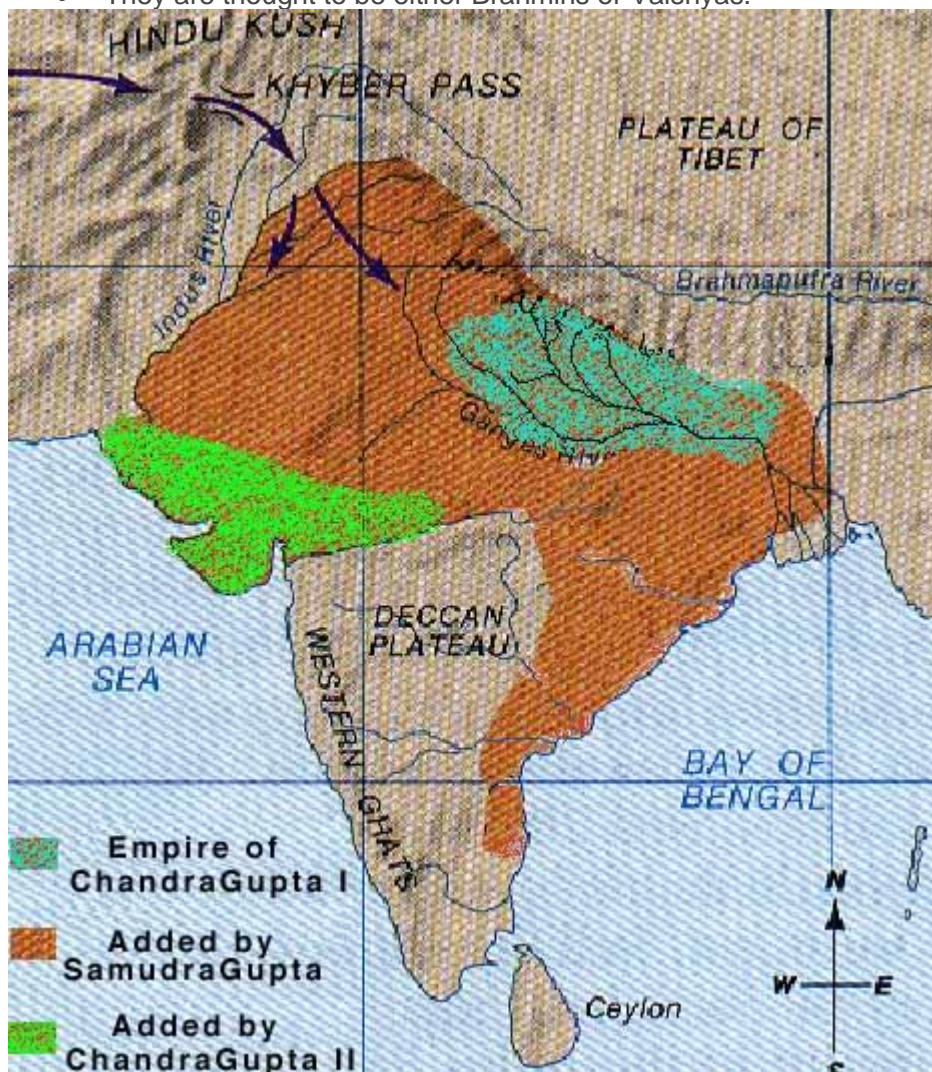


Origins

- The Gupta Empire rose to prominence in 320 AD and spread to large parts of northern India, central and small parts of southern India.
- The founder of the Gupta dynasty is Sri Gupta.
- The original homeland of the Guptas is not known for certain. But they might have originated from Bengal. Some scholars think they are from Prayaga (Allahabad in UP).
- They are thought to be either Brahmins or Vaishyas.



Early kings

- The first ruler was Sri Gupta (reign from 240 AD to 280 AD).
- He was succeeded by his son Ghatotkacha (reign: 280 – 319 AD).
- Both Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha are mentioned as Maharaja in inscriptions.

Chandragupta I (Reign: 320 – 335 AD)

- Was the son of Ghatotkacha.
- Acquired the strategically important Magadha kingdom on marriage to a Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi.
- He extended his kingdom through conquests. His territory extended from the Ganges River to Prayaga by 321 AD.
- He issued coins in the joint names of his queen and himself.
- He assumed the title of Maharajadhiraja (great king of kings).
- He was successful in building a small principality into a great kingdom.
- He is considered the first great king of the Gupta Empire.

Samudragupta (Reign: 335 – 380 AD)

- Son of Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi.
- Was a military genius and was successful in adding many territories into the Gupta Empire.
- The Allahabad inscription describes his bravery as composed by his court poet, Harisena. There it is said that he defeated nine kings of the Ganges Valley, twelve kings from the southern region and eighteen forest tribes.
- His region extended from the Himalayas in the north to the Krishna and Godavari Rivers in the south; and from Balkh (Afghanistan) in the west to Brahmaputra River in the east.
- He was a follower of Vaishnavite Hinduism but was tolerant of other faiths. He gave permission to the king of Sri Lanka, Meghavarna to build a monastery in Bodh Gaya.
- He was also called “Indian Napoleon” by art historian Vincent Smith.
- He also performed Ashvamedha sacrifice. Hence, one of his coins refers to him as “the restorer of Ashvamedha.”
- He was also called “Kaviraja” since he composed verses.

Chandragupta II (Reign: 380 – 418 AD)

- Son of Samudragupta and his queen Dattadevi.
- He was also known as ‘Vikramaditya’.
- He further annexed territories including Saurashtra which gave him the western coastline.
- He used matrimonial alliances to expand his kingdom. He established matrimonial alliances with the Nagas and the Vakatakas. He gave his daughter Prabhavatigupta in marriage to Vakataka ruler of Maharashtra Rudrasena II.
- He also annexed three Satrapa kingdoms and assumed the title Sakari (destroyer of the Sakas). He defeated the Saka king Rudrasimha III thus acquiring Saurashtra and Kathiawar.
- Through the western ports, the kingdom’s prosperity grew through trade links with Roman Empires.
- After East and West India, Chandragupta II defeated northern rulers also like the Hunas, Kambojas, Kiratas, etc.
- He was a brilliant conqueror and an able administrator as well.
- Like his father, he was a Vaishnavite but was tolerant of other religions.
- His other names (as mentioned in coins) include Vikrama, Devagupta, Devaraja, Simhavikrama, Vikramaditya Sakari, etc.

- His court had nine jewels or Navaratnas, nine people eminent in various fields of art, literature and science. This included the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, Harisena, Amarasimha (lexicographer) and Dhanvantari (physician).
- Fa-Hien, a Buddhist from China visited India during his reign. He records the prosperity of the Gupta Empire.

Other Gupta rulers

- Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta I. He ruled till 455 AD.
- Kumaragupta I was the founder of the Nalanda University. He was also called Shakraditya.
- The last great king of the Gupta dynasty, Skandagupta was the son of Kumaragupta I. He was able to repulse an attack by the Hunas but this strained his empire's coffers.
- The Gupta Empire declined after the death of Skandagupta in 467 AD.
- He was followed by many successors.
- The last recognised king of the Gupta line was Vishnugupta who reigned from 540 to 550 AD.