

GUPTA DYNASTY

North India came under the rule of several foreign people, such as the Yavanas, Kushans, Sakas, Parthians, etc. They began to settle in north-west India from the first century B.C. onwards.

Foreign rulers came to India due to the turbulent condition in central Asia. They adjusted themselves with Indian culture, and introduced some new elements in India.

Three big political powers emerged in India between the 1st century B.C. and 3rd century A.D., which played an important stabilising factor over large regions. They were:

Satavahanas in the Deccan, Kushanas in the north, and Sakas in the west.

In the mid of 3rd century A.D., the empires of the Satavahanas and Kushanas came to an end.

A new dynasty, known as Gupta, emerged in north India. They made a permanent impact on Indian history by building up a large empire. They have firmly established several trends of Indian culture like the Mauryas a few centuries earlier.

Apart from political might and strength, the Gupta kings were also known for their great achievements in the field of science, art, culture, and literature.

The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta mentions maharaja Srigupta and maharaja Ghatotkacha as his ancestors. But we do not know much about the early Guptas.

I-tsing, a Chinese traveler, came to India between A.D. 671 and 695. He mentioned Srigupta as the builder of a temple at Gaya for the Chinese pilgrims about 500 years before his time.

The king, Srigupta, has been identified as the first Gupta king mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription.

Puranas also mentioned that the early Guptas controlled the area along the Ganga (the middle Gangetic basin), Prayag (Allahabad and surrounding region), Saketa (Ayodhya region), and Magadha.

CHANDRAGUPTA I

Chandragupta-I was considered to have laid the foundation(320 CE) of the great Gupta Empire. He was married to a Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi. The Lichchhavis were related to Gautama Buddha.

The Gupta era was started with a coronation of Chandragupta-I in A.D. 320. He was the first Gupta king to adopt the title '*Maharajadhiraja*' and issued gold coins. Chandragupta-I introduced a new era called Gupta era.

SAMUDRAGUPTA

Samudragupta succeeded his father Chandragupta-I about A.D. 340. He earned a reputation as one of the greatest kings and conquerors.

The Allahabad pillar inscription gives a detailed account of the career and personality of Samudragupta.

Harishena one of the officials composed the inscription and engraved on the Ashoka's pillar at Allahabad.

Samudragupta proceeded for his south Indian campaign, through the eastern and southern parts of Madhyadesha to Orissa and then advanced along the eastern coast and reached Kanchi and beyond and returned to his capital by way of Maharashtra and Khandesh.

Samudragupta performed '*Ashvamedhayajna*' after his several conquests and issued gold coins depicting the sacrificial horse and bearing the legend, which conveying that he performed the *Ashvamedha* sacrifice.

Meghavarna, the king of Sri Lanka, sent an embassy to Samudragupta for his permission to build a monastery and a guest house for Buddhist pilgrims at Bodhi Gaya.

Samudragupta was a versatile genius. He was called as '*Kaviraja*' i.e. the king of poets. He was proficient in war and sastras as well.

The Allahabad pillar inscription calls him a great musician. This is also confirmed by his lyricist type of coins, which shows him playing veena (lute).

CHANDRAGUPTA II 380 CE

Chandragupta II had established a matrimonial alliance with Vakatakas by marrying his daughter Prabhavatigupta with Rudrasena-II of the Vakataka dynasty.

Chandragupta-II made an alliance with the Vakatakas before attacking the Sakas so as to be sure of having a friendly power to back him up in Deccan.

Prabhavatigupta acted as a regent on behalf of her two minor sons after the death of her husband Rudrasena II.

Chandragupta-II's victory over the mighty Sakas dynasty was his foremost success. The annexation of Sakas's kingdom comprising Gujarat and part of Malwa strengthened the Gupta Empire, but also brought it into direct touch with western sea ports. This gave a great motivation to foreign trade and commerce.

Ujjain, a major centre of trade, religion, and culture became the second capital of the Gupta Empire after the conquest.

After the victory over Sakas, Chandragupta-II adopted the title of '*Vikramaditya*.'

Chandragupta-II issued dated silver coins to commemorate his victory over Saka kshatrapas.

The Mehrauli iron pillar inscription records portray a king named Chandra.

Chandragupta-II's reign is remembered for his patronage of literature and arts and for the high standard of artistic and cultural life.

Kalidas, the great Sanskrit poet was a member of Chandragupta-II's court.

Fa-Hien, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim visited India between A.D. 405 and A.D. 411. He visited for collecting Buddhist manuscripts and text and studying at Indian monasteries.

KUMARAGUPTA 413 CE

Kumaragupta issued *Ashvamedha* type of coins like his grandfather, Samudragupta.

The epigraphic records show that he organised the administration of vast empire and maintained its peace, prosperity, and security for a long period of forty years.

The Gupta Empire was challenged by the Pushyamitras at the end of Kumaragupta's reign.

Pushyamitras were living on the banks of the Narmada.

Skandagupta was the son of Kumaragupta-I.

SKANDAGUPTA 455 CE

Hunas were the greatest enemies of Gupta's empire during this period.

Hunas were a ferocious barbarian horde. They lived in central Asia.

Skandagupta successfully defeated the Hunas. So they did not dare to disturb the Gupta Empire for half a century. Though they continue to disconcert Persia during this period.

The important event of Skandagupta's reign was the restoration and repair of the dam on *Sudarsana* Lake after 8 hundred years of construction. It was built during Chandragupta Maurya's reign.

Sudarsana Lake was also repaired previously during the reign of Saka kshatrapa Rudradaman I.

GUPTA ADMINISTRATION

The kingdom (*Rajya*) was divided into a number of provinces and they were known as '**Bhukti**' in the north and '**Mandala**' or '**Mandalam**' in the south.

The provinces were sub-divided as '**Vishaya**' or '**Bhoga**' in the north (India) and '**Kottams**' or '**Valanadu**' in the south (India).

Some other units of administration were the districts, which were called as '**Adhis**,' '**Thana**,' or '**Pattana**' in the north (India) and '**Nadu**' in the south (India).

The group of villages (i.e. modern tehsil) was known as '**Vithis**' in the north (India) and '**Pattala**' and '**Kurram**' in the south (India). The villages were the lowest administrative units.

GUPTA LITERATURE

Gupta period was considered as the golden phase of Indian literature.

The wonderful literature was produced in prose, poetry, drama, and grammar. It is the

noticeable product of the system of education and learning.

The *Puranas* preserved the traditions, legends, moral codes, religious, and philosophical principles. They are eighteen in number. Important Puranas of the period are Vishnu, Vayu and Matsya Purana. Others include, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana etc.

The *Smritis* are metrical texts containing the rules and regulations and laws for the guidance and governance of the society. Important ones include Yajnavalka, Narada, Katyana and Brihaspati smriti.

Smritis are based on *dharmasutras* and *grihyasutras* of Vedic literature. They are written in verse.

Some additions and alterations have been done to make *Smritis* suitable to the changing conditions of society.

The commentaries on the *Smritis* were written after the Gupta period. The compilation of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* was completed by the 4th century A.D.

Nitisara was written during this period, a book on statecraft, written by Kamandaka.

Kalidas has written the best works in poetry, drama as well as in prose. His lyrical poems(kavyas) such as *Meghaduta*, *Raghuvamsa*, and *Kumarasambhava*, and dramas such as *Abhijnashakuntalam* , *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramorvasiyam* are the best literary works of this time and it is considered as the best even today. These works have been translated into many languages.

Mrichchakatika (written by Sudraka), is considered one of the best plays of ancient India. This play is about the love of a Brahman with the beautiful daughter of a courtesan. It is on the basis of Dradiracharudatta written by Bhasa.

Bhasa, another playwright, was the author of works such as the *Madhyamavyayoga*, *Duta-Ghatotkacha*, *Balacharita* and *Charudatta*.

Vishakhadatta had written two plays, namely *Mudrarakshasa* and *Devichandraguptam*.

The compilation of the *Amarakosha* by Amarasimha is memorable work of this period. Amarasimha was a popular personality in the court of Chandragupta II.

The Prakrit was popular language of the Gupta period (as it was earlier).

The *Svetambara* Jain canon have been written in Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit.

Fa-Hien, the Chinese pilgrim with four other monks, came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II.