

# HARSHAVARDHANA

## LECTURE-1

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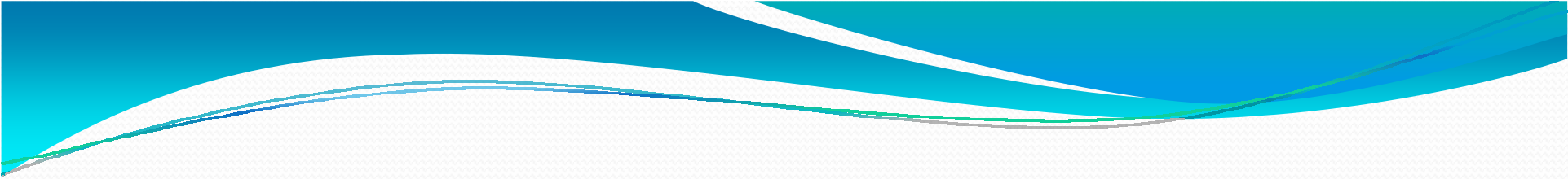
# Introduction

The decline of the Gupta Empire was followed by a period of political disorder and disunity in north India. The subsequent period is generally referred to as early medieval period. It saw the emergence of numerous ruling dynasties in different parts of the country. The most important ruling family that rose to prominence, soon after the Guptas, was that of Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar. Harshnavardhana's accession to the throne in 606 CE heralded an age in the history of Ancient India. His reign witnessed the last attempt to realize political unification of north India by a Hindu king.



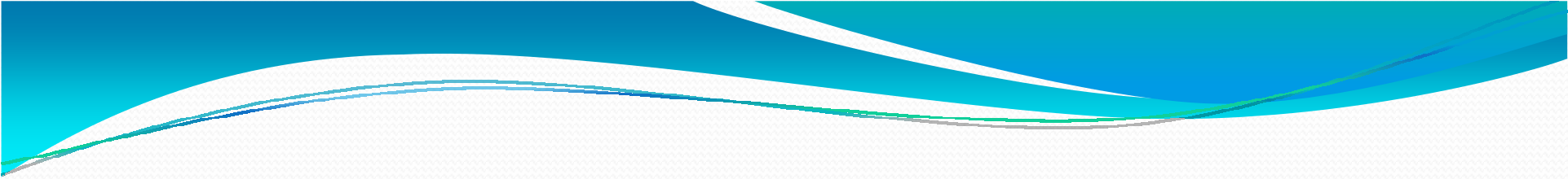
# **SOURCES**

The reign of Harshavardhana from the period 606 to 647 CE is relatively well constructed because of the abundance of source materials. Textual and archaeological evidences which are more or less contemporary that is belonging to 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century and such material which have a direct bearing on the period of his rule, have assisted in framing the political history of the contemporary period as well as the history of the development of ideas, thoughts, theories and institutions.



Archaeological material for the Post-Gupta period gets progressively reduced indicating a weakening of what can be termed as material culture, despite the ornamental references to towns and town life in literature. Evidence of any large scale monumental building is lacking. The only archaeological evidence could be of some section of the Nalanda University . As Hieun-Tsang provides detailed description of the monastery its continuity as an important educational centre can be safely presumed.

Epigraphic and numismatic evidences constitute very dependable source material, though evidences are scanty. Such evidences belonging to the Pre-Harsha that is the Gupta period and those of the contemporary dynasties like the Later Gupta, Maukharis, Maitrakas, Gurjara and the Chalukyas also through sufficient light on the reign of the Harsha. The Aihole Inscription of Pulakesin II

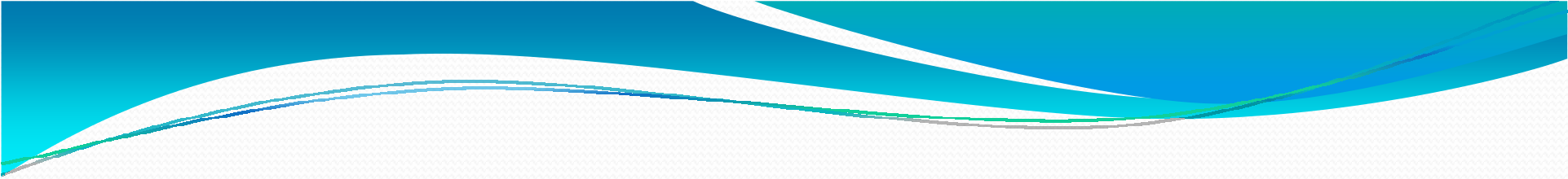


makes a reference to the war against Harsha and the success of the former. Chronological discrepancy is, however, noted for the inscription would Place the war somewhere around 613-644 CE whereas evidences forthcoming from the “Si-Yu-Ki” would fix the war somewhere around 633 CE. The inscription bestows on Harsha the title of “Sakala utara patha natha” and coming from his chief adversary , it does indicate his over lordship over North India. Most of the records were mainly to authorize land -tax donations and to commemorate royal victories but they through incidental references on Harsha’s reign. The records of the Madhavaraja of Orissa does indicate his independent rule till about 623 CE and it was after the death of the former that Harsha undertook his campaign against Kalinga. The Madhuban and Banskhera Inscriptions issued by the king

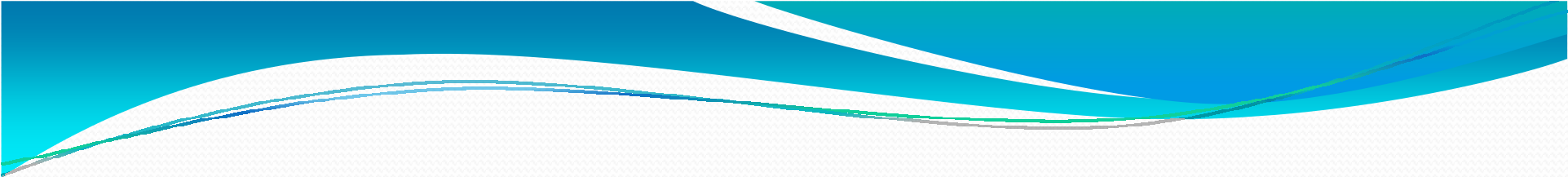


himself are charters recording land donations.

Numismatic evidences pertaining to Harsha's reign is forthcoming from various places. A remarkable discovery of the hoards discovered by R. Bern at Faizabad . Coins bearing the names Pratapa Sila and Siladitya have been identified as Harsha Vardhana and his father Prabhakara Vardhana . The Chinese sources refers to the adoption of the viruda, "Siladitya" by Harsha, though the indigenous sources are silent on this account. The discovery of coins with the Siladitya legend authenticate the Chinese version. The hoards also testify Harsha's mastery and his near complete control over the areas east of Kanauj.



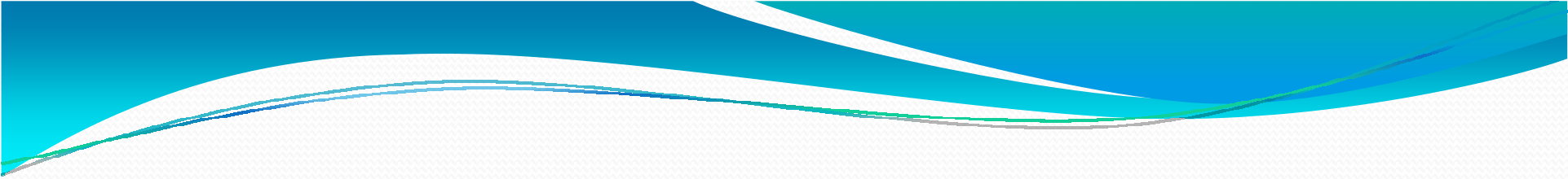
While the archaeological sources provide significant information, in main the period of Harsha's reign has been constructed on the basis of the literary source materials. The tradition of Smriti literature which began in the two centuries before Christ, matured towards 7<sup>th</sup> Century. They reflect traditional and contemporary views on the formulation and execution of policies and laws concerning government and society. The information sometimes appears didactic, however corroboration with contemporary sources make it possible to extract the historical writing on the lines of Arthashastra. Kamandaka's "Niti Sara" provides us with comparatively full study of polity at the time of the decline of the Guptas. The arrangement and classification of Kamandaka's material compensates to some extent for his lack of originality.



In the 36 chapters of his book, Kamandaka deals with various aspects of statecraft, classified as the education of the kings, his duties, protection of the social order, the conduct of mandala etc. Harsha's example provides the most vivid example of mandala, although not in entirety. It develops some common place principles of state-craft for example the assumption that the kingdom in the immediate neighborhood may be suspected of jealousy and while the one beyond it may be considered friendly and that the king should satisfy all his allies in a successful campaign with booty, himself being content with fame alone.

The period witnessed the writing of several other Smiriti texts such as those of Katyana, Devala and Aashaya's commentary on the Narad Smirti. Some idea of the administration of law in Harsha's time may be gathered from the Katyana Smriti. The text uses the term "Pradvivaka" for Judge and state that he should be assiduous and





impartial . The dharma adhikarna or the court of justice is the place where truth is discussed according to the sacred law. Katyana discusses the various sources of law and differentiate between judgment after a complete trial and Judgment before trial indicating that some cases were judged summarily.

Literary works like Dandin's Dasa Kumara Charita is more or less contemporary and depicts the socio-cultural life of the period. The three plays by Harsha himself namely Ratnavali, Priyadarshika and Nagananda are valuable evidences on the general conditions of the times, in addition to providing a guide on their authors beliefs and character. The plots of the Ratnavali and Priyadarshika are based on court romances and through light on general condition of women and social festivities. The Nagananda came later and has a Buddhist theme. However the references to Gauri in the Buddhist play points not only to Harsha's own mixed religious beliefs but also to the literal



tendency of the times. All three throw light on the social, economic and religious life of the period. (To be continued)