

# 3

## LAND GRANTS AND THE INDIAN SOCIETY

By the order of Sree Vindhyasakti II, the Vakataka Maharaja...

We grant half of this village to the Brahmins in order to attain victory, longevity and welfare and peace in this world as well as in afterlife. The exemptions approved by the Chatur Vedas and the previous Maharajas will be applicable to this grant as well. They are: The administration here will not be like that in the other areas. Salt or alcohol should not be produced. There is no need to pay money or cereals to the treasury. No need to present flowers or milk to the king. Providing cow or bullock to the officials is not needed. There is no need to give any service to the state. There shall be no liability to provide charcoal or caparison. The police shall not enter here. No need to provide cot or hearth to the touring officials. No need to pay tax to the king. No need to pay tax for goods transportation... will be entitled to the treasures hidden beneath the land. Will have the right to fence and raise the land and to use big tools. Anyone who obstructs this or causes obstruction shall be punished as and when complained.

Cdr Alok Mohan, *Ancient Indian Inscriptions*, Vol 3, 1967, pp. 122-124

This is an order issued by the Vakataka King Vindhyashakti II (355-400 CE). The order refers to the transfer of some of the land in the king's possession to the Brahmins along with special rights. This is known as 'Land Grants'.

- What is the purpose of land grants by the king?
- When did the practice of land grants start? Why?
- Were such grants common?

Mention of land grants can be found in Buddhist works. But, it was only during the post- Mauryan period that it became widespread and also produced far-reaching consequences.

After the fall of the Mauryas, several dynasties came to power in different parts of India. Locate them in the map given below.



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## Land Grants

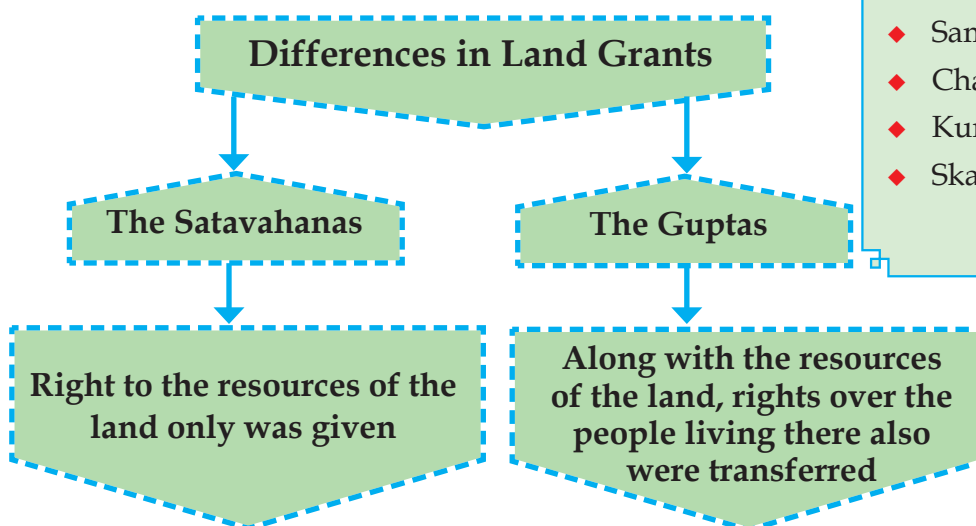
Among these dynasties, the Satavahanas who ruled the Deccan region, started the practice of giving land grants to please the Brahmins who were dominant in the society. This system became wide-spread under the Guptas who came to power in Pataliputra by the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.



### Gupta kings

Srigupta was the founder of the Gupta kingdom. The other important kings of the dynasty were:

- ◆ Chandragupta I
- ◆ Samudragupta
- ◆ Chandragupta II
- ◆ Kumaragupta I
- ◆ Skandagupta



### Let's look at the changes brought about by the land grants during the Gupta period.

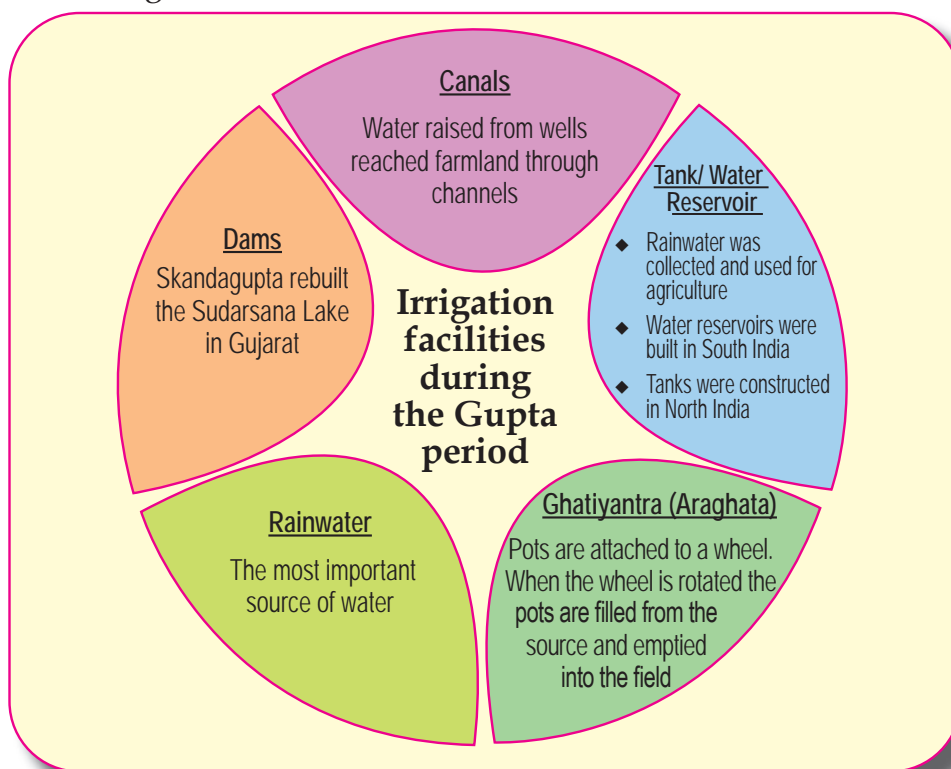
- The king's authority over the donated land gradually declined.
- The right to collect taxes and administer justice over the donated land was transferred along with the ownership of land.
- Those who received the land grants also got the right to grant the land to someone else.
- In course of time, the kings and nobles began to give land grants instead of cash as remuneration for the services they received.
- Although most of the land grants were received by the Brahmins, gradually, other sections also started receiving land as grant.

With the widespread practice of land grants, a powerful section of landowners with immense wealth and influence was formed in the society. Those who worked on the land became rightless dependents of the landlords. In such a system, the farmers, the agricultural labourers and the slaves were bound to the land. They lived and died in the same soil where they were born. They laboured throughout their life for their masters. In addition to taxes, these people from the lower stratum of the society had to provide free services to the upper stratum. This system has been called 'Indian Feudalism'. During this period, there was a remarkable improvement in the agriculture sector.

*Factors that helped the spread of agriculture*

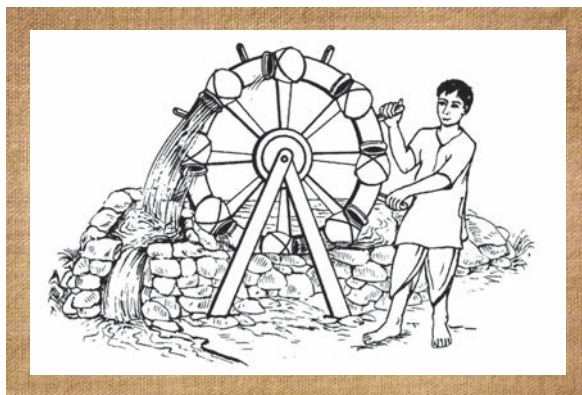
- Even the uncultivated areas were made suitable for agriculture
- The new social system provided sufficient labour-force for agriculture
- The knowledge of Brahmins about agricultural technology and climate
- Different irrigation facilities

Let us see the irrigation methods that helped the expansion of agriculture.





Discuss the characteristics of the Samanatha System that came into existence during the Gupta period.



## Crafts and Trade

Expansion of agriculture that resulted from land grants led to the growth of non-agricultural activities too. People took to different crafts in order to make a living. The literary works and artefacts of this period give us information regarding the crafts of the period. Given below is the information regarding the artefacts received from the excavation of sites corresponding to the period. Find out the arts and crafts of the period from the information and complete the table.

Artifacts Recovered	Crafts
• Earthen Pots	• Pottery making
• Jewellery made of gold, silver and precious stones	• .....
• Pearls	• .....
• Glassware	• .....
• Silk, cotton textiles	• .....
• Sculptures in ivory	• .....

People engaged in the same craft gradually formed associations. These came to be called 'Guilds' or 'Srenis'. Governments ratified the 'Srenis'. Members of a 'Sreni' had to abide by its rules.

### Srenis



'Srenis' were associations of craftsmen and traders. Collecting raw-materials, controlling production and marketing the finished goods were their responsibilities.



## Trade and Commerce

Internal trade flourished during the initial years of the Gupta rule. We have understood from the table above that various crafts existed along with agriculture. Such products made by the skilled craftsmen were the chief items of trade. Textiles was one of the most traded products. Different types of textiles (muslin, calico, linen) were manufactured on a large scale.



### Nagarathaar (Nagarasreshtin)

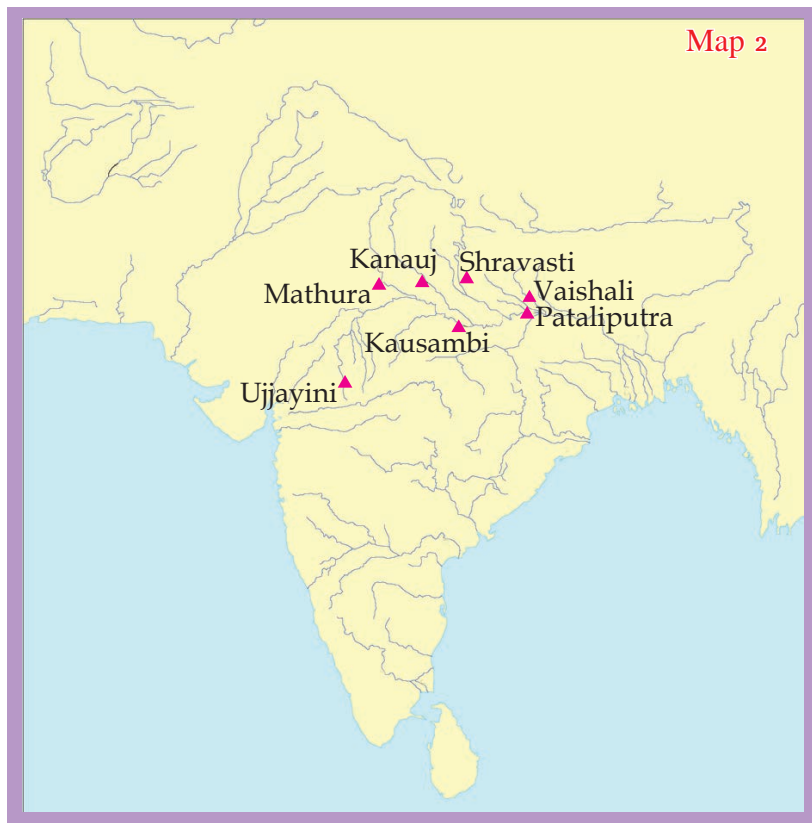
These wealthy merchants of the cities had a role in administration also. Besides, they were prominent members of the merchant guilds.

The Guptas had external trade links with West Asia, Central Asia, South East Asia, and Rome. New trade routes developed during the period. Gold, silver and copper coins of high quality were minted. Prominent traders known as 'Nagarasreshtin' and 'Sarthvaha' had their role in the government. Vaishali, Pataliputra, Kanauj, Shravasti, Kausambi, Ujjayini and Mathura were important centres of trade.



Gupta Coins

## Some important cities of the Gupta period



Find out in which present Indian states are the Gupta cities marked in the above map, located.

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•	.....
•	.....
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•	.....
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•	.....

India's foreign trade declined following the collapse of the Roman Empire by the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Another reason for this was that the westerners had learned the technique of silk-making from the Chinese. Decline of foreign trade adversely affected the internal trade also. There was a dip in the movement of the craftsmen and artisans to different parts of the country for trade purposes. They confined themselves to their villages. This led to the ruralisation of arts and crafts. The slump in trade, the general decline in crafts and ruralisation led to the decay of many major towns. Cities like Kausambi, Hastinapura, Ahicchatra, Takshasila, Ayodhya, Ujjayini and Mathura lost their glory. Places that were described by the 5<sup>th</sup> century Chinese traveller Fa-Hien as large cities were mentioned by the 7<sup>th</sup> century traveller Hiuen Tsang as villages. This description indicates the urban decay during the period.

### **Social Life**

We have already discussed the various occupational groups (Srenis) that were formed in the Gupta period. The entry of new occupational groups and the coming of new peoples led to the formation of a number of sub-divisions in the society. It was impossible for the existing varna system to accommodate all these new occupational groups. In this circumstance, each occupational group became a new 'jati' or 'upajati'. Besides the occupational groups, people who came from outside the subcontinent, the forest dwellers ('Nishadas') and children born of inter-caste marriages also formed new 'jatis'. This made the caste system more complex.



There was no change in the position and privileges of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas in the new complex system that evolved. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang who visited India in the seventh century described Sudras as peasants. These descriptions indicate the social status of the Sudras in an agricultural society.

The 'Antyajas' who were outside the Chaturvarnya system were considered 'untouchables'. Accordingly, the lowest among the 'Antyajas' were the graveyard keepers called 'Chandalas' and the animal skin tanners called 'Charmakaras'.

### Position of Women

Generally, women had a low status in society, even though a few queens like Prabhavati Gupta of the Vakataka dynasty were held in high esteem. All women, from queens to the women of the lowest section in the society, were expected to be submissive to men. Even the upper-class women did not enjoy a high position or consideration in the society. There is no evidence of land grants received by even a Brahmin woman.



#### 'Anuloma' and 'Pratiloma' Marriages

*Arthashastra* refers to inter-caste marriages. Marriage between a groom from a caste considered upper and a bride from a caste considered lower was called 'Anuloma' marriage.

Marriage between a bride from a caste considered upper and a groom from a caste considered lower was called 'Pratiloma' marriage.



#### Chandalas in the Description of Fa Hien

The Chinese Buddhist traveller Fa Hien who visited India during the reign of Chandragupta II in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, gives this description: "When Chandalas enter a city, or a market, they should make sounds by beating a wooden plank. This was done to inform the higher caste people about their coming in advance and to move away."

## State: Central Authority and Local Power



*"Equal to Kubera, Varuna, Indra and Anthaka and with no equal rival on the face of the Earth..."*

These words are from the Prayagaprasthi, situated in Allahabad which tells us about Samudragupta, the most powerful ruler of Gupta period.

What do you understand from this text about the powers of the king during the Gupta period?

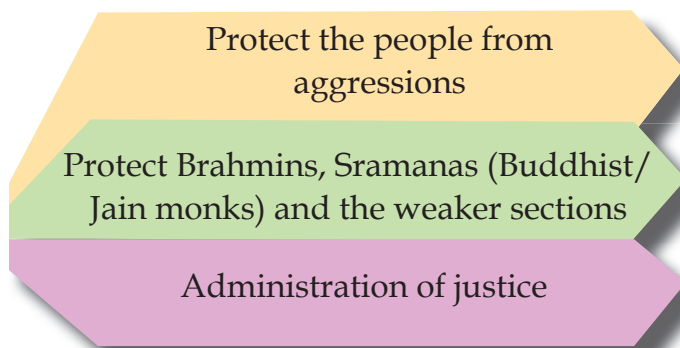


### Village Administration During the Gupta Period

'Gramapati' or 'Gramadhyaksha' was the head of village administration during the Gupta period. The disputes in the village were settled by 'Gramavridhdhar', a group of elders in the village. Majority of the village dwellers were peasants. Carpenters, weavers and herdsmen were also there. Their communities also were represented in the village administration.

- The king was considered equal to God
- 

Gupta kings had extensive powers. At the same time, they had some responsibilities as well. Let us have a look at them.



The Guptas allowed the rulers of the territories they conquered to continue as 'Samanthas' of the Gupta kingdom. They were given autonomy in their respective areas. The Guptas did not interfere in their matters of administration or succession. But they developed an elaborate administrative system in the areas where they ruled directly.



Prepare a note comparing the administrative systems of the Mauryas and the Guptas.

## Prasastis

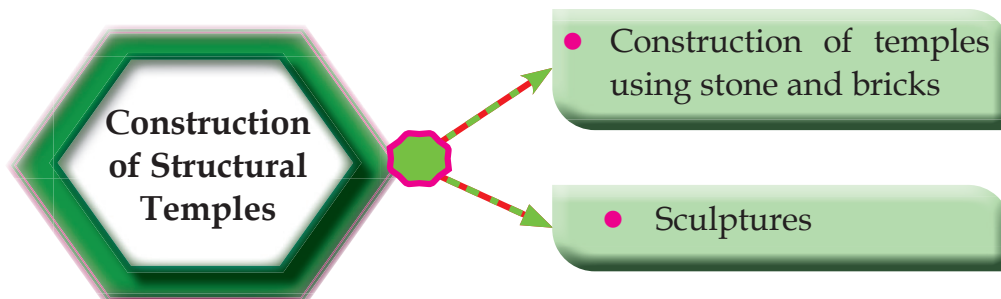
*Prasastis* are stone inscriptions erected by rulers of ancient India to proclaim their achievements. The Junagarh Prasasti of Rudradaman, inscribed in the second century CE, is the earliest known *prasasti*. It is inscribed on one portion of the Junagarh Sasana of Asoka. The *prasastis* praise the king and his achievements in wars. In South India, Cholas, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas and Pallavas followed the practice of writing the *prasastis* in new forms. Although there could be exaggeration; the *prasastis* are helpful as sources of historical information about rulers.

## Prayaga Prasati

The Prayaga Prasasti was inscribed in praise of the conquests and military victories of the Gupta king Samudragupta. It is also called the Allahabad Prasasti. It praises Samudragupta's conquests from Nepal in the North to the areas of Tamil Nadu in the South. The Prasasti was composed by Harisena, the court poet of the Guptas in Sanskrit.

## Art and Literature

We have studied the socio-political developments of the Gupta period. Along with this, art and Sanskrit literature developed during the period. In the field of art, architecture excelled. Many temples were constructed during the period. Let us study their features.



List out the features of architecture during the Gupta period by observing the following pictures.



Dasavatara Temple, Deogarh,  
Uttar Pradesh



Vishnu Temple of Tigawa,  
Madhya Pradesh



Nachna Kutara Parvati Temple,  
Panna, Madhya Pradesh



Some of the world famous paintings of the Ajanta Caves (Maharashtra) belong to the Gupta period. These paintings depict royal life, royal court and celestial beings. Scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* also became themes of these paintings. Natural colours were used to paint these pictures that have survived several centuries and still remain graceful.



Prepare and present a digital edition of the pictures of the temples and caves of the Gupta period.

Sanskrit literature received royal patronage during the Gupta period. Sanskrit was the language of administration. Even the Buddhists who had been using common languages like Pali started writing in Sanskrit. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and most of the *Puranas* were codified in written Language (oral to written) and converted into the present textual form during this period.

Dramas, poems, Grammar, and Lexicon were composed during this period in Sanskrit. The given table shows some of the major texts of the period.

Name of the Text	Author	Genre of Literature
<i>Abhijnana Sakunthala</i>	Kalidasa	Drama
<i>Kumarasambhava</i>	Kalidasa	Poem
<i>Mriccha Katika</i>	Sudraka	Drama
<i>Swapnavasavadattha</i>	Bhasa	Drama
<i>Thrikandi</i>	Bhartrhari	Grammar
<i>Amarakosam</i>	Amarasimha	Lexicon

Although Sanskrit dramas are world renowned, when they were staged, only the so called upper caste male characters spoke in Sanskrit. Women characters including the queen, and male characters belonging to castes considered lower used only Prakrit language.

The Six Systems of Philosophy which laid the foundation for the Indian philosophical thought also were formulated during this period. They took shape through mutual debates. Let us familiarise these philosophies and their proponents.

Philosophy	Exponent
<i>Samkhya</i>	Kapila
<i>Yoga</i>	Patanjali
<i>Nyaya</i>	Gauthama
<i>Vaisheshika</i>	Kanada
<i>Vedanta</i>	Badarayana
<i>Mimamsa</i>	Jaimini



## Science

Books on science also were written during the Gupta period. Most of the works were on Astronomy, Mathematics, and Medical Science. Notable works of the period were *Brihatsamhita* of Varahamihira, *Aryabhatiya* of Arya Bhata and *Amarakosa* of Amarasimha.

### Metallurgy

The iron pillar built in 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, and situated at Mehrauli near Delhi is an excellent example for the technological skills achieved in metallurgy during that period. Weathering the rains and heat for several centuries, this iron pillar shows no sign of rusting.



Evaluate the contributions made to the field of science during the Gupta period.

## South India

We have discussed the granting of land to Brahmins by the Gupta rulers. The practice of land grants spread to South India by the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. This was due to the migration of Brahmins from North India to South India. The Pallavas and the Pandyas were the important dynasties of South India during the period. They granted lands to Brahmins and temples. As a result, the Brahmins attained high status in the South Indian society and economy. Granting of land to the Brahmins led to the development of agriculture in this area. As we have seen earlier, the Brahmins' knowledge of agricultural technology and climate helped the expansion of agriculture. Kings and local administrative bodies encouraged agriculture by building reservoirs and maintaining irrigation facilities.

There was agricultural progress in the Pallava Kingdom due to the activities of the temples controlled by the Brahmins. Surplus production in agriculture led to the progress of trade. Maritime trade flourished along with internal trade. Mahabalipuram was a busy port under the Pallavas. Nagapattanam was another port of trade. Merchant guilds were a feature of the Pandyan trade. The merchant guilds which were known as 'Srenis' in North India came to be called as 'Vanika' communities in South India. Each guild specialised in the trade of a particular product.

'Nagarattars' were traders. Pepper, sandal, gold, and pearls were the chief items of export from the Pandyan Kingdom. The Pandyas traded with the Roman, Greek, Chinese and Arab merchants through the ports Korkai, Kayal Pattanam and Periya Pattanam. Expansion of agriculture, growth of trade, and a variety of crafts became the sources of revenue to the Pallava and Pandya Kingdoms. Land tax was the chief source of income. People had to pay  $\frac{1}{10}$  to  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the produce as land tax. Those engaged in different crafts had to pay taxes. At the same time, the *Brahmadeya* land granted to temples and the *Agraharas* (Brahmin villages) were exempted from land tax.



### *Brahmaswam or Brahmadeya*

Land granted to a group of Brahmins was called *Brahmadeya*.



### *Agrahara*

Brahmin villages were called *agraharas*.



### *Devaswam or Devadanam*

Land gifted to the Deity or the Temple came to be called *Devadanam*. This land was administered by the temple trustees.



Discuss the economic changes brought about by the spread of the land grant system to South India.

Now, let us discuss the social and cultural life of South India.

The Pallava-Pandya societies were based on the caste system. The Brahmins who received large extents of land as *Brahmadeya* were wealthy and they had a dominant status in society.

Those who were considered as low castes suffered many hardships. There were also sections outside the varna system.

There was village autonomy in the Pallava and Pandya kingdoms. Village courts also existed. Education, justice, etc. were administered and disputes were discussed and settled through collective opinion. The Kings did not interfere in such matters. Neither did they interfere in the customs, practices of worship or caste rules.

Jainism and Buddhism which we studied earlier were flourishing in South India before the Pallava period. But these religions declined with the increased power of the Brahmins. Both Pallavas and Pandyas built Saiva- Vaishnava temples and encouraged the Bhakti movement.

Ideas of Brahmanical religion and Bhakti were reflected well in the South Indian literary works of that period. Pallavas encouraged Sanskrit literature. The Pallava king Mahendravarman I was a Sanskrit scholar. *Matthavilasa Prahasana* was written by him.

Temples of South India had a considerable influence on the life of the people at that time. Temples were the chief works of art of that period. Important temples of the period are situated in Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram and Madurai. South Indian style of temple construction known as 'Dravidian style' evolved during the period of the Pallavas. Gradually, temple constructions developed, through three phases. They are given below.

- Rock-cut temples
- Monolithic chariot temples
- Structural temples



Mamandur Cave Temple  
(Kanchipuram)



Chariot Temple at Mahabalipuram



Madurai Meenakshi  
Temple

## Dravidian Architecture

Temple building was there in India from ancient times. There were three styles of temple architecture. 'Nagara' and 'Vasara' styles were followed in North India whereas the 'Dravidian' style prevailed in South India. Huge *mandapas* was the chief characteristic of Dravidian architecture.

Pallavas were the first to prove excellence in Dravidian architecture. Temples at Mahabalipuram are the finest examples of their excellence in temple building. At the same time, the largest number of temples in the Dravidian style were built by the Cholas. Temples built by them during that period still exist in different parts of Tamil Nadu. The Meenakshi temple at Madurai and the Srirangam temple are the famous constructions of the Pandyas.

Temples built in the Dravidian style of architecture have certain specific features. They are, 'Sreekovil' or 'Garbhagriha' (Sanctum Sanctorum), 'Vimana' (the top portion of the temple building), 'Sikhara' (the top

portion of the vimana), 'Mandapa' and 'Pradakshina patha' (Path for circumambulation). Gigantic entrance gateways, tall 'gopuras', (towers), carved elephants, horses, and dragon faces in decorative styles are the characteristic features of the Dravidian style. Characters from Itihasas and Puranas have been carved on the walls of these temples with great care and extraordinary skill.



### Mahabalipuram

The most notable temples and stone-carved figures of this period can be seen at Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu. This place, also known as Mamallapuram, is situated on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. The five monolithic Ratha Temples representing the five Pandavas and Draupati, the Shore Temple built on the sea shore are the finest examples of Pallava architecture. The rock carved figures called 'Arjuna's Penance' and 'Mahishasura Mardana' are other examples of Pallava art. UNESCO has declared Mahabalipuram as a heritage city.



Shore Temple



### Extended Activities

- Organise a seminar on 'Land Grants and their consequences during the Gupta Rule'.
- Prepare an album, collecting pictures of temples built in various styles.
- Make a digital presentation on the achievements in science and technology during the Gupta period.