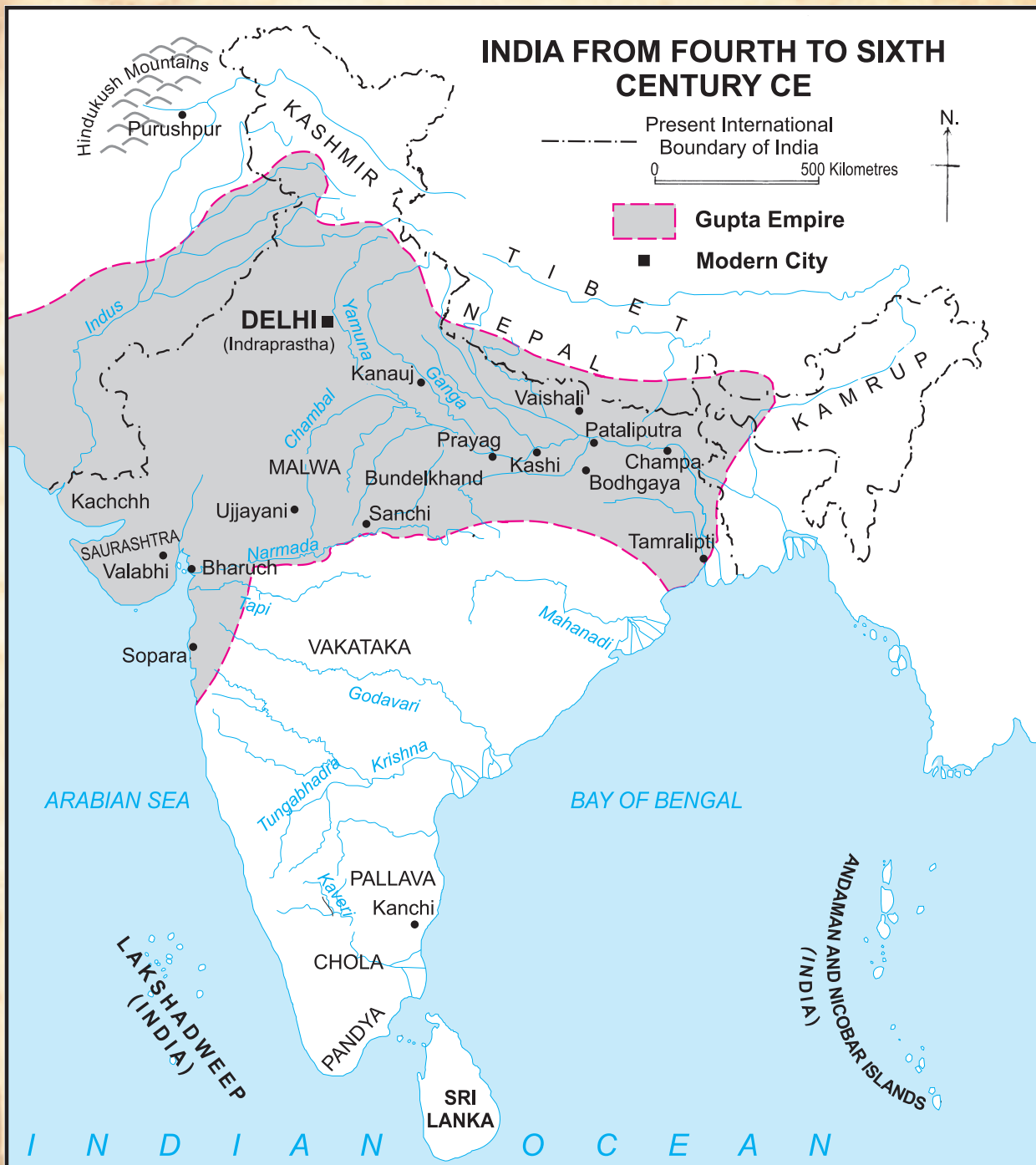


8. States after the Maurya Empire



- 8.1 The Shunga dynasty
- 8.2 Indo-Greek kings
- 8.3 Kushana kings
- 8.4 The Gupta dynasty
- 8.5 The Vardhan dynasty
- 8.6 Powers in Northeast India

8.1 The Shunga dynasty

After Emperor Ashoka, Maurya power started declining. The last Maurya Emperor was called Brihadratha. The Maurya General Pushyamitra Shunga revolted against Brihadratha, killed him and became the king himself.

8.2 Indo-Greek kings

During this period, there were several small kingdoms ruled by Greek kings to the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. Those kings are known as Indo-Greek kings. In the history of the coins of ancient India, the coins of these kings are very important. They had a tradition of putting the picture of the king on one side and that of a deity on the other side. This tradition later took root in India. One of the famous Indo-Greek kings was Menander, who discussed Buddhist philosophy with the Buddhist *bhikkhu*, Nagasena. Menander is also referred to as 'Milinda'. The questions that he discussed with *Bhikkhu* Nagasena led to the creation of the book 'Milind Panha'. The Pali word '*panha*' means 'question'.



A silver coin of Menander – both sides

8.3 Kushana kings

India was invaded from time to time by several tribes. The Kushanas were one such tribe from Central Asia. They established their rule in the northwestern region and in Kashmir in the first century CE. The Kushana kings were the first to start minting of gold coins in India. They started the custom of putting the images of Gautama Buddha and different Indian deities on the coins. The Kushan king Kanishka extended their empire.

Emperor Kanishka :

Kanishka's empire extended from Kabul in the west to Varanasi in the east. Gold and copper coins minted by him have been found in North India. The fourth Buddhist Council was held in Kashmir during his reign. He established the city of Kanishkapur in Kashmir. It is believed that the village of Kampur near Srinagar today could be Kanishkapur.

The well-known poet Ashvaghosh lived during the reign of Kanishka. He wrote the texts 'Buddhacharita' and 'Vajrasuchi'. The famous *vaidya* Charaka was also in Kanishka's court.



A gold coin of Kanishka – both sides



Do you know?

Kanishka's gold coin : It was minted by Emperor Kanishka. It has the words 'Shao Nano Shao Kaneshki Koshano' on one side. It means 'King of kings, Emperor Kanishka Kushana'. On the other side, there is an image of Gautama Buddha and the word 'Boddo', meaning Buddha, written in the Greek script.



8.4 The Gupta Dynasty

The end of the third century CE saw the rise of the Gupta dynasty in North India. The Guptas remained in power for nearly three centuries. ‘Shrigupta’ was the founder of the Gupta dynasty. Samudragupta and Chandragupta II were the notable kings of the Gupta dynasty.

Samudragupta : The expansion of the Gupta empire began during the reign of Chandragupta I. His son, Samudragupta, defeated the smaller neighbouring kingdoms and extended the empire further. In his time, the Gupta empire spread from Assam upto the Punjab. He had also conquered the eastern coastal region up to Kanchi in Tamilnadu. Due to these victories, his power came to be recognised everywhere. As a result, kings on the northwestern frontiers as well as those in Sri Lanka made treaties of friendship with him. A pillar inscription at Prayag describes Samudragupta’s conquests and victories. This inscription is known as ‘Prayag-prashasti’ and also as ‘Allahabad Prashasti’. He was an expert *veena* player. He minted coins which had a variety of images engraved on them. In one of them, he is seen playing the *veena*. His name Samudragupta, is engraved on it.



A gold coin of Samudragupta – both sides

Chandragupta II : After

Samudragupta, his son Chandragupta II ascended the throne. He extended the Gupta empire towards the northwest. He also won Malwa, Gujarat and Saurashtra. He established good relations with the powerful Vakataka rulers in the south by giving his daughter Prabhavati in marriage to Rudrasen II.

There is an iron pillar at Mehrauli near Delhi. It has not rusted even in the course of the last fifteen hundred years. It is an excellent specimen of the metallurgical skill of the ancient Indian people. The inscription on the pillar bears the name of a king called ‘Chandra’. It is on this basis that the iron pillar is assumed to be of the period of Chandragupta II.



Do you know?

The Chinese traveller Fa Hien came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II. In his travelogue, he has described the social life during the Gupta period. He says that Indian cities are big and prosperous. There are several guest houses for travellers and also several charitable organizations. The city has hospitals where the poor get medical treatment free of charge. There are great *vihars* and temples. People are free to choose any occupation. They move about freely – there are no restrictions on their movement. Government officers and soldiers are paid their salaries regularly. People do not drink alcohol or commit violence. The administration of the Gupta rule is conducted in a proper and efficient manner.



In this period, the Buddhist *bhikkhu*, Fa Hien, came to India from China. He has written an account of his travels in India. From his writings, we learn about the efficient administration of the Gupta emperors.

8.5 The Vardhan Dynasty

With the decline of the Gupta power, many States emerged in North India. The Vardhan dynasty was one of them. Prabhakar Vardhan was the king of Thanesar, near Delhi. The Vardhan dynasty became powerful during his reign. His son, Harshavardhan, expanded the Vardhan Empire up to Nepal in the north, up to the river Narmada in the south, Assam in the east and Gujarat in the west. He had cordial relations with Raja Bhaskarvarman of Kamrup, i.e., ancient Assam. He had also established friendly relations with the Emperor of China and even sent his ambassador to the Chinese court.

The capital of Harshvardhan's Empire was Kanauj. Trade flourished during his reign. He spent a large portion of his revenue for the welfare of the people. Every five years, he would distribute all his wealth amongst the people.

The court poet Banabhatta wrote 'Harshacharita', a biography of Emperor Harshavardhan. This text provides information on the life and achievements of Harshavardhan. Harshavardhan had become a follower of Buddhism but gave generous patronage to other religions, too. He wrote three Sanskrit plays 'Ratnavali', 'Naganand' and 'Priyadarshika'. The Buddhist *bhikkhu*, Yuan Chwang had come to India from China during his regime. He travelled to

all parts of India. He stayed at the Nalanda University for two years. On returning to his homeland, he translated many Buddhist manuscripts into Chinese.



Yuan Chwang



Do you know ?

Yuan Chwang travelled all over India. He has words of praise for the people of Maharashtra. He writes, 'The people of Maharashtra are a proud people. They never forget a favour done to them but they do not spare anyone who insults them. They will help another in distress without a care even for their own life. They do not harm anyone who takes refuge with them.'





Nalanda University

8.6 Powers in Northeast India

A story in Mahabharata tells about the marriage of Arjuna and Ulupi – the princess of Manipur State in East India. The State of ‘Kamrup’ emerged in the fourth century CE. It was established by Pushyavarman. His name has been mentioned in the pillar inscription of Samudragupta at Allahabad. Many inscriptions of the Kamrup kings are available. The epics Mahabharata and Ramayana use the name ‘Pragjyotish’ for Kamrup. The capital of that State was ‘Pragjyotishpur’. Today, we know it as the city of Guwahati in Assam.

In the book ‘Periplus of the Erythrean Sea’, Kamrup is mentioned as ‘Kirhadiya’ or ‘the region of the Kirat people’. The Kamrup kingdom extended in the Brahmaputra river basin, Bhutan, some parts of Bengal and Bihar. During the reign of king Bhaskarvarman, Yuan Chwang had visited ‘Kamrup’.

In this chapter, we learnt about the different kingdoms in North India that emerged in the period after the Mauryas. Similarly, we also learnt about the situation in the northeastern part of India during that period. In the next chapter, we will get acquainted with the kingdoms of the south of the same period.



Do you know ?

According to the Indian tradition, Kashmir was known as Kashyapapur in ancient times. Greek historians have mentioned it by the names of Kaspapyros, Kaspatyros and Kasperia. There is a mention that the Kamboj dynasty ruled there during the period of the Mahabharata. During Emperor Ashoka’s period, Kashmir had become a part of the Maurya Empire. In the 7th century CE, Kashmir was ruled by the Karkot dynasty. Kalhan has written about it in his book ‘Rajtarangini’.





Exercise

1. Can you tell ?

- (1) The kings who started the minting of gold coins in India.
- (2) The city established by Kanishka in Kashmir.
- (3) The king who played the *veena*.
- (4) Another name for Kamrup.

2. Observe the map in the lesson. List the names of the modern cities which were part of the Gupta Empire.

3. Discuss and write.

- (1) Emperor Kanishka
- (2) The Iron Pillar at Mehrauli

4. Make a list of the various books and authors mentioned in the lesson.

5. Make a comparative chart of the Vardhan and Gupta dynasties based on the following points.

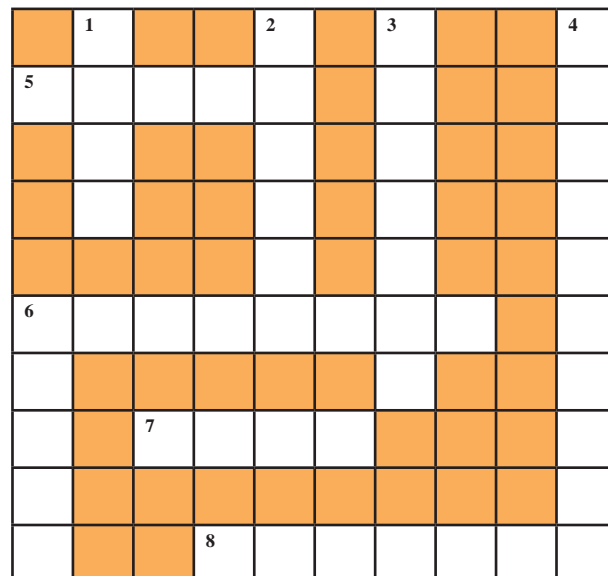
| Points | Gupta Dynasty | Vardhan Dynasty |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Founder | | |
| Expansion of the kingdom / empire | | |
| Achievements | | |

6. What would you do if you met foreign travellers like Yuan Chwang?

Activity :

Obtain more information about the rulers of the period following the Maurya period in India. Enact the role of a ruler of your choice.

7. Solve the puzzle.



Down

1. (A word for) King in Indian languages.
2. A Chinese traveller to India
3. A famous Indo-Greek King had discussions with this *Bauddha bhikkhu*.
4. A poet at the court of Emperor Harshavardhan, who also wrote his biography.
6. Chandragupta II conquered this State neighbouring Gujarat.

Across

5. A Pali word that means question
6. The most famous Indo-Greek King
7. Kanishka was the first Emperor to make this from gold.
8. An ancient Indian University where the Chinese traveller Yuan Chwang stayed for two years.