

Tender Heart High School, Sec 33B, Chd

History and Civics

Class IX

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Chapter 6 The Age of the Guptas

After the end of the Mauryan Empire a number of dynasties like the Sungas, Kanvas, Kushanas ruled over northern India. The most important were the Guptas who brought unity and peace over nearly the whole of northern India. The origin of the Guptas is shrouded in mystery. The founder of the Gupta dynasty was Srigupta who was probably a minor chief. He was followed by his son Ghatotkacha. It was Chandragupta I who was the first independent ruler with the title of Maharajadhiraj.

Before we study about the Guptas in detail, let us study about the sources which help us to reconstruct the history of the Guptas. Among the literary sources the most important was the accounts of Fa-hien, a Chinese pilgrim who came to visit India during the reign of Chandragupta II. According to him Pataliputra was a flourishing city, people were prosperous and led simple lives. The main religions were Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Buddhism and Jainism. Among other literary sources were the works of Kalidasa and Vishakhadatta. The Smritis

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and the Puranas also provide valuable information.

The most important archaeological source was the Allahabad Pillar Inscription which provides information about the most powerful Gupta ruler, Samudragupta (the son of Chandragupta I). It was composed by Harisena and provides the list of kings both in north and south India who were defeated by Samudragupta. Please read the conquests of Samudragupta as given on Pg. 59 and 60. While the regions in the north were annexed, the rulers of the south were allowed to rule and had to pay annual tribute to Samudragupta. He performed Asvamedha Yajna and is depicted on his coins playing the veena.

Samudragupta was succeeded by Chandragupta II. His main achievement was to overthrow the Sakas of Malwa, Gujarat and Saurashtra. With a view to pursuing his plans, Chandragupta married Kubernaga. He married his daughter to the Vakataka ruler Rudrasena II. He took the title of 'Sakari'. On many of his coins, he has the title of Vikramaditya. Chandragupta II was succeeded by Kumar Gupta, who maintained the integrity of the empire. The last of the imperial Guptas was Skandagupta.

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As we have studied the Gupta dynasty produced a number of able rulers who established an efficient system of administration. As monarchy was the prevailing form of government, the king was the most important figure in the whole empire. He was compared to different Gods and took titles like Maharajadhiraj, Parambhattaraka and Paramadavaita. He was assisted by the council of ministers. Among the high officers were Kumarmatyas and Sandhivigraha. Some of the officers maintained records of lands. The officer connected with the collection of toll on commodities was known as shaulkika.

The empire was divided into provinces called as bhuktis which were under governors called as uparika. The Bhuktis were divided into Vishayas which were ruled by Vishayapatis. In some places there were other administrative units called as desa, mandala. The lowest unit was village which was managed by village headman. The towns were having their own administration and put under the charge of purapala.

The Mauryan administration was a centralised system. But in the Gupta period we find feudal developments i.e. freedom from the interference of Central Government and devolution of power.

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There was a transfer of power by Central Government to local bodies, guilds and professional bodies.

The Gupta age is called as the golden age of Indian culture. We will first discuss here about their education. As education was given importance so there were many centres of learning in cities like Pataliputra, Ujjain, Nalanda, etc. For higher education a number of universities were set up. The most famous educational institution was Nalanda University. It was situated near Rajagriha in Bihar and founded during the reign of Kumaragupta. The university had many imposing buildings. There were three great libraries. Students came to study here not only from various parts of India but also Korea, Mongolia, Japan, China and Tibet. Admission was restricted by a difficult entrance examination and only two or three out of ten succeeded in getting admissions.

During the Gupta period great progress was made in the field of scientific studies such as astronomy, mathematics and medicine. We all know about Aryabhatta. Please give a reading to his achievements on Pg. 64. Apart from him, Varahamihira was another great scientist of the Gupta age. He wrote Brihat Samhita which deals with astronomy,

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botany, natural history and physical geography. Brahmagupta was also a mathematician and astronomer who described the law of gravitation before Newton.

The Gupta period witnessed the beginning of a new style of temple architecture. With the revival of Hinduism under the Guptas, a large number of temples were built of brick, stone and mortar. The Vishnu Temple also called as Dashavatara Temple is one of the finest example of Gupta architecture. The temple marked a transition from the early flat-roofed temples to the later style with a shikhara or a tower. It stands on a wide platform, approached by flights of steps on the four sides. It is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, who is shown asleep on the coil of the giant serpent called Sheshnaga. Please give a reading to literature given on Page 65 and focus on the main writers and their works.

Note:- Parents are requested to read aloud the chapter and ensure that the child completes the following assignment

Homework:- Short Answer Questions:- 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9

Structured Questions:- 1(c); 2(a,c); 3(a); 4(b)