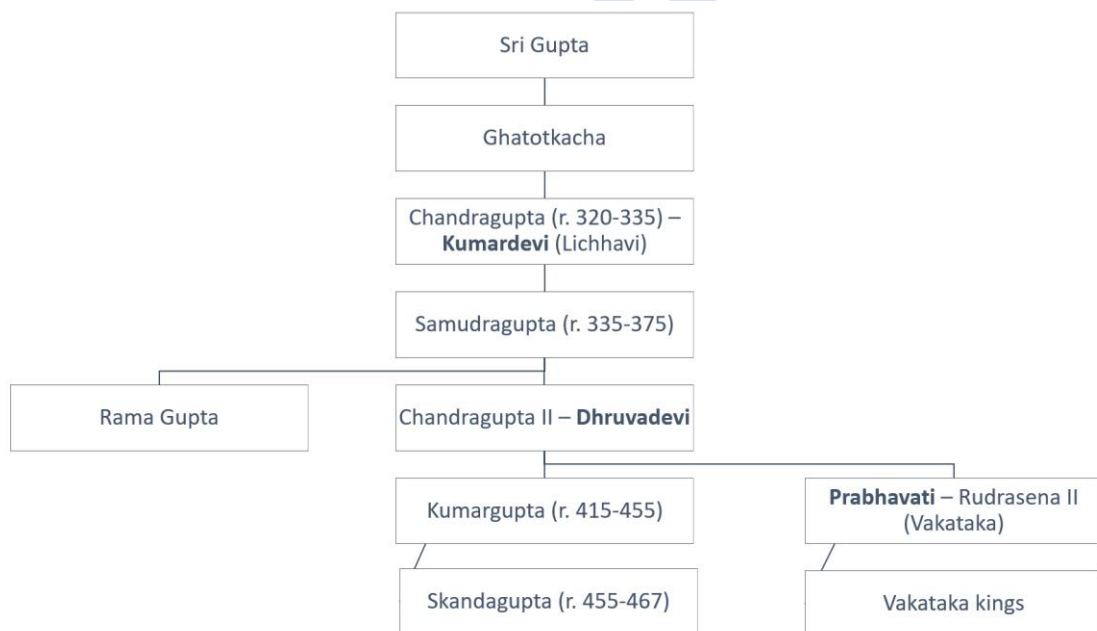
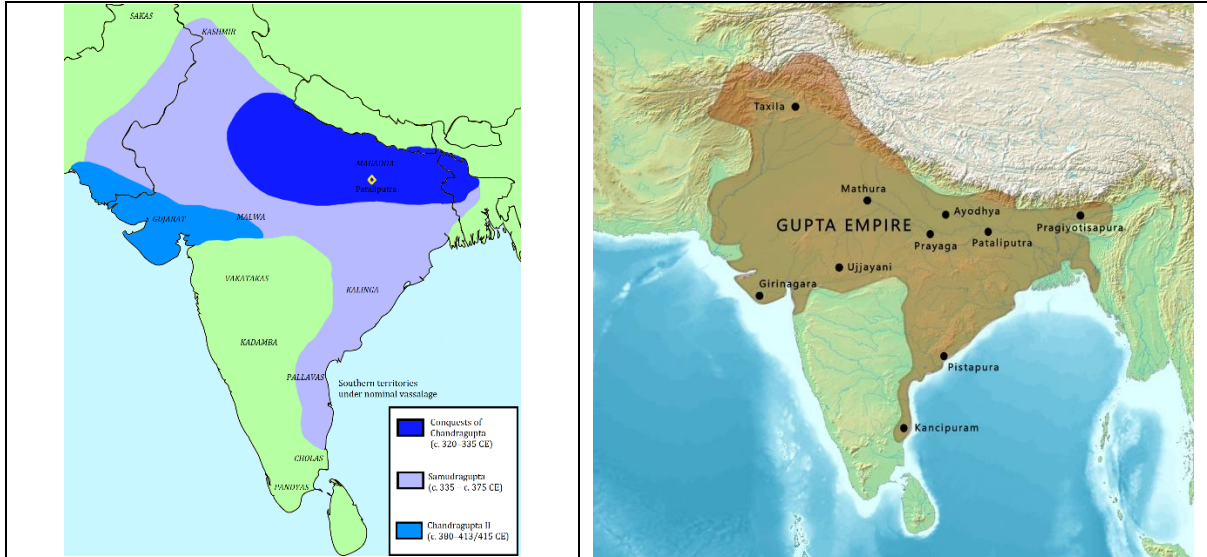


**Prelims Master Program (2023-24) – Ancient, Medieval, Art and Culture**  
**Handout 13: Gupta Era (4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century)**

The Guptas originated from the Magadha region.



## IMPORTANT KINGS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

### SRIGUPTA (270 - 300 CE)

Srigupta was the founder of the dynasty but was a vassal of the Kushanas.

### GHATOTKACHA (300 CE-319 CE)

He was also not a sovereign king.

### CHANDRAGUPTA I (319 - 335 CE)

He was the real founder and the first sovereign king of the dynasty.

- He **overthrew the yoke of the Kushanas**, took the title of **Maharajadhiraj** and established his **capital** at **Pataliputra**.
- He secured paramount position in **Magadha** region, with control over **UP** and **Bihar**.
  - On the basis of a verse in Vayu Puran, scholars generally accept the view that he ruled over Saket (Avadh) Prayag (Allahabad) and Magadha (south Bihar).
- He married **Kumaradevi**, a princess of the Lichhavi clan of Vaishali (a kshatriya clan)
- Upon his coronation, he introduced a new calendar called the '**Gupta Samvat**' in 319 CE.
- **No inscription** belonging to this period has been discovered.



### SAMUDRAGUPTA (335- 375 CE)

He is considered to be the greatest Gupta king and warrior.

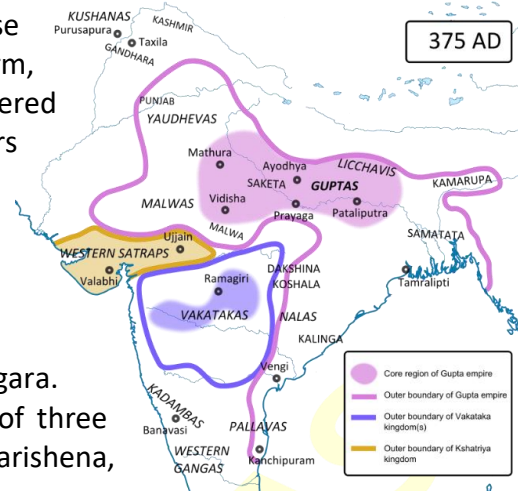
Contemporary epigraphs, such as the **Eran inscription**, credits him with the overthrowing of 'the whole tribe of kings upon the earth'. His exploits have been recorded in the '**Prayag Prashasti**' found on the **Allahabad Pillar**, composed by his court poet, **Harisena**, in **Sanskrit** using the **Brahmi** script. This inscription give full details about him.



#### Details of Prashasti:

- **Genealogy** from Srigupta, Ghatotkacha and Chandra Gupta I.
  - Special mention is made in respect of Mahadevi Kumar devi, a Licchavi princess.
- Superhuman attributes are paid to him.

- Excellence in Gandharva Vidya (Great Musician and Poet)
- "Samudragupta was skilful in engaging in a hundred battles of various kinds, whose only ally was the strength of his own arm, whose most elegant physique was covered over with all the beauty of the scars caused by the blows of battle arrows, spears, spikes lances, javelins and many other weapons.'
- More interesting facts
  - Mention of Ganga Avatara
  - Pataliputra was referred to as Pushpanagara.
  - Rajasabha mentioned with the names of three Mahadandanayaka: Dhruvabhuti, Harishena, Tilakabhata
  - Weapons mentioned: Shanku, Parashu, Narach, Sar, Bhindipal, Tomar
- Samudragupta's followed a conscious **policy of imperialism (dharanibandha)**. Several rulers and their kingdom which were either annexed or conquered by Samudragupta.



3 + 9 kings of <b>Aryavarta</b> (North India) including the Naga dynasty.	Prasaboddharana
Confederacy of 12 kings of <b>Dakshinapatha</b> (South India) led by Vishnugopa of Pallavas.	Grahanamokshanugraha
Subjugation of Forest tribes: <b>Atavika Rajya</b> (tribal kingdoms of central India).	Parachariki-krita
Border/Frontier states ( <b>Pratyanta Rajya</b> )	Sarvakaradana-Ajnakarana-Pranamagaman
<b>Foreign powers:</b> Shakas (Shakamurunda), Kushanas (Devaputrashahi Shahanushahi), Sri Lanka (Simhalaka)	Samudra Gupta commanded respect amongst independent rulers of many neighboring states. There were cordial relations with Ceylon.

Samudragupta emphasised upon the **divine nature of kingship**.

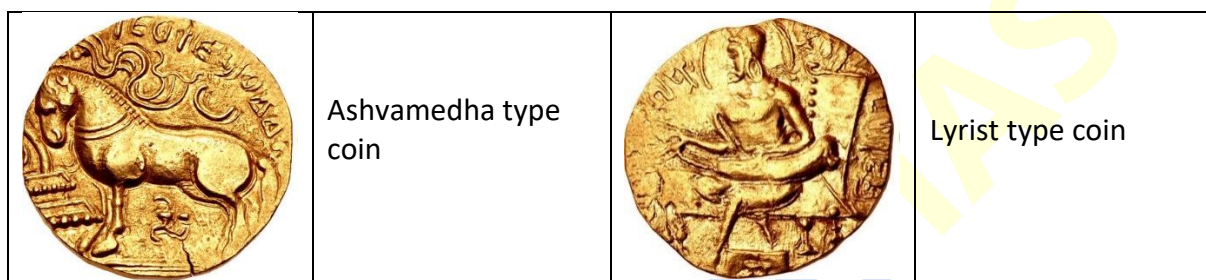
- He claimed to be an incarnation of Vishnu.
- He struck a number of Lakshmi type coins (carrying Goddess Lakshmi's image with his own)
- He assumed high-sounding titles, such as 'Maharajadhiraja' and 'Parambhattaraka'

### Coins and royal ideology

Samudragupta has left an extensive coinage. Some important political events of his reign are known from these.

- Samudragupta's cultivated his **image as a warrior-poet**.
  - This conquest of Bengal is commemorated in the **Tiger-Slayer coins**.
  - He assumed the title '**Kaviraj**' as he was a great patron of the arts.
  - He was himself an accomplished Veena player as is commemorated in his **Veena-Player coins**, carrying an image of him playing the Veena.
- Revival of Brahmanism

- Performed the **Ashwamedha Yajna**, which he commemorated by striking the Ashvamedha type coins.
- He also adopted the title '**Lichchavi Dauhitra**' to emphasize upon his **Kshatriya heritage**.
- He was a great patron of **Vaishnavism**. Samudragupta also issued **Garuda** type coins.
- Images of **Lakshmi, Durga, Saraswati** and **Ganga** and the symbols like **Chakra, Lotus** and **Garuda** found in his gold coins.
- **Tolerance:**
  - Vasubhandu, the famous Buddhist scholar, was his minister.
  - He permitted to construct monastery at Bodhgaya.



### RAMAGUPTA (375- 380 CE)

Till half century ago it was believed by many historians that Chandragupta II succeeded Samudragupta. But the discovery of a lost dramatic work, '**Devi Chandraguptam**' by **Vishakhadatta** proved his existence. Accordingly, Samudragupta was succeeded by his eldest son Rama Gupta and not by Chandragupta II.

### CHANDRAGUPTA II 'VIKRAMADITYA' (380- 415 CE)

- **Defeat of Shakas (b 388-409 CE):** The greatest military achievement of Chandra Gupta II was the conquest of the Sakas who were ruling in Gujarat and Kathiawar peninsula.
  - **Policy of Matrimonial Alliance:**
    - Chandra Gupta II gave Prabhavati Gupta in marriage to the Vakataka Rudrasena II.
  - His inscriptions at **Sanchi** and **Udaygiri** were composed by his court poet, **Ravisena**, in Sanskrit using Brahmi script.
  - He established his **second capital at Ujjain** in order to maintain effective control over the western reaches of his empire.
  - **Consequence**
    - The empire of Chandra Gupta extended to the natural frontiers of India as he gained the areas of Gujarat and Saurashtra. Thus, the western boundary of the empire became secure.
    - Gupta's gained control over the ports of western India.
    - Not only commercial relations were established with the countries abroad, but cultural relations were also established.



- Internal trade also received a fillip.
- In order to commemorate his victory over the Shakas,
  - He adopted the **title 'Vikramaditya'** after defeating the Shakas.
  - He issued silver coins known as '**Rupaka**', thus becoming the first Gupta king to issue silver coins.



Sanchi inscription of Amrakardava, says that **Chandragupta "acquired victory and fame in many battles"**



Symbolism of Varaha legend in Udayigiri cave. ...**king, who is desirous of conquering the whole world...**

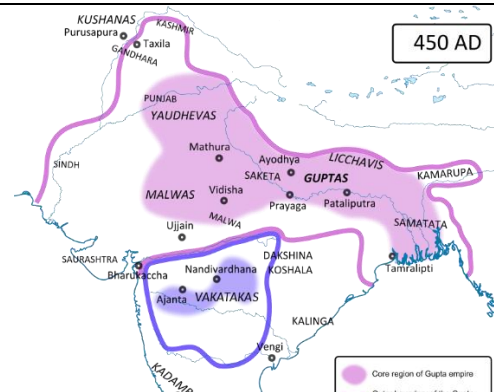


Coin of Rudrasimha III – Western Kshatrap



Coin of Chandragupta II – A Gupta King

- The **Mehrauli iron pillar** inscription mentions a king called '**Chandra**'

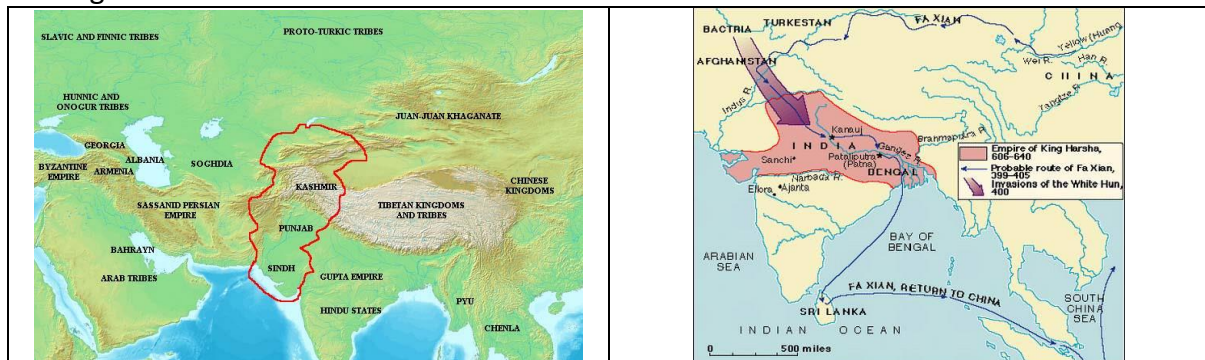


He attracted talents around him: like the poet Kalidasa, the astronomer Varahamihira, and the linguist Vararuchi, who become part of the nine jewels (**navratna**) of his court.

धन्वन्तरिः क्षपणकाऽमरसिंह शङ्कुः  
वेताळभट्टः घटकर्परः काळिदासः।  
ख्यातो वराहमिहिरो नृपते सभायाम्  
रत्नानि वै वररुचिर्नव विक्रमस्य॥

## KUMARAGUPTA (415- 445CE)

- Son of Chandragupta II and Dhruvadevi
- Performed Ashvamedha – military achievements?
- Administrative consolidation
  - His inscriptions reveal some important names of ministers and governors.
- Religious harmony
  - During his reign, the **Nalanda Buddhist Monastery** was built, to which he donated one village. (Shakraditya)
- **The Huns**, a war-like tribal group from Central Asia, began invading India during his reign.



## SKANDAGUPTA (445- 467 CE)

- Last great Gupta King
- Defence of India
  - Bhitari Pillar inscription
  - Kahoum Pillar inscription
- **Junagarh rock inscription:** Repair of Sudarshana lake
  - Parnadatta as Governor of Saurashtra
  - Parnadatta appointed his son Chakrapalita as the magistrate of the Girinagara city.
  - The dam burst in 450s CE – Chakrapalita spent “immeasurable wealth” to repair it and also built a Vishnu temple.
- He also donated one village to the Nalanda Mahavihara.

## White Hunas (440s-560s): Toramana and Mihirkula

### **Rajadhiraja Toramana Prakashaditya (493-515 CE)**

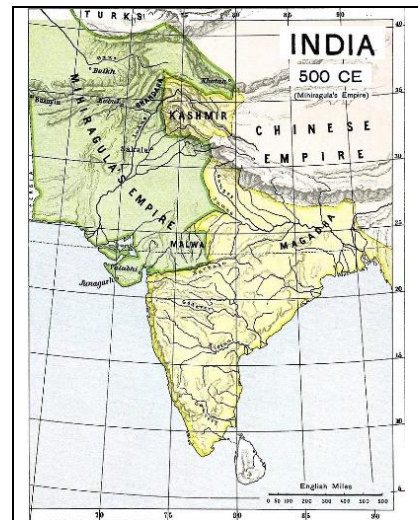
- Most successful Huna king in India so far: Entrenched in Punjab. Struck Mathura in the doab region, conquered it. Then sacked and destroyed Kaushambi, one of the earliest cities India. And soon, Toramana expanded to UP, Gwalior, Rajasthan.
- Toramana tried to appropriate Vaishnava ideas to support his conquest.
  - Eran Varaha inscription of Dhanyavishnu/Surashmichandra for Narayana temple. It refers to Toramana as Rajadhiraja.
  - Toramana used Varaha symbol. Earlier Guptas projected Chandragupta II as Varaha.
- Defeats
  - May have been defeated by Bhanugupta (510 CE)
  - Defeated by Prakashadharman of Malwa (515 CE) (Risthal inscription)

### **Mihirkula (502-530 CE)**

- This second Huna was less successful than his father.
- He preferred Shaivism.
- Later work Rajatarangini calls him cruel, "a man of violent acts and resembling kaal (death)", who ruled "the land then overrun by hordes of mlecchas (foreigners)."

### Resistance to Hunas

- From Gandhara, Hunas rampaged across the Punjab and as far as Malwa since c 500.
- As Garudadvaja fell silent, new kings, managed to push the Hunas back.
  - **Madhyadesha (doab): Maukharis** new state centred around the ancient city of **Kanyakubja**.
  - **Malwa: Auilcara** kings of **Dashabpura**, among the foremost patrons of Pashupata Shaivas, were at the forefront of Hunnic wars.
  - Both realized it was in their interest to coordinate against Hunas. Soon, their huge armies came together.
- Yashodharman vs Mihirkula: Battle of Sondani (Mandsor) 528 CE
  - Afterwards, Hunas then retired to Kashmir and continued persecution, vandalism and unspeakable atrocities for another generation.



Eran varaha statue inscription names king **Toramana, ruler of Huns, as ruling over Malwa ("governing the earth")**





### Impact of Hunnic Invasions:

- **Political**
  - Destroyed the dominance of the Gupta Empire through repeated invasions. Now, small kingdoms began to grow and prosper.
  - Cities like **Pataliputra** or **Ujjain** soon lost their glory. There was the **emergence of Kannauj (Kanyakubja, Mahodaya)**: Shift of the political citadel of north India from Pataliputra to Kannauj in the doab.
- **Economic**
  - Trade with West
    - Trade between India and Roman Empire weakened.
  - Trade with Central Asia and China
    - Karakoram route fell into disuse as Buddhist traffic shifted east to the Tibetan tableland.
    - Until the advent of Islam, the overland trade with China and the west would not be restored.
  - Trade with Southeast Asia
    - On the other hand, trade with Southeast Asia and China prospered through ports like Tamralipta, Kaveri Pattanam, etc. (oceanic route)
- **Social**
  - Some Hunas **blended** with the Indian population. Some remained in North, some moved further south/west.
- **Religious:**
  - **Buddhism in Indus basin (Gandhara region)** would never recover from this blow. The great Buddhist establishments at Taxila, Peshawar and Swat suffered severely from Huna iconoclasm.
  - Violent trauma that Toramana inflicted decreased the popularity of Vaishnavism and increased that of Shaivas.
  - Mihirakula is believed to have patronized Shaivism tradition of Hinduism. However, except for rare texts such as Rajatarangini, he is hardly acknowledged and never praised in Hindu texts.
- **Cultural**



- The arts changed. No more serene and peaceful Buddha and Vishnu but demonic sculptures more popular.
- Destruction of grand old cities → new cities emerging like Sthaneshwara, Vallabhi, Kanyakubja, Shripura etc. Artists fled to these newly emerging courts, creating new and diverse artforms across wider geographic zone.

#### **Reason for the decline of Guptas:**

- Weak successors
- Foreign invasions of Huna
  - It led to Military and economic stress.
  - Disrupted long-distance overland trade with the west.
  - The superior gold coins issued by Chandragupta and Samudragupta could not be continued by their later successors.
- Absence of strong central authority and emergence of Feudalism
  - Many chiefs revolted against later Gupta rulers. They were successful in setting up an independent kingdom towards the middle of 6th Century.
  - Increasing practice of land grants

#### **Afterwards: Mihirkula → Aulikara → Maukharis → Vardhanas**

- Soon, **Aulikaras** quickly grabbed the title of Maharajadhiraja, attempting to seize the title of the Guptas.
- They were soon defeated by **Maukharis**, who now gradually expanded along the Ganga plains and finally restored peace and order.
  - Maukhari kings soon started to restore temples build during the Gupta period, to create a connection through patronage of religion and art.
  - **Kanyakubja** soon emerged into an immense city, studded with parks, gardens and ponds.
- Soon, there was **the emergence of Sthaneshwara Pushyabhutis**

**Monarchy:**

- **Centralised monarchy**
  - The king was an **absolute monarch**.
    - Title: Maharajadhiraja
    - Adjoining areas were in their direct control, while South India was under their indirect control.
  - Considered to possess **divine powers**.
    - Narayana, Parameshvara, Paramabhattaraka, Parambhagavata, Lokadhamdeva, Achintyapurusha, Dhanadavarunendrantaka-sama
- **Matrimonial alliances** to strengthen the rule.
  - Chandragupta I: married a Lichhavi princess to legitimise his rule.
  - Samudragupta: married the daughters of defeated kings to ensure their loyalty.
  - Chandragupta II: married his daughter Prabhavatigupta to the Vakataka ruler Rudrasena II.
- **Succession**
  - The Guptas followed the notion of **primogeniture**, but it was not rigid.
  - This led to **wars of succession**, such as the conflict between Ramagupta and Chandragupta II.
- **Strategies for Political Legitimacy**
  - Kamandaka's Nitisara
  - Raghuvarsha of Kalidasa (Sanskrit Mahakavya)
  - Innovative new forms of temple building
  - Coins portrayal of kings
  - Udayagiri Cave

**Administration:****Central Bureaucracy**

They continued the Mauryan tradition of appointing top central officials to assist the king, such as:

- Kumaramatyā
- Mahamatya - Chief secretary/ minister to the king
- Mahasenapati - Commander - in - Chief
- Mahashvarohi - In-charge of cavalry
- Mahapilupati - in - charge of elephants
- Mahapratihara
- Mahadandanayak - officer in-charge of law and order
- Mahanyayadhish - Chief Justice
- Mahasandhivigrahaka - in-charge of foreign affairs/ war and peace
- Ranabhandagaradhyaksha
- Khadyatapatika
- Dutaka

**Provincial / sub - provincial administration**

It was a close approximation of the Mauryan system:

- The empire was divided into provinces called as **Bhuktis** (east) or **Desh** (west), governed by **Uparikas** (east) or **Gopatri** (west)
- The provinces were divided into districts called **Vishayas**, headed by **Vishayapati**.
- These were subdivided into **Sthaniya (vithi/petha)** headed by **Sthanika**.
- The Grams were headed by **Gramika/Gramini**.

### Local Administration (Adhithana Adhikarana – district boards)

An element of local administration was visible in urban administration, state officials were assisted by a Council of notable citizens -

- head of the overseas trading guild
- **Prathamkulika**: chief of the artisan guild
- **Prathamkayastha**: representative of government officials
- **Nagar Sresthin / Pratham Sresthin**: chief of the banking guild.

### Ancient Panchayat?

- **Ashtakula Adhikarana** (8 members' board) in Bengal, headed by Mahattar (village elder)
- **Panchamandali** mentioned in Sanchi inscription.

### Revenue/Taxation

- Officers – Akshapataladhikrita, Pustapal
- Bhaga (1/6<sup>th</sup> shadbhagin – king)
- Kara and Uparikara
- Udranga
- Hiranya
- Shulka
- Kipta
- Vishthi

	
<p><i>"Subjects owe the king revenue as a reward for protection provided"</i></p>	<p><i>"king be like a florist or a milkman in matters of taxation"</i></p>

However, it was also **different from Mauryan bureaucracy** because:

- It was **not as elaborate and large as the Mauryan** bureaucracy because:
  - The tax net was not a wide, no rigid control of economy.
  - The empire was not as large since only North India was under its direct control.
  - State regulation was not as complete – light-touch approach.
  - No severe criminal punishment, mild penal code
  - Leading role to local elements in administration
- **Feudal** Elements were not present in Mauryan era.
  - Some Gupta officials held **more than one position**. E.g.: Harisena was the Court Poet, Mahamatys and Mahasandhivignahake of Samudragupta .
  - Some positions were **hereditary**. E.g.: Harisena and his son, Ravisena, both served as court poets.
  - Senior Gupta officials were paid in **land grants**.
    - Priests and religious institutions also received land grants.
    - The people receiving land grants were authorised to:
      - Administer justice upon people under their jurisdiction.
      - Extract forced labour called "Vrishti / Vishti "

**Agriculture:**

- Crop diversity indicates mature knowledge of soil type, seasons, technology and specialization.
  - Rice (Dhanya) – Most important
    - Kalidasa (Raghuvamsa): sali, nivara, kalama, uncha and shyamaka
    - Amaravati-Bhandara region
    - Wider use of transplantation
  - Cash crops
    - Amarkosha – cotton, oilseed, indigo, mustard etc
    - Coconut plantation
    - Sugarcane of Paundrak
    - Arecanut, Spices like pepper and cardamom
- **Irrigation**
  - Variety of structures: Sudarshana Lake, Wells, Ponds (Pushkarani), Tanks (Tadaag), River embankments, Canals – Ali/Brihadali (jalanirgama in Amarkosha)
  - Role of state in building/maintaining – Junagarh
  - Due protection to Irrigation structures. Fines and punishments for causing damage.
- **Types of Land**
  - Cultivated area (kshetra) was differentiated from habitational plots (vastu) and forest (aranya).
  - Amarakosha lists 12 types of land: urvara (fertile), ushara (barren), maru (desert), aprahata (fallow), shadvala (grassy), pankila (muddy), jalaprayamanupam (wet), kachcha (adjacent to water), sharkara (full of pebbles, limestone), sharkavati (sandy), nadimatrika (watered by a river), devamatrika (watered by rain)

<b>Types of Khila (fallow plots)</b>	
Aprahata	Never tilled before
Adyastambha	Covered with shrubs, never cleared
Aprada	Unyielding
Apratikara/shunyapratikara	Not yielding any revenue
Khila Kshetra	Arable plot kept fallow

<b>Land size measurement – diversity of units → regional variation</b>	
Smaller Units	Angula (probably $\frac{3}{4}$ inch), Hasta (cubit, 8 inches).
Larger Units	Dhanu/danda, Nala
Units in Eastern India	Aadhavapa ( $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ acre), Dronavapa ( $1\frac{1}{2}$ –2 acres), Kulyavapa (12–16 acres)
Largest Unit	Pataka (60–80 acres)



### Land Ownership: Multi-tiered system of rights

Village Community	Royal Ownership	Private Ownership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Important in land matters</li> <li>Boundary dispute</li> <li>Pastureland unpartitioned</li> <li>Water resources rights</li> <li>King to notify land donations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Smritikar debate: Bhusvami (thus land tax) v/s tax as wages for protection</li> <li>Lord of all land but the legal owner (Land-grants – some ownership)</li> <li>Power to divest peasants from land – hardly used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Books on issue of possessions, ownership, title, partition, sale, mortgage</li> <li>Numerous copper-plate inscriptions on sale-purchase deeds</li> </ul>

**Preponderance of copper plate charters** to exempt land/village donations from revenue. In Gupta era, there was Increased number of land grants and power of donees. Thus, there was the beginning of the era when rural agrarian economy became more dominant.

### Trend:

- Land Gifts in Mahabharata: Gau, Hiranya, Prithvi
- Satavahanas: Land Grant with Pariharas
- Gupta: Land Grant + Increasing Pariharas + Hereditary
- Post Gupta: Land Grant + Pariharas + Heredity + Sub-assignments



Land Gift – Technical Tenure Terms	
Nivi Dharma	Grant of permanent usufructory rights
Akshaya Nivi	Inalienable Gift
Nivi Dharma Kshaya	Alienable Gift (power to sale/transfer)
Some Examples of Pariharas	
Achandradityakalo	Forever in eternity
A-Karada	No tax
Sa-Nidhi	With underground possessions
A-Bhadra-Praveshya	No entry to Govt officers
Sa-Amra-madhuka	With usufructory rights

**Hierarchical rights:** *mahipati* (king), *kshetrasvami* (landowner) and *karshaka* (cultivator) – Yajnavalkya

- Kshetrasvami:** Rise of landed intermediaries in this era, in power and position.
- Rise in position and material condition Brahmana donees – enjoyed revenues and cesses by royal order. Brahmanas donees didn't till themselves– employed others.

### However,

- Most land granted in Bengal were fallow/uncultivated
- Pustapalas give permission to land transfer as it didn't affect economic interest of the ruler.
- Mentions of kutumbin and the mahattara don't seem so powerless.

**Non-agrarian economy:** As important as agrarian economy, if not more

- Prevalence of a large variety of crafts
  - Amarkosha
  - Kamsutra – 64 Kalas
  - Ajanta Painting – wealth/palaces/ornaments
- Many crafts (potters, carpenters, ivory, Textile)
- Distinctive feature – rise in metal-based industry
  - References to iron workers, coppersmiths, goldsmiths
  - Raghuvamsham – Ayoghana (iron working by heating and beating)



### Guilds in Gupta Era

- Multifunctional role like before
  - Mandsor inscription – building sun temple
- Detailed structure
  - Chiefs
  - Officers (madhyastha, karyachintaka etc)
- Joint corporate bodies or partnership
  - Sreshthi-Kulika-Nigama
  - Sreshthi-Sarthavaha-Kulika-Nigama
- Role in local administration



<b>Mandsor Inscriptions</b> (MP 436, 473 CE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guild of silk workers</li> <li>• Spatial migration – Lata to Dasapura</li> <li>• Occupational migration</li> <li>• Old profession – prosperity.</li> <li>• New – Archers, astrologers, storytellers</li> </ul>
<b>Vadrapalli Inscription</b> (GJ, 503 CE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vaniggrama (Professional Merchants' Body)</li> <li>• Both local and non-local traders: Kanyakubja, Ujjayini, Gdusuyebhassam</li> <li>• Voluntary cess on commodities for temple</li> </ul>
<b>Vishnusenana Charter</b> (Maitraka ruler, GJ, 592 CE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privileges for the vaniggrama which was expected to be settled down at Lohatagrama.</li> <li>• These merchants undertook trips to land abroad, possibly by sea-going vessels</li> </ul>



**Brisk Trade:** Both domestic and external

Domestic Trade	Brisk Western Trade	Eastern Trade (Role of Bengal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kraya-vikraya in Amarkosha, vipanis/apanamarga in Kalidasa</li> <li>Kamandaka – traders bring riches, so king should specially patronize them</li> <li>Epigraphs speak of rich shreshthins and sarthavaha</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cosmas Indicopleustes (Christian Topography) – imp Konkan and Malabar ports</li> <li>Roman empire → loss in trade, Rise of Byzantine → again trade rose (Red sea trade)</li> <li>Sassanid empire (Persian gulf)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faxian: Tamralipti → SL → Java → China</li> <li>Hsuan Tsang: importance of Samatata</li> <li>Ship-building area (navatakshehi)</li> <li>Kalidasa – Chinamshuka by rich</li> </ul>



**Coinage: Complex monetary history**  
Superb quality of silver and gold coins

	<p><b>Gold coins (Dinaras → Suvarnas)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Debasement → decline in long distance trade due to Huna inroads?</li> <li>Early Gupta rulers followed the late Kushana weight standard, Skandagupta raised the weight.</li> <li>Inspite of debasement, Gupta rulers continued to strike coins and maintain a uniform standard.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Silver coins (known as rupaka)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Began by Chandragupta II after defeating Saka Kshatrapas</li> </ul>

	<b>Paucity of copper coins</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barter in daily life?</li> </ul>
	<b>Faxian – cowry shells</b> <b>Gold dust</b>

### Deurbanisation or thriving urban centres?

Trade centres, administrative centres, military camps and cultural centres

	Evidence of Decline	Counter-evidence
<b>Literature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faxian and Huen Tsang: several famous cities of north India lost their prosperity.</li> <li>Ramayana story of Ram leaving Ayodhya</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stories of Kalidasa</li> <li>Nagaraka in Kamasutra</li> <li>Vasantsena's haveli in Mrichhakatika</li> <li>Markets of Silappadikaram and Manimekalai</li> <li>Amarkosha – Pura, Nagara, Putabhedana</li> </ul>
<b>Archaeology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decay in Shravasti, Mathura, Rajagriha, Vaishali, and Champa</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No decline in cities like Varanasi and Ujjaini or Mahasthangarh and Bangarh (Bengal)</li> </ul>



## Social Life

**Observations by Faxian:** Very pleasing, romantic and idealized picture of India to Chinese

- Very few daily life details
- No political comment either
- People are simple and honest
- Ahimsa was strong element in middle India
- Rich, pious inhabitants
- Numerous charitable institutions, free hospitals
- Rest-houses for travelers

“People are very well off, without poll tax or official restrictions... The kings govern without corporal punishment; criminals are fined according to circumstances, lightly or heavily. Even in cases of repeated rebellion they only cut off the right hand. The king’s personal attendants, who guard him on the right and the left, have fixed salaries. Throughout the country the people kill no living thing nor drink wine, nor do they eat garlic or onions, with the exceptions of Chandalas only.”

### **Greater Fluidity in Social Norms**

Shastric view of Society was very orthodox but theoretical in nature.

- **Varna**
  - Agraharin Brahmin, yet trader (Charudatta) and robber (Dashakumarcharita of Dandin)
  - Kings – Guptas and Kadambas not Kshatriyas
- **Women**
  - Lowering age of marriage? – Shakutala as upbhoagakshama in Kalidas
  - Dharmya as preferred type of marriage? Gandharva based in mutual love in Kamasutra.
  - No widow remarriage? – Punarbhu in Amarkosh
  - Eran Sati stone (510 CE) – only one!
  - No Stridhana? – coins, donative inscriptions, matrimonial alliances
- **Kaliyuga?**
  - Progressive decline of dharma and increase in evils – implicit acknowledgement of different norms of social reality
- **Lower caste and class oppression increased**
  - Forced labour – Vishthi – seems to be regular
  - Narada mentions more types of slaves than Manu or Arthashastra
  - Chandals lived outside city and had to announced their arrival (Faxian)
  - Untouchability also emerged in deep south in late sangam era

### **Fa Hien**

The famous Chinese traveller Fa Hien visited India between 399-412 CE. He arrived via the land route (through central Asia) and returned via the sea route (including Sri Lanka and Java).

The purpose of his visit was to:

- Visit Holy Buddhist sites such as Gaya Lumbini, Sarnath, Sanchi Kushinagar, etc.

- To collect Holy Buddhist scripture.

His book, '**Fu-Kyo-Ki**' contains valuable accounts of his travels, describing Indian culture, society, customs and economic life. He learnt Sanskrit and translated several Buddhist scrolls and scriptures.

**Comments:**

- The beauty of Pataliputra, especially the king's wooden throne.
- India's colourful festivals.
- The high moral character of Indians.
- Indian tradition of time-keeping
- Indian sense of cleanliness and hygiene.
- The law and order situation
- However, he was shocked to see the practice of untouchability.

He does not appear to have been interested in India's political affairs, because he has not mentioned any Indian king by name. This indicates that his accounts are largely unbiased but also uncritical.

### Religious Life

#### **Was Buddhism Declining?**

- **Faxian's observation on Buddhism:** According to him, Buddhism flourished in southern and western India and was liberally endowed by kings. But there were declining trends in the Gangetic plains.
  - Noticed many flourishing monasteries from his Indus to Mathura travel.
    - Both Hinayana and Mahayana
    - In Mathura, he noticed 20+ monasteries.
    - Buddha image procession in Pataliputra
  - Faxian also mentions many ruined monasteries at Bodhgaya, Lumbini, Kapilavastu and Kushinagar. He has lamented the dilapidated state of prominent sites as "like great desert". He says that the Gangetic plains were the 'land of Brahmanism'.
- Gupta royal patronage
  - Samudra Gupta granted permission to the ruler of Ceylon for the construction of Vihar at Gaya.
  - The Sanchi inscription of Chandra Gupta II referred to a grant instituted by military officer, for feeding the Buddhists.
  - The Buddhist University of Nalanda was a beneficiary of the royal patronage.
  - A large number of Buddha and Bodhisattva images are discovered from Nalanda and Mathura.
- During this period Buddhism underwent complete transformation and adopted some of the practices of Shaivism and Shaktism.

## Rise of Puranic Hinduism

- The Gupta rulers were the champion of new Brahmanical movement.
  - The revival of Brahmanism had begun long ago during the Shunga/Satvahana period.
  - Sanskrit inscriptions, Royal sacrifices like Ashvamedha
  - From the inscription: Gupta's God constructed many temples and made liberal Grants to the religious institution.
- Rise of Vaishnavism
  - Most of the Gupta rulers supported Vaishnavism.
- A distinguish feature of Gupta period is religious freedom and toleration. The Gupta King's were quite tolerant towards other religion.
  - **Accommodation of a diversity of people:** The epigraphs and coins speak of other God and Goddesses like Laxmi, Durga, Parvati, Shiva, Kartikeya and Surya etc.
  - **Peaceful coexistence, No narrow sectarianism – Religious freedom and protection.**
    - Six schools coexisted
    - Guptas patronising Kalidasa
    - Chandragupta II's Senapati was Amrakaradava, Kumargupta started Nalanda.
    - Valabhi Jain Council (during Maitrakas).
    - Udayagiri Inscription of Kumar Gupta I in the Kancham Pillar Inscription relates to the installation of Tirthankaras.
- **Cultural synthesis of Puranas (imp literature)**
  - **Integrating diverse beliefs** – Vedic to Puranic, rituals to philosophy, from fictional legends to factual history, individual yoga to social festivals, vratas, empires to pilgrimage (tirtha), from god to goddesses and tantra.
  - **Diversity of paths** (Karma, Jnana and Bhakti) – but Bhakti emerges as prominent. (temple-based)
- **Coexistence and Syncretism**
  - Avataravad
  - Composite – Harihara, Trimurti, Ardhanarishvara, Srivaishnavism
  - Local popular deities fused with great tradition (shakta peetha emerge, saptamatrika)
  - Panchayatan temple – coexistence
  - Bhagvadgeeta – attempt at unification