CONCLUSION

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION
AS GLENEED FROM THE GUPTA COINS

Gupta coins provide us with welcome information about various aspects of contemporary social, cultural and economic life of Northern India. As a matter of fact, they supplement and modify our knowledge of Gupta society, economy and culture as may be gleaned from the inscriptions of the Imperial Guptas and the classical Sanskrit literature, both religious and profane.

With regard to the state of society the Gupta coinage in the first instance throws a flood of light on the religious belief of the monarchs as well as of the general people. That the Gupta monarchs were great patrons of Vaishnavism, which is known from other sources, is corroborated by the numismatic evidence. Legend signifying the Vaishnava faith like Paramabhasavata, and the figure of Vishnu and his sacred vahana Garuda are seen on the Gupta coins. From the Asvamedha-type coins we come to know that some Vedic sacrifices were prevalent in the contemporary society. Again, the depiction of the God Kārttikeya on the coins of Kumāragupta I shows that Kumāragupta had special devotion for the God of war. The Kushānas depicted on their coins the deities of different pantheons, for the reverse device. It has been mentioned earlier that the Guptas were great patrons of Vaishnavism. Naturally they depicted Vishnu on their coins either in theriomorphic or in anthropomorphic or even in symbolic
forms. Of course, some other allied Brähmanical divinities, viz. Lakshmi, Goddess on Lion, Gāṇḍā and Kārttikeya, have been depicted on their coins.

From Gupta coins we get some glimpses of the social customs. On the Chandragupta-Kumārādevī-type coins we see the king as offering a ring to his spouse Kumārādevī. This ring offering custom is generally believed to be European in origin. But the episode of Dushyanta offering a ring to Sakuntalā as a promise of marriage as recorded in the Abhijñāna-Sakuntalam of Kālidāsa, clearly shows that the custom was also prevalent in India.

For obvious reasons, Gupta coins are not likely to give us any idea about the life of the common people. But they throw some welcome light on the past times of the royal personages who are regularly depicted on them. That the Gupta monarchs took much interest in hunting is proved by the Tiger-slayer, Lion-slayer and Rhinoceros-slayer types of coins. Again, the Horse-man type coins of the Gupta monarchs indicate that they were fond of Horse-riding. Moreover, the Lyrist-type coins of Samudra-gupta and Kumāragupta I which show them as playing on a lyre make it clear that the playing on lyre was a favourite pastime of some Gupta kings. However, the Lyrist type coins of Samudragupta confirm the inscriptionsal claims of Samudragupta’s excellence and competence in musical instruments.

The Gupta coins also make us to form some ideas about the life-style of the monarchs. The depiction of the furniture like
modā (wicker-stool), conch, throne and some ornaments like bow and arrow, and also the sword makes it clear that they were used for regular purpose. The figures of both men and women as depicted on coins are adorned with sewn garments. From the coins it is also evident that the kings, Queens or even the Goddesses are shown as adorning dhoti, sari and also veil. But the voluptuous breasts of the Goddesses which are often kept bare arise a question whether this was a social practice.

The Gupta coinage also throws some important light on the art and sculpture of the Golden Age. The originality and creative genius of the Gupta artists are reflected not only in the sculptural specimens of the age, but also in the coins of the period. It is true that in its initial stage the Gupta mint-artists were inspired by the bewildering varieties of Kushana types, but gradually they shook-off the influence of their foreign predecessors and introduced purely Indian elements in the devices of the coins.

In Chapter III we have tried to show in some details the varied iconic postures of the deities, who have been depicted on the coins. In our study we have endeavoured to bring out the artistic qualities and creative impulse of the artists of the Gupta mints/delineated the Gods and Goddesses after a happy blending of both foreign and indigenous features. In the initial stage, we observe some incongruity in delineating the figures of the deities, but slowly and gradually the Gupta artists overcame the foreign influence and made a sincere effort to represent the deity
according to their own ideas. But curiously enough, even up to the end of the Gupta rule we often see the Goddess as holding the cornucopiae, which no Indian Goddess is known to hold.

Further, the importance of the Gupta coins from the point of view of cultural history lies in the fact that the Gupta mint artists evinced a great power of assimilation and synthesis while they conformed to certain numismatic conventions, established by their foreign predecessors. They also slowly but progressively asserted themselves and created a pattern, which speaks of their creative urge and high artistic ability.

It is generally known that the gold coinage in India owes its origin mainly to the Kushānas, though the literary evidences seem to indicate that gold coin, or rather some sort of medium of exchange in gold, was known even in the Vedic period. It has been suggested by scholars that, extensive volume of trade with the Roman world induced the Kushānas to issue gold coins for easy convertibility with the Roman 'denarius'. Indeed, some scholars think that the gold coins of the Kushānas were minted out of the Roman gold received through trade. Whether the same is true of the Gupta gold coins has never been examined in depth. In any case, the source of gold for the Gupta mints has still eluded comprehension of scholars. It is supposed that though during the Gupta's the trade contact with the Roman world dwindled to a considerable extent, there was possibly regular and wide-ranging trade contact with China and South-East Asia, in which seems to
have enjoyed a favourable balance of trade. This would explain the issuance of such innumerable types and varieties of gold coins by the Guptas. There should, however, be no doubt that the Guptas fully utilised the indigenous sources of gold like the gold mines of South India. Again, according to Dr. U. N. Thakur Suvamsakundya referred to in Kautilya's Arthasastra and located in Kāmarupa (Assam) probably also provided some gold for coining purposes.

From the foregoing discussion it appears that gold derived from both foreign and indigenous sources helped the Guptas issue gold coins in such extensive scale. Besides trade and commerce, the Gupta coins throw light on some other aspects of economic life, viz. crafts and industries of North India under the Guptas. In the course of our study we have seen that the kings, queens, and even Goddesses have been depicted on the coins as adorned with various jewelleries. In all likelihood, gold, silver and precious and semi-precious stones were the chief materials for these ornaments. We may thus conclude that the manufacture of jewellery flourished at that time. The rare artistic excellence of many Gupta gold coins is itself the most tangible proof of the high craftsmanship of the Gupta goldsmiths.
Notes

2. CGE, Pl. III, 6-12; and Pl.XIII, 7-10.
3. Ibid., Pl. XIII, 11-14.
4. EMG (GD), Pl. III, 1-16.
5. Fleet, OBC, Ins. Ind., III, p. 8, 1. 27.
7. Cf. Ibid., Pl. IX, 1-5.