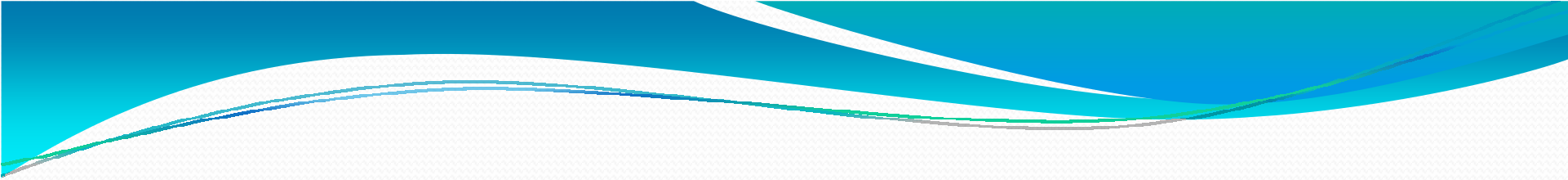


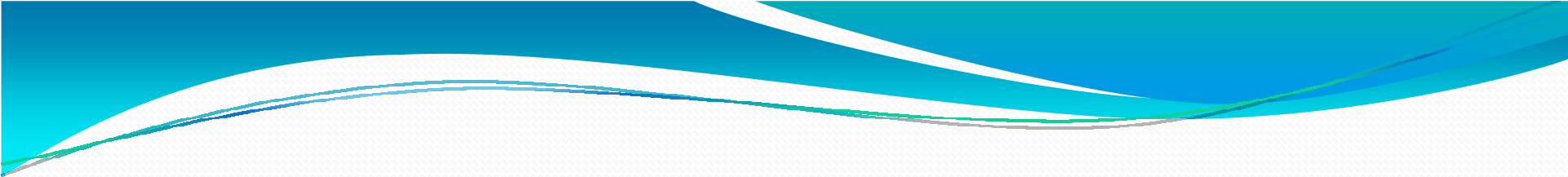
# HARSHAVARDHANA

## LECTURE-2

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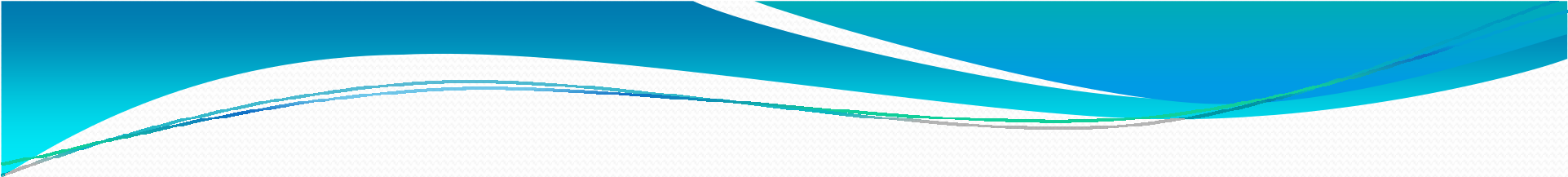


The two major literary references primarily used for Harsha's reign are the writings of the two great contemporary writers, Bana bhatta and Hiuen-Tsang. Bana's Harsha Charita and Hiuen-Tsangs , Si yu Ki or the Records of the western world are the main bases for reconstructing the story of Harsha's reign. Sifting through these material one has to be particularly careful for ulterior motives or because of the close association they had with their patron king possibilities of exaggerated description increase. Hiuen-Tsangs, Si yu ki , has been used extensively by historians for constructing the extension of Harsha's empire. The pilgrim ascribes to Harsha the conquest of 'five India' which finds some corroboration in Pulakesin's references to Harsha as a lord of the



North while referring to kingdoms east and west of Harsha's capital, he makes a reference to the local dynasties and the relationship that they had with Kanauj which in turn helps in ascertaining the areas under the direct and indirect control of Kanauj. The chronology and the sequential planning of Harsha's conquests is made possible on the basis of Hieun-Tsang's account referring to outlying regions like, Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Kashmir and Sind. The writer describes the local dynasties, it is on the basis of his account that dating of Harsha's conquest of Bengal and Orissa can more or less be suggested. The Chinese pilgrim has also left a record of the famous battle between Harsha and Chalukya ruler Pulakesin II.

His accounts give an impression of well being in Harsha's reign. The administration is honest and the people live together in harmony, observe the pilgrim in his opening remark. On revenue and taxation he records that government officials were tolerant and that there was



no corporal punishment. Regarding the people of India he says that although ill-tempered they are simple . Impressed with Harsha's capital Kanauj, he has left behind a detailed inscription of the city of its lofty structures , gardens and tanks.

Hiuen-Tsang's detailed account of Nalanda throws light on various aspects of education in India. He speaks about the educational centers of Kashmir, Jalandhar, Vallabh and leaves behind a rich description of the college at Kanchipuram. Hiuen-Tsang remarks on the taxes being light and mentions the existence of a brisk trade along the Central Asian route on the one hand as well as to S.E. Asia and the use of land and sea routes from China.

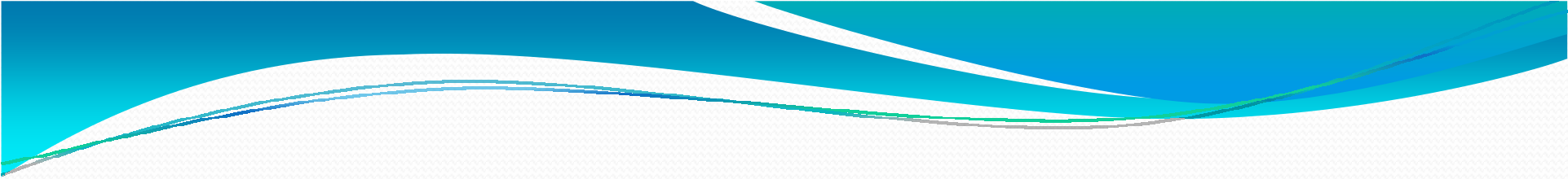
He provides a detailed description of Harsha's administration , the king's personal involvement in acts of benevolence and that the resources of the empire were divided into four sections, the quarter



part of which was spent on endowing the officials, ministers, men of letters and religious men and institutions. The records suggest that Harsha may have made land grants for secular purposes.

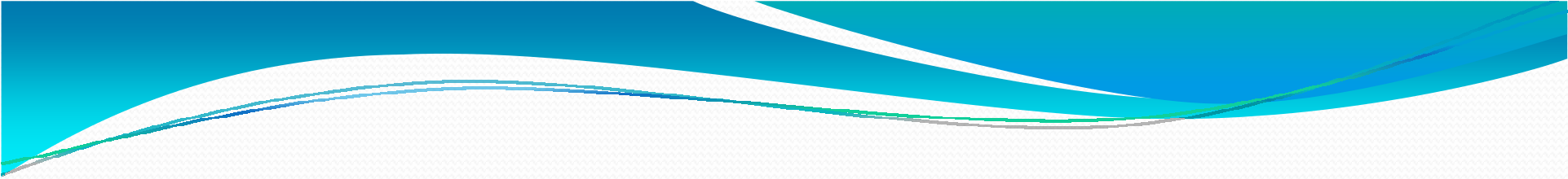
Hieun-Tsang's account in general provides a relatively trustworthy description of conditions that prevailed in Harsha's time, but at times his descriptions have been affected by some preconceived notions. Being a Buddhist monk and visiting the land of the Buddha, the idealistic picture that he had about the land comes to the fore when he suggests that Harsha forbade meat eating in the land. This could be wishful thinking for elsewhere he talks about the Hinayanists consuming meat.

The criticism often levied against him is that his description is affected by his own pre-conceived notions on government, his training, his Buddhist bias and the values prevailing in his country.



His zeal for the land of the Buddha led him to write about prohibition on meat eating and miraculous Buddhist stories. It is often argued that he gives a biased picture of his Indian patron not only because of patronage extended to him but also because of his Buddhism. However, Hiuen-Tsang praise for the non-Buddhist rulers like Mahesvara, Pariyatra etc. are complimentary and his unreserved praise for Pulakesin II the Chalukyan ruler , the arch enemy of his patron Harsha, proves that he has successfully balanced his account. His criticism of Sasanka, the ruler of Bengal is mild compared to Bana's denouncement of the king.

Besides it has to be remembered that Hiuen-Tsang wrote the ' Si yu ki' in China, when he was under no pressure to give a favorable account of India, her people or her ruler. By leaving out or placing in a right perspective his weaknesses, Hiuen -Tsangs account can be treated as a major source material.



The second major contemporary literacy text is that of the panegyrist Banabhatta. The Harsha Charita , a biography of the king is sometimes considered of dubious value on account of the exaggerations noticed there in . The Harsha Charita typifies the kind of court literature that begin from this period of time, wherein the poet seeks royal patronage and immortalizes his patron. The major part of the account deals with the early life of the Harsha , with which the author had no direct relations. The description of events are realistic and because of his knowledge and association with people , his access to the court, the information available and if one leaves the metaphors and similes , the source is extremely informative.

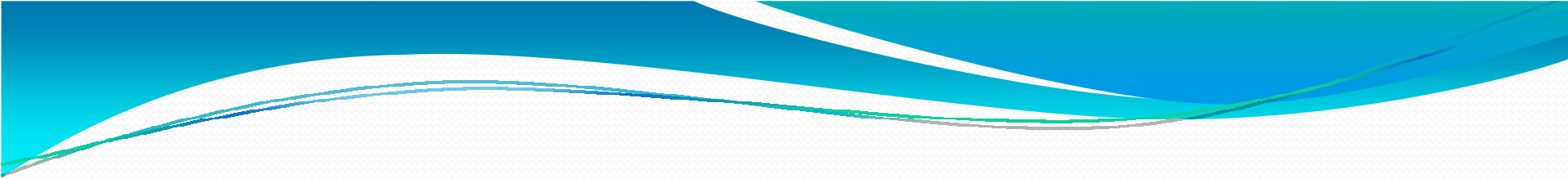
The non-reference to Rajya Vardhana at the time of his father's death, indicates by implication however clearly manipulated, that there were episodes uncomplimentary to the king. Bana gives a full account of



events leading to Harsha's accession to the throne of Kanauj.

The Harsha Charita describes Prabhakar Vardhan capital Thaneshwar, its affluence, prosperity and the grandeur of the king's palace. Bana provides a detailed picture of Harsha's court with hundreds of tributary chiefs and feudatories. He speaks of nearly 18 feudal categories and Harsha's success in effecting a right balance in relationship. The Kadambari in particular describes development of a feudal society. Bana throws light on the trading pattern of the period in particular to trade in Chinese silk. An active trade in horses existed between India and Central Asia and Bana refers to Khamboja and Iran. Harsha's internal relationship with his dependencies particularly Kanauj as mentioned by Bana reveals the ability to conduct on an amiable basis relationship with the kingdoms with whom he had a friendly relationship. The Atavi Rajyas or the kingdoms existing in the forest tract of Central India had a balanced





relationship with the ruler. Bana refers in great detail the benevolence of the ruler and the patronage that he extended to scholars, ascetics and efficient officials.

Sorting through the metaphors and the similes , historical evidences can be gleaned from the otherwise ornamental accounts of Bana. Bana makes an attempt to highlight in his biography the achievement of Harsha in attaining the throne of Kanauj and thus the biography can be broadly divided into a period in which the efforts to attain the goal was made and, subsequently the period of achievement. Thus Bana's narrative ends with the attainment of the throne of Kanauj. (To be continued)