

HISTORY: CLASS-6: SUMMARY

CHAPTER 8 - AGE OF SMALLER KINGDOMS

Points of Discussion

- Harsha Age
- Extent of Harsha's Empire
- Religious Policy
- Social conditions
- Chalukyas
- Pallavas

EMERGENCE OF NEW SMALL KINGDOMS

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.

A. NORTH INDIA

AGE OF KING HARSHA

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.

EXTENT OF HARSHA'S EMPIRE

- Harsha ruled for 41 years. His feudatories included those of Jalandhar (in 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 moved his capital from Thanesar to Kanauj as Kanauj was a more central place.
- He set out on a long campaign and conquered almost the whole of northern India, including the Punjab, eastern Rajasthan, and the Ganga valley as far as Assam.



- 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.**

RELIGIOUS POLICY OF HARSHA

- Harsha was a **worshipper of Siva at least up to 631 CE. But he embraced Buddhism under the influence of the Buddhist monk Hiuen Tsang.**
- Harsha became a Buddhist in his later years, although he continued to bestow his patronage on other religions as well.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN HARSHA'S KINGDOM

- Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese traveller, came to India in this period and met Harsha. His accounts provide a lot of information about social conditions prevailing at that time.
- Hiuen Tsang also noticed the **existence of the caste system** and the bad treatment of untouchables who had to live outside the towns.
- Hiuen Tsang also noted that Indians were mostly vegetarians. The use of onion and garlic in the food preparation was rare.
- The life pattern of the people of India during the rule of Harsha is known from the accounts of Hiuen Tsang: People lived a simple life. They dressed in colourful cotton and silk clothes.
- In the towns, there was a difference between the houses of the rich and those of the poor. The houses of the rich were beautifully built and decorated, while those of the poor were simple and white-washed and had mud floors.

END OF HARSHA EMPIRE

With the death of Harsha, there was confusion in northern India for some time. The kingdom split into many smaller units, which kept fighting one another. Meanwhile, the kingdoms of the Deccan and the south became powerful.

B. DECCAN AND SOUTH

The political history of south India during the sixth century to ninth century C.E. was marked by conflicts between the Chalukyas of Badami (also known as Western Chalukyas), and the Pallavas of Kanchi.

CHALUKYAS

- The Vakatakas had tried to build a strong state but it did not last. They were followed by the **Chalukya dynasty with its centre at Vatapi.**
- The Chalukya king Pulakeshin reigned here at the same time as Harsha in the north. His ambition was to control the whole of the Deccan Plateau.
- One of the most outstanding victories of Pulkeshin II was the defeat of Harshavardhana's army on the banks of the Narmada.
- Chalukyas had two enemies, the Rashtrakutas to the north and the Pallavas to the south.
- **The Rashtrakutas** were ruling a small kingdom in the northern Deccan. They began by being subordinate to the Chalukyas and did not become really strong until the eighth century A.D. when they attacked and subdued the Chalukya king.
- Pallavas were becoming powerful in South India at the same time as the Chalukyas in the Deccan. Pulakeshin attempt to attack Kanchipuram was thwarted by Mahendravarma Pallava.

MISC FEATURES ABOUT CHALUKYA EMPIRE



- The Chalukya capital at Vatapi was a flourishing city. Trade connections with Iran, Arabia and the Red Sea ports to the west and with the kingdoms of south-east Asia still continued.
- Pulakeshin sent an embassy to the Persian king Khusrao II. A hundred years later, when the Zoroastrians left Iran, they came and settled in the towns along the west coast of the Deccan and were later called Parsis, that is, Persians.

PALLAVAS

The Pallava dynasty was an Indian dynasty that existed from 275 CE to 897 CE, ruling a portion of southern India. They gained prominence after the eclipse of the Satavahana dynasty, whom the Pallavas served as feudatories.

THE PALLAVA-CHALUKYA CONFLICT

- The Pallava-Chalukya conflict continued during the subsequent decades, with some intermittent peace.
- Pallavas had to fight many wars against the Pandyas and the Chalukyas, both of whom, tried to stop the Pallavas from becoming powerful. But the Pallavas managed to establish their rule all the same. They conquered the land to the south of Kanchipuram, Tanjore, and the Pudukottai region, because it was rich and fertile.



ART AND CULTURE

- Mahendravarman, the Pallava king, ruled at the same time as Harsha and Pulakeshin. He too was not just a warrior but also a poet and a musician. **He was a Jaina, to begin with, but was later converted to Shaivism by Appar, one of the Tamil saints.**
- The **Alvars** were the devotees of Vishnu and the **Nayanmars** were the devotees of Shiva.
- Kanchipuram, apart from being the capital of the Pallavas, was also a centre of Tamil and Sanskrit studies. Writers, such as Dandin wrote in Sanskrit, since they were writing for the court circles and the upper castes.

ARCHITECTURE

- The Pallava kings had many temples built. Some were cut out of large rocks, such as the Ratha temples.
- Mahendravarman I is credited with the introduction of rock-cut temples in the Pallava territory.
- Others were built of stone blocks, such as those at Kanchipuram. The image was placed in a room at one end of the temple and on the roof of this room, there was built a tall tower.
- The temple became a gathering place for the village. Villagers would come and sit in the temple courtyard in the evenings and exchange news or discuss matters concerning the welfare of the village, such as taxes and water for the fields.



Rock-cut temple of Mahendravarman Pallava