

Mauryan Empire

Directions: Examine the readings and documents below and answer the questions that follow.

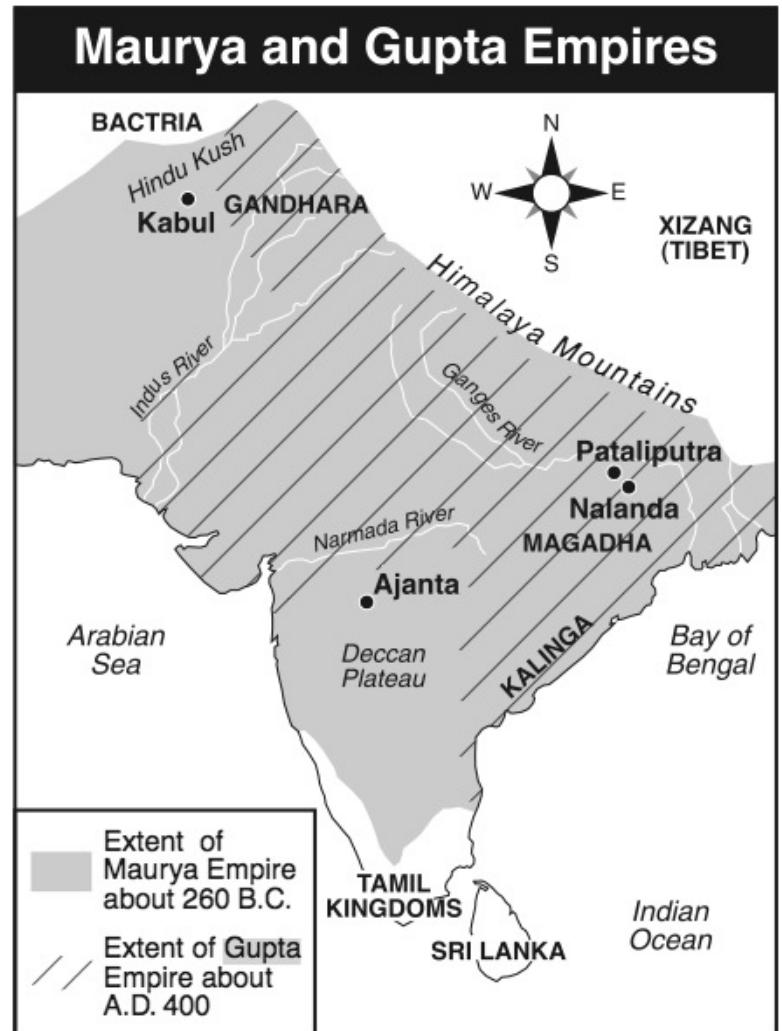
SPOILER ALERT! India was divided into small kingdoms and states until the rise of the great **Mauryan Empire**, which ruled most of the subcontinent. The most famous Mauryan emperor was Ashoka the Great, a convert to Buddhism who created a peaceful and organized empire. In the centuries after the Mauryan decline, several small empires emerged in different parts of India. The most influential of these classical empires was the **Gupta Empire**, which made many advances in science, math, literature, art, and medicine.

By the 300s BC a number of small kingdoms existed across India. Each kingdom had its own ruler, and no central authority united them. One of the dominant kingdoms was **Magadha**, located near the Ganges River in northeastern India (see map). There, a strong leader named **Chandragupta Maurya** (shuhn-druh-goop-tuh mour-yuh) gained control and began conquering the surrounding kingdoms in the northeast.

In 326 BC the military conqueror **Alexander the Great** marched his army into northwest India. In a fierce battle, Alexander’s army defeated a powerful Indian force equipped with 200 war elephants. Alexander and his forces did not remain in India long, though. His battle-weary soldiers wanted to return to their homes, and Alexander and his army soon left India.

With the kingdoms of northwest India weakened from fighting Alexander, Chandragupta Maurya took the opportunity to conquer northwest India as well. He built up an immense army that included some 600,000 soldiers as well as thousands of chariots and war elephants. By 303 BC the Mauryan Empire controlled northern India as well as much of what is now Afghanistan.

According to the quote from the Arthashastra, a Maurya handbook on governance, how should a ruler govern his people?



Arthashastra

“In the happiness of his subjects lies [a king’s] happiness, in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects.”

Why was Chandragupta Maurya such a successful conqueror and ruler? Give more than one reason.

The Mauryan Emperor **Ashoka** was a mighty conqueror. Under his rule, military campaigns expanded the empire that his grandfather had founded. Then in the 260s BC, Ashoka invaded Kalinga, a tribal kingdom on India's eastern coast. The invasion was a massive slaughter. According to reports from the time, some 100,000 people died during the fighting, and more died later from their wounds. In addition, Mauryan soldiers forced their way into Kalinga homes and took more than 150,000 people captive. According to Ashoka, the brutality of the invasion appalled (shocked) him and filled him with remorse (regret).

In response, Ashoka converted to Buddhism and became a strong supporter of ahimsa (nonviolence). He made it part of his duty as emperor to spread Buddhist teachings. Across his empire, he had messages inscribed on stone pillars and rocks urging people to engage in "right conduct." These messages and rules were known as the **Edicts of Ashoka**. To spread his message to foreign lands, he sent out Buddhist missionaries. He even went on a 256-day pilgrimage to Buddhist holy sites. In this way, a man who began life as a mighty conqueror ended up becoming famous for promoting peace.

"It is difficult to achieve happiness, either in this world or in the next, except by intense love of Dharma, intense self-examination, intense obedience, intense fear [of sin], and intense enthusiasm. Yet as a result of my instruction, regard for Dharma and love of Dharma have increased day by day and will continue to increase. . . . For these are the rules: to govern according to Dharma, to administer justice according to Dharma, to advance the people's happiness according to Dharma, and to protect them according to Dharma."

"The Beloved of the Gods [Ashoka] . . . honors members of all sects [religions] . . . Whoever honors his own sect and disparages [speaks poorly about] another man's . . . does his own sect the greatest possible harm. Concord [harmony] is best, with each [person] hearing and respecting the other's teachings."

— Edicts of Ashoka

How did Ashoka's experience change his outlook on life?

How did his Buddhist beliefs shape the way he ruled?

How were other religions treated?

Examine the map of the Maurya and Gupta Empires. How did geography limit the growth of both empires?