

BANABHATTA
(PART-2)
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MILITARY EXPEDITION OF HARSHA AS MENTIONED BY BANABHATTA

The immediate task before him was to rescue his sister, who after having escaped from the prison had entered the Vindhya forest, and to relieve Kanauj from the control of Sasanka. When he was about to set out on his digvijaya (conquest) with a strong force, Hamsavega, a messenger of king Bhaskaravarman of Pragjyotisa (Assam), entered his court with gifts and message of friendship. A perpetual treaty of friendship between these two contemporary kings was concluded as stated by Bana in the seventh chapter of

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his work. The said messenger in the course of narrating the early history of Assam told Harsha the names of some of the prominent rulers of different dynasties including those of the predecessors of Bhaskaravarman of Varman dynasty who ruled over the kingdom concerned, as we find in the same chapter. After the departure of Hamsavega from Thanesar, Harsha entered the Vindhya forest and made a vigorous search for her sister, Rajyasri, and at last with the help of forest chiefs like Vyagraketu, Bhukampa and

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Nirghata and a Buddhist monk, Divakaramitra, rescued her at the moment when she was about to immolate herself. He along with his sister returned to his camp on the bank of the Ganga, as described in the seventh and eighth chapters of the work. In these two very chapters Bana has described in detail the life and culture of the tribal people of the Vindhya region with special reference to the Sabaras.

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We are informed by Bana that Harsha made an elaborate preparation to wage war against the Gauda king Sasanka, who is described as 'the vilest of Gaudas' and the 'vile Gauda serpent'. But he does not provide us with any detail of the war between the two. It seems that the friendly alliance between Harsha of Thanesvar and Bhaskarvarman of Kamarupa (one of the ancient names of Assam) struck fear in mind of Sasanka, and instead of facing an impending danger he withdraw from Kanauj which paved the way for Harsha to establish his rule there. He probably

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in the last phase of his life transferred his capital from Thaneshwar to Kanauj and made it the seat of his power. Thus, he not only inherited the paternal kingdom but also got the Maukhari throne of Kanauj. The amalgamation of these two kingdoms helped him in consolidating his position and extending his authority and influence in all directions.

Bana, while describing Harsha as a warrior and conqueror,

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Informs us (in third chapter) that he conquered Sindhudesa and annexed it to his kingdom and thereby completed the unfinished task of his father. The river Indus formed the western boundary of his empire. In the same chapter we are further informed that kings of the states in the Himalayan region were also subjugated by him. They after acknowledging his political supremacy started paying taxes to him. His conquest of Malwa and its annexation to his kingdom finds mention in the seventh chapter of the author's

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work. These initial successes he achieved as a king of Thaneshvar. We do not get a clear picture of the extent of Harsha's empire. However, it is true that he earned name and fame as the last great Hindu emperor of north India.

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The information furnished by Bana in the second chapter of his work regarding the administrative system and military organization of Harsha is of considerable historical value. He has highlighted the feudal structure of his administration. It may be stated here that the increase in the number of samanta, mahasamanta and feudatory chiefs after the disintegration of the Gupta Empire had great bearing on the administrative system of Harsha. Bana has presented an enlarged picture of the feudal

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system that had already existed in ancient India prior to Harsha's time. The same system continued in the time of Harsha. According to Bana, there were different categories of samanta, viz., samanta, mahasamanta, apasamanta, pradhanasamanta, satrumahasamanta and pratisamanta who offered their services to Harsha and his predecessors. The samantas ruling over the territories assigned to them used to pay taxes annually to the said kings. They used to render all kinds of services to the kings.

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Those who occupied high positions among the Samantas were designated Pradhanasamanta. Satrumahasamantas were conquered chiefs who had to obey the orders of the king. They were treated with some respect. All other samantas had to offer their services in the kingly court and royal palace whenever needed. The loyal and faithful mahasamantas used to accompany the kings while going on military expedition. Some of the feudatory kings in the time of Harsha also find mention in the

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work. Bana has also focused on the inter-state relations in the time of Harsha. The policies he followed towards kings are in perfect harmony with what we find in the Prayaga-prasasti of Samudragupta. In the same chapter Bana has provided the details of military strength of Harsha with special description of elephant force and cavalry.

With regard to religious beliefs and faiths of the people, Bana informs us that altogether twenty-one religious sects existed in

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India. He has referred to three popular cults of Hinduism, the Saiva, Sakti and Vaisnava, the Lokayatika sect, Buddhism, Jainism, etc., that had already flourished before the dawn of the seventh century AD. On the combined testimony of the data available in the third, fifth and eighth chapters of his work it can plausibly be concluded here that Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism were three popular forms of religion. Their co-existence

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is a proven fact. In the times of Harsha and his predecessors, Brahmanism and Buddhism flourished side by side, after having reigned for about for a decade Harsha passed away in AD 647 or 648.

A long list of twenty-seven kings of different dynasties that ruled over different kingdoms in ancient India furnished by Bana in the sixth chapter of his work on the basis of his knowledge of the past history also deserves our notice. The list includes Somaka of

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Paurava dynasty, Nagasena of Naga dynasty of Padmavati (Pavaya), Vatsaraja Udayana (or Kausambi), rulers of Ayodhya, Sravasti, Videha, Kasi, Kalinga, Mathura, Asmaka, Sovira and of Pradyota dynasty, and Kakavarna of Sisunaga dynasty, Brhadratha of Maurya dynasty, Agnimitra, Sumitra and Devabhuti of Sunga dynasty, and rulers of Gupta dynasty that

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ruled over Magadha, and Ksatravarman of Maukhari dynasty. Even the killing of a Saka king at the hands of Chandragupta II attracted the attention of Bana. Actually, his elder brother, Ramagupta, after being defeated by the Saka king agreed to surrender even his wife, Dhruvadevi, to him in compliance with his desire, but Chandragupta in the guise of a

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woman killed that Saka king in his camp itself, which Visakhadata in his Mudraraksasa has highlighted, already mentioned before. These are some of the additional historical information which Bana has supplied in his work.

(To be continued)