**The Gupta Empire in India.**

The story of the rise and fall of the Gupta empire is in many ways different from that of the Han and Roman empires. The Gupta empire was much younger, dating to about 320 CE. Before the rise of the Gupta, India had been governed by a number of kingdoms. All of them prospered from the enormous amount of trade that flowed through the region. Both the Han and Roman empires were major consumers of Indian cotton and spices. Chandra Gupta, the Gupta founder, built his empire by conquering some neighboring kingdoms and establishing alliances with others. Unlike the Romans or Han, who favored central control, the Guptas gained the loyalty and support of regional kingdoms by allowing them to retain a great deal of autonomy.

So long as the empire remained united and good order was maintained by regional authorities, Gupta rulers were content to devote most of their energy to promoting learning, religion, and art. This they did in spectacular fashion, resulting in what has been termed a “golden age” for India. Gupta scholars made remarkable achievements in many fields including literature, astronomy, and mathematics. Important discoveries were passed along the trade routes to be adopted other civilizations. One example is the use of Hindi (later termed Arabic) numbers, place value, and the decimal system. Gupta rulers also enthusiastically supported a revival of Hinduism, which had earlier suffered a decline owing to the rise of Buddhism. During Gupta rule the caste system was codified in greater detail, forming the basis for Indian law for centuries to come. For over two hundred years, India enjoyed a high level of organization, peace, and prosperity.

While Han China and Rome struggled to deal with attacks by pastoral nomads, the formidable Hindu Kush and Himalaya Mountains gave the Gupta some protection. The powerful Sassanian empire in Persia also provided something of a buffer against nomad invasion. But such defenses could not last forever. Central Asian nomads, sometimes referred to as “White Huns” or Hephthalites, invaded and occupied Bactria (Afghanistan) during the fourth century. In 455 CE, they crossed the Hindu Kush and Invaded Gupta territory. Gupta forces at first repulsed the Hephthalites. But defense was costly, and attrition of resources eventually left the Gupta at the mercy of the invaders, who finally rampaged across northern India. With Gupta authority fading, India broke up once more into regional kingdoms. By 550 the empire was gone. So, in contrast to the complicated stories of disintegration that explain the fall of the Han and Roman empires, the Gupta story is relatively simple.

By the time the Gupta succumbed to the Hephthalites, trade and communication had already begun to falter across Afroeurasia. Trade became more limited and dangerous to conduct. Warfare became more local. Where once great empires tied many diverse peoples together, there stood fragmented, regional kingdoms whose outlook was far more geographically and culturally limited. China, with its common script and traditions was eventually able to regain unity under the Sui. India would not see unification again until the Mughals arose in the early sixteenth century. The Mediterranean basin never regained unity.