

UNIT 42 – UPSC - Ancient India- Gupta and Post-Gupta (NCERT)

This article on ancient India covers Gupta and post-Gupta rulers. The compilation based on NCERT texts will also help you learn the cultural history of India.

NCERT History Text- Standard 6

The reference material for this post is NCERT History text for Class 6 (Our past -1). Only main points from each chapter is compiled below. Our advice is to first go through the respective NCERT text and use this compilation then for quick revision. We believe that this listing will come handy during exam time.

New Empires and Kingdoms

Guptas

- Information about their history through inscriptions and coins.
- Chandragupta was followed by Samudragupta.
- Samudragupta, Gupta ruler (1700 years ago, ie AD 300). Harisena was his court poet.
- Chandragupta, his father, was the first ruler of the Gupta dynasty to adopt the grand title of maharaj- adhiraja, a title that Samudragupta also used.
- “Prashasti” = inscription ‘in praise of’. Prashasti about Samudragupta was inscribed on the Asokan pillar at Allahabad (Prayag).
- Four different kinds of rulers in different parts of India/Nepal/Srilanka either surrendered to him or made alliances. (Eg- Aryavartha, Dakshinapatha, gana sanghas etc).
- Main centers of Guptas- Prayag (Allahabad, UP), Ujjain (Avanti, MP) and Pataliputra (Patna, Bihar).
- Samudragupta’s son = Chandragupta II. Kalidasa and Aryabhata adorned his court. He overcame the last Sakas.

Harshavardhana & Harshacharita

- Information about their history through biographies.
- He belonged to Pushyabhuti Dynasty when Gupta dynasty was fading.

- His court poet, Banabhatta, wrote his biography, the Harshacharita, in Sanskrit.
- Xuan Zang, spent a lot of time at Harsha's court and left a detailed account of what he saw.
- Harsha took over the kingdom of Kanauj, and then led an army against the ruler of Bengal.
- Although he was successful in the east, and conquered both Magadha and Bengal, he was not as successful elsewhere.
- He tried to cross the Narmada to march into the Deccan, but was stopped by a ruler belonging to the Chalukya dynasty, Pulakeshin II.

The Pallavas, Chalukyas and Pulakeshin

- The Pallavas and Chalukyas were the most important ruling dynasties in south India during this period.
- The kingdom of the Pallavas around their capital, Kanchipuram, to the Kaveri delta, while that of the Chalukyas [Aihole, the capital] was centred around the Raichur Doab, between the rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra.
- The Pallavas and Chalukyas frequently raided one another's lands which were prosperous ones.
- The best-known Chalukya ruler was Pulakeshin II. We know about him from a prashasti, composed by his court poet Ravikirti.
- Ultimately, both the Pallavas and the Chalukyas gave way to new rulers belonging to the Rashtrakuta and Chola dynasties.
- Land revenue remained important for these rulers, and the village remained the basic unit of administration
- There were military leaders who provided the king with troops whenever he needed them. These men were known as samantas.
- The inscriptions of the Pallavas mention a number of local assemblies. These included the sabha, which was an assembly of brahmin land owners.
- And the nagaram was an organisation of merchants.
- The Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian noticed the plight of those who were treated as untouchables by the high and mighty.

Buildings, Paintings and Books



- Iron pillar – during the time of Chandra – Gupta.
- Stupas (mound) – Relic casket may contain bodily remains of the Buddha or his followers or the things they used. Pradakshina patha was laid around the stupa. (Eg- Sanchi, Amaravathi)
- Cave temples.
- Rock cut temples.
- Hindu temples- Garbhagriha = place where the image of the chief deity was placed. Shikara = tower made on the top of garbhagriha to mark this out as a sacred place. Mandapa = hall where people could assemble.
- Examples of early temples - Bhitargaon, UP (AD 500) – made of baked brick and stone, Mahabalipuram – monolithic temples, Aihole Durga temple (AD 600).
- PS- Association of ivory workers paid for one of the beautiful gateways at Sanchi.
- Jain monastery in Orissa.
- Paintings – Ajanta caves – Buddhist monks.
- Books – Silappadikaram (by Ilango Adikal, AD 200) and Manimekalai (by Sattanar, AD 600), Meghaduta (by Kalidasa).
- Puranas – were meant to be heard by every body. Believed to be compiled by Vyasa.
- Jataka and Panchatantra stories