

## DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

### I M A HISTORY I SEMESTER CORE – I : SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF INDIA UPTO 1206 A. D(18MHI11C)

DR. SEETHALAKSHMI, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY- GAC (AUTO)- 18

Cell: 9487087335

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#### Golden age of Guptas

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The **Gupta Empire** was an [ancient Indian](#) empire existing from the mid-to-late 3rd century CE to 543 CE. At its zenith, from approximately 319 to 467 CE, it covered much of the [Indian subcontinent](#).<sup>[4]</sup> This period is considered as the [Golden Age of India](#) by some historians.<sup>[5][note 1]</sup> The ruling dynasty of the empire was founded by the king Sri [Gupta](#); the most notable rulers of the dynasty were [Chandragupta I](#), [Samudragupta](#), and [Chandragupta II](#) alias [Vikramaditya](#). The 5th-century CE [Sanskrit](#) poet [Kalidasa](#) credits the Guptas with having conquered about twenty-one kingdoms, both in and outside India, including the kingdoms of [Parasikas](#), the [Hunas](#), the [Kambojas](#), tribes located in the west and east [Oxus valleys](#), the [Kinnaras](#), [Kiratas](#), and others.<sup>[7][non-primary source needed]</sup>

The high points of this period are the great cultural developments which took place primarily during the reigns of Samudragupta, Chandragupta II and Kumaragupta I. Many of the literary sources, such as [Mahabharata](#) and [Ramayana](#), were canonised during this period.<sup>[8]</sup> The Gupta period produced scholars such as [Kalidasa](#),<sup>[9]</sup> [Aryabhata](#), [Varahamihira](#), and [Vatsyayana](#) who made great advancements in many academic fields.<sup>[10][11][12]</sup> [Science](#) and political administration

reached new heights during the Gupta era.<sup>[11]</sup> The period gave rise to achievements in architecture, sculpture, and painting that "set standards of form and taste [that] determined the whole subsequent course of art, not only in India but far beyond her borders".<sup>[13]</sup> Strong trade ties also made the region an important cultural centre and established the region as a base that would influence nearby kingdoms and regions in South Asia and [Southeast Asia](#).<sup>[14]</sup><sup>[unreliable source?]</sup> The [Puranas](#), earlier long poems on a variety of subjects, are also thought to have been committed to written texts around this period.<sup>[13][3]</sup> Brahmins flourished in the Gupta empire but the Guptas tolerated people of other faiths as well. Vedic sacrifices reduced in the Gupta period<sup>[15]</sup>

The empire eventually died out because of many factors such as substantial loss of territory and imperial authority caused by their own erstwhile feudatories, as well as the invasion by the [Huna peoples](#) ([Kidarites](#) and [Alchon Huns](#)) from [Central Asia](#).<sup>[16][17]</sup> After the collapse of the Gupta Empire in the 6th century, India was again ruled by numerous regional kingdoms.




The homeland of the Guptas is uncertain.<sup>[18]</sup> According to one theory, they originated in the present-day lower-doab<sup>[19]</sup> region of [Uttar Pradesh](#), where most of the inscriptions and coin hoards of the early Gupta kings have been discovered.<sup>[20][21]</sup> This theory is also supported by the [Purana](#), as argued by the proponents, that mention the territory of the early Gupta kings as [Prayaga](#), [Saketa](#), and [Magadha](#) areas in the [Ganges](#) basin.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

Another prominent theory locates the Gupta homeland in the present-day [Bengal](#) region, based on the account of the 7th century Chinese Buddhist monk [Yijing](#). According to Yijing, king Che-li-ki-to (identified with the dynasty's founder [Shri Gupta](#)) built a temple for Chinese pilgrims

near Mi-li-kia-si-kia-po-no (apparently a transcription of [Mriga-shikha-vana](#)). Yijing states that this temple was located more than 40 [yojanas](#) east of [Nalanda](#), which would mean it was situated somewhere in the modern Bengal region.<sup>[24]</sup> Another proposal is that the early Gupta kingdom extended from Prayaga in the west to northern Bengal in the east.<sup>[25]</sup>

The Gupta records do not mention the dynasty's [varna](#) (social class).<sup>[26]</sup> Some historians, such as [A.S. Altekar](#), have theorised that they were of [Vaishya](#) origin, as certain ancient Indian texts prescribe the name "Gupta" for the members of the Vaishya varna.<sup>[27][28]</sup> According to historian [R. S. Sharma](#), the Vaishyas – who were traditionally associated with trade – may have become rulers after resisting oppressive taxation by the previous rulers.<sup>[29]</sup> Critics of the Vaishya-origin theory point out that the suffix Gupta features in the names of several non-Vaishyas before as well as during the Gupta period,<sup>[30]</sup> and the dynastic name "Gupta" may have simply derived from the name of the family's first king [Gupta](#).<sup>[31]</sup> Some scholars, such as S.R. Goyal, theorise that the Guptas were [Brahmanas](#), because they had matrimonial relations with Brahmins, but others reject this evidence as inconclusive.<sup>[32]</sup> Based on the Pune and Riddhapur inscriptions of the Gupta princess [Prabhavati-gupta](#), some scholars believe that the name of her paternal [gotra](#) (clan) was "Dharana", but an alternative reading of these inscriptions suggests that Dharana was the *gotra* of her mother Kuberanaga.<sup>[33]</sup> According to the inscription at the Allahabad column, Guptas belong to the [Solar race](#).<sup>[34]</sup>

[Gupta](#) ([Gupta script](#):  *gu-pta*, fl. late 3rd century CE) is the earliest known king of the dynasty: different historians variously date the beginning of his reign from mid-to-late 3rd century CE.<sup>[36][37]</sup> "Che-li-ki-to", the name of a king mentioned by the 7th century Chinese Buddhist monk [Yijing](#), is believed to be a transcription of "[Shri-Gupta](#)" ([IAST](#): Śrīgupta), "Shri"

being an honorific prefix.<sup>[38]</sup> According to Yijing, this king built a temple for Chinese Buddhist pilgrims near "Mi-li-kia-si-kia-po-no" (believed to be a transcription of [Mrgasikhāvana](#)).<sup>[39]</sup>

In the [Allahabad Pillar](#) inscription, Gupta and his successor [Ghatotkacha](#) are described as [Maharaja](#) ("great king"), while the next king [Chandragupta I](#) is called a [Maharajadhiraja](#) ("king of great kings"). In the later period, the title *Maharaja* was used by feudatory rulers, which has led to suggestions that Gupta and Ghatotkacha were vassals (possibly of [Kushan Empire](#)).<sup>[40]</sup> However, there are several instances of paramount sovereigns using the title *Maharaja*, in both pre-Gupta and post-Gupta periods, so this cannot be said with certainty. That said, there is no doubt that Gupta and Ghatotkacha held a lower status and were less powerful than Chandragupta I.<sup>[41]</sup>

Religion[[edit](#)]

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The Guptas were traditionally a [Hindu](#) dynasty.<sup>[113]</sup> They were orthodox [Hindus](#), but did not force their beliefs on the rest of the population, as [Buddhism](#) and [Jainism](#) also were encouraged.<sup>[114]</sup> [Sanchi](#) remained an important centre of Buddhism.<sup>[114]</sup> [Kumaragupta I](#) (c. 414 – c. 455 CE) is said to have founded [Nalanda](#).<sup>[114]</sup>

Some later rulers however seem to have especially favoured [Buddhism](#). [Narasimhagupta Baladitya](#) (c. 495–?), according to contemporary writer [Paramartha](#), was brought up under the influence of the [Mahayanist](#) philosopher, [Vasubandhu](#).<sup>[113]</sup> He built a [sangharama](#) at [Nalanda](#) and also a 300 ft (91 m) high [vihara](#) with a Buddha statue within which, according to Xuanzang, resembled the "great Vihara built under the [Bodhi tree](#)". According to the [Manjushrimulakalpa](#) (c. 800 CE), king Narasimhsagupta became a Buddhist monk, and left

the world through meditation ([Dhyana](#)).<sup>[113]</sup> The Chinese monk [Xuanzang](#) also noted that Narasimhagupta Baladitya's son, Vajra, who commissioned a sangharama as well, "possessed a heart firm in faith".<sup>[115]:45[116]:330</sup>

## Gupta administration<sup>[edit]</sup>

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A study of the epigraphical records of the Gupta empire shows that there was a hierarchy of administrative divisions from top to bottom. The empire was called by various names such as *Rajya*, *Rashtra*, *Desha*, *Mandala*, *Prithvi* and *Avani*. It was divided into 26 provinces, which were styled as *Bhukti*, *Pradesha* and *Bhoga*. Provinces were also divided into *Vishayas* and put under the control of the *Vishayapatis*. A *Vishayapati* administered the *Vishaya* with the help of the *Adhikarana* (council of representatives), which comprised four representatives: *Nagarasreshethi*, *Sarthavaha*, *Prathamakulika* and *Prathama Kayastha*. A part of the *Vishaya* was called *Vithi*.<sup>[117]</sup> The Gupta also had trading links with the Sassanid and Byzantine Empire.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> The four-fold varna system was observed under the Gupta period but caste system was fluid. Brahmins followed non-Brahmanical profession as well. Kshatriyas were involved in trade and commerce. The society largely coexisted among themselves. Prisoners of war were taken as slaves and slavery existed in the society.<sup>[118]</sup>

## Legacy<sup>[edit]</sup>

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Scholars of this period include [Varahamihira](#) and [Aryabhata](#), who is believed to be the first to consider [zero](#) as a separate number, postulated the theory that the Earth rotates about its own axis, and studied [solar](#) and [lunar eclipses](#). [Kalidasa](#), who was a great playwright, who wrote plays such as [Shakuntala](#), and marked the highest point of [Sanskrit literature](#) is also said to have belonged to this period. The [Sushruta Samhita](#), which is a Sanskrit redaction text on all of the

major concepts of ayurvedic medicine with innovative chapters on surgery, dates to the Gupta period.

[Chess](#) is said to have developed in this period,<sup>[119]</sup> where its early form in the 6th century was known as [caturaṅga](#), which translates as "four divisions [of the military]" – [infantry](#), [cavalry](#), [elephantry](#), and [chariotry](#) – represented by the pieces that would evolve into the modern pawn, knight, bishop, and rook, respectively. Doctors also invented several medical instruments, and even performed operations. The [Indian numerals](#) which were the first [positional base 10 numeral systems](#) in the world originated from Gupta India. The [names of the seven days in a week](#) appeared at the start of the Gupta period based on Hindu deities and planets corresponding to the Roman names. The ancient Gupta text [Kama Sutra](#) by the Indian scholar [Vatsyayana](#) is widely considered to be the standard work on [human sexual behaviour](#) in Sanskrit literature.

[Aryabhata](#), a noted mathematician-astronomer of the Gupta period proposed that the earth is round and rotates about its own axis. He also discovered that the Moon and planets shine by reflected sunlight. Instead of the prevailing cosmogony in which eclipses were caused by pseudo-planetary nodes [Rahu](#) and [Ketu](#), he explained eclipses in terms of shadows cast by and falling on Earth.<sup>[120]</sup>

Art and architecture[[edit](#)]

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The Gupta period is generally regarded as a classic peak of North [Indian art](#) for all the major religious groups. Although painting was evidently widespread, the surviving works are almost all religious sculpture. The period saw the emergence of the iconic carved stone deity in Hindu art,

as well as the Buddha-figure and [Jain tirthankara](#) figures, the latter often on a very large scale. The two great centres of sculpture were [Mathura](#) and [Gandhara](#), the latter the centre of [Greco-Buddhist art](#). Both exported sculpture to other parts of northern India.

The most famous remaining monuments in a broadly Gupta style, the caves at [Ajanta](#), [Elephanta](#), and [Ellora](#) (respectively Buddhist, Hindu, and mixed including Jain) were in fact produced under later dynasties, but primarily reflect the monumentality and balance of Guptan style. Ajanta contains by far the most significant survivals of painting from this and the surrounding periods, showing a mature form which had probably had a long development, mainly in painting palaces.<sup>[121]</sup> The Hindu [Udayagiri Caves](#) actually record connections with the dynasty and its ministers,<sup>[122]</sup> and the [Dashavatara Temple](#) at [Deogarh](#) is a major temple, one of the earliest to survive, with important sculpture.<sup>[123]</sup>

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## **Social Developments During Guptas Period**

Large-scale land grants to the brahmanas suggest that the brahmana supremacy increased in Gupta times.

The Guptas, who probably were originally vaishyas, came to be looked upon as kshatriyas by the brahmanas.

The brahmanas presented the Gupta kings as possessing god-like attributes.

All this helped to legitimize the position of the Gupta princes, who became great supporters of the brahmanical order. The brahmanas accumulated wealth on account of the numerous land grants made to them and therefore claimed many privileges, which are listed in the Narada Smriti, the lawbook of Narada, a work of about the fifth century.

The castes proliferated into numerous sub-castes as a result of two factors. A large number of foreigners had been assimilated into Indian society, and each group of foreigners was considered a kind of caste. As the foreigners largely came as conquerors they were given the status of kshatriya in society.

The Hunas, who came to India towards the close of the fifth century, eventually came to be recognized as one of the thirty-six clans of the Rajputs. Even now some Rajputs bear the title Hun. The other reason for the increase in the number of castes was the absorption of many tribal people into brahmanical society through the process of land grants.

#### ADVERTISEMENTS:

The tribal chiefs were assigned a respectable origin, but most of their ordinary kinsmen were assigned a low origin, and every tribe became a kind of caste in its new incarnation. This process continued in some ways up to the present. The position of shudras improved during this period. They were now permitted to listen to recitations of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas. The epics and the Puranas represented the kshatriya tradition, whose myths and legends won loyalty to the social order.

The shudras could also worship a new god called Krishna and were also permitted to perform certain domestic rites which naturally meant fees for the priests. This can all be linked to some



improvement in the economic status of the shudras. From the seventh century onwards, they were mainly represented as agriculturists; in the earlier period, they generally figured as servants, slaves, and agricultural labourers working for the three higher varnas.

However, during this period, the number of untouchables increased, especially the chandalas. The chandalas entered the society as early as the fifth century BC. By the fifth century AD, their number had become so enormous and their disabilities so glaring that these attracted the attention of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien. He informs us that the chandalas live outside the village and deal in meat and flesh.

Whenever they enter the town, they strike a piece of wood to announce their arrival so that others may avoid them. In the Gupta period, like the shudras, women were also allowed to listen to the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas, and were advised to worship Krishna. However, women of the higher orders did not have access to independent sources of livelihood in pre-Gupta and Gupta times.

#### ADVERTISEMENTS:

The fact that women of the two lower varnas were free to earn their livelihood, which gave them considerable freedom, but this was denied to women of the upper varnas. It was argued that the vaishya and shudra women take to agricultural operations and domestic services and are therefore outside the control of their husbands. In contrast, by Gupta times, members of the higher orders came to acquire more and more land which made them more polygamous and more property-minded.

In a patriarchal setup, they began to treat women as items of property, to such a degree that a woman was expected to follow her husband to the next world. The first example of the immolation of a widow after the death of her husband occurred during the Gupta period in AD 510. However, some post-Gupta law-books held that a woman could remarry if her husband was dead, destroyed, impotent, had become a renouncer, or had been excommunicated.

The principal reason for the subordination of women of the upper varnas was their complete dependence on men for their livelihood, and lack of proprietary rights. However, the oldest Smritis or law-books state that gifts of jewellery, ornaments, garments, and similar other presents made to the bride on the occasion of her marriage were considered her property. Gupta and post-Gupta law-books substantially enlarged the scope of these gifts.

According to them, presents received by the bride not only from her parents' side but also from her parents-in-law at marriage and on other occasions formed the stridhana. Katyayana, a lawmaker of the sixth century, held that a woman could sell and mortgage her immovable property along with her stridhana. This clearly implies that women received shares in landed property according to this lawmaker, but generally a daughter was not allowed to inherit landed property in the patriarchal communities of India.

Niyoga, according to which a younger brother or kinsman could marry the wife of the elder brother after the latter's death, was practised by the brahmanas and kshatriyas in Vedic times, but was not allowed to them by the law-books of Gupta and earlier times. Similarly, widow remarriage was not allowed to members of the higher orders, but the shudras could practise both niyoga or levirate and widow remarriage.

## Hsüan-Tsang

Fa-hsien in the fifth century was the first Chinese Buddhist pilgrim to visit India, the trip by Hsüan-tsang more than two centuries later was equal if not greater in terms of historical significance. As Fa-hsien spurred Chinese interest in Buddhism by bringing back scriptures from its birthplace in India, Hsüan-tsang helped influence much wider acceptance of the faith among Chinese. He also became the first Chinese visitor to go to all major regions of India, and he is remembered today as the initiator of Sino-Indian relations.

### ***Background***

Buddhism had its origins in the sixth century b.c. ministry of an Indian prince named [Siddhartha Gautama](#) (563-483 b.c.) After years of spiritual seeking in which he rejected wealth and worldly pleasures, as well as the precepts of both Hinduism and Jainism, he experienced a spiritual transformation, after which he was known as the Buddha, or "the awakened one." A faith grew up around his teachings, which included the idea that desire is the cause of pain. The Buddha also taught that only through reaching nirvana, a state of inner peace, can the individual transcend the cycles of reincarnation that characterize the Hindu worldview.

Buddhism initially gained adherents in India, but it was destined to enjoy its greatest influence in China. The new faith made its first appearance there during the Later Han period (a.d. 23-220), but initially the Chinese rejected it as a "foreign" religion. Only later, during a period of turmoil between dynasties (220-589), did Mahayana or "Great Vehicle" Buddhism finally begin winning Chinese adherents.

One of the principal agents of this change was the monk and pilgrim Fa-hsien (c. 334-c. 422). Dissatisfied with existing Chinese translations of Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures, Fa-hsien set out for India at age 65, intent on finding originals. What followed was an odyssey of some 10,000 miles (16,000 kilometers) in 15 years, during which he traveled through Buddhist lands in China, central Asia, Indian, Ceylon, and the [East Indies](#). He finally returned to his own country bearing the scriptures he had sought, and as a result of his work, knowledge and acceptance of Buddhism in China increased enormously in the years that followed.

### ***Impact***

More than two centuries after Fa-hsien, another pilgrim named Hsüan-tsang (c. 602-664) set out for India with much the same purpose in mind: to increase his understanding of the Buddha's teachings by going to the source—not only the original Buddhist texts, but the geographical homeland of Buddhism.

A child prodigy, Hsüan-tsang had been raised as a Buddhist monk, but under the Sui Dynasty (589-618) and the newly founded T'ang Dynasty (618-907), he and other monks faced a government suspicious of their influence. Not only did T'ang China's first ruler, Kao Tsu (r. 618-626), embrace the rival faith of Taoism, but he had placed restrictions on travel in western portions of the country—precisely the area through which Hsüan-tsang would have to pass if he wanted to go to India.

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And Hsüan-tsang certainly wanted to go. Whereas Fa-hsien's mission started from his dissatisfaction with Chinese translations of the Buddhist scriptures, Hsüan-tsang's longing arose from his preoccupation with difficult theological questions. If he intended to answer these growing quandaries, he needed to consult the *Yogacarabhümi sastra* (fourth and fifth century a.d.), which could only be found in India. Therefore he resolved to make the arduous, extremely challenging, journey across the mountains.

It should be noted that though civilizations thrived in India and China during ancient times, their two peoples were ignorant of one another for nearly two millennia, a fact that highlights the great barrier posed by the Himalayas and other ranges that separate the two lands. Added to this was the emperor's restriction on travel, which made Hsüan-tsang's trip across China doubly dangerous.

Starting from Ch'ang-an, the T'ang capital in east-central China, Hsüan-tsang followed a route more southerly than that of Fa-hsien. He made his way deep into the west, but he was preceded by messengers from the emperor, bearing news of a monk trying to defy imperial orders against travel in the west. He later wrote, "As I approached China's extreme outpost at the edge of the Desert of Lop, I was caught by the Chinese army. Not having a travel permit, they wanted to send me to Tun-huang to stay at the monastery there. However, I answered, 'If you insist on detaining me I will allow you to take my life, but I will not take a single step backwards in the direction of China.'"

As it turned out, the leading government official in the region was a devout Buddhist, and he chose to look the other way, allowing Hsüan-tsang to pass the military outposts that separated China from the lands of central Asia. Hsüan-tsang continued on, making his way over mountains

and across deserts, where he encountered both bandits and marauding tribes, as well as admiring rulers and welcoming groups of sages. Much of what is "known" about his journeys comes from hagiographic accounts that exaggerate many of Hsüan-tsang's accomplishments; in any case, he traveled much further west than Fa-hsien, visiting the cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Balkh. (The first two are today in Uzbekistan, and the last in Afghanistan. All three were important trading and cultural centers of the premodern era.)

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In about 631 Hsüan-tsang reached India, where he visited numerous sites important to the Buddha's life and ministry. In time he made his way to the monastery at Nalanda, India's largest Buddhist center, where the esteemed master Silabhadra taught him personally for 15 months. Hsüan-tsang would spend a total of five years at Nalanda, off and on, during which time he composed three religious treatises in Sanskrit.

He also traveled from his base at Nalanda to various parts of India, including Bengal in the east, the Deccan Plateau of central India, and both the Coromandel (eastern) and Malabar (western) coasts. In addition, he journeyed through the Indus River Valley by which he had entered the country, and in time he became eager to follow that route back to China.

However, a king named Kumara invited Hsüan-tsang to visit him in Assam, in northeastern India, an offer Hsüan-tsang could not safely refuse. This in turn led Kumara's rival Harsha (c. 590-647)—India's greatest ruler of the early medieval era—to make an invitation of his own. At Harsha's court in 642, Hsüan-tsang greatly impressed a gathering of several thousand kings and

wise men, winning arguments with Hindu and Jain theologians. Harsha showered him with gifts, but Hsüan-tsang accepted only a buffalo-skin coat to keep him warm and dry, and an elephant to transport the many books he had brought with him. Finally, in 643, he set off for China.

Given the fact that he had left illegally, Hsüan-tsang undoubtedly returned with much apprehension. From the oasis at Khotan, he sent a letter to the emperor announcing his return, and eight months later he received a welcoming reply. As it turned out, Kao Tsu had been ousted by his son T'ai Tsung (r. 626-649), who was a Buddhist and eager to meet Hsüan-tsang. The latter arrived at Ch'ang-an early in 645, and the crowd that came out to greet him was so large that at first he could not enter the city.

He met with the emperor, who debriefed him on all manner of details concerning the lands he had visited. T'ai Tsung even offered him a position as his personal advisor, and when Hsüan-tsang demurred, the emperor instead set him up at nearby Hung-fu Monastery with a fleet of assistants to help him in his translation work. The only stipulation was that Hsüan-tsang write a record of his travels, *Ta T'ang Hsi-yü-chi*, or "The Great T'ang Record of Travels to the Western Lands," which he completed in 646.

Hsüan-tsang's translation work continued under the reign of Kao Tsung (r. 649-683), and after 19 years yielded 76 books. When the great monk died in 664, it was said that some 1 million people attended his funeral, and in later years he became a legendary figure. Not only did his translations, commentaries, and those of his close followers make up fully one-quarter of the extant [Buddhist literature](#) in Chinese, but the contact he had initiated with India led to increased T'ang relations with the southern power.

Nine hundred years after his death, Hsüan-tsang became the subject of a fictional narrative, *Hsi-yü-chi* by Wu Ch'eng-en (c. 1500-c. 1582). Translated in the twentieth century as *The Journey to the West* (1977-83), the book is one of the classics of [Chinese literature](#), an enthralling comic adventure in which Hsüan-tsang becomes the quixotic monk Tripitaka, accompanied by the companions Monkey and Pigsy. Much like legends such as that of [King Arthur](#) in the West, this fictionalized version of Hsüan-tsang's story has permeated virtually every facet of Chinese cultural life, from opera to comic books and animated cartoons.

## **JUDSON KNIGHT**

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### **Harshavardhana Empire**

In his early life, Harsha was a devout Saiva but later he became an ardent Hinayana Buddhist. Hiuen Tsang converted him to Mahayana Buddhism. Harsha prohibited the use of animal food in his kingdom and punished those who kill any living being. He erected thousands of stupas and established travellers' rests all over his kingdom. He also erected monasteries at the sacred places of Buddhists. Once in five years he convened a gathering of representatives of all religions and honoured them with gifts and costly presents. He brought the Buddhist monks together frequently to discuss and examine the Buddhist doctrine.



Harsha organized a religious assembly at Kanauj to honor the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang towards the close of his reign. He invited representatives of all religious sects. It was attended by 20 kings, 1000 scholars from the Nalanda University, 3000 Hinayanists and Mahayanists, 3000 Brahmins and Jains. The Assembly went on continuously for 23 days. Hiuen Tsang explained the values of Mahayana doctrine and established its superiority over others. However, violence broke out and there were acts of arson. There was also an attempt on the life of Harsha. Soon, it was brought under control and the guilty were punished. On the final day of the Assembly, Hiuen Tsang was honoured with costly presents.

Hiuen Tsang mentions in his account about the conference held at Allahabad, known as Prayag. It was the one among the conferences routinely convened by Harsha once in five years. Harsha gave away his enormous wealth as gifts to the members of all religious sects. According to Hiuen Tsang, Harsha was so lavish that he emptied the treasury and even gave away the clothes and jewels he was wearing. His statement might be one of admiring exaggeration.

Both Bana and Hiuen Tsang portray the social life in the times of Harsha. The fourfold division of the society – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya and Sudra – was prevalent. The Brahmins were the

privileged section of the society and they were given land grants by the kings. The Kshatriyas were the ruling class. The Vysyas were mainly traders. Hiuen Tsang mentions that the Sudras practiced agriculture. There existed many sub castes. The position of women was not satisfactory. The institution of Swyamvara (the choice of choosing her husband) had declined. Remarriage of widows was not permitted, particularly among the higher castes. The system of dowry had also become common. The practice of sati was also prevalent. Hiuen Tsang mentions three ways of disposal of the dead – cremation, water burial and exposure in the woods.

The trade and commerce had declined during Harsha's period. This is evident from the decline of trade centres, less number of coins, and slow activities of merchant guilds. The decline of trade in turn affected the handicrafts industry and agriculture. Since there was no large scale demand for goods, the farmers began to produce only in a limited way. This led to the rise of self-sufficient village economy. In short, there was a sharp economic decline as compared to the economy of the Gupta period.

The art and architecture of Harsha's period are very few and mostly followed the Gupta style. Hiuen Tsang describes the glory of the monastery with many storeys built by Harsha at Nalanda. He also speaks of a copper statue of Buddha with eight feet in height. The

brick temple of Lakshmana at Sirpur with its rich architecture is assigned to the period of Harsha.

Harsha was a great patron of learning. His biographer Banabhatta adorned his royal court. Besides Harshacharita, he wrote Kadambari. Other literary figures in Harsha's court were Matanga Divakara and the famous Barthrihari, who was the poet, philosopher and grammarian. Harsha himself authored three plays - Ratnavali, Priyadarsika and Nagananda. Harsha patronised the Nalanda University by his liberal endowments. It attained international reputation as a centre of learning during his reign. Hiuen Tsang visited the Nalanda University and remained as a student for some time.

The Chinese travelers of ancient India mentioned a number of educational institutions. The most famous among them were the Hinayana University of Valabhi and the Mahayana University of Nalanda. Hiuen Tsang gives a very valuable account of the Nalanda University. The term Nalanda means "giver of knowledge". It was founded by Kumaragupta I during the Gupta period. It was patronised by his successors and later by Harsha. The professors of the University were called panditas. Some of its renowned professors were Dingnaga, Dharmapala, Sthiramati and Silabadhra.

Dharmapala was a native of Kanchipuram and he became the head of the Nalanda University.

Nalanda University was a residential university and education was free including the boarding and lodging. It was maintained with the revenue derived from 100 to 200 villages endowed by different rulers. Though it was a Mahayana University, different religious subjects like the Vedas, Hinayana doctrine, Sankhya and Yoga philosophies were also taught. In addition to that, general subjects like logic, grammar, astronomy, medicine and art were in the syllabus. It attracted students not only from different parts of India but from different countries of the east. Admission was made by means of an entrance examination. The entrance test was so difficult that not more than thirty percent of the candidates were successful. Discipline was very strict. More than lectures, discussion played an important part and the medium of instruction was Sanskrit.

Recent archeological excavations have brought to light the ruins of the Nalanda University. It shows the grandeur of this centre of learning and confirms the account given by the Chinese pilgrims. It had numerous classrooms and a hostel attached to it. According to Itsing, the Chinese pilgrim, there were 3000 students on its rolls. It had an observatory and a great library housed in three buildings. Its

fame rests on the fact that it attracted scholars from various parts of the world. It was an institution of advanced learning and research.

### **Hiuen Tsang Harsha's**

The history of Harsha remains incomplete without a reference to Hiuen Tsang. Among all the foreign travellers who visited in ancient times, no one is more famous or more celebrated than this Chinese pilgrim. Rightly has he been described therefore as the "Prince of Pilgrims".

He is known as the Chinese "Master of the Law". India is much indebted to this Chinese for the valuable accounts he left behind with many details of political, religious and social conditions of those days.

His biography, written by another Chinese, is also another valuable source for Indian history.

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Hiuen Tsang was born in China in 600 A.D. Becoming a Buddhist monk at the age of twenty, he longed for knowing more and more of Buddhism to satisfy his spiritual hunger. But without a

visit to India, he knew, his desire for learning would remain unfulfilled. When he was about 30, he secretly left China for an adventurous journey towards India. Passing through Tashkand, Samarkand and Balkh, he finally reached Gandhara in 630 A.D.

In India, he wanted to visit all the sacred places connected with the life of Buddha, as well as to learn of Buddhism through study. During his travel he covered many more places and observed keenly the social, religious, political, cultural and” economic conditions of the country.

#### ADVERTISEMENTS:

Hiuen Tsang visited Kashmir and the Punjab. He proceeded to Kapilavastu, Bodh-Gaya, Sarnath, and Kusinagara. He studied in the University of Nalanda. He also travelled through the Deccan, Orissa and Bengal. He went almost to every part of India. Harsha came to admire him for his deep devotion to Buddha and his profound knowledge of Buddhism. He honoured him in his Kanauj religious Assembly, and also invited him to attend the Prayaga Assembly. After attending those two magnificent functions, Hiuen Tsang prepared to leave for China in 644 A.D., after having spent long fourteen years of his life on the soil of India.

The emperor was sorry to part with the pilgrim. But he made elaborate arrangements for his safe return. A king named Udito of Jalandhar was authorised by Harsha to take Hiuen Tsang under a strong military escort to the frontiers of India. Beyond the frontiers, the pilgrim was accompanied by Harsha’s official guides who carried the letters of authority from emperor to produce them in other countries. It is understood that Harsha, in his letters, requested the foreign rulers to “provide carriages or other modes of conveyance to escort the Master even to the

borders of China. Thus helped, Hiuen Tsang finally reached home in 645 A.D. by way of the Pamirs and Khotan.

Hiuen Tsang took with him from India 150 pieces of the bodily relics of Buddha; a large number of Buddha images in gold, silver and sandal wood; and above all, 657 volumes of valuable manuscripts, carried by twenty horses of his escort party. Back in his home in China, he set himself to translate some of those manuscripts into the Chinese language, assisted by several scholars. About 74 Buddhist works were translated during his life time which proved of immense value to the people of China. Hiuen Tsang died in 664 A.D.

Hiuen Tsang was indeed an ancient ambassador of peace between China and India. Harsha, too was a man of international vision like Asoka. Coming to hear of the prestige of Chinese Emperor from his pilgrim friend, Harsha sent an ambassador to the Chinese Court in 641 A.D. in the person of a Brahmin. Two years later, 643 A.D., the Chinese Emperor sent a mission to Harsha. A second Chinese mission also came in that very year to India. Within the next years, a third mission also came from China. But when it reached India, Harsha was no more.

#### ADVERTISEMENTS:

Regarding Hiuen Tsang's praise of Harsha and of the Indian people in his Travel Accounts, it may be said that the Chinese pilgrim was writing the memoirs of his Indian days in far-away China, without any compulsion or pressure from anybody to give a favourable account of the rulers and peoples of another country. He was writing what he saw, and what he honestly felt, as well as of what he had heard.

As a true Buddhist, and a pious pilgrim to a holy land, he could not have been dishonest or untruthful in his writings. He had no reason to flatter anybody when far out of sight. He had also no reason to seek anybody's favour for his Travel Accounts. He was, in fact, describing the condition of Buddhism in India as he saw. That was the subject of his prime concern. Other episodes came in as side descriptions. On the whole, Hiuen Tsang's accounts have been accepted as truthful and trustworthy. His writings have thrown immense light on an important era of the ancient Indian history.

### **Social and Cultural Development during Rajput Dynasty**

**'Rajput' is derived from Sanskrit word 'raj-putra' which means "son of a king". Rajput was identified for their courage, loyalty and royalty. They were the warriors who fought in the battles and took care of the administrating functions. The Rajput originated from western, eastern, northern India and some parts of Pakistan. Rajput has their prominence during the 6th to 12th centuries. Until 20th century Rajput ruled in trounce majority in the princely states of Rajasthan and Surashtra.**

**[JAGRAN JOSH](#)**

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Rajput's were valiant and aggressive fighters which they even considered as their 'Dharma'. They valued qualities and ideals that were of very high fundamentals. Yet they were large-hearted and generous and they took pride in their roots and lineage which to them was supreme.



They were brave, egoistic and very forcefully loyal clan who gave shelter to the refugees and their foes.

### **Social and General Conditions of the People**

- Wars conquests and victories was the dominating feature of the Rajput culture and society.
- The society suffered also because there was a great disparity in the standard of living of the people. They believed in caste and creed systems.
- The ministers, officials, feudal chiefs belonged to the upper class so they enjoyed the privileges to accumulate wealth as they were entitled to live in luxury and splendor.
- They were indulged in costly clothes, jewels and ornaments of gold and silver. They lived in palace like houses of several storeys.
- The Rajput showed their glory with their Harems and number of servants that worked under them.
- On the other hand the peasants were burdened with the land revenue and other taxes that were brutally taken by the feudal lords or else they had to render forced labor.

### **Caste System**

- The lower castes suffered the animosities of feudal lords who looked upon them like vultures.
- Most of the workers like weavers, fishermen, barbers, etc. as well as tribal were treated very ruthlessly by their owners.
- The Rajput's as a new caste were more involved in image building and had supreme egos which made the caste system even more prominent.

### **Condition of Women**

- Although the honor of women was much defined and matter of utter dignity to the Rajput's yet they lived in an unauthentic and handicapped society.

- The Rajput women of low class were denied the right to study the Vedas. However families of higher families received higher education. The laws for women were very stingy.
- They were supposed to follow higher ideals in terms to their men and society. They were supposed to gladly sacrifice themselves along with the dead bodies of their husbands.
- Though there was no 'purdah' system. And 'Swayamvar' type of marriage was in vogue in several royal families yet the society saw the evil practice of Infanticide and early marriage.

### **Education and Science**

- Under the rule of Rajput only Brahmans and some sections of upper classes were entitled to be educated.
- The famous centre of higher learning was at Nalanda in Bihar and some other important centres were Vikramasila and Uddandapura. At this time only some Saiva centers of learning flourished in Kashmir.
- Religion and philosophy were the popular subjects for study and discussion.
- Yet during this time the overall, growth of the knowledge of science slowed down as the society became increasingly rigid, thinking was mostly confined to traditional philosophy also during this period Science did not get proper scope or opportunity to develop.

### **Architecture**

- The Rajputs were significantly great builders who expended extravagantly on building forts, palaces and temples to show off their generous wealth and valor. In this period Temple building reached its zenith.
- Few significant temples are the Lingaraja temple, Jagannath temple at Puri and the Sun temple at Konark.
- Khajuraho, puri and Mt. Abu are measured most well-known temples built by the Rajput.

- Rajput was also known of building irrigation canals, dams, and reservoirs which are still considered for their precision and high quality.
- Foundations of many cities like Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, were laid down by the Rajput kings these cities were decorated with beautiful palaces and forts and are today known as Heritage Cities
- The Victory Tower at the fort of Chittor the Lake palace at Udaipur, Hawa Mahal and, Astronomical Observatory by Sawai JaiSingh in 18th century are some astonishing examples of very complexly built Rajput architecture.

### **Paintings**

- The Rajput works of art can be ordered into two schools-the Rajasthani and the Pahari schools of painting.
- The subjects of the artworks were enormously affected by the Bhakti religion and for the most part portray scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata and Radha and Krishna in different temperaments.
- The system of both the schools is the same and both have made utilization of brilliant shades to explain scenes from the lives of the basic individuals.

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