

India's First Empires

MAIN IDEA

POWER AND AUTHORITY

The Mauryas and the Guptas established empires, but neither unified India permanently.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The diversity of peoples, cultures, beliefs, and languages in India continues to pose challenges to Indian unity today.

TERMS & NAMES

- Mauryan Empire
- Asoka
- religious toleration
- Tamil
- Gupta Empire
- patriarchal
- matriarchal

SETTING THE STAGE By 600 B.C., almost 1,000 years after the Aryan migrations, many small kingdoms were scattered throughout India. In 326 B.C., Alexander the Great brought the Indus Valley in the northwest under Macedonian control—but left almost immediately. Soon after, a great Indian military leader, Chandragupta Maurya (chuhn•druh•GUP•tuh MAH•oor•yuh), seized power.

The Mauryan Empire Is Established

Chandragupta Maurya may have been born in the powerful kingdom of Magadha. Centered on the lower Ganges River, the kingdom was ruled by the Nanda family. Chandragupta gathered an army, killed the unpopular Nanda king, and in about 321 B.C. claimed the throne. This began the [Mauryan Empire](#).

Chandragupta Maurya Unifies North India Chandragupta moved northwest, seizing all the land from Magadha to the Indus. Around 305 B.C., Chandragupta began to battle Seleucus I, one of Alexander the Great's generals. Seleucus had inherited part of Alexander's empire. He wanted to reestablish Macedonian control over the Indus Valley. After several years of fighting, however, Chandragupta defeated Seleucus. By 303 B.C., the Mauryan Empire stretched more than 2,000 miles, uniting north India politically for the first time. (See map on page 191.)

To win his wars of conquest, Chandragupta raised a vast army: 600,000 soldiers on foot, 30,000 soldiers on horseback, and 9,000 elephants. To clothe, feed, and pay these troops, the government levied high taxes. For example, farmers had to pay up to one-half the value of their crops to the king.

Running the Empire Chandragupta relied on an adviser named Kautilya (kow•TIHL•yuh), a member of the priestly caste. Kautilya wrote a ruler's handbook called the *Arthashastra* (AHR•thuh• SHAHS•truh). This book proposed tough-minded policies to hold an empire together, including spying on the people and employing political assassination. Following Kautilya's advice, Chandragupta created a highly bureaucratic government. He divided the empire into four provinces, each headed by a royal prince. Each province was then divided into local districts, whose officials assessed taxes and enforced the law.

Life in the City and the Country Eager to stay at peace with the Indian emperor, Seleucus sent an ambassador, Megasthenes (muh•GAS•thuh•neeZ), to

TAKING NOTES

Comparing Use a chart to compare the Mauryan and Gupta empires.

Mauryan	Gupta
1.	1.
2	2
3	3

Chandragupta's capital. Megasthenes wrote glowing descriptions of Chandragupta's palace, with its gold-covered pillars, many fountains, and imposing thrones. The capital city featured beautiful parks and bustling markets. Megasthenes also described the countryside and how farmers lived:

PRIMARY SOURCE **A**

[Farmers] are exempted from military service and cultivate their lands undisturbed by fear. They do not go to cities, either on business or to take part in their tumults. It therefore frequently happens that at the same time, and in the same part of the country, men may be seen marshaled for battle and risking their lives against the enemy, while other men are ploughing or digging in perfect security under the protection of these soldiers.

MEGASTHENES, in *Geography* by Strabo

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Primary Sources

A What information in this quotation indicates that Mauryan India valued agriculture?

In 301 B.C., Chandragupta's son assumed the throne. He ruled for 32 years. Then Chandragupta's grandson, **Asoka** (uh•SOH•kuh), brought the Mauryan Empire to its greatest heights.

Asoka Promotes Buddhism Asoka became king of the Mauryan Empire in 269 B.C. At first, he followed in Chandragupta's footsteps, waging war to expand his empire. During a bloody war against the neighboring state of Kalinga, 100,000 soldiers were slain, and even more civilians perished.

Although victorious, Asoka felt sorrow over the slaughter at Kalinga. As a result, he studied Buddhism and decided to rule by the Buddha's teaching of "peace to all beings." Throughout the empire, Asoka erected huge stone pillars inscribed with his new policies. Some edicts guaranteed that Asoka would treat his subjects fairly and humanely. Others preached nonviolence. Still others urged **religious toleration**—acceptance of people who held different religious beliefs.

Asoka had extensive roads built so that he could visit the far corners of India. He also improved conditions along these roads to make travel easier for his

Vocabulary

Edicts are official, public announcements of policy.



▲ This pillar, on which Asoka's edicts are written, is located at Vaishali.

History Makers

Chandragupta Maurya

?–298 B.C.

Chandragupta feared being assassinated—maybe because he had killed a king to get his throne. To avoid being poisoned, he made servants taste all his food. To avoid being murdered in bed, he slept in a different room every night.

Although Chandragupta was a fierce warrior, in 301 B.C., he gave up his throne and converted to Jainism. Jains taught nonviolence and respect for all life. With a group of monks, Chandragupta traveled to southern India. There he followed the Jainist custom of fasting until he starved to death.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH LINKS For more on Chandragupta Maurya and Asoka, go to classzone.com



▲ This grouping of Asoka's lions is used as a symbol of India.

Asoka

?–232 B.C.

One of Asoka's edicts states,

If one hundredth part or one thousandth of those who died in Kalinga . . . should now suffer similar fate, [that] would be a matter of pain to His Majesty.

Even though Asoka wanted to be a loving, peaceful ruler, he had to control a huge empire. He had to balance Kautilya's methods of keeping power and Buddha's urgings to be unselfish.

Asoka softened Chandragupta's harsher policies. Instead of spies, he employed officials to look out for his subjects' welfare. He kept his army but sought to rule humanely. In addition, Asoka sent missionaries to Southeast Asia to spread Buddhism.

MAIN IDEA

Clarifying

B Which of Asoka's actions show the influence of Buddha's teaching of "peace to all beings"?

officials and to improve communication in the vast empire. For example, every nine miles he had wells dug and rest houses built. This allowed travelers to stop and refresh themselves. Such actions demonstrated Asoka's concern for his subjects' well-being. Noble as his policies of toleration and nonviolence were, they failed to hold the empire together after Asoka died in 232 B.C. **B**

A Period of Turmoil

Asoka's death left a power vacuum. In northern and central India, regional kings challenged the imperial government. The kingdoms of central India, which had only been loosely held in the Mauryan Empire, soon regained their independence. The Andhra (AHN•druh) Dynasty arose and dominated the region for hundreds of years. Because of their central position, the Andhras profited from the extensive trade between north and south India and also with Rome, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia.

At the same time, northern India had to absorb a flood of new people fleeing political instability in other parts of Asia. For 500 years, beginning about 185 B.C., wave after wave of Greeks, Persians, and Central Asians poured into northern India. These invaders disrupted Indian society. But they also introduced new languages and customs that added to the already-rich blend of Indian culture.

Southern India also experienced turmoil. It was home to three kingdoms that had never been conquered by the Mauryans. The people who lived in this region spoke the **Tamil** (TAM•uhl) language and are called the Tamil people. These three kingdoms often were at war with one another and with other states.

The Gupta Empire Is Established

After 500 years of invasion and turmoil, a strong leader again arose in the northern state of Magadha. His name was Chandra Gupta (GUP•tuh), but he was no relation to India's first emperor, Chandragupta Maurya. India's second empire, the **Gupta Empire**, oversaw a great flowering of Indian civilization, especially Hindu culture.

Chandra Gupta Builds an Empire The first Gupta emperor came to power not through battle but by marrying a daughter of an influential royal family. After his marriage, Chandra Gupta I took the title "Great King of Kings" in A.D. 320. His empire included Magadha and the area north of it, with his power base along the Ganges River. His son, Samudra (suh•MU•druh) Gupta, became king in A.D. 335. Although a lover of the arts, Samudra had a warlike side. He expanded the empire through 40 years of conquest.





▲ This terra-cotta tile, showing a musician playing a stringed instrument, is from a Hindu temple of the Gupta period.

Daily Life in India The Gupta era is the first period for which historians have much information about daily life in India. Most Indians lived in small villages. The majority were farmers, who walked daily from their homes to outlying fields. Craftspeople and merchants clustered in specific districts in the towns. They had shops on the street level and lived in the rooms above.

Most Indian families were **patriarchal**, headed by the eldest male. Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and children all worked together to raise their crops. Because drought was common, farmers often had to irrigate their crops. There was a tax on water, and every month, people had to give a day's worth of labor to maintain wells, irrigation ditches, reservoirs, and dams. As in Mauryan times, farmers owed a large part of their earnings to the king.

Southern India followed a different cultural pattern. Some

Tamil groups were **matriarchal**, headed by the mother rather than the father. Property, and sometimes the throne, was passed through the female line. 🕒

Height of the Gupta Empire While village life followed unchanging traditional patterns, the royal court of the third Gupta emperor was a place of excitement and growth. Indians revered Chandra Gupta II for his heroic qualities. He defeated the Shakas—enemies to the west—and added their coastal territory to his empire. This allowed the Guptas to engage in profitable trade with the Mediterranean world. Chandra Gupta II also strengthened his empire through peaceful means by negotiating diplomatic and marriage alliances. He ruled from A.D. 375 to 415.

During the reign of the first three Guptas, India experienced a period of great achievement in the arts, religious thought, and science. These will be discussed in Section 2. After Chandra Gupta II died, new invaders threatened northern India. These fierce fighters, called the Hunas, were related to the Huns who invaded the Roman Empire. Over the next 100 years, the Gupta Empire broke into small kingdoms. Many were overrun by the Hunas or other Central Asian nomads. The Empire ended about 535.

MAIN IDEA

Contrasting

🕒 How were the family systems of north and south India different?

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Mauryan Empire
- Asoka
- religious toleration
- Tamil
- Gupta Empire
- patriarchal
- matriarchal

USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which similarity of the empires do you consider the most significant? Explain.

Mauryan	Gupta
1.	1.
2	2
3	3

MAIN IDEAS

3. Why was Asoka's first military campaign also his last campaign?
4. Who were the Tamil people?
5. What caused the fall of the Gupta Empire?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **SUPPORTING OPINIONS** Which Indian ruler described in this section would you rather live under? Explain.
7. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** What impact did the Greeks, Persians, and Central Asians have on Indian life between the Mauryan and Gupta empires?
8. **ANALYZING ISSUES** Which empire, Mauryan or Gupta, had a more significant impact on Indian history? Explain.
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** For three of the rulers in this section, choose an object or image that symbolizes how that ruler exercised power. Write **captions** explaining why the symbols are appropriate.

CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A PIE GRAPH

Use the Internet or library sources to create a **pie graph** showing the percentage of the population in India today that is Hindu, Buddhist, or a follower of other religions.