

Lord Chitragupta *In* Eternal Repose

Priceless 433-year-old idol returns to its Mughal-era seat



A temple that has stood witness through many centuries to Patna's evolution as the capital city of India's Bihar province, is poised to relive its erstwhile glory. Dedicated to Lord Chitragupta, the Hindu God who records all actions of human beings, the shrine is located on the southern bank of the holy Ganga river in the Diwan Mohalla locality of the old Patna city. It was originally constructed by Mudrarakshasha, the Prime Minister of Magadh empire ruler Mahapadmananda (364-326 B.C.), who later served Chandragupta Maurya in the same capacity. The aura of the Shri Chitragupta Adi Mandir acquired a timeless quality when Raja Todarmal, celebrated Revenue and Treasury Minister and one of the navratnas (nine jewels) of Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556 AD-1605 AD), installed a black basalt idol of Lord Chitragupta as its presiding deity in 1574. This statue was stolen in the late 1950s. It has since been providentially recovered and restored to the temple this Deepawali festival season. Thanks to the support extended by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the shrine is on its way to claim its rightful position as an international religious tourism destination.

Circa 1574 black basalt Hindu deity
restored to ancient Patna temple



The Good Lord

Chitragupta is a Hindu God assigned with the task of keeping complete records of all actions of human beings on the earth, and upon their death, deciding as regards sending them to the heaven or the hell, depending on their actions on the earth. *Chitragupta Maharaj* (*Chitragupta*, the King) is the patron deity of *Kayasthas*, a Hindu *jāti* (*clan*) of India, who trace their origin to him.

The legend has it that *Yama*, the Hindu God of death, used to get confused when deciding the fate of dead people and sending them to hell or heaven, in the absence of any records of their actions on earth. *Yama* narrated his predicament to the Creator of the world *Brahma* and prayed for his assistance. At the instance of *Brahma*, *Lord Shiva* commanded *Chitragupta Maharaj*, who was a clone of *Brahma* himself, to assume responsibility for this task. Lord *Chitragupta* is considered a perfect professional and is believed to keep meticulous, complete and accurate records of the actions of all human beings, from their birth till death. We also know this in theosophical parlance as the “Akashic Records”.

Birth:

Lord *Chitragupta* came into being after Lord *Brahma*, the Creator, having established the four *varnas* — Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra — ordained *Dharamraj* (also called *Yamraj*, the god of death) to keep record of the deeds — good and evil — of all life-forms born and yet to be born on earth, in the heavens above and on the lands below. *Dharamraj*, however, complained, “O Lord, how can I alone keep record of the deeds of the beings born into 84 lakh *yonis* (life-forms) in the three worlds?”

Lord *Brahma* went into meditation for 11,000 years and when he opened his eyes he saw a man holding a pen and an ink-pot in his hands and a sword girdled to his waist. Lord *Brahma* spoke: “*Thou hast been created from my body (Kaya), therefore shall thy progeny be known as the Kayasthas. Thou hast been conceived in my mind (Chitra) and in secrecy (gupta), thy name shall also be Chitragupta.*” *Brahma* then enjoined him to dispense justice and punish those who violated the *dharma* (duties).

The Idol:

The 16th century black basalt idol of Lord *Chitragupta* is one of its kind in the world. A masterpiece, it represents medieval Indian sculpture at its finest. Its eternal quality lies in the detailing — every facial inflection of the deity is there in its finest manifestation. It is priceless — an exquisite piece of art steeped in antiquity and nestled in a religious halo that transcends many generations of Hindus living across the world.

A bit of history:

Mudrarakshasha, who is credited with the establishment of the original Chitragupta temple at the same place, in the 4th century BC, presents probably the only example in history wherein the Prime Minister of a defeated King — Mahapadmananda of the Nanda dynasty — was reappointed to the same high office by the victorious king, Chandragupta Maurya. He did so under instructions from his mentor and guru Kautilya, better known as Chanakya. Mudrarakshasha remained Prime Minister of the Maurya Dynasty (326-293 B.C) for 27 years, till his death at the age of 88. *Kayashtas* of Bihar claim *their lineage to him*. *Kayashtas* have, since, acquired prime administration and treasury management positions in many subsequent rules.

And Some More

Legend has it that in on *Yama Dwitiya* day (devoted to Yama, the Hindu God of death), in 1573 AD, Raja Todarmal, while on his way back from Janakpur (the birthplace of Sita, daughter of King Janak and wife of Lord Rama) in Nepal to the Mughal capital of Delhi, stopped to offer prayers at this temple, where *Kayasthas* were prying Chitragupta on *Yam Dwitiya* day, which is also celebrated as “Dawat-Pooja” by *Kayasthas*. He returned to the place in the following year (1574) and got the basalt statue of Chitragupta installed there. Raja Todarmal was a *Kayastha* from the ancient city of Gaya who later migrated to Varanasi after Emperor Akbar gifted him a small state to rule, from where he managed the revenue administration and treasury of Emperor Akbar. Lord *Chitragupta* had two wives and 12 sons whose descendents are known as Shrivastava, Ambasthas, Mathurs, Nigams, Kulshresthas etc. Ambasthas were later divided into 98 territories or “*Khas Ghars*”. Raja Todarmal belonged to “*Khas-Ghar*” known as “*Mal*” whose inhabitants were popularly known as “*Maldahiyars*”. The reach of “*Maldahiyars*” as minor rulers extended to Gaya, Patna and Nepal. Todarmal ruled Varanasi and its surrounding areas. One of his singular contributions to history was to patronize and protect Goswami Tulsidas and encourage him to write the legendary epic, “*Ramcharitmanas*”, in Bhasha, the language of the common man. Todarmal is also known to have institutionalise the “*Ramlila*”, a 10-day ballet that is still popular in many parts of the world. Interestingly, the *Agrawals* of Bihar and U.P and *Khatris* of Punjab also trace their ancestry to Raja Todarmal. In 1766, a local ruler, Maharaja Sitab Rai, made large stretches of adjacent land available to the temple. His grandson, Bhup Narain Singh, is credited with giving the shrine its present form.

The Temple now

The *Shri Chitragupta Adi Mandir*, the seat of the black basalt statue, is a fine example of Indian temple architecture. Its dome rests on 16 columns, arranged in rows of four. From the dome rises a four-walled projection that takes a pyramidal shape at the top. The *garbhagriha*, literally the womb of the idol, is surrounded by a pathway meant to facilitate its circumvention by the devotees.

A vision of future:

The *Shri Chitragupta Adi Mandir* Management Committee, under able leadership of its President — leading businessman and social worker Ravindra Kishore Sinha —, has drawn up an elaborate plan to develop the temple complex as a modern structure built upon its historic moorings. The idea is to develop the shrine and the area surrounding it as a socio-religious centre that can figure on the international tourist landscape and serve the needs of the local community, simultaneously. One of the projects announced by Mr. Sinha include the creation of an animated audio visual walk-through showcasing the of culture and history of Bihar, beginning from the Nanda dynasty and culminating with the modern-day, 1970s leadership of Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan. Along with the ancient kingdoms, the song-and-light show encompass historical events like the visit of Chinese traveller Huein Tsang, era of the ancient Nalanda University, Vaishali as the cradle of democracy, the *Patna Kalam* style of painting, the Mughal and British rules, the works of Vidyapati, the timers of Manadan Mishra and Bharati who defeated Adi Shankaracharya in *Shastrartha*, famed dancing of Amrapali and Bihar's place in the Indian freedom movement. Another one is to establish the “**Raja Todarmal Institute of Revenue and treasury Management**”. A third major project is to develop the Ganga river bank near the temple on the pattern of “Har ki Pauri”, in Haridwar. The cost of the projects has been tentatively estimated at British Pound 10 million (about Rs 80 crore) but an upward revision may be required.

A cause to serve

The *Shri Chitragupta Adi Mandir* resurrection plan offers all Indians, particularly those who constitute the diaspora, an opportunity to delve into their history and socio-religious moorings. A monetary contribution from you will help create out of an ancient setting an international cultural destination par excellence, in the heart of what was once the vibrant city of Pataliputra. Give it a thought: it may just be your article of faith!



Mr. R K Sinha and Me. R R Pd with the basalt idol

CONTACT

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