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Religion and Philosophy in the Age of the Guptas

(circa 200—700)

Students of the religious history of India know how the Brahmanic religion, which had manifested itself successively in the forms of the cosmic-heroic worship of the early Vedic Aryans, the elaborate ritualism of the priestly class, and the mystic speculations of the Upaniṣadic free thinkers, suffered a serious set-back on account of the rapid growth of the heterodox systems of thought like Buddhism. The beginnings of these systems have, indeed, to be traced back to very early times; but it was the *Upaniṣads* themselves, which must, in a sense, be said to have actually prepared the ground on which they throve. The protagonists of the Brahmanic way of life and thought seem to have met this situation, which was becoming increasingly alarming, in several ways. The content of Brahmanism was by no means inferior to or less stimulating than that of the heterodox ideologies. Only its form and the ways of its propagation had to be adapted to the changing conditions. First of all, therefore, attempts were made to reorganise and systematise the entire sphere of Brahmanic thought and life. A more or less definite and concrete form was given to the various aspects of Brahmanism. The literary monuments of this great Brahmanic resuscitation are the *vedāṅgas*, particularly the *śrauta-sūtras*, and, to a certain extent, the *sūtras* of the six orthodox *darśanas*. But far more fruitful than the steps taken in the direction of the revival and consolidation of the ancient orthodox thought were the steps taken in another direction. Due recognition now began to be given to the gods and religious practices of the common people, which were hitherto almost despised by the priestly hierarchy and the Upaniṣadic thinkers. They were now assigned their proper place in the general scheme of orthodox religion. The gods of the people soon superseded the gods of the hieratic Vedic pantheon, and the cult of *bhakti* made religion the concern, not only of a select few as heretofore, but of everyone who cared to practise it. It was, indeed, this new popular religion, eventually sponsored by the votaries of orthodox Brahmanism themselves, which helped, more than anything else, to arrest successfully the onward march of the heterodox religions. Its message and its teachings were conveyed to the masses through the vehicle of the po-

pular epics, which were assuming their final shape during this period. Brahmanism thus gave place to, or rather enlarged itself into, Hinduism. Theistic devotionalism, a new code of conduct, a popular synthesis of the conflicting religious and philosophical ideologies, each one of which proclaimed its allegiance to Brahmanism, and, above all, the shrewd claim that it only continued and, in a way, consummated the orthodox Vedic religion — these were the main features, which invested Hinduism with a tremendous popular appeal.

It was about this time that the rise of the dynasty of the Śuṅgas in Magadha gave greater impetus to the movement of the renaissance of Brahmanism in the form of Hinduism. Buddhism and, to a certain extent, Jainism were actively patronised by the Mauryas. Particularly, under the great Aśoka, Buddhism had reached almost the peak of its glory. However, the deterioration in the Maurya imperial power was accompanied also by the gradual decline of Buddhism and the corresponding popularisation of Hinduism. And when Puṣyamitra Śuṅga established himself as the ruler of Magadha, after overthrowing his Maurya master, he signalised his victory by performing the *aśvamedha* sacrifice in the right Brahmanic fashion. This Vedic sacrifice, which was performed after a considerable lapse of time, may be said to have marked the beginning of the Hindu renaissance. Far more significant from the point of view of this renaissance than the resurrection of Vedic sacrifices was the popularisation of Hinduism through the epics, which are appropriately called the "Vedas of the masses". Through them, the cult of *bhakti*, which was associated with the gods of the people, reached even the lowest strata of the society. The popular form of Hindu religion and philosophy as presented in the final redactions of the epics; the Hindu ideal of social and political organisation as taught in the *Manusmṛti*; the revival of ancient Brahmanic sacrifices as exemplified by the performance of the *aśvamedha* by Puṣyamitra; and the rehabilitation of Sanskrit as indicated by the *Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali — these were the main characteristics of the Hindu renaissance in the Śuṅga period.

The fall of the Śuṅgas, however, marked the beginning of a period of uncertainty in the fortunes of Hinduism. Several circumstances may be said to have conspired to bring about this contingency. To begin with, there was at that time no single paramount power which could have, by virtue of its imperial sovereignty, kept the banner of Hinduism flying throughout the country in all its freshness and glory. It was a period of great social upheaval and of unsettled political conditions. Adequate attention could not, therefore, be paid to the great movement of the Hindu renaissance, which had been inaugurated under the aegis of the Śuṅgas. Efforts in the direction of promoting that movement were no doubt made by the Kāṇvas, the Āndhras, the Bhāraśivas, and the early Vākāṭakas, but, naturally enough, these efforts could not command the necessary nation-wide appeal. The

religious affiliations of the foreign tribes like the Bactrian Greeks, the Śakas, the Pahlavas, and the Kuṣāṇas, who made inroads in India during this period and eventually settled down in this country as Indians, were divided between Hinduism and Buddhism. Most of these foreigners had sojourned in Serindia before they came over to India and had, therefore, already come under the influence of Buddhism, which had spread far and wide in that region. In course of time, however, they seem to have been converted to one or the other sect of Hinduism. Another significant factor, which must have seriously affected the growth of Hinduism, was the rise, during this period, of a strong rival to that religion in the form of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Hīnayāna, which represents an earlier scholastic formulation of the original teachings of the Buddha, did not concern itself very much with metaphysical speculations and logical subtleties. It rather put an emphasis on a life of rigorous self-discipline and supramundane contemplation. As against this, the Mahāyāna was a more popular religion. It was more popular "not in the sense of being simpler, for parts of its teachings were exceedingly abstruse, but in the sense of striving to invent or include doctrines agreeable to the masses. It was less monastic than the older Buddhism, and more emotional, warmer in charity, more personal in devotion, more ornate in art, literature and ritual, more disposed to evolution and development, whereas the Hīnayāna was conservative and rigid, secluded in its cloisters, and open to the plausible, if unjust, accusation of selfishness"[1]. The Mahāyāna, richer in mythology and teaching selfless devotion, thus substantially resembled the popular Hinduism of the epics. Just as the latter superseded the idolless ritualism of the *Brāhmaṇas*, the Mahāyāna superseded the Hīnayāna. In a sense, the Mahāyāna may be said to have been a Hinduised version of early Buddhism. It, therefore, wielded among the masses an influence more or less similar to that of Hinduism.

Hinduism under the Guptas

When, early in the fourth century A.D., the Guptas came to power, they picked up the threads left by the Śuṅgas in the matter of the Hindu renaissance and raised the glory of Hinduism to great heights. The imperial suzerainty of the Guptas, the sense of security and affluence engendered among the people during their regime, and the strong creative urge which generally characterised that epoch made this great achievement possible for them. The epigraphic records of the Guptas clearly show that they were staunch adherents of Hinduism and followed the religious practices both of

[1] Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism* II, p. 4.

Brahmanism and popular Hinduism. As a matter of fact, the popular theistic cults were, in their original form, anti-Vedic, in so far as their gods had superseded the gods of the Vedic pantheon and the doctrine of *bhakti* sponsored by them had replaced the practices of the Brahmanic ritual. Indeed, they represented the reaction of the masses against priestly hieratic sacerdotalism. In course of time, however, an ingenious synthesis of these two religions — Brahmanism and popular theism — was brought about with a view to consolidating the forces of Hinduism against the heterodox religions. It was this synthesis which, more than anything else, made Hinduism stronger and less vulnerable. The Hinduism of the Guptas was of this type. While, on the one hand, they called themselves *paramabhāgavatas*, on the other, they themselves performed or helped others to perform various Vedic sacrifices. Kumāra Gupta I, for instance, is styled *paramabhāgavata* on his coins, and, at the same time, numismatic evidence itself clearly points to the celebration of the *aśvamedha* by that monarch. In the Mathura inscription of Candra Gupta II[2] and the Bihar and Bhitari inscriptions of Skanda Gupta[3], Samudra Gupta is credited with having performed the *aśvamedha* sacrifice, which was for a long time out of vogue. The gold coins of the *aśvamedha* type issued by Samudra Gupta also corroborate the fact of the performance of the *aśvamedha* by him. Apart from the Horse-sacrifice, which was the symbol of imperial sovereignty, other Vedic sacrifices, small and big, have also been mentioned in the Gupta records. The first and the second Damodarpur copperplates, dated 124 G.E. and 129 G.E.[4] respectively, are clearly Brahmanical in character, for, they refer to *agnihotra* and *mahāyajña*. A reference may also be made in this connection to the fact that the Vākāṭaka monarch, Pravarasena I, performed many Vedic sacrifices including *agniṣṭoma*, *āptoryāma*, *ukthya*, *ṣoḍaśin*, and *bṛhaspatisava*. Further, with a view to proclaiming his imperial power, he also performed the *vājapeya* and the *aśvamedha*. There is epigraphic evidence to show that the Maukharis, who were the contemporaries of the later Guptas of Malwa, performed quite a large number of Vedic sacrifices. Thus, in the age of the Guptas, Brahmanic ritualism seems to have been regarded as an essential feature of the greater Hinduism. References to sacrifices in the works of K ā l i d ā s a and other contemporary writers would also support this assumption. In the subsequent period, however, the practice of performing Vedic sacrifices came to be gradually discontinued.

More prominently than this ritualistic aspect of Hinduism is its popular theistic aspect reflected in the Gupta records. On the basis of the available

[2] *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (*CII*) III, 25.
[3] *CII* III, 52.
[4] *EI* XV, 129; 132.

evidence in this connection it may be assumed that several sects of this popular Hinduism, such as Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, Śāktism, Tāntrism, etc., flourished in the days of the Guptas, and that each of them could boast of a large following. One thing, however, is certain, namely, that the mutual antagonism among the followers of these several sects, which came to be a significant feature of later Hinduism, was almost unknown under the Guptas. There are instances of members of the same royal family having been the devotees of different gods. Individual rulers are seen to have changed their religious affiliations according to their own personal inclinations. The first three rulers of Valabhi, for instance, were Māheśvaras, the fourth was a Bhāgavata, and the fifth was a worshipper of the Sun-god. Hastin of the Parivrājaka dynasty was a Śaiva, but his son, Saṁkṣobha, was a Vaiṣṇava[5]. Kālidāsa, the court-poet of Candra Gupta II, was himself a staunch devotee of Śiva. In the *nāndī* stanzas of his dramas and also at several places elsewhere he clearly indicates his avowed inclination towards the Śaiva cult. But he was not a bigoted fanatic. In conformity with the remarkably catholic attitude in religious matters, which generally characterised the age of the Guptas, Kālidāsa is seen to glorify also the gods, Brahmā and Viṣṇu[6]. As a matter of fact he points out that Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva are the three aspects of one and the same supreme divinity[7].

Vaiṣṇavism

Epigraphic and numismatic evidence would, however, indicate that most of the Gupta sovereigns were devout Vaiṣṇavas or Bhāgavatas. Candra Gupta II, Kumāra Gupta I, and Skanda Gupta style themselves as *paramabhāgavatas* on their coins[8]. The emblems normally used for the personal and official seals of the Gupta monarchs, such as, *śaṁkha*, *cakra*, *Lakṣmī*, *garuḍa*, etc., also point to the Vaiṣṇava inclinations of those monarchs. Another significant point to be noted in this context is that sovereign power

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[5] *CII* III, 106; 114.

[6] *cf. Kumārasambhava* II. 6; *Raghuvaṁśa* X. 16.

[7] *Kumārasambhava* VII. 44.

[8] D.C. Sircar ("Sectarian Difference among the Early Vaiṣṇavas", *BV* VII, 109—111) draws attention to the fact that, unlike his successors, Samudra Gupta is never referred to as *paramabhāgavata* in any of the Gupta records or on any of the Gupta coins. There is, at the same time, enough evidence to prove that he was a Vaiṣṇava. That is to say, Samudra Gupta was a Vaiṣṇava but not a Bhāgavata. Sircar, therefore, suggests that the word, *bhāgavata*, indicates a specific sect of Vaiṣṇavism, and that it was from the times of Candra Gupta II onwards that the Gupta sovereigns adopted the *bhāgavata* form of Vaiṣṇavism.

is often personified and represented in the Gupta epigraphic records as Lakṣmī, Śrī, Kamalā, and Padmā[9]. The Meharauli pillar is called *viṣṇudhvaja*, which fact indicates the Vaiṣṇava character of that inscription[10]. The Udayagiri cave inscription of Candra Gupta II[11] is engraved on a smoothened panel over two figures, one of Caturbhuja Viṣṇu, attended by his two consorts, and the other of Dvādaśabhujā Devī. The object of the inscription is to record the gift, by a Mahārāja of the Sanakānika tribe, who seems to have been a feudatory of Candra Gupta II, of the two groups of sculptures, above which the record is inscribed. The Junagadh rock inscription[12], of Skanda Gupta's time, records the construction of a temple of Cakrabhṛt, and the Bhitari inscription[13], belonging to the regime of the same Gupta monarch, speaks of the installation of the image of Śārṅgin. Mention of a temple of Viṣṇu is also made in the Gangadhar inscription of Viśvavarman, dated 480 V.S[14]. The erection of a *dhvajastambha*, dedicated to Janārdana, by Mātṛviṣṇu and Dhanyaviṣṇu, is recorded in the Eran inscription of Budha Gupta[15]. In that inscription, Mātṛviṣṇu is described as a great devotee of Bhagavān Viṣṇu. It thus becomes clear that Viṣṇu was worshipped, in the age of the Guptas, under several names, such as Cakrabhṛt, Janārdana, Śārṅgin, etc. The *varāha* incarnation of Viṣṇu is associated with another Eran inscription[16] relating to Toramāṇa and Dhanyaviṣṇu. A Gupta sculpture at Udayagiri represents very artistically the rescue of the earth by Viṣṇu in his boar-incarnation. In Puṇḍravardhana also there was a temple of *varāha*. No other *avatāra* of Viṣṇu seems to have been glorified during the regime of the Guptas as prominently as the *varāha-avatāra*. This fact may indicate that the Guptas perhaps claimed the greatest affinity with the *varāha*, by virtue of their having rescued the earth from distress, as Viṣṇu had done in his third *avatāra*. A very striking reference to Lord Kṛṣna is made in the Bhitari pillar inscription of Skanda Gupta[17]. Describing, in a picturesque manner, Skanda Gupta's encounter with the Hūṇas, after his victory over the Puṣyamitras, the inscription goes on to say: "Who, when (his) father had attained the skies, conquered (his) enemies by the strength of his arm, and established again the ruined fortunes of (his) lineage; and then crying, 'the victory has been achieved', betook himself to (his) father, whose

[9] *C I I* III, 56.
[10] *C I I* III, 139.
[11] *C I I* III, 21.
[12] *C I I* III, 56.
[13] *C I I* III, 52.
[14] *C I I* III, 72.
[15] *C I I* III, 88.
[16] *C I I* III, 159.
[17] *C I I* III, 52.

eyes were full of tears of joy, just as Kṛṣna, when he had slain (his) enemies, betook himself to (his mother) Devakī." Incidentally, attention may be drawn to the curious fact that, though the history of the kings of the Raghu race is given, in such detail, by Kālidāsa in his magnificent epic poem, the *Raghuvaṁśa*, the Gupta records do not anywhere allude to the Rāma-incarnation of Viṣṇu[18].

Śaivism

It may be generally assumed that the Guptas, the Pallavas, and the Gaṅgas were Vaiṣṇavas, while the Vākāṭakas, the Bhāraśivas, the Maitrakas, the Kadambas, and the Parivrājakas were Śaivas. However, as indicated elsewhere, the Guptas exhibited a remarkably catholic spirit in the matter of religion. It has been seen, for instance, how, while themselves being devout Bhāgavatas, the Gupta monarchs freely patronised the ancient Brahmanic ritualism. A similar attitude was taken by them in respect of the other sects of Hinduism. The very fact that the Gupta emperors, who styled themselves *paramabhāgavata*, had their own personal names, such as Kumāra and Skanda, adopted from the Śaivite sect, is a sufficient testimony in this regard. There is also epigraphic evidence to show that the Gupta sovereigns, who were Vaiṣṇavas, had Śaiva ministers, like Śaba and Pṛthviṣeṇa. Similarly Kālidāsa, who was avowedly a follower of the Śaiva religion, was patronised by the Vaiṣṇava sovereign, Candra Gupta II. While one Udayagiri cave inscription[19] of Candra Gupta II is Vaiṣṇava in character, another[20], which is undated, records the excavation of the cave as a temple of Śiva by order of Śaba, who was the king's minister of peace and war 'having got the position by hereditary rights'. The Karamdanda inscription[21], dated 437 A.D., mentions that Pṛthviṣeṇa, the son of Śikharasvāmin, who was *mantrin*, *kumārāmātya*, and afterwards *mahābalādhikṛt* of Kumāra Gupta I, got a temple of Śiva constructed, in order to commemorate his own name. Similar references to the construction of temples of Śiva, in commemoration of some events, are found in several other inscriptions of the Gupta period. For instance, the wife of Candragupta, a petty chief of Jallundhur, is said

[18] This may, however, not be understood to indicate that Rāma was not then an object of popular worship. Varāhamihira, who died in 587 A.D., has given in his *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* the measurements for the image of Rāma. This fact would point to the existence of Rāma's temples in the Gupta period.

[19] *CII* III, 21.

[20] *CII* III, 34.

[21] *EI* X, 71.

to have built a Śiva temple in memory of her husband[22], and Mihiralakṣmī is credited with having dedicated a temple, in the Kangra district, to Mihireśvara[23]. Śiva is represented in Gupta sculptures, both in the human form and through the phallic symbol. It is interesting to note that the later Kuṣāṇa coins show the human form of Śiva. Just as Vaiṣṇava emblems were used for personal and official seals in the days of the Guptas, the Śaiva emblems, such as the trident and the bull, are also seen to have been used.

From among other deities belonging to the Śaiva pantheon, Kārttikeya, a son of Śiva and the Commander-in-chief of the gods, seems to have been particularly popular with the Guptas. Kumāra and Skanda, which are two other names of this god, were proudly borne by two great Gupta emperors. The famous poet K ā l i d ā s a has likewise devoted an entire epic poem to the subject of the birth of Kārttikeya. The martial ambitions and achievements of the Gupta emperors would seem to explain their special affiliation to the Divine General. Even the construction of a temple of Kārttikeya, which is a very rare phenomenon in the Hindu religious history, is recorded in one of the inscriptions of Kumāra Gupta I. The Bilsad pillar inscription[24], dated 415 A.D., speaks of the construction of a temple of Kārttikeya and the establishment of a *sattra* at that place. Curiously enough, the other son of Śiva, namely Gaṇeśa, who is usually worshipped in order to secure an auspicious beginning of any undertaking, is not mentioned in any of the Gupta records. The Dvādaśabhujā Devī, represented in the sculptures at Udayagiri, is presumably the consort of Śiva in her aspect of Mahiṣāsuramardinī.

Several sub-sects of Śaivism have been known from very early times. The most prominent among them was undoubtedly the Pāśupata sect, which is traditionally regarded to have been founded by Lakulīśa, a native of Gujarat, who must have lived in the early first century of the Christian era. The main teachings of Lakulīśa were, in course of time, consolidated into four distinct schools known as Śaiva, Pāśupata, Kāruka, and Kāpālika. Mathurā seems to have been the centre of the philosophical Śaivism taught by Lakulīśa and there is a long unbroken tradition of Pāśupata teachers maintained at that place. Epigraphic evidence would show that among the Pāśupata teachers, who flourished during the Gupta regime, were Parāśara, Upamita, Kapila, and Udita[25]. It may also be pointed out in this connection that, as recently as 1945, an image of Lakulīśa, obviously belonging to the Gupta period, was discovered at Mathurā. The Śaiva sculptures at Mathurā give us some

[22] *E I* I, 13.
[23] *C I I* III, 289.
[24] *C I I* III, 42.
[25] *E I* XXI, 8.

indications about the type of Pāśupata Śaivism, which prevailed there. Extreme practices, such as self-immolation at the feet of the God, appear to have been not uncommon[26]. The works of Kālidāsa clearly show that he was a Śaiva by religious profession[27], but it cannot be definitely said that he was the follower of any particular sect of Śaivism. It has been suggested[28] that he was born in Kashmir, and that he was an adherent of the Kashmir Śaivism. The Kashmir Śaivism had developed two principal schools — the *spanda* and the *pratyabhijñā*. The first of these, namely, *spanda*, is traditionally believed to have been founded by Vasugupta, who lived in the beginning of the ninth century A.D., and his pupil, Kallaṭa, and the second, namely *pratyabhijñā*, by Somānanda in the tenth century A.D. A critical study of the works of Kālidāsa would show that he was in no way influenced by the teachings of any of these two schools. The similarities between the teachings of the *pratybhijñā* school and the views expressed by Kālidāsa in his works, which have been sometimes referred to[29], are clearly superficial.

Sun-Worship: Other Minor Sects

A remarkable feature of the Hindu religious practices current in the age of the Guptas was the worship of the Sun, which seems to have been fairly common in those days. Generally speaking temples of the Sun-god are a rare phenomenon in India. It is, therefore, interesting to note that the Indor inscription of Skanda Gupta[30] records the donation of a gift, by one Devaviṣṇu, for perpetually lighting a lamp in the temple of the Sun. The famous Mandasor inscription, dated 437 A.D. and 473 A.D.,[31] reports that a guild of silk-weavers, who had migrated to Daśapura, built a temple of the Sun-god at that place in 437 A.D. It further reports that, 'under several kings', a part of the temple fell into disrepair, and that the temple was again repaired by the same guild in 473 A.D. Another temple of the Sun-god is mentioned in the Gwalior inscription of Mihirakula[32]. Therein we have been told that a temple of the Sun was built by one Mātṛceṭa on

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[26] A terracotta panel, now deposited in the Mathurā Museum, seems to depict a devotee offering his own head to god; but there is no clear trace of the god. *cf.* V.S. Agrawala, *Handbook of Archaeology*, 1939, p. 51, fig. 39.

[27] *Śākuntala* VII. 35; *Kumārasambhava* II. 58 etc.

[28] Lachhmidhar Kalla, *The Birth-place of Kālidāsa*, 1926.

[29] *ibid.*

[30] *C I I* III, 68.

[31] *C I I* III, 79.

[32] *C I I* III, 162.

the mountain called Gopa. The Sun-worship must have thus been a significant sect of Hinduism in the days of the Guptas. There is evidence to show that the orb of the Sun was also employed by some people as a symbol on their personal seals[33]. Among other minor sects of Hinduism, which were prevalent in the days of the Guptas, may be mentioned the *yakṣapūjā* and the *nāgapūjā*. The temple of Yakṣa at Padmāvatī and the Maṇināga-shrine at Rajgir are the architectural remnants of those sects. There are also to be seen, in the popular religion of the period, traces of Śāktism and Tāntricism. These were perhaps due to the assimilation into the Hindu religion, on a vast scale, of non-Brahmanic cults and beliefs of the earlier ages. If the *Purāṇas* represented the theology of those sects, the *Tantras* contained their magic and mystic practices. Altogether, the Hinduism under the Guptas must be said to have been a synthetic religion — a religion which brought about a popular synthesis of the Vedic faith and the tribal cults, and of the Aryan mode of worship and the non-Aryan religious practices.

Popular Religious Beliefs and Practices

A few general observations may be made here regarding the popular religious beliefs and practices of the Hindus in the Gupta period. Frequent epigraphic references to temples show that worship in public temples must have been quite in common vogue in those days. The *Purāṇas*, which are appropriately called the 'Vedas of the people', were then being composed and revised; and the public recital, in temples, of the *Purāṇas* must have formed an important feature of the Hindu religion in those days. As a matter of fact, it can be said with full justification that the *Purāṇas* constituted one of the principal sources of the real strength of Hinduism in the Gupta period. They helped, to a considerable extent, to popularise the ancient orthodox religion by simplifying its message and carrying it even to the lowest strata of the society. This new popular religion also simplified the ancient religious practices. Performance of elaborate Vedic sacrifices was not possible for all. The new Hinduism, therefore, substituted in their place simpler practices like *saṁdhyā*, *pūjā*, *japa*, *śrāddha*, etc. The large number of *vratas*, mentioned in the *Purāṇas* and the *Smṛtis*, are also indicative of this new reform. The difficult *śrauta-mārga* (the path of the *Śrutis*) of old may thus be said to have been replaced by the popular and easily accessible *smārta-vartman* (the path of the *Smṛtis*)[34]. But of all the religious practices current in that period the most popular seems to have been *dāna*. A large number of in-

[33] *ASRWC* 1919, pl. 26.
[34] *C I I* III, 59.

scriptions record grants of land and of entire villages to the Brāhmaṇas. It cannot be denied that such patronage was generally the privilege of the Brāhmaṇas only. The five Damodarpur plates and the four Faridpur plates[35], for instance, refer to grants of land made either to the Brāhmaṇas or to some Hindu gods. Epigraphic references to the establishment of free boarding houses, such as the ones in the Kārttikeya temple at Bilsad[36] and in the Piṣṭapurī temple at Manpur[37], are quite common. These and other similar charities were freely endowed by royal personages and common people alike. Apart from its religious significance, the practice of *dāna* was important also from the point of view of the spread of Hindu religion and culture. Yājñavalkya, the eminent law-giver of the Gupta period, seems to have fully realised the importance of this aspect of *dāna*, and has specially dealt with it in his *Smṛti*[38].

Pilgrimage to holy places, as a religious practice, is referred to both in the Gupta inscriptions and in the contemporary literature[39]. The sacredness of the Gaṅgā must have then been popularly recognised and cases of religious suicide at the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā near Prayāga and at other places also were not altogether unheard of. It may, however, be incidentally pointed out that the holy city of Kāśī is conspicuous by its being not mentioned in any of the Gupta epigraphic records. The belief that the world has been steadily deteriorating in the course of the four successive *yugas*, the recognition of the sacred character of the *uttarāyaṇa*, and the celebration of popular religious festivals on fixed days every year are some of the other minor items of religious significance, that can be gleaned from the inscriptions and the literature of the Gupta period.

Characteristic Features of Hinduism in the Age of the Guptas

This statement regarding the resurgence of Hinduism, which distinguished the age of the Guptas, would, however, not be complete without a reference to some striking features of that remarkable cultural movement. Firstly, it becomes clear from the study of the Gupta inscriptions that the Gupta monarchs were imbued with the true spirit of Hinduism, namely, tolerance for other religions. This aspect of the religious policy of the Guptas was to be seen

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[35] *E I* XV, 7; *E I* XVII, 193; *IA*, 1910; *JASB*, 1911.
[36] *C I* III, 42.
[37] *E I* XVI, 19.
[38] *YS* I, 5.
[39] *cf. C99* III, 95; *Raghuvaṁśa* VIII, 5.

particularly in their attitude towards the Buddhists and the Jainas. Secondly, the new, vigorous Hinduism of the Guptas gave an unprecedented impetus to Sanskrit language and literature. In this connection, it is noteworthy that classical Sanskrit was then deliberately and widely used even for popular and secular purposes, as is clearly evidenced by the royal and private lithic and other records of that period. Moreover, in those days, even the Jainas and the Buddhists thought it necessary to write their sacred texts in Sanskrit. Thirdly, thanks to the activities of the wandering minstrels, who visited distant parts of the country, under the pretext of the several pilgrimages recommended by the popular scriptures, and who thus carried the message of Hinduism, through the *Purāṇas*, directly to the masses, Hinduism proved, in that period, a significant force in unifying the heterogeneous elements in the country by the common bond of religion. Fourthly, Hinduism had then assumed a positive and an assertive role in the sense that the movements of the Hinduisation of foreign tribes and of the spread of Hinduism in foreign lands, which were started in the preceding period of Indian history, were actively promoted also by the Guptas. And finally, Hinduism of the Gupta period was not only characterised by the new, popular forms of religious practices mentioned above, but it was also marked by profound philosophical speculations.

Hindu Philosophical Systems

In the age of the Guptas, a very significant advance was made in every system of orthodox philosophical thought. The founder of the *Sāṁkhya-darśana* is traditionally believed to have been Kapila, but nothing definite is known about the *Sāṁkhya-Sūtras*, which were presumably written by him. A brief but exceedingly lucid exposition of the theoretical teaching of the Sāṁkhya system is found in the *Sāṁkhya-Kārikās* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, which is perhaps the earliest available text-book of the classical Sāṁkhya. Without going into the details of the several views that have been put forth in connection with the date of Īśvarakṛṣṇa[40], we may generally assume that he lived in the early years of the Gupta regime. His work consists of seventy *kārikās*, and, on account of its excellent and almost complete treatment of the Sāṁkhya metaphysics, within such short limits, it is properly described as the 'pearl of the whole scholastic literature of India'. A comparison of the *Sāṁkhya-Kārikās* with the account of the Sāṁkhya given by earlier writers, like Caraka (78 A.D.), would show that Īśvarakṛṣṇa has made

[40] *cf.* Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* II, 254 ff.; Dasgupta *A History of Indian Philosophy* I, 212; H. D. Sharma, *The Sāṁkhya-Kārikā*, Introduction, pp. 25—26.

substantial modification in the original Sāṁkhya doctrine. Since the beginning of the fourth century, however, Īśvarakṛṣṇa's teachings have been regarded as representing the proper classical Sāṁkhya. As in the Sāṁkhya system, very significant work seems to have been done, in the age of the Guptas, also in other systems of orthodox Indian philosophy. For instance, Praśastapāda, who belonged to the fifth century A.D., wrote a commentary on the *Vaiśeṣika-Sūtras* attributed to Kaṇāda. In his commentary, Praśastapāda has not followed the order of the *sūtras*, which latter he has, as a matter of fact, employed merely as a slender basis for his own exposition of the categories generally accepted by the Vaiśeṣikas. Indeed, he himself does not claim that his work is a *bhāṣya* on the *Vaiśeṣika-Sūtras* in the correct sense of the term; he calls it *Padārthadharmasaṁgraha*. Several important doctrines relating to atomic pluralism, about which the *Vaiśeṣika-Sūtras* are strangely enough silent, have been treated in a masterly manner, for the first time, by Praśastapāda. In this connection a mention must be made also of the remarkable contribution made to Indian logic by Vātsyāyana through his commentary on the *Nyāya-Sūtras* of Gautama. Vātsyāyana, who lived about 400 A.D., mentions in his work the views of several earlier Naiyāyikas, from whom he differs substantially. A significant point regarding Vātsyāyana's *Nyāyasūtrabhāṣya* is that it seems to have been subjected to a severe criticism by the eminent Buddhist logician, Diṅnāga, who must have been more or less contemporaneous with him. The views of Vātsyāyana were, however, strongly defended by Udyotakara in his famous *Vārttika*. An important work in the field of the Yoga system, belonging to the Gupta period, is the *bhāṣya* on the *Yoga-Sūtras* of Patañjali attributed to Vyāsa. In his *bhāṣya* on the *Nyāya-Sūtras*, Vātsyāyana quotes a passage from the *Vyāsabhāṣya* (III. 13) and criticises it as self-contradictory. It is, therefore, certain that Vyāsa lived before Vātsyāyana, and may accordingly be assigned to the fourth century A.D. It is suggested by some scholars that even the *Yoga-Sūtras* of Patañjali belonged to the Gupta period[41].

An outstanding figure in the history of Indian philosophy, who belonged to the age of the Guptas, was Śabara, the renowned commentator of the *Pūrva-Mīmāṁsā-Sūtras* of Jaimini. A critical study of all available evidence relating to the date of Śabara would indicate that he lived at the beginning of the fifth century A.D. Not much credence may be put on the popular tradition that the great king Vikramāditya was the son of Śabara by a Kṣatriya wife. The *Sūtras* of Jaimini are perhaps the oldest and certainly the most voluminous of the philosophical *sūtras*. They deal exhaustively with the ancient system of Vedic ritual and the correct method of the interpretation of Vedic texts. Several commentaries seem to have been writ-

[41] Jacobi, "Dates of Philosophical Sūtras", *JAOS* 1911.

ten on these *Sūtras* but the real system of Pūrva-Mīmāṁsā must be said to have been consolidated first through the *Śābarabhāṣya*. It is well-known that the Pūrva-Mīmāṁsā doctrine elaborated by Śabara was later explained in two ways, differing from each other in certain essential respects, by Prabhākara (650 A.D.) in his *Bṛhatī*, and by Kumārilabhaṭṭa (circa 700 A.D.) in his *Ślokavārttika*. It is likely that Upavarṣa, who was one of the eminent predecessors of Śabara, himself belonged to the Gupta period. It is more than likely that Baudhāyana, who is credited with having written the first commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa, was a contemporary of Upavarṣa. It will be thus seen that work of first rate importance, relating to every orthodox system of philosophy, was produced during the days of the Guptas. Though the actual beginnings of these systems, in the form of the *sūtras*, have to be traced back to the period between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D., their proper elaboration and consolidation must be assigned to the age of the Guptas. It was during this period that the exposition of the teachings of at least some of the *darśanas* reached its high-water mark.

Buddhism: Evidence of Gupta Inscriptions

The fate of any religion may be said to depend, among other factors, on the royal patronage that it receives. Most of the Gupta monarchs were devout Vaiṣṇavas. The teachings of the *Bhagavadgītā* perhaps suited their imperial ambitions very well. The idea underlying the synthesis of several religious and philosophical systems, which was accomplished by that oracle of the Bhāgavatas, was, in a sense, transplanted by the Guptas into the political sphere, where they brought about a synthesis of several political units under their own imperial suzerainty. As indicated above, the Guptas actively promoted the cause of the new assertive Hinduism which had then arisen. But they also saw to it that Hinduism, though generally dominant, did not assume he form of fanaticism. Religious persecution of the non-Hindus was entirely unknown in those days. Non-interference, on the part of the state, in matters pertaining to religion as well as complete absence of exploitation of the community by any particular religion or its hierarchy seem to have been the outstanding features of the Gupta period. *Dharma* was the business of the state only in the Aristotelian political sense. In the age of the Guptas, one sees the happy spectacle of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism flourishing side by side without any trace of mutual conflict or tension. References such as the one which we find in Mahānāman's inscription of Bodhgaya[42] that heretics opposing the view of the great Buddha were completely overthrown, are very

[42] *C I I*, III, 276.

rare. The Gupta sovereigns always showed laudable impartiality in the matter of their patronage to religions. We know, for instance, that in response to the appeal made by Meghavarman of Ceylon, Samudra Gupta had allowed a magnificent *vihāra* to be built at Gayā for the convenience of Buddhist pilgrims from that island. The Sanchi inscription[43] of Candra Gupta II records a grant, made by a military officer, for feeding ten Buddhist mendicants and for lighting two lamps in the 'jewel-house'. The Mankuwar inscription[44] of Kumāra Gupta I speaks of the installation of an image of Buddha by one Bhikṣu Buddhamitra. There is another inscription at Sanchi, dated 449 A.D., of Harisvāminī, the wife of Sanasiddha, which records the grant of twelve *dinars* as a fixed capital, out of the interest on which a mendicant belonging to the Ārya-saṁgha was to be fed daily. There is a mention, in that inscription, also of a grant, to the 'jewel-house', of three *dinars*, the interest on which was to be spent on three lamps to be lighted daily before the Blessed Buddha, and of one more grant, to the seats of the four Buddhas, of one *dinar*, the interest on which was to be spent on a lamp lighted daily at those seats. Further references are found, in the inscriptions of Kumāra Gupta II[45] and Buddha Gupta[46], to images of Buddha set up at Sarnath. More images are said to have been set up, two at Mathurā, in 453 A.D. and 548 A.D., and one each at Deoriya in the Allahabad district, Kasia in the Gorakhpur district, Bodh Gaya, and Sarnath. Vainya Gupta, who was a Śaiva, is known to have given a donation to a Saṁgha of the Mahāyāna Buddhists[47]. It further becomes clear from the Gupta records that persons professing Buddhism were unhesitatingly employed as officers in the Gupta administration. The liberal patronage given by the Gupta emperors to the Buddhist university at Nalanda is also very significant in this connection. Samudra Gupta, who was avowedly a devout Vaiṣṇava, felt no compunction in entrusting the education of his son to the great Buddhist teacher, Vasubandhu. Nor does Narasiṁha Gupta seem to have felt any compunction, when, as tradition records, he openly embraced Buddhism as soon as he was convinced of the superiority of the Buddha's teachings.

Mahāyānism

It should, however, be remembered that it was the Mahāyāna Buddhism, rather than the Hīnayāna, which had become particularly prominent in the days of the Guptas. The immediately preceding period of Indian history had

[43] *C I I* III, 29.
[44] *C I I* III, 45.
[45] *ASR* 1914—15, p. 124.
[46] *ASR* 1914—15, p. 125.
[47] *IHQ* VI, 53 ff.

already seen the rise of Mahāyānism. As a matter of fact this new, vigorous school of Buddhism was symbolic of the general trend of religious thought during the three hundred years before the rise of the Guptas. Popularisation of religion among the masses had been the watch-word of those times. In a sense, Hinduism and Buddhism may be said to have had parallel developments. Just as the older Brahmanism with its elaborate practices and abstruse speculations was transformed into popular Hinduism, so too the Hīnayāna Buddhism, which demanded very austere spiritual discipline, was simplified and popularised through the Mahāyāna, with its large number of godheads and legends. The Mahāyāna Buddhism may, indeed, be said to represent the result of the 'Hinduisation' of the Hīnayāna or 'the socialisation of the rigorous ideal of Buddhist sainthood'. We have further the Tāntric Buddhism[48] to correspond with the Tāntric Hinduism. If Buddhism could give a good account of itself against the growing strength of the newly arisen popular Hinduism, during the Gupta period and also during the earlier periods, it was certainly by virtue of the changes effected by Mahāyānism in the teachings and practices of earlier Buddhism. Indeed, in several respects, Hinduism and Mahāyānism had actually come quite close to each other. The Mahāyāna writers employed the Sanskrit language for their writings, and the Mahāyāna Buddhists worshipped images and indulged in the legends of their Bodhisattvas. Where, however, there was no conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism, the older school persisted. Ceylon, for instance, still remained the stronghold of Hīnayānism.

Buddhist Thinkers and Authors: Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna

Apart from the fact that Mahāyānism saved Buddhism from utter extinction, it also made remarkably rich contributions to Indian philosophical thought as a whole. Among the luminaries of Mahāyānism, who exercised the most profound influence, the first place must be necessarily conceded to Nāgārjuna. He is universally regarded as the great master of the Mahāyāna Buddhism and is also sometimes credited with having been its founder. As a matter of fact, however, he is the founder of one school of Mahāyānism, namely the Mādhyamika school. Nāgārjuna lived about the end of the second century A.D., and cannot, therefore, be, strictly speaking, assigned to the age of the Guptas. From the biography of Nāgārjuna, translated into Chinese

[48] The fact that Buddhism was not free from Tāntric practices is proved by the oldest extant Chinese translation of *dharaṇis*, which may be ascribed to 307—342 A.D.

by Kumārajīva (circa 405 A.D.), it would appear that Nāgārjuna had originally been a Brāhmaṇa well-versed in the four Vedas and the Brahmanic *Śāstras*. After he became a Buddhist monk, he studied and mastered the *Tripiṭaka* in ninety days. He was, however, not spiritually satisfied and, therefore, sought enlightenment elsewhere. In the course of his wanderings, as his biography records, he met a highly gifted monk in the Himalayas and received from him some *sūtra* of Mahāyānism. Out of it, he later evolved the Mādhyamika doctrine. The *Mūla-Madhyamaka-Kārikās* or the *Mādhyamika-Sūtras* of Nāgārjuna is a systematic philosophical work, exactly of the type of Brahmanical scientific treatises, in the form of *kārikās*, on which the author himself has written a commentary. The commentary, called *Akutobhayā*, is, however, unfortunately not available in Sanskrit but is known only through its Tibetan translation[49]. Nāgārjuna's biography tells us that for 300 years he worked with great vigour and enthusiasm for the spread of Buddhism in South India[50].

Side by side with Nāgārjuna must also be mentioned Asaṅga or Āryāsaṅga. What Nāgārjuna was in respect of the Mādhyamika school of Mahāyānism, Asaṅga was in respect of the Yogācāra school. Asaṅga has systematically assimilated into Mahāyānism the teachings of Yoga and mysticism, which were already well-known to Hīnayānism. A principal work of the Yogācāra school is the *Yogācāra-Bhūmiśāstra*, which is traditionally believed to have been 'revealed' by Maitreya. Another work, which also is believed to have been 'revealed' by Maitreya, is the *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṁkāra*. But Sylvain Lévi[51], who discovered that work, has proved that its author was Asaṅga. Asaṅga was the eldest among three gifted brothers, the sons of a Brāhmaṇa of the Kauśika *gotra* living in Puruṣapura. These three brothers seem to have belonged to the fourth century A.D. When they were first converted to Buddhism, they accepted the doctrines of the Sarvāstivāda school, but, later on, they became eminent teachers of Mahāyānism. The youngest brother, Vasubandhu Viriñcivatsa, is not very well-known in the literary field. The most outstanding of the three brothers was undoubtedly the middle one, popularly known as Vasubandhu.

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[49] An attempt at a reconstruction of the Sanskrit original of the text of the *Akutobhayā* from the Tibetan translation is made by (Miss) I. Datar in her doctorate thesis submitted to the Bombay University in 1949.

[50] Nāgārjuna is said to have been a great expert in chemistry (*rasaśāstra*) and magic. This tradition is, however, unacceptable, for it is based on a wrong identification of the Buddhist philosopher, Nāgārjuna, with the alchemist Nāgārjuna, who was evidently a different person and lived in the seventh or the eighth century A.D.

[51] Asaṅga: *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṁkāra*, edited and translated into French by Sylvain Lévi, Paris 1907—11.

A profound scholar and an independent thinker, Vasubandhu was a renowned figure not only in the history of Buddhism but of Indian philosophical thought as a whole. Until very recently the Sanskrit original of his principal work, the *Abhidharma-Kośa*, was not available. It was known, on the one hand, through the Sanskrit commentary on it, by Yaśomitra, called the *Sphuṭārthā: Abhidharma-Kośa-Vyākhyā*[52], and, on the other, through its Chinese and Tibetan versions[53]. Mention must also be made of Vasubandhu's *Paramārthasaptati*, a work in seventy stanzas, which constitutes the refutation of the Sāṁkhya doctrines as embodied in the *Sāṁkhyasaptati* of Vindhyavāsa, who was one of his contemporaries[54]. Vasubandhu was the founder of the *vijñaptimātratā* doctrine, which he has elaborated in his works called the *Viṁśikā* and the *Triṁśikā*[55]. He also wrote commentaries on a number of Buddhist works, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*[56] and the *Prajñāpāramitā*[57], but they are known only through their Chinese and Tibetan translations[58].

Diṅnāga, who was a Sautrāntika, is reputed to have been a pupil of Vasubandhu, and to have lived about 400 A.D. He was a celebrated

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[52] Edited by Wogihara in Tokyo, 1932—36.

[53] The Sanskrit original of the *Kārikā* portion of the *Abhidharma-Kośa*, discovered in Tibet by Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana, is now edited by V. V. Gokhale (Poona) and published in *JBBRAS* 1946. The Sanskrit original of the *Bhāṣya* portion, also discovered by Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana in Tibet, is undertaken for publication by the Vishvabharati, Santiniketana.

[54] It is suggested by some scholars that the *Sāṁkhyasaptati* is the same work as the *Sāṁkhya-Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa. It is curious to note, in this connection, that one tradition ascribes to Vasubandhu (obviously wrongly) a commentary on the *Sāṁkhya-Kārikā*. A work called *Suvarṇasaptati* or *Sāṁkhya-Kārikā-Bhāṣya* was translated into Chinese by Paramārtha (557—569 A.D.), but its author is not known. In any case, he could not have been Vasubandhu. Ayyaswami, in his edition of that work, seems to ascribe it to Māṭhara. Incidentally it may be pointed out that the *Śūnyatāsaptati* of Nāgārjuna must have been the prototype of the *Sāṁkhyasaptati* (ascribed by Paramārtha to Vindhyavāsa) and the *Paramārthasaptati* of Vasubandhu.

[55] The Sanskrit originals of these texts, based on a Nepali manuscript, are published by Sylvain Lévi.

[56] Vasubandhu's *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtraśāstra* was translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci and others (508—535 A.D.).

[57] Vasubandhu is traditionally said to have written the *Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitāśāstra* in collaboration with Asaṅga.

[58] The question of Vasubandhu's date is recently discussed at great length by Frauwallner. The present writer has not been able to get hold of Frauwallner's monograph as yet. It is, however, reported that the author there speaks of two Vasubandhu's — one the author of the *Abhidharma-Kośa* and the other that of the *Viṁśikā* and the *Triṁśikā*.

logician, and, in his well-known work, the *Pramāṇa-Samuccaya*, he is said to have ably established the tenets of Buddhist logic and refuted several views of Vātsyāyana, the well-known commentator of the *Nyāya-Sūtras*. This work of Diṅnāga also is not available in Sanskrit original, but is known only through its Tibetan translation[59]. Dharmakīrti (7th cent. A.D.) was another Buddhist logician who lived in the age of the Guptas. He was a great master of Buddhist epistemology, and his works, the *Pramāṇavārttika* (with his own commentary) and the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, are ranked high in Buddhist philosophical literature. Mention may also be made, at this stage, of the three great commentators of Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamikaśāstra*, namely, Buddhapālita, Bhavya or Bhāvaviveka, and Candrakīrti. A special reference deserves to be made to Bhāvaviveka's *Madhyamakahṛdaya*, which is a kind of a history of Indian philosophy from the Buddhist point of view[60]. In it the author has stated and critically examined several systems of Indian philosophy, such as Vedānta, Sāṁkhya, and Mīmāṁsā. Candragomin (circa 673 A.D.), well-known as a grammarian, philosopher, and poet, and the author of the *Śiṣyalekhadharmakāvya*, and Śāntideva (7th century A.D.), the renowned author of the *Śikṣā-Samuccaya*, were other important teachers of Mahāyānism, who belonged to the age of the Guptas.

The *Dīpavaṁsa* and the *Mahāvaṁsa*, the two famous Pali chronicles from Ceylon, which belong to the Gupta period, are not important from the philosophical point of view. Though not regular histories, they may be aptly described as historical poems. The author of the *Dīpavaṁsa* is not known, but he seems to have lived some time between the beginning of the fourth century and the first quarter of the fifth century A.D. The main source of his work is the *Aṭṭhakathā* preserved in the great cloister of Anurādhapura. As a matter of fact, the *Dīpavaṁsa* may be said to be the first, though certainly an imperfect, attempt to present, in the form of an epic, the historical traditions stored in the Simhalese *Aṭṭhakathā*. The *Mahāvaṁsa* is ascribed to the authorship of a poet called Mahānāman, who lived in the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. Compared with the *Dīpavaṁsa*, the *Mahāvaṁsa* is undoubtedly a more thoroughly accomplished epic; and, as the author has himself pointed out, he has specially exerted to make it a great work of literary art. He claims, with full justification, to

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[59] An attempt to restore the Sanskrit text of a small portion of this work is made by Rangaswami of Mysore. Incidentally it may be pointed out that it is difficult to accept the suggestion that, in *Meghadūta* 14, Kālidāsa is referring to Diṅnāga, the eminent Buddhist logician. No pun on the word, *diṅnāga*, seems to have been intended in that passage.

[60] V.V. Gokhale (Poona) has been working on an edition of this work.

have scrupulously avoided the pitfalls of the ancient historical writings. But by far the most outstanding Ceylonese figure in Buddhist philosophy and literature, belonging to the age of the Guptas, is Buddhaghoṣa. Buddhaghoṣa, who flourished in the first half of the fifth century A.D., is traditionally believed to have been a Brāhmaṇa convert to Buddhism. In his first great work, the *Viśuddhimagga*, he deals, in a learned manner, with the *Arhat* ideal of the Hīnayāna, and the doctrines of the Theravāda. He has written excellent commentaries on several Buddhist texts, such as the four *Nikāyas*, the *Vibhaṅga*, and the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*. Out of these writings, Buddhaghoṣa's commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, called *Aṭṭhasālinī*, is very valuable. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* is the first systematic treatise of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, and Buddhaghoṣa's commentary on it contains some important historical and geographical information besides a learned exposition of the technical terms of Buddhist psychology. The fact that Buddhaghoṣa was born in India and brought up in Brahmanic tradition was mainly responsible for his entirely new and refreshingly original approach to Buddhist philosophy. He must, indeed, be said to have considerably enriched Buddhist philosophy on account of his Brahmanic scholarship and training. Buddhaghoṣa was perhaps the last protagonist of the Theravāda, and his name will continue to be cherished as long as Buddhism remains a living faith on the face of this earth.

Fa Hien's Testimony

Since the special mission of the Chinese pilgrim, Fa Hien, who visited India in the heyday of the Gupta imperial power, was to acquaint himself with the activities of the Buddhist Order, the evidence of his travel-diary[61] may be accepted as more or less authoritative in the matter of the extent to which Buddhism prevailed in those days. Fa Hien found Buddhism 'very flourishing' in the Panjab and 'becoming very popular' in the region round Mathurā. 'All the kings in North India to the west of the desert are sworn believers. When they make offerings to the monks they take off their caps of state, and, together with their courtiers, wait upon the monks at table never daring to take higher seats in their presence'. In Bengal, too, in the region near Tāmralipti, the Buddhist faith was 'flourishing'. It would appear from such descriptions that Buddhism prevailed more in the east and in the west, while, in the centre of the Gupta empire, Hinduism was definitely

[61] J.H. Legge, *Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms, being an account of the Chinese Monk Fa-hien's Travels*, Oxford 1886. H.A. Giles, *The Travels of Fa-hien* (re-translated), Cambridge 1923.

predominant. Fa Hien writes but little of the relations between the Hindus and the Buddhists. He says that 'the Brāhmaṇas invite the Buddhists', indicating thereby that, at several places, Hinduism and Buddhism existed side by side in the spirit of exemplary tolerance. It is further reported that the Brāhmaṇas of Pāṭaliputra took part in the annual festival of the Bauddhas in the capital. The occasional bickerings with 'Brāhmaṇa heretics', which seem to have once prevailed at Ayodhyā and elsewhere, had become things of the past, and religious persecution of any kind was unknown under Candra Gupta II.

Hinduism and Buddhism

It cannot, therefore, be said that the age of the Guptas marked the decline and downfall of Buddhism. True to their tolerant and eclectic spirit, the Guptas even promoted, to a certain extent, the expansion of Buddhism. The contribution, made by the Buddhists, to literature, philosophy, art, and sciences, during the Gupta regime, was, indeed, remarkable and it was not a little responsible for making that period the golden age of Indian culture. It was an epoch of a universal cultural awakening in India — an awakening, which was made possible by the best that was in Hinduism as well as in Buddhism. The monuments of Buddhist art of that period are as much representative of that great awakening as the poetry of Kālidāsa. It has been already pointed out that, in religious practices and beliefs, Hinduism and Buddhism had come very close to each other. So far as philosophical speculations were concerned, Buddhist thinkers and their Hindu compatriots were tackling more or less the same problems, but from different points of view. Though, in course of time, the Buddhist religion as such gradually declined in India, the Buddhist civilisation, which it had created, continued to prevail as a significant element in her cultural make-up.

Jainism under the Guptas

The Gupta monarchs seem to have extended their patronage to the Jainas as impartially as to the Bauddhas. The Udayagiri inscription[62] of Kumāra Gupta I, dated 424 A.D., and the Kahaum pillar inscription [63] of Skanda Gupta, dated 459 A.D., record the installation of the images of the Jaina Tīrthaṁkaras. Another inscription of Kumāra Gupta I, dated 431 A.D.,[64]

[62] *C I I* III, 258.
[63] *C I I* III, 65.
[64] *E I* II, 210.

also records the setting up of a similar image at Mathurā. The Jaina inscriptions pay a frank tribute to the efficient and impartial administration of the Guptas, most of whom were orthodox Hindus. There is epigraphic evidence also to show that the Jainas generally respected the Hindus and their teachers[65]. It would appear from the Jaina inscriptions and literature that Mathurā and Valabhī were the centres of the Śvetāmbara Jainas, while the Digambara Jainas had mustered round Puṇḍravardhana. Generally speaking, however, during the Gupta period, the influence of Jainism had been gradually waning in the north, though, in the south, it still continued to be actively promoted and patronised.

Jaina Philosophical Literature

In accordance with the general trend in religion and philosophy, which characterised the Gupta period, the Jainas also re-organised their religious practices and philosophical teachings in those days. Evidence is available from the Jaina tradition itself to show that two councils were convened by the Śvetāmbara Jainas in the second decade of the fourth century A.D., one at Valabhī, under the leadership of Nāgārjuna, and the other at Mathurā, under the presidency of Skandila. The ancient Jaina texts, which had become obscure and disorganised, were properly regularised by those councils. They were finally consolidated by another, and more important, council held at Valabhī, by the middle of the fifth century A.D., under the leadership of Devardhi Kṣamāśramaṇa. Like the Mahāyāna Buddhists, the Jainas also felt the necessity of writing Sanskrit commentaries on their original Prakrit Scriptures. Some Jaina authors even wrote independent religious and philosophical treatises in Sanskrit. It must, however, be said that no significant changes were made in the original tenets of Jainism. Among the Jaina writers, who were responsible for this new epoch in the history of Jainism, mention must first be made of Umāsvāti. The *Tattvārthadhigama-Sūtra* of Umāsvāti, who flourished in the beginning of the Gupta period, is one of the earliest treatises containing systematic exposition of the religion and the philosophy of the Jainas. It consists of ten chapters, and has been commented upon by several writers. It becomes clear from the *Tattvārthādhigama-sūtra* that, though there is apparent similarity between the Sāṁkhya dualism and the Jaina dualism, while the Sāṁkhyas derive the evolution of the material world and living beings from *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*, the Jainas trace them all to primeval nature. Umāsvāti's exposition of the Jaina notion of being, which involves permanence through

[65] *CII* III, 47.

change[66], appears like an attempt to bring about a reconciliation of the two extremes of Vedāntism and Buddhism. Side by side with their pluralistic and realistic metaphysics, the Jainas had also developed, even at an early date, a remarkable system of logic. The most eminent expounder of this logic was Siddhasena Divākara, who lived in the fifth century A.D. Logic was mixed up with metaphysics and religion in earlier Jaina works, as in those of other sects; but Siddhasena seems to have been the first Jaina author to write on pure logic. His *Nyāyāvatāra* is a small metrical work, consisting of thirty-two stanzas in Sanskrit, and deals in a lucid manner with the essential principles of Jaina logic. Siddhasena is the author also of the *Sammati-tarkasūtra*, which is a Prakrit work on Jaina philosophy and logic. According to tradition, Siddhasena was a contemporary of Vikramāditya, and, under the name Kṣapaṇaka, he was celebrated as one of the 'Nine Jewels', who adorned the court of that sovereign[67].

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[66] *cf. utpāda-vyaya-dhrauvya-yuktaṁ sat.*

[67] The 'Nine Jewels' are enumerated as follows: *Dhanvantari — Kṣapaṇakā — 'marasiṁha — Śaṅku — Vetālabhaṭṭa — Ghaṭakharpara — Kālidāsāḥ | Khyāto Varāhamihiro nṛpateḥ sabhāyāṁ Ratnāni vai Vararucir nava Vikramasya ||.*