

Srikrishna college Bagula, Nadia

Study Material

1st semester History programme Course

By Aniket Mitra

Achievements by the Gupta Dynasty

The Gupta age in ancient India has been called the 'Golden Age of India' because of the many achievements in the field of arts, science and literature that Indians made under the Guptas. The prosperity under the Guptas initiated a period of splendid accomplishments in arts and sciences. The Gupta Empire lasted from 320 AD to 550 AD.

Literature

Sanskrit literature flourished under the Guptas. Kalidasa, the great poet and playwright was in the court of Chandragupta Vikramaditya. He composed great epics such as Abhijnanashaakuntalam, Kumarasambhavam, Malavikagnimitram, Ritusamharam, Meghadootam, Vikramorvashiyam and Raghuvamsham.

The celebrated Sanskrit drama Mṛcchakatika was composed during this time. It is attributed to Shudraka.

Poet Harisena also adorned the court of Chandragupta Vikramaditya. He wrote the Allahabad Prashasti (inscription).

Vishnusharma of Panchatantra fame lived during this era.

Amarasimha (grammarian and poet) composed a lexicon of Sanskrit, Amarakosha.

Vishakhadatta composed Mudrarakshasa. Other grammarians who contributed to the Sanskrit language include Vararuchi and Bhartrihari.

Kalidas

Kalidas has written the best works in poetry, drama as well as in prose.

His kavyas such as Meghaduta, Raghuvamsa, and Kumarasambhava, and dramas such as Abhijnashakuntalam are the best literary works of this time and it is considered as the best even today. These works have been translated into many languages.

Kalidas adorned the court of Chandragupta-II, the king of Ujjayini, who was popular as Vikramaditya.

Fa-Hien

Fa-Hien came to India through land route via central Asia and Kashmir and traveled across north India.

Fa-Hien stayed three years at Patliputra and here he learned the Sanskrit language.

Hiuen Tsang

Fa-Hien was interested only in Buddhism; however, he gave an idea of general peace and welfare during Gupta's court.

Hiuen-Tsang,

another Chinese traveler, visited India during Harsha's reign. He spent thirteen years in India, in which eight years, he stayed in Harsha's kingdom.

Hiuen-Tsang had studied at Nalanda University. He visited various Indian kingdoms and mentioned about their condition. His book "Si-yu-ki" is a precious source of ancient Indian history.

Hiuen-Tsang was honored by Harshavardhana of Kanauj and Bhaskarvarma of Assam.

I-tsing, a Chinese traveler, came to India via sea route. He spent many years in Sumatra and Sri Vijaya and learned Buddhism.

I-tsing

I-tsing stayed at Nalanda for ten years and studied and translated Buddhist texts.

I-tsing compiled a Sanskrit Chinese dictionary and translated a number of Sanskrit texts.

I-tsing mentioned about Buddhist Religion as Practised in India. He gave a detailed account of Buddhism and general condition of India and Malaya.

Science

In the fields of science, mathematics and astronomy also, the Gupta age saw a lot of interesting advancements.

Aryabhatta, the great Indian mathematician and astronomer wrote Surya Siddhanta and Aryabhattiya. Aryabhatta is believed to have conceptualised 'zero'. He also gave the value of Pi. He postulated that the earth is not flat and it rotated around its own axis and also that it revolved around the sun. He also gave the distance between earth and sun which is remarkably close to the actual value. He wrote on geometry, astronomy, mathematics and trigonometry.

The Indian number system with a base of 10 which is the present numeral system evolved from scholars of this era.

Varahamihira wrote Brihatsamhita. He was an astronomer and an astrologer.

Dhanvantari, the great physician is supposed to have lived during this time.

Sushruta, composed the Sushrutasamhita around 600 AD. He has detailed surgical procedures in this work.

The Nalanda University, a centre of Buddhist and other learning attracted students from abroad. The Guptas patronised this ancient seat of learning.

Art & architecture

Many magnificent temples, palaces, paintings and sculptures were created.

Dashavatara Temple in Deogarh, UP is one of the earliest surviving Hindu temples. It is a fine example of Gupta architecture.

Mural paintings of Ajanta depicting the life of the Buddha as told in the Jataka tales were created in this period. Places like Ajanta, Ellora, Mathura, Sarnath; and Anuradhapura and Sigiriya in Sri Lanka bear examples of Gupta art and architecture.

Classical Indian music and dance took shape in this time.

The Gupta legacy in arts can be seen in Southeast Asia also today.

The Bronze Buddha which is 7.5 feet high and found at Sultanganj is a product of the Gupta age.

The iron pillar at Mehrauli, Delhi is a marvellous creation of this period. It is a 7 m long pillar and it is made up of a composition of metals such that it is rust-free. This is a testimony to the metallurgical skills of Indians of that time.

Social culture & religion

petus under the Guptas and it flourished and expanded throughout India.

Although the Gupta kings were Vaishnavas they were tolerant of Buddhism and Jainism. They patronised Buddhist art.

The Shakti cult rose up around this time.

Sacrifice was being replaced by Bhakti and Pooja.

Occult practices like tantrism also emerged during this time.

The game of chess is said to have originated from this time. It was called Chaturanga meaning the four divisions (of the military such as infantry (pawn), cavalry (knight), elephantry (bishop) and chariotry (rook)).