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Chandragupta I: Marriage, Empire, and the Gupta Era

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Chandragupta I: Marriage, Empire, and the Gupta Era

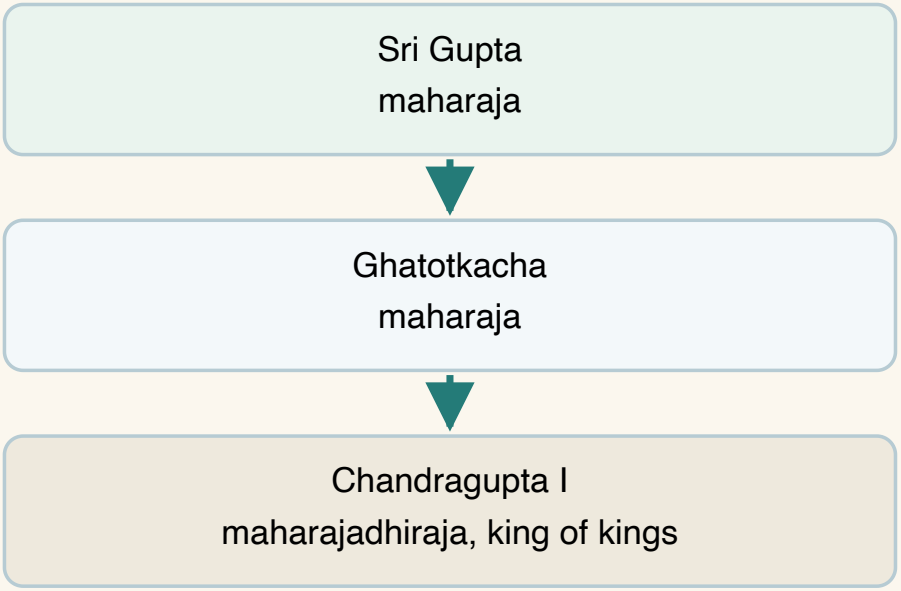
Chandragupta I turned a small dynasty into an empire by marrying into the Lichchhavi clan. Historians link that alliance to his new, grander title.

1 Who ruled before him?

Chandragupta I did not found the Gupta line. He inherited it from two earlier rulers. Both were small kings with modest titles.

Who were his forefathers?

- The Allahabad Pillar Inscription names Sri Gupta as the first king.
- One later record calls Ghatotkacha the first king instead.
- His son Ghatotkacha came next.
- Chandragupta I was the son of Ghatotkacha.
- Little is known about the first two. No inscription of Sri Gupta survives.



Each ruler moved up in title. Chandragupta I moved up the most. Original explanatory diagram.

What changed with Chandragupta I?

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription calls Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha “maharaja”. It calls Chandragupta I “maharajadhiraja”. That means “king of kings”. Think of a promotion from district officer to chief secretary. The title jumped a full step.

What is the memory hook?

Think “maharaja, maharaja, then maharajadhiraja”.

> **Quick check 1.** Chandragupta I was the first of his line to use the title maharajadhiraja. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: puratattva.in

Sources: whatisindia.com; worldhistory.org

2 Whom did he marry?

Chandragupta I married Kumaradevi. She was a princess of the Lichchhavi clan. The Lichchhavis were a respected old clan.

Why did the marriage matter?

Think of a village head marrying into a powerful family. His standing rises at once. Historians link the Gupta rise to this match.

- One reading says his change of title came through the alliance, not a recorded conquest.
- Another says it was “doubtless” the marriage that raised him to power.
- One account says the marriage brought mines rich in iron ore close to his kingdom.
- No source here says how the match came about.

What is the memory hook?

Think “wedding first, empire after”.

> **Quick check 2.** Kumaradevi, the wife of Chandragupta I, belonged to the Kushan clan. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: puratattva.in; whatisindia.com; worldhistory.org

3 What does the coin show?

A gold coin records the marriage. It is called the King and Queen type. Coin collectors also call it the Marriage type.

What is on the coin?

- The front shows Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi standing together.
- Their names appear beside them.
- The king looks at his bride and offers her a ring.
- The back carries the legend “Licchavayah”, meaning “of the Lichchhavis”.
- The goddess Lakshmi sits on a lion on the back.



The “King and Queen type” gold coin, showing Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi standing together. British Museum specimen. Photo by Uploadalt, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Who issued it?

Experts disagree. John Allan gave it to Samudragupta, and most numismatists accept that. A. S. Altekar gave it to Chandragupta I himself. In either case, the coin celebrates the match with the Lichchhavis.

What is the memory hook?

Think “king, queen, Lichchhavis”.

> **Quick check 3.** The King and Queen coin carries the legend "Licchavayah" on its back. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: puratattva.in; whatisindia.com; ha-europe.com

4 What is Lichchhavi-dauhitra?

Lichchhavi-dauhitra means “the daughter’s son of the Lichchhavi”. Samudragupta used it for himself. It tells you how proud the family was of this link.

Where does the phrase appear?

- It appears in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription.
- It is not “Gauptaputra”, which would mean “son of a Gupta”.
- The same epithet was used for him by his successor in their records.
- The Lichchhavi link was thus treated as a great event by the imperial Guptas.

Why choose the mother's side?

Imagine a prince who names his maternal grandfather before his own surname. He is saying the mother's family was the more honoured one. That is the point of the phrase.

What is the memory hook?

Think "daughter's son, proud of mother's line".

> **Quick check 4.** Lichchhavi-dauhitra means "son of the Guptas". *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

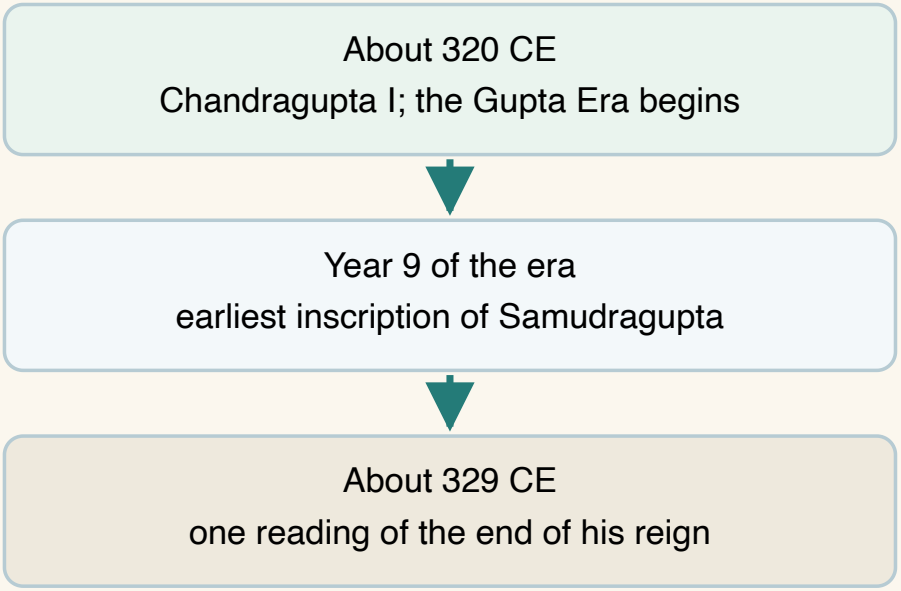
Sources: puratattva.in; whatisindia.com

5 When did he rule?

Chandragupta I came to the throne about 320 CE. Most scholars link the start of the Gupta Era to this event. The era then gave later kings a fixed way to count years.

What are the dates?

- World History Encyclopedia gives his reign as 320 to 335 CE.
- Another page by the same encyclopedia gives 319 to 335 CE.
- Puratattva gives 320 to 329 CE.
- So the end of his reign is not fixed. Sources differ by a few years.



Year nine of the era points to about 329 CE. Original explanatory diagram.

How is 329 CE reached?

Samudragupta's earliest inscription is dated to year nine of the Gupta Era. Nine years after 320 gives 329 CE. That can be taken as the last year of Chandragupta I.

What is the memory hook?

Think "320 starts the clock".

> **Quick check 5.** Sources differ on the year Chandragupta I's reign ended. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: puratattva.in

Sources: worldhistory.org

6 Who succeeded him?

His son Samudragupta followed him. The father chose him. Samudragupta was not the eldest son.

How was the choice made?

- The Allahabad Pillar Inscription says Chandragupta I himself selected him.
- It says the brothers viewed the choice with jealousy.
- It says ministers and people of the court were glad.
- Some historians think an elder son, Kacha, ruled first. Only some coins support this.

What came next?

Samudragupta expanded the empire widely. His conquests are known mainly from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. A court officer named Harishena wrote it.

What is the memory hook?

Think “father picks, brothers frown, court cheers”.

> **Quick check 6.** Samudragupta was the eldest son of Chandragupta I. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: puratattva.in; worldhistory.org

7 What do exams ask?

Exams test clear contrasts. Keep the chain of kings straight and the three key terms ready.

What are the common traps?

- **Which title?** Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha were maharajas. Chandragupta I was the first maharajadhiraja.
- **Whose clan?** Kumaradevi was Lichchhavi. The phrase “Lichchhavi-dauhitra” belongs to her son.
- **Which era?** The Gupta Era is linked to his accession, around 320 CE.
- **Who chose the heir?** Chandragupta I chose Samudragupta, who was not the eldest son.

How do you remember them?

Think “title, clan, era, heir”.

> **Quick check 7.** Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha carried only the title maharaja. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: puratattva.in; whatisindia.com; worldhistory.org

Practice MCQs

1. Which title did Chandragupta I take that Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha did not?

A. Senapati

B. Maharajadhiraja

C. Chakravartin

D. Maharaja

See answer ↓

2. Which clan did Kumaradevi, the wife of Chandragupta I, belong to?

A. Malla

B. Shakya

C. Lichchhavi

D. Kuru

See answer ↓

3. What does the word "Licchavayah" on the King and Queen gold coin mean?

A. Of the Lichchhavis

B. Of the Guptas

C. Victory to Lakshmi

D. Of the king

See answer ↓

4. Samudragupta called himself Lichchhavi-dauhitra. What does the phrase mean?

A. Conqueror of the Lichchhavis

B. Daughter's son of the Lichchhavi

C. Friend of the Lichchhavis

D. Priest of the Lichchhavis

See answer ↓

5. Who chose Samudragupta as the next king, according to the Allahabad Pillar Inscription?

A. Harishena

B. The Lichchhavi council

C. His brothers

D. His father, Chandragupta I

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** The answer is maharajadhiraja, meaning king of kings. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription gives his forefathers only the title maharaja. The jump shows his higher standing. Chakravartin and Senapati are not the titles in that inscription. Memory hook: maharaja, maharaja, then maharajadhiraja. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** The answer is the Lichchhavi clan. Kumaradevi was a Lichchhavi princess. Historians link the Gupta rise to this alliance. The Shakya, Malla and Kuru clans are not connected to her. Memory hook: wedding first, empire after. ↑ Q2
3. **A.** The answer is "of the Lichchhavis". The word sits on the back of the coin. The front shows Chandragupta I and Kumaradevi. The coin celebrates the match with the Lichchhavi clan. The goddess Lakshmi is shown on the back too, but her image is not the word. Memory hook: king, queen, Lichchhavis. ↑ Q3
4. **B.** The answer is "daughter's son of the Lichchhavi". Samudragupta used it in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. It named his mother's clan with pride. The other meanings do not match the phrase. Memory hook: daughter's son, proud of mother's line. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** The answer is his father, Chandragupta I. The inscription says he selected Samudragupta himself. The brothers viewed the choice with jealousy. Harishena only wrote the inscription. Memory hook: father picks, brothers frown, court cheers. ↑ Q5

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** His forefathers carried only the title maharaja. ↑ 1
2. **False.** it is false. She was a Lichchhavi princess. ↑ 2
3. **True.** The word means of the Lichchhavis. ↑ 3
4. **False.** it is false. It means daughter's son of the Lichchhavi. ↑ 4
5. **True.** Dates run from 329 to 335 CE across sources. ↑ 5
6. **False.** it is false. His father nominated him, so he was probably not the eldest. ↑ 6
7. **True.** The bigger title came with Chandragupta I. ↑ 7

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