

## Gupta Coins

The Gupta dynasty was founded by a feudal Srigupta in c. 260 CE. His son and successor, Ghatotkacha, did not succeed in attaining to the imperial status and did not issue any coinage. His son and successor, Chandragupta I, was the real founder of the greatness of his house. His matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis, a princess of whose family named Kumaradevi was his crowned queen, helped his rise to the imperial position. He assumes the imperial title maharajadhiraja, started the Gupta era as well as the coinage. Gupta coins constitute the earliest indigenous coinage of India. They are regular in size and weight and bear the figure and name of the issuer. For a few years they showed some foreign influence, but very soon they became thoroughly national in their art, motif and execution. In its artistic merit, variety and originality, the gold coinage of the Imperial Gupta has hardly any equals among the coinage of ancient India.

On the Gupta coins, the king is shown in a variety of attitudes and variety of attributes. He is usually standing and wielding either a bow, or a battle axe, or a standard; sometimes there is an umbrella-bearer by his side. He is often showing in a deadly grapple with the lion, the tiger, or the rhinoceros. Sometimes the king is shown riding a horse, an elephant, playing on a lute, or feeding a peacock. Apart from the multiplicity of types, each type shows a surprising number of varieties. Archer type was the most common type of Chandragupta II, in sub variety name of king written on different places, bow is held in left as well as in right hand, king face looks left or to right.

Gupta gold coins display superb craftsmanship and are masterpieces of design and artistic technique. The lion-slayer coins of Chandragupta II, displaying his slim, muscular and graceful body have hardly any equals in their superb grace. The figure of standing queens or goddesses are slim, lovely and winsome, the graceful manner in which they hold a lotus flower or scatter gold coins or feed the peacock, show the refined taste of the age. The tribhanga posture is extremely charming. The design of the king-and-queen types of Chandragupta I and Kumaragupta I, of the lyrist and asvamedha types of Samudragupta, of the chakravikrama and lion-slayer types of Kumaragupta I, are all original and show complete mastery of the artistic technique. On the reverse of the gold coins of Chandragupta II, there is usually the seated goddess. In the majority of cases she is seated on a lotus; in a few cases she occupy the high-backed throne as on the Kushana prototype.

Most of the successors of Skandagupta confined themselves to a single type, viz. the archer type. Such is the case with Budhagupta, Narasimhagupta, Kumaragupta II, Vishnugupta and Vainyagupta. Only Prakashaditya among the later Gupta rulers selected the Horse-man-Lion-slayer type.

## Coin-types

### Chandragupta I:

He issued coins only in the king and the queen type. On the obverse Chandragupta, usually nimbate, standing to left, wearing trousers, head-dress, - in some cases with pearl border, - and a close fitting tailed coat. He wears ear-ring, armlets and necklace and hold in left hand a crescent-topped standard adorned with fillets. With his right hand he is offering a present to Kumaradevi, who stand facing him to right, wearing a sari, an upper garment, a close fitting head-dress, a necklace, ear-ring and armlets. Her right hand is on waist and the left is hanging down. There is crescent between the king and the queen on some coins. Legend is Chandragupta Sri Kumaradevi or Kumaradevisri. On the

reverse, within the dotted border goddess, wearing dress and ornaments, seated on lion facing to right or left, holding a noose in right hand and a cornucopiae in the left; a circular dotted carpet under her feet. The legend is lichchhavayah. On the basis of the placement of the legend, direction of faces, etc. sub-types are reported.

Samudragupta:

He issued a number of coin-types during his long reign, of which the standard type was the most popular, the archer and the battle-axe types were further modification of the standard type. These three types recognized as military types. As a mark of victories in the battle-field, he performed asvamedha sacrifice, which resulted in the issue of asvamedha type. Due to his love for sport and music, he decided to proclaim these hobbies of his to his subjects as well as to posterity on some of his coins, and the result was the tiger-slayer and the lyrist types.

On the standard type of coins, on obverse well-dressed king is shown holding standard in left hand and offering incense with the right hand on an altar at his feet, behind which there is a standard decorated with fillet and surmounted by garuda facing. The vertical legend is Samudragupta and the circular legend is 'samara-sata-vitata-vijayo jita-ripurajito divam jayati' - the invincible (king) who had own victories on a hundred battle fields and conquered the enemies, weans the heaven. On the reverse goddess (Lakshmi?) seated facing on throne holds cornucopiae in left hand and a noose in right. Her feet rest on a circular mat. The legend is parakramah.

On the archer type, king is shown standing left, holding a bow with string inwards by left hand, and right hand either holding an arrow or offering oblation on altar, garuda standard with fillet on left in front of the king; crescent between the king's head and the banner in some cases. Legend Samudragupta, and circular legend 'apratiratho vijitya kshitim sucharitair (or avaniso) divam jayati - having conquered the earth, the invincible one (or lord of the earth) wins heaven by meritorious deeds. On the reverse, goddess (Lakshmi?) seated holding cornucopiae in left hand and noose in right hand, and the legend is apratirathah.

On the battle-axe type, king standing left, or right, usually with sword at the belt, right hand rest on the west, left hand holds a parasu (battle-axe), on left or right a dwarf attendant, standing before the king and looking up to him, crescent topped banner between the two. The legend 'kritantaparasurjayatyajitarajajetajitah' – wielding the battle-axe of kritanta, the unconquered kings, is victorious. On the reverse, goddess Lakshmi seated on throne holding noose in right hand and a cornucopiae or lotus bud in left hand and her leg rests on lotus. The legend is kritantaparasuh.

On the asvamedha type, uncaptured horse, in some cases with a strap on the neck, to left before the sacrificial post adorned with a pedestal, pennon flies over the horse from the top of the post. Beneath the horse is the letter si, circular legend 'rajadhirajah prithivimavitva (or vijitya) divam jayatyahrita-vajimedhah' – the king of king who had performed the vajimedha (asvamedha) sacrifice, wins heaven after protecting (or conquering) the earth. The reverse bears, crowned queen Dattadevi standing to left on pearl-bordered circular mat hold a chouri over her right shoulder in her right hand and a towel in her left hand, hanging by her side. The legend is asvamedhaparakramah.

On the coin of tiger-slayer type, king standing to right wearing a turban, short jacket and a close-fitting dhoti, tramples on a tiger attacking him, which falls back as he shoots it with bow in right

hand, left hand stretching the bow-string to the ear; on left behind the tiger crescent-topped standard adorned with fillet. Circular legend is 'vyaghraparakramah - valiant like a tiger. The reverse depicts goddess Ganga standing on a makara with lotus in left hand, right hand outstretched and empty, on the left crescent-topped banner with fillets. The legend is 'raja Samudraguptah' – king Samudragupta.

On the coins of lyrist type, king seated cross-legged to left on a couch with high and cushioned back, playing lute (vina) resting on his lap. Beneath the couch is inscribed and the circular legend is 'maharajadhiraja sri Samudraguptah' – Samudragupta, overlord of kings. On the reverse, goddess Lakshmi seated to left on stool, noose in right hand and cornucopiae in the left. The legend is Samudraguptah.

Kacha:

The coins of Kacha were issued in one type. It is generally agreed that Kacha was an early Gupta ruler, but the attribution of Kacha coins is a matter of dispute. The early view advocated by Prinsep and Thomas was that Kacha should be identified with Ghatotkacha, the father of Chandragupta I. But Ghatotkacha was a merely feudatory and he could hardly have issued any coins. Some scholars identify Kacha with Samudragupta, while others as either his brother or son. In favour of the identity of Kacha with Samudragupta, the average weight about 116 grains, simile in legend with archer type of Samudragupta and reverse depiction with tiger-slayer and asvamedha type, the reverse legend 'sarvarajochhetta' epithet given to Samudragupta. These arguments are not conclusive, and Kacha was different from Samudragupta. Altekar says that Kacha was a Gupta king and came after Samudragupta. On the coins king standing to right, holding chakradhvaja (standard surmounted by wheel) in left hand and offering incense on altar with right hand, garudadhvaja in front of the king on some cases. The legend is Kacha and circular one is 'Kacho gamavajitya divam karmabhiruttamairjayati' – having conquered the earth, Kacha wins the heaven by excellent deeds. On reverse, goddess (Lakshmi?) standing on a circular carpet holding a flower or noose in left hand. The legend is 'sarvarajochhetta' – exterminator of all kings.

Chandragupta II:

Chandragupta did not merely continue the types of his father and add two new to them. He followed the standard type, archer type, tiger-slayer type transformed in lion-slayer type, the lyrist type replaced by couch type. He did not issue asvamedha and kritantapasu types. The chakravikrama type, horseman, and chhatra types are new innovation. Vikrama either by itself or in combination with other words like ajita-, simha- and chakra- is the invariable epithet of Chandragupta II on his coins. Later in his reign he started silver currency primarily to meet the needs of newly acquired area of Gujarat and Kathiawar. He also issued several types in copper.

On the archer type, king standing left, holds bow in left hand and arrow in right, whose palm is generally turned downwards. Garuda standard decorated with fillets in his front. Chandra, written vertically, circular legend 'deva sri maharajadhiraja sri Chandraguptah'. On the reverse, goddess is seated on throne feet on circular mat or lotus. In her left hand holds a cornucopiae or lotus and the right hand holds a pasa (noose) but it is sometimes empty or dropping down. Legend is srivikramah.

On the lion-slayer type, king standing left or right and usually shooting an arrow at the lion at point blank range, bow in left hand or right hand and from other stretching the bow-string. King is almost touching the lion. The legend is 'narendrachandrah prathitarano rane jayatyajeyo bhuvim simhavikramah' – the moon among the king, who is famous for his warfare, who is valorous like a lion, is victorious in the battle field. For the variations in this type, one can see the lion-combatant, lion-trampler, lion-retreating types.

On the horseman type, king riding a full caparisoned horse to right or left, with weapons like bow, sword or shown without weapon. Legend 'paramabhagavata maharajadhiraja sri Chandraguptah' – the great devotee of Vishnu, the emperor Chandragupta. On the reverse, goddess seated on stool, noose in right hand and lotus in left, legend 'ajitavikramah'.

On chhatra type, king standing left offering oblations on altar in his front with right hand, left hand resting on sword, behind him a dwarf attendant holding state umbrella (chhatra) over him. The legend is 'maharajadhiraja sri Chandraguptah' – king of kings, his majesty Chandragupta or 'kshitimavajitya sucharitairadivam jayati Vikramadityah' – having conquered the earth, Vikramaditya wins the heaven by his meritorious deeds. On the reverse, goddess holding noose in right hand and lotus in left, legend vikramadityah.

On the couch type, king seated on high back couch holding flower in uplifted right hand, the left hand resting on the edge of couch, circular legend 'devasri maharajadhiraja sri Chandraguptasya vikramadityasya' – of the emperor, his majesty, Chandragupta Vikramaditya. Beneath the couch is written rupakrita. On the reverse, goddess seated on throne holds lotus in left or right hand. Some of the varieties bear legend paramabhagavata.

On the king and queen on couch type, king standing to left, offering incense on an altar before him and holding a standard in the right hand. Chandra is written under the left arm and the circular legend begins with paramabhagavata. On the reverse, king and the queen are sitting on a couch facing each other. The king is offering to the queen an object with a curved handle and a thick knob at the top, possibly a sinduradani. Crescent depicted between the two. Legend is srivikramah.

On the standard type, king is shown standing to left holding in left hand standard adorned with fillet and offering oblations on altar by right hand, garuda standard behind the altar. Chandragupta and 'vasudha vijitya tradava prithavasvarah' – having conquered the globe, the lord of the earth wins heaven by meritorious deeds'. On reverse, goddess is shown seated on throne, facing holding noose in outstretched right hand and cornucopiae in the left hand, and paramabhagavat is written.

On the Chakravikrama type, God Chakrapurusha is standing to right within a double-rimmed wheel, holding a mace (gada) in his left hand hanging by his side and offering by right hand three round objects held in his palm to king standing facing him, extending his right hand to receive the divine gift and left hand is placed on the hilt of a sword hanging by the left leg. On the reverse, within the dotted border Lakshmi standing on a lotus holding a lotus with a long stalk having a bud as well. The legend is chakravikrama. It is presumed that king receiving a divine favour direct from Chakrapurusha, who is manifesting himself before him for that purpose, the prasada in the form of three round objects may be taken to symbolize three fold royal power consisting of prabhusakti, utsahasakti and mantrasakti, which together constitute the kriyasakti of a king, as Chakrapurusha was a representation of the kriyasakti of Vishnu.

The silver coins are copy of the Kshatrapa silver issue current in western India. On the obverse the king's bust is closely modelled on that of the Kshatrapa prototype but Saka era is replaced by the Gupta era. On the reverse, the wavy line at the bottom, the crescent and the cluster of dots at the top are allowed to continue, but the three-arched hill in the centre replaced by garuda. Silver coins of Chandragupta II are divided into two classes. In class 1, the legend ends with vikramaditya and mention the religious persuasion and not the family name of the issuer – 'paramabhagavata maharajadhiraja sri Chandragupta vikramaditya', while in class 2 the legend ends with vikramanka and gives the family name 'sri guptakulasya maharajadhiraja sri Chandragupta vikramaditya.

The copper coinage of Chandragupta is fairly original, known in different types like, chhatra type, standing king type, archer type, bust type, chakra type, and vase type. On vase type, within dotted border Chandra surmounted by a crescent and on reverse within dotted border kalasa or vase with flowers hanging down from its edge is shown. Chakra type bears in upper half chakra or wheel, in the lower half Chandra is written and on the reverse in the upper half garuda in the lower half gupta is written. On the standing king type, king standing left with right hand raised up and on the reverse garuda having no human arms and legend sri Chandraguptah. On the bust type, king bust holding flower in uplifted right hand and garuda with outstretched wings and the name of the king on the reverse. Garuda sometimes represented with human hands and in other examples without human hands.