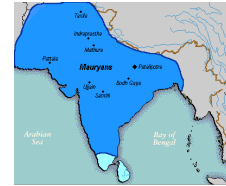


First Empires of India: The Mauryan and Gupta Dynasties

Geographic and climatic diversity made India difficult to unify, but by 400 BCE the first real Indian empire came about. This was made possible by the development of new religious ideas flexible enough to act as a unifying influence along with the rise of powerful military leaders. Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan Dynasty (325-299 BCE), largely existing in northeastern India. He expanded into the Indus River Valley and Punjab, where he conquered the foreign Macedonian generals who had been controlling the region after the death of Alexander the Great.

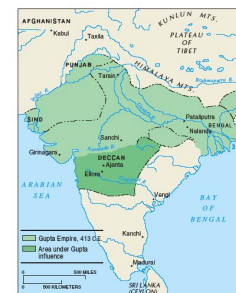


Chandragupta was known as a very strong and harsh general and ruler, with an army of 700,000 soldiers and 9,000 elephants. His political guidebook, the *Athashastra*, states: “government is the science of punishment.” However, he also built and maintained public works and infrastructure systems such as roads, bridges, and irrigation systems for the good of his subjects. He maintained order in a large, diverse empire with an efficient government and bureaucracy, sending out spies to report on disloyalty among local governing officials and taxing productive land and crops to raise funds.

Chandragupta’s son maintained the kingdom, but his grandson, Ashoka, is known as one of the most remarkable rulers in history (269-232 BCE). After expanding the empire in a bloody war he adopted Buddhism, an increasingly popular belief system in India. He embraced the concept of non-violence, renounced war, outlawed the killing of any animals not used or eaten, and allowed religious freedom throughout the empire. His use of Buddhism both helped unify the diverse empire as well as increase Buddhism’s popularity, which he directly promoted by sending out missionaries. He erected large pillars throughout the empire with edicts inscribed on them informing all of the new unified law code based on justice and tolerance, and continued his grandfather’s work in building public infrastructure projects as well as wells, hospitals, and rest houses. Unfortunately, Ashoka’s policy of non-violence possibly also undermined his army’s efficiency, which allowed revolts, invasions, and the fall of the Mauryan Empire by 185 BCE.



After the fall of the Mauryan Dynasty, India was fragmented and ruled in some states for the next 500 years. It did not regain a unified government until the rise of the Gupta dynasty in the fourth century. Chandra Gupta I and his son gained lands through marriage alliances and military conquest, forming a



centralized empire that lasted until attacks by the Huns and other invading peoples in the 500's.



The Gupta period (320-550 CE) is seen as a golden age of Indian culture. Indian astronomers came up with the idea of a round earth rotating on its axis. Artisans developed advanced metallurgy, erecting a 23-foot tall iron pillar, the largest piece of iron made for the next 1,000 years. Indian mathematicians developed such concepts as Pi, negative numbers, a decimal system with place value digits, zero, and quadratic equations. Unfortunately, these ideas remained the preserve of a select group of individuals. Not until the Arabs came into India and adapted these concepts for their own uses were they made generally available. This is reflected by our still referring to them as Arabic numerals.

In literature, India's two greatest epic poems, the *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*, which itself contains possibly the most revered work in Indian literature, the *Bhagavad Gita*, were written down in their final forms. India's greatest playwright, Kalidasa, flourished at this time, writing plays in Sanskrit that are performed to this day. Both Buddhist and the emerging Hindu art and architecture also thrived. Hindu and Buddhist temples were often modeled after caves, which Indians always considered sacred and were decorated with sculptures.



The Guptas became incredibly wealthy from foreign trade, buying and selling valuable goods along the Silk Road. These traveling merchants spread Indian culture, especially Buddhism, to East Asia where it flourished. In India, however, Buddhism's general popularity declined, as it was seen as too strict and difficult for the everyday person to follow and its monasteries became associated with wealth and corruption. Hinduism, meanwhile, was going through a revival of popular spiritualism that made it easier for people to practice without undergoing elaborate rituals mediated through the Brahmin priest caste. In the following centuries, Hinduism would replace Buddhism as the major religion in India.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Mauryan vs. Gupta Dynasties GRAPES Chart

	Mauryan Dynasty	Gupta Dynasty
Geography		
Religion		
Achievements		
Politics		
Economy		
Society		

Mauryan vs. Gupta GRAPES Chart – Answer Key

	Mauryan Dynasty	Gupta Dynasty
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chandragupta established in northeastern India - Ashoka expanded empire to most of Indian subcontinent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reunified empire in northern half of subcontinent
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hinduism dominant religion - Buddhism became increasingly popular, especially under rule of Ashoka - Ashoka sent out missionaries and promoted Buddhism in law code 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buddhism spread throughout Asian through trade during Gupta dynasty - Buddhism declined in India and popular Hinduism became more dominant by end of dynasty
Achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Efficient administration - Religious tolerance under Ashoka - Ashoka built up public infrastructure, roads, irrigation, free hospitals, rest houses, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - considered Golden Age of India - math and astronomy discoveries - Sanskrit plays, Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana written down - Religious art and temples built
Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chandragupta established first united Indian empire - Ashoka ran country through non-violent Buddhist policies (possibly also responsible for downfall of dynasty) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - marriage and conquest used to form empire - dynasty declines with invasions of Huns and other peoples
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - taxation system to pay for government, military, and public works - beginning of increased trade with surrounding countries of China and Persia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - very rich empire - lots of trade with outsiders via Silk Road - invention of banking - trade helped spread Indian culture, especially Buddhism
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dominated by caste system of Hinduism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dominated by caste system of Hinduism