

Name:

Date:



Classical India

Fill out the spaces and put your section on the timeline.

Time period	Summary of events	Difference from ancient civilizations?
Mauryan Empire Years:		
Post-Mauryan period Years:		
Gupta Dynasty Years:		
Post-Gupta period Years:		



Classical India

The Emergence of Kingdoms and Empires

By about the 7th century BC territories combined and grew, giving rise to larger kingdoms that stretched from what is now Afghanistan to what is now the state of Bihār. Cities became important during this time, and, shortly thereafter, systems of writing developed. Reform schools of Hinduism emerged, challenging the orthodox practices of the Vedic tradition and presenting alternative religious world views. Two of those schools developed into separate religions: Buddhism and Jainism.

1. The Mauryan Empire

Chandragupta Maurya was the first ruler of the Mauryan dynasty in the ancient Indian kingdom of Magadha. After taking the throne in about 321 BC, he expanded the territory of his kingdom to the southwest.

According to traditional accounts, Chandragupta then abdicated to become a monk. This painting shows Chandragupta receiving a morning salute from his bodyguard of women soldiers. He died about 286 BC.

Buddhism originated in India in the 6th century BC. A period of royal patronage began with the conversion of the Indian ruler Asoka in the 3rd century. This Buddhist temple, known as the Great Stupa, was constructed between the 3rd century BC and the early 1st century AD.

By the 6th century BC, Indian civilization was firmly centered at the eastern end of the Gangetic Plain (in the area of present-day Bihār), and certain kings became increasingly powerful. In the 6th century BC the Kingdom of Magadha conquered and absorbed neighboring kingdoms, giving rise to India's first empire. At the head of the Magadha state was a hereditary monarch in charge of a centralized administration. The state regularly collected revenues and was protected by a standing army. This empire continued to expand, extending in the 4th century BC into central India and as far as the eastern coast.

Mauryan king Asoka, whose empire encompassed most of the Indian subcontinent in the 3rd century BC, was renowned for his promotion of Buddhism and for his humane and tolerant rule. This article by Indian professor Romila Thapar discusses what scholars have learned about the history of the ancient Mauryan empire through the multilingual inscriptions left across India by Asoka and his government.

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As political power shifted east, the area of the upper Indus became a frontier where local kings were confronted by an expanding Persian empire. These invaders had conquered the land up to the Indus River near the end of the 6th century BC. In 326 BC, after fighting the Persians and the tribes to the west of the Indus, Alexander the Great traveled to the Beās River, just east of what is now Lahore, Pakistan. Fearing the powerful and well-equipped kingdoms that lay farther east, Alexander's army revolted, forcing him to turn back from India. What was left after his death in Babylon in 323 BC were the Hellenistic states of what is now Afghanistan; these states later had a profound influence on the art of India.

Chandragupta Maurya, the first king of the Mauryan dynasty, succeeded the throne in Magadha in about 321 BC. In 305 BC Chandragupta defeated the ruler of a Hellenistic kingdom on the plains of Punjab and extended what became the Mauryan Empire into Afghanistan and Baluchistan to the southwest. Chandragupta was assisted by Kautilya, his chief minister. The empire stretched from the Ganges Delta in the east, south into the Deccan, and west to include Gujarāt. It was further extended by Ashoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, to include all of India (including what is now Pakistan and much of what is now Afghanistan) except the far southern tip and the lands to the east of the Brahmaputra River. The Mauryan Empire featured a complex administrative structure, with the emperor as the head of a developed bureaucracy of central and local government.

After a bloody campaign against Kalinga in what is now Orissa state in 261 BC, Ashoka became disillusioned with warfare and eventually embraced Buddhism and nonviolence. Although Buddhism was not made the

state religion, and although Ashoka tolerated all religions within his realm, he sent missionaries far and wide to spread the Buddhist message of righteousness and humanitarianism. His son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitta converted the people of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and other missionaries were sent to Southeast Asia and probably into Central Asia as well. He also sent cultural missions to the west, including Syria, Egypt, and Greece. Ashoka built shrines and monasteries and had rocks and beautifully carved pillars inscribed with Buddhist teachings. (The lion capital of one of these pillars is now the state emblem of India.)

2. The Post-Mauryan Kingdoms and Empires

Indian Dynasties and Rulers

Only major dynasties and the most important rulers are included. The dates given for dynasties and rulers cover periods of their importance.

The Mauryan Empire rapidly disintegrated after Ashoka's death in 232 BC. In its aftermath, invaders fought for outlying territories in the north, while regional monarchies gained power in the south. The Mauryas' original territorial core on the Gangetic Plain was defended by the Sunga dynasty, which had consolidated its power by about 185 BC. The Sungas reigned over extensive lands and were the most powerful of the north-central kingdoms. Their dynasty lasted about a century, and was succeeded by the Kanvas, whose shrunken kingdom was defeated in 28 BC by the Andhra dynasty, invading from their homeland in the south.

The invasions of northern India came in several waves from Central Asia. Indo-Greeks conquered the northwestern portion of the empire in about 180 BC. Shortly thereafter, Menander, an Indo-Greek king, conquered much of the remainder of northern India. By the 1st century BC, the Shakas of Central Asia had brought numerous tribes in western India under their control. In south and central India, the Andhra dynasty (also known as Satavahana) ruled for almost four centuries. The Maha-Meghavahanas held territories in the southeast, while the Chola and the Pandya dynasties controlled the far south.

The first centuries AD saw the rise and triumph of another major power from Central Asia: the Kushānas. At its height, this empire stretched from Afghanistan to possibly as far as eastern Uttar Pradesh, and included Gujarāt and central India. Although it is unclear whether he converted himself, the Kushāna ruler Kanishka (who ruled in the late 1st century AD) is considered one of the great patrons of Buddhism. He is credited with convening the fourth council on Buddhism that marked the development of Mahayana Buddhism.

Between the decline of the Mauryas and the emergence of the Gupta Empire, India was at the center of a global economy, with social and religious links to all of Asia. Trade with the Roman Empire brought an abundance of Roman gold coins to India beginning in the 1st century AD. These coins were melted down and reminted by the Kushānas. Buddhism spread through Central Asia and Southeast Asia toward China. Indian art, particularly sculpture, achieved greatness in this era.

The Classical Age

3. The Gupta Dynasty

Gupta Empire

Emerging around AD 320, the Gupta Empire united much of northern India. It reached its height in the late 300s, and flourished for nearly a century. Hinduism became a more coherent and codified religion because of the efforts of the Gupta kings, who fused elements of Buddhism with Hinduism and emphasized the theistic nature of the religion, particularly the role of the god Vishnu.

The Kushāna dynasty collapsed in the 3rd century, leaving the Ganges River valley in the hands of several small kingdoms. In about AD 320, Chandragupta I, the ruler of the Magadha kingdom, united the many peoples of the valley and founded the Gupta dynasty. For about the next century his son Samudragupta and grandson Chandragupta II brought much of India under unified control for the first time since the Mauryan

Empire, controlling the lands from the eastern hills of Afghanistan to Assam, north of the Narmada River. Samudragupta conducted a successful military expedition as far south as the city of Kānchipuram, but probably did not directly rule in those regions. The Guptas directly ruled a core area that included the east central Gangetic Plain, located in present-day Uttar Pradesh and Bihār. In addition, they conquered other areas, reinstating the kings who were then obliged to pay tribute and attend the imperial court. Both Chandragupta I and Chandragupta II made strategic marriages that extended the empire, the latter with the successors to the Andhra dynasty in central India. A policy of religious tolerance and patronage of all religions also helped consolidate their rule.

The time of the Gupta Empire has been called the golden age of Indian civilization because of the period's great flowering of literature, art, and science. In literature, the dramas and poems of Kalidasa, who wrote the romantic drama *Sakuntala*, are especially well known. The Puranas, a collection of myths and philosophical dialogues, was begun around AD 400. These remain today the basic source for the tales of the gods who are now central to Hinduism: Vishnu, Shiva, and the goddess Shakti. During this era India's level of science and technology was probably higher than that of Europe. The use of the zero and the decimal system of numerals, later transmitted to Europe by the Arabs, was a major contribution to modern mathematics.

4. Regional Kingdoms after AD 500

The arts flourished in the regional kingdoms that arose in India after 500 AD. Among the architectural achievements of the period were a number of temples sculpted out of solid rock at Ellora in Mahārāshtra State. The Kailasa Temple, shown here, is considered the most spectacular of the cave temples.

The Gupta Empire faced many challengers. Until about AD 500 it was able to defeat internal and external enemies. In the mid-5th century the White Huns, a nomadic people from Central Asia, moved onto the Indian plains and were defeated by the Guptas. The Huns invaded India again in AD 510, when Gupta strength was in decline. This time the invasion was successful, forcing the Guptas into the northeastern part of their former empire. The Huns established their rule over much of northwest India, extending to present-day western Uttar Pradesh. However, they in turn were defeated by enemies to the west a short time later. The Buddhist monasteries and the cities of this region never recovered from the onslaught of the Huns. By AD 550 both the Hun kingdom and the Gupta Empire had fallen.

The absence of these centralizing powers left India to be ruled by regional kingdoms. These kingdoms often warred with each other and had fairly short spans of power. They developed a political system that emphasized the tribute of smaller chieftains.