

Post-Classical Indian Empire Economy

During the Gupta period agriculture formed a significant part of the empire's economy. However, the trade and commerce activities of the Gupta Empire grew steadily. The merchant and other traders were organized into guilds. These guilds were given concessions in the taxes that were liable to be paid to the government.

The guilds played a chief role in the goods industry and also helped to further strengthen the economic condition of the empire. The guilds had regulated their own laws and all the member merchants were expected to abide by these laws.

At the time of the Gupta dynasty rule kings gave land grants to the Buddhist church. The church or the sangha took up the role of a banker and provided monetary support on interest to those in need. During this period, borrowing money was less expensive as compared to the Mauryan Empire. There was no fixed rate of interest since there was none prescribed by the government.

However, the rate of interest could be more than the existing one only when it was so agreed by both the parties involved. The easy accessibility of money to those in need and that to at a reasonable rate was a positive factor which helped the economy of the Gupta Empire to progress.

There was industrial development during the Gupta period. The textile industry was an essential industry of this empire. Some of the major items of produce included silk, muslin, calico, linen, wool and cotton. These goods were also exported.

There were other flourishing industries of the Gupta empire like ivory work, stone cutting and carving of stones like jasper, agate, quartz, carnelian, lapis- lazuli, etc; metal work of precious metals like gold, silver, copper, iron, bronze, lead, etc. Pearl industry was also very popular. However, the most important industry was pottery.

Trading activities within the empire were carried out very smoothly and efficiently. Animals were used for transporting goods from one place to another. Goods were also transported via sea- route with the help of ships. The Gupta rulers issued large number of gold coins. These gold coins were known as dinars.

After the Saka- Kshatrapa kingdom of Gujarat was invaded, the Gupta rulers also issued silver coins. During the reign of the Gupta dynasty, lead and rare copper coins were also issued. Gupta Empire carried out trade with China, Ceylon and other European countries.

After around 550 AD, trading activities with the Roman Empire were relaxed. The Guptas imported Chinese silk and ivory from East Africa. During this time, South- East Asia became a trade centre for the Gupta Empire.

Post-Classical Indian Empire Politics

The Gupta period marked an important phase in the history of ancient India. The long and efficient rule of the Guptas had a huge impact on the political, social as well as cultural spheres. In spite of the Gupta Empire not being as widespread as the Mauryan Empire, yet the Gupta dynasty was successful in creating an empire which is significant in the history of India. It is purely due to the significance of the Gupta Empire that this period was also popularly known as the Golden Age of India. The lifestyle and culture of the Gupta dynasty can be inferred through the availability of various ancient coins, scriptures, inscriptions, texts, etc. belonging to that era.

Apart from the several similarities which the Gupta Empire shared with the Mauryan Government, one was the setup of government though it a whole distinct style of government. Like the Mauryan system the Gupta kings were at the epicenter of the entire administration. The empire was divided into several provinces each of which had viceroys who were appointed from amongst the members of the royal family. These Viceroys undertook the task of carrying out the administration for the province allotted to them. The provinces were further sub-divided into a series of districts.

Each district had its own separate administrative centers. The local administration of the district was at liberty to take decisions on governing the area, essentially free from central control, except in matters which may have dealt with central policies. The highest officer in a district was known as the 'kumaramatya' and he acted as the link between the centre and the district. Contrary to their Mauryan counterparts, the Gupta kings were not concerned with every nuance of local administration thereby leaving such matters to the discretion of the kumaramatya. An efficient central government allowed trade to prosper and provided a stable background for advances in learning and the arts.

Villages were organized under rural bodies which consisted of the headman and village elders. The most respected people of the village served on the council. In the cities there was a council which consisted of several officers like the President of the City Corporation, the chief representative of the guild of merchants, a representative of the artisans along with the chief scribe. The Gupta system of urban and rural administration was based on encouraging local participation unlike the Mauryan system where administration came to be carried out by the royally appointed councils were the norm. Initially, women were allowed to serve on councils.

However, eventually, Hindu law placed greater restrictions on women thus excluding them from any kind of such participation. Additionally, the Gupta rulers also gave power to local leaders. These local leaders were elected by merchants and artisans. In each village, a headman and councils made decisions for the village. The Gupta Empire's government had a system that work to keep order. A significant change which took place during the Gupta regime was the increasing trend of paying salaries in land grants instead of paying cash. Land grants usually gave the beneficiary hereditary rights over the land, although it was generally the king who retained the right to repossess the land if he was unhappy with the conduct of the beneficiary. Brahmins were usually granted tax free lands which were another concession to an already existing privileged class. Land grants undermined the authority of the king as more and more land came to be taken away from his direct control. Also since the beneficiaries of land grants were usually Brahmins or government officials the king was not really able to exercise the repossession option with the apprehension of a political backlash.

The government revenue essentially came from land as commercial activity was no longer as big a contributor as it once was. Land revenue came from a variety of sources, like direct tax on the land as well as a tax on the cultivated produce of the land.

Post-Classical India Intellect

It is not for nothing that the Gupta regime been referred to as the 'Golden period in the history of ancient India.' A careful look at all the achievements of this period, it is amply clear the reason for such an attribution. From architecture to astronomy, infinite landmark achievements have taken place during the Gupta rule. During the Gupta regime, education included grammar, composition, logic, metaphysics, mathematics, medicine, and astronomy which became highly specialized and reached an advanced level.

Architecture - Gupta architecture marked the epoch in the creation of a number of stone temples dedicated to the various Hindu gods. Additionally, Buddhists also built shrines to house the remains of select holy people. These structures were called 'Stupas.' This form of architecture made its way to China where it was altered slightly and renamed the 'pagoda.'

Arithmetic - Beginning with arithmetic, the Indian numeral system which is many times wrongly contributes to the Arabs, who took it from India to Europe where it replaced the Roman system along with the decimal system which are in fact pure Indian inventions of this period. This is the number writing system used throughout the world today.

Further, Scholars of this period include Varahamihira and Aryabhata, who is believed to be the first to come up with the concept of zero and also developed the decimal system based on the number 10. They also created a number writing system that was later adopted by the Islamic Empire.

Astronomy - In the field of Astronomy also, it was scholars like Varahamihira and Aryabhata who believed that the Earth revolved around the Moon. They also made a detailed study about solar and lunar eclipses. Aryabhata, a noted mathematician-astronomer of the Gupta period proposed that the earth is not flat, but is instead round and rotates about its own axis.

Medicine - In medicine, Gupta physicians developed herbal remedies to treat various illnesses. They also developed a form of plastic surgery for the treatment of facial injuries. Physicians vaccinated against smallpox, a practice later used in China around the 10th century and in Europe in the 17th century.

Charaka and Sushruta wrote about a fully evolved system, which resembled the works of Hippocrates and Galen in Greece. Although progress in physiology and biology was hindered by various religious injunctions as according to various beliefs contact with dead bodies was highly discouraged due to which scientific dissection and anatomy could not be practiced.

In spite of all this, Indian physicians excelled in pharmacopoeia, caesarean section, bone setting, and skin grafting. Doctors also invented several medical instruments, and even performed operations.

Arts and Literature - Kalidasa, who was a great playwright, and who wrote several plays such as Shakuntala, which is said to have inspired Goethe, and also marked the highest point of Sanskrit literature is also said to have belonged to this period.

These stories spread widely west to Persia, Egypt, and Greece, and became the basis for many Islamic literary works such as, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and Aladdin and his Magic Lamp. The ancient Gupta text Kama Sutra is widely considered to be the standard work on human sexual behavior in Sanskrit literature written by the Indian scholar Vatsyayana.

Games - The game of Chess is also believed to have been originated in this period, where its early form in the 6th century was known as caturanga, meaning the "four divisions [of the military]"

Post-Classical India Military

The Gupta Empire was established around 320 CE and lasted until 550 CE. The Gupta period is known as the Golden Age as it was during their rule that there was political unity and harmony, there was peace and prosperity in [the kingdom](#).

During the Gupta kingdom rule, [the chariots](#) had been substituted by mounted cavalry. They continued using mounted cavalry despite the fact that their opponents like the Scythians, Parthian and Hunas were using horse archers. The Gupta rulers maintained a standing army and the use of cavalry and horse archery was given importance.

During the Gupta period, the territories on the border of the empire were kept under watchful eyes. The Gupta rulers largely depended on infantry archers. The bow was one of the primary weapons in the Gupta army. The longbow used by the Gupta army was made either from metal or bamboo. The longbow was considered to be a potent weapon and was capable of cutting through the thick armor worn by the soldiers.

The longbow also provided a long range to counter the enemy. It also had a good resistant quality and they were designed in such a manner that they would be less exposed to damaging in the damp and moist conditions. Thus, the shell- life of these weapons was very long.

The use of fire arrows during that period is also known. The Gupta army used iron shafts against armored elephants. Like the longbow, steel bow was also considered to be capable of long range and cutting through the thick armor. However, the steel bows were rare and were only used by the noblemen. Some of the steel weapons used by the Gupta army were broadswords, axes and the khanda.

The usage of breast plate and helmet was common. [The archers](#) generally provided protection by infantry equipped with shields, javelins and long swords. The Gupta army was aware of sophisticated war machines like siege craft, catapults and other weapons. The coastal areas were guarded by the navy. The Gupta Empire was however defeated by the Hunas. This defeat marked the end of the Gupta Empire.

Post Classical Indian Empires Social Issues

Still, traditional societies in Southeast Asia had some clearly hierarchical characteristics. At the top of the social ladder were the hereditary aristocrats, who monopolized both political power and economic wealth and enjoyed a borrowed aura of charisma by virtue of their proximity to the ruler. Most aristocrats lived in the major cities, which were the main source of power, wealth, and foreign influence. Beyond the major cities lived the mass of the population, composed of farmers, fishers, artisans, and merchants. In most Southeast Asian societies, the vast majority were probably rice farmers, living at a bare level of subsistence and paying heavy rents or taxes to a landlord or a local ruler.

The average Southeast Asian peasant was not actively engaged in commerce except as a consumer of various necessities. But accounts by foreign visitors indicate that in the Malay world, some were involved in growing or mining products for export, such as tropical food products, precious woods, tin, and precious gems. Most of the regional trade was carried on by local merchants, who purchased products from local growers and then transported them to the major port cities. During the early state-building era, roads were few and relatively primitive, so most of the trade was transported by small boats down rivers to the major ports along the coast. There the goods were loaded onto larger ships for delivery outside the region. Growers of export goods in areas near the coast were thus indirectly involved in the regional trade network but received few economic benefits from the relationship.

As we might expect from an area of such ethnic and cultural diversity, social structures differed significantly from country to country. In the Indianized states on the mainland, the tradition of a hereditary tribal aristocracy was probably accentuated by the Hindu practice of dividing the population into separate classes, called *varna* in imitation of the Indian model. In Angkor and Pagan, for example, the divisions were based on occupation or ethnic background. Some people were considered free subjects of the king, although there may have been legal restrictions against changing occupations. Others, however, may have been indentured to an employer. Each community was under a chieftain, who was in turn subordinated to a higher official responsible for passing on the tax revenues of each group to the central government.

In the kingdoms in the Malay peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago, social relations were generally less formal. Most of the people in the region, whether farmers, fishers, or artisans, lived in small *kampongs* (Malay for “villages”) in wooden houses built on stilts to avoid flooding during the monsoon season. Some of the farmers were probably sharecroppers who paid a part of their harvest to a landlord, who was often a member of the aristocracy. But in other areas, the tradition of free farming was strong. In some cases, some of the poorer land belonged to the village as a collective unit and was assigned for use by the neediest families.

Women and the Family The women of Southeast Asia during this era have been described as the most fortunate in the world. Although most women worked side by side with men in the fields, as in Africa they often played an active role in trading activities. Not only did this lead to a higher literacy rate among women than among their male counterparts, but it also allowed them more financial freedom.

Post Classical India Religion

The Chinese pilgrims who traveled to India during the Gupta era found a Buddhism that had changed in a number of ways in the centuries since the time of Siddhartha Gautama. They also found a doctrine that was beginning to decline in popularity in the face of the rise of Hinduism. The transformation in Buddhism had come about in part because the earliest written sources were transcribed two centuries after Siddhartha's death and in part because his message was reinterpreted as it became part of the everyday life of the people. Abstract concepts of a Nirvana that cannot be described began to be replaced, at least in the popular mind, with more concrete visions of heavenly salvation, and Siddhartha was increasingly regarded as a divinity rather than as a sage. The Buddha's teachings that all four classes were equal gave way to the familiar Brahmanic conviction that some people, by reason of previous reincarnations, were closer to Nirvana than others. Why was Buddhism unable to retain its popularity in its native India, although it became a major force elsewhere in Asia? Some have speculated that in denying the existence of the soul, Buddhism ran counter to traditional Hindu belief. Perhaps, too, one of Buddhism's strengths was also a weakness. In rejecting the class divisions that defined the Indian way of life, Buddhism appealed to those very groups who lacked an accepted place in Hindu society, such as the untouchables. But at the same time, it represented a threat to those with a higher status. Moreover, by emphasizing the responsibility of each person to seek an individual path to Nirvana, Buddhism undermined the strong social bonds of the Indian caste system.

Islam first reached India through the Arabs in the eighth century, but a second onslaught in the tenth and eleventh centuries by Turkic-speaking converts had a more lasting effect. Although Arab merchants had been active along the Indian coasts for centuries, Arab armies did not reach India until the early eighth century. When Indian pirates attacked Arab shipping near the delta of the Indus River, the Muslim ruler in Iraq demanded an apology from the ruler of Sind, a Hindu state in the Indus valley. When the latter refused, Muslim forces conquered lower Sind in 711 and then moved northward into the Punjab, bringing Arab rule into the frontier regions of the subcontinent for the first time.

Like their counterparts in other areas that came under Islamic rule, many Muslim rulers in India were relatively tolerant of other faiths and used peaceful means, if any, to encourage nonbelievers to convert to Islam. Even the more enlightened, however, could be fierce when their religious zeal was aroused. One ruler, on being informed that a Hindu fair had been held near Delhi, ordered the promoters of the event put to death. Hindu temples were razed, and mosques were erected in their place. Eventually, however, most Muslim rulers realized that not all Hindus could be converted and recognized the necessity of accepting what to them was an alien and repugnant religion. While Hindu religious practices were generally tolerated, non-Muslims were compelled to pay a tax to the state. Some Hindus likely converted to Islam to avoid paying the tax, but they were then expected to make the traditional charitable contribution required of Muslims in all Islamic societies. Over time, millions of Hindus did turn to the Muslim faith. Some were individuals or groups in the employ of the Muslim ruling class, such as government officials, artisans, or merchants catering to the needs of the court. But many others were probably peasants from the *sudra* class or even untouchables who found in the egalitarian message of Islam a way of removing the stigma of low-class status in the Hindu social hierarchy.

Seldom have two major religions been so strikingly different. Where Hinduism tolerated a belief in the existence of several deities (although admittedly they were all considered by some to be manifestations of one supreme god), Islam was uncompromisingly monotheistic. Where Hinduism was hierarchical, Islam was egalitarian. Where Hinduism featured a priestly class to serve as an intermediary with the ultimate force of the universe, Islam permitted no one to come between believers and their god. Overall, the Muslims continued to view themselves as foreign conquerors and generally maintained a strict separation between the Muslim ruling class and the mass of the Hindu population. Although a few Hindus rose to important positions in the local bureaucracy, most high posts in the central government and the provinces were reserved for Muslims.