

NOTABLE TRAVELLERS AND EMPERORS

(600 to 1100 AD)

A Chinese Traveller

"Here rice and wheat grow in plenty. Ginger, mustard and many kinds of cucumbers and gourds are grown. Onions and garlic are rarely cultivated, because very few people eat them. Normally milk, butter, ghee, sugar, jaggery, mustard oil and roti are eaten. Fishes, mutton and venison are also consumed. However, pork, beef, the flesh of donkeys, elephants and horses are strictly forbidden."

This is the account of a Chinese traveller about 1350 years ago. His name was Hiuen Tsang. He came to India in 630 AD and travelled to various towns and villages of India for many years.

Hiuen Tsang covered thousands of kilometers through deserts and mountains to come to India to study Buddhism. Yes! by that time Buddhism had spread to Central Asia and

Fig. 1 Hiuen Tsang the Chinese traveller



China and many people travelled to India from those countries. Hiuen Tsang studied for many years in the famous Buddhist monastery of Nalanda.

Hiuen Tsang has written about many kings and kingdoms of that time in his book called *Si Yu Ki*. In those days there were three important kings, Harshavardhana, Pulakesin and Mahendravarman.

Between 600 to 750 AD

King Harshavardhana ruled from the city of Kanyakubja. He ruled from 606 to 647 AD. The whole of north India was under his control. He had defeated many kings in battle. However, his efforts to extend his empire in south India did not succeed. One of its powerful rulers named Pulakesin defeated Harsha on the banks of the Narmada and checked his advance.

Pulakesin belonged to the Chalukya dynasty and ruled from 608 to 642 AD from the city of Vatapi. In order to expand his kingdom, he moved further south with his army. He defeated many kings and reached Kanchipuram.

Kanchipuram was then ruled by Mahendravarman of the Pallava dynasty. He was also a powerful king, but Pulakesin defeated him too. Mahendravarman ruled from 600 to 630 AD. After a few years Nrsimhavarman, his son defeated and killed Pulakesin. He also looted and destroyed Vatapi, the Chalukyan capital.

These kings were busy fighting all the time. However, they were also interested in art and literature. In the court of Harsha lived a Sanskrit poet named Banabhatta, while in

शुभाङ्ग नानन्ददासैः श्रीहर्षाचार्यः

Fig. 2 Signature of King Harsha on a copper plate. It says 'Svahastho mama maharajadhiraja Shri Harshasya'. It means 'by my own hand, the king of kings, Shri Harsha'.

Can you identify the letters 'ha' and 'ma' in it?

This signature is in Siddhamatrika script. Take the help of your teacher to decipher the other letters.

Kanchipuram lived a storywriter named Dandin.

Though himself a worshipper of Shiva, Harsha was a patron of Buddhism. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang was his friend. He also gave many gifts to Buddhist viharas.

You must be remembering that Jainism too had emerged with Buddhism. By 600 AD Jainism had spread all over India and many people followed it. King Pulakesin and Mahendravarman were both followers of the Jaina faith.

However, some new sects were also coming up in this period, such as, Vaishnavism (worship of Vishnu) and Shaivism (worship of Shiva). King Mahendravarman foresook Jainism under the influence of a Shaivite saint named Appar and adopted Shaivism. He and his son Nrsimhavarman had beautiful temples carved out of large granite boulders.

Pala, Pratihara and Rashtrakuta Dynasties (750 to 1000 AD)

Between 750 and 1000 AD three large kingdoms emerged - the kingdom of the Pala dynasty in Bengal, of the Pratihara dynasty in north India and of the Rashtrakuta dynasty in Maharashtra. All these were powerful kingdoms. They kept fighting with each other for supremacy. However, none of the three could defeat the other two and become the supreme ruler. The struggle among these kingdoms continued for about 250 years and in this process they gradually lost their vitality and power.

1000 to 1200 AD

In the far south a powerful kingdom came up under the Chola dynasty. The important rulers of this dynasty were Rajaraja Chola (985 to 1014 AD), Rajendra Chola (1014 to 1044 AD) and Kullottunga Chola (1070 to 1118 AD). They not only defeated many south Indian rulers to expand their kingdom but also defeated the rulers of Srilanka, Malaysia, Indonesia and captured their lands. These kings are also famous for building beautiful temples.

Around the same time, the rulers of the Paramara dynasty established a large kingdom in Madhya Pradesh. Bhoja was their most famous king. Bhoja ruled from 1000 to 1035 AD. Apart from being a powerful ruler, Bhoja was deeply interested in science, literature and architecture. Bhoja also wrote a book on machines of that time. He built a temple for the Goddess Saraswati in his capital, Dhara, where scholars used to assemble and debate over various issues. This building is known today as Bhojashala.

Around this time Mahmud of Ghazni became the ruler of Afghanistan. He was a very powerful king. From 977 to 1010 AD he attacked the kingdoms of north India several times and looted their wealth. In the kingdom of Mahmud Ghaznavi, lived a famous scholar named Al Biruni. He wanted to study mathematics, astronomy and various religious systems of India. He had heard that during the reign of the Gupta's, India produced some great

Fig. 3 A battle scene on terracotta (baked clay) tablet



scholars of mathematics and astronomy. So he came to India to study these works. He learnt Sanskrit and travelled to many places to study books on these topics. Having returned to his country, he wrote a book in 1030 AD, giving

details about the religion, customs, science, mathematics, astronomy, and people of India. The book is called *Al Hind* and is in Arabic language. We learn a lot about India of those times from this book.

LEARN A NEW WORD

Contemporary: This means 'of the same time' - as king Harsha and the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang were of the same time. We can say that Harsha and Hiuen Tsang were 'contemporaries'. Are you a contemporary of Harsha?

Find out from the list given below the contemporaries of these dynasties:

Contemporaries of Chalukya dynasty-

Contemporaries of Pala dynasty-

Contemporaries of Parmara dynasty-

List- Al Biruni, Mahendravarman, Hiuen Tsang, Rajendra Chola, Rashtrakuta dynasty, Harsha, Pratihara dynasty, Mahmud of Ghazni.

Read at leisure

WHO WROTE WHAT?

Author	Book	Language	Subject
Hiuen Tsang	<i>Si Yu Ki and Si Ru Yi</i>	Chinese	Travels in India
Banabhatta	<i>Harshacharita</i>	Sanskrit	Life of Harsha
Mahendravarman	<i>Mattavilasaprahasana</i>	Sanskrit	A satirical play
Dandin	<i>Dashakumaracharita</i>	Sanskrit	Stories
Bhoja	<i>Samaranganasutra</i>	Sanskrit	Machines etc.
Al Biruni	<i>Al Hind</i>	Arabic	Religion and Sciences of India

EXERCISE

1. Name the important kings who were fighting amongst each other between 600 to 750 AD.
2. Name the dynasties that fought wars between 750 to 1000 AD.
3. Between 600 to 1000 AD which religious sects were becoming popular?
4. Name the countries from where travellers came to India between 600 to 1200 AD. What were their names? Why did they come to India?
5. The rulers of which dynasty extended their empire outside India?
6. Where did Bhoja rule? Where was his capital? What were his interests?