

Harshvardhan (606-647 AD)

Content:

1. Introduction
2. Ascending to throne
3. Administration and empire
4. Religion
5. Important Personalities
6. Decline

Introduction:

- After the downfall of the Gupta Empire in the middle of the 6th century, North India was split into several independent kingdoms.
- Harsha (590–647 CE), also known as **Harshavardhana**, was an Indian emperor who ruled North India from 606 to 647 CE.
- He was a member of the **Vardhana dynasty (Pushyabhuti dynasty)**.
- Pushyabhuti dynasty foiled attack of **Hunas** over Indian subcontinent.
- The Chinese traveler **Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang)** visited the court of Harsha in 631 AD and stayed for eight years and wrote a very favourable account of him, praising his **justice and generosity**.

About Harsha ascent to throne:

- He became King at the age of 16 with a responsibility of **avenging** his Brother in law and real Brother assassinations.
- His first act was to save his sister who was about to commit sati. Thereafter he waged a war against **Shashanka** and defeated him convincingly.

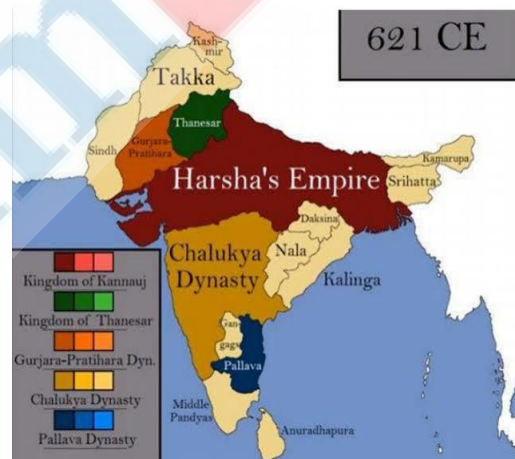
(A detailed version of this story shall be discussed in class)

Harsha administration:

- He made **kannauj (Kanyakubja its old name)** his capital. (Reasons why Kannauj replaced Magadha as centre of power shall be discussed in class)
- Like **Kshatras** in Kushan rulers, in Harsha empire 'samanta' system was practiced.
- '**Mahasamantas**,' paid tribute to Harshavardhana and also helped him by supplying **military** reinforcements.
- He also maintained cordial relations with the **Chinese**. He even sent an Indian mission to China, establishing a diplomatic relationship between India and China.
- Generally, Harsha was **efficient ruler** and subjects lived comfortable life.
- There was **no slavery** in his empire.

RELIGION:

- He was an ardent devotee of Lord **Shiva** and his subjects described him as '**Parama-Maheshvara**' (supreme devotee of Lord Shiva).
- He also wrote **Nagananda** in praise of Shiva and Parvati.
- Harsha converted himself into **Buddhism** under the influence of his sister Rajyeshree and Heun Tsang.



- He started a religious **ritual of 21 days in Kannauj** in honor of Lord buddha, in this festival prayers used to be organized in front of life size statue of Buddha made of gold.
- He also wrote three plays in Sanskrit name **Nagananda, Ratnavali and Priyadarshika**.

Important personalities in Harsha's court:

1. **Banbhatta**: wrote **Harshacharita** (biography of Harsha) and **Kadambari**.
2. **Hiuen-Tsang** a Chinese pilgrim visited Harsha's court, wrote the book '**Shi-Yu-Ki**'.

Historical account of Hiun-Tsang about Harsha Kingdom:

- Hiuen-Tsang studied at **Nalanda**.
- Harsha was praised as an ideal administrator.
- **Strict punishment** norms were there in his kingdom.
- Despite strict penal laws, highways were not safe for travel and Hiuen Tsang himself was **robbed by Highway robbers**.
- Harsha used to organize **Mahamoksha Parishad** at Prayag after every five years where he donated wealth to poor and destitute.

Decline of Harsha empire:

- The defeat of Harshavardhana by the **Chalukya king Pulakesin II** in 637AD is mentioned on the **Aihole** inscription (Karnataka).
- He was the first North Indian king to be defeated by South Indian King.
- This is also the **only defeat** that Harsha had to face throughout his life.
- he **did not have any heirs** (his two sons were killed by his ministers) his empire collapsed and disintegrated rapidly into small states.
- The demise of King Harshavardhana in **647 AD**. marked the end of the mighty Vardhana dynasty.