ABSTRACT

In the present thesis an attempt has been made to give an updated comprehensive study of the polity under the Gupta and the Vakataka empires on the basis of epigraphical material of this period. The general plan of treatment which has been followed in this work is as under:

Chapter-I deals with the extent of the Gupta empire and its geographical and political conditions under different Gupta kings. It describes the political atmosphere which led to the rise and foundation of the Gupta kingdom which later on developed into an empire of great magnitude. While making a precise and concise account of the conquests of Gupta rulers, this chapter focuses at the political agendas and strategies applied by them in order to extend the empire. It is shown that Gupta empire in its glorious days included not only considerable territories of the western and northern India and eastern parts of south India but also colonies in the Far East. The empire was largely constituted by states ruled by different subordinate rulers also called feudatories, important among them were the Valkhas, the Maukharies, the later Guptas, the Parivrajakas, the Uchchakalpas, the Aulikaras and the Maitrakas. These feudatories contributed in the disintegration of the Gupta empire. They gradually accumulated power and taking advantage
of the political chaos, after the Huna invasion they asserted their independence, as a result of this the Gupta empire disintegrated and parcelled out into small independent kingdoms.

Chapter-II is devoted to an account of the administration under the Guptas and deals with the central as well as provincial administration. It also deals with another substantive question i.e., the depth of administrative control in the Gupta empire. By comparing epigraphic texts it is also tried to establish in this chapter whether the administration of the Guptas was able to maintain a uniformity of official style in titles, terminology etc. and how much control and authority was exercised by the Gupta rulers in their administration. Besides, on the basis of epigraphic and literary evidences the rise and growth of feudal elements in the state structure of ancient India particularly of the post Maurya and Gupta period is described. Here certain broad features of feudalism including its political, social and economic concomitants have been traced in this period of Indian history.

Chapter-III describes the role of regional subordinate dynasties in the Gupta empire and the control of paramount ruler i.e., the Gupta emperor over these dynasties. This chapter throws a flood of light on the relations between the Gupta paramount lord and their feudatories with
the help of inscriptions. Besides, the rights and obligations of the feudatories of the Gupta empire are also described by corroborating Gupta inscriptions and some literary sources of the post Gupta period.

Chapter-IV is devoted to the examination of the Vakataka inscriptions. The rich epigraphic information on the Vakataka kingdom within a comparatively limited region raises the issue of how far this was a unitary polity. This chapter concerns with this issue. It deals firstly with the early history of the Vakataka and attempts to solve the problem regarding their original home. Besides giving a detail description about the allies of both the branches of the Vakataka dynasty viz. Nandivardhana and Pravarapura branch and Vatsagulma branch, this chapter also tries to settle the controversies regarding their feudatories on the basis of available epigraphical data. Along with this it attempts to establish the exact position of the feudatories in the Vakataka polity. All possible attempts have been made in this chapter to give an accurate picture of the Vakataka administration. However, some important aspects of their administrative structure have either been left out or have been treated very briefly owing to the paucity of information.
Chapter-V deals with the agrarian and fiscal rights of the state. It deals with the vexed question of land ownership and tries to find out whether the whole land belonged to the king or the individuals have some rights over the land in this period. Besides, it also deals with the king’s prerogative over the donated lands. The chapter describes in detail some important aspects of agrarian system such as land tenure and boundary specifications and also tries to establish the magnitude of fiscal rights of the state on the basis of the evidences provided by the Gupta and Vakataka inscriptions which is supplemented by literary texts of this period.