

Q: Would you consider the Gupta period a "Golden Age"? Critically analyse. (20)

Answer :- The characterization of the Gupta period (c. 320 - 550 CE) as a "Golden Age" represents a contested historiographical paradigm. While nationalist historians celebrate its elite civilizational heights, Marxist critiques reveal deep systemic vulnerabilities.

A) The Foundations of the Classical Zenith :

- Political Consolidation :- Rulers like Samudragupta (through his Digvijaya Policy) and Chandragupta II established subcontinental hegemony, restoring political stability after centuries of post-Mauryan fragmentation.
- Cultural Efflorescence :- Sanskrit literature achieved unmatched sophistication, exemplified by Kalidasa's Abhimanasa Kuntalam. Structural temple architecture debuted with the stone-built Dashavatara Temple at Deogarh.
- Scientific Advancements :- Intellectual developments peaked, led by Aryabhata's introduction of decimal system and zero in his treatise Aryabhatiya.
- Material Prosperity : The minting of high-purity gold coins (Dinaras) and

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robust trade along the Silk Route highlighted thriving commercial wealth.

B) Structural Counter Narrative : ↓

However, as historian Romila Thapar famously contends much of this romanticized golden imagery is "shown as more times", masking stark socio-economic divides :-

- Social Stratifications :- The caste-system rigidified. Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien recorded the severe marginalization of Chandalas, who were forced to strike wooden clappers to signal their presence.
- Subjugation of Women :- Patriarchal norms intensified, limiting women's literacy and giving rise to practices like Sati, recorded in the Eran inscription of 510 CE.
- Urban and Monetary Decline :- Late Gupta phases faced Huna invasions, triggering a monetary crunch and the decay of vital trade hubs like Pataliputra and Bengal's maritime port, Tamralipta.
- Socio-Economic Feudalisation :- R. S. Sharma links the proliferation of royal land grants (Agraharas) to regional decentralization, sub-infed sub-infederation and the rising exploitation of the peasantry.
- Religious Exclusivism :- Royal patronage

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disproportionately favoured the Brahmanical revival, pushing heterodox sects like Buddhism into a steady, localized regional decline.

Thus, the Gupta era was a period of remarkable elite cultural efflorescence rather than a uniform 'Golden Age', as its internal socio-economic inequalities left marginalized classes entirely excluded from its prosperity

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Q ii) Discuss the administrative system of the Mauryan empire (20 Marks)

Answer :- The administrative system of the Mauryan Empire was a ground breaking paradigm of centralised paternal despotism, balancing absolute bureaucratic control with welfare ideals (Yogakshema).

Prominent historian Romila Thapar argues that the Mauryan State was not a uniform monolithic structure but a complex web where the core, metropolitan and peripheral regions experienced varying degrees of direct administrative control.

Key Structural Elements of Mauryan Administration

1) Centralised Autocracy and Kautilyan Saptaanga :-

The King was the supreme authority, guided by Mantri Parishad. [Eg] Ashoka's Dhamma modified this absolute power by introducing moral accountability, viewing subjects as his children (Major Rock Edict V).

2) Elaborate Bureaucracy :- Administration was run by a hierarchical structure of Adhyakshas (Superintendents) and Amatyas. E.g :- The Pantavadyaksha regulated weights and measures to standardize trade across provinces like Taxila and Ujjain.

3) Provincial and Local Governance :- The Empire was divided into provinces (Chakras) ruled by royal princes (Kumaras); further divided into Ahara or Visaya. For instance, at the grass root level, officials like Rajukas (royal administrators) and Gopa (village accountants) maintained land records and judicial order.

4) The Espionage System :- A highly organized network of spies (Gudhapurushas), consisting of stationary (Danatha) and wandering (Danchari) agents, acted as the eyes and ears of the king.
[Eg.] Spies monitored corrupt officials and checked subversion in distant provinces.

5) Municipal and Military Management :- Megasthenes describes a system of six committees of five members each for city (Pataliputra) and military administration. [Eg.] The municipal board meticulously recorded births and deaths to streamline taxation.

While ~~efficient~~ highly efficient, the extreme centralisation and ~~heavy~~ heavy financial burden of maintaining this vast bureaucracy and military ultimately ~~strained the~~ strained the state treasury — contributing to the post-Ashokan decline. Thus, the Mauryan administration was a sophisticated matrix of authoritarian efficiency and ethical paternalism, creating India's first successful blueprint for subcontinental imperial integration.

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