

Study Material for Semester- II
Paper – Mauryan and Gupta Empire (Core-3)
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Gupta Administration

Unlike the Mauryas, the Guptas adopted such pompous titles as Parameshvara Maharajadhiraja, Paramabhattacharya, etc., which imply the existence of lesser kings with considerable authority within the empire. Besides, the Guptas added other epithets claiming for themselves super-human qualities which raised them almost to the level of gods. In fact, in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, Samudragupta is referred to as a god dwelling on earth. Kingship was hereditary, but royal power was limited by the absence of a firm practice of primogeniture.

Council of Ministers and other officials:

The Guptas continued the traditional machinery of bureaucratic administration but it was not as elaborate as that of the Mauryas. The Mantri (chief-minister) stood at the head of civil administration. Among other high imperial officers were included the Mahabaladhikarta (commander-in-chief), the Mahadandanayaka (general) and the Mahapratihara (chief of the palace guards).

The Mahabaladhikarta, probably corresponding to the Mahasenapati of the Satavahana kings, controlled a staff or subordinate officers such as the Mahashvapati (chief of cavalry), Mahapilupati (officer in charge of elephants), Senapati and Baladhikarta. A high ranking official, heard for the first time in the Gupta records was the Sandhivigrahika (the foreign minister).

A link between the central and the provincial administration under the Guptas is furnished by the class of officers called Kumaramatyas and Ayuktas. The Kumaramatyas were the high officers and the personal staff of the emperor and were appointed by the king in the home provinces and possibly paid in cash. Recruitment was not confined to the upper varnas only and several offices came to be combined in the hands of the same person, and posts became hereditary.

This naturally weakened the royal control. The Ayuktas were entrusted with the task of restoring the wealth of kings conquered by the emperor and sometimes placed in charge of districts or metropolitan towns.

Army:

The numerical strength of the Gupta army is not known. In contrast to the Mauryas, the Guptas do not seem to have possessed a big organized army. Probably troops supplied by the feudatories constituted the major portion of the Gupta military strength. Also, the Guptas did not enjoy a monopoly of elephants and horses, which were essential ingredients of military machinery.

All this led to the increasing dependence on feudatories, who wielded considerable authority at least on the fringes of the empire. Chariots receded into the background, and cavalry came to the forefront.

The Mahabaladhikrta (commander-in-chief) controlled a staff or subordinate officers as mentioned above. The army was paid in cash and its needs were well looked after by an officer-in-charge of stores called Ranabhandagarika.

Revenue Administration:

Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines. In Samudragupta's time we hear of an officer Gopasramin working as Akshapataladhikrita whose duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues, to check embezzlement and recover fines.

Another prominent high official was Pustapala (record-keeper). The Gupta kings maintained a regular department for the proper survey and measurement of land as well as for the collection of land revenue.

Provinces, Districts and Villages:

The provinces or divisions called bhuktis were governed by Uparikas directly appointed by the kings. The province was often divided into districts known as Vishayas which were ruled by Kumaramatyas, Ayuktas or Vishayapatis. His appointment was made by the provincial governors.

Gupta inscriptions from Bengal shows that the Municipal board – Adhistanadhikarana associated with itself representation from major local communities: the Nagarasresthi (guild president), the chief merchant Sarthavaha, the chief artisan – Prathama Kulika and the chief scribe – Prathama Kayastha. Besides them were the Pustapalas – officials whose work was to manage and keep records.

The lowest unit of administration was the village. In eastern India, the vishayas were divided into vithis, which again was divided into villages. The Gramapati or Gramadhyaksha was the village headman. The Gupta inscriptions from north

Bengal show that there were other units higher than the villages such as the Rural Board – Asthakuladhikarana which comprised of the village elders – Mahattaras and also included the village headman – Gramika and the householders Kutumbins.

With the absence of any close supervision of the state, village affairs were now managed by the leading local elements. No land transactions could be affected without their consent. The village disputes were also settled by these bodies with the help of Grama-vridhdhas or Mahattaras (village elders). The town administration was carried on by the mayor of the city called Purapala.

Reference - <https://www.historydiscussion.net/empires/history-of-the-gupta-empire-indian-history/600>