

THE ADMINISTRATION OF HARSH'S KINGDOM

Harsha was not only a great conqueror but also an efficient administrator. He extended his empire and provided it with the best administrative set-up.

(1) **The King:** Harsha was the head of the kingdom. He wielded extensive powers. He was both the highest court of justice and the supreme commander. He himself led his armies and himself made appointment to high offices of the kingdom. Though a despot, he never ruled as such. His administration was based on the principle of people's welfare. He was liberal and was always prepared to work for the welfare of his people. He was enlightened and indefatigable. He had opened dispensaries, rest-house etc., for his people. He forgot sleep and food in his devotion to good work.

(2) **Council of Ministers:** There was a Council of Ministers to aid and advice the king in his administration. The Council of Ministers was authorized even to choose the successor to the vacant throne. The other important duty of the council was to decide matters concerning foreign policy. Harsha's cousin Bhandi was his Chief-Minister. Sinhanand was the chief commander. Avantī was his minister for foreign affairs. Skandgupta was the Minister of the Elephant wing. He had appointed several other big and small officials to look after other details of the administration.

(3) **Provincial Administration:** Harsha, had divided his empire into several provinces which were called 'Bhuktis'. Each Bhukti was governed by a governor whose chief duty was to obey the king's orders and to keep peace and order in his area. Each province was divided into several districts or 'vishayas'. The smallest units of administration. The Chief of the village was called 'Gramika' who looked after the village administration with the help of the Gram-panchayats.

(4) **Income and Expenditure:** Land revenue was the chief source of income which was 1/6 of the total produced. The traders had to pay taxes which were realized from markets and ferry stations as well. Fines were not the source of state income. Hidden treasures and minerals were the property of the king.

The expenditure was incurred judiciously and was well planned. The whole income was divided into four parts: one part of it was spent on administration; the second part was spent on paying salaries to the ministers and high officials and other functionaries of the state, while the third part was spent on patronizing scholars and artists and giving charity to the Brahmanas, while the fourth part was spent on the king himself.

(5) **The Penal System:** Harsha's penal system was very strict and severe punishments were awarded to the wrong doers. Small crimes were punished with fines. Social offences and offences against state laws were punished by chopping ear, hand etc. Offenders were also banished or awarded capital punishment in case of serious crimes. These were also the practice of making the offender confess his guilt through the ordeals of water, fire, poison etc. Though the punishments were

severe, yet the roads and highways were not so safe. Hieun Tsang himself was looted twice.

(6) **The Record Department:** Harsha has established a record department to maintain a record of the big and small events, good or bad incidents, government projects and natural calamities occurring in the state.

(7) **Military Organisation:** Harsha had an efficient military administration. According to Hieun Tsang, his army consisted of 1, 00,000 cavalry, 60,000 elephants and 50,000 foot soldiers. Good horses for mounted cavalry were obtained from Sindh, Afghanistan and Iran etc. It was on the strength of this vast army that Harsha succeeded in founding such a big empire, checking internal revolts and protecting his empire against foreign invasions.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF HARSHA

Harsha is rightly called the last great Hindu Emperor of Northern India. After him no ruler of the North in ancient India ruled such a vast empire as was ruled by Harsha. Harsha was great in war. He founded a great empire by registering several great conquests.

Harsha's Greatness of Peace: Harsha's greatness in peace was also remarkable like his greatness in war. He had the following achievements to his credit in this regard:

(a) **His Achievements in the Field of Religion:** Harsha's name in the field of religion is known for his great efforts in making Buddhism popular like those of Asoka and Kanishka before him. He abstained from meat-eating and prohibited the killing of animals, encouraged the Buddhist monks for spreading their religion and built monasteries for them. He also built viharas and Stupas. But his real greatness lies in this tolerance towards other faiths.

The Kanauj Assembly: Harsha convened a grand assembly at Kanauj to spread Mahayana faith. A pillar was constructed in the middle of the Assembly Hall where a grand golden image of Buddha was installed. After conducting Buddha's worship Hieun Tsang gave a discourse praising the Mahayana sect and explained the principles of the Mahayana faith. He held discussions with scholars of the other sects and faiths. But ultimately Hieun Tsang vanquished their arguments and proved the superiority of the Mahayana faith.

The Prayag Assembly: Harsha convened an Assembly of the Buddhist monks at Prayag regularly after every five years. Here he used to exhaust his treasure while giving donations to scholars, the poor and the monks. A similar Assembly was called 643 A.D. at Prayag where Hieun Tsang was also present. In this Assembly on the first three days, the images of the Buddha, the Sun and Shiva were worshipped respectively. It was followed by 75 days of charity and donations. Harsha gave away even his personal jewellery and garments and had to beg clothes from his sister Rajyashri.

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(b) **Harsha's Achievements in the field of Administration:** Harsha has a special place as a ruler as well. He founded a well-organized system of administration. He had divided his kingdom into provinces, districts and villages for the purpose of proper and efficient administration. He personally looked after the details of the administration. Like Ashoka, he never forgot that the king's chief duty was to look after the well-being of his people. Hieun Tsang writes, "He was indefatigable and forgot sleep and food in his devotion to good works." Harsha had built 'Dharamsalas' where the poor were given free food. He had also built hospitals where the poor were given free treatment.

(c) **Harsha's Achievements in the field of Culture :** Harsha was himself a learned scholar and also a patron of learning. He himself wrote three plays, Ratnavali, Naganadna, and Priyadarshika in Sanskrit. He liberally patronized great scholars like Banabhatt, Hieun Tsang and Bhartri Hari. A writer has praised his patronage to the scholars in these words, "He gathered round him some of the finest intellectual and holiest sages. "He helped the growth of education by allowing financial grants to Nalanda. He also spent 1/4th of his income on extending patronage to the learned scholars. At the Prayag Assembly also, which was held regularly after every five years, he helped liberally the scholars, saints and intellectuals.

(d) **An Ideal Ruler.** The above description is enough to prove that Harsha was a great general, an able administrator, an empire builder, a religious leader, a servant of the people, a lover of justice, generous and a great lover of learning. It has rightly been said, he was, in short, a great warrior in camp, a statesman at court, a poet in his palace, and a devotee in the temple, a reigned diplomat, and a respected despot, he was a worthy successor to the glories of the Mauryas and the grandeur of the Guptas. All these things justify his claim to be called as 'Harsha' the Great.

What light does the account of Hieun Tsang throw on Indian life in the 7th century?

Who was Hieun Tsang?: Hieun Tsang was a Chinese traveler who came to India to collect religious books of Buddhism and to visit the holy Buddhist places in India in the seventh century A.D. He started from China in 629 A.D. and returned there after 15-16 years in 645 A.D. In his celebrated work 'Si-yu-ki' he has described vividly the political, social, religious and economic conditions of India during Harsha's times. This book is a treasure-house of accurate information indispensable to every student of Indian antiquity and has done more than any archaeological discovery to render possible the remarkable re-association (revival) of past history.

1. **About the King: Hieun Tsang stayed with Harsha at Kanauj for quite a long time.** Having been with the king for such a long period he has been able to give a true account about Harsha's character. He writes: (1) the king was very generous. He had built many rest-houses, viharas, monasteries and stupas. (2) Harsha was a dutiful king who never turned his face from the people's welfare. (3) Hieun Tsang also tells us about Harsha's religion. According to him, he was a devotee of Lord Shiva and Vishnu in the beginning but later on he became a follower of the Buddha. (4) He also

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writes about Harsha's capital Kanauj, which was a beautiful city with several Buddhist monasteries.

2. **About the Political Conditions and Administration:** About Harsha's administration, Hieun Tsang writes: (1) Harsha kept full personal supervision over every detail of the administration. He fully realized that in order to keep his subjects happy it was essential to keep vigilance on his officers. (2) Harsha's administration was liberal and the people were allowed sufficient freedom to move wherever they wanted. (3) The chief source of state revenue was land tax which was realized at 1/6th of the production. (4) This income or revenue was divided into four parts. One part was spent on administration of the government, the other on payment of salaries to officials and functionaries, the third to reward scholars and the learned and the fourth part was spent on religious donations and charity. (5) Penal code was quite strict. Hands, feet, nose and ears etc. were cut off as punishment to small offences. (6) The roads were not sufficiently safe as Hieun Tsang himself was robbed thrice. (7) There was also a record department which maintained records of all events in the kingdom. (8) About Harsha's army Hieun Tsang says that it was well-equipped and well-organized and numbered over 2,00,000 men.

3. **About the Socio-Economic Conditions.** Hieun Tsang writes that (1) During Harsha's times people lived a simple life. They wore ornaments but did not wear shoes and walked bare-footed. (2) Their food was also simple and constituted of wheat, barley, milk, curd and vegetables. Ordinarily, people did not eat onion, garlic and meat. The meat-eaters were treated as untouchables. (3) People cared much for cleanliness and took habitual bath before taking meals. The earthen pots were thrown away after being used once. (4) People lived a holy life and were afraid of committing sins and were eager to such deeds as would make their lives happier in the next world. They were generally honest and generous. Many a rich people had opened free dispensaries and rest-houses where the poor were given free treatment and food. (5) About social practices he writes that the caste system had become rigid and migration from one caste to another was quite impossible. The purdah system had not yet started while the sati system was quite popular. (6) Agriculture, domestication of animals, practicing different crafts and trade were the chief occupations. Trade was carried on with other countries including China and Persia.

4. **About Religious Conditions.** Hieun Tsang specially describes the religious conditions. He writes - (1) There were three popular religions in Harsha's time - Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. (2) About Buddhism he says that it was still popular. But his account that holy Buddhist places like Kapilvastu and Gaya were in ruins makes us believe that Buddhism was on the decline. Besides two major sects - the Mahayana and the Hinayana - Buddhism had been divided into eighteen other sects. (3) About Hinduism, he says that it was reviving and gaining in popularity. Among the Chinese, India was known as a land of the Brahmans. (4) Hieun Tsang writes that the Indians practiced religious tolerance. Though Harsha himself was a follower of the Buddha, he respected other faiths and religions as well. Every body had complete religious freedom.

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5. **The Education System:** Hieun Tsang writes that there was a well-organised system of education. The students were taught in big monasteries and viharas. Primary education was given in the homes of the priests or in the temples while there were universities for higher education. Some famous universities were those of Taxila, Ujjain and Gaya, where about 10,000 students received education. But the Nalanda was the biggest and the most famous of all the universities. Students there came not only from India but from all parts of the world. The education was free and no fees were charged. The students were given free meals and clothes.

6. **Harsha and his Assemblies:** Hieun Tsang writes in detail about Harsha's assemblies as well (1) A religious discussion was arranged between Hieun Tsang and the Brahman scholars at the Kanauj Assembly. Ultimately Hieun Tsang defeated his rivals and he was taken out in a special procession. (2) About the Prayag Assembly, he says that it was held there regularly after an interval of five years. Such an assembly was held there in 643 A.D., where Hieun Tsang was also present. About this assembly, Hieun Tsang writes that Harsha distributed so much wealth in charity that he had not even his clothes left on him, which he had to beg from his elder sister Rajyashri.

NALANDA UNIVERSITY

Nalanda University: Nalanda was the famous centre of higher education where students flocked from far and wide. It counted 10,000 students on its rolls. The university provided not only free education but also free board and lodging. The revenues of one hundred villages were remitted for its endowment. The university was meant for advanced studies and so the administration was strict. Its foundation stone was laid by Kumar Gupta I in the middle of fifth century. It was situated in Bihar. In the beginning it was a simple monastery but soon it developed into the most renowned seat of learning and literary activities for impacting higher education to the students. It is rightly described as "The Oxford of Mahayana Buddhism". It followed a wide curriculum of studies and by the day it rose to prominence and became an international seat of learning. Students came here from China, Tibet, Central Asia, Bukhara, Korea, Java and other places. The teachers of Nalanda used to be most renowned scholars of other particular subjects. The names of Dharampal, Chandrapal, Shilbhatta, Dharam Kerti, Gunamati, Sitharmati, Padam Sambhava who taught and guided the students in various subjects. Hieun-Tsang was the student of Nalanda University for over five years. Another Chinese student was Itsing. The rulers of India gave their patronage to this university and by their lavish grants, gifts and endowments they greatly contributed to its popularity. During Harsha's time as many as 10,000 students were studying in the university and as many as 1510 teachers were busy imparting knowledge to the students. The university specialized in the study of Mahayana doctrines but its curriculum included the study of the literature of other Buddhist sects as well as Brahmanial literature both sacred and secular. Scholars came there to put an end to their doubts and learn. The admission to the university was very difficult. Those who were fortunate enough to get

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admission were provided free board and lodging. There were separate arrangements for hostel facilities.

According to Hieun Tsang there was cordial relation between the teachers and the taught. The Nalanda University had a long line of distinguished professors. Shilbhadra was the head of the Nalanda University. He was a friend and teacher of Hieun Tsang. The teachers were held in high respects and were looked up to as models all over India.

The course of studies comprised all the works of the eighteen schools of Buddhism and also included such varied subjects as the Vedas, Astronomy, Medicine, Sciences, Logic, Grammar and Philosophy in its curriculum. Nalanda was much responsible for spreading India culture in many foreign countries like Tibet, China and Central Asia.

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