

SRI HARSHA OF KANAUJ.



A monograph on the history of India
in the first half of the 7th century A.D.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
NOTE	iii
CHAPTER I.—THE POLITICAL CONDITION OF INDIA IN THE 6TH CENTURY A.	1
" II.—THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE REIGN OF HARSHA	9
" III.—HARSHA—THE KING	29
" IV.—THE SOCIAL CONDITION OF INDIA IN HARSHA'S TIME	38
" V.—HARSHA—THE POET	64
CONCLUSION	76
MATERIAL AVAILABLE FOR A STUDY OF HARSHA'S LIFE ...	78

Note.

For the chapter dealing with Harsha's literary achievements I have used some material kindly placed at my disposal by Pandit Sastry A. D. Harisarma of Cochin. I am deeply grateful to him for it.

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CONCLUSION.

FROM the foregoing sketch it should be clear that India, in the first half of the 7th century had reached a comparatively unique state of civilisation. In Europe at that time forces of anarchy and barbarism had completely destroyed the civilisation of Rome. Persia was in its last stage of degeneration in which it fell an easy prey in a few decades to the onslaught of Muslim invaders. In China, the great and glorious dynasty of the Tangs ascended the throne only in 618. The Celestial Empire was at that time very much under the influence of the creed of the Buddha. To the Chinese of the time India was the sacred land. Traversing deserts and mountain ranges her children visited India in a spirit of veneration in order to study at her universities and partake of her culture. It is undeniable that India in the 7th century was the most civilised country in the world.

The reign of Harsha may thus be said to mark the culmination of Hindu culture. From the next century the period of decline may be said to begin. In literature, in art and in education the later ages showed no development. The decadent classicism of the Maha Kavyas and Champūs of the 8th and the 9th centuries is typical of the decay of sciences and letters that followed the break-up of the last great empire of Northern India. It is Harsha's glory to have been the last in the long line of Hindu rulers beginning with Chandra Gupta Maurya in whose time India appeared to the world not

only as an ancient and mighty civilisation, but an organised and powerful State working for the progress of humanity. There is no doubt that Harsha, the ruler, the poet, and the religious enthusiast will ever have an honoured place in Indian history.

MATERIAL AVAILABLE FOR A STUDY OF HARSHA'S LIFE.

THE two primary authorities for the life and times of Harsha are the *Harsha Carita* of Bāna and the travels of Yuan Chwang. Though Bāna's *Harsha Carita* has been known to scholars for long, its historical value was not fully recognised till Yuan Chwang's travels were translated from Chinese and published. Now it is admitted on all hands that Bana's poem is a work of historical merit of great value and rare accuracy. Bāna's prose, as we have noticed elsewhere, was highly artificial and complicated and hardly suited to a historical composition. In fact, his idea was certainly not to write a biography but a *kavya* glorifying the achievements of his patron. In doing so he mentions the facts of his life. His attempt is to make Harsha appear like one of the kings whose greatness is celebrated in the Puranas. In a classic passage he wants to show that Harsha is even greater than all his predecessors. He is compared to all the gods and fulsome praise is bestowed on him.

The value of *Harsha Carita* does not depend entirely on its historical accuracy. As a picture of social and political life of an ascertained age it is of the highest importance. His own early life and training that Bāna describes is as important to us as the campaign of Harsha to recover Rajyasri. Here even his elaborate descriptions come to be of value. His detailed narra-

tion of the court as he saw it though fantastic and exaggerated to a degree shows us the nature of royal camps as they continued to be down to the very days of British occupation.

Though fantastic in many respects Bāna never allowed his imagination to carry him away from historical facts. This is best exemplified in his description of Harsha's ancestry. He makes no attempt to connect his patron with any mythical god or hero. The fabrication of ancestry is a pleasant and to some extent a harmless pastime of all biographers. But Bāna's statements in this matter have been borne out by the sober researches of history.

Unfortunately, Bāna's romance deals only with the early history of Harsha. The period of Harsha's political activity is left untouched by Bāna. But here we are supplied with the full and copious memoirs of the illustrious Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang. Yuan Chwang was no ordinary pilgrim. The Tripitaka Master of the great Compassion Monastery was a sage and scholar who was held in high esteem in his own country. He was descended from an illustrious family which traced its descent from the Royal line itself. Yuan showed early in his life a thirst for knowledge and an enthusiasm for Buddhist learning which made him desirous of visiting the native land of the Divine Master. But such an undertaking was no easy job. But Yuan undertook it with courage and was fortunate enough to meet with no serious accident on the way.

He stayed in India for 15 years and his travels extended all over the country. Unlike his predecessor Fa Hian, Yuan Chwang had a keen eye for observation. His book of travels entitled *Siyuki* is a classic in Buddhist countries. It throws a flood of light on the social and political conditions of India. It is true that in matters connected with Buddhist miracles Yuan was easy of belief almost to the point of credulity. But it must be remembered that he was essentially a pilgrim with a perfect and unbounded faith in the religion of the master. But this does not take away the value of his observations on the political and social state of India. He was on terms of intimacy with Harsha and his vassal kings and went all over India as a royal guru.

His narrative differs profoundly in style from the romance of Harsha. The simple matter-of-fact descriptions of the Chinese pilgrim bear strong contrast to the high-flown and ornate style of the poet. But the picture of the country which these works present is found to be in singular agreement. Bāna though he ends abruptly by about A.D. 629, and Yuan though he does not begin till about A.D. 630, corroborate and supplement each other. The value of both of these works does not lie in their being works of history. They are descriptive more of social conditions than of purely historical facts. It is as such that their value has to be estimated.

Harsha Carita has been translated into English for the Royal Asiatic Society by Cowell and Thomas. The translation is done with extraordinary skill and ingenuity

and is a model for all such work. Yuan Chwang's work is available in English through the translation of Beal "Buddhist Records of the Western World" (Trübner & Co., London, 1888). It has been rendered into English also by Thomas Watters (Vol. XIV and XV of the books published by the Oriental Translation Fund.) The rendering is critical and the notes are extremely valuable.

There has been so far only one published life of Harsha. M. Ettinghansen's "Harsha Vardhana: empereur et poète" (Paris, 1905) brings together all the material then available. Unfortunately, it is more imaginary than otherwise and the utilisation of the material has not been very satisfactory.

Of the other material available for the period under study much lies buried in the volumes V to VIII of *Epigraphica Indica* and the back numbers of the *Indian Antiquary*. Fleet's Gupta inscriptions—C. I. I. Vol. III—is of course the most important primary source of our archaeological evidence. It is the groundwork of all study on Indian history during our period. Dr. Indraji's inscriptions from Nepal is invaluable for matters connected with that kingdom and Stein's translation of *Rajatarangini* has been found very useful in many important matters. I-Tsing's *Record of the Buddhist Religion in India* translated by Takakusu (Oxford, 1896) is of value in studying the religious problems of the time.

Of the secondary authorities Vincent Smith's "Early History of India" is easily the most important. It describes Harsha's career in detail and utilises with great skill all the material available. For the history of the Deccan and Southern India I have depended mostly on Sir Ramakrishna Bhandarkar's classical "Peep into the Early History of the Deccan" first published in the *Bombay Gazetteer*. Prof. Jeaveau Dubreuil's "Ancient History of the Daccan" is a well-documented, scholarly work dealing with a period that is insufficiently known. The same author's work on the Pallavas has also been found very useful. Other books are acknowledged in the footnotes.

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