Name: _____ Date: _____

**Study Guide#18: The Beginnings of Imperial India**

**Powerful Kings and Outside Invasions.** By the early 500s B.C., 16 kingdoms had developed in northern India. Eventually, by 540 B.C., the kingdom of Magadha dominated the rest. Magadha remained powerful until the 300s B.C.

Northwest India suffered outside invasions. The Persians ruled the area for 200 years, until the invasion of Alexander the Great ended Persian control in 326 B.C. However, Alexander was forced to retreat by low troop morale.

**The Mauryan Empire.** After Alexander the Great withdrew, Chandragupta Maurya took power in northern India, establishing the first Indian Empire. His empire brought strong centralized rule to northern India. He signed a treaty with Greece in 305 B.C., fixing their borders and establishing diplomatic relations. In 301 B.C. he become a Jainist monk and passed power to his son, Bindusara.

Bindusara's son Asoka continued his grandfather's expansionist policy until the brutality of the campaign against Kalinga forced him to reject the idea of conquest. Attracted to the Buddha's emphasis on nonviolence, he converted to Buddhism and sent missionaries to Ceylon and Burma. Asoka tried to unite his people by improving living conditions. He also preached religious tolerance and nonviolence. After his death the Mauryan Empire declined and collapsed.

**Invasions and Cultural Development.** After the collapse of the Mauryan Empire, northwest India was again open to invasion. The most important of the invading peoples were the Kushans, who established a vast empire an expanded overseas trade. As the Kushans encouraged contact with Central Asia Buddhism spread and incorporated elements of other religions. However, by the A.D. 300s Buddhism had lost influence in Indian life, becoming an increasingly monastic religion.

In part, Buddhism's decline can be attributed to the rise of Hinduism, which grew as political instability led people to turn to the old Vedic religion of the Brahmins. To give people a greater sense of security, Brahmins began to compile Hindu legal codes, such as the Law Code of Manu, which described the gods and what was required of people. People also began to seek security through a closer connection to the gods, developing intensely devotional worship practices.

**The Gupta Empire.** The rise of the Hindu Gupta family, beginning with Chandra Gupta I in A.D. 320, also led to the decline of Buddhism. The Guptas united all of northern India. Under their rule society prospered. Eventually, decentralized power and invading nomads weakened the empire, which fell around A.D. 550.

**The Flowering of Hindu Culture.** The Gupta Period was India's classical age, with great advances in art, literature, and science. Many of the arts combined religious images with scenes of everyday life. The Gupta period was also a time of great literary achievement, producing a book of fables called the

*Panchatantr*a. Indian scientists and mathematicians developed numerals and the decimal system. They also calculated pi (p) and discovered that the earth was a sphere rotating on an axis. In medicine, physicians pioneered the practice of creating a sterile environment for surgery and used vaccinations.

**Gupta Society.** Under the Guptas, Hindu society developed hundreds of *jati* with many fixed relationships between them. At the top level of Gupta society, the Brahmins divided life into four stages: student, householder, hermit, and wanderer, ending with an effort to attain *moksha,* or liberation from the wheel of reincarnation. Women had less freedom than men. They were supposed to worship their husbands as gods, and widows often practiced **suttee**, or suicide by fire, after their husbands died. Gupta rule did little to change life for Indians in the lower groups.

Answer the questions below in your own words and in complete sentence. Highlight your evidence.

**1.** Which kingdom dominated northern India until the 300s B.C.?

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**2.** What factors led to India's disunity in the years before the Mauryan Empire?

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**3.** How did Buddhism change after the fall of the Mauryan Empire?

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**4.** What factors led to the rise of Hinduism after the Mauryan Empire collapsed?

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**5.** What advances did scientists make under the Gupta empire?

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**6.** Why do some observers call the Gupta period India's classical age?

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