

MAHARAJADHIRAJA SAMUDRAGUPTA

(RULED FROM 335 AD TO 375 AD)

Samudragupta

About 500 years after Ashoka another great king emerged in Magadha. His name was Samudragupta. Like Ashoka his capital was also Pataliputra. Locate the city of Pataliputra in map 2.



Fig. 1 A coin issued by Samudragupta

Samudragupta issued many coins. One of the coins is shown in the picture above. In this coin Samudragupta is shown playing the *veena*. Samudragupta was interested in music. The best of poets and artists lived in his court. Apart from his cultural accomplishments, Samudragupta was also famous for his military victories.

The Poet Harishena

A poet named Harishena gives us the details of Samudragupta's victories over other kings and also explains his policies towards them. Harishena was a poet and an official in the court of Samudragupta. He had composed a long eulogy in praise of Samudragupta in Sanskrit.

The Allahabad Pillar

The eulogy composed by Harishena is inscribed on a stone pillar. This was the same pillar that was used by king Ashoka to inscribe his own message. Nowadays this pillar is kept in the fort of Allahabad.

Thus the Allahabad pillar provides us information about two great kings.

- *Underline eight important words or phrases of the above section.*

Samudragupta became king in 335 AD. At that time his kingdom was very small and was surrounded by many big and small kingdoms. Samudragupta wanted to increase his power and glory by creating a powerful kingdom.

Kingdoms of Aryavarta

The Allahabad inscription says,

With his unmatched power, Samudragupta destroyed many kings of Aryavarta and incorporated their kingdoms into his own. These kings were Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyutanandin and Balvarman.

As a result of these victories the kingdom of Samudragupta expanded into the whole of Aryavarta. Those days the plains of the Ganga and the Yamuna were called Aryavarta mainly because the Aryan tribes had settled there.

- *How many kings of Aryavarta did Samudragupta defeat?*
- *What did he do after defeating them?*
- *Locate the area of Aryavarta in map 2.*

Kingdoms of Dakshinapatha

After his victories in the Aryavarta, Samudragupta turned south. In those days, areas south of the Narmada were called Dakshinapatha. Read a part of Harishena's inscription to learn of what happened there. (While your teacher reads this portion out loud,

Figure 3. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription Composed by Harishena

This inscription is engraved in script called *Brahmi* script. Can you recognise any letter among these?

The language used in this inscription is Sanskrit. Is Sanskrit still written in this script?

The letter 'ka' is written thus in Brahmi script: क

How many 'ka's can you locate in this inscription? Circle all of them and count them.



you locate the places mentioned in map 2.)

Samudragupta is not only powerful but also generous. That is why after defeating all the kings of Dakshinapatha, he restored them to their kingdoms. These kings of Dakshinapatha were Mahendra, the king of Kosala; Vyagharaja, the king of Mahakantara; Mantaraja, the king of Kurala; Mahendragiri, the king of Pishtapura; Swamidatta, the king of Kottura; Daman, the king of Erandapalla; Vishnugopa, the king of Kanchipuram; Nilaraja, the king of Avamukta; Hastivarman, the king of Vengi; Ugrasena, the king of Palakka; Kubera, the king of Devarashtra and Dhananjaya, the king of Kusthalapura.

After these conquests, even in the Dakshinapatha there was no king equal in powers to Samudragupta. Samudragupta became the king of all kings.

- How many kings of Dakshinapatha were defeated by Samudragupta?

Dakshinapatha During the Mauryas

Five hundred years before Samudragupta, kings of the Mauryan dynasty

(Chandragupta, Bindusara, Ashoka) had come to the south to conquer territories. However, the Mauryan kings did not have to fight so many kings. In those days there were not many kings in the south. When the kings of the Mauryan dynasty came to Dakshinapatha, they stationed their soldiers and officials in villages and settlements there. However, five hundred years after the Mauryas, when Samudragupta came to establish his kingdom in Dakshinapatha he had to fight many kings.

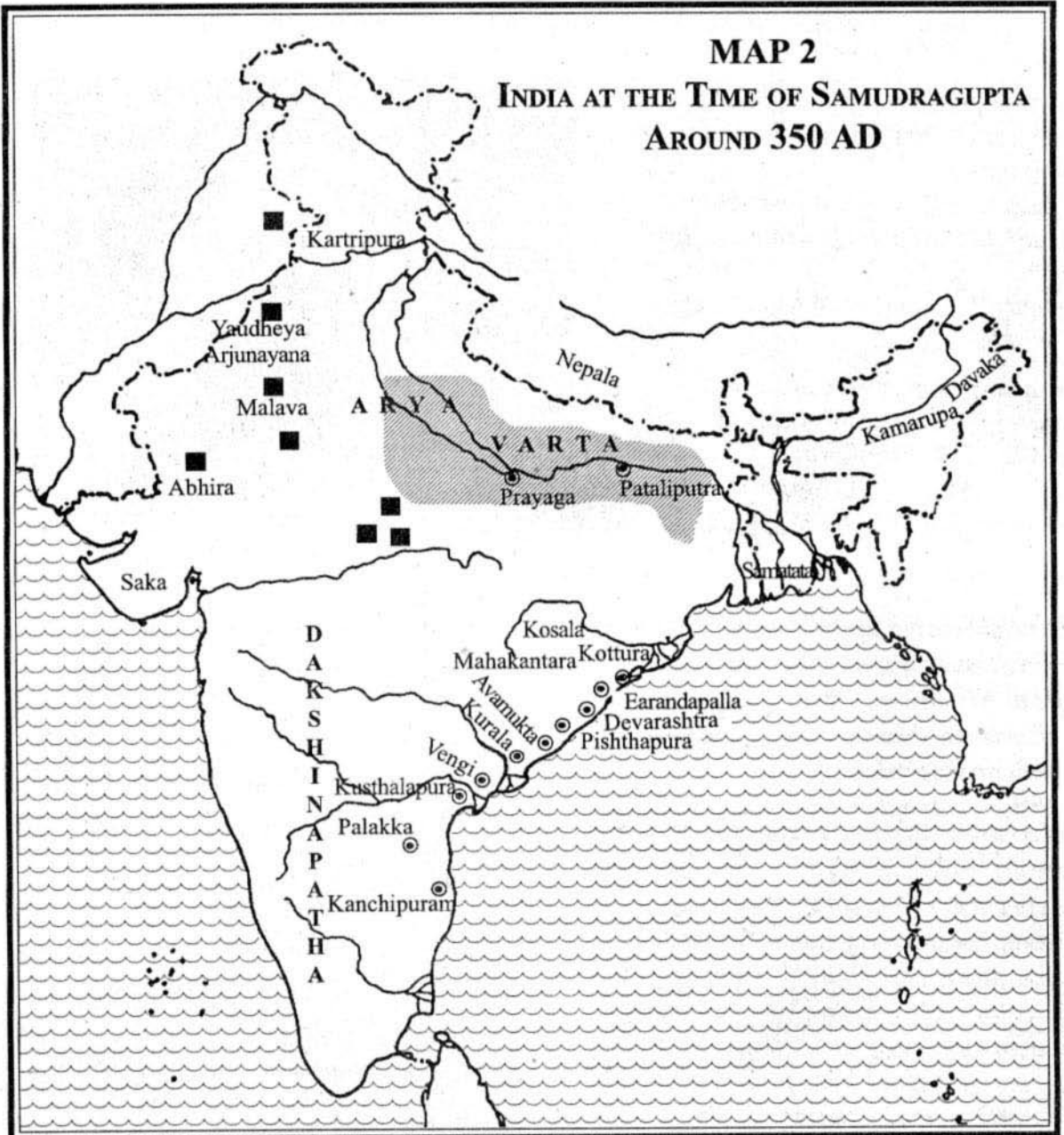
- What was the policy of Samudragupta towards the defeated kings of Dakshinapatha?
- Did he adopt a similar policy towards the rulers of the Aryavarta?
- Explain how the policy of Samudragupta in Dakshinapatha differed from those of the Mauryan kings?

Neighbouring Kings and Kings of Other Countries

As a result of his victories Samudragupta's fame spread far and wide. He was considered a powerful king. Other kings were impressed by this fact. The Allahabad inscription says:

MAP 2

INDIA AT THE TIME OF SAMUDRAGUPTA AROUND 350 AD



INDEX





	Samudragupta's empire		Cities
	Ganasanghas		Present external boundary of India



Fig. 3 An army ready for war

The neighbouring kings come with gifts to please Samudragupta. They bow to him and follow his orders. These neighbouring kingdoms are Samtata, Davaka, Kamarupa, Nepala and Kartripura.

- *Locate these neighbouring kingdoms in map 2.*
- *Look at map 1 to find out whether these kingdoms existed at the time of the mahajanpadas.*
- *Samudragupta did not defeat the kings of these kingdoms. Why do you think they were obeying his orders?*

In those days there were many republics also. They were not ruled by any king. People of these republics also brought gifts to Samudragupta. Harishena also writes that kings from distant countries wanted to befriend Samudragupta and have marital ties with him.

After reading this it appears that Samudragupta was considered very powerful and he had considerable influence in those days. However, we should remember that Harishena was writing in praise of his king and perhaps he was exaggerating. It is possible that Samudragupta was not as influential as stated.

Different Kinds of Policies

Nevertheless, the inscription of Harishena tells us one important fact. We are told that in those days a king like Samudragupta was following different kinds of policies to increase their power. He annexed the kingdoms of the Aryavarta to his kingdom after defeating their rulers. However, Samudragupta returned their kingdoms to the rulers of Dakshinapatha, even after defeating them.

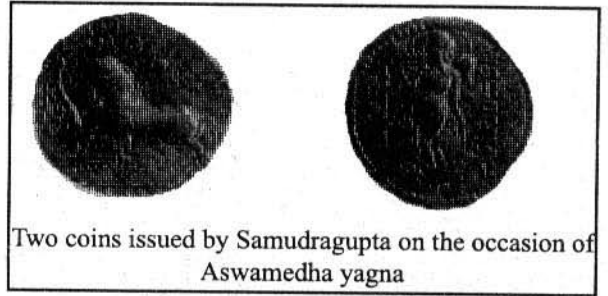
- *Can you think of a reason why Samudragupta did not annex the kingdoms of Dakshinapatha?*
- *Were the kingdoms of Dakshinapatha far away from the capital of Samudragupta?*

We shall see that many kings who ruled after Samudragupta frequently followed such a policy to increase their power. Restoring a king after defeating him became an important policy.

Other Kings of the Gupta Dynasty

After Samudragupta, the Gupta dynasty produced kings like Chandragupta Vikramaditya, Kumaragupta and Skandagupta.

During their rule, the Huns, a tribe from Central Asia, fought several wars with the Gupta kings. Gradually, however, the power of the Guptas waned and around 550 AD the Gupta dynasty came to an end.



EXERCISE

1. Write about the Allahabad pillar. Why is this Pillar important?
2. a. Describe Dakshinapatha at the time of the Mauryas? Did it consist of many kingdoms/ some villages and habitations / many cities? What did the Mauryas do in Dakshinapatha?
b. Describe Dakshinapatha at the time of Samudragupta. Did it consist of many kingdoms/ a few villages and habitations / many cities? What did he do in Dakshinapatha?
3. According to Harishena what was the reason behind Samudragupta's restoring kingdoms to their rulers in Dakshinapatha?
4. Write six points about Samudragupta which you think are significant.
5. Which of Samudragupta's policies were adopted by rulers of later periods?