

1.4 THE SUNGAS

As mentioned before, the last king of the Mauryas, Brihadratha, was assassinated by Pushyamitra Sunga in 180 BCE. This is corroborated by Bana, the court poet of Harshavardhana of Kannauj.

The Sungas were brahmanas and there are several references to Sunga teachers in Vedic texts. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* mentions a teacher named Sungiputra. From Panini we learn that the Sungas were of Bharadvaja gotra. Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra* describes Agnimitra, son of Pushyamitra, as belonging to the Baimbika kula and the *Baudhayana Srauta Sutra* represents the Baimbikayah as Kashyapas. In view of the conflicting statements, it is difficult to say whether Pushyamitra was a Sunga of Bharadvaja gotra or Baimbika of Kashyapa lineage. However, all these sources indicate that the Sungas were brahmanas. Moreover a later text like *Harshacharita* also refers to Pushyamitra as a brahmana who was an ignoble person.

Sunga rule in India according to the *Puranas* lasted for 112 years. Magadha was the nucleus of the kingdom. The usurpation of the Mauryan throne by Pushyamitra is referred to in the *Puranas* and Banabhatta's *Harshacharita*. According to the *Puranas*, Pushyamitra ruled for 36 years and died in 151 BCE. His son and successor was Agnimitra and he was succeeded by his son Vasumitra. The *Puranas* refer to ten Sunga rulers. Except for Pushyamitra, Agnimitra, Vasumitra and Dhanadeva, the historicity of other rulers is not supplemented by sources. Pushyamitra Sunga is also known for his encounter with the *Yavanas* (Bactrian Greeks.) According to Patanjali's *Mahabhasya* (III.2.111), there were Greek incursions during the rule of the Sungas. This information is also corroborated by *Yugapurana*. The Greeks besieged Saketa (near Ayodhya in the Faizabad District of Uttar Pradesh) and Madhyamika (Nagari near Chittor in Rajasthan). This is clear from the phrase '*Arunòad Yavano Saketam, Arunòad Yavano Madhyamikam*'. Patanjali also indicates that the *yavanas* lived outside Madhyadesha which was situated to the east of Adarsa. The date of *Mahabhasya* is taken to be c. 150 BCE. *Malavikagnimitram*, a play by Kalidasa, preserves the memory of the defeat of the *yavanas* at the hands of Vasumitra, the grandson of Pushyamitra Sunga. According to the play, Pushpamitra (Pushyamitra) sent his

grandson Vasumitra (Agnimitra's son) who escorted the sacrificial horse during its travels through different areas prior to the performance of the *Asvamedha yajya*. Vasumitra defeated the *Yavanas* on the banks of the Sindhu river. The sacrifice was performed after Vasumitra returned victorious along with the horse. It is not certain who the leader of the Bactrian Greek army was. Menander Demetrius and Eucratides have been suggested as possible candidates.

After Ashoka's tryst with *Dhamma* and Buddhism, the Sungas are known for having reverted to Brahmanical orthodoxy. In the Ayodhya inscription of Dhanadeva, Pushyamitra Sunga is credited with the performance of two *Asvamedha* sacrifices. Buddhist sources claim that he persecuted the Buddhists. *Divyavadana* depicts Pushyamitra as a destroyer of Buddhist monasteries and places of worship, particularly those constructed by Ashoka. For instance, it is said that he attempted to destroy the Kukuta *Arama* monastery at Pataliputra. According to sources he also fixed a prize of 100 *dinaras* for the head of every monk. However this account of *Divyavadana* seems highly exaggerated. If the renovations conducted on the Stupas and other Buddhist monuments date to this period, then it would be difficult to believe that the Sungas acted against the Buddhists.

Another feature of this period was that the kings assumed grandiose titles. This is in contrast to the Mauryan period when Ashoka called himself only *Raja*. In this period however, we see the use of titles like *Maharaja*, *Rajaraja*, *Rajati raja*, *Shaonanoshao* etc. Vedic sacrifices like *Asvamedha*, *Rajasuya* etc. were performed with a view to augment royal power. Theoretical treatises of this period uphold the concept of divine creation or divine origin of the king. The *Manusmriti* explains that *Prajapati* (the Creator) created the king by combining the essence of divinities like Indra, Varuna, Vayu, Yama, Agni, etc. More or less a similar description also figures in the *Ramayana* which presents the king as someone who must not only be always obeyed, but revered too (*manyascha pujyascha nityada*). Thus relation with divinity formed a crucial aspect of the polity of the period.

The last Sunga king was Devabhuti. He was killed by his brahmana minister Vasudeva. Thus, the Sunga line came to an end by 75 BCE. They were followed by Kanvas whose founding member was Vasudeva.

1.5 THE INDO-GREEKS

Under the rule of Alexander, Greeks had settled in Bactria, a region which can be identified with the present-day northern Afghanistan, southern Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. After Alexander's death, his generals came to rule the kingdoms. One such example was the Seleucid kingdom which was coterminous with the Mauryas. Soon Bactria broke away from the Seleucid Empire in about 250 BCE and the Bactrian Greeks formed their own empire as the eastern most post of Hellenism. The Bactrians were pushed out of Bactria by the nomadic incursions from Scythian tribes. The Greeks were dislodged between 145 and 130 BCE and the Bactrian Greeks moved southwards and came to control southern Afghanistan (Arachosia), covering the area from the Hindukush to Gandhara. It is from here that the history of Indo Greeks begins (to be covered in the 2nd Unit).

1.6 INDO-SCYTHIANS AND INDO-PARTHIANS

The Indo-Scythians are also known as the Sakas. They were the first large nomadic community to reach South Asia through Bactria. The history of the Indo-Scythians has to be reconstructed largely on the basis of numismatic evidence as the names of the rulers are furnished by their coins. Scythian is a generic term which refers to a group of people, originating in Central Asia and then migrating to south and west. One of the Scythian clans was that of Vonones and his associates who reached India through Afghanistan; the other was Maues who had crossed the Pamirs and entered into India. However, in the middle of the first century BCE, it was Azes, once a co-ruler of the Vonones group who assumed sole power and extended the rule of the Scythians in India. He issued coins with the title 'King of Kings'. Large parts of north-west India were united during the rule of Azes I and his huge output of coinage suggest a great increase in wealth. He might have

general. We have no evidence of his rule in Mathura. The Indo-Scythians ruled in the north-west India giving space to local dynasties till they were supplanted by Gondophares, the founder of the Indo-Parthian kingdom.

The Indo-Parthians or the Pahlavas succeeded the Indo-Scythians in the Indo-Iranian borderlands. The first ruler was Gondophares whose kingdom extended from Seistan through Arachosia, to the Kabul valley and over Gandhara to the Jammu-Pathankot area. Their coins were divided into four principal categories. The reign of Gondophares could be fixed approximately between c.20 and 45 CE. The Indo-Parthian kingdom was quite large and there were geographical variations. In order to keep the kingdom together, Gondophares probably allowed the Kshatrapas a large measure of autonomy. He cooperated with powerful forces on the ground and absorbed them in his sphere of influence. He expanded his influence from Seistan to the river Sutlej. His policy was conquest by a system of absorption, allowing local rulers to keep their independence. The kingdom collapsed as a result of a major invasion by the Kushanas under Kujula Kadphises. The overstrikes of Kujula Kadphises over the coins of Gondophares indicate very clearly that Kujula brought to an end Parthian rule in Paropamisadae (Kabul-Begram region) and Gandhara.

1.7 THE KUSHANAS

A major ruling group of the post-Mauryan period was the Kushanas. The Kushanas were a branch of the Yueh-chi, a nomadic group of people who inhabited territories near Dunhuang until conflicts with the Xiongnu led to their migration across the Tarim Basin to Bactria between c. 165-128 BCE. They were one of the five clans into which the Yueh-chi tribe was divided.

The significance of the Kushana realm in the political history of the subcontinent and its north-western borderlands is enormous. With the advent of the Kushanas, small territorial kingdoms in the Indo-Iranian borderlands gave way to an Empire which was achieved through political integration of the region. It transformed the Kushana principality in Bactria into a massive empire which included portions of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, parts of Chinese Central Asia, north-west borderlands of the subcontinent, Mathura and at times beyond Mathura through the Ganga plains till Bhagalpur in Bihar. Because of this, the Kushana Empire is sometimes called the Central Asian Empire.

The glowing testimony of Kushana control till the Ganga valley comes from the Rabatak inscription discovered from the Puli Khumri area of Afghanistan of Kanishka I written in Bactrian language. Although the name of Vima Taktu as the direct successor of Kujula Kadphises (the head of the Kushana clan) is not entirely clear, the Rabatak inscription confirms that Kujula Kadphises was followed by another ruler before Vima Kadphises (Kanishka's father). Vima Taktu can be linked with 'Soter Megas' ('Great Savior'), the Kushana ruler who issued a series of coins that follow the coin-types of Kujula Kadphises and precede those of Vima Kadphises.

During the Kushana period in the first to third centuries CE, political, economic, religious, and cultural contacts between South Asia and Central Asia increased greatly. Archaeological excavations, art historical evidence, coins, and inscriptions directly reflect these connections. During Kanishka's rule over Transoxiana and Bactria, the empire came to play an important role in the Silk route. The Silk route connected China across Bactria with West Asia and the Mediterranean.

2.5 THE SATAVAHANAS

Contemporary to the Sakas were the Satavahanas in the Deccan. The Satavahana family laid the foundation of the first monarchical polity in Deccan in the post-Mauryan period.

2.5.1 Sources

The names of the Satavahana rulers occur in the lists of kings found in the *Puranas*. However these lists should be used in conjunction with other sources. This is so because, the names of the kings and duration of their rule vary in different *Puranas*. The *Puranas* also contain a lot of myths and legends which distort the picture. However, *Puranas* become an important source when studied with other sources such as coins and inscriptions.

The Satavahanas minted a large number of coins in lead, silver and an alloy of copper. Their silver coins carry the portrait of the king and his name. The inscriptions are found in Buddhist rock cut caves and record donations made by Satavahana kings and queens to a large number of people. By comparing the information available in these different sources, scholars generally accept that the Satavahanas began their rule in the first century BCE. The earliest record is found engraved on rock in a cave near Nasik in the present state of Maharashtra.

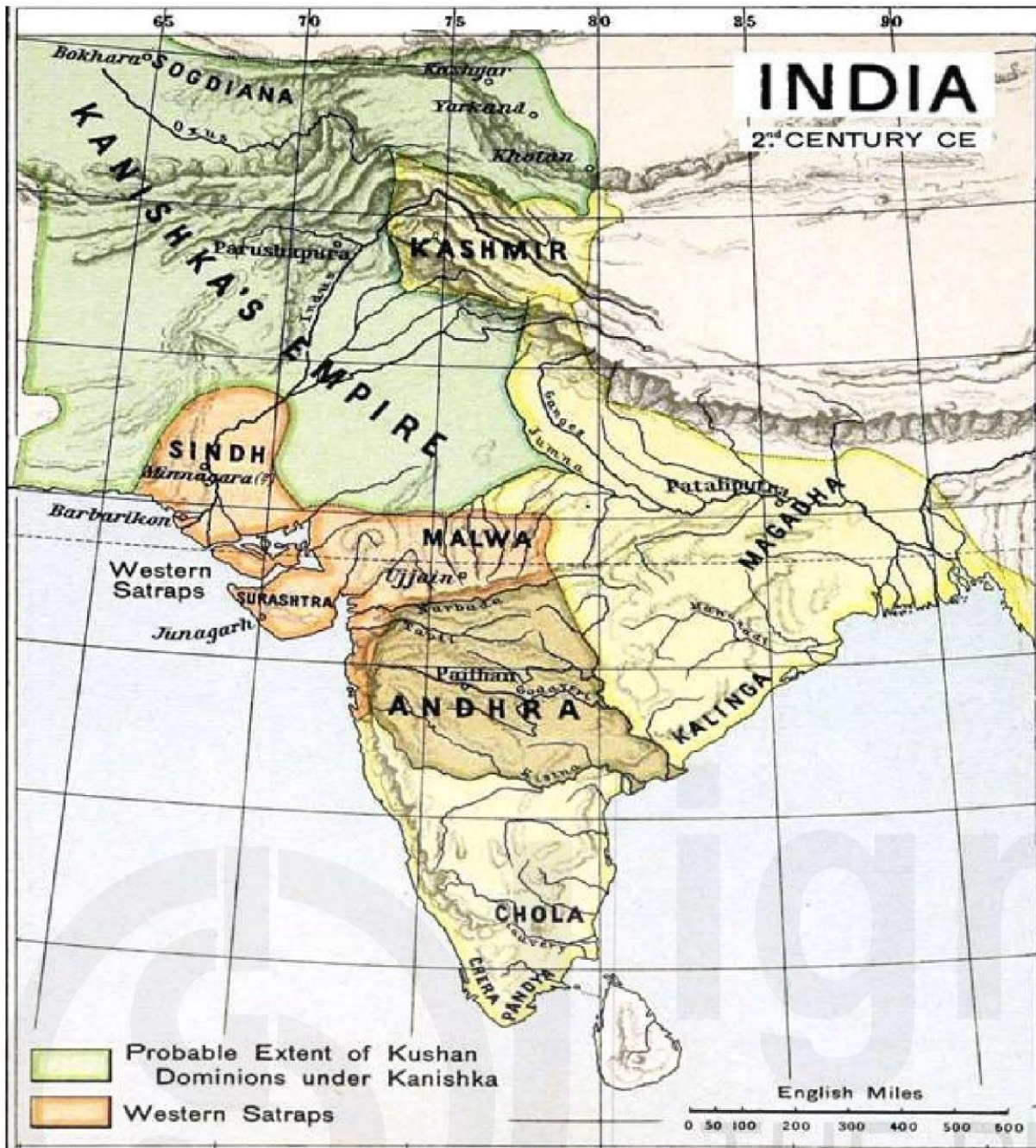
2.5.3 Political History of the Satavahanas

We can place the beginning of the Satavahana kingdom around the late first century BCE, and it flourished for the next 250 years. Paithan in the central Deccan was the apex political centre throughout the Satavahana history right from the days of the first ruler Simuka (late first century BCE). Though their origin must have been in a region located in eastern Deccan i.e. between the Godavari and the Krishna rivers, initially they rose to power in central Deccan with Pratishthana (modern Paithan, Maharashtra) as their capital.

The Satavahanas are identical with the Andhras of *Puranas*. The Sanskrit Puranic texts mention the Satavahanas as belonging to the *Andhra-jati* or as *Andhra-bhrityas*. There is a debate as to whether the Satavahanas initially came to power in the eastern or western Deccan. Since they called themselves Andhras, they probably belonged to the Andhra tribe. The term *Andhra-bhritya* is taken by some scholars to indicate that they were subordinates of the Mauryas (*bhritya* means 'servant' or 'subordinate'). However *Andhra-bhritya* could also mean 'servants of the Andhras'. Thus it may apply not to the Satavahanas but to their successors.

Early Satavahana coins have been found from Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh indicating that their rule began in eastern Deccan. On the other hand, inscriptions in the Naneghat and Nasik caves point to the western Deccan as their initial base. It is possible, according to some scholars, that Paithan was their initial base territory in the western Deccan, from where they expanded into eastern Deccan, Andhra and the western coast.

Ashokan inscriptions mention Andhras among the subject population within the Mauryan realm. Their own inscriptions refer to them as belonging to the Satavahana family (*Satavahana-kula*) and never as Andhras or *Andhrabhritiyas*. The *Puranas* provide us with varying lists of rulers of the Andhra origin; *Matsya* and the *Brahmanda Purana* mention a list of 30 kings who were assigned a period of 460 years whereas the *Vayu Purana* gives a list of 17 kings covering 300 years. Some of the *Matsya Purana* manuscripts speak of a shorter duration of Andhra rule of 272/275 years. Epigraphic and numismatic sources provide the evidence in support of approximately fifteen Satavahana kings who actually ruled. It is, therefore, more logical to prefer a shorter chronology of 275 years under fifteen or seventeen Satavahana rulers in the Deccan (from c. 50 BCE to CE 225) to longer duration of 460 years. Thus it could be said that the Satavahanas ruled from about the 1st century BCE to 3rd century CE.



The first known ruler of this dynasty, according to archaeological finds and the *Puranic* lists, was Simuka (also called Sisuka). On his coins Simuka is mentioned as Chhimuka who can be placed around the 1st century BCE. Simuka was succeeded by his brother Kanha or Krishna, who extended the empire eastwards till Nasik; next came Satakarni I. He was the first powerful ruler of the dynasty and has been lauded as the Lord of the Deccan (*Dakshinapathapati*) in Queen Naganika's inscription at Naneghat. Satakarni is known from two records from Nasik. He is possibly identical with Satakarni figuring in Kharavela's *prasasti*. He probably extended his sway to the east as his coins have been recovered from Kaundinyapura in Vidarbha. Who succeeded Satakarni I is not clear, but prior to the succession of Gautamiputra Satakarni there was another ruler named Gautamiputra Siva Satakarni whose coins have been recently reported. The *Puranic* list mentions one Siva Svati as a predecessor of Gautamiputra Satakarni.

Gautamiputra Satakarni was the next powerful ruler in the dynasty. We learn about his achievements and personality from the Nasik *prasasti*, which was caused to be engraved by his mother Gautami Balasri during the reign of Vashisthiputra Pulumavi. He is described as the destroyer of the Sakas, Yavanas and Pahlavas. It also credits him with the annihilation of the Kshaharata dynasty and restorer of the fortune of the Satavahana family ((*khakharatavasa niravasesakara Satavahana-kula-yasa-patithapana-kara*)).

The *Nasik prasasti* describes Gautamiputra Satakarni as the ruler of Asika (Rishika, between the Godavari and the Krishna), Asaka (Asmaka to the north of Rishika), Mulaka (area around Pratihstana in the central Deccan), Kukura (northern Kathiawad), Anupa (Mahishmati to the south of the Narmada), Vidabha (Vidarbha in Nagpur), and Akaravanti (Avanti located around Ujjaini in western Malwa and Akara in eastern Malwa around modern Sanchi-Vidisa-Bhopal region in MP). He is also praised as the lord of the following mountains (*pavata-pati*): Vijha (Vindhya or the eastern part of the Vindhya range), Achhavat (Rikshavat, part of the Vindhya to the north of the Narmada), Parichata (Paripatra or the present Aravalli mountains), Sahya (Sahyadri or the Western Ghats), Kanhagiri (Kanheri near Mumbai), Mahendra (Eastern Ghats) and Setagiri (the hill near Nagarjunakonda in the Guntur area of Andhra Pradesh). When he is praised as the ruler whose chargers drank the water of the three seas (*tisamuda toyapita vahana*), there seems to have been an allusion to the expansion of the Satavahana power over the entire Deccan from the western to the eastern sea-boards. Put differently it points to his claims of extensive conquest in trans-Vindhyan India. He fittingly assumed the epithet 'the Lord of the Deccan' (*Dakshinapathapati*). Under Gautamiputra, the Satavahana power penetrated to the areas to the north of the Narmada, e.g. eastern and western Malwa and southern Gujarat. For the first time a power of the Deccan expanded beyond river Narmada, traditionally known as the northern boundary of the Deccan.

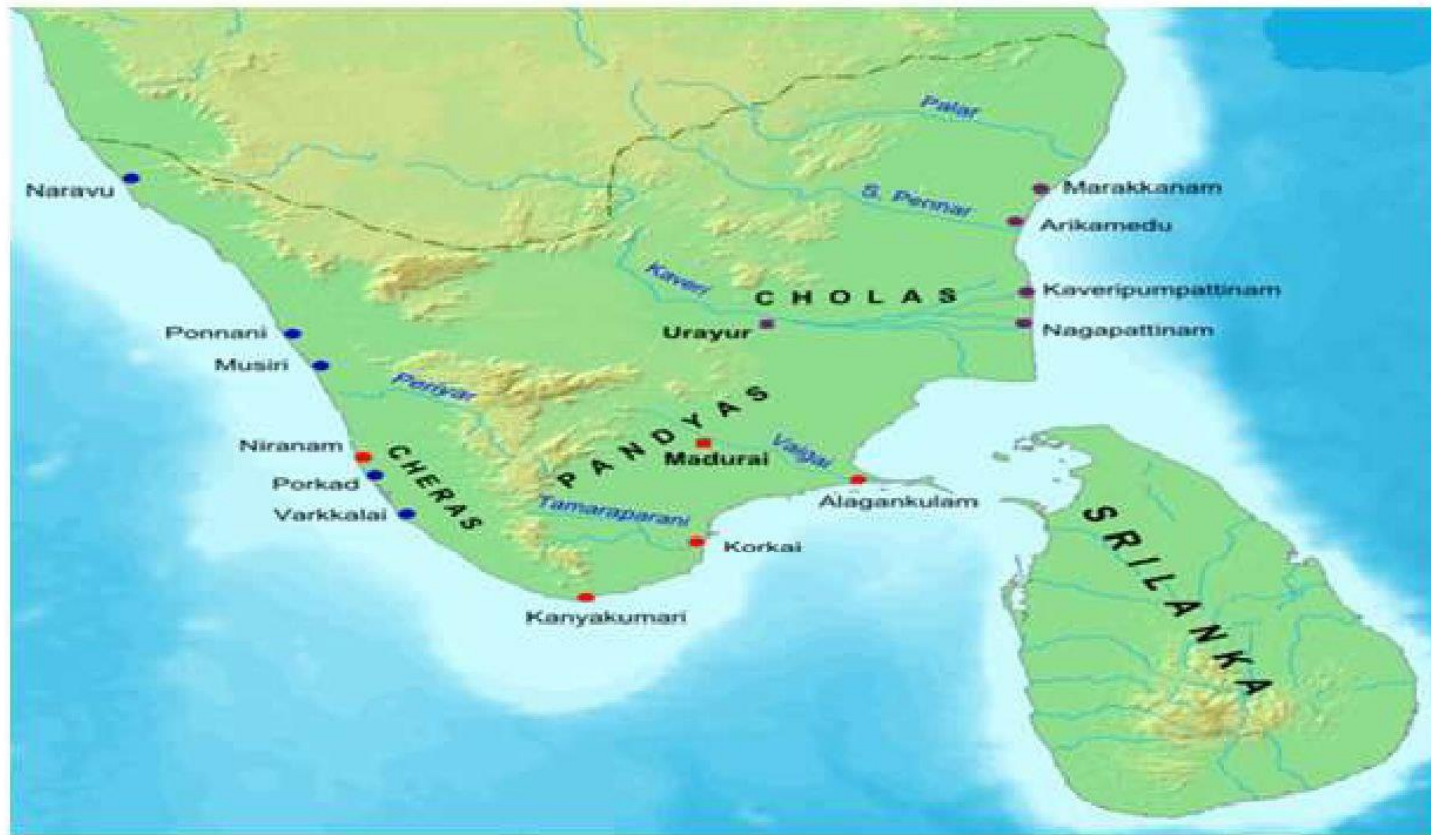
He was succeeded by his son **Vasisthiputra Pulumavi** who too ruled for twenty-four years (c. 130-54 CE) like his father. He is clearly identifiable with **Siro P(t)olemaios (Sri Pulumavi)** of Ptolemy's *Geography*. His political centre continued to be at **Betana (Paithan)**. He indeed retained intact the Satavahana control over Nasik which has yielded his four inscriptions (yrs. 2, 6, 19 and 22) and also over **Karle near Pune**. His inscriptions from **Amaravati** in eastern Deccan suggest that the **Amaravati region was controlled by him**. His **coin with ship motif circulated in eastern Deccan** which also indicates **Satavahana mastery over the east coast**.

In spite of the **heavy losses suffered in later years due to Rudradaman's conquest**, the Satavahanas somehow managed to retain their control over their primary stronghold in Nasik and western Deccan (two inscriptions of **Vasishthiputra Satakarni** from Nasik and Naneghat in his year 13 have been found). **Yajnasri Satakarni** was a **prominent king among the later Satavahanas**. Inscriptions attest to his long reign of at least twenty seven years during which the Satavahana territorial possession comprised Nasik, western Deccan, eastern Deccan and Vidarbha. He was probably the last of the powerful Satavahana monarchs. His **successors ruled over a much reduced territory which was confined to Andhra Pradesh and the Bellary area of Karnataka**. These later successors are mostly known from their silver coins with bust of the ruler. The issuance of such coins began during the time of **Vasishthiputra Pulumavi** and continued till the end.

The regular issuance of coins, including coins with ship-motifs (single or double masted) indicate Satavahana interests in commercial exchanges. Grand epithets were bestowed upon the Satavahana rulers when they were compared in valour with several Epic heroes. Being a monarchy, the rulers embraced the Brahmanical norms as the ideology of the state and performed Vedic sacrifices like *asvamedha*, *vajapeya* and *rajasuya*. Gautamiputra Satakarni was glorified as a unique brahmana (*eka bamhana*) who stopped the admixture among the four varnas (*vinivatita chatuvanasamkara*). In the Satavahana realm the importance of queens, e.g. Nayanika and Gautami Balasri was recognized. Nayanika in fact served as a queen regent when her son was a minor. Even coins were issued with her name inscribed on one side, with her spouse Satakarni's name on the other.

3.10 SOUTH INDIA (*TAMILAHAM*): THE REGION

The land in between the hills of Venkatam and Kanyakumari is called *Tamilaham* or *Tamilakam*. It includes the whole of modern Tamil Nadu and Kerala. With forested hills, undulated terrains, pastures, arid zones, wet-lands and a long sea coast, the region represented a combination of diverse eco-zones. The three principal chiefdoms – the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas – had their strongholds both in the interior as well as on the sea coast. The Cheras had Karur in the interior and Muciris, the well-known ancient port on the west coast.



Ancient *Tamilaham* Ports. Source: <http://www2.demis.nl/mapserver/mapper.asp>. Credit: Lotlil. Photo Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient_tamilakam_ports.png).

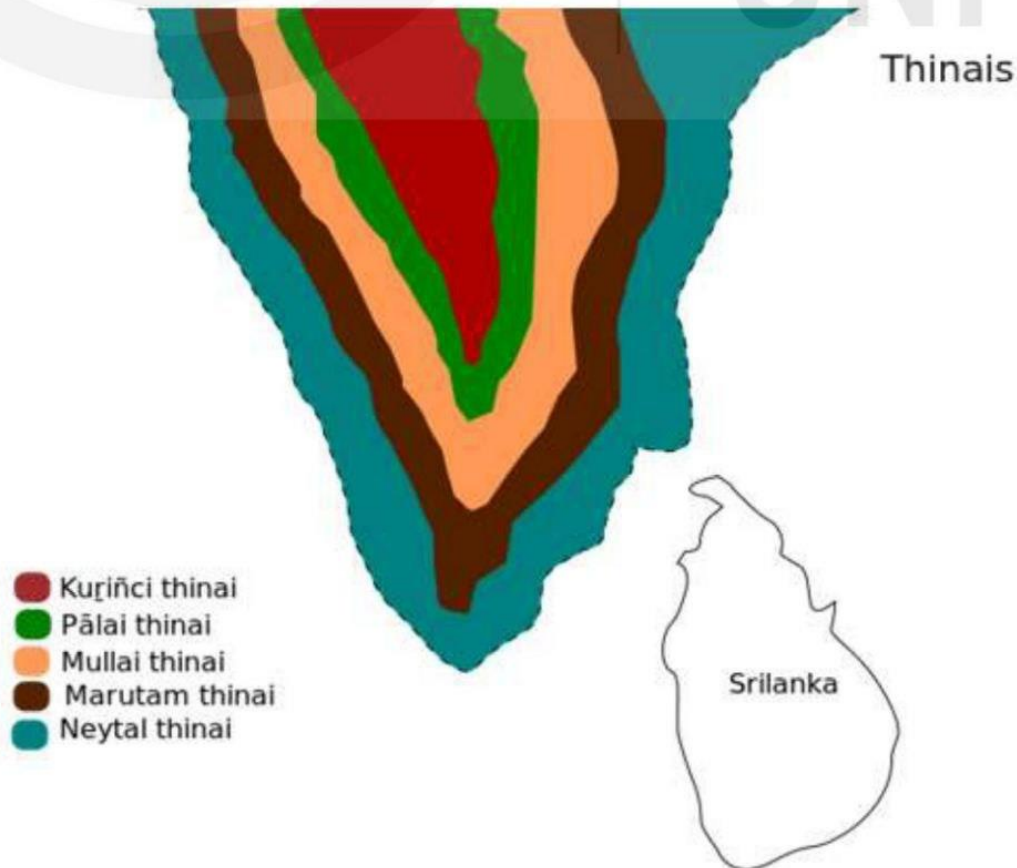
The Cholas had Urayur in the interior and Puhar on the Coromandel coast as their strongholds. Similarly, the Pandyas had Madurai and Korkar as their interior headquarters and port respectively. These were the most important political centres of the period in the region.

3.11 THE FIVE ECO-ZONES AND SUBSISTENCE PATTERNS

The ecological differences of the region are reflected in ancient Tamil poetry. This is in the form of the concept of *aintinai* (five eco-zones). In ancient Tamil poetry *Tamilaham* is portrayed as a combination of five *thinai*s, viz.:

- *kurinji* (hilly backwoods),

- *palai* (arid zone),
- *mullai* (pastoral tracts),
- *marutam* (wet-land), and
- *neital* (sea coast).



UNIT 6 THE RISE OF GUPTAS: ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND POLITY*

6.3 POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE GUPTAS

Very little is known about the early Gupta rulers. Whatever we know about them generally comes from the records of later imperial rulers. As a result, there has always been speculation among historians about the ancestry and family of early Guptas. Some of the historians try to trace back their ancestry to any person appearing in the historical records with the name ending with ‘gupta’, such as Sivagupta who appeared in a Satavahana inscription.

The original core of the Gupta territory lay in eastern UP. This can be surmised from the fact that Samudragupta’s Allahabad (now Prayagraj) pillar inscription comes from this region. Besides the coin hoards of the Guptas have been found from this region. Lastly, the *Puranas* describe the early Gupta territories in this region.

It is possible that in the closing decades of the 3rd century CE, the Guptas were subordinates of a branch of later Kushanas ruling in north-west India. However inscriptional and archaeological data suggests that they became independent in the second decade of the fourth century CE.

Inscriptions tell us that Chandragupta was preceded by Srigupta and Ghatotkacha before being mentioned as the first independent king with the title *maharajadhiraja*. He started an Era in 319-20 CE known as *Gupta Samvat*. This is also confirmed from the account of Al-Biruni, who had visited India in the first part of 11th century CE. Historical records do not give us a clear picture about the territories under his control. Though a passage of *Vishnu Purana* gives us some details about the territories ruled by him. According to this passage the territories of Prayagraj (present-day Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh), Saket (around present day Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh) and Magadha were under the control of Chandragupta I. But the authenticity of this passage is still not established, thus it is not sure whether these areas were actually controlled by Chandragupta I. The Chandragupta-Kumaradevi (king-queen type) type gold coins of Chandragupta I inform us about the matrimonial alliance between the Gupta king Chandragupta I and Lichchhavis princess Kumaradevi. These coins have Chandragupta and his queen Kumaradevi engraved on the obverse and a seated goddess on the reverse with the legend *Lichchhavayah* (i.e. the Lichchhavis). The Lichchhavis were ruling in the region of Vaishali (Muzaffarpur in north Bihar) since the 6th century BCE. This alliance not only enlarged his kingdom but also legitimized his rule. The fragmentary information received about the territorial expansion and marriage alliance with Lichchhavis indicate that Chandragupta I might have come to have firm control over the middle Ganga valley, in areas both to the north and south of the river.

Samudragupta (335-75 CE)

During Chandragupta I's successor, Samudragupta's reign, the kingdom grew into an empire. The most important source which gives us information about his accession and conquests is Prayagraj *Prashasti* (till now known as the Allahabad *Prashasti*). It was composed by his court poet Harishena who composed 33 lines which were engraved on a pillar. It is a possibility that there may have been a war of succession to the throne before Samudragupta became the king. This is largely due to the discovery of coins bearing the name of Kacha. These coins in many respects are similar to Samudragupta's coins. Many interpretations have been given about these coins. Some historians considered Kacha as the elder brother of Samudragupta, who might have been killed in the war of succession. Other scholars maintain that these were the coins which were issued by Samudragupta in the memory of his brother Kacha. The third interpretation suggests that Kacha was the initial name of Samudragupta and latter name was acquired by him after the conquest of the South. Except these coins not much is known about Kacha from other sources; this name does not even appear in official Gupta inscriptions. Prayagraj *Prashasti* depicts Samudragupta as an extraordinary person and an ideal king.

Samudragupta adopted an aggressive policy of conquests. Regarding his campaigns in Aryavarta, some scholars believe that he carried his conquests of Aryavarta at one time only. However, some other historians believe that there were two campaigns in Aryavarta. This is so because the *Prashasti* first mentions the subjugation of three Aryavarta kings, being followed by his southern campaigns, and then again mentions the defeat of nine Aryavarta kings. The kings of Aryavarta that were defeated by him were Achyuta (ruling over Ahichchatra), Nagasena (ruling over Gwalior region) and Kota-Kulaja (the ruler of the Kota family in east Punjab and Delhi). By defeating them Samudragupta established firm control over the Ganga valley and some adjacent regions.

Regarding his campaigns in south India, twelve rulers were defeated by him which included:

- 1) Mahendra of Kosala (Raipur, Durg, Sambalpur and Bilaspur districts)
- 2) Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara (Jeypore, forest region of Odisha)
- 3) Mantaraja of Kaurata (Sonpur area in Madhya Pradesh or Plain country to the north-east of Mahendra hill)
- 4) Mahendragiri of Pishtapura (Pithasuram, East Godavari district)
- 5) Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district)
- 6) Damana of Erandapalla (Chicacole or West Godavari district)
- 7) Vishnugopa of Kanchi (Chingelput district)
- 8) Nilaraja of Avamukta (Godavari valley)
- 9) Hasti-varman of Vengi (Cellor in the Krishna-Godavari delta)
- 10) Ugresena of Palakka (Nellore district)
- 11) Kubera of Devarastra (Yellamanchiti in Visakhapatnam district)
- 12) Dhananjaya of Kushthalpura (in North Arcot district in Tamilnadu)

Chandragupta II (375-414 CE)

Under Chandragupta II, the son and successor of Samudragupta, the growth and spread of Gupta power reached its peak. Coins, inscriptions and some literary sources give information about Chandragupta II's reign. The Gupta inscriptions mention Chandragupta II as the successor of Samudragupta. However, a 7th century dramatist Vishakhadatta in his drama *Devichandraguptam* mentions that Chandragupta II killed his elder brother, Ramagupta. This was so because Ramagupta was facing defeat at the hands of the Sakas and in order to save the kingdom, Ramagupta had agreed to surrender his wife to the Saka king. Chandragupta opposed this and went to the Saka camp in the guise of queen Dhruvadevi I, the wife of Ramagupta. He was successful against the Saka king. However, in the ensuing hostility between Chandragupta II and his brother Ramagupta, he killed the latter and married his widow Dhruvadevi. Certain other texts like the *Harshcharita* and *Kavyamimansa* also refer to this episode. Thus, Chandragupta II came to the throne to re-establish the supremacy of Guptas. He established matrimonial relations with the Nagas by marrying princess Kubernaga whose daughter Prabhavati was later married to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka family. He established matrimonial alliance with Kadambas of Karnataka as well. He defeated the Saka Kshatrapa king Rudrasimha-III and brought an end to their rule in western India. As a result, the regions of Gujarat, Kathiawad and western Malwa were added to the Gupta Empire. Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription is

identified by many scholars with Chandragupta-II. According to this inscription Chandra crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (Balkh in Afghanistan). This inscription also mentions about his victory over enemies from Vanga (Bengal).

On the basis of these evidences it can be suggested that Chandragupta II was able to extend the frontiers of Gupta Empire in western, north-western and eastern India. Chandragupta II ruled till 415-16 CE.

Kumaragupta I (414-54)

At the time of the death of Chandragupta II, the Gupta empire extended from the greater part of north India to the Kathiawad peninsula. As a result, there was no one who could challenge their power. Hence, the reign of Kumaragupta I, son and successor of Chandragupta II, was marked by only a few military campaigns. From his inscriptions it seems that he certainly retained firm control over the core area of the empire. His reign was also known for political consolidation and prosperity. However, at the end of his reign, the Gupta empire faced Huna invasion in north-west region which was checked by his son Skandagupta.

Skandagupta (454-467)

Skandagupta is generally considered the last important ruler of Gupta Empire, who ruled over a vast territory. From the beginning of his reign he started facing various troubles in his realm. The Bhitari inscription informs us that at the very beginning of his reign Pushyamitras posed trouble. Though he was successful in averting the onslaught of Hunas, these campaigns cost the kingdom dearly. Scholars maintain that his gold coins were not only limited but also had less gold in them as compared with the earlier rulers. He was the last Gupta ruler to mint silver coins in western India.

In administration the Guptas borrowed various features from their predecessors such as Mauryas, Kushanas and Satavahanas. King was the central figure of the administrative system and it was reflected by the titles held by them, such as *maharajadhiraja*, *parama-bhattaraka*, *parameshvara*, *samarat* and *dharmmaharaja*. They were considered divine rulers on earth. The duties of the king were the following:

- 1) Despite the supreme power vested in him, he was expected to follow a righteous path.
- 2) He was supposed to decide the policy of the state during war and peace.
- 3) He should always protect his countrymen from any invasion.
- 4) He led the army in case of war.
- 5) He should support the brahmanas, *Sramanas* and others who needed his protection.
- 6) He was supposed to venerate the learned and religious people and give them every possible help.
- 7) As the Supreme judge he was to look after the administration of justice according to religious precepts and customs.
- 8) He appointed his central and provincial ministers.
- 9) As a reigning king he appointed the successor to the throne.

The king was thus the focus of administration. He was assisted by princes, ministers and advisors. The princes also held positions like viceroys of provinces. The king used to issue written instructions to officials on all important matters. In some cases, the office of the functionaries became hereditary. Inscriptions suggest that Gupta administration was more decentralised as compared to that of

the Mauryas. The Gupta administration made some efforts at restructuring the agrarian economy. This is indicated by land grants where the donees were expected to augment agricultural potential of the region. It was in this way that cultivation of fertile, irrigated lands was improved, and settlement of wasteland was encouraged. The initial land grants were not in the centre but the areas beyond. Thus, this initiative brought peripheral regions into the larger agrarian economy.

The high-ranking officers included the *Mahadandanayaka* (Chief Justice) who assisted the king in the matters of justice. In the provinces this work was entrusted to the *Uparikas* and in the districts to the *vishayapatis*. In the villages the headman and the village elders used to decide upon petty cases. The other high officials included the *Mahapratihara* (chief of the palace guards), *Pratihara* (regulated ceremonies and granted necessary permits for admission to the royal presence), *Dutakas* (implemented gifts when gifts of land were made to the brahmanas and others). There existed an espionage system as well.

For facilitating the efficient functioning of administration, the kingdom was generally divided into a number of regions or provinces, headed by governors appointed by the king. These provinces were known as the *deshas*, *rashtras* or *bhuktis*. Some of the provinces mentioned in Gupta inscriptions are *Tirabhukti* (corresponded to north Bihar), *Nagarabhukti*, *Magadhabhukti* and *Pundravardhanabhukti* (corresponded to north Bengal). The *bhuktis* were governed by *Uparikas* directly appointed by the king. The territorial units under the provinces (*bhukti/desha*) were known as *vishaya* (governed by *vishayapati* or in some cases by *Ayuktaka*). He was appointed by provincial governor. The inscriptions from Bengal indicate that the *vishayapati* associated himself with *Nagarsresthi* (head of city merchants), *Sarthavaha* (caravan leader), *Prathamakulika* (head of the artisan community) and *Prathamakayastha* (head of the kayastha community). Apart from these *Pustapalas* were officials who managed and kept records.

The administrative units below the district were referred differently in different regions, such as — *vithi*, *ashtakuladhikarana*, *bhumi*, *pathaka* and *petha*. It seems that these units were placed above several villages and were administrated by different officials such as *ayuktakas* and *vithi-mahattaras*. The lowest unit of administration was known as the *grama* which was headed by a *gramika* or *gramadhyaksha*. It is not very clear whether these officials were appointed by higher authorities or selected with the permission of villagers.
