

## **Gupta period 319/320-540 AD**

- Sources: Eran Prahasti (MP), Stupas at Sarnath, Ratnagiri (Orissa), Bhitari inscription near Gorakhpur, Mirpir Khan (Sindh), writings of Kalidas, Fahien, Devichandraguptam by Vishakhadutta,
- **Golden or Classical Age** of Ancient Indian History
- Over the greater part of Northern India, Political unification
- The original core of the Gupta territory lay in eastern UP
- Centre was Magadha
- Was not as large as that of the Mauryas
- It is possible that in the closing decades of the 3rd century CE the Guptas were subordinates of a branch of the later Kushanas ruling in north-western India.
- However, literary and archaeological sources indicate that they became independent in the second decade of the 4th century CE.

### **Srigupta (Title: Maharaj)**

- Inscriptions tell us that Srigupta was the first king and Ghatotkacha was the next to follow him.
- Ghatotkach (Title: Maharaj)

### **Chandra Gupta I (319-334)**

- Chandragupta-I was the first independent king with the title ***Maharajadhiraja***.
- Matrimonial alliance with the ***Lichchhavis***, rulers of Mithila.
- Married **Lichchavi princess Kumar Devi**
- Issued original gold coins called ***Dinars***
- both Chandra Gupta & Kumar Devi inscription on coins

### **Samudra Gupta (335-380)**

- Greatest Gupta king
- **Napoleon of India** by V. A. Smith
- ***Prayaga Prahasti* or Allahabad Pillar Inscription** by Harisena
- As per it, he was a great conqueror (northern India direct and southern indirect)
- Had navy, maintained relation with Java, Sumatra, Malaya etc.
- Titles: ***Kaviraja***, Param Bhagavat, etc.
- Performed ***Ashmaveda sacrifice***

- **Meghavarman**, king of Ceylon sought permission to build a monastery at Bodh Gaya for Buddhist pilgrims
- Displayed as playing **veena and as archers** on coins

### **Chandra Gupta II (380-414)**

- **Ramagupta** became king for a short period after Samudra Gupta
- Only king to issue **copper coins**
- Chandra Gupta II forged matrimonial alliance with the **Nagas and Vakatakas**
- Married Naga princess **Kuber Naga** and married his daughter **Prabhavati Gupta** to Vakataka Prince Rudrasena II
- 1<sup>st</sup> Gupta ruler to issue **silver coins**
- Adopted the title **Vikramaditya**
- Made **Ujjain** second capital
- **Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription** relates to him.
- Nine gems of his court: **Kalidasa, (Meghdut, Abhijana Shakuntalam, Malvikagnimitra etc), Amar Simha (Amarakosha), physician Dhanvantari.**
- **Varahmihir (Pancha Siddantaka)**
- Chinese pilgrim **Fahein** visited his court
- Issued **Dinar coins**

### **Kumar Gupta (415-455)**

- Founded the **Nalanda Vihara**, centre of great learning

### **Skanda Gupta (455-467): last great Gupta ruler**

- **Junagarh Rock, Bhitari Pillar inscription** relates to him
- **Huns (Toramana and Mihirkula)** invaded but repulsed.
- Decline of the empire began soon after his demise.

### **Gupta Administrative System**

- Sources of information are:
  1. inscriptions written on different materials like copper plates, stone, clay seals
  2. coins issued by rulers of different dynasties
  3. material from excavations;
  4. contemporary literature; and
  5. accounts left by foreign travellers like Fa-Hien.

- Gupta kings did not interfere in the administration of those regions where the kings had accepted their suzerainty.
- However, this does not mean that the Guptas were ruling only through their feudatories.
- They had an elaborate administrative system which was in operation in areas which were directly controlled by them.
- Gupta monarchs adopted high sounding titles like: *Paramabhattaraka*, *Parama-daivata*, *Chakravarti*, *Parameshvara* etc.
- **Allahabad Prashasti** of Samudragupta describes him as “equal to the gods Dhanada (Kubera), Varuna (Sea-God), Indra and Antaka (Vama); who had no antagonist of equal power in the world

### Council of Ministers and Other Officials

- The Gupta inscriptions are not very clear about the hierarchy of ministers.
- The minister’s office was perhaps hereditary.
- Though the supreme judicial powers were vested in the King, he was assisted by the *Mahadandanayaka* (Chief Justice).
- In the provinces this work was entrusted to the *Uparikas* and in districts to the *Vishayapatis*.
- In villages, the **headman and the village elders** used to decide the petty cases.
- The Chinese traveller **Fa-Hien** states that **capital punishment** was not given at all.
- *Mahapratihara* was the chief of the palace guards,
- the *Pratihara* regulated ceremonies and granted the necessary permits for admission to the royal presence.

### Provinces, Districts and Villages

- The whole empire was divided into **Desas**, or **Rashtras**, or **Bhuktis**.
- The inscriptions provide us with the names of certain **Bhuktis**.
- The **Bhuktis** were governed by **Uparikas** directly appointed by the King.
- The Province (**Bhukti**) was again divided into districts (**Vishayas**) under an official called **Ayuktaka** and in other cases a **Vishyapati**.
- major local communities: the **Nagarasreshthi** (head of city merchants), **Sarthavaha** (Caravan-leader), **Prathama-Kulika** (head of the artisan community) and **Prathama Kayastha** (head of the Kayastha community).

- The lowest unit of administration was the village where there was a headman called **Gramapati** or **Gramadhayaksha**.
- However, there were other units higher than the village. In some cases, we find references to **Astakuladhikarana**.
- Besides agriculturists, there were certain other groups in the villages who followed such professions as carpentry, spinning and weaving, pot-making, oil extraction, gold smithery, and husbandry.
- All these groups must have constituted local bodies which looked after the affairs of the village.

### Army

- The Guptas must have had a big army organisation.
- there was a minister called **Sandhi-Vigraha** (Minister in charge of peace and war) who was helped by a group of high officials.
- The official title **Mahabaladhikrita** occurs in many inscriptions.
- Officials like **Pilupati** (head of elephants), **Ashvapati** (head of horses), **Narapati** (head of foot soldiers) possibly worked under him.
- The army was paid in cash and its needs were well looked after by an officer-in-charge of stores called **Ranabhandagarika**.
- Amongst other duties this officer was to look after the supply of offensive and defensive weapons such as battle-axes, bows and arrows, spear pikes, swords, lances, javelins etc.

### Revenue Administration

- Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines.
- Another prominent high official was **Pustapala** (record-keeper).
- Both Kalidasa and the author of the **Narada-Smriti** state that one-sixth of the produce should be claimed as the royal revenue.
- Besides this there was the **Uparikara** which was levied on cloth, oil, etc. when taken from one city to another.
- The organisation of traders had to pay a certain commercial tax (**Shulka**), the non-payment of which resulted in cancellation of the right to trade and a fine amounting to eight times of the original **Shulka**.
- The King had a right to forced labour (**Vishthi**), **Bali** and many other types of contributions.