

Body: Provincial administration: The provinces called ‘**Deshas**’ or ‘**Bhukti**’ were under direct superintendence of Gupta rulers as attested by **Prayag Prasasti of Samudragupta**. The provincial governor called Uparikas were directly appointed by the ruler and Uparikas in turn appointed the district administrators as suggested by **Copper Plate inscriptions of Damodarpur**.

The **Uparikas** enjoyed high position in Gupta administrative structure as suggested by use of Maharaja title by them. They controlled the military machinery at provincial level and even looked after the public infrastructure as shown by the Junagarh inscription which says that Sudarshan lake was repaired by the provincial governor of Saurashtra region during the reign of Samudragupta.

District administration: Districts in the Gupta administration were known as **Vishayas**, which were ruled by **Vishayapatis** appointed by the Uperikas. The Vishyapati was assisted by many **non official** functionaries like Nagarasreshthi (chief trader), the Sarthavaha (caravan leader), etc., who held positions of respect from a local point of view or were representatives of locally important social groups. This was an innovation of Gupta period. Also the Guptas are credited with the inclusion of non-officials in the district boards.

Local administration: The administrative units below the district level included the clusters of settlements known variously as **Vithi, Petha, Bhumi** etc. and were administered by Vithi-kulika and ‘ashtakuladhikarana’ who seems to be local non official bodies which took care of local administration.

At the village level, villagers chose functionaries such as **Gramika** or **Gramadhyaksha** who performed the function of village headmen. An institution similar to village panchayat might have existed as suggested by ‘**Pancha-mandali**’ of Sanchi inscription of Chandragupta. Even the village elders played an important role in administration like settling disputes etc.

Conclusion: Study of the inscriptions shows that at district and local level the non-officials were integrated into the structure of Gupta administration, whereas the provinces were directly under control of rulers.

GIST OF THE ANSWER

- **Sources:** Prayag Prasasti of Samudragupta, Copper Plate inscriptions of Damodarpur.
- **Concept/Principle in Body:** Highlight the central control over the provinces and the decentralized character of District and village administration.
- **Must use Key-words:** Proto-feudal, Deshas, Bhukti, Uparikas, Vishaya, Vishayapatis

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