

# A Historical Study of Gupta Empire to Ancient Indian Coins

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## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 15 April 2019

### Keywords

Gupta Empire, Ancient, Indian Coins

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## ABSTRACT

The age of Gupta's has been regarded as the age of all-round progress in India by all historians. Obviously, the Gupta period was the traditional time of antiquated India however we need to acknowledge its impediments moreover. The expectations for everyday comforts, which achieved their pinnacle, were constrained to privileged societies alone and, promote the style of the Gupta period was confined to northern India alone. Coins are as important as the inscription in history. They confirm the information derived from literature. They are of various metals –gold, silver, copper, or alloy and contain legends or simple marks. The coins are very important to the reconstruct of the ancient Indian history. It is a part of archaeological sources. Those with dates is probably very valuable for the framework of Indian chronology. Coins are almost our sole evidence with regarded to the Indo Scythian and Indo Bactrian King. The Bilingual coins had served as Rosetta Stones in deciphering the Ancient Indian writings. The purity of the metal reflects the financial conditions of the Gupta Empire. The inscription on the coin indicates territory over which the rulers ruled. Some coin throws significant light on the personal events of certain rulers. The discovery of the same kind of coins at different places helps up in fixing the coverage of various kingdoms in ancient India.

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## 1. Introduction

The history of coins extends from ancient times to the present, and is related to economic history, the history of minting technologies, the history shown by the images on coins, and the history of coin collecting. Coins are still widely used for monetary and other purposes. All western histories of coins begin with their invention at some time slightly before or after 700 BC. In Aegina Island, or according to others in Ephesus, Lydia, 650 BC. Ancient India in circa 6th century BC was one of the earliest issuers of coins in the world. Ancient India: In ancient India, people used money trees to store their coins. A money tree was a flat piece of metal, shaped like a tree, with metal branches. At the end of each branch was a round disk with a hole in the center. Each of these disks was an ancient Indian coin. When you needed money, you simply broke off a coin from your money tree. The ancient Indians often used pictures of dragons and other make-believe animals on their coins.

## 2. Gupta empire in the history of India

The Gupta period marks an important phase in the history of ancient India. The long and efficient rule of the Guptas made a huge impact on the political, social and cultural spheres. Though the Gupta Empire was not as widespread as the Mauryan Empire was in India, yet the Gupta dynasty was successful in creating an empire that is significant in the history of India. The Gupta Period is additionally prominently known as the Golden Age of India and for the correct reasons. The way of life and culture of the Gupta tradition is known through the accessibility of different antiquated coins, sacred writings, engravings, writings, and so on having a place with that time. The leaders of the Gupta Empire were effective chairmen who knew how to oversee with a firm hand without being tyrannical. Amid this age, workmanship and training thrived and numerous

incredible disclosures were made in these fields. Aryabhata and Varahamihira, the two awesome mathematicians contributed much amid this period in the field of Vedic Mathematics. Aryabhata assessed the estimation of "Pi" to the fourth decimal place. Polynomial math was created, as it were, and the ideas of zero and boundlessness were found. The images of numbers 1 to 9 were contrived which was an extraordinary commitment in science. These images came to be known as Hindu Arabic numerals later when the Arabs excessively embraced them. The Gupta Age is likewise known for its advances in cosmology. Amid the rule of the Gupta rulers, cosmologists and savants proposed the hypothesis that the earth was not level but rather round. The hypothesis of gravity was likewise propounded amid this time. The space experts made an achievement when they discovered the diverse planets and began to make horoscopes in view of the planetary positions. The field of drug additionally propelled a considerable measure amid this time and specialists used to perform tasks notwithstanding amid that period. Since such huge numbers of revelations and advances were made in expressions, solution, writing and science amid Gupta period, it has been known as the Golden Age of India. This period is viewed as the brilliant time of Indian culture. The high purposes of this social inventiveness are glorious and innovative engineering, model, and painting. The divider artistic creations of Ajanta Cave in the focal Deccan are considered among the best and most capable works of Indian craftsmanship. The sketches in the surrender speak to the different existences of the Buddha, yet additionally are the best source we have of the everyday life in India at the time. There are forty-eight caverns making up Ajanta, a large portion of which were cut out of the stone in the vicinity of 460 and 480, and they are loaded with Buddhist figures. The stone sanctuary at Elephanta (close Bombay) contains an intense, eighteen foot statue of the three-headed Shiva, one of the rule Hindu divine beings. Each head

speaks to one of Shiva's parts: that of making, that of saving, and that of wrecking. The period likewise observed dynamic working of Hindu sanctuaries. These sanctuaries contain a lobby and a pinnacle. The best essayist of the time was Kalidasa. Verse in the Gupta age tended towards a couple of classes: religious and thoughtful verse, verse, story histories (the most well known of the common literary works), and show. The best Mathematician of India Aryabhata likewise has a place with this age. The Panchatantra and Kamasutra were composed amid this period. The Nalanda University in Bihar, came to distinction amid the Gupta run the show. Shockingly, not very many landmarks worked amid Gupta rule survive today. Cases of Gupta engineering are found in the Vaishnavite Tigawa sanctuary at Jabalpur (in Madhya Pradesh state) worked in 415 AD and another sanctuary at Deogarh near Jhansi worked in 510 AD. Bhitia in Uttar Pradesh State has various antiquated Gupta sanctuaries, most are in ruins. In view of broad exchange, the way of life of India turned into the predominant culture around the Bay of Bengal, significantly and profoundly impacting the way of life of Burma, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka. From various perspectives, the period amid and following the Gupta tradition was the time of "More noteworthy India," a time of social action in India and encompassing nations working off of the base of India.



Fig 1: Iron Pillar

### Beginnings of the Guptas

Since the fall of the Mauryan Empire in the second century BC, India had remained divided. For 500 years, India was a patchwork of independent kingdoms. During the late third century, the powerful Gupta family gained control of the local kingship of Magadha (modern-day eastern India and Bengal). The Gupta Empire is generally held to have begun in 320 AD, when Chandragupta I (not to be confused with Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Mauryan Empire), the third king of the dynasty, ascended the throne. He soon began conquering neighboring regions. His son, Samudragupta (often called Samudragupta the Great) founded a new capital city, Pataliputra, and began a conquest of the entire subcontinent. Samudragupta conquered most of India, though in the more distant regions he reinstalled local kings in exchange for their loyalty. Samudragupta was also a great patron of the arts. He was a poet and a musician, and he brought great writers, philosophers, and artists to his court. Unlike the Mauryan kings after Ashoka, who were Buddhists, Samudragupta was a devoted worshipper of the Hindu gods. Nonetheless, he did not reject Buddhism, but invited Buddhists to be part of his court and allowed the religion to spread in his realm.

### Gupta Empire Expansion

Samudragupta succeeded his father, Chandragupta I, in 335 CE, and ruled for about 45 years. He conquered the kingdoms of Ahichchhatra and Padmavati early in his reign, then attacked neighboring tribes, including the Malwas, Yaudheyas, Arjunayanas, Maduras, and Abhiras. By his death in 380 CE, Samudragupta had incorporated over 20 kingdoms into his realm, and extended the Gupta Empire from the Himalayas to the Narmada River in central India, and from the Brahmaputra River that cuts through four modern Asian nations to the Yamuna—the longest tributary of the Ganges River in northern India. To celebrate his conquest, Samudragupta performed the royal Vedic ritual of Ashvamedha, or horse sacrifice. Special coins were minted to commemorate the Ashvamedha, and the king took the title of Maharajadhiraja (or "King of Kings") even higher than the traditional ruler's title of Maharaja. According to the Gupta records, Samudragupta nominated his son, Prince Chandragupta II, born of Queen Dattadevi, as his successor. However, his eldest son, Ramagupta, may have been his immediate successor until he was dethroned by Chandragupta II in 380 CE.

### 3. Types of coins in ancient India:

Numismatic or coin collecting is the science of coins under an economic, legislative, metrological and artistic point of view. It has a great importance in the whole Historical and Archaeological science; as a matter of fact into the peculiarity of a people or age the Coin holds a fundamental role: Numismatic has always reflected the political, economical, artistic and social trends of the time in which it developed. The most ancient coins of India are commonly acknowledged as 'punch-marked coins'. The Ashtadhyayi cites that the metallic pieces were stamped (ahata) with symbols (rupa). As the name indicates, these coins carry the symbols of assorted types, punched on pieces of silver of defined weight. Fascinatingly, the earliest Indian coins have no determined shapes and were mostly unified. Secondly, these coins are deficient in any inscriptions scripted in contemporary languages and almost always struck in silver. These unique characters makes ancient Indian coins stand very much apart from their contemporaries in Greece. Punch-marked coins are marked with 1-5 (and at times more) marks, representing a choice of symbols. Two well acknowledged numismatists, D. B. Spooner and D.R. Bhandarkar, after careful study, independently had concluded that the punching of these umpteen symbols exemplifying animals, hills, and tree and human figures followed a definitive pattern and these coins were always issued under royal authority.

**Punch Marked Coins:** There is no particular date that has been stated for the discovery of advent of "punch marked coins". Historians say that the first trace for this coin were available in Harappa and MohenjoDaro in the Indus Valley Civilization. There is no proper evidence to establish that these coins were actually from that era. However, it is widely believed that the "punch marked coins" were issued somewhere between the 7th and 8th century BC and 1st century AD. These coins got its name from the manufacturing technique, mostly made of silver, with symbols embossed on the coins on either side. The coins were first issued by the merchant guilds and then by the States, and were extensively used for the purpose of urban development and trade activity.

**Dynastic Coins:** The exact date of the dynastic coin usage is contentious. The earliest use of these coins relate to the dynastic rules of Kushans, Saka-Pahlavas and Indo-Greeks. The main use of these coins was between 2nd century BC and 2nd century AD. The Indo-Greek coins are signified by the Hellenistic traditions, where the Greek gods and goddesses figure prominently in the coin surface, along with the issuer's portrait. These coins, with Greek gods and legends, are extremely significant as it has helped in the reconstruction of Indo-Greek history. The Saka coinage is perhaps the earliest dated coins, which goes back to the Saka era, 78 AD. The official calendar of the Indian Republic is represented by the Saka era. Much of the Kushan coinage attributes to Vima Kadphises. The coins from the Kushan Dynasty generally depict iconographic forms taken from Mesopotamian, Zoroastrian, Greek and Indian mythology. Mostly Indian gods were portrayed in those coins and were influenced by subsequent issues, namely the Guptas.

**Samudragupta:** Samudra Gupta, (died 380 CE), regional emperor of India from about 330 to 380 CE. He generally is considered the epitome of an "ideal king" of the "golden age of Hindu history," as the period of the imperial Guptas (320–510 CE) has often been called. The son of King Chandra Gupta I and the Licchavi princess Kumaradevi, he is pictured as a muscular warrior, a poet, and a musician who displayed "marks of hundreds of wounds received in battle." In many ways he personified the Indian conception of the hero. From inscriptions on gold coins and on the Ashoka pillar in the fort at Allahabad, Samudra Gupta is shown to have been especially devoted to the Hindu god Vishnu. He revived the ancient Vedic horse sacrifice, probably at the conclusion of his fighting days, and distributed large sums for charitable purposes during these ceremonies. A special gold coin that he issued commemorated this ceremony, while another showed him playing the harp; all were of high gold content and excellent workmanship. Among the Gupta kings, the coins of Samudra Gupta are especially significant.

#### 4. Regard ancient Indian coins news in media:

##### Gold Coins Of Gupta Era Found In West Bengal.

Gold coins belonging to the Gupta period have been found at Ahiran in West Bengal Murshidabad district. The coins found during a road construction on National Highway 34, date around fourth century A.D. The region's chronological history may have to be rewritten following this find, archaeologists said. It is the second such discovery in the State since the early colonial era and is considered significant, as according to historians, it can present new evidences of the reach of the Gupta empire. It also opens up new scope of research in Gupta coinage system in India. Amal Roy, the deputy director of the State's Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government visited the spot on Saturday. Gautam Sengupta, director, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of West Bengal, said it is second discovery of a coin horde of the Gupta era in West Bengal, the first one being at Kalighat here during the early colonial era. The gold coins were found where the soil was brought from nearby Gonkar and Hatpara areas under Sagardighi police station. The coins were believed to have been carried along with the soil. Archaeologists visited those sites as well. Mr. Roy told The Hindu that 11 coins had

so far been found and kept at the local police station. More coins could possibly be unearthed. He said the finding could help historians fill up the gaps in Murshidabad's history where there were evidences of settlements from the first and second century A.D. during the Kushana period and then during the Sashanka period dating to the sixth and seventh century A.D. The coins were of the imperial series of coins during the regime of Gupta kings Chandragupta and Samudragupta, Mr. Roy said. "The coins depict a king along with a Garuda Stambha on his right and with a fire altar. On the other side of the coin there is an image of goddess Lakshmi," he said. Historians hold varying opinions about the original homeland of the Guptas and the discovery of the coin horde can throw some light on the issue, Dr. Sengupta said. "The discovery of the coins will help us revisit the original homeland of the Guptas as well as the extent of presence of early Guptas in the area," he added.

##### Gupta Period Gold Coin, Locket Found.

**KOLKATA/DANTAN:** A wave of excitement swept the Moghalmari excavation site near Dantan on Wednesday following the chance discovery of a gold coin and a locket. Though yet to be confirmed, archaeologists feel the exhibits belong to the sixth century AD, which is generally known as the Gupta period in ancient history. It is also known as King Shashanka's reign in the history of Bengal. In 2003, when Indologist BN Mukherjee had visited Dantan to document Bengal's navigational history; he came across a huge mound at Moghalmari, which the locals call Sakhi Sena or Sashi Sena. They told him that underneath the mound lay the state's oldest Buddhist monastery, which might even beat the Raktamrittika Vihara of Murshidabad (erstwhile Karnasuvarna) in age. Chinese scholar Hiuen Tsang had mentioned the existence of an old Buddhist monastery in Bengal that was older than Raktamrittika. However, this was never found and historians felt the excavation might finally bring the age-old mystery to an end. At the behest of Mukherjee, the Calcutta University took up the excavation project at Moghalmari. Gradually, a tri-ratha structure, typical of Buddhist monastic architecture complete with innumerable cells for the monks was unearthed.

##### Art, architecture & culture

The finest examples of painting, sculpture and architecture of the period can be found in Ajanta, Ellora, Sarnath, Mathura, Anuradhapura and Sigiriya. The basic tenets of Shilpa Shashtra (Treatise on Art) were followed everywhere including in town planning. Stone studded golden stairways, iron pillars (The iron pillar of Dhar is twice the size of Delhi's Iron Pillar), intricately designed gold coins, jewellery and metal sculptures speak volumes about the skills of the metalsmiths. Carved ivories, wood and lac-work, brocades and embroidered textile also thrived. Practicing vocal music, dance and seven types of musical instruments including veena (an Indian musical stringed instrument), flute and mridangam (drum) were a norm rather than exception. These were regularly performed in temples as a token of devotion. In classic Indian style, artists and litterateurs were encouraged to meditate on the imagery within and capture its essence in their creations. As Agni Purana suggests, "O thou Lord of all gods, teach me in dreams how to carry out all the work I have in my mind".



Fig. 2



Fig 3: Gold Coin of Gupta Period

## Economy

The spread of information with respect to the utilization of iron furrow share, compost, water system and safeguarding of steers riches in reverse territories additionally added to provincial thriving. It however conveyed no alleviation to laborers who kept on affliction huge taxation rate. The Gupta and post-Gupta period saw a relative decrease in nation's exchange and trade. Till AD 550 India kept on having some exchange with the eastern Roman domain to which it sent out silk, and flavors. Around the 6th century the Romans learnt the specialty of raising silk worms. This antagonistically influenced India's remote exchange this valuable ware. The disturbance of north-western course by the Hunas was another factor for this decrease. India attempted to make up the misfortune via carrying on exchange with south-east Asian nations yet it didn't help restore the economy significantly. The misfortune in exchange decreased the inflow of gold and silver into the nation. It is affirmed by a general shortage of gold coins after the Guptas. The Guptas issued an extensive number of gold coins called dinaras. Yet, we see that the gold coins of each progressive Gupta ruler, after Chandragupta II, contain less of gold and a greater amount of composite. After the Guptas not very many coins of Kings of various administrations have been found. Therefore without coinage we can assume that an independent monetary framework with restricted exchange won after the defeat of the Guptas.

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