

## UNIT 127 – UPSC - Indian History - Reign of Samudragupta

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[AD 335-380]

#### Harishena's Inscription

Samudragupta was the son of Chandragupta I and though the exact date of his birth is not known, it seems he must have ascended the throne after the death of his father Chandragupta I in AD 335. The information about his reign is on an inscription engraved on a pillar at Allahabad. The text of this inscription was recorded by Harishena, the court poet of Samudragupta. Part of the inscription was lost in the course of time. Harishena's inscription tells us about Samudragupta's various conquests and small kingdoms existing at that time. Samudragupta also left an extensive coinage which supports the information of the inscription.

#### Samudragupta's Conquest

Samudragupta was a great warrior. His passion of conquest was so great that he did not rest till he captured almost whole of India. It seems Samudragupta first waged wars against the neighbouring kingdoms of Shichchhatra (Rohilkhand) and Padmavati (in Central India), then ruled by Achyuta and Nagasena. Then he incorporated in the Gupta empire the kingdom of Kota kings by defeating him. He also waged wars against tribal states like those of Malvas, the Yaudheyas, the Arjunayanas, the Maduras and the Abhiras. The descendants of Kushanas, many chieftains of Sakas, the Ceylonese hastened to propitiate the great Gupta by offering homage and tribute or presents.

Samudragupta's daring adventure was his military expedition to the south along the coast of the Bay of Bengal. He defeated Mahendra of Khosla, Mantaraja of Kurala, Mahendragiri of Pithapuram, Svamidatta of Kottura, Damana of Erandapalla, Vishnugupta - the Pallava king of Kanchi, Kubera of Devarashtrain the Vizagapatam district and Dhananjaya of Kushthalapur possible in North Arcot. Samudragupta did not go beyond the river Krishna.

Towards the west, Samudragupta subdued Palaghat, Maharashtra and Khandesh. He did not annex any part of the Deccan to his empire as he knew that it would be difficult to control those territories situated so far from Patliputra.

Samudragupta's territories extended from the Himalayas in the north to the river Narbada in the south and from the Brahamaputra river in the east to the Yamuna river in the west. Then there were other kingdoms like Assam, Nepal, Devaka, Kartipura.

## Samudragupta's Reign



Samudragupta is considered as one of the greatest rulers in Indian history. He is also compared to Alexander or Napoleon as a conqueror. He performed *Ashwamedha Yajna* (horse sacrifice) after defeating nine kings in the north and twelve kings in the south to underline the importance of his conquest of almost the whole of India. He also assumed the title of *Maharajadhiraja* (King of Kings) and *Chakravartin* (Universal Monarch).

Samudragupta was not only a great warrior but also a great patron of art and literature. He gathered around himself a galaxy of poets and scholars, the most prominent ones being Harishena, Vasubandhu and Asanga. He himself was a great poet and musician. In one of his coins, he is shown playing the Veena. Samudragupta was a staunch believer of Hinduism and was a worshiper of Lord Vishnu. He also respected other religions like Buddhism and also allowed the Buddhist king of Ceylon to build a monastery at Bodh-Gaya.

