
UNIT 4 : THE MAURYAN EMPIRE : CONQUEST AND ADMINISTRATION

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- trace the foundation of the Mauryan empire,
- discuss Ashoka and his Dhamma,
- discuss the Mauryan Administrative system,
- know about the disintegration of the Maurya Empire.

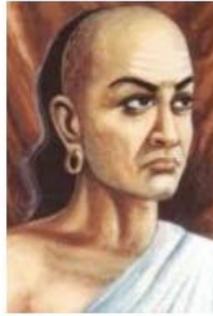
4.2 INTRODUCTION

In unit 5 we have already discussed the sixteen *mahajanapadas*. In the 6th century B.C the entire northern territory was divided into 16 *mahajanapadas*. Among the sixteen *mahajanapadas*, there was Magadha, which became the most powerful *mahajanapada* between the 6th and the 4th century B.C. The growth of Magadha culminated in the emergence of the Mauryan Empire. In this unit we will discuss the rise and fall of the Mauryan Empire.

4.3 RISE OF THE MAURYA

The rise of the Maurya and the foundation of the Mauryan Empire are considered a landmark event in Indian history. This Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya by defeating the Nandas in 321 B.C. It is said that he was guided by a Brahmana named Kautilya or Chanakya, who was traditionally believed to be the Prime Minister of Chandragupta.

Figure 7.1: Kautilya or Chanakya



Source: Google Images

Historians have used a variety of sources to learn about the rise of Chandragupta Maurya and his Empire. We have different opinions about the origin of the Mauryas. According to Buddhist traditions, they were a branch of the Kshatriya *Moria* class associated with the *Sakyas*. But according to the Puranic tradition, Chandragupta Maurya was the son of the last Nanda king from his Sudra concubine, Mura. The name Maurya is believed to be derived from his mother's name Mura.

Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of the growing weakness and unpopularity of the Nandas in the last days of their rule. Though Chandragupta's military strength was inferior to that of the Nandas, his superior strategy helped him. Once he established his control over the Ganga plain, he moved to the North-West. He liberated North-Western India from the Greek General Seleukos Nikatar, the successor of Alexander the Great. A treaty was signed in 303 B.C. and some Seleucid territories were ceded to the Mauryan kingdom. There was also a possible marriage alliance between the two royal families. Thus, the territorial foundation of the Mauryan Empire was laid and Chandragupta established his control over the Gangetic plains and the Indus Valley.

The Mauryan contact with the Greeks was important for territorial expansion, as well as for the development of friendly relations between the two. It led to the creation of a new cultural development. Besides, exchange of envoys between the Mauryan and the Seleucids, there was also the exchange of envoys with the Greek states of the West. Seleukos sent an envoy, Megasthenes to the Mauryan court. The latter spent considerable time at the capital Pataliputra and in his treatise *Indika* he had left a valuable account of the city and also of Indian society.

According to Jaina tradition, Chandragupta became an ardent Jaina towards the end of his life. He made his son Bindusara, the king of Magadha, become an ascetic. He went to South India and there he ended his life by regulated slow starvation in the orthodox Jaina manner.

Bindusara ascended the throne in about 297 B.C. According to Buddhist tradition he was associated with the *Ajivika* sect. A Tibetan history of the Buddha suggests that Bindusara campaigned in the Deccan. However it is not sure whether this land was occupied by Bindusara or his son Asoka. He too continued to exchange embassies with Greece and showed interest in Greek philosophy. Bindusara died in 272 B.C. By then a large part of India had come under Mauryan sovereignty.

LET US KNOW

The account of Megasthenes does not exist in full. But quotations occur in the works of several subsequent Greek writers. These fragments have been collected and published in the form of a book called Indika or An Account of India.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 1: Who founded the Mauryan Empire?

.....

Q 2: Who was Kautilya?

.....

Q 3: Who was the Greek envoy to the Mauryan court?

.....

Q 4: When was Mauryan Empire established?

.....

Q 5: Who ascended the throne after Chandragupta Maurya?

.....

Q 6: Write a note on the foundation of the Mauryan Empire (within 60 words).

.....

.....

.....

4.4 ASOKA AND HIS DHAMMA

Asoka who ascended the Mauryan throne after his father's death was well known for his *Dhamma*. He was a great ruler. But it was his *Dhamma* which made him a popular ruler and which won the hearts of his subjects. In this section we are going to discuss about the religious policy of Asoka which centred round the *Dhamma*. Before going into it we will discuss in brief the early life of Asoka.

- **Early Life of Asoka**

Bindusara was succeeded by his son Asoka, who is considered the greatest of the Mauryan rulers. We can know about Asoka through his edicts distributed over a large part of India. They give us a detailed account about his life and various activities. The edicts of the earlier half of Asoka's reign were inscribed on rock surfaces and are therefore called the Minor and Major Rock edicts. In the later part of his reign, his edicts were inscribed on well polished sandstone monolithic pillars which are called Pillar Edicts.



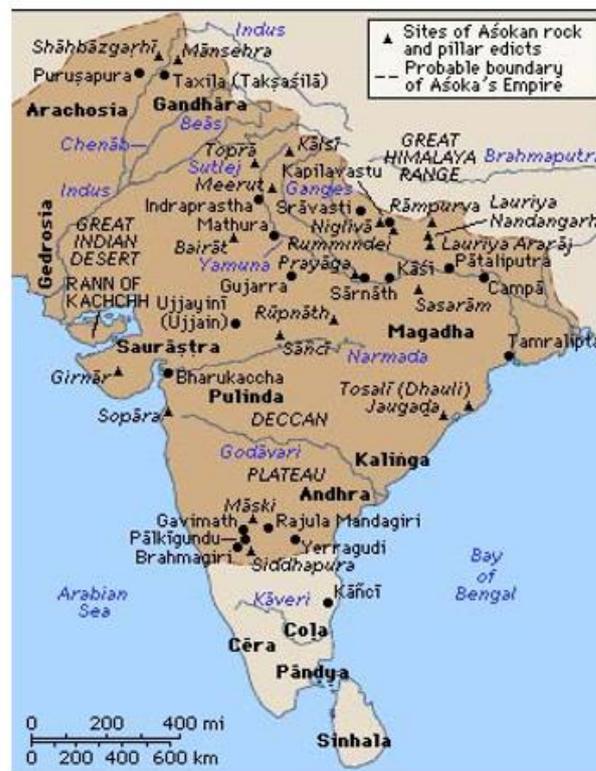
Source: Google Images

LET US KNOW

In 1834 James Prinsep deciphered the Brahmi script in which the edicts of Asoka were inscribed. Though most of the Asokan edicts were written in Prakrit, some edicts found in North-West of India were in Aramaic and Greek languages. Most Prakrit edicts were written in Brahmi script. However some edicts of North-West were written in Kharosthi. Greek and Aramaic scripts were used for edicts in Afghanistan.

However, for the early life of Asoka we have to depend upon the Buddhist account. According to Buddhist tradition he was appointed governor of Taxila and Ujjain during the reign of Bindusara. There is a controversy regarding his accession to the throne. Whether he ascended the throne immediately after his father's death or whether there was a four year *interregnum* involving a struggle for the throne with his brothers is not very clear.

Figure 7.3: Asoka's Empire



Source: Google map

The most important event in the early life of Asoka was the famous campaign in Kalinga in about 261 B.C. It was possible that the main motive behind this campaign was to obtain resources from Kalinga, to safeguard the trade routes with the peninsula or to give Kalingans a lesson for overthrowing Magadhan control. But the large scale deaths in the war moved the king. After this incident he became attracted to Buddhism. But the conversion did not take place immediately. It took almost two and a half years for him to embrace Buddhism.

During Asoka's reign the Third Buddhist Council met at Pataliputra in 250 B.C. This council decided to send missionaries to various regions. Accordingly Asoka sent his people outside India to spread Buddhism.

- **Asoka's Religious Policy**

The Kalinga war opened a new chapter in the life of Asoka. He developed a philosophy based on his interpretation of *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* is the **Prakrit** form of the Sanskrit word Dharma, which means the universal law or righteousness. However, Asoka gave it a wider meaning.

The *Dhamma* which Asoka preached was not simple piety but the specific code of moral duties laid down for the common people. Asoka wanted to transform Buddhism into a popular religion. His edicts are, therefore, of two kinds: (a) The smaller group of edicts was addressed to the Buddhist *Sangha*. These edicts describe his adherence to Buddhism and his relationship with the Buddhist *Sangha* or community of monks. (b) The larger group of edicts on the rock surfaces is more important. The Minor Rock Edicts and Major Rock Edicts and the Pillar Edicts define Asoka's concept of *Dhamma*.

Some historians thought that there was no difference between Asoka's *Dhamma* and Buddhism. But from his edicts it appears that Asoka wanted to use his *Dhamma* to reduce social conflict and intolerance. He especially emphasized tolerance towards all people and towards their beliefs and ideas. Therefore, the principle of *Dhamma* was defined in such a way that it should be acceptable to people belonging to any religious sect. However, his *Dhamma* was influenced to a great extent by the teachings of Buddha, especially the emphasis on non-violence and proper behavior towards all.

One important principle of Asoka's *Dhamma* was harmonious living. Therefore, he discouraged assemblies and gatherings which created differences of opinions. Another principle of *Dhamma* was non-violence. He discouraged war conquest by violence and prohibited killing of animals on certain specified occasions. However, Asoka recognized the occasions where violence was unavoidable.

Asoka opposed the practice of many orthodox ceremonies and maintained that the practice of morality was more important than the observance of rituals. Rock Edict XI is concerned with the practice of morality, such as giving respect to the elders, being charitable towards friends, slaves and servants, etc.

Asoka appointed *Dhammamahamatras* for propagating *Dhamma*. The activities of the *Dhammamahamatras* were not restricted to any particular community. They were expected to work impartially among all sects.

Thus, for Asoka *Dhamma* was a way of life based on harmonious blending of social ethics, moral virtues and civic responsibility. However, his policy of *Dhamma* did not succeed. It may be because he was too much occupied with his efforts to spread Buddhism and he did succeed in transforming this local creed in the Gangetic Valley into a world religion.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 7: Who succeeded Bindusara?

.....

Q 8: Where did the Third Buddhist Council meet?

.....

Q 9: Asoka was appointed as governor ofand
during the reign of Bindusara.

Q 10: Into how many types Asoka's edicts can be divided?

.....

Q 11: Whom did Asoka appoint for propagating Dhamma?

.....

4.5 MAURYAN ADMINISTRATION

The Mauryan dynasty organized a very elaborate system of administration. We can collect information about the Mauryan administration from the accounts left by Megasthenes, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the inscriptions or edicts of Asoka.

4.5.1 Central Administration

The king was the pivot of the administrative structure in the Mauryan Empire. He had absolute power in the administration. However, the king was expected to consult with his ministers, but the final decision lay with him.

The king was assisted by a Council of Ministers, the *Mantri Parishad*. According to *Arthashastra*, two important officers in the central administration were *Sannidhata* (the treasurer) and *Samaharta* (the chief collector). The treasurer was the custodian of the realized revenue. The chief collector supervised the collection of revenue from the whole kingdom.

Another important officer of the Mauryan administration was the *Adhyakshas* or superintendents. We find mention of about 32 superintendents in charge of different departments. They were linked to local administration and the central government. The different departments were treasury, mines, metals, mint, salts, gold, trade, forest produce, weights and measures, tolls, agriculture, infantry, horses, chariots, elephants, shipping, cattle, gambling, jail, ports, etc.

One-quarter of the total revenue was reserved for salaries of the officials and for public works. The salaries of the higher officials were very high. Public works covered a wide range of activity - building and maintaining roads; wells and rest houses; planting trees; irrigation projects; maintaining the army; running the mines; the grants of the royal family to the religious institutions and individuals and the maintenance of the royal family.

LET US KNOW

Some changes in the Mauryan administration were brought about by Asoka. Traditional Mauryan concept of kingship was softened by Asoka's paternalistic concept. In a separate Kalinga edict, Asoka declared- 'All men are my children'. Asoka appointed a new class of officials known as *Dhammamahamatras* to promote the material and spiritual wellbeing of the people.

The administration of the capital Pataliputra was well planned. It was looked after by a Municipal Commission consisting of thirty members. The commission was divided into six boards or committees of five members each. These committees looked after industrial arts, foreigners, registration of births and deaths, trade and commerce, manufactured articles and collection of tax and sold goods.

Espionage was recognized as an official activity in the Mauryan Empire. A large number of spies were appointed who transmitted secret and confidential reports to the king. Spies helped to maintain contact with even the remote parts of the Empire.

4.5.2 Provincial Administration

There were five major political centres in the Mauryan Empire, as mentioned in the Asokan inscription. We have already discussed about that the capital Pataliputra had well planned administered. The other four centres were: Taxila, Ujjain, Tosali and Suvarnagiri. They were each placed under a governor who usually belonged to the imperial family. Governors of smaller units were selected from local people. Senior officers called *Pradeshikas* visited the provinces every five years to check the administration. Another group of officers called *Rajukas* were appointed both in cities and villages to look after the judicial matter. *Yukta* was appointed for recording information coming from various sources.

According to Arthashastra, provinces were further sub-divided into *Vishayas* or districts and district into villages. In each village, there was an accountant and a tax collector. The *gramas* or village headman was responsible to them.

4.5.3 The Army

The Mauryan Empire maintained a huge army. According to the account of a Roman writer called Pliny, Chandragupta maintained 600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry and 9000 elephants. Another source tells us that Mauryas also had 8000 chariots. Megasthenes mentions that a committee with six sub-committees was responsible for coordinating military activity. Of these, one looked after the navy, the second managed transport and provisions, the third was responsible for infantry, the fourth for horses, the fifth for chariots and the sixth for elephants. According to Megasthenes, the soldiers received regular pay from the state. Kautilya mentions a *Navadhyaks* or superintendent of ships. Therefore it is possible that the Mauryans possessed a navy.

LET US KNOW

The Mauryans had chosen their provincial centres very carefully. Both Taxila and Ujjain were situated on important long-distance trade routes. Suvarnagiri was possibly located in one such way that facilitated the collection of gold from the mines of Karnataka.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 12: Who was the head of the administration in the Mauryan Empire?

.....

Q 13: Who looked after the collection of revenue in the Mauryan Empire?

.....

Q 14: How many political centres were there in the Mauryan Empire?

.....

Q 15: Who was Samaharta ?

.....

Q 16: Who was Adhyaksha?

.....

Q 17: Who was Pradeshika?

.....

Q 18: Who was Navadhyak?

.....

Q 19: Prepare a note on the central administration of the Mauryas? (Answer in about 60 words)

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.....

.....

.....

4.6 DISINTEGRATION OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

Asoka died in about 232 B.C. With his death, the Mauryan Empire began to disintegrate. The last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha, was assassinated by his Brahmana commander Pushyamitra Sunga. Following this Pushyamitra established the rule of the Sunga dynasty.

Earlier, it was accepted that Asoka's policy was mainly responsible for the decline of the Mauryas. It was believed that his inclination towards Buddhism offended the Brahmanas, who revolted against him. But if we consider his policy we see that Asoka repeatedly emphasized on showing respect to Brahmanas and Shramanas.

It is also said that Asoka's policy of non-violence weakened the Mauryan army. As a result, the foreign invaders got an opportunity to attack the Empire. But this cannot be accepted as we have already discussed in the previous section that though Asoka accepted the policy of non-violence, yet he mentioned the use of violence where necessary.

Therefore, the causes for the decline of the Mauryas must lie elsewhere. The pressure on the Mauryan economy can be considered as a cause for the downfall. The vast expenses of the Empire to maintain an army, to pay the ministers and to meet the cost of establishing settlements in newly cleared land could have drained the treasury.

Although Mauryan economy was based on agriculture, yet it might be possible that the revenue collected from agriculture was not sufficient to maintain the whole Empire. Probably the Mauryas did not restructure the economy sufficiently to provide long-term support to the Empire.

Mauryan administration was also in a way responsible for the decline of the Empire. In the Mauryan Empire the Emperor was the central figure around whom the administration revolved. When a ruler changed, the new ruler was required to possess the capability to attract the loyalty of the people by being an efficient administrator. But the successor of Asoka lacked this essential quality.

In the Mauryan administration the process of recruitment was arbitrary. Local governors had the power to change their officers. So many a time they chose a person of their choice ignoring the capability.

Another problem was the absence of representative institutions in the Empire. For a vast Empire like that of the Mauryas, representative institutions were required to stabilize public opinion.

It is very essential for the survival of the state to get loyalty of the people. But in the Mauryan system, loyalty was directed to the social order. Because of the interdependence of caste and politics, gradually caste was given higher status than politics. According to Arthashastra, a state should have seven limbs - the king, the territory, the administration, the treasury, the capital, coercive powers, and allies. Gradually, Brahmanical text emphasized on two factors for the existence of a state - one was *Danda* and the other was *Varnasramadharma*. Gradually the *varna-ashramadharma* became more important than the state.

The successors of Asoka could not maintain the mighty fabric of the Empire. Immediately after his death, one of his sons Jalauka set up an independent principality in Kashmir. Another prince, Virasena made himself independent in Gandhara. Vidarbha or Berar also separated from the Mauryan Empire. The Greek evidence further confirms the loss of the Northern provinces to the Bactrian Greeks.

LET US KNOW

Kautilya occupies a unique place in the history of India. He aroused a national spirit among the Indians to throw out the Greeks from the soil of India. For this purpose he advised Chandragupta to unite the warring tribes and republics. As the Chief Advisor and Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, he rendered a valuable service in running the state. He wrote Arthashastra, a book on the art of government

and state craft. He described in detail the various duties of the ruler, the role of the king's advisors, welfare duties of the government, spy system and administration of justice. It also contains rules to regulate different social relations.

ACTIVITY 4.2

Make a list of the successors of Asoka.

.....

4.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that,

- Chandragupta Maurya had established the first Indian Empire with the help of his Prime Minister Kautilya or Chanakya. After establishing himself in the Gangetic plains, he moved towards North-West India and liberated that part from the Greek General Seleucus Nikatar. By a treaty in 303 B.C. Chandragupta secured some Seleucid territories. He established political as well as cultural contact with the Greeks. His son Bindusara succeeded him in 297 B.C, who too exchanged embassies with the Greeks. He ruled till 272 B.C. and brought a large part of India under Mauryan sovereignty.
- Asoka, the son of Bindusara ascended the Mauryan throne after his father's death. He was the greatest of the all Mauryan rulers. The Kalinga campaign greatly changed his life and he became a Buddhist. He initiated a unique religious policy termed as Dhamma. Through his Dhamma, Asoka tried to reduce social conflict and intolerance. Though his Dhamma was not successful, but he successfully spread Buddhism and made it a world religion.
- The Mauryans had a centralized administration where king the was all powerful. The king was assisted by a Council of Ministers or Mantri Parishad. Every department had a superintendent to look after it. The provinces were placed under governors and senior officials called Pradeshikas visited the provinces every five years to check the administration. The Mauryans had a huge army with a committee having sub-committees under it to coordinate military activity.
- With the death of Asoka, there started the decline of the Mauryan Empire. His sons established themselves independently. The Mauryan economy was weak and could not hold the pressure of the Empire for long. The Mauryan administration centered round the Emperor and the successors of Asoka were weak and inefficient. They failed to attract the loyalty of the people which affected the Mauryan administration. The recruitment policy of the Mauryans was too arbitrary. There was also no representative institution in the Mauryan Empire. All these collectively led to the downfall of the Mauryan Empire. The Sunga dynasty succeeded the Mauryan dynasty.

4.8 FURTHER READING

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4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Chandragupta Maurya

Ans to Q No 2: Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya

Ans to Q No 3: Megasthenes

Ans to Q No 4: 321 B.C.

Ans to Q No 5: Bindusara

Ans to Q No 6: Chandragupta Maurya by overthrowing the Nandas in 321 B.C. founded the Mauryan Empire. He was guided in his efforts by Chanakya who was traditionally believed as his Prime Minister. After establishing his control over the Gangetic Plain, he liberated North Western India from the Greek General Seleukos Nikatar and secured some Seleucid territories by a treaty in 303 B.C.

Ans to Q No 7: Asoka

Ans to Q No 8: Pataliputra

Ans to Q No 9: Taxila, Ujjain

Ans to Q No 10: Two

Ans to Q No 11: Dhammamahamatras

Ans to Q No 12: The King

Ans to Q No 13: Samaharta

Ans to Q No 14: Five

Ans to Q No 15: Chief Collector

Ans to Q No 16: Superintendent

Ans to Q No 17: Senior Officer

Ans to Q No 18: Superintendent of Ships

Ans to Q No 19: The central administration of the Mauryas centred round the king who enjoyed absolute power in the administration. He was assisted by a Council of Ministers or Mantri Parishad. There were also superintendents in charge of different departments which were linked up to both the local

administration and central government. The king had a good espionage system.

4.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q 1: When did Bindusara ascend the throne?

Q 2: Asoka was well known for his..... (Fill up the blank)

Q 3: What was the function of a Yukta?

Q 4: Who authored Arthashastra?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Narrate the contact of the Mauryans with the Greeks. What was the impact of the Indo-Greek contact?

Q 2: Write a note on the early life of Asoka?

Q 3: How did Kalinga campaign influence the life of Asoka?

Q 4: How does Arthashastra help us to know about the Mauryas?

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the foundation of the Mauryan Empire.

Q 2: How did Asoka promote Buddhism? Discuss his concept of Dhamma.

Q 3: Describe the administrative system of the Mauryan Empire.

Q.4: Assess the causes behind the downfall of the Mauryan Empire.

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UNIT 5 : GUPTA SOCIETY : LAND GRANTS, PEASANTRY AND BEGINNING OF FEUDAL SOCIETY

Structure

- 5.1 Learning Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Emergence of the Guptas
- 5.4 Extension of the Gupta Empire
 - 5.4.1 Samudragupta's Policy of Expansion
 - 5.4.2 Chandragupta II's Policy of Expansion
- 5.5 Consolidation of the Gupta Empire
- 5.6 Polity and Administration
 - 5.6.1 Administrative Divisions
 - 5.6.2 Judicial Administration
 - 5.6.3 Revenue Administration
- 5.7 Downfall of the Guptas
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Further Reading
- 5.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 5.11 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the emergence of the Guptas in ancient India
- explain the extension and consolidation of the Gupta Empire
- describe the polity and administration of the Guptas
- analyse the causes for the downfall of the Guptas.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

India had witnessed a number of Empire building efforts throughout the ancient period of its history. We have already discussed one such successful effort at the initiative of the Mauryas. Even after the fall of the Mauryas this imperial ambition continued for centuries when different royal dynasties like Sunga, Kushana, Satavahana, etc tried to emulate the Mauryas, in building an empire but nothing special happened on the lines of an Empire, until the appearance of the Guptas in Indian politics during the 4th century A.D. However, some scholars like Romila Thapar refused to recognize the initiatives of the Guptas as being the perfect

realization of the concept of an Empire, primarily because of its decentralized form of administration. Whatever might be the fact, the Gupta period (starting from 4th century A.D. to of 6th century A.D.) is an important phase in Indian history with manifestation of excellence and glory in every walk of life. The Gupta period epitomised the enduring achievements of ancient Indian Civilization.

In this unit we will now discuss the Gupta Empire in detail. The emergence of the Guptas, the territorial expansion and consolidation by the Gupta rulers, the Gupta system of administration, and the factors that brought about the downfall of the Gupta dynasty will be the major part of discussion in this unit.

5.3 EMERGENCE OF THE GUPTAS

The origin of the Guptas, like most of the ruling dynasties of ancient India, is somewhat obscure in nature. Different theories have been put forward by historians from time to time about the origin of Gupta dynasty. Some historian believed that they were the rulers of a small principality in Magadha, while others held that their original homeland was the Western Gangetic plain. On the other hand, depending on their name, some historians tried to identify them as belonging to the *Vaishya* community, but some others tried to accord them with the status of a *Brahmana*.

Now regarding the question of their actual emergence, the Gupta records mentioned the name of the first three rulers of the family as Maharaja Srigupta, his son Maharaja Ghatotkachagupta and the latter's son Maharajadhiraja Chandragupta I . Depending on different records the majority of historians now confirm that during the 4th century A.D. there was a general tradition among the sub-ordinate chiefs to be normally styled as *Maharaja*, while the independent kings liked to call themselves *Maharajadhiraja*. As to the line of that description- the first two rulers of the Gupta dynasty appeared to be the feudatory chief, but it is difficult to know the name of their suzerain.



Fig. 10.1: Gupta Empire

Source: Google Image

LET US KNOW

I-tsing, a Chinese traveler, who visited India in the 7th century A.D. made some comments about the first Gupta ruler Srigupta, (275-300 A.D.) which was supposed to be a authentic one. According to him Srigupta’s kingdom comprised of a portion of North Bengal and Bihar. Srigupta became a Buddhist and said to have constructed a temple for the Chinese pilgrims near Mrigashikhavana. The Vakataka records refer to Srigupta as the *adiraja* or the first ruler of the Gupta line. Srigupta was succeeded by Ghatotkachagupta.

Chandragupta I, the third ruler of the Gupta line succeeded Ghatotkacha and brought the house successfully under the full light of history by removing the veil of obscurity. It was he who determined the tract of an imperial identity for the Guptas in future. Chandragupta I married into the Lichchavi family, once an old established *Gana-Sangha* of North Bihar, now associated with the kingdom of Nepal. This Lichchavi-Gupta matrimonial alliance had a special significance for the emergence of Gupta power in future. Eminent historian Romila Thapar has put forwarded the view that perhaps the Guptas had no royal origin, and under such circumstances, the marriage alliance with an old prestigious family, had normally set a stamp of acceptability. On the other hand V.A Smith expressed the view that the Lichchavi Princess Kumaradevi brought to her husband as her dowry valuable influence which in due course of time offered him a paramount position in Magadha and in the neighbouring countries. In other words, it can be said that the marriage alliance of Chandragupta I was important less from the social point of view but more from political point of view.

After stabilizing his position in Indian politics, Chandragupta I successfully extended his rule over the main heartland of Gangetic plain which had included some of the important territories like Magadha, Saketa, Prayaga. This inclusion sufficiently proved his independent status to adopt the title like *Maharajadhiraja* or king of kings. Based upon the campaigns of Chandragupta I some historians consider his kingdom as consisting of whole of Bihar, a portion of Bengal except the part of Samatata or Eastern Bengal, Eastern U.P. i.e. a territory extending upto Benaras. However, there are lot of confusions over the question of the extension of his Empire. The establishment of the Gupta era from the date of his accession i.e. in and about 319-320 A.D. has further highlighted the political importance of the reigning period of Chandragupta I, thus the first three rulers of the Gupta line had successfully established themselves as emerging power of Indian politics.

ACTIVITY 5.1

Prepare a list of the rulers of the Gupta dynasty.

.....
.....
.....

5.4 EXTENSION OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

The Gupta rulers established a far flung Empire in India. They were very good conquerors and by the might of their sword, they occupied different areas, thereby extending the dominion of the Gupta Empire. In this section we will discuss the extension of the Gupta Empire.

5.4.1 Samudragupta's Policy of Expansion

The extension of Gupta Empire was mainly the handi-work of great Gupta Emperor Samudragupta, who ascended the throne in about 335 A.D. The main source of information of his campaign is a lengthy eulogy, inscribed on an Asokan Pillar at Allahbad known as the *Allahbad Pillar Prasasti*. The writer of this eulogy was his court poet Harisena. Apart from this inscription, the Bhitari Seal and Pillar, different numismatic evidences, along with *Vayu Purana* and *Bhagavata Purana* throw a good deal of light on the political condition of India at that time.

There is a controversy regarding a civil war for the throne, on the basis of a Sanskrit term *Tulya Kulaja* i.e. 'Princes of Equal Birth'. Allahabad *Prasasti* clearly states that Samudragupta was nominated to the throne by his father Chandragupta I on the occasion of a full session of royal court. His nomination probably offended the Princess of his equal birth as some historians think and provided an opportunity of a revolt under the leadership of an obscure Prince Kacha. This Kacha was supposed to be the eldest brother of Samudragupta. But subsequent numismatic evidence proves that Kacha was an alias of Samudragupta himself. This view is yet to gain the general acceptability of the scholars and it still remains as a matter of further research. Whatever might be the trouble that led to his coronation, Samudragupta had successfully overcome it.

Allahbad Pillar Inscription gives an impressive list of kings and the region that were conquered and brought under various degrees of his subjugation. Depending on that list the victorious campaign of Samudragupta can be discussed in the following.

The great king started his career of expansion by subjugating the neighbouring kings in the Ganga-Yamuna Valley and thus tried to consolidate his position at home before he started his campaign in the remote South. It was at that initial strokes that he defeated four important kings of modern UP and Central India. They were Achyuta of Ahichhatra (Modern Ramnagar and Rai Bareilly district of U.P) Nagasena of Mathura, Ganapati Naga of Padmavati (Gwalior) and the Prince of the Kota family (yet to be ascertained).

Samudragupta was a great conqueror. After consolidating his position in and around his home tract of Magadha, he might have started his campaign towards *Dakshinapatha* (South India). It is interesting that his South Indian campaign was formulated with a theory of *Dharmavijaya* which was marked by three principles namely Grahana (capture of the enemy), *Moksha* (liberation) and *Anugraha* (principle

of favoring by reinstating the enemy). During the course of his campaign, Samudragupta defeated as many as twelve kings of South India, whom he first captured and then liberated and ultimately reinstated in their respective kingdom. The list of the twelve South Indian kings as put forward by the Allahbad Prasasti are as follows Mahendra of Kosala (Bilaspur, Raipur, Sambalpur district), Vyaghraja of Mahakantara (forest tract of Jaipur region of Orissa), Mantaraja of Kurala (yet to be ascertained), Mahendragiri of Pishtapuram (Pithapuram in Godavari district), Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district), Damana of Erandapalla (Vizagapatam district), Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Hastivarman of Vengi (Ellore in Krishna- Godavari district), Nilaraja of Avamukta (yet to be ascertained), Ugrasena of Palakka (Vellore district), Kuvera of Devarashtra (Gapatam district) and Dhananjaya of Kushalapura (in North Arcot district).

Probably when Samudragupta was engaged in his Southern Campaign, some of the North Indian rulers, by taking the opportunity of his absence, might have started a revolt against him. To deal with the matter Samudragupta hurried back home and found that nine of his hostile North Indian kings formed a confederacy to resist his victorious campaign. Among these nine rulers- three of them were the Naga rulers of Central India, namely Achyuta, Nagasena and Ganapati Naga whom he had defeated in his earlier campaign. The other six rulers of North India to form the confederacy were: Rudradeva (identified as Rudrasena I of Vakataka), Matila (Western UP), Nagadatta, Nandin, Balavarman and three other Naga rulers of Central India. In spite of their combined efforts, the descriptions of Poet Harisena has made it clear that Samudragupta not only defeated them but also uprooted them violently.

Apart from these three major campaign Samudragupta also defeated some of the forest kings or the tribal chiefs of Central India and the Deccan. Along with that, nine republics, including the age old *Malavas*, *Yaudheyas*, *Madrakas* were also forced to accept the Gupta suzerainty. His victory over the tribal and the republican states proved to be disastrous one for the later Guptas. Accordingly, when the Hunas invaded North-Western India, including Punjab and Rajasthan, no power was there to act as a buffer for the Gangetic plain.

The impression of his power compelled some of the frontier states *Pratyanta Nripatis* like Samatata (South-Eastern Bengal) Davaka (Dabaka in Nagaon district of Assam) Kamarupa, Nepal, Kartripura, to become voluntarily his vassals by paying tribute, obeying his order and offering him personal homage. Apart from that even some of the independent or semi-independent foreign powers beyond the frontier of Samudragupta's Empire like *Daivaputra Shahi Shahanu Shahi Saka Murundas*, etc also entered into sub-ordinate alliance with him. Moreover, Meghavahana, the king of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) maintained diplomatic relation with him.

Thus, the Gupta Empire during the time of Samudragupta included whole of North India except the tract of the Saka rule in Western India, Kashmir, Western Punjab, Western Rajputana. In the South, the Gupta hegemony was extended even upto the tract of Tamil Nadu. Despite his all round conquest of the Indian subcontinent, the main area of his rule, however was much more limited as his direct

rule comprised only of U.P, Bihar, West Bengal a portion of Central Province and Vindhya region. To commemorate his victory Samudragupta performed the *Asvamedha* Sacrifice (Horse Sacrifice), the performance of which is often regarded in history as a symbol of imperialism.

5.4.2 Chandragupta II's Policy of Expansion

There was another important phase of expansion of Gupta history, which started with the reigning period of Chandragupta II, son and successor of Samudragupta. This was a campaign against the Sakas of Western India. This campaign took place in between 388-409 A.D. The main source of information of this campaign are the two inscriptions in Udaygiri and Vishakhadatta's Sanskrit drama *Devi Chandraguptam*. According to the story of the drama, after the death of Samudragupta, his eldest son Ramagupta became the king of the Gupta Empire. The name of the wife of the king Ramagupta was Dhruvadevi. The Sakas invaded the Gupta territory and Ramagupta failed to resist the Saka invasion. Ultimately he had to make an agreement with the Saka ruler to surrender his wife Dhruvadevi in return for his kingdom. Chandragupta II who was the younger brother of Ramagupta was disgusted with the action of his elder brother and he in a heroic attempt not only rescued Dhruvadevi from the Sakas but also killed the Saka king. Then Chandragupta II killed his elder brother and occupied the Gupta throne and married queen Dhruvadevi. Whatever might be the truth, the story in its turn confirmed the natural tendency of Westward expansion of Gupta Empire which Samudragupta left to his successor.

As we have already discussed, Samudragupta had extended the frontier of the Gupta Empire on all sides. He left his vast Empire to his successor Chandragupta II. We have to depend upon various literary and geographical evidences for forming our idea about Chandragupta II's conquests. Samudragupta had extended his frontier East and Southward. His Westward expansion halted at Eastern Malwa. Further expansion Eastward and Southward was not possible. Hence the natural tendency of expansion in the reign of Chandragupta II lay Westward against the kingdom of the Saka Satrapas of Western Malwa and Gujarat. He feared an alliance between the Sakas and the Vakatakas of Maharashtra and the Nagas.

Therefore, he followed a policy of isolating the Sakas by forging a matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas and the Nagas.

As a result of that Chandragupta II married Kuvera Naga, a Princess of the Naga family and won the friendship of the Naga power. The Nagas formed a powerful political force in Central India and their alliance consolidated Gupta authority in the region. Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II and his queen Kuvera Naga, was married to Rudrasena II, the Vakataka ruler of Maharashtra. The geographical position of the Vakataka kingdom was such that it could be of immense help to Chandragupta II for his projected campaigns against the Sakas of Kathiwar and their hostility could seriously embarrass him. Moreover, the Vakataka alliance was a useful deterrent against any future revolt of the Sakas in Saurashtra. Rudrasena II had died at an early age and after his death Prabhavati.

Gupta became the regent of her minor sons, which indirectly increased Gupta influence in the Vakataka court. According to a tradition, Chandragupta II or his son married a Kadamba Princess of the Kuntala country. This marriage is politically useful for operation against the Sakas. Thus, by a policy of matrimonial alliance with the Nagas, Vakatakas and Kadambas, Chandragupta II encircled the Sakas.

Chandragupta II's brilliant victory over the Saka Satrap united Western India with the rest of Northern India. It rounded off the Gupta Empire by pushing its Western limit to the natural frontier on the Arabian Sea. The Gupta Empire now extended from the Bay of Bengal in the East to the Arabian Sea on the West. The annexation of Saurashtra and Malwa by Chandragupta II opened up to the Guptas free access to the ports of the Western coast especially to the part of Barygaza. Indian trade between Northern and Western India vastly increased as a result of the conquest of Malwa and Saurashtra. The city of Ujjaini lay on the high road of trade between the Northern and Western India. The city became a great emporium of trade. It became a great centre of culture and religion. Chandragupta II converted this city into his second capital. However, Chandragupta II's great victory over the Sakas is not directly mentioned in any official epigraph of the Guptas.

Chandragupta II's greatest achievement was the conquest of Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiwar from the Western Saka Satraps. The Sakas of Western India were a very powerful neighbour. They remained a thorn on the side of the Gupta Empire. Chandragupta II, while he was a crown prince, acted as a governor of Eastern Malwa and was conscious of the Saka problem on the frontier. He connected Eastern Malwa as his lease of operation against the Saka Satrap Rudrasinha II. This is corroborated by the *Udayagiri Inscription* and also by the *Harshacharita*. The *Mehrauli Iron Pillar* (near the Qutub Minar in Delhi) Inscription refers to the exploit of a king Chandra who quelled a rebellion in Bengal and vanquished the rulers of the Sapta Sindhu area. As Chandragupta II is called 'Chandra' in his coin, historians generally accept his identification with the Chandra of the inscription. With the end of the reigning period of Chandragupta II, the period of expansion of Gupta Empire has come to an end. Despite his important conquests he was remembered not as a great conqueror but as a consolidator.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write True / False:

- a) Harisena was a court poet.
- b) Tulya Kulaja means Princes of Unequal Birth.
- c) Dakshinapatha means the Western part of India.
- d) Devi Chandraguptam is a Sanskrit drama of Vishakhadatta.
- e) Chandragupta II married Kuvera Naga.
- f) Ujjaini lay on the high road of trade between the Northern and Western India.

Q 4: What is the main source of information for Samudragupta's policy of conquest?

.....

Q 5: Who was Ramagupta?

.....

Q 6: Write about Samudragupta's policy of conquest towards South India in about 60 words.

.....

.....

.....

.....

5.5 CONSOLIDATION

After the vigorous campaign of Samudragupta, there came a phase of consolidation and stabilization. Samudragupta left for his successor Chandragupta II a legacy of a vast Empire. Justifying his nomination, the fifth ruler of the Gupta line had not only completed the work left undone by his father, but also assimilated large number of tribal tracts, including the territories ruled by the Sakas and the Kushanas in Western India, Samatata or a part of Eastern Bengal.

As we have discussed earlier, Chandragupta II liberated Western India from the age old servitude of the Saka Satraps. Thus, by bringing the land between the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea under the shadow of an Imperial identity, Chandragupta II completed the work of the political unification of Northern India.

In consolidating the Gupta power in India the political marriage had always played a vital role. At the stage of their emergence the Lichchavi marriage alliance provided them with political status and acceptability. Similarly, at the stage of consolidation also marriage alliances provided them an opportunity to strengthen their hold further in North Indian politics. Chandragupta II, the great consolidator concluded a number of marriage alliances with different Indian rulers which created a ring of a friendly states around him. Except the campaign against the Western Saka, no major military expedition had been taken by Chandragupta II. The entire period of his reign was a peaceful one. His pacific policy further strengthened the process of consolidation of the Gupta Empire.

As a result of his pacific policy Gupta history entered into a phase of cultural renaissance. It provided him an opportunity to pay more attention to the development of Gupta art and culture. Chandragupta II was known as the patron of legendary Nine Gems or *Nava Ratna*, of whom Kalidasa was the most prominent one. This great poet Kalidasa immortalized the age by his great literary creations.

The Gupta period witnessed the ultimate revival of Brahmanical culture which saw its beginning in the horse sacrifice of Samudragupta. One of the main vehicles of this Brahmanical culture was the Sanskrit language. By patronizing the gems of the Sanskrit literature, Chandragupta II put it at the pin node of its glory. By patronizing the creative spirit of his age, he successfully enhanced not only the military but also the cultural pride of the Empire and consolidated the position of Gupta Empire as a centre of creative activity.

LET US KNOW

The Nine Gems or *Nava Ratna* were Kalidasa, Khatakarpara, Dhanwantari, Varahamihira, Kshapanaka, Shankhu, Amarasimha, Vetalbhatt (or Vetalabhata) and Vararuchi.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7: Which marriage alliance initially provided the Guptas political status and acceptability?

.....

Q 8: Who provided patronage to the Nava Ratna?

.....

Q 9: Who was the most prominent amongst the Nava Ratna?

.....

5.6 POLITY AND ADMINISTRATION

We have a few important sources for the study of the Gupta polity and administration. Some literary sources like various *Smritis*, *Manava Dharma Sastra*, *Yajnavalka Smritis*, *Narada Smriti* and Kamandaka's *Nitisara*, etc are important sources. The Damodarpur and the Eran Inscriptions throw light on Gupta administration. Let us analyse the polity and administration of the Guptas.

Monarchy was advocated as an ideal system of government in the Gupta period. There were some tribal republics like those of the *Malavas*, *Yaudheyas*, *Arjunayanas* in Northern India. There was always contradiction between the two systems of government. Kingship being sanctioned by the Brahmanical *Shastras* was powerful and aggressive against the republics.

The king or *Samrata* was at the head of the government. He ruled by hereditary right. The Gupta Emperors adopted the high sounding titles of *Maharajadhiraja*, *Paramabhattacharaka*, etc. They brought additional lustre to their position by claiming for themselves divine origin and super human qualities. Hence, they assumed magnificent titles like *Paramesvara*, *Achintyapurusha*, *Lokadhamadeva*, *Paramadaivata*, etc.

Theoretically, there was no limit on the king's power. He ruled over his vast Empire with absolute command over all the branches of the government. He was the supreme commander of the army. Samudragupta and Chandragupta II personally led the army. The governors, important civil and military officers were appointed by the king and they held office at his pleasure. The central bureaucracy functioned under his personal supervision. The king was the master of all lands and he could grant them to anybody.

However, the claim of divine origin and the enjoyment of vast theoretical rights did not convert the Gupta Emperors into crude despots without any touch of benevolence among them. Samudragupta and Chandragupta II were aware of their duties to the

people. The government did not interfere in the daily life of the people. It was sympathetic to people's needs. Moreover, there were certain practical checks on the king's authority and power. He had to share power with high officials. It was a custom for the king to abstain from routine duties of ministers. He had to obey the rules laid down by the *Dharmashastras*. The local bodies enjoyed a good deal of autonomy in which he normally did not interfere. Moreover, the system of granting *agrahara* and *brahmadeya* lands led to increasing decentralization in administration and weakening hold of the central authority. The succession to the throne was hereditary but the Emperor reserved the right of selecting the heir apparent. Samudragupta was nominated by Chandragupta I as his successor from among the sons of the latter. Kumaragupta I probably nominated Skandagupta. But the system of nomination was not free from trouble.

The king was the supreme head of the government. Next in rank to him was the *Yuvaraja* or crown prince. The *Mantrin* or ministers stood at the head of the civil administration and their offices were generally hereditary. Perhaps some other high offices were also hereditary and limited to a number of families only. The *Mahadandanayakas* held offices in hereditary capacity. *Sandhivigrahika* or minister of war and peace was a new office of minister created in the Gupta period. Some of the ministers combined different offices at the same time. We do not know whether there was a *Mantri Parishad* or Council of Ministers of the Mauryan type. Kalidasa refers to a council of ministers whose decision was conveyed to the Emperor by the chamberlain or *Kanchuki*. Generally, ministers acted as individual advisers and assistants of the king.

The vast Empire of the Guptas could only be managed with the help of an organized bureaucracy. The central and provincial officials were differentiated by their designation. Among the high officials in the central administration mention may be made of *Mahabaladhikrita* (commander-in chief), *Mahadandanayaka* (chief general), *Mahapratihara* (chief of the palace guards), *Sandhivigrahika* (minister in charge of war and peace), *Akshapataladhikrita* (keeper of State documents); *Mahakapati* (head of the cavalry force), etc. They were assisted by a host of junior officials. There was no distinction between civil and military officials and sometimes both duties were combined in a single person.

There was another class of officials called *Kumaramatyas* and *Ayuktas*. They worked as the link between the central and provincial administration. High imperial officers and officers of the personal staff of the Emperor were included in the rank of the *Kumaramatyas*. It is said that *Kumaramatyas* means ministers for *Kumara* or crown prince. It is also said that *Kumaramatya* was a cadet or apprentice minister, who was minister from youth. However, *Kumaramatyas* served both the Emperor and crown prince and served in the province and district level. *Ayuktas* were employed by the Emperor specially in districts and metropolitan towns. They also performed the duty of restoring properties of the defeated king who had been reinstated.

5.6.1 Administrative Divisions

The Empire was divided into a number of provinces. The usual names of the provinces were *Bhuktis*, *Desas* and *Bhogas*. The provinces were sub-divided into districts called *Vishayas*. A part of the *Vishaya* was called *Vithi*. The villages or *Gramas* were the lowest administrative units.

The provinces called *Bhuktis* were governed by officers called *Uparikas* or sometimes by princes of royal blood bearing the title *Maharajajouta Devabhattacharka*. The provinces called *Desas* were governed by officers called *Goptis* or wardens of the marches. The districts or *Vishayas* were ruled by district officers styled *Vishayapatis*, *Kumaramatyas* and *Ayuktas*. Sometimes districts were governed by feudatories or *Samantas*. Usually the district officer was appointed by the provincial governor, though sometimes he was directly appointed by the Emperor. The *Ayuktas* served as a link between the central and district administration as discussed earlier. The *Vishayapati* or district officer generally acted under the *Uparikas* or provincial governors as testified by the Damodarpur Copper Plate. The *Antarvedi Vishaya* or the Doab region was the heartland of the Gupta Empire. The *Vishayas* were pivots of the Gupta provincial administration. In every *Vishaya* perhaps there was an advisory council or *Parishad* comprising local representatives. (village headman), *Bhojakas*, etc. The *Gramikas* ruled the villages with the help of village councils. He was a paid official of the state. The *Talabara*, *Vinayasthitisthapaka* were new dignitaries vested with military and religious and judicial duties respectively.

Some North Bengal inscriptions throw an interesting sidelight on the association of popular representatives in the Gupta administration. In the provincial, district or village level of administration, the officer in charge was assisted by an *Adhikarana* or Council consisting of local representatives. In the cities, the Municipal Boards (*Adhikaranas*) consisted of guild president, chief merchant or *Nagara Shresthi*, chief artisan or *Prathama Kulika* and chief scribe or *Prathama Kayastha*. In the districts and villages the Boards consisted of village head-men, householders, etc. The Guptas made a bold administrative experiment by associating popular elements in the administration.

LET US KNOW

Beyond the Empire under direct rule of the Guptas lay the frontier states both monarchical and republican. With politic generosity the Guptas left them in a position of sub-ordinate status of vassals to the Gupta suzerain without disturbing their internal autonomy. Samudragupta's *prasasti* (eulogy) gives a long list of such frontier vassal states brought under his sub-ordinate dependence. Their status varied according to their relative strength in comparison with that of the suzerain power. Among the states in the Eastern frontiers were the monarchies of Samatata, Kamarupa, Davaka, Nepal and Kartripura and on the Western frontier the nine tribal republics of Punjab and Rajputana.

5.6.2 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*.

5.6.3 Revenue Administration

The main sources of royal revenue were various types of land revenues, fines realized for offences, commercial taxes and tax on salt, taxes on mines, etc. Exemptions from taxes were granted to villages on some occasions. The officials were recruited on the basis of merit and ability. No distinction between caste and creed was made. Guilds continued to flourish among the merchants and artisans.

The guilds or *Shrenis* were autonomous, and the guilds were governed by their own laws. Even the Buddhist Churches or *Sanghas* participated in trade and acted as bankers or *Shresthis* and lent money on interest. The state and the village society collectively held the ownership of land and without mutual consent land could not be bought or sold.

As a whole, the Gupta administration had a benevolent character and people lived happily under it. The benevolent ideal of the government even survived after the fall of the Gupta Empire. The Kalachuris, the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas were inspired by the models of the Gupta administrative system.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Match the following:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| a) Samrat | 1. Chamberlain |
| b) Sandhivigrahika | 2. Provincial Officer |
| c) Kanchuki | 3. Head of the Cavalry Force |
| d) Mahakapati | 4. Record Keepers |
| e) Goptis | 5. King |
| f) Pusta Palas | 6. Minister of War and Peace |

Q 11: Who was Mahabaladhikrita?

.....

Q 12: Write a note on the revenue administration of the Guptas in about 50 words.

.....

5.7 DOWNFALL OF THE GUPTAS

The factors responsible for the decline of Gupta power in India were many. The Huna invasion was one of the prime factors responsible for the decline of the Gupta power in India. A branch of the Hunas from Central Asia had occupied Bactria in the 4th century A.D. and crossed the Hindukush mountains during the time of Kumaragupta I, son and successor of Chandragupta II (415-54 A.D.). But we learn from the *Bhitari Pillar Inscription* and *Junagarh Rock Inscription* that the *Yuvaraja* Skandagupta succeeded in repelling this invasion in the 5th century A.D.

But, after him, repeated waves of the Huna invasions made the Gupta power weak. Even Skandagupta who battled violently and resisted the Hunas for some time from entering into the main heartland of India had to face different internal problems, like the revolt of his feudatories, which made his task a difficult one. The death of Skandagupta in about 467 A.D. was followed by a succession of various kings, who could not keep the Empire intact. The final blow to the Gupta power came towards the end of 5th century A.D., when the Hunas poured into North India and hastened the process of ultimate disintegration of Gupta Empire within the next half a century and thus it paved the road for the creation of a number of small kingdoms.

Apart from the Huna invasions there were number of other factors responsible for the decline of Gupta power in India. As we have stated earlier, the breaking away of the feudatories of Gupta was one such major factor of the decline of Gupta power. One such good example was the invasion of the Vakataka. By means of a matrimonial alliance Chandragupta II had established a friendly relation with the Vakatakas. But the successors of Chandragupta II had no peaceful relation with the Vakatakas. In the reigns of Budhagupta, the Vakataka king Narendrasena invaded some of the Central Indian region like Malwa, Kosala, and Mekala, etc. This invasion considerably weakened the Gupta hegemony in Central Indian region. In subsequent years, another Vakataka king Harisena conquered Gujarat and Malwa from the Imperial Guptas, which on the one hand weakened the Gupta prestige and on the other hand, inspired their feudatories to declare their independence. Similarly, the rulers like Yasodharman also inflicted a death blow to the Gupta Empire. These examples were followed by other feudatories which led to the ultimate disintegration of the Gupta Empire.

At the same time the decentralized form of administration had also contributed substantially to its downfall. The provincial governors of the Gupta Empire enjoyed a good deal of freedom and authority. The Gupta rulers failed to erect any such administrative machinery to keep a check on the highhandedness of the provincial governors. The Gupta rulers also failed to pay cash salary to any of their officials. In lieu of that they granted land by which the official developed a feudal character in them. They identified themselves only to their local interest in defiance of the central authority. Thus, the growth of the feudal elements further accelerated the process of decentralization of Gupta Empire.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 24: During whose reign did the Hunas cross the Hindukush mountains?

.....
.....

Q 25: How Chandragupta II established a friendly relationship with the Vakatakas?

.....
.....

Q 26: How did feudal character develop in the Gupta administration?

.....
.....

5.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt about—

- The emergence of the Guptas in India marked the beginning of a glorious period in ancient Indian history. But the origin of the Guptas cannot be directly ascertained as it is somewhat obscure in nature. Srigupta laid down the foundation of the Gupta Empire and he was followed by rulers like Ghatotkachagupta, Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta I, Skandagupta and others. The first two rulers of the Gupta dynasty were probably subordinate chiefs as they took the title Maharaja. But the third ruler Chandragupta I not only brought the Gupta dynasty to its glory but also became an independent ruler adopting the title Maharajadhiraja.
- The first three rulers of the Gupta dynasty laid down the basis upon which the superstructure was built by Samudragupta, and Chandragupta II with their expansionist policies. Samudragupta after consolidating his position at home brought Dakshinapath (South India) upto Tamil Nadu under his control defeating as many as twelve rulers as stated in the Allahbad Prasasti. He too defeated the rulers of North India, Central India and Eastern India along with the forest kings, tribal chiefs, etc. and performed the Asvamedha sacrifice showing his imperial authority. His son and successor Chandragupta II too continued his father's policy led his expansion campaign in Western India and fought against the Sakas who dominated Western India at that time. By a policy of matrimonial alliance with the Nagas, Vakatakas and Kadambas, Chandragupta II encircled the Sakas, defeated them and united Western India with the Northern India by occupying Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiwar. He too had other successful military campaigns to his credit.
- Chandragupta II is more remembered as a consolidator than a conqueror. He completed the task of conquest left incomplete by his father Samudragupta and after that stabilized and consolidated the conquest made by the Gupta rulers. By concluding a number of marriage alliances with different Indian rulers, Chandragupta II created a ring of friendly states around the Gupta Empire. His

pacific policy created such a peaceful atmosphere in the Gupta Empire that there began a cultural renaissance in the Empire. Chandragupta II provided patronage to the Nava Ratna.

- Monarchy was the form of government with the king being the supreme head. The kingship was hereditary. He was assisted by the crown prince, ministers and other officials. The Guptas had an organized bureaucracy with the central and provincial officials being differentiated by their designation. The Empire was divided into provinces called Bhuktis or Desas. The provinces were divided into districts or Vishayas. In Judicial matters, the king was the highest judge who personally attended the court to hear the cases and was assisted by other officials. In cities the city magistrates and in villages the panchayats or family gatherings used to dispose of the cases. Different sources of royal revenue were there in the form of land revenues, fines, commercial taxes, etc. The ownership of land was collectively held by the state and village society. As a whole the Gupta administration was benevolent one and was followed by later dynasties like Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, etc.
- Several factors brought about the downfall of the Gupta Empire. Foremost among these factors was the invasion of the Hunas who, towards the end of the 5th century A.D, gave a death blow to the Gupta power. The breaking away of the feudatories also weakened the power of the Guptas. With the decentralization in administration, the provincial governors under the Guptas enjoyed much freedom and authority for which they displayed their local interest defying the central authority. Instead of cash salary the provincial governors were given land which developed a feudal character in them further accelerating the process of decentralization of Gupta Empire and leading to its eventual downfall.

5.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) Majumdar, R. C., Raychaudhuri, H.C., Datta, K. (1986). *An Advanced History of India*. New Delhi, Macmillan India Ltd.
- 2) Sharma, L. P. (1981). *Ancient History of India (pre-historic Age to 1200 A.D.)*. New Delhi, Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd.
- 3) Thapar, Romila. (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India from The Origins to A D 1300*. New Delhi, The Penguin Group.

5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) Srigupta, Ghatotkachagupta, Chandragupta I, b) Maharajadhiraja, (c) Kumaradevi

Ans to Q No 2: Chandragupta I married into the Lichchavi family. This Lichchavi-Gupta matrimonial alliance was an important one from the political angle as it greatly helped in the emergence of Gupta power. Romila Thapar said that this matrimonial alliance provided acceptability to the Guptas who perhaps had no royal origin. V.A Smith expressed

the view that the Lichchavi Princess Kumaradevi brought to her husband the needed political influence.

Ans to Q No 3: a) True, b) False, c) False, d) True, e) True, f) True

Ans to Q No 4: Allahbad Pillar Inscription.

Ans to Q No 5: Ramagupta was the eldest son of Samudragupta.

Ans to Q No 6: A great conqueror Samudragupta probably started his campaign towards Dakshinapatha (South India) after consolidating his position at home. His South Indian campaign was one of Dharmavijaya which was marked by three principles namely, grahana, moksha and anugraha. In this campaign, Samudragupta defeated as many as twelve kings of South India, whom he first captured and then liberated and ultimately reinstated in their respective Kingdom.

Ans to Q No 7: Lichchavi.

Ans to Q No 8: Chandragupta II.

Ans to Q No 9: Kalidasa.

Ans to Q No 10: a) 5, b) 6, c) 1, d) 3, e) 2, f) 4

Ans to Q No 11: Mahabaladhikrita was the Commander-in-Chief.

Ans to Q No 12: The royal revenue was collected from different sources like various types of land revenues, fines for offences, commercial taxes, etc. Revenue officials were recruited on the basis of merit and ability without having any distinction on the basis of caste and creed. Exemption from taxation were granted to villages on some occasions.

Ans to Q No 13: a) True, b) True, c) False, d) True, e) False, f) False, g) False

Ans to Q No 14: a) Vedas, b) slave, c) eight, d) Kumaragupta, e) Varamihira, f) China

Ans to Q No 15: Brahmacharya, Garhastha, Banaprastha and Sanyas. Unit 10 Gupta Empire

Ans to Q No 16: Elephant Riding.

Ans to Q No 17: By digging of tanks, wells, cutting of canals, etc.

Ans to Q No 18: An all round industrial growth was witnessed in the Gupta period. This growth was facilitated by the richness of the country in natural resources, mineral, animal and plant produce. Gold, Copper, Textile and Wood Carving were popular industry of the period.

Ans to Q No 19: a) True, b) False, c) True, d) False, e) True, f) False, g) True

Ans to Q No 20: a) 3, b) 1, c) 2

Ans to Q No 21: a) Chandragupta II, b) Mihirakula, c) Bimola, d) Buddhism, e) Samudragupta, f) Kalidasa, g) Harisena, h) Kavya

Ans to Q No 22: Small flat roofed temples, sometimes surrounded by the pillared halls are characteristic of the early Gupta period.

Ans to Q No 23: Paintings of Ajanta are religious by nature, whereas Bagh paintings are purely secular.

Ans to Q No 24: Kumaragupta I.

Ans to Q No 25: By means of a matrimonial alliance Chandragupta II had established a friendly relationship with the Vakatakas.

Ans to Q No 26: The Guptas did not pay cash salary to their officials. In lieu of that they granted land to the officials which developed a feudal character in the Gupta administration.

5.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each Question in about 50 words)

Q 1: Who was Srigupta?

Q 2: Name the mother of Prabhavati Gupta.

Q 3: Who was Vishnudeva?

Q 4: Give one reason of the downfall of the Guptas.

B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What do you know about the emergence of the Gupta dynasty?

Q 2: What light does Allahbad Pillar Inscription throw on Samudragupta's policy of conquest?

Q 3: What was the contribution of Chandragupta II in building up the Gupta Empire?

Q 4: Write a note on the administrative divisions under the Gupta administration.

Q 5: How was the society divided in the Gupta period?

Q 6: What was the position of women in the Gupta period?

Q 7: Write a note on the development of agriculture in the Gupta period.

Q 8: Write a note on the development of Brahmanical Hinduism during the Gupta rule.

Q 9: What do you know about the development of Sanskrit literature in the Gupta period?

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the extension and consolidation of the Gupta Empire.

Q 2: Explain the administrative system of the Gupta rulers.

Q 3: Describe the socio-economic condition of the Gupta period.

UNIT 6 : GUPTA POLITY : CONQUESTS AND ADMINISTRATION

Structure

- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Society and Economy under the Gupta Rule
 - 6.3.1 Society under the Gupta Rule
 - 6.3.2 Economy under the Gupta Rule
- 6.4 Religion and Culture under the Gupta Rule
 - 6.4.1 Religion under the Gupta Rule
 - 6.4.2 Culture under the Gupta Rule
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Further Reading
- 6.7 Answers to check your Progress
- 6.8 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand the society under the Gupta rule,
- discuss the economy under the Gupta rule,
- discuss the religion under the Gupta rule,
- describe the culture under the Gupta rule.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we have already discussed the Gupta Empire. In this unit, we are going to discuss the society, economy, religion and culture under the Gupta Empire. The Gupta rulers were both able administrators as well as well wishers of their people and therefore in this period all round development of the society was noticed. So the Gupta period was called as ‘Golden Period’ of Indian history.

6.3 SOCIETY AND ECONOMY IN THE GUPTA PERIOD

The Guptas established a large Empire in India. The Gupta rulers with sound administration provided a stable authority in the kingdom which helped in maintaining the social fabric and facilitated the economic growth. Our study of the Gupta Empire will be incomplete without discussing the condition of the society and economy during the Gupta period. In this unit we will discuss the social and economic condition of the Gupta Empire in the following sections with separate sub-headings.

6.3.1 Society under the Guptas

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 A.D.

- **Division of Society:** During the Gupta period society was divided into four castes –*Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*. Each one of these comprised a major caste or varna and had specific duties assigned to them. Fa-hien's account about the plight of *Shudras* proves the prevalence of caste system and caste prejudices in the Indian society during the Gupta period. The reference to the people of various castes in the epigraphs and literary works also point towards the existence of caste system during this period.

The *Brahmanas* were primarily concerned with the study and teachings of Vedas and other scriptures as also the performance of sacrifices and other religious practices. The *Kshatriyas* came next to *Brahmanas* in status and position in the society. *Kshatriyas*, being the ruling class, enjoyed a very high status in the society. The *Kshatriyas* as well as the *Vaishyas* enjoyed the status of *Dvijati* or twice born as the *Brahmanas*. The *Vaishyas* because of their immense wealth were also shown due regard. *Shudras* formed the lowest rank of the caste system. They were forced to serve the other three classes. Besides the division of the society into four major castes, the contemporary inscriptions and literature bear ample testimony to the existence of sub-castes. However, there were no rigid rules in respect of either inter-caste marriage or inter dining among them.

LET US KNOW

There were four stages in the life of a Hindu. These stages were known as *Ashramas*. The first 25 years of the life called *Brahmacharya Ashrama* were to be spent in studying the scriptures and getting education in different fields according to one's caste. The second stage was the *Grihastha Ashrama* in which one enjoyed the life of a householder for another 25 years. The third stage *Vanaprastha* (going to the forest) began when one attained the age of 50 years and retired to the forest to live in solitude and meditation. This was the *Vanaprastha Ashrama*. The last stage was *Sanyasa*, which began with one crossing the age of 75 years, and continued for the rest of one's life. During this period a *Brahmana* was required to completely isolate himself from all worldly ties. The object of the division of life into four distinct stages seems to have been to discipline the human lives according to a set pattern and to provide against excesses in any form.

- **Slavery:** Although there was no institutionalized slave system in India, sources refer to the prevalence of slaves during the period. There were various categories of slaves during the Gupta age. Prisoners of war were often reduced to the status

of slaves. Drunkards, gamblers, etc, who were unable to pay off their debts to their creditors, were often compelled to sell themselves as slaves. Persons doing manual works in the royal household too were termed as slaves. But the slave system under the Imperial Guptas differed from the slave system in Western countries. In India, any slave could get emancipation after fulfilling certain conditions. The slaves could regain their liberty after the payment of their dues either by themselves or their relatives and friends. It is evident from the contemporary records that even prisoners of war could be free if they could provide a substitute for themselves. A slave who saved the life of his master did not only become free but also become entitled to a equal son's share of his master's property.

➤ **Position of Women:** The position of women in Hindu society has been different from age to age. In the Vedic age, she enjoyed honour and respect in society. In the Gupta age, the *Puranas* did their best to improve the lot of the women in some respect of life, but not much could be done due to some prejudice against women. According to *Manavadharmasastra* women should be under the protection of their father, husbands or eldest son as the society was distinctly patriarchal. Yet, woman like Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II was regent in the Vakataka kingdom, following the death of her husband.

Many writers have stated the usual eight forms of marriage for a woman. There are *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Arsha*, *Prajapatya*, *Asura*, *Gandharva*, *Rakshasa* and *Paisacha*. The first four forms are approved, as they involve parental consent although in the *Daiva* and *Arsha* forms a bride price is demanded. The last four forms are not approved although the *Asura* (marriage by abduction of the bride, sometimes with her consent) and *Gandharva* (marriage by mutual consent, without the necessity of parental approval) forms were prevalent in the society.

The practice of *Sati* was in vogue during the Gupta rule. Vatsayana and Kalidasa refer to it. Some instances of *Sati* are found in the time of the Gupta period. From the *Mandasor Stone Inscription* of Kumaragupta I, we come to know that practice of *Sati* was prevalent during the Gupta age. Polygamy was very popular during the Gupta age. The kings and feudatory lords often had more than one wife. The practice was not confined to kings, but extended also to other people. A woman suffered the misfortune of getting a co-wife if she was stupid, or barren, or if she repeatedly bore daughters. Inscription refer to Kuvera Naga and Dhruvaswamini as the queens of Chandragupta II.

➤ **Food:** According to the description of Kalidasa, the food of the people of Gupta period, was both delicious and nutritious. Barley, Wheat and Rice were their staple food. Cucumber, onion, garlic, pumpkin, gourd, etc. were used as vegetables.

We have ample references to edible spices, oilcrops and medicinal herbs. Mustard seed, tamarind, cardamoms, cloves, betel nut, ginger, turmeric and saffron were used for different purposes. Moreover the forests and gardens

yielded a large variety of valuable fruits such as mango, orange, jackfruit, pomegranate, grapes, banana, coconut, etc. Sugar was manufactured from sugarcane. Various kinds of sweet dishes were prepared out of milk and sugar. Honey was another item of food, which was also used in the reception of a guest and at other festive rites.

- **Dress:** Suiting to all occasions and weather, men and women used various kinds of dresses. Kalidasa refers to hunting dress. Man put on *dhoti*, turban and a scarf. They were generally made of cotton, but their wedding dresses were of silk. Women used *sari* and shawl. Clothes were of various colours such as white, red, blue, saffron, multi coloured and black. Both men and women of this period commonly used different kinds of jewellery, such as ornaments for head and hair, ears, neck, arm, waist, feet and fingers. A large variety of jewellery used by men and women are seen from the sculptures and the Ajanta paintings.
- **Amusement and Sports:** Kalidasa has vividly described the high standard of music both in theory and practice. Music, dancing and acting were quite popular in the Gupta society. The spring festival and another popular amusement in some festivity was the sprinkling of coloured water. Dicing was a popular game. Hunting was another pastime. Elephant riding was the favourite outdoor sport of the kings.

6.3.2 Economy under the Guptas

The establishment of the political unity by the Gupta monarchs coupled with an efficient and benevolent government provided a fruitful soil for the development of trade, industry and agriculture which helped to build the economic conditions of the country on a sound footing.

- **Agriculture:** Agriculture was, as in the past, still the mainstay of the economic life of the majority of the people during the Gupta period. There was an increase in the demand for more and more land for cultivation purpose as is evidenced from the Bengal land grants and other sources. Since the revenue from land was still the main source of the income of the state, the Gupta monarchs took special pains to promote the interests of the cultivators and increase the produce of the soil. Attempts were made to expand agriculture. Wastelands were brought under cultivation through various means such as the digging of tanks, wells, cutting of canals, etc. The establishment of a large number of irrigation works gave a further impetus to the growth of agriculture even in the dry lands. The *Junagarh Rock Inscription* refers to the repairing of the dam of the Sudarsan, an artificial lake, by Skandagupta's governor Parnadatta.

The scientists of the age had laid down guidelines for the development of agriculture along scientific lines. In this respect the *Brihat Samhita* of Varahamihira is especially noteworthy. Rice, Barley and Wheat continued to be the principal crops. Different varieties of vegetables, peas, beans and many

more were also grown. Cultivation of oil-seeds was done on an extensive scale. A large number of fruit trees, Indian and foreign, were also grown.

Inscriptions or other records of the Gupta period provide no clue to the existence of anything like the *zamindari* system of modern times. However, this period witnessed the inauguration of a new type of feudal economy with the state gradually granting away different rights over the land to *Brahmanas* and temples.

Keeping in view the importance of agriculture, the state laid down rules and regulations to protect the interests of the agriculturists. Rules were also been prescribed to safeguard the interests of agricultural labourers and land holders.

- **Industry:** The economic conditions during the Gupta period were specially marked by an all round development in the field of industry and handicrafts. The richness of the country in natural resources, mineral, animal and plant produce provided enough scope for the development of a large number of handicrafts and professions. Both the law books and epigraphs, have laid stress on the state ownership of the mines and forests and as such these were controlled and maintained by the state for all practical purposes. A special officer was appointed by the government to superintend the forests.

Metals were most useful in everyday life of the people for agricultural implements and domestic articles, including vessels. This industry was one of the most flourishing industries during the Gupta period. The Mehrauli Iron Pillar near the Qutub Minar in old Delhi stands testimony to the art of metallurgy.

The large number of articles made of Gold point towards the flourishing conditions of Gold industry. Gold ornaments generally satisfied the demands of richer sections of the society settled mainly in big towns and cities. *Amarkosa*, *Brihat Samhita* and the works of Kalidasa refer to diamonds, pearls, corals and precious stones which indicate the existence of small industrial units for these articles. The extensive use of Copper proves the existence of Copper industry. Pottery, making of utensils and articles of clay was one of the most popular industries of the period.

Textile industry was yet another popular industry that prospered during the period of the Imperial Gupta monarchs. Wood Carving was yet another important industry because of the use of wood for building purpose along with bamboo.

The archaeological discoveries, reference in contemporary literary works and a large number of epigraphs have all proved the existence of a flourishing trade and commerce, internal as well as external during the Gupta period. The chief articles of internal trade included all sorts of commodities of everyday use. The economic prosperity of the Gupta period is exhibited in a flourishing

external trade by land and water routes. Fine quality silk was imported from China.

The economic prosperity of the country during the Imperial Gupta period is amply borne out by numismatic and literary evidences. The majority of coins issued by the Gupta monarchs were minted out of pure Gold. While Samudragupta issued eight different types of Gold coins, his grandson Kumaragupta I issued as many as nine varieties of Gold coins. Fa-hien, the famous Chinese traveler who visited during the time of Chandragupta II also hinted at the prosperous economic conditions of the country during the period.

Thus the above general survey of the economic conditions during the Gupta period leaves no doubt that in the field of economic prosperity the Gupta period was indeed a Golden Age of Indian history.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Write True / False:

- a) Fa-hien was a famous Chinese Pilgrim.
- b) There were various categories of slaves during the Gupta age.
- c) In the Vedic age women were disrespected in the society.
- d) Parnadatta was the commander-in-chief of Skandagupta.
- e) Amarkosa was the work of Kalidasa.
- f) Kumaragupta I issued eight varieties of gold coins.

Q.2. Fill in the blanks:

- a) Brahmanas were primarily concerned with the study of _____.
- b) There was no institutionalized _____ system in India.
- c) There was usually _____ forms of marriage for a woman.
- d) Mandasore Stone Inscription belongs to the reign of _____.
- e) The author of Brihat Samhita was _____.
- f) Fine quality silk was imported from _____.

Q.3. What were the four stages of life?

.....

Q.4. What was the favourite outdoor sports of the Gupta kings?

.....

Q.5. By what means wastelands were brought under cultivation?

.....

Q.6. Write a note within 40 words on the growth of industry in the Gupta period?

.....

.....

.....

6.4 RELIGION AND CULTURE IN THE GUPTA PERIOD

The Gupta period witnessed new developments in the field of religion and culture. In this section we will discuss the religious and cultural developments that took place

during the Gupta period.

6.4.1 Religious Condition under the Guptas

The age of the Imperial Guptas was an age of great religious activity. It was particularly remarkable for new advancement made in the field of Hindu revival. Much of the progress made during the Gupta period in the sphere of Hindu revivalism was due to the patronage extended by the Gupta monarchs, most of whom were followers of the Brahmanical God Vishnu.

- **Hinduism:** Incarnations of Vishnu also became popular during this period. Samudragupta was a devout worshipper of Vishnu. *Garuda*, the vehicle of Vishnu was the emblem of the family. There were coins, which were struck with *Garuda* standing by him. It is true that the word *Bhagavat*, no doubt, implied Vishnu worshippers in general but to a particular sect of the Vaishnavas. Chandragupta II or Vikramaditya became a more influential advocate of the *Bhagavat* form of Vaishnavism than his father. He styled himself with the title of *Parambhagavat*. In the Mathura and Gadhwa inscriptions he is called by these titles. The *Udayagiri Cave Inscription* dated 401-402 A.D. reveals that Vishnudeva, a sub-ordinate of the king was a *Bhagavat*. His name shows that he was a devotee of Vishnu.

Like Vaishnavism, the followers of Saivism regard Shiva as the highest god. Although the Gupta rulers were devotees of Vishnu, they extended their patronage to other religious sects. Some of the Gupta rulers and their chiefs were the worshippers of Shiva.

Sun God was also worshipped during the Gupta period. The *Mandasor Inscription* dated 436 A.D. of the time of Kumaragupta I records that a guild of silk weavers built a temple for Sun. Mihirakula, the Huna Chief, was a devout worshipper of *Surya*. He built a Sun Temple on the Gopa Mountain to increase his religious merit. There were other temples at Mandasor, Gwalior, Indore and Asramaka, dedicated to the Sun God *Surya* and built during the Gupta rule. The images of *Surya* have been found in various parts of North India, including Assam.

Worship of Shakti was also popular. She is known by various names such as *Uma*, *Parvati*, *Durga*, *Kali*, *Maheswari*, etc. In the Markandeya Purana the exploits as the destroyer of demons are recorded. With the passage of time, Shakti became associated with Shiva and became his consort. A feudal lord under Chandragupta II dug a cave near Sanchi where an image of *Mahishamardini*, a form of Shakti, was established. Shakti worship in India can be traced to the worship of the Mother Goddess of the Harappan people.

- **Jainism:** In addition to the popularity of various cults and creeds of Hinduism, Jainism had many adherents. Not only Jain philosophy but also Jain religion was

enriched. A religious council at Valabhi was called in 453 A.D. Many Jain temples were built during the Gupta period. During the time of Skandagupta idols of 5 *Tirthankaras* were established a Kahaum in Gorakhpur district. Fa-hien records that Jain mode of worship in their Jain temples were expensive. The grand procession of images was also a costly affair and a popular form of worship of the Jaina deities.

- **Buddhism:** Buddhism flourished during this age. Paharpur, Ajanta, Nagarjuna-konda, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Punjab were the strong holds of Buddhism. Mathura, Kosambi, Kasi and Sarnath were the important centres of Buddhism. The Buddhist *Stupas* and *Viharas* in Andhra, Ajanta and Ellora were very famous. The University of Nalanda, the seat of Buddhist studies attracted students from various foreign countries. Its intellectual and moral standard won the admiration of all. Many Gupta rulers like Narasimhagupta, Buddhagupta were ardent followers of Buddhism according to the testimony of Hiuen-Tsang.

Samudragupta, who was an ardent Vaishnava, had Vasubandhu, a Buddhist of the Mahayana School as one of his advisors. Kumaragupta I was a patron of the Buddhist University at Nalanda. The kings favoured Vaishnavism, Saivism and Buddhism. The Gupta rulers were not intolerant towards other religion.

6.4.2 Cultural activities under the Guptas

The Guptas were patron of art and architecture. Small flat roofed temples, sometimes surrounded by the pillared halls are characteristic of the early Gupta period. Temple at Sanchi furnishes a good example. But a few shrines, with a sikhara on the roof, started a new style in North India which later came to be adopted all over the country. Two best examples of Gupta temples are brick temple at Bhitargaon and the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh.

The age of Imperial Guptas was also a dynamic age in the field of literary activity. Sanskrit literature, reached its culmination during this period.



Fig. 11.1: Sanchi Temple

- **Sculpture:** In the domain of sculpture, the Gupta period witnessed the highest development. The Gupta sculpture may be regarded as typically Indian in every sense of the term. The figures of Buddha found in large number at Sarnath and other places show a fully evolved form. The fine image of Buddha at Sarnath

exhibits at once the grace and refinement. This high quality generally marks also the figures of *Brahmanical* Gods as illustrated by the images of Shiva, Visnu and others in the sculptured panels of the Deoghar temples.

The Gupta artists and craftsmen were also capable in working metals. A copper image of Buddha, about 80 feet high, was erected at Nalanda in Bihar at the close of the 6th century A.D. Another important characteristic of Gupta art is the concept of beauty and simplicity of style.



Fig. 11.2: Buddha image at Sarnath

- **Painting :** No description of Gupta art can be completed without a reference to the highly developed art of paintings. The *Chitra Sutra*, *Kamasutra*, etc are sources for the study of painting of the Gupta period.

The paintings in Ajanta caves are world famous. The themes of the Ajanta paintings are intensely religious in tone and mostly centre round Buddha, Bodhibattavas, incidents from life of Buddha and Jataka.



Fig. 11.3: Ajanta Paintings

Another example of Gupta painting is the paintings of the Buddhist caves of Bagh. The paintings of Bagh represent only an extension of the Ajanta school and in variety of design vigorous execution and decorative quality seem to have ranked as high as those of Ajanta. Though stylistically the paintings of Ajanta and Bagh belong to the same norms, there is a slight difference between the two. Paintings at Bagh are secular.

- **Sanskrit Literature:** The Gupta age was the heyday of Sanskrit, the language of

the Vedas. The Prakrit languages and Pali were superseded. Sanskrit became the official language of the Gupta Empire and was spoken by the king and the elite. All the religious and secular literature of the playwright, Kalidasa, adorned the Ujjaini court, most probably in the days of Chandragupta II. He was undoubtedly the leading light of the age and one of the greatest poets. His great dramas are *Abhinjanam Shakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitra* and *Vikramorvasi*. These dealt with love, romance and princely life. *Meghaduta* (cloud messenger) and *Ritu Samhara* (a description of the seasons) are his lyrical poems. *Raghuvamsa* and *Kumarasambhava* are his Kavyas or epics. His works are marked by “vivid portraiture, compact and elegant expression and an ardent love of nature”. Other dramatists of the age are Sudraka and Vishakhadatta. The *Mrichchakatika* of Sudraka traces the story of Charudatta’s love for Vasantasena, a courtesan of Ujjain. Vishakhadatta was the author of two historical plays *Mudrarakshasa* dealing with the Mauryan revolution and *Devichandraguptam* based on the Gupta conquest of the Sakas.

During the Gupta age, the literary and scientific progress was made possible because of two important factors. In the first place, the Gupta monarchs gave political unity to the country after a long spell of foreign domination and political disintegration. The Imperial Gupta monarchs having integrated the country into a single political unit gave it the best and most benevolent administration. The peace and tranquility established by the Gupta rulers provided a suitable atmosphere for the development of intellect of the people of the country.

Secondly, the era of economic prosperity ushered in by a brisk internal and external trade, made the people of India free from want and provided them with an opportunity to concentrate on the art of peace such as religion, philosophy, art, literature and science. Thirdly, the Gupta monarchs themselves were men of learning and scholarship. Samudragupta is significantly given the title of *Kaviraja* by the court poet Harisena. In one of his Gold coins he is depicted playing the lute. These Gupta monarchs extended staunch patronage to Sanskrit learning. The progress of Sanskrit literature during the Gupta period may conveniently be studied under two heads- Religious literature and Secular literature.

- **Religious Literature :** In the field of religious literature, the age of the Imperial Guptas was the richest in Indian history. The two great Epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were given their present shape in the Gupta period and the subject matter in them was rearranged and edited with such a skill as to give them the shape of almost a new literature. The renowned authors of *Niti* and *Dharmasastras* such as Yajnavalkya, Narada, Katyayana, Brihaspati and Kamandaka flourished in this period. The best works of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy were a product of their period, the contributors to which were a galaxy of brilliant thinkers like Sasanga, Vasubandhu and Dignaga.
- **Secular Literature:** The progress in secular literature was more marked during the Gupta period than in any other period of Indian history. Technical literature,

Kavya literature, the *Puranas* are various branches of Sanskrit literature. Among the technical literature, mention may be made of *Chandrvyakarana* by Chandra Gomin, *Amarakosa* by Amarasingha, *Vrihatsamhita* by Varahamihira, etc.

The famous *Kavya* writers of the age were Kalidasa, Vatsabhathi, etc. The style of writing partly in verse was developed for the first time. The style is popularly known as the *Champu Kavya* in the history of the period. Among the *Prasasti* writers of the period, Harisena, the author of Allahabad *Prasasti* and court poet of Samudragupta occupied the foremost rank. Vatsabhathi was another notable writer of the *Prasasti* type of literature.

Among the Buddhist literature, Nagarjuna was the founder of the *Madhyamika* School of philosophy. Arya Deva and Arya Asanga are the two most notable writers of this school.

The Jaina canonical literature at first grew up in Prakrit dialects. But Sanskrit came to be the medium later. Vimala, Devardhi Gani, Siddhasena Divakara are important scholars of the age.

The works of various literary figures that happened to flourish during this period were not only known for their literary qualities, but also provide us with a most reliable index for a study of the culture of the society of the period.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.7. Write True/False:

- The Gupta rulers were followers of Vaisnavism.
- Vehicle of Vishnu was a lion.
- Chandragupta II took the title of Parambhagavat.
- The Gupta rulers were intolerant towards other religion.
- The copper image of Buddha at Nalanda was about 80 feet high.
- The themes of the Ajanta paintings were not religious.
- Ritu Samhara provide description of the seasons.

Q.8. Match the following:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| a) Meghadutam | 1. Sudraka |
| b) Mrichchakatikam | 2. Vishakhadatta |
| c) Mudrarakshasa | 3. Kalidasa |

Q.9. Fill in the blanks:

- _____ styled himself with the title of Param bhagavat.
- _____ was the Huna chief.
- _____ was a notable writer of the Madhyamika School of Philosophy.
- Buddhagupta was an ardent follower of _____.
- Vasubandhu was the advisor of _____.
- Abhinjanam Shakuntalam was written by _____.
- Samudragupta was given the title of Kaviraja by his court poet _____.

h) Vatsabhathi was a famous _____ writer of the Gupta age.

Q.10. Mention one characteristic of the early Gupta temple.

.....
.....

Q.11. What is the main difference between Ajanta and Bagh painting?

.....
.....

6.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that-

- the society was divided into four major castes. There were also different sub-castes in the society. Different categories of slaves were there in the society. Women had to live under the protection and domination of male in the patriarchal society.
- Sati and Polygamy were prevalent in the society. The people used to have delicious and nutritious food.
- As per the occasion and weather, men and women wore different kind of dresses. They too used different kinds of jewellery.
- The people were fond of amusement and sports. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people.
- Land revenue being the main source of income of the state, the Gupta rulers looked after the welfare of the cultivators and development of agriculture.
- All round development was also made in the field of industry and handicrafts. Gold, Copper, Textile and Wood Carving were popular industry of the period.
- Trade and commerce, both internal and external too was in a flourishing condition. The Gupta monarchs issued pure Gold coins which show that the Gupta period was economically very prosperous.
- The Gupta period was an age of religious activity. There was the revival of Hinduism. Incarnations of Vishnu and worship of Shakti was very popular. Some of the Gupta rulers and their chiefs worshipped Shiva. Sun God was also worshipped.
- Jainism was too popular in the Gupta period and had many followers. Many Jain temples were built during the Gupta period. Buddhism too flourished during the Gupta period. There were different centres of Buddhism. The University of Nalanda was the seat of Buddhist studies and it attracted students from various foreign countries.
- Art and architecture too developed in the Gupta period under the royal patronage. In the field of sculpture, there was the highest development. The art of painting was also highly developed as depicted in the world famous paintings in the Ajanta caves and caves of Bagh.
- Literature too greatly developed in the Gupta period. Sanskrit literature reached the apex of its development. Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas became the official language of the Gupta Empire and it superseded Pali and Prakrit. Sanskrit literature developed as a religious literature and secular literature.

6.6 FURTHER READING

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- 2) Thapar, Romila. (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India from The Origins to A D 1300*. New Delhi, The Penguin Group.
- 3) Tripathi, Ramashankar. (1999). *History of Ancient India*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

6.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Answer to the Question no 1:** a) True, b) True, c) False, d) True, e) False, f) False, g) False
- Answer to the Question no 2:** a) Vedas, b) slave, c) eight, d) Kumaragupta, e) Varamihira, f) China
- Answer to the Question no 3:** Brahmacharya, Garhastha, Banaprastha and Sanyas.
- Answer to the Question no 4:** Elephant Riding
- Answer to the Question no 5:** By digging of tanks, wells, cutting of canals, etc.
- Answer to the Question no 6:** An all round industrial growth was witnessed in the Gupta period. This growth was facilitated by the richness of the country in natural resources, mineral, animal and plant produce. Gold, Copper, Textile and Wood Carving were popular industry of the period.
- Answer to the Question no 7:** a) True, b) False, c) True, d) False, e) True, f) False, g) True
- Answer to the Question no 8:** a) 3, b) 1, c) 2

UNIT 7 : Harshavardan: Achievemnets

Structure

- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 pushyabhutis
- 7.4 Harshavardhana of Thanesar
- 7.5 Relation of Harshavardhana with Kamarupa Kingdom
- 7.6 Let us Sum up
- 7.7 Further Reading
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 7.9 Model Questions

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Place Harshavardhana in proper perspective.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit the main focus will be on the famous king Harshavardhana of the Pushyabhutis and his relationship with king Bhaskaravarman of the Varman dynasty who ruled over the kingdom of Kamarupa.

| |
|--|
| <i>Regent : an interim sovereign authority</i> |
|--|

7.3 PUSHYABHUTIS

One of the ruling dynasties that emerged in Northern India during the early medieval India was the Pushyabhutis. The founder ruler of this dynasty was Pushyabhuti after whom the dynasty was named. The Pushyabhuti rulers initially ruled from Thanesar (Haryana) and later on from Kannauj (Uttar Pradesh). The early rulers of this dynasty, namely, Pushyabhuti, Naravardhana, Rajyavardhana I and Adityavardhana assumed the title of Maharaja which probably indicates that these rulers were feudatory rulers under the imperial Guptas.

Prabhakaravardhana, son of Adityavardhan was the first important ruler of the Pushyabhuti dynasty as he ruled independently assuming the title of *Maharajadhiraja*. He defeated the Hunas, the ruler of Gurjara, and the king of Malwa. He also established matrimonial relationship with the Maukharis, a powerful ruling dynasty of Kannauj by giving in marriage his daughter Rajyashree in marriage to the Maukhari king Grahavarman. Prabhakaravardhana had two sons Rajyavardhana

and Harshavardhana, both of whom ruled one after another over the Pushyabhuti kingdom.

At the death of Prabhakaravardhana, his eldest son Rajyavardhana ascended the throne of Pushyabhutis in 605 A.D. Almost at the same time king Devagupta of Malwa and king Sasanka of Gauda formed an alliance and attacked Kannauj. The king Devagupta of Malwa successfully led this campaign against Kannauj killing its ruler Grahavarman, captured queen Rajyashree and occupied the kingdom. At this Rajyavardhana decided to take revenge of the killing of his brother-in-law, rescue his sister Rajyashree and recover Kannauj. He immediately marched against king Devagupta of Malwa leaving his brother Harshavardhana at the capital to look after the kingdom. In a fierce battle he killed Devagupta and recovered Kannauj. But king Sasanka of Gauda, the ally of deceased king Devagupta, treacherously murdered Rajyavardhana and once again occupied Kannauj.

The sudden death of Rajyavardhana forced his brother Harshavardhana to sit at the throne of Thanesar at a very young age of 16 in 606 A.D. The reign and achievements of Harshavardhana who emerged as the greatest king of the Pushyabhuti dynasty will be discussed in the next sub-section.

7.4 HARSHAVARDHANA OF THANESWAR

Harshavardhana had to encounter many problems immediately after his accession. He, at first, released his sister Rajyashree and restored her back the kingdom of Kannauj by driving away Sasanka from there. At the request of his sister, Harshavardhana also had to take the responsibility of administering the kingdom of Kannauj as no rightful heir to the throne was there. As such, Harshavardhana united the kingdom of Thanesar and kingdom of Kannauj into one which greatly strengthened his position. He even transferred his capital from Thanesar to Kannauj as it was located in a more central place to administer the entire kingdom.

With his newly acquired power and position, Harshavardhana started his conquests. He brought most of Northern India, namely, Punjab, Malwa, Magadha, Orissa, and Mithila under his control and thereby assumed the title of *Siladitya*. Then he turned his attention towards Western India where he defeated the king of Valabhi, but had to face defeat at the hands of Pulakesin II, the Chalukya ruler of Badami. Being defeated, Harshavardhana had to turn towards eastern India where he founded an ally in king Bhaskaravarman of Kamrup who helped him in his successful campaign against king Sasanka of Gauda. Harshavardhana successfully occupied parts of the Gauda kingdom.

The successful expeditions of Harshavardhana, except the one against Pulakesin II, proved his military prowess and also testify the vastness of his kingdom. To rule such a vast kingdom, Harshavardhana organised a decentralised system of administration with elements of feudalism in it. The king was the centre of administration and was assisted by the crown prince. The majority part of the territory conquered by him was

ruled by the feudatories. Even princes of royal blood were appointed as Viceroys of provinces. Several ministers and other officials were also there to assist in the administration. In order to supervise the administration, Harshavardhana maintained contact with the public opinion through his officers and by his own tours.

Harshavardhana was also a man of considerable literary interests and talents. Despite of his duties as a ruler, he wrote three plays, *Ratnavali*, *Priyadarshika*, and *Nagananda*. His court was a magnificent one being adorned by great luminaries like Banabhatta, Mayura, Bhartrihari and others. Harshavardhana was even the chief patron of the Nalanda University where during that period 10,000 students from all parts of India and abroad studied. In religious matters, he was liberal and secular. He was a born Hindu and worshipped Lord Shiva. But later on he accepted Buddhism and changed over to its Mahayana form being influenced by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang who visited his kingdom. Harshavardhana also exchanged diplomatic missions with China.

7.5 RELATION OF HARSHAVARDHANA WITH KAMRUPA KINGDOM

The relationship of Harshavardhana with the kingdom of Kamrupa was very much cordial. A friendly relationship, rather an alliance, was established between king Bhaskaravarman and king Harshavardhana. This friendship proved to be equally beneficial for both the rulers in strengthening their respective political positions. Further, Bhaskaravarman, on the basis of this relation, could play an important role in the political history of Northern India in the first half of the 7th century A.D.

Bhaskaravarman ascended the throne of Kamarupa in c.600 A.D and ruled till c.650 A.D. for a period of fifty years. He was the most illustrious of all the Varman rulers. At the time of his accession, the glory of the kingdom of Kamarupa was greatly undermined with the loss of Pundravardhana and the defeat at the hands of Mahasenagupta and Sasanka. Bhaskaravarman could not tolerate the rise of Sasanka of Gauda.

It was under such a situation that Bhaskaravarman sought the friendship of king Harshavardhana who too had enmity with king Sasanka of Gauda. Bhaskaravarman sent an embassy to Harshavardhana under Hamsavega with valuable items for seeking the latter's alliance against their common enemy. Harsha too was in need of an ally and he heartily welcomed the offer and thus, was formed an offensive and defensive alliance between the two independent monarchs of Northern and Eastern India.

The combined forces of Harshavardhana and Bhaskaravarman probably launched an attack upon Sasanka. From the West, Bhandi, the cousin and general of Harshavardhana attacked Gauda. While from the East, Bhaskaravarman fell upon him. Unable to face the combined attack, Sasanka fled away to Orissa where he continued to rule till c.619-620 A.D. With this victory, Gauda with its capital city of Karnasuvarna came into the possession of Bhaskaravarman. To commemorate the

occasion, he issued from his victorious camp at Karnasuvarna the famous *Nidhanpur grants* reconfirming the land grants made by Bhutivarman in Pundravardhana.

LET US KNOW

To make friendship with Harshavardhana, king Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa sent his ambassador Hamsavega, who met Harshavardhana with rich presents like Abhoga (umbrella of Varuna), crest jewels, pearl necklaces, silken cloth, manuscripts on aloe bark, drinking vessel, etc.

By forming an alliance with Harshavardhana, Bhaskaravarman not only recovered the lost glory and possession of the kingdom of Kamarupa, but also carried the political glory of Kamarupa to a point not reached ever before. Later, Bhaskaravarman too participated in the religious assembly at Kannauj and religious convocation at Prayaga arranged by Harshavardhana. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang visited the kingdom of Kamarupa and stayed at the court of king Bhaskaravarman. The Chinese pilgrim was very much pleased with the hospitality of Bhaskaravarman and with the peace and prosperity prevailing in the kingdom of Kamarupa.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q7: Who was the founder ruler of the Pushyabhuti dynasty?

.....

Q8: At what age did Harshavardhana ascend the throne of Thaneswar?

.....

Q9: Who united the kingdom of Thaneswar and kingdom of Kannauj?

.....

Q10: Who was Pulakesin II?

.....

Q11: Who was the chief patron of the Nalanda University?

.....

Q12: When did Bhaskaravarman ascend the throne of Kamarupa?

.....

Q13: Who was Bhandi?

.....

Q14: Name the capital city of the kingdom of Gauda.

.....

7.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt

The Pushyabhuti dynasty emerged in Northern India during the early medieval India. The founder ruler of this dynasty was Pushyabhuti after whom the dynasty was named. The Pushyabhuti rulers initially ruled from Thaneswar (Haryana) and

later on from Kannauj (Uttar Pradesh). Prabhakaravardhana was the first important ruler of the Pushyabhuti dynasty. The most illustrious ruler of this dynasty was Harshavardhana, the youngest son of Prabhakaravardhana.

Harshavardhana ascended the throne of Thaneshwar at a very young age of 16 in 606 A.D. and had to face various problems, which he successfully encountered. He was a good warrior and administrator also had interest in literature and wrote three plays.

Harshavardhana established friendly relationship with king Bhaskaravarman of Kamrupa. Both were in need of an ally and as such they entered into an offensive and defensive alliance. The combined forces of Harshavardhana and Bhaskaravarman probably defeated king Sasanka of Gauda, their common enemy. By forming an alliance with Harshavardhana, Bhaskaravarman carried the political glory of Kamarupa to a point not reached ever before.

7.7 FURTHER READING

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to the question no 7: Pushyabhuti.

Answer to the question no 8: 16.

Answer to the question no 9: Harshavardhana united the kingdom of Thaneshwar and kingdom of Kannauj.

Answer to the question no 10: The Chalukya ruler of Badami who defeated Harshavardhana.

Answer to the question no 11: King Harshavardhana.

Answer to the question no 12: Bhaskaravarman ascended the throne of Kamarupa in c.600 A.D.

Answer to the question no 13: The cousin and general of Harshavardhana.

Answer to the question no 14: Karnasuvarna.

7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS

Q.4: Who was the first important ruler of the Pushyabhuti dynasty?

Q5: What title was assumed by king Harshavardhana?

Q6: Name the Chinese pilgrim who visited the kingdom of Kamarupa.

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

Q.4: Critically estimate the reign of king Harshavardhana?

Q.5: Examine the relationship between king Harshavardhana and king Bhaskaravarman of Kamrupa.