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THE GUPTAS AND THEIR SUCCESSORS (A.D.300–750)

After the decline of the Kushanas, north India witnessed the rise of the Gupta dynasty. The rulers of this dynasty were able to establish a vast empire that included almost the entire north India. The Guptas had certain material advantages that helped them to carve an empire. They operated from eastern U.P. and Bihar which was very fertile. They could also exploit the iron ores of central India and Bihar to their advantage. Their period was marked by great progress in art, architecture and literature. They ruled up to circa A.D.550. After their collapse there emerged various regional kingdoms in north India. South India too witnessed the rise of two important kingdoms under the Chalukyas and the Pallavas respectively during AD 550–750.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the rise of the Gupta empire and the political achievements of its rulers;
- describe the emergence of regional kingdoms after the decline of the Guptas;
- analyse the nature of the Gupta and post-Gupta political structure;
- notify social and economic changes from c. A.D. 300–750;
- identify cultural developments with special reference to art and literature;
- learn about the consolidation of Brahmanical tradition and the emergence of *Pauranic* religion;
- list the developments in science and technology;

7.1 POLITICAL HISTORY

The Gupta dynasty was established by Shrigupta, who probably belonged to the vaishya caste. He hailed from either Magadha (Bihar) or Prayaga (eastern U.P.). His son Ghatotkacha, who carried the title of *maharaja*, appears to be some small king about whom nothing much is known.

(a) Chandragupta I

The real founder of the Gupta empire was Chandragupta I (AD 319–334). The year of his accession in A.D. 319 marks the beginning of the Gupta era. It was henceforth used in all their records, and also those of their feudatories. He took the title of *maharajadhiraja* (*king of kings*). He married a Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi. This event is recorded in a series of gold coins issued by Chandragupta. It appears



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.1

1. Who was the real founder of the Gupta dynasty?

2. Give two material advantages that helped the Guptas to establish an empire?

3. How did the marriage alliance with the Lichchhavi's help Chandragupta?

(b) Samudragupta

Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Samudragupta (A.D. 335–375). Samudragupta followed a policy of conquest and enormously enlarged his kingdom. His achievements are recorded in a long inscription (prashasti), written in pure Sanskrit by his court poet Harisena. The inscription is engraved on a Pillar at Allahabad. It enumerates the people and the regions conquered by Samudragupta. He adopted a different policy for different area conquered by him.

In the Ganga-Yamuna doab, he followed a policy of annexation. He defeated nine naga rulers and incorporated their kingdoms in the Gupta empire. He then proceeded to conquer the forest kingdoms of central India, mentioned as atavirajyas. The rulers of these tribal areas were defeated and forced into servitude. This area had a strategic value as it contained a route to south India. It enabled Samudragupta to proceed to South along the eastern coast conquering twelve kings on the way and reached as far as Kanchi near Chennai. Samudragupta, instead of annexing their kingdoms, liberated and reinstated these kings on their thrones. This policy of political conciliation for south India was adopted because he knew that it was difficult to keep them under control and subservience once he returned to his capital in north. So it was enough for him that these states recognized his suzerainty and paid him tributes and presents.

According to the Allahabad inscription, neighbouring five frontier kingdoms and nine republican states of Punjab and western India were overawed by the conquests of Samudragupta. They agreed to pay tribute and taxes to Samudragupta and obey his orders without any fight. The inscription adds that Samudragupta also received tributes from many kings of south - east Asia.

It is generally believed that though he had spread his influence over a vast area, Samudragupta exercised direct administrative control mainly over Indo-Gangetic basin. He celebrated his conquests by performing a horse sacrifice (ashvamedha) and by issuing ashvamedha type of coins (the coins portraying the scene of sacrifice) on the occasion. Samudragupta was not only a conqueror but also a poet, a musician and a patron of learning. His love for music is attested by his coins that represent him as playing on a vina (lute).



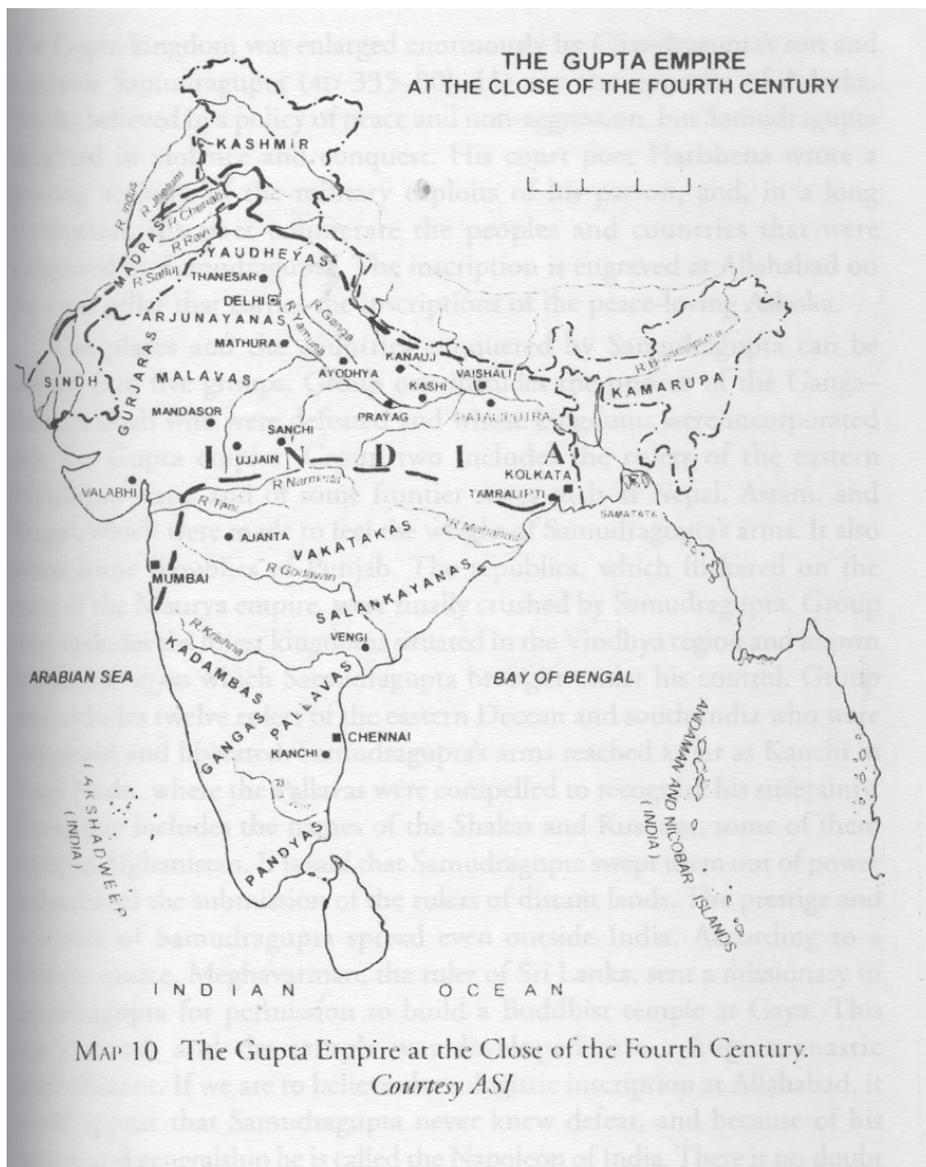
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INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.2

1. What is the importance of the Allahabad Pillar inscription in the history of Samudra-gupta?

2. What do we know about Samudragupta's personality from his coins?



Map 7.1 Gupta Period



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(c) Chandragupta II

Samudragupta was succeeded by his son Chandragupta II (AD 375–414) also known as Chandragupta Vikramaditya, he not only extended his father's empire but also consolidated his position through matrimonial alliances with other royal dynasties of the period. He married Kuvernaga, the Naga princess and had a daughter Prabhavati from her. Prabhavati was given in marriage to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka dynasty ruling in Deccan. After the death of her husband, Prabhavati ruled the territory as regent to her minor son with the help of her father. The control of Vakataka territory proved very beneficial to Chandragupta II, as he was now able to target his other enemies better.

His greatest military achievement was his victory over the Shaka kings who were ruling in western India for the last three hundred years. This conquest made Gupta empire reach up to the western coast.

An iron pillar inscription at Mehrauli in Delhi indicates that his empire included even north-western India and Bengal. He took the title of *Vikramaditya* i.e. the one who is as powerful as the sun. Chandragupta II is remembered for his patronage of art and literature. He is credited with maintaining nine luminaries (navaratna) in his court. The great Sanskrit poet and playwright Kalidasa was the most notable of them all. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa Hien (AD 404–411) visited India during his reign. He has left an account of the life of people in India in the fifth century AD.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.3

1. Chandragupta II married his daughter into which dynasty?

2. How did this alliance help Chandragupta II?

3. Name the Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the reign of Chandragupta II?

4. Name the great Sanskrit poet and playwright who adorned the court of Chandragupta II?

(d) Decline

Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta (AD 415–455). He was able to maintain the empire built up by his father but during the later part of his reign there was a threat from the Hunas of Central Asia. After occupying Bactria the Hunas crossed the Hindukush Mountains and entered India. Their first attack during his reign was repulsed by prince Skandagupta. The Guptas however could not protect their empire for long and the successive waves of Huna invasion made the Gupta's very weak. This was one of the main factors which accelerated the disintegration of the Gupta empire.

The inscriptions issued by the Hunas show that by AD 485 they had occupied eastern Malwa and a large part of central India. Punjab and Rajasthan also passed into their hands. The first important ruler of the Hunas in India was Toramana who conquered an area stretching up to Eran near Bhopal in central India. His son Mihirkula suc-



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ceeded him in AD 515. He is described in texts as a tyrant and an iconoclast. Both Yashodharman of Malwa and Narasimhagupta Baladitya of the Gupta dynasty finally defeated Mihirkula. But this victory over the Hunas could not revive the Gupta Empire.

Besides the Huna invasion there was also a gradual decline in economic prosperity. It is indicated by the gold coins of later Gupta rulers, which have less of gold content and more of alloy. We also notice a gradual disappearance of coins in the post Gupta period. It led the kings to make payments in form of land rather than cash. It is evident by the discovery of large-scale land grant charters donating land to brahmanas and officers.

The practice of giving land for religious and secular purposes in lieu of services rendered to the State is normally termed as feudalism. Under this practice, the donee (the one who receives the grant) was given the right not only to collect the taxes but also to administer the donated land. This created small-small pockets of power trying ceaselessly to expand their sphere of influence at the cost of the ruling authority.

The decline of the Gupta empire resulted in the emergence of numerous ruling dynasties in different parts of northern India. The prominent among them were the Pushyabhutis of Thanesar, Maukharis of Kanauj and the Maitrakas of Valabhi. The political scene in the Peninsular India was no different. The Chalukyas and the Pallavas emerged as strong regional powers in Deccan and northern Tamil Nadu respectively.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.4

1. Which group of family did Toramana belong to?

2. Name the Gupta prince who was able to repulse the first raids of the Hunas?

3. Name two dynasties that emerged in north India after the decline of the Guptas?

7.2 MAITRAKAS

The Maitrakas were tributary chiefs of the Guptas, who established an independent kingdom in western India. Dhruvasena II was the most important ruler of the Maitrakas. He was a contemporary of Harshavardhana and was married to his daughter. Hsuan Tsang tells us that Dhruvasena II attended Harsha's assembly at Prayaga (Allahabad). Ruling over Saurashtra in Gujarat, the Maitrakas developed Valabhi as their capital. This city became an important center of learning. Being on the Arabian Sea, it was also a port town having flourishing trade and commerce. Maitrakas continued to rule until the middle of the eighth century when Arab attacks weakened their power.

7.3 MAUKHARIES

The Maukharis ruled over Kanauj, a city in western Uttar Pradesh, which gradually replaced Pataliputra as a political center of north India. Maukharis were also the subordinate rulers of the Guptas and used the title of *samanta*. Harshavardhana's sister Rajyashri was married to Grihavarman. Shashanka, the ruler of Bengal (Gaur), and Devgupta, the Later Gupta ruler jointly attacked Grihavarman and killed him. The kingdom of Kanauj was then merged with that of the Pushyabhutis and Harsha shifted his capital from Thanesar (Kurukshetra) to Kanauj.



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7.3 PUSHYABHUTIS OF THANESAR

An important ruling family to gain prominence after the fall of the Gupta was that of the Pushyabhutis who had their capital at Thanesar (Thanesvara in Kurukshetra). The dynasty became influential with the accession of Prabhakarvardhana, who was able to defeat the Hunas and strengthen his position in the regions of Punjab and Haryana. After his death, his elder son Rajyavardhana came to the throne but he was treacherously killed by Shashanka, the king of Bengal and Bihar. Harshavardhana then ascended the throne in AD 606. He was only sixteen years of age at that time. Still he proved himself to be a great warrior and an able administrator. We have two valuable sources that throw important light on the life and times of Harshavardhana (606–647). These are *Harshacarita* written by his court poet Banabhatta and *Si-Yu-Ki*, the travel account of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan Tsang, who visited India during AD 629–644.

After his accession Harshavardhana united his kingdom with that of his widowed sister Rajayashri (see above) and shifted his capital to Kanauj and is described as the lord of the north (sakalauttarapathanatha). He brought Punjab, Uttara Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under his control. Harsha wanted to extend his power in the Deccan. But he was defeated by Pulakesin II, the Chalukya ruler, on the banks of river Narmada. The river thus became the southern boundary of his kingdom.

The death of Harsha in AD 647 was followed by a political confusion that continued up to the eighth century when the Gurjara Pratiharas, the Rajput rulers, emerged as a big force in northern India.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.5

1. Who is the author of *Harshacarita*?

2. Hsuan Tsang visited India during the reign of which king?

3. Which ruler defeated Harsha?

PENINSULAR INDIA

7.5 VAKATAKAS

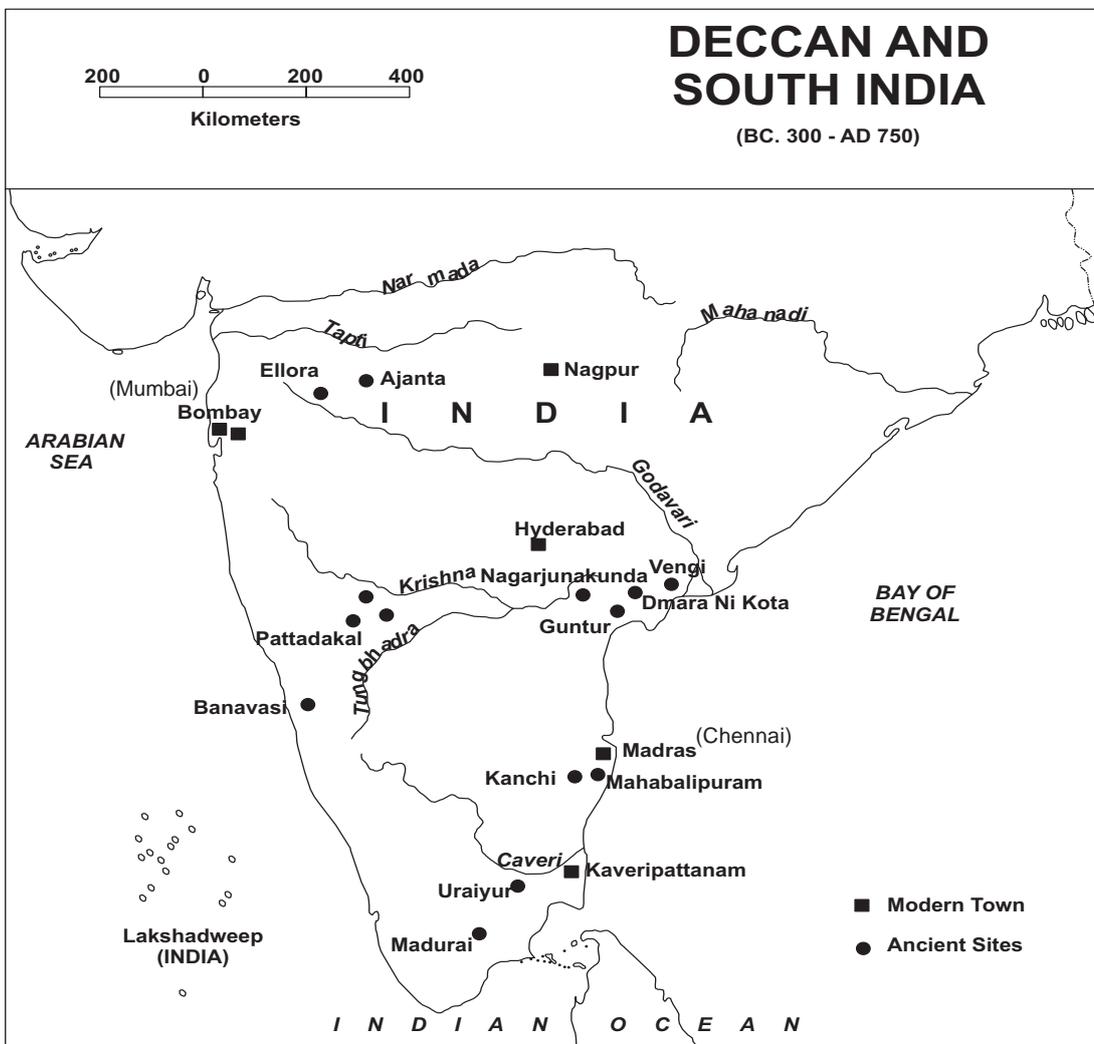
In peninsular India the Vakatakas, were a local power that ruled over northern Maharashtra and Vidarbha. Their history can be reconstructed on the basis of a large number of land grant charters issued to the brahmanas. Rudrasena II of the royal Vakataka family was married to Prabhavatigupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II of the imperial Gupta family. Culturally the Vakataka kingdom is important because it became a channel to spread brohamanical culture to south India.



7.6 CHALUKYAS (SIXTH-EIGHTH CENTURY A.D.)

The Chalukyas played a prominent role in the history of Deccan and south India for about two hundred years from the beginning of sixth century A.D. They set up their kingdom in western Deccan with capital at Vatapi (modern Badami in Karnataka).

The kingdom rapidly rose to prominence during the reign of Pulakesin II (AD 610–642). He was the greatest ruler of the Chalukyas. He consolidated his authority in Maharashtra and conquered large parts of Deccan. He defeated Harshavardhana in circa AD 630 and acquired the title of *dakshinapatheshvara* (lord of the south). However, he himself was defeated and killed by the Pallava king Narasimhavarman in c. AD 642. It marked the beginning of a long drawn political struggle between the Pallavas and Chalukyas that continued with ups and down for more than a hundred years. In about AD 757 their feudatories, the Rashtrakutas, overthrew them. Culturally, their period is important for the growth of art and architecture in Deccan.



Map 7.2 Deccan & South India



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.6

1. Name the capital of the Chalukyas?

2. What was Pulakesin II known as?

7.7 PALLAVAS

The Pallavas established their authority over south Andhra Pradesh and north Tamil Nadu with capital at Kanchi. Kanchi under them became an important temple town and a center of trade and commerce.

The Pallavas rose to power during the reign of Mahendravarman (AD 600–630) and Narasimhavarman I (AD 630–668). Throughout their reign they were in constant conflict with Chalukyas of Vatapi in the north and the Tamil kingdoms of Cholas and Pandyas in the south. Their rule in south India was replaced by the imperial Cholas. Culturally their reign is important for the growth of Tamil *bhakti* literature and the Dravidian style of art and architecture in south India. It was under them that Mahabalipuram, south of Chennai, emerged as an important centre of temple architecture.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.7

1. Name the capital of the Pallavas?

2. Who were the main enemies of the Pallavas in north?

7.8 ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM (c.A.D.300–750)

In the Mauryan period, the political authority was concentrated in the hands of the king. But, the Gupta **administration** was decentralized in nature. It means that feudatories i.e. local Kings and smaller chiefs ruled a large part of their empire. The pompous titles such as *maharajadhiraja*, *parambhattaraka*, *parameshvara* etc were adopted by the imperial Guptas. These lesser rulers adorned their names with titles like *raja* and *maharaja*.

The kingship was normally hereditary. The king was the focus of administration. Princes, ministers and advisors assisted him. The princes were also made the vice-roys of the provinces. Provinces were known as *desh*, *rashtra* or *bhukti* and their head was called *uparika*. The provinces were divided into a number of districts called *pradesha* or *vishaya*. The administrative head of the *vishaya* was known as *vishayapati*. The *vishayas* were further divided into villages. The village headman called *gramadhyaksha* looked after the affairs of the village with the help of village elders. The artisans and merchants took an active part in the town administration during the Gupta period. The Gupta bureaucracy was less elaborate as compared to that of the Mauryas. The high level central officers under the Guptas were called the *kumaramatyas*. Important functionaries like *mantri*, *senapati* were all recruited from that



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cadre. Administrative posts were not only hereditary but often several offices were combined in the hands of the same persons as in the case of Harisena, the composer of the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. He has been described as a *mahadandanayaka* (chief judicial officer) as well as a *mahasandhivigrahika* (minister for war and peace). The ruler himself often appointed high-ranking officers but the hereditary nature of the post must have weakened the royal control over the administration.

During the Gupta period land taxes increased considerably. The land tax called *bali* varied from 1/4th to 1/6th of the total produce. Two new agricultural taxes that appear in Gupta inscriptions are *uparikara* and *udranga*. However, their exact nature is not clear. In addition, the peasants had to meet the demands of the feudatories. They also had to feed the royal army when it passed from the villages. The villagers were also subjected to forced labour (*vishti*).

The judicial system was far more developed under the Gupta rulers than in earlier times. For the first time civil and criminal laws were clearly demarcated. Disputes connected with various type of property were considered in civil law. Elaborate laws were laid down about inheritance. Theft and adultery fell under criminal law. The king upheld the law and tried cases with the help of the brahmanas. The guilds of merchants and artisans were governed by their own laws.

Harsha governed his empire on the same lines, as did the Guptas. But during his period the administration became more decentralized and the number of feudatories grew further. In Harsha's time the officers and the religious persons were paid mainly in land. It encouraged the system of feudalism which grew much more in the post- Harsha period.

In the empire of Harsha law and order does not appear to be so well maintained. Hsuan Tsang was twice robbed of all his belongings during his travels in India. On the other hand Fa Hien had to face no such difficulty during Gupta period.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.8

1. Give the titles adopted by the Gupta rulers?

2. What were the provinces known as in the Gupta period?

3. Name the lowest unit of administration in the Gupta period?

4. Who were the *kumaramatyas*?

5. Name the two new taxes imposed by the Guptas?

6. How was the law and order situation in Harsha's time?



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7.9 SOCIETY

The structure of the **society** was undergoing a change in the Gupta period. The supremacy of the brahmanas was increasing. They were getting large-scale land grants not only from the rulers but from other people also. The land was given along with administrative rights and tax exemptions. Thus, a new class of brahmana landlords was created. Supported by the king, they tended to exploit the peasants.

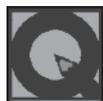
We also notice a proliferation of castes in this period. With the extension of brahmanical culture in distant and different areas, a large number of tribals were assimilated in the brahmanical social structure of varna system fold, as were some foreigners such as the Hunas. While the foreigners and tribals heads were included as kshatriyas, the ordinary tribals were given the status of shudras.

The position of shudras however improved somewhat during this period. They were allowed to listen to the epics and the *puranas*. They could also perform some domestic rituals that were earlier prohibited for them. In the seventh century Hsuan Tsang calls shudras as agriculturists and the vaishyas as traders. A distinction was also made between shudras and untouchables, the latter being treated lower in status than the shudras.

The untouchables are referred to as chandalas. They lived outside the village and dealt in unclean jobs such as scavenging or butchery. The Chinese traveler Fa-Hien tells us that whenever they entered the towns or market places they would strike a piece of wood to announce their arrival, so that the others might not touch them and get polluted.

References to slaves are found in the contemporary *Dharmashastras* (Law Books). Narada mentions fifteen types of slaves. They were mainly domestic servants employed in cleaning and sweeping. The prisoners of war, debt bondsmen, born of a slave woman were all considered slaves.

The status of women continued to decline in Gupta period. The main reason for the subordination of women was their complete dependence on men for their livelihood. The women were not entitled to inherit property. However, she had full right on her *stridhana* i.e. the presents received by the bride at the time of her marriage. The free representation of females in art suggest that there was no *pardah* system in the society. However, there is evidence of the presence of *sati* system. The first evidence of *sati* (immolation of widow) is found in an inscription (AD 510) at Eran in Madhya Pradesh. In the *Harshacarita* of Bana, the queen performs *sati* on the death of her husband king Prabhakaravardhana. Even Rajyashri, sister of Harsha was about to perform *sati* when Harsha rescued her.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.9

1. What are shudras described as by Hsuan Tsang?

2. What is *stridhana*?

3. Where do we find the first epigraphical evidence to '*Sati*'?



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7.10 ECONOMY

The period from circa fourth century to eighth century was a period of great agricultural expansion. The vast areas of land were brought under cultivation and improvements were made in the existing methods of production to attain higher yield. One of the reasons for it was the practice of granting lands to brahmanas and secular officers in different areas. It helped in bringing virgin land under the plough. The spread of knowledge regarding the use of iron plough share, manure, irrigation and preservation of cattle wealth in backward areas also contributed to rural prosperity. It however brought no relief to peasants who continued to suffer tremendous tax burden.

The Gupta and post-Gupta period witnessed a comparative decline in country's trade and commerce. Till AD 550 India continued to have some trade with the eastern Roman empire to which it exported silk, and spices. Around the sixth century the Romans learnt the art of rearing silk worms. This adversely affected India's foreign trade in this precious commodity. The disruption of north-western route by the Hunas was another factor for this decline. India tried to make up the loss by carrying on trade with south-east Asian countries but it did not help revive the economy substantially. The loss in trade lessened the inflow of gold and silver into the country. It is confirmed by a general scarcity of gold coins after the Guptas.

The Guptas did issue a large number of gold coins called *dinaras*. But we notice that the gold coins of each successive Gupta ruler, after Chandragupta II, contain less of gold and more of alloy. After the Guptas very few coins of Kings of different dynasties have been found. Thus in the absence of coinage we can presume that a self-sufficient economic system with limited trade prevailed after the downfall of the Guptas.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.10

1. Name the commodities exported by the Indians to the eastern Roman empire?

2. What were the Gupta gold coins known as?

7.11 LITERATURE

The Gupta period is considered as the Golden Age of art and literature.

A huge body of religious and secular literature was compiled in this period. The two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were finally completed in the fourth century. The stories of both the epics symbolize the victory of good over evil. Both Rama and Krishna came to be considered incarnation of Vishnu.

The Gupta period marks the beginning of the writing of the literature known as *Puranas*. These texts refer to the stories about the Hindu gods and mention the ways to please them through fasts and pilgrimages. The major *Puranas* written in this period are the *Vishnu Purana*, *Vayu Purana* and the *Matsya Purana*. For the worship of Shiva, *Shiv Purana* was written whereas the various incarnations of Vishnu are glorified in *Varaha Purana*, *Vamana Purana*, and *Narasimha Purana*. They were meant for the worship by common man. Some *Smritis* or the law books were also compiled in the Gupta period. One of these, the *Narada Smriti* throws light on the general social and economic rules and regulations of the period.



Notes

The literature in Gupta period was written in Sanskrit. The greatest of all the poets was Kalidasa who lived in the court of Chandragupta II in the fifth century AD. His works are very famous and have been translated in many European languages. Some of the works that he authored are *Meghadutam*, *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, *Raghuvamsha*, *Kumarasambhava* and *Ritusamhara*. The notable feature of his works is that the characters of higher caste speak in Sanskrit while those of lower caste and women speak in Prakrit. The other famous dramatists to have flourished in this period are Shudraka, writer of *Mrichchhkatikam* and Vishakhadatta who authored *Mudrarakshasa*.

In the seventh century Banabhatta, the court poet of Harsha, wrote *Harshacarita* praising his patron. Written in an ornate style, it became a model for later writers. The early history of Harsha is reconstructed on the basis of this text. Another text written by him is *Kadambari*. Harsha too was considered to be a literary monarch. He is said to have authored three plays: *Priyadarshika*, *Nagananda* and *Ratnavali*.

In south India, the period from AD 550–750 witnessed the growth of Bhakti literature in Tamil. Songs were composed by the Vaishnava saints (Alvars) and Saiva saints (Nayannaras) in praise of their respective gods. One of the most famous of the *Alvar* saints was a woman called Andal. The Vaisnava devotional songs are later arranged in a text called *Nalayira Prabandham* while those of the Saivites are preserved in the text known as *Devarama*.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.11

1. What are the Puranas?

2. Who was Andal?

3. What is the bhakti literature of the Nayannars called?

7.12 ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Ancient Indian art was mainly inspired by religion. As in earlier times, Buddhism gave a great impetus to art in Gupta period also. A life size image of Buddha made in copper is found from Sultanganj in Bihar. Beautiful images of Buddha were also created at Mathura and Sarnath. The finest examples of Buddhist art during Gupta period are the paintings of Ajanta caves. Depicting the life of Buddha and the Jataka stories, these paintings with lustrous colors have not faded even after fourteen centuries. The Ajanta caves are now included in the list of the World Heritage Sites by the UNESCO.

It is for the first time in the Gupta period that the temples in the form of structures were constructed in north India. These temples were made in the architectural style known as **Nagara**. Two of these temples, one made of bricks at Bhitargaon in Kanpur and the other of stone at Deogarh in Jhansi have been found in Uttar Pradesh. Here the images of Vishnu are placed in the center as a chief deity.

The Gupta coins are also pieces of art. They are well designed and meticulously crafted. They carry aesthetically impressive depictions of the activities of the rulers.



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The lyricist type of gold coins issued by Samudragupta show him playing a lute. His interest in music can be detected from this representation. He also issued *ashvamedha*



Fig. 7.1 Deogarh Nar-Narayan

type of coins as mentioned above, In peninsular India also the worship of Vishnu and Shiva was becoming popular.

The Pallava rulers constructed stone temples in seventh and eighth centuries to house the images of these gods. The most famous are the seven *rathas* or temples each made out of a solid, piece of stone constructed by king Narasimhavarman at Mahabalipuram, 65 km from Chennai. The Pallavas also built many structural temples. One of the most important among them is the Kailashnath temple, constructed in the eighth century.

The Chalukyas of Vatapi also erected numerous temples at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal. Pattadakal has as many as ten temples built in seventh and eighth centuries and Virupaksha temple. The southern style of architecture came to be known as **Dravida**.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.12

1. Where in Uttar Pradesh are found Gupta temples?

2. Name the north and south Indian styles of architecture?



Notes

3. Why is Mahabalipuram important?



Fig. 7.2 Rath Mandir - Mahabalipuram

7.13 RELIGION

The Gupta rulers gave patronage to Bhagvatism. But they were tolerant to other religions too. The Chinese pilgrims Fa Hien and Hsuan Tsang, who came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II and Harsha respectively, clearly give the impression that Buddhism was also flourishing. Harsha, though a *Shaiva* in his early life, became a follower of Buddhism and a great patron of the religion. He convened an assembly at Kanauj to publicize Mahayanaism. **Nalanda** developed as a great center of education for Mahayana Buddhism during his time. Students from outside countries also came to study in this university. According to Hsuan Tsang the revenues of one hundred villages supported it.

Bhagvatism centered on the worship of Vishnu and his incarnations. It put emphasis on *bhakti* (loving devotion) and *ahimsa* (non killing of animals) rather than Vedic rituals and sacrifices. The new religion was quite liberal, and assimilated the lower classes in its fold. According to *Bhagavadgita*, the chief text of Bhagvatism, whenever there was a social crisis Vishnu would appear in a human form and save the people. Thus ten incarnations of Vishnu were perceived. *Puranas* were written to popularize the virtues of each one of these incarnations. The idols of gods were housed in the temples constructed in Gupta period.

In south India, from the seventh century onwards the Tamil saints called *Alvars* and *Nayannaras* popularized the concept of *bhakti*. *Alvar* saints popularized the worship of Vishnu and the *Nayannar* saints, the worship of Shiva.

We also notice the spread of Tantrism in India in this period. From the fifth century the brahmanas had started receiving land in the tribal areas of Nepal, Assam, Bengal, Orissa, central India and Deccan. As a consequence, the tribal elements came to be assimilated in the brahmanical society. The brahmanas adopted their rituals, gods and



goddesses. It is this assimilation of brahmanical religion and tribal practices which resulted in the development of Tantrism. It did not believe in any caste or gender bias and admitted both women and shudras in its ranks. It put emphasis on 'female' as a source of power and energy. The Tantrik concepts affected, Shaivism and Vaishnavism as well as Buddhism and Jainism. It resulted in the introduction of the worship of female deities in these religions.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.13

1. Where did Harsha convene an assembly for Buddhism?

2. Name the centre of education for Mahayana Buddhism during Harsha's time?

3. How many incarnations of Vishnu were perceived?

4. Name the saints who popularized the worship of Vishnu and Shiva in south India?

7.14 SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

An idea of the progress of science and technology in the Gupta period can be had from the important texts written on these subjects during this period. The most notable among them is an astronomical text called *Aryabhatiyam*, written by Aryabhata in the fifth century. Aryabhata was an astronomer and a mathematician. He for the first time suggested that the earth rotates on its axis, and revolves around the sun and causes eclipse. He was the first to invent "zero" and the use of the decimal system. Another scholar Varahamihira (end of sixth century) was a great astronomer who has written a number of books on astronomy. His work *Panchasiddhantika* deals with five astronomical systems. Brahmagupta a well known mathematician also lived in the Gupta period.

Metallurgy also saw technological advancement in Gupta times. The bronze images of Buddha produced on a considerable scale in the period are an example of advanced technology. The twenty-three feet high iron pillar at Mehrauli in Delhi too speaks volumes of the iron technology prevailing in the Gupta period. Standing in the open, this pillar has not gathered rust even after fifteen centuries. The wonderful paintings of Ajanta, still intact, indicate besides other things, the art of making colors during this period.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.14

1. Who was Aryabhata and what theories did he propound?

2. Name the text written by Varahamihira?

3. Which is the most important example of the advancement in metallurgy in Gupta period?



Notes



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT

Let us briefly recapitulate the main points of this lesson: Chandra Gupta I (AD 319–334) was the real founder of Gupta empire. Guptas were able to establish a vast empire as they could exploit the iron ores of central India and Bihar and also this being very fertile land. He was succeeded by Samudragupta (AD 335–375) and Chandra Gupta II (AD 375–414). Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa Hien (AD 404–411) visited India and has left an vivid account of people of that period. Great Sanskrit poet and playwright Kalidasa was one of the nine luminaries of Chandra Gupta II. Hunas from Central Asia threatened the Gupta empire & its invasion made Gupta's very weak. Subsequently decline in economic prosperity led to gradual decline of Gupta's empire.

Harshavardhana (606–647), a great warrior and able administrator established kingdom in north whose account is available in Harishcharita by his court poet Banabhatta. Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan Tsang visited India during his time. Harsha was defeated by Pula Kesin II Chalukya ruler of south, so river Namada become Harsha's Southern boundary.

Pallavas rose to power in penninsular India. Tamil bhakti literature and Dravidian style of art and architecture in South India developed during this period.

Society underwent a change during Gupta's period. Brahminal culture extended to distant and different areas. A large number of tribals were assimilated in the varna system and some foreigners like Hunas were also stratified into Brahmanical system. The status of women declined further in this period.

Gupta period is Golden age of Art and literature Ramayana and Mahabharata were completed in 4th century. Puranas began to be written. Alvars & Nayannaras, The South India saints composed Bhakti literature in Tamil.

Nagara-North Indian temples and southern style Dravida temples came to be established in their respective regions.

Ajanta Caves paintings depicting the life of Budha were also created during this period. The famous Mahabalipuram rath temples are also a creation of this period.

Aryabhatiyam, a notable astro-nomical text written by Aryabhatta of 5th century stated for the first time that the earth rotates on its axis and revolves around sun. Metallurgy saw technological advancement in Gupta times. Mehrauli's Iron pillar and bronze images of Buddha are few examples of this advancement.



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the achievements of Samudragupta on the basis of Allahabad Pillar inscription?
2. Account for the decline of the Gupta empire?
3. Give an account of the Gupta administration?
4. Write a note on the proliferation of castes during the period under study?
5. Discuss the position of women and untouchables in the Gupta period?
6. Give reasons for the expansion of agriculture in the period of our study?
7. Why did the trade decline in Gupta period?



Notes

8. Why is the Gupta age considered the Golden Age of art and literature?
9. Write a note on the Gupta coins?
10. Discuss the contribution of the Pallavas and the Chalukyas in the field of architecture?
11. Write a paragraph on Bhagvatism?
12. What were the factors that led to the rise of Tantrism in post-Gupta period?
13. Discuss the development of science and technology from c.AD 300–750?



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

7.1

1. Chandragupta I
2. Fertile area; Rich in iron ore
3. Legitimacy, prestige, strength

7.2

1. It gives a detailed account of Samundragupta's period
2. Poet, musician and patron of learning

7.3

1. Vakataka
2. He was able to target his other enemies better
3. Fa Hien
4. Kalidasa

7.4

1. Huna
2. Skandagupta
3. Pushyabhutis at Thanesar; Maukharis at Kanauj

7.5

1. Banabhatta
2. Harsha
3. PulakesinII

7.6

1. Vatapi
2. Dakshinapatheshvara

7.7

1. Kanchi
2. Chalukyas

**Notes****7.8**

1. maharajadhiraja, parambhattaraka, parameshvara
2. desha, rashtra, bhukti
3. grama
4. High level central officers
5. Uparikara and Udranga
6. It was bad as Hsuan Tsang was robbed of his belongings twice.

7.9

1. Agriculturalists
2. presents received by the bride at the time of her marriage
3. Eran in Madhya Pradesh

7.10

1. Silk, spices
2. Dinaras

7.11

1. These texts refer to stories about Hindu gods and mention the way to please them.
2. Alvar women saint of South India.
3. Devarama

7.12

1. Bhitargaon in Kanpur and Deogh in Jhansi (U.P.)
2. Nagara and Dravida
3. It contains the seven rathas temples built by the Pallava king Narasimhavarman

7.13

1. Kanauj
2. Nalanda
3. Ten
4. Alvars and Nayannars

7.14

1. Astronomer and mathematician [He invented zero and brought forth the importance of decimal system earth rotates on its axis & revolves around Sun.
2. Panchasiddhantika
3. Iron pillar at Mehrauli in Delhi



Notes

HINTS TO TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Refer 7.1 para 3
2. Refer 7.1
3. Refer 7.8
4. Refer 7.9 para 2
5. Refer 7.9 para 4
6. Refer 7.10 para 1
7. Refer 7.10 para 2
8. Refer 7.11 and 7.12
9. Refer 7.10 para 3 and 7.12 para 3
10. Refer 7.12 para 4 & para 5
11. Refer 7.13 para 1
12. Refer 7.13 para 3
13. Refer 7.14

GLOSSARY

Donee	–	the beneficiary of land -grants
Eulogy	–	a piece of writing in praise of a person
Feudalism	–	grant of a piece of land by an overlord to a donee with all financial, administrative and judicial rights.
Land Grant	–	Found mainly on copper plates. These refer to land granted to
Charters	–	donee with rights to collect revenue from peasants