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**

- Tamil
- Guptas
- Empire
- patriarchy
- matriarchy
- Mauryan
- Empire
- Asoka
- religious
- toleration

### 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 *Arthasastra* (ah•thuh•SHAH•S•trueh). 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

To stay at peace,Seleucus sent an ambassador, Megasethenes (muhr•GAS•thuh•neez), to Chandragupta’s capital. 

**INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY**

Voices from the Past Audio

Power Presentations

Geography Transparencies

- GT7 India Under the Mauryan Dynasty, 250 B.C.

**TEKS** All students identify major causes and describe the major effects of . . .

**TEKS 1B, 3A**

- **ALL STUDENTS**
  - In-Depth Resources: Unit 2
    - Guided Reading, p. 51
  - History Makers: Chandra Gupta II, p. 65

- **Formal Assessment**
  - Section Quiz, p. 108

- **ENGLISH LEARNERS**
  - In-Depth Resources in Spanish
    - Guided Reading, p. 54

- **Spanish/English Guided Reading Workbook**
  - Section 1

- **INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY**

  - TEKS 1B identify major causes and describe the major effects of . . .
  - TEKS 1B, 3A describe the major political, religious/philosophical, and cultural influences of . . .

- **STUDENTS**
  - In-Depth Resources: Unit 2
    - Guided Reading, p. 51
  - Building Vocabulary, p. 54
  - Reteaching Activity, p. 68

- **Guided Reading Workbook**
  - Section 1

- **GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS**
  - In-Depth Resources: Unit 2
    - Primary Source: from *Arthasastra*, p. 58
    - Literature: from the *Panchatantra*, p. 62

- **TEKS 1B, 3A** identify major causes and describe the major effects of . . .

- **TEKS 1B, 3A** describe the major political, religious/philosophical, and cultural influences of . . .
Farmers don’t have to be in the army. They can plant crops without fear.

Nonviolence
The Buddhist principle of nonviolence, which Asoka applied in ruling the Mauryan Empire, has been used by other great leaders to create political and social change. Nonviolent resistance helped both Mohandas Gandhi gain India’s independence from Britain and Martin Luther King, Jr., win civil rights for African Americans. Ask students to name forms of nonviolent resistance (sit-ins, marches, fasts, strikes) and have them discuss why it is such a powerful force for change.

Asoka
Asoka has become one of India’s most celebrated leaders. Yet it wasn’t until 1837, when Asoka’s edicts were deciphered, that he became a well-known historical figure. In addition to information about his policies, the edicts reveal Asoka’s attitude toward his subjects. His paternalistic, or fatherly, feeling is shown by his referring to them as “my children.”

History Makers
Chandragupta Maurya and Asoka
Religion played an important role in the lives of both Chandragupta and his grandson Asoka. Only Asoka, however, incorporated religion as a guiding principle for his rule. Encourage interested students to research and compare Buddhism and Jainism and to present their findings to the class.

PRIMARY SOURCE

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

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

Connecting Ideas

Class Time 15 minutes
Task Analyzing a primary source
Purpose Clarify the speaker’s purpose
Instructions Read the quotation from Megasthenes with students. Have them state in their own words what Megasthenes is saying. For example, they might restate the first few sentences this way:

Farmers don’t have to be in the army. They can plant crops without fear.

Help students rewrite the entire passage. Call on volunteers to read the linguistically accommodated passage aloud. Allow beginning ELL students to echo or choral read as other students read aloud.

You may want to extend the lesson by asking students to discuss why Megasthenes didn’t mention anything about taxation of farmers in his statement. In fact, the farmers had to support the army. Help students understand that, since Megasthenes was an ambassador from Greece, he wanted to flatter Chandragupta and maintain his good opinion and peaceful relations with Greece.
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’duh) 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’uh) 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 (Guh’puh), 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 (sub’uh-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.

Literature During the Gupta Empire: The Panchatantra

Class Time 45 minutes

Task Reading and discussing an Indian fable

Purpose Understand the cultural evolution under the Guptas

Instructions Have students read the selection from the Panchatantra by Vishmusharmam on page 62 of the In-Depth Resources for Unit 2. Explain that a Brahman is a Hindu of the highest caste who traditionally served as a priest and that Panchatantra means “five chapters” in Sanskrit. Tell students that this fable was probably written during the development of the Gupta Empire. Make sure they understand that a fable is a story that teaches a lesson or moral. Ask them to give examples of other fables they are familiar with, such as the tales of Aesop. Suggest that they discuss The Lion-Makers among themselves and compare its moral with that of other fables. Why do they think fables are effective ways to teach a lesson? (They are usually short, humorous, and have simple and clearly defined characters.) You might want to suggest that students choose parts of the fable and enact it for the class.

Critical Thinking

• How might invaders and refugees have disrupted India? (Possible Answer: by increasing the population and bringing new customs)

Critical Thinking

• What effect did India’s climate have on its economy? (Droughts led to a water tax and necessitated labor in water-related technology)

In-Depth Resources: Unit 2

• History Makers: Chandra Gupta II, p. 65
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.

Hindu Musical Instruments  One of the most important instruments used in ancient and modern Hindu music is the sitar. A lute with a gourd-like body and movable strings, it may be related to the ancient harp, or vina. The sitar is often played with the drum, or tabla, and the tamboura, another type of lute. The sitar has been popularized in the West by the internationally known master Ravi Shankar and by the Beatles.


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 of the two Indian empires had the most significant political influence? 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.

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

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

Answers

1. Mauryan Empire, p. 189; Asoka, p. 190; religious toleration, p. 190; Tamil, p. 191; Gupta Empire, p. 191; patriarchal, p. 192; matriarchal, p. 192

2. Sample Answer: Mauryan—Unified and extended kingdom by force, required high taxes, promoted Buddhism and religious toleration; Gupta—Unified and extended kingdom by force, required high taxes, promoted culture. Promotion of religion and culture were most important.
3. He began following the path of nonviolence after realizing the devastation of war.
4. Inhabitants of the southern tip of India
5. It broke into small kingdoms, many of which were overrun by Central Asian invaders.
6. Possible Answers: Chandragupta Maurya—Tried to control crime; Asoka—Believed in nonviolence; Chandra Gupta II—Promoted flowering of culture.
7. Brought new languages and customs that both enriched and disrupted the empires
8. Possible Answer: Mauryan because of the policies of toleration and nonviolence

Rubric  Comments should
• clearly relate to the object or image.
• convey information about the ruler.
• be readily understandable to the reader.