CHAPTER - I

EXTENT OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE
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Geographical and Political Conditions

The empire of the Guptas was one of the largest in the history of ancient India. Before we go to examine the geographical extent of the Gupta empire which varied from reign to reign of the Gupta Kings, it is essential to survey briefly the circumstances and political conditions, in the epoch immediately preceding that of the Gupta, for these very circumstances led to the rise and consolidation of the Gupta kingdom which later on developed into an empire.

The political picture of India towards the close of the second and the beginning of the third century A.D. reflects the decline of two great powers, the Kushanas in the north and the Satavahanas in the south. The Kushana power was breaking up after the death of Vasudeva I whose rule can to an end sometimes between A.D. 180 and 240\(^1\). Kushanas lost their hold over the interior of India. However, their rule seems to have continued in western Punjab and Kabul valley. In the southern Punjab and the Gangetic plains, some old ruling powers and some new ones took advantage of the weakening of the Kushana power and resserted their supremacy once again. In the south too, owing to the weakness of

\(^1\) Ashwini Agrawal, *Rise and fall of the Imperial Guptas*, Delhi, 1989, p. 47.
the later Satavahana rulers, their feudatories and governors weaned themselves away from the central authority and laid the foundation of small independent states. Thus, the country disintegrated into a number of small states. Consequently we find during the third century A.D. three great political powers viz. the Vakatakas, the Bharashiva Nagas and the Guptas, rising in the country. In the middle of the third century A.D. Vakatakas established themselves in the Vindhyan region. Their dominion included a major portion of Bundelkhand area of Madhya Pradesh. Later on they shifted their power southwards in the Vidarbha region. The western part of Madhyadesha saw the rise of the Bharashiva nagas with their kingdom in Padmavati (Padampawaya in Madhya Pradesh). They claim to have held the land upto the Ganga under their sway². And the third power i.e. the Guptas established themselves in the eastern Uttar Pradesh towards the close of the third century A.D.

Among these three the Guptas proved themselves as the greatest power of the age. Founded by Maharaja Sri Gupta (c.A.D. 275-300)³ the Gupta kingdom initially included Varanasi and its adjoining region. This can be attested by a Chinese tradition recorded in the account of

³ The Indian Antiquary, Vol. XXXI, 1902, Delhi, p. 257.
Itsing. According to which che-li-ki-to (Maharaja Sri Gupta)\textsuperscript{4} built a temple at mi-li-kia-si-kia-po-no (Mrigashikhavana) for the residence of the Chinese pilgrims and granted 24 villages towards its recurring expenditure. Mrigashikhavana is identified with the famous Buddhist place of pilgrimage Mrigadaya or the deer park near Sarnath and China temple is located in its proximity somewhere within Varanasi\textsuperscript{5}. Maharaja Sri Gupta’s son Ghatotkacha who was a Maharaja like his father also ruled that region. It was after him that his successors, known as the great conquerors and statesmen of their age extended Gupta Kingdom and its political influence. By conquests along with political strategies and diplomacy they build one of the largest empires in the history of Ancient India which included the whole of India north of Vindhyas and had a great influence over the south.

Glorious days of the Gupta kingdom began from A.D.319 which is the epoch of the Gupta era and indicates the rise of Chandragupta I\textsuperscript{6} the son and successor of Ghatotkacha. In this period Gupta kingdom was founded as sovereign state on a sure and firm basis. Chandragupta I succeeded in enlarging it’s territories to a considerable extent. Unlike

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\textsuperscript{4} J. Allan, *Catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka. Kings of Gauda*, London, 1939, XV. Allan has identified the king Che-li-ki-to of I-Tsing’s account with Maharaja Gupta, the progenitor of the Gupta dynasty.


\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, p. 218; *RFIG*, p. 99.
his father and grandfather who adopted the lesser title of Maharaja. Chandragupta I assumed the title Maharajadhira which is symbolic of suzerain power. One of the factors that helped him to power and prestige was his connection by matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis, who were powerful republican people ruled in Vaishali. His marriage to the Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi is evident by the Chandragupta-Kumaradevi type coins of Chandragupta I\(^7\) portraiture Chandragupta and Kumaradevi with their names inscribed on the obverse and the legend Lichchhavaya on the reverse, and by the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Chandragupta’s son and successor Samudragupta in which latter is described as Lichchhavidauhitra, the son of Lichchhavi’s daughter\(^8\). According to Vincent Smith, Lichchhavis at this time actually held Pataliputra and through his marriage Chandragupta I succeeded to the power of his wife’s relatives. Therefore, it can be said that two of the principalities of the Eastern India, the state of Lichchhavis and the kingdom of the Guptas were united by a matrimonial alliance and Chandragupta I thus acquired a considerable kingdom\(^9\).

No inscription or record of Chandragupta I so far is available to give us any detail of the expansion of his kingdom. It is only in the records of his successors that he is called Maharajadhiraaja. We may reasonably infer that his dominions must have been sufficiently large to justify his assumption of the imperial title. It is generally held on the basis of a passage in the Puranas that in the period of Chandragupta I the Gupta territories comprised the region of Prayag-Allahabad; Saket-oudh; and Magadha-Bihar.

_Anu Ganga Prayagam Cha Saketam Magadham Statha_
_Etan janapadan Sarvan bhokshyante Guptavamsajah_\(^{10}\)

These Gupta dominions grew to an empire of great magnitude under Chandragupta’s son and successor Samudragupta who raised his family to the status of a great imperial power in true senses. His _Allahabad Pillar inscription_ which is an eulogy on him composed by one of his offices named Harishena provides an impressive list of kings and regions that succumbed to Samudragupta’s triumphal march across various parts of subcontinent. It is evident from the inscription that Samudragupta’s ambition was to establish an extensive empire, and no doubt he laid a lasting foundation for a great one which was one of the largest after the decline of the Mauryan empire. But here we find a

striking contrast between the Mauryan and Gupta empires which is neatly pointed by the Allahabad Pillar inscription. Whereas the empire of the Mauryas was an integrated one and was a centralised monarchy, an important feature of which was the centralised control of the Mauryan government over areas which gradually lost their independence and were included within an extensive political system planned by this government. Arthasastra the famous treatise of that age also emphasizes the control of the central authority. Every detail of the organization of the kingdom is fitted into the administrative plan and is aimed at giving final control to the king. The evidences from the Asokan edicts also indicates that the king had control over even the most remote part of the empire. On the contrary, the study of the nature of the Gupta empire reveals that it was largely formed by the subordinate states ruled by subordinate or tributary rulers, often referred to in modern writings as feudatories. Most of these states were subdued in pursuance of the policy of dharmavijaya i.e. righteous conquest. This discouraged the annexation of a conquered territory but recommended

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the acceptance of subordination by the defeated king\textsuperscript{13}. This tendency is very old and deep-rooted in the Indian tradition and also received the sanction of the \textit{smritis}. According to Vishnu, “A king having conquered the capital of his foe, should invest there a prince of royal race of that country with the royal dignity”\textsuperscript{14} The \textit{Arthasastra} differentiates between \textit{dharmavijaya} and \textit{lobhavijaya} or \textit{Asuravijaya}. A \textit{dharmavijayi} was satisfied with mere obeisance or surrender on the part of the conquered\textsuperscript{15}. The theory finds elaborate expression in the works of Kalidasa who in his \textit{Raghuvamsha} described this policy as one of uprooting and replanting.

\begin{quote}
They who lowly bowed down to his lotus like feet and who (therefore) were reinstated after having been ousted, honoured Raghu by presenting him with their wealth, like kalama plants which are bent down to their roots and which presents fruits when they are transplanted after having been first uprooted."
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{14} \textit{The Institutes of Vishnu}, tr. by Julius Jolly, \textit{The Sacred Books of the East}, Vol. VII, Delhi, 1880, III, 47, p.18.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Arthasastra}, part II, XII, 1, p. 247.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Raghuvansa of Kalidasa}, with the commentary of Mallinath, ed. By Gopal Raghunath Nandargikar, Delhi, 1982, V. 37, p. 105.
RaghuVamsa has a detailed account of the conquest of many regions at the hands of Raghu. But nowhere is Raghu said to have attempted the annexation of conquered territory. A verse of RaghuVamsa states-

रूपः
श्रीमहेन्द्रनाथस्य जहार नतु मेदिनीम्।

"The righteous conqueror took away the wealth but not the territory of the lord of Mahendra, capture but (subsequently) released". Though brief, it is the best description of the policy of Dharmavijaya. It was not a principle of purely academic interest, but seems to have actually been followed. The Allahabad pillar inscription reveals Samudragupta as following this ideal. No doubt he violently uprooted many petty states around his own kingdom in the region of Ganga-yamuna doab in northern India (Aryavarta) and created a consolidated empire. But this policy of suppression was not applied in the case of many other kings and states mentioned in the inscription. In Dakshina path, for instance, he adopted a different policy. Twelve kings of south India ruling over the region along with the eastern coast of Deccan from

17 Ibid. V. 43, p. 107.
Orissa upto Kanchipuram (near modern Chennai)\textsuperscript{18} were defeated by Samudragupta. They were captured \textit{(grahna)}; liberated \textit{(moksha)}; and reinstated in their own kingdoms \textit{(anugraha)}\textsuperscript{19}. Here, one can notice close kinship between the expression \textit{grahana-moksha-anugraha} of \textit{Allahabad pillar inscription} and the phrase \textit{पुष्कितं प्रतिमुक्तस्य} given by Kalidasa in \textit{Raghuva\mbox{\textit{msa}}. Pratyantas}\textsuperscript{20} i.e. five kingdoms and nine tribal territories located on the borders of Samudragupta's kingdom in the north, east and western India\textsuperscript{21} were forced to accept Gupta suzerainty. According to the \textit{Allahabad pillar inscription} these states sought submission to Samudragupta by rendering satisfaction to his formidable rule with the payment of all tributes, execution of orders and visit to his court to pay homage in person. \textit{Sarvva-karadan-ajnakarana-pranamagamana-paritoshita-prachanda-sasanasya}\textsuperscript{22}. The kings of forest kingdoms \textit{(atavikarajya)}\textsuperscript{23} situated in the hilly and forest infested region of central India\textsuperscript{24} were forced into servitude, \textit{Paricharakikrita-sarva-atavika-rajasy}\textsuperscript{25}. And more distant rulers such as the \textit{Daivaputra-}

\textsuperscript{18} D.R. Bhandarkar, 'Identification of the Princes and territories mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta; \textit{Indian Historical Quarterly}, Vol. I. Calcutta, 1985, pp. 251-254.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p. 213, L. 22.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{RFIG}, pp. 117-122.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{CII}, Vol. III, p. 213, L. 22.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, L. 21.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{RFIG}, p. 117.
shahi-shahanu-shahi (Kushana rulers to the west of the Indus), Saka-
Murundaih (the western Saka kshatrapas of Gujarat and Saurashtra),
Saimhalakadibhis-chasaryva-dvipa-vasibhir (the kings of Sri Lanka and
the dwellers of all the islands)\(^{26}\) also acknowledged Samudragupta’s
sovereignty. They sought to win the favour of the Gupta emperor by
rendering him many kinds of services as offering their personal
attendance, offering their daughters in marriage and request for the
administration of their own districts and provinces through the Garuda
token, *atmanivedana kanyopayana-dana-garutmadanka svavisaya-
bhukti sa(sana) (y) achanadyupaya sevakita*\(^{27}\).

The influence of Samudragupta’s imperial power over these
regions can be proved on the basis of some other independent evidences.
That some remnants of the Kushanas namely saka, shilada and Gadahara
rulers of central and western Punjab accepted his suzerainty is indicated
by some Gadahara coins which bears on its obverse the name Samudra
written under the arm of the king and the name Gadahara outside the
spear\(^{28}\). Regarding Simhala or Sri Lanka, a Chinese source provide
evidence that the Cylonese king Meghavarman sent presents and sought
Samudragupta’s permission to build a Buddhist monastery at

\(^{26}\) Ibid, L. 23, 24; RFIG, p. 122; V.A. Smith, JRAS, London, 1897, p. 159.
\(^{28}\) A.S. Altekar, Corpus of Indian Coins, Vol. IV, The coinage of the Gupta empire,
Banaras, 1957, p. 52.
Bodhagaya. The required permission was granted\textsuperscript{29}. Archaeological evidences, such as pieces of sculptures bearing the influence of Gupta art as well as temples of Gupta style belonging to the same period discovered in Java and Cambodia\textsuperscript{30} suggest that ‘dwellers of all the islands’ mentioned in the \textit{Allahabad Pillar inscription}, very likely, refers in a general way, to the Hindu Colonies in Malaya peninsula, Java, Sumatra and other islands in Indian Archipelago\textsuperscript{31}, with which contacts had increased in this period. This is further supported by the narratives of Fa-hien, according to whom Tamralipti in Vanga was a busy port for active sea borne communication with Sri Lanka and other islands of the Pacific Ocean\textsuperscript{32}. Therefore, the reference to the homage paid by the dwellers of all other islands should not be treated as mere rhetoric. It may be based on actual relationship with some of them, the exact nature of which, however, cannot be ascertained\textsuperscript{33}.

The foregoing survey enables us to know the nature and the extent of Samudragupta’s empire. His direct political rule was confined to the

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{The Mahavamsa or the Great chronicle of Ceylon}, tr. By Wilhelm Geiger. Delhi. 1912, p. XXXIX; V.A. Smith, \textit{EHI}, pp. 303-304.


\textsuperscript{31} R.C. Majumdar, \textit{The vakataka-Gupta Age} (c. 200-500 A.D.) Banaras, 1946, p. 139.


\textsuperscript{33} \textit{VGA}, p. 139.
Ganga-Yamuna plain which was the prime Magadhan territory, the heart of the Gupta empire. Other neighbouring and distant powers were subdued and were brought under various degrees of subjection. He did not attempt to bring all of them under his direct rule but contented with having established his overlodship over them; and in doing so, he not only followed the political ideology of Dharmavijaya but showed the wise and political vision of a great statesman. He did not try to annex the frontier kingdom and tribal states and retained them as faithful tributaries. Instead of indulging in a harder task of their conquest, he patronised them as buffer states against the foreign powers and added strength to the defence of his empire. The Sakas and Kushanas were overawed by the colossal military might of Samudragupta and thought it better to establish diplomatic relations with him. On the other hand Samudragupta also realised his limitations and thought it politic to abide by this alliance and consolidated his position in the newly conquered areas at home rather than venture fresh conquests in the far off lands of Saurashtra and the regions beyond the Indus. However, from the statement in the *Allahabad Pillar inscription*, it is clear that this alliance of friendship was not based on equality. It is highly probable, even if we make an allowance for exaggeration on the part of Harishena, the author of the eulogy, that the Sakas along with the Kushanas were reduced to
the status of tributary states. The kings of forest region (atavika) in central India were also placed in the state of subordination.

Thus, the territory under the direct administration of Samudragaupta included in the east the whole of Bengal, excepting its south-east portion. Its northern boundary ran along the foothills of the Himalaya, and in the west its limit extended up to the territories of the republican states of the west and north-west of India. While the kingdoms of forest region stretched over the hilly tracts of central India, the states of South along the eastern coast of Deccan and the frontier states of the Gupta empire situated in the south-eastern Bengal (Bangladesh), Assam, Nepal, Uttrakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Northern Maharashtra, Southern Rajasthan, Haryana and western Punjab acknowledged the suzerainty of Samudragaupta and served as faithful tributaries of the Gupta empire.

Accepting suzerainty of the Gupta emperor did not mean transformation in the method of administration, or change of royal dynasty. Subordinate states retained their individuality, their institutions and organization, their system of administration and government. The visible manifestation of their subordinate capacity consisted in periodical payments of tributes and presents, attendance of their
suzerain’s court, and absence of separate foreign relations. In other respects these states were given a free hand to act for themselves.

Generally, subordinate states remained faithful to the empire but always waiting for the opportune moment to throw off the yoke. Only a capable monarch with his strong central government could prevent the disruptive tendencies of these states and their mutual dissensions. So long as the emperors were at the helm of affairs, these states place themselves in a state of subordination. But when once these towering personalities disappeared from the arena of the imperial stage, there was opportunity for the subordinate states to declare their independence. That was exactly happened after Samudragupta whose reign came to an end in about A.D. 375.

Samudragupta was succeeded by his son Ramagupta who is known from his *Vidisha stone image inscriptions* which mention him as *Maharajadhiraja*[^34], and by his copper coins from Eran-Vidisha region in Madhya Pradesh and Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh[^35]. Ramagupta was a weak ruler and he could not control saka rebellion in western India. It was after his complete discomfiture at the hand of a saka adversary that he was overthrown by his brother Chandragupta II. The ingnominal episode

of Ramagupta and Sakas is described in many literary and epigraphical sources of the Gupta and later period. From these descriptions, it appears that Sakas, i.e., western kshatrapas of Gujarat and Saurashtra who were in terms of subordinate alliance with the Gupta empire during the period of Samudragupta, rebelled after him and Ramagupta had to engage in a war with the saka king during the course of which he came within the strangle hold of the enemy, who would spare his life and allow him to retire only on the condition of the surrender of his wife, Dhruvadevi. Ramagupta agreed to this condition but his brother Chandragupta objected such act of cowardness and in order to save the honour of his family he went to the enemy camp in female disguise to kill the Saka lord and actually killed him. Later he killed Ramagupta, seized the Gupta throne and married Dhruvadevi whom he rescued from the voluptuous enemy.

The date of Chandragupta II’s accession can be regarded either A.D. 375-76 or A.D. 380-381, on the basis of his earliest known

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record viz. *Mathura stone pillar inscription* dated G. year 61/A.D. 380-81. Of all the Gupta kings Chandragupta II is reputed to have shown exceptional chivalrous and heroic qualities. He assumed the title of *Vikramaditya*-son of prowess, which occurs on his gold coins. His long reign of about thirty years saw the consolidation of the Gupta empire. He not only maintained the vast empire, carved out by his father but also extended it’s boundaries and influence in all directions. It is evident from different sources that Chandragupta II adopted a slightly different policy from that followed by his father Samudragupta. We find that he undertook various military campaigns which led to the annexation of many subordinate states of the time of Samudragupta. An important epigraph viz. *Mehrauli Pillar inscription* of Chandra which by consensus of opinion is assigned to Chandragupta II provides invaluable information about his reign. It gives the account of his military activities in different parts of India and beyond its frontiers. It is evident from this inscription that Chandragupta II’s victorious arms penetrated as far as the eastern limits of India. According to the description a battle was fought in Vanga territory against a confederacy

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41 *Bayana Hoard*, p. 68; *Coinage*, p. 93.
of kings in which Chandra (Chandragupta II) displayed extraordinary valour and defeated the enemies, \textit{Yasy-odvarttayatah pratipam-urasa satrun-samety-agatan-Vangeshv-ahava-varttino-bhilikhita khadgena kirttir-bhuje-} “on whose arm fame was inscribed by the sword, when in battle in the Vanga territory, he dashed back with his breast the enemies who, uniting together, came upon (him)”\textsuperscript{43}. Vanga denotes south-eastern Bengal, very nearly to the same country as Samtata which was included in the tributary frontier states of Samudragupta\textsuperscript{44}. We do not know whether there was a rebellion in Bengal and its adjoining areas, or whether the war was caused by the aggressive imperial policy of Chandragupta II which sought to incorporate the region into the dominions directly administered by him. In any case it was probably as a result of this campaign that direct Gupta rule was established in this region, for we know that early in the sixth century A.D. a Gupta king namely Vainyagupta was ruling in this part of eastern India.\textsuperscript{45}

From the information provided by the \textit{Mehrauli Pillar inscription} it is also evident that Chandragupta II undertook a military expedition against some of the subordinate states of south India. It seems that they risen their heads against the Gupta empire in this period and by this

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, p. 213, L. 22.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Sel. Ins.}, I, pp. 340-345.
expedition Chandragupta II brought some of them under his direct control. But about this the inscription does not refer anything explicitly, it only mentions that “by the breezes of whose valour the southern ocean is still perfumed” yasyad-y-apy-adhivasyate-Jalanidhir-vviryy-anilair-ddakshinah. But we may trace an echo of this great south eastern expedition in the Puranas which speak of the extension of Gupta rule over Kosala i.e. South Kosala, Odra, Pundra, Tamralipti and Puri on the sea board by Devarakshita i.e., Devagupta or Chandragupta II. About Pundra i.e. Pundravardhana, it is evident from the Damodarpur copper plate grants of the period of Kumaragupta I, Buddhagupta and Vishnugupta that it had been an important and integral province of the Gupta empire. Gupta suzerainty over South Kosala is evident by the reference to the famous imperial title of Gupta i.e. Paramabhattaraka in the Kursud copper plate grant of Maharaja Narendra of Sharabhapuria dynasty of this region.

Chandragupta II broke the power of republican tribal states which were allies of Samudragupta and acted as buffer states at the north-west and western frontiers of the Gupta empire. It can be safely admitted that

47 DKA, p. 54.
these states were assimilated in the empire by Chandragupta II\textsuperscript{50}. For we
do not find any record, nor any mention of any one of them in the
history of ancient India hence onwards. Apart from this, on the basis of
a statement of Kalhana in Rajatarangini (A.D. 1148-49), which refers
that on the death of Hiranya, Vikramaditya appointed Matrigupta as the
governor of Kashmir\textsuperscript{51}, P.L. Gupta states that in northern India the
region upto Kashmir was brought under the direct rule of Gupta empire
by Chandragupta II\textsuperscript{52}.

In the west Chandragupta II had conquered and assimilated
Gujarat and Saurashtra region into the organization of the empire. We
know this region was under the Sakas or Western Kshtrapas and the
expedition against them had become an imperative necessity after
Ramagupta and Saka episode as a consequence of which the Sakas
began to be looked upon as a potential danger to be rooted out at the
earliest opportunity. No details of the expedition are available but we
can be sure that the Saka ruler defeated by Chandragupta II was most
probably Rudrasimha III\textsuperscript{53}. The approximate period of this conquest can
be established with the help of the numismatic evidence. The latest

\textsuperscript{50} G.N. Dwivedi, The western limits of the Gupta Empire, Proceedings of the Indian
History Congress, 34\textsuperscript{th} session, Chandigarh, 1973, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{51} Kalhana’s Rajatarangini, A chronicle of the kings of Kashmir, tr. by M.A. Stein.
Vol. I, Delhi, 1900, pp. 87-93.
\textsuperscript{52} IG, p. 300.
available date on the silver coins of Rudrasimha III is either 310 or 319 (the unit figure is lost) of the Saka era which correspond to A.D. 388 and 397. Again the earliest known date on Chandragupta II’s silver coins which he issued in imitation of the Saka coins is G. year 90/A.D. 409. Therefore, we can safely place Chandragupta II’s conquest of the Saka dominions between A.D. 388 A.D. 409. About this great campaign which led to the annexation of western India R.N. Saletore says, ‘If the Devi Chandraguptam can be relied upon to enshrine the historical incidents of the relations between Ramagupta and his wife Dhruvadevi, the Saka ruler must have revolted and was conquered by Chandragupta II. The conquest of Western Kshtrapas however must have been affected by Chandragupta II, for his rare silver coins are more or less direct in imitations of those of the latest of Western Kshatrapas.’ By this campaign the Gupta emperor put an end to the domination of the western kshatrapas from western India which had lasted in these parts for about three centuries. Its significance lay not only in the western borders of the Gupta empire being secure but also in its giving access to the western trade since the ports were now in Gupta hands.

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55 CCGD, pp. 49-50.
56 R.N. Saletore, Life in the Gupta Age, Bombay, 1943, pp.24-25.
Thus, by his great conquering ability and valour Chandragupta II consolidated Gupta empire and extended his direct rule over a vast region. Besides northern India which was already under the Gupta hegemony, the whole of Bengal and a large portion of Orissa in the east and south east respectively were now under the Gupta’s control. In the south the boundaries of the Gupta empire extended upto Vindhyas and in the west the whole region upto Arabian sea which was previously ruled by different republican tribal states and by the Sakas was now administered by the Gupta officials.

Following his aggressive imperial plans and his object to ‘conquer the whole world’, Chandragupta II carried his arms successfully in the Trans-Indus region after his victory in Saurashtra. The Mehrauli Pillar inscription records that Chandragupta II conquered Vahlikas after crossing the seven mouths of Indus- Tīrṭva sapta mukhani yenasamare sindhor-jjitva Vahlīka. The place Vahlīka is almost certainly identified with Bactria or modern Balkh in north eastern Afghanistan. But different opinions have been expressed regarding the identification of the people who occupied Vahlīka or Bactria in this period.

R.C. Majumdar has identified them with the Kushanas at one place⁶⁰. But now it is known certainly that the Kushanas under their king Kidara had moved out of Bactria in the middle of the fourth century A.D. under the mounting pressure of the Juan-Juan tribe and settled in the Kabul valley about this time⁶¹. The Juan-Juan tribe has been identified with the Chionites or Hunas who had occupied Bactria⁶². Therefore, Hunas were the people against whom Chandragupta II led his military expedition in Vahlika or Bactria.

On the basis of some verses in *Raghuvamsa* some scholars have proposed to equate the account of the north-western conquest of Raghu recorded in the *Raghuvamsa* with the conquest of Bactrians (Vahlkas) described in the *Mehrauli Pillar inscription*⁶³. They suggested that Chandragupta II adopted a land route in his military expedition against the Vahlkas which lay through Saurashtra to southern Afghanistan via Trans-Indus region and during this expedition he came close to the north-eastern fringe of the Sassanian empire, where according to Kalidasa he defeated the Parasikas or Persians.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid, pp. 31-32; *CA*, III, p.57; *RFIG*, pp.48-49.
⁶³ *SIHC*, p. 326; *RFIG*, p. 165.
⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 164-165.
“Thence he set out by an inland route to conquer the Parsis (Persians) as proceeds an ascetic to conquer, by the knowledge of truth the enemies called senses”

“He covered the earth with their bearded heads, severed by his bhalla arrows, as with fly covered heaps of honey combs.”

The bearded Persian warriors mentioned by Kalidasa have been identified by the scholars with the Sassanians and it is suggested that henceforward Chandragupta II headed northwards reached Bactria or Vahlika, where he had a battle with the Hunas on the river oxus. This suggestion is based on the following verses of Raghuvamsa.

“Thence Raghu, like the sun taking up the sap (of the earth) by his rays, careered towards the direction of Kubera (i.e. the northern direction) extirpating the northerns with his arrows.”

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65 Raghuvamsa, V. 60, p. 113.
67 RFIG, p. 165.
68 Raghuvamsa, V.66, p.115.
"There the exploits of Raghu, the power of which was clearly seen in (the slaughter of) the husbands of young women in the inner apartments of the Huna kings, proved a teacher of the ruddiness in their cheeks."

Thus, Chandraguta II subdued the Hunas with his might and extended Gupta influence in such a remote region outside India. By his aggressive policy he reestablished the prestige and glory of the Gupta empire, which was on the verge of disintegration and collapse after the defeat of Ramagupta. Besides the frontiers of the empire were made immune from any danger of a foreign invasion as the Sakas Kushanas and even the Hunas had been cut to size, the war having been carried to their very home and fought on their soil.

To these military achievements of Chandragupta II may be added that his matrimonial and diplomatic alliances played an important role in his policy towards other contemporary states. He seems to be well aware of the political advantage of the matrimonial alliance. He knew how such an alliance with the Lichchhavis helped his grandfather Chandragupta I to rise to imperial position. An important alliance,
perhaps of Chandragupta II's time was his marriage with the Naga princes Kuberanaga. However some scholars are not inclined to attach any political importance to this marriage, for the Nagas had lost their importance in this period and were a political non-entity. The most important matrimonial alliance contracted by Chandragupta II was with the Vakatakas who, in this period emerged as a dominant power in the Deccan earlier held by the Satavahanas. Chandragupta II felt their strength and realising the value and importance of their alliance he arranged the marriage of his daughter Prabhavatigupta with the Vakataka crown prince Rudrasena II, son of Prithivishena I. It was a remarkable strategic move on the part of Chandragupta II who foresaw that the powerful Vakataka king of south-western Deccan could be of great help to him in his campaign against the Saka Kshatrapas of Saurashtra and their hostility could easily prove to be a serious embarrassment. Therefore, this matrimonial alliance was deliberately made with a political object. Besides, this marriage strengthened Gupta access to the Deccan, although the Vakatakas remained an independent power.

Rudrasena II, the son-in-law of Chandragupta II had a short reign and died in A.D.390. After his death the rule of Prabhavatigupta as the

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70 IG, p 306.
71 VGA, p. 156.
regent queen of her minor sons continued for about twenty years and
during this period the Gupta emperor exercised great influence on the
Vakataka kingdom. It is evident by the Vakataka inscriptions of this
period which commence with the Gupta genealogy instead of the
Vakatakas\textsuperscript{72}. Most likely Chandragupta II gave Prabhavatigupta all help
to run the Vakataka administration properly by deputing his own civil
and military officers to the Vakataka court\textsuperscript{73}.

Another matrimonial relationship with the Gupta family had been
established by the Kadamba ruler Kakutsthavarman. It is evident by the
\textit{Talagund stone Pillar inscription} wherein Kakutsthavarman is said to
have caused to blossom the lotus beds in the form of the families of
rulers, the foremost among whom were the Guptas. The inscription says,

\begin{verbatim}
Guptadipartthiva-kulamburuhasthalani
    snehadara-pranaya-sambhraama-kesarani |
Srimantyaneka nripashatpada-sevitani
Yo=bodhyadduhitri-didhitibhir-nrirparkkah ||\textsuperscript{74}
\end{verbatim}

"This sun of a king by means of his rays—his daughters caused to
expand the splendid lotus-groups—the royal families of the Guptas and
others, the filaments of which were attachment, respect, love and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{73} IG, pp. 302-303, \textit{RFIG}, p. 168; \textit{SIHC}, p. 395.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{EI}, Vol. VIII, Delhi, 1905-06, p. 33.
\end{footnotesize}
reverence (for him), and which were cherished by many bees—the kings (who served them).”

In this inscription the name of the Gupta emperor is not mentioned but as Kakutsthavarman ruled between A.D.405 and 435, the Gupta king who contracted this matrimonial alliance with the Kadamba ruler might have been either Chandragupta II or Kumaragupta I.

Besides matrimonial alliances Chandragupta II established diplomatic relations with some other southern powers. It is suggested from a Kavya called Kuntalesvara Daityam, now lost, some verses from which have been preserved in the literary works of the later period, that Chandragupta II had successfully exerted his influence over the Kuntala king and established friendly relation with him with the assistance of Kalidasa, who went there as his emissary. Some scholars identified the king of Kuntala with Srikrishnavarman while some other with Devaraja of the Rashtrakuta family of Manapura. By these alliance Chandragupta II extended Gupta influence in south India. His last known date i.e. G.Year 93/A.D. 412-13 comes from his Sanchi stone inscription. He left a vast empire for his successors which actually stretched from Bengal in the east to Gujarat and Kathiwad in the west.

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75 IG, pp. 143-144; RFIG, pp. 169-170.
76 IG, p. 303.
77 RFIG, p. 170.
and from Himalaya in the north upto Narmada in the south. He was most probably succeeded by his son Maharaja Sri Govindagupta who is known from the Basarah clay sealing\textsuperscript{79} of his mother Mahadevi Dhruvasvamini the chief queen of Chandragupta II; and from the Mandasor stone slab inscription dated in the Malava year 524/A.D. 467\textsuperscript{80} which point out that like his father Govindagupta was an imperial Gupta ruler to whom a large number of kings paid homage; and whose armies under the command of his general wiped out all opposing armies\textsuperscript{81}. Govindagupta enjoyed a very short region between G.Year 93/A.D 412-13, the last known date of Chandragupta II and G.Year 96/A.D. 415-16, the first available date of Kumaragupta I\textsuperscript{82}, another son of Chandragupta II.

When Gupta empire passed on to Kumaragupta I it was on its most glorious stage. Kumaragupta I’s long region of over forty years\textsuperscript{83} was by far the most prosperous period in the total rule of the Gupta dynasty. He assumed the title Mahendraditya and proclaiming himself as a paramount sovereign he celebrated the Asvamedha sacrifice as an

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, p. 261.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Bilsad Stone Pillar inscription of Kumaragupta I, G.year 96, CII, III, p.269.
\textsuperscript{83} His last known date i.e. G. year 135/A.D. 454-55 is found on his silver coins, Coinage, pp.230-231.
assertion of his paramountcy\textsuperscript{84}. Hence it may be concluded that he should have added more territories to the empire, though none of the records of his conquests is available to us. However, some epigraphic and literary evidences provides us some information in this regard. The \textit{Mandasor inscription} of the guild of silk weavers contains a specific mention of the Gupta sovereign Kumaragupta I who was ruling over the earth while the Varman ruler Bandhuvarman was protecting the town of Dasapura in the M.Year 493/A.D. 436\textsuperscript{85}. This shows that Kumaragupta I had extended Gupta suzerainty over the region of Dasapura and Bandhuvarman ruled over this region as a Gupta feudatory.

On the basis of statement in Puranas that Mahendra (i.e. Kumaragupta I) added Kalinga and Mahishaka to his kingdom\textsuperscript{86}, P.L. Gupta suggests that Kumaragupta I eliminated some of the south-eastern feudatories of the time of his grandfather Samudragupta\textsuperscript{87}.

Thus, the empire continued to progress in Kumaragupta I's reign and he was able to retain every inch of territory. Only a strong and efficient administration could have kept the vast empire so thoroughly intact. The inscriptions of this period indicate the development of the administrative machinery in different regions of the empire. It is also

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, pp. 200-203; \textit{Bayana Hoard}, pp.299-300.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{CII}, Vol. III, p. 326, L. 13, 16.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{DKA}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{IG}, p. 309.
evident by these inscriptions that Kumaragupta I was a strong administrator and was sagacious in the selection of his governors and viceroys for the different provinces from amongst the princes of the blood royal, ministers and officers. Damodarpur copper plate grants dated G. year 124/A.D 442-43\textsuperscript{88} and G. year 128/A.D 446-47\textsuperscript{89} inform us that the governor (uparika) appointed by Kumaragupta I himself was governing the province of Pundaravardhana. Ghatotkachagupta, a prince of royal blood probably a son of emperor himself, was the viceroy of Eastern Malava as is known from the Tumain fragmentary inscription\textsuperscript{91}. The Baigram copper plate grant tells us that the Kumaramatya Kulavriddhi was administering the district of Panchanagari\textsuperscript{91} (modern Panchili in the Bogra district of Bangladesh). These administrative measures ensured the stability and integration of the empire.

But as indicated by the Junagadh rock inscription of the G.year 136 /AD 455-56\textsuperscript{92} and the Bhitari Pillar inscription of Skandagupta\textsuperscript{93}, the son and successor of Kumaragupta I that either towards the close of the latter's reign or immediately after his death Gupta empire had met with serious reverses and crisis was brought about by the invasion of the

\textsuperscript{88} CII, Vol. III, pp. 282-287.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, pp. 288-291.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{92} CII, Vol. III, pp. 296, 305.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, pp. 312-317.
Pushyamitras and the Hunas. Pushyamitra tribe is unknown to epigraphic records but known to the Puranas which record thirteen kings of the Pushyamitra dynasty and they have been placed in the third century A.D. by Pargiter. Fleet made the suggestion that they were a tribe on the Narmada region.

They had built up a strong military power and the resources for a war. The sudden upheaval and the severity with which Pushyamitras fought, temporarily affected the prestige of imperial Gupta power. It is evident from the Bhitari Pillar inscription that at the initial stage Pushyamitras made the struggle so grim even for a heroic warrior like Skandagupta that he had to pass a whole night on bare ground but ultimately he tided over the critical situation and emerged victorious.

As far as Hunas or Mlechchhas (as they referred to by the Junagadh rock inscription) were concerned, we know that they had occupied Bactria about A.D.350 and under their pressure the Kushanas known as Kidarites after their chief Kidara, had to move southwards into

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95 CII, III, p.315, L.15.
96 DKA, p. 51, 73.
97 J.F. Fleet, 'The Coins and History of Toramana', IA, XVIII, Delhi, 1889 p.228.
Gandhara and occupied Kabul valley\textsuperscript{100}. Kalidasa in his \textit{Raghuvamsa} also placed the Hunas on the banks of the river Oxus where they were defeated by Raghu\textsuperscript{101}. One section of them though subject to the Juan–Juan tribe for a time, became very powerful about the middle of the fifth century A.D. This branch is referred to in the Greek accounts as white Hunas, but also called ye-tha, Hephthalites or Ephthalites from the name of their ruler’s family. From the bank of the Oxus these Hunas invaded both Persia and India\textsuperscript{102}. They overthrew Kidara Kushanas from Gandhara and occupied that region sometime in the fourth decade of the fifth century A.D.\textsuperscript{103} Either before G.year 138/A.D.457-458 or most probably before G.year 136/A.D. 455-56, they crossed the Indian frontier\textsuperscript{104}. They were terrible warriors and became a real threat to the Gupta empire. But their advance was halted by the valiant Gupta emperor Skandagupta who inflicted upon them a crushing defeat after fighting a terrible battle and saved the Gupta empire from the scourge of a cruel and barbaric foe. The verses of \textit{Bhitari Pillar inscription} describing Skandagupta’s conflict with the Hunas, leave no doubt that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Martin, op. cit., pp. 24-26.
\item \textit{Raghuvamsa}, V.66, 68, p. 115.
\item R.C. Majumdar, Ibid, p. 74.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the struggle was severe\textsuperscript{105}. The utter discomfiture of the Hunas is borne out by the fact that for nearly half a century the Indian frontiers were immune from this menace.

From the provenance of Skandagupta’s inscriptions located at Junagadh in Gujarat\textsuperscript{106}, Kahaum in the Gorakhpur district,\textsuperscript{107} and at Indore in the Bulandshahar district in Uttar Pradesh,\textsuperscript{108} it is inferred that the Gupta empire did not suffer even a temporary eclipse in its extent and limits but was in all its glory and tranquility. These inscriptions also bear testimony that the Gupta government continued in the western provinces, eastern provinces and the central provinces as well. While the western province of Saurashtra was governed by Parnadatta who was appointed by Skandagupta himself,\textsuperscript{109} the Vishaya of Antarvedi (the country lying between the Ganga and Yamuna\textsuperscript{110} or the region of Kanauj lying between the Ganga and Yamuna, commonly called Doab)\textsuperscript{111} was administered by the Vishyapati Sarvanaga\textsuperscript{112}. Thus, the Gupta empire was the undisputed possession of one master whose commands were

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{106} Ibid, pp. 296-305.
\bibitem{107} Ibid, pp. 305-308.
\bibitem{108} Ibid, pp. 308-312.
\bibitem{109} Ibid, pp. 299-300, L. 7-9.
\bibitem{110} Fleet, CII, III, pp. 69-70.
\bibitem{111} CII, Vol. III, f. no. 5, p. 309.
\bibitem{112} Ibid, p. 310.
\end{thebibliography}

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implicitly obeyed by the governors appointed by him, from one end to the other of this vast region.

Skandagupta’s last known date is G. year 148 /A.D. 467\textsuperscript{113}. After his death, the central authority of the Guptas declined at an increasing pace. A number of seals of administrative offices have been discovered with the name of various kings whose succession is uncertain. The varied order of succession points to the confusion prevailed in the Gupta dynasty at that time. Skandagupta’s immediate successor was most probably his brother Ghatotkachagupta who, as referred to by the Tumain inscription of the G. year 116/A.D. 435\textsuperscript{114} had ruled as a governor of Eastern Malava in the period of his father Kumaragupta I. Besides this inscription, he is also known from his Basarh clay sealing\textsuperscript{115} and his two gold coins one of which contains his name as Ghato and the marginal legend Kramaditya\textsuperscript{116}. Because of the existence of the two gold coins of Ghatotkachgupta it has to be conceded that he did assume royal authority for sometime, but when and how long are questions that remain to be answered. For now, it can be said that most probably after a brief rule he was either ousted or died. He was succeeded by his brother Purugupta. No inscription of this ruler has been

\textsuperscript{113} Coinage, pp. 257-258.
\textsuperscript{114} CII, Vol. III, pp. 276-279.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, pp. 294-296.
discovered so far. Purugupta’s name with the title *Maharajadhiraja* and as a son of the Gupta emperor Kumaragupta I is known to us from the *Nalanda clay sealings* of the former’s sons namely Budhagupta and Narsimhagupta\(^\text{117}\) and from the *Bhitari silver-copper seal* and the *Nalanda clay sealing* of his grandson Kumaragupta III\(^\text{118}\). Some gold coins with the legend *Prakashaditya* are also attributed to Purugupta\(^\text{119}\). Besides, there are other kings known from coins and inscriptions whose position in the Gupta family is not known with certainty. One is Kumaragupta II who ruled in G. year 154/A.D. 473 as known from the *Sarnath Buddha image inscription*\(^\text{120}\). He bore the title *Kramaditya* which is inscribed on his gold coins of Archer type\(^\text{121}\). Thus, there is hardly any doubt that Ghatotkachagupta, Purugupta and Kumaragupta II did reign but we have no definite knowledge of the events of their period.

The obscurity lifts with the accession of Budhagupta the son of Purugupta. His earliest known date is G. year 157/A.D. 477 which we get from the *Sarnath Budha image inscription*\(^\text{122}\). An inscription discovered on a stone pillar from Rajghat also belongs to the reign of


\(^{118}\) Ibid, pp. 355-358, pp. 358-360.

\(^{119}\) *Coinage*, pp. 283-286.


\(^{121}\) *Coinage*, pp. 272-275.

Maharajadhiraja Budhagupta. Yet another copper plate grant dated 159 obviously of the Gupta era though does not mention the name of Budhagupta as the reigning emperor but the date coupled with the mention in line 16 of the fact that one sixth of the religious merit of this donation accrued to the Paramabhattaraka, clearly shows that the ruling authority in the region was the emperor Budhagupta whose title Paramabhattaraka Maharajadhiraja and name we get in two Damodarpur copper plate grants from west Dinajpur district of west Bengal. One of these dated G. year 163/A.D. 481 while in other the date has lost. These grants record pious householders purchasing land from the government for building temples or for settling brahmana families. An important inscription inscribed on the Eran stone pillar, which records the setting up of this pillar as a flagstaff of Vishnu (garuda-dhvaja) by two brothers viz. Maharaja Matrivishnu and his younger brother Dhanyavishnu, contains a mention of a governor named Surashmichandra under Budhagupta, who was governing the entire region lying between the river Yamuna and Narmada in the G. Year 165/A.D. 483. Besides this, a Budha image inscription from Mathura

123 Ibid, pp. 334-335.
126 Ibid, 342-345.
dated in Budhagupta's reign\textsuperscript{128} shows that his authority extended as far north as Mathura. All these evidences prove beyond the possibility of any doubt that Budhagupta's authority extended over those parts of Gupta empire which were ruled over by the Gupta emperors previously, and that the empire had suffered no loss of territory as yet.

However, some indication of the loosening of the imperial authority can be sensed in the existence of some land grants made during Budhagupta's rule, where any reference to the emperor and central government has been omitted. Two copper plate land grants dated G. year 158/ A.D. 478\textsuperscript{129} issued by a Maharaja Lakshmana whose jurisdiction appears to have extended over some territory in the neighbourhood of Prayag. The inscription records the grant of an agrahara in the village Phela-parvvatika, situated very close to Kaushambi\textsuperscript{130}.

The facts that the agrahara grant was made by Maharaja Lakshmana in Prayag region which had been an integral part of the Gupta empire from the time of Chandragupta I and that it does not contain even a faint reference to the contemporary Gupta suzerain Budhagupta is conclusive enough to prove the Gupta emperor's

\textsuperscript{129} EI, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1894, pp. 363-365.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
slackening of the revenue and administrative rights in Prayag region which implies the weakening of the imperial authority of the Guptas in this part of northern India.

Similarly, we find a few more feudatory dynasties, which appeared to have become independent or semi-independent by this time. In central India, except Maharaja Harivarman of the Maukhari dynasty, who mentions the name of his overlord Buddhagupta in his Shankarpur (Siddhi district Madhya Pradesh) Copper plate grant of the G. Year 168/A.D. 486\(^{131}\), other feudatory rulers do not make mention of the sovereignty of the Gupta emperor. The Parivrajaka Maharajas, who had been Gupta feudatories for generations in the Atavika region and ruled in Bundelkhand area had ceased to acknowledge the Gupta supremacy in this period. Maharaja Hastin (A.D. 476-516) of this family issued land grants without mentioning Gupta emperor Budhagupta, making only a general reference to the Gupta sovereignty\(^{132}\). Contiguous to the Parivrajaka kingdom was another principality with Uchchakalpa (modern city of Nagod, in the Satna district of Madhya Pradesh) as the capital. Maharaja Jayanatha of this dynasty issued land grants in the G.

\(^{131}\) Kiran Kumar Thapalyal, Inscriptions of the Maukharis, Later Guptas, Puspabhutis and Yashovarman of Kanauj, New Delhi, 1985,-Appendix,pp.156-157.

\(^{132}\) Fleet, CII, Vol. III, p. 95, L.1, p. 102, 107, L. 1.
year 174/A.D. 493 and 177/A.D. 496\textsuperscript{133}. It is indicated from the locality and the use of the Gupta era that this kingdom was once included in the Gupta empire but as Jayanatha’s grants do not contain any reference to the Gupta sovereignty, it is probable that by A.D. 493 he had ceased to owe any allegiance to it. Similarly, the grant made by Maharaja Subandhu from the ancient town of Mahishmati (Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh) on the Narmada in the G.year 167/A.D. 486\textsuperscript{134} is also indicative of the loss of Gupta authority, for it makes no reference to the contemporary Gupta sovereign Budhagupta.

The story in western parts of the empire was not much different. Saurashtra, which had been an important province of the Gupta empire administered by its governors had become a feudatory state ruled by Maitraka dynasty from their capital at Vallabhi. We know that in the period of Skandagupta, Pamadatta was appointed as the governor of Saurashtra\textsuperscript{135}. It is very likely that alongwith the appointment of Parnadatta as the civilian governor, Bhattaraka, the founder of the Maitraka dynasty was appointed as a general in this province. Bhattaraka was succeeded by his son Dharasena at this part as per

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, pp. 117-125.
\textsuperscript{134} EI, Vol. XIX, New Delhi, 1928, pp. 261-263.
\textsuperscript{135} CII, Vol. III, pp. 299-300.
practice in the Gupta empire\textsuperscript{136}. Both are called Senapati in the records of their successors\textsuperscript{137}.

Bhattaraka's second son Dronasimha in his \textit{Bhamodra Mohota copper plate inscription} dated G. year 183/A.D. 502\textsuperscript{138} assumed the title \textit{Maharaja} generally used by the feudatories in this period. It is claimed in the inscriptions of this dynasty that the paramount ruler in person installed him in royalty by a regular ceremony\textsuperscript{139}. As Dronasimha was ruling over Saurashtra in A.D. 502, the paramount ruler, referred to was most probably the Gupta emperor Budhagupta\textsuperscript{140}. Thus, Dronasimha became a feudal chief rather than an imperial officer and though the family still paid nominal allegiance to the Gupta emperor, the Maitrakas of Vallabhi were well on the way to setting up an independent kingdom.

These instances show that while outwardly the Gupta empire suffered no diminution in its extent, and its authority was still acknowledged as far as the Bay of Bengal in the east the Arabian sea in the west and the river Narmada in the south, its power and prestige had considerably declined and some of its provinces located in western central and northern India were enjoying a semi-independent status.

\textsuperscript{136} It is well known, that in the Gupta period administrative posts had become hereditary.
\textsuperscript{137} EI, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1894-95, p. 320.
\textsuperscript{140} CA, p. 30.
Budhagupta seems to have died shortly after A.D. 494 or in A.D. 499, for among his latest silver coins five are dated G. year 175/A.D. 494\(^{141}\) and on the sixth the date has been read as G. year 180/A.D. 499. But this reading is doubtful\(^{142}\). Soon after his death we find that Epthalites or the white Hunas who had faced a crushing defeat at the hands of Skandagupta appeared again on the Indian soil. In A.D. 484 Hunas ended their long struggle against Sassanian or Persian empire by defeating Persian king Piroz or Firoz, and by the end of the fifth century A.D. they ruled over a vast empire with their principal capital at Balkh or Bactria\(^{143}\). Now they turned their covetous eyes towards India and soon crossed the Indian frontier under their king Toramana and lodged themselves in north-western Punjab as is indicated by a stone inscription discovered from kura or khewra in the Salt Range in the district of Jhelum, which mentions Rajadhiraja Toramana, ruling over this region\(^{144}\). Having consolidated his position in Punjab Toramana advanced towards the interior of India and invaded the Gupta territory. At this time, most probably Maharajadhiraja Vainyagupta was ruling over the Gupta empire. He succeeded Budhagupta sometimes about A.D. 500 and is known from his Gunaighar copper plate grant dated G.

\(^{141}\) J.F. Fleet, , IA, Vol. XVIII, p. 227.
\(^{142}\) Ibid; Coinage, p. 279; R.C. Majumdar, CHI, Vol. III, p. 87.
year 188/A.D. 507\textsuperscript{145}, from his gold coins\textsuperscript{146} and the fragmentary \textit{Nalanda clay sealing}\textsuperscript{147}. Vainyagupta could not defend his empire as his great predecessors had done and Huna leader Toramana conquered a large part of western and central India. Even Airikina (Eran) \textit{Vishaya} in the Eastern Malava was included in his dominions. Toramana’s conquest of Airikina is indicated by the mention of his regnal year and name as the ruling \textit{Maharajadhiraja} in the \textit{Eran stone Boar inscription}\textsuperscript{148} recording the building of a temple of god Varaha by Dhanyavishnu, who along with his elder brother \textit{Maharaja Matri}vishnu is also known from the \textit{Eran stone pillar inscription}, erecting flag staff of god Vishnu in the same temple complex in the period of Budhagupta\textsuperscript{149}. Thus, it is evident that the transfer of political authority in Airikina had taken place within a very short period after the setting up of the pillar in honour of Vishnu in the G. year 165/A.D. 484\textsuperscript{150}. We can safely admit that C.A.D. 500 the \textit{Vishaya} of Airikina or perhaps a substantial part of Eastern Malava had been lost to the Guptas and had passed into the hands of Hunas.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, pp. 340-345.
\textsuperscript{146} Coinage, pp. 281-282.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{CII}, Vol. III, p. 321.
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{CII}, Vol. III, pp. 339-341.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
And as that was not enough, it is also evident from a few Bengal inscriptions that either in the period of Vainyagupta or shortly after him, Gupta authority in some regions of Bengal was decaying. As we have found Vainyagupta ruling over a part of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) in A.D. 507 but shortly after this date Maharaja Vijayasena, who was the administrator in this region on behalf of Vainyagupta\textsuperscript{151}, figures in the \textit{Mallasural copper plate grant} as a feudatory of one Maharajadhirja Gopachandra in the Vardhamana bhukti\textsuperscript{152}. It shows that in this region an independent Kingdom had come into existence under Gopachandra. It is further conformed by the \textit{Faridpur copper plate grant} of Maharajadhiraja Dharmaditya who may be placed before Gopachandra\textsuperscript{153}.

Meanwhile, in central India Guptas were still making attempts to organize resistance to the Hunas and to regain control over that region. For we find the Huna suzerainty over Eastern Malava being challenged by one of the member of the Gupta family named Bhanugupta some time before setting up of the memorial stone pillar inscription at Eran in G. year 191/A.D. 510\textsuperscript{154} commemorating the death of Maharaja Goparaja (probably a Gupta feudatory) in the battle. In this brief record

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, p. 372.
Bhanugupta’s heroic deeds have been equated with those of the epic hero Arjuna and he is called *Raja Mahan*. As generally accepted, it appears that the battle fought by Bhanugupta and Goparaja at Eran, referred to in this inscription was against the Huna king Toramana. We can not anticipate any other enemy against whom the Gupta armies would have been sent to Eastern Malava. For we know definitely from the *Eran stone pillar inscription* of the G. year 165 and the *Eran stone boar inscription* of first year of Toramana’s reign that the Huna king had conquered this region soon after Budhagupta.

On account of the lack of clear evidence it is not possible to know the outcome of the battle fought by Bhanugupta and Goparaja against the Hunas. Whether the Guptas could regain their control over Eran region or not is not known. But epigraphic evidences indicate that about the same time the Huna sovereignty in central India was challenged by Prakashdharma, the ruler of Aulikara dynasty of Dasapura.

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159 They were not Gupta’s feudatories. And whether they had some connection with the family of Varman feudatory chiefs, who were also known as Aulikaras and were ruling over Dasapura as Gupta feudatories in the fifth century A.D., is not known.
Prakashdharma’s *Risthal stone inscription* of M. year 572/A.D. 515\(^{160}\) shows that Drumavardhana, the founder of this dynasty started his career as *senapati* or general of the army of some king. How and when he rose to the position of a king is not known. But this family had gradually built its strength and by the time of Prakashdharma, who was the sixth ruler in line of succession, it achieved a sovereign status and Prakashadharma became so powerful that he challenged Huna king Toramana and inflicted a crushing defeat on him\(^{161}\). As the *Risthal inscription* is dated in the A.D. 515, the defeat of Toramana must have taken place before this date.

After this defeat Toramana’s power suffered a decline. He appears to have been forced out of central India about this time and retreated to Gwalior, where Toramana’s son Mihirakula is known to have ruled for fifteen years, according to the Gwalior inscription of his reign\(^{162}\).

Mihirakula conformed to the conventional image of the Hunas. An account of Sung-Yun, a Chinese ambassador to the Huna king of


\(^{161}\) Ibid.

Gandhara in A.D. 520\textsuperscript{163} and a somewhat later account (c.A.D 525-535)\textsuperscript{164} given by the Alexandrian Greek, Cosmos Indicopleusts in his Christian Topography, describe the kingdom of white Hunas proper to the west of the Indus which separated all the countries of India from the country of the Hunas.

But these accounts describe Huna king Mihirakula (king Gallas, according to Cosmos)\textsuperscript{165} as cruel and barbaric. According to Sung-Yun he was hostile to Buddhism and had entered in a war with Kashmir (kipin)\textsuperscript{166}. While cosmos mentions him as the lord of India who oppressed people and forced them to pay tribute\textsuperscript{167}.

Thus, it appears from these accounts that Mihirakula was a powerful tyrant and under his leadership Hunas overran a large part of northern India and he exercised suzerainty over that region. The inscription dated in the fifteenth year of his reign shows that his sovereignty extended at least up to Gwalior\textsuperscript{168}. According to the information provided by Hiuen Tsang even the contemporary Gupta king Narsimhagupta Baladitya (who is also known from his gold

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\textsuperscript{163} The account is quoted by Hiuen-Tsang in his \textit{Si-yu-ki, Buddhist records of the western world}, tr. By Samual Beal, II ed., 1983, Delhi, p.c.
\textsuperscript{164} CA, Vol. III, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{BRWW}, Beal, p.c.
\textsuperscript{167} CA, Vol. III, p. 36.
\end{flushright}
coins
d and sealings from Bhitari and Nalanda) was forced to the humiliating situation of paying tribute to Mihirakula, the king of Sakala, who invaded his territory. But finally he (Baladitya) triumphed over his enemy and resolved to kill Mihirakula, but released him on the intercession of his mother. Mihirakula was driven out of the plains and he obtained an asylum in Kashmir where he killed the king and placed himself on the throne of Kashmir. From there he attacked Gandhara, exterminated the royal family and killed the king, destroyed Buddhist establishments, plundered the wealth of the country and returned. But within a year he died.

According to many scholars Hiuen Tsang’s account of Mihirakula has lack of conviction. It is full of so many inaccuracies. Besides, it is also difficult to believe many of the details of this story. The long account of the defeat and discomfiture of Mihirakula at the hands of Gupta king Narsimhagupta Baladitya and particularly the manner in which it was achieved appears to have contained a great deal of exaggeration. Therefore, generally the scholars do not place much reliance upon it.

\[171\] \textit{BRWW}, pp. 167-172.
\[172\] \textit{CA}, Vol. III, p. 38; \textit{RFiG}, pp. 245-246.
Reference may be made in this connection to the defeat inflicted upon the Huna king Mihrakula by the Aulikara ruler Yashodharman, the son of Prakashadharma. We have two inscriptions of Yashodharman from Mandasor which provide us a graphic account of the prestige, prowess and the conquest of Yashodharman. One of them i.e. Mandasor stone slab inscription is dated in the M.Y. 589/A.D. 532 and indirectly refers to Yashodharman's victory over the Guptas of the east and the Hunas of the north.\(^{173}\) While his undated Mandasor stone pillar inscription tells us, that 'he subjugated Mihrakula whose head had never previously been brought into the humility of obeisance to any other save the god Stahanu\(^{174}\) (Siva). Since Mandasor stone slab inscription belongs to A.D. 532 the defeat of Mihrakula must have taken place before A.D. 532. After this defeat the Hunas appear to have lost their Indian dominion. They no longer appear as a great power or even a disturbing element in Indian history.

Mandasor inscription describes some other military achievements of Yashodharman and claims that he undertook a digvijaya, the traditional Indian 'conquest of the quarters'\(^{175}\). However, this claim is not accepted in its eternity. For Yashodharman's power was of very

\(^{173}\) Sel. Ins., Vol. I, p. 413, V.7, f.no. 4.
\(^{174}\) Ibid, p. 419, f. no. 4.
\(^{175}\) Ibid, p. 419, L 4-5.
short duration. He rose and fell like a meteor between A.D. 530 and 540. This finds support from the fact that nothing is known about him beyond *Mandosor inscriptions*.

By this time Guptas had lost their control in most of the parts of *Aryavarta*. Now how much territory was under their control, we cannot precisely suggest, but is not unlikely to assume that it was extending from northern Bengal at least upto eastern Uttar Pradesh, as epigraphic evidences clearly point out that Gupta kings were still exercising imperial authority over the region between Pundaravardhana and modern Bhitari. Kumaragupta III, the son of Narsimhagupta, was still issuing grants in Bhitari which is proved by the silver copper seal\(^{176}\) found from that place. No copper plate recording the grant has been found attached to it but its very existence proves that Kumaragupta III definitely made some donation of land either to an individual or the temple at Bhitari. Apart from this, the continued rule of Guptas over Magadha is evident from the clay sealings of Kumaragupta III found from Nalanda\(^{177}\), which indicate that he made some donation to the university of Nalanda. His successor Vishnugupta, the last known imperial ruler of the Gupta dynasty whose fragmentary clay sealing has


\(^{177}\) Ibid, pp. 355-358.
been found at Nalanda,\(^{178}\) still exercised sovereign power over Pundaravardhana in northern Bengal as is apparent from the *Domodarpur copper plate grant* dated G. year 224/A.D. 543\(^{179}\). This copper plate shows that Pundaravardhana was being governed by a prince of the blood royal *Maharajaputra Devabhattaraka*\(^ {180}\). A comparison of this inscription with the copper plate grant of the reign of Budhagupta found from the same place\(^ {181}\) shows that the same administrative machinery was at work in the district, the same method and procedure was followed in the transaction and sale of the land. Thus, there does not appear to have been any break in the history or tradition of the imperial Gupta rule in the east at least upto A.D. 543, except south-east portion of Bengal, whereas stated earlier an independent kingdom had come into existence under Dharmaditya and Gopachandra.

We do not hear of any Gupta ruler after Vishnugupta and this is a self indication that the Gupta rule ended with him. This is also supported by a copper plate grant found at Amauna in Gaya district, in the very heart of Magadha which was issued by *Kumaramatya Maharaja*

\(^{178}\) Ibid, p. 364.
\(^{179}\) Ibid, pp. 360-364.
\(^{181}\) Ibid, pp. 343-345.
Nandana in G. year 232/A.D. 551-52\textsuperscript{182}. It has no reference to any supreme ruler. It thus shows that by that time i.e. A.D. 550 Guptas ceased to exercise any effective authority over the greater part of Magadha, the land that was once their own. About this time we find that the Maukharis and the Later Guptas who were at first feudatories of the imperial Guptas had attained independent position. These two royal houses shared between themselves those territories of the Gangetic plain which formed the heart of the Gupta empire ruled over by Samudragupta and his successors.

In the west, the Maitrakas of Vallabhi who were in control of Saurashtra and Kathiawad, realising the weak position of the imperial Gupta power, ceased to kept even the semblance of allegiance towards them and became independent in c. A.D. 550.

So we find that right from the Bay of Bengal in the east upto the Arabian sea in the west, the Gupta empire had parcelled out in small independent kingdoms in the middle of the sixth century A.D. However, its name lingered on in some remote parts of India, as evident by *Sumandala* (Ganjam district, Orissa) *copper plate grant*\textsuperscript{183} issued by a king named Prithivigraha. This inscription refers to the sovereignty of

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, Vol. XXVIII, New Delhi, 1949-50, pp. 79-85.
the Guptas by a phrase *Vasundharayam Vartamana Gupta rajye* (the existing Gupta kingdom on the earth) in the G. year 250/A.D. 569-70\textsuperscript{184}. It shows that some Gupta rulers were still ruling in the second half of the sixth century A.D. and at least the region of Kalinga was under them. The Gupta hold over Kalinga was terminated by G. year 280/A.D. 599 is apparent from inscription of that date found at Kanasa in the same region. In this inscription it is said that *Vasundharayam pravarttamane Gupta – kala* (Gupta year current on the earth)\textsuperscript{185}.

Thus, ended one of the greatest empires of ancient India.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, p. 84, L.2, pp. 81-82.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid, p. 331, L.2.
EXTENT OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE