**Classical Civilization: India--the Gupta Dynasty**

I. Gupta’s (320 – 550 CE)

A. Maurayans controlled more territory than the Guptas

B. After Ashoka (ruled 269 – 232 BCE) died the empire started to fall apart & local rulers take over until Gupta’s took over

--Kushans & others from the north moved in; the Gupta’s arose from 320 - 550 CE

--Gupta’s influence was greater than the Mauryan w/ 2 centuries of Gupta rule giving Northern India pol. stability

(Classical Age of Indian Civ.) until the Huns started invading in 450 CE & the final blow coming in 535 CE

--Gupta’s power came from occupying trade routes, key agricultural areas, & controlled iron deposits; the gov’t. had

a loose control on outlying areas giving local leaders more control as long as they gave tribute

--military used steel bows, elephants, catapults

--Mauryans were Buddhists but the Gupta’s Hindu & reacted against Buddhist power—resurgence in Hindu power

C. When the Gupta’s fell, civilization continued—religion, complex social/family network, a loose pol. structure, main

religion, large peasant class, close knit villages, pol. power w/ landowners, patriarchic, while China had the same except several religions & a strong political structure & less trade

--Raided from the north by the Hunas (the White Huns or Hephthalites, a nomadic Mongolian tribe) due to horses

(expensive in India)

--last Gupta king died in 550 CE

II. Social:

A. Lower castes had few rights

B. Patriarchical--Family life stressed hierarchy w/ males dominating

--Some believed that women could only move up caste if they were only a man first

--Arranged marriages w/ dowries—girls were drawn into families w/ no voice

--some examples of swayamvara (grooms assemble & one is picked) or by asura viviha (marriage by abduction)

--sati was in its infancy & female rights decreased; a widow who refuse sati was not allowed to remarry, shunned

socially, & could not earn a living

--women were expected to follow similar rules as the 3 submissions in China

C. Families were very important & were economic units

D. Social structure became institutionalized

--Varnas (Brahmin, Kshastriya, Vaishaya, Shudra, Harijans); Castes (3,000 w/ over 25,000 sub-castes); Jatis –

grew up w/ families & jobs

III. Economic

A. Indian steel was the best in the world at the time

B. First to manufacture cotton cloth, calico, cashmere

C. Far more emphasis on trade than in China although there was caravan trade w/ China

D. created guilds (sreni) to establish pricing/quality controls, distribute products, bankers—allowed trade to flourish

IV. Political Institutions:

A. Political rule was never as solid as in China nor like during the Mauryans, but more like Greece in its fragmentation

--Did not create a bureaucracy; allowed local rulers to have power (feudalism?)

--Gupta’s had personal representatives sent to each area

B. No single language was imposed—Guptas spoke Sanskrit

C. Guptas did spread a uniform law code

V. Religion/Culture (Dharma or Moral Path)

A. Hinduism was the cement for society—would outlast the Hun invasions

--Was a way to maintain continuity & cohesiveness up to this day

--Hinduism had no major founder & many paths

--Adapted to the needs of groups & to change to circumstances; very tolerant

--Gods of nature were molded into moral terms (gods)

--Varna was the god of the sky but became the guardian of right/wrong

--As time passed Hinduism became more ritualistic

B. in 563 BCE Siddhartha Gautama challenged Hinduism by denying the caste system

--nirvana= no desire through self control

--denied power of the priests since anyone could achieve enlightenment

--Brahmins & Guptas pushed out Buddhism

C. Indian religion did not stress politics

--Caste system provided a pseudo-political order

--As time passed it became more complex—couldn’t move up but down while alive

--Upward mobility w/in the caste was possible

--In the beginning it allowed the victors & the defeated to live together

--Outright slavery was avoided & tolerance was strengthened

D. Art, Writing

--wall paintings of Ajanta Cave represent the various lives of the Buddha

--48 caves w/ a variety of paintings showing daily life

--rock temple near Elephanta contains an 18’ statue of Shiva

--Kalidasa—most famous poetry & drama writer

VI. Intellectual

A. Centered around story collections such as the Panchatantra w/ many of the Indian classics achieved their final form

B. Science--Great leaps in astronomy—calculated the rotation of the earth; identified 7 planets; calculated the length of

the solar year; sterilization used during surgery & cleaning wounds

C. smallpox serum developed using cowpox serum

D. Indian numbering system is what we use—invented concept of zero & decimal system, negative numbers, square roots