

10. AGE OF REGIONAL KINGDOMS

(500 A.D. - 700 A.D.)

After the decline of the Gupta empire, Northern India broke up into a large number of small kingdoms. On the one hand some new kingdoms came up and on the other hand, those kingdoms which were under the authority of Gupta kings declared themselves independent. There were frequent wars among these kingdoms to increase their sovereignty. In this period Vardhanas in the north and Chalukyas and Pallavas of the south gained importance. In this lesson we are going to read about them.



Pic. 10.1

HARSHWARDHANA (606 A.D. - 647 A.D.)

About 100 years after the decline of the Gupta dynasty a new kingdom emerged. Thaneshwar, near Delhi, was its capital. This kingdom had a famous king Harshwardhana, who was also known as Harsha. Around 606 A.D. he ascended the throne of Thaneshwar. He was a powerful king and like the Gupta rulers he tried to establish a huge empire. He conquered most of the kingdoms in northern India. He led a campaign into the south but was defeated by the Chalukyas ruler, Pulakesin II.



Pic. 10.2 King Harshwardhana

Harsha's empire extended from Punjab to Orissa. Later on he made Kannauj his capital because it was at the centre of his empire. Harsha died in 647 A.D. after ruling for 41 years.

The kingdoms which were conquered by Harsha would pay him regular tribute and would send their soldiers to assist Harsha at the time of war. These kingdoms were under the authority of Harsha, but administration was theirs and they could take their own decisions related to it.

Sanskrit scholar, Banabhatta was the poet of the court of Harsha. In his book "Harshacharita" - which is a biography of Harsha- we find descriptions of villages, cities, forests etc. of that time. The Chinese Buddhist scholar Huiyen Tsang visited India during Harsha's reign. Huiyen Tsang visited many Buddhist shrines in different



parts of India and studied the Buddhist literature. He wrote, in detail, about his experiences in India. These writings give us a lot of information about that time.

Harsha was a great patron of learning and the learned. He was the author of Sanskrit plays namely Ratnavali, Nagananda and Priyadarshika.

Harsha was a worshipper of Shiva. He organized Buddhist council at Kannauj. He organized the Prayag assemblies held every fourth year for religious discussions and debates. At these assemblies he gave donations to the learned scholars, orphans and the poor.

Huien Tsang was a Chinese Buddhist traveller. He came to India in 630 A.D. He was so fond of studies that he faced several hardships for this. He crossed mountains and deserts and came to India and studied at Nalanda. Nalanda university was a centre of Buddhist learning at the time of Harsha. Harsha had granted 100 villages to the university of Nalanda and the revenue collected from these villages was used to meet its expenses.

Huien Tsang stayed for 5 years in India and when he returned he wrote his travelogue. He said that Buddhism in India was not as popular as he had thought.

Huien Tsang travelled to Chhattisgarh too. He has said that the prominent city Sirpur (Shripur) of southern Koshal was one of the main centre of Buddhist literature at that time.

SOUTHERN KINGDOMS

Chalukyas

At this time southern India, that is, Maharashtra and Karnataka was ruled by the Chalukyas. Their capital was Vatapi (or Badami)

The most renowned ruler of the Chalukyas was Pulakesin II. He had defeated Harshvardhan and ruled Deccan (south) for a long time. He had also defeated the Pallava king Mahendravarman. But later on, he was defeated by Narsimhavarman.

Vatapi, the capital of Chalukyas, was a flourishing city. Foreign trade with Iran, Arabia, ports of the Red Sea and South East Asia flourished under the Chalukyas.



Pic. 10.3 Chinese Buddhist traveller
-Huien Tsang



Chalukya kings were great patrons of art. They gave large amount of money for the construction of cave temples on the hills of the Deccan. A large sum of money was given by the Chalukyas for the construction of the world famous Ajanta and Elora caves. A picture in the Ajanta caves shows Pulakesin II welcoming the ambassador of Iran. Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal (in Bijapur district) were centres of urban architecture at the time of the Chalukyas.

Chalukya kings were Jains, but some worshipped Shiva and Vishnu too.

PALLAVA DYNASTY

Pallavas established their own kingdom at Tamil Nadu in south India. Kanchipuram (Kanchi) was the capital of Pallava kings. Mahendravarman was the chief ruler of this dynasty. He was the contemporary of Harsha and Pulakesin II. He started the art of constructing temples by cutting rocks. He was a famous writer and dramatist. But he was defeated by Pulakesin II in the battle. His son Narsimhavarma was also a famous ruler. By defeating chalukyas Naresh Pulakesin II, he took his revenge of his father's defeat.



Pic. 10.4 Kailash Temple of Kanchi



Earlier the Pallava rulers used to follow Jainism, but later they became great devotee of Shiva and Vishnu. They built several temples. Some temples were made out of single large rocks. The Ratha temple of Mahabalipuram is an example of such temples. There were temples which were constructed by joining huge boulders like the Kailash temple at Kanchi. These temples were not just places of worship, but were used as places to gather for discussions, to educate children and to celebrate festivals.

During this period a group of people in south India felt that religion was the personal worship of gods like Shiva or Vishnu. This ideology came to be known by the name of 'Bhakti'. This movement was joined by the common people in large numbers. They wandered from place to place singing hymns of Shiva and Vishnu. They preached in the local language, Tamil. The devotees of Vishnu were called Aalvar and the devotees of Shiva were called Nayanar. They influenced the society of southern India greatly.

EXERCISE

I. Fill in the blanks

- _____ had started the art of constructing temples by cutting rocks.
- _____ was the main education centre of the Pallavas.
- _____ Pallava king was a writer and a dramatist.
- Pulakesin II defeated _____ in war.
- Chalukya king Narsimhavaram had defeated _____ in war.

II. Answer the following questions:-

- How far had Harshvardhan's empire extended?
- What did Huien Tsang say about Indian society?
- Describe the religious activities of Harsha.
- With which countries did the Chalukyas have trade relations?

III. Write brief notes on

- Aalvar and Nayanar
- Huien Tsang

