

HISTORY: CLASS-6: SUMMARY

CHAPTER 7 - ORIGIN OF GUPTA EMPIRE

In the fourth century A.D., there arose in Magadha a new Indian dynasty which established a large kingdom over the greater part of Northern India. This was the Gupta dynasty whose rule lasted for two hundred years.

- The Gupta Empire was an ancient Indian empire existing from the mid-to-late 3rd century C.E. to 543 CE. At its zenith, from approximately 319 to 467 CE, it covered much of the Indian subcontinent.
- This period saw some of the great achievements of Indian culture and is, therefore, sometimes referred to as the "Golden Age."

GUPTA LINEAGE

- The Gupta kings seem to have arisen from the modest origins. The ruling dynasty of the empire was founded by the king Sri Gupta; the most notable rulers of the dynasty were Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, and Chandragupta II.

- **EARLY RULERS**

The first ruler of the Gupta Empire was **Sri Gupta** (240–280 CE) who was succeeded by his son **Ghatotkacha** (280–319 CE). Both Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha are mentioned as Maharajas in inscriptions.

- **CHANDRAGUPTA I**

- Chandragupta I, the son of **Ghatotkacha**, ruled from 319 to 335 CE and is considered to be the first great king of the Gupta Empire. Chandragupta held the title of maharaja-adhiraja (great king over other kings).
- He **married a Lichchhavi princess**, which may have helped him to extend his political power and dominions, enabling him to adopt the imperial title 'Maharajadhiraja'.
- He ruled over Saketa (the region of Ayodhya), Prayaga (Allahabad) and Magadha.

- **SAMUDRAGUPTA**

- Chandragupta I appointed his son Samudragupta to succeed him in 335 CE.
- A great deal about Samudragupta is known because of an inscription, engraved on a pillar at Allahabad, which describes his achievements. The inscription was composed by a poet at the court of Samudragupta.
- **HIS CAMPAIGNS:** He defeated four kings of northern India and added the region of the present Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh to his kingdom. He fought against a number of kings in the Deccan and South India, such as those in Orissa, Andhra and Madras. He campaigned against kings in eastern India. He attacked the forest tribes of the Deccan.
- He received tribute from the kings of Assam, the Ganga delta, Nepal and northern India, from the nine tribal republics of Rajasthan, from the Kushana kings, the Shakas, and the king of Ceylon, and perhaps from other islands even further away in South-east Asia.
- Historians call Samudragupta the **Napoleon of India**.
- Samudragupta was not merely a conqueror; **he was also a poet and a musician**. His coins bear the insignia of him playing the vina.

- Samudragupta patronised scholars and poets like Harisena and thus promoted Sanskrit literature. Though an ardent follower of Vaishnavism, he also patronised the great Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu.

• **CHANDRAGUPTA II**

- Chandragupta II was a capable ruler, who ruled for 40 years from c. 375 to 415 CE. He is also known as Vikramaditya. He extended the limits of the Gupta Empire by conquest and matrimonial alliances.
- **He married off his daughter Prabhavati to a Vakataka prince, who ruled the strategic lands of Deccan.** This alliance was highly useful when he proceeded against the Saka rulers of western India.
- Chandragupta II conquered western Malwa and Gujarat by defeating the Saka rulers who had reigned for about four centuries in the region.
- He is best remembered for his patronage of learning and the arts. Philosophers, poets and writers in those days were paid by the king for their work if it pleased him.
- Chandragupta II took pride in having at his court some of the wisest and most learned men of the country. His court had nine jewels or navaratnas, that is, nine eminent people in various fields of art, literature and science.



• **LATER KINGS**

- Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son **Kumara Gupta I, who founded the Nalanda University.** He was **also called Sakraditya.** The last great king of the Gupta dynasty, Skanda Gupta, was the son of Kumara Gupta I.
- After Chandragupta there followed a **number of weak kings.**
- To add to their troubles, India was threatened from the north by the Central Asian people, the **Hunas.** Their continued attacks weakened the resistance of the Guptas, and finally, the Hunas became the rulers of the Punjab and Kashmir.

GUPTA ADMINISTRATION

• **THE KING**

During the Gupta age, political hierarchies can be identified by the titles adopted. Kings assumed titles, such as maharajadhiraja, parama-bhattaraka.

• **MINISTERS AND OTHER OFFICIALS**

- Seals and inscriptions make mention of official ranks and designations; the term "**kumaramatya**" occurs in six Vaishali seals.
- The officers employed by the Guptas were paid salaries in cash.

• **GOVERNORS**

The governors of the provinces were more independent than they had been in Mauryan times. For instance, they did not always seek permission from the king for everything they did.

• **DIVISION OF EMPIRE**

The provinces were divided into districts and the people of the districts were asked to help in the administration. There were district councils to advise the governor, and these councils consisted not only of the officers but also of citizens from the towns.

LIFE OF PEOPLE

• **SOCIETY**

Fa Hien's account is very useful in telling us about life in India during the Gupta period.

- Society was divided into castes, most of which lived in harmony together. But there was one group in the towns which was badly treated — the untouchables. The status of the brahmans in society rose higher.
- Agriculture flourished in the Gupta period due to the establishment of irrigation works.
- The revenues of the state came from the taxes obtained on cultivated land.

• **TRADE**

- Trade was carried trade within India itself and with western Asia, and also with south-east Asia. Along with the growth of knowledge, sea-faring and shipbuilding also improved.
- Trade was carried by ports along the east and west coast: **Tamralipti** (Tamluk) in the Ganga delta handled a large part of the trade with countries of south-east Asia, such as Suvarnabhumi (Burma), Yavadvipa (Java), and Kamboja (Cambodia). Broach, Sopara and Kalyan were the main ports on the west coast, and they too sent ships to south-east Asia.

• **RELIGION**

- In the Gupta period, Hinduism became a powerful religion. The Gupta kings were worshippers of Vishnu. Religious sacrifices were also held.

• **ART AND ARCHITECTURE**

- The Gupta art ushers in a formative and creative age in the history of Indian architecture with a considerable scope for future development.
- Cave cut temples gave way to **Structural temples in this era**, made up of materials like brick and stone. Images of gods were placed in the temples.
- **STUPA**: Stupas were also built in large numbers but the best are found at Samat (Uttar Pradesh), Ratnagiri (Orissa) and Mirpur Khas (Sind). Some of the Buddhist monasteries were in caves cut out of hills; example - Ajanta near Aurangabad.
- **PAINTING**: The mural paintings of this period are found at Ajanta, Bagh, Badami and other places.



• **LITERATURE**

- The Guptas made Sanskrit the official language and all their epigraphic records were written in it. The period saw the last phase of the Smriti literature.
- **Important works :**
 - Kalidasa's famous dramas are Sakunthalam, Malavikagnimitram and Vikramaurvashiyam. The works of Sudraka (Mrichchhakatika), Visakhadatta (Mudraraksasa and Devichandraguptam) and the lesser-known dramatists and writers also contributed to the literary and social values in the classical age.

- The Puranas, as we know them in their present form, were composed during this time.
- Another popular work which came to be translated into many languages of the world was the Panchatantra, a collection of fables.

• **SCIENCE**

- The invention of the theory of zero and the consequent evolution of the decimal system are to be credited to the thinkers of this age.
- There was an advancement in the knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, with **Aryabhata and Varahamihira** making new discoveries. Aryabhata explained that the earth moves around the sun.
- **Varahamihira's Brihat Samhita** (sixth century C.E.) is an encyclopaedia of astronomy, physical geography, botany and natural history. His other works are **Panch Siddhantika and Brihat Jataka**.
- **Brahmagupta** (late sixth and early seventh century C.E.) is author of important works on mathematics and astronomy, namely **Brahmasphuta-siddhanta and Khandakhadyaka**.
- Metallic preparations for the purpose of medicine and references to the use of mercury and iron by Varahamihira and others indicate that much progress was made in chemistry.

DECLINE OF EMPIRE

The last recognised king of the Gupta line was Vishnugupta who reigned from 540 to 550 CE. Internal fighting and dissensions among the royal family led to its collapse.