Lecture 4
Gupta Empire

Ashvamedhapanarakrama coin
Samudragupta

Nikhil Sheth
Vajiram and Ravi
2021-22
Golden Age?
Colonial View
Nationalist View
Marxist View
Part I – Political History
Sri Gupta

Ghatotkacha

Chandragupta (r. 320-335) – Kumardevi (Lichhavi)

Samudragupta (r. 335-375)

Rama Gupta

Chandragupta II – Dhruvadevi

Kumargupta (r. 415-455)

Skandagupta (r. 455-467)

Prabhavati – Rudrasena II (Vakataka)

Vakataka kings
(3) Chandragupta I (320-335 CE)

Kumardevi-Lichhavayah
(Chandragupta I and Kumardevi)
(4) Samudragupta (335-375 CE)
(5) Chandragupta II (375-415 CE)

- Legend of Ramgupta
- Conquest of Malwa + Gujarat and defeat of Western Kshatrapas

Symbolism of Varaha legend in Udayigiri cave
...

Sanchi inscription of Amrakardava, says that Chandragupta “acquired victory and fame in many battles”
Coin of Rudrasimha III – Western Kshatrap

Coin of Chandragupta II – A Gupta King
Culture – Navaratnas, Faxian

Amarasimha  Dhanvantari  Ghatkarpur
Kalidasa  Kshapanaka  Shanku
Varahamihira  Vararuchi  Vetala-bhatta
Raghuvamsha of Kalidasa

• Sanskrit Mahakavya
• Extremely popular in India and Southeast Asia
• Story of Raghu dynasty: Raghu…. Dasharatha, Rama,....
• Modelled after Samudragupta/Chandragupta?
  • Digvijay of Raghu
  • Clear detailed circumambulation of Indian subcontinent
  • military expedition of Transoxiana until Amu Darya (Vakshu river) and Pamir region (Kambhoja)
• A great political poetry
  • Developed ideal kingship model
  • Idea of dharma, purushartha, varna, ashrama
  • Struggle between kama and dharma
Kamandaka’s Nitisara

• Traditional branches of learning, as in Kautilya’s Arthashastra, like the state, its constituents and preservation; the mandala theory on inter-state relations; various types of policies; war and peace; diplomacy and intelligence; military organization; and defects to avoid.

• Nitisara differs from Arthashastra in that the former focuses on valour and the military qualities of the ruler, whereas the latter was dependent on deliverance of kingly duties.

Having studied the learned works of that master of science (vidyanam paradrvana) (i.e., Visnugupta) and out of our love for science of polity (rajaridy), we set ourselves to the compilation of an abridged treatise following the views of the master of science of polity (rajaridyavirdam matam).

Shloka 1.1.7-8
(6) Kumargupta I (415-455 CE)

- Son of CGII and Dhruvadevi
- Performed Ashvamedha – Military achievements?
  - Aulikaras?
  - Trailkutakas?
- Administrative consolidation
- Religious conexistence
- Shakraditya and foundation of Nalanda
- Some problems at the end
Trouble in the final years?

Mankuwar Buddha, near Allahabad, dated to the end of the reign of Kumaragupta I in 448 CE, only uses the title Maharaja.
Skandagupta (455-467 CE)

- The last great Gupta king
- **Bhitari pillar** inscription – he restored "the fallen fortunes of his family"

(Perfection has been attained! In the tranquil reign of Skandagupta, whose hall of audience is shaken by the wind caused by the falling down (in the act of performing obeisance) of the heads of a hundred kings; who is born in the lineage of the Gupta; whose fame is spread far and wide... (Kahaum Pillar)
Once again Junagarh
Rock Inscription

- Parnadatta as Governor of Saurashtra
- Parnadatta appointed his son Chakrapalita as the magistrate of the Girinagara city
- Dam burst again in 450s CE – Chakrapalita spent “immeasurable wealth” to repair it and also built a Vishnu temple
Mihirkula and Toramana

Eran varaha statue inscription names king Toramana, ruler of Huns, as ruling over Malwa ("governing the earth") and records a dedication of a stone temple to Narayana (Vishnu).
Yashodharman vs Mihirkula
Battle of Sondani (Mandsor) 528 CE
Decline of Guptas
Part II – Features

Polity, Administration, Economy, Society, Religion
Polity and administration

**Imperial, Divine Titles (Exalted position)**
- Maharajadhiraja
- Parameshvara
- Paramabhattaraka
- Parambhagavata
- Lokadhamdeva
- Achintyapurusha
- Dhanadavarunendrantaka-sama

**Officials (many hereditary)**
- Kumaramatya
- Sandhivigrahika
- Mahadandanayaka
- Mahabaladhirkita
- Ranabhandagaradhikarana
- Mahapratihara
- Khadhyatapakita
- Dutaka

**Administrative Tiers**
- Provinces – Bhukti (Uparika) and Desh (Gopatri)
- Districts – Vishaya (Vishayapati)
- Below district – Vithi or Petha (by vithi kulika/mahattara)
- Villages (by gramika)
Liberal-yet-efficient Administration
A Typical Comparison with Mauryan

- Bureaucracy not as elaborate as Mauryas
- Not vexatious but light-touch official regulation
- Light taxation – no rigid regulation of economy
- Roads safe to travel + freedom of movement
- No severe criminal punishment, mild penal code
- Leading role to local elements in administration

District board –
Adhishtana Adhikarana (five members board)
- Uparika or Vishayapati (as head)
- Nagarsreshthi
- Sarthavaha
- Prathamakulika
- Prathamakahastya

Ancient Panchayat –
- Ashtakula Adhikarana (board of 8 members) in Bengal, headed by Mahattar (village elder)
- Panchamandali mentioned in Sanchi inscription
Revenue and Taxation

- Officers
  - Akshapataladhikrita
  - Pustapal
- Fiscal terms
  - Bhaga (sadbhagin – king)
  - Bhoga
  - Kar and bali
  - Uparikara
  - Udranga
  - Hiranya
  - Shulka
  - Klipta
  - Vishthi

“Subjects owe the king revenue as a reward for protection provided”

“king be like a florist or a milkman in matters of taxation”
Economy – Crop diversity in agriculture
Mature knowledge of soil type, seasons, technology and specialization

• Rice (Dhanya) – Most important
  • Kalidasa (Raghuvamsa) – list of diverse varieties – sali, nivara, kalama, uncha and shyamaka
  • Amaravati-Bhandara region
  • Wider use of transplantation

• Cash crops
  • Amarkosha – cotton, oilseed, indigo, mustard etc
  • Coconut plantation
  • Sugarcane of Paundrak
  • Areca nut, Spices like pepper and cardamom
Economy – Irrigation

- Irrigation
  - Sudarshana Lake
  - Ponds (Pushkarani)
  - Tanks (Tadaag)
  - River embankments
  - Canals — Ali/Brihadali (jalanirgama in Amarkosha)

Role of state in building/maintaining – Junagarh
Considering the economic importance of irrigation and agriculture, irrigation works were duly protected by the state. Fines and punishments were imposed on those who caused damage to them.

Prachi Prachura Payasi
Did Feudalism emerge in Gupta era?

- Increasing role of agriculture, ruralisation
- Increasing power and position of landed intermediaries
- Emergence of self-sufficient trade
- Decline in long-distance trade and money economy
  - Debasement of gold coins
  - Less use of copper coins
  - Faxian – use of cowry
- Relegation of crafts and secondary economic activities in the background
- De-urbanization
Important Feature – Creation of Agraharas
Copper plate charters to exempt land/village donations from revenue

Before Satavahanas
- Land Gifts
- Mahabharata – Gau, Hiranya, Prithvi

Satavahanas
- Land Grant
- Beginning of Pariharas

Gupta
- Land Grant + Increasing Pariharas
- Hereditary

Post Gupta
- Land Grant + Pariharas + Heredity
- Subassignments
Kshetrasvami – Rise of landed intermediaries

*mahipati* (king), *kshetrasvami* (landowner) and *karshaka* (cultivator) – Yajnavalkya

- Hierarchical rights
  - Brahmanas donees didn't till themselves – employed others
  - Rise in position and material condition Brahmana donees – enjoyed revenues and cesses by royal order

**Other possibilities**

- No secular sale deeds of this period – maintained on perishable material?
- Most lands granted in Bengal were fallow/uncultivated
- Pustapalas (record keepers) give permission to land transfer as it didn’t affect economic interest of the ruler.
- Mentions of kutumbin and the mahattara (important agriculturists) don’t seem so powerless
Non-agrarian economy
As important as agrarian economy, if not more

- Prevalence of a large variety of crafts
  - Amarkosha
  - Kamsutra – 64 Kalas
  - Ajanta Painting – wealth/palaces/ornaments
- Distinctive feature – rise in metal-based industry
  - References to iron workers, coppersmiths, goldsmiths
  - Raghuvaṃśha reference to Ayoghana (iron working by heating and beating)
- Other crafts
  - Potters, carpenters, ivory
  - Textile – Mandsor Inscription
## Brisk Trade
Both domestic and external

### Domestic Trade
- Kraya-vikraya in Amarkosha, vipanis/apanamarga in Kalidasa
- Kamandaka – traders bring riches, so king should specially patronize them
- Faxian – security on trading routes
- Epigraphs speak of rich shreshthins and sarthavaha

### Brisk Western Trade
- Cosmas Indicopleustes (Christian Topography) – imp Konkan and Malabar ports
- Roman empire → loss in trade, Rise of Byzantine → again trade rose (Red sea trade)
- Sassanid empire (Persian gulf)

### Eastern Trade - Role of Bengal
- Faxian: Tamralipti → SL → Java → China
- Hsuan Tsang - importance of Samatata
- Manimekalai mentions sea voyages to Srilanka and Java
- Kalidasa – Chinamshuka by rich
- Malayan inscription mentions mahanavika (master mariner) from Bengal named Buddhagupta
- Ship-building area (navataksheni)
Coinage – Complex monetary history
Superb quality of silver and gold coins

**Gold coins (Dinaras → Suvarnas)**
- Debasement → economic difficulties and decline in long distance trade due to Huna inroads?
- Metrology – Early Gupta rulers followed late Kushana weight standard, Skandagupta raised the weight (suvarna standard).
- Inspite of debasement, Gupta rulers continued to strike coins and maintain a uniform standard.

**Silver coins (known as rupaka)**
- Began by Chandragupta II after defeating Saka Kshatrapas
- Followed Western satrapa weight standard instead of long-standing indigenous karshapana (silver coin) standard.

- **Paucity of copper coins**
  - Barter in daily life and self-sufficient village?
  - Cheaper copper not often hoarded?
- Faxian – cowry shells
- Gold dust
Guilds in Gupta Era

- Detailed structure – Chiefs, Officers (madhyastha, karyachintaka etc) – expanding role
- Multifunctional role like before
  - Mandsor inscription – building sun temple
- Joint corporate bodies (partnership in trade and production)
  - Sreshthi-Kulika-Nigama
  - Sreshthi-Sarthavaha-Kulika-Nigama
- Role in local administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandsor Inscriptions (436, 473 CE)</th>
<th>Vadrapalli Inscription Sanjeli (GJ, 503 CE)</th>
<th>Vishnusena Charter (Maitraka ruler) Lohatagram (GJ, 592 CE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Guild of silk workers</td>
<td>• Vaniggrama (Professional Merchants’ Body)</td>
<td>• Records several privileges for the vaniggrama who by such concessions were expected to be settled down (acharasthitipatra) at Lohatagrama.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spatial migration</td>
<td>• Both local and non-local traders</td>
<td>• These merchants undertook trips to land abroad, possibly by sea-going vessels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lata to Dasapura</td>
<td>• Including Kanyakubja and Ujjayini and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Occupational migration</td>
<td>• One non-Indian merchant Gdusuyebhassam</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Old profession – prosperity,</td>
<td>• Met and decided to pay voluntary cesses on certain commodities in favour of a Vishnu temple.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction of Sun temple</td>
<td>• Most cesses levied in cash (silver coins), and some in kind.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Changed profession –</td>
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<tr>
<td>archers, astrologers,</td>
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<tr>
<td>storytellers</td>
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</table>
Deurbanisation or thriving urban centres?
Trade centres, administrative centres, military camps and cultural centres

• Literary Evidence
  • Faxian and Huen Tsang: several famous cities of north India lost their prosperity

• Literary counter-evidence
  • Stories of Kalidasa
  • Nagaraka in Kamasutra
  • Vasantsena’s haveli in Mrichhakatika
  • Markets of Silappadikaram and Manimekalai
  • Amarkosha – Pura, Nagara, Putabhedana

• Archaeological evidence
  • Decay in Shravasti, Mathura, Rajagriha, Vaishali, and Champa

• Archaeological counter-evidence
  • No decline in cities like Varanasi and Ujjaiyini or Mahasthangarh and Bangarh (Bengal)
Faxian painted very pleasing, romantic and idealized picture to Chinese about people/places associated with Buddhism in India.

- Very few daily life details
- No political comment either
- People are simple and honest
- Ahimsa was strong element in middle India
- Rich, pious inhabitants
- Numerous charitable institutions, free hospitals
- Resthouses for travelers

“People are very well off, without poll tax or official restrictions... The kings govern without corporal punishment; criminals are fined according to circumstances, lightly or heavily. Even in cases of repeated rebellion they only cut off the right hand. The king’s personal attendants, who guard him on the right and the left, have fixed salaries. Throughout the country the people kill no living thing nor drink wine, nor do they eat garlic or onions, with the exceptions of Chandalas only. “
Greater Fluidity in Social Norms
Shastric view of Society – orthodox but theoretical

• Varna
  • Agraharin Brahmin, yet trader (Charudatta) and robber (Dashakumarcharita of Dandin)
  • Kings – Guptas and Kadambas not Kshatriyas

• Women
  • Lowering age of marriage? – Shakutala as upbhoagakshama in Kalidas
  • Dharmya as preferred type of marriage? – Gandharva based in mutual love in Kamasutra
  • No widow remarriage? – Punarbhu in Amarkosh
  • Eran Sati stone – only one!
  • No Stridhana? – coins, donative inscriptions, matrimonial alliances

• Kaliyuga?
  • Progressive decline of dharma and increase in evils – implicit acknowledgement of different norms of social reality

Lower caste and class oppression increased
• Forced labour – Visthi – seems to be regular
• Narada mentions more types of slaves than Manu or Arthashastra
• Chandals lived outside city and had to announced their arrival (Faxian)
• Untouchability also emerged in deep south in late sangam era
• He crossed Pamir and came to India, spent 3 years in Pataliputra and 2 years in Tamralipti, then returned via ocean (Srilanka, Java, China)

• Said that Buddhism was flourishing in India, liberally endowed by kings
  • Noticed many monasteries from Indus → Mathura travel of both Hinayana and Mahayana
  • In Mathura, he noticed 20+ monasteries
  • In Pataliputra, he noticed a Buddhist procession with the image of Buddha being mounted in huge carts with many wheels

He failed to discern that Buddhism was already on decline. He himself mentions many ruined monasteries also – at Bodhgaya, Kapilavastu and Kushinagar. (“like great desert”)
Religion – Peaceful coexistence of diversity

Hindu Renaissance? – No, rather culmination

• Era of Brahmanical Revival?
  • Long process since Shunga, Satvahana etc
  • Sanskrit inscriptions firmly established
  • Royal sacrifices – Ashvamedha
• Peaceful (no narrow sectarianism) – Religious freedom and protection.
  • Six schools coexisted
  • Guptas patronising Kalidasa
  • Chandragupta II’s Senapati was Amrakaradava
  • Kumargupta started Nalanda
  • Valabhi Jain Council (during Maitrakas)
Creation of culture of India

- Diversity of paths (Karma, Jnana and Bhakti) – but Bhakti emerges as prominent. (temple-based)

- Cultural synthesis of Puranas (final reworking)
  - Integrating diverse beliefs – Vedic to Puranic, rituals to philosophy, from fictional legends to factual history, individual yoga to social festivals, temples to pilgrimage, from god to goddesses and tantra.
  - Accommodation of a diversity of people – With different languages, from different economic classes, across different kingdoms and traditions

Coexistence and Syncretism
- Avataravad
- Composite deities – Harihara, Trimurti, Ardhanarishvara, Srivaishnavism
- Local popular deities fused with great tradition (shakta peetha emerge, saptamatrika)
- Panchayatan temple – coexistence
- Bhagvadgeeta – attempt at unification
• Golden Age Debate?
  • Will be covered in next lecture
  • Will include aspects of religion, art, architecture, science and literature

• Additional Handouts
  • Harsha
  • Travel accounts of Faxian, Huen Tsang, Itsing
  • Feudalism Debate
Additional Slides
## Ashta-vivaha – Dharmya and Adharmya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahma</td>
<td>Father of bride gives her away in marriage to the bridegroom whom he formally approves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daiva</td>
<td>If woman’s family doesn’t get a suitable groom after waiting for long time, matchmaking through priest who duly officiates at a religious ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arsha</td>
<td>Girl is given in marriage to a sage/seer. The bride used to be given in exchange for some cows. (eg Agastya and Lopmudra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prajapatty</td>
<td>Popular among the commoners (praja) who could not afford traditional, expensive marriages. Exchange garlands in the presence of friends and family as witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gandharva</td>
<td>Voluntary union – bride-groom with mutual consent – Love marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asura</td>
<td>Bride’s father gives his consent under pressure, fear, or due to material/economic consideration. Here groom may not often be compatible with the bride and may even possess some abnormality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakshasa</td>
<td>Forcible abduction of a girl from her home after killing/wounding her kinsmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paishacha</td>
<td>Coercive marriage (violence, kidnapping, rape), in which instead of taking the bride’s consent brute force is used to force her to marry the groom.</td>
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</tbody>
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Land – Terminology

- Types of Land
  - Cultivated area (kshetra) was differentiated from habitational plots (vastu) and forest (aranya).

- Amarakosha lists 12 types of land
  - urvara (fertile)
  - ushara (barren)
  - maru (desert)
  - aprahata (fallow)
  - shadvala (grassy)
  - pankila (muddy)
  - jalaprayamanupam (wet)
  - kachcha (adjacent to water)
  - sharkara (full of pebbles, limestone)
  - sharkavati (sandy)
  - nadimatrika (watered by a river)
  - devamatrika (watered by rain)

### Types of Khila (fallow plots)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aprahata</td>
<td>Never tilled before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adyastambha</td>
<td>Covered with shrubs, never cleared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aprada</td>
<td>Unyielding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apratikara/shunyapratikara</td>
<td>Not yielding any revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khila Kshetra</td>
<td>Arable plot kept fallow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Land size measurement – diversity of units ➔ regional variation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Type</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Units</td>
<td>Angula (probably ¾ inch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hasta (cubit, 8 inches).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger Units</td>
<td>Dhanu/danda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Units in Eastern India</td>
<td>Aadhavapa (3/8–1/2 acre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(based on seeds to be sowed)</td>
<td>Dronavapa (1½–2 acres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kulyavapa (12–16 acres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largest Unit</td>
<td>Pataka (60–80 acres)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Land Ownership
Multi-tiered system of rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village community</th>
<th>Royal Ownership</th>
<th>Private Ownership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important in land matters</td>
<td>Smritikar debate – Bhusvami (thus land tax) v/s tax as wages for protection</td>
<td>Books on issue of possessions, ownership, title, partition, sale, mortgage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary dispute</td>
<td>Lord of all land but the legal owner (Land grants – some ownership)</td>
<td>Numerous copper-plate inscriptions on sale-purchase deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastureland unpartitioned</td>
<td>Power to divest peasants from land – hardly used</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>King to notify land donations</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Land Gift – Technical Tenure Terms

- **Nivi Dharma**: Grant of permanent usufructory rights
- **Akshaya Nivi**: Inalienable Gift
- **Nivi Dharma Kshaya**: Alienable Gift (power to sale/transfer)

Some Examples of Pariharas

- **Achandradityakalo**: Forever in eternity
- **A-Karada**: No tax
- **Sa-Nidhi**: With underground possessions
- **A-Bhadra-Praveshya**: No entry to Govt officers
- **Sa-Amramadhuka**: With usufructory rights