

10. Changing Times

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After the disintegration of Mauryan empire, the ambition of local rulers got strengthened. The regional kingdoms came to a rise. Among them, we studied the Shunga and Satavahana kingdoms in the last lesson. During the same period there began foreign invasions, such as invasions by Greek, Shakas, Kushanas, on India. This period of the rise of regional kingdoms was also the period of political and social transition.

10.1 Nomadic tribes of Central Asia

After the death of Alexander, the Satrapas appointed by him declared their independent status and they came to be known as Indo-Greek kings. During the declining period of Indo-Greek kings, nomadic tribes in Central Asia attacked Bactria. The tribes of Central Asia migrated to India in this period. These migrations proved to be important in the political scene in North India. In the latter half of 2nd century B.C.E., the Pahalavas (Parthians) and Shakas (Scythians) attacked northwestern regions. The Yuezi tribes from China pushed the Shakas out from Central Asia. Yuezis were pastoralists. With the strength of their war skills, they vanquished the local kings and there they established their own kingdoms.

10.2 Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Kushanas

Indo-Greeks : The Greek Satrapas of North-west are known as 'Indo-Greeks'. In Indian tradition, they are mentioned as Yavana. Their objectives were to establish their dominance in the region of Mediterranean Sea and to strengthen the hold over trade in west and central Asia. Seleucus Nicator was Indo-Greek king from the province of Bactria in the North-west. In the conflicts between the Indo-Greek kings, the kingdom of Bactria proved to be powerful. Bactrian king Demetrius attacked India in 180 B.C.E. He won over Takshashila. His capital was at Sakal (Siyalkot). During this period, the Indo-Greek king Eucratides established an independent kingdom. In this way, two independent Indo-Greek kingdoms were established in the northwest region. There were 40 Indo-Greek kings in total including the two branches established by Demetrius and Eucratides. The only source to know the history of Indo-Greeks is their coins. Things like emblems, script, portraits on their coins of the kings, images of deities are their gifts to the numismatic tradition of India.

To know the extent of Indo-Greek kingdom see :
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Indo-Greeks_100bc.jpg

Shakas : Shakas came from Central Asia. They established their kingdom by driving out the Greeks of Bactria. Their colony acquired the name 'Shakasthan' (Shistan). 'Maues' alias 'Moga' was the first Shaka king in India. He established the kingdom by conquering the provinces of Gandhara and Punjab. Due to the weakness of the succeeding Shaka kings, Pahalava king Gondophernes defeated them and established his rule in India.



Junagarh inscription

For additional information : The rule of Shaka king Rudradaman proves to be noteworthy due to his conflict with the Satavahanas. The Junagarh inscription in Saurashtra is an important Sanskrit inscription. It is inscribed below the Ashokan edict. The Ashokan edict is in Prakrit while Rudradaman's inscription is in Sanskrit. It seems that the Shaka kings had adopted Sanskrit language. The Rudradaman inscription records repairs of Sudarshan lake that was built during the Mauryan era. It shows that the lake was used over a prolonged period. It mentions Rudradaman's victory in the Narmada valley, expedition against Satavahana kingdom and praises him for his victory over Yaudheya Republics in Rajasthan.

Although the Shaka rule in Gandhara and Punjab came to an end, some Shaka rulers continued to rule in Western India. The Shaka administrative system was structured after the Achaemenid and Seleucid models. The state was divided into various Satrapis (provinces) and 'Mahakshatrapa', a military official, was appointed for each satrapy. These Satrapies were further divided into sub-sections and a Satrapa was appointed on each of it. These Satrapas were permitted to engrave their own inscriptions and also issue coins. It seems that they had considerable autonomy.

You would like to know : Shakas were nomadic pastoralists. There are no architectural remains, which can be ascribed to Shakas. However, their characteristic tombs have been discovered. These tombs contain remains of an individual, who could be their chief, along with his personal belongings including remains of his horse and other objects. Horse was an important part of the culture of Shakas. Their skills in mounted archery enabled them to make swift attacks. Saddle, reins, composite bow and arrow made their war technique more effective.

Kushanas : After coming to Bactria from central Asia, the Kushanas captured the Indo-Greek kingdoms. As an effect of their contact with the Greek is reflected in some traits of Kushana culture. After pushing the Shakas out to the South, under the leadership of Kujula Kadphises, the Yuezi groups came together and Kujula Kadphises brought them to northwest India from the Hindukush mountains. He declared himself as the king of Bactria. With this the Kushana rule was established upto Kabul, Kashmir. We get this information from Chinese records, Greek, and Roman literature. In Indian literature, Kushanas are referred as 'Tukhar' or 'Tushar'.

10.3 Kushana Empire

After winning over the small kingdoms, Kushanas followed the system of Shakas and established their Satrapis there. A military officer called 'Satrapa (Kshatrapa)' was appointed on the satrapies. The King was the chief of all the Satrapas and adopted the titles like 'Rajadhiraj', 'Maharaj' etc. The concept of divinity of the King is seen for the first time in the inscriptions on the Kushana coins. They called themselves as 'Devputra'(Son of God).

By defeating many Shaka kings, Kanishka obtained the status of an emperor. He built the Kushana empire from Kabul to Pataliputra and from Kashmir to Malwa. He

is said to have attacked China twice. From Central Asia it was difficult to administer over the far extended empire. Hence an intermediate administrative centre was the need of the moment. Hence, Kanishka established two capitals, one at Purushpur (Peshawar) and the other at Mathura. Kanishka had organised the fourth Buddhist Council in the vihara at Kundalvan in Kashmir.

The Kushanas had adopted the Indian culture. This is obvious from the name of last Kushana king 'Vasudeva'. During his period the decline of Kushanas began. The Kushana empire disintegrated into pieces and the various Satrapas became independent. The Kushana rule existed in the province of Punjab and Gandhar till 4th century C.E.

Visit the below website to see the expansion of the Kushana empire : https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kushan_Empire#/media/File:Kushanmap.jpg

10.4 Gupta Empire

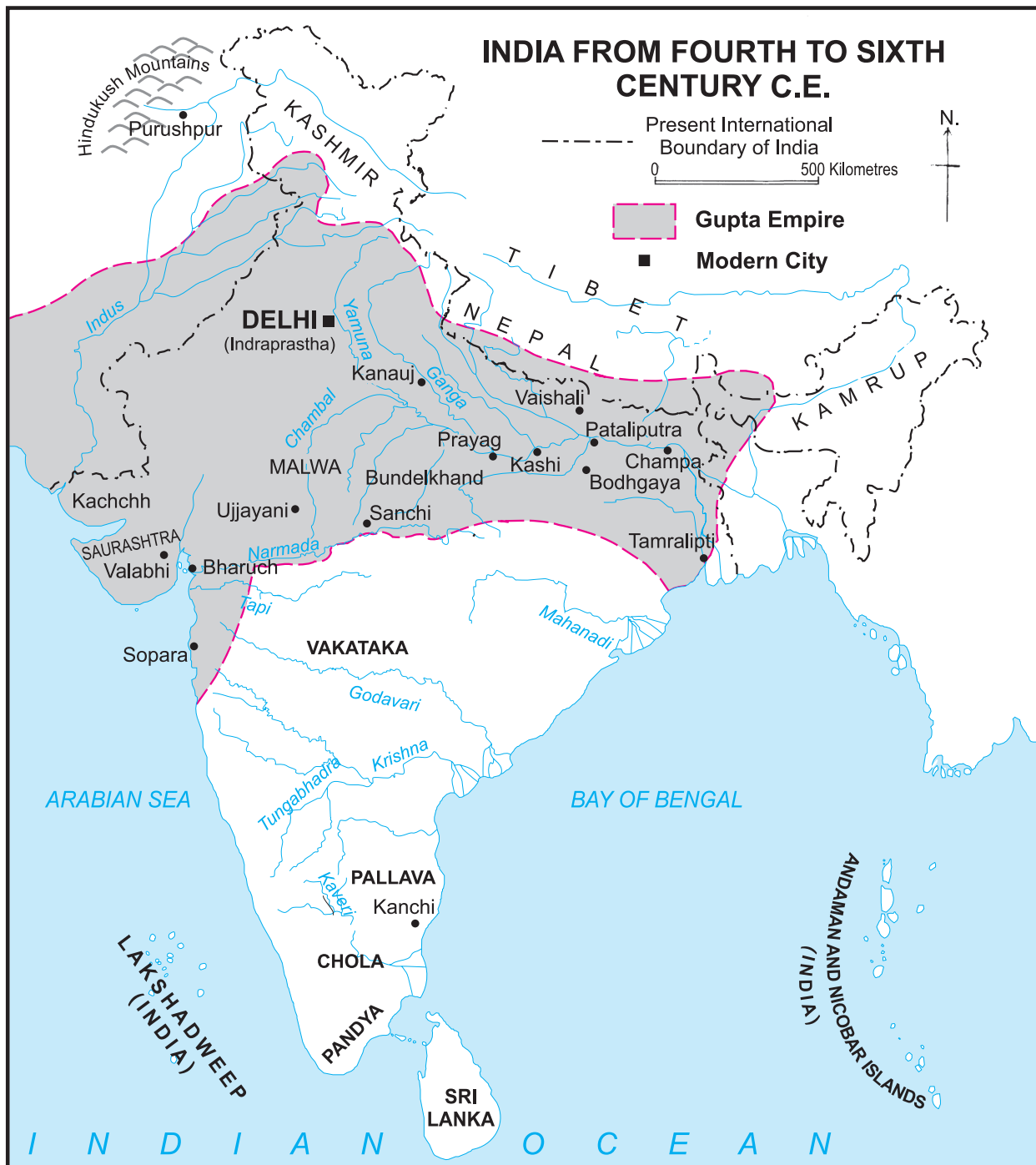
The history of Gupta empire indicates the process of transformation of a small state into a mighty empire. Srigupta was the founder of Gupta dynasty. His title 'Maharaj' indicates that he was a feudatory. His son Ghatotkach also uses the same title which means during his period also the Gupta kings were feudatories. Chandragupta I is given the credit of expanding the Gupta rule and transforming it into an empire. The title added to his name, titled 'Maharajadhiraj', gives an idea of the increasing status of the Gupta kings. He married Kumaradevi who belonged to the Lichchhavi clan. This matrimonial alliance proved to be politically beneficial for the Gupta dynasty. His portrait with Kumaradevi is seen on a coin issued by him. His rule was spread over in the regions of Magadha, Saket (Ayodhya) and Prayag. King Samudragupta was the most brilliant, valiant and benevolent ruler of this dynasty.

Samudragupta's ambition was to rule entire India as an unified empire. His title 'Sarvarajochchheta' on his coins, which

You would like to know : The detailed Prashasti (eulogy) of Samudragupta is inscribed on the Ashokan pillar at Allahabad. This prashasti is a written source giving information of his political career. This inscription is known as 'Prayaga Prashasti'. It is paradoxical right below Ashokan's edict declaring the importance of 'Dhammavijay' is inscribed the detailed account of Samudragupta's 'Digvijaya'.

means, 'the annihilator of all kings' proves this. Samudragupta first conquered neighboring kingdoms. After the conquest in the North, he carried out expedition in the South to conquer the Southern kingdoms. During that period, the rule of Vakatakas was strong in southern region. Samudragupta could include the southern part upto the region of Kanchi under his dominance, except the Vakatakas. The rulers of the regions beyond his conquered area became his feudatories. By obtaining tribute from these kings, he made them accept his sovereignty.

After this great conquest (Digvijay), Samudragupta performed Ashwamedha sacrifice and proclaimed himself as Chakravarti king. Shakas, Kushanas, and kings in Sri Lanka accepted the suzerainty of the Guptas. The image of Samudragupta along with a lyre (Veena) on his coins indicates that he was a patron of art. Chandragupta II defeated Shakas and ascended the throne. He took up the title 'Vikramaditya'. He established his rule in the western regions of Malwa, Gujarat, and Kathewar. Due to this the areas on west coast also came under the dominance of the Guptas and they entered into the trade carried out in the west. Later Chandragupta crossed Hindukush and brought the north-western provinces under his control. In this manner he established a sovereign state encompassing the entire north India. He gave his daughter, Prabhavati, in marriage to the Vakataka king Rudrasena II and created congenial relations with the Vakatakas in the south.



During the period of Kumargupta, son of Chandragupta II, the Huna invasions in India began. Kumargupta withheld the attacks of Hunas. After Kumargupta, the succeeding

kings proved to be incapable of protecting their kingdom. Finally their kingdom was disintegrated into many small kingdoms.

You would like to know : Chandragupta II gave patronage to many scholars, just like his father and had deep interest in knowledge and art. It is said that there were 'Navratnas' (nine gems) in his court. They were : Dhanvantari (physician), Kshapanak (astrologer), Amarsinha (lexicographer), Sanku (architect), Vatal Bhatt (magician), Ghatkarpura (architect/author), Kalidasa (great poet), Varahamihira (astronomer) and Vararuchi (grammarian).

State administration and social life:

The Gupta period is considered as the Classical Age of Indian history.

During the Gupta period, king was the centre of administration. The Prince, Amatya (ministers) and advisors helped him. Many a times, the Prince was appointed as Viceroy who looked after the provincial administration. Every province was subdivided. These subdivisions were called 'Vishaya'. There was an independent administrator appointed on these Vishayas. They were known as 'Vishayapati'. 'Kumaramatya' were the provincial officers and 'Ayuktak' were the officials who looked after the affairs of the districts. Gupta administration was decentralized. Many decisions were taken at the local level.

The Gupta kings changed the economic structure of agricultural system. Their preference was on giving the land to local farmers for tilling. Land donations were also made for the cause of religion and learning. These lands were tax free. They were called as 'Agraharas'. Similarly, in this period the civil and military officers were granted land grants instead of salaries. The roots of feudal system, an important feature of the mediaeval period lie in this system. It is believed that this feudal economy brought about the decline of urban centres. Because of revenue tax exemption on the donated land, the revenue decreased and royal treasures depleted. It was concentrated in the hands of local landlords. Because of this the king no longer remained in the centre of power.

According to the Chinese traveller Yuan Chwang, sugarcane and wheat were cultivated in the north-western province of the Gupta empire, while rice was cultivated in Magadha and eastern regions.

Minerals, animals and herbs were the main commodities of trade that brought prosperity during Gupta period. Goldsmiths enjoyed a high social status in this period. The gold coins during Gupta period are

excellent examples of their skills. Beautiful and realistic portrayal of various aspects of the king is characteristic of Gupta coins. 'Nigam', 'Shreni' and 'Gana' like Organisations were established by traders and industrialists.

Till the Gupta period, many foreign communities, came and settled in India. They were accepted in the social system. Smriti texts such as 'Narada Smriti', 'Yajnavalakya Smriti' were written during this period. These texts provide a glimpse of the social changes in this period.

For additional information : Textile industry flourished during Gupta period. A variety of textiles were produced on large scale. These varieties include *Kshaum* (linen), *Chitrapatta* (printed silk), *Dukul* (silk), *Pulakbandh* (coloured cotton), *Pushpapatta* (floral designs), *Amshuka* (muslin). These textiles had great demand in internal and distant market.

The prosperity is reflected in contemporary sculptural art and literature. Political stability in the Gupta period, prosperity and royal patronage gave impetus to the creation of Sanskrit literature. One of the best creations in Indian literature of this period is Kalidasa's 'Shakuntalam'. Human figure was the central theme of the sculptures in Gupta period. Human sculptures and images of deities were created during this period. Sculptures belonging to this period are found at many places such as Sarnath, Devgadh, Ajanta. During this period, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religious icons were made of stone, metals and terracotta. The Greek influence seen on Gandhara style is no longer seen on the sculptures of Gupta period.

During this period, the foundation of Indian temple architecture was laid down. Use of dressed stones became common during this period. The earliest remains of temples of Gupta period are found in places like Sanchi, Bhumra, and Deogadh. These are a

few examples of the Gupta style of architecture.

You would like to know : In the Gupta period, there was remarkable progress in making alloys and casting of metals. The



Iron Pillar : Mehrauli

iron pillar at Delhi stands as a witness for this. Since many centuries the iron pillar stands without rusting. From this we understand that during this period the science of metallurgy was very advanced.

10.5 Vardhan Empire

During the declining period of the Guptas, in Northern India there was rise of dynasties such as Vardhans at Sthaneshwar (Thanesar), Maukharis in Ganga Yamuna Doab, Maitrakas in Saurashtra etc. Pushyabhuti was the founder of the Vardhan dynasty. After the accession of Prabhakarvardhan, the Vardhan dynasty became powerful. He took up the sovereign title of 'Parambhattarak Maharajadhiraj'. The most prominent ruler of this dynasty was Harshavardhan. His empire extended from Nepal to Narmada and Saurashtra to Bengal. After Harshavardhan, there was no heir to the throne under the situation the empire disintegrated and many feudatories declared independent status in North India.

We get a lot of information about this period from 'Harshacharita' written by Banabhatta who was the court poet and also from the travel accounts of Chinese traveller Yuan Chwang. The universities of Nalanda and Vallabhi became the great learning centres during harshavardhan's reign.

Hundreds of students, not only from India but also from other countries like China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Sri Lanka etc. came here. Harshavardhan's empire was the last powerful empire in ancient India.

10.6 Karkotaka Empire

Among the dynasties that ruled in Kashmir, the Karkotaka dynasty (7-9th century C.E.) is mentioned by Yuan Chwang. He had been to Kashmir when he had visited India. A detailed information regarding this dynasty is found in Kalhan's Rajatarangini. Durlabhavardhan was the founder of Karkotaka dynasty. His empire extended from Narmada to Tibet.

The reign of Lalitaditya (Muktapeed, 724-760 C.E.), the grandson of Durlabhavardhan, is noteworthy. He is credited with two victorious expeditions (Digvijaya). He drove away many foreign tribes on the northern borders of Kashmir, especially the region in the Amudarya basin. It included the Tukhar (Turks) as well. He conquered the regions from Avanti in the north upto Pragiyotishpur (Assam). He conquered Tibet with the help of Yashovarma, the king of Avanti (Kanaur). After conquering the regions upto Kaveri river in the south, he crossed the seas and reached the land beyond (Sri Lanka). This is mentioned by Kalhan, which suggests that Lalitaditya had extended his empire from Tibet in the north to the river Kaveri in the south. Lalitaditya's empire is comparable to the Gupta empire. Lalitaditya was a devotee of Vishnu. He built the Martand temple. He set up the city of Lalitpur. Lalitpur, situated on the banks of river Jhelum, might be the ancient Lalitpur. He built Buddhist Viharas at Hushkapur (Ushkur).

10.7 Trade, coinage, art, iconography

In Indian history, the period of six centuries from 2nd century B.C.E. to 4th century C.E., was the period of arrival of the Central Asian tribes and the kingdoms that they established. These people adopted various cultural traits as they came to India. The introduction of these traits brought about

For Additional Information : Some Bactrian coins resemble the Greek coins in terms of their shape and weight. On some of these coins the image of owl is seen. Owl is the symbol of Goddess Athena. Athena was the main deity of Athens. Indo-Greek coins are found in Bactria. The Greek legends are written on the obverse side and the legends are written in Prakrit. Kharoshthi script on the reverse side.

a transformation in the cultural life of India as well.

In contemporary India, agriculture and animal husbandry were the main sources of livelihood. Along with it various industries and trade developed during this period. India's contact with the foreigners proved to be beneficial for this. During this period also merchant and artisans guilds (shrenis) were in existence. During this period, India's sea trade began to increase on a large scale. Indian goods were sent upto the Red Sea and from there via Egypt to Rome. From India, animals such as tiger, lion and monkey; birds such as parrot and peacock; wool, silk, muslin, cotton cloth, ivory, pearls, spices, sandalwood, medicinal herbs, diamonds, precious stones, and other luxury items were exported and from other countries goods such as lead, copper, glass, silver, gold, wines etc. were imported. Due to this trade the flow of gold coins was constantly coming in India and hence India became prosperous.

The portraits of kings and images of deities were inscribed on the gold coins of the Bactrian Greeks. There was a great impact of the Greek and Roman coins on the coins of Shaka and Kushana rulers. The use of Kharoshthi script is seen on the Shaka coins.

The coins of this period indicate the mixed impact of Greeks, Indian and Persian cultures. The Kushana kings depicted Indian deities on coins. They brought in circulation the gold and copper coins with the image of Shiva. Kushana coins are also found in the

border regions of India and China. There were political relations between Kushanas and Chinese rulers. The legends on the Kushana coins found in Central Asia are in Prakrit language, written in Kharoshthi script. This evidence indicates that people speaking Prakrit language were also staying outside the Indian subcontinent.

The Gandhara region had become a melting pot of Indian, Greek, Roman, Persian and Shaka cultures. This province acquired

importance from cultural point of view. A new style of iconography developed in the cities of Pushkalavati, Taxila, Purushpur etc. It is known as 'Gandhara style'. The theme of the sculpture was Indian but the style was Greek. The Mahayana sect of Buddhism gave an impetus for the development of this style of art. Along with the images of Gautama Buddha and Bodhisatva



Gandhara Art

statues of the donors are carved in stone. But this style remained limited to parts of North-west India. In the icons of Gandhara style, there was more emphasis on physical beauty. During the same period, Mathura and Varanasi style of art developed. The images of Gautama Buddha were completely Indian in nature. Mathura was an important centre of Indian art of sculpture. Portrait sculpture is the feature of Mathura style of art. The statues of Kushana kings, Vima Takshama and Kanishka are examples of this portrait sculpture. Similarly images of Saraswati, Vishnu, Surya, Shiva and Karttikeya were created for the first time during this period. The sculptural art during Kushana period was an indication of innovation in the history of Indian sculpture. During this period there was an effort of imprinting the reflection of the then society.

10.8 Indo-Roman trade (Trade centres in Maharashtra)

The Periplus of Erythrean Sea written in

Greek language in the mid 1st century C.E., mentions about the Red Sea and the sea routes connecting coastal line, ports, provinces, goods exchanged in trade. Red Sea was important for trade relations between India and Rome. Among the trading commodities textile, black pepper, precious stones, ivory and animals such as monkey, parrot and peacock for the entertainment of the Roman elites came to be exported from India. Gold coins were paid in exchange of these goods. Coral and liquor were also imported. The remains of Amphorae are found in the excavations. Residues at the base of the amphora, revealed remains of wines. Amphorae were also used for storing olive oil and garom (pickled fish). The price of the goods exported to Roman market was paid in gold coins. The large amounts of

these coins found in South India gives an idea of the extensive scale of this trade. The flourishing Indo-Roman trade gave rise to several markets and cities. There was rise of important ports in western India as well. The merchandise transported to Maharashtra were stored at Ter, Nevasa, Bhokardan, Kondapur, and Sannati. The ports of Sopara and Kalyan were important centres of Indo-Roman trade. Excavations at the archaeological sites have brought forth the evidence of trade in the form of Roman pottery (amphorae) and red ware. The replicas of Roman coins are also found in the excavations. In South India, along with increase in trade the Buddhist centres were established at places such as Dharnikot, Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda.

In the next lesson we are going to study about the ruling powers in South India.

Exercise

Q.1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the sentence.

- (1) The history of Indo-Greeks is known through their
 (a) literature (b) inscription
 (c) coins (d) pottery
- (2) Gupta dynasty was founded by
 (a) Sri Gupta (b) Ghatotkach
 (c) Samudragupta (d) Ramgupta
- (3) After accession by defeating the Shakas, took up the title of 'Vikramaditya'.
 (a) Chandragupta II
 (b) Ramgupta (c) Chandragupta I
 (d) Kumaragupta

(B) Find the incorrect pair and write the correct ones.

- (1) *Kshaum* – Linen cloth
- (2) *Pushpapatta* – Cotton cloth
- (3) *Dukul* – Silk cloth
- (4) *Amshuka* – Muslin cloth

Q.2 Explain the following statements with reasons.

- (1) During the Gupta period the power

was concentrated in the hands of local landlords.

- (2) Every tide of Huna invasion made the Gupta rule weaker.

Q.3 State your opinion.

Samudragupta performed Asvamedha sacrifice after Digvijaya.

Q.4 Write Short notes.

- (1) Gupta Sculpture
- (2) Indo-Roman Trade

Q.5 Answer the following question with the help of given points.

How did the standardisation in various sections during the Gupta period take place?

- a. division of Gupta administration
- b. changes in economic structure economy of agriculture
- c. Development of Gupta coinage

Activity

Collect more information about 'Harshacharita' written by Banabhatta, with the help of internet.

