

Guptas

Features:

- The Gupta Empire ruled India from the early fourth to late sixth centuries CE.
- It ruled much of the Indian subcontinent from around 319 to 467 CE.
- Historians call this period "India's Golden Age."
- King Sri Gupta established the empire's ruling dynasty, and its most notable rulers were Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, and Chandragupta II, also known as Vikramaditya.
- Strong trade ties also aided in the region's establishment as a cultural hub and a base for influencing neighbouring kingdoms and regions in India and Southeast Asia.
- Due to factors such as significant territorial and imperial authority losses caused by former feudatories, as well as the Huna peoples' (Kidarites and Alcon Huns) invasion of Central Asia, the empire eventually fell apart.
- Following the fall of the Gupta Empire in the sixth century, India was ruled by a slew of regional kingdoms.

Origin:

- The decline of the Mauryan empire resulted in the rise of two major political powers, the Kushanas in the north and the Satavahanas in the south.
- Both of these empires brought political and economic unity to their respective regions.
- The Kushan reign in north India ended around c.230 CE, and the Murundas took over a large portion of central India (possible kinsmen of the Kushanas).
- The Murundas only ruled for 25 to 30 years. The Gupta dynasty rose to power in the last decade of the third century CE (around 275 CE).
- The Gupta empire established control over a large portion of the former Kushana and Satavahana dominions.

- For over a century (335 CE- 455 CE), the Guptas (possibly Vaishyas) kept northern India politically united. The Guptas are thought to have been feudators of the Kushanas.
- The Guptas' original kingdom included Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with their capital in Prayag (U.P).
- The Guptas established their rule over the fertile plains of Madhyadesha, also known as Anuganga (the middle Gangetic basin), Saketa (U.P Ayodhya), Prayag (U.P), and Magadha (mostly Bihar).

Gupta Rulers:

Sri Gupta (240-280 AD):

- According to some inscriptions, Sri Gupta was the likely founder of the Gupta dynasty.
- Between 240 and 280 A.D., he reigned. Sri Gupta is described as Adhiraja of Gupta dynasty in the Poona copper inscription of Prabhavati Gupta (Daughter of Chandra Gupta II).
- Other early Guptas, however, were mentioned in many inscriptions, including Shiva Gupta in the Nasik inscription and Puru Gupta in the Karle inscription.
- The majority of the evidence, however, pointed to Sri Gupta as the founder of the Gupta dynasty.

Ghatotkacha:

- Ghatotkacha was the second ruler of Gupta Dynasty.
- He was the successor of his father Sri Gupta.
- He ruled between 280 AD to 319 AD.
- Pre-imperial Gupta Kings included Ghatotkacha and his father, Sri Gupta.
- His son Chandragupta I became his successor.
- Ghatotkacha was the son of Gupta, the Gupta dynasty's founder.
- Ghatotkacha, like his father, is not documented by his own inscriptions.

- His grandson Samudragupta's Allahabad Pillar inscription contains the earliest description of him, which is repeated verbatim in several later records of the dynasty.
- Previously, a gold coin and a clay seal were attributed to him, but these are now unanimously assigned to Ghatotkacha-gupta, who was a son or younger brother of the 5th century Gupta ruler Kumaragupta I.

Chandragupta I (319 to 334 AD):

- King Chandragupta I of the Gupta Empire ruled over northern India between the years 319 and 334 CE.
- He may have been the dynasty's first emperor, as suggested by his title Maharajadhiraja ("great king of kings").
- The exact process by which he expanded his small hereditary kingdom into an empire is unknown, but a widely accepted hypothesis among contemporary historians holds that it was made possible by his union with Kumaradevi, a Licchavi princess, who served as a political ally.
- Samudragupta, their son, strengthened the Gupta empire much further.
- Chandragupta was the son of Gupta king Ghatotkacha and the grandson of Gupta, the founder of the dynasty, both of whom are referred to as Maharaja ("great king") in the Allahabad Pillar inscription.
- Chandragupta assumed the title Maharajadhiraja and issued gold coins, implying that he was the dynasty's first imperial ruler.

Samudragupta (335/336 - 375 CE):

- Samudragupta (r. 335/336–375 CE) was the second emperor of Ancient India's Gupta Empire and one of the greatest rulers in Indian history.
- He greatly expanded his dynasty's political and military power as the son of Gupta emperor Chandragupta I and the Licchavi princess Kumaradevi. His conquests laid the groundwork for the expansion of the Gupta Empire, a period dubbed the "Golden Age of India" by oriental historians.
- The Allahabad Pillar inscription, a prashasti (eulogy) written by his courtier Harishena, credits him with numerous military victories.

- It implies that he defeated several northern Indian kings and annexed their territories to his empire.

Chandragupta II (380 to 412 AD):

- Chandragupta II (c. 380 – c. 412 CE), also known as Vikramaditya and Chandragupta Vikramaditya, was the third ruler of India's Gupta Empire and one of the dynasty's most powerful emperors.
- Chandragupta carried on his father's expansionist policy, primarily through military conquest.
- He defeated the Western Kshatrapas and expanded the Gupta Empire from the Indus River in the west to the Bengal region in the east, and from the Himalayan foothills in the north to the Narmada River in the south, according to historical evidence.
- Prabhavatigupta, his daughter, was queen of the southern Vakataka kingdom, and he may have had influence in the Vakataka territory during her regency.
- During Chandragupta's reign, the Gupta Empire reached its pinnacle.
- According to the Chinese pilgrim Faxian (Fa-Hien), who visited India during his reign, he ruled over a peaceful and prosperous kingdom.
- The legendary Vikramaditya is most likely based on Chandragupta II (among other kings), and the noted Sanskrit poet Kalidasa may have served as his court poet.

Kumaragupta I (413 to 455 AD):

- Kumaragupta I was the son of Gupta emperor Chandragupta II and queen Dhruvadevi.
- From 413 to 455 AD, he was in power.
- He was also known as Shakraditya and Mahendraditya. He established Nalanda University.
- Hunas encroached on India during his rule.
- Although no concrete information about Kumaragupta's military achievements is available, he performed an Ashvamedha sacrifice, which was typically performed to demonstrate imperial sovereignty.

- The Bhitari pillar inscription states that his successor Skandagupta restored the Gupta family's fallen fortunes, which has led to speculation that during his final years, Kumaragupta suffered reverses, possibly against the Pushyamitras or the Hunas.

Skandagupta (455 to 467 AD):

- Skandagupta was a Gupta Emperor from northern India. Skandagupta was the son of Gupta emperor Kumaragupta I.
- He ascended to the throne in 455 AD and reigned until 467 AD.
- Skandagupta demonstrated his ability to rule by defeating Pushyamitras during his early years in power, earning the title of Vikramaditya.
- During his 12 year reign, he not only defended India's great culture, but also defeated the Huns, who had invaded India from the north west.
- He is widely regarded as the final of the great Gupta Emperors.

Vishnu Gupta (540 - 550 AD):

- Vishnugupta was one of the Gupta Dynasty's lesser-known kings. He is widely regarded as the last recognised king of the Gupta Empire.
- He reigned for ten years from 540 to 550 AD.
- The Gupta dynasty began to wane following Skandgupta's rule.
- Skandgupta's successors failed to solidify the empire's position.
- Skandgupta's successors were very obscure kings, and Vishnugupta was one of them.
- He also served as the last king of the Gupta Dynasty.
- He was the son of Kumaragupta III and the grandson of Narasimhagupta.

Life in the Gupta Age:

Administration:

- Monarchy was the dominant form of government during the Gupta period. The Gupta dynasty's rulers had their own councils.
- Mantri Parishad was the name given to the ministerial council.
- It was made up of high-ranking officials such as the kumaramatyā and the sandhivigrahika.
- The empire was divided into provinces called 'bhuktis.'

- The bhuktis were further classified as 'Vishyas.'
- Each bhukti was administered by a 'uparika,' who was appointed by the king.
- Vishayapatis were appointed by the provincial governor or, in some cases, the king himself to control the vishayas.
- The bhuktis were further subdivided into 'vishayas,' each of which was overseen by a Vishayapati.
- The village administration was overseen by the village headman.
- Unlike the Mauryan period, the administration in the Gupta period appears to have been managed from the ground up.

Trade and Agriculture:

- In ancient India the Guptas issued the largest number of gold coins which were called dinars in their inscriptions.
- Regular in size and weight, they appear in many types and subtypes.
- They clearly portray Gupta kings, indicating the latter's love for war and art.
- Although in gold content these coins are not as pure as Kushan ones.
- They not only served to pay the officers in the army and administration but also to meet the needs of the sale and purchase of land.
- After the conquest of Gujarat, the guptas issued a good number of silver coins mainly for local exchange, in which silver occupied an important position under the Western Kshatrapas.
- In contrast to those of the Kushans, the Gupta copper coins are very few.
- This would suggest that the use of money did not touch the common people so much as it did under the Kushans.
- Compared to the earlier period we notice a decline in long distance trade.
- Till 550AD India carried on some trade with the eastern Roman Empire to which it exported silk.
- Around AD 550 the people of the eastern Roman Empire learn from the Chinese the art of growing silk, which adversely affected the export of India.

- Even before the middle of the 6th century the demand for Indian silk abroad had slackened.
- In the middle of the 5th century a guide of silk weavers left their original home in western India in the country of Lata in Gujarat and migrated to mundus Mandasor, where they gave up the original occupation and took to other professions.
- The striking development of the Gupta period, especially in Madhya Pradesh, was the emergence of priestly landlords at the cost of local peasants.
- Land grants made to the priest certainly bought many virgin areas under cultivation.
- But these beneficiaries were imposed from above on the local tribal peasants, who were reduced to a lower status.
- In central and western India the peasants were also subjected to forced labor.
- On the other hand a good deal of virgin land was brought under cultivation and better knowledge of agriculture seems to have been introduced by the brahmana beneficiaries in the tribal area of central India.

Social Development:

- Large-scale land allocations to the Brahmanas indicate that their dominance grew during the Gupta era.
- The Guptas, who were presumably originally vaishya, eventually gained the reputation of being Kshatriyas among the Brahmanas.
- The Brahmanas presented the Gupta Kings as possessing god-like attributes.
- The caste system, or varna system, had become rigid during the Gupta period, and the Brahmins occupied the top position in society.
- The Brahmins received lavish gifts from rulers and other wealthy people.

- The practise of untouchability had begun during the Gupta period. The Chinese traveller Fahien mentions that 'Chandalas' were separated from society.
- The advancement of Brahmanism led to the neglect of Buddhism and Jainism.
- During this time, religious literature such as Puranas was written.
- Women's Position deteriorated during the Gupta period.
- Women were not permitted to study religious texts such as the Puranas.
- Education and learning were highly valued in Gupta society.
- During the Gupta period, education was provided by Brahmanical agraharas and Buddhist monasteries.

Religion and Culture:

- The Guptas were historically a Hindu dynasty.
- They were devout Hindus who permitted Buddhists and Jainists to pursue their respective faiths.
- Sanchi is still a significant Buddhist centre.
- Nalanda is credited with being established in 455 CE by Kumaragupta I.
- Modern genetic research suggests that endogamy among Indian caste groupings began during the Gupta period, when caste groups stopped intermarrying.
- However, several subsequent kings appear to have made special efforts to promote Buddhism.
- archaeological findings show that the Guptas possessed a large amount of gold, whatever its source, and issued the greatest number of gold coins.
- Princes and the wealthy could divert a portion of their wealth to support artists and writers.
- Samudragupta and Chandragupta II both supported art and literature.
- Painting reached its pinnacle of glory and splendour during this period.
- The most significant examples of Gupta paintings can be found in the wall frescoes of the Ajanta and Bagh caves.

Origin of Bhagavatism:

- Bhagavatism emerged during the post-Maurya period.
- Bhagavatism was centred on the worship of Bhagavata or Vishnu.
- Vishnu was merged with a God named Narayana in the second century BC.
- Narayana and Vishnu were the names given to these Gods.
- Worshippers of Vishnu and Narayana were lumped together when Vishnu and Narayana were merged.
- Vishnu was regarded as a Vedic God.
- Narayana, on the other hand, was associated with non-Vedic culture.
- As a result, both Gods were brought together and merged.
- Bhagavatism was denoted by two terms: Bhakti and Ahimsa.
- Bhakti is defined as a devotional offering.
- Ahimsa is defined as the non-killing principle.
- Devotees used to worship Vishnu's image and offer it sesamum, etc.

Gupta Coins:

- Coins bear the names of the Kings as well as the dates.
- This information aided in the reconstruction of the Gupta dynasty's chronology.
- In fact, the time period of the Gupta rulers is based on the dates found on the coins.
- The titles "Maharajadhiraja" (King of Kings) and "Vikramaditya" appear on coins.
- A title given to those Indian rulers.
- These titles revealed the status and power of the Gupta rulers.
- Coins shed light on the Gupta rulers' foreign relations.
- Kumardevi, a Lichahvi princess, is depicted on Chandragupta I coins.
- This indicates that Chandragupta-I had a matrimonial relationship with the Lichahvi princess, and the depiction of the Lichahvi princess on the Gupta coin revealed the significance of this relationship.

- Lichachhavidauhitra (Son & daughter of Lichahhvi) appears on coins issued by Samudra Gupta.
- This also demonstrated Gupta ties to the Lichahhvi dynasty.
- Samudra Gupta's Ashwamedha coins indicate that he was a great military conqueror.
- Tiger slayer coins issued by Samudra Gupta indicated that he conquered East India tigers found only in the forest of East India at the time.

Art and Architecture:

- The Gupta period is widely regarded as the pinnacle of North Indian art for all major religious groups.
- Although painting was clearly popular, the surviving works are almost entirely religious sculpture.
- In Hindu art, the period saw the emergence of the iconic carved stone deity, as well as the Buddha-figure and Jain tirthankara figures, the latter often on a grand scale.
- Mathura and Gandhara were the two great sculpture centres, the latter being the centre of Greco-Buddhist art. Both sold their sculptures in other parts of northern India.
- The most famous remaining monuments in a broadly Gupta style, the caves at Ajanta, Elephanta, and Ellora (respectively Buddhist, Hindu, and mixed including Jain), were actually built by later dynasties, but they primarily reflect the monumentality and balance of Gupta style.
- Ajanta has by far the most significant survivals of painting from this and subsequent periods, displaying a mature form that had most likely developed over time, primarily in painting palaces.
- The Hindu Udayagiri Caves document connections with the dynasty and its ministers, and the Dashavatara Temple in Deogarh is a major temple, one of the earliest to survive, with significant sculpture.

Economy:

- Agriculture was the Gupta Empire's mainstay.
- The Gupta economy prospered by focusing on agriculture.

- During the Gupta period, the agricultural system was well developed, and the Gupta emperors used scientific methods to increase agricultural production.
- India had developed a sophisticated agricultural, industrial, and trade system long before the rise of the imperial Guptas.
- Economic stability and prosperity aided the period's overall cultural advancement.
- Trade took place both on land and along the coast.
- India had trade relations with both eastern and western countries.
- India maintained regular maritime contacts with Sri Lanka, Persia, Arabia, the Byzantine Empire, Africa, and beyond.

