

HARSHAVARDHANA

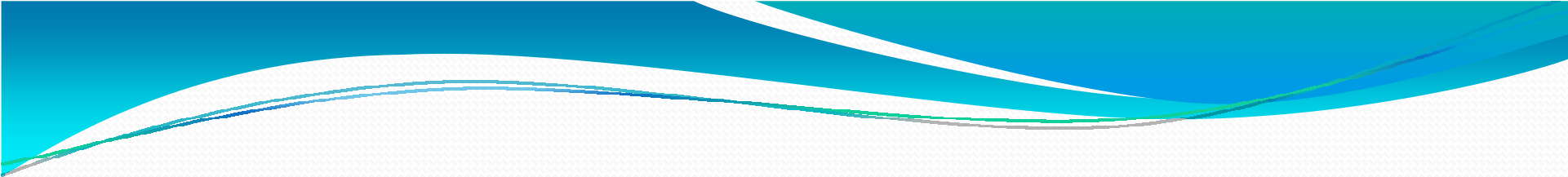
LECTURE-3

DR. MD. NEYAZ HUSSAIN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & HEAD
PG DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
MAHARAJA COLLEGE , VKSU, ARA(BIHAR)



Early Life and Career

Harsha was the son of Prabhakaravardhana. He had an elder brother named Rajyavardhana and a sister by name Rajyasri. When the Huns attacked the kingdom Thaneshwar Prabhakaravardhana sent both Rajyavardhana and Harshavardhana to fight against the Huns. While the sons were away on the battle field, Prabhakaravardhana suddenly fell ill and died. Then Rajyavardhana who was successful in subduing the Huns hurried back to the capital and ascended the throne of Thaneshwar (605 CE). It was at this moment of sorrow, the tragic news reached the Thaneshwar, that Devagupta of Malwa assisted by Sasanka, killed Grahavarman and imprisoned Rajyasri. Thereupon Rajyavardhana marched against Devagupta and defeated him with ease. But before he could return to his capital, he was treacherously



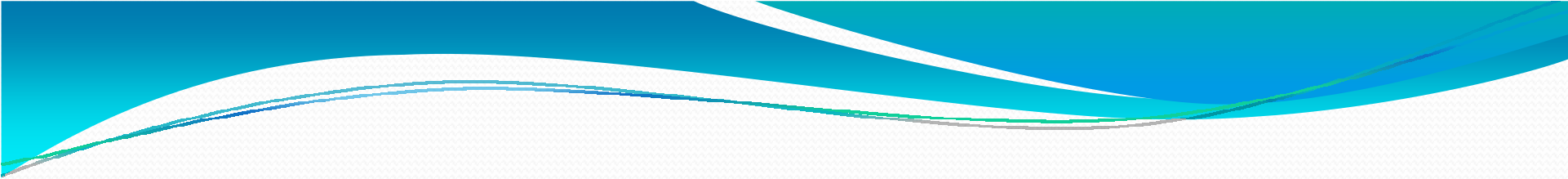
murdered by Sasanka of Bengal. In the meantime, Rajyasri escaped from her prison into the Vindhyas. At this critical juncture Harsha succeeded his brother at Thaneshwar in 606 CE at the tender age of 16. Prabhakaravardhana's desire for conquest was eventually fulfilled by his younger son, Harshavardhana, generally known as Harsha. Harshavardhana reigned between 606 and 647 CE. He commemorated his accession to the throne by founding a new era came to be known as the Harsha Era. Harsha has extended his authority through his military achievements, administration and religious policy.



Military Achievements

Harsha on coming to the throne had to face a sea of troubles. He had to rescue his sister, the Maukari queen Rajyasri, the widow of Grahavarman, who already had fled from her confinement. He had to avenge the death of his elder brother. In this connection his arch rivals were Devagupta and Sasanka. Finally he had to expand and consolidate his authority in two kingdoms i.e. Thaneswar and Kanauj, over which he was called upon to rule.

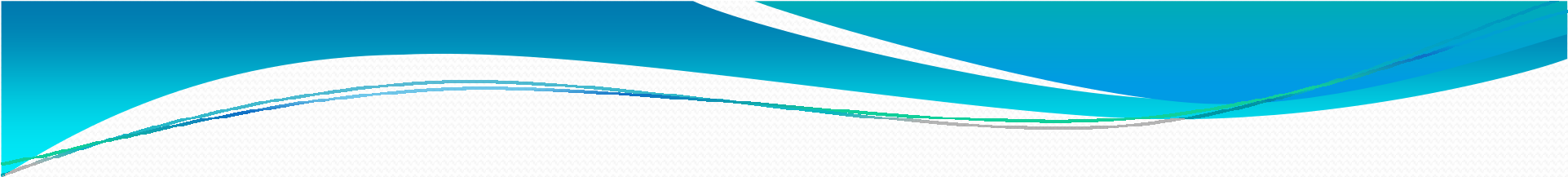
- His first act was to rescue his widow sister. The recovery of Rajyasri was effected within a short time.
- Harsha then diverted his fury towards Devagupta, the ally of Sasanka. He defeated him and occupied his Magadha region. These



two acts helped Harsha not only to unite Thaneshwar and Kanauj but also enabled Harsha to follow the policy of expansion. Later, he shifted his capital from Thaneshwar to Kanauj. Thus Kanauj became the centre of political activity in the subsequent years.

➤ Harsha entered into a treaty of alliance with Bhaskaravarman the ambitious king of Kamarupa in modern Assam. This was a master-stroke of diplomacy on the part of Harsha. He successfully did it and thereby weakened Sasanka and attacked him.

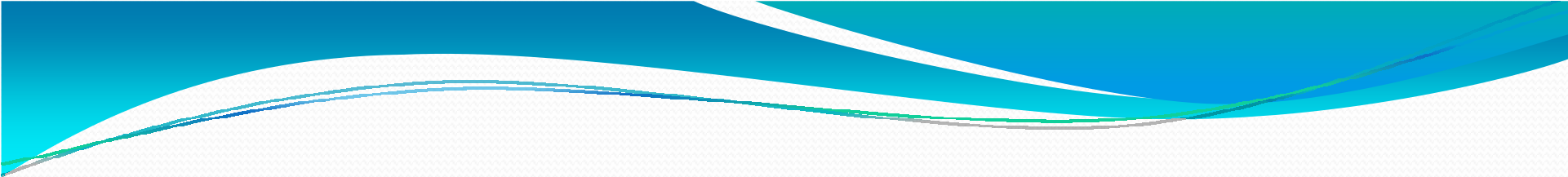
➤ It is evident from the account of HiuenTsang that Harsha is said to have waged incessant warfare for a period of six years. It is said that Harsha brought the “Five Indies” stated to be the



Punjab, Kanauj, Gauda, Mithila, and Orissa under his control. However, Sasanka proved to be a formidable opponent. His power seemed to have continued undiminished till 619 C.E.

Harsha succeeded in strengthening his position in the home territories, including the greater part of Bengal, the eastern part of the Punjab and the Saurashtra region which was then under the control of the Vallabhis. According to Hiuen Tsang, the army of Harsha consisted of 50,000 infantry, 60,000 elephants and 1,00,000 cavalry.

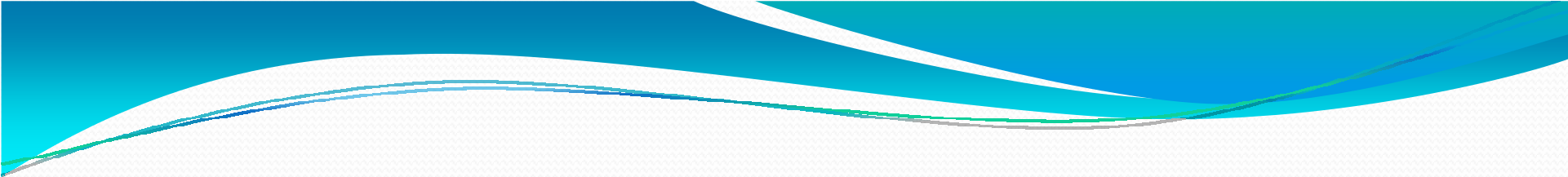
➤ In 620 CE Harshavardhana invaded the Chaulukya kingdom in the Deccan which was then ruled by Pulakesin II. But the Chaulukya resistance proved tough for Harshavardhana and he was defeated. Both the accounts of Hiuen Tsang and the inscriptions of Pulakesin-II provide the details of this campaign. After this a treaty was concluded between the two according to which the territorial integrity was honored by these two kings.



➤ Harsha in 634 C.E., waged a successful war against the Maitrakas of Vallabhi and defeated Druvasena Baladitya II, the king of Vallabhi. It is said that Harsha made friendship with Druvasena II and strengthened it by giving his daughter in marriage to him.

➤ Harsha established control over Kashmir and its ruler sent tributes to him. The last campaign of Harsha was in 643 C.E., and it was directed against Ganjam and had conquered the odra region in Odissa. It is also said that Harsha attacked Sindh whose king was deprived of his royal fortune.

➤ Harshavardhana at the same time maintained diplomatic and cordial relation with China. In 641 C.E. he sent a Brahmin envoy to China, who returned in 643 C.E., accompanied by a Chinese mission.



Thus Harsha established his hold over the whole of north India. Harsha's supremacy extended on the West up to the Vallabhi kingdom in Saurashtra and on the East up to the borders of Assam. The southern boundary was the river, Narmada while in the North it included the whole of upper India except the Punjab region. The kings of Assam and Nepal acknowledged his supremacy. Harsha was regarded as a great conqueror and a powerful emperor.

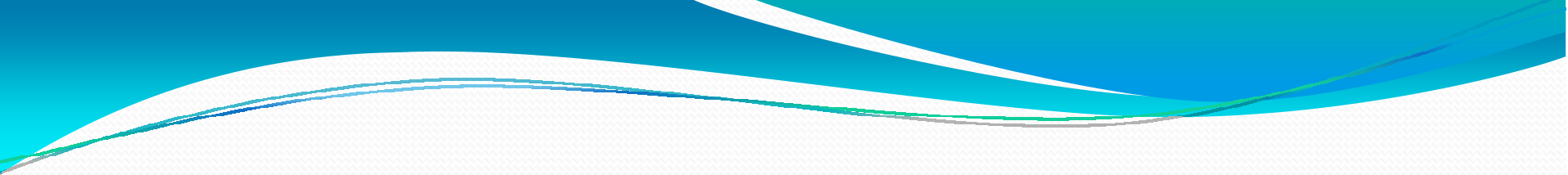
EXTENT OF HARSHA'S EMPIRE





ADMINISTRATION

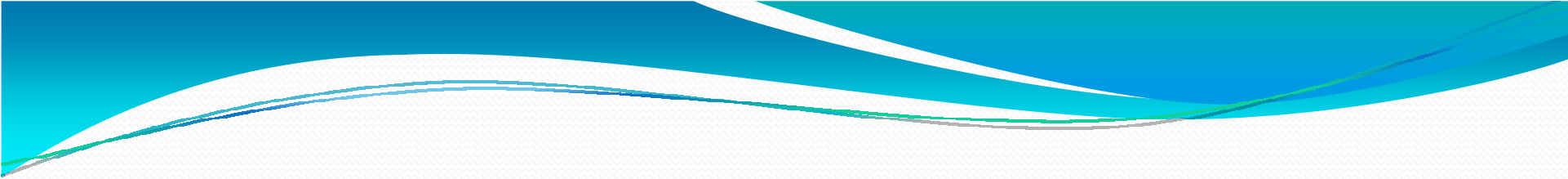
The administration of Harsha, in many ways resembled the Gupta polity, where decentralization played an important part. A pivot of administration, he efficiently governed his empire and personally looked into the affairs of the state. The king in theory was the head of the state. He was assisted by a Council of Ministers headed by the *Bhandi*. The council of ministers was more or less an advisory body in the Mauryan period, but the same played a very important part during the time of Harsha. The empire divided into *Bhukti* (provinces), Vishaya (districts), *Pathaka* (taluks), *Gramas* (villages).



They were kept under the control of officials of various ranks and status. The local administration for all practical purposes was independent of the centre. The official's in-charge of provinces and districts were the link between the local administration and the centre.

The inscriptions and the account of Hiuen Tsang state that the salaries of the officials were paid not in cash but in grants of the land. The practice of granting the king's share of revenue to the officials, in lieu of their services to the state later on paved the way for the emergence of a new politico-economic system.

The main source of revenue to the king was derived from the crown lands and it was assessed at one-sixth of the produce. He maintained a vast standing army by which he not maintained only law and order in the state but also expanded his empire. Criminal law was severe.



Offenders were punished by a cruel sort of punishment as well as by the mutilation of limbs. Minor offences were punished with fine. Trial by ordeal was in practice during this period. In spite of such severe punishments, the roads were not safe from robbers. For example Hiuen Tsang himself was robbed twice.



ROYAL TOURS

Harsha maintained contact with the public opinion both through his officers and by his own tours, which will give him an opportunity to supervise the working of officials at various administrative units. By the seventh century a centralized system, was unworkable in the context of political and economic relations in northern India and Harsha's extensive tours were an attempt at compromise. He took up on himself, as it were the duties of royal inspector and looked into the collection of taxes, listened to complaints, inspected the general working of the administration and in addition gave charitable donations.

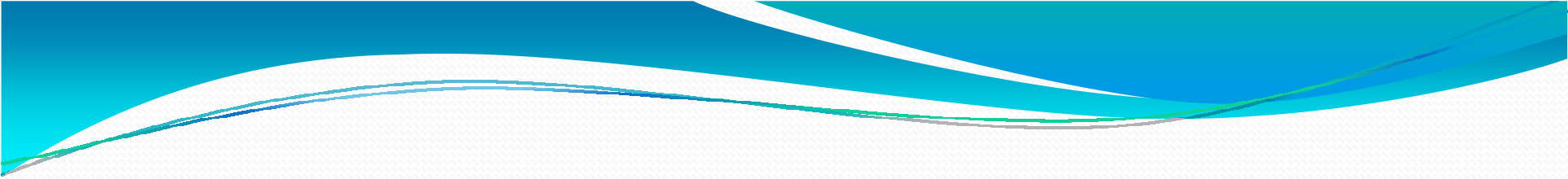


LEARNING AND EDUCATION

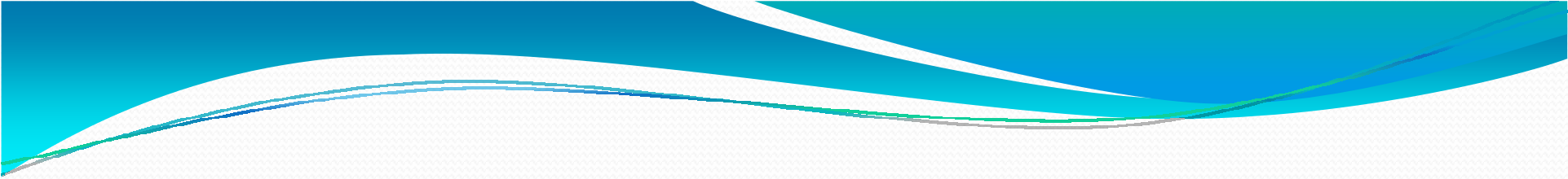
Harsha's reign witnessed hectic activity in the field of learning and education. Pataliputra lost its glory and magnificence. Its place was occupied by Kanauj and became the centre of trade and commerce and intellectual activity.

Nalanda University

The accounts of Hiuen Tsang and I-tsing give us valuable information about the Nalanda University. It became prime centre of learning and education. When Hiuen Tsang visited this university, it was having 10,000 students on its rolls. He states that there were about 1,500 teachers who delivered among themselves hundred different discourses on different subjects every day. It provided free education, boarding and lodging facilities to the students.



The professors of the university were called pandits. Some of the renowned scholars were Dignaga, Dharmapala, Shriramati and Silabhadra. The university specialized in the study of Mahayana doctrine, but its curriculum included the study of the literature of both Buddhist sects as well as Brahmanical literature. More than lectures, discussion – played an important part. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit. The university had a splendid library housed in three imposing buildings and contained valuable works on various subjects. The splendid buildings of the Nalanda University, its extensive curriculum, unique educational atmosphere, gatherings of students coming from distant places, diffusion of knowledge by way of discussions, profound scholarship of teachers and the taught were the pride of this age. In addition to Nalanda, Taxila, Ujjain were other centers of learning. Recent archeological excavations brought to light the ruins of the Nalanda University.



Harsha donated vast sums of money to Nalanda University. The account of HiuenTsang states that the university and other monastic establishments were maintained by the revenue derived from 100 to 200 villages endowed by different rulers.

Harsha himself was a great patron of learning and a scholar in Sanskrit. Despite his duties as king and administrator, Harsha is said to have written three plays viz., *Nagananda*, *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarsika*. Bana the author of *Harshacharitha* and *Kadambari* was his court poet. The other literary figures were Jayasena, Matanga, Mayura, Divakara etc.,

ANCIENT NALANDA UNIVERSITY





SUMMARY

The early medieval India, especially the seventh century in Indian history is said to be the Age of Harsha. His reign marks an important epoch in the history of India. He was not only a great general, good administrator, outstanding poet ; but also great patron of letters. To conclude in the words of H.G. Rawlinson, “*soldier and administrator, unwearied in his efforts for the good of his subjects, pious and merciful, a patron of literature and himself a poet, he stands forth on the pages of history, a bright and fascinating figure*”. Harshavardhan was a great ruler of ancient India.

He died in about 647 CE. Soon after his death, there was disorder and confusion in Northern India. Numerous small kingdoms emerged in the north and the south. These small kingdoms were unable to face the Turkish invasion which India witnessed later on.