



The Gupta art

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Abstract

The gupta period is known as the golden period from the artistic point of view. Almost all the historians have admitted the fact that this period, reached a high level of excellence in the domain of fine arts. The gupta rulers were able administrators, and they had achieved success in maintaining peace and order in the country they had also brought about political unity. Consequently, the people were economically prosperous and they could devote their time and money to the cultural progress of the country.

Introduction

The Gupta Dynasty is an important dynasty which ruled ancient India between 4th Century to 6th Century. They have left amazing examples of their glorious reign which has been called the Golden Era of Indian History. Architecture had greatly flourished during the reign of the guptas. The buildings, temples, pillars and stupas of this age were grand and beautiful. Unfortunately, some gupta temples and buildings were destroyed by the huns and the musli invaders. Some of them are still extent in the form of old monuments. The construction of the temples had a special significance in this period.

Main characteristics of the gupta art

- **Indianisation** : The heart and soul of the artists of the gupta period were purely Indian. They gradually made artistic images free from the foreign artistic features. Their subject and method of display, both were Indian. In the words of E.B Havell, "Indian was not then in a state of pupilage but the teacher of all Asian and she borrowed western suggestions to mould them in her own way of thinking."
- **Simplicity** : Simplicity was the salient feature of the gupta art. The artists of that period have successfully exhibited unique feature in their works. In this way, the gupta sculpture marks an improvement over the images of amaravati.
- **Spirituality** : The monuments of the gupta period represent a great spiritual achievement of the age. The gupta art has a great depth of meaning. The artists of that period successfully expressed the combination of the soul and body in the images. The images of Lord Buddha at Sarnath looks like a living person. It is posed on a diamond seat in the preaching mood. In short, it can be said that spirituality and gracious dignity are the pleasing characteristics of the Gupta art. In the words of Dr. V.S. Agarwal, "The spiritual expression, the tranquil smile,



the serene contemplative mood of the sarnath Buddha posed on a diamond seat in the attitude of preaching show us the highest triumph of Indian art."

- **Aesthetic presentation** : The aesthetic sense of the artist of the gupta age was highly developed. He introduced some important changes in the established methods of art with special reference to the Buddha statue, such as, hair style, ornamentation etc. they spared no efforts to develop the sense of beauty. In spite of that, the artist did not make any image in an absence of manner. Thus we see that the gupta art had some important characteristics. It was natural, simple, aesthetic and spiritual. The gupta rulers constructed many temples. Following were the main features of the temples of that age:
 - The temple was constructed on a high and big platform.
 - Steps were built round the platform.
 - There was a 'garbha -griha' in the temple in which statue was installed.
 - Round the 'garbha-griha' there was the 'pradakshinnapatha' which was covered from above.
 - There were four pillars on the four corners of the temple. These pillars were decorated beautifully.
 - The outer wall of the temple was plain and undecorated.
 - The roofs of the temples used to be flat in the beginning; but later on turrets were also built on them.
 - Many splendid temples were constructed during the gupta period among those that survived, the following are well known:
 - ✓ The dashavatra temple at Devagarh in Jhansi district.
 - ✓ The shiva temple at Phumara in nagada state of Madhya Pradesh.
 - ✓ The temple of lord Vishnu at Tigawa in Jabalpur district.
 - ✓ A beautiful temple of parvati at Nachna, near the state of Ajaygarh.
 - ✓ The temple at Bhitarganon near Kanpur.
 - ✓ A temple has been found in a ruined state at dah parbatia on the banks of the river Brahmaputra in Darrang district in Assam. This temple is of much importance from the artistic point of view.

Besides the above, some stupas, caves and viharas were also constructed during that period. The stupa of sarnath, the caves of Ajanta, and udayagiri are of great artistic merits. All the temples of the gupta period except the temple of bhitargaon, are made of stone. Among these temple, the Dashavatara temple at Devagarh is the most beautiful.¹

The temple of bhitargaon is situated near Kanpur. It had been build of bricks. The roof of that temple looks like a pyramid. By the scrutiny of this temple, we can form an idea about the structure and construction of the temples made of bricks during that age. Percy brown, an eminent authority on art, is of the opinion that the architecture of the temple of of bhitargaon indicates a long tradition of the construction of the temples of such type in



India. The temple of bhitargaon is famous for its aesthetic beauty and the excellence of the architecture of that time.²

Sculpture

An extraordinary progress was made in the field of sculpture during the gupta period. In other words, it may be said that the gupta period was at its zenith in the field of sculptural representation. There were some important features of the guptasculpture. It was free from foreign influence. The soul of the gupta sculpture was Indian. In this respect, it surpassed the characteristics of the gandharaschool of art which was a mixture of Indo-greek art. The aim of the gupta sculpture was to represent the spiritual ideas. During this period, the statues, both Buddhist and Brahminical, were built and the artists aimed to represent inner tranquility. The sculpture of the gupta age was full of spiritualism. The image of the Buddha found at Sarnath is posed on a diamond seat in the preaching mood. The spiritual expression, a peaceful smile and the contemplative attitude of the Sarnath Buddha reveals high degree of skill.³

Salient features of gupta sculpture are

- It was free from foreign influence.
- Gupta sculpture was aimed at representing the internal tranquility, rather than the outer physical beauty.
- The statues of the gupta period had curly hair.
- The halo behind the statues of gupta period had ornamentation of different kinds.

Buddhist statues : Beautiful idols of Lord Buddha had been made in stone, metal and clay and various puranic statues were engraved on stone magnificently. Out of all the statues of Lord Buddha, the following three are the most remarkable:

- (i) Sarnath statue of Buddha.
- (ii) Buddha's statue at sultanganj.
- (iii) Standing statue of Buddha at Mathura.

Besides the statues of Buddha several images of other gods of hindus, such as Shiva, Vishnu, Sun etc., have been found at different places.

1. A marvelous statue of Vishnu has been found at Devangarh in Jhansi district. It has been praised for its beauty and splendor
2. The statue of Varahavatar at Udayagiri has also been regarded as a monument to the genius of the gupta sculpture.
3. Vishnu statue at Mathura has been described as the best in the gupta plastic art and expression.



4. The beautiful statue of Kartikeya at Kasha has spiritual sersnity on the face.
5. A large statue of sun at Kausambi is also famous among the statues of the gupta age.

Besides the statues referred to above, the statues of ganga, Yamuna, serpents, lion's mouths and innumerable terra cotta figures are also fine specimens of the guptasculpture.

Painting:

The art of painting reached its climax during the gupta period along with architecture and sculpture. The pictures depicted in Ajanta, Ellora and Begh caves are fine examples of paintings of the guptaage.

The subject matter of Ajanta caves is threefold:

1. Decorative designs like scrolls, Folwers, creepers, trees. Animals and mythological beings.
2. Portraits of Buddha and Bodhisattvas.
3. Events from the life of Buddha and his various births as deccribed in Jatakas.

The Ajanta paintings have great importance in the history of Indian painting. All the critics of art have lavished their immense praises on these fine specimens

Bagh cave paintings :

Paintings of the gupta age have also been discovered at Bagh. The subject matter of these paintings is also lord Buddha and his life stories as described in jatakas.

Literature :

During the reign of gupta kings, there was also great advancement in literature. The gupta period is known as the golden age in the field of Sanskrit. In fact, the gupta rulers were the real admirers of Sanskrit language and they provided royal patronage and support to various men of letters. Besides religious literature, poetry, story writing,drama, grammar, philosophy etc. also progressed during the reign of the gupta kings.⁴Kalidasa was the greatest literary personage of the gupta age. Owing to his grand and marvelous literary achievements, Kalidasa is often compared with Shakespeare, the famous English poet and dramatist and also known as the Shakespeare of India. A great deal of controversy revolves round the date of Kalidasa and historians and scholars hold divergent views about it, some scholars regard him as a contemporary of Vikramaditya of Ujjain while the others connect him with the royal court of Chandragupta II.

He wrote dramas like 'Abhijnanashakuntalam' 'Malavikagnimitram' and 'Vikramorvashiyam'. He also penned epics like 'Kumarasabhava' and 'Raghuvamsha'. His Gitikavyas like 'Ritu-Samhara'

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and 'Meghdoot' are also very popular. His description of nature is marvelous and excels all other poets of Sanskrit. Vishakhadatta was another poet and dramatist of the gupta age. He wrote 'Mudrarakshasa' and 'Devichandragupta'. The former deals with Chandragupta Maurya and the later refers to the victory of Chandragupta Vikramaditya over the sake rulers. Bhairavi was also popular for his literary achievements. He composed 'Kiratarjuniyam'. Shudraka, another prominent writer of the gupta period, compiled 'Mrichchhakatika'.

Besides the above quoted prominent literary figures of the gupta age, the following were also well known for their literary contribution:

1. Amar singh composed and compiled the famous 'Amarakosha'.
2. Ishwar Krishna wrote 'sankhyakarika'.
3. Dandin wrote 'Kavyadarshan' and 'Dashkumaracharita'.
4. The stories of 'Panchtantra' and 'Hitopadesha' were also written during the gupta age.
5. Vatsyayana wrote 'nyayabhashya'.

Religious and philosophical books

A great number of books on religion and philosophy were also composed during the gupta period. Various religious books, such as, Puranas, Smritis and the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were also given final touches during the reign of the guptas. Apart from hindupuranic literature several books were composed by Buddhist and Jain scholars. Many prominent scholars like Vasubandhu, Asanga, Kumarajiva, Dignaga etc., wrote books on Buddhism. Buddhist books such as 'Dipavamsa' and 'Mahavamsa' were also compiled during the reign of the gupta rulers. Jain scholars of that age were Acharyasiddhasena, Diwakar, Jinabhadrani, Devanani who compiled several books pertaining to Jainism. Thus we see an all round literary progress during the gupta period. Books on poetry, drama, prose, grammer and religion were composed and compiled during the gupta period which constitute no less than a treasure for posterity.⁵

Science:

We see a tremendous progress in the field of various branches of science during the gupta period. Mathematics, Astronomy and Medical Science flourished greatly. The decimal fraction and the principle of cypher originated during his age. The Europeans believed that they gathered the knowledge of numbers from the Arabs but the Arabs admit that they got this knowledge from India. Arayabhatta, Varahamihira and Brahmagupta were the famous scientists of the gupta age. Aryabhatta was the most prominent Astronomer and Mathematician. He wrote the most authentic book entitled, 'Aryabhattiyam'. In this book he has efficiently dealt with geometry, Algebra, Arithmetic, Astronomy etc. He has also refuted the theory that ellipses are caused by 'Rahu' and 'Ketu' and established that eclipses that are caused by the shadow of the moon and the earth. He also established the theory that the earth is round and it rotates on its axis. Owing to his scientific discoveries he is regarded by the scholars in great esteem. Varahamihira was also a famous scientist. He too, compiled several books on various scientific topics.

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Brahamaguptawas the third prominent scientist of the gupta period. He propounded the principles relating Arithmetic, Geometry and Algebra in details. He is supposed to have discovered the most significant theory of Gravitation which was later on propounded by Newton, a modern scientist. Chemistry and Knowledge of metal working also made great advancement in the Guptaperiod.⁶

Ayurveda:

Ayurveda also greatly progressed under the region of gupta rules. Charak and suhurta were the two prominent doctors of this period. Veterinary science also developed in this age. A book on medical science known as ' Hastayured'' was written during this period. Dhanvantari, the greatest physican of ancient times, was also the product of this age.⁷

Conclusion

Thus we see that there was an all round progressed in the field of arts, Literature and science and it could reach such an excellence due to the liberal patronage of the Gupta kings.

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