

### GUPTA DYNASTY

- In the beginning of the fourth century A.D. no large state structure existed in India
- In the post-Mauryan period two large state structures emerged in north India and in the Deccan – Kushana state (north) & the Satavahana state (Deccan)
- Kushan & Saka chiefs continued to rule even in early fourth century A.D., but their power had become considerably weak, & the Satavahana state had disappeared before the middle of the third century A.D.
- There was no major political power but there were minor powers. It means there was no complete political vacuum
- Guptas, a family of uncertain origins, began to build up an empire from the beginning of the fourth century A.D.

### NORTH-WESTERN & NORTHERN INDIA

- Before the middle of the third century A.D. the rule of the Sassanians had been established in Iran & the Sasanian rulers started claiming overlordship over Kushana kings.
- The mighty Kushana kings of north-west reduced to the position of subordinates & the Sasanian authority also extended to Sindh & other areas.
- However, a large number of coins – based on earlier Kushana coins – found in Afghanistan & Punjab suggests that several branches of rulers, continued to rule in the region.
- Some other coins like Kidara Kushana & his successors, in Afghanistan, Kashmir & western Punjab – possibly some of these rulers were contemporaries of the early Gupta rulers.
- In other parts of the Punjab, Haryana & Rajasthan, old coins – points to the existence of a number of republican states.
- These states were not ruled by a single king but possibly by several chiefs; one among those chiefs might be claiming the status of the King of a clan.
- The Madras, mentioned in connection with the exploits of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta - such exploits were located in the Punjab; the Yaudheyas were extremely powerful with their centre in present-day Haryana & the Malavas were located in Rajasthan.
- Many such republican states are mentioned in the Gupta records.
- Some branches of Nagas who became very powerful in Mathura & other centres after the decline of Kushana power in north India are also known.

- Some of the north Indian rulers who were defeated by Samudragupta were definitely of Naga origin.

### WESTERN & CENTRAL INDIA

- A branch of Kshatrapa rulers established themselves in Western India in the post-Mauryan period.
- The line of Chastana(Shaka), to which the well-known Saka Kshatrapa Rudradaman belonged, continued to rule till 304 A.D. & then a new line of rulers began to rule.
- However, Kshatrapa rule came to an end towards the close of the fourth century A.D.
- When Gupta ruler Chandragupta-II conquered & annexed their territories.
- In the region of ancient Vidarbha, the core of which was Nagpur in northeast Maharashtra, a new power Vakatakas emerged by the middle of the third century A.D. – founded by Vindhyashakti.
- Vakataka power soon became formidable and a branch was also established at Vatsagulma ( Washim near Akola)
- The Vakataka & Guptas, formed a matrimonial alliance was formed between the two families.

### DECCAN & SOUTH INDIA

- The decline of the Satavahana state of the Deccan was followed by the emergence of a number of new royal families in different parts of the Deccan.
- In coastal Andhra – Ikshvakus, the Salankayanas & others emerged
- In Karnataka, the Kadamba power was founded by Brahmin Mayurasarman whose Talagunda inscription gives some interesting details of the circumstances leading to the establishment of the kingdom & its extent.
- Pallavas, emerged in Tamilnadu till the ninth century is known from their records to have started ruling from the middle of the third century A.D.
- The inscriptions of the early Pallava rulers were written in the Prakrit language & were in the form of copper plates – belongs to 250-350 A.D.
- Sivaskandarasman Pallava, beginning of the fourth century A.D., was a powerful ruler & his kingdom spread across Andhra, Karnataka & Tamil Nadu.
- Kanchipuram (Chingleput dist. -Tamil Nadu) became the capital of the Pallavas & when Gupta ruler Samudragupta led an expedition to the south, he encountered Pallava king Vismigopa at Kanchi.
- Many areas like Bengal, Orissa, forest regions of Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere kingdoms were emerging for the first time.
- This was a new trend & was very significant for the later course of political history.

## THE RISE OF THE GUPTAS

- The early history of the Gupta family are little known, & have naturally given rise to various speculations.
- Names ending in Gupta, such as Sivagupta which occurs in a Satavahana inscription, possible suggestions of their ancestry.
- Original home of the Guptas, quoted differently by scholars: North Bengal, Magadha in Bihar & U.P. - It can be suggested that the original core of the Gupta territory lay in eastern U.P.
- Allahabad pillar inscription, is the earliest inscription explaining the achievements of an early Gupta ruler, Samudragupta, comes from this region.
- The nature of the coin-hoards of the Guptas, found in this region, suggests this
- The description of early Gupta territories in the Puranas may point to this.
- Possibly till the 3rd century A.D. the Guptas were subordinates of a branch of the later Kushanas ruling in north-western India.
- However, literary & archaeological sources indicates that, they became independent in the second decade of the fourth century A.D.
- Inscriptions tell us that Srigupta was the first king and Ghatotkacha was the next to follow him.
- Chandragupta-I was the first independent king with the title Maharajadhiraja.
- After declaring his independence in Magadha, he with the help of a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchavis,, enlarged his kingdom.
- This alliance form a special category of coins. These coins have Chandragupta & his queen Kumaradevi engraved on the obverse & a seated goddess on the reverse with a legend Lichchhavayah.
- These coins were made of gold.
- Guptas followed the weight system of Kushana gold coins suggests that the Guptas had been in contact with the Kushana territories.
- There are no concrete evidences to determine the boundaries of Chandragupta's Kingdom . But it is assumed that it covered parts of Bihar, U.P. and Bengal.
- Chandragupta-I is said to have also started a new era from 319-320 A.D. known as Gupta Samvat or Gupta era. It is not clear from any records that he started this era.
- But since he is mentioned as a Maharajadhiraja he is credited with the founding of the era.
- It was during the times of his son Samudragupta that the kingdom grew into an empire.

## SAMUDRAGUPTA

- An inscription engraved (at a later date) on the Asokan pillar at Allahabad (known as Prayaga Prashasti) gives us information about Samudragupta's accession & conquests

- Harishena, an important official of the state, had composed 33 lines which were engraved on the pillar
- It mentions that Maharajadhiraja Chandragupta-I in a highly emotional tone declared his son Samudragupta as his successor.
- Further, the discovery of some gold coins bearing the name of Kacha has generated a controversy relating to this – because: i) in many respects Kacha's coins are similar to the coins of Samudragupta, ii) the name of Kacha does not appear in the official lists of Gupta rulers, as they are available in the Gupta inscriptions
- Various interpretations have been given in this regard: According to one interpretation Samudragupta's brothers revolted against him and placed Kacha, the eldest brother, on the throne. However he died in the war of succession.
- Another view mentions that these coins were issued by Samudragupta in the memory of his brother.
- A third view mentions Kacha as the initial name of Samudragupta and the later name was adopted only after the conquest of south.
- There is no solution to the controversy –possibly it may infer that, since the number of Kacha coins found so far is somewhat limited his hold over the throne would have been for a very short duration
- Also that Samudragupta, in spite of Chandragupta's abdication, did face problems in relation to accession to the throne but ultimately he emerged victorious.

## CAMPAIGN & CONSOLIDATION

- Samudragupta adopted an aggressive policy of conquests.
- In the South--he let the kings, whom he had defeated, rule over their regions. They accepted his suzerainty & paid tributes.
- Such a policy adopted in relation to the far-flung areas might have paid dividends in solving problems of communication and effective control, hence bringing about stability for the time being
- All the campaigns of Samudragupta available only from one record, the Prayag Prasasti of Harishena.

## CAMPAIGN OF ARYAVARTA

- Some historians are of the view that Samudragupta carried his victorious campaign of Aryavarta at one time.
- Prayag Prasasti mentions the conquests of Samudragupta in a chronological order, have opined that there were two campaigns in north India
- This is because the prasasti first mentions three Aryavarta kings, then it mentions his southern campaign and again mentions nine Aryavarta kings.
- It appears that taking advantage of the war of succession, which Samudragupta had to face,

certain rulers attempted to establish their dominance.

- It might be in this context that Samudragupta defeated Achyuta, Nagasena and Kota-Kulaja. There are no details regarding these conquests or regarding the identity of the specific regions over which they ruled.
- However, historians have identified Achyuta as ruling over Ahichchhatra, Nagasena over Gwalior area and Kota-Kulaja or ruler of the Kota family in east Punjab and Delhi.

#### CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH

- The Prayag Prashasti mentions 12 rulers from south India who were defeated by Samudragupta.
- These were: Mahendra of Kosala (Raipur, Durg, Sambalpur & Bilaspur districts) Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara (Jeypore, forest of Odisha) Mantaraja of Kaurata (Probably Sonpur in M.P. or Plain of north-east of Mahendra hill) Mahendragiri of Pishtapura (Pithasuram, East Godavari district) Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district) Damana of Erandapalla (West Godavari district) Vishnugopa of Kanchi (Chingleput district) Nilaraja of Avamukta (Godavari Valley) Hasti-varman of Vengi (Cellor in the Krishna-Godavari delta) Ugresena of Palakka (Nellore district) Kubera of Devarashtra (Yellamanchiti in Visakhapatnam district & Dhananjaya of Kushthalpura (possibly in North Arcot district in Tamil Nadu).
- The Prayag Prashasti says that Samudragupta showed favour to be Dakshinapatha kings by first capturing them (grahana) and then releasing them (moksha).
- He pursued a completely different policy with regard to the kings of Aryavarta
- He not only defeated them but also annexed their territories which became integrated into the Gupta empire.
- The north Indian kings defeated by Samudragupta were: Rudradwa, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyuta, Nandi, Balavarman and others.
- Rulers like Chandravarman who ruled in West Bengal represented new ruling families. The Prashasti further says that Samudragupta reduced all states in the forest regions to the position of servants.
- In another category are mentioned the frontier kingdoms like Samatata (in southeast Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Nepala (Nepal) and others and the republican states of the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, etc
- They paid him tributes of all kinds, carried out his orders and paid him homage. They pleased him by "self-surrender, offering (their own) daughters in marriage, and a request for the administration of their own districts and provinces"

- This means that they remained independent but their independence had to be approved by Samudragupta.
- In this category were included the foreign rulers of north-western India like the later Kushanas & the Saka chief and residents of different island countries including Sinhala or Sri Lanka.
- Many of the claims made by Harishena, the composer of Prayag Prashasti, are highly exaggerated but many of the claims are also genuine.

#### CHANDRAGUPTA II

- The Gupta inscriptions mention Chandragupta-II as Samudragupta's successor.
- Literary sources, copper coins & inscriptions suggested that the successor was Samudragupta's other son Ramagupta.
- Visakhadatta's drama Devichandraguptam mentions that Chandragupta-II killed his elder brother Ramagupta.
- He did this because Ramagupta was facing defeat at the hands of the Sakas and in order to save the kingdom, he had agreed to surrender his wife to the Saka king.
- Chandragupta marched successfully against the Saka king but he killed his brother due to subsequent hostility & married his wife Dhruvadevi
- Texts like the Harshacharita, Kavyamimamsa, etc. also refer to this episode.
- Some copper coins bearing the name Ramagupta have also been found and inscriptions on the pedestals of some Jaina images found at Vidisha, bear the name Maharaja Ramgupta.
- Similarly, Dhruvadevi is described as mother of Govindagupta (Chandragupta's son) in a Vaisali seal.
- He entered into matrimonial alliances with the Nagas by marrying princess Kuberanaga whose daughter Prabhavati was later on married to Rudrasena-II of the Vakataka family.
- Though there is no record like the Prayag Prashasti to describe the events of his reign – Chandragupta's campaigns & successes from certain inscriptions, literary sources and coins: He defeated the Saka king Rudrasimha-II and annexed his kingdom.
- This brought an end to Saka Kshatrapa rule in western India and added the regions of Gujarat, Kathiawad and west Malwa to the Gupta empire.
- The details of Chandragupta-II's campaigns against the Sakas are not known. His matrimonial alliances with the Vakatakas & the Nagas must have been of tremendous significances in his preparations for the campaigns.
- Two inscriptions at the Udayagiri caves near Sanchi & one inscription at Sanchi, all referring to Chandragupta II & to his subordinate rulers and military officials, also suggest that he was present in eastern Malwa for some time preparing for the campaigns.

- One inscription describes him as "desirous of conquering the whole earth".
- There evidences to prove that, Chandragupta II, conquered the Saka territories .These evidences are as follows
- We no longer find any Saka coins minted after this period, although Saka coins were being minted without a break for almost four hundred years previously.
- 2) The Guptas, from the time of Chandragupta, started minting Saka-type silver coins-for this region. They only added their own distinct symbols on these coins; otherwise, the coins were like Saka coins in circulation till then. This definitely shows that the Saka areas came within the control of Chandragupta-II.
- 3) The success of Chandragupta-II against the Sakas seems to have developed later on into the tradition of Sakari Vikramaditya, that is, of 'Vikramaditya, who was an enemy of the Sakas'.
- 4) 'King Chandra' whose exploits have been mentioned in the Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription, which is located in the Qutab-Minar complex in Delhi is identified by many scholars with Chandragupta- II
- 5) According to this inscription Chandra crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (identified with Bactria).
- 6) Some scholars identify Chandragupta-II with the hero of Kalidasa's work Raghuvamsa because Raghu's exploits appear comparable with those of Chandragupta
- 7) The Mehrauli inscription also mentions Chandragupta's victory over enemies from Vanga (Bengal).
- These evidences suggests that Chandragupta-II was able to extend the frontiers of the Gupta empire to western, north-western and eastern India.
- The visit of Fa-Hien, a Chinese pilgrim, who came to India in search of Buddhist texts.
- In his memoirs he has given a vivid description of the places he visited. However, he does not mention the name of the King in his accounts.
- But he speaks highly of the King of Madhya-desa, the region which was directly ruled by the monarch in this period, under whom the people were prosperous and happy.
- Chandragupta-II is also known for his patronage to men of letters and he ruled till about 415-16 A.D.

#### KUMARAGUPTA-I

- Chandragupta-II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta. We get information about him from certain inscriptions and coins.
- 1) The earliest known inscription of his period is from Bilsad (Etah district) which is dated 415 A.D. (Gupta Era 96).

- 2)The Karamdanda (Fyzabad) inscription of Kumaragupta's minister (436 A.D.) mentions his fame having spread to the four oceans.
- 3)A stone inscription from Mandsaur (436 A.D.) mentions Kumaragupta as reigning over the whole earth.
- 4)The Damodarpur(Bihar) Copper Plate inscriptions (433 A.D. and 447 A.D.) refer to him as Maharajadhiraja and show that he himself appointed the governor (Uparika) of
- 5)Pundravardhana(Bengal) bhukti (or province) being the biggest administrative division in the empire.
  - 6)The last known date of Kumaragupta is from a silver coin dated 455 A.D. (Gupta Era 136).
  - The wide area over which his inscriptions are distributed indicates that he ruled over Magadha and Bengal in the east and Gujarat in the west
  - It has been suggested that towards the last year of his reign the Gupta empire faced foreign invasion which was checked by the efforts of his son Skandagupta.
  - He maintained cordial relationship with the Vakatakas which had been established through matrimonial alliances earlier.

#### SKANDAGUPTA

- Skandagupta, who succeeded Kumaragupta-I was perhaps the last powerful Gupta monarch.
- To consolidate his position he had to fight the Pushyamitras, and the country faced Huna invasion from across the frontiers in the northwest.
- However, Skandagupta was successful in throwing the Huns back. It appears that these wars adversely affected the economy of the empire, and the gold coinage of Skandagupta bears testimony to that.
- In comparison to the gold coins of the earlier rulers the types of gold coins minted by Skandagupta were limited.
- He introduced a new, heavier weight system for gold coins but generally his coins had less gold in them than earlier coins.
- Moreover, he appears to have been the last Gupta ruler to mint silver coins in western India.
- However, the Junagadh inscription of his reign tells us about the public works undertaken during his times.
- The Sudarsana lake (originally built during the Maurya times) burst due to excessive rains and his governor Parnadatta got it repaired.
- This indicates that the state undertook the task of public works.
- The last known date of Skandagupta is 467 A.D. from his silver coins.

#### GUPTA RULER AFTER SKANDAGUPTA

- It is not very clear in what order the successors of Skandagupta ruled. Skandagupta himself may not have been the rightful heir to the throne and therefore he had to fight other contenders to the throne.

- This may be the reason why a seal inscription traces a line of Gupta rulers after Skandagupta from Kumaragupta-I and his son Purugupta and not Skandagupta.
- Secondly, it is probable that the division of the Gupta empire into many parts already began towards the close of Skandagupta's reign.
- Thus an inscription from western Malwa, recorded in the last year of Skandagupta does not refer to him but to some other rulers beginning with Chandragupta-II
- Some of the successors of Skandagupta, mentioned in inscriptions, were: Budhagupta, Vainyagupta, Bhanagupta, Narasimhagupta Baladitya, Kumaragupta-II and Vismigupta
- Guptas continued to rule till about 550 A.D. but by then their power had already become very insignificant.

#### DISINTEGRATION

#### HUNA INVASION

- From the time of Kumaragupta-I the north-west borders had been threatened by the Hunas a Central Asian tribe which was successfully moving in different directions and was establishing pockets of rule
- But their attacks were repulsed during that period. However, towards the end of the fifth century A.D. the Huna chief Tormana was able to establish his authority over large parts of western India and in central India. Mihirakula, his son, further extended the dominions.
- Thus, the Huna attacks caused a major blow to the Gupta authority particularly in northern and western regions of the empire.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE WEAKNESSES

- The policy adopted by the Guptas in the conquered areas was to restore the authority of local chiefs or kings once they had accepted Gupta suzerainty. In fact, no efforts were made to impose a strict and effective control over these regions.
- Hence it was natural that whenever there was a crisis of succession or a weak monarchy within the Gupta empire these local chiefs would re-establish their independent authority.
- Towards the end of the fifth century A.D. and beginning of sixth century A.D. taking advantage of the weak Gupta emperors, many regional powers asserted their authority, and in due course declared their independence
- It has been argued that the Guptas issued land grants to the Brahmana donees and in this process surrendered the revenue and administrative rights in favour of the donees.
- Further, it is believed that the Samanta system in which the Samantas or minor rulers, who ruled as subordinates to the central authority, started to consolidate itself in the Gupta period.

#### GUPTA PERIOD:-POLITY ,ECONOMY & SOCIETY

- These sources of information are: (i) inscription written on different materials like copper plates, stone, clay seals; (ii) coins issued by rulers of different dynasties; (iii) material from excavations; (iv) contemporary literature; and (v) accounts left by foreign travellers like Fa-Hien.
- It will also deal with the economic activities of the period & with different sources of state revenue.

#### ADMINISTRATION

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

#### KING

- The King remained the central figure of administration. However, there was a considerable change in the character of monarchy. Gupta monarchs adopted high sounding titles like: Parama Bhattaraka, Parama-daivata, Chakravarti, Paramesvara, etc.
- For example, the Prayag Prashasti of Samudragupta describes him as "equal to the gods: Dhanada (Kubera), Varuna (Sea-God), Indra and Antaka (Vama), who had no antagonist of equal power in the world ...."
- Like the King who has been given a divine status in the Smriti scriptures, the Gupta monarchs too came to be considered a divinity on earth.
- However, in the spirit of Smriti literature and that of Kalidasa we find Skandagupta in his Bhitari Pillar inscription eulogized as a person who "subdued the earth & became merciful to the conquered people, but he became neither proud nor arrogant though his glory was increasing day by day.
- His father, Kumaragupta, "followed the true path of religion". Such references to the monarchy indicate that in spite of the supreme powers that vested in the King he was expected to follow a righteous path, and had certain duties:

#### DUTIES OF THE KING

- To decide the policy of the state during war & peace. For instance, Samudragupta was prudent enough to reinstate the monarchs of dakshinapatha in their original kingdoms.
- To protect his countrymen from any invasion. The King was to lead the army in case of war—demonstrated through the campaigns of Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II.
- To support the Brahmanas, Sramanas and all others who needed his protection.
- To venerate the learned and religious people and give them every possible help.
- As the supreme judge he looked after administration of justice according to religious precepts & existing customs.

- To appoint his central & provincial officers.
- The Prayag Prashasti & the Apratigha type coins of Kumaragupta-I point to the appointment of successor to the throne by the reigning King.
- An important political development of this period was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King.
- Gupta King would not interfere with the administration of such regions.

#### ABOUT "APRATIGHA TYPE COINS

- The central figure is the king, as his name is written in two lines on either side of him. The other two, according to Altekar, may be the queen & crown prince, trying to persuade the king from his decision of renunciation (as he is not wearing jewelry & placing his hair in a top-knot). But their efforts are not successful, as the king is *apratigha*, invincible.
- However, Ellen Raven has challenged this explanation, pointing out that the king *is* wearing jewelry. She suggests he is the young Kumara (crown prince) being offered the Garuda banner at the commencement of his rule. Thus, while Altekar suggests it is a coin commemorating the *end* of Kumaragupta's reign, Raven suggests it marks the *beginning* of the reign.

#### COUNCIL OF MINISTERS & OTHER OFFICIALS

- The Gupta inscriptions are not very clear about the hierarchy of ministers. King used to take counsel of his ministers & issue written instructions to officials on all important matters.
- The minister's office was perhaps hereditary. For example, the Udayagiri (Vidisha) inscription of the time of Chandragupta-II informs us that, Virasena Saba, the minister for war & peace, was holding this office by inheritance.
- Though the supreme judicial powers were vested in the King, he was assisted by the Maha Dandanayaka (Chief Justice).
- In the provinces this work was entrusted to the Uparikas & in districts to the Vishayapatis.
- In villages, the headman & the village elders used to decide the petty cases. The Chinese traveller Fa-Hien states that capital punishment was not given at all.
- Other high officials : – Mahapratihara was the chief of the palace guards, the Pratihara regulated ceremonies & granted the necessary permits for admission to the royal presence.
- There existed an espionage system as in the earlier period.
- The land grant inscriptions often mention Dutakas who were associated with the task of implementing gifts when gifts of land were made to brahmanas & others.

#### ARMY

- The Guptas must have had a big army organisation.

- At the time of war the King led his army but ordinarily there was a minister called 'Sandhi-Vigrahika' (Minister in charge of peace and war) who was helped by a group of high officials.
- The official title Mahabaladhikrita occurs in many inscriptions. Officials like Pilupati (head of elephants), Asvapati (head of horses), Narapati (head of footsoldiers) possibly worked under him.
- The army was paid in cash and its needs were well looked after by an officer-in-charge of stores called Ranabhandagarika.
- He had to look after the supply of offensive and defensive weapons such as battle-axes, bows and arrows, spear pikes, swords, lances, javelins, etc.

#### REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

- Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines.
- In Samudragupta's time we hear of an officer Gopasramin working as Akshapataladhikrita.
- His duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues from the sureties of servants, to check embezzlement & recover fines for loss due to neglect or fraud.
- Pustapala (record-keeper) : – to make enquiries before recording any transaction
- The Gupta kings had a department for the proper survey & measurement of land as well as for the collection of land revenue
- Kamandaka in the Nitisara suggests that a King should take special care of his treasury, for the life of the state depends solely on it.
- Both Kalidasa & the author of the Narada-Smriti state that one-sixth of the produce should be claimed as the royal revenue.
- Uparikara which was levied on cloth, oil, etc. when taken from one city to another.
- The organization of traders had to pay a certain commercial tax (Sulka), the non-payment of which resulted in cancellation of the right to trade and a fine amounting to eight times of the original Sulka.
- The King had a right to forced labour (Visthi), Bali and many other types of contributions..
- The King's personal income derived from royal lands and forests
- King's treasury had a right to treasure troves (treasures in the forms of coin-hoards, jewels or other valuable objects, discovered from below the earth accidentally), digging of mines & manufacture of salt.

#### PROVINCE, DISTRICTS & VILLAGES

- The whole empire was divided into Desas, or Rashtras, or Bhuktis. The inscriptions provide us with the names of certain Bhuktis.
- Pundravardhana Bhukti corresponds to north Bengal.
- Tira-bhukti corresponded to north Bihar.
- The Bhuktis were governed by Uparikas directly appointed by the King.

- In areas like western Malwa had local rulers like Bandhuvarman ruling as subordinate to Kumaragupta-I
- Parnadana was appointed a governor in Saurashtra by Skandagupta.
- The Province or Bhukti was again divided into districts or Visayas under an official called Ayuktaka and in other cases a Vistiyapati. His appointment was made by the provincial governor.
- Gupta inscriptions from Bengal show that the office (Adhikarana) of the district head associated with itself representation from major local communities: the Nagarasresthi (head of city merchants), Sarthavaha (Caravan-leader), Prathama-Kulika (head of the artisan community & Prathama Kayastha (head of the Kayastha community).
- Pustapalas-officials whose work was to manage & keep records.
- The lowest unit of administration was the village. In villages where there was a headman called Gramapati or Gramadhayaksha
- However, the Gupta inscriptions from north Bengal show that there were other units higher than the village.
- In some cases we find references to Astakuladhikarana.
- Different categories of villages mentioned as Gramikas, Kutumbis and Mahattaras sent representatives to these offices which on various occasions functioned above the level of the village
- Besides agriculturists, there were certain other groups in the villages who followed such professions as carpentry, spinning and weaving, pot-making, oil extraction, goldsmithery, and husbandry.
- All these groups must have constituted local institutions or bodies which looked after the affairs of the village.
- The village disputes were also settled by these (bodies) with the help of Grama-vridhdhas or village elders.

#### ECONOMY

- Agricultural crops constituted the main resources which the society produced and that the major part of the revenue of the state also came from agriculture.
- This of course does not mean that agriculture was the only occupation of the people or that people lived only in villages.
- There were other occupations like commerce and production of crafts which had become specialized occupations and in which different social groups were engaged
- Various types of land are mentioned in the inscriptions; land under cultivation was usually called Kshetra.
- Lands not under cultivation were variously called as Khila, Aprahata, etc. inscriptions give the

impression that uncultivated land was being regularly brought under cultivation.

- Classification of land according to soil, fertility and the use to which it was put was not unknown.
- Different land measures were known in different regions, although one cannot be certain what exact measure was denoted by a term
- In some areas Nivarthana was the term used for a measure of land whereas in the inscriptions of Bengal terms like Kulyavapa & Dronavapa are used.
- It is not possible to classify the regions precisely according to the Crops grown, but all the major categories of crops- were known long before the Gupta period and continued to be cultivated.
- Crops like maize or vegetables like potatoes or tomatoes were not known to the farmers of the Gupta period.
- The concern of the society with agricultural production is also reflected in the importance given to irrigation.
- The Sudarsana reservoir (Tadaga) in Saurashtra in Gujarat. Originally built in the Maurya period, this reservoir was thoroughly repaired when it was extensively damaged in the time of Maha Kshatrapa Rudradaman (Second century A.D.)
- It was again severely damaged in the time of Skandagupta. Parnadatta, his governor of Saurashtra and Parnadatta's son Chakrapalita, undertook the repair of the reservoir this time.
- Another method for irrigation was to draw water from wells and supply the water to the fields through carefully prepared channels.
- A mechanism possibly known before the Gupta period, was to tie a number of pots to a chain: the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the hull, and by making the chain and the pots rotate, it was ensured that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it.
- This mechanism was known as ghati-yantra as ghati was the name used for a pot. This type of mechanism also came to be known as araghatta.
- In the Harshacharita of Banabhatta, which was written in the seventh century A.D. there is a very charming description of how cultivated fields, producing crops like sugarcane, were being irrigated with the help of ghati-yantra.
- In regions like Bengal, rainwater was collected in ponds and other types of reservoirs; in peninsular India, tank irrigation became gradually the norm.
- The role of the state was only marginal in providing irrigation facilities to farmers.
- The farmers depended mainly on rainfall and the importance of rainfall is underlined not only in the Arthasastra & the texts written in the Gupta period.
- The sources of the Gupta period suggest that certain important changes were taking place in the agrarian society.

- The inscriptions from Bengal refer to sale of land by district-level administration to individuals who bought them by paying cash and made gifts of purchased land to brahmanas who were expected to perform vedic sacrifices or to Buddhist or Jaina religious establishments.
  - But land was not only purchased and gifted; the practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common by now.
  - Even the remuneration for serving rulers in different capacities was received in the form of land by officials of different categories.
  - All this was not absolutely new. But by now the number of ruling families had vastly increased and thus the number of persons who received land but did not cultivate themselves went on increasing.
  - The virtues of giving land were highly praised and those who took away gifted land were threatened with many evil consequences.
  - All this led to the emergence of a class of people who enjoyed superior rights over land and by virtue of these rights and by belonging to higher varnas had high economic and social status.
  - Land rights did not belong only to those who received land. The Gupta inscriptions refer to different types of village residents like Gramikas, Kutumbis & Mahattaras who must have been village landholders, and their participation in land transactions indicates that they too were important members of rural society.
  - The ordinary cultivators, known by various terms such as Krishibala or Karshaka who had low economic and social status.
  - Among the actual cultivators there were those who filled the lands of others and received only a share of the produce.
  - There were also slaves who worked on the fields of their masters. Even domestic female slaves were cruelly exploited, and a text like the Kamasutra, which was probably written in the Gupta period tells us how much hardship they had to go through at the hands of their masters.
  - Decline in the condition of the ordinary cultivators due to : – Appearance of small kingdoms of new rulers and their official and sections of people who did not take part in agriculture created great inequalities in society and imposed great burden on actual tillers of the soil.
  - The number of taxes imposed by the state on the producers also increased in this period.
  - The practice of imposing vishti or unpaid labour was also in vogue, although we do not know for certain how much essential it was for agricultural production.
- CRAFTS PRODUCTION & TRADE**
- Crafts production covered a very wide range of items, including wide variety of luxury items including jewellery made of gold, silver and precious stones; objects made of ivory; fine clothes of cotton and silk and other costly items had to be made available to the affluent sections of people.
  - Descriptions of many luxury objects, of which no trace is generally found in archaeological excavations, may be found in the literary texts or inscriptions of the period.
  - The sources also give us hints regarding the status of different categories of craftsmen. For example, different varieties of silk cloth, called Kshauma and Pattavastra are mentioned in the texts of this period.
  - An inscription of fifth century from Mandsaur in western Malwa refers to a guild of silk-weavers who had migrated from south Gujarat and had settled in the Malwa region.
  - Texts like Amarakosha (Amarasimha) and Brihat Samhita (Varahamihira) which are generally dated to this period, list many items, give their Sanskrit names and also mention different categories of craftsmen who manufactured them.
  - Many important sites like Taxila, Ahichchhatra, Mathura, Rajghat, Kausambi and Pataliputra in the Ganges Valley and other sites in other geographical regions have yielded many craft products like earthen wares, terracottas, beads made of different stones, objects of glass, items made of metals, etc.
  - Crafts production in the Gupta period suffered some setback.
  - India had extensive trade links with Central, West & Southeast Asia and with the Roman world in the preceding period, and trade routes connecting different regions within the country had been developing over centuries.
  - That commercial activities continued in the Gupta period are evident. Like their Kushana predecessors the Gupta rulers too minted coins of different types, and the gold coins of the Gupta rulers show excellent qualities of craftsmanship.
  - The Guptas also issued coins in copper, silver and lead.
  - The merchants held a high position in society
  - Two types of representatives of merchants- the Nagarasresthi and the Sarthavaha-were associated with the administration of the district headquarters in north Bengal.
  - The seals of the Gupta period, found at Vaishali in north Bihar, suggest that the merchants constituted an important section of the population of the city of Vaishali.
  - Literary texts of the period too show that in cities like Pataliputra and Ujjayini commercial activities were carried on briskly and people from different countries.
  - There were organizations which facilitated the functioning of both craftsmen and traders. The ancient term which was generally used for these organizations was Sreni, and the State was



expected to provide the guilds protection and to respect their customs and norms.

- Similarly, members of the Sreni were also expected to follow the norms of the organization; otherwise, they were liable to punishment. The term Sreni is often interpreted as guild but there are different interpretations of the term and in terms of many details, we are still not quite sure what the Srenis were really like.
- There were many types of craftsmen and they were not all identical either in wealth or in social status. For example, there was vast difference between a goldsmith and his family with a shop in a city like Ujayini and a family of basketmakers in a village.
- This is reflected to some extent in the Dharmasastras written by the brahmanas in this period.
- The Dharmasastras assign different ranks to different groups of craftsmen, although in their scheme the craftsmen and artisans held a status lower than that of the brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaishyas.
- The Dharmasastras also suggest that each group of craftsmen formed a jati or caste. For example, the Kumbhakaras or potters formed one caste, the Suvarnakaras or goldsmiths formed another caste and so on
- Although the system of caste was not really so simple, generally the trend among craftsmen was that persons following one craft formed a jati or a caste.
- Crafts production and commercial activities perhaps started declining from the Gupta period onward in most regions and according to some historians, this resulted in the decline of towns and cities and in greater dependence of society of agricultural production.

#### SOCIETY

- According to the scheme of society conceived by the brahmanas, society was divided into four varnas with each varna performing the set of functions prescribed for it and enjoying whatever rights were given to it.
- The state was expected to preserve the social order based on varna.
- This means that when even a small state emerged in some corner of the country, the King of that state was expected to recognize this as the ideal social order.
- The Brahmanas came to exert considerable influence on the kings from the Gupta period and this is quite clear from the way they received land from the kings and others.
- The kings, officials and others gave land not only to Individual brahmanas but also sometimes incited big groups of brahmanas to come and settle in remote areas.

- Thus, the number of brahmana settlements variously called Brahmadiyas, Agraharas & so on started increasing and they started spreading, the idea of a varna-divided social order.
- There were many groups in society whose varna identity could never be determined – brahmanas tried to determine the status of various castes or jatis by giving fictitious explanations of their origins.
- They suggested that various jatis or groups originated through varna-samskara or inter-marriages between various varnas.
- The foreigner ruling families of the pre-Gupta period, of Greek or Sicythian origin were given the semi-kshatriya status (vratya Kshatriya) because they could not be considered to be of pure Kshatriya origin
- Similarly, fictitious origins were thought of for tribal groups who came to be absorbed into the Brahmanical society.
- Dharmasastras also speak of apadharma or conduct to be followed during periods of distress.
- This means that the varnas take to professions and duties not assigned to them when they found it necessary to do so
- These changes of course originated much before the Gupta period, but with the spread of the Brahmanas to different parts of India, the social structure came to be very complex
- The new society had to absorb many social groups. Thus, the actual social structure came to vary from region to region, although certain ideas were common to them
- The Brahmanas came to be recognized as the purest and therefore the highest varna.
- Since they were associated with Sanskrit learning and performed priestly functions.
- Even when the rulers were supporters of Buddhism, Jainism or a particular religious sect, they continued to patronize brahmanas, particularly those of high learning – nexus between Royal power & brahmana became stronger
- This remained one of the major reasons for the economic prosperity and prestige of the brahmanas.
- There were various groups who were kept out of this scheme of varnas. They were the antyajas or untouchables.
- They were considered impure; even their touch was considered impure and their physical presence in areas where higher varnas lived and moved was not allowed.
- The Chandalas, the Charmakaras and similar groups were considered impure and outcastes
- Thus in the brahmanical order of society the condition of a number of social groups remained miserable throughout.
- The position of woman or higher varnas was low. Although we hear of personalities like the Vakataka

queen Prabhavatigupta who wielded considerable power, not all women were so privileged

- The brahmana texts set norms which women were expected to follow, to function mainly as an ideal wife and ideal mother.
- In many Brahmana texts, women were even considered, to be of the same category as the Sudras
- We do not come across evidence of land being given to Brahmana women.
- There existed great difference between the ways of life of the rich city-dwellers and people living in villages. The ideal city-dweller was the nagaraka, i.e. the urbanite who, because of his affluence, lived a life of pleasure and refined culture
- There are interesting descriptions of this way of life not only in Vatsyayana's Kamasutra but also in other literary texts of the , period.

#### PUSHYABHUTI DYNASTY

- The post-Gupta political developments in the north India was characterised by the emergence of numerous ruling families like the Maukharis of Kanyakubja, later Guptas of Magadha, Gaudas of West Bengal (Murshidabad Dist.), Maitrakas of Valabhi (Saurashtra peninsula), Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar, etc
- Many of them were originally subordinates of the Guptas. But, with the decline of the Guptas, they assumed independence.
- North India in the 6th century had multiple regional ruling powers, all, were constantly fighting with each other.
- In such a political scenario, the samantas (subordinates) emerged powerful.
- They kept control over outlying areas or fought battles in areas far away from the political centres of their overlords.
- The rise of local & regional powers has been regarded as the hallmark of this period.

#### POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN NORTH INDIA

- Some regions acquired more power – Emergence of strategic areas :- – Areas situated on elevated regions or those surrounded by hills or rivers; regions which were well connected by land and water routes for facilitating the movement of army or the easy transportation of supplies and provisions for the army, assumed more importance than the older capitals.
- These new centres were called Jayaskandhavaras ('camp of victory') in epigraphs.

#### RISE OF NEW POLITICAL CENTRES :- JAYASKANDHAVARAS

- Inscriptions of the early medieval polities referring to various Jayaskandhavaras under different kings
- From these Jayaskandhavaras, the land grants were issued to religious authorities.

- From such references, the political conquests and the extent of the territories of the rulers may be inferred.
- As for instance, the Banskhera & the Madhuban copper plates of Harsha were issued from the Jayaskandhavaras of Vardhamana Koti & Kapitthika respectively.(Uttar Pradesh)

#### KANNAUJ AS A NEW POLITICAL CENTRE

- Kanauj, earlier known as Kanyakubja or Mahodaya, situated in the present Uttar Pradesh assumed a lot of significance in the politics of early medieval North India.
- Though Located in the fertile plains of the Ganga-Yamuna doab, Kannauj stood on an elevated area that could be easily fortified.
- Besides, Kanauj was rooted in a large agrarian expanse in the western Ganges plains.
- Land-grants could be made in plenty from this area.
- Naturally, the area attracted a large number of brahmanas they came to be widely esteemed in the royal courts throughout the country.
- Kanauj was also well-connected by routes going towards east into the Ganges plains as well as with those going to the south.
- Due to all these factors, it rose to power & a shift of focus seen from Pataliputra in south Bihar to Kannauj.
- Kannauj also came to constitute a central theme in the politics of post-Gupta north India
- As a political centre Kanyakubja first appears in the Harshacharita as a seat of power of the Maukharis under Grahavarman who was married to the Pushyabhuti princess Rajyashree, the sister of Harshavardhana.
- When Harshavardhana became king he chose this city as his seat of power instead of Thaneswar in Haryana, which was the capital of his predecessors.
- This choice of capital might have been due to the threatening activities of the Hunas who were making inroad into India from the north-west since the reign of Skandagupta in the middle of the 5th century CE.

#### DECLINE OF THE PATALIPUTRA

- Historians like R. S. Sharma are of the opinion that Pataliputra in the post-Gupta period was on decline due to decay of trade and commerce.
- This was part of the process of feudalisation of the state polity and economy.
- Tolls used to be collected from traders coming to this city from other places.
- Since trade declined, money in the form of coins had become scarce. Thus, officers, soldiers and other royal servants had to be given their salaries through the assignment of land.
- Therefore, in the post-Gupta times the cities lost their importance & the Skandhavaras acquired prominence.

- Thus, R.S. Sharma has remarked that Pataliputra largely represents the pre-feudal order whereas the emergence of Kanyakubja under Harsha typifies the advent of the feudal age in north India.
- However, this view has its critics. A study of the economy of the various regions and localities does not point to an overall decline of trade, urban centres, and money economy in the period immediately following the Guptas.
- It was not a pan-Indian phenomenon. Rather, in some areas like south-eastern Bengal, western India etc. trade flourished, and there is an abundance of gold and pure silver coins.
- Besides, inter and intra-regional trade used to be carried on a large scale.
- Kanyakubja became powerful after Harsha chose it as his capital and Banabhatta, his court poet, glorified it in his Harshacharita.
- This, contributed to the theory of "Tripartite Struggle" by the historians like H. C. Raychaudhuri and others.
- They believed that it was a struggle among three dynasties: the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Western India, the Palas of Bengal and Bihar and the Rashtrakutas of Deccan.

#### PUSHYABHUTIS

- The sources like Harshacharita, accounts of Hiuen-tsang and some inscriptions and coins – inform us about the rise of the family of Pushyabhuti
- Banabhatta informs us that the founder king of this dynasty at Thaneshwar was Pushyabhuti
- However, the inscriptions of Harsha make no reference to him.
- The Banskhera and Madhuvan plates and royal seals mention five earlier rulers among whom the first three are given the title of Maharaja.
- This may indicate that they were not sovereign monarchs.
- The fourth king Prabhakara Vardhana has been described as a Maharajadhiraja means he was an independent monarch and had established matrimonial relations with the Maukharis by marrying his daughter Rajyasri with Grahavarman.
- Thaneshwar, during this time (about 604 CE) was threatened by the Hunas from the western side.
- Banabhatta has described Prabhakara Vardhana as "a lion to the Huna Deer".
- According to him an army under Rajyavardhana was sent to defeat the Hunas but due to the sudden illness of his father he had to come back
- With Prabhakar Vardhan's death the family had to face troubled times for a while.
- The Malava king killed Grahavarman and took Rajyasri prisoner. It appears that the Malava and the Gauda kings entered into alliance & even Thaneshwar was threatened.
- Rajyavardhana defeated the Malavas but was killed through treachery by Sasanka, the Gauda king.

- Now it was Harsha's responsibility to seek revenge and in due course he was able to establish a strong empire.

#### THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENTS OF HARSHA SOURCES

- Prashastis in the form of epigraphs & copper plate charters of dynasties are eulogistic accounts with exaggerated claims of political might & personal qualities.
- These prashastis are stereotypical account of the political conquests of the king.
- They claim that the king was a universal emperor (chakravartin/sarvabhauma king) who had conquered all quarters and, thus, accomplished digvijaya.
- They refer to the political centres, the areas of land-grants & territorial boundaries of their states
- The charita kavyas (biographical poems) composed by the court poets for their patron kings — portrays the patron king as a hero — as he overcomes many challenges & vicissitudes.
- Harshacharita was first formal charita kavya – poet Banabhatta relates the account of Harshavardhana's rise to power.
- According to Banabhatta, When Pushyabhuti king Prabhakara Vardhana was ruling, the formidable Hunas had attacked the north-western frontier of the kingdom. Both of the princes Rajyavardhana and Harshavardhana went to resist them. In the meantime Prabhakara Vardhana fell ill and died.
- Their brother-in-law and the husband of their sister Rajyasri, the Maukhari king Grahavarman of Kanyakubja was killed by enemies.
- These were Sasanka of Gauda and Devagupta of Malava.
- Rajyavardhana went to fight the enemy and died at the enemy camp.
- Harshavardhana rescued his sister and since the Maukharis had no successor, the throne of Kanyakubja was offered to him by the ministers of the Maukharis.
- He accepted it and, thus, he became the joint ruler of the Pushyabhuti and Maukhari kingdoms.
- He made Kanyakubja his capital — Thus ends the poem. The aim of the poet was to tell the tale of Harsha's ascendancy to the throne.
- By portraying him as an upright and just person, by underlining the mutual love that both the brothers shared, Bana justifies Harsha for having succeeded to the throne even though, by doing this, he superseded his elder brother.
- In the subsequent period rulers like Ramapala of Bengal and Bihar, Vikramaditya VI of the Western Chalukya dynasty, Kumarapala of the Chalukya dynasty of Gujarat appear as the central characters of the charita kavyas like Ramacharita, Vikramankadevacharita and Kumarpal Charitra respectively.
- This indicates how the Harshacharita had set up as an example and initiated a genre of literature that became

widespread and were followed by rulers of different regions who wished to appear as heroes of poems.

- Other source for the period concerned comes from the well-known account of the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang who travelled in India from 629-645 CE and spent much time at the court of Harsha.

#### INTERPRETATION OF SOURCES

- Harsha was a patron of both Banabhatta and Hluen Tsang. Their accounts project Harsha as the master of the whole of north India.
- By taking such accounts at face value, earlier historians projected Harsha as the last great 'Hindu' empire-builder of post-Gupta period.
- Again, such views were strengthened by the epithet of sakalottarapathesvara ("the war-like lord of all the regions of the north") attributed to Harsha by the successors of his arch rival Chalukya king Pulakesin II.
- Thus, in the scheme of periodization of Indian history, historians used to mark the end of an era with the death of Harsha in 647 CE, verily the end of the "Hindu" period.
- Thus, Vincent Smith, one of the earliest authors of a comprehensive volume of Indian history (Early History of India), talks of the 'medieval Hindu kingdoms from the death of Harsha' in which the Rajputs come to the forefront.
- The major criteria of this change were the break-up of a large empire as they believed that Harsha was the last emperor of pre-medieval period who had authority over vast portions of north India similar to that of the Mauryas or the Guptas.
- The beginning of the medieval period, despite the presence of the Rajputs, was perceived as largely a Muslim era.

#### POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF HARSHA

- Harsha ascended the throne in 606 CE. He belonged to the Pushyabhuti dynasty based around Sthanvisvara (Thanesar-Ambala district - Punjab).
- The claims of conquests made in the records of Harsha can be judged from the inscriptions of his contemporary kings like Sasanka, the king of Gauda (Murshidabad - West Bengal) or Chalukya Pulakesin II. Both were his rivals.
- Prabhakara Vardhana was Harsha's father and the fourth king in the line. His two sons were Rajyavardhana and Harshavardhana.
- His daughter Rajyasri was married to Grahavarman, the king of Maukhari dynasty of Kanyakubja.
- It was an important marriage alliance which influenced the power balance in the 7th century North India

#### POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF HARSHA IN THE EAST

- Gauda, the archrival of the Maukharis (earlier the Maukhari king Isanavarman claimed to have defeated the Gaudas) had formed an alliance with Devagupta of Malava.

- The Gauda king Sasanka and the Malava king Devagupta had created trouble by killing Grahavarman: the Maukhari king and the brother-in-law of Harsha.
- They captured Kanyakubja. Rajyavardhana, Harsha's elder brother died in the enemy camp.
- After rescuing his sister and Grahavarman's widowed queen Rajyasri, Harsha was offered the throne by the ministers of the Maukharis since they had no successor.
- Harsha now occupied the throne of Kanyakubja and, thus, began to rule over both the territories of the Pushyabhutis & the Maukharis.
- He now took a vow to take revenge on Sasanka and invaded those kingdoms in the east which had refused allegiance to him.
- However, neither Banabhatta nor Xuan Zang give any information regarding the actual conflict between Sasanka and Harsha.
- Besides, Xuan Zang mentions that some years before 637-638 CE,
- Sasanka had cut down the Bodhi tree at Gaya.
- It was a sacred symbol of the Buddhists and Sasanka could not have performed such an act unless he was in occupation of the Gaya region.
- He also indicated that Harsha conquered Odra and Kongada (North, eastern and southern Odisha) by 643 CE. Thus, it appears that Harsha could not achieve any success in eastern India before the death of Sasanka in c. 637 CE.

#### ACTIVITIES IN THE WEST

- The kingdom of Valabhi in Saurashtra was being ruled by the Maitrakas who were vassals of the Guptas.
- The relationship between Harsha & the Maitraka dynasty is a little complicated.
- In the inscription of the Gurjara kings of Broach (Navsari grant of Jayabhata II, 726 CE) they claimed to have protected the Valabhi ruler who was overpowered by Harsha.
- Originally the Latas (southern Gujarat), Malavas and the Gurjaras occupied a strategic position in between the kingdoms of Harsha and that of Chalukya Pulakesin II situated to the north & south of the Narmada respectively.
- Thus, both Harsha and Pulakesin would attempt to bring three of them under control.
- Pulakesin II claims these three rulers as his vassals in his Aihole inscription.
- However, when Harsha occupied the Valabhi kingdom, peace must have been settled due to a matrimonial alliance between the two.
- Thus, Dhruvasena II Baladitya of the Maitraka dynasty married the daughter of Harsha & became his ally.
- This alliance, thus, weaned away Dhruvasena II from Pulakesin's influence.

- This might have been the reason for the celebrated conflict between Harsha and Pulakesin II.

#### CONFLICT WITH PULAKESHIN II

- The kingdoms of Harsha and Pulakesin II touched on the border of the river Narmada.
- In his Aihole inscription Pulakesin says that Harsha's joy (harsha) melted away through fear when his elephants fell in battle.
- From the account of Xuan Zang it appears that Harsha took the initiative but could not achieve any success against Pulakesin.
- Claims are made by the successors of Pulakesin that he acquired the title of Parameshvara by defeating sakalottarapathesvara (Harsha).
- R. C. Majumdar suggests that the result of the battle was magnified in favour of Pulakesin by his successors.
- This is a fine example of the poet's intention to speak highly of the rivals in royal prashastis in order to glorify the achievements of their patrons

#### TERRITORIAL BOUNDARIES OF THE KINGDOM

- Harsha appears to have been in occupation of parts of present UP, south Bihar and Odisha.
- He inherited Thanesar, parts of eastern Punjab and eastern Rajasthan.
- Besides Bhaskar Varman, the ruler of Kamarupa was his subordinate ally
- Harsha also exercised influence on the kings of Jalandhar and perhaps Kashmir.
- In the south the Narmada was the boundary beyond which Pulakesin II was ruling.
- The extent of Harsha's empire was, not as large as earlier historians had thought. So there is no reason to project him as "the last great Hindu emperor" or to view his reign as marking the end of the ancient and the beginning of the medieval era.
- In fact, contemporary historians question the view that saw the end of an era as being marked by any event like the death of a king.
- The transition of one era into another should be based on historical processes which had a much greater impact on all aspects of society.

#### HIUEN TSANG

- Xuan Zang, the Chinese pilgrim travelled in India from 629 to 645 CE.
- He speaks about the prosperity of Kanauj under Harsha.
- He says that the king travelled frequently throughout his kingdom to understand the condition of his subjects.
- He presents Harsha as a follower of Mahayana Buddhism and he has given a grand description of the Buddhist assembly at Kanyakubja during his reign.
- He also says that Harsha granted lands to his ministers and officials in lieu of salary.
- However, the actual evidence of such secular grants has not come down to us.

- He also mentions that this patronage to the Mahayanas by Harsha was resented by the Hinayanas and the Brahmanas.
- Harsha almost exhausted the royal treasury by making lavish gifts to the Buddhists.
- How far this account is true is difficult to ascertain.
- But it definitely brings out the religious tension among different sects in this period who fought among themselves to secure royal patronage.
- Xuan Zang himself says that at the Prayaga Assembly Harsha worshipped Buddha, Shiva and the Sun and distributed charity to the followers of all faiths.
- The Banskhera and Madhuban copper plates of Harsha record his grant of land to Rigvedin and Samavedin Brahmanas. (Aitareya, shankhayan Pancavimsa, the Sadvimsa, and the Jayminiya)
- Inscriptions also suggest that the early Pushyabhuti kings worshipped Surya while Rajyavardhana was a devotee of the Buddha.
- Harsha has been represented as a devotee of Shiva in these inscriptions.
- Moreover, among three plays attributed to Harsha — namely, Priyadarshika, Ratnavali and Nagananda — the first two begin with an invocation to Brahmanical gods.

#### ARAB ACCOUNT

- Alberuni who came to India in the 11th century records that Harsha Era was in use in Mathura and Kannauj.
- This era commenced from 606 CE: the date of Harsha's ascendancy to throne.
- The Banskhera, Madhuban and the newly discovered Kurukshetra Varanasi copper plates of Harsha & the Shahapur image inscription of Adityasena are probably dated in this Era.
- Previously, the Guptas who ruled a large part of north India had also introduced the Gupta Era.
- This indicates that the rulers wished to commemorate themselves to posterity by initiating an era in their name.

#### END OF THE REIGN OF HARSHA

- From the Chinese sources we learn that the T'ang emperor Tai Tsung sent an embassy to the court of Harsha in 643 and again in 647 CE.
- On the last occasion they found Harsha was no longer alive and his throne had been usurped by someone.
- With the help of forces from Nepal and Assam the usurper was defeated and taken as a prisoner to China.
- This event shows the growing interest of the Chinese in the politics of North India

#### THE CHANGING NATURE OF POLITY

#### TITLES OF KINGS

- The elaborate titles assumed by the Gupta rulers & names of administrative units were followed by many powers of the subsequent period.

- The common titles used by the kings claiming a sovereign status were:
  - Maharajadhiraja,
  - Parameshvara
  - Parama-bhattaraka.
- Ideally, they should have a samantachakra (circle of feudatories).
- The subordinates used titles like maharaja, samanta, mahasamanta, ranaka etc.
- The titles and designations in the land-grant charters suggest different tiers, ranks and functionaries in the administration of the kingdoms.

#### ADMINISTRATION

- Very little data is available regarding the administration in Harsha's reign.
- The various official designations seem to have continued from the days of the Guptas.
- Xuan Zang says that taxes were not heavy and the king took one-sixth of the farmer's produce as his grain share.
- According to him there was no regular corvee but then he mentions that it was moderate and that the taxes were light.
- Devahuti feels that he is probably referring to labour in lieu of taxes.
- Harsha was a strong ruler & inspired confidence and loyalty in his ministers.
- Xuan Zang mentions that he was an industrious king.
- His day was divided into three periods out of which one was devoted to the affairs of the kingdom and two to religious affairs.
- While the affairs of the state may imply more secular aspects of administration, religious affairs may point to opening of hospitals for the needy; provision of free rest houses on highways; distribution of charity; arrangement of philosophical debates; fruit bearing or shady trees; establishment of educational establishments etc.
- He also kept in close touch with the common man through tours of inspection in which he travelled incognito.
- He was familiar with his extensive empire and that added to his proficiency as an administrator.
- For example, he knew the local geography and the temperament of the people belonging to varied terrains and that helped him in choosing the right governors.
- Harsha was in the habit of convening personal audiences with his tributary leaders and this ensured seamless administration.
- In 643 CE there were about 20 such tributary leaders.
- Harsha was on friendly terms with neighbouring countries who he asked to extend facilities of travel and residence to Xuan Zang.
- He also had diplomatic contacts with the Chinese emperor.

- The highest title in Harsha's reign was "parama bhattaraka maharajadhiraja", "the noblest supreme king of kings".
- The use of such high sounding titles became a norm from the Guptas onwards.
- The epithet sakalottara path esvara (the lord of the entire north) bestowed upon Harsha by his rival Pulakesin II further strengthens the authenticity of such a high sounding title.
- The lesser kings were known as rajas or maharajas. They were independent in their territories but owed allegiance to the sovereign.
- Unfortunately, the two main authorities – Bana & Xuan Zang – do not tell us much about Harsha's administration.
- The king was the supreme head of the government. He appointed the ministers and important officers of the state. He led the armies in battle.
- He ruled according to the ideals laid down in the Dharmashastras.
- The king was assisted in his administration by a council of ministers.
- In his council were included feudatories, samantas, princes and high officials.
- There was special staff of officers to manage the royal palace.
- There were departmental heads that were directly under the control of king.
- In Harsha's time civil and military departments were not clearly separate.
- The provincial and district administration did not differ much from that of the Guptas.
- This is evident from the names of the administrative divisions and those of the officers mentioned in the inscriptions of Damodarapuram of Kumaragupta I, Faridpur inscriptions of Dharmaditya and Samachardeva and seals of Basadha are also found in the inscriptions of Harsha and in the descriptions of Bana

#### POLITICAL STRUCTURE

- The political activities of early medieval kings like Harshavardhana reveals difficulty in forming an idea about the innumerable early medieval kingdoms and the extent of their respective areas on the basis of available sources.
- The contours of their kingdoms were rather fluid. Matrimonial alliances as well as conflicts were common among the lineages.
- B. D. Chattopadhyaya has shown that, in early medieval India lineage ties were central to political formations & there were actually no dichotomy between lineage & states.
- The prashastis (eulogies) of this period are indicative of a hierarchical political structure.
- Inscriptions of the subordinate kings refer to their overlord.

- The phrase commonly used in this connection is tatpadanudhyata literally meaning “meditating at his feet”.
- This phrase is also used by kings in connection to their fathers. However, when used by a subordinate in connection to his overlord, it meant ‘favoured by his feet’
- It is also an issue how far the term ‘feudatory’ or ‘vassal’ is applicable to subordinate rulers who were obliged to offer allegiance or military service.
- There used to be no contract between the overlord and subordinates as was the case in Western European feudalism.
- The actual evidence of the ruler granting land to his feudatory (secular land grants) are very few.
- Therefore, the increase in the number of land grants from the 6th century could not have been a contributing factor to the emergence of ‘feudal polity

#### AFTERMATH OF TRIPARTITE STRUGGLE FOR KANNAUJ

- Harsha is credited to have established Kanyakubja as the symbol of royal power in north India.
- In the subsequent period we see repeated attempts by rulers to position themselves as kings of Kanyakubja.
- In the early 8th century Yasovarman, the hero of a Prakrit poem Gaudavaho posed himself as the ruler of Kanyakubja.
- The title of the poem Gaudavaho (in Sanskrit Gaudavadha means the defeat & death of the king of Gauda) suggests rivalry between Gauda and Kanyakubja.
- According to D. C. Sircar, it began as early as the reign of the Maukharis, when in his Haraha inscription, dated 554 CE, Ishanavarman claimed to have defeated the Gaudas.
- This legacy of the rivalry between these two powers continued with Harsha representing Kanauj and Sasanka representing Gauda and ultimately ended up with the conflict between the Palas of Bengal and Bihar (represented as Gaudesvara in the north Indian sources) and the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kanauj.
- Even in the Rajatarangini Kalhana claims that Yasovarman was defeated by Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Karkota dynasty of Kashmir.
- The veracity of the varied claims of majestic conquests put forward by the respective court poets can never be ascertained.
- However, such representations of heroes of poems posing themselves as conqueror of Kanauj nevertheless indicates the growing importance of Kanyakubja in the political scenario of 6th-8th/9th century North India.

#### POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DECCAN & SOUTH

- South India = Region lying to the south of the Vindhya - division existing since ancient times – ancient name was “Dakshinapatha”.

- Dakshina became Dakkan of medieval times, from which, in turn, the term Deccan is derived.
- But, historians and geographers have found it more useful to distinguish the Deccan proper from the rest of south India
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#### POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN THE DECCAN TILL 6TH CENTURY

- After the decline of the Satavahanas the political control of Deccan under one dynasty came to an end.
- Several kingdoms arose in different regions as successors of the Satavahanas.
- In northern Maharashtra we see the Abhiras, who for a time served as army commanders in the Shaka kingdoms, founding a kingdom in mid-3rd century CE.
- The founder of this line was one Isvarasena who began an era in 248-49 CE.
- This era became very important later and came to be known as Kalachuri-Chedi Era.

#### VIDARBHA

- The Deccan plateau was dominated by the Vakatakas who started as the minor kings from the 3rd century CE, but rapidly gained in power
- They extended their sway over most of Maharashtra and adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh.
- Two lines of Vakataka kings : – The main line ruled from eastern Maharashtra (the Vidarbha) – The Basin branch ruled in southern Maharashtra.
- The most famous Vakataka king was Pravarasena-I of the main line – alone had the title of Samrat among the Vakatakas – performed several Vedic sacrifices & issued many land-grants to the Brahmanas.
- The Vakatakas seem to have been a peace-loving people – formed matrimonial and diplomatic ties with their powerful neighbours – such as the Guptas in the north, the Vishnukundins in eastern Deccan & the Kadambas in the south.
- But the break-up and weakening of the kingdom could not be prevented as the Kalachuris and Kadambas carved out their territories at its cost in the first half of the 6th century CE.
- By the mid-6th century they were supplanted by the Chalukyas of Badami as the major power in the Deccan.

## KARNATAKA

- In the coastal strip of northern Karnataka & adjoining areas a small kingdom was carved out by the Chutus – ruled till about the mid-4th century CE - supplanted by the Kadambas.
- Founded by the famous Mayurasarman – an expert in guerrilla warfare – compelled the Pallavas of Kanchi to recognize his sovereignty.
- He performed horse sacrifices (ashvamedha) & became Mayuravarman from Mayurasarman – a kshatriya from a brahmana
- Varman was a kshatriya surname while Sarman was a brahmana surname
- Kadamba kingdom had two parts between the two lines of the family, with Vaijayanti (Banavasi) & Palasika (Halsi) as the capitals
- The two lines were in conflict with each other – were threatened by their more powerful neighbours – the Pallavas, the Western Gangas, and above all, the Chalukyas of Badami.
- The Chalukyas by about 575 CE completely vanquished them

## EASTERN DECCAN

- Politically, the most disturbed region in the post-Satavahana Deccan was the fertile Krishna-Godavari delta (Andhra delta) in the east.
- Here, the Satavahanas were succeeded by the Ikshvakus from 225 CE.
- There was a brief interregnum in their rule by the coming of Abhiras from the west – Ikshvakus came back and ruled for the next 50 years or so.
- Then, the area was apparently split up into a number of principalities.
- From copper-plate inscriptions we come to know of the kings of Brihat Phalayana gotra followed by those of Salankayana gotra.
- The Allahabad Pillar Inscription praises Samudragupta mentions of Vengi and of Kurala, with capitals at Pishtapura and at Avamukta of Devarashtra & so on.
- Vishnukundins brought Political stability to the Andhra delta from the mid-5th century – had good relations with the Vakatakas & prolonged, conflicts with the Western Gangas of south Karnataka.
- Madhavarman-I (440-60 CE), the founder performed many horse sacrifices, and Madhavavarman-II (556-616 CE) was among the famous rulers of the line.
- The Vishnukundins ruled till about the first quarter of the 7th century CE when the Chalukyas came in.

## SOUTH KARNATAKA

- At the beginning of the 5th century CE – Western Gangas to distinguish them from the Eastern Gangas of Odisha.
- The Western Gangas ruled over south Karnataka for the next 600 years – the area came to be called Gangavadi.

- Gangavadi is an isolated territory surrounded by mountains & is relatively less prosperous agriculturally.
- Both these factors allowed the Ganges to rule without much interference – advantageously situated from a military point of view – play a very important role in the mutual conflicts between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas of Badami, mostly as subordinate allies of the Chalukyas & in the conflict between the Pallavas & Pandyas.
- They did not generally have cordial relations with the Pallavas who were well placed to harass them from their lofty mountain fortress of Nandi durg.

## POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTH

- The Sangam period in Tamilnadu and Kerala drew to the end of the 3rd century CE. The history of this area from the 4th to the mid-6th century CE is very obscure.
- The early history of the Pallavas belongs to this period – their copper-plate charters issued from Kanchi.
- Pallava rule was traditionally associated with the Kanchi region (Palar river valley) or Tondaimandalam (Tondai is Tamil for Pallava).
- The Kanchi region was not under their effective control as they had been pushed north by mountainous tribes called Kalabhras.
- From the end of the Sangam period to the mid-6th century CE Tamilnadu & Kerala were dominated by the Kalabhras.
- Very little is known about them – scanty evidence provided that they were against Brahmanical institutions & favoured Buddhism & Jainism.
- They put an end to the rule of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas of the Sangam age – they were non-agricultural hill tribe – caused great havoc among settled agricultural population.
- The Kalabhra threat seems to have extended to the borders of the Chalukyas in north Karnataka, for they too claim to have defeated them. This period is known as the 'Kalabhra Interregnum'.

## THE RISE OF CHALUKYAS, PALLAVAS & PANDYAS CHALUKYAS

- From the mid-6th century CE the political scene in the Deccan and south India was dominated by : the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi, and the Pandavas of Madurai.
- Pulakesin-I laid the foundations of kingdom – built a strong fortress near Badami in the Bijapur district of Karnataka in 543-44 CE and performed a horse sacrifice
- His successors overthrew the Kadambas and also subjugated the Mauryas of Konkan.
- Under Pulakesin-II the Chalukyas became the paramount power in Deccan as the Western Gangas and Alupas in the south and the Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras in the north offered their submission to him.



- The army of Pulakesin-II checked the forces of Harshavardhana on the banks of the Narmada.
- Pulakesin-II defeated the Vishnukundins of Andhra delta.
- But, he was looking for one million acres of rich arable land in the Krishna-Godavari delta.
- In the 621 CE he sent his younger brother Vishnuvardhana to take over the area.
- In 631 CE Vishnuvardhana was allowed to form his own kingdom.
- Thus, began the line of the Chalukyas of Vengi or Eastern Chalukyas – who remained in control of the area for more than 500 years.

#### PALLAVAS

- Pallavas began with Simhavishnu – middle of the 6th century CE. He ended to the Kalabhra Interregnum in Tondaimandalam (Kanchi Region) and extended kingdom southward up to the Kaveri delta.
- He was succeeded by Mahendravarman-I who annexed territories in the north up to the river Krishna.
- The Pallavas secured submission from the neighbouring chieftains and kings, and influenced of the Chalukyas of Badami & of the Pandyas.
- Pandyas had to accept their overlordship briefly. Thus, by the middle of the 7th century CE, the Pallavas had set up a powerful regional kingdom in south India.
- Their power began to weaken from the mid-8th century when the Chalukyas were being replaced by the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan.
- By the early 10th century CE, the Pallava rule came to an end when Aparajata was defeated by Aditya Chola-I.

#### PANDYAS

- The Pandyas came to light with king Kadungon in the end of 6th century CE when he suppressed the Kalabhras.
- The Pandyas ruled in the southernmost districts of Tamilnadu, with the Vaigai river basin as the heartland of the kingdom.
- They constantly tried to extend their sway over the Kaveri delta in the north and Chera country (Kerala) in the southwest

#### OTHER POWERS

- The Gangas continued to rule in Gangavadi in south Karnataka.
- Besides, there were several other small kingdoms & chieftaincies in the Deccan & south India such as the Nolambas, the Banas, the Silaharas, etc.
- Unlike in northern India there were no contiguous stretches of river valleys and plains due to
  - The major river valleys such as the Raichur Doab (Tungabhadra & the Krishna), the Krishna-Godavari delta, the lower Kaveri valley and the Vaigai valley are separated from each other by rugged mountainous territories.

- vast expanses of forests that divided cultivated zones.
- All this encouraged political fragmentation and allowed small political units to survive in isolated pockets of habitation.
- The important river valleys could and did support greater kingdoms such as the Chalukyas of Badami (Raichur Doab), the Pallavas (Palar river valley), and so on.
- But, it was a difficult task for any one of the regional kingdoms to extend its sway over the rest, much more difficult than in the case of northern India.
- This comes out very clearly in the account of mutual conflicts of the Chalukyas, Pallavas and the Pandyas.

#### CONFLICT

- The political history of this period is marked by frequent wars between the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas, and between Pandyas and the Pallavas.
- Pulakesin-II defeated Mahendravarman and occupied the northern part of Pallava kingdom.
- He vanquished the Banas ('feudatories' of the Pallavas in Rayalaseema) and threatened Kanchi.
- But, he was badly defeated in several battles by Narasimhavarman-I who had succeeded Mahendravarman.
- Narasimhavarman then attacked the Chalukyas, captured Badami and probably killed Pulakesin-II.
- The situation was saved by the latter's son Vikramaditya-I.
- He drove out the Pallavas, formed an alliance with the Pandyas, and repeatedly raided Pallava territory.
- His successor, Vikramaditya-II, said to have overrun and looted Kanchi three times.
- Pallavas had to engage in battles with the Pandyas too.
- In these conflicts it was always the Pallavas were the target of attack.
- This was not just because they were situated between the Chalukyas and the Pandyas, because they were the most prosperous of all. It is significant that it
- Chalukyas who attacked the Pallavas and that the Pallavas driving them back into their territory.
- Only Narasimhavarman-I penetrated into Chalukyan kingdom & his occupation of its capital. But this was a retaliatory move and was made only once in the entire history of the conflict.
- Pallava Paramesvaravarman-I launched an expedition into the Chalukyan kingdom as a diversionary move.
- Paramesvaravarman wanted to get rid of the Chalukyan forces occupying his kingdom by diverting their attention.

- The Pandyas fought repeatedly with the Pallavas for the control of Kaveri delta.
- According to Sangam literature & Hiuen- Tsang the Vaigai river valley – the core of Pandyan kingdom – was relatively poor agriculturally.
- The Pandyas must have realised that if they wanted to be rich and powerful, they would have to control the rich Kaveri delta.
- By the early 9th century CE they eventually came to control this area

#### ROLE OF MINOR KINGS

- They took part in the conflict of regional kingdoms as subordinate allies of one or the other of these powers.
- Pulakesin-II had to subdue the Banas – allies of the Pallavas – before attacking Narasimhavarman-I.
- Pallava general Udayachandra engaged in battles with Sabara king
- Udayana & Nishada chieftain Prithvi Vyaghra who probably sided with the Chalukyas. These subordinate allies shared not only in the plunder but could add new areas to their realm as well.
- Smaller principalities individually, do not find them worthy of attention because each small kingdom by itself was insignificant, a non-entity. But taken together, they represent a political force to reckon
- Equally striking is the inability of any king from the 4th to the 9th century CE to establish his hold over the Deccan and south India.
- For these six centuries political disunity was the norm despite the energetic efforts and ambitions of a number of kings.
- The broken geography of southern India had a role to play here in political disunity as well as in the importance of lesser kings and chieftains
- An important offshoot of the Pallava-Chalukya conflict was the emergence of the kingdom of Chalukyas of Lata or south Gujarat.
- As a result of Narasimhavarman's occupation of Badami and the death of Pulakesin-II there was terrible confusion and political disorder in the Chalukyan kingdom.
- In the task of restoring unity to it, suppressing the hostile forces, and of driving out the Chalukyas, Vikramaditya-I had been greatly helped by his younger brother Jayasimhavarman.
- In return, Vikramaditya rewarded his brother by giving away south Gujarat to him.

#### RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

- Active interest in the political affairs of Sri Lanka.
- In the battles with the Chalukyas, Narasimhavarman-1 had a Lankan prince Maravarma on his side.
- He had been driven into exile and had sought refuge at the Pallavan court.
- After his return from Badami Narasimhavarman helped Maravarma to gain the throne at Anuradhapura by sending two naval expeditions.

- Later, when he had again been dispossessed of his kingdom it was to the Pallava king that Maravarma looked for help.
- The Pandyans, too, showed keen interest in Sri Lanka, the wealth of which lured them into launching predatory raids into this area.
- The Pallavas seem to have taken interest in and somehow influenced the politics of South-east Asia.
- It is possible that Nandivarman-II Pallava Malla came from South-east Asia to succeed to the Pallava throne in mid-8th century.
- The powerful fleet of Nandivarman-III and a Tamil record in Thailand mentioning a Vishnu temple and a tank.
- A more direct interference in South Asia, came only with the Cholas who put an end to Pallava dominance in south India.

#### KERALA

- Kerala seems to have continued under the rule of the Perumals in this period, although the details of the political history of the period are lacking.
- A famous ruler in this line was Cheraman Perumal (late 8th/early 9th century CE).
- He seems to have pursued his religion and religious policy in some extraordinary manner, so that the Jains, Christians, Shaivites and Muslims praise him as a patron & claim him as a practitioner of their own religion.
- The prosperity of Malabar constantly attracted invaders from outside.
- Not only the Pandyas claimed to have vanquished Kerala; the same claim was also made by Narasimhavarman, a number of Chalukyan kings and later, by the Rashtrakuta

#### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

- The king assumed high sounding titles such as maharaja, bhattaraka, dharma maharajadhiraja, etc.
- In the beginning, kingship was governed by the Vedic ideal.
- They performed horse sacrifices (ashvamedha) and other Vedic sacrifices such as vajapeya, rajasuya, etc.
- These sacrifices did not have the social significance they had in the Later Vedic period.
- But they had a special political meaning as they served to underline the independence of a particular king
- The King was helped by his ministers at the court. Members of the royal family including the crown prince (yuvaraja) took an important part in running the government at higher levels
- Then, there were a number of officials of various ranks who discharged various administrative duties in the name of the King.
- An important part of their job was to collect taxes. There was a principal tax on land amounting to one-sixth or more of the produce, in addition to several miscellaneous taxes such as those on weavers, draught cattle, marriage parties and so on.