

Gupta Empire and Their Rulers – History Notes

Posted On [April 28, 2020](#) By [Cgpsc.Info](#)

[Home](#) » [CGPSC Notes](#) » [History Notes](#) » [Gupta Empire and Their Rulers](#)

Gupta Empire and Their Rulers – The Gupta period marks the important phase in the [history of ancient India](#). The long and efficient rule of the Guptas made a huge impact on the political, social and cultural sphere. Though the Gupta dynasty was not widespread as the Maurya Empire, but it was successful in creating an empire that is significant in the history of India. The Gupta period is also known as the “classical age” or “golden age” because of progress in literature and culture. After the downfall of Kushans, Guptas emerged and kept North India politically united for more than a century.

Early Rulers of Gupta dynasty (Gupta Empire) :-

- **Srigupta – I (270 – 300 C.E.):** He was the first ruler of Magadha (modern Bihar) who established Gupta dynasty (Gupta Empire) with Pataliputra as its capital.
- **Ghatotkacha Gupta (300 – 319 C.E):** Both were not sovereign, they were subordinates of Kushana Rulers
- **Chandragupta I (319 C.E. to 335 C.E.):**
 - Laid the foundation of Gupta rule in India.
 - He assumed the title “**Maharajadhiraja**”.
 - He issued gold coins for the first time.
 - One of the important events in his period was his marriage with a Lichchavi (Kshatriyas) Princess.
 - The marriage alliance with Kshatriyas gave social prestige to the Guptas who were Vaishyas.
 - He started the Gupta Era in 319-320C.E. Chandragupta I was able to establish his authority over Magadha, Prayaga, and Saketa.

Calendars in India

- 58 B.C. Vikram Samvat (Oldest Calendar in India)
- 78 A.D. Kanishka
- 248 A.D. Kalchuri Samvat
- 319 A.D. Gupt Samvat
- 606 A.D. Harsha Samvat
- 622 Hijri (Islamic Calendar)

All calendars mentioned above are Lunar calendars (Based on one cycle of moon) Gregorian calendar (Pope Gregory XIII, 1582) is solar calendar.

- **Samudragupta (C.E. 335 – 375)**
 - Referred to as the “**Napoleon of India**” by historian Vincent. A. Smith.
 - He was magnificent dynasty (Gupta Empire) builder and great administrator and greatest among Guptas.
 - His achievements, successes and 39 victories are mentioned by his court poet “Harisena”.
 - He wrote a long inscription engraved in Allahabad in Sanskrit on the Ashoka Pillar known as “Prayag Prashasti”
Two types of rule were prevalent.
 - Direct rule in Bengal, Bihar, U.P., and parts M.P. and indirect rule. After defeating the kings he returned the kingdom to them on conditions of
 - 1) Tribute,
 - 2) personal appearance in court of Samudragupta and
 - 3) had to marry their daughters with him.
 - He performed an Asvamedha, adopted title “Parakramanka”. He wrote poems and earned the title “Kaviraja”. He minted gold coins with his own image and Laxmi’s image, Garuda, Ashvamedha yagya & playing veena
- **Chandragupta II (380 C.E. to 415 C.E.):**

- He also known as Chandragupta Vikramaditya .
- According to drama — “Devichandraguptam” written by Vishakhadutta is about Chandragupta’s succession by displacing his brother Ramagupta. Ramaupta ruled for very short period .
- Chandragupta II defeated Shaka Rulers .
- He made Ujjain his second capital.
- He adopted the titles Vikramaditya.
- He was the first Gupta king who issued silver coins. “Mehuauli” Iron pillar inscription says that the king defeated the confederacy of Vangas and Vahilkas.
- Navratnas adorned his court.
- Navaratna (Nine gems)of Chandrgupta – II:
 - Kalidas
 - Amarasimha
 - Vishakhadatta
 - Physician Dhanvantri
 - Araruchi
 - Ghatakarna
 - Kshapranak
 - Velabhata
 - Shanku
- Fahien, the Chinese traveler visited India during his time (399 A.D.-410 A.D.)

• Kumaragupta (415 C.E. to 455 C.E.)

- Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumargupta I. 17 Inscriptions mainly in Mandasur M.P. and Mathura written in Sanskrit give evidence of his reign.
- He adopted the title of Mahendraditya.
- First Huna (Central Asian tribe) threatened the gupta dynasty (Gupta Empire) .
- Kumargupta was the worshipper of god Kartikeya. According to the Bhitri inscription of Skandagupta, some Pushyamitras invaded the Guptas during his period.
- Nalanda Buddhist Monastery (later became Nalanda University) was built during his period.

• Skandagupta (455 C.E. – 467 C.E.)

- He was the last greatest Gupta ruler.
- He assumed the titles Parambhattaraka, Paramdevta, Maharajadhiraj, etc.
- He successfully resisted the Huns invasion.
- The Junagadh inscription mentions the restoration of the embankment of Sudarshana Lake.
- The Bhitari inscription records the career of Skandagupta.
- He erected a pillar of victory surmounted by the statue of God Vishnu.
- He issued the Lion type coins. Purugupta ascended the throne after Skandagupta. Vishnugupta was the last king.

POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SET UP OF GUPTAS (Gupta Empire)

- The king was the head of state as well as that of administration (Centralized Administration). Some of officials and ministers were hereditary. Feudalism started emerging as compensations would be in form of land.
- The Gupta king took exalted titles like the Mahadhiraja, Samrat, Ekadhiraja, befitting their large empire and imperial powers.
- The ministers were appointed by the king on merit and one of their important qualifications was their capability to lead the army. In the Gupta period for the first time civil and criminal law were clearly defined and demarcated.
- The primary source of income was land revenue (Udranga) and the taxes were 1/6th of their produce which was collected in cash as well as kind.
- Arthashastra written by Kautilya contains chapters belonging to Mauryans, post-Mauryan and Gupta period

SOCIETY AND RELIGION

- The varna system begins to get modified owing to the proliferation of castes.
- The structure of the society was basically the same as mentioned in the Hindu Dharmashastra.
- The period marked the revival of Hinduism under the patronage of the Gupta rulers.

- Brahmins started getting donated land known as Agrahagar or brahmadeya which weakened the position of later Gupta rulers.
- Vaish community was most productive but had to pay most taxes.
- Remarkable impact of Ahimsa and vegetarianism on society.
- Shudras were mostly engaged in labor and crafts as well as agriculture.
- Even below shudras there were people who were untouchables and outcasts.
- Rise of a new caste Kayastha (mentioned in Yajnavalkya Smriti), they used to keep the land records.
- Women were subordinate to men and their conditions was deteriorating .
- Polygamy was widely prevalent.
- Widow remarriage was banned.
- Basic education was denied to them.
- Sati system came into light from the "Eran Inscription" in 510 A.D. Devadasi system also was vogue in this period.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Religious Literature:

- The age of Guptas has been regarded as the age of the classic age in India.
- It is primarily because of its progress in the field of literature.
- Sanskrit language had become virtually the national language of India and so most of the works were prepared in Sanskrit in their age. Many Smritis like Manu, Narada, Brahaspati, Gautam, Prashar and different Dharmashastras were also written or completed in this period.
- Oldest Smriti – Manu Smriti (Most comprehensive but biased in favor of upper castes and males) Some of Puranas like Vishnu, Shiv, Agni, Matsya were written during this period.
- Puranas are tales of Gods and Goddesses.
- They give chronology of ancient Indian rulers and dynasties.
- Good source to know about prevalent culture and society.
- Style of Puranas was future tense.
- The epics, Ramayana (12,000 shlokas added to already 12000 shlokas) and Mahabharata (longest epic 1,00,000 shalokas, Shat Sahastra Samhita) received present shape during this age.

Kalidasa

- He has been regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist of ancient India.
- Probably he was a contemporary of Chandragupta II.
- Kalidasa wrote the Ritusamhara, the Meghadutta, the Kumarasambava, the Raghuvansa, the Viramavamsiya, the Malavikagnimitra and Abhijnana Sakuntalam have been regarded as the best ones of Kalidasa during this time.

Other important Indian literature (Not related to Gupta Period only)

- Daridra Charudatta (By Bhasa)
- Mrichchakatikam (By Charudatta)
- Devi Chandraguptam m Mudra Rakhshasa (Both by Vishakha Datta)
- Kadambri (Banabhatta in 7th century A.D.)
- Jambavati Kalyanam (16th Century by Krishnadev Raya)
- Amarakosha (by Amar Simha dictionary in Sanskrit)
- Panchatantra (by Vishnu Shastri)
- Kamasutra (by Vatsayana)

Science, Grammar, Astrology, Medicine, etc., also made tremendous progress during this age.

Aryabhata:

- He has been accepted as the greatest scientist and mathematician of this age.
- His text Aryabhatiyam contains solutions for many problems of algebra, geometry and trigonometry.
- He was the first Indian astronomer to discover that the earth rotates on its axis.

- It is also believed that decimal system was discovered by the Hindus during this period. Panch Diddhhanitika was written by Varahamihira was the greatest astrologer of this age.
- Nagarjuna, the famous Buddhist scholar was also a great student of medicine, chemistry and metallurgy.
- Dhanavantri was the most renowned physician of Ayurvedic medicine during this age.

Authors and Books During The Gupta Age (Gupta Empire)

- Iswarakrishna – Sankhyakarika
- Vatsayana's – Kamasutra
- Panini's – Astadyayi
- Patanjali's – Gita Govinda
- Vajikas – Kaumudimahotsava
- Somadeva's – Kathasaritsagara
- Bhasa – Swapnavasadatta
- Suband – Vasavadatta
- Bhattin – Ravanavadha
- Visakadatta – Mudrarakshas
- Sudarak – The Mrichchakatikam
- Dandi – Dasakumaracharita
- Bharavi – Kiratarjuniyam

Gupta Empire Sources :

- The writings of foreign travelers like Fahien, Huan-Tzang and It-Sing along with sources like literature, coins, inscriptions, monuments, constitute major sources of Guptas History.
- The Allahabad Pillar inscription.
- The Sanskrit Drama –Kaumudumahotsava, written by Kisorika.
- The Mehrauli inscription.
- The Bilsand inscription.
- The Bhitari inscription etc. throws lights on imperial Gupta kingdoms.

Literary Sources:

- Vayu Purana
 - Madhya Purana
 - Vishnu Purana
 - Brahma Purana
 - Bhagvat Purana
- Dharmashastras such as –Narada Smriti and –Brahapati Smriti. Kamadaka Nitisara and Kavya Nataka. The Kamudi Mahotsava is a drama in five sets which lays down the political condition of Magadha on the eve of ascending of Guptas. Fahien, the Chinese traveler during Chandragupta II tells about the social, religious, political conditions of Guptas.
 - Seals: A large number of seals have been found in Vaishali. The seal of –Mahadevi Dhruvaswami, the Queen of Chandragupta II. The Variety of seals gives us an insight of provincial and local administration.
 - Monuments: The monuments of the Gupta period also are a reliable source of the artistic and religious history of Gupta period. Schools like Mathura, Banaras and Nalanda depict and illustrate the different Art and Architecture of the Guptas.
 - Numismatic: A lot of useful and authentic information has been found in the coins of Guptas dynasty. Various types of coins of Gupta Dynasty (Gupta Empire) have been unearthed. Some of the types are: Tiger Type, Lyrist Type, Archer Type, Houseman Type, Landlord Type, Elephant Rider Type, Asvamedha Type The Archer type coins of Skandagupta are mainly of Gold. Samudragupta and Chandragupta issued as many as six types of gold coins.
 - Remarkable progress was made in the field of Art and Architecture during the Gupta age. Different coins of gold and silver of artistic taste were issued, with queen Kumaradevi standing face to face with Chandragupta I on one side and Durga seated on the Lion on the other side.
 - Samudragupta has been shown in different poses with his Queen Dattadevi, with battle axe or slaying a tiger. Kumaragupta I issued a variety of coins like peacock type, elephant rider type and archer type. Music, dance and drama were patronized by the Gupta emperors and women were trained in fine arts.

- Terracotta (pottery, images, etc. of clay) were most popular during the Gupta age.
- It was considered a poor man's art.
- Iron and stone pillars near the Qutab Minar were constructed; probably by Chandragupta II. They were the lone example of its own kind.
- They constructed pillars at different places which were used for engraving their inscriptions. The construction of Stupas, Chaitya Halls, Monasteries, Cave temples and Cave dwellings were prominent during the Gupta age. Buddhist buildings, the Stupas at Rajagiri and the Dhamekha stupa at Saranath are most prominent.
- The frescos of Ellora caves, the Bagh caves, the Sittana Vasal Temple in Tamil Nadu and Rocket chambers at Sigiriya in Sri Lanka are examples of Gupta paintings.
- The period also produced magnificent Brahmanical temples, Dasavatara temple of Devgarh, Vishnu temple of Tigawa, Shiva temple at Bhumarah and Khohand, two Buddhist shrines at Sanchi & Bodh Gaya.
- Greek influence resulting into Gandhara cult and late Mathura art and Saranath schools are fully Indianized.
- The Ekamukhi (one faced) and Chaturmukh (four faced) Sivalinga and the Ardhanarisvara form of Siva representing the synthesis between male and female deity represent a few fine specimen of the art of sculpture the Gupta age.

Important inscriptions of Gupta period (Gupta Empire)

- Mathura inscriptions of Chandragupta II
- Eran stone inscription of Samudragupta.
- Gadhwa inscription of Chandragupta II
- Gadhwa stone inscription of Kumaragupta
- Indore Copper Plate inscription of Skandagupta.

Different styles of architecture in the Gupta period :

- Dravida Style – a second storey (Vimana – South Indian style)
- Nagara Style – Shikara (North Indian style)
- Besara Style – Mixed North and South Indian style.

GUPTA AGE (319-550) Art and Architecture

- **Architecture:**
 - There are no surviving palaces or forts of Gupta period but a few temples survive.
 - Gupta period marks the advent of structural temple architecture.
 - Oldest temple in Indian subcontinent is Sanchi Temple 2nd oldest Dashaavatar temple (Deogarh Jhansi) dedicated to Vishnu .
 - Deogarh temple became trendsetter in temple design and architecture. It had two important features:
 - First temple in India with pyramidal shape (Shikhar Style) and Mandap (Raised platform in temple's courtyard where spiritual ceremonies take place.)
 - Garbh Griha is most important part in temple. Presiding deity of the temple is kept here.
 - Bhitargaon temple (Kanpur UP) was dedicated to Shiva is the first brick temple; earlier temples were made of stone.
 - Nachna Kuthar temple MP dedicated to Parvati
- **Sculptures :**
 - The icons and standards of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist divinities were perfected, which served as ideal models of for later centuries.
 - They were different from Gandhara (Greco-Roman), Mathura, and Amravati. Gupta style was indigenous. Some typical highlights of Gupta style architecture:
 - Sculptures and paintings of Buddha and his life predominantly depicted in Jataka Tales.
 - Sculptures of Buddha were with curly hair style like that of Indo-Greek Style .
 - Facial expressions were much better depicted, statues depicted were fully clothed and not erotic
 - Abhaya Mudra (Blessing form).
 - Hollow-divine light (aura) in background
 - Three statues became very famous : Mathura (Standing Buddha), Sarnath (Sitting Buddha) and Sultanganj (Standing Buddha, Bhagalpur, Bihar, made of Copper). Evidences of Brahminical sculpture are found on walls of

Dashavtar temple, where Vishnu is shown resting on Sheshnag

- **Paintings**

- Evidences from Ajanta (Maharashtra) and Bagh (MP). Significance of Ajanta and Bagh. Highly detailed, long lasting colors, perfection in technique. Ajanta caves are 29 rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments which date from the 2nd century BCE to about 480 or 650 CE. The site is a protected monument in the care of the Archaeological Survey of India, and since 1983, the Ajanta Caves have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Like other ancient Buddhist monasteries, Ajanta was a kind of college monastery. The earliest group of caves consists of caves 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15A credited to Satvahanas. Paintings are in 10, 11, 16, 17 & 19. Last three caves have paintings are from Gupta period

- **Style and theme of paintings :**

- Paintings are done in Frescoe style, in this style paintings are executed when the plaster on walls is still wet. The themes are derived from Jataka tales, (Part of last Segment of Sutta Pitaka).
- According to this legend Buddha had more than 550 lives which are described in Jataka tales.
- In Cave 16 the theme is of dying princess (depicted dying scene of Buddha's sister-in-law)
- Cave 17 depicts Mother and Son, Rahul and wife Yashodhara meeting Buddha when he was leaving the palace.
- Importance of paintings: We can get a fair idea of life and culture dating back to 1600 years.

- **Bagh Caves**

- The Bagh Caves are a group of nine rock-cut monuments, examples of Indian rock-cut architecture, situated among the southern slopes of the Vindhyas in Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh. Most significant of these caves is Cave 4, commonly known as the Rang Mahal (Palace of Colors).
- Most paintings were carefully removed in 1982 and today can be seen in Archaeological Museum of Gwalior. Theme is derived from Buddhism. Paintings also depict the life of common man, flora & fauna is also present.

- **Decline of Gupta Dynasty**

- Gupta's didn't have direct control over their entire kingdom. When their kingdom became weak, after death of Skandagupta, defeated kings became independent. In areas of direct control, they had given land grants to ministers and monasteries and these feudals became very prosperous as well as powerful.
- Concept of state-within a state started emerging, which weakened imperial authority of the Guptas. Rulers after Skandagupta were weak both in terms administration as well as military strength.
- Economy was on decline. There was a general lack in growth of trade, crafts and industry.
- This in turn affected military power of Guptas and regional powers became stronger. Guilds were operating independently, so there were multiple factors for the decline of Guptas.

After Guptas there was a political vacuum. There were no major kings. Regional dynasties became prominent. Hunas, Pallavas etc. were some larger regional dynasties. This trend continued till 6th century A.D.

- **Post -Gupta Period or Vardhana dynasty:**

- The Vardhana dynasty was founded at Thanesar (Kurukshetra district, Haryana) by Pushyabhuti probably towards the beginning of the 6th century.
- The first important ruler of the dynasty was Prabhakaravardhana.
- He was succeeded by his eldest son Rajyavardhana. Rajyavardhana had to face problems from the day of his succession to the throne. Grahavarman, the Maukhari ruler of Kannauj and husband of Rajyashri (sister of Rajyavardhana) was murdered by Deva Gupta (the ruler of Malwa) who in alliance with Shashanka.
- Rajyavardhana undertook a campaign against Deva Gupta and killed him but he was killed by Shashanka in 606 AD.

- **Harshavardhana (606-647)**

- He was last great king of ancient times, he belonged to Vardhan or Pushyabhuti dynasty.
- His father Prabhakaravardhana was a king in Thanesar, who gave his kingdom to his elder son Rajyavardhana.

- He was killed in a conspiracy by rulers of Malwa and Bengal. Harshvardhana ascended to the throne thereafter and from here "Harsha Era" started. After ascending the throne Harsha first rescued his widowed sister Rajyashri, from Vivandhya forest. Harshvardhana was a great empire builder.
- His capital was in Kannauj.
- He was good Administrator; administration was centralized and similar to Gupta Empire.
- Empire extended from Bengal to Sindh and Himalayas to Vindhya, Kashmir and Kamarup (Assam) were not part of his kingdom though they acknowledged his sovereignty.
- He maintained a very large army. He made Kannauj (UP) as his capital.
- He wrote three dramas,
 - Priyadarshika
 - Naganad and
 - Ratnavali

Banbhata was the Court poet and biographer of Harsha and wrote two works which provide insight to his kingdom. His famous works are:

- **Harsha Charita (Sanskrit), Kadambari – a drama (Sanskrit).** Harsha Vardhan divided his income in four parts for family, army-administration, religious endowments & charity. Harsha was first North Indian King to be defeated by a South Indian Ruler when he invaded southern region. In South India Harsha's contemporary was a very famous king Pulakeshin II (Chalukya) with kingdom at Badami/Vatapi (modern day Karnataka). Aihole inscriptions provide evidence of this defeat though Banbhata didn't mention Harsha's defeat in his books
- **Kannauj Assembly:** An all religions conference took place in his capital Kannauj in which scholars and priests of different sects were invited. Presidential address was given by Hiuen Tsang who supported Mahayanist sect of Buddhism. Priest class of Brahmins got very annoyed and burnt down the conclave. Harsha punished about 500 Brahmins. Except for this incident he is regarded as tolerant king
- **Festival in Prayag-** Mahamoksha Parishad :It was held every 5th year and in this festival Shiva, Ganesh, Buddha were revered, one day was devoted for charitable purposes. Harsha personally participated in these festivals. Here he met Hiuen Tsang for the 6th and the last time

The two famous Chinese travelers; Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang

- **Fa Hien (Faxien):**
 - He was first Chinese pilgrim as well as Buddhist monk who visited during 399-415 during the reign of Chandragupta Vikramaditya (380-415).
 - His purpose is to collect the holy Buddhist texts (Pitakas, Jataka tales) from Northern India. He came through land route but went by sea route via Sri Lanka.
 - His travelogue didn't mention any king (Chandraputa II of Pataliputra).
 - He explains about the society; various castes, faith and culture of India, was shocked by practice of untouchability.
 - He also gives details about lavishness of Pataliputra, and throne of king.
- **Hiuen Tsang:**
 - He was also a Chinese pilgrim who visited India for 15 years during first half of seventh century to study and collect the holy Buddhist texts from Northern India.
 - He wrote his impressions in book called Shi-yu-qui or "The Records of Western World".
 - He came and went back by land route. He mentioned three kings of that period, Harshavardhana, Narshimhavarman (Pallavas Kanchi, TN), Pulakeshin II (Chalukyas – Badami Karnataka).
 - He studied yoga shastra for one and half years in Nalanda, he also taught in the same university for 9 years. Information that is available about Nalanda University during the 6th and 7th centuries A.D. is due to the accounts left by Hiuen-Tsang.
 - Nalanda attracted students from places as distant as China and South-east Asia.
 - Nalanda was supported by the income from a number of villages which the monastery acquired over the years through donations.
 - Built during the days of Kumar Gupta Admission to studentship in the University was extremely strict. Intending students had to undergo entrance test.
 - Swarpada was in charge for conduct of examination and Chief of monastery was Sheelbhadra.

Important inscriptions of Gupta period (Gupta Empire)

- Mathura inscriptions of Chandragupta II
- Eran stone inscription of Samudragupta

- Gadhwa inscription of Chandragupta II
- Gadhwa stone inscription of Kumaragupta
- Indore Copper Plate inscription of Skandagupta.

Gupta dynasty source

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gupta_Empire
- https://www.ancient.eu/Gupta_Empire/
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gupta-dynasty>

Related Posts:

- [Maurya Dynasty - History Notes - History English notes](#)
- [Babur - Mughal empire \(मुग़ल साम्राज्य\) - Hindi notes](#)
- [Akbar - Mughal empire \(मुग़ल साम्राज्य\) - Hindi notes](#)
- [Humayun - Mughal empire \(मुग़ल साम्राज्य\) - Hindi notes](#)

Posted in [History Notes](#) Tagged [Gupta Empire](#), [Gupta Empire rulers](#), [history notes](#)
