

Gupta Period (319 AD-540 AD)

1. In 4th Century AD a new dynasty, the Guptas, arose in Magadha and established a large kingdom over the greater part of Northern India (though their empire was not as large as that of the Mauryas). Their rule lasted for more than 200 years.
2. This period is referred as the 'Classical Age' or 'Golden Age' of ancient India and was perhaps the most prosperous era in the Indian history.
3. According to epigraphic evidence, the founder of the dynasty was a person named Gupta. He used the simple title of Maharaja.
4. Gupta was succeeded by his son Ghatotkach, who also inherited the title of Maharaja.

The Gupta Dynasty

1. Chandragupta = I **319-334 AD**
2. Samudragupta = **335-380 AD**
3. Ramgupta = **380 AD**
4. Chandragupta II(Vikramaditya) = **380- 414 AD**
5. Kumargupta(Mahendraditya) = **414-455 AD**
6. Skandagupta I
7. Purugupta
8. Kumargupta II
9. Buddhgupta
- 10.Narsimhagupta III = 467-540 AD

Chandragupta I : 319-334 AD

1. He was the first Gupta ruler to assume the title of Maharajadhiraja.
2. He strengthened his kingdom by matrimonial alliance with the powerful family of Lichchhavis who were the rulers of Mithila. His marriage to Lichchhvi princess Kumaradevi, brought to him enormous power, resources and prestige. He took advantage of the situation and occupied the whole of fertile Gangetic Valley.
3. He started the Gupta Era in **319-20 AD**.

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4. Chandragupta I was able to establish his authority over Magadha, Prayaga and Saketa.

5. **Original type of Gold Coins (Dinaras)** : Chandragupta I-Kumaradevi type.

Samudragupta : 335-380 AD

1. Samudragupta was the greatest king of Gupta dynasty.

2. The most detailed and authentic record of his reign is preserved in the Prayaga Prasasti / Allahabad pillar inscription, composed by his court poet Harisena.

3. According to Prayaga Prasasti, he was a great conqueror.

4. In the Gangetic Valley and Central India, Samudragupta annexed the territories of the defeated monarchs but in South India he remained content with victories alone and did not annex the territories of the vanquished rulers.

5. Samudragupta's military campaigns justify description of him as the 'Napoleon of India' by A. Smith.

6. The reference to his domination over Java, Sumatra and Malaya islands in the sea shows that he had a navy.

7. When he died his mighty empire bordered that of the Kushan of Western province (modern Afghanistan and Pakistan) and Vakatakas in Deccan (modern Southern Maharashtra).

8. His greatest achievement was the political unification of most of India or Aryavarta into a formidable power.

9. **Titles** : Kavaja i.e. king of poets (Prayaga Prasasti), Param Bhagavat (Nalanda copper plate), Ashvamedha - parakrama i.e. whose might was demonstrated by the horse-sacrifice (coin), Vikram i.e. prowess (coin), Sarva-raj-ochchetta i.e. uprooter of all kings (coin) etc. Note : Only Gupta ruler had the title of Sarva-raj-ochchetta.

10. **Original types of Gold Coins (Dinars)** : Garud type, Dhanurdhari i.e. Archer type, Axe type, Ashvamedha type, Vyaghrahanan i.e. Tiger-killing type, Veenavadan i.e. lute playing type.

11. Samudragupta was a Vaishnavite.

12. According to the Chinese writer Wang-Hiuen-Tse, Meghavarna, king of Sri Lanka, sent an embassy to Samudragupta for his permission to build a monastery for Buddhist pilgrims at Bodh Gaya.

Chandragupta II 'Vikramaditya' : 380-414 AD

1. According to 'Devi Chandragupta' (Vishakhadatta), Samudragupta was succeeded by Ramgupta. It seems Ramgupta ruled for a very short period. He was 'the only Gupta ruler to issue copper coins'.

2. Ramagupta, a coward and impotent king, agreed to surrender his queen Dhruvadevi to Saka invader. But the prince Chandragupta II, the younger brother of the king, resolved to go to the enemy's camp in the guise of the queen with a view to kill the hated enemy. Chandragupta II succeeded in killing the Saka ruler.

3. Chandragupta II also succeeded in killing Ramgupta, and not only seized his kingdom but also married his widow Dhruvadevi.

4. Chandragupta II extended the limits of empire by matrimonial alliances (with the Nagas and Vakatakas) and conquest (Western India). He married Kubernaga of Naga dynasty and married his daughter Prabhavatigupta with Vakataka prince Rudrasena II.

5. As a result of the overthrow of Saka rule in Western India, the Gupta empire extended upto Arabian sea. He issued silver coins in the memory of victory over Sakas. He was 'the first Gupta ruler to issue silver coins' and adopted the titles Sakari and Vikramaditya. Ujjain seems to have been made the second capital by Chandragupta II.

6. Mehauli (near Kutub Minar, Delhi) Iron Pillar inscription says that the king defeated the confederacy of Vangas and Vahilkas (Bulks).

7. Nava Ratna (The nine gems) of Chandragupta II: 1. Kalidasa (Poetry—Ritusamhara, Meghadutam, Kumarsambhavam, Raghuvamshama; Dramas - Malvikagnimitra, Vikramorvasiyam, Abhijnan-Shakuntalam) 2. Amarsinh (Amarsinhkosh) 3. Dhanavantri (Navanitakam—medicine text) 4. Varahmihira (Panch Sidhantaka, Vrihatsamhita, Vrihat Jataka, Laghu Jataka) 5. Vararuchi (Vartika-a comment on Ashtadhyayi) 6. Ghatakarna 7. Kshapranak 8. Velabhata 9. Shanku.

8. It was in Chandragupta's time that the Chinese pilgrim Fahien visited India.

9. Titles : Devagupta / Devaraja / Devashri, Parama Bhagavata, Narendra Chandra, Sinh Vikram etc.

10. Original types of Gold coins (Dinaras) : Ashvarohi type, Chhatradhari type, Chakra - Vikram type etc.

Kumaragupta I : 415-455 AD

1. Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta I.
2. Towards the end of his reign, the Gupta empire was threatened from the North by the Huns, who were temporarily checked by his son Skandagupta.
3. Kumaragupta was the worshipper of god Kartikeya.
4. He founded the Nalanda Mahavihara which developed into a great centre of learning.
5. **Titles** : Mahendraditya, Mahendra Sinh and Ashvamedha Mahendrah (coins) etc.
6. **Original types of Gold Coins (Dinars)** : Khadadhari type, Gajarohi type, Gajarohi Sinh-nihanta type, Khang-nihanta i.e rhino eros-slayer type, Kartikeya type, Apratigh-mudra type etc.

Skandagupta : 455-467 AD

1. Skandagupta, the last great ruler of the Gupta dynasty.
2. During his reign the Gupta empire was invaded by the Huns. He succeeded in defeating the Huns. Success in repelling the Huns seems to have been celebrated by the assumption of the title 'Vikramaditya' (Bhitari Pillar Inscription).
3. The continuous attacks of the Huns weakened the empire and adversely affected its economy. The gold coinage of Skandagupta bears testimony to this.
4. The decline of the empire began soon after his death.
5. **Titles** : Vikramaditya and Kramaditya (coins), Param Bhagavat (coins), Sharkropama Kahaum Pillar Inscription), Devaraja (Arya Manjushri Mula Kalpa) etc.

Administration

1. Centralised control was not as fully realized under Guptas as it had been under the Mauryas.

2. Guptan administration was, thus, highly decentralised, and as patrimonial bureaucracy reached its logical conclusion. In hereditary grants it reflected the quasi-feudal character of the economy.

3. It comprised a network of self governing tribes and tributary kingdoms and their chiefs often served as representatives of imperial powers.

4. The Gupta king took exalted titles like the Mahadhiraja, Samrat, Ekadhiraja, Chakravartin, befitting their large empire and imperial status.

5. The practice of appointing the crown prince (Kumara) came in vogue.

6. The Gupta kings were assisted by a council of ministers (Ma ripari shad / Mantrimandalam). The existence of such a council is implied in the Prayaga / Allahabad Pillar Inscription, which speaks of the delight of the 'Sa hyas' (members) at the selection of Samudragupta for the throne.

7. Among the high officers we may take special notice of the Kumaramatya and the Sandhivigrahika, who are not known to in scriptions of earlier period.

8. The Kumaramatyas formed the chief care for recruiting high officials under the Guptas. It was from them the Mantris Senapa Mahadanda-nayaka (Minister of Justice) and Sandhivigrahika (Minister of peace and war) were generally chosen.

9. The office of Sandhivigrahika first appears under Samudragupta, whose amatya Harisena held this title.

10. Other Important officials : Mahapratihari (the Chief usher of the Royal Palace), Dandapashika (Chief officer of Police Department), Vinayasthitisthapa (Chief Officer of Religious affairs), Mahapilupati (Chief of Elephant corps), Mahashvapati (Chief of Cavalry) etc.

S No	Administrative Unit	Head
1.	Bhumi / Bhoga (i.e. Province)	Uparika / Bhogapati
2.	Pradesha (i.e. District)	Vishayapati / Ayukta
3.	Vithana / Nagar (i.e. City)	Nagarpati / Purapala
4.	Gram (i.e. village)	Gramika

11. The important Bhuktis (i.e. provinces) of Gupta period were : Magadha, Bardhaman, Pundra Vardhana, Teerbhukti (Northern Bihar), Eastern Malwa, Western Malwa and Saurashtra.

12. The administration of city was in the hand of a council (Paura), which consisted of the president of the city corporation, the chief representative of the guild of merchants, a representative of the artisans and the Chief Accountant.

13. Whereas under the Mauryas, the city committee was appointed by the Maurya government, under the Guptas, it was comprised of the local representatives.

Culture

1. The architecture of the Gupta period may be divided into three categories :

1. Rock-cut caves : Ajanta and Ellora Group (Maharashtra) and B g h (M).

2. Structural Temples : Dasavatara temple of Deoga h Jhansi d trict, UP)—the oldest and the best, Siva temple of Bhumra (N god, MP), Vishnu and Kankali temple (Tigawa, MP), Parvati temple of N chana—Kuthwa (Panna district, MP), Shiva temple of Khoh (Satna, Panna, MP), Krishna brick temple of Bhattargaon (Kanpur, UP), Laxman temp e of irpur Raipur, MP), Vishnu temple and Varah temple of Eran (MP).

3. Stupas : Mirpur khas (Sindh), Dhammekh (Sar nath) and Ratnagiri (Orissa).

2. The art of architecture at ained great h ights. By evolving the Nagara Style (Shikhar style), the Gupta t ushers the history of Indian architecture. Shikhara Shrine, a Vaishnav symbol, one of the most characteristic features of temple architecture, found its fullest development during this period. The temple architecture with its arbha griha (shrine room) in which the image of the god was p aced began with the Guptas.

3. The fra me tary remains of Dasavatara temple of Deogarh is the example of the most ate and beautifully composed Gupta temple building.

4. The cen res of the Gandhar sculptures declined and their places were taken by Benaras, Patliputra and Mathura.

5. For the first t me we get images of Vishnu, Shiva and other Gods.

6. Among the best specimen of the images of Buddha is a seated Buddha image of Sarnath, which depicts the Buddha preaching the Dhamma.

7. Of the Brahmanical images perhaps the most impressive was the Great Boar (Varah) carved in relief at the entrance of a cave at Udayagiri.

8. The painting of this period are found in Bagh (Dhar district, MP), and Ajanta (Aurangabad district, Maharashtra). The frescoes of the Ajanta caves are the masterpieces of the paintings of this age.

Religious Literature

A. Hindu Texts : Some of the old religious books (viz. Vayu Purana, Vishnu Purana, Matsya Purana ; Ramayan and Mahabharata, Manu Smriti) were re-written. Narada Smriti, Parashara Smriti, Bhrihaspati Smriti and Katyayana Smriti were written in this period.

B. Buddhist. Texts : Abhidharma Kosha (Dignaga), Vishudhimagga (Buddhghosa)

C. Jain texts : Nyayavartam (Sidhsena)

Secular Literature

Ritusamhar (first poetry), Meghadutam, Kumarasamvayam, Raghuvamsam; Malavikagnimitra (first drama), Vikramorvashi-yam Abhijana-Shakun-talam (Kalidasa), Mudrarakshasa (Visakhadatta), Kirataniya (Bharavi), Kavyadarsa, Dasa Kumar Charita (Dandin), Mrichchakatika (Sudraka) Panchatantra (Vishnu Sharma), Kamasutra (Vatsyayan)

Scientific Literature

Aryabhatiya, Surya Sidhanta (Aryabhatta); Brahmasidhanta (Brahmagupta); Pancha Sidhantaka, Vrihat Sंहिता, Vastu Jataka, Laghu Jataka (Varahamihira); Ashtanga Hridaya (medicine) (Vagbhata); Navanitakam (Dhanvantri); Mahabhaskariya, Laghu bhaskariya (Bhaskara); Hastiyayurveda (Palkapya)

Note :

- 1.'Manu smriti' was translated in English under the title of 'Institutes of Hindoo Law' by William Jones.
2. Abhijnana Shakuntalam (i.e. recognition of Shakuntala) was translated in English by William Jones.
3. Kalidas is known as 'the Shakespeare of India'.
4. 'Mrichchakatika' (i.e. the clay cart), love story of a poor brahman Charudatta and virtuous courtesan Vasantasena, is notable for its realistic depiction of city life.
5. 'Kamasutra' is the earliest book on sex.
6. 'Brahmasidhanta' was translated in Arabic under the title of 'Sind Hind'.

Gupta Period : Golden Age of Ancient India—Reality or Myth ?

Arguments :

For : 1. There were political units; foreign rule was completely removed and peace and prosperity prevailed 2. Enlightened character of government, i.e. taxes were light, punishment mild, etc. 3. Revival of Hinduism but there was tolerance of all other religions 4. Use of Sanskrit developed and art and literature flourished during the period 5. Great personage like Kalidasa, Amarsinha, Dhanavantri, Aryabhata, Varahamihira etc. lived during this period.

Against : 1. Existence of too many feudatories 2. Absence of large Central army and Bureaucracy 3. Development of Feudal elements (Increasing land grants, Serfdom, Sub-infeudation etc.) 4. Decline of trade and Guilds 5. Decline of urban centres 6. Increasing Varna distinction and social disorder 7. Decline in status of women.