

# Harshavardhana Dynasty

King Harsha, well known as **Harshavardhana**, was the leader of a massive empire in the northern region of India from 606 CE to 647 CE. Harshavardhana's reign appeared to indicate a transition from the old to the mediaeval periods, while decentralised provinces fought for expansionism all the time.

He was the final leader of the Vardhana Empire, also ancient India's last great empire prior to the Islamic Intrusion. Harshavardhana joined the majority of northern India and reigned for 40 years from the capital of Kanyakubja post the collapse of the great Gupta Empire in the midst of the sixth century CE, during which India witnessed its own golden age.

Harshavardhana's empire kept expanding as he acquired Kannauj, followed by Punjab, Orissa, Bihar and Bengal. He took care of the needy and poor by constructing rest homes with all the necessary amenities. He decided to not levy high taxes on the citizens, and even the economic condition was rather self-sufficient.

## History of Vardhana Dynasty or Pushyabhuti Dynasty

The **Pushyabhuti dynasty**, well known by the name **Vardhana dynasty**, gained prominence post the Gupta Empire fell. Rajyavardhana, his elder brother, succeeded Harshavardhana.

It was one of the largest Indian imperial powers of the 7th century CE, encompassing all of the Northern and North-western regions in India. In eastern India, his empire stretched all the way to Kamarupa and down to the Narmada River.

Harshavardhana's empire is said to have spanned the existing states of Bengal, Orissa, Punjab, including the entire Indo-Gangetic plain. The Vardhana Empire was divided into two kinds of territories:

- those explicitly under Harsha's rule, like the Central Provinces of Gujarat, Kalinga, Bengal, and Rajputana, and
- those that were feudatories under his power, such as Kashmir, Jalandhar, Sind, Nepal, and Kamarupa (Assam).

## Administration Of Harshvardhana

Harshavardhana's administration was almost like that of the Gupta Empire as there was no slave labor in his kingdom, and individuals were allowed to live their lives as they pleased.

- Kannauj, His capital, drew poets, artists, religious leaders, and intellectuals from all over the world.

- He also kept friendly ties with the Chinese rulers. He even dispatched an Indian quest to China, instituting a strategic relationship between the two countries. Xuanzang, a renowned Chinese monk, lived for 8 years in his kingdom.
- Harshavardhana amassed a formidable army during his reign. When his empire was at its peak he was said to have a cavalry of 100,000 men, 50,000 infantry men, including 60,000 elephants.
- Furthermore, the majority of North India was devoid of coins during Harsha's rule. This indicates that the economic condition was in a feudal state.
- Independent rulers who were collectively called 'Mahasamantas,' paid homage to Harshavardhana. He also assisted him by providing military reinforcements.
- It was critical to the advancement of Harshavardhana's empire.

## Harshavardhana's Empire- Education and Art

Harsha supported art as well as education. He was also an author, having written three Sanskrit plays, Ratnavali, Nagananda, and Priyadarshika.

- Scholars received a quarter of his earnings.
- Furthermore, the famous Nalanda University was at its peak during Harsha's reign.
- In addition, a renowned Indian author and poet called Banabhatta used to serve as the 'Asthana Kavi' in Harshavardhana's court.

## Harshavardhana's Empire- Societal Structure And Religious Beliefs

Women's status had declined since the liberal times of previous eras. The caste system was widespread in the Hindu community. Widow immolation was prevalent, and widow remarriage was forbidden in upper castes. Harsha was initially a Shiva worshipper, before becoming a Mahayana Buddhist.

They were classified into four castes or as they called it 'varna' (each with a distinct subcaste):

- Brahmana,
- Vaishya,
- Kshatriya, and
- Shudra,

## Achievements of Harshavardhana

King Harshavardhana was indeed a successful warrior, administrator, supporter of Buddhism, and a big advocate of learning and education. Except for Kashmir, there is no reason to suspect that Harshavardhana invaded and occupied all of northern India. Following are some of the eminent **achievements of Harshavardhana**.

- Harshavardhana, aided by Bhaskara Varma of the Kamarupa empire, attacked and retaliated against Shashanka of the Gauda Kingdom.
- However, till Shashanka was not dead, he couldn't completely destroy him. Afterwards, he crushed Devagupta of Malwa and invaded and occupied the kingdom on his own.
- By 612 CE, he had gained full control of Punjab's Pancha Sindhus.
- His kingdom expanded to include Kannauj, Bihar, Orissa, and other areas. He dethroned Vallabhi's Dhruvasana II. He later married his daughter to him and developed a solid partnership with him.
- Harshavardhana conquered Orissa, Magadha, Vodra, Kongonda (Ganjam), and Bengal after the death of Shashanka of Gaudadesha (Gaudadesha).
- Later, he deposed Nepal's ruler and welcomed respect from him. He established his authority by vanquishing the North Indian dynasties.
- In recognition of the achievements of Harshavardhana, he was given the title "Uttarapatha Swara."
- As a leader, Harshavardhana travelled from one province to another inspecting administrative details.
- He was courteous to all religions, as evidenced by his patronage of Buddhism as a saiva.
- Under his leadership, Ujjain had become a centre of literary interaction.
- Harsha patronised Banabhatta, the writer of Harshacharita, as well as a handful of poets and literary figures.
- Harsha is credited with three dramatic works: Nagctncmda, Ratriavcili, and Priyadarshika. Such were the achievements of Harshavardhana in life.

