

HARSHA VARDHANA

(MILITARY CONQUEST)

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

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THE MILITARY ACTIVITIES OF HARSHA

Campaign against Sasanka.

Harsha ascended the throne at Thaneshvara, when a political disaster had fallen upon his house due to the death of his elder brother Rajyavardhana in the hand of Sasanka and the murder of his brother in law, Grahavarman and imprisonment of his sister by the enemy. The immediate task before Harsha was to take revenge by crushing the enemy. He had to rescue his sister from enemy camp. During that time, Sasanka was the ruler of Gauda (North Bengal). His rule extended

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over a large tract known as Sasanka mandala. This included Bengal, Orissa and Magadha (part of Bihar). Banabhatta mentioned Harsha's military preparation against Sasanka, his army was consists of 50,000 soldier, 5000 elephant and 20,000 cavalry. Corroborated by Hiuen Tsang account he waged continuously 6 years wars and besieged and brought five Indian ruler or Pancha Varata namely Kunjala, Pundravardhana, Karnasuvarna, Samataka, Tamralipti under his allegiance. When Harsha marched against

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Sasanka, he received a proposal from King Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa for forming an alliance against Sasanka perhaps the former had hostility with Sasanka. Harsha readily courted the alliance.

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Being fortified with the new alliance Harsha hurried to meet Sasanka's army then occupying Kanauj but the outcome of this campaign against Sasanka is not clear to us. Bana's narrative abruptly ends here. Leaving us in void it is assumed that on the arrival of Harsha's army near Kanauj, Sasanka thought discretion was the best part of valour and he made a masterly retreat. The hostility between Harsha and Sasanka did not end with the latter's withdrawal from Kanauj or its vicinity. According to

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‘ *Arya Manjushree Mulakalpa* ’ Harsha marched against the capital of Sasanka, defeated him and forbade him to move out of the country but this theory was not free from criticism. Many other sources said that Sasanka ruled peacefully with sovereignty till his death like the Madhavaraja grant of Sailodbhovas mentioned in Guptbda 300 Sasanka, was his overlord.(619 A.D), even Hieun Tsang mentioned that when he visited Magadha in 637 A.D. he heard from the people that Sasanka cut down the Bodhi tree recently at

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Bodh Gaya (637 A.D). It was only after the death of Sasanka that Harsha conquered the Kingdom of his adversary consisting of Magadha, Bengal, Orissa and Kangoda. Ma-Twan-Lin has stated that Harsha established his authority in Magadha in 641 A.D. Harsha conquered Orissa and Kongoda, the remaining part of Sasanka dominion in 643 A.D.

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War with Pulakesin II

After his campaign against Sasanka and finally conquest of Gauda, the lord of Uttarapatha Raja Siladitya (Harsha) put an envy eye on the Dakshinapatha, where Pulakesin II of the Chalukyan family ruled over. Harsha, started a campaign against Pulakesin II in the year 642 A.D but the date was in obscurity. There are many causes for the conflict between two great rulers, the causes are like clash for supremacy, old enmity with Vallabhi and Harsha's enduring

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ambition. In the opinion of noted British historian Vincent Smith, the Harsha-Pulakesin war took place near the river Reva i.e Narmada. On the assumption that Pulakesin guarded the passes of the Narmada so effectively that Harsha was forced to retire after facing discomfiture. He was forced to accept river Narmada as dividing line. The result of the war was that, Harsha was defeated by the Chalukyan prince and retired to his capital Kanauj. This fact was corroborated by the Aihole Inscription and the account of Hieun Tsang.

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Ravikirti says that “ Harsha, whose lotus feet were arrayed with the rays of jewel of the diadems of the hosts of feudatories, prosperous with unmeasured might, throw him and his mirth melted away by fear, having become loathsome with the rows of lordly elephants fallen in battle”. Hiuen Tsang tells that “the celebrated great king Siladitya at the time of invading east and west and countries far and near giving allegiance to him, but Ma-ha-la-cha refused him”..

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The Rirpana, Kurnool and Tograsedu plates testify to the Chalukyan monarch Pulakesin II adoption to the title Paramesvara after defeating the war like lord of all region of the north 'Sakalttarapathanatha'.