

## The Maurya Empire

**Chandragupta Maurya**, India's first emperor, was a military genius who founded the Mauryan Civilization (321-185 B.C.). Chandragupta Maurya had a huge army and a brutal but efficient secret police. Fearful of his many enemies, he had specially trained women warriors guard his palace and servants taste his food to protect him from poisoning. Under Chandragupta Maurya, the government owned all the land and peasants paid taxes. Commerce and industry flourished. There were schools and libraries in the capital. Artisans manufactured jewelry, perfumes, fine fabrics, leather, pottery and clothing. His capital was the most prosperous city in the world at that time. Although the empire is known for their harsh system of government, there was one ruler who had a different method of ruling.



**ASOKA:** Chandragupta's grandson, **Asoka** took over. Asoka conquered the Deccan region in 270 BC, in which 100,000 died. The large number of deaths horrified Asoka, who refused any further conquests. He soon rejected violence, became a Buddhist and led by moral example. He erected stone pillars across India, stating his new intentions, on which he proclaimed: "All people are my children, and just as I desire for my children that they should obtain welfare and happiness, both in this world and in the next, so do I desire the same for all people." *"Whoever honors his own religion and disparages another man's, whether from blind loyalty or with the intention of showing his own religion in a favorable light, does his own religion the greatest possible harm. Respect other teachings. It is the wish of the king that members of all religions should be learned and should teach virtue."*

He then built roads, rest houses for travelers and hospitals. Asoka also sent male & female missionaries to spread Buddhism throughout India, although also preaching religious tolerance for other religions. Asoka unified the people of India, but the empire declined after his death due to power struggles and foreign invaders.

Despite this turmoil, India became a significant center for trade. By 100 BC, Indian textiles, gems, incense and spices were in great demand. These goods reached Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Due to the size and diversity of India it was very difficult to unite, however, about 500 years later another dynasty was successful in creating an empire...

## The Gupta Dynasty

The next great Indian empire was the Gupta dynasty (320-550 AD). The Guptas unified northern India and ruled over a prosperous country with law and justice, scientific advances and achievements in the arts. This is considered the Golden Era for its peace and prosperity.

City governments were elected by local merchants and artisans, leaving much power in the hands of individual villages. The Guptas established hospitals for the poor. Trade and farming flourished. Farmers harvested wheat, rice and sugar cane. Artisans produced cotton cloth, pottery and metalware for local markets and export. During this time building, painting and literature flourished. He gave up warfare and concentrated on the arts and peace. Taxation was light. Serious crime was rare. Folk tales and songs were written about the popular ruler. Legend spread that he gave pearls to the poor to share the wealth. Arabic numerals were created with the concept of zero, and the decimal system based on the number 10. Gupta doctors used herbs to cure sick people. They performed plastic surgery and vaccinated people against small pox. They built magnificent temples and **stupas**, dome-shaped shrines. Life in Gupta was depicted in huge wall paintings, called **murals**. The Gupta Empire lasted for 200 years, and then it declined.

