

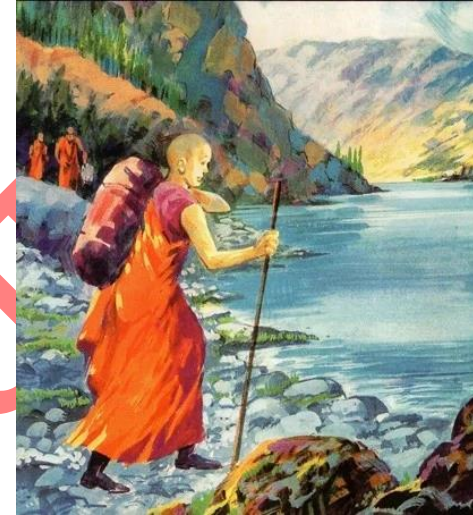
The period of about two centuries from early fourth century AD is known as the Imperial Age of the Guptas. During this period India made progress in the field of education, science and culture. The period is also known as the "**classical age**" or the **golden age** of Indian history.

SOURCES

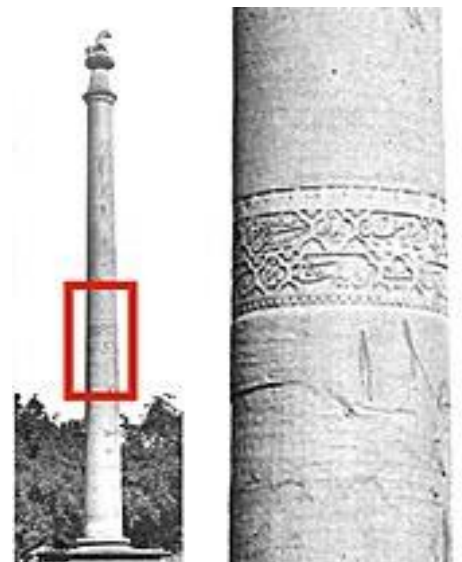
The main sources of information about the Guptas are the following:

1. Accounts of Fa-hien: Fa-hien was the earliest Chinese pilgrim who visited India on a religious mission during the reign of Chandragupta II. During his stay in India, he went on a pilgrimage to Mathura, Kannauj, Kapilavastu, Kushinagar, Vaishali, Pataliputra, Kashi and Rajagriha and made careful observations:

- Magadha was a prosperous country with large towns, growing with wealthy population.
- Pataliputra was a flourishing city with numerous charitable institutions/including a hospital endowed by kind citizens.
- Although the people were wealthy, they led simple lives, generally observing the Buddhist rules of conduct.
- Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Buddhism and Jainism were the main religions.
- Hindu gods and goddesses were depicted on coins and also in sculptures and paintings.



2. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription or Prayaga Prashasti: It is one of the important inscription proof of the Imperial Guptas. Composed by Harisena, the court poet of Samudragupta. It is written in praise of Samudragupta, the most powerful of the Gupta rulers. It describes the reign of the Guptas in ancient India. It provides list of Kings and tribal republics that were conquered by Samudragupta. The inscription is also important because of the political geography of India that it indicates by naming the different kings and peoples who populated India in the first half of the 4th century



AD.

REIGN OF GUPTA PERIOD

The First two rulers of the Gupta dynasty are Sri Gupta and his son Ghatotkacha. It is believed that the Gupta Era originated with the reign of Chandragupta I.

Chandragupta-I : Chandragupta I was the first independent king with the title of Maharajadhiraja or the king of kings. After declaring his independence in Magadha, Chandragupta-I extended his empire through matrimonial alliance by marrying a Lichchhavi princess, Kumaradevi.

Samudra Gupta: Because of his bravery and general ship that he is known as the 'Napoleon of India'.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta describes four different kinds of rulers and tells us about Samudra Gupta's policies towards them:

- (a) The nine rulers of Aryavarta were uprooted and their kingdoms were made a part of Samudra Gupta's empire.
- (b) The twelve rulers of Dakshinpatha (South India), who surrendered to Samudra Gupta.
- (c) The inner circle of neighbouring states, including Assam, Coastal Bengal, Nepal and a number of gana sanghas in the north-west paid tribute, followed his orders and attended his court.
- (d) The rulers of the outlying areas submitted to him and offered their daughters in marriage.

According to Samudragupta's court poet Harisena, Samudragupta performed an Ashvamedha Yajna or horse sacrifice, Samudragupta was not only a brave warrior and conqueror but also a great ruler, a musician and a poet. In one of his coins he is shown playing the veena. Samudragupta issued eight types of coins made of gold. His court was full of great scholars and literary persons.

Chandragupta II Vikramaditya: The Gupta inscriptions mention that Chandragupta II succeeded his father, Samudragupta. He inherited the military genius of his father and extended the Gupta empire by conquest of

his own. He annexed the territories of Sakas of Malwa, Gujarat and Saurashtra. For this he was given the title **'Sakari' or conqueror of Sakas**.

Chandragupta II entered into matrimonial alliances as a part of his foreign policy. He married Kuberanaga of the Naga family. The marriage of Chandragupta's daughter, Prabhavati with the Vakataka ruler, Rudrasena II helped him to establish his political influence in the Deccan.

Chandragupta II has the title Vikramaditya. His court is said to have been adorned by nine gems' including Kalidasa, Varahamihira and Amarsimha.

He gave the Hunas a crushing defeat and they did not dare attack India in the next 50 years.

MONARCHY

Monarchy was the prevailing form of government during the Gupta period. The theory of the divinity of kings became popular during this period. The Gupta Kings were compared to different Gods such as Yama, Varuna, Indra and Kubera. They were compared to Vishnu as regards their function of preserving and protecting the people.

The Gupta kings enjoyed a large number of powers which covered the political, administrative, military and judicial fields. They were the commanders-in-chief of the army.

THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

The Gupta rulers had their council. Mantri-Parishad consisted of the prince, the high officials and the feudatories. Among the high officers were the kumaramatya and the sandhivigrahika. The kumara Matyas formed the chief cadre for recruiting high functionaries.

The office of the sandhivigrahika (minister of peace and war).

Civil officials such as amatyas, kumaramatyas, etc. performed military functions .

The officer connected with the collection of tolls on commodities is known as shavilkika.

PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Provincial Administration: The core of the Empire directly controlled by the Guptas was divided into bhuktis, each of which was placed under the charge of an uparika -governor.

The bhuktis were divided into vishayas, placed under the charge of the vishayapati. The vishaya was divided into smaller units. Each Vishaya were divided as desa, mandala, bhoga, etc.,

Village Administration: The village administration was managed by the village headman. The village or small towns was called vithis. All land transactions required their permission.

Town Administration: There were various towns (janapadas) under officer called purapala, which issued their seals and coins. They were administered by a committee of five.

Guilds of artisans and traders flourished during the Gupta age. Vaishali in Bihar was an important town where there were separate guilds of artisans (kulika) and of merchants (shreshthi).

FEUDAL NATURE OF POLITY

The system of administration underwent several changes under the Guptas.

The Mauryan state is credited with "comprehensive competence based on centralised control". The Gupta period shows the process of the giving power to local authority by Central authority. The functions of collection of taxes, regulation of mines, agriculture, maintenance of law and order and defence were given to local authority.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF INDIAN CULTURE

The Gupta period is described as the Golden Age of Indian culture because of the high level of civilisation and culture of this period. Along with the revival of Hinduism, the power of creativity was released in the fields of education, literature, arts, architecture, science.

EDUCATION

During the Gupta Age, education was given utmost importance. There were many centres of learning in cities like Pataliputra, Valabhi, Ujjain, Ayodhya and Nasik. According to the inscriptions, the teachers were learned Brahmanas, who were known as **Acharyas and Upadhyayas** and **Bhattas**. The two popular universities were Takshila and Nalanda.



Nalanda University: It was the most renowned educational institution of ancient India. It was located at .

There were at least eight colleges built by different patrons including one by Balaputradeva King of Sumatra. There were more than 10,000 students and teachers. They came from Korea, Mongolia, Japan, China, Tibet, Ceylon and various parts of India.

The subjects of study at Nalanda University were all the four Vedas. logic, grammar, medicine, sankya, yoga, nyaya and the Buddhist works of the different schools.

Nalanda was destroyed by Mohammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khiliji a general of Mohammad Ghori, in 12th century AD.

SCIENCE

Varahamihira was a great astronomer. He proved that moon rotates round the earth and the earth rotates round the sun. **The Brihat Samhita of Varahmihira** deals with astronomy, botany, natural history and physical geography.

Brahmagupta was a mathematician and astronomer. He described the law of gravitation several centuries before Newton.

Charaka and Sushruta were famous scholars of Ayurveda.

Iron Pillar at Delhi near Qutub Minar is example of metallurgy.

Aryabhata: He was a great astronomer and mathematician. He flourished during the reign of Gupta dynasty. His two famous books include Aryabhattivam and Surya Siddhanta. His main achievements were the following:

- (i) He said that the earth moves round the sun.
- (ii) He discovered the rule for finding the area of a triangle.
- (iii) He calculated the exact value of pi which was equal to 3.1416.
- (iv) In his work Surya Siddhanta he explained the exact causes of solar and lunar eclipses.
- (v) Aryabhata was acquainted with the decimal system and use of 'zero'.

CULTURE

During the Gupta period temples were built with elaborate details. the temples in Gupta period were built of solid material like bricks and stone. These temples were built in the architectural style known as Nagara. Two of these temples, one made of stones at Deogarh in Jhansi and the other made of bricks at Bhitargaon in Kanpur have been found in Uttar Pradesh.

The Vishnu Temple at Deogarh: The Vishnu temple, also called the



Dashavatara Temple. It is one of the earliest Hindu stone temples to survive till date. It was the first North Indian temple with a Shikhara or tower. The temple was built on a 1.5 metre high platform. Its exterior is decorated with scenes from Ramayana.

LITERATURE

The Gupta age constitutes an important phase in the history of Sanskrit literature. Guptas made Sanskrit the official language for administrative purposes. The Gupta period marked the beginning of the writing of important works known as Puranas like Vishnu Purana, Vayu Purana, Varaha Purana, Narsimha Purana.

Kalidasa: Kalidasa is regarded as the greatest poet and playwright, India has ever produced. His four poetic works are: Ritusamhara, Raghuvamsa, Meghaduta and Kumarasambhava. The Meghaduta, (the Cloud Messenger) is an outstanding lyrical poetic work.

The three dramatic works of Kalidasa were: Vikramorvashiyam, Malavikagnimitram and Abhijnanashakuntalam. His dramatic work Abhijnanashakuntalam narrates the love story of king Dushyanta and Shakuntala whose son Bharata later became the ruler.