

the Gupta empire as the epicentre of a complex web of varied political relationships. The Allahabad *prashasti* clearly presents Samudragupta must have inherited an empire that included the Magadha area of Bihar and adjoining areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bengal, stretching to the Himalayan foothills in the north. His initial military campaigns were directed towards extending his control over territories lying immediately beyond this area. Line 14 of the inscription refers to his capturing a king of the Kota family while the latter was playing in the city of Pushpa (identified variously with Pataliputra or Kanauj); this may have been a ruler of the upper Ganga valley. Line 21 refers to Samudragupta violently exterminating a number of kings of Aryavarta and making all the kings of the forest his servants, i.e., subordinates. The kings of Aryavarta mentioned are Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyuta, Nandin, and Balavarman. Rudradeva may be identified with the Vakataka king Rudrasena I, the western Kshatrapa ruler Rudradaman II, or his son Rudrasena III. Or he may be the same as the Rudra whose coin has been found at Kaushambi. Matila is mentioned on a seal from Bulandshahr district (UP), but the name is not accompanied by any epithet suggesting royal status. Chandravarman may have been a local ruler of Bengal, whose inscription has been found at Susuniya near Bankura. Alternatively, he may be the Chandravarman mentioned in an inscription found at Mandasor in central India. The coins of a Ganapatinaga have been found at Pawaya in central India. A king named Nagasena is mentioned in the *Harshacharita* as ruling from Padmavati. Coins of a king named Achyuta have been found at Ramnagar (ancient Ahichchhatra) in Bareilly district (UP). The territories of the various kings mentioned in Lines 14 and 21 seem to have been annexed, leading to an extension of the Gupta empire over the Ganga-Yamuna valley up to Mathura and Padmavati in the west.

Other areas were subordinated in a different manner. Line 22 of the *prashasti* refers to rulers offering tribute, obeying the orders of the Gupta king, and coming to perform obeisance before him. They included the frontier kings of Samatata, Davaka, Kamarupa, Nepala, and Kartripura. Samatata corresponds to south-east Bengal. Davaka refers to the area around Dabok in Naogaon district and Kamarupa the Guwahati region, both in Assam. Nepala corresponds roughly to modern Nepal. Kartripura may have comprised Kartarpur in Jalandhar district and the erstwhile Katuria raj of Kumaon, Garhwal, and Rohilkhand. The polities subordinated in this manner also included a number of *ganas*, namely the Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas, and Kharaparikas. At this time, the Malavas were based in south-east Rajasthan, the Arjunayanas in the Bharatpur-Alwar areas of Rajasthan, while the Yaudheyas held sway in parts of Punjab and Rajputana. The Sanakanikas were located in eastern Malwa or somewhere in the north-western part of the subcontinent. The Kakas may have been connected with Kakanadabota, the ancient name for Sanchi in the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh; or they too may have been located in the north-west. The Madrakas originally had their capital in modern Sialkot in the Punjab. The Abhiras may



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at this point of time have been located in the northern Konkan. The Prarjunas were probably located in the north-west. The relationship between the Gupta emperor and all these groups had certain elements of a feudatory relationship, although there is no direct mention of their having provided troops. Perhaps this was subsumed within the phrase *ajna-karana* (obeying the orders) of their overlord.

Lines 19 and 20 of the Allahabad *prashasti* refer to Samudragupta having captured and then released several southern kings. These included Mahendra of Kosala, Vyaghra-*raja* of Mahakantara, Mantaraja of Kairala or Kaurala, Mahendra of Pishtapura, Svami-datta of Kottura on the hill, Damana of Erandapalla, Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Nilaraja of Avamukta, Hastivarman of Vengi, Ugrasena of Palakka, Kubera of Devarashtra, Dhanan-jaya of Kusthalapura, and all the other kings of Dakshinapatha. Kosala corresponds to the modern Raipur, Bilaspur, and Sambalpur areas of eastern Madhya Pradesh and western Orissa. The forested kingdom of Mahakantara may have been located in the Vindhyas, the Kosala area, central India, or Orissa. Kairala would correspond to the Kerala region, but if the correct reading is Kaurala, this may have been located on the eastern coast of Andhra Pradesh. Kottura may be Kothoor, near Mahendragiri in Ganjam district of Orissa. Pishtapura is identified with modern Pithapuram in Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. Erandapalla was located in Ganjam district of Orissa or Vishakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Vishnugopa was a Pallava king of Kanchi, ruling the area of the Chingleput district. Hastivarman was a king of the Shalankayana dynasty of Vengi, located between the Krishna and Godavari rivers in Andhra. Devarashtra is identified with the Yellamanchili region of Vishakhapatnam district. Kusthalapura may correspond to Kuttalur in north Arcot district of Tamil Nadu, but this is far from certain.

Line 23 of the inscription refers to some rulers rendering all kinds of service to Samudragupta, seeking the use of the Gupta *garuda* seal and entering into matrimonial alliances with the Guptas of their own accord. These included rulers with the epithets *Daivaputra*, *Shahi*, and *Shahanushahi*, probably representing the last vestiges of Kushana rule. The Shakas and Murundas (the phrase 'Shaka-Murunda' can, alternatively, be interpreted as the Shaka lords) are also mentioned in this context. There is further mention of the people of Simhala, i.e., Sri Lanka, and all the other island dwellers. A Chinese text refers to king Meghavarna of Sri Lanka sending a mission accompanied with gifts to Samudragupta, asking his permission to build a monastery and rest house for Sri Lankan pilgrims at Bodh Gaya. Permission was evidently granted and the monastery built, as its magnificence was described by Xuanzang in the 7th century.

At the end of his reign, Samudragupta's empire seems to have comprised much of northern India, with the exception of Kashmir, western Punjab, Rajasthan, Sindh, and Gujarat. It included the highlands of central India to the east of Jabalpur, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, and the area on the eastern coast at least up to Chingleput. This inner core of directly annexed territories was rimmed by a large number of subordinate states. Beyond these, to the north-west, lay the principalities of the Shakas and Kushanas, over whom Samudragupta claims to have impressed his might. To the south were the kings of Dakshinapatha, who were humbled, but who suffered neither annexation nor a reduction to feudatory status. Still further south lay the island of Sri Lanka, which, we are told, also acknowledged Gupta suzerainty. The Guptas did not create an all-India empire under their direct control. But through their successful military campaigns, they did establish a network of political relationships of paramountcy and subordination that extended over a large part of the subcontinent.

Samudragupta emerges from the Allahabad Prashasti as a powerful emperor. But