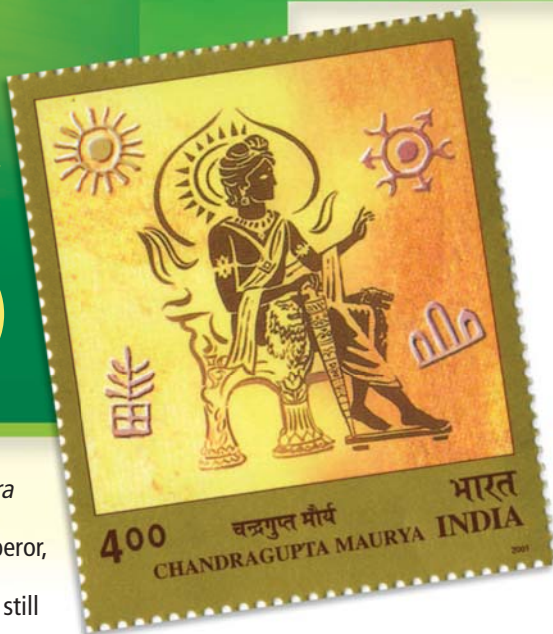


The *Arthashastra* was written for India's first emperor, Chandragupta Maurya, who is still honored today.



WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Behavior Fit For a King

“In the happiness of his subjects lies [a king’s] happiness, in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects.”

—*Arthashastra*, a Maurya handbook on governance

According to Hindu teachings, a ruler’s duties included maintaining peace and order by enforcing laws, resisting invaders, and encouraging economic growth. Those who successfully achieved those goals became some of India’s great rulers.

Focus Question In what ways did Maurya and Gupta rulers achieve peace and order for ancient India?

Powerful Empires of India

Objectives

- Analyze how Maurya rulers created a strong central government for their empire.
- Explore the kingdoms that arose across the Deccan.
- Explain why the period of Gupta rule in India is considered a golden age.
- Understand how family and village life shaped Indian society.

Terms, People, and Places

| | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Chandragupta Maurya | golden age |
| dissent | decimal system |
| Asoka | joint family |
| missionary | dowry |

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence Use a timeline to record the sequence of important events that occurred during the Maurya and Gupta periods.



Northern India was often a battleground where rival rajahs fought for control of the rich Ganges valley. But in 321 B.C., a young adventurer, **Chandragupta Maurya** (chun druh GUP tuh MOWR yuh), forged the first Indian empire.

The Maurya Empire Creates a Strong Government

We know about Chandragupta largely from reports written by Megasthenes (muh GAS thuh neez), a Greek ambassador to the Maurya court. He described the great Maurya capital at Pataliputra. It boasted schools and a library as well as splendid palaces and temples. An awed Megasthenes reported that the wall around the city “was crowned with 530 towers and had 64 gates.”

Chandragupta Forges an Empire Chandragupta first gained power in the Ganges valley. He then conquered northern India. His son and grandson later pushed south, adding much of the Deccan to their empire. From 321 B.C. to 185 B.C., the Maurya dynasty ruled over a vast, united empire.

Chandragupta maintained order through a well-organized bureaucracy. Royal officials supervised the building of roads and harbors to benefit trade. Other officials collected taxes and managed state-owned factories and shipyards. People sought justice in royal courts. Chandragupta’s rule was effective but harsh. A brutal secret police force reported on corruption, crime, and **dissent**—that is, ideas that opposed those of the government. Fearful of his many enemies, Chandragupta had specially trained women warriors guard his palace.

Asoka Rules by Moral Example The most honored Maurya emperor was Chandragupta's grandson, **Asoka** (uh SOH kuh). A few years after becoming emperor in 268 B.C., Asoka fought a long, bloody war to conquer the Deccan region of Kalinga. Then, horrified at the slaughter—more than 100,000 people are said to have died—Asoka turned his back on further conquests. He converted to Buddhism, rejected violence, and resolved to rule by moral example.

True to the Buddhist principle of respect for all life, Asoka stopped eating most meats and limited Hindu animal sacrifices. He sent **missionaries**, or people sent on a religious mission, to spread Buddhism across India and to Sri Lanka. By doing so, he paved the way for the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia. Although Asoka promoted Buddhism, he also preached tolerance for other religions.

Asoka had stone pillars set up across India, offering moral advice and promising a just government. Asoka's rule brought peace and prosperity and helped unite the diverse peoples within his empire. He built hospitals and Buddhist shrines. To aid transportation, he built roads and rest houses for travelers. "I have had banyan trees planted on the roads to give shade to people and animals," he noted. "I have planted mango groves, and I have had [wells] dug and shelters erected along the roads."

Division and Disunity Set In After Asoka's death, Maurya power declined. By 185 B.C., the unity of the Maurya empire was shattered as rival princes again battled for power across the Gangetic Plain.

In fact, during its long history, India has seldom remained united for long. In ancient times, as today, the subcontinent was home to many peoples. Although northern India shared a common civilization, fierce local rivalries kept it divided. Meanwhile, distance and cultural differences separated the peoples of the north and the peoples of the Deccan in the south. Adding to the turmoil, foreigners frequently pushed through mountain passes into northern India. The divided northern kingdoms often proved incapable of resisting these conquerors.

 **Checkpoint** How did Chandragupta organize Maurya government?

WITNESS HISTORY VIDEO

Watch *Asoka's Elephant Warriors* on the **Witness History Discovery School™** video program to learn more about Asoka's conquests and his conversion to Buddhism.



Maurya and Gupta Empires

Geography Interactive

For: Audio guided tour

Web Code: nap-0331



Map Skills Maurya and Gupta emperors were able to unite much of India under their rule.

1. Locate (a) Ganges River (b) Indus River (c) Tamil Kingdoms (d) Hindu Kush (e) Nalanda

2. Movement How did geography limit the northward expansion of both empires?


3. Analyze Information What region of the Indian subcontinent remained separate from both the Maurya and the Gupta empires?

Kingdoms Arise Across the Deccan

Like the Gangetic Plain, the Deccan was divided into many kingdoms after the decline of Maurya power. Each kingdom had its own capital with magnificent temples and bustling workshops. The peoples of the Deccan were Dravidians with very different languages and traditions from the peoples of the north. Over the centuries, Hindu and Buddhist traditions and Sanskrit writings drifted south and blended with local cultures. Deccan rulers generally tolerated all religions as well as the many foreigners who settled in their busy ports.

In the Tamil kingdoms, which occupied much of the southernmost part of India, trade was important. Tamil rulers improved harbors to support overseas trade. Tamil merchants sent spices, fine textiles, and other luxuries westward to eager buyers in the Roman empire. And as the Roman empire declined, Tamil trade with China increased.

The Tamil kingdoms left a rich and diverse literature. Tamil poets described fierce wars, heroic deeds, and festive occasions, along with the ordinary routines of peasant and city life.

 **Checkpoint** How do you think trade helped link the separate kingdoms of the Deccan?

The Guptas Bring About a Golden Age

Although many kingdoms flourished in the Deccan, the most powerful Indian states rose to its north. About 500 years after the Mauryas, the Gupta dynasty again united much of India. Gupta emperors organized a strong central government that promoted peace and prosperity. Under the Guptas, who ruled from A.D. 320 to about 540, India enjoyed a **golden age**, or period of great cultural achievement.

Peace and Prosperity Abound Gupta rule was probably looser than that of the Mauryas. Much power was left in the hands of individual villages and city governments elected by merchants and artisans. Faxian (FAH shyahn), a Chinese Buddhist monk who visited India in the 400s, reported on the mild nature of Gupta rule:

Primary Source

“The people are numerous and happy; . . . only those who cultivate the royal land have to pay [a portion of] the grain from it. . . . The king governs without . . . corporal punishments. Criminals are simply fined, lightly or heavily, according to the circumstances [of each case].”

—Faxian, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*

Trade and farming flourished across the Gupta empire. Farmers harvested crops of wheat, rice, and sugar cane. In cities, artisans produced cotton cloth, pottery, and metalware for local markets and for export to East Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The prosperity of Gupta India contributed to a flowering in the arts and learning.

Indians Make Advances in Learning Under Gupta rule, students were educated in religious schools. However, in Hindu and Buddhist centers, learning was not limited to religion and philosophy. The large Buddhist monastery-university at Nalanda, which attracted students from many parts of Asia, taught mathematics, medicine, physics, languages, literature, and other subjects.

GOLDEN AGE IN THE ARTS

Gupta artists may be best known for the magnificent sculpture that they carved on stone temples for the rajahs who sponsored an immense flowering in the arts. Such buildings were literally covered with carvings of mostly religious subjects. In addition, the golden age of the Gupta dynasty encompassed other arts, including painting, music, dance, and literature. Regarded as highly now as they were when created, the Gupta arts influenced artistic styles in later Indian societies as well as in many other parts of Asia.



◀ **Sculpture** Scenes from Indian religious myths abound in Gupta sculpture. This one depicts the Hindu god Vishnu (center top) rescuing from a serpent a man who was cursed into the form of an elephant.



▲ **Music** Musicians often entertained in Gupta courts. This terracotta tile shows a musician playing a lyre.

▼ **Painting** Famous Gupta murals decorate a series of cave temples carved into rock cliffs at Ajanta, in western India. The vibrant paintings, such as this one showing divine musicians, recall Buddhist stories and legends.

Dance Dancers have performed Indian classical dances since a few centuries before the Gupta era up through the present day. Each movement of the arms, hands, and eyes carries particular meaning. ▶



Thinking Critically

- Synthesize Information** What role did religion play in the arts of Gupta India? What role do you think the arts played in religion?
- Make Comparisons** Compare the subject matter of the three pieces of art shown here. What is similar? What is different?

Performed for Centuries

The Indian play *Shakuntala* has been re-enacted for centuries. In this scene from a modern-day performance, Shakuntala, her husband, and her son reunite at the end of the play, with gods watching over them. *What about this play might appeal to people throughout time?*



Indian advances in mathematics had a wide impact on the rest of the world. Gupta mathematicians devised the system of writing numbers that we use today. (However, these numerals are now called “Arabic” numerals because Arabs carried them from India to the Middle East and Europe.) Indian mathematicians also originated the concept of zero and developed the **decimal system** of numbers based on ten digits, which we still use today.

By Gupta times, Indian physicians were using herbs and other remedies to treat illness. Surgeons were skilled in setting bones and in simple surgery to repair injuries. It seems that doctors also began vaccinating people against smallpox about 1,000 years before this practice was used in Europe.

Expanding India’s Literature During Gupta times, many fine writers added to the rich heritage of Indian literature. They collected and recorded fables and folk tales in the Sanskrit language. In time, Indian fables were carried west to Persia, Egypt, and Greece.

The greatest Gupta poet and playwright was Kalidasa. His most famous play, *Shakuntala* (shahk oon TAH luh), tells the story of a king who marries the lovely orphan Shakuntala. Under an evil spell, the king forgets his bride. After many plot twists, he finally recovers his memory and is reunited with her.

The Gupta Empire Declines Eventually, Gupta India declined under the pressure of weak rulers, civil war, and foreign invaders. From central Asia came the White Huns, a nomadic people who overran the weakened Gupta empire, destroying its cities and trade. Once again, India split into many kingdoms. It would see no other great empire like those of the Mauryas or Guptas for almost 1,000 years.



Checkpoint

How did religion influence learning and the arts in Gupta India?

Family and Village Life Shape Indian Society

Most Indians knew nothing of the dazzling courts of the Mauryas or Guptas. The vast majority were peasants who lived in the villages that dotted the Indian landscape. In Indian society, everyday life revolved around the rules and duties associated with caste, family, and village.

Joint Family Structure The ideal family was a **joint family**, in which parents, children, and their offspring shared a common dwelling. Indian families were patriarchal—the father or oldest male in a family headed the household. Adult sons continued to live with their parents even after they married and had children. (A daughter would go to live with her husband and his family.) Often only the wealthy could afford such large households. Still, even when they did not share the same house, close ties linked brothers, uncles, cousins, and nephews.

A father was thought to have wisdom and experience, and he enjoyed great authority. Even so, his power was limited by sacred laws and tradition. Usually, he made decisions after consulting his wife and other family members. Property belonged to the whole family.

The Family Performs Certain Duties The family performed the essential function of training children in the traditions and duties of their castes. Thus family interests came before individual wishes. Children worked with older relatives in the fields or at a family trade. While still young, a daughter learned that as a wife she would be expected to serve and obey her husband and his family. A son learned the rituals to honor the family's ancestors. Such rites linked the living and the dead, deepening family bonds across the generations.

For parents, an important duty was arranging good marriages for their children, based on caste and family interests. Marriage customs varied. In northern India, for example, a bride's family commonly provided a **dowry**, or payment to the bridegroom, and financed the costly wedding festivities. After marriage, the daughter left her home and became part of her husband's family.

Role of Women Changes Over Time In early Aryan society, women seem to have enjoyed a higher status than in later times. Aryan women even composed a few Vedic hymns. However, attitudes and customs affecting women varied across India and changed over time. By late Gupta times, upper-class women were increasingly restricted to the home. When they went outside the home, they were supposed to cover themselves from head to foot. Lower-class women, however, labored in the fields or worked at spinning and weaving.

Women were thought to have shakti, a creative energy that men lacked. In marriage, a woman's shakti helped to make the husband complete. Still, shakti might also be a destructive force. A husband's duty was to channel his wife's energy in the proper direction. Women had few rights within the family and society. Their primary duties were to marry and raise children.

For a woman, rebirth into a higher existence was gained through devotion to her husband. Often, a widow was expected to join her dead husband on his funeral fire. In this way, a widow became a sati, or "virtuous woman." Some widows accepted this painful death as a noble duty that wiped out their own and their husbands' sins. Other women bitterly resisted the custom.

Vocabulary Builder

status—(STAT us) *n.* social standing or prestige



Primary Source

“With the monsoon, the tempo of life and death increases. Almost overnight grass begins to grow and leafless trees turn green. . . . While the monsoon lasts, the showers start and stop without warning. The clouds fly across, dropping their rain on the plains as it pleases them, till they reach the Himalayas. . . . Lightning and thunder never cease.”

—Khushwant Singh,

Train to Pakistan



A family escapes the floodwaters caused by the monsoons, which still bring both hardship and needed rain to people in India today.

Typical Village Structure Throughout India’s history, the village was at the heart of daily life. The size of villages varied, from a handful of people to hundreds of families. A typical village included a cluster of homes made of earth or stone. Beyond these dwellings stretched the fields, where farmers grew wheat, rice, cotton, sugar cane, or other crops according to region.

Each village included people of different castes who performed the necessary tasks of daily life. It ran its own affairs based on caste rules and traditions and faced little outside interference as long as it paid its share of taxes. A village headman and council made decisions. The council included the most respected people of the village. In early times, women served on the council. As Hindu law began to place greater restrictions on women, they were later excluded. The headman and council organized villagers to cooperate on vital local projects such as building irrigation systems and larger regional projects like building roads and temples.

Agriculture and Trade Shape Life In most of India, farming depended on the rains brought by the summer monsoons. Too much or too little

rain meant famine. Landlords owned much of the land. Farmers who worked the land had to give the owner part of the harvest. Often, what remained was hardly enough to feed the farmers and their families.

Villages usually produced most of the food and goods that they needed. However, they relied on trade for some essentials, such as salt and spices, as well as various manufactured goods. People regularly interacted with others from nearby villages while attending weddings, visiting relatives, or shopping at marketplaces. This continual interchange was crucial in the establishment of common ideas across the subcontinent.



Checkpoint Describe the structure of a typical Indian family.

SECTION 3 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice

Web Code: naa-0331

Terms, People, and Places

1. For each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

Note Taking

2. Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence

Use your completed timeline to answer the Focus Question: In what ways did Maurya and Gupta rulers achieve peace and order for ancient India?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Make Comparisons** Compare the approaches of Chandragupta and Asoka to ruling the Maurya empire.
4. **Analyze Information** Describe three achievements of the Gupta period that made it a golden age.
5. **Recognize Ideologies** How did the roles played by family and village in Indian life reveal the value of placing the needs of the community or group above those of the individual?

Writing About History

Quick Write: Gather Details On some essay tests, you may be asked to defend a position about a topic that you have studied. Before you write a response, you may find it useful to gather details that support your position and organize them in an outline. Gather details and write an outline defending your position on the following topic: What was the most important way in which religion influenced life in ancient India?

Asoka's Edicts

During his rule of Maurya India, Asoka converted to Buddhism, rejected violence, and resolved to rule by moral example. The messages he published on stone pillars across India pronounced moral edicts, or commands, and described the just actions of his government. The following are excerpts from several of the pillars.

All men are my children. Just as I seek the welfare and happiness of my own children in this world and the next, I seek the same things for all men.

It is difficult to achieve happiness, either in this world or in the next, except by intense love of Dharma, intense self-examination, intense obedience, intense fear [of sin], and intense enthusiasm. Yet as a result of my instruction, regard for Dharma and love of Dharma have increased day by day and will continue to increase. . . . For these are the rules: to govern according to Dharma, to administer justice according to Dharma, to advance the people's happiness according to Dharma, and to protect them according to Dharma.

The faiths of others all deserve to be honored for one reason or another. By honoring them, one exalts¹ one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others. By acting otherwise, one injures one's own faith and also does disservice to that of others. . . . Therefore concord² alone is commendable.

Whatever good deeds I have done the people have imitated, and they have followed them as a model. In doing so, they have progressed and will progress in obedience to parents and teachers, in respect for elders, in courtesy to priests and ascetics³, to the poor and distressed, and even to slaves and servants.

There is no gift that can equal the gift of Dharma. . . . If one acts in this way, one achieves . . . happiness in this world and infinite merit in the world to come.

I have commanded this edict on Dharma to be inscribed so that it may last forever and so that my descendants may conform to it.

1. **exalt** (eg ZAWLT) *vt.* raise up
2. **concord** (KAHN kawrd) *n.* friendly relations or peace
3. **ascetic** (uh SET ik) *n.* someone who chooses a life of self-denial



▲ Asoka



▲ Many of Asoka's pillars, such as this one in Vaishali, India, were erected in places where people often congregated.

Thinking Critically

1. **Identify Central Issues** What are the major themes in these edicts?
2. **Predict Consequences** In what ways do you think Asoka's edicts may have contributed to the peace and prosperity of the Maurya empire?