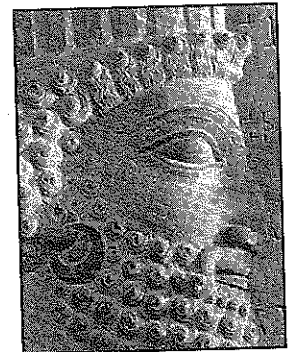


## THE MAURYAN EMPIRE (321 B.C.–232 C.E.)

Shortly after Alexander the Great invaded northwestern India saw the rise of one of the greatest Hindu empires. King **Chandragupta** challenged the Greeks and established the powerful **Mauryan Empire** in India, which stretched from Afghanistan to the Ganges. His grandson **Asoka** (269 B.C.–232 B.C.) was the next great ruler of India.

Asoka began his reign by fighting a series of wars to enlarge his empire. After eight years of nearly constant warfare, Asoka grew horrified by the bloodshed of battle. This prompted him to renounce violence and to convert to Buddhism.

Asoka decided to win his people's loyalty by acts of kindness and by promoting their welfare and happiness. He decreed that people of all religions should live peacefully with one another. He improved roads, built hospitals, and sent teachers throughout the empire to encourage education. To promote Buddhism, he built Buddhist shrines throughout India and sent missionaries to other lands. Despite his successes, after Asoka's death the Mauryan Empire began to fall apart.

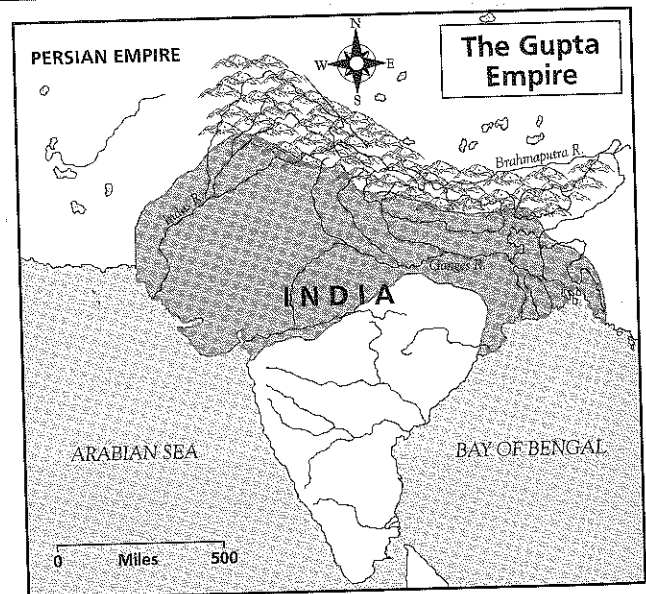


Emperor Asoka

## THE GUPTA EMPIRE (320 A.D.–535 A.D.)

In 320 A.D., a new ruling family, the **Gupta**, emerged. They united the territory around the Ganges River. Gupta emperors encouraged peace, prosperity, and trade with foreign lands, especially China.

The two centuries of Gupta rule are sometimes referred to as the "**Golden Age of Hindu Culture**." A "golden age" is a period marked by peace and stability accompanied by strides in the arts and literature. Gupta emperors built universities and supported learning, the arts, and literature. Gupta artists painted colorful murals, while writers composed poems and plays written in Sanskrit.



Indian scholars excelled at the sciences and mathematics. Gupta mathematicians developed the concept of zero, the idea of infinity, and the decimal system. Arabic numerals, used throughout the world today, were first developed in India during this period. Gupta astronomers put forward the idea that the Earth was not flat, but round and rotated on its own axis. These astronomers calculated the solar year and the shape and movement of bodies in space with remarkable accuracy. In the field of medicine, Gupta physicians set bones and performed minor skin grafts. This prosperous period drew to a close around 500 A.D. The Huns, a warlike tribe from Central Asia, invaded northeastern India, causing the Gupta Empire to disintegrate into smaller states.