

influences on Gupta art, painting and drama writing. In spite of these limitations the Gupta civilisation was certainly very creative, versatile and deep in character.

Literature in the Gupta Age : The Gupta Age had a remarkable progress in the field of literature. Sanskrit became the chief vehicle of literary creation.

Revival of
Sanskrit

Scholars like Maxmuller have described the Age as one of Sanskrit revival. But it would be incorrect to say that Sanskrit was restored by the Guptas from oblivion. It was never

obliterated, even in spite of the Mauryan patronage to Prakrita. In the post-Maurya period Sanskrit quickly recovered its splendour under the Sungas and the Kushanas. The Guptas extended a vigorous patronage to the language and adopted it as the lingua-franca. The use of pure Sanskrit in the epigraphs and in the literature of the Age point to a revival of Sanskrit. Moreover the Sanskrit of the Gupta Age was different from the Vedic Sanskrit in style and composition which points to its recreation. In this period we find a great advance in literature and other branches of knowledge. It was a language of the upper class used in the court and among the aristocracies, while Prakrita remained as the spoken language of the commoners. In the dramas of Kalidasa, the servants of the royal household speak Prakrita, while the members of the royal family speak in Sanskrit. In short, Sanskrit became the language of the elite. In addition to the progress in Sanskrit literature, outside the court circle, Prakrita literature was written by the Jains. They were mostly religious and devotional songs written in the language spoken by the people.¹ Panini and later Patanjali had put severe discipline on Sanskrit as a language by imposing rigid rules of grammar and rigid meanings of words. Such strait-jacket rules stood as an obstacle in the path of versatile growth of the language and expression of inner meanings. Hence we miss the chaste expression yet deep with inner meanings of the Dhammapada written in Pali, in Sanskrit. The language is used by scholars and poets in excessive ornamental style lacking realism and humanism. It was done to suit the taste of the upper class people and intellectuals. It was devoid of the touch of day-to-day life of the common

¹ Romila Thapar, P. 147.

men and was designed to suit the taste of men with leisure. Though a few books on astronomy and astrology were written; applied and technical sciences and disciplines were neglected. Books useful for carpenters, potters improved farming were not written; nor works on geography, mathematics, bio-sciences, botany were prolific. Court literature and abstract philosophical treatises were plentiful.

In the field of theological studies the Katyana Smriti, Devala Smriti and Vyasa Smriti, the Narada Smriti, the Brihaspati Smriti and Patanjali Smriti were written in this Age. Among the eighteen Puranas some of the Puranas were revised and modified in the Gupta Age. Dr. Hazara has shown by a painstaking analysis the different sections of the Puranas revised in the period. Such revision and codification became necessary to integrate vedic religion with newly emerging creeds. Among the commentators on theology of the Age, the name of 'Ashabarya' should be mentioned. Perhaps Kamandaka's 'Nitisastra' was composed in the same period. Probably the great Epic was also re-edited during the period.

In philosophy, Isvara Krishna expounded the 'Sankhya-karika'. Varubandhu, perhaps a contemporary of the former composed the 'Purva Mimamsa-bhasya'. Asanga, the brother of Varubandhu wrote a treatise on 'Nagachakra-Prasasti'. Asanga, the brother of Varubandhu wrote a treatise on 'Nagachakra-Prasasti'. The earliest expositor of Nyaya-sutra was the great teacher Shastrin. The earliest expositor of Nyaya-sutra was the great teacher Shastrin. The earliest expositor of Nyaya-sutra was the great teacher Shastrin. The great Buddhist philosopher Dinnagacharya adorned the age. He composed the philosophical work 'Pramana Samuchchaya'. Guadapada, the great exponent of monistic Vedanta philosophy and the guru of Sankara also flourished in the middle of 6th C.A.D. Prastapada composed the 'Padartha-dharma-samgraha', a commentary on Kanada's philosophy.

It was in secular literature that the Gupta Age had an unprecedented progress. Kalidasa the most brilliant luminary of the Gupta Age shed his light on the whole realm of Sanskrit literature. Although doubts are expressed about his date and time, the general opinion regards him to be a contemporary of Chandra Gupta II, and Kumara Gupta I. A simple Brahmin, a pious Saiva and a versatile genius, Kalidasa was "unquestionably the finest master of Indian poetic style by Sanskrit." 'The Avijana Sakuntalam' of Kalidasa is one of the best among the dramas of Kalidasa. European literary critics have offered high praise for the drama. It is an asset in the world of literature. Kalidasa converted the insignificant episode of Dusmanta and Shakuntala in the great Epic into an immortal story of pure love, romance and pathos of separation. He added flesh and blood to the story of the great Epic and injected his deep humanise eternal values and love of nature in the drama. Shakuntala's life became a part of eternal nature. Her humanism evident in her love for the

plants and animals that lived in the subcontinent with her are depicted with great
tenderness and sympathy by the poet. Among his other works mention may be
made of the dramas 'Malavikagnimitra' and 'Vikramorvasin'. While
Kalidasa selected his subject matter of his dramas from the Epics or Puranas
in 'Malavikagnimitra' he selected Agnimitra of the Sunga dynasty as the hero
of his drama. He composed the story of the drama from the life and
court life of Agnimitra with a rare skill and poetic style true to his own. His
two mahakavyas 'Raghuvansham' and 'Kumarasambhavam' and the lyrical
poem 'Meghadutam' are universally regarded as valuable gems in Sanskrit
literature. Another poetical work of Kalidasa is 'Ritu Samharam'. Among his
poetical creation Kalidasa's 'Meghadutam' is regarded as his best work. It is
composed in mandakranta rhyme which is harmonious with the theme. This
lyric provides a picture of wonderful world before its readers. As the lyric
unfolds itself, Kalidasa's vast knowledge of India's geography, its people of
different regions, its cities are revealed. The 'Raghu Vansham' is a poetical work
depicting the life and conquests of Raghu, of the Epic. The description of
Raghu's conquest according to Pandit Ashok Shastri reminds us the conquests
of Samudra Gupta. This poetical work is excellent for use of similes and its
historical value is immense.

But the Gupta Age produced not only Kalidasa but many other literary
geniuses. Bharavi, the author of 'Kirtanrajynam', Sudraka, the author of
'Mrichchhakatikam' and Vishakhadatta, the author of 'Mudra Rakshasa'
did their lustre on the age. Sudraka's tone may be earlier than that of the
Gupta Age. Magha composed his poetical work 'Svapna Badha'. Harishena,
the minister of Samudra Gupta was a poet of no mean order. He was the author
of the 'Allahabad Prasasti'. Virashena Sena, a member of the court of
Chandragupta II was another poet, and a grammarian. Buddha Ghoshia
composed the 'Padyacharuman'. Its subject matter is the life of Buddha. The
'Shanti Karjyam' was composed by Bharti. It illustrated the rules of Panini.
Bhartihari composed the poetical works like 'Sringarasataka', 'Naishtika'
etc. Amuru composed the 'Amuru-Sataka'. These poets of the Satakas belonged
to the 7th C.A.D. Chandragupta II, according to tradition had nine gems
(Nava Ratna) or nine great scholars in his court. But all the scholars of the
9th gems were not his contemporaries.

However, the Sanskrit dramas of the Gupta period were mostly romantic
comedies. The only exception being the Mrichchhakatikam of Sudraka. The
absence of tragedies in the dramas of the Gupta Age has
puzzled many scholars. Marxists offer the explanation that
as most of the dramas were written for entertainment of the
court people and the aristocracy, they were written in comic vein. Such an
explanation is perhaps superficial. Literary critics of eminence think that
comedies are the other name of tragedies. The drama 'Vikramorvasin' of
Kalidasa begins as a comedy and ends as a tragedy. The concept of tragedy in
the Gupta period might have been different ideas from that of the European
era. In the same drama both tragedy and comedies remain side by side.

In prose literature, fables and romances, the 'Panchatantra', the 'Brihatkatha' of Gunadhya deserve special mention. Dandin, the master of inimitable prose style composed 'Kavyadarśa' and 'Dasakumaracharita' at the same age. Dandin's style of prose was highly ornamental. He perhaps belonged to 7th C.A.D.

In the field of scientific and technical studies the intellect of the Gupta Age was highly fertile. Amarasimha, the lexicographer, Vagbhata, the great medical writer composed famous treatises 'Astangasangraha'. In practical and applied sciences, the great Varahamihira composed his 'Panchasiddhanta' which is regarded as the Bible of Indian astronomy. But in spite of his great knowledge in astronomy, Varahamihira showed his leanings for astrology which is far from a discipline of science. Varahamihira divided astronomy into five branches viz. astronomy, mathematics and astrology, a division which great astronomers may not approve.¹ Some scholars find influence of Greek astronomy on Varahamihira's works. Among his five propositions or Siddhanta the second and the third propositions i.e. the 'Romaka Siddhanta' and 'Pancasiddhanta' are said to be greatly influenced by Greek and Roman astronomy. The scientific spirit of the Age was truly expressed in the inventions of the great mathematician and astronomer, Aryabhata. The outstanding treatises of Aryabhata are 'Dasagitikasutra', 'Aryastusata', 'Aryabhattiya' etc. The last one was written in 499 A.D. He was first to link astronomy with high mathematics. He has been rightly acclaimed as the 'Newton of India'. He was the first astronomer to invent that the earth rotates round the Sun and the shadow of the earth falling on the moon causes lunar eclipse. Aryabhata was almost accurate in calculating that the solar year consists of 365, 242,200 days.² It is not a fact that the knowledge and advance in Indian astronomy was a result of India's contact with Greece. Aryabhata and Varahamihira accepted some propositions of Greek astronomy and rejected others and contributed their own. It is not that they did not make any original contribution to the branch of science.³ Aryabhata is said to have invented the decimal system. There is a view that the decimal system was in vogue before Aryabhata. He merely reformed it, gave it a scientific basis. The Arabs borrowed Indian mathematics and decimal system from India.

While Varahamihira, though great astronomer failed to withstand the pressure of tradition and superstition and made a compromise with it. Aryabhata stood true to his scientific and rational spirit. Varahamihira made a departure from his rational and experimental astronomical studies by treating astrology as a science, which in fact it was not. Hence he composed the astrological treatise 'Brihat-Samhita' which is at variance with the pure scientific treatise 'Pancha Siddhanta'. His other books of astrology is 'Brihajalaka' and 'Brihat-Bibaha Patana' etc. In the 7th C.A.D. Brahmagupta composed two treatises 'Brahma Siddhanta' and 'Khandakhadya'. It dealt with geometry, arithmetic

1. Romila Thapar, P. 156.

2. Romila Thapar, P. 155.

3. Romila Thapar—ibid.