

18.3 Universities

The period of the Gupta Empire was a time of learning. The Guptas built many colleges and universities throughout the empire. Some universities were Hindu; others were Buddhist. The schools were open primarily to males. However, teachers' daughters were allowed to attend.

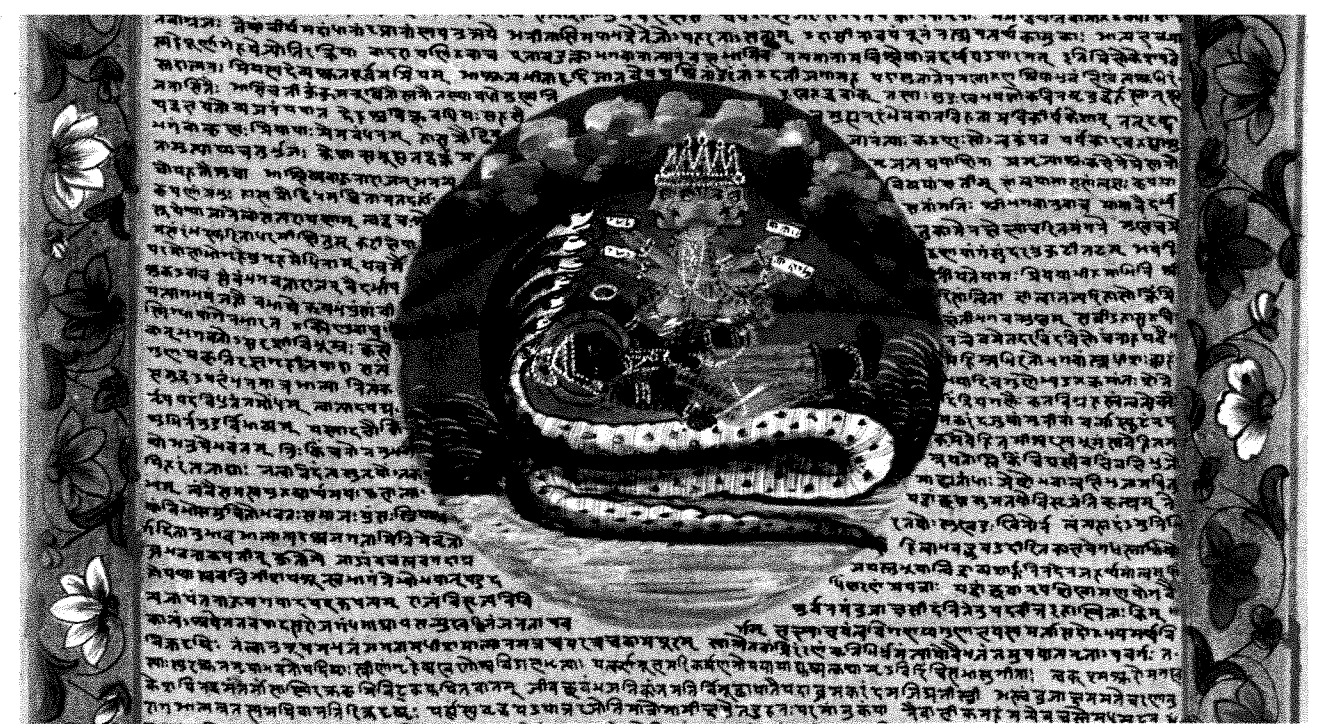
Hindu universities provided the upper classes with religious training. Students attended classes in religion, **mathematics**, **astronomy**, chemistry, and Sanskrit. They could also study sculpture, painting, music, and dancing.

The most famous university was the Buddhist school at Nalanda, in northern India. The school had eight colleges and three libraries. It also had a hospital and a monastery. Students were instructed in Buddhist and Hindu **philosophy**. They also studied logic, grammar, and medicine.

Students of medicine learned the practices of the day. They were trained in how to question patients about their physical problems. Students were taught how to make cures from bark, roots, leaves, and minerals. They also learned how to use the front claws of giant ants to stitch up wounds. Hindu doctors were especially skilled at performing surgery.

philosophy a theory or set of values by which one lives; the search for wisdom and knowledge

The ruins of the university at Nalanda are impressive in size.



18.4 Literature

Gupta writers created many kinds of literary works. They wrote poetry, fables, and folktales. They also created plays, including both comedies and dramas. Some of the plays were about historical and political subjects. Large audiences gathered to watch the performances.

There were other forms of writing as well. Scholars and lawyers wrote about Hindu law and religion. Some of the great Sanskrit literature took shape during this time. The *Puranas* ("Ancient Lore") was a collection of Hindu legends that taught the lessons of the Vedas, or sacred Hindu texts, through tales of sages and kings. These stories had been passed down orally for generations. The Guptas were the first to gather these stories together and record them. The *Mahabharata* ("Great Work"), a poem composed over hundreds of years, reached its final form during the Gupta era. Its themes relate to Hindu values and the battle between good and evil.

The *Bhagavad Gita* (BAH-guh-vahd GHEE-tuh) is part of the *Mahabharata*. Its name means "Song of the Lord." The *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the most beloved works of Hinduism. In this poem, Prince Arjuna is taught basic truths of Hinduism by Krishna, an earthly form of the deity Vishnu.

Some Gupta literature spread beyond India. Gupta sacred texts influenced cultures of countries as far away as Greece and Persia (present-day Iran). The famous Arabian tale about Aladdin and his magic lamp was inspired by a Gupta folktale.

Manuscripts were written in Sanskrit and often illustrated. This page is from the *Bhagavata Purana*, a sacred Hindu literary text. This work's 18,000 verses about the Hindu god Vishnu have greatly influenced Indian culture.