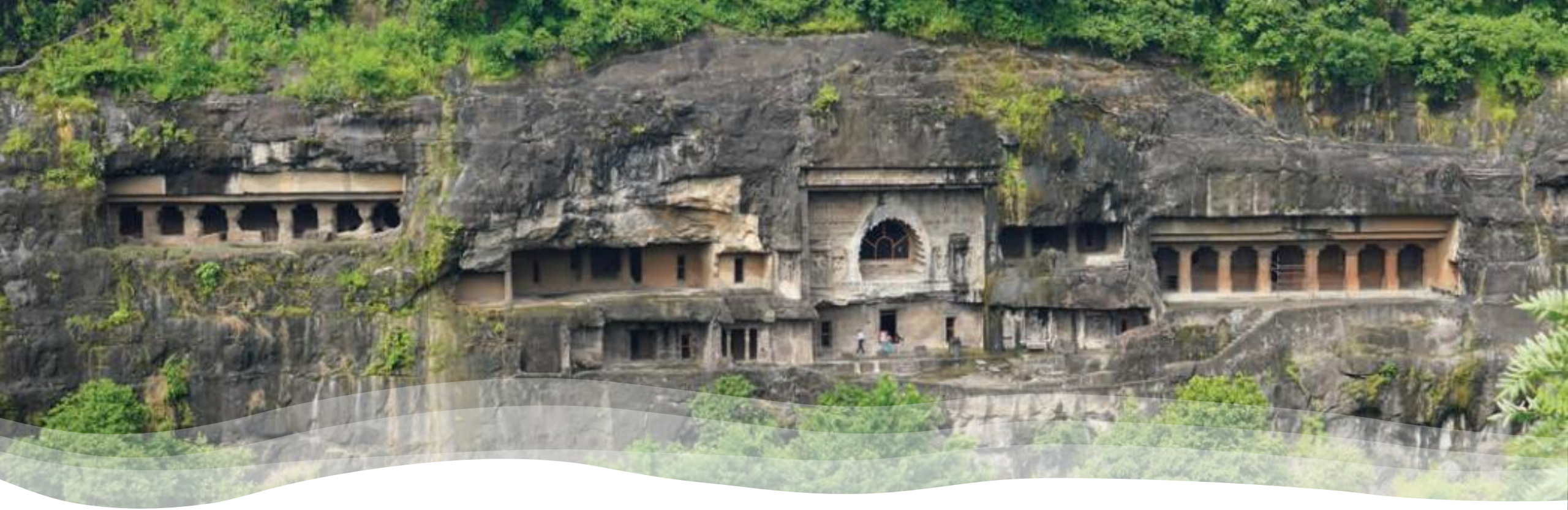




Chapter 7

The Gupta Era: An Age of Tireless Creativity

Class VII
Social Science



Landscape of Ajanta caves, dating from the 2nd century BCE to about 480 CE

The Big Questions?

01

Who were the Guptas?
Why is the Gupta period sometimes called the 'classical age' in Indian history?

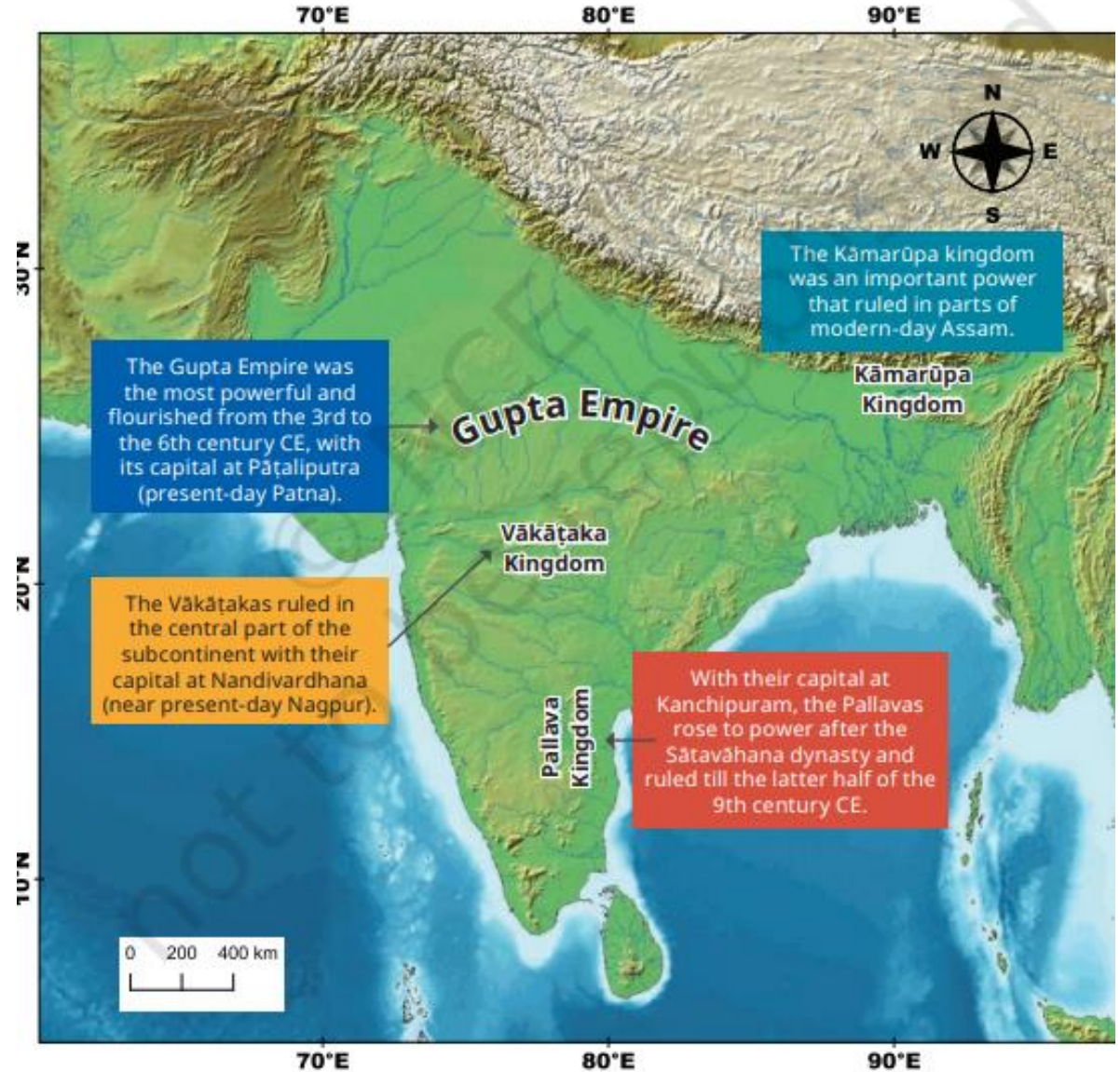
02

What was happening in the rest of the subcontinent at this time?

03

Who were some great figures of this period, and why do their stories matter today?

Empires and kingdoms during the period from 3rd to 6th century CE.



Emergence of the Gupta Empire

- By the 3rd century CE, the Kuṣāṇa Empire began to weaken in the north and northwest of the Indian Subcontinent.
- This decline led to the rise of new regional kingdoms.
- The Gupta dynasty emerged as a new power, likely originating near present-day Uttar Pradesh.
- Initially regional rulers, the Guptas gradually expanded and built a powerful empire.
- Their rule is considered a golden age in Indian history.
- Significant progress was made in art, architecture, literature, and science, especially during Chandragupta II's reign.
- The cultural and scientific legacy of the Gupta period remains influential even today.

Chandragupta II – A Renowned Gupta Ruler



An inscription on the Iron Pillar in Delhi mentions a king named '**Chandra**', identified as **Chandragupta II**.



He should not be confused with **Chandragupta Maurya** of the Maurya dynasty.



Chandragupta II was also known by the title '**Vikramāditya**'.



He was a prominent and celebrated ruler of the **Gupta dynasty**.



A devout follower of **Vishnu**, the deity's mount **Garuda** is often depicted in his inscriptions.



Chandragupta I and II – Founders of a Strong Empire

- The ‘**II**’ in *Chandragupta II*'s name indicates that there was an Chandragupta II was the **grandson** of Chandragupta I.
 - Naming a grandson after his grandfather is a tradition still followed in some Indian families.
 - **Chandragupta I** played a key role in the **early expansion** of the Gupta Empire.
 - He is known for issuing **coins** and forming **strategic alliances**, which helped him consolidate power.
 - His efforts laid the **foundation** for a powerful and enduring empire.
-



Gold coin featuring King Chandragupta I with his queen, Kumāradevī; on the reverse side, a seated goddess identified as Lakṣmī.

Samudragupta – The Warrior King

The **Prayāga Praśasti**, an inscription on a pillar in **Prayagraj**, glorifies the achievements of **Samudragupta**, father of Chandragupta II.

Written by his court poet **Harisena**, it describes Samudragupta's ambition to be '**dharāṇi-bandha**' – the **unifier of the Earth**.

He led numerous **military campaigns**, defeating many kings and expanding the Gupta Empire.

Some defeated rulers were **reinstated** and made to pay **tribute**, while others **submitted peacefully** out of fear.

Apart from being a warrior, Samudragupta was also a **patron of art, learning, and trade**, contributing to the empire's prosperity.

He was skilled in music and is shown playing the **veena** on one of his **coins**.



- Ambitious kings sometimes performed the aśvamedha yajña to build mighty empires and leave a legacy for the future.
- Such a significant event was commemorated by minting special coins like the one shown in Fig.



A seated
Samudragupta, playing the
veena; on the reverse side,
goddess Lakṣmī

- Ambitious kings sometimes performed the aśhvamedha yajña to build mighty empires and leave a legacy for the future.
- Such a significant event was commemorated by minting special coins like the one shown in Fig.

Extent of the Gupta Empire – Insights from Literature

- Some **literary sources** provide detailed information about ancient rulers, kingdoms, and regions.
 - The **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** names key regions under Gupta rule:
 - **Anugaṅga** (middle-Gangetic basin)
 - **Prayāga** (present-day Prayagraj)
 - **Sāketa** (Ayodhya)
 - **Magadha** (roughly present-day Bihar)
 - However, at its **peak**, the Gupta Empire extended far beyond these areas.
 - It included most of **north and west India**, as well as parts of **central and east India**.
-



The Gupta Empire's extent. Note that the Vākāṭakas were the allies of the Guptas. The Guptas claim to have conquered parts of the east coast, down to the Pallavas, whom they may have briefly subdued.



A Traveller's Account of Indian Society in the Gupta Age



Faxian (pronounced *Fa-Shi-Anne*) was a **Chinese Buddhist pilgrim** who visited India in the **early 5th century CE**.

His journey aimed to:

- Visit **sacred Buddhist sites**
- Learn from **Indian scholars**
- Collect **Buddhist manuscripts** to take back to China

Faxian **traveled extensively** across India, documenting its **culture, society, and governance**.

His detailed **travelogue** has survived, providing valuable historical insights into **Gupta-era India**.

Understanding Historical Sources – A Balanced Approach



Historical accounts like Faxian's travelogue are valuable but reflect only the **author's perspective**, time, and limited sections of society.



For example, while Faxian praised many aspects of Indian society, he also noted the **harsh treatment of the chaṇḍālas**, who were considered **outcasts** and forced to live **outside city limits**.



Different readers or historians may **interpret the same source differently**.



Therefore, historians examine **multiple sources** to get a **more accurate and balanced understanding** of the past.



This highlights the importance of **cross-checking perspectives** and avoiding conclusions based on a **single viewpoint**.

Glimpses of the Gupta Empire – Governance and Administration

During the Gupta period, **many kingdoms coexisted**, often **competing or warring** with one another to expand their territories.

The political landscape was **diverse and dynamic**, with both powerful empires and smaller regional kingdoms.

This context reflects **Kauṭilya's ideas** from the *Arthaśāstra* on ruling a kingdom effectively.

He proposed the concept of **saptāṅga** (seven limbs of a kingdom), one of which was **mitra** (forming alliances).

Alliances were considered essential for **strengthening a ruler's position**, maintaining stability, and countering rivals.

New Kings ... New Titles



Inscriptions and coins reveal the **grand titles** used by Gupta rulers.



Titles included:

‘**Mahārājadhirāja**’ – Great King of Kings

‘**Samrāt**’ – Emperor

‘**Chakravartin**’ – Universal Ruler



These titles signified their **supreme authority** and **imperial ambition**.



They marked a shift from earlier, simpler titles like ‘**Rājan**’ (King) and ‘**Mahārāja**’ (Great King).



The use of such titles emphasized the **power, prestige, and elevated status** of Gupta rulers compared to their predecessors.

Expansion through Alliances – The Role of Prabhāvatī Gupta

The **Gupta rulers** used a mix of **military conquests, diplomacy, and matrimonial alliances** to expand and consolidate their empire.

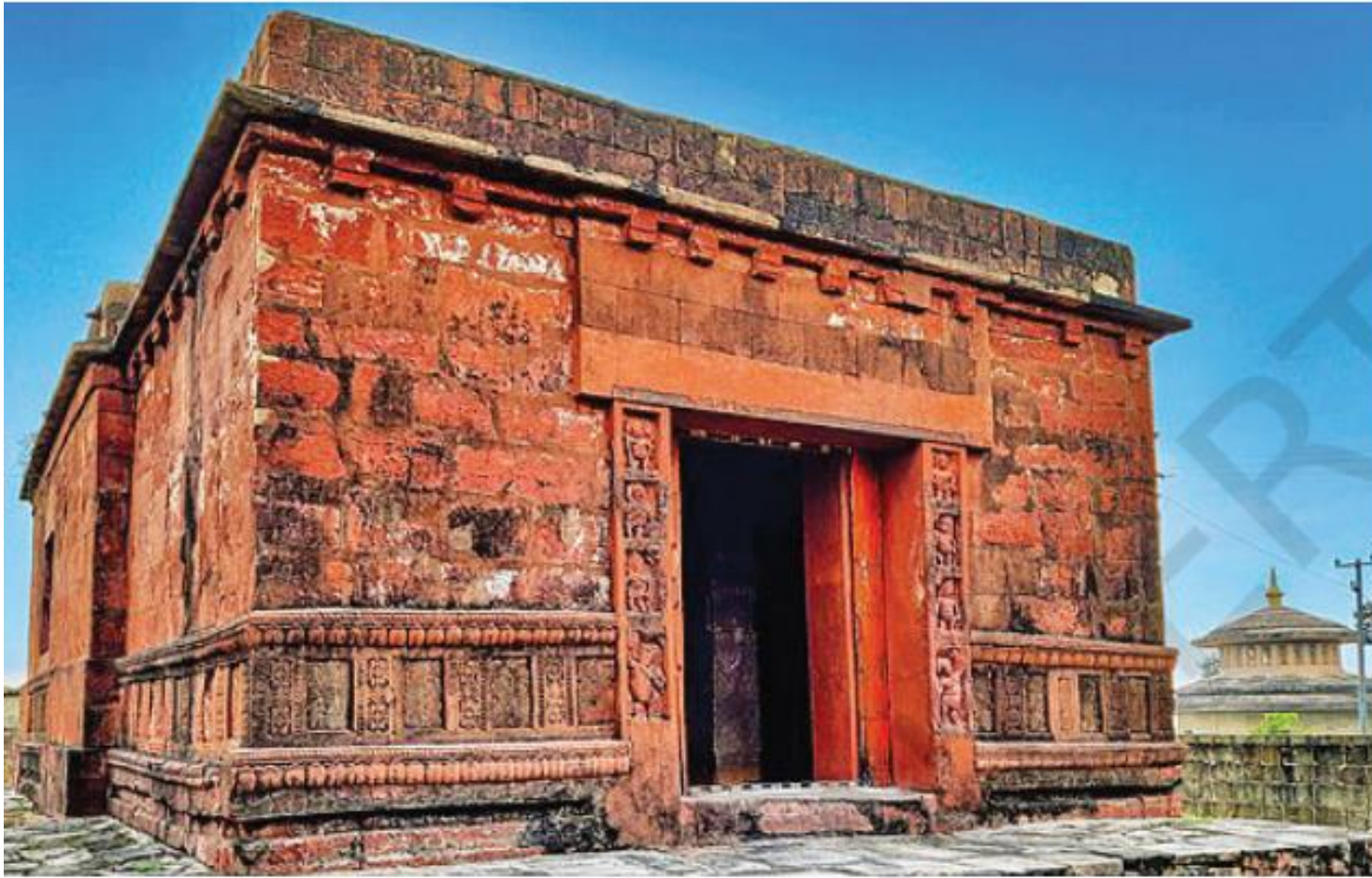
A notable example is **Prabhāvatī Gupta**, daughter of **Chandragupta II**, who married a **prince of the Vākāṭaka kingdom**, the Guptas' southern neighbors.

After her husband's early death, she served as **regent**, effectively ruling the kingdom and maintaining strong **Gupta–Vākāṭaka relations**.

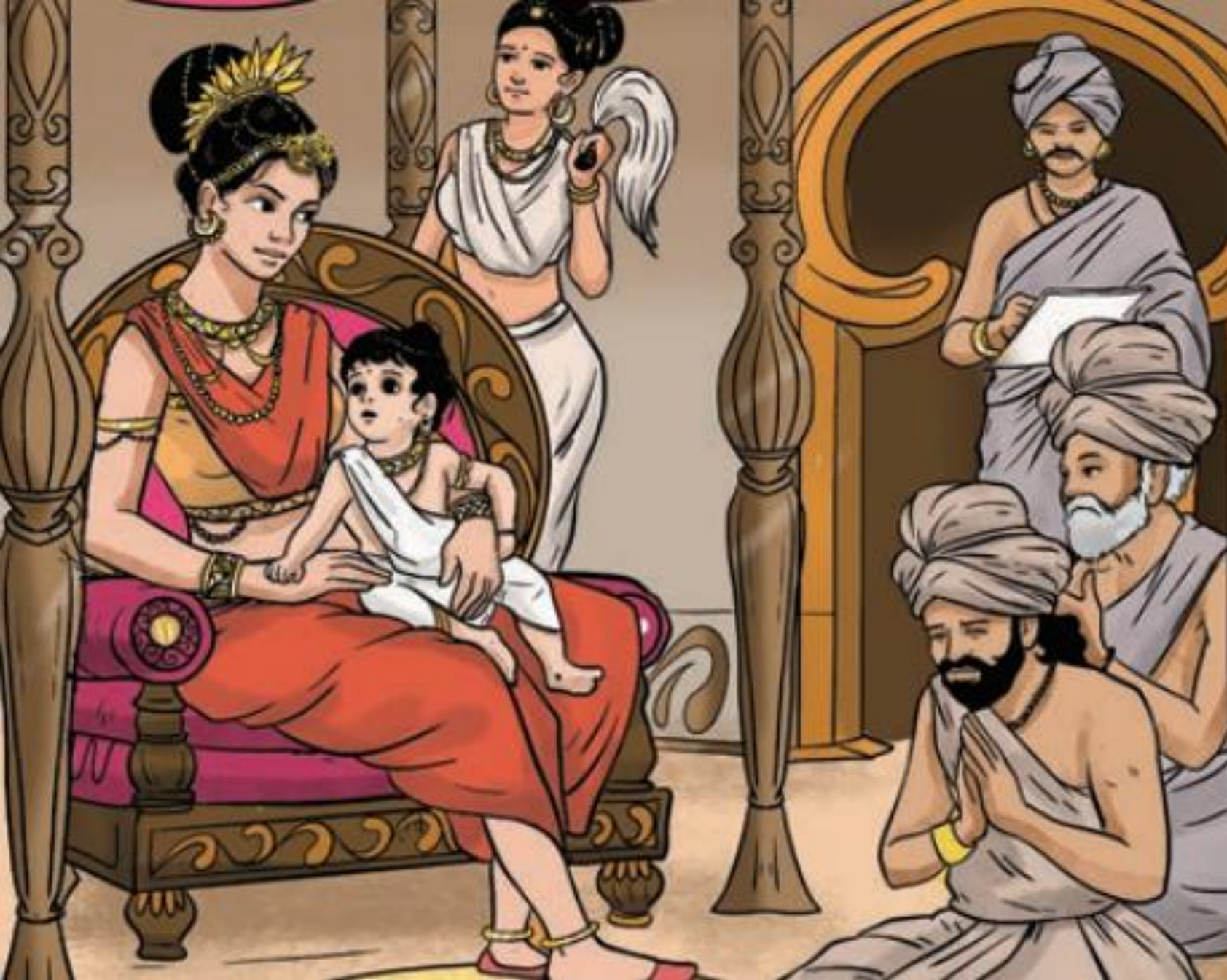
An inscription calls her the '**mother of two kings**', referring to her sons who ruled the Vākāṭaka dynasty.

A **devotee of Viṣṇu**, like her father, she is linked to the construction of **seven temples** dedicated to Viṣṇu and his avatars.

Some of these temples, such as those in **Ramagiri (Ramtek hill)** in present-day **Maharashtra**, are believed to have been built by her or in her memory.



The Kevala Narasimha temple dedicated to Narasimha, one of the avatars of Viṣṇu; according to some historians, this temple was constructed by Prabhāvatī Gupta's daughter in her memory



Prabhāvatī
Gupta sitting
in her court

Thriving Trade in the Gupta Era

- The **Guptas'** main source of revenue was **land tax**.
 - Other sources included:
 - **Fines**
 - Taxes on **mines**, **irrigation**, **trade**, and **crafts**
 - Revenue supported:
 - **Administration**
 - **Army maintenance**
 - Construction of **temples** and **infrastructure**
 - Patronage of **scholars** and **artists**
 - To sustain a large empire, the Guptas encouraged **vibrant internal and external trade**.
- 

Thriving Trade in the Gupta Era

India traded with the **Mediterranean world**, **Southeast Asia**, and **China**, exporting:

- **Textiles**
- **Spices**
- **Ivory**
- **Gemstones**

The **Indian Ocean trade network** linked Indian ports to **global markets**.

Socotra Island, in the **Arabian Sea**, was a key stop en route to the Mediterranean.

Archaeological finds on Socotra include:

- **Pottery**
- Inscriptions in **Brahmi script**
- A **Buddhist stūpa design**

These show the **long-standing presence** of **Indian traders**, along with those from **Egypt, Arabia, Rome, and Greece**, highlighting the **rich cultural exchanges** of the time.

New Ideas and Wonders: The Classical Age

Gupta rulers were primarily **devotees of Viṣṇu**, as seen in their **coins and inscriptions**.

However, they also **supported other religious traditions**, showing a spirit of **inclusivity and openness**.

They **patronised Buddhist institutions**, including:

- The famous **Nālandā University**
- Several **Buddhist vihāras** (monasteries)

This pluralistic approach helped the **cultural and intellectual life** of the Gupta era to flourish.

These institutions will be studied **in more detail in higher grades**.



Remains of Nalanda University



The Classical Age of India – Gupta Period

A long period of **peace and stability** led to major achievements.

Called the '**Classical Age**' due to progress in many fields.

Sanskrit literature flourished (e.g., **Kālidāsa**, **Purāṇas**).

Āryabhaṭa and **Varāhamihira** advanced **math and astronomy**.

Medical texts refined earlier knowledge.

Iron Pillar shows skill in **metallurgy**.

A strong economy helped support **scholars, artists, and scientists**.



Chandragupta II goes to war (an artist's imagination from the 1920s)

Chandragupta II's Court – A Hub of Talent



**CHANDRAGUPTA II PATRONISED MANY
LEARNED MEN, POETS, AND ARTISTS.**



**HIS SUPPORT FOR DIVERSE TALENTS MADE HIS
COURT CULTURALLY RICH AND VIBRANT.**



**SEVERAL REMARKABLE FIGURES FROM THIS
PERIOD MADE LASTING CONTRIBUTIONS TO
LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND THE ARTS.**

Chandragupta II's Court – A Hub of Talent



Chandragupta II patronised many **learned men, poets, and artists.**



His support for diverse talents made his **court culturally rich and vibrant.**



Several **remarkable figures** from this period made lasting contributions to **literature, science, and the arts.**

The Quest for Beauty – Gupta Art and Craftsmanship

The Gupta rulers fostered an environment where **creativity and craftsmanship flourished.**



Important art centres included:

Sārnāth (near Varanasi, UP), famous for beautiful **Buddha sculptures**

The **Ajanta Caves** (Maharashtra), known for stunning rock-cut caves and paintings

Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh), with detailed carvings of **deities** on rock surfaces



Gupta art set high standards of **aesthetics and beauty** and had a **lasting influence** on Indian art history.

The Decline of the Guptas

By the **6th century CE**, the Gupta Empire began to **weaken**.

External invasions by the fierce **Hūṇa tribe** from Central Asia repeatedly attacked the empire.

The rise of **powerful regional rulers** caused **internal conflicts**.

These challenges weakened Gupta control over **north India**.

Whether this marked the **end** or a **turning point** in Indian history will be explored further.



Udayagiri Caves and a Gupta-era temple near Sanchi are both located in Madhya Pradesh.
Arjuna and Karṇa in battle — A sculpted depiction from the Mahābhārata

Meanwhile in the South and Northeast...

While the **Guptas** ruled the north, the **Pallavas** rose to power in the **south**.

They gradually established control over parts of **present-day Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh**.

The **origins** of the Pallavas are unclear.

They likely started as a **tributary power** under the **Sātavāhanas**.

The **decline of the Sātavāhanas** gave the Pallavas an opportunity to **gain independence and power**.

The Pallavas – Patrons of Art, Architecture, and Learning

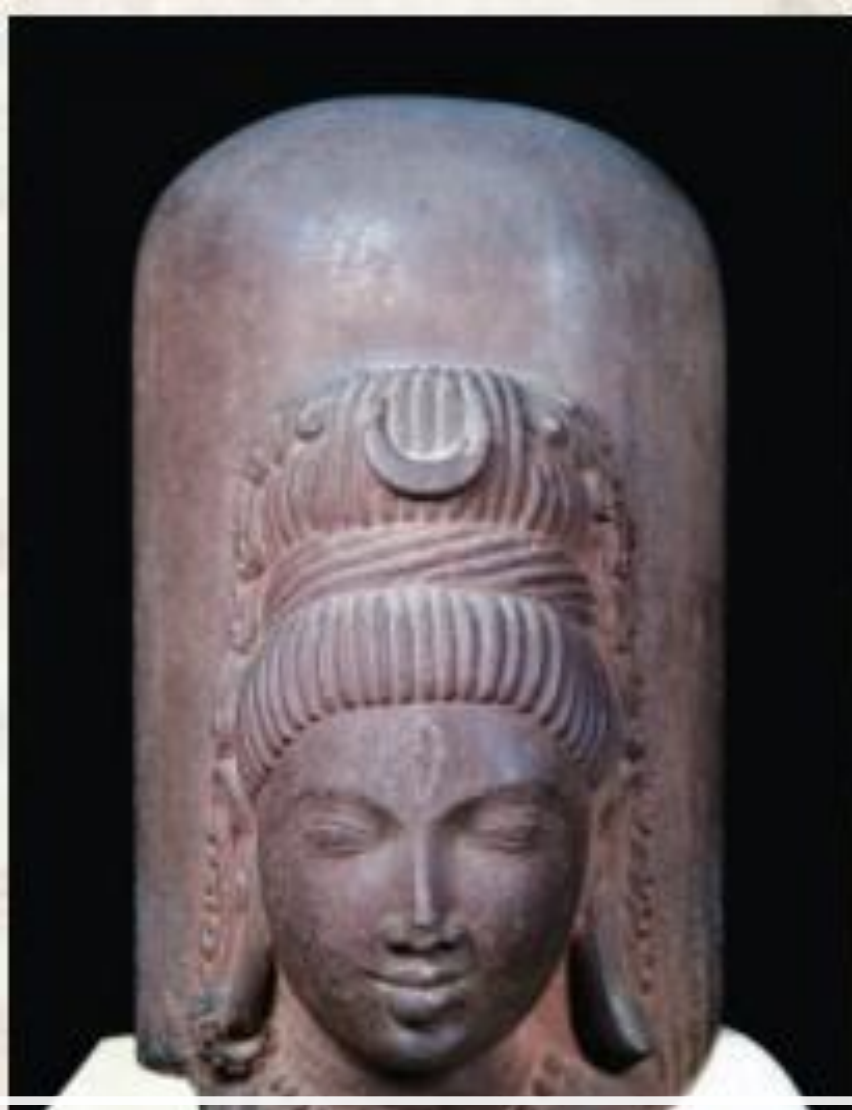
The **Pallavas** were known for their support of **art and architecture**.

Most rulers were **devotees of Śhiva** and built **magnificent temples and rock-cut caves**.

Their capital, **Kānchipuram** (Tamil Nadu), became famous as the ‘**city of a thousand temples**’.

Kānchipuram also developed into a **major centre of learning** in South India.

Ghaṭikās (centres of learning), first seen under the **Sātavāhanas**, thrived during Pallava rule, promoting **education and intellectual growth**.



Various aspects of Gupta art

Kāmarūpa in the Northeast

Kāmarūpa, ruled by the **Varman dynasty**, was in present-day **Assam, northern Bengal, and Bangladesh.**

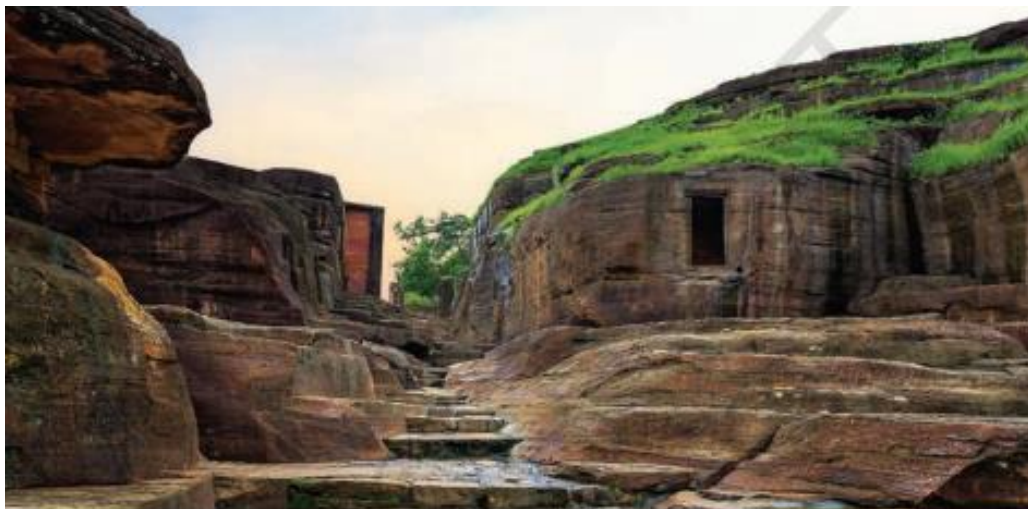
The region was once called **Prāgjyotiṣha**, mentioned in the **Rāmāyaṇa** and **Mahābhārata.**

King Bhagadatta of Prāgjyotiṣha fought for the **Kauravas.**

Kāmarūpa was a **major cultural and political centre** with **temples and monasteries** as learning hubs.

Pallavas and Kāmarūpa in the Prayāga Praśasti

- The **Prayāga Praśasti** mentions both the **Pallavas** and **Kāmarūpa**.
- During his **southern campaigns**, **Samudragupta** defeated the **Pallava ruler** but did **not annex** the region.
- Similarly, he defeated the **Kāmarūpa ruler** in the **northeast** but let him remain in power.
- These local rulers kept their thrones by **accepting Gupta overlordship** and **paying tribute**.
- This approach helped maintain **peaceful relations** and was a **recurring strategy** in Gupta diplomacy.



Udayagiri Caves and a Gupta-era temple near Sanchi are both located in Madhya Pradesh. Arjuna and Karṇa in battle — A sculpted depiction from the Mahābhārata

Legacy of the Gupta Period



The **Gupta period** saw remarkable progress in **art, science, literature, and governance**.



Achievements in **mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and metallurgy** laid the groundwork for future advancements.



Temples and Sanskrit literature from this time still inspire today.

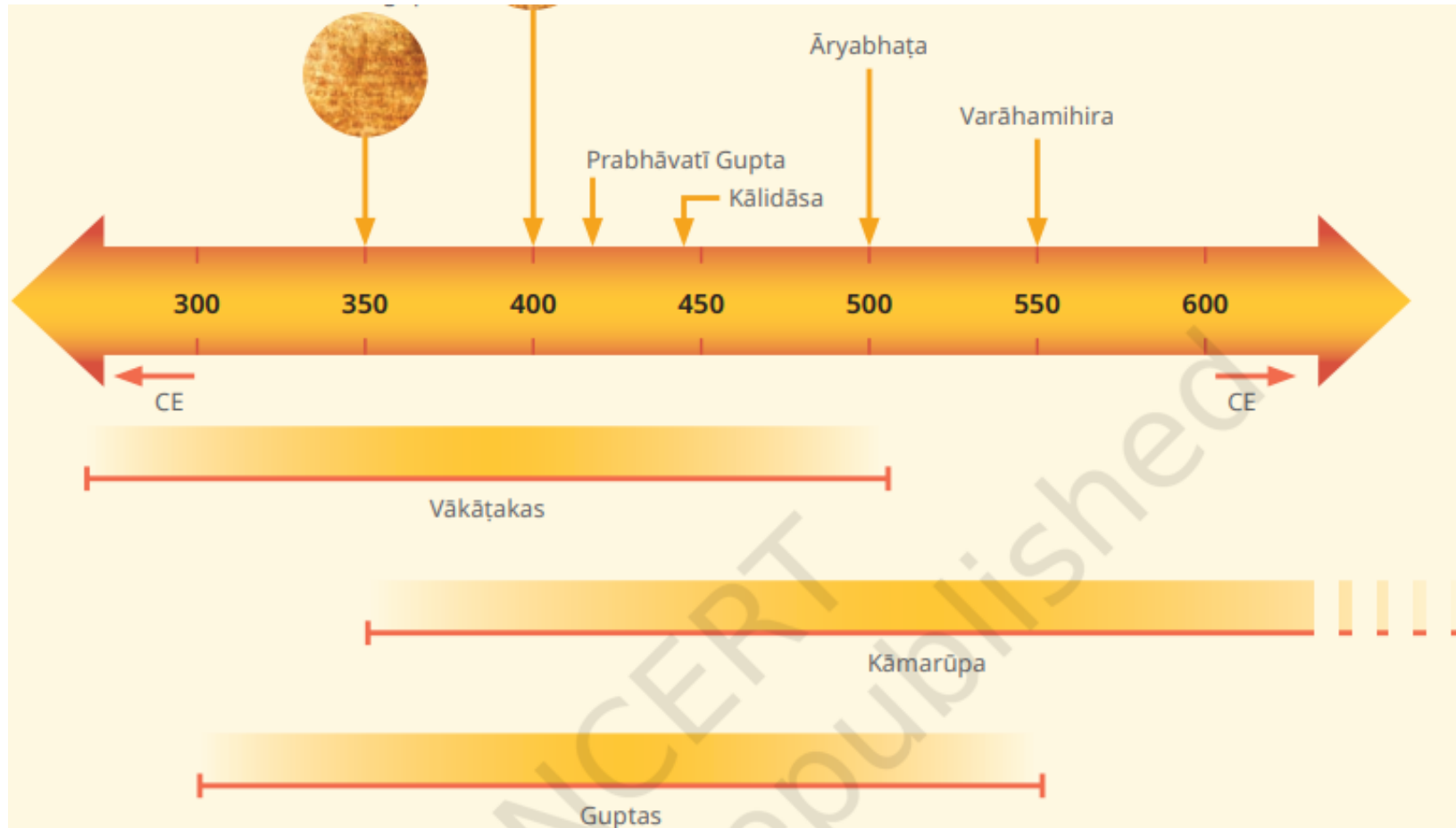


The Guptas built a **stable and prosperous society**, becoming a **model for future rulers**.



Their **lasting legacy** continues to shape **India's culture, traditions, and way of life**.

TIMELINE



The background is a solid medium purple color. It is decorated with several abstract elements: a large, irregular shape in the top center filled with a white dot pattern; a smaller, similar shape in the top left corner; a solid purple organic shape on the right side; and a solid purple organic shape in the bottom left corner, also partially covered by a white dot pattern.

THANK YOU