

# Gupta Empire

## Ancient History NCERT Notes For UPSC

In Ancient Indian, the Gupta empire was established in the mid 3rd century A.D and lasted till 543 A.D. The founder of the Gupta empire was Sri Gupta. The Gupta empire reached its prominence in 320 A.D.

- Major part of the country was under the reign of the Gupta dynasty. The homeland of the Guptas is not known for sure, but scholars believe that the Guptas might have originated from either Bengal or Prayaga.
- Though the Gupta empire was not as large as the Maurya empire, the Guptas kept the entire North India politically united for more than a century.
- There are several sources like literary works, inscriptions, epigraphical and numismatic sources which reconstruct the history of the Gupta age.
  - The information regarding the genealogy and the rise of Guptas are provided in the contemporary literary works like **Devichandraguptam** and **Mudhrakshasam**.
  - An account of the social, economic and religious conditions of the Gupta empire was left by the Chinese traveller Fahien.
  - Inscriptions such as the Allahabad pillar inscription, the Mehrauli Iron pillar inscription mentions the achievements and reign of the Guptas.

This article on NCERT Notes on Gupta Empire deals with the origin, rulers and some important facts about Gupta dynasty which will be useful for the upcoming [UPSC Exams](#).

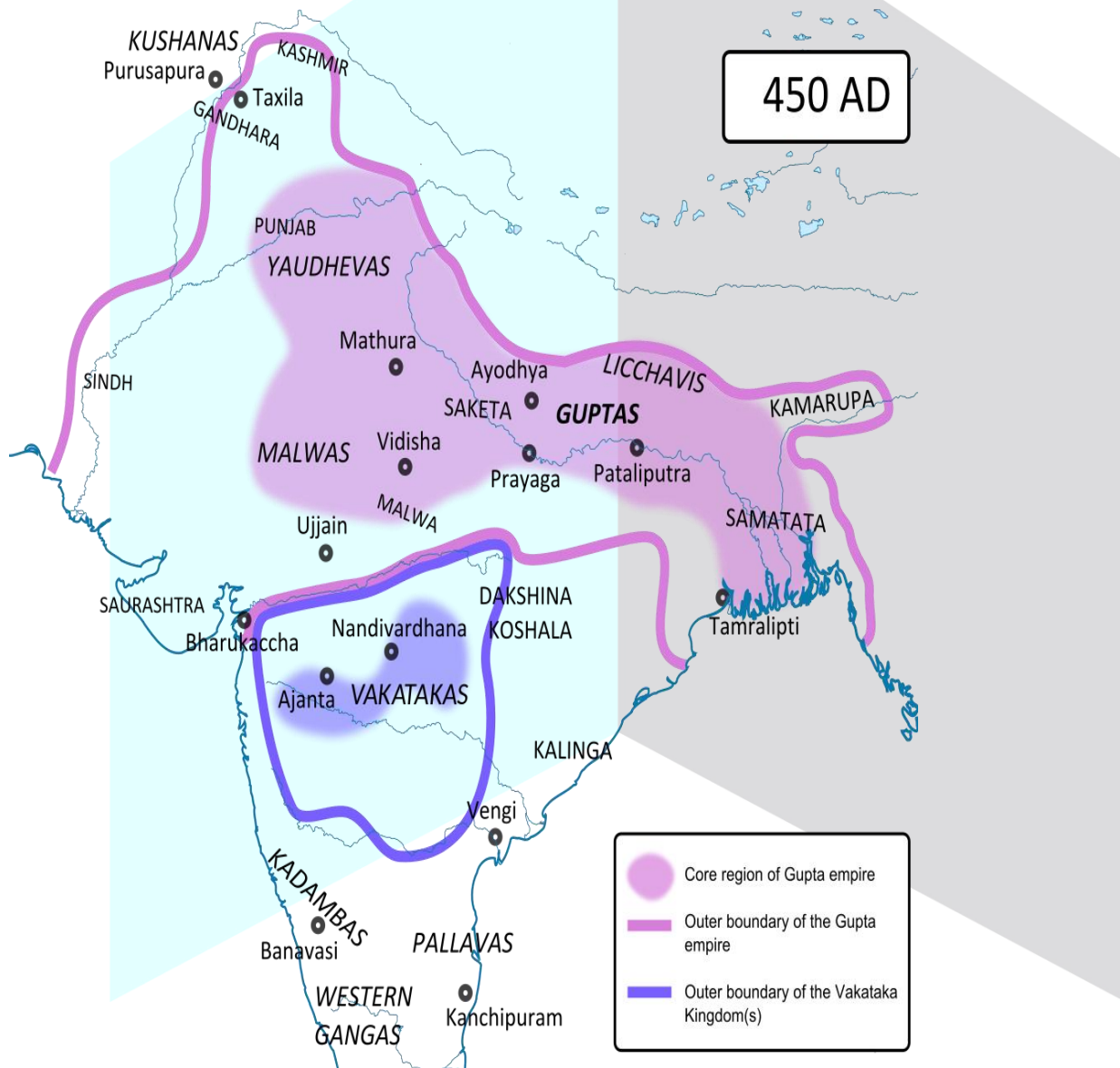
### Origin Of Gupta Empire

- With the decline of the Maurya empire, two large political powers emerged. They were the **Satavahanas (Andhras)**, who established rule over the Deccan and the South and the **Kushans**, who took control of the North.
- Around A.D.230, the Kushans rule in north India came to an end and the **Murundas**, who are believed to be the kinsmen of the Kushans, took over a good part of central India. Murundas reign lasted only for about 25 years.
- Around A.D.275, on the ruins of Kushan empire, **Gupta empire** was established and a large part of the former dominions of both the Kushans and the Satavahanas came under their rule. For more than a century, North India was politically united under their reign.

## Material Advantages Of Gupta Empire

- The fertile land of Madhyadesha which covered Bihar and Uttar Pradesh was their center of operation.
- The iron ore reserves of central India and South Bihar were possibly exploited by them.
- The proximity to the areas in North India were taken advantage of by them and carried out silk trade with the Eastern Roman empire (Byzantine empire).

The Gupta empire originally comprised Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However Uttar Pradesh seems to have been their operating place with a center of power at Prayag. Due to these favourable factors, the Guptas set up their rule over Anuganga (the middle Gangetic basin), Magadha, Saketa (Ayodhya, U.P) and Prayag (Modern Allahabad).



## Chronology Of Gupta Empire

Beginning with Sri Gupta, over the period of 200 years the Gupta empire reached its prominence until the reign of Skandagupta, after which the weak rulers of the Gupta dynasty reigned and eventually led to the decline of the empire.

### Sri Gupta (A.D. 240-280)

- Founder of the Gupta dynasty
- He was described as Maharaja in the Allahabad pillar inscription.

### Ghatotkacha (A.D 280- 319)

- Succeeded his father Sri Gupta
- Along with Sri Gupta, he was also described as Maharaja in the Allahabad pillar inscription.

### Chandragupta I (A.D. 319-334)

- Succeeded Ghatotkacha as the ruler
- He was the first important king of the Gupta dynasty
- The Gupta Era began with his accession to the throne in A.D.320
- He was the first king to be called Maharajadhiraja.
- He married the Lichchhavi princess (Possibly from Nepal), Kumaradevi. With this matrimonial alliance, he strengthened his position and added prestige to the Gupta dynasty.
- The **Mehrauli iron pillar inscription** explains in detail about his lengthy conquests.
- Magadha, Saketa and Prayaga were brought under the authority of the Gupta dynasty by him.
- During his period , **Pataliputra** was the capital city of the Gupta empire.

### Samudragupta (A.D.335-380)

- He was the son and successor of Chandragupta I.
- The Gupta Kingdom enlarged enormously under his reign.
- The people and the countries conquered by him are engraved in the **Allahabad inscriptions**.
- His conquests can be classified into five groups.

<b>Group I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Against the princes of Ganga-Yamuna doab</li> <li>• Their kingdoms incorporated were into Gupta empire</li> </ul>
<b>Group II</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Against rulers of eastern Himalayan and princes some frontier states (Nepal, Bengal, Assam, etc., )</li> <li>• The republics which remained were destroyed</li> </ul>
<b>Group III</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Against Atavika rajyas (the forest kingdoms in Vindhya region)and took up their territory</li> </ul>
<b>Group IV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conquered and liberate the 12 rulers of the Deccan and South India</li> <li>• Against Kanchi in Tamil Nadu, where the Pallavas were forced to acknowledge his suzerainty.</li> </ul>
<b>Group V</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Against Shakas and Kushans.</li> </ul>

- His conquest extended even outside India. According to the Chinese sources, the ruler of Sri Lanka (Meghavarmā) sent a missionary to seek permission from Samudragupta for building a Buddhist temple at Gaya.
- He believed in policy of violence and conquest
- His court poet Harishena wrote a glowing account on Samudragupta's military exploits
- V.A. Smith praised him as the Napoleon of India for his bravery and generalship
- Though he brought most parts of the country under the Gupta empire, he exercised direct administration only over the Gangetic plains and central India. In the remaining areas, the former rulers were allowed to continue with the annual payment to the treasury. This gave rise to the unique political situation called **Samandha system** (Vassal kings).

### Chandragupta II (A.D. 380-412)

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- According to the Devi Chandraguptam, Ramagupta (elder brother of Chandragupta II) was the successor of Samudragupta. He surrendered to the Saka ruler Dhruvadevi.
- Chandragupta II invaded the enemy camp and captured the throne.
- The Gupta empire saw the high watermark under the reign of Chandragupta
- He strengthened his political power through matrimonial alliance. He married the Naga princess of central India, Kubernanga. He married his daughter Prabhavati to Rudrasena II, a Vakataka prince.
- With the death of Rudrasena II, Prabhavati became the virtual ruler and promoted the interests of her father Chandragupta II. In this way he had indirect control over the Vakataka kingdom (Central India).
- With great influence in Central India, territories such as western Malwa and Gujarat which were under the rule of Shaka Kshatrapas were conquered.
- To commemorate the victory over Shaka Kshatrapas, he performed horse sacrifice (Ashvamedha) and called himself Vikramaditya.
- Ujjain was made the second capital of the Gupta empire during the reign of Chandragupta II.
- Mehrauli Iron pillar inscription claims his authority over the north western portion of India.
- The Chinese pilgrim, Fa Hien visited India during his reign.
- His court was adorned by 9 scholars who were known as Navaratnas (nine gems) of his court. They were Kalidasa, Amarasingha, Dhanyantari, Shanku, Varahamihira, Kshapanaka, Ghatakarapara, Vararuchi and Vetala Bhatta.

### Kumaragupta (A.D. 415-455)

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- He was the son of Chandragupta II
- He took up the title Mahendraditya
- He founded the Nalanda University with gained the international importance
- Gupta empire began to face Hunas invasion during his period. Although he tried to avoid the invasion of Hunas into India, his successors proved to be weak.

### Skandagupta (A.D. 455-467)

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- He is considered to be the last great ruler among the Gupta dynasty.
- He defeated the Huns invasion and Pushyamithra's threat.

## Important Facts About The Gupta Empire

1. The rulers of Gupta dynasty took up pompous titles such as Parameswara, Samrat, Paramabhattacharaka, Maharajadhiraja.
2. Ashvamedha was a common practise in the Gupta period.
3. The Gupta administration was decentralised quasi feudal in nature.
4. Most of the Gupta rulers were Vaishnavites
5. The Gupta age is called the golden age of ancient India, due to several achievements in various fields under Guptas.
6. The two styles of art that evolved in the Gupta era were Nagara and Dravidian.
7. The only Gupta ruler who issued copper coins was Ramagupta.
8. The largest number of Golden coins were issued under the Guptas reign.

The decline of the Gupta empire was followed by political disintegrity in North India. In the Gangetic region, it was succeeded by Maukari dynasty and Pushyabhuti dynasty. Gurjaras and Pratiharas succeeded the Gupta dynasty in the western region. South India came under two big empires, Chalukyas of Badami and Pallavas of Kanchi.

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