

9. THE GUPTA AGE

(300 A.D.-500 A.D.)

In this chapter we shall read about the happenings which had taken place 1700 years ago. By this time people had taken to farming in India. Population in the villages had started increasing and several big and small cities were also established. With this, several small states had emerged all over India. These small states had their own kings and their dynasties.

In this period Chhattisgarh was known as Dakshin Kaushal. An influential city like Shripur (Sirpur) had emerged here. Dakshin Kaushal included Bilaspur, Raipur, Durg and Rajnandgoan districts of Chhattisgarh and Sambalpur district of Orissa. In this period the king of this region was Mahendra who was defeated by Samudragupta. Samudragupta took yearly tribute from Mahendra and returned his kingdom to him. He was allowed to rule independently.



Pic. 9.1

1. **Why did Samudragupta return Mahendra's kingdom ?**
2. **Name some prominent places of Dakshin Kaushal.**

SAMUDRAGUPTA

In this period Magadh (present Bihar) was ruled by the Gupta dynasty. Samudragupta is regarded as the greatest ruler of this dynasty. Its capital was Patliputra (presently known as Patna). In those days powerful kings would attack other states. This way their kingdoms would expand, their territories and their income would increase. Samudragupta too wanted the same.

An eulogy (praise) or 'Prashasti' of Samudragupta is engraved on a pillar of Allahabad. According to the prashasti, Samudragupta defeated several rulers of Aryavarta (northern India), Aatvik state (Vananchal) and Dakshinpatha (southern India). Southern Kosal (whose capital was Sirpur) and Mahakantar (which is in Bastar and Orissa) were the two states of Dakshinapatha which were defeated by Samudragupta.



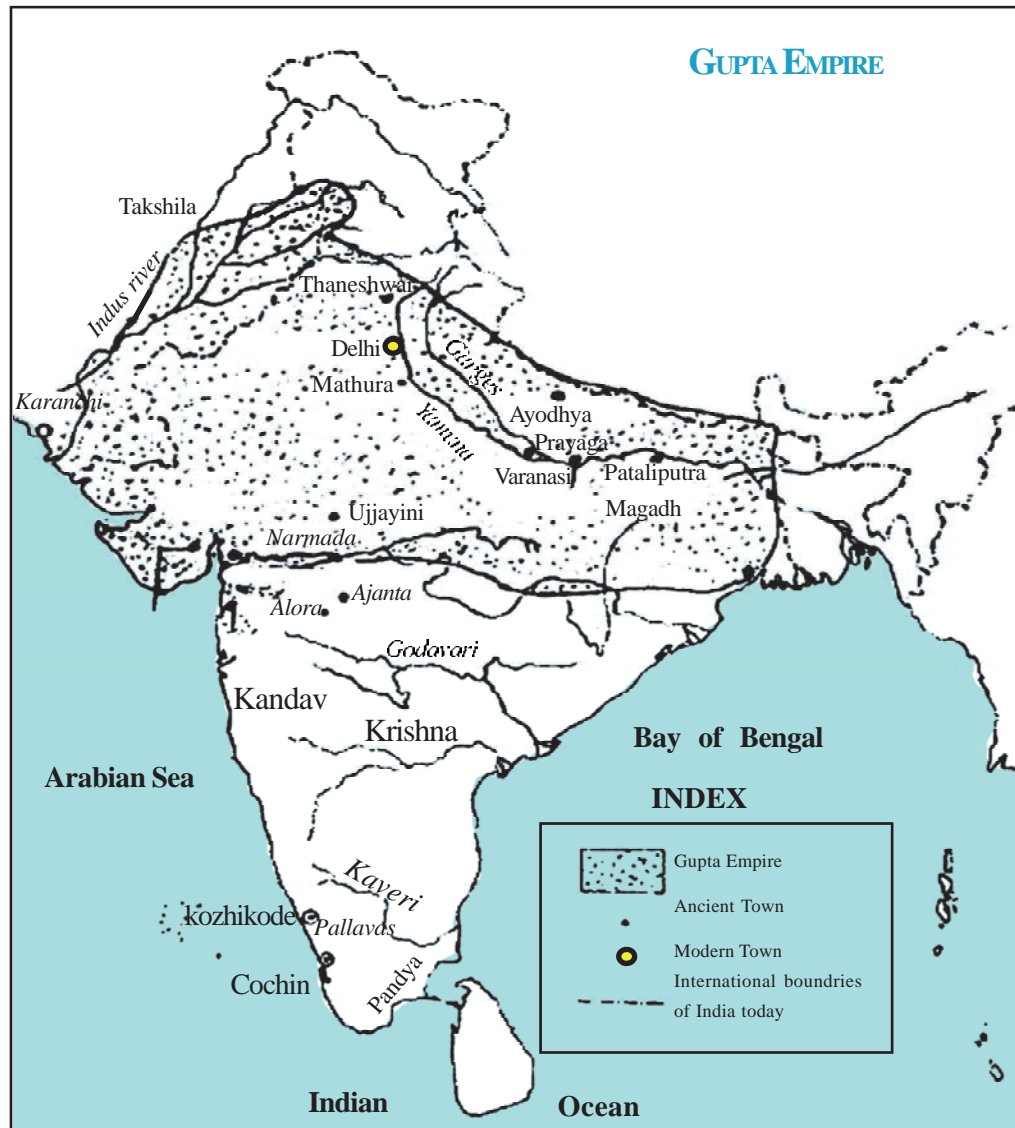
Pic. 9.2 Remains found in Sirpur



Samudragupta fought and annexed the kingdoms of Aryavarta. This way he became the powerful king of a big empire in northern India. But, he returned the kingdoms to the rulers of the Dakshinpath after defeating them.

Look at the map of India and try to recognize the northern and southern states ? Identify Samudragupta's empire and his capital.

Discuss in class why Samudragupta annexed the kingdoms of Aryavarta and not those of the south.



Map 9.1

Samudragupta was not only a warrior but was a lover of art too. Gold coins of his era show him playing the veena. After Samudragupta his son Chandragupta Vikramaditya ascended the throne. He also expanded his empire and made friendly relations with some influential southern kings. His empire extended from Bengal to Gujrat.



The Gupta empire was divided into several provinces (bhuktis) and every province was further divided into districts (Vishaya). The administration was done by local people and the king gave orders only on important issues. A council of village elders administered the village. This way the local people played important roles in administration during the Gupta age.

Besides these kings, Kumargupta and Skandgupta, too were famous rulers of the Gupta dynasty. The Gupta dynasty ruled till about 500 A.D. This era is very important in the progress of Indian science, art and religion. Many changes came in the lives of the people in this period.

LIFE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE GUPTA AGE

How was the life of the people ? How can we know that? Several books relating to religion, stories, plays and science were written at that time. By reading those books we can know a lot about the lives of the people. We can get information from the several stone inscriptions. Many Chinese scholars came to India to study the Buddhist scriptures and they visited the places which were related to the Buddha. One of them was Fa Hien, who wrote an account of his experiences in India. This account has helped to learn several things about life in India in the Gupta period.

Fa Hien wrote- Here the people were rich and happy. They did not have to pay much land revenue and there were no administrative restrictions. Killing of animals was forbidden and people did not drink wine. Onions and garlic were eaten by chandals. Buddhist monasteries were given fields along with houses, gardens, farmers and oxen.

In India monasteries were revered greatly. Fertile lands were given in donation to the monasteries. The monks living there would work in the fields. People of India believed in non-violence. Indians used to perform elaborate yajnas. They loved vegetarian food.

Some of the other books which were written in India show that what Fa Hien had written was not fully correct. Other books show that caste system and untouchability were prevalent in the society.

People belonging to the upper section of the society lived a very cultured life. They were fond of poetry, plays, music, dance, paintings and sculptures. This was the time when several restrictions were imposed on women. Child marriages had started. Widows were forced to become 'sati' and burned on the funeral pyre of her husband. Poor people in the society were facing difficulties. Trade with far off land had decreased as a result of which the industries reduced their production. Lack of jobs made the people leave the cities and settle down in the villages. This reduced the size of big cities.

From books and rock inscriptions it is learnt that kings gave villages in donation to brahmins, abbeyes and Buddhist monasteries. Those who got donations would make the farmers work on their fields and lived on its income.

Why was there less work in cities in the Gupta Age?

Are there more restrictions on women than men even to-day?

Why would the kings have given villages and not money in donations to the Brahmins and abbeyes ?



RELIGION

The Gupta age was the period when there was rapprochement of several religious ideologies and changes. Vedic religion adopted several things from Buddhism and Jainism. Now Vedic religion too made a start in stopping animal sacrifices. It started adopting the teachings of different sects like worship of Shiva, Vishnu, Devi etc. Now ancient Vedic gods like Indra, Agni and Varun were given less importance. In this period elaborate yajnas were replaced. Temples were constructed and poojas of the statues of different gods and goddesses became popular. Expensive yajnas and religious rituals were being replaced by poojas, fastings and donations. This enabled poor people to take part in the religious activities. The Gupta rulers were vaishnavites, but others were free to practice their own religion.

SCIENCE

Aryabhatta was the famous mathematician and astronomer of the Gupta age. In 499 A.D Aryabhatta had composed “Aryabhattiyam”. In it he has given solutions to intricate mathematical problems. He put forward the theory that the earth is round and rotates on its own axis. He said that eclipse takes place because of shadows of earth and moon and not because of the swallowing of Rahu and Ketu. These theories were accepted by very few people in his time.

Varahamihira was another famous scientist of this period. He tried to connect astronomy and astrology. Modern science has approved the findings of Aryabhatta regarding the earth. Several books were written, in this period, on farming and medicine (specially veterinary science).

Why would the people not have accepted what Aryabhatta said ?

LITERATURE

Some of the greatest works of Sanskrit literature were composed during the Gupta period. Kalidasa, Bharvi, Shudraka and Magha were great poets of this period. It is said that it was in this period that Vishnusharma wrote the famous fables of Panchatantra and Narayan Pandit wrote Hitopadesha. Chandragupta Vikramaditya's court was famous for nine gems of which Kalidas was the main one. He produced famous works like ‘Meghadoota’ and ‘Kumarsambhava’. His play ‘Abhijnana Shakuntalam’ is world famous. Literature of this period mainly dealt with human feelings and their problems in detail.

Tell a few stories of the Panchatantra in class



ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Like literature and science other arts like sculpture, architecture and paintings, too flourished. Beautiful cave temples at Ajanta were built in this period. There are beautiful murals in the Ajanta caves depicting scenes from the life of Buddha. They have been done so carefully that even to-day they look real.

Murals are paintings done on walls.

Along with paintings many temples, caves, Chaityas, vihars, stupas etc. were also constructed in this era. There was remarkable progress in the field of sculpture. Large number of statues of Vishnu, Shiva, Buddha and Jain Tirthankaras were made. A beginning was made in expressing feelings of the statues in this period.

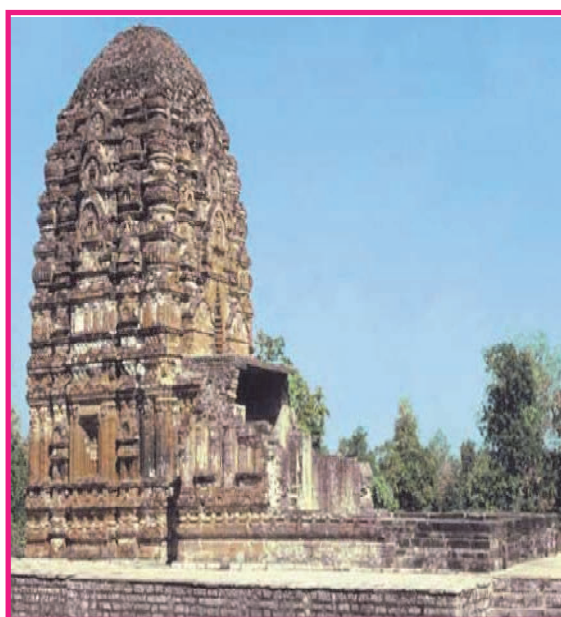
A large number of temples, chaityas, viharas and stupas were constructed in the Gupta age. Temples were made with bricks and stones. Some temples and Buddhist viharas were constructed in caves cut out of hills. In the Gupta age a huge Buddhist vihar was constructed at Sarnath. The Dashavatar temple of Devgarh at Jhansi and caves of Udaigiri at Vidisha were also built at the same time. The Vishnu temple at Bhitargaon near Kanpur is the oldest temple in the world which is made of bricks.



Pic. 9.3 Vishnu Temple in Bheetargaon, Kanpur (U.P.)

ART OF THE GUPTA AGE IN CHHATTISGARH

In Chhattisgarh, too, there is a beautiful work of architecture which was made by bricks. This is the Lakshman temple at Sirpur, which was built around 650 A.D. It is about 79 km. away from the capital Raipur. Its shikhara resembles the shikhara of the temple of Bhitargaon. Here also scenes from mythological legends are depicted, and the entrance gate and the door frame are well-decorated. This shows that Chhattisgarh was also influenced by the art of Gupta age. Even today a fair is organized at Sirpur on the occasion of Buddha Purnima and Magha Purnima.



Pic. 9.4 Laxman Temple, Sirpur (C. G.)



EXERCISE

I. Match the following:-

	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>
1.	Samudragupta	a) Chinese traveller
2.	Sirpur	b) Astrologer
3.	Fa hien	c) Great warrior
4.	Varahamihir	d) Southern Kosal

II. Answer the question:-

- Who wrote Panchatantra?
- What is the name of the book of Aryabhata?
- What are Ajanta caves famous for?
- What material is the temple at Bhitargaon made of?
- Who said that the earth is not stationary, it rotates on its axis?
- How did Samudragupta treat the kings of Chhattisgarh?
- What were the characteristics of administration in Gupta empire?
- Which things did you like about the society in Gupta age?
- What features of religion in the Gupta age could be liked by the poor people?
- Which policy did Samudragupta adopt to have control over other kingdoms?

III. Eligibility extension:-

- Collect more information about Sirpur.
- Find the architectural features of one of the temples in your village/city.

