Shuddhodhana, afraid that Siddhartha might not become a great emperor hid him from evidence of the suffering of the world. Despite his precautions, Siddhartha one day saw four signs of misery; an old man suffering from decrepitude, a man suffering from sickness, a dead man, and a holy mendicant. Profoundly moved by these signs he committed himself to improving the world and abandoned his wife, son, and old life for the life of an ascetic.

His initial attempts at ascetic austerity were impressive and he attracted five followers. For six years he punished himself with great austerities; but one day, waking from a starvation-induced faint he realized that even this feat of self-denial had not lead to enlightenment. He abandoned the life of asceticism to his followers' disgust. With a full stomach he sat beneath a tree (the so-called Bodhi Tree) and swore to meditate until he had reached enlightenment. It took 49 days of meditation and resisting the temptations of the demon Mara for the Buddha (Enlightened One) to finally reach enlightenment. Catching up with his former followers at Sarnath, outside Varanasi, he gave his first sermon, setting in motion the Wheel of Dharma.

Over his long ministry, spreading his message throughout India and defending his revelation against arguments of the *brahmins*, he gathered many followers. He died when he was 80 in about 483 B.C. from an illness brought on by a meal of pork.

It is easy enough to see Buddha as a mortal (the more fantastic aspects of his life story aside) who brought a new philosophy to those who were inclined to hear it. However, Buddhism came to see Buddha as being divine, a perfect being who had become a god through several lives of merit and choosing to be born on earth as a mortal so he could spread the *dharma*. More than that, he is not the only Buddha to have lived in this age; he has had three predecessors and the world will see one more Buddha, called Maitreya, before the end of this age.

## **Buddhist Philosophy**

The realization of Gautama Buddha under the Bodhi Tree was that extreme asceticism was not the way to free oneself of a life made miserable by loss and failed expectations; the path to happiness was the *Middle Way*, neither indulgent nor excessively austere. The Middle Way is based on four Noble Truths. The Noble Truth of Sorrow has it that the world is full of misery. The Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow is that this misery comes from desire. The Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow says that one must abandon desire to stop sorrow. The Noble Truth of the Way which Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow is the Eightfold Path -- right views, right thought, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

By experiencing desire one is chained to the cycle of birth and rebirth. However, when one understands that one is not separate from the whole, there is no desire. This realization leads to *nirvana*, which in Buddhist belief is an indescribable state of simultaneous being and non-being.

Buddhist metaphysics differs from Hinduism in a number of ways. An important difference is that Buddhism does not recognize the existence of souls. Rebirth therefore is not the transmigration of the soul to a new body. Instead it is a process likened to lighting a fresh candle with a used candle as the old candle is extinguished; nothing of the old candle is transferred though the light, the "life," of the candle is passed on.

Another fresh perspective of Buddhism is the view that everything is transitory; moments do not have existence, only the transitions between moments. It is important to appreciate that everything will change, the seasons will change, and people will die.

## **Buddhism in India**

About 100 years after Buddha's death there was a schism in the community of Buddhists. The Mahasanghika, Members of the Great Community, left the fold. Those remaining were known as the Sthaviravadins (or Theravadins in the Pali language), Adherents to the Teaching of the Elders. Theravada Buddhism is the traditional form of Buddhism. It believes that Buddha is gone from us after he achieved nirvana and that is entirely up to one to find nirvana alone.

The heart of Buddhism is the monk. Monks are required to follow ten precepts:

1. Avoid taking life.
2. Only take what is offered.
3. Be chaste.
4. Do not lie.
5. Avoid alcohol and other drugs.
6. Eat moderately and do not eat after noon.
7. Do not watch dancing, singing, or dramas.
8. Do not use perfumes or flowers as decorations.
9. Sleep on hard, low beds.
10. Do not accept money for alms.

The first five are also required for lay Buddhists.

The heterodox sects, including Buddhism, received patronage during the reign of Ashoka (see p. xx). The devout Mauryan emperor promoted the tenets of Buddhism and supported the religion itself, including sending missionaries. His greatest success was Sri Lanka, which adopted Theravada Buddhism, according to legend being converted by Ashoka's brother.

Thanks to Ashoka, Theravada Buddhism, was a success. However, a new development, Mahayana Buddhism, the Great Vehicle developed in north west India, gave the religion new life, and helped it spread beyond India. The Great Vehicle centered on the idea that Buddha spent several lives becoming the Buddha, during which time he was a "*bodhisattva*," working for the good of the world. As Gautama is not the only *buddha* there are also other *bodhisattvas* working now for the good of humanity, shepherding people towards *nirvana*. These are beings of great merit and could achieve *nirvana* if they chose but instead have elected to stay on earth and aid humanity, postponing their *nirvana*. These *bodhisattvas* have the nature of gods and live in heaven.

A further novelty of Mahayana Buddhism is that the Buddha has not entirely gone from us to *nirvana*, only his created body, *nirmanakaya*, has left. Buddha is still with us with a body of bliss, *sambhogakaya*, which resides in heaven and a transcendent body of essence, *dharmakaya*.

Mahayana is an optimistic approach. Though it still maintains the world is suffering, it says that everyone will eventually gain *nirvana*, or even better, get to heaven with Buddha.

From about A.D. 500, a new vein in Buddhism developed, Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana, the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt. Bearing many similarities to Shaktism, Vajrayana gives much importance to the wives of the *bodhisattvas*, Tara the wife of Avalokiteshvara, who are seen as the active half of the partnership. Vajrayana advocates the attainment of *nirvana* in a lifetime by *yoga* and from base experiences of the world one is attempted to transcend (which, until Vajrayana became more contemplative in about the 9th century, involved practices similar to Hinduism's Vamachara) -- the idea being that we are all *buddhas* already, we just don't realize it. Following the practices of Vajrayana gives the practitioner magic powers as a perk.

Buddhism flourished in India for many centuries, but by the 7th century A.D. the religion was in serious decline. The Buddhists monasteries had been unfortunate victims of the Hunas invasions (see

p. xx). This was not the main reason for Buddhism weakness however. The problem was that the monks were expected to be supported by the laity but offered nothing in return. They were not priests and therefore did not perform rituals for their flock. A resurgent Hinduism also hurt Buddhism by incorporating Buddha as an *avatara* of Vishnu. Buddhism finally succumbed with the arrival of the Muslims and their destructive raids.

Buddhism has seen a small revival in recent times. The untouchable writer of the constitution, B.R. Ambedkar encouraged untouchables to become Buddhist, after his example, to free themselves from Hindu persecution.

## Islam

Although Islam had its genesis outside of India it became the regions second most important religion, second to Hinduism.

Considerably more information about Islam and Muslims can be found in *GURPS Arabian Nights*. This section deals with Islam only briefly and emphasizes Islam as it is relevant to India.

## History

The Islamic calendar begins in A.D. 622 when Mohammed fled from Mecca to establish a community at Yathrib (renamed Medina, "City of the Prophet"). Mohammed returned to conquer Mecca in 630 and the rest of Arabia shortly after. Under the caliphs, Mohammed's successors, the Islamic army spread the faith by the sword, building an empire that by 711 stretched from the Atlantic to the Indus. Islam arrived in India in 711 with the conquest of Sind but the religion did not penetrate into the Indian heartland until the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni. Mahmud forcibly converted locals as well as slaughtering and looting. When an Islamic dynasty was established at Delhi in 1206 the religion began to win serious adherents. (See *Muslim India*, p.xx.)

## Muslims in India

In time, most of India was subject to Muslim rule. However, in most of India, Muslims were in the minority and even where they were in the majority, such as Sind, west Punjab, and east Bengal, they lived with a large number of Hindus. It was the practice of Muslims to convert or put to the sword any pagans that they conquered and to impose a tax, the *jizya*, on members of revealed religions, the so-called "People of the Book." It was quite impractical to exterminate the non-converting Hindus of India, so instead they were taxed as People of the Book on the strength of the fact they had their own religious texts.

Despite India's tolerant climate, Hindus and Muslims have always been suspicious of each other. The two communities accentuate their differences by dressing differently and playing up their different customs. As the minority, Muslims feel entrenched. For their part Hindus have not forgotten the bloody raids of Mahmud or the discriminating *jizya*. This divisiveness occasionally turns violent, particularly during religious festivals. The partition of India damaged relations between the religions as it was a forthright admission of the divisions between the communities. The state of Pakistan was created as a home for Indian Muslims and therefore is assertive in its Islam. Many Muslims living in modern India recognize Pakistan as some sort of homeland and take pride in Pakistan's achievements over India, most commonly expressed as support for the Pakistani cricket team. India in contrast was established as a secular country.

## Islamic Stricture

A Muslim is made by reciting the *shahada*, the declaration of faith, "There is no God but Allah, and

Mohammed is his prophet." The word "Islam" means submission and Islam is submission to Allah. Islam is strictly monotheistic; not only is there only one God, Allah is the only object of worship. Although Mohammed and the Koran are revered, they are not worshipped.

The *shahada* is the first of the "five pillars" of Islam, the five obligations required of all Muslims. The second pillar is prayer which must be said five times daily at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall. The third pillar is the Ramadan fast. The fourth is the giving of alms to the poor; Muslims are expected to give 1/40 of their wealth as gifts. The fifth is the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which all Muslims must perform once in their lives if they are able-bodied and can afford the journey.

## Sikhism

While Sikhism is not a huge religion, Sikhs, the men particularly with their distinctive uncut beards and large turbans, are prominent in India beyond their numbers.

The religion of Sikhism is a happy merging of Hinduism and Islam. These two proud religions have been at odds since Islam arrived in numbers in 997. They differ at the most fundamental level; where Hinduism is idolatrous, Islam is iconoclastic; Islam preaches love of God and promises heaven, Hinduism is predicated on the absence of eternal heaven and offers *samsara* instead. Sikhism is more than a compromise between these two, it is a whole new religion.

### Guru Nanak

"God is neither Hindu nor Muslim, and the path I follow is God's."

--<#208> Nanak

Nanak was born in A.D. 1469 at Talwandi near Lahore, an area where Hindu and Muslim lived side by side. He had a vision of God and received the message that there is no Hindu and no Muslim as God is the same to all. God to Nanak was the *True Name*, He was Allah and Vishnu.

Nanak's message was one of toleration. God was supreme and appears in different forms. The devotion that Nanak took up and preached involved worship and servitude to God in the Muslim manner but in a world governed by *karma* and reincarnation as well as *maya*. One gains release when one is absorbed in God and to attain this one must be entirely devoted to God. This is not to be achieved by ritual or the worship of idols and pilgrimages and asceticism are merely distractions from one's faith.

This teaching of Nanak was one of peace and virtue. God is compassionate so we must be as well.

After taking his message around North India, Nanak established a lasting community in Punjab. He named Angad as his successor *guru*.

### Guru Govind Singh

"Hail, hail to the Creator of the world, the Saviour of creation, my Cherisher, hail to Thee, O Sword!"

--<#208> Govind Singh

Sikhism was both blessed and cursed by living with the Moghul Empire, (see *Moghul Empire*, pp. xx-yy). The third *guru*, Amar Das was patronized by Akbar who had a highly liberal attitude to



religion. Ram Das, the fourth *guru*, served at Akbar's court and was granted land in Punjab. However, Jahangir, Akbar's intolerant son, killed Guru Arjan. Arjan's son, Guru Har Govind reacted by building a fortress and promoting militarism amongst the community of Sikhs.

The conflict intensified during the reign of Aurangzeb and the tenth *guru*, Govind Rai, went beyond the start made by Har Govind and turned the Sikhs into a military brotherhood -- the Khalsa (Army of the Pure). Govind made war a holy pursuit by drawing parallels between God and weapons. Members of the Khalsa are baptized in holy water that has been stirred by a sword. All male members of the Khalsa take the name Singh (lion), and girls take the name Kaur (princess). All Sikhs must wear the Five K's (see sidebar) for their practical purposes but also so they might identify each other.

Govind Singh was the last Sikh *guru*. He was killed by a Muslim assassin in 1708. Govind left no human successor, instead he decreed that the *Granth*, the Sikh holy book, was their last and eternal *guru*.

From the formation of the Khalsa, the Sikhs have been famous warriors. In the 19th century, the Khalsa defended a Sikh kingdom until it fell to the British. Under the British and into modern times Sikhs have been a very important part of the Indian army. Sikhs are generally bigger than the average Indian and are given a good deal of respect by most non-Sikhs.

Partition was harsh on the Sikhs as it divided their homeland and 2.5 million Sikhs moved east from Pakistan to India.

Since the establishment of the country of India, some Sikh radicals have been struggling for an independent Khalistan, a struggle has been bloody at times.

Sikhs make up about 2% of the population of India or about 20 million adherents, almost all of them in Punjab and Delhi.

## Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is the ancient religion of Persia. The religion was established by Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, and his teachings are recorded in the Zend-Avesta. In the Zoroastrian worldview the world is a battleground between Ahura Mazda, the god of light and truth, and Ahriman, the god of falsehood and darkness. Ahura Mazda is represented by fire and Zoroastrians worship in fire temples though they hold all four elements to be sacred (and hence their celebrated practice of hanging corpses to be eaten by vultures in "towers of silence" rather than burying or cremating them).

Adherents of the faith migrated to India to escape persecution in Muslim Persia and are now found in Karachi and Mumbai where they are known as Parsis. They form a small community, less than 100,000 and shrinking. However, they have a presence far beyond their numbers. Parsis are extraordinarily successful in business and have managed to avoid conflict with other communities. Their greatest ability has been to assimilate. They have considerable influence in Mumbai and own a good deal of property there. Parsi buildings can often be identified by carved sphinxes.

## Christianity

There are over 20 million Christians living in India the oldest community of which dates back to the early years of Christianity. Legends ascribes the founding of the first Syrian Christian community to St Thomas (see p. xx) as early as the first century. Christianity was certainly extant in India before A.D. 189 when the Bishop of Alexandria sent his envoy Pantaenus to visit the Christian community

in India. Orthodox Christianity was brought to India by Armenians. European presence in India led to many conversions and a growth in the population of Christians. The Portuguese first brought Catholicism to India. The British missionaries worked to convert Indians to English Christian denominations, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Methodism.

Conversion to Christianity was a way to escape untouchability. However, Christian communities are not immune to caste prejudices; many churches in India require low-caste converts to sit in a partitioned area. Similarly Hindus remain aware of the low status of converted castes.

A good summary of the Christian religion can be found in *GURPS Fantasy*.

## **Judaism**

There is only a small number of Jews in India, most of them living in Cochin. The Cochin community has lived in India since 587 B.C.

## **Hinduism? Kya Hai?**

Just like "India," the name "Hindu" refers to the Indus river (and the land beyond it), a name coined by outsiders. Followers of the Hindu religion, though calling it Hinduism in English, know it as Santana Dharma, the Eternal Truth, or perhaps *varnashramadharma*, i.e. the proper conduct for one's class and age.

## **Cow Protection**

Although not practiced through its whole history, the worship of the cow is an inviolate principle of Hinduism. The cow the divine symbol of motherhood, her pacifism and detachment are seen as saintly.

Cow urine is treated by many as being a sort of holy elixir and is sometimes drunk or bathed in.

## **Revealed and Remembered**

The *Vedas*, from the *Samhitas* to the *Upanishads*, are known as *shruti* or revealed texts. They are believed to have been transmitted to *rishis* (sages) directly from God (or more accurately, from the heavens) like smoke from fire. They are eternal and fundamental to the universe.

All other Hindu texts are *smriti*, (remembered) texts that are handed down by tradition. They are of less weight and defer to the *shruti* texts if there is an inconsistency.

Certain sects consider their texts to be *shruti*, for example the Tantrics consider the *Tantras* as revealed.

## **Oral Literature**

Until about 1000 B.C. the *Vedas* were not even committed to writing. To do so was considered a dilution of them and the *Vedas* are still transmitted from teacher to student orally. The written form of the *Vedas* is not able to properly express the correct emphases and nuances that the spoken word can carry and at any rate, the sound of the *Vedas* carries as much power as the meaning.

## **The Bhagavad Gita**

The most important piece of religious discussion found in the epics is the *Bhagavad Gita* (the Song of the Lord) from the *Mahabharata*. On the verge of the great battle of Kurukshetra, Krishna, *avatara* of the great god Vishnu, lays down the fundamentals of the Hindu religion to Prince Arjuna.

Arjuna is loath to let the battle commence as he cannot bear that so many good men, family members included, will die just so that he may be king. Krishna stresses on Arjuna that he must fight because, as a warrior it is his duty. At any rate, those who might die in the battle will have another life.

In the *Gita*, Krishna reveals himself to Arjuna as the Supreme God. Explaining also the importance of having complete faith in Him.

The *Gita* is the single most important piece of Hindu literature as it contains pretty much all that is needed to be known, straight from God's mouth. Many Hindus have the *Gita* memorized.

## **Brahman and Atman**

Fundamental to Upanishadic philosophy is the existence of an "Ultimate," called Brahman -- a

Universal Essence, which can be called God but is essentially unknowable and beyond description (though It can be experienced).

Furthermore, there exists an individual essence or soul, the *atman*, associated with everyone. If the *atman* has any existence it is as pure consciousness. Individual characteristics such as identity, feelings, and intellect, are aspects of the *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body or ego, which is the habitation of the *atman* in the same way as the physical body or *shula sharira* is the habitation of the ego. The *atman* cannot be perceived as the senses exist only in the physical and subtle bodies.

It is a fundamental idea of the *Upanishads* that the *atman* and the Brahman are the same, expressed in the phrase "*tat tvam asi*," "that art thou." To understand how the soul can be part of the whole consider the air inside a jar that is no way different from the air outside the jar. If one is able to fully comprehend this oneness and its implications one is able to achieve a union between one's *atman* and Brahman (see *Jnana Yoga*).

## Maya

The impression, that comes to one naturally, that one is an individual, independent in any way from the rest of the world, is a delusion. The entire phenomenological world is in fact an illusion; it has no real existence as only Brahman exists, nothing else. Maya is the illusion that blinds us from this realization and keeps us from a union with Brahman.

## Vedanta

The *vedanta* or study of the *Upanishads* forms one of the six branches of philosophy in Hindu thought (see *Philosophy*, p. xx). There are three principal schools of *vedanta*, each seemingly in contradiction to the others. Shankara (A.D. 788-838), the most respected *vedanta* scholar, outlined the *advaita* (non-dualistic) school based on the belief that there is no difference at all between the *atman* and Brahman. Ramanuja's (A.D. 1017?-1137?) *vishishtadvaita* (qualified non-dualistic) school believes that the *atman* is a limb of Brahman and hence is part of but clearly less than Brahman. The *dvaita* (dualistic) school of Madhva (A.D. 1197-1280) claims that the *atman* is not of Brahman. Madhva's view is a strongly deistic view.

Other views of the relationship between Brahman and *atman* include *dvait-advaita* (dualistic monism) where the soul is different but dependent on Brahman, *shuddh-advaita* (pure monism) where the soul is permitted to have a separate existence by Brahman, and *bheda-abheda* (different yet not different) where Brahman and *atman* are compared to fire and sparks.

## States of Consciousness

There are four states of consciousness; the waking state, the dreaming sleep state, the deep dreamless sleep state, and *turiya*, the state of pure consciousness when one can perceive one's unity with Brahman. In *turiya*, there is no conception of subject or object.

## God is One

It is a fundamental tenet of Hinduism, understood by even the most uninformed devotee, that God is one. That a religion with so many gods could be monotheistic is seemingly absurd, until it is appreciated that each of the many, many gods of the Hindu pantheon are just manifestations of the One.

## The Hindu Trinity

The three most important gods of post-Vedic Hinduism are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, the trinity of Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer. This three-fold scheme, called Trimurti, is entirely a positive process -- the fact that one aspect of it is destruction simply acknowledges that there must be a purging for there to be renewal.

The trinity should not be taken as too crucial a concept. Not all of the trinity are afforded the same reverence, even though they are theoretically equal. The worship of Brahma is considerably less strong than that of Shiva or Vishnu, the worshippers of whom treat their favorite as being more important than the other two members of the trinity and subsume the roles of the others, e.g. Shaivites see Shiva as creator, sustainer, and destroyer while still acknowledging Brahma and Vishnu.

## Vishnu's Avataras

**1. Matsya the fish.** Warned Manu, the first man, of the great flood and guided Manu's boat with the horn on its head.

**2. Kurma the tortoise.** Acted as the base for the gods and devils to churn the primal sea to obtain *amrit*. (See p. xx.)

**3. Varaha the boar.** Raised the earth out of the waters on its tusk after it had been sunk by Hiranyaksha, a *rakshasa* (a race of monsters; see *Bestiary*, p. xx).

**4. Narasingha the man-lion.** Hiranyakasipu the *rakshasa* could not be killed by a weapon, by man or beast, inside or outside, at night or during the day. To deal with him Vishnu became Narasingha, half-man, half-lion, and disemboweled him with his claws at dusk in an entranceway.

**5. Vamana the dwarf.** Became a giant and encompassed the earth and heaven in three strides to reclaim them from the *rakshasa* Bali.

**6. Parashurama the brahmin warrior with an axe.** Wiped out all *kshatriyas* 21 times in succession.

**7. Rama.**

**8. Krishna.**

**9. Buddha.** Yes, that Buddha.

**10. Kalki the destroyer.**

## Garuda

Half eagle, half giant, with the body and limbs of a man with the head, talons and wings of an eagle.

Garuda has a great hatred of snakes stemming from an enmity between his mother and his father's other wife, mother of the *nagas* (snakes or snake-men).

## Rama

Rama is worshipped as the perfect king and his story has been told in the *Ramayana* (see p. xx).

In recent times his worship has become tied up with militant Hinduism (see *India Today*, pp. xx-yy).

## **Krishna**

Krishna, the Black-skinned, is one of the most loved of the Hindu gods. He is a god of great personality and the stories of his life are highly entertaining. As a child and youth he was very mischievous, he had to be tied up to stop him stealing butter and he once hid the clothes of the milkmaids as they swam naked in the Ganga (to teach them to be more respectful to the river). He had over 16,000 wives but his love affair with Radha is the story of perfect lovers (and a parable of the irresistible love between humanity and God). As an adult he ruled the kingdom of Dwarka and in the *Mahabharata* he helped the Pandvas, delivering the *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna.

## **Lingam**

Almost all temples to Shiva contain a *lingam* and a *lingam* alone can constitute a shrine to Shiva. The *lingam* for this purpose is rather stylized, being quite squat and featureless.

There are 12 great *linga* in India, the  *jyotilinga*, and any Hindu that visits all of them in a lifetime goes to heaven upon death. There is, however, no consistent list of the 12.

## **Left Hand Path**

The Right Hand Path (Dakshinachara) of Shaktism worships the positive, vital aspects of the power of the feminine principle. However, Shaktism has a sinister dark side -- the Left Hand Path.

Vamachara, or the Left Hand Path of Tantrism is an unpleasant and morally degenerate cult and hence is practiced only in secret. The teachings of Left Hand Tantrism are highly esoteric and open up magical powers. The basis of the approach being to get beyond the Self by indulging in pleasurable or impulsive acts. The consumption of meat and the drinking of wine often form part of the rites as are various acts of ritual sex including, in extreme rites, incest and necrophilia. To experience the dangerous spiritual consequences of these forbidden acts leads to a higher control of the self and to *moksha*.

Tantrics are greatly feared in India as practitioners of black magic and ritualistic murders are attributed to them.

## **Balarama**

Balarama is a certainly a lesser god and not normally worth mentioning. However, also known as Baldev, he is the namesake of the author and, in a shameless case of self-indulgence, Balarama's story will be told here in the briefest possible manner to illustrate the life and personality of a fairly typical god.

Balarama is Krishna's older brother and is also of divine origins, being an incarnation of Sheshnag, the thousand headed cosmic serpent upon whose head the world sits. (Balarama is also indirectly an incarnation of Vishnu.) Where Krishna is black, Balarama is white.

Balarama had many adventures in his youth with Krishna. When very young Balarama conspired with Krishna to steal butter. Their later adventures were chiefly defeating *rakshasas*.

In personality Balarama was rash and violent, and a skilled warrior also. All the same, he was more noble in character than his brother, whose womanizing Balarama disapproved of. However, where Krishna's indulgence was women, Balarama's was wine and while drunk he could be even more impetuous and dangerous than usual.

Balarama had only one wife, the beautiful Revati. Revati's father, King Raivata, desirous of a good match for his daughter, asked Brahma for advice. Brahma suggested Balarama. However, Brahma took so long in praising Balarama that eons passed and when Raivata returned mankind had degenerated and shrunk in height so that Revati towered above Balarama. To remedy this Balarama had to cut Revati's legs off at the knees.

Balarama's end came just before Krishna's death. Their tribe, the Yadavas, had just annihilated themselves in a quarrel. Balarama sat down under a tree to rest and while sleeping his soul left his body as a snake through his mouth. His body was cremated along with his brother's by Arjuna.

## **Goshala and the Ajivikas**

For the first six years of his search for enlightenment Vardhamana was accompanied by Goshala Maskariputra, another follower of Parshva. They argued bitterly and went their separate ways. Goshala established the sect of the Ajivikas. He preached that one could not escape one's destiny -- one's lot in life is not determined by one's *karma* and action in previous lives, but by the cosmic principle *niyati*. One lives through 8,400,000 eons before achieving *moksha* regardless of one's actions. Goshala practiced self-denial himself as he believed this was his destiny. The Ajivikas flourished in Mauryan times as did the other heterodoxies and had their greatest height in the 6th century A.D. but declined and by the 14th century had disappeared from India.

## **Sky Clad or White Clad**

A schism in Jainism developed at about the time of the exodus. The Digambaras (Sky Clad) insisted that monks must be naked like Mahavira. The Shvetambaras (White Clad) allowed the wearing of clothes. The two sects had only one major doctrinal difference regarding women. The Digambara sect does not allow women to achieve release. They are not allowed to be Digambara monks or enter temples and their only hope is that they are reborn as men.

## **The Quality of Souls**

Not all souls are equal, but then one could hardly expect the soul of a vegetable to be the equal of the soul of a human. The quality of a soul is dependent on how many senses it has. Gods, demons, humans, and animals have five senses. Insects have only four. Smaller insects and moths are blind and deaf, having only three senses. Lesser beings such as worms have only taste and touch. Those that can only touch are trees, vegetables, and the elements (earth, fire, air, and water can all have souls, not as "elementals" as such, simply as rocks or running water or leaping fire, etc.).

## **Souls and the Material World**

In the Jain cosmology, the whole dynamics of this world is the interaction of souls with the five classes of non-living entities or *ajiva*, the ether (*akasha*), movement (*dharma*, in a very different sense to Hindu *dharma*), rest (*adharm*), time (*kala*), and matter (*pudgala*).

There is a definite distinction between *jiva* and *ajiva*. The former is pure and good. The latter is evil.

## **Gods in Buddhism and Jainism**

Buddhists and Jains are not necessarily atheists but, although they may accept the existence of gods and demons, they make little difference to their philosophy. There is no supreme unmoved mover, only the *dharma*.

## **Buddhist Nuns**

Women are not greatly respected in Buddhism. However there are Buddhists nuns as well as monks. The Buddha allowed women to join the Order when prevailed upon by his cousin but despaired that the effect of this concession was that the Law would now only last 500 years rather than 1000.

## **Bodhisattvas**

**Avalokiteshvara** The Lord Who Looks Down. The greatest living *bodhisattva*. He often comes to earth to help humanity in person.

**Manjushri** The *bodhisattva* of wisdom.

**Vairochana** The *bodhisattva* of *dharma*.

**Samanta-bhadra** A real monk who taught the path to bodhisattvahood.

## **Buddhism Outside India**

In India, Buddhism was a keen religious experiment. Its new ideas enriched the religion and culture of the land, but ultimately it was abandoned. In East Asia however, the new converts to the religion picked it up and ran with it.

**Pure Land Buddhism** developed in China considers heaven to be the ultimate goal and one gets there by constantly thinking of Buddha in heaven.

**Zen** is the famous form of Buddhism that focuses on meditation and insight, including the contemplation of puzzling or nonsensical *koan*.

**Tibetan Buddhism** is a sophisticated form of Tantric Buddhism.

## **The Prophet**

Mohammed was born in A.D. 570 at Mecca. In 595 he married the rich widow Khadijah, for whom he worked as a merchant. He was then free to spend time contemplating God. In 610 he was visited by the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) while meditating in a cave on Mt Hira outside Mecca. Jibreel carried messages from Allah to Mohammed and commanded Mohammed to be God's messenger.

Mohammed was reluctant at first. It was three years before he could be persuaded to preach. His message was not well received by the people of Mecca and he and his few followers were persecuted. For this reason he moved to Medina and later brought the religion to Mecca forcibly.

Mohammed was not the first prophet of God, Moses and Jesus were also God's prophets, but he is most assuredly the last. The pronouncements given to Mohammed through Jibreel is the ultimate revelation for man from God.

## **The Koran**

After becoming the Messenger of God Mohammed made thousands of proclamations, many of them while in a trance. After his death these were collected in the 114 *surahs* (chapters) of the Koran, the Muslim holy book. The content of the Koran, though spoken by Mohammed, is the Word of Allah; every word in it is the Truth.

## **Sunni and Shia**



Although Mohammed established a faith, he did not appoint a successor to direct the community after his death. He had no son to take over from him. Abu Bakr, Mohammed's father-in-law became the first caliph (successor). However, some reckoned Ali, Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law should have been caliph. The two factions, the Sunni and Shia, did not split until after Ali, who had his turn at being caliph from 656, was assassinated in 661.

Sunni Islam is the religion's greater party. However, in 1502, Ismail I became Shah of Shi'ite Persia and hence, with a Shi'ite neighbor, India has a large population of Shi'ites as well as Sunnis. The difference is not apparent to anyone outside the religion but there is sometimes friction between the two parties, sometimes violent.

## **Ramadan**

The ninth month of the Islamic year is celebrated as the month of Ramadan. Starting from the full moon at the beginning of the month Muslims are forbidden to eat and drink during the day until the next full moon, the *Id* moon. Fasting in this way for a month is difficult and the sick and infirm are excused from this requirement, as are people travelling or in similarly inconvenient situations.

## **Sufism**

In a land of unbridled mysticism, it is no surprise that Islamic mysticism, Sufism, took hold here. Sufism became one of the dialects spoken in interdenominational religious conferences. A number of new Sufi orders developed in India, including the Shattariya and Qadiriya orders.

## **The Ten Gurus**

**Nanak** (b. 1469, d. 1538)

**Angad** (r. 1539-1552)

**Amardas** (1552-1574) Abolished caste distinctions by instituting communal eating.

**Ramdas** (1574-81) Built the Golden Temple.

**Arjan Dev** (1581-1606) Composed the *Granth*. Tortured to death by Jehangir for being suspected of supporting the Prince Khusrau (see *Moghul Empire*, p. xx).

**Har-gobind** (1606-1645) Established military brotherhood of Sikhs. Imprisoned by Jehangir for 10 years.

**Har-rai** (1645-1661)

**Har-krishan** (1661-1664) Guru at 5 and dead of smallpox by 8.

**Tegh Bahadur** (1664-1675) Executed by Aurangzeb for not embracing Islam.

**Godind Singh** (1675-1708) Established the Khalsa. Assassinated as the last human *guru*.

## **Nanak-panthis**

There are serious differences between the Sikhism of Guru Govind and the pacifism of Guru Nanak. Not all Sikhs chose to become members of the Khalsa. They are Nanak-panthis, followers of Nanak and are largely pacifists.

## **The Five K's**

*Kirpan* Sword.

*Kesh* Uncut hair.

*Kangha* Comb.

*Kacch* Shorts.

*Kara* Steel bracelet on right wrist.

# Magical India

India -- the land, its people, its rivers and forests, its beasts -- is steeped in magic. All occurrences, from the creation of the world to a bicycle puncture, are not the effects of nature or chance, but are the workings of divine magical will, invisible spirits, or of malicious charms.

In GURPS terms, India should be considered an area of "high mana," magic is common and anyone could potentially learn magic. The shifting of circumstance and fortune are likely as not mitigated by some sort of magical agency, mothers invoke *mantras* from the *Arthava Veda* over their children when they fall sick, and scarcely a day will go by without one seeing a wandering *sadhu*, doubtless possessing great knowledge of the arcane workings of the supernatural, or a woman brazenly wearing her hair down, marking her undeniably as a witch. This applies throughout Indian history, from Indic times when *yoga* was first practiced, to the modern day where the prime minister decides the fate of the nation only after consulting his astrologer. It also applies regardless of how much magic *actually* exists in the world; in a world of no mana, the wandering *sadhu's* arcane knowledge is bogus and national affairs are not tied to the stars, but most Indians still believe it to be this way -- the existence of magic is proven to them daily through inexplicable coincidences, the claims of magical power by *brahmins*, and the demonstrations of legerdemain by charlatans.

Typically for India, with its happy acceptance of a lack of consistency between its proliferating philosophies and theologies, there are several different forms of magic, all of which can be simultaneously valid even if they are philosophically incompatible or even contradictory. The various forms of magic differ in the source of their magical power, the manner of obtaining magical knowledge, and in the controlling of magical effects.

## Sources of Magic

In GURPS, magic is activated and motivated through a magical energy, mana. An equivalent magical energy is known in India and is called *akasha* (see sidebar p. xx). However, *akasha* can only be recognized in the theory of some schools of magic in India. Some magical practitioners get their magic from quite different sources and some might totally reject the concept of an ethereal magical energy, for example a deeply theistic magic practitioner might find the idea of a power separate from the gods or a magical agent between the will of God and the manifest world to be unpalatable. Generally however, the existence of *akasha* will not be completely dismissed; as a normal rule Indians are very accepting of different theories, even if they do not subscribe to them personally or are contrary to their own beliefs.

As is the case anywhere, magic in India, as an arcane art, is secretive and abstruse. While works of magic such as the *Atharva Veda* are accessible to anyone who is interested (not withstanding the ban on the reading of the *Vedas* by *shudras*), the basis behind Indian magic, particularly its source, is either a guarded secret or simply not known. Below are suggested four possible sources of Indian magic. They are presented and discussed in an attempt to produce some clarity for gaming purposes; the distinction is not one an Indian would recognize. That four sources of magic are detailed below does not mean that only one of the four is available to any magician or that the four sources are exclusive, a particular type of magic might have a combination of sources, for example, divinely inspired magic worked through *akasha*.

### Divine Magic

Theistic Hinduism believes that God is omnipresent; God either directs all action in the universe, or the actions of the universe *are* the actions God. Magic is simply the manifestation of God's will. It might also be thought of as a force through which God creates, maintains, and animates the universe.

To make use of this divine magic, the magician or priest appeals to a god or gods for service through *mantras*, which are spells in the form of hymns. *Mantras* are generally sycophantic pleas full of praises of the god's or gods' strength and generosity. The practical effects of these *mantras* is to bring part of the god to the spell-caster.

There are two ways for magic of this type to work; either the spells cast are actively worked by a god or the spell is not consciously performed by a god and instead the spell works off some latent magical energy of the god who might not even be aware of it. In the first case, for the spell to succeed if cast successfully, one of gods appealed to must want to help. While the gods are liberal with their favors and easily cajoled, they may choose not to grant a spell if the obvious effects of it are clearly contradictory to their nature or if they seriously dislike the spell-caster. However, the gods are highly susceptible to praise and the greater the praise used in the spell, the more likely they are to respond. (Enormously powerful magicians might even demand magic from the gods who will grant it out of fear.) An appeal directly to the gods should normally include an offering as this form of magic is based on the sacrificial magic of the *Vedas*. Thus this magic needs some form of "ingredients" that are exhausted when the spell is cast, the ingredient itself remains but its subtle essence is consumed by the god. The sacrificial ingredients are usually food, mango or clarified butter say, and are specific to the ritual.

In the second case, where the spell is not powered consciously by the gods, the spell-caster is not required to request directly from the gods, though the *mantra* used will be the same. If the divine magical energy is simply an impartial force then the caster need not be especially holy to tap into it (and it can be treated simply as *akashic* magic with the limitation that should a god discover their magic is being used without their assent they could stop it, if able, or punish the user). However, another option is that the currents of divine magic are dictated by *dharma*, in which case it can only be used for *dharmic* purposes, and no amount of pleading or sacrificing is going to help. Thus it would not be possible to perform evil with magic from Vishnu or magic for the purpose of conciliation from Kartikeya.

### **Spirit Magic**

Most Indians believe that the world is full of spirits, some beneficial or malicious, but most neutral. These spirits can be blamed for misfortune and good luck might be attributed to them. A popular theory of magic in India is that all magical effects are carried out by these spirits. How this magic is exercised depends on the nature of the spirits with either or both of two options possible in a campaign. These spirits might be tied to an object, a place, or a force (e.g. gravity). In this case a magical effect requires requesting or compelling the appropriate spirit to alter their associated object or force. Alternatively the spirits are not bound and generally have a wider range of powers.

### **Akashic Magic**

A system of magic is known in India wherein magic does not come from any sentient agency such as gods or spirits, but instead is powered by *mana* or *akasha*, an impartial pervasive magic energy. Akashic magic is identical to "manic" magic of standard GURPS.

### **Immanent Magic**

An alternative view is that there is no amorphous energy that powers magic and that magical effects are simply natural effects obeying the natural physical laws of the universe. The philosophies of *sankhya* and *vaishasheka* (see *Philosophy*, p. xx), while they both include a substance coincidentally called *akasha*, do not make mention of an all-encompassing force/substance that powers the motion of the universe. (In these two philosophical systems *akasha* is the ether, either one of the five elements in the case of *sankhya*, or as one of the five non-physical realities in the case of *vaishasheka*.) Also, they have no requirement of a prime cause or agents to enact the physical

laws, hence there is no need for gods or spirits in these systems.

To use "immanent" magic ("immanent" because the magic is simply the inherent working of the universe without intermediary) one must fundamentally understand the machinery of the physical system (how substances are made up and how they interact with each other and with other realities such as time) and then how to influence its workings. Applying one's will to this then causes magical effects to be realized by a "natural" process.

## Learning Magic

While magic is common enough in India and even non-magicians can learn magic, the practice of magic by serious magic practitioners is a difficult and often arduous road. Magic in India can be incredibly powerful, the greatest practitioners can hold even the gods in fear. However, to achieve even modest levels of magic requires great work far beyond the demands of mundane pursuits. Magical knowledge might be gained from years of study of the *Vedas*, body-breaking austerities, spiritual contemplation, or the practice of precise bodily contortions, but regardless of the method it requires the same level of sacrifice, be it in time, effort, or discipline.

Learning magic in India almost always requires a teacher or *guru*; while autodidactic discovery of the mysteries of the universe might not be impossible (Buddha being an eminent example), it is generally believed in India that such knowledge must be taught -- even the ancient sages who first acquired this knowledge had it passed down to them from the gods. The difficulty in learning magic without a *guru* is that books of magic and metaphysics in India are incomplete as a full understanding cannot come from just the written word. For those studying without books, e.g. by contemplation in the wilderness, little or no progress can be made without an initial direction. The greatest obstacle to learning magic alone however, is the fact that Indian magic is so *hard* and its pursuit is something one person cannot reasonably do alone; its mysteries are so deep and profound that not only must the secrets themselves be taught, but also the mindset with which to understand them. For these reasons, magic in India is harder to learn without instruction than is normally the case and an unsupervised student requires three times the amount of effort to learn (each spell cost three times as many character points) rather than twice the effort as per the standard GURPS rules.

Not only is solo-learning difficult, it is also dangerous. Without a *guru* students might injure themselves physically or spiritually while teaching themselves spells or may uncover unexpected and overwhelming mysteries through their investigations. A student attempting to learn a spell without proper supervision must roll once the spell is learnt as if casting the spell (though the spell is not in fact cast). If a critical failure results the student suffers some serious injury, the nature and severity of which the GM should decide based on the spell itself and the way in which it was learnt. Possible effects could come from injury in learning the spell or side-effects from the revelations of the research. The effects might be mental, such as mild insanity, diminished ability to learn certain mental skills or spells, maybe a whole college, or they might be physical if the training involved physical austerities, postures, or manipulations, examples might be permanent HT loss from starvation, atrophied limbs, or limbs stuck in certain positions, for example, an austerity in which the arms are raised skywards might leave them set in this position permanently. The effects might be magical such as having the effects of the spell back-fire on the learner, the implementation of the spell might be seriously flawed, or the learner may attract the unwanted attention of a *rakshasa*, *asura*, or god. Whether the spell is in fact learnt after this critical failure is up to the GM, i.e. the learner may suffer in the learning but still learn. (Some GM's may feel that since Indian magic is such a hazardous and fickle study that such a roll is required even when the spell is learnt through a *guru*. In this case the self-taught will suffer a mishap for a simple failure of the roll.) At the same time, a GM might be inclined to reward a critical success with some beneficial effect or unlooked for knowledge.

## Magic Workers

It is generally the case in India, that magic can be learnt by anyone (though this will depend on the campaign), minor spells and charms can be learnt from one's *brahmin*, *guru*, or uncle. However, dedicated magic workers, feared and worshipped by the masses, are exceptional people, exceptional in their dedication, their bravery, and their birth. To become such an exceptional person often requires several lives of effort, slowly building in magical competence. To progress as a magician requires the Magical Aptitude advantage which for the purposes of **GURPS India** indicates that the character has the sufficient resolution to follow the arduous path of magic as much as it indicates an affinity with magic.

The different magic workers (*jadugars* or *jadu wallahs* to use the vernacular, *jadu* being the word for magic) outlined differ primarily in the way they get their magic, for example, the hierophant gets his magical knowledge from studying the *Vedas* and the *yogi* from practicing yogic postures and breathing techniques.

Several of the descriptions of magic-workers given below are included strictly as options, the ayurvedic magician for example, and are included to show how the many philosophies and sciences of India might be developed beyond their principal, straightforward scope into systems of magic. That this might be plausible in India is a consequence of the link between learning and enlightenment enshrined in the notion of *jnana yoga*.

### Alchemist

An Indian alchemist is very similar to a "standard" alchemist as described in chapter 6 of **GURPS Magic**, with the peculiarities of Indian alchemy are discussed in the sidebar. All the alchemy rules of **GURPS Magic** apply to Indian alchemists, although some GM may wish not to relax the requirement for Magical Aptitude; in Indian alchemy, the mind and soul must be pure for the alchemical reactions to work, hence it is not unreasonable for a successful alchemist to require Magical Aptitude.

Indian alchemy, as with any intellectual pursuit in India, is a path to deeper knowledge, a type of *jnana yoga* perhaps. Through the isolation of alchemical substances, the preparation of compounds, and the inducing of magical effects in elixirs the dynamics of the gross and subtle worlds are revealed. An alternative approach is then to take alchemical practice as a process of magical revelation allow to alchemists to cast spells as well as producing elixirs. No spell can ever be learnt to a level greater than the alchemist's skill in Alchemy.

### Astrologer

Indians have great faith in astrology; children are not named until an astrologer is consulted and any difficult decision in life can be taken to one's astrologer.

Astrology in India is very similar to Western astrology, it having been imported to India early in the Christian era. Hence the same signs are used in India (see sidebar for the Indian names of the signs). Over the years considerable research has gone into astrology in India and the science has diverged from its Western counterpart. Indian astrologers use different techniques to cast and interpret horoscopes, even the dating of birth signs are different as the Indian and Western systems have accounted for changes in the positions of the constellations in the sky due to the precession of the earth in different ways.

If astrology is taken to be a magical skill in a campaign and astrologers as magicians, then astrologers should be given the ability to cast any information spells at a level no higher than their

astrology skill. However, all spells are considered rituals and are cast at a penalty if the astrologer does not have his almanac available. While this might seem underpowered astrology has the benefit of not being actual "magic" and hence cannot be protected against by spells or anti-magic charms. Furthermore, an astrologer does not need to have Magical Aptitude.

Astrology in India first gained popularity during Gupta times and rapidly increased in popularity and sophistication to become India's preferred method of augury. Other methods of divination can also be used with the same as rules as for astrologers (though with a different relevant skill).

## **Ayurvedic Magician**

Ayurvedic theory, as outlined on page xx, contains much metaphysics, generally of less use in treating disease. It is possible this knowledge could be used to produce magic.

*Ayurveda* is chiefly concerned with balancing of the bodily humours. The balance of these humours determines one's state of health and also one's temperament by determining to what extent one is influenced by each of the three *gunas*. An extension of this system would be to allow one to achieve extraordinary conditioning of the body through controlling these humours through herbal drugs, exercise, prayer, or mind-over-matter. This might also involve an exceptional control over the warp and woof of the bodies seven substances.

This form of magic, if it can indeed be called magic, is quite restricted. The only effects that can be achieved are those that effect the human body in ways that are consistent with ayurvedic metaphysics, e.g. Vigor can be used by an ayurvedic magician, but Earth Vision, that might be interpreted as effecting the physical eyes, would not be available to an ayurvedic magician. Most ayurvedic "spells" would only be able to effect the caster or a willing subject, though foes could be effected through the secret administering of drugs.

An ayurvedic magician cannot have any spell at a level greater than their Ayurveda skill. An option that might be used in a campaign is to give ayurvedic physicians the ability to create elixers from herbs similar to alchemical elixers. Again, only those elixers that directly effect the body are possible.

## **Buddhist Magician**

A Buddhist magician achieves the deep understanding of the universe needed to work magic through meditation and detachment. When the Buddhist is able to pierce *maya* and lose his attachment to individuality he realizes his unity with the universe, and is intellectually at one with the mind of the universe.

Buddhist enlightenment comes through lifestyle as much as through meditation. Hence a Buddhist magician must follow the 10 precepts strictly (see p. xx), taking the Disciplines of Faith (Devout Buddhist) disadvantage. If he willingly breaks any of the precepts he is unable to use his magic for such a period of time that demonstrates he has again taken up a Buddhist lifestyle, which might be a day for a minor transgression, or permanently for gross infractions.

A Buddhist magician cannot have any spell at a level above the level of his Meditation skill.

## **Hierophant**

The *Vedas* are the principal sources of knowledge in India; all other knowledge in the world is inferior to the *Vedas*. Consequently they contain the most direct magical information along with their considerable religious content. In fact, the *Artharva Veda* is largely a grimoire, containing dozens of

charms and invocations.

Gleaning magical knowledge from the *Vedas* requires years of study and training. The *Vedas* themselves must be understood as religious texts before their magical aspects can be learnt. A hierophant cannot learn a spell to a level greater than their Vedic Sacrifice skill. A hierophant is almost always a *brahmin* (and it would be claimed by some that all *brahmins* gain magical knowledge in their training) but it is not impossible that for other *varnas* to learn magic from the *Vedas* (unless the campaign reserves the ability to work magic exclusively to the *brahmin varna*).

The non-specific term "hierophant" is used here to describe a magician who gains his knowledge from the *Vedas*. In India the term "*rishi*" might be used for very powerful magicians, though this applies more correctly to legendary sages. A scholar who has mastered all four *Vedas*, including the magic-containing *Artharva Veda*, is known as a *chaturvedi*.

## **Jain Magician**

As a Jain frees himself from bonds through following the strictures of the religion he comes closer to the secrets of the universe and can learn to control them with magic.

There is no skill required to be a Jain magician but one must live as a strict Jain, having no possessions, including clothes for the Skyclad, and practicing zealous non-violence. The Disciplines of Faith (Devout Jain) disadvantage is required. This is a difficult requirement as the accidental breaking of these taboos, even violations of which one is unaware, will undo the benefits of one's efforts and will impair one's magic use.

## **Muslim Magician**

Islam has its own magical traditions, outlined in *GURPS Arabian Nights* (or the magic of *The Thousand and One Nights* at any rate). There are some differences between Muslim and Hindu traditions. Islamic magic is rather more complex in its implementation, usually involving extravagant gestures and ingredients, dramatic "special effects," and negotiations with immensely powerful spirits (the *djinn*). Its effects are often more subtle, however; any spell that directly causes damage to another is prohibited (e.g. Fireball, Lightning, or Ice Storm). Also prohibited are Dispel Magic and possibly Remove Curse -- Islamic spells can only be broken by fulfilling some condition, not by counter-magic.

By about the time of the Moghul Empire, there was considerable fusion between Islamic and Hindu thought, with native Sufism developing and Kabir and Nanak blending the religions (see the *Religious India* chapter, particularly *Hindu-Islam Symbiosis* and *Sikhism*). The injection of Hindu philosophy into Islamic magic allows the above limits on damage-causing and anti-magic spells to be lifted, though at the cost of adulterating the Islamic nature of the magic (a cost some Muslim magicians may be unwilling to pay).

## **Natural Philosopher**

The philosophies of *sankya* and *vaisheshika* provide descriptions of the make-up of the world and the interactions within it. Perhaps a deep understanding of these systems could lead to a way to influence the physical system by applying one's will to it.

There are no spells in *sankya* and *vaisheshika*, so magic based on these philosophies must be improvised (see *GURPS Magic* Chapter 4). Each of the verbs and nouns (see p. M77) are learnt as a skill with no default but cannot ever be higher than the magician's skill in the appropriate philosophy.



Magic based on *sankhya* and *vaisheshika* is in truth unknown in India and its inclusion here is a speculation on the possibilities at the fringes of *jnana yoga*.

## Numerologist

Mathematics is India's premier science. Not only was mathematical knowledge developed to a high degree in India, it was also incorporated into religion and metaphysics. This is apparent in instructions in the *Vedas* for constructing alters to precise geometry and the prevalence and importance of certain inviolate numbers, such as 4, the number of *Vedas* and *varnas*, or 108, the number of major *Upanishads* (the fact that there are actually 150 does not diminish the importance of this number). When one understands fully the importance of these numbers and their effect on the world, one is able to use them to create extraordinary effects. These are often realized through the use of magic squares and geometrical designs.

Rather than requiring the Magical Aptitude advantage, a numerologist requires the Mathematical Ability advantage. A numerologist is limited in the level of any spell known by the level of his Mathematics skill.

## Ritvij

In Vedic times (c. 1500-500 B.C.), the only magic available to the Aryan priests was ceremonial magic (see p. B151). A crucial part of the training of a *brahmin* was to learn the complex rituals and sacrifices that invoked the beneficence of the gods and harnessed the power of the universe.

No spell may be learned by a *ritvij* to a level greater than their Ritual Magic skill. Note though, that in Vedic ceremonial magic it is not necessary for the participant to be physically touching, only that they be actively involved in the ceremony.

Note that the hierophant is also gains his knowledge from the *Vedas*, but uses a very different magical paradigm. With the writing of the *Upanishads* theology in India changed considerably. The sovereign importance of sacrifice rites was superseded by the quest for an intimate experience of the universal soul. Thus magic too became more personal, the elaborate ceremonies of the sacrifice became internalized and were substituted by thought.

Aryan sacrificial magic was not the only magic in India during the Vedic Age; non-Aryans had developed a primitive form of *yoga*.

## Sadhu

A *sadhu* magician is one who has gained magical power through asceticism. By denying the body, the mind and soul lose their attachment to the world of *maya*. The *sadhu* is then rewarded with certain magical powers, called *siddhis*.

*Sadhus* are seen as those who have foregone the luxuries of life and society for the pursuit of knowledge so weighty that it cannot be said to be all that desirable. They exist on the fringes of society, an accepted part of society, but eccentric. They might even be thought of as mad.

## Godman

A Godman is one who has received magical powers directly from God. This gift may be granted for a number of reasons, the most likely being: the god needs a conduit and has arbitrarily chosen the saint, the saint is particularly holy and is rewarded for this, or the saint has found a path to knowledge and is rewarded. The Power Investiture or Blessed advantages are required (in the place

of Magical Aptitude).

## Tantric

Right hand Tantrism, or Dakshinachara, the worship of the divine feminine principle as a positive energy, is a legitimate form of religious devotion. However, its "evil twin," Left Hand Tantrism, or Vamachara, is India's most feared and most depraved tradition of black sorcery.

The depravations of Left Hand Tantrism contain so much occult power, that their practice leads to the acquiring of potent magical powers, the more potent the power, the more depraved must be the practices. Tantric magic is generally malicious or at least self-profiting. However, Tantrics do not see themselves as being evil, in fact they consider their practice to be virtuous, in so much as these terms have any meaning.

Vamachara is greatly feared and shunned that anyone who practices it gains the Secret disadvantage of -20 points (see p. CI78), i.e. if discovered, one is advised to cut and run. Being a Tantric is not itself illegal but may have involved illegal practices that could lead to imprisonment. It is not unlikely that a discovered Tantric will be lynched.

## Yogi

*Yoga* is one of India's oldest arts, predating the Aryan migration. Over time, particularly after the writing of the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*, it has been made more sophisticated and has developed branches. The most mystical of those branches, *laya yoga*, promises the awakening of magical powers latent in the body through harnessing the spiritual energy currents within the body. As one achieves greater control over the flow of *prana* through breath control and body control through increasing demanding contortions, the *kundalini* is awakened and magical abilities become available to the *yogi*.

No spell can be gained at a level greater than one's *Laya Yoga* skill. (If the campaign allows *raja yoga* (see p. xx) to lead to the acquisition of magical powers, then *Yoga* is the applicable skill.)

The spells gained through *laya yogic* discipline can do more than just effect the body of the *yogi* even though the control is only over the internal *prana* currents. This is because there is a correlation between the system within the body and world outside it, see the sidebar *As Within, So Without*.

## Other

The above description of different *jadugars* includes all the conventional methods of gaining magic as well as a few well-grounded possibilities. However, who is to know what other undocumented or clandestine schools of magic exist in India? The scriptures warn against workers of black magic who do not get their magic from orthodox methods. While these sorcerers might be Tantrics, there may be any number of aberrant schools of magic in India.

## Available Magics

The range of magical abilities ascribed to magicians in India is extremely wide. In practice, unless specifically restricted, an Indian magician can use any of the magic available in ***GURPS Basic Set***, ***Magic***, and ***Grimoire*** even necromantic magic, curious though that might seem given the prevailing belief in reincarnation. The available magics include the capacity to make magical items, spontaneous magic, and rune magic (though Indian runes are either Sanskrit characters or indigenous symbols such as "om," the trident, and the swastika). Most Indian magic comes in the form of spells, either those learnt from the *Arthava Veda* or from one's *guru*, or specific *siddhis* gained from

austerities or yogic discipline. However, when a magician begins to understand the roots of his magical tradition, the casting of extempore spells becomes possible. Hence, the use of spontaneous magic is encouraged for those who are comfortable with its use in a campaign (see Chapter 6, *GURPS Magic*).

The existing division of spells into the various colleges suffices to categorize Indian magic, though they were not conceived with Indian magic in mind (and a whole college is missing, the elemental college of ether). In order to contrive an Indian flavor to the spells, one might like to consider how the effects of spells should be understood from an Indian point of view; for example, the result of a spell might be to alter the mix of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (see *Sankhya*, p. xx) or to impart something of the nature of a particular god to the subject of the spell, or spells cast on a person might alter the person's balance of humours (see *Ayurveda*, p. xx) or their *prana* flows (see *Laya Yoga*, p. xx). One might also consider using more Indian names for the spells, bearing in mind that Indians are more inclined to use religious references and poetry. The same applies to the names of the alchemical elixirs, the Greek names are of course not appropriate, but similar names from Indian mythology would be apt, such as the elixirs Brahmya (after Brahma) and Chyavana (named after a famous sage from mythology), or more descriptive names, such as *tejo-varadhana*, "splendor-increasing."

## Attitudes Towards Magic

Indians willingly accept the ubiquity of magic, but this does not mean that they trust it. Magic is just another force of nature, but as the uninitiated do not understand it they are suspicious of it and are unaware of its limitations. For this reason, most are more than happy to leave it alone. This suspicion is extended to magicians. While magic is not presumed to be evil, per se, the natural Indian mistrust of strangers is only stronger for strangers with potentially injurious supernatural powers.

The mistrust of magic workers is exacerbated by the practice of some, *sadhus* particularly, to consider themselves as being outside of society, and so, not bound by the demands of society, they can get away with otherwise antisocial actions. At its least offensive this includes not needing to wash, dress well (or even wear clothes), or be polite. The more unsympathetic magic workers, or those that believe more deeply that common morals do not apply to them, might engage in more unpleasant behavior, such as sexual exploitation.

## Availability of Magic

It is generally taken in India that anyone can learn magic of some type. There are differing opinions however and a GM can easily justify restrict the availability to magic in a campaign.

One option is to restrict magic to *brahmins*, as some *brahmins* would claim that magic is open only to the those born in the *brahmin varna*. Even if it is the case that only *brahmins* can learn magic, some magical abilities could be available to all, or other groups. An example might be magic restricted to a caste, such as the Dasari caste that is believed to have the ability to raise the dead, including animals (caste advantage, Inherent Magic (Resurrection)).

## Akasha

In India mana is known as *akasha*. *Akasha* is both the primal substance and the universal force. From *akasha* is formed all matter and all forces are simply specific instances of *akasha*. Magical effects are induced by imposing one's will over *akasha*, whether manifest as a substance or a force, and changing its form, either making physical changes in a substance or altering the action of a force.

## Tapas

Another magical force is *tapas*, translated literally as "heat." *Tapas* is the energy that powers magic. It is through *tapas* that God keeps the universe running.

Ceremonial sacrifices are able to produce magical results because *tapas* is generated by the ritual. One of the great breakthroughs of the *shramanas* was to internalize the production of *tapas* so that complicated rites need not be performed and instead *tapas* can be generated through body-control, hence austerities create *tapas*.

## Magical Aptitude

The requirement that professional magic working characters take the Magical Aptitude advantage is an acknowledgement that the path of magic is typically beyond common people. The Indian application of this advantage should therefore be understood to indicate dedication rather than an affinity with magic.

Other advantages grant a character magical powers, specifically the Blessed, Clerical Magic, and Power Investiture advantages. The implication of these advantages is that the magic is a gift from God. Although a good deal of magic in India appears divine in nature, it is contrary to the spirit of

magic as it is presumed to be practiced in India, where magical ability is something that is worked for and taken, rather than given.

In an epic or fantasy campaign, the case may be very different; heroes may be granted magic by their patron deities (through Power Investment or Blessed) and all practicing *brahmins* might be granted Clerical Magic.

## Mantra

A spoken spell is known as a *mantra*. It is through the power of sound and words that *mantras* gain their magical potency. It is critical that they be pronounced without error; for this reason they cannot be learnt from books, only from a *guru*.

In general the shorter the *mantra* the more power it has, but also the more demanding is the need for precise pronunciation. The most powerful of all *mantras* is "om," which is the eternal syllable.

The most practiced of magicians are able to cast *mantras* silently.

## Evil Eye

If an Indian suffers some misfortune they are likely to blame the evil eye, *kudrishti*, curses enacted through the jaundiced vision of a malefactor. The evil eye is not a true invoked curse and may be entirely unintended, being born simply from jealousy, so intense is that emotion. Note though that evil eye curses will only occur if the jealousy is truly justified, for example, if the jealousy is over beauty, the subject must in fact be beautiful. Hence to protect against the evil eye, imperfections can be introduced. For this reason, young children have kohl put around their eyes, making them practically less attractive. Even putting a small dot of kohl at the back of one's foot out of sight can protect against the evil eye in this way.

The evil eye is an example of two important Indian concepts, the importance of *darshan* (vision) and the balancing of fate.

The sight of something is a mystical connection. Seeing a person, object, or place gives a measure of power over the subject or allows power of some sort to be derived from it. It is in this way that the evil eye works and many spells are cast along the line of sight (though it is generally not necessary), including true invoked curses cast by real magicians. In an analogous way, the vision of something or someone can impart part of the power or holiness of that object or person. For this reason it is considered important to look upon idols of gods and at the person of religious *gurus*.

The curse of the evil eye is in some way "deserved," it is cruel recompense for being lucky enough to have something of such value that it is coveted by others. Indians that realize they are getting too much of a good thing always worry about when they will get their share of misfortune. There is an impartial, unstoppable, nemesis-like agent that ensures everyone gets their karmic due.

## Secrecy

Access to mystical books in India is easy, but access to the mystical knowledge in the books is most definitely difficult. The books of magic are deliberately written to conceal their mysteries and one must learn how to read them before one can begin to learn to understand them. For those familiar with the secret language of the mystical literature, a whole new meaning is revealed in the books.

A further difficulty in learning magic from books is that much of the knowledge simply cannot be expressed in the written word and must be spoken. Some secrets cannot even be spoken and must be

shown by actions. The most deep of secrets however can only be expressed through silence.

## **Magic of the Atharva Veda**

The *Atharva Veda* is a *bona fide* grimoire, but is not a particularly sophisticated source of magic by Indian standards.

This *Veda* contains two types of spells. The *bheshajani* are beneficent spells, including healing spells of all kinds, charms (particularly for fertility and the birth of sons), and love spells (including a spell to put a household to sleep while a lover sneaks in to visit the daughter). The *abhichara* spells are mostly curses to bring disease, bad luck, and to remove virility.

Also included are hymns to evil spirits and serpents from which can be gained powers of black magic. At the same time however, the *Artharva Veda* vilifies workers of black magic.

## **Alchemy**

Largely derived from Chinese and Arab alchemy, Indian alchemy is similar in many ways to Western alchemy. The laboratory techniques in particular are almost identical between the two traditions with the same materials being used (salt, sulfur, the metals, acids, cinnabar, and calamine being a very brief list of examples) in the same apparatuses (crucibles, furnaces, etc.). However, the theory of Indian alchemy, based on Indian philosophy, *yoga*, and *ayurveda*, is unique.

As in Western alchemy, a primary goal is the isolation of the elements. Further though, in Indian alchemical theory there is a primal substance from which everything is made, including the elements. This primal substance is identified with the cosmic ocean out of which creation sprang and is believed to be mercury (*parada*) when in a liquid state. (Ashes or *bhasman* are believed to be a less refined form of the primal substance or mercury. Hence all material is converted to its quiddity by burning it to cinders.)

The magical side of Indian alchemy is concerned with the production of elixirs (called *rasas* in the liquid state and *churna* in powder form). Almost all elixirs are made by combining mercury and ashes with a large number of different ingredients, often including bodily fluids and other products such as blood, skin, or semen. The preparation of elixirs involves not only mixing, heating, and other chemical techniques, but also a good deal of superstition, astrology, and other mumbo-jumbo. Note that it is not necessary, or even necessarily desirable, to drink the elixir, looking at it or holding it may be enough.

A great goal of alchemy is the making of the Philosopher's Stone, or Sparshamani, the touch of which is believed to turn base elements into gold. Making the Sparshamani is a hugely involved process, requiring great knowledge of alchemy, great effort, and great assiduity in following the arcane rituals.

The ultimate goal of Indian alchemy however is the Rasayana, or Elixir Vitae. This most powerful of elixirs can cure all diseases, give one a perfect memory, increase one's vitality (including one's sexual vigor), make one immortal, and even raise the dead.

To practice alchemy requires not only considerable chemical knowledge and skill, it requires also an equal amount of mystical knowledge and a pure soul. Alchemy is a spiritual practice as much as a scientific one. An alchemical laboratory is a temple and a *lingam* is an important laboratory accoutrement as any chemical apparatus. Alchemy, as with any study in India, is a path of salvation - in this case salvation through elixirs.

## **Planets**

Sun; Surya, Ravi

Moon; Chandra, Soma

Mercury; Budha

Venus; Shukra

Mars; Mangala

Jupiter; Brihaspati

Saturn; Shani

## **Constellations**

Aries; Mesha

Taurus; Vrishabha

Gemini; Mithuna

Cancer; Karkata

Leo; Sinha

Virgo; Kanya

Libra; Tula

Scorpio; Vrishika

Sagittarius; Dhanus

Capricorn; Makara

Aquarius; Kumbha

Pisces; Mina

## **As Within, So Without**

As an individual person and their identity is inseparable from the universal soul ("*tat tvam asi*," see *Brahman and Atman*, p. xx), so too is the body of a person intimately connected to the rest of the world. The human body is a microcosm of the universe. Within the body (including the subtle body) can be found everything that is without.

The body is made from the same atoms as the rest of the world and is moved by the same forces. The elements are found in the body, earth is the bones, water the bodily fluids, air is the breath, and fire in the blood. But not only that, the world itself (or India at least) is mirrored in the body. The Ganga is the *ida* and Jamuna is the *pingala* (see *Laya Yoga*, p. xx), and all other sacred sites of India are

found within the body as well as the heavens and hells. Also contained in the bodies of all humans are all possibilities, for example, each person, despite external appearances, are androgynous, containing the other gender latent within them.

By controlling the substance and forces within one's own body, one can control the substances and forces outside the body. It is in this way that magical control over one's surrounding can be achieved through physical control and/or development. Furthermore, when one learns the geography of one's own body, one is able to travel on pilgrimages to the sacred sites internally and get the benefits from them without having to physically visit the sites.

## **Asceticism**

The path of a *sadhu* is a hard one. The practice of asceticism involves eschewing possessions, practicing painful austerities, and long periods of lonely contemplation. A *sadhu* will dress in no more than robes (and often much less, as little as a smattering of ash) and survives on alms. Only when these courses are sincerely followed will mystical knowledge come.

The process of removing oneself from the physical world is expedited by the practicing of tortuous punishments, such as starvation, lying on beds of nails, staring at the sun, and standing on one leg. As well as bringing one closer to the mystical levels of understanding, these ordeals generate *tapas*.

## **Madness**

It is believed by some that magic users are indeed mad, explaining the tendency of *sadhus* to wear only ash and to delve into areas best avoided by mortals. Perhaps this is true, that their quests into the unknown have driven them mad, but then this madness might be the key to their ability to work magic.

## **Laya Yoga**

*Laya yoga* is a development of *raja yoga* (detailed on page xx), focussing on the *kundalini*. The *kundalini* is an energy inside the human body. It is likened to a serpent that naturally lies coiled at the base of the spine. By yogic techniques, the *kundalini* can be made to rise through the body up the spine or *sushumna*. As it rises it passes through special points in the body known as *chakras* and one's path to enlightenment is measured by which *chakras* the *kundalini* has reached. It is also believed that as the *chakras* are "excited" by the *kundalini* psychic powers are gained.

There are seven important *chakras* on the spine. They are *muladhara* at the base of the spine, *svadishthana* behind the genitals, *manipura* at the navel, *anahata* at the level of the heart, *vishuddha* at the throat, *ajna* between the eyes, and *sahasrara*, the lotus of a thousand petals, just above the head.

*Laya yoga* theory holds that there are in fact some 88,000 *chakras* in the body. It also theorizes the existence of energy channels or *nadis* throughout the body which carry *prana* (which might be translated as "vital air"). There are 72 million *nadis* and they exist in the subtle body (and hence are invisible). The most important are the *pingala* and *ida nadis* which twist up and around the spine. Manipulating a person's *chakras* and *prana* flows can influence their physical and spiritual health.

## **Elements**

The elements in Indian metaphysics and magic differ from those presented in GURPS not only in having a whole additional element, the ether, but also in the nature of the elements themselves, particularly in the way the elements are related to the senses.



At its purest level matter has no manifestation in the physical world and exists only as a potential, at which level it is known as *tanmatra*. In Indian thought, each of the elements is associated with one of the five sensations. *Tanmatra* associated with a sensation is known as *artha*. Building up the elements with the next conceptual level, that of the *action* of sensing, or *vishayas*, is obtained the gross, physical elements, the *mahabhutas*, from which is made all physical matter. Hence each of the five elements manifests as a sensation rather than incarnate matter and each of the sense organs is sensitive to a particular element. These elements are not the inanimate, passive substances recognizable in the GURPS magic system; instead they are active and dynamic, almost sentient. They are more processes than substances, quick rather than inert. Rather than possessing qualities, they *are* qualities themselves.

**1. Ether (*akasha*)** is associated with the sensation of hearing and the actions of the ear and is manifest as sound. Ether is fluid, rarefied, and weightless. Ether is all-pervasive and is a medium for remote influence.

**2. Air (*vayu*)** is the sensation of tactile feeling, which is felt through the skin. It is weightless and rarefied and is cold and dry.

**3. Fire (*tejas*)** is seen through the eyes. It is luminous, hot, dry, and liquid.

**4. Water (*apas*)** is the sensation of taste and the tongue. It is liquid, cold, and soft.

**5. Earth (*prithivi*)** is smell and is experienced in the nose. Earth is inert, massive, hard, course, and opaque.

True physical matter is made up of a combination of the elements, which are never naturally found isolated.

### **The College of Ether**

Given the association of ether with sound and the sense of hearing, it is sufficient to rename the College of Sound the College of Ether.

# Indian Bestiary

## Natural Creatures

India is distinguished by its variety and abundance of animals. With a fauna so vast, it would be folly to try to even list them here. Detailed in this chapter are those animals which are either unique to India or require a more in-depth information additional to that given in Bestiary 3rd edition. The number of animals is so much greater than can be expressed here and the GM should always make an effort to fill any scene or situation with animals, using the list of animals in this chapter only as a starting point.

It has been claimed that the only animal that is not held to be sacred by some group in India, is the camel. Many animals are universally held sacred, such as the cow and the snake. Other animals are considered sacred in certain circumstances or in particular places; crocodiles for example are typically treated as fearsome animals to be avoided, but when kept in special tanks in temples, it is a holy act to feed them. Even the dog and pig, normally seen as dirty animals, are worshipped by some groups.

The Hindi name of each animal is given in parenthesis after its English name.

### **Bear (Richh) see p. BeXX**

India's indigenous ursine is the sloth bear (mistakenly associated with the 3-toed sloth). It is similar in size to the black bear and its stats are the same. It is black in color, with a horseshoe of tan fur on its breast. The sloth bear is only aggressive in defense but often lets people get close enough to warrant attacking them without warning them away. It is very dangerous in attack and its sharp claws do cutting damage rather than crushing.

The sloth bear once roamed across India but is now very limited in numbers. It is most likely to be found as a "dancing" bear, chained through its nose.

The Asian black bear also lives in the far north of India in the Himalayas.

### **Cattle (Gai) see p. BeXX**

The Indian domestic cow is white or russet and features a large hump on its shoulders, of great use in harnessing oxen to carts and ploughs, and a large flap of skin on the underside of the animal's neck and breast. All Indian cattle have horns, some of remarkable size. Cattle are generally placid but can get annoyed and will languidly try to strike with their horns by swinging their heads.

The cow far outstrips any other animal in its holiness. Its tranquility is seen as saintliness. On Hindu festivals cows are fed sweets and some are ornamented and have their horns painted. Even so, cows are still animals are treated in that way; a cow stealing an apple off a fruit cart will have its nose belted, even if it is a god.

Other species of cattle of India include the granite-skinned water buffalo (see p. BeXX), both wild and domestic, and the gaur, at 6' tall the largest cattle-beast in the world.

### **Crocodile (Magar) see p. BeXX**

Once common in the rivers and swamps of India, the crocodile is now all but extinct. The common fresh-water crocodile of India, the *magar*, is smaller than the average croc. Also found in Indian

rivers is the midget pencil-snouted gaviol. The larger salt-water crocodile is often found in the estuaries of Indian rivers.

### **Deer, etc. (Mrig) see p. BeXX**

India is home to a large number of ungulates, including a number of species of deer, antelope, and gazelle. The most common species of deer are the axis deer and the Indian sanbar; both range across India. The nilgai and four-horn antelope are native to India but are in decline. The most impressive antelope of India is the corkscrew-horned blackbuck, an endangered species. The edmi and goitered gazelle live in western India.

Note that contrary to the entry in the Bestiary, the meat of deer is not highly prized in India.

### **Dog, Pariah (Kutta)**

**ST:** 3-6 **Speed/Dodge:** 9/7 **Size:** 1

**DX:** 14 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 20-50 lbs.

**IQ:** 5 **Damage:** 1d-3 cut **Habitat:** urban

**HT:** 10-12 **Reach:** C

The urban feral dog of India is a pitiful creature. Known as pi-dogs, these starved, mange-ridden, and tick-infested animals scavenge for scraps in the ubiquitous rubbish heaps of Indian cities. At night they fill the cities with a litany of raucous barking.

Pi-dogs do not form packs and do not range far from their chosen territory. They are generally not aggressive and are all but oblivious to the presence of humans. However, dogs are susceptible to rabies, which drives them mad. A rabid dog *is* aggressive and may bite, the greatest danger of which is in catching rabies from the dog's saliva.

### **Dog, Red (Dhole) see p. BeXX**

The *dhole* is a small canine of India and looks like a cross between a dog and a red fox.

Their treatment in the Bestiary, after that of Kipling, has them far more gregarious than they are in reality. It might be pointed out though that when their greater numbers gives them a sure advantage they can be quite brave and packs have been known to bring down tigers.

### **Dolphin, River (Susu)**

**ST:** 16-20 **Speed/Dodge:** 12/7 **Size:** 2-3

**DX:** 12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 100-300 lbs

**IQ:** 8 **Damage:** 1d cr# **Habitat:** FW

**HT:** 12-14 **Reach:** C

The Indus and the Ganges are home to the river dolphin. Not all that closely related to the true dolphin, the river dolphin is smaller than its salt-water cousin and sports a long and very thin snout with needle sharp teeth. It differs in appearance also by having a head clearly distinct from its body.

It is almost blind and "sees" almost exclusively by echolocation. The river dolphin lives on fish and crabs.

## **Elephant, Asiatic (Hathi)**

**ST:** 250-280 **Speed/Dodge:** 8/0# **Size:** 10

**DX:** 12 **PD/DR:** 3/4 **Weight:** 5 tons

**IQ:** 6 **Damage:** 3d cr# **Habitat:** J, P

**HT:** 17/40-45 **Reach:** C, 1, 2

Magnificently massive, intelligent, highly versatile, and amenable to training, the elephant is one of the wonders of India. They are one of India's most prized possessions and one of its most desired treasures. Caparisoned and decorated they form part of the pageantry of India.

The Asian elephant stands as tall as 9 feet at the shoulder and weighs as much as 5 tons. (Note that the stats above differ from the elephant stats in the Bestiary 3rd edition as they are for the Asian elephant only.) Their main attacks are trampling and charging, which cause 3d crushing damage. They may also use their trunks as weapons, doing 1d damage as a bludgeoning weapon with a strength of 12 and a reach of 2 hexes, or the elephant may pick up and throw objects or opponents (double the trunks ST when determining distance) with its trunk; see *Throwing* (p. B90) and *Falling* (p. B131) to determine results. The elephant cannot dodge (though its trunk can dodge at 6) and its skull has an extra 2 DR due to its thickness.

The elephant is a very intelligent animal. It is highly competent in the wild and makes good use of its trunk which it uses to grasp objects (treat as two-handed for lifting and carrying, see *Lifting and Moving Things*, p. B89) and to siphon water, which it then spits out, either into its mouth or over its body to shower (the elephant does not sweat and must wash regularly). The trunk is equipped with a "finger," with which it is able to pick up objects as small as a coin. A male elephant is able to carry large objects by using his trunk to cradle them in his tusks (female Asian elephants do not have tusks). For these capabilities elephants have been used as draft animals in India for millennia.

In the wild, elephants live in highly sociable herds of 15-30 dozen animals, ranging over a large territory. Elephants, with quite inefficient digestive systems, spend most of their day eating, consuming several hundred pounds of food a day. Wild elephants must be respected; they are generally happy to keep to themselves but will attack if provoked. Occasionally elephants will encroach on the lands of humans through desperation and may trample whole villages to the ground to drive people away. Stories are told of elephants getting drunk from illicit stills found in their jungle and causing destruction in their inebriety.

Elephants have not been fully domesticated and are mustered in the wild when they are young and subjected to rigorous training (from which less than half survive). A trained elephant is very loyal, particularly to their rider, or *mahout*, to whom they can be very protective. So close is the bond between elephant and *mahout* (a *mahout* will drink from an elephant's trunk) and so intelligent is the animal that they can learn a number of spoken commands. Domesticated elephants are greatly loved by Indians and during festivals they are decorated with colorful caparisons and painted.

Elephants are good for riding. An elephant can carry a rider on its neck or back. Alternatively, the elephant can carry a howdah, a small platform strapped to the elephant's back. An elephant will not carry more than Medium encumbrance (10xST) on its back, but can manage several people in a howdah.

Fully trained elephants are generally docile but can be very dangerous when enraged. Male elephants between 15 and 20 years old go through a phase of heightened aggressiveness. About 3 times a year, for periods between a day and one month, they become dangerously bellicose; a state known as *musth*, forewarned by the secretion of an odoriferous discharge from neck glands. *Musth* bulls are either not worked during their difficult stage or are worked so hard they are too tired to get aggressive.

Elephants were highly valued in battle, being one of the four limbs of the ancient army (see *Ancient Armies*, p. xx). Their chief use was in intimidating and trampling ground troops, but were very useful in crushing defenses, crossing difficult terrain, and being an elevated platform for archers. A problem with elephants on the battlefield was that if panicked they could cause as much damage and disarray to one's own army. Rulers would see it as a high priority to build a strong retinue of war elephants and would spend a fortune on them and would stage fights between their elephants for entertainment.

In cosmology elephants (along with the tortoise Akapura and the snake Sheshnag) hold up the world, and 8 elephant couples guard the 8 directions. In ancient times elephants had wings and would fly amongst the clouds. However, once a number of elephants alighted on a branch of the tree under which the sage Dirghatamas was preaching. The branch broke and several of the sage's students were crushed, so the sage cursed the elephants to forever lose their wings.

The African elephant is taller than the Asian elephant, reaching heights of 12 ft and weights of 8 tons, but is comparatively slender considering its greater size. It has larger ears (to provide more cooling for its bigger body) and tusks and the tallest point of its body is its head, rather than back in the case of the Asian elephant. The African elephant is less amenable to being tamed than the Asian.

### **Horse (Ghota) see p. BeXX**

Many breeds of horse have been introduced to India from as early as the Aryan migration. It is an important and valuable animal in India. The Muslims brought several of their species of horse to India, including the impressive Arab, as highly valued in India as it is anywhere.

### **Jackal (Siyar) see p. BeXX**

The jackal resembles something like the cross between a fox and a wolf, however, they are more likely to be heard than seen. They live on the verges of civilization and enter towns looking for scavenge, but are very timorous and flee at the first sight of a human.

At night jackals indulge in choral howling, a disturbing and ominous sound to those unused to it.

Jackals are crafty and intelligent. If caught young they can be tamed.

### **Leopard (Chita) see p. BeXX**

Of the great cats, the leopard is one of the smallest. It makes up for this by being crafty. Leopards spend a good deal of time in trees, where they take their prey to avoid interlopers. Despite being one of nature's greatest killers, the leopard is preyed upon itself, by the tiger and lion. With these two animals dwindling, the leopard is now the paramount predator in the Indian jungle.

### **Lion (Singh) see p. BeXX**

The lion was once king of the Indian jungle, but as humans have encroached on its territory it has dwindled to a small protected enclave in the Gir forest in Gujarat. As in other lands where lions have

roamed, the nobility of lions is recognized in India; Ashoka used the lion on his monuments (an odd symbol for a pacifist perhaps).

### **Mongoose (Nakul) see p. BeXX**

The mongoose ranges across India. Its fame as an enemy of snakes comes mainly from its being pitted against them in captivity for show. All the same, the mongoose is an effective fighter of snakes, which it achieves by keeping above the snake, which must strike downwards.

### **Monkey (Bandar) see p. BeXX**

**ST:** 5 **Speed/Dodge:** 9/7 **Size:** 1

**DX:** 17 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 20-40 lbs.

**IQ:** 6 **Damage:** 1d-4 cr **Habitat:** J, F, P

**HT:** 13/4-5 **Reach:** C

India is home to a number of species of monkey. The most common are the Hanuman langur found across India, the rhesus found in the north, and bonnet macaque found in the south. The statistics above are for the Hanuman. The Hanuman langur is slender and long limbed, having a distinctly human appearance, and are particularly dexterous. Their fur is silver and their faces and extremities dark gray or black. Normally placid they have little respect for humans and adult monkeys are particularly brave. They form troupes of any size between 10 and 100 (depending on the ability of their territory to sustain them) and live in a variety of habitats from thick jungle to semi-desert and are found in cities all over India.

The rhesus and the bonnet macaque, both of the macaque genus, are smaller than the Hanuman, averaging between 15 and 25 lbs, but are stockier. They are slightly less strong and less dexterous. They are typically colored brown with a light colored face.

Monkeys are feared for their strength and petulance. They can be particularly dangerous when they contract rabies. However, monkeys are worshipped in India, particularly the Hanuman langur because of its association with Hanuman. In regions where monkeys proliferate temples to Hanuman are often built.

### **Rhinoceros (Gandak) see p. BeXX**

The Indian or gray rhinoceros is as big as the white rhino of Africa. It has only one horn and its skin is arranged into thick armor-like plates.

In addition to its horn and its trample, the Indian rhino can attack with its sharp tusk-like teeth for 1d+1 cutting damage.

The range of rhinos has decreased considerably and is now only found in the far east of India. Its population has dwindled as its habitat has been taken over by humans and it has been hunted, its horn and skin being considered potent magical substances.

### **Snake (Naga) see p. BeXX**

There are many, many species of snake in India. The different varieties of snake vary from monsters several yards long to snakes so small they are veritably cute. They can be found anywhere, in the

grass, in the dust, in the water, in the home.

The most notorious of India's snakes is the king cobra. It is the largest of the poisonous snakes with a venom that can kill an elephant. The cobra's signature is its ability to stretch its neck to create a hood below its head making it seem larger. It does this in the striking-ready pose, hissing menacingly, and perhaps slithering forward -- positively terrifying.

Other notable snakes in India are various varieties of python and viper and other varieties of cobra.

Snakes are spiritually potent in India. They are regarded with a mixture of respect, awe, and fear. They are respected from a pragmatic point of view because they can be so dangerous, but this menace, combined with their otherworldliness lead them to being considered hallowed and possessing great spirituality. There are quite a number of cosmic serpents, many of them having multiple heads.

### **Tiger (Badh) see p. BeXX**

The Bengal tiger is one of the largest subspecies of tiger and it is India's most effective and magnificent hunters. However, its very beauty and formidableness have led to its downfall as has been hunted to near extinction.

The tiger is master the Indian wilds, with no enemies other than humans. They are the stealthy solitary hunters of the jungle, able to remain hidden in undergrowth by their camouflage before bursting forth in a furious attack, grabbing their victim by the throat and breaking its neck or strangling it. They are consummate predators, stealthy, alert, and indomitable in a fray.

Though they are formidable animals, humans generally should not fear tigers as they will only attack if they believe they are under attack themselves, which they will believe if you get too close. Some tigers do decide that humans are good prey, generally these tigers are injured, weak, or have contracted rabies. The tigers of the Sunderbans though have developed a taste for humans and scores of people are killed by tigers there every year.

The tiger's attractive pelt and fearsome reputation has made it the foremost trophy prey of recreational hunters. Despite being a peerless hunting/killing machine, the tiger has no answer to the gun. Extravagant royal hunts would slaughter dozens of tigers in a single foray. Hunting, as much as loss of habitat, is the cause of the destruction of the populations of tigers. Tiger hunting is now illegal but poaching still continues. The protection and regeneration of the tiger population is a priority of the Indian government

### **Wolf (Bhediya) see p. Bexx**

The Indian wolf is slightly smaller than the average wolf. Wolves are found in northern India, as far south as the Deccan, but not in south India. It is unwelcome in India and has nearly been exterminated.

## **Creatures of Rumour**

Indian mythology mentions a number of animals which are not now seen in India. Quite likely they exist only in myth, but the possibility of them still living in the jungles and waters of India will be an exciting prospect for cryptozoologists.

### **Ihamriga**

**ST:** 220-250 **Speed/Dodge:** 4/4 **Size:** 10

**DX:** 9 **PD/DR:** 3/4 **Weight:** 5 tons

**IQ:** 6 **Damage:** 3d cr **Habitat:** FW

**HT:** 17/40-45 **Reach:** C, 1, 2

The *ihamriga* is an aquatic elephant that inhabits the rivers and lakes of India. It differs from the terrestrial elephant only that it has no legs, Instead has huge fins on its torso with which it swims.

Fins or legs, the natural element for an elephant is the land. The *ihamriga* is a poor swimmer, being slow and not greatly mobile. Still, with its bulk and its tusks it can be a danger to boats and swimmers.

## **Sharabha**

**ST:** 50-75 **Speed/Dodge:** 9/5 **Size:** 3

**DX:** 10 **PD/DR:** 5/2 **Weight:** 1 ton

**IQ:** 4 **Damage:** 2d# **Habitat:** J, P

**HT:** 16/30-40 **Reach:** C

The most formidable animal of the mythical Indian jungle is not the tiger, it the *sharabha*, a fearsome creature that scares even India's great predators. The *sharabha* is a large, but not greatly bulky, creature that runs on 6 or 8 legs. It has 2 horns on its head and often one on its nose like a rhinoceros, the charging blow of which causes 2d crushing damage. Most fearsomely, its body is covered in stiff, arrow-like spikes. These spikes make the *sharabha* very hard and very dangerous to hit in close combat. Every time a blow is landed on the *sharababha's* body, a DX roll must be made to avoid 1d impaling damage to the attackers arm.

The *sharabha* is a rare animal, which is very lucky as it is aggressive and relentless.

## **Shardula**

**ST:** 24-30 **Speed/Dodge:** 10/6 **Size:** 2

**DX:** 13 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 300-600 lbs.

**IQ:** 4 **Damage:** 2d-2 cut **Habitat:** J, P

**HT:** 15/16-20 **Reach:** C,1

The shardula is a lion with a beak rather than a maw. It cannot roar like a lion, and instead shrieks.

## **Yali**

**ST:** 24-30 **Speed/Dodge:** 10/6 **Size:** 2

**DX:** 13 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 300-600 lbs.



**IQ:** 4 **Damage:** 2d-2 cut **Habitat:** J, P

**HT:** 15/16-20 **Reach:** C,1

The *yali* is quite an unusual animal, being essentially a lion with an elephant's trunk. The *yali's* trunk is proportionally smaller than that of an elephant, having a strength of only 6 and a reach of 1, but is just as versatile.

## Supernatural Creatures

Within India's enormous body of mythology are contained myriad supernatural creatures. This section details those that have not been published elsewhere. To this list of creatures should be appended: chordewa (p. BT85 passim), cushna (p. FB20), dundubhis (p. FB22), ghormuha (p. FB26), kaliya (p. FB36), makara (p. FB43), panchajana (p. FB50), pishaca (p. UN83), preta (p. UN73 passim), vetala (pp. BT86, UN83), and vritra (p. FB94).

Note that most of the supernatural creatures below are sentient, some of them sufficiently so to be considered intelligent races and are detailed with race templates rather than simply stats. GMs can therefore generate instances of the race in all their variety. Some too might be used as PC races.

Some of the creatures live in other realms, or at least, part of their population lives in another realm. These are the *apsaras* and *gandharvas*, *nagas*, *yakshas*, *rakshasas*, *hataka*, *bhutas*, *kumbhandas*. How these creatures travel between earth and the other realms depends on the relationship between the realms in a particular campaign. If the realms are on different planes then some form of gate magic is required. It may be that the creature may only travel when sent by a god; the *hataka* for example, as servants of Shiva might reside only in their home, Vitala, until transported to earth by Shiva. Alternatively, there may be some of the race who know Gate Magic, specifically the spells Plane Shift and Plane Shift Other or Create Gate. This might be the case for the *naga*, *rakshasa*, and *yaksha*. If the races are able to move between the planes freely then each member of the race should have a Plane Shift as a Knack. For the case of the *apsaras* and *gandharvas*, Plane Shift Knacks might be the norm, or it might be an advantage held only by a few, or not by any with the aid of gods being required to move between planes. (In the description of *apsaras* and *gandharvas* below it is assumed Plane Shift is a Knack for all. If this is taken away decrease the cost of the template by 40 points.) If the different realms are simply different levels of the same physical earth then no magic is required.

### Apsara and Gandharva

The *apsaras* are *gandharvas* are celestial beings; female and male respectively. They live in heaven (Indra's court in particular) and entertain the gods with music, dance, games, artistry, and sexual arts. Their ministrations are also a reward for meritorious mortals.

In appearance *apsaras* are *gandharvas* look like exceedingly attractive and sensuous humans. They can be identified as heavenly as they dress in the fashions of heaven rather than of earth. They are all but irresistible to mortals and make a pastime out of seducing humans. It requires great willpower to resist their seductions and only the truly holy and self-controlled can manage it. If their powers of compulsion do not work, they can use their powers of magic, most commonly involving illusions that cause confusion and madness.

As servants of the gods, they are often ordered to earth for the purposes of seducing humans, particularly *rishis* in their austerities. Their relationships with humans can have more depth however; they can be helpful and have been known to fall in love with humans marked with evident destiny. *Gandharvas* often aid virtuous warriors, but being stout fighters themselves, their aid is commonly

only offered if the supplicant agrees to a duel with the *gandharva*.

The first *apsaraa* were born at the churning of the ocean (see *Amrit*, p. xx). As well as living in heaven, the *gandharvas* have their own city, the roving *Visapana*. *Apsaras* and *gandharvas* also have the aspects of nature spirits and can be found living in trees and cavorting in the wilds, sometimes in less attractive, more savage guises -- even satyr-like, having animal limbs for example.

### **Apsaras and Gandarvas 262**

Advantages: Very Handsome/Beautiful [25]; Divine Favor [25]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Immortality [140]; Inherent Magic (Persuasion) [20]; Inherent Magic (Plane Shift) [40]; Limited Magery 1 (Mind Control Spells) [10]; Music Ability 5 [5].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing [-5]; Duties (to the gods) [-5]; Short Attention Span [-10]; Social Stigma (Non-Human) [-15].

Skills Bonuses: Artistic Skills +2 [12]; Carousing +2 [2]; Sex Appeal +3 [3].

### **Bhuta**

If the correct rituals are not performed for the dead, the spirit will become a ghost or *bhuta*.

*Bhutas* are generally invisible and incorporeal, so their actions on the physical world are subtle, typically accomplished through curses. The curses of *bhutas* are usually motivated by jealousy or spite. They can only cause malice, so the only *bhutas* that will be encountered will be evil spirits.

Sometimes a *bhuta* who has great unsatisfied desires can take a physical form. The most common form of bodied *bhuta* is the unmarried woman. Such a *bhuta* will often waylay young men who are typically found dead the next day. Stories have been told of men marrying these *bhutas*, only to have their nature revealed to them later (e.g. by the *bhuta* stretching her fingers unnaturally when reaching for something).

The world is rarely cleansed of *bhutas* so their number is constantly increasing. They often live in trees, sometimes restricting themselves to this dwelling, but will often be found in their mortal remains if not disposed of properly. *Bhutas* have keen hearing and will usually come when their name is called.

### **Guhyaka**

The *guhyaka* are one of a number of races that serve Kubera, the God of Riches.

Incredibly secretive, the *guhyaka* live in hideouts in the jungle and in caves, guarding the wealth of Kubera. Their natural form is as a human with an angelic appearance, but when in battle they appear demonic. They are masters of concealment also know mantras that help to keep them in seclusion from humans (these include Avoid, Hide, Hush, and Invisibility).

The term "*guhyaka*" is also used to refer generally to spirits of concealment.

### **Guhyaka 20 points**

Advantages: Handsome [15], Divine Favor (Kubera, not a particularly powerful god who will rarely help) [10], Magical Aptitude [15], Silence [5]

Disadvantages: Bezerk [-15] (temporary disadvantage Monstrous while bezerk), Social Stigma (Non-Human) [-15]

Racial Skill Bonuses: Stealth +3 [4], Camouflage +2 [1]

## **Hataka**

**ST:** 35 **Speed/Dodge:** 7/5 **Size:** 1

**DX:** 9 **PD/DR:** 0/2 **Weight:** 400-500 lbs.

**IQ:** 7 **Damage:** 2d-1 cut (bite) **Habitat:** caves

**HT:** 20 **Reach:** C, 1

Dwelling in caves and underground caverns, the *hatakas* are a race of savage ogres. No friends to humanity, they live on raw meat and dress in rags. They are hulking, hirsute beasts with oversized teeth.

The *hatakas* are worshippers and servants of Shiva. They represent his primitive side and the connection between human and beast. Shiva uses them to do his work so their motives are often unfathomable.

## **Kimpurusha**

The *kimpurushas* are a race of wilderness people living far from human civilization, with their largest population in the Himalayas. They are comely and graceful, often clad in fine clothing. As a race they are adept at magic.

In *kimpurusha* society, there is equality between the sexes and when they marry they are rarely found without their partner.

### **Kimpurusha 41 points**

ST -1 [-10]; DX +1 [10]; HT -1 [-10]

Advantages: Animal Empathy [5]; Attractive [5], Decreased Life Support [10]; Magical Aptitude 1 [15] High Technology +1 [20].

Disadvantages: Intolerance [-5]; Social Stigma (Non-Human) [-15]

Racial Skill Bonuses: Animal Skills +1 [6]

## **Kinnara**

In Kubera's court, the *kinnara* are his musicians. They have horses heads and their bodies are typically human, though bird-bodied *kinnaras* are also known.

## **Kumbhanda.**

**ST:** 40 **Speed/Dodge:** 13/8 **Size:** 1

**DX:** 15 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 300-400 lbs

**IQ:** 4 **Damage:** 2d impale (claws, bite) **Habitat:**

**HT:** 35 **Reach:** C

The *kumbhandas* are a hideous race of monsters. These tall ogres are covered in wiry bristles, have sharp fangs and claws, huge bloodshot eyes, and have repulsive, capacious genitalia. Their breath is putrid and can cause madness (as the Madness spell, p. M58).

## **Naga**

**BODY-2CL:**The *nagas* are an ancient race of serpent people. They are physically half human, half snake, with their lower quarters being that of a huge snake.

*Nagas* were once lords of the earth, but ceded it to the Aryans. They are now only rarely found on earth and live chiefly in their kingdom of Patala. The art, science, and magic of the *nagas* is superior to that of humans. It was recognized by the Aryans that the *nagas* were culturally advanced even though they didn't sacrifice to the Aryan gods. However, the Aryans were fearful of the power the *nagas* obtained from their serpent patrons so they drove them from India rather than try to learn from them.

*Nagas* are an important part of the mythology of India and they are described in various ways. An alternative description has them simply as snake-worshipping humans. To *nagas* are ascribed the maintenance of aspects of the natural earth, the waterways and cycles of rain in particular.

Note that the *nagas* should not necessarily be equated with the people of Nagaland who are also called Nagas.

### **Naga 53 points**

DX +1 [10], IQ +1 [10]

Advantages: High Technology +1 [20]; Magical Aptitude [15]; Speak with Snakes (an instance of Speak with Animals) [5]

Disadvantages: Social Stigma (Non-Human/Non-Aryan) [-15]

Skill Bonuses: Soft Sciences +1 [6]; Hard Sciences +2 [12]

## **Nishada**

Driven into the wilderness by the encroachments of the Aryans, the *nishadas* are a race of dwarfs, black in complexion with red eyes. They are perpetually a tech-level behind humans.

### **Nishada 2 points**

HT +1 [10].

Advantages: Fit [5].

Disadvantages: Primitive -1 [-5]; Social Stigma (Non-Aryan) [-15]; Unattractive [-5].

Racial Skill Bonuses: Craft Skills +1 [6]; Outdoor Skills +1 [6].

## **Pramatha**

**ST:** 9 **Speed/Dodge:** 5/5 **Size:** 1

**DX:** 10 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 60-90 lbs

**IQ:** 8-9 **Damage:** Weapon **Habitat:** graveyards, rubbish dumps

**HT:** 9 **Reach:** Weapon

Skills: Hand weapon (e.g. garrote, knife, shortsword, spear) 10

Attendants of Shiva, the *pramathas* are ugly and malicious goblin-like beings. They are short and misshapen, with crooked limbs, squashed faces, and ruddy, leathery skin. If they bother to dress they will wear little more than rags and will typically carry nothing more than a dagger. Of no great intelligence and with a spiteful sense of humor, a pramatha enjoys nothing more than harassing people, scaring them and stealing their belongings.

They are typically found in graveyards as they have a taste for carrion.

Some *pramathas* possess evil magic (curses chiefly) that they can cast on people who have not performed their religious rituals or ablutions properly.

## **Rakshasa**

**ST:** 25 **Speed/Dodge:** 7/8 **Size:** 1

**DX:** 16 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 300-400 lbs

**IQ:** 9 **Damage:** 1d+1 cut or by weapon **Habitat:** various

**HT:** 20 **Reach:** C

Typical Skills: Hand Weapon 18

The *rakshasa* are the despoilers of sacrifices and the enemies of humanity.

Epic India is populated by a vast number of *rakshasas*. They are a constant bother to heroes in the wilderness and there are whole kingdoms of *rakshasas*, Ravana's kingdom at Lanka for example. They come in a variety of forms (*rakshasas* are the favorite supernatural being in Indian myth and have been described in many different ways in many different sources), the typical *rakshasa*, for which stats above are provided, is huge and strong with long powerful limbs, bulbous red eyes, long tongues, and curved fangs too big even for its oversized mouth. However, it is common for a *rakshasa* to differ from the above description in at least one significant way that makes them even more unnatural and hideous. Examples are multiple heads or limbs, preternaturally long limbs, or extraordinarily large mouths that can consume enormous quantities. One peculiar *rakshasa* was nothing more than a mound of flesh with a mouth and one eye.

One breed of *rakshasa* had tiger heads and were the enemies of Agni. (It may be however that the term "*rakshasa*" has been broadened here to include a whole other class of beings.)

(Compare also the *raksha* ogres of *GURPS China*, p. 120. These are certainly the same creatures as Indian *rakshasas*, or at least a sub-breed, though their culture may have diverged somewhat over the

years.)

*Rakshasas* are the principal enemies of humans and in Indian fantasy setting are likely to be the most important and commonly encountered supernatural beings. The GM should customize *rakshasa* to fit the campaign. They may be inhuman, blood-drinking demons with an appearance much like that above, more powerful at night than during the day. Alternatively they may have a civilization as cultivated as that of humans, though debased due to their shunning of the Vedic sacrifice. In appearance they may be indistinguishable from humans (Ravana is sometimes depicted as being human, his exceptional number of heads notwithstanding). They may each be possessed of supernatural powers (shape-changing and speeds faster than the wind are two powers often ascribed to them) or instead it may only be trained sorcerer *rakshasas* that can use magical powers. In a modern fantasy campaign they may hide themselves amongst humans with their powers of shape-changing or illusion. They might even be found in futuristic and sci-fi settings; in Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* the *rakshasas* are an alien race indigenous to a planet colonized by humans.

The racial template below can be modified as the GM sees fit.

### **Rakshasa 390 points**

ST +15 [150]; DX +6 [80]; IQ -1 [-10]; HT +10 [175]

Advantages: Claws (Sharp) [25]; Early Maturation 6 [30]; Magical Aptitude [15]; Night Vision [10]; Teeth (Fangs) [10]; Toughness DR1 [10]

Disadvantages: Horrific [-30]; Bloodthirst [-15]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Increased Life Support [-10]; Odious Personal Habits [-5]; Sadism [-15]; Social Stigma (Enemy of Humanity) [-20]

### **Vanara**

The *vanara*, Hanuman's people, are a race of intelligent monkeys. They live chiefly in the forests of India central regions (*vana* = forest). Here they have established kingdoms of fair sophistication.

There are suggestions that there are tribes of other intelligent animals, bears being an example.

An Aryan-centric view of ancient India has the north populated by humans, Aryans, the central regions populated by anthropomorphic animals, friendly non-Aryan tribes, and the south populated by *rakshasa*, hostile non-Aryan kingdoms.

### **Vanara 31 points**

ST -5 [-40]; DX +7 [100]; IQ -1 [-10]; HT +3 [30].

Advantages: Decreased Life Support [10]; Extra Arms x 2 (Short Arms, temporary disadvantage Legless when in use) [6]; Penetrating Call [5]; Perfect Balance [15]; Super Climbing +2 [6]; Super Jump +2 [20].

Disadvantages: Cannot Swim [0]; Distractible [-1]; Edgy [-5]; Reduced Hit Points -9 [-45]; Semi-Upright [-5]; Short Lifespan 2 [-20]; Sleepy [-10]; Social Stigma (Non-Aryan) [-15].

### **Yaksha**

The *yaksha* are a group of beings more varied even than the *rakshasa*. They come in any form (and in fact are generally able to change shape at will) and may have either a malicious, neutral, or

benevolent. They overlap with *rakshasa* and *bhuta*, as well as seemingly being a generic name for spirits. They are the most commonly occurring beasts in folklore (as *rakshasa* are in myth and epics) and may in fact be a wide range of creatures and spirits, rather than a single variegated race.

The class or breed of *yaksha* described in the racial template below are those that attend to Kubera. These *yaksha* have a society as sophisticated as that of humans and they live in splendid underground settlements and cities in other realms. They may have temperaments of any sort, from virtuous to evil, though their personalities are generally more pronounced than human's; their warriors are more valiant and their *brahmins* are more devout. Like their master, they are squat, bow-legged, and pot-bellied.

### **Yaksha -1 points**

Advantages: Divine Favor (Kubera, not a particularly powerful god who will rarely help) [10]; Comfortable [10]

Disadvantages: Unattractive [-5], Bowlegged [-1]; Social Stigma (Non-human) [-15]

Quirks: Characters must take at least three quirks and as many as six.

### **Yatu**

**ST:** 15 **Speed/Dodge:** 6/5 **Size:** 1

**DX:** 10 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 200-250 lbs

**IQ:** 9 **Damage:** 1d-1 cut **Habitat:** various

**HT:** 15 **Reach:** C

The *yatus* are a degenerate breed of sub-*rakshasa*. They will almost always be found in the presence of their more powerful cousins, feeding on the scraps of carrion the *rakshasas* do not finish. In their natural form they appear similar to *rakshasas* but are smaller and typically hoofed. If the *rakshasas* of a campaign can learn magic then so can the *yatus*, but at a much less powerful level.

# Indian Glossary

**Adivasis:** A general name for the many primitive tribes living in the wildernesses of India, even in the modern day. They are also known as tribals and junglis.

**Ahimsa:** Non-violence.

**Ajivika:** An extinct religion formulated at the same time as Jainism. Ajivikas believe in the inevitability of destiny.

**Akasha:** 1. The ether. One of the five elements of the *sankhya* and one of the five non-physical realities of the *vaisheshika* philosophy.

2. Magical energy.

**Amrit:** Divine elixir of immortality.

**Arthashastra:** Ancient Machiavellian text on statecraft.

**Aryan:** A culture of Indo-European language speakers. Believed to have migrated to India in the 2nd millennium B.C. One of the major influences on Indian culture.

**Ashramas:** Four phases of life. The *brahmacharya ashrama* student phase, *grihastha ashrama* homemaker phase, *vanaprastha ashrama* "forest" stage, and *sannyasa ashrama* mendicant phase.

**Ashvamedha:** Horse sacrifice in which a *raja* proves his dominion and power over his neighbors.

**Asuras:** A classification of gods opposing the *devas* who make up the majority of the Hindu pantheon.

**Atman:** The individual soul.

**Avatara:** An incarnation of a god on earth.

**Ayurveda:** Tradition of holistic medicine.

**Bhakti:** Devotion.

**Bhakti Yoga:** The path to *moksha* through devotion.

**Brahman:** The soul of the universe.

**Brahmanda:** The golden egg that contains creation.

**Brahmin:** One of the four *varnas* whose role is that of priest or scholar.

**Buddha, The:** The Enlightened One. After Siddhartha Gautama discovered the four Noble Truths of Buddhism he became the Buddha.

**Buddhism:** Religion founded by Buddha based overcoming the misery of life by overcoming desire. Adherents are called Buddhists.



**Caste:** A division of society. In India it typically refers to *jati*, but is sometimes taken to refer to *varna* or any general division of society.

**Chakra:** 1. Wheel.

2. A critical point of the body activated by the *kundalini*.

**Chakravartin:** One For Whom the Wheel Turns. Universal Emperor.

**Darshan:** 1. Vision.

2. Six schools of Indian philosophy: *nyaya*, *vaisheshika*, *sankhya*, *yoga*, *mimamsa*, and *vedanta*.

**Deccan:** South. Generally used to refer to the plateau of peninsular India.

**Devas:** Gods.

**Dharma:** Righteousness, but in a very strong sense. A cosmic righteousness, ordained by a power beyond the gods, and beyond even thought. The particular *dharmas* for an individual depends on what *varna* they were born in and which *ashramas* they are in.

**Dhimmi:** People of the Book. People of religions related to Islam who are spared annihilation but must pay the *jizya*. This status was extended even to Hinduism.

**Digambara:** Jain sect believing clothes should not be worn by the devout.

**Din-I-Ilahi:** Religion established by Akbar.

**Dowry:** Payment by a bride's family to her groom and often the rest of his family. Ostensibly for her security but essentially a gift to the groom.

**East India Company:** British company with monopoly rights to trade with the East. Came to rule most of India.

**Factory:** Trading post.

**Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand, (Mahatma):** Social reformer and freedom fighter par excellence. Using assertive non-violence compelled British to leave India.

**Ghi:** Clarified butter.

**Great Game, The:** Machinations between Imperial Russia and Britain conducted mostly in Central Asia.

**Greater Vehicle:** See Mahayana.

**Gupta Empire:** Empire spanning northern India in the 4th to 6th centuries A.D. Coincided with what is generally considered a golden age in Hindu culture.

**Guru:** Teacher.

**Hajj:** Pilgrimage to Mecca expected to be performed by all Muslims.

**Harem:** Section of a palace set aside for the female and children royal members (including wives, mistresses, and daughters).

**Himalayas:** Abode of the Clouds. Mountain range running across the north of India.

**Hinduism:** The religion of India's majority. Based on a belief in reincarnation determined by one's actions. Characterized also by a large pantheon and a doctrine of social division. Adherents are called Hindus.

**Howdah:** Platform for riding an elephant.

**Imam:** Islamic prayer leader.

**Islam:** Monotheistic religion founded by Mohammed. Although originating in the Middle East, Islam became an important religion in India. Adherents are called Muslims.

**Jainism:** Religion founded by Mahavira. Its principal tenet is that action ties the immortal soul to the corrupt physical world. Followers are called Jains.

**Jati:** A uniquely Indian division of society into tribe-like endogamous communities, defined in large part by occupation.

**Jihad:** Holy war.

**Jizya:** Tax on non-Muslims.

**Jnana Yoga:** The path to *moksha* through knowledge. Pronounced "gyana yoga."

**Kamasutra:** Manual on hedonistic living. Famously including sections on erotics.

**Karma:** A measure of one's good and bad actions in life. One's *karma* determines one's reincarnation.

**Karma Yoga:** The path to *moksha* through selfless toil.

**Khalsa, The:** Sikh military brotherhood, the Army of the Pure, which all male Sikhs belong to.

**Koh-i-Noor:** Mountain of Light. A famous diamond.

**Koran:** Muslim holy book.

**Kshatriya:** One of the four *varna* whose roles include ruling and fighting.

**Kumbha Mela:** India's largest festival, occurring once every three years at one of four locations in a 12 year cycle.

**Kundalini:** A snake-like energy that can be induced to rise up the spine, bringing enlightenment.

**Kurukshetra:** Field on which the great battle of the *Mahabharata* was fought.

**Left Hand Path:** See Vamachara.

**Lesser Vehicle:** See Theravada.

**Mahabharata:** Great India. One of Hinduism two great epics.

**Mahajanapada:** Tribal kingdoms.

**Maharaja:** Literally "great king" but generally referring to a king of no particular authority.

**Mahayana:** The Great Vehicle of Buddhism. A sect that believes that all humans are raised towards enlightenment together, with the help of already enlightened *bodhisattvas*.

**Mamluk:** Slave soldier of Islam.

**Mansab:** An official of the Moghul Empire.

**Mantra:** Spoken spell.

**Marathas:** Warrior caste of western India.

**Marga:** Path.

**Martial Races:** Those peoples deemed sufficiently trustworthy by the British to join the Indian army.

**Mauryan Empire:** Indian empire of the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C. Distinguished by being the first large empire of India and for Ashoka, the saintly emperor.

**Masala:** Mixture.

**Maya:** Illusion.

**Moghul, (Great):** Ruler of the Moghul Empire (16th to 18th centuries).

**Moksha:** Release from *samsara*. Realized by a union of the *atman* with Brahman.

**Mulla:** Islamic religious teacher or sage.

**Muslim:** Follower of Islam.

**Nadi:** Channel within the *sukshama sharira* carrying *prana*.

**Nawab:** Govenor.

**Nirvana:** The indescribable state reached when one is released from *samsara*. Simultaneously a state of being and non-being.

**Nizam:** Ruler of Hyderabad.

**Papa:** Sins.

**Pardah:** The practice of keeping women out of sight of non-family members.

**Parsi:** The Indian name for a follower of Zoroastrianism. Refugees from Persia.

**Partition:** When British India became independent it was partitioned into two countries, India and

Pakistan.

**Peacock Throne:** Gem-encrusted throne of the Moghul Empire.

**People of the Book:** See *dhimmis*.

**Peshwa:** Prime-minister of the Maratha kingdom. Became effective ruler.

**Prana:** Vital air. Ethereal effluvium carried in the *nadis*.

**Puja:** Ritual prayer.

**Punya:** Virtuous deeds.

**Puranas:** Hindu books of mythology.

**Rakshasa:** Evil creatures. Enemies of humanity.

**Raj, The:** British rule of India.

**Raja:** King or chief.

**Raja Yoga:** The path to *moksha* and magical powers through psycho-physical discipline.

**Rajput:** Esteemed warrior caste.

**Rama:** Hero of *Ramayana*, *avatara* of God, and symbol for righteous Hindu rule.

**Ramayana:** The story of Rama. One of Hinduism two great epics.

**Rani:** Queen.

**Reincarnation:** Rebirth in new life but with the same *atman*.

**Resident:** British observer/governor in independent princely states.

**Rishi:** Sage.

**Rita:** Cosmic *dharma*.

**Sadhu:** Wandering ascetic.

**Samsara:** The cycle of birth and rebirth. Reincarnation.

**Sannyasi:** One who has abandoned the world to live as a mendicant.

**Sati:** Widow suicide.

**Satyagraha:** Truth force. Philosophy of absolute non-violence and faith in one's cause pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi.

**Sepoys:** Native infantrymen in British Indian Army.

**Shaivism:** Hindu sect venerating Shiva.

**Shakti:** Power.

**Shaktism:** Hindu sect glorifying goddesses.

**Shariat:** Islamic law.

**Shia:** Islamic sect. Descendants of those who believed Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law, should have been the first caliph.

**Shramana:** Non-brahminic religious savant of Vedic times.

**Shreni:** Guild.

**Shudra:** One of the four *varnas* whose place it is to serve.

**Sikhism:** Religion fusing elements of Hinduism and Islam founded by Nanak. Later became distinctly martial. Followers are Sikhs.

**Sky Clad:** See Digambara.

**Shula Sharira:** Physical body.

**Shvetambaras:** Jain sect that allows the wearing of clothes.

**Soma:** Narcotic drink used in early Hindu religious rites.

**Suble Body:** See *sukshma sharira*.

**Sufism:** Islamic mysticism.

**Sukshma Sharira:** Subtle body. Bodily home of the soul.

**Sunni:** Islamic sect. Descendants of those who supported Abu Bakr, Mohammed's father-in-law, as the first caliph.

**Tantras:** Holy books of Shaktism.

**Tapas:** Heat. Subtle magical energy created by religious rituals and austerities.

**Thagi:** Sect of Kali worshipers who murdered travelers.

**Theravada:** The Lesser Vehicle of Buddhism. A sect that believes that enlightenment can only be achieved individually through individual effort.

**Turiya:** An enlightened state of consciousness attained by abandoning all *maya*.

**Untouchable:** Hindus born without a *varna*. To untouchables are assigned the most debased of jobs.

**Upanishads:** Mystical texts of Hinduism. The most influential works on modern Hindu philosophy.

**Vaishnavism:** Hindu sect exalting Vishnu.

**Vaishya:** One of the four *varnas* whose role is that of peasant, merchant, or artisan.

**Vamachara:** Debased Shaktic sub-sect believing that spiritual development is brought about by performing deviant acts.

**Varna:** One of four classes of society, *brahmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya*, and *sudra*.

**Veda:** Knowledge. The earliest texts of Hinduism.

**White Clad:** See Shvetambara.

**Yoga:** Yoke. 1. A method of attaining *moksha*.

2. A system of physical and mental discipline.

**Yuga:** An eon.

**Zoroastrianism:** Religion of ancient Persia. Founded by Zoroaster, or Zarathustra. Followers are called Zoroastrians, or Parsis in India.

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