

# India in the Classical Age



- ❧ Throughout most of its history, the subcontinent of India is divided into regional kingdoms, and not united under one ruler.
- ❧ The classical Mauryan and Gupta empires are short but important interludes because they laid the foundations for commerce and religion throughout the subcontinent and into Asia that persisted well past their dynasties.

## Founding of the Mauryan Empire

### *Alexander the Great*

- Alexander conquered by force in northwest India, 326 BC
- Did not remain in India long
- Battle-weary soldiers wanted to return home, soon left India

## The Mauryan Empire

### *Chandragupta Maurya*

- Alexander's conquest inspired Chandragupta Maurya
- Seized throne of kingdom of Magadha, 321 BC
- Began Mauryan empire
- Built immense army, 60,000 soldiers including chariots and war elephants
- Began conquering northern India
- Defeated Seleucus I, 305 BC
- Mauryan empire controlled northern India by 303 BC
- Also controlled much of what is now Afghanistan

# Mauryan Government



## Strong Government

- Like Qin, Han rulers, Chandragupta Maurya established a centralized government to control the empire; crushed any resistance
- Relied on brilliant adviser **Kautilya**, Brahmin / member
- Chandragupta divided the empire into districts and appointed loyalists to rule them
- Organized a bureaucratic government, spies monitored officials, gathered information, rooted out threats to state

## *Arthashastra*

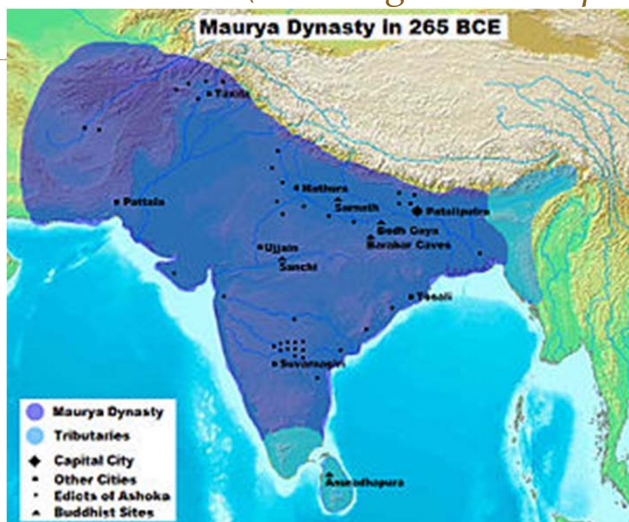
- A manual for statecraft and administrative principles, thought to be written by Kautilya
- Called for strict state control
- Also called for use of spies, even assassination

# Ashoka (*India's greatest emperor*)

- Chandragupta gave up throne in 301 BCE and became a Jainist monk
- Son became emperor, followed by grandson **Ashoka** (268 BCE)
- Mauryan empire reached it's height under Ashoka
- Through warfare empire expanded, included most of India
- A skilled governor who utilized a strong bureaucracy under his direct control including a central treasury
- Established the capital at Pataliputra
- Developed public works projects such as irrigation systems and imperial roads to encourage agricultural developments and trade
- Centralized laws were communicated on inscribed pillars through the empire (Rock Edicts)



## Ashoka (India's greatest emperor)



## Ashoka

- Ashoka was a great warrior as a youth, known for the brutality of his conquests
- Became sickened by the violence of war after one of his greatest victories at Kalinga
- Abandoned his policy of conquest and converted to Buddhism
- Began to promote a policy of right conduct: Buddhism
- Supported Buddhist missionaries, worked to improve the lives of his people
- Advocated peace and tolerance, spreading those ideals throughout India by means of his **Rock and Pillar Edicts**, which were carved on rocks and pillars throughout the empire. These edicts reminded Mauryans to live generous and righteous lives.
- Admired for his justice and wisdom
- Remains famous for his efforts to create harmony between Buddhists, Hindus, and the followers of India's other religions.



## Decline of the Mauryan Empires

- ☞ The Mauryan empire began to decline following the death of Ashoka, 232 BC
- ☞ Sons battled for power and central control weakened
- ☞ Distant provinces began to slip away
- ☞ Last Mauryan emperor was killed by one of generals, 184 BC
- ☞ Mauryan empire lasted 140 years, then collapsed

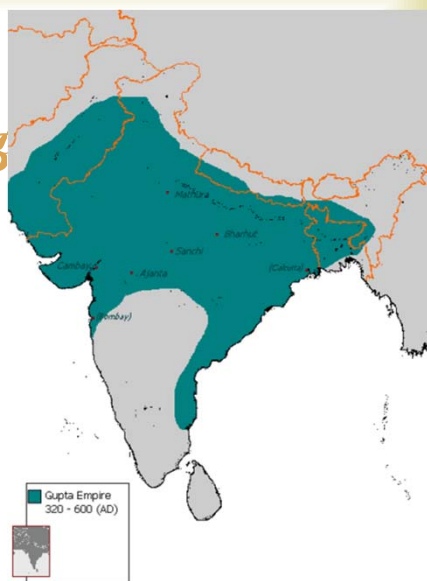
## Regional Kingdoms

As the Mauryan Empire collapsed, India again divided into many regional kingdoms. These kingdoms differed in the north and south.

- ☞ **Northern India**
  - Invaders from Central Asia established new dynasties
  - Many had been displaced by expansion of China
- **Bactrians (Greeks)**
  - Greek invaders from what is now Afghanistan formed Greco-Indian dynasties
  - Introduced Greek art forms to India, influenced local styles
- **Kushans**
  - Conquered much of north during first century AD
  - Restored some of grandeur of Mauryan Empire to region
  - Height in power coming under the rule of Emperor Kanishka (78-103 C.E.)
    - Played a crucial role in the Silk Road trading network.
  - Kushan dynasty fell, AD 250

## The Gupta Empire

- ☞ Controlled the region from 320-550 CE.
- ☞ Created a tributary empire that was less centralized than the Mauryans
- ☞ Continued to provide peace and prosperity – critical to the interregional trade networks of the silk roads (if it's not safe, people won't travel)
- ☞ Territory included much of the former Mauryan empire but was smaller overall
  - ☞ Controlled every area except the Deccan Plateau and the southern tip of India



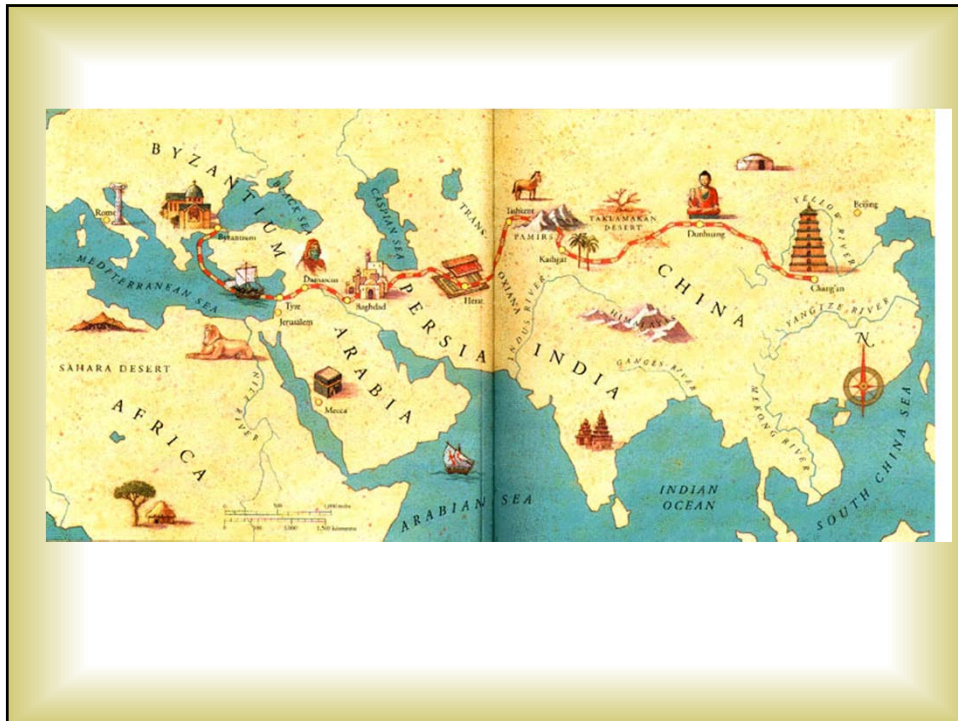
## The Gupta Empire

- ☞ Chandra Gupta (no relation to Chandragupta Maurya) and his two successors expanded the empire
- ☞ Government was more similar to the Persians than the Mauryans
  - ☞ Left governing in the provinces to local allies.
- ☞ White Hun invasions from the northwest split the Gupta empire into its original regions
- ☞ The last Gupta rulers lost their power to regional rulers
- ☞ India became a continent of many kingdoms AGAIN.

## Importance of These Empires

- ☞ They provided peace and prosperity to the region and to travelers across the silk roads, but without the classical imperial structures of Persia and China.
- ☞ India's central location to both land and maritime trade becomes even more significant in this time period.
- ☞ Reoccurring foreign invasions (White Huns) challenged the strength of both empires.





## Economic Development

The success of iron metallurgy and great harvests allowed Indian to develop more urban centers and fostered more trade. However, both of these developments also intensified the caste system.

## Towns and Trade



- ❧ Indian craftsman provided numerous manufactured products for the common and elite classes.
- ❧ Many towns in India provided marketplaces to distribute goods from thousands of workshops.
- ❧ Long-distance trade was carried out primarily through the northwest region, following the roads built by the Persians, and maintained by Alexander and Chandragupta.
- ❧ The endpoints of direct Indian trade along this route were China in the east and Persia in the west.

## Towns and Trade



- ❧ Increasingly, merchants turned to the Indian Ocean for trade.
- ❧ Merchant ships benefited from the monsoon seasons that brought winds from the southwest in the spring and summer and winds from the northeast during the fall and winter.
- ❧ Along the seacoast were ships that went as far away as the Red Sea and there is evidence that the Romans had trading posts in western India.

## Family Life



- ❧ Despite the ideal of the extended family living in one household, most Indians lived with their nuclear families.
- ❧ Only the highest castes with wealth came close to the ideal.

## Role of Women



- ❧ Gender distinctions trace back to the Aryan tradition of recognizing descent through the male line.
  - ❧ Women had no public authority.
  - ❧ Women could only inherit land if there were no male heirs.
  - ❧ Women could not preside over family religious rituals.
  - ❧ Women received almost no formal education
  - ❧ The Lawbook of Manu – proper duty of women was to bear children and maintain the home.
  - ❧ Practice of sati, the sacrifice of widows on their husband's funeral pyre (although never widely practiced), was a powerful illustration of a woman's devotion to her husband.

## Role of Women



- ❧ In the classical age, women's positions became even more subordinate to men.
- ❧ Women were viewed as weak in Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.
- ❧ And, the evidence that the patriarchy became more dominant is that the number of child brides betrothed to men in their twenties increased.
- ❧ Nevertheless, it is still highly probable that women dominated domestic issues.

## Origins of the Caste System



- ❧ The Aryans' social hierarchy, which rested on sharp, hereditary distinctions between individuals and groups according to their occupations and roles in society, served to maintain order and stability and became the foundation of the caste system.
- ❧ This system developed gradually as growing complexity and interaction with Dravidians (south Asian peoples') prompted the Aryans to shift from their traditionally simple hierarchy to a more complex system based on ancestry.
- ❧ Varna = the Sanskrit term for social distinctions (suggests they may have originally been based on skin color)

## The Four Main Varnas



- ☞ *Brahmins* = priests
- ☞ *Kshatriyas* = warriors and aristocrats
- ☞ *Vaishyas* = cultivators, artisans, and merchants
- ☞ *Shudras* = landless peasants and serfs

## The Caste System



- ☞ In classical times, it continued with its four major groups but a new social order began to emerge.
- ☞ As trade and industry took off, groups of merchants and craftsman formed guilds to set prices and provide aid to their members.
- ☞ The guilds functioned more as subcastes, or jati, with primary responsibility to all members of their occupation.
- ☞ Social stability and security became a function of local groups rather than governmental bodies.

## The Caste System



- ☞ In addition, tremendous wealth generated by increased manufacturing often gave more influence to members of the two lower castes than the two upper castes.
- ☞ During this time, the absolute power of castes over life in India became more solidified.

## Daily Life



- ☞ For the rest of slides, simply take notes in the remaining space on your page below your notes about the caste system.

## Daily Life



- Growth of trade strengthened the economy; Gupta Empire's cities reflected prosperity
- Use of money became more common; new group of bankers, moneylenders emerged
- Luxury, pleasure for urban rich; enjoyed music, poetry, art

## Simple Lives



- Most Gupta people led simple lives in small villages
- Majority of village dwellers were farmers
- Most villages self-sufficient, but trade between villages occurred
- People from different villages got together for religious festivals, other events

## Legal Codes/Social Structures



- Legal codes and castes defined people's roles
- *Laws of Manu*, compiled between 200 BCE - 200 CE
  - Defined proper behavior
  - Female child subject to father, female youth to husband
  - Men expected to treat women with respect
  - Abused women could leave

## The Gupta Golden Age



- ☞ Like the Han period in China, the Gupta period was a golden age of cultural and scientific achievements.
- ☞ Sanskrit Literature
  - Many great works created during Gupta period
  - One of greatest writers, **Kalidasa**
    - Poet, playwright
    - Wrote plays for royal court
    - *Sakuntala*, most famous
    - Play combines myth, humor, court life, lyric poetry

# The Gupta Golden Age



## ☞ **Panchatantra**

- Another popular work of period
- *Five Books*, collection of stories meant to teach lessons
- *"The good and bad of given schemes  
Wise thought must first reveal  
The stupid heron saw his chicks  
Provide a mongoose meal."*
- Warning to think before acting

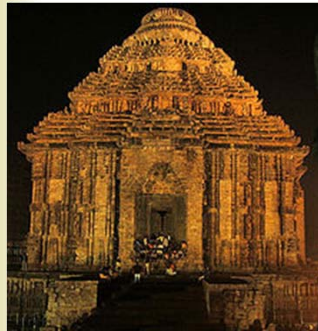
# The Gupta Golden Age



## ☞ **Religious Art**

- Much of the art and architecture of the Gupta period was religious
- Magnificent Hindu, Buddhist temples built across India
- Hindu temples: huge towers, covered with carvings
- Buddhist temples: included **stupas** (temples with domed roofs); built to house sacred items from life of Buddha; like Hindu temples, covered with detailed carvings

### Hindu Temples



### Buddhist Temples



## The Gupta Golden Age



### ☞ **Most Spectacular Architecture**

- Temples, monuments carved out of rock and cliff faces
- Most famous, cave temples at Ajanta and Ellora
- Intricately carved columns; include halls, rooms, windows



# The Gupta Golden Age



## ☞ *Great works of art*

- Paintings of the time often portray beautiful, graceful Indians wearing fine jewelry, stylish clothing
- Many of finest paintings found in Buddhist and Hindu temples

## ☞ *Temple paintings*

- Hindu artists decorated walls, entrances with *devas*, aspects of Brahman
- Buddhists covered plaster walls, ceilings with scenes from life of Buddha
- Some of finest examples of Buddhist art found in Ajanta cave temples

## ☞ *Statues*

- Made for temples
- Buddhist temples, statues of Buddha, kings
- Hindu temples, statues of Siva, Vishnu, other *devas*

# The Gupta Golden Age



## ☞ *Metallurgy*

- Ancient Indians pioneers of science of working with metals
- Indian iron valued for hardness, purity
- Gupta metalworkers built famous Iron Pillar, near Delhi
- Iron Pillar is resistant to rust
- Still being studied by scholars today

## ☞ *Mathematics*

- Gupta scholars most advanced mathematicians of their day
- Developed modern math system
- First to use concept, symbol of zero
- **Hindu-Arabic numerals**; created by Indians, brought to Europe by Arabs

# The Gupta Golden Age



## ☞ *Medical Science*

- Ancient Indians quite advanced
- Made medicines from plants
- Knew how to inject small amounts of viruses to protect against disease
- Doctors could perform surgery, repair broken bones, treat wounds

## ☞ *Astronomy*

- Indians identified seven planets in solar system
- Could predict eclipses of sun, moon
- **Aryabhata**, one of most famous Indian astronomers
  - Correctly argued that Earth rotates on axis, revolves around sun
  - Knew Earth was sphere, calculated circumference with remarkable accuracy