

Pratihara Dynasty

What was Pratihara Dynasty?

Pratihara means 'doorkeeper' in Sanskrit. They were the impactful rulers of the western and northern India. The most well-known king of this dynasty was Bhoja or Mihira Bhoja (circa 836-885 CE).

Under Nagabhata I (730–760 CE), of the Pratihara Dynasty, who successfully defeated Arab invaders, the fortunes of this dynasty improved in the second quarters. After his dominance over Arabs, he ruled Malwa, Rajputana and Gujarat. The Pratihara Dynasty depicts a rich art and culture. Khajuraho, the UNESCO World Heritage site in India is famous for its rich style of temple architecture.

Distinctive Nature of Pratihara Dynasty

Aside from inscriptions, the sculpture and monuments erected during the Pratihara Dynasty provide substantial evidence of their times and rule. Accounts of Arab merchants who visited India during this period include Suleiman (c. 9th century C.E.), who visited India in the 9th century C.E. and bore evidence of the uniqueness of the Pratihara Dynasty.

Political History of the Pratihara Dynasty

The fall of the Pushyabhuti Dynasty under the rule of Harshavardhana resulted in a significant political instance in history. Political history of Pratihara kingdom is as under-

Nagabhata I (c. 730 – 760 CE)

Nagabhata was a diplomatic and prominent ruler of the Pratihara Dynasty. His rule stretched from 730-756 C.E. He successfully captured Gujarat to Gwalior and snatched the position of the Arabs. Kakkuka and Devaraja, his nephews, succeeded him. He defeated Arab army to resist the invasion of Arabs. Nagabhata I was defeated by Dhruv, the Rashtrakuta King.

Vatsaraja (c. 780 – 800 CE)

Vatsaraja had his eyes fixed on Ujjain and extended his capital. He had several conquests in the North Indian territories of Kanauj, Central Rajputra, the Doab Region, and the Ganga Yamuna Valley. Nagabhata II succeeded him.

Nagabhata II (c. 800- 833 CE)

Nagabhata II worked on changing the conquest policies and extension of the Pratihara Empire. Andhra, Saindhava, Vidarbha, and Kalinga were all defeated by him. He conquered the Matsayas to the North, the Vatsas to the east, and the Turuskka (Muslims) to the west. Dharmapala had defeated Indrayudh and installed his brother Chakrayudh as ruler of Kannauj. Nagabhata attacked Kannauj and occupied it after defeating Chakrayudha. He also defeated Dharmapala and advanced into his territory as far as Munger in Bihar. Kannauj became the capital of the Gurjar Pratihara state, which ruled over much of northern India at the time.

Mihir Bhoja (c. 836- 885 CE)

Mihirbhoja restored the old glory of Nagabhatta. He is known for renowned conquests and tactical military defense. He had established Kannauj as his capital. He was a Vishnu devotee, so he took on titles like Varaha and Prabhas in his honor. Mihirbhoja was in power for 49 years. His rule extended from Multan to West Bengal and Kashmir to Karnataka.

Mahendrapala (c. 885- 910 CE)

The Pratihara empire extended a lot under Mahendrapala rule because of his significant contributions. He made Pratihara to reach east to Bengal, north to the Himalayas, West to Sindh's border, and south to Narmada. He got the title Maharajadhiraja of Aryavarta. He had to give up some part of his territory to the king to Kashmir after he lost the battle. He was an admirer of art. His court had the presence of a renowned poet of Sanskrit, Rajashekhar. Prapanch Pandev, Vidhasalabhanjika, Bhrinjika, Balabharata, Kavya Mimansa, Karrupuramanjari are some of his famous writings.

Mahipala I (c. 913 – 944 CE)

Mahipala I was responsible for the downfall of the Pratihara Dynasty. The city of Kannauj under his rule was destroyed by Indra III, the Rashtrakuta after defeating him in a battle. Not only this, but Rashtrakuta took Gujarat's control under him because of which the kingdoms belonging to the Pratihara Dynasty were not given any access to the sea.

Rajyapala (c. 960- 1018 CE)

Another ruler who has to taste defeat from the Rashtrakuta king, Krishna III was Rajyapala. At similar point of time, Rajyapal and Kannauj were attacked by Mahmud Ghazi because of which, they had to flee off the battlefield. Later, Vindhyaadhar Chandela killed Rajyapala.

Yashpala (c. 1024- 1036 CE)

The end of Pratihara dynasty was marked by the defeat of Yashpala. He was the last ruler of the kingdom, who was defeated by the Gandhavalas. He conquered Kannauj in 1090 CE, after defeating Yashpala.

The successors of these rulers were unable to defend their kingdom. They lost the empire to Ghaznavis in the 11 century CE. The successors were- Chahamanas, Pawars, and Chalukyas.

Art and Architecture of Pratihara Dynasty

The Pratihara Dynasty were the worshippers of art and architecture. The Someshwara Temple is carved out into an octagonal arrangement of seven pillars. The earliest mulaprasadas are known to reign in this temple. The Teli-ka-Mandir in Gwalior is dedicated to a Shakti cult. It comprises an elevated rectangular mulaprasada, a double oblong shikhara, and a closed portico.

The early works at Osian have five-bay mulaprasadas. All these Osian structures possess a porch, and open hall. However, there was no ambulatory, or vestibule. Most of them comprises of five-shrine complexes (Pancha-katana).

Religion in Pratihara Dynasty

During this period, the influential religious groups of Hinduism were Vaishnava, Shaiva, Sakta, and Surya. The renovation of temples and statues was considered a sacred duty by the followers of these cults. The donations from kings and other wealthy individuals were the support for the temples and helped in their smooth functioning. Yajnas and charitable giving at religious sites were also prevalent. Durga, Chamunda, Bhagavati, and Kali were the most prominent of these goddesses.

The Pratiharas were mostly tolerant towards preaching other religions. However, there is evidence of some religious intolerance during their period.

The Pratihara Dynasty ruled for a century and kept their control with strength and dignity. They were strong defenders against the Palas. Rashtrakutas, however, couldn't solidify their power for long, resulting in their decline.

