

Study Material for Semester- II
Paper – Mauryan and Gupta Empire (Core-3)
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Art Architecture and Literature of Gupta Period

Gupta Arts and Architecture:

Religion was intimately connected with the developments in architecture and plastic arts.

Sculpture:

Earlier developments in plastic arts seem to have culminated in the Gupta sculpture. The most important contribution of Gupta sculpture is the evolution of the perfect types of divinities, both Buddhist and Brahmanical.

A large number of Buddha images have been unearthed at Sarnath, and one of them is justly regarded as the finest in the whole of India. Stone and bronze images of Buddha have also been found at Mathura and other places.

The images of Siva, Vishnu and other Brahmanical gods are sculptured in some of the finest panels of the Deogarh temple (Jhansi district). Of the Brahmanical images perhaps the most impressive is the Great Boar (Varaha), at the entrance of a cave in Udayagiri.

The art of casting metals reached a degree of development. Fa-Hien saw an over 25 metre high image of the Buddha made of copper, but it is not traceable now. The Bronze Buddha, found at Sultanganj, is 71/2 feet high and is a fine piece of sculpture. The Iron Pillar of Delhi, near the Qutub-Minar, is a marvellous work belonging to the early Gupta period.

Architecture:

The Gupta period was poor in architecture. The doctrine of bhakti and the growing importance of image worship led to the construction of the free standing temple with its sanctuary (garbha griha), in which the central cult image was placed. The Gupta period marks the beginning of Indian temple architecture. The temples are simple and impretentious structures, but their bearing upon later

developments is of great significance. The following well defined types may be recognized.

1. Flat roofed, square temple with a shallow pillared porch in front.
2. Flat rooted, square temple with a covered ambulatory around the sanctum and proceeded by a pillared porch, sometimes with a second story above.
3. Square temple with a low and squat sikhara (tower) above.
4. Rectangular temple with an apsidal back and a barrel – vaulted roof above.
5. Circular temple with shallow rectangular projections at the four cardinal faces.

The first three types of may be regarded as the forerunners of medieval Indian temple styles. Representative examples of the first include temple No. XVII at Sanchi, Kankali Devi temple at Tigawa and Vishnu and Varaha temples at Eran.

The nucleus of a Temple (garbha – griha) with a single entrance and a porch (mandapa) appears for the first time as an integrated composition in this type of Gupta temples. The second type is represented by Parvati temple at Nachna Kuthara and the Siva temple at Bhumara (both in M P). This group of temples shows many of the characteristic features of the dravida style.

Notable examples of the third type are seen in the so called Dasavatara Temple at Deogarh (Jhansi district) and the brick temple at Bhitargaon (Kanpur district). The importance of this group lies in the innovation of a shikhara or tower that caps the sanctum, the main feature of the nagara style.

The fourth type is represented by a temple at Ter (Sholapur district) and the Kapoleshvara temple at Aihole. The fifth is represented by a solitary monument known as Maniyar Matha at Rajgir, Bihar.

The rock-cut caves continue the old forms to a large extent, some of the caves at Ajanta and Ellora (Maharashtra) and Bagh (M.P.) may be assigned to the Gupta period. Both Chaitya and Vihara caves were excavated at Ajanta and the Vihara cave No. XVI and XVII and the Chaitya cave no. XIX are the best artistic monuments of the Gupta period.

The earliest of the Brahmanical shrines are to be seen in group of caves at Udayagiri (MP.). The caves at Mogulrajapuram, Undavalli and Akkannamadanna in the Andhra country belong to the Gupta period.

Stupas were also built in large numbers, but the best are found at Sarnath (Dhamekh Stupa), Rajgir (Jarasindha – k.a – Baithak), Mirpur Khan in Sindh and at Ratnagiri (Orissa).

Paintings:

The art of painting reached its height of glory and splendour in this age. The most important examples of the Gupta paintings are to be found on the wall frescos of the Ajanta caves, the Bagh caves. The Gupta painters also painted incidents from the life of Buddha during the Gupta period.

Cave No. XVI at Ajanta has the scene known as “Dying Princess”. Cave no. XVII has been called a picture gallery. At Ajanta other prominent cave paintings are cave no. XIX, I and II.

Gupta Literature:

Sanskrit language and literature after centuries of evolution, through lavish royal patronage reached to the level of classical excellence. Sanskrit was the court language of the Guptas.

1. The Puranas had existed much before the time of the Guptas in the form of bardic literature; in the Gupta age they were finally compiled and given their present form.
2. The period also saw the compilation of various Smritis or the law-books written in verse. The Smritis of Yajnavalkya, Narada, Katyayana and Brihaspati were written during this period.
3. The two great epics namely the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were almost completed by the 4th century A.D.
4. The Gupta period is remarkable for the production of secular literature. Among the known Sanskrit poets of the period, the greatest name is that of Kalidasa who lived in the court of Chandragupta II. The most important works of Kalidasa were the Abhijnanashakuntalam (considered to be one of the best hundred literary works in the world) Ritusamhara, Malavikagnimitra, Kumarasambhava, Meghaduta, Raghuvamsha and Vikrama Urvashiyam. Shudraka wrote the drama

Mrichbhakatika or the little Clay cart. Vishakadatta is the author of the Mudrarakshasa, which deals with the schemes of the shrewd Chanakya.

The Devichandraguptam another drama written by him, has survived only in fragments.

5. The Gupta period also saw the development of Sanskrit grammar based on Panini and Patanjali. This period is particularly memorable for the compilation of the Amarakosha by Amarasimha, who was a luminary in the court of Chandragupta II. A Buddhist scholar from Bengal, Chandragomia, composed a book on grammar, named Chandravyakaranam.

6. Buddhist and Jaina literature in Sanskrit were also written during the Gupta period. Buddhist scholars Arya Deva, Arya Asanga and Vasubandhu of the Gupta period were the most notable writers. Siddhasena Divakara laid the foundation of logic among the Jainas. The Gupta age witnessed the evolution of many Prakrit forms such as Suraseni used in Mathura and its vicinity, Ardhamagadhi spoken in Oudh and Bundelkhand, Magadhi in Bihar and Maharashtri in Berar.

Reference <https://www.historydiscussion.net/empires/history-of-the-gupta-empire-indian-history/600>