

The Gupta and Other Contemporary Rulers

After the Kushanas, the Guptas were the most important dynasty. The Gupta period has been described as the Golden Age of Indian history. They maintained an empire over Northern, Central and Western part of India from the early 4th to the late 6th century CE.

The Gupta Empire

The Gupta age is also called as the *Classical age*. It refers to the period when most of North India was united under the Gupta Empire. It was perhaps, sometimes late in the obscure period of the AD 3rd century that the Gupta dynasty emerged.

After the decline of Kushanas in Northern India and the Satavahanas in the Deccan in the AD 3rd century, a period of political disintegration paved the way for the emergence of several minor powers and new ruling families. In this situation, the Guptas laid the foundation of an empire. Their origin determined with certainty but likely, that they began their career as subordinates of one of the branches of the later Kushanas and acquired political control in the region of Magadha in the second decade of the AD 4th century.

The first two Guptas, Srigupta and Ghatotkacha, were rulers of no consequence and are known only through respectful mention by Chandragupta I, the real founder of the Gupta empire.

Not much is known about the early days of the Gupta empire. Through different sources we come to know about the genesis of Gupta empire, the travel diaries and writings of Buddhist monks which are the most trustworthy sources of information we have about those days.

The travelogues of Fa Hien (AD 337-422), Hiuen Tsang (AD 602-664) and Yijing (I Tsing, AD 635-713) prove to be invaluable in this respect.

The Gupta Empire during the rule of Srigupta (AD 240-280) comprised only Magadha and probably a part of Bengal too. Srigupta ruled from Pataliputra, close to modern day Patna. Srigupta was succeeded to the throne by his son Ghatotkacha (AD 280-319).

Chandragupta-I (AD 319-335)

The first Gupta ruler was Chandragupta I, son of Ghatotkacha. By marrying a Lichchhavi Princess Kumaradevi, he sought to gain in prestige, though Vaishali does not appear to have been a part of his kingdom. His rule remained confined to Magadha and parts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh (Saketa and Prayaga). He took the title of *Maharajadhiraja*, and his accession in about AD 319-320 marked the beginning of *Gupta era*. The territorial heads ruling over various parts of India could not counter the superior armed forces of Chandragupta I and had to surrender before him. It is conjectured that at the end of his reign, the boundary of the Gupta Empire already extended to Allahabad.

Samudragupta (AD 335-375)

Chandragupta I was succeeded by his son Samudragupta probably in AD 335. Samudragupta became the ruler after subduing his rival Kacha, an obscure prince of the dynasty. His conquests are known from a lengthy eulogy composed by his court-poet Harisena and inscribed on an Ashokan pillar at Allahabad. This account contains a long list of states, kings and tribes which were conquered and brought under various degrees of subjugation.

The list can be divided into four categories

1. The first category includes the twelve states of Dakshinapatha with the names of their kings who were captured and then liberated and reinstated. They were Kosala, Mahakantara, Kaurata, Pishtapura, Kottura, Erandapalli, Kanchi, Avamukta, Vengi, Palakka, Devrashtra and Kushthalpura.
2. The second category includes the names of the eight kings of Aryavarta, who were violently exterminated; prominent of them were Rudradwa, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, etc.
3. The third category consists of the rulers of the forest states (Atavirarajyas) who were reduced to servitude and the chief of the five Border States (Pratyantas) and nine tribal republics that were forced to pay all kinds of taxes. The five Border States were Samtata (South-East Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Nepala (Nepal), Davaka (Assam) and Kartipura (Kashmir). The nine tribal republics were the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Arjunayanas, Sarakinakas, Kavas and Kharaparikas.
4. The fourth category consists of the Daivaputra Shahi Shahanushahi (Kushanas), the Saka, Murundas, the dwellers of Sinhala (Ceylon) and all the other islands who paid tribute to the King.

Harisena, the court poet of Samudragupta rightly describes him the hero of a hundred battles, and Vincent Smith calls him as the 'Napoleon of India'. But in spite of his preoccupation with political and military affairs, he cultivated music and poetry. Some of his gold coins represent him as playing on the lyre.

The Guptas were followers of the Brahmanical religion and Samudragupta performed the Asvamedha sacrifice. However, he fully maintained the tradition of religious toleration. According to a Chinese source, Meghavarman, the ruler of Sri Lanka was granted permission by Samudragupta to build a monastery at Bodha Gaya.

Chandragupta II (AD 380-415)

Samudragupta was succeeded by his younger son Chandragupta II. But, according to some scholars, Samudragupta who died shortly before AD 380 was succeeded by his elder son Ramagupta. The drama *Devichandraguptam* of Vishakhadatta suggests that Ramagupta suddenly attacked by the Sakas, made peace with them on condition that his queen Dhruvadevi was to be surrendered to the Saka chief.

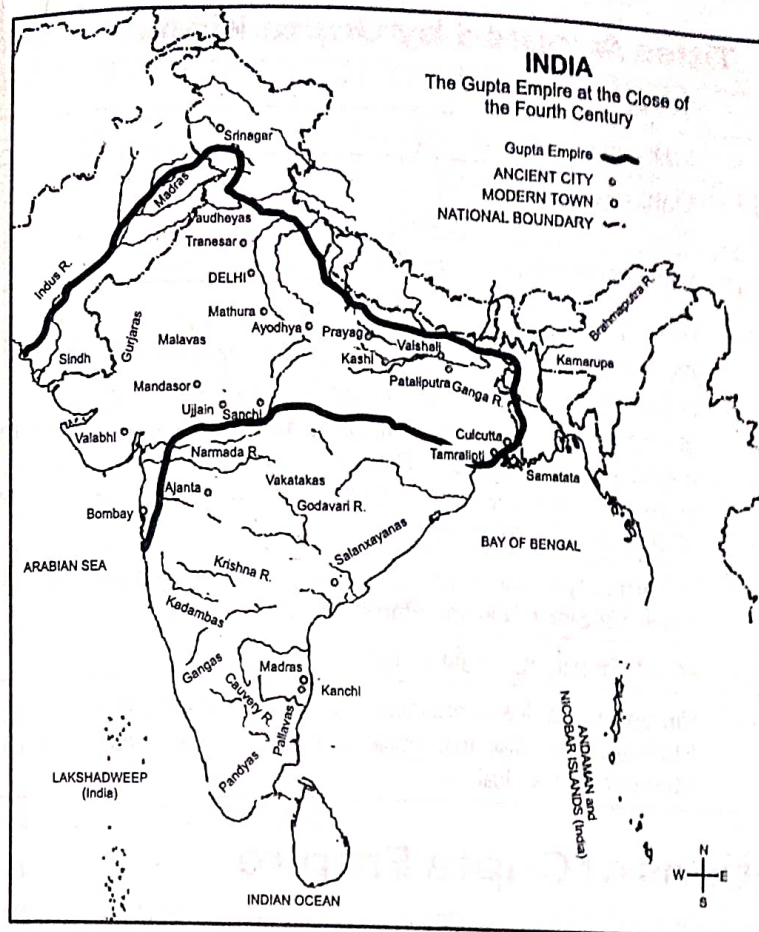
This infuriated his younger brother Chandragupta, who went himself in the disguise of the queen to the Saka chief and killed him. Then he murdered his brother Ramagupta and married the queen. The official records of the Guptas, however do not refer to Ramagupta and trace the succession directly from Samudragupta to Chandragupta II.

Extension of Empire's Territorial Boundary

The reign of Chandragupta II saw the high watermark of the Gupta Empire. He extended the limits of the empire by marriage alliance and conquests, Chandragupta II married Kubernaga of the Naga family. The Nagas were a powerful ruling clan and this matrimonial alliance helped the Gupta ruler in expanding his empire.

The marriage of his daughter Prabhavati by his wife Kubernaga with the Vakataka king Rudrasena II helped him to establish his political influence in the Deccan. With his great influence in this area, Chandragupta II conquered Western Malwa and Gujarat from the Saka Kshatrap, Rudrasimha III.

The conquest gave Chandragupta II the Western sea coast famous for trade and commerce. This contributed to the prosperity of Malwa, and its chief city Ujjain. Ujjain seems to have been made the second capital of Chandragupta II.



Sources of Information about Chandragupta II

'King Chandra' whose exploits have been mentioned in the Mehrauli Iron Pillar inscription, which is located in the Qutub-Minar complex in Delhi is identified by many scholars with Chandragupta II. According to this inscription, Chandra crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (identified with Bactria). It also mentions Chandragupta's victory over enemies from Vanga (Bengal).

Chandragupta II adopted the title of 'Vikramaditya' which had been first used by an Ujjain ruler in 57 BC as a mark of victory over the Saka Kshatrapas of Western India. An important incident which took place during his reign was the visit of Fa-Hien, a Chinese pilgrim, who came to India in search of Buddhist texts. The court of Chandragupta II at Ujjain was adorned by numerous scholars including Kalidasa and Amarasingha.

Observations of Fa-Hien

Fa-Hien was a Chinese Buddhist monk, who visited India during, AD 399-414 in the reign of Chandragupta II. He wrote his experiences in his book named *Fu-Kwo-Ki*. He never mentioned the name of Chandragupta II, but his sketch of the social and economic condition of the middle kingdom is of great importance.

The people were numerous and happy and moved about freely without any restrictions. The character of the government was extremely mild. Most of the crimes were punished only by fines. Punishments were not severe and only for repeated rebellions, the right hand was cut off. The people were generally vegetarians and practiced non-violence.

The Chandalas were social outcastes and lived separately, hunted animals and ate meat. Buddhism according to him, flourished in Punjab, Bengal and Mathura. There were two large monasteries in Pataliputra, one for the Hinayana faith and the other for Mahayana faith.

He was impressed by the city of Pataliputra and the place of Ashoka. His account indicates the importance of seven precious substance for Buddhist worship, stupa-veneration, Jataka tales illustrated in the paintings of Dunhuang caves.

Kumaragupta I (AD 415-455)

Chandragupta II died about AD 413 and was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta who enjoyed a long reign of more than forty years. He performed the *Asvamedha* sacrifice, but we do not know of any military success achieved by him. He maintained intact the vast empire built up by his two predecessors.

Towards the close of his reign the empire was menaced by hordes of the Pushyamitras probably a tribe allied to the Hunas which were defeated by the crown prince Skandagupta.

Skandagupta (AD 455-467)

Skandagupta, who succeeded Kumaragupta I, was perhaps the last powerful Gupta monarch. To consolidate his position he had to fight the Pushyamitras, and the country faced Huna invasion from across the frontiers in the North-West. However, Skandagupta was successful in throwing the Hunas back. This heroic feat entitled him, like Chandragupta II, to assume the title of Vikramaditya, it appears that these wars adversely affected the economy of the empire, and the debased gold coin of Skandagupta bears testimony to this. Moreover, he appears to have been the last Gupta ruler to mint silver coins in Western India.

The Junagarh inscription of his reign tells us about the public works undertaken during his times. The Sudarsana lake (originally built during the Maurya times) burst due to excessive rains and in the early part of his rule his governor Parnadatta and his son Chakrapalita got it repaired. The last known date of Skandagupta is AD 467 from his silver coins.

Hunas

The dissolution of the Gupta empire coincides with the establishment of the Huna kingdom in North India as far as Eran in Madhya Pradesh.

Toramana

The first important Huna king was Toramana, who converted to Jainism. In AD 515, he was succeeded by his son, Mihirakula, who ruled from Sakala (Sialkot). He was a tyrant, an iconoclast and a persecutor of the Buddhists, but he was a devotee of Shiva who found the temple of Mihreshvara. He was defeated by Yashodharman of Malwa and by Narasimhagupta Baladitya of the Gupta dynasty.

Downfall of the Gupta Empire

After the demise of his father Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta I (AD 415-455) ruled over the vast empire with skill and ability. He was able to maintain peace and even fend off strong challenges from a tribe known as Pushyamitra. He was helped by his able son Skandagupta (AD 455-467) who was the last of the sovereign rulers of the Gupta dynasty. He also succeeded in preventing the invasion of the Hunas (Hephthalites). Skandagupta was a great scholar and wise ruler.

After Skandagupta's death the dynasty became embroiled with domestic conflicts. The rulers lacked the capabilities of the earlier emperors to rule over such a large kingdom. This resulted in a decline in law and order. They were continuously plagued by the attacks of the Hunas and other foreign powers.

This put a dent in the economic well-being of the empire. On top of this, the kings remained more occupied with self-indulgence than in preparing to meet with the challenges of their enemies.

The inept ministers and administrative heads also followed suit. Notably, after the defeat and capture of Mihirakula, one of the most important Hephthalite emperors of the time, Gupta King Baladitya set him free on the advice of his ministers.

The Hunas came back to haunt the empire, later and finally drew the curtains on this illustrious empire in AD 550.

Title Adopted by Gupta Rulers

The Guptas were fond of high-sounding titles like Parameswara, Paramadaivata and Maharajadhiraja and the whole administrative structure was saturated with designations and titles. The king was the head of the administration and in theory his power was unlimited.

Titles Adopted by Gupta Kings

Kings	Titles
Srigupta	Maharaja
Ghatotkacha Gupta	Maharaja
Chandragupta I	Maharajadhiraja
Samudragupta	Kaviraja (Prayaga Prasasti) Ashwamedha-Prakaranam (on coins) Vikram (on coins) Param Bhagvat (Nalanda copper plate); Sarva-raj-ochh chetta i.e. Uprooter of all kings (on coins the only ruler with this title) and Allahabad Pillar inscription mention the title Dharma Prachar Bandhu, that it is he who was the upholder of Brahminical religion.
Chandragupta II	Vikramaditya, Sakari Devagupta/Devashri/ Devaraja, Narendra Chandra Singh Vikram, Param Bhagavata etc.
Kumaragupta I	Mahendraditya, Shakraditya
Skandagupta	Vikramaditya, Karamaditya, Parama Bhagvat (on coins); Shakrapama (Kahamu Pillar inscription); Devaraja, Arya Manjushri Mula kalpa.

Inscriptions of Gupta Empire

During the reign of Gupta empire (period) large number of inscriptions were constructed, till now more than 50 inscriptions have been found. But inscription of early ruler such as Srigupta. Ghatokcha does not exist. Brahmi and Sanskrit language is used in inscriptions.

King	Inscription
Samudragupta	Prayag Inscription Nalanda Inscription, Gaya Inscription
Chandragupta II	Udaygiri I Inscription Udaygiri II Inscription Gadwas I Inscription Sanchi Inscription Mehrauli Inscription
Kumaragupta I	Bilsad Pillar Inscription Mandsour Inscription Tuman Inscription Mathura Inscription
Skandagupta	Junagarh Inscription Bhitri Inscription Indore Inscription
Purugupta	Bihar pillar Inscription Poharpur Copper plate Inscription Rajghat pillar Inscription
Buddhagupta	Sarnath Buddhamurti Inscription
Bhanugupta	Eran Pillar Inscription

Polity in Gupta Empire

As the Gupta empire was one step more than the Mauryan empire administration was the culmination of the Mauryan administration. The imperial perfection was achieved in the hands of the Guptas and their administration was better than that of the Mauryas. Whole empire was categorised into Central and Provincial and

local level. Kingship was hereditary, but royal power was limited by the want of a firm adherence to primogeniture.

The throne did not always go to the eldest son, creating uncertainties of which the chiefs and high officials took advantage. Central Administration-King was head of the state and there was council of minister to help him.

The King and His Functions

The king possessed limitless powers and was the fountain head of civil, military and judicial administration. Samudragupta and Chandragupta II personally conducted operations of war in the battle fields. Although, kingship was hereditary, the usual practice was selection by the dying king of the best fitted prince from amongst his sons. Samudragupta was selected by his father and thus, the words *tatparigrihitena* in the Mathura inscription.

King assumed titles such as Paramadvaita, Parama- Bhattaraka, Maharajadhiraja, Samrat, Chakravartin etc.

Council of Ministers

There was a council of ministers and according to Kalidasa, some officers of the designation Kanchuki (Chamberlain) acted as a go-between the king and the council. King was assisted by a Chief Minister called *Mantri* or *Sachiva* for administration of the kingdom.

Other Officers

Name of Officer	Field
Mahasandhi Vighraha	War and peace
Amatya	Chief councillorship
Mahabaladhikrita	Military forces
Mahadandanayaka	Law and order
Ranabhandagaradhikarana	Chief of the treasury of war officer
Sandhivighraha or Mahasandhivighraha	Foreign Minister
Sarvadyakshas	Superintendents
Dutuka or Duta	Royal envoy
Dandapasadhikarana	Chief of police
Sanvyvachari or Ayuktakas	Executive officers of the district
Maharattaras	Village elders
Gramika	Village headman
Saulkika	Collector of customs and tolls
Gaulmika	Incharge of forests and forts

According to Kalidasa, there were three other ministers apart from the council, foreign minister, finance minister and law minister. The Gupta civil administration was a bureaucracy of high-sounding officials like Rajapurusha, Rajanayaka, Rajaputra, Rajamatya, Mahasamanta, Mahapratihara and Mahakumaramatya.

Bureaucracy

The Gupta empire was more extensive than the Maurya empire and it was therefore more imposing and bureaucratic. In hierarchy bureaucrats followed ministers, they are responsible for day to day business of administration. With time bureaucratic system become complex and corrupt activities led to inefficiency in the system.

☉ Divine Right of Kings

The Guptas were great believers in the divine right of kings and so the Allahabad pillar inscription describes Samudragupta as the "incomprehensible being, who is the cause of creation and destruction, a God, dwelling on Earth." In literature, he is depicted as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Provincial Administration

The provinces or divisions called *bhuktis* were governed by *Uparikas* directly appointed by the kings. The province was often divided into districts known as *Vishayas* which were ruled by *Kumaramatyas*, *Ayuktas* or *Vishayapatis*. His appointment was made by the provincial governors.

Gupta inscriptions from Bengal shows that the Municipal board-*Adhisthanadhikarana* associated with itself representation from major local communities: the *Nagarasresthi* (guild President), the chief merchant *Sarthavaha*, the chief artisan-*Prathama Kulika* and the chief scribe- *Prathama Kayastha*. Besides them were the *Pustapalas*-officials whose work was to manage and keep records.

Village Administration

The lowest unit of administration was the village. In Eastern India, the *vishayas* were divided into *vithis*, which again was divided into villages. The *Gramapati* or *Gramadhyaksha* was the village headman. The Gupta inscriptions from North Bengal show that there were other units higher than the villages such as the Rural Board-*Asthakuladhikarana* which comprised of the village elders-*Mahattaras* and also included the village headman-*Gramika* and the householders *Kutumbins*. With the absence of any close supervision of the state, village affairs were now managed by the leading local elements. No land transactions could be done without their consent. The village disputes were also settled by these bodies with the help of *Gramavridhdhas* or *Mahattaras* (village elders). The town administration was carried on by the mayor of the city called *Purapala*.

Revenue Administration of Gupta Empire

Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines. In Samudragupta's time there was an officer Gopasramin working as Akshapataladhikrita, whose duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues, to check embezzlement and recover fines. Another prominent high official was *Pustapala* (record-keeper). The Gupta kings maintained a regular department for the proper survey and measurement of land as well as for the collection of land revenue.

Taxes Levied During the Gupta Period

Tax Names	Tax Specifics
Klipta/Upkiltpta	Sales tax and Purchase tax
Halivakara/Halidanda	Tax on ploughing
Bali	An additional oppressive tax on people
Pratyaya	Toll tax
Bhoga	King's share of produce
Bhag Bhagkar	Combination of Bhog and Bhaga
Bhatta	Police tax
Chat	Security tax
Chakrasana	Grazing tax
Hiranya	Tax on special produce taken in cash
Udakabhaga	May be water tax
Uparikara	Tax collected from all subjects
Taradaya	Tax on navigation
Rajju	Tax for measurement of land
Sarvarishtia	Forced tax
Bedakbhoga	Irrigation tax
Uparnik	Tax taken from border area
Bhoga	General tribute

Land Revenue

The land revenue was main source of income for the state *There were two specific land taxes namely:*

1. **Sita** the tax imposed on crown lands and
2. **Bhaga** the share of the state collected from private lands.
3. **Bhogabhgya** was Another tax that was levied during the period of the Guptas. This term was used in the sense of royalties. The main evidence of the imposition of this tax is the Karitalai copper plate inscription of the Maharaja Jayantha. It was collected both in cash and in kind.

The land revenue system of the Guptas was a complicated one. There were two other taxes that were levied on land. They were 'Uparikara' and 'Udranga'. The term 'Uparikara' means "a tax levied on cultivators who had no proprietary rights on the soil". Udranga was the tax imposed on the permanent tenants. The traditional custom of taking 1/6th of the produce as state's share was continued in the age of the Guptas.

Judicial System of Gupta Empire

The Guptas also had a fairly good judicial system. Gupta emperors ruled over a spectacular court at Pataliputra. At the bottom, there were various councils which were authorised to resolve disputes that arose like for instance there was the village assembly or the trade guild. Hence, justice was usually available in the place a person lived or worked and hence didn't need to travel a long distance just to get justice.

The king presided over the highest court of appeal and he was usually assisted by various judges, ministers and priests etc, depending upon the nature of the case. The judgements were usually made based on legal texts, social customs or specific edicts from the king.

Law Enforcement During Gupta Empire

The maintenance of law and justice was entrusted to Dandapasadhikarana (the chief of police) and Mahadandanayaka (the chief judge). The law administered was the traditional law of the Smritis, especially that of Manusmriti. In matters of transfer of property, state sanction was always required. The Gupta administration was thus, a remarkable blend of the best ideals of monarchy, democracy and federation in their harmonious and cooperative working.

Army During Gupta Empire

The army had four wings—infantry, cavalry, elephants and the navy. The main weapons were bows and arrows, swords, axes and spears. Important military officers in the Gupta army were Senapati, Mahasenapati, Baladhyaksha, Mahabaladhyaksha, Baladhikrita and Mahabaladhikrita.

They were assisted by commander of the infantry and cavalry called *Bhatasvapati* and commander of elephant corps called *Katuka*. According to Fa-Hien, punishment was lenient and capital punishment was very rare. The Mahadandanayaka had possibly two functions, one, a general of the army and the other as a judge.

Emergence of Feudalism

State was the owner of land. The giving of land grants paved the way for the growth of feudal society. There are many theories regarding the emergence of feudalism in India during the Gupta period. The first theory states that the decentralised structures led to the emergency proto feudal phase.

A practice of land grants with administrative rights corroded the authority of the state. The second theory states that the earlier social formation came to an end which led to sustained social conflicts.

The collapse of the social order led Guptas to make land grants because they were unable to extract revenue from the subjects which led to the emergence of feudal society. The theory is also called the *theory of social crisis*.

The third theory emphasises that it was the decline of towns and urban economy that led to the development of feudal economy. Several inscriptions indicate the emergence of serfdoms which meant that the peasants were attached to their land even when it was given away. This led to the gradual weakening of the institution of slavery. The process of sub-infeudation eroded the rights of the peasantry.

Agriculture During Gupta Empire

Land was classified into five categories in the Gupta period were

- (i) *Kshetra* or cultivable land
- (ii) *Khila* or waste land
- (iii) *Varti* or habitable land
- (iv) *Aprahata* or forest land and
- (v) *Gopata Sarah* or pasture land

Ustapala was the officer who maintained the rewards of any land transactions at the district level while the village accountant preserved the records of land at the village level.

The village assumed more authority with less central interference. There was oppression of peasantry. The independent peasants were reduced to the position of serfs. It reduced permanent tenants to the position of tenants at-will. There was existence of forced labour or *vishti*. The growth of private property in land.

Crops such as rice, wheat, barley, peas, lentils, pulses, sugarcane, oil seeds were cultivated. Mango, coconut, grape, palmyra and bread fruit were also cultivated.

Different land measures such as *Nivaratna*, *Kulyavapa* and *Dronavapa* were known to *Guptas*. The Gupta period marked the beginning of feudal polity and decentralisation.

Land Grants

The sources of the Gupta Empire suggest that certain important changes were taking place in the agrarian society. Feudal development surfaced under the Guptas with the grant of fiscal and administrative concessions to priests and administrators. Started in the Deccan by the Satavahanas, the practice became a regular affair in Gupta times.

Religious functionaries were granted land, free of tax, forever and they were authorised to collect from the peasants all the taxes which could have otherwise gone to the emperor.

Religious grants were of two types

- (i) *Agrahara* grants were meant for the Brahmanas which meant to be perpetual, hereditary and tax-free, accompanied with the assignment of all land revenue.
- (ii) The *Devagrahara* grants were made to secular parties such as writers and merchants, for the purpose of repair and worship of temples.

According to it, two villages were bestowed as a mark of favour, in perpetuity with fiscal and administrative rights upon a person called Pulindabhatta. Epigraphic evidence of land grants made to officers for the administrative and military services is lacking, though such grants cannot be ruled out. In fact, certain designations of administrative officers such as *bhagika* and *bhogapalika* suggest that some of the state officials may have been remunerated by land grants. Law givers almost unanimously advocated early marriage for girls, some of them even preferred pre-puberty marriage. Celibacy was to be strictly observed by windows. They were not given right to property except *Stridhana*.

Trade and Commerce

There was not much change in the trade routes, commercial organisation, currency systems, trade practices etc during the period. Like the previous phase, we have reference of two types of merchants in the Gupta empire, namely *Sresthi* who was usually settled at a particular place and enjoyed an eminent position and the *Sarthavaha* who was a caravan trader.

Luxury goods formed the principal articles of long distance trade. Narada and Brihaspati laid down many regulations to govern the trade practices of the time.

Compared to the earlier period, there was a decline in long-distance trade. Silk and spices were the chief Indian export articles of Indo-Roman trade. But by the middle of the sixth century silk worms were secretly brought overland from China and introduced into the Byzantine Empire. This produced an adverse effect on India's trade with the West.

Guilds, (*nigama*, *sreni*) continued as the major institution in the manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise. They remained almost autonomous in their internal organisation, the government respecting their laws which were generally drafted by a larger body, the corporation of guilds, of which each guild was a member.

Each guild had a President called *Prathama* or *Pravara*. Some of the industrial guilds, such as the silk weaver's guilds had their own separate corporation which was responsible for large-scale projects, such as endowments for building a temple, etc.

Crafts Production and Industry

Crafts production covered a wide range of items. Texts like Amarakosha of Amarasimha and Brihat Samhita which are generally dated to this period, list many items, give their Sanskrit names and also mention different categories of craftsmen who manufactured them.

Many important sites like Taxila, Ahichchhatra, Mathura, Rajghat, Kausambi and Pataliputra have yielded many craft products like earthen wares, terracottas, beads made of different stones, objects of glass, items made of metals, etc.

Different varieties of silk, cloth, called kshauma and pattavastra are mentioned in the text of this period.

An inscription of fifth century from Mandasour in Western Malwa refers to a guild of silk weavers who had migrated from South Gujarat and settled in the Malwa region. Among the various industries that flourished in the Gupta period, mining and metallurgy certainly occupied the top position.

Changing Social Structure

The social structure was undergoing changes in the Gupta period. Pronounced varna distinctions in various spheres of life can be seen in the contemporary writings.

According to Varahamihira, a Brahmana should have a house with five rooms, a Kshatriya with four, a Vaishya with three and a Shudra with two. The length and breadth of the main room should vary in accordance with the order of superiority. The old provision allowing for different rates of interest for different castes continued in Gupta times.

Varna Distinction

A Puranic text compiled in Gupta times associated the four colours white, red, yellow and black with Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra respectively. This shows the relative status of the four orders. The writings of the period emphasise, that a Brahmana should not accept food from a Shudra because it reduces his spiritual strength. Brahmin supremacy and purity were stressed.

Varna distinctions were also observed in legal matters. The law books lay down, that a Brahmana should be tested by a balance, a Kshatriya by fire, a Vaishya by water and a Shudra by poison.

In law suits requiring the deposit of sureties distinction between the twice born and the Shudra as was made. Equally, discriminatory were inheritance rules. A Shudra son of a person belonging to a higher caste would get the smallest share.

According to Brihaspati, the son of a Brahmana male and a Shudra female was not entitled to any share in landed property. Also, witnesses should belong to respectable families and Shudras could appear only on behalf of their own caste. All this proves the class bias of law and justice, which tended to become prominent in course of time. This period also saw the increase of the Kshatriya class with the influx of Hunas and Gurjars. There was an increase in the Shudra class also because of the inclusion of forest tribes. The Gupta period saw a decline in the position of women. A new caste called the *Kayastha* or scribes came into existence.

A distinction was made between Shudras and untouchables. A Shudra marrying a Chandala woman was to be reduced to her position.

Untouchability

The practice of untouchability became more widespread and severe than in the earlier period, Chandals entering the gate of a city or market, place would strike a piece of wood to give prior notice of their arrival, so, that other men could avoid them. Chandals are associated with impurity, untruth, theft, heterodoxy, useless quarrels, passion, wrath and greed.

Position of Women

The status of women continued to decline. In the Gupta period certain features emerged, which became characteristic of their position in subsequent times. Women were not entitled to formal education, though like the Shudras, they were not allowed to listen to the epics and the Puranas. Reference to women teachers, philosophers and doctors are available in early Indian literature, but they are few.

☉ Sati Practice

- The practice of women following their husbands to the funeral pyre (sati) gained the approval of the jurists, even if it remained confined to the upper classes. The first memorial of a sati, found at Eran in Madhya Pradesh is dated AD 510, though substantial evidence of it comes from the later period. Women were denied any right to property except for 'stri-dhana' in the form of jewellery and garments.
- The social philosophy demanding the increasing subjugation of women was a natural development in a patriarchal class, divided society based on developed nation of private property and a very small number of them may have had the option of becoming nuns and courtesans or joining troupes of performers.

Emergence of Puranic Hinduism

The Early Puranic period from 200 CE to 500 CE saw the golden age of Hinduism which coincides with the Gupta period. Six branches of Hindu philosophy emerged *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika*, *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. The period also saw the development of Bhakti movement and sects like Vaishnavism and Shaivism.

Adi Shankara's Advaita had incorporated the Buddhist thought into Vedanta. Orthodox Brahmana culture got patronage under the Gupta ruler. The Puranas were written during the period. Puranic Hinduism was different from Brahmanism of Dharmashastras and the Smriti's. It led to the increased popularity of image worship and saw a growth of temples.

The expansion of trade led to the inter mixing of various cultures and people. Emergence of theistic cults like Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism of Puranic Hinduism came into existence in the Gupta Age. Puranas being a guide for the worshipper led to the rise of text on Mythology, legends about dieties, rituals and worship. Unlike Vedic Brahmanism Puranic Hinduism was accessible to all.

Coinage During Gupta Empire

The flourishing state of the economy was ascertained by a large number of gold coins circulated during different Gupta rulers. Famous for their gold coins, the Gupta numismatic art has an abundance of coins in the variety of designs. They also issued silver coins.

However, coins made of copper, bronze or any other alloy metals were very less. The Gupta gold coins are known as Dinars and they are the most extraordinary examples of numismatic and artistic excellence. The coins, in general, depicted the ruling monarch on the obverse and carried legends while the reverse depicted the figure of a goddess. Gupta coins were continuation of legacy of Indo-Greeks rulers.

Samudragupta

Samudragupta is credited to have issued only gold coins (Dinar) during his reign in seven different types. Samudragupta's coins according to their design and variety are known in numismatic terms as Standard types, the Archer types, Battle Axe type, Lichchavi type, Kacha type, the Tiger Slayer type, the Lyrist type, and Asvamedha types.

Chandragupta-II

Chandragupta-II is known to have issued a total of eight types of gold coins (Dinars). He was known through his coins as 'Vikramaditya'. Chandragupta II also issued silver (Denaree) and copper (Daler) coins, probably to be circulated in the region that was conquered from the Western Kshatrapas.

Chandragupt a II issued, Archer type, Couch type, the Chhatra type, Lion Slayer type, Horse Man type, The Standard type, Chakarvikrama type and Kalasha type coins during his reign.

Kumaragupta-I, often inscribed on coins as 'Mahendraditya', issued a 14 different types of gold (Dinar) and silver (Denaree) coins. His coinage itself is enough to speak about the vastness and prosperity of his empire. His long reign saw both, the epitome and the decline of the empire as the Hun invasions during the later period of his rule shook the Gupta Empire. The financial crunch led Kumaragupta to issue silver-plated copper coins (Daler). Mostly continuing the coin types of his predecessors, he introduced a few new varieties.

The gold coins of Skandagupta lack the variety of type. The illustrious Gupta period began to decline during the reign of Skandagupta. Inscribed on coins as 'Kramaditya', Skandagupta issued four types of gold dinars and three types of silver denarees. The Gupta gold coins, once an ultimate example of numismatic art, now began to lose their lustre and the political strain became evident in coin designs and its execution.

Coins issued by him were mentioned as archer type, king and Lakshmi type, horse man type and chattra type. His successors Purugupta, Kumaragupta-II issued only one type of gold coins namely Archer type. Budha Gupta's coins followed his predecessor's type but the artistic degree declined greatly. Lack of consistency in the same coin design shows symptoms of a steady decline of the once mighty empire.

Education and Educational Institutions During Gupta Empire

Nalanda University

The intellectual greatness, which characterised the Gupta age was typified in the university of Nalanda. The fame of this great seat of learning reached the remotest corners of Asia and attracted students from all over Asia. The foundation of the Nalanda University was laid by Kumaragupta I and the instruction imparted was Buddhist, though the Guptas were Hindus by faith. It was a place of worship as well as a temple of learning. Its layout was over one mile long and half a mile wide.

The central college had 7 halls. For the lectures there were 300 small rooms. There were deep ponds with lotuses which added to the beauty and at the same time, supplied water to the establishment. The monk students were housed in the monasteries, which were atleast 13 in number. These were two, storeyed having single or double rooms and were assigned to the students on the basis of seniority.

Curriculum and Administration

The curriculum was very comprehensive and belonged to the Mahayana school of Buddhism. There was also provision for teaching of the Hinayana school. The three, Vedas, Vedanta and the Samkhya philosophy were also taught here. In the AD 9th century, the university continued to enjoy an international reputation.

Vallabhi University

Situated in modern Gujarat, it was a monastery and Buddhist seat of learning. The university specialised in many branches of learning such as Arthashastra, law and medicine.

Development of Sanskrit Literature Under Gupta Empire

After centuries of evolution Sanskrit language and literature, through lavish royal patronage, reached what has been described as a level of classical excellence.

Kalidasa

The most well-known Sanskrit poet of this period lived in the court of Chandragupta II. The *Meghaduta*, his lyrical poem of a little over a hundred graceful stanzas, contains the message from the love, Lord Yaksha to his wife pining across the Northern mountains in Alaka. The *Raghuvamsha* speaks of the all round victories of Rama and may indirectly refer the some Gupta conquests.

The *Kumarasambhava* deals with the courtship of Shiva and Parvati and the birth of their son, Skanda. The *Ritusamhara* describes the six season in relation to the loves of man and woman and exhibits the poet's loving empathy with nature.

The *Vikramorvasiyam*, one of his finest plays, is based on the Vedic story of the mad love of Pururvas for the fierce-souled, Urvashi, whom Kalidasa transforms into a happy and obedient wife. Kalidasa's most famous work, the play *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, has for its theme the union of king Dushyanta with Shakuntala. This work remains the supreme achievement of early Indian literature and stagecraft.

Other Dramatists During the Gupta Empire

Shudraka, often supposed to be of royal lineage, wrote the *Mrichchhakatika*. Its plot centres round the love of the poor Brahmana Charudatta for the wealthy, beautiful, accomplished and cultured courtesan Vasantasena. Vishakhadatta is the author of the *Mudrarakshasa*, which deals with the schemes of the Shrewd, Chanakya. The *Devichandraguptam*, another drama written by Vishakhadatta, has survived only in fragments.

Poets and Playwrights

The best poets and playwrights often found their richest and creative canvas in the passionate physical love of men for women, literary descriptions of feminine beauty are often similar to the representation of figures at Ajanta. Erotica, in fact became prominent in the literary world from the Gupta period onwards and the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana, the first systematic exposition of the art of love, remained a model for later writers on the subject patronised by the feudal aristocracy and the ruling class.

The life of the royal court, therefore, is richly reflected in Sanskrit plays and poems. Sanskrit literature, like art, was mainly enjoyed by the royal court, the upper class and the aristocracy. The leading male characters therefore, speak polished Sanskrit as they are of high social status and those of low status, women and sudras speak Prakrit.

Religious Literature

The Gupta period saw an increase in the production of religious literature, some of the most important of the 18 Puranas (the Markandeya, Brahmanda, Vishnu, Bhagavata and Matsya) were redacted during this period.

The Mahabharata, traditionally attributed to Vyasa, was also redacted, it was increased from 24000 verses to 100000 verses. Several law books like those of Vishnu, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Brihaspati and Katyayana may also have been composed during Gupta times.

The Brahmanical world view found in the epics, Puranas and Dharmashastra texts is reflected in various versions of the Panchatantra fables.

Literature of Gupta Period

Writers	Works
Kalidasa	Vikramorvarsiyam Kumarsam bhava Malavikagnimitram Raghuvamsa Ritusamharam Meghaduta Abhijnansakuntalam
Bhasa	Swapnavasavadattam Charudatta Pratignayaugandharayana
Vishakhadatta	Mudrarakshasa Devichandraguptam
Shudraka	Mrichchakatika
Harisena	Prayag Prasasti
Dandin	Kavyadarshana
Amarsimha	Amarakosha

Writers	Works
Chandragomin	Chandravyakarana
Vishnu Sharma	Panchatantra
	Hito Padesha
Dandin	Dasakumarcharita
Ishwar Krishna	Sankhyakarika (Sankhya Philosophy)
Prashastipada	Dharmasangraha (Vai Sheshika Philosophy)
Acharya Vyasa	Vyasa Bhasya (Yoga Philosophy)
Vatsyayana	Nyaya Bhashya (Nyaya Philosophy)
Vatsyayana	Kamasutra
Bhamah	Kavyalankara
Bharavi	Kiratarjuniya

Development in Science, Astronomy and Mathematics

Some important astronomical works were also written during the Gupta period. Aryabhatta, the author of the *Aryabhatiyam*, flourished in the 5th century which deals with algebra, arithmetics and geometry. He calculated π is equal to 3.1416 solar year is equal to 365.3586805 days. Contrary to the prevalent notions, he suggested that the Earth rotates on its axis, revolves round the Sun and causes eclipses by casting its shadow on the Moon. He was the first to use the decimal place value system, but its invention is not attributed to him.

Varahamira, who lived towards the end of the 6th century, wrote several treatises on astronomy and horoscopy. His *Panchasiddhantika* deals with five astronomical systems (Siddhanta). The *Laghu Jataka* and *Brihat Jataka*, both written by him, are works on horoscopy, which became popular from the Gupta period onwards. The *Amarakosha* was compiled by Amarasimha.

Hastaryurveda was written by Palakalpya. Another medical work *Navanitakam* was a manual of recepies, formula and prescriptions. There was the development of atomic theory by the Vaisesika school of physicists. Among other famous works were of Brahmagupta which were *Grahmasphata Siddhanta* and *Khanda Khedyaka*.

Art and Architecture

Religion was intimately connected with developments in architecture and arts. The doctrine of Bhakti and the growing importance of image worship led to the construction of the free standing temple with a sanctuary (Garbagriha), in which the central culture image was placed. Several temples

with central shrines have survived from the Gupta period at Sanchi, Ladh Khan, Deogarh (near Jhansi), Bhitargaon, Tigawa and Bhumara. Built either in stone or brick, they were very small and had roofs with spouts to drain off water.

Beginning of Temple Architecture

During Gupta Era, the rockcut architecture reached its zenith and this era marked the beginning of the free standing temple architecture. Most of the temples built in the Gupta age were carved representation of Gods and Goddesses.

Silient features of the Gupta Temples

- The Shikhara was not a prominent part.
- Gupta style temple was modeled on the architectural norms of the Mathura school.
- Temple have a square tower of Shikhara
- Main style of temple is Nagara style and Dravida style actually began from the Gupta era.

Vishnu Temple, Deogarh The most ornate and beautifully composed example of Gupta temple building is the fragmentary temple of Vishnu at Deogarh. It occupies the centre of a square plinth, each of whose four corners had a subsidiary shrine, housing a lesser deity.

It may be one of the earliest specimens of the five-shrine (Panchayatana) variety of temples, which became common in subsequent times. Free standing temples did not displace cave temples and some of the cave at Ajanta may be assigned to the period of the Guptas. The highest achievement of early Indian cave architecture is seen in the Kailashnath temple at Ellora, belonging to the 8th century.

Other types of temple architecture can be seen in following types of temples

- Representative of the first include Kankali Devi temple, Viraha temple, temple No. XVII at Sanchi.
- The second type represented Parvati temple at Nachna, Kuthara and Shiva temple at Bhumara.
- The third type were the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh, Bhitargaon temple.

Famous Temples of the Gupta Age

Temples	Locations
Vishnu Temple	Tigawa (Jabalpur)
Shiva Temple	Bhumara (Nagaud)
Parvati Temple	Nachna Kuthara
Dasavtar Temple	Deogarh (Jhansi)
Shiva Temple	Koh (Nagaud)
Bhitargaon Temple	Bhitargaon
Lakshman Temple	Kanpur (Brick made)
Lakshman Temple	Sirpur (Raipur)
Mukund Darra Temple	Kota

Sculpture

Gupta sculpture marks the culmination of earlier developments in the Sculpture arts. The unusual larger than life size house sculpture from Khairigarh in Uttar Pradesh often believed to represent a sacrificial house used by Samudragupta for one of his Asvamedha rituals. Several images of Shaivite deities (Durga, Skanda etc) have been found at important centres i.e. Vidisha, Eran and Udaygiri in Madhya Pradesh.

Seated and standing images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas at Sarnath are outstanding. A good specimen of Sarnath sculpture is the image of the Buddha sitting in the *Dharma-Chakra-Pravattana* attitude. This is a fine expression in stone of the meditative and compassionate Buddha giving his first sermon.

Paintings

Painting was a developed art during Gupta reign. Literary referenes prove that apart from professional artists, men and women of the upper classes were also able to handle a brush.

- Remains of cave paintings of Gupta paintings may be seen in caves at Bagh, Ajanta and Badami.
- The Ajanta murals supplied the norm for all contemporary painting. The Ajanta artists displayed a great skill in delineating human and animal figures. Decorations on ceilings, pedestals of columns, door and window frames speak of the artists, extraordinary powers of conception and technique.
- The themes at Ajanta are religious, one can see in the painting a dramatic panorama of the life of princes, nobles, warriors and sages.
- The general impression we gain is one of the affluence of the upper classes, the normal hardships of the village folk are not portrayed.

Vakatakas

The Vakatakas rose to power in the later half of the AD 3rd century installing themselves on what remained of the Satavahana kingdom, in Central India and some parts of the Deccan. Vindhayashakti (250-270 CE) was the founder of the Vakataka dynasty and may have belonged to a Yavana or Greek tribe of the name Kilakilas.

The view that the Vakatakas had a Southern origin is substantiated by the fact, that the name *Vindhya Shakti* was derived from the word *Vindhya* region. Also, like the Satavahanas, Kadambas and Chalukyas, the Vakatakas called themselves Hariputras. The Vakatakas assumed the title of Dharmamaharaja, which was a typical characteristic of the Southern kings.

Vindhyashakti (250-270 CE)

He founded the Vakataka dynasty and is described in the inscription as Vakataka Vamsaketu, who stands comparison with Vishnu and Indra. Capital of Vakatakas was Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh).

Pravarasena I (270-330 CE)

Pravarasena I succeeded Vindhyashakti, who is considered the real founder of this dynasty. He extended his kingdom upto Narmada. His capital was at Purika. He performed seven Vedic sacrifices and four Asvamedha sacrifices, which prove that he made conquests in all directions.

Rudrasena I (330-355 CE)

Rudrasena I succeeded his father Pravarasena and he was a contemporary of Samudragupta and his name is mentioned in the *Allahabad pillar inscription*. After being defeated by Samudragupta, his dominion was confined to Northern Vidarbha.

Prithvisena I (355-380 CE)

Son and successor of Rudrasena I, Prithvisena I conquered Kuntala and this justifies his name Kuntalendra in the *Allahabad pillar*.

Rudrasena II (380-385 CE)

He came to limelight by marrying Prabhavati, the daughter of Chandragupta II. The Gupta Vakataka matrimonial alliance resulted in the overthrow of the Saka rule from India.

Divakarsena (385-400 CE) and Damodarasena (400-440 CE) were the successors of Rudrasena II.

Narendra Sena (440-460 CE)

Adopted a very aggressive policy and made conquests both in the East and the North and subjugated Kosala, and Malawa.

Prithvisena II (460-480 CE)

Transferred his Capital to Padmapura with him ended the so-called *senior branch of the Vakataka dynasty* in AD 483 century.

Another Branch of Vakatakas

The discovery of the Basima copper plate inscription of Vindhyashakti II in 1939 enlightens us with the existence of another line of Vakatakas, which formed a separate kingdom with Vatsagulma as the capital in the Akola district.

Downfall of the Vakatakas

The later kings and successors were quite incompetent to run the administration. The invasions of the Nalas and the Rashtrakutas weakened and disintegrated the Vakataka kingdom. The growth of independent power under the leadership of Yashodharman in Malava wiped away the Vakataka power.

post-Gupta Era

The post-Gupta era is a period that witnessed the beginnings of the regional identities that took deep roots in course of time. This formative period requires a detailed study, since many institutions and problems of present-day India owe their origin to this period. With the disintegration of the Gupta political power centre, the Northern half of the subcontinent splintered into 'warring kingdoms' and each tried to become a sovereign power.

The decline of the Gupta kingdom in the 6th century AD slowly and gradually led to the growth of many small kingdoms. In this process, certain regions witnessed the emergence of new kingdoms; and in other regions, the erstwhile Gupta vassals freed themselves from the sovereignty of the Guptas, founding independent kingdoms.

Of the new political powers that emerged, the important ones are kings like Yasodharman, and powers such as the Maukharis, the Hunas and the later Magadhan Guptas.

Along with these new powers, the Pushyabhutis, the Gaudas, the Varmans and the Maitrakas also became important powers to be reckoned with at that time. The political scenario of this period is to be understood against this background of the emergence of regional identities represented by the new political powers.

Pushyabhutis (Vardhana Dynasty)

According to Harsha-Charita, a dynasty was founded by Pushyabhuti, a devout Shaivite, some where near Thaneshwar in the present day Ambala district of Haryana. Nothing much is known about early ruler. It was only the fourth ruler Prabhakaravardhana that the title Maharajadhiraja was assumed.

Historians surmise that like the Maukharis, their immediate neighbour in the East, the Pushyabhutis took advantage of the fall of the Gupta empire to establish an independent principality.

Another text Kadambari has provided knowledge about socio-economic condition during the Vardhan dynasty. Harshavardhan himself wrote few books such as Nagananda, Priyadarshika and Ratnawali all these three book give valuable information about the reign of Harshavardhana.

Inscriptions and Seals of Harsha's Period

Banskhera inscription dated AD 628 was found in Banskhera, Shanjahanpur (Uttar Pradesh) in 1894. This inscription gives a lot of information regarding Harsha.

The inscription says that Harsha had granted Markatsagar village to two Brahmans Balachandra and Bhattaswami. This also speaks of the victory of Rajyavardhana over the Malwa king Devagupta and the murder of Devagupta by Shashanka. Madhuban inscription dated AD 631 has been found at Ghoshi (UP). It mentions the grant of Somkunda village by Harsha.

The Aihole inscription of the Chalukya king Pulakesin II is dated AD 633-34. This inscription deals with the war between Harshavardhana and Pulakesin II. The inscription was written by Ravi Kirti, a court poet of Pulakesin.

Seals Two seals of Harsha have been found in Nalanda (Bihar) and Sonipat. One is of clay, while the other is of copper. These seals contain the names of all the kings, from Rajyavardhana I to Harshavardhana, of the Vardhana dynasty. It is the Sonipat seal which gives Harshavardhana as the full name of Harsha.

Rulers of Vardhana Dynasty

The following are the known rulers of the Pushyabhuti or Vardhana dynasty, given in sequence wise

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| • Pushyabhuti (Pusyabhuti) | • Naravardhana |
| • Rajyavardhana | • Adityavardhana |
| • Prabhakaravardhana | • Harshavardhana |

Harsha's Rise to Power

Harshavardhana the second son of Prabhakaravardhana and Yasomati ruled North India from AD 606 to 647 CE. He was the most powerful ruler of the *Pushyabhuti* dynasty also known as the *Vardhana* dynasty. He came to throne after defeating the Huna invaders and the assassination of his brother Rajyavardhana by Shashanka and became the king of Thaneshwar. His reign led to transition from ancient to Medieval period.

Harsha united the republics which fragmented as a result of the collapse of Gupta empire. He assumed the title of *Siladitya*, *Paramabhattaraka*, *Mahesvara*, *Maharajadhiraja* etc. Sources point out that Harsha belonged to the Vaishya varna like the Guptas.

Hiuen Tsang mentions that the king belonged to 'Fei-she' which meant Vaishya varna. His empire extended from the kingdoms of Thaneshwar or Eastern Punjab and Kannauj in the Gangetic Doab. It also included regions like Ahichchhatra or Rohilkhand, Sravanti or areas in Oudh and Prayaga or Allahabad. It also included areas such as Magadha and portion of Odisha and kingdom of Vallabhi. In the East it included Bengal.

Besides direct rule, indirect sovereignty was asserted on areas ruled by king of Kamarupa, Jalandhar, Nepal, Sind and Kashmir who paid tribute and homage. His capital was at Kannauj. He took the title of Sakal Uttara Patha Nathu (Lord of North India).

The term 'Five Indies' is used by Hiuen Tsang to give an account of different regions under Harsha's Sway. There regions included Vallabhi, Magadha, Kashmir, Gujarat and Sindh. He was defeated by Pulakeshin II of Chalukya dynasty when he tried to expand his territory in Southern Peninsula.

Administration of Harsha's Period

Feudalism was a striking feature of Harsha's administration. It was decentralised in nature. Major part of his kingdom was ruled by his feudal chiefs who accepted his sovereignty.

Some of the important feudatories of Harsha's times were : Bhaskaravarman or Kamarupa, Dhruvabhatta of Vallabhi, Purnavarman of Magadha and Udit of Jalandhara. His administrative system was similar to the Gupta dynasty. Paucity of coins in North India suggests feudal economy. Independent ruler's or feudal lords were called *Mahasamantas*. Their main function was to provide military support.

King and Council of Ministers

King was the apex of administration. He was the head of administration, supreme law maker, chief executive and incharge of justice. King was assisted by the crown prince and viceroys of provinces. He was a despot and enjoyed absolute powers. The council of ministers called '*Sachiv*' or *Amatya* assisted the king in administration. They acted as advisors. The *Chief Sachiv* was *Bhandi* and *Sandhi*.

Other Officers in the Administration in Harsha's Period

- Governor was called *Rajarthaniya*.
- Head of province was called *Uparika*.
- Head of district was called *Vishyapati*.
- Minister of war and peace was called *Mahasandhivigrashikrita*.

- Officer of supreme command in the area was called Mahabaladhikrita.
- Senapati was called *Baladhikrita*. *Simhananda* was the Senapati of Harsha.
- Head of cavalry officer was called *Brihadavara*.
- Provincial Governors were called *Lokapalas*.

The police department was similar to the Gupta period. It had officers like *Dandapashika*, *Dandika*, *Chaurodvaranika*, and *Yamacheti*.

Administrative Division During Harsha's Period

Division of Kingdom (*Rajya*) was done into provinces known as *Bhukta* which was further divided into districts called *Vishayas*. The districts were further divided into subdistricts called *Patakas* which were further divided into villages known as *grama*.

Army During Harsha's Period

Recruitment in the army was based on merit—Infantry, cavalry and elephants were the three branches of Harsha's army. The cavalry in Harsha's army was 1,00,000 with 60,000 elephants and 50,000 infantry. This was possible because of the feudal set up where each feudatory contributed his quota of foot soldier and horses.

Economy During Harsha's Period

Harsha's empire marked the beginning of feudalism in India. Decentralisation caused an increase of land grants of villages given to grantees who were called *Sthana-jana sahita*, *Janata-samridha* and *Saprativani-jana-sahita*. Economy was feudal and self-sufficient due to decline of trade and commerce. The taxation policy was liberal. The cultivators paid 1/6th of produce of taxes king's dues *were of two kinds*

- (i) **Tulya Mela** These were taxes dependent on weights and measures of things sold.
- (ii) **Bhaga-Bhaga-Kara** Hiranyadi which was a share of produce, taxes and payments in cash from other sources of income like *Udranga* (type of revenue), *Uparaka* (taxes besides the regular times), *Hirenya* (Gold), ordinances.

Money was also imposed by fines, duties on goods 1/4th revenue went in patronising scholars.

Society During Harsha's Period

Caste system was a predominant part of the society during Harsha's reign. The period also saw the decline in the status of women. Remarriage of widows was not permitted, dowry system was common and there were examples of sati practice in the empire. There is also reference of existence of subcastes and social violation of marriage.

Religion During Harsha's Period

Harsha being the follower of Lord Shiva and later he embraced Mahayana Buddhism. Being the ardent follower of Lord Shiva he was described by his subjects as *Parama-Maheshvara*. He was tolerant towards other religions also. He organised religious assemblies called 'Moksha'. Education was given to people in five shastras i.e., grammar, science of art and craft, medicine, logic and philosophy. He arranged two assemblies or convocation at Kannauj and Prayag.

Harsha is also credited to have constructed Buddhist stupas after conversion to Buddhism. He built monasteries in North India and banned animal slaughter. Harsha's ancestors were Sun worshippers while his brother Rajyavardhana was a Buddhist.

Culture, Literary Development and Education During Harsha's Period

Harsha's period saw the development of regional culture of Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan. Literary development under Harsha's rule was distinct. He is credited to have authored Sanskrit plays like *Ratnavali*, *Nagananda* and *Priyadarshika*.

Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller wrote a favourable account of Harsha's reign. Banabhatta also referred to as *Asthanakavi* was in the Court of Harsha.

Banabhatta wrote *Harshacharita* and *Kadambari*. Harsha's interest in prose and poetry is well documented. Besides Banabhatta, other prominent writers of this period were Mayura who wrote *Mayurashataka* and the grammarian Bhartrihari who wrote *Vakapadaya*.

Nalanda university achieved its glory during the reign of Harsha. The university had 10000 students, with 2000 teachers. Endowments were made to Nalanda University. Subjects like law, science, medicine, fine arts were taught here. The head of the university was Silvadra. It had libraries called *Dharmaya Yogya*, *Ratnasagara* and *Ratnodadhi*.

Assemblies During Harsha's Period

The two memorable assemblies which Harsha held, and to which Hiuen Tsang was intimate witness, give a picture of Harsha's religion. *Brief accounts of those assemblies are presented below*

The Kannauj Assembly

In the year 643 AD, Harsha held a great religious assembly in his capital at Kannauj on the bank of the river Ganges. The purpose of the assembly was to highlight the teachings of

Buddha. On that occasion, Harsha also wanted to honour the Chinese Master of the Law, Hiuen Tsang.

This grand function was attended by twenty tributary kings, including the kings of Kamarupa Bhaskara Varman from the extreme East, and the King of Vallabhi Dhruvasena from the extreme West. Three thousand Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhists, three thousand Brahmins and Jainas, and one thousand Buddhist scholars from the University of Nalanda attended this assembly.

Harsha himself proposed the name of Hiuen Tsang to take the chair. The subject of discussion in the assembly related to Mahayana Buddhism. The assembly continued for long 23 days.

Activities During Assembly

From the accounts of Hiuen Tsang it is known that a splendid monastery with a shrine was constructed, on the bank of the Ganges for the purpose of the assembly. There, on the huge tower, 100 feet high, a golden image of Buddha equal to the height of Harsha himself was kept for the view of the large gathering. A smaller image of Buddha, 3 feet in height was every day carried in a procession, joined by all the 20 kings, and with 300 elephants. In that procession, Harsha himself, appearing as God Sakra, held the canopy on the image. The King of Kamarupa, dressed as the God Brahma, waved a white fly-whisk around the image.

As the procession progressed, Harsha scattered golden flowers, pearls and gems on all sides for showing honour to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. At the end of the procession, Harsha used to wash the image in his own hands at the altar, and carry it on his own shoulders to be placed at the appropriate tower. There, the image was dressed in many silken robes, decorated with gems.

The Prayaga Assembly

The Kannauj Assembly was followed by another spectacular assembly at Prayaga in 643 AD. While the Kannauj Assembly was a religious assembly to highlight Mahayanism, the Prayaga Assembly was an assembly of universal character for offerings of royal charities to all classes of people. It was known as the *Maha Moksha Parishad*. Harsha was at his best in the Prayaga Assembly as a generous monarch and an admirer of all the major faiths of his country.

The Prayaga Assembly saw a huge gathering of people. The Emperor came there with Hiuen Tsang, and the kings of twenty countries. The site of the assembly was on the vast expanses of sands at the meeting place of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. Half a million people, summoned

from the distant corners of the 'Five Indies' attended this unique assembly to receive gifts from the king.

Activities During Assembly

On the first day of the Prayaga Assembly, an image of Buddha was worshipped amidst distribution of valuables. On the second day, (was worshipped) the image of Surya. And, on the third day, the image of Shiva was worshipped.

There after followed the many days of gift making to thousands upon thousands of Buddhists, Brahmanas, Jainas, and the followers of other faiths. Next followed the giving of alms to the mendicants, to the poor, the orphans, and the destitute. The Prayaga Assembly finally closed after 75 days.

Shalankayana Dynasty

The Shalankayana dynasty of ancient India ruled a part of Andhra region in India from 300 to 440 CE. Their territory was located between the Godavari and the Krishna rivers. Their capital was located at Vengi, modern Pedavegi near Eluru in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

The Shalankayanas succeeded the Andhra Ikshvaku dynasty and were vassals of the Pallava kings of Southern India. During their time the script for Telugu and Kannada began to clearly separating from that of the other South Indian and North Indian languages.

In the late 5th century, the Shalankayanas were conquered by Madhavarma II of the Vishnukundinas kings.

Chronology of Kings

- Hasti Varma
- Nandi Varma
- Vijayadeva Varma
- Vijayanandi Varma

Vishnukundina Dynasty

The Vishnukundina dynasty was an imperial power controlling the Deccan, Odisha and parts of South India during the 5th and 6th centuries, carving land out from the Vakataka Empire. It played an important role in the history of the Deccan. The area North of the Godavari, Kalinga, became independent after decline of Gupta period. The area South of the Krishna river fell to the Pallavas.

The Vishnukundina reign might be fixed between the end of the Salankayana and the rise of the Eastern Chalukyan power in 624 CE. Some historians mention Vishnukundins reign was from 420 to 624 CE, while some other historian say their reign was from early 5th century to the 7th century.

Govinda Varma I took the imperial title of Maharaja and his son Madhav Varma I was the founder of the power based on grants from Sripurvata (Nagarjunakonda) and Indrapalagutta.

Chronology of Kings

- Govinda Varma I
- Madhav Varma I
- Madhav Varma II
- Vikramendra Varma II
- Govinda Varma II

The Vishnukundina reign came to an end with the conquest of the Eastern Deccan by the Chalukya, Pulakeshin II. Pulakeshin appointed his brother Kubja Vishnuvardhana as Viceroy to rule over the conquered lands. Eventually, Vishnuvardhana declared his independence and started the Eastern Chalukya dynasty.