

NUMISMATIC STUDY OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF GUPTA EMPIRE

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Introduction:

Today's world is representing the post-modern period. In this era developments measured by the availability of materialistic things. For this development currency is the most powerful medium of exchange. Currency plays the prominent role in present days as well as play the significant role in historic period. In the history of human evaluation and its development, coins had been originated recently. When we study human evaluation, we get idea about its developmental steps with great discoveries. All these discoveries made human life simple and rational. Some important and great discoveries like, invention of fire, Wheel, Agriculture etc. made human life stable and society got in shape and started forming social group. The discovery have own importance. Coins made humans commercial life easy and relevant. It also helped to simplify their exchange system.

In initial stage ancient coinage did not have the ideal measure and shape. But in the course of time development of coinage took place and apex point of Indian coinage had been taken place in the age of Kushana and Gupata. Indian coin had been introduced in regional, central monarch and commercial group. The scientific and systematic study of Coin known as numismatics, with the help of numismatic study researcher can discover the past and explore the political, socio, economic, religious & cultural condition of that period. We can also established the chronological, genealogical & Cultural sequence of dynasties and able to crate the intact structure

of past. Thus the Numismatic study plays an important role in re exploring and reconstructing the history.

Coins have two sides obverse and reverse. With the study of obverse and reverse sides, we get an idea about shape & weight of coins, types of coins, metal, and legend on coins, picture, symbol, mints and origination of coins. Whenever we expands our view, we get adequate knowledge about economical transactions, its barter system, contemporary prosperity and downfall, technological development, political system and expansion, its philosophy and religious ideas, art and artistry of that time. Its Numismatic study is multipurpose and interpretive.

Research Methodology:

For this research paper researcher has used the Archaeological explorative method for data collection. Descriptive and analytical research methodology is used interpret the data. Regarding the research problem researcher has collected Primary data from Numismatic study and research institute, Anjaneri, Nasik and Chh. Shivaji Maharaj Museum, Mumbai researcher had visited the private collection of Kishor Chandak of Solapur. Photograph of coins from above area has been taken. For the secondary sources various libraries were used. Libraries like the numismatic study and research institute library, Anjaneri, Nasik. As well as Chh. Shivaji Maharaj Museum library, Mumbai has been referred. Also the Deccan collage library, pune and solapur university library has been referred.

Selection of topic:

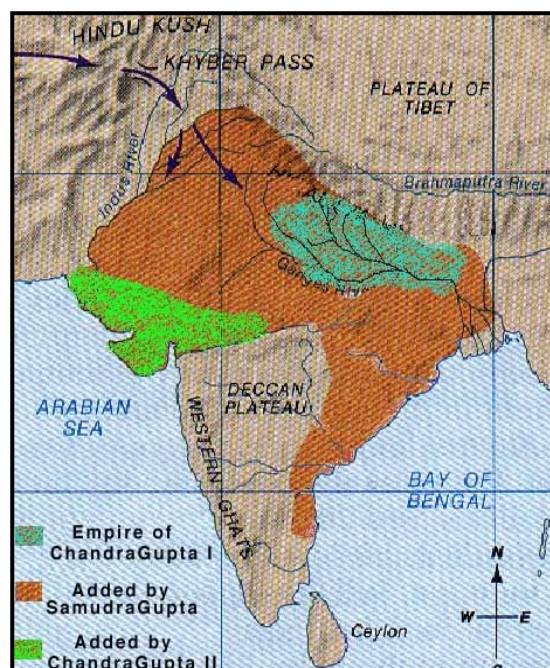
After the downfall of Maurya Empire, many small kingdoms and regional power rose. Which caused to continue foreign assault on Indian Territory. Gupta Kings took benefit of this instability to extend their boundaries and established glorious Empire. They left their political influence over India and brought India under single domination. Rise of Gupta dynasty took place revolutionary occurrence in Indian political, social, religious and cultural arena. Some of the historians glorified Gupta dynastic period as the “Golden Age” in the Indian history. Ancient Gupata Empire

was known as a one of the prosperous and dominant central power. This period also known as the Golden age of Indian art and architecture. Historians and archaeologists have the difference of opinion regarding to the golden age concept. In Guptas Empire their currency (Coins) had played the significant role to crate the identity of golden age. Hence researcher would like discover the what is the actual political and economic condition of that period, on the basis of availability of ancient Gupta's coins. This numismatic study has a ample research opportunities to explore this political and economically transforming period. So this topic is selected for the study.

Geographical& Historical expansion of Gupta Empire:

Gupta dynasty arose in North East India. Sri Gupta was the founder of the Gupta dynasty. According to the Dr. Fleet the Chandra GuptaI was the founder of Gupta dynasty which began in 319-20 A.D. He has been described as a Mharajadhiraj or King of the King.(Mahajan V.D.476-477)He had founded Gupta kingdom around Magadha. That time the territory of U.P. and Bengal included in the Gupta kingdom.

The Gupta Empire extended in the time of Chandragupta I. He was the first paramount ruler of Gupta kingdom; he had achieved extensive conquest, which made him paramount sovereign of a large part of North India. According to coins of different part of India and descriptions from Puranas the emperor of Chandragupta I extended around Ayodhya, Parag and Magadha. King of Vallabhi was feudatory of ChandraguptaI. (Mahajan V.D.Page No.477)



After Chandragupta I Samudragupta was crowned, It was great triumphant. He acquired lot of universal conquest. These spectacular victories extended the

boundaries of his kingdom from all sides. His kingdom extended from foothill of north Himalaya to Narmada in South India and from East Brahmaputra to west Yamuna in West. In his regime he left a large empire behind him. (Mahajan V.D. Page No. 479-80)

Samudragupta's successor Chandragupta II was efficient ruler. He acquired lot of conquest and extended the boundaries of kingdom, as his father. Chandragupta II defeated Shaka, Kushana and Hunas and extended the boundaries from Himalaya in North to Tamilnadu in South and Afghanistan in North with West Arabian sea in West to East Assam. Chandragupta II left his political influence over India, exclusively on Vakataka in Maharashtra. In the time of Chandragupta II Gupta Empire was on the peak of its political expansion.. Chandragupta adopted the title of vikramaditya. In his period the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hian (399-414) visited India and wrote the explanatory information of the ruler and common people (Sharma R.S. . India's Ancient Past, Page No. 234) In course of time Gupta Empire declined due to many reasons in the 6th century A.D.

Gupta Dynasty and Their Coins:

Gupta Dynasty ruled in from the beginning of 4th century A.D. to the end of the 6th century A.D. that period was known as the "Golden Age" or "Classical Era" of Indian History. At the time of Gupta. India was under single domination. In the regime of Gupta dynasty, India reached to the apex position in the realm of Art and Artistry. Gupta Kings issued most diverse coins. Guptas Most of the issued coins were of gold, they were also issued silver and copper coins for their subject. Technically these coins are great, their size, weight, design and legend shows the greatness of this empire. These coins also give us socio, economical, political & religious information of Gupta empire,

Chandragupta I (300 A.D to 330 A.D.):

Chandragupta I was the first paramount ruler of Gupta Dynasty. He issued King and Queen Type Coin... Coins of Chandragupta I came across from the Mathura,

Ayodhya, Lucknau, Varanasi and Gazipur. Great Bayana hoard also consist's these types of coins

Type of Coin : King and Queen Type



Obverse



Reverse

Metal : Gold

Weight: 120 grains

Description : on obverse King standing usually nimbate, wearing close-fitting tailed coat, pearl-bordered head-dress, earrings, armlets and shoes and offering with right hand, raised up, an object which is a ring in some cases or bangle to the Kumaradevi. Who stands before him facing right, wearing a sari and neck less, armlets and Bangles. On the reverse side Goddess Female image (Ambika?), nimbate, wearing a Sari an upper garment across her shoulder, holding a Pasa in outstretched right hand and a cornucopias in left hand. Border of dots all round.

Legend : Lichhavayah. (Davlikar M. K. Page No 180)

SamudraguptasCoin: (330 A.D. to 370 A.D.) :

After Chandragupta I succeeded by Samudragupta. The main source of Samudragupta's history is Allahabad Pillar Inscription. In His ruling period he has acquired and extended the boundaries of his kingdom. Samundragupta issued only gold coins for his subjects. He issued coins differenttypes of coins (Davlikar M. K. Page No 180) Samudragupta and kumar gupta had also issued special coins for distributing as a *Dakshina* to the priests who participated in their Asvamedha scarification (Gupta P.L. Page No 72)

Type of Coin: Tiger Slayer Type:



Obverse



Reverse

Metal : Gold

Weight: 115 grains

Description: On obverse King standing wearing Turban (Pagote), short Dhotee, necklace, ear-ring and Armlet (keura). Trampling on a Tiger, which falls backwards, Moon crescent is behind Tiger. On reverse shows Goddess Ganga standing on Makara, Wearing Necklace, Ear-ring (Karnabhushan), Anklet (Painjan) and Armlet (Keyura). (Gupta P.L. Coine.73)

Legend: On obverse “Vyaghraparakramah”. On reverse “Raja Samudraguptah”.

Type of Coin: Standard Type Coin



Obverse



Reverse

Metal: Gold. **Weight:** 115 grains.

Description: On obverse King standing, wearing close coat and other ornaments. Dropping Ardhi (incense) on Vediti (Alter) with his right hand. Behind Vediti Garuda Dhvaja is shown beneath the king's arm legend. On reverse side Goddess (Laxmi) seated, wearing Kanchuki (loose robe) with other useful ornaments.

Legend: On obverse “Samarasatavitatavijayo jitaripurajito divam jayati”.

On reverse “Parakramah”

Type of Coin-Lyrist type:



Obverse



Reverse

Metal: Gold. **Weight:** 111 to 121 grains.

Description: on obverse King seated cross-legged to one on couch, wearing traditional cloths and useful ornaments, Playing Vina (Lute) which lies on his knees. On reverse Goddess Lakshmi seated on the stool. Wearing *Kanchuki* (loose robe) and ornaments and held *Pasa*(Fillet)in right hand and *Vrushbhsrung* (Cornucopia)in left.

Legend: On obverse “Maharajadhiraja-sri-Samudraguptah”.

: On reverse “Samudraguptah”(Altekar A.S.Coin of Gupta Empire,)

Type of Coin-Asvamedha type:



Metal: Gold.**Weight** : 115 to 118 garins.

Description: on obverse shows Horse standing. These Horse adorn with verious ornaments. Beneath the Horse letter Si is impressed.

Legend: “Rajadhirajah prithivim avitva divam jayatyaprativarya viryah”.

(The emperior who perform the Ashwamedha yjana conqar earth & Heaven (Swarga)(Davlikar M.K. Page No 185)

Chandragupta II (375 A.D. to 414 A.D.):

Chandragupta II was one of the most powerful kings of the Gupta Dynasty. He extended the limits of the empire by marriage alliance and conquest. His daughter Prabhavati gupta got married to Vakataka king.(Sharma R.S. Page No 234) Hence Chandragupta established the indirect control on vakaraka Kingdom The most important event of his period that he had conquest of Western Malva and Saurashtra (Kathiawad) which were under the rule of Saka shatrapa. He had assumed the *Vikramaditya* title. He issued various types of Coins of gold, silver & copper

Gold Coins:**Type of Coins: Archa Type:**

Obverse



Reverse

Metal: Gold. Weight: 121, 124 or 127 grains.

Description: On Obverse, Standing king, wearing Coat, Cap with fringe of Pearl and other ornaments. He holds Archer in left hand and arrow in left, front of them Garuda-dhvaja. Beneath left hand word Chandra. On reverse, Goddess, seating on the Lotus wearing useful ornaments, Holding Lotus in uplifted left hand and *Rushabhsrung* in right, resting feet on Lotus.

Legend: On obverse “Deva sri Maharajadhiraja sri Chandraguptah”

On reverse “Sri Vikramah”.

Type of Coins-Lion slyer Type:



Type of Coin: Lion Slyer Type.

Metal: Gold. **Weight :** 121 grains.

Description : on obverse king standing right. He wears Ardhorukh and other ornaments. Lion on right, king trampling on Lion with one foot, shooting with arrow at Lion.

Legend : "Narendrachandrah prathitasriya divam".

(Gupta P.L.Page No. 72)

Copper Coins:



Type of Coin: King Type.

Metal: Copper

Weight: 100 grains.

Description: The Bust of the ruler to the right.

Kumargupta I (414 A.D. to 455 A.D.):

Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumargupta I. He issued gold, silver, copper and he also issued silver gilded copper coins in the critical stage. His silver coins were also found at Satara in Maharastra. He performed Ashvamedha Yadnya. He introduced newly Apratigha type of coin. Image of Kartikeya was seen first time on the coin, and the figure of Peacock and Garuda was found on his coins. (Davlikar M.K.Page No 200)

Type of Coin: Horseman Type:



Observe



Reverse

Metal: Gold. **Weight:** 127 grains.

Description: On obverse king riding a ornamented horse, wearing Coat, sword on his waist. On reverse side Goddess Lakshmi seated on stool, wearing useful ornaments. Lakshmi feeds grapes to Peacock. She holds Lotus in her left hand.

Legend : on reverse “Ajitamahendra”. (Davlikar M.K.Page No 202)

Lion slayer type:



Type of Coin: Lion slayer Type.

Metal: Gold. **Weight:** 127 grains.

Description: Goddess Durga seated on Lion, Lion facing towards right. Goddess holds Fillet in her right hand and Lotus in her left hand.

Legend : Sihanihant Mahendragaj
(Lion killer kings elephant)

Type of Coin: Garuda Type:



Obverse



Reverse

Metal: Silver.

Weight: 30 grains.

Description: On obverse bust of the ruler facing towards right. There is a date indicated on the right side. On reverse side the image of Garuda with outstretched wings.

Legend: on reverse side “*Parambhagvata Rajadhiraja Sri Kumarguptah Mahendraditya*”.

This coin is merely similar with Chandragupt II Silver Coin & also influenced by Kshatrap coins

Skandgupta (455 A.D. to 468 A.D.):

After Kumargupta I his son was crowned. He had succeeded to stop the attacks of

tribals Humans. He got engaged in warfare & internal conflicts in his regime. He issued ample, silver coin compare to gold coins. (Davlikar M.K. Page No.216). The noticeable feature of his coins is that the debasement of metal that is found in the coin of his father is quite absent. (Gupata P.L. Page No 74)

Type of Coin: Archer Type.



Reverse



Obverse

Metal: Gold.

Weight : 127 to 130 grains.

Description: On obverse side king standing, wearing Coat and other useful ornaments. He holds Arrow in his right hand and Bow in his left hand. There is a Garud dhvaja on the right side. Beneath the left hand, the letters Skand is in vertical. On reverse: Goddess Lakshmi seated on Lotus. She holds Pasa in her right hand and Lotus in her left. **Legend:** On obverse "*Jayati Mahitalam*". On reverse "*Sri Skandguptah*"

Type of Coin: Garuda Type



Metal: Silver. **Weight:** 30 grains.

Description: image of Garuda on reverse side with outstretched wings.

Legend: "*Parambhagvatah Maharajadhiraja Sri skandguptah*"

Legend: "*Parambhagvatah Maharajadhiraja Sri skandguptah*" (Davlikar M.K. Page No 219)

Numismatics base study of Political and Economic Conditions of Gupta Empire:

Gupatas king established single politically powerful dominant empire in ancient

India. India's Political, Economical & cultural prosperity materialized in this period so the nationalist school of historian called this period "Golden Age" of Ancient India. Gupta Kingdom was not only geographically expanded but also economically strong. The Political, Economical & Religious condition reflected from Gupta Coins. Coins help to understand the political expansion of Gupta Empire. Changing pattern of coins and the metal of coins shows their economical progress images symbols on coins acquaint us the religious and cultural scenario of Gupta. We can also trace the causes behind the downfall of Gupta. Thus coins play significant role in the Gupta empire.

Chandragupta I issued King and Queen Type coins in his regime. That coins are good in its artistic view as well as create some political possibilities. The legends on coin have lot of historical importance. It proves that Chandragupta I had great political relations with the state of Lichhavi. This legend shows prominent proof of his matrimonial alliance with Lichhavi. (Davlikar M.K. 179) The legends so many questions in our mind. In answer to these questions, we get so many possibilities from that. Lichhavi might have helped Chandragupta I in establishment of his kingdom in the beginning or helped him to make his kingdom powerful or to expand. We can't ignore the possibility that Lichhavi state merged into the Gupta Kingdom. Though these possibilities create some difficulties it clears that there was a strong political relations between Gupta and Lichhavi. It also focused light on the great contribution of Lichhavis in favour of Chandragupta I.

The coins of Kachagupta also had political importance in the Gupta history. The question like was the Kachagupta ruler of Gupta dynasty or not? Because the coins of Kachagupta were found with other Gupta kings, but his name on their official genealogical list not mentioned. We get genealogical list of Gupta Dynasty from the Allahbad Pillar Inscription and from other sources. We have only coins as the evidence of his existence. Kachagupta was in light through his coins. His coins were found in the hoard with the coins of Samudragupta and Chandragupta I. The Tanda

hoard consists Kachgupta coins with the coins of Samudragupta; similar to the Samudragupta's coins. The great hoard of Bayana consist 16 coins of Kachagupta. After the study of these coins we can say that he was the king of Gupta Dynasty. Probably he was a contender in the time of Samudragupta. (Gupata P.L. Page No 71)But, his absence at the genealogical list creates doubt about him. To the linkage with this description may create some statement, Kachagupta might have ruled for short period in the absence of Samudragupta, at the time of his campaigns in the South. We can say that he might have feudatory to the Samudragupta.

In the course of time Gupta kings issued silver coins in the provinces, they had own. The Silver coins of Gupta Dynasty, It also provides us with good deals of information about territorial expansion. A big hoard of 1895, Silver coins of Kumargupta I was found at Samand in Satara dist. (Altekar A.S.) Small one of the 13 pieces was found at Elichpur in Berar. Presence of gupta coins at these places is probably due to their political influence on this reign. As per the political information coins provide us a good deals of information about state economy of Gupta. Lots of coins we found in the western side of gupata empire Saurashtra, Rajastan Madhya Pradesh these coin provide the enough information about the state policy of the gupata. Through the coin we could traced the feudal polity and their economical contribution in the Gupta Empire. Why the western region of gupta empire always under the threat of the foreign invention? That foreign invention influenced the gupatas currency. kumargupata I, Skandhagupta issued the sliver and mixed metal coin indicated that in the later period Guptas economical condition was not that much strong.

The reason behind the issued silver coins was that, it would be easy for their transaction in that province. He had issued silver coins for convenient use for his new subject. But not a single Gold Coin was issued, that's the statement of Romila Thaper seems to be right. But it was notable that the provision of Saurashtra and Malva of Gujarat endowed with the lot of availability of Silver. Chandragupta II

might have taken benefit of this availability, and issued Silver coins only for this provision.

At the time of Gupta Barter System was used to transact goods in rural area. It was not possible to use Gold coins in daily exchange, because the Gold was rare in that period also. Gold coins mainly used to give wages of the Militant officer or other admin officers to the Gupta. Gold coins may also have been used to Dakshina to the priest. Role of Gold coins was important mean in the administration of Gupta.

At the beginning of the 4th century A.D. Benzentine Empire of Rome was collapsed. The Indian foreign trade was influenced due to the downfall of Benzentine Empire. At the same time Arab traders create their monopoly in the foreign trade, that's the Indian traders became unemployed. It was the first recession in the domain of Indian foreign trade. Due to this recession, continues flow of gold was affected, which created shortage of gold in India.(Sharma R.S. Page No 293) The shortage of gold in India affected the coinage of Gupta. In course of time upcoming kings after Chandragupta II Kumargupta I and others issued Silver and Copper coins in number. This shows that the Gupta's economy was in critical stage. This economic recession not only created unemployment among the Indian traders but also affect Gupta's administration.

The shortage of gold affected Gupta's coinage, which led to change metal of coins. This change was affected state of administration of Gupta Empire. Most of the gold coins were used to give wages to the militant officers. Religious gift was also given in the form of gold coins. Land was offered to pay wages of the militant and admin officers after the reduction in Gold Coins. The religious *Smruti* of that period also ordered to pay religious donation or *dengi* in the form of land, this led to raise land grand system. Land was granted in number for religious gift and the payment of the militant officers. Land grand system created feudatory in India. So much land was granted in the period of Gupta which led to rise of feudalism in India. Feudalism grew rapidly and took domination over kingship. The domination of feudatories on

land and militant caused to decline of Gupta Empire in future. All these occurrences took place due to reduction of coinage or change in metal of coins. In this way Gupta's administration and economy was affected, due to changes in their coinage. It was the major cause to decline the Gupta Empire.

Regarding to the Golden age Concept of Gupta Empire Politically Gupta Empire was very strong it was expanded near about the whole northern and western ancient India. According to the R.C. Majumdar the Gupta Empire came to an end in the fullness of maturity. It had served its purpose and accomplished its objects. It laid down an ideal and fixed standard for the future .the Gupta empire which ushered in the Gupta Age may be regarded as the most important Phenomenon in the political history of ancient India.(Majumdar R.C Page No 105-107)

At the time of Gupta there was growth of wealth and agricultural products. Agriculture was the prime occupation for lively hood. The irrigation facilities were provided to the agricultural work through lake and well. Trade and Commerce was another occupation for the subject to live hood. The development in the urban centre was taken place at the time. So many trading cities like Patliputra, Vaishali, Ujjaini, Bhadoch etc flourished. (Mahajan V.D. Page No 559) These cities were well known for the domain of trade and commerce. India had commercial relations with western and eastern countries. Countries like Rome, Arab in Western and Java, Sumatra, Cambodia etc. in eastern had great economical deals with India. As per this context India had contact with Middle East countries, specially China had a commercial friend of India. With these trades India exported Spicy things, Medicinal things and woollen cloths specially and imported Gold and other useful things. The trades with Rome continuously flow of Gold flows towards India that was confirmed from the Gold Coins of Gupta.

R.N.Dandekar Pointed that the result of the highly organized administration of the Guptas was to be clearly seen in the prosperity and happiness of their subjects the economical stability and development formed the true basis of the all-round cultural

progress made in the period of history.(Dandekar R.N. Page No 282-86)That's so many nationalist historians glorifies the Gupta age as "Golden Age" of India. Regarding to this opinion the group of historian in contrast view they claimed that, this golden age was limited to the northern part of India and it was related to the upper class of society.

According to the Romila Thaper, The Gupta age is referred to as the classical age of ancient India. The description is true in so far as we speak of the upper class amongst whom living standard reached to the peak never before Attained and that was true for northern India The golden age had to be a utopia set in the distant past and period chosen by those working on the early history of India was one in which Hindu culture came to be firmly established. However, the classism of the Gupta period was restricted to the Northern India. (Thapar Romila Page No 136) Gupta's Golden Age, it was limited only to the North India. Because the most of the Gold coins of Gupta found only in the North Indian Cities like Patliputra, Vaishali, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura, Gazipur and in Rajastan territory and Silver and Copper Coins in South India, the hoard like Samand in Satara consist only Silver Coins. Chandragupta II issued silver coins in the province Malva, Saurashtra and kathiavad in Gujrat after the successful conquest on Kshatrapa . these coins have influenced of Kshatrapa coins.

According to the Golden age concept Dr. D.N. Jha has opinion that "In the time of Gupta life was never happier in the certain part of the country serfdom appeared leading eventually to the economic bondage of the peasantry. Women become an item of property and come to live the perpetual tutelage of men notwithstanding their idealization in the art and literature. Cast distinction and cast rigidity become sharper than ever before. Law and justices showed definite bias in favor of the higher castes"(Jha D.N. Page No 114-116) thus the deferent opinion came regarding to the golden age when we thoroughly observed the coin of Gupta we realized that Gupta Empire Economic & Political Condition. Only assistance of the

coin we cannot drown the whole social and cultural condition of Gupta Empire. We cannot count development and prosperity only on currency, the development is depended upon the overall development society and its benefits reached all the sector of society.

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