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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Gupta age is regarded as golden age of ancient India. Discuss (150 words)

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Approach

- Briefly explain golden age.
- Write the elements of golden age in Gupta period in terms of polity, economy, art, science and technology.
- Conclude with a balanced opinion by bringing in the limitations of Gupta age in social sphere.

Answer

The term golden age refers to the age of Indian history during which remarkable progress were witnessed in different spheres of human life like polity, economy, culture, society etc.

Elements of Golden age in Gupta period (320-550 AD)

Polity

- With the decline of Mauryan Empire, the unity and integrity of India shattered. The central authority disappeared and regional principalities emerged everywhere.
- This trend was reversed by emergence of **Gupta rulers in 4th Century AD**. They ruled over extensive empire with their capital at Pataliputra.
- Therefore, the Gupta age witnessed **political unification of India** after long period of more than 500 years after the decline of Mauryans.
- A number of strong and efficient rulers came to power during Gupta period. For example, Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II and Skandgupta ruled over extensive empires.

Economy

- Gupta age was full of economic prosperity. According to Chinese traveller **Fa-hien** Magadh, the power centre of Gupta empire was full of cities and its rich people.
- In ancient India, the Guptas issued the largest number of **gold coins** which were called '**dinaras**' in their inscriptions.

Art and Literature

- Gupta rulers were patrons of art and literature. For example, **Samudragupta** was represented on his coins **playing the vina** and **Chandragupta II** is credited with maintaining in his court **nine luminaries**.

- During the Gupta age beautiful images of Buddha were fashioned at Sarnath and Mathura, but the finest specimens of Buddhist art in Gupta times are the Ajanta paintings. Although these paintings covered the period from the first century BC to the seventh century AD, most of them relate to Gupta times.
- The Gupta age is remarkable for the production of secular literature. For example **Kalidasa** belonged to this age. He was the greatest poet of classical Sanskrit literature and wrote *Abhijnanashakuntalam* which is very highly regarded in world literature.
- There was also an increase in the production of religious literature. The two great epics the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata** were almost completed by the fourth century AD.

Science and Technology

- In mathematics, a work called **Aryabhatiya** was written by **Aryabhata** in age. Aryabhata displayed an awareness of both the **zero system** and the **decimal system**. A Gupta inscription of 5th century AD from Allahabad suggests that decimal system was known in India.
- The Gupta age craftsmen distinguished themselves by their work in iron and bronze. For example, **iron pillar found at Mehrauli** in Delhi manufactured in the 4th century AD has not gathered any rust over the subsequent fifteen centuries which is a great tribute to the technological skill of the craftsmen.

However, it should be noted that Gupta age did not witness progress in the social development, for example the **number of chandalas(untouchables) increased** and their condition worsened during the Gupta age, the first example of the **sati** occurred during the Gupta period in 510 AD etc. In this way the golden character of Gupta age can be accepted only in degrees not in absolute terms.