

1. i) Would you consider the Gupta Period a 'Golden Age'?
- ii) Discuss the administrative system of the Mauryan empire.

1. (i) The term "Golden Age" implies a period of high artistic, literary, scientific and political achievement combined with economic prosperity and political stability. Nationalist historians like K. P. Jayswal and R. C. Majumdar characterized the Gupta Period (320-550 CE) as the "Golden Age" or "Classical Age" of Ancient India. However, modern and Marxist historians like D. N. Jha and R. S. Sharma offers a critical re-evaluation of this concept.

Arguments Supporting the 'Golden Age' Hypothesis

Political Unification & Stability:

- i) Under Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya), a vast imperial structure was established, ending centuries of political fragmentation.
- ii) Prayag - Prashasti (Composed by Harisena) highlights Samudragupta's military conquests and diplomatic supremacy across Northern and Southern India.

Cultural & Literary Renaissance:

i> Sanskrit literature: Flourishing of classical Sanskrit literature is a main feature of Gupta Age. Kalidasa wrote masterpieces like Meghduta, Abhijnanshaktuntalam and Raghuvamsham.

ii> Other Notable Scholars: Shudraka (Mricchakatikam), Vishakadatta (Mudrarakshasa) and Harisena (Allahabad Prasasti)

Advancements in Science, Mathematics & Astronomy

i> Aryabhatta, authored Aryabhatiya (introduced concept of zero, value of π , accurate cause of eclipses and heliocentric ideas).

ii> Varahamihira, authored Panchasiddhantika and Brihat Samhita in astronomy.

iii> The rustless Iron pillar of Mehrauli demonstrates unparalleled metallurgical expertise.

Art and Architecture:

i> Perfection of the Nagara Style of architecture. (e.g. Dashavatara Temple at Deogarh)

ii> Rock-cut architecture and wall paintings

in Ajanta Caves (Caves 16, 17 & 19) and Bagh Caves.

iii) Sarnath School of Sculpture produced iconic Buddha statues emphasizing serene spirituality.

Economic Prosperity & Trade:

i) High quality, abundant gold coins (Dinara) issued by Gupta monarchs reflect imperial wealth and flourishing internal and maritime trade.

ii) Fa-Hien's travelogues (Fu-kuo-ki) describe peace, low crime rates and general social harmony.

Critical Re-evaluation & Counter Arguments

Gupta Period Re-evaluation

Feudal Tendencies
(Land Grants / Agrahara)

Decline of Trade
(Rise of Couriers)

Social Rigidity
(Degradation of Untouchables)

i) Emergence of Feudalism: Proliferation of ~~religious~~ ^{religious} land grants (Agrahara) transferred administrative, fiscal and judicial rights to brahmins and weakening central control.

ii) Economic decline in late Gupta Era: There was a progressive debasement of gold coins in the late Gupta period. Decline of urban centers and long-distance maritime trade with the Roman Empire, increased dependence on

Cowries (kapardaka) for local transactions.

iii) Social Inequalities and Rigidity:

Caste rigidity increased and the condition of women degraded, (early marriage, widowhood restrictions). Fa-Hien observed the severe discrimination faced by Chandala (untouchables), who had to sound a wooden clapper when entering towns.

Conclusion:

The Gupta period cannot be regarded as an unblemished "Golden Age" for all sections of society, particularly the marginalized classes and lower castes. However, given its epoch-making achievements in literature, art, architecture, philosophy and science, it can legitimately be termed the "Classical Age" of Ancient India — a foundational era that set standards for classical Indian culture.

2. The Mauryan Empire (321-185 B.C.E.) founded by Chandragupta Maurya, established India's first highly centralised and bureaucratic imperial system. Primary sources of understanding Mauryan administration include Kautilya's Arthashastra, Megasthenes's Indica and Ashoka's edicts.

2. Structure of Mauryan Administration

Central Administration
(King / Raja)

↓
Maukripaishad

↓
Provincial Administration
(Aryaputras)

↓
District level
(Pradesika)

↓
Local level
(Gopa and Gramani)

i) Central Government

The king: Absolute political Authority

Maukripaishad: An advisory council of ministers assisting the monarch.

Tisthas & Adhyakshas: 28 Tisthas (high officials like Purohita, Senapati, Yuvraj etc.) and 27 Adhyakshas (departmental heads managing trade, mints, agriculture, tolls etc.).

ii) Provincial & Local Administration

Provinces → The empire was divided into key provinces:

Uttarapatha (Taxila)

Avantiratha (Ujjain)

Dakshinapatha (Surarnagiri)

Kalinga (Tosali)

Prachya (Pataliputra - central division)

Districts are headed by Pradeshika and assisted by Rajukas (revenue and judicial officers). The smaller units (villages)

managed by Gramani with the help of Gopa (accountant for 10-15 villages)

iii) Revenue:

Sannidhata (Chief Treasury officer)

Samaharta (Collector general of Revenue)

iv) Taxes: Bhaga (land tax, usually $\frac{1}{6}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of produce)

Bali (tribute)

Karra / Suktas (Customs / tolls tax)

v) Judiciary:

Courts: Dharmasthiya (Civil courts)

and Kantakasodhana (Criminal Courts)

Highly authorized network of spies categorized into Sametha (stationed spies) and Sanchara (wandering spies), ensuring internal security and monitoring officials.

vii)

Military:

Megasthenes mentions a 6-member board consisting of 30 officers managing six ~~military~~ branches: Navy, Transport, Infantry, Cavalry, War Elephants and Chariots.

viii)

Ashoka's Ideological Shift:

Ashoka introduced Dharma - Mahamatta to propagate morality, welfare & communal harmony across all provinces.

Conclusion:

The Mauryan Administrative machinery was a ~~the~~ sophisticated blend of autocratic control, bureaucratic efficiency and paternalistic welfare. Its structured hierarchy, elaborate revenue system and intelligence network laid the administrative foundation for future imperial structures in Indian history, including the Guptas and Mughals.

Good

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