

The Gupta Period of India

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Nalanda University was founded during India's Golden Age.

The Gupta Period was an important time in India's history. The period began about 1700 years ago and lasted for 220 years. This time was not defined by great wealth or extensive trade.

Instead, the period is known for its creativity. The arts, literature, and scholarly study grew and developed greatly during this time in India.

Before the Gupta Period

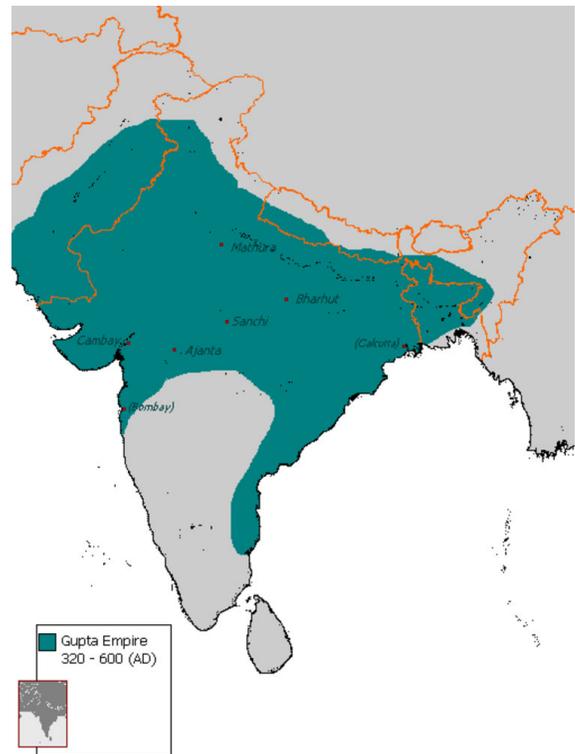
Long before the Gupta Period began, India was ruled by the Mauryans. When the last Mauryan king was killed, their large kingdom — or empire — fell apart. In its place, small kingdoms were created all over India. Each kingdom was ruled by its own king, and no one ruled over all of India.

For nearly 500 years, the small kingdoms fought wars with each other. Then, in the year 320, Chandragupta became a ruler of a small kingdom in the north. He began taking over other small kingdoms and building a new empire. His rule marked the start of the Gupta Period.

Victory at any cost

Chandragupta's son, Samudragupta, ruled after Chandragupta. Samudragupta wanted to unite all of India under his rule. To do this, he waged wars across much of India. One by one, he defeated nine kings in the north and 12 in the south.

The Gupta Empire expanded greatly under Samudragupta's reign. He has often been compared to famous conquerors such as Alexander the Great and Napoleon. But Samudragupta did not become a great conqueror on his own. Small groups, or squads, all over India helped Samudragupta in his military successes. Each squad had one elephant, three soldiers who fought on horseback, and five foot soldiers. The squads protected Gupta villages from attacks and revolts. In times of war, the squads joined together to form a strong royal army.



Gupta achievements in the arts

In addition to being a great fighter, Samudragupta also loved the arts. He not only had artistic talent, but he also gave money to support the arts.

Samudragupta's reign was followed by that of his son, Chandragupta II. Like his father, Chandragupta II greatly supported the arts. Under his rule, artists were paid for their work — which rarely happened during ancient times.

Much of the literature written during the Gupta Period was poems and plays. However, texts about history, grammar, and science were also written.



Two of the most famous scholars of the time were Kalidasa and Aryabhata. Kalidasa was a great writer, whose plays were filled with humor and heroism. Aryabhata was a great scientist, who correctly suggested that Earth is round and spins. He also added up the time it takes Earth to travel around the Sun as 365.358 days. His number was only three hours over the number figured out by modern scientists.

The art of painting also developed greatly during the Gupta Period. Some of the greatest paintings of this time were found on the walls of caves in southern India. The paintings are of Buddha, who was a teacher and philosopher. He founded the religion of Buddhism. An 18-foot statue of the Hindu god Shiva was also found within a Gupta temple in the region.

A lasting inspiration

The Gupta rulers practiced Hindu traditions. But it is clear from the discovery of the paintings of Buddha that the Guptas allowed religious freedom. The remains of a Buddhist university within the region is additional proof that Hindus and Buddhists lived near each other peacefully during this time.

After the reign of Chandragupta II, the Gupta kingdom rapidly weakened. A wave of invasions by the Huns, a group from central Asia, started in the year 480. Soon, Gupta kings had little territory left under their control. Around the year 550, the empire ended completely.

But the culture of the Guptas did not disappear. The art and literature of that time period is still studied today.

Quiz

- 1 Examine the image in the section "Gupta achievements in the arts."
How does the image help develop a MAIN idea of the article?
- (A) It portrays Chandragupta II's power and wealth.
 - (B) It portrays Chandragupta II's love of horseback riding.
 - (C) It portrays Chandragupta II's appreciation of art.
 - (D) It portrays Chandragupta II's love of waging war.
- 2 Which selection from the article is BEST illustrated by the map?
- (A) Then, in the year 320, Chandragupta became a ruler of a small kingdom in the north.
 - (B) Samudragupta wanted to unite all of India under his rule.
 - (C) The Gupta Empire expanded greatly under Samudragupta's reign.
 - (D) Small groups, or squads, all over India helped Samudragupta in his military successes.
- 3 Which sentence from the article BEST suggests that the Gupta Empire is known for its creativity?
- (A) In addition to being a great fighter, Samudragupta also loved the arts.
 - (B) However, texts about history, grammar, and science were also written.
 - (C) Two of the most famous scholars of the time were Kalidasa and Aryabhata.
 - (D) The art and literature of that time period is still studied today.

- 4 Read the selection from the section "Gupta achievements in the arts."

Aryabhatta was a great scientist, who correctly suggested that Earth is round and spins. He also added up the time it takes Earth to travel around the Sun as 365.358 days. His number was only three hours over the number figured out by modern scientists.

Which of the following is an accurate explanation of this selection?

- (A) Aryabhatta was a scientist who tried to figure out how long it took the Earth to travel around the Sun but was very far off.
- (B) Aryabhatta was a scientist who came very close to being correct about how long it takes the Earth to travel around the Sun.
- (C) Aryabhatta was a scientist who studied the Sun and discovered that the Earth travels around the Sun.
- (D) Aryabhatta was a scientist who guessed that the Earth travels around the Sun without any evidence.