

300CE onwards, political hierarchies can be identified by the title of rulers which reflect relations of paramountcy and subordination. The Gupta rulers assumed imperial titles such as parameshvara, maharaja-dhishaja and paramabhattaraka. They also connected themselves with the gods through epithets such as parama-daivata (foremost worshipper of gods) and parama-bhagvate (foremost worshipper of Vasudeva-Krishna).
^(Who??)
Some historians have stated that the Gupta Kings claimed divine status. Kingship was hereditary but royal power was limited by the want of a firm adherence to primogeniture. The throne always did not go to the eldest son, creating uncertainties of which the chiefs and high officials took advantage. The Guptas issued seals and inscriptions which mentioned the official ranks and designations whose meaning is uncertain.

The numerical strength of the Gupta army is not known. Evidently the King maintained a standing army, which was supplemented by the forces occasionally supplied by his feudatories. Horse chariots receded in the background and cavalry came to the fore. Horse archery became an important element in military tactics.

However, the historians have found some terms like 'Kumaramatyā' occurring on sin Vaishali seals,

which suggests that this title represented a high ranking officer associated with an office (adhyaksha) of his own. The designation 'amatya' occurs on several Bhita seals, and the Kumaramatya seems to have been pre-eminent among amatyas and equivalent in status to princes of royal blood. Kumaramatyas were variously attached to the king, crown prince, revenue department, or a province. Individuals of the rank of Kumaramatyas sometimes had additional designation of uella, and such ranks could be hereditary. The Kasandanda stone inscription of Kumaragupta mentions two generations of 'mantri-Kumaramatyas' who served two generations of kings - Shikhasasvarin and who served Chandragupta II, and Shikhasasvarin's son Prithvisena served Kumaragupta I. Prithvisena is subsequently described as mahabala dhrikrita.

The Gupta empire was divided into provinces known as 'deshas' or 'bhuktis', administered by governors who were usually designated as 'aparikas'. The uparika was directly appointed by the king himself, and in turn, frequently appointed the head of the district administration and the district town-board.

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Vaishali seal refers to the office of the uparika of Tisabhukti. One of the Damodarpur copper plates describes Chisadatta, the uparika of Pundravardhana bhukti as appointed by the king (Kumara Gupta I). The Damodarpur plate during the reign of Vishnugupta, dated in the year 224 of the Gupta era, mentions an uparika who has the epithet of maharaja, bhattasaka, and raja-putra. and he appointed Svayambhudeva as visahyapati. It also refers to the uparika as carrying on the administration 'with the enjoyment of [the rule] consisting of elephants, horses and soldiers indicating his control over the military machinery as well. The fact that the uparika had the title maharaja in three of the Damodarpur plates indicates his high status and rank in the administrative hierarchy.

The Eran pillar inscription of Budhagupta, dated Gupta year 165, refers to maharaja Sureshmichandra as a lokapala governing the land between Kalindi and Narmada rivers. lokapala here seems to refer to a provincial governor.

Saurashtra was an important province in the Gupta Empire. Skandagupta's Junagadh inscription provides details about the Sudarshana lake ~~current~~ at

that had been built during the Mauryan period and repaired in Rudrasamudra's time. It states that Skandagupta appointed Pasnadata as governor of Surashttra (Saurashtra). Pasnadata in turn appointed his son Chakrapalita to govern the city where this inscription was inscribed. The inscription thus reflects the practice of the delegation of official responsibilities from father to son, and the role of the provincial government in initiating the repair of waterworks.

The provinces of the Gupta empire were divided into districts known as visayas, under officers known as visayapatis. The visayapati seems to have been generally appointed by the provincial governor. However, the Indone copper plate inscription dated in year 146 in Gupta reign during the reign of Skandagupta, suggests that this was always not the case. It may be noted that the Eran pillar inscription of the time of the Huna-ruler - Toramana refers to Airakina visaya, indicating an element of continuity in administrative divisions in post-Gupta times.

Significant details of district-level administration in Bengal are reflected in the Damodarpur copper plates dated in Gupta year 124 during the reign of

The record orders are headed by the *adhitasana* of the villages. The *adhitasana* *adhitasana* of *Kotivasha* had five members - the *uparika*, or *vishayapati* (who ~~was~~ was the head), the *nagasa-sreshthin* (chief merchant/banker), *sarthava* (chief caravan trader), *prathamakulika* (chief artisan) and *prathama-Kayastha*. This indicates that the *vishayapati* was assisted in his administrative duties by certain prominent members of the town. Administrative units below district-level included clusters of settlements known variously as *vithi*, *patta*, *bhumi*, *pathaka* and *petha*. There are references to officials known as *ayuktakas* and *vithi-mahattaras*. At the village level, villagers chose functionaries such as the *gramika* and *gramacharyaksha*, and village elders also had an important role to play in important matters. The *Damodaspur* copper plate of the reign of *Budhagupta* mentions an *ashtakula-adhitasana* (a board of eight members) headed by the 'mahattara'. *Mahattara* has a range of meanings including village elder, village headman, and head of a family or community. The *Sanchi* inscription of time of *Chandragupta II* mentions

the pancha-mandali, which may have been a corporate village body. The Gupta Kings were assisted by a council of ministers (mantrins). The Allahabad prashasti refers to an assembly or council, presumably of ministers - known as the sabha. The various high-ranking functionaries included the sandhivigrahika or mahasandhivigrahika (minister for peace & war), who seems to have been a high-ranking officer in charge of the conduct of relations with other states, including initiating war and concluding alliances and treaties. An Udaygiri inscription describes Virasena Shaba, a sandhivigrahika of Chandragupta II, as a poet. These two inscriptions indicate that officers who discharged the job of drafting treaties had much more than basic skills of drafting.

Some seals dating around the period 300-600 CE mentions the names of dandanayakas and mahadandanayakas, who were high-ranking judiciary or military officers. The Allahabad prashasti refers to three mahadandanayakas. Seals and inscriptions mention other military designations such as baledhikrita and mahabaledhikrita (commander-in-chief of the army). A Yatsa seal mentions Yatsa-vatsa, a khatash-sapati (commander in infantry & cavalry). The standard term senapati does not occur in Gupta inscriptions, but is mentioned in some Vakataka epigraphs.

a top layer of the administrative structure also included amatyas and sachivas, who were executive officers in charge of various departments. The system of espionage included spies known as 'dutas'.

The ayuktakas were another cadre of high-ranking officers. The Allahabad prasasti describes Samudragupta's ayuktakas as ceaselessly engaged in restoring wealth to the many conquered kings.

One of the Damodarpur plates mentions an ayuktaka who was also a bhandaka and head of the district town administration of Kotivarsha nishaya. A Vaishali seal mentions the adhikarana of vinayashitisthapaka of Tirabhukti. The term 'vinayashitisthapaka' has been translated as 'one who maintains moral and social discipline' - but the precise functions of this officer are unclear.

The artisans had guilds of their own, and they looked after the affairs of their own members.

The administration applied only to North Bengal, Bihar, U.P., adjoining areas of M.P., which were ruled directly by the officers appointed by the Gupta kings. The vassals who lived on the edge of the empire had three obligations to fulfill. As subordinate princes, they offered homage to the sovereign by personal attendant at

his court, paid tribute to him, and presented to him daughters in marriage. It seems that in return they obtained charters to rule their areas, and these, marked with royal Gauda seal, seem to have been issued to the varas.

Religious functionaries were granted land, free of tax, for posterity, and they were authorized to collect from the peasants all the taxes that once went directly to the emperor. The villages granted to the beneficiaries could not be entered by royal agents, retainers, and others, and the beneficiaries were also empowered to punish criminals.

Whether state officials were paid by grants of land in Gupta times is not clear. The abundance of gold coins would suggest that higher officials continued to be paid in cash, but some of them may have been remunerated by land grants.

As much as the imperial administration was managed by feudatories and beneficiaries, the Gupta rulers did not require as many officials as did the Mauryas, and also because, in contrast to the Maurya state, the Gupta state did not regulate economic activities on any substantial scale. The Guptas neither needed nor had the elaborate administrative machinery of Maurya times, and in some ways their political system appears to have been feudal.