
UNIT 7 : GUPTA AGE: AGRARIAN EXPANSION, LAND GRANTS, GRADED LAND RIGHTS AND PEASANTRY

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Agrarian Expansion
- 7.3 Land Grants
- 7.4 Graded Land Rights
- 7.5 Position of the Peasantry
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit you will be able to know about:

- the economic conditions under the Guptas in relation to agriculture,
- land grant system and land rights, and
- position of the peasantry

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As we know in ancient period agricultural crops constituted the main resources which the society produced and that the major part of the revenue of the state also came from agriculture. This of course does not mean that agriculture was the only occupation of the people or that people lived only in villages. There were other occupations like commerce and production of crafts which had become specialized occupations and in which different social groups were engaged. This also means that, as in earlier periods, people lived in forests, in agrarian tracts, in towns and in cities, but certain changes had started taking place in the pattern of economic production and consequently in relations between different social groups. We shall highlight some of these changes in the course of this and the next section.

7.2 AGRARIAN EXPANSION

The agricultural crops constituted the main resources which the society produced and the major part of the revenue of the state came from the agriculture. It is argued by many scholars that the state was the exclusive owner of the land. The most decisive argument in favour of the exclusive state ownership of land is in the Paharpur copper plate inscription of Buddhagupta. It appears that though the land was to all intents and purposes that of the peasants, the king claimed its theoretical ownership. Various types of land are mentioned in the inscriptions, land under cultivation was usually called *Kshetra*, *Khila* was the uncultivable land, *Aprahata* was the jungle or forest land, *Gopata Sarah* was the pasture land and *Vasti* was the habitable land. Classification of land according to soil, fertility and the use to which it was put was not unknown. Different land measures were known in different regions, although one cannot be certain what exact measure was denoted by a term. In some areas *Nivartana* was the term used for a measure of land whereas in the inscriptions of Bengal terms like *Kulyavapa* and *Dronavapa* are used. It is not possible to classify the regions precisely according to the crops grown, but all the major categories of crops--cereals like barley, wheat and paddy, different varieties of pulses, grams and vegetables as well as cash crops like cotton and sugarcane were known long before the Gupta period and continued to be cultivated. Of course, one should not assume that crops like maize or vegetables like potatoes or tomatoes were known to the farmers of the Gupta period.

The concern of the society with agricultural production is also reflected in the importance given to irrigation. According to Narada, there are two kinds of dykes the *bardhya* which protected the field from floods and the *Khaya* which served the purpose of irrigation. The canals which were meant to prevent inundation were also mentioned by Amarasimha as *jalanirgamah*. The tanks were variously called, according to their sizes, as the *vapi*, *tadaga* and *dirghula*. The best example is the Sudarsana reservoir (Tadaga) in Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Originally built in the Maurya period, this reservoir was thoroughly repaired when it was extensively damaged in the time of Mahakshatrapa Rudradaman (middle of the second century CE). It was again severely damaged in the time of Skandagupta. Parnadatta, his newly appointed governor of Saurashtra and Parnadatta's son Chakrapalita, undertook the repair of the reservoir this time. Another method for irrigation was to draw water from wells and supply the water to the fields through carefully prepared channels. A mechanism, possibly known before the Gupta period, was to tie a number of pots to a chain, the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the well, and by making the chain and the pots rotate, it was ensured that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it. This mechanism was known as *ghati-yantra* as *ghati* was the name used for a pot. This type of mechanism also came to be

known as *araghatta*. In the Harshacharita of Banabhatta which was of course written in the seventh century CE, there is a very charming description of how cultivated fields, producing crops like sugarcane, were being irrigated with the help of *ghati-yantra*. In regions like Bengal, rainwater was collected in ponds and other types of reservoirs, in peninsular India tank irrigation became gradually the norm. There were thus different systems of irrigation and the role of the state was only marginal in providing irrigation facilities to farmers. The farmers of course depended mainly on rainfall and the importance of rainfall is underlined not only in the Arthashastra of Kautilya but also in the texts written in the Gupta period.

The sources of the Gupta period suggest that certain important changes were taking place in the agrarian society. The inscriptions from Bengal refer to sale of land by district-level administration to individuals who bought them by paying cash and made gifts of purchased land to Brahmanas who were expected to perform Vedic sacrifices or to Buddhist or Jaina religious establishments. But land was not only purchased and gifted, the practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common by now. Even otherwise, remuneration for serving rulers in different capacities was received in the form of land by officials of different categories. Of course, all this was not absolutely new. But by now the number of ruling families had vastly increased and thus the number of persons who received land but did not cultivate themselves went on increasing. The virtues of giving land were highly praised and those who took away gifted land were threatened with many evil consequences. All this led to the appearance, in society, of a class of people who enjoyed superior rights over land and by virtue of these rights and by belonging to higher varnas had high economic and social status. Of course, land rights did not belong only to those who received land. The Gupta inscriptions refer to different types of village residents like *Gramikas*, *Kutumbis* and *Mahattaras* who must have been village landholders, and their participation in land transactions indicates that they too were important members of rural society.

Compared with the recipients of land from the rulers and the influential categories of landowners in villages, the condition of ordinary cultivators may be considered to have been rather bad. It is believed by some historians that because of the practice of land grants, the peasant population as a whole were reduced to a very low position in society. This is not entirely true. It was the ordinary cultivators, known by various terms such as *Krishibala*, *Karshaka* or *Kinass* who had low economic and social status. Among the actual cultivators there were those who filled the lands of others and received only a share of the produce. There were also slaves who worked on the fields of their masters. Even domestic female slaves were cruelly exploited, and a text like the *Kamasutra*, which was probably written in the Gupta period tells us how much hardship they had to go through at the hands of their masters.

There were other reasons why the condition of the ordinary cultivators declined considerably. One was that in many areas the appearance of small kingdoms of new rulers and their official and sections of people who did not take part in agriculture created great inequalities in society and imposed great burden on actual tillers of the soil. The number of taxes imposed by the state on the producers also increased in this period. Further, the practice of imposing *vishti* or unpaid labour was also in vogue, although we do not know for certain how much essential it was for agricultural production. All in all, the condition of the ordinary cultivators seems to have become worse than in the earlier periods.

7.3 LAND GRANTS

The sources of the Gupta period suggest that certain important changes were taking place in the agrarian society. Feudal development surfaced under the Guptas with the grant of fiscal and administrative concessions to priests and administrators. Started in the Deccan by the Satavahanas, the practice became a regular affair in Gupta times. Religious functionaries were granted land, free of tax, forever, and they were authorised to collect from the peasants all the taxes which could have otherwise gone to the emperor.

Religious grants were of two types-*Agrahara* grants were meant for the Brahmanas which meant to be perpetual, hereditary and tax-free, accompanied with the assignment of all land revenue. The *Devagrahara* grants were made to secular parties such as writers and merchants, for the purpose of repair and worship of temples. The secular grants were made to secular parties and are evident from a grant made by the *Uccakalpa* dynasty.

According to it, two villages were bestowed as a mark of favour, in perpetuity with fiscal and administrative rights upon a person called Pulindabhatta. Epigraphic evidence of land grants made to officers for the administrative and military services is lacking, though such grants cannot be ruled out. In fact, certain designations of administrative officers such as *bhagika* and *bhogapalika* suggest that some of the state officials may have been remunerated by land grants.

7.4 GRADED LAND RIGHTS

The debate regarding the ownership of land in ancient India has focused on assessing the evidence for communal/corporate ownership (*i.e.*, ownership in the hands of the village community), royal ownership, and private ownership. Although the *Dharmashastra* texts have a great deal to say about property, their opinions on land rights vary considerably, and contradictory statements are sometimes made within the same text. Certain texts suggest that the village community had an important say

in land-related matters, even if this did not amount to full-fledged ownership. For instance, the village community was assigned an important role in settling boundary disputes and the sale of land, and the king was supposed to inform it when he made a gift of land. According to the *Vishnu Smriti*, pasture land was community property and could not be partitioned. The village community seems to have exercised rights over water resources as well. A few earlier sources assert the indivisibility of landed property, *i.e.*, that it could not be divided. The institution of private property was well entrenched by c. 300–600 CE. The law books of this period discuss and distinguish between the issues of possession, ownership, and legal title to property in general and land in particular. Laws regarding the partition, sale, and mortgage of land are laid down. Literary references to various types of private land transactions are matched by those from inscriptions. Numerous inscriptions record the purchase of land by individuals for the purpose of donations to Brahmanas or religious institutions. How can all this evidence be reconciled? Epigraphic references suggesting corporate or communal ownership are very few and belong to an early period. And although the village community—or at least its dominant section—may have had a say in land-related matters, this did not amount to corporate or communal ownership. On the other hand, from c. 300 CE onwards, literary and epigraphic evidence can be marshalled to argue for both royal and private land ownership. While variations in textual statements can be understood as representing different schools of thought, a similar argument cannot be made with regard to the epigraphic evidence. The answer seems to be that from c. 300 CE onwards, the king was considered the lord of all the land, but not the ‘owner’ in the legal sense. Private property in land existed under the umbrella of a somewhat vague or largely theoretical notion of ultimate royal control, and the king’s claims did not preclude the rights of private individuals.

7.5 POSITION OF THE PEASANTRY

The land grants paved the way for feudal development in India. Several inscriptions refer to the emergence of serfdom, which meant that the peasants were attached to their land even when it was given away. Thus in certain parts of the country the position of independent peasants were undermined, and they were reduced to serfs or semi-serfs. The repression of the peasantry was also caused by the right of subinfeudation granted to the recipients of land grants.

They were often authorised to enjoy the land, to get it enjoyed, to cultivate it or get it cultivated. The donated land could thus be assigned to tenants on certain terms. This also implied the donee’s right to evict the tenants from their land. The practice of subinfeudation therefore reduced the permanent tenants to the position of ten-ants-at-will. The position of peasants was also undermined from the Gupta period onwards

on account of the imposition of forced labour (*Vishti*) and several new levies and taxes.

Check Your Progress

1) Fill in the blanks:

- a) Land under cultivation was usually called (Khila/Kshetra).
- b) The practice of gifting land to religious donees (had become/was not at all) common during the fifth-sixth Century CE.
- c) The ordinary cultivators (flourished/suffered) during this period.
- d) Sudarsana lake was repaired during the time of (Skandagupta/Purugupta).

2) Mention the methods adopted for irrigation during this period in about ten lines.

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3) Write a note in five lines on ownership of lands during Gupta period.

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7.6 LET US SUM UP

There was considerable concern towards agricultural production and this is reflected from the way irrigation got priority during this period. The practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common and the Brahmanas exerted considerable influence over the King. There was differentiation amongst the cultivators and compared to the rich, the condition of ordinary cultivators declined considerably.

7.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

- 1) (a) Kshetra (b) had become (c) suffered (d) Skandagupta.
- 2) See Sec. 7.2
- 3) See Sec. 7.4

SUGGESTED READINGS

Sharma R.S., 1983. *Material Cultures and Social Formations in Ancient India*, New Delhi.

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UNIT 8 : VARNA, PROLIFERATION OF JATIS: CHANGING NORMS OF MARRIAGE AND PROPERTY

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Varna and Jati
- 8.3 Marriage System
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 Key Words
- 8.6 Answers To Check Your Progress Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you would be able to:

- know about Social stratification based on varna system during this period
- understand proliferation of different jatis, and
- position of women and marriage system of the society

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The Gupta Empire will be incomplete without discussing the condition of the society during the Gupta period. The *Puranas*, *Sastras*, the *Niti Sastras* of Narada, the Dramas of Kalidasa, etc., supply us with a good deal of information regarding the social life of the Gupta period. Many interesting features about the social life are also found to be referred to in the contemporary inscriptions. Fa-hien, the famous Chinese pilgrim had also made some observations about the society as it existed in India towards the opening of the 5th century CE.

8.2 VARNA AND JATI

According to the scheme of society conceived by the Brahmanas, society was divided into four *Varnas* (Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra), with each *Varna* performing the set of functions prescribed for it and enjoying whatever rights were given to it. This was the ideal social order and the state was expected to preserve it. The Brahmanas came to exert considerable influence on the kings from the Gupta

period and this is quite clear from the way they received land from the kings and others. The kings, officials and others gave land not only to individual Brahmanas but also sometimes incited big groups of Brahmanas to come and settle in remote areas. Thus, the number of Brahmana settlements variously called *Brahmadiyas*, *Agraharas* and so on started increasing and they started spreading, among other things, the idea of a *Varna*-divided social order.

The conventional historiography projected continuation of the four-fold division of the *Varna*-System (*Chatuh-Varna*) in the Gupta and post-Gupta period. However, R.C. Hazra mentions that early *Puranas* offer descriptions of *Kaliyuga* in terms of foreign invasions, instability, social tension, struggle, teaching of hedonistic sects. But modern historians like R. S. Sharma ascribes the origin of *Kaliyuga* to mixing of castes (*Varna Shankara*) and the rise of *Shudras* on the beginning of the 4th century CE. Hence, it was a period of social crises. It was an age of enmity between Brahmins and Shudras, Vaishyas refusing to perform *yojnas* on tax burdened subject population law and order problem, thefts, unsecured family and property, increasing materialism and decreasing religious rituals, sovereignty of *mlechha* (low-caste) kings. The inscriptions of the Vakatakas of Viderbha and Pallavas of Kanchipuram are quoted to show that they acted together against *Kaliyuga*. Brahmanisation of villages under the Vakatakas and Pallavas are supposed to indicate social disorder. It is assumed that the rulers set to order *Kaliyuga* from the 4th century onwards. The rise of the Vakatakas, Pallavas, Gangas and Kadambas are supposed to indicate brahmanical reactions against the Shudrasas these dynasties originated from Brahmana families.

From the latter half of the Gupta period and particularly the Vakatakas and Pallavas enforced strict rules according to *Varna* order to deal with *Kaliyuga*. One of the chief mechanisms of continuing *Kaliyuga* was land grants. The Guptas and their contemporaries began to grant land to religious donees, Brahmanas and temple-priests, and later to secular donees, ministers, civil and army officers and even merchants. Thus, began the age of landed-intermediaries intervening between states and peasants. Land grants gave rise to a graded rural society and ranking status and ranks which did not fit into *Varna* order-*Mahamandalika*, *Mandalika*, *Mandaleshwara*, *Mahasamanta* etc., as mentioned in *Aparajitaprachha* (a book of architecture) but a receipt which clearly indicate that the concept of *Kaliyuga* was popularized by Brahmanas must be viewed in the context of state formation process. Rural society had to be initiated in the norms of state society in regions where local state formation was taking place for the first time. Taxes and resources had to be mobilized for the first time from a rural population which was getting families with state and its administration and military institutions. The fear of *Kaliyuga* forced communities to conform to social and political order in regions, which were going

through processes of state formation for the first time. Secondly a detailed study of epigraphical records reveals that land grants did not introduced a graded society for the first time. B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Nandini Sinha Kapur in their case studies have demonstrated a hierarchical rural society in Bengal, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat in which Brahamana and non-Brahamana landlords, peasants, artisans and landless labourers constituted rural society before the beginnings of the practice of land grants. One of the most important social developments in this period was proliferation of castes or *jatis*. Many castes originated with incorporation of economic specialists, tribes and immigrants from central Asia into the Brahmanical *Varna* Society.

8.3 MARRIAGE SYSTEM

In *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, the admonition addressed to the king by the sage Kanva's disciple, we have echoes of rules in *Smritis* deprecating long residence of the wife with her paternal relatives and admitting the husband's complete authority over her. Kanva's own summary of the duties of a wife, addressed to *Sakuntala* on the eve of her departure for her husband's place, is based on the rules laid in earlier *Smritis* and *Kamasutra*. In the character *Dhuta*, wife of the hero in the *Mrichchakatika* we have a typical instance of the good wife described in *Smritis*. The belief in the extraordinary powers of the devoted wife (*pativrata*), which is expressed in the Mahabharata and other works, is reflected in a story of the *Dasa-Kumar-Charita*. The attitude of high-born ladies is illustrated in another story of the same work, where a woman, repudiated by her husband, declares it to be a living death for women of high birth to be hated by their husbands, for the husband alone is the deity of such women. Still another story shows how the qualities of economic housekeeping and absolute devotion to the husband were highly prized among wives. Following is a description of an ideal wife based on various *Smritis* and *Kamasutra*.

Vatsyayana draws a picture of the good wife and may be taken as to be a faithful reflection of real life. The picture exhibits those qualities of service and self-restraint as well as sound household management, which have remained the hallmark of Hindu, wives down to the present day. The wife is supposed to devote herself to her husband as though to a deity. She should personally look after the comforts of her husband. She shares her husband's fasts and vows, not brooking into refusal. She attends festivities, social gatherings, sacrifices, and religious processions, only with his permission. She engages sports approved by him. She avoids company of disreputable women, shows him no signs of displeasure, and does not loiter about at the doorstep, or in solitary places for a long time. She is not puffed up with prosperity, and she does not give charity to anyone without informing her husband. She honours her husband's friends, as is their due, with gifts of garlands, unguents,

and toilet. She serves her father-in-law and mother-in-law and abides by their commands. When in their presence, she makes no replies, speaks few but sweet words, and does not laugh aloud. She engages servants in their proper work and honours them on festive occasions. Above all, when her husband is gone abroad she lives a life of ascetic restraint: she gives up wearing all ornaments excepting the marks of her married state: she engages in religious rites and fasts: she acts as bidden by her superiors: she does not go out to visit her relations except on occasions of calamities or festivities: when she visits them, she does so only for a short while and in the company of her husband's people. When her husband returns home, she goes forth immediately to meet him in her sober dress, and then she worships the gods and makes gifts.

Apart from attending to her husband and his parents, relations, as well as his friends, the wife has complete and comprehensive charge of the household. She keeps the household absolutely clean, adorns it with festoons of flowers, and polishes the floor completely smooth. She looks after the worship of the gods at the household shrine and the offering of *bali* oblations three times a day. In the garden attached to the house she plants beds of various vegetables, herbs, plants, and trees. She keeps a store of various provisions in the house. She knows how to spin and weave, how to look after agriculture, cattle-breeding, and draught animals, how to take care of her husband's domestic pets and so forth. She frames an annual budget and makes her expenses accordingly. She keeps daily accounts and makes up the total at the end of the day. During her husband's absence she exerts herself in order that his affairs may not suffer. She increases the income and diminishes the expenditure to the best of her power. In case the woman has a co-wife she looks upon the later as a younger sister when she is older in age, and as a mother when she herself is younger.

The rule of life for the virtuous wife sketched above from the *Smritis* and the *Kamasutra* appears to have been generally followed in the Gupta Age. Again, according to Katyayana and Veda-Vyasa, the wife is to be associated with the husband in the performance of his religious acts, but all acts done by her to secure her spiritual benefit without his consent are useless. On the other hand, husband must maintain his wife. Some of the texts even prescribe penance for a husband for deserting a faultless wife.

Interestingly, we mark a striking similarity in Buddhist and Hindu sources on the interpersonal relationship in a conjugal life. The woman was mostly responsible for the household management and subservient to her husband. Unlike the Vedic period, women no longer enjoy equality with their husbands. They are also marginalised in other spheres of public life. The basic framework of the social structure thus can be inferred to be patriarchal, though there are rare instances of royal women acting as

sovereigns. In Orissa, several queens of Bhaumaka dynasty occupied the throne in the absence of male heirs. Hence, it is hard to generalise for the whole subcontinent.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Write a note in ten lines about the Varna and Jati system in the early medieval India.

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- 2) Discuss the literary source which are helpful to understand Marriage system in the early medieval India. Answer in five line

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8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we saw the different aspects of social life *i.e.* division of society, discrimination based on *varna* and *jati*, and different patterns of marriages available to the society.

8.5 KEY WORDS

Marginalised: treat (a person, group, or concept) as insignificant or peripheral.

Mlechha: referring to barbarous peoples in ancient India, as contradistinguished from Aryas

Donees: a person who receives a gift.

8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

1) See sec. 8.2

2) See sec. 8.3

SUGGESTED READINGS

Sharma R.S., 1983. *Material Cultures and Social Formations in Ancient India*, New Delhi.

Singh, U., 2009. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India – From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*, Delhi: Pearson.

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UNIT 9 : THE NATURE OF POLITIES: THE GUPTA EMPIRE

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The Rise of the Guptas
 - 9.2.1 Samudragupta
 - 9.2.2.1 Expansion and Consolidation
 - 9.2.2 Chandragupta-II
 - 9.2.3 Kumaragupta-I
 - 9.2.4 Skandagupta
 - 9.2.5 Disintegration of the Gupta Empire
 - 9.2.5.1 Huna Invasions
 - 9.2.5.2 Administrative Weaknesses
- 9.3 Polity and Administration under the Guptas
 - 9.3.1 King
 - 9.3.2 Council of Ministers and Other Officials
 - 9.3.3 Army
 - 9.3.4 Revenue Administration
 - 9.3.5 Judicial Administration
 - 9.3.6 Provinces, Districts and Villages
- 9.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.4 Key Words
- 9.5 Answers To Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to know about

- the circumstances that led to the rise of Gupta power,
- the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta empire.
- the order of succession of the Gupta rulers and their military exploits, and
- the polity and administrative set-up during Gupta period.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will analyse the historical situation which led to the rise of the Gupta dynasty. We take into account the controversies relating to the succession of Gupta kings and at the same time discuss some of their achievements which made possible the formation and consolidation of the empire. The Unit also takes into account the politics and administration prevailed during Gupta time.

9.2 THE RISE OF THE GUPTAS

The ancestry and early history of the Gupta family are little known, and have naturally given rise to various speculations. Names ending in Gupta, such as Sivagupta which occurs in a Satavahana inscription, are sometimes taken to suggest their ancestry. But these suggestions are rather far-fetched. Different scholars also place the original home of the Guptas differently- Some would place it in north Bengal, some in Magadha in Bihar and some in Uttar Pradesh on the basis of the following arguments it may, at the moment, be suggested that the original core of the Gupta territory lay in eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh;

- Allahabad pillar inscription, the earliest inscription recording the achievements of an early Gupta ruler, Samudragupta, comes from this region.
- The nature of the coin-hoards of the Guptas, found in this region, suggests this, and
- The description of early Gupta territories in the Puranas may point to this.

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 fourth century CE.

Inscriptions tell us that Srigupta was the first king and Ghatotkacha was the next to follow him. Chandragupta-I was the first independent king with the title *Maharajadhiraja*. After declaring his independence in Magadha, he with the help of a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis, enlarged his kingdom. We know about this alliance from a special category of coins. These coins have Chandragupta and his queen Kumaradevi engraved on the obverse and a seated goddess on the reverse with a legend *Lichchhavayah* (i.e. the *Lichchhavis*). These coins were made of gold, and this fact in addition to the fact that the Guptas followed the weight system of Kushana gold coins suggests that the Guptas had been in contact with the Kushana territories.

There are no concrete evidences to determine the boundaries of Chandragupta's kingdom. But it is assumed that it covered parts of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal.

Chandragupta-I is said to have also started a new era from 319-320 CE. It is not clear from any records that he started this era, which came to be known as Gupta *Samvator* Gupta era, but since Chandragupta-I is mentioned as a *Maharajadhiraja* he is credited with the founding of the era. It was during the times of his son Samudragupta that the kingdom grew into an empire.

9.2.1 Samudragupta

An inscription engraved (at a later date) on the Asokan pillar at Allahabad (known as *Prayagaprasasti*) gives us information about Samudragupta's accession and conquests. Harishena, an important official of the state, had composed 33 lines which were engraved on the pillar. The inscription mentions that *Maharajadhiraja* Chandragupta-I in a highly emotional tone declared his son Samudragupta as his successor. This caused joy among the courtiers and heart-burning among those of equal birth. It can be presumed that other princes might have put forward their contending claims which were put to rest by this declaration. Further, the discovery of some gold coins bearing the name of Kacha has generated a controversy relating to this. The controversy has arisen because;

- i. in many respects Kacha's coins are similar to the coins of Samudragupta,
- ii. the name of Kacha does not appear in the official lists of Gupta rulers, as they are available in the Gupta inscriptions.

Various interpretations have been given in this regard:

- According to one interpretation Samudragupta's brothers revolted against him and placed Kacha, the eldest brother, on the throne. However he died in the war of succession.
- Another view mentions that these coins were issued by Samudragupta in the memory of his brother.
- A third view mentions Kacha as the initial name of Samudragupta and the later name was adopted only after the conquest of south.

There is no solution to the controversy as each view has arguments in favour or against. We could only say that since the number of Kacha coins found so far is somewhat limited his hold over the throne would have been for a very short duration. Also that Samudragupta, instead of Chandragupta's abdication, did face problems in relation to accession to the throne but ultimately he emerged victorious.

9.2.2.1 Expansion and Consolidation

For the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta power Samudragupta adopted an aggressive policy of conquests. This initiated a process which culminated in the formation of the Gupta empire. However, we have to take note here of the fact that in certain regions- particularly in the South--he let the kings, whom he had defeated, rule over their regions. Of course, they accepted his suzerainty and paid tributes. Such a policy adopted in relation to the far-flung areas might have paid dividends in solving problems of communication and effective control, hence bringing about stability for the time being. Let us briefly discuss the aggressive campaigns taken by Samudragupta in various regions. We may mention again that we come to know about all the campaigns of Samudragupta only from one record, the *Prayagaprasasti* of Harishena.

1) Campaigns in Aryavarta

Some historians are of the view that Samudragupta carried his victorious campaign of Aryavarta at one time. However, some other historians, assuming that the *Prayagaprasasti* mentions the conquests of Samudragupta in a chronological order, have opined that there were two campaigns in north India. This is because the prasasti first mentions three Aryavarta kings, then it goes on to mention his southern campaign and again mentions nine Aryavarta kings. It appears that taking advantage of the war of succession, which Samudragupta had to face, certain rulers attempted to establish their dominance. It might be in this context that Samudragupta defeated Achyuta, Nagasena and Kota-Kulaja. There are no details regarding these conquests or regarding the identity of the specific regions over which they ruled. However, historians have identified Achyuta as ruling over Ahichchatra, Nagasena over Gwalior area and Kota-Kulaja or ruler of the Kota family in east Punjab and Delhi. Though differences continue to prevail over these identifications it is clear that Samudragupta, after defeating them, established firm control not only over the Ganga Valley but also over some adjacent regions.

2) Campaign in South

The *Prayagaprasasti* mentions twelve rulers from dakshinapatha or south India who were defeated by Samudragupta. These were:

- Mahendra of Kosala (Raipur, Durg, Sambalpur and Bilaspur districts)
- Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara (Jeypore, forest region of Odisha)
- Mantaraja of Kaurata (Probably Sonpur area in Madhya Pradesh or Plain country to the north-east of Mahendra hill)
- Mahendragiri of Pishtapura (Pithasuram, East Godavari district)

- Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district)
- Damana of Erandapalla (Chicacole or West Godavari district)
- Vishnugopa of Kanchi (Chingleput district)
- Nilaraja of Avamukta (Godavari Valley)
- Hasti-varman of Vengi (Cellor in the Krishna-Godavari delta)
- Ugresena of Palakka (Nellore district)
- Kubera of Devarastra (Yellamanchiti in Visakhapatnam district), and
- Dhananjaya of Kushthalpura (possibly in North Arcot district in Tamilnadu)

However, again there are differences among historians as to the specific identifications of these kings and their kingdoms. The *Prayagaprasasti* says that Samudragupta showed favour to be *Dakshinapatha* kings by first capturing them (*grahana*) and then releasing them (*moksha*). He pursued a completely different policy with regard to the kings of *Aryavarta* or north India. He not only defeated them but also annexed their territories which became integrated into the Gupta empire. The north Indian kings defeated by Samudragupta were Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Archyuta, Nandi, Balavarmna and others. It is impossible to identify all of them, but it is certain that they were ruling in different parts of northern India. Some of them were obviously Naga rulers who had been powerful in several regions before the Guptas. Rulers like Chandravarman who ruled in West Bengal represented new ruling families. The *Prasasti* further says that Samudragupta reduced all states in the forest regions to the position of servants. In another category are mentioned the frontier kingdoms like Samatata (in southeast Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Nepala (Nepal) and others and the republican states of the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, etc. They paid him tributes of all kinds, carried out his orders and paid him homage. Rulers of another category of states acknowledged his sovereignty in a different way. They pleased him by "self-surrender, offering (their own) daughters in marriage, and a request for the administration of their own districts and provinces". This means that they remained independent but their independence had to be approved by Samudragupta. In this category were included the foreign rulers of north-western India like the later Kushanas and the Saka chief and residents of different island countries including Simhala or Sri Lanka.

9.2.2 Chandragupta-II

The Gupta inscriptions mention Chandragupta-II as Samudragupta's successor. But on the basis of literary sources, some copper coins and inscriptions it is suggested that the successor was Samudragupta's other son Ramagupta. Visakhadatta's drama *Devi-Chandraguptam* mentions that Chandragupta-II killed his elder brother Ramagupta. He did this because Ramagupta was facing defeat at the hands of the

Sakas and in order to save the kingdom, he had agreed to surrender his wife to the Saka king. Chandragupta-II protested, and went to the Saka camp in the disguise of the queen Dhruvadevi. He was successful against the Saka king but as a result of the subsequent hostility with his brother he killed him and married his wife Dhruvadevi. Certain other texts like the *Harsacharita*, *Kavyamimansa*, etc., also refer to this episode. Some copper coins bearing the name Ramagupta have also been found and inscriptions on the pedestals of some Jaina images found at Vidisa, bear the name Maharaja Ramgupta. Similarly, Dhruvadevi is described as mother of Govindagupta (Chandragupta's son) in a Vaisali seal. We can say that Chandragupta ascended the throne at a time when there were problems emerging again and he had to lead military campaigns to establish Gupta supremacy once again. He entered into matrimonial alliances with the Nagas by marrying princess Kuberanaga whose daughter Prabhavati was later on married to Rudrasena-II of the Vakataka family. Though there is no record like the *Prayagaprasasti* to describe the events of his reign we do get information about Chandragupta's campaigns and successes from certain inscriptions, literary sources and coins: He defeated the Saka king Rudrasimha-III and annexed his kingdom. This brought an end to Saka Kshatrapa rule in western India and added the regions of Gujarat, Kathiawad and west Malwa to the Gupta empire. The details of Chandragupta's campaigns against the Sakas are not known. His matrimonial alliances with the Vakatakas and the Nagas must have been of tremendous significances in his preparations for the campaigns. Two inscriptions at the Udayagiri caves near Sanchi and one inscription at Sanchi, all referring to Chandragupta-II and to his subordinate rulers and military officials, also suggest that he was present in eastern Malwa for some time preparing for the campaigns. One inscription describes him as "desirous of conquering the whole earth". That his conquest of the territories of the Sakas was complete is proved beyond doubt because:

- We no longer find any Saka coins minted after this period, although Saka coins were being minted without a break for almost four hundred years previously.
- The Guptas, from the time of Chandragupta, started minting Saka-type silver coins for this region. They only added their own distinct symbols on these coins, otherwise, the coins were like Saka coins in circulation till then. This definitely shows that the Saka areas came within the control of Chandragupta-II.
- The success of Chandragupta-II against the Sakas seems to have developed later on into the tradition of Sakari Vikramaditya, that is, of Vikramaditya, who was an enemy of the Sakas.
- 'King Chandra', whose exploits have been mentioned in the Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription, which is located in the Qutab Minar complex in Delhi is identified by many scholars with Chandragupta-II. According to this inscription Chandra crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (identified with

Bactria). Some scholars identify Chandragupta-II with the hero of Kalidasa's work *Raghuvamasa* because Raghu's exploits appear comparable with those of Chandragupta.

- The Mehrauli inscription also mentions Chandragupta's victory over enemies from Vanga (Bengal).

On the basis of these evidences it can be suggested that Chandragupta-II was able to extend the frontiers of the Gupta empire to western, north-western and eastern India.

An important incident which took place during this period was the visit of Fa-Hien, a Chinese pilgrim, who came to India in search of Buddhist texts. In his memoirs he has given a vivid description of the places he visited and certain social and administrative aspects related to them. However, he does not mention the name of the King in his accounts. But he speaks highly of the King of *Madhyadesa*, the region which was directly ruled by the Gupta monarch in this period, under whom the people were prosperous and happy. Chandragupta-II is also known for his patronage to men of letters and he ruled till about 415-16 CE.

9.2.3 Kumaragupta-I

Chandragupta-II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta. We get information about him from certain inscriptions and coins. For example:

- The earliest known inscription of his period is from Bilsad (Etah district) which is dated 415 CE (Gupta Era 96).
- The Karamdanda (Faizabad) inscription of Kumaragupta's minister (436 CE) mentions his fame having spread to the four oceans.
- A stone inscription from Mandsor (436 CE) mentions Kumaragupta as reigning over the whole earth.
- The Damodarpur Copper Plate inscriptions (433 CE and 447 CE) refer to him as Maharajadhiraja and show that he himself appointed the governor (*Uparika*) of Pundravardhana *bhukti* (or province) being the biggest administrative division in the empire.
- The last known date of Kumaragupta is from a silver coin dated 455 CE (Gupta Era 136).

The wide area over which his inscriptions are distributed indicates that he ruled over Magadha and Bengal in the east and Gujarat in the west. It has been suggested that towards the last year of his reign the Gupta empire faced foreign invasion which was checked by the efforts of his son Skandagupta. He maintained cordial relationship with the Vakatakas which had been established through matrimonial alliances earlier.

9.2.4 Skandagupta

Skandagupta, who succeeded Kumaragupta-I was perhaps the last powerful Gupta monarch. To consolidate his position he had to fight the Pushyamitras, and the country faced Huna invasion from across the frontiers in the northwest. However, Skandagupta was successful in throwing the Huns back. It appears that these wars adversely affected the economy of the empire, and the gold coinage of Skandagupta bears testimony to that. In comparison to the gold coins of the earlier rulers the types of gold coins minted by Skandagupta were limited. In addition to following the earlier system of weights, he introduced a new, heavier weight system for gold coins but generally his coins had less gold in them than earlier coins.

Moreover, he appears to have been the last Gupta ruler to mint silver coins in western India. However, the Junagadh inscription of his reign tells us about the public works undertaken during his times. The Sudarsanalake (originally built during the Maurya times) burst due to excessive rains and in the early part of his rule his governor Pamadatta got it repaired. This indicates that the state undertook the task of public works. The last known date of Skandagupta is 467 CE from his silver coins.

Gupta Rulers after Skandagupta

It is not very clear in what order the successors of Skandagupta ruled. Skandagupta himself may not have been the rightful heir to the throne and therefore he had to fight other contenders to the throne. This may be the reason why a seal inscription traces a line of Gupta rulers after Skandagupta from Kumaragupta-I and his son Purugupta and not Skandagupta. Secondly, it is probable that the division of the Gupta empire into many parts already began towards the close of Skandagupta's reign. Thus an inscription from western Malwa, recorded in the last year of Skandagupta does not refer to him but to some other rulers beginning with Chandragupta-II.

Some of the successors of Skandagupta, mentioned in inscriptions, were: Budhagupta, Vainyagupta, Bhanagupta, Narasimhagupta Baladitya, Kumaragupta-II and Vismigupta. It is unlikely that all of them ruled over a vast empire, as Chandragupta-II and Kumaragupta-I had done in an earlier period. The Guptas continued to rule till about 550 CE, but by then their power had already become very insignificant.

9.2.5 Disintegration of the Gupta Empire

In this section we deal with some of the factors that contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta empire.

9.2.5.1 Huna Invasions

From the time of Kumaragupta-I the north-west borders had been threatened by the Hunas a Central Asian tribe which was successfully moving in different directions and was establishing pockets of rule in northwestern, northern and western India. But their attacks were repulsed during that period. However, towards the end of the fifth century CE the Huna chief Tormana was able to establish his authority over large parts of western India and in central India. Mihirakula, his son, further extended the dominions. Thus, the Huna attacks caused a major blow to the Gupta authority particularly in northern and western regions of the empire.

9.2.5.2 Administrative Weaknesses

The policy adopted by the Guptas in the conquered areas was to restore the authority of local chiefs or kings once they had accepted Gupta suzerainty. In fact, no efforts were made to impose a strict and effective control over these regions. Hence it was natural that whenever there was a crisis of succession or a weak monarchy within the Gupta empire these local chiefs would reestablish their independent authority. This created a problem for almost every Gupta King who had to reinforce his authority. The constant military campaigns were a strain on the state treasury. Towards the end of the fifth century CE and beginning of sixth century CE taking advantage of the weak Gupta emperors, many regional powers reasserted their authority, and in due course declared their independence.

Besides these, there were many other reasons which contributed to the decline of Guptas. For example, it has been argued that the Guptas issued land grants to the Brahmana donees and in this process surrendered the revenue and administrative rights in favour of the donees. Further, it is believed that the Sarnanta system in which the Samantas or minor rulers, who ruled as subordinates to the central authority, started to consolidate itself in the Gupta period. This is also believed to be the reason why Gupta administrative structure became so loose. There is diversity of opinion as to how the system originated and regarding the details of the system, but the presence of many Samantas within the empire does show that they wielded power almost independently of the Gupta authority.

There is no doubt that divisions within the imperial family, concentration of power in the hands of local chiefs or governors, loose administrative structure of the empire etc. contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta empire.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i. Chandragupta-I had a matrimonial alliance with Lichchhavis. ()

- ii. The Prayagaprasasti refers to the victories of Pravarsena. ()
 - iii. The Huna invasion during Kumaragupta's time was checked by Skandagupta. ()
 - iv. Fa-Hien came to India in search of Jaina texts. ()
 - v. Ramagupta is said to be Chandragupta-II's elder brother. ()
 - vi. Sudarshanlake was repaired during Skandagupta's rule. ()
- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the efforts made by Samudragupta for the expansion of Gupta empire.

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- 3) Discuss in about ten lines the military campaigns of Chandragupta-II.
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9.3 POLITY AND ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE GUPTAS

We have a few important sources for the study of the Gupta polity and administration. Some literary sources like various *Smritis*, *Manavadharmasastra*, *Yajnavalka Smritis*, *NaradaSmriti* and Kamandaka's *Nitisara*, etc., are important sources. The *Damodarapur* and the *Eran* inscriptions throw light on Gupta administration. Let us analyse the polity and administration of the Guptas. The 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.

9.3.1 King

The King remained the central figure of administration. However, there was a considerable change in the character of monarchy. We find that the Gupta monarchs adopted high sounding titles like: *Paramabhattacharaka*, *Parama-daivata*, *Chakravarti*, *Paramesvara*, etc. For example, the Allahabad *Prasasti* 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." Like the King who has been given a divine status in the *Smriti* scriptures, the Gupta monarchs too came to be considered a divinity on earth. However, in the spirit of *Smriti* literature and that of Kalidasa we find Skandagupta in his Bhitari Pillar inscription eulogized as a person who "subdued the earth and became merciful to the conquered people, but he became neither proud nor arrogant though his glory was increasing day by day", and his father Kumaragupta as a person who "followed the true path of religion". Such references to the monarchy indicate that instead of the supreme powers that vested in the King he was expected to follow a righteous path, and had certain duties *i.e.*,

- It was the King's duty to decide the policy of the state during war and peace. For instance, Samudragupta was prudent enough to reinstate the monarchs of *dakshinapatha* in their original kingdoms.
- It was considered a prime duty of the monarch to protect his countrymen from any invasion.
- The King was to lead the army in case of war. This is demonstrated through the campaigns of Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II.
- The King was also expected to support the Brahmanas, Sramanas and all others who needed his protection.
- He was also supposed to venerate the learned and religious people and give them every possible help.
- As the supreme judge he looked after administration of justice according to religious precepts and existing customs.
- It was the duty of the King to appoint his central and provincial officers.
- The *Prayagaprasasti* as well as the *Apratigha* type coins of Kumaragupta-I point to the appointment of successor to the throne by the reigning King.

An important political development of this period was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King, and the Gupta King would not interfere with the administration of such regions.

9.3.2 Council of Ministers and Other Officials

The Gupta inscriptions are not very clear about the hierarchy of ministers. However, there is no doubt that the King used to take counsel of his ministers and issue written instructions to officials on all important matters.

The minister's office was perhaps hereditary. For example, the Udayagiri inscription of the time of Chandragupta-II informs us that Virasena Saba, the minister for war and peace, was holding this office by inheritance. 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 traveler Fa-Hien states that capital punishment was not given at all.

There were some other high officials. For example, the *Mahapratihara* was the chief of the palace guards, the *Pratihara* regulated ceremonies and granted the necessary permits for admission to the royal presence. There existed an espionage system as in the earlier period. The land grant inscriptions often mention *Dutakas* who were associated with the task of implementing gifts when gifts of land were made to Brahmanas and others.

9.3.3 Army

The Guptas must have had a big army organisation. At the time of war the King led his army but ordinarily there was a minister called '*Sandhi-Vigrahika*' (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), *Asvapati* (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.

9.3.4 Revenue Administration

Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines. In Samudragupta's time we hear of an officer *Gopasramin* working as *Akshapataladhikrita*. His duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues from the sureties of servants, to check embezzlement and recover fines for loss due to neglect or fraud.

Another prominent high official was *Pustapala* (record-keeper). It was his duty to make enquiries before recording any transaction. The Gupta kings maintained a regular department for the proper survey and measurement of land as well as for the collection of land revenue. Kamandaka in the *Nitisara* suggests that a King should take special care of his treasury, for the life of the state depends solely on it.

Both Kalidasa and the author of the *Narada-Smriti* state that one-sixth ($\frac{1}{6}$) 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 organization of traders had to pay a certain commercial tax (*Sulka*), the non-payment of which resulted in cancellation of the right to trade and a fine amounting to eight times of the original *Sulka*. The King had a right to forced labour (*Visthi*), Bali and many other types of contributions. The King's income from royal lands and forests was considered as his personal income. Besides this, the King's treasury had a right to treasure troves (treasures in the forms of coin-hoards, jewels or other valuable objects, discovered from below the earth accidentally), digging of mines and manufacture of salt.

9.3.5 Judicial Administration

The inscriptions of the Guptas do not throw any definite light on their judicial system. The *Katyayana Smriti* lays down in the traditional way that the king is the highest judge. He personally attended the court to listen to cases and was assisted by the body of Ministers (*Amatyas*), Judges (*Pradvivaka*), Brahmins (*Purohita*). In the cities, the city magistrates were assisted by the heads of the *Shrenis* or guilds, merchants, etc. In the villages, the village *panchayats* or family gatherings (*Kulas*) disposed of the cases. The criminal law as a whole was lenient as testified to by the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien.

9.3.6 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*. In Bengal we hear of *Pundravardhara Bhukti* which corresponded to north Bengal. *Tira-bhukti* corresponded to north Bihar. The *Bhuktis* were governed by *Uparikas* directly appointed by the King. In areas like western Malwa we find local rulers like Bandhuvarman ruling as subordinate to Kumaragupta-I but Parnadana was appointed a governor in Saurashtra by Skandagupta.

The Province or *Bhukti* was again divided into districts or *Vishayas* under an official called *Ayuktaka* and in other cases a *Vistiyapati*. His appointment was made by the provincial governor. Gupta inscriptions from Bengal show that the office (*Adhikarana*) of the district-head associated with itself representation from major

local communities: the *Nagarasresthi* (head of city merchants). *Sarthavaha* (Caravan-leader). *Prathama-Kulika* (head of the artisan community and *Prathama Kayastha* (head of the *Kayastha* community). Besides them, there were the *Pustapalas*-officials whose work was to manage and keep records. The lowest unit of administration was the village. In villages there was a headman called *Gramapati* or *Gramadhayaksha*.

However, the Gupta inscriptions from north Bengal show that there were other units higher than the village. In some cases we find references to *Astakuladhikarana*. Different categories of villages mentioned as *Gramikas*, *Kutumbis* and *Mahattaras* sent representatives to these offices which on various occasions functioned above the level of the village.

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 institutions or bodies which looked after the affairs of the village. The village disputes were also settled by these (bodies) with the help of *Gramavridhdhas* or village elders.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mark which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).
 - i. The King no more remained a central figure under the Guptas. ()
 - ii. The King was to lead the army in case of war. ()
 - iii. Mahadandanayaka was the minister of revenues. ()
 - iv. One-sixth of the produce was claimed as royal revenue. ()
 - v. The highest unit of administration was the village.()

- 2) Write in about five lines about the revenue administration of Guptas.

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- 3) Write in about ten lines the powers and duties of the King.

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9.4 LET US SUM UP

In the beginning of the fourth century CE north India was divided into many small kingdoms and chiefdoms. These kingdoms in different regions often fought with each other. It was in such a political situation that the Gupta dynasty gained power and gradually established an empire. The kings of this dynasty undertook extensive military campaigns in different regions. It was under Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II that the imperial power was properly consolidated. The Guptas remained a strong force till the time of Skandagupta but after him the process of disintegration started. Various factors like foreign invasion, dissension within the ruling family, reassertion of power by local chiefs, administrative weakness, etc. hastened the process of disintegration. Considerable changes had taken place in the Gupta polities and administration when compared to the earlier periods. An important aspect related to kingship was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King

9.5 KEY WORDS

Consolidation: the action or process of making something stronger or more solid.

Eulogize: praise highly in speech or writing.

Polity: a form or process of civil government or constitution.

9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) i) × ii) √ iii) × iv) √ v) ×

2) See Sub-sec. 9.2.2.1

3) See sec. 9.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

1) i) √ ii) × iii) √ iv) × v) √

- 2) See Sub-sec. 9.3.4
- 3) See Sub-sec. 9.3.1

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UNIT 10 : POST-GUPTA POLITIES - PALLAVAS, CHALUKYAS, AND VARDHANAS

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Pallavas
- 10.3 Chalukyas
 - 10.3.1 Chalukyas Badami
 - 10.3.2 Chalukyas Vengi
- 10.4 Vardhanas/Pushyabhutis
 - 10.4.1 Harshavardhana
- 10.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.6 Key Words
- 10.7 Answers to Check Progress Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- learn about the political changes that took place after the disintegration of the Gupta empire,
- know about the emergence of various political powers which were gradually gaining importance,
- discuss the origin and growth of the power of the Pallavas, Chalukyas and Vardhanas.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

After the downfall of the Gupta Empire, the provinces and feudatory states declared their independence and number of new political powers emerged both in northern and southern India. In certain regions new kingdoms emerged and in other areas the dynasties which had earlier accepted Gupta suzerainty now declared their independence. In this unit we will discuss about the rise of the major political powers *i.e.* Pallavas, Chalukyas and Vardhanas/Pushyabhutis in the post Gupta era.

10.2 PALLAVAS

The Pallavas were one of the most important powers of South India. They replaced the Ikshvakus from the Krishna-Guntur region. After the fall of the Satavahanas, the Pallavas made themselves the masters of the entire region from Krishna to the Palar River with Kanchi as their capital. A variety of opinions exist regarding the genealogy and chronology of the Pallavas. The term Pallava means 'creeper', and is a Sanskrit version of the Tamil word '*tondai*', which also carries the same meaning. Probably the Pallavas were a local tribe who established their authority in the Tondainadu or the land of creepers. The earliest records of the Pallavas are inscriptions in Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil languages.

Simha Vishnu (575-600 CE) was one of the most powerful rulers of the Pallava kingdom. He waged war against the Cholas, the Pandyas and their allies. During the last quarter of the 6th century CE he extended his power up to the Kaveri River. He was succeeded by his son Mahendravarman-I (600-630 CE). He was a dramatist, musician and a poet. He was the author of a play, '*Mattaritasa-Prahasana*'. He suffered several defeats at the hands of Chalukya king Pulakesin-II. Pulakesin-II even occupied Vengi and appointed his brother Vishnuvardhana as the viceroy of that area. Later on Vishnuvardhana started the line of the Eastern Chalukyas with Vengi as the capital.

Narasimhavarman-I (630-660 CE) was the son and successor of Mahendravarman-I. His surname was Mahamalla. He not only resisted the second invasion of Pulakesin-II, but also killed him and thereafter captured the Chalukyan capital Vatapi or Badami. After this success he won the title of 'Vatapikonda'. During his reign the famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang visited Kanchi in 642 CE. He was a great lover of art.

The Chalukya king Vikramaditya-I defeated and killed the Pallava ruler Mahendravarman-II (668-670 CE). The next Pallava ruler Parameshwaravarman-I (670-680 CE) lost his capital Kanchi to Chalukya king Vikramaditya-I, soon recovered it. Parameshwaravarman-I was succeeded by his son and successor Narasimhavarman-II (680-720 CE). He is also known as Rajasimha. His period is marked by peace and prosperity. The famous Kailasanatha temple of Kanchi and the Shore temple at Mahamallapura were constructed by him. He is said to have sent embassies to China. Maritime trade flourished during his reign.

The next Pallava ruler Parameshwaravarman-II (728-731 CE) faced the combined attack of Chalukyas and the Gangas and he was killed in that attack. During the reign of Pallava king Nandivarman II (731-795 CE), the Chalukya king Vikramaditya II

invaded and captured the Pallava capital, but withdrew from Kanchi without destroying it. Nandivarman-II constructed the Vaikuntaperumal temple at Kanchi.

Aparajita was the last ruler of the Pallavas. He was defeated by Aditya Chola-I in the early 10th century CE. Thus the Imperial Cholas overthrew the Pallavas and this marked an end to the Pallava rule.

The Pallava rulers greatly contributed in the field of art, architecture and literature. A large number of temples were constructed by the Pallava rulers which are known for their architectural beauty. Amongst such temples mention may be made of the rock-out temples at Bhairavakonda, the Anantesvara temple at Undavalli, the Rathas of Mahabalipuram, the Shore temple of Jalashayanaswami, the Kailashanatha temple at Kanchipuram, the Vaikuntaperumal temple at Kanchi, the Muktesvara temple, and the Matangesvara temple at Kanchi etc. The best example of Pallava sculpture is the 'Descent of the Ganga' or Arjuna's Penance at Mahabalipuram.

The Pallava capital Kanchi was a great center of Sanskrit learning and Sanskrit was the official language of the Pallavas. Both Bharavi, the author of Kiratarjuniyam and Dandin, the author of Dasakumarcharitam, lived in the Pallava court.

10.3 CHALUKYAS

The Chalukyas were one of the most important regional powers amongst others that emerged in southern India in the post Gupta era. From the mid-sixth century CE the Chalukyas had replaced the Vakatakas as the major power in the Deccan. The Chalukyas claimed descent from the lunar race but opinion differs regarding their origin. The Chalukyas ruled over four different regions of India at different periods of time. They were also known as the Chalukyas of Badami, the Chalukyas of Vengi, the Chalukyas of Kalyani and the Chalukyas of Anhilwada. However, we will confine our discussion to Chalukyas of Badami and Vengi, as Chalukyas of Kalyani and Anhilwada came to power after 750 CE.

10.3.1 ChalukyasBadami

The Chalukyas began their base at northern Mysore at Vatapi or Badami and the adjacent Aihole. From here they moved northwards and then they annexed the former kingdom of the Vakatakas, which was centered round Nasik and the upper Godavari. The Chalukya power at Badami had a humble beginning under Jayasimha and his son Ranaraga. It is said that after defeating the Rashtrakuta king Indra, Jayasimha established his authority at Badami and marked the beginning of the political history of the Chalukyas. Pulakesin-I (550-566 CE) was the third ruler of the Chalukyas of Badami and he was the real founder of the Chalukya dynasty of

Badami. Hemade Vatapi or Badami as his capital. He adopted the title of “Vallabhashvara” and also performed the ‘Ashvamedha’ sacrifice. He was succeeded by Kirtivarman-I. By defeating the Mauryas of North-Konkana and the Nalas of Nanavadi, Kirtivarman-I extended his kingdom. He invaded the territories of Bihar and Bengal in the north and the Chola-Pandya region in the south. He was succeeded by his brother Mangalesa. Mangalesa began to rule as a regent because Pulakesin-II (the son of Kirtivarman-I) was a minor. Mangalesa defeated the Kalachuris of Chedi and established the authority of the Chalukyas over the entire areas between the western and eastern seas. Soon a civil war started between Mangalesa and Pulakesin-II when the former refused to hand over the power to the later. In this fight Mangalesa met his death.

Pulakesin II after defeating his uncle Mangalesa, ascended to the throne in 609 CE. He raised the power and prestige of the Chalukyas of Badami. He adopted the title of Satyashraya. The western Gangas and the Alupas in the south and the Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras in the north accepted the suzerainty of Pulakesin-II. He even defeated Harshavardhana. His first expedition against the Pallava ruler Mahendravarman-I was a great success and he annexed Vengi. Pulakesin-II appointed his brother Vishnuvardhanaas Yuvaraja to govern that area. This marked the beginning of the Eastern Chalukyas or the Chalukyas of Vengi. Unfortunately Pulakesin’s second invasion against the Pallavas ended in failure. In about 642 CE the Pallava king Narasimhavarman-I occupied the Chalukya capital at Badami. Probably in this fight Pulakesin-II was killed. Pulakesin-II sent an ambassador to Iran in 625 CE and in return the Iranian king Khusrau-II also sent an ambassador to the Chalukya capital Badami. In about 641 CE the famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang visited the kingdom of Pulakesin-II. Pulakesin-II also encouraged art and architecture and also promoted religion and learning. His court poet Ravi Kirti wrote his eulogy in the Aihole inscription.

Pulakesin-II was succeeded by his son Vikramaditya-I. Here stored the power of the Chalukyas by regaining the territories which were earlier lost to the Pallavas. He even plundered the Pallava capital Kanchi. He was succeeded by his son Vinayaditya, whose region was generally peaceful and prosperous. The next ruler of the dynasty was Vijayaditya. His region was the longest, the most prosperous and peaceful one. Vikramaditya-II succeeded him. It is said that Vikramaditya-II had overrun Kanchi three times. In around 740 CE he completely routed the Pallavas which marked the end of the Pallava supremacy in southern India. He also resisted the Arab invasion of south Gujarat. The last ruler of the Chalukyas of Badami was Kirtivarman-II. He was defeated by one of his feudatories, Dantidurga. Thereafter Dantidurga founded the Rashtrakuta dynasty which finally put an end to the Chalukya dynasty of Badami.

The Chalukya rulers of Badami had immense contribution in the field of art, architecture and temple-building. They had developed the Deccan or Vesara style in the building of structural temples. They also had perfected the art of stone building without mortar. Under their patronage, the Buddhists, Jainas and Brahmanas competed with each other in building cave temples. Large numbers of temples were constructed under the patronage of the Chalukya rulers of Badami. These temples represented various architectural styles. Some of the temples constructed during that period were the temples at Aihole and Badami, the Ladhkan temple, the Durga temple, the Hucimaligudi temple, the Jain temple at Meguti, the Melagitti Sivalaya, the Papanath temple and the Virupaksha temple etc.

10.3.2 Chalukyas Vengi

Pulakeshin-II conquered the eastern Deccan, corresponding to the coastal districts of modern Andhra Pradesh in 616, defeating the remnants of the Vishnukundina kingdom. He appointed his brother Kubja Vishnuvardhana as Viceroy in 621 CE. Thus the Eastern Chalukyas were originally of Kannada stock. After the death of Pulakeshin-II, the Vengi Viceroyalty developed into an independent kingdom and included the region between Nellore and Visakhapatnam. After the decline of the Badami Chalukya empire in the mid-8th century, territorial disputes flared up between the Rashtrakutas, the new rulers of the western deccan, and the Eastern Chalukyas. For much of the next two centuries, the Eastern Chalukyas had to accept subordination towards the Rashtrakutas. Apart from a rare military success, such as the one by Vijayaditya-II (c.808–847 CE), it was only during the rule of Bhima-I (c.892–921 CE) that these Chalukyas were able to celebrate a measure of independence. After the death of Bhima-I, the Andhra region once again saw succession disputes and interference in Vengi affairs by the Rashtrakutas.

The fortunes of the Eastern Chalukyas took a turn around 1000 CE. Danarnava, their king, was killed in battle in 973 CE by the Telugu Choda King Bhima who then imposed his rule over the region for twenty-seven years. During this time, Danarnava's two sons took refuge in the Chola kingdom. Choda Bhima's invasion of Tondaimandalam, a Chola territory, and his subsequent death on the battlefield opened up a new era in Chola–Chalukya relations. Saktivarman-I, the elder son of Danarnava was crowned as the ruler of Vengi in 1000 CE, though under the control of king Rajaraja Chola-I. This new relationship between the Cholas and the coastal Andhra kingdom was unacceptable to the Western Chalukyas, who had by then replaced the Rashtrakutas as the main power in the western Deccan. The Western Chalukyas sought to brook the growing Chola influence in the Vengi region but were unsuccessful.

Initially, the Eastern Chalukyas had encouraged Kannada language and literature, though, after a period of time, local factors took over and they gave importance to Telugu language. Telugu literature owes its growth to the Eastern Chalukyas.

10.4 VARDHANAS/PUSHYABHUTIS

A variety of sources inform us about the rise of the family of Pushyabhutis which first ruled from Thaneshwar in Haryana and later from Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh. These sources include the text *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta, accounts of Hiuen-tsang and some inscriptions and coins etc. Banabhatta informs us that the founder king of this dynasty at Thaneshwar was Pushyabhuti and that the family was known as Pushyabhutivamsa. However, the inscriptions of Harsha make no reference to him. The Banskhera and Madhuvan plates and royal seals mention five earlier rulers among whom the first three are given the title of Maharaja. This may indicate that they were not sovereign monarchs. The fourth king Prabhakarvardhana has been described as a Maharajadhiraja which makes us infer that he was an independent monarch and had established matrimonial relations with the Maukharis by marrying his daughter Rajyasri with Grahavarman.

Thaneshwar, during this time (about 604 CE) was threatened by the Hunas from the western side. Banabhatta has described Prabhakarvardhana as "a lion to the Huna deer". According to him an army under Rajyavardhana was sent to defeat the Hunas but due to the sudden illness of his father he had to come back. With Prabhakarvardhana's death the family had to face troubled times for a while. The Malava king killed Grahavarman and took, Rajyasri prisoner. It appears that the Malava and the Gauda kings entered into alliance and even Thaneshwar was threatened. Rajyavardhana defeated the Malavas but was killed through treachery by Sasanka, the Gauda king. Now it was Harsha's responsibility to seek revenge and in due course he was able to establish a strong empire.

10.4.1 Harshavardhana

Harsha ascended the throne of Thaneshwar around 606 CE and immediately marched against the Gaudas. He also entered into an alliance with Bhaskarvarman-the king of Pragyaotisha (Assam) as both had a common enemy in Sasanka, the king of Gauda (Bengal). We have no information whether Harsha entered into battle with Sasanka but he was able to save his sister Rajyasri and the kingdoms of Thaneshwar and Kanauj were combined with Harsha now ruling from Kanauj. In fact Hiuen-tsang's account mentions him and his predecessors as rulers of Kanauj. Both Bana and Hiuen-tsang refer to Harsha's vow of defeating other kings. Subsequently, he fought the rulers of Valabhi and Gurjaras in the west; Chalukyas in the Deccan; and Magadha and Gauda in the east:

- The Maitrakas of Valabhi had emerged as a strong power in the Saurashm region of Gujarat. Valabhi is generally identified with Wala, 18 miles from Bhavnagar in Kathiawar. We find the names of five Valabhi kings who were contemporaries of Harsha. Hiuen-tsang has mentioned the Valabhi king Dhruvasena-II Baladitya as Harsha's son-in-law who also attended the religious assembly called by Harsha at Prayaga. This indicates that Harsha's hostilities with Valabhis ended through a matrimonial alliance. However, through the inscriptions of Gurjara kings we know that their king Dadda-II, had supported the Valabhis. The Valabhis remained a strong power during the reign of Harsha.
- From Bana's account we know that the Gurjaras were hostile to the Vardhanas. A family of Gurjara rulers was ruling at Nandipuri in the Broach region of Gujarat in this period. This might have continued during the period of Harsha. It appears that the Gurjaras accepted the suzerainty of Chalukyas of Badami in Karnataka as a safeguard against Harsha, for the Aihole inscription mentions Lata, Malava and Gurjara as feudatories of Pulakasin-II, the Chalukya ruler.
- An eulogy or prasasti of Pulakasin-II, placed on a temple wall at Aihole, also mentions Pulakesin's military success against Harshavardhana.
- Hiuen-tsang's account mentions that instead of his victories over many kingdoms he was not able to defeat Pulakasin-II, the Chalukya ruler of Badami in Karnataka. We have no details of the battle and where it was fought but this is clear that Harsha could not achieve success against Pulakesin-II.
- Harsha was successful in his eastern campaigns. A Chinese account mentions him as the king of Magadha in 641 CE, we have already mentioned his alliance with Bhaskaravarman the king of Assam and it is possible that they jointly conducted campaigns in Bengal and other parts of eastern India.
- Harsha had diplomatic relations with the Chinese for his contemporary Tang emperor sent three embassies to his court. The last of these, under Wang-hiuentse, arrived in India in 647 CE when Harsha was no longer alive. Harsha himself had sent a Brahmana envoy to China in 641 CE. Harsha ruled for a period of 41 years and is said to have died about 647 CE. The administrative set-up under Harsha was in some ways a continuation of the system prevalent under the Guptas. Hiuen-tsang mentions that Harsha used to take up tours throughout his kingdom. The king remained the supreme authority, assisted by his ministers and other officials of different categories.

For example, the Madhuban copper plate mentions the names of various officials like *uparika* (provincial governor), *Senapati* (Army chief), *Dutaka* (informer), etc. However, his inscriptions, Bana's *Harshacharita* and Hiuen-tsang's account leave no doubt that the stability of the administration and of the empire had come to depend much on the support of allies and feudatories (*Samantas* and *Mahasamantas*). The officials, it appears, were not paid salaries in cash. Instead, they were given land as

payment for their services. The law and order situation seems to have slackened during this period as Hiuen-tsang himself had to face plunder by dacoits.

The Banskhera, Nalanda and Sonapat Inscriptions of Harsha describe him as a worshipper of Siva. However, later on he became a Buddhist and convened a conference at Kanauj. Here the doctrines of Mahayana were propagated with utmost precision. This assembly, according to Hiuen-tsang, was attended by eighteen kings and three thousand monks and continued for eighteen days. Another such event during Harsha's reign was the Quinquennial distribution ceremony at Prayaga. Harsha performed five such ceremonies in his last thirty years. He used to distribute all the treasures accumulated during the last five years in these ceremonies.

Learning and education got royal patronage during this period. Nalanda University had more than ten thousand students. Harsha had given hundred villages in donation to this University.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×)?
 - i. Narasimhavarman-I was the son of Mahendravarman I. ()
 - ii. Aparajita was the first ruler of the Pallavas. ()
 - iii. Jayasimha defeated the Rashtrakuta king Indra. ()
 - iv. Hiuen-t-sang was an Arab traveller. ()
 - v. Harsha defeated Pulakesin-II. ()
 - vi. Harsha did not convene a Buddhist conference. ()

- 2) Explain in ten lines about conflict between Pallava-Chalukya.

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- 3) Discuss the conquest of Pulakesin-II. Answer in ten lines.

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10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress

- 1) i) \checkmark ii) \times iii) \checkmark iv) \times v) \times vi) \times
- 2) See sec. 10.2
- 3) See Sub-sec. 10.3.1
- 4) See Sub-sec. 10.4.1

SUGGESTED READINGS

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