CONCLUSION
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A careful perusal of the foregoing chapters has made us to reach on certain general conclusions. After the decline of the Kushana power several small states came into existence in northern India. In these circumstances sometimes towards the end of the third century A.D. Maharaja Srigupta of Gupta dynasty also carved out an independent kingdom for himself which had control over the region around Varanasi in eastern Uttar Pradesh. This family has gradually built its strength. By the time of Chandragupta I, the grandson of Srigupta, it achieved a sovereign status ruling over a considerable part of eastern India including Magadha, Prayag and Saket and during the period of Chandragupta I’s successors viz. Samudragupta and Chandragupta II it emerged as the greatest imperial power of the age. Political strategies adopted by Gupta rulers in order to extend their empire included diplomacy and military expedition. Guptas contracted matrimonial alliances with some of the contemporary powerful ruling families, Lichchavis, Nagas, Vakatakas, and Kadambas were important among them. Through the power of their sword they acquired control over other neighbouring and foreign states. Samudragupta’s military exploits are clearly stated in his Allahabad Pillar inscription. If the description given
in this inscription is to be believed, it can be said that Samudragupta unified the greater part of India and his power was felt as far as Ceylon. In the inscription his conquests have been detailed to show how politically Samudragupta suppressed different powers around his kingdom. Some kings of north India were killed in the battle and their principalities were annexed to the Gupta empire. With some of them he contracted alliances while towards some others he adopted the political ideology of Dharmavijaya. They were defeated but reinstated in their kingdoms as feudatory kings. Agreements were also negotiated with such rulers they paid tributes, came to perform obeisance and acts of respectful services, gave their daughters in marriage to the Gupta emperor, executed his orders and requested him for the permission for the enjoyments of their own territories.

After Samudragupta when the integrity of the Gupta empire was threatened by the Sakas of western India it was saved by Chandragupta II who followed an aggressive policy to consolidate the empire. His Mehrauli Pillar inscription describes his imperial plans. He exterminated many subordinate states of the time of his father Samudragupta and extended his direct rule over them. He defeated Sakas and conquered western Malawa and Gujarat which remained under their rule for about three centuries. He broke the power of the
republican states and terminated their rule which survived for so many centuries despite being repeatedly attacked. In Chandragupta II’s period the Gupta empire extended from Himalaya in the north upto Narmada in south and its boundaries actually touched the waters of Arabian sea in the west and Bay of Bengal in the east. Besides, he also extended Gupta influence over the distant region of Bactria or Balkh in the north eastern Afghanistan are reestablished the prestige and glory of the Gupta empire. Despite the invasion of Pushyamitras and the Hunas, the empire remained intact during the rule of Kumaragupta I and Skandagupta who took strong and effective administrative measures to ensure the stability and integrity of the empire.

But after Skandagupta the Gupta power was gradually weakening. However, the Gupta emperors still occupied the imperial throne, but they had failed to maintain the position acquired by their predecessors. In this period feudatories began to assert their independence and the directly administered areas had turned into feudatory states because of the ambitious desires of Gupta officials appointed in those regions. The Maitraka dynasty is the best example for this fact. Second Huna attack sometimes after A.D. 484 accelerated the process of decline of the Gupta imperial power. Thus, the Gupta empire which confined to Magadha and northern Bengal in its last days disintegrated by A.D. 550.
We find that right from the mouths of the Ganges in the east upto the Arabian sea in the west, the Gupta empire was being parceled out into small independent kingdoms. The substantial loss of territory and imperial authority of the Guptas was caused by their own erstwhile feudatories viz. the Maukharis, the Later Guptas and the Maitrakas who snatched from the hands of the Guptas considerable territories in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat.

Gupta feudatories acquired such power because from the beginning they had many rights in their territories. Some obligation were imposed on them by the Gupta emperors such as they had to pay tribute, personal homage and obeisance to the Gupta emperors. Some of them required imperial charter for administration over their own territories, they had to use Gupta era for dating their records and were not allowed to issue any coins of their own. Besides, they used to accompany their overlord in military campaigns. But as suggested by epigraphical evidences feudatories ruled in their kingdoms like independent kings. We have a vast treasure of copper plate grants issued by various Gupta feudatory dynasties and kingdoms viz. The Valkha kingdom who were among the earliest feudatories of the Gupta empire, the Maukharis, the Later Guptas, the Parivrajakas, the Uchchakalpas, the Maitrakas of Valabhi and the Aulikaras or Varmans of Dasapura. They
granted land and villages to brahmanas and religious institutions with fiscal and administrative rights. And for this they did not feel necessary to take the permission or to mention the name of their Gupta overlord to whom their kingdoms originally belonged. Some of the feudatories had even sub-feudatories under them. Their copper plate grants contain long list of officers which indicate the existence of developed administrative organization in their kingdoms. This system of government led to the decentralization of the administration and disintegration of the empire. Feudatories gradually accumulated power and resources and at the first sign of the weakening of the central government they asserted their independence.

Even if the Gupta empire was not a centralized empire Gupta emperors made efforts to maintain uniformity of official style in title, terminology, etc. They attempted to give a uniform look to the administration of the whole Gupta empire. Thus, the feudatories who were allowed to flourish within the Gupta empire with their parallel governments adopted a similar form of administrative machinery. This was indeed a big achievement of the Gupta emperors, as we know that when the foundation of the Gupta empire was laid by Samudragupta it included various principalities varying in size, power and culture and had various categories of political organizations. There were Naga
kingdoms, republican states, Saka and Kushana states and there were several forest tribes all with different types of political and administrative setups. They existed in their respective regions for centuries and had laid their foundations broad and deep. Guptas gradually lowered local variations by merging some of these principalities into Gupta dominion and by introducing and encouraging a uniform pattern of government in others without interfering in their administrative independence.

We find a number of administrative officials, mentioned in the inscriptions. Mahasandhivigrahika, Mahabaladhikrita, Mahasvapati, Mahapilupati, Mahapratihara, Mahadandanayaka, Vinayasthitisthapaka, Kumaramatya, Amatya are some of the various officials connected with the personal staff with the paramount Gupta emperors, crown prince, prince as well as feudatories of the Gupta empire. It appears that most of the officers in the Gupta empire tended to become hereditary in character and that several functions were often discharged by the same officer.

Various administrative units referred to in the land grant charters. Bhukti, Vishaya and Grama are some of the units mentioned in most of the inscriptions along with Desa, Rasatra, Mandala, Vithi, Patta, Petha, Pathaka and Sthali, which are found in the inscriptions of some specific
regions. The *Grama* seems to have been the lowest unit of administration in all parts of the Gupta empire. However, there seems to have been regional variations in the pattern of administrative and territorial units. Along with the administrative units we also find a number of officials connected with these units, mentioned in these inscriptions. *Gopta* and *Uparika* were the governors of *Desa* and *Bhukti* respectively who were appointed by the emperor. *Vishayas* were headed by *Vishayapatis*, who were appointed by *Uparikas* while *Vithis* and Gramas were administered by *Ayuktakas* and *Gramika* respectively. *Purapala* was the head of town or city. At the provincial headquarters there were official establishments (*Adhikaranas*) of the *Uprikas* which comprised *Ranabhandagaradhikarana*, *Dandapasadhikarana*, *Vinayasthitisthapakadhikarana*. Besides, there were *Mahapratihara*, *Mahadandanayka*, *Bhatasvapati* etc. at the provincial level. *Kumaramatyas* were also appointed in different provinces either as the vigilant officers of the central government or as provincial officers. *Uparikas* were very powerful and had great authority over the provinces. Sometimes princes of royal family were also appointed to this post.

*Vishayapati* was appointed by *Uparika*. A number of copper plate inscriptions from the eastern part of the Gupta empire show that *Vishaya*
or district government was in the hands of a board formed by a representative body of all classes of the people of Vishaya. The board consisted of Nagarasreshthin, Sarthavaha, Prathamakulika, Prathamakayastha. Similarly Vithis and Gramas also had their own councils which comprised local influential people such as Vithi Mahattaras, Kutumbins, Kulikas and Grama Mahattaras. Besides there were Astakuladhikarana which represented eight or more village families. In addition to this non-official staff, there was official staff also at the Vishaya Vithi and Grama level which consisted of Saulkika, Agraharika, Gaulmika, Dhruvadhekarnika, Pustapala, Divira, Dandapasika, Kayastha, Aksapatadaladhikrita, chatas and bhatas etc. Local Adhikarnas with the help of these officials look after the administration. Land transaction formed an important part of their functions.

Land could not be transferred or alienated without the permission or sanction of the government. But as indicated by Gupta records land inspection, land measurement, boundary specification etc. were such works performed by local council including Mahattaras and others. The powers of local Adhikaranas were immense. Even the Vishayapati had to apply to the local Adhikarana for grant of village land. But central government did not interfered in these transactions. How the state
officials paid in the Gupta period? Whether they paid in cash or they were assigned land grants in return of their service, is not certain. Legal texts indicate that probably from this time onwards the idea was gaining ground that territorial units were meant for the enjoyment of local governors and officials. But in the early stage central control was effective enough to check it.

Epigraphical evidences suggest that Gupta period witnessed some political and administrative development which encouraged the decentralisation of political power and feudalisation of state structure. The practice of making land grants largely contributed in this process. In this period land and villages were frequently donated to priests and religious institutions both in the Gupta and the Vakataka empires. The grants were made in perpetuity with fiscal and administrative rights which created powerful intermediaries of politico-economic importance between the king and actual tiller of the soil and implies the permanent break-up of the integrity of the state.

As the land was granted with many privileges it led to the subjection of peasantry which was an important development connected with the socio-economic dimensions of feudalism. It can be explained by several factors. One of them was increased in the burden of taxation on the villagers. This is indicated by the long list of fiscal exemptions
recorded in the inscriptions which also included some new impositions such as *udranga, uparikara, halikakara* etc. and by the fact that donees had right to make new impositions under the terms ‘etcetera’ (*adi*) and all sources of income (*Samasta-pratyaya*). A second factor that undermined the position of the peasants was the impositions of forced labour (*visti*). Occasionally imposed by the ruling chiefs upon the villagers, forced labour was bound to prove oppressive from the last quarter of the sixth century A.D. when transferred to donees with the grants. Besides, in Gupta period the conditions of villages placed under the charge of village headman were not very different. In central and western India village headman who forced peasant women to work in his fields and house, was developing as a manorial lord. The right of subinfeudation was another factor which further worsened the condition of the peasants. The donees were authorized to enjoy the land, to get it enjoyed, to cultivate it and get it cultivated. The earliest epigraphical evidence of subinfeudation belongs to A.D. 375. Legal texts of the period refers to the existence of three stages of landed interests between the king and the actual tiller of the soil. This created a class of temporary peasants and also led to the replacement of old peasants. The practice mainly led to the servitude of the people was the transfer of cultivators and artisans along with the village granted to the donees.
People living in the villages were advised to stay on in the gifted villages. This led to peasant subjection and restriction on the mobility of peasants and artisans.

Self-sufficient economic units also arose in India as the result of land and village grants wherein beneficiaries were given several economic rights which cut the economic ties between central authority and the donated areas. This is indicated by the rarity of coins of common use from the Gupta period onwards. The volume of foreign trade had also increasingly declined by the end of the Gupta period when Byzantines acquired self-dependence in the production of silk. Whatever internal trade and commerce existed had to be fitted into the emerging feudal structure. The declining of the central authority is indicated from the legal texts of Gupta period wherein king is advised to observe and enforce the laws of guilds.

As far as Vakatakas are concerned it has been shown in the present study that their original territory lay in the Vindhya region of central India which continued under them upto at least the time of Prithivishena I as indicated by a critical analysis of the Puranic data and the Nachna-ki-Talai and Ganj inscriptions of his time. They shifted to the Vidarbha region under Pravarasena I around the close of the third century A.D. Kanchanaka, identifiable with modern Nachna in the
Panna district of Madhya Pradesh, was their only capital when their authority was confined to the Vindhya region. During the closing years of Pravarasena I's reign the Vakataka territory was partitioned among his four sons as averred in the Puranic texts; out of these only two branches are known at present, one ruling successively from Nandivardhana and Pravarapura and the other from Vatsagulma identified with modern Washim in the Akola district of Vidarbha. These two branches of the Vakatakas ruled in the Vidarbha and other regions of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and exercised tremendous influence over wide areas of Deccan. Vakatakas had matrimonial relations with the Bharashivanagas of Padmavati, Imperial Guptas, the Kadambas of Karnataka and Vishnukundins of Andhra Pradesh.

The present study also establishes that Nachna-ki-Talai and Ganj inscriptions of Vyaghradeva belonged to Prithivishena-I. When the Bundelkhand-Baghelkhand region was under Vakatakas. But it is yet uncertain that who was Vyaghradeva. Whether he was Uchchakalpa ruler and Vakataka feudatory as suggested by V.V. Mirashi or he was an important/ ordinary state official of Vakatakas is not known.

Besides, it is also established that the rulers of Kosala, Mekala and Malava were not the feudatories of the Vakatakas. While the rulers
of Kosala and Malava were actually the feudatories of the Guptas. The Mekala king Maharaja Bharatabala of the Bamhani plates was also falsely regarded as the feudatory of Vakataka Narendrasena. For he is established far removed in time from Narendrasena on the basis of Mallar plates of Bharatabala’s son Surabala Udirnavaire. It is also confirmed in the present study that Bamhani plates also belong to Udirnavaire like Mallar plates and not to his father Bharatabala.

Thus on the basis of Vakataka inscriptions and other corroborative inscriptions of the contemporary and later dynasties, it becomes clear that Vakatakas had a very limited number of feudatories. Whose rights were drastically reduced by the Vakataka emperors. They were not even allowed to make any land grant without the specific permission of their overlord. About the Vakataka administration available inscriptive data indicates that the whole Vakataka kingdom including both Vakataka branches had divisions like, Rajyas, Kata, Pattas, Margas, Aharas, Bhogas, Bhuktis and Rashtra. The administration of the kingdom must have been carried on with the help of a large number of officers but only few are found mentioned in the Vakataka inscriptions. Such as Sachiva, Amatya, Sarvadhyaksha, Kulaputras, Bhojaka, Rajyadhirkitra, Rajjuka, Senapati, Dandanayaka, chhatra or chata and bhata. However, it is made clear by the
inscriptions that Vakataka administration was on the whole vigilant and efficient. Even the Copper plate grants were issued being checked. The inspection machinery of the central government continuously toured to find out whether the orders of central government were being properly carried out or not by subordinate officers. Sometimes certain conditions were imposed on the brahmana donees in the land grant charters. The state reserved the right to resume the grant without any moral or spiritual compunction, if the conditions were not fulfilled by the donees. Thus, the available evidences show that the Vakataka kingdom was more united and centralized and less perforated by semi-independent feudatory sates than the Gupta administrative machinery.

About the Agrarian and fiscal rights of the Gupta as well as Vakataka states the law books of the period clearly pointed out that the individuals had ownership rights over the land.

These sources devote attention to the discussion of the rules regarding partition or inheritance of movable and immovable property and laydown detail rules regarding partition, sale and purchase of land and boundary disputes. It implies that there was a remarkable growth in the conception of the individual rights of land. Besides, the king also came to be recognized as the lord of the earth, powerful enough to give away land in charity for his own religious merit as well as the spiritual
merit of his ancestors. In most cases the donor of the land was king himself. This indicates the royal ownership of land. But this apparent contradiction need not to be taken too far, as the king is portrayed in the sources as the largest landowner and the donees as intermediaries, who derived their rights from their benefactor.

The precise definition of the boundary marks of the gifted villages and fields reveal that the importance was attached to the system of land survey. For this purpose separate departments were established in the Gupta and Vakataka empires.

The analysis of the sources indicates that the king was entitled to extract taxes, because he was the lord of the land the protector of his people. The principles of taxation as laid down by the law givers seem to have guarded the interest of people by at least theoretically forbidding the king to resorting the oppressive measures against the subjects.

Thus, on the basis of the available data it has been postulated that land revenue was assessed on individual holdings and the rate of taxation was one-sixth of the produce. The number of land taxes seem to have been many as is evident from the inscriptions. Bhoga, bhaga, kara, hiranya, udranga, uparikara, ditya may be taken to be various taxes connected with land and which formed regular source of income to the state. The inscriptions provide enough evidence to the fact that the
people were also subjected to forced labour (*Visti*). In this period *Sulka* was a royal share of merchandise brought into a town or harbour by merchants.

At the time of donating a village or land, the listing of exemptions from taxes in the land grant charters was not taken for granted. Specific and particular taxes were listed as immunities. The king according to his wish or as the time and position may permit could withhold or grant any tax to the donee.