

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.

Gupta Empire Literature

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.

Sciences

- 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 Aryabhattachya. 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

- The Hindu epics were given their final touches during this time. The Hindu religion also received an impetus 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)).

Fall of the Gupta Empire

Decline of the Gupta Empire

- The Gupta decline started during the reign of Skandagupta, the grandson of Chandragupta II. He was successful in retaliating against the Huns and the Pushyamitras, but his empire was drained of finances and resources because of this.
- The last recognised king of the Gupta line was Vishnugupta who reigned from 540 to 550 AD.
- Internal fighting and dissensions among the royal family led to its weakening.
- During the reign of a Gupta king, Budhagupta, the Vakataka ruler Narendrasena of western Deccan attacked Malwa, Mekala and Kosala. Later on, another Vakataka king Harishena conquered Malwa and Gujarat from the Guptas.
- During Skandagupta's reign, the Huns invaded northwest India but were restricted. But in the sixth century, they occupied Malwa, Gujarat, Punjab and Gandhara. The Hun invasion weakened the Gupta hold in the country.
- Independent rulers emerged all over the north like Yasodharman of Malwa, the Maukharis of U.P., the Maitrakas in Saurashtra, and others in Bengal. The Gupta Empire was restricted to Magadha only. (Yasodharman had joined forces with Narasimhagupta to successfully retaliate against the Hun chief Mihirakula.)
- The later Guptas' following of Buddhism rather than Hinduism unlike their ancestors also weakened the empire. They did not focus on empire-building and military conquests.
- So weak rulers along with incessant invasions from foreign as well as native rulers caused the decline of the Gupta Empire.

- By the beginning of the sixth century, the empire had disintegrated and was ruled by many regional chieftains.