



# Post Gupta

Complete Course on Ancient and Medieval India (NET/JRF DEC 2022)

Prabhakaravarchan → Param Bhattaraka MDH

## The Vardhanas

Harsha chavita → Shashanka (Gurda)  
↓  
Devagupta (Malwa)  
- 0 -

- In North India as the Gupta rule began to decline from the turn of the sixth century – to disappear eventually by the middle of it – a number of small kingdoms arose. Two of these were ruled by the (**Maukharis of Kanauj**) and the **Pushyabhutis of Sthaneshvara** (modern Thanesar in Haryana) respectively.
- The *Pushyabhuti kings* had the suffix **vardhana** at the end of their name, such as **Prabhakaravardhana, Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana**. That is why they are also known as **Vardhanas**.  
606 CE
- Princess **Rajyashri** from the Vardhana family was married to the Maukhari king. When he died, her brother, King **Harshavardhana of Thanesar** (Harsha in short), became the effective ruler of both the kingdoms, probably by virtue of his widow sister's claim to the throne; she, according to the Chinese sources, 'regularly took a seat of honour beside her brother Harsha, and shared in state deliberations'.
- Through a number of wars lasting over a number of years, Harsha formed a very large, but extremely short-lived, empire in North India; it fell to pieces immediately after his death in **647 CE**.

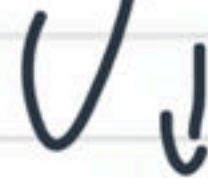
# Maukharis

Rulers :-

Hari-Varman



Aditya Varman



Ishvaravarmān



Ishanavarmān

Shervavarmān



Avantivarman



Grahavarman



x

① Asirgarh Seal Inscription of Sharvavarman

② Haraha Inscription of Isanavarman

---

Kannauj

Chess

H. T. Bakker

# Harshavardhana (CE 606–47)

## (SOURCES FOR HARSHA'S PERIOD)

- Bana was the *court poet of Harsha* and the author of *Harshacharita*, *Kadambari* and *Parvatiparinay*. *Hiuen Tsang* was the Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the seventh century CE.
- Both deal with *Harsha's wars* but in a vague and general manner and sometimes make us even more confused. Above all, they sometimes give an *exaggerated account of Harsha*.
- *Harsha's dramas* such as *Ratnavali*, *Nagananda* and *Priyadarsika* give us information about the political conditions in those days.
- *Nausasi Copper Plate* gives us information about Harsha's successful expedition against Valabhi.

Banskheda Insc.

# Origin and Early Life of Harsha

- **Harsha** was the second son of **Prabhakaravardhana**, the first important king of *Pushyabhuti dynasty with its capital at Thanesvar*. Pushyabhutis were the feudatories of the Guptas, but had assumed independence after the Huna invasions.
- **Harsha** was favoured to his elder brother, **Rajyavardhana**, by both his father and the nobles. But **Harsha** expressed his reluctance to supersede his brother. **Rajyavardhana** who became the ruler had to face problems from the day of his succession to the throne.
- **Grahavarman**, the Maukhari ruler of Kanauj and husband of **Rajyasri** (daughter of **Prabhakara**), was murdered by **Devagupta** (the ruler of Malwa) who in alliance with **Sasanka** (ruler of Gauda or Bengal) now occupied **Kanauj** and imprisoned **Rajyasri**.

- *Rajyavardhana*, therefore, undertook a campaign against *Devagupta* and killed him but he was deceived and killed by *Sasanka*. In the meanwhile *Rajyasri* escaped into the forests of *central India*.
- Harsha now succeeded his brother at *Thanesvar*. His first act as the ruler was naturally to rescue his sister and avenge the deaths of his brother and brother-in-law, and was quite successful in both. He drove out ***Sasanka*** of ***Gauda*** from ***Kanauj***. Between 606 and 612 he brought most of northern India (Punjab, Kanauj, parts of Gauda, Orissa and Mithila) under his control, and assumed the title of '**Siladitya**'.

Lord of 5 Indias

## Harsha's Military Conquests

- **Occupation of Kanauj** : In his first expedition, Harsha drove away Sasanka from Kanauj who had occupied it after murdering Harsha's brother. After this, he not only unified Kanauj with Thanesvar but also made it his new capital, which made him the most powerful king of north India.
- **Conquest of Valabhi** : His early relations with the rulers of **Valabhi** were cordial because he was engaged in consolidating his position against the Gupta-Gauda axis in the east. But soon Malwa became the bone of contention between the two and so he had to turn his attention to western India. **Nausasi Copper Plate** Inscription gives information about his expedition against Valabhi. It resulted in the defeat of the Valabhi ruler, Dhruvasena II and his acceptance of the position of a feudatory vassal.

Sakalottorpatho Malh


King of Magadha.

Bhasikaravarman  
↓  
Kamrup;

Dr. K. M. Panikar →

Dr. B. C. Majumdar →

# His Other Conquests

- According to some scholars, **Harsha** defeated the **Pallava ruler, *Mahendravarman I***, and also some other southern rulers. But in the absence of any direct evidence, we cannot say anything conclusively. 
- But Orissa or the kingdom of Kalinga seems to have been subjugated by Harsha. Thus, Harsha established his hold practically over the whole of north India.
- Rajasthan, Punjab, UP, Bihar and Orissa were under his direct control but his sphere of influence spread over a much wider area since peripheral states such as *Kashmir, Sind, Valabhi and Kamarupa* acknowledged his sovereignty.

Pulakesin II

↳ Parameshwara

↳ Aihole

↳

Sind

cr

idle

reign

epoch

withhold

praise

# Harsha's Government

Harsha governed his empire on the same lines as the Guptas did, except that his administration had become more feudal and decentralised. It is stated that Harsha had cavalry numbering over one lakh and 60,000 elephants. This seems to be astonishing because the Mauryas, who ruled over practically the whole of the country, maintained only 30,000 cavalry and 9,000 elephants.

- Harsha could possess a larger cavalry only if he could mobilise the support of all his feudatories at the time of war. Evidently every feudatory contributed his quota of foot soldiers and horses, and thus made the army vast in numbers.
- Land grants continued to be made to priests for special services rendered to the state. In addition Harsha is credited with the grant of land to the officers by charters. These grants allowed more concessions to priests and officers than those by the earlier grants. Thus, the feudal practice of rewarding and paying officers with grants of land on a large scale seems to have begun under Harsha.

# Economy under Harsha

- The nature of the economy under Harsha became increasingly more *feudal and self-sufficient!* The decline of trade and commerce which started during the Gupta period itself went on unabated under Harsha. This is evident from the decline of trade centres, paucity of coins and the almost complete disappearance of guilds of traders and merchants. The decline of trade and commerce obviously affected the handicrafts and other industries for want of demand.
- *This period was marked by the the rise of a self-sufficient village economy, in which all the needs of the village were met from within, and also marked by an increasing dependence on agriculture.*

Ferdal.



Land

Ferdalism

# Society under Harsha

- This period witnessed the ascendancy of varnasrama-dharma and it became an indispensable cornerstone of the Brahmanical social structure. Hiuen Tsang writes about the existence of four varnas or orders in India. Bana characterised Harsha as one who carried out all the rules for the varnas and asramas.
- The first varna—Brahmins—continued to enjoy a very high and respectable position in the society and the glorification of gifts to them by the other three varnas became a distinct feature of Brahmanism.
- Both *Bana* and *Hiuen Tsang* talk about the existence of many subcastes such as the class of vernacular poets, class of bards, class of betel-bearers, and so on. However, all those groups and subcastes were not new to this period and at least some of them existed in the earlier periods.

- The rise of those subcastes was due to the social violation in the code of marriages and general ethics, and also different occupations. **Hiuen Tsang** takes note of many outcastes and untouchables such as butchers, fishermen, executioners and scavengers, who were segregated and were not allowed to mix with the people of the higher varnas and had habitations marked by a distinguishing sign.
- The position of women seems to have suffered a further decline during this period. The institution of **svayamvara** (self-choice in choosing the partner) declined and there is no instance of its practice in the contemporary literature. **Remarriage of widows** was not permitted particularly among the higher varnas. The evil system of **dowry**, according to Bana, was quite common. There are also a few examples of the practice of committing **sati**.

Mahatma Mohan  
Parishad

# Religion under Harsha

(4) (6)

- Brahmanism, which reasserted itself under the Guptas, got further strengthened during this period. Its gradual ascendancy brought about the decline of Buddhism despite the patronage given to it by Harsha which is evident from the account of *Hiuen Tsang*.
- But Jainism did not undergo any major changes and it made neither progress nor any decay.
- *Saivism* became the main theistic system of this period. But Vaishnavism, which was very popular during the age of the Guptas, was gradually declining during this period as is evident from the rare references to it.
- The Vedic ceremonies and rituals once again came to be regarded as inseparable and integral constituents of Brahmanism, and the people practised them on a large scale.

Politics

# Feudalism Debate

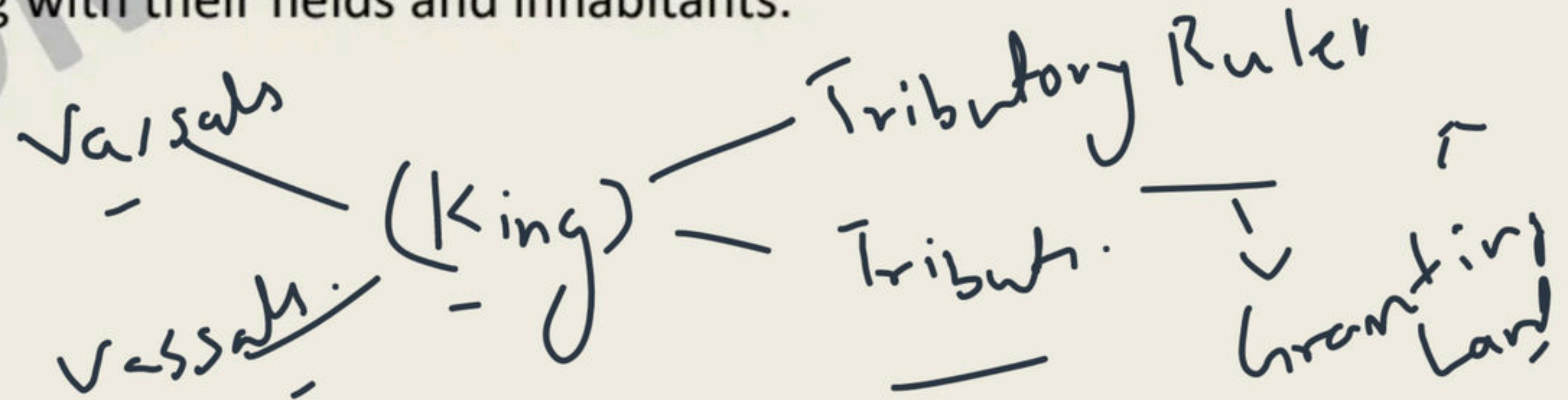
Feudal Period

# Political processes in Early Medieval India

- The early medieval period coincides with the phase when the Gupta Empire had declined and the Delhi Sultanate was yet to be established. It is the period of transition from the ancient period to the medieval period and thus is termed early medieval.
- Earlier, scholars called it the **dark period** of Indian history as there was no centralized pan-Indian political structure. However, later researches show that significant changes were taking place during this period also. There were a number of states which emerged during this period like that of the **Pratiharas, the Palas, the Cholas, the Chahamanas, Chandelas, Rashtrakutas and others** in different parts of the Indian sub-continent. Some states survived for long with extensive areas under their possession while the others had control over smaller areas.

- Early medieval India was marked by a ***lack of political unity***, and hence the reason for the emergence of so many kingdoms in the country. It has been argued that this was the reason for the Arab and Turkish rulers to easily defeat the Indian powers, as the conditions were conducive for their invasion.
- Recent studies have focused on the political processes which in turn led to such a fragmented history for this period. Infact, the study of the political processes also helps us to understand the political history of the period.
- Scholars like ***D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, B.N.S. Yadava*** and others following their contention found *feudalism as the prominent socio-economic system that moulded developments in India during the period between the decline of Harshavardhana's empire and the emergence the Delhi Sultanate.*

- **D.D. Kosambi** was the first to suggest about the two-stage development of the political formation namely, 'feudalism from above' and 'feudalism from below'. However, **R.S. Sharma** differed from Kosambi's two-tier approach to view the process and provided a different concept to explain Indian Feudalism. His notion was supported by scholars like **B.N.S. Yadava, D.N. Jha, R.N. Nandi** and others which characterized the political structures emerged during this period as feudal polities.
- According to **R.S. Sharma**, the roots of the feudal elements in early medieval northern India can be traced to the practice of land grants made to Brahmanas, temples and monasteries. Although the epigraphic evidence for the same is datable to an earlier period, it increases with Gupta period with references to grant of villages along with their fields and inhabitants.



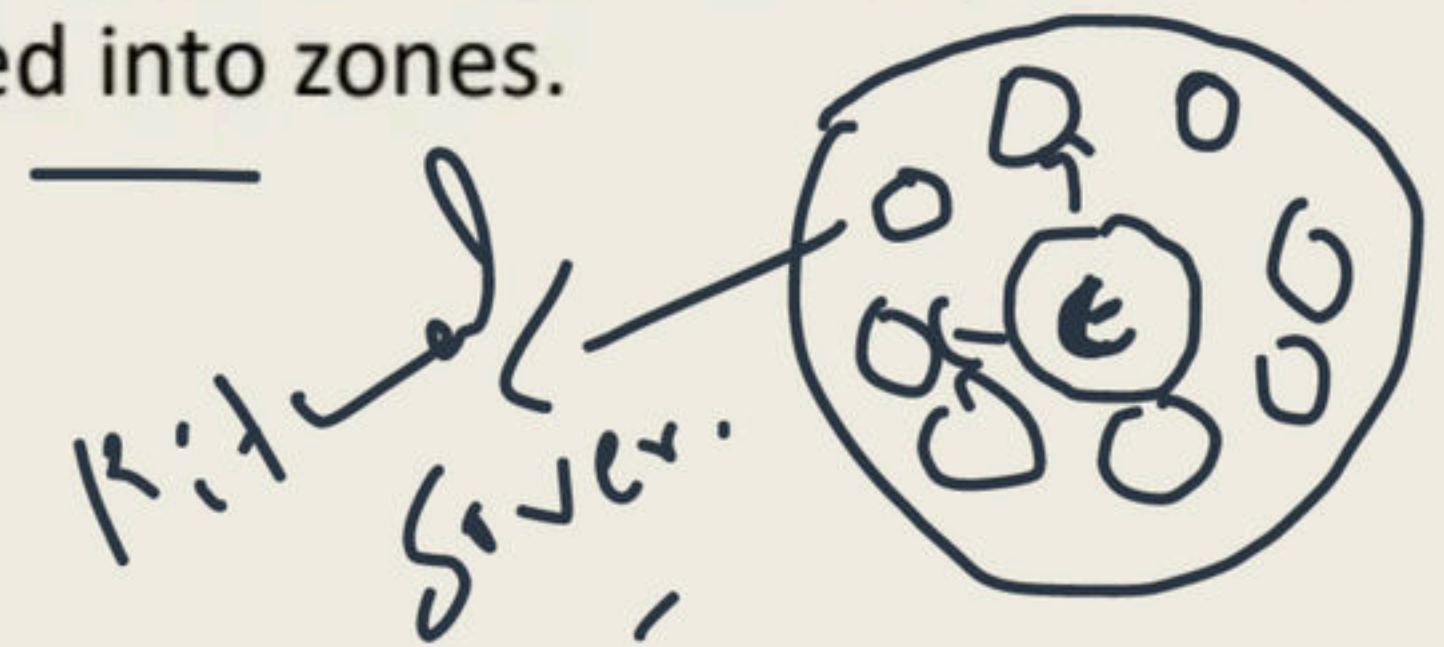
- It is important to note that now the fiscal, administrative and judicial rights over the donated land were also given to the religious beneficiaries. These grants were not confined to the priests but later extended to the warrior class, and the officials such as governors, judges, military commanders and other related state personnel were also assigned land in lieu of salaries in cash.

- *According to the scholars who support the aforementioned opinion regarding the feudal formation, religious and secular grants became increasingly popular with the emergence of local and self-sufficient economies marked by lack of commercial intercourse, decline of urban life and paucity of coins.*
- *The economic essence of Indian feudalism as argued by **R.S. Sharma** lay in the rise of the landed intermediaries which in turn led to the enserfment of the peasantry as there were restrictions on their mobility and freedom.*
- *The period witnessed the growth of self-sufficient economy due to the decline of urban centres, commodity production and foreign trade. Coins became scarce and payments were now made through land assignments. **R.S. Sharma** finds that these traits were present in the regional polities of the early medieval period including the Pala and the Pratihara polities in northern India and in the Rashtrakuta polity in the Deccan.*

- Thus, there was *decentralisation of administration and revenue collection that led to the emergence of various intermediaries between the ruler and the ruled. This was clearly in sharp contrast to the Mauryan state which was described as a highly centralized state by Prof. Sharma himself.*

- Thus, it was the practice of land grants which led to the decentralization of the authority and subsequent feudalization of these polities.
- Epigraphic and literary sources indicate that rulers assigned villages as grants to feudal chiefs in northern India, particularly in modern day Uttar Pradesh, central India, Rajasthan, Malwa and Gujarat. Grants of land were also made to individuals for distinguished acts of valour.
- Chieftains were frequently reduced to submission after defeat in war and forced into accepting the overlordship of the conqueror by paying tributes. Such chiefs came to be known as the **samantas**, **ranakas** and **rauts** who apart from paying annual tributes and rendering mandatory military services also had to pay homage in person to the victorious overlord.
- There were various categories of such samantas, ranakas, etc. and as long as the chief remained a feudatory of the ruler he called himself the **samanta**. But he discarded such titles and adopted independent sovereign titles such as **maharaja and maharajadhiraja** once he became independent from the overlord.

- **D.N. Jha** has tried to locate the feudal formation in the internal social dynamics of the time. He argues that there was *a prelude to the feudalization* of the Indian society. The Kali Age is characterized by **varnasankara** i.e. intermixing of varnas or social orders which implies that the vaishyas and shudras including the peasants, artisans, and labourers either refused to perform production functions or the vaishya peasants declined to pay taxes and refused to supply the necessary labour for economic production.
- ***The concept of 'feudal polity' was widely discussed and examined by other scholars who observed certain limitations in this formulation. This led them to present alternative models to view the political formations in different regions.***
- In 1980 **Burton Stein** applied the '**segmentary state model**' to explain the political formations in the Chola and Vijaynagara kingdoms. According to him the political process in southern India had a segmentary structure without any fixed boundaries, wherein the basic socio-political segment was a local territory grouped into zones.



- These zones comprised major subdivisions which were again split into macro regions. All these segments together constituted the kingdom. *The king exercised direct or actual control over the core region and ritual sovereignty over the peripheral zones.*
- Thus, a very limited area was under the actual control of the central authority whereas the remaining peripheral zones owed only customary or nominal allegiance to the head of the state. *This model, however, lacked focus on the issues such as those related to the administrative machinery in the nadus, and also the role of temples in the Chola polity. In this context, the alternative perspectives developed by the researches of **R. Champakalakshmi, James Heitzman, Noboru karashima and Y. Subbarayulu** are noteworthy.*

- Another explanation which has been offered for the political processes of early medieval period is that of the **'integrative model'** propounded by **B.D. Chattopadhyaya**. According to this, a polity integrated the graded hierarchy of samantas and that was a **'prelude to the exercise of greater control by the medieval state through its nobility and its regulated system of service assignments'**. The samantas were integrated into a political structure marked by the domination of the overlord-vassal relationships. It was this relationship which was dominant over the other levels of relation in the structure.

Ighadar. / Mangab.



- The integrative polity, like the feudal polity, views political process in parallels to contemporary economic, social and religious developments such as horizontal spread of rural agrarian settlements; horizontal spread of the dominant ideology of social order based on varna division; integration of local cults, ritual and sacred centres into a larger structure.
- According to **B.D. Chattopadhyaya**, any lineage or segment of larger ethnic group with a coherent organisation of force could successfully make a bid for political power and lay the foundation of a large state structure. He cites the example of **Gurjaratara or Gurjarabhumi** (land of Gurjars) which was the base from where emerged several lineages tracing descent from the **Gurjaras**.
- The separation of the ruling lineages from the common stock is suggested by the general name Gurjara-Pratihara used by the lineages and while the base of one such lineage in the Jodhpur area seems to have been established by displacing pre-existing groups, in the Alwar area in eastern Rajasthan there is a clear indication of such a base having developed between Gurjara cultivators and the Gurjara-Pratihara ruling lineage.

- It is this base which worked as the foundation for the Gurjara-Pratihara ruling supra-regional power rooted in the expansion of one of the lineages that extended at one stage to as far as Bengal.
- **Chattopadhyaya** further points out that the larger polities generally emerged in the '**nuclear**' regions like Ganga basin, Kaveri basin, Krishna-Godavari doab so that they were facilitated by an agrarian resource base. Further, it was not essential that the polities would originate only in nuclear areas but by mobilizing their strength they could move towards the nuclear areas and hence result in the transformation of the political structure in the region.
- The examples can be seen in the movement of the **Pratiharas** from Rajasthan to Kannauj and of the **Palas** from south-east Bengal to the middle and lower Ganga basin. Thus, according to him the phenomenon of different foci of power was not particularly south Indian but cut across all political structures of early medieval period and this '**foci of power**' is represented by the '**samanta system**', an order which assumed the characteristics of a **hierarchical formation**.

- **Hermann Kulke** has identified three stages in the emergence of the regional states.
- In his opinion, in the **first stage** a tribal chieftain would turn into a local Hindu princeling (ruler of a small area), in the **second stage** this prince would become a king surrounded by samantas and thus establish an 'early kingdom' and in the **third stage**, great rulers of 'imperial kingdoms' would emerge who controlled large realms and integrated the samantas into the internal structure of their realm. These three stages are respectively named as local/sub-regional and regional/supra-regional polities by **B.D. Chattopadhyaya**.

• Thus, **Chattopadhyaya** and **Kulke** have seen the early medieval polity not as decentralised polity of Indian feudal model where bases of power are created from above through individual or institutional agents nor have they explained it in terms of relationship of segment as explained by the segmentary state model but they have visualized these polities as integrative polities.

**Thank You !**