

THE GUPTA EMPIRE

320 AD – 535 AD

I. The “Golden Age of Hindu Culture”

A. 320 AD a new ruling family emerged

1. The Gupta’s
2. uniting territory around the Ganges

II. Contact with other cultures

A. encouraged peace, prosperity, and trade with foreign lands

1. China

III. The Achievements of the Gupta’s

A. Emperors built universities

1. supported the arts and literature
2. Indian scholars excelled in science
3. Indian mathematicians developed:
 - a) the use of zero
 - b) the concept of infinity
 - c) decimal system
 - d) early form of Arabic numbers was also developed
4. Artists
 - a) painted colorful murals
5. Writers
 - a) created poems and plays
 - 1) in Sanskrit

IV. The Fall of the Gupta Empire

A. drew to a close around 500 AD

B. The Huns

1. warlike tribe from Central Asia
2. invaded northeastern India
3. breaking up the Gupta empire into smaller states

Section Focus Transparency Activity 8-3

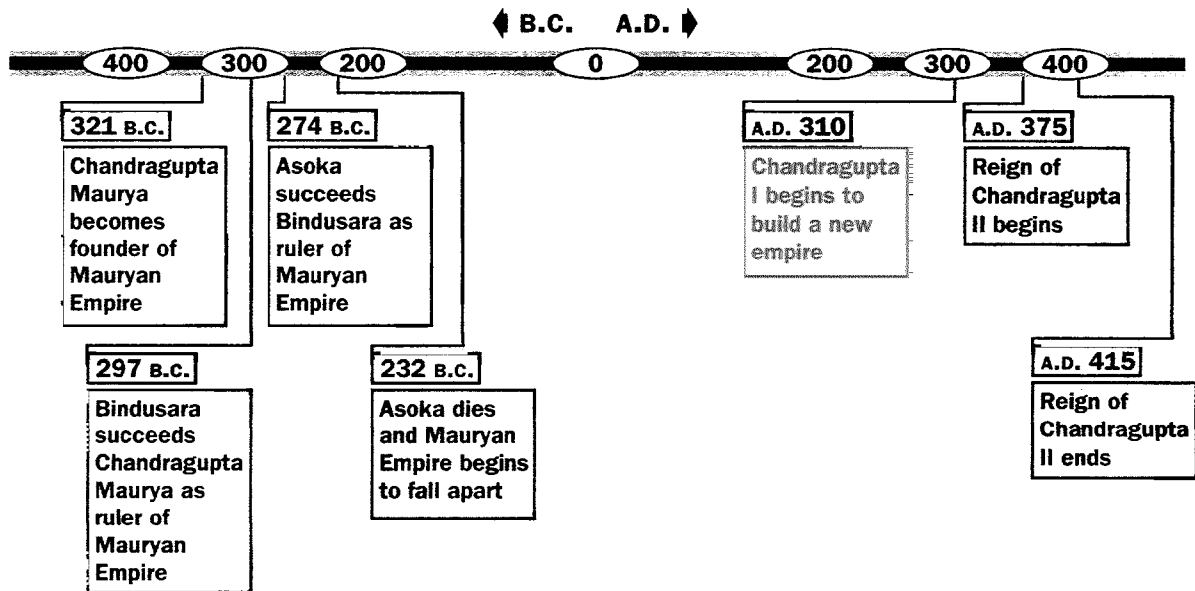
Indian Empires

- 1** When did Asoka die? **2** Whose reign began in A.D. 375? **3** What is the oldest event shown on this time line?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



THE RISE OF EMPIRES IN INDIA

The Aryans. About 1500 B.C., groups of warriors and herders from central Asia, called Aryans, started invading the Indus Valley. Dravidians, survivors of the Indus civilization, opposed the Aryans. In time, the Aryans conquered the northern section of India. The Dravidians retreated to the south. Aryan warriors settled on farms, built villages, and founded great cities.

An important feature of the Aryan way of life was the caste system. It divided people into four major groups called castes and set up strict rules for living. A person was born into a caste and could not leave it, except in rare cases. A person in one caste could not eat with anyone in another caste or marry a person from another caste. Certain types of jobs were reserved for a particular caste. Members of other castes could not do this work.

The highest caste was the Brahmin. It included priests and scholars. Warriors and government officials made up the second caste, the Kshatriyas. The third was the Vaisya, which included landowning farmers, merchants, and crafts workers. Laborers belonged to the Sudra group. The caste system continued to exist in India until the mid-20th century A.D.

Those people who performed the least respected jobs were called *pariahs*, or untouchables. They were not included in the caste system and were not allowed to associate with caste members.

The Aryans spoke a language called Sanskrit. They developed a system of writing and set down their religious stories and songs in books known as *Vedas*. (Veda means "knowledge".) One of the important parts of the Vedas is the Rig-Veda. It consists of some 1,000 songs of praise to the many gods the Aryans worshiped.

Another important collection of religious writing is the *Upanishads*. It includes discussions on the meaning of life and the nature of the universe.

- Why is the statement below false? Rewrite it as a correct statement.
In Aryan society, all people were treated as equals.

The Empire of the Mauryas. Starting about 321 B.C., an Indian conqueror named Chandragupta Maurya gained control over northern India. He began the Mauryan dynasty.

Chandragupta's grandson, Asoka, expanded the Mauryan Empire to include almost all of India. After a particularly bloody battle, Asoka gave up the idea and practice of war and became a Buddhist. At his direction, monks spread the teachings of Buddha to other parts of Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

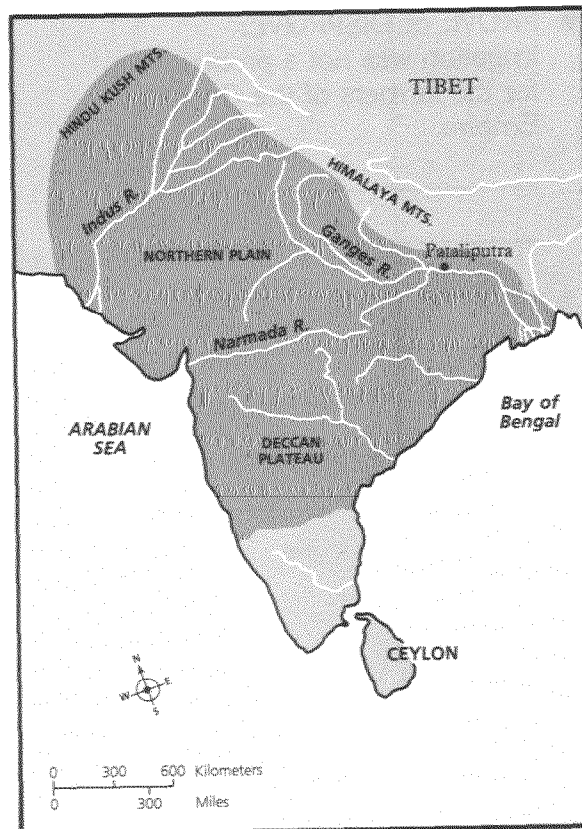
Asoka had rules of conduct for his people carved on stone pillars. Pillars with these rules on them were set up throughout the empire so that everyone could see them. After Asoka's death in 236 B.C., the Mauryan Empire declined.

- PROVE or DISPROVE: Religion was important to Asoka.

The Maurya Empire, 250 B.C.

- ◆ Identify two large geographic areas of India controlled by the Maurya Empire.

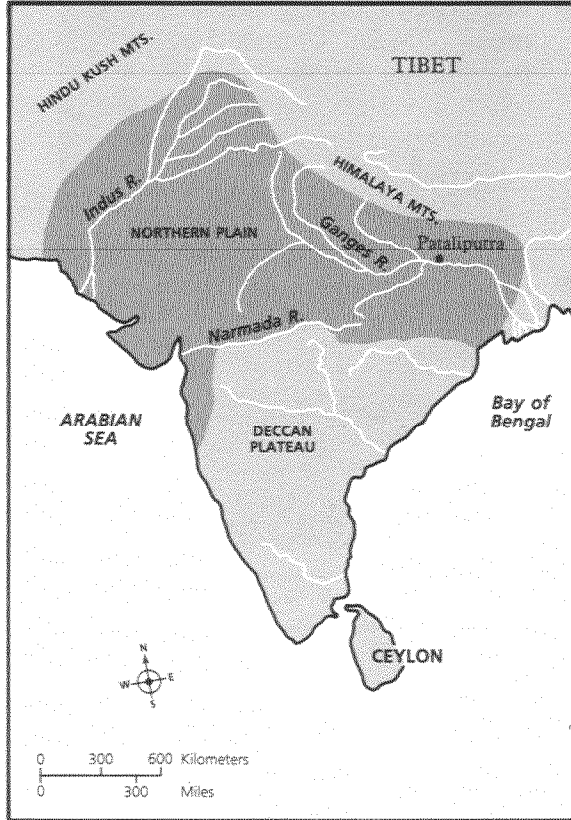
- ◆ Explain how these areas are geographically different from one another.



The Gupta Empire. About 500 years after the Mauryas, another powerful dynasty, the Gupta, ruled over much of India. The Guptas ruled from about A.D. 320 to 535. _____

The Gupta Empire, A.D. 400

◆ PROVE or DISPROVE:
Irrigation was not a problem
for the farmers of the Gupta
Empire.



Under the Gupta emperors, India entered a golden age of peace, prosperity, and cultural achievement. Indian mathematicians invented the decimal-based number system we use today. The work of Gupta writers and artists became well known outside of India. Their work later influenced the literature and art of the Middle East and Europe. Southeast Asia wholeheartedly accepted the culture of the Gupta Empire.

In the 400's, Huns from central Asia invaded India. They caused the downfall of the Guptas. After the mid-500's, India experienced many centuries of weak government and foreign invasions.

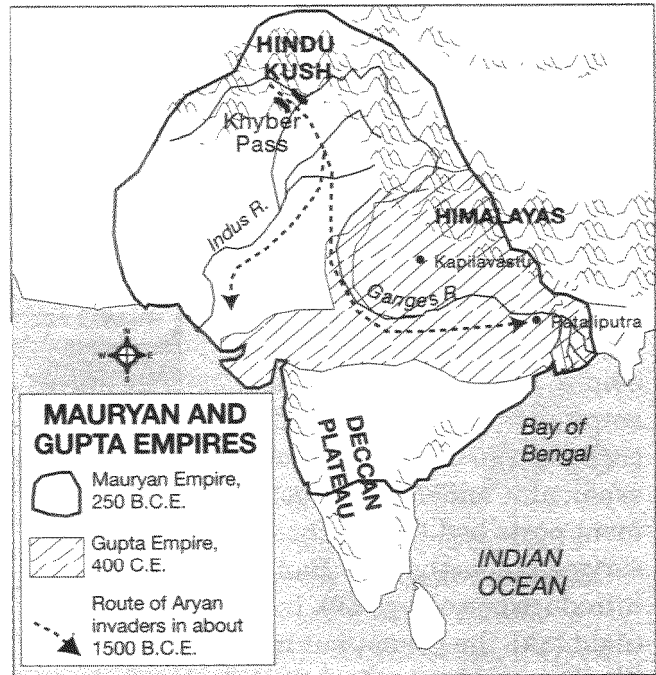
• Why was the period of the Gupta rule called a "golden age"?

The Gupta Empire in India

Until 321 B.C.E., large sections of India were ruled by foreign invaders. The Aryans poured into the Indus-Ganges Plain from Central Asia in about 1500 B.C.E. They were followed 1,000 years later by Darius of Persia and then by Alexander the Great. Chandragupta Maurya was the first Indian to unite and rule large areas of India. His grandson, Asoka, extended the Mauryan empire until it covered most of the Indian subcontinent. The bloodthirstiness of battle persuaded Asoka to become a Buddhist. From military conquest, he turned to projects that would benefit his people: free hospitals, fine roads, and compassionate laws. After 184 B.C.E., the Mauryan Empire disintegrated into smaller, warring kingdoms.

In about 310 C.E., another Indian ruler named Chandragupta I built an empire that was smaller than the Mauryan Empire but covered some of the same area. As the map shows, the Gupta Empire stretched from east to west across central India. This empire lasted for 200 years. It was based on a strong central government, a powerful army, and the use of terror to intimidate opponents if necessary.

Unlike Asoka, the Guptas were Hindus and encouraged the spread of Hinduism across their empire. They believed in the importance of learning; their court included poets, dramatists, philosophers, and scientists. Much of their work was devoted to religious themes, but their astronomers



understood that the world is round and their mathematicians invented the zero and devised the numbers 1 through 9. Because Gupta traders traveled the land and sea routes to Arabia, Central Asia, China, and the Mediterranean, Gupta learning was able to spread to these areas. Their number system was adopted by Arab traders (hence they are called Arabic numerals) and provided an important tool for scientists around the world.

- 1 List three major contributions to learning that the Gupta made.

Gupta doctors were the first to use inoculation to stop the spread of disease. They injected their patients with small amounts of cowpox to stop the spread of the deadly smallpox germ. Their surgeons could set broken bones and use plastic surgery to repair injured ears and noses. They also understood how important it was to sterilize their surgical instruments.