

HISTORY – GUPTA EMPIRE – PART II

DECLINE

- ❖ Vishnugupta- last recognised ruler – 540 to 550 CE.
- ❖ Internal fight among the royal families.
- ❖ During the reign of Budhagupta – Vakataka ruler Narendrasena of western Deccan attacked Malwa, Mekhala, Kosala.
- ❖ Later another Vakataka ruler Harisena conquered Malwa and Gujarat from Gupta.

- ❖ Since Kumara Gupta time north west India was threatened by Huna invasion.
- ❖ Mid fifth century – Ye- tha white Huns – Hephthalites in Greek account dominated the Oxus Valley.
- ❖ They made inroads to Iran and India – crossed Hindukush – conquered Gandhara – their further movement was controlled by Skanda Gupta' s army.
- ❖ The tribals from central India took over western India – Skanda Gupta took necessary measures to stop their intrusion to India.
- ❖ But the later Gupta's were weak and failed to prevents Huns invasion.
- ❖ Huns were excellent horsemen and archers.
- ❖ 485CE – Huns occupied eastern Malwa – main part of central India.
- ❖ Their inscriptions are found from Eran in Madhya Pradesh.
- ❖ Punjab and Rajasthan – two intermediate regions also passed their hands.
- ❖ Huna chief – Toramana – conquered all these places.
- ❖ Numismatic evidences – his control may extend over Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kashmir.
- ❖ He converted to Jainism.
- ❖ The Kuvalayamala – 8th century Jaina text – refer to Toramana adopting the Jaina faith nad living in the banks of the Chenab at Pavvaiya.
- ❖ Beginning of 6th century – the conquests of Huna must have drastically reduced.
- ❖ Stories speak him as – persecutor of the Buddhists – destroyed Buddhist monasteries.\

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- ❖ He was a Shaivite.
- ❖ Built the temple of Mihirashvara – ran over much of north India.
- ❖ Suffered the defeat at the hands of Yasodharman of Malwa.
- ❖ He was defeated by the – Narasimhagupta Baladitya of Gupta dynasty.
- ❖ He was also defeated by the Maukharis.
- ❖ Escaped to Kashmir – died in 542 CE.
- ❖ The power of Huns declined thereafter.
- ❖ Gupta empires financial resources drained due to constant war with the Huns.
- ❖ As **Huns invasion weakened** – there **emerged the independent rulers in north**.

Independent Rulers in North India
Yasodharman of Malwa
Maukharis in Kannauj (capital) – Uttar Pradesh and Bihar
Maitrakas in Saurashtra – Valabhi (capital)
Chandras in Bengal
Pushyabhutis in Thaneswar
Guptas of Magadha

- ❖ Guptas of Magadha – not part of main Gupta dynasty but a minor lineage bearing same name.
- ❖ Magadhan Guptas were defeated by the Maukharis.
- ❖ The Gupta suzerainty was recognized by the Parivrajaka Maharaja and Maharajas of Uchchakalpa – in central India.
- ❖ They were feudatories – subdued by Samudra Gupta.
- ❖ By the beginning of sixth century CE – feudatories emerged independently as the Gupta empire weakened.
- ❖ Maitrakas – established their authority in Gujarat.
- ❖ Feudatories changed their title – from Maharaja to Maharaja- adhiraja.
- ❖ Imitating the Guptas.

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- ❖ Pushyabhutis in Thaneswar ruled north of Delhi - Maukharis in Kannauj - a marriage alliance between them – on the death of last Maukhari king led to the unification of the two kingdoms.

Establishment of lesser dynasties
❖ The Manas
❖ The Shailodbhavas in Orissa
❖ The Varmans in Assam

- ❖ Administrative weakness
- ❖ No efforts made to control over the conquered regions.
- ❖ Gupta's policy in the newly conquered areas – was to restore authority of local chiefs or kings.
- ❖ Once they accept the suzerainty.
- ❖ Whenever there is succession war or weak rulers - the independent local chiefs re-establish their power.
- ❖ Constant military campaigns.
- ❖ Drained their treasury resources.
- ❖ There are many other reasons for the weakness of Gupta empire.
- ❖ Land grants issued to the Brahmana.
- ❖ Decentralization.
- ❖ The revenue and administrative rights were surrendered in favour of donees.
- ❖ Donees were empowered to punish the criminals.
- ❖ Land grants included – right over mines and salt.
- ❖ Weakened the royal authority.
- ❖ Oppression of peasantry.
- ❖ Growth of feudalism due to donation of land grants.
- ❖ Inscription mention – peasantry was transferred along with the land grants.
- ❖ Sub infeudation – donated lands were given to tenants on certain terms.
- ❖ Guptas did not maintain an elaborate bureaucracy.
- ❖ Several administrative posts were given to same person.
- ❖ Administrative posts became hereditary.
- ❖ They did not possess a large professional army.
- ❖ Found it difficult to maintain huge army.

ENTRI

- ❖ No indication about standing army in the Allahabad inscription.
- ❖ Fa Hien – did not provide the numerical strength of the Gupta army.
- ❖ Feudatories supplied soldiers.
- ❖ Led to the dependence of feudatories.
- ❖ Increasing practice of giving land grants for religious and other purposes – bound to reduce the revenue.
- ❖ Their income reduced due to the decline of the foreign trade.
- ❖ Migration of the guild of silk weavers from Gujarat to Malwa in 473CE.
- ❖ Gujarat trade gradually disappeared.
- ❖ They were desperate to maintain their gold currency by reducing the content of pure gold in it.

ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM OF GUPTA EMPIRE

- ❖ The Gupta kings did not interfere in administration of those regions where the kings had accepted their suzerainty.
- ❖ This does not mean that the Guptas were ruling only through their feudatories.
- ❖ They had an elaborate administrative system which was in operation in areas which were directly controlled by them.

King

- ❖ The central figure of administration
- ❖ Adopted high sounding titles like: **paramabhattaraka, Parama-daivata, chakravarthi, paramesvara.**
- ❖ The Allahabad prasasthi of Samudra Gupta describes him as - “ equal to the gods: Dhanada (kubera), Varuna(sea-God), Indra and antaka (varma) who had no antagonist of equal power in the world...” .
- ❖ The Gupta kings too came to be considered a divinity on earth.
- ❖ A divine status-They were also connected with gods through epithets such as parama-daivata.
- ❖ The Guptas made munificent gifts to the brahmanas, who expressed their gratitude by comparing the king to different gods.
- ❖ The kings duty to decide the policy of the state during war and peace.
- ❖ To protect his countrymen.

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- ❖ The king was to lead the army in case of war.
- ❖ Administration of justice.
- ❖ Appointment of central and provincial officers

Ministers and other officials

- ❖ King used to take counsel of his ministers.
- ❖ The Allahabad inscription – mention about the council of ministers.
- ❖ Hereditary – minister's office.
- ❖ The Udayagiri inscription – Chandragupta II – informs us that – Virasena Saba the minister of war and peace – holding this office by inheritance.
- ❖ Kumaramatyā – occurs on six Vaishali seals.
- ❖ Representation of high ranks.
- ❖ *Amatyā* the designation – occurs in several Bhatta seals Uttar Pradesh.
- ❖ The Karamdanda stone inscription of Kumaragupta – mention – *mantri-kumaramatyā*.
- ❖ The Allahabad Prashasti – refers to *mahadandanayakas* – high ranking judicial or military officers.
- ❖ One of the seals mentions – *mahadandanayaka* – named Agnigupta.
- ❖ Some other officials:

Mahapratihara	Chief of palace guards
Pratihara	Regulated ceremonies Granted necessary permissions for admission to the royal presence.
Ayuktakas	Cadre of high ranking official.
Khadyatapakita	Superintendent of the royal kitchen

- ❖ Vaishali seal mention the term – *Vinayashitisthapaka* – translated as 'one who maintains moral and social discipline'.
- ❖ Officials were paid in cash.

Army

- ❖ The official title *Mahabaladhikrita* occurs in many inscriptions
- ❖ Officials like *pilupati* (head of elephants)

Asvapati (head of horses),

Narapati (head of foot soldiers) possibly worked under him.

- ❖ A Vaishali seal mentions about the office of **ranabhandagarika**.
- ❖ He an officer -in-charge of army storms.
- ❖ He had to look after the supply of weapons.
- ❖ Term “**Senapati**” does not occur in Gupta inscriptions
- ❖ The system of espionage existed - spies known as **dutakas**
- ❖ The numerical strength of the Gupta army is not known.

Revenue Administration

- ❖ Revenue department existed
- ❖ Land revenue was the main source
- ❖ Land taxes increased in number, and those on trade and commerce decreased
- ❖ The king collected taxes varying from one- fourth to one- sixth of the produce
- ❖ Both Kalidasa and the author of the Narada-smriti give testimony to this
- ❖ The gaya copper plate inscription mentions about an officer gopavasamin working as
- ❖ Akshapatalashikrita- responsible for the recovery of fines- during Samudra Gupta time
- ❖ Another official: pustapala (record- keeper)
- ❖ Kamandaka Nistisara advises the king to be like a florist or milkman in matters of taxation
- ❖ The Nitisara mentions various sources of revenue
- ❖ Military campaigns financed through revenue surplus.
- ❖ The judicial system developed
- ❖ Several law - books were compiled
- ❖ Civil and criminal laws were clearly demarcated
- ❖ Theft and adultery fell under criminal law
- ❖ Disputes regarding various types of property under civil law
- ❖ Elaborate laws were laid down about inheritance

- ❖ Many laws continued to be based on varna differentiation

Division of the Empire

Provinces - deshas or bhuktis
Districts - vishayas
Village - headman called Gramapati or Gramadhyaksha

- ❖ The Gupta Empire was divided into provinces known as deshas or bhuktis
- ❖ The inscriptions provide us with the name of certain Bhuktis
- ❖ In Bengal we hear of Pundravardhara Bhukti which corresponded to north Bengal
- ❖ Tira - bhukti corresponded to north Bihar.
- ❖ The Bhuktis were governed by Uparikas.
- ❖ They were directly appointed by the king.
- ❖ Parnadatta was appointed a governor in saurashtra by Skanda Gupta.
- ❖ In the Damodarpur plates the uparika had the title maharaja.
- ❖ Shows high status and rank.

- ❖ Bhukti was again divided into districts or vishayas under an official called Ayuktaka and in other cases a Vishayapati.
- ❖ His appointment was made by the provincial governor.

- ❖ The lowest unit of administration was the village.
- ❖ In villages where there was a headman called Gramapati or Gramadhyaksha.
- ❖ No land transactions could be affected without their consent.
- ❖ In the towns, organized professional bodies were given the rights of governance.
- ❖ The sealings from Vaishali show that artisans, merchants and the head of the guild conducted the affairs of the town.
- ❖ Artisans and bankers were organized into their own separate guilds.
- ❖ Numerous guilds of artisans, traders, etc... at Bhita and Vaishali.
- ❖ At Mandasor in Malwa and at Indore, silk weavers maintained their own guilds

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- ❖ In the district of Bulandashahar in western UP, the oil, pressers were organized into guilds
- ❖ The system of administration described above applied only to north.
- ❖ Bengal, Bihar, Up, and some adjoining areas of MP, which were ruled directly by the officers appointed by the Gupta king.
- ❖ The major part of the empire was held by feudatory chiefs
- ❖ The Gupta rulers did not require as many officials as did the Mauryans.
- ❖ The participation of leading artisan, Merchants, elders, and other in the rural and urban
- ❖ administration also lessened the need to maintain a large retinue of officers.

Economic Condition

- ❖ Agriculture flourished in the Gupta.
- ❖ Irrigation works -Skanda Gupta -sudarsana lake- pranadatta.
- ❖ Individual cultivators brought waste lands under cultivation.
- ❖ Crops and fields were fenced.
- ❖ Brahmins, Buddhists and Jain sangha's brought waste lands under cultivation when they were donated to them as religious endowments.
- ❖ Varahamihira on the plantations of fruit trees.
- ❖ The paharpur copper plate inscription indicates that the king was the sole proprietor of the land.
- ❖ Even when he made land grants, he reserved his prerogatives over it.
- ❖ The paharpur plates says that an officer called ustapala maintained records of all the land transactions.

The land was classified as:
Kshetra-cultivable land
Khila-Waste land
Aprahata-Jungle or waste land
Vasti- Habitable land
Gapata sarabha- pastoral land

Terms used for measure of land

Nivartana
Kulyavapa
Dronavapa

- ❖ Peasants were reduced to the position of serfs due to the caste classification and also due to the granting of various privileges and lands to others.
- ❖ The farmers were required to pay various taxes.
- ❖ Mining and metallurgy were one of the most flourishing industries.
- ❖ Iron mine in Bihar, copper mine in RJ- these were mined extensively.
- ❖ Metals like copper was used for the manufacture of various.
- ❖ Domestic implements, utensils and weapons.
- ❖ Mehrauli iron pillar.
- ❖ The Guptas issued the largest number of gold coins.
- ❖ They were called dinaras.
- ❖ In gold content the Gupta coins are not as pure as the Kushan ones.
- ❖ Gold coins were used to pay the officers.
- ❖ After the conquest of Gujrath, the Guptas issued a large number of silver coins - but they were few while comparing with gold coins.
- ❖ The Gupta copper coins are very few in number.
- ❖ Craft items: furniture, baskets, metal tools for domestic use.
- ❖ Luxury items: gold and silver ornaments, fine clothes of cotton and silk.
- ❖ Texts like Amarakosha and Brihat samhita-about craft activity.

Trade and commerce

- ❖ Two distinctive types of **traders called sresti and sarthavaha** existed.
- ❖ **Sresti was usually settled at a particular place.**
- ❖ **Sarthavaha was a caravan trader** who carried his goods to different places.
- ❖ **Merchants' guilds**-They made laws-the govt. Respected their laws- guilds engaged in charity.
- ❖ The Narada and Brihaspati Smritis mention the guild had a chief and two, three or five executive officers.
- ❖ Guild laws were apparently laid down in written documents.
- ❖ Trade items: paper, sandalwood, ivory, elephants, horses, gold, copper, iron.

- ❖ *Urban decay*- R S Sharma
- ❖ 2 phases, 1st one after, 250 CE and 2nd one after 500 CE.
- ❖ According to Sharma, archaeological evidence from all over the subcontinent reflects the phenomenon of urban decline.
- ❖ He also points to a decrease in references to artisans and merchants in inscriptions.

- ❖ Prophecy made in Varahamihira' s *Brihat Samhita* that various towns will either be destroyed or will fall on evil days.
- ❖ The picture of the city's dissolution in Kalidasa' s *Raghuvamsha*.
- ❖ He says the Urban decay as the result of a decline in trade.
- ❖ He says that urban decay lasted for at least seven centuries.
- ❖ A mild urban decay lasted for at least seven centuries.
- ❖ A mild urban renewal occurred in some parts of the subcontinent in the 1000 CE.
- ❖ urbanism became a recognizable process.
- ❖ Sharma has also argued that the Gupta and post-Gupta periods saw a decline in the money economy.
- ❖ He points out that Guptas issued many gold coins, but comparatively few silver and copper coins.
- ❖ Upinder sing says that the hypothesis of urban decay can be questioned.
- ❖ She says the texts of the time abound in lengthy, poetic descriptions of cities and city dwellers.
- ❖ They reflect an idea of flourishing urban centres
- ❖ The Brihatsamhita mentions about the mansions of kings, officials, and other wealthy people.
- ❖ The *Mrichachhakatika* gives a vivid description of the heroine Vasantasena' s magnificent house in ujjayi.
- ❖ Its lofty portal and gold doors studded with diamonds, and its lavishly decorated rooms.
- ❖ The Kamasutra-about wealthy and educated townsmen or nagaraka

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- ❖ The *Narada and Brihaspathi smritis* describe the organization and activities of a prosperous guild of silk weavers.
- ❖ The account of Cosmas mentions various ports in the western coast of India such as calliena(kalyan), sibor (chaul), and the markets of male (Malabar), Mangarouth (Mangalor)
- ❖ Fa Hein refers to Tamralipti in Bengal as an important centre of trade on the eastern coast.
- ❖ These ports and towns were connected with those of Persia, Arabia, and Byzantium on the one hand and Sri Lanka, china, and southeast Asia on the other.
- ❖ The descriptions of cities and city life in the Tamil epics.
- ❖ The *Silappadikaram* describes the busy and bustling markets of Puhar and Madurai with sellers and followers of flowers, garlands, aromatic powder, betel nut, shell bangles, wines, cloth, and garments.
- ❖ There were also shopkeepers, gem workers, and various kinds of skilled workers.
- ❖ Puhar is described as having two parts- the pattinappakkam or akanagar (residential area) and the maruvurpakkam (costal port area).

Terminologies

Kulika (artisan or merchant)

Vanijaka (merchant)

Sreshthi (banker)

Sarthavaha (caravan trader)

Shreshthi-sarthavaha-kulika-nigama (the guild of bankers, caravan traders, and artisans/ merchants)

Kayastha-scribe

Gulma- a military settlement

Different Land Tenures

- ❖ **Nivi dharama**- endowment of land under a kind of trusteeship



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| ❖ Nivi dharma aksayana- A perpetual endowment- The recipient could make use of income derived from it. |
| ❖ Aprada dharma- income from land could be enjoyed, but the recipient is not permitted to gift it to anyone -The recipient has no administrative rights either. |
| ❖ Bhumichchidranayaya- Right of ownership acquired by a person making barren land cultivable for the first time. This land was free from any rent liability |

Land grants

- ❖ **Agrahara grants-** Given to Brahmins, it was perpetual, hereditary and tax-free.
- ❖ **Devagrahara grants-** A land grant in favour of a brahmin as well as gifts to merchants for the repair and worship of temples.
- ❖ **Secular grants** -Grants made to feudatories of Guptas.
- ❖ Kings who conquered neighbouring kingdoms sometimes converted the defeated kings into tributary or subordinate rulers, often referred to in modern writing as feudatories.
- ❖ Agreements were also negotiated with such rulers.
- ❖ The term **samanta**, originally meaning **neighbour**, was used to denote tributary ruler.
- ❖ The **samanthas** became strong when the kings power weakened.

SOCIETY

- ❖ The ideal social order.
- ❖ The state was expected to preserve it.
- ❖ The Brahmanas came to be recognized as the purest and therefore the highest varna.
- ❖ The associated with Sanskritic learning and performed Priestley functions.
- ❖ The Brahmana had influence on the kings.
- ❖ The received land from the kings.
- ❖ The kings, officials and other invited big groups of Brahmanas to come and settle in remote areas.

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- ❖ Even when the rulers were supporters of Buddhism, Jainism, or a particular religious sect, they continued to patronize Brahmanas.
- ❖ This remained one of the major reasons for the economic prosperity and prestige of the Brahmanas.

- ❖ The position of sudras improved during this period.
- ❖ They were now permitted to listen to recitations of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the puranas.
- ❖ There were various groups who were kept out of the caste system.
- ❖ The number of untouchables increased.
- ❖ They were considered impure.
- ❖ The chandalas, the Charmakaras and similar groups were considered outcastes.
- ❖ Fa Hein informs us that the chandalas live outside the village and deal in meat and flesh.
- ❖ Whenever they entered the town, they strike a piece of wood to announce their arrival so that others may avoid them.
- ❖ The position of women or higher varnas was low.
- ❖ Women were also allowed to listen to the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and puranas.
- ❖ Women of the higher orders did not have access to independent sources of livelihood in pre- Gupta and Gupta times.
- ❖ The fact women of the two lower varnas were free to earn their livelihood.
- ❖ The Vaishya and sudras women take to agricultural operations and domestic services.
- ❖ Women were completely dependent on men for their livelihood.
- ❖ They did not have proprietary rights.
- ❖ Widow remarriage was not allowed to members of the higher orders.
- ❖ The Kamasutra suggests that polygyny was also prevalent among sections of the non- royal elite.
- ❖ In states that progeny, fame, and social approval are obtained by a man who marries a virgin of the same varna according to religious rites.
- ❖ It forbids sexual relations with women belonging to higher varnas and with married women.

ENTRI

- ❖ It has no problem with sexual relations purely for pleasure with women belonging to certain lower varnas, placing them on par with relations with prostitute.
- ❖ According to the Kamasutra, a good wife serves her husband diligently, keeps the House clean and manages the servants.
- ❖ She is dutiful and submissive
- ❖ She waits on her husband.

Caste Proliferation

- ❖ As a result of **two factors** there formed caste proliferation.
- ❖ A **large number of foreigners had been assimilated into Indian society.**
- ❖ Each group of foreigners largely came as conquerors they were given the status of kshatriya in society.
- ❖ The Huns, eventually, came to be recognized as one of the thirty-six clans of the Rajput.
- ❖ Even now some Rajput bear the title Hun.
- ❖ The other reason for **the increase in the number of castes was the absorption of many tribal people into Brahmanical society through the process of land grants.**
- ❖ The tribal chiefs were assigned as respectable origin, but most of their ordinary kinsmen were assigned a low origin and every tribe became a kind of caste in its new incarnation.
- ❖ **Forced labour (vishti)** became more common.
- ❖ The *Naradha smriti* has a detailed **discussion of slavery and lists 15 types of slaves.**