



UNIT 8

Harsha and Rise of Regional Kingdoms

Learning Objectives



I Harsha

- To know the ancestors and contemporaries of Harsha
- To learn about the military conquests of Harsha
- To understand the nature of Harsha's administration
- To obtain knowledge of the religious policy of Harsha
- To become aware of the socio-cultural life of the people in India from the accounts of Hieun Tsang

II The Palas

- To know the history of Palas as a strong regional power in eastern India
- To learn the contribution of prominent Pala rulers such as Dharmapala, Devapala and Mahipala I in administering their kingdom
- To understand the significance of their role in the spread of Mahayana Buddhism in the Ganges plain
- To gain knowledge about the contribution of Palas to literature, art and architecture

III The Rashtrakutas

- To know the greatness of the Rashtrakutas
- To learn the fact that successful rulers, Krishna I through Krishna III, prevented the Pallava expansion northward.
- To apprise yourself of the development of Kannada literature under the patronage of Rashtrakutas.

I Harsha

Introduction

North India splintered into several warrior kingdoms after the downfall of the Gupta Empire. Excepting in the areas that were subdued by the Huns (modern Punjab, Rajasthan and Malwa), regional identity became pronounced with the emergence of many small states. Maithrakas had organised a powerful state in Sourashtra (Gujarat), with Valabhi as

their capital. Agra and Awadh were organised into an independent and sovereign state by the Maukharis. The Vakatakas had recovered their position of ascendancy in the western Deccan. Despite political rivalry and conflict among these states, Thaneswar, lying north of Delhi between Sutlej and Yamuna, was formed into an independent state by Pushyabhutis. It rose to prominence under Harsha. Harsha ruled the kingdom as large as that of the Guptas from 606 to 647 CE.

Sources

I. Literary sources

- Bana's Harshacharita
- Hieun Tsang's Si-Yu-ki

II. Epigraphical sources

- Madhuban copper plate inscription
- Sonpat inscription on copper seal
- Banskhera copper plate inscription
- Nalanda inscription on clay seals
- Aihole inscription



Bana's Harshacharita was the first formal biography of a king. It inaugurated a new literary genre in India.

8.1 Pushyabhutis

The founder of the Vardhana dynasty was Pushyabhuti who ruled from Thanesar. He served as a military general under the imperial Guptas and rose to power after the fall of the Guptas. With the accession of Prabhakara Vardhana (580–605 CE), the Pushyabhuti family became strong and powerful. Prabhakara Vardhana fought against the Gurjaras and the Huns and established his authority as far as Malwa and Gujarat. He gave his daughter Rajyasri in marriage to the Maukhari king, Grahavarman, of Kanauj (near modern Kanpur), thus making Kanauj his ally. Prabhakara Vardhana's dream of building an empire was eventually realised by his younger son Harsha-Vardhana.

Rajavardhana (605–606 CE), the eldest son of Prabhakaravardhana, ascended the throne after his father's death. He was treacherously murdered by Sasanka, the Gauda ruler of Bengal. This resulted in his younger brother Harsha-Vardhana becoming the king of Thanesar. Harsha had known the weakness of a group of small kingdoms and conquered his neighbours to integrate them into his empire. As Thanesar was too close to the threats from the north-west, Harsha shifted his capital from Thanesar to Kanauj. Kanauj was located in the rich agricultural region of the western Ganges Plain.

Harsha as King of Kanauj :

The magnates of Kanauj (the capital of Maukhari kingdom), on the advice of their minister Poni, invited Harsha to ascend the throne. A reluctant Harsha accepted the throne on the advice of Avalokitesvara Bodhisatva with the title of Rajputra and Siladitya. Thus the two kingdoms of Thanesar and Kanauj became united under Harsha's rule. Consequently, Harsha transferred his capital to Kanauj.

8.2 Harsha's Military Conquests

On his accession in 606 CE Harsha focused his attention on the affairs of his sister Rajyasri who had fled to Vindhya mountains to escape from the evil design of Deva Gupta of Malwa to covet her. Harsha went to Vindhya mountain ranges and succeeded in saving his sister who was about to burn herself after killing Deva Gupta. Harsha consoled Rajyasri and brought her back to the kingdom of Kanauj. Later Rajyasri took to Buddhism and was instrumental in converting Harsha to Buddhism.



Harsha Coin

According to Bana, Harsha, in an effort to build an empire, sent an ultimatum to the following kings to either surrender or be prepared for a battle:

1. Sasanka, the Gauda ruler of Bengal.
2. The Maithrakas of Valabhi and Gurjara of Broach region.
3. The Chalukya king, Pulikesin II, in the Deccan
4. Rulers of Sindh, Nepal, Kashmir, Magadha, Odra (northern Odisha) and Kongoda (another geographical unit in ancient Odisha).



Harsha's immediate task was to take revenge on Sasanka. Harsha entered into an alliance with the king of Kamarupa (Pragiyatishya), which is today the modern Assam. But there is hardly any detail of the war between Harsha and Sasanka. However, Harsha seems to have successfully subjugated the Gauda Empire, which included Magadha, Gouda, Odra and Kongoda only after the death of Sasanka.



Coins of Sasanka

The hostilities between Harsha and the Maithrakas ended in the marriage of Dhruvabhatta with the daughter of Harsha. Soon, Valabhi became a subordinate ally of Harsha.

Pulikesin II, the Chalukya King

Harsha sought to extend his authority southward into the Deccan. However the Chalukya king Pulikesin II, who controlled the region, humbled Harsha. In commemoration of his victory over Harsha, Pulikesin assumed the title of "Parameswara". Inscriptions in Pulikesin's capital Vatapi attest to this victory.



Pulikesin II (modern representation)

Extent of Harsha's Empire

Harsha ruled for 41 years. His feudatories included those of Jalandhar (in the Punjab), Kashmir, Nepal and Valabhi. Sasanka of Bengal remained hostile to him. Though it is claimed that Harsha's Empire comprised Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Kanauj, Malwa, Odisha, the Punjab, Kashmir, Nepal and Sindh, his real sway did not extend beyond a compact territory between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. The kingdom of Harsha disintegrated rapidly into small states after his death.

Harsha's Relations with China

Harsha had cordial relations with China. The contemporary T'ang emperor, Tai Tsung, sent an embassy to his court in 643 and again in 647 CE. On the second occasion, the Chinese ambassador found that Harsha had recently died. On learning that the throne had been usurped by an undeserving king, the Chinese ambassador rushed to Nepal and Assam to raise a force to dislodge the usurper. Later, the king who had usurped the throne was taken to China as a prisoner.

Administration

According to historian Burton Stein, a centralised administration did not even exist under the powerful Guptas. It was restricted only to the central part of the Gangetic plain between Pataliputra and Mathura. Beyond that zone, there was no centralised authority. The only difference between Guptas and Vardhanas is that the former had formidable enemies like Huns, while the latter had no such opponents. The copper plates of 632 CE record a gift of land to two Brahmans. The names of certain political personages with state power, as protectors of the gift, are mentioned in them. Some were *mahasamantas*, allied to the king but of a subordinate status. Others were independent maharajas but acknowledged feudatories of Harsha. There was yet another category of rulers who pledged their loyalty to Harsha and professed to be at his service. This is the characteristic of Harsha's imperial authority in North India.





Council of Ministers

It appears that the ministerial administration during the reign of Harsha was the same as that of the imperial Guptas. The emperor was assisted by a council of ministers (Mantri Parishad) in his duties. The council played an important role in the selection of the king as well as framing the foreign policy of the empire. The prime minister was of the most important position in the council of ministers.

Key Officials

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1. Avanti | - Minister for Foreign Relations and War |
| 2. Simhananda | - Commander-in-Chief |
| 3. Kuntala | - Chief Cavalry Officer |
| 4. Skandagupta | - Chief Commandant of Elephant Force |
| 5. Dirghadhvaj | - Royal Messengers |
| 6. Banu | - Keeper of Records |
| 7. Mahaprathihara | - Chief of the Palace Guard |
| 8. Sarvagata | - Secret Service Department |

Revenue Administration

Bhaga, Hiranya and Bali were the three kinds of tax collected during Harsha's reign. Bhaga was the land tax paid in kind. One-sixth of the produce was collected as land revenue. Hiranya was the tax paid by farmers and merchants in cash. There is no reference to the tax Bali. The crown land was divided into four parts.

- Part I - for carrying out the affairs of the state
Part II - for paying the ministers and officers of the crown
Part III - for rewarding men of letters
Part IV - for charity to religious institutions

Administration of Justice

Criminal law was more severe than that of the Gupta age. Mimamsakas were appointed to dispense justice. Banishment and the

cutting of limbs of the body were the usual punishments. Trial by ordeal was in practice. Life imprisonment was the punishment for the violations of the laws and for plotting against the king.

Hieun Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, spent nearly 13 years in India (630–643 CE), collecting sacred texts and relics which he took back to China. He was known as the “prince of pilgrims” because he visited important pilgrim centres associated with the life of Buddha. His *Si-Yu-Ki* provides detailed information about the social, economic, religious and cultural conditions during the reign of Harsha.

According to Hieun Tsang, perfect law and order prevailed throughout the empire, as the law-enforcing agencies were strong. The pilgrim records the principal penalties and judicial ordeals practised in India at that time. Corporal punishment for serious offences was in practice. But the death penalty was usually avoided. Offences against social morality and defiance of law were punished by maiming. Harsha travelled across the kingdom frequently to ensure his familiarity with his people. He was accessible to people and kept a closer watch on his tributary rulers.

Administration of Army

Harsha paid great attention to discipline and strength of the army. The army consisted of elephants, cavalry and infantry. Horses were imported. Ordinary soldiers were known as Chatas and Bhatas. Cavalry officers were called Brihadisvaras. Infantry officers were known as Baladhikritas and Mahabaladhikritas. Hieun Tsang mentions the four divisions (*chaturanga*) of Harsha's army. He gives details about the strength of each division, its recruitment system and payment for the recruits.

Division of the Empire

The empire was divided into several provinces. The actual number of such provinces is not known. Each province was divided into Bhuktis. And each Bhukti was divided into several Vishayas. They were like the districts.



Each vishaya was further divided into Pathakas. Each such area was divided into several villages for the sake of administrative convenience. *Harsha Charita* refers to a number of officials who took care of the local administration. Only their titles are known. What they did isn't available in *Harsha Charita*. We learn that bhogapathi, ayuktha, pratpalaka-purusha and the like looked after the local administration.

Cities and Towns

Hieun Tsang describes the structure, aesthetics and safety measures of the cities, towns and villages of India. In his view, India was the land of innumerable villages, numerous towns and big cities like China. He pointed out that Pataliputra lost its prominence and its place was taken by Kanauj. The elegance of Kanauj with its lofty structures, beautiful gardens and the museum of rare collections is described. The refined appearance of its residents, their costly dressings and love for learning and art are also pointed out in his account.

Most of the towns, according to Hieun Tsang, had outer walls and inner gates. Though the walls were wide and high, the streets and lanes were narrow. Residential houses had balconies made of wood and coated with lime mortar. Floors were smeared with cow dung for the purpose of purity and hygiene. Big mansions, public buildings and Buddhist monasteries and viharas were magnificent multi-storeyed structures. They were built of kiln-fired bricks, red sandstone and marble. Harsha constructed a large number of viharas, monasteries and stupas on the bank of the Ganges.

Harsha built charitable institutions for the stay of the travellers, and to care for the sick

and the poor. Free hospitals and rest houses (*dharmasalas*) in all the towns were constructed where the travellers or the outsiders could stay. Hospitals were built to provide medical treatment free of charge.

Religious Policy

Harsha was a worshipper of Siva at least up to 631 CE. But he embraced Buddhism under the influence of his sister Rajyasri and the Buddhist monk Hieun Tsang. He subscribed to the Mahayana school of thought. Yet he held discourses among learned men of various creeds. Slaughter of animals and consumption of meat was restricted. Harsha summoned two Buddhist assemblies (643 CE), one at Kanauj and another at Prayag.

The assembly at Kanauj was attended by 20 kings including Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa. A large number of Buddhist, Jain and Vedic scholars attended the assembly. A golden statue of Buddha was consecrated in a monastery and a small statue of Buddha (three feet) was brought out in a procession. The procession was attended by Harsha and other kings.

Buddhist Assembly at Prayag

Harsha convened quinquennial assemblies known as Mahamoksha Parishad at Prayag (at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna). He distributed his wealth among Buddhists,

Vedic scholars and the poor people. Harsha offered fabulous gifts to the Buddhist monks on all the four days of the assemblage.



Hieun Tsang, hailed as the prince of pilgrims, visited India during the reign of Harsha. Born in China in 612 CE he became a Buddhist monk at the age of twenty. During his travels, he visited various sacred places of northern and southern India. Hieun Tsang spent about five years in the University of Nalanda and studied there. Harsha admired him for his deep devotion to Buddha and his profound knowledge of Buddhism. Hieun Tsang carried with him 150 pieces of the relics of Buddha, a large number of Buddha image in gold, silver, sandalwood and above all 657 volumes of valuable manuscripts.



Hieun Tsang



Hieun Tsang observed that the principles of Buddhism had deeply permeated the Hindu society. According to him, people were given complete freedom of worship. Social harmony prevailed among the followers of various creeds. Harsha treated the Vedic scholars and the Buddhist *bikshus* alike and distributed charities equally to them.

Caste System

Caste system was firmly established in the Hindu society. According to Hieun Tsang, the occupations of the four divisions of society continued to be in practice as in the previous times. People were honest and not deceitful or treacherous in their conduct. The butchers, fishermen, dancers and sweepers were asked to stay outside the city. Even though the caste system was rigid, there was no social conflict among the various sections of the society.

Status of Women

Hieun Tsang's account also provides us information on the position of women and the marriage system of the times. Women wore purdah. Hieun Tsang, however, added that the purdah system was not followed among the higher class. He pointed out that Rajyasri did not wear purdah when listening to his discourse. Sati was in practice. Yasomatidevi, wife of Prabhakara Vardhana, immolated herself after the death of her husband.

Lifestyle

The life pattern of the people of India during the rule of Harsha is known from the accounts of Hieun Tsang. People lived a simple life. They dressed in colourful cotton and silk clothes. The art of weaving fine cloth had reached perfection. Both men and women adorned themselves with gold and silver ornaments. The king wore extraordinary ornaments. Garlands and tiaras of precious stones, rings, bracelets and necklaces were some of the ornaments used by the royalty. The wealthy merchants wore bracelets. women used cosmetics.

Dietary Habits

Hieun Tsang also noted that Indians were mostly vegetarians. The use of onion and garlic in the food preparation was rare. The use of sugar, milk, ghee and rice in the preparation of food or their consumption was common. On certain occasions, fish and mutton were eaten. Beef and meat of certain animals were forbidden.

Education

Education was imparted in the monasteries. Learning was religious in character. Much religious literature were produced. The Vedas were taught orally and not written down. Sanskrit was the language of the learned people. An individual took to learning between 9 and 30 years of age. Many individuals devoted their whole life to learning. The wandering *bhikshus* and *sadhus* were well known for their wisdom and culture. The people also paid respect to such people of moral and intellectual eminence.

Harsha as a Patron of Art and Literature

Harsha patronised literary and cultural activities. It is said the state spent a quarter of its revenue for such activities. Bana, the author of *Harshacharita* and *Kadambari*, was a court poet of Harsha. The emperor himself was a renowned litterateur, which is evident from the plays he wrote such as *Priyadarsika*, *Rathnavali* and *Nagananda*. Harsha gifted liberally for the promotion of education. Temples and monasteries functioned as centres of learning. Renowned scholars imparted education in the monasteries at Kanauj, Gaya, Jalandhar, Manipur and other places. The Nalanda University reached its utmost fame during this period.

Nalanda University

Hieun Tsang recorded the fame of the Nalanda University. Students and scholars from the Buddhist countries like China, Japan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Tibet and some other countries of Central and Southeast Asia stayed and studied in the university. Shilabhadra, a



reputed Buddhist scholar, who probably hailed from Assam, was the head of the University during the visit of Hieun Tsang. As an educational centre of international fame, Nalanda had 10,000 students on its rolls. Dharmapala, Chandrapala, Shilabhadra, Bhadrihari, Jayasena, Devakara and Matanga were important teachers in the university receiving royal patronage.

II The Palas

After the death of Harsha, the Pratiharas (Jalore-Rajasthan), the Palas (Bengal) and the Rashtrakutas (Deccan) engaged in a triangular contest for the control of the Ganga–Yamuna doab and the lands adjoining it. The Palas controlled vast areas of the eastern Gangetic Plain. Apart from earning revenue from agriculture, Palas also derived income from their wide commercial contacts in South-east Asia. Buddhism in Bengal provided a link between eastern India and Java and Sumatra.

8.3 Establishment of Pala Rule in Bengal

Sashanka, the Gauda ruler, believed to have ruled between 590 and 625 CE, is considered the first prominent king of ancient Bengal. After the fall of the Gauda kingdom, there was no central authority, which led to recurring wars between petty chieftains. So, in 750 CE, a group of chiefs met and decided on a “Kshatriya chief” named Gopala to be their ruler. There is a story that Gopala was elected because of his ability to kill a “demoness” that had killed those who were previously elected like him. Though Gopala did not have royal antecedents, he succeeded in acquiring a kingdom. Gopala’s political authority was soon recognised by several independent chiefs. His original kingdom was in Vanga or East Bengal.

The Palas ruled eastern India from Pataliputra between the ninth and the early twelfth centuries. Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali were the languages in use in their kingdom. Palas followed Mahayana Buddhism.

Pala Rulers

Gopala I was succeeded by his son Dharmapala (770–815 CE) who made the Pala kingdom a force to reckon with. Bengal and Bihar were directly ruled by him. Kanauj was ruled by his nominee. The rulers of the Punjab, Rajaputana, Malwa and Berar accepted his suzerainty. He assumed titles like Paramesvara, Parambhattaraka and Maharajadhiraja.

Dharmapala proved to be a great patron of Buddhism. He founded the Vikramasila monastery in Bhagalpur district in Bihar, which developed into a great centre of Buddhist learning and culture. He built a grand *vihara* at Somapura in modern Paharapura (present-day Bangladesh). Dharmapala also built a monastery at Odantapuri in Bihar. He patronised Harisbhadrar, a Buddhist writer.

Dharmapala’s son Devapala extended Pala control eastwards up to Kamarupa (Assam). He defeated Amoghavarsha, the Rashtrakuta ruler, by allying with all the states that regarded the Rashtrakutas as their common enemy. Devapala was also a great patron of Buddhism. He granted five villages to Balaputradeva, the king of the Sailendra dynasty of Suvarnadipa (Sumatra), to maintain a monastery built by him at Nalanda. Nalanda continued to flourish as the chief seat of Buddhist learning even during the Pala reign.

Devapala was succeeded by Vigramapala, who abdicated his throne after ruling for a few years and went to lead an ascetic life. Narayanapala, son of Vigramapala, was also a man of pacific and religious disposition. The Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas took advantage of Narayanapala’s disposition and defeated the Palas. The rise of the Pratiharas in Jalore under Mihira Bhoja and the advance of the Rashtrakutas into Pala territories inevitably brought about the decline of the Palas. The petty chiefs, who formerly owed allegiance to the Palas, also started asserting their independence.



The slide of the Pala dynasty was accelerated during the rule of his three successors – Rajyapala, Gopala III and Vigramapala II. The fortunes of the dynasty, however, were revived by Mahipala I, son of Vigramapala II. The most important event of his period was the invasion of northern India by Rajendra Chola sometime between 1020 and 1025 CE. However, the advance of the Cholas beyond the Ganges was checked by Mahipala I.

After 15 years of Mahipala's rule, four insignificant rulers followed. Ramapala was the last ruler who tried to recover the lost glory of the dynasty. He ruled for about 53 years and after his death, the presence of Pala dynasty was confined to only a portion of Magadha (Bihar) and continued to exist only for a short period. Vijayasena of the Sena dynasty who had become powerful by then in northern Bengal expelled the last ruler Madanapala (1130–1150 CE) from Bengal and established his dynastic rule.

Religion

The Palas were great patrons of Mahayana Buddhism. The Buddhist philosopher Haribhadra was the spiritual preceptor of Dharmapala, the founder of the Pala kingdom. Bengal remained one of the few places where Buddhist monasteries continued to exist. The kingdom as well as Buddhism soon suffered decline because of large-scale conversion of merchants and artisans to Islam.

Art and Architecture

Two artists of this period were Dhiman and his son Vitapala. They were great painters, sculptors and bronze statue makers. The Pala school of sculptural art was influenced by the Gupta art. Mahipala I constructed and repaired several sacred structures at Saranath, Nalanda and Bodhi Gaya. Gopala founded the famous monastery at Odantapura (Bihar). Dharmapala established the Vikramashila and the Somapura Mahaviharas (Bangladesh).



Somapura Mahavihara (Bangladesh)

Literature

The prominent Buddhist scholars of Vikramashila and Nalanda universities were Atisha, Saraha, Tilopa, Dansheel, Dansree, Jinamitra, Muktimitra, Padmanava, Virachan and Silabhadra. The notable Pala texts on philosophy include *Agama Shastra* by Gaudapada, and *Nyaya Kundali* by Sridhar Bhatta. Many texts on medicine were compiled by Chakrapani Datta, Sureshwar Gadadhara Vaidya and Jimutavahana. The Palas also patronised Sanskrit scholars. Many Buddhist tantric works were authored and translated into Sanskrit. The original tantric works comprise a varied group of Indian and Tibetan texts. The “Mahipalageet” (songs on Mahipala), a set of folk songs, are still popular in the rural areas of Bengal. Sandhyakar Nandi's epic *Ramacharitam*, a biography of a later Pala ruler Ramapala, describes how forest chiefs were brought into their alliance through lavish gifts.



Vikramashila University

III The Rashtrakutas

The rivalry between the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas proved to be destructive to both the dynasties. The Arab traveller Al-Masudi who visited Kanauj recorded the enmity between the two ruling dynasties. The Rashtrakutas who were bidding their time to



capture Kanauj from Pratiharas succeeded in their motive and continued to rule until 10th century CE. They claimed descent from the Rastikas or Rathikas, an important clan domiciled in the Kannada-speaking region and mentioned in the edicts of Ashoka.

8.4 Rise of Rashtrakuta Dynasty

The Rashtrakutas were originally known to be the feudatories of the Western Chalukyas of Vatapi. Though Rashtrakutas were early rulers, the greatest ruler of the dynasty was Dandidurga. Ruling from a smaller part of Berar, Dandidurga built his career of territorial conquest after the death of Vikramaditya II (733–746 CE), the Chalukya ruler. He captured Gurjara Kingdom of Nandipuri, Malwa and eastern Madhya Pradesh and the whole of Berar. By 750 CE, he had become the master of central and southern Gujarat and the whole of Madhya Pradesh and Berar.

After consolidating his position, and after defeating Kirthivarman II (746–753 CE), the last Chalukya ruler of Vatapi, Dandidurga assumed the titles of Maharajadhiraja, Parameshwara and Paramabhattaraha. He developed relationships with the Pallava ruler Nandivarman II by giving his daughter in marriage to the Pallava king. After Dandidurga's death in 756 CE, his uncle (father's brother) Krishna I ascended the throne.

Krishna I and His Successors

Krishna I (756–775 CE) defeated the Gangas of Mysore. His eldest son Govinda II succeeded him in 775 CE. He defeated the Eastern Chalukyas. He left the affairs of country to his brother Dhruva who eventually crowned himself as the ruler. During the reign of Dhruva (780–794 CE), the Rashtrakuta power reached its zenith. After humbling the western Ganga king, Dhruva defeated Dantivarman, the Pallava king. The ruler of Vengi (modern Andhra) also had to accept his suzerainty. After establishing his hegemony in the south, Dhruva turned his attention towards the regions around Kanauj.

Vatsarya, the Pratihara king, and Dharmapala, the Pala ruler, who were contenders for supremacy in the region, were defeated by Dhruva. He nominated his third son Govinda III as the heir-apparent.

The accession of Govinda III (794–814 CE) to the throne heralded an era of success like never before. Dantika, the Pallava king, was subdued by Govinda III. Vishnuvardana, the ruler of Vengi, turned out to be his maternal grandfather and so he did not challenge his authority. Thus Govinda III became the overlord of the Deccan. The Rashtrakuta Empire reached its height of glory.

Govinda III was succeeded by his son Amoghavarsha (c. 814–878 CE). Amoghavarsha ruled for 64 years and his first twenty years of the rule witnessed endless wars with the Western Gangas. Peace returned when Amoghavarsha gave his daughter in marriage to a Ganga prince. Amoghavarsha was a patron of literature and he patronised the famous Digambara acharya Jinasena, Sanskrit grammarian Sakatayana and the mathematician Mahaviracharya. Amoghavarsha was himself a great poet and his *Kavirajamarga* is the earliest Kannada work on poetics. After Amoghavarsha, his successors were able to sustain the vast empire, but the ablest among them was Krishna III (939–968 CE).

Krishna III was the last great ruler of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. Soon after his accession, he invaded the Chola kingdom along with his brother-in-law Butunga. Kanchi and Thanjavur were captured in 943 CE. His army remained in effective control of Thondaimandalam, consisting of Arcot, Chengalpattu and Vellore. In 949 CE, he defeated the Chola army of Rajadithya in the battle of Takkolam (in present day Vellore district). Krishna III marched upto Rameshvaram where he built a pillar of victory. Thus he succeeded in establishing his suzerainty over the entire Deccan region. It was under him the Rashtrakutas joined the contest that was held then among the northern ruling dynasties for control of Kanauj. The continued conflict over the



possession of Kanauj emboldened some of the local rajas to assert their independence. Their defiance destroyed the possibility of a single kingdom ruling northern India with its centre at Kanauj. Invasions from the north-west also prevented any such attempts to create a powerful state. But the successors of Krishna III were too weak to save the kingdom from its decline.

Religion

The worship of Shiva and Vishnu was popular during the Rashtrakuta reign. The famous rock-cut Shiva temple at Ellora was built by Krishna I. The seals have the pictures of Garudavahana of Vishnu or of Shiva seated in yogic posture. Dantidurga performed the Hiranyagarbha ritual at Ujjayini. There are references to Tula-danas gift or offer of gold equal to one's own weight to temple deities.

Hiranyagarbha literally means golden womb. A person coming out of this golden womb, after elaborate rituals performed by priests, is declared as reborn possessing a celestial body. The Satavahana king Gautamiputra Sathakarni performed this ritual to claim kshatriya status.

Jainism was patronised by later rulers such as Amoghavarsha I, Indra IV, Krishna II and Indra III. Buddhism had declined and its only important centre was at Kanheri.

Literature

The Rashtrakuta rulers were great patrons of learning. Kannada and Sanskrit literature made great progress during their reign. Amoghavarsha I was the author of *Prasnottaramalika*, a Sanskrit

work, and *Kavirajamarga*, a Kannada work. Jinasena wrote the Adipurana of the Jains. Krishna II's spiritual guide, Gunabhadra, wrote the Mahapurana of the Jains. The three gems of ancient Kannada literature – Kavichakravarthi Ponna, Adikavi Pampa and Kavichakravarti Ranna – were patronised by Rashtrakuta king Krishna III, as well as by Tailapa and Satyashraya of Western Chalukyas.

Architecture

The Rashtrakutas made splendid contributions to Indian art. The rock-cut shrines at Ellora and Elephanta located in present-day Maharashtra belong to their period. The



Ellora cave complex contains the features of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain monuments and art work. Amoghavarsha I espoused Jainism and there are five Jain cave temples at Ellora ascribed to his period.

The most striking structure at Ellora is the creation of the Monolithic Kailasanath Temple. The temple was hewn out of a single rock during the time of Krishna I in the 8th century. It is similar to the Lokeshvara temple at Pattadakal, in Karnataka, built by Chalukya king Vikramaditya II to commemorate his victory over the Pallavas. The sculptured panels of Dasavatara Bhairava, Ravana shaking the Mount Kailasa, dancing Shiva and Vishnu, and Lakshmi listening to music are the best specimens of sculpture inside the temple.



Kailasanath Temple - Ellora



Ellora Sculptures



Elephanta Cave



The main shrine at Elephanta is artistically superior to the shrines at Ellora. The sculptures such as Nataraja and Sadashiva excel even that of the Ellora sculptures in beauty and craftsmanship. Ardhanarishvara and Maheshamurti are the other famous sculptures. The latter, a three-faced bust of Lord Shiva, is 25 feet tall and considered one of the finest pieces of sculpture in India. The paintings are still seen in the porch of the temple of Kailasa and ceilings of the Mahesamurti shrine at Ellora.

SUMMARY

I Harsha

- The period between the Guptas and the Vardhanas saw many independent principalities. North India lacked a strong central power.
- The Huns, Maithrakas of Valabhi, Maukharis of Kanauj, Yasodharman of Mandasor, Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar and Later Guptas of Magadha were sub-regional kingdoms.
- Harsha maintained cordial relations with China and the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang recorded the socio-religious conditions of the people of that period.
- Harsha patronised Buddhism and convened Buddhist assemblies at Kanauj and Prayag.

II Palas

- The founder of Pala dynasty Gopala was elected to rule by the chieftains and rulers of little kingdoms.
- Dharmapala, Devapala and Mahipala I ruled ably and kept their domain under effective control.
- The patronage of Palas to Vikramashila and Nalanda universities paved the way for the progress of Buddhist, Jain and Sanskrit literature.

III Rashtrakutas

- Rashtrakutas emerged as the most feared and powerful kingdom during the reign of a series of successful rulers from Krishna I through Krishna III.
- Rashtrakutas patronised Sanskrit and Kannada scholars.
- The art found at Ellora and Elephanta are their contributions.



EXERCISE



I. Choose the correct answer

1. Prabakaravardhana gave his daughter Rajyasri in marriage to_____.
(a) Grahavarman (b) Deva Gupta
(c) Sasanka (d) Pushyaputi
2. Harsha accepted the throne of Kanauj on the advice of_____.
(a) Grahavarman
(b) Avalokitesvara Bodhisatva
(c) Prabakaravardhana
(d) Poni
3. _____was the minister for Foreign Relations and War.
(a) Kuntala (b) Banu
(c) Avanti (d) Sarvagata
4. Which of the following was written by Harsha?
(a) Harsha Charitha (b) Priyadharsika
(c) Arthasastra (d) Vikramorvasiyam
5. Which one of the following statements is wrong?
(a) Dharmapala established Somapura Mahavihara.
(b) Ramapala wrote Ramacharitam.
(c) Mahipala Songs are still popular in rural parts of Bengal.
(d) Agama Shastra was written by Gaudapada.

II. Write Brief Answers

1. What are the epigraphical sources for the study of Harsha's Empire?
2. How did Harsha become the king of Kanauj?
3. Discuss the greatness of Mahipala I.
4. Point out the significance of the battle of Takkolam.
5. Highlight the significance of Nalanda University during the Pala dynasty.

III. Write Short Answers

1. Harsha's relationship with the Chinese.
2. Importance of Harsha's criminal justice system.
3. Shrines at Elephanta and at Ellora.
4. Contribution of Rashtrakutas to Kannada literature.
5. Patronage of Rashtrakutas to Jains.

IV. Answer the following in detail

1. Give an account of the military expeditions of Harsha in northern India.
2. Explain the religious policy of Harsha.
3. Highlight the condition of North India as described by Hieun Tsang.
4. What were the contributions of Palas to Buddhism?
5. Account for the greatness of Rashtrakutas.

Activity

1. Enact a drama on a Buddhist Assembly Meeting.
2. Debate:
 - (i) Bakhtiyar Khalji attacked Nalanda University thinking that it was a fort.
 - (ii) Hieun Tsang's visit to India to collect Buddhist texts.



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GLOSSARY

quinquennial	occurring once in five years	ஐந்தாண்டிற்கு ஒருமுறை நிகழும்
bhikshu	Buddhist monk	பௌத்தத் துறவி
immolate	killing oneself by jumping into fire	தீப் பாய்தல்
reckon	calculate	கணக்கிடு
preceptor	teacher	ஆசிரியர்
booty	plunder	போரின் மூலம் கொள்ளையடிக்கப்பட்டவை
espoused	supporting a cause	ஒரு காரியத்திற்கு அல்லது செயல்பாட்டிற்கு ஆதரவு கொடுத்தல்
hewn	chiselled	செதுக்கப்பட்ட
ascribed	assigned	சார்ந்தது