

B.A- PART-1, PAPER-1

THE GUPTAS-POLITICAL HISTORY (PART-2)

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- ***Chandragupta-II (375 – 414 CE):***

The peak of the territorial expansion of the Gupta empire reached its heights during the reign of Chandragupta-II, the son of Samudragupta and Dattadevi. His long reign of about forty years (375-415 CE) had a rather mysterious beginning. The *Devi Chandraguptam of Visakhadatta* tells us that Ramagupta succeeded Samudragupta and ruled five years from 370 – 375 C.E. It mentions the events on the death of Samudragupta and introduces Ramagupta as the son who succeeded Samudragupta. The story goes that Ramagupta was defeated in the battle by the Sakas to whom he agreed to surrender his wife



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Dhruvadevi. His younger brother Chandragupta was incensed by this, disguised himself as the queen got into the apartment of the Saka king and killed him. This secured him the affection of the people but created enmity between him and his brother Ramagupta. Finally Chandragupta killed his elder brother and married his widow, Dhruvadevi, and occupied the throne. The discovery of the coins of Ramagupta and inscriptions mentioning Dhruvadevi as Chandragupta's wife gave some authenticity to this story. This story with slight variation is referred to in *Bana's Harshacharita* and *Rajasekhara's Kavyamimamsa*.



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- *War against the Sakas:*

The most important military achievement of Chandragupta-II was his war against Saka Kshatras of western India. Rudrasimha-III, the last ruler of the Saka Kshatrapa was defeated, dethroned and killed. His territories in Western Malwa and Kathiawar were annexed into the Gupta empire. After this victory, he performed the horse sacrifice and assumed the title 'Sakari' meaning destroyer of Sakas. Chandragupta-II adopted the title of Vikramaditya as a mark of victory over the Sakas. As a result of the conquest of Western India, the Western boundaries of the empire became secure for



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some time and Guptas gained control over Broach, Sopara, Cambay and other sea ports. This enabled the Guptas to control trade with the Western Countries. Ujjain became an important commercial city and soon became the alternative capital of the Guptas. Thus the conquest of Gujarat and Malwa got both political and economic significance.

- ***Diplomatic matrimonial alliance with Vakatakas:***

Chandragupta-II entered into matrimonial alliances with a number of Royal dynasties. He married Kuberanaga, a Naga princess of central India. Samudragupta gave his daughter Prabhavatigupta in marriage to Rudrasena-II of the Vakataka



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dynasty. The political importance of this marriage lies in the fact that the Vakatakas occupied geographically strategic position, and emerged dominant power in Deccan. This alliance secured the subordinate alliance of the Vakataka king, and also provided a secure southern frontier to the Gupta empire. Rudrasena-II died five years after coming to the throne and at that time his son was a minor. Prabhavatigupta became a regent and ruled the Vakataka kingdom from 390-410 CE. She managed the affairs of her kingdom with the help of an official sent by her father, Chandragupta II. Thus Chandragupta- II exercised indirect control over the Vakataka kingdom. He made Ujjain as the second capital of the Empire .



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- ***Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription:***

The exploits of a king called Chandra are glorified in an iron Pillar inscription fixed near Qutb Minar in Delhi. The Chandra of the Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription has been identified with Chandragupta-II. It is evident from the inscription that Chandragupta-II fought against confederacy of enemies of Bengal (Vanga) and also crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (Bactria). With these conquests, the Gupta empire extended in West as far as Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiawar, in the North-West beyond the Hindukush upto Bactria, in the east Bengal, and in the south the Narmada River.



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- ***Fahien's visit:***

The famous Chinese pilgrim, Fahien visited India, as a Buddhist missionary. Out of his nine year stay in India; he spent six years during the reign of Chandragupta II. The main object of Fahien's mission was to secure copies of Buddhist manuscripts. In his memoirs he gave a vivid description of the places he visited. In India he visited Peshawar, Mathura, Kanauj, Sravasti, Kapilavastu, Kusinagara, Vaisali, Pataliputra, Kasi, Gaya, Bodh Gaya and other places. He spent three years at Pataliputra. However, he does not mention the name of the king in his accounts. But he speaks highly of the king of Madhyadesa, the region ruled by the Gupta monarch, under whom the people were peace and prosperous.



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- *Estimate of Chandragupta-II:*

The reign of Chandragupta-II witnessed pinnacle of power and prosperity. He enjoyed the titles ‘Vikramaditya (the sun of prowess) and ‘Sakari’. His reign is often remembered not for wars but for his patronage of Art and Literature. The Court of Chandragupta was adorned by celebrated scholars collectively known as ‘Navaratnas’. Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit poet and play Wright, flourished in his court.



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- ***Kumaragupta I (415 – 454 CE.):***

Chandragupta-II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta who enjoyed a long reign of forty years. He maintained intact the Empire which he bequeathed from his father. He issued number of coins. His inscriptions are found all over the Gupta empire. He also performed Asvamedha sacrifice. He laid the foundation of the Nalanda University which emerged as an institution of international importance. But towards the close of his reign the empire was seriously threatened by the attacks of Pushyamitras and Huns. But the danger was averted by the crown prince, Skandagutpa who repelled the invaders. On the whole the reign of Kumaragupta remained peaceful.



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- ***Skandagupta (455 – 467 CE.):***

He was the last great ruler of the Gupta dynasty. He was an able and energetic ruler. An inscription at Girnar hill, near Junagarh in Kathiawar, refers to the restoration of the ancient embankment of the great Sudarsana Lake which had burst owing to heavy rains in the first year of Skandagupta's reign. The Saurashtra governor and his son promptly repaired the breach and saved the country from a great calamity. The Huns invaded the Gupta empire during the reign of Skandagupta. He fought them bravely but the situation became complicated owing to several domestic problems. It appears that these wars



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adversely affected the economy of the empire and the Gold coinage of Skandagupta bear testimony to that. His gold coins were not only few in number but also showed depreciation in the purity of gold. With the death of Skandagupta the political unity and stability of the Gupta Empire was reduced to dust. The last known date of Skandagupta is 467 CE.



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- ***Other Successors:*** History of the imperial Guptas after the death of Skandagupta is shrouded in mystery. Skandagupta was succeeded by Purugupta, Kumaragupta II, Budhagupta, Narasimhagupta, Vinayagupta, Baladitya, etc. A number of rulers are known in some cases with dates but they can't be arranged in any genealogical and chronological order. With the accession of Budhagupta in 476 – 77 CE the history of the imperial Guptas stands again on a firm ground. The records of his reign prove beyond doubt that he ruled over extensive regions. But it was during his reign that the Gupta empire showed signs of visible decay. A major blow to Gupta power



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came towards the end of the 5th Century, when the Huns entered North India in large numbers. Excellent archers and skillful horsemen familiar with metal stirrups, the Huns hastened the disintegration of the empire, and within the next half century it gave way to a number of kingdoms. The Guptas continued to rule till about 550 C.E., but by then their power had already become very insignificant. Vishnugupta was the last ruler of this dynasty. Thus the Guptas who came to lime light in the first quarter of the 4th century dominated the destinies of the North India, for more than a century and finally lapsed into oblivion by the dawn of the 6th century.



DECLINE OF THE GUPTAS

- **Causes for the decline of the Gupta empire:**

The mighty Gupta empire declined and came to an end by the middle of the 6th century.

The following are the important causes for the fall of the empire :

- ❖ The Pushyamitras, a war like tribe, gave the first staggering blow to the Gupta empire during the last days of Skandagupta.
- ❖ One of Huns were the fierce nomadic tribes who originally lived in Central Asia. The Huns under the leadership of Toramana and Mihiragula attacked and broke the back of the Gupta empire. It accelerated the fall of the Empire.



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- ❖ The weakness of the central authority made the feudatories like the Maitrakas of Vallabhi, the Vardhanas of Sthaneswar, the Maukharis of Kanauj, the Gaudas of Bengal and Yasovarman of Mandasor asserted their independence. This gave a death blow to the political unity of the Gupta empire.
- ❖ The successors of Skandagupta were weak and incompetent. They failed to maintain their hold firmly over the empire.
- ❖ The dissensions among the royal princes ultimately weakened the Guptas.



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- ❖ Trade with the Roman Empire declined due to the Hun attack on the Roman empire.
- ❖ Granting land assignments to the officers in lieu of their salaries resulted in the loss of income to the state.
- ❖ Much of the income was spent in suppressing the uprisings of the Pushyamitras and repelling the invasions of Huns.

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