

## Lesson 7

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

#### Summary

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 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. You will read about this in this lesson.

#### POLITICAL HISTORY

• Gupta dynasty was established by Shrigupta

• real founder of the Gupta empire was Chandragupta I (AD 319–334).

• Chandragupta I took the title of *maharajadhiraja* (king of kings).

• Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Samudragupta (A.D. 335–375).

• Samudragupta's achievements are recorded on a Pillar at Allahabad

• Samudragupta was succeeded by his son Chandragupta II (AD 375–414)

• Chandragupta II greatest military achievement was his victory over the Shaka kings

• The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim FaHien (AD 404–411) visited India during his reign

#### Decline

Huna invasion made the Gupta's very weak.

Gradual decline in economic prosperity

The decline of the Gupta empire resulted in the emergence of numerous ruling dynasties

The prominent among them were the Pushyabhutis of Thanesar, Maukharies of Kanauj and the Maitrakas of Valabhi

#### ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

- Gupta administration was decentralized in nature
- The kingship was normally hereditary.
- The king was the focus of administration.
- Princes, ministers and advisors assisted him.

- Provinces were known as *desha*, *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 *grama dhyaksha*
- The high level central officers under the Guptas were called the *kumaramatyas*.
- 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*
- 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.

### Society

- A new class of brahmana landlords was created
- The position of shudras however improved
- The untouchables are referred to as chandalas
- The women were not entitled to inherit property. However, she had full right on her *stri dhana*
- There was no *purdah* system in the society

### Economy

- The period from circa fourth century to eighth century was a period of great agricultural expansion
- The Gupta and post- Gupta period witnessed a comparative decline in country's trade and commerce.
- The loss in trade lessened the inflow of gold and silver into the country
- The Guptas did issue a large number of gold coins called *dinaras*.

- After the Guptas very few coins of Kings of different dynasties have been found.

### Literature-

- The Gupta period is considered as the Golden Age of art and literature.
- Ramayana and the Mahabharata completed in this period.
- Beginning of the writing of the literature known as Puranas.
- Narada Smriti compiled in this period
- Kalidas also belonged to this period

### ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Ancient Indian art was mainly inspired by religion

The finest examples of Buddhist art during Gupta period are the paintings of Ajanta caves.

For the first time the temples in the form of structures were constructed in north India.

These temples were made in the architectural style known as *Nagara*.

### RELIGION

- The Gupta rulers gave patronage to Bhagvatism. But they were tolerant to other religions too.
- Nalanda developed as a great center of education for Mahayana Buddhism during Harsha's time.
- 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.
- 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.

## **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

- An astronomical text called Aryabhatiyam, written by Aryabhata in the fifth century.
- Aryabhata for the first time suggested that the earth rotates on its axis, and revolves around the sun and causes eclipse.
- Aryabhata was the first to invent “zero” and the use of the decimal system
- Varahamihira (end of sixth century) was a great astronomer who has written a number of books on astronomy.
- Brahmagupta a well known mathematician also lived in the Gupta period
- Metallurgy also saw technological advancement in Gupta times.
- The twenty-three feet high iron pillar at Mehrauli in Delhi too speaks volumes of the iron technology prevailing in the Gupta period.
- The wonderful paintings of Ajanta, still intact, indicate besides other things, the art of making colors during this period.

## **Evaluate Yourself**

- Q.**The Gupta period is considered as the Golden Age of art and literature. Examine.
- Q. Explain the reason for the decline of the Gupta empire.
- Q. Write a note on Ajanta Painting.