

HISTORY

Chapter 10: New Empires and Kingdoms



New Empires and Kingdoms

The Gupta Empire

A new and a powerful empire emerged in the Indian subcontinent about 1700 years ago. This was the Gupta Empire which reached its height under the rule of Samudragupta, one of the greatest kings of the Gupta dynasty. We mainly know about him from his *prashasti* written by his court poet Harishena inscribed on the Ashoka pillar at Allahabad. Prashasti is a Sanskrit word which means 'in praise of'. It is a long poem which recounts the annexations and the glory of the king. The *prashasti* of King Samudragupta reveals the following facts:

- Chandragupta and Kumara Devi were the parents of Samudragupta.
- Samudragupta adopted the title of maharaj-adhiraj
- King Samudragupta was a great king, a true warrior and one of the best poets.
- He annexed many North Indian kingdoms of the land known as 'aryavrata'.
- He defeated the rulers of the south but allowed them to rule their states.
- Many neighbouring states like Bengal and many gana sanghas in the north-west gave him regular tribute and followed his orders.
- The descendants of the Kushanas and the Shakas and the ruler of Sri Lanka also submitted to him.

Chandragupta, the father of Samudragupta took the title of maharaj-adhiraja, which was also used by the latter. Samudragupta's son, Chandragupta II defeated the Shakas. His court was adorned with many learned scribes such as the poet Kalidasa and the astronomer Aryabhata.



A gold coin dating back to the Gupta Empire

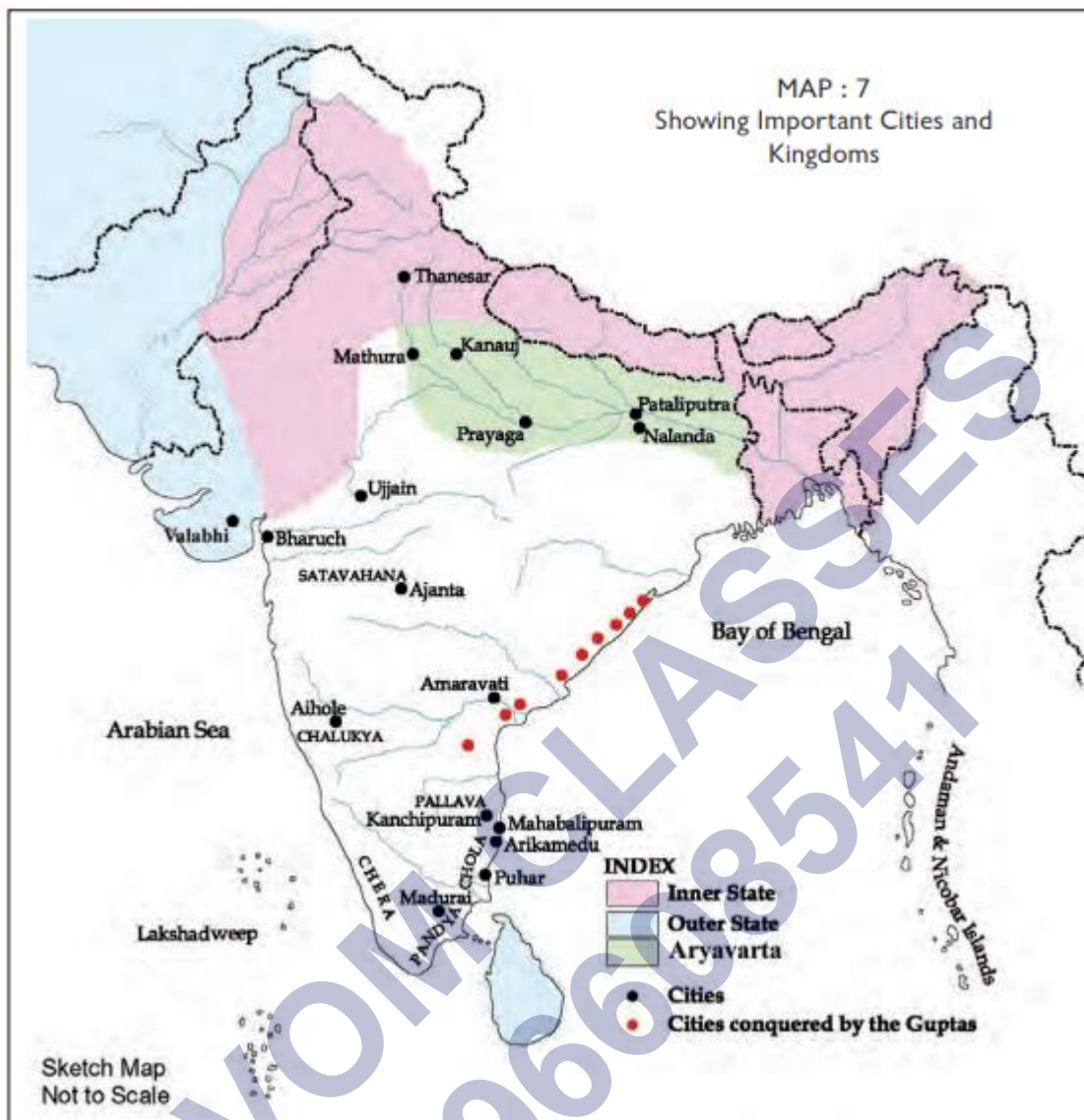
King Harshavardhana

Harshavardhana, who ruled nearly 1400 years ago, was one such ruler. His court poet, Banabhatta, wrote his biography, the Harshacharita, in Sanskrit. This gives us the genealogy of Harsha and ends with his becoming king. Xuan Zang also spent a lot of time at Harsha's court and left a detailed account of what he saw.

Harsha was not the eldest son of his father but became king of Thanesar after both his father and elder brother died. His brother-in-law was the ruler of Kanauj (see Map) and he was killed by the ruler of Bengal. Harsha took over the kingdom of Kanauj, and then led an army against the ruler of Bengal. Although he was successful in the east, and conquered both Magadha and Bengal, he was not as successful elsewhere. He tried to cross the Narmada to march into the Deccan, but was stopped by a ruler belonging to the Chalukya dynasty, Pulakeshin II



King Harshavardhana



The Kingdoms of the Pallavas and Chalukyas

The kingdoms of the Pallavas and Chalukyas were two major ruling dynasties of South India.

- The capital of Pallavas was Kanchipuram. This empire extended from Kanchipuram to the Kaveri delta.
- Aihole was the capital of the Chalukyas and also an important trading centre. Pulakeshin II was the best known ruler of this dynasty.
- His prashasti written by his court poet Ravikirtai form an important source of information about this period.
- Pulakeshin II led expeditions along the west and the east coast. He also stopped the advancing armies of King Harshavardhana in Deccan.
- Pulakeshin II also attacked the Pallavas.

- Gradually both dynasties became weak and two new dynasties- the Rashtrakutas and the Chola emerged.



The city of Kanchipuram was the capital of the Pallavas

The Administration of the Kingdoms

Some of the main features of the administration of the kingdoms at this time were:

- Important administrative posts like that of the chief judicial officer were hereditary. Poet Harishena in the court of Samudragupta, was the *maha-danda-nayaka* or the chief judicial officer.
- At times, many offices were held by one person. For example, Harishena was not only the chief judicial officer but also a minister of war and peace.
- Important people like the *nagara-shreshthi* or the chief banker, the *sarthavaha* or the leader of the merchant caravans, the *prathama kulika* or the chief craftsman and the head of the *kayastha* or the scribes were influential members in the local administration.
- In South India, there were a number of assemblies during the rule of the Pallavas.
- There was a Sabha- an assembly of Brahmin land owners. This assembly had various sub assemblies under it which looked after departments like irrigation, roads, agricultural operations etc.
 - The *ur* was a village assembly in areas where the land owners were not Brahmins. *Nagaram* was an organisation of the merchants.
- These assemblies were probably controlled by rich and powerful landowners and merchants.



Map showing the kingdoms of the Chalukyas and the Pandavas with their capitals.

Main features of the Army

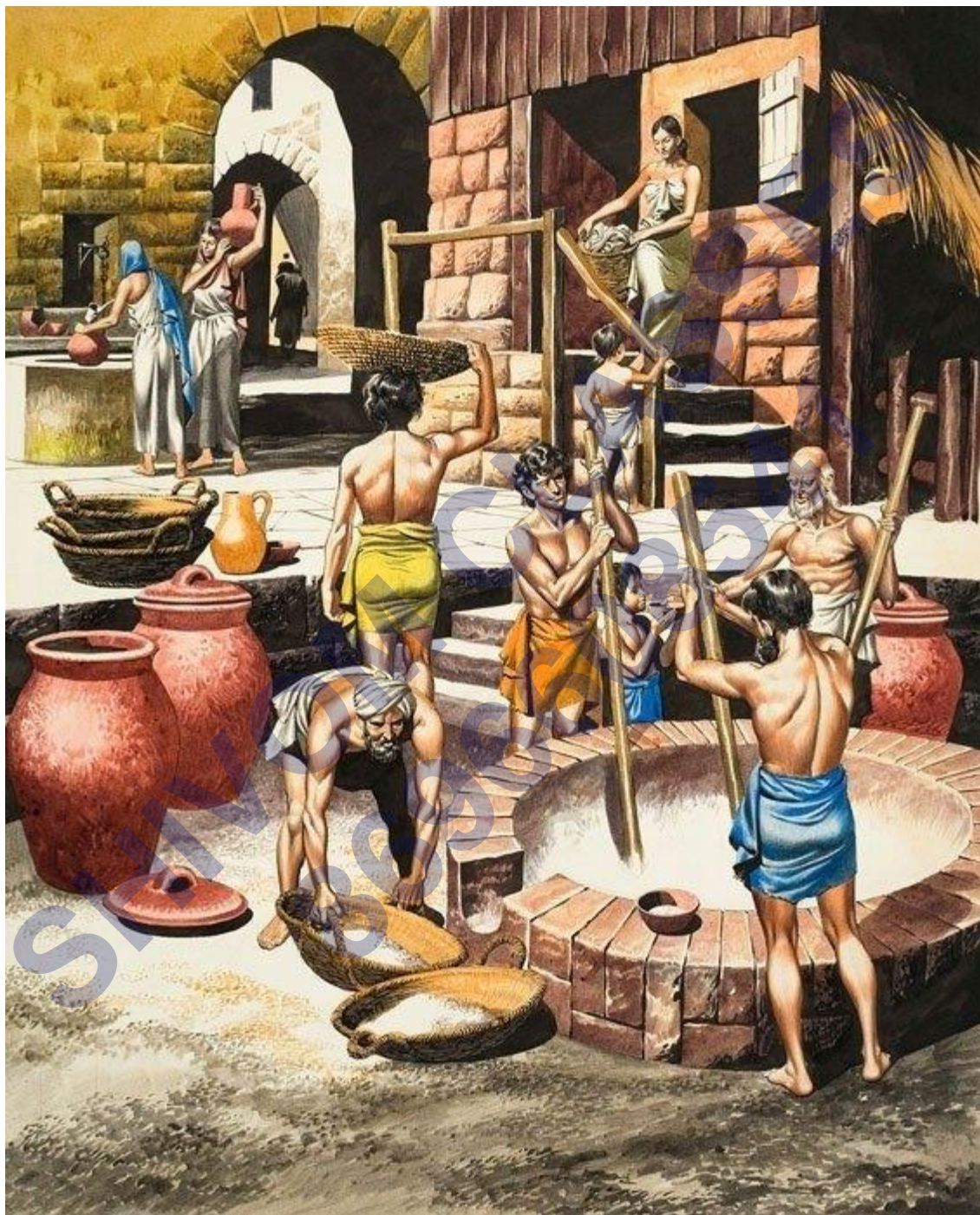
Some of the main features of the army were:

- The kings maintained well organised armies which had elephants, cavalry, chariots and foot soldiers.
- Many military leaders known as *samanthas* maintained troops of their own and provided these and equipments of warfare to the kings during wars.
- These military leaders were not paid regular salaries. Instead, they received grants of lands from the king.
- These samathas sometimes became very powerful and even threatened the authority of the weak kings.

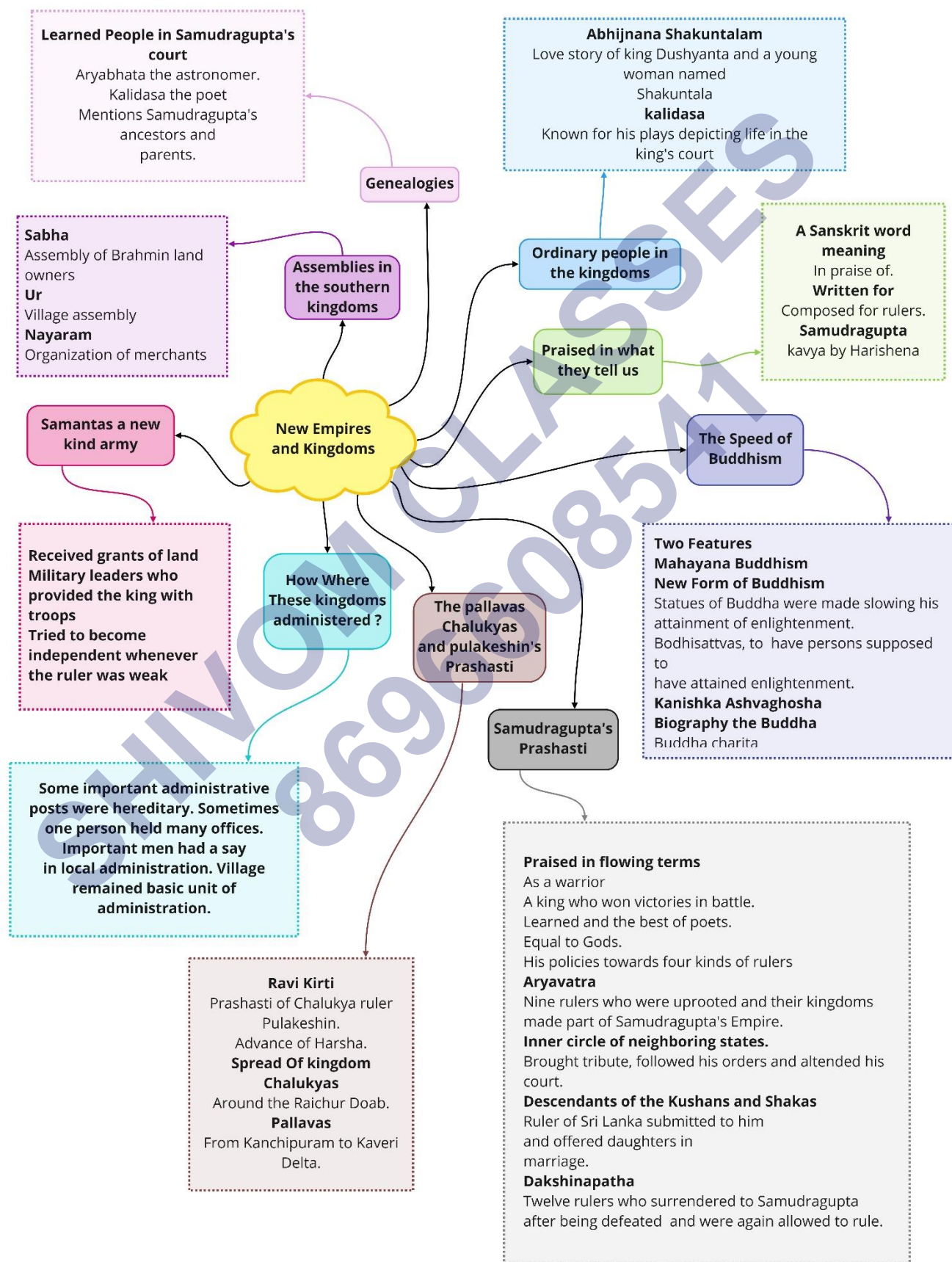
Common People in the Kingdom

As shown in the plays of Kalidasa, the king and most of the Brahmins spoke sanskrita while the common people spoke Prakrit. The Chinese pilgrim Fa Xian observed that the people of lower castes lived a miserable life. The untouchables lived on the outskirts of the city. Their contact was considered to be polluting and people avoided touching them.

Through the writings of Banabhatta, we know that whenever the king's army was on the move, it was assisted by the villagers. But while marching, the army often destroyed the villages. For example, the elephants in the army while moving destroyed the fields and trampled the huts of the villagers.



Class : 6th Social Studies (History)
Chapter - 10 : New Empires And Kingdoms



Important Questions

➤ Multiple Choice Questions:

Question 1. Harshvardhana tried to cross the Narmada to march into the Deccan but stopped by:

- (a) Pulakeshin-II
- (b) Ravikirti
- (c) Samudragupta
- (d) None

Question 2. Meaning of Maha-danda-nayaka is:

- (a) Minister of war and peace
- (b) Chief judicial officer
- (c) Chief Banker
- (d) Scribes.

Question 3. Meaning of prathama-kulika is:

- (a) Minister of war and peace
- (b) Chief judicial officer
- (c) Chief Banker
- (d) Chief craftsman

Question 4. A famous poetry book Abhijnana Shakuntalam was written by:

- (a) Banabhatta
- (b) Kalidasa
- (c) Harishena
- (d) Ravikirti

Question 5. The language used by Brahmins was:

- (a) Prakrit
- (b) Hindi
- (c) English
- (d) Sanskrit

Question 6. Samudragupta was the king of:

- (a) Maurya Empire
- (b) Gupta Regime

(c) Chalukya

(d) Cholas

Question 7. Banabhatta was in the court of:

(a) Harshavardhana

(b) Chandragupta

(c) Ashoka

(d) Samudragupta

Question 8. Who wrote the famous biography Harshacharita?

(a) Kalidasa

(b) Aryabhata

(c) Banabhatta

(d) Harisena

Question 9. Aryabhata was a famous:

(a) Poet

(b) Warrior

(c) Merchant

(d) Astronomer

Question 10. Harshavardhana first became king of:

(a) Mathura

(b) Nalanda

(c) Thanesar

(d) Kannauj

Question 11. Who was the poet in the Samudragupta court

(a) Harshsena

(b) Banbhatt

(c) Harishena

(d) Harshagupta

Question 12. Which new Indian dynasty arose in Magadha in the fourth century A.D

(a) Chalukya Dynasty

(b) Pandyas Dynasty

(c) Chola Dynasty

(d) Gupta Dynasty

Question 13. Pulakeshin II stopped Harsha to cross the _____ to march into the Deccan

(a) Narmada

(b) Tapi

(c) Godavari

(d) Krishna

Question 14. Harshavardhana, was the king of

(a) Manesar

(b) Ujjain

(c) Taxila

(d) Thanesar

Question 15. Harsha belonged to the _____ dynasty.

(a) Chola

(b) Vardhan

(c) Pallavas

(d) Gupta

➤ **Match The Following:**

	Column-I		Column-II
1.	Maha-danda-nayaka	A.	Important minister
2.	Kumar-amatya	B.	Chief Judicial officer
3.	Sandhi-vigrahika	C.	Scribes
4.	Nagara-shreshthi	D.	Chief Craftsman
5.	Prathama-kulika	E.	Chief banker
6.	Kayasthas	F.	Minister of war and peace

➤ **Fill in the blanks:**

1. We can learn about the Gupta rulers from their _____ and _____.
2. Kumara devi, mother of Samudragupta belonged to the _____.
3. _____ checked the advance of Harsha.
4. The _____ and _____ were the most important ruling dynasties in south India

during this period.

➤ Write true (T) or false (F):

1. His brother-in-law was the ruler of Kanauj.
2. Harishena composed a prashasti in praise of Gautamiputra Shri Satakarni.
3. The rulers of Aryavarta brought tribute for Samudragupta.
4. There were twelve rulers in Dakshinapatha.
5. Taxila and Madurai were important centres under the control of the Gupta rulers.
6. Local assemblies functioned for several centuries in south India.

➤ Very Short Questions:

1. Whose court poet was Ravikriti?
2. What do genealogies mean?
3. Name an Indian king who was known as 'musician king'.
4. In ancient period, who was called sarthavaha?
5. Who was the best-known Chalukya ruler?
6. In which language is Harshacharita written?
7. What was the capital of Chalukyas?
8. Which ruler was described as equal as gods?
9. How many rulers were there in dakshinapatha?
10. Who composed the Prashasti of Chalukya king Pulakeshin II?
11. Who led an expedition to western India against Shakas?
12. Who wrote the biography of king Harshavardhana?
13. What do you know about the mother of the greatest Gupta emperor Samudragupta?
14. What were the functions of assemblies in southern kingdom?
15. What was Ur?

➤ Short Questions:

1. Write a note on rulers of Dakshinapatha.
2. Who was the first ruler of Gupta Dynasty who adopted the grand title of maharaj-adhiraja?
3. What is Abhijana Shakuntalam?
4. How did poet praise the king Samudragupta?
5. How did the Sabha function in ancient India?

6. How do we come to know about Harshavardhana?

➤ Long Questions:

1. What changes do you find in the army at this time?
2. What do you know about Chalukyas kingdom?
3. What were the new administrative arrangements during this period?
4. Write a note on Pulakeshin II.
5. Write a short note on Harshavardhana?
6. Write about assemblies in the southern kingdoms.

ANSWER KEY –

➤ Multiple Choice Answer:

1. (a) Pulakeshin-II
2. (b) Chief judicial officer
3. (d) Chief craftsman
4. (b) Kalidasa
5. (b) Hindi
6. (b) Gupta Regime
7. (a) Harshavardhana
8. (c) Banabhatta
9. (d) Astronomer
10. (c) Thanesar
11. (c) Harishena
12. (d) Gupta Dynasty
13. (a) Narmada
14. (d) Thanesar
15. (b) Vardhan

➤ Match The Following:

	Column-I		Column-II
1.	Maha-danda-nayaka	B.	Chief Judicial officer
2.	Kumar-amatya	A.	Important minister

3.	Sandhi-vigrahika	F.	Minister of war and peace
4.	Nagara-shreshthi	E.	Chief banker
5.	Prathama-kulika	D.	Chief Craftsman
6.	Kayasthas	C.	Scribes

➤ **Fill in the blanks:**

1. Inscriptions and coins
2. Lichchhavi gana
3. Pulakeshin II
4. Pallavas and Chalukyas

➤ **Write true (T) or false (F):**

1. True
2. False
3. False
4. True
5. False
6. True

➤ **Very Short Answer:**

1. Pulakeshin II.
2. Genealogies mean lists of ancestors.
3. Samudragupta.
4. Leader of the merchant caravans was called as Sarthavaha.
5. The best-known Chalukya ruler was Pulakeshin II.
6. Harshacharita is written in Sanskrit.
7. Aihole was the capital of the Chalukyas.
8. Samudragupta.
9. There were twelve rulers in dakshinapatha.
10. Ravikirti the Prashasti of Chalukya king Pulakeshin II.
11. Chandragupta II led an expedition to western India against Shakas.
12. Banabhatta wrote the biography of king Harshavardhana.
13. His mother was Kumara devi and she belonged to the Lichchhavi gana.

14. These assemblies looked after irrigation, agricultural operations, making roads, local temples, etc.
15. The ur was a village assembly found in areas where the land owners were not brahmins.

➤ Short Answer:

1. There were twelve rulers in dakshinapatha. They surrendered to Samudragupta after being defeated and he then allowed them to rule again.
2. Chandragupta was the first ruler of the Gupta dynasty to adopt the grand title of maharaj-adhiraja
3. Abhijnana Shakuntalam is the most famous play of Kalidasa. It is the story of the love between a king named Dushyanta and a young woman named Shakuntala.
4. The poet praised the king in glowing terms — as a warrior, as a king who won victories in battle, who was learned and the best of poets. He is also described as equal to the gods.
5. Sabha was an assembly of brahmin land owners and this assembly functioned through subcommittees, which looked after irrigation, agricultural operations, making roads, local temples, etc.
6. **We can find out about Harshavardhana from:**
 - His biography, the Harshacharita written by his court poet, Banabhatta.
 - A detailed account left by Xuan Zang, who spent a lot of time at Harsha's court.

➤ Long Answer:

1. Some kings maintained a well-organised army. Besides, there were military leaders who provided the king with troops whenever he needed them. They were not paid regular salaries. Instead, some of them received grants of land. They collected revenue from the land and used this to maintain soldiers and horses, and provide equipment for warfare.
2. Chalukyas was one of the most important ruling dynasties in south India. Chalukyas was centred around the Raichur Doab, between the rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra. Aihole, the capital of the Chalukyas, was an important trading centre. It developed as a religious centre, with a number of temples.
3. There were some new developments. Kings adopted a number of steps to win the support of men who were powerful, either economically, or socially, or because of their political and military strength.

For instance:

- Some important administrative posts were made hereditary.

- Sometimes, one person held many offices.
 - Besides, important men probably had a say in local administration.
4. The best-known Chalukya ruler was Pulakeshin II. We know about him from a prashasti, composed by his court poet Ravikirti. This tells us about his ancestors, who are traced back through four generations from father to son. Pulakeshin evidently got the kingdom from his uncle. According to Ravikirti, he led expeditions along both the west and the east coasts. Besides, he checked the advance of Harsha.
 5. Harsha was not the eldest son of his father, but became king of Thanesar after both his father and elder brother died. His brother-in-law was the ruler of Kanauj and he was killed by the ruler of Bengal. Harsha took over the kingdom of Kanauj, and then led an army against the ruler of Bengal. Although he was successful in the east, and conquered both Magadha and Bengal, he was not as successful elsewhere. He tried to cross the Narmada to march into the Deccan, but was stopped by a ruler belonging to the Chalukya dynasty, Pulakeshin II.
 6. The inscriptions of the Pallavas mention a number of local assemblies. These included the sabha, which was an assembly of brahmin land owners. This assembly functioned through subcommittees, which looked after irrigation, agricultural operations, making roads, local temples, etc. The ur was a village assembly found in areas where the land owners were not brahmins. And the nagaram was an organisation of merchants. It is likely that these assemblies were controlled by rich and powerful landowners and merchants. Many of these local assemblies continued to function for centuries.