

HARSHA VARDHANA (SOURCES)

B.A. (HISTORY) PART-2
PAPER-3

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INTRODUCTION

In the sixth century A.D. the disintegration of the Gupta Empire gradually paved way for the growth of many smaller kingdoms. In certain regions new kingdoms emerged and in other areas the dynasties which had earlier accepted Gupta suzerainty now declared their independence. For example, kings like Yasodharma and political powers like the Maukharis, the Hunas and the later Magadhan Guptas were the new powers. Besides these the Maitrakas of Kanauj, the Pushyabhutis of

Thaneswar, the Gaudas under Sasanka , the Varmans in Kamarupa grew in importance. There was political turmoil and several dynasties were emerging the Pushyabhuti of Thaneswar was the most important ruling family which emerged. Thaneswar was situated in the Srikantha Janapada, which is now identified with modern Haryana. This dynasty made very significant contribution to the history of India in Seventh Century A.D. Harsha Vardhana, was the most famous descendant and ruler in the Pushybhuti family, he succeeded to his brother king Rajya Vardhan in or about A.D.

SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF HARSHA

Literary Sources

We are fortunate to get plenty of information about Harsha. In fact we do not have abundant information about all the past ruler of India. The travelogue of Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited India during Harsha's reign and Banabhatta, Harsha's court poet, have left behind rich literary source about Harsha and his time. The information collected from Bana and Hiuen Tsang is further corroborated by epigraphic, numismatic and other archaeological sources. For proper understanding of the subject we have given herein the details of those sources.

Harsha Charita of Banabhatta

Among the literary sources the most important one is the *Harsha Charita of Banabhatta*, the court poet of Harsha. Harsha Charita, is the biography of Harsha, which gave us an exaggerated account of Harsha's life in an ornate style. It was not a complete biography. It covers only a part of Harsha's life and his achievements. This is particularly helpful for its content regarding the family, Harsha's accession to the throne and his campaign against Sasanka, where the works stop abruptly.

Hiuen Tsang account –Si-Yu-Ki

Hiuen Tsang was a Chinese pilgrim travelled into India to visits places associated with Lord Buddha. He also wanted to study Buddhist literature. He has given an account of his experience in India. His account throws light on the economic and social life as well as religious condition of India. Hiuen Tsang was royal guest of Harsha for a long time. He witnessed the court affairs of Harsha his account throws ample light on the history of Harsha's reign. Even historian view that Hiuen Tsang account was like a gazette.

Epigraphical Sources

Apart from the literary sources as mentioned above we have the following epigraphic records for the reign of Harsha.

1. Banskhera Copper Plate
2. Nalanda Seals
3. Sonapat Seals
4. Madhuvana Copper Plate
5. Aihole inscription

The above epigraphic records show the land grant pattern, their use and the society during Harsha' rule.

Numismatic Sources

Besides the epigraphic sources few coins were also discovered by archaeologist. Those provide us information regarding the Harsha's empire and its extensions and economic condition.

Archaeological Sources

The most important archaeological sources are the monuments and material ruins of the period unearthed from the archaeological mounds. Hence, the ruins of Nalanda University and the material unearthed therein were also reveal us about the conditions of India during Harsha's rule. Besides the above sources it is believed that three dramas entitled *Ratnavali*, *Nagananda* and *Priyadarshika* were written by King Harsha himself.

The Ratnavali and Priyadarshika deals with love and court intrigues, whereas Nagananda refers to the charity and magnanimity of Harsha. The above sources were utilized by historian to reconstruct the history of Harsha Vardhana.