

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Arts (First Year)

Subject: History

Course Code: HSC 102

Course Title: History of India (From Earliest Times up to 8th century C.E)

Unit III: The Gupta Empire: Contributions to Religion, Literature, Sciences, Art and Architecture

Module Name: Gupta Empire: Contribution to Religion, Literature

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Notes

The Gupta period (A.D. 320 to 647) is considered as the classical age of Hindu civilization. Sanskrit literature flourished; astronomy, mathematics, and medicine saw important findings. The Gupta Empire was founded by Maharaja Sri Gupta. The Gupta empire was an ancient Indian empire that covered much of the Indian Subcontinent around 320-550 CE. Gupta rule was known for territorial expansion by the means of war. They began a period of peace and prosperity which was marked by advancements in science, technology, engineering, art, dialectics, literature, logic, mathematics, astronomy, religion, and philosophy. Guptas were well known for their contribution to religion and culture.

The Gupta Empire was marked by the return of Hinduism as the state religion. After Buddhism died out Hinduism returned in the form of a religion called Brahmanism. Indigenous gods were worshipped. Gupta rulers patronised the Hindu religious custom hence, orthodox Hinduism re-established itself during this period. The Gupta king was venerated as an *avatar* of Lord Vishnu. Brahmanism was the state religion. The Gupta period also witnessed the peaceful coexistence of Brahmins and

Buddhists and visits by Chinese travellers like Fa Hien. The unique Ajanta and Ellora caves were created during this period.

Architecture, sculptures and paintings survive as reminders of the creativity of the time. Wide promotion of science, art, philosophy, and religion by the government was seen during the period of Chandragupta II. Chandragupta's court consisted of the *Navaratnas*, or the Nine Jewels who were a group of nine scholars. These scholars included Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Vishnu Sharma, Sushruta and others. Aryabhata proposed the concept of zero and worked on the approximation for *Pi*. He also hypothesized the theory that the Earth moves round the Sun and is not flat, but instead is round and rotates on its own axis. Aryabhata wrote *Surya Siddhanta* in which he explained the true causes of solar and lunar eclipses.

Varahamihira was an astronomer, astrologer, and mathematician, who is known for his remarkable work which is a treatise on mathematical astronomy. Varahamihira wrote *Brihat Samhita* which is a work on Astronomy, botany, natural history and physical geography. He also wrote *Navanitakam*, *Pancha Siddhantika*, *Brihajataka* and *Laghujataka*. Brahmagupta proposed that, "All things fall to the earth by a law of nature; for it is the nature of the earth to attract and keep things." Sushruta, was an Indian physician of the Gupta period. He wrote the *Samhita*, a Sanskrit text on major concepts of ayurvedic medicine. It consists of chapters on surgery.

Under the Gupta rule, a number of notable scholars flourished, including Kalidasa- the greatest poet and dramatist of the Sanskrit language; Aryabhata- the first of the Indian mathematician-astronomers who worked on the approximation for *Pi*; Vishnu Sharma- author of the *Panchatantra*; and Vatsyayana- author of the *Kama Sutra*.

Kalidasa, the greatest poet and dramatist of the Sanskrit language belonged primarily to this period. He wrote plays, such as *Abhijnana-Shakuntala*, *Ritusamhita*, *Malavikagnimitram*, *Kumarasambhava*, *Meghaduta*, *Raghuvamsa* and *Vikrama Urvashyam*. The Indian scholar and Hindu philosopher Vatsyayana, authored the *Kama Sutra*, which became a standard work on human sexual behavior. Vishnu Sharma authored *Panchatantra*. Bhasa composed dramas like *Svapnavasavadatta*, *Madhyamvyayoga*, *Pratijna-Yaugandharayana*, *Dutavakya*, *Balacharita*, *Pratima*, *Abhisheka*, *Avimarka*, *Charudatta*, *Duta-Ghatotkach*, *Karuabhara*, *Urubhanga* and *Pancharatra*. Sudraka authored *Mrichchhakatika*. Vishakhadatta wrote

Mudrarakshasa which is a story of the revolution which put Chandragupta Maurya on the throne of Magadha. Bhatti wrote *Ravanavadha*, also known as *Bhattikavya*.

The Guptas produced magnificent architecture, including palaces and temples, sculptures and paintings. The walls of Buddhist shrines and monasteries were decorated with colourful frescoes. It depicted scenes from the life of the Buddha. Some shrines were cut out of the cliffs, and although dark, they were also decorated with sculptures and paintings.

Worship of Vishnu

Worship of goddess Laxmi

Shaivism

Cult of Shakti

Cult of Skanda

Patronized Hinduism.

Worship of Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Muruga, Sun.

Tolerant of Buddhism and Jainism.

Literature

Followers of Lord Vishnu.

Styled themselves as *Parambhagavatas*.

Figure of *Lakshmi*- coins.

Garuda- seals

Vishnudhvaja- Inscription of Buddhagupta

Invocation- Junagadh inscription of Skandagupta

Worship of Goddess Lakshmi

Images of Goddess Lakshmi found on coins.

Consort of Lord Vishnu.

Goddess of wealth and riches of the land.

Wealth of the kingdom of the ancient Hindu monarchs.

Shiva temple at Bhumra in Nagod and Khoh in Nagaudh.

Parvati temple at Nachna-Kuthara in Ajaigarh.

Kritantaparasah or destroyer of Yama- Shiva.

Udaygiri cave inscription of Chandragupta-II- Shiva inscription.

Karmadanda inscription of Kumaragupta- *Namo Mahadevaya*.

Cult of Shakti

Parvati temple- Nachna-Kuthara in Ajaigarh.

Sankanika cave at Udaigiri- image of mahishasurmardini.

Durga cult- Brahmanda purana, Bhagvata Purana, Markandeya Purana.

Sapta Matrika- Brahmi, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Vaisnavi, Varahi, Mahendri and Camundi.

Shakti and Purusa.

Cult of Skanda

War god, riding a peacock.

Temples of Kartikeya or Swami Mahasena.

Bilsad Stone Pillar inscription of Kumaragupta- improvement of temple of Swami Mahasena.

Skandapradanai- Bihar Stone Pillar inscription of Skandagupta.

Cult of Surya

Worship of Sun.

Prayer dedicated to Surya- Indore Copper Plate of Skandagupta.

Consciousness gained back from Surya.

When Buddhism and Jainism reached at its peak, Hinduism had become less popular.

Guptas extended royal patronage to Hinduism.

State religion.

Tolerant towards Buddhism and Jainism.

Samudragupta patronized the Buddhist scholars- Vasubandhu.

Orthodox Hindus- Rulers guided by Brahmana advisors.

Samudragupta and Kumaragupta- horse sacrifices.

Temples of various deities established.

Worship of incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

Depiction of deities having many arms and heads-popular during Gupta period.

The Guptas were tolerant towards all religions. Gupta period is considered to be the Golden Age of Sanskrit literature.