

SOCIETY

- Society was **divided into four *varnas*** (*Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*), with each *varna* performing the set of functions prescribed for it and enjoying whatever rights were given to it.
- This was the **ideal social order and the state was expected to preserve it.**
- The ***Brahmanas*** came to exert considerable influence on the kings.
- They **received land from the kings** and others.
- **The kings, officials and others gave land not only to individual *brahmanas* but also some times incited big groups of *brahmanas* to come and settle in remote areas.**
- Thus, the number of *brahmana* settlements variously called **Brahmadiyas**, **Agraharas** and so on started increasing and they started spreading, among other things, the idea of a **varna divided social order.**
- However, **there were many groups in society whose varna identity could never be determined.**
- Secondly, **it was assumed that the varnas would perform their duties; in reality, they may not have done so.**
- These suggest that **real society was different from the ideal society** and this was also recognized by the *brahmana* writers of the **Dharmashastras.**
- They, therefore, tried to determine the status of various castes (**jatis**) in society by giving fictitious explanations of their origins.
- They suggested that various **jatis** originated through **varna-samkara** that is inter-marriages between various **varnas.**
- Fictitious origins were thought of for **tribal groups** who came to be absorbed into the Brahmanical society.
- Various **foreign ruling families** were assimilated in the **varna** system.
- **Even when the rulers were supporters of Buddhism, Jainism or a particular religious sect, they continued to patronize brahmanas**, particularly those of high learning.
- This remained one of the major reasons for the **economic prosperity and prestige of the brahmanas.**
- There were the **antyajas** (untouchables).

- They were considered impure; even their touch was considered impure and their physical presence in areas where higher **varnas** lived and moved was not allowed.
- The **Chandalas**, the **Charmakaras** and similar groups were considered impure and outcastes.
- The position of women of higher **varnas** was **low**.
- Considerable **decline in the position of women** in society.
- Women were expected, in the family, to function **mainly as an ideal wife and ideal mother**.
- In many *Brahmana* texts, **women were even considered to be of the same category as the *Shudras***.
- Although *Brahmanas* were given land-grants regularly, we **do not come across evidence of land being given to Brahmana women**.
- There existed great difference between the ways of life of **the rich city-dwellers and people living in villages**.

ECONOMY (AGRICULTURE)

- Land under cultivation was usually called **Kshetra**.
- Lands not under cultivation were variously called as **Khila, Aprahata** etc., and
- Inscriptions give the impression that **uncultivated land was being regularly brought under cultivation**.
- In some areas **Nivartana** was the term used for a measure of land; whereas in the inscriptions of Bengal terms like **Kulyavapa** and **Dronavapa** are used.
- **Irrigation**- repair of **Sudarshana reservoir**
- Another method for irrigation was **to draw water from wells and supply the water to the fields through carefully prepared channels**.
- To tie a number of pots to a chain: the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the hull, and by making the chain and the pots rotate, it was ensured that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it.
- This mechanism was known as **ghati-yantra** as **ghati** was the name used for a pot.
- This type of mechanism also came to be known as **araghatta**.
- Role of the **state was only marginal in providing irrigation facilities** to farmers.
- Land was not only purchased and gifted;

- The practice of **gifting land to religious donees had become quite common** by now.
- Because of the practice of land-grants, the peasant population as a whole were reduced to a very low position in society.
- Ordinary cultivators, known by various terms such as **Krishibala, Karshaka** or **Kinass**,
- **Slaves** also worked on the fields of their masters.
- ***Kamasutra*** written in the Gupta period tells us how much hardship female slaves had to go through at the hands of their masters.

CRAFTS PRODUCTION AND TRADE

- Ordinary domestic items like **earthen pots, items of furniture, baskets, metal tools for domestic use**
- **Luxury items** including **jewellery made of gold, silver and precious stones; objects made of ivory; fine clothes of cotton and silk**
- Some of these items **were made available through trade; others were manufactured locally**
- Texts like **Amarakosha** and **Brihat Samhita**, list many items, give their Sanskrit names and also mention different categories of craftsmen who manufactured them.
- An idea of the quantity and variety of objects manufactured in this period one has to go through **reports of what have been found at various archaeological sites like Taxila, Ahichchhatra, Mathura, Rajghat, Kaushambi and Pataliputra in the Ganges valley** and other sites.
- Gupta rulers minted **coins of different types, and the gold in copper, silver and lead.**
- **Merchants** held a high position in society.
- For example, two types of representatives of merchants – the **Nagarasresthi** and the **Sarthavaha** – were associated with the administration of the district headquarters in north Bengal.
- The seals of the Gupta period found at Vaishali in north Bihar suggest that the merchants constituted an important section of the population of the city of Vaishali.
- in cities like Pataliputra and Ujjayini commercial activities were carried on briskly and people from different countries were present in them.
- **Merchants were important communities also in these cities.**

- There were **organisations** which facilitated the functioning of both craftsmen and traders.
- The ancient term which was generally used for these organisations was **Shreni** (guild) and **the State was expected to provide the guilds protection and to respect their customs and norms.**
- Similarly, members of the **Shreni** were also expected to follow the norms of the organisation; otherwise, they were liable to punishment.
- **Crafts production and commercial activities perhaps started declining** from the Gupta Period onward in most regions
- this resulted in the **decline of towns and cities and in greater dependence of society of agricultural production.**

CULTURE

- The Gupta period has often been referred to as “**Golden Age**” due to its cultural heritage.
- This applies to great accomplishments **in the field of art and architecture, language and literature.**
- From the vantage point of architecture, **the Gupta period reflects creative enthusiasm and deep sense and awareness of beauty.**
- These are evident in the ***Dashaavataara* temple** at Deogarh in Jhansi district (UP), **Bhitargaon temple** near Kanpur (UP), **Vishnu temple** at Tigawa (Jabalpur district, MP), **Shiva temple** at Bhumara (Satna district, MP), **Parvati temple** at Nachna-Kuthara (Panna district, MP) etc.
- Some of them are adorned with **beautiful sculptural panels.**
- However, the high and elaborately carved ***shikharas* (towers)** on top of the temples were yet to register their appearance.
- **Therefore, Gupta period marks the formative phase of temple construction in India,** but it was a significant phase that **continued to influence temple-building right up to the medieval period.**
- **Sanskrit** was widely patronised by the Gupta rulers, making it the **official language** of their court.
- **All their inscriptions are written in Sanskrit.**
- **Sanskrit saw its revival under the Guptas.**

- It became a **widespread language in entire north India during the Gupta period.**
- Even Buddhist scholars, particularly those of **Mahayana Buddhism**, began **composing their scriptures in Sanskrit.**
- **Great poets, dramatists, grammarians and playwrights** of Sanskrit are known from this period.
- The epics **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** are believed to have been compiled and given their final form around 4th-5th century CE. (ৰামায়ণ আৰু মহাভাৰত মহাকাব্যসমূহ খ্ৰীষ্টীয় চতুৰ্থ-৫ম শতিকাৰ আশে-পাশে সংকলন কৰি চূড়ান্ত ৰূপ দিয়া বুলি বিশ্বাস কৰা হয়।)
- The great Sanskrit writer-poet **Kalidasa** – one of the **Navaratnas (nine gems)** of the court of Gupta king Chandragupta Vikramaditya – wrote dramas like **Abhijnana-Shakuntalam**, **Malavikagnimitram**, **Vikramorvashiyam** and poetic works such as **Raghuvamsham**, **Kumarasambhavam** and **Meghadutam** which show the excellent literary standards achieved during the Gupta period.
- **Varahamihira** wrote **Brihat Samhitaa** that deals with scientific subjects like astronomy and botany.
- **Aryabhatta** wrote **Aryabhattiyam**: a famous work on geometry, algebra, arithmetic and trigonometry.
- The notable creations on medicine include **Charaka Samhitaa** and **Sushruta Samhitaa**.
- An **all-round progress in literature** was manifest during this time.