

# ANCIENT INDIA: GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY

The government and economics in ancient India developed over time. Nomadic groups organized and leaders emerged as they settled.

## INDUS

Not much is known about the governments of the Indus, India's earliest civilization. The organization and complexity of the cities, such as those excavated at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro suggest there was some sort of government. Leaders likely focused on securing the food supply since many supplies were needed to feed their large populations. Mohenjo-Daro bought food from nearby farmers and fisherman. Some sites studied showed no evidence of a king or queen. They seemed to have focused on sharing resources instead of having a single leader who controlled the wealth. The Indus economy was mainly agricultural. Livestock included cattle, goats, and sheep. Barley and wheat were the main crops. Trade was strong at the end of the Indus period. This included regions that were far away, such as Mesopotamia and other parts of the Middle East. Indus traders exchanged textiles and items, like beads and dice, for resources such as gemstones and tin.



## VEDIC

Indo-Aryans in the Vedic era focused on raising cattle. They transitioned to agriculture over time, cutting down trees in the forest around the Ganges River to farm the land. A sacred ancient Indian book called the *Rigveda* discusses the agricultural lifestyle, including how farmers used plows and harvested rain. Many Indo-Aryans settled in small tribal groups called *janas*. Each had a *rjan*, "chief," and *samiti* and a *sabha*, which were ruling councils. The *janas* often fought one another over property and livestock. The *janas* had grown into clearly marked *janapadas* by 800 BCE. These small kingdoms were led by a *raja*, or king, who protected their people and cattle from enemies. The *raja* relied on two people. The *senani* led the army and the *purohita* was a priest who acted like a shaman or medicine man by treating illnesses with spells. Tribes soon grew to become *mahajanapadas*, or "great kingdoms." Power shifted from the countryside to urban areas throughout ancient India. The Vedic civilization thrived from 1000 BCE to 600 BCE. This growth created additional jobs such as carpenters, goldsmiths, potters, and tanners. They made bows and chariots. India had 16 *mahajanapadas* by 600 BCE. Magadha became the most powerful. Other forms of government also existed in the Vedic era. Many small republics stood alongside the *mahajanapadas*. Kings ruled the republics, but their governments had elements of democracy too. This included executive, judicial, and legislative branches. The king had final say in the decisions of all branches as the supreme ruler. He also appointed the officials who held positions in the administration of the kingdom. The foreign Persian civilization invaded the area in 550 BCE. Macedonia's Alexander the Great took control two centuries later. He only stayed in India for two years though and the Mauryan Empire took control soon after.



## CHANDRAGUPTA

Chandragupta Maurya united India's many kingdoms into an empire almost spanning the entire subcontinent in 321 BCE. He also created a central government located in Pataliputra, the empire's capital. Chandragupta's system of government had levels. Each of the smallest, the villages, had a headman and a council that served as the local government. The next level, the district, consisted of groups of villages. Groups of districts were provinces. The government representatives at the province level were governors. The economy improved with the strengthening of the government structure by Chandragupta. The Mauryan Empire had a strong and active trade. Persia and Greece were international trading partners. Agriculture blossomed during this period. Chandragupta's thriving empire included currency made from silver coins. Around 297 BCE, Chandragupta gave up his position and his son, Bindusura, became emperor. He expanded and strengthened the empire before passing the empire to his own son, Ashoka, who was even more successful.

## ASHOKA

Ashoka, a skilled military leader, extended the Mauryan Empire even farther. He defeated the country of Kalinga, which is part of the northeastern India state of Orissa today. The bloody battle changed Ashoka though. He was troubled by the pain he and his army caused. They had killed thousands in their conquest. Ashoka gave up fighting and converted to Buddhism. He shared his newfound beliefs in a number of edicts that were carved in locations throughout the kingdom to inspire his people. Ashoka ordered the construction of many monasteries and stupas, a type of shrine. Ashoka's governing reflected his faith. He changed laws that his father and grandfather had made. Legislation was less harsh and forced labor was banned. Ashoka restricted the killing of animals by prohibiting hunting and limiting slaughter to only what was necessary. He strengthened connections with Asian and European countries. Ashoka's reign was peaceful, stable, and prosperous. His devotion to his beliefs made their mark on India's history and is known as Ashoka the Great.



## GUPTAS

The Mauryan Empire declined following Ashoka's death in 232 BCE. A succession of dynasties followed. India moved away from the unified glory of its time under Ashoka's thoughtful rule as time passed. This changed with the emergence of the Gupta Empire in 320 CE though. Chandragupta I was a local chief in the Magadha kingdom. His power grew after his marriage to the princess of a tribe that controlled much of northeastern India that added the Ganges Valley to his territory. His son, Samudragupta, was a great military man who expanded the empire through many battles. He established the capital of his empire in Pataliputra, just as Chandragupta Maurya, had done several centuries before. Samudragupta was interested in more than fighting. He also enjoyed music and poetry. He was a Hindu but tolerated other religions. The Gupta Empire continued to grow after his death in 380 CE. Chandragupta II took power and became the most successful of the Guptas. He continued to expand the empire, relying on military action and arranged marriages between his children and those of other leaders. He gained control over trade routes, strengthening the economy. Gold coins with images of the Guptas were minted. Chandragupta II's government was strong. It included a second capital at Ujjain. The Guptas supported cultural development, including the arts, education, and medicine. They worked to improve the lives of their people by building free hospitals, monasteries, and universities. Culture flourished during the Gupta Empire, which is why it is called a golden age of India's history by many scholars.

# GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY

**IDENTIFY:** Use the word bank to identify each description.

edicts	Gupta	Rigveda	Greece
janas	wheat	Chandragupta	Ashoka
Pataliputra	stupas	Ganges	Magadha

	1. Chandragupta made this the capital of the Mauryan Empire
	2. Small tribal groups that formed during the Vedic era
	3. Indo-Aryans cut down trees around this river to farm the land
	4. A main crop of the Indus
	5. This was the most powerful mahajanapada during the Vedic era
	6. United India's many kingdoms into the Mauryan Empire
	7. Leader of the Mauryan Empire who spread Buddhism
	8. Sacred Indian book that discussed the agricultural lifestyle during the Vedic era
	9. International trading partner during the Mauryan Empire
	10. This Indian empire is considered a golden age by scholars
	11. Ashoka ordered the construction of these shrines
	12. Ashoka had these carved into locations throughout his kingdom to inspire his people

**MULTIPLE CHOICE:** Choose the best answer.

13. What was the role of the senani during the Vedic era?

- A. They were the ruling councils.
- B. They led the army.
- C. They acted as a medicine man.
- D. They made bows and chariots.

14. Which event changed how Ashoka ruled?

- A. He converted to Hinduism after learning more about the religion from foreign invaders.
- B. He traveled to Persia and Greece and learned more about their government.
- C. He gave up fighting and converted to Buddhism after defeating Kalinga.
- D. He learned about democracy from the ancient Greeks and gave his people more rights.

15. Which best describes the Gupta Empire?

- A. Chaotic
- B. Prosperous
- C. Declining
- D. Dangerous

16. Which level of Chandragupta's system of government was the largest?

- A. Districts
- B. Villages
- C. Provinces
- D. Capitals

17. Which is true about Samudragupta?

- A. He was the son of Chandragupta.
- B. He was a weak ruler.
- C. He was a Buddhist.
- D. He was interested in music and poetry.

18. What type of currency was used in trade during the Mauryan and Gupta Empires?

- A. Coins
- B. Paper money
- C. Beads
- D. Dice