

Post-Gupta Era, UPSC Notes

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The successive invasion of Hunas from Central Asia made the Guptas very weak and thus affected the economy. It is indicated by the gold coins of later Gupta rulers, which have less gold content and more alloy.

- The decline of the Gupta empire resulted in the **emergence of numerous ruling dynasties in different parts of northern India**.
 - The prominent among them were the **Pushyabhutis** of Thanesar, the **Maukharis** of Kanauj, and the **Maitrakas** of Valabhi.
- The political scene in Peninsular India was no different.
 - The **Chalukyas** and the **Pallavas** emerged as strong regional powers in Deccan and northern Tamil Nadu, respectively.

What factors led to the fall of the Guptas?

The prominent factors which led to the fall of the Guptas can be summarised below:

- **Invasion of Hunas from Central Asia:** The successors of Skandagupta proved to be weak and could not cope with the Hunas, who were strong horsemen.

- **Rise of feudatories:** The governors and their feudatories appointed by the Guptas in the Bengal region tended to become independent.
- **The decline in foreign trade:** After Skandagupta, hardly any Gupta coin or inscription has been found in western Malwa and Saurashtra.
 - The **loss of western India** deprived the Guptas of the rich revenues from sea trade and commerce and crippled them economically.
- **Land grants:** Because of the growing practice of land grants for religious and other purposes, it was difficult for Guptas to maintain a large army. It was bound to **reduce their revenues**.

Vakataka Dynasty - Rulers and their Contributions	
Period: 250-510 AD	Capital: Vatsagulma (modern Washim)
• Rise: Satavahanas started growing weaker from the 3rd century AD. Vakatakas took advantage of this situation and established independent rule. • Expansion: After Vindhyashakti, King Pravarasena I ascended the throne. He expanded the Vakataka Empire to Malwa in the North and from Gujarat to the South up to Kolhapur, Kurnool (Andhra Pradesh). ◦ Kolhapur was known as 'Kuntala' at that time. • Title: Pravarasena I performed four Ashwamedha sacrifices and took up the title 'Samrat'. • Division: There were two lines of Vakataka kings ruling in different areas. ◦ The main line ruled from eastern Maharashtra (the Vidarbha region), ◦ The collateral branch, called the Basin branch of the Vakatakas, ruled in southern Maharashtra. • Land grants: Their history can be reconstructed on the basis of a large number of land grant charters issued to the Brahmanas. • Alliance with Guptas: Daughter of Chandragupta II of the imperial Gupta family was married to Rudrasena II of the royal Vakataka family. ◦ They also had matrimonial alliances with the Vishnukundins in eastern Deccan and the Kadambas in the south. • Cultural importance: Culturally, the Vakataka kingdom is important because it became a channel to spread Brahmanical culture to south India. • Art and architecture: The second phase of the <u>Ajanta Caves</u> is attributed to the Vakatakas.	

Vindhyashakti (250-270 AD)	• Founder of the Vakataka dynasty. • In the Cave XVI inscription of Ajanta, Vindhyashakti is described as the banner of the Vakataka family and a Dvija. • Vindhyashakti is also mentioned in Vayu-Purana. • His son Pravarasena succeeded him.		• Most important King of the Vakataka dynasty. • Only Vakataka king to bear the imperial title Samrat. • Most expansions of the empire happened during his reign.
Prabhavati Gupta (385-405 AD)	• Vakataka-Gupta age: Due to the close proximity of both kingdoms. • Miregaon plates inscription: Describes her as the mother of two kings	Pravarasena I (270-330 AD)	• In his period Vtakatas came in contact with the powerful Guptas of the north.

Maitrakas - Rulers and their Contributions	
Period: 475-776 AD	Capital: Valabhi
• Region: Maitraka dynasty ruled in Gujarat and Saurashtra (Kathiawar) from the 5th to the 8th century CE. • Rise: Its founder, Bhatarka, was a general who, taking advantage of the decay of the Gupta empire, established himself as ruler of Gujarat and Saurashtra with Valabhi (modern Vala) as his capital. • Independent nature of State: Although the early Maitraka kings were loosely feudatory to the Guptas, they were, in fact, independent. • Expansion: Under the powerful Shiladitya I, the kingdom became very influential; its rule extended into the regions of Malwa and Rajasthan. Later, however, the Maitrakas suffered at the hands of the Chalukyas and of the emperor Harsha.	

Pushyabhutis of Thanesar - Rulers and their Contributions

Period: 500-647 AD	Capital: Thanesar (Thaneshwara) , later Kannauj (Kanyakubja)
• Founder: The founder of the dynasty was Pushyabhuti, who was a military general under Guptas. • Rise: After the fall of the Gupta, Pushyabhutis under Prabhakara Vardhana rose to power by defeating Hunas and had their capital at Thanesar (Thanesvara in Kurukshetra). • Alliance with Maukharis: Prabhakara Vardhana gave his daughter Rajyasri in marriage to the Maukhari king Grahavarman of Kanauj, thus making Kanauj his ally. • Harshavardhana: He was the most important king who ascended the throne in AD 606. While only sixteen years of age, he proved himself to be a great warrior and an able administrator.	
Harshavardhana (606-647 AD)	
• The Pushyabhutis rose to prominence under Harsha. Harsha ruled the kingdom as large as that of the Guptas. • Sources: ◦ Literary sources: Bana's Harshacharita and Hsuen Tsang's Si-Yu-ki ◦ Epigraphical sources: Madhuban copper plate inscription, Sonpa inscription on the copper seal, Banskhera copper plate inscription, Nalanda inscription on clay seals. • Sakalauttarapathanatha: After his accession, Harshavardhana united his kingdom with that of his widowed sister Rajayashri and shifted his capital to Kanauj and is described as the lord of the north. • Expansion: Harsha wanted to expand in Deccan, but he was defeated by Pulakesin II, the Chalukya ruler, on the banks of river Narmada. The river thus became the southern boundary of his kingdom. • Hsuen Tsang: A Chinese traveller visited during his reign ◦ He was impressed by Harsha's patronage of Buddhism and scholarship for it. ◦ He spent the most time in Kannauj to learn early Buddhist scriptures. • Other reason to shift capital: Thanesar was too close to the threats from the northwest. Kanauj was located in the rich agricultural region of the western Ganges Plain. • Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva: On his advice, Harsha accepted the throne of Kannauj with the titles of Rajputra and Siladitya. • Alliance with Maitrakas: Marrying his daughter with Dhruvabhata of Maitraka. Thus, Valabhi became a subordinate ally of Harsha.	
Contributions to Art and Architecture	
• The art and architecture under Harsha are related to art and architecture under Guptas only. It has no separate existence.	

Sultanganj Buddha (500-700 AD)



- It is the **largest copper Buddha figure known from the time.**
- It is the only remaining statue of metal size of any size from Gupta art.
- It was cast in pure, unrefined copper by **the lost wax technique.**
- The **right hand** raised is in **Abhaymudra.**
- **left hand** is held downwards with palm outwards, said to **indicate granting a favour.**

Other Arts

- **Printing, colouring, metal works, ivory works etc.**
- **Centre of arts:** Kannauj, Varanasi, Ujjain.

Contribution to Literature

Harshavardhana	- Composed three plays, namely, Priyadarshika (the union of Udayana and Priyadarshin). Ratnavali (alliance of King Udayana and Ratnavali). Nagananda (self-sacrifice of Jimutavahana). Banskhera copper plate inscription: Reveals that he was a skilled Calligraphist. Regional cultural units such as Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat etc., started during his time
Banabhatta	- A Sanskrit scholar of Harsha's court. - Works: Harshacharita (in Kavya Style, biography of Harsha). Kadambari (lyrical prose romance). Candikasataka (a hymn to goddess Durga).
Jayasena	Recognised for his learnings in Hetuvidya, Sabdavidya, and Yogasastra.
Mayurabhatta	Wrote Suryashataka (praise of Hindu Sun god).
Hsuen Tsang	- His accounts present Harsha as a follower of <u>Mahayana Buddhism</u>. - Kannauj Buddhist assembly was held in his honour.
Contemporary Scholars	Bharavi wrote Kirtarjuniyan (Mahabharat theme). Kumardas wrote Janaki Haran.

Administration under Harshavardhana

- **On the same lines as Guptas:** Except that his administration had become more feudal and decentralised.
- **Land grants:** Continued to be made to priests for special services rendered to the state.
 - In addition, Harsha is credited with the grant of land to the officers by charters.
- **Law and Order:** It was not well maintained. Hsuen Tsang, about whom special care may have been taken, was robbed of his belongings.
- **Empire division: Provinces (Bhuktis), provinces into districts (Visayas), and the districts into villages (gram).**
- **Officers:** Same as under Guptas.
 - The **high officials** such as **Mahasamantas and Maharajas were hereditary- local chiefs.**
 - Other **provincial officers were Kumaramatyas, Uparikas, etc.**
 - **Visayapati** was the district officer, and Gramika was the village officer.
- **Karanikas:** The central and provincial governments maintained a keeper of records called Karanika.

Society and Religion under Harshavardhana

- **Sources:** Both Banabhatta and Hsuen Tsang portray the social life in the times of Harsha.
- **Prevalent fourfold division:**
 - **The Brahmins** were the privileged section of the society and were given land grants by the kings (Brahmadeya grants).
 - **The Kshatriyas** were the ruling class.
 - **The Vysyas** were mainly traders.
 - Hiuen Tsang mentions that the **Sudras practised agriculture.**
- There existed many sub-castes.
- **The position of women:** It was not satisfactory.
 - Remarriage of widows was not permitted, particularly among the higher castes.
 - The system of dowry was also common.
 - The practice of sati was also prevalent.
- **Religious policy:** Harsha followed a tolerant religious policy.
 - A Shaiva, in his early years, gradually became a great patron of Buddhism under the influence of Hsuen Tsang.
- **Buddhism under Harsha:** As a devout Buddhist, he convened a grand assembly at Kannauj to widely publicise the doctrine of Mahayana.

Economy under Harshavardhana

- **Trade and commerce:** Declined during Harsha's period. This is evident from the decline of trade centres, less number of coins, and the slow activities of merchant guilds.
- **Effect on industry:** The decline of trade, in turn, affected the handicraft industry and agriculture.
 - The farmers began to produce only in a limited way due to less demand. This led to **the rise of the self-sufficient village economy.**

- **Taxes:** The royal revenue was derived from three kinds of taxes, namely the Bhaga (Share), Bali, and Hiranya.
- **Bhaga:** The major source of revenue was the Bhaga (land tax). Bhaga was the **one-sixth share of the produce** of the land taken as revenue.
- **Other taxes:** There were ferry tax, customs duty, etc.



Empire of Harshavardhana

Maukharis - Rulers and their Contributions	
Period: 510-606 AD	Capital: Kannauj (Kanyakubja)

- **Political Centre:** Ruled from Kannauj, it replaced Pataliputra as a political centre of north India.
- **Religion: Staunch Hindus.** Tried to maintain social order.
- **Buddhism:** Held its sway under Maukharis.
- **Vassal state:** Maukharis were subordinate rulers of the Guptas and later of Harshas.
- **Titles:** Maharaja and Maharajadhiraja. **Ishanavarman** was the first Maukhari ruler to adopt the title of **Maharajadhiraja**.
- **Asigarh Seal inscription:** It throws light on literary works by patrons and poets under Maukharis.
- **Contacts with Sasanian Empire:** Through the gift of the game of Chess, Maukharis established contact with Sasanian Empire.
- **Succession:** Pushyabhtis ultimately succeeded Maukharis.

Pallavas of Kanchi - Rulers and their Contributions

Period: **575-897 AD**

Capital: **Kanchi**

- The Pallavas established their authority over south Andhra Pradesh and north Tamil Nadu, with the capital at Kanchi.
- Kanchi, under them, became an important temple town and a centre of trade and commerce.
- The Pallavas rose to power during the reign of **Mahendravarman and Narasimhavarman I**. Throughout their reign, they were in constant conflict with the Chalukyas of Vatapi in the north and the Tamil kingdoms of Cholas and Pandyas in the south.

Chalukyas of Badami - Rulers and their Contributions

Period: **543-755 AD**

Capital: **Badami**

- **Region:** They set up their kingdom in western Deccan with the capital at Vatapi (modern Badami in Karnataka).
- **Rise:** The kingdom rapidly rose to prominence **during the reign of Pulakesin II**.
- **Expansion:** He consolidated his authority in **Maharashtra and conquered large parts of Deccan**. He defeated Harshavardhana and acquired the title of **dakshinapatheshvara (lord of the south)**.
- **Political struggle:** Pulakesin II was defeated by Pallava king Narasimhavarman. It marked the beginning of a long-drawn political struggle between the Pallavas and Chalukyas that continued with ups and down for more than a hundred years.

Administration in Post-Gupta Period

- **Administration:** It was mostly **centralised**.
 - The administration **under Harsha was more feudal**.
- **Titles of officials:** Continued as in the Gupta period. A class of officials was known as **Kumaramatyas**.
- **The Samanta:** Semi-independent local chiefs of this period.

- **Land grants:** Continued to be made to priests for special services rendered to the state.
- **Judicial system:** More developed than Guptas. Legal matters were dealt with by **Dharmashastras**. There was a **differentiation between civil and criminal cases**.

Society and Religion in Post-Gupta Period

- **Emergence of new castes:** As trade declined, with the transformation of guilds, new castes emerged.
- **Growth of Kayasthas:** As land grants grew, there was a need for a body of scribes and record keepers who were employed to draft assignments of land and keep details of land transfer, including various items of revenue. Thus Kayasthas emerged.
- **Social status:** Due to the position of land holding and association with agriculture, the position of Shudras improved, and that of Vaishyas decreased.
- **Position of women:** There was a progressive decline. Early marriages were preferred.
- **Religious policy:** The post-Gupta dynasties followed tolerant religious policies.
- **Religion:** The orthodox Brahmanical order continued to be challenged, particularly by movements within Shaivism, by poet-saints, and by those who practised the Tantric form of worship.
- Most religions, irrespective of whether it was Brahmanism, Buddhism, or Shaivism, developed institutional bases in the form of temples and monasteries.
- Ruling powers supported institutions and Brahmanas, monks, and Acharyas by grants of land, wealth, and other means. Through these acts of patronage, the ruling powers strengthened their social base.
- **Emergence of the Bhakti movement** was a special feature of this period.

Economy in Post-Gupta Period

- **Trade and Commerce:** Northwestern route disruption by Hunas resulted in a comparative **decline in the country's trade and commerce**.
 - Till 550 AD, India continued to have some trade with the eastern Roman Empire, to which it exported silk and spices.
- **Loss of gold:** The loss in trade lessened the inflow of gold and silver into the country. It is confirmed by a general scarcity of gold coins after the Guptas.
- **Self-Sufficient economy:** Thus, in the absence of coinage, we can presume that a self-sufficient economic system with limited trade prevailed after the downfall of the Guptas.
- **Feudal land tenure: Yajnavalkya and Brihaspati**, authors of Smriti's works, mention four grades of land rights in the same piece of land. It led to hierarchical rights over land and sub-infeudation.
 - The Mahipati (king),
 - Kshetrasvamin (master of the land),
 - Karshaka (cultivator) and
 - The sub-tenant.

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