



## The Gurjara-Pratiharas

**For Prelims:** Gurjara-Pratihara's prominent rulers, Art and Architecture

**For Mains:** Gurjara-Pratihara's way of administration, Social Conditions, Art and Architecture

### Who are the Gurjara-Pratihara?

- The meaning of the word **Pratihara** is "**doorman**."
- The **Gurjara-Pratiharas** came to prominence in the second quarter of the **8<sup>th</sup> century**, when they offered successful resistance to the **Arabs** during the time of **Nagabhata I**.
- **Bhoja** was the **Pratihara dynasty's greatest emperor** and the **actual founder** of the empire.
- The **Pratiharas** who ruled over **Kannauj** for a longtime are also called **Gurjara- Pratiharas**.
- In the **eastern and central portions of Rajasthan**, the **Pratiharas** founded a number of principalities.
- The expansion of the **Gurjara-Pratihara Kingdom** involved constant conflicts with other contemporary powers such as the **Palas** and **Rashtrakutas**.
- They fought with the **Rashtrakutas** for **Malwa** and **Gujarat**, and subsequently for **Kanauj**, which meant control of the **upper Ganga valley**.
- **Dhruva and Gopal III** of the **Rashtrakuta Kingdom** defeated the early **Pratihara emperors'** attempts to expand their dominion over the **Malwa region and the upper Ganga basin**.
- The **Rashtrakutas** defeated the **Pratiharas** in **790** and again in **806-07**, after which they withdrew to the **Deccan** and cleared the way for the **Palas**.
- The **poet Rajashekhar**, associated with the court of the **Gurjara-Pratihara King Mahendrapala** and his son **Mahipala**.

### Who were Prominent Ruler of Pratiharas?

- **Nagabhata I (730 - 760 AD):**
  - The foundation of **Pratihara dynasty's** magnitude was positioned by **Nagabhata I**, who ruled between **730-756 C.E.**
  - His rule was **prominent** because of his successful confrontation with the **Arabs**.
  - He defeated the **Arabs** while the **caliphate** was being propagated.
  - He **established** an empire extending from **Gujarat to Gwalior** and defied the **Arab** invasions towards further **east of Sindh**.
  - He fought against **King Dantidurga** the **Rashtrakuta** ruler as well and was defeated.
  - Conversely the success of **Dantidurga** was short-term and **Nagabhata** left for his successors a far-reaching empire which included **Gujarat, Malwa** and parts of **Rajputana**.
  - **Nagabhata I** was succeeded by his brother's sons, **Kakkuka and Devaraja**.
- **Vatsaraja (780 - 800 AD):**
  - **Devaraja** was succeeded by his son **Vatsaraja** who proved to be an influential ruler.
  - He ruled from **775 to 805 AD**. He seems to have consolidated his position and made **Ujjain** as his capital.
  - He was on the verge of his imperial career in **Western India**.
  - He increased his control over a sizable portion of **north India**.

- He in trying to be ruler of Northern India annexed the territories upto **Kanauj** and **central Rajputra** by defeating **Bhandi**, the ruling dynasty probably related to the **Vardhanas**.
- **Kannauj (Western Uttar Pradesh)** became his capital.
- His ambition to capture **Kannauj** led him into conflicts with the **Pala ruler Dharmapala of Bengal** and the **Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva**.
- In the tripartite struggle, **Dharmapala (the Pala king)** was defeated by **Vatsaraja**, who was then defeated by **Dhruv (the Rashtrakuta king)**.
- 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**.
- **Vatsaraja** was succeeded by **Nagabhata II**.
- **Nagabhata II (800 - 833 AD):**
  - **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.
  - **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, Devapala.
  - He was succeeded by his son **Mihirbhoj** who proved to be an ambitious ruler.
  - **Nagabhata's** control extended over parts of **Malwa, Rajputana, and Gujarat**.
  - Later **Gurjara-Pratihara kings**, including **Nagabhata II**, moved into the **Kanauj region**.
- **Bhoja I/Mihir Bhoja (836 - 885 AD):**
  - The best known **Gurjara-Pratihara** king was **Bhoja**, grandson of **Nagabhata II**.
  - A glorious chapter of the history of the Pratiharas begins with the accession of **Mihirabhoja**.
  - **Mihirabhoja** ascended to the throne in **836 AD**.
  - He ruled the **Pratiharas** for more than **46 years** and is regarded as their most popular king.
  - He reorganized and consolidated the empire inherited from his ancestors and ushered in an era of prosperity for the **Pratiharas**.
  - **Kannauj** which was likewise known as **Mahodaya** was regarded as the capital of his empire,
  - The **Skandhavara military camp** at **Mahodaya** is mentioned in the **Barrah Copper Plate inscription**.
  - He was a great follower of **Vaishnavism** and assumed the title of **"Adivaraha"**.
  - The **Arabs of Sindh, the Chandalas, and the Kalachuris** all acknowledged his supremacy.
  - The **Pratihara** rulers reportedly had **India's strongest cavalry**, according to **Arab travelers**.
  - **Al-Masudi**, an **Arab traveler**, gave him the title **"King Baura."**
- **Mahendrapala (885 - 910 AD):**
  - He significantly contributed to the expansion of the **Pratihara Empire**, which extended across the **Narmada** and north to the **Himalayas**, east to **Bengal**, and west to the **Sindh border**.
  - The title **"Maharajadhiraja of Aryavarta"** was bestowed upon him (Great king of

northern India).

- **Rajashekhar**, a renowned **Sanskrit poet** and **critic**, graced his court.
- **Karpuramanjari** (written in **Sauraseni Prakrit**), **Kavya Mimansa**, **Balabharata**, **Bhrinjika**, **Vidhasalabhanjika**, **Prapanch Pandav**, and other works are among his works.

▪ **Mahipala I (913 - 944 AD):**

- During his rule, the **Pratiharas** began to fall apart.
- The **Rashtrakuta king, Indra III**, beat him and devastated **Kannauj**.
- **Al-Masudi** writes in his accounts that the **Pratihara kingdom** "had no access to the sea," which led to the **Rashtrakutas** gaining dominance of **Gujarat**.

▪ **Rajyapala (960 - 1018 AD):**

- **Krishna III of Rashtrakuta** defeated the Pratihara king.
- When **Mahmud Ghazni** stormed **Kannauj**, **Rajyapala** was forced to leave the battle.
- **Vindyardhar Chandela** was the man who killed him.

▪ **Yashpala (1024 - 1036 AD):**

- He served as the **Pratihara dynasty's** last ruler.
- The **Gandhavalas** took control of **Kannauj** about 1090 AD.
- **Rajashekhar's drama**, the **Viddhashalabhanjika**, was staged in the court of **Yuvaraja** in order to celebrate the victory against the **Rashtrakutas**.

## What type of administration did Pratihara have?

- In the **Gurjara-Pratihara** history, kings occupied the highest position in the state and had enormous powers, kings adopted big titles such as '**Parmeshwara**', '**Maharajadhiraja**', '**Parambaterak**'.
- The appointment of the samantas and singing on giants and charities were also the works of the kings.
- The **samantas** used to give military help to their Kings and fought for them, the advice of the high officers was taken in matters of administration.
- However, there is **no reference of mantriparishad or ministers** in the inscriptions of that period.
- There are **eight types of different officers in the administration** of the Pratiharas such as
  - **Kottapala**: Highest officer of the fort.
  - **Tantrapala**: Representative of the king in samanta states.
  - **Dandapashika**: was the highest officer of the police.
  - **Dandanayaka**: look after the military and justice department.
  - **Dutaka**: carry order and grants of the king to specified persons.
  - **Bhangika**: was the officer who wrote orders of charities and grants.
  - **Vynaharina**: was probably some legal expert and used to provide legal advice.
  - **Baladhikrat**: was the chief of army.
- The entire state was divided into many **bhuktis**.
- There were many **mandals** in each **bhukti**.
- Each **mandala** had several **cities** and many **villages** as well.
- Thus, the **Pratiharas** had organized their empire into different units for administrative convenience.
- The **samantas** were called **Maha samantahipati** or **Maha Pratihara**.
- The villages were locally administered.
- The elders of the villages were called **Mahattar** who looked after the administration of the village.
- **Gramapati** was an officer of the state who advised in **matters of village administration**.
- The administration of the city was looked after by councils which are referred to as **Goshthi**, **Panchakula**, **Sanviyaka** and **Uttar sobha** in the inscriptions of the **Pratiharas**.
- Thus, the administration of the **Pratiharas** was quite efficient.
- It was on account of the efficient administration that the **Pratiharas** were able to defend India from the attacks of the **Arabs**.

## What type of social conditions Existed under Pratihara's rule?

- **Caste system** was prevalent in India during **Gurjara-Pratihara period** and the reference of all the four castes of the **Vedic period** is found in the inscription as well.

- The inscription refers to the **Brahmans as Vipra** and several **Prakrit words** are used for **Kshatriyas**.
- The people of each caste were divided into different classes.
- **Chaturveda** and **Bhatta** groups were prominent among the **Brahmans**.
- Among the **Vaishyas** the **Kanchuka** and **Vakata** groups were prominent.
- The Arab writer **Ibda Khurdadab** has referred to **seven castes** in the time of the **Pratiharas**.
  - According to him, there existed the classes of **Savakufria, Brahman, Kataria, Sudaria, Bandalia and Labla**.
- **King** was selected from the **Savakufria class** whereas people of the **Brahman class** did not take **wine** and married their sons with the daughters of the **Kataria class**.
- The **Kataria classes** were regarded as **Kshatriyas**.
- The people of **Sudaria** were regarded as **Sudras** and usually did **farming or cattle rearing**.
- **Basuria class** was the **Vaishya class** whose duty was to serve other classes.
- The people of **Sandila class** did the work of Chandals.
- **The Lahuda class** was a low and wandering tribe.
- The above description of the Arab writer indicates that the **Vaishyas did the work of the Sudars** and the **Sudar did the work of the Vishyas**.
- It appears that the caste system was slowly and gradually breaking in a nice manner.
  - The **Brahmans** started marrying **kshatriya girls** and the **vaishyas** performed the work of the sudras as well.
- The Muslim attacks had begun during this period and many Hindus of the conquered states had been becoming the followers of Islam.
  - It also appears that the Hindu society had allowed the purification of such Hindus.
- **Smriti Ghandrayana Vrat, 'Biladuri'** and the writings of **Aluberni** and other Muslim writers also confirm this fact.
- Some references of **inter-caste marriage** have also been found.
  - The prominent **Sanskrit scholar Rajasekhar** had married a **Kshatriya girl** named **Avanti Sundari**.
- Kings and the rich classes practiced **polygamy**.
  - However, usually men had only one wife.
- It can also be known from some reference where on the death of their husbands, women had burnt themselves along with their husbands.
  - Thus, **sati pratha** was there though it was not very much prevalent.
- There was no **purdah system** among the women of the royal families.
- According to **Rajasekhar** women learnt **music, dancing and paintings**.
- Women were very much fond of ornaments and also used oils and cosmetics.
- People of rich families used to wear very thin clothes.

## How did art and architecture develop more and more during Pratihara's regime?

- 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 **Viswaroop** 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 female figure named as **Sursundari** exhibited in **Gwalior Museum** is one of the most charming sculptures of the **Gurjara-Pratihara art**.
- The most important groups of **architectural works** generally credited to the early **Pratiharas** are at **Osian** in the **heart of Gurjara**, to the **east in the great fort at Chittor** and at **Roda in the south** by the border of modern **Gujarat** which the **Pratiharas** had absorbed by the end of the **8<sup>th</sup> century**.
- They had also reached **north-central India**, where several temples around Gwalior are comparable to the later works at **Osian**.
- The extraordinary **Teli-ka-Mandir** in **Gwalior fort** is the oldest surviving large-scale **Pratihara work**.
- The early works at **Osian** have **five-bay mulaprasadas** with **porch** and **open hall** but no **vestibule or ambulatory** and several have **five-shrine complexes (pancha-yatana)**.



- In addition to **ghana-dwaras** for the principal manifestations of the deity in the central projections.
- Open halls are surrounded by **vedika** with 'seat-back' coping supporting truncated **purna-kalasha columns** and their internal pillars, square with projections, often have **purna-kalasha** for both capital and base to provide the extra height needed in the center of halls, as in the **Surya Temple** and **Hari-Hara I**.
- The shrine portal of **Hari-Hara III** is typical of non-architectonic compositions with **lotus**, pearl and **mithuna jambs** rising from **Ganga** and **Yamuna** and **dikpalas** but Surya's richly incised pilasters support a prasada.
- Porches and the balconies of **Hari-Hara III** have flat roofs and even the later halls have two or three superimposed slabs without additional superstructure.
- Early ceilings are **flat**, **later ones corbelled** and **embellished** with carving.
- **Hari-Hara III's** nine-square hall is unique in having curved side vaults.
- Most of the works at **Roda** have **five-bay mulaprasadas** without **ambulatory**, like the temples at Osian, but they generally have only a porch.
- Sometimes with platforms, they have **socles** unlike those of early **Pratihara** works elsewhere.
- For instance, one piece of architecture in Roda, has a **slab-like plinth** with a semi-**kumbha**, a recessed zone and a festooned floor slab surmounted by a minor padma, all below a heavy dado which includes **khura**, **kaiasha** and **kapota**. Walls are usually relieved only by **ghana-dwaras**.
- **Shikharas** are all of the **Latina variety**, similar in their stunted profile and bold central bands to the predominant type at **Osian**.
- **Porches** sometimes have **pitched roofs** in superimposed tiers with bold blind dormers, like those of the **Maitrakas**.
- Pillars are usually exquisite examples of the square type with **purna-kalasha capitals** and the **sanctuary portals of Roda IV and III** well represent respectively the non-architectonic and architectonic approaches - the deeply carved pilasters of the latter, conforming to the type of the attached pillars outside, bearing a particularly elegant suite of five niches assimilated to the prasada motif.
- 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**.
- There are two principal projections to the back with **ghana-dwaras** bearing tiered **kapotas** and **miniature lunettes**, like those of the **sides**, flanked by **aedicule** with various **shikhara** like superstructures.
- On a simple platform and stepped base, the unorthodox dado has a double recession with **kaiasha** and **kapota**.
- The **stepped superstructure** over the **portico** is modern but the **Kameshvara** at Auwa the **Teli-ka-Mandir contemporary** has one of the earliest surviving examples of a **Phamsana roof**, for which precedents may most plausibly be found in the Maitraka tradition.
- Thus, in these early works the various elements of the mature northern complex had appeared Latina **mulaprasadas** with varied planes **accommodating ambulatories, balconies, open halls** with **full vedika** and closed ones matching the mulaprasada, **Phamsana roofs, richly faceted supports** with varied **purna-kalasha or padma-kumbha capitals**.
- In the next phase of their development the **Pratiharas** turned their attention to the elaboration of the **socle** and the **superstructure**.
- The **Ghateshwara at Baroli** has a **Phamsana** in two registers over its **square, portico** with parapets bearing **elaborate aedicule** and **miniature Latina shikharas** at the corners.
- In this and several other features the **Baroli temple** anticipates the sumptuous practice of the Chandelles in particular:
- The **shikhara** is taller, more **elegantly curved** than hitherto, and has central bands which penetrate up into the zone of the **amalaka's base**.
- The partly excavated **Gyaraspur Temple** is more advanced in plan, with **ambulatory** as well as **vestibule** and closed hall with balconies and porch making it cruciform.
- Its **shikhara**, with nine miniature Latina forms clustered about its base, is perhaps the oldest surviving Sekhari example in the central domain of the Pratihara Empire.
- The roofs of both hall and porch are **Phamsana**. The dado with **kaiasha** and **kapota** is raised on a high podium.
- The **Ambika Matha** at Jagat is an early and exquisite example of the further elaboration and synthesis of the various elements so far encountered: five-bay **mulaprasada**, with **ambulatory**, and **equilateral projections** suggesting a **diagonal** as well as **octagonal** grouping of facade

elements in response to the clustered composition of its **Sekhara shikhara, Phamsana-roofed, cruciform closed hall** with richly detailed aedicule matching those of the **mulaprasada, porch** with **high vedika, seat-like coping and prominent chadya, elaborately carved purna-kalasha pillars** with **prominent bracket capitals**.

- The **Vishnu** and **Someshwara Temples** at **Kiradu** may be taken as representative of the still more sumptuous culmination of the **Pratihara tradition**.

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/the-gurjara-pratiharas>

