

Economic System of Ancient India: Maurya and Gupta Empire

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ABSTRACT: From social system to almost everything of a state depends on the economic conditions of that state. The subject is no exception in Ancient time, as it applies today. Even in the present time economic crisis and economic recession are often observed. Also in Ancient times the economy was severely affected by this incompetence of the rulers, epidemics, natural disasters etc. Again the issue of economic prosperity was also observed. According to the division of eras, there is a scarcity of sources of knowledge about Ancient India between Ancient, Medieval and Modern Bengal. Again some sources of Ancient India have been found which have not been deciphered till now. That is why it is very difficult to search for information about Ancient India. Keeping in mind all kinds of limitations attempts are made to know about Ancient India. I have had to take help from several books and articles to work on the current research. After reading books and articles I have to collect information from there very carefully. After excluding and including all data from these I use those information in my research. Apart from this, information about the economic condition of that time has also been collected from various coins, land deeds, copper plates etc.

Keywords: *Economy, Gupta Empire, irrigation, Maurya Empire, revenue, trade and commerce.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The economy is inextricably linked with our daily lives. In Ancient India also there was no exception. This economic trend has changed at different times. Like the reshuffle of power, the change in the course of economy was also noticeable. The wheel of the economy was sometimes upward and sometimes downward. Sometimes the wheel of the economy was the cause of power shifting. Because the economically powerful rulers wanted to seize power by invading his neighboring states. That's why the rulers wanted to run the economy of his state smoothly. One of the policy makers of the Ancient India like Maurya, Gupta, or whatever the period was depended on how active the economy of that period was. The issue of competence or incompetence of the rulers was also involved with that. Also the role of the common people of Ancient India was very important to keep the economy active. Since the economy of the Ancient India was mainly dependent on agriculture, the common people were more involved in it. Besides that, the foreign affairs of Ancient India were also involved with economics. The present research will be conducted to highlight those economic aspects of the Ancient India. Through which we hope to find out a clear direction of the economic situation of that time. So, how the rulers, the common people, the power and the economy have influenced each other and how important their influence is today that topic is the main thing of this research.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper has been written on the basis of reviewing some related literature, articles written on the basis of Ancient India. Although there are many primary sources written on Ancient India, but those sources do not deciphered, so for this research I have to rely more on the secondary sources. Data has been collected from all these sources and after verified those I used them in my present research. Due to the scarcity of information on Ancient India, some limitations had to be met in completing the research. Secondary sources of data have been used in this research which collected from various types of articles, books, thesis paper and so on. All kind of secondary sources have been considered as data collection tools based on economic system of Ancient India. Special attention should be given for making this research more effective, successful and target oriented. First of all collected data has been processed, analyzed and interpreted for research findings. In this study I used narrative and quotation method in order to analyze based on study objectives.

III. MAURYA EMPIRE

The Maurya Empire was founded in 322 BCE by Chandragupta Maurya. With the help of kautilya (also known as Chanakya) author of "Arthashastra" Chandragupta Maurya raised an army force and overthrew the

Nanda Empire. With the advent of the Maurya's in the late 4th century BC, the history of India came to light through darkness. Chandragupta Maurya was the first emperor of Maurya Dynasty. There is disagreement over the exact date of Chandragupta Maurya's accession to the throne. Because different sources have different descriptions about this. There is no contemporary account of how Chandragupta Maurya annihilated the Nanda Dynasty. For this we have to rely on different sources.

There are two types of sources to know about Maurya Empire. The one is literary and the other is Archeological. Literary sources of Maurya Empire comprise of texts written by both indigenous as well as foreign authors. Indigenous sources are- Kautilya's "Arthashastra", Vishakhadatta's Sanskrit drama "Mudraraksasa", Banvatta's "Harshacharita"(a biography of Harshabardhana), Kalahana's "Rajtarangini", "Jain ParishishthaParvana", Buddhist traditions etc. Foreign sources- Megasthenese's "Indica"(written in Greek), Pliny's "Natural History"(written in 72 AD), Sri Lankan Buddhist texts(written in Pali), travel accounts of three Chinese travelers; FaHien, Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing.

The epigraphical sources that are available today, are Edicts of Ashoka on which inscriptions are written. Ashokan inscriptions can be classified into three categories based on the surface of the rock. They are Rock Edicts, Pillar Edicts, and Cave Edicts. The Rock Edicts are divided into major Rock Edicts and minor Rock Edicts. Major Rock Edicts are Girnar (near Junagadh), Shahbazgari, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (written in Kharoshti script), Mansehra, Yerragudi, DhauliJaugada (near Bhubaneswar, Odisha), Sopara (Maharashtra), Kalsi, Sannati, Kandahar Greek inscription. The minor Rock Edicts are Bhabru, Kandahar Bilingual inscriptions etc. The archeological sources include Ashokan Edicts and inscriptions and material remains such as gold, silver and copper punch-marked coins.



Fig:Maurya Empire.

All these sources help to find out the main content about the Maurya Dynasty. According to these sources when Kautilya was insulted by the king Dhana Nanda, he convinced Chandragupta Maurya to conquer the kingdom of Nanda. Kautilya swore revenge and vowed to destroy the Nanda Empire. His main intentions were to train army under Chandragupta Maurya's command and attack the Empire of Nanda. Chandragupta Maurya and his army was encouraged by Kautilya to take over the throne of Magadha. That time the people of Magadha were very upset over the corrupt and oppressive rule of the king Dhana Nanda. Chandragupta Maurya praised his army and got ready to conquer the kingdom of Dhana Nanda. He announced a battle and Magadha army was drawn from the city to distant battlefield to engage with Maurya's forces. Chandragupta Maurya also created an atmosphere of civil war in the kingdom of Dhana Nanda and Kautilya managed to win over common people sentiment. Finally Nanda resigned, handed over his power and went into exile, Nanda never heard of again. After that Chandragupta Maurya was legitimately installed as the new king of Magadha in 322 BCE, at the age of 21 and Kautilya assumed the position of an elder statesman. Chandragupta Maurya established his power at Magadha and had its capital city at Pataliputra (modern Patna). The Empire was the largest to have ever existed in the Indian Subcontinent and its area was around 5 million square kilometers at its zenith under Ashoka. Chandragupta Maurya rapidly expanded his power with the help of Kautilya. That time Maurya Empire was one of the largest empires of the world. The empire stretched to the north along the natural boundaries of the Himalayas, to the east into Assam, to the west into Balochistan and into the Hindukush Mountains of what is now Afghanistan. The empire was expanded into India's central and southern regions by the emperors Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara, but it excluded a small portion of unexplored tribal and forested regions near Kalinga, until it was conquered by Ashoka. The Empire was declined for about 50 years after Ashoka's rule ended, and Maurya Dynasty was dissolved in 185 BCE with the foundation of the Shunga Dynasty in Magadha.

3.1 Economic System of Maurya Dynasty:

Under Chandragupta Maurya and his successor internal and external agriculture, trade and other economic activities thrived and expanded across South Asia due to the creation of a single and efficient system of finance, administration and proper security. The economy of Maurya Empire was very developed at that time.

3.1.1 Agriculture:

Most of the people of Maurya Dynasty was agriculturists and lived in villages. Since in the Maurya Era one of the main sources of revenue was the money coming from agriculture, the rulers were more focused on land development. From financial assistance to poor farmers, land grants were also made for cultivation. By cleaning the forest and fallen land the state helped people to bring new areas under cultivation. But not all types of forest certain types of forest were protected by laws. The farmer had a direct communication with king. A number of crops like rice, coarse grains, sesame, pepper and saffron, pulses, wheat, bamboo, paddy, mustard, linseed, vegetable and various kinds of fruits, sugarcane were grown in Maurya period.

3.1.2 Ownership of the land:

Dayodorous mentioned the king's ownership of the land. According to him no individuals could not own any kind of property. Megasthenese also said the same thing about land ownership. There are so many conflict doctrine about the king's ownership of the land prevailed. According to some historians, the king was not the owner of the land, since he protected the land he received a certain portion of the crop as tax. However, "Manu-Shamhita's" statement about the king who was the owner of the land is significant. According to, "Manu-Shamhita", "he (the king) is the Lord of the land." Neither of this two doctrines is entirely acceptable. The most accepted opinion at present is that the king did not have full ownership of the land at that time, but the king had the special rights over the land. "Arthashastra" mentioned that some lands which were owned by the king and cultivated under the government management. There was also mentioned of some other lands which were in the possession of the taxpayers.

3.1.3 Land system:

According to Dr. Basu, the land system was not the same. At least there were three types of land. Somewhere the land was owned by peasants, somewhere by the state or somewhere the land was jointly owned. He also said that tenant rights to land were gradually increasing. There was a difference between former ownership and joint ownership of land. In "Arthashastra" there was a hint of the rights of the peasants. Also the king had the right to confiscate the land of the peasants who were indifferent to cultivation. But later the rule was changed. If necessary the land was given to someone else for improvement. As a result the ownership of the land would not change. Dr. Basu thought that the rights of the farmer and the ruler were same in the land. Individual ownership was increasing instead of joint ownership.

3.1.4 Land Revenue system:

According to Dr. Ghoshal's "Indian Revenue System" land revenue was the mainstay of the Indian economy in the period of the Maurya Empire. In Maurya Empire four types of taxes had been collected from land, those were Shita, Vag, Bali and Kara.

- Shita-The crop grown on the royal farm was related to Shita tax. The farmer of the farm had to pay water tax to avail the benefits of the royal irrigation system. The farmer had to pay one-fifth of the crop if he carried the water by himself, one-fourth of the crop if he took the help of animal and if he took the help of machinery then he had to pay one-third of the crop. If the farmer took water from rivers or lakes, he had to pay a quarter of the crop as tax. If cultivation was done with the help of government equipment by a prisoner, slave or free laborer under the supervision of a government employee, then all the crops produced would go to the royal treasury. The one who provided oxen for cultivation in a barren land would get half of the crop, and he gave manual labor he would get one-fourth or one-fifth of the crop. The rest of crop was deposited in the royal treasury as revenue. At Maurya Empire land was divided into two classes. State tax was collected from one class of the land. One-sixth of the crop produced from such land had to be taxed. D.D Koshambi termed the second class land as ShitaJamin. In this land settlement and agriculture were all under the direct supervision of the king. Most of the land of Maurya period were ShitaJamin. The tax applicable to all these lands was called Shita tax. That time land could not be transferred without special permission. If someone failed in agriculture, his land would be given to someone else. Shita taxes were waived if the settlement was new or in times of calamity. The lowest Shita tax rate was one-fifth of the crop produced.
- Vag- The second tax was called Vag. The tax that was usually the king's share of the crops grown on the land was called Vag tax.

- Bali and Kara- The other two types of taxes were Bali and Kara. According to many historians these were sub-taxes. These two taxes were mainly levied on special lands and for the maintenance of special classes of employees.

The financial base of Maurya Empire was mainly land revenue and also trade and commerce. The gradual expansion of the agrarian economy and improvement in the administrative machinery for collecting revenue increased the income from land revenue. Kautilya mentioned that the state should organize the clearing of wasteland and settle it with the villages of shudra cultivators. The nature of land revenue has been a subject of controversy. Also there are references to the crown lands, the cultivation of which was important to the economy. There were two types of taxes- one on the amount of the land and the other on the produce of the land. Irrigation system was maintained by the states in the limited areas and also in limited periods. Cultivators and landowners also privately control the irrigation system as well. Revenue policy was also levied on both internal and foreign trade. In that time roads were built to ensure quick communication with the local administration inevitably became arteries of exchange and trade. Restrooms had been set up along with major trade routes. As a result commercial interests had improved. Tariffs were imposed on imports and exports, which enriched the royal treasury.

In Maurya period the statement of Megasthenese and other Greek writers about land and revenue system are important. Megasthenese had made three statements on that subject-

1. The second nation in India was the farmers and also they were more in number. They gave the king a quarter of what they produced without land tax.
2. The whole country was the property of the king. Farmer cultivate the land on the condition of getting a quarter of the crop produced.
3. By farming the peasants paid taxes to the king and the independent cities.

The king needed a lot of money to meet his regular and basic needs. There were many salaried employees in addition to the army. State land was the sure and main purpose of income. The other sources of state income were not so sure and secure. That was why the amount of state land was increased in different ways. If no one had made a will before his death, his land would have been taken over by the state. The fallow lands were settled for the tenants and all the vast land were cultivated. Those who settled on the fallow land got tenancy but did not get ownership of that land. Megasthenese as well as Ariyan, Diadorous and Strabo also made some quotations on land revenue. According to Ariyan "Peasants cultivated the land and paid taxes to the king or to the independent cities". According to Diaodorous "they paid land tax to the king, as the whole of India was considered as royal property and no individual could own land there. In addition to taxes farmers deposited a quarter of their produce in the royal treasure". Strabo said, "three-quarters" of the crops produced had to be paid to the state as land revenue, while farmers received one-fourth as wages." It is difficult to say whether this difference in revenue rate was due to the difference in the conditions of cultivating the land of the farmer or anything else. It is possible that where the king gave only land to the farmer, the rate of revenue was lower, and where he provided plows, oxen, fertilizer etc. required for agriculture, the rate of the revenue was higher. This difference in revenue is also reflected in "Arthashastra". That time the village was considered as the unit of economy. Each village was connected to the central government through these two taxes Vag and Bali. Villagers would give tax exemption if they dig new pond or recover damaged pond. The state protected the farmers from all kinds of losses.

3.2 Trade and commerce:

The political unity and internal peace of Maurya Empire encouraged the expansion of trade in India. During Ashoka's reign the Maurya's international network of trade saw great expansion. The Khybar Pass became a strategically important point of trade and interaction with the outside world. Greek states and Hellenic kingdoms in West Asia became trading partners. Trade also extended through the Malay Peninsula into Southeast Asia. The state thus became the biggest trader in the country, and had to control its entire trade to safe-guard its own interests. The control of trade was based on the state control of prices. A variety of Taxes were levied on trade and commerce in various ways. Although the state did not have a benevolent attitude towards traders, some money was deposited in the treasury through trade. In "Arthashastra" the traders were called "Achaurashchar" (even if not in name but practically a thief). The Mauryans had a good relationship with other countries. For business purpose Mauryans developed a good relationship with several countries like Syria and Egypt in addition to several others in the west. That time the industry and business flourished extremely. Many foreign traders came to Mauryan Dynasty and took up residence in cities. The system of price control was based on certain inevitable provisions. Any kinds of goods could not be sold at the place of their origin, field or factory. They were to be carried to the appointed markets (pannya-sala) where the dealer had to declare particulars as to the quantity, quality and the prices of his goods, which were examined and registered in the

books. Every trader had to get a license for sale. A trader from outside had to obtain a passport in addition. There were goods being exported and imported. Maurya kings were used to import some goods which were very much demandable in their kingdom. Such as cloths, pearls, coins, wines, figs, carpets and beautiful vessels made of silver. As they import some important things from abroad they also export some valuable items. All of these exported items Muslin and Jamdani cloths were very demandable items. The development of trade and commerce soon became very profitable for empire and there was a separate department looked after trade and commerce and ensured that a transparent system was put in place. Standard weights and measures were used and all goods bore the official stamp. Later in Maurya period sea trade began to take place, they built ships and hired them out for trade to merchants. In Maurya Dynasty there was not a formal banking system, but the concept of exchanging money existed. Taxes were levied on import and export goods. Taxes were levied exclusively on goods. Trade was taxed all along its way by export and import duties. Trade depended upon its routes. In Maurya Empire trade and commerce was done by roads as well as water ways.

3.3 Other Taxes:

Most of the revenue of the Maurya kingdom came from land tax (Shita, Vag, Bali and Kara). Although land tax was the main source of the revenue, but it was not the only source of revenue, exchanging money existed. Artists and craftsman were not also exempt from taxes. Other taxes that are worth mentioning here, that were-

- Shenavaktam- The tax that was paid to support the army was called Shenavaktam tax.
- Utshanga- The money that came as a gift when a Prince was born was called Utshanga tax.

Besides, prostitutes, gambling dens, bars and slaughter houses were one of the sources of state income. State gave money as a debt. The state would also get a lot of income from the amount of interest that would come from that payable money. Those who had their own home in the city had to pay tax. A lot amount of revenue came from ferry crossing, irrigation etc. The fine imposed during the trial were also deposited in the treasury. If there was no inheritance of any property it would go to the king. Any kind of hidden treasure found anywhere in the state was considered property of the state. Special taxes were levied on incase of emergency. Royal forests, land and mines were considered as state property. These mines filled the royal treasury and made it possible to form armies. The state had the exclusive right to produce salt. Imported salt could be taxed at a small rate. Adding alloy to the currency also resulted in state income. Unemployed labor was also considered as a source of income.

In Maurya Empire those who were Non-Brahman had to bear the burden of taxes. Most of the money spent on war, evangelism and public welfare which came from various types taxes. So, the tax burden was not small at all. In the case of tax collection the employees of tax oppress the tenants. The tax system was a major factor in the subsequent revolts in various provinces of the Maurya Dynasty.

3.4 Revenue Administration:

Dr. Ghoshal explained how revenue administration functioned in the Maurya period. He said that it was not immediately clear in "Arthashastra" about the minister's participation in the revenue administration. But there was a provision in the "Manu-Shamhita" that the king will appoint a secretary for the work related to the treasury. In "Arthashastra" there were mentioned of two high-ranking official persons, they were called "Shamarhata" and "Shanniddhayta". They had the primary right to control the administration of economic affairs. Their status was equal. Their salary was 24,000 silver coins annually. Both had economic responsibilities as well as other responsibilities. Shamarhata's other responsibilities were related to public and criminal justice. In carrying out his police duties, he was assigned to monitor the activities of monks and businessmen through spies. In order to fulfill his financial responsibilities, he had to look after the entire revenue and expenditure of the state. He had to look after everything included the ports, mines, irrigation system, forests, trade routes etc. The expectation was that he would increase income and reduce expenses. In the time of crisis, he had to increase the amount of revenue. Shanniddhayta was responsible for the construction and maintenance of government buildings. He was the in charge of the state treasury. He had to have a special idea about the amount of revenue. Shamarhata and Shanniddhayta's lower level were the superintendents and they had to pass a special examination to get appointment.

Three more categories of employees were involved with finance administration. They were-

- Gopp- Gopp had to make financial records of five or ten villages they headed.
- Sthanik- They were in charge of a quarter of the state. So that they had to make records for larger area.
- Pradeshta- It is known that Pradeshta were used to collect taxes from the area under their charge.

The superintendent of commerce fixed the whole-sale prices of goods. He allowed a margin of profit to fix the retail price. Smuggling and adulteration of goods were severely punished. Any kind of strikes of labor to raise their wages were declared illegal. Against unauthorized prices and fraudulent transactions the state had

to undertake a heavy responsibility in protecting the public, customers and consumers. The state also had to post an army of spies or market inspectors on the trade-routes to detect false declaration as to goods and apprise merchants of same. The transit of goods was guarded all along its way. If any kind of loss suffered in transit that was to be made good by the Government officer who were in charge of the locality through which they passed. In the village, the responsibility was that of its headman (Grama-Svami or Grama-mukhya). In those days trade had to be protected against the gangs of dacoits who were abroad, the turbulent Mlechchha tribes (like the Kiratas) and the wild people of the forests who were all out for plunder. But every village was directly guarded against thieves by the hunters and keepers of dogs.

Never before in the history of Ancient India had such a large empire been established before and after the Maurya Empire. After emperor Ashoka no more competent rulers came to power and gradually the empire declined. Explaining the fall of the Maurya Empire Dr. Niharranjan Roy speaks of mass revolt. According to him, this revolt was due to the imposition of exorbitant taxes by the Maurya emperors. But as opposed to Megasthenese, the tax was a quarter of what was harvested, which was not very high at all. According to Dr. Koshambi the Maurya economy came under pressure during the post-Ashoka period. Because at that time prostitutes were also taxed. Besides, the amount of adulteration in the currency of that time had increased a lot. But Dr. Romila Thapar had opposed it. According to him, the importance of the tax was first realized in the Maurya Period. So, at that time there was a tendency to impose taxes on everything that was taxable. These taxes were normal. And adding extra adulteration to the currency could also be a way to hide surplus wealth.

IV. GUPTA EMPIRE

After the fall of the Maurya Dynasty the unity of Indian history was largely destroyed. Because the post-Maurya rulers had failed to follow the example of the Mauryas. Moreover, after the Mauryas most of the India was gone under the foreign rule for a long time. In the Kushana period unity of India was restored for some time, but after their fall the unity was lost again. Gujrat and Malavar were under the dynasty of Shakas, but they did not survive for long. About five centuries after the fall of the Maurya Empire another great empire was formed around Magadha under the leadership of the Gupta. Once again the Gupta Dynasty brought unity, peace and prosperity to the Indian subcontinent. Although the Gupta Dynasty was smaller in size than the Maurya Dynasty, the Gupta ruled longer than Maurya. Gupta period is considered as the golden age of India by some historians. The Gupta Dynasty was founded by the king Sri Gupta and the most powerful and notable rulers of the dynasty was Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. Towards the end of the third century CE three great powers emerged in three parts of India. The Varsib Nags emerged in the Western part of the Midlands, the Bakatakas in the Deccan and the Guptas in Eastern India. There is no exact information available as to know which tribe the Guptas belonged to. Also it is difficult to say exactly where their original adobe was. According to historians the Guptas were initially feudal lords under the Varsib Nags of the Western Midlands and their adobe was Prayag. Many have again identified Magadha as their original adobe based on Vayu, Vishnu and Bhagabata Purana. A.S. Altekar was once a supporter of this view. But later he became skeptical about that matter. Because no coin of the first ruler of Gupta Dynasty Chandragupta I was found in Bihar. Later Dr. D.C. Ganguli shed new light on that matter. He identified Murshidabad in Bangla as the adobe of the Guptas. According to Dr. Goyal, the Guptas were lived in the Eastern part of the United States (Jukta Pradesh), especially in the Allahbad



Fig:Gupta Empire.

region. That is why he had emphasized on the writings and coins of the Guptas, especially the place where did the AllahbadPrashasti was found. Fourteen treasures of gold coins of Gupta rulers had been found in this region of Uttar Pradesh and only two treasures had been found in Bihara and in Bengal. Of the fifteen inscriptions of the first 150 years of Gupta rule, six were found in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, two in Magadha and

five in Bengal. It is clear from the source of HarishenaPrashasti that Allahbad was Samudragupta's favorite areas. So, it is easy to understand that the early Gupta rules in the center of the kingdom was in East-Uttar Pradesh.

The elements of the history of Gupta period are mainly of three classes- Inscriptions, Coins and Literature. Samudragupta's pillar inscription was the best of the Gupta period inscriptions. His Aaron, Nalanda and Gaya inscriptions are also noteworthy. The Mathura pillar inscriptions of Chandragupta II also carries a lot of important information. Kumaragupta I had the highest number of inscriptions, a total of fourteen. Among them the third Udaipur cave inscription, Mandasor inscription and Damodarpur inscription are notable. Skandhagupta'sJunnagarh inscription, Supiya inscription and Vitari inscription provide important information. Budhgupta'sSaranath inscription, Paharpur copper plate, Rajghat pillar inscription, Damodarpur copper plate find out valuable information. Gold, silver and copper these three types of coins were used in Gupta period. The gold coins of that period seem to be imitations of the Kushangold coins. But this is not entirely acceptable. However in the Gupta period the amount of gold in gold coins decreased and the amount of adulteration increased. That increasing and decreasing in the amount of gold is indicative of economic disaster. All these gold coins have been found in different parts of India will help in revealing the history of Gupta Dynasty. The information obtained from these coins helps in reviving the history of the Guptas.

In addition to inscriptions and coins, literature is also helpful in writing the history of that era. Among them Purana is a good source of history. "Aryamanjusrimulka", the drama "KaumudiniMahotshaba" written by a woman writer Bajjika, the drama "Devi Chadraguptam" written by Vishakhadutta, Kamandak's "Nitisara" those sources carried important information about the Gupta Empire. It is possible to compose a history about the Gupta Dynasty by including and excluding information from these three sources.

4.1Economic System of Gupta Dynasty:

During Gupta period the economic stability and prosperity facilitates all-round cultural progress. Besides having agriculture as an important part, industry and trade in Gupta Empire had a significant progress. Like the Maurya Empire agriculture was significant in the Gupta Empire too. In Gupta period the combination of agriculture and trade made the economy prosperous and advanced.

4.1.1Agriculture:

Agriculture was the mainstay of Gupta Empire. The Gupta economy had prospered by focusing on the agricultural system. During the Gupta period the agricultural system was well developed and scientific method were used by the Gupta emperors to increase agricultural production.

4.1.2Ownership of the Land:

Different historians gave different views on the ownership of the land in the Gupta period. Dr. Basak thought that the land was not owned by the state that time. In this case he presented two arguments. First is- the state and the district people's representative, Mahamatra and other businessman, even the state had not the power to transfer the land to someone without the consent of the general public. Secondly, he said, a deed of donation had been found in Faridpur made it clear that one-sixth of the proceeds from the sale legally would be deposited in the state treasury. It was not clear that where the rest of the money would go. This means that the one-fifth of the remaining six would go to the Gram-Shava treasury. Dr. Ghoshal tried to refute Basak's two arguments. Ghoshal said Dr. Basak's opinion was not based on sufficient information. He said that there was no mention of public representatives in this regard in the inscriptions of Gupta era. There are mention of minor employees, but there is no evidence that their consent was required to sell the land. According to him, Basak's second argument is based on a mistranslation of the word "Dharmasaravaga". The real meaning of this word is the share of religious virtue. In those days, in order to purchase land the candidate had to inform in writing to the buyer that he would re-transfer the land later only for religious purpose. So, it was thought that the king would grant the buyer's request and a share of that potential merit. However, it is widely believed that the peasants were the owners of the land for a long time during the Gupta period. The obvious exception is in the inscription found in North Bengal. It seems that the state and the village community jointly enjoyed the land ownership. The right to transfer the land was jointly in the hand of the king and the district councils. It is not possible at present to make any definite and simple decision about the land system of the whole state. However the large amount of grain stored in the royal barns to prevent famine and everyone thought that there was no right of the king in that portion. During famine the grain was distributed among the poor people of the state. The king was able to give out grants called "AGRAHAARA" which was revoked after death. In Gupta period the king had the total control of land. The main crops of Gupta period were paddy, wheat, sugarcane, bamboo etc. The Gupta kings took special care for the irrigation system in agriculture.

The rulers of the Gupta Empire gave land grants to the Buddhist Church. Who needs money, the church took up the role of a banker and provide monetary support to them. During that period borrowing money was less expensive as compared to the Maurya Empire. Since there was no prescribed by the Government there was no fixed rate of interest. Only when it was so agreed by both the parties involved, the rate of interest could be more than the existing one. The easy accessibility of money to those in need and that to as a reasonable rate was a positive factor which helped the economy of the Gupta Empire to progress.

4.1.3 Classification of Land:

The land of the Gupta period can be classified into the following groups-

- Kshetra: cultivable land.
- Khila: waste land.
- Aprahita: jungle or forest land.
- Vasti: habitable land.
- Gapata Sarah: pasture land.

4.1.4 Irrigation system:

Since agriculture was one of the main source of revenue in the Gupta Period, therefore one of the main tasks of the rulers was to focus on the overall development of agriculture. So, the rulers used various methods to maintain the irrigation system in the agricultural land properly. The methods were-

- Reservoir: One of the most popular irrigation system of Gupta period. The Sudersana reservoirs of Saurashtra was completely repair after it was badly damaged during Mahakshatrapa. Skandhagupta got it repaired.
- Wells: That was another means of irrigation. In that system water was drawn from the wells and supplied to the field through prepared channels.
- Chain of Pot Method: That was a mechanism prevalent even before Gupta period. In that method a number of pots tied with a chain and the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the hull and by making the chain and the pots rotate it was ensued that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it. That method was also known as Araghatta or Gati.

In Ancient India rain water was being collected in ponds and which was known other kind of reservoir. In South India, tank irrigation was the method implied. Thus, Gupta Empire saw prevalence of various methods of irrigation and the role of the state was to provide such irrigation facilities to the cultivators.

4.2 Trade and Commerce:

There was industrial development during the Gupta period. In Gupta Empire textile industry was an essential industry. Many product were produced in those industry and export them as well. Some of the major items produce were- Muslin, linen, silk, food grains, spices, salt, bullion, calico, wool and cotton etc. There were other industries of Gupta Empire like- ivory work, stone cutting and curving or shaping of stones. Metal work of precious metals like- gold, silver, copper, iron, bronze, led, pearl industries were also very popular. But the most important industry during Gupta period was pottery. The Gupta rulers issued a large number of gold coins. These gold coins were known as Dinar. In Ancient India gold coins of Gupta Empire found more than any other empire. The Gupta rulers also issued silver coins. Emperor Chandragupta I first issued silver coins in Gupta Dynasty. Also lead and rare copper coins were issued in Gupta Era. Gupta Empire carried out trade with China, Ceylon and with other European countries. The Guptas imported Chinese silk and ivory from East Africa. During that period South-East Asia became a trade center for the Guptas. Trading activities within the empire were carried out very smoothly and efficiently. After around 550 AD, trading activities with the Roman Empire was relaxed.

In Gupta period leather industry also flourished. Leather boots and shoes were shown in the contemporary sculptures and paintings. The art of the jewelry was in the advanced condition. In "Brihat-Samhita" there mentioned about twenty two types of jewelry. At that period jewelry were used for a long variety of purpose. Hiwen-Tsang also mentioned that brass, gold and silver were produced in abundance. The seals, gold, silver and copper coins of that period also reflect the advance stage of the metal industry. In Gupta period the ship buildings industry was also well developed which facilitated trade and communication activities as well. That helped in trade and colonization. Among these various industry that flourished in Gupta period mining and metallurgy certainly occupied the top position. Guilds continued as the major institution in the manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise. There were guilds not only of traders and bankers but also of manual workers like weavers and stone cutters. To manage their own affairs and participated effectively in the economic life of the people these guilds enjoyed sufficient autonomy. They had their own property and

trusts which worked as bankers, settle disputes of their members and issued their hundis and even coins. These guilds played an important role in the goods industry and also helped to further strength the economic condition of the empire. The guilds had regulated their own laws and all the merchants member were expected to abide by these laws.

In that period goods were transported by animals from one place to another. The trade was carried on by road and through rivers. Important cities of Gupta period were-Broach, Prayag, Vidisha, Tamralipti, Gaya, Pataliputra, Vaishali, Banaras, Kausamvi, Mathura, Peshawar etc. Those were well connected by public highways and the state arranged all facilities and security for the travelers and traders. Guptas had trade relations with both the eastern and the western countries. The ruler Gupta Empire maintained regular maritime relation with Sri Lanka, Persia, Byzantine Empire, Africa, Arabia etc. Some important sea ports of Gupta period were-

- Tamralipti
- Arikamedu
- Muziris
- Barbaricum
- Kaveripattanam
- Pratishthana
- Brighukachchha
- Sopara

All these ports were well connected through inland routes from all parts of the Gupta Empire.

4.3 Revenue System:

Taxes and revenue system were of special importance in the Gupta period. The inscriptions of that time did not mention much about the tax system of the Gupta period. These are taxes that were considered to be prevalent in the Gupta period-

- Land Tax: One-sixth or one-fourth of the crop produced was deposited in the treasury. That tax was called Land Tax.
- Vog Kara or Chungi Kara: That tax was allocated as part of the remuneration of village and town employees. That tax was levied on goods.
- Bhootpratya or Excise Duty: That tax was levied on manufactured goods within the empire. In addition taxes were levied on ports, ferries and protected cities. Fallen lands, forests and salt mines were owned by the state. Money was earned by renting those or by selling products made from those. The fallow land was the property of the state, it was managed by the local institutions.

Fa-Hien writes that “only those who cultivated state land had to pay a share of the grain”. His statement has caused confusion in the mind of the historians. Many think that most of the revenue was collected from the rent on the state land. But this idea is not entirely correct. If Fa-Hien testimony is accepted, then the income of the state from the sale of alcohol should be excluded. In “Arthashastra” the sale of alcohol was said to be one of the sources of income for the state. The document before and after the Gupta period indicate that drinking alcohol was not strictly forbidden in the Gupta period as well. According to Fa-Hien people of the middle kingdom was prosperous and happy in the beginning of the 5th century. He also mentioned that the similar account of prosperity and peace in India. People were also maintaining a high standard of living and luxury of the town life.

The main source of income of the state of the Gupta period was land revenue. One kind of the produce was claimed as the royal revenue “Uparikara” (octroi) was a kind of tax levied on cloth, oil etc. When any kind of products transported from one city to another city “Sulka” was taken from the traders. If any traders failed to give that “Sulka” than he had to canceled his transportation otherwise he had to pay a fine of maximum eight times of the original “Sulka”.

4.4 Revenue Administration:

Several officials were appointed to carry out the revenue administration:

- Pustapala (record keeper): Before recording any kind of transaction Pustapala made enquirers and after that they include all kind of transaction information in their record.
- Gopasramini: He entered several crisis in the accounts registers, besides that he recovered royal duties. He also checked embezzlement and recovered fines for loss due to neglect or fraud.

V. CONCLUSION

Whether it was the Maurya or the Gupta period, the main source of revenue in both the periods was land revenue. In both eras most of the people in the empire were farmers and they lived mainly in villages.

These were the ones who kept the wheel of the economy moving on. The Royal treasury was also enriched by trade and commerce but the amount was less than the land revenue. The rulers of the Maurya and Gupta era always needed skilled armies to manage their vast empire. Again a lot of money was needed to support that huge army. Moreover, the rulers should always keep a watchful eye to prevent foreign aggression and maintain good relations with the outside world. From agriculture to trade and commerce and to established good relations with the other countries in both eras the rulers needed a lot of money. That was why the rulers took various steps to expand agriculture and develop trade and commerce. In that way, the rulers filled their treasury by achieving economic prosperity. Although no empire lasted forever, the rulers did not made a mistake in trying to keep their empire's economy afloat. Starting from the appointment of skilled treasurers, the rulers had worked for the overall prosperity of the revenue system. So that, the treasury was always filled with money and the rulers could managed their governance very well. In both eras, the rulers resorted almost the same measure to maintain their economy prosperity as well. Everything from irrigation system to the revenue collection was done smoothly in both the eras.

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