

## Ancient Civilizations of Asia—India

### Section 4



#### MAIN IDEAS

1. The Mauryan Empire unified most of India.
2. Gupta rulers promoted Hinduism in their empire.

### Key Terms and Places

**mercenaries** hired soldiers

**edicts** laws

### Section Summary

#### MAURYAN EMPIRE UNIFIES INDIA

Under Aryan rule, India was divided into several states with no central leader. Then, during the 300s BC, the conquests of Alexander the Great brought much of India into his empire. An Indian military leader named Candragupta Maurya followed Alexander’s example and seized control of the entire northern part of India, using an army of **mercenaries**, or hired soldiers. The Mauryan Empire lasted for about 150 years.

Candragupta’s complex government included a huge army and a network of spies. He taxed the population heavily for the protection he offered. Eventually, Candragupta became a Jainist monk and gave up his throne to his son. His family continued to expand the Indian empire.

Candragupta’s grandson, Asoka, was the strongest ruler of the Mauryan dynasty. The empire thrived under his rule. But at last, tired of killing and war, Asoka converted to Buddhism. He sent Buddhist missionaries to other countries and devoted the rest of his rule to improving the lives of his people. He had workers build wells, tree-shaded roads, and rest houses, and raised large stone pillars carved with Buddhist **edicts**, or laws. When Asoka died, however, his sons struggled for power and foreign invaders threatened the country. The

**Who inspired Indian leader Candragupta Maurya to unify India for the first time?**

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**What is the relationship between Candragupta’s government and the heavy taxes?**

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**Asoka is sometimes regarded as proof that national security can coexist with peace. Do you think a leader like Asoka could be effective in the world today? Why or why not?**

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**Section 4, continued**

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Mauryan Empire fell in 184 BC, and India remained divided for about 500 years. The spread of Buddhism steadily increased, while Hinduism declined.

**GUPTA RULERS PROMOTE HINDUISM**

A new dynasty was established in India. During the 300s AD, the Gupta Dynasty once again rose to unite and build the prosperity of India. Not only did the Guptas control India’s military, they were devout Hindus and encouraged the revival of Hindu traditions and writings. The Guptas, however, also supported Jainism and Buddhism.

Indian civilization reached a high point under Candra Gupta II. He poured money and resources into strengthening the country’s borders, as well as promoting the arts, literature, and religion.

The Guptas believed the caste system supported stability. This was not good for women, whose role under the empire was very restricted. Women were expected to marry, in weddings arranged by their parents, and raise children. A woman had to obey her husband and had few rights.

The Gupta Dynasty lasted until fierce attacks by the Huns from Central Asia during the 400s drained the empire of its resources. India broke up once again into a patchwork of small states.

**Which dynasty ruled over a “golden age” of Indian civilization?**

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**Name two flaws, from a democratic point of view, in Indian civilization under the Guptas.**

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**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences** Asoka was strongly influenced by Buddhism. Candra Gupta II followed Hinduism. Write a short essay explaining which king you think was a better leader. How did their religion affect their rule? Keep in mind the situation of Indian society under both kings’ reign.