UNIT 8: SOCIETY, ECONOMY, RELEGION AND ART IN THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

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- 8.3.1 Mauryan Society
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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- discuss the social and economic life in the Mauryan Empire,
- analyse the religious condition in the Mauryan Empire,
- trace the cultural development in the Mauryan Empire.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we have already discussed the rise and fall of the Mauryan Empire with particular emphasis on King Asoka, the greatest Mauryan king. You have learnt about the political condition of India and the related developments that led to the foundation of the great Mauryan Empire. In this unit we will deal with the socio-economic and cultural and religious aspects of the empire that enable you to learn about the most significant role played by the great Mauryan Kings like Chandragupta and Asoka in the ancient history of India. The following sections will provide comprehensive

understanding of the Indian society in ancient times in its different dimensions.

8.3 SOCIETY AND ECONOMY IN THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

In this section we are going to deal with the society and economy of the Mauryan period. Without discussing the social and economic condition of India during the Mauryan period, our study about the Mauryan Empire will not be a complete one.

8.3.1 Mauryan Society

In the Mauryan period, the social organisation based on ***Varna*** and ***Ashrama*** which had begun in the Vedic age, reached a definite stage. In this period the Brahmanas regained their lost position in the society. Megasthenes divides the Mauryan society into seven divisions - philosophers, farmers, herdsman, artisans, soldiers, magistrate and councillors. They have been interpreted as castes because no one was allowed to marry outside his own division or change his profession. Let us discuss them in detail-

The philosophers consisted of Brahmanas and Shramanas. The Shramanas included ascetics, monks and the followers of various sects. The philosophers did not pay tax. The farmers included the land owners, the Shudra cultivators and the labourers working on the land. The herdsmen were probably the pastoralists who comprised a significant section in the Mauryan population. The status of the artisans depended on his particular craft. For instance, metal workers were given a higher status than the weavers and potters. The soldiers were the largest class in the society. Besides Kshatriyas, lower castes were also appointed as infantry men, charioteers and attendants. Magistrates and councillors were an important part of the administrative system and were appointed either from the Brahmanas or the Kshatriyas. However, the social

compositions as suggested by Megasthenes might not be as simple because if we consider Brahmanical texts and Buddhist texts, we find different views regarding the caste division.

In the Mauryan Empire, women were employed in various activities. They were appointed as king's body guards, spies and performers. Poor and widowed upper caste women, deserted wives and ageing prostitutes were provided with some work. We also have instances of a few female ascetics. Kautilya insisted that tax should be collected from the prostitutes, it suggests that they were large in number in the Empire. From the textual sources it can be assumed that the majority of women had to follow the wishes of the men in their family in a patriarchal society.

8.3.2 Mauryan Economy

The Mauryan economy was mainly dependant on agriculture. A large part of the government income came from land revenue. Therefore, importance was given on efficient collection of revenue. The farmers or landowners had to pay a variety of taxes to the state. Gradually, private ownership of land was allowed. A vast area of wasteland and crown lands was cultivated under the supervision of the state. From the account of Megasthenes we come to know that it was the responsibility of the state to clear new areas or deserted land and to settle the shudra cultivators. These cultivators were initially exempted from paying tax, but once they started working on the land, a tax was imposed.

There were two types of land revenue. The first one was rent for the use of land and the second was based on the assessment of the produce. The assessment varied according to local condition or the productivity of the soil. The sources mention a range from one sixth to a quarter of the produce of the land. We find mention about different types of taxes. One such was ***Pindakara*** which was collected jointly from a village. Pastoralists also had to pay tax on the number of animals and also on their produce. One

unique kind of tax was *Visthi* which was paid in the form of free labour to the state. Taxes were also levied for providing irrigation.

Besides agriculture, craft and trade were also two important economic activities of the Mauryan Empire. Some artisans were employed by the state and they were exempted from tax. Armourers and shipbuilders came under this category. Others, who worked in state workshop, had to pay taxes. The rest of the artisans worked either individually or as part of a guild called *Shreni* or *Puga*. These associations helped the state in tax collection.

The state controlled trade and industry. The working of mines and forests, the construction and security of trade-routes and the establishment of market towns were all under the state. It also supervised the sale of goods and the superintendent of commerce fixed the prices of the goods. Merchants had to pay a toll tax which was one-fifth of the value of the goods. In addition, there was a trade tax of one-fifth of the toll. Merchants were forbidden to make excessive profits. The collection of revenue from commercial sources was varied according to Mauryan control over an area or a route.

We also find the mention of organized money lending. Money could be given as loan from the treasury on interest of 15 percent per annum. However, in less secure transactions like long sea voyages the interest rate could be higher.

The remains of the urban centres which belonged to the Mauryan period suggest that the standard of living was high. Brick, stone and wooden buildings were found during excavation. The discovery of a large number of iron goods suggests extensive use of iron in this period. The distribution of ***Northern Black Polished Ware*** as far as South India is an indication of the expansion of trade.

It was possible that the punch-marked silver coins were the imperial currency of the Mauryas. Most of the punch-marked coins discovered have the symbols like crescent-on-arches or hills, the tree-in-railing, the sun symbol and the circle with six arrows like

extension. These coins were used for collection of taxes and payment of officers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Name the seven divisions of the Mauryan society.

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Q. 2: Who were Shramanas?

. . . . . .

Q.3: Who formed the largest class in the Mauryan society?

. . . . . .

Q.4: Name the two types of land revenue.

. . . . . .

Q.5: Who controlled trade and industry?

. . . . . .

Q.6: What was the standard of living in the Mauryan period?

. . . . . .

Q.7: Choose the correct answer:

a) Magistrate and councillors were appointed from

i) Brahmanas or Kshatriyas ii) Kshatriyas or Vaishyas,

iii) Vaishyas or Brahmanas iv) Vaishyas or Shudras.

b) The currency of the Mauryan period was

i) Copper coins ii) Punch marked silver coin

iii) Round shape gold coins iv) none of the above

8.4 RELIGION AND ART

Religion and culture constituted an important part of the life of the people in the Mauryan period. We are now going to study in this section the religious condition and cultural development of India in the Mauryan period.

8.4.1 Religious Condition of the Mauryan Empire

Several religious sects existed in the Mauryan period. Brahmanism was an important religion during the Mauryan period. Along with this, Buddhism and Jainism began to play an important part in the religious life of the people. Some distinct religious sects namely, *Ajivika*, *Shramanas*, and *Nirgrantha* were also followed among some communities. The *Ajivikas* were the ardent followers of Mahavira Swami. They lived like the naked saints. The *Shramanas* were also the followers of Mahavira Swami. They were content to live on fruits picked up when they dropped on the ground. The *Nirgrantha* were those who had broken the worldly ties.

Among these religions, Buddhism became a predominant religion under the patronage of Asoka. Still Brahmanism continued to prevail in the society. The Vedas did not completely lose its hold on the people. Kautilya praised the Vedic way of life. In the *Arthasastra*, we find reference to the worship of several deities. The worship of the deities consisted of prostration before the idol and offering gifts in the form of flowers and incense.

Several changes were brought about in Brahmanism in the Mauryan period. Krishna, Varuna, Indra, Agni and rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna were worshipped. Many of the devotees abandoned their homes for a life of an ascetic. A new class of religious philosophers called the *Lokayatas* emerged. They were opposed to the priestly class. They maintained that there existed neither paradise, nor the ultimate liberation.

It appears that diverse religious ideas and practices existed in the vast Empire of the Mauryas. While Buddhism flourished remarkably. Brahmanism had retained its position. But Jainism failed to make much progress. Most importantly, religious toleration prevailed in the Mauryan period inspite of there being different religious sects.

8.4.2 Architectuse and Sculputre

It must be generally agreed upon that fine art has its root in the Mauryan period specially under Ashoka. His use of stone for monuments have grasped the attention world-wide. The monolith structures are circular and free standing. The Allahabad pillar is a perfect example. The shaft is 10.7 metres in length, 88.8 centimetres in diameter at the bottom and 66 centimetres at the top. The pillar at Kolhua (Bihar) is reported to be the largest pillar with a height of 13.75 metres. The total weight is estimated at over 50 tons. All the pillars are embellished by a 'capital' which is carved out of a separate block of stone. The 'capital' appears as a bell shaped, fluted lower part and above it a platform with the outer band decorated with figures of animal or flowers. The main 'capital' at the very top is composed of a single lion, or a set of lions or other single animals. While the capitals have been apparently lost over the period of time, the Ashokan pillar at Lauriya Nandangarh has stood the test of time.

Most of the pillars bear the Ashokan inscriptions and carries the edicts of Ashoka. However, shafts with uninscribed pillars or capitals have been found at Kolhua (as mentioned earlier), Rampurwa (Bihar), Gotihwa (Nepalese Terrai), etc. While it is presumed that the uninscribed pillars may have been put up before Ashoka, however it will be hard to argue that the uniform design in all the pillars could be the work of more than one person (J.Irwin).

Figure 8.1: Sanchi Stupa



Source: *Google Images*

Ashoka also set up *dhamma* pillars which he mentions in Pillar Edict VII. Built for religious purpose, these pillars were found installed at sacred sites for the Buddhist or near the stupas. Ashoka could have also set up the Pillars as a symbol of royalty and royal *dhamma* for public display.

Most of the Ashokan pillars have been made of the sandstone (buff gray, fine, hard grained in nature) quarried from Chunar near Varanasi. The Delhi-Topra Pillar is made of pinkish sandstone which might have come from the quarries near Mathura. Another aspect of Mauryan architecture includes a pillared hall of 84 pillars with wooden roofing at Kumrahar, Patna. The pillars stand at 9.3 metres in length made of Chunar sandstone. The other interesting architecture are the caves. These rock cut caves were not ornamented but rather made more functional as it was meant for the retreat of the monks. Ashoka built three caves in the Barabar hills north of Bodh Gaya. He gifted this to the Ajivikas. Dasaratha, his successor also built one in the Nagarjuni hills. The caves have polished surfaces with inner chambers.



Source: *Google Images*

Stone sculptures of Ashokan times displays great skill and taste. The 'capitals' of the Ashokan pillars form the major achievements in this field of art. Some of the animals found in three dimensions in the 'capitals' are-

a. Lion (single)- (Lauriya Nandangarh, Kolhua, Bansi (forelegs preserved only)

b. Lion (set of four)- Sanchi, Sarnath

c. Bull: Rampurwa

d. Elephant: Sankisa

e. Crocodila: Besnagar

On the reliefs of the abacus, the animals seen are the lion, the elephant, the horse, the Bactrian camel, the bull and wild geese. At the Udayagiri Pillar, a mythical winged horse is seen. John Marshall praises the Sarnath pillar as 'unsurpassed by anything of their kind in the ancient world' for their design and skill.

No human figures were found on any Ashokan sculpture. This restraint could have been due to the Buddhist convention against human representation. However, there is no textual evidence for the same.

Terracota figurines of female deities, animals and toys were found in considerable numbers in the Mauryan sites. The figurines were manually shaped with a few being cast from terracotta matrixes as found at Bhir Mound (Taxila).

Figure 8.3: A Rock Cut Cave



Source: *Google Images*

The Mauryan **pottery** consisted of many types of wares. The black polished type found in North India is one of the most beautiful specimens of the Mauryan pottery. It has a burnished and glazed surface.

Jewellery making was also known in the Mauryan period. During the excavation at Taxila, some ornaments of the Asokan period were found. Those ornaments show the artistic skill of the goldsmiths of the Mauryan period.



ACTIVITY - 8.1

Make a list of the stupas and pillars constructed during the Mauryan period.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.8: Fill in the blanks:

a) The Ajivikas were the ardent followers of ..... Swami.

b) ..... were the religious philosophers.

c) Stupas are great form of ..... art.

d) Asoka built 84,000 stupas in .....and .....

Q.9: Write a note within 50 words on the cultural development of the Mauryan Empire.

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8.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt that-

- In the Mauryan period, the social organisation was based on ***Varna*** and ***Ashrama***. In this period the Brahmanas regained their lost position in the society.
- The philosophers consisted of Brahmanas and Shramanas. The philosophers did not pay tax.
- The farmers included the land owners, the Shudra cultivators and the labourers working on the land.
- In the Mauryan society, women were employed in various activities. They were appointed as king's body guards, spies and performers.
- The Mauryan economy was mainly dependant on agriculture.
- Besides agriculture, craft and trade were also two important economic activities of the Mauryan Empire.
- The state controlled trade and industry.
- In the religious field, Brahminism, Buddhism and Jainism were the main religious sects practiced by the people.
- Tremendous progress was made in the field of art and architecture in the Mauryan period. There were palaces, stupas, pillars, etc. The Mauryan art and architecture mainly developed under Asoka and he is credited of being the patron of the cultural development that took place in the Mauryan period.



8.6 FURTHER READING

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3. Tripathi, Ramashankar. (1999). *History of Ancient India*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

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8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to the Question no.1: Philosophers, Farmers, Herdsman, Artisans, Soldiers, Magistrate and Councillors.

Answer to the Question no.2: Shramanas were ascetics, monks and followers of various sects.

Answer to the Question no.3: Soldiers were the largest class in the Mauryan society.

Answer to the Question no.4: Rent for the use of land and assessment of the produce.

Answer to the Question no.5: The state controlled trade and industry.

Answer to the Question no.6: The standard of living in the Mauryan period was high.

Answer to the Question no.7: a) Brahmanas or Kshatriyas, b) Punch Marked Silver Coin

Answer to the Question no.8: a) Mahavira, b) Lokayatas, c) Mauryan, d) India, and Afghanistan

Answer to the Question no.9: Tremendous progress was made in the field of art and architecture during the Mauryan period. Asoka was the main patron of this cultural development. Many beautiful palaces, stupas, pillars, etc were made in the Mauryan period. Sanchi stupa, Sarnath and Sanchi pillar, Nagarjuni hill caves, etc are some fine specimen of Mauryan art.



8.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q.1: What do you know about *Pindakara?*

Q.2: Who were *Ajivikas?*

Q.3: What was *Visthi?*

Q.4: Into how many divisions did Megasthenes divide the Mauryan society?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q.1: What was the condition of society in the Mauryan period?

Q 2: Write a note on the religious development in the Mauryan period?

Q.3: Write a short note on the Mauryan Pillars.

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q.1: Describe the socio-economic condition of the Mauryan period.

Q 2: Describe the economic measures undertaken by the Mauryan rulers. Was their economic policy successful?

Q 3: 'The Mauryan age had a glorious cultural development'. Discuss

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UNIT 9: POST-MAURYAN DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Rise of New Kingdoms

- 9 .3.1 Sungas
- 9.3.2 Kushanas
- 9.3.3 Satavahanas

9.4 Post Mauryan Cultural Development

- 9.4.1 Development in Language and Literature and Religion
- 9.4.2 Development in Art, Architecture and Sculpture
- 9.4.3 Gandhara and Mathura Art

9.5 Sangam Literature, Society and Culture

- 9.5.1 Sangam Literature – it's Development
- 9.5.2 Social Condition and Cultural Life

9.6 Let Us Sum Up

9.7 Further Reading

9.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.9 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- analyse the rise of new kingdoms in the post-Mauryan period.
- discuss the cultural development that took place after the Mauryans
- list various features of Gandhara art
- describe the importance of Mathura art
- define various aspects of Sangam literature
- draw a picture of society and culture of southern India during the Sangam age.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

We have already discussed how the Mauryan empire came to an end. After the Mauryas a large number of big and small kingdoms emerged. The Sunga dynasty succeeded the Mauryas at Magadha. The Satavahanas emerged as a great power in the Deccan. The Indo-Greeks, the Sakas, the Parthians and the Kushanas also ruled over several territories in India. The intermingling of various races, Indian as well as foreign, had far reaching consequences on the social and cultural life of India. In this unit we are going to discuss the rise of new powers in the Indian history and their impact.

9.3 RISE OF NEW KINGDOMS

9.3.1 Sungas

According to the contemporary sources, Pushyamitra Sunga was the founder of the Sunga dynasty. He was the commander-in-chief of the last Mauryan emperor Brihadratha. He killed his master in a 'coup de etat' and assumed the royal power. Pushyamitra was a Brahmin. He undertook the performance of the 'asvamedha' sacrifice. According to the traditional accounts, his rule extended over the cities of Pataliputra, Ayodhya and Vidisha and perhaps over Jalandhar and Shakala as well. The Maurya system of administering the provinces through royal blood continued and royal power tended to decentralise in the form of establishment of nuclear kingdoms within the empire. Pushyamitra conducted several campaigns against the Yavanas, or the Indo-Greeks, who were trying in this period to expand from Bactria into North western India.

Sunga history after Pushyamitra, who ruled for roughly 36 years, is largely uncertain. Nothing substantial is known about his successor, Agnimitra, the hero of Kalidas's play 'Malavikagnimitram'. According to the Puranas, Agnimitra's successors, in genealogical order, were- Sujyastha(or Vasujyestha), Vasumitra, Andhraka(or

Bhadraka), Pulindaka,Ghosha, Vajramitra, Bhagavata and Devabhumi(Devabhuti). The period witnessed the revival of Brahmanism and the growing importance of the Bhagavatreligion. The great grammarian Patanjali was a contemporary of Pushyamitra.

The suzerainty of Magadha was lost by later Sunga rulers mainly because of their moral depravity. Though the Sunga lost Magadha, they did not altogether disappear from the stage of Indian history. They continued to rule Vidisha until the region passed into the hands of the Andhras.



LET US KNOW

Chronology of the Sungas :

Pushyamitra Sunga	(185 B.C.-148 B.C)
Agnimitra	(148 B.C.-141 B.C.)
Sujyestha	(141 B.C.-133 B.C.)
Vasumitra	(133B.C.-123 B.C.)
Vajramitra	(123BC-114 B.C)
Bhagavata	(114 B.C.-82 B.C)
Devabhuti	(82 B.C.-72 B.C.)

The Brahmanical religion had a great ascendency in the Sunga period. Pushyamitra patronized the Brahmins in his Court and his example was well fallowed by his successors. The horse sacrifice performed by Pushyamitra marked the early development in the Brahmanical reaction, which was fully developed five centuries later during the time of the Guptas. With the revival of Brahmanisim, Brahma nical literature flourished in the time of the Sungas. Sanskrit became the literary vehicle of the period. 'Mahabhashya', a commentary of Panini's grammar was composed by Patanjali during that period. Most probably 'Manusmriti' was also compiled in the Sunga period. The period witnessed a great development in art. The construction of the famous Bharhut railings has made the name

of Sungas immortal. Vidisa became the centre of an important school of art.

9.3.2 Kushanas

The Kushana Period is one of the most important periods in the history of Indian culture. According to Chinese historians, the Kushanas were a section of the Yuch-chi race. They established their rule in the North-west part of India after destroying the Saka empire. They also made a significant contribution to the art and religion of the Country.

The first powerful ruler of the Kushana dynasty was Khadphasis I. He established an empire which extended between the rivers of Oxus and Sindh. His empire comprised Bactria, Afghanistan, East Iran and the North Western part of India. It is evident from his coins that he defeated the last Yavana ruler and extended the Kushana empire up to Taxila. His period of rule was full of struggles and wars.

Khadphasis II was the son and successor of Khadphasis I. He was a brave and courageous ruler. He extended his empire from Taxila to many parts of Northern India. He followed the imperialistic policies of his father. His empire touched the boundaries of Roman empire in the West, China in the North and the Satavahana kingdom was situated in the South-East. He issued a large number of coins which tell about the power and religion of Khadphasis II. He adopted the tittles of '*Maheshvara'*, '*Sarva-Lokeshwra'*, '*Maharaja'* etc.

Khadphasis II was succeeded by Kanishka,who was undoubtedly the greatest king of all the Kushana rulers in India. The most reliable year of the accession of Kanishka was 78 A.D. According to the historians, Kanishka started a new era in this year. He incorporated Rajasthan, Punjab, Malwa, Saurashtra and Uttar Pradesh into his ancestral kingdom.The most significant event of the Kanishka's reign was the war with China and conquest of three

Chinese Provinces namely Khotan, Kashgar and Yarkand. Kanishka was influenced by the natural beauty of Kashmir. He conquered Kashmir and annexed it to his empire. He also laid the foundation of a town Kanishkapur in the memory of his conquest. He believed in the divine right of Kingship. He ruled in an autocratic manner. But he had to share power in practice with his provincial satraps. The provincial satraps probably enjoyed good deal of local autonomy. It was a common practice of the Kushana emperors to appoint the crown prince as co-ruler.

According to noted historian N.N. Ghose, "Kanishka was a foreigner by birth, but an Indian by choice and a devout Buddhist of Mahayana school by faith." The coins of Kanishka point to the gradual transformation of his religious belief towards Buddhism. According to the legend, Kanishka came in contact with Asvaghosha and was very much impressed by his teachings. During his reign, the famous Fourth Buddhist Council was convened in Kashmir and the convocation was presided by Vasumitra. The purpose of the Council was to codify and collect different views on Buddha's teachings and to write commentaries on them in the light of new developments.

The rulers of Kushana dynasty were great patrons of art. Kanishka's reign is a landmark in the realm of art and architecture. Four eminent schools of sculpture developed from four centres. They were– Sarnath, Mathura, Amravati and Gandhara. Each school of sculpture had a separate style of its own. The Gandhara school had a significant progress in Kanishka's reign. In art, the reign of Kanishka is marked by the growth of two distinct styles, one Indian and the other exotic. The Indian style is represented by the headless statue of Kanishka at Mathura and the image of Buddha found at Sarnath. The exotic school known as Gandhara art was the Greeco-Roman art applied to Buddhist subjects found in Gandhara region. The Gandhara art flourished on Buddhist theme.

Although the Kushanas were foreigners, yet they made Sanskrit as their state language and thus created a congenial atmosphere of royal patronage for the production of Sanskrit literature. Their inscriptions were also written in Sanskrit language. Kanishkas' patronage to learning is noteworthy. A galaxy of great scholars such as Asvaghosha-the Buddhist writer, Nagarjuna- the philosopher, Mathara- the politician, Vasumitra- the Buddhist scholar, Charaka-the physician adorned the Court of Kanishka. The Kushanas broke the isolated character of Indian politics and established close political and commercial relationship with China, Central Asia and the Roman empire in the Western Asia.

9.3.3 Satavahanas

In the Deccan, the Satavahanas appeared as one of the heirs to the Mauryan empire and ruled for a continuous 460 years. They were also known as Andhras. The founder of the dynasty was Simuka. There is considerable uncertainty about Simuka's antecedents, but his descendants assumed Brahmanical status. Simuka is believed to have destroyed the Shunga power. The Satavahanas gained eminence under Satakarani-I, son of Simuka. He conquered Western Malwa, Anupa(Narmada Valley) and Vidharbha. He assumed the title of 'Dakshinapathapati'.

Gautamiputra Satakarani was the greatest king of the dynasty, under whom the Satavahanas made a sharp and total recovery. His achievements are recorded in the Nasik Inscription by his mother Gautami Balasri. He assumed the title of 'Rajaraja' and 'Maharaja'. He was the lord of a far-flung empire.His direct government was established in the region extending from the Krishna to Kathiwar and from Berar to Konkan. But beyond this region his suzeraine authority was established over a vast area. It is not merely as a conqueror that Gautamiputra made his mark on the history. If he was great in war, he was also great in peace. He bore a resolute sense of public duty. His administration was based on the twin foundation of Sastric laws and humanism. The successors of

Gautamiputra Satakarani of the Satavahana dynasty ruled till 220 CE. The coins and inscriptions of his immediate successor Vashishthiputra Pulmayi.(CE 130-54) have been found in Andhra indicating that by the middle of the second century CE his capital was at Paithan or Pratisthan on the bank of the River Godavari in the Aurangabad district. The Shakas resumed their conflict with the Satavahana for the possession of Saurashtra (Kathiawar), defeated the Satavahanas twice, but did not destroy them because of shared matrimonial relations. Yajna Sri Satakarani (CE 165-94) was the last great king of the Satavahana dynasty and recovered north Konkan and Malwa from the Shaka rulers. The successors of Yajna Sri Satakarani were unable to retain the Satavahana kingdom which was destroyed by CE 220.

It is evident from the inscriptions of that period that ample freedom has been given to villages and towns. They had their separate unions. District officials appointed by the Satavahana kings were designated as *Mahasenapatis*. This fact proves that the provincial administration was of a military character. There was also a *Mantri Parishad* which was the chief governing body. The Unagarh inscriptions also describes the cabinet system. Besides the *Mantri Parishad*, the king was assisted by many other officials such as *Mahabhojas*, *Maharathis*, *Mahasenapatis*, *Amatyas*, *Mahamatras,* etc. These officials were appointed by the king himself. Although hereditary monarchy prevailed in the administration of the Satavahanas, the rulers still regarded it as their duty to work for the good of the people. In other words, the welfare of the people was the ultimate aim of the king.

The official records of the Satavahana kings and the Buddhist texts throw some light on the Satavahana government. The Satavahana administration was based on the simple laws of the Dharma Sastras. The Satavahana king did not claim any divine right. He was content with the modest titles of Rajan or Raja-Raja. Theoretically, the king enjoyed absolute power, but in practice he

was checked by customs,conventions and the laws of the Sastras. The provincial function of the king was to defend the country from the foreign invaders. The Princes were called Kumaras. They generally served as trusted viceroys in various provinces.

Both Brahmanism and Buddhism prospered under the tolerant rule of the Satavahanas. The kings were Brahmanas and were followers of Vedic Hinduism.Satakarani I performed two horse sacrifices and numerous other sacrifices according to the Vedic rites. Gifts were made to the Brahmanas. Craft-guilds or Srenis were normal features of the Age. The Srenis or the craft-guilds also acted as banks where money could be deposited on interest. In the Satavahana period, the economy of Deccan was greatly prosperous due to the twin combination of agriculture and trade. Farming of land by iron plough spread to Deccan in the Maurya period. Hence, Deccan in the Satavahana Age inherited the legacy of improved farming of the Mauryan period.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. Answer the following questions:

a) Who was the founder of the Sunga dynasty?

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b) Name the hero of the drama 'Malavikagnimitram'?

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c) In which year did Kanishka start a new era?

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d) Name the Chinese provinces conquered by Kanishka?

.....

e) Who was the president of the Fourth Buddhist Council?

.....

f) Who was Nagarjuna?

.....

g) Who was the founder of the Satavahana dynasty?

.....

h) Who assumed the title of 'Dakshinapathapati'?

.....

9.4 POST MAURYAN CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

9.4.1 Development in Language, Literature and Religion

Language and literature: In the post- Mauryan period literary activities were developed to a great extent. Sanskrit literature developed in this period. Some of the works of the ***Dharmashastra***s were also composed in this period. The *Manusmriti* or the *Manava Dharmashastra* was composed in about the 1st century B.C.

A remarkable contribution of this period was in the field of Sanskrit grammar. Patanjali, the great grammarian, wrote his *Mahabhasya* in the 2nd century B.C. It is a commentary on Panini's *Asthadhyayi*. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* probably assumed its final form during this period.



Hellenistic: Pertaining to or connected with the Greek history, language and culture of the 4th -1st centuries B.C

Ashvaghosha was one of the famous literary figures of the period. He was a playwright, a poet and a great Buddhist philosopher. He wrote *Saundarananda*, *Buddhacharita*, *Vajrasuchi* and a number of other works. Another accomplished playwright of that period was Bhasha. His *Sapnavasavadattam* was one of the famous Sanskrit plays of the period. The Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna also wrote in Sanskrit. He was the author of the *Madhayamikasutras*.

Prakrit language also developed under the patronage of the Satavahana rulers. Satavahana inscriptions were composed in Prakrit language. Satavahana king Hala was a great poet who wrote *Gathasaptashati* while Gunadhya wrote the *Kathasarita Sagara*.

Religion: In this period many new developments took place in the field of religion. Buddhism became the religion of the rich and the powerful. As a result, the Buddhist monasteries were well endowed. These monasteries, which were built up in remote areas

were sufficiently aided so that the monks lived a comfortable life. Thus, the *Sangha* was moving away from the common people and lost its original ethical value.

Some new elements also developed in Buddhism. Idols of Buddha were built for worship. The concept of ***Bodhisattva*** also developed. The notion of transferring merit started too. According to this, the merit could be transferred from one person to another by a pious act in the name of the person to whom this transfer was made. Donations and the giving of gifts were linked to acquiring merit. The *Sangha* now became dependent on the donation of the followers. As communication improved, it led to the increase in pilgrimages. New places for pilgrimage developed. The 4th Buddhist Council, was held in Kashmir in the early 2nd century under the patronage of the Kushana king Kanishka. The Hinayana followed the older order and philosophy of Buddhism. The Mahayana had incorporated the new ideas mentioned above (image worship, concept of Boddhisattva, etc.). The development of the Mahayana philosophy is ascribed to Nagarjuna.

Jainism also flourished in this period. It also enjoyed patronage of kings and wealthy people. This religion was also split into the *Digambara* and the *Svetambara*. The former was orthodox while the latter was more liberal. Groups of Jaina monks began to settle in different parts of the country. Shravana Belgola in modern Karnataka became the biggest centre of Jainism.

Though the followers of Vedic Brahmanism were fewer in number, yet they were very influential. They got the patronage of the ruling families like the Sungas and Satavahanas. Vedic sacrifices played an important role in the coronation of kings. Some of the Vedic Gods had passed into oblivion, some lost their pre-eminence and others were emerging as new Gods. At this time Vedic Brahmanism became differentiated from the newly evolving sects such as the Bhagavata and Shaiva. It was called Pauranic Hinduism and it started to develop towards the later part of the period.

The Vaishnava and Shaiva sects did not develop as a separate religion. Instead, they developed as various cults, beliefs and rituals. A new form of worship evolved where personal relationship between God and the devotee was given importance.

The idea of **Trinity of God** developed in this period with Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver and Shiva as the god who destroys the universe. Of these three gods, the cult of Vishnu and Shiva became more popular. Vishnu was believed to have been manifested in numerous incarnations. The Epics were given the status of sacred texts. They were revised and new portions were added. The famous addition was that of *Bhagavadgita* or Divine song to the Mahabharata.

In the first century A.D., Christianity was introduced in India by the traders from the West. The coming of Christianity is associated with the legend of St. Thomas, who came twice on a mission to India. However, the first coming of Christianity to India is more likely to be linked to the establishment of the Syrian Christian Church.

9.3.2 Development of Art, Architecture and Sculpture

Excavation of many cities revealed great architectural development in this period. Religion played an important role in art and architecture. In India, in the early period, art was the handmaid of religion. Buddhist religious architecture consisted of *Vihara* or monasteries, Stupas and ***Chaitya*** halls. Some of this structure was free standing and some cut into rock at hillsides. Sanchi, Amaravati, Bharhut and Sarnath stupas are the best examples of the Buddhist art and architecture. Huge caves were dug into hillsides, following the plan of a monastery or of a Chaitya.

Buddhist narrative art developed in this period. The life of Buddha and the Jataka stories are depicted in the sculptures. In the early century A.D. many artistic activities took place at Amaravati, Ghantashala and Nagarjunakonda. Beside Buddhism, other religious

sects also had contributed in this field. The Ekamukhalingam, the lingam having anthropomorphic elements, emerged at this time. Two notable forms of art were developed at Mathura and Gandhara during this period.

During this period, sculpture emerged as an adjunct of architecture. On the gateways, railings and entrances of architectural designs we can see some free standing sculptures. Though earlier sculptures were not much familiar with the use of stone, yet by the early Christian era the sculptors of the Deccan show a mastery over stone. Besides stone, ivory was also started to be used in sculptures.



LET US KNOW

It is said that history of Indian art practically started with the Mauryan age. The Mauryan art may be divided into court art and popular art. The first included pillar art and cave art.The pillars were well polished. The columns of Ashokan pillars were also monolithic, decorated with sculptured animal figures of remarkable excellence. Sarnath column has the most magnificent and it has been adopted as the emblem of the modern Indian Republic.

9.4.3 Gandhara and Mathura Art

In the post-Mauryan period, trade relations between India and Greece, Rome and Iran took a new turn. Along with the exchange of merchandise, cultural interaction was also witnessed. The most direct and visible interaction was seen in the field of art. One great example of this was the Gandhara art that emerged in Afghanistan and North-West India.

Gandhara art evolved as a mixture of styles. It was a combination of the Graeco-Roman style and Hellenistic and Indian models. The emergence of Gandhara art coincided with the

introduction of multiple celestial beings and heavens in Buddhist tradition and it was depicted through sculpture and painting. As diverse influences affected Gandhara art, so it was possible that this form of art was sub-divided according to its diversity. The Gandhara art depicted especially the themes of Buddhism. However, other deities and themes were not ignored. The mother of Buddha resembled an Athenian matron. Portraits of Buddha was given an Apollo like face. Greek Gods were depicted paying obeisance to the Buddha.

Stucco was a popular medium in Gandhara art. At Hadda and later at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, monasteries were decorated with stucco images of the Buddha and of Bodhisattvas. The magnificent stucco art at Hadda was a creation of local artists. The large statues of Buddha at Bamiyan were one of the finest examples of the Gandhara art. Unfortunately they were destroyed during the Taliban regime.

The Mathura school of art flourished during the Kushana period. Like Gandhara art here also the main theme was derived from Buddhism. It was also a centre for images of Buddha. The Mathuran sculptures incorporated many **Hellenistic** elements for representing deities. For instance, the general idealistic realism and key design elements such as the curly hair and folded garments were adopted.

Besides the statues of Buddha, the statues of the Kushana kings were also made. The headless statue of Kanishka is a unique piece of Mathura art, which is kept in the Mathura museum. The representation of female figures attained greater freedom and movement in this form of art. Mathura also produced many fine specimens of sculpture. It include images of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist deities and the life size sculptures of Yakshas, Yakshinis and portrait sculptures of the kings.



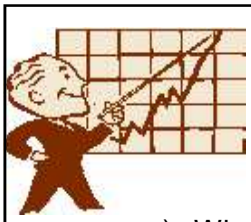
ACTIVITY - 9.1

Give four important religious developments that took place in the post-Mauryan period.

.....

.....

.....



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.2. Answer the following:

a) Who was Asvaghosha?

.....

b) In the 'Trinity of God' who was considered as the creator?

.....

c) What was stucco?

.....

Q.3. Fill in the blanks :

a) _____ followed the older order of Buddhism.

b) Besides stone _____ was also started to use in sculpture in the Post-Mauryan period.

c) The Gandhara art depicted especially the _____.

9.5 SANGAM LITERATURE SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Towards the end of the first millennium B.C. South India moved from pre-history into history and literary records reflecting the contemporary events are available. Ashoka, in his inscriptions, refers to the people of South India as the Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas and Satiyaputras and Kerelaputras. The first three clans acquired the status of kingdoms in a later period. To get information about that period we have the Sangam literature which developed in this period.

9.5.1 Sangam Literature and its Development

Tamil is the oldest among the spoken literary languages of South India. The earliest known phase of this literature is associated with the Sangam. Sangam is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word – Sangha, which means a group of persons or associations. The Sangam was a college or an assembly of Tamil poets held probably under royal patronage. We do not know the exact number of Sangams or the period for which they were held. It is stated in a Tamil commentary of the middle of the 8th century A.D. that three Sangams lasted for 9,990 years. According to tradition, the first Sangam founded by Sage Agastya was held at Thenmadurai (South Madurai) and 4449 poets attended it. The second Sangam was held at Kabadapuram and attended by 3700 poets. The third Sangam was held at Madurai and had 444 poets. However, the number might be an exaggeration. It was possible that each Sangam consisted of a number of distinguished poets and scholars.

The age of the Sangam is the age of the Sangam literature. Of the whole corpus of literature, Ettogai Collection is considered to be the earliest one belonging to 3rd century B.C. to 3rd century A.D. A good deal of literature was compiled later on.

The Sangam literature is roughly divided into narrative and didactic texts. The narrative texts are called *Melanakku,* comprising eighteen major works. The didactic works are called *Kilkanakku* with eighteen minor works. The narrative Sangam texts glorify heroes and provide details of the life of the people during the period. They also tell us about polity and administration of the period. The didactic prose provides a code of conduct for the king and his court and also for various social groups and occupations. *Tirukkural* or *Kural*, of Tiruvalluvar is the best among the minor didactic poems. *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* are the two Tamil Epics which were composed around the 6th century A.D. Both the epics throw valuable light on the economic and social life of the Tamil people upto about the 6th century A.D.

9.5.2 Social Condition and Cultural Life

Sangam texts suggest several stages of social evoluation in the Sangam age. Early Tamil people were primarily pastoral. In various sites of Southern India hoes and sickles have been found during excavations. But no traces of ploughshares are seen. Besides, the tools which were meant mainly for war and hunting like arrowheads, long swords and lances, spikes and spearheads, etc. were also found. This gives support to the Sangam text which speaks about perpetual war and cattle raids. The text suggests that war booty was an important source of livelihood. It is possible that the earliest phase of social evaluation reflected in the Sangam works relates to early megalithic stage.

Till the 2nd century B.C. peninsular India was inhabited by megalith people. They were called megalith because they had burials encircled by big pieces of stone.

By the 3rd century B.C., the megalithic people had moved to the fertile river basins and began to practice paddy cultivation. The influence of material culture of the North and the impact of traders, conquerors and religious missionaries became evident when the megalithic people founded numerous villages and towns.

The head of the households enjoyed special importance. But a higher status was given to the chiefs called *Velir*. These chiefs might have been associated with the megalithic burials. However, the highest status was given to the powerful chiefdoms of the ***Ventor***.

In this period the poet or bard was held in high esteem. They were rewarded with wealth for their creations. Gift giving was taken for granted in such societies and the economy was tied into kinship. Lesser kinsmen provided for the chiefs who carried out raids. The use of non-kin labour was a later development. The Sangam poems refer to various occupations, but not directly to the social ordering of varna.

The warrior class occupied a prominent place in the society. Civil military offices were held by Vellala or rich peasants. They held the bulk of the land. The status of the labourers who cultivated land was a little better than that of the slaves. The condition of the artisans was not different from that of the agricultural labour. A sharp social inequality divided the people in the Sangam age. The rich lived in houses of brick and mortar and the poor in mud structure. Polygamy was practiced, though on a limited scale. Marriages among near relatives were allowed. Dancing girls and prostitutes lived in towns. Women could receive higher education. The Sangam literature includes poems by women also.

A mixture of diverse practices and beliefs were followed by the people. The Vedic religion of sacrifices was followed by the kings. Shiva, Krishna, Balaram and Subramaniya have been mentioned in the poems. The chief local God worshipped by the people of the hilly region was Murugan, who came to be called Subramaniya in early medieval times. There are a few references of Buddhism and Jainism in early Sangam literature. The existence of Jainism is proved by the presence of Shravaka, by the followers of Jainism and of Jaina monasteries in Madurai.

The Megalithic culture is mostly known for its burials. These burials are termed as megaliths. They are marked by an abundance of iron tools and black and red pottery. They have a surprising uniformity all over the peninsula. Potteries of different shapes can be seen. Of the iron implements, the main types are axes with crossed straps, sickles, tripods, tridents, spearheads, swords, lamp hangers, arrowheads and lamps. Occasionally, gold ornaments and objects of copper or stone are also found. The Southern kingdoms contributed much to art, architecture, painting and sculptures. Beautiful temples, caves and viharas were built in this period.

This period witnessed the growth of Tamil literature. About Sangam literature we have discussed already. Besides Sangam

texts, we have a text called *Tolkkapiyam*. It deals with grammar and poetics.



LET US KNOW

The earliest references about the people and kingdoms of South India are preserved in three forms: Ashokas inscriptions, Sangam literature and Megesthanes' accounts. The Rock Edict II and XIII of Ashoka mention the Southern kingdoms of Chola, Pandya, Satyaputra, Keralaputra and Tambapanni. Megasthenes also mentions these states.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4. Fill in the blanks :

a) Higher status was given to the chiefs called _____.

b) The _____ occupied a prominent place in Sangam society.

c) The _____ religion of sacrifices was followed by the king.

Q.5. State True or False **:**

a) The Sangam text suggest that war booty was an important source of livelihood.

b) In Sangama period poets were given great respect.

c) Women were not given opportunity for higher education in Sangama age.



9.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit we have learnt about–

- the rise of new kingdoms during the post-Mauryan period and that the Post-Mauryan period witnessed all round development in the cultural field.

- you have also learnt that the Gandhara art is a unique combination of Indian and Greek art.
- the contribution of Mathura art to Indian culture is far reaching. This unit will also help you to get a fair idea about the Sangam literature which plays a pivotal role in illustrating the social and cultural history of peninsular India.
- Sangam society and culture were totally different from the Northern Indian society and culture of the contemporary period.



9.7 FURTHER READING

1. Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C., Datta, K. (1986). *An Advanced History of India*. New Delhi, Macmillan India Ltd.
2. Thapar, Romila. (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India from The Origins to A D 1300.* New Delhi, The Penguin Group.
3. Tripathi, Ramashankar. (1999). *History of Ancient India*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.



9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q.No. 1 : a) Pushyamitra**,** b) Agnimitra, c) 78 A.D., d) Khotan, Kashgar, Yarkand, e) Vasumitra, f) He was a great philosopher, who adroned the Court of Kanishka, g) Simuka, h) Satakarani-I

Ans. to Q.No. 2 : a) Famous literary figure of Post-Mauryan period, b) Brahma, c) Popular medium in Gandhara art

Ans. to Q.No. 3 : a) The Hinayana, b) ivory, c) themes of Buddhism

Ans. to Q.No. 4 : a) Velir, b) Warrior class, c) Vedic

Ans. to Q.No. 5 : a) True, b) True, c) False



9.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q.1. Who was the author of 'Madhayamikastras'?

Q.2. Who was Hala?

Q.3. What was the main purpose of the Fourth Buddhist Council?

Q.4. Who founded the first Sangam?

Q.5. What was the main occupation of the early Tamil people?

Q.6. What is 'Velir'?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q.1. What was the condition of women in the society during the Sangam age?

Q.2. What is 'Chaitya'

Q.3. Distinguish between the 'Digambara' and 'Svetambara' sect of the Jainism.

Q.4. Briefly discuss the Kushana administration?

Q.5. Write Short notes:

i) Language and literature of the Post-Mauryan Period

ii) Gandhara and Mathura art

iii) Social and Cultural life of Sangam age.

C) Long Questions (Answer each question within 300-500 Words)

Q.1. Write about the rise of new kingdoms in the Post-Mauryan Period.

Q.2. Write about the development in the field of art, architecture and sculpture in the Post-Mauryan period.

Q.3. Discuss the religious belief of the people in the Post-Mauryan period.

Q.4. Describe the development of Sangam literature.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 10: GUPTA EMPIRE

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Foundation of the Gupta

10.4 Expansion of the Gupta Empire

- 10.4.1 Samudragupta's Policy of Expansion
- 10.4.2 Chandragupta II's Policy of Expansion

10.5 Consolidation of the Gupta Empire

10.6 Administration

- 10.6.1 Administrative Divisions
- 10.6.2 Judicial Administration
- 10.6.3 Revenue Administration

10.7 Downfall of the Guptas

10.8 Let Us Sum Up

10.9 Further Reading

10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.11 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the emergence of the Guptas in ancient India
- explain the extension and consolidation of the Gupta Empire
- describe the polity and administration of the Guptas
- analyse the causes for the downfall of the Guptas.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

India had witnessed a number of Empire building efforts throughout the ancient period of its history. We have already discussed one such successful effort at the initiative of the Mauryas. Even after the fall of the Mauryas this imperial ambition continued for centuries when different royal

dynasties like Sunga, Kushana, Satavahana, etc tried to emulate the Mauryas, in building an empire but nothing special happened on the lines of an Empire, until the appearance of the Guptas in Indian politics during the 4th century A.D. However, some scholars like Romila Thapar refused to recognize the initiatives of the Guptas as being the perfect realization of the concept of an Empire, primarily because of its decentralized form of administration. Whatever might be the fact, the Gupta period (starting from 4th century A.D. to of 6th century A.D.) is an important phase in Indian history with manifestation of excellence and glory in every walk of life. The Gupta period epitomised the enduring achievements of ancient Indian Civilization.

In this unit we will now discuss the Gupta Empire in detail. The emergence of the Guptas, the territorial expansion and consolidation by the Gupta rulers, the Gupta system of administration, and the factors that brought about the downfall of the Gupta dynasty will be the major part of discussion in this unit.

10.3 FOUNDATION OF THE GUPTAS

The origin of the Guptas, like most of the ruling dynasties of ancient India, is somewhat obscure in nature. Different theories have been put forward by historians from time to time about the origin of Gupta dynasty. Some historian believed that they were the rulers of a small principality in Magadha, while others held that their original homeland was the Western Gangetic plain. On the other hand, depending on their name, some historians tried to identify them as belonging to the *Vaishya* community, but some others tried to accord them with the status of a *Brahmana*.

Now regarding the question of their actual emergence, the Gupta records mentioned the name of the first three rulers of the family as Maharaja Srigupta, his son Maharaja Ghatotkachagupta and the latter's son Maharajadhiraja Chandragupta I . Depending on different records the majority of historians now confirm that during the 4th century A.D. there was a general tradition among the sub-ordinate chiefs to be normally styled as *Maharaja,* while the independent kings liked to call themselves *Maharajadhiraja*. As to

the line of that description- the first two rulers of the Gupta dynasty appeared to be the feudatory chief, but it is difficult to know the name of their suzerain.

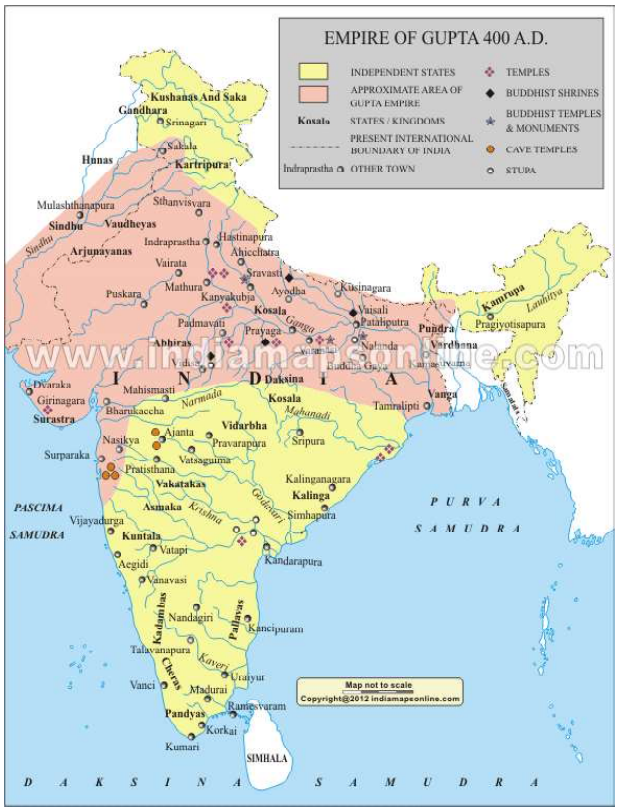


Fig. 10.1: Gupta Empire

Source: Google Image



LET US KNOW

I-tsing, a Chinese traveler, who visited India in the 7th century A.D. made some comments about the first Gupta ruler Srigupta, (275-300 A.D.) which was supposed to be a authentic one. According to him Srigupta's kingdom comprised of a portion of North Bengal and Bihar. Srigupta became a Buddhist and said to have constructed a temple for the Chinese pilgrims near Mrigashikhavana. The Vakataka records refer to Srigupta as the *adiraja* or the first ruler of the Gupta line. Srigupta was succeeded by Ghatotkachagupta.

Chandragupta I, the third ruler of the Gupta line succeeded Ghatotkacha and brought the house successfully under the full light of history by removing the veil of obscurity. It was he who determined the tract of an imperial identity for the Guptas in future. Chandragupta I married into the Lichchavi family, once an old established *Gana-Sangha* of North Bihar, now associated with the kingdom of Nepal. This Lichchavi-Gupta matrimonial alliance had a special significance for the emergence of Gupta power in future. Eminent historian Romila Thapar has put forwarded the view that perhaps the Guptas had no royal origin, and under such circumstances, the marriage alliance with an old prestigious family, had normally set a stamp of acceptability. On the other hand V.A Smith expressed the view that the Lichchavi Princess Kumaradevi brought to her husband as her dowry valuable influence which in due course of time offered him a paramount position in Magadha and in the neighbouring countries. In other words, it can be said that the marriage alliance of Chandragupta I was important less from the social point of view but more from political point of view.

After stabilizing his position in Indian politics, Chandragupta I successfully extended his rule over the main heartland of Gangetic plain which had included some of the important territories like Magadha, Saketa, Prayaga. This inclusion sufficiently proved his independent status to adopt the title like *Maharajadhiraja* or king of kings. Based upon the campaigns of Chandragupta I some historians consider his kingdom as consisting of whole of Bihar, a portion of Bengal except the part of Samatata or Eastern Bengal, Eastern U.P. i.e. a territory extending upto Benaras. However, there are lot of confusions over the question of the extension of his Empire. The establishment of the Gupta era from the date of his accession i.e. in and about 319-320 A.D. has further highlighted the political importance of the reigning period of Chandragupta I, thus the first three rulers of the Gupta line had successfully established themselves as emerging power of Indian politics.



ACTIVITY 10.1

Prepare a list of the rulers of the Gupta dynasty.

.....

.....

.....



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Fill in the blanks:

a) The first three rulers of the Guptas were ....., ..., and .....

b) Independent kings liked to call themshelves as .....

c) Chandragupta I married the Lichchavi Princess .....

Q 2: How did Lichchavi-Gupta matrimonial alliance helped the Guptas? (Answer in about 60 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

10.4 EXPANSION OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

The Gupta rulers established a far flung Empire in India. They were very good conquerors and by the might of their sword, they occupied different areas, thereby extending the dominion of the Gupta Empire. In this section we will discuss the extension of the Gupta Empire.

10.4.1 Samudragupta's Policy of Expansion

The extension of Gupta Empire was mainly the handi-work of great Gupta Emperor Samudragupta, who ascended the throne in about 335 A.D. The main source of information of his campaign is

a lengthy eulogy, inscribed on an Asokan Pillar at Allahbad known as the *Allahbad Pillar* ***Prasasti***. The writer of this eulogy was his court poet Harisena. Apart from this inscription, the Bhitari Seal and Pillar, different numismatic evidences, along with *Vayu Purana* and *Bhagavata Purana* throw a good deal of light on the political condition of India at that time.

There is a controversy regarding a civil war for the throne, on the basis of a Sanskrit term *Tulya Kulaja* i.e. 'Princes of Equal Birth'. Allahabad *Prasasti* clearly states that Samudragupta was nominated to the throne by his father Chandragupta I on the occasion of a full session of royal court. His nomination probably offended the Princess of his equal birth as some historians think and provided an opportunity of a revolt under the leadership of an obscure Prince Kacha. This Kacha was supposed to be the eldest brother of Samudragupta. But subsequent numismatic evidence proves that Kacha was an alias of Samudragupta himself. This view is yet to gain the general acceptability of the scholars and it still remains as a matter of further research. Whatever might be the trouble that led to his coronation, Samudragupta had successfully overcome it.

Allahbad Pillar Inscription gives an impressive list of kings and the region that were conquered and brought under various degrees of his subjugation. Depending on that list the victorious campaign of Samudragupta can be discussed in the following.

The great king started his career of expansion by subjugating the neighbouring kings in the Ganga-Yamuna Valley and thus tried to consolidate his position at home before he started his campaign in the remote South. It was at that initial strokes that he defeated four important kings of modern UP and Central India. They were Achyuta of Ahichhatra (Modern Ramnagar and Rai Bareilly district of U.P) Nagasena of Mathura, Ganapati Naga of Padmavati (Gwalior) and the Prince of the Kota family (yet to be ascertained).

Samudragupta was a great conqueror. After consolidating

his position in and around his home tract of Magadha, he might have started his campaign towards *Dakshinapatha* (South India). It is interesting that his South Indian campaign was formulated with a theory of *Dharmavijaya* which was marked by three principles namely *Grahana* (capture of the enemy), *Moksha* (liberation) and *Anugraha* (principle of favoring by reinstating the enemy). During the course of his campaign, Samudragupta defeated as many as twelve kings of South India, whom he first captured and then liberated and ultimately reinstated in their respective kingdom. The list of the twelve South Indian kings as put forward by the Allahbad *Prasasti* are as follows- Mahendra of Kosala (Bilaspur, Raipur, Sambalpur district), Vyaghraja of Mahakantara (forest tract of Jaipur region of Orissa), Mantaraja of Kurala (yet to be ascertained), Mahendragiri of Pishtapuram (Pithapuram in Godavari district), Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district), Damana of Erandapalla (Vizagopatam district), Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Hastivarman of Vengi (Ellore in Krishna- Godavari district), Nilaraja of Avamukta (yet to be ascertained), Ugrasena of Palakka (Vellore district), Kuvera of Devarashtra (Gapatam district) and Dhananjaya of Kushalapura (in North Arcot district).

Probably when Samudragupta was engaged in his Southern Campaign, some of the North Indian rulers, by taking the opportunity of his absence, might have started a revolt against him. To deal with the matter Samudragupta hurried back home and found that nine of his hostile North Indian kings formed a confederacy to resist his victorious campaign. Among these nine rulers- three of them were the Naga rulers of Central India, namely Achyuta, Nagasena and Ganapati Naga whom he had defeated in his earlier campaign. The other six rulers of North India to form the confederacy were: Rudradeva (identified as Rudrasena I of Vakataka), Matila (Western UP), Nagadatta, Nandin, Balavarman and three other Naga rulers of Central India. Inspite of their combined efforts, the descriptions of Poet Harisena has made it clear that Samudragupta not only defeated them but also uprooted them violently.

Apart from these three major campaign Samudragupta also defeated some of the forest kings or the tribal chiefs of Central India and the Deccan. Along with that, nine republics, including the age old *Malavas*, *Yaudheyas*, *Madrakas* were also forced to accept the Gupta suzerainty. His victory over the tribal and the republican states proved to be disastrous one for the later Guptas. Accordingly, when the Hunas invaded North-Western India, including Punjab and Rajasthan, no power was there to act as a buffer for the Gangetic plain.

The impression of his power compelled some of the frontier states *Pratyanta Nripatis* like Samatata (South-Eastern Bengal) Davaka (Dabaka in Nagaon district of Assam) Kamarupa, Nepal, Kartripura, to become voluntarily his vassals by paying tribute, obeying his order and offering him personal homage. Apart from that even some of the independent or semi-independent foreign powers beyond the frontier of Samudragupta's Empire like *Daivaputra Shahi Shahanu Shahi Saka Murundas,* etc also entered into sub-ordinate alliance with him. Moreover, Meghavahana, the king of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) maintained diplomatic relation with him.

Thus, the Gupta Empire during the time of Samudragupta included whole of North India except the tract of the Saka rule in Western India, Kashmir, Western Punjab, Western Rajputana. In the South, the Gupta hegemony was extended even upto the tract of Tamil Nadu. Despite his all round conquest of the Indian sub-continent, the main area of his rule, however was much more limited as his direct rule comprised only of U.P, Bihar, West Bengal a portion of Central Province and Vindhya region. To commemorate his victory Samudragupta performed the *Asvamedha* Sacrifice (Horse Sacrifice), the performance of which is often regarded in history as a symbol of imperialism.

10.4.2 Chandragupta II's Policy of Expansion

There was another important phase of expansion of Gupta history, which started with the reigning period of Chandragupta II, son and successor of Samudragupta. This was a campaign against the Sakas of Western India. This campaign took place in between 388-409 A.D. The main source of information of this campaign are the two inscriptions in Udaygiri and Vishakhadatta's Sanskrit drama *Devi Chandraguptam*. According to the story of the drama, after the death of Samudragupta, his eldest son Ramagupta became the king of the Gupta Empire.The name of the wife of the king Ramagupta was Dhruvadevi. The Sakas invaded the Gupta territory and Ramagupta failed to resist the Saka invasion. Ultimately he had to make an agreement with the Saka ruler to surrender his wife Dhruvadevi in return for his kingdom. Chandragupta II who was the younger brother of Ramagupta was disgusted with the action of his elder brother and he in a heroic attempt not only rescued Dhruvadevi from the Sakas but also killed the Saka king. Then Chandragupta II killed his elder brother and occupied the Gupta throne and married queen Dhruvadevi. Whatever might be the truth, the story in its turn confirmed the natural tendency of Westward expansion of Gupta Empire which Samudragupta left to his successor.

As we have already discussed, Samudragupta had extended the frontier of the Gupta Empire on all sides. He left his vast Empire to his successor Chandragupta II. We have to depend upon various literary and geographical evidences for forming our idea about Chandragupta II's conquests. Samudragupta had extended his frontier East and Southward. His Westward expansion halted at Eastern Malwa. Further expansion Eastward and Southward was not possible. Hence the natural tendency of expansion in the reign of Chandragupta II lay Westward against the kingdom of the Saka Satrapas of Western Malwa and Gujarat. He feared an alliance between the Sakas and the Vakatakas of Maharastra and the Nagas.

Therefore, he followed a policy of isolating the Sakas by forging a matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas and the Nagas.

As a result of that Chandragupta II married Kuvera Naga, a Princess of the Naga family and won the friendship of the Naga power. The Nagas formed a powerful political force in Central India and their alliance consolidated Gupta authority in the region. Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II and his queen Kuvera Naga, was married to Rudrasena II, the Vakataka ruler of Maharashtra. The geographical position of the Vakataka kingdom was such that it could be of immense help to Chandragupta II for his projected campaigns against the Sakas of Kathiwar and their hostility could seriously embarrass him. Moreover, the Vakataka alliance was a useful deterrent against any future revolt of the Sakas in Saurashtra. Rudrasena II had died at an early age and after his death Prabhavati

Gupta became the regent of her minor sons, which indirectly increased Gupta influence in the Vakataka court. According to a tradition, Chandragupta II or his son married a Kadamba Princess of the Kuntala country. This marriage is politically useful for operation against the Sakas. Thus, by a policy of matrimonial alliance with the Nagas, Vakatakas and Kadambas, Chandragupta II encircled the Sakas.

Chandragupta II's brilliant victory over the Saka Satrap united Western India with the rest of Northern India. It rounded off the Gupta Empire by pushing its Western limit to the natural frontier on the Arabian Sea. The Gupta Empire now extended from the Bay of Bengal in the East to the Arabian Sea on the West. The annexation of Saurashtra and Malwa by Chandragupta II opened up to the Guptas free access to the ports of the Western coast especially to the part of Barygaza. Indian trade between Northern and Western India vastly increased as a result of the conquest of Malwa and Saurashtra. The city of Ujjaini lay on the high road of trade between the Northern and Western India. The city became a great emporium of trade. It became a great centre of culture and religion. Chandragupta II converted this

city into his second capital. However, Chandragupta II's great victory over the Sakas is not directly mentioned in any official epigraph of the Guptas.

Chandragupta II's greatest achievement was the conquest of Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiwar from the Western Saka Satraps. The Sakas of Western India were a very powerful neighbour. They remained a thorn on the side of the Gupta Empire. Chandragupta II, while he was a crown prince, acted as a governor of Eastern Malwa and was conscious of the Saka problem on the frontier. He connected Eastern Malwa as his lease of operation against the Saka Satrap Rudrasinha II. This is corroborated by the *Udayagiri Inscription* and also by the *Harshacharita*. The *Mehrauli Iron Pillar* (near the Qutub Minar inDelhi) Inscription refers to the exploit of a king Chandra who quelled a rebellion in Bengal and vanquished the rulers of the Sapta Sindhu area. As Chandragupta II is called 'Chandra' in his coin, historians generally accept his identification with the Chandra of the inscription. With the end of the reigning period of Chandragupta II, the period of expansion of Gupta Empire has come to an end. Despite his important conquests he was remembered not as a great conqueror but as a consolidator.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write True / False:

a) Harisena was a court poet.

b) Tulya Kulaja means Princes of Unequal Birth.

c) Dakshinapatha means the Western part of India.

d) Devi Chandraguptam is a Sanskrit drama of Vishakhadatta.

e) Chandragupta II married Kuvera Naga.

f) Ujjaini lay on the high road of trade between the Northern and Western India.

Q 4: What is the main source of information for Samudragupta's policy of conquest?

.....

Q 5: Who was Ramagupta?

.....

Q 6: Write about Samudragupta's policy of conquest towards South India in about 60 words.

.....

.....

.....

.....

10.5 CONSOLIDATION

After the vigorous campaign of Samudragupta, there came a phase of consolidation and stabilization. Samudragupta left for his successor Chandragupta II a legacy of a vast Empire. Justifying his nomination, the fifth ruler of the Gupta line had not only completed the work left undone by his father, but also assimilated large number of tribal tracts, including the territories ruled by the Sakas and the Kushanas in Western India, Samatata or a part of Eastern Bengal.

As we have discussed earlier, Chandragupta II liberated Western India from the age old servitude of the Saka Satraps. Thus, by bringing the land between the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea under the shadow of an Imperial identity, Chandragupta II completed the work of the political unification of Northern India.

In consolidating the Gupta power in India the political marriage had always played a vital role. At the stage of their emergence the Lichchavi marriage alliance provided them with political status and acceptability. Similarly, at the stage of consolidation also marriage alliances provided them an opportunity to strengthen their hold further in North Indian politics. Chandragupta II, the great consolidator concluded a number of marriage alliances with different Indian rulers which created a ring of a friendly states around him. Except the campaign against the Western Saka, no major military expedition had been taken by Chandragupta II. The entire period of

his reign was a peaceful one. His pacific policy further strengthened the process of consolidation of the Gupta Empire.

As a result of his pacific policy Gupta history entered into a phase of cultural renaissance. It provided him an opportunity to pay more attention to the development of Gupta art and culture. Chandragupta II was known as the patron of legendary Nine Gems or *Nava Ratna*, of whom Kalidasa was the most prominent one. This great poet Kalidasa immortalized the age by his great literary creations.

The Gupta period witnessed the ultimate revival of Brahmanical culture which saw its beginning in the horse sacrifice of Samudragupta. One of the main vehicles of this Brahmanical culture was the Sanskrit language. By patronizing the gems of the Sanskrit literature, Chandragupta II put it at the pin node of its glory. By patronizing the creative spirit of his age, he successfully enhanced not only the military but also the cultural pride of the Empire and consolidated the position of Gupta Empire as a centre of creative activity.



LET US KNOW

The Nine Gems or *Nava Ratna* were Kalidasa, Khatakarpara, Dhanwantari, Varahamihira, Kshapanaka, Shankhu, Amarasimha, Vetalbhatt (or Vetalabhatta) and Vararuchi.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Which marraige alliance initially provided the Guptas political status and acceptability?

.....

Q 8: Who provided patronage to the Nava Ratna?

.....

Q 9: Who was the most prominent amongst the Nava Ratna?

.....

10.6 ADMINISTRATION

We have a few important sources for the study of the Gupta polity and administration. Some literary sources like various *Smritis, Manava Dharma Sastra*, *Yajnavalka Smritis*, *Narada Smriti* and Kamandaka's *Nitisara*, etc are important sources. The Damodarpur and the Eran Inscriptions throw light on Gupta administration. Let us analyse the polity and administration of the Guptas.

Monarchy was advocated as an ideal system of government in the Gupta period. There were some tribal republics like those of the *Malavas*, *Yaudheyas*, *Arjunayanas* in Northern India. There was always contradiction between the two systems of government. Kingship being sanctioned by the Brahmanical *Shastras* was powerful and aggressive against the republics.

The king or *Samrata* was at the head of the government. He ruled by hereditary right. The Gupta Emperors adopted the high sounding titles of *Maharajadhiraja*, *Paramabhattaraka,* etc. They brought additional lustre to their position by claiming for themselves divine origin and super human qualities. Hence, they assumed magnificent titles like *Paramesvara*, *Achintyapurusha, Lokadhamadeva, Paramadaivata,* etc.

Theoretically, there was no limit on the king's power. He ruled over his vast Empire with absolute command over all the branches of the government. He was the supreme commander of the army. Samudragupta and Chandragupta II personally led the army. The governors, important civil and military officers were appointed by the king and they held office at his pleasure. The central bureaucray functioned under his personal supervision. The king was the master of all lands and he could grant them to anybody.

However, the claim of divine origin and the enjoyment of vast theoretical rights did not convert the Gupta Emperors into crude despots without any touch of benevolence among them. Samudragupta and Chandragupta II were aware of their duties to the people. The government did not interfere in the daily life of the people. It was sympathetic to people's needs. Moreover, there were certain practical checks on the king's authority and power. He had to share power with high officials. It was a custom for

the king to abstain from routine duties of ministers. He had to obey the rules laid down by the *Dharmashastras*. The local bodies enjoyed a good deal of autonomy in which he normally did not interfere. Moreover, the system of granting *agrahara* and *brahmadeya* lands led to increasing decentralization in administration and weakening hold of the central authority. The succession to the throne was hereditary but the Emperor reserved the right of selecting the heir apparent. Samudragupta was nominated by Chandragupta I as his successor from among the sons of the latter. Kumaragupta I probably nominated Skandagupta. But the system of nomination was not free from trouble.

The king was the supreme head of the government. Next in rank to him was the *Yuvaraja* or crown prince. The *Mantrin* or ministers stood at the head of the civil administration and their offices were generally hereditary. Perhaps some other high offices were also hereditary and limited to a number of families only. The *Mahadandanayakas* held offices in hereditary capacity.*Sandhivigrahika* or minister of war and peace was a new office of minister created in the Gupta period. Some of the ministers combined different offices at the same time. We do not know whether there was a *Mantri Parishad* or Council of Ministers of the Mauryan type. Kalidasa refers to a council of ministers whose decision was conveyed to the Emperor by the chamberlain or *Kanchuki*. Generally, ministers acted as individual advisers and assistants of the king.

The vast Empire of the Guptas could only be managed with the help of an organized bureaucracy. The central and provincial officials were differentiated by their designation. Among the high officials in the central administration mention may be made of *Mahabaladhikrita* (commander-in-chief), *Mahadandanayaka* (chief general), *Mahapratihara* (chief of the palace guards), *Sandhivigrahika* (minister in charge of war and peace), *Akshapataladhikrita* (keeper of State documents); *Mahakapati* (head of the cavalry force), etc. They were assisted by a host of junior officials. There was no distinction between civil and military officials and sometimes both duties were combined in a single person.

There was another class of officials called *Kumaramatyas* and *Ayuktas*. They worked as the link between the central and provincial administration. High imperial officers and officers of the personal staff of the Emperor were included in the rank of the *Kumaramatyas*. It is said that *Kumaramatyas* means ministers for *Kumara* or crown prince. It is also said that *Kumaramatya* was a cadet or apprentice minister, who was minister from youth. However, *Kumaramatyas* served both the Emperor and crown prince and served in the province and district level. *Ayuktas* were employed by the Emperor specially in districts and metropolitan towns. They also performed the duty of restoring properties of the defeated king who had been reinstated.

10.6.1 Administrative Divisions

The Empire was divided into a number of provinces. The usual names of the provinces were *Bhuktis*, *Desas* and *Bhogas*. The provinces were sub-divided into districts called *Vishayas*. A part of the *Vishaya* was called *Vithi*. The villages or *Grama* were the lowest administrative units.

The provinces called *Bhuktis* were governed by officers called *Uparikas* or sometimes by princes of royal blood bearing the title *Maharajajouta Devabhattarka*. The provinces called *Desas* were governed by officers called *Goptis* or wardens of the marches. The districts or *Vishayas* were ruled by district officers styled *Vishayapatis*, *Kumaramatyas* and *Ayuktas*. Sometimes districts were governed by feudatories or *Samantas*. Usually the district officer was appointed by the provincial governor, though sometimes he was directly appointed by the Emperor. The *Ayuktas* served as a link between the central and district administration as discussed earlier. The *Vishayapati* or district officer generally acted under the *Uparikas* or provincial governors as testified by the Damodarpur Copper Plate. The *Antarvedi Vishaya* or the Doab region was the heartland of the Gupta Empire. The *Vishayas* were pivots of the

Gupta provincial administration. In every *Vishaya* perhaps there was an advisory council or *Parishad* comprising local representatives. (village headman), *Bhojakas,* etc. The *Gramikas* ruled the villages with the help of village councils. He was a paid official of the state. The *Talabara*, *Vinayasthitisthapaka* were new dignitaries vested with military and religious and judicial duties respectively.

Some North Bengal inscriptions throw an interesting sidelight on the association of popular representatives in the Gupta administration. In the provincial, district or village level of administration, the officer in charge was assisted by an *Adhikarana* or Council consisting of local representatives. In the cities, the Municipal Boards (*Adhikaranas*) consisted of guild president, chief merchant or *Nagara Shresthi*, chief artisan or *Prathama Kulika* and chief scribe or *Prathama Kayastha*. In the districts and villages the Boards consisted of village head-men, householders, etc. The Guptas made a bold administrative experiment by associating popular elements in the administration.



LET US KNOW

Beyond the Empire under direct rule of the Guptas lay the frontier states both monarchical and republican. With politic generosity the Guptas left them in a position of sub-ordinate status of vassals to the Gupta suzerain without disturbing their internal autonomy. Samudragupta's *prasasti* (eulogy) gives a long list of such frontier vassal states brought under his sub-ordinate dependence. Their status varied according to their relative strength in comparison with that of the suzerain power. Among the states in the Eastern frontiers were the monarchies of Samatata, Kamarupa, Davaka, Nepal and Kartripura and on the Western frontier the nine tribal republics of Punjab and Rajputana.

10.6.2 Judicial Administration

The inscriptions of the Guptas do not throw any definite light on their judicial system. The *Katyayana Smriti* lays down in the traditional way that the king is the highest judge. He personally attended the court to listen to cases and was assisted by the body of Ministers *(Amatyas)* , Judges (*Pradvivaka*), Brahmins (*Purohita*). In the cities, the city magistrates were assisted by the heads of the *Shrenis* or guilds, merchants, etc. In the villages, the village panchayats or family gatherings (*Kulas*) disposed of the cases. The criminal law as a whole was lenient as testified to by the Chinese pilgrim ***Fa-hien***.

10.6.3 Revenue Administration

The main sources of royal revenue were various types of land revenues, fines realized for offences, commercial taxes and tax on salt, taxes on mines, etc. Exemptions from taxes were granted to villages on some occasions. The officials were recruited on the basis of merit and ability. No distinction between caste and creed was made. Guilds continued to flourish among the merchants and artisans.

The guilds or *Shrenis* were autonomous, and the guilds were governed by their own laws. Even the Buddhist Churches or *Sanghas* participated in trade and acted as bankers or *Shresthis* and lent money on interest. The state and the village society collectively held the ownership of land and without mutual consent land could not be bought or sold.

As a whole, the Gupta administration had a benevolent character and people lived happily under it. The benevolent ideal of the government even survived after the fall of the Gupta Empire. The Kalachuris, the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas were inspired by the models of the Gupta administrative system.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Match the following:

Samrat	1. Chamberlain
b) Sandhivigrahika	2. Provincial Officer
c) Kanchuki	3. Head of the Cavalry Force
d) Mahakapati	4. Record Keepers
e) Goptis	5. King
f) Pusta Palas	6. Minister of War and Peace

Q 11: Who was Mahabaladhikrita?

.....

Q 12: Write a note on the revenue administration of the Guptas in about 50 words.

.....

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.....

10.7 DOWNFALL OF THE GUPTAS

The factors responsible for the decline of Gupta power in India were many. The Huna invasion was one of the prime factors responsible for the decline of the Gupta power in India. A branch of the Hunas from Central Asia had occupied Bactria in the 4th century A.D. and crossed the Hindukush mountains during the time of Kumaragupta I, son and successor of Chandragupta II (415-54 A.D.). But we learn from the *Bhitari Pillar Inscription* and *Junagarh Rock Inscription* that the *Yuvaraja* Skandagupta succeeded in repelling this invasion in the 5th century A.D.

But, after him, repeated waves of the Huna invasions made the Gupta power weak. Even Skandagupta who battled violently and resisted the Hunas for some time from entering into the main heartland of India had to face different internal problems, like the revolt of his feudatories, which made his task a difficult one. The death of Skandagupta in about 467 A.D. was followed by a succession of various kings, who could not keep the Empire intact.

The final blow to the Gupta power came towards the end of 5th century A.D., when the Hunas poured into North India and hastened the process of ultimate disintegration of Gupta Empire within the next half a century and thus it paved the road for the creation of a number of small kingdoms.

Apart from the Huna invasions there were number of other factors responsible for the decline of Gupta power in India. As we have stated earlier, the breaking away of the feudatories of Gupta was one such major factor of the decline of Gupta power. One such good example was the invasion of the Vakataka. By means of a matrimonial alliance Chandragupta II had established a friendly relation with the Vakatakas. But the successors of Chandragupta II had no peaceful relation with the Vakatakas. In the reigns of Budhagupta, the Vakataka king Narendrasena invaded some of the Central Indian region like Malwa, Kosala, and Mekala, etc. This invasion considerably weakened the Gupta hegemony in Central Indian region. In subsequent years, another Vakataka king Harisena conquered Gujarat and Malwa from the Imperial Guptas, which on the one hand weakened the Gupta prestige and on the other hand, inspired their feudatories to declare their independence. Similarly, the rulers like Yasodharman also inflicted a death blow to the Gupta Empire. These examples were followed by other feudatories which led to the ultimate disintegration of the Gupta Empire.

At the same time the decentralized form of administration had also contributed substantially to its downfall. The provincial governors of the Gupta Empire enjoyed a good deal of freedom and authority. The Gupta rulers failed to erect any such administrative machinery to keep a check on the highhandedness of the provincial governors. The Gupta rulers also failed to pay cash salary to any of their officials. In lieu of that they granted land by which the official developed a feudal character in them. They identified themselves only to their local interest in defiance of the central authority. Thus, the growth of the feudal elements further accelerated the process of decentralization of Gupta Empire.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 24: During whose reign did the Hunas cross the Hindukush mountains?

.....

.....

Q 25: How Chandragupta II established a friendly relationship with the Vakatakas?

.....

.....

Q 26: How did feudal character develop in the Gupta administration?

.....

.....



10.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt about–

- The emergence of the Guptas in India marked the beginning of a glorious period in ancient Indian history. But the origin of the Guptas cannot be directly ascertained as it is somewhat obscure in nature. Srigupta laid down the foundation of the Gupta Empire and he was followed by rulers like Ghatotkachagupta, Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta I, Skandagupta and others. The first two rulers of the Gupta dynasty were probably sub-ordinate chiefs as they took the tile Maharaja. But the third ruler Chandragupta I not only brought the Gupta dynasty to its glory but also became an independent ruler adopting the title Maharajadhiraja.
- The first three rulers of the Gupta dynasty laid down the basis upon which the superstructure was built by Samudragupta, and Chandragupta II with their expansionist policies. Samudragupta after consolidating his position at home brought Dakshinapath (South India)

upto Tamil Nadu under his control defeating as many as twelve rulers as stated in the Allahbad Prasasti. He too defeated the rulers of North India, Central India and Eastern India along with the forest kings, tribal chiefs, etc. and performed the Asvamedha sacerifice showing his imperial authority. His son and successor Chandragupta II too continued his father's policy led his expansion campaign in Western India and gought against the Sakas who dominated Western India at that time. By a policy of matrimonial alliance with the Nagas, Vakatakas and Kadambas, Chandragupta II encircled the Sakas, defeated them and united Western India with the Northern India by occupying Malwa,Gujarat and Kathiwar. He too had other successful military campaigns to his credit.

- Chandragupta II is more remembered as a consolidator than a conqueror. He completed the task of conquest left incomplete by his father Samudragupta and after that stabilized and consolidated the conquest made by the Gupta rulers. By concluding a number of marraige alliances with different Indian rulers, Chandragupta II created a ring of a friendly states around the Gupta Empire. His pacific policy created such a peaceful atmosphere in the Gupta Empire that there began a cultural renaissance in the Empire. Chandragupta II provided patronage to the Nava Ratna.
- Monarchy was the form of government with the king being the supreme head. The kingship was hereditary. He was assisted by the crown prince, ministers and other officials. The Guptas had an organized bureaucracy with the central and provincial officials being differentiated by their designation. The Empire was divided into provinces called Bhuktis or Desas. The provinces were divided into districts or Vishayas. In Judicial matters, the king was the highest judge who personally attended the court to hear the cases and was assisted by other officials. In cities the city magistrates and in villages the panchayats or family gatherings used to dispose of the cases. Different sources of royal revenue were there in the form of land revenues, fines, commercial taxes, etc. The ownership of land was collectively

held by the state and village society. As a whole the Gupta administration was benevolent one and was followed by later dynasties like Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, etc.

- Several factors brought about the downfall of the Gupta Empire. Foremost among these factors was the invasion of the Hunas who, towards the end of the 5th century A.D, gave a death blow to the Gupta power. The breaking away of the feudatories also weakened the power of the Guptas. With the decentralization in administration, the provincial governors under the Guptas enjoyed much freedom and authority for which they displayed their local interest defying the central authority. Instead of cash salary the provincial governors were given land which developed a feudal character in them further accelerating the process of decentralization of Gupta Empire and leading to its eventual downfall.



10.9 FURTHER READING

1) Majumdar, R. C., Raychaudhuri, H.C., Datta, K. (1986). *An Advanced History of India*. New Delhi, Macmillan India Ltd.

2) Sharma, L. P. (1981). *Ancient History of India (pre-historic Age to 1200 A.D.).* New Delhi, Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd.

3) Thapar, Romila. (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India from The Origins to A D 1300*. New Delhi, The Penguin Group.



10.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) Srigupta, Ghatotkachagupta, Chandragupta I,
b) Maharajadhiraja, (c) Kumaradevi

Ans to Q No 2: Chandragupta I married into the Lichchavi family. This Lichchavi-Gupta matrimonial alliance was an important one from the political angle as it greatly helped in the emergence of Gupta power . Romila Thapar said that this matrimonial alliance provided acceptability to the Guptas who perhaps had no royal origin. V.A Smith expressed the view that the Lichchavi Princess Kumaradevi brought to her husband the needed political influence.

Ans to Q No 3: a) True, b) False, c) False, d) True, e) True, f) True

Ans to Q No 4: Allahbad Pillar Inscription.

Ans to Q No 5: Ramagupta was the eldest son of Samudragupta.

Ans to Q No 6: A great conqueror Samudragupta probably started his campaign towards Dakshinapatha (South India) after consolidating his position at home. His South Indian campaign was one of *Dharmavijaya* which was marked by three principles namely, grahana, moksha and anugraha. In this campaign,Samudragupta defeated as many as twelve kings of South India, whom he first captured and then liberated and ultimately reinstated in their respective Kingdom.

Ans to Q No 7: Lichchavi.

Ans to Q No 8: Chandragupta II.

Ans to Q No 9: Kalidasa.

Ans to Q No 10: a) 5, b) 6, c) 1, d) 3, e) 2, f) 4

Ans to Q No 11: Mahabaladhikrita was the Commander-in-Chief.

Ans to Q No 12: The royal revenue was collected from different sources like various types of land revenues, fines for offences, commercial taxes, etc.Revenue officials were recruited on the basis of merit and ability without having any distinction on the basis of caste and creed. Exemption from taxation were granted to villages on some occassions.

Ans to Q No 13: a) True, b) True, c) False, d) True, e) False, f) False, g) False

Ans to Q No 14: a) Vedas, b) slave, c) eight, d) Kumaragupta, e) Varamihira, f) China

Ans to Q No 15: Brahmacharya, Garhastha, Banaprastha and Sanyas.

Ans to Q No 16: Elephant Riding.

Ans to Q No 17: By digging of tanks, wells, cutting of cannals, etc.

Ans to Q No 18: An all round industrial growth was witnessed in the Gupta period.This growth was facilitated by the richness of the country in natural resources, mineral, animal and plant produce.Gold, Copper, Textile and Wood Carving were popular industry of the period.

Ans to Q No 19: a) True, b) False, c) True, d) False, e) True, f) False, g) True

Ans to Q No 20: a) 3, b) 1, c) 2

Ans to Q No 21: a) Chandragupta II, b) Mihirakula, c) Bimola, d) Buddhism, e) Samudragupta, f) Kalidasa, g) Harisena, h) Kavya

Ans to Q No 22: Small flat roofed temples, sometimes surrounded by the pillared halls are characteristic of the early Gupta period.

Ans to Q No 23: Paintings of Ajanta are religious by nature, wheresas Bagh paintings are purely secular.

Ans to Q No 24: Kumaragupta I.

Ans to Q No 25: By means of a matrimonial alliance Chandragupta II had established a friendly relationship with the Vakatakas.

Ans to Q No 26: The Guptas did not pay cash salary to their officials. In lieu of that they granted land to the officials which developed a feudal character in the Gupta administration.



10.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each Question in about 50 words)

Q 1: Who was Srigupta?

Q 2: Name the mother of Prabhavati Gupta.

Q 3: Who was Vishnudeva?

Q 4: Give one reason of the downfall of the Guptas.

B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What do you know about the emergence of the Gupta dynasty?

Q 2: What light does Allahbad Pillar Inscription throw on Samudragupta's policy of conquest?

Q 3: What was the contribution of Chandragupta II in building up the Gupta Empire?

Q 4: Write a note on the administrative divisions under the Gupta administration.

Q 5: How was the society divided in the Gupta period?

Q 6: What was the position of women in the Gupta period?

Q 7: Write a note on the development of agriculture in the Gupta period.

Q 8: Write a note on the development of Brahmanical Hinduism during the Gupta rule.

Q 9: What do you know about the development of Sanskrit literature in the Gupta period?

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the extension and consolidation of the Gupta Empire.

Q 2: Explain the administrative system of the Gupta rulers.

Q 3: Describe the socio-economic condition of the Gupta period.

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