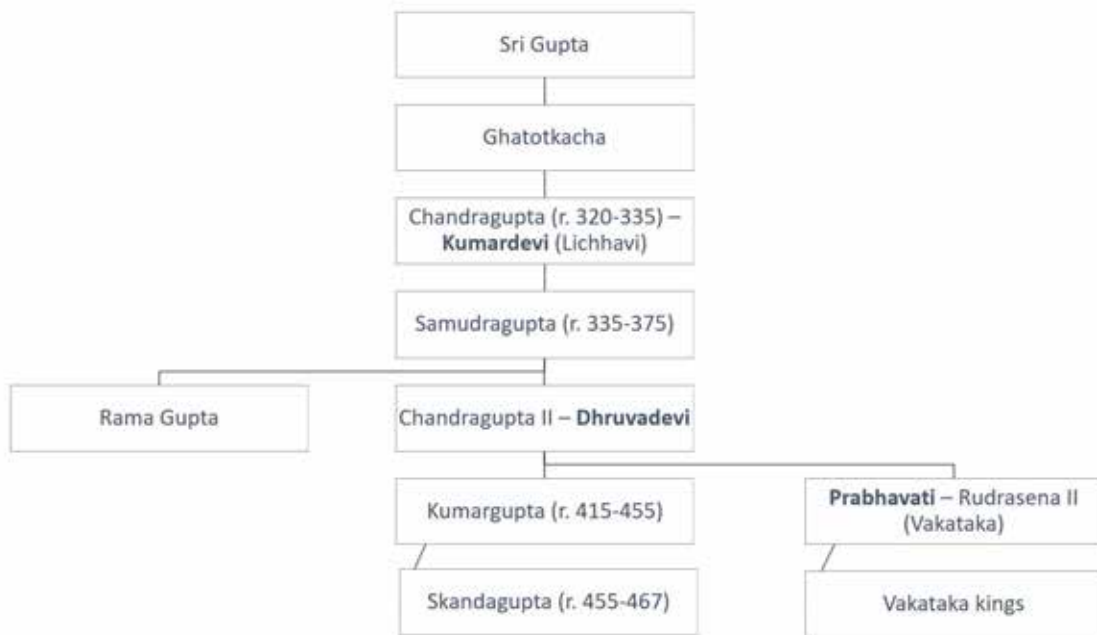
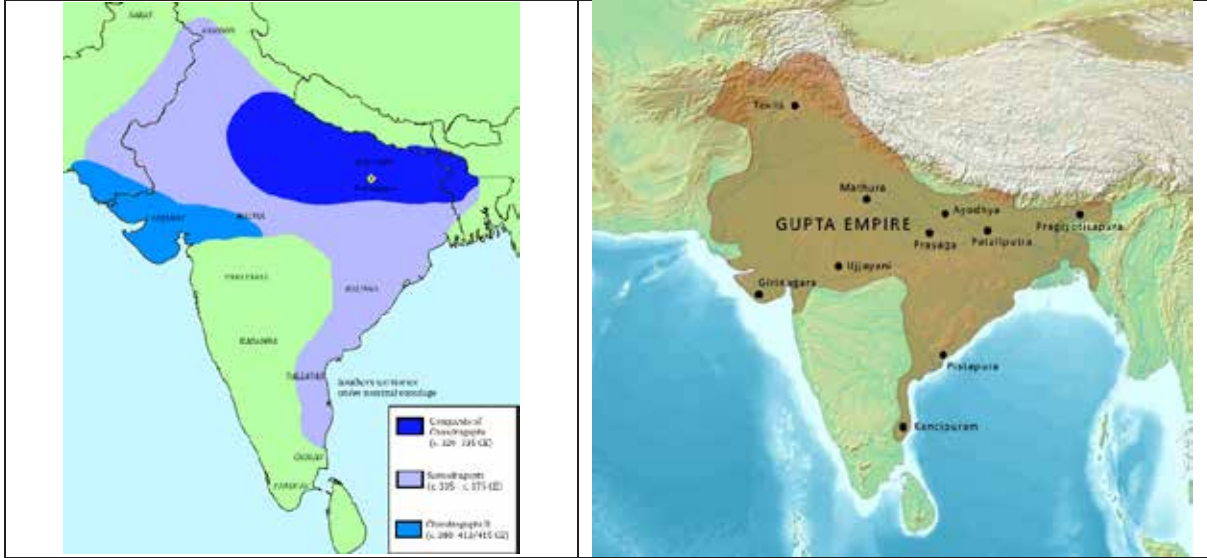


Prelims Master Program (2023-24) – Ancient, Medieval, Art and Culture
Handout 13: Gupta Era (4th – 6th century)

The Guptas originated from the Magadha region.



IMPORTANT KINGS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

SRIGUPTA (270 - 300 CE)

Srigupta was the founder of the dynasty but was a vassal of the Kushanas.

GHATOTKACHA (300 CE-319 CE)

He was also not a sovereign king.

CHANDRAGUPTA I (319 - 335 CE)

He was the real founder and the first sovereign king of the dynasty.

- He **overthrew the yoke of the Kushanas**, took the title of **Maharajadhiraj** and established his **capital** at **Pataliputra**.
- He secured paramount position in **Magadha** region, with control over **UP** and **Bihar**.
 - On the basis of a verse in Vayu Puran, scholars generally accept the view that he ruled over Saket (Avadh) Prayag (Allahabad) and Magadha (south Bihar).
- He married **Kumaradevi**, a princess of the Lichhavi clan of Vaishali (a kshatriya clan)
- Upon his coronation, he introduced a new calendar called the '**Gupta Samvat**' in 319 CE.
- **No inscription** belonging to this period has been discovered.



SAMUDRAGUPTA (335- 375 CE)

He is considered to be the greatest Gupta king and warrior.

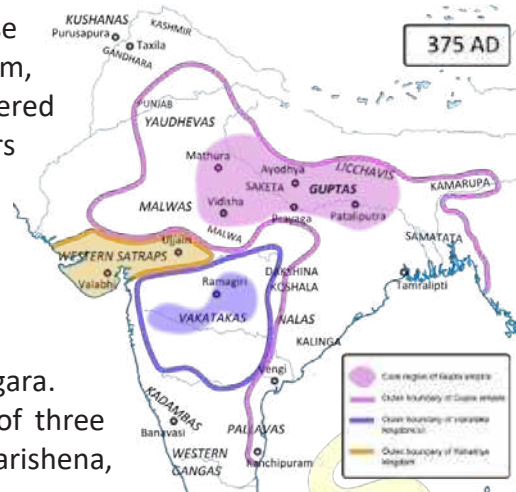
Contemporary epigraphs, such as the **Eran inscription**, credits him with the overthrowing of 'the whole tribe of kings upon the earth'. His exploits have been recorded in the '**Prayag Prashasti**' found on the **Allahabad Pillar**, composed by his court poet, **Harisena**, in **Sanskrit** using the **Brahmi** script. This inscription give full details about him.



Details of Prashasti:

- **Genealogy** from Srigupta, Ghatotkacha and Chandra Gupta I.
 - Special mention is made in respect of Mahadevi Kumar devi, a Licchavi princess.
- Superhuman attributes are paid to him.
 - Excellence in Gandharva Vidya (Great Musician and Poet)

- "Samudragupta was skilful in engaging in a hundred battles of various kinds, whose only ally was the strength of his own arm, whose most elegant physique was covered over with all the beauty of the scars caused by the blows of battle arrows, spears, spikes lances, javelins and many other weapons.'
- More interesting facts
 - Mention of Ganga Avataran
 - Pataliputra was referred to as Pushpanagara.
 - Rajasabha mentioned with the names of three Mahadandanayaka: Dhruvabhuti, Harishena, Tilakabhata
 - Weapons mentioned: Shanku, Parashu, Narach, Sar, Bhindipal, Tomar
- Samudrapupta's followed a conscious **policy of imperialism (dharanibandha)**. Several rulers and their kingdom which were either annexed or conquered by Samudragupta.



3 + 9 kings of Aryavarta (North India) including the Naga dynasty.	Prasabodddharana
Confederacy of 12 kings of Dakshinapatha (South India) led by Vishnugopa of Pallavas.	Grahanamokshanugraha
Subjugation of Forest tribes: Atavika Rajya (tribal kingdoms of central India).	Parachariki-krita
Border/Frontier states (Pratyanta Rajya)	Saryakaradana-Ajnakarana-Pranamagaman
Foreign powers: Shakas (Shakamurunda), Kushanas (Devaputrashahi Shahanushahi), Sri Lanka (Simhalaka)	Samudra Gupta commanded respect amongst independent rulers of many neighboring states. There were cordial relations with Ceylon.

Samudragupta emphasised upon the **divine nature of kingship**.

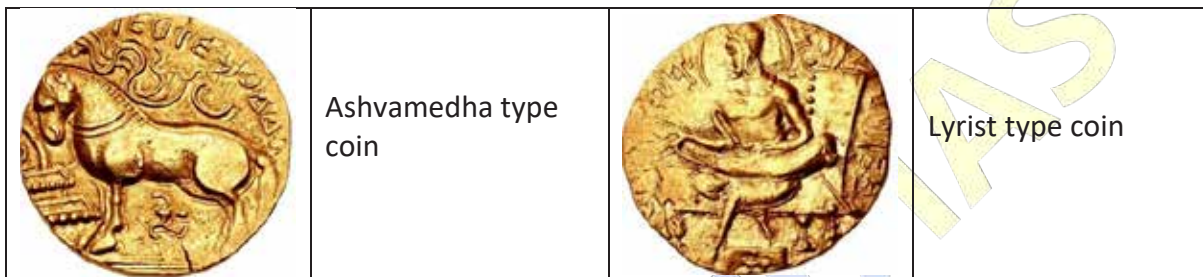
- He claimed to be an incarnation of Vishnu.
- He struck a number of Lakshmi type coins (carrying Goddess Lakshmi's image with his own)
- He assumed high-sounding titles, such as 'Maharajadhiraja' and 'Parambhattaraka'

Coins and royal ideology

Samudragupta has left an extensive coinage. Some important political events of his reign are known from these.

- Samudrapupta's cultivated his **image as a warrior-poet**.
 - This conquest of Bengal is commemorated in the **Tiger-Slayer coins**.
 - He assumed the title '**Kaviraj**' as he was a great patron of the arts.
 - He was himself an accomplished Veena player as is commemorated in his **Veena-Player coins**, carrying an image of him playing the Veena.
- Revival of Brahmanism

- Performed the **Ashwamedha Yajna**, which he commemorated by striking the Ashvamedha type coins.
- He also adopted the title '**Lichchavi Dauhitra**' to emphasize upon his **Kshatriya heritage**.
- He was a great patron of **Vaishnavism**. Samudragupta also issued **Garuda** type coins.
- Images of **Lakshmi, Durga, Saraswati** and **Ganga** and the symbols like **Chakra, Lotus** and **Garuda** found in his gold coins.
- **Tolerance:**
 - Vasubhandu, the famous Buddhist scholar, was his minister.
 - He permitted to construct monastery at Bodhgaya.



RAMAGUPTA (375- 380 CE)

Till half century ago it was believed by many historians that Chandragupta II succeeded Samudragupta. But the discovery of a lost dramatic work, '**Devi Chandraguptam**' by **Vishakhadatta** proved his existence. Accordingly, Samudragupta was succeeded by his eldest son Rama Gupta and not by Chandragupta II.

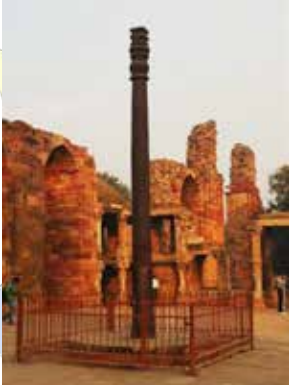
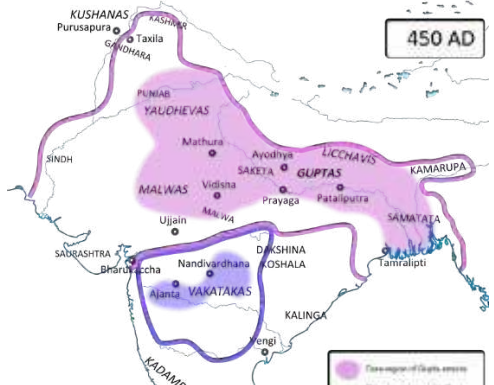
CHANDRAGUPTA II 'VIKRAMADITYA' (380- 415 CE)

- Defeat of Shakas (b 388-409 CE): The greatest military achievement of Chandra Gupta II was the conquest of the Sakas who were ruling in Gujarat and Kathiawar peninsula.
 - Policy of Matrimonial Alliance:
 - Chandra Gupta II gave Prabhavati Gupta in marriage to the Vakataka Rudrasena II.
 - His inscriptions at **Sanchi** and **Udaygiri** were composed by his court poet, **Ravisena**, in Sanskrit using Brahmi script.
 - He established his **second capital at Ujjain** in order to maintain effective control over the western reaches of his empire.
 - **Consequence**
 - The empire of Chandra Gupta extended to the natural frontiers of India as he gained the areas of Gujarat and Saurashtra. Thus, the western boundary of the empire became secure.
 - Gupta's gained control over the ports of western India.
 - Not only commercial relations were established with the countries abroad, but cultural relations were also established.

- Internal trade also received a fillip.
- In order to commemorate his victory over the Shakas,
 - He adopted the title 'Vikramaditya' after defeating the Shakas.
 - He issued silver coins known as '**Rupaka**', thus becoming the first Gupta king to issue silver coins.

 <p>Sanchi inscription of Amrakardava, says that Chandragupta "<i>acquired victory and fame in many battles</i>"</p>	 <p>Symbolism of Varaha legend in Udayigiri cave. ...king, who is desirous of conquering the whole world...</p>
 <p>Coin of Rudrasimha III – Western Kshatrap</p>	 <p>Coin of Chandragupta II – A Gupta King</p>

- The Mehrauli iron pillar inscription mentions a king called '**Chandra**'

	 <p>450 AD</p>
---	--

He attracted talents around him: like the poet Kalidasa, the astronomer Varahamihira, and the linguist Vararuchi, who become part of the nine jewels (**navratna**) of his court.

धन्वन्तरिः क्षपणकाऽमरसिंह शङ्कुः
वेताळभट्टः घटकर्परः काळिदासः।
ख्यातो वराहमिहिरो नृपते सभायाम्
रत्नानि वै वररुचिर्नव विक्रमस्य॥

KUMARAGUPTA (415- 445CE)

- Son of Chandragupta II and Dhruvadevi
- Performed Ashvamedha – military achievements?
- Administrative consolidation
 - His inscriptions reveal some important names of ministers and governors.
- Religious harmony
 - During his reign, the **Nalanda Buddhist Monastery** was built, to which he donated one village. (Shakraditya)
- **The Huns**, a war-like tribal group from Central Asia, began invading India during his reign.



SKANDAGUPTA (445- 467 CE)

- Last great Gupta King
- Defence of India
 - Bhitari Pillar inscription
 - Kahoum Pillar inscription
- **Junagarh rock inscription:** Repair of Sudarshana lake
 - Parnadatta as Governor of Saurashtra
 - Parnadatta appointed his son Chakrapalita as the magistrate of the Girinagara city.
 - The dam burst in 450s CE – Chakrapalita spent “immeasurable wealth” to repair it and also built a Vishnu temple.
- He also donated one village to the Nalanda Mahavihara.

White Hunas (440s-560s): Toramana and Mihirkula

Rajadhiraja Toramana Prakashaditya (493-515 CE)

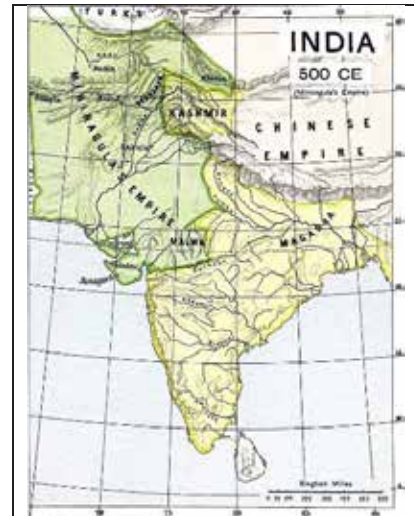
- Most successful Huna king in India so far: Entrenched in Punjab. Struck Mathura in the doab region, conquered it. Then sacked and destroyed Kaushambi, one of the earliest cities in India. And soon, Toramana expanded to UP, Gwalior, Rajasthan.
- Toramana tried to appropriate Vaishnava ideas to support his conquest.
 - Eran Varaha inscription of Dhanyavishnu/Surashmichandra for Narayana temple. It refers to Toramana as Rajadhiraja.
 - Toramana used Varaha symbol. Earlier Guptas projected Chandragupta II as Varaha.
- Defeats
 - May have been defeated by Bhanugupta (510 CE)
 - Defeated by Prakashadharman of Malwa (515 CE) (Risthal inscription)

Mihirkula (502-530 CE)

- This second Huna was less successful than his father.
- He preferred Shaivism.
- Later work Rajatarangini calls him cruel, "a man of violent acts and resembling kaal (death)", who ruled "the land then overrun by hordes of mlechhas (foreigners)."

Resistance to Hunas

- From Gandhara, Hunas rampaged across the Panjab and as far as Malwa since c 500.
- As Garudadvaja fell silent, new kings, managed to push the Hunas back.
 - **Madhyadesha (doab): Maukharis** new state centred around the ancient city of **Kanyakubja**.
 - **Malwa: Auilcara** kings of **Dashabpura**, among the foremost patrons of Pashupata Shaivas, were at the forefront of Hunnic wars.
 - Both realized it was in their interest to coordinate against Hunas. Soon, their huge armies came together.
- **Yashodharman vs Mihirkula: Battle of Sondani (Mandsor) 528 CE**
 - Afterwards, Hunas then retired to Kashmir and continued persecution, vandalism and unspeakable atrocities for another generation.



Eran varaha statue inscription names king **Toramana, ruler of Huns, as ruling over Malwa ("governing the earth")**



Impact of Hunnic Invasions:

- **Political**
 - Destroyed the dominance of the Gupta Empire through repeated invasions. Now, small kingdoms began to grow and prosper.
 - Cities like **Pataliputra** or **Ujjain** soon lost their glory. There was the **emergence of Kannauj (Kanyakubja, Mahodaya)**: Shift of the political citadel of north India from Pataliputra to Kannauj in the doab.
- **Economic**
 - Trade with West
 - Trade between India and Roman Empire weakened.
 - Trade with Central Asia and China
 - Karakoram route fell into disuse as Buddhist traffic shifted east to the Tibetan tableland.
 - Until the advent of Islam, the overland trade with China and the west would not be restored.
 - Trade with Southeast Asia
 - On the other hand, trade with Southeast Asia and China prospered through ports like Tamralipta, Kaveri Pattanam, etc. (oceanic route)
- **Social**
 - Some Hunas **blended** with the Indian population. Some remained in North, some moved further south/west.
- **Religious:**
 - **Buddhism in Indus basin (Gandhara region)** would never recover from this blow. The great Buddhist establishments at Taxila, Peshawar and Swat suffered severely from Huna iconoclasm.
 - Violent trauma that Toramana inflicted decreased the popularity of Vaishnavism and increased that of Shaivas.
 - Mihirakula is believed to have patronized Shaivism tradition of Hinduism. However, except for rare texts such as Rajatarangini, he is hardly acknowledged and never praised in Hindu texts.
- **Cultural**
 - The arts changed. No more serene and peaceful Buddha and Vishnu but demonic sculptures more popular.

- Destruction of grand old cities → new cities emerging like Sthaneshwara, Vallabhi, Kanyakubja, Shripura etc. Artists fled to these newly emerging courts, creating new and diverse artforms across wider geographic zone.

Reason for the decline of Guptas:

- Weak successors
- Foreign invasions of Huna
 - It led to Military and economic stress.
 - Disrupted long-distance overland trade with the west.
 - The superior gold coins issued by Chandragupta and Samudragupta could not be continued by their later successors.
- Absence of strong central authority and emergence of Feudalism
 - Many chiefs revolted against later Gupta rulers. They were successful in setting up an independent kingdom towards the middle of 6th Century.
 - Increasing practice of land grants

Afterwards: Mihirkula → Aulikara → Maukharis → Vardhanas

- Soon, **Aulikaras** quickly grabbed the title of Maharajadhiraja, attempting to seize the title of the Guptas.
- They were soon defeated by **Maukharis**, who now gradually expanded along the Ganga plains and finally restored peace and order.
 - Maukhari kings soon started to restore temples build during the Gupta period, to create a connection through patronage of religion and art.
 - **Kanyakubja** soon emerged into an immense city, studded with parks, gardens and ponds.
- Soon, there was **the emergence of Sthaneshwara Pushyabhutis**

