

**Student Handout #1 – Gupta Golden Age Note Tracker**

In each column, take notes on examples and/or evidence that help answer the driving questions below:

	The Golden Age of the Gupta <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How was it Golden?</li> <li>• Why do we consider this a Golden Age?</li> </ul>	To what extent was it a “Golden Age”? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did it affect everyone in India?</li> <li>• Did everyone have the same chance to benefit from the advances of the Golden Age? Why or why not?</li> </ul>
Video on the Gupta		
Overview Article (Handout #2)		
PPT slides on advances		

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Reading on Faxian		
Reading and slides on Caste		
Slides on gender and patriarchy		

## Student Handout #2

### Historical Overview of the Gupta Empire and Summarization Exercise:

*Read the entire article first. Then go back and summarize each paragraph in the spaces provided. Each paragraph should be summarized in 20 words or less. Finally, combine your four section summaries into one paragraph of no more than 30 words.*

1) The Gupta Empire was one of the largest, most prosperous societies in the history of India. From 320 CE to around 550 CE, they ruled over much of what is India today, and some areas that border modern India. Before the Gupta Empire, India was controlled by several smaller kingdoms that divided this large territory up. Many of these kingdoms were becoming wealthy as a result of trade with Han China and the Roman Empire. Cotton and spices that were grown in India were valued in Rome and China, so trade was very profitable.

Paragraph 1 Summary:

2) The Gupta family came into power in one region of India, Magadha, and from there they expanded their reach through both military conquests and also by family alliances and marriages with the children of rulers from other areas. Over time, they gained control of more and more of what is now India. Chandragupta I, who was the third Gupta to hold power, is known for finally gaining control over the whole area in 320 CE and established the complete Gupta Empire.

Paragraph 2 Summary:

3) Chandragupta and other Gupta rulers were different from the rulers of China and Rome. They allowed some of the kingdoms they brought into the empire to remain somewhat independent, allowing their leaders to still control much of what happened in their land. This meant that they spent less time on military conquest and could put their energy into supporting religious, artistic, and scientific advances. Villages were protected from bandits by small military squads, but there was no large scale focus on war once peace was established. During the rule of the Guptas, great works of literature were produced along with important art and architecture and many advances in science and math. Hinduism also gained strength and influence in India with the support of the Gupta. As Hinduism grew, Buddhism lost some support there even as it expanded eastward. The caste system of social hierarchy was further developed under the Gupta as well and Indian law was shaped in this time. This was a time of peace and prosperity in India.

Paragraph 3 Summary:

4) In approximately 450 CE, the Hephthalites – a nomadic group from central Asia – began to clash frequently with the Gupta and moved into the northwest part of the empire. Having been at peace for so long, the Gupta were not prepared to defend their empire, and the Hephthalites began an invasion around 480. Within 40 years, the Hephthalites had pushed back the Gupta and taken over most of their territory. By the middle of the next century, the Gupta Empire was completely gone, and no Gupta leader was in place anywhere in India by 720 CE.

Paragraph 4 Summary:

Article Summary:

# Faxian (337? CE-442? CE)

A Chinese Buddhist Monk Travels to Gupta India



Faxian (fa-hsien) was a Chinese Buddhist monk who travelled to India from China during the height of the Gupta Empire. He stayed in India for about six years (405-411 CE) and wrote about his observations and impressions of India. His writings even detail aspects of social class, the government system, and social welfare programs. Historians rely on Faxian's writings in *A Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms* as

an account to help us understand various elements of life in the Gupta Empire.

**Turn and talk** with a partner about the questions below and then move on to the next page where you will find excerpts from Faxian's writings. As you read those selections, try to figure out what we can learn about Gupta India.

## Turn & Talk:

Faxian was an outsider to India. Why might it be **valuable** to use an outsider's point of view in trying to understand a particular society?

What might be some of the **limitations** of an outsider's account of a society or culture?

Why do you think that a Chinese Buddhist Monk wanted to travel to India at this time in history? What do you think he was looking for?

## Interpreting Faxian's Writings

Read each excerpt from *A Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms* with a partner. Then on a separate sheet of paper jot down your ideas about what we can learn about the Golden Age of Gupta India from each of Faxian's writings (excerpts 1-4). Write down one big idea for each excerpt. What made the age "golden" and was it golden for all? After reviewing these ideas with your teacher, you will add them to your note tracker for this lesson.

### Excerpt 1:

*It is a time of peace. The people are numerous and happy. They do not have to register with the government, or answer to any judges and their rules. Only those who farm the royal land have to pay the royal government part of what they earn from the land. If they want to leave their land, they go, if they want to stay on their land they stay.*

### Excerpt 2:

*The king governs without beheadings or other harsh bodily unfit punishments. Criminals are simply fined, lightly or heavily, according to the facts of each case. Even in cases of repeated rebellion against the government, the culprits only have their right hands cut off... All through the entire country the people do not kill any living creature, nor drink alcoholic beverages or eat any onions or garlic...*

### Excerpt 3:

*As it is a powerful and prosperous civilization, the people who dwell in the cities and towns are rich and prosperous, and compete with one another in doing acts of charity and good deeds... The heads of the Vaishya (caste with the merchants, artisans, and cultivators) families set up centers in the cities to give out alms and medicines. All the poor and poverty-stricken people in the country go to those centers- orphans, widowers and childless men, maimed people and cripples, and all those who are sick.*

*At these centers, they receive every kind of help, and doctors examine their illnesses. They get the food and medicines that they need, and are made to feel comfortable and rested. When they are better, they go away by their own choice.*

### Excerpt 4:

*I can also testify to the fact that the arts, including the Buddhist arts, is flourishing under the tolerant open society of the Guptas. This also shows that the leader supports learning and the arts.*