

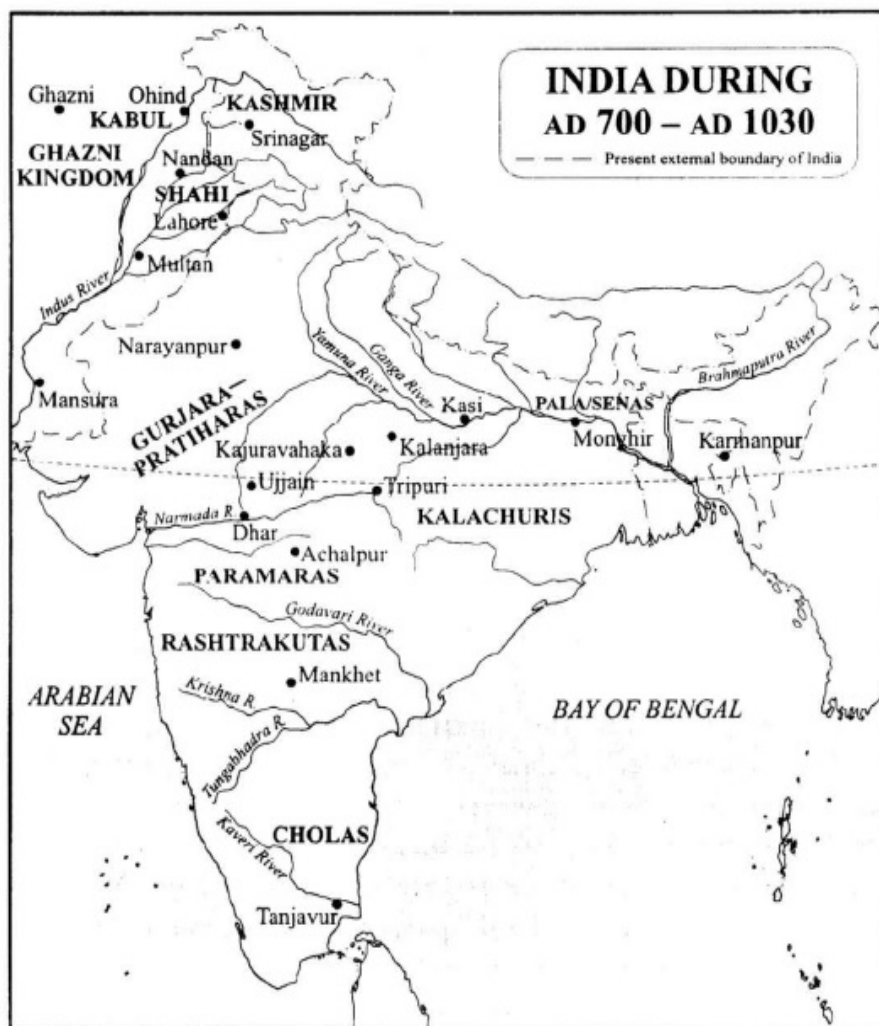
Topic

POLITICAL HISTORY OF GURJARA-PRATIHARA DYNASTY

By

Dr. Malyaban Chattopadhyay

Assistant Professor, Department of History , Asansol Girls' College.



E-LEARNING MATERIAL DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

For the students of Department of History, Asansol Girls' College by Dr.Malyaban Chattopadhyay

The Pratiharas ruled over Kanauj for a longtime are also called **GurjaraPratiharas**. Most scholars consider that they originated from the Gurjaras who were pastoralists and fighters, like the Jats. The Pratiharas established a series of principalities in central and eastern Rajasthan.

Epigraphic helps us to trace the origin of the Pratiharas . Pratiharas were descendants of Lakshmana of the solar race of the great epic, the Ramayana. Some scholars opine that they were a branch of the Gurjara race. They are mentioned in the Aihole inscription of Pulakesin II, the records of Hieun Tsang and the Hashacharita of Bana. It is known from the Rashtrakuta record that the Pratiharas belonged to the Gurjara stock. It is also held by some scholars that the Gurjaras were central Asiatic nomads who accompanied the Hunas into India. Some others are of the opinion that the Gurjaras were of indigenous origin. Another opinion is that the Pratiharas were a tribe of the land called Gurjaradesa. The expression Gurjara-Pratihara family of the Gurjara country was possessed by the Pratiharas since the time of Vatsaraja. The Gurjaras came into prominence about the second half of the 6th century C.E. They took advantage of the downfall of the Gupta Empire to establish their political authority. The Gurjara Pratihara dynasty was founded by Nagabhatta I in the region of Malwa in the eighth century C.E. He belonged to a Rajput clan.

Pratihara dynasty gained importance during the reign of Nagabhatta I, who ruled between 730-756 C.E. He was successful against the Arabs. The Pratiharas who first had their capital at **Bhinmal** gained prominence under **Nagabhatta I** who offered stout resistance to the Arab rulers of Sind who were trying to encroach on Rajasthan, Gujarat, the Punjab, etc. The Arabs made a big thrust towards Gujarat but were decisively defeated by the Chalukyan ruler of Gujarat in 738. The efforts of the early Pratihara rulers to extend their control over the upper Ganga valley and Malwa were defeated by the Rashtrakuta rulers Dhruva and Gopal III. He established an empire extending from Gujarat to Gwalior and defied the Arab invasions towards further east of Sindh. He fought against Dantidurga the Rashtrakuta ruler as well and was defeated. Conversely the success of Dantidurga was short-term and Nagabhatta left for his successors a far-reaching empire which included Gujarat, Malwa and parts of Rajputana. Nagabhatta I was succeeded by his brother's sons, Kakkuka and Devaraja.

Devaraja was succeeded by his son Vatsaraja who proved to be an influential ruler. He ruled from C.E 775 to 805. Vatsaraja extended his rule over to a large part of North India and made Kannauj in western Uttara Pradesh his capital. Vatsaraja's policy of expansion brought him in conflict with Dharmapala, the Pala King of Bengal and Bihar. He succeeded in defeating Dharmapala in the Doab region and vanquished Northern India including the Ganga Yamuna valley. Dhurva defeated him later on and captured Kannauj.

Satish Chandra mentioned that,

E-LEARNING MATERIAL DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

For the students of Department of History, Asansol Girls' College by Dr.Malyaban Chattopadhyay

‘... Soon, the Rashtrakuta king Dhruva from south India jumped into the fight. And thus began what is known as Tripartite Struggle’ i.e struggle among three powers. It continued for about the next hundred and fifty years under various succeeding kings with ups and downs. The Gurjara-Pratiharas, however, could continue to maintain their hold over Kannauj till the last.’

(Satish Chandra , History of Medieval India)

Vatsraja was succeeded by Nagabhata II. Nagabhata II who succeeded Vatsaraja revived the lost prestige of the empire by conquering Sindh, Andhra, Vidarbha. After the defeat of Vatsaraja by Dhruva the Pratihara empire was limited only to Rajputana. Nagabhata II revived the policy of conquest and extension of the empire. He defeated the rulers of Andhra, Saindhava, Vidarbha and Kalinga. He subdued Matsayas in the North, Vatsas in the East and Turuskka (Muslims) in the West. Dharmapala had defeated Indrayudh and made Chakrayudh, his brother, the ruler of Kannauj. Nagabhata attacked Kannauj and after defeating Chakrayudha occupied it. He also succeeded in defeating Dharmapala and entered into his territories as far as Munger in Bihar. But he could not enjoy his success for long. Nagabhata II was initially defeated by the Rashtrakuta ruler Govinda III, but later recovered Malwa from the Rashtrakutas. He rebuilt the great Shiva temple at Somnath in Gujarat, which had been demolished in an Arab raid from Sindh. Kannauj became the center of the Gurjar Pratihara state, which covered much of northern India during the peak of their power. Rambhadra, the son and successor of Nagabhata II proved incapable and lost some of his territories, probably, to Pala ruler, Devapal.

He was succeeded by his son Mihirbhoj who proved to be an ambitious ruler. Mihirabhoja started to expand the empire from 836 C.E. A magnificent chapter of the history of the Pratiharas begins with the accession of Mihirabhoja. He conquered a vast area.

Varaha, Daulatpur and Kahala inscriptions specify that **he had brought Rajputana and several other provinces under his control.** It can also be stated that king Kakkata of Mandsoor branch of the Pratiharas who was the samanta of Nagabhata again became the ruler of this region. Kakkata had fought against the Gaudas in Mudoggiri. Bahuka was his son who had killed Nandabala and Mayra and had defeated the kings of nine Mandals. Bahuka had also become independent but Mihirabhoja again brought him under his control. Pratapgarh inscription mentions the following words. It also confirms the control of Mihirbhoja over the southern portion of Rajputana. Chatus inscription of Jaipur also let the reader know that Mihirbhoja had compelled Harsha Gupta, who had defeated the gauda King, to accept his sovereignty. Harsha Guhila had presented many horses to Mihirabhoja.

'Rajatarangini' of Kalahana and Pahewa inscription indicate that Karnal region of the eastern Punjab was under the control of Mihirabhoja. However, it is stated that when Mihirabhoja was in the wars of eastern India, king Sankarvarman of Kashmir had brought this

E-LEARNING MATERIAL DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

region under his control. But even after that some portion of the Karnal region remained under the control of Mihirabhoja.

During the reign of Mihirabhoja, Amoghavarsa and Krishna II were the Rashtrakuta kings who were ruling over Kannauj. These were weak rulers and hence Mihirabhoja captured Kannauj and extended his empire up to river Narmada. In the course of time, however, Dhruva II, the Gujarat samanta of Amoghvarsa defeated Mihirabhoja in the battle and had driven him away. The war between Rashtrakutas and Bhoja continued for several years and both tried to bring the province of Avanti under their control. Even the last years of the reign of Mihirabhoja passed in these wars.

King Devapala of the Pala dynasty was a brave and powerful king during the reign of Mihirbhoja. His inscriptions refer that he realized tributes and taxes from the Kings of the territories from Himalaya to Vindiyachal and from the eastern frontier to the western frontier of northern India. Though these descriptions seem to be an exaggeration, yet the power of Devapala was so strong that it appears that both Bhoja and Palas must have shared victories as well as defeats in their wars with each other. The historian expresses different views with regard to the final victory. But according to Gwalior prasasti, in the end, Bhoja has defeated the son of Devapala.

Mihirabhoja had also conquered many other provinces. He had attacked Karnal, western and southern Saurashtra etc. The Arab travelling Suleman has praised his big army and his efficient administration. Mihirabhoja was the most powerful ruler of the Pratihara dynasty. His empire extended from the Terai of Himalay to Bundelkhanda and Kausambhi, to the frontier of Pala kingdom in the east, and Saurashtra in the west. A large portion of Rajasthan was also under his control. Some of the coins of Mihirabhoja that are found can be mentioned as alloyed silver which indicates that on account of constant wars his economic condition had become bad. He was the worshipper of Vishnu and Shiva.

It can be said that Mihirbhoj made Kannauj his capital and succeeded in consolidating Pratihara power and influence in Malwa, Rajputana and Madhyadesh. He had to face continuously defeats in the hands of Devapal, King Dhruva and King Kokkalla. These consecutive trounce resulted in weakening his grasp over Rajputana and even the feudatory Pratihara ruler of Jodhpur became independent. The death of Devapal, ruler of Bengal and, thereafter, weakness of his successors gave Mihirbhoj an opportunity to restore his strength towards the east and south due to the policies undertaken by Rashtrakuta ruler. He conquered part of Western Kingdom by defeating the Pala king Narayanapala. Yet again he took offensive against the Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna II and defeated him on the banks of the Narmada. Subsequently he occupied Malwa and Kathiawar. He had an extensive empire which included Kathiawar, territories up to the Punjab in the North-West, Malwa and Madhyadesh. He had

consolidated his power in Rajputana and the Kalachuris of Bihar and Chandelas of Bundelkhand had accepted his sovereignty. He made conquests in Punjab, Oudh and other Northern territories. Mihirbhoja was not only a great conqueror but also a great lover of art and literature. He was a great patron of men and letters. Poet Rajasekhara adorned his court. Consequently his reign was regarded as the glorious period of Pratihara ascendancy.

Mahendrapala succeeded to the throne of his father, Mihirbhoja. He succeeded in maintaining the empire of his father and also extended it further by annexing Magadha and parts of Northern Bengal. He lost some parts to the Kings of Kashmir. It is believed that his empire extended from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas and from the Eastern to the Western ocean. After death of Mahendrapala, a war of succession took place which substantially weakened the power of the dynasty. Mahendrapala was succeeded by his son Bhoja II but his cousin, Mahipala, shortly dethroned him and became the ruler of Kannauj. During his period, the Rashtrakutas King, Indra III defeated Mahipala of Kannauj. After Indra III retiring to the south, Mahipala again consolidated his position. In the period in-between the Pala rulers captured some eastern parts of his empire and occupied the forts of Kalinjar and Chitrakuta. His period marked the beginning of the decline of the power of Pratiharas. Mahipala was succeeded by his son Mahendrapala II. He ruled only for a year. Afterwards, we find no less than four successors during a period of fifteen years. Devapala, Vinayakapala II, Mahipala II and Vijayapala ruled in succession over the throne of Kannauj but none of them proved to be a capable ruler. That resulted the decline of the dynasty. Several feudatories of the empire took advantage of the temporary weakness of the Gurjar Pratiharas during war of succession and they declare their independence, notably the Paramaras of Malwa, the Chandelas of Bundelkhand, and the Kalachuris of Mahakoshal.

AL- MASUDI – A FOREIGNER’S VOICE

Al- Masudi, a native of Baghdad, who visited Gujarat in 915–16, testifies to the great power and prestige of the Pratihara rulers and the vastness of their empire. He calls the Gurjara-Pratihara kingdom al-Juzr (a corrupt form of Gurjara), and the king Baura, probably a mispronunciation of Adivaraha the title used by Bhoja, although Bhoja had died by that time. Al-Masudi says that the empire of Juzr had 1,80,000 villages, cities and rural areas and was about 2000 km in length and 2000 km in breadth. The king’s army had four divisions, each consisting of 7,00,000 to 9,00,000 men: ‘with the army of the north he fights against the ruler of Multan and other Muslims who align themselves with him.’

(mentioned by Satish Chandra in his book Medieval India)

PATRONAGE

E-LEARNING MATERIAL DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

For the students of Department of History, Asansol Girls’ College by Dr.Malyaban Chattopadhyay

Here mention may be made of Rajashekhara. He was the court poet of the Gurjara Pratiharas. He was an eminent Sanskrit poet, dramatist and critic.

Rajashekhara wrote the *Kavyamimamsa* between 880 and 920 CE. The work is essentially a practical guide for poets that explains the elements and composition of a good poem.^[3] He is most noted for the *Karpuramanjari*, a play written in Sauraseni Prakrit. Rajashekhara wrote the play to please his wife, Avantisundari, a woman of taste and accomplishment. Rajashekhara is perhaps the only ancient Indian poet to acknowledge a woman for her contributions to his literary career.

The Gurjara-Pratihara rulers were great patrons of arts, architecture and literature. Mihir Bhoj, was the most outstanding ruler of the dynasty. Notable sculptures of this period include Viswaroopa form of Vishnu and Marriage of Siva and Parvati from Kannauj. Beautifully carved panels are also seen on the walls of temples standing at Osian, Abhaneri and Kotah. The extraordinary Teli-ka-Mandir in Gwalior fort is the oldest surviving large-scale Pratihara work. Dedicated to a Shakti cult, the Teli-ka-Mandir at Gwalior consists of an elevated rectangular mulaprasada and a double oblong shikhara and a closed portico.

It is important to note that this age was the age of the progress of the **Brahminical religion.** Vaishnava, Shaiva, Sakta and Surya were the important sects of Brahmanism where the Brahmin enjoyed the first class. This age was the age of the progress of the Brahminical religion. Different sects of Brahmanism further progressed during this period. Vaishnava, Shaiva, Sakta and Surya were the prominent sects of Brahmanism, which were prevalent during this period. The people of these sects considered the construction of temples and statues a sacred duty. The kings and other rich persons gave donations to the temples for their expenses. The followers of Shaiva religion worshipped Siva with different names such as Indra, Sankar, Pashupati, Yoga swami, Shambhu etc. Kings such as Vatsaraja, Mahendrapala and Trilochanapala were the worshippers of Siva.

IMPORTANCE OF THE EMPIRE

Mentioning the importance of the Gurjara-Pratihara Empire, Dr. R.C. Majumdar has observed, "The Gurjara Pratihara Empire which continued in full glory for nearly a century, was the last great empire in Northern India before the Muslim conquest. This honour is accorded to the empire of Harsha by many historians of repute, but without any real justification, for the Pratihara Empire was probably larger, certainly not less in extent, rivalled the Gupta Empire and brought political unity and its attendant blessings upon a large part of Northern India. But its chief credit lies in its successful resistance to the foreign invasions from the west, from the days of Junaid. This was frankly recognised by the Arab writers themselves."

(R.C. Majumdar, Ancient India)

IMPORTANT FACTS ON GURJARA PRATIHARA

E-LEARNING MATERIAL DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

For the students of Department of History, Asansol Girls' College by Dr.Malyaban Chattopadhyay

- The Gurjara Pratihara, often simply called Pratihara Empire, was an imperial Indian dynasty that ruled much of Northern India from the 6th to the 11th centuries. Kannauj was the capital of imperial Gurjara Pratiharas. The Gurjara Pratihara rulers in the tenth century was entitled as Maharajadhiraja of Aryavarta. The word "Pratihara" means protector or "who takes over the enemy or opponent"
- Harichandra is said to have laid the foundation of this dynasty in the 6th century C.E. He created a small kingdom at Bhinmal near about 550 C.E. after the fall of Gupta Empire. Nagabhata I extended his control east and south from Mandor, conquering Malwa as far as Gwalior and the port of Bharuch in Gujarat. He established his capital at Avanti in Malwa, and checked the expansion of the Arabs, who had established themselves in Sind. Nagabhata I was followed by two weak successors, who were in turn succeeded by Vatsraja (775-805 C.E). Vatsraja ambitions for capturing Kannauj, brought the Pratiharas into conflict with the Pala dynasty of Bengal and the Rashtrakutas of the northern Deccan, with whom they would contest for primacy in northern India for the next two centuries.
- Vatsraja successfully challenged and defeated the Pala ruler Dharmapala and Danti durga the Rashtrakuta king for control of Kannauj. Vatsraja was succeeded by Nagabhata II. Nagabhata II was initially defeated by the Rashtrakuta ruler Govinda III, but later recovered Malwa from the Rashtrakutas, conquered Kannauj and the Indo-Gangetic Plain as far as Bihar from the Palas, and again checked the Muslims in the west.
- Bhoja I or Mihir Bhoja expanded the Gurjar dominions west to the border of Sind, east to Bengal, and south to the Narmada. He was the greatest among the Pratihara rulers and was also a great patron of art and letter.
- After Bhoja, many rulers such as Mahenderpal-I, Bhoja II, Mahipala-I, Rajapala, Trilochanpala ruled as kings. Jasapala, was the last Gurjar ruler of Kanauj, died in 1036.
- The Pratihara Empire was probably larger, certainly not less in extent, rivalled the Gupta Empire and brought political unity and its attendant blessings upon a large part of Northern India. The Pratihara successfully resisted the foreign invasions from the west, for a long time.

SUGGESTED BOOKS

Kulke, H., (ed.), The State in India 1000-1700, New Delhi, 1995.

Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. (2016)

Chandra, Satish, History of Medieval India, Orient BlackSwan; First edition (2007)

. Sastri K.A.Nilakanta, A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar, Oxford, 1997

E-LEARNING MATERIAL DURING LOCKDOWN PERIOD

For the students of Department of History, Asansol Girls' College by Dr.Malyaban Chattopadhyay