**Gupta Dynasty**

* North India came under the rule of several foreign people, such as the Yavanas, Kushans, Sakas, Parthians, etc. They began to settle in north-west India from the first century B.C. onwards.
* Foreign rulers came to India due to the turbulent condition in central Asia.They adjusted themselves with Indian culture, and introduced some new elements in India.
* Three big political powers emerged in India between the 1st century B.C. and 3rd century A.D., which played an important stabilising factor over large regions. They were −
  + Satavahanas in the Deccan,
  + Kushanas in the north, and
  + Sakas in the west.
* In the mid of 3rd century A.D., the empires of the Satavahanas and Kushanas came to an end.

**Gupta Dynasty**

A new dynasty, known as Gupta, emerged in north India. They made a permanent impact on Indian history by building up a large empire. They have firmly established several trends of Indian culture like the Mauryas a few centuries earlier. Apart from political might and strength, the Gupta kings were also known for their great achievements in the field of science, art, culture, and literature. The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta mentions maharaja Srigupta and maharaja Ghatotkacha as his ancestors. But we do not know much about the early Guptas. I-tsing, a Chineses traveler, came to India between A.D. 671 and 695. He mentioned Srigupta as the builder of a temple at Gaya for the Chinese pilgrims about 500 years before his time. The king, Srigupta, has been identified as the first Gupta king mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription.

Puranas also mentioned that the early Guptas controlled the area along the Ganga (the middle Gangetic basin), Prayag (Allahabad and surrounding region), Saketa (Ayodhya region), and Magadha. Ghatottotkacha succeeded his father Srigupta. He was also referred as the Maharaja in Gupta records.

**Chandragupta-I**

* Chandragupta-I succeeded his father Ghatottotkacha in A.D. 320.
* Chandragupta-I was considered to have laid the foundation of the great Gupta Empire. He was married to a Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi. The Lichchhavis were related to Gautama Buddh.
* The Lichchhavis were an old and established *Ganarajya* and quite powerful and still being respected in north India.
* The marriage alliance of Chandragupta-I was important for his political career as is proved by the coins Chandragupta I. These coins portray the figures of Chandragupta and Kumaradevi with the name of the Lichchhavis.
* In the Allahabad inscription, Samudragupta son of Chandragupta-I and Kumaradevi, proudly called himself Lichchhavis *‘Dauhitra’* i.e. son of the daughter of Lichchhavis.
* The Gupta era was started with a coronation of Chandragupta-I in A.D. 320. He was the first Gupta king to adopt the title *‘Maharajadhiraja’* and issued gold coins. Chandragupta-I introduced a new era called Gupta era.

**Samudragupta**

* Samudragupta succeeded his father Chandragupta-I about A.D. 340. He earned a reputation as one of the greatest kings and conquerors. He was chosen by his father as his successor because of his qualities that would make him into a good king.
* The Allahabad pillar inscription gives a detailed account of the career and personality of Samudragupta.
* Harishena one of the officials composed the inscription and engraved on the Ashoka's pillar at Allahabad.
* Samudragupta was a great military general. He had a long list of the kings and rulers whom he defeated and subdued as a part of his military achievements. He uprooted nine kings and princes from the Aryavarta and annexed their kingdom.
* Campaign of southern India was the most important campaign of Samudragupta
* Altogether twelve kings and princes of the south (*dakshinapatha*) are listed in the inscription.
* During the campaign of southern India, he adopted the policy of first capturing the kings, then releasing them from captivity, and then reinstalling them as kings in their territory. By showing royal mercy, he won their allegiance.
* Samudragupta proceeded for his south Indian campaign, through the eastern and southern parts of Madhyadesha to Orissa and then advanced along the eastern coast and reached Kanchi and beyond and returned to his capital by way of Maharashtra and Khandesh.
* Samudragupta performed ‘*Ashvamedhayajna*’ after his several conquests and issued gold coins depicting the sacrificial horse and bearing the legend, which conveying that he performed the *Ashvamedha* sacrifice.
* The Allahabad pillar inscription also lists fourteen kingdoms bordering his kingdom. These rulers paid tribute followed his orders and showed their obedience by attending his court.
* These were located in eastern Rajasthan, northern Madhya Pradesh, Assam, and Nepal. Further, some forest kings (atavika-rajas) are mentioned whom Samudragupta had made his ‘*Paricharaka*’ (helpers).
* Other political powers listed in the inscription are such as Kushanas, Sakas, Murundas as well as Simhalas (Sri Lanka) and inhabitants of other islands. These rulers sent embassies to Samudragupta's court.
* Meghavarna, the king of Sri Lanka, sent an embassy to Samudragupta for his permission to build a monastery and a guest house for Buddhist pilgrims at Bodh Gaya.
* Samudragupta was a versatile genius. He was called as ‘*Kaviraja*’ i.e. the king of poets. He was proficient in war and sastras as well.
* The Allahabad pillar inscription calls him a great musician. This is also confirmed by his lyricist type of coins, which shows him playing veena (lute).
* Samudragupta patronized learned men in his court and appointed them as his ministers.
* Samudragupta died in about A.D. 380 and was succeeded by his son Chandragupta II.

**Chandragupta II**

* Chandragupta II was the son of Samudragupta and Dattadevi and he was chosen by his father as his successor.
* The Gupta Empire reached its highest glory, both in terms of territorial expansion and cultural excellence under Chandragupta II.
* Chandragupta II had inherited a strong and consolidated empire from his father Samudragupta.
* Chandragupta II had established a matrimonial alliance with Vakatakas by marrying his daughter Prabhavatigupta with Rudrasena-II of the Vakataka dynasty.
* Chandragupta-II made an alliance with the Vakatakas before attacking the Sakas so as to be sure of having a friendly power to back him up in Deccan.
* Prabhavatigupta acted as a regent on behalf of her two minor sons after the death of her husband Rudrasena II.
* Chandragupta-II’s victory over the mighty Sakas dynasty was his foremost success. The annexation of Sakas’s kingdom comprising Gujarat and part of Malwa strengthened the Gupta Empire, but also brought it into direct touch with western sea ports. This gave a great motivation to foreign trade and commerce.
* Ujjain, a major centre of trade, religion, and culture became the second capital of the Gupta Empire after the conquest.
* After the victory over Sakas, Chandragupta-II adopted the title of ***‘Vikramaditya.’***
* Chandragupta-II issued dated silver coins to commemorate his victory over Saka kshatrapas.
* The Mehrauli iron pillar inscription records portray a king named Chandra.
* The king Chandra is generally identified as Chandragupta-II. This would mean his kingdom extended from Bengal to the north-west frontiers.
* Chandragupta-II's reign is remembered for his patronage of literature and arts and for the high standard of artistic and cultural life.
* Kalidas, the great Sanskrit poet was a member of Chandragupta-II’s court.
* Fa-Hien, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim visited India between A.D. 405 and A.D. 411. He visited for collecting Buddhist manuscripts and text and studying at Indian monasteries.

**Kumaragupta-I**

* Chandragupta-II died about A.D. 413. His son Kumaragupta became the next king.
* Kumaragupta ruled for more than forty years. He performed an *Ashvamedha* sacrifice; though his military achievements are not known.
* Kumaragupta issued *Ashvamedha* type of coins like his grandfather, Samudragupta.
* The epigraphic records show that he organised the administration of vast empire and maintained its peace, prosperity, and security for a long period of forty years.
* The Gupta Empire was challenged by the Pushyamitras at the end of Kumaragupta's reign.
* Pushyamitras were living on the banks of the Narmada.
* Skandagupta was the son of Kumaragupta-I.

**Skandagupta**

* Kumaragupta-I died in A.D. 455. His son Skandagupta became the next king.
* Skandagupta's reign seems to have been full of wars. He struggled with his brother Purugupta.
* Hunas were the greatest enemies of Gupta’s empire during this period.
* Hunas were a ferocious barbarian horde. They lived in central Asia.
* Skandagupta successfully defeated the Hunas. So they did not dare to disturb the Gupta Empire for half a century. Though they continue to disconcert Persia during this period.
* The important event of Skandagupta's reign was the restoration and repair of the dam on *Sudarsana* Lake after 8 hundred years of construction. It was built during Chandragupta Maurya's reign.
* *Sudarsana* Lake was also repaired previously during the reign of Saka kshatrapa Rudradaman I.
* During the period between Guptas and Harsha, polity, religion, society, economic life, literature, art, and architecture and technology were in the highest state of glory. Because of this reason, this period is popular as ‘a golden period’ of Indian history.

**Structure of Administration**

* Set up of the governments was well organized during the Gupta period, which provided a strong base for them to hold together their extensive territories for such a long period.
* In spite of intermittent wars among them, the reigns of the Guptas survived for two hundred years; the Chalukyas lasted for four hundred years; and Pallavas lasted for about six hundred years.
* The basic (governance) functionalities of the different dynasties were almost same except some differences in their name.
* The kingdom (*Rajya*) was divided into a number of provinces and they were known as ‘***Bhukti***’ in the north and ‘***Mandala***’ or ‘***Mandalam***’ in the south.
* The provinces were sub-divided as ‘***Vishaya’*** or ‘***Bhoga***’ in the north (India) and ‘***Kottams***’ or ‘***Valanadu***’ in the south (India).
* Some other units of administration were the districts, which were called as ‘***Adhis***,’ ‘***Thana***,’ or ‘***Pattana***’ in the north (India) and ‘***Nadu***’ in the south (India).
* The group of villages (i.e. modern tehsil) was known as ‘***Vithis***’ in the north (India) and ‘***Pattala***’ and ‘***Kurram***’ in the south (India).
* The villages were the lowest administrative units.
* There was a number of central, provincial, and local official to carry on the administration.

Governance under Gupta Empire

* The administration under Gupta Empire was largely dependent upon the old bureaucratic form of administration; however, they organized it much systematically and elaborately.
* The governor of ‘*Bhukti*’ was appointed by the king and known as ‘***Uparika***.’
* The administrative work was undertaken by a Board of Advisors, consisting of four members representing the various important sections, namely −
  + The ‘*Nagarsresthis*,’ were the chief of the guild of traders and bankers. They represented the guilds in particular and the urban population in general.
  + The ‘*Sarthavaha*,’ were the head of guild of traders and represented the various trading communities.
  + The ‘*Prathamakulika*’ (the chief of artisan) represented various artisan classes.
  + The ‘*Prathamakayastha*’ might have represented the government official like the Chief Secretary of the present day. This body was known as ‘*Adhisthanadhikarana*.’
* Each city administration had a council body.
* The village administration was under the control of rural bodies consisting of a headman and the village elders.
* During Gupta period, there was a remarkable growth of the local self-governing institutions such as the village committees and district committees.
* Inscriptions and literature records describe the existence of local bodies since very early period. They mentioned about the nature and the activities of these local bodies and testify to the most wonderful organization that the ancient Indians evolved.
* Two New classes of officers were introduced by the Guptas, namely −
* ***Sandhivigrahika***, he was the minister of peace and war i.e. modern foreign minister
* ***Kumaramatyas***, he was a body of top ranking officials attached not only to the king, but also to the crown-prince, and sometimes placed as in charge of districts.
* *Ayuktas* were another important official, they were same as *Yuktas* mentioned in the Ashokan inscriptions and in Kautilya's Arthasastra.
* During the Gupta period, many known officials - such as *Mahapratihara, Mahabaladhikrita,* and *Mahadandanayaka*, etc. used their title prefixed with ‘*Maha*.’ The powers of all these officials and officers emanated from the king.
* Gupta rulers assumed several titles such as ‘*Maharajadhiraja*,’ ‘*Parambhattaraka*,’ ‘*Parmesvara*,’ etc.
* In Allahabad pillar inscription, Samudragupta is described as equal to the Gods Indra, Varuna, Kuvera, and Varna and also as a ‘God dwelling on the earth’. Such titles were used by the rulers of foreign origin such as the Greeks, or the Kushanas, but never by a king of an Indian origin.
* Guptas were the first who adopted high sounding titles in the history of India.
* Literature of this period mentions the ideals of popular government.
* The Smritis explain that "the ruler has been made by Brahma, a servant of the people, getting his revenue as remuneration".
* During the Gupta’s period, the powers of the king were more restricted and he was advised to rule with the help of ministers and to respect the decision of guilds and corporate bodies.
* The Gupta kings are usually represented on their coins. They have been described as an excellent and unrivalled chariot warriors and horsemen.
* In the early history of India, Gupta period is considered as a landmark in the field of administration of law and justice. The legal literature, developed during this period, reflects a distinct advancement in the legal system.
* Lawmakers drew a clear line between civil and criminal law for the first time.
* The *Brihaspatismriti* enumerates eighteen titles of land and adds that fourteen of these have their origin in property (*Dhanamula*) and four in injury (*Himsamula*).
* During the Gupta period, the land became private property that could be sold for money.
* Detailed law about partition, sale, mortgage, and lease of land were mentioned in the law-books and in the inscriptions of this period.
* Kautilya’s Arthashastra enumerated a bigger list of taxes than those were found in the Gupta inscriptions.
* The burden of taxation was decreased in Gupta period because of the prosperity of the state.
* Land taxes were collected both in cash and kind. It was varying from one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce.
* Special officers are mentioned in the inscriptions to kept proper records of assessment and collection of revenues, land transactions, etc.

Literature of Gupta Period

* Gupta period was considered as the golden phase of Indian literature.
* The wonderful literature was produced in prose, poetry, drama, and grammar. It is the noticeable product of the system of education and learning.
* The *Puranas* preserved the traditions, legends, moral codes, religious, and philosophical principles. They are eighteen in number.
* The *Smritis* are metrical texts containing the rules and regulations and laws for the guidance and governance of the society.
* *Smritis* are based on *dharmasutras* and *grihyasutras* of Vedic literature. They are written in verse.
* Some additions and alterations have been done to make *Smritis* suitable to the changing conditions of society.
* The commentaries on the *Smritis* were written after the Gupta period.
* The compilation of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* was completed by the 4th century A.D.
* Kalidas has written the best works in poetry, drama as well as in prose. His *kavyas* such as *Meghaduta, Raghuvamsa,* and *Kumarasambhava*, and dramas such as *Abhijnashakuntalam* are the best literary works of this time and it is considered as the best even today. These works have been translated into many languages.
* Kalidas adorned the court of Chandragupta-II, the king of Ujjayini, who was popular as Vikramaditya.

**Inscriptions as Source**

A few inscriptions of the period are −

* + The Allahabad pillar inscription composed by Harisen;
  + Mandsor inscription composed by Vatsabhatt; and
  + Junagarh rock inscription, Mehrauli Pillar inscription, Aihole inscription composed by Ravikriti.
* These all inscriptions (listed above) consist most of the characteristics features of Sanskrit kavya.
* The most notable in the field of drama were Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidas, and Bhavabhuti.
* *Mrichchakatika* (written by Sudraka), is considered one of the best plays of ancient India. This play is about the love of a Brahman with the beautiful daughter of a courtesan.
* Vishakhadatta had written two plays, namely *Mudrarakshasa* and *Devichandraguptam*.
* Famous plays written by Kalidas are *Malavikagnimitram, Abhijnanashakuntalam,* and *Vikramorvasiyam*.
* *Uttararama-charita* and *Malati-Madhava* were written by Bhavabhuti.
* *Panchatantra*, written by Vishnu Sharma, is one of the most famous works of this period. It was translated into Persian and Arabic in the 8th century A.D. and has been translated into almost all European languages by the time.
* The popular work *Hitopadesa* is based on the Panchatantra.
* *Harshacharita* is the biography of Harsha written by Banabhatta. It is an outstanding work of the period.
* The development of Sanskrit grammar (based on Panini and Patanjali) was also seen in this period.
* Bhartrihari composed three Shatakas. He had also written a commentary on the *Mahabhasya* of Patanjali.
* The compilation of the *Amarakosha* by Amarasimha is memorable work of this period. Amarasimha was a popular personality in the court of Chandragupta II.
* The Prakrit was popular language of the Gupta period (as it was earlier).
* The *Svetambara* Jain canon have been written in Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit.
* The religious texts of the *Digambara* Jain (of south India) were written in the *Maharashtri* and *Sauraseni* Prakrits.
* The commentaries on Buddhist texts were written in Pali.
* *‘Prakritaprakasha’* written by Vararuchi and *‘Prakritalakshana’* written by Chanda are the well-known grammar works on Prakrit and Pali language.
* ‘*Katyayanaprakarna*’ is a Pali grammar book.

**Foreign Accounts**

* **Fa-Hien**, the Chinese pilgrim with four other monks, came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II.
* Fa-Hien came to India through land route *via* central Asia and Kashmir and traveled across north India.
* Fa-Hien stayed three years at Patliputra and here he learned the Sanskrit language.
* Fa-Hien was interested only in Buddhism; however, he gave an idea of general peace and welfare during Gupta’s court.
* **Hiuen-Tsang**, another Chinese traveler, visited India during Harsha's reign. He spent thirteen years in India, in which eight years, he stayed in Harsha's kingdom.
* Hiuen-Tsang had studied at Nalanda University. He visited various Indian kingdoms and mentioned about their condition. His book ***“Si-yu-ki”*** is a precious source of ancient Indian history.
* Hiuen-Tsang was honoured by Harshavardhana of Kanauj and Bhaskarvarma of Assam.
* **I-tsing**, a Chinese traveler, came to India *via* sea route. He spent many years in Sumatra and Sri Vijaya and learned Buddhism.
* I-tsing stayed at Nalanda for ten years and studied and translated Buddhist texts.
* I-tsing compiled a Sanskrit Chinese dictionary and translated a number of Sanskrit texts.
* I-tsing mentioned about Buddhist Religion as Practised in India. He gave a detailed account of Buddhism and general condition of India and Malaya.

**Economy in Gupta Period**

* India had developed an advanced system of agriculture, industry, and trade long before the rise of the imperial Guptas.
* The economic stability and prosperity facilitates all-round cultural progress made during this period.
* The agriculture system was well developed and scientific methods were used to increase agricultural production.
* The *Amarakosha* and *Brihat Samhita* contain special chapters on the study of plants and gardens, forest, crops, manure, etc.
* Various branches of industry had developed because of the abundance of raw materials and the skill and enterprise of the artisans and the craftsmen.
* The literary works also describe a large variety of clothing such as cotton, silk, wool, and linen.
* Hiuen-Tsang described the classification of Indian clothing materials under the heads as - silk, cotton, linen, wool, and goat hair.
* *Amarakosha* mentions various terms used for the finer and coarser varieties of cloth as well as for unbleached and bleached silk.
* Ajanta wall paintings also exposed different techniques of weaving.
* The major centres of textiles production were Banaras, Mathura, Dashapura, and Kamarupa.
* The Mandsor inscription gives details about the guilds of silk weaver and corporate activities of the period.
* Ivory work flourished. A seal found in the excavation at Bhita reveals about the guilds of ivory workers.
* The leather industry also flourished. Leather boots and shoes were shown in the contempary sculptures and paintings.
* The art of the jewelery was in the advanced condition. The *Brihat Samhita* describes twenty-two jewels. Jewels were used at this period for a large variety of purposes.
* *Ratna pariksha* mentioned the science of testing gems. Technical sciences were utilised for the manufacture of metals.
* Vatsyayana mentions about *Ruparatnapariksha, Dhatuveda,* and *Maniragakarajnanam* i.e. testing of precious stones, the smelting of metals, and the technology of jewels accordingly.
* Hiuen-Tsang also mentioned that brass, gold, and silver were produced in abundance.
* The Mehrauli iron pillar (of Gupta period) is the best example of metal workmanships. The seals, gold, and silver coins of this period also reflect the advance stage of the metal industry.
* The ship building industry was also well developed in Gupta period that facilitated trade and communication activities.
* Smritis described in detail the laws of partnership, contract, right and duties of the individual members of the guild, and structure of guild that corroborated by contemporary literature and inscriptions.
* The seals and inscriptions mention about the legends *Sreshthi-kulika-nigama* and *Sreshthisarthavaha- kulika-nigama*. These permanent endowments reveal the function of the guilds in the capacity of banks as well as confirm their stable position in terms of business stability.
* Public works were undertaken and executed by the state as well as by the guilds.
* The repairs of *Sudarshana* lake dam and the connected irrigation canal in the province of Saurashtra were carried out by provincial governor Parnadatta and his son Chakrapalita during the rule of Skandagupta.

**Trade and commerce**

* Trade was carried on both through the land as well as the coastal routes.
* India had trade relations with both the eastern and the western countries.
* India maintained regular maritime relation with Sri Lanka, Persia, Arabia, Byzantine Empire, Africa, and even further west.
* India also developed commercial relations with China, Burma, and South East Asia.
* The important trade items were silk, spices of various kind, textiles, metals, ivory, sea produce, etc.
* Some important **sea ports** of the Gupta period were −
  + Tamralipti,
  + Arikamedu,
  + Kaveripattnam,
  + Barbaricum,
  + Muziris,
  + Pratishthana,
  + Sopara, and
  + Brighukachchha.
* All these ports (enumerated above) were well connected through inland routes from all parts of India.
* According to Fa-Hien, people of the 'Middle Kingdom' were prosperous and happy in the beginning of the 5th century and he also mentioned the similar account of prosperity and peace in India.
* People were maintaining a high standard of living and luxury of the town life.
* The land grants were given to Brahmans, temples, *viharas, mathas* to run the educational institutions and other social welfare activities.
* The tradition of land grants for the charitable purposes continued into the medieval period as well. These were known as *Madad-i-mash, Suyarghal*, etc.

## **Religion**

The Gupta Empire was one of the most prosperous during its time. The royal family encouraged arts and literature and advancement in math and science. They were also very liberal when it came to religion.

Buddhism and Hinduism were both widely practiced during the Gupta Empire. The ideas and features of Hinduism have aided the religion in surviving over time. The idealistics of Buddhism led to its decline in the Gupta Empire. It was widely practiced religion in the Gupta Empire and was important in ritual making. Jainism, another less practiced religion, was unchanged during the Gupta Empire. It’s main support was from the merchant communities in India. Although Buddhism gradually declined with in the Indian region, it spread beyond the frontiers of India first to central parts of Asia and then to China and also to South-East Asia.

A far more important development of the 5th century was the emergence of a religious group associated with the worship of women deities and fertility cults. The influence of this group lead to the evolution or a new branch of Buddhism in the 7th century called vajrayana of Thunderbolt Vehicle Buddhism. In this Buddhism female counterparts came to be added to the male figures known as taras. This particular facet of Buddhism still exists today in Nepal and Tibet.  
During the Gupta era, Hinduism developed some distinct characteristics which are incorporated into the religion. One of these is the worship of images which was favored of the use of sacrifices. The sacrifices of the older days became symbolic sacrifices to the images in the poojas, a prayer ritual used to honor one or more deities. This led to the lack of use of the priests who were dominant in sacrifices because they were no longer needed. The difficulty of enforcing the sacred laws due to the ever changing public allowed a more broad frame of difference to be involved at the four ends of man-religion and social law (dharma), economic welfare (artha), pleasure (kama) and salvation of the soul (moksha). Then onward it was maintained that a correct balance of the first three ends could lead to the fourth.

Those who practiced Hinduism to a serious extent eventually broke into two sects came into existence--Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Vaishnavism was mostly prevalent in northern India while the Shaivism in southern India. At this time the tantric (liberation of consciousness) beliefs had left their mark on Hindu religion. Shakti clans came into existence with the subtle ideal that being that  males can only be activated by being united with a female. It was then that Hindu gods began to have wives and both came to be worshiped by Hindus.

Jainism remained unchanged during the Gupta era. Jainism is a religion that teaches the liberation and bliss of renunciation. This religion is similar to Buddhism. Both religions believe in the idea of renunciation and the idea of reincarnation. They both associate with karma. These similarities are due to the fact that they both began in India therefore intermingled and gained similarities.

**Culture & Society**

The royal families in the Gupta Empire were the liberal kind. They set up systems so they could have overall power but the leave the work to someone else. For example, there were forms of leadership in the provinces, districts, cities, and villages. Gupta culture included literature, science, arts, and math. The royal families encouraged advancement all around. There was also a rise of Buddhist and Jain literature written in Sanskrit.

Trade and commerce flourished during the Gupta rule. Districts monitored trade between the region. The people of Gupta produced wheat, rice, sugarcane, jute, oilseeds, cotton and spices. Many people were wealthy during this empire. There was little crime. Those of wealth showed off with fine jewelry and clothing. Common folk wore clothing of cotton. The cities encouraged the advancement of math and science. During this time, Samudragupta had been a king and was intent on conquering other kingdoms under the ideology dharanibandh. Dharanibandh was the idea of uniting India under one political system. Samudragupta’s son carried the same ideal, Chandragupta II, shared the same ideal.

The men and women were initially both able to participate in local government but soon it those who could participate in government were only the males. The social system was divided into castes on the basis of wealth. Men would choose often marry women of lower castes and women could choose similarly for their partner. During this time, polygamy was outlawed for both men and women and the royal family.  
The Gupta era was a new beginning of literature dedicated to rulers as a patronage. The rise of Sanskrit also occurred then during the period mainly in the literature being produced.

Max-Muller, Sanskrit scholar, has called the Gupta era as a Renaissance Period for Sanskrit. Harishena the Sandhibigrahak was the Allahabad Prasasti. He admired Samudragupta who was a novice poet. Another prominent figure during this time was Virasena, a poet during Chandragupta II’s time. He was also a mathematician and Jain philosopher.

Architecture was constructed by the Guptas were in the form of temples and monuments. They featured various Hindu gods. They included pillars and edifices that made the structure visually appealing. This age saw the use of permanent materials in the shrines and monuments with bricks and stones favored over the commonly used bamboo. The royal Gupta palace in Pataliputra was also an incredible piece of architecture. Exquisite architecture was also featured in other big cities in Gupta.

Art in the Gupta age was uninfluenced by foreign ideals. The art sometimes depicted scenes from the Buddhist religion or other religions for that matter. The paintings featured bold bright colors and were described as highly advanced and contained a lot of human emotion. They were gracefully posed and called charming and full of dignity.

The culture of the Gupta era was unlike those of any other kingdoms because their religion weighed heavily into their culture. The culture of the Gupta was similar to the people rich in rituals and tradition and refined and dignified.

# Decline of Guptas

* The Gupta dynasty continued to be in existence for more than 100 years after the death of Skandagupta in A.D. 467.
* Skandagupta was succeeded by his brother Purugupta. Nothing is known about his achievements.
* **Budhagupta** was the only Gupta ruler who continued to rule over a large part of the empire.
* Budhagupta inscriptions have been found from Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.
* Huna’s leader, Toramana attacked Gupta Empire in A.D. 512. He conquered a large part of north India up to Gwalior and Malwa.
* Toramana was succeeded by his son Mihira kula. He founded his capital at Sakala (Sialkot).
* Huna ruled in India for a very short period, but the Gupta Empire suffered much from it.
* Huna rule was one of the shortest instances of foreign rule over India.
* Hiuen-Tsang describes that Mihirkula invaded Magadha. He was defeated and captured by the Gupta king Baladitya. It is also mentioned that Mihirkula’s life was saved at the intervention of the queen mother of Magadha.
* Inscription from Malwa mentioned that Yasovarman was a powerful local ruler of Malwa. He also defeated Mihirakula (Huna Ruler).

**Vakatakas**

In early India, the chronology and genealogy of dynasties cannot be established with absolute certainty, as the source material is inadequate to postulate a definite chronology. The Vakataka dynasty is one among them. Therefore, the details available about them are mostly conjectural. In the absence of ascertainable details, we have to depend on conjectures.

* The Vakatakas, who were probably the feudatories of the Satavahanas, became the most important political power in the Deccan and Central India, after the disappearance of their overlords for a period of three centuries from 3rd century to the 6th century AD.
* Their original home is not yet very satisfac­torily established and their origin is shrouded in mystery. Some scholars hold the view that they were Brahmins and their original home was Malwa. Others are of the view that they came from South India or the Eastern Deccan. However, as most of their inscriptions have been found in Madhya Pradesh, R.C. Majumdar concludes that their original home could be today’s Madhya Pradesh.
* Though the Vakatakas at one stage of their existence, ruled over dominions extending from former Bundelkhand in the north to Hyderabad in the south, the core area of their rule appears to be confined to modern Madhya Pradesh. Until recently, the period of their rule was very controversial but the Poona copper plate of Prabhavathi Gupta clinched the issue by proving that the Vakatakas were the contemporaries of the Guptas.
* However, it is interesting to note that they do not figure in the list of vanquished rulers subdued by Samudragupta. Though on a smaller scale, the Vakatakas too made significant contributions to Indian culture by adding substantially to the famous gallery of cave temples and paintings at Ajanta. The founder of the Vakataka dynasty was Vindhyasakti. He is said to have ruled from Purika, in the last quarter of 3rd century AD.
* He is credited to have extended his political power by occupying Malwa. He is also said to have performed a number of Vedic sacrifices and thus revived Brahmanical rituals, which were in abeyance during the rule of the later Satavahanas.
* Vindhayasakti’s son and successor Pravarasena I, who is said to have ruled from AD 280 to 340, is considered the founder of the real power and greatness of the Vakatakas. As he assumed the title of Samrat and as he happened to be the only ruler who assumed that title, it is believed that he must have enlarged his kingdom in all directions. His son Gautamiputra married the daughter of Bhanaga of the Bharashiva dynasty. By this marriage alliance, he appears to have improved the political stature of the Vakataka dynasty.
* Thus, by military exploits and matrimonial alliances, Pravarasena, extended his kingdom from Bundelkhand in the north to Hyderabad in the south and to commemorate his victories, he performed an Asvamedha sacrifice and one Vajapeya sacrifice. Pravarasena had four sons who were ruling independently in separate provinces. The Puranas mention that on the death of Pravarasena, his four sons divided the empire and declared their independence. It appears that Gautamiputra died during the lifetime of his father and hence, his son Rudrasena I succeeded his grandfather Pravarsena to the throne and ruled from Nandivardhana, near modern Nagpur.
* Sarvasena, another son of Pravarasena, started ruling independently from Vastugulma, which is identified as modern Bassien in Vidarbha as his capital. We do not have any knowledge of the other two sons of Pravarasena. Thus, by AD 340, the Vakatakas were divided into two lines, one ruling from Nandivardhana and the other ruling from Vastugulma.
* In spite of these happening in the Vakataka kingdom, the contem­porary Gupta rulers never attacked the Vakatakas. It could be because the Guptas thought that the Vakatakas would be useful to them in defeating the Western Kashtrapas. Rudrasena is said to have ruled from AD 340 to 365 but as no inscription of this is available, nothing can be said about the events that took place during his reign.
* He is known to have been a worshipper of Lord Mahabhairava, another name of Siva. Rudrasena was followed by his son Prithvisena I, who ruled from AD 365 to 390. He appears to have spent his time in consolidating his kingdom and the chief feature of his reign appears to be a political alliance between Chandragupta II and himself Together they defeated the Saka Satraps of Malwa and Kathiawar.
* It was during his reign that the Guptas and the Vakatakas entered into a matrimonial alliance. Prithvisena’s son Rudrasena II, the crown prince was married to Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II. Prithivisena also was a Saiva like his father. Rudrasena II ruled only for a period of five years from AD 390-395. As he died prematurely leaving behind two minor sons Diwakarasena and Damodarasena, his wife Prabhavatigupta ruled as the regent until AD 410. Unfortunately, Diwakarasena also died prematurely so that Damodarasena became the ruler.
* Damodarasena ruled for a period of 35 years and assumed the title of Pravarasena II. A dozen copper-plate grants of his were discovered in different parts of Vidarbha. He is credited with the founding of a new capital at Pravarapura, which is identified as Paonar in the present-day Wardha district. He was also a poet in Prakrit and was the author of Setubandhakavya that won appreciation from contemporary poets and scholars. He entered into a matrimonial alliance with the contemporary Kadamba ruler as his son Narendrasena was married to a princess of Kuntala, Ajihata Bhattarika, the daughter of Kakutsavarman of the Kadamba dynasty.
* Narendrasena ruled for a decade from 455-465 AD. He had to face the invasion of Nala Bhavadottavarman both in the beginning and at the end of his reign. In-between, he made some conquests and yet he had to face the stiff opposition from Nalas. His son Prithvisena II succeeded Narendrasena.
* He is credited with having retrieved the fallen fortunes of the Vakatakas. He had to face thrice the invasion of Harisena of Vastugulma branch and the invasion of Bhavadottavarman of the Nala dynasty. He also appears to have fought with the Traikutaka king, Dahrasena of southern Gujarat. He is the known last ruler of Nandivardhana branch of the Vakataka dynasty. We may conclude that after his death, during the time of his successors, Harisena of the Vastugulma branch conquered them and united that kingdom with his own kingdom.
* The founder of the Vastugulma line of the Vakatakas was Sarvasena, the son of Pravarasena I. It is believed that his successor Vindhyasena or Vindhyasakti ruled over the southern part of Vidarbha, the northern part of Hyderabad state and some other adjoining territories. He is said to have defeated a Kadamba ruler of Kuntala. He ruled for four decades. His son and successor Pravarasena II appears to have ruled for a period of fifteen years. Devasena, who was a pleasure-seeking ruler, followed him but luckily a very capable minister, Hasthibhoja, served him. His successor Harisena II was the ablest and the greatest ruler of this line, who ruled from AD 480 to 515.
* He united the two Vakataka kingdoms and extended his territories by conquering Kuntala, Avanti, Kalinga, Konkan and Andhra. Dandin, a poet of 6th century AD described Harisena as “powerful, truthful and bountiful, glorious, lofty, and a penetrating critic of ethical and economic compendia”.
* His kingdom extended from Malwa in the north to south Maharashtra in the south and from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west. With the death of Harisena II, the glory of the Vakatakas ended and the Nalas, the Kadambas, the Kalachuris and Yasodharman of Malwa occupied their territory.
* Walter M. Spink observes that what Harisena did was to stave off the seam of decay he presided over the final thrust of the Classical Age by his patronage of the Ajanta cave paintings. As the Western Chalukyas of Badami never claimed to have defeated the Vakatakas, the Vakataka power must have disappeared by the middle of the 6th century AD. The Vakatakas played an effective role in the political game of the Deccan for more than two and a half centuries, and made significant contributions to the growth of culture.
* The silence over Samudragupta’s exploits against the Vakatakas in the Allahabad pillar Prasasti and the matrimonial alliance contracted by Chandragupta II made some scholars postulate a theory that the Vakatakas were also powerful contempo­raries of the Guptas. It is also suggested that their rule and achievements were overshadowed by the Guptas’ glory and grandeur. Further, the revival of Brahmanical religion is also attributed to them as they performed many Asvamedhas and other religious ceremonies and made substantial land grants to Brahmans.
* At the same time, it is also said that they were liberal in outlook and patronized Buddhism and literature, and kings like Pravarasena II and Sarvasena were themselves poets of great repute in Prakrit. Pravarasena II is the celebrated author of Setubandhakavya and Sarvasena was the author of Harivijaya, another work of considerable merit in Prakrit. A style by name Vaidharbhariti was developed in Sanskrit during their rule, which was praised by the poets, Kalidasa, Banabhatta and Dandin.
* They are also credited with having built a few temples in Tigwa and Nachanakuthara. They do not however, show their individual style but indicate continuation of Indo-Persepolitan style. They made a remarkable contribution in the field of painting and Ajanta cave numbers XVI, XVII and XIX are the best examples of Vakataka excellence in the field of painting and in particular the painting Mahabhinishkramana.
* Not only the Vakataka rulers, but their ministers or governors Hastibhoja and Varahadeva too extended their benevolent patronage to the Ajanta cave painters. Thus, the Vakatakas leave behind them as patrons of art and letters, a stamp of their own.