

APPOLO STUDY CENTRE

GUPTAS

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6th term - 3

Unit 3. The Age of Empires: Guptas and Vardhanas

Introduction

- By the end of the 3rd century, the powerful empires established by the Kushanas in the north and Satavahanas in the south had lost their greatness and strength. After the decline of Kushanas and Satavahanas, Chandragupta carved out a kingdom and establish his dynastic rule, which lasted for about two hundred years. After the downfall of the Guptas and thereafter and interregnum of nearly 50 years, Harsha of Vardhana dynasty ruled North India from 606 to 647 A.D (CE).

Sources

- Archaeological Sources
- Gold, silver and copper coins issued by Gupta rulers.
- Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta.
- The Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription.
- Udayagiri Cave Inscription, Mathura Stone Inscription and Sanchi Stone Inscription of Chandragupta II.
- Bhitari Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta.
- The Gadhwa Stone Inscription.
- Madubhan Copper Plate Inscription
- Sonpat Copper Plate
- Nalanda Inscription on clay seal

Literary Sources

- Vishnu, Matsya, Vayu and Bhagavata Puranas and Niti Sastras of Narada
- Visakhadatta's Devichandraguptam and Mudrarakshasa and Bana's Harshacharita
- Dramas of Kalidasa
- Accounts of Chinese Buddhist monk Fahien who visited India during the reign of Chandragupta II.
- Harsha's Ratnavali, Nagananda, Priyadharshika
- Hiuen-Tsang's Si-Yu-Ki

Foundation of the Gupta Dynasty

- Sri Gupta is considered to be the founder of the Gupta dynasty. He is believed to have reigned over parts of present-day Bengal and Bihar. He was the first Gupta ruler to be featured on coins. He was succeeded by his son Ghatotkacha. Both are mentioned as Maharajas in inscriptions.

Chandragupta I (c. 319–335 AD(CE))

- Chandragupta I married Kumaradevi of the famous and powerful Lichchhavi family. Having gained the support of this family, Chandragupta could eliminate various small states in northern India and crown himself the monarch of a larger kingdom. The gold coins attributed to Chandragupta bear the images of Chandragupta, Kumaradevi and the legend 'Lichchhavayah'.

Samudragupta (c. 335–380)

- Samudragupta, son of Chandragupta I, was the greatest ruler of the dynasty. The Prayog Prashasti, composed by Samudragupta's court poet Harisena was engraved on Allahabad Pillar. This Allahabad Pillar inscription is the main source of information for Samudragupta's reign.

Consolidation of Gupta Dynasty

- Samudragupta was a great general and when he became emperor, he carried on a vigorous campaign all over the country and even in the south. In the southern Pallava kingdom, the king who was defeated by Samudragupta was Vishnugopa.
- Samudragupta conquered nine kingdoms in northern India. He reduced 12 rulers of the southern India to the status of feudatories and forced them to pay tribute. He received homage from the rulers of East Bengal, Assam, Nepal, the eastern part of Punjab and various tribes of Rajasthan.

Chandragupta II (C.380 - 415)

- Chandragupta II was the son of Samudragupta. He was also known as Vikramaditya. He conquered western Malwa and Gujarat by defeating the Saka rulers. He maintained friendly relationship with

the rulers of southern India. The iron pillar near Qutub Minar is believed to have been built by Vikramaditya. Fahien, a Buddhist scholar from China, visited India during his reign. Vikramaditya is said to have assembled the greatest writers and artists (Navaratna [Nine Jewels]) in his court. Kalidasa is said to be one among them. Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta I, who built the famous Nalanda University.

- Kumaragupta's successor Skandagupta had to face a new threat in the form of the invasion of Huns. He defeated them and drove them away. But after twelve years, they came again and broke the back of the Gupta Empire. The last of the great Guptas was Baladitya, assumed to have been Narasimha Gupta I.

Fahien

- During the reign of Chandragupta II, the Buddhist monk Fahien visited India. His travel accounts provided us information about the socio-economic, religious and moral conditions of the people of the Gupta age. According to Fahien, the people of Magadha were happy and prosperous, that justice was mildly administered and there was no death penalty. Gaya was desolated. Kapilavasthu had become a jungle, but at Pataliputra people were rich and prosperous.
- He was himself attracted towards Buddhism. He was paying tribute to Mihirakula but was distressed by his hostility towards Buddhism. So he stopped paying tribute. Though Baladitya succeeded in imprisoning him, Mihirakula turned treacherous and drove away Baladitya from Magadha. After Baladitya, the great Gupta Empire faded away. The last recognised king of the Gupta Empire was Vishnugupta.

Gupta Polity

- The divine theory of kingship (the concept that king is the representative of God on earth and so he is answerable only to God and not to anyone else) was practised by the Gupta rulers. The Gupta kings wielded enormous power in political, administrative, military and judicial spheres. The Gupta king was assisted by a council of mantris (ministers). The council consisted of princes, high

officials and feudatories. A large number of officials were employed by the Gupta rulers to carry on the day-to-day administration of the country. High-ranking officials were called dandanayakas and mahadandanayakas.

- The Gupta Empire was divided into provinces known as deshas or bhuktis. They were administered by the governors, designated as uparikas. The province was divided into districts such as vishyas and they were controlled by the officers known as vishyapatis. At the village level, there were functionaries such as gramika and gramadhyaksha. The extensive empire shows the important role of military organisation. Seals and inscriptions mentioned military designations as baladhikrita and mahabaladhikrita (commander of infantry and cavalry respectively). The system of espionage included spies known as dutakas.

Society and Economy

Land and Peasants

- Nitisara, authored by Kamandaka, emphasises the importance of the royal treasury and mentions various sources of revenue. The military campaigns of kings like Samudragupta were financed through revenue surpluses. Land tax was the main revenue to the government. The condition of peasants was pathetic. They were required to pay various taxes. They were reduced to the position of serfs.

Classification of land during Gupta period	
Kshetra	Cultivable land
Khila	Waste land
Aprahata	Jungle or forest land
Vasti	Habitable land
Gapata Saraha	Pastoral land

Trade and Commerce

- The contribution of the traders for the development of Gupta's economy was very impressive. There were two types of traders, namely Sresti and Sarthavaha.

Sresti	Sarthavaha
Sresti traders usually settled	Sarthavaha traders were

at a standard place

caravan traders who carried their goods to different places.

- Trade items ranged from daily products to valuable and luxury goods. The important trade goods were pepper, gold, copper, iron, horses and elephants. Lending money at a high rate of interest was in practice during Gupta period. The Guptas developed roadways connecting different parts of the country. Pataliputra, Ujjain, Benaras, Mathura were the famous trade centres. Ports in western (Kalyan, Mangalore, Malabar) and eastern (Tamralipti in Bengal) coasts of India facilitated trade.

Nalanda University

- Nalanda University flourished under the patronage of the Gupta Empire in the 5th and 6th centuries and later under emperor Harsha of Kanauj.
- At Nalanda, Buddhism was the main subject of study. Other subjects like Yoga, Vedic literature and Medicine were also taught.
- Hiuen Tsang spent many years studying Buddhism in the University.
- Eight Mahapatashalas and three large libraries were situated on the campus.
- Nalanda was ravaged and destroyed by Mamluks (Turkish Muslims) Under Bhaktiyar Khalji.
- Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Metallurgy

- Mining and metallurgy were the most flourishing industries during the Gupta period.
- The most important evidence of development in metallurgy was the Mehrauli Iron Pillar installed by King Chandragupta in Delhi. This monolithic iron pillar has lasted through the centuries without rusting.

Society

- The society that adhered to four varna system was patriarchal. According to laws of Manu, which was in force, women should be under the protection of their father, husband or eldest son. Polygamy was widely prevalent. The kings and feudatory lords often had more than one wife. Inscriptions refer to Kubernaga and Dhruvaswamini as the queens of Chandragupta II. Sati was practised during the Gupta rule.

Slavery

- Slavery was not institutionalised in India, as in the West. But there are references to the existence of various categories of slaves during the Gupta age.

Religion

- There was revival of Vedic religion and Vedic rites. Samudragupta and Kumaragupta I performed Asvamedha Yagna (a horse sacrifice ritual). We notice the beginning of image worship and the emergence of two sects, namely Vaishnavism and Saivism, during the Gupta period. Buddhism also continued to flourish though it split into two sects, namely Hinayana and Mahayana.

Art and Architecture

- The Guptas were the first to construct temples, which evolved from the earlier tradition of rock-cut shrines. Adorned with towers and elaborate carvings, these temples were dedicated to all Hindu deities. The most notable rock-cut caves are found at Ajanta and Ellora (Maharashtra), Bagh (Madhya Pradesh) and Udaygiri (Odisha). The structural temples built during this period resemble the characteristic features of the Dravidian style.
- Two remarkable examples of Gupta metal sculpture are (i) a copper image of Buddha about 18 feet high at Nalanda and (ii) Sultanganj Buddha seven-and-a-half feet in height. The most important examples of the Gupta paintings are found on the Fresco of the Ajanta caves and the Bagh cave in Gwalior.

Literature

- Though the language spoken by the people was Prakrit, the Guptas made Sanskrit the official language and all their epigraphic records are in Sanskrit. The Gupta period also saw the development of Sanskrit grammar based on the grammar of Panini and Patanjali who wrote Ashtadhyayi and Mahabhashya respectively. A Buddhist scholar from Bengal, Chandrogomia, composed a book on grammar titled Chandrvyakaranam. Kalidasa's famous dramas were Sakunthala, Malavikagnimitra and Vikramoorvashiyam. Other significant works of Kalidasa were Meghaduta, Raghuvamsa, Kumarasambava and Ritusamhara.

Mathematics, Astronomy and Medicine

- Invention of zero and the consequent evolution of the decimal system were the legacy of Guptas to the modern world. Aryabhatta, Varahamihira and Brahmagupta were foremost astronomers and mathematicians of the time. Aryabhatta, in his book Surya Siddhanta, explained the true causes of solar and lunar eclipses. He was the first Indian astronomer to declare that the earth revolves around its own axis. Dhanvantri was a famous scholar in the field of medicine. He was a specialist in Ayurveda. Charaka was a medical scientist. Susruta was the first Indian to explain the process of surgery.

Vardhana Dynasty

- The founder of the Vardhana or Pushyabhuti dynasty ruled from Thaneswar. Pushyabhuti served as a military general under the Guptas and rose to power after the fall of the Guptas. With the accession of Prabhakaravardhana, the Pushyabhuti family became strong and powerful.
- Rajavardhana, the eldest son of Prabhakaravardhana, ascended the throne after his father's death. Rajavardhana's sister Rajayashri's husband, Raja of Kanauj, was killed by the Gauda ruler Sasanka of Bengal. Sasanka also imprisoned Rajayashri. Rajavardhana, in the process of retrieving his sister was treacherously killed by Sasanka. This resulted in his younger brother Harshavardhana becoming king of Thaneswar. The notables of the Kanauj kingdom also invited Harsha to take its crown. After becoming the ruler of the both Thaneswar and Kanauj, Harsha shifted his capital from Thaneswar to Kanauj.

Conquest of Harshavardhana

- The most popular king of the vardhana dynasty was Harshavardhana. Harsha ruled for 41 years. His feudatories included those of Jalandhar, Kashmir, Nepal and Valabhi. Sasanka of Bengal remained hostile to him.
- It was Harsha who unified most of northern India. But the extension of his authority in the south was checked by Chalukya king Pulikesin II. The kingdom of Harsha disintegrated rapidly into small states after his death in 648 AD (CE). He maintained a cordial relationship with the rulers of Iran and China.

Administration

- The emperor was assisted by a council of ministers. The prime minister occupied the most important position in the council of ministers. Bhaga, Hiranya and Bali were the three kinds of tax collected during Harsha's reign. Criminal law was more severe than that of the Gupta age. Life imprisonment was the punishment for violation of the laws and for plotting against the king. Perfect law and order prevailed throughout the empire. Harsha paid great attention to discipline and strength of the army. Harsha built charitable institutions for the stay of the travellers, and to care for the sick and the poor.

Religious Policy

- Harsha was the worshipper of Shiva in the beginning, but he embraced Buddhism under the influence of his sister Rajyashri and the Buddhist monk and traveller Hiuen Tsang. He belonged to Mahayana school of thought. Harsha treated Vedic scholars and Buddhist monks alike and distributed charities equally to them. He was the last Buddhist sovereign in India. As a pious Buddhist, Harsha stopped the killing of animals for food. He was noted for his policy of religious toleration and used to worship the images of Buddha, Shiva and Sun simultaneously. He summoned two Buddhist assemblies, one at Kanauj and another at Prayag.

Art and Literature

- Harsha, himself a poet and dramatist, gathered around him a best of poets and artists. Harsha's popular works are Ratnavali, Nagananda

and Priyadharshika. His royal court was adorned by Banabhatta, Mayura, Hardatta and Jayasena.

- Temples and monasteries functioned as centres of learning. Kanauj became a famous city. Harsha constructed a large number of viharas, monasteries and stupas on the bank of the Ganges. The Nalanda University, a university and monastery combined, was said to have had 10,000 students and monks in residence, when Hiuen Tsang visited the university.

NOTE

- ❖ Lichchhavi was an old gana-sanga and its territory lay between the Ganges and the Nepal Terai.
- ❖ Prashasti is a Sanskrit word, meaning commendation or 'in praise of'. Court poets flattered their kings listing out their achievements. These accounts were later engraved on pillars so that the people could read them.
- ❖ Samudragupta was a devotee of Vishnu. He revived the Vedic practice of performing horse sacrifice to commemorate victories in wars. He issued gold coins and in one of them, he is portrayed playing harp (veenai). Samudragupta was not only a great conqueror but a lover of poetry and music and for this, he earned the title 'Kaviraja'.
- ❖ Srimeghavarman, the Buddhist king of Ceylon, was a contemporary of Samudragupta.
- ❖ The surnames of Chandragupta II were Vikramaditya, Narendrachandra, Simhachandra, Narendrasimha, Vikrama Devaraja, Devagupta and Devasri.
- ❖ Samudragupta introduced the Gupta monetary system. Kushana coins provided inspiration to Samudragupta. The Gupta gold coins were known as Dinara. Guptas issued many gold coins but comparatively fewer silver and copper coins. However, the post-Gupta period saw a fall in the circulation of gold coins, indicating the decline in the prosperity of the empire.
- ❖ The metals used by them were: iron, gold, copper, tin, lead, brass, bronze, bell-metal, mica, manganese and red chalk.
- ❖ Harsha met the Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang, at Kajangala near Rajmahal (Jharkhand) for the first time.
- ❖ Hiuen Tsang, the 'prince of pilgrims', visited India during Harsha's reign. His Si- Yu-Ki provides detailed information about the social,

economic, religious and cultural conditions of India during Harsha's time. Hiuen Tsang tells us how Harsha, though a Buddhist, went to participate in the great kumbhamela held at Prayag.

- ❖ The assembly at Kanauj was attended by 20 kings. A large number of Buddhist, Jain and Vedic scholars attended the assembly. A golden statue of Buddha was consecrated in a monastery and a small statue of Buddha (three feet) was carried in a procession.
- ❖ In the assembly at Prayag, Harsha distributed his wealth among the Buddhists, Vedic scholars and poor people. Harsha offered fabulous gifts to the Buddhist monks on all the four days of the assembly.
- ❖ Chandragupta I was the contemporary of Constantine the Great, the Roman Emperor, who founded Constantinople.
- ❖ Harsha's time coincided with a early days of Tang Dynasty of China. Their capital(Xi'an) was a great centre of art and learning.

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Unit - 7 The Guptas

Introduction

- After the Mauryan empire, many small kingdoms rose and fell. In the period from c. 300 to 700 CE, a classical pattern of an imperial rule evolved, paving the way for state formation in many regions. During this period, the Gupta kingdom emerged as a great power and achieved the political unification of a large part of the Indian subcontinent. It featured a strong central government, bringing many kingdoms under its hegemony. Feudalism as an institution began to take root during this period. With an effective guild system and overseas trade, the Gupta economy boomed. Great works in Sanskrit were produced during this period and a high level of cultural maturity in fine arts, sculpture and architecture was achieved.
- The living standards of upper classes reached a peak. Education, art and study of science progressed, but the feudal system of governance put people in some form of hardship. Although some historians proclaim that Gupta period was a golden age, it is not entirely accurate. Many scholars would, however, agree that it was a period of cultural florescence and a classical age for the arts.

Sources

- There are three types of sources for reconstructing the history of the Gupta period.

I. Literary sources

- Narada, Vishnu, Brihaspati and Katyayana smritis.
- Kamandaka's Nitisara, a work on polity addressed to the king (400 CE)

- Devichandraguptam and Mudrarakshasam by Vishakadutta provide details about the rise of the Guptas.
- Buddhist and Jaina texts
- Works of Kalidasa

Accounts of the Chinese traveller Fahien

II. Epigraphical Sources

- Mehrauli Iron Pillar inscription -achievements of Chandragupta I.
- Allahabad Pillar inscription -describing Samudragupta's personality and achievements in 33 lines composed by Harisena and engraved in Sanskrit in Nagari script.

III. Numismatic Sources

- Coins issued by Gupta kings contain legends and figures. These gold coins tell us about the titles the Guptas assumed and the Vedic rituals they performed.

Origins of the Gupta Dynasty

- Evidence on the origin and antecedents of the Gupta dynasty is limited. The Gupta kings seem to have risen from modest origins. Chandragupta I, who was the third ruler of the Gupta dynasty married Kumaradevi, a Lichchavi prince. The marriage is mentioned in the records of his successors with pride indicating that that royal connection would have contributed to the rise of Guptas. Lichchavi was an old, established gana-sangha and its territory lay between the Ganges and the Nepal Terai. According to Allahabad pillar inscription Samudragupta, the illustrious son of Chandragupta I, had conquered the whole fertile plains west of Prayag to Mathura and launched a spectacular raid through Kalinga into the south as far as Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital. The Puranas mention Magadha, Allahabad and Oudh as the Gupta dominions.

- The first ruler of the Gupta Empire was Sri Gupta (240–280 CE) who was succeeded by his son Ghatotkacha (280–319 CE). Both Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha are mentioned as Maharajas in inscriptions. Chandragupta I, the son of Ghatotkacha, ruled from 319 to 335 CE and is considered to be the first great king of the Gupta Empire. Chandragupta held the title of maharaja-adhiraja (great king over other kings). His imperial position is inferred from the records of others. No inscriptions or coins have survived from his reign.
- Chandragupta I appointed his son Samudragupta to succeed him in 335 CE. A lengthy eulogy on him, inscribed on an Ashokan pillar, suggests that he was claiming the legacy of the Mauryan kingdom. This inscription gives an impressive list of kings and regions that succumbed to Samudragupta's march across the country.
- Four northern kings were conquered mainly in the area around Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh. The kings of the south and the east were forced to pay homage, and from the places mentioned, it appears that Samudragupta campaigned down the eastern coast as far as Kanchipuram. Nine kings of the western half of the Ganges Plain were violently uprooted. The forest kings (tribal chiefs of Central India and the Deccan) were forced to pay tribute. The kings of Assam and Bengal in eastern India and those of small kingdoms in Nepal and the Punjab also paid tribute by submission. Nine Republics in Rajasthan, including the Malavas and Yaudheyas, were forced to accept Gupta's suzerainty. In addition, foreign kings, such as the Daivaputra Shahanushahi (a Kushana title), the Sakas and the king of Lanka also paid tribute, as mentioned in the eulogy.
- Though this statement is exaggerated, it is undeniable that the southern kings paid tribute, while the northern kingdoms were annexed to the Gupta Empire under Samudragupta. His direct control was confined to the Ganges valley, since the Sakas remained unconquered in western India. The tribes of Rajasthan paid tribute, but the Punjab was outside the limits of his authority. Samudragupta's campaign broke the power of the tribal republics in those regions that led to repeated invasions from the Huns.

- The relationship with Kushanas is not certain, but with regard to Lanka, its ruler Meghavarman sent presents and requested permission from Samudragupta to build a Buddhist monastery at Gaya. Samudragupta's reign lasted for about 40 years, which must have given him ample time to plan and organise these campaigns. He performed the horse-sacrifice ritual to proclaim his military conquests.
- Samudragupta patronised scholars and poets like Harisena and thus promoted Sanskrit literature. Though an ardent follower of Vaishnavism, he also patronised the great Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu. As a lover of poetry and music, he was given the title "Kaviraja". His coins bear the insignia of him playing the vina (lute).
- Named after his grandfather, Chandragupta II was a capable ruler, who ruled for 40 years from c. 375 to 415 CE. He came to power after a succession struggle with his brother Rama Gupta. He is also known as Vikramaditya. With the capital at Pataliputra, Chandragupta II extended the limits of the Gupta Empire by conquest and matrimonial alliances. He married off his daughter Prabhavati to a Vakataka prince, who ruled the strategic lands Chandragupta II of Deccan. This alliance was highly useful when he proceeded against the Saka rulers of western India. Chandragupta II conquered western Malwa and Gujarat by defeating the Saka rulers who had reigned for about four centuries in the region.
- The kingdom's prosperity grew out of its trade links with Roman Empire. After establishing himself in eastern and western India, Chandragupta II defeated northern rulers like the Huns, Kambojas and Kiratas. He was a great conqueror and an able administrator as well. His other names (as mentioned in coins) include Vikrama, Devagupta, Devaraja, Simhavikrama, Vikramaditya and Sakari. His court had nine jewels or navaratnas, that is, nine eminent people in various fields of art, literature and science. This included the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, the Sanskrit scholar Harisena, the lexicographer Amarasimha, and the physician Dhanvantari. Fahien, the Buddhist scholar from China, visited India during his reign. He records the prosperity of the Gupta Empire. Chandragupta II was

the first Gupta ruler to issue silver coins. His rule thus formed the peak period of Gupta's territorial expansion.

- Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumara Gupta I, who founded the Nalanda University. He was also called Sakraditya. The last great king of the Gupta dynasty, Skanda Gupta, was the son of Kumara Gupta I. He was able to repulse an attack by the Huns, but the recurrence of Huns' invasion strained his empire's coffers. The Gupta Empire declined after the death of Skanda Gupta in 467 CE. He was followed by many successors who hastened the end of the Gupta Empire. The last recognised king of the Gupta line was Vishnu Gupta who reigned from 540 to 550 CE.

The King

- During the Gupta age, political hierarchies can be identified by the titles adopted. Kings assumed titles such as maharajadhiraja, parama-bhattaraka and parameshvara. They were also connected with gods through epithets such as parama-daivata (the foremost worshipper of the gods) and parama-bhagavata (the foremost worshipper of Vasudeva Krishna). Some historians have suggested that the Gupta Kings claimed divine status. For example, Samudragupta is compared to Purusha (Supreme Being) in the Allahabad inscription. These assertions can be seen as reflections of an attempt to claim divine status by the king.

Ministers and other Officials

- Seals and inscriptions make a mention of official ranks and designations, whose precise meaning is often uncertain. The term "kumaramatya" occurs in six Vaishali seals, which suggests that this title represented a high-ranking officer associated with an office (adikarana) of his own. The designation "amatya" occurs on several Bita seals, and the "kumaramatya" seems to have been pre-eminent among amatyas and equivalent in status to princes of royal blood. Kumaramatyas were attached to the king, crown prince, revenue department or a province. One of the Vaishali seals refers to a kumaramatya who seems to have been in charge of the maintenance of the sacred coronation tank of the Lichchavis.

Individuals holding the ranks of kumaramatya sometimes had additional designations as well, and such ranks were hereditary. For example, Harisena, composer of the Allahabad prashasti (inscriptions of praise), was a kumaramatya, sandhivigrahika and mahadandanayaka, and was the son of Dhruvabhuti, a mahadandanayaka.

Fahien's account on Mathura and Pataliputra

At Mathura, the people are numerous and happy; they do not have to register their household. Only those who cultivate the royal land have to pay a portion of the grain from it. Criminals are fined both lightly and heavily depending on the circumstances.

In the case of repeated rebellion, their right hands are cut off. Throughout the whole country, the people do not kill any living creatures or drink any intoxicant.

The inhabitants of Pataliputra are rich and prosperous and vie with one another in the practice of benevolence. In the cities, the Vaisya families establish houses for dispensing charity and medicines. All the poor and destitute, orphans, widows and childless, maimed and cripples are provided with every kind of help.

The origin of Huns is not definitely known. According to Roman historian Tacitus, they were a barbarian tribe living near Caspian Sea and contributed to the fall of Roman Empire. They organised under Attila and were known for their savagery and bestiality in Europe. One branch of Huns, known as white Huns, moved towards India from Central Asia and their invasion began about a hundred years after the Kushanas.

Council of Ministers

- The Gupta king was assisted by a council of mantrins (ministers). The Allahabad prashasti refers to an assembly or council, presumably of ministers, which was known as the Sabha. The various high-ranking functionaries included the sandhivigrahika or mahasandhivigrahika (minister for peace and war), who seems to have been a high-ranking officer in charge of contact and correspondence with other states, including initiating wars and concluding alliances and treaties. High-ranking officials were called dandanayakas, and mahadandanayakas were high-ranking judicial

or military officers. One of the seals mentions a mahadandanayaka named Agnigupta. The Allahabad prashasti refers to three mahadandanayakas. All these suggest that these posts were hereditary by nature. Another person had a designation mahashvapati (commander of the cavalry), indicating military functions.

Division of the Empire

- The Gupta Empire was divided into provinces known as deshas or bhuktis. They were administered by governors who were usually designated as uparikas. The uparika was directly appointed by the king and he, in turn, frequently appointed the head of the district administration and the district board. Uparika carried on the administration “with the enjoyment of the rule consisting of elephants, horses and soldiers”, indicating his control over the military machinery as well. The fact that the uparika had the title maharaja in three of the Damodarpur plates indicates his high status and rank in the administrative hierarchy. The Eran pillar inscription of Budhagupta, dated Gupta year 165 CE, refers to maharaja Surashmichandra as a lokpala, governing the land between the Kalinandi and Narmada rivers. Lokpala here seems to refer to a provincial governor.
- The provinces of the Gupta Empire were divided into districts known as visayas, which were controlled by officers known as vishyapatis. The vishyapatis seems to have been generally appointed by the provincial governor. Sometimes, even the kings directly appointed the vishyapatis. Prominent members of the town assisted the vishyapati in administrative duties.

Administrative Units below the District level

- The administrative units below the district level included clusters of settlements known variously as vithi, bhumi, pathaka and peta. There are references to officials known as ayuktakas and vithi-mahattaras. At the village level, villagers chose functionaries such as gramika and gramadhyaksha. The Damodarpur copper plate of the reign of Budhagupta mentions an ashtakula-adhikarana (a board of eight members) headed by the mahattara. Mahattara has a range of

meanings including village elder, village headman, and head of a family community. The Sanchi inscription of the time of Chandragupta II mentions the panch-mandali, which may have been a corporate body.

Army

- Seals and inscriptions mention military designations such as baladhikrita and mahabaladhikrita (commander of infantry and cavalry). The standard term “senapati” does not occur in Gupta inscriptions, but the term could be found in some Vakataka epigraphs. A Vaishali seal mentions the ranabhandagar-adhikarana, which is the office of the military storehouse. Another Vaishali seal mentions the adhikarana (office) of the dandapashika, which may have been a district-level police office. The officials connected specifically with the royal establishment included the mahapratihara (chief of the palace guards) and the khadyatapakita (superintendent of the royal kitchen). A Vaishali seal mentions a person both as a mahapratihara and a taravara. The top layer of the administrative structure also included amatyas and sachivas, who were executive officers in charge of various departments. The system of espionage included spies known as dutakas. The ayuktakas were another cadre of high-ranking officers.

Economic Condition

- Nitisara, written by Kamandaka, is a text like Arthashastra. It emphasises the importance of the royal treasury and mentions various sources of revenue. The many ambitious military campaigns of kings like Samudragupta must have been financed through revenue surpluses. Gupta inscriptions reveal some details about the revenue department. The akshapataladhikrita was the keeper of royal records. Gupta inscriptions mention the terms klipta, bali, udranga, uparikara, and iranyavesti meant forced labour.

Agriculture and Agrarian Structure

- Agriculture flourished in the Gupta period due to establishment of irrigation works. Apart from the state and individual cultivators, Brahmins, Buddhists and Jain sanghas brought waste lands under

cultivation when they were donated to them as religious endowments. Cultivators were asked to maintain their crops properly from damages and those who indulged in damaging the crops were punished. Likewise, crops and felds were fenced.

The crops cultivated during the Gupta period were rice, wheat, barley, peas, lentils, pulses, sugarcane and oil seeds. From Kalidasa, we come to know that the south was famous for pepper and cardamom. Varahamihira gives elaborate advice on the plantation of fruit trees.

The Paharpur copper plate inscription indicates that the king was the sole proprietor of the land. Even when he made land grants, he reserved his prerogatives over it. The location and boundaries of individual plots were marked out and measured by the record keepers and influential men in the locality. As stated in Paharpur plates, an officer called ustapala maintained records of all the land transactions in the district and the village accountant preserved records of land in the village. During the Gupta period, the land was classified as detailed below.

Kshetra	Cultivable land
Khila	Waste land
Aprahata	Jungle or waste land
Vasti	Habitable land
Gapata Saraha	Pastoral land

Types of tenures	Nature of Holding
Nivi dharmā	Endowment of land under a kind of trusteeship was prevalent in North and Central India and Bengal.
Nivi dharmā aksayana	A perpetual endowment. The recipient could make use of income derived from it.
Aprada dharmā	Income from land could be enjoyed, but the recipient is not permitted to gift it to anyone. The recipient has no administrative rights either.

Bhumi chhidranaya	Right of ownership acquired by a person making barren land cultivable for the first time. This land was free from any rent liability.
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Other Land Grants

Agrahara grants	Given to Brahmins, it was perpetual, hereditary and tax free.
Devagrahara grants	A land grant in favour of a Brahmin as well as gifts to merchants for the repair and worship of temples.
Secular grants	Grants made to feudatories of Guptas.

Irrigation

- The importance of irrigation to agriculture was recognised in India from the earliest times. From the Narada Smriti, we understand that there were two kinds of dykes: the bardhya, which protected the field from floods, and the khara, which served the purpose of irrigation. To prevent inundation, jalanirgamah (drains) were constructed, which is mentioned by Amarasimha. Canals were constructed not only from rivers but also from tanks and lakes. The most famous lake was the Sudarsana lake at the foot of Girnar Hills in Gujarat.

Position of Peasantry

- The position of peasantry was undermined. They were reduced to the position of serfs due to the caste classification and also due to the granting of various privileges and lands to others. The practice of lease-holding reduced the permanent tenants to tenants at will (which means tenants could be evicted without notice). The farmers were required to pay various taxes.

Tax	Nature
Bhaga	Kings customary share of the produce normally amounting to one-sixth of the produce paid by cultivators
Bhoga	Periodic supply of fruits, firewood, flowers, etc., which the village had to provide to the king
Kara	A periodic tax levied on the villagers (not a part of the annual land tax)
Bali	A voluntary offering by the people to the king, but later became compulsory. It was an oppressive tax.
Udianga	Either a sort of police tax for the maintenance of police stations or a water tax. Hence, it was also an extra tax.
Uparikara	Also an extra tax. Scholars give different explanations about what it was collected for.
Hiranya	Literally, it means tax payable on gold coins, but in practice, it was probably the king's share of certain crops paid in kind.
Vata-Bhuta	Different kinds of cess for maintenance of rites for the winds (vata) and the spirits (bhuta)
Halivakara	A plough tax paid by every cultivator owning a plough
Sulka	A royal share of merchandise brought into a town or harbour by merchants. Hence it can be equated with the customs and tolls.
Klipta and Upaklipta	related to sale and purchase of lands.

Industry: Mining and Metallurgy

- Mining and metallurgy was one of the most flourishing industries during the Gupta period. Amarasimha, Varahamihira and Kalidasa make frequent mention of the existence of mines. The rich deposits of iron ore from Bihar and copper from Rajasthan were mined extensively during this period.
- The list of metals used apart from iron were gold, copper, tin, lead, brass, bronze, bell-metal, mica, manganese, antimony, red chalk (sanssilajata) and red arsenic.
- Blacksmiths were next only to agriculturists in importance in the society. Metal was used for the manufacture of various domestic implements, utensils and weapons. The improvement in the ploughshare, with the discovery of iron, for deep ploughing and for increasing cultivation happened during this period.
- The most important and visible evidence of the high stage of development in metallurgy is the Mehrauli Iron Pillar of King Chandra in the Qutb Minar Complex in Delhi, identified with Chandragupta II. This monolith iron pillar has lasted through the centuries without rusting. It is a monument to the great craftsmanship of the iron workers during the Gupta period. Coin casting, metal engraving, pottery making, terracotta work and wood carving were other specialised crafts.
- A significant development of the period in metal technology was the making of the seals and statutes of Buddha and other gods. It was laid down that the people had to pay for the loss arising out smelting of iron, gold, silver, copper, tin and lead.

Trade and Commerce

- The contribution of traders to the soundness of the Gupta economy is quite impressive. Two distinctive types of traders called sresti and sarthavaha existed. Sresti was usually settled at a particular place and enjoyed an eminent position by virtue of his wealth and influence in the commercial life and administration of the place. The

sarthavaha was a caravan trader who carried his goods to different places for profitable sale.

- Trade items ranged from products for daily use to valuable and luxury goods. They included pepper, sandalwood, elephants, horses, gold, copper, iron and mica. The abundant inscriptions and seals mentioning artisans, merchants and guilds are indicative of the thriving crafts and trade. (Guild is a society or other organisation of people with common interests or an association of merchants.) There are several references in several sources to artisans, traders and occupational groups in the guilds. Guilds continued as the major institution in the manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise. They remained virtually autonomous in their internal organisation, and the government respected their laws. These laws were generally drafted by a larger body, the corporation of guilds, of which each guild was a member.
- The Narada and Brihaspati Smritis describe the organisation and activities of guilds. They mention that the guild had a chief and two, three or five executive officers. Guild laws were apparently laid down in written documents. The Brihaspati Smriti refers to guilds rendering justice to their members and suggests that these decisions should, by and large, be approved by the king. There is also mention of the philanthropic activities of guilds, for instance, providing shelter for travellers and building assembly houses, temples and gardens. The inscription also records that the chief of the guilds played an important role in the district-level administrative bodies. There is also mention of joint corporate bodies of merchant-bankers, caravan merchants and artisans. The guilds also acted as banks. The names of donors are mentioned in this inscription.
- Usury (the lending of money at an exorbitant rate of interest) was in practice during the Gupta period. The detailed discussion in the sources of that period indicates that money was used, borrowed and loaned for profit. There were many ports that facilitated trade in the western coast of India such as Calliena (Kalyan), Chaul port in ruin sixty kilometres south of Mumbai, and the markets of Male (Malabar), Mangarouth (Mangalore), Salopatana, Nalopatana and Pandopatana on the Malabar coast. Fahien refers to Tamralipti in

Bengal as an important centre of trade on the eastern coast. These ports and towns were connected with those of Persia, Arabia and Byzantium on the one hand and Sri Lanka, China and Southeast Asia on the other. Fahien describes the perils of the sea route between India and China. The goods traded from India were rare gems, pearls, fine textiles and aromatics. Indians bought silk and other articles from China.

The Guptas issued many gold coins but comparatively few silver and copper coins. However, the post-Gupta period saw a decline in the circulation of gold coins.

Cultural Florescence

Art and Architecture

- By evolving the Nagara and the Dravida styles, the Gupta art ushers in a formative and creative age in the history of Indian architecture with considerable scope for future development.

Rock-cut and Structural Temples

- The rock-cut caves continue the old forms to a great extent but possess striking novelty by bringing about extensive changes in the ornamentation of the facade and in the designs of the pillars in the interior. The most notable groups of the rock-cut caves are found at Ajanta and Ellora (Maharashtra) and Bagh (Madhya Pradesh). The Udayagiri caves (Orissa) are also of this type.
- The structural temples have the following attributes: (1) flat-roofed square temples; (2) flat-roofed square temple with a vimana (second storey); (3) square temple with a curvilinear tower (shikara) above; (4) rectangular temple; and (5) circular temple.
- The second group of temples shows many of the characteristic features of the Dravida style. The importance of the third group lies in the innovation of a shikhara that caps the sanctum sanctorum, the main feature of the Nagara style.

Stupas

- Stupas were also built in large numbers but the best are found at Samat (Uttar Pradesh), Ratnagiri (Orissa) and Mirpur Khas (Sind).

Sculpture: Stone Sculpture

- A good specimen of stone sculpture is the well-known erect Buddha from Sarnath. Of the puranic images, perhaps the most impressive is the great Boar (Varaha) at the entrance of a cave at Udayagiri.

Metal statues

- The technology of casting statues on a large scale of core process was practised by the craftsmen during the Gupta period with great workmanship. Two remarkable examples of Gupta metal sculpture are (1) a copper image of the Buddha about eighteen feet high at Nalanda in Bihar and (2) the Sultanganj Buddha of seven-and-a-half feet in height.

Painting

- The art of painting seems to have been in popular demand in the Gupta period than the art of stone sculptures. The mural paintings of this period are found at Ajanta, Bagh, Badami and other places.
- From the point of technique, the surface of these paintings was perhaps done in a very simple way. The mural paintings of Ajanta are not true frescoes, for frescoes is painted while the plaster is still damp and the murals of Ajanta were made after it had set. The art of Ajanta and Bagh shows the Madhyadesa School of painting at its best.

Terracotta and Pottery

- Clay figurines were used both for religious and secular purposes. We have figurines of Vishnu, Karttikeya, Durga, Naga and other gods and goddesses.

- Gupta pottery remains found at Ahchichhatra, Rajgarh, Hastinapur and Bashar afford proof of excellence of pottery. The most distinctive class of pottery of this period is the “red ware”.

Sanskrit Literature

- The Guptas made Sanskrit the official language and all their epigraphic records were written in it. The period saw the last phase of the Smriti literature.

Smritis are religious texts covering a wide range of subjects such as ethics, politics, culture and art. Dharmasastras and puranas form the core of this body of literature.

Sanskrit Grammar

- The Gupta period also saw the development of Sanskrit grammar based on Panini who wrote Ashtadhyayi and Patanjali who wrote Mahabhashya on the topic. This period is particularly memorable for the compilation of the Amarakosa, a thesaurus in Sanskrit, by Amarasimha. A Buddhist scholar from Bengal, Chandrogomia, composed a book on grammar named Chandrvyakaranam.

Puranas and Ithihasas

- The Puranas, as we know them in their present form, were composed during this time. They are the legends as recorded by the Brahmins. They were originally composed by bards (professional storytellers), but now, having come into priestly hands, they were rewritten in classical Sanskrit. Details on Hindu sects, rites and customs were added in order to make them sacrosanct religious documents. The succession of dynasties was recorded in the form of prophecies. Thus what began as popular memories of the past were revived and rewritten in prophetic form and became the Brahmanical interpretation of the past. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana also got their final touches and received their present shape during this period.

Eighteen major puranas are listed. Of them the well known are: Brahma

Purana, Padma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Skanda Purana, Shiva Maha Purana, Markendeya Purana, Agni Purana, Bhavishya Purana, Matsya Purana and Shrimad Bhagavat Purana.

Buddhist Literature

- The earliest Buddhist works are in Pali, but in the later phase, Sanskrit came to be used to a great extent. Most of the works are in prose with verse passages in mixed Sanskrit. Arya Deva and Arya Asanga of the Gupta period are the most notable writers. The first regular Buddhist work on logic was written by Vasubandhu. Vasubandhu's disciple, Dignaga, was also the author of many learned works.

Jaina Literature

- The Jaina canonical literature at first took shape in Prakrit dialects. Sanskrit came to be the medium later. Within a short time, Jainism produced many great scholars and by their efforts the Hindu itihasa and puranas were recast in Jaina versions to popularise their doctrines. Vimala produced a Jaina version of Ramayana. Siddasena Divakara laid the foundation of logic among the Jains.

Secular Literature

- Samudragupta himself had established his fame as Kaviraja. It is widely believed that his court was adorned by the celebrated navaratnas like Kalidasa, Amarasimha, Visakadatta and Dhanvantri. Kalidasa's famous dramas are Sakunthalam, Malavikagnimitram and Vikramaurvashiyam. The works of Sudraka (Mrichchhakatika), Visakhadatta (Mudraraksasa and Devichandraguptam) and the lesser known dramatists and writers also contributed to the literary and social values in the classical age. An interesting feature of the dramas of this period is that while the elite spoke in Sanskrit, the common people spoke Prakrit.

Prakrit Language and Literature

- In Prakrit, there was patronage outside the court circle. The Gupta age witnessed the evolution of many Prakrit forms such as Suraseni

used in Mathura and its vicinity, Ardha Magadhi spoken in Awadh and Bundelkhand and Magadhi in modern Bihar.

Nalanda University

- Nalanda was an acclaimed Mahavihara, a large Buddhist monastery in the ancient kingdom of Magadha in India. The site is located about ninety five kilometres southeast of Patna near the town of Bihar Sharif and was a centre of learning from the fifth century CE to c. 1200 CE. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- The highly formalised methods of Vedic learning helped inspire the establishment of large teaching institutions such as Taxila, Nalanda and Vikramashila, which are often characterised as India's early universities. Nalanda flourished under the patronage of the Gupta Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries and later under Harsha, the emperor of Kanauj. The liberal cultural traditions inherited from the Gupta age resulted in a period of growth and prosperity until the ninth century. The subsequent centuries were a time of gradual decline, a period during which Buddhism became popular in eastern India patronised by the Palas of Bengal.
- At its peak, the Nalanda attracted scholars and students from near and far with some travelling all the way from Tibet, China, Korea and Central Asia. Archaeological findings also confirm the contact with the Shailendra dynasty of Indonesia, one of whose kings built a monastery in the complex.
- Nalanda was ransacked and destroyed by an army of the Mamluk dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate under Bakhtiyar Khalji in c. 1200 CE. While some sources note that the Mahavihara continued to function in a makeshift fashion for a little longer, it was eventually abandoned and forgotten. The site was accidentally discovered when the Archaeological Survey of India surveyed the area. Systematic excavations commenced in 1915, which unearthed 11 monasteries and 6 brick temples situated on 12 hectares (30 acres) of land. A trove of sculptures, coins, seals and inscriptions have also been discovered since then and all of them are on display in the Nalanda Archaeological Museum situated nearby. Nalanda is now a notable

tourist destination and a part of the Buddhist tourism circuit. Recently, the government of India, in cooperation with other South and South-east Asian countries, has revived this university.

Gupta Sciences Mathematics and Astronomy

- The invention of the theory of zero and the consequent evolution of the decimal system are to be credited to the thinkers of this age. In the Surya Siddhanta, Aryabhata (belonging to late fifth and early sixth century CE) examined the true cause of the solar eclipses. In calculation of the size of the earth, he is very close to the modern estimation. He was the first astronomer to discover that the earth rotates on its own axis. He is also the author of Aryabhattiyam, which deals with arithmetic, geometry and algebra.
- Varahamihira's Brihat Samhita (sixth century CE) is an encyclopaedia of astronomy, physical geography, botany and natural history. His other works are Panch Siddhantika and Brihat Jataka. Brahmagupta (late sixth and early seventh century CE) is author of important works on mathematics and astronomy, namely Brahmasphuta-siddhanta and Khandakhadyaka.

Medical Sciences

- Metallic preparations for the purpose of medicine and references to the use of mercury and iron by Varahamihira and others indicate that much progress was made in chemistry. The Navanitakam was a medical work, which is a manual of recipes, formulation and prescriptions. Hastayurveda or the veterinary science authored by Palakapya attests to the advances made in medical science during the Gupta period.

Decline of the Gupta Empire

- The last recognised king of the Gupta line was Vishnugupta who reigned from 540 to 550 CE. Internal fighting and dissensions among the royal family led to its collapse. During the reign of a Gupta king, Budhagupta, the Vakataka ruler Narendrasena of western Deccan, attacked Malwa, Mekala and Kosala. Later on, another Vakataka

king Harishena conquered Malwa and Gujarat from the Guptas. During Skanda Gupta's reign, the grandson of Chandragupta II, the Huns invaded northwest India. He was successful in repulsing the Huns, but consequently his empire was drained of financial resources. In the sixth century CE, the Huns occupied Malwa, Gujarat, Punjab and Gandhara. As the Hun invasion weakened the Gupta hold in the country, independent rulers emerged all over the north like Yasodharman of Malwa, the Maukharis of Uttar Pradesh, the Maitrakas in Saurashtra and others in Bengal. In time, the Gupta Empire came to be restricted to only Magadha. They did not focus on empire building and military conquests. So, weak rulers along with incessant invasions from foreign as well as native rulers caused the decline of the Gupta Empire. By the beginning of the sixth century, the empire had disintegrated and was ruled by many regional chieftains.

Feudalism

The social formation of feudalism was the characteristic of the medieval society in India. Feudal features listed by historian R.S. Sharma are: royal grants of land; transfer of fiscal and judicial rights to the beneficiaries; the grant of their rights over peasants, artisans and merchants; an increased incidence of forced labour; appropriation of surplus by the state; a decline in trade and coinage; payment of officials through land revenue assignments; and the growth of the obligations of the samantas (subordinate or feudatory rulers).

Lesson VIII

Harsha and Rise of Regional Kingdoms

I Harsha

Introduction

- North India splintered into several warrior kingdoms after the downfall of the Gupta Empire. Excepting in the areas that were subdued by the Huns (modern Punjab, Rajasthan and Malwa), regional identity became pronounced with the emergence of many small states. Maithriyas had organised a powerful state in Sourashtra (Gujarat), with Valabhi as their capital. Agra and Oudh were organised into an independent and sovereign state by the Maukharis. The Vakatakas had recovered their position of ascendancy in the western Deccan. Despite political rivalry and conflict among these states, Thaneswar, lying north of Delhi between Sutlej and Yamuna, was formed into an independent state by Pushyabhutis. It rose to prominence under Harsha. Harsha ruled the kingdom as large as that of the Guptas from 606 to 647 CE.

Sources

Literary sources

Bana's Harshacharita

Hieun Tsang's Si-Yu-ki

Epigraphical sources

Madhuban copper plate inscription

Sonpat inscription on copper seal

Banskhera copper plate inscription

Nalanda inscription on clay seals

Bana's Harshacharita was the first formal biography of a king. It inaugurated a new literary genre in India.

Pushyabhuti

- The founder of the Vardhana dynasty was Pushyabhuti who ruled from Thanesar. He served as a military general under the imperial Guptas and rose to power after the fall of the Guptas. With the accession of Prabhakara Vardhana (580–605 CE), the Pushyabhuti family became strong and powerful. Prabhakara Vardhana fought against the Gurjaras and the Huns and established his authority as far as Malwa and Gujarat. He gave his daughter Rajyasri in marriage to the Maukhari king, Grahavarman, of Kanauj (near modern Kanpur), thus making Kanauj his ally. Prabhakara Vardhana's dream of building an empire was eventually realised by his younger son Harsha-vardhana.
- Rajavardhana (605-606 CE), the eldest son of Prabhakaravardhana, ascended the throne after his father's death. He was treacherously murdered by Sasanka, the Gauda ruler of Bengal. This resulted in his younger brother Harsha-vardhana becoming the king of Tanesar. Harsha had known the weakness of a group of small kingdoms and conquered his neighbours to integrate them into his empire. As Tanesar was too close to the threats from the northwest, Harsha shifted his capital from Tanesar to Kanauj. Kanauj was located in the rich agricultural region of the western Ganges Plain.

Harsha as King of Kanauj

The magnates of Kanauj (the capital of Maukhari kingdom), on the advice of their minister Poni, invited Harsha to ascend the throne. A reluctant Harsha accepted the throne on the advice of Avalokitesvara Bodhisatva with the title of Rajputra and Siladitya. Thus the two kingdoms of Tanesar and Kanauj became united under Harsha's rule. Consequently, Harsha transferred his capital to Kanauj.

Harsha's Military Conquests

- On his accession in 606 CE Harsha focused his attention on the affairs of his sister Rajyasri who had fled to Vindhya mountains to escape from the evil design of Deva Gupta of Malwa to covet her. Harsha went to Vindhya mountain ranges and succeeded in saving his sister who was about to burn herself after killing Deva Gupta. Harsha

consoled Rajyasri and brought her back to the kingdom of Kanauj. Later Rajyasri took to Buddhism and was instrumental in converting Harsha to Buddhism.

According to Bana, Harsha, in an effort to build an empire, sent an ultimatum to the following kings to either surrender or be prepared for a battle:

1. Sasanka, the Gauda ruler of Bengal.
 2. The Maitrakas of Valabhi and Gurjara of Broach region.
 3. The Chalukya king, Pulikesin II, in the Deccan
 4. Rulers of Sindh, Nepal, Kashmir, Magadha, Odra (northern Odisha)
 5. and Kongoda (another geographical unit in ancient Odisha).
- Harsha's immediate task was to take revenge on Sasanka. Harsha entered into an alliance with the king of Kamarupa (Pragiyatisha), which is today the modern Assam. But there is hardly any detail of the war between Harsha and Sasanka. However, Harsha seems to have successfully subjugated the Gauda Empire, which included Magadha, Gouda, Odra and Kongoda only after the death of Sasanka.
 - The hostilities between Harsha and the Maitrakas ended in the marriage of Dhruvabhata with the daughter of Harsha. Soon, Valabhi became a subordinate ally of Harsha.

Pulikesin II, the Chalukya King

- Harsha sought to extend his authority southward into the Deccan. However the Chalukya king Pulikesin II, who controlled the region, humbled Harsha. In commemoration of his victory over Harsha, Pulikesin assumed the title of "Parameswara". Inscriptions in Pulikesin's capital Badami attest to this victory.

Extent of Harsha's Empire

- Harsha ruled for 41 years. His feudatories included those of Jalandhar (in the Punjab), Kashmir, Nepal and Valabhi. Sasanka of Bengal remained hostile to him. Though it is claimed that Harsha's Empire comprised Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Kanauj, Malwa, Odisha,

the Punjab, Kashmir, Nepal and Sindh, his real sway did not extend beyond a compact territory between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. The kingdom of Harsha disintegrated rapidly into small states after his death.

Harsha's Relations with China

- Harsha had cordial relations with China. The contemporary T'ang emperor, Tai Tsung, sent an embassy to his court in 643 and again in 647 CE. On the second occasion, the Chinese ambassador found that Harsha had recently died. On learning that the throne had been usurped by an undeserving king, the Chinese ambassador rushed to Nepal and Assam to raise a force to dislodge the usurper. Later, the king who had usurped the throne was taken to China as a prisoner.

Administration

- According to historian Burton Stein, a centralised administration did not even exist under the powerful Guptas. It was restricted only to the central part of the Gangetic plain between Pataliputra and Mathura. Beyond that zone, there was no centralised authority. The only difference between Guptas and Vardahanas is that the former had formidable enemies like Huns, while the latter had no such opponents. The copper plates of 632 CE record a gift of land to two Brahmins. The names of certain political personages with state power, as protectors of the gift, are mentioned in them. Some were mahasamantas, allied to the king but of a subordinate status. Others were independent maharajas but acknowledged feudatories of Harsha. There was yet another category of rulers who pledged their loyalty to Harsha and professed to be at his service. This is the characteristic of Harsha's imperial authority in North India.

Council of Ministers

- It appears that the ministerial administration during the reign of Harsha was the same as that of the imperial Guptas. The emperor was assisted by a council of ministers (Mantri Parishad) in his duties. The council played an important role in the selection of the king as well as framing the foreign policy of the empire. The prime minister was of the most important position in the council of ministers.

Key Officials

1. Avanti - Minister for Foreign Relations and War
2. Simhananda - Commander in chief
3. Kuntala - Chief Cavalry Officer
4. Skandagupta - Chief Commander of Elephant force
5. Dirghadhvajasa - Royal Messengers
6. Banu - Keeper of records
7. Mahaprathihara - Chief of the Palace Guard
8. Sarvagata - Secret Service Department

Revenue Administration

- Bhaga, Hiranya and Bali were the three kinds of tax collected during Harsha's reign. Bhaga was the land tax paid in kind. One-sixth of the produce was collected as land revenue. Hiranya was the tax paid by farmers and merchants in cash. There is no reference to the tax Bali. The crown land was divided into four parts.

- Part I - for carrying out the affairs of the state
Part II - for paying the ministers and officers of the crown
Part III - for rewarding men of letters
Part IV - for charity to religious institutions

Administration of Justice

- Criminal law was more severe than that of the Gupta age. Mimamsakas were appointed to dispense justice. Banishment and the cutting of limbs of the body were the usual punishments. Trial by ordeal was in practice. Life imprisonment was the punishment for the violations of the laws and for plotting against the king.
- Hieun Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, spent nearly 13 years in India (630–643 CE), collecting sacred texts and relics which he took back to China. He was known as the "prince of pilgrims" because he visited important pilgrim centres associated with the life of Buddha. His Si-Yu-Ki provides detailed information about the social, economic, religious and cultural conditions during the reign of Harsha.

- According to Hieun Tsang, perfect law and order prevailed throughout the empire, as the law-enforcing agencies were strong. He records the principal penalties and judicial ordeals practised in India at that time. Corporal punishment for serious offences was in practice. But the death penalty was usually avoided. Offences against social morality and defiance of law were punished by maiming. Harsha travelled across the kingdom frequently to ensure his familiarity with his people. He was accessible to people and kept a closer watch on his tributary rulers.

Administration of Army

- Harsha paid great attention to discipline and strength of the army. The army consisted of elephants, cavalry and infantry. Horses were imported. Ordinary soldiers were known as Chatas and Bhatas. Cavalry officers were called Brihadisvaras. Infantry officers were known as Baladhikritas and Mahabaladhikritas. Hieun Tsang mentions the four divisions (chaturanga) of Harsha's army. He gives details about the strength of each division, its recruitment system and payment for the recruits.

Division of the Empire

- The empire was divided into several provinces. The actual number of such provinces is not known. Each province was divided into Bhuktis. And each Bhukti was divided into several Vishayas. They were like the districts. Each vishaya was further divided into Pathakas. Each such area was divided into several villages for the sake of administrative convenience. Harsha Charita refers to a number of officials who took care of the local administration. Only their titles are known. What they did isn't available in Harsha Charita. We learn that bhogapathi, ayuktha, pratpalaka-purusha and the like looked after the local administration.

Cities and Towns

- Hieun Tsang describes the structure, aesthetics and safety measures of the cities, towns and villages of India. In his view, India was the land of innumerable villages, numerous towns and big cities like China. He pointed out that Pataliputra lost its prominence and its

place was taken by Kanauj. The elegance of Kanauj with its lofty structures, beautiful gardens and the museum of rare collections is described. The refined appearance of its residents, their costly dressings and love for learning and art are also pointed out in his account.

- Most of the towns, according to Hieun Tsang, had outer walls and inner gates. Though the walls were wide and high, the streets and lanes were narrow. Residential houses had balconies made of wood and coated with lime mortar. Floors were smeared with cow dung for the purpose of purity and hygiene. Big mansions, public buildings and Buddhist monasteries and viharas were magnificent multi-storeyed structures. They were built of kiln-fired bricks, red sandstone and marble. Harsha constructed a large number of viharas, monasteries and stupas on the bank of the Ganges.
- Harsha built charitable institutions for the stay of the travellers, and to care for the sick and the poor. Free hospitals and rest houses (dharmasalas) in all the towns were constructed where the travellers or the outsiders could stay. Hospitals were built to provide medical treatment free of charge.

Religious Policy

- Harsha was a worshipper of Siva at least up to 631 CE. But he embraced Buddhism under the influence of his sister Rajyasri and the Buddhist monk Hieun Tsang. He subscribed to the Mahayana school of thought. Yet he held discourses among learned men of various creeds. Slaughter of animals and consumption of meat was restricted. Harsha summoned two Buddhist assemblies (643 CE), one at Kanauj and another at Prayag.
- The assembly at Kanauj was attended by 20 kings including Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa. A large number of Buddhist, Jain and Vedic scholars attended the assembly. A golden statue of Buddha was consecrated in a monastery and a small statue of Buddha (three feet) was brought out in a procession. The procession was attended by Harsha and other kings.

Buddhist Assembly at Prayag

- Harsha convened quinquennial assemblies known as Mahamoksha Parishad at Prayag (at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna). He distributed his wealth among Buddhists, Vedic scholars and the poor people. Harsha offered fabulous gifts to the Buddhist monks on all the four days of the assemblage.
- Hieun Tsang observed that the principles of Buddhism had deeply permeated the Hindu society. According to him, people were given complete freedom of worship. Social harmony prevailed among the followers of various creeds. Harsha treated the Vedic scholars and the Buddhist bikshus alike and distributed charities equally to them.

Caste System

- Caste system was firmly established in the Hindu society. According to Hieun Tsang, the occupations of the four divisions of

Hiuen Tsang, hailed as the prince of pilgrims, visited India during the reign of Harsha. Born in China in 612 CE he became a Buddhist monk at the age of twenty. During his travels, he visited various sacred places of northern and southern India. Hieun Tsang spent about five years in the University of Nalanda and studied there. Harsha admired him for his deep devotion to Buddha and his profound knowledge of Buddhism. Hieun Tsang carried with him 150 pieces of the relics of Buddha, a large number of Buddha image in gold, silver, sandalwood and above all 657 volumes of valuable manuscripts.

society continued to be in practice as in the previous times. People were honest and not deceitful or treacherous in their conduct. The butchers, fishermen, dancers and sweepers were asked to stay outside the city. Even though the caste system was rigid, there was no social conflict among the various sections of the society.

Status of Women

- Hieun Tsang's account also provides us information on the position of women and the marriage system of the times. Women wore

pardah. Hieun Tsang, however, added that the pardah system was not followed among the higher class. He pointed out that Rajyasri did not wear pardah when listening to his discourse. Sati was in practice. Yasomatidevi, wife of Prabhakara Vardhana, immolated herself after the death of her husband.

Lifestyle

- The life pattern of the people of India during the rule of Harsha is known from the accounts of Hieun Tsang. People lived a simple life. They dressed in colourful cotton and silk clothes. The art of wearing fine cloth had reached perfection. Both men and women adorned themselves with gold and silver ornaments. The king wore extraordinary ornaments. Garlands and tiaras of precious stones, rings, bracelets and necklaces were some of the ornaments used by the royalty. The wealthy merchants wore bracelets. women used cosmetics.

Dietary Habits

- Hieun Tsang also noted that Indians were mostly vegetarians. The use of onion and garlic in the food preparation was rare. The use of sugar, milk, ghee and rice in the preparation of food or their consumption was common. On certain occasions, fish and mutton were eaten. Beef and meat of certain animals were forbidden.

Education

- Education was imparted in the monasteries. Learning was religious in character. Much religious literature were produced. The Vedas were taught orally and not written down. Sanskrit was the language of the learned people. An individual took to learning between 9 and 30 years of age. Many individuals devoted their whole life to learning. The wandering bhikshus and sadhus were well known for their wisdom and culture. The people also paid respect to such people of moral and intellectual eminence.

Harsha as a Patron of Art and Literature

- Harsha patronised literary and cultural activities. It is said the state spent a quarter of its revenue for such activities. Bana, the author of Harshacharita and Kadambari, was a court poet of Harsha. The emperor himself was a renowned litterateur, which is evident from the plays he wrote such as Priyadarsika, Rathnavali and Nagananda. Harsha gifted liberally for the promotion of education. Temples and monasteries functioned as centres of learning. Renowned scholars imparted education in the monasteries at Kanauj, Gaya, Jalandhar, Manipur and other places. The Nalanda University reached its utmost fame during this period.

Nalanda University

- Hieun Tsang recorded the fame of the Nalanda University. Students and scholars from the Buddhist countries like China, Japan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Tibet and some other countries of Central and Southeast Asia stayed and studied in the university. Shilabhadra, a reputed Buddhist scholar, who probably hailed from Assam, was the head of the University during the visit of Hieun Tsang. As an educational centre of international fame, Nalanda had 10,000 students on its rolls. Dharmapala, Chandrapala, Shilabhadra, Bhadrhari, Jayasena, Devakara and Matanga were important teachers in the university receiving royal patronage.

II The Palas

- After the death of Harsha, the Pratiharas (Jalore-Rajasthan), the Palas (Bengal) and the Rashtrakutas (Deccan) engaged in a triangular contest for the control of the Ganga-Yamuna doab and the lands adjoining it. The Palas controlled vast areas of the eastern Gangetic Plain. Apart from earning revenue from agriculture, Palas also derived income from their wide commercial contacts in South-east Asia. Buddhism in Bengal provided a link between eastern India and Java and Sumatra.

Establishment of Pala Rule in Bengal

- Sashanka, the Gauda ruler, believed to have ruled between 590 and 625 CE, is considered the first prominent king of ancient Bengal. After the fall of the Gauda kingdom, there was no central authority, which led to recurring wars between petty chieftains. So, in 750 CE, a group of chiefs met and decided on a “Kshatriya chief” named Gopala to be their ruler. There is a story that Gopala was elected because of his ability to kill a “demoness” that had killed those who were previously elected like him. Though Gopala did not have royal antecedents, he succeeded in acquiring a kingdom. Gopala’s political authority was soon recognised by several independent chiefs. His original kingdom was in Vanga or East Bengal.

The Palas ruled eastern India from Pataliputra between the ninth and the early twelfth centuries. Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali were the languages in use in their kingdom. Palas followed Mahayana Buddhism.

Pala Rulers

- Gopala I was succeeded by his son Dharmapala (770–815 CE) who made the Pala kingdom a force to reckon with. Bengal and Bihar were directly ruled by him. Kanauj was ruled by his nominee. The rulers of the Punjab, Rajaputana, Malwa and Berar accepted his suzerainty. He assumed titles like Paramesvara, Parambhattaraka and Maharajadhiraja.
- Dharmapala proved to be a great patron of Buddhism. He founded the Vikramasila monastery in Bhagalpur district in Bihar, which developed into a great centre of Buddhist learning and culture. He built a grand vihara at Somapura in modern Paharapura (present-day Bangladesh). Dharmapala also built a monastery at Odantapuri in Bihar. He patronised Harisbhadr, a Buddhist writer.
- Dharmapala’s son Devapala extended Pala control eastwards up to Kamarupa (Assam). He defeated Amoghavarsha, the Rashtrakuta ruler, by allying with all the states that regarded the Rashtrakutas as their common enemy. Devapala was also a great patron of

Buddhism. He granted five villages to Balaputradeva, the king of the Sailendra dynasty of Suvarnadipa (Sumatra), to maintain a monastery built by him at Nalanda. Nalanda continued to flourish as the chief seat of Buddhist learning even during the Pala reign.

- Devapala was succeeded by Vigramapala, who abdicated his throne after ruling for a few years and went to lead an ascetic life. Narayanapala, son of Vigramapala, was also a man of pacific and religious disposition. The Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas took advantage of Narayanapala's disposition and defeated the Palas. The rise of the Pratiharas in Jalore under Mihira Bhoja and the advance of the Rashtrakutas into Pala territories inevitably brought about the decline of the Palas. The petty chiefs, who formerly owed allegiance to the Palas, also started asserting their independence.
- The slide of the Pala dynasty was accelerated during the rule of his three successors – Rajyapala, Gopala III and Vigramapala II. The fortunes of the dynasty, however, were revived by Mahipala I, son of Vigramapala II. The most important event of his period was the invasion of northern India by Rajendra Chola sometime between 1020 and 1025 CE. However, the advance of the Cholas beyond the Ganges was checked by Mahipala I.
- After 15 years of Mahipala's rule, four insignificant rulers followed. Ramapala was the last ruler who tried to recover the lost glory of the dynasty. He ruled for about 53 years and after his death, the presence of Pala dynasty was confined to only a portion of Magadha (Bihar) and continued to exist only for a short period. Vijayasena of the Sena dynasty who had become powerful by then in northern Bengal expelled the last ruler Madanapala (1130-1150 CE) from Bengal and established his dynastic rule.

Religion

- The Palas were great patrons of Mahayana Buddhism. The Buddhist philosopher Haribhadra was the spiritual preceptor of Dharmapala, the founder of the Pala kingdom. Bengal remained one of the few places where Buddhist monasteries continued to exist. The kingdom

as well as Buddhism soon suffered decline because of large-scale conversion of merchants and artisans to Islam.

Art and Architecture

- Two artists of this period were Dhiman and his son Vitapala. They were great painters, sculptors and bronze statue makers. The Pala school of sculptural art was influenced by the Gupta art. Mahipala I constructed and repaired several sacred structures at Saranath, Nalanda and Bodhi Gaya. Gopala founded the famous monastery at Odantapura (Bihar). Dharmapala established the Vikramashila and the Somapura Mahaviharas (Bangladesh).

Literature

- The prominent Buddhist scholars of Vikramashila and Nalanda universities were Atisha, Saraha, Tilopa, Dansheel, Dansree, Jinamitra, Muktimitra, Padmanava, Virachan and Silabhadra. The notable Pala texts on philosophy include Agama Shastra by Gaudapada, and Nyaya Kundali by Sridhar Bhatta. Many texts on medicine were compiled by Chakrapani Datta, Sureshwar Gadadhara Vaidya and Jimutavahana. The Palas also patronised Sanskrit scholars. Many Buddhist tantric works were authored and translated into Sanskrit. The original tantric works comprise a varied group of Indian and Tibetan texts. The "Mahipalageet" (songs on Mahipala), a set of folk songs, are still popular in the rural areas of Bengal. Sandhyakar Nandi's epic Ramacharitam, a biography of a later Pala ruler Ramapala, describes how forest chiefs were brought into their alliance through lavish gifts.

III The Rashtrakutas

- The rivalry between the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas proved to be destructive to both the dynasties. The Arab traveller Al-Masudi who visited Kanauj recorded the enmity between the two ruling dynasties. The Rashtrakutas who were biding their time to capture Kanauj from Pratiharas succeeded in their motive and continued to rule until 10th century CE. They claimed descent from the Rastikas or Rathikas, an important clan domiciled in the Kannada-speaking region and mentioned in the edicts of Ashoka.

Rise of the Dynasty

- The Rashtrakutas were originally known to be the feudatories of the Western Chalukyas of Vatapi. Though Rashtrakutas were early rulers, the greatest ruler of the dynasty was Dandidurga. Ruling from a smaller part of Berar, Dandidurga built his career of territorial conquest after the death of Vikramaditya II (733–746 CE), the Chalukya ruler. He captured Gurjara Kingdom of Nandipuri, Malwa and eastern Madhya Pradesh and the whole of Berar. By 750 CE, he had become the master of central and southern Gujarat and the whole of Madhya Pradesh and Berar.
- After consolidating his position, and after defeating Kirthivarman II (746–753 CE), the last Chalukya ruler of Vatapi, Dandidurga assumed the titles of Maharajadhiraja, Parameshwara and Paramabhataraha. He developed relationships with the Pallava ruler Nandivarman II by giving his daughter in marriage to the Pallava king. After Dandidurga's death in 758 CE, his uncle (father's brother) Krishna I ascended the throne.

Krishna I and His Successors

- Krishna I (756–775 CE) defeated the Gangas of Mysore. His eldest son Govinda II succeeded him in 775 CE. He defeated the Eastern Chalukyas. He left the affairs of country to his brother Dhruva who eventually crowned himself as the ruler. During the reign of Dhruva (780–794 CE), the Rashtrakuta power reached its zenith. After humbling the western Ganga king, Dhruva defeated Dantivarman, the Pallava king. The ruler of Vengi (modern Andhra) also had to accept his suzerainty. After establishing his hegemony in the south, Dhruva turned his attention towards the regions around Kanauj. Vatsarya, the Pratihara king, and Dharmapala, the Pala ruler, who were contenders for supremacy in the region, were defeated by Dhruva. He nominated his third son Govinda III as the heir-apparent.
- The accession of Govinda III (794–814 CE) to the throne heralded an era of success like never before. Dantika, the Pallava king, was subdued by Govinda III. Vishnuvardana, the ruler of Vengi, turned

out to be his maternal grandfather and so he did not challenge his authority. Tus Govinda III became the overlord of the Deccan. Te Rashtrakuta Empire reached its height of glory.

- Govinda III was succeeded by his son Amoghavarsha (814–880 CE). Amoghavarsha ruled for 64 years and his frst twenty years of the rule witnessed endless wars with the Western Gangas. Peace returned when Amoghavarsha gave his daughter in marriage to a Ganga prince. Amoghavarsha was a patron of literature and he patronised the famous Digambara acharya Jinasena, Sanskrit grammarian Sakatayana and the mathematician Mahaviracharya. Amoghavarsha was himself a great poet and his Kavirajamarga is the earliest Kannada work on poetics. Afer Amoghavarsha, his successors were able to sustain the vast empire, but the ablest among them was Krishna III (939–968 CE).
- Krishna III was the last great ruler of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. Soon after his accession, he invaded the Chola kingdom along with his brother-in-law Butunga. Kanchi and Thanjavur were captured in 943 CE. His army remained in effective control of Thondaimandalam, consisting of Arcot, Chengalpattu and Vellore. In 949 CE, he defeated the Chola army of Rajadithya in the battle of Takkolam (in present day Vellore district). Krishna III marched upto Rameshvaram where he built a pillar of victory. Thus he succeeded in establishing his suzerainty over the entire Deccan region. It was under him the Rashtrakutas joined the contest that was held then among the northern ruling dynasties for control of Kanauj. The continued conflict over the possession of Kanauj emboldened some of the local rajas to assert their independence. Their defiance destroyed the possibility of a single kingdom ruling northern India with its centre at Kanauj. Invasions from the north-west also prevented any such attempts to create a powerful state. But the successors of Krishna III were too weak to save the kingdom from its decline.

Hiranyagarbha literally means golden womb. A person coming out of this golden womb, after elaborate rituals performed by priests, is declared as reborn possessing a celestial body Te Satavahana king Gautamiputra Sathakarni performed this ritual to claim kshatriya status.

Religion

- The worship of Shiva and Vishnu was popular during the Rashtrakuta reign. The famous rock-cut Shiva temple at Ellora was built by Krishna I. The seals have the pictures of Garudavahana of Vishnu or of Shiva seated in yogic posture. Dantidurga performed the Hiranyagarbha ritual at Ujjayini. There are references to Tuladanas gift or offer of gold equal to one's own weight to temple deities.
- Jainism was patronised by later rulers such as Amoghavarsha I, Indra I V, Krishna II and Indra III. Buddhism had declined and its only important centre was at Kanheri.

Literature

- The Rashtrakuta rulers were great patrons of learning. Kannada and Sanskrit literature made great progress during their reign. Amoghavarsha I was the author of Prasnottaramalika, a Sanskrit work, and Kavirajamarga, a Kannada work. Jinasena wrote the Adipurana of the Jains. Krishna II's spiritual guide, Gunabhadra, wrote the Mahapurana of the Jains. The three gems of ancient Kannada literature - Kavichakravarthi Ponna, Adikavi Panpa and Kavichakravarti Ranna - were patronised by Rashtrakuta king Krishna III, as well as by Tailapa and Satyashraya of Western Chalukyas.

Architecture

- The Rashtrakutas made splendid contributions to Indian art. The rock-cut shrines at Ellora and Elephanta located in present-day Maharashtra belong to their period. The Ellora cave complex contains the features of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain monuments and art work. Amoghavarsha I espoused Jainism and there are five Jain cave temples at Ellora ascribed to his period.
- The most striking structure at Ellora is the creation of the Monolithic Kailasanath Temple. The temple was hewn out of a single rock during the time of Krishna I in the 8th century. It is similar to the Lokeshvara temple at Pattadakal, in Karnataka, built by Chalukya king

Vikramaditya II to commemorate his victory over the Pallavas. The sculptured panels of Dasavatara Bhairava, Ravana shaking the Mount Kailasa, dancing Shiva and Vishnu, and Lakshmi listening to music are the best specimens of sculpture inside the temple.

- The main shrine at Elephanta is artistically superior to the shrines at Ellora. The sculptures such as Nataraja and Sadashiva excel even that of the Ellora sculptures in beauty and craftsmanship. Ardhanarishvara and Maheshamurti are the other famous sculptures. The latter, a three-faced bust of Lord Shiva, is 25 feet tall and considered one of the finest pieces of sculpture in India. The paintings are still seen in the porch of the temple of Kailasa and ceilings of the Maheshamurti shrine at Ellora.

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