CHAPTER V

THE GUPTA PERIOD

The decline of the Kushanas in the north, the Andhras in the south and the Kshatrapas in the west, was followed by a period of political turmoil till the Guptas emerged as rulers of Magadha in 320 A.D. and gradually, extended their sway westwards to the Indo-Gangetic Valley and to the south up to Broach and the Narbada Valley. But even during this period of political eclipse, and changing dynasties in the sub-continent, Broach was able to maintain her commercial contacts with West Asia and Africa across the Arabian Sea and with Ceylon, Burma, the Indonesian-Malaysian Archipelago and China to the south and east, because of its long standing experience in overseas trade. By 390 A.D. Chandragupta II Vikramaditya subjugated the Sakas, annexed Broach and claimed for the Gupta Empire the vital corridor of Malwa which linked the Gujarat coast and Broach with the Gangetic Plain. The importance which Vikramaditya attached to Gujarat as an outlet of his Empire was evident when he appointed his son Kumaragupta as its Viceroy. Chandragupta II Vikramaditya (390-413 A.D.) wielded an Empire which included within its limits the Malwa Plateau, the Rath country, north and south Gujarat, Kathiawad, Sind, the north western territories of
the Punjab and Kashmir and the Middle and Eastern Gangetic Plain. To the south it stretched as far as the Narbada, and along the coast beyond the Narbada, to Kalleina and Sopara. The territories of the Vakatakas of the Plateau were in alliance with Chandragupta. The inclusion of Broach within the limits of a well organised administrative unit which commanded an extensive territory, rich in agriculture and industry, gave it the opportunity to ressurrect as one of the leading ports of the Empire.

DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY UNDER THE GUPTAS:

Agriculture was conducted along traditional lines. It continued to depend on the Monsoons. But Varahamihira, author of the Brahatsamhita mentions that the Gupta astronomers could forecast accurately the time of the arrival of the rains as well as its intensity. Moreover, the Guptas also paid great attention to irrigation. The restoration of the old Sudarsana Lake of Asoka Maurya in Junagadh is proof of the Gupta stress on irrigated cultivation. The implements used by the peasants during this period were also the traditional ones. Amarkosa refers to the plough, the harrow, the hoe and the sickle as tools used in the farms. Two crops were taken in the course of the year generally, and the second crop was mainly dependent on irrigation. A third and a minor crop was taken in Spring, besides the two main harvests, in some places. The land was
exceedingly fertile and there was abundance of water for cultivation. According to the Amarkosa and Brihatsamhita, rice was the major crop. Magadha grew fragrant rice and Pariyatra (Bairat), a variety of rice, while there was an abundance of wheat and wheat flour in the north western provinces. The other products mentioned are barley, peas, lentils, oilseeds such as sesame, linseed and mustard, ginger a variety of vegetables, pepper and other spices and raw and refined sugar. The agricultural practices of the Mauryas, as expounded in the Arthasastra of Kautilya, were revived with efficiency under the Guptas. Great care was taken in the preparation of the soil, grafting of plants, spacing of the trees and cultivated crops, treatment of diseases and promotion of the growing of all kinds of plants. Even a regional specialisation in crop cultivation, which was not unknown in the Mauryan Period, could be detected with more clarity in the Gupta Period. Thus the Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa mentions that saffron abounded on the banks of the Indus and in Kashmir. Amarkosa mentions that Kashmir was the original home of saffron. Sandalwood came from Malaya, identified as the southern part of the Western Ghats. Pepper and cardamom and sandalwood are mentioned as natives of Malaya. Kashmir and Kuluta (Kulu) cultivated medicinal plants and fruits of various kinds were grown in orchards and homesteads from Poonch to Mathura. Sandalwood, camphor and other fragrant trees grew along the sea coast in the Pandyan
kingdom. Many of these products of the Empire came to Broach for export.

The Gupta administration promoted the interests of agriculturists by a series of fines imposed on their subjects who neglected or damaged dams, irrigation works, agricultural tools and standing crops. A small fine was imposed on those who obstructed the flow of water in channels. Any one who leased cultivable land and neglected to cultivate it was also subject to a fine. On the other hand, any one who brought under the plough long standing fallow or cultivable land was allowed to keep an eighth part of the produce for a period of seven or eight years. With the intensive care and supervision of the administration and the extreme fertility of the Indo-Gangetic Plain for agricultural crops, the Gupta Empire could claim surpluses from land in a variety of products which had a wide market both external and internal.

Likewise industries were also encouraged by the Guptas. There was an abundance of raw material for industries. The Guptas inherited the craftsmanship of the Indians for which they were famed since the days of the Indus Valley Culture. But credit goes to the Guptas for organising the technical skill of the craftsmen under royal supervision and inducing them to be enterprising in their trade. One of the most ancient industries of India was the textile industry consisting of cotton, wool, silk and fabrics made of goat's
hair and from the fibres of the barks of certain trees. Linen, cotton, bar silk, spider silk, shot silk, muslin, wool etc.
are mentioned in the Amarkosa. Different terms are used to distinguish coarse material from fine, bleached and unbleached material, coloured and printed material, woven flowered material and brocade. The Ajanta frescoes reveal the technical skill of the craftsmen in weaving, gold and silver brocade making, dyeing and printing.

The centres where the textile industry was famous were Varanasi, Mathura, Kamarupa etc. Varanasi was the producer of the best silk garments. Mathura produced striped cotton while Kamarupa was known for its woven silk and figured textiles.

Leather industry is mentioned in the Amarkosa as synonymous with leather fan, leather bottles, shoes and boots. The contemporary sculptures and paintings show deities wearing shoes. Leather making therefore must have flourished during the Gupta Period.

Ivory work was another ancient industry which survived political upheavals and reappeared as a thriving industry under the Guptas. It is mentioned in the literary works of the period. Ivory was used for many purposes. Seals, chess coins, decorative carving, figure carving in ivory were all crafts well known in India even before the Gupta Period.
An ivory seal of the Gupta Period was recovered from Bhita near Allahabad.

Metal work, also an ancient industry of India, was well advanced during the Gupta Period, although the source of the metal is not known. Copper and tin were imported as in the earlier period. Copper was also found in Nepal and Kuluta (Kulu). There was an abundance of gold which made it possible for the Guptas to strike coins in gold. Probably the gold coins came from Byzantium in exchange for Indian exports and were restruck as Gupta coins. But gold and silver were also mined in the extreme north west of the Empire between the Beas and the Sutlaj and also in the province of Sindhu.

The technical skills available at that time for metal work, gold and silver work, jewellery, work in precious and semi-precious stones, beadwork, smelting and casting of metal, testing precious stones etc. were highly scientific and commendable. Some of these are mentioned in the 64 Kalas of Arts. Brass work was one of the specialised arts of the country. The Brass Temple of Nalanda and the colossal Copper Buddha (attributed to Harsha) could not have been fashioned but for the development of the art of metal work over the previous centuries. The famous iron pillar of Vikramaditya in Delhi, which has not suffered corrosion, in spite of being exposed to the elements for more than 15 centuries, bears testimony to the skill of the metal workers of the 4th and 5th
centuries A.D. Metal mirrors, very much evident in the Ajanta frescoes, were held in high esteem and attained a polish which made them useful as mirrors. They were articles of export from the Indian ports.

Gold and silver ornaments were always popular in India and had reached technical perfection even in an earlier period. The Brihatsamhita mentions 22 jewels including diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, ruby, beryl, amethyst, moon-gem, azure, topaz, opal, pearl and coral as well as less precious substances like agate, quartz, beads and conchshell. The science of testing gems was so perfected in India as to arouse the admiration of the later European travellers of the 16th century. Varahamihira mentions the varieties of diamonds, pearls, emeralds, rubies and other precious stones and the source of these gems. Berar (Kosala or Kosa) produced diamonds. Pearls came from Ceylon, Persia and the Pandyan country. The Dravida country had gold and many precious stones; Gold and precious stones were used not only in making jewellery but also in the making of seals, mirror frames, lamps, for decorating and as inlays for floors in houses. They were considered as good omens. The Mrichchakatika of Kalidas mentions the elaborate arrangements made for the jewel workers in the palace of the heroine.

Pearl working seems to have reached the height of perfection at this time. The Brihatsamhita, recalling the
information given in Kautilya’s Arthasastra, gives a long list of pearl chains ranging from one to 1008 strings. Pearls were also used combined with other gems or gold, in inlay work, in the manufacture of sword hilts and handles, drinking vessels, in dresses and costumes and for a variety of other purposes. The literary work of the period and the Amarkosa abound in the descriptions of the crafts of the time.

The art of working in semi-precious stones can be traced back to the Indus Valley people. Beads of many sizes and colour, small objects of jasper, agates, carnelian, quartz and lapis lazuli, belonging to the Gupta Period, were recovered from Bhita near Allahabad.(2)

With a thriving industry and agriculture, the Gupta era was one of economic stability and commercial prosperity. Surpluses flowed from the fields and from workshops to supply the ports with commodities for an overseas trade. Broach, as the leading outlet of the Empire benefited by the emergence of a rich and well organised hinterland. Important cities like Ujjain, Bhilsa, Mathura, Hastinapura, Kasi, Kanauj, Pataliputra and Tamralipti were now in close commercial contact with Broach.

Samudragupta's conquests and subjugation of a large territory gave Vikramaditya the economic and political stability to concentrate on the consolidation of the Empire
and on improving its administration. He knew the value of inland and overseas trade for the prosperity of his Empire. Vikramaditya gave special attention to the province of Gujarat and its well established ports. The Valabhis of Vale (Bhavanagar coast) were in alliance with the Guptas and acknowledged their suzerainty. The major port of the Mauryas on the Saurashtra coast, namely Somnath Patan, had declined. The trade was diffused and shared by several small ports such as Vale, Mangrol, Gōga, Porbunder and Dwaraka, each of which had a limited hinterland. Broach could easily monopolise the western trade of India with the Persian Gulf - Red Sea ports and the coasts of Africa and Arabia and draw the resources of Saurashtra because of its superior facilities. The small ports of Saurashtra thrived mostly on a transit trade and Broach maintained both land and sea contacts with these ports. In the Deccan were the ports of Kalleina and Sopara, both of which had long standing experience in overseas trade. Samudragupta's conquests had included these ports within the Empire. But the Gupta sway in the upper Konkan did not extend beyond the coast. The Deccan Plateau, which was the natural hinterland of these ports, was under the Vakatakas. Even though a marriage alliance, aimed at cementing the relations between the Guptas and the Vakatakas was achieved, Sopara and Kalleina were cut off from the Plateau. They were at best frontier ports of the Gupta Empire and were not always...
at its disposal. The Guptas found it more economical to concentrate port facilities at Broach and improve its transport links with the Deccan and divert the trade from the Konkan ports to Broach itself. The Junnar-Nanaghat route and the Khandesh-Surhanpur-Maheshwar route from the Plateau to the Narbada Valley were known at least from Mauryan times and, under the Guptas, this route was made safe through State supervision. The only other port which Broach had to compete with in the Gupta Empire was Tamralipti which is cited as the second largest port of the Guptas. Situated at the eastern end of the Empire and very near to the capital, Pataliputra, it had certain advantages. It was favourably located to command the trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Far East. But the major part of its natural hinterland with its famous market towns of Kasi, Kanauj, Mathura, Hastinapura was oriented towards Ujjain and even Pataliputra itself, and Broach, rather than to Tamralipti. On Ujjain was knotted up the trade routes from all directions. The great east-west Hindustan Road, through which there was a constant westward flow of goods, was linked with Ujjain and from thence to Broach. The flow of goods from the east Gangetic plain was mainly to the west, north west and south west so that even in the far eastern trade, Broach could compete with Tamralipti.

The Guptas inherited the roads of the Mauryas. A common transport policy encouraged trade. Duties imposed on
merchants by the different rulers had previously increased the prices of goods at the port of exit, reducing their capacity to compete in the overseas markets. Vikramaditya reduced the custom duties. The merchants were given facilities to collect goods from the different market towns of the Empire, free of dues. Duties were demanded only at the port of exit. It was a great incentive to traders.

Naradsmriti gives details of the elaborate rules and regulations introduced by the Guptas to encourage trade. The capital required for conducting trade was procured somewhat on a co-operative basis. Merchants formed partnerships and invested equal amounts and shared the profits equally. If any extra profit was made by the ingenuity of one partner, he was rewarded by a further 1/10 of the profits. Conversely if the profits declined, because of the neglect of one particular partner, he was punished by a cut of 1/10 in the profits. If the loss was due to natural calamities or piracy in the sea, it was shared equally by the partners and the State also paid compensations. In the event of the death of a partner his successor automatically stepped into his place. But if the successor failed to put in his claims, the State kept his goods in safe custody for a period of 10 years, after which it became the property of the State.

Merchants were obliged to declare the value of goods which entered their trade, on the basis of which they were
charged custom dues. Any concealment of the goods or reduction in their value was punishable by a fine amounting to eight times the value of the goods. But certain goods received in charity and also household goods were free from duties. (3)

There were also elaborate rules to protect the interests of the merchants and the contractors who supplied or transported the goods.

Land trade was usually conducted by caravans. In the days when journeys were long, tedious and expensive and risks from thefts, highway robbery, political attacks and natural calamities, like floods and storms, were great, there was need for co-operative effort in transporting goods. Vehicles were drawn by oxen, camels, donkeys, yaks and other animals. In mountainous regions where vehicles could not be used, pack animals carried goods from place to place.

Jain literature, attributed to the Gupta Period, mentions the different kinds of caravans used by merchants. The Avasyaka Churni says there were caravans exclusively used for moving goods such as the Bhandi Sartha. The Bahalikas were drawn by oxen, horses, camels and donkeys. The Baravahas were men who carried their own loads. There were caravans called Audarika Sartha for moving labourers and those of mendicants and monks called Karpatika Sartha. Caravans could be hired by merchants on a contract basis for transporting goods. (4)
The goods carried by caravans were carefully classified into four groups, namely, Ganima, that is those which were countable like myrobalan, arecanuts etc.; Dharima or those goods which were measured by weight like sugar; Meya, that is goods which were measured by volume, like ghee, oil, rice, etc. and lastly Parichchedya or goods which were tested by the eyes like cloth, pearls and precious stones. (5)

Caravans preferred routes which passed through populated areas and well known market towns so that the merchants could buy and sell on the way. But sometimes the high roads were lonely and risky between population centres. On such lonely stretches, the merchants preferred to go on bylanes and branch roads to avoid the risk of attack from highway robbers and political or commercial rivals. In the forest areas the merchants protected themselves from wild animals by lighting huge fires while in the desert areas where water was scarce, they chose the oases for halting. Journeys across vast sandy deserts and forests were very risky, not only because of lack of water and danger from wild animals, but also because it was difficult to know the direction. Merchants preferred to travel by night to avoid the heat of the deserts and also to be guided by the stars. The Government of the Guptas had special arrangements made to guide the merchants through desert and forest, Pegs were planted all along the known routes. Caravans had to face natural as well as man made calamities on their long journeys overland. It took several
months to reach their destination and as such only very high priced goods like precious stones, metal, perfume, musk, sandalwood, agallochum, corals, and textiles (6) could bear the cost of transport.

Transport of goods was usually on a contract basis. The contractors were required to supply the vehicles and animals for the movement of goods at a pre-arranged Market Town. If they refused, they were fined 1/6 of their wages. If after settling affairs the contractor refused to supply animals or vehicles for loading, he had to pay a fine of 1/4 of the settled rates. If a load carrier showed any unwillingness at the start of the journey, he was fined three times the amount of his wages. If his partner, through his carelessness, damaged the goods, he had to pay damage. But if the damage was due to natural causes he did not have to pay anything. If a carrier did not deliver the goods he was punished. If the purchased goods were delivered to somebody else, the seller had to pay compensation amounting to two times the price of the goods and the same amount as fine. On the other hand if a party dispensed with the services of the carrier half way, it had to pay the full settled rate. In the same way, if a purchaser refused to take delivery of the goods, the seller could sell it without incurring any punishment. If the price of goods fell in the market the purchaser had to pay the actual price on the loss.
incurred by the fall in prices. The seller could also not supply inferior goods after showing quality goods. This amounted to cheating and the seller had to pay two times the price of the goods and a fine.\(^7\) The Gupta administration maintained the quality of goods throughout the Empire and encouraged honest trade by a strict supervision by its officers. Both contractors and merchants were expected to pay for breaking any of the rules imposed on them. But the king respected the rules and regulations of their Guilds.

Prices of goods were fixed by the State and no merchant could make undue profits on goods sold. Their profits generally depended on the prices of the different goods. The merchants, therefore, had to determine the prices of goods according to the time and place.\(^8\)

The Guild system was also strengthened to advance the interests of the traders. They framed their own rules and regulations and these were invariably accepted by the State. Jambudvipa Prajnapti and Mahavastu give an account of the various guilds during the Gupta Period. The former mentions 18 guilds. There were guilds for potters, silk weavers, goldsmiths, cooks, singers, barbers, garland makers, vegetable growers, betel leaf sellers, cloggers, oil pressers, sellers of napkins, calico printers, braziers, tailors, cowherds, hunters and fisherman. All these Guilds were closely linked
with trade. Even though manufacturing was on a cottage basis, it was highly organised.

The literature of the Gupta Period also mentions that the traders of the period were divided into different categories such as, traders in perfumes, in the business of mortgage and banking, those dealing in cattle and export of goods to foreign countries and those dealing with buyers etc. The professions of trade and commerce are praised because they yielded good money. The profession of the perfumers is also highly commended as the trade in perfume brought in a good deal of profit. On foreign trade, the profit was often 200 to 300%. (9)

For a well organised trade, a common, easily exchangeable and acceptable currency was necessary. The Gupta Period is well known for the stability of its currency which depended on maintaining its steady value in terms of goods.

The early Gupta gold coins closely resembled those of the Kushanas but they soon became Hinduised in type and design. In weight also the Gupta coins adopted the Kushana standard weight of 120 grains. Chandragupta II raised it to 12½ grains and some types of Kumaragupta's coins weighed as much as 132 grains. Skandagupta raised it to 14½ grains. The later Guptas followed this standard. Silver coins were started by the Guptas towards the end of the reign of Chandragupta II
when they came in contact with the silver currency of the Kshatrapas. Their size and weight were similar to those of the Kshatrapas. They were originally intended to circulate only in the Kshatrapa provinces conquered by the Guptas, but later began to circulate in the north as well. The average gold and silver coins of this period weighed only 120 and 30 grains respectively. But it was the Guptas that raised the weight of the gold and silver coins steadily reaching 148 grains for gold coins by the middle of the 5th century. Sixteen silver pieces were equal to one gold coin. The ratio between the prices of gold and silver was as high as 7:2. The Gupta coins of 148 grains however contained only 50% of gold. The real rate between the prices of the two metals seems to have been 7:1. But it was higher than that of the Satavahanas which was 9:1. The Guptas issued also copper coins apparently intended to weigh 100, 90, 75, 60, 50, 40, 30, 20, and 10 grains. The ratio between the prices of silver and copper varied between 50:1 and 70:1.\(^{10}\)

The stability of the Gupta coins made them acceptable beyond the limits of the Empire. Trade expanded with the availability of an acceptable currency. It was only when the Empire began to crumble and continuous wars debased the coins, that barter trade once again became more popular than trade by currency.

Besides coins, the Guptas also increased the Empire's facilities for hundies, bills of exchange and credit at the
well known market centres so that merchants could transact business without being obliged to carry huge amounts of cash with them. These facilities and banking facilities were extended to all traders and manufacturers. The Brahadrkalpasutra Bhashya says there were Guilds exclusively devoted to the problems of business transactions. The Nagarashreshthi was the head of the bankers and enjoyed a high status in society. He was adviser to the King himself in matters of currency, coinage, hundi, bills of credit and exchange etc. The Nagarashreshthi was usually a big businessman. The banks and business were thus interlinked. The merchants also could purchase commodities through these Guilds of bankers and command services as those connected with mortgages, measurements, weights etc.

One of the major facilities offered by the Gupta administration and which gave an impetus to trade was the improvement of roads and the organisation of traffic along them. Many of the major roads of the Empire had already been functioning as arteries of the Mauryan Empire. But the post Mauryan period saw the flow of goods on trans-country routes obstructed by political and custom barriers. These hindrances were now removed with the expansion of the Gupta Empire from Kashmir and the Punjab in the north west to Magadha in the east and to the Narbada in the south. The Great Hindustan Road from Pataliputra, across the frontiers of India, to Kabul and Balkh, was now at the disposal of the Guptas. It had important
connections through Mathura, Patan and Ujjain to Broach. Broach was thus linked once again with the Indo-Gangetic and Central Asiatic market towns.

Pataliputra was linked with Broach by the well known trade and military road through Ujjain, Tanda and Bagh. It was also connected to Broach by another route radiating from the Hindustan Road through Kasi, Kausambi, Vidisa, Ujjain and Maheshwar. From Indraprastha another route branched off from the Hindustan Road through Mathura, Pushkar, Daspura and Ujjain to Broach while a branch reached Broach through Patan. Broach was therefore closely oriented, both politically and economically, to the road system of the Hindustan Plains. The well known market towns of the Indo-Gangetic Plain such as Kasi, Kausambi, Kanauj and Mathura and those of Malwa, namely Ujjain, Vidisa and Maheshwar were within easy reach of Broach. Tasar silk from the north eastern hill forests, silks from Kasi, striped cotton and other commodities of the Gangetic Plain came through these routes to Broach. Ujjain was the major town on which converged the routes from the Ganges Valley.

The route from the Hindustan Road, through Mathura and Ujjain, was one of the busiest in the Empire. Mathura, was one of the well known market centres of the Gupta Empire and it had links with Takshashila, on the frontiers of India,
and with Balkh in Afghanistan. Ujjain was also a very rich market town abounding in cotton and cotton fabrics. It traded in horses, elephants, chariots and a variety of goods which came from the Deccan and the northern plains. Pearls from Tamralipti, muslin and silk from Kasi, cotton from Mathura, wool and woollen cloth and saffron from the Punjab and Kashmir, lycium from Nepal, pepper from Peninsular India flowed to Ujjain through these routes and from thence to Broach for export and re-distribution.

A second set of routes connected Broach with Saurashtra, Sind and from thence with the Punjab and the frontier market town and control point of all Central Asiatic routes, namely Taxila (Takshashila).

The Broach-Dwaraka route ran through Vale, Somnath Patan and along the coast to Dwaraka. The coastal route to Dwarka connected Broach to all the important ports of Saurashtra. Goods from Saurashtra came to Broach by land and sea but the land route was considered safer when piracy became rampant on the Saurashtra coast.

From Somnath Patan an important road ran across the Saurashtra Peninsula through the Wadhwan Gateway, to Patan. It had connections with Dwaraka as well. Patan, like Ujjain and Mathura, was another control point on which converged routes from the frontier towns of Taxila and Multan and
from Afghanistan and Persian Plateau. It was directly linked with Broach.

The Patan route also gave Broach direct access to Sind. From Patan the route continued to Patala, the well known market town of Sind, as far back as the Mauryan Period. From Patala the route went through Roruka to Taxila, From Roruka there was an important connection through the Bolan Pass to Kandhar (Kandahar) in Afghanistan. The Kandhar-Taxila route went through Ghazni and Kabul, both market towns of Afghanistan. It was also connected to Persia. Sind itself was well known for its cotton, asses, camels, honey, pearls, carpets, rugs, dates, wines, silver and gold, spikenard, rubies, Arab horses and a variety of other commodities. The return traffic from Broach consisted largely of cotton cloth and agates. Situated between the important market towns of the Persian Gulf and the coasts of Arabia and Africa on the one side, and the Gujarat ports on the other, Sind handled an important part of the trade of the Arabian Sea. It had also close commercial links with the Punjab and Kashmir. Sind had both land and sea connections with the Gujarat coasts even in the pre-Mauryan times although the flow of goods along these routes depended on the political situation and the availability of other and better routes for the powers that ruled the Gujarat plains. During the post-Mauryan period, when the major flow of the trade of the Roman ports of the
Red Sea was diverted to the ports of Peninsular India, the Kshatrapas, who wielded power in Gujarat and the port of Broach, had found it necessary to use the Patan route by land to the Sind ports and the sea route along the Sind-Makran coast to the Persian gulf and the Arabian coast, to meet the challenge of the Romans in the eastern trade. The Guptas, when they established themselves in Broach also continued to look to the Sind route to the Persian Gulf as one of the major outlets of their trade because they had little direct control of the Deccan ports. Sind was held by the Guptas and its ports had physical facilities and a long standing commerce with the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea coast. But the fact that Sind was on the frontiers of the Empire made it politically unstable and of doubtful value whenever fresh waves of invaders poured into Mesopotamia and the Persian Plateau. During the Gupta Period, however, the Sassanids maintained close relationship between the Persian Gulf ports and the market towns on the Persian land routes on the one side, and the frontier market towns of the Gupta Empire on the other. The muslins and cloth of Gujarat fetched a high price in Persia and merchants carried goods over long distances by land and sea.

A third set of routes connected Broach to the Deccan Plateau. Although Peninsular India, beyond the Narbada and the upper Konkan coast, was mainly outside the Gupta Empire, the expanding trade of Broach and the facilities made
available to it by the efficient administration of Vikramaditya, together with the enterprising nature of its merchants, enabled Broach to draw to it the wealth of the Deccan. Broach merchants had also the capital to invest in trade and the Deccan trade was a probitable one. Fa Hien, who travelled in India during Vikramaditya's time, bears testimony to the prosperity of the Broach merchants. He says that they endowed large sums to numerous charitable institutions on the major trade routes, maintained free hospitals etc. The Guptas, further, did not meet with any political rivalry in the south. The Andhra power had dwindled by the time the Guptas established themselves in the north. The Vakatakas, who succeeded them, were not a powerful people and were drawn into an alliance with the Guptas. Sopara and Kalleina, the major ports of the Andhras, had been added to the Gupta Empire and a large part of their trade was diverted to Broach. The Vakatakas were dependent on the Guptas for an outlet for their kingdom. The States of the far south and east also offered no rivalry to the Guptas.

The Broach-Masalia Road connected Broach to Maśalia on the east coast. It ran through the Narbada Valley, Maheshwar and the Khandesh bottleneck (Khandavana) to Vatsgulm and from thence to Pithapuram and Masalia (Masulipatam). The Pithapuram-Masulipatam region was well known for its cotton manufacture. Khandesh and the Narbada Valley were rich in
cotton and timber and other products from the forests. The route also ran through Rajpipla from where came the valuable carnelians and agates. Before Cambay took to the polishing of agates Broach was the centre of its industry and the major port through which the polished stones and beads were exported.

A second route connected Broach with Masalia. It ran through Maheshwar, Ajanta, Paithan and Tagara to Masulipatam. Paithan and Tagara were well known market towns of the Deccan, rich in cotton and cotton goods. Paithan commanded the trade routes from the Narbada to the south.

The Paithan route also connected Broach to the far south, to Rameshwaram, Negapatam, Kaveripattanam, Colchi etc. on the east coast. From Kaveripattanam there was a coastal route northwards through Kanchipuram, Masulipatam and Mahendragiri to Tamralipti. The connection of Broach with the Rameshwaram route enabled it to get the diamonds from the Krishna Valley, silks from the Karnataka coast and even pearls from the Mannar Gulf. The coast off Rameshwaram and Kaveripattanam was well known for pearl fishing.

Besides these routes there was a coastal route from Broach to Kanyakumari, also largely outside the Empire. Broach was connected by this route to all the important ports of the Konkan and Malabar, such as Kalleina, Sopara, Goa, Karwar,
Granganore and Quilon. Broach under the Gupta administration, could receive goods from some of the ports of the Konkan and Malabar which were famous during the period of Roman contacts with the Indian coasts. But the Roman trade had by now declined and the Mediterranean contacts with India were mainly through the Auxumite Kingdom (Ethiopia). The Auxumite merchants met the Indian merchants generally at the Malabar or Konkan ports Ceylon or at the ports of Africa and exchanged goods. The merchants of Broach were active in this trade.

**SEA TRADE AND FOREIGN TRADE OF BROACH**

With the economic stability ushered in by the Gupta administration, the revival of a strong currency and the absence of any rival dynasties in the sub-continent to challenge the might of the Guptas, Broach was able to successfully resume its longstanding overseas connections which it enjoyed during the pre-Mauryan and Mauryan Period.

The dominating position of India in the Indian Ocean, and its location on cross roads of the great sea routes from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, once again made itself felt, with the efficient organisation of trade and trade routes under the Guptas. It was a trade that involved all the States of the Indian Ocean. Goods from the Far East, China and Japan were exchanged for those of the Mediterranean States, Europe and Russia by the numerous States flanking the Indian Ocean. Under the Guptas, and particularly during
Vikramaditya's time, this trade reached its zenith, with the Gupta Empire playing a major role. The annexation of Broach and the Gujarat coasts brought the Gupta Empire to the sea coast. Merchants made profits of 150% to 300% in overseas trade during this time. Broach as the leading port of the Empire enjoyed all the care of an efficiently run Government. It had good transport facilities and above all a thriving merchant community which was capable and willing to take the risk of long sea voyages for the sake of profit. Broach was even able to compete with Tamralipti, the second most important port of the Gupta Empire, in the Eastern trade with Malaysian Archipelago, China and Japan, while it had a near monopoly of the Western trade with the Persian Gulf, Arabia and Africa.

Sea voyages were very risky, not only because of natural calamities such as storms and cyclones, but also because of the activities of pirates and smugglers. Fa Hien's vivid account of his journey from Ceylon to Canton is proof of the dangers of sea travels during the Gupta period. He says he boarded a large ship carrying 200 passengers at Sri-Lanka. It was accompanied by a small rescue ship. After two days at sea a storm broke out and the vessel developed a leak. The merchants and passengers, anxious to save their lives, disposed of their luggage to reduce the load of the ship. The gale blew for 13 days and drove them to an island. Here
they plugged the leaking ship and resumed their journey. On the sea they met with pirates. There was no means of finding out the direction in the great expanse of the sea. Huge turtles and sea monsters could be seen in the waves that lashed the ship. The ship sailed thus without direction for 90 days and reached Java. After staying 5 months at Java, they again embarked on another ship. Again they were caught in a cyclone and the pilot lost his direction and floated for 70 days. They had to use salt water for cooking as sweet water was rationed. After another 12 days in the sea they reached the Shantung promontory from where they sailed to Canton. (13)

The risk of sea voyages is mentioned also in the voyage of the daughters of Pandusena, ruler of Madurai, to Sāurashtra. They were shipwrecked in a storm. Another passage in Avasyakachurni says that ships sailing from Champa to Gambhira (probably Tamralipti) sailed to Suvarna Divpa and from there to Kaliyadvipa (probably Zanzibar). (14) Sea voyages were made particularly dangerous because there was no means of knowing the direction in the boundless expanse of the sea. The only guidance was provided by the Sun, Moon and Stars. A ship taken out of its course by a storm had to float aimlessly for days before finding its bearings. But the winds in the
Indian Ocean were kindly enough to take them to some inhabited island or port before they were completely lost. The above narrative while confirming the risks of sea voyages also bear proof that sailing ships did reach some destination with the aid of the winds, where the merchants could trade or exchange their goods and return to their homes with another favourable wind, even though they did not have any efficient instruments to guide them on their journey. The long coastlines of the land masses surrounding the Indian Ocean and the innumerable islands, peninsulas, promontories and archipelagos strewn about the normal sea routes taken by the sailing ships, helped the sailors to a great extent. Sailors of the period had the wisdom of experience acquired through continuous use of the sea routes. They knew the coasts and the ports well and had a good idea of the winds of the Indian ocean.

The ships of the period were propelled by the wind. A favourable tail wind was necessary to carry the ships across the seas. The Indian merchants were quite conversant with the winds of the Indian Ocean and the connecting seas. The Avasyakachurni divides the sea winds into 16 types. The successful completion of a sea voyage depended on the expert knowledge the pilots had of these winds, their direction and their velocity. The Prachina vata was an easterly wind, the Udichina and the Uttarapaurastya, northerly winds and the
Dakhinatya vata a southerly wind. The Sattvasuka was considered dangerous because it blew in all directions. The Apara Dakshina Bijapa was a wind blowing from the south west and quite favourable for ships sailing from the Java-Sumatra coasts to the Indian coast. But the Dakshina-Purva Tungara was a stormy wind blowing in a south-easterly direction which had to be avoided. The Apara Bijapa was a westerly wind but the Aparottara Garjabha was a north westerly stormy wind which was dangerous. Besides these winds there were the Uttara Sattvasuka, Dakshina Sattvasuka, Purva Tungara, Dakshina Bijapa, Paschima Bijapa, Paschima Garjabha and Uttara Garjabha. The terms Sattvasuka, Tungara and Bijapa were nautical terms and were generally used to describe the favourable and unfavourable winds. The Garjabhas and Tungaras were sometimes favourable and sometimes stormy winds while the Sattvasukas could be a wind which blew in all directions. Besides all these winds, cyclones known as Kalikavata were quite periodical and caused many ship wrecks. But the Avasyakachurni says that a clever pilot could reach his destination safely with a favourable wind, if he avoided storms and cyclones.\(^{(15)}\) The Indian sailors under the Gupta administration had access to treatises put out by the State or by private organisations under State encouragement, which instructed them fully with the vagaries of the winds, storms and cyclones of the Indian Ocean. The Avasyakachurni could be considered as one of the
earliest treatises on the climatic conditions of the Indian Ocean. It was mainly compiled to help sailors and encourage trade with distant lands across the seas.

The motive power for the sailing ships being the wind, the ships were small in size compared to the present giant sized steam ships. The quantity of merchandise which could be transported in one trip was small and the journey took months because of the limited speed of the ship and the long halts they had to make at ports, waiting for a favourable wind. Very often cargo ships had to also accommodate passengers as there were very few scheduled sailings to cater to travellers. The boats were also obliged to carry a large crew to help with the sails during storms, to meet the challenges from pirates and sea animals, and also for the number of services required in a long journey. All this reduced the space for cargo. Sea transport was therefore quite costly and time-consuming. Only high priced goods as before, could bear the cost of transport and in general only luxury goods entered the Indian Ocean trade.

Ships were carefully classified according to their length, breadth and height. Large ships of 120 feet in length were in use during this period. Small ships of special design had to be built for constricted channels like that between Ceylon and India or the Malacca Straits.(16)
The science of ship building was highly advanced. The ship builders had a thorough knowledge of the art of ship building. Even as early as the Mauryan period, ship building was a flourishing industry. The Guptas also paid great attention to the science of ship building to promote both riverine and sea traffic. The ship builders had a full knowledge of the types of wood, their properties, durability in sea water and the size, shape and tonnage required for ships used for different purposes, long before the Guptas took over power in northern India.\(^{(17)}\)

Under the Guptas, shipping industry thrived and the east-west trade gained momentum with the increasing prosperity of the Empire and the facilities made available to traders. The foreign trade of India which had seen certain reverses due to competition during the post-Mauryan days, revived with the strength of the Gupta administration. But across the borders of India, the Sassanids had subplanted the Parthians. The Sassanids had little control beyond the Persian Gulf region. The Central Asian land route to China, with their important links with India, was not always at the disposal of the Sassanids. In the Mediterranean region also, the Roman sway had ceased. The Empire had broken up into two by the 3rd century A.D., the west with its capital at Rome and the east with its capital at Byzantium. Rome also lost Egypt and the Levant. Even though Byzantium inherited the
The maritime trade of Rome, it had no access to the east beyond Alexandria in Egypt and beyond the Black-Sea-Caspian Sea region in Central Asia. When the Guptas took over power in India, the coasts of Africa were also run over by the Vandals. The course of India's trade with the west was thus beset with several hurdles, due to political unrest. Thus the Gupta Period is better noted for the progress made in the Far Eastern trade and the emergence of "Greater India" based on commerce, in South East Asia.

The trade of Broach with the Persian Gulf ports, the Arabian and African coasts and the Red Sea ports, however, continued. During the Kshatrapa supremacy in Gujarat, Broach had actually found it necessary to establish closer contact with the Persian Gulf ports, the ports of the Arabian coast, the Horn of Africa and East Africa, when the major trade of the Red Sea ports of the Romans was diverted to the Konkan and Malabar ports of the south. The Guptas also found that the Sassanids of the Persian Gulf area were anxious to maintain sea contacts with the Indian ports. The rest of West Asia and East Africa were in a political turmoil and the Guptas found it necessary to ally with the Sassanids to carry on their Western trade.

The well known ports of the Persian Gulf such as Apologus, Charax Spasini, Gerrha and Ommana maintained
their contacts with Broach. But Broach was not alone in this trade. Patala in Sind and Vale on the Bhavanagar coast of Saurashtra had also a thriving trade with the Persian Gulf ports. Sind was a Gupta Province and Vale acknowledged the suzerainty of Vikramaditya. The trade of Broach with the Persian Gulf was often through the Saurashtra and Sind ports. Many of the products which Broach received from the Far East, as well as the commodities from its own hinterland, were exported to the Persian Gulf. Spices, camphor, ivory, cotton cloth, sandalwood, teak, ebony, rose wood, musk, aloe and wheat were exchanged by Broach for the wine, corals, pearl, stibnite, realgar, nard, horses, gold, silver, white lead, slaves, mirrors, glass beads, rugs and carpets etc. of the Persian Gulf.

Through Mesopotamia, Persia also traded with Iraq where there was a good demand for spices, camphor, dyes, aromatics, textiles, including silk, rhubarb, musk, porcelain etc. from the East. Broach received mainly gold, silver, mirrors, glass beads and special kinds of fabrics from Iraq.

The trade of Broach with the Persian Gulf ports was profitable also because Persia maintained treaty relations with the Byzantine Empire. One of the routes of the Byzantine Empire to the East was through Persia. Even though constant wars broke out between Persia and Byzantium to mar treaty
relations, both were anxious to continue the trade. For the Roman Empire it was the trade with the East that was of first importance. From the East came the luxuries which were gradually thought of as necessities by Rome. When the Empire broke up, it was still the trade with the East that engaged absorbed the energies of the Byzantine merchants. It was the power of the merchant who brought the wealth of the East that kept the Barbarian invaders of Rome in awe, when the reputed strength of its army failed to do so. For the Byzantine Empire therefore it became a matter of prestige to bring the treasures of India and China to the west because on its commercial strength lay its acceptance in Europe. Just as the Indian dynasties were striving to continue the Western trade, despite all risks, the Byzantine merchants were also making every effort to reach out to India bypassing the Syrians who dominated the Levant coast and the Vandals who had by now over-run Africa. The route through Persia was the shortest and the safest one, both to India and China. Byzantium drew up commercial treaties with Persia to keep open the Bukhara-Samarkand route to China and the Taxila and Kandahar routes to India. A much more difficult route from China and India to Byzantium was the one through the Caspian Sea and from thence, avoiding Persian territory, to the Black Sea and the Russian principality of Keiv. From Keiv the voyage down the Dneiper to the Dardanelles-Bosporus and Byzantium was dangerous because of the hostile
tribals who attacked traders. Byzantium, however, found it necessary to draw up treaties with Kiev when the caravan routes through Persia were closed because of the breakage of hostilities between the two countries. The Caspian route came into vogue, however, a few centuries later, after the fall of the Guptas and the Sassanids. The commodity that was most in demand in Byzantium was silk. But sandalwood, spices, precious and semi-precious stones etc. also went by the caravan route to the frontier towns. (19)

On the Arabian coast Eudaemon had regained its glory by the 4th century A.D., after having been eclipsed by Muza in the 1st and 2nd centuries. But Muza also continued to trade with Broach. Cotton cloth, silk, quilts, wheat, rice, oil, ghee and saphires went from Broach in return for frankincense myrrh, bdellium, gold, silver, dates, slaves and horses, from Muza and Eudaemon.

On the Red Sea route, besides Eudaemon and Muza, Alexandria became a major market where merchants from Byzantium met those of the East. The competition of the Syrians of the Levant coast forced Byzantium to turn to the Egyptian port for contacts with the East. Silks, sandalwood, musk, muslin, camphor, rubies, saphires, etc. went to Alexandria through the Auxumite kingdom and the Nile from the East. Broach took an active part in this trade. It also exported to Alexandria products such as agates, diamonds, woollen cloth etc. from its
own hinterland. The return traffic consisted of slaves, corals, mirror, glass, wine, copper, tin and linen.

The Red Sea route continued to be of importance to the trade of the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean although Egypt was now outside Roman and Byzantine control. The Persian route being conditioned by Byzantium's relations with that country the Red Sea route was considered a more stable route. Cosmos Indicopleustus says the Auxumites played a key role in this trade. They brought goods from the East to Adul (Adulis) on the Red Sea, which at this time had become the capital of the Kingdom of Axum. Traders from India exchanged silk, aloes and sandalwood for glass and embroideries of Syria at Adul. They took pepper from Malabar, sesame wood and copper from Kalleina and the west coast ports of India and bartered them for gold, cloves, ivory, cinnabar and frankincense. Broach also sent cotton cloth, wheat, rice, ghee, sugar, gingelly oil, corn, sashes, agates and beads to the ports of Malao, Opone, Mundus and Mossylum on the horn of Africa. In return she received frankincense, myrrh, sandalwood, ivory, cinnabar, cloves, camphor and ivory.

But Adul of the Auxumites was the main centre from which the commodities of India and the East went to Byzantium. From Adul they went to Jotabe where the Byzantine merchants
had to pay heavy duties. From Jotabe they would proceed to Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba or to Clysma near Suez. A canal from Clysma led to the Nile and to Alexandria. But the merchants of Broach perhaps had no direct trade with the Byzantine Empire. Cosmos Indicopleustus says that the Auxumite merchants came as far as Ceylon, Malabar and the Gujarat ports to transport the goods to their port. But Indian traders still exchanged their products at Mundus, Malao, Opone, and Mossylum. They knew Alexandria quite well.

Along the East African coast the trade of Broach was mainly with Zanzibar. But Apokoka, Mogadishu, Brava, Lamu, Mombasa, Pemba and Rhapta also traded with Broach. As the trade with the ports of the Horn of Africa declined, with the rise of the Auxumite Kingdom and its attempts to monopolise the trade with Byzantium, the Indian traders moved south to the East African ports. The country was rich in gold, cloves, sandalwood, frankincense, myrrh and camphor, all of which were highly valued commodities in the Indian Ocean trade. The main exports of Broach to these ports were cotton, cloth, some cereals and oil, sugar, ghee, agate, beads etc.

The Gupta Period however is noted for the expansion of the trade of India with the Far East and the establishment of Hindu Kingdoms in South East Asia. This trade, like that of India's trade with the Arabs, Egyptians and the Persians beyond the Arabian Sea, was opened up atleast as far back as
Mauryan Period if not earlier. As in the Arabian Sea the changing Monsoon winds in the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea and the Java-Banda Seas encouraged sailors to venture out into the sea in search of the commodities of trade. The long coast line and the innumerable islands stretching from the Indian coasts to the Indonesian-Malaysian Archipelago, China and Japan induced sailors to go from coast to coast and island to island picking up and depositing cargo. Experience gave them the knowledge required, of the winds and currents. The area was also very rich in many of the commodities which were in demand in India and the West. The colonisation of South East Asia, which features as a significant factor in history during the Gupta Period, was achieved by the commercial vigour of the Indian merchant community, through the centuries. Broach merchants played a leading role in the colonisation of Indo China, Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Borneo and the other islands of South East Asia.

The Kingdom of Funan in the lower basin of the Mekong river commanded the sea route to China through the South China Sea. The navigable Mekong river gave it access to a rich hinterland. The greater force of Hindu expansion in South East Asia, during this time, was across the neck of the Malay Peninsula from Takkola to Ligor and from thence to the coasts of Indo China to the north and along the eastern coasts of Malaya to Java, Borneo, the Celebes and the
Moluccas to the south and southeast. From Java there was also a migration to Sumatra. The greater impact of Hindu culture was in the Indo-China coast, Java, Sumatra, eastern Malaya, Borneo and Celebes. But the port Pasai on the northern tip of Sumatra and Malacca in Malaya was also known. The Funan Kingdom was well placed to command the trade with China and Japan as well as that with Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Celebes and the Moluccas. The Chinese chronicles of the 4th century A.D. list the items that entered the trade of the Funan Kingdom. White and red sandalwood from the Celebes, Java and Funan itself, corals from Borneo and aloe from Champa went to Funan and from thence to Broach. The return traffic mainly consisted of cloth and muslin. Go-oc-eo was its port of export and import.

To the west of the Funan Kingdom was Suvarnakudia which was also rich in red and white sandalwood. Its location between Burma and Funan enabled it to take an active part in the east-west trade.

The Kingdom of Champa on the Annam coast had several ports which traded with India and Broach. It also commanded the South China Sea route to China and Japan. But its hinterland was obstructed by the Annam Chain of mountains stretching north-south. It had also no great navigable rivers, like the Mekong and the Menam, to link it with the interior. But
its ports Myson, Sa Huan, Singapure, Vijaya, Mathura, Pandurang etc. had a thriving trade with India and Broach in aloe. Indian traders had exclusive trading colonies in Champa.

The Kingdom of Dwaravati situated at the head of the Gulf of Siam had a lucrative trade with India during the Gupta Period. Its capital Nikon Pathom was a well known port where Indians traded. Gupta coins seals and Indian stone wheels found in the area bear abundant proof of its trade with the Gupta Empire and its major port Broach. Dwaravati's strategic situation made it a target of attack from the mightier Funan Kingdom which absorbed it in 550 A.D.

To the north of Dwaravati was the Kingdom of Sri Dev which was also quite active in the Indian Ocean trade. Like Dwaravati its main exports were aloe and sandalwood.

Commanding the entrance to the Straits of Malacca from the Bay of Bengal was the kingdom of Kedah, controlling the sea route through the Malacca Straits. But the Malacca Straits was infested with pirates and considered risky at this time.

Malacca itself was an important port for the Indian Ocean trade in the 5th century. The sea routes from the Banda-Java seas converged on the Straits of Malacca. The Indians traded at Takkola, Trang, Kedah and Penang on the west coast and Chumphon, Chia Ligor and Selensing on the east coast of Malaya. But the Malacca Straits abounded in pirates.
Fa Hien mentions that the small Indian ships preferred to sail to Takkola and across land to Ligor to the east coast of Malaya and then sail through the Java and Banda Seas up to the Moluccas. The greatest rivals of the Indians in the Malacca Straits were the Chinese who, even during Asoka's time, threatened the Indian traders. (22)

The Chinese trade of the Guptas was also very lucrative. Silk was in great demand in the West and China was its major exporter. Silk had by now become common in private life and in the church in the Byzantine Empire. Although its major trade with the West was through Samarkand and Bukhara and across the caravan routes of Persia to the frontier towns, there was export of silk from China by sea as well, particularly after China advanced to the coast in the 1st century A.D. and gained control of Canton and Chiao-chi. (23) As land routes across Central Asia became cumbersome, silk was exported by sea and the merchants of Broach procured it either at any of the ports of South East Asia or directly from China. China also sent to Broach rhubarb, musk and porcelain. Indian merchants sailed beyond China to Japan long before the Europeans discovered it.

The trade of the Gupta Empire reached its height during the reign of Chandragupta II Vikramaditya. His death in 413 A.D. ended a twenty three year reign during which Broach enjoyed the stability resulting from a peaceful and efficient
administration. Broach and Tamralipti are cited as the main ports of the Empire. But Tamralipti, though nearer to the Gupta capital, was only second to Broach because of the locational advantages of the latter in relation to the trade centres of Africa, Arabia, Persia and the Red Sea ports and also in relation to the transport facilities made available to it during the centuries preceding the Gupta Period. Besides Broach (and Gujarat as a whole) possessed a vigorous merchant community willing to take the risks of commerce with distant lands. Her trading class had also an accumulated capital, derived from a favourable balance of trade over centuries of profitable overseas trade, which it was willing to invest in furthering trade, manufacture and in promoting the interests of the trading community by improving institutional advantages.

After Chandragupta's death, slow decay set in. The Gupta administration had certain inherent weaknesses which surfaced to the top with the weakness of the Central Government. It was similar to that of the Mauryans only superficially. The king was the highest authority and the Empire was divided into provinces, districts and groups of villages, for administrative purposes, in hierarchical order. Each had its own officers who were responsible to the most senior officer in that unit. But the Gupta administration differed from the Maurya administration in one significant aspect.
The Guptas laid more emphasis on local administration and the control of the centre was far less than during the Mauryan Period. Even in the administration of the urban areas, the City Board consisted of representatives from the local bodies such as the heads of Guilds and merchant bodies and not officers appointed by the State. The tendency to delegate responsibility to local bodies was evident also in the sphere of land administration. Revenues were still collected by the officers of the State as during the Mauryan Period. But they were allowed to retain a certain percentage of the revenue instead of being paid a regular cash salary. This method of payment to the officers of the State came to be increasingly practiced under the Guptas. Often the King even granted the revenue of whole villages and areas to officials. Land was also made over to non-officials, brahmins, learned men and others. The alienation of land had its own effects. Since the major part of the State revenues came from the land, grants of land revenues to officials and non-officials decreased the revenue and also caused a radical change in the revenue system. Although the grantees, theoretically, were entitled only to the revenue and had no claim on the land, they gradually came to look upon the land as part of the grant, and as such, private property. Such grants came to be bestowed on officials and non-officials, charity institutions and temples. Customs revenues of the
ports were thus dissipated. Technically the King could, at any time, withdraw the grant but in practise it was never done. The system in general loosened the control of the State over the revenues and emphasised local independence, particularly when the Gupta kings failed to assert their authority over local bodies. The grantee assumed the position of local patron and local land lord. He attracted the loyalty of the local people to himself rather than to the State and its symbol, the king. As the invasions of the Hunic tribes became more frequent and the king came to be harassed by economic and political emergencies, his contacts with the provinces, districts and villages were all but absent. The shift in emphasis from the central to the local bodies soon made itself felt on the integrity of the State. (24)

After Chandragupta II, the Guptas had to face the challenge of the hordes of invaders who came across the north western mountain barrier. Kumaragupta (413-433) who succeeded Chandragupta had to contend with the rising strength of the Pushyamitras of Thaneshwar who made themselves powerful by allying with the Hunic invaders. Although Kumaragupta was able to repel their combined attack in Kathiawar, the wars with the Huns continued to lay waste the Empire. The Junagadh Inscriptions, the Chandragupta Sutra and the Manjari Mula Kalpa Sutra mention that Skandagupta, the successor of Kumaragupta, also had to fight the Huns, the
Yavanas, the Persians and the Sakas. Although he is said to have defeated them the "Golden Age" of the Guptas, which saw the crystallisation of the classical norm on both political and cultural levels under Vikramaditya, gave way to a period of internal strife and external pressures.

The Guptas were involved in huge military expenditures which had an impact on the economy of the Empire. Even Skandagupta's wars against the Huns caused a debasement in the Gupta currency. The gold coins of Skandagupta had only 50% of gold in them. Gradually, Gupta coins came to be increasingly mixed with copper. Their stamped value was greater than their value in the market against commodities. The Gupta coins ceased to be acceptable in the Indian Ocean trade. Barter trade once again came to be considered stabler than trade by currency.

Conditions became worse under Ramagupta (467-470 A.D.) when trade slackened seriously. Travel by land and sea became dangerous. In 470 A.D. Bhataka, the Gupta General in Valabhi, established his independence. One by one, provinces and districts and even towns asserted their authority. The Gupta Viceroy of Gujarat lost Broach to the Traikutakas in 470 A.D.

Across the north western borders of India the Huns harassed the Sassanids of Persia (224-251 A.D.). In 484 A.D. King Firoz of Persia was killed and the Sassanid Dynasty,
which had so far borne the full brunt of the Hunic invasions across Central Asia to Persia and thence to India, all but succumbed. The victory of the Huns over Persia made the north western frontiers of India and the vital passages to the Indo-Gangetic Valley defenceless and open to pressures. The Huns occupied Kapisa, Gandhara, Kashgar and Khotan, blocking the land links between the plains of India and the Persian-Afghanistan Plateau. The power vacuum in the northern plains of India soon tempted the invaders to force themselves into the heart of the fertile Indo-Gangetic Valley, disrupting the trade and trade routes of the ports of Western India.

Beyond West Asia also great changes had taken place even before the Guptas established themselves as the paramount power in India. The Huns did not spare the Roman Empire, the great market in the Mediterranean for the luxury goods of India and the Far East. The Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire) which inherited the trade and the sea power of the Romans in the Eastern Mediterranean had no control of either the vital Levant Coast (which controlled the routes from the Persian Gulf across the Fertile Crescent to the Mediterranean), or Egypt; and the Nile (which controlled the sea route to the East). The contacts of the Byzantine Empire with the East were dependent on Alexandria at the head of the Nile and the Auxumites of Ethiopia with whose alliance the Eastern trade trickled through to the
Mediterranean world. Besides the loss of the Red Sea route, the Byzantines had to resort to a treaty with Persia for procuring the goods of India and China. The goods passed through the oases Sogdiana (Samarkand and Bukhara) and the caravan routes of Persia to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. All the three routes from the East to the Mediterranean were interrupted by small independent kingdoms and chiefdoms which extracted heavy duties on goods in transit. Byzantium and Venice (which became a commercially vigorous city in the Eastern Mediterranean) had to pay heavily for the luxuries from the East. The Western Roman Empire was at its best only a land power and ceased to be interested in trade. The wealthy Romans had never looked upon trade as a respectable occupation, They preferred to invest in land. Byzantium as the successor of the Roman Empire in the East, due to its locational advantages with regard to the eastern trade, took up the traditions of Rome but gradually surrendered to the commercial vigour of Venice by the 9th century. By the 11th century the contacts of Byzantium with the east had ceased to be of any importance to the Mediterranean world. But long before the decline of the trade of Byzantium with the east, the direct contacts of India with the Mediterranean were disrupted by the Hunic and Vandal incursions in West Asia, Africa and Europe beginning with the third country in West Asia and reaching India by the 5th century A.D.
References:

THE GUPTA PERIOD


(2) The Classical Age, op.cit., pp. 590-596.

(3) Moti Chandra, op.cit., pp. 150-151.


(7) Moti Chandra, op.cit., p. 151.

(8) Moti Chandra, op.cit., p. 151.


b. Radhamukud Mukherjee, The Gupta Empire (Motilal Banarasidas), 1973, pp. 30-37, 52-56, 84-89 and 97-100. (For the various types of coins from Chandragupta I to Skandagupta).
(12) See Map 10.
(14) Moti Chandra, op.cit., p.165.
(18) Norman H. Baynes, The Byzantine Empire, op.cit., p.44.
    b. V.A. Smith, op.cit., p.328 and footnote 3.