

# CHAPTER-8

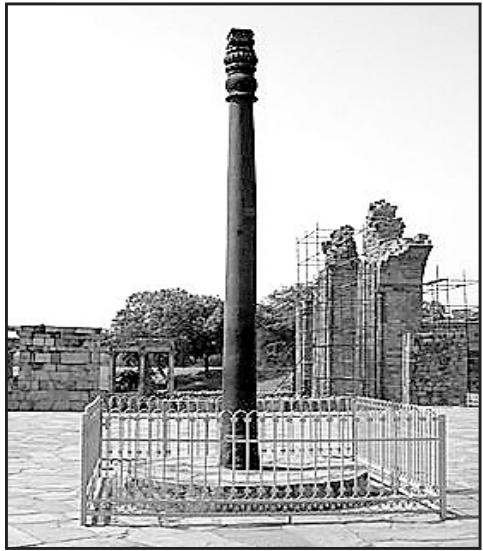
## GUPTAS AND VARDHANAS



**After studying this chapter you learn :**

- About the famous rulers, expansion and growth of Gupta empire.
- About their contribution to administration literature and science.
- About the growth of Vardhana's and their contributions to literature and education.
- To know the extent of Gupta empire in the map of India.





**Mehrauli Iron Pillar**

After centuries of political instability, the Gupta Empire rose in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Sanskrit language and its vast literature bear a mirror to this age. The guptas probably came over from Magadha. Chandragupta I married a Licchavi princess and strengthened his kingdom. It is believed that the Gupta era began with his reign in 320 C.E. He was called the Maharajadhiraja.

We see his son Samudragupta after him. His achievements have been commemorated in the Allahabad prashati

written by Harisena. This is in Sanskrit language and has been inscribed on Ashoka's pillar. Most part of India was under the rule of the Guptas during the time of Samudragupta. His Aswamedhayaga brings to mind the Vedic rituals and traditions Samudragupta was not just a conquerer, but a great poet and a lover of music too. His passion for music can be seen in the gold coins which depict him playing on the veena.

The Iron Pillar at Mehrauli in Delhi near Qutb Minar is important. It is 23 feet and eight inches in height and weighs 6,000 kg. It is one of the finest examples of the technical skill of the time. It has not become rusty till now. If phosphorus is mixed with iron resting process will be delayed. That shows in those days Indians had a sound knowledge about metallurgy.

### **Meghadoota**

This is a poetic creation of Kalidasa, and is one among his very famous work. Yaksha is exiled by King Kuber for having neglected his duties. In this situation, the yaksha stops a passing cloud and persuades it to carry a message of love to his wife who lives near the Kailash mountain. He describes the beautiful scenery on the route to his wife's place . Even today this poem is famous all over the world. It has been translated into all the Indian languages and major languages of the world. People have been enjoying the dramatization of Meghadoota till today.

Chandragupta II expanded the kingdom of Samudragupta and brought stability. He defeated the Sakas and made Western India a part of the Gupta Empire. He developed relationships with many Indian royal families through marriage and became very influential. He earned the title of Vikramaditya. His reign is memorable more for the encouragement given to literature and art, rather than for its battles. The famous Sanskrit poet and dramatist, Kalidasa, belonged to this age. Meghadoota, Raghuvamsha, Kumarasambhava and Ritu Samhara are his lyrical contributions. Abhijnana Shakuntala is one of his noteworthy plays. Sudraka's Mricchakatika and Vishakadatta's Mudrarakshasa are the other literary works of this period.

### **Abhijnana Shakuntala**

This is considered the best drama of Kalidasa. The story of Shakuntala is in the Mahabharata. In the story, King Dushyanta while on his hunt in the forest, happens to come to Sage Kanva's ashram. There he sees Shakuntala, falls in love with her and both get married in Gandharva style. All this takes place in the absence of Sage Kanva. After some time, Dushyanta leaves Shakuntala in the ashram and returns to his capital. During this period of separation, Sage Durvasa arrives at Kanva's ashram. Seeing Shakuntala lost in the thoughts of Dushyanta and finding none to attend him was enraged. Sage Durvasa lost his temper and cursed her saying, "Let the one in whose memory you are, forget you". When he realised his own harshness, Sage Durvasa suggested a way to be free from the curse. He says that an object given to her would ultimately bring back his memories of her. The object was a ring that Dushyanta had given to Shakuntala. As Sage Durvasa had said, Dushyanta forgets Shakuntala. After a period of time the disciples of sage Kanva took Shakuntala to the court of Dushyanta to unite them. She was pregnant at that time. On the way, Shakuntala lost the ring which would have brought back recollection in Dushyanta. Thus Dushyanta was unable to recognize her. Shakuntala leaves the palace in humiliation. After a few days, the ring was found in the stomach of a fish, and on seeing it, Dushyanta recalls everything. He was filled with remorse.

Some time later, while he was returning from a journey, he pays a visit to Sage Maricha's ashram. There he sees a small boy playing with lion cubs, and when he enquires about his background, he comes to know that the boy is his own son, Sarvadamana. In this manner, Dushyanta is united with his wife, Shakuntala, and son. Abhijnana Shakuntala is one of the greatest plays in the world. It has earned great acclaim all over the world.

The Gupta Empire was subjected to continual attacks of the Huns and thus, declined soon. The Guptas did not have a fully equipped large army. The vassal kings would fulfil the requirements during times of war. Hence, the vassals had become very powerful. The bureaucracy consisted of Kumar Amatyas. They head various positions. The administration was decentralized. The priests received many grants. They would be granted many villages. Many temples saw development due to this. These areas not only enjoyed financial and administrative concessions but also became independent in all matters. However, over a period of time, the local people, farmers and artisans began to be controlled by the landlords. In this way, society grew more and more complex.

During this period, the trade that the Guptas had with the Westerners collapsed. Consequently, their economic system suffered. The restrictions imposed on their empire obstructed their internal trade too. Trade was limited to villages. The collapse of trade led to the decline of the trade centres. Pataliputra got reduced to the size of a village.

Based on the sentiment of bhakthi, this period witnessed creation of various religious texts like the Puranas and the Dharmashastras. Varahamihira, Bhaskara-I, Aryabhata, Charaka and Sushruta were the great scientists of this time. Varahamihira, Bhaskara-I and Aryabhata made significant contributions to the study of astrology, astronomy and mathematics. Charaka wrote Charaka Samhita. Sushruta wrote Sushruta Samhita which dealt with surgery.

### **Scientists of the Gupta Period :**

- 1. Dhanwantari:** He was a famous scholar in the field of medicine. He was a specialist in Ayurveda. He is the father of Indian Medicine. His chief contribution to the medical field has been the Ayurvedic dictionary.
- 2. Charaka:** He was a medical scientist. His major contribution to the field of medicine has been the Charaka Samhita.
- 3. Sushruta:** He was a surgeon. He was the first Indian to explain the process of surgery. He has recorded that in those days, there used to be a separate wing to treat soldiers. Like modern surgeons sushruta was a wellknown surgeon of yester years and contributed significantly to the field of surgery.

- 4. Aryabhata:** He was a famous astronomer and mathematician. He is the prominent scientist who come after Varahamihira. His contribution to Astronomy and Mathematics has been highly significant.

This is the reason that the Aryabhata award is being presented by the Indian Government to great scientists. The first Indian satellite has been named after Aryabhata. He is believed to have invented ‘the zero’. He was the first Indian to master algebra. He reiterated the fact that solar and lunar eclipses happen not due to Rahu but solar eclipse is caused when the moon is between the sun and the earth. Lunar eclipse - when the earth is between the sun and the moon.

- 5. Varahamihira:** He was a famous astronomer. He wrote a book on astronomy named Panchasiddhantika, In addition to this, he wrote Bruhat Samhita, Bruhat Jataka and Laghu Jataka. He was a scholar in many fields like astronomy, astrology, geography, metereology, etc.

## **THE VARDHANS**

The Gupta Empire which had flourished for two centuries, disintegrated around 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Many small kingdoms sprang up at this time. The kingdom of the Vardhanas was one of them. They ruled from Thaneswar in 6<sup>th</sup> century. Some copper inscriptions, Bana's Harshacharita and the Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang's writings throw light upon this period.

Pushyabhuti is the founder of this dynasty. Prabhakaravardhana and Harshavardhana are the prominent kings of the dynasty. After the death of his father, Prabhakaravardhana, and his brother, Rajyavardhana, Harsha became the king of Thaneswar.

His sister Rajyashree was married to the king of Kanauj. When the king of Bengal Sashanka killed the king of Kanauj, Harsha captured Kanauj, and attacked the king of Bengal. Bengal and Magadha came under his rule. But he could not advance beyond the Narmada river in the south. The Kannada king of the Chalukyas, Pulakeshi II, halted his progress, and forced him to go back. This achievement of Pulakesh II has been immortalized in the panegyric (prashasti) inscription written by the court poet, Ravikirti. Harsha lost his Harsh (joy) due to his defeat.

The king's rule was assisted by the council of ministers. The bureaucracy consisted of the Mahasandhivigraha (the negotiator), Mahabaladhikruta (military general), Bhogapati (tax official) and Doota. The kingdom had been divided into provinces. Land tax was the major source of income for the kingdom. Feudatory chiefs paid tribute to the king. The king gave them land, grants and in return, got the help of their armies. When the king became weak, the feudatory chiefs became independent.

Land grants were given to other communities and religious people as well. Harsha gave prominence to Buddhism. We get details of the popularity of Buddhism from Hiuen Tsang's writing. The Buddhist wing. Nalanda University was full of activity during this period. It enjoyed royal patronage.

## Nalanda



Buddha's followers believe that 'Nalanda' was the name of Buddha in his previous birth. This is famous as an ancient university. Buddha had visited Nalanda. Mention has been made of the 25 metre tall bronze image of Buddha that

Harshavardhana gifted to Nalanda. Kumaragupta had made contributions to a fine arts school here. Nagarjuna the Chief exponent of middle path, Dinnaga and Dharmapala were the other famous scholars who taught here. The Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang, visited this place and stayed for some time. He has given a detailed description of this place. There were stupas, chaityas, viharas, rest houses, benches here and there to sit and rest awhile, meditation rooms, lecture rooms and many other structures reveal the glory of this place. The Gupta kings and Harshavardhana have been the famous patrons of this place. An accidental fire destroyed many texts at Nalanda.

### EXERCISES

#### I Complete the following sentences by using suitable words in the blanks :

- 1 The Guptas began their reign from the place \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 Chandragupta I was called \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 One of the great play of Kalidasa is \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 4 Vishakadatta's literary work is \_\_\_\_\_.

- 5 The literary work written by Sudraka is \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 The founder of Vardhana dynasty was \_\_\_\_\_.

**II Answer in brief the following questions :**

- 7 Write about Chandragupta II.
- 8 What were the reasons for the downfall of the Gupta Empire?
- 9 Name the great scientists of the Gupta Age.
- 10 How was the administration during the Vardhana rule?
- 11 Write about Nalanda University.

**III Activities :**

- 12 Collect details about all the works of Kalidasa.
- 13 Collect information and pictures of the scientists of the Gupta period.

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