STRUCTURE OF THE GUPTA AND VAKATAKA POLITY: AN EPIGRAPHICAL STUDY

ABSTRACT
THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy
IN
HISTORY

BY
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Under the Supervision of

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
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ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

Chapter-IV is devoted to the examination of the Vakataka
inscriptions. The rich epigraphic information on the Vakataka kingdom
within a comparatively limited region raises the issue of how far this
was a unitary polity. This chapter concerns with this issue. It deals
firstly with the early history of the Vakataka and attempts to solve the
problem regarding their original home. Besides giving a detail
description about the allies of both the branches of the Vakataka dynasty
viz. Nandivardhana and Pravarapura branch and Vatsagulma branch,
this chapter also tries to settle the controversies regarding their
feudatories on the basis of available epigraphical data. Along with this it
attempts to establish the exact position of the feudatories in the
Vakataka polity. All possible attempts have been made in this chapter to
give an accurate picture of the Vakataka administration. However, some
important aspects of their administrative structure have either been left
out or have been treated very briefly owing to the paucity of
information.
Chapter-V deals with the agrarian and fiscal rights of the state. It deals with the vexed question of land ownership and tries to find out whether the whole land belonged to the king or the individuals have some rights over the land in this period. Besides, it also deals with the king’s prerogative over the donated lands. The chapter describes in detail some important aspects of agrarian system such as land tenure and boundary specifications and also tries to establish the magnitude of fiscal rights of the state on the basis of the evidences provided by the Gupta and Vakataka inscriptions which is supplemented by literary texts of this period.
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ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
ALIGARH (INDIA)
18 May 2010
Dedicated to My Mother (Late Mrs. Rajrani Sharma)
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis “Structure of the Gupta and Vakataka Polity: An Epigraphical Study” by Meenakshi Sharma is the original research work of the candidate.

I recommend that the thesis may be placed before the Examiners for evaluation.

Dated: 18.05.2010

(Prof. B.L. Bhadani)
Supervisor
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(Meenakshi Sharma)
ABBREVIATION
# ABBREVIATIONS

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<td>The Age of the Va katakas</td>
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<td><strong>ABORI</strong></td>
<td>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute</td>
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<td><strong>ASIAR</strong></td>
<td>Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports</td>
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<td><strong>BRWW</strong></td>
<td>Buddhist Records of the Western World</td>
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<td><strong>C</strong></td>
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INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

After the downfall of the Kushanas in the north and the Satavahanas in the south, three political powers emerged in central and eastern part of northern India. In the middle of the third century A.D. the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh saw the rise of the Vakatakas. In the western part of Madhyadesha, Bharashiva nagas had established themselves with their kingdom in Padmavati i.e., Padmapawaya of Madhya Pradesh and towards the close of the century the Varanasi region of eastern Uttar Pradesh came under the rule of the Guptas. Bharashivas merged their kingdom with the Vakatakas, who later shifted their seat of power to Vidarbha region and established their supremacy in Deccan. The Guptas then built one of the largest empire in the history of Ancient India which included the whole of India north of Vindhyas.

Our entire information for the Gupta empire (including its feudatories) and the Vakataka kingdom comes from inscriptions which included copper plate grants or land grant charters, cave inscriptions, prasastis or eulogies inscribed on stone and stone pillars and various seal inscriptions. Their number has been kept on increasing with fresh discoveries and publications. The Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum editions of Gupta inscriptions edited by J.F. Fleet and then by D.R.
Bhadarkar, in successive versions and of Vakataka inscriptions edited by V.V. Marashi are supplemented in the present study by inscriptions published in *Epigraphia Indica* and other journals such as Indian *Antiquary*, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India* etc. as well as by volumes edited by K.V. Ramesh, S.P. Tewari and Ajay Mitra Shastri. These new inscriptions not only constitute a large body of evidence making it possible to take up afresh the question of the relationship between the Gupta emperors and their feudatories but also reveal some new informations about political, administrative and economic conditions of the Gupta as well as the Vakataka empires.

The inscriptions particularly copper plate grants of the Guptas and their feudatories are all dated in the Gupta era while that of the Vakatakas are dated in the regnal year of the reigning monarch. They provide us the description of the donors, donees, the list of officers, their designations as well as throw light on the nature of state organisation and administration. Thus, the inscriptions provide information about the political and administrative structure of the Guptas and Vakatakas and the subordinate dynasties of the Gupta realm.

After scanning this vast treasure of information it is found that the Guptas who emerged later than the Vakatakas rose as an independent power in the region around Varanasi under Maharaja Srigupta (A.D.
They grew powerful in the period of Chandragupta I and developed into a great imperial power by the mighty emperors Samudragupta and his son Chandragupta II in whose period Gupta empire had control over the whole Aryavarta region extended from the Himalaya in the north upto Narmada in the south and from Arabian sea in the west upto Bay of Bengal in the east and had great influence over Dakshinapath i.e., South India. Political strategies including military conquest and diplomatic alliances of the Gupta rulers mainly contributed in extending Gupta territories. Epigraphical evidences suggest that Gupta empire was largely formed by the states administered by subordinate or tributary rulers, often referred to in the modern writings as feudatories. They were called Maharajas and Mahasamantas, payed tributes to their overlord and enjoyed a large extent of autonomy in their respective kingdoms which were formally included in the Gupta empire.

This system of government though worked successfully in the early days of the Gupta empire when central government was effective enough to control and prevent the disruptive tendencies of the feudatories but it ultimately led to the decentralization and disintegration of the empire. Another important development of this period was the growing practice of making grants of land and villages to individuals and religious institutions for religious purpose with certain privileges
including revenue and administrative rights. This strengthened the position of donees and in course of time led to a new social formation which has been described as feudal.

After a critical assessment of the evidences provided by the literary and epigraphical sources belonging to the Vakatakas, it is established in the present study that the Vakatakas began their rule somewhere in the Vindhya region under their founder member viz. Vindhyasakti I. Their early capital seems to have been in the town of Kanchanaka which is identified with Nachna-ki-Talai in the Panna district of the Bundelkhand division of Madhya Pradesh. They moved southwards to Vidarbha under Pravarasena I and divided into two branches after him known as Nandivardhana - Pravarapura branch or main branch and Vatsagulma branch after their respective capitals. Whatever evidences provided by the Vakataka inscriptions indicate that Vakataka kings (of both the branches) administered their kingdoms with more authority. There were feudatories but their number was limited and they were less powerful than the Gupta feudatories. From the Vakataka sources it appears that Vakataka kingdom was more centralized.

The importance of land grant charters as a source for the study of economic history is immense. These charters contain references to the number of taxes, from which the donated villages were exempted which
give us an idea of the fiscal rights of the Gupta and Vakataka states. In the land grant charters the donated land or village is very often specified by the boundary marks like the wells, tanks and certain other physical features. The name of the village and the description of its physical situation may indicate whether it lies in virgin, semi-virgin, or settled area. In the present study major questions regarding ownership of land, land tenure and land survey are also investigated.

While it is true that the reliable stock of information is taken from the inscriptions, the literary sources of the period are also investigated to correlate this information. The literary sources include the legal texts belonging to fourth to sixth century A.D. such as the law books of Brihaspati, Narada and Kamandaka and of the earlier period like Arthashastra, Manusmriti and Vishnu Smriti. Hindu religious texts i.e. Puranas are also useful. The Puranic account given in the dynasties of the Kali Age edited by F.E. Pargitar is used. Ceylonese Buddhist Chronical viz. Mahavamsa is investigated to find out Guptas’ relations with Ceylon. In the category of secular literature of the period under study the most important are the works of Kalidasa. His Raghuvamsa is used to find out information about various aspects of the Gupta polity. The accounts of the foreign travellers who came to India during the period under study have not been overlooked. The most important
among them are those left by Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang. Their observations regarding the administration of contemporary period are important and is analysed in the light of information we get from the inscriptions of the Gupta period.
CHAPTER - I

EXTENT OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE
CHAPTER – I
EXTENT OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE
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 sway\(^2\). 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)\(^4\) 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\(^5\).

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\(^6\) 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


\(^6\) Ibid, p. 218; *RFIG*, p. 99.
his father and grandfather who adopted the lesser title of Maharaja. Chandragupta I assumed the title Maharajadhiraṇa 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 Lichchhavayaḥ 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\(^9\).

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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 Maharajadhiraja. 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\(^{11}\). *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\(^{12}\). 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

\(^{11}\) Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the decline of the Mauryas*, Revised edition, 1997, Delhi, p.94.

the acceptance of subordination by the defeated king. This tendency is very old and deep-rooted in the Indian tradition and also received the sanction of the 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.” The Arthasastra differentiates between dharmavijaya and lobhavijaya or Asuravijaya. A dharmavijayi was satisfied with mere obeisance or surrender on the part of the conquered. The theory finds elaborate expression in the works of Kalidasa who in his Raghuvamsa described this policy as one of uprooting and replanting.

आपादपञ्चमणातः कल्मािवतेश्युम्
फलसंवर्ध्यायामसुरुत्खात प्रतिरोपिता:।

“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.”

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15 Arthasastra, part II, XII, 1, p. 247.
16 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—

श्रीमत प्रतिमुक्तस्य सदर्मविजयी त्रृपः।
श्रियं महेन्द्रनाथस्य 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)\(^{18}\) were defeated by Samudragupta. they were captured (grahna); liberated (moksha); and reinstated in their own kingdoms (anugraha)\(^{19}\). Here, one can notice close kinship between the expression **grahana-moksha-anugraha** of *Allahabad pillar inscription* and the phrase ग्रहणं प्रतिमुक्तस्य given by Kalidasa in *Raghuvamsa. Pratyantas*\(^{20}\) i.e. five kingdoms and nine tribal territories located on the borders of Samudragupta’s kingdom in the north, east and western India\(^{21}\) were forced to accept Gupta suzerainty. According to the *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. **Sarvva-karadan-ajnakarana-pranamagamana-paritoshita-prachanda-sasanasya**\(^{22}\). The kings of forest kingdoms (*atavika-rāja*)\(^{23}\) situated in the hilly and forest infested region of central India\(^{24}\) were forced into servitude, *Paricharakikrita-sarva-atavika-rajasya*\(^{25}\). And more distant rulers such as the *Daivaputra-


\(^{20}\) Ibid, p. 213, L. 22.

\(^{21}\) *RFIG*, pp. 117-122.


\(^{23}\) Ibid, L. 21.

\(^{24}\) *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-chasarvva-dvipa-vasibhir (the kings of Sri Lanka and the dwellers of all the islands) 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 svavisayabhukti sa(sana) (y) achanadyupaya sevakritā.

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. 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

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Bodhagaya. The required permission was granted. 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 Combodia suggest that ‘dwellers of all the islands’ mentioned in the 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, 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. 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.

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

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33 *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 Samudragupta 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 Samudragupta 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\(^\text{34}\), and by his copper coins from Eran-Vidisha region in Madhya Pradesh and Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh\(^\text{35}\). 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

\(^{34}\) CII, Vol. III, pp. 231-234.
of Ramagupta and Sakas is described in many literary and epigraphical sources of the Gupta and later period\(^{36}\). 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\(^{37}\).

The date of Chandragupta II’s accession can be regarded either A.D. 375-76\(^{38}\) or A.D. 380-381\(^{39}\), on the basis of his earliest known


record viz. *Mathura stone pillar inscription* dated G. year 61/A.D. 380-81\(^40\). 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\(^41\). 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\(^42\) 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

\(^41\) *Bayana Hoard*, p. 68; *Coinage*, p. 93.
of kings in which Chandra (Chandragupta II) displayed extraordinary valour and defeated the enemies, *Yasy-odvarttayatah pratipam-urasa sattrun-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)"^43. Vanga denotes south-eastern Bengal, very nearly to the same country as Samtata which was included in the tributary frontier states of Samudragupta^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.^45

From the information provided by the *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

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

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47 DKA, p. 54.
these states were assimilated in the empire by Chandragupta II\(^5\). 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\(^5\), P.L. Gupta states that in northern India the region upto Kashmir was brought under the direct rule of Gupta empire by Chandragupta II\(^5\).

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\(^5\). The approximate period of this conquest can be established with the help of the numismatic evidence. The latest

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\(^{51}\) Kalhana’s Rajatarangini, A chronicle of the kings of Kashmir, tr. by M.A. Stein. Vol. I, Delhi, 1900, pp. 87-93.

\(^{52}\) 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\textsuperscript{54} 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\textsuperscript{55}. 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\textsuperscript{56}.’ 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.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{CCGD}, pp. 49-50.
\textsuperscript{56} R.N. Saletore, \textit{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’\(^57\), 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- *Tirtva sapta mukhani yenasamare sindhor-jjitva Vahlika*\(^58\). The place Vahlika is almost certainly identified with Bactria or modern Balkh in north eastern Afghanistan\(^59\). But different opinions have been expressed regarding the identification of the people who occupied Vahlika or Bactria in this period.


R.C. Majumdar has identified them with the Kushanas at one place. 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 time. The Juan-Juan tribe has been identified with the Chionites or Hunas who had occupied Bactria. 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 (Vahlikas) described in the *Mehrauli Pillar inscription*. They suggested that Chandragupta II adopted a land route in his military expedition against the Vahlikas 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.

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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”

र्ग्हू. प्रतस्ये कार्येरू भार्तानिवर्वागदिशाम।
शास्रस्त्रसिििि्विच्यानुदिशिःप्रसाधिः। ॥

“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.

र्ग्हू. प्रतस्ये कार्येरू भार्तानिवर्वागदिशाम।
शास्रस्त्रसिििि्विच्यानुदिशिःप्रसाधिः। ॥

“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 Kushanans 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,

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69 Ibid, V.68, p. 115.
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\textsuperscript{70}. 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\textsuperscript{71}. 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

\textsuperscript{70} IG, p 306.
\textsuperscript{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\(^2\). 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\(^3\).

Another matrimonial relationship with the Gupta family had been
established by the Kadamba ruler Kakutstavarman. It is evident by the
*Talagund stone Pillar inscription* wherein Kakutstavarman 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,

\[
\text{Guptadipartthiva-kulamburuhasthalani}
\text{snehadara-pranaya-sambhrama-kesarani |}
\text{Srimantyaneka nripashatpada-sevitani}
\text{Yo=bodhyadduhitri-didhitibhir-nrirparkkah} ||\(^4\)
\]

“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

\(^3\) *IG*, pp. 302-303, *RFIG*, p. 168; *SIHC*, p. 395.
\(^4\) *EI*, Vol. VIII, Delhi, 1905-06, p. 33.
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 Kakusthavarman 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 Dautyam, 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\textsuperscript{75}. Some scholars identified the king of Kuntala with Srikrishnavarman\textsuperscript{76} while some other with Devaraja of the Rashtrakuta family of Manapura\textsuperscript{77}. 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\textsuperscript{78}. He left a vast empire for his successors which actually stretched from Bengal in the east to Gujarat and Kathiwad in the west

\textsuperscript{75} IG, pp. 143-144; RFIG, pp. 169-170.
\textsuperscript{76} IG, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{77} RFIG, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{78} CII, Vol. III, p. 250.
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. 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 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. 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, P.L. Gupta suggests that Kumaragupta I eliminated some of the south-eastern feudatories of the time of his grandfather Samudragupta.

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

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84 Ibid, pp. 200-203; Bayana Hoard, pp.299-300.
86 DKA, p. 54.
87 IG, p. 309.
evident by these inscriptions that Kumaragupta I was a strong administrator and was sagacious in the selection of his governors and viceroyos 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\(^{88}\) and G. year 128/A.D 446-47\(^{89}\) 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*\(^{91}\).

*The Baigram copper plate grant* tells us that the *Kumaramatya* Kulavriddhi was administering the district of Panchanagari\(^1\) (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\(^2\) and the *Bhitari Pillar inscription* of Skandagupta\(^3\) 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

\(^{89}\) Ibid, pp. 288-291.
\(^{90}\) Ibid, p. 278.
\(^{92}\) *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 296, 305.
\(^{93}\) Ibid, pp. 312-317.
Pushyamitras⁹⁴ and the Hunas⁹⁵. 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 Pargiter⁹⁶. Fleet made the suggestion that they were a tribe on the Narmada region⁹⁷.

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 victorious⁹⁸.

As far as Hunas or Mlechchhas (as they referred to by the Junagadh rock inscription)⁹⁹ 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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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{Raghuvasa} 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

\textsuperscript{100} Martin, op. cit., pp. 24-26.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Raghuvasa}, V.66, 68, p. 115.


\textsuperscript{104} R.C. Majumdar, Ibid, p. 74.
the struggle was severe. 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, Kahaum in the Gorakhpur district, and at Indore in the Bulandshahar district in Uttar Pradesh, 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, the Vishaya of Antarvedi (the country lying between the Ganga and Yamuna or the region of Kanauj lying between the Ganga and Yamuna, commonly called Doab) was administered by the Vishyapati Sarvanaga. Thus, the Gupta empire was the undisputed possession of one master whose commands were

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106 Ibid, pp. 296-305.  
107 Ibid, pp. 305-308.  
110 Fleet, CII, III, pp. 69-70.  
112 Ibid, p. 310.
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\(^{113}\). 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\(^{114}\) 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\(^{115}\) and his two gold coins one of which contains his name as Ghato and the marginal legend Kramaditya\(^{116}\). Because of the existence of the two gold coins of Ghatotkachagupta 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

\(^{113}\) Coinage, pp. 257-258.
\(^{115}\) 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\(^1\) and from the Bhitari silver-copper seal and the Nalanda clay sealing of his grandson Kumaragupta III\(^2\). Some gold coins with the legend Prakashaditya are also attributed to Purugupta\(^3\). 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\(^4\). He bore the title Kramaditya which is inscribed on his gold coins of Archer type\(^5\). 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\(^6\). 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.  
\(^{120}\) CII, Vol. III, pp. 321-322.  
\(^{121}\) Coinage, pp. 272-275.  
Maharajadhiraja Budhagupta\textsuperscript{123}. 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,\textsuperscript{124} 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\textsuperscript{125} while in other the date has lost\textsuperscript{126}. 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\textsuperscript{127}. Besides this, a Budha image inscription from Mathura

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid, pp. 334-335.
\textsuperscript{125} CII, Vol. III, pp. 335-339.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid, 342-345.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, pp. 339-341.
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 \textit{Maharaja} Lakshmana whose jurisdiction appears to have extended over some territory in the neighbourhood of Prayag. The inscription records the grant of an \textit{agrahara} in the village Phela-parvvatika, situated very close to Kaushambi\textsuperscript{130}.

The facts that the \textit{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

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{128}] \textit{Journal of Epigraphical Society of India}, Vol. IX, Delhi, 1985, p.6.
\item[\textsuperscript{129}] \textit{EI}, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1894, pp. 363-365.
\item[\textsuperscript{130}] Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
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, 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. 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.


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. Both are called Senapati in the records of their successors.

Bhattaraka’s second son Dronasimha in his *Bhamodra Mohota copper plate inscription* dated G. year 183/A.D. 502 assumed the title *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. As Dronasimha was ruling over Saurashtra in A.D. 502, the paramount ruler, referred to was most probably the Gupta emperor Budhagupta. 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.

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136 It is well known, that in the Gupta period administrative posts had become hereditary.
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\(^\text{141}\) and on the sixth the date has been read as G. year 180/A.D. 499. But this reading is doubtful\(^\text{142}\). Soon after his death we find that Eptalites 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\(^\text{143}\). 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\(^\text{144}\). 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.

year 188/A.D. 507\textsuperscript{145}, from his gold coins\textsuperscript{146} and the fragmentary *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) *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 *Maharajadhiraja* in the *Eran stone Boar inscription*\textsuperscript{148} recording the building of a temple of god Varaha by Dhanyavishnu, who along with his elder brother *Maharaja* Matrivishnu is also known from the *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 *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{148} *Sel. Ins.* Vol. I, p. 421.  
\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 Mallasural copper plate grant as a feudatory of one Maharajadhiraja 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 Faridpur copper plate grant of Maharajadhiraja Dharmaditya who may be placed before Goapchandra\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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156 *CA*, Vol. III, p. 34; *IG*, p. 365; *RFIG*, pp. 234-235.
158 *Sel. Ins.* Vol. 1, p. 421.
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\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{162}.

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

\textsuperscript{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 (kippin)\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 upto 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

\textsuperscript{163} The account is quoted by Hiuen-Tsang in his \textit{Si-yu-ki, Buddhist records of the western world}, tr. By Samuel Beal, II ed., 1983, Delhi, p.c.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{CA}, Vol. III, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{BRWW}, Beal, p.c.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{CA}, Vol. III, p. 36.
coins\textsuperscript{169} and sealings from Bhitari and Nalanda\textsuperscript{170} 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\textsuperscript{171}.

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\textsuperscript{172}. Therefore, generally the scholars do not place much reliance upon it.

\textsuperscript{169} J. Allan, \textit{CCGD}, pp. 137-139.
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{BRWW}, pp. 167-172.
\textsuperscript{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. 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 (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'. However, this claim is not accepted in its eternity. For Yashodharman’s power was of very

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 up to 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

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\(^{177}\) Ibid, pp. 355-358.
been found at Nalanda,\textsuperscript{178} still exercised sovereign power over Pundaravardhana in northern Bengal as is apparent from the \textit{Domodarpur copper plate grant} dated G. year 224/A.D. 543\textsuperscript{179}. This copper plate shows that Pundaravardhana was being governed by a prince of the blood royal \textit{Maharajaputra Devabhattaraka}\textsuperscript{180}. A comparison of this inscription with the copper plate grant of the reign of Budhagupta found from the same place\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Kumaramatya Maharaja}\textsuperscript{180}.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid, p. 364.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid, pp. 360-364.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, p. 362, L. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{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
CHAPTER - II

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE
CHAPTER-II

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

As the Gupta empire was one of the largest in ancient Indian History its architects had to make great efforts to maintain its integrity. To administrate their vast empire Gupta rulers followed a middle course between the strict imperial control and full local autonomy. The empire comprised of two types of territories, 1. the territory directly under control of the Gupta emperors or their home dominion, and 2. autonomous feudatory states subjected to allegiance to the paramount king through the payment of customary tributes and presents. This system would hardly square with territorial divisions imbibed with an administrative control on bureaucratic lines. Under such conditions the central government, i.e. the government of paramount Gupta king, would not, in all practical references to these autonomous areas be very effective. These feudatory states enjoyed a large extent of autonomy so much so that they had their own administrative areas, law courts, and fiscal system etc.

In this situation the central government would seek first to retain the allegiance to all component parts of the empire, and next to administer the home dominion with all efficiency. To achieve the first
purpose the Gupta paramount kings imposed certain minor or major obligations on their feudatories such as they had to pay tributes and homage to the Gupta emperor; they were not allowed to issue their own coins etc. Besides this, it appears that some attempts had also been made to give a uniform look at least to the administration of the whole Gupta empire. However, the names of the territorial and administrative divisions in the feudatory states varied from that prevalent in the Gupta's home dominion. Epigraphical evidences indicate that there was a kind of uniformity in the administrative terminology in official titles. Thus, the feudatories of the Guptas whether they ruled in central India or in western India adopted the similar form of administrative machinery in their respective territories.

The territory directly under the control of paramount Gupta kings originally belonged to them and formed a regular part of the empire. As regards its size there appears to have existed much variation from time to time. To ensure efficient administration hereditary officers of great ability and loyalty and also feudatory kings were freely associated with the administration of the paramount king. We have in the time of Samudragupta the Kumaramatya Harishena who was Sandhivigrahika and Mahadandanayaka and was the son of Mahadandanayaka and Khadyatapaikasya (the head of the superintendents of the royal kitchen)
Dhruvabhuti,\(^1\) in the reign of Chandragupta II Virasena alias Saba of Pataliputra who called himself the hereditary minister as well as Sandhivigrahika;\(^2\) and in the period of Kumaragupta I we have the instance of Mantri-Kumaramatya Prithivishena who was also the Mahabaladhidraka under Kumaragupta I and was son of Shikharasvamin the Mantri-Kumaramatya of Chandragupta II.\(^3\) There were some of the feudatory chiefs associated with the administration of the home dominion of the Gupta emperor. The Gunaighar copper plate grant mentions that Maharaja Sri Mahasamanta Vijayasena was the Mahapratihara, Mahapilupati, Panchadhikaranoparika, Patyuparika and Purapaloparika under his Gupta overlord viz. Vainyagupta.\(^4\)

Dhruvasena I of the Maitraka dynasty of Valabhi used five feudatory titles Pancha-Mahasabda which included Mahakarttakritika, Mahadandanayaka, Mahapratihara, Mahasamata and Maharaja,\(^5\) and hence we may assume that he performed different roles under his overlord.

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\(^1\) CII, III, L.31-32, p. 215.
\(^2\) Ibid, L. 3-4, p. 256.
\(^3\) Ibid, L.6-7, p. 282.
\(^4\) Sel-Ins., I, L. 15-16, p. 343.
\(^5\) EI, XX, p. 7; IA, IV, p. 105.
Thus, the Gupta emperors were assisted by a number of ministers and officers in their administration. There were the *Sachivas*, *Mantris*, *Mahasandhivirahika*, *Mahabaladhikrita*, *Mahasvapati*, *Mahapilupati*, *Mahapratihara*, *Mahadandanayaka* etc. who corresponded to the ministers, minister of peace and war or of foreign affairs, commander-in-chief, head of the cavalry, chief of the elephant corps, head of the doorkeepers of the royal palace or the king's chamber, or of the capital city, and chief of the police and justice respectively. In addition to these there might have been an official in charge of public morals-*Vinayasthithisthapaka*. All these higher officials of the Gupta emperor were selected from the cadre of the Gupta bureaucracy known as *Kumaramatya* who were a distinct class of officials who could be selected for the central as well as the local administration. The sealings from Vaishali, and Bhita disclose that these officers were attached to the personal staff of the Gupta emperor, crown prince, prince and other

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6 *CII*, III, p. 256.
7 Ibid, p. 282.
8 Ibid, p. 256.
9 *ASILAR*, 1903-04, no. 12, p. 108.
10 Ibid, 1911-12, no. 32, p. 52.
11 *Sel-Ins.*, I, L.15, p. 343.
12 Ibid.
13 *CII*, III, L.31-33, p. 215.
14 *ASILAR*, 1903-04, no. 21, p. 109.
higher civil and military officers. On these sealings following inscriptions can be read:

1. Sri Paramabhattacharaka-padiya-kumaramatyadhikaranasya\(^{16}\) (Kumaramatya attached to the office of the emperor); 2. Yuvaraja-bhattaraka-padiya-kumaramatyadhikaranasya\(^{17}\) (Kumaramatya attached to the office of the heir-apparent); 3. Sriyuvaraja-bhattaraka-padiya-baladhikaranasya\(^{18}\) (commander of the army attached to the office of the heir-apparent); 4. Yuvaraja-padiya-kumaramatyadhikaranasya\(^{19}\) (Kumaramatya attached to the office of prince); 5. Mahasvapati-Mahadandanayaka Vishnurakshita-padanugrihitakumara-matyadhi-karansya\(^{20}\) (The office of the Kumaramatya favoured by the feet of Vishnurakshita the head of the cavalry and chief of the police and justice). Most likely these offices worked as central secretariat.

On similar lines the feudatories of the Guptas maintained as full an establishment of government as their lord paramount. They were not prevented to use high sounding and grandiloquent titles for their officers. The titles with the prefix Maha, as in Mahasandhivigrahika,
Mahabaladhikrita etc. are not a sure indication that the officers were of the paramount emperor, while those without the prefix as Sandhivigrahika, baladhikrita etc. were of the feudatory king. The titles of the officers of Parivarajaka and Uchchakalpa Maharajas appear to be as high sounding and impressive as of the imperial officers. The copper plate grants indicate that Maharaja Hastin had his Mahasandhivigrahika, Mahabaladhikrita. Maharaja Sarvanatha's officers also had similar titles and both are only feudatory chiefs. If the foreign minister of Samudragupta could have the simple title of Sandhivigrahika while the foreign minister of Sarvanatha, a feudatory of the Guptas held the title of Mahasandhivigrahika. Like the Gupta emperors their feudatories also had hereditary officers. The family of Mahasandhivigrahika of Mahajara Hastin named Vibhudatta served Parivrajaka Maharajas for five generations as hereditary officers.

Similarly, Khoh copper plate grant of Uchchakalpa Maharaja Jayanatha dated G.year 177/A.D. 496-97 mentions Sandhivigrahika Gallu who

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was the grandson of the Bhogika, the Amatya Palgudatta and son of the Bhogika Varahadinna.\textsuperscript{26}

On the basis of the evidence provided by the Gupta inscriptions it may be assumed that the area under the direct control of the Guptas was divided into provinces and provinces into districts and other smaller divisions; and that these provinces and districts were administered by various officials.

The above details do not lead to the conclusion that it had been done on a uniform pattern and the whole administration was controlled from the centre. It may be pointed out that the territorial divisions under the Guptas for administrative purpose varied in size, resources and importance from province to province and from time to time. We find in existence during the period different types of territorial divisions with different names in the several parts of the Gupta dominion. Besides there were feudatory states with varying size of administrative areas known by different names.

\textit{Desas} and \textit{Bhuktis} were the largest units under the Gupta administration, which may for purpose of convenience be called provinces. Whether \textit{Bhukti} was a smaller unit under the \textit{Desa} or was an independent unit, similar to that of the \textit{Desa} is not clear? It may be

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, L.21-22, p. 123.
inferred from the *Junagadh rock inscription* of Skandagupta that Saurashtra was known as *Desa*\(^27\) in his period. However it was also called *Avani*, as it is referred to at one place in the same inscription.\(^28\) From the *Sanchi stone inscription* of Chandragupta II of the G. year 93/A.D. 411-12, we know a *Desa* named Sukuli\(^29\) existed in modern Madhya Pradesh. The inscription from Bengal refers to a *Bhukti* called Pundravardhana.\(^30\) The sealings found at Nalanda and Vaishali reveal the names of the *Bhuktis* called Tira,\(^31\) Nagara\(^32\) and Magadha.\(^33\) *Bhukti* is also found mentioned in a copper plate grant of Gupta feudatory Maharaja Bhulunda of Valkha (Western Madhya Pradesh) dated G. year 57/A.D. 376 which referred to a village called Nimbapadraka situated in Bappabhatti *Bhukti*.\(^34\) Here the term ‘*Bhukti*’ denotes a province or any other territorial division is not clear. The records of the Parivrajaka and Uchchakalpa *Maharajas* mention two officers-*Uparika* and *Bhogika*.\(^35\) While *Uparika* was the well known title of the governors of *Bhuktis* in

\(^{27}\) *CII*, III, L.6, p. 299.  
\(^{28}\) Ibid, L.9, p. 300.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid, L.4, p. 250.  
\(^{31}\) *ASIAR*, 1903-04, no. 20, p.109.  
\(^{33}\) Ibid, pp. 51-52.  
\(^{34}\) Ramesh & Tewari, L. 4, p, 24.  
\(^{35}\) Fleet, *CII*, III, p. 108, Ibid, p. 120.
the Gupta empire, *Bhogika*, according to J.F. Fleet was also a technical official title possibly connected with the territorial divisions *Bhoga* and *Bhukti*.\(^{36}\) Thus, it may safely be concluded that there were *Bhuktis* in the Parivrajaka and Uchchakalpa territories. However, they are not mentioned in their records.

In the Valkha kingdom provinces were most probably known by the name of *Rashtra* or *Rashtrakula*.\(^{37}\) In the eastern parts of the empire, provinces were also called *Mandala*. *Paharpur copper plates* mention Nagiratta*Mandala.*\(^{38}\)

The administrative unit lower than *Desa* and *Bhukti* was *Vishaya*. In the Gupta dominion there were *Vishayas* like *Krivila*,\(^{39}\) *Vavirikshyara*,\(^{40}\) *Gaya*,\(^{41}\) *Lata*,\(^{42}\) *Kotivarsha*,\(^{43}\) *Khadatapara*,\(^{44}\) *Airikina*\(^{45}\) etc. Sometimes the *Vishaya* covered a fairly large territory as Antaravedi lying between the Ganges and the Yamuna was a *Vishaya*.\(^{46}\) This administrative division was also existed in the feudatory kingdoms e.g. a grant of Maharaja Bhulunda dated G.year 59/A.D.378 mentions a

\(^{36}\) Ibid, f.no.2, p. 100.
\(^{37}\) Ramesh & Tewari, p. 13, 60, 39, 46.
\(^{38}\) EI, XX, p. 61.
\(^{39}\) CII, III, p. 227.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Ibid, p. 230.
\(^{42}\) Ibid, L.3, p. 324.
\(^{43}\) Ibid, p. 285.
\(^{44}\) Ibid, p. 275.
\(^{45}\) Sel.Ins., I, p. 422.
\(^{46}\) CII, III, p. 310.
Vishaya named Narmmadaparapara. Some Valabhi copper plate grants, however of the later period indicate that in the Valabhi kingdom also provinces were divided into the Vishaya. Thus, from the provenance of inscriptions referring to the Vishaya in different parts of the empire it appears to have been in existence in all parts of it.

Vithi and Patta were the smaller units than the Vishaya. Vithi is referred to in the Gupta copper plate grants while Patta is found mentioned in the records of some Gupta feudatories of Central and Western India. The Kalaikuri-Sultanpur copper plates dated G. year 120/A.D. 439 mention Sringavera Vithi with its headquarters Purnakausika which was situated in Pundravardhna Bhuki. The Paharpur copper plates of the G. year 159/A.D. 479 mention Dakshinamsaka Vithi. Nandapur copper plates dated G. year 169/A.D. 488 refer to Nanda Vithi on the bank of the river Ganga. The reference to the strip of land along the banks of the rivers in context of Vithi indicates that river-side areas had their own territorial administrative units. Patta is mentioned in the Khoh copper plate grant of Maharaja Hastin dated G. year 163/A.D. 482 which refers to the agrahara of

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47 Ramesh & Tewari, p. 28.
48 EI, XIII, p. 88; IA, VII, p. 12.
49 Sel. Ins., I, p. 352.
50 EI, XX, p. 61.
51 Ibid, XXIII, L.3, p. 54.
Korparika in the Uttarapatta (northern patta)\textsuperscript{52} A Valabhi grant of post Gupta period belonged to Maitraka Dhruvasena III refers to the village Patapadraka in Dakshina i.e. Southern patta.\textsuperscript{53} From these references it is indicated that the territorial term ‘Patta’ was used to denote the correct direction or location in the districts.

*Pathaka, Petha* and *Sthali* were some other administrative units existed in the territories of the feudatories of the Guptas belonging to central and Western India. *Khoh copper plate grant* of Maharaja Samkshobha of the G. year 209/A.D. 528 refers to the village Opani in the Maninaga Petha.\textsuperscript{54} Two other villages Vyghrapallika and Kacharapallika are also said to have been situated in the same *Petha* in a grant of Maharaja Sarvanatha of the G. year 214/A.D. 533.\textsuperscript{55} The details indicate that *Petha* was a unit comprising of several villages. *Pathaka* is found in many grants of Valkha kingdom.\textsuperscript{56} A still bigger group of villages called *Sthali* is known from *Mota Machila copper plate grant* of Maitraka Dhruvasena I dated G. year 206/A.D. 525\textsuperscript{57} and from Palitana\textsuperscript{58} and *Jhar plates* of Maitraka Dharasena II dated G. year 252/A.D. 571.

\textsuperscript{52} Fleet, *CII*, III, L.15, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{53} *EI*, XIII, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{54} Fleet, *CII*, III, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{56} Ramesh & Tewari, p. 33, 41, 46, 52, 58, 65.
\textsuperscript{57} *EI*, XXXI, p. 301.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, XI, L.24, p. 83.
The latter refers to Vatgrama village as existing in the Dipanaka Petha and Bhilvakhata Sthali. This shows that Sthali was a bigger unit than Petha.

_Pura_ was an urban administrative unit. Pataliputra, Ayodhya, Ujjayini, Dasapura, Girinagar, Varanasi were a few towns and cities in the Gupta period which are known from various sources. The administration of the towns was headed by _Purapala_ who was appointed by the governor of the province. _Purapaloparika_ was the head amongst the administrators of the cities.

The lowest unit of the administration was the immemorial _Grama_ or village. _Grama_ is found mentioned in almost all the copper plate grants of the Gupta period.

Gupta inscriptions and sealings gave many details about the administrative machinery under the Gupta kings. From these it is reflected that the government of the Guptas was very elastic and the administrative control was not much rigid. Except few high officers at the central as well as provincial level all other official staff was appointed and controlled by the governor of the province or by other senior officers. Besides, people also took part in the administration, they

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59 _IA_, XV, p. 187.
60 _IHQ_, VI, p. 53.
61 _Sel. Ins._, I, p. 343; _IEG_, p. 265.
had a voice in the matters related to land transaction and local administration. A number of administrative duties at the district and village level were performed by different representative bodies which included all classes of people.

The provinces i.e. Desas and Bhuktis were generally governed by Goptas and Uparikas respectively who were appointed by the emperor. Junagadh rock inscription informs us that the emperor appointed Goptas to all provinces Sarvesu desesu vidhaya Goptrn.\textsuperscript{62} While according to Damodarpur copper plates of Kumaragupta I dated G. year 124/A.D.442-43 Chiratadatta, the Uparika of the Pundravardhana Bhukti was selected by Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraja Kumaragupta's feet-(Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraja Sri-kumaragupte prithivipatau tat-pada-parigrihite Pundravardhana bhuktau-Uparika-Chiratadatten).\textsuperscript{63} At the provincial headquarters there were official establishments of the Uparikas called Adhikaranas. There is a seal of the Uparika of Tira Bhukti which contain the legend Tirabhukty-Uparika-adhikaranasya\textsuperscript{64} (of the office of Uparika of Tira-Bhukti). Uparikas were aided in their administrative work by various other officers who had their separate establishments. According to the seals

\textsuperscript{62} CII, III, L.6, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, L.1-3, p. 285.
\textsuperscript{64} ASIAR, 1903-04, no. 20, p. 109.
found at Vaishali which was the headquarter of Tira Bhukti other offices at Tira Bhukti were Tirabhuktavina

ayasthitisthapakhadikaranasya (Of the office of the controller of morals of Tira Bhukti), Sri-ranabhanda garadhikaranasya (of the office of the officer-in-charge of military stores); danda-pas-adhikaranasya (of the office of the chief of police); Mahapratihara-Taravara-Vinayasurasya (Of Vinayasura, the chief chamberlain and prefect of police); Mahadandanayaka- Agniguptasya (Of Agnigupta the principle judiciary officer or chief of the police); Bhatasvpati Yaksavatsasya (of Yaksavatsa the commandent of the irregular cavalry). Besides these officers, Kumaramatyas were also appointed in the provinces. There are seals of the adhikaras of Kumaramatyas who worked at different places, e.g. Tira-kumaramaty-adikaranasya, Vaisalinamakunde-kumaramatyadhikaranasya, Magadha-bhuktav-kumaramatyadhikaranasya, Nagara-bhuktav-kumaramatyadhikaranasya. It is not certain whether these Kumaramatyas were the officials of provincial

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65 Ibid, no. 21, p. 109.
68 Ibid, no. 16, p. 108.
70 Ibid, no. 18, p. 109.
73 NEM, pp. 51-52.
74 Ibid, pp. 52-53.
governments or were posted in these provinces on behalf of central
government as the vigilance officers.

Governors of the provinces were wielded enough powers, as we
find these officers sometimes called themselves Maharajas. They had
their control over the Vishayapatis (administrators of the Vishayas) and
other officers of the province and had the authority to appoint them. We
find the provincial governor like Parnadatta could appoint his son to
office of his own choice which certainly reflects that the central
government of the empire did not exercise much control over their
governors. Sometimes princes of the royal family were appointed as
governors. We have several examples for this Rajputra-devabhattacharaka was the governor of Pundravardhana Bhukti in the period of
Vishnugupta, Govindagupta was the governor of Tira-Bhukti in the
period of Chandragupta II and Ghatotkachagupta was the governor of
Eastern Malava with its centre at Airikina in the period of Kumaragupta
I.

The head of the Vishaya or district administration was
Vishayapati whose appointment was made by the Uparika or provincial

75 CII, III, p. 336, 344.
76 CII, III, p. 300, 303.
78 Ibid, p. 260, IA, XLI, 1912, Delhi, p. 3.
79 CII, III, p. 278.
Sometimes Kumaramatyas were appointed at the post of the head of district e.g. Kumaramatya Vetravarman was the head of Kotivarsha Vishaya in the period of Kumaragupta I. Sometimes Ayuktakas who generally took care of Vithi administration were raised to the position of district head as the Vishaya of Kotivarsha was administered by Ayuktaka Sandaka in the period of Budhagupta.

_Damodarpur copper plates_ suggest that Vishayas had their headquarters in Adhisthanas (towns) where they had their separate establishment which were known as Vishaya-adhisthana-adhikaranas. e.g. Kotivarsa-adhisthana-adhikarana. District head i.e. Vishayapati was assisted in his administration by a Board or council constituted of four members, viz. 1. Nagarasreshti who was perhaps the most wealthy man of the town and was also the president of the chamber of commerce; 2- Sarthavaha-head of the merchant guild or guilds; 3. Prathama-kulika-chief of the guild or guild of artisans; 4. Prathama-kayastha- the chief scribe or writer. Thus, the Vishaya Board was a representative body of all classes of people of the Vishaya. A difference between this council and the committee described by Kautilya is that the

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82 Ibid, L.3, p. 344.
83 The legend on the seal of Domodarpur copper plates G. year 224, Ibid, p. 361.
earlier government appointed the committees, whereas in the Gupta system the council or board consisted of local representatives, among whom commercial interests often predominated. This Board perhaps had far and wide jurisdiction in all the matters of administration. They control the administration of whole Vishaya including city the suburban and the rural areas. This appears from the list of officials of the Vishaya-adhikarana mentioned in the inscriptions. The list constituted of 1. Saulkika\(^85\) (superintendent of tolls and customs); 2. Agraharika\(^86\) (officer-in-charge of the agraharas i.e. the settlements made in favour of the brahmanas and the temples); 3. Gaulmika\(^87\) (superintendent of forests and woods); 4. Dhruvadhikarnika\(^88\) (superintended the collection of the royal share of the produce in grain). Besides, some other officers of various categories such as Dandapasikas\(^89\) (police officers), chatas and bhatas\(^90\) (regular and irregular troops or the soldiers and the member of police force) and others were also associated with the district administration.

\(^{85}\) Fleet, CII, III, f.no. 3, p. 52.
\(^{86}\) Ibid, f.no. 2.
\(^{87}\) Ibid, f.no. 4.
\(^{88}\) EI, XI, p. 107.
\(^{89}\) Ibid.
\(^{90}\) Ibid.
Pustapalas were in charge of records and files at Vishaya Adhikarana.\textsuperscript{91} They used to keep the records of the details of land. They generally formed the body of three and the head of this body was called Prathama-Pustapala.\textsuperscript{92} Under this department were a number of clerks called Diviras.\textsuperscript{93} Their main duty was to write and copy out the records. Besides looking after the administration, land transaction formed an important part of the functions of the district head.

Kalaikuri copper plates of the G. year 120/A.D. 439\textsuperscript{94} and Jagdishpur copper plates of the G. year 128/A.D. 447\textsuperscript{95} inform us about the administration of Vithi which was controlled by the Vithyadhikarana (sub divisional Board).\textsuperscript{96} The officer-in-charge of the Vithi administration was called Ayuktaka. Like the Vishayapati he was also aided by a Board of non-official members called Vithi-Mahattaras (elders of the locality) and Kutumbins (leading agricultural householders).\textsuperscript{97} The staff of the Ayuktaka office included Pustapalas (record keepers), Kayastha (scribe or clerks), and Kulikas

\textsuperscript{91} CII, III, p. 286, 290, 345, 362.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, L.10-11, p. 362.
\textsuperscript{93} Fleet, CII, III, f.no. 6, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{94} Sel-Ins., I, pp. 352-355.
\textsuperscript{95} EI, XXXVIII, pp.247-252.
\textsuperscript{96} Sel-Ins., I, L.1, p. 352; EI, XXXVIII, L.1-2, p. 250.
\textsuperscript{97} Sel-Ins, I, L.1-12, pp. 352-353; EI, XXXVIII, L.4-8, p. 250.
The functions of the Ayuktaka of a Vithi were almost like those of a Vishayapati and were largely related to land transactions.

As far as village is concerned it may be pointed out that it enjoyed considerable autonomy in administration. The village headman-Gramika was at the helm of the affairs of administration of a village. He was associated in his work by a local council which sometimes called Pancha-Mandali (Fleet identifies it with modern Panchayat) in Central India and sometimes Grama-Janapada or Parishad in Eastern India, particularly in modern Bihar. It is noteworthy in this connection that in the feudatory Valkha kingdom perhaps a council of five artisan classes-Panch-karukam was existed at the village level. And as indicated by a grant of Maharaja Bhulunda of the G. year 47/A.D. 367 the members of this council were informed (or consulted) about any religious endowment. The village councils had their own seals which they affixed on documents issued by them. Their members were known as Mahattaras who were the senior members of different

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98 Sel-Ins., Ibid; EI, XXXVIII, L.14-16, p. 251.
100 Ibid, L.6, p.31 and f.no.5, p. 32.
102 Ramesh & Tewari, L. 8, p. 2,3.
communities within the village, holding prominent position by virtue of their age, experience and character. The village councils discharged almost all the functions of the government viz. they looked after village security, settled village disputes, organised the works of public welfare, collected government dues and deposited it with the royal treasury. They had their jurisdiction over houses, streets, markets, wells, tanks, waste and cultivable land, forests, temples, cremation grounds within the limits of their own territory. No land even for the religious purpose, could not be sold without the consent of (or without informing to) the Mahattaras. Another important village office was Astakuladhikarana.\textsuperscript{105} D.C. Sircar takes it to mean ‘a village Jury’ representing eight or more families.\textsuperscript{106} The Dhanaidha and Damodarpur copper plates of Kumaragupta I refer to this office along with the Gramika and the Mahattaras, who informed the village people about the application presented to them for the purchase of land.\textsuperscript{107} This means that the office was closely associated with the land transactions in the village. However, it is not unlikely that this office also functioned as the court of justice consisting of Juri of eight members.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Sel-Ins., 1, f.no. 5, p. 356.
There were other various important officers who worked under village council to carry out village administration. The following are prominent among them. *Agraharika*, who was evidently in charge of *agraharas*, villages granted to brahmans for religious and educational purposes. *Nalanda copper plate grant* of Samudragupta of the G. year 5/A.D. 324-25 shows that the *Agraharika* could not introduce any tax-paying cultivator or artisan for settling in the village and carrying on their occupation, otherwise he would violate the privileges of the *agrahara*.\(^{108}\) This officer is also mentioned in the *Bihar stone pillar inscription*\(^{109}\) of Skandagupta, though, of course, without any specific duty.

The larger demand for land on account of the development of agriculture in the Gupta period made it necessary for the government to maintain a regular department for land survey and land measurement to avoid or settle land-disputes among people and to ensure the proper realization of revenues. The officer called *Aksapataladhikrita* is found in *Nalanda copper plate grant* of Samudragupta in the sense of 'a keeper of records'\(^{110}\) *Aksapataladhikrita* even of a village was an important

\(^{108}\) *CII*, III, L.8-9, p. 227. The record is generally considered as spurious. However, some scholars are of the opinion that the inscription is genuine. See Ibid, pp. 224-226.


\(^{110}\) *CII*, III, L.11, p. 227.
officer, as we find in the *Nalanda plates* that Gopasvamin, the *Aksapateladhikrita* was a *Mahapilupati* and *Mahabaladhikrita*. As noted above another officer entitled *Pustapala* also kept record of all land transaction at the district level. It should be noted that the boundaries of villages or of individual plots were carefully marked, measured and recorded by the *Pustapalas*. Hence the copper plate grants of the Gupta period give us detailed description of the boundaries of the sold-purchased or donated land.\(^{111}\)

Land could not be transferred or alienated without the permission or sanction of the government. According to the procedure the petition for purchase of land was to be submitted to the officer of the locality. Then the state authority i.e. *Pustapala* verified the relevant records and placed the matter before the concerned village council and *Astakuladhikarana* who again reported the matter to the leading brahmanas, prominent citizens and householders of the village. The land concerned was then inspected-*pratyaveksya* by the village council including *Mahattars* and others and was surveyed and separated from other plots by measurement. Then the matter was referred to the *Pustapala* for report. Sale was sanctioned on the favourable report of the

\(^{111}\) Ibid.
\(^{112}\) e.g. Gunaighar copper plate inscription of Vainyagupta, G. year 188, *Sel-Ins.*, I, L. 18-31, pp. 343-345; *IHQ*, vol. VI. no. 1, pp. 55-56.
Pustapala that the particular land was transferable and everything was proper and in accordance with the customary rule of sale. The Petitioner must satisfy the conditions that the land tenure would be regulated by nivi-dharma\textsuperscript{113} that the land was Khila (as yet untilled), not given to any body and free of revenue, that its price would be paid according to the rate of the village. The transfer was effected by suspending the condition of its non-transferability.\textsuperscript{114}

Thus, on the basis of these evidences it can be said that system of land transaction in the Gupta empire was well organized and some control was exercised by the state in the matters related to the land, of course, through the local adhikaranas which included different representative bodies of the people. We are to bear in mind that the charters for sale and grant of land were entirely at the disposal of these local adhikaranas as attested by the legends of seals.\textsuperscript{115} In these transactions the central secretariat took no part. The petitions were addressed to the leading men of the locality in addition to the head of the district and the local adhikarana. Even the Vishyapati had to apply to

\textsuperscript{113} The custom regarding permanent endowments; the condition that donee should not destroy the principal but should only enjoy the income arising from it. IEG, p. 220.

\textsuperscript{114} Paharpur copper plate grant, G. year 159, EI, XX, pp. 61-64; Damodarpur copper plates grant, G. year 163, CII, III, pp. 336-339.

\textsuperscript{115} IA, XXXIX, p. 174.
the local *adhikarana* for grant of village lands. Thus the power of the then *adhikaranas* is beyond any question.

Thus, it can be said that the government under the Guptas was mild and the people were comparatively free from the interference and control of the central authority. Provinces and districts had their own administrative offices. But for all practical purposes local administration was distant from the centre. Decisions, whether of policy or in relation to individual situations, were generally taken locally, unless they had a specific bearing on the policy or orders of central authority. The officers in charge of the districts such as *Vishayapati*, *Ayuktakas* and higher officials like *Kumaramatya* were the link between local administration and the centre. As we have seen in some case the office became hereditary, further underlying its local importance. Besides, local councils at the district and village level also enjoyed immense powers.

This is significantly different from the Mauryan administration whereas Ashoka insisted that he/be kept informed of what was happening, the Guptas seemed satisfied with leaving it to the *Kumaramatyas* and *Vishyapatis*. Evidence from the inscriptions and seals suggests that the Gupta administration was more decentralized, with, as stated above, officials holding more than one office. A more

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elastic policy was adopted towards feudatories who were very much free to do what they like in their kingdoms which were formally included in the Gupta empire.

We have no detailed information about the administration in the feudatory states of the Gupta empire. There are various copper plate grants issued by feudatory kings in favour of brahmanas, temples and other religious institutions which refer about various officers working under them, though, of course, without any specific duty, unlike the Gupta records from eastern India referred above, which are really deeds of sale of land issued by local contain detailed information about the administration of the home dominion of the Gupta empire. But as the titles of most of the official and non official staff referred to in the feudatories’ inscriptions are the same as those mentioned in the Gupta records, it may be assumed that their functions and duties were supposed to be similar. From the copper plate grants of Gupta feudatories, who ruled in different regions we get the following list of officers. Maharaja Dhruvasena I of Valabhi had his Ayuktakas, Viniyuktakas, Drangikas, Dhruvadhidhikaranikas, Dandapasikas, Pratiharas, Mahattaras, chatas and bhatas. Names of some other administrative officers are found in Valabhi grants of slightly later period belonging to Guhasena and

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Dharasena II\textsuperscript{118}. They are, Chauroddharnika Shaulkika, Rajasthaniya, Kumaramatya and Sandhivigrahika. The Parivrajaka and Uchchakalpa Maharajas of Central India had their Mahasandhivigrahikas, Mahabaladhirikitas, Bhogikas, Amatyas, Uparikas, Vishayapatis, Sthapatisamrat, Diviras etc.\\textsuperscript{119} Maukhari ruler Maharja Harivarman who was the feudatory of Gupta emperor Budhagupta had Mahapratihara, Kumaramatya and Bhogika under him.\\textsuperscript{120} Copper plate grants of Maharaja Subandhu, another Gupta feudatory in central India mention his various officials viz. Ayuktakas, Viniyuktakas, Dityodgrahakas, Sthanalakas, Goshthikas, Gamagamikas, Dutapreshanikas, chatas and bhatas.\\textsuperscript{121} Similarly Maharajas of Valkha kingdom also aided in their administration by Bhandakagarikahs, Pratiharas, Ayuktakas, Arakshikas, Dauvarikas, Viniyuktakas, Amatyas, Rajyadhikritas, Preshanika.\\textsuperscript{122} etc.

Some of these officers mentioned above are not usually (or very rarely) found in the records of the Gupta king, such as Drangika, according to D.C. Sircar was an officer-in-charge of city-station or

\textsuperscript{119} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, pp. 93-139.
\textsuperscript{120} Thapalyal, appen, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{121} Bagh cave plates of Subandhu, \textit{CII}, IV, pp. 20-21.
\textsuperscript{122} Ramesh & Tewari, p. 1-70.
watch-tower for collection of custom duties;\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Viniyuktaka}, (an officer under the \textit{Ayuktaka})\textsuperscript{124}, \textit{Chauroddharnika} (an officer-in-charge of the recovery of stolen property or a police officer)\textsuperscript{125}, \textit{Rajasthaniya} (a viceroy)\textsuperscript{126}, \textit{Sthapatisamrat} or \textit{Samraj} (the chief of architects)\textsuperscript{127}, \textit{Sthanalaka}, (a local officer)\textsuperscript{128}, \textit{Dityodgrahaka} (an officer in charge of collecting customary presents)\textsuperscript{129}, \textit{Goshthikas} (the members of a committee like that of the trustees)\textsuperscript{130}, \textit{Gamagamika} (according to D.C. Sircar was an officer-in-charge of regulating the people’s entrance and departure into cities)\textsuperscript{131}, \textit{Dutapreshanika} or \textit{Preshanika} (an officer-in-charge of sending envoys)\textsuperscript{132}, \textit{Dauvarika} (a door keeper)\textsuperscript{133}, \textit{Arakshika} (a police officer)\textsuperscript{134} and \textit{Rajyadhikrita} (according to D.C. Sircar was chief minister).\textsuperscript{135}

All these officials mentioned in the records of the feudatories of the Guptas exercised different degrees of control over the various administrative areas of feudatories’ territories like the \textit{Bhuktis, Rashtras}.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{IEG}, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid p. 375.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid p. 72.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid p. 273.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid p. 323.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid p. 99.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid p. 119.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid p. 109.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid p. 104.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid p. 86.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid p. 26.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid p. 275.
Vishayas, Pethas, Pathakas, Sthalis, Gramas etc. and thus formed an adequate picture of feudatory or tributary government which was a replica of the government of the paramount Gupta king.

These feudatories with their parallel governments ultimately weaken the authority of central government and led to the decentralization which in turn encouraged the feudalization of state structure of the Gupta empire.

Rise And Growth Of Feudal Tendencies

The state structure of ancient India has been described by many scholars in terms of feudalism. Certain broad features of feudalism have been traced in this period of Indian history including the political, social and economic concomitants of feudalism, which appear to be more visible from the post Maurya and especially from the Gupta period onwards. When certain political and administrative developments encouraged the feudalisation of state apparatus.

The study of feudalism is intimately linked with the mode of remunerating the state servants, especially in terms of land and revenue of villages and the extent to which such grants were permanent and hereditary in nature.
Despite the fact that ancient Indian epigraphs do not say anything explicitly about service tenure in ancient India, the practice of granting land to state officers cannot be entirely ruled out. Legal texts provide us information that in certain specific cases the administrative officers were paid by land grants. Kautilya, while dealing with the colonisation of waste lands, provides for the grant of land to superintendents, accountants, gopas, sthanikas and others\textsuperscript{136}. These grants were without the right of sale or mortgage\textsuperscript{137}. A passage found in Manusmriti implies a close association between the enjoyment of land and administrative work. It recommends land grants for remunerating officials who are placed in charge of one, ten, twenty a hundred or a thousand villages to collect royal dues and maintain law and order\textsuperscript{138}. Brihaspatismriti while defining prasada-likhita (a writing containing a mark of royal favour) refers to the provision of grants for military and other services\textsuperscript{139}. However, the Gupta inscriptions are silent about this practice. In this connection some designations of the administrative officers and units of Gupta period are noteworthy. The title bhogika and bhogapatika in the

\textsuperscript{136} Arthasastra, Part I, II, 1,7, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Brihaspati, VIII, 18, pp. 306-307.
majhagawan\textsuperscript{140}, karaitalai\textsuperscript{141} and mallasural copper\textsuperscript{142} plate grants indicate that these officers were overlords and jagirdars enjoying revenue in return of their services and became gradually powerful, comparatively free from the central yoke\textsuperscript{143}. It can also be pointed out that the expression sarvanatha-bhoge in the Bhumara pillar inscription of AD 508-09\textsuperscript{144} implies the territory enjoyed by the feudatory king Maharaja Sarvanatha under the nominal authority of the Gupta emperor\textsuperscript{145}. Thus, these terms smack of feudal relations. Towards the close of the Gupta period feudal tendencies had been developed on a considerable scale. The practice of allotting lands to state officials has been recorded by Hiuen-Tsang\textsuperscript{146}.

The growing hereditary character of some of the officers like mantrin and the sachiva of the emperor and the divisional and district officers in the Gupta period undermined the central authority and as its natural corollary the entire administration was practically feudalised and decentralised\textsuperscript{147}. From Damodarpur copper plate grants we learn of three Uparikas Chitradatta, Brahmadatta and Jayadatta governing

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, p. 119, L. 22-23.
\textsuperscript{142} Sel ins., I, p. 373, L.4, f. no. 9.
\textsuperscript{144} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, p. 111, L.4.
\textsuperscript{145} IF, p. 14
\textsuperscript{146} BRWW, Beal, l. p.88.
\textsuperscript{147} IF, p.17.
Pundravardhana *bhukti* successively in the period of Kumaragupta I and Buddhagupta. The surname datta suggests that they belonged to the same family. In the records of central India also we find that one family enjoyed the privilege of different officials in five generations, the first was *amatya*, the second *amatya* and *bhogika*, the third simply *bhogika* and the fourth and fifth *mahasandhivigrahika*. The same region also furnishes other instances of two and sometimes three generations of *bhogikas*.

In the political sector, a characteristic element of feudalism is the lord-vassal relationship. Its traits may be taken back to the Saka-Kushana polity, where vassals (*Samantas*) were called *Shahi* and their overlord *Shahanushahi* (king of kings). The Scythian title *rajatiraja*, which was commonly used by the Kushana rulers also suggests a feudal authority relationship characterised by vassalage. Later on, it was transformed into *Maharajadhiraja*, the well known title of paramountcy in the Indian *Samanta* system. The records of the Saka Kshatrapas of

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152 Ibid.
western India clearly reflect a relationship of overlordship and vassalage between the *Mahakshatrapas* and *Kshatrapas* respectively.\(^{153}\)

Feudal relations between overlord and vassal developed in the Gupta period with the process of conquest by which smaller chiefs were reduced to subordination and reinstated and in their position provided they paid regular tributes and did homage. It reached its culmination with Samudragupta whose whirlwind conquest of vast areas led to the establishment of such relations on a much wider scale and provided a pattern for his successors.\(^{154}\) The term *Samanta* which was used in Mauryan period in the sense of neighbouring cultivators and neighboring king\(^{155}\) had become increasingly common in the general sense of subordinate ruler or vassal from the Gupta period onwards. The term does not occur in any record of the Gupta dynasty. However, it appears at several places in the *Kamandakiya Nitisara*\(^{156}\) and occurs in two verses of *Raghuvamsa*\(^{157}\) one of them reveals that the *Samanta* accompanied their overlords in military expeditions.\(^{158}\) Epigraphical evidences suggest that in the second half of the fifth century A.D, the

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\(^{153}\) Ibid.

\(^{154}\) *IF*, p. 19.

\(^{155}\) *Arthasastra*, part I, III, 9, 3, p. 109; 8, 1, p. 107; *Sel. Ins.*, I, p. 18, L. 3, f. no. 3.


\(^{157}\) *Raghuvamsa*, V. 28, p. 103, V. 33, p. 104.

\(^{158}\) Ibid, V. 33, p. 104.
term was used in the sense of vassal, for the phrase *Samanta Chudamanayah* appears in a Pallava inscription of the time of Santivarman (c.A.D. 455-470)\(^{159}\) and in the *Devagiri plates*\(^{160}\) of Yuvaraja Devavarman, Kadamba king Krishnavarman (c.A.D. 475-485) is described as *Samantarajavisesaratna*. In north India the earliest use of the term in a similar sense seem to have been in the *Gunaighar copper plate grant* (AD 507) of Vainyagupta where in a *Mahasamanta* as a principal local officer is mentioned\(^{161}\), and in the *Barabar hill cave inscription* of the Maukhari chief Anantavarman in which his father Sardulavarman is described as *Samanta Chudamani*\(^{162}\). Sardulavarman is generally placed in about AD. 500, when the Maukharis were the *Samantas* of the Guptas. During the sixth century A.D. the number of such inscriptions mentioning the term *Samanta* became quite considerable when the Maitraka rulers of Valabhi, who were Gupta feudatories bore the titles of *Samanta Maharaja* and *Mahasamanta* in their land grant charters\(^{163}\). In the Gupta period the relation between the Gupta overlords and their *Samantas* was denoted by the expression *paramabhattaraka padanudhyata* meditating on the feet of


\(^{160}\) *LA*, VII, p. 33.

\(^{161}\) *Sel. ins.*, I, pp. 340-345.

\(^{162}\) Fleet, *CII*, III, p. 223, f. no. 5.

The expression seems to denote the subordination and loyalty of a *Samanta* towards his paramount lord. It indicates that by this time the term *Samanta* had undergone a change of meaning and indicated a state of subordination. Thus, in this period it emerged as the key-word of Indian feudalism. Gradually the application of the terms *Samanta Maharaja* and *Mahasamanta* was extended from the defeated chiefs to royal officials and by the seventh century A.D. these terms appears as the titles of great imperial officials.

The term *Samanta* is not used for the feudatories of Samudaragupta but his *Allahabad pillar inscription* throws light on their (feudatories’) obligations. It shows that in return for being reinstated in their thrones the conquered and subjugated kings were expected to pay all tributes, to carry out royal orders, to give their daughters in marriage, and to render homage to the conqueror. However, in the *Harshacharita* and the *Kadambari* (seventh century AD), we find for the first time a detailed description of the obligations of *Samanta* or feudatories.

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164 Ibid.
In addition to the feudatory rulers, the grants of land had created other categories of intermediaries. The practice of making land grants to religious beneficiaries including brahmanas and Buddhists started in the pre-Christian days but in the Gupta land grant charters it exhibited two significant features, the transfer of all sources of revenue and the surrender of police and administrative functions$^{169}$. For instance, the *Chammak copper plate grant*$^{170}$ of Pravarasena II states clearly that the king gave up his control over almost all important sources of revenue including pasturage, hides and charcoal, salt mines, forced labour and all hidden treasures and deposits. It records that the villagers were asked to pay the customary tributes and royalties to the donee and to render him all obedience. The donees were warned at the same time that they must act justly towards both the villagers and the state$^{171}$.

In central India many privileges were granted with the grant of settled villagers by the big feudatories of the Gupta empire. In these grants the villagers were asked by the rulers to pay the customary taxes to the donees and to obey their commands$^{172}$. During fifth century A.D. the rulers generally retained the right to punish thieves$^{173}$, which was

$^{169}$ *IF*, p.2.
$^{170}$ *CII*, V, pp. 22-27.
$^{171}$ Ibid, p. 24-25.
one of the chief premises of the state power. But in the inscriptions of
the later period the use of the expressions *sa-danda-das-aparadhah*\(^\text{174}\)
and *abhyantara-siddhi*\(^\text{175}\) denotes that how the donees could turn the
benefices into practically independent pockets\(^\text{176}\). It may be noted here
that Buddhaghosh of the fifth century A.D. while commenting on the
term *Brahmadeya* says that the term carries with it judicial-
administrative rights. Thus, in this period the practice of granting lands
led to the rise of intermediaries of politico-economic importance\(^\text{177}\).

The earliest record in which donee was authorised to grant or
alienate his rents or land in the copper plate grant of A.D. 397 of
*Maharaja* Svamidasa\(^\text{178}\), a feudatory chief of the Gupta emperor. It
records the former’s consent to the grant of a field by a merchant,
showing thereby the rise in power of the said feudatory chief so as to
enable him to grant without royal consent\(^\text{179}\).

Some copper plate grants from central India provide evidence that
in the Gupta period villages were granted to secular parties also who
administered them for religious purposes. The *Khoh copper plate grant*
of the G.year 177/A.D. 496\textsuperscript{180} records the grant of a village as an agrahara by Uchchhakalpa Maharaja Jayanatha to the divira (scribe) Sarvavadha and his son and two grandsons. The inhabitants of the village granted were asked to pay bhaga, bhoga, kara, hiranya etc. to the beneficiaries and also to obey their commands but the donor reserved the right of punishing the thieves (chora-danda-varjja)\textsuperscript{181}. It is not known how far the religious interests were served by the donee like the scribe, noted here, who belonged to the class whose oppressions became proverbial\textsuperscript{182}. A copper plate grant of Maharaja Sarvanatha, son of Jayanath, dated in the G.year 193/A.D. 512-13\textsuperscript{183} mentions the grant of village in four shares to four individuals-Vishnunandin, the merchant Saktinaga, Kumaranaga and Skandanaga, with the right to udranga and Uparikara and also with the administrative immunity that it is not to be entered by the irregular and regular troops, for the worship of two gods and the repair of the shrines\textsuperscript{184}. This record shows that the fiscal and administrative rights were given over to the secular donees and only the income was to be spent for religious purposes\textsuperscript{185}. The same sort of grant

\textsuperscript{180} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, pp. 121-125.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid, p. 122, L.5-14.
\textsuperscript{182} IF, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{183} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, pp. 125-129.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, p. 127, L.9-17.
\textsuperscript{185} IF, p.10.
to Chhodugomika, a secular party is referred to in another copper plate grant of the same king\textsuperscript{186}.

Besides, it is evident from another record of Sarvanatha dated G.year 214/A.D.533-34\textsuperscript{187} that land grants were made even independently to secular parties. In this inscription, Pulindabhata, probably an aboriginal chief\textsuperscript{188} and the recipient of the grant of two villages with the fiscal and administrative rights is found to have granted them to another person called Kumarasvamin in perpetuity for the worship of Pishtapurikadevi and for the repair of her temple\textsuperscript{189}. In this record the term used for the grant is not \textit{Sasani-krita} as per the practice of religious charters but \textit{Prasadi-krita} (mark of favour)\textsuperscript{190} which is found in the secular charters of the later period. This indicate that Pulindabhata held the two villages as the secular assignments before donate them to Kumarasvamin\textsuperscript{191}.

In all the aforementioned instances it is described that the grant is endurable till the moon and the sun last, and descends by right of inheritance to the son, grandson and more remote descendants. Similar

\textsuperscript{186} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, pp. 129-132.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid, pp. 135-139.
\textsuperscript{188} \textit{IF}, p.11.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid, p. 136, L.10.
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{IF}, p. 11.
injunctions are found in the legal texts of the period concern\textsuperscript{192}. This indicate that grant of land or villages were made in perpetuity with fiscal and administrative rights to brahmanas, religious institutions and sometimes to the secular parties for the religious purposes. This led to the growth of a landowning class that could weaken the authority of the king. Such grants distanced the owners from the control of the central authority, thus predisposing administration to be more decentralized. As a result of this the comprehensive competence based on centralised control, which was the hall-mark of Maurya state, gave way to decentralisation in the post-Maurya and Gupta periods\textsuperscript{193}. Those with substantial grants of land providing revenue could together accumulate sufficient power and resources to challenge the ruling dynasty. If in addition they could mobilize support from peer groups and others such as the forest chiefs or coerce the peasants into fighting for them, they could overthrow the existing authority and establish themselves as kings, at least on the fringes of the kingdom\textsuperscript{194}.

If the grant was substantial enough the grantee could become the progenitor of a dynasty through appropriation of power and resources. Inscriptional evidence of the sixth century A.D. refers to the conquest of

\textsuperscript{192} Brihaspati, VIII, 14, p.306.
\textsuperscript{193} IF, p.4
\textsuperscript{194} Romila Thapar, \textit{The Penguin History of Early India, From the Origins to AD 1300}, New Delhi, 2002, p. 293.
eighteen forest polities as the inheritance of the Parivrajaka rajas. This may point to the ancestor having received a grant of forested land\textsuperscript{195}.

The period between fifth and seventh centuries A.D. also witnessed the rise of landowning temples the ‘prototypes of later mathas’\textsuperscript{196}. The grants of agraharas by the king for religious and educational purposes led to the rise of such landowning institutions\textsuperscript{197}. The charters of granting land to temples as well as to brahmanas in this period are numerous. We learn of two such endowments of land to a temple of the goddess Pistapuri in central India, one of them dated in the G.year 214 A.D. 533-34\textsuperscript{198}. Besides, \textit{Bihar stone inscription}\textsuperscript{199} and \textit{Bhitari pillar inscription}\textsuperscript{200} of Skandagupta supply a few other instances.

The subjection of peasantry constitute an essential ingredient of feudalism. It can be explained by various important factors and one of them was the increasing burden of taxation on the villagers. This can be inferred from the list of dues mentioned in the epigraphic records belonging to the period of the present study. The number of fiscal

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{195} Ibid, pp. 293-294. \textit{Parivrajaka} normally refers to wandering religious mendicants.
  \item \textsuperscript{196} \textit{IF}, p.36.
  \item \textsuperscript{197} Ibid, p. 37.
  \item \textsuperscript{198} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, pp. 135-139, pp. 129-132.
  \item \textsuperscript{199} Ibid, pp. 47-52
  \item \textsuperscript{200} Ibid, pp. 52-56.
\end{itemize}
exemption (pariharas) are recorded in detail in many inscriptions. A Vakataka grant, for instance, specifies fourteen pariharas and records that the grant is accompanied with all kinds of immunities (Sarvajati pariharaparihitam)\textsuperscript{201}. Similarly in the records of Parivrajakas, Uchchhakalpas and Maitrakas, we have list of fiscal exemptions\textsuperscript{202}. Thus, as compared to the earlier period, though most of the dues mentioned in the Vakataka list may have been irregular contributions in the form of provisions, there is little doubt that taxes like udaranga, uparikara, halikakara etc were new impositions on the people\textsuperscript{203}. Besides, sometimes the donees were authorised to collect taxes covered by the term ‘etcetera’ (adi) and all sources of income (Samastapratyaya) which implies that they could make new impositions\textsuperscript{204}.

The right of subinfeudation was another factor which further worsened the condition of the peasants. The brahmanas, the Buddhist monasteries and the temples were given occupation of considerable area in almost all parts of the Gupta empire. The terms accompanying the grants are not always specified in the grants. But in most of the cases of the grant of land the existence and transfer to tenants cannot be ruled

\textsuperscript{201} CII, V, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{202} See Chap. V.
\textsuperscript{203} D.N. Jha, Early Indian Feudalism, A Historigraphical Critique, Proceedings of Indian History Congress, XL, Session, Waltair, 1979, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{204} IF. pp. 217-218.
out. This can be inferred not only from the fact that the brahmana donees could not cultivate all the land themselves but also from the internal evidence of the charters. Thus, a Vakataka charter records the endowment of 8,000 nivartanas of land to 1,000 brahmanas\textsuperscript{205}. Who must have assigned cultivation of field of their tenants \textit{Indore copper plate grant of Maharaja Svamidasa} of the G.year 67/A.D.397\textsuperscript{206} provides perhaps the earliest epigraphic evidence of the subinfeudation of the soil. This grant authorises the donee to enjoy the field, cultivate it and get it cultivated so long as he observes the conditions of the \textit{brahmadeya grant}\textsuperscript{207}. This leaves clear scope for creating tenants on the donated land. We have here the beginning of the process of subinfeudation which continued in the western part of central India in the fifth century A.D. and characterised the grants of Maitraka rulers of Valabhi in the sixth and seventh centuries\textsuperscript{208}. Their records often state that obstruction should not be caused to donee while he enjoys the donated land, cultivates it, causes it to be cultivated or assigns it to others\textsuperscript{209}. The testimony of Fa-hien who states that the monasteries are given fields and gardens with husbandmen and cattle to cultivate them

\textsuperscript{205} \textit{Chammak plates} of Pravarasena II, \textit{CII}, V, pp. 22-27.
\textsuperscript{206} \textit{EI}, XV, pp. 286-290.
\textsuperscript{207} \textit{Ochitaya brahmadeya bhuktya bhunjata krishatah krishapayatas-chah}, Ibid, p. 289, L. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{208} \textit{IF}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{209} \textit{EI}, XVII, p. 107, L.17-18.
also points to the existence of temporary tenants\textsuperscript{210}. I-tsing informs us that the Samgha provided the bulls and fields to the tenants and generally received one-sixth of the produce from them though he does not say whether the cultivators were also given ploughs, seeds, manure, and other agricultural accessories\textsuperscript{211}.

The legal texts of the period also suggest the emergence of a class of intermediaries between the king and the actual tiller of the soil. Yajnavalkya lays down that land could be assigned to the cultivator by the landowner (Ksetrasvamin) and not by the king (Mahipati), who could lay his claim on fruits received after improvements on land, only if the owner is not present there\textsuperscript{212}. It appears that there were three stages of landed interests in the Gupta period. This is attested by the statement of Brihaspati\textsuperscript{213} who, however, introduces the term Svamin in place of the term Ksetrasvamin but makes it clear that the Svamin formed an intermediate stage between the raja and the actual tiller of the soil\textsuperscript{214}. The Svamin owned this position to the practice of leasing out land by the owners to cultivators. According to Yajnavalkiya and Brihaspati, these cultivators were liable to penalties if they neglected

\textsuperscript{210} IF, pp. 36-37.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{212} Yajnavalkya Smriti, text, transliteration, Notes and English translation, B.S. Bist. Delhi, 2004, part II, 157, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{213} Brihaspati, XIX, 29, p. 355.
\textsuperscript{214} IF, p. 38.
cultivation\textsuperscript{215}. They were temporary tenants. Further, the right of getting their land cultivated by others on lease not only helped in the creation of a class of temporary tenants but it also must have led to the replacement of old peasants\textsuperscript{216}.

Some of the land grant charters seem to refer to the transfer of peasants along with the land to the beneficiaries. This practice ‘mainly led to the servitude of the peasants’\textsuperscript{217}. In central India, the \textit{Riddhapur copper plate grant} of Prabhavatigupta refers to the donation of a field formerly enjoyed by Bhuktaka, together with a farm house situated in it and four huts of cultivators\textsuperscript{218}. This implies that peasants were transferred to the donees as early as the fifth century A.D\textsuperscript{219}. This solitary example to the transfer of cultivators to the donees in itself does not indicate that there was a large scale transfer of cultivators to the donees. However, the commands issued to the cultivators, brahmanas and artisans to render to the donee the tribute of customary royalties and taxes to be obedient to his commands as in the case of Uchchhhalpaka grants\textsuperscript{220}, and to live in happiness in the donated villages\textsuperscript{221} seem to

\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Yajnavalkya}, II, 158, p. 164; \textit{Brihaspati}, XIX, 29, p. 355  
\textsuperscript{216} \textit{IF}, p. 39.  
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid, p. 43.  
\textsuperscript{218} CII, V, p. 36-37, L. 14-16.  
\textsuperscript{219} IF, p. 45.  
\textsuperscript{220} Fleet, CII, III, pp. 117-139.  
suggest that the people living in the villages were advised to stay on in the gifted villages\textsuperscript{222}. All this led to peasant subjection and restriction on the mobility of the peasants and artisans, who are also mentioned specifically in the land grants. However, since the transfer of the cultivators along with villages, and the immobility of the peasants are not explicitly referred to in the inscriptions of the period it has been argued that 'to give a village is really the same as to give a village along with the villagers, which means that the king’s rent paying subjects in the villages, should henceforth pay taxes to the donees'\textsuperscript{223} and that there were no restrictions on the movement of the peasants and artisans, who are mentioned in the grants\textsuperscript{224}. But it needs to be appreciated that the term 'in happiness' sounds incongruous in the context of the fiscal and administrative privileges with which the beneficiaries were armed and the whole instruction implies that the people were advised to stick to the soil\textsuperscript{225}. This created a category of tied peasantry whose number gradually grew larger. But this was not the equivalent of serfdom as the contractual relation between peasant and donee was not identical with the generally accepted pattern of serfdom. Nor was the labour used

\textsuperscript{222} IF, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{223} D.C. Sircar, Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India as revealed by Epigraphical Records, Lucknow, 1969, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{225} IF, p. 45.
parallel to that of serfs. The peasant so transferred was not necessarily required to cultivate the land of the donee in addition to his own\textsuperscript{226}.

The imposition of forced labour (\textit{Visti}) further undermined the position of the peasants. The practice is evident in the Vakataka copper plate grants mentioning exemption from \textit{visti}. The \textit{Jamb plates} of Pravarasena II record exemption from ‘all kinds of forced labour-\textit{sarva-visti}’\textsuperscript{227}. Similar stipulation is also found in the \textit{Siwani, Belora,} and \textit{Chammak copper plate grants} of Pravarasena II\textsuperscript{228} and \textit{Riddhapur copper plate grant} of Prabhavatigupta\textsuperscript{229}. This may be taken to mean that probably the granted villages were freed from the obligation to perform forced labour for the king and that the right to labour was conferred on the beneficiaries\textsuperscript{230}. In the inscriptions belonging to the rulers of the Parivrajaka and Uchchhakalpa dynasties in central India, we do not get reference to \textit{visti}. The absence of this expression in their grants may be taken to imply that the donees could not demand forced labour from villages granted to them because it was not mentioned in the charters\textsuperscript{231}. The practice was known very well in these regions of central India and this is confirmed by the references point to the use of forced

\textsuperscript{226} \textit{PHEI}, p. 295; See also \textit{IF}, p. 43, 47.
\textsuperscript{227} \textit{CII}, V. p. 13, L. 27.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid, pp. 16-21, 22-27, 28-32.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid, pp. 33-37, L. 19.
\textsuperscript{230} \textit{IF}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid, p. 39.
labour for agriculture in the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana, whose geographical knowledge may be applied to the central and western India. From the last quarter of the sixth century A.D. the term *visti* became fairly common in the land grants of western India. In the inscriptions of the Maitraka dynasty, we find the expression *satpadyamanavistik* 

This is translated differently but with the same connotation. D.R. Bhandarkar translates it as 'with (the right to) forced labour as it arises'. R.S. Sharma interprets it as 'the right to impose forced labour as occasion might arise' and Mirashi takes it to be 'the right to forced labour'. It appears that since the beneficiaries had the right to demand forced labour from the villagers they also had the right to determine the occasion for forced labour at their own will.

The feudal order was based on more or less self-sufficient economic units which also arose in India as the result of land grants wherein beneficiaries were given several economic rights which cut the economic ties between the central authority and the donated areas. For the continuity and development of their economy they were more dependent on the local artisans and cultivators than on the officials of

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232 Ibid, pp. 41-42.
235 IF, p.40.
236 CII, IV, no.9, pp. 25-29.
237 IF, p.40.
the central government. The beneficiaries were entitled to all kinds of local dues, a part of which they must have invested in local undertakings\textsuperscript{238}. Thus, emerged the self-sufficient village economy wherein the commodities were produced for the local use and local needs were fulfilled locally. The condition of villages under the village headman, who compelled peasant women to work in his fields and residence and was developing as a manorial lord was not much different\textsuperscript{239}. The self-sufficient village economy was preserved by tying down the peasants into the fields and by not allowing the movement of any tax paying villager from another village into the gift villages which were exempted from various royal dues and impositions. Because it would not only deprive the state of revenues but also disturb the existing economy of the village from which they migrated\textsuperscript{240}.

The existence of local units is also evident from the paucity of coins of common use from the Gupta period onwards. However, it is stated sometimes that Gupta period had no dearth of coins\textsuperscript{241}. But a comparison of the Guptas with Indo-Bactrians and Kushanas who issued a large number of copper coins, shows that the Guptas except

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{238} Ibid, p. 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{239} Ibid, p. 52, 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{240} Ibid, p.52.
  \item \textsuperscript{241} D.C. Sircar, \textit{Land System and Feudalism in Ancient India}, Calcutta, 1966, p. 57.
\end{itemize}
Kumaragupta I, issued only a few copper coins\textsuperscript{242}. It is also attested by the statement of Fa-hien that in the Gupta age cowries were common medium of exchange. This indicates that money economy was becoming weaker in this period. The situation became more grave when the coins in general became rarer from the post Gupta period onwards which led to the decline of trade and urban life\textsuperscript{243}.

By the end of the Gupta period the volume of the Indian trade had increasingly declined. One of the most important articles of trade between India and the West was silk. This must have suffered considerably when the Byzantines started to produce silk of their own\textsuperscript{244}. The Mandasor inscription\textsuperscript{245} shows how the weavers of Lata Vishaya had earned enough wealth by silk trade with the West and when this silk trade began to decline, these weavers were forced to settle in more inland areas like Dasapura and even change their professions\textsuperscript{246}. Hence so long as some new articles did not take the place of silk there was no means to restore the balance, and retrogression in foreign trade was inevitable\textsuperscript{247}.

\textsuperscript{242} IF, pp. 52-53
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid, pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{245} CH, III, pp. 322-332.
\textsuperscript{247} IF, p.55.
Whatever internal trade and commerce existed had to be fitted into the emerging feudal structure. This is reflected in the rules laid down in the legal texts of the Gupta period, regarding the functioning of the corporate bodies of artisans and traders. The decline of the central authority is evident from the fact that the king is required to observe and enforce the laws of the guilds. Brihaspati enjoins the king to approve of whatever is done by the heads of the guilds whether harsh or kind towards other people.  

The issue of seals by Nalanda villages, which glorify themselves as Janapadas in Gupta times, indicates that they were emerging not only as politically independent but economically self-sufficient units.  

Thus, it may be safely admitted that Gupta period witnessed certain political, social and economic developments which may be described as the base of feudalism. This included the existence of the institution of vassalage, granting of land and settled villages to the religious beneficiaries with fiscal and administrative rights, the transfer of peasants along with the grants, subjection of peasants and the restriction on the mobility of the peasants and artisans, the extension of forced labour, subinfeudation, paucity of the coins of the common use.

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248 Brihaspati, XVII, 18, p. 349.
249 NEM, pp. 45-48.
250 IF, p. 59.
and decline trade and the beginning of remuneration in revenues to the state officials\textsuperscript{251}.

However, this practice was of very limited character. Probably from this period onwards the idea was gaining ground that territorial units were meant for the enjoyment of local governors and officials, but in the early stage central control was effective enough to check it. Thus, unlike Europe, in ancient India the decentralisation of political power was not the result of fiefs granted to military officers, but the practice of land to priests and temples wherein the donees enjoyed fiscal, judicial and administrative authority, largely contributed to this development.

\textsuperscript{251} For details see IF, pp. 1-62.
CHAPTER - III

ROLE OF REGIONAL SUBORDINATE DYNASTIES
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ROLE OF REGIONAL SUBORDINATE DYNASTIES

Regional subordinate states were important elements in the body politic of Gupta empire. In the previous chapters it has been described that there were a large number of dynasties not only existing within the boundaries of the empire but ruling as subordinate kings.

This type of loosely knitted imperial fabric of the Guptas was the embodiment of their sovereignty which was obtained by them partly through the conquests and partly by diplomacy. As it has been already observed how Samudragupta conquered certain kings and incorporated their kingdoms in his dominions; conquered others and allowed them to rule their own kingdoms; and lastly the frontier kings and tribes submitted voluntarily and preferred services, presents and tributes. Besides these, there were certain foreign powers bounded with diplomatic alliance. There were thus several categories of dominions included within the empire of the Guptas yielding varying degrees of obedience. Such dominions could not be transformed into one uniform type, so that one uniform central government could be imposed upon all. A system of government therefore had to be devised which would respect the local variations and at the same time would be competent to
impose the paramountcy of one upon all. In this system the conquered territory reduced to the subordinate status and as stated earlier defeated kings were converted into tributary or feudatory rulers who were allowed to remain in the possession of their own dominions and to exercise their control over it. The Allahabad Pillar inscription suggests that the Sankanikas had been subordinated but the Udayagiri cave inscription of the G. year 82/A.D. 400-4001 records the grant of a cave by a certain Sankanika Maharaja, a feudatory of Chandragupta II. This shows that subordinate states were allowed to exist. Besides, in Bagh region Valkha dynasty, and in Malava region Aulikara dynasty were ruling. Similarly in Bundelkhand region we find the dynasties of the Parivrajakas and the Uchchakalpas ruling as subordinate kings. There were other subordinate dynasties whose progenitors were administrative officials like governors or commander in chief of the army to begin with but became feudal vassals with the growth of their power in the later years of the Gupta rule. The Maitraka land grants provide the most clear picture of this process of transformation.

There are facts, however, which show that these subordinate or feudatory rulers were not petty nobles but rulers of considerable importance in their respective regions. At the same time they played

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1 CII, III, p. 213, L. 22
2 Ibid, pp. 243-244.
prominent role in the polity and administration of the Gupta empire. The Gupta emperor did not interfere with the internal freedom of the subordinate state. Titles and terms indicating rulership were used in their records. The subordinate kings according to their importance were styled Raja, Maharaja, Samanta, Mahasamanta etc. They ruled in their kingdoms by hereditary rights. This is attested by the fact that the genealogical portions of their inscriptions contain the description of their predecessors who were also under subordination of the Gupta empire. Instances of grants of villages and revenues by subordinates which was a royal prerogative make it clear that they, when making such grants exercised their rights as rulers. Besides, such subordinate kings had their own administrative set up and officials. Inscriptions of two Maharajas viz., Hastin and Sarvanatha clearly indicate that there were bhogas and bhuktis in their kingdoms. Both of them and another subordinate king viz. Mahasamanta Maharaja Dhruvasena I had their administrative officials with very high sounding and grandiloquent titles. If a subordinate or feudatory ruler could enjoy many rights and maintain as full as establishment of government as the paramount power

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4 Fleet, CII, III, p. 100, f. no. 2, pp. 111-112.
than the obvious inference is that the position of the farmer obviously supersedes the latter.

But the power and autonomy enjoyed by a subordinate state appears to have varied with its size, geographical position and the financial resources. Subordinate kings who had been permitted to rule after a smashing defeat, or who were very near to the heart of the imperial kingdom, or whose resources and powers were insignificant, enjoyed little internal autonomy. They were not even the full masters of the revenues of their respective territories\(^5\). In this connection we may refer to king Rudradatta, who was a subordinate of the Gupta emperor Vainyagupta and had to get the imperial sanction for making a grant or a portion of his revenue for some purpose\(^6\).

There were also such feudatory dynasties as those of the Parivrajakas, the Uchchakalpas and the kings of Mandasor who, on account of their large and great resources enjoyed autonomy within their respective territories to such a large extent that they enjoyed the right of making land grants without any reference to the imperial government. While the Parivrajakas and the kings of Mandasor make passing reference to their overlords in their copper plate grants, the

\(^5\) VGA, p. 258; GP, p. 240; IG, p. 50.
\(^6\) IHQ, VI. No. 1, 1930, pp. 53-60.
Uchchakalpas do not do even that\(^7\). Some of the powerful and important subordinate chiefs had subfeudatories under them; thus king Surashmichandra who was a feudatory of Gupta emperor Budhagupta had a subordinate in person named king Matrivishnu of Eran\(^8\). Likewise the Parivrajakas and Maitrakas also had their own feudatories. The kings of Garulaka family were the subordinates of Maitrakas. They adopted the title *Samanta Maharaja*\(^9\). The feudatories of Parivrajaka *Maharaja* Hastin have been mentioned in a very specific way in the latter’s copper plate grants. They are described as *Mat-padapind opa-jivin-* ‘subsisting on the cakes which are my (Maharaja Hastin’s) feet’, Fleet compares this expression with *tat-padapadmopajivin-* ‘subsisting (like a bee) on the waterlilie that are his feet’, which in later times in south India, became the customary technical expression to describe the relation of feudatory princes and nobles and other officers to their paramount sovereigns\(^10\).

It is difficult to describe the exact relationship that existed between the imperial government and the subordinate dynasties in the Gupta period. However, the relation of Samudragupta with certain foreign states throw some light on the status of subordinate kings. These

\(^7\) *VGA*, p. 259.  
\(^8\) *CII*, III, pp. 340-341.  
\(^9\) *EI*, XI, 1911-12, pp. 16-20.  
states are described as surrendering themselves, offers their daughters in marriage to the Gupta emperor and requests for the imperial charters confirming the possession of their territory\(^{11}\). For defeating kings would appear to have been reinstated in their kingdoms by a royal charter. These charters did not create any new rulership. Whereas formerly a king ruled in his own right as a subordinate he required a charter issued in his favour. Besides, it is also indicated by the *Allahabad pillar inscription* that as a general rule it was enjoined upon the subordinate rulers to pay all kinds of taxes (*sarva-kara-dana*)\(^{12}\). But the reference in the inscription does not reveal the nature of these *karas*. Was a fix sum paid annually or periodically, had the paramount sovereign enjoyed the right to extort as much money as possible, or was the feudatories merely expected to pay something in the nature of presents? These questions cannot be answered certainly. But as the literary sources of the later period indicate that in the areas administered by the feudatories the emperor realised annual taxes from them and not from the subjects\(^{13}\). Thus, it can be safely concluded that the feudatories were held accountable for royal taxes in the areas held by them and they annually paid *karas* to the paramount lord.

\(^{11}\) *CII*, III, p. 213, L. 24.
\(^{12}\) *Ibid,* L. 22.
\(^{13}\) *Harsacarita,* p. 217.
The feudatories were required to obey the emperor’s commands (ajna-karana)\textsuperscript{14}. Their important duties were to report at the imperial court to pay homage and respect to the emperor (pranamagamana)\textsuperscript{15} and to win his favour by various personal services (parichariki-karna)\textsuperscript{16}. Detailed description of these services are given in the literary sources of the post Gupta period, wherein five model of saluting the emperor by the defeated kings, who were certainly reduced to the subordinate position, have been mentioned\textsuperscript{17} and it is described that the subordinate kings had to render three kinds of services to the emperor. They held chowries in their sovereign’s court\textsuperscript{18}. They served as door-keepers\textsuperscript{19} and as reciters of auspicious words uttering ‘success’ (Jaya)\textsuperscript{20}. In the Gupta period loyal and faithful feudatory kings served as the door-keeper of the king’s chamber or the royal palace is evident from the Gunaighar Copper plate grant wherein Maharaja Sri Mahasamanta Vijayasena is described as Mahapratihara (chief of the door-keepers)\textsuperscript{21}. In addition to it, feudatories were required to make use of the Gupta era for dating their inscriptions. It also appears that no feudatory was allowed

\textsuperscript{14}CII, III, pp. 213, L. 22.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid, L.21.
\textsuperscript{17}Kadambari, p.128
\textsuperscript{18}Harsacarita, p.60.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{20}Kadambari, pp. 127-128.
\textsuperscript{21}IHQ, VI, no. 1, p. 55, L. 15-16; IEG, p. 184.
evidently to issue any coins of their own as we do not find the coins of feudatories issued during the Gupta period. However, foreign states had the right to issue their own currency with the obligation that they had to inscribe the name of the Gupta emperor on their coins.\(^{22}\)

Epigraphical sources do not provide any information that whether the subordinate kings kept their representatives at the imperial court on a permanent basis to serve as a hostage for their loyalty or whether the imperial government stationed their officers at the courts of these kings to ensure their loyalty? However, *Kamandakiya Nitisara* informs us that when the emperor marched for a military expedition he at first held consultation with the ambassadors of the feudatory kings.\(^{23}\) This indicates that the ambassadors of the feudatories were not only given appropriate place in the court of their paramount lord but their counsel was considered valuable in the matters of grave importance such as war.

It appears that the subordinate kings used to accompany the emperor in his wars. It is evident from the *Allahabad Pillar inscription* that the kings of forest region were made the feudal vassals.\(^{24}\) The use of forest tribes in warfare is oftenly mentioned in the *Kamandakiya*

\(^{22}\) Some coins with the name of Samudragupta inscribed upon them, were actually used by the Kushana rulers of western Punjab, *Coinage*, p. 52.

\(^{23}\) *Kamandakiya Nitisara*, XV, 51, p. 224.

\(^{24}\) *CII*, III, p. 213, L. 21.
Nitisara. According to V.R.R. Dikshitar, in building up the mighty empire Samudragupta not only vanquished the foresters as a class but there is evidence to show that the great monarch had made use of these forest troops in several of his wars. In support of his view he refers Kamandakiya Nitisara which mentions he is alone a clever leader in war, who places the forest troops in the front and his own troops in the rear. That the feudatories used to present with their Gupta overlord at the time of war is further confirmed by the Gunaighar grant which was issued from ‘the victorious camp full of great ships, elephants and horses’ - Maha-nau-hasty-asva-jayaskandhavara. It is evident from the inscription that Gupta emperor Vainyagupta’s two subordinate viz., Maharaja Rudradatta at whose request the grant was made and Maharaja Sri Mahasamanta Vijayasena were present with Vainyagupta at the victory camp situated at a place called Kripura.

On the basis of the information provided by similar grant, it can also be established that subordinate rulers were also associated with the administration of the paramount king. The record mentions Maharaja Sri Mahasamanta Vijayasena as the Dutaka or executor of the grant

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25 Kamandakiya Nitisara, XVIII, pp. 240-249.
28 IHQ, VI, no. 1, p. 53, 57, L. 1.
29 Ibid, pp. 53-55.
made by Vainyagupta. Apart from this he is also endowed with various official designations such as *Mahapratihara* (chief of the door-keepers of the king’s chamber or the royal palace), *Mahapilupati* (master of elephants), *Pancadhikaranoparika* (head of five administrative offices or departments), *patyuparika* (probably, the head of the department of accounts) and *Purpaloparika* (chief amongst the governors of cities). This indicates that Vijayasena, a feudatory ruler, occupied various administrative posts under his sovereign Vainyagupta. It is difficult to say whether the different posts were held by him at the same time or one after another. It seems that such offices were entrusted upon a feudatory to show the suzerain’s favour and appreciation of the loyalty of the former.

Subordinate kings contributed in the integrity of the empire when loyal and faithful to the paramount lord i.e., the Gupta emperor. But the relationship between the subordinate and sovereign states depended upon the comparative strength of the two states. A feudatory king remained loyal and paid his allegiance only as long as the suzerain was powerful. On the least sign of the weakness of the empire the feudatories tried to shake off the subordination. They were always on the lookout to declare their independence and the paramount power had

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31 Ibid, IEG, p. 183, 184, 229, 247, 265.
to bring them to submission from time to time. We have these kinds of instances throughout the Gupta period. We know how subordinate rulers as the Sakas, the rulers of Bengal and South India raised the banner of revolt at the first sign of weakness and confusion after the death of Samudragupta. And the Mehrauli Pillar inscription refers to Chandra or Chandragupta II as having subdued these feudatories by his might. Besides, the copper plate grants issued by the feudatory rulers in the later period e.g., the grants of Maitraka dynasty of the after Mahasamanta Maharaja Dhruvasena, the Uchchakalpas and that of Maharaja Lakshamana and Maharaja Subandhu do not contain even a veiled reference to their weak overlords. Thus, it was the fear of the might of the paramount lord that kept the subordinate dynasties loyal and under control.

32 CII, III, p. 259.
34 Fleet, CII, III, pp. 117-139.
36 Ibid, XIX, pp. 261-263.
CHAPTER - IV

NATURE OF POLITY UNDER THE VAKATAKAS
CHAPTER-IV

NATURE OF POLITY UNDER THE VAKATAKAS

The Vakatakas as they styled in their inscriptions and known to modern historians or Vindhyakas as they are called in the Puranas geographically played a very important role in the political history of the Deccan and Central India in particular and that of India as a whole in general. The original centre of the Vakataka power layed in the Vindhyan region of Madhya Pradesh to the north of Narmada as is evident from a study of Puranic evidence.¹ From where they moved southward to Vidarbha and other regions of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnatak and exercised considerable influence over wide areas of the Deccan.

Like their Gupta contemporaries, Vakataka polity had an important place for allies and feudatories. But one element that characterized their polity was strict control or authority. There is evidence showing that Vakataka rulers exercised rigid control over their feudatories and administration. In these pages all these facts are dealt

with in detail, along with a brief description of early history of the Vakatakas.

Early History

The Puranas provide several indications to the fact that Vakataka originated in the Vindhyan region. Firstly, Vindhyasakti, the name of the founder of the family, signified one whose strength lay in the Vindhyan region. Secondly, the Puranas describe the family of Vindhyasakti as Vindhyaka or ‘belonging to the Vindhyan region’, immediately after referring to the reign of the four sons of Pravira i.e Pravarasena I, the son of Vindhyasakti. The use of the term Vindhyaka for the Vakatakas closely resembles the mention of the Satavahanas as Andharas or Andhrajatiyas in the Puranas. Just as the dynasty of the Satavahanas is called as such in the inscriptions and as Andhra or Andhrajatiya in the Puranas, the Vakatakas are called as such in the inscriptions and as Vindhyakas in the Puranas. Like Satavahana, Vakataka was evidently the family or dynastic name, while Vindhyaka referred to the area where

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2 DKA, p.50; The Puranas refer to the second Vakataka king as Pravira while all the official records of the Vakatakas mention him invariably as Pravarasena. Pravarasena was his coronation name and Pravira his personal name., The Age of the Vakatakas, ed., Ajay Mitra Shastri, New Delhi, 1992, pp.13-14.

3 DKA, pp.35-43.
they had their original habitat and continued to rule for some initial
generations.4

The location of the early capital of the Vakatakas seems to have
been in the town of Kanchanaka. It is clearly referred to in the Puranas
as the centre of authority of Pravira or Pravarasena I. Their dynastic
sections inform us that he ruled from the city of Kanchanaka for six
decades, Vindhyasakti-sutas ch=api Praviro nama viryavan bhokshyate
cha samah shashtim purim kanchanakam cha vai.5

According to Ajay Mitra Shastri both the ka-s in Kanchanaka,
initial and concluding, got dropped in course of time and the remainder,
nchana, got transformed into Nachna which was equated by K.P.
Jayaswal long back with the modern village of Nachna or Nachna-ki-
talai in the Panna district of the Bundelkhand division of Madhya
Pradesh.6 His suggestion has been fully endorsed by Ajay Mitra Shastri
for it seems to satisfy all the conditions of identification. It is situated in
the Vindhyan region and known to have been an antiquarian site. A
number of early monuments including a couple of early Vakataka lithic
records and an early Gupta-Vakataka temple standing here a quite well

4 AV, p.12.
5 DKA, p.50, 73.
f.no.39; HI, p.16, f.no.3,p.70.
known. These facts fit well with the view that the Vindhyan tract including a major portion of the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh formed part of Vakataka dominion during the days of Pravarasena I. However, it seems that later on when the gravity of Vakataka power shifted southward due to Gupta pressure or occupation of their original cradle land by Samudragupta, the Vakatakas found themselves compelled to shift their capital somewhere in the Vidarbha region. According to Ajay Mitra Shastri, the first such capital must have been Padmapura followed by Nandivardhana and Pravarapura.

As stated above Vindhyasakti I laid the foundation of the Vakataka power. Vakataka inscriptions provide a general description of his military successes suggesting that he was constantly engaged in military activities, but giving no specific reference to the enemies defeated by him. Vindhyasakti I may be assigned a reign of twenty five years viz. c.A.D.250-275. After him Vakataka kingdom was developed into an empire by his able son and successor Pravarasena I (c.A.D. 275-335) who led to the extension of the Vakataka power towards south to Vidarbha. He supplanted the Andhra-Satavahanas around the close of  

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7 AV, p.9; VSH, p.156.
8 Ibid, p.222.
the third century A.D. These achievements of Pravarastra -I were fairly remarkable and justified the assumption of the title of *Samrat* or emperor by him (which is used only for him among the Vakatakas). From the position of the king of a petty kingdom in Vindhya region he rose to be the ruler of a big empire which included all the territory from Bundelkhand-Baghelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh to the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra including all the intervening region of Madhya Pradesh.

Puranic account indicates a division of Pravarastra I empire amongst his four sons. It can not be determined certainly because the Puranas only state that four sons of Pravira (Pravarastra I) would become kings, without giving further details. However, epigraphical records of the family testify to the division of Pravarastra I’s empire at least in to two parts: The first and foremost under the descendants of his son Gautamiputra ruling at first from Nandivardhana and later from Pravaraapura. Both are located in the Nagpur and Wardha

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11 Both branches of the Vakatakas refer to Pravarastra I as *Samrat* in their inscriptions e.g. *Jamb plates of Pravarastra II, CII*, V. L.3,p.12; *Basim Plates of Vindhyasakti II, year 37*, ibid, L.2-3, p.96.
12 *VSH*, p.170.
13 *DKA*, p.50.
districts of Maharashtra, and second under his another son Sarvasena and his successors which had Vatsagulma as its capital identified with Washim in the Akola district of Maharashtra. These two branches are generally called Nandivardhana-Pravarapura branch or main branch and Vatsagulma branch respectively. Genealogy and chronology of both the Vakataka branches are generally established by the scholars as under:

**Genealogy and Chronology of the Vakatakas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vindhyasakti I</td>
<td>Pravira alias Pravarasena I</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 250-275)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gautamiputra</td>
<td>Sarvasena I</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 325-355)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudrasena I</td>
<td>Vindhyasakti II alias Vindhyasena</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 355-400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prithivishena I</td>
<td>Pravarasena II</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 400-425)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudrasena II</td>
<td>Sarvasena II</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 425-455)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Yuvaraja)Divakarasena</td>
<td>Devasena</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 455-480)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damodarsena</td>
<td>Pravarasena II</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 420-455)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prithivishena II</td>
<td>Harishena</td>
<td>(c.A.D. 480-510)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narendrasena</td>
<td></td>
<td>(c.A.D. 455-480)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prithivishena II</td>
<td></td>
<td>(c.A.D. 480-500/505)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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15 Ibid, p.223.
On the basis of the above genealogical and chronological table the period of the Vakataka authority may be placed between mid-third century and close of the fifth century A.D. During this long period of about two and a half centuries Vakatakas provided peace and prosperity to the Deccan, and in terms of political power for sometime they were next only to the imperial Guptas.

**Vakataka allies**

The Vakataka rulers seem to be well aware of the political advantage of the matrimonial alliances which played an important role in strengthening their position. They established close relationship by contracting alliances with the Nagas of Padmavati, the imperial Guptas, the Kadambas of Karnataka and the Vishnukundins of Andhra Pradesh.

**Vakataka matrimonial alliance with the Bharasiva Nagas of Padmavati** who were very powerful in central India was contracted by Pravarasena I. His son Gautamiputra was married to the daughter of the Naga king Bhavanaga, whose family is said to have been created by god Siva who was pleased with them because of their carrying his phallus (Siva-linga) on their shoulders, to have been anointed with the pure waters of the river Bhagirathi obtained by their own valour and taken sacred ablution after performing ten asvamedhas.¹⁷ This matrimonial

¹⁷ *CII, V, L.4-7,p.12.*
alliance was of momentous importance and appears to have played a significant role in strengthening the Vakataka power and prestige and is invariably mentioned with a sense of pride in all the official records of the Nandivardhana-Pravarapura branch. The records refer to Rudrasena I, grandson and successor of Pravarasena I and son of Gautamiputra and his Naga wife, as, _Bharasivanam Maharaja Sri Bhavanagadauhitra_ (the daughter’s son of the illustrious Bhavanaga, the _Maharaja_ of the Bharasivas),\(^{18}\) in their genealogical portions.

It is generally believed that in the Indian dynastic genealogies the maternal grandfather of a king is introduced only when he (the maternal grand father) is known to have been a distinguished ruler, or when he happens to have afforded considerable help to his grand son at a crucial period, or when his kingdom happens to be inherited by his daughter’s son. Ajay Mitra Shastri is of the opinion that ‘In the Vakataka records _Dauhitra_ is employed most probably as a technical term as in _Lichchhavi-dauhitra_ employed in referring to the Gupta emperor Samudragupta who inherited the joint Gupta-Lichchhavi kingdom which made substantial accretion to his power and dominion.’ According to him Bharasiva Naga king Bhavanaga had perhaps no male issue and therefore his daughter’s son from Gautamiputra, viz. Rudrasena I was to

\(^{18}\) _Ibid_, L.7,p.12,14.
succeed him in his kingdom of Padmavati in addition to his own share of the Vakataka kingdom.\footnote{VSH, p.175. In the period of Samudragupta Padmavati was ruling by Nagasena who was ousted by the former. Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. CII. III, L.21, p.213; D.R. Bhandarkar, IHQ. I, pp.255-256.}

The most important alliance of this period was undoubtedly the Vakataka-Gupta matrimonial alliance which was contracted between Vakataka king Prithivishena I of the Nandivardhana-Pravarapura branch and Chandragupta II Vikramaditya of imperial Gupta dynasty. Vakataka crown prince Rudrasena II, son of Prithivishena I married Prabhavatigupta, daughter of Chandragupta II, born of the Naga princes Kuberanaga. This event was of momentous importance and referred to with pride in all the subsequent official records of this Vakataka branch.\footnote{CII, V, L.14-15, p.12; Ibid, L.21-26, p.81.} It is generally believed that this marriage had a political motive behind it. Chandragupta II wanted to facilitate his contemplated conquest of Gujarat and Kathiawar by ensuring the presence of a friendly power on his southern flank, which might afford help at least to his commissariat and supplies, even if not with direct military aid.\footnote{VGA, pp.101-102; EHDY, p.174; PHAI, pp.554-555.} But according to S.R. Goyal and Ajay Mitra Shastri, the marriage of Prabhavatigupta with Rudrasena II took place most probably sometime between A.D. 375 and 380 and Saka Kshatrapa kingdom of Gujarat was

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conquered by Chandragupta II probably towards the close of the first decade of the fifth century A.D. (about A.D. 409). Thus, these two events were separated from each other by about 30 years; in no case by less than two decades and there was no casual relationship between the Vakataka–Gupta matrimonial alliance and the Saka war of Chandragupta II.  

The real advantage of this alliance was derived by the Gupta empire, specially after the death of Rudrasena II, son-in-law of Chandragupta II. He seems to have expired soon after his fifth regnal year, i.e., in c.A.D.395. His death was a personal loss to Prabhavatigupta and Chandragupta II but a political gain to the Gupta empire. Prabhavati carried on the administration of the Vakataka state for about two decades as the regent of her three minor sons, one after another. During this period the influence of the Guptas on the Vakataka court increased, exact nature and extent of which is difficult to determine but most probably Chandragupta II had sent a number of his trusted officers and statesmen to assist his daughter in governing her kingdom.  

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23 A copper plate charter issued by him has been found at Mandhal in the Nagpur district which was issued in his fifth regnal year, *AV*, pp.227-230.  
24 *CII*, V, p. XXIV; *EHDY*, p.175; IG, p.303.
The Gupta influence on the Vakatakas is also indicated by the fact that in her copper plate grants Prabhavatigupta got her parental genealogy recorded instead of her husband’s and by her retention of her parental gotra (Dharana)\(^25\) as against the common practice of the wife changing over to her husband’s after the marriage. In this connection the fragmentary *Ramtek Prabhavatigupta Memorial Stone inscription*\(^26\) which was put up after the death of Prabhavatigupta and in the reign of Pravarasena II disposes interesting evidence. In this inscription high praise is lavished on not only Chandragupta II but also on his son Ghatotkachagupta. Chandragupta II is described as ‘devadeva’—‘god of gods’ and *tri-samudra-natha*—the lord of the three oceans while Ghatotkachagupta is mentioned as *raja-raja-sovereign* overlord.\(^27\) The employment of the title *tri-samudra-natha* for Chandragupta II in this inscription seems to indicate that at the time of its composition he was regarded, at least theoretically as the overlord of a considerable part of the South Indian peninsula. “This claim becomes all the more significant as it is met with in the inscription of another dynasty. Historically speaking, it is indicative of the tremendous influence verging on political hegemony wielded by Chandragupta II over a large part of the

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\(^26\) *AV*, pp. 253-257.

\(^27\) Ibid.
Deccan during the regency of his daughter Prabhavatigupta covering the minority of her son Divakarsena and the reigns of Damodarasena and Pravarasena II.\(^\text{28}\)

The relations between the Guptas and the Vakatakas continued to be friendly till the very end of this branch of Vakataka dynasty. This is inferable from the continuation of the reference in glowing terms to the marriage of Prabhavatigupta with Rudrasena II in the copper plate grants of Prithivishena II, the last known king of this branch.\(^\text{29}\)

Epigraphical references indicate the friendly relationship between the Vakataka of Nandivardhana-Pravarapura branch and Kadambas. The copper plates of Prithivishena II mention him as the son of Vakataka king Narendrasena, born of his queen Ajjhitabhattarika, the daughter of the lord of Kuntala.\(^\text{30}\) Here the king of Kuntala is generally identified with the Kadamba ruler Kakutsthavarman of Vanavasi (Uttarakannada district, Karnataka)\(^\text{31}\) because, firstly, Kuntala was known to have been the region ruled by the Kadambas and secondly, the well known Talagunda pillar inscription of Kadamba Kakutsthavarman avers that

\(^{28}\) Ibid.


\(^{30}\) Ibid.

he gave his daughters in marriage to the Guptas and other kings. It is suggested that looking to the friendly Vakataka-Gupta relations that persisted all through it is quite likely that he (Kakutsthavarman) had his daughters married to the Vakataka kings as well. According to A.S. Altekar, this marriage must have established an _entente cordiale_ among the Kadambas, the Vakatakas, and the Guptas.”

The Vakataka-Kadamba relationship took a new turn in the later period. The influence of the Vakataka Vatsagulma branch on the Kadambas grew when the Kadamba kingdom was divided into two branches. Under Kakutsthavarman’s two sons, viz. Santivarman and Krishnavarman. It is evident from the _Mudigere copper plate grant_ of the fifth regnal year of the Kadamba king Simhavarman, son of Vishnuvarman and grandson of Krishnavarman. In this grant Simhavarman is bestowed with high conventional praise and is said to have been consecrated or crowned by king Sarvasena: “_Tad=anu-Sarvvasena-maharajena-murddh-abhishekenabhyar-chchitah_”

Sarvasena is identified with the Vakataka king Sarvasena II of the Vatsagulma branch whose name has come to light from the _Bidar_ 

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32 _EI, VIII_, p.33.  
34 B.R. Gopal, _Corpus of Kadamba Inscriptions_, Sirsi, 1985, pp.139-143.  
36 _VSH_, p.199.
copper plates of his son Devasena and from the Thalner copper plates of his grandson Harishena. The description that Kadamba ruler Simhavarman felt honoured by being coronated at the hands of Sarvasena is indicative of the high esteem in which the former held the latter. If the statement properly interpreted, it would mean that Simhavarman regarded himself as a subordinate ally, if not a vassal of the Vakataka king Sarvasena II. In this connection it is noteworthy that the earliest date suggested for Simhavarman is c.A.D. 490 and Vakataka Sarvasena II came to throne about A.D.425 and his rule must have come to a close before Saka year 380/A.D. 458, the known date of his son Devasena's reign which comes from the Hisse-Borala stone-slab inscription. Thus, there is a long gap of about thirty five years between the latest date for Sarvasena II and the earliest suggested date of Kadamba Simhavarman. In this regard Ajay Mitra Shastri suggests, “There is absolutely no certainty regarding the dates of individual Kadamba rulers as their inscriptions are all dated only in the years of individual reigns as most of the Vakataka records are. And this is the only known Sarvasena who could be a contemporary or near

37 JESI, XIII, pp.71-75.
38 Av, pp.251-253.
39 CKJ, p.XXX.
contemporary of the Kadamba king Simhavarman and should consequently be identified with the Sarvasena mentioned in his only known record. This would indeed involve antedating the commencement of the reign of Simhavarman by a little over three decades which should not be difficult in view of the purely tentative nature of Kadamba chronology.

Sarvasena II’s son Devasena entered into a new matrimonial alliance when he married his daughter to the most powerful Vishnukundin king Madhavavarman II Janasraya, whose son Vikramendravarman I is said to have adorned the twin families of the Vakatakas and the Vishnukundins by his birth. This relationship appears to have played an important role after Vakataka power ceased to exist.

**Feudatories**

There is very little information available regarding the feudatories of the Vakatakas. Grand eulogies like the *Allahabad Pillar inscription* of Samudragupta and copper plate grants like those issued by various feudatories of the Gupta empire are absent here. Whatever material is available is of incomplete nature on the basis of which it is very difficult

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41 *VSH*, pp. 199-200, 229-230.
to establish the exact position of the feudatories in the Vakataka polity. Insufficient information has given rise to the controversies among the scholars. And this is the very cause that till this date the identity of Vyaghradeva of Nachna-ki-talai and Ganj inscriptions and that of his Vakataka overlord and the true nature of the Vakataka Prithivishena II’s claims on behalf of his father could not have conclusively settled. Therefore, first of all, it is necessary to ascertain the correct position in these matters on the basis of available data.

*Nachna-ki-talai and Ganj inscriptions* (Panna district Madhya Pradesh) of Vyaghradeva refer to some pious act made by him at this place for the religious merit of his parents. This unnamed activity seems to be the creation of a reservoir. The inscriptions describe Vyghradeva as meditating upon the feet of Prithivishena, the Maharaja of the Vakatakas. Even though he is not clearly described so, scholars have generally taken him to be a feudatory of the said Vakataka king. However, there is a great controversy regarding the identification of Vyaghradeva himself and of his overlord Vakataka king Prithivishena because there were two kings of this name in the Vakataka dynasty and

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43 Fleet, *CII*, III, pp. 233-235; *EI*, XVII, pp.13-14. There is two inscriptions at Nachna-ki-talai, one is incomplete.

44 "वाकटकानव महाराज 'श्र (शी) पुरीविवेखपावि(प)वदशतो व्यावधे' * . Ibid.
both were the members of Nandivardhana-Pravarapura branch. They are designated as Prithivishena I and II.

Paleography is sometimes used as a means of fixing the dates of individual records and correspondingly those of the rulers referred to in them. But as indicated by a comparison of paleographical arguments of D.C. Sircar\(^{45}\) and V.V. Mirashi\(^{46}\) on paleographical considerations the inscriptions in question can not be assigned definitely to any of the two kings. K.P. Jayaswal, H.C. Raychaudhari, A.S. Altekar, and Ajay Mitra Shastri are inclined to identify Prithivishena with the first king of this name,\(^{47}\) while J.Dubreuil, K.N. Dikshit, V.V. Mirashi and S.R. Goyal favoured the second king.\(^{48}\) V.V. Mirashi proposes to identify Vyaghradeva of these inscriptions with Maharaja Vyaghra, the father of the Uchchakalpa Maharaja Jayanatha mentioned in the genealogical portions of the copper plate grants of the family.\(^{49}\) He seems to have ruled almost contemporaneously with Prithivishena II. According to Mirashi as the Uchchakalpa king Jayanatha is known to have been ruling in the G. years 174 and 177, his reign may be taken to have

\(^{45}\) *CA*, III, p.179, f.no.1. Here D.C. Sircar favours the attribution of Nachna and Ganj inscriptions to Vakataka Prithivishena I; *Sel. Ins.*, I, p.456, f.no.1. He has changed his views and has attributed said inscriptions to the Vakataka Prithivishena II.

\(^{46}\) *CII*, V, pp.89-90.

\(^{47}\) *HI*, p.73; *PHAI*, p. 478; VGA, p. 101; *EHDY*, p. 173; *VSH*, pp.38-65.


\(^{49}\) *CII*, V, p.91; for the inscriptions of Uchchakalpa Maharajas see Fleet. *CII*, III, pp.117-139.
extended from A.D. 490 onwards and the reign of his father Maharaja Vyaghra may be placed immediately prior to it i.e. in c.A.D. 470-490 and this Vyaghra was the feudatory of Vakataka Prithivishena II whose reign he assigns as c.A.D. 470-490. He takes the Nachna and Ganj inscriptions as the evidence of the expansion of the Vakataka kingdom into the Bundelkhand region during the time of Prithivishena II.50

However, the well known Puranic evidence and new epigraphical discoveries suggest that the Vakataka king Prithivishena of Nachna and Ganj inscriptions could be only Prithivishena I. As described above, according to the Puranic account the original home of the Vakatakas lay in the Vindhyan region (Bundelkhand-Baghelkhand) and Pravira (Pravarasena I) ruled over the city of Kanchanaka which is identified with modern Nachna51 and from where two of the present records has been found. Even though Pravarasena I had expanded his kingdom southward so as to include the Vidarbha and other adjoining regions, he continued to have his capital at Kanchanaka or Nachna and so did his grandson and successor Rudrasena I and latter’s son and successor Prithivishena I for at least the earlier part of his reign.52 Prithivishena’s hold over the Vindhyan region which had already slackened due to the

50 CII. V, pp XXVII-XXVIII.
51 DKA, p.50,73; HI,p.16, f.no.3, p.70; AV,p.9.
52 Ibid, pp.11-12.
shifting of the focus further south in Vidarbha as well as because of the
decline of the Bharasiva Naga power in Central India, only put to an end
by the mounting pressure of the mighty Gupta emperor Samudragupta
whose Eran (Sagar district Madhya Pradesh) inscription\(^{53}\) shows that he
had extended his direct rule over this region. Since then Bundelkhand-
Baghelkhand region remained under the Gupta, not Vakataka, suzerainty
for quite a long period (to be precise at least upto A.D. 528), and this is
proved by \textit{Eran stone pillar inscription} of Budhagupta of the G. year
165/A.D. 484-485\(^{54}\), by the Shankarpur (Siddhi district Madhya
Pradesh) copper plate grant of Maukhari \textit{Maharaja} Harivarman\(^{55}\) who
ruled over this region as a feudatory of the Gupta emperor Budhagupta
in A.D. 487-88, and by the inscriptions of the Parivrajaka Maharajas
whose kingdom situated to the west of the Uchchakalpa dominion and
who explicitly acknowledged the suzerainty of the Guptas upto the
G.year 209/A.D. 528.\(^{56}\) In view of these facts, the suggestion that the
Vakatakas succeeded in extending their power over the Bundelkhand-
Baghelkhand region in the period of Prithivishena II has to be taken as a

\(^{53}\) \textit{CII}, III, pp.222-224.
\(^{54}\) Ibid, pp.340-341.
\(^{55}\) Thapalyal, Appen., pp. 156-157.
\(^{56}\) \textit{Khoh copper plate grant of Parivrajaka Maharaja Samkshobha, G.Year 209},
wrong observation and thus, it is conclusively established that the Nachna and Ganj inscriptions may not be attributed to him.

Let us now throw light on some arguments against the theory identifying Vyaghradeva of these inscriptions with Vyaghra of Uchchakalpa kingdom. Firstly, the inscriptions under review give the name of the supposed feudatory of the Vakataka Maharaja Prithivishena as just Vyaghradeva without any regal title, whereas the Uchchakalpa grants refer to the father of Maharaja Jayanatha as Vyaghra, (not Vyaghradeva) and his name is preceded by the feudal title Maharaja. Secondly, and this is very important, the Uchchakalpa records nowhere indicate that they were the feudatories of the Vakatakas in the time of Maharaja Vyaghra. Thirdly, as their Parivarjaka neighbours were the feudatories of the imperial Guptas, Uchchakalpas must have also owned, as a matter of geopolitical, if not anything else, compulsion, the Gupta suzerainty, even though their records are reticent on this point. This argument can be supported by the fact that they used Gupta era for dating their records which indicates that they acknowledged the suzerainty of the imperial Guptas in a general way.

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58 Karaitalai copper plate grant of the Uchchakalpa Maharaja Jayanatha, G. year 174. Fleet, CII, III, L.4, p.118.
59 VSH, pp.57-58.
Now the question arises, who was this Vyaghradeva. If he was feudatory of the Vakataka Prithivishena I, it is likely that his rule was brought to an end and he was included among the rulers of Aryavarta extirpated by Samudragupta and alluded to among the numerous other \((ady-aneka)^{60}\) kings besides those named specifically in Allahabad Pillar inscription. It is equally likely that he was an important ordinary state official, and not a vassal of Prithivishena, as generally assumed by scholars.\(^{61}\)

The states of Kosala (South Kosala, roughly corresponds to the districts Raipur, Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh and a part of district Sambhalpur in Orissa), Mekala (Amarkantak region, Chhattisgarh) and Malava (Malwa, Madhya Pradesh) were till recently regarded as the feudatory states of the Vakataka kingdom. This assumption was based on the acceptance of the claim made in the three copper plate grants of Vakataka Maharaja Prithivishena II. In these charters Prithivishena II’s father Narendrasena has been described as a ruler, whose commands were obeyed by the lords of Kosala, Mekala and Malava.\(^{62}\) On the basis of this statement S.R. Goyal puts forward the theory that “sometime in

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\(^{60}\) *CII*, III, L.21,p.213.
\(^{61}\) *VSH*, p.57, 64.
the middle of the fifth century A.D. the ruler of Mekala transferred his allegiance from the Guptas to the Vakatakas. This must have happened either towards the close of the reign of Kumaragupta-I or in the early years of the reign of Skandagupta. It appears that as a reaction against the aggressive policy of the Guptas, which led to the occupation of the Vakataka capital Nandivardhana by Bhavadattavarman, the Nala ally of the Guptas, the Vakataka ruler Narendrasena, soon after recovering the lost ground, launched an offensive against the Guptas when their empire was passing through a grave crisis. (viz. the Huna invasion).

The claim made in Prithivishena II’s charters in regard of Mekala was sought to be supported by Bamhani copper plate grant which was believed to belong to Bharatabala alias Indra, the Pandava ruler of Mekala. B.C. Chhabra approximately equated the second year of his rule to A.D. 460. The word narendra in verse 11 of this charter was taken to make a veiled allusion to the Vakataka king Narendrasena and it was

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63 HVGR, p.110. According to S.R. Goyal Nala king Bhavadattavarman who invaded Vakataka kingdom in the period of Narendrasena was a Gupta ally. Ibid, p.108. Bhavadattavarman is known from his Riddhapur plates which were issued from Nandivardhana, the earlier Vakataka capital EI, XIX, pp.100-104.
64 EI, XXVIII, pp.132-145; CII, V, pp.82-88.
65 EI, XXVII, p.138.
suggested that the verse aimed at describing by double entendre the contemporary Pandava king as a feudatory of Narendrasena.\textsuperscript{66}

This assumption has been proved to be erroneous by the Mallar copper plate grant of Bharatabala’s son and successor Surabala Udimavaira.\textsuperscript{67} It has been established now that the Bamhani plates also belong to Surabala Udimavaira and not to his father Bharatabala. The Mallar plates have a short prose passage introducing Surabala, which has been left out by inadvertence in the Bamhani plates which are otherwise generally identical. The prose passage is, \textit{tasyaputratat-pad-anudhyatahparama-mahesvarah parama-brahmanyah paramagurudevadhid-aivata- viseshah srimatyam Mahadevyam=utpannah sri-maharaja-Surabalah.}\textsuperscript{68} In addition to it the Mallar plates also contain the word \textit{narendra} just after the name of the issuer of the grant viz. Surabala Udimavaira which leaves no doubt that the word has to be taken only in the sense of ‘king’ and it is employed only as an adjective of Surabala.\textsuperscript{69} The same stanza also speaks of feudal chiefs falling at the feet of Udimavaira which clearly indicates that Udimavaira, the issuer of both the copper plate grants, regarded himself

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, p. 137; CII, V, p.83.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, L.27-28, p.83.
as a paramount ruler with a number of feudatory chiefs acknowledging his sovereignty.\textsuperscript{70}

The date of Bamhani and Mallar plates has been fixed as about the beginning of the seventh century A.D.\textsuperscript{71} on the basis of the historical facts provided by these plates which shows that Bharatabala and his son Surabala Udirmavaira flourished considerably after the end of the Vakatakas and that consequently there could be absolutely no question of the two being connected in any manner.

As far as Kosala is concerned, in any case we have no evidence of Vakataka influence in that region. It is well known that the area was conquered by Samudragupta about the middle of the fourth century A.D.\textsuperscript{72} when it was under the rule of certain Mahendra.\textsuperscript{72} The continuation of the Gupta overlordship over this region can be proved by some important evidences. Sarabha, the first member of the Sarabhapuriya dynasty of South Kosala is regarded as a Gupta feudatory and is generally identified with Sarabharaja, the maternal grandfather of Gupta king Bhanugupta’s contemporary Goparaja who according to \textit{Eran stone memorial inscription} died in battle at Eran in A.D. 510\textsuperscript{73} Sarabha’s rule is accordingly placed in the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. and the

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid. p.124.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, pp.125-127; \textit{VSH}, appen .III, pp.82-83.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{CII, III}, L.19, p.212.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p.353; for the identification of Sarabha see \textit{ISPS}, part-I, pp. 104-107.
Gupta emperor Budhagupta who was on the throne at that time was obviously his overlord. Sarabha’s son Narendra (c.A.D. 500-525)\(^{74}\), as indicated by his *Kurud copper plate grant*\(^{75}\) continued to acknowledge the supremacy of the Imperial Guptas till at least the twenty fourth year of his reign. This grant was a renewal of an earlier one written on palmyra-leaf that had been granted to the present donee’s father by the *Paramabhattarakas* while taking the ceremonial bath in the waters of the Ganga (apparently referring to the Gupta emperor, the well known *Paramabhattarakas* of their times, staying at the capital city of Pataliputra lying on the Ganga) when it was reported to Narendra that the leaf charter had been burnt in the conflagration in the house of the donee.\(^{76}\) It is interesting to note that the plates refer to his Gupta overlord in a respectful manner as *Paramabhattarakas* while Narendra himself is given the comparatively simple title *Maharaja* and the grant was renewed by him not for the increase of his own merit but that of his overlord.\(^{77}\) Thus, the region of South Kosala was under Gupta suzerainty till at least A.D. 524.

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\(^{74}\) Ibid, p.110.
\(^{75}\) *EI*, XXXI, pp.263-266; D.C. Sircar, A Note of Kurud plates of Narendra, year 24. Ibid, pp.267-68.
\(^{76}\) Ibid, p.267.
\(^{77}\) Ibid.
Regarding Malava it is surmised by S.R. Goyal that the Pushyamitras (who invaded the Gupta empire towards the close of Kumaragupta I’s reign or in the early years of the reign of Skandagupta) were subordinate allies of Vakataka Narendrasena and were instigated by him to attack the Guptas and during this period of trouble the Varmans of Dasapura shifted their allegiance to the Vakatakas.\(^78\)

It is, however, very difficult to accept this speculation. No Aulikara ruler of Dasapura is known to have owed allegiance to any Vakataka monarch. It is very significant indeed that while there is not the slightest hint to the Vakataka suzerainty over Dasapura in the Mandasor stone slab inscription dated M.S. 524/A.D.467,\(^79\) the last known date of Skandagupta, this inscription specifically mentions the Gupta emperors Chandragupta II and his son Govindagupta\(^80\) and also records that king Prabhakara who was ruling over Dasapura in A.D. 467, was “the fire to the wood of the ememies of the Gupta dynasty”.\(^81\)

Similarly the Mandasor inscription of the Guild of silk-weavers which

\(^78\) HVGR, pp. 111-115. The Pushyamitras have been identified by Goyal with the Pandava rulers of Mekala who according to him transferred their allegiance from Guptas to the Vakatakas sometime in the middle of the fifth century A.D. Ibid, pp.108-111.


\(^81\) Ibid, L.8, p.408, f.no.3.
was composed in M.S. 529/A.D.472 by the command of the same
guild does not mention the name of the Vakataka Narendrasena.

Thus, in any case at present there is no independent evidence to
sustain these claims made in Prithivishena II’s charters. Neither any
record of the Vakatakas has been reported from these regions nor do the
records of other ruling families of these regions provide any hint of
Vakataka occupation. In view of these facts the rulers of Kosala, Mekala
and Malava can not be regarded as the feudatories of the Vakatakas.

We may now turn our attention towards the known feudatories of
the Vakatakas. Some of them are mentioned only by their names in the
Vakataka copper plate grants, such as Satrughnaraja, Kondaraja and
Narayanaraja, beyond this we do not know anything about them.
Fortunately there is an inscription in the Ajanta cave XVII which
certainly belongs to a feudatory of Vakataka Maharaja Harishena of the
Vatsagulma branch. The inscription provides some details about the said
feudatory and his predecessors but his name according to V.V. Mirashi
has not been preserved due to the exposure to the inclemencies of
weather. However, Ajay Mitra Shastri has read the name of the said

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82 CII, III, pp. 322-332.
83 Chammak plates of Pravarasena II, year 18, CII, V, L.19, p.24; Pattan plates of
84 Ibid, pp.120-129.
85 Ibid, p.121.
feudatory as Dharadhipa in the expression Dharadhip-akhyam employed to him in verse 9 of the inscription. It is stated in the inscription that he was preceded by ten other princes. The name of the founder of the family has been lost. All members of the family or at least its last chief was a feudatory of Vakataka king Harishena. The object of the inscription is to record the excavation and donation by this feudatory chief (Dharadhipa) of a monolith Mandapa containing the Chaitya of the Buddha in the form of the present cave XVII, a large water cistern and a grand gandha-kuti chaitya (cave XIX) to its west. Verse 21 of the inscription contains the conventional coaxing description of the family's overlord Harishena:

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the execution of caves at Ajanta and nearby Gulwada by his minister Varahadeva, and the absence of any allusion to the local ruling family clearly denotes that the region was governed directly by the Vakatakas.

Bhagwanlal Indarji and Ajay Mitra Shastri have suggested on the basis of the verse 10 of the present record containing the name Asmaka etc. (Asmaka-adi), that the ruling family belonged to the Asmaka country, which most probably included the southern part of the Marathwada region to the south of the river Godavari together with some part of the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh.

Besides, it is also suggested on the basis of Thalner grant of Bhanushena of the Kumbhakarna dynasty that his ancestors were ruling, perhaps as feudatories of the Vakatakas, over Dhule region of Khandesh.

Beyond this we have no information about the feudatories of the Vakatakas. As stated above the Vakataka inscriptions are silent on this point and the inscriptions which are recorded by the feudatories are only three in number viz. the Nachna and Ganj inscriptions of Vyaghradeva (if he really was a feudal chief) and the inscription in Ajanta cave XVII.

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91 VSH, p.48.
92 J.Burgess, Bhagwanlal Indraji, Inscriptions from the cave temples of Western India, Delhi, 1881, p.73; VSH, p.48.
93 EI, XXXVIII, part-I, pp.69-75.
94 A.M. Shastry, A Note on the Thalner plates of Bhanushena, JESI, XII, pp.53-58.
All these three are not official records and appear to be of the nature of pilgrims's records (or of religious nature) and do not provide any data of great significance to reach on a conclusive point about the position of the feudatory in the Vakataka polity.

In this situation it has to be concluded that the feudatories of the Vakatakas were few in number. Most probably they ruled in their own territories but certain conditions were imposed on them. Their ruling powers were very limited. Since the Vakataka copper plate grants discovered so far, all belong to the Vakataka Maharajas of both the branches, it may also be suggested that Vakataka feudatories were not allowed to make any land grant at least without the permission of their Vakataka overlord. We may say so, because not a single copper plate grant issued by any feudatory of the Vakatakas, has been found out as yet, and their inscriptions which are available to us, inspite of their religious nature, do not fail to mention their Vakataka suzerains viz. Prithivishena I of the Nandivardhana-Parvarapura branch and Harishena of the Vatsagulma branch.

Vakataka kings appear not even to have permitted feudatories within their jurisdiction. Kondaraja and Narayananaraja no doubt figure respectively in the Chammak copper plate grant and Pattan copper
plate grant of Pravarasena II, but their title raja seems to be purely formal. Even if they were feudatories, it does not seem that they enjoyed any considerable power. They are seen requesting the Vakataka king to make certain land grants for some projects in which they were interested. Thus, the available evidence shows that the Vakataka empire was more united and centralized and less perforated by semi-independent feudatory states than was the case with the Guptas.

Administration

It is not yet possible to give a vivid and comprehensive picture of the administration of the Vakatakas. The material available for the purpose is very meagre. The Vakataka copper plate grants mention only a few officers and hardly supply us with any material for giving an adequate picture of the central and local administration.

Available inscriptive data indicates that the whole Vakataka kingdom was divided into divisions like, raja, kata, pattas, margas, aharas, bhogas, bhuktis and rashtra. Of these,
rajya and kata were large divisions. The rajya including sub-divisions like rashtra, bhoga and marga. While kata was divided into pattas and bhogas. The divisions patta and marga were probably named after the directions. Such as Aparapatta and Uttarapatta, and Uttaramarga, Padmapura-purva-marga and Padmapura-apara-marga. Other divisions like aharas and bhuktis were also probably the parts of rajyas. As the Vakataka inscriptions, do not give sufficient information regarding the relations between these divisions, their status or their size etc, it is not possible to present a coordinate study of the administrative division under the Vakatakas.

As the form of government under the Vakatakas was monarchical, the king had supreme authority whose post was hereditary. The Vakataka kingdom was fairly extensive, but unlike the Guptas its rulers did not assume high sounding titles like Paramabhattaraka, Maharajadhiraja, Parmesvara etc. but contented themselves with the mere title of Maharaja. Only one amongst them, Pravarsena I, who was undoubtedly a great conqueror, took the title Samrat. But none of his successors bore this imperial title which was certainly due to their loss of imperial position. His empire was already partitioned between his

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105 AV, pp.78-79.
107 CII, V, L.5, p.96; AV, p.228; JESI, X, L.19,p.113.
two\textsuperscript{109} (or among his four sons, according to the Puranas)\textsuperscript{110} sons. They were certainly not powerful enough to warrant the use of the imperial title of \textit{Samrat}, particularly in the presence of the mighty Gupta emperors like Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta I, Skandagupta and so on. It does not mean that the position of the Vakataka rulers reduced to mere feudatory status, but they appear to have maintained a low profile before the Gupta emperors. It can also be said that they (Vakataka rulers) had acquiesced in the position of the Gupta’s obliging allies.

Members of the royal family like the \textit{Yuvaraja} (heir-apparent) and other princes must have been entrusted with some duties in the administration, but we have no definite information on the point. In the Vakataka empire dowager queens used to supervise and direct the administration, if the heir-apparent to the throne happened to be a minor. Prabhavatigupta, the widow of Rudrasena II successfully steered the ship of state through troubled waters for a period of about twenty years, of course, with the help of his father Chandragupta II Vikramaditya.

The administration of the kingdom must have been carried on with the help of a large number of officers, civil and military, but

\textsuperscript{109} One under the descendants of Gautamiputra and another under sarvasena and his successors.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{DKA}, p.50.
curiously enough they are referred to very rarely in the Vakataka records. One of the inscription in the Ajanta cave XVI, refers to a *Sachiva* or minister, without giving the proper designation of his portfolio. Besides, the *Miregaon charter* of Prabhavatigupta of the reign of Pravarasena II, year 20 refers to an *Amatya* (minister) named Chandra as the drafter of the grant.\(^{111}\) We may, however, assume that the non-mention of the ministers in the Vakataka records is accidental and that the Vakataka government was carried on by the king with the help of an adequate number of advisors and deputies, as was the case in other contemporary administrations. The Ajanta record indicates that some of the ministers held hereditary offices.\(^{112}\) The Prime-Minister or Chief-Minister was the head of the Secretariat. He was in charge of the whole administration; it is probably he who is referred to by the appropriate and significant title *Sarvadhyaksha* in Vakataka grants.\(^{113}\) How he conducted the administration is not known for the Vakataka grants refer only to a very few officers, but it is certain that he was invested with authority to appoint subordinate officers called *Kulaputras*.\(^{114}\) The *Kulputras* had various duties. Their primary function was of course the

\(^{111}\) CII, V, L.15, p.108; *VSH*, p.92.

\(^{112}\) Ibid, Varahadeva was the minister of Vakataka Harishena and the father of the former served under Vakataka Devasena as his minister V.19, p.111.

\(^{113}\) See e.g. Ibid, L.20, p.12.

maintenance of law and order. For this purpose they had a number of bhatas and chhatras (chatas) under them who are referred to as the member of the military forces and police in the Vakataka grants. These all officers worked under the direction of Sarvadhyakshas and are described in the Vakataka records as the officers who conveyed and executed royal orders. They were obviously like the inspectors appointed by the central government to tour in the kingdom and find out whether its orders were being properly carried out or not by the subordinate and district officers. They collected the land-revenue and various taxes due to the state. They were entitled to free boarding and lodging while touring in districts for the work of the state. They could seize the treasure trove, work salt and other mines, and make village people work free of charge for the state. They must, no doubt, have been exacting and oppressive in their dealings with the village people. They were therefore expressly forbidden to enter agrahara villages donated to Brahmanas, and could not claim from them any of the privileges allowed to them in other places. So long the donees of these land-grants did not rebel against the king and did not commit any offence against the residents of other villages, they were free from molestations of these

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115 Ibid, p.9, f.no.1.  
116 Ibid, L. 16-17, p.9, f.no.2.  
117 Ibid.
officials. The *Kulaputras, bhatas* and *chhatras* had therefore to be specially informed of every land-grant made by the king. The inspection machinery of the central government is but rarely referred to in ancient Indian records and the Vakataka plates are, therefore, regarded as very valuable evidence in this respect.

An officer called *Bhojaka* is mentioned in the *India Office plate* of Vakataka Devasena of Vatsagulma branch. He seems to denote an important official, but we have as yet not sufficient data for defining the scope of his office or duties. In the grant he is mentioned among the touring officials of the king. In the *Tirodi plates* of Vakataka Pravarasena II of the Nandivardhana-Pravarapura branch, one Chamidas is referred to as *rajyadhikrita*. According to D.C. Sircar the term denotes Chief Minister, while V.V. Mirashi is of the opinion that these officers were appointed to govern the *rajyas* or provinces of the kingdom.

The officer of the title *rajjuka* figures in a solitary grant as its writer; what precisely was his function in this period we do not know.

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118 Ibid., pp. XXXVII-XXXVIII.
119 Ibid., L.2, p.102.
120 Ibid.
122 IEG, p.275.
123 CII, Vol.V, p.XXXVII.
124 Ibid, L.34, p.41.
Probably he was an officer in charge of the revenue administration and of the measurement of the lands in the kingdom.\textsuperscript{125}

How the different territorial units like districts and villages were administered? We do not know because Vakataka records are lacking in detail about their administration. Most probably districts were in charge of officers of the central government. They were heads of the general administration and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order. In all probabilities members of the police and military force (\textit{chhatras} and \textit{bhatas}) helped them in this work. The central government controlled the administration through its inspecting staff, which has been already referred to above.

The only military and police officials of higher ranks mentioned in Vakataka grants are the \textit{Senapati}\textsuperscript{126} and the \textit{Dandanayaka}.\textsuperscript{127} Vakataka plates state at their end that when they were issued, so and so was the \textit{Senapati} or general of the king.\textsuperscript{128} The manner in which the names of the generals are mentioned at the end of the copper plates suggests that the charters were drafted in their offices under their supervision. There were apparently frequent transfers of officers; for we find that the post of \textit{Senapati} was held by different persons or by the

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, p. XXXVIII.
\textsuperscript{126} See e.g. Ibid, L.59-60, p.26.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, L.2, p.102.
\textsuperscript{128} See e.g. Ibid, L.59-60, p.26, 27.
same person at different times during the reign of Pravarasena II.\(^{129}\)

*Dandanayaka* was most probably a senior police officer who sometimes joined touring officials.\(^{130}\)

We thus get only an imperfect picture of Vakataka administration, but such evidence as we possess indicates that it was on the whole vigilant and efficient. It may be assumed that Copper plate grants appear not even to have issued before they had been checked, as each of them usually bears a certificate to this effect as testified by the term *drishtam* inscribed on the plates.\(^{131}\) The term denotes, 'has been seen', i.e. 'found correct and approved' indicating the approval of the proper authorities.\(^{132}\) There is evidence to show that inaccurate or unsatisfactory plates were rejected.\(^{133}\) Still more interesting is what has been stated above that even the Brahmana donees of the copper plate grants were not above the law; some of the grants expressly lay down specific conditions under which alone the grants were to be continued. First of all they and their descendants were to be loyal to the state and to offer the fullest co-operation in apprehending the person guilty of


\(^{130}\) *CII*, V, L.2,p.102.

\(^{131}\) See eg. *Ibid*, L.1, p.12.

\(^{132}\) *IEG*, p.102.

\(^{133}\) *EI*, IX, pp. 268-269; *Ibid*, XXII, pp.208-209.
treason, theft, and immorality. They were further not to interfere with the rights of neighbouring villages. If these conditions were not fulfilled, the state could resume the grant without any moral or spiritual compunction.\textsuperscript{134} This shows strict control exercised by the Vakataka rulers over their administration. Land also was carefully surveyed according to the measure determined by the state, and the requisite entries were made in the relevant records.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{134} CII, V, L.39-43, p.25.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. L. 18-19, p.24.
CHAPTER V

AGRARIAN AND FISCAL RIGHTS OF THE STATE
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Ownership Pattern and Land Rights

One of the most complicated problems connected with the agrarian system of ancient India is the ‘Ownership of Land’. It has been a matter of controversy among the scholars. Ownership of land is supposed to be of three different kinds:- 1. Communal or corporate ownership, 2. Royal or state ownership, and 3. Individual ownership. Whereas R.G. Basak and R.C. Majumdar are the exponents of communal ownership, K.P. Jayaswal and A.S. Altekar are in favour of individual ownership and V.A. Smith and number of other scholars including U.N. Ghoshal and S.K. Maity are in view of royal or state ownership.

V.A. Smith states that, “the native law of India has ordinarily recognised agricultural land as being crown property and has admitted the undoubted right of the ruling power to levy a crown rent or ‘land revenue’, amounting to a considerable portion, either of the gross produce or of its own value”.\(^1\) About the individual ownership of

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\(^1\) EHI, pp. 137-138.
land, K.P. Jayaswal says, "that this right of individual regarding land is inviolable and that all possible pretentions of the crown to such right were denied in the clearest possible terms in ancient India".\(^2\)

As regards the survival of communal ownership of land. We do not have any direct reference in the contemporary legal texts. Nor do the inscriptions of the period bear clear reference to the existence of communal ownership of land. However, from the *Faridpur copper plate grant* of Dharmaditya,\(^3\) Pargitar tries to prove the existence of communal ownership. He says, "that ownership of land was vested in the village, as land could be purchased only after the unanimous approval of the leading men of the district as well as the common folk".\(^4\) R.G. Basak supports this by saying, "If we assume that the land belonged to the state why could it not alienate them without the consent or approval of the people’s representatives, the *Mahattras* and the businessmen (*Vyavharins*) of the province and the district, and sometimes, even the common folk? One way of answering these questions may be that these lands belonged not to the state but to the whole village or village assemblies, and hence their transfer could not

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\(^3\) *IA*, XXXIX, p. 200.
\(^4\) Ibid, p. 214.
take place without the consent or approval of the latter".\(^5\) It is also maintained by Basak that since it is recorded in very clear terms that one sixth of the proceeds of the transaction will go to the state according to law, the remaining five-sixths of the price was to go to the funds of the village assemblies thus indicating that land was owned by the people themselves and not by the state and that the state could receive taxes in return of the protection given to them.\(^6\) R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar defend the view put forward by Basak. While advocating the communal ownership R.C. Majumdar says, “the village corporations were practically the absolute proprietors of the village lands, including the fresh clearings, and were responsible for the total amount of rent to the government. In case the owner of a plot of land failed to pay his share it became the property of the corporation which had a right to dispose of it to realise the dues”.\(^7\) Similarly, Altekar suggests that the ownership of the cultivable land vested in private individuals or families, and not in the state.\(^8\)

Basak’s argument, however, has not been accepted by S.K.

\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, II\(^{nd}\) ed., Calcutta, 1922, p. 186.
\(^8\) *VGA*, p. 333.
Maity⁹ and D.N. Jha¹⁰ for the fact that the inhabitants of the village were informed of the grant not because they were the owner of the land lying around the village but because the introduction of new owner was considered important and concerned the whole village. Besides, there are references to the importance of the villagers and elders in settling boundary disputes. Narada lays down that in all quarrels regarding landed property or boundaries the decision rests with the neighbours, the inhabitants of the same town or village, the other members of the same community and the senior inhabitants of the village.¹¹ Brihaspati also considers neighbour's testimony of great importance and lays down that in disputes regarding a house or field, the decision belongs to the neighbours as well as to the inhabitants of that village, or to members of the same society, and to the elders of the village.¹² Thus, in view of all this the ownership of land in *Faridpur copper plate inscription* may not be taken to mean the survival of communal ownership.

Although the law givers do not provide clear evidence of communal ownership of land, they frequently refer to individual holdings and enjoyment of land. The rules laid down by them

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¹¹ *Narada*, XI, 2, pp. 154-155.
¹² *Brihaspati*, XIX, 8, p. 352.
regarding partition seem to have promoted individual ownership of land. Brihaspati clearly states that, "houses and landed property inherited from an ancestor shall be shared equally by the father and son".\(^{13}\) That land was partitioned is further specified by Brihaspati, when he ordains that 'a son begotten with a Sudra woman by a twice-born man is not entitled to a share of the landed property'.\(^{14}\) Even the pasture lands are made liable to be partitioned by Brihaspati when he declares that 'fields and embankments shall be divided according to their shares. A common pasture ground may always be used by the co-heirs in due proportion to their several shares'.\(^{15}\) The legal approval of the partition of pasture land seems to be significant as vast stretches of land owned by joint families could be brought under private possession.\(^{16}\) All this indicate the existence of private or individual ownership.

The mode of acquiring property as laid down in the Smritis also suggests the existence of individually owned land. Narada, while laying down rules for acquiring property states that "property obtained by inheritance, gifts made from love, and what has been obtained with a wife (as her dowry), are the three kinds of pure

\(^{13}\) Ibid, XXV, 2, p. 370.
\(^{14}\) Ibid, 32, p. 375.
\(^{15}\) Ibid, 84, p. 382.
\(^{16}\) IF, p. 119.
wealth, for all (castes) without distinction".  

Brihaspati lists houses and fields in the list of acquisition, which may be gifted away by an individual. This is qualified by the rule laid down by Brihaspati in the section of possession, where it is stated that ‘immovable property may be acquired in seven different ways, namely, by learning, by purchase, by mortgaging, by valour, with a wife (as her dowry), by inheritance (from an ancestor), and by succession to the property of kinsman who has no issue’. The rules regarding sale and purchase enunciated by law givers of Gupta period are also indicative of individual ownership of land e.g. Brihaspati states ‘when a person having purchased a house, field or other (property) causes a document to be executed containing an exact statement of the proper price paid for it, it is called a deed of purchase’. Further, the rules regarding the use of land as a pledge also suggest the existence of individual ownership of land during the period under review. The use of a mortgaged house, or the produce of a field is termed as ‘bhoga-labha’ (interest by enjoyment) by Brihaspati.

As regards the epigraphic evidence suggesting the existence of

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17 *Narada*, I, 51, p. 54.
18 *Brihaspat*, XV, 4, p. 342.
19 Ibid, IX, 2, p. 309.
20 Ibid, VIII, 7, p. 305.
individual ownership of land, a number of inscriptions advocate this right. In the inscriptions of Bengal, we have references to the fields belonging to individuals, while the boundaries of the land granted are demarcated. The *Gunaighar grant* of Vainyagupta, while giving the boundaries of five plots, refer to fields belonging to several individuals who are named.\textsuperscript{22} In the Kathiawar region also a number of inscriptions refer to the fields belonging to various individuals. The *Jhar plates* of Dharasena II of Maitraka dynasty refer to the field of Jhajjhaka, the field of Khandaka, or Vinhalka, a resident of the village of Bhramarakalyangrama.\textsuperscript{23}

In central India and Deccan most of the charters record the grant of villages. There are charters, which refer to the grant of villages by individuals, the king being asked only to give his assent. In the *Indore plates* of Vakataka *Maharaja* Pravarasena II, the gift of a village to the brahmanas by the merchant Chandra after having purchased it is mentioned.\textsuperscript{24} The *Majhgawan copper plate grant* of the Parivrajaka *Maharaja* Hastin dated G. year 191 records that the village named Valugarta, was granted at the request of Mahadevideva

\textsuperscript{22} *IHQ*, VI, pp. 45-60.
\textsuperscript{23} *IA*, XV, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{24} *CII*, V, pp. 38-42.
to some brahmanas. Similarly, the Khoh copper plate grant of the Parivrajaka Maharaja Samkshobha dated G. year 209 refers to the grant of half of the village of Opani at the request of Chodugomin.

The individual could purchase land for religious purposes is evident from the land grants from Bengal belonging to the Gupta period. In these grants there are references to land being purchased by individuals, either for donation to brahmanas, or for performing the religious sacrifices themselves.

All these indicate that individuals could purchase land or even villages. It may however be kept in mind that the right to purchase land or even villages, recognized by the jurists may have been limited only to religious purposes and the evidence of the secular sales or transfers of land has not survived though it is difficult to rule out the possibility that they were written on perishable materials such as palm-leaves or cloth. Further, the individual's right were also curtailed by the authority of the king who could grant land belonging to an individual to another person. References to donation of land belonging to private individuals are found in many copper plate grants. Of the thirty two copper plate grants of Valkha kingdom

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26 Ibid, pp. 112-116.
eleven record that certain villages and land held by some individuals were granted by the Kings to the brahmanas and temples. For example a grant of Maharaja Swamidasa dated G. year 63 records the donation of the village of Damanaka which was holding of one Mandara to the Arya-Chaturvaidyapadas.\textsuperscript{28} A grant of Maharaja Rudradasa of the G. year 67 mentions that a field held by the potter Aryyadasa was granted by the king to the brahmana Hunadhyaka as brahmadeya.\textsuperscript{29} In one case a plot of land and a house belonging to Indrasena was granted as brahmadeya to a brahmana named Jayavarddhana.\textsuperscript{30} Similarly in the \textit{Palitana plates} of Maitraka king Dhruvasena I it is stated that one hundred and forty \textit{padavartas}\textsuperscript{31} of land which previously belonged to the householder Isvara was granted to another person.\textsuperscript{32}

As regards the king’s rights over land, according to legal traditions the king, if he so desired could annex the lands of individual to the state. The injunctions with regard to the property received in dowry and by inheritance no doubt establishes individual ownership, but it has to be remembered that when a person died

\textsuperscript{28} Ramesh & Tewari, pp. 32-34.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, pp. 67-68.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, pp. 15-17.
\textsuperscript{31} A land measure, an area of 100 \textit{padavartas} being 100 feet each way, i.e. 10,000 square feet. \textit{EG}, p. 225.
without any heir his property was to be escheated by the sovereign. Brihaspati and Narada hold that if 'a Kshatriya, Vaishya or Sudra die without male issue, or wife or brother, their property should be taken in escheat by the king, for he is the lord of all'.

Further, the royal ownership of land is established from a host of Gupta inscriptions. In Bengal we have a number of copper plate inscriptions in which land was purchased by individuals and donated to others. These are principally distinguished by the fact that the sale of the land required consent of the district officials. Further, in some of these charters the *Pustpalas* were asked to clarify the position regarding the land in question. It was only after the *Pustpalas* or the record-keepers decided that the land may be given the land was severed off its boundaries. It is clear that the *Adhikarana* though having considerable authority, was neither the owner of the land to be sold nor had the power to dispose of it at its own discretion. Besides, the district officials also did not have the ownership of land to be sold as the land was purchased by an *Ayuktaka* in the *Dhanaidaha copper plates* grant of Kumaragupta I and by

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Vishayapati in the *Nandapur copper plate grant* of Budhagupta.\(^{36}\) The villagers also did not seem to have right over the land, as one householder or a *Kutumbin* in the *Baigram copper plate grant* of the time of Kumaragupta I\(^{37}\) purchased land. Thus, it may be safely assumed that the land in the sale inscriptions also belonged to the king\(^{38}\) as in all the other grants recording the donation of land to brahmanas or to the Buddhist monasteries.

There are many copper plate grants of the Gupta and Vakataka empires in which the kings of this period are recorded as endowing a whole village, a part of a village or a certain amount of land along with the royal revenues, wealth underground and administrative privileges to the donees. It is difficult to account for the king’s power to grant such a comprehensive rights over villages to religious bodies, unless it was implicitly believed that he was the ultimate owner of the land.

Even after the donation of the land the king reserved certain prerogative rights over the donated lands, such as the right of imposing fines on thieves.\(^{39}\) Moreover the donee was not allowed to exact any new taxes from the people of the donated area unless it was

\(^{36}\) *EI*, XXIII, pp. 52-56.

\(^{37}\) *Sel.Ins*, I, pp. 355-359.

\(^{38}\) *LSNI*, p. 17.

specifically mentioned in the grant. He was liable to punishment or
annulment of his rights if he imposed any new taxes.⁴⁰ The donee
enjoying tax-free village or lands was forbidden to encourage revenue
paying cultivators, artisans etc. from other villages to immigrate into
the donated villages⁴¹ for this would involve loss of revenue to the
state. Furthermore, certain conditions of tenureship are imposed on
land grants. Thus, in case of lands granted under the terms of *nivi-
dharma, akshaya-nivi-dharma, aprada-dharma*, etc., the donees have
no right to alienate them by sale, or mortgage, etc. Thus, the land
grants point to the existence of individual ownership in land, though
overshadowed by the royal ownership of land.

The land grants, apart from indicating the existence of
landownership rights of both the king and the individual also
introduced a new class of landholders, who belonged mainly to the
highest *varna*, i.e., the brahmanas. Since this new class of landholders
came to acquire land on the basis of a document issued to them in the
form of copper plate charters the lawgivers also formulated new rules
regarding the ownership of land. The law-books of this period do not
recognise mere possession of land as the sole basis for a person to
enjoy land as long as he wishes to. In the earlier period, Manu’s

⁴⁰ Fleet, *CII*, III, p. 117, 125.
maxim that the field belongs to him who first removed the weed, and the deer belongs to him who first wounded it was accepted. But during the Gupta period the situation seems to have changed. Narada suggests ‘when possession has been successively held, even unlawfully, by the three ancestors of the father (of the present possessor), the property cannot be taken away from him because it has gone through three lives in order’. He also tells us that, “where there is enjoyment but no title of any sort, there a title is required in order to produce proprietary right. Mere possession is not sufficient to create proprietary right in that case”. Narada goes a step further and frames laws against illegal possession ‘He who can only plead possession, without being able to produce any title, must be considered a thief, in consequence of his pleading such illegitimate possession. This is specially true of immovable property. Similarly according to the norms laid down by Brihaspati ‘when possession extending over three generations has descended to the fourth-generation, it becomes a legitimate possession, and a title must never be enquired for’ and possession coupled with a legitimate title

42 Manu, IX, 44, p. 251.
43 Narada, I, 91, p. 63.
44 Ibid, 84, p. 62.
46 Brihaspati, 26, p. 313.
constitutes proprietary right.

Thus, the concept of ownership contained in Manu's axiom that one who clears the land owns it, gradually came to be associated with three generations of actual possession along with a written document or a legal title.

The rules thus laid down by the lawgivers find echo in the land charters issued by rulers in various parts of the country in the Gupta period. The donees received copper plate charters as the basis of possession and the land tenure under which the land was given as religious grants provided them proprietary rights. In the copper plate grants certain specific terms for land-tenure are mentioned, such as 1. nividharma, 2. akshaya-nivi-dharma or akshaya-nivi, 3. nividhrma-akshaya, 4. aprada-dharma, 5. apradakshaya nivi, and 6. Bhumichhidra-nyaya.

According to S.K. Maity an endowment made according to nividharna was to be maintained perpetually by the donee, but that he

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49 Sel-Ins, I. P. 356.
50 CII, III, p. 275.
51 EI, XV, p. 143.
52 CII, III, p.289.
53 Fleet, CII, III, p. 137.
could make use of the income accruing to it. Sometimes the term *akshaya* is added to *nivi*, in order to give more emphasis to the permanancy of the endowment, for *akshaya* literally means 'indestructable' or 'perpetual' This can better be taken as an extension of the meaning of *nivi-dharma*. The lands or money endowed according to this principle were to be treated as *akshaya-nivi* where the original endowment was in no circumstances be destroyed or diminished. This is further indicated by the fact that when *akshaya-nivi-dharma* is mentioned in some cases we have also the expression *sasvata-chandrarkka-taraka*, as in the *Paharpur* and the *Baigram copper plates*. It thus indicates that the endowment was perpetual and could be possessed, theoretically, as long as sun, moon and stars exist.

In certain cases it is seen that the above terms of tenureship are reversed. The new owner has got the full right to enjoy the endowment with the power of transfer and sale. Here the term *kshaya* (in *nividharma-kshaya*) literally means destruction, and so the term *nividharma-kshaya* implies the destruction of the principle of *nividharma*. This is illustrated by the *Dhanaidaha copper plates* of

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54 *ELNI*, p. 27.
56 *Sel-Ins.*, I, p. 356; *EI*, XX, p. 63.
Kumaragupta I.\textsuperscript{57} It is here stated that a place named Kshudraka was in the possession of Sivasarma and Nagasarma. It was afterwards donated to Varahasvamin after reversing the process of \textit{nivi-dharma}. Thus, it seems from the use of the word \textit{nividharma-kshayena} that the intending purchaser wanted to buy land by destroying the condition of non-transferability of it, that is, to buy it with the future right of alienation.\textsuperscript{58}

The next fiscal term is \textit{apradadharma}. According to this the donee has all the rights to enjoy such a property, but has no right to make further gift to the same and can only enjoy the interest and income that accrue from the donated land. In other words, just like \textit{nividharma} the original endowment must not be diminished or destroyed, but must be preserved intact in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, \textit{nividharma}, \textit{akshayanivi-dharma} and \textit{aprada-dharma} indicate almost the same kind of tenureship of land. However, there may have some minute technical difference between them.

The term \textit{apradakshayanivi} occurs in the \textit{Damodarpur copper plates} of Kumaragupta I of the G. year 128.\textsuperscript{60} According to Ghoshal as with \textit{nividharma} the donee has the full right of perpetual

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{CII}, III, p.275.
\item \textsuperscript{58} \textit{ELNI}, p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid, p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{60} \textit{CII}, III, p. 289.
\end{itemize}
enjoyment of the endowment, but has not the power to alienate or
destroy or diminish it.\(^{61}\)

Another important fiscal term is \textit{bhumichhidra-nyaya}. It occurs
in many inscriptions of the Gupta period. There is a chapter in the
\textit{Arthasastra} of Kautilya, having the title of \textit{bhumichhidravidhanam}. It
treats mainly of uncultivable tracts, which are to be utilised as
pasture land.\(^{62}\) According to U.N. Ghoshal this term ‘implies the grant
of full right of ownership, such as would be acquired by a person
making fallow land cultivable for the first time’.\(^{63}\) The term
\textit{bhumichhidra-nyaya} occurs in the \textit{Khoh copper plate grant} of
Sarvanatha dated G. year 214\(^{64}\) and \textit{Maliya copper plate} of Dharasena
II\(^{65}\) and many other grants of the later period. Most of the lands
granted under this rule are cultivable lands. In some cases, the whole
villages were granted under this tenureship,\(^{66}\) and village must include
all kinds of lands. According to S.K. Maity, ‘In the earlier period this
term may have indicated land unfit for cultivation, as we find in
Kautilya.......... But from the sources of the Gupta period it is

\(^{61}\) U.N. Ghoshal, \textit{Contribution to the History of the Hindu Revenue system}, Calcutta,
1972, p. 199.
\(^{63}\) \textit{HRS}, p. 212.
\(^{64}\) Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, p. 137.
\(^{65}\) Ibid, p. 166.
quite impossible to agree with those who give the term this interpretation'. He suggests as regards its implications for the system of land tenure, *bhumiichhidra-nyaya* very clearly indicates permanent land tenureship, and the property endowed under this rule is freely handed down from generation to generation.

Besides, in the copper plate grants, we have references to the villages, or land to be enjoyed as long as the sun and the moon will endure, and to follow the succession of sons and son's son.

Thus, though different terms were current in different parts of the country, it seems that the donees were given land proprietorship for all practical purposes with inheritance rights, when land was sold, or donated, and the right to collect taxes and other benefits, which otherwise accrued to the king was given in perpetuity in the case of village grant.

Although it is quite clear from epigraphic and literary records that pious kings of India generally respected the rent free holdings created by earlier rulers either of their own family or of other dynasties, a significant fact revealed by the copper plate grants is the

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67 *ELNI*, p. 32.
68 Ibid.
69 See e.g. *Khoh copper plate grant* of the Maharaja Sarvanatha, Fleet, *CII*, III, p. 131.
70 *LTAMI*, p. 10
persistent fear of the donors that their gifts might be resumed by the future rulers of their own families or other royal families. This clearly establish the fact that resumption of rent-free holdings or collection of taxes from them by the rulers was a far from uncommon feature in the administration of those days. The donors are therefore often found to request their successors to be so good as to preserve the gifts and usually quoted certain old stanzas declaring the virtue occurring to the gift of land and its preservation as well as the great sin resulting from the confiscation or resumption of gift lands.  

But in some cases the kings reserved the right to confiscation under certain circumstances and there were some recognized ways of resuming gift lands without blemish. *Chammak copper plate grant* of the Vakataka king Pravarasena II has the following passage, “and this condition of the charter should be maintained by the brahmanas (i.e. the donees) and by the rulers, namely that (the donees should enjoy the donated estate) as long as the moon and the sun endure, provided that they do not rise in rebellion (*a-droha-pravritta*) against the state which is an aggregate of seven constituent elements (viz. the king, the ministers, the allies, the territory, the fortresses, the army and the treasury), that they are on hostile terms (*sangramam kurvatam*) with the slayers of

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71 *LSNI*, p. 22.
the brahmanas and with robbers, adulterers and traitors to the king (raj-apathyaka-rin) and that they do no wrong to the other villages. But if they act otherwise or assent (to such acts), the king will commit no theft in confiscating the estate".72

Besides, the king had right to made donation in exchange of earlier grants. In the Vakataka copper plate grants there are at least three cases where we find villages being donated in exchange for donations made previously, e.g. donation of Dhuvavataka in exchange for vijaypallivataka (vijayapallivatakasya prativastu) in the Pandhurna plates, Sriparnaka in exchange for previously donated (purvvaparigraha-prativastu) Manapallika in the Patna Museum plates and grant of 50 nivartanas by royal measure in exchange for some other lands (bhumi-prativastu) (village(s) not named) in the Pauni grant.73

In addition to it, the king had right to resume any grant and donate that to another person. A land grant made by Valkha Maharaja Rudrasena in the G. year 70 in favour of a brahmana Varadatta was previously enjoyed as a brahmadeya by Bhutapalak and Aryyadasa.74

All this indicate that despite the conception of individual ownership

72 CII, V, p. 25.
74 Ramesh & Tewari, pp. 50-51.
was growing in this period, the king was regarded as the highest lord of the land.

With the steady growth of agriculture and general prosperity of the people under the Imperial Guptas the demand for all types of land was probably keenly felt. As a result of this great care was taken to maintain proper boundary marks. It is evident that there were regular records of the boundaries of the villages and of the small plots of land within the villages.

Brihaspati and Narada enacted laws and regulations regarding the boundary specifications for safeguard the interest of the landholders. According to Brihaspati the determination of boundaries should be settled at the time of any change and it should be marked by visible and invisible signs to dispel doubt.\textsuperscript{75} Narada lays down that the boundary should not be fixed by one man single-handed, though he be a reliable person. This business should be entrusted to a plurality of persons, because it is an affair of importance.\textsuperscript{76} It is in keeping with the injunctions of the lawgivers that the donated villages were carefully and precisely demarcated. The \textit{Khoh copper plate grant} of \textit{Maharaja Jayanatha dated G. year 177} specifies the boundaries of the

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Brihaspti}, XIX, 2-7, p. 351.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Narada}, XI, 9, p. 157.
village of Dhavasandika.\textsuperscript{77} Maharaja Hastin’s endowment of the agrahara of Korparika was also marked with boundaries.\textsuperscript{78}

A similar specification of village boundaries is found in the Vakataka grants. The \textit{Poona plates} of Prabhavatigupta specify the boundaries of donated village Danguna.\textsuperscript{79} The \textit{Jamb plates} demarcate the boundaries of the donated villages for future identification\textsuperscript{80} and the \textit{Siwani plates} of Pravarasena II demarcate the boundaries of the donated villages for future identification.\textsuperscript{81}

References to the specified boundaries of the donated villages are also found in Bengal. The precise demarcation of the boundaries might have been useful for the revenue records and revenue collection.

Sometimes several plots of land were marked with detailed boundaries as seen in the \textit{Gunaighar copper plate grant} of Vainyagupta.\textsuperscript{82} The boundaries were marked by chaff, coal, etc. as can be inferred from the \textit{Nandapur copper plate grant}.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Fleet, \textit{CII, III}, pp. 121-125.}
\footnote{Ibid, pp. 100-105.}
\footnote{\textit{CII, V. Pp. 7-9.}}
\footnote{Ibid, pp. 12-15.}
\footnote{Ibid, pp. 30-32.}
\footnote{\textit{Sel-Ins.}, I, pp. 343-345.}
\end{footnotes}
Fiscal Rights of the State

The precision with which the granted villages and the fields were marked suggests that villages and land in the kingdom were a principle source of revenue for the state treasury. Treasury has been considered by our ancient lawgivers as one of the main organs of the state. Vishnu lays down that 'the monarch, his council, his fortress, his treasury, his army, his realm, and his ally are the seven constituent elements of a state. The king must punish those, who try to subvert any one among them'.

The treasury or kosa, being an important organ of the state naturally presupposes the existence of many sources of revenue which could be tapped to fill the king's treasury. According to Kamandaka, agriculture, trade routes (vanikpatha), fortifications (towns), dams and reservoirs (for irrigation), enclosures for elephant (elephant forests), mines, forests and reclamation of uninhabited settlements (sunya nivesa) are the eight sources of income (astavarga) which a king should maintain in proper condition and develop, thereby promoting the means of livelihood for the people engaged in different trades and professions through considerate officials.

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83 Vishnu, III, 33-34, p. 17.
84 Kamandaka, V, 78-79, p. 60.
Besides enumerating the importance of *kosa* or treasury for the state and various sources of revenue the lawgivers have also laid down certain principles for the collection of revenue. They explain the method and manner of levying taxes. *Kamadaka* says that just as the cow maintained properly yielded milk in time, and the florist both tends and sprinkled water on his plants yields flowers, so also the subjects yield revenue in time, where their interests are promoted by the rulers.\(^8^5\)

The lawgivers of the period have not only enunciated the principles of taxation, but have also recommended the rate at which the land tax may be collected by the king on land. Vishnu advises the king to take from his subjects a sixth part every year of the grain and a sixth part of all other seed as taxes.\(^8^6\) Narada states that one sixth of the produce of the soil forms the royal revenue. It is taken as the reward of the king for the protection of his subjects.\(^8^7\) Thus, one-sixth was according to our lawgivers the customary share of the king from the products of the soil.

The epigraphic evidence of the period does not give any clue to the rate of land tax, which was actually taken by the rulers. Only in

\(^{8^5}\) Ibid, 84, p. 61.
\(^{8^6}\) *Vishnu*, III, 22-23, p. 16.
\(^{8^7}\) *Narada*, XVIII, 48, p. 221.
the inscriptions of Bengal do we find reference to one sixth share of
the merit, which would accrue to the king, if the land, asked for
would be sold to the person, who had applied for it and thereafter he
had gifted it over to someone else for the performance of religious
sacrifices or to the Buddhist monastery. This reference to the
expression *dharmasadbhaga*\(^{88}\) in Gupta epigraphs may suggest that
the king’s normal grain share was one-sixth of the produce. It is
however curious that we do not find any reference to any revenue
terms in Bengal epigraphs belonging to the Gupta period, as in the
land charters belonging to central and western India and Deccan.

This conspicuous absence may be explained by analysing the
inscriptions from Bengal and other parts of India. The Bengal charters
as stated above are not directly issued by the king. These charters are
sale deeds, whereby individual bought land from the district
administration. It was maintained that the sale would not in any way
affect the revenue receipts of the ruler, rather the king would get one-
sixth share or *dharmasadbhaga* of the religious gift. Further the land
sold was waste land, which was not yielding any revenue to the king
otherwise also.

The objects of donation were mostly villages in central India

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\(^{88}\) *EI*, XX, p. 63; Ibid, XXIII, p.54.
and Deccan in the Vakataka empire and villages and fields of various sizes in western India. Most probably the donated villages before being transferred to the beneficiaries were paying all those dues or taxes which are mentioned in the grants. All this implies that the number of peasants paying taxes directly to the king was falling off. For what the peasants paid as revenues to the state was converted as a result of grants into rents to the beneficiaries, many of whom, being priests or religious institutions, did not have to pay any portion of their income as tax to the state.

S.K. Maity assumes that the tax was in the form of a proportion of the actual crop. Regarding the taxes, the epigraphs do not provide direct evidence of the taxes prevalent in the Gupta and the Vakataka empires. But from references to exemptions from various kinds of royal dues to their transfer to the donees and the retention of some of them by the donor himself, the system of land revenue can broadly be outlined.

In the western part of Madhya Pradesh the rulers of Valkha kingdom issued many land and village grants. But except the copper plates of Maharaja Bhattaraka of the G. year 120 which record a

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89 LSNI, p. 61.
90 ELNI, p. 56.
grant of a plot of land along with the *udranga* revenue,\(^9\) rest of the thirty one charters of this kingdom do not mention any revenue term. This was because of the fact that these charters are at the starting point of the popular system of making land-grants to brahmanas and religious institutions. The basic motivation behind the making of these land-grants through so many charters certainly was the reclamation of lands for increasing food production and founding of new settlements particularly for accommodating the freshly increasing brahmana members of an otherwise predominantly tribal society. That is why most of these land grants charters contain the expression, *uchitya brahmadey-agrahara-bhuktya bhunjatah krishatah samavasayatas-cha-* as per the norms governing the enjoyment of the *brahmadeyagrahara* grant, enjoy, cultivate and inhabit this village.\(^9\)

In central India and Deccan charters of the Parivrajakas, the Uchchapkalpas and the Vakatakas mention several important revenue terms such as *udranga, uparikara, bhoga-bhaga, kara, hiranya, dhanya, klipta* and *upaklipta*. In the inscriptions of the Parivrajakas, only two revenue terms, *udranga* and *uparikara* are mentioned. The five copper plate grants of *Maharaja* Hastin record the grant of

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\(^9\) Ramesh & Tewari, L. 6, p. 52.

\(^9\) See e.g. Ibid, pp. 23-25, 30-32, 43-45.
villages with exemption from the payment of *udranga* and *uparikara*. Out of two charters issued by Samkshobha only one refers to these two taxes, whereas the other the *Khoh copper plate grant* of the G. year 209 does not mention any revenue term. Further the fact that the Uchchakalpa land charters record some more taxes in the list of exemptions from the same region suggests that most probably the Parivrajaka rulers were neither powerful nor wealthy enough to exempt the donated villages from all the taxes. This is further supported by the *Khoh copper plates* of Samkshobha which does not exempt the gifted village even from *udranga* and *uparikara*. Most probably, it may be said that the donee might have been given some land in the village and the inhabitants of the village continued to pay other taxes to the king only. The copper plate grants of the Maharajas of Uchchakalpa record village donations and in contrast to the Parivarajaka grants have provided a longer list of revenue terms. Thus in these records the donees are provided with *udranga, uparikara, bhoga, bhaga, kara* and *hiranya*.

All these revenue terms seem to denote different taxes. This may be inferred from the fact that out of the two grants of *Maharaja*...
Jayanatha, one mentions the *udranga, uparikara, bhoga-bhaga* and *kara*, whereas the second grant of the same ruler issued most probably two years later than the first grant include *hiranya* also in the list of exemptions granted to the beneficiary. Similarly, the next ruler *Maharaja* Sarvanatha belonging to the sixth century A.D. adds *avata* to the list of exemptions given in his first two charters. It can be inferred from these records that it was not obligatory on the part of the king to deprive himself of all the taxes while donating a village. It was his prerogative to add some taxes and to omit others from the list of exemptions. Besides, it also indicates that the king could increase the taxes on the inhabitants living in the donated villages. That same number of taxes were also collected from the inhabitants of the ordinary tax paying villages cannot also be ruled out completely. Therefore, it may be said that in the Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand regions of central India the taxes seemed to be on the increase.

In Deccan the epigraphical records of the Vakatakas *Maharaja* Pravarasena II, Poona plates of Prabhavatigupta and *Riddhapur plates* of Prabhavatigupta contain the same list of exemptions. No distinction is made between the villages or the fields while granting

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97 Ibid, pp. 135-139, p. 138, f.no. 3.
98 *LSNI*, p. 64.
the exemptions. Jamb charter of Pravarasena II says that the village is exempted from “grass hides and seats, and charcoal (to touring officers); royal prerogative of purchasing fermenting liquors and digging (salt) exempt from (the royal prerogative of (the right to) mines and khadira trees; exempt from (the obligations) to supply flowers and milk; (it is donated) together with hidden treasure and deposits (and) together with major and minor taxes and forced labour”. It may be noted that the list of exemption provided by the Vakatakas indicates that unlike the Parivrajakas and the Uchchakalpas, the Vakatakas transferred to the donees even the right to the hidden treasures and deposits.

In western India, in the Maitraka grants of the sixth century the terms ditya and danakarna are often mentioned. In the later half of the same century we find undranga, uparikara, vat-bhut, dhanya, hiranya etc.

The omission of certain revenue terms from the text of the charter and reference to many terms as discussed above seems to suggest that the listing of the exemptions was not taken for granted.

Specific and particular taxes were listed as immunities. The king as

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100 CII, V, pp. 10-15.
101 EI, XXXI, pp. 299-301.
102 IA, V, pp. 206-207.
said earlier could according to his wish or as the time and position
may permit, could withhold or grant any tax to the donee.

The most common revenue terms in the inscriptions of this
period is *bhaga-bhoga*. Sometimes this expression is recorded in a
reverse order as *bhoga-bhaga*. Fleet takes *bhaga, bhoga* as one word,
and explains it as the 'enjoyment of taxes or shares.'\(^{103}\) U.N. Ghoshal
also takes it as a compound for a single levy and according to him the
expression denotes kings' grain share in general, identical with the
*bhaga* of the *Arthasastra* and *bali* of the Smritis.\(^{104}\) Thus, *bhaga* may
be taken to mean the customary share of the produce as is also
explained by D.C. Sircar.\(^{105}\)

The *bhoga* of the inscriptions may be taken as the periodical
supplies of fruits, firewood, flowers and the like, which the villagers
had to supply to the king as is specifically stated in the Vakataka
grants.\(^{106}\) S.K. Maity also agrees with this view.\(^{107}\)

*Kara* is another revenue term which we get in the copper plate
grants.\(^{108}\) *Kara* seem to have been of the nature of a periodical tax
levied more or less universally from villagers, and it may have been

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\(^{103}\) Fleet, *CII*, III, f.no. 1, p. 120.
\(^{104}\) *HRS*, p. 393.
\(^{105}\) *Sel-Ins*, I, f.no. 2, p. 179.
\(^{107}\) *ELNI*, p. 58.
realized over and above the king’s normal grain share.\textsuperscript{109} Another fiscal term which we come across in the grants is \textit{hiranya}. This term is found in all the epigraph of northern India. This indicates the importance of \textit{hiranya} as an important source of revenue. In the inscriptions, the term \textit{hiranya} occurs with \textit{bhaga-bhoga} (royal share of the produce) and along with \textit{dhanya}.\textsuperscript{110} It may therefore be inferred from this that \textit{hiranya} may have been some sort of a tax on agricultural produce.\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Hiranya} according to Ghoshal literally means gold, but in its technical sense, it means king’s hare of certain crops paid in cash as distinguished from tax in kind (\textit{bhoga}) levied on ordinary crops.\textsuperscript{112} Sircar also accepts this view.\textsuperscript{113}

Besides these fiscal terms, we also come across \textit{uparikara} and \textit{udranga}. According to Fleet, the word \textit{uparikara} is derived from the word \textit{upari} or \textit{upri} and meant a tax levied from the cultivators who had no proprietary rights in the soil.\textsuperscript{114} This had led Ghoshal to suggest that \textit{uparikara} was a tax levied on the temporary tenants and \textit{udranga} was a tax on permanent tenants.\textsuperscript{115} In support of his

\textsuperscript{109} ELNI, pp. 59-60; RSPMGT, pp. 46-47.
\textsuperscript{110} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, 122, 127, 131.
\textsuperscript{111} RSPMGT, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{112} HRS, p. 403.
\textsuperscript{113} IEG, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{114} Fleet, \textit{CII}, III, f.no. 1, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{115} HRS, pp. 276-277.
contention, he further tries to relate *uparikara* with the Marathi word *upari* which means the cultivator not belonging originally to a village, but residing and occupying land in it either upon a lease for a stipulated term of years or on the will of the proprietor. According to Maity, the evidence, however, is very tenuous since the Marathi language did not develop for some centuries after the date of our inscriptions and it is very rash to draw conclusions from such feeble linguistic evidence.\(^{116}\)

Since *upari* in the Sanskrit, Hindi and Bengali means ‘upon’ or ‘extra’\(^{117}\), D.C. Sircar has explained it as an extra cess.\(^{118}\) The interpretation of the term, however, remains inconclusive.

The term *undranga*, which appears along with *uparikara*, is also difficult to explain. Fleet explains *udranga* as ‘the share of the produce collected usually for the king’.\(^{119}\) This explanation is not accepted by the scholars as it is generally believed that *bhaga* means the regular land tax.\(^{120}\) Ghoshal, on the other hand, interprets *udranga* as a tax on permanent tenants\(^{121}\) and has been supported by Sircar\(^{122}\) in

\(^{116}\) *ELNI*, p. 61.
\(^{117}\) Ibid, p. 62.
\(^{118}\) *IEG*, p.352; *IE*, pp. 393-394.
\(^{119}\) Fleet, *CHI*, III, pp. 97-98.
\(^{120}\) Ibid.
\(^{121}\) *HRS*, p. 423.
\(^{122}\) *IEG*, p.349.
this contention Maity offers two other explanations of this term. If it is the same as *dranga* which according to the *Rajatarangini* is a watch station, it can be taken as a sort of police tax, levied on the districts for the maintenance of the local police station. It might also be suggested that it is an anomalous derivative of the Sanskrit word *udaka*, and in that case it may be a water tax. However, in view of the fact that it is recorded along with other normal royal dues like *uparikara, udranga* also may have been a levy over and above the usual grain share.

There are some other fiscal terms such as *ditya*, and *dhanya* mentioned in the records of the Gupta period. The word *ditya* occurs in the Maitraka inscriptions. The expression is recorded in the inscriptions as *sa-ditya dana-karana*. It may mean exemptions from all dues and making gifts. Accordingly *ditya* did not denote any particular tax and many taxes may have been included in it.

The term *dhanya* also appears to have denoted the general land tax. Ghoshal is of the view that probably *dhanya* was a share of the

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123 *ELNI*, p. 62.
124 *RSPMGT*, p. 56.
125 *EI*, XXXI, L.14, p. 301.
126 *LSNI*, p. 72.
127 Ibid.
produce. It may be said that dhanya was also unspecified tax.

Other fiscal terms referred to in the copper plate grants are bali, vata-bhuta. Bali was some kind of religious tax. It is quite in agreement with the epigraphic records of this period, for whenever the term bali occurs in the inscriptions it is recorded along with charu and sattra. The bali like charu is an offering to the gods, comprising clarified butter, grain, rice, fruits, flowers and so on. Therefore, bali can be explained as a sort of religious cess or contribution. The term, vata-bhuta is referred to in the Mota Machiala copper plates of Dhruvasena I. It is possible that these two terms should be taken separately as different kinds of cess for the maintenance of rites respectively for the winds (vata) and for the spirits (bhuta), in the same manner as bali and charu. These are probably some kind of general contribution was collected for these ceremonies either in cash or in kind.

In the Khoh copper plates of Sarvanatha dated G. year 197 halikakara is recorded. Ghosal suggests that this was a plough-

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128 HRS, p. 219.
129 See e.g. Khoh copper plate grant of Maharaja Sarvanatha, G. year 193, Fleet, CII, III, L.16, p. 127.
130 ELNI, p. 61.
131 EI, XXXI, p.301.
132 ELNI, p. 63.
133 Fleet, CII, III, L.13, p. 134.
tax.\textsuperscript{134} It might also be an extra tax imposed on the area which could be cultivated one plough in a single season, though any interpretation is uncertain.\textsuperscript{135}

In the Gupta period \textit{vishti} or forced labour became a source of state income and was looked upon as a sort of taxation paid by the people. So it finds frequent mention along with other taxes in the Gupta inscriptions. The donees were not only provided with land and villages along with right to various taxes, they were also given the right to forced labour. This shows that forced labour was probably more common than in the earlier period. In the \textit{Chammak copper plates} of Pravarasena II, the land was endowed entirely free from all obligations of forced labour.\textsuperscript{136} The exemption from forced labour we find in Pravarasena's \textit{Siwani copper plate grants}.\textsuperscript{137} In the \textit{Ganeshgadh copper plate grant} of Dhruvasena I of Maitraka dynasty the land was granted with exemption of all taxes and forced labour.\textsuperscript{138} Some later grants specifically record the grants of land along with the right of forced labour. \textit{The Palitana plates} of Dharasena II state that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{HRS}, p. 403.
\item \textit{ELNI}, p. 63.
\item \textit{CHI}, V, p. 13.
\item Ibid, p.31.
\item \textit{EI}, III, p.321.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the land was donated with the right to eventual forced labour.\textsuperscript{139}

The Vakataka records make mention of good number of other fiscal immunities which deserves our careful scrutiny. \textit{The Basim plates} of the Vakataka king Vindhyasakti II\textsuperscript{140} refer about following immunities (\textit{pariharas}), 1. \textit{a-lavana-klinna khataka} probably means a moist commodity like sugar which was obtained by boring certain trees like the Palmyra palm. Besides, the word may indicate toddy etc., 2. \textit{A-hiranya-dhanya-pranaya-pradeya-} freedom from the obligation of paying taxes in cash and kind as well as emergency imposts or occasional supplies of fruits etc., 3. \textit{a-vara-siddhika-} supply of free labour by the villages in turn., 4. \textit{a-carm-angaraka} freedom from the obligation of supplying hide-seats and charcoal to the touring royal officers encamped in the villages; 5. \textit{a-vaha-} obligation of supplying horses to or carrying the loads of the touring officers; 6. \textit{sa-nidhi and s-opanidhi-}privilege of enjoying treasures hidden under the surface of the earth and deposits or finds on the soil; 7. \textit{sa-mancha-mahakarana,} suggests that the grant was made with the plateforms used by officers for the collection of tolls as well as with important records in the custody of local officers.\textsuperscript{141} Some Vakataka

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\footnotetext[139]{\textit{IA}, V, p. 81, 84.}
\footnotetext[140]{\textit{CII}, V, pp. 93-100.}
\footnotetext[141]{\textit{LTAMI}, p. 68.}
\end{footnotes}
copper plate grant contain the term ‘sa-klpt-opaklpts’ which appears to mean ‘together with the fixed and unfixed imposts’ or ‘fixed taxes on the permanent tenants an varying taxes on the temporary tenants’.142

Sometimes in donations of land the entrance of chatas and bhatas was prohibited. The chatas and bhatas acted partly as police and partly as military. They were appointed to arrest robbers and persons guilty of high treason143 and to impose fine on thieves and mischief-doers.144

During the period not only the agriculturists but also the artisans had to pay taxes to the state. But we do not know in what way or to what extent they were taxed. In this period sulka145 was a royal share of the merchandise brought into a town or harbour by merchants. Gupta government had maintained a regular department to collect sulka and superintendent of tolls or customs dues was called Saulkika.146 Mandhal copper plates of Prithivishena II147 mention the donated village was situated to the west of Sulkavata which may have been named after a banyan tree close to an octroi post at the boundary

143 ELNI, p. 64.
144 Fleet, CII, III, p. 116.
146 Ibid, L.29, p. 50.
147 AV, pp. 240-244.
of the village.

In this period rules were also laid down by Jurists to govern the sales and custom duties. According to Narada, 'A trader on reaching a toll house should pay the legal duty. A prudent man must not try to evade it, because it is called the king's due (or tax)'. But 'if he evades of paying toll or if buys or sells at another than the legal hour, or if he does not state the value of his goods correctly, he shall be fined eight times the amount he tried to evade'. But Narada exempts the brahmanas from paying this duty. Even when the brahmanas are engaged in trading, they shall pay no ferry toll.

Thus, it appears that in the Gupta empire the burden of taxes increased on the people. Several new taxes such as *udranga* and *uparikara* appear along with *bhoga-bhaga, dhanya* and *hiranya*. In addition to these there may have been other taxes in the inscriptions as we get the word *adi* (et cetera) mentioned in them.

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148 *Narada*, III, 12, p. 126.  
149 Ibid, 13, p. 126.  
150 Ibid, XVIII, 38, p. 219.
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the time of donating a village or land, the listing of exemptions from taxes in the land grant charters was not taken for granted. Specific and particular taxes were listed as immunities. The king according to his wish or as the time and position may permit could withhold or grant any tax to the donee.
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7. Copper-Plate grant of Valkha Maharaja Bhulunda, G. year 54-
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8. Copper-Plate grant of Valkha Maharaja Bhulunda, G. year 54-
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9. Copper-Plate grant of Valkha Maharaja Bhulunda, G. year 55-
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11. Copper-Plate grant of Valkha Maharaja Bhulunda, G. year 56-
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67. Mandasor stone inscription of the Guild of silk weavers M.S.
68. *Risthal stone inscription of Prakasadharna, M.S. 527-SAIH*, p. 27; *RIEN*, p. 91


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76. *Barwani Copper-Plate grant of Maharaja Lakshmana G. year 167-EI, Vol. XIX, p. 262.*

77. *Bagh Cave-Plate grant of Maharaja Subandhu-CII, Vol. IV, p. 19.*

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Map
Power increased by matrimonial alliances and by conquest of territory, (c. 5th century AD).

IMPERIAL GUPTA AND CONTEMPORANEOUS POWERS

SOUTH ASIA IN THE GUPTA-VĀKĀTAKA AGE,
c. 300-550

KEY TO INSCRIPTIONS
A: Abhirā
B: Cālukya
G: Gupta
H: Hūpa
K: Kadamba
P: Pallava
V: Vākātaka
Y: Yaudheyā


Scale: 100 km
Map