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Gupta Age and Other Rulers

In the third century impressive Gupta dynasty was established in Magadh. Gupta dynasty established political entity, peace and security in India, which brought unprecedented prosperity. Thus, Gupta age is called 'golden age of India'. Golden age means best progress of all the people. The Gupta rulers gave peace and prosperity to the people, which has even been appreciated by foreign travellers also. Gupta emperors were creators of 'Golden Age'.

Chandragupta I

Srigupta was the founder of Gupta dynasty in the kingdom of Magadh. His son's name was Ghatotkach Gupta. Chandragupta I (319 AD) succeeded Pataliputra as the successor of king Ghatotkach. He married Kumardevi, who was a girl of powerful Lichchhavi tribe. He extended boundaries of Magadh by conquering near by places like Prayagraj (Allahabad), Saket (Ayodhya). He assumed glorious title of 'Maharajadhiraj' in place of 'Maharaj'. In order to show his power and reputation he started gold coins. Since the accession of his coronation he started Gupta Samvat. Vallabhi rulers of Saurashtra also accepted Gupta Samvat. Due to initiation of Gupta Samvat, the arrangement of historical events according to the dateline was made possible in the history of India.

Emperor Samudragupta

After Chandragupta, his majestic son, Samudragupta came to power. Information about Samudragupta's time is obtained from pillar inscription of Prayagraj (Prayag-Prashasti) and his coins. This Prashasti has been composed by royal poet Harishen. It describes the victories and cultural achievements of Samudragupta. In very short time, he made his triumphant journey from northern states to the Kushan rule of Afghanistan. He defeated about twelve kings in South. After defeating these kings, he restored them wisely. He restored their kingdoms. Governors and officials were appointed to run the administration of the state.

Samudragupta was a great conqueror and a cultured emperor. His literary achievement and his character were notable. He composed many poems and got the title of 'Kaviraj'. Unfortunately, not even a single poem of his is available today. One coin shows Samudragupta playing 'Veena', which shows his love for music.

During his reign many temples, monasteries and Jain temples were constructed. He performed Ashwamedh yagna. In this regard he had got coins made. He collected scholars in his court and created high quality literature. Scholars wanted his and he wanted scholars' companionship. He encouraged Hinduism. He embraced social customs. Samudragupta's position in the history is unique and significant. He was the creator of importance of Gupta empire.





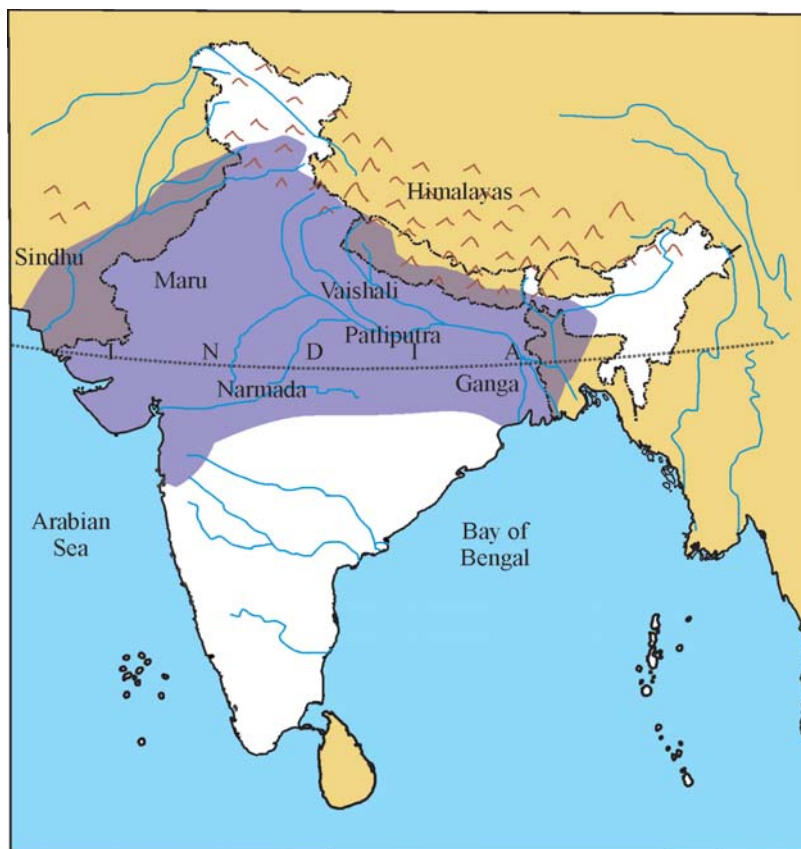
7.1 Coins of Gupta Age

Chandragupta-II - Vikramaditya

Samudragupta died. In his place Chandragupta II came to the throne. He not only successfully preserved the great legacy of his father which he inherited but also expanded the empire by conquering some of the regions.

Chandragupta II was the most talented ruler of Gupta dynasty. The boundaries of his empire extended upto Shak kingdom. He attacked Gujarat and ended Shak-Kshatrapa dynasty. In memory of this victory, he adopted the title of 'Shakari'. He was also called Vikramaditya.

He increased his military power by establishing marital relations with powerful kingdoms to remove Shak-Kshatrapas who had been ruling since three hundred years. These marriages proved to be very helpful in increasing his empire and defeating his enemies. New territories won by him were very important. They obtained the rich kingdoms of Guajrat and Saurashtra, the prosperous ports of Bhargukutch (Bharuch) and Stambhithir (Kambhat). As a result maritime trade of the state increased and Gupta kings became owner of intangible property.



7.2 Map of India during Gupta Period



Fahien a Chinese pilgrim, in the time of Chandragupta II praised administration and prosperity of Gupta empire. Though Chandragupta II was Vaishnav, he had great respect for other religions. His Army chief Amrakardev was Buddhist and his state minister Varsen was a Shaiv. Many monasteries were there in the capital, Patliputra.

Because of cultural achievements achieved during his reign, the Gupta age could become the golden age. He was the patron of scholars and poets. The great Sanskrit poet and playwright Kalidas was his royal poet Dhanvantri was his royal vaidya. Gems like scientist Varahmihir, Vaitalbhatt, writer of Amarkosh-Amarsingh etc. used to adorn the court. During his rule sculpture and drawing developed. Many of art pavilion of Ajanta caves were made during his time. He built a number of Buddhist monasteries in the capital Patliputra, Mehroli iron pillar near Delhi was made during his reign, which has not rusted for centuries, despite being in heat and rain.



7.3 Mehroli iron pillar

He made Ujjain his another capital besides Patliputra. He divided the state into different administrative units for running streamlined administration. In the year 414 the great emperor Chandragupta Vikramaditya died.

End of Gupta Dynasty

After the death of Chandragupta II, his majestic son Kumargupta-I came to throne. During his time some famous caves of Nalanda and some caves of Ajanta were erected.



7.4 Nalanda University



7.5 Caves of Ajanta

After Kumargupta-I, his brave son Skandgupta came to power. The weak rulers of post-Skandgupta time could not withstand the onslaught attacks of the obsessive and powerful Hunas and Gupta empire disintegrated (in 550 A.D.)

Administration of Gupta Age

We get information about administration during Gupta age from records, smritis and puranas. Accordingly the governing body was divided into three sections - Central, Provincial and Local.



Emperor was at the center of Gupta administration. He adopted titles like ‘Maharajadhiraj’, ‘Param Bhagwat.’

● Know it ●

The army chief was called ‘Mahabaladhikrut’ the minister of External affairs was called ‘Mahasandhivigrahk’ chief of palaces and gates guards were called ‘Mahapratihar.’ ‘Mahaashwapati’ was the chief of cavalry army and chief of army of elephants was called ‘Mahapilupati’. ‘Pustapal’ was appointed to take care of documents of the state.

Usually prince was appointed as the head of the province ‘Kumaramatya’ and ‘Commissioner’ played a major role in the province. The province was called ‘Bhukti’, whose head was regional. The province was divided into districts. The district was called ‘Vishay’.

A committee was formed at the village level. Which included elders, village heads and important adult citizens.

Economic Condition During Gupta Age

In economic terms, Gupta age was a golden period. Farming, internal trade and international trade will very developed. Special farming practises included annual, three year and five year farming. Wheat, rice in North India, Sugarcane in Gandhar, grapes and kesar in Kashmir and coconut in Kamroop were grown. Rice was grown in large quantity in Bengal, Cotton in Gujarat and Sindh, and silk was produced in Bengal. Trade of condiments and spices, silk and cotton had developed in South India.

King used to tax one sixth of the total production Land was donated to brahmins and temples. International trade was the epitome of Gupta age. Cotton, silk and spices were exported to Europe from India through Central Asia. While cotton, silk, spices, condiments and timber were exported to East and West of the world through international ports like Khambhat, Bharuch, Sopara and Tamralipti. Gold, silver and other items were imported.

Religious Status

Hinduism and Indian culture are seen in full swing during Gupta age. The Gupta emperors gave Vaishnavism the status of state religion. As a result, Vishnu his avatars Sri Ram and Sri Krishna were mostly worshipped at this time. Laxmi became very famous goddess. It was during this time only that Ramayan, the Mahabharat as well as the Puranas were re-compiled. Shrimad Bhagwat Gita became very important text of this time.

Like Vaishnavism, Shaivism also developed during Gupta age. In south India Shaiv saints were called ‘Naynar’, while Vaishnav saints were called ‘Alwar’ in south India. Mahishasurmardini (Durga) was also quite popularly worshipped here. The worship of Kartikeya was also practised during Gupta age.



Even Buddhism and Jainism also developed during Gupta age. Samudragupta was protector of Buddhism. Mahayan and Hinyan cult of Buddhism also developed.

Cultural Condition During Gupta Period

Gupta age was culturally golden age of India. Many new languages developed during this age. Kalidas, Skand Swami, Hariswami and Rani Vijaya and Aryasur were important litterateurs. Among all of them Kalidas was the best. Kalidas is called the Shakespeare of India. Taking story of Indian epics, he wrote epics like 'Abhigyanshakuntalam', 'Raghuvansham' and 'Meghdootam.' Gupta age was era of temple architecture. Gop in Gujarat, Parvati temple of Nachana Kothar and temple of Jhansi are the first brick temples of India. The Gupta age marks the beginning of the temple architecture. The idols of Durga, Buddha, Krishna and Shiva were made in large number.

Condition of Science During Gupta Age

Aryabhatta and Varahmihir were among the greatest scientists of this period. Aryabhatta discovered zero and 'decimal system'. Varahmihir wrote an important text named 'Brihadsanhita', which was related with Astronomy. Vagbhatt wrote a great text on Ayurveda named, 'Astanghradaysanhita' During this time medicines developed for humans as well as animals. Even medicines were also discovered for elephant and horse. Chemistry also developed quite well. Its best example is Iron pillar of Mehroli near Delhi which is not corroded even today also.

Emperor Harshvardhan

After Gupta age the kingdom of Harshvardhan is considered as one of the important states of ancient India. He belonged to Pusyabhuti clan of Thaneshwar. Rajyavardhan and Harshvardhan were sons of Prabhakar Vardhan. While his daughter was Rajyashree, who was married to king of Kanauj DhruvVerman. Gaud king Shashank and king of Malwa kidnapped Rajyashree and attacked on the kingdom, which created a major crisis. Rajyavardhan died while trying to save Rajyashree.

In such an emergency situation Emperor Harsh ascended the throne in 606 A.D. He saved Rajyashree. Not only this, he started his proper rule in both the states 'Kanauj' and Thaneshwar.

Harshvardhan was last great emperor of ancient India. He spread his empire in Magadha, Odisha, Saraswat, Gaud, Mithila. In contemporary states, Maitrak king Dhruvsen was his son-in-law. Pulkeshi II was the most powerful ruler in the south. In the battle of Narmada between Harshvardhan and Pulkeshi, Harshvardhan was defeated. Harshvardhan was regarded as the powerful king in North of Narmada.

Cultural contribution of Emperor Harshvardhan is very important. Great Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang came to India during his time. He stayed in his palace. Harsh was devotee of shiv and later became a great follower of Buddhism. He organized a religious conference under the Presidentship of



Hiuen Tsang. He placed idol of Buddha on mantle of elephant and worshipped. A seminar was organized on Mahayan and Hinyan.

Emperor Harsh had passion for literature, art and education. Great poet Banbhatt was associated with his court. He had written great volumes like 'Harshcharitam' and 'Kadambari' in Sanskrit. Mayurbhatt and Jaysurya were also great poets of the time of Harsha. Emperor Harsh himself also was a high-ranking literary figure. He composed two plays called 'Priyadarshika' and 'Ratnavali'. Along with it he also wrote a special play based on Jatak stories of Buddha named 'Naganand.'

Harsh also formed friendly relations with other countries. He sent a delegation to China. Similarly, a Chinese delegation also visited India. In this way Harsh was a high-ranking ruler, conqueror, administrator and litterateur. He donated 100 villages to sustain Nalanda Vidyapeeth.

Pulkeshi II

Among the contemporary kings of emperor Harsh's time, Pulkeshi II was the most powerful Chalukyan king. He took the power from Rastrakutas in Maharashtra and established a state. Pulkeshi II ruled for almost 40 years. He even defeated Emperor Harsh. He was a great winner. After defeating Kadamb, Gangas of Maheshwar, Mauryas of Konkan, he received the title of 'Lord of the south.' He also defeated Laat, Malav and Gurjars. He was the ruler of all regions of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Konkan.

Just like Harsh he had also developed relations with other countries. He had sent one of his ambassador to Iran's emperor Khushroo II who was his friend.

Other States

At this time, other states included Pallavas of Kanchi, Gurjars, Pratihars of Rajasthan, Maitraks of Vallabhi, Gurjars in South Gujarat, Karkotako of Kashmir etc. Pallavas of Kanchi had become famous for their architecture and art. They built many temples of Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh by cutting rocks. Pallavas who built chariot temple on sea shore, have increased India's cultural prosperity. Kailashnath temple built in Kanchipuram can be considered as the best temple of that time.

Exercises

1. Choose the correct alternative and write correct answer :

(1) Who was the founder of Gupta Dynasty ?

(A) Shrigupta (B) Chandragupta I (C) Samudragupta (D) Chandgupta-II

(2) Which king is shown in the coin as playing Veena ?

(A) Samudragupta (B) Chandragupta II (C) Scandgupta (D) Kumargupta



(3) During whose time the iron pillar was constructed in Delhi ?

(A) Chandragupta II (B) Scand Gupta (C) Samudragupta (D) Chandragupta I

(4) Which vidyapeeth was founded in the time of Kumargupta ?

(A) Vallabhi (B) Nalanda (C) Vikramshila (D) Kashi

2. Answer the following questions in short :

(1) In which emperor's age Gupta Age was known as 'golden age' ?

(2) Who was the writer of 'Harshcharitam' ?

3. Match the information given in section 'A' with the information given in section 'B'.

A

- (1) Chief Commander
- (2) District
- (3) Revenue
- (4) Vagbhatt
- (5) Emperor of Iran

B

- (a) Subject
- (b) Sixth part of Production
- (c) Mahabaladhikrut
- (d) Khushroo
- (e) Astanghriday Sanhita

