

B.A- PART-1, PAPER-1

THE GUPTAS-SOURCES (PART-2)

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Literary Sources

Written history in the established proper sense of the term was not an art that was well-practised in ancient India. Literary sources of the Gupta include both religious and secular as well as writings of foreign travelers. The available written material of the Gupta period are mostly from the *Puranas*, which are more prophetic in nature than a factual record of the unfolding of actual events. They occasionally mention some event, normally culled from local stories and lore, passed on orally and committed to writing only at a much later stage. Their veracity therefore becomes questionable. The *Vishnu-Purana* clearly mentions the rule of the Gupta kings. One statement in it can be translated as, The nine Nagas will reign in Padmavati,



Literary Sources

Kantipuri and Mathura; and the Guptas of Magadha and for that reason called gupta-vansas‘, literally meaning along the Ganges to Prayaga.‘ Here the nine Nagas (or Nakas as they are called in some translations) were an obscure tribe of secret races‘ (the word gupta in Sanskrit means secret, and is not to be confused with the title “Gupta” of the dynasty being examined). They were supposed to be nine families who ruled various districts, independent of each other. The *Vayu-Purana* elaborates further on the statement in the *Vishnu-Purana* and states, Princes of the Gupta race will possess all these countries (the holding of the Nagas), the banks of the Ganges to Prayaga, and Saketa, and Magadha (the Magadhas).



Literary Sources

Thus, Puranas, such as "Vayu-Purana", Matsya Purana", Vishnu Purana", "Brahmanda Purana" and "Bhagvat Purana" are the most important sources for the Guptas. They throw light on the dynastic list, the area of science, polity and system of government etc. the empire and names of the provinces.

Other, literary sources are the "***Dharmasastras***" such as "*Narada Smriti*", and "*Brihaspati Smriti*" was probably written during the Gupta period and give us a lot of useful information. "*Kamandaka Nitisara*" was probably written during the Chandra Gupta-II reign by Sikhara, Prime Minister of Chandragupta-II. The object of the book was to give instructions to the king. The author defends the murder of Saka king by his sovereign.



Literary Sources

The '*Kavya-Nataka*' literature is also useful as a source of information. The "*Kaumudi Mahotsava*" is a drama in five Acts, which lays down the political condition of Magadha on the eve of ascendancy of the Guptas. The other drama "*Devichandraguptam*" narrates the contest for the throne between Ramagupta and Chandragupta-II.

The records of the Buddhist Kingdom handed down by *Fa-hien*, the Chinese traveler who visited India during the reign of Chandra Gupta-II tells us the social, religious and economic condition of India at that time. He noted the wealth and prosperity of the towns and their citizens. He also refers to the free hospitals maintained by the state and other charitable institutions. (To be continued)



Literary Sources

Another Chinese traveler *I-tsing*, who travelled in India after the Gupta age. He refers to Maharaja Srigupta, who created a shrine for the use of Chinese pilgrims near Mrigasikhava known as the Temple of China.

He saw the ruins of that temple. He states that, a temple was built about 500 years before his time. This Srigupta was probably the founder of the Gupta dynasty and reigned about 500 years before the visit of the *I-tsing*.