

Indian Empires

Gupta Empire



Maurya Empire

Gupta Empire

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.



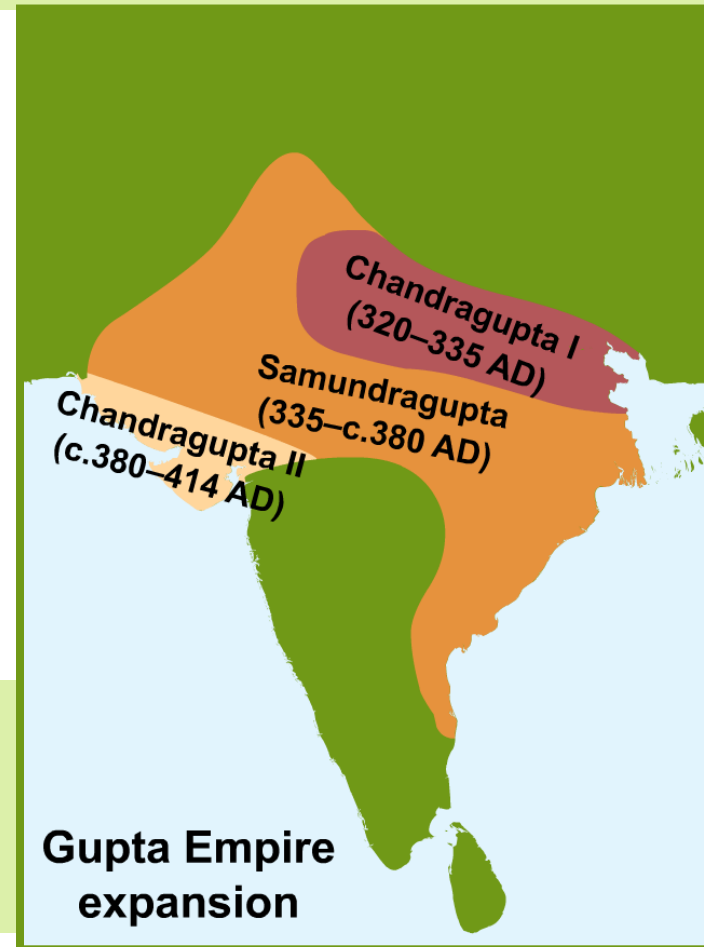


The Gupta Empire flourished between 320–500 AD and is known as the Golden Age of India, largely due to its cultural advancements in architecture, sculpture and painting.

At its peak, the empire covered most of North India.

The classical **Sanskrit** poet, Kalidasa, noted that the Guptas conquered twenty one kingdoms during their rule.

This map shows the areas conquered by the different rulers of the Gupta Empire.

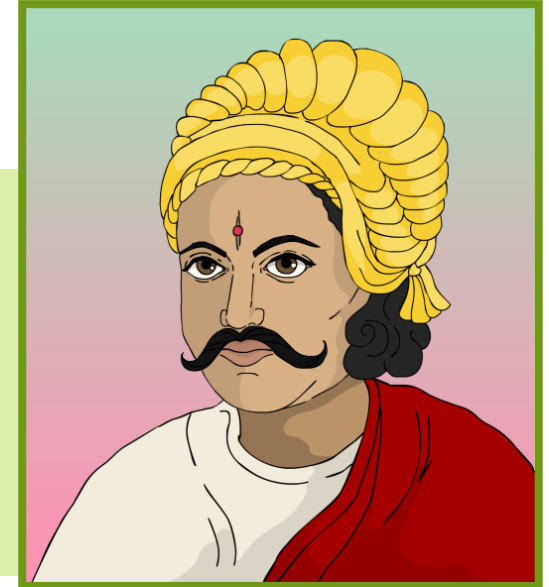




The Gupta Empire is thought to have begun in 320 AD when Chandragupta I (unrelated to the earlier Mauryan ruler) ascended the throne and married a Licchavian princess.

The **Licchavia** tribe was the leading power in northern India. Their power enabled Chandragupta I to expand his own empire across this region.

His marriage was so important to his rule that coins were made portraying him and his wife. Some historians believe that the empire began the day of his marriage rather than his accession to the throne.



Chandragupta I was referred to as **Maharajadhiraja**, (king of kings), for his large accumulation of territory. He conquered and united several Indian kingdoms.



Chandragupta I's son, **Samudragupta**, further expanded the empire by conquering land in southern and eastern India. He ruled from 335–c.380 AD.

Upon gaining the throne he immediately attacked and conquered neighboring kingdoms such as Padmavati.

Renowned as a great military leader, there is no record of him ever losing a battle.



Why do you think this is?

Chandragupta II, son of Samudragupta, reigned from c.380–415 AD. He expanded the empire by marrying his daughter **Prabhavati** to an influential king.

Prabhavati married Rudrasena II, king of the **Vakatakas**. They controlled an area of central India that bordered the Gupta Empire.

Rudrasena II died young, which left Prabhavati to rule the Vakatakas with the support of Chandragupta II.



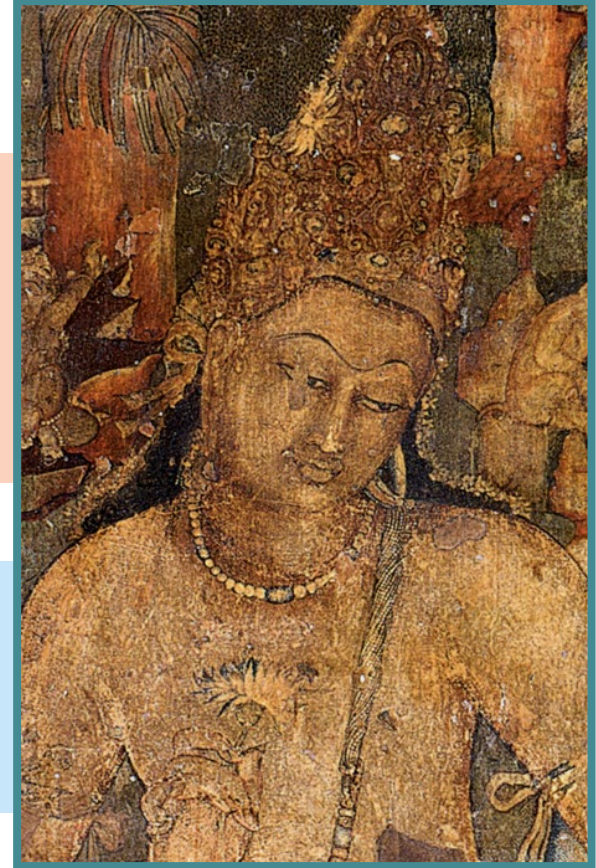
The tactical location of the Vakatakas allowed Chandragupta II to attack and defeat the Western Satraps, a political enemy.



The wealth of the Gupta empire led to advancements in the arts and sciences.

Stone artwork was perfected and painting became popular. The **Ajanta caves** illustrate the artistic skills that developed under the golden age.

Early Gupta scientists observed solar eclipses and realised that the moon orbited the Earth.



This image from the Ajanta caves shows a painting of a **bodhisattva**.



Architecture in the Gupta Empire combined previous styles with new techniques and influences.

Temples underwent massive architectural development and were made of brick and stone for the first time.

These new structures became the artistic standard under the Gupta Empire and India's later rulers. Remains of ancient temples show that architectural structures such as arches and domes were popular during this period.



**Architecture was centered around religion.
Why do you think this was?**



Bhitargaon Temple

The Bhitargaon temple is a Hindu shrine with a roof and a high Shikhara (rising tower). It was built in the 400s AD, during the Gupta period.

This photo, taken in 1875, shows the temple before its restoration. It illustrates its impressive size and intricacy. Vaulted arches were used for the first time in India.



What other features of this temple make it so impressive?



Literature flourished during the Gupta Empire. **Kalidasa** became known as the greatest Sanskrit playwright. Also, two Sanskrit epic poems were written: the **Mahabharata** and the **Ramayana**, which are still read today.

The Mahabharata is a history of the **Kurukshetra War** and uses stories to explain religious philosophy in accessible ways. The Ramayana tells the story of Rama, an **avatar** of the Hindu god **Vishnu**.



This image shows a manuscript illustration of the Battle of Kurukshetra.

Groundbreaking advancements in math and science took place during the Gupta period.

Mathematical concepts such as zero and the decimal system were invented.

Aryabhata, a mathematician and astronomer, wrote about the irregularity of Pi in the 500s AD. This concept was not discovered until 1761 in Europe. He also noted the Earth's orbit around the sun.

The **Kama Sutra**, a Sanskrit text on human sexual behaviour, was written by the philosopher Vatsyayana during this period.



This photo shows a modern statue of Aryabhata

The Gupta Empire followed Hinduism, but also allowed people to practice Jainism and Buddhism.

Practices developed during the Gupta period have influenced modern traditions.

For example, the worship of specific deities in purpose-built temples developed during this period. Deities such as Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti inspired the creation of Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism, now three of the most popular Hindu denominations.



This image shows an interpretation of the god Vishnu.

Women in the Gupta Empire were considered inferior to men. They did not have the right to own or inherit property, read sacred texts or study religious practices.

Women's lives were initially controlled by their fathers, followed by their husbands and sons once they married. Girls could be married as young as seven to ensure virginity.

A widowed woman could be forced to practice **sati**, the act of throwing herself on her husband's funeral pyre, or otherwise face rejection from society.

Education was encouraged throughout the Gupta Empire, but only some women were allowed to study the arts.

Why might people have believed the practice of sati was necessary?



The government in the Gupta Empire was less bureaucratic than in the Maurya Empire.

States were autonomous and different religious practices were allowed. This is known as **religious tolerance**.

Legal disputes were often settled at a village level. City-state cases could be taken to the king depending on their importance. Local men were encouraged to join in the managing of village laws.

The emperor was advised by a council of around ten men when making political decisions. The council members were often Brahmin priests at the top of the **caste system**.



After the death of Chandragupta II in 415 AD, the Gupta Empire began to decline. This occurred for several reasons:

Foreign invasion: Skandagupta's rule was successful in defending a number of attacks from the Hunas and the Pushyamitras but at the cost of draining the economy.

Internal dissent: succession disputes occurred after the deaths of later kings. This weakened central authority.

Pacifism: later rulers were Buddhist and their belief in non-violence weakened the military. This left the empire exposed to attack and led to some territories asserting independence.



Why else might the empire have ended?

Keywords

