HISTORY OF INDIA FROM
C. 300 C.E. TO 1206

School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University

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GUIDELINES FOR STUDY OF THE COURSE

In this Course we have followed a uniform pattern for presenting the learning material. This starts with an Introduction to the Course underlining the significant developments in a chronological order and covers 16 Units. For the convenience of study all the Units have been presented with a uniform structure. Objectives as the first section of the Unit have been included to help you find what are you expected to learn from the study of the Unit. Please go through these objectives carefully and keep reflecting and checking them after studying a few sections of the Unit. Introduction of the Unit introduces you to the subject areas covered and guides you to the way the subject-matter is presented. These are followed by the main subject area discussed through Sections and Sub-Sections for ease of comprehension. In between the text some Check Your Progresss have been provided. We advise you to attempt these as and when you reach them. These will help you assess your study and test your comprehension of the subject studied. Compare your answers with the Answer Guidelines provided after the Summary. The Key Words and unfamiliar terms have been explained subsequently. At the end of each Unit under Suggested Readings we have also provided a list of books or articles as references. These include the sources which are useful or have been consulted for developing the material for the concerned Unit. You should try to study them; they will help you in understanding and learning the subject matter in an all-inclusive manner.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Chronologically, this is in continuation to the Course **BHIC-131: History of India from the Earliest Times up to *c*. 300 CE**. It gives a historical overview of major polities that emerged and made their mark during this period both in the northern and southern India: the Guptas, the Pushyabhutis followed by the Pallavas, the Pandyas, the Kalachuris, the Kadambas, the Chalukyas, the Cholas, the Hoysalas, the Rajputs, the Rashtrakutas, the Arabs, and the invasions of Mahmud Ghazni and Mohammad Ghouri. It also encapsulates economic, social and cultural history that this period exhibits, demonstrates and reflects. This applies to land holdings, revenue systems, agrarian relations, social structure, gender relations, growth and development of art, language and literature, coming up of religion and the ensuing religious trends etc. Hence, it offers an in-depth insight into the significant transition from the early historic to the early medieval period of Indian history. We need to understand and study this shift as students of Indian history. This Course covers **16 Units** arranged and ordered both thematically and sequentially.

It begins with the Guptas, who, like the Mauryas, set a benchmark in early Indian history. **Unit 1** deals with the circumstances that led to the rise of Gupta empire, its expansion and consolidation, the order of succession of the Guptas, their military exploits, and the factors and processes that resulted in their decline. **Unit 2** discusses their administrative set-up, the economic conditions under them in relation to agriculture, crafts production and trade, and aspects of culture and social life during this period. **Unit 3** traces how the political scenario of north India changed in the 5th-6th century CE, the emergence of new types of political centres known as the *Jayaskandhavaras,* why Kanauj became the new political centre of north India, Harsha's political activities, the extent of his empire and the impact of the Tripartite struggle that led to the rise of Kanauj.

Unit 4 gives a background to the kingdoms that arose in the Deccan and south India, the role of geography in their emergence, the relations between them, and how people were governed in these kingdoms. **Unit 5** particularly throws light on the political history of the Pallavas, the Pandyas and the Kalachuris, their rise and fall, their administration, social, economic and religious conditions during them and their cultural endeavours in the fields of literature, art and architecture. Likewise, **Unit 6** elucidates the nature of monarchical polities of the Kadambas, the Chalukyas of Badami, the Cholas and the Hoyasalas. It also focusses on their territorial expansion and their administrative and institutional structures.

In **Unit 7** we attempt to familiarise you with economic and social changes in the post-Gupta times. This is explained in the context of the origin and economic implications of land-grants, the process and consequences of the gradual decline of cities/urban settlements, villages and village economy; agrarian relations, agricultural production, different forces which led to modifications in *varna* hierarchy resulting in the emergence of new castes, and the position of women in society. **Unit 8** highlights polity, religion and culture in the post-Gupta period. It explains why the political organisation of this period is described as feudal in nature by many historians, main features of later Brahmanism, new religious trends like the Bhakti cult and Tantrism, and temple architecture, literature and the emergence of new fields of knowledge during this phase.

Rajput history is dealt with in **Unit 9.** We highlight their emergence in early medieval north India, the debate regarding their origin on the basis of evidence from contemporary sources, and their political and military character that helped in their consolidation. History of the Rashtrakutas as a dominant power in the Deccan becomes the theme of **Unit 10**. Herein we pinpoint the major and minor kingdoms that were ruling over different territories of south India between 8th and 11th centuries CE, the formation and organisation of Rashtrakuta empire or state, and social, religious, educational and cultural achievements during the Rashtrakutas. The contributions of different Rashtrakuta kings, the nature of early medieval polity and administration in the Deccan, significant components of the feudal political structure such as ideological bases, bureaucracy, military, control mechanism, villages etc. are also dealt with.

Unit 11 focusses on Arab invasions in the early medieval period, the sources, reasons and phases of the Arab capture of Sindh, the colonial understanding of Sindh conquest, and cultural comingling between the Arab and Indian cultures. In continuation, **Unit 12** highlights the invasions by Mahmud Ghazni and Mohammad Ghouri, the reasons for the rise of Ghurid power, phases of the conquest of north India by Mohammad Ghouri, reasons for defeat of the Rajputs, causes behind the success of Mohammad Ghouri, and difference between the Ghaznavids and the Ghurids.

Unit 13 shall enable you to understand the period *c*. 700-1200 CE through the study of land, revenue and agrarian relations. This is expounded in the light of the importance of land and associated resources in early medieval India, the aims, chronology and expansion of the land grant system, the nature of rights to land, revenue systems and the roles of state peasant, landlord and village. You will also learn about agrarian development in the Indian subcontinent in this period, character and function of different agricultural settlements, and features of the early medieval agrarian economy. **Unit 14** throws light on various literary and archaeological sources for the reconstruction of the social history of this period, distinctive features of social life, various social groups and interrelations among them, elements of change and continuity in social structure and gender relations, the role of different agencies or factors in social transformations, and the emerging trends in economy, polity and culture corresponding to these social transformations.

Unit 15 offers a detailed study of art, language and literature during the Guptas. Herein we describe why is this period known as "Golden Age" in the field of culture, the active patronage by Gupta rulers to cultural pursuits, unprecedented development of architecture, sculpture and painting, the great advancement and refinement attained by Sanskrit language, and prolific literary activity and impressive standards set by literature of this era. After reading the last Unit – **Unit 16** – you will know about the changing religious landscape of early medieval India, with special reference to the Bhakti movement and Tantrism. You shall understand the rise of Puranic Hinduism in various forms, the conditions that gave rise to *Bhakti*, its trajectory, how it ultimately did not bring about a drastic change in social conditions, the rise and assimilation of Tantrism and its lasting legacy in different traditions.

UNIT 1   RISE AND GROWTH OF THE GUPTAS*

Structure

1.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you shall be able to:

- learn about the political conditions in India at the beginning of the 4th century CE;

- familiarise yourself with the circumstances that led to the rise of Gupta power;

- explain the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta empire;

- understand the order of succession of the Gupta rulers and their military exploits; and

- understand the process that led to the decline of the Guptas.

1.1   INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, after briefly discussing the political situation of the 4th century CE we will analyse the historical situation which led to the rise of the Gupta dynasty. The attempt here will be to give you a political outline of the period. We take into account the controversies relating to the succession of Gupta kings and, at the same time, discuss some of their achievements which made possible the formation and consolidation of the empire. Kings like Samudragupta, Chandragupta-II, Kumaragupta and Skandagupta figure very prominently in the history of the empire. The Unit also takes into account some of the problems faced by the Gupta kings and the factors responsible for the decline of Gupta.

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*This Unit has been borrowed from EHI-02, Block-8.

1.2 POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In the beginning of the 4th century CE no large state structure existed in India. You have read in earlier Course that in the post-Mauryan period two large state structures had emerged in north India and in the Deccan. These were the Kushana state of the north and the Satavahana state of the Deccan. But, although the Kushanas and Shaka chiefs continued to rule even in early 4th century CE, their power had become considerably weak, and the Satavahana state had disappeared before the middle of the 3rd century CE. This does not, however, mean that there was complete political vacuum. There was no major political power but there were minor powers and new families of rulers were emerging. It was in this situation that the Guptas, a family of uncertain origins, began to build up an empire from the beginning of the 4th century CE. Before we take up the history of this empire, we present an outline of the political situation of this period by taking up different regions separately.

1.2.1 North-western and Northern India

Before the middle of the 3rd century CE the rule of the Sassanians had been established in Iran and the Sassanian rulers started claiming overlordship over Kushana kings. The mighty Kushana kings of north-western India were reduced to the position of subordinates and the Sassanian authority also extended to Sindh and certain other areas.

However, a large number of coins which are based on earlier Kushana coins and are found in Afghanistan and Punjab suggest that several branches of rulers, some Kushana, continued to rule in the region. There are also the coins of Kidara Kushana and his successors, in Afghanistan, Kashmir and western Punjab and it is possible that some of these rulers were contemporaries of the early Gupta rulers.

In other parts of the Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, old coins again point to the existence of a number of republican states. These were states which were not ruled by a single king but possibly by several chiefs; it was only occasionally that one finds a chief claiming the status of the king of a clan. The Madras, mentioned in connection with the exploits of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta, were located in the Punjab; the Yaudheyas were extremely powerful with their centre in present-day Haryana and the Malavas were located in Rajasthan. There were many other republican states like these, and some of them are even mentioned in the Gupta records.

Several branches of the Nagas who became very powerful in Mathura and other centres after the decline of Kushana power in north India are also known. Some of the north Indian rulers who were defeated by Samudragupta were definitely of Naga origin.

1.2.2 Western and Central India

You have read that a branch of Kshatrapa rulers established themselves in Western India in the post-Mauryan period. The line of Chastana, to which the well-known Shaka-Kshatrapa Rudradaman belonged, continued to rule till 304 CE. And then a new line of rulers began to rule. However, Kshatrapa rule came to

an end towards the close of the 4th century CE when Gupta ruler Chandragupta-II conquered and annexed their territories.

In the region of ancient Vidarbha, the core of which was Nagpur in north-east Maharashtra, a new power had emerged by the middle of the 3rd century CE. This power was that of the Vakatakas, a new line of rulers started by Vindhyasakti. Vakataka power soon became formidable and a branch was also established at Vatsagulma (modem Basim in Akola district). The Vakataka family later on came into close contact with the Guptas, particularly after a matrimonial alliance was formed between the two families.

1.2.3 The Deccan and South India

The decline of the Satavahana state of the Deccan was followed by the emergence of a number of new royal families in different parts of the Deccan. In coastal Andhra, there was a succession of families like the Ikshvakus, the Salankayanas and others. In Karnataka, the most important ruling family was that of the Kadambas. The Kadamba power was founded by Brahmin Mayurasarman whose Talagunda inscription gives some interesting details of the circumstances leading to the establishment of the kingdom and also some idea regarding its extent. The ruling family of the Pallavas, which became a formidable power in Tamilnadu till the 9th century is known from their records to have started ruling from the middle of the 3rd century CE. The inscriptions of the early Pallava rulers were written in the Prakrit language and were in the form of copper plates. They are generally assigned to the period between *c*. 250-350 CE. Sivaskandarasman of this family, who ruled in the beginning of the 4th century CE, was a powerful ruler and his kingdom included parts of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. Kanchi or Kanchipuram in the Chingleput district of Tamilnadu became the capital of the Pallavas and when Gupta ruler Samudragupta led an expedition to the south, he encountered Pallavan king Vismigopa at Kanchi. The above sketch does not mention many areas and many ruling families but only those who were comparatively important. It must, however, be noted that in many areas like Bengal, Orissa, forest regions of Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere, kingdoms were emerging for the first time. This was a new trend and was very significant for the later course of political history.

1.3 THE RISE OF THE GUPTAS

The ancestry and early history of the Gupta family are little known, and have naturally given rise to various speculations. Names ending in Gupta, such as Sivagupta which occurs in a Satavahana inscription, are sometimes taken to suggest their ancestry. But these suggestions are rather far-fetched. Different scholars also place the original home of the Guptas differently: some would place it in north Bengal, some in Magadha in Bihar and some in UP. On the basis of the following arguments it may, at the moment, be suggested that the original core of the Gupta territory lay in eastern UP:

- Allahabad pillar inscription, the earliest inscription recording the achievements of an early Gupta ruler Samudragupta, comes from this region.

- The nature of the coin-hoards of the Guptas, found in this region, suggests this.

- The description of early Gupta territories in the *Puranas* may point to this.

It is possible that in the closing decades of the 3rd century CE the Guptas were subordinates of a branch of the later Kushanas ruling in north-western India. However, literary and archaeological sources indicate that they became independent in the second decade of the 4th century CE.

Inscriptions tell us that Srigupta was the first king and Ghatotkacha was the next to follow him. Chandragupta-I was the first independent king with the title *Maharajadhiraja*. After declaring his independence in Magadha, he, with the help of a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis, enlarged his kingdom. We know about this alliance from a special category of coins. These coins have Chandragupta and his queen Kumaradevi engraved on the obverse and a seated goddess on the reverse with a legend *Lichchhavayah* (i.e. the Lichchhavis). These coins were made of gold, and this fact in addition to the fact that the Guptas followed the weight system of Kushana gold coins, suggests that the Guptas had been in contact with the Kushana territories.

There are no concrete evidences to determine the boundaries of Chandragupta's kingdom. But it is assumed that it covered parts of Bihar, UP and Bengal.

Chandragupta-I is said to have also started a new era from 319-320 CE. It is not clear from any records that he started this era, which came to be known as Gupta *Samvat* (Gupta era) but since Chandragupta-I is mentioned as a *Maharajadhiraja* he is credited with the founding of the era. It was during the times of his son Samudragupta that the kingdom grew into an empire.

1.3.1 Samudragupta

An inscription engraved (at a later date) on the Asokan pillar at Allahabad (known as *Prayaga-prashasti*) gives us information about Samudragupta's accession and conquests. Harishena, an important official of the state, had composed 33 lines which were engraved on the pillar. The inscription mentions that *Maharajadhiraja* Chandragupta-I in a highly emotional tone declared his son Samudragupta as his successor. This caused joy among the courtiers and heart-burning among those of equal birth. It can be presumed that other princes might have put forward their contending claims which were put to rest by this declaration. Further, the discovery of some gold coins bearing the name of Kacha has generated a controversy relating to this. The controversy has arisen because:

i) in many respects Kacha's coins are similar to the coins of Samudragupta,

ii) the name of Kacha does not appear in the official lists of Gupta rulers, as they are available in the Gupta inscriptions.

Various interpretations have been given in this regard:

• According to one interpretation Samudragupta's brothers revolted against him and placed Kacha, the eldest brother, on the throne. However, he died in the war of succession.

• Another view mentions that these coins were issued by Samudragupta in the memory of his brother.

• A third view mentions Kacha as the initial name of Samudragupta and the later name was adopted only after the conquest of south.

There is no solution to the controversy as each view has arguments in favour or against. We could only say that since the number of Kacha coins found so far is somewhat limited, his hold over the throne would have been for a very short duration. Also that Samudragupta, in spite of Chandragupta's abdiction, did face problems in relation to accession to the throne but ultimately he emerged victorious.

1.3.2 Expansion and Consolidation

For the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta power Samudragupta adopted an aggressive policy of conquests. This initiated a process which culminated in the formation of the Gupta empire. However, we have to take note here of the fact that in certain regions – particularly in the South – he let the kings, whom he had defeated, rule over their regions. Of course, they accepted his suzerainty and paid tributes. Such a policy adopted in relation to the far-flung areas might have paid dividends in solving problems of communication and effective control, hence bringing about stability for the time being. Let us briefly discuss the aggressive campaigns taken by Samudragupta in various regions. We may mention again that we come to know about all the campaigns of Samudragupta only from one record: the *Prayaga-prashasti* of Harishena.

1) Campaigns in *Aryavarta*:

    Some historians are of the view that Samudragupta carried his victorious campaign of *Aryavarta* at one time. However, some other historians, assuming that the *Prayaga-prashasti* mentions the conquests of Samudragupta in a chronological order, have opined that there were two campaigns in north India. This is because the *prashasti* first mentions three *Aryavarta* kings, then it goes on to mention his southern campaign and again mentions nine *Aryavarta* kings. It appears that taking advantage of the war of succession, which Samudragupta had to face, certain rulers attempted to establish their dominance. It might be in this context that Samudragupta defeated Achyuta, Nagasena and Kota-Kulaja. There are no details regarding these conquests or regarding the identity of the specific regions over which they ruled. However, historians have identified Achyuta as ruling over Ahichchhatra, Nagasena over Gwalior area and Kota-Kulaja as ruler of the Kota family in east Punjab and Delhi. Though differences continue to prevail over these identifications it is clear that Samudragupta, after defeating them, established firm control not only over the Ganga valley but also over some adjacent regions.

2) Campaign in South:

    The *Prayaga-prashasti* mentions 12 rulers from *Dakshinapatha* (south India) who were defeated by Samudragupta. These were:

    *   Mahendra of Kosala (Raipur, Durg, Sambalpur and Bilaspur districts)

    *   Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara (Jeypore, forest region of Odisha)

    *   Mantaraja of Kaurata (probably Sonpur area in Madhya Pradesh or plain country to the north-east of Mahendra hill)

    *   Mahendragiri of Pishtapura (Pithasuram, east Godavari district)

    *   Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district)

- Damana of Erandapalla (Chicacole or west Godavari district)

- Vishnugopa of Kanchi (Chingleput district)

- Nilaraja of Avamukta (Godavari valley)

- Hasti-varman of Vengi (Cellor in the Krishna-Godavari delta)

- Ugresena of Palakka (Nellore district)

- Kubera of Devarastra (Yellamanchiti in Visakhapatnam district), and

- Dhananjaya of Kushthalpura (possibly in north Arcot district in Tamilnadu).

However, again there are differences among historians as to the specific identifications of these kings and their kingdoms. The *Prayaga-prashasti* says that Samudragupta showed favour to *Dakshinapatha* kings by first capturing them (*grahana*) and then releasing them (*moksha*). *Aryavarta* (north India). He not only defeated them but also annexed their territories which became integrated into the Gupta empire. The north Indian kings defeated by Samudragupta were: Rudradwa, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarma, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Archyuta, Nandi, Balavarmna and others. It is impossible to identify all of them, but it is certain that they were ruling in different parts of northern India. Some of them were obviously Naga rulers who had been powerful in several regions before the Guptas. Rulers like Chandravarma who ruled in present West Bengal represented new ruling families. The *Prashasti* further says that Samudragupta reduced all states in the forest regions to the position of servants. In another category are mentioned the frontier kingdoms like Samatata (in south-east Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Nepala (Nepal) and others and the republican states of the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras etc. They paid him tributes of all kinds, carried out his orders and paid him homage. Rulers of another category of states acknowledged his sovereignty in a different way. They pleased him by "Self-surrender, offering (their own) daughters in marriage, and a request of the administration of their own districts and provinces." This means that they remained independent but their independence had to be approved by Samundragupta. In this category were included the foreign rulers of north-western India like the later Kushanas and the Shaka chief and residents of different island countries including Simhala (Sri Lanka).

Many of the claims made by Harishena – the composer of *Prayaga-prashasti* – are highly exaggerated but many of the claims are also genuine. The military foundations of the Gupta empire were laid by Samundragupta; his successors built upon these foundations.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Fill in the blanks:

   a) At the beginning of the 4th century CE there were .... (many/no) small kingdoms in North India.

   b) Chandragupta-I had a matrimonial alliance with .... (Shakas/Lichchhavis).

   c) The *Prayaga-prashasti* refers to the victories of .... (Pravarsena/Samudragupta).

2) Discuss the efforts made by Samudragupta for the expansion of Gupta empire.

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3) List five minor powers in north India at the beginning of 4th century CE.

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1.4   CHANDRAGUPTA-II

The Gupta inscriptions mention Chandragupta-II as Samudragupta's successor. But, on the basis of literary sources, some copper coins and inscriptions it is suggested that the successor was Samudragupta's other son Ramagupta. Visakhadatta's drama *Devi Chandraguptam* mentions that Chandragupta-II killed his elder brother Ramagupta. He did this because Ramagupta was facing defeat at the hands of the Shakas and in order to save the kingdom, he had agreed to surrender his wife to the Shaka king. Chandragupta protested and went to the Shaka camp in the disguise of the queen Dhruvadevi. He was successful against the Shaka king but as a result of the subsequent hostility with his brother he killed him and married his wife Dhruvadevi. Certain other texts like the *Harshacharita*, *Kavyamimamsa* etc. also refer to this episode. Some copper coins bearing the name Ramagupta have also been found and inscriptions on the pedestals of some Jaina images found at Vidisha bear the name *Maharaja* Ramgupta. Similarly, Dhruvadevi is described as mother of Govindagupta (Chandragupta's son) in a Vaishali seal. We can say that Chandragupta ascended the throne at a time when there were problems emerging again and he had to lead military campaigns to establish Gupta supremacy once again. He entered into matrimonial alliances with the Nagas by marrying princess Kuberanaga whose daughter Prabhavati was later on married to Rudrasena-II of the Vakataka family. Though there is no record like the *Prayaga-prashasti* to describe the events of his reign, we do get information about Chandragupta's campaigns and successes from certain inscriptions, literary sources and coins: He defeated the Shaka king Rudrasimha-III and annexed his kingdom. This brought an end to Shaka-Kshatrapa rule in western India and added the regions of Gujarat, Kathiawad and west Malwa to the Gupta empire. The details of Chandragupta-II's campaigns against the Shakas are not known. His matrimonial alliances with the Vakatakas and the Nagas must have been of tremendous significance in his preparations for the campaigns. Two inscriptions at the Udayagiri caves near Sanchi and one inscription at Sanchi – all referring to Chandragupta II and to his

subordinate rulers and military officials – also suggest that he was present in eastern Malwa for some time preparing for the campaigns. One inscription describes him as "desirous of conquering the whole earth". That his conquest of the territories of the Shakas was complete is proved beyond doubt because:

- We no longer find any Shaka coins minted after this period, although Shaka coins were being minted without a break for almost 400 years previously.

- The Guptas, from the time of Chandragupta, started minting Shaka-type silver coins for this region. They only added their own distinct symbols on these coins; otherwise, the coins were like Shaka coins in circulation till then. This definitely shows that the Shaka areas came within the control of Chandragupta-II.

- The success of Chandragupta-II against the Shakas seems to have developed later on into the tradition of *Shakari Vikramaditya* i.e. "Vikramaditya who was an enemy of the Shakas".

- 'King Chandra' whose exploits have been mentioned in the Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription, located in the Qutub-Minar complex in Delhi, is identified by many scholars with Chandragupta-II. According to this inscription, Chandra crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (identified with Bactria). Some scholars identify Chandragupta-II with the hero of Kalidasa's work *Raghuvamsha* because Raghu's exploits appear comparable with those of Chandragupta.

- The Mehrauli inscription also mentions Chandragupta's victory over enemies from Vanga (Bengal).

On the basis of these evidences it can be suggested that Chandragupta-II was able to extend the frontiers of the Gupta empire to western, north-western and eastern India.

An important incident which took place during this period was the visit of Fa-Hien, a Chinese pilgrim, who came to India in search of Buddhist texts. In his memoirs he has given a vivid description of the places he visited and certain social and administrative aspects related to them. However, he does not mention the name of the king in his accounts. But he speaks highly of the king of *Madhya-desha* – the region which was directly ruled by the Gupta monarch in this period – under whom the people were prosperous and happy.

Chandragupta-II is also known for his patronage to men of letters and he ruled till about 415-16 CE.

1.5   KUMARAGUPTA-I

Chandragupta-II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta. We get information about him from certain inscriptions and coins. For example:

- The earliest known inscription of his period is from Bilsad (Etah district) which is dated 415 CE (Gupta Era 96).

- The Karamdanda (Fyzabad) inscription of Kumaragupta's minister (436 CE) mentions his fame having spread to the four oceans.

- A stone inscription from Mandsor (436 CE) mentions Kumaragupta as reigning over the whole earth.

- The Damodar Copper Plate inscriptioms (433 CE or 447 CE) refer to him as *Maharajadhiraja* and show that he himself appointed the governor (*Uparika*) of Pundravardhana *bhukti* (or province) being the biggest administrative division in the empire.

- The last known date of Kumaragupta is from a silver coin dated 455 CE (Gupta Era 136).

The wide area over which his inscriptions are distributed indicates that he ruled over Magadha and Bengal in the east and Gujarat in the west. It has been suggested that towards the last year of his reign the Gupta empire faced foreign invasion which was checked by the efforts of his son Skandagupta. He maintained cordial relationship with the Vakatakas which had been established through matrimonial alliances.

1.6   SKANDAGUPTA

Skandagupta, who succeeded Kumaragupta-I, was perhaps the last powerful Gupta monarch. To consolidate his position he had to fight the Pushyamitras, and the country faced Huna invasion from across the frontiers in the north-west. However, Skandagupta was successful in throwing the Hunas back. It appears that these wars adversely affected the economy of the empire, and the gold coinage of Skandagupta bears testimony to that. In comparison to the gold coins of the earlier rulers the types of gold coins minted by Skandagupta were limited. In addition to the earlier system of weights, he introduced a new, heavier weight system for gold coins but generally his coins had less gold in them than earlier coins.

Moreover, he appears to have been the last Gupta ruler to mint silver coins in western India. However, the Junagadh inscription of his reign tells us about the public works undertaken during his times. The Sudarshana lake (originally built during the Maurya times) burst due to excessive rains and in the early part of his rule his governor Parnadatta got it repaired. This indicates that the state undertook the task of public works. The last known date of Skandagupta is 467 CE from his silver coins.

Gupta Rulers after Skandagupta

It is not very clear in what order the successors of Skandagupta ruled. Skandagupta himself may not have been the rightful heir to the throne and therefore, he had to fight other contenders to the throne. This may be the reason why a seal inscription traces a line of Gupta rulers after Skandagupta from Kumaragupta-I and his son Purugupta and not Skandagupta. Secondly, it is probable that the division of the Gupta empire into many parts already began towards the close of Skandagupta's reign. Thus, an inscription from western Malwa recorded in the last year of Skandagupta does not refer to him but to some other rulers beginning with Chandragupta-II.

Some of the successors of Skandagupta, mentioned in inscriptions, were: Budhagupta, Vainyagupta, Bhanagupta, Narasimhagupta Baladitya, Kumaragupta-II and Vismigupta. It is unlikely that all of them ruled over a vast

empire, as Chandragupta-II and Kumaragupta-I had done in an earlier period. The Guptas continued to rule till about 550 CE but by then their power had already become very insignificant.

1.7 DISINTEGRATION OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

In this section we deal with some of the factors that contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta empire.

1) **Huna Invasions**

   From the time of Kumaragupta-I the north-west borders had been threatened by the Hunas: a central Asian tribe which was successfully moving in different directions and was establishing pockets of rule in north-western, northern and western India. But their attacks were repulsed during that period. However, towards the end of the 5th century CE the Huna chief Tormana was able to establish his authority over large parts of western India and in central India. Mihirakula, his son, further extended the dominions. Thus, the Huna attacks caused a major blow to the Gupta authority particularly in northern and western regions of the empire.

2) **Administrative Weaknesses**

   The policy adopted by the Guptas in the conquered areas was to restore the authority of local chiefs or kings once they had accepted Gupta suzerainty. In fact, no efforts were made to impose a strict and effective control over these regions. Hence, it was natural that whenever there was a crisis of succession or a weak monarchy within the Gupta empire these local chiefs would reestablish their independent authority. This created a problem for almost every Gupta king who had to reinforce his authority. The constant military campaigns were a strain on the state treasury. Towards the end of the 5th century CE and beginning of 6th century CE, taking advantage of the weak Gupta emperors, many regional powers reasserted their authority, and in due course declared their independence.

   Besides these, there were many other reasons which contributed to the decline of Guptas. For example, it has been argued that the Guptas issued land-grants to the *Brahmana* donees and in this process surrendered the revenue and administrative rights in favour of the donees. Further, it is believed that the *samanta* system in which the *samantas* (minor rulers), who ruled as subordinates to the central authority, started to consolidate itself in the Gupta period. This is also believed to be the reason why Gupta administrative structure became so loose. There is diversity of opinion as to how the system originated and regarding the details of the system, but the presence of many *Samantas* within the empire does show that they wielded power almost independently of the Gupta authority.

   There is no doubt that divisions within the imperial family, concentration of power in the hands of local chiefs or governors, loose administrative structure of the empire etc. contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta empire.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the military campaigns of Chandragupta-II.

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2) Discuss the factors which brought about the disintegration of Gupta empire.

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3) Which of the following statements are right or wrong?

a) The Huna invasion during Kumaragupta's time was checked by Skandagupta. ( )

b) Fa-Hien came to India in search of Jaina texts. ( )

c) Ramagupta is said to be Chandragupta-II's elder brother. ( )

d) Sudarshana lake was repaired during Skandagupta's rule. ( )

1.8   SUMMARY

In the beginning of the 4th century CE north India was divided into many small kingdoms and chiefdoms. These kingdoms in different regions often fought with each other. It was in such a political situation that the Gupta dynasty gained power and gradually established an empire. The kings of this dynasty undertook extensive military campaigns in different regions. It was under Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II that the imperial power was properly consolidated. The Guptas remained a strong force till the time of Skandagupta but after him the process of disintegration started. Various factors like foreign invasion, dissension within the ruling family, reassertion of power by local chiefs, administrative weakness etc. hastened the process of disintegration.

1.9   KEY WORDS

Aryavarta   :   Literally meaning "abode of the Aryans", it is the region where the Vedic Aryans settled after their migration into the Indian subcontinent. It covers parts of north-western and northern India.

Prashasti   :   Panegyric/Eulogy.

Puranas   :   Encyclopaedic Hindu texts on a variety of topics.

1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) a) many, b) Lichchhavis, c) Samudragupta

2) Compare your answer by reading Sub-sec. 1.3.2

3) Yaudheyas, Malavas, Nagas, Madras, Later Kushanas. See Sub-sec. 1.2.1.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Compare your answer with the contents in Sec. 1.4

2) See Sec. 1.8

3) a) √ b) × c) √ d) √

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Agarawal, Ashwini (1980). *Rise and Fall of Imperial Guptas*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Banarsidass.Gupta, P.L. *The Imperial Guptas*. Varanasi.

Thapar, Romila (1983). *A History of India*. Penguin.

UNIT 2   ECONOMY, SOCIETY, CULTURE AND POLITY: THE GUPTAS*

2.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you shall be able to learn about:

- the administrative set-up of the Guptas;

- the economic conditions under the Guptas in relation to agriculture, crafts production and trade; and

- the various aspects of culture and social life during this period.

2.1   INTRODUCTION

After having made you familiar with an outline of the political history of the Gupta period (Unit 1) we now take up certain other aspects of this period. There are a variety of sources which tell us about economic, social, administrative and cultural aspects of this period. These sources of information are:

i)   inscriptions written on different materials like copper plates, stone, clay seals;

ii)   coins issued by rulers of different dynasties;

iii)   material from excavations;

iv)   contemporary literature; and

v)   accounts left by foreign travellers like Fa-Hien.

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* This Unit has been borrowed from EHI-02, Block-8.

In this Unit we shall tell you about the administrative set-up adopted by the Guptas. It will also deal with the economic activities of the period and different sources of state revenue. The Unit also discusses culture and the social conditions during this period.

2.2   ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE GUPTAS

We have already mentioned in Unit 1 that the Gupta kings did not interfere in the administration of those regions where the kings had accepted their suzerainty. However, this does not mean that the Guptas were ruling only through their feudatories. They had an elaborate administrative system which was in operation in areas which were directly controlled by them.

2.2.1   King

The king remained the central figure of administration. However, there was a considerable change in the character of monarchy. We find that the Gupta monarchs adopted high sounding titles like:

- Paramabhattaraka,
- Parama-daivata,
- Chakravarti,
- Parameshvara etc.

For example, the Allahabad **Prashasti** of Samudragupta describes him as "equal to the gods Dhanada (Kubera), Varuna (Sea-God), Indra and Antaka (Vama); who had no antagonist of equal power in the world…." Like the king who has been given a divine status in the **Smriti** scriptures, the Gupta monarchs, too, came to be considered a divinity on earth. However, in the spirit of **Smriti** literature and that of Kalidasa we find Skandagupta in his Bhitari Pillar inscription eulogized as a person who "subdued the earth and became merciful to the conquered people, but he became neither proud nor arrogant though his glory was increasing day by day". His father Kumaragupta "followed the true path of religion". Such references to the monarchy indicate that in spite of the supreme powers that vested in the king he was expected to follow a righteous path, and had certain duties:

- It was the King's duty to decide the policy of the state during war and peace. For instance, Samudragupta was prudent enough to reinstate the monarchs of *dakshinapatha* in their original kingdoms.

- It was considered a prime duty of the monarch to protect his countrymen from any invasion.

- The King was to lead the army in case of war. This is demonstrated through the campaigns of Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II.

- The King was also expected to support the *Brahmanas*, *Sramanas* and all others who needed his protection.

- He was also supposed to venerate the learned and religious people and give them every possible help.

- As the supreme judge he looked after administration of justice according to religious percepts and existing customs.

- It was the duty of the King to appoint his central and provincial officers.

- The **Prayaga-prashasti** as well as the **Apratigha** type coins of Kumaragupta-I point to the appointment of successor to the throne by the reigning King.

An important political development of this period was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King. And the Gupta King would not interfere with the administration of such regions.

2.2.2 Council of Ministers and Other Officials

The Gupta inscriptions are not very clear about the hierarchy of ministers. However, there is no doubt that the King used to take counsel of his ministers and issue written instructions to officials on all important matters.

The minister's office was perhaps hereditary. For example, the Udayagiri inscription of the time of Chandragupta-II informs us that Virasena Saba, the minister for war and peace, was holding this office by inheritance. Though the supreme judicial powers were vested in the King, he was assisted by the **Mahadandanayaka** (Chief Justice). In the provinces this work was entrusted to the **Uparikas** and in districts to the **Vishayapatis**. In villages, the headman and the village elders used to decide the petty cases. The Chinese traveller Fa-Hien states that capital punishment was not given at all.

There were some other high officials. For example, the **Mahapratihara** was the chief of the palace guards, the **Pratihara** regulated ceremonies and granted the necessary permits for admission to the royal presence. There existed an espionage system as in the earlier period. The land-grant inscriptions often mention **Dutakas** who were associated with the task of implementing gifts when gifts of land were made to *brahmanas* and others.

2.2.3 Army

The Guptas must have had a big army organisation. At the time of war the King led his army but ordinarily there was a minister called **Sandhi-Vigrahika** (Minister in charge of peace and war) who was helped by a group of high officials. The official title **Mahabaladhikrita** occurs in many inscriptions. Officials like **Pilupati** (head of elephants), **Ashvapati** (head of horses), **Narapati** (head of foot soldiers) possibly worked under him. The army was paid in cash and its needs were well looked after by an officer-in-charge of stores called **Ranabhandagarika**. Amongst other duties this officer was to look after the supply of offensive and defensive weapons such as battle-axes, bows and arrows, spear pikes, swords, lances, javelins etc.

2.2.4 Revenue Administration

Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines. In Samudragupta's time we hear of an officer **Gopasramin** working as **Akshapataladhikrita**. His duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues from the sureties of servants, to check embezzlement and recover fines for loss due to neglect or fraud.

Another prominent high official was **Pustapala** (record-keeper). It was his duty to make enquiries before recording any transaction. The Gupta kings maintained

a regular department for the proper survey and measurement of land as well as for the collection of land revenue. Kamandaka in the **Nitisara** suggests that a King should take special care of his treasury, for the life of the state depends solely on it.

Both Kalidasa and the author of the **Narada-Smriti** state that one-sixth of the produce should be claimed as the royal revenue. Besides this there was the **Uparikara** which was levied on cloth, oil, etc. when taken from one city to another. The organisation of traders had to pay a certain commercial tax (**Shulka**), the non-payment of which resulted in cancellation of the right to trade and a fine amounting to eight times of the original **Shulka**. The King had a right to forced labour (**Vishthi**), **Bali** and many other types of contributions. The King's income from royal lands and forests was considered as his personal income. Besides this, the King's treasury had a right to treasure troves (treasures in the forms of coin-hoards, jewels or other valuable objects, discovered from below the earth accidentally), digging of mines and manufacture of salt.

2.2.5 Provinces, Districts and Villages

The whole empire was divided into **Desas**, or **Rashtras**, or **Bhuktis**. The inscriptions provide us with the names of certain **Bhuktis**. In Bengal we hear of Pundravardhara **Bhukti** which corresponded to north Bengal. **Tira-bhukti** corresponded to north Bihar. The **Bhuktis** were governed by **Uparikas** directly appointed by the King. In areas like western Malwa we find local rulers like Bandhuvarman ruling as subordinate to Kumaragupta-I but Parnadana was appointed a governor in Saurashtra by Skandagupta.

The Province (**Bhukti**) was again divided into districts (**Vishayas**) under an official called **Ayuktaka** and in other cases a **Vishyapati**. His appointment was made by the provincial governor. Gupta inscriptions from Bengal show that the office (**Adhikarana**) of the district-head associated with itself representation from major local communities:

- the **Nagarasreshthi** (head of city merchants),
- **Sarthavaha** (Caravan-leader),
- **Prathama-Kulika** (head of the artisan community) and
- **Prathama Kayastha** (head of the Kayastha community).

Besides them, were the **Pustapalas** – officials whose work was to manage and keep records. The lowest unit of administration was the village where there was a headman called **Gramapati** or **Gramadhayaksha**.

However, the Gupta inscriptions from north Bengal show that there were other units higher than the village. In some cases we find references to **Astakuladhikarana**. Different categories of villages mentioned as **Gramikas**, **Kutumbis** and **Mahattaras** sent representatives to these offices which on various occasions functioned above the level of the village.

Besides agriculturists, there were certain other groups in the villages who followed such professions as carpentry, spinning and weaving, pot-making, oil extraction, gold smithery, and husbandry. All these groups must have constituted local institutions or bodies which looked after the affairs of the village. The village

disputes were also settled by these bodies with the help of **Grama-vriddhas** (village elders).

Check Your Progress 1

1) Which of the following statements are right (√) or wrong (×)?

   a) The King no more remained a central figure under the Guptas. (   )

   b) The King was to lead the army in case of war. (   )

   c) *Mahadandanayaka* was the minister of revenues. (   )

   d) One-sixth of the produce was claimed as royal revenue. (   )

   e) The highest unit of administration was the village. (   )

2) Write about the revenue administration of Guptas.

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3) Write about the powers and duties of the King.

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2.3   ECONOMY

You have read earlier that agricultural crops constituted the main resources which the society produced and that the major part of the revenue of the state also came from agriculture. This, of course, does not mean that agriculture was the only occupation of the people or that people lived only in villages. There were other occupations like commerce and production of crafts which had become specialised occupations and in which different social groups were engaged. This also means that, as in earlier periods, people lived in forests, in agrarian tracts, in towns and in cities, but certain changes had started taking place in the pattern of economic production and consequently, in relations between different social groups. We shall highlight some of these changes in the course of this and the next section.

2.3.1 Agriculture

Let us begin with the pattern of agricultural production. The concern of the society with agricultural production is clear from the way various aspects associated with agricultural operations are mentioned in the sources of the Gupta period. Various types of land are mentioned in the inscriptions: land under

cultivation was usually called **Kshetra**. Lands not under cultivation were variously called as **Khila, Aprahata** etc., and inscriptions give the impression that uncultivated land was being regularly brought under cultivation. Classification of land according to soil, fertility and the use to which it was put was not unknown. Different land measures were known in different regions, although one cannot be certain what exact measure was denoted by a term. In some areas **Nivartana** was the term used for a measure of land whereas in the inscriptions of Bengal terms like **Kulyavapa** and **Dronavapa** are used. It is not possible to classify the regions precisely according to the crops grown, but all the major categories of crops – cereals like barley, wheat and paddy, different varieties of pulses, grams and vegetables as well as cash crops like cotton and sugarcane – were known long before the Gupta period and continued to be cultivated. Of course, you should not assume that crops like maize or vegetables like potatoes or tomatoes were known to the farmers of the Gupta period.

The concern of the society with agricultural production is also reflected in the importance given to irrigation. You have already read about the Sudarshana reservoir (**Tadaga**) in Saurashtra in Gujarat. Originally built in the Maurya period, this reservoir was thoroughly repaired when it was extensively damaged in the time of *Mahakshatrapa* Rudradaman (middle of the 2nd century CE). It was again severely damaged in the time of Skandagupta. Parnadatta, his newly appointed governor of Saurashtra and Parnadatta's son Chakrapalita, undertook the repair of the reservoir this time. Another method for irrigation was to draw water from wells and supply the water to the fields through carefully prepared channels. A mechanism, possibly known before the Gupta period, was to tie a number of pots to a chain: the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the hull, and by making the chain and the pots rotate, it was ensured that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it. This mechanism was known as **ghati-yantra** as **ghati** was the name used for a pot. This type of mechanism also came to be known as **araghatta**. In the **Harshacharita** of Banabhatta, which was written in the 7th century CE there is a very charming description of how cultivated fields, producing crops like sugarcane, were being irrigated with the help of **ghati-yantra**. In regions like Bengal, rainwater was collected in ponds and other types of reservoirs; in peninsular India, tank irrigation became gradually the norm. There were, thus, different systems of irrigation and the role of the state was only marginal in providing irrigation facilities to farmers. The farmers, of course, depended mainly on rainfall and the importance of rainfall is underlined not only in the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya but also in the texts written in the Gupta period.

The sources of the Gupta period suggest that certain important changes were taking place in the agrarian society. The inscriptions from Bengal refer to sale of land by district-level administration to individuals who bought them by paying cash and made gifts of purchased land to *brahmanas* who were expected to perform Vedic sacrifices or to the Buddhist or Jaina religious establishments. But, land was not only purchased and gifted; the practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common by now. Even otherwise, remuneration for serving rulers in different capacities was received in the form of land by officials of different categories. Of course, all this was not absolutely new. But, by now the number of ruling families had vastly increased and thus, the number of persons who received land but did not cultivate themselves went on increasing. The virtues of giving land were highly praised and those who

took away gifted land were threatened with many evil consequences. All this led to the appearance, in society, of a class of people who enjoyed superior rights over land and by virtue of these rights and by belonging to higher **varnas** had high economic and social status. Of course, land rights did not belong only to those who received land. The Gupta inscriptions refer to different types of village residents like **Gramikas**, **Kutumbis** and **Mahattaras** who must have been village landholders, and their participation in land transactions indicates that they, too, were important members of rural society.

Compared with the recipients of land from the rulers and the influential categories of land owners in villages, the condition of ordinary cultivators may be considered to have been rather bad. It is believed by some historians that because of the practice of land-grants, the peasant population as a whole were reduced to a very low position in society. This is not entirely untrue. It was the ordinary cultivators, known by various terms such as **Krishibala**, **Karshaka** or **Kinass**, who had low economic and social status. Among the actual cultivators there were those who filled the lands of others and received only a share of the produce.

There were also slaves who worked on the fields of their masters. Even domestic female slaves were cruelly exploited, and a text like the *Kamasutra* written in the Gupta period tells us how much hardship they had to go through at the hands of their masters.

There were other reasons why the condition of the ordinary cultivators declined considerably. One was that in many areas the appearance of small kingdoms of new rulers and their officials and sections of people who did not take part in agriculture created great inequalities in society and imposed great burden on actual tillers of the soil. The number of taxes imposed by the state on the producers also increased in this period. Further, the practice of imposing **vishti** (unpaid labour) was also in vogue, although we do not know for certain how much essential it was for agricultural production. All in all, the condition of the ordinary cultivators seems to have become worse than in the earlier periods.

2.3.2 Crafts Production and Trade

Crafts production covered a very wide range of items. There were items of ordinary domestic use like earthen pots, items of furniture, baskets, metal tools for domestic use and so on; simultaneously a wide variety of luxury items including jewellery made of gold, silver and precious stones; objects made of ivory; fine clothes of cotton and silk and other costly items had to be made available to the affluent sections of people. Some of these items were made available through trade; others were manufactured locally. Descriptions of many luxury objects, of which no trace is generally found in archaeological excavations, may be found in the literary texts or inscriptions of the period. These sources also give us interesting hints regarding the status of different categories of craftsmen. For example, different varieties of silk cloth, called **Kshauma** and **Pattavastra** are mentioned in the texts of this period. An inscription of 5th century from Mandasor in western Malwa refers to a guild of silk-weavers who had migrated from south Gujarat and had settled in the Malwa region. Texts like **Amarakosha** and **Brihat Samhita,** which are dated to this period, list many items, give their Sanskrit names and also mention different categories of craftsmen who manufactured them.

However, for an idea of the quantity and variety of objects manufactured in this period one has to go through reports of what have been found at various archaeological sites. Many important sites like Taxila, Ahichchhatra, Mathura, Rajghat, Kaushambi and Pataliputra in the Ganges valley and other sites in other geographical regions have yielded many craft products like:

- earthen wares,
- terracottas,
- beads made of different stones,
- objects of glass,
- items made of metals etc.

It seems that in comparison with crafts production in the preceding Shaka-Kushana period, crafts production in the Gupta period suffered some setback. It has, however, not yet been possible to make a very satisfactory comparative study between these two periods from this angle.

All items were not available at all places; the movement of items for trade from one place to another, therefore, continued as in the earlier periods. You have read that India had extensive trade links with Central, West and South-east Asia and with the Roman world in the preceding period, and trade routes connecting different regions within the country had been developing over centuries. That commercial activities continued in the Gupta period are evident. Like their Kushana predecessors the Gupta rulers, too, minted coins of different types, and the gold coins of the Gupta rulers show excellent qualities of craftsmanship. The Guptas also issued coins in copper, silver and lead. These coins were obviously used for purposes of commercial exchange and in some regions of the Gupta empire at least, the merchants held a high position in society. For example, two types of representatives of merchants – the **Nagarasresthi** and the **Sarthavaha** – were associated with the administration of the district headquarters in north Bengal. The seals of the Gupta period found at Vaishali in north Bihar suggest that the merchants constituted an important section of the population of the city of Vaishali. Literary texts of the period, too, show that in cities like Pataliputra and Ujjayini commercial activities were carried on briskly and people from different countries were present in them. Merchants were important communities also in these cities.

There were organisations which facilitated the functioning of both craftsmen and traders. The ancient term which was generally used for these organisations was **Shreni** (guild) and the State was expected to provide the guilds protection and to respect their customs and norms. Similarly, members of the **Shreni** were also expected to follow the norms of the organisation; otherwise, they were liable to punishment. The term **Shreni** is often interpreted as guild but there are different interpretations of the term and in terms of many details, we are still not quite sure what the **Shrenis** were really like.

Although crafts production and commercial activities were brisk in the Gupta period, there are two points we should especially remember:

i) There were many types of craftsmen and they were not all identical either in wealth or in social status. For example, there was vast difference between a goldsmith and his family with a shop in a city like Ujjayini and a family

of basket-makers in a village. This is reflected to some extent in the **Dharmashastras** written by the *brahmanas* in this period. The **Dharmashastras** assign different ranks to different groups of craftsmen, although in their scheme the craftsmen and artisans held a status lower than that of the *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaishyas*. The **Dharmashastras** also suggest that each group of craftsmen formed a **jati** (caste). For example, the **Kumbhakaras** (potters) formed one caste, the **Suvarnakaras** goldsmiths) formed another caste and so on. Although the system of caste was not really so simple, generally the trend among craftsmen was that persons following one craft formed a **jati** (caste).

ii) Crafts production and commercial activities perhaps started declining from the Gupta Period onward in most regions and according to some historians, this resulted in the decline of towns and cities and in greater dependence of society of agricultural production. You will be reading more about these changes in Unit 7.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Fill in the blanks:

   a) Land under cultivation was usually called............(**Khila**/**Kshetra**).

   b) The practice of gifting land to religious donees.......................... (had become/was not at all) common during the 6th-5th century CE.

   c) The ordinary cultivators....................... (flourished/suffered) during this period.

   d) Sudarshana lake was repaired during the time of......................... (Skandagupta/Purugupta).

2) Mention the methods adopted for irrigation during this period.

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3) Discuss the sources which refer to crafts and craftsmen.

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2.4   CULTURE[1]

The Gupta period has often been referred to as "Golden Age" due to its cultural heritage. This applies to great accomplishments in the field of art and architecture, language and literature. The Gupta age, thus, stands out as a significant and noteworthy departure from previous historical periods, particularly in the cultural

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[1] This Section has been written by Dr. Abhishek Anand.

history of India due to impressive standards achieved by artistic and literary expressions of this time. For the same reason, cultural development and cultural legacy of the Guptas is dealt with separately in subsequent Unit 15 of this Course.

It has been rightly commented that the Gupta art represents ancient Indian art at its best. From the vantage point of architecture, the Gupta period reflects creative enthusiasm and deep sense and awareness of beauty. These are evident in the *Dashaavataara* temple at Deogarh in Jhansi district (UP), Bhitargaon temple near Kanpur (UP), Vishnu temple at Tigawa (Jabalpur district, MP), Shiva temple at Bhumara (Satna district, MP), Parvati temple at Nachna-Kuthara (Panna district, MP) etc. Some of them are adorned with beautiful sculptural panels. The Gupta temple-building activity represents evolution from the earlier tradition of rock-cut shrines which now reached a whole new level. However, the high and elaborately carved *shikharas* (towers) on top of the temples were yet to register their appearance. Therefore, Gupta period marks the formative phase of temple construction in India, but it was a significant phase that continued to influence temple-building right up to the medieval period.

What we now refer to as "Classical Sanskrit" developed during the Guptas. Sanskrit was widely patronised by the Gupta rulers, making it the official language of their court. All their inscriptions are written in Sanskrit. Ignored earlier under the influence of the Buddhist and Jaina traditions that encouraged vernacular dialects like Pali, Prakrit and *Ardhamaagadhi*, Sanskrit saw its revival under the Guptas. Due to the same, it became a widespread language in entire north India during the Gupta period. Even Buddhist scholars, particularly those of *Mahayana* Buddhism, began composing their scriptures in Sanskrit. Great poets, dramatists, grammarians and playwrights of Sanskrit are known from this period.

The epics **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** are believed to have been compiled and given their final form around 4th-5th century CE. The great Sanskrit writer-poet Kalidasa – one of the *Navaratnas* (nine gems) of the court of Gupta king Chandragupta Vikramaditya – wrote dramas like **Abhijnana-Shakuntalam**, **Malavikagnimitram**, **Vikramorvashiyam** and poetic works such as **Raghuvamsham**, **Kumarasambhavam** and **Meghadutam** which show the excellent literary standards achieved during the Gupta period. Besides these, Varahamihira wrote **Brihat Samhitaa** that deals with scientific subjects like astronomy and botany. Aryabhatta wrote **Aryabhattiyam**: a famous work on geometry, algebra, arithmetic and trigonometry. The notable creations on medicine include **Charaka Samhitaa** and **Sushruta Samhitaa**. An all-round progress in literature was manifest during this time.

2.5 SOCIETY

You have already read that according to the scheme of society conceived by the *brahmanas*, society was divided into four *varnas* (*Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*), with each *varna* performing the set of functions prescribed for it and enjoying whatever rights were given to it. This was the ideal social order and the state was expected to preserve it. This means that when even a small state emerged in some corner of the country, the King of that state was expected to recognize this as the ideal social order. The *Brahmanas* came to exert considerable influence on the kings and this is quite clear from the way they

received land from the kings and others. The kings, officials and others gave land not only to individual *brahmanas* but also some times incited big groups of *brahmanas* to come and settle in remote areas. Thus, the number of *brahmana* settlements variously called **Brahmadiyas**, **Agraharas** and so on started increasing and they started spreading, among other things, the idea of a **varna-**divided social order.

However, **varna** order was an ideal order and there were many groups in society whose **varna** identity could never be determined. Secondly, it was assumed that the **varnas** would perform their duties; in reality, they may not have done so. These suggest that real society was different from the ideal society and this was also recognized by the *brahmana* writers of the **Dharmashastras**. They, therefore, tried to determine the status of various castes (**jatis**) in society by giving fictitious explanations of their origins. They suggested that various **jatis** originated through **varna-samkara** that is inter-marriages between various **varnas**.

The various foreign ruling families of the pre-Gupta period — of Greek or Siythian origin – were given the semi-*kshatriya* status (**vratya-Kshatriya**) because they could not be considered to be of pure **Kshatriya** origin. Similarly, fictitious origins were thought of for tribal groups who came to he absorbed into the Brahmanical society.

The **Dharmashastras** also speak of **apadharma**: conduct to be followed during periods of distress. This means that the **varnas** could take to professions and duties not assigned to them when they found it necessary to do so. In matters of profession also the **Dharmashastras**, thus, recognized that the real society was different from their ideal society. These changes, of course, originated much before the Gupta period, but with the spread of the *Brahmanas* to different parts of India, the social structure came to be very complex. The new society had to absorb many social groups. Thus, the actual social structure came to vary from region to region, although certain ideas were common to them:

- The *Brahmanas* came to be recognized as the purest and, therefore, the highest **varna**. Since they were associated with Sanskritic learning and performed priestly functions, they came to be closely connected with royal power. Even when the rulers were supporters of Buddhism, Jainism or a particular religious sect, they continued to patronize *brahmanas*, particularly those of high learning. This remained one of the major reasons for the economic prosperity and prestige of the *brahmanas*.

- Ideally, although there were four **varnas**, there were various groups who were kept out of this scheme. They were the **antyajas** (untouchables). They were considered impure; even their touch was considered impure and their physical presence in areas where higher **varnas** lived and moved was not allowed. The **Chandalas**, the **Charmakaras** and similar groups were considered impure and outcastes. Thus, in the Brahmanical order of society the condition of a number of social groups remained miserable throughout.

- The position of women of higher **varnas** was low. Although we hear of personalities like the Vakataka queen Prabhavatigupta who wielded considerable power, not all women were so privileged. The *Brahmana* texts set down norms which women were expected to follow and women were expected, in the family, to function mainly as an ideal wife and ideal

mother. In many *Brahmana* texts, women were even considered, for various reasons, to be of the same category as the *Shudras*. It is significant that although *Brahmanas* were given land-grants regularly, we do not come across evidence of land being given to *Brahmana* women.

Another aspect of social life was that there existed great difference between the ways of life of the rich city-dwellers and people living in villages. The ideal city-dweller was the **nagaraka** i.e. the urbanite who, because of his affluence, lived a life of pleasure and refined culture. There are interesting descriptions of this way of life not only in Vatsyayana's **Kamasutra** but also in other literary texts of the period. Of course, it would be wrong to presume that all classes of people who lived in cities could afford this way of life.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Which of the following statements are right (√) or wrong (×) ?

   a) The *Brahmanas* exerted considerable influence on kings from the Gupta period. ( )

   b) The real society during the Gupta period was different from the ideal society. ( )

   c) *Antyajas* were the highest in **varna** scheme. ( )

   d) The life of the city-dwellers and the villagers was the same. ( )

2) Discuss the changes in the **varna** system.

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2.6   SUMMARY

In this Unit, after going through the various aspects of Gupta administration, economy, culture and society we find that considerable changes had taken place when compared to the earlier periods. An important aspect related to kingship was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King. There was considerable concern towards agricultural production and this is reflected from the way irrigation got priority during this period. The practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common and the *Brahmanas* exerted considerable influence over the King. There was differentiation amongst the cultivators and compared to the rich, the condition of ordinary cultivators declined considerably. Similarly, the wealth and social status of different types of craftsmen also varied. Though commercial activities continued during this period, it appears that there was a decline in crafts production. This period also witnessed significant development in art, architecture and literature. The **varna** system continued in society. Various foreign ruling families were assimilated in the **varna** system. At the same time, various

groups were kept out of the **varna** scheme and were considered untouchables. There was also a considerable decline in the position of women in society.

2.7   KEY WORDS

Dakshinapatha	:	Ancient south region of the Indian subcontinent below *Uttarapatha*. It also connotes the great route linking Magadha and Pratishthana (present-day Paithan in Maharashtra) in ancient times.
Chandala	:	One of the lowest rungs of the *Varna* order of ancient times. They were regarded untouchables and supposedly engaged in disposal of corpses.
Charmakaras	:	Those involved in tanning leather.
Sramanas	:	Literally meaning "one who toils, labours or exerts himself", it refers to the ascetics; those in pursuit of spiritual liberation.
Terracotta	:	The Italian word meaning "baked earth". It is a type of ceramic pottery made by baking terracotta clay. It was also widely used in ancient times to make sculptures.

2.8   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) (a) × (b) √   (c) ×   (d) √   (e) ×

2) See Sub-sec. 2.2.4

3) Base your answer on Sub-sec. 2.2.1

Check Your Progress 2

1) (a) *Kshetra*   (b) had become   (c) suffered   (d) Skandagupta.

2) Base your answer on Sub-sec. 2.3.1

3) Check your answer by comparing with the first two paragraphs of Sub-sec. 2.3.2

Check Your Progress 3

1) (a) √   (b) √ (C) ×   (d) ×

2) Check your answer by reading Sec. 2.5

2.9   SUGGESTED READINGS

Agarawal, Ashwini (1980). *Rise and Fall of Imperial Guptas*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Banarsidass.Gupta, P.L. *The Imperial Guptas*. Varanasi.

Thapar, Romila (1983). *A History of India*. Penguin.

UNIT 3 THE PUSHYABHUTIS AND THE RISE OF HARSHA*

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn:

- how the political scenario of north India changed in the 5th-6th century CE;

- the emergence of new types of political centres – the *Jayaskandhavaras;*

- why Kanauj became the new political centre of North India;

- Harsha's political activities;

- the extent of Harsha's 'empire';

- the changing political structure of north India; and

- impact of the rise of Kanauj: the Tripartite struggle.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The political scenario in post-Gupta north India was characterised by the emergence of numerous ruling families like the Maukharis of Kanyakubja, later

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Guptas of Magadha, Gaudas of West Bengal (Murshidabad Dist.), Maitrakas of Valabhi (Saurashtra peninsula), Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar, etc. Many of them were originally subordinates of the Guptas. But, with the decline of the political authority of the Guptas, they assumed independence. North India in the 6th century was, thus, an arena where multiple ruling powers, all rooted in their respective regional contexts, were constantly fighting with each other. In such a political scenario, the *samantas* (subordinates) emerged powerful. They kept control over outlying areas or fought battles in areas far away from the political centres of their overlords. The rise of local and regional powers has been regarded as the hallmark of this period. In this Unit we are introducing you to a brief history of the Pushyabhutis and how Harsha became the most important ruler and succeeded in establishing an empire.

3.2 THE CHANGING POLITICAL SCENARIO IN NORTH INDIA

In this period, we see that some regions became more powerful than others. For example, the places located in strategically sound areas, like those situated on elevated regions or those surrounded by hills or rivers; regions which were well connected by land and water routes for facilitating the movement of army or the easy transportation of supplies and provisions for the army, assumed more importance than the older *rajadhanis* (capitals). These new centres were called *Jayaskandhavaras* (literally meaning 'camp of victory') in epigraphs.

3.2.1 New Type of Political Centres: the *Jayaskandhavaras*

It was from these *Jayaskandhavaras* that the ruling dynasties issued land-grants to religious recipients like the *Brahmanas* or the monasteries and temples. Inscriptions of the early medieval polities are replete with references to various *Jayaskandhavaras* under different kings. From such references, the political conquests and the extent of the territories of the rulers may be inferred. As for instance, the Banskhera and the Madhuban copper plates of Harsha were issued from the *Jayaskandhavaras* of Vardhamanakoti and Kapitthika respectively. Both were probably located somewhere in Uttar Pradesh.

3.2.2 Kanauj as the New Political Centre

Kanauj, earlier known as Kanyakubja or Mahodaya, situated in the Kannauj district of present Uttar Pradesh assumed a lot of significance in the politics of early medieval North India. Located in the fertile plains of the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*, Kanauj stood on an elevated area that could be easily fortified. Thus, despite the fact that it was situated in the plains, due to its favourable location, it could be easily fortified and was secure. Besides, Kanauj was rooted in a large agrarian expanse in the western Ganges plains. Land-grants could be made in plenty from this area. Naturally, the area attracted a large number of *brahmanas* who settled here and for subsequent centuries the *brahmanas* of Kanauj came to be widely esteemed in the royal courts throughout the country. Kanauj was also well-connected by routes going towards east into the Ganges plains as well as with those going to the south. Due to all these factors, it rose to power and became an important nodal point in the north. With this development we see a shift of focus from Pataliputra in south Bihar to Kanauj. The latter also came to constitute a central theme in the politics of post-Gupta north India.

As a political centre Kanyakubja first appears in the *Harshacharita* as a seat of power of the Maukharis under Grahavarman who was married to the Pushyabhuti princess Rajyasri, the sister of Harshavardhana. When Harshvardhana became king he chose this city as his seat of power instead of Thaneswar in Haryana, which was the capital of his predecessors. This choice of capital might have been due to the threatening activities of the Hunas who were making inroads into India from the north-west since the reign of Skandagupta in the middle of the 5th century CE. Since Thaneswar was closer to the north-west, Harshavardhana must have felt more secure at Kanyakubja as it was more centrally located to the east.

3.2.3   Decline of Pataliputra

Historians like R. S. Sharma are of the opinion that Pataliputra in the post-Gupta period was on decline due to decay of trade and commerce. This was part of the process of feudalisation of the state polity and economy. Tolls used to be collected from traders coming to this city from other places. Since trade declined, money in the form of coins had become scarce. Thus, officers, soldiers and other royal servants had to be given their salaries through the assignment of land. Therefore, in the post-Gupta times the cities lost their importance and the *Skandhavaras* acquired prominence. Thus, R.S. Sharma has remarked that Pataliputra largely represents the pre-feudal order whereas the emergence of Kanyakubja under Harsha typifies the advent of the feudal age in north India.

However, this view has its critics. A study of the economy of the various regions and localities does not point to an overall decline of trade, urban centres, and money economy in the period immediately following the Guptas. It was not a pan-Indian phenomenon. Rather, in some areas like south-eastern Bengal, western India etc. trade flourished, and there is an abundance of gold and pure silver coins. Besides, inter and intra-regional trade used to be carried on a large scale.

Kanyakubja became powerful after Harsha chose it as his capital and Banabhatta, his court poet, glorified it in his *Harshacharita*. This, on the other hand, contributed to the theory of "Tripartite Struggle" by the historians like H. C. Raychaudhuri and others. They believed that it was a struggle among three dynasties: the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Western India, the Palas of Bengal and Bihar and the Rashtrakutas of Deccan. The aim was to capture Kanyakubja which became the royal capital since it was chosen by Harshavardhana.

3.3   THE PUSHYABHUTIS[1]

A variety of sources inform us about the rise of the family of Pushyabhutis which first ruled from Thaneshwar in Haryana and later from Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh. These sources include the *Harshacharita*, accounts of Hiuen-tsang and some inscriptions and coins. Banabhatta informs us that the founder king of this dynasty at Thaneshwar was Pushyabhuti and that the family was known as Pushyabhuti *vamsha*. However, the inscriptions of Harsha make no reference to him. The Banskhera and Madhuvan plates and royal seals mention five earlier rulers among whom the first three are given the title of *Maharaja*. This may indicate that they were not sovereign monarchs. The fourth king Prabhakarvardhana has been described as a *Maharajadhiraja* which makes us

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[1]This Section has been borrowed from EHI-02, Block-8, Unit-34.

infer that he was an independent monarch and had established matrimonial relations with the Maukharis by marrying his daughter Rajyasri with Grahavarman.

Thaneshwar, during this time (about 604 CE) was threatened by the Hunas from the western side. Banabhatta has described Prabhakarvardhana as "a lion to the Huna Deer". According to him an army under Rajyavardhana was sent to defeat the Hunas but due to the sudden illness of his father he had to come back. With Prabhakarvardhana's death the family had to face troubled times for a while. The Malava king killed Grahavarman and took Rajyasri prisoner. It appears that the Malava and the Gauda kings entered into alliance and even Thaneshwar was threatened. Rajyavardhana defeated the Malavas but was killed through treachery by Sasanka, the Gauda king. Now it was Harsha's responsibility to seek revenge and in due course he was able to establish a strong empire.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Read the following statements and mark right (√) or wrong (×).

    i) Thansewar was the kingdom of the Maukharis. ( )

    ii) Kanyakubja was located in the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*. ( )

    iii) As the political centre of north India Kanauj replaced Ujjayini. ( )

    iv) Tripartite struggle was fought between two powers. ( )

2) Why did *Jayaskandhavaras* become important in the post-sixth century CE polity of north India?

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3) Write five sentences on the reasons for the decline of Pataliputra.

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4) Write in 100 words about the Pushyabhutis.

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3.4   THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF HARSHA

3.4.1   Sources

Epigraphs, mostly in the form of eulogies and copper plate charters of the dynasties of this period make exaggerated claims of political conquests and other kingly qualities. Such *prashastis*, however, present a stereotypical account of the political conquests of the king. They claim that the king was a universal emperor (*chakravartin/sarvabhauma* king) who had conquered all quarters and, thus, accomplished *digvijaya*. The reference to political centres, the areas of land-grants recorded in the inscriptions as well as the find spots of the records may hint at the extent of territory under the dynasty. Apart from this, the *charita kavyas* (biographical poems) composed by the court poets for their patron kings emerged as a new source of historical information in this period. In such poems the patron king of the court poet is the hero and he passes through many vicissitudes and challenges which he overcomes finally. The earliest model of this kind is found in the *Harshacharita* (The Life of Harsha). It was the first formal *charita kavya*. In this *kavya,* the poet Banabhatta relates the account of Harshavardhana's rise to power. We are told that when the Pushyabhuti king Prabhakaravardhana was ruling, the formidable Hunas had attacked the north-western frontier of the kingdom. Both of the princes Rajyavardhana and Harshavardhana went to resist them. In the meantime Prabhakaravardhana fell ill and died. The situation worsened when the Maukhari king Grahavarman of Kanyakubja, their brother-in-law and the husband of their sister Rajyasri, was killed by enemies. These were Sasanka of Gauda and Devagupta of Malava. Rajyavardhana went to fight the enemy and died at the enemy camp. Later, Harshavardhana rescued his sister and since the Maukharis had no successor, the throne of Kanyakubja was offered to him by the ministers of the Maukharis. He accepted it and, thus, he became the joint ruler of the Pushyabhuti and Maukhari kingdoms. He made Kanyakubja his capital. Thus ends the poem. It may be noted that the aim of the poet was to tell the tale of Harsha's ascendancy to the throne. By portraying him as an upright and just person, by underlining the mutual love that both the brothers shared, Bana justifies Harsha for having succeeded to the throne even though, by doing this, he superseded his elder brother.

In the subsequent period rulers like Ramapala of Bengal and Bihar, Vikramaditya VI of the Western Chalukya dynasty, Kumarapala of the Chaulukya dynasty of Gujarat appear as the central characters of the *charita kavyas* like *Ramacharita*, *Vikramankadevacharita* and *Kumarapalacharita* respectively. This indicates how the *Harshacharita* had set up as an example and initiated a genre of literature that became widespread and were followed by rulers of different regions who wished to appear as heroes of poems.

Other source for the period concerned comes from the well-known account of the Chinese traveller Xuan Zang who travelled in India from 629-645 CE and spent much time at the court of Harsha.

Interpretation of Sources

Harsha was a patron of both Banabhatta and Xuan Zang. Their accounts project Harsha as the master of the whole of north India. By taking such accounts at face value, earlier historians projected Harsha as the last great 'Hindu' empire-

builder of post-Gupta period. Again, such views were strengthened by the epithet of *sakalottarapathesvara* ("the war-like lord of all the regions of the north") attributed to Harsha by the successors of his arch rival Chalukya king Pulakesin II. Thus, in the scheme of periodization of Indian history, historians used to mark the end of an era with the death of Harsha in 647 CE, verily the end of the "Hindu" period. Thus, Vincent Smith, one of the earliest authors of a comprehensive volume of Indian history (*Early History of India*), talks of the 'medieval Hindu kingdoms from the death of Harsha' in which the Rajputs come to the forefront. The major criteria of this change were the break-up of a large empire as they believed that Harsha was the last emperor of pre-medieval period who had authority over vast portions of north India similar to that of the Mauryas or the Guptas. The beginning of the medieval period, despite the presence of the Rajputs, was perceived as largely a Muslim era.

3.4.2 Political Activities of Harsha: An Overview

Harsha ascended the throne in 606 CE. He belonged to the Pushyabhuti dynasty based around Sthanvisvara (modern Thanesar in the Ambala district of Punjab). The claims of conquests made in the records of Harsha can be judged from the inscriptions of his contemporary kings like Sasanka, the king of Gauda (Murshidabad district of West Bengal) or Chalukya Pulakesin II. Both were his rivals. We shall discuss the political activities of Harsha in the following manner.

Early career

Prabhakaravardhana was Harsha's father and the fourth king in the line. His two sons were Rajyavardhana and Harshavardhana. His daughter Rajyasri was married to Grahavarman, the king of Maukhari dynasty of Kanyakubja. It was an important marriage alliance which influenced the power balance in the 7th century North India. Gauda, the archrival of the Maukharis (earlier the Maukhari king Isanavarman claimed to have defeated the Gaudas) had formed an alliance with Devagupta of Malava.

Eastern campaign

The Gauda king Sasanka and the Malava king Devagupta had created trouble by killing Grahavarman: the Maukhari king and the brother-in-law of Harsha. They captured Kanyakubja. Rajyavardhana, Harsha's elder brother died in the enemy camp. After rescuing his sister and Grahavarman's widowed queen Rajyasri, Harsha was offered the throne by the ministers of the Maukharis since they had no successor. Harsha now occupied the throne of Kanyakubja and, thus, began to rule over both the territories of the Pushyabhutis and the Maukharis. He now took a vow to take revenge on Sasanka and invaded those kingdoms in the east which had refused allegiance to him. However, neither Banabhatta nor Xuan Zang give any information regarding the actual conflict between Sasanka and Harsha. Besides, Xuan Zang mentions that some years before 637-638 CE, Sasanka had cut down the Bodhi tree at Gaya. It was a sacred symbol of the Buddhists and Sasanka could not have performed such an act unless he was in occupation of the Gaya region. He also indicated that Harsha conquered Odra and Kongada (North, eastern and southern Odisha) by 643 CE. Thus, it appears that Harsha could not achieve any success in eastern India before the death of Sasanka in *c*. 637 CE.

Western India

The kingdom of Valabhi in Saurashtra was being ruled by the Maitrakas who were vassals of the Guptas. The relationship between Harsha and the Maitraka dynasty is a little complicated. In the inscription of the Gurjara kings of Broach (Nausari grant of Jayabhata II, 726 CE) they claimed to have protected the Valabhi ruler who was overpowered by Harsha. Originally the Latas (southern Gujarat), Malavas and the Gurjaras occupied a strategic position in between the kingdoms of Harsha and that of Chalukya Pulakesin II situated to the north and south of the Narmada respectively. Thus, both Harsha and Pulakesin would attempt to bring three of them under control. Pulakesin II claims these three rulers as his vassals in his Aihole inscription. However, when Harsha occupied the Valabhi kingdom, peace must have been settled due to a matrimonial alliance between the two. Thus, Dhruvasena II Baladitya of the Maitraka dynasty married the daughter of Harsha and became his ally. This alliance, thus, weaned away Dhruvasena II from Pulakesin's influence. This might have been the reason for the celebrated conflict between Harsha and Pulakesin II.

Conflict with Pulakesin II

The kingdoms of Harsha and Pulakesin II touched on the border of the river Narmada. In his Aihole inscription Pulakesin says that Harsha's joy (*harsha*) melted away through fear when his elephants fell in battle. From the account of Xuan Zang it appears that Harsha took the initiative but could not achieve any success against Pulakesin. Regarding the claim made by the successors of Pulakesin that he acquired the title of *Parameshvara* by defeating *sakalottarapathesvara* (Harsha). R. C. Majumdar suggests that the result of the battle was magnified in favour of Pulakesin by his successors. This is a fine example of the poet's intention to speak highly of the rivals in royal *prashastis* in order to glorify the achievements of their patrons.

3.4.3 The Extent of Harsha's Kingdom

Harsha appears to have been in occupation of parts of present UP, south Bihar and Odisha. He inherited Thanesar, parts of eastern Punjab and eastern Rajasthan. Besides Bhaskaravarman, the ruler of Kamarupa was his subordinate ally and Harsha also exercised influence on the kings of Jalandhar and perhaps Kashmir. In the south the Narmada was the boundary beyond which Pulakesin II was ruling.

The extent of Harsha's empire was, thus, not as large as earlier historians had thought. So there is no reason to project him as "the last great Hindu emperor" or to view his reign as marking the end of the ancient and the beginning of the medieval era. In fact, contemporary historians question the view that saw the end of an era as being marked by any event like the death of a king. The transition of one era into another should be based on historical processes which had a much greater impact on all aspects of society.

3.4.4 Xuan Zang's Account

Xuan Zang, the Chinese pilgrim travelled in India from 629 to 645 CE. He speaks about the prosperity of Kanauj under Harsha. He says that the king travelled frequently throughout his kingdom to understand the condition of his subjects. He presents Harsha as a follower of *Mahayana* Buddhism and he has

given a grand description of the Buddhist assembly at Kanyakubja during his reign. He also says that Harsha used to pay salary to his ministers and officials by land grants. However, the actual evidence of such secular grants has not come down to us. He also mentions that this patronage to the *Mahayanas* by Harsha was resented by the *Hinayanas* and the *Brahmanas*. Harsha almost exhausted the royal treasury by making lavish gifts to the Buddhists. How far this account is true is difficult to ascertain. But it definitely brings out the religious tension among different sects in this period who fought among themselves to secure royal patronage.

On the other hand, Xuan Zang himself says that at the Prayaga Assembly Harsha worshipped Buddha, Shiva and the Sun and distributed charity to the followers of all faiths. Besides, the Banskhera and Madhuban copper plates of Harsha record his grant of land to *Rigvedin* and *Samavedin Brahmanas*. Inscriptions also suggest that the early Pusyabhuti kings worshipped Surya while Rajyavardhana was a devotee of the Buddha. Harsha has been represented as a devotee of Shiva in these inscriptions. Moreover, among three plays attributed to Harsha — namely, *Priyadarshika*, *Ratnavali* and *Nagananda* – the first two begin with an invocation to Brahmanical gods. This data might indicate that the Chinese pilgrim was actually biased in favour of Buddhism and wanted to present Harsha as its great patron.

3.4.5 Harsha Era

Alberuni who came to India in the 11th century records that Harsha Era was in use in Mathura and Kanauj. This era commenced from 606 CE: the date of Harsha's ascendancy to throne. The Banskhera, Madhuban and the newly discovered Kurukshetra Varanasi copper plates of Harsha as well as the Shahpur image inscription of Adityasena are probably dated in this Era. Previously, the Guptas who ruled a large part of north India had also introduced the Gupta Era. This indicates that the rulers wished to commemorate themselves to posterity by initiating an era in their name.

3.4.6 End of Harsha's Reign

From the Chinese sources we learn that the T'ang emperor Tai Tsung sent an embassy to the court of Harsha in 643 and again in 647 CE. On the last occasion they found Harsha was no longer alive and his throne had been usurped by someone. With the help of forces from Nepal and Assam the usurper was defeated and taken as a prisoner to China. This event shows the growing interest of the Chinese in the politics of North India.

3.5   THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF POLITY

The elaborate titles assumed by the Gupta rulers as well as names of administrative units were followed by many powers of the subsequent period.

3.5.1   Titles of Kings

The common titles used by the kings claiming a sovereign status were:

- *Maharajadhiraja*,
- *Parameshvara* and

- *Parama-bhattaraka*.

Ideally, they should have a *samantachakra* (circle of feudatories). The subordinates used titles like *maharaja*, *samanta*, *mahasamanta*, *ranaka* etc. The titles and designations in the land-grant charters suggest different tiers, ranks and functionaries in the administration of the kingdoms.

3.5.2 Administration

Very little data is available regarding the administration in Harsha's reign. The various official designations seem to have continued from the days of the Guptas. Xuan Zang says that taxes were not heavy and the king took one-sixth of the farmer's produce as his grain share. According to him there was no regular corvee but then he goes on to say that it was moderate and that the taxes were light. Devahuti feels that he is probably referring to labour in lieu of taxes. Harsha was a strong ruler and inspired confidence and loyalty in his ministers. Xuan Zang mentions that he was an industrious king. His day was divided into three periods out of which one was devoted to the affairs of the kingdom and two to religious affairs. While the affairs of the state may imply more secular aspects of administration, religious affairs may point to opening of hospitals for the needy; provision of free rest houses on highways; distribution of charity; arrangement of philosophical debates; fruit bearing or shady trees; establishment of educational establishments etc. He also kept in close touch with the common man through tours of inspection in which he travelled incognito. He was familiar with his extensive empire and that added to his proficiency as an administrator. For example, he knew the local geography and the temperament of the people belonging to varied terrains and that helped him in choosing the right governors. Harsha was in the habit of convening personal audiences with his tributary leaders and this ensured seamless administration. In 643 CE there were about 20 such tributary leaders. Harsha was on friendly terms with neighbouring countries who he asked to extend facilities of travel and residence to Xuan Zang. He also had diplomatic contacts with the Chinese emperor.

The highest title in Harsha's reign was *param bhattarakamaharajadhiraja*, "the noblest supreme king of kings". The use of such high sounding titles became a norm from the Guptas onwards. As soon as the kings became universal conquerors and achieved foremost position among the rivals, such titles became common. The epithet *sakalottara path esvara* (the lord of the entire north) bestowed upon Harsha by his rival Pulakesin II further strengthens the authenticity of such a high sounding title.

The lesser kings were known as *rajas* or *maharajas*. They were independent in their territories but owed allegiance to the sovereign.

Unfortunately, the two main authorities – Bana and Xuan Zang – do not tell us much about Harsha's administration. The inscriptions of Harsha and Pulakesin II and his successors and other contemporary kings do give us some details of administration. The king was the supreme head of the government. He appointed the ministers and important officers of the state. He led the armies in battle. He ruled according to the ideals laid down in the *Dharmashastras*.

The king was assisted in his administration by a council of ministers. In his council were included feudatories, *samantas*, princes and high officials. There

was special staff of officers to manage the royal palace. There were departmental heads that were directly under the control of king. In Harsha's time civil and military departments were not clearly separate. As a result, some of the top civil officers functioned in the capacity of military officers also. The provincial and district administration did not differ much from that of the Guptas. This is evident from the names of the administrative divisions and those of the officers mentioned in the inscriptions of Damodarapura of Kumaragupta I, Faridpur inscriptions of Dharmaditya and Samachardeva and seals of Basadha are also found in the inscriptions of Harsha and in the descriptions of Bana.

3.5.3 Political Structure

The above discussion on the political activities of a famous king like Harshavardhana brings out difficulty in forming an idea about the innumerable early medieval kingdoms and the extent of their respective areas on the basis of available sources. The contours of their kingdoms were rather fluid. Matrimonial alliances as well as conflicts were common among the lineages. B. D. Chattopadhyaya has shown that in early medieval India lineage ties were central to political formations and there were actually no dichotomy between lineage and states.

The *prashastis* (eulogies) of this period are indicative of a hierarchical political structure. Inscriptions of the subordinate kings refer to their overlord. The phrase commonly used in this connection is *tatpadanudhyata* literally meaning "meditating at his feet". This phrase is also used by kings in connection to their fathers. However, when used by a subordinate in connection to his overlord, it meant 'favoured by his feet', thereby claiming a sort of closer association with him than others.

It is also an issue how far the term 'feudatory' or 'vassal' is applicable to subordinate rulers who were obliged to offer allegiance or military service. There used to be no contract between the overlord and subordinates as was the case in Western European feudalism. The actual evidence of the ruler granting land to his feudatory (secular or non-religious land grants) are very few. Therefore, the increase in the number of land grants from the 6th century could not have been a contributing factor to the emergence of 'feudal polity'.

3.6 AFTERMATH: THE TRIPARTITE STRUGGLE FOR KANAUJ

Harsha is credited to have established Kanyakubja as the symbol of royal power in north India. In the subsequent period we see repeated attempts by rulers to position themselves as kings of Kanyakubja. In the early 8th century Yasovarman, the hero of a Prakrit poem *Gaudavaho* posed himself as the ruler of Kanyakubja. The title of the poem *Gaudavaho* (in Sanskrit *Gaudavadha* means the defeat and death of the king of Gauda) suggests rivalry between Gauda and Kanyakubja. According to D. C. Sircar, it began as early as the reign of the Maukharis, when in his Haraha inscription, dated 554 CE, Ishanavarman claimed to have defeated the Gaudas. This legacy of the rivalry between these two powers continued with Harsha representing Kanauj and Sasanka representing Gauda and ultimately ended up with the conflict between the Palas of Bengal and Bihar (represented as Gaudesvara in the north Indian sources) and the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kanauj.

Even in the *Rajatarangini* Kalhana claims that Yasovarman was defeated by Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Karkota dynasty of Kashmir. The veracity of the varied claims of majestic conquests put forward by the respective court poets can never be ascertained. However, such representations of heroes of poems posing themselves as conqueror of Kanauj nevertheless indicates the growing importance of Kanyakubja in the political scenario of 6th-8th/9th century North India.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What are the characteristics of a *charita kavya*?

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....

2) Write five sentences on the conflict between Harsha and Pulakesin II.

....

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....

....

....

3) Read the following statements and mark right ($\sqrt{}$) or wrong ($\times$).

   i)   Xuan Zang travelled in India from 629-645 CE.   (   )

   ii) Harsha was a Buddhist according to his inscriptions.   (   )

   iii) Harsha Era commenced from 606 CE.   (   )

   iv) *Sakalottarapathanatha* was a title given to Harsha by his own   (   )
        family.

3.7 SUMMARY

The rise of Harsha amply reflects the rise to importance of the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*. No doubt that it obtained much fame in the influential accounts of Banabhatta and Xuan Zang. The epithet *sakalottarapathanatha* applied to him by his rivals — the Chalukyas of Deccan – further emphasized its significance. The above discussion, however, would indicate how this claim is grossly exaggerated.

Even, putting aside such claims the emergence of Kanauj in the post-Gupta polity cannot be denied. Kanauj commanded an impressive agrarian hinterland which was important in the growth of a town. This also reflects the changing political economy in which exploitation of agrarian resources became essential for the innumerable local, supra-local and regional dynasties that were to dominate the north Indian political arena for subsequent years to come.

3.8   KEY WORDS

Jayaskandhavara	:	Literally "Camp of victory", it implies a temporary camp situated at a strategic location.
Tripartite struggle	:	The struggle among three powers, namely the Palas of Bihar and Bengal, the Gurjara-Pratiharas of western India and the Rashtrakutas of Deccan for capturing Kanyakubja in the 8th-9th century CE.
Charita Kavya	:	Biographical poem.
Sakalottarapathesvara	:	The war-like lord of all the regions of the north, signifying the sovereign ruler of *Uttarapatha* (north India).
Samantachakra	:	Circle of feudatories.
Tatpadanudhyata/ padanudhyata	:	Literally meaning "meditating at his feet", it is often used to refer to the son and successor of the king or the favourite *samanta* (subordinate).

3.9   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) i) x   ii) √   iii) ×   iv) ×

2) Your answer should explain the meaning of the word *Jayaskandhavara*, its difference from the *rajdhanis* (capitals). You must highlight the changing economic scenario in which religious land-grants became important and also the strategic location and connectivity of the *Jayaskandhavaras*. See Sub-section 3.2.1

3) See the explanation given by R.S. Sharma regarding post-Gupta economy and state whether you agree with his view. The decline of Pataliputra, should, however, not to be seen as a general phenomena of the decline of urban centres in the 6th century. See Sub-section 3.2.3

4) See Section 3.3

Check Your Progress 2

1) Your answer should begin with the meaning of the term *Charita Kavya*. You need to explain when and why did this particular genre of literature originate and assume importance. See Sub-section 3.4.1

2) Your answer should begin with the identities of these two rulers. You need to explain the factors leading to their conflict regarding the common boundaries of their kingdoms, control over the powers occupying strategic locations like the Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras. See Sub-section 3.4.2

3) i) √ ii) × iii) √ iv) ×

3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4   KINGDOMS IN THE DECCAN AND THE SOUTH*

Structure

4.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- the kingdoms that arose in the Deccan and South India with special reference to the Chalukyas of Badami and Pallavas of Kanchi;

- the relations between these kingdoms;

- the role of geography in understanding the political history of our period; and

- how people were governed in these kingdoms.

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*This Unit has been adopted from EHI-02, Block-8.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

People often speak of India south of the Vindhyas as South India or the Deccan. This division has been made for a long time, indeed as early as ancient India when the area south of the Vindhyas was called *Dakshinapatha* (Southern Territory). *Dakhina* became Dakkan of medieval times, from which, in turn, the term Deccan is derived. But, historians and geographers have found it more useful to distinguish the Deccan proper from the rest of south India. The Deccan consists of Maharashtra and northern Karnataka, and as far as the double deltas of Godavari and Krishna. Following this usage, we shall speak of the Deccan and south India as the two regions south of the Vindhyas while the term 'southern India' will stand for both the regions and as distinct from 'northern India'. You will appreciate the value of these distinctions more and more as you go deeper into the study of the history and society of this area.

You have already read about the political developments which took place in the Deccan and south India in the Mauryan and post-Mauryan period. You have noticed that while the Deccan was included in the Mauryan empire, the major chiefdoms of south India i.e. those of the Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras and Satiyaputras were friendly neighbours of the Mauryas. In the post-Mauryan period, initially minor chiefs assuming the title of *raja* (King) appeared in the Deccan and the Deccan was politically integrated by the Satavahanas who called themselves "Lords of the Deccan". In the south too, the chiefdoms were going through important changes resulting in the emergence of state systems in the subsequent period. In this Unit you shall be reading about the political situation which developed in the Deccan from the post-Satavahana period (beginning of the 3rd century CE to the 8th century CE).

4.2 POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE DECCAN TILL THE MID-SIXTH CENTURY CE

After the decline of the Satavahanas the political control of Deccan under one dynasty came to an end. Several kingdoms arose in different regions as successors of the Satavahanas. In northern Maharashtra we see the Abhiras, who for a time served as army commanders in the Shaka kingdoms, founding a kingdom in mid-3rd century CE. The founder of this line was one Isvarasena who began an era in 248-49 CE. This era became very important later and came to be known as Kalachuri-Chedi Era.

4.2.1 Vidarbha (Maharashtra)

The Maharashtra plateau soon came to be dominated by the Vakatakas. They began as minor kings from the last quarter of the 3rd century CE, but rapidly gained in power and extended their sway over most of Maharashtra and adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh. There were two lines of Vakataka kings ruling in different areas. The main line ruled from eastern Maharashtra (the Vidarbha region), while a collateral branch called the Basin branch of the Vakatakas ruled in southern Maharashtra. The most famous Vakataka king was Pravarasena-I of the main line, who alone had the title of *Samrat* among the Vakatakas. He performed several Vedic sacrifices and issued many land-grants to the *Brahmanas*. The Vakatakas seem to have been a peace-loving people overall and had formed

matrimonial and diplomatic ties with their powerful neighbours such as the Guptas in the north, the Vishnukundins in eastern Deccan and the Kadambas in the south. But the break-up and weakening of the kingdom could not be prevented as the Kalachuris and Kadambas carved out their territories at its cost in the first half of the 6th century CE. By the mid-6th century they were supplanted by the Chalukyas of Badami as the major power in the Deccan.

4.2.2 Karnataka

In the coastal strip of northern Karnataka (North Kanara) and adjoining areas a small kingdom was carved out by the Chutus. They ruled till about the mid-4th century CE when they were supplanted by the Kadambas. This kingdom was founded by the famous Mayurasarman who was an expert in guerrilla warfare and compelled the Pallavas of Kanchi to recognize his sovereignty. He, then, performed horse sacrifices (*ashvamedha*) and became Mayuravarman from Mayurasarman, that is, a *kshatriya* from a *brahmana* (Varman was a typical *kshatriya* surname while Sarman was a *brahmana* surname). Early in its history there was a division of the Kadamba kingdom into two parts between the two lines of the family, with Vaijayanti (Banavasi) and Palasika (Halsi) as the capitals. The two lines were never at peace with each other, and both were threatened by their more powerful neighbours – the Pallavas, the Western Gangas, and above all, the Chalukyas of Badami. The Chalukyas gradually entered into their territory and by about 575 CE completely vanquished them.

4.2.3 Eastern Deccan

Politically, the most disturbed region in the post-Satavahana Deccan was the fertile Krishna-Godavari delta (Andhra delta) in the east. Here, the Satavahanas were succeeded by the Ikshvakus who in control of this region from 225 CE. There was a break in their rule by the coming of Abhiras from the west but it was a brief interregnum and the Ikshvakus came back and ruled for the next 50 years or so. Then, the area was apparently split up into a number of principalities. From copper-plate inscriptions we come to know of the kings of Brihatphalayana *gotra* followed by those of Salankayana *gotra*, while the Allahabad Pillar Inscription (*Prayaga-prashasti*) which praises Samudragupta, informs us about half a dozen kingdoms in this area about 350 CE. These included kingdoms of Vengi and of Kurala, with capitals at Pishtapura and at Avamukta of Devarashtra, and so on.

Political stability returned to the Andhra delta from the mid-5th century with the coming of the Vishnukundins. They had good relations with the Vakatakas, but had prolonged, continued conflicts with the Western Gangas of south Karnataka. Madhavarman-I (440-60 CE), the founder of the line who performed many horse sacrifices, and Madhavavarman-II (556-616 CE) are among the famous rulers of the line. The Vishnukundins ruled till about the first quarter of the 7th century CE when the Chalukyas came in.

4.2.4 South Karnataka

In south Karnataka there arose a dynasty at the beginning of the 5th century CE. The kings of this dynasty are called Gangas or Western Gangas to distinguish them from the Eastern Ganges of Odisha. The Western Gangas ruled over south Karnataka for the next 600 years. Because of such a long association the area

came to be called Gangavadi. Gangavadi is an isolated territory surrounded by mountains and is relatively less prosperous agriculturally. Both these factors allowed the Gangas to rule without much interference from outsiders for such a long time. They were, however, very advantageously situated from a military point of view. They were to play a very important role in the mutual conflicts between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas of Badami, mostly as subordinate allies of the latter, as well as in the conflict between the Pallavas and Pandyas. They did not generally have cordial relations with the Pallavas who were well placed to harass them from their lofty mountain fortress of Nandidrug.

4.3 POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH INDIA

The _Sangam_ period in Tamilnadu and Kerala drew to a close about the end of the 3rd century CE. The history of this area from the 4th to the mid-6th century CE is very obscure. The early history of the Pallavas belongs to this period. We have their copper-plate charters that were issued from Kanchi. Pallava rule was traditionally associated with the Kanchi region (Palar river valley) or Tondaimandalam (_Tondai_ is Tamil for Pallava). But it seems that during this period the Kanchi region was not under their effective control as they had been pushed north by mountainous tribes called Kalabhras.

In fact, from the end of the _Sangam_ period to the mid-6th century CE Tamilnadu and Kerala were dominated by the Kalabhras. We do not know much about them, but it has been inferred from the scanty evidence that they were against Brahmanical institutions and favourably disposed towards Buddhism and Jainism, that they put an end to the rule of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas of the _Sangam_ age, and that they were non-agricultural hill tribes who caused great havoc among settled agricultural population. The Kalabhra threat seems to have extended to the borders of the Chalukyas kingdom which emerged in north Karnataka, for they too claim to have defeated them. This period is known as the 'Kalabhra Interregnum'.

4.4 THE RISE OF THE CHALUKYAS, THE PALLAVAS AND THE PANDYAS

From the mid-6th century CE the political scene in the Deccan and south India was dominated by the activities of three powers: the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi, and the Pandavas of Madurai.

4.4.1 The Chalukyas

The Chalukyas became the sovereign power with Pulakesin-I. He laid the foundations of his kingdom by making the hill near Badami in the Bijapur district of Karnataka into a strong fortress in 543-44 CE and performed a horse sacrifice. His successors overthrew the Kadambas and annexed their kingdom gradually, and also subjugated the Mauryas of Konkan (the coastal strip of Maharashtra). With the expeditions of Pulakesin-II the Chalukyas became the paramount power in Deccan as the Western Gangas and Alupas in the south and the Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras in the north offered their submission to him. The army of Pulakesin-II checked the forces of Harshavardhana on the banks of the Narmada.

Pulakesin-II also defeated the Vishnukundins of Andhra delta. But, he was not satisfied demanding just offers of submission as the Krishna-Godavari delta with almost one million acres of rich arable land was too valuable a possession. So about 621 CE he sent his younger brother Vishnuvardhana to consolidate the conquest and take over the area. In 631 CE Vishnuvardhana was allowed to form his own kingdom. Thus, began the line of the Chalukyas of Vengi or Eastern Chalukyas who remained in control of the area for more than 500 years.

4.4.2 The Pallavas

The rise of Pallavas began with Simhavishnu about the middle of the 6th century CE. He put an end to the Kalabhra Interregnum in Tandaimandalam (Kanchi Region) and extended his kingdom southward up to the Kaveri delta. He was succeeded by Mahendravarman-I who annexed territories in the north up to the river Krishna. The Pallava kings also secured submission from the neighbouring chieftains and kings, and thus reached the zone of influence of the Chalukyas of Badami, and of the Pandyas. Even the Pandyas had to accept their overlordship briefly. Thus, by the middle of the 7th century CE, the Pallavas had set up a powerful regional kingdom in south India. Their power began to weaken from the mid-8th century when the Chalukyas were being replaced by the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. By the early 10th century CE, the Pallava rule came to an end when Aparajata was defeated by Aditya Chola-I.

4.4.3 The Pandyas

The Pandyas came to light with king Kadungon towards the close of the 6th century CE when he suppressed the Kalabhras. The Pandyas ruled in the southernmost districts of Tamilnadu, with the Vaigai river basin as the heartland of the kingdom. They constantly tried to extend their sway over the Kaveri delta in the north and Chera country (Kerala) in the southwest.

4.4.4 Other Powers

The Gangas continued to rule in Gangavadi in south Karnataka. Besides, there were several other small kingdoms and chieftaincies in the Deccan and south India at this time, such as the Nolambas, the Banas, the Silaharas, etc. Unlike in northern India there were no continuous stretches of river valleys and plains here. The major river valleys such as the Raichur Doab (between the Tungabhadra and the Krishna), the Krishna-Godavari delta, the lower Kaveri valley and the Vaigai valley are separated from each other by rugged mountainous territories. Moreover, there were vast expanses of forests that divided cultivated zones. All this encouraged political fragmentation and allowed small political units to survive in isolated pockets of habitation. The above mentioned important river valleys could and did support greater kingdoms such as the Chalukyas of Badami (Raichur Doab), the Pallavas (Palar river valley), and so on. But, it was a difficult task for any one of the regional kingdoms to extend its sway over the rest, much more difficult than in the case of northern India. This comes out very clearly in the following account of mutual conflicts of the Chalukyas, Pallavas and the Pandyas.

4.5 CONFLICTS BETWEEN DIFFERENT POWERS

The political history of this period is marked by frequent wars between the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas, and between Pandyas and the Pallavas. Hostilities began with the raid of Chalukya's Pulakesin-II who defeated Mahendravarman and occupied the northern part of Pallava kingdom. In another campaign he vanquished the Banas (the 'feudatories' of the Pallavas in Rayalseema) and once again threatened Kanchi. But, he was badly defeated in several battles by Narasimhavarman-I who had succeeded Mahendravarman.

Narasimhavarman then attacked the Chalukyas, captured Badami and probably killed Pulakesin-II. The situation was saved by the latter's son Vikramaditya-I. He drove out the Pallavas, formed an alliance with the Pandyas, and repeatedly raided Pallava territory. The reign of one of his successors, Vikramaditya-II, is especially marked in this connection, for he is said to have overrun and looted Kanchi three times.

Without going into the details of particular wars and battles, we may note that the Pallavas had to engage in battles with the Pandyas too. It is remarkable that in these conflicts it was always the Pallavas who were the target of attack. This was not just because they were situated between the Chalukyas and the Pandyas, but mainly because they were the most prosperous of all. It is significant that it was always the Chalukyas who attacked the Pallavas and that the Pallavas concerned themselves mainly with driving them back into their territory. The only exception was the raid of Narasimhavarman-I into Chalukyan kingdom and his occupation of its capital. But this was a retaliatory move and was made only once in the entire history of the conflict. Another time, Pallava Paramesvaravarman-I launched an expedition into the Chalukyan kingdom as a diversionary move. Paramesvaravarman wanted to get rid of the Chalukyan forces occupying his kingdom by diverting their attention.

The same is true of the Pandyas who fought repeatedly with the Pallavas for the control of Kaveri delta. The *Sangam* literature as well as the account of Hiuen-Tsang suggests that the Vaigai river valley – the core of Pandyan kingdom – was relatively poor agriculturally. The Pandyas must have realised that if they wanted to be rich and powerful, they would have to control the rich Kaveri delta. They seemed to have fought the Pallavas with this purpose in mind, and by the early 9th century CE they eventually came to control this area.

4.5.1 The Role of Minor Kings

The lesser kings and chieftains took part in the conflict of regional kingdoms as subordinate allies of one or the other of these powers. Pulakesin-II had to subdue the Banas – allies of the Pallavas – before attacking Narasimhavarman-I. Similarly, Pallava general Udayachandra engaged in battles with Sabara king Udayana and Nishada chieftain Prithvivyaghra who probably sided with the Chalukyas. These subordinate allies shared not only in the plunder but could add new areas to their realm as well.

When we look at the smaller principalities individually, we do not find them worthy of attention. That is because each small kingdom by itself was insignificant, a non-entity. But taken together, they, no doubt, represent a political

force to reckon with in the affairs of the Deccan and south India. Equally striking is the inability of any king from the 4th to the 9th century CE to establish his hold over the Deccan and south India. For these six centuries political disunity was the norm despite the energetic efforts and ambitions of a number of kings. As already noted, the broken geography of southern India had a role to play here in political disunity as well as in the importance of lesser kings and chieftains

4.5.2 Other Dimensions of Political Conflicts

An important offshoot of the Pallava-Chalukya conflict was the emergence of the kingdom of Chalukyas of Lata or south Gujarat. As a result of Narasimhavarman's occupation of Badami and the death of Pulakesin-II there was terrible confusion and political disorder in the Chalukyan kingdom. In the task of restoring unity to it, suppressing the hostile forces, and of driving out the Chalukyas, Vikramaditya-I had been greatly helped by his younger brother Jayasimhavarman. In return, Vikramaditya rewarded his brother by giving away south Gujarat to him.

4.5.3 Relations with Other Countries

A noteworthy feature of south Indian politics at this time was an active interest in the political affairs of Sri Lanka. In the battles with the Chalukyas we hear that Narasimhavarman-1 had a Lankan prince Maravarma on his side. He had been driven into exile and had sought refuge at the Pallavan court. After his return from Badami Narasimhavarman helped Maravarma to gain the throne at Anuradhapura by sending two naval expeditions. Later, when he had again been dispossessed of his kingdom it was to the Pallava king that Maravarma looked for help. The Pandyans, too, showed keen interest in Sri Lanka, the wealth of which lured them into launching predatory raids into this area.

The Pallavas seem to have taken interest in and somehow influenced the politics of South-east Asia. It is possible that Nandivarman-II Pallavamalla came from South-east Asia to succeed to the Pallava throne in mid-8th century. We also hear of the powerful fleet of Nandivarman-III and a Tamil record in Thailand mentioning a Vishnu temple and a tank. A more direct interference in South Asia, however, came only with the Cholas who put an end to Pallava dominance in south India.

4.5.4 Kerala

Kerala seems to have continued under the rule of the Perumals in this period, although the details of the political history of the period are lacking. A famous ruler in this line was Cheraman Perumal (late 8th/early 9th century CE). He seems to have pursued his religion and religious policy in some extraordinary manner, so that the Jains, Christians, Shaivites and Muslims do not just praise him as a patron, but actually claim him as a practitioner of their own religion. The prosperity of Malabar constantly attracted invaders from outside. Not only the Pandyas claimed to have vanquished Kerala; the same claim was also made by Narasimhavarman, a number of Chalukyan kings and later, by the Rashtrakutas.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Which of the following statements are right (√) or wrong (×).

   a) The political control of the Deccan continued to remain under one dynasty after the decline of the Satavahanas.   ( )

   b) The Vakatakas seem to have been a peace-loving people.   ( )

   c) Tamilnadu and Kerala were dominated by Kalabhras after the decline of *Sangam* period.   ( )

   d) In the conflicts in south India the Pallavas were the targets of attack.   ( )

   e) The prosperity of Malabar did not attract invaders.   ( )

2) What do you know about the Chalukyas, Pallavas and Pandyas?

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3) Discuss the nature of conflicts amongst the powers of south India. What role did the minor kings play in it?

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4.6 POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Let us briefly discuss the political organization of these kingdoms.

4.6.1 The King and the Higher Stratum of Administration

We shall now proceed to discuss the patterns of administration that prevailed in these kingdoms. In theory the king was the source of all authority. He assumed high sounding titles such as *maharaja, bhattaraka, dharmamaharajadhiraja*, etc. In the beginning, kingship was governed by the Vedic ideal. We find kings proclaiming in their inscriptions that they performed horse sacrifices (*ashvamedha*) and other Vedic sacrifices such as *vajapeya*, *rajasuya*, etc. During this period these sacrifices did not have the social significance they had in the Later Vedic period. But they had a special political meaning as they served to underline the independence of a particular king and justified his right to rule. Thus, Pulakesin-I – founder of the Chalukya kingdom – performed a horse sacrifice to mark the beginning of his dynastic rule. The same was done by many other kings. Gradually, however, as the religious milieu changed, the ideal

of kingship changed too and the practice of making royal Vedic sacrifices fell into disuse.

The King was helped by his ministers at the court. Members of the royal family including the crown prince (*yuvaraja*) took an important part in running the government at higher levels. Then, there were a number of officials of various ranks who discharged various administrative duties in the name of the King. An important part of their job was to collect taxes. There was a principal tax on land amounting to one-sixth or more of the produce, in addition to several miscellaneous taxes such as those on weavers, draught cattle, marriage parties and so on. Besides collecting taxes, the state officials maintained law and order and adjudicated cases of crime and civil disputes that came before them.

4.6.2 Administrative Units

The kingdom was divided into a hierarchy of administrative units. In the Deccan these units were called *vishaya*, *ahara*, *rashtra*, etc. From the 8th century CE there developed a trend in the Deccan of dividing kingdoms into a hierarchy of the multiples of 10 villages. Less often, a district consisted of 12 villages. In the Pallava kingdom the *nadu* emerged as the main, lasting unit of administration.

The Kings of this period realised the importance of agriculture, the revenue from which was the main basis of their wealth and strength. It is significant that *nadu* – the basic political unit in Pallava (and later in Chola) times – also meant arable land in contrast to *Kadu* which meant non-cultivable waste land. Therefore, the state made all attempts to encourage the extension of agriculture. King Mayurasarman of Kadamba dynasty is said to have brought vast tracts of virgin land to the plough by inviting *brahmanas* from afar. For probably the same purpose a Pallava King gave away a thousand ploughs. Moreover, as agriculture depended a great deal on irrigation in south India, the Pallavas took great interest in the provision and maintenance of canals, tanks, lakes and large wells.

4.6.3 Local Associations

A characteristic feature of south Indian polity, especially Pallava, was the importance of local corporate units in most important aspects of the lives of people. There were innumerable local groups and associations based on caste, craft, profession or religious persuasion. Thus, there were associations of handicraftsmen like the weavers, oil pressers etc.; of merchants like the *Nanadesis*, the *Manigramam* and the *Five Hundred of Ayyavole* (Ayyavole is the Tamil name of Aihole); of students; of ascetics; of temple priests, etc. In addition, there were three important territorial assemblies:

- *Ur*,
- *Sabha*, and
- *Nagaram*.

Ur was a non-brahmanical village assembly. *Sabha* was a village assembly consisting only of *brahmanas*, and *nagaram* was an assembly where mercantile interests predominated (*nagaram* had some agricultural interests too). The members of an assembly used to meet annually while the day-to-day tasks were looked after by a smaller executive body. Each group functioned autonomously in accordance with its own constitution based on custom and usage and took

care of the problems of its members at the local level. In matters affecting people of more than one assembly or association, decision was taken by mutual deliberation.

Local administration through the corporate units greatly lightened the burden of the government. It not only gave a chance to people to air their grievances and problems, but also fixed responsibility on the people themselves for redressing the grievances and solving the problems. This strengthened the basis of the state by minimizing opposition to it as the people could not hold the government responsible for these matters.

That is why we do not find the Pallava kings trying to encroach upon the functioning of the local autonomous corporate groups. But, they did seek to strengthen their own base by bringing in *brahmanas* and creating privileged *brahmana* settlements by making land-grants to *brahmanas*, either directly (called *brahmadeya*) or in the name of a temple (called *devadana*). These *brahmana* settlements were created all over the core areas of the Pallava kingdom. The "core areas" were the most prosperous areas based on irrigated rice cultivation, on the prosperity of which the strength of the Pallavas depended. As we have seen, the village assembly of *brahmanas* was called *sabha* or *mahasabha*. During the late Pallava period the *sabha* developed a system of governance through committees. This is known as the committee or *variyam* system. It became a hallmark of self-government in the *brahmana* settlements in south India. The *sabha* managed several tasks mostly through these committees – maintenance of tanks and roads, management of charitable donations and of temple affairs, and regulation of irrigation rights.

In the Deccan, the role of local associations and assemblies was less conspicuous. In place of corporate institutions, it was the local notables called *mahajanas* who took part in local administration in villages and towns in Chalukyan times. In villages the *mahajanas* had a leader called *gavunda* (headman). These notables did not enjoy the same kind of autonomy as was the case with south Indian assemblies but were closely supervised by state officials.

Brahmana settlements, however, were to be found all over the Deccan as well as in South India. We do not know precisely how the *brahmanas* in the Deccan managed their collective affairs. But, since they were all a creation of kings and chiefs they must have looked after the interests of the government in the locality.

4.7 RELATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF RULERS

The relation between big kings and their lesser allies is a matter of controversy. Broadly, there are two views about the relations between powerful kings, and minor kings and chieftains. First, it is said that smaller kings and chieftains regarded a big king, especially the Pallavas, as their overlord on religious grounds. The Pallava kings used to participate in elaborate religious ceremonies which gave them a high ritual status. It was this high ritual status that was respected by lesser kings and chiefs. This theory is not supported by historical evidence. It cannot explain how these minor kings could shift their respect from the Pallavas to Chalukyas, or why they should stop respecting any high ritual status king in volatile political situations and declare their independence, or why they should again be made to respect the ritual status by force.

The alternative view regards these smaller kings and chieftains as the 'feudatories' of major powers. But 'feudatory' is a technical term which stands for a special kind of relationship that existed in medieval Western Europe. We are not sure whether the same relation was there between the Pallavas or the Chalukyas and the lesser kings and chiefs. That is why, we have preferred a neutral term "subordinate ally" to describe the relation of minor political powers with the major ones.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the role of local associations in administration.

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2) Highlight the relations between different categories of rulers.

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4.8 SUMMARY

In this Unit you have learnt about the political situation in the Deccan and south India up to the mid-6th century CE. After this period we find that the Chalukyas, Pallavas and the Pandyas were the major political powers in the region. There were certain minor powers also, but their role was not very significant. The major powers were constantly in conflict with each other and the minor powers did side with one or other major power during these conflicts.

As far as the political organization is concerned, the king remained the central figure of administration and was helped by other officials. A significant feature was the role of local associations in the day-to-day administrative work.

4.9 KEY WORDS

Ashvamedha	:	horse sacrifice.
Brahmadeya	:	land-grant to *brahmanas.*
Devadana	:	land-grant to temple.
Nagaram	:	assembly where mercantile interests predominated.
Sabha	:	a village assembly which consisted of only *brahmanas.*
Ur	:	non-Brahmanical village assembly.
Yuvraja	:	crown prince.

4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) a) × b) √ c) √   d) √ e) ×

2) Base your answer on Section 4.4.

3) Base your answer on Section 4.5.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Base your answer on Sub-section 4.6.3.

2) Base your answer on Section 4.7.

4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Gupta, P. L. *Imperial Guptas*. Varanasi.

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UNIT 5 THE PALLAVAS, THE PANDYAS AND THE KALACHURIS*

Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- the political history of Pallavas, Pandyas and Kalachuris and their rise and fall;

- administration and the social, economic and religious conditions under these three dynasties; and

- their cultural activities in the fields of literature and art and architecture.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Earlier in this Course we read about different kingdoms in Deccan and south India from the post-Satavahana period. In this Unit we will look at three significant dynasties from the region viz. the Pallavas, Pandyas and Kalachuris in some detail. Ancient Tamil region was denoted by the term *Tamilakam* or *Tamilaham* which can be identified with present-day Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, Lakshadweep and southern parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Dominant Tamil kingdoms of the region were Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas during the *Sangam* age which roughly spans from 300 BCE to 300 CE. In this Unit we will read about Pandyas during the *Sangam* age and the period of discontinuity in

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their political power during post-*Sangam* age, followed by the revival of their power after the post-*Sangam* period. Other dynasties which we will study are Pallavas and Kalachuris. Pallavas were located in Tondaimandalam region or the northern-most part of present-day Tamil Nadu between the two rivers Pennar and Ponnaiyar, with their capital at Kanchipuram. Kalachuris had several branches but our main focus will be on the Kalachuris of Chedi located in parts of central India and those of Kalyani in the modern state of Karnataka.

In this map we can clearly see the kingdoms of Pallavas in Tondaimandalam region and Pandyas in *Tamilaham* as well as the kingdoms of the Chalukyas of Vatapi and of their political collaborator the western Ganga dynasty after the Kalabhras were displaced by Pallavas, Pandyas and Chalukyas of Vatapi and thus,

Pallavas and Pandyas resurfaced in *c*. 6th century CE. Created from Thomas Lessman's Free Domain Material. Credit: Yon Man33. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_India_in_AD_600.jpg).

5.2 PALLAVAS

In the previous Unit we learnt that on the ruins of Satavahanas there arose a number of kingdoms. The Pallavas were one of them. They were feudatories of Satavahanas who came into power after the downfall of their overlords. However, their origin is much debated. Some historians trace their origin with the Pahlvas or Parthians who were a principal political power in ancient Iran, ruling from 247 BCE to 224 CE, while others believe that their origin was indigenous and not foreign; that they were an indigenous tribe or a clan or, maybe, a caste. It has been suggested that they were associated with the Vakataka clan. Another theory looks at the role of matrimonial alliances to explain their origin and propounds that a Pahlava minister of western Kshatrapas through a matrimonial alliance acquired the throne of Kanchi. He married the daughter of Sivaskanda-Naga-Shatakarni. Some also believe that they were the descendants of a Chola prince and a Naga princess of Manipallavam.

In order to understand their political history their rule can be broadly divided and studied under two main sections:

- the early Pallavas, and
- the imperial or later Pallavas.

Many aspects of the history of early Pallavas are yet not very clear and we have more information on the history of the imperial Pallavas starting from *c*. 6th century CE. A major part of the history of the latter is about continuous battles between the Chalukyas of Vatapi or Badami (in the Bagalkot district of the modern state of Karnataka) and the imperial Pallavas.

It is difficult to establish an accurate genealogy of the early Pallava rulers. Some scholars believe that Virakurcha was the first important emperor of early Pallavas. He is believed to have married a Naga princess who supposedly belonged to Satavahana family. When the Satavahana dynasty declined he became independent. His grandson Kumara Vishnu occupied Kanchipuram and established a kingdom in about 200 CE and made Kanchipuram his capital. During the reign of the last ruler of early Pallavas the Kalabhras invaded the kingdom and defeated him. This brought an end to the rule of early Pallavas.

The Pallavas were able to regain their lost political significance in Tondaimandalam when Simhavishnu (575-590 CE) defeated the Kalabhras and, thus, inaugurated the rule of imperial Pallavas in *c*. 6th century CE. He also fought battles against Cholas and Pandyas. He took the *birudas* (royal titles) of:

- *Avanisimha* (lion of the earth), and
- *Simhavishnupottarayan*.

At Mahabalipuram there is a sculptural bas relief in the Adivaraha *Mandapa* (a cave-temple) which depicts him with his two queens.

His son Mahendravarman I (590-630 CE), became the ruler after his father's demise. Under him the Pallavas became a major political power. He was a king with many accomplishments. He is known for his literary works and temple-building activities and he was also a skilled *veena* player. He promoted many artistic activities like drama, painting, music. He took the titles of:

- *Mattavilasa* (addicted to pleasures),
- *Chitrakarapuli* (tiger among the painters),
- *Lalitankura* (charming offspring),
- *Gunabhara* (virtuous),
- *Chattakari* (temple builder), and
- *Vichitrachitta* (curious-minded).

His reign saw the beginning of Pallava-Chalukya conflicts in which the succeeding rulers of these two dynasties also had to participate and contest one another. Pulakesin II, the powerful king of the Chalukyas of Vatapi who had earlier won a crucial battle against the great ruler of Pushyabhuti dynasty – Harshavardhana – defeated Mahendravarman I near Kanchi. Afterwards, Pulakesin II marched towards the capital of Pallavas. Mahendravarman I in order to save his capital agreed to sign a peace treaty with the Chalukyan emperor and gave him northern territories of his kingdom.

Narshimhavarman I (630-668 CE) succeeded his father Mahendravarman I. He is considered to be the greatest Pallava ruler. He took the title of *Mamalla* (great warrior). He defeated and killed Chalukyan ruler Pulakesin II and destroyed the Chalukyan capital Vatapi. He took the title *Vatapikonda* (conqueror of Vatapi) in order to commemorate this remarkable victory. Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas also suffered defeat at his hands. He invaded Ceylon (Sri Lanka) twice in order to help Manavamma, an exiled Ceylonese prince who had come to him seeking his support in securing the throne of Ceylon. The Pallava ruler sent his army to Ceylon with the prince. Though Manavamma was successful in getting the throne of Ceylon his success was not long-lasting. He asked for help for the

second time from the Pallava king. Second naval expedition to Ceylon was more successful and the Ceylonese prince was able to secure and sustain his royal power. It was during the reign of Narsimhavarman I that the famous Chinese Buddhist traveller Hieun Tsang visited Kanchipuram in 642 CE.

Mahendravarman II (668-670 CE) was the next ruler. His reign was short. Enmity between the Pallavas and Chalukyas caused political disturbance in the Pallava kingdom. The Chalukyan king Vikramaditya I, with the help of the western Ganga emperor, defeated and killed Mahendravarman II. This time the Pallava capital Kanchipuram was captured and brought under the rule of the Chalukyas of Badami for a brief period of time.

Parmesvaravarman I (670-690 CE) made several attempts to defeat the Chalukyas in which he was successful in the end. To celebrate his victory over the Chalukyas he took the titles of:

- *Ugradanda* (ruling with a rod of iron), and

- "the destroyer of the city of Ranarasika".

Ranarasika was the title taken by the Chalukyan emperor Vikramaditya I.

The reign of Narsimhavarman II (695-722 CE) was peaceful as the continuous battles between the two kingdoms came to a halt during his time. He sent embassies to China.

Parmesvaravarman II (728-731 CE) had to sign a humiliating peace treaty with the king of the Chalukyas of Vatapi Vikramaditya II when the latter had invaded Kanchipuram. He was put to death by the Gangas, the political allies of the Chalukyas.

After Parmesvaravarman II's demise, Nandivarman II (731-795 CE) sat on the throne. He belonged to the collateral branch of Pallavas i.e. the Kadavas who were the descendants of Bhimavarman, the brother of Simhavishnu, and, thus, started the period of the later Pallavas of the Kadava line. Like his predecessor he too had to fight with Vikramaditya II who again invaded the Pallava capital. Though the Chalukyan emperor captured Kanchipuram this time the capital city was not devastated and he decided to retreat to his territory. This is the only rare case of leniency seen in the political conflicts between them. He was also defeated by a Pandya ruler but he was able to defeat the western Gangas. He was succeeded by:

a) Dantivarman,

b) Nandivarman III,

c) Nrupatunga, and

d) Aparajita.

Aparajita — the last imperial Pallava — became one of the feudatories of the Cholas.

5.3   PANDYAS

It is difficult to say about the origin of the term 'Pandya' with much accuracy. There are many different opinions regarding the term. We find the names of the Pandyan monarchs mentioned in some important literary works such as:

- the *Sangam* literature,

- the Epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*,

- the Sri Lankan chronicle *Mahavamsha*,

- the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, and

- *Indica*: the account of Megasthenes who was the Greek ambassador to the court of king Chandragupta Maurya of the Mauryan Empire.

Some historians opine that the term was derived from the label 'Pandava'. It has also been suggested that if we look at the meaning of the word 'Pandia' in Tamil it means old country. Another speculation made in order to interpret its origin is that it comes from the word 'Pandi' which in Tamil means bull and in *Tamilaham* the bull was considered as a symbol of strength and masculinity. Thus, it is argued that the Pandyan rulers used it in order to represent themselves as powerful sovereigns. The first king who took the title of 'Pandya' was Kulashekharan. His successors continued using this title and this is how it is claimed that the cognomen of 'Pandya' became synonymous with the dynasty.

As in the case with Pallavas the Pandyan rule can also be categorized into the following sections:

1) early Pandyas,

2) the first Pandyan empire, and

3) the second Pandyan empire.

The early Pandyas or Pandyas of the *Sangam* age were contemporaries of the Cheras and the Cholas during the *Sangam* period. These neighbouring powers were engaged in conflicts to establish their own political supremacy. And as we read earlier about the rise of the Kalabhras in the post-*Sangam* age in the Tamil country and that they brought an end to the rule of the Pallavas, likewise the Kalabhras became the cause for the decline of the early Pandyas as well but eventually, like the Pallavas the Pandyas were successful too in acquiring the political hold in the region. The river Kaveri became the border between the Pallavas and the Pandyas.

The earliest known ruler from the Pandyan dynasty was Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi. Neduncheliyan I or Ayyappudai Kadantha Neduncheliyan was the 4th king of this kingdom. His royal title *Ayyappudai Kadantha* means the one who vanquished the Aryans. His name is mentioned in a significant Tamil literary piece: the *Silapaddikaram* written by a Chera prince Ilango Adigal. According to this work Nedunchelian failed in his kingly duty of providing fair justice when he, in his anger and without any proper judicial enquiry, ordered the execution of an innocent man named Kovalan who was falsely charged with the stealing of an anklet of the queen. Nedunchelian II was the greatest ruler of early Pandyas. He defeated the combined forces of Cholas and Cheras at the battle of Talaiyalanganam. This enabled him to acquire much of the Tamil region and expand the territory of the Pandyas. After the *Sangam* age their power declined and the Kalabhras emerged as a dominant political force in the region.

Kadungon founded the first Pandyan empire after defeating the Kalabhras during *c*. 6th century. After him the rulers of the first Pandyan empire adopted the titles of:

- *Maravarman,* and

- *Sadayavarman* (worshippers of lord Shiva) or *Sadaiyan* (the one with dreadlocks).

Arikesari Maravarman was an important ruler of this empire. From the Pandyan inscriptions we get to know that he defeated the Cheras a number of times and even imprisoned the reigning Chera ruler. During the period of his son and successor Kochadaiyan Ranadhiran the Chalukya-Pandyan conflicts began in which the Chalukyas of Badami were assisted by the western Gangas. He died while fighting against the Cholas. His son Maravarman Rajsimha I became the next emperor and he fought many battles with the Pallava ruler Nandivarman II and obtained some portion of the Pallava territory. He also defeated the Chalukyas and the Gangas. The Chalukyan ruler Kirtivarman II married his daughter to the son of the Pandyan king. The last ruler of this empire was Maravarman Rajasimha III. He was defeated by the Chola king Parantaka I. The victorious ruler captured the capital of the Pandyans and, thus, took the title of *Maduraikonda*. Gradually, when the Cholas re-emerged in the *c.* 10th century the power of the Pandyans was eclipsed. Aditya Karikala who was the son of Parantaka Chola II defeated the Pandyan monarch Vira Pandya.

Later in the 13th century the Pandyans again became powerful. Maravarman Sundara Pandyan laid the foundation for the 2nd Pandyan empire when he forced the Chola ruler Kulothunga Chola III to formally submit to the Pandyan authority. The most prominent king was Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan. During this time the territorial size of the empire was extended to a large extent. They successfully captured the Telugu country, Kalinga (in present-day Odisha) and also made invasions into Ceylon. The Chola kings after Kulothunga Chola III were not very successful in curbing the rising power of the Pandyans. Despite the fact that the Cholas were assisted by the Hoysalas to check the Pandyan powers they kept losing their territories, prestige and power. The Pandyans became the dominant political force in south India. Finally, Maravarman Kulashekhara Pandyan I defeated the combined armies of Rajendra Chola III and the reigning Hoysala emperor. This brought an end to the Chola empire. However, after the downfall of the Cholas the Pandyans also could not survive for long and the civil war which was the outcome of the war of succession between Vira Pandya and Sundara Pandya the two sons of Maravarman Kulashekhara Pandyan I fastened the pace of their political decay.

5.4   THE PALLAVA-PANDYA CONFLICTS

Conflicts and alliances were outcomes of the political ambition of the rulers to acquire more and more resources for the efficient functioning of their respective governments. The Chalukyas of Vatapi and the Pallavas of Kanchi were frequently at war with one another. The Pallava monarch Mahendravarman I had expanded the territory of the Pallava dynasty towards the north up to the river Krishna. The Vishnukundins became the neighbouring kingdom located to the north of the Pallavas. Pulakesin II defeated the Vishnukundins and the territory of the Vishnukundins became the part of Chalukyan dynasty. The Chalukyan king made his brother Kubja Vishnuvardhana the viceroy of this conquered territory. Later, Vishnuvardhana founded the eastern Chalukyan dynasty or the Chalukyan kingdom of Vengi. With the decline of Vishnukundins the Chalukyans became

the neighbouring territory of the Pallavas to the north. Thus, the expansionist policies of Mahendravarman I and Pulakesin II brought the two emperors together on a battlefield against each other. This began the constant conflicts between the two dynasties.

The third important dynasty which played a significant role in this clash was the Pandyas of Madurai in the Vaigai valley. These three political powers were contemporaries and rose to prominence at almost the same time. The Pandyas and the Chalukyas were the neighbouring kingdoms of the Pallavas. Each wanted to extend their territorial boundaries at the expense of the other. The Pandyas were eager to take control of the fertile Kaveri delta. They saw it befitting to make the Chalukyas of Vatapi, who were constantly at war with the Pallavas, their political ally to realize their political ambition. Accordingly, Arikesari Parankusa Maravarman I – the Pandyan ruler – made an alliance with the Chalukyan king Vikramaditya I and attempted to acquire some portion of the Pallava territory. The Pandyas were also at war with the other neighbouring dynasty the Cheras in order to extend their territorial boundaries. The battles fought and won were always a matter of pride for the victorious ruler. They would demonstrate it through various means. Jayantavarman (645-70 CE), the son of Maravarman Avanisulamani, adopted the epithet of *Vanavan* which tells us that he had been successful to some extent against the Cheras. The Pandyas also tried to invade Ceylon during the period of the Sinhalese ruler Sena I, devastating the region and carrying away a huge booty. The succeeding Sinhalese emperor Sena II, in order to avenge the Pandyas, invaded the Pandya kingdom and carried away a large sum of booty.

The Pandyas also looked for opportunities to interfere in the internecine feuds in the Pallava kingdom. The Pandyan king Maravarman Rajasimha I (735-765 CE) made an alliance with the Chalukya emperor Vikramaditya II and supported Chitramaya for the throne of the Pallava kingdom. The Pandyan ruler defeated the Pallava king Nandivarman II a number of times. In order to highlight this achievement he took the title of *Pallava Bhanjana* (Breaker of the Pallavas). In the end Chitramaya was killed by a military general of Nandivarman II. But this interference of the Pandyas into the political affairs of the Pallavas and their repeated attacks on the Pallavas alarmed Nandivarman II and he wanted to contain the increasing influence of the Pandyas of Madurai.

During the period of Kirtivarman II Dantidurga a feudatory of the Chalukyas and who had high political ambitions, was attempting to carve out an independent territory. He, in the process, attacked the Pallava monarch Nandivarman II. The latter gave a tough fight to Dantidurga and so, after a negotiation between the two, Dantidurga gave his daughter Reva to Nandivarman II in marriage. Meanwhile, Dantidurga defeated Kirtivarman II and laid the foundation of the Rashtrakuta empire of Manyakheta. Just as the Chalukyas in alliance with the western Ganga dynasty fought many battles against the Pallavas, or the Pandyas made the Chalukyas their political ally so as to check the political influence of the Pallavas, likewise Nandivarman II after the matrimonial alliance with Dantidurga wanted to lessen the power of the Pandyas, as the Chalukyas of Vatapi were now displaced by Dantidurga. The Pallava monarch was trying to form a confederacy of rulers to support him against the Pandyas. A kingdom

named Kongu located adjacent to the western Ganga dynasty was also one of kingdoms of the confederacy. The emperor of Kongu was defeated by the Pandyan ruler and the kingdom was merged into the Pandyan territory. The Pandyas were also able to advance deep into the Pallava territory. The Pallavas failed in their attempt to stop the Pandyan advance. However, despite many battles, defeats and victories, none of the sides could claim any territorial gains for long. There were continuous attacks and counter-attacks and losses and gains.

5.5   INTERREGNUM AND DOWNFALL

The Pandyas were overthrown by the Kalabhras. This created an interregnum (a period of political discontinuity) of the Pandyan rule by the Kalabhras and, therefore, this period is known as the Kalabhra interregnum which lasted from *c*. 3rd to the 6th-7th centuries. The origin of the Kalabhras is not known. It is believed that by the end of the 6th century or in the early 7th century the Pandyas under Kadungon remerged. He restored the Pandyan power in the region. The Pallavas also faced similar fate from the Kalabhras and later, under Simhavishnu they resurfaced. He became the founder of the imperial Pallava dynasty. After the Kalabhra interregnum was over these kingdoms flourished again.

The prestige of the Pallavas as an imperial power suffered a setback when the Chalukyan ruler Vikramaditya II invaded the Pallava territory and for a brief period of time captured Kanchipuram. Later, Nandivarman III was defeated by a Pandyan ruler Shrimara Shrivallabha (815-862 CE) near Kumbakonam. After the death of the Pallava king there was a war of succession among his three sons. In this power-struggle one of the royal brothers Nrupatunga lost his life. The Chola king Aditya Chola along with the Pandya emperor Kamavarman defeated another Pallava brother Aparajita while the 3rd one accepted the overlordship of the imperial Cholas in the beginning of the 10th century. Thus, this civil war finally resulted in the breakdown of the rule of imperial Pallavas. Besides, the Pallavas had to constantly engage in battles against the Chalukyas who were assisted by the western Gangas. The Pandyas, the Rashtrakutas and the Cholas also attacked the kingdom whenever they found the opportunities to do so.

Similarly, in the Pandyan kingdom also the war of succession created the situation of civil war and finally, it became one of the causes for their downfall. In 1311 Malik Kafur – the military general of the sultan of Delhi, Alauddin Khilji – invaded Madurai. At this time there was a fight going on between the two brothers Vira Pandya and Sundara Pandya for the throne of the Pandyan kingdom. It is said that of all the Deccan and south Indian military campaigns of Kafur this was materially the most satisfying one, which proves that the Pandyas were a rich kingdom but the invasion weakened their position. It also enabled the feudatories of the Pandyas to exercise their power independently. The Pandyas lost their northern territory to the Kakatiyas. Later, there were two more invasions made from the Delhi Sultanate. The last one was carried out by Ulugh Khan (Muhammad Bin Tughlaq) and this time the Pandyan territory was annexed and merged into the Sultanate. But, during the rule of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq (1325-1351) the Sultanate lost its control over Madurai.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Why did the Pallava ruler Narsimhavarman I adopt the royal title of *Vatapikonda*?

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2) What was the role of the western Ganga dynasty in the Pallava-Chalukya conflicts?

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3) Throw some light on the conflicts between:

   i)   the Pallavas and Pandyas

                        or

   ii)   the Pallavas and Chalukyas.

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4) How were the wars of succession responsible for the downfall of the Pandya and Pallava dynasties?

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5.6   KALACHURIS

Now let us understand the political history of the Kalachuri dynasty. The origin of the Kalachuris, also known as the Haihayas, is not very clear. They belonged to a *Kshatriya* tribe. They are mentioned in the Brahmanical epics and the

Puranas. The early Kalachuris or the Kalachuris of Mahishmati rose in the present-day Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Some important rulers of this dynasty were:

- Krishnaraja,

- Shankaragana, and

- Buddharaja.

They ruled from 550-620 CE. The early Kalachuris could not flourish much because of their neighbouring kingdoms viz. the Chalukyas of Vatapi and the Maitrakas of Valabhi. These two kingdoms were too dominating political forces for them to expand and finally, their power was undermined. Buddharaja during his period had to fight against the Chalukyas twice. In the 1st battle he was defeated by Mangalesha and in the 2nd he was defeated by Pulakesin II. After these defeats though the Kalachuris were weakened yet they continued to survive. They had matrimonial relations with the eastern and western Chalukyas.

By *c*. 9th century we come across a number of collateral branches of the Kalachuris. The major ones were:

- the Kalachuris of Chedi (also known as the Kalachuris of Tripuri), and

- the Kalachuris of the Deccan.

There were some other branches of the Kalachuris too, such as:

- the Kalachuris of Ratanpur,

- the Kalachuris of south Koshala,

- the Kalachuris of Gorakhpur,

- the Kalachuris of Raipur etc.

The Kalachuri dynasty of Ratanpur was founded by one of the sons of Kokalla I: a Kalachuri ruler of Chedi. Initially it was under the subordination of the Kalachuris of Chedi. It became independent under Jajjaladeva I in *c*. 12th century. He took the royal titles of:

- *Maharajadhiraja*, and

- *Parameshvara*.

The Kalachuris of Ratanpur conquered south Koshala. Later, another branch erupted from the Ratanpur Kalachuris and it was known as the Kalachuris of Raipur.

The Kalachuris of Chedi or the *Dahala-Mandala* rulers ruled from their capital Tripuri which is now a village near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. The first important king of this branch was Kokalla I whose reign began in about 845 C.E. He defeated the Pratihara emperor Bhoja I. He had also defeated the Rashtrakuta king Krishna II after whose defeat the Rashtrakutas started having matrimonial relations with the Kalachuris. Thus, we see that Kokalla I through his military skills and successes was able to increase the prestige of the Kalachuris. He was succeeded by his eldest son Shankaragana. After his death Balaharsh came into power, followed by Yuvaraja I. The most important political event that took place during his period was the battle between the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III and him, in which he was defeated. He lost his territory to Krishna

III. But Krishna III could not keep the acquired territory of the Kalachuris for long. Yuvaraja I was successful in regaining the lost territory. After him Laksmanaraja, Yuvaraja II and Kokalla II sat on the Kalachuri throne.

Thereafter, the significant rule of Gangeyadeva began. He is considered as the greatest Kalachuri monarch. During his reign the Kalachuris became an important political power. He took the title of *Vikramaditya*. He tried to expand his territory by following the expansionist policy. He defeated the king of south Koshala – Mahashivagupta Yayati – and took the title of *Trikalingadhipati* (Lord of Trikalinga). He also defeated the Pala emperor Mahipala I and captured Benaras. He formed an alliance with the rulers of the Paramaras and the Cholas against the Chalukya king Jayasimha but Jayasimha defeated them. Later, the Paramara ruler as well as the Chandella king of Bundelkhand also defeated him. After Gangeyadeva a number of Kalachuri monarchs succeeded one after another. Vijayasimha was the last ruler of the Kalachuris of Chedi.

The Kalachuris of Kalyani came into existence as a political entity during the 12th century. Their rule was from 1156 to 1181 CE. They ruled over parts of the present-day Karnataka and Maharashtra. Though they ruled for a very brief period of time i.e. for 25 years their rule was not without any significance. Bijjala II was the founder of this dynasty and also the most important ruler of this branch of the Kalachuris. Earlier, he was appointed as a governor of the Chalukyan dynasty. But, he declared his independence during the reign of Taila III. After his death his sons – Someshvara and Sangama – sat on the throne of the Kalachuris of Kalyani but they were not strong enough to sustain the power of the Kalchuris and the Chalukyas were able to recover their lost territory.

5.7   ADMINISTRATION

In the following sections we are going to introduce you to administration, economy, society, religion, literature and art and architecture during the rule of the above mentioned ruling dynasties.

To understand the administration under the Pallavas let us look at their central administration and the local administrative units. The Pallavas had a hereditary monarchy. The king was the highest authority in his kingdom, supreme head of the judiciary department, supreme leader of his army etc. He adopted the title of *Dharma-Maharaja* to emphasize that he governed his kingdom according to the tenets of the *Dharmashastras*[1]. The Pallava administrative system was well structured. The appointed ministers called *amatyas* offered their services and assistance to the king. The government departments were headed by the royal members such as young princes of the kingdom. Apart from the royal family members the distinguished army-officials were also given the task of supervising the royal departments. The dynasty had a well-maintained army.

The administrative divisions of the Pallava kingdom bear close resemblance to the Gupta empire. The territory of the kingdom is referred to as *rashtra*, *desh* or

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[1] A genre of Sanskrit theological literature; ancient compendiums of moral laws and principles for religious duty and righteous conduct to be followed by a Hindu. For example, *Manusmriti* or the *Manava Dharmashastra* (*c*. 2nd century BCE-3rd century CE). They are based on the ancient *Dharmasutra* corpus dated to 1st millennium BCE which itself emerged from the literary tradition of the *Vedas* composed between 2nd millennium BCE to the early centuries of the 1st millennium BCE.

mandala in the Pallava inscriptions. These terms for the territory are also found in the Gupta inscriptions. The whole kingdom or *rashtra* was divided into a number of administrative units called:

- *Kottams,* and
- *Nadus*.

Each *kottam* was under the supervision of the officers appointed by the king. Village (*grama*) was the smallest administrative unit. To look after the administration of villages there were many local assemblies which were autonomous in nature. *Sabha* and *Ur* were the most important among them. The *Sabhas* were generally found in *Brahmadeya* villages (villages granted to the *Brahmanas*). So, they were assemblies whose members belonged to the Brahmin caste. The *Ur* consisted of people from different castes. These self-governing assemblies were involved in performing tasks such as:

- managing temples,
- repairing irrigational tanks,
- doing charitable works etc.

The village assemblies were functioning in different parts of the Pallava dynasty and were very important for the efficient functioning of the villages. But, a lot of aspects related to their functions and their relation to the central government are not known.

The central government and the *gramas* carefully kept an exhaustive record of arable and waste lands, water bodies such as rivers and lakes, wells and irrigation tanks or artificial reservoirs and also, rocks and trees in the kingdom as these were vital resources for the land and other grants to temples and the *Brahmanas* and also for the revenue. The main source of the revenue of the kingdom was land tax. However, no tax was collected from:

- *Devadanas* (the lands granted to temples),
- *Agraharas* (the lands settled by *Brahmanas*), and
- *Brahmadeyas* (the lands given to a Brahmin or a group of this priestly class).

There were other types of taxes as well such as:

- *Irai*,
- *Kaanam*,
- *Poochi*, and
- *Paatam*.

The tax on weavers was called *Than Irai* and *Kusakaanam* was tax collected from the potters. Toddy-tappers, oil-pressers, goldsmiths, cattle-breeders, washer-men, textile-manufacturers etc. also paid taxes. Two types of taxes were collected from the villages:

1) The land revenue which the peasants were obliged to pay. It varied from one-sixth to one-tenth of the land produce. This was collected by the village and given to the state collector.

2) The second type of tax was local in nature.

These taxes were collected in the village and used for its maintenance.

The taxes collected from various sources were spent on the maintenance of the king and his retinue, for the maintenance of his army and naval force etc. The Pallavas maintained a huge army. Infantry, cavalry, a unit of elephants and chariots were the four main branches of the army. Since fine breeds of horses were not available locally the Pallavas had to import them from north India or West Asia, because of which they had to spend a huge portion of the revenue on cavalry. They also had a naval force. As we discussed earlier, when the Ceylonese exiled prince came to the court of the Pallava king Narshimhavarman I he sent two naval expeditions to Ceylon.

The Pandyan rulers were *vendars* (crowned kings). Like the Pallavas the nature of their monarchial rule was also hereditary. Nevertheless, wars of succession were also evident. The highest court of justice was the *Sabha* or *Manram*. The kingdom of the Pandyas was divided into *Mandalams* (provinces) and *Mandalams* were divided into *Nadus* or *Valanadus* (sub-provinces). A *nadu* was comprised of many villages. To look after the village administration the following five *variyams* (committees) were appointed:

- *neernilai variyam*,
- *aranilaya variyam*,
- *nanaya variyam*,
- *varithandal variyam,* and
- *needhi variyam*.

The *variyams* became a distinguishing feature of the village organization. Those engaged in farming were known as *Bhumiputras*.

5.8 ECONOMY

From the post-Gupta period the practice of land-grants became frequent in the north as well as south India. It was useful in the expansion of the agricultural lands because many uncultivated virgin lands were granted to the donees. The Pallava kingdom was very prosperous. The Pallava inscriptions inform that the Pallava rulers made many land-grants. They also donated lands for the maintenance of temples which emerged as important economic centres. They received rich endowments. They were granted obligatory contribution of food-grains from a group of villagers called *magamai*. The temples had *Koyil Parivarams* (ritual specialists). On annual festivals they attracted a huge mass of people and also gifts from them.

Hiuen Tsang who visited Kanchipuram records the Pallava capital in his celebrated account according to which the Pallava territory was very fertile and, hence, the agricultural sector flourished. Agricultural production was high. The forest lands were also used for cultivation. So, the forests not only provided timber and elephants but also helped in the expansion of the agricultural lands. The Pallavas had provided irrigation facility for the promotion of agriculture in various parts of the kingdom. Many irrigation tanks were made and some have survived till today. Many large irrigation tanks show that they must have required a large number of skilled labour. Many of the village *sabhas* had a separate Tank Supervision Committee to look after the construction and proper maintenance of the tanks.

The Pallavas were largely engaged in conflicts with the Chalukyas and the Pandyas. But during the peaceful times they could pay more attention towards improving trade and commerce in their domain. Narsimhavarman II Rajasimha (700-728 CE) had enjoyed a comparatively peaceful reign as there were no battles fought with the reigning Chalukyan ruler during his time. Maritime trade received a welcoming boost. Mahabalipuram was a busy Pallava port and its harbour was full of ships, loading and unloading cargo. When the Pallava emperor Narsimhavarman I sent his naval expedition to Ceylon for the 2nd time it was this port which was used for sending his army. They also had dockyards at Nagapattinam.

The Pandyans especially had a prosperous trade, both internal and external. There were several different kinds of merchants and traders (*vanigars*) such as the merchants of:

- salt,
- gold,
- ploughshare,
- cloth etc.

They were organized into many merchant guilds. Those engaged in external trade were called *paravas* or *paratavars*. *Nagarattars* were another type of active traders. The Pandyas exported spices (especially pepper), timber, gold and sandalwood but the primary item of export was pearls. The Pandyan kingdom was also known for their pearl fisheries. Marco Polo – an Italian explorer – speaks of the extremely fine quality of the pearls from this kingdom. Their major port cities were:

- Korkai,
- Kayal,
- Periyapattinam etc.

The Pandyas had inter-continental trade. The foreign merchants and travellers addressed the Pandyan kingdom as *Mabar* which is an Arabic term for ferry or passage. This underlines the significance of the region and there is evidence that it was frequently visited by the merchants and travelers, especially from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian region. Polo in his account informs that the Pandyan kings took interest in the promotion of trade and commerce and provided a favourable condition for the native and foreign merchants to engage in trading activities. One of the chief items the Pandyas imported was horses. The early Pandyas had a flourishing trade relation with the Romans, Greeks, China and south-east Asia as well. There was an exchange of embassies between the Roman empire and the Pandyan kingdom. In about 361 CE a Pandyan ruler had sent an envoy to the court of the Roman emperor Julian. We also find names of the Pandyan kings in Greek accounts.

The Kalachuris also enjoyed a flourishing economy. The Kalachuris of Tripuri controlled a territory which was rich in mineral resources. King was the supreme lord of lands in his domain. Their inscriptions show that he donated entire villages and such donations were made only by him. The kingdom had the monopoly over mines and other such reserves of valuable resources. The lands granted to the *Brahmanas* by the king made this priestly class socially and

economically powerful. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people. To promote agriculture irrigation facilities were provided. Since the territory of the Kalachuris of Chedi was very rich in forest land this enabled them to fully utilize the forest products and develop their industries. The growth of wood-work and tanning industries was especially fostered due to their easy access to the forests for raw materials. Other industries prevalent during this period were:

- mining,
- oil-mining,
- textile,
- metal,
- liquor manufacturing, and
- stone work industries.

In towns several activities concerning internal trade were conducted. At *Mandapika* all products to be sold in the market were taxed. These products were then sold in *vithis* (shops). Some historians opine that as Tripuri – the capital of the Kalachuris of Chedi – was the place through which many trade routes passed, so this must have given their economy a boost.

5.9 SOCIETY

The ruling and priestly class had an interdependent relationship. The *Brahmanas* provided political legitimacy to the ruling lineage and the kings granted them tax-free lands. The practice of land-grants, as mentioned earlier, further strengthened the political, social and economic bases of the *Brahmanas*. They occupied a high social status. The Tamil society underwent a great change during the Pallavas. Under them the "Aryanization" of south India was completed. The monuments they constructed were mainly religious structures dedicated to Hindu deities. The temples spread religious ideas but they also performed secular functions. There were many temples with libraries and thus, they became centres of religious as well as secular learning. The educational institutions attached to temples were:

- *Ghatikas*, and
- *Mathas*.

The wealthy temples had skilled musicians, singers and dancers in their service. The practice of employing female temple dancers evolved into the *devadasi* system. During this period the female temple dancers were honoured for their skills. Even the royal ladies were found to have acquired this skill. Rangapataka, a queen of Narsimhavarman II was a skilled dancer. So, the temples not only propagated religious and secular education but also acted as an employer.

The *Bhakti* movement which flourished under the Pallavas created a major impact on their social structure. We find that the growing influence of the *Bhakti* cult in the region led to the lessening of the influence of Buddhism and Jainism. The saint poets and poetesses of the movement belonged to different castes: from both high and low. There were:

- *Arasars* (kings),

- Brahmins,
- *Vanigars* (traders),
- *Vellalas* (agriculturists),
- *Kuyavars* (potters),
- *Vendars* (hunters) etc.

The caste system was an important aspect of Pallava society. Each caste was organized into occupational classes which were hereditary in nature. So, the caste and occupation of an individual were inter-related.

Class distinctions played a vital role in the Pandyan society as well. In the early Pandyan society people were divided into many classes. The king was at the top of the social hierarchy followed by:

i) the *Arivars* (the learned ascetics),

ii) *Ulavar* (the peasantry class),

iii) *Poruppan* (the warrior class),

iv) *Aayars* (shepherds),

v) *Vedduvars* (hunters),

vi) artisans (goldsmiths, blacksmith etc.),

vii) *Valayars* (fishermen) and lastly,

viii) *Pulayars* (scavengers) who were at the lowest rung of the society.

The various types of social classes created social inequality. The nature of society was patriarchal. Women were not regarded as equal to men. They had no right to property. The condition of widows was not good. The *Sati* system was evident and it was called *Tippaydal*. On the death of a Pandyan ruler named Pudappandiyan his queen observed this custom. During the Pandyan empire the king practiced polygamy. Polo records that the king had a number of trusted ministers who on his death burnt themselves on the funeral pyre of their king. However, women were given education and had the privilege to choose their husbands. In the *Sangam* age the women who were skilled in *iyal* (literature), *isai* (music) and *natakam* (drama) were regarded as *mudukkuravai*. The Tamil epic *Silapaddikaram* (*c*. 100-300 CE) describes Kannagi (the wife of Kovalan) as *mudukkuravai*.

As in the Pallava society the temples in the Pandyan kingdom too were more than religious establishments. They had social and economic functions as well. They received lavish gifts from the kings, princes and rich merchants. Such rich endowments made them the centres of many cultural activities such as:

- dance,
- music,
- singing,
- jewel-making etc.

Many temples had libraries which facilitated education. The study and the recitation of the *Vedas* and *Puranas* were carried out in them.

The Kalachuri rulers also gave land-grants to *mathas* and such educational institutions attached to the temples. They believed in the preservation of the ideal of *varnashrama dharma* which was one of the important characteristics of the ancient Indian society, according to which the society was divided into four *varnas* (classes). Under the Kalachuris of Kalyani the Virashaiva movement by Basavana started which began to promote equality. He established public institutions such as the *Anubhava Mantapa* to encourage spiritual discussions among both male and female followers belonging to different castes and classes.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Highlight some of the political achievements of Gangeyadeva of the Kalachuris of Chedi.

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2) Comment briefly on any two:

   i) Village administration of the Pallavas,

   ii) Nature of taxation under the Pallavas,

   iii) Village administration of the Pandyas,

   iv) Correlation between trade and the maintenance of the army of the Pallavas,

   v) Irrigation system in the Pallava period, and

   vi) Inter-continental trade during the Pandyan period.

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3) How did access to rich forest land facilitate the growth of industries under the Kalachuris of Chedi?

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4) Temples in the Pallava kingdom were centres of multiple activities. How?

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5.10   RELIGION

The Pallavas contributed to the growth of Brahmanical religion in their kingdom. Their inscriptions inform us that they performed Vedic sacrifices like the *Ashvamedha*. Mahendravarman I followed Jainism in the initial phase of his period but was converted into Brahmanical faith by a Nayanmar saint Appar (also known as Tirunavukkarasu). He became the worshipper of Shiva. His work *Mattavilasa Prahasana* throws some interesting light on the existing situation of the followers of different faiths in his kingdom.

Hiuen Tsang during his visit to Kanchipuram noted that Buddhism was in a thriving condition. There were about 100 *Sangharamas* (Buddhist monasteries) and 10,000 Buddhist priests were engaged in the study of *Mahayana* Buddhism. The number of Hindu and Jain temples was about 80. Dharampal, a Buddhist scholar who later became the head of the University of Nalanda was from Kanchipuram. However, Buddhism and Jainism during this time could not find royal patronage. As followers of Vaishnavism and Shaivism the Pallava rulers gave patronage largely to Brahmanical faith and this can be seen in Pallava art and architecture, the royal titles they adopted, their taxation system etc. The tradition of temple-building in south India was started by the Pallavas with the construction of rock-cut religious structures. The temples were commissioned by rulers in order to:

- express their devotion to a particular deity,
- commemorate a victory in a battle, or
- to emphasize their power.

Narsimhavarman II took the title of *Sankarbhakta* which means the worshipper of Shiva. He had commissioned the construction of:

- the Kailashnath temple at Kanchi,
- the Shiva temple at Penamalai, and
- the Shore temple at Mamallapuram.

The temples performed several important functions in each village and, thus, the religious structures emerged as hubs of political power. They gradually became temple cities. Tax-free land grants were given to them. Paramesvaravarman I granted the village of Parmesvaramangalam to a Shiva temple in the village Kuram for the maintenance of the temple.

Apart from the royal patronage the rise of the *Bhakti* movement during the Pallava period also led to the popularity of Brahmanical religion. It transformed the religious outlook of people. The *Bhakti* philosophy started to govern their religious life. The worship of Vishnu and Shiva was beginning to become more popular with the arrival of *Bhakti* and the teachings of the *Bhakti* saints.

Like the Pallavas, the Pandyan rulers too performed Vedic sacrifices. They were worshippers of Vedic deities. The *Brahmanas* held a high position in Tamil society. *Tamilaham* during the *Sangam* age was divided into five main *tinais* (physiographic divisions). The occupation and the deities worshipped by the people were related to the regions inhabited by them:

- The chief deity of the people living in *kurunjis* (hills) was Murugan (or Skanda) – the son of Shiva and Parvati.

- Mayon (Vishnu) was the chief god of those dwelling in *mullais* (jungles).

- The people in *marudams* (plains) worshipped Indra while those in *neydals* (coastal areas) worshipped Varuna.

- People from *palais* (drylands) were the worshippers of Korravai (mother of Murugan).

In the Pandyan kingdom of *Sangam* age Shaivism and Vaishnavism thrived and these faiths co-existed with Jainism and Buddhism. During the Kalabhras who were possibly the followers of Jainism or Buddhism both gained more prominence in the region. With the rise of *Bhakti* tradition Shaivism and Vaishnavism re-emerged. When Hiuen Tsang visited the Pandyan kingdom he found that Buddhism was in a declining condition.

The Kalachuris of Chedi gave royal patronage to Brahmanical religion, especially to Shaivism. They worshipped Vishnu and Shiva and made numerous land-grants for the maintenance of religious establishments. The Kalachuri ruler Yuvaraja I was a worshipper of Shiva and gave royal patronage to Shaivite saints. Durvasa, a well-known Shaivite established a monastery named Golakimatha. He gave lands for the maintenance of this monastery. His son and successor Lakshmanaraja was also a Shiva devotee. Shakti worship was also prevalent. The practice of Yogini cult was popular. There are 64 Yoginis. Their temples are found at:

- Khajuraho,

- Bheraghat,

- Shahdol etc.

Jainsim and Buddhism were also practiced. During the time of Kalachuris of Kalyani the *Virashaiva* or *Lingayat* movement (a sub-tradition within Shaivism) emerged in order to simplify religion. It was founded by Basavanna – a minister at the court of the Kalachuri king Bijjala. It was joined by many women saints as well as poetesses. Chennabasava (the nephew of Basava), Akka Mahadevi, Allama Prabhu, Renukacharya, Darukacharya, Nilambike etc. were some of the popular saints who belonged to this movement.

5.11 LITERATURE

The literature during the period of the Pallavas was both religious and secular but largely religious in nature. Both Sanskrit and Tamil literature flourished during this time. The court of the Pallava rulers granted royal patronage to Sanskrit literature. The Tamil literature received an impetus with the growth of *Bhakti* movement. Several *Nayannar* or *Nayanmar* (devotees of Shiva) poet saints as well as *Alvar* (devotees of Vishnu) poet saints wrote literary works of great importance which we will look at now.

The Pallava rulers largely patronized Sanskrit learning and culture. Sanskrit was their court language. However, their early inscriptional records are in Prakrit which by the latter half of the 14th century was replaced by Sanskrit. Mahendravarman I himself is remembered for his literary contributions. He was the author of:

- *Mattavilasa Prahasanam*: a satirical play written in Sanskrit, and

- *Bhagavadajjuka*.

He had written other works also but unfortunately those are lost and gone. Dandin adorned the court of the Pallava king Narsimhavarman II. He wrote *Dashakumaracharita* and *Avantisundarikatha* in Sanskrit. Not only the court of the Pallavas had prominent poets and authors but it also attracted poets from other royal courts. Bharavi, a Sanskrit poet who wrote *Kiratarjuniyam* visited the Pallava court during the time of Simhavishnu. Kanchipuram was an important centre of Sanskrit learning. Mayur Sarman, the founder of the Kadamba dynasty studied the *Vedas* at Kanchipuram.

We know that during the Pallavas there was growth of a sectarian movement i.e. the *Bhakti* movement. The *Alvar* and the *Nayanmar* saints composed many devotional songs and hymns to express devotion and love towards their deity. These devotional compositions played a significant role in enriching the *Bhakti* literature as well as Tamil literature because these were written in Tamil expressing the philosophy of *Bhakti*. The most significant work composed by the Vaishnavite saint poets is *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* which consists of 4,000 Tamil verses and was written by 12 Alvars. It is also known as the *Dravida Veda* or the 5th *Veda*. On the other hand *Tirumurai* is regarded as the major Shaivite canonical text. It has 12 books. The 1st seven are called *Tevaram*, written by the three important Nayanmar saints viz. Sundarar, Sambandar and Appar. Manikavasagar completed the 8th book. He was one of the ministers working under the Pandyan ruler Varaguna Varman II (862-885 CE). The 9th book includes the works of minor Nayanmar poets. The 1st nine books are called *Thoththiram* which means that the hymns were written chiefly to praise Shiva. The 10th contains the composition of Tirumular and it has guidelines (*chaththiram*). Again, the 11th book, as in the case of volume-9 of *Tirumurai*, has the works of the minor Shaivite saints such as Karaikkal Ammaiyar who was a female Nayanmar saint and Nambi Andar Nambi. The last volume of *Tirumurai* is called *Periyapuranam* (great epic) authored by Sekkilar during the Cholas and not the Pallavas. The *Bharatavenba* by Perundevanar is a Tamil composition written during the later Pallava period.

Some important literary figures during the Kalachuris of Ratanpur (who were earlier the vassals of the Kalachuris of Chedi) were:

- Rudrashiva,

- Rajaguru,

- Babu Reva Ram,

- Shiv Dutt Shastri, and

- Gopal Prasad Mishr.

The noted works of Babu Reva Ram are:

- *Ratnapariksha*,

- *Brahmastrota*,

- *Vikramvilas*,

- *Gangalahiri*,

- *Ramayana Dipika*,

- *Saar Ramayana*,

- *Narmadashtak,*

- *Tawarikh hay-hay Vanshi*, and

- *Geeta Madhav*.

Gopal Prasad Mishr wrote *Khoob Tamasha* which is a critical account of the administration of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. He also wrote:

- *Bhakta Chintamani*,

- *Sudamacharita*, and

- *Rampratap*.

Itihasa Samuchhya and *Ratanpur Akhyan* were written by Shiv Dutt Shastri. During the reign of Yuvaraja I of the Kalachuris of Chedi the famous poet Rajashekhar staged a drama named *Viddha Salabhanjika* at his court. Under the Kalachuris of Kalyani, Kannada literature flourished. During this time a new trend in Kannada poetry called *Vachana Sahitya* was introduced. It is a type of rhythmic writing. The *Vachana* writers were known as *Vachanakaras*. Some important works of this period are:

- *Bijjalarayacharita* by Dharani Pandita,

- *Chennabasavapurana* by Virupaksha Pandita, and

- *Bijjalarayapurana* by Chandrasagara Varni.

5.12 ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Let us next look at the art and architecture under these dynasties. The architecture of a particular kingdom is influenced by various factors such as:

- the availability of resource materials in the respective regions,

- political situations,

- political conflicts,

- preference of the kings,

- skills of the artisans, and

- the belief system.

The Pallavas and the Pandyas used granite which is a type of hard rock for the construction of their temples. Unlike soft rocks, cutting and shaping hard rocks is not easy. It requires very skilled artisans. It is believed that possibly, the cave temples commissioned by the Pallavas and the Pandyas were made by same artisans.

In south India, rock-cut architecture laid the foundation for the Dravidian style of architecture. The Pallavas are credited with the introduction of this style. The evolution of the Pallava style of architecture corresponded with the reigning rulers, viz. Mahandravarman I, Narsimhavarman I, Rajsimhavarman and Aparajita. Each of them contributed towards the development of unique styles and, thus, each style is named after their respective patrons. The Pallava architecture progressively evolved from rock-cut temples to monolithic *rathas* and finally, it gave way to structural temples. The evolution of Pallava architecture can be divided into four different stages or styles:

a) **Mahendra Style**: Mahendravarman I was also known by a royal title Chattakari which shows his liking for temple-building. He had employed artisans to construct rock-cut cave temples and thus, under his patronage the earliest stage of Pallava architecture was developed. Some of the salient features of this style are:

   i)   cubical pillars,

   ii) circular lingam,

   iii) two-armed dvarapalas (door-guardians) standing in some distinct position on each side of the doors of the shrines etc.

This style has cave temples with the *garbhagriha²* behind the rectangular *mandapa³*. The *mandapa* has short and heavy pillars which are equally spaced. These pillars are square in shape at the top and base. The middle portions of the pillars are in octagonal form. They are without any ornamentation, but during the later phase of this style the top and the base of the pillars are found to be decorated with the lotus-motif. The early rock-cut cave temples were dedicated to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (Trinity) whereas the later ones are dedicated to a single Hindu deity – either Vishnu or Shiva. However, the shrine cells are without any image of a deity. These are completely empty. But, we know through the inscriptions of the temples that the *garbhagriha* had the image of a deity. Perhaps, the images were made of perishable material like wood and that is why those could not survive. Stone was not used for making the images to be placed in *garbhagriha* during this period. Some examples of the cave-temples built in this style are:

- Mahendravishnugrha (a Vishnu temple) at Mahendravadi near Arkonam,
- Lakshitayatana cave temple, and
- the ones built at Dalavanur, Mandagapattu and Tiruchirapalli.

b) **Mamalla Style**: Narsimhavarman I or Mamalla is well known for his temple-building activities. In the early phase of his reign some of the temples constructed such as the ones at Pudukotta and Trichinopoly show that he continued the Mahendra style. One very important feature of the Mamalla style is the pillars of the temples. In the Mahendra style they are thick, heavy and cubical in shape with corbel capitals. As a departure this style displays their better proportion. They are tall, slender, more ornamented and appear elegant. On their base we find leogryph (lion-headed creature) or *vyala* motif. These *simha vyalas* are shown in a seated position providing support to the pillars. Hence, this style introduced a very vital feature of the Pallava architecture i.e. the pillars adorned with *simha vyala* images.

A crucial development in the field of the Pallava architecture occurred during this style. It witnessed steady transition from the rock-cut style to the construction of the monolithic structures. He is well-known for the construction of the seven *pagodas* or the monolithic *rathas* at Mahabalipuram/Mamallapuram (Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu). These

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² Sanctum sanctorum or the sacred chamber wherein the image of the primary deity of a temple is kept.

³ A pillared hall.

rathas are built out of monolithic rock. These are 10 in number out of which the five *rathas* – commonly known as *pancha pandava rathas* – are of more significance. These *pancha rathas* are:

- the Draupadi *ratha*,

- Dharmaraja *ratha*,

- Bhima *ratha*,

- Arjuna *ratha*, and

- Nakul-Sahdeva *ratha*.

They are placed in a single temple complex. Except for the Draupadi *ratha* they are built in the Buddhist *vihara* and *chaitya* style. The Draupadi *ratha*, in a square plan, is made in a very simple manner. It appears to look like a village hut with a thatched roof. The Bhima *ratha* – the largest of all – has a barrelled roof as we see in the Buddhist *chaityas*. The Dharmaraja *ratha* with its three-storeyed *vimana* (tower) has the tallest and largest *vimana* of all the monolithic *rathas* at Mahabalipuram. Apart from these five *rathas* we also have the Valaiyankuttai *ratha*, Ganesha *ratha*, northern Pidari *ratha* and southern Pidari *ratha* and another one in front of the Mahishasurmardini cave.

LEFT: *Pancha Pandava Rathas*, **Mamallapuram, Tamilnadu. Credit: G41rn8. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/83/Mamallapuram_si0508.jpg).**

RIGHT: Bhima *Ratha* with *Simha Vyala* Carved on the Pillars. Credit: Zuhebkhan94. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Bhima_Ratha_(Five_Rathas),_Mahabalipuram.jpg).

c) **Rajasimha Style**: Narsimhavarman II or Rajasimha constructed structural temples which were constructed by using blocks of rock placed one upon the other. It is a very different technique from the earlier ways of temple construction during the Pallava period. At Mamallapuram he built the Shore temple overlooking Bay of Bengal, Ishvara temple and Mukunda temple and at Kanchipuram he is known to have built the Kailashnath temple (also known as the Rajasimhesvara temple), the Vaikunthaperumal temple and the Airavatesvara temple. The Kailashnath temple is well noted for its pyramidal *vimana* and a flat-roofed *mandapa*.

d) **Aparajita Style**: Under this the temples built were very ornate in style. Beautiful images of kings and their queens are also shown which can be noted as one of the important characteristics of this style. We can find a few examples of this style at Dalavanur.

Another feature of these monuments commissioned by the Pallava rulers is the artistic sculptural panels found on their walls. In Mahishasurmardini *mandapam* which is a rock-cut cave temple in Mahabalipuram there is a huge sculptural panel on the wall at the northern end. It depicts a battle scene between the eight-armed goddess Durga mounted on a fierce lion and the buffalo-headed king of demons Mahishasura. The latter is shown in a retreating position. In the same rock-cut cave temple is the bas-relief of Anantashayana or Vishnu Sheshasayi in which he in his *yoganidra* is shown lying on the divine serpent Adishesha.

Another celebrated sculptural panel belonging to the Pallava period is Gangadhara or "the descent of the Ganga", also called "Arjuna's Penance", at Mamallapuram. It captures the story of the descent of river Ganga to earth. The penance of the sage Bhagiratha, or sometimes believed to be Arjuna, brought it to earth. Shiva is shown controlling the fury of the descending river through his hair locks. The panel is also shown in the Kailashnath temple at Kanchipuram.

LEFT: Mahishasurmardini Sculptural Wall Panel, Mahabalipuram. Credit: Jenith. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mahishasura_sculpture_ at_Mahabalipuram.jpg).

RIGHT: Vishnu _Sheshasayi_ Panel. Credit: Richard Mortel. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mahishasuramardini_Mandapam,_Pallave_ period,_7th_century,_Mahabalipuram_(39)_(36804060563).jpg).
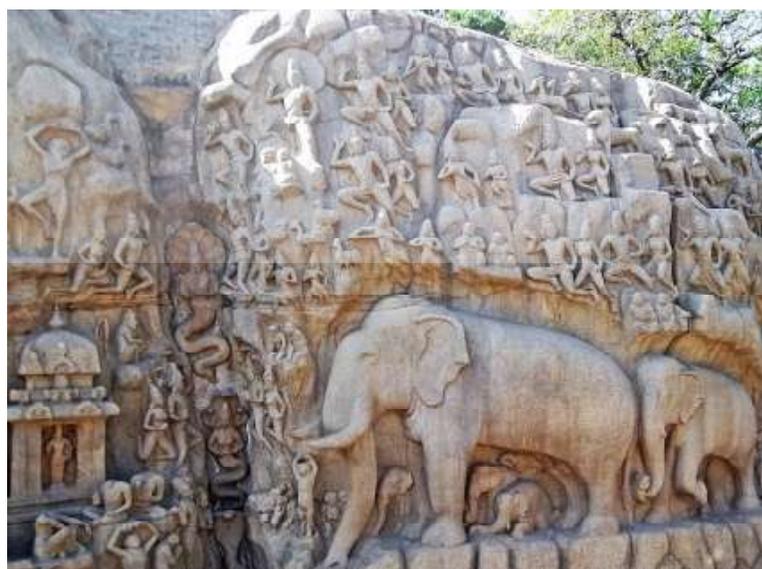
Gangadhara's or Arjuna's Penance. ASI Monument No. N-TN-C57. Credit: Dr. Gunjan Guha. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stone_ Sculpture_Representing_The_Group_Of_Elephants,_Monkeys_-_Mamallapuram_- _Kanchipuram_(3).jpg).

Other examples of sculptural panels are the Varaha, the Trivikrama, the Gaja-lakshmi and Durga panels in the Varaha *mandapa* and the Somaskanda panel in the Dharmaraja *ratha*. There are also portrait sculptures of Pallava rulers.

Thus, we see that Pallava architecture is chiefly religious in nature. The Pallava rulers mainly endorsed the construction of temples and these religious structures are primarily dedicated to Brahmanical deities like Vishnu and Shiva. The legacy of the Pallava style of architecture was carried on by the imperial Cholas with some significant changes, such as the small towers of the Pallava temples became lofty during their period. The Pallava architecture also influenced the south-east Asian temple architecture.

The characteristics of the architectural structures of the Pandyas, in many ways, appear similar to the architecture of the Pallavas. As we have seen earlier, in their respective regions soft stone was not available and so, for carving their artisans used hard stone i.e. granite. It could be possible that the craftsmen working under these two dynasties were of the same group, sharing similar expertise and the techniques of carving. The Pandyan architecture was comparatively simpler in its execution and smaller in its structure than that of the Pallavas. For example, the pillars of the Pandyan temples are not very ornate and lack any elaborate motif such as *simha vyala*. Whereas by the reign of Narsimhavarman I we find the progression of the Pallava architecture from rock-cut cave structures to monolithic ones and the architectural style had become more advanced. The architectural structures built by the Pandyas seem to be in the very early phase of rock-cut architecture. Therefore, some scholars believe that the tradition of the rock-cut caves in south India was introduced by the Pandyas and not by the Pallavas. To the south of the river Kaveri we find some interesting examples of the Pandyan cave-temples. These are:

- The Vishnu cave-temple at Malaiyadipatti,

- Shiva cave-temple at Malaiyakkoyil,

- Satyagirisvara cave-temple at Tirumayam,

- Arivarkoyil cave-temple at Sittannavasal which is a Jain cave temple, and

- Karpakavinayakar cave-temple at Pillaiyarpatti.

Inscriptions from the Shiva cave-temple at Malaiyakkoyil and Satyagirisvara cave-temple at Tirumayam contain the names of some musical instruments. Karpakavinayakar cave-temple has the earliest sculpture of the Hindu deity Vinayaka or Ganesha. The inscription of this temple is inscribed both in Brahmi and Tamil languages.

After the resurgence of Pandyans we find significant changes in their architectural style which, in turn, contributed to the development of the Dravidian school of architecture. For example, the temples built by them during this phase have huge ornamented gateways called *gopurams*. The height of these *gopurams* in their temples is noticeably taller than those of the *vimanas* (towers over the *garbhagriha*). During the imperial Cholas the *vimanas* were built taller than the *gopurams*. However, the Pandyans gave more attention to the *gopurams* of the temples they constructed. They also started adorning their *gopurams* with the *vimanas* in the oblong pyramidal shape. These *gopurams* are now highly ornamented. The Meenakshi Amman temple at Madurai and Nellaiappar temple

at Tirunelveli are some of the significant examples of the temples of Pandyan empire.

The Kalachuris also made their contributions in the field of art and architecture. They are credited to have excavated many caves, for example cave nos. 6 and 7 of the Buddhist caves at Aurangabad and some caves of Elephanta, Ellora and Jogeshwari, all in Maharashtra. The Kalachuris of Mahishmati or the early Kalachuris seem to have controlled the Konkan coast and therefore, some of the monuments on Elephanta island can be attributed to them. The Ellora cave no. 29 displays similarities in its architectural style to that of Elephanta caves which received the patronage of Kalachuris of Mahishmati. We read earlier that during the Kalachuris of Chedi along with
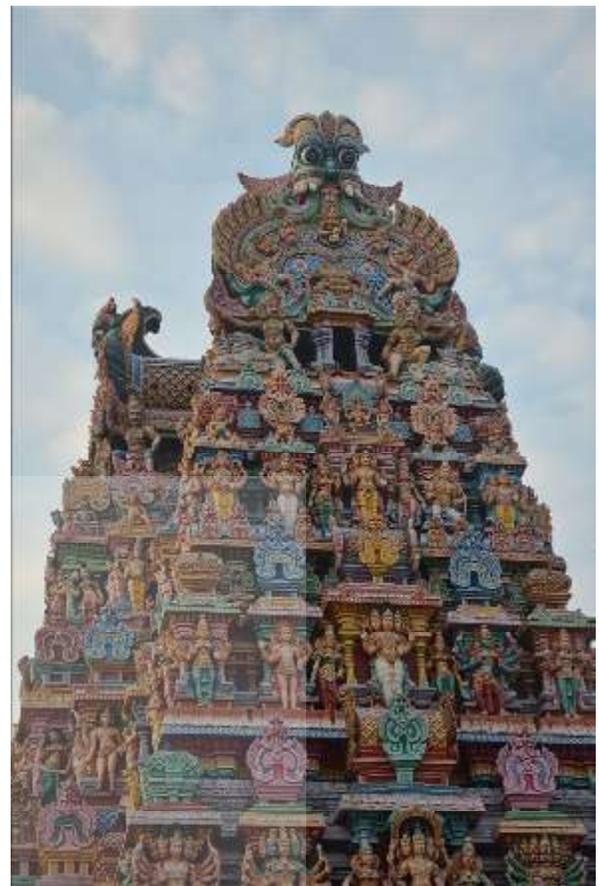
Gopuram **of the Meenakshi Amman Temple.**
Source: Dr. Richa Singh.

Shaivism and Vaishnavism Devi worship was also prevalent. The temples dedicated to Chausath Yoginis were built at Khajuraho, Bheraghat, Shahdol etc. They also built temples at Chandrehe, Amarkantak, Sohagpur etc.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Write few lines on the following:

   i) The *Virashaiva* movement

   ii) Contribution of the *Alvar* saint-poets towards the growth of the *Bhakti* literature and

   iii) Development of Tamil literature during the Pandyas.

   ....
   ....
   ....

2) Discuss the gradual evolution of Pallava architecture from rock-cut cave temples to monolithic structures and its culmination into structural temples.

   Or

   Give some examples of the sculptures of the Pallava period and discuss any one.

   ....
   ....

5.13 SUMMARY

To sum up, this Unit shows:

- The Pallavas, the Pandyas and the Kalachuris structuring their relationship with their respective neighbouring kingdoms and the impacts these interactions created on their political history. The struggle for political supremacy also shaped the relationship with their feudatories.

- The relationship of the king with his territory comprising of agricultural lands, forest areas, wastelands, water bodies etc. Some tracts of lands had state monopoly while others were redistributed through the system of land-grants. The land-grants which started with the Satavahanas became plentiful under the Guptas. During the post-Gupta period it was widespread which led to the expansion of cultivated lands and integration, emergence of *Brahmanas* as landed intermediaries and caste differentiation which brought changes in their society, economy and religious beliefs as well as in cultural arena.

- Development of art and architecture under the Pallavas, Pandyas and Kalachuris.

5.14 KEY WORDS

BCE	:	Before Common Era.
CE	:	Common Era (The traditional method of dividing dates into BC or Before Christ and AD or Anno Domini has been replaced by the modern system of using BCE and CE.)
Interregnum	:	of a particular dynasty denotes a period of interval or discontinuity of its rule.
Rock-cut Structure	:	a structure when a natural solid rock or boulder is cut in order to give it a desired shape.
Dravidian School of Architecture	:	the style of architecture which originated and developed in south India. *Gopuram*, water tank and other characteristic features make this style of architecture unique and different from the *Nagara* school of architecture.

5.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) See Section 5.2

2) See Section. 5.2

3) See Section. 5.4

4) See Section 5.5

Check Your Progress 2

1) See Section 5.6

2) See Section 5.7, 5.8

3) See Section 5.8

4) See Section 5.9

Check Your Progress 3

1) See Section 5.10, 5.11

2) See Section 5.12

5.16 SUGGESTED READINGS

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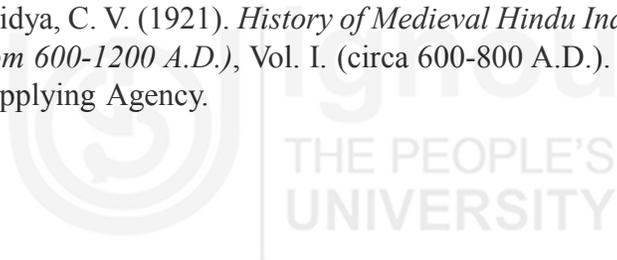
UNIT 6 THE KADAMBAS, THE CHALUKYAS OF BADAMI, THE CHOLAS AND THE HOYASALAS*

Structure

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about the:

- major kingdoms and their territorial expansion and political processes in the peninsular India from 6th to 12th centuries CE;

- nature of monarchical polities of the Kadambas, Chalukyas, Cholas and the Hoyasalas; and

- administrative and institutional structures of the Kadambas, Chalukyas, Cholas and the Hoyasalas.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit traces the political developments in the Deccan and the Deep South during the 9th-13th centuries CE. After the weakening of the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan and the Deep South, new political formations emerged. Later Kadambas who were the feudatories of Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas, taking advantage of the waning power, established their independent kingdoms at Gopakapattana (Goa) and Banavasi (Hangal). The Cholas (medieval Cholas) re-emerged as a powerful force, almost dominating the region for four centuries. At the same time, there was a subtle decline of the Pallavas and the Pandayas in the region, giving way to the emergence of the Chalukyas of Badami. Hoysalas also took advantage of the situation and emerged prominent and even overran the entire Chera territories and became *Keralasvamis*.

6.2 THE KADAMBAS

The Kadambas initially emerged prominent around Talagunda (modern Shimoga district) in the north-western Karnataka around 345 CE. The centre of their political activities was Banavasi region, that is why they are also commonly

*This Unit has been adopted from MHI-04, Units 6 and 15. However, Sections 6.2 and 6.5 are freshly written.

known as Kadambas of Banavasi. They were absorbed into Chalukyan polity around 6th century CE and became feudatories of the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas. They once again emerged into prominence in the second half of the 10th century CE. Here we are not concerned with early Kadambas, instead the focus of our discussion will be on medieval Kadambas who were prominent in the region during 10th-13th centuries CE. In the 11th century there emerged two prominent groups claiming Banavasi Kadamba lineage:

1) Kadambas of Hangal (in Dharwar district) and

2) the Kadambas of Goa (Dharwar, Karwar and Belgaum districts).

Both claimed the title *Banavasipuravaradhisvara*, suggestive of their claims over the capital Banavasi. The Kadambas of Goa governed from Chandrapura and Gopakapattana; while Kadambas of Hangal retained their base at Banavasi.

The Kadambas of Hangal ruled around mid-9th century to early 13th century with their capital at Banavasi. The Kadambas of Gopakapattana (modern Goa) were prominent during 11th century to mid-13th century. They ruled over north-western part of Goa, Belgaum (Patasige 1200), Dharwar and parts of northern Kanara (Konkana 900, present Ratnagiri) districts of modern Karnataka. The founder of the Kadambas of Goa was Sheshtha-I. However, the proper history of the Kadambas of Goa begins with Guvaladeva-I, Sheshtha I's son. To him goes the credit of bringing Lamka (south Goa) permanently under his jurisdiction. They finally lost to the Chalukyas of Badami.

King and His Officials

Though king was all powerful, an important feature of medieval Karnataka was the decentralised polities where the king delegated powers to local chiefs/feudatories who ran almost parallel governments, maintained their own administrative set-up and officers. There was a tradition of appointing *yuvaraja* (crown prince, heir-apparent). Jayakesi-I assumed the title of:

- *Konkanadhisa*,
- *Konkana Chakravarti* (Lord of Konkana) and
- *Paschim-Samudradhisvara* (Lord of the western ocean).

Guvala-II had his own *mantri-parishad*. In an inscription of 1054 CE Viravarmadeva is described as *Mahamandaleshvara*. Shashthideva performed *Tulapurusa* and *Ashvamedha* sacrifices and paid visit to Somnath temple.

We also hear specific functionaries of the court officials like:

- *Manevargade* (of the household),
- *Tantrapala* (councillors),
- *Pradhana* (head), and
- *Tambula Parupatyegara* (keeper of the betel-plate).

Similarly, there was also the presence of *mahamattra*, *rajjuka* and *lekhaka*.

Regions were divided into *visayas* (districts) administered by *maneyas*. The lowest unit was village (*grama*) governed by *grama mukhya*, *Urodeya* or *Gavunda*. They maintained their own army and performed judicial functions. *Mahajanas* were important members of the assemblies.

Economy and Trade

Both agriculture and trade formed the backbone of the economy. References of *tribhoga*, *sarvanamasya* and *talavritti* land-grants suggest presence of land holdings by the individuals and religious groups. Kadamba rulers provided liberal grants to Jainas and Shaivas. Xuan Zhang attests to presence of a number of Buddhist monasteries and *mathas* at Banavasi.

Kadambas owed their prosperity largely to their maritime activities. The capital of the Kadambas of Goa – Chandapur – was an important maritime centre. Their important port Ganadevi (in modern Surat district) had contacts with east African coast. Jayakesi I assuming the title of *Paschim-Samudradhishvara* (Lord of the western ocean) suggests importance of oceanic trade in the Kadamba economy. One also finds strong presence of the Arab merchants in the region. Guhalladeva was saved by Madhumada (Muhammad)/ Ali, an Arab merchant during his pilgrim voyage to Somanath. Ali's son Sadhana even received land-grants, held administrative post and built a mosque (*mijigiti*).

6.3 THE CHALUKYAS OF BADAMI

When Pallavan king Simhavishnu (500-580 CE) was busy expanding his territories, it was almost about the same time the Chalukyas of Badami started ruling in North Karnataka with Badami (Bijapur District) as their capital. The founder, Pulakesin I (543-66 CE) converted the hill near Badami into a strong fortress and launched his expansionist activities. The territory of the Kadambas of Banavasi towards the South and that of the Mauryas of Konkan on the West were soon conquered and annexed to their growing territory by Kirtivarman I (566-597 CE).

It was, however, in the reign of Pulakesin II (609-42 CE) that the Chalukya territory expanded to a large extent. The Ganga rulers of South Karnataka and the Alupas of the West coast (South Kanara District) were made their subordinates. Thus, more or less the whole of Kannada speaking area was brought under one rule. In the North the army went beyond the Narmada river to Malwa and Southern Gujarat where the Latas, Malwas and Gurjaras became submissive. Crowning all these, the Chalukyan ruler came head-on against his greatest northern adversary, Harsha of Kanauj, who was planning to attack the Deccan and won a decisive victory on the banks of the Narmada. Ravikirti's Aihole inscription speaks in detail the victory of Pulakesin II over Harsha. After the victory Pulakesin II assumed the title of *Parameshvara* (Supreme Lord).

Pulakesin II tried to control the whole of Deccan by undertaking an expedition into the Eastern Deccan and coastal Andhra comprising the deltas of Krishna and Godavari rivers. This brought him into conflict with the Pallavas who had been trying to control the delta for more than a century. Mahendravarman I (580-630 CE), the Pallava contemporary, was also an ambitious king. In the ensuing encounters the Pallavas suffered defeat and the Chalukyan army penetrated deep into the Pallava territory almost up to the capital city Kanchipuram. Soon after this, Pulakesin II put up his brother Vishnuvardhana to rule over the Andhra country and this paved the way for the new long-lasting dynasty called the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi centred in the Godavari-Krishna delta.

The Pallava king Narasimha I (630-68 CE), son and successor of Mahendra I, proved an equal match to the Chalukyan king and after a series of battles he took his forces into the Chalukyan territory and even entered into Badami where an inscription of his victory was inscribed on a rock.

The succeeding decades saw more hostilities between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas but with no decisive changes on either side. Then followed a lull in war activities for about three decades. At this time the Chalukyan king was Vijayaditya (696-733 CE) and his Pallava contemporary was Rajasimha (691-729 CE). The Chalukyan rule in Badami was replaced by the Rashtrakutas in about 750 CE when Rashtrakuta feudatory Dantidurga gave a final blow and defeated the Chalukyan king Kirtivarman II.

The Chalukyan Polity

The Deccan kingdoms of the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas were polities based on the Brahmanical socio-political order and institutions like the *Brahmadeya* and the temple, but remained a loosely knit *Samanta* type of feudatory states where crisis was built into the very nature of the feudatory system, with ranking among the chiefships and an authority/power structure in which the scale could easily be tilted by one or the other chiefship with military capability. Thus, there was hardly any scope for a centralised administration to develop, though there was a centralised taxation system and a hierarchically organised bureaucracy. There was no proper standing army except the royal troops at the capital and the smaller groups of fighters in the neighbouring regions held under the control of members of the royal family, some of whom were placed at strategic points in the transit zones and buffer zones held by feudatories or smaller powers owing allegiance to the main dynasty, zones leading to more powerful neighbours in the Tamil and Andhra regions.

Kingship

High sounding titles were used by the rulers to express their very uncertain power. The titles of Chalukyan kings were as follows:

* *Satyasraya*,

* *Sri-Prithvi-Vallabha*,

* *Maharaja*,

* *Parmeshvara* and

* *Maharajadhiraja.*

It was not a centralized kingdom. We do not find reference to council of ministers but it seems that the royal family was placed in charge of official positions. Later, the Eastern Chalukyan kingdom and other kingdoms developed due to this policy. They emerged as offshoots of the original Chalukyas of Badami. Inscriptions give us information about the administrative system. *Rajasravitam* were the royal orders. The *Vijnaptis* (petitioners) and writers of the king's orders related to grants on stone or copper plates were important administrative personnel. They held the position of *Mahasandhivigrahika* (officer-in-charge of peace and war). The divisions mentioned in the epigraphical records are:

* *Rashtra*,

* *Vishaya* and

- *Nadu.*

The copper-plate grants bestowed by the Chalukya kings refer to *Vishyapatis, Samantas, Gramabhogikas, Maharattaras* etc. Thus, the administrative system was not centralised. However, *Vishayapatis* were royal personnel. Village was the smallest part of the administrative system. The *Gamunda* was the royal representative at the village level. He was the connecting link between king and village people. The *Karanas* were the village accountants. *Mahajans* constituted the village elders. The Lakslunesvar inscription gives us details regarding the links between the royal machinery and local administration. An *Achara vyasthe* (charter of rights and duties) was bestowed upon the *Mahajans, Nagaras* (commercial interests) and 18 *Prakritis* (classes). It refers to royal personnel, *Mahajans, Desadhipatis* (officers who collected taxes), *Shrenis* (guild) of oil mongers etc. Various taxes are mentioned in the inscription which were to be paid to the king's officials for great festivals, salt, tribute and gold. The Hyderabad grant of Pulkesin II refers to the village being granted together with the *Nidhi* (treasure), *Upanidhi*, *Klipta* and *Uparikara* (dues). Members of the royal family and trade associations also made gifts to the temples in kind (millet, betel leaves) [MHI-04, Unit 15, p. 22].

Administration

The officers with impressive designations like *Mahasandhivigrahika, Mahadandanayaka* and so on were appointed from among the kinsmen of the royal families and even from among the lesser chiefs and feudatories. Government at the local level can be located in regions called the *Vishaya*, *Rashtra* and *Desha*, with their respective heads called *Vishayapati*, *Deshadhikari*, etc. while the *Grama* (village) was run by the *mahajanas* – the big men of the village – controlling land, production and redistribution and also local administration. In most cases these divisions were not created by the central authority but were those spontaneously evolved regions which were recognized as such by the ruling powers, the centre of power shifting according to the change in the dynasties which acquired a hegemonic control over certain core regions and territories. Hence, these polities may be best understood as loosely knit chiefships under a more powerful dynastic rule/control, with a monarchy supported by the Brahmanical order and institutional means. It was a scale of formations which had the potential of tilting in favour of the mightier among the ruling powers.[1]

Source: MHI-04, *Political Structures in India*, Units 6 and 15.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Write a note on the Kadambas.

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1 The entire section on the Chalukyas of Badami is adopted from MHI-04, *Political Structures in India*, Unit 6.5, pp. 24-26, 29-30 and Unit 15.6, p. 22.

2) Discuss briefly the emergence of Chalukyan power under Pulakesin II.

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3) Do you agree that the Chalukyan polity was highly centralised in nature?

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4) Which one of the following statements is wrong?

   i)   Ravikirti's Aihole inscription mentions the defeat of Harsha at the hands of Pulakesin II. ( )

   ii) Chalukyan clashes with the Pallavas were responsible for the downfall of the Chalukyan state . ( )

   iii) Danti Durga was a Rashtrakuta feudatory. ( )

   iv) Pulakesin II assumed the title of *Parameshvara* after his victory over Harsha. ( )

6.4   THE CHOLAS

The Cholas – the most powerful of the peninsular polities with the Kaveri valley as the nucleus of their power — succeeded in establishing the most enduring regional state in the Tamil macro-region [MHI-04, Unit 6.1, p. 24].

Territorial Expansion

The Cholas as a ruling power rose to eminence in the 9th century CE when Vijayalaya seized Tanjavur from a feudatory chief of the Pallavas called Muttarayas. Henceforth, the Cholas were able to establish control over Pallava territories and subdued the Pandyan power. The Chola state stood on a firm footing deriving sustenance from the resource-pocket located in the fertile and rich area of the Kaveri valley. In the period of Rajaraja I and subsequent period, various feudatory chiefs were subjugated and the earlier category of *Nadu* was regrouped into *Valanadu* and was placed under the subdued chiefs. The landed magnates were also incorporated into the state system and were provided prestigious titles and were assigned administrative and military duties which included collection and assessment of land revenue.

Chola Kingship

The Cholas traced their origin to the *Suryavamsha.* Mythical traditions are mentioned in the inscriptions especially in the *prashastis* containing the genealogies (Tiruvalangad Copper Plates, the larger Leiden Plates and the Anbil Plates, Kanya Kumari inscription of Vira Rajendra etc.) and these are interspersed

with information about historical personages. It appears that these served the purpose of legitimization of the rule of the Cholas. The *prashastis* of the Cholas were based on the *Itihaasa-Purana* tradition. The dominance of the Sanskritic and the Brahmanical traditions is well attested. The Cholas also ascribe to the legacy of the *Sangam* period. The genealogies of the Cholas attribute eminent and prestigious lineage to the king to legitimize his position as king. The period from the eighth year of Rajaraja onwards is marked by absence of genealogical record in the Tamil *Meykkirttis*. These compositions narrate the military exploits of the kings, are inscribed on stone and address the Tamil landed magnates. The Cholas ascribe *Kshatriya* origin to themselves as is attested by the title *Kshatriyasikhamani* of the king Rajaraja. The *Yarman* suffix (Sanskritic) added to the names of the kings was also a part of the process of claiming *kshatriya* status e.g. Adityavarman (871-906 CE) and Parantaka Varman (707-755 CE). The practice of assuming names during coronation also existed under the Cholas e.g. Prakesarivarman, Rajakesarivarman and Arumolivarman (Tamil name with a Sanskrit suffix). The charters of the Cholas consist of the *prashastis* and genealogies in Sanskrit and the details regarding the grant in Tamil. *Hiranyagarbha* and *Tulabhara* ceremonies were conducted by the Chola kings. The anointment ceremony was also a means to claim *Kshatriya* position. A grant of Vira Chola points out that the king was advised by a *Brahmana* moral preacher (*dharmopadeshta*) that bestowment of land to *Brahmanas* would lead his forefathers to heaven. However, actual motive for making the grants was redistribution of resources in the form of land, gold, cattle etc. The gifts were bestowed for meritorious service provided by the *Brahmanas* and also to seek legitimacy from them in political sphere. We have proper records of land-grants but the grants of gold, cattle etc. were merely stated in *prashastis*. Through the land-grants the kings tried to convert unsettled areas into agrarian settlements. These grants did not simply serve a charitable purpose. Rajaraja is regarded as *Ulakalanda Perumel* (the great one who measured the earth like *Trivikrama)* and as Shiva who established control over the land of Bhargava Rama.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss briefly Chola territorial expansion.

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2) Trace the characteristic features of Chola kingship on the basis of *prashastis*.

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Local Administration: *Ur* **and** *Nadu*

The Chola copper plate evidence refers to the following while executing the land-grant:

1) *Nattar*

2) *Brahmadeyakkilavar*

3) a) *Devadana*

   b) *Palliccanda*

   c) *Kanimurruttu*

   d) *Vettapperu-Urkalilar*

4) *Nagarattar*

Nattars were the representatives of *Nadu* (locality). The *Brahmadeyakkilavars* were the *Brahmana* donees of *Brahmadeya* (lands given to the *Brahmanas*). *Nagarattars* comprised of the trading community and belonged to the *nagaram* (settlement of a group of traders). *Devadana*, *Palliccanda*, *Kavimurruttu* and *Vettaperu* have been identified as tax-free villages. Y. Subbarayalu has pointed out that *nattars* were analogous to the *Vellanvagai Urars* (peasant villages) since a number of *Urs* constituted a *Nadu*. Subbarayalu considers the village (*Ur*) as a small component (fractional) of the *Nadu*. As a constituent of administrative structure the *Nadu* was important but it incorporated and represented the *Urs* (*vellanvagai* villages). Thus, in the territorial sphere *Nadu* comprised of *Vellanvagai* villages. *Nattars* were the important members (land holders) of the *Nadu* (locality). There are very few inscriptions related to the *vellanvagai* villages. It seems that the *Ur* being the common populace represented the section which was not literate. However, the inscriptional evidence related to *Urs* which is found in the temples is attributed to literate groups.

N. Karashima has analysed the two Tanjavur inscriptions of Rajaraja I and Gangaikkondacolapuram inscription of Vivarajendra. According to him, the *vellanvagai* villages comprised of agricultural lands, lands used by pastoralists, irrigation devices, funeral place, dwelling place etc. The dwelling area comprised of:

l) habitation sites of landholders/cultivators *(ur-nattam/ur-irukkai)*,

2) those of the artisans *(kammanacceri)*,

3) those of agricultural labour *(paraicceri)*.

Karashima is of the opinion that in the *Vellanvagai* villages differentiation is not noticed. Subbarayalu, however, refutes this argument and suggests the existence of a hierarchical structure in these villages comprising of:

• cultivators *(kaniyudaiyar)*,

• tenant cultivators *(ulukudi)*,

• artisans and

• the agricultural labourers.

The cultivators were generally referred to as *vellals*. The functions of the *Ur* included: supervision of village lands viz. activities related to sale, purchase and gift. An important prerequisite for becoming a member of the *Ur* was to be a

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holder of land. From the inscriptional evidence we come to know that the members of the *Ur* also possessed the titles like:

- *Udaiyan*,

- *Kilan (kilavan)*,

- *Velan*, and

- *Peraraiyan*.

All these titles point to landholding. Thus, the epigraphical testimony enables us to infer that *Ur* was the group/assembly of non-*brahmana* land holders of a village.

Karashima has argued that the land was held in common in the *Ur* villages. In some other instances he refers to sale of land by members of *Ur* as individuals. Subbarayalu also refers to the tendency towards 'individual holdings' in this period. *Nadus* were named after a village which formed a part of a *Nadu*. Inscriptional evidence indicates that in several *Nadus* the main village was *Brahmadeya* (land given to *Brahmanas*). However, several *nadus* did not have *Brahmadeya*. Subbrayalu refers to increase in *Nadus* from the 9th century CE. Initially, *Nadus* emerged in fertile areas which had more villages and later spread to periphery (less fertile areas) where the number of villages was comparatively less. Nilakanta Sastri points out that the *Nadu* comprised of many villages which were the smallest component of administration. Mahalingam suggests that *Nadu* was an administrative unit and it was sub-divided into villages. There is no unanimity of opinion among scholars regarding whether *Nadu* comprised of only *Vellanvagai* or also consisted of *Brahmadeya*, *Devadana* etc. Subbrayalu points out that *Nadu* and *Ur* represented a locality comprising of *Vellanvagai* villages and its representatives participated in the assembly of *Nadu*. It is difficult to delineate the exact area over which the *Nadus* were spread. *Nadus* differed in size and they did not have any natural divisions (e.g. rivers). Therefore, they could not possibly have been been artificially created units or divisions. Sometimes, *Nadus* covered the area beyond a river. In conventional historiography *Nattar* was regarded as a territorial assembly of a territorial unit *Nadu* which comprised of eminent members of every village. Other assemblies such as of *Brahmedeya*, *Pallicandam* were also considered subordinate to *Nadu* in the administrative machinery. Recently, historians have argued that *Nadu* was not an administrative unit created by the Chola state but it was a natural collection of peasant settlements which was incorporated into the state system of the Cholas as a legacy from the previous period. This is proved by the fact that these *Nadus* were not of same size and were nucleated. The *Valanadus* which came into existence in the period of Rajaraja I were artificially created as administrative divisions. *Nadus* initially emerged in fertile areas and later spread to comparatively less fertile zones. This is how the agrarian economy expanded. *Nadus* located in the fertile tracts were more populated than those in other areas.

There are several inscriptions which give us information about *Nadus*. *Kiranur* inscription of 1310 refers to the '*urom* of villages Nanjil, Peruncevur, Viraikkudi...as qualified for the *Nadu* or Vada-chiruvayil-nadu.' (Veluthat 1993: 184). It is clear from the evidence of the records that the *Nattars* were the *Vellals* and the functions of *Nattar (Nadu)* were performed by the *Vellala* who held the title of *Velan*. The main occupation of *Nattar* was agriculture since *Nadu* was a collection of agricultural settlements. The copper plates which basically deal

with land-grants address the *Nattar* and the execution of the grant made by the king was entrusted to them (deciding the limits of the lands granted by the establishment of superior rights of new grantees etc.) *Nuttar* was subservient to the will of the ruler. *Nattar* also supervised irrigation works. They bestowed land on temples. They also served as stockists of donation made to temples. They also supervised the grants made by individuals and exempted the lands donated from tax and, in return, took a certain sum of money as a deposit. *Nadu* also bestowed land on temples which was tax-free *(nattiraiyili)*. The tax payments exempted on lands donated to the temple were now the responsibility of *Nadu* towards the state. *Nadu* seems to have levied a cess for meeting these expenses. These levies or imposts were:

- *Nadatci*,

- *Nattu viniyogan*, or

- *Nattu-vyavasthai.*

The temple lands were sold and leased out, a process in which the *nattar* played an important role. *Nadu* seems to have been engaged in tax collection and assessment. Sometimes, the *Nattar* performed the revenue collection task on behalf of the state and sometimes king's personnel *(komarravar)* were responsible for this work. *Mudaligal* and *Dandanayakam* were functionaries deputed in *nadu* and as royal officials they were entrusted with administrative responsibility. Thus, the land holders in a locality were absorbed into the state system by the Cholas. These constituted the local landed magnates and worked on behalf of the king who exercised authority over them.

Nadu was the smallest unit for revenue administration. *Nattup-puravu*, *Nattu-vari* (land revenue) and *Nattukkanakku*: all refer to revenue of *Nadu*. *Nattuk-kanakku* was the personnel responsible for revenue administration of *Nadu*. The collection and fixation of the revenue of a village was carried out within the context of *Nadu* where the village was located. When *Ur* exempted taxes this got reflected in *Nadu* accounts.

The king's decision to transfer the funds of temple for a specific purpose in the temple was reflected in:

- the *Variyilarkanakku* (revenue register of royal authority) and

- the *Nattuk-kanakku* (revenue register of *nadu*).

This testifies to the relevance of *Nadu* as an important part of administrative system of the Cholas in spite of its locally independent character. *Nadu-vagai-ceyvar*, *Nadu-kurk-ceyvar*, *Nadu-kankani-nayagam* and *Nadu-kankatci* were the personnel who represented royal power in *Nadu*. *Nadu Kuru* is mentioned in an inscription of *Kulottunga* I (1116 CE) who managed the functioning of new *Devadana*. These personnel were given the role of maintaining the accounts of temples in localities. *Nadu vagai* is mentioned as participating in the assembly of *Brahmadeya* (*sabha*). In an inscription *Nadu-kankani-nayagam* is placed below *Senapati*. These posts of *Nadu* officers were transferable. Some officers were entrusted with the administrative responsibility in more than one *Nadu*. Thus, they worked as part of royal administrative machinery.

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Brahmadeya and *Nagaram*

Brahmadeyas constituted the category of *Brahmanas* who were landholders in the agricultural tracts and who had been endowed with land (tax-free) and had organised themselves into a distinct group. *Nagaram* comprised of traders who carried out trading and exchange activities in the pockets which had developed into commercial centres on account of the spurt in craft production and other activities carried out by artisans.

When the Cholas emerged as an important ruling power in the middle of 9th century CE in Thanjavur, there already existed many *Brahmadeyas* which were densely populated and rich tracts in the Kaveri region. The Karantai plates of Rajendra I refer to 1080 *Brahmanas* who inhabited Tribhuvanamahadevi Caturvedimangalam. The assembly of these *Brahmanas* which inhabited agricultural tracts was called *Sabha* or *Mahasabha.* Most of the *Brahmadeyas* or *Brahmana* settlements were centred round the temple. Through the temple and the ideological focus based on the *Puranas* and *Itihaasas*, *Bhakti* and *varnashramadharma* the differentiated society and monarchical polity were legitimized. Therefore, the kings endowed lands to *Brahmanas* and created *Brahmadeyas* as a means to legitimize their power.

The inscriptions inform us that many of the *Brahmadeyas* in the Chola period were *Taniyur* (separate village) in a *Nadu.* They had a separate administrative system (revenue and justice). Many of the agricultural villages were clubbed together with a *Taniyur.* Sometimes a *Taniyur* was placed subordinate to a temple. Here the *Mulparusai* was the body which looked after the work of administration.

The inscriptions give the important prerequisites like age, landholding, knowledge, good behaviour for membership to an executive committee of *Sabha.* The Karantai plates (1080 *Brahmanas*) refer to *Brahmadeyas* but do not inform us how the *Sabha* and other committees were formed. They were not established by royal authority. Their origin may be attributed to *Dharamashastric* norms. The *Sabha* and its committees supervised the temple lands, cattle and other resources. They assigned lands to tenants and levied rent. They kept a record of revenue collected and expenses incurred. They supervised the temple functionaries from priest to cleaner and organised the daily services of temples. *Sabha* acted as a group and the decisions taken were for the benefit of the organisation and not individuals.

The *Brahmadeya* settlements where the temple played a pivotal role lost importance in the later phase of the Chola period. After mid-11th century CE we find fewer *Brahmadeya* tracts and more temples were constructed and the older ones were improved upon. Sometimes, the *Mahasabha*, unable to pay the amount taken from a temple due to shortage of funds, was forced to fall back upon its income from the neighbouring village.

Nagaram settlement was a tract where traders and others (including artisans) lived. "An inscription of 1036 CE from Chidambaram distinguishes between non-*brahmana* inhabitants of superior status *(kudiga)* and those of inferior status *(kil kalanai).* *Kudiga* included two merchant groups: *Sankarappadiyar* (lower group) and *Vyaparin* (higher group) plus three other groups - *Vellals* (cultivators), *Saliyar* (cloth merchants) and *Pattinavar* (fishermen). The subordinate workmen (*kil kalanai*) were *Taccar* (carpenters), *Kollar* (blacksmiths), *Tattar* (goldsmiths) and *Koliyar* (weavers)" (Stein, 1980).

Nagarattar was the representative body of traders. *Nagaram* settlement was a separate area. Committee of *Nagarattar* was referred to as *Nagaravariyam*. *Nagaram* also held land in common called *Nagarakkani*. This they acquired through purchase but they also leased out land and performed the task of levying taxes and rendering services to the local groups. They maintained their records regarding income and expenditure. They also paid royal levies in the form of gold and paddy. They also allocated taxes to the local temples viz. *Kadamai* (tax on land), *Nagaraviniyogam* (a tax for sustenance of *Nagaram)* etc. In some cases *Nagaram* were independent of *Nadu* (*taniyur*).

King, Officials and Chiefs

A number of officers were responsible for administration in the Chola kingdom. Although there is no clear evidence of a council of ministers but *Uddan-kottam* seems to have served this purpose. Upward and downward mobility is noticed in the administrative hierarchy. According to conventional historiography *Perundanan* and *Sirutaram* were higher and lower category officials respectively. *Senapatis* (commander of troops) had the middle position referred to as *Sirudanattup Perundaram. Nyayattar* (judges) were of both category. Recently, historians have pointed out that these divisions are not conclusively borne out by evidence. Officials were paid by allotting land rights. Tax on land was levied in cash and kind both. Officials were referred to as holders *(udaiyan, kilan)* of lands. They could further sub-assign land or even sell it. Communal ownership was prevalent and customary rights of villagers were recognised. The lowest unit of administration was the village. They combined to form a *Nadu*. A *Valanadu* comprised of a few *Nadus*. *Taniyur* was a separate village or settlement site. Above *Valanadu* there was *Mandalam* which was equivalent to a province. *Karumigal* and *Panimpkkal* meant officers and servants. Anbil plates refer to a *Brahmana* Manya Sachiva. He was granted land by the king. The king conveyed his orders orally *(triuvaykkelvi)* especially with regard to gift to temples. The directive was conveyed through a letter *(sri-mukham)* issued by *Anatti* (executive officer) appointed by the king. The local bodies were apprised and when the process was completed a record was prepared in the presence of the local magnates called *Nattukkon*, *Nadukilavan*, *Urudaiyan*.

Officers associated with the process of bestowment and registration of land-grants were many and some are also referred to as *Uttaramantris*. *Puravu-vari-tinaikkalam* was the department of land revenue. *Varipottagam* was the record of land rights and *Vari-pottagak-kanakku* was the register of revenue department. Officers associated with the task of maintaining records and registers of land rights and land revenue department were *Varipottagam* and *Variyiledu*. *Kankanis* (supervisors) were the audit officers. Entry in a record was called *Variyilidu*. *Mugavettis* wrote royal letters and *Pattolais* were junior functionaries of land revenue department. Officers of *Nadu* (of the status of *adhikari*) were *Nadu kuru* (revenue assessment and settlement officer) and *Nadu vagai* (revenue official). *Mandira olai* was the officer who wrote the *Tirumugam* (letter containing the royal order). The term *Naduvirukkai* was used for *Vijnapti* (*vaykkelvi*) or petitioner and *Anatti* (executive officer) who served as a link between monarch and the persons who wished to approach the king. The king made oral orders *(triuvaykkelvi)* regarding the issues brought to him by the officers. These requests transformed into orders were sent to local administration and central administration for implementation. The *Olai nayagam* were the officers who verified the letters written by *Mandira-olai.* The oral order of the king was put

to writing *(eluttu)* and compared *(oppu)* and then entered *(pugunda)*. *Vidaiyil adigari* got the order listed in the record. The document was called *Tittu* and the charity deed, *aravolai.*

Justice was carried out by the village assemblies through the committees comprising of *Nyayattar.* The central court of justice was the *Dharmasana* which conducted its affairs through *Dharamasana bhattas* (*Brahmanas* proficient in law). It appears that civil and criminal offences were not dealt separately. The penalty for crime committed by a person affecting the king or ruling dynasty was decided by the king himself. Several methods of punishment prevailed viz. imposition of fines, capital punishment etc.

Adhikaris were the king's officers. They possessed the titles *Udaiyan*, *Kilan/ Kilavan*, *Velan*, *Muvendavelan*, *Brahma*, *Pallavaraiyan*, *Vilupparaiyan* and other chiefly nomenclature. Sometimes, more than one nomenclature was adopted. At times the name of the Chola ruler or his epithet was used as a prefix by the *Adhikaris. Naduvirukkai* were mostly *Brahmana* (held titles like *Bhatta*, *Barhmadhirajan)* officers and acted as a link between the royal authority and the bureaucracy and they are always referred to in connection with the *adhikaris*.

Personnel in charge of temples were *Srikaryam* but they did not look after the ritual related aspects like worship etc. In some cases we have the evidence of *Adhikaris* holding the *Srikaryam* office. Generally, they had a distinctive position in the administrative system. The titles held by them were *Kilan/Kilavan*, *Velan*, *Muvendvelan*, *Brahma*, *Bhatta*, *Kon*, *Pallavaraiyan*, *Vilupparaiyan*, *Nadu* title, King's title. *Senapati* was in charge of military affairs. They bore the king's title/name and other titles such as *Udaiyan*, *Brahma*, *Araiyan*, *Kilans*. The office of *Dandanayakam* was probably akin to the *Senapati* (military office). The title mentioned for this office is *Pallavaaraiyans*. The titles held by *Senapatis* were:

- *Udaiyan,*
- *Brahma,*
- *Araiyan* etc.

The office of *Tiru-mandria olai nayakam* was an important office associated with preparation of land-grant documents. The titles of these officers were *Muvendavelan*, *Brahma* etc.

Officers deputed at *Nadu* who discharged their duties at the behest of the king were *Nadu Vagai* who were revenue assessment officers. *Kottam-vagai* was deputed in *Tondaimandalam* area and performed the same function as *Nadu vagai. Nadukankaninayakam* had control over more than one *Nadu* and had a higher position than *Nadu vagai.* The titles which occur with the office of *Nadu vagai* were: *Araiyan* and *Udaiyan. Muvendavelan* was borne by *Nadu kuru* (officer of *nadu*) who was an officer of the rank of *Adhikari*.

Rajaraja I (1001 CE) adopted an elaborate land revenue fixation and assessment mechanism and thus, *Valanadus* were created and this practice was also adopted by other rulers. The land revenue department was called *Puravuvari tinaikkalam.* This department was an administrative division of the king's government and had the following personnel:

- *Puravu vari,*

- *Vari pottagan,*
- *Mugavetti,*
- *Vari pottaga,*
- *Kanakku,*
- *Variyi/idu,*
- *Pattolai* etc.

In the time of Rajendra II the administrative personnel had more elaborate designations: *Puravu-vari-tinaikkala-kanakkar* etc. The period of Kulottunga I witnessed few officers:

- *Puravu-vari-Srikarana,*
- *Nayagam* and
- *Mugavetti.*

Later, the term *Variyilar* refers to personnel of revenue department as a general terminology. These officers had the epithets: *Udaiyan*, *Muvendavelan* etc.

The titles held by the king's personnel such as *Udaiyan*, *Kilan* and *Kilavan* refer to possession. Other titles were *Velan* and *Muvendavelan.* The latter is a typical Chola title and occurs from the time of Parantaka. These titles suggest that those who bore them were land-holders or associated with land. The title *Muvendavelan* was bestowed by the Chola King and K. Veluthat points out: "...the strong association of those who bore this high title with offices of some importance is ... borne in mind, demonstrating that the major *Vellal* landed magnates were enlisted in the service of the king by which process they became an integral part of the state system." It appears that the title used by chiefs and their families viz. *Araiyan* was used by other eminent people as well. In the period of Rajaraja I the chiefly rule suffered a setback but the number of *Araiyan* title holders was on the rise. This title was more prestigious than *Muvendavelan.* It is conjectured that the chiefs were subdued to the position of landed magnates or cultivators from the period of Rajaraja and his successors although they still held the title.

The cattle herders *(manradi)* supervised the grants for lighting lamps in the temples. Merchants held the titles of *Cetti*, *Mayilatti* and *Palan.* They even occupied the important offices like *Senapati* and accountant. *Peruntaccan* and *Perunkollan* were titles used by artisan category but at the most their important positions were confined to royal palace and the temple connected with it.

We do not get clear evidence of a council of ministers but there existed officers like:

- *Purohita (dharmopadeshta),*
- *Rajagurus,*
- *Tirumandira olai,*
- *Adhikari,*
- *Vayilketpar* (officer who noted the king's directives) etc.

M. G. S. Narayanan points out that *Udan kuttams* were like king's companions of honour. They might have had a head because we have mention of *Adhikari* of

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Udankuttam. There are references to the court in literature *(Periyapuranam* etc.). The king's court comprised of:

- *Brahmana* advisors,
- priests,
- *Rajaguru*,
- *Adhikaris*,
- *Tirumandira olai nayagams*,
- *Vayilketpar*,
- head of the king's bodyguards, and
- *Samantas* (feudatory chiefs).

The various levies of this period were:

- *Antarayam*,
- *Eccoru*,
- *Kadamai* (produce-rent),
- *Kudimai*,
- *Muttaiy-al*,
- *Vetti* (labour-rent) and
- *Tattar-pattan* (cash payment).

Most of the imposts were exacted in kind viz. paddy.

The Cholas undertook military expedition to Sri Lanka (during the time of Rajaraja I) and SriVijaya (during the time of Rajendra I). This shows the military strength of the Chola state. It seems that the cavalrymen *(kudiraiccevagar)*, *Anaiyatkal* (those who fought on elephant), archers *(villigal, anukkar)* were names of the categories constituting the military force. *Valangai* (right hand) *Velaikkarar* were the soldiers recruited from among the peasants. Soldiers were also recruited from the artisan groups (*idangai* - left hand). These were basically mercenary soldiers. Chola *Meykkirttis* refer to Kantalur *Salai* which has been interpreted as an educational institution in the Chera kingdom which imparted military education and training to the *Brahmanas* which is mentioned in *Meykkirttis* was the place where Chera fleet was destroyed by the Chola king. This proves that Chola military prowess was insurmountable.

The chiefs held an important position in the state system. In the Pandyan kingdom the only category of chiefs was *Ays*. In the *Sangam* literature there is reference to many chiefs viz. *Ays*, *Vels*, *Muvas*, *Kodumbalurs* and *Adigamans*. The records of the Pallavas refer to chiefs such as *Gangas* and *Adigamans*. The various other chiefs who accepted the suzerainty of Pallavas were *Banas, Vettuva-adiaraiyan, Muttaraiyar* etc. The chiefs of the Chola period were:

- *Paluvettaraiyar,*
- *Vels,*
- *Malavas,*
- *Gangas,*
- *Banas* etc.

It appears that the chiefs were assigned land and collected dues from it in return for *padi kaval* (protection of territory). In the post-Kulottunga period there is reference to *Nilamaittittu:* diplomatic agreement between two or more chiefs. These chiefs also had their soldiers and retainers. Their services were utilized by the Chola kings.[2]

Check Your Progress 3

1) Discuss the role and functions of *ur* and *nadu*.

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2) Define *Brahmadeya* settlements.

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3) What were the *nagarams*?

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4) Discuss briefly the Chola administrative set-up.

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6.5 THE HOYASALAS

The Hoyasalas of Dwarsmudra, as they are commonly known in history, emerged in the Kannadiga region and occupied prominence during 11th-14th centuries in South India with Belur as the centre of the activities (later, the capital shifted to Halebidu). At that time the western Chalukyas of Kalyani and the Cholas along with the Pandayas, Kakatiyas (in the east), Kalachuris, Yadavas of Devgiri (northern Karnataka) were prominent in the region. The weakened and waning

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[2] The entire section on the Cholas is adopted from MHI-04, *Political Structures in India*, Unit 15.5, pp. 14-21.

political authority of the Cholas and Pandyas eased the road to supremacy of the Hoyasalas. The founder of the dynasty was Nripa Kama II who was the feudatory of Western Gangas. Vinayaditya subdued a number of Malnad (Karnataka) chiefs (Kongalvas, Chengalvas, Sandharas, of Humcha, Shimoga) as well as Kadambas of Bayal-nadu (Wynad). Ballal I's inscription also confirms that Bayal-*nadu* was part of his kingdom. However, the real founder of the dynasty was Vishnuvardhana. Ariskere inscription (1197 CE) has eulogized him as "a devouring epidemic to Chera". Channarayapatna record (1190 CE) acclaims him as the one "who broke down the bones of Chera-Kerala" (Dhiraj, 2016: 638-639). He overpowered Ananale (petty kingdom in the Western Ghats), Elumale (modern Ezhimala near Kannur - the centre of Mushaka power) and Bayal-nadu (Wynad). Belur record of 1185 CE identifies the boundaries of his kingdom: "Kongu on its south, Kanchi on the east, rivers Krishna and Venna on the north, and the Arabian Sea on the West" (Dhiraj , 2016: 639). Inscriptional evidence confirms that the Cholas and Pandya power completely got subjugated and were subordinated. The last Perumal of Mahodayapuram Rama Kulasekhara (*c.* 1089-1122 CE) had shifted his base from Mahodayapuram to Kurakeni Kolam probably under Hoyasala pressure. The boundaries of Hoyasala kingdom further extended as far as Vikramesvaram (Ramesvaram) under Narasimha I, the son and successor of Vishnuvardhana. Besides, Kongu (Coimbatore), Bayal-*nadu* touching the Western Ghats also formed part of his dominion, confirming that Hoysala power completely overran the Kerala region during Narasimha I's reign. Narasimha II's reign was marked by the cordial alliance between the Cholas and the Hoyasalas. Narasimha II married his daughter to Chola king Rajaraja II (1216-1256 CE). This alliance saved the Cholas from the constant attacks of the Pandayas. During this period Pandayas appear to have received the support of petty chieftains of Kerala, which was possibly the reason for Hoyasala attacks in the region, as is evident from the Channarayapatne record of 1223 CE. The last powerful king of the Hoyasalas was Somesvara. Arsirkere (1239 CE) and other inscriptions refer him as the "sole protector of Chola-kula" (Dhiraj, 2016: 643-644). By 1229 CE Hoysala boundaries expanded to Kanchi in the east, Belur in the west, river Krishna formed the boundary towards north, while touched Bayal-*nadu* (Wynad) in the south. Narsimha II granted the entire Chera territories to his son-in-law Chola king Rajaraja Chola III. Arkalgud taluk (Hassan district) inscription of 1252 CE praises Somesvara as "a lion to the deer Kulothunga-Chola and the Kerala chief" (Dhiraj, 2016: 644). During Narasimha III's reign itself the internal feuds led Somesvara to parcel out his kingdom between Narasimha III (who ruled from Halebidu) and his half-brother Ramnath (who ruled from Kannanur). However, the ultimate signs of disintegration crept up in the time of Ballal III's reign when Alauddin's forces under the leadership of Malik Kafur overran the territories in 1310-1311 CE and Ballala III had to shift his base to Tiruvannamalai.

King and His Officials

King was at the helm of affairs of the kingdom. His duty was "to restrain the evil and to protect the good" (Coelho, 1950: 180). He was the supreme authority and the final court of appeal. All matters pertaining to justice were personally administered by the king. In the Hoysala kingdom 'crowned queens' occupied special administrative authority. They had separate ministers and stewards even at times lead military campaigns. However, there were 'uncrowned queens' as well who hardly enjoyed any powers of such nature. *Yuvaraja* was the heir-apparent, second in command and often appointed as governor. However, in that

capacity he was not superior to *dannayakas/dandanayaks*. *Mandaleshvaras* were subject-princes, at one point of time were independent or else were earlier feudatories of Chalukyas or Rashtrakutas. Their position was almost equal to 'crowned queens'. Below them were the *mandalikas* (generally petty rulers), then came the *samantas* (frontier chiefs who ruled over hereditary lands). In the bureaucracy there were *dannayakas/dandanayaks* who held the highest position in the official hierarchy; were appointed as army generals and also appointed at various prominent offices. *Maha-pradhans* were king's counsels whose advice king used to seek from time to time. The specially favoured used to receive high sounding titles like *sarvadhikari*, *param-visvasi*, *bahattara-niyogadhipati* (master of 72). *Nayaks* were captains of the foot/horse (Coelho, 1950: 187-188). *Vicaris* and *rajyadhyaksis* (inspectors) were appointed by the king to keep an eye over the *dannayakas*. Minister for foreign affairs was known as *sandhi-vigrahi*. His duty was to enter into alliances, making war, negotiate between rajas of other territories.

Though king used to lead the military campaigns personally, generals were often given the command of leading campaigns. They were called *senapati* (commander) or *samasta-senadhipati* (commander-in-chief). These commanders were usually *Brahmanas*. After the successful battles commanders were granted badges of honour. Granting of betel-leaf was one such mark of honour. Revenue-free grants were made to the dependents of generals' widows and children who died in the battle-fields.

We hear nothing about the *sabhas* (assembly of *Brahmanas*) in the inscriptions. The largest number of settlements was those of non-*Brahmana* villages (*urs*) and *kaluvallis* (hemlets). A number of villages formed a *nad/nadu* (district) headed by *ad-heheggade* (sheriffs) and *nad-prabhus* (deputy sheriffs). *Pattanas* were the market towns wherein flocked the merchants from all directions. We hear of the presence of *nanadesis* in these *pattanas*. We do hear of *pattana-svamis* (mayors) of the *pattanas* as well. Some of the *pattanas* were capital towns (*rajadhani-pattana*) (Coelho, 1950: 187-190).

Strict punishments were given to the criminals. People often accompanied armed guards for their highway securities. However, if during the campaigns crops were damaged by the marching forces, due compensations were given for the damages.

Land Revenue

Land revenue was the main source of state's income. Land tax was usually collected in kind. Permanent (land) revenue/revenue settlement was known as *siddhaya* which varied from 1/6th to 1/7th of the gross produce (Coelho, 1950: 196). Land was measured in *kambas* which varied from place to place. However, besides land revenue the list of the burden of taxes upon the commoners appears to be endless:

- *Sunka* was imposed upon individual assessee at each settlement;

- *Kumara* and *Kumara-ganike* was levied for the Crown Prince;

- *Nibandha* was tax for payment of royalties and pensions granted by the *raja*;

- *Sri-karana* was levied for the maintenance of the *nad* (district) treasury staff.

The Kadambas, the
Chalukyas of Badami, the
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A number of taxes were imposed to maintain kings's troopers and beasts of burdens – war tax (*vira-sese*); separate fodder charges (*khana-nibandha*) and horse contribution (*kudureya-sese*) for king's horses during the campaigns were taken. Similarly, *aneya-sese* was imposed for the upkeep of royal elephants. Peasants had to provide paddy for the king's troops, for that *bhatta* was levied. *Kataka-sese* was the contribution for the camp. People had to pay for the supply of cows and bullocks to the king during campaigns (*nallavu-nallettu*). Besides ennumerable one time taxes were imposed at the time of coronation (*patta-baddha*), *putrotsaha* for the birth of a son. Fines were also one of the regular sources of state's income. *Anyaya* was levied for law breaking. Besided these, state taxes, a number of fines and taxes were levied by *nad* assemblies and *nad-heggade* and the landlords with royal sanctions. The list is endless: marriage tax (*maduve*), loom tax (*tari irai*), oil-press tax (*gana-dere*), dyer tax (*bannige*), concubine tax (*tottu-dere*), and so on.

Agrahara villages were granted to *Brahmanas* for their upkeep. We get as many as approximately 104 references of *agrahara* villages in the Hoyasala inscriptions. However, we do get instances of resistance for converting non-*agrahara* land-holdings into *agraharas*. When one of the *gauda*'s (rich landlord) land was converted into an *agrahara* they resisted and it resulted into a fight between the *gaudas* and the *Brahmanas* in which *Brahmanas* successfully defended their claims. For the repairs and upkeep of temples lands were granted. These lands were liberally granted to all religions and sects (Shaiva, Vaishnava, Jainas) irrespective of king's religious leanings.

Trade, Merchants and the State

Trade and commerce was also an important source of income of the Hoyasala state. Tax on merchandise was usually collected in cash. State was largely dependent on merchants for the supply of arms, elephants, horses and precious and luxury items that developed a greater interdependence between the two. Some wealthy merchants were even granted high-sounding titles like *Rajasresthigal* (royal merchants) and regarded as pillar of the towns (*pura mula stambha*). Merchants of Karnataka (like *Ayyavole Ainnuruvar*) had contacts with Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Kashmira, Singhala and Chakragotta. Merchants were even appointed at various administrative posts within the *nadus*, towns and at various other administrative posts and even they appeared to take part in the campaigns. The 1145 CE Ballaru inscription records the death of *dannayaka* Nagrasetti in the battle of Sige. A number of merchants of Gujarat (Lata), Kerala (Maleyala), Tamilnadu (Tigula) and Andhra (Tellugu) settled down in the Hoyasala territory and played an important role as administrators. Kudalaru inscription (1177-78 CE) mentions of Marisetti of Ayyavole, a bangle merchant, who settled down in the Hoyasala country. He was addressed as *mahaprabhu* (great officer) and his great grandson Perumadideva became the *mahapradhan* (great minister) and *tantrapala* (foreign minister) under Ballala II. Inscriptional evidence suggests that these merchants even rose to the position of *pattanasvami/pattanasetti*. They were also appointed in the minting of coins. The 1188 CE Banavara inscription records *mahavaddavhari* as *Kammata* (mint) Chattisetti. These merchants provided liberal patronage to temples and involved in the construction and repairs of temples. Sravanbelgola inscription of 1117 CE records that the mothers of royal merchants Poysalasetti and Nemisetti built a Jaina temple. Similarly, Dyampura inscription records that in 1188 CE the Bammeshvara temple was built by Bammisetti's son Vankagavuda. Merchants

were also actively involved in reclamation of land, digging wells, building tanks and other irrigation projects. Marasanahalli inscription of 1027 CE refers to an excavation of Arapamma tank at Sirivur and a sluice by Sakayya son of Palagesetti. It appears that in comparison to 11th century, merchants' participation increased in the 12th-13th centuries in building temples in the Hoyasala state, suggestive of the increased participation and administrative power of the merchants (Nayaka, 2003).

Check Your Progress 4

1) Discuss in brief the extent of Hoyasala kingdom.

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2) Write five lines on the Hoyasala administrative set-up.

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3) What role did the merchants play in the Hoyasala state?

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Cholas and the Hoysalas

6.6   SUMMARY

This Unit has dealt with the political formations in the peninsular India during the 9th-13th centuries. In the Konkan region Kadambas re-emerged and particularly on account of their advantageous rich coastal region Kadambas of Goa held prominent position in the northern Karnataka region. The Cholas re-emerged on the scene as the most powerful polity in the Tamil macro-region with the nucleus of their activities in the Kaveri delta. The decline of the Western Chalukyas, the Pandayas and the Pallavas paved the way for the rise of the Chalukyas of Badami in the northern Karnataka, while Hoyasalas overran the entire Chera country. The political history of the period was marked by warfare and territorial expansion. Simultaneously, it also led to migration of people resulting in agrarian expansion. State as well as the local officials paid special attention towards irrigation and constructed a number of tanks and wells. In the territories of the Kadambas, Cholas and Hoyasalas flourished brisk trading activities; particularly the western coastal region was flooded with foreign merchants. There existed close interaction between the state and the traders. A number of traders in the Hoyasala country occupied administrative offices. Traders were also involved in digging up tanks and wells for the welfare of the inhabitants.

6.7   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) See Section 6.2

2) See Section 6.3

3) See Section 6.3

4) i) √   ii) ×   iii) √   iv) √

Check Your Progress 2

1) See Sub-section 6.4.1

2) See Sub-section 6.4.2

Check Your Progress 3

1) See Sub-section 6.4.3

2) See Sub-section 6.4.4

3) See Sub-section 6.4.4

4) See Sub-section 6.4.5

Check Your Progress 4

1) See Section 6.5

2) See Section 6.5

3) See Section 6.5

6.8   SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 7   ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN THE POST-GUPTA PERIOD*

Structure

7.0   OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we are going to explain to you the economic and social changes in the post-Gupta times. After reading this Unit, you should be able to learn about:

- origin and economic implications of land-grants;

- process and consequences of the gradual decline of cities, the nature of villages and village economy;

- nature of agrarian relations and agricultural production; and

- different forces which led to modifications in *varna* hierarchy, emergence of new castes, and position of women in society.

7.1   INTRODUCTION

The post-Gupta period was characterized by certain changes in Indian economy.

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*This Unit has been adopted from EHI-02, Block-9.

1) Many important cities (such as Taxila, Kaushambi, Pataliputra) ceased to exist after the Gupta period. This decline of urban settlements was not an isolated phenomenon; it seems to have been quite widespread.

2) Trade activities also suffered a setback because of various reasons. This is perhaps most clear from the fact that minting and circulation of coins were on a much more limited scale than before.

It may be noted that many of these changes had begun in the Gupta period itself. What we see is the emergence of a predominantly agrarian economy. Large-scale land grants; decline of trade, commerce and urban life; paucity of money; agrarian expansion and growing agrarian character of society; and the emergence of relatively closed local units of production and consumption were the chief characteristics of the economy. On this basis evolved a social structure broadly characterised by a sizable ruling landed aristocracy, intermediaries and a large body of impoverished peasantry. New social groups emerged, along with the proliferation of new castes, the hardening of caste relations and the acculturation of the tribes. There emerged a much more complex society in which social differentiation, represented by different groups like peasants, *brahmanas*, craftsmen, merchants, rulers etc. was present.

7.2 ECONOMY

Economy in post-Gupta period witnessed changes in its character. How does one explain the changes in economy? According to the assessment of some historians the crucial element in the chain of developments was the system of land-grants. Land-grants grew in number in the Gupta and especially post-Gupta times and became widespread throughout the country. Land grants were made to *brahmanas* and religious establishments like temples and monasteries on a large scale by kings, chiefs, members of the royal family and their feudatories. From the 5th century onwards not only were the revenues of the donated lands transferred to the donees but the mines and minerals in the said area were also transferred. The donated land, village or villages were exempted from the interference of soldiers and royal officials. Finally, kings and princes made over to the *brahmana* donees even the right to punish all offences against family, private property and person, with the privilege to enjoy the fines thus received.

Contemporary *Dharmashastra* literature recommended the grant of land or of revenues therefrom to state officials, in lieu of their salary. Among other things, land-grants also had a bearing on the question of land rights, the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, the right to free enterprise of craftsmen and traders in the donated towns and the emergence of a relatively closed economy.

The attachment of peasants, artisans and merchants to their respective settlements and restrictions on their movements created an atmosphere in which the emergence of a closed economy was the natural result.

7.2.1 Decline of Trade

Commercial decline set in during the Gupta period, and it became more pronounced by the middle of the 6th century CE. The inflow of Roman coins into India stopped after the early centuries of the Common Era. The emergence of the Arabs and the Persians as competitors in trade did not augur well for Indian

merchants. Silk and spices were important items in the Indo-Byzantine trade. The Byzantium, however, learnt the art of growing silk worms in the middle of the 6th century CE. Consequently, the silk trade was badly affected. Whatever little remained of the contacts with Central Asia and Western Asia were completely wiped off by the Huna invasions.

It is said that the coastal towns of India carried on some trade with countries of South-East Asia and China. However, this interaction does not appear to have been of any intense kind.

Decline of trade was just not limited to foreign trade. Long-distance internal trade, too, suffered owing to the weakening of links between coastal towns and the interior towns and further between towns and villages.

This, however, is not to deny that trade in basic necessities such as salt, iron artefacts etc. continued. Moreover, some long-distance trade went on in prestigious, expensive luxury goods such as precious stones, ivory and horses. It, thus, seems that for quite a few centuries large-scale, organised trade was replaced by itinerant petty traders, pedlars and trickle trade.

7.2.2 Paucity of Coins

Decline of commerce is demonstrated by the paucity of coins in the post-Gupta period. Gold coins which were so abundant during the periods of the Kushanas and of the Guptas went out of circulation after the 6th century. The absence of silver and copper coins also attracts attention. The gold content of the later Gupta coins was only half of that of the Kushana coins. The coins of Harshavardhana are too meagre and the Rashtrakutas and the Palas who came to power in the Deccan and Bengal respectively in the 8th century issued no coins. Metallic currency was absent in most parts of northern India, Bengal, Odisha, Central India and the Deccan. What was true of these regions also holds good for South India.

It has been argued by some historians that earlier, coins served the purpose of currency in later period and rendered the issue of fresh coins unnecessary. However, the period under discussion was characterized by unprecedented agrarian expansion and this alone would have normally necessitated more metallic money. Further, coins were an expression of sovereignty. Unless the compulsions were serious enough, no ruler would have willingly forgone the privilege of minting coins in his own name. The decline of trade and the grant of land to high functionaries in lieu of money payments did away with the need for coins. Moreover, there is evidence for barter and the use of cowries as a medium of exchange in daily transactions.

7.2.3 Decline of Towns

Decline in trade, paucity of coins and absence of coin moulds and commercial seals indicate economic decline. The pre-Kushana and Kushana towns in northern India and those associated with the Satavahanas in the Deccan began to decay from the middle of the 3rd or the 4th century. What was true of northern India, Malwa and the Deccan was equally true of southern India. The sites such as Sanghol, Hastinapur, Atranjikhera, Mathura, Sonkh, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Khairadih, Chirand, Tamluk etc. in the Upper and Middle Gangetic plains

experienced decline. Early prosperous centres such as Ujjain, Nagar, Pauni, Ter, Bhokardan, Nasik, Paithan etc. spread over Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra witnessed similar trends. Arikamedu in Tamil Nadu and the Satavahana urban centres in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were no exception to this phenomenon. The second phase of urban decay set in after the 6th century and these centres ceased to be towns thereafter.

The decline of towns and cities is reflected in contemporary literature and inscriptions as well. Up to the 6th century, inscriptions and seals refer to the importance of artisans, craftsmen and merchants in the life of the towns. After this such information stopped. The decline of Buddhist towns in northern India is attested by the account of Hiuen Tsang who visited India during the time of Harshavardhana. Unlike the robust urban life so vividly depicted in Vatsayana's *Kamasutra*, post-Gupta literature such as the *Kuttanimatam* of Damodaragupta (7th century) is concerned with life in the countryside.

All settlements, however, were not rural. In the post-Gupta period non-agriculturist settlements appeared as seats of administration, military garrisons and religious or pilgrimage centres. Military camps are referred to as *skandhavara* in inscriptions of the 5th-8th centuries. There is evidence to suggest that certain towns continued to survive as a result of their conversion to centres of pilgrimage. All these non-agriculturist settlements, variously known as *pura, pattana, nagara* and *rajadhani*, were centres of consumption and not production.

7.3 AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

The patronage extended by kings, princes and chiefs to agriculture, improvement in irrigational facilities, increasing knowledge of agricultural sciences etc. were some of the causative factors which strengthened rural economy. Decline of towns may have led to the migration of a number of skilled artisans into the countryside. Land-grants in tribal frontiers brought virgin land under cultivation.

About 50 ruling powers were in existence in the 5th to the 7th centuries in the Deccan and Central India. They were spread over Maharashtra, eastern Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Odisha and Bengal. The various new ruling dynasties in this region issued their own land-grants. Each of these states depended on revenues from land and agriculture. In fact, in post-Gupta times agriculture constituted the basis of the state. Thus, the rise of states in such areas in which states were absent earlier presupposes agrarian expansion and the spread of village economy.

The above-mentioned developments took place in rural settlements in early medieval India. *Grama* was the usual term for villages. However, all rural settlements were not of the same kind. We come across other terms denoting different types of rural settlements. *Palli* normally meant a tribal village. The expression *Pataka* stood for a part of a village. It was a kind of a hamlet with a name of its own but actually formed a part of a larger village. Settlements of herdsmen were called *ghosas*. However, it may be remembered that these terms representing different types of settlements were not always unchangeable categories. With the spread of agriculture and Brahmanical culture, tribal hamlets, too, changed in character.

A large number of copper-plate charters of the post-Gupta period while recording land-grants describe various types of land which include cultivated, uncultivated,

high, low, water-logged, marshy, grassy and forest land. Villages which were donated to and inhabited by the *brahmanas* were *Brahmadeyas*. *Agrahara* villages, although they were inhabited by *brahmanas*, were associated with non-*brahmanas* as well. The proprietary right of such villages, however, belonged to the *brahmanas* only. In South India such villages were also known as *mangalams*.

7.4 AGRARIAN RELATIONS

We shall now discuss the main features of agrarian relations which developed in the early medieval period.

7.4.1 Obligations of the Peasants

The donee was entitled to collect all kinds of taxes. He could collect regular and irregular taxes and fixed and unfixed payments. The donees enjoyed these exceptional advantages in addition to such regular taxes as *bhaga, bhoga, kara, uparikara, hiranya, udranga, halikakara*, etc. The Pallava records specify 18 to 22 kinds of taxes. By the turn of the 1st millennium CE the number of taxes increased enormously.

7.4.2 Feudal Land Tenure

Yajnavalkya and *Brihaspati*, authors of *Smriti* works, mention four grades of land rights in the same piece of land. According to them, holders of rights of different grades were:

- the *Mahipati* (king),
- *Kshetrasvamin* (master of the land),
- *Karshaka* (cultivator) and
- the sub-tenant.

Land-grants led to hierarchical rights over land and sub-infeudation. The practice gave rise to a hierarchy of landlords, which lived off the surplus produced by the actual cultivators. From the Pallava period onwards temple servants were remunerated through assignments of land. The implications are obvious. Religious establishments became landed beneficiaries and, in turn, they gave plots of land to their dependants such as petty officials, artisans, musicians, attendants etc. Such assignments could be subleased to the actual tiller of the soil. Likewise, temple land was leased out to tenants for cultivation.

7.4.3 Growth of Closed Economy

Early medieval Indian economy experienced the rise and growth of a number of rural settlements which were not linked to exchange networks and long-distance trade. Local needs came to be met locally. The movement of soldiers for wars, pilgrims to religious centres and *brahmanas* for the acquisition and enjoyment of land grants were possibly the only forms of spatial mobility. All this fostered strong local identity. The growing sense of localism and the self-sufficiency of the villages is reflected in expressions such as *gramadharama*, *gramacara*, and *sthanacara*: all referring to village or local practices in contemporary Puranic literature.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss briefly the decline of towns and trade.

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2) Discuss the main features of agrarian relations during the early medieval period.

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7.5   SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Land-grants and the emerging landed intermediaries wielding economic power and political authority modified the *varna*-divided society. The new social groups did not fit in with the four-fold *varna* system. The unequal distribution of landed property created social ranks which cut across social status based on *varna* considerations. The inclusion of the foreign ethnic groups and indigenous tribal chieftains in the *Kshatriya varna* as part of the ruling aristocracy, and the acculturated tribes in the *Shudra varna* not only swelled their ranks but also transformed the *varna*-divided society. Moreover, the earlier distinction between *Dvija* (twice born) and *Shudra* began to be modified in the period.

One's position in society did not simply depend on the *varna* to which one belonged. His social rank came to be connected with his position as a landholder among different categories of landholders. These tendencies began in this period and got accentuated in the 9th-10th centuries. From the 9th-10th centuries, the *Kayasthas*, traders and members of the rich dominant peasantry were also conferred titles such as *ranaka, nayaka* and so on. They constituted a part of the upper section of the society and ruling landed elite.

New *jatis* (castes) emerged. The increase in the number of new castes affected the *brahmanas, kshatriyas, kayasthas* and *shudras*. The number of mixed castes and untouchable castes increased. The transformation of craft guilds into castes as a result of the decline of trade and of urban centres and the localised hereditary character of the crafts helped the process of the formation of new *jatis*.

7.5.1   Lords and Peasants

It has already been pointed out that in the agrarian system of this period there were different grades of landlords as distinguished from the peasants. Terms such as *bhogi, bhokta, bhogapati, mahabhogi, brihadbhogi*, etc. were used for

the landed beneficiaries. The upper crust of landlords included such dignitaries as *ranaka, raja, samanta, mahasamanta, mandalesvara* and so on. The king, similarly, had many high-sounding titles, connoting his lordship and ownership of land.

The peasantry itself was not a homogeneous community. They were known by various names such as *karshaka, krishivala, kinasa, kshetrajivi, halika, ardhasiri, ardhika, kutumbi and bhurnikarshaka* among others. What is common to these expressions is that they seem to have nothing to do with control over land. However, they refer to different categories of tillers of the soil – dependent peasants, share-croppers, field labourers etc. – none of whom were in absolute, independent control over their holdings.

7.5.2 Proliferation of Castes

While a number of castes came to be incorporated within each *varna*, there are also examples of earlier cohesive communities breaking up into many *varnas* and *jatis*. The Abhira tribe provides a good example as it fragmented into Abhira *brahmanas*, Abhira *kshatriyas* and Abhira *shudras*.

Brahmanas

The number of castes which emerged among the *brahmanas* was considerable. *Brahmanas* who "commercialised" their priestly services, those who came in contact with the aboriginals or those who could not entirely avoid physical labour stood degraded in the eyes of the *srotriyaagrahara-brahmanas* "who did not engage in manual labour". The migration of *brahmanas* to various regions for the enjoyment of land-grants also accelerated the process of caste and sub-caste formation within the *varna. Brahmanas* who stood close to political power and held high state offices were a different section. The eminent position held by such *brahmanas* led to the formation of different ranks within the *brahmana varna*. The same process was true also of the *kayasthas*.

Kshatriyas

Among the *kshatriyas*, proliferation of caste was caused by the emergence of new ruling houses from among the local tribes and the incorporation of foreign ethnic groups, wielding political power, into the mainstream of society. Among the foreign ethnic groups, the Bactrian Greeks, Shakas, Parthians, Hunas etc. were accommodated in the *varna* system as second class *kshatriyas*. The *kshatriya* castes multiplied from the 5th-6th centuries when many tribal chiefs were transformed into "Hinduised" *rajas* through the approval of the *brahmanas* whom they patronized and the performance of Vedic sacrifices. The heterogeneous origins of the ruling dynasties and their desire for social acceptance explain the proliferation of castes in the *kshatriya* community.

Shudras

Endogamous groups coming from various communities and regions vastly expanded the base of the *shudra varna*. Petty peasant castes, rich peasants, share-croppers and artisanal castes, with unequal access to economic power were included in the *shudra varna* in Gupta and post-Gupta times. Tribes became castes as a consequence of their gradual transformation as peasants and these peasant groups were incorporated into the brahmanic society as *shudras*. This considerably added to the number and variety of *shudra* castes.

7.5.3   Growth of *Kayasthas*

The scribe or the *kayastha* community was a product of the socio-economic forces of the times. Land-grants involved the transfer of land revenues and land to *brahmanas*, religious establishments and officials. This and other complex administrative functions created the need for a body of scribes and record keepers who were employed to draft assignment of land and keep details of land transfer including various items of revenue. The Gupta period witnessed the beginning of fragmentation of land. The maintenance of proper records of individual plots was very much necessary for settling disputes. This difficult job was carried out by a class of writers who were known variously as *kayastha, karana, karanika, pustapala, chitragupta, aksapatalika* etc. The *kayasthas* were only one group of the community of scribes. However, gradually the scribes and record keepers as a community came to be known as *kayasthas*. Initially, the educated members from the upper *varnas* were called upon to work as *kayasthas*. In course of time the scribes recruited from various *varnas* began to limit their social interaction to members of their profession and started practising community endogamy and family exogamy. That completed the process of caste formation among the *Kayasthas* (endogamy and commensality are the two basic traits of the caste system).

7.5.4   The Untouchables

The "impure" castes or the untouchables had assumed a definite shape by the early Common centuries. Nevertheless, they were numerically small. From around the 3rd century CE onwards the practice of untouchability appears to have intensified and the number of untouchables registered a rise. Katyayana, a *Dharmashastra* writer of the Gupta period, was the first to use the expression *asprishya* in the sense of untouchables. By the turn of the 1st millennium CE hunters, fishermen, butchers, executioners and scavengers appear as untouchables. Kalidasa, Varahamihira, Fa-Hsien, Bana and others have given a vivid account of the social disabilities imposed on them. The *Chandalas* were only one section of the untouchables, although the lowest in the social ladder.

It is difficult to explain the phenomenal growth in the number of untouchables during this period and later. However, Brahmanical and Buddhist sources suggest that most untouchable castes were originally backward tribes. It has been argued that their backwardness and resistance to the process of acculturation and "Brahmanization" may have prevented them from being absorbed within the society and pushed them to the position of untouchables. They may have been dispossessed of their lands and made to settle outside the villages.

7.5.5   Crafts and Castes

During this period several groups of artisans and craftsmen lost their earlier status and many even came to be regarded as untouchables. To some extent this may have resulted from the decline of urban centres where craftsmen were in great demand. Craft guilds became transformed into castes and this transformation effectively sums up the changes in the nature and organization of craft production. Various castes such as the *svarnakara* (goldsmith), *malakara* (garland maker), *chitrakara* (painter), *napita* (barber), etc. emerged out of the numerous crafts (practiced by different groups). Weavers, dyers, tailors, barbers, shoemakers,

ironsmiths, washermen and others were reduced to the position of untouchables by the turn of the millennium.

7.6 DECLINE OF *VAISHYAS* AND RISE IN THE SOCIAL STATUS OF THE *SHUDRAS*

The *Dharmashastras* and similar literature suggest that a major change was taking place in the social structure within the framework of the four *varnas*. A sizable section of the *shudras* were rising in social and economic status after their association with agriculture, and sections of the *vaishyas*, particularly those at the lower end, were descending to the level of the *shudras*. Thus, there was a change in the relative positions of the two lower *varnas*. The *shudras* were no longer slaves and servants; they emerged as tenants, share-croppers and cultivators. Urban decline too forced many *shudra* artisans to take to cultivation.

During the heyday of Indian foreign trade in the post-Mauryan times the *vaishyas* got identified with urban occupations and towns. In a predominantly agrarian setting of the post-Gupta period, the *vaishya* traders and merchants suffered economic loss and social degradation. The distinction between the *vaishyas* and the *shudras* got blurred as the differences in their occupations and standards of living faded away.

7.7 POSITION OF WOMEN

The impression that one gets about women's position in society during this period is that of progressive decline. The law-books provide for the marriage of women at an early age, pre-puberty marriage being preferred. Formal education was denied to them. Women and property came to be bracketed together with adverse consequences for women's status. They were generally denied property rights. However, in the case of widows there was some improvement in proprietary rights. It may be pointed out that the provision for *stridhana* (which literally means: wealth of women) actually did not amount to much, for it did not extend beyond rights to personal jewels, ornaments and gifts. The joint references to women and *shudras* in contemporary literature such as the *Brihat Samhita* amply demonstrate the plight of women. They were debarred from various sacrifices and ceremonies. The practice of *Sati* (self-immolation by wife on the funeral pyre of her dead husband) gained social acceptance during this period. The change of women's *gotra* upon marriage can be dated to the period after the 5th century CE. This constituted an important development because it marked the curtailment of their rights in their parental home and symbolised the final triumph of the patriarchal system of male-dominated society.

Check Your Progress 2

1) How were the main features of the status of untouchables in the post-Gupta period?

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2) Discuss the changes in the *Vaishya* community with reference to their economic decline.

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3) Discuss the position of women during this period.

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4) The proliferation of castes was an important development in the Gupta and post-Gupta period. Explain.

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7.8 SUMMARY

The different dimensions of change in economy and society from about the middle of the 1st millennium CE have been considered. These changes were extremely significant in so far as they brought the ancient period to an end and marked the beginning of a new stage in Indian history. The ways in which the new stage marked a departure from the ancient period can be seen in the major changes themselves. The Gupta and post-Gupta times were characterized by the emergence of a class of landlords and a class of subjugated peasantry in an agrarian economy which was predominantly rural and agrarian, conspicuous decline of trade, decline of towns and the paucity of metallic money.

However, the period was also characterized by immense dynamism. It is in this context that such changes as appeared later have to be appreciated: the growth of new crops, the construction of irrigational facilities, the increasing awareness about plant and animal diseases, the improvements in other aspects related to agriculture, the growth in the size of some settlements which emerged as meeting points in the midst of rural clusters and the re-emergence of exchange networks, fairs and trading centres.

The post-Gupta period was characterized by important social changes. The structure and character of *varna* hierarchy as they are known from *Dharmashastra* literature, were radically transformed. In northern India the *vaishyas* became hardly distinguishable from the *shudras*. In eastern India, the Deccan and the south there were mainly the *brahmanas* and the *shudras*.

Economy and Society in the
Post-Gupta Period

7.9   KEY WORDS

Acculturation	:	adapting to a new culture. Here we mean Brahmanic culture.
Autochthonous	:	indigenous, native, aboriginal.
Barter	:	exchange of goods for other goods.
Benefice	:	gifted landed property held by *Brahmanas* etc.
Beneficiary	:	receiver of benefits.
Caste-peasant base	:	referring to early settled agricultural society whose members were socially classified along caste lines.
Charter	:	deed conveying grant of rights.
Commensality	:	eating and interacting together as a group for mutual benefit.
Donee	:	recipient of gift.
Endogamy	:	the practice of marrying within one's own group.
Exogamy	:	marriage outside one's own group.
Exotic	:	something expensive and introduced from abroad
Itinerant	:	travelling from place to place.
Patriarchal	:	families governed by paternal rights.
Pedlar	:	travelling salespersons were socially classified along caste lines.

7.10   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1)   See Sub-section 7.2.1 and 7.2.3

2)   See Section 7.4

Check Your Progress 2

1)   See Sub-section 7.5.4

2)   See Section 7.6

3)   See Section 7.7

4)   See Sub-Section 7.5.2

7.11   SUGGESTED READINGS

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Singh, Upinder (2008). *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson.

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UNIT 8   POLITY, RELIGION AND CULTURE IN THE POST-GUPTA PERIOD*

8.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to explain the:

- nature of polity, religion and culture in the post-Gupta period;

- reason why the political organization of this period is described as feudal in nature by many historians;

- main features of later Brahmanism, Bhakti cult and Tantrism; and

- temple architecture, literature and the emergence of new fields of knowledge in the post-Gupta period.

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*This Unit has been adopted from EHI-02, Block-9.

8.1   INTRODUCTION

The period under study was dominated by the reigns of the Guptas and Pushyabhutis in the north, of the Vakatakas, Kadambas and Chalukyas of Badami in the Deccan and of the Pallavas in southern Andhra and Tamil Nadu. There were, of course, a number of small kingdoms and chieftaincies in many parts of the country. The major sources for the study of the polity of this period are inscriptions, *dharmashastra* literature, the *Harshacharita* of Bana and the accounts of Chinese travellers like Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, etc. Broadly speaking, the polity of this period was marked by hereditary monarchies ruling over small territories with one or two of them assuming wider sovereign status now and then. For example, Harsha (in the first half of the 7th century CE) had wide areas under his control. In this Unit we shall discuss the main features of the political organization in the period between *c*. 300 CE and 700 CE. We shall also try to show how these features mark a change from the political organization of the earlier periods and, thus, indicate that important changes were taking place also in the political organization of the country during this period. You will also learn about the developments taking place in the field of religion and culture.

8.2   KINGSHIP

Most of the country was ruled by kings. Only in a few fringe areas there lingered on the *gana* (tribal republic) form of government. After the military expeditions of Samudragupta in north India early in the 4th century CE most of these tribal republics almost disappeared from the political scene. Thus, the Madra and Yaudheya in the Punjab, the Abhira in central India, etc. are not heard of again. Some of the tribal chieftaincies also slowly became monarchies. The King took pompous titles like *pararnamahesvara, rajadhiraja, paramabhattaraka*, etc. which indicate their superiority over many other smaller rulers. During this period the divine right theory also came into vogue. The King in keeping with this theory held such titles as *prithvivallabha* i.e. "the beloved of the Earth goddess". He is called the fifth *lokapala* as the other existing four *lokapalas* or guardians of the four cardinal directions were namely Kubera, Varuna, Indra and Yama. Though the concept of the divinity of the King became dominant, it was combined with the notion of the King as guardian and protector.

Kingship was hereditary. Though succession to the throne was generally decided by law of primogeniture, that is, the eldest son succeeding his father, there were many exceptions to this rule. Sometimes kings were even elected by nobles and councillors. As head of the government, the King was overseer of all administrative activities of his realm. He was the supreme judge, and he usually led his army to the battlefields.

There are occasional references to queens acting as rulers, as in the case of Didda: the queen of Kashmir of a later period. Generally, however, the queens remained in the background.

8.3   POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

As compared to the Mauryan period, there is no clear evidence for the existence of a central *mantriparishad* (council of ministers) to advise the King. There were, however, many high officials who were at times called *mantrin*. The other

designations for higher officials were *sandhivigarhika*, who was minister for foreign affairs, war and peace; *mahabaladhikrita* and *mahadandanayaka*, both of which denoted superior posts in the army. Sometimes, the same person was holding more than one such post; for example, Harishena who composed the famous Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta is said to have been a *sandhivigrahika* as well as a *mahadandanayaka*.

Most of the titles of officials and high officers continued in the post-Gupta period. For example, a class of officials were known as *kumaramatyas*. It seems that most of the high officials were selected from this class or cadre and so the *kumaramatyas* are mentioned in various capacities like *sandhivigrahika*, *mahabaladhikrita*, etc. Some of them were under the direct control of the King whereas some seem to have served the princes and provincial governors. The officer called *Uparika*was was in charge of a *bhukti*, an administrative division. *Ayuktaka* was a member of the bureaucracy who, like *Vishayapati*, functioned at a level higher than the villages, and he was an important intermediate administrative link between the *bhukti* and the village. The officials seem to have been paid in cash in the beginning of our period and later, they were just assigned revenues of some designated territories and they were, therefore, called *bhogika* or *bhogapati*. This is known from the *Harshacharita* which refers to the complaints made to Harsha by villagers against such officials. The posts also became hereditary, thereby weakening the King's authority in course of time.

8.3.1   The Army

Both for maintaining internal peace and for defending against external aggression a standing army became a regular feature during this period. It was noted above that there were a number of high military officials and they were obviously in charge of this army. Cavalry was an important element of this army. Some maritime states like the Pallavas in the south also had navy. Chariots do not figure prominently during this time. The royal army was supplemented by the militia of feudatory chiefs (*samanta*).

8.3.2   Administrative Divisions

The country was organized into many divisions for administrative purposes. The highest unit among these territorial divisions was called *bhukti* which was under the charge of a high official called *uparika*. Sometimes, princes were also in charge of some *bhuktis*. *Vishaya* was the next administrative division below which was the lowest unit, i.e., the village. In certain areas *vishaya* was also known as *rashtra*. In eastern India the *vishayas* were also divided into *vithis* over and above the village. At the level of *vishaya* the officials (or locally powerful people) called *Vishayapatis* played a leading role in the administration. In each village a headman and the village elders managed the local affairs. In urban settlements or towns there were a number of craft and merchant guilds to look after their administration.

8.3.3   The *Samanta*

Semi-independent local chiefs called *samanta* were an important feature of the polity of this time. We have already read that Samudragupta conquered and

subjugated a number of territories. Some of the rulers of these territories which were on the fringes of the Gupta empire were made subordinate allies of the King. They became feudatories, so to say, of the Gupta king paying periodical tribute to the latter. This continued in the post-Gupta period too. Some of the *Samantas* presented the King their daughters in marriage. They were obliged to pay homage to the King by personally attending his court. The King, in turn, recognized their right to continue to rule over their own territories and for this he also gave them charters. These subordinate rulers were also obliged to send their men to fight in the King's army during times of war. Subject to the above obligations the feudatories or *samantas* were left to look after the administration of their territories.

Another factor which really introduced features of a decentralized polity was the granting of land to priests and officials for their maintenance. Generally, the King not only gave the land but also parted with some of his administrative rights like taxing the people, punishing the criminals, etc. The granted territories were also given immunity from the entry of the King's army. Naturally, the grantees of such lands became almost independent of the King and became *samantas* themselves. Consequent to this, in the 7th century CE and after, we find officials giving themselves pompous titles like *mahasamanta* and "one who obtained the privilege of five great sounds (*panchamahasabda*)". Through the use of these titles, the *samantas* and *mahasamantas* proclaimed their autonomy. The presence of all these features in polity has led historians to suggest that from the Gupta period onwards the political organization which developed in India represented a feudal-type of political organization.

8.3.4 Taxation

The government got most of its revenue through taxation. Land taxes called *baga, bhoga*, etc. were the main items and the land taxes actually increased through the centuries. As trade and commerce seem to have declined during this period commercial taxes are not found prominently. It may be noted here that as far as the lands granted to officials and priests are concerned, the government lost much of its revenue from those lands.

8.4 JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Judicial system was more developed now compared to earlier times. Many law codes and treatises were compiled during this period and the *dharmashastras* elaborately dealt with legal matters.

There were different courts like *Karana*, *Adhikarana*, *dharmasana*, etc. Criminal and civil cases were clearly differentiated from each other. Laws regarding property and inheritance were elaborate. Of course, justice was based on the *varna* classification in society. For the same kind of crime, culprits belonging to a higher *varna* (caste) got less punishment than those belonging to a lower *varna. Dharmashastras* also insisted that local usages and practices of different guilds and castes should be given due weight while dispensing justice.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Describe the main features of Kingship during the post-Gupta period.

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2) Write in about five lines the role of *samantas* in polity.

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8.5   RELIGION IN THE POST-GUPTA PERIOD

You are by now familiar with certain broad stages of the religious history of early India. While archaeological material suggests that certain elements of Indian religions were present in the archaeological cultures dating prior to the *Vedas*, the hymns of the *Rig Veda* give us for the first time, an idea of how prayers were offered to deities to please them. However, the simple prayers of the *Rig Veda* gave place gradually to complex rituals dominated by *Brahmanas* and one can notice the growth of a close relationship between the *Brahmanas* and the rulers and warriors in this situation. Not only the wandering ascetics who moved away from the established society but also the Buddhist and Jainas did not accept the dominance of the *Brahmanas* and the rigid social and moral order which the *Brahmanas* advocated. There, thus, grew the heterodox movements which received support not only from rulers and rich merchants but also from other sections of people. In the post-Gupta period Buddhism reached the height of its glory, spread to countries outside India and Buddhist structures were constructed on a large scale.

Meanwhile, certain changes were taking place within Brahmanism as well as within heterodox sects. From the religious point of view, the most important change was that the devotee was considered as being bound to the supreme god-head by devotion (*bhakti*) and the god-head was worshipped in the form of images. Vaishnavism and Shaivism as parts of Brahmanical religion attracted many devotees; image-worship became widespread among the Buddhists who worshipped not only the Buddha or *Bodhisattva* but also a host of other deities; the Jainas, too, worshipped the images of *Tirthankaras*, various minor deities, stone *ayagapatas* and other objects. The *Brahmanas* used image-worship to build up pantheons of deities by assimilating gods and goddesses from diverse sources. This is how many female deities (*shakti*) became prominent in Brahmanical religions in this period.

In fact, there was no homogeneity in Brahmanical religions and religious practices, and beliefs varied widely. Different sects of Shavism, such as the *Pasupatas*, the *Kaula-Kapalikas* and the *Kalamukhas* were opposed to the dominance of the *Brahmanas*. They had their own religious orders centered around *mathas* (monasteries) and they received support from many royal families. At the same time, *Brahmanas* who cultivated the *Vedas* and continued to perform Vedic sacrifices received royal support and *agrahara* settlements of the *Brahmanas* came to be a major link in the spread of Brahmanical ideas and practices throughout the country. The temple also became an institution which drew people together and served effectively in the spread of ideas. Although in the complex religious situation of early medieval India the *Brahmanas* were gaining ascendancy, one should keep in mind also the following terms:

1) The orthodox Brahmanical order continued to be challenged, particularly by movements within Shaivism, by poet-saints and by those who practiced Tantric form of worship.

2) Most religions, irrespective of whether it was Brahmanism, Buddhism or Shaivism, developed institutional bases in the form of temples and monasteries.

3) Ruling powers and elite sections of society supported institutions and *Brahmanas*, monks, *acharyas* (religious heads) and others by grants of land, wealth and by other means. By these acts of patronage, the ruling powers and elite sections of society strengthened their own social base.

8.5.1 Emergence of *Bhakti*

Brahmanism had to accept the growing importance of new gods like Shiva and Vishnu side by side with Vedic gods like Indra and Varuna. It also assimilated many other popular deities like Vasudeva, Skanda and so on. All these led to the growth of the *Bhakti* cult.

An important characteristic of later Brahmanism was its capacity to adopt new trends. This became necessary to meet the challenge of the 'heretical sects' which were opposed to Brahmanism. Besides adopting new gods, Brahmanism gradually shifted its emphasis from Vedic rituals to *Bhakti*, which implied the cultivation and development of apersonal relationship between God and the devotee. Thus, a monotheistic concept of God, with either Shiva or Vishnu as his manifestation and *Bhakti* (loyalty and devotion) to him was gaining strength. Soon *Bhakti* became the dynamic force of later Brahmanism also called Hinduism (you will be reading about *Bhakti* in detail in Unit 16)

8.5.2 Syncretism of Deities

An important characteristic of the new Brahmanism was its genius to syncretize many local deities and to evolve a monotheistic great God. Syncretism in this context will mean that deities worshipped at different places and by different people were recognized as identical and were worshipped as manifestation of the same supreme deity. Thus, Vasudeva was identified with Vishnu, a minor Vedic god and Narayana, a god of obscure origin mentioned in the *Brahmana* literature. Then, Vishnu was closely connected with the name of Krishna who represented the fusion between martial hero and a flute-playing pastoral deity. Vishnu could assimilate many other cults – the cult of the "divine boar" which

prevailed among some of the tribes of Malwa; the cult of Parashurama, a *Brahmana* hero; and Rama, the great hero of the *Ramayana*. Then, Vishnu rose to the status of the Universal God in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Similarly, Shiva came to be syncretized with the Vedic Rudra and Bhairava, a tribal god, and was worshipped in the form of the phallic emblem (*linga*). With Shiva were later associated certain other deities such as Skanda and the elephant-headed Ganesha. These theistic cults stressed the merit of worship rather than the performance of Vedic sacrifice.

8.5.3   Incorporation of Tribal Rituals

Yet another important feature of later Brahmanism was its incorporation of the tribal rituals keeping the Vedic *Yajna* rites supreme only in theory. In course of time, the merits derived out of these new rituals were equated with the merit of the Vedic *Yajna*. Further, the sacred spots of the tribals were included as new places of pilgrimage (*tirtha*) with suitable myths to make them respectable. The *Itihaasa* and *Puranas* are full of such material or stories which inspire *bhakti* (devotion) to a personal god.

8.5.4   Royal Support to Temples and Theism

The *Puranas* highlighted the merits acquired by visiting great cult entrées like Mathura and Varanasi which were major places of pilgrimage. This gave stimulus to the institution of the temple. In fact, the *Puranas* and other texts of the period list numerous places of pilgrimage (*tirthas*) which drew devotees in large numbers because visiting *tirthas* would ensure merit. The temple, which housed the deity, became a place of worship and, thus, drew devotees away from home to an institution which became a public center. The Gupta age marked the beginning of temple construction. It laid the foundation of the typical styles of Indian temple architecture. The Epic and Puranic stories relating to Rama and Krishna were represented in the temple sculptures. Excellent specimens of them are still found in the Deogarh temple. The Gupta emperors patronized both Shaivism and Vaishnavism. However, the personal religion of most of the Gupta rulers was Vaishnavism which led to the creation of a number of important Vaishnava centers and Vaishnava sculptures in the Gupta period. However, in the 6th and 7th centuries CE Shaivism seems to have replaced Vaishnavism as recipient of royal patronage in northern India. Shaivism counted among its followers' supreme rulers – foreign as well as indigenous – such as Mihirakula, Yashodharman, Sasanka and Harsha. *Pashupata* or Shaiva *acharyas* are frequently mentioned in contemporary records which include inscriptions and many literary works like those of Varahamihira, Bana and Hiuen Tsang.

8.5.5   Spread of North Indian Religions to the South

All the major north Indian religions – Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism – travelled southwards. The *Brahmanas* brought with them the Vedic *Yajna* cult and the two theistic cults Vaishnavism and Shaivism. The kings were in favour of the Vedic rituals as they conferred ritual status on them. The theistic cults struck root among the people. However, eventually the devotional theistic cults were to prove stronger than any other religious force in the south, and this was recognized even by royal patrons who extended support to Vaishnavism, Shaivism and their sects. Among the early Chalukyan kings of Vatapi some professed

Bhagavatism and others, the Pasupata cult. The famous bas-reliefs of Badami testify to the popularity of the theistic cults in the Deccan in the 6th-7th centuries CE. Similarly, the Pallavas of Kanchi patronized the two theistic cults as shown by the monolithic *rathas* (chariots) at Mahabalipuram and many bas-reliefs on them.

Bhakti, centering around the worship of specific deities, began to spread fast in the south through the *brahmana* settlements and temple-centers where the exposition of the Epics and the *Puranas* was institutionalized by means of munificent land-grants. Thus, *Bhakti* was popularized among the common people. It is to be noted that the way in which the *Brahmanas* transformed the earlier religious forms into temple-centered theistic culture in the north was repeated in the south also.

8.6 *BHAKTI* MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA

The final form of theistic *Bhakti* was largely the result of the influence of the Tamil devotionalism. This devotionalism was a product of the fusion between ecstatic local tribal cults (e.g. VelanVeriyadal) and northern theistic schools. This cross fertilization started at Tiruppati and Kalahasti, which then constituted the northern door of the Tamil country. Then, it developed around Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital, and soon reached the region of Madurai, the Pandyan capital. The TiruMuruguArruppadai – a famous devotional work on Muruga, the local tribal god who was syncretized with Skanda in this work – is the earliest example of this cross fertilization.

Soon, this Tamil devotionalism developed into a great movement when it was adapted to the two theistic cults Shaivism and Vaishnavism. Then, Tamil *Bhakti* movement was characterized not only by intense ecstatic piety for the deity, but also an aggressive militancy against the heterodox cults which were growing in popularity among the people with royal support.

This movement was spearheaded in the 6th century CE by gifted poet-saints who traversed the country many times with great missionary zeal. All their way they sang their hymns, danced and debated with the heterodox cults. Among these hymnal poet-saints the Shaiva saints are called *Nayannars* and the Vaishnava saints as *Alvars*.

This great wave of religious enthusiasm attained its peak in the early 7th century and its triumph was largely achieved in the two centuries that followed. The hymns of the saints of this period are marked by an outspoken hatred against the Buddhists and the Jainas. As a result, public debates, competition in the performance of miracles and tests of the truth of their doctrines by means of ordeal became the order of the day.

There were other reasons for the success and popularity of these hymnal saints. Unlike the *Brahmanas* who propagated Hinduism through esoteric theories and the use of Sanskrit, the hymnal saints sang in easily understood forms using only the popular language Tamil.

Their *Bhakti* was not a reverence for a transcendent deity, but ecstatic love for an imminent one. Being unable to stand before the force of this *Bhakti* wave which also attracted royal support, Jainism and Buddhism had to retreat from the South.

8.6.1 Protest and Reform in the *Bhakti* Movement of the South and its Later Transformation

Whereas the *Brahmanas* were obsessed with caste regulations, the *Bhakti* movement not only ignored caste but also included men and women of all castes. Among the *Nayannars*, Karaikkal Ammai was a woman and Nandanar was a member of the depressed class. Among the *Alvars*, Andal was a woman and Timppan was a hymnist from a "low caste". Thus, the whole movement carried elements of protest and reform. However, it soon became part of the establishment, lost its early character and got engulfed by Brahmanical orthodoxy.

The *Bhakti* movement ran parallel to the growth and consolidation of early medieval monarchies, first under the Pallavas and then under the Cholas, Pandyas and the Cheras. Many rock temples were cut, and structural temples were built for Shiva and Vishnu throughout the Tamil land by almost all the reigning monarchs.

These temples were endowed with vast landed property, often tax-free. Extensive areas of land were donated to the *Brahmanas* as is evident from the thousands of donative inscriptions on the walls of the south Indian temples. A prince-priest axis soon emerged. The monarchs fervently welcomed the rich temple-centered *bhakti* (unflinching loyalty) as it suited the monarchical ideology. The *Brahmanas* welcomed this as it enabled Brahmanism, with its institutional base in the temple-centered agrarian settlements, to emerge as the most dynamic force in south India.

Everywhere, the local temple was the nucleus of religious life and a new social formation. In these temples the two arms of the Brahmanical religion – the ritualistic Vedic cult and the theistic devotional cult – could meet. The temple-centered *Bhakti* enabled the all-embracing caste system to attract all the original tribes of south India within its fold and place them in the hierarchical caste order. This order fixed the ritual and social status of the tribes with the *Brahmana* as the fixed point of reference. The ideology of *Bhakti* could bring together kings, priests and the common people within a network of understandable social relations.

With the increasing patronage of kings and landed magnates, the *Bhakti* movement soon became part of the establishment. Thus, all traces of dissent, protest and reform were obliterated in the 10th century CE. The *Alvars* and the *Nayannars* do not appear any more. Their place was taken by Vaishnava *acharyas*, all of whom were *Brahmanas* or the Shaivite *acharyas* who all came from the rich landed *Vellala* caste.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the reasons for royal support to temples.

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2) In what ways did the *Bhakti* movement in the south differ from Brahmanism?

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8.7   EMERGENCE OF TANTRISM

The religious practices which originated in the most primitive fertility rites of the non-Aryan tribal circles later came to be known as Tantrism. It not only infiltrated into the other 'civilized' cults (Jainism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism etc.) but also emerged as a challenge and reaction to these cults, as all of them had developed vested interests and had become parts of the establishment by the early medieval period.

8.7.1   Some Main Features of Tantrism

Women clearly enjoyed a higher status in all the tribal belts. Since in the Sanskrit texts they were bracketed with the *shudras*, it became necessary for them to raise their traditional ritual status by means of Tantric initiations. The reason for the importance of female deities in Tantrism is that in all the tribal belts the cult of the mother goddesses was widely prevalent. These aboriginal goddesses entered into Brahmanism as Shakti, Buddhism as Tara and Jainism as many *Yakshinis*. The *Gaudavah* – a Prakrit text of the early medieval period – associates Kali and Parvati with such tribals as the Kols and the Sabaras. Shakti is known as Matangi (a goddess of Matanga tribes) and Chandali (a goddess of the Chandalas). At the end of the Gupta period many tribal goddesses were absorbed into the higher cults, together with many magical rites and a new form of animal sacrifice. All these increased in importance throughout the early medieval period. Tantrism emerged as a religious factor in the 6th century CE and became a strong force by the 9th century (You will be reading about Tantrism in detail in Unit 16).

8.7.2   Tantrism and the Heterodox Religions

Tantrism penetrated Buddhist, Jaina and the *Brahmana* theology. Early Buddhism and Jainism tried their best to check the infiltration of these Tantric practices into their cults. In the earliest phase of their history Buddhism and Jainism launched a systematic campaign against the cult of image worship, rituals and sacrifices as destructive of all morals. They stressed on the purification of soul for the attainment of *nirvana* (salvation).

Mahayanism is said to have developed into Mantrayanism or Vajrayanism in the Andhra region by adopting Tantric practices. Many Tantric texts emerged since the 3rd century CE from Andhra and Kalinga and spread to Vanga and Magadha where Nalanda developed as a centre of Tantric study during the reign of the Palas. The *Vajrayana* Tantric literature is so vast that only a nominal catalogue of its works found in Tibetan language comprises three high volumes.

Idol worship and rituals appeared in Jainism in the early centuries of the Common Era. *Puranas* and other literature emphasized that the devotees of Adinatha could get victory over enemies and ward-off diseases and evil spirits. In the early medieval age Tantrism infiltrated into Jainism on a significant scale as it did into other religions. As a result, Jainism developed a pantheon of *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* (the attendant demi-gods and goddesses of the *Tirthankaras*) together with a number of *mantras* (magical formulae) to propitiate them. Many Jaina Tantric texts, which incorporated elements of magic and miracle, glorified the cult of *Yakshis* like Padmavati Ambika, Siddhayika and Jvalamalini. These *Yakshis* were believed to bestow superhuman powers on their devotees. The *Yapaniya* sect of the Jainas was the foremost in propagating Tantric mode of worship in early medieval Karnataka.

8.8   CULTURE IN THE POST-GUPTA PERIOD*

In the fields of art, architecture, literature and poetry, the post-Gupta period witnessed great achievements. The beginnings of temple construction can be traced to the Gupta period as briefly mentioned in Unit 2. From the post-Gupta phase, we have the evidence of profusion of temple building in both north and south India. The scale and grandeur of the temples also grew manifold. Many architectural features such as ground plans evolved from the earlier styles. The flat roof was now replaced by the tall central tower known as *shikhara* and we also see smaller *shikharas* over subsidiary shrines accompanying the main shrine. Puranic Hinduism that is reflected in the Puranic literature often depicts a main deity such as Vishnu or Devi being accompanied by a host of attendant deities and this becomes evident in the temple complexes dedicated to them. The *shikhara* as an additional feature provided ample scope for experimentation in terms of embellishment. They were richly and exquisitely carved and beautified with sculptures. Another departure from the Gupta period was that the temples grew in size: from small places of worship to gigantic structures.

These temple complexes began to serve many functions. For example, they came to be associated with the coronation and procession ceremonies of kings as depicted by many sculptural panels of these temples. The temple also became a symbol of royal power, hence kings commissioned building of monumental temple structures to convey a sense of their power. Secondly, now entire *mathas* (counterparts of Buddhist *sanghas*) were attached to the temple just like a *stupa* and it became a centre of religious learning where recitations of *Puranas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and other compositions were made by professional narrators.

In the field of literature, the patronage to Sanskrit continued. In fact, post-Gupta period witnessed the perfection of classical Sanskrit. Poets of widespread repute such as Bharavi, Kumaradass and Dandin and great dramatists like Vishakhadatta lived in this age. Along with renewed interest in various branches of knowledge such as mathematics, astronomy and medicine, new subjects of study such as various schools of philosophy like *Mimamsa* and *Nyaaya* evolved in this period. King Harsha was an ardent connoisseur and patron of learning. He was himself a poet, dramatist and writer of three plays. His court poet Banabhatta wrote *Harshacharita* (biography of Harsha) and *Kadambari*. His court attracted poets,

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*This Section is written by Dr. Abhishek Anand.

dramatists, philosophers and painters from far away. He is said to have convened the famous Kanauj Assembly that was attended by numerous learned scholars.

A significant contribution of the contemporary Puranic literature is the writing of *Vamshanuvalis* i.e. genealogical lists of kings and dynasties, which is to be seen in the wider context of the *Iitihaasa-Purana* tradition. This should silence those who argue and allege that ancient Indians lacked a sense of history. The post-Gupta kingdoms began writing their own history, the evidence of which comes from the inscriptions issued by kings, their biographies (*charitas*) and chronicles etc. For example, the *Harshacharita* decribes Harsha's rise to the throne, Sandhyakara-Nandin's *Rama-charita* gives an account of the Pala ruler Ramapala's crushing of revolt by the Kaivartas and reassertion of his power. Another evidence of the historical consciousness of people in this time comes from the texts that began to be dated in eras, such as the Harsha era of 606. The beginning of these eras was associated with a king or a dynasty, but they were calculated on the basis of calendrical traditions or astronomical observations, thereby indicating the historical importance of time grasped by the people of this age.

8.9   SUMMARY

From the above sections a fair idea may be obtained regarding the polity of the post-Gupta period. There were a number of common features. Monarchy had become a regular feature throughout the length and breadth of the subcontinent. A regular division of each state's territory for administrative purpose, a hierarchy of officials forming the bureaucracy, a standing army and a sort of revenue or taxation system may be found in all the kingdoms, particularly in central parts of each sovereign state. But, when compared to the Mauryan polity the King's government during this period did not possess effective powers and control throughout its territory.

In this Unit you have seen how Brahmanism had to accept the growing importance of new gods and assimilated many other popular deities. The *Bhakti* cult emerged out of the various religious cults and became very strong in South India. It ignored caste regulations and women had a higher status in *Bhakti* movement when compared to Brahmanism. Tantrism emerged as an important force in the early medieval period. The practices of Tantrism infiltrated into other religions. As far as the period under study is concerned, the new elements were just emerging and they took more definite shape in later centuries.

Significant development occurred in the realm of culture in the post-Gupta period. Temple styles became crystallised and now elaborate temples began to be constructed. This development was helped by the huge number of land-grants which the temples were endowed with. Literature flourished in this period. *Vamshavalis* and *charita* literature emerged and are a mine of information about various dynasties and their kings. New fields of study were an important development of this period.

8.10   KEY WORDS

Adhiarana   : a court of justice.

Alvars   : the Vaishnava *Bhakti* saints of early medieval Tamil
                       country (6th-9th century CE).

Bhaga	:	land tax.
Bhagavata	:	a devotee of Vasudeva-Krishna.
Bhukti	:	highest administrative division.
Brahmanism	:	A syncretizing religion under the Brahmin leadership. Always holding the supremacy of the Vedic rituals in theory, it adapted *Bhakti*, many tribal gods and tribal rituals.
Divine Right theory	:	the theory that the right (of kingship) was obtained from the god.
Feudalism	:	a socio-economic and political system where relationship between a superior (lord) and his subordinate (vassal) is based on land-grant or assignment (fief) and where the lord is obliged to protect his vassal and the vassal is obliged to render military service to his lord in times of need.
Gana	:	a tribal republic which is governed by chiefs or a chief of ruling clans and not by a king.
Heterodox Cults	:	Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivikism which first challenge Vedic rituals and then all Brahmanism.
Kumaramatya	:	a general cadre of higher officials.
Mantri	:	Minister.
Muruga	:	a tribal god of the early Tamils, syncretized around 3rd-4th century CE by Brahmanism with Skanda-Kartikeya.
Nayannar	:	the Shaiva *Bhakti* saints of early medieval Tamil country, 63 in number. A few of the them were great hymnal poets.
Nirvana	:	liberation of the soul as conceived by the heterodox cults.
Pashupatas	:	the devotees of Shiva or Pashupati. Their cult originated in the North and developed special features.
Shaivism	:	a general term to denote any cult which conceived Shiva as the greatest god. Shaivism has many local varieties.
Samanta	:	a feudatory chief.
Sandhivigrahika	:	minister for foreign affairs, peace and war.
Tantrism	:	religion originating in the primitive fertility rites of the non-Aryan tribal circles. Later adapted and mystified by the civilized cults.
Vaishnavism	:	a general term to denote any cult with Vishnu as the greatest God. It has many local varieties.
VelanVeriyadal	:	a primitive orgiastic-ecstatic cult of the ancient Tamil tribals centering on Muruga.

| *Yajnas* | : | the complex rituals of the later Vedic times, including expensive animal sacrifices,. | **Polity, Religion and Culture in the post-Gupta Period** |

8.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) See Section 8.2

2) See Sub-section 8.3.3

Check Your Progress 2

1) See Sub-section 8.6.4

2) See Sub-section 8.6.5 and Section 8.7

8.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Singh, Upinder (2008). *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India. From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. New Delhi: Pearson.

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UNIT 9   EMERGENCE OF RAJPUTS*

Structure

9.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will:

- know about Rajput clans and their emergence in early medieval north India;

- understand the debate related to origin of Rajputs and find out the truth on the basis of evidence of contemporary sources; and

- know about political and military character of the Rajput clans which proved as a pedestal in their emergence and consolidation.

9.1   INTRODUCTION

Political changes in Indian history have been marked by dynastic shifts. Each dynasty has had its own genealogy and chronology which represented its rule in India. The structures of polities in ancient India have been generally identified by scholars in the context of centralization or decentralization. Centralized polities denoted unified rule over a vast area under one political power in contrast to decentralization which represented centrifugal regional tendencies. Themes such as state formation, structure of polity, nature of power and political control etc. have been a subject of historical studies. The aim of this Unit is to introduce the emergence of Rajputs in India in the form of regional political powers, especially in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

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9.2 MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TERM "RAJPUT"

The term *rajput* is derived from Sanskrit root *rajputra* (son of the king). Prakrit forms of the term *rajputra* are variously known as *rawat, rauta, raul* and *rawal*. A transformation in connotation of the term is noticeable from 7th century CE onwards as it began to be used in literary texts in the sense of a landowner rather than "son of the king". In the *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta (7th century CE) the term has been used in the sense of a noble or landowning chief. In *Kadambari* also it is used for persons of noble descent who were appointed by the king as local rulers. In the capacity of local rulers they might have naturally governed a large portion of land under them and, thus, played an active role in political and administrative system of the state. In *Rajatarangini* the term *rajputra* is used in the sense of a mere landowner, acclaiming birth from 36 clans of the Rajputs. The reference of 36 clans clearly denotes their existence by 12th century CE.

The term began to be more commonly used from 12th century onwards. The 12th century *Aparajitprachha* of Bhatta Bhuvanadeva, which describes the composition of a typical feudal order, refers to *rajaputras* as constituting a fairly large section of petty chiefs holding estates, each one of them constituting one or more villages. Among the ruling elites, *rajputra* covered a wide range: from actual son of a king to the lowest ranking landholders.

9.2.1 *Rajputra* as a Military Chief

The appearance of *rajputras* as mercenary soldiers is proved as early as 7th century CE from the reference in Bakshali manuscript found in the North-West Frontier Province and subsequently from the *Chachnama* in Sindh in 8th century CE. In all bardic traditions of this period the Rajputs are depicted as horsemen. It may not be again ignored that the Pratiharas, one of the clansmen of the Rajputs of early medieval period felt pride to bear the title of *hayapati*, "the lord of horses". The military character of the *rajputras* is also reflected from *Lekhpaddhati* (a collection of the models of documents from Gujarat and Western Marwar region) which refers to assignment of land-grants to them in return for the performance of military services to the state or the overlord. Regarding the military obligation, one of the charters in the above mentioned text provides us the details that a *rajputra* applies to a *ranaka* (feudal chief representing the state) for a fief and when he is granted a village he is required not only to maintain law and order within it and collect revenues according to the old just practices but also to furnish 100 foot-soldiers and 20 cavalrymen for the service of his *ranaka* overlord at his headquarter. The fact that he was not allowed to make gift of uncultivated land to temples and *Brahmanas* indicates his limited rights over the land granted to him, which he could sub-infeudate to others. Sometimes, the *rajputras* were also provided cash endowment for the supply of military soldiers in the service of the overlord. In addition to the military service rendered to his immediate overlord *ranaka*, the *rajputras* were also asked to pay the revenue in both cash and kind on the land assigned to him for cultivation. The amount of the revenue was strictly to be paid within the specified time limit. If the *rajputra* failed to do so, it was not to be paid without a fixed amount of interest imposed as late payment.

9.2.2 *Rajputras* as Sons of the Kings and Officials

The position of the *rajaputras* was distinct under the Gahadawalas and the Chahamanas, as the title was usually applied to the actual sons of the reigning kings. They exercised special powers in administration, acting as governors of estates assigned to them by the reigning kings. Under Gahadawalas, they were provided a special privilege of using their own seals with the separate insignia, differentiating them from the Gahadawala royal seal. On account of their keen interest in the affairs of administration some of the *rajputras* under the Chahamanas were endowed with the royal prerogatives and were given the charge of all the royal and administrative activities. They could also grant lands and villages with the consent of the reigning king. Under Chahamanas, the instances are there of the *rajputras* and *maharajputras* serving as governors. The Chahamana princes were also given fiefs (*seja*) for their personal enjoyment. However, these fiefs were not regarded as their personal property, as sometimes the central government exercised its power of assigning revenues out of these fiefs. The right of alienating land out of their fiefs was not usually extended to these Chahamana *rajputras*. But, often, they appear to have the right of assigning small portion of the land or its income as a gift for charitable purpose without the king's permission.

However, under the Chahamanas the *rajputras* who were not the actual sons of the king but bore the mere title, also worked as feudatory chiefs or officials to govern the functions of the landed estates under the strict control and supervision of the king and the viceroy.

9.2.3 Thirty Six Rajput Clans

Almost all the contemporary texts provided, the number of the Rajput clans is 36. The whole list is provided by *Prithvirajraso*, *Kumarapalacharita*, *Varnaratnakar* and by an ancient work from a Jaina temple in Marwar.

Col. James Tod has studied the clan names of the above sources and prepared his own list removing some vernacular errors.

However, the comparison of the above list with those of original literary texts reveals that Tod had also included the tribal groups of foreign origin and even those Rajput clans which had originated quite later as sub-clans.

9.3 ORIGIN OF RAJPUTS: DEBATES

The origin of Rajputs is shrouded under mystery. Scholars are hardly in unison over their origin and a number of views are in currency pertaining to their origin.

i) *Agnikula* Origin of the Rajputs : A Myth

Chand Bardai in his *Prithvirajaraso* (12th century) refers that the Chalukyas, Pratiharas, Paramaras and Chahamanas have their origin from the fire pit of Vashistha. According to Raso, Vishvamitra, Agastya, Vashistha and other sages began a great sacrifice at Mt. Abu. *Daityas* (demons) interrupted it and then Vashistha created from the sacrificial pit three warriors in succession: the Padihara (Pratihara), the Solanki, and the Paramara. The

bardic text also mentions that none of the created warriors, however, succeeded in completely removing the demons.

The modern scholars who believe in the *Agnikula* origin of the Rajputs are:

- **Watson**,
- **Forbes**,
- **Camphel**,
- **D. R. Bhandarkar** etc.

They believe that all the so-called *agnikula* Rajputs are of Gurjara stock. The Gurjara origin of the Rajputs is being criticised by **Pratipal Bhatia**. She argues that the Gurjara is not only the name of a people but also a country and of all the people who inhabited it, to whichever caste or clan they might have belonged (Bhatia 1970: 14).

We only knew about the solar and lunar *Kshatriyas* in the ancient texts. The solar and lunar origin of the Rajputs is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. The earliest tradition of the Chandella family found mentioned in their inscriptions traces the origin of the Chandellas from Moon, identifying them as the lunar race of the *Kshatriyas*. It appears that the concept of the solar and lunar *Kshatriyas* of the Sanskrit literary texts was replaced in the bardic account of *Raso* and inscriptions during the early medieval period by that of *agnikula* origin.

ii) **Other Views**

B. N. S. Yadav has traced the emergence of the early Rajput clans in Rajasthan and Gujarat during the period of political and social confusion and chaos which may be characterised by a declining economy following the invasions and settlements of the foreigners and collapse of the Gupta empire. The rising feudal tendencies, according to him, created favourable circumstances for the emergence of ruling landed aristocracy connected intimately with land. Attached to this background, he traced out the rise of the military clans of the Gurjaras, Guhilots, Chahamanas, Chapas etc. in northern India during 650-750 CE. However, their rise as independent ruling clans may be traced back to the 8th century, when Gurjara-Pratiharas as the first Rajput ruling clan established their hold over Kanauj and other regions in the northern India.

D. C. Sircar puts forth that in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* the term *rajputra* is used in the sense of a mere landowner. They claimed birth from 36 clans of the Rajputs. It indicates that by the beginning of the 12th century CE, these clans had already come into existence. During this period *rajputras* had become a class by themselves.

iii) **Recent View: Processual Theory**

B. D. Chattopadhyaya examines the emergence of the Rajputs as a process, which in different periods and different regions was not almost alike but differed in context of time and place. According to him, their emergence should not be looked in terms of ancestry. The term *rajputra* in early medieval literary texts and inscriptions, in reality, represented a mixed caste constituting a fairly large section of petty land holding chiefs. The status of

the clan was generally counted a lot during the early medieval period, which was known for hereditary offices and a stereotype system of administration. The contemporary status of the clan was , thus, the criterion for the inclusion in the Rajput clans mentioned in *Rajatarangini*, *Kumarapalcharita* and *Varnaratnakara*. It is to be noted that the list of 36 clans mentioned in all the literary texts is dissimilar. Political dominance may altogether be the prominent criterion which might have added to the status of a clan. Thus, it was perhaps owing to the political dominance of the Pratiharas and Chahamanas that their name was retained regularly in the lists. He suggests that the process of the emergence of Rajputs in early medieval records is found linked with political, economic and social developments. Chattopadhyaya, on the basis of the study of the sources, has traced the following developments which were directly linked to the process of the emergence of Rajputs.

- **Agrarian and Territorial Settlements:** The colonization of new areas resulted in the expansion of a number of settlements and also of agrarian economy. The comparison of the list of early historic sites with those of early medieval period and appearance of new place names in the contemporary inscriptions clearly suggest an increase in the number of settlements. The inscriptions of the western and central India also refer to the territorial expansion of the Rajput power by suppressing the tribal settlements of the Bhils, Pulindas and Sabaras. The Guhila kingdom was founded in the 7th century on the Bhil settlements, according to tradition. Similar movements of expansion are found in case of the Chahamanas of Nadol. Shakambhari – the capital of the main line of the Chahamaans – also came out of the colonization, which was earlier a forest land (*jangaladesha*). The present region of Rajasthan, according to Chattopadhyaya, in the period when Rajput polity was beginning to emerge was in its various areas undergoing a process of change from tribalism.

- **Mobility to *Kshatriya* Status:** All the Rajput clans did not emerge out of the process of colonization. The Meds reached to the Rajput status from a tribal background and the other group, namely Hunas, were assimilated in Indian society and acquired the status of *Kshatriyas*. Thus, a criterion for the inclusion of the Meds and Hunas was mobility to *Kshatriya* status which was more commonly practiced. For the majority of other newly emerging royal lines *Brahma-Kshatra* was a transitional status. Chattopadhyaya opines that *brahma-kshtra* might have been an open status during the early medieval period.

- **Political Eminence:** The Gurjara-Pratiharas emerged out of different stocks of the Gurjaras acquiring political eminence in western India. However, in their inscriptions they have variously claimed their origin either from *Brahman*, Sun, Indra etc. in order to maintain the ancestral respectability. The sovereign or ruling families of a clan had a general tendency to frame the genealogies with respectable ancestry. It seems that a definite co-relation did exist between the political eminence and a movement towards corresponding social status.

- **Mobility from Feudatory to Independent Status:** Some of the Rajput clans emerged out from the feudatory to the independent status, as is clear from the genealogical claims. The case of Gurjaras of Gujarat, Guhilas of

Kiskindha and Dhavagarta, Guhilas of Mewar, Chahamanas of Gujarat and Rajasthan was a case of transition from feudatory to independent status. This transition and upward mobility was a result of the growth of the military strength. The emergence of the Rajputs, thus, in the existing hierarchical political structure was not sudden but a gradual process.

- **The System of Land Distribution:** The process of the emergence of early Rajputs is associated at the level of economy, with certain new features of land distribution and territorial system. One feature of land distribution, the trend of which appears to have been higher in Rajasthan, was the distribution of land among royal kinsmen. This practice was common among the Pratihara, Chahamana, and Guhila clans. Such land assignments were also hereditary in nature. The specific thing was that while the other assignees were not authoritative to grant land independently out of their holdings and depended on the approval of the king, the kinsmen needed no such sanction and could make grant independently without king's approval.

- **Fortifications:** The Rajput clans strengthened themselves by maintaining military power, one of the chief features of which was the construction and maintenance of forts. The inscriptions of the early medieval period mentions about a number of fortresses in Rajasthan. Besides serving the defence purpose, the forts played wider functions such as maintaining linkage with big landholdings and existing composition of population. Rajasthan was a cradle land of such fortresses. Forts, thus, represented a process of consolidation of ruling clans.

- **Inter-clan Relations:** At the level of social relations, the consolidation of the Rajput clans and the acceleration of the process of "Rajputization" were through the marriage network among the clans (inter-clan relationships). The inter-clan relations maintained through marriage network provided social legitimacy. These marriages may have led to collaboration in wider areas of social and political activity. The new clans and the recognized sub-divisions of earlier clans were brought into the Rajput network by a few cases of marriage of which records are available. The consolidation of Rajput ascendency was also due to the circulation of clan members in different kingdoms and courts and their participations at various levels of polity.

9.4 RISE OF THE RAJPUT STATES: TRIPARTITE STRUGGLE – EMERGENCE OF THE GURJARA-PRATIHARAS

The post-Harsha period was a period of great political turmoil in north India. Kannauj, which was seat of Harsha, remained a bone of contention. Each one of the political powers was having an eye on it for the occupation. The major political powers which entered into a struggle – generally known as 'tripartite struggle' – were the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Palas and the Rashtrakutas. The results of this struggle were not decisive. Temporarily, the Pratihara king Nagabhatta boldly annexed Kannauj in the 8th century CE. The Pratiharas, thus, gained the supreme power in the north after the conquest of Kannauj. The circumstances, which led the Pratihara king to such a usurpation of power, were the domestic seditions in the Rashtrakuta family. This triangular struggle did not end with the

temporary success of the Gurjara-Pratiharas but it continued further under the successors of Nagabhatta. The period of Bhoja-I (*c.*836-885 CE) – the grandson of Nagabhatta – was a period of consolidation of Pratihara power. He re-established the supremacy of his family by restoring his authority over the *Gurjaratrabhumi* (Jodhpur or Marwar). The Gurjara-Pratiharas in early 8th century came into prominence first by establishing their seat of power in Ujjaini which was a major urban and political centre in western Malwa. The decline of the Pratihara dynasty in the 10th century CE opened the way for their own feudatory chiefs to declare themselves as independent powers. The Chaulukyas, Chandellas, Chahmanas, Gahadawalas, Paramaras, Kalachuris and Guhilas, all of whom were the feudatory chiefs of the Gurjara-Pratiharas in different regions, thus, became independent as distinct Rajput clans in their own territories.
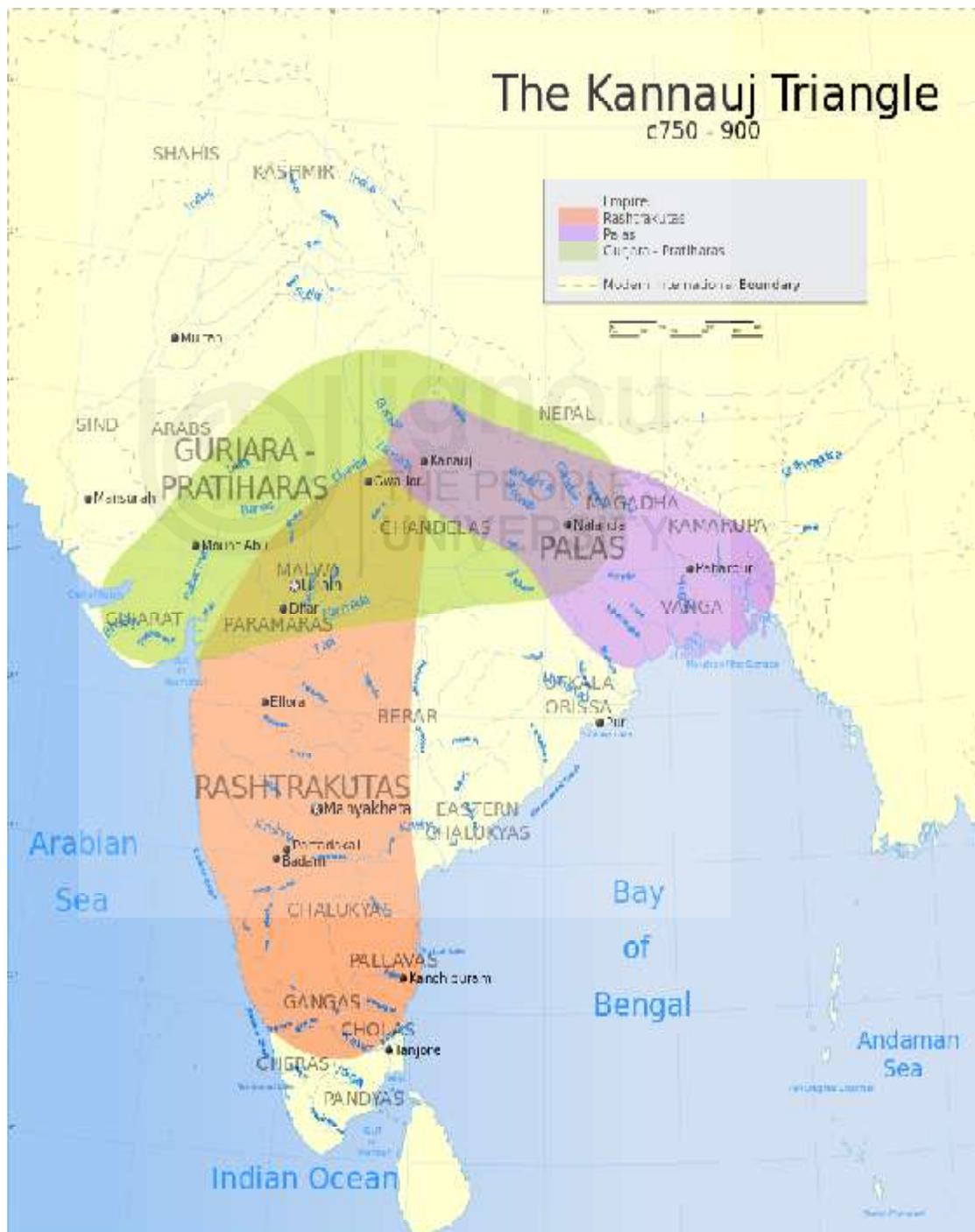
Tripartite Struggle. Credit: w:user:Planemad. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/45/Indian_Kanauj_triangle_map.svg).

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss the connotation of the term *rajputra* during the early medieval period in India.

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2) Who were the Gurjara-Pratiharas? How did they emerge out as independent Rajput clan?

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3) Which one of the following statements is wrong?

   i)   The first reference of *rajputra* as mercenary soldier comes from the *Harshcharita* of Bana.   (   )

   ii) The *Lekhpaddhati* is a source related to the Rajputs of Gujarat and western Marwar.   (   )

   iii) The nomenclature of the Rajput clans mentioned in the list of 36 clans in different sources is the same.   (   )

   iv) The first independent Rajput clan was that of the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kannauj.   (   )

9.5   MAJOR RAJPUT STATES AFTER GURJARA-PRATIHARAS

The Gahadawalas

The Gahadawalas occupied Kannauj in the 11th century. From Kannauj they ruled over the major portions of the Gangetic *doab* during 1090-1193. The Gahadawala king Jayachandra is usually styled as the king of Benares by the Muslim historians owing to his intimate connection with the city of Banaras, perhaps as the habitual abode due to its religious importance and geographically on account of its central location in India. The Gahadawalas had bitter struggle and enmity with the Chahamanas.

The Chahamanas

Chahamanas came into prominence after the decline of the Gurjara-Pratiharas. There were numerous branches of the Chahamanas but some of them were unquestionably the feudatories of Pratiharas of Avanti and Kannauj. It also remains a fact that during 750-950 CE most of the regions ruled by the

Chahamanas formed part of Pratihara dominion. In 973 CE they became practically independent.

The main branch of the Chahamanas was famous as the Chauhans of Sapadalaksha or Jangaladesh. The city of Ajayameru (modern Ajmer) founded by king Ajayaraja was their political centre and seat of power. The Chahamana dynasty, the rulers of which were indulged in the fratricidal wars with their neighbours, also came to an end with the second battle of Tarain (1192 CE) which brought the destruction of the greatest king, Prithviraja III. Besides the Gahadawalas, the bitterest enemies of the Chahamanas were their contemporaries: the Chalukyas and the Chandellas.

The Chandellas

Another contemporary political power was the Chandellas: one of the feudatories of the Gurjara-Pratiharas. The Chandellas ruled over central India between 10th-13th centuries CE. Their territory was known as Jejakabhukti (modern Bundelkahnd). Their territorial extension varied from time to time. But the important places which remained included in their territory were:

- Kalanjar,
- Khajuraho,
- Mahoba, and
- Ajayagarh.

The Paramaras

Another contemporary Rajput political power – the Paramaras – emerged in the region of Gujarat, Malwa and Southern Rajputana out of the bitter struggle between the Gurjara-Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. The territory ruled over by the Paramaras of Malwa included Malwa proper and the adjoining districts.

The principal areas of influence under the Paramaras were spread over modern cities and towns of Ujjain, Dhar, Bhilsa, Bhojpur, Shergarh, Udaipur, Mandu, Depalpur**.**

The Chalukyas

The region of Gujarat and Kathiawad was possessed by the Chalukyas around 950 CE as the feudatories of the Gurjara-Pratiharas. Taking advantage of the disturbance and anarchy in the Pratihara kingdom following the invasion of Indra III and then the rapid decline of the Rashtrakutas during *c.* 956-973 CE after the death of Krishna III, they became successful in carving out independent principality of their own in Saraswati valley. They ruled over parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan between 940-1244 CE. Their capital was Anhilawada, modern Patan (a detailed discussion on Chalukyas of Badami is done in Unit 6 of this Course).

The Vaghelas

The Vaghelas ruled over Gujarat including Anhilawada during the 13th century. Their capital was Dholka. The Dilwara temples of Mt. Abu were built by two Vaghela ministers Vastupala and Tejapala.

Parshvanath Temple, Dilwara. Credit: Pratyk321. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/65/Dilwara_Prashvantha_Temple_%282%29.jpg).

The Kalachuris

Kalachuris, who were in the service of the Gurjara-Pratiharas as feudatories, also did not hesitate to declare their independence. They were also known as Kalachuris of Chedi or Tripuri. They ruled the Chedi region from their capital Tripuri (modern Tewar near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh). In the east, the centre of Kalachuri power was Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh). However, they lost some of their power owing to the rise of the Gahadawalas in the east. Later on, the central Indian dominions of the Kalachuris had extended far up to the districts of Prayagraj and Varanasi (Banaras). In their efforts of extension, they came into conflict with the Paramaras and the Palas.

The Guhilas

The Guhilas earlier served the Pratiharas as feudatories. They succeeded in declaring themselves as independent rulers in Mewar during the second half of the 12th century. The last vestige of the Guhila power was *Maharana* Hammir, who recovered Chittor from the Muslims after it had been lost by *Raval* Ratnasimha in 1303 CE and, thus, revived the lost glory of the dynasty of Mewar for some time. Hammir occupied Chittor, ousted the Chauhans and laid down the foundation of Sisodia rule there. His influence was recognised by the rulers of Mewar, Amber and others as far as Gwalior, Raisen, Chanderi and Kalpi.

The Kachhapagatas

The Kachhapagatas were at first the feudatories of the Gurjara-Pratiharas. They made themselves masters of the fort of Gwalior after defeating the ruler of Kannauj. During the 10th and 11th centuries, the region of eastern Rajaputana and Gwalior residency was overruled by three independent branches of Kacchapagatas.

The Kachhawahas of Dubkund

The Kachhawahas of Dubkund were subordinates to the Chandellas, as we do not find imperial titles for the rulers of this line.

9.6 LATER RAJPUT STATES OF WESTERN AND NORTH-EASTERN RAJASTHAN

Being defeated by the Muslim invaders, the Rajput clans sought refuse in the protected land of Rajasthan. Full of the hilly regions and the desert areas, it could well provide abundant security to its immigrants. Thus, considering the geographical importance of this region, the princes belonging to the Guhila, Panwar, Chauhan, Sonigara, Solanki, Parmara and Deora clans carved out their small principalities at several places in western Rajasthan like Khed, Barmer, Sojat, Mandor, Jalor, Bhinmal, Mahewa, Sirohi and Abu. Some of the major Rajput clans of this region are as follows:

Rathors

Rathors emerged as a political power by having possession of a number of villages in that area and ultimately annexing Khed from Raja Pratapsi of the Guhila Clan (1398-1423 CE). Later on, their rule was extended over a large area of Pali, Khed, Bhadrajan, Kodana, Mahewa (Mallani), Barmer, Pokharan, Jaitaran, Siwana, and a large part of Nagpur district and some areas of Bikaner. The Rathor rule continued over these territories up to 1529 CE: the date of the death of Rao Ganga.

Bhattis

The north-eastern Rajasthan was ruled by the Rajput tribe of Bhattis. During the 12th century the main centre of their activities was Jaisalmer.

Deora Chauhans

Like the Bhattis, the region of Sirohi was ruled by the Deora branch of Chauhan clan.

Kachhapagatas

One branch of the Kacchapaghatas established their estate at Dhundhar (Amber and later on Jaipur or Sawaijaipur including Shekhawati), ousting the Minas from that area.

9.7 PROLIFERATION OF RAJPUT CLANS

It is apparent from the literary and inscriptional evidence of early medieval period, which mention certain members belonging to a Rajput clan or descent, that the structure of Rajput polity may be defined in terms of proliferation. At

the later stage, the inter-clan relationships governing the distribution of power consolidated the structure of Rajput polity as well. The emergence of minor clans and sub-divisions of major clans was a result of proliferation. The sub-clans emerged out from the movement of some members of a clan to newer areas. The proliferation of the Rajput clans with their establishment in different areas led to the further extension of the Rajput fold. It, thus, widened the process of emergence of the Rajputs which may safely be termed as "Rajputization".

The absorption of local elements into sub-clans was also a common phenomenon. Usually, the already established clans came into social contact of the newly established clans and provided them a social network which naturally strengthened the latter ones.

India: *c.* 1000-1200 CE. Source: EHI-03: *India from 13th to 15th Century AD*, Block-3, Unit 8: "Nature of Regional Politics", Map-1, p. 10.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Locate the major Rajput clans in northern India and their states.

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2) What do you mean by the proliferation of the Rajputs? Discuss.

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3) Which of the following statements are right or wrong?

   i)   *Sapadalaksha* was the territory of the Chahamanas.   (   )

   ii) Bhattis ruled over the area of Jaisalmer.   (   )

   iii) The sub-clans of the Rajputs came into existence through proliferation.   (   )

   iv) The principal area of influence of the Parmaras was the region of Gujarat.   (   )

9.8 POLITICAL AND MILITARY SYSTEM OF THE RAJPUTS

Inter-state rivalries are represented by the struggle for supremacy. The king was the supreme head of the state and the conductor of the overall executive, judicial and military administration. To some extent, he was assisted in administrative matters by the queens, a number of whom figure in the records of different dynasties of our period. However, none of them is possibly found entrusted with any administrative post. Their involvement in administration is borne out indirectly in some of the land-grants. They are sometimes found granting land-grants with the formal permission of the King. The ministerial council acted as a consultative body on all the important matters of polity. The office of the ministers was generally hereditary. The officials often adopted the feudal titles like *rajaputra*, *ranaka*, *thakkura*, *samanta*, *mahasamanta*, *raut* etc. in addition to the administrative posts like *mahasandhivigrahika dutaka*, *maha-akshapatalika* and others. The combining hereditary position and feudal ranks made these officials more powerful. The territorial administration consisted of the *vishayas*, *bhuktis* and other sub-divisions was usually fully governed by a class of power feudatories entitled usually as *mandaleshvarars*, *mandalikas*, *samantas*, *thakkuras*, *ranakas*, *rajaputras* etc. The administrative heads in villages apart from the village headman were the *panchkulas* (a body of five members in a village like *panchayat*), *mahajanas* and *mahattaras* (village elders). The official posts and designations of administrative officials at various levels were different under various Rajput clans.

The military system of any dynasty is always a direct reflection of its political organization. The feudalization of political structure of the Rajputs had also resulted in their military organization. The military functions were mainly played almost under all the Rajput clans by the feudatory chiefs of various ranks. The chief obligation on the part of such chiefs was to serve the king or the respective overlord at the time of war by fighting valiantly from his side. The literary sources like *Lekhapaddhati*, *Prithvirajvijaya Mahakavya* and the contemporary inscriptions throw sufficient light on such obligations and duties of the feudatories towards the state and the overlords. The personal grievances of the feudal lords like *rajaputras*, *ranakas*, *rautas*, *samantas* etc. created consternation in the whole administrative set up. The powerful feudatories did not hesitate to declare themselves as independent in the hour of the weak position of the king.

The political system of the Rajputs is to be defined as bureaucratic-cum-feudal in character. There was an absence of uniformity in adoption of strategy and the organization of troops in general. Different dynastic clans probably had the tendency to organize the various components of their army in war, in accordance with their own convenience. The chief weakness of the Rajput military was their backwardness in the field of military technology unlike the Turks who were fully conversant with the mounted archery and its strategic use in warfare. However, they prominently used mechanical devices known as *munjaniqs* and *arradas* (Persian names of siege machines) in siege operations to hurl heavy stones and projectile weapons on enemy's ranks and fortifications like the Arabs and Turks. That they used these machines in order to bombard enemy's troops from the ramparts of the forts by the Rajput rulers is known from a variety of sources. The Hindus were known to have learnt the use of these machines from the Arabs and Turks who, in turn, imitated the Greek and Romans in using these devices. The Greek and Roman siege machines, which were the variants of machines used by the Hindus and their Muslim adversaries including the Arabs and the Turks , were named as *mangonel* and *catapults*.
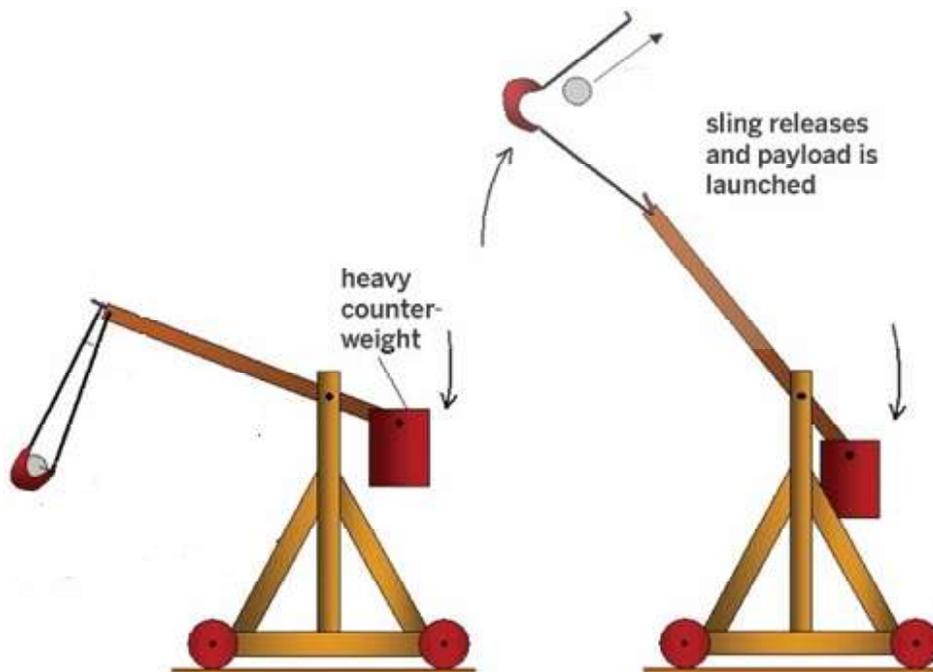
Mangonel: A Greek Variant of Stone-throwing Machines used by the Rajputs and Muslims including Arabs and Turks.

9.9   RAJPUT FORTS/STRONGHOLDS

Forts attained an inevitable importance under the Rajputs rulers. The magnanimity and impregnability of these forts attracted the Muslims to besiege them. These forts served as a great means of the defence of the Rajputs, as they fought with their Muslim adversaries from the walls of these forts. Realising the strategic and militaristic importance of forts, the Rajput rulers paid special attention to possess them and erect several new ones in order to strengthen their military power. The fort of Mandor is regarded to have originally constructed by the Pratiharas around the 7th century CE. Among the Rajputs, the Chandellas were the great builders of a number of strong forts and fortresses. The Chauhans and Paramaras, both, were outstanding builders of forts in Rajasthan. Almost all the big forts had either been constructed or renovated by them. The fort of Mandalgarh is believed to have been built by Chauhan king of Ajmer probably around the 13th century CE. The fort of Nagaur situated in the north-east of Jodhpur is supposed to be built by one of the feudatories of the Chauhan king Someshvara, the father of Prithviraja-III. The forts constructed by the Paramaras were large in number. Similarly, the fort of Achalgarh is believed to be erected by the Paramara chiefs in 900 CE and rebuilt by Maharana Kumbha in 1442 CE.
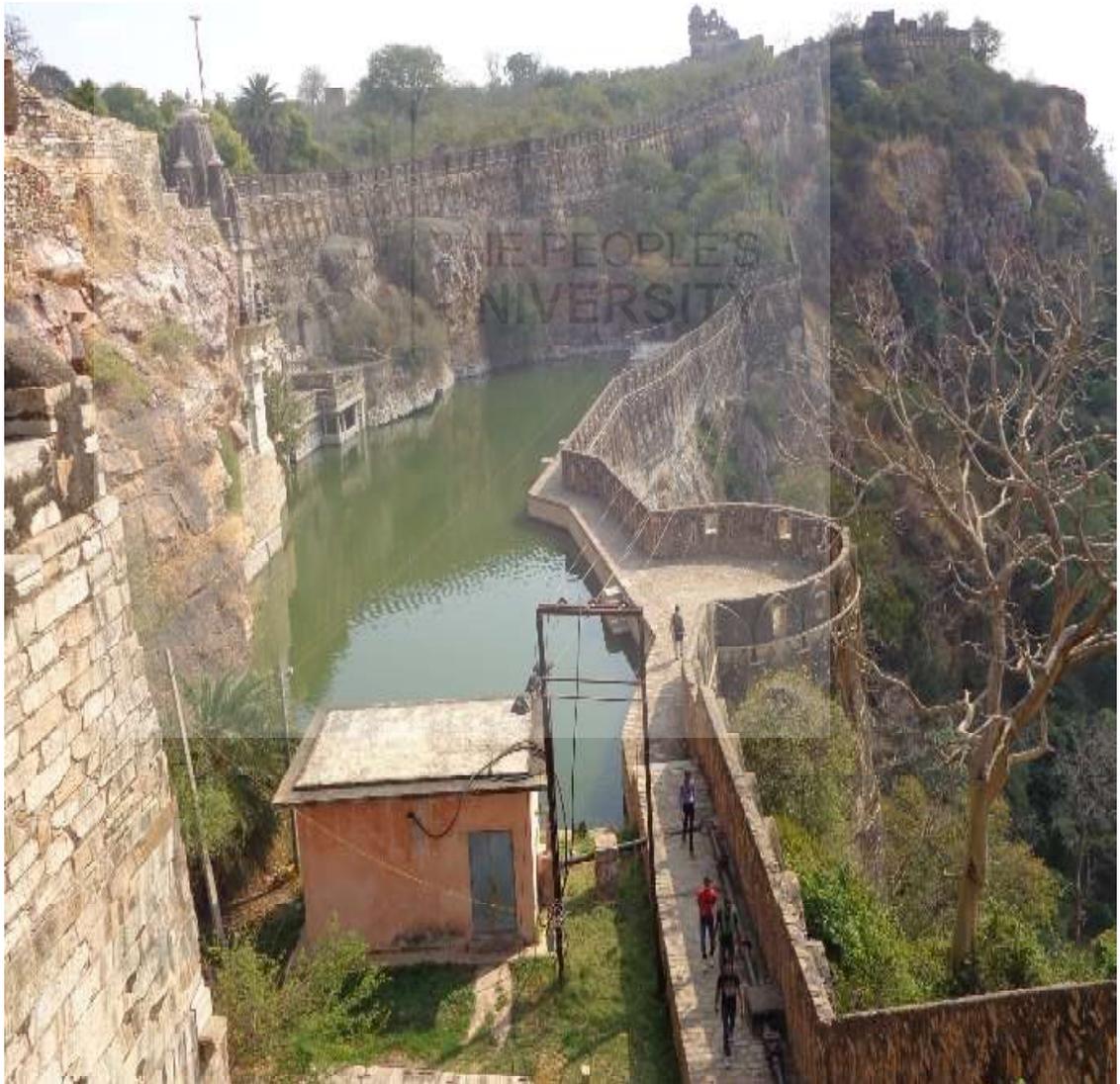
An Outer view of Chittorgarh Fort – Its Moat as a Security Wall. Credit: Dr. Rashmi Upadhyaya.
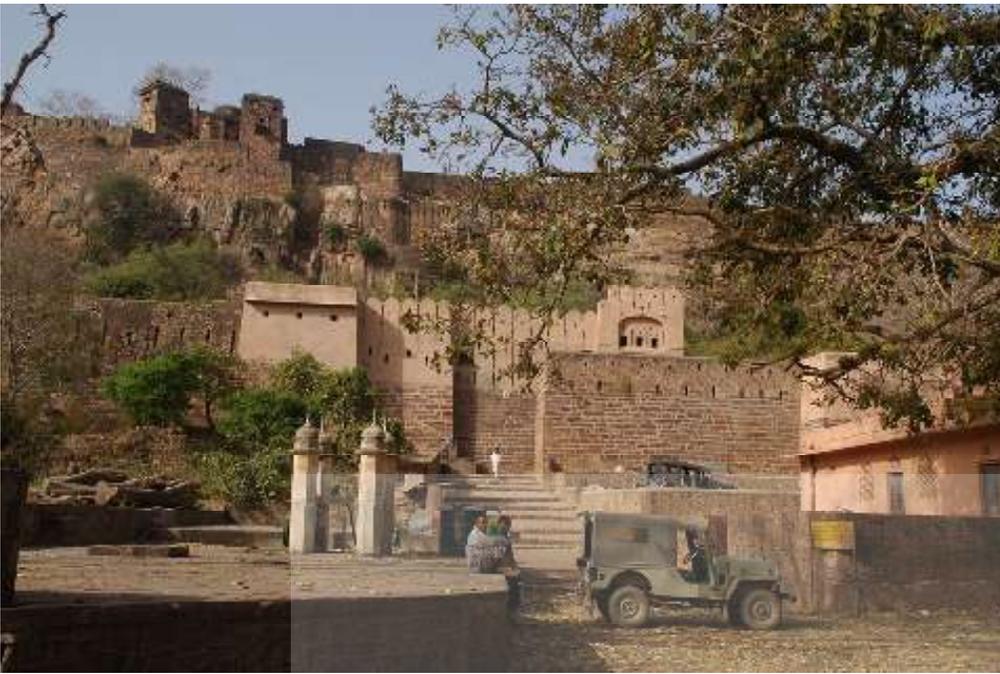
Ranthambhor Fort. Credit: Amitjls. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://upload.wikim edia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1f/Naulakha_gate%2Cranthambor_fort.jpg).

Check Your Progress 3

1) Discuss significant features of the political and military system of the Rajputs.

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2) Discuss various views regarding the emergence of the Rajputs. Was the emergence of the Rajputs result of a process?

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3) Which of the following statements are right or wrong?

 i) The emergence of the Rajputs in different areas was through a common process. ( )

 ii) The political system of the Rajputs was bureaucraticand feudal. ( )

 iii) The Rajputs originated from one single caste (*varna*). ( )

 iv) The Meds reached to Rajput status from a tribal background. ( )

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9.10   SUMMARY

The 7th-12th century Rajput polity presents a picture of disunited India after the death of Harsha. The first Rajput clan of Gurjara-Pratiharas, who were earlier the feudatory chiefs of Harsha in Ujjain, emerged as an independent political and military power to rule over Kannauj and the neighbouring regions of Northern India. The political and military strength was, thus, to be regarded as a major pointer at this stage in the emergence of the Rajputs. At the second stage the emergence of the feudatories of Gurjara-Pratiharas in different areas of central and western India as independent clan holders was also a ramification of the same trend of the possession of supreme military strength, which led to the independence or dominance of politically and militarily superior clans over the less powerful ones. The allotment or distribution of land among royal kinsmen and to different grades of the feudatories and officials was necessarily a step in the creation of the different grades of feudatories, many of whom later on emerged as clans or sub-clans.

The consolidation of the Rajput clans in different parts of central and western provinces of India has also been reflected by the presence of innumerable impregnable forts, which obviously represented the military strength of the clans. The social relations maintained by the marriage alliances among the members of the different clans provided a legitimate position.

The emergence of the Rajputs has, thus, to be understood in reality not in terms of the mythological traditions of the *Agnikula* and solar and lunar dynastic origins. It should be regarded as a process in terms of the political, social and economic developments in the history of early medieval northern India. B. D. Chattopadhya's contention of the origin of the Rajput seems juxtaposed in the light of the evidence of the contemporary epigraphs. The origin of the Rajputs has to be traced from different strata of indigenous population including the *Kshatriyas*, *Brahmanas* and some tribes including the aboriginal ones.

9.11   KEY WORDS

Rajputra	:	literally, a son of the king, but with the development of feudalism the term began to be used for a class of feudal chiefs holding estates.
Panchkula	:	a committee of five members governing towns and villages.
Ranaka	:	a title of feudatory chief in Northern India.
Thakkura	:	another title of feudatory chief in Northern India.
Mahajana	:	a local governing body at village level consisting of its leading members.
Overlord	:	the uppermost feudatory chief in feudal hierarchy who commanded and controlled the lesser ranks of feudatory chiefs.

9.12   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1)   See Section 9.3 and 9.4

2)   See Section 9.6

3)   i) (×)   ii) (√)   iii) (√)   iv) (√)

Check Your Progress 2

1)   See Section 9.7

2)   See Section 9.9

3)   i) √   ii) √   iii) √   iv) √

Check Your Progress 3

1)   See Section 9.10

2)   See Section 12

3)   i) ×   ii) √   iii) ×   iv) √

9.13   SUGGESTED READINGS

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Chattopadhyaya, B. D. (1998) "Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan". In *Making of Early Medieval India.* Second Edition. Oxford University Press (OUP).

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UNIT 10 EMERGENCE OF RASHTRAKUTAS*

Structure

10.0   OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss about the origin and emergence of the Rashtrakutas and the formation of Rashtrakuta empire. Later, we will also explore the organization and nature of Rashtrakuta state with social, religious, educational, cultural achievements during the Rashtrakutas. After studying the Unit, you will be able to learn about:

* major and minor kingdoms that were ruling over different territories of south India between 8th and 11th centuries;

* emergence of the Rashtrakutas as a dominant power in Deccan;

* the process of the formation of Rashtrakuta empire and contributions of different kings;

* the nature of early medieval polity and administration in the Deccan;

* significant components of the feudal political structure such as ideological bases, bureaucracy, military, control mechanism, villages etc.; and

* social, religious, educational, architectural and cultural developments within the Rashtrakuta empire.

10.1   INTRODUCTION

India witnessed three powerful kingdoms between *c*. 750 and 1000 CE: Pala empire, Pratihara empire and Rashtrakuta empire in south India. These kingdoms fought each other to establish their respective hegemony which was the trend of early medieval India. Historian Noboru Karashima treats the empire as a new type of state, i.e. feudal state showing both discontinuities and continuities with states that had emerged in these areas from 3rd century onwards. Rashtrakuta empire dominated the Deccan for almost 200 years till the end of 10th century and also controlled territories in north and south India at various times, which

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*Dr. Pintu Kumar, Assistant Professor, Motilal Nehru College (Evening), University of Delhi

lasted the longest of the three. It was not only the most powerful empire of the time but also acted as a bridge between north and south India in economic as well as cultural matters. It also promoted and expanded north Indian traditions and policies in south India. Significantly, India touched new heights of stability and achievements in the field of polity, economy, culture, education and religion in this phase.
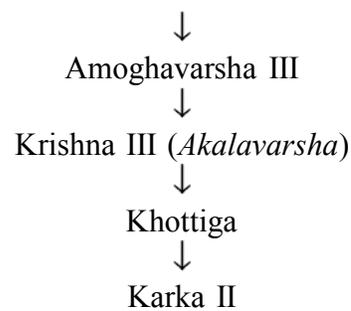
10.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE EMPIRE

The word 'Rashtrakuta' means chief of the *Rashtra* (division or kingdom). It is possible that the line of kings belonged to this class of provincial officers, as the designation appears in the inscriptions of many dynasties. We may say for sure that the Rashtrakutas were high officials, either provincial chiefs or another kind of administrators. For example, a Rashtrakuta Govindaraja, son of Shivaraja acting as *vijnapti* (petitioner), is mentioned in the Naravana plates of Chalukya Vikramaditya II of Badami. Romila Thapar also cites that Dantidurga – founder of the main branch of the Rashtrakutas – was one of the subordinates of Chalukyas and a high official in the administration. Historians are still not clear about origin of the Rashtrakutas and its branches. Following the tradition of devising Puranic pedigrees, the Rashtrakutas also claim in their inscriptions that they belong to the Satyaki branch of *Yaduvamsha* (e.g. Inscription Nos. IX, X and XXI) and the line of Tungas (e.g. Inscription Nos. XXIV, XXV and XXVI). Historian Nilkantha Sastri, based on the study of inscriptions, claims that the Rashtrakutas were of Kannada origin, and their plates indicate that Kannada was their mother tongue despite the extensive use of Sanskrit. Also, the standard title *Lattaloora-puravareshvara* ("the eminent lord of the city of Lattalura") assumed by Rashtrakuta princes of both the main line and of the secondary branches indicates their original home. Lattalura has been identified with Latur in the Bidar district of Hyderabad. In this way, we can say that Deccan was the original home of the Rashtrakutas, which generally means the whole region occupied by the Telugu speaking population as well as Maharashtra with certain parts of northern Karnataka (Kannada speaking).

The Rashtrakuta dynasty is famous for a long line of brave warriors and able administrators, which helped them in the formation of a vast empire. They fought continuously with the Pratiharas, eastern Chalukyas of Vengi (in modern Andhra Pradesh), Cholas, Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai. The Pallavas were in decline and their successors – the Cholas – were emerging. Weaknesses of these kingdoms became helpful in victories and the establishment of Rashtrakuta empire. There was no power in northern India strong enough to interfere with affairs of the Deccan that also provided an opportunity for the emergence of Rashtrakutas. Thapar argues that geographical position of the Rashtrakutas, i.e. in the middle of the Indian subcontinent led to their involvement in wars and alliances with both the northern and, more frequently, the southern kings. It resulted in expansion of the empire in all directions. Historian Karashima argues that one of the crucial factors for the formation of Rashtrakuta power might have been an environment within their territory favourable to the growth of agriculture. Thapar also explores favourable economic factors and mentions that the Rashtrakutas had the advantage of controlling a large part of the western seaboard and, therefore, trade with West Asia, particularly with the Arabs, provided the wealth to back their political ambitions.

10.3   THE RASHTRAKUTA EMPIRE

There were several branches of the Rashtrakutas ruling in different parts of India in the early medieval period. Earliest known ruling family of the Rashtrakutas was founded by Mananka in Malkhed, having the *Paalidhvaja* banner and the *Garuda-laanchhana*. Another Rashtrakuta family was ruling in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. The Antroli-Chharoli inscription bearing the *Garuda* seal dated 757 CE mentions four generations: Karka I, his son Dhruva, his son Govinda, and his son Karka II belonging to a collateral branch of the Malkhed line holding sway in the Lata country in Gujarat. Dantidurga was the founder of the imperial Rashtrakuta line. He seems contemporary of Karka II. Exact relation of these kings to the Malkhed line cannot be decided with certainty, though it is not impossible that Karka I of the charter of 757 CE was identical with the grandfather of Dantidurga himself. The kingdom was founded by Dantidurga who fixed his capital at Manyakheta or Malkhed near Modern Sholapur. Manyakheta branch of the Rashtrakutas soon became dominant and imperial by assimilating other branches in due time. We can prepare a dynastic chart of the imperial line of Rashtrakutas with their titles as follows:

Danti-varman
↓
Indra I
↓
Govindaraja
↓
Kakka I
↓
Indra II
↓
Dantidurga (*Prithivivallabha, Maharajadhiraja, Parameshvara, Paramabhattaaraka*)
↓
Krishnaraja I (*Shubhatunga, Akaalavarsha, Rajadhiraja, Parameshvara*)
↓
Govinda II (*Prabhutavarsha* and *Vikramavaloka*)
↓
Dhruva (*Nirupama, Kali-vallabha, Dharavarsha, Shrivallabha*)
↓
Govinda III (*Jagattunga, Kirti-Narayana, Janavallabha, Tribhuvanadhavala, Prabhutavarsha, Srivallabha*)
↓
Amoghavarsha I (Sarva) (*Nripatunga, Atishayadhavala, Maharaja-shanda, Vira-Narayana*)
↓
Krishna II (*Akalavarsha* and *Shubhatunga*)
↓
Indra III (*Nityavarsha, Rattakandarpa, Kirti-Narayana, Rajamartanda*)
↓
Amoghavarsha II
↓
Govinda IV (*Suvarnavarsha, Prabhutavarsha, Chaanakyachaturmukha, NripatiTrinetra, VikrantaNarayana*)

$$\downarrow$$
Amoghavarsha III
$$\downarrow$$
Krishna III (*Akalavarsha*)
$$\downarrow$$
Khottiga
$$\downarrow$$
Karka II

We now come to the main line of Rashtrakutas. **Dantidurga**, a strong and able ruler, was the real founder of a lasting empire. The earliest record of his reign – the Ellora inscription of 742 CE – mentions the titles *prithvivallabha* and *khagavaloka* (he whose glances are as keen as the edge of a sword) for him. Lata and Malava were in a disturbed condition after the Arab invasion and taking that advantage Dantidurga took control of the territories. Dantidurga also attacked Kanchi, the capital of the Pallavas, and struck up an alliance with Nandivarman Pallavamalla to whom he gave his daughter Reva in marriage. The warlike monarch Dantidurga captured the outlying territories of the extensive Chalukyan empire and then assaulted on the heart of empire and easily defeated Kirtivarman. The Samangadh inscription of 754 CE records that Dantidurga overthrew the last Chalukya ruler of Badami called Kirtivarman II and assumed full imperial rank and described himself as:

- *Prithvivallabha,*

- *Maharajadhiraja,*

- *Parameshvara, and*

- *Paramabhattaraka*

Kirtivarman continued to rule with diminished glory until the reign of Dantidurga. Dantidurga describes his territory as comprising four lakhs of villages, which probably included his sway only over a little more than one half of the Chalukyan empire of Badami.

Dantidurga died childless, which aroused a dispute between **Krishnaraja I** – his uncle – and other family members who succeeded in seizing the throne for a while but whom Krishnaraja I overthrew easily in 756 CE because of his popularity. He had the titles *Shubhatunga* (High in Prosperity) and *Akalavarsha* (Constant Rainer) mentioned in Bhandak Inscription of Krishnaraja I of 772 CE. The newly established Rashtrakuta kingdom expanded in all direction under him. He started with the completion of the overthrow of the Chalukyas of Badami. The Bhandak plates of 772 CE show that the whole of Madhya Pradesh had come under his rule. In other inscriptions, he is said to have overcome Rahappa and thereby gained the *Palidhvaja* banner and the imperial title *Rajadhiraja Parameshvara.* Historian Sastri treats Rahappaas Kakka II of Lata which may be taken to mark the end of the first Lata branch of the Rashtrakutas. Southern Konkana was also conquered and brought under his sway by Krishnaraja I. He also expanded his empire in the southern direction by establishing lordship over the Ganga kingdom. Also, his son and *yuvaraja* Govinda compelled Vijayaditya I of the Vengi branch of Chalukya for formal submission. The Rashtrakuta empire under Krishnaraja I may, thus, be taken to have extended over the whole of the modern Maharashtra state, a good part of the Mysore

country, practically the whole of the former Hyderabad state, with Vengi farther east acknowledging its supremacy and a good portion of Madhya Pradesh.

Krishnaraja I died sometime between 772 CE and 775 CE and was followed on the throne by his son *yuvaraja* **Govinda II**. Govinda II bears the titles *Prabhutavarsha* (Profuse Rainer) and *Vikramavaloka* (the man with a heroic look) in the Alas plates. His name is omitted in some of the later grants of the line. It was due to civil war for the throne between him and his younger brother Dhruva ruling in the region of Nasik and Khandesh as the governor. The first war between brothers ended disastrously for Govinda II. He then allied with the Pallava ruler of Kanchi, the Ganga king, the king of Vengi and the ruler of Malava who were traditional foes of the Rashtrakutas, but got defeated in a battle and **Dhruva** assumed the sovereignty. Dhruva assumed the titles:

- *Nirupama* (Unequalled),
- *Kali-vallabha* (fond of war),
- *Dharavarsha* (Heavy Rainer) and
- *Shrivallabha* (the Favourite of Fortune).

Dhruva severely punished all kings who assisted Govinda II in the late civil war after securing the throne. He made his younger but ablest son **Govinda III** emperor during his lifetime.

Govinda III (793-814) became one of the greatest Rashtrakuta rulers who had the titles of:

- *Jagattunga* (prominent in the world),
- *Kirti-Narayana* (the very NârâyaGa in respect of fame),
- *Janavallabha* (favourite of the people),
- *Tribhuvanadhavala* (pure in the three worlds),
- *Prabhutavarsha* (the abundant rainer), and
- *Shrivallabha*.

He first quelled the rebellions of his elder brothers in the south. In the north, after a successful expedition against Nagabhatta of Kanauj and the annexation of Malawa along with Kosala, Kalinga, Vengi, Dahala and Odraka, Govinda III again turned to the south. We are told in the Sanjan Inscription that Govinda "terrified the Kerala, Pandya and the Chola kings and caused the Pallavas to wither. The Gangas of Karnataka, who became dissatisfied through baseness, were bound down with fitters and met with death." Govinda's southern campaign seems to be no more than a *digvijaya*: the traditional proclamation of superior power by a triumphant march across the territory of the neighbouring rulers demanding tokens of their submission. Performing better than his father's expectations, he spread the fame of the Rashtrakuta empire literally from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin through his skills both in diplomacy and on the battlefield. It is said that the Rashtrakutas became as unassailable as the Yadavas after the birth of Sri Krishna.

Govinda's successor became his only son *Maharaja Sarva* better known as **Amoghavarsha I** (814-878 CE) who, also like his father, proved himself as one of the greatest of Rashtrakuta monarchs. Amoghavarsha ruled for 68 years, but

by temperament he preferred *digvijaya* in the sphere of religion, literature, and architecture better than to war. He had the titles:

- *Nripatunga* (Exalted among kings),

- *Atishayadhavala* (Wonderfully white in conduct),

- *Maharaja-shanda* (Best of the great kings), and

- *Vira-Narayana* (The heroic *Narayana*).

He was genuinely interested in the religious traditions of contemporary India and used to spend his time in the company of Jaina monks and other forms of spiritual meditation. His inscriptions count him among the most prominent followers of Jainism. He was not only an author himself but also a patron of authors. Jinasena, the author of *Adipurana,* was among the Jaina preceptors of Amoghavarsha I. He did not only promote Jainism but also the Brahmanical religion and also performed several rituals for the welfare of his subjects. He was also a great builder and is celebrated in the inscriptions Nos. XXIV, XXV, and XXVI as the maker of the capital city Manyakheta to excel in the city of Indra.

There were many rebellions in the far-flung Rashtrakuta empire under his long reign. His death was followed by the accession of his son **Krishna II** in about 879 CE. Krishna II had the titles *Akalavarsha* and *Shubhatunga*. He was not wholly successful in curbing rebellions. The only success of his reign was the termination of Lata viceroyalty. The wars he undertook against Vengi and the Cholas got him on the whole nothing but disaster, disgrace, and exile for some time. His son **Indra III** became king in 915 CE. Indra III had the titles:

- *Nityavarsha* (constant rainer),

- *Rattakandarpa* (Eros among the Rattas

- *Kirti-Narayana,* and

- *Rajamartaong* (Son among kings).

Amoghavarsha I's grandson Indra III re-established the empire. The advance of the Rashtrakuta forces through Lata and Malawa right up to Kalpi and Kanauj and the dethronement of Mahipala were, no doubt, significant military achievements of Indra. After the defeat of Mahipala and the sack of Kanauj in 915 CE, Indra III was the most powerful ruler of his times. According to Al-Masudi who visited India at that time, the Rashtrakuta king Balhara or Vallabharaja was the greatest king of India and most of the Indian rulers accepted his suzerainty and respected his envoys.

Indra III's reign comes to a close towards the end of 927 CE. He was followed on the throne by his son **Amoghavarsha II** and reined for one year according to the Bhandana grant of Silahara Aparajita (997 CE). His younger brother, the ambitious **Govinda IV**, celebrated his coronation with great pomp. Govinda IV had the titles:

- *Suvar Gavarsha* (rainer of gold),

- *Prabhutavarsha*,

- *Chanakyachaturmukha*,

- *VikrantaNarayana*, and

- *Nripati Trinetra.*

He was not a good king. His life, rule and acquisition of throne provoked resentment among the feudatories. They became united for a revolution which ended with the defeat and dethronement of Govinda IV and the transfer of the crown to **Amoghavarsha III** in 934-35 CE for saving the fair name of the royal family. Amoghavarsha III had a short reign of four to five years. He was a gentle, peaceful and wise king and strongly marked by a religious turn of mind. He engaged himself in the promotion of the royal family by granting many villages to Brahmins and building many temples of Shiva. His son and *yuvaraja* Krishna III managed all other affairs of the state. His greatness as a soldier is indeed attested by the early wars he waged as crown prince on behalf of his brother-in-law Butugga, and perhaps by the success of Rashtrakuta arms in the confused struggles that went on the Vengi kingdom. The Deoli and Karhad plates (Nos. XXIV and XXV) indicate that **Krishna III** became king after his father's death in 939 CE and bestowed with the particular imperial title *Akalavarsha*.

Krishna III was the last in a line of brilliant rulers. He was engaged in a struggle against the Paramaras of Malava and the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi. The Karhad plates (No. XXV) issued from the king's camp at Melpadi in the North Arcot district mention that he also undertook one of the earliest but extensive military conquest against the Chola ruler of Tanjore, who had supplanted the Pallavas of Kanchi. Krishna III defeated the Chola king Parantaka I (949 CE), annexed the northern part of the Chola empire and distributed the Chola kingdom among his servants. He, then, pressed down to Rameshwaram and set up a pillar of victory there and built a temple. After his death, all in late 966 CE or very early in 967 CE his opponents united against his successor half-brother **Khottiga**. The Rashtrakuta capital Manyakheta was sacked, plundered and burnt in 972 CE by the Paramara kings and the emperor was forced to abandon Manyakheta. **Karka II** succeeded Khottiga, who was overthrown by Tailla II, Chalukya. The Bhandana grant of Aparajita (997 CE) and the Kharepatan plates dated 1008 CE state that Tailapa, the Chalukya defeated Karka in battle and the *Rammarajya* ceased to exist. It marked the end of the Rashtrakuta Empire.

10.4 DISINTEGRATION OF THE EMPIRE

Ahavamalla Tailaparasa, one of the most potent feudatories of the Rashtrakuta Empire, became strong enough within a few years of the death of Krishna to overthrow Karka II and establish himself as independent monarch by laying the foundation of the Western Chalukya Empire of Kalyani. There were several reasons behind the sudden disintegration of the Rashtrakuta empire. The Rashtrakutas continuously engaged in the struggle with the Pratiharas, the Chalukyas, the Pallavas, and the Palas who were relatively equally matched empires, which turned into a war of attrition and the almost simultaneous decline of the rival powers. The Rashtrakuta Empire was based on a large number of small and big feudatories, and these *samantas* took advantage to break away and found smaller kingdoms. These feudatories always aspired to be independent, so local wars between them and the overlords were frequent, which disturbed the peace of the empire. Amoghavarsha never eliminated the threat of rebellion by subordinate rulers in his rule. Krishna in the process of saving the Rashtrakuta empire made it weak from the core. He rewarded warriors, relatives and friends

like Butuga and Taila for their services, loyalty, and bravery with an open heart and they became great powers of the empire. For example, Krishna III did not foresee the feudal developments likely to endanger the stability of his empire, and he gave the province of Tardavadi 1000 near the heart of the empire as *anungajivita* (military fief) to Taila. Their sway extended over home territory and directly administered by the emperor. In this way, Krishna was a good friend but by no means a wise emperor. He allowed momentary personal feelings to betray him into courses of action which proved politically disastrous to the empire. We can conclude that the feudalism — once the strength of the Rashtrakutas – swallowed them when kings became weak and incapable of managing feudatories.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Read the following sentences and write True or False.

   i) The Rashtrakuta kingdom survived longer than the Pratiharas and the Palas which ruled over the Deccan for more than two centuries. ( )

   ii) All the Rashtrakuta princes assumed the title of *Lammalura-puravareshvara*.   ( )

   iii) The Deccan was the original home of the Rashtrakutas.   ( )

   iv) The Rashtrakutas were high officials; either provincial chiefs or another kind of administrators.   ( )

   v) The warrior Rashtrakuta kings established and expanded their empire supported by the growth of agriculture, the control of western seaboard, and the trade with the Arabs.   ( )

2) Fill in the blanks.

   a) The Rashtrakutas often struggled with their contemporary kingdoms such as:

      ...., ...
      ,.......................... ...., ...

3) Note down five favourable factors in the formation and expansion of the Rashtrakuta empire.

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4) How did Krishnaraja I and Govinda III contribute to the expansion of the Rashtrakuta empire?

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10.5 ADMINISTRATION

The warrior kings of the Rashtrakutas created a vast empire in South India which was touching the northern parts of India comprising approximately seven and a half lakh villages. The Rashtrakutas not only won and created a vast kingdom but also maintained it well. A powerful monarchy was the core of the empire, assisted by a large number of feudatories. Interestingly, the realm was getting feudalised more and more with the maturity of the reign of each Rashtrakuta king. The system of administration in the realms was based on the ideas and practices of the Gupta Empire and the Harsha's kingdom in the north, and the Chalukyas in the Deccan. As before, the monarch was the fountainhead of all powers including the head of administration and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The king was responsible for the maintenance of law and order within the kingdom and expected absolute loyalty and obedience from his family, ministers, vassal chiefs, feudatories, officials, and chamberlains. The king's position was generally hereditary, but the rules about succession were not rigidly fixed. The eldest son often succeeded, but there were many instances when the eldest son had to fight his younger brothers and sometimes lost to them. Thus, the Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva and Govinda IV deposed their elder brothers. Kings were generally advised and helped by many hereditary ministers chosen by them from leading families. We do not know how many of them were there and how they worked. From epigraphic and literary records it appears that in almost every kingdom there was a chief minister, a minister of foreign affairs, a revenue minister and treasurer, chief of armed forces, chief justice, and *purohita*.

In the Rashtrakuta kingdom the directly administered areas were divided into:

* *Rashtra* (province),
* *Visaya*, and
* *Bhukti*.

The head of a *Rashtra* was called *Rashtrapati* (governor) who sometimes enjoyed the status and title of a vassal king. The *Visaya* was like a modern district under *Visayapati*, and the *Bhukti* was a smaller unit than it. A body of assistants called the *Rashtramahattaras* and *Vishayamahattaras* respectively assisted provincial governors and district level governors in the Rashtrakuta administration. The roles and powers of these smaller units and their administrators are not clear. It seems that their primary purpose was the realisation of land revenue and some attention to law and order. It appears that all officials were paid by giving them grants of rent-free land.

The feudatories played an essential role in the formation and administration of the Rashtrakuta empire. We know that the Rashtrakutas won many battles and expanded the empire which was not possible without the help of feudatories. The lords from the Ganga kingdom were primarily known for their valour in the expeditions of Rashtrakutas. The kings regularly rewarded these chiefs with land-grants for their loyalty and bravery that resulted in the emergence of lords as powerful as the king. For example, the position of Taila and Ganga Butuga in the reign of Krishna III. Sastri mentions from the study of inscriptions that Butuga was ruling Belvola 300, Purigere 300, Gangavadi 96000, Kisukad 70, Bagenad 70 and Banavasi 12000. The empire consisted of the areas administered directly and areas governed by the vassal chiefs. The areas ruled by the vassal

chiefs were autonomous as far as internal affairs were concerned and had a general obligation of loyalty, paying a fixed tribute and supplying a quota of troops to the overlord. The vassal chiefs or their son were required to attend the *darbar* of the overlord on special occasions, and sometimes they were expected to marry one of their daughters to the overlord or one of his sons.

The Rashtrakuta kings had large and well-organised infantry, cavalry, and a large number of war-elephants mentioned in the chronicles of Arab travellers. The large armed forces were directly related to the glamour and power of the king, which was also essential for the maintenance and expansion of the empire in the age of wars. The Rashtrakutas were famous for a large number of horses in their army imported from Arabia, West Asia, and Central Asia. The real power of the Rashtrakutas is reflected from their many forts garrisoned by special troops and independent commanders. The infantry consisted of regular and irregular soldiers and levies provided by the vassal chiefs. The regular forces were often hereditary and sometimes drawn from different regions all over India. There is no reference to war chariots which had fallen out of use.

Below these territorial divisions was the village. The village was the basic unit of administration. The village administration was carried on by the village headman and the village accountant whose posts were generally hereditary. Grants of rent-free lands were paid to them. The headman was often helped in his duties by the village elder called *grama-mahajana* or *grama-mahattara*. In the Rashtrakuta kingdom, particularly in Karnataka, we are told that there were village committees to manage local schools, tanks, temples and roads in close cooperation with the headman and received a particular percentage of the revenue collection. Towns also had similar committees, in which the heads of trade guilds were also associated. Law and order in the cities and areas in their immediate vicinity was the responsibility of the *koshta-pala* or *kotwal*. The petty chieftainship and the increased hereditary elements weakened the power of village committees. The central rule also found it difficult to assert his authority over them and to control them. It is what we mean when we say that the government was becoming feudalised.

10.6 POLITY, SOCIETY, RELIGION, LITERATURE

The acquisition of several titles by the Rashtrakuta kings itself seems the adoption of the practice of north Indian kings. We can take a glimpse of the Rashtrakuta culture through titles used by different kings such as *Prithvivallabha*, *Khagavaloka*, *Maharajadhiraja*, *Parameshvara*, *Paramabhammaraka*, *Shubhatunga*, *Jagattunga*, *Akalavarsha*, *Rajadhiraja Parameuhvara*, *Prabhutavarsha*, *Nityavarsha*, *Suvarnavarsha*, *Vikramavaloka*, *Nirupma*, *Shrivallabha*, *Janavallabha*, *Rajamartanda*, *NripatiTrinetra*, *KirtiNarayana*, *VikrantaNarayana* etc. These Brahmanical titles and the performance of Vedic sacrifices became a means to legitimise their rule following the north Indian practice. It is interesting to note that the number of titles of the kings corresponded to the power of Rashtrakuta kings and sometimes we find older titles also reused. Politically, they were engaged in assuming high sounding titles such as *Maharajadhiraja*, *Parameshvara*, *Paramabhammaraka* etc. and granting rent-free lands and villages to lords for their services for claiming the excellent position and the sole owner of the state. Another interesting way of proclaiming the subordination of feudatory and defeated rulers was to install their portrait

images as *dvarapalakas* in temples in the capital city. For example, Govinda III introduced two statues of the lord of Lanka like pillars of victory in adorning the portals of a Shiva temple in Manyakheta. The Rashtrakuta kings also donated villages to learned *Brahmanas* known as *Agrahara* villages. Govinda IV created 400 *Agrahara* villages at the time of his accession. Krishna maintained and symbolised his high imperial position also through the great works of art, the celebrated temple of Kailasha at Ellora being the most prominent among them. The temple of Kailashanatha is one of the largest rock-cut temples carved out of a single huge rock, which is universally recognised as the high-water mark of the excellence of the style of architecture and sculpture initially associated with the Pallavas.

The society at the time of Rashtrakutas became more stratified based on caste system. Besides the usual four castes, i.e. *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*, there existed some discriminated and untouchable social groups such as:

- shoemakers,

- carpenters,

- bamboo-workers,

- fishers,

- washermen,

- sweepers,

- *Chandalas* etc.

The dominant castes followed their traditional duties such as *Brahmanas* were devoted to religious rituals and teaching and *Kshatriyas* were engaged in administration and war. The *Vaishyas* had degenerated to the status of *Shudras* due to the decline in commerce and engagement in agricultural activities. Simultaneously, the position of the *Shudras* improved considerably due to the expansion of agriculture and enlistment in the army. The condition of women seems to not have degraded in contemporary society. Women participated in religious and administrative activities with men. Ladies of the king's household also attended the court on festive occasions. Princesses were also appointed to government posts, such as the Rashtrakuta princess Chandrobalabbe, a daughter of Amoghavarsha I, administered the Raichur *doab* for some time. According to Arab writers, in the Rashtrakuta Empire ladies did not veil their faces, which indicate towards the non-existence of the *purdah* system. A. S. Altekar says that the widow marriages had gone out of fashion in the higher levels of the society, but the widow's right to inherit the property of her husband was being gradually recognised.

Archaeologist Pandit Vishveshwar Nath concludes through the studies of inscriptions that the kings of the Rashtrakuta dynasty from time to time used to observe the Shaiva, the Vaishnava, and the Shakta religion. The Rashtrakuta kings presented an excellent example of religious tolerance and gave patronage to all the faiths such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Islam. They did not kill anyone for his or her religious beliefs. Toleration was also shown between the members of the different sects. The hope that religious charity will earn divine favour became a funding source to religious and socio-religious activities. In this phase of Indian history, the southern states came more and more under

the spell of the Vedic and Agamic religion. Temples became a centre of Hindu gods and goddesses, culture, religion, education, and rituals. Buddhism was the least popular religion. The number of monasteries declined considerably during the rule of the Rashtrakutas, and the inscriptions reflect only three large, active and vital monasteries: at Kanheri, Kampil, and Dambal. Jainism continued to be a strong rival of Hinduism due to the generous patronage of the Rashtrakuta kings like Amoghavarsha I, Krishna II and Indra III and the literary and religious activities of some famous monastic scholars. A great patron of Jainism, Amoghavarsha I appointed a Jaina monk Gunabhadra as tutor to his heir-apparent Krishna II, extended patronage to many Jaina scholars and gave grants to several Jaina monasteries. Even Muslims were welcomed and allowed to preach their faith by the Rashtrakuta kings. It meant that politics and religion were, in essence, kept apart. Religion was necessarily a personal duty of the king. Thus, Amoghavarsha I, who was a staunch follower of Jainism, also worshipped the Hindu goddess Lakshmi equally. In this sense, we can say that the state was mostly secular.

Altekar mentions that *Agrahara* villages, Jaina and Buddhist monasteries, and temples also acted as the centres of higher Sanskrit education in the Rashtrakuta empire. These institutions provided instruction in different branches of learning. The Rashtrakuta kings were also learned person such as Amoghavarsha himself wrote the *Prashnottara Ratnamalika*: a small Jaina dialectic. The plates issued by the Rashtrakutas show the extensive use of Sanskrit and the presence of several scholars in their court. The liberal support and promotion of Sanskrit and Kannada education in the empire led to the composition of several pieces of literature and significant development in the field of research, logic, art, and sciences. Halayudha wrote his *Kavirahasya* in the court of Krishna III, which explains the conjugational peculiarities of roots have the same form with a eulogy of the poet's patron. Jainism had notable patrons in the Rashtrakuta court. Amoghavarsha I had many Jaina authors in his court. Naturally, Jaina literature made significant progress in this period. Harisena, his spiritual preceptor, had composed the *Harivamsha* in 783 CE but his *Adipurana*, which he left unfinished, was begun in the 9th century. It was completed by his disciple Gunachandra in 897 CE. The *Amoghavritti* of Sakatayana — a work on grammar — and the *Ganitasarasamgraha* of Viracharya — a treatise on mathematics — were also composed in the reign of Amoghavarsha I. Later, Somadeva composed the *Yashastilaka* and *Nitivakyamrita*. Also, the Kannada literature witnessed its beginning and significant prosperity in the Rashtrakuta period as Amoghavarsha himself was the author of the *Kavirajamarga*: the earliest work on poetics in Kannada. Amoghavarsha also refers to his contemporary Kannada poets Srivijaya and Gunavarman I whose works exist only in scattered quotations. Several Kannada works were written at the court of the Chalukyas of Vemulwad, who were feudatories of the Rashtrakutas.

Pampa I, the earliest and most celebrated of the Kannada poets, flourished here and wrote the *Adipurana* and the *Vikramarjunavijaya*. The latter provides valuable information about the northern campaign of Indra III. Ponna, the author of the *Shantipurana*, is another famous poet of this period who got the title of *Ubhayakavichakravartin* on account of his proficiency as a poet both in Sanskrit and Kannada by Krishna III. Chamundaraja, the Jain general and minister of Marasimha II of Gangavadi, composed the *Chamunarayapurana* in prose. Ranna, the author of the *Ajitapurana* and the *Gadayuddha*, was his younger

contemporary. Altekar points out that in this period most of the Kannada writers were Jainas by faith, which shows an essential step towards religious cooperation and tolerance in the field of academics. The vernacular language was necessary for preaching to the masses, which led to a plethora of vernacular literature.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Which of the following statements is Right or Wrong?

   i) The system of administration in the Rashtrakuta empire was based on the ideas and practices of the Gupta Empire, the Harsha's kingdom, and the Chalukyas.   ( )

   ii) Provincial governors and district level governors in the Rashtrakuta administration were assisted by a body of assistants called the *Rashtramahattaras* and *Vishayamahattaras* respectively.   ( )

   iii) In the Rashtrakuta kingdom, there were only directly administered areas.   ( )

   iv) The Rashtrakutas were famous for a large number of horses in their army imported from Arabia, West Asia, and Central Asia.   ( )

2) List the central administrative units of the Rashtrakuta kingdom.

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3) In Section A are given the names of Kannada authors and in B the titles of their books. Match Section A and Section B.

Section A	Section B
a) Amoghavarsha I	i) *Kavirajamarga*
b) Pampa I	ii) *Shantipurana*
c) Ponna	iii) *Ajitapurana* and *Gadayuddha*
d) Chamundaraja	iv) *Chamundarayapurana*
e) Ranna	v) *Adipurana* and *Vikramarjunavijaya*

4) Describe religious policy of the Rashtrakutas.

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10.7 SUMMARY

The history of the Rashtrakutas is considered as an important phase in the history of India. From the collapse of the Chalukyas of Badami to the revival of Chalukya power under Taila II at Kalyani is roughly two centuries, and during this long interval the line of Rashtrakutas started by Dantidurga continued to rule Western Deccan. The circle became complete. Their direct rule was confined to the area that is called Rattapadi seven and a half lakhs in Tamil inscriptions. In the North, the Pratiharas and the Palas were defeated in wars by the Rashtrakutas, and the Paramaras became their vassals. In the South, the Ganga country was a viceroyalty under the Rashtrakutas for many years, and the rising empire of the Cholas suffered a severe loss. In the eastern half of the Deccan, the Rashtrakutas tried to bring the Chalukyas of Vengi under control. A series of battles strained the resources of the state and gave rise to feudal conditions and the growth of mighty vassals who disturbed the peace of the realm and ultimately overthrew the Rashtrakuta power. The memorials of Rashtrakuta rule in art, architecture, religion, and literature claim an essential place in the heritage of India. The Kailasha temple of Krishna I reflects extraordinary architecture. Hinduism and Jainism prospered in the Rashtrakuta empire in an environment of religious harmony. In this era, Kannada became one of the important languages of South India through the evergreen works of several scholars. The administration of the empire won the admiration of foreign visitors.

10.8 KEY WORDS

Palidhvaja	:	Royal banner.
Parameshvara	:	Devotee of Shiva.
Anungajivita	:	Award for extraordinary military service.
Rashtramahattara	:	Official of province.
Agrahara	:	Brahmin village.

10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) True

2) The Pratiharas, the Palas, the Cholas, the Pallavas, the Eastern Chalukyas.

3) See Section 10.3

4) See Section 10.3

Check Your Progress 2

1) (i) Right (ii) Right (iii) Wrong (iv) Right

2) Butuga and Taila. See Section 10.5.

3) (a) i (b) v (c) ii (d) iv (e) iii

4) See Section 10.6

10.10   SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 11 THE ARABS: INVASIONS AND EXPANSION*

Structure

11.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will know:

- the background for understanding the foreign invasions from Arabia in early medieval period;

- the sources on the Arab conquest of Sindh;

- the reasons for the capture of Sindh by the Arabs;

- the phases of conquest of Sindh;

- the colonial understanding of Sindh conquest; and

- cultural comingling between the Arab and Indian cultures.

11.1   INTRODUCTION

In the Units so far, we had studied about the social, political, economic or cultural aspects of Ancient India. Based on the unique traits of the period, historians have called it as Ancient history. Similarly, the period that followed had its own characteristic features to be termed as Medieval. The rise of Islam in west Asia and the Muslim conquests around the world is atypical of the early medieval period. In this Unit, we will study one such inter-related development in the Indian subcontinent. This is the Arab conquest of Sindh in the north-western region of the subcontinent.

The Early Medieval in Indian History

The Early Medieval is a phase of transition from ancient to medieval period. In relation to north India, the period before the sultanate phase is termed as early medieval. Many historians also refer to it as post-Gupta period. It

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signifies a different chronological construct in Indian history that had characteristics of its own that were not to be found in the earlier or later phases. The use of such terms in academic circles is of more recent origin. Before its usage, the medieval period was mostly understood in terms of foreign or Muslim invasion and rule in India. However, with in-depth micro-studies in medieval Indian history, it was realized that the various cultural traits found in the region cannot be aggregated together under a single term of medieval. In the beginning, Niharranjan Ray attempted a multi-dimensional characterization of medievalism. He envisaged three sub periods within the medieval, namely:

i)   7th to 12th century

ii)   12th to first quarter of 16th century

iii)   first quarter of 16th century to the close of 18th century.

According to historians like B. D. Chattopadhyaya, the time-spans in history are culturally diverse enough not to be comfortably categorized together. Therefore, even these sub-periods can be broken into different periods with their own cultural traits. In line with such an argument, it can be said that the post-Gupta or early medieval saw different phases with distinct traits. For instance, 7th to 10th and 10th to 12th centuries can be differentiated on different grounds. One such ground is the Arab conquest of Sindh in the 8th century or the rise of Turkish invasion in north India between 10th to 12th centuries.

11.2 THE RISE AND SPREAD OF ISLAM IN 7TH-8TH CENTURIES

Source: http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/full/opr/t253/e17/images/0195334012.spread-of-islam-the.1.jpg
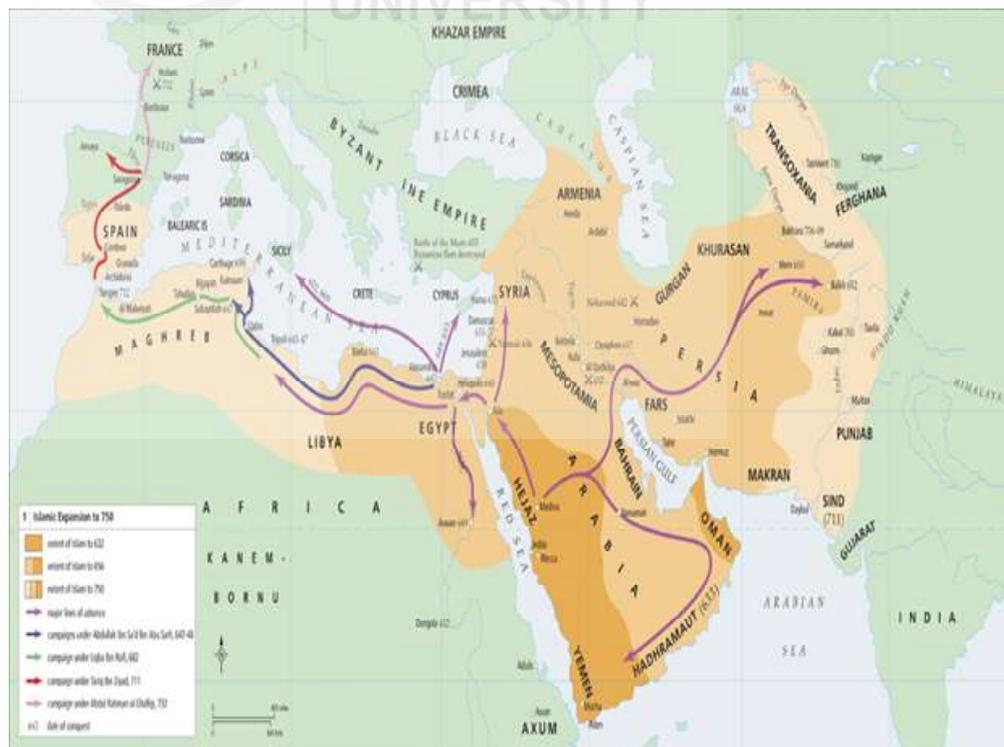
The religion of Islam was founded in the 7th century by Muhammad: an Arabian merchant from Mecca. At this time, the region of Arabia was inhabited by several warring Bedouin tribes following pagan faiths, worshipping many deities. They constantly fought with each other over economic or religious issues. However, Muhammad unified these Arabian tribes with his monotheistic teachings. Perhaps this was the biggest contribution of Muhammad in Arabia. Along with bringing this unity, his new faith had greatly influenced the political and economic policies of the future Muslim states as well.

After his death, the rapid expansion of the Muslim polity in and outside the Arabian Peninsula happened under the Rashudin and Umayyad Caliphates. The expanded empire stretched from Central Asia across the Middle East and North Africa to the Atlantic. Some scholars opine that the political formation of a state in the Arabian peninsula and religious unity and mobilization were the most significant reasons for the establishment of the largest empire in the pre-modern period. This empire formed by the Islamic caliphate was around 13 million square kilometers. With Islam as their religion and the new empire as their booty, the Arabs lived amongst a vast array of people belonging to different race, among which they formed a ruling minority of conquerors. However, the gradual end of wars and the development of economic life produced a new governing class of administrators and traders, heterogeneous in race, language and ethnicity. This is how the Muslim population kept spreading in and around the Arabian Peninsula. The conquest of Sindh in the Indian subcontinent was an extension of this endeavor by the Muslim world.

11.3 THE *CHACHNAMA*

As far as the historical sources on the Arab conquest on Sindh are concerned, there is a miserable dearth. Even the Arab sources only give brief, scant details or passing reference to this episode while discussing the rise and expansion of early Islam. The conquest is compressed into a few pages of the *Futuh al Buldan* of Al-Baladhuri. Al-Madaini gives plentiful information on the Arab conquest of Transoxiana, but Sindh finds little mention in his account. However, this dearth of the Arab sources on the theme is largely compensated for by the *ChachNama*, a Persian text written by Ali Kufi in 1226 CE. It is a reliable historical work that claims to be the translation of a lost Arab account dealing with the history of this conquest; it is only to the *ChachNama* that one can give the credit of providing detailed information on the Arab invasion of Sindh.

The *ChachNama* details on the history of Sindh from 680-718 CE. Etymologically, the term *ChachNama* means the story of Chach. He was the Hindu Brahmin ruler of Sindh. This book was a Persian prose work written in the city of Uchch, which was the political capital of Sindh in those times. Presently, it can be located around 70 kilometers north of the port city of Karachi in Pakistan.

As an important historical source of Muslim India, the *ChachNama* has not received its due share of attention. Its partial translation in English was done by Elliot and Dowson, and a full translation from Persian to English was done in 1900 by Mirza Kalich Beg, the first Sindhi novelist. The first and only edition of the Persian text appeared in 1939.

The *ChachNama* has not been given adequate importance since most historians, like the colonial and the nationalist historians, have seen it only as a narrative on the advent of early Islam to the Indian subcontinent. However, Ali Kufi's claim of the *ChachNama* being a translation of an 8th century work in Arabic shows that it can be a repository of other types of information apart from that on the advent of Islam. In fact, the text indeed gives more information. Scholars like Yohanan Friedmann, Manan Ahmed Asif etc., who have read and analyzed it, contend that it has a wide variety of information, and no systematic attempt has been made to classify and analyse all the available data. After its detailed examination, they certified the fact that it has relevant information on the history of Sindh, its government and politics. Therefore, the scholars who have read this text realize the dire need to read and understand this medieval source in entirety, and refrain from seeing it only as a text on the advent of early Islam and its capture of Sindh.

Narrative of *ChachNama*

As mentioned before, historians like Friedmann and Ahmed Asif have rejected the view of seeing it only as a history of conquest of Sindh. Their detailed study throws light on other aspects as well. Friedmann opines that the text may be divided into four parts starting from the varied details on the praise of Prophet Muhammad, the Arab warriors and the Arab manuscript describing Muhammad Bin Qasim's military exploits in Sindh. Further, it describes the Arab invasion of Sindh.

Starting from king Chach, it gives the intricate details on his successors. It enumerates the journey of a Brahmin named Chach bin Silaij from being the chief minister of the king of Sindh to his own rise to power with the queen's help after the king's death. As a king, Chach established a successful state of Sindh by capturing forts, signing agreements and winning over both the Buddhist and Hindu subjects. It was a mixture of his offensive, defensive and tolerant policies that enabled him to rule over Sindh for a long time. However, his success as a good ruler was undone by the war of succession between his two sons Dahar and Daharsia. As the text shows, Dahar came to power, and it was he who welcomed the Arab rebels, pirates and warlords to Sindh. This had raised the ire of the Muslim state of Iraq in the 8th century.

According to Ahmed Asif, this text is divided into three portions. The first one discusses three intertwined themes of the need of legitimacy for the king, the good counsel of the advisor and the requirement for creating a justly governed polity. The second describes the history from the Caliphs to Walid. It talks about the time of Caliph Umar (*c*. 634-644 CE) when the Muslim campaigns were led to Sindh and Hind. It gives intricate details on the governors dispatched to regions such as Makran, Zabulistan and Qandahar, as also the rebellious Muslim groups running away to the frontiers. The revolting troops conspiring against the state in Damascus have also been discussed. It is mentioned here that in order to fight such groups and assert political control over the region, the governor of Iraq had sent the young commander named Muhammad Bin Qasim to Sindh in 711 CE. This is when the regions of Makran, Dabol or Daybul, Nerun were attacked and taken over. The forces of Raja Dahar were defeated in a battle fought at the banks of river Indus. After defeating the king of Sindh, Qasim also occupied the regions of Aror, Brahmanabad and Multan. This is how Dahar was avenged for supporting the Arab rebels and pirates against Iraq.

The end narrative discusses the downfall of Qasim at length. As it shows, Qasim was killed at the orders of the caliph at Baghdad after being accused of sexual violence by the daughters of Dahar. The last portion of the text revolves around the themes of good governance, good advisory and the political theory needed for the creation of a successful polity. This part is a discussion of the military campaigns of both Chach and Qasim. According to Ahmed Asif, the text contains speeches on policy and taxation, private conversations between commanders and their prophecies and dreams. It also discusses the statements of significant men on political theory and governance.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Who was Ali Kufi and why is he important to the study of Indian history?

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2) What is the *ChachNama*?

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11.4 THE CONQUEST OF SINDH

Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_bin_Qasim).

The region of Sindh is located on the south eastern-zone of present-day Pakistan. This area on the western coast of the Indian subcontinent has a long history. Since ancient times, it has been a hotbed of trade and commerce. The Arab merchants had active trade relations with their Indian and south-east Asian counterparts. They were known to the sea routes to the western coast of India. To be precise, these merchants sailed from Siraf and Hormuz on the Persian Gulf to the mouth of the Indus, and thence to Sapera and Cambay, and further to Calicut and other ports on the Malabar coast. They brought back tidings of Indian wealth and luxury goods like gold, diamond, jewelled idols etc. to Arabia. Therefore, as India had been famous for its riches for long, the Arabs wanted to conquer it. After their "Islamization", they had the proselytizing zeal that made them overrun many regions in Middle East, Europe, Africa and Asia.

The penetration of the Arabs in the coastal towns of Sindh in Indian subcontinent had started as early as 636 CE during the reign of caliph Umar, the second successor of the Prophet. The pillaging expeditions such as the one in Thane (near Bombay) in 637 CE continued for a long time. However, such expeditions were only plundering raids and not conquests. A systematic Arab conquest happened only in 712 CE during the reign of the Umayyad caliph al-Walid. It was then that Sindh was incorporated to the Muslim empire.

As mentioned before, along with the aspiration to own Indian riches, the reason for the conquest of Sindh was the desire of the Arabs to spread Islam. But, the immediate cause was the Sindhi pirates who had plundered some Arab ships near the coast of Dabol/Daybul or Karachi. Historical evidences show that these ships carried gifts sent by the king of Ceylon for the Caliph of Baghdad, and also al-Hajjaj, the governor of Iraq. This was sent to establish cordial relations with Hajjaj. However, the ship was plundered by the pirates near the mouth of the river Indus, and the Arabs were detained at the port of Dabol. A demand for restitution was made to Dahar, the king of Sindh, to compensate for the outrage and punish the offenders. But, he refused to do so. He showed his inability to control the pirates as a reason behind his refusal. Nevertheless, he was not trusted, and was rather accused by Baghdad of protecting the pirates. So, Hajjaj took the permission of caliph Walid for attacking Sindh. Thereafter, three military expeditions, one after the other, were led against the king. It was in the third expedition by Muhammad Bin Qasim in Debal that Dahar was defeated and killed. Subsequently, all the neighbouring towns of Nirun, Rewar, Brahmanabad, Alor and Multan were also captured. This is how the state of Sindh was finally conquered by the Arabs in 712 CE.

Muhammad Bin Qasim, the Conqueror, and his Expeditions

He was the 17 years old Umayyad general who had led the conquest of Sindh. This adolescent conqueror followed in the footsteps of Alexander in carrying a new faith and a new culture into the Indus basin. He has been mentioned in the *ChachNama* between the years 709-711 CE when Hajjaj, the governor of Iraq, had made him the head of an expedition against Sindh. Qasim was the nephew of Hajjaj, and being an able commander he was appointed by his uncle as the head of the frontier district of Makran. He was given a mission of conquest in the direction of Sindh. Qasim's expedition against Sindh was prepared with utmost care. The backbone of his force consisted of 6,000 men of the *gund* of Syria, and also various other contingents. Shiraz was the base for planning the eastward campaign. Under Hajjaj's orders, Qasim had stayed there for months

concentrating on his troops. From here, he moved eastward with Muhammad ibn Harun (who died during this march), his predecessor in the command of the frontier district. As the Arab sources show, the Indus basin was ruled by a king named Dahar in the 8th century. He was the son and successor of king Chach. The Arab forces wanted to conquer this basin. According to the *ChachNama*, Chach had a vast empire that extended from Makran, Kashmir, etc. But, that ruled by his son was not as expansive, and it only comprised of the lower Indus region consisting of cities like Brahmanabad, Aror, Debal, etc. Therefore, the huge empire established by Chach could sustain only till his lifetime. After him, it was reduced to a small state under king Dahar, especially after the Arab invasion.

As a general, Qasim reached the delta of the Indus besieging the city of Debal by land; the additional war materials reached him by sea. Debal was a great city on the mouth of river Indus that was ruled by a lieutenant of king Dahar. After this, the forces proceeded upwards in the Indus valley. They reached Nirun (near to present-day Hyderabad in Pakistan), and it surrendered peacefully. After this, many other regions like Sadusan, Sawandri, Basmad, etc. were captured. Finally, Qasim aimed to tackle Dahar himself by crossing the river Indus. On his part, Dahar along with his strong army valiantly fought the invaders for many days. However, he was badly defeated and killed by the Arab forces. Subsequently, the capital of Brahmanabad, and also Alor were captured. Moving further northwards towards the eastern bank of the Indus, Qasim aimed to conquer Multan. The *ChachNama* mentions that Hajjaj had directed Qasim to capture Multan as the final goal.

As a matter of principle and policy, even after getting a series of victories in Sindh, this conquest by Qasim did not blindly lead to *en masse* conversion to Islam. Though the Arab conquests in Debal and Multan were followed by massacre, there were examples like Alor, Nirun, Surast, Sawandri, etc. that saw negotiations and settlement between the victor and the vanquished. The principle of tolerance and religious freedom practiced by Qasim in Alor paved the way for the co-existence of conquering Islam with the religion and culture of India. As the *ChachNama* says, Qasim followed a policy of tolerance towards the defeated population. He allowed religious freedom to both the Brahmanic and Buddhist people. He preserved the privileges of the priests from both religions. It shows Qasim to be upholding the Indian social tradition of privileging the Brahmins. In fact, *ChachNama* mentions that he used to call the Brahmins as "good and faithful people", and after the siege of Brahmanabad they were reappointed to the same positions as they had held under the Hindu dynasty. Furthermore, these positions were also made hereditary by him. The common people were also left free to worship as per their wish, provided they paid the Arabs the same taxes as they had paid to Raja Dahar. In short, he did not meddle with the social systems of Sindh, and agreed to maintain peace in many regions. Such a policy was followed by Qasim under the instructions of Hajjaj who believed in granting religious freedom to people. Therefore, as the *ChachNama* states, Qasim had left Brahmanabad in an orderly and peaceful condition to proceed northward towards Alor. Such a policy of elasticity and tolerance was peculiar to Islam during its initial period of conquest, and its followers practiced it.

Death of Muhammad Bin Qasim

The end of this valiant general was tragic. There are different narratives regarding his end journey. The *ChachNama* attributes his demise to the two virgin daughters of king Dahar named Suryadevi and Palmaldevi who were sent to the caliph Walid as prisoners of war after the death of their father. As a revenge of their father's death, they had accused Qasim of having violated them. This incurred the wrath of the Caliph who had ordered to kill him instantaneously. He ordered that wherever he might be, Qasim was to get himself sown in cow's skin, and be sent to the Caliph. After his death, when his body was shown to the two daughters they revealed the truth of avenging Qasim for killing their father and destroying their family. Subsequently, even they were punished with death by the Caliph.

On the other hand, another text titled *Futuh ul Buldan* of Baladhuri gives an altogether different reason for the downfall and death of Muhammad Qasim. It says that Qasim was captured and tortured to death by caliph Sulaiman who had bitter enmity with Hajjaj, the uncle of Muhammad Bin Qasim.

Baladhuri contends that his end was related to the contemporary political situation in the Arab empire and was interconnected with the reactions of caliph Sulaiman, who succeeded his brother Walid in 715 CE. As a blind follower of caliph Walid, Hajjaj had supported him against his brother Sulaiman. Walid had toyed with the idea of putting aside Sulaiman's claim to succession by appointing his son instead of him, and Hajjaj had supported this plan of Walid. This is how Sulaiman was deprived of his right to succession, and this had enraged him especially against the powerful governor of Baghdad. The hatred reached its zenith when the Umayyad prince gave asylum to Yazid Bin al-Muhallab who had escaped the persecution by Hajjaj. The rivalry between the Hajjajites and Muhallabites was born like this. It was seen during the entire period of Arab empire under the caliphates of Walid, Sulaiman and Yazid II, and this rivalry struck hard at the roots of the Umayyad empire that had seen both the Muhallabites and Hajjajites as loyal servants.

The anti-Hajjajites reaction broke out when Sulaiman came to power with the Muhallabites as his faithful servants. This reaction could have affected Hajjaj the least, since as per his wish he had died a little before his caliph Walid. However, the rivalry had definitely affected the faithful protégés and kinsmen of Walid. The first and the foremost victim of this reaction was Qutaiba Bin Muslim, who was persecuted for rebelling against the new caliph Sulaiman. Qutaiba is known in the pages of history as the Arab conqueror of Central Asia. Likewise, the next victim was the favourite of Hajjaj – Muhammad Bin Qasim. Though evidences do not substantiate Qasim's declaration regarding the lapse of Sulaiman's right to succession in the territories conquered by him. But, it is believed that Qasim had followed this order of Hajjaj. Therefore, the destiny meted out to him was more than expected after the deaths of Hajjaj and Walid. In that case, the story of being sewn in cow's skin remains a fictitious narrative. As per the popular practice, perhaps he was arrested by Yazid Bin Kabsha as-Saksaki, his successor in the government of Sindh. This had happened under the order of the new financial governor of Iraq named Salih Bin Abd ar-Rahman. After four years of adventurous campaigns for enlarging the dominion of Arabism and Islam, Qasim was put behind bars at Wasit. It was here that he was put together with the other relatives of Hajjaj, and was tortured to death in 715 CE.

This is how a tragic destiny waited for almost all the architects of the great Arab conquests during their second and final wave of expansion.

11.5   ARAB ADMINISTRATION

After being conquered, the region of Sindh saw the Arab form of administration. This was the same pattern that was practiced by the Arab conquerors in the other regions they had conquered. Scholars opine that this pattern of administration was more liberal than the later systems. This was mainly because the school of Islamic law in the earlier centuries was not as strict as that in the later ones. For the same reason, the Muslim regimes around the world in the later centuries were seen to be more austere comparatively. The cases of the Turkish or Mughal rules in India from 12th to 18th centuries can be cited as examples of this trend.

In contrast, the Arab rule of the early medieval period was more lenient and flexible. The Arab victors or conquerors followed a general policy of keeping the local practices unhindered. As one of the creators of the Arab system of administration, caliph Umar disallowed the Arabs from either interfering with the local administration or acquiring landed property in subjugated areas. Even though the chief military general of a conquered region was made its governor, he could not have interfered with its civil administration. It was mainly in the hands of the local chiefs, who mostly were non-Muslims. Such an arrangement of Qasim made after his victory over Dahar was known as the 'Brahmanabad Settlement'. It mainly comprised of the treatment of the Hindus as "the people of the book" or the *zimmis* (the protected ones). This settlement was mainly the work of Hajjaj under the instructions of the caliph. It was outlined that since the *zimmis* had agreed to pay taxes to the Caliph, they were taken under the latter's protection. They were given the permission to follow their faith and worship their own gods. Also, the Arab rulers or administrators were disallowed from snatching away their property. Such a pronouncement was mainly the result of a plea from the people of Brahmanabad to repair their temple and practise their religion. This request to Qasim was forwarded to Hajjaj, and Hajjaj, in turn, consulted the Caliph on it; the latter adopted a policy of tolerance which, in turn, was diligently carried forward by Hajjaj and Qasim. The aforementioned cases of Qasim's tolerant policy towards the Brahmins and the native tradition can be understood in this light.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Match the following

    i) | **Person** | **Known As** |
        | --- | --- |
        | Palmaldevi | Umayyad General |
        | Muhammad Bin Qasim | Governor of Baghdad |
        | al-Hajjaj | Brother of Walid |
        | Sulaiman | Princess |

2) Discuss the narratives in the *ChachNama* about Muhammad Bin Qasim's death.

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11.6   ARAB CONQUEST OF SINDH: A TRIUMPH WITHOUT RESULTS?

The Arab conquest of Sindh has been seen as "a triumph without results" by scholars like Stanley Lane Poole, Elphinstone, etc. because there was no major victory for either the Muslim Arabs or the Indian rulers. They opine that this victory of the Arabs was without any impact or result on the history of the Indian subcontinent. It could not affect the political or military conditions of the rest of India. The Arab rule only got confined to the Sindh region, and the Indian rulers ruled their states without fearing or ousting the Arabs from their frontiers. The influence of the Arabs was restricted to only a small part of the subcontinent. They could not get a foothold in the Indian subcontinent, unlike the Turks who had established a full-fledged state a few centuries later (i.e. the Delhi Sultanate from 12th century onwards).

However, the scholars critiquing this viewpoint have given varied arguments for refuting it. They hold that even though the conquest did not have any substantial effect on the political geography of India, it had definite political influences on both sides. As seen before from the sources, Muhammad Bin Qasim was as able an administrator as a warrior. After his victories, he maintained the law and order of a region, and believed in placing good administration under the Muslim rule. The arrangements made by him with the non-Muslims provided the basis for later Muslim policy in the subcontinent. Under the able guidance from his uncle Hajjaj, he had given socio-cultural and religious freedom to the defeated population. By the time Islamic law had been codified, stringent provisions were given for the idolaters. The reason why we find these provisions were not followed on the Hindus was mainly due to the tolerant policies of Qasim. He exhibited the political acumen to keep the native social customs and traditions intact. Neither did he lead to forceful conversion of the non-Muslims nor to end the social institutions like caste system etc. This was how the caste system remained untouched and was followed as ever before.

The prevalence of such practices showed the internal weaknesses of the Indian social and political systems to the Arabs and the Muslim world. Therefore, these fissions in the social fabric were used by them to their own advantage. As discussed before, perhaps the Brahmins of Brahmanabad were termed as faithful people by him to continue their all-round support in running the Arab polity and administration. Undoubtedly, the Arab invasion did not affect the political set up of India then, but it definitely gave a good view of the social weaknesses of the region. These were used by the invaders a few centuries later.

Further, the cultural intermingling between the Indian and Arab cultures showed its effects on various other fields like literature, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, etc. Such contacts at an intellectual level led to the mutual growth and development of both the cultures. The earliest recorded Indo-Arab intellectual contact happened in 771 CE when a Hindu astronomer and mathematician reached Baghdad with a Sanskrit work called *Brahma Siddhanta* by Brahmagupta. This text was translated into Arabic with the help of an Arab mathematician, and was named as *Sindhind*. It had the greatest influence on the development of Arab astronomy even though three other works on mathematics were also translated to Arabic. In mathematics, the most important contribution of the Indian culture to Arab learning was the Arabic numerals.

Similarly, even greater attention was given to Indian medicine by the Arabs. At least 15 Sanskrit works were translated, including those of Charaka and Sushruta. The Indian doctors were given great prestige and honour at Baghdad, and so they were found in good numbers there. Manka was one such doctor who had earned prestige and money by curing the ailing caliph Harun-al-Rashid.

Further, astrology and palmistry also gained the Arab attention, and many books from these fields were translated into Arabic. They, too, have been preserved in the Arab historiographies. Other translations were from the fields of statecraft, art of war, logic, ethics, magic, etc. This is how the famous *Panchatantra* was translated and known as the story of Kalila and Dimna in Arabic.

Indian music had a considerable influence on Arabic music even if no translated works have been found. The work of an Arab author named Jahiz reveals the appreciation got by the former at Baghdad. He called the music of the people of Indian subcontinent as pleasing. Another such reference on Indian music was from an Arab author who talks about an Indian book on tunes and melodies. It has been suggested by some scholars that many of the technical terms for Arab music were borrowed from Persia and India. Likewise, even Indian music incorporated many Perso-Arab airs like *Yeman* and *Hijj*.

As against the availability of such information from the Arab works on the vibrant relations between the Indian and Arabic cultures, it will be unreasonable to call the Arab conquest of Sindh as a triumph without results. In other words, it would be incorrect to give leverage to the political consequences alone and negate the socio-cultural or other impacts or results.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What is the colonial argument on the consequences of the conquest of Sindh?

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2) Discuss the cultural contacts between the Indians and Arabs in the early medieval period.

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11.7 SUMMARY

The rise of Islam in the early medieval period had far-reaching political, socio-economic and cultural implications around the world. Its first contact with the Indian subcontinent in the 8th century is mostly known from the Persian text named *ChachNama*, a source that enumerates the history of Sindh in general. However, the colonial understanding of it was one of origin of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. The trend of seeing it only as a source on the rise of Islam or conquest of Sindh sprang from this understanding, and it has largely been refuted by the contemporary historiographers. They see the details of the conquest only as one of its aspects. The text is an enumeration of the history of Sindh in general.

The descriptive account of the conquest involves the discussion of a young general named Mohammad Bin Qasim, who valiantly conquered the region of Sindh. The text elucidates the tolerant and broad minded approach of this Muslim conqueror towards the vanquished Hindu population. However, his rise as well as fall depended upon his relations with the caliphate, and the change of the caliph led to the downfall and decline of him and many other able and promising Arab conquerors. Such politics at the court of the caliphate greatly affected the fate of Arab conquests in Indian subcontinent and around the world. The containment of Arab empire to the north-western region of India should be understood under this light.

The inability of the Arab conquerors and rulers of Sindh to extend their influence into India cannot be seen as their complete failure; their triumph over Sindh cannot be belittled under this light by simply calling it a triumph without results. Even if the Arabs could not affect the political situation inside India, they definitely influenced the Indian culture in various other ways. The cultural proximity between the Indian and Arab cultures has its definite imprints on their literature, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, etc. Over and above this, the successful invasion of India by the Muslim Turks like Mahmud Ghazni and Muhammad Ghouri in the 11th and 12th centuries respectively can be seen as the climax of the background prepared by the conquest of Sindh in the 8th century.

11.8 KEY WORDS

Adequate	:	Sufficient
Containment	:	Action of preventing the expansion of something
Dearth	:	Shortage
Elucidate	:	Throw light on
Endeavour	:	Attempt
Etymology	:	The study of the sources and development
Opine	:	Suggest
Pronouncement	:	A formal and authoritative announcement or declaration
Proximity	:	Nearness
Tenacity	:	Ability to grip something firmly
Tidings	:	Information

Repository	:	A place where things are stored
Resounding	:	Unmistakable; loud enough to echo
Vanquished	:	Defeated
Vis-a-vis	:	In comparison to

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) See Sec. 12.3

2) See Sec. 12.3

Check Your Progress 2

1) Palmaldevi   Princess

  Muhammad Bin Qasim Umayyad General

  al-Hajjaj   Governor of Baghdad

  Sulaiman   Brother of Walid

2) See Sec. 12.4

Check Your Progress 3

1) See Sec. 12.5

2) See Sec. 12.5

11.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 12 MAHMUD GHAZNI AND MOHAMMAD GHOURI: INVASIONS AND RESISTANCE*

Structure

12.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will know:

- the background for understanding foreign invasions in early medieval India;

- the nature of Mahmud Ghazni's invasions;

- reasons for the rise of Ghurid power;

- phases of conquest of north India by Mohammad Ghouri;

- reasons for defeat of the Rajputs;

- causes behind the success of Mohammad Ghouri; and

- difference between the Ghaznavids and the Ghurids.

12.1   INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit we got a detailed view of the Arab invasion, conquest and expansion in the Indian subcontinent. We read on the causes and effects of the first Muslim invasion in India. As discussed earlier, the conquest of Sindh by Arabs in 8th century has been seen as an episode of triumph in the history of Islam. Some colonial scholars have called this episode as "a triumph without results" because there was no major victory for either the Muslim Arabs or the Indian rulers. Arab rule was confined to Sindh region alone and the Indian rulers ruled their states without fearing any Arab invasion.

However, this situation changed in 11th and 12th centuries with the rise of Turks in central Asia. After having gained a foothold on north-western frontiers, Islam could enter India due to the Muslim Turks, namely Mahmud Ghazni and Muizzuddin Mohammad Ghouri. They attempted to either plunder or conquer India between 10th and 12th centuries.

In this Unit we will elaborate on this unique feature of early medieval India. The invasions by Muslim Turkish invaders started with mere plunder and loot by Mahmud Ghazni in early 11th century. It went on to see its climax with the establishment of first Muslim state in India by Muizzuddin Mohammad Ghouri in late 12th century. This Unit aims to discuss different phases of invasion, conquest and expansion of the Muslim rule in India, as also the factors aiding such phenomena.

12.2 SITUATION OF CONSTANT FLUX IN WEST AND CENTRAL ASIA

As seen in the last Unit, the Abbasids had been the most powerful empire in West Asia since 5th century CE.

However, this situation started changing from the end of 9th century. It was mostly because of the dissipation of its energy and resources in fighting the heathen Turks from central Asia. The empire got fragmented into several aggressive fledgling states ruled by both non-Turk rulers and Turkish kings or *Sultans*. All these states accepted the suzerainty of the Caliph or *Khalifa*[2] who received his formal legitimacy through grant of *manshur* (formal letter).

Now most of these Muslim rulers called themselves *Sultans*. On the other hand, in the 8th century the Turkish nomads had been infiltrating into TransOxiana: the region between central and east Asia (it is known as *Mawaraun Nahr* in Arabic sources and *Fararud* in Persian). As they had good military skills they were converted to Islam and recruited as mercenaries, palace guards and slaves by
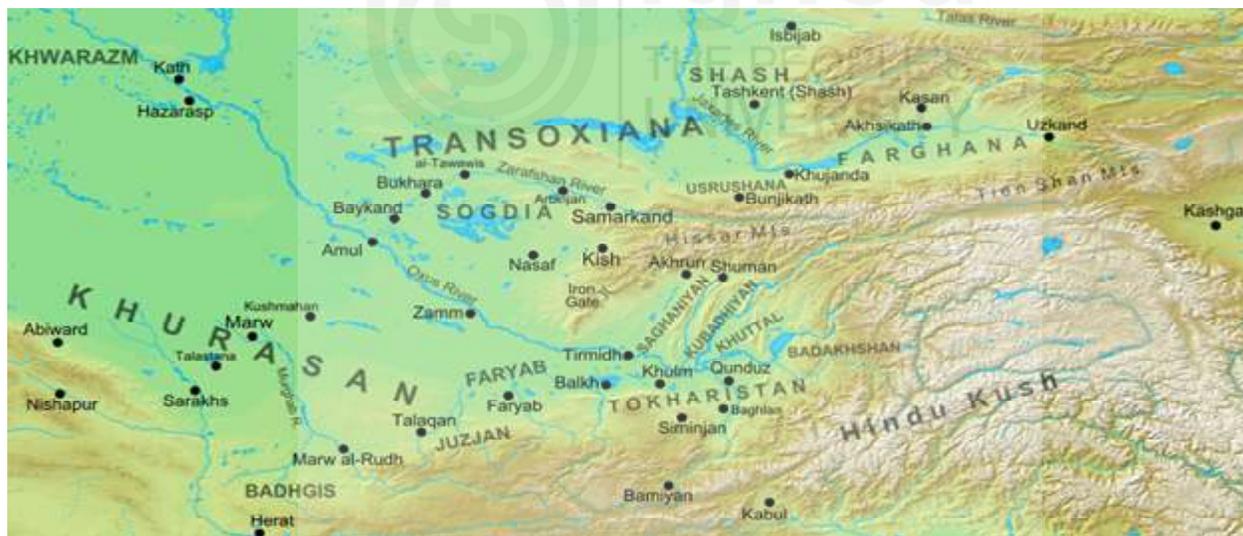

Map of the Region and Principal Localities of Transoxiana in 8th Century. Source: Guy Le Strange (1905), *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia, from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur*, **Barnes & Noble, New York. Credit: Cplakidas. Photo Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons (https://er.wikipedia.org/wiki/file:transoxiana_8th_century.sag).**

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[1] The chief Muslim civil and religious authority vested in a person regarded as Prophet Muhammad's successor and a leader of entire *ummah* (community). The caliph ruled in Baghdad until 1258 and then in Egypt until the Ottoman invasion and conquest of 1517; the title was then held by Ottoman *sultans* until it was abolished in 1924 by Atatürk. The central religious text of Islam – *Quraan* – uses the term *Khalifa* twice. Firstly, it refers to God creating humanity as his *Khalifa* on Earth. Secondly, it addresses King David as God's *Khalifa* and reminds him of his responsibility and obligation to rule with piety and justice.

[2] In Arabic it means "Boundaries of the World" or "Limits of the World". It is a 10th century work on geography authored in Persian by an unknown author from Jowzjan/Jawzjan/Jozjan, one of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

Abbasid Caliphs and Iranian rulers. Gradually, these Islamized Turkish commanders also got "Persianized" in language, etiquettes, administrative policies etc. It means that this Turkish governing class had assimilated Persian culture and was proud of its racial origin. They were bilingual in speech. Ultimately, they became the ones to expand their power in both west Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

After the fall of the Abbasid empire in this region the situation was just like that in north India in the post-Gupta period. It was ruled by many rulers, each fighting amongst each other for expansion of one's own territory and power. Also, in such states even ambitious officials tried dethroning the king to usurp power for themselves. This is how many dynasties rose and fell. Amidst such political flux in West and central Asia the main factor behind the strength and survival of any dynasty was its military power and efficiency. Therefore, we see many dynasties coming to power one after another. This is how the Samanid dynasty ruled from *c*. 874 to 999 CE.
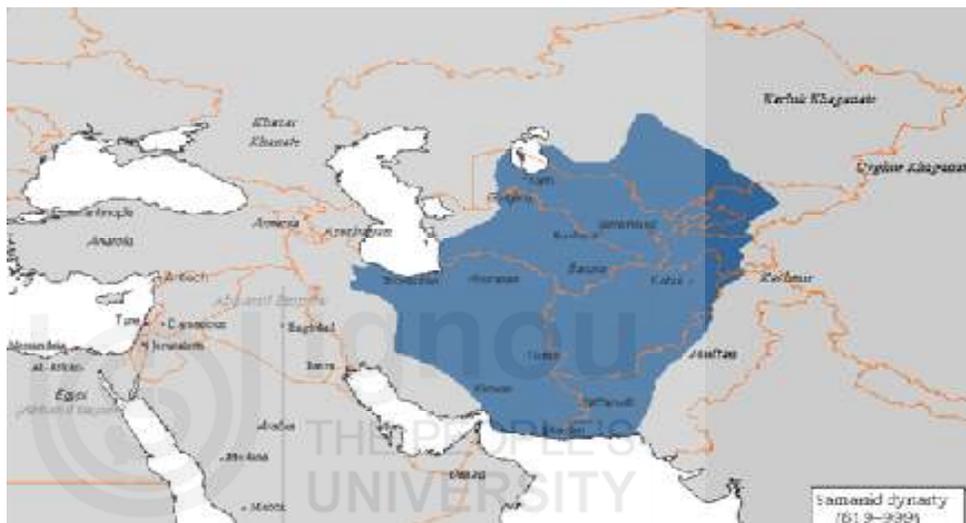
Samanid Dynasty. Credit: Arab League. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Samanid_dynasty_(819%E2%80%93999).GIF).

It was established by an Iranian noble from Balkh who was a convert. He had governed regions like Samarqand, Herat etc. in Central Asia and Afghanistan. This dynasty was followed by that of the Ghaznavids who ruled from 962 to 1186 CE.

Ghaznavid Empire at its Greatest Extent in *c*. 1030 CE. Credit: Arab League. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ghaznavid_Empire_975_-_1187_(AD).PNG).

It was founded by Alp-tigin/Alp-tegin: a Turkish slave under the Samanids. Further, the Ghaznavids were defeated by the Seljukid and also the Khwarizmi dynasties. In fact, the latter also established a vast empire that was shattered by the ruthless Mongol attacks of Chengiz Khan/Genghis Khan.

As seen above, there were constant skirmishes or wars between different groups of Islamized Turks to expand their territories. All of them exhibited good military skills in the battlefield and competed with each other for power. Satish Chandra mentions certain factors that favoured and increased military efficiency of the Turkish warriors of central Asia. One needs to know these factors since these were some of the reasons behind their success against Indian monarchs:

a) First important reason was the availability of finest breeds of horses in the steppes of central Asia. They were the best varieties in the entire world and they were bred by sturdy, disciplined warriors. They were imported to Arabia and India because the native breeds there were not as good as the central Asian ones. The people of Ghur enjoyed far-reaching fame as horse-rearers.

b) Second cause was the easy availability of war implements. The region of Ghur (also spelled Ghowr or Ghor) – one of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan – and its neighbouring areas were rich in metals, especially iron. The mountain ranges of this topographic zone were of huge metalliferous value and it appears that particularly iron was available in hefty quantities. The people of Ghur specialized in production of weapons and war-equipment and exported them to neighbouring lands. In the words of the anonymous author of *Hududul Alam*[2], "From this province come slaves, armour (*zirah*), coats of mail (*jaushan*) and good arms." According to another writer of that time the entire region from Ghur and Kabul to Qarluq/Karkluk/Qarluk/ Karluq – a prominent Turkic tribal confederacy west of Altay mountains in central Asia – was metal-working. Therefore, war implements and materials were easily available to the Turkish warriors. When Mahmud Ghazni attacked Ghur in 1020 CE its chief Abul Hasan Khalaf brought him shields and cuirasses and a tribute of arms was levied on him. The value of Ghurid arms was identified and admired by Mahmud and he employed Ghurid officers as experts in siege-warfare. Thereby, the supply of good-quality horses and war materials to the Turks helped them in their military pursuits everywhere. Ghur had very recently opened its doors to Muslim cultural interface and possessed two most significant and crucial requisites of war in the middle ages – horses and iron.

Map of Afghanistan with Ghor Highlighted. Credit: TUBS. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ghor_in_Afghanistan.svg).

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[1] In Arabic it means "Boundaries of the World" or "Limits of the World". It is a 10th century work on geography authored in Persian by an unknown author from Jowzjan/Jawzjan/Jozjan, one of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

c) Another factor responsible for success of the Turkish warriors was their *Ghazi*[3] spirit. This was seen for the first time in West Asia when the Turkish warriors had to constantly fight against the non-Turkish nomadic warriors called the Turkmen or *Turkomans*. At this time the region of TransOxiana was under Iranian rule and its surrounding areas were inhabited by Turks and non-Muslim nomadic *Turkomans*. There were constant fights between the Turks and the *Turkomans* like Guzz or Oguzz etc. living in the Kara-Khitai (central Asian steppes). During this period the Turkish emperors made continuous inroads into the Turkmen areas for capturing slaves who were in great demand in slave-markets of Herat in present-day Afghanistan, Sistan in present-day Iran, Samarqand/Samarkand and Bukhara in modern-day Uzbekistan. Ghur had a reputation for supplying slaves to these markets. The warriors who were involved in such raids were free to earn through plunders in such expeditions. However, another aim of the Muslim Turkish warriors behind such loot and plunder was to spread Islam amongst the non-Muslim population and so, they were known as the *Ghazis*. Hence, we see that the *Ghazi* spirit was first employed and exhibited in fighting the central Asian nomadic tribes and later it was deployed against the "unbelievers" in India. Mahmud Ghazni – a plunderer from Afghanistan – embodied and displayed the same spirit in his raids in India. Few historians view his invasions and conquests in the Indian subcontinent as some sort of a Holy War for which there was no dearth of volunteers to aid and assist in. His triumphs were popularly known all over the East and some 20,000 warriors came to him from the land beyond the Oxus[4], praying and urging to be granted the privilege of fighting for Islamic faith, and possibly, attaining the crown of martyrdom for this lofty and noble cause. With a huge army strengthened and solidified by such zealots he undertook and fought his greatest campaign in India in 1018 CE and forayed farther into east than ever before.

12.3 GHAZI INROADS IN THE NORTH-WESTERN REGION OF INDIA

As understood so far, the Turkish and non-Turkish hordes from central Asia constantly struggled with each other to expand their spheres of influence in their surrounding areas. In such endeavors they also conquered many regions in Afghanistan. This is how Alptigin – a commander of the Samanid rulers in Khurasan – marched towards Ghazni in south Zabulistan in 963 CE and proclaimed himself as an independent ruler.

The Hindu Shahi kings of Afghanistan allied with former Samanid governor of Ghazni, Bhatti emperors near Multan as well as the Muslim *Amir* of Multan to protect their borders and territories.

They had helped the Hindu Shahi ruler named Jayapal since they were constantly pestered by slave raids of the invaders of Ghazni. Sabuktagin/Sabuktigin/Sebuktigin – Alp-tigin's successor – had the same intention in Hindu Shahi areas since 977 CE. Consequently, by the end of 10th century Zabulistan and

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[3] Islamic term for a warrior. It was a title ascribed to the Muslim warriors or champions and used by several Ottoman *Sultans*.

[4] Oxus is the Latin name of a major river in central Asia, popularly known as the *Amu Darya*, also called the Amu or Amo river. In ancient times it constituted the boundary between the modern greater Iran and Turan.

Afghanistan were already conquered. The conquest of these areas laid the foundation for the Turkish inroads in India.

Further, Ghazi raids were continued since 999 CE by Mahmud Ghazni (also known as *Sultan* Mahmud bin Sabuktigin) – Sabuktigin's successor. Interestingly, the title "Mahmud Ghazni" is not found on his coins which simply designate him as *Amir Mahmud*, nor was it given to him by the Caliph. He deserved this title based on his conquests in Persia and TransOxiana. He fought a furious battle against Jayapal in 1001 CE. It was a battle of cavalry and skillful military tactics. Jayapal was severely routed by Mahmud's forces and his capital of Waihind/Peshawar was devastated. Nevertheless, perhaps the latter made peace with the former and only conquered the territory west of the Indus. However, this defeat gave a severe jolt to Jayapal and he died some time later. According to the sources he self-immolated in a funeral pyre as a result of humiliation of his defeat because his subjects thought that he had brought disgrace and disaster to the Shahi dynasty.

He was succeeded by his son Anandapal/Anantpal who continued to challenge Turkish raids in his territory. Before entering Punjab, Mahmud still had to contend with Anandapal's forces near the Indus. After a tough interface his army conquered the upper Indus in 1006 CE. The Punjab province was finally won over three years later in Chhachh/Chach plains on the eastern zone of Indus. This was followed by over-running Nandana/Nandna fort in the Salt Range in present-day Punjab province of Pakistan to which the Shahis had shifted their capital after their previous defeat at Waihind. Despite the heavy losses of men and resources suffered by Mahmud's army, Anandapal lost the battle and himself suffered much financial and territorial loss. This was his last resistance to Mahmud. He was forced to sign a treaty with the Ghaznavids in 1010 CE and shortly a year later died a natural death.

The Bhimgarh fort, also called the Reasi fort as it is located near Reasi which is a town at the bank of river Chenab to the north-west of present-day Jammu, was also captured but Anandapal was allowed to rule over Punjab as Mahmud's feudatory. However, in 1015 CE Mahmud even annexed Lahore to extend his empire up to the Jhelum river. Multan which was ruled by a Muslim *Sultan* was also conquered despite Anandapal's alliance with him. However, Mahmud's desire to conquer Kashmir remained unfulfilled with the defeat of his forces in 1015 CE due to unfavourable weather conditions and this was his first defeat in India.

This is how Mahmud made his way towards India by conquering eastern Afghanistan and then Punjab and Multan. Next in line was his aim to acquire wealth through his raids in the Gangetic plains. Before studying Mahmud's victorious raids in this region it is imperative and significant to have an idea of northern Indian states during this period.

Political Geography of North India in Early 11th Century

From the post-Gupta period to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate the northern Indian region was divided into many Rajput states. Almost same was the case with south India. In fact, the north zone lacked a vast empire like that of the Guptas in this period. The political climate of this time was characterized by the tripartite struggle between Gurjara-Pratiharas, Palas and the Rashtrakutas.
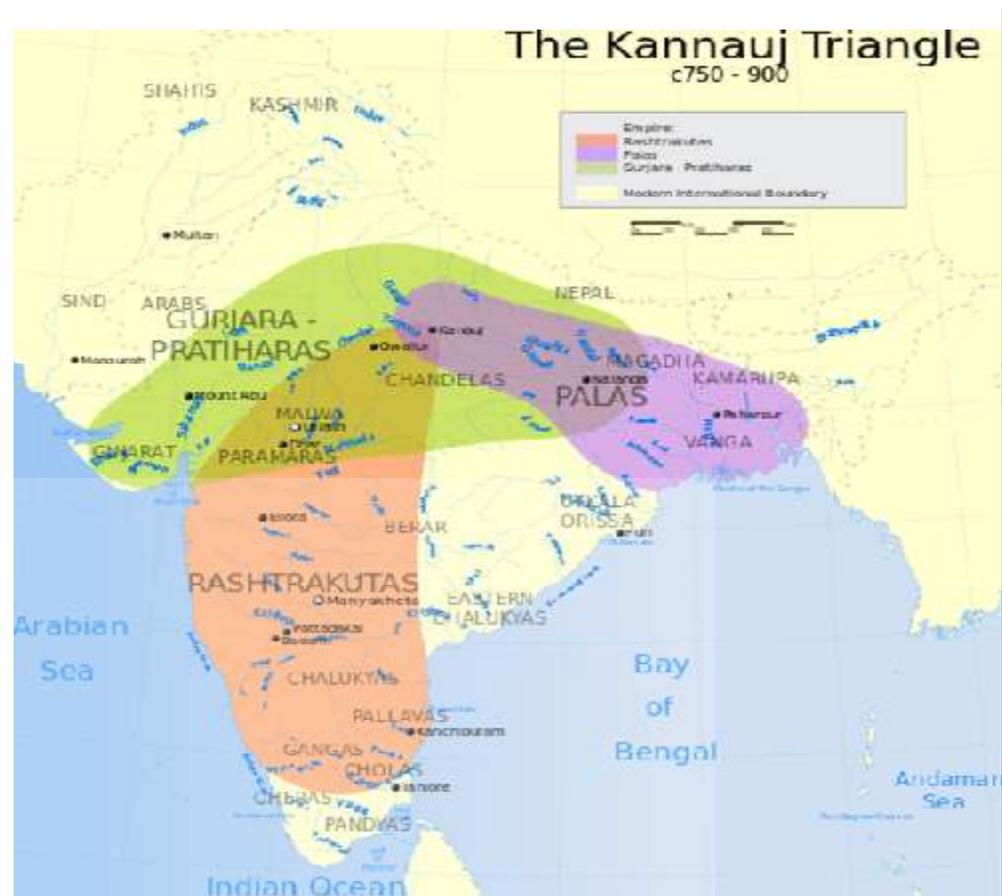
Credit: w:user:Planemad. Source: John Keay, History of India, 2000, Grove publications, New York, p. 198. Photo Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_Kanauj_triangle_map.svg).

Gurjara-Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas were two of the most powerful polities in India then. However, both of them declined by the middle of the 10th century. The sway of Gurjara-Pratiharas that once spanned from Himalayan foothills in the north to Ujjain in the south and from Mongyr in the east to Gujarat in the west got confined to only present-day Uttar Pradesh by second quarter of the 10th century. Meanwhile, a number of states mushroomed in north and central India; the most prominent among which were:

- Chandelas of Kalinjar and Mahoba in the modern state of Madhya Pradesh,

- Chauhans/Chahamanas of Sakambhari or Sambhar in Rajasthan,

- Chalukyas of Gujarat (also known as Solanki dynasty in vernacular literature) with their capital at Anahilavada (modern Patan), and

- Paramaras of Malwa with Dhara (now Dhar) in western Madhya Pradesh as their capital which was later shifted to Mandapa-Durga (now Mandu), about 35 km. from the present-day Dhar city, after Dhara was sacked multiple times by their enemies.

Kashmir was ruled by queen Didda who reigned for 26 years[5] and had old rivalry with Hindu Shahi dynasty due to which she did not help it against

[5] She was the ruler of Kashmir from 958 to 1003 CE, first as a Regent for her son and various grandsons and from 980 CE as the sole monarch. We get most knowledge about her and her reign from the 12th century *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana: a legendary historical chronicle in Sanskrit of the north-western Indian subcontinent, particularly the rulers of Kashmir.

Ghaznavid inroads. Therefore, we can see that north India was thoroughly disunited against the foreign invaders. Precisely for this reason, undertaking raids in this region was all the easier for Mahmud. After Punjab he made three expeditions in the Gangetic plains for acquisition of wealth. Towards the end of 1015 CE he marched along the Himalayan foothills and defeated a local Rajput ruler at Baran or Bulandshahar with the help of some feudatory rulers. After this he plundered the temple towns of both Mathura and Vrindavan.

Plunder of Mathura by Mahmud

The holy city of Mathura – an ancient home of Hindu worship – was filled with temples which Mahmud thought were "not built by man but by *Jinn*"; where colossal golden and silver idols flashed with jewels stood so gigantically that they had to be broken up in order to be weighed. He faced the town wall which was an exquisite structure constructed of hard stone and had opening on to the river Yamuna with two gates raised on high and massive basements to protect them from floods. On two sides of the city were thousands of houses with temples attached, all of masonry and strengthened throughout with bars of iron, and opposite them were other buildings supported on stout wooden pillars. In the middle of the city was a temple – larger and finer than the rest – to which neither a painting nor description could do justice. He wrote about it in wonder and amazement:

"If any one wished to construct a building equal to it he would not be able to do so without expending 100 million *dinars* and the work would occupy 200 years even though the most able and experienced workmen were employed."

Orders were given for all temples to be burnt with naphtha and fire, crushed and levelled with the ground. The city was thrown to ravage and plunder for 20 days. Among the spoils are said to have been five great idols of pure gold with eyes of rubies and adornments of other precious stones, together with a vast number of smaller silver images which, when broken up, constituted a load for more than a hundred camels. The total value of the booty has been estimated at three millions of rupees while the number of Hindus carried away into captivity exceeded 5000. Many of the temples, after being emptied of all their valuable contents, were left standing, probably because they were too massive for an easy destruction. Some historians allege that Mahmud spared them on account of their splendid beauty, magnificence and exuberance, basing their opinion on his glorifying and eulogistic tone in his letter to the Governor of Gazni quoted above.

These spectacular victories were followed by his attack on Kannauj – capital of Gurjara-Pratiharas – reputed and touted as the chief city of Hindustan. This was the most stunning forage for him in the Ganga valley. The *raja* fled at the mere knowledge of the *Sultan*'s coming and seven forts of the great city on the Ganges fell during the span of one day. Of all its opulent and gorgeous temples not even one was spared. Nor were the neighbouring rulers any more fortunate, such as Chandal Bhor of Asi. Chand Rai, the *Hindu raja* of Sharwa – a kingdom that stretched in the Shivalik hills – collected his treasures and departed for the hills but was tracked down through forest by the enemy Mahmud. He brought home such booty and mobs of prisoners that the slave-markets of Persia were satiated and saturated and a slave could be purchased for a couple of shillings.

The wealth looted and earned from plunders in India helped him against his enemies in central Asia. He even extended his empire in Iran and additionally got more recognition from the *Khalifa* at Baghdad.

He made two more raids in the Ganga valley in 1019 and 1021 CE but these were without much gain for him. The first one was to break a Rajput alliance in the Gangetic valley. The Rajput king of Gwalior had provided help to the Hindu Shahi emperor against Mahmud. Mahmud defeated both the Hindu Shahi as well as the Chandela rulers. Further, he also moved on to defeat the Chandela monarch Vidyadhar but nothing conclusive happened between the two and Mahmud chose to accept a nominal tribute from Vidyadhar.

It is to be understood that such expeditions in north India were not aimed at expanding Mahmud's empire beyond Punjab. They were only to plunder wealth of the states on one hand and make the upper Ganga *doab* as a neutral territory without any powerful local stronghold on the other. Indeed, these raids thoroughly ravaged even the powerful Shahi and Chandela territories. Mahmud's last major raid was on Somnath temple in Saurashtra on the western coast of Gujarat in 1025 CE. It took him across the Thar desert in Rajasthan that had previously deterred most invaders from raiding it.

Plunder of Somnath by Mahmud

Mahmud undertook in the winter of 1025-26 CE his final invasion of Gujarat, crowning his triumphs by the sack of the inordinately wealthy Somnath temple. It is said that a hundred thousand pilgrims assembled there at any given point of time, a thousand *Brahmanas* served the temple and guarded its treasures and hundreds of dancers and singers performed before its gates. In the *garbhagriha* stood the famous *linga*, a pillar-stone decked with sparkling gems and lighted by jewelled candelabra reflected in the rich hangings embroidered with precious stones like stars that adorned the shrine. So long as this worshipful emblem stood inviolate in its pristine glory Mahmud could not rest from the iconoclasm he inflicted upon India, nor could his treasury boast of the finest gems from India. Hence, his backbreaking march continued across the desert from Multan to Anhalwara and on to the coast,
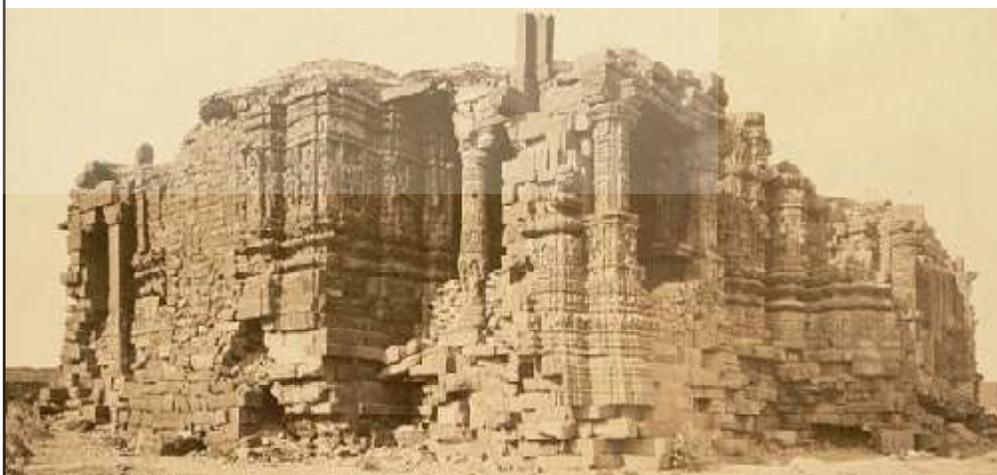
Somnath Temple Ruins. Photograph taken in *c.* **1869 by D. H. Sykes from the Archaeological Survey of India. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ruins_somnath_temple.jpg. Credit: D. H. Sykes. Photo Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Somnath_temple_ruins_(1869).jpg).**

fighting and slaughtering as he progressed, until he reached at last the temple fortress washed by the waves of Arabian sea. Undaunted by the sheer strength of men in guard and service of the shrine, he along with his force scaled the walls, slaying about 50,000 Hindus. The great stone was cast down and its fragments transported to grace the conqueror's palace. The temple-gates were put up at Ghazni and a million pounds' worth of treasure was the reward for the invader-plunderer's men who joined him in his wrathful expeditions to India and beyond.

Somnath's devastation made Mahmud of Ghazni a champion and trailblazer of Islamic faith – a faith antagonistic to the Hindu belief-system – in the eyes of every Muhammadan for nearly nine centuries and the feat got associated and embellished with fantastic legends extolling him and his army.

The strength and scale of his successful military campaigns do not belie or undermine the difficulties faced by him and his troops while coming and even more while returning. His forces were led astray by the perfidious guides and a substantial number of men perished in the desert due to scarcity of water. Those who survived fell into the hands of the rapacious *Jaats* of the Salt Range who hassled the exhausted soldiers as they toiled homewards, laden with the items of loot. Before the year was over Mahmud led his troops for the last time into India to punish the antithetical and protesting forces. According to sources, he built a fleet at Multan, armed it with spikes and rams and placed 20 archers with naphtha bombs on each of his 1400 boats confronting and engaging the opposed army of the *Jaats*, 4000 in numerical strength. By raining the naphtha he sank or burnt their vessels. However, these details could be fabricated or exaggerated because firstly, there could never be that many boats on the upper Indus and secondly, the mountain-tribes are not usually adept in fighting naval wars. Taking revenge from the *Jaats*, whether by the way of land or water cannot be said with assurance, he returned to Ghazni where he died four years later in 1030 CE.

He was a bold warrior who had great military capabilities and political achievements. He had turned the small state of Ghazna/Ghazni/Ghaznin into a vast and wealthy empire comprising most parts of the present-day Afghanistan, eastern Iran and north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent. Apart from his martial skills he was also a patron of Persian literature in the Ghaznavid empire. Taking cue from the cultural centers of Samanid Bukhara and Khurasan he transformed Ghazni into a center of Persian learning by inviting poets and writers like:

- Firdausi,
- Alberuni,
- Uzari,
- Unsuri etc.

Such display of pomp and show by him and the grandeur maintained in his state of Ghazni was made possible mostly due to the wealth amassed from his plundering raids in India.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Which factors favoured and increased the military efficiency of the Turkish warriors?

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2) Throw light on Rajput disunity in north India in the 11th century.

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12.4 FALL OF THE GHAZNAVIDS AND RISE OF THE GHURIDS IN CENTRAL ASIA AND INDIA

It was seen that despite the amount of wealth plundered from India, Mahmud could not become a good and capable ruler. He built no lasting institutions in his state and his rule outside Ghazni was tyrannical. Perhaps this was the reason as to why the Ghaznavid historian Utbi[7] said in reference to Khurasan/Khorasan[8] when it was under the sway of Mahmud:

"Affairs were characterized there by nothing but tax levies, sucking which sucked dry and attempt to extract fresh sources of revenue without any constructive measure. Hence, in sometime Khurasan was pauperized since water had been thrown on her udder, not a trickle of milk could be got nor any trace of fat."

An unexpected rise of Ghurids at a small and isolated province of Ghur located between Ghaznavid empire and that of the Seljukids was an unusual development in the 12th century. It was one of the least developed regions of the present-day territory of Afghanistan. It lay west of Ghazni and east of the Herat province in fertile valley of the Herat/Hari river in western Afghanistan. Since it was a hilly tract of land the main occupation was mostly cattle-rearing or agriculture. It had remained a pagan region surrounded by Muslim principalities. However, it was "Islamicized" by Ghaznavids in the late 10th and the early 11th century.

The Ghurid rulers or the Shansabanids were humble pastoral chieftains. They tried to make themselves supreme in the middle of the 12th century by intervening in Herat when its governor had rebelled against the Seljuqid king named Sanjar.

[7] Full name: Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al Jabbaru-l 'Utbi (or *al-Utbi*).
[8] Region to the north-east of greater Iran that includes parts of central Asia and Afghanistan. The term simply connotes "East" (literally "Sunrise").

Further, as the Ghaznavids felt threatened by this act of the Ghurids they captured and poisoned the brother of the Ghurid emperor Alauddin Hussain Shah. Subsequently, he captured Ghazni by defeating the Ghaznavid ruler Bahram Shah. The city of Ghazni was plundered and thoroughly destroyed. For the same reason Alauddin was given the title of *Jahan Soz* ("world burner"). This marked the fall of Ghaznavids and the rise of Ghurids.

By now the Ghurids wanted to break free of the Seljuqids and fight for their control over the rich areas of Khurasan and Merv. Like the Ghaznavids they were also unpopular for their burdensome levies on people. This made it difficult for them to maintain their authority and order in the region. Apart from this, they were constantly at loggerheads with the other Turkish tribes across the Oxus river. These were the broad reasons behind their inroads into India in the latter half of the 12th century. Ghiyasuddin Muhammad who became the ruler of Ghur in 1163 CE made his younger brother Muizzuddin Muhammad the king of Ghazna. On the other side he himself concentrated on the central and west Asian matters.

Political Geography of North India in the Early 12th Century

In the 12th century north India saw the same disunity between different Rajput states that was evidenced in the 11th century during Ghaznavid raids. One of the powerful states of this period was of the Chahmanas or Chauhans. It tried to expand its territories towards Delhi, Mathura, Gujarat, Rajputana etc. The Chauhan king Vigraharaj conquered Chittor and also Delhi from the Tomar monarchs in 1151 CE and tried annexing the area between Delhi and Hansi as well which was a disputed zone between the Tomars and the Ghaznavids. The Chauhans faced the Ghaznavid raids.

Prithviraj III, popularly known as **Prithviraj Chauhan** or **Rai Pithora** in folk legends, was the most prominent and reputed emperor of this dynasty. He acceded the throne possibly at the age of 16 and rapidly expanded his empire in Rajputana[9]. Many of the petty Rajput states were conquered. He also led an expedition towards the Chandelas of Khajuraho and Mahoba. As had been witnessed in the 11th century the Chandelas formed the most powerful state spanning the north and central regions of India. They had a proud history of giving a tough fight to even the Ghaznavids. The battles of the famous warriors Alha and Udal who died fighting saving Mahoba from the Chauhans have been mentioned and extolled in the literary pieces of *Prithviraj-Raso* and *Alha-Khanda*. However, since these works were written much later, their narratives are doubted by the historians. Nonetheless, what is worth believing is that in reality the Chandelas were thoroughly defeated by the Chauhans. The latter were also aspirational about defeating their old rival – the Chalukyas of Gujarat – but to no avail. Henceforth, they tried fulfilling the same ambition in the Ganga valley and Punjab.

At this time the Gahadwalas ruled over the northern plains with their capital at Kannauj. As per the oral narratives which are historically unreliable and unauthentic, the main reason behind rivalry between both the political powers

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[9] Literally meaning "Land of the Rajputs", it was a region that included mainly the present-day Indian state of Rajasthan, parts of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and some adjoining areas of Sindh in the modern-day southern Pakistan.

was abduction of the daughter of the Gahadwala *samraat* Jai Chand. According to the story his daughter Sanyogita was abducted by Prithviraj Chauhan in her *svayamvara* which raised the ire of Jai Chand. However, since this tale is not corroborated by other historical sources like literary works, inscriptions etc. it is not trusted. The chief cause of rivalry may have been Prithviraj's urge to annex Ganga plains.

In a nutshell it could be conclusively argued that the northern and central states of India were thoroughly divided amongst each other to unify against the foreign invader Muizzuddin Mohammad Ghori. Consequently, it was not so difficult for the Ghurids to defeat the Chauhans in 1192 CE. As had been mentioned earlier, Ghori was made to ascend the throne of Ghazna by his elder brother Ghiyasuddin in 1173 CE. He almost followed the same route to India as the Ghaznavids. In other words, Muizzuddin too started moving towards India from the north-western region. At first he conquered Multan in 1175 CE from the Carmathians or Karamati whose state boundaries spread from north-west portion of the Indian subcontinent up to Iran further west. In next couple of years he captured Uchch and moved on to Neharwala in Gujarat.

LEFT: Statue of Prithviraj Chauhan at Ajmer, Rajasthan. Source: Prithvi Raj Chauhan.JPG. Photo Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prithvi_Raj_Chauhan_(Edited).jpg).

RIGHT: Prithviraj Chauhan statue at Qila Rai Pithora, Delhi. Credit: Ashish Bhatnaagar. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prithviraj_Chauhan_III_statue_at_Qila_Rai_Pithora,_Delhi.jpg).

As known from before, during this period Gujarat was ruled by Chalukyas and they badly defeated the Ghurids near Mt. Abu. The Chalukyas had requested the Chauhans for help against the Ghurids but to no avail. Prithviraj declined to help since he saw the Chalukyas as much an arch-rival as the Ghurids. After the debacle experienced in Gujarat, Ghori changed his action-plan. He chose to subjugate the Ghaznavids first at the north-western borders of India. After defeating them at Peshawar in 1179-80 CE he marched towards Lahore to beat the Ghaznavid ruler Khusrau Malik that he did in 1181 CE. Subsequently, Malik

was allowed to rule Lahore for some time since Ghori was busy expanding his control over parts of Punjab and Sindh. However, very soon even Malik was put to death by the Ghurids.

The Battles of Tarain in 1191 and 1192 CE

After these victories in the north-western region Ghori captured the fortress of Tabarhinda in Punjab. Tabarhinda was strategically important for the security and protection of Delhi. Perhaps for the same reason, without wasting any time Prithviraj Chauhan reached Tabarhinda to reverse the situation. The war fought between the two forces in 1191 CE is known as the First Battle of Tarain. Not only did Prithviraj win, he also left Ghori badly wounded. However, Ghori was saved by a Khalji horseman who carried him to safety. With this triumph Prithviraj took the Ghurids for granted and surmised that like the Ghaznavids the Ghurs would also rule only the frontier areas outside India. The Ghurid attack on Tabarhinda was treated only as a frontier attack by him and he maintained complacency in not ousting the Ghurid forces from the outlying areas. This cost him dearly some time later.

Turkish forces attacked for the second time in 1192 CE which is known as the Second Battle of Tarain. This time Ghori came with good preparations. He had carefully planned his moves to defeat the Chauhans. His army consisted of 120,000 men who were fully armoured and equipped. A 17th century historian named Ferishta reveals that Prithviraj's forces consisted of 300,000 cavalry, 3000 elephants etc. Such figures may be gross exaggerations to show the challenge and scale of Ghori's victory on Prithviraj. Ferishta also claimed that Prithviraj sought help from the other "*Rais* of Hind" who joined him against Ghori. Given the fact that Prithviraj's expansionist tendencies had annoyed most of his neighbouring states, it is difficult for the historians to accept Ferishta's claim. Also, since not even one of the friendly *Rais* is named by him, this assertion of his is doubtful. Perhaps Prithviraj's army consisted of his feudatories who may have supplied their military forces to him. His decentralized army was inferior to the disciplined and centralized army of Muizzuddin.

Satish Chandra opines that the Second Battle of Tarain was "more a war of movement than of position". He explains it by saying that the "lightly armed mounted archers" of Muizzuddin kept harrassing the "slow moving forces" of Prithviraj and created confusion by attacking from all sides. The Chauhan ruler was badly defeated in this war and he was caught by the Turkish forces near Sarsuti or Sirsa in the present-day Hissar district of Haryana. Minhaj Siraj mentions that he was captured and executed after his defeat. However, a modern scholar named Hasan Nizami on the basis of available numismatic evidence refuted this claim of Siraj and opined that Prithviraj was still allowed to rule in Ajmer after his defeat. On the basis of Prithviraj's coins that reveal these words – "Sri Muhammad Sam" – on the obverse side Nizami has contended this. Accroding to him, Prithviraj was executed only after his rebellion sometime later. Therefore, all the narratives on his execution that are not based on historical sources are aberrations and doubtful.

Movement towards Upper Ganga Valley

After the battle Muizzuddin adopted a cautious policy and at many places still continued the indigenous rule. He placed Govindraj's son as a vassal in Delhi.

If Ferishta is to be believed, Govindraj was the Tomar chief of Delhi and he had helped Prithviraj in the Second Battle of Tarain. He had died in this battle. Further, Prithviraj was reinstated at Ajmer as a vassal. On the other hand, important places were kept under Turkish control. Muizzuddin had annexed whole of the region between the Siwalik area and Ajmer, Hissar and Sirsa. He had placed Hissar and Sirsa under the charge of one of his loyal slaves named Qutubuddin Aibak. Having the plan of moving towards the upper Ganga valley, the Turks had realized the importance of the strategic location of Delhi and, therefore, wanted to keep it in Turkish hands. Henceforth, the revolts at Ajmer and Delhi by Prithviraj's son were immediately quelled. Thereafter, Delhi was kept under direct Turkish control and the Tomar vassal was removed in 1193 CE when he was found to be involved in treason. Along with Delhi, now Ajmer was also taken away after defeating Prithviraj's brother Hari Singh who had been leading the Rajput resistance against the Turks. Further, Ajmer was also placed under a Turkish governor and Prithviraj' son named Govind was forced to move to Ranthambhor.

After putting Delhi and Ajmer under Turkish control, the Ghurids planned to attack the most powerful kingdom in India then, i.e. the state of the Gahadvalas of Kannauj. With his return to India in 1194 CE Muizzuddin captured the neighbouring regions of Delhi in the upper *doab*, namely Meerut, Baran or Bulandshahar and Koil or Aligarh. This upper *doab* area was ruled by the Dor Rajputs and the region had been attacked some time after the Second Battle of Tarain. Though the Gahadvala king Jai Chand could have helped his neighbouring states once again he chose to stay away. Rulers like him who rather rejoiced at or stayed neutral to the defeats of the Chauhans and others forgot that they may also be attacked if the Turks were not stopped. Such disunity between the different Rajput states cost India heavily. Most of the states were conquered by Muizzuddin without much effort.

Further, even the Gahadvalas were attacked. In 1194 CE the Muzzi forces marched towards Kannauj and Benaras. A battle was fought at Chandawar in the modern Etawah district. The exaggerated figures in the contemporary literary works on Jai Chand's army show it to be consisting of 80,000 armourers, 30,000 cavalry, 300,000 infantry, 200,000 archers etc. Nonetheless, the Gahadvalas were badly defeated. Kannauj was also sieged in 1198 C.E. The defeat was followed by plunder, especially of the fort of Asni in Fatehpur district which was a treasure-house of the Gahadvalas. Even Benaras was plundered and its temples were looted and destroyed.

The defeat of the Chauhans and the Gahadvalas in the Second Battle of Tarain and the Battle of Chandawar respectively were biggest victories for the Turks, since these were the most powerful foes for them. The Turks laid the foundation of the Turkish rule in Ganga valley with these victories. Even after the two wars there was resistance to the Turkish invasions in Ganga valley but these minor revolts were easily suppressed.

To consolidate and protect their stronghold of upper Ganga valley the Turks attacked its western and southern regions. They tried to conquer the strategic forts between Delhi and Malwa. Therefore, Bayana was sieged in 1195-96 CE and the strong Gwalior fort was also besieged within a couple of years. Likewise, Bundelkhand, Khajuraho, Mahoba and Kalinjar were conquered from the Chandela rulers. As mentioned earlier, the Chandela state was also powerful but

to no avail. The Turkish forces also started expanding towards the east and west of their stronghold of upper Ganga valley. Muizzuddin's forces sieged Anhilwara in Gujarat in retaliation of the *Rai* who had assisted in a Rajput rebellion earlier. Towards the east, even Bihar and Bengal were conquered by Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khalji.

Despite such expansion in all directions, the Turks were mostly unable to control the conquered areas that were far away from the stronghold of Delhi and upper Ganga valley. This problem cost them very heavily due to fresh central Asian developments in 1204 C.E. In this year the Ghurid Turks were badly defeated by the pagan Kara Khanid Turks of Samarqand at the Battle of Andkhui near the Oxus river. The rumours of Muizzuddin's death in this battle led to the revolt of the Khokhars in Punjab and he was coaxed to come back to suppress it. He successfully quelled the rebellion but on his way back from Punjab to central Asia he was killed by the Karamatias. However, his death did not stop the expansion of Turkish rule in India as was seen in the case of the Ghaznavids. In fact, his loyal slaves conquered more territories in India to extend their rule in India, thereby establishing the first Muslim state in India i.e. the Delhi Sultanate.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Match the following:

    i)   **Dynasty**   **Ruler**

         Chauhan   Jayapal

         Hindu Shahi   Vigrahraja

         Chandela   Jai Chand

         Gahadvala   Prithviraj

    ii) **Dynasty**   **Region**

         Chauhan   Delhi

         Tomar   Bundelkhand

         Chandela   Ajmer

         Chalukya   Kannauj

         Gahadvala   Gujarat

2) Discuss the factors that led to the Turkish military success in India and elsewhere.

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12.5 REASONS BEHIND RAJPUT DEFEAT AND TURKISH VICTORY

Several reasons have been assigned for the defeat of the Rajputs and success of the Turks in India. Initially, this debate started with British historians who were trying to understand Indian history in depth. Primarily, they stuck to two reasons for Turkish victory over Rajput rulers. These factors were named as military power and expertise of the Turks and pacifist nature of the Rajput rulers. They opined that Ghurid armies consisted of men who were drawn from warlike tribes residing in the mountainous areas between the Indus and Oxus rivers in Central Asia. Also, they had got military training and expertise by fighting against the fierce tribes of Central and West Asia. By drawing a comparison between the Turks and Indians, the British historians held that the latter lacked such training as they were pacifist in nature. Alternatively, the Indians were not used to fighting wars like the Turks and therefore, the Rajputs were defeated by them. Also, lack of unity between them added to advantage of the invaders.

However, other historians have rejected this explanation by citing that the early medieval period from 8th to 12th century was one of warfare and violent internal struggles between different states within India. This in itself proves that the Rajputs were not pacifist or of docile temperament, and they did not lack martial spirit or bravery.

Some other historians like Jadunath Sarkar and Mohammad Habib have traced Turkish success to the Indian social structure and also the one newly created by Islam in India. Sarkar emphasized on the characteristics imparted by Islam to the Muslim groups like the Arabs, the Pathans, the Turks, etc. that prepared the foundation of their victory in India. He argued that unlike the caste-divided society of India the Islamic social system was based on equality and social solidarity in legal and religious fields. He also held that absolute faith in god in the Islamic system gave a drive and a sense of mission to the Muslims. It provided a strong bond of unity between different groups of people and imbued them with a strong sense of mission and fighting spirit. A somewhat similar view was given by Mohammad Habib on the basis of the observation of an 11th century Arab writer named Alberuni on Indian caste system. Habib argued that resistance to the Ghurid invasions by Hindu rulers was undermined by two factors:

1) Since the caste system allowed only the warrior *kshatriyas* to participate in wars, it seriously impaired military effectiveness of Hindu kingdoms.

2) The caste system discounted the social unity of Hindu society vis-a-vis its Muslim counterpart that believed in equality. Therefore, a section of the urban masses of the Muslim society accepted Islam for a better social status. Such views have also been rejected since the historical sources show that groups like *Jaats*, *Meenas* and *Kuvarnas* (lower castes) were also included in Rajput armies. Also, sources supporting mass conversion of *vaishyas* and *shudras* to Islam around the 12th century do not exist. Additionally, they show that like the Hindu rulers the Muslim conquerors were also indifferent to degraded status of the lower castes.

Further, the Turkish military tactics and technology have been seen as another reason behind Turkish victory. As mentioned before, the central Asian regions like Ghur were renowned for their metal deposits and manufacture of weapons and other commodities of warfare. The use of iron-stirrup that enabled horsemen to use spears without being thrown off the horse was known to the Turks. The use of such armaments like iron-stirrup or crossbow was, perhaps, not widely known, especially in India. Over and above this, as has been said earlier, the good breed of central Asian horses vis-a-vis Indian horses has also been cited as a reason for military efficiency of the Turks. Many scholars have also named the unique Turkish tactics of warfare on the battlefield as a reason behind their success. However, scholars like Peter Jackson have declined to give utmost importance to Turkish military tactics and technology.

The causes behind the defeat of the Rajputs and victory of the Turks are to be understood by enlarging one's frame of reference. We should not restrict ourselves to only one particular reason or to the events happening since the Second Battle of Tarain. One has to understand the happenings in north-western region of India since the early 11th century. The invasions and plundering raids by Mahmud Ghazni happened in India only after breaching the outer defences, namely Afghanistan and Punjab in the north-western region of India. By having a hold over these regions Mahmud could plan out his further inroads in India. Here, disunity between various Rajput states can be seen as a major factor behind Mahmud's victory. As seen before, the internal rivalries were so strong that the regional kingdoms remained disunited even after Mahmud's death. Their disunity, as also the raids by Mahmud's successors continued in Rajasthan, Ajmer, Kannauj, Benaras etc. in upper Ganga valley. The only repose of relief for the Rajputs was that unlike the earlier time they could succeed in ousting the successors.

Analyzing the socio-political system of the Rajputs, Satish Chandra has given plausible reasons of their defeat. He contends that irrespective of not being inferior in numbers or in the quality of mounts and weapons, the Rajputs lacked proper organization and leadership. Their armies did not have a unified command since they were supplied by different feudal lords to the ruler. On the contrary, the Turkish sultans were used to maintaining large standing armies which were paid in cash or by means of *iqta* system. They bought and trained slaves for warfare who were loyal and devoted to their *sultans*.

Another reason for Rajput defeat mentioned by Chandra is the lack of a strategic perspective of the Rajputs. As he says, Alberuni had mentioned in his writings, "The Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation but theirs, no kings but theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid. Their haughtiness is such that if you tell them of any science or scholar in Khurasan or Persia they think you both as ignoramus and a liar." Chandra holds that this sense of insularity restricted the Indians from going to West or central Asia and bring back scientific or social knowledge from there. Such an attitude was due to *kali varjya*: ban on Hindus from crossing the salt seas or travelling to countries where the *munja* grass did not grow. Therefore, neglect and ignorance of the outside world and also the lack of strategic perspective "led to long-term repercussions of which the Turkish conquest was, perhaps, the first but not the last consequence".

Thus, the defeat of Rajputs by the Turks is to be understood by broadening the horizons to be able to see the long-term perspective. Disunity amongst the

Rajput rulers, their weak military organization and leadership vis-a-vis the Turks, as also their inferior military tactics/technology were not the only reasons for their defeat. It was also rooted in the defective social organization that led to the growth of states that were structurally weak in comparison to the Turkish states. The aforementioned Hindu insularity rooted in Indian cultural ethos barred the development of a strategic perspective. Hence, the foreign invaders could not be kept away from Indian soil through military or diplomatic means.

12.6 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE GHAZNAVIDS AND THE GHURS

In the interpretation of early medieval Indian history the Turkish invasions from northern and western frontiers of India is widely known. Frequent attacks by Mahmud Ghazni and Muizzuddin Mohammad Ghouri are largely discussed and understood. However, differences between them are not discussed so commonly. Nonetheless, few scholars like Satish Chandra, who have briefly touched upon it, at least acknowledge the distinction between them. Largely, he has discussed these differences in the context of their invasions and other activities in India. He extols Mahmud as a better general than Muizzuddin since he had never seen a defeat in India. But he praises Muizzuddin for being a tough fighter whose spirit was not defeated even after facing defeats. He argues, "Muizzuddin could recover and take lessons from his defeats, and change his entire approach which showed both a dogged tenacity of purpose and a grim sense of political realism." Chandra exemplifies his argument with Muizzuddin's defeat at Anhilwara. After this defeat Muizuddin was seen to have changed his entire approach towards India by shifting his gaze from Rajasthan to Punjab. The same tenacity, approach and preparedness were seen after his defeat in the First Battle of Tarain leading to his resounding victory in the second battle. Further, Chandra gives credit to Mahmud for laying the foundations on which Muizzuddin could build and achieve his mission in India. He contends that by breaching the outer defences of India by defeating the Hindu Shahis in Afghanistan and conquering Punjab, Mahmud had laid the roots of Turkish expansion in India. Chandra's close study does help one in distinguishing Mahmud from Muizuddin rather than only seeing them as invaders with similar mission and activities in India.

However, an attempt to intricately differentiate between the two invaders, their processes, methods and the underlying designs outside India has hardly come under the purview of most historians till late. The discussions on them have mostly been concentrated around their plundering raids or attacks on the north and western regions of India or their military tactics used to do the same. Therefore, a gap remains in understanding the pre-sultanate history of north-western India and its intricate linkage with the developments in the regions of Afghanistan, West and central Asia.

Thankfully, in the recent times this gap has been filled by the in-depth analysis by scholars like Peter Jackson and Sunil Kumar. In fact, Kumar has vividly studied pre-sultanate India and its northern and western regions to understand their underlying, interlinked political and economic processes. His nuanced approach has brought out distinctive features of the Ghaznavid and the Ghurid systems. Some of these are as follows:

1) Even though their military and political systems were based in Afghanistan and both lacked in internal resources, their political systems were quite different. The ruling family of the Ghaznavids comprised of Turkish military slaves who, perhaps, had come to eastern Afghanistan from the Samanid capital of Bukhara. They created an authoritarian political regime that ignored its local ties and rather strengthened its links with Khurasan in eastern Iran or Persia. After gaining more political strength they tried aping the grandeur of Persian culture and learning. Kumar contends that historical sources of the period reveal that Mahmud even carried his interpreters with him during his campaigns into Ghur. On the contrary, the Shansabanids or the Ghurids were of more humble origin and designs. As mentioned before, they were pastoral chieftains from Ghur: a poor and scarcely developed region of Afghanistan. It was a region between Ghazni and Herat that was "islamicized" by the Ghaznavids. Nonetheless, neither did the Ghurids have the same wherewithal nor the aims like that of the Ghaznavids to imitate Persian culture and glory in their state.

2) Almost the same level of difference was seen between their forms of governance. While the Ghaznavids tried their best to maintain a centralized form of governance, the Ghurids even at the peak of their power in the 12th century had only military commanders for administrative purposes. In comparison to the Ghaznavids, the Ghurids rather followed a decentralized form of governance in which even during the zenith of their strength and power they gave governorship to all the males of the ruling family. These military governors, indeed, functioned as autonomous *sultans* or kings in their provinces and their royal administrative posts and titles were given as a mark of honour to them.

3) Further, their reasons for invading India were also found to be different. The Ghaznavids only intended to plunder and loot the riches from India. Their ambition of getting territorial gains was restricted to Sindh, Multan, Lahore etc. on the north-western frontier and did not extend eastwards towards the Indian heartland. This was clearly seen from the shifting of their capital to Lahore after their defeat at the hands of the Seljuks at Dandanqan in 1040 CE.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Analyze the reasons for Turkish victory in India.

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2) Discuss a case study to show disunity between Rajput rulers against the Ghurids.

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12.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit we discussed the situation of constant political flux in West and central Asia after the downfall of the Abbasid empire in the 9th century. This period was characterized by continuous upheavals between different Turkish and non-Turkish tribes. Amidst this, the Ghaznavid dynasty rose to power in Ghazni and it plundered neighbouring areas including India. Mahmud Ghazni as one of the Ghaznavid kings raided India 17 times to only plunder its wealth. He did not have any territorial ambitions in India. However, the next Turkish invader in India – Muizzuddin Mohammad Ghouri – aimed to conquer India. After defeating Prithviraj Chauhan in 1192 CE he gained access to Delhi. Keeping Delhi as the center of his operations, within a decade, he conquered many areas in eastern, central and western India. This is how he laid the foundation of first Muslim state in India – the Delhi Sultanate.

This period in Indian history was characterized by utmost disunity between different Rajput states. Be it the Arab, Ghaznavid or Ghurid invasion of India, the disunity aided invaders in their plunders or conquests. Historians opine that lack of unified resistance from the Indian side was one of the biggest reasons behind the success of Muslim invaders. Good availability of arms, ammunitions, equipments and horses in central Asia can be counted as another factor behind the Turkish success. Also, their tactics and technology of warfare was mostly superior to that of the Indian rulers. However, over and above all these causes is the lack of strategic perspective and social solidarity that had cocooned the Indian, mostly the Hindu society, to not understand the good or bad side of the outside world.

12.8 KEY WORDS

Aid	:	Help
Aforementioned	:	As mentioned before
Climax	:	Most important point of something; culmination
Cocooned	:	Surrounded in a protective way
Tenacity	:	Ability to grip something firmly
Resounding	:	Unmistakable; loud enough to echo
Vis-a-vis	:	In comparison to

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) See Section 12.2

2) See Section 12.3

Check Your Progress 2

1) i) Chauhan   Prithviraj, Vigrahraja

        Hindu Shahi   Jayapal

        Gahadvala   Jai Chand

ii)	Chauhan	Ajmer
	Tomar	Delhi
	Chandela	Bundelkhand
	Chalukya	Gujarat
	Gahadvala	Kannauj

2) See Section 12.4

Check Your Progress 3

1) See Section 12.5

2) See Section 12.5

12.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 13 LAND, REVENUE SYSTEMS AND AGRARIAN RELATIONS: *C.* 700-1200 CE*

Structure

13.0 OBJECTIVES

We will be able to understand early medieval India of particularly *c.* 700-1200 CE through the study of land, revenue, and agrarian relations. You can discuss in detail about the following after reading this unit:

- importance of land and associated resources in early medieval India;

- aims, chronology, and expansion of the land-grant system;

- growth and nature of rights to land;

- revenue systems and the role of state peasant, landlords, and village;

- agrarian development in the Indian subcontinent;

- character and function of different agricultural settlements; and

- features of the early medieval agrarian economy.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The contemporary historiography presents broadly two phases of Indian history at the level of the land, revenue, and agricultural relations. Early Indian history is imagined as the age of prosperity marked by long-distance trade, spread of urban centres, less unequal distribution of land, communal land ownership, etc.

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The post-Gupta period is envisioned as the Classical age of Indian feudalism marked by changes such as local state formation, rural and agrarian economy, agrarian expansion, peasantization of tribes, the decline of trade and urban centres, uneven distribution of land, regional agricultural structures, private land ownership etc. Early medieval started with consolidation of peasant activities and state motivated by Brahmanical ideology, structures, and institutions. The dynamic age of *c.*700-1200 CE showed significant changes in land, revenue, and agrarian relations due to the transformation and expansion of Indian polity, economy, and culture, which need to be studied as beign inter-related. The pre-Muslim India touched a higher level of elaboration and complexity than ancient India due to the formation of agrarian regions. Politically, the early medieval period is marked by the emergence of regional powers fighting each other for supremacy. A political disorder and instability became rampant in the absence of a durable power. Positively, small kingdoms expanded state authority into the unreached areas to utilise the local resource base. Peasant settlements, chiefdoms, and larger state systems interacted with each other and changed accordingly. An increasing number of land grants from *c.* 600 CE became a medium for this expansion in the evolved shortage of workforce and money. Several Marxist historians stress upon substantial changes in socio-economic and political processes due to land grants after *c.* 600 CE, which led to the formation of Indian feudalism. In other words, the revolutionary changes in land, revenue systems, and agriculture are termed as the beginning of Indian feudalism from *c.* 700 CE. We will try to study these changes in the existing Unit, which started in north India and spread across the Indian subcontinent through a process of interaction.

13.2 LAND

Land and associated rights became the centre of almost all activities in between *c.*700-1200 CE. Early medieval Indian economy, polity, society, and religion became more and more linked and depended on the land and its resources until the establishment of the Muslim empire, which introduced large-scale cash payment. The land became the most important source of income for kings. The sovereign issued land as a medium of exchange for services rendered by officials and religious communities in the time of financial crisis. In this way, kings tried to use the land of their kingdoms and fought each other to acquire more and more. The contemporary society also became more stratified and complicated. The quantity of land became a medium of social mobility and status symbol. We can witness the considerable transformation in the status of farmers and a rise of complex stratification based on land, such as rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, sharecroppers, and tenant. The landless labourers who formed the working agricultural population also became a valuable asset for the kingdoms.

The early medieval economy became structured, modified, and functioned around land. Land became a significant source of revenue. And kings also donated land to individuals and institutions for their service to the empire. The system of land-grants became an all-India feature by *c.* 1200 CE and incorporated almost all kinds of lands such as fertile, semi-fertile, arid, unfertile, pastures, and other ecological kinds. Religious institutions and communities also emerged as landed magnets. The kings granted them land for their favour and services. *Brahmanas,*

temples, government officers, and royal kinsmen benefitted most by land grants and emerged as landlords.

Interestingly, land became valuable as private property in *c*.700-1200 CE as compared to ancient India. The rights of use, mortgage, resale, and gift were acquired with the land, and the denees were free to use it. We have epigraphical evidence of the sale and purchase of property as for back as the 2ⁿᵈ century CE. Fortunately, we have recovered several land sale records of the post-Gupta the Chola periods. The proprietary rights emerged in undeveloped areas in phases with gradual agrarian development.

13.2.1 Land-Grants

Indian culture has a rich tradition of gift or *dana* to Brahmins and religious institutions as the surest means of acquiring merit (*punya*) and destroying sin. There were several items of gifts such as food, grains, paddy, gold, money, land, garden, home, cow, plough, oxen, etc. The donation of land was a part of Indian tradition, which became popular in *c*. 700-1200 CE due to changed economic situation. Inscriptions and religious literature mention grants of cultivable land to Brahmins as the best of all types of gifts. Indirectly, the conscious and systematic arrangement of land grants provided means of subsistence to the Brahmins, and in return, they offered religious sanction to the monarch and their reign. Politically, land-grants expanded the resource base of the rulers. In the 4ᵗʰ-5ᵗʰ centuries, the land-grant system started in the Ganga valley and spread over northern Deccan and Andhra. In the 6ᵗʰ-7ᵗʰ centuries, the land-grants covered eastern and western India. South India came in contact with land grants in the 8ᵗʰ-9ᵗʰ centuries. Till the end of the 13ᵗʰ century, the land-grant system became a uniform and universal feature in the entire Indian subcontinent. The land-grants implied more than the transfer of land rights. For example, in many cases, with the revenues, natural, and economic resources of the village, human resources such as peasants, artisans, and others were transferred to donees.

Land-grants generated differential access to power, resources, and intricate relations of domination and subordination in donated areas. We can divide land-grants broadly in two categories, i.e. religious and secular awards. Spiritual gifts include *Brahmadeya*, *Devadana*, and *Agrahara/Mangalam*, which was started by the ruling dynasties and subsequently followed by chiefs, officials, and feudatories. Lands granted to one or more numbers of Brahmins are called *Brahmadeya*. *Agrahara/Mangalam* were tax-free villages donated to Brahmins for their resettlement respectively in north and south India. *Devadana* was land given to temples, monasteries and other religious establishments, both *Brahmana* and non-*Brahmana*. The institutions such as *Brahmadeyas* and temples played an essential role in the development and expansion of the agrarian base, consolidation of state power, peasantisation of *Shudras*, and social differentiation.

Secular grants were made from the 7ᵗʰ century onwards for secular purposes to officials and royal kinsmen who were assisting the king in administration and defence. We find frequent references to awards to ministers, kinsmen, military commanders and others between the 10ᵗʰ and the 12ᵗʰ centuries from Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Assam, and Odissa etc. Officials enjoyed income from their land-grants including taxes and levies irrespective of the tenure of these levies. It is important because it created another class of landlords other than *Brahmanas*.

The above described developments had significant regional variations due to geographical and ecological factors. It seems that the first religious grants started in outlying, backward, tribal, and arable areas to Brahmins and religious institutions thereby integrating them into the economy. Later secular awards began by the monarch for help in administration and defence. The impact of land-grants on local inhabitants varied over areas depending on whether the donation was in a settled area with a long history of agriculture or in a virgin tract or a tribal frontier.

13.2.2 Rights to Land

Historians maintain three positions on the question of rights to land, especially ownership of agricultural land. The nationalist writings argued for the individual/ peasant ownership of property prevailing all through Indian history. The Marxist historians critically perceived that no private individual could hold land as a matter of absolute right because the king was the ultimate owner with superior rights. The third group of historians took the middle path and argued for common or joint ownership. In this way, we can say that multiple forms of ownership, private and royal prevailed in early medieval India as indicated by literary and archaeological sources. R. S. Sharma also points out to a multiplicity of hierarchically graded rights over land based on the evidence of land-grant charters and the exemptions and privileges granted to the donees.

The land-grants brought fundamental changes in the rights to land. In ancient India, king and farmer had rights over the land, but in the early medieval period, the intermediary rights were created through land-grants. Land-grants destroyed community rights to land. They transformed the community and communal property into feudal property, which affected the means and process of production, leading to the subjection of the peasantry . The individual rights to land developed at the cost of communal agrarian rights.

Yajnavalkya and **Brihaspati** mention four grades of land rights in the same piece of land:

- the *Mahipati* (king),

- *Kshetrasvamin* (master of soil),

- *Karshaka* (cultivator) and

- the sub-tenant.

Peasants remained the owner of their lands, but the pattern of land ownership changed. Land-grants damaged the independent position of peasants through the establishment of superior rights over land. Now, independent landowners transformed into tenants and became a class of subordinated peasants. *Circa* 800 CE onwards, the king started providing proprietary rights with fiscal and administrative rights to feudal lords, which became hereditary in due time. Land-grants led to hierarchical rights over land and sub-infeudation. The practice gave rise to a hierarchy of landlords surviving on the surplus produced by the actual cultivators. The different types of landlords that emerged were:

- *maha-mandaleshvara*,

- *mandaleshvara*,

- *mandalika*,

- *samanta*,

- *mahasamanta*,

- *thakkura* etc.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Read the following sentences and write True or False.

   i)   The period of *c*.700-1200 CE is popularly known as the Classical age of Indian feudalism.   (   )

   ii) The early medieval economy became structured, modified, and functioned around land.   (   )

   iii) *Brahmadeya*, *devadana*, and *agrahara*/*mangalam* are types of religious land-grants.   (   )

   iv) Land-grants played an essential role in the development and expansion of agriculture, consolidation of state power, and social differentiation.
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   v)   The land was considered as the best gift of all types of gifts.   (   )

2) Write five lines on the role of land in the early medieval economy, polity, society and religion.

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3) Note down the favourable factors behind the expansion of the land-grants.

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4) What are the differences between *brahmadeya*, *devadana*, and secular land-grants?

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13.3 REVENUE SYSTEMS

Land and agriculture have always been the base of the Indian economy, which became more pronounced in our period of study. Land and agricultural tax became crucial for the revenue system in *c*. 700-1200 CE. Certain levies on trade and commerce too were collected. The revenue system was under great pressure because of the feudal economy. The surplus was extracted through various methods. Economic coercion was a conspicuous method. We can suppose two collectors in the early medieval feudal economy, i.e. king and feudal lords. Both collected revenue mostly in terms of kind. The feudal lords had the right to collect revenues from their donated lands, which was transferred by the king. In the beginning, they were paying a fixed share of the total revenue to the king, but later, they started keeping soldiers for that share, which was supplied to the king whenever he demanded.

13.3.1 State

The state consciously tried to increase income to meet the increased demands in the era of expansion and struggle. It became essential with the tax exemption that was provided to *brahmadeyas* and *devadanas*. Also, the king was not allowed to collect revenue from the donated lands. The monarchical state reached to relatively unknown areas with agrarian expansion on an unprecedented scale. The income of the state must have increased through the collection of surplus from hitherto uncultivated and unsettled areas. In between 700-1200 CE, the state charged several taxes and levies on the independent peasants, artisans, merchants, and others. The land-grant charters reflect taxes, dues and levies collected by the state since kings cautiously mentioned their name in the record which was getting transferred to the feudatories. Historian Lallanji Gopal provides the list of some important taxes such as *bhoga, bhaga, kara, uparikara, hiranya, udranga, halikara, samastapratyaya, dasaparadha, pravanikara, turuskasanda, aksapatalaprastha, pratiharaprastha, visatiathuprastha, visayadana, akara, kutaka, jalakara, gokara, valadi, lavanakara, parnakara* etc. In addition to these, sometimes a particular king also imposed extra tax/taxes for some special purpose.

13.3.2 Landlords and Peasants

In the post-Harsha period, peasants became the main producer and taxpayer. The early peasantry in early medieval India was subjected to an ever-increasing tax/rent burden. Kings provided superior rights to feudal lords to collect all taxes including regular, irregular, fixed, and traditional payments from the inhabitants of granted villages. The list of taxes in the inscriptions has no end because it ends with the expression *adi* or *adikam* meaning etcetera. R. S. Sharma connects it to the further empowerment of landlords as they took advantage of the expression *adi* and collected maximum from peasants through unspecified and extra-legal sources. The donees also collected regular taxes as:

- *bhoga*,

- *bhaga*,

- *kara*,

- *uparikara*,

- *hiranya,*

- *udranga,*

- *halikara,*

- *samastapratyaya* etc.

The Vakataka grants list 14 types of taxes. The Pallava records specify 18 to 22 of them. The number of taxes increased enormously until the end of *c*. 1000 CE. From the 7th century onwards grants provided rights to water resources, trees, bushes, and pastures to the donee which not only badly affected the peasantry of the donated villages but also strengthened the power of the donees. The donees charged levies on the use of above resources of the village, which was earlier in the ownership of the village community and free to all. Above all, the land-grant charters asked the peasants to carry out orders of the landlords as disobedience amounted to treason (*mahadroha*). The right of extracting forced labour, i.e.*vishti* became regular in early medieval India exercised by the *Brahmanas* and other donees of lands such as officials, village authorities, and others. Land-grants transferred it to the grantee, which was earlier a prerogative of the king. In the Chola inscriptions alone, there are more than 100 references to forced labour.

13.3.3 Villages

Ranabir Chakravarti highlights that a large number of grants enjoyed by landed intermediaries resulted in a situation where both the intermediaries and the ruler exploited the peasants. This resulted peasant-resulted in the emergence of the self-sufficient, enclosed village. The village was also the lowest unit of tax collection but an important one. Villages provided maximum revenue to the state and the lords. The amount of taxes were paid through a large part of the surplus, which was collected by the headman. The village head distributed this burden upon all individual villagers. In this way, both peasants with high and low earnings and tenants survived the heavy burden of taxes of king and feudatories by a being a member of the village community.The taxes from an *agrahara* were assigned to the *Brahmana* donees. The *brahmadeya* villages were generally exempted from various taxes or dues either entirely or at least in the initial stages of settlement. They were also endowed with ever-growing privileges (*pariharas*).

Check Your Progress 2

1) Fill in the blanks.

    i) ——————— became crucial for the revenue system in *c*.700-1200 CE.

    ii) In the post-Harsha period, ——————— became the primary producer and taxpayer.

    iii) The list of taxes in inscriptions has no end because it ends with the expression ———————.

    iv) The village was the ——————— unit of tax collection.

    v) ——————— became regular in early medieval India exercised by the feudatories.

2) Describe the share of peasants in the revenue system of *c*.700-1200 CE.

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3) What was the nature of rights enjoyed by land grantees?

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13.4 AGRARIAN RELATIONS

Agrarian relations, i.e. relations between land and cultivators, became complex with the advent of feudalism. We can notice a significant change in the basis of agrarian relations, i.e. the forms of landed property. The production relations in agriculture also changed significantly with a shift in land ownership and land tenure. With the rise of new property relations, new mechanisms of economic subordination also evolved.

Literary sources before *c*. 600 CE mention a functional status of cultivators reflected from terms such as:

*   *gahapati*,

*   *kutumbika*,

*   *mahattara* etc.

These terms possibly suggest landholding by peasants themselves. B. N. S. Yadav notices an essential change in their status as a ploughman through the study of early medieval texts, which rarely mention these terms and frequently mention titles like:

*   *halakara*,

*   *halika*,

*   *karshaka*,

*   *krishivalajana* etc.

These epithets focus more on the profession of peasants as a tiller and less on their landholding. Chakravarti also points to the lowered status of ordinary peasants with the advent of *arddhika* (sharecropper as a social group in early medieval Deccan). Concerning the grantee, peasants were becoming more miserable day by day, but the landlords owned the landed property and flourished. Peasants of a particular village owning land in other settlements either through

donation, inheritance or purchase found themselves in a dwindling situation. In such cases, the owner-cultivator in one village happened to be a lord, however modest, vis-à-vis tenant, in another.

Every peasant family constituted the smallest but central unit of production in *c*. 700-1200 CE. Peasants possessed the land, but they had paid to pay rent in cash, kind, and labour to the feudal lords. The cultivators pay not because of the expectations of return but because of custom, coercion, legal and religious sanction. The landlords collected surplus not with the object of promoting agriculture or the economic growth of the kingdom but mainly for their consumption. Farmers produced not in response to the market but according to the needs of the landlords, who may take account of the interests of his overlord – the king.

13.4.1 Agrarian Expansion

The period *c*. 700-1200 CE reflects agrarian growth and expansion on an unprecedented scale in India as proved by epigraphic and literary evidence. The generation of land ownerships in tribal, wild, virgin, barren, coastal, and borderlands through land-grants were the main reason behind the development of agriculture in new areas and step-wise agrarian integration of the region. South India shows gradual spread of agriculture from wet to the dry zone, in Kaveri delta, and the upper reaches of the Tamraparni. To meet the increased need of resources, kings, princes, chiefs, and government officials of Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Assam, Andhra, Telengana, Bengal, Karnataka, and Rajasthan extended patronage to agriculture and brought improvement in irrigational facilities, which strengthened this process. Kesavan Veluthat shows a different development in Kerala, where temple emerged as the nucleus of large agrarian corporations. The non-governmental individual and group initiatives in launching and maintaining irrigation projects outnumbered the royal/government efforts. Such meritorious acts of public welfare became a symbol of the enhanced social status of individuals/groups.

The attention paid to agriculture by rulers and landed beneficiaries can be seen in the detailed description of the plough, the land, the crops, and the improvement in irrigation facilities in inscriptions and literature. The decreased dependence on rain for irrigation became a crucial factor for easy conversion of virgin lands into cultivable, settled areas with increased production, and population growth. Inscriptions mention *udghataghat* and *ghatiyantra* in Uttar Pradesh, *araghattas* (irrigational wells), *dhinkus* (wells), *tadaga* in Rajasthan, tanks and canals in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Deccan, rivers, rivulets, ditch (*khata*), wells (*kupa*) in Bengal and Kerala,*vapi* in Gujarat, and channels in the context of rural settlements and accessible irrigation facilities suitable to ecological differences of the subcontinent. Also, we can point out local level diversities in the preference for irrigation devices as per its geographical features after the study of Chola inscriptions. The use of conduit was limited in comparison to the use of tanks and canal irrigation. Several early medieval Indian rulers constructed large reservoirs named after them called:

- *sagara*,
- *samudra*,
- *varidhi* etc.

South Indian rulers of the Pallava-Chola periods, the Rashtrakuta, and the Kakatiya dynasties were famous for the construction of large tanks and used the sluice-weir device in it to boost crop production. There were elected committees in the villages to look after the installation and maintenance of tanks, canals, and reservoirs. Overall, these initiatives led to not only agrarian expansion but also flourished agriculture, diversification of crops, and increased production and population attested by visiting the Arabian geographers. Early medieval India produced at least 50 types of paddy in Bengal and most exceptional qualities of spices, especially pepper from Malabar.

13.4.2   Agrarian Settlements

Historian B. P. Sahu finds out that from 6th-7th centuries onwards, the spread of *Vedic-Shastric-Puranic* ideas and land-grants led to the formation of agrarian settlements at the locality and sub-regional levels all over India, which led to strengthening of the authority of ruling dynasties, the legitimisation of the social order, and cultural integration over more extensive areas. Bengal under the Palas and Senas, Odisha under the Somavamsis and Later Gangas, Western Ganga and Hoysala Karnataka and Tamil Nadu during the Pallava, Pandya, and Chola times reflect these developments. Epigraphic evidence from the 9th-10th centuries shows the increasing density of settlements and the higher utilisation of arable land as evident through detailed boundary delineations of donated land marked by adjoining settlements and plots owned by others. The new rural settlements led to the extension of agrarian space in tribal and virgin frontiers and vice-versa. In some cases, earlier tribal hamlets could be transformed into peasant village such as in Bengal. It also implied an increase in the density of settlements in already settled areas. We have the picture of dispersed settlements in Assam against the clusters of villages in Bengal in the Gupta period. Variations across regions can also be seen by comparing changes over time.

The spread of agrarian settlements could have hardly been possible without adequate irrigation facilities. The pattern of geographical distribution of settlements was related to water resources, both natural and human-made, and the agrarian potentiality of the landscape. Sahu opines that there seems to have been a correspondence between the increase in irrigational works and the rise in the number of *nadus* between 7th and 10th centuries in Tamil Nadu. In contrast to the smaller *nadus* in river valleys, the less fertile tracts were characterised by larger *nadus* with a lesser density of settlements. Nandini Sinha says that donation of few plots in a settled village would have made no substantial difference to its organisation except for extending the network of the village.

Rural settlements in early medieval India were the hub of all activities. They were called:

- *Grama*,
- *Palli* (tribal village),
- *Pataka* (a hamlet near a larger village),
- *Padra*,
- *Ghosa* (herdsmen village), etc.

Early medieval villages mostly derived their names from local flora, mineral resources or even occupational associations. Generally, a distinction is made

between *Brahmana* and non-*Brahmana* communities, which are different from each other both at the level of administration and social organisation. B. D. Chattopadhyaya takes it as an indicator of differentiation between rural settlements and the growing complexity of the social organization.

The Brahmanical settlements are called *brahmadeya*, *agrahara* and *mangalam*, where *Brahmanas* may have been the dominant category. Independent well-to do peasants co-existed with *brahmadeya* owners in many villages. Brahmanical settlements in most regions formed only a part of the totality. Nandini Sinha, in her study on south-western Rajasthan, shows that only one out of the 10 villages discussed was an *agrahara* with full exemption. *Brahmana* villages were stratified and characterised by private ownership. Sometimes, two or more settlements were clubbed together to form a *brahmadeya* or an *agrahara* with the construction of a new irrigation source. *Brahmadeyas* contributed a lot in the growing peasantisation of *Shudras* and other lowest castes. Some of the small *Brahmana* donees, in the absence of tenants, were themselves, peasant cultivators.

Devadanas, land-grants to religious establishments, both Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical also worked as nuclei of agricultural settlements and integration of various peasant and tribal settlement. Temples leased out its land to tenants for a share of crops. The supervision of temple and monastery lands were in the hands of *Brahmana* and non-*Brahmana* landed elite. In non-*Brahmana* settlements, temple lands were administered by the temple executive committees.

13.4.3 Agrarian Economy

Historians have worked out at some length aspects of the agrarian economy of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Bengal and Assam and in Andhra, Orissa and Rajasthan some beginnings have been made. Agricultural activities dominated early medieval economy. The system of land grants made economy dependent on agriculture with the decline in the non-agrarian sectors such as trade, long-distance commerce, and crafts. The agrarian prosperity became true in terms of both agricultural expansion and increase in crops production and variety in *c.* 700-1200 CE. D. D. Kosambi proved improved irrigation and crop production in the Vitasta valley. Rising agrarian productivity provided the basis for the emergence of *hattas*, local fairs and nodal points, especially from about the 10th century, which stimulated the exchange and distribution of goods and the creation of inter-village networks. Peasants also must have been prosperous with agrarian growth. It seems the cultivators were able to pay regular and extra demands of landlords.

The early medieval agrarian economy was highly complex. It was overshadowed by feudal economy, which we have studied in the above sections. North Indian agrarian economy became more and more feudalised, but south India presented independent peasant regions such as *nadus*. *Nadus* were managed by the *nattars* organising themselves into assemblies. Land-grants in *nadus* issued with the consent of the *nattar* and later they used to execute the donation. The *Brahmanas* and the dominant peasants' *vellallas* allied in the production process. Thus, the *Brahmanas*, the religious institutions like temples and monasteries, the higher castes with lots of land, officials and holders of superior rights to property became the central figure in the organisation and function of the early medieval agrarian economy.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Which of the following statements are right (√) or wrong (X)?

    i)   The Brahmanical and other agrarian settlements led to the expansion of agriculture and consolidation of the state.   (   )

    ii) Several early medieval rulers constructed large reservoirs, tanks, channels, and wells for irrigation purpose.   (   )

    iii) Agrarian prosperity became true in terms of both agricultural expansion and increase in crops' production and varieties in *c.*700-1200 CE.(   )

    iv) Rural settlements in early medieval India were not the hub of all activities.   (   )

2) In Section A are given the names of irrigation sources and in B the regions. Match Column A and Section B.

Section A		Section B
a) Rajasthan	i)	*araghattas*, *dhinkus* (wells), *tadaga*
b) Gujarat	ii)	rivulets, ditch (*khata*), wells (*kupa*)
c) Kerala and Bengal	iii)	*vapi*
d) Karnataka and Tamil Nadu	iv)	tanks and canals

3) Describe in five sentences the agrarian relations between *c.* 700-1200 CE.

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5) Write five sentences on the rural settlements of early medieval India describing its formulations and expansion.

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5) Comment on the agrarian development in early medieval India.

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13.5 SUMMARY

Land, revenue system, and agricultural relations were the essential part of feudalism developed in *c*. 700-1200 CE. The revolutionary changes occurred in these sectors compared to the situation that existed in *c*. 600 CE, which brought broad changes in early medieval Indian socio-economic and political conditions. In this way, we can question the popular notion of the millennial changelessness of Indian society. The land became crucial and a valuable resource in the era, both politically and economically. Land-grants led to the emergence of new religious and secular landed intermediaries and feudatories. Peasants hardly remained as owner of their areas and almost turned into labourer/tiller. The cultivators were paying numerous legal and extra-legal taxes to landlords and king, including *vishti* (forced labour). The state shared its revenue resources with feudal lords.

Land-grants led to the availability of new lands hitherto unutilized. It became beneficial for both the state and peasants. The state started generating more revenue through access to new areas and local resource base. The state also carried forward its authority to each corner of the kingdom. The ruler became more powerful politically and economically by creating a loyal group of recipients of royal favour with additional facilities such as irrigation sources. The peasants also got new lands to work since the feudal lords, temples, and Brahmins did not work themselves. New agrarian settlements out of *brahmadeya*, *agrahara*, *manglam*, *devadanas* and secular grants provided enough opportunities to farmers to acquire land and work. It led to the expansion of agriculture all over India. The peasants remained the sole producer and commanded the directions of the early medieval agrarian economy.

13.6 KEY WORDS

Agraharas	:	Land grants made to Brahmins.
Peasantization	:	The process by which tribes became a part of the peasantry.
Sharecropper	:	A cultivator who rents land and gives part of his crop as rent.

13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) True (v) True

2) See Section 13.2.

3) See Sub-section 13.2.1.

4) See Sub-section 13.2.1.

Check Your Progress 2

1) (i) land and agriculture (ii) peasants (iii) *adi* or *adikam* (iv) lowest (v) *vishti*

2) See Sub-section 13.3.2.

3) See Sub-section 13.3.2.

Check Your Progress 3

1) (i) √ (ii) √ (iii) √ (iv) X

2) (a) i (b) iii (c) ii (d) iv

3) See Section 13.4.

4) See Sub-section 13.4.2.

5) See Sub-section 13.4.1.

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UNIT 14 SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND GENDER RELATIONS: *C*. 700-1200 CE*

Structure

14.0   OBJECTIVES

The prime objectives of this Unit are to study:

- various literary and archaeological sources for the reconstruction of the social history of the period;

- the distinctive features of the social life of the period;

- various social groups and interrelations among them;

- the elements of change and continuity in social structure and gender relations during this period;

- the role of different agencies or factors in social transformation; and

- the emerging trends in economy, polity and culture corresponding to social transformations.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The time period from *c*. 700 to 1200 CE is termed as "early medieval" in Indian history. This period is neither ancient nor medieval in character, but clearly denotes some departures from the pre-600 CE period and the beginning of medieval elements and, thus, holds an intermediate position between the two. The early medieval period sets in with the decline of the Gupta Empire in northern India and ends with the coming of political Islam in India. The nature of early medieval society, economy and polity has been a debatable issue among historians.

The background of social transformations is provided by certain economic and political developments. Pervasive land-grants across the sub-continent arguably became the root cause for all political, economic and socio-cultural developments. Land-grants led to the spread of state society into non-state regions and became instrumental in unprecedented proliferation of polities. The emergence of regional, sub-regional and trans-regional political entities paved way for economic as well as social transformations. The Brahmanical social ideal of the four-fold *varna* order gave way to a more complex, heterogeneous and regionally varied *jati* (caste) system. While the construct of the four-fold *varna* system continued to persist in the *Dharmashastra*s – the Brahmanical normative texts – during this period it never remained the same as it was perceived earlier. The *varna* system worked at a theoretical level in the Brahmanical discourse on society, while the *jati* (caste) system provided the functional aspect to society. In other words, the *varna* system got incorporated into the caste system. Sometimes, even the terms *varna* and *jati* were used interchangeably particularly for the *Brahmana* caste.

The caste identity emerged dominant from the early medieval period onwards. The changing nature of social structure provided avenues for both upward and downward social mobility. The social transformation in the early medieval period was also portrayed as the coming of *kaliyuga* or *kali* age crisis, expansion of class distinctions and hierarchies and subjugation of women. The notion of *kali* age itself represents a great departure from the Vedic traditions. Unfortunately, women and gender relations were paid little attention in the early researches. This Unit aims to not only provide a comprehensive account of social structure, but also include women and gender relations into the social history of the period.

14.2 SOURCES FOR RECONSTRUCTION

Sanskrit came out of the clutches of sacredness and became the language of politics and literature. By the end of the period, emergent vernacular languages started challenging the domination of Sanskrit in literary production. Various kinds of literary works were produced. These included religious texts, poetry and drama (*kavya-nataka*), philosophical texts, technical treatises on mathematics, grammar, medicine, music, architecture, lexicography, etc. The proliferation of regional states also led to the production of royal biographies such as Banabhatta's *Harshacharita*, Sandhyakaranandin's *Ramacharita*, Padmagupta's *Navasahasankacharita*, Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacharita*, Hemachandra's

Kumarapalacharita and anonymously authored *Prithvirajavijaya*, Chand Bardai's *Prithvirajaraso*, etc. Kalhana also wrote *Rajatatrangini* – the earliest known historical chronicle in India – about the rulers and dynasties of Kashmir. The composition and compilation of *Puranas* continued throughout the early medieval period. While the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* and *Kalika Purana* were authored, some older *Puranas* were added to and some *Upapuranas* were composed. Some *Dharmasutras* were also compiled such as *Chaturvimshatimata*, Lakshmidhara's *Krityakalpataru* and Devanabhatta's *Smritichandrika*. Jimutavahana also wrote an influential work on law called *Vyavaharamatrika* and a digest called *Dayabhaga*. Commentaries on *Smritis* and *Mimansa* texts provided fresh interpretations in accordance with time and space, thereby factoring in the changing social milieu of the period.

Besides Sanskrit, other languages, too, witnessed the flowering of literature. Some Jaina texts were written in *Maharashtri* Prakrit. One can also trace the influence of Apabhramsha on Jaina texts. In south India, hagiographies of Alvarand Naynamnar saints were composed in Tamil. Royal houses from south like Rashtrakutas, Hoyasalas and Chalukyas also patronized literature including some Kannada works. Besides these texts, *Lekhapaddhati*, a collection of model forms of legal and other documents from Gujarat; *Krishiparashara*, a treatise on agriculture from Bengal; *Dharmakatha*, a collection of Jaina folk tales; and Mahaviracharya's *Ganitasarasangraha* and Bhaskaracharya's *Lilavati* on mathematics also offer important historical information.

Chinese and Arab traveller's accounts are also an important source of information for the period. Xuan-Zang and Yijing from China visited India, while Arab travelers such as Sulaiman, Al-Masudi, Abu Zaid, Al-Biduri, Ibn Haukal, Al Biruni, Muhammad Ufi and Ibn Batuta left rich accounts on India.

Besides the large number of literary sources, inscriptions from the period constitute a major source of information for the reconstruction of social history. Land-grants given to temples, priests and officials contain largest amount of epigraphical historical data for the period. The meagre archaeological and numismatic data have yet to prove their usefulness for the period.

14.3 DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

It was the national movement that brought the "question of women" to a central position. The socio-religious movement fought for the cause of women and many of the pre-colonial practices like *Sati* (widow-immolation), celibate widowhood, prohibition of widow remarriage, polygamy and child-marriage came under attack. Many Indian reformists and, later, nationalist-minded historians ventured into the ancient texts to study the position of women. Earlier studies were generally concerned with examining the social position of women with reference to certain select parameters such as their right to property, education and participation in assemblies, as well as their role and position in relation to their male relatives within the limited context of family. Earlier studies on women also primarily drew upon Brahmanical texts, ignoring their in-built gender bias. As a consequence of this selective reading and interpreation of sources, the nationalist history-writing generally projected a high social position of women in ancient India. Representative of such tendency is the highly influential work, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* by A.S.

Altekar who took same conventional position as earlier historians such as R. C. Dutt. They glorified Indian womanhood to reject imperialist writings and always remained selective in their approaches. Later, the Altekarian paradigm was challenged by almost all feminist historians who called it very limited and biased. For instance, Uma Chakaravarti, in her article, '*Beyond the Altekarian Pardigm: Towards a new Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian History'*, stressed on the urgent need to move forward and rewrite history that does justice to women. Since then, a large numbers of books and articles have been published on the status of women and gender relations by feminists and other historians.

As far as social classes are concerned, the nationalist history-writing generally ignored the study of such social institutions as caste, slavery and untouchability. However, some Marxist historians such as D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma produced excellent works on *Shudras*, untouchables, slavery and caste system. But they were more focused on the material conditions and disabilities of lower castes and the nature of their socio-economic relations with the higher *varn*as, rather than the broader dynamics of inter- and intra-class/caste relations. Marxist histories also characterized the early medieval period as one of *kali*-age social crisis; decline of trade, coinage and urban centers; increased ruralization of settlements; feudalisation of social, political and economic relations; decentralization and parcellization of political authority and, most importantly, the emergence of an exploitative 'feudal order'. The Marxist view was later challenged by other historians such as Herman Kulke and B. D. Chattopadhyaya using new interpretive models such as the segmentary or integrative state to study the developments in this period. These historians used the same set of sources but reached different conclusions and enhanced our understanding of the period. However, keeping in mind the vastness of sources at disposal, very few works were produced on the social dimensions of early medieval India.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss the various sources for the reconstruction of social history for the period from *c*. 700 to 1200 CE.

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2) Discuss the various perspectives on social structure and gender relations in the early medieval period.

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14.4   SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Early medieval period witnessed great transformations of the society with the proliferation of castes and sub-castes and their social mobility. This made the social situation more complex and fluid than before. On the one hand, the social transformations marked a significant departure from the simplistic ideal of a rigid social order, i.e. the four-fold *varna* system, advocated by the Brahmanical texts. On the other hand, the Brahmanical texts themselves captured the represented deflections from their ideal in the form of a social crisis known as *kali-yuga*. In the Brahmanical discourse, the *kali-yuga* was projected as the polar opposite of the other three preceding *yuga*s-*krita*, *treta* and *dvapara* in terms of societal decline. Descriptions of the *kali* age appear in the Epics and *Puranas* from about 3rd century CE onward and are also echoed in some early medieval texts and inscriptions. The *kali* age crisis not only represents a strong expression of dissatisfaction of the authors of Brahmanical texts with the perceived deviation from Brahmanical social norms, but also comments on the changing social situation in the early medieval period.

On the one hand, the Brahmanical scheme of *varnashrama-dharma* (the ideal division of society into *varnas*) and individual's life into *ashramas* (stages) continued to be reiterated in the early medieval texts such as the *Smritis*, commentaries (*Tika*, *Bhashya*, *Vritti*) on the *Dharmashastras*, compilations (*samgraha*) or digests (*nibandha*) of extracts from the *Dharmashastras* and *Puranas*. But, on the other hand, they also made significant departures in highlighting contemporary social changes. They offered fresh interpretations, modifications and occasionally substitutions in the light of changing social milieu of the early medieval period. Many of the early medieval texts created a binary between the *Brahmana* or *dvija* (twice-born) and all non-*Brahmanas* or *a-dvijas* (not twice-born). Here, the *Shudras* stand for all non-*Brahmana*s. This scheme of binary division was noticeable in Bengal and Tamil-speaking areas. Interestingly, this binary division omits the presence of two significance social groups: the *Kshatriya*s and the *Vaishya*s. Like the texts before, the early medieval Brahmanical texts also explained the proliferation of castes in terms of the concept of *varna-samkara* that denoted marriages among the *varna*s or between *varna*s and *mishrajati*s (mixed castes) or among the *mishrajati*s, all of which were thought to result in multiplicity of mixed castes (*mishrajati*s) and thereby, an expansion of caste hierarchy. In the inter-*varna* marriages, *anuloma* (hypergamy) and *pratiloma* (hypogamy) were conceived as causing *varnasamkara* (admixture of *varna*s). While both were not approved, the offspring of *anuloma* was put above that of *pratiloma* in the *varna* hierarchy. Nothing remained 'pure' when it came to caste level. The Brahmanical *varna-jati* system adopted various social groups within it, but also excluded many by placing them outside of it. Several indigenous tribes, frontier people, foreign migrants, occupational groups and religious sects were incorporated into the *varna-jati* order, while others were ostracized as *malechchhas*. However, the inclusion, exclusion and ranking of groups within the *varna-jati* scheme were never consistent and uniform in all texts. This suggests a considerably fluid and regionally vareigated social stratification and thereby explains the differences in Brahmanical perceptions on the constituent groups of the *varna-jati* system.

14.5 THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER – THE CASTES

The period witnessed great transformations in every aspect of society. Early medieval processes led to transformations from *varna* to *jati*s. The proliferation of *jati*s became a distinctive feature of the society. The society moved beyond the binary of *dvija* and *a-dvija*. Combinations and permutations within the *varna* order started the process of proliferation of *mishrajati*s or mixed castes. This is well attested by various sources including *Rajatarangini*, the twelfth-century chronicle from Kashmir. *Jati* created hierarchies at various levels. At the plank of intermixing itself three categories were created:*uttamasamkara*, *madhyamasamkara* and *adhamasamkara*. The *jati* system transformed simple sedentary societies into more complex endogamous groups. Occupational, indigenous and non-indigenous groups were incorporated at various levels within the *jati* system. Proliferation of *gotras* also continued in the period along with caste and reached upto 500 by fourteenth century CE.

14.5.1 Priestly Class to *Brahmana* Sub-Castes

The *Brahmanas* did not constitute a monolithic or homogenous group. They were subdivided into several *gotra*s, *pravara*s, *vamsha*s, *paksha*s, *anvaya*s, *gana*s, *gami*s, etc. Inscriptions use various descriptors such as *shrotiya, acharya, purohita, pandita, maharaja pandita, pathaka, tripathi, dvivedin, trivedin, chaturvedin, dikshita, yajnika, shukla, agnihotrin, avasathika, avasthin*. They also indicate that their identity varied according to their distinct territorial origins, ancestry or lineage, school of Vedic learning and priestly functions, etc. Notwithstanding these differences, their *varna* identity remained intact. The proliferation of *Brahmana* sub-castes also led to a monumental increase in the *gotras* in the early medieval period.The north-south binary led to the creation of two different set of *Brahmana*s associated with their regions: the *pancha-gauda*s (the northern group) and the *pancha-dravida*s (the southern group). Their territorial affiliations were narrowed down to important learning centers that they belonged to and even up to their native villages. For instance, in Bengal and Mithila, the *Brahmanas* were divided into number of sub-castes on the basis of their *gami*s and *mula*s.

They continued to occupy the upper echelons of the early medieval society through their power over land, ritual and scriptures. The proliferation of regional states also served the purpose of *Brahmana*s. In the struggle for power and legitimation, the *Brahmana*s received patronage from the emergent ruling families in return for creating concocted genealogies linking them to Epic and Puranic heroes and deities, and performing grand sacrifices for them. At the political level, the *Brahmana*s emerged as ideologues and legitimizers of political power. They were granted land with fiscal, administrative and judicial rights. Such land grants were made not only individually but also collectively or institutionally. The *Brahmana*s and their religious establishments such as temples or *matha*s emerged as the largest beneficiaries of land grants. The proliferation of polities accelerated land-grant donations to new areas and created a distinct class of landowners (*Brahmanaagraharin*s), who were neither feudatories nor agriculturists in the sense that they enjoyed land and revenue from it, without tilling it, without paying taxes or tributes to the ruler. In other words, they became feudal lords minus feudal responsibilities.

From the early medieval period onward the *Brahmana*s got incorporated into the rural society or agrarian community. They emerged as the major landholding community or rural landed aristocracy in the early medieval period. They empowered themselves through land grants, migrations, administration of Brahmanical temples and monastries and connection with the ruling elites. They acted as agents of transformation of diverse societies of the subcontinent. In this period they penetrated deep into the rural society via land grants and migrations. Study of land grants indicates that the *Brahmana*s appeared as donees in most of the cases. They were represented in both *agrahara* and non-*agrahara* settlements and helped in agrarian expansion. They were not only instrumental in setting up new settlements but also introduced class and caste society to the new settlements. Whether they cultivated land themselves or not cannot be ascertained but it is certain that they became part of the peasant household. They emerged as landed magnates and wielded their authority in nexus with other social groups like *mahattama*s, *kutumbins*, *kayastha*s, etc. This led to a further rise in their power based on rituals, scriptures and land. On the other hand, the ruling elites also reclaimed their authority in rural areas through *Brahmanas,* and led to further subinfeudation of rural society. The proliferation of regional polities also helped them in enhancing their status not only through land-grants but also by conferring extensive privileges, covering a vast range of sources, resources and rights. Both of them legitimized each other in the process. With command over vast resources and labor, the *Brahmana*s cemented their position in the rural society. Migratory networks, kinship relations, academic credentials, royal connections, all amplified the magnitude of their domination. The period also witnessed the emergence of Brahmanical religious centers or complexes across the subcontinent. The expansion of Brahmanism in rural areas enhanced the importance of priestly class in extravagant rituals, *varta*s and *prayaschitta*s. Apart from land-grants, they also received *dakshina* and *dana* in return for their services to common people.

Decline in the Vedic sacrificial rituals opened new avenues for the *Brahmana*s. Land grants, migrations, state-formation and agrarian expansion made a conducive environment for the *Brahmana*s to pursue non-religious occupations such as agriculture, trade, administrative and military services, etc. There are numerous examples in the epigraphic and literary sources of *Brahmana*s following a variety of occupations. Ksemendra's *Dashavataracharita* (11th century CE) disapprovingly describes some *Brahmana*s as following the degrading occupations of artisans, dancers, sellers of wine, clarified butter, salt, etc.; and others as becoming 'degraded' for giving up their religious duties. This, however, does not signify that they left their priestly vocation altogether. Proliferation in devotional cults, pilgrimages, worships, vows, penances and recitation of *Purana*s continued to supply them with a good source of income. They acquired considerable property and prestige on account of their relation with ruling elites, feudatories, land-grants and other kinds of gifts.

The *Brahmana*s not only adopted agriculture which was the primary occupation of *Vaishya-Shudra*s, but also took up various non-traditional professions including trade. Charudatta, the hero of the play *Mrichchhakatika*, is a merchant by profession and a 'pious' *Brahmana* by caste. It cannot be generalized that all members of the priestly class enjoyed material prosperity; some of them resorted to lower works as well. With the development of *jajmani* system the *Brahmana*s also became immobile and remained attached to local social groups who provided

patronage in lieu of services offered by the *Brahmana*s. Brahmanical texts did not attest *Brahmana*'s services to certain mixed castes. Those who served were declared degraded or *patita* equal to the status of the mixed castes they served. Al-beruni also mentions a degraded *Brahmana* called *Maga* or *Shakadvipi Brahmana*s of Iranian origin.

Sheer occupational diversity and clear gradation of status such as *raja-brahmana*s, *ksatra-brahmana*s, *vaishya-brahmana*sand even *shudra-brahmana*s provided both upward and downward mobility. A section of *Brahmana*s moved from landed aristocracy and acquired territorial powers and became the ruling elite of *kstriya* status. The combination of *brahma-kshatra* was not an open status so they dropped the Brahmana status and purely claimed *Kshatriya* origin. The emerging ruling families of Rajasthan, viz. Chahamanas, Pratiharas, and Guhilas, first claimed descent from the union of two *varna*s because of their *Brahmana* origin but took the role of *Kshatriyas*. But once they established themselves, they completely gave up *Brahmana* status.

Thus, we see that the *Brahmana*'s position became more complex and fluid in the early period owing to proliferation in the fields of economies and polities, acculturations and integrations; medieval distinctions and hierarchies among *Brahmana*s led to the emergence of numerous sub-castes of *Brahmana*s. Explorations for new land through land grants, integration of people within Brahmanical socio-economic-political and cultural fold made *Brahmana*s emerge as one of the affluent castes in the Indian subcontinent.

14.5.2 Emergence of Ruling Castes

The proliferation of regional polities or ruling houses led to many social transformations. Traditional *Kshatriyavarna* went into an ideal position and gave way to new clan-based social groups of what were called "*Rajputras* or *Rajputs*" of early medieval period. Early medieval works like *kumarapalacarita*, *varnaratnakara*, *rajatarangini*, etc. mention thirty-six clans of *rajputs*. But the list of 36 clans varies from text to text. While some clans like *chahmanas* and *pratiharas* did not face exclusion and occurred regularly in the list.

The origin of Rajput is a much debated topic; still it is difficult to conclude whether they were foreign immigrants or indigenous tribes or older *Kshatriyas* or *Brahmana*s or ranked feudatories or all. The proliferation of *Rajputs* points towards heterogeneous origins. From 8th century onwards many such groups emerged in western and central India and captured political space. Later on the same process was repeated in many parts of the Indian subcontinent which gave it a distinctive social identities. Many new lineages got incorporated into political status through the process of 'Rajputization'. The process of rajputization started from 7-8th century CE and reached its climax in 12th century CE. Rajputs enhanced their power and status through myths, marriage alliances, support of *Brahmana*s, sectarian bhakti cults etc. Many new clans of Rajput emerged and many major clans subdivided into minor clans. B. D. Chattopadhyaya explains the origin of Rajputs in association with the early medieval processes such as colonization of new regions through land grants, integration into supra regional structure, expansion of agriculture, extension of village economy, proliferation of castes etc. On the one hand tribes like the Medas reached Rajput status from a tribal background, on the other, foreign immigrant like the Hunas were also incorporated

into the Rajput status.The social upward mobility led many groups to compete for Rajput or a *Kshatriya* status.

Land grants also led to the emergence of new classes. Feudal lords or nobles emerged as a separate class. The *aprajitaprccha* of Bhatta Bhuvanadeva (12th century) provides eight categories of feudal vassals and distribute the houses scheme according to their hierarchy including *mahamandaleshvara*, *mandalika*, *mahasamanta*, *samanta* and *laghusamanta*. It recommends that the emperor or *samarata*, who holds the title of *maharajadhirajaparameshvara*, should have four *mandaleshvara*s, 12 *mandalika*s, 16 *mahasamanta*s, 32 *samanta*s, 160 *laghusamanta*s,and 400 *chaturasikas* in his court, below whom all others are known as *rajputra*s. It cannot be ascertained clearly whether these feudal lords held *Kshatriya* or Rajput status. But it is obvious that initially Rajputs were placed at a lower order of feudal hierarchy. Another contemporary text *Manasara* indicates that irrespective of *varna*s two military posts in feudal hierarchy–*praharaka* and *astragrahin*, were open to all *varnas*. Despite being lower in rank, the *astragrahin* was entitled to possess 500 horses, 5000 elephants, 50000 soldiers, 5000 women and one queen. Land and power became basis for emerging social and political classes. In early medieval period some of *vanij* castes or merchants and artisans were also conferred with feudal titles indicating military and administrative ranks. These administrative ranks enhanced the social status of the beholders. Titles like *thakur*, *raut* and *nayaka* were not only conferred on *Kshatriyas* or Rajputs but also *kayasthas* or members of other castes.The adoption of new titles like *rajputra*, *rajakula* or *ranaka* was not only limited to Rajput clans but also opened to a few outsiders. These titles were entirely different from feudal titles like *samanta*, *mahasamanta*, *laghusamanta*, etc. Adoption of these titles by various castes in modern time attests to the early medieval phenomenon.

In the formative phase all major Rajput clans like the Pratiharas, Guhilas, and Chahamanas claimed feudatory's status of established dynasties. They not only changed their political status by declaring sovereignty power but also claimed respectable social ancestry by claiming the Rajput status. They fabricated their genealogies and claimed the *Kshariya* status with a mythical past. In the 11-12th centuries CE the proliferation of Rajput clans was the result of a comprehensive social phenomenon called rajputization. Formation of sub-clans or minor clans from the main clans also intensified the process of proliferation of Rajputs. Doda, a sub-clan of the Paramaras. Pipadia and Mangalaya, sub-clans of the Guhilas; Devada, Mohila and Soni, sub-clans of the Chahamanas; and Dadhicha, a sub-clan of the Rathors,were formed in the course of time. Many factors contributed towards this sub-clan formation such as direct segmentation, localism, matrimonial alliances.

Divergent social groups got incorporated in the new socio-political fold of *rajputras* including *Shudra*s. That's why the *Brihaddharmapurana* regarded *rajputras* as a mixed caste and *Shudra-kamalakara* equates the Rajputs with *ugra*, a mixed caste born of the union of a *Kshatriya* man and a *Shudra* woman. Arab traveller Ibn Khurdadba's accounts (10th century CE) reveal two types of *Kshatriya*s: *sat-Kshatriya*s and *asat-Kshatriya*s. This binary division between pure and other *Kshatriyas* became an important feature of the 12thcentuy CE, attested by many texts and inscriptions, to segregate superior clans among the divergent ruling elites and disfavour others.

14.5.3 Proliferation of Trading Castes (the *Vaishyas*)

Vaishyavarna also underwent transformation during the early medieval period. Proliferation of castes led to inclusion of multiple professions within the *Vaishyavarna*. *Vaishya*s became synonymous with *vanij* or merchant during the period. Expansion of agriculture and conspicuous association of *Shudra*s with agriculture forced *Vaishya* to give up their traditional duties assigned by *shruti* literature. We have references of their settlements known as *vanijgrama*. Proliferation of crafts and various kinds of artisanal productions led to expansion of *vanij* castes primarily associated with gems, pearls, corals, metals, woven clothes, perfumes and condiments. By the early medieval period the *vanij* emerged as a dominant identity, and they gave up their *varna* identity. Some of *vanij* families from western India established their affluence and started patronizing religio-cultural activities. The 9th century Siyadoni inscription shows how a salt-dealer or *nemaka-vanija*, whose father was also *nemaka-vanija* and who made several donations to religious establishments and, at the end, became a member of *nemaka-jati*. This is how a hereditary profession turned into caste status rather than *varna*.

14.5.4 Proliferation of *Shudra*s

Early medieval period also witnessed great transformation in the fourth *varna* as well. Early medieval processes also led to the proliferation of number of low or inferior *Shudrajati*s or mixed castes. The emergence of such a large group is neither uniform and nor static. Some older names continued while some new were added at different intervals. *Brahmavaivartapurana* dated between 10th to 15th century CE from Bengal registered 17 *sat-Shudrajati*s and various *asat-Shudrajati*s, with *patita* and *adhama* titles implying their impure or untouchable status. The *Brihddharmapurana* from 12-13th century Bengal recorded 36 mixed castes or mixed *Shudras* of non-Brahmana status. It further divided them into 22 *uttama*, 12 *madhyama* and 9 *adhama* or *antyaja* categories. It seems 36 emerged a stereotype figure in early medieval times particularly in connection with class and castes. Mention of 36 clans of Rajputs became quite significant in the early medieval literatures. The number of *jati*s rose up to thousands or were too numerous to be counted in early medieval time. The *vishnudharmamottarapurana* (8th century CE) refers to the origin of thousands of mixed castes. Chinese traveler Xuanzang also refers to numerous castes.

14.5.5 The New Castes: The Kayasthas and the Vaidyas

Sometimes untouchables were also called the fifth *varna*. Certain groups were placed at the bottom of social hierarchy, henceforth; they faced severe socio-cultural segregation and discrimination by *varna-jati* order. The notion is as old as later Vedic period. They were first noticed in 600 BCE in the forms of *Chandala, Magadha* and *Paulkasa*. It cannot be said with certainty whether it was practiced during that time or not. But it is evident that they were treated differently. Around 200 CE the notion took a definite shape in the early *Dharmasutras*, *Arthashastra* and *Manusmriti*. *Chandala* became a synonym for untouchable and treated such by the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina texts. Along with *Chandala*, *Shvapaka* and *antayavasayin* became permanent source of pollution and various disabilities were imposed on them. They were also assigned lowly or impure occupations such as those of cremators, refuse-cleaners and executioners.

The practice of untouchability intensified in the early medieval period Brahmanical law books like *visnusmriti* and *katyayanasmriti* used the word 'asprishya' for first time. More groups were added to the list but *Chandala* and *Shvapaka* continued to be treated as untouchables and they were saddled with more taboos. They were also distinguished from *Shudra*s. Chinese traveler Fahsien also attests to complete social, occupational and physical segregation of *Chandala*s. Same treatment was also given by Buddhist and Jaina texts. In 12th century untouchability reached its peak. Expansion of Brahmanical society to new areas led to the inclusion of varied occupational groups and tribes into the untouchable fold. Notion of ritual purity and impurity sharpened more and that became a transmittable even through sight, shadow, touch, water and food. The *Chandala*s were the worst hit. Some existing groups with taboos were also designated untouchables which included *Charmakara, Rajaka, Buruda, Nata, Chakri, Dhvaji, Shaundika*, hunters, fishermen, butchers, executioners and scavengers. Beef-eaters or *gavasanah* were for the first time made untouchable. Several aboriginal tribes such as *Bhilla*s, *Kaivarta*s, *Meda*s and *Kolika*s were also made untouchables because of their refusal of Brahmanical order. But they are not met with the same treatment like the mainstream untouchables such as *Chandala* and *Shvapaka*. *Kaivarta* and *Nishada* were not registered as untouchables in all the Brahmanical texts. Some agricultural castes were also labeled as untouchables due to their opposition to the Brahmanical system. Attempts were also made to create hierarchy among untouchables on the basis of degree of untouchability associated with different groups. Sometimes *Shudras* were also identified as untouchables particularly *asat-Shudra*s. In nutshell, the untouchability was used as a weapon of exclusion at one hand; on the other hand, it was used to suppress the voice of dissent. But all untouchables were not excluded from society. Some early medieval Brahmanical texts provide exceptional references. The *Smrityarthasara* permits the untouchables to enter temples. *Atrismriti* and Devanna Bhatta's *smritichandrika* allow mixing with untouchables on several occasions such as in festivals, battles and religious processions; during calamities and invasions of the country. *Rajatarangini* also provides opposite pictures where *Dombas* and *Chandalas* appear to be playing a prominent role in court politics; Kalhana however also reveals the horror of untouchability increasing in his age.

14.5.6 The Untouchables

The emergence of *Kayastha* as a community of the scribes is another important social development of the period. Proliferation of land grants created a class of inscriber or document writers or keepers of record. They were known variously as *kayastha, karana, karanika, adhikr, pushtapalaka, chitragupta, lekhaka, divira, dharmalekhin, aksaracana, akshapatalika and akshapataladhikrta*. Out of these dozen categories, they formed one class of *kayastha*. Initially literate persons from upper *varna*s were appointed as *Kayastha*; later on, writing documents became an open profession for all. When the profession became hereditary it took the shape of caste where members practiced class endogamy and marriage exogamy. *Kayastha*'s *varna* association could not be established exactly because of their linkage with both *dvija*s and *advija*s or *Shudra*s.

Brahmanical normative texts declared *Ambastha*s or *Vaidya*s or physicians as *Shudra* and barred the *dvijas* from taking their profession. There might be various reasons – perhaps because of their scientific outlook or perhaps their association with Buddhist monasteries. Besides the ban, many groups adopted the profession

and became physicians by defying normative texts. As usual the practice became hereditary and the profession turned into a caste. When *Brahmana*s themselves started practicing the profession in Brahmanical monasteries, the prejudice against the profession declined significantly. The composition of treaties in medicine, botany and veterinary science also uplifted the spirit of the profession and the caste.

14.6 TRIBES

Land grants made in interior countryside along with villages and patches of forests led state society to come face to face with tribes inhabited there. Many inscriptions indicate that the transition from pre-state society to state society or peasantization was not peaceful at all. They resisted both state and new ideology but both succeeded in subjugating and converting tribes into Brahmanical socio-cultural fold. In return *Brahmana*s appropriated tribal cults into the Brahmanical fold. Cult appropriation also served the political purpose of the ruling class. Jagannatha cult of Puri is the best example of tribal integration which emerged under the patronage of Ganga dynasty(11-15th century) in early medieval Orissa. Entire tribe did not convert to *jati* or *varna*. Some groups from the same tribe were incorporated at the highest level (i.e., as *Brahmana* or *Kshatriya*) or at the lowest level (i.e., as *Shudra* or even untouchables). Brahmanised tribal groups such as *AbhiraBrahmana*s, *Ambastha Brahmana*s and Boya *Brahmana*s are some best examples. Boyas who were prominent tribal community in the Nellore-Guntur region of Deccan, turned into *Brahmana*s and emerged as prominent local power of the Deccan.

14.7 SLAVES

Slavery existed since the early Vedic period but slaves were never incorporated into production-related activities and remained confined to the so-called impure household tasks such as sweeping, removing human excreta and rendering personal services to the master. Slaves were never a homogenous class. The *Arthashastra* enumerates five types of slaves; the *Manusmriti*, seven types and the *Naradasmriti*, fifteen types. There were distinctions among slaves based on their birth, purchase, mortgage, gift, inheritance, voluntary enslavement, capture in war, indebtedness, etc. The slaves or *dasas* were distinct from hired servants. *Shudraka*'s *Mrichchhakatika* provides a vivid picture of slavery. Slaves were items of sale and purchase. The *dasaputra* or son of slave and *dasaputri* or daughter of slave, were repeatedly used as abuses. *Lekhapaddhati*, a 13th century text, provides in detail the manifold duties of a female slave in household and fields and even permits sending them overseas. Slaves totally depended on their masters for their livelihood. They did not have any kind of proprietary rights. They were physically abused. The *Lekhapaddhati* refers to a female slave being tortured and driven to commit suicide. But their emancipation was possible. *Naradasmriti* provides elaborate provisions for it.

Slavery existed in south India since the late *Sangam* period. In south India, slaves were considered as private property. Inscriptions record that both male and female, were sold to temples where females were employed as 'temple-women'. Slaves were also transferable as a part of dowry in marriages. In some cases slavery was voluntary where depressed families offered themselves to temples.

14.8   *MALECCHAS*

The concept was not new; it was introduced much before the early medieval period. It was generally used for those people who did not accept the values, ideas or norms of the Brahmanical society. It was primarily used for foreigners and indigenous tribes. The framework was used to safeguard the Brahmanical social system and to create a dichotomy between the cultured and barbarians. The notion of *Malecchas* was not fixed but varied across time and space. The *Maleccha* groups were heterogeneous in nature. In early medieval period, large numbers of tribes were incorporated into the expanding Brahmanical society at various levels. However some of them resisted Brahmanical social order or the expanding state society; they remained outside and designated as *Malecchas.* Several early medieval texts speak about *Malecchas* such as *BrhaddarmaPurana, Varna ratnakara* etc. In these literatures some tribes like *Bhillas, Pulindas* and *Sabaras*of Vindhyanvallays were depicted as anti-social. *Rajatarangini* also represents some of *Maleccha* chiefs of Astor, Skanda and Gilgit region as backward and outsiders in the pale of the Kashmiri culture.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Which statement is true or false for early medieval social classes? Write against each

   a) Brahamans emerged as rural landed magnets in the early medieval period.   ( )

   b) *Kayasthas* and *Vaidyas* emerged as new castes in the early medieval India   ( )

   c) Slaves were also engaged in production work   ( )

   d) All tribes were incorporated as either shudras or untouchables   ( )

   e) The notion of *Maleccha* declined in the early medieval time   ( )

2) Discuss the status of untouchables in this period.

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3) Discuss the changing status of *sudras* in early medieval period.

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14.9 GENDER RELATIONS

With the expansion of agrarian economy during the early medieval period, landed property emerged as the most valuable form of wealth. The new emerging states or regional polities wielded much power and exercised superior land rights over every type of land. Extensive land grants were made at regional and sub regional level, leading not only to expansion of state society but also eviction of traditional rights of the tillers. *Brahmana*s ventured into new areas through land grants and accumulated vast land holdings on behest of non-*Brahmana*s. The above mentioned socio-economic, political and cultural developments made gender relations more complex in the early medieval time. The gender relations could easily be understood by studying women's position in the patriarchal society with reference to her property rights, say in marriages, widowhood, sati system, education and some exceptional roles in politics or administration.

14.9.1 Property Rights of Women

Brahmanical law books recognized woman's right to inherit property in the absence male heirs. Women's right to property family indicates hold over property and reduced the possibilities of its seizure by state. Jimutavahana's *Dayabhaga* (12th century CE) and Vijnaneshvara's *Mitakshara* (11th century CE) also recognized the widow's right to inherit. But this was not practiced across the Indian sub-continent. Inscription of king Kumarapala of Gujarat dated to 1150 CE prescribes widow's right to inherit her husband's landed property. Another from Achchalpuram, Tamil Nadu, of Rajaditya Chola II talks about *sabha* or assembly's decision of a *brahmadeya* village to permit a widow to inherit the lands and other properties of her husband.

The earlier rights of women in the form of *stridhana* expanded in the early medieval period. Early medieval commentaries and digests amplify the scope of *sridhana*. *Mitakshara* interprets it as property of any kind belonging to the *women*. But the definition is not uniform in all texts. Some texts like *Dayabhaga* and *Smritichandrika* recognized the very limited scope of *stridhana*. Initially *stridhana* was largely limited to movable wealth. But women did not have absolute ownership rights to dispose the property through sale, mortgage or gift. Women were given only the right to possess. Family had superior rights over immovable property.

Early medieval inscriptions also indicate that a few of queens and wives of feudatories became fief-holder in the lifetime of their partners. Some of them donated their fiefs to temples and *Brahmana*s to gain religions merit. Some of them contributed towards religious architecture, repair and renovation of temple and tanks. This shows that upper class women had considerable rights and resources at their disposal. The practice was very common among Chola queens and princesses, indicating that they might have enjoyed personal allowance or personal property. Temple dancing girls or *tevaratiyal* were also assigned shares in temple land, revenue and taxes. They had landholding rights in the temple land. Women's landholding rights varied according to their social status. *Rajatarangini* also mentions many women donors and builders in Kashmir including female rulers (Sugandha, Didda and Suryamati); queens (Ratnadevi) and some non-royal woman (e.g., Sussala, Chinta, Valga, and Sambavati).

While women had limited control over resources, males had undisputed right over land and other resources and controlled it through family, fief and state system. Brahmanical normative laws also serve the cause of male domination over women's rights. The concept of gender equality was almost invisible. The Kashmir story is exceptional in this case where both men and women defied the traditionally recognized roles and undertook same projects of donation, buildings construction.

14.9.2 Marriage and Divorce

Besides the property rights to women, women's position in compassion to their men folk within and outside the household also indicate their gender relations. Marriage is the root of family from where gender relations generate. In the earlier period *anuloma* marriage was encouraged and *pratiloma* marriage was strongly disfavored. Both these marriages resulted in inter-mixing of *varna*s and *jati*s. In the same fashion, in the early medieval period marriage of *dvija* or *dvijati* men with other girls was disqualified. Some texts allowed the union but only for sexual gratification. In certain exceptional circumstances such union was allowed. *Smriticandrika* allowed such unions and framed rules of inheritance for the offsprings. In such cases, offspring were not granted same social status as of their parents but lower than them (*anuloma* marriage). In case of *pratiloma* marriage, irrespective of their *varna-jati* status, offspring were given *Shudra* status or less than that. But marriage rules were not fixed. It was more fluid than it was projected.

Early medieval texts increasingly lowered the marriageable age of girls while prescribing no rules for men. Pre-puberty marriage was made common. Al-beruni observed the same thing among Hindus and the normal age for a *Brahmana* bride was 12 years. Early marriage made girls more vulnerable to patriarchal domination. But the practice of pre-puberty marriage was not universally followed across all classes and strata of population. In south India as well, the pre-puberty marriage and bride price (dowry) became the norms of society. A girl's birth was not welcomed in the family. The discrimination against the girl child was sharper in upper classes than in lower classes. In corollary to simple form of marriages, re-marriage was made next to impossible or only in exceptional circumstances.

14.9.3 Widowhood and *Niyoga*

Brahma Purana allows remarriage of a child widow or one forcibly abandoned or abducted. While Medhatithi, commentary on *Manusmriti*, and others disapproves widow remarriage. The same practice was not observed among lower castes. *Lekhapaddhati* reveals that divorce was very common among the lower section of society while rules for divorce were not enshrined in the Brahmanical texts. Thus, upper-caste men exercised strong control over their women through the institution of marriage and prohibition of divorce.

The Brahmanical literature also disfavoured the earlier practice of *niyoga* and the views remained divided on the issue of paternity of the child born out of *niyoga*. Some ascribed paternity to the biological father and some to the husbands or to both. The practice became deeply problematic during the early medieval period and it seems that women increasingly lost their control over their reproductive capacity. Further, *niyoga*, especially of a woman with her younger

brother-in-law, challenged the gender hierarchy on the one hand, the kinship hierarchy on the other. Under such circumstances, along with the complex inheritance laws, the practice of *niyoga* was increasingly discarded in the early medieval period.

The plight of women worsened in the early medieval period. More restrictions were added on the widowhood in the early medieval texts. They prescribed the tonsure of head of widows along with austere, ascetic and celibate life. They also put restriction on diet, attire and self-adornment. In South India, under Brahmanical influence situation worsened after 7th century CE. The tonsure of head was an early Tamil practice, later adopted by north India.

14.9.4 *Sati* System (Widow-Burning)

The practice of widow-burning or *sati* became a more pronounced practice in the early medieval India. Textual and inscriptional records show it but it was mainly confined to upper strata more particularly to ruling and military elite. The practice was a product of patriarchal and patrilocal society where women and her sexuality were considered a danger or threat to the society. Physical death through immolation was considered easy than the prolonged or permanent widowhood leading to torture of body and soul both. The practice was also valorized as an act of courage and expression of fidelity. In northern India, practice of *sati* was more popular in the North-West, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The Brahmanical texts had divergent opinions on the issue. Medhatithi disapproves the practice. But sati got practiced. Non-canonical texts and epigraphic data also attest to it. *Rajatarangini* also records several instances of *sati* practice in the royal families of Kashmir. Here, not only royal women but also near relatives concubines, minister, servants and nurses burnt themselves on the funeral pyre of the masters.

Bana also talks about the practice in *Harshacharita*. *Sati* memorial stones from western Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and, *Satisatta* plaques from Ahichchhatra also attest to the practice. The practice was glorified everywhere in India, but it remained more a status symbol than a common custom of all communities. Like hero stones, the sati stones became the symbol of women's valour.

14.9.5 Women's Education

Women were not considered fit for formal education. *Mitakshara* explains that women are like *Shudra*, having no right to *upanayana* ritual which debars women from entering into educational life. Asahaha, 8th century commentator on *Naradasmriti*, justify the woman's dependency on the ground that they lacked proper education and well developed understanding. Elite women had some access to education and military training. Lower caste women had traditional training of their caste based professions, crafts and folk knowledge. There are some stray references of Sanskrit poetesses. Eminent poet of 9th century, Rajashekhara refers to some poetesses, such as Shilabhattarika, Vijjika, Prabhudevi, Vikatanitamba and Subhadra. He says that 'like men, women can also be poets'. The poet Dhanadeva also mentions some poetesses such as Morika and Marula who are adept in writing poetry, achieved education, won debates and attained proficiency in speaking about everything. However, we could not get a single *kavya* written by any poetess; even the verses attributed to them are limited in number (about 140 verses ascribed to 33 poetesses). The

authorship of these verses could not be determined easily, since they are not part of any specific *kavya*. Women's position in society could be understood by the study of *natya* literature. In the *natya* literature, even the high-class women are denied speech in Sanskrit which was generally meant for high born males. In *Mrichchhakatika*, in exceptional case the *ganika* Vasantasena speaks in Sanskrit, while other high-class women speak in other dialects than Sanskrit. In *Shringaramanjarikatha*, Bhasa describes *ganika* Shringaramanjari as the epitome of learning and culture. The gendered Sanskrit literature of early medieval period shows a very marginal position of literate women.

14.9.6 Some Exceptional Roles: Women in Politics or Administration

Not only Sanskrit literature got gendered, every entity got gendered – the earth, the realm, all were assigned feminine character. Political domain remained essentially masculine, but women worked in different capacities which marked a specific feature of gender relations in the early medieval period. Whereas Brahmanical literature favoured male and denied women public roles of authority, *Rajtarangini* revealed the best examples of female rulership of early medieval period. The text not only highlights the women sovereign rulers but also of women's agency behind the throne. The texts provides the reign of three female rulers of Kashmir (Yashovati, Sugandha and Didda of Gonda, Utpala and Yashakara dynasties respectively) in opposition to 104 male rulers. The text also justifies the female rulership in terms of divine sanction, popular demands and regency of a minor male heir to throne. Besides the rulers, a large number of women also participated actively in court politics in different capacities as queen, princesses, low caste wives, concubines and servant girls. Besides these royal women, courtesans, temple dancers, wives and mother of *damaras* and widows were also depicted as playing important roles in court politics. Besides politics, some royal and non-royal women were also shown patronizing religious buildings and other activities. However, the nature of society and state remained patriarchal in nature with some non-patriarchal possibilities. The power these royal women exercised essentially remained patriarchal and masculine in nature. Not only in Kashmir where women ascended to the throne in the absence of male heir but similar cases come also from different parts of sub-continent. Vijayamahadevi became the ruler after her husband's death in Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi. Divabbarasi also ruled in lieu of her minor son for the Kadambas of Vanavasi in Karnataka. We could also get same references from Bhaumakaras of Orissa and Kakatiyas of Warangal (Andhra Pradesh) where women became rules. Besides being rulers, some of the royal women were appointed as governors, administration, village chieftain, counselor etc. Some women succeeded in breaching the ideological bastion of men. The gap between textual representation and actual practices was reconciled through reversal of gender imagery. The proliferation of regional polities and its decentralized nature served the purpose of women's rulership. The overlapping of politics and kinship provided avenues and enabled women to exercise supreme authority at several occasions and in different regions. Cross-cousin marriages and matrimonial alliances among royal families also allowed women to use their maternal connections politically and socially even after marriage. Nevertheless, women's participation in power politics did not remain uniform in the early medieval time and space.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Which statement is true or false for early medieval gender relations? Write against each.

   a) *Dayabhaga* and *Mitaksara* recognized the widow's right to inherit

   (   )

   b) Temple dancer girls were not assigned shares in temple land, revenue and taxes   (   )

   c) Brahmanical literature favoured *Niyoga*.   (   )

   d) Women were considered fit to take formal education   (   )

   e) Female ruler Didda belonged to Yasakara dynasty.   (   )

2) Discuss the status of widows in this period.

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3) Discuss the roles of royal and non-royal women in politics and administration.

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14.10 SUMMARY

The study of social structure and gender relations in this period highlights the followings:

- Early medieval society was not static but very transformative.

- The fluid nature of society got well attested to in the transformation of social structure.

- A hierarchy of rights and statues existed at all levels of social structure.

- Land grants strengthened the position of Brahmanas in rural areas, and they emerged as landed magnates in this period.

- Brahman *varna* also got divided into various sub-castes based on their associations with learnings, locality, villages, regions etc.

- Early medieval India witnessed the rise of a new ruling class through the process of Rajputization.

- *Rajputs* were not a homogeneous group but were divided into numerous clans.

- Gradually *vaishyas* left agriculture and became a trading community. Many new *vanij* castes emerged due to the incorporation of new professions.

- This period witnessed upper social mobility for shudras. Shudras became agriculturists due to the expansion of agriculture in new areas. New castes were added in the shudra fold. More untouchable castes were added to the list. Brahmanical literature imposed more restrictions on them.

- The period also witnessed the emergence of some new castes like the *kayastha* and *vaidyas*, cutting across *varnas* and caste system.

- Remote areas were brought under state society, leading to subjugation of indigenous tribes or incorporation into Brahmanical order. The dissent groups were suppressed by assigning a *shudra* or untouchable status.

- Slavery existed but remained confined to household works.

- The notion of *maleccha* was used for those who either did not accept Brahmanical ideology or remained outside of it.

- The condition of women worsened in this period. Though lawgivers recognized women's right to inherit property in the absence of a male heir. The notion of *sridhana* also expanded in this period.

- The marriageable age of girls lowered to pre-puberty. Lawgivers did not formulate the law for divorce. Anuloma marriages were encouraged, and pratiloma marriages were disfavoured.

- More restrictions were put on widows, and widow burning or *sati* became rampant — Brahmanical literature disfavoured Niyoga.

- Women were not considered fit for formal education.

- Some upper-class women had great control or access to resources, and they also played significant roles in politics or administration. However, these were exceptional examples which could not be used to produce a generalized picture of women's status in this period.

14.11 KEY WORDS

Dvija	:	literally meaning 'twice born'; those entitled to perform *upanayana* (sacred thread) ceremony
Gotra	:	the clan system of brahmanas later applicable on non-brahmanas as well
Anuloma	:	marriage between higher varna male and lower varna female
Pratiloma	:	reversal of *Anuloma*. Marriage between lower *varna* male and higher *varna* female
Patriarchy	:	A social system where male exercises domination over women
Agrahara	:	land or village gifted by a king.

Niyoga : an ancient tradition in which a woman is allowed to have sex with her deceased husband's brother to produce progeny.

14.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) Base your answer on section 14.2

2) Base your answer on section 14.3

Check Your Progress 2

1) a) True. b) True c) False d) False and e) False.

2) Base your answer on section 14.5.6

3) Base your answer on section14.5.4

Check Your Progress 3

1) a) True. b) False c) False d) False and e) True.

2) Base your answer on section 14.9.3 and 14.9.4

3) Base your answer on section 14.9.6

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UNIT 15 GROWTH OF ART, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: *C*. 300 CE TO 1206*

Structure

15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will know:

- why is the Gupta period known as the "Golden Age" in the field of culture;

- the active patronage bestowed by the Gupta rulers to art, language and literature;

- unprecedented development of architecture, sculpture and painting in the Gupta phase;

- the great advancement and refinement attained by Sanskrit language during this time; and

- the outburst of literary activity and impressive standards set by literature of this era.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The Gupta period has often been referred to as "Golden Age" due to its cultural heritage. This applies to great accomplishments in the field of art, language and literature. The Gupta age, thus, stands out as a significant and noteworthy departure from previous historical periods, particularly in the cultural history of India due to impressive standards achieved by artistic and literary expressions of this time. The Gupta rulers worshipped Hindu gods and goddesses, patronised Sanskrit scholars and bestowed lavish prosperity on the artists. Under them, art and literature attained a level of excellence unlike under none of their predecessors. It is true that art and architecture had been promoted and encouraged by the Vakatakas, but it was under the Guptas that they became a widespread phenomenon. One can also logically surmise that the kings, nobility and other

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rich people had that kind of wealth that they could invest a substantial part of their income to financially support those engaged in literature and art.

In this Unit we will try to explain the cultural development and cultural legacy of the Guptas through the pointers of Art, Language and Literature. The Gupta sovereigns supported cultural pursuits on a large scale and its result is evident in the form of both literary and archaeological masterpieces that we will now throw light on.

15.2 GROWTH OF ART

In this section we will try to familiarize you with the remarkable progress of art in this period in the context of architecture, sculpture and painting.

15.2.1 Architecture

The Gupta period is known as the phase of Brahmanical resurgence. The Gupta kings were keenly interested in building temples and installing images of their devoted gods (*ishta-deva*) therein. The *Bhakti* ideology and increasing significance of image worship resulted in the building of free-standing temples with a cella or sanctuary called the *Garbhagriha* in which the image of the deity was housed. Many such temples are known from this period. The building medium was stone or brick. Initially, they were small structures with central shrines having roofs with spouts for easy drainage of water. The earliest of extant Gupta temples is Temple no.17 near the *chaitya*-hall at Sanchi. It is well-designed. It constitutes an enclosed cella in the form of a square chamber and columned portico or varendah in front. This plan became the basic idea for erecting the temples of later Gupta and post-Gupta period.

The Gupta temple-building activity represents evolution from the earlier tradition of rock-cut shrines which now reached a whole new level. It marks the formative phase of temple construction in India, but it was a significant phase that continued to influence temple-building right up to the medieval period. This age prepared the ground for immense possibilities for the future that laid the foundation of characteristic styles of Indian temple architecture.

The Gupta period reflects creative enthusiasm and deep sense and awareness of beauty. These are evident in the following surviving specimens:

- *Dashavatara* temple at Deogarh in Jhansi district (UP),

- Bhitargaon temple near Kanpur (UP),

- Vishnu temple at Tigawa (Jabalpur district, MP),

- Shiva temple at Bhumara (Satna district, MP) and Khoh (Bharatpur district, Rajasthan),

- Parvati temple at Nachna-Kuthara (Panna district, MP),

- temple dedicated to the Sun-god at Ashramaka (Satna district, MP) and Mandsaur (MP),

- Yaksha temple at Padmavati (modern Pawaya) near Gwalior (MP),

- temple at Bhitari (Ghazipur district, UP),

- a great temple complex and accompanying sculptures at Eran (Sagar district, MP) etc.

It is important to note that a temple in ruined state, but of immense artistic merit and value, has been found along the bank of the river Brahmaputra at the present Darrang district of Assam. It shows that temple building activity was not confined to the geographical heartland of the Guptas.

Some of these temples are adorned with beautiful relief sculptures that do not look awkward because they complement architectural scheme of the temple. The fragmentary Deogarh temple, dedicated primarily to Vishnu, attracts one's attention due to the conception of ornate sculptural reliefs such as:

- the *Nara-Naranaya* relief,

- the *Gajendramoksha* relief,

- ''Vishnu on Shesha'' relief etc.

It has a square chamber with the image of primary deity. Each of the four corners of this plinth has a subsidiary shrine that encased a secondary deity. This is one of the earliest evidences of *Panchayatana* (five-shrine) kind of temples which were built on a large scale in later times and reflected the expanding domain of gods and goddesses in Hindu pantheon. Many such temples have sculptural panels wherein the leading god is given central position with subsidiary deities surrounding him. And in many instances, the chief deity is larger in size and scale than his subordinate gods.

The high and elaborately carved *shikharas* (towers) on top were yet to register their appearance. But, the germination of this idea can be seen in the brick temple at Bhitargon and miniature depiction of temples on sculptural panels of the temple.

Alongside erection of structures, cave architecture was also in vogue. The breathtakingly beautiful paintings at the caves of Ajanta are known from this time. The cave temple at Udayagiri near Vidisha (MP) also belongs to this period. Twenty rock-cut chambers were carved inside the cave, two of which have inscriptions securely dated to the reign of Chandragupta II. These carvings are important because they are the earliest intact body of Hindu art in India. They constitute evidence of the fact that many Hindu iconographic ideas were already well established by early 5th century CE.

It needs to be kept in mind that prolific architectural activity, though centered primarily around the Brahmanical religion, was not confined to it. We have evidence of structural remains of magnificent *Stupas*, *Chaityas* and *Viharas* of the Gupta period from the Buddhist sites of:

- Sarnath (UP),

- Nalanda (Bihar),

- Rajgir (Nalanda district, Bihar),

- Jaulian and Mohra Maradu (both near Taxila in Pakistan),

- Pushkalavati (ancient Gandhara region of present-day Pakistan) etc.

The Dhamekh *stupa* at Sarnath is striking on account of a variety of geometric patterns and artistic designs. The earliest brick structure of the Buddhist University

at Nalanda founded by Kumaragupta I belongs to this era. The 300 feet tall Buddha temple at Nalanda is another fine architectural exhibit from this time. There is historical evidence that Buddhist *chaityas*, cave structures in western Maharashtra and monasteries at Kanheri, Bhaja, Junnar, Bedsa and Mahar (all in Maharashtra) were commissioned not only by the aristocracy but also by affluent guilds, merchants and artisans. Similarly, many *Stupas* and *Viharas* came up in *Andhradesha* (parts of the present Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka). The *Mani-naga* Jaina temple at Rajgir is also known from this period.

15.2.2 Sculpture

Gupta sculpture demonstrates master execution and high degree of skill. Prime contribution of this age lies in the development of perfect images: both Brahmanical and Buddhist. It looks to the viewer that the sculptor's chisel transformed stone into creations of permanent beauty and grace. It can be convincingly argued that a firm, intelligent and thorough understanding and grasp of fundamental principles and true aims of sculpture, a highly developed notion of beauty and expertise in steady hands characterizes the image-making activity of this period.

Innumerable sculptures of a host of Brahmanical deities like Vishnu, Shiva, Kartikeya, Ganesha, Surya etc. as well as Buddhist and Jaina figures such as the Buddha, *Bodhisattva*, *Tirthankara* etc. are known from this period.

Vaishnavism and Shaivism were popular sects, patronised by the Gupta kings, and sculptors made the images of their principal deities on a regular basis, which reveal an easy expertise in the handling of Puranic legends such as stories of the incarnations (*avataaras*) of Vishnu as well as the lesser Vaishnavite deities. Representations from the lives of Rama and Krishna found effective success in the temple sculptures at Deogarh. A human-size statue of Hari-Hara (syncretic union of Vishnu and Shiva) is found from MP. The two halves of the combined depiction are easily recognizable on the basis of differences in headdress and other features. A fine specimen of "Krishna Lifting Mount Govardhana"[1] is recovered from Arra (Varanasi district, UP). Epigraphic evidence from Eran documents brisk artistic activity from the time of Samudragupta till the Huna invasion around the beginning of 6th century CE. A large sculpture of Varaaha (boar incarnation of Vishnu) was found here. It has boar head and human body. He is shown rescuing and lifting the earth (in human form as goddess Prithvi) on his tusks from submersion in the ocean. This is the artistic manifestation of a Puranic tale[2]. A double-sided image of Garuda atop a pillar was also recovered here. The two lions at his feet bear resemblance to the Mauryan Lion Capital and this shows that possibly, some earlier art traditions or at least their ideas continued in the Gupta period.

The Shiva cult still revolved around phallic worship and we find beautiful *Ekamuhki Shivalinga* in the temples at Khoh and Udayagiri. However, we do find several images of Shaivite deities like Skanda from places like Udayagiri, Vidisha and Eran. Images of goddesses Lakshmi, Durga and Parvati are also known. That Sun worship was prevalent around the present region of Bengal is evidenced in the images of Sun-god found here.

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[1] To save the Vrindavan people from the deluge sent by lord Indra who was enraged by their neglecting praying to him.

[2] It finds mention in the *Vishnu Purana*.

We highlighted in the previous sub-section the significance of Udayagiri cave complex from the vantage point of architecture. Here, it becomes relevant to bring out its importance from the perspective of sculpture. You have read that this site demonstrates that Hindu iconography had already evolved by the early 5th century CE. This is said because of the wide range of gods and goddesses carved in this cave complex:

i)   Two goddesses standing atop *makaras* (alligators), which are believed to be the precursors of the representations of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna riding an alligator and a tortoise respectively.

ii) Two *dvarapaalas* (guardian figures) flanking the door of the facade.

iii) Ganesha.

iv) Durga in her Mahishasurmardini (killing the buffalo-demon Mahisha) form. It is a 12-armed image, suggesting the trend towards deployment of multiple body parts as representations of the manifold powers and functions of deities.

v)   Two depictions of Vishnu.

vi) *Saptamaatrikas* (seven mothers): consorts of various principal gods who helped Shiva kill the multiple versions and forms of an *asura* (demon) named Andhaka. They are proof that some of the Puranic legends were well-developed by this time.

vii) Large-scale image of Varaaha and accompanying scenes. It is strikingly similar to the Varaaha from Eran.

viii) River goddesses Ganga-Yamuna on both side walls behind the Varaaha.

ix) *Ekamukha* (one-faced) *Linga*.

Apart from the sculptures of Brahmanical gods discussed above, several stone and bronze images of the Buddha are discovered at various excavated sites like:

*   Nalanda (Bihar),

*   Mathura (UP),

*   Sarnath (UP),

*   Paharpur (Bihar),

*   Ajanta (Maharashtra),

*   Nagarjunakonda (Andhra Pradesh) etc.

They are the evidence of exemplary toleration granted by the Gupta emperors of Brahmanical faith to heterodox sects, religious freedom enjoyed by these sects and the peaceful coexistence of these sects with the Brahmanical religion. They also convey the idea that the Gupta period was a golden age for Buddhist art too. The rich Buddhist and Jaina devotees did not lag behind in installing awe-inspiring images of the Buddha, *Bodhisattvas* and Jaina *tirthankaras*. These pieces exhibit perfect combination of inner spirit, with stress on increased spiritual expression, and outer form. The workman of Gupta period introduced some new elements in fashioning the Buddha image and these innovations became the hallmarks of this period. For example:

*   Curly hair as opposed to the shaven head of Kushana Buddha statue.

*   Wide range of postures (*mudras*) including hand-poses.

- The Gupta sculptor is restrained by a conscious sense of morality. Drapery in the Kushana art was deployed to reveal the charm of the flesh. But, drapery in Gupta art was made to conceal the flesh. Nudity of any sort is completely eliminated.

- More spiritual calmness is noticed in the Buddha statue of the Gupta phase than that made under the Gandhara and Mathura schools of art of the preceding centuries.

- The Hellenistic influence visible in the Gandhara style was altogether abandoned in the Gupta times.

Among numerous Buddha images recovered from Sarnath the most extraordinary is that of the compassionate Buddha rested on a diamond seat in preaching (*dharmachakra pravarttana*) mode, giving his first sermon. It is noteworthy for its calm smile and serene contemplative attitude. The influence of this Sarnath style reached up to eastern and western India as well as Deccan. Another image worth mentioning here is of standing Buddha from Mathura.

A nearly six feet high Buddha image of bronze was found at Sultanganj near Bhagalpur (Bihar). It weighs over a tonne. Fa-Hsien mentions an over 82 feet high gigantic Buddha statue made of copper which has not been found. The Gupta artisans made images in iron, copper and bronze that shows their expertise in metallurgy and knowledge of advanced metal technology. There is adequate proof of widespread casting of images in bronze during this period. The best example of brilliance achieved in iron technology is the Mehrauli Iron Pillar (near Qutub Minar, Delhi). It is a solid shaft of pure iron, weighing around six tonnes. Dated around 4th century CE, it has remained rust-proof and corrosion-free even after 1500 years despite being exposed to sun, rain and storm. How it was produced is a mystery even today. It amply exhibits the exemplary standards of technological development under the Guptas. A pillar of this particular trait was not manufactured in any iron foundry in the West till about a century ago. These fine specimens are marvels of the impressive metallurgical skill of the Gupta workmen.

Three Jaina sculptures from Durjanpura near Vidisha are particularly noteworthy. The best preserved of them shows a central figure with hands in *dhyana-mudra*. The body type shows semblance to the previous Kushana ideal, but the ornamentation of the halo behind the head indicates the transition to the Gupta model. All three of them are securely dated on the basis of their inscriptions to the time of Gupta king Ramagupta and therefore, besides their artistic value they are also an important document of the Gupta history.

The Ajanta caves are renowned all over the world for their beautiful paintings. However, there are also sculptures in these caves which are equally vocal about the magnificence of Gupta art. For example, the image in Cave 9 of Naagaraja seated with his queen.

The unusual, larger-than-life size horse sculpture from Khairigarh (UP) is believed to represent a sacrificial horse used by Samudragupta for one of his *Ashvamedha* rituals on the basis of the extremely withered inscription accompanying it. The *Ashvamedha* ritual is also depicted in his coins. The sculpture is made of beige sandstone. The Khairigarh region was important in the context of the early Gupta-Lichchhavi alliance.

15.2.3 Painting

Painting in the Gupta era struck a new line of development like never before. The glory and splendour of Gupta painting is unmatched in ancient Indian history. We have the most celebrated examples of it from the Ajanta frescoes (Aurangabad district, Maharashtra) and cave paintings at Bagh (Dhar district, MP) and Badami/Vatapi (Bagalkot district, Karnataka), besides faint remnants at various other places. It looks that the site of Ajanta was chosen by great visionaries and appreciators of nature and its scenic beauty. Ajanta caves are located in a long horse-shaped hill overlooking a deep valley. They have been numbered at 29 out of which Cave no. 1, 2, 16, 17 and 19 have survived for us to assess the excellence of painting in the Gupta phase. Although these frescoes are dated to a vast time-range of 1st-7th centuries CE, most of them belong to the Gupta period.

The subject-matter of Ajanta frescoes can be divided into the following:

i)   Figures of the Buddha and *Bodhisattvas*

ii)   Scenes and incidents from the Buddha's life

iii)   Narratives from *Jatakas* (stories of previous births of the Buddha)

iv)   Representations from nature, such as flowers, trees and animals

v)   Mythological figures such as *Yakshas*, *Apsaraas*, *Gandharvas* etc.

The murals are replete with depictions of both religious and secular life. Although the central theme is religious, almost all aspects of secular domain find painted which look so life-like and natural. Flora and fauna have been painted freely in a masterly fashion. Opulent mountains, lush vegetation, forests and gardens, blooming flowers, luxuriant creepers, flowering trees, flowing streams, soaring birds, fighting or springing animals, roaming predators, monkeys jumping from branch to branch, naïve beings like deer and elephants have been painted which show how closely the painter has observed, grasped, perceived and understood the world and nature around him. If, on one hand, we get an insight into the affluence of rich people, on the other hand we also see scenes from the lives of mendicants and beggars.

The wide range of visually breathtaking depictions also include representations of meditative Buddha, *Bodhisattvas* Avalokiteshvara and Padmapani, kings and queens, princes and princesses, nobles, warriors, sages, hunters, butchers, beautiful and graceful women as *apsaraas*, *naayikas* etc., scenes from home, court and palace life, toilet and sports, processions and festivities, etc. that gives us an overview of the marvelously varied ideas and imaginations in the artist's mind. Both sculptures and paintings of beautiful women provide a graphic view of their fashion sense, ways of arranging hair, variety and designs of ornaments worn by them etc. The literary descriptions of feminine beauty often correspond to the representations of women at Ajanta.

Decorations on ceilings, pedestals, columns, facades, doorways and window-frames give evidence of the painters' extraordinary ability of conception and technique. It looks as if the artists left no stone unturned in turning these cave sites into the masterpieces of their genius, skill and craft.

The present ruined condition of Ajanta cannot conceal their unique charm. The brilliance of their colours has not faded even after 1500 years. They set a standard

and provided a norm for all contemporary painting of those times. Particularly, the depiction in Cave 1 of the *Bodhisattva* announcing his renunciation and in Cave 17, that of lord Indra and his entourage flying to greet the Buddha in Tushita heaven are a sight to behold.

The paintings in Bagh caves are also spectacular due to their vigorous execution and variety of decorative designs like patters and scrolls. Unlike their counterparts at Ajanta, they are more secular in nature.

We get references in literary sources that the ability to handle a brush masterfully was inculcated not only by professional artists but also by the men and women of upper classes.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Throw light on Gupta temple architecture or Gupta sculpture.

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2) Why the Ajanta paintings are called one of the best specimens of Gupta art?

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15.3 GROWTH OF LANGUAGE

What we refer to as "Classical Sanskrit" developed during the Guptas. Sanskrit had suffered a serious setback since the time of Ashoka due to his widespread patronage to Buddhism. But now it got a fresh lease of life under the Guptas. They made it the official language of their court and liberally encouraged its use. All their inscriptions are written in Sanskrit. Ignored earlier under the influence of the Buddhist and Jaina traditions that wrote their scriptures and literary works in vernacular dialects like Pali, Prakrit and *Ardhamaagadhi*, Sanskrit saw its revival under the Guptas. Due to the same, it became a widespread language in entire north India during this period. Even Buddhist scholars, particularly those of *Mahayana* Buddhism, started composing their texts in Sanskrit. Similarly, many works of Jaina faith such as *Nyaayavataara* and *Tatvaarthadhigama-sutra* were authored in Sanskrit in place of Prakrit. This shows upper hand of Sanskrit over other languages that previously dominated the linguistic landscape of ancient India. It replaced them in scriptures, inscriptions and coins.

Great poets, dramatists, grammarians and playwrights of Sanskrit are known from this period. Apart from proficiency in political science and studies related to military and warfare, ministers of the Gupta court such as Harisena/Harishena were also poets and authors of no less repute. Most of the poets in Samudragupta's kingdom enjoyed his patronage. Harishena wrote *Prayaga-Prashasti* (eulogy) in his honour. It is a pillar inscription on the details of his conquests, exploits and victories. Historians have also expressed the possibility of the composition of the Panegyric on the Mehrauli Iron Pillar by Virasena or Shaaba who was an accomplished poet and a favourite minister of Chandragupta II.

The Brahmanical religion found favour with the Gupta kings and under their protection and encouragement Sankrit language proudly raised its head once again. Buddhism was denied royal patronage and it lost the status of state religion. However, one should not understand by this that it was persecuted. Had it been like that, we would not have got evidence of the construction of a large number of Buddhist structures and making of Buddhist images. It looks fairly obvious that it thrived alongside Brahamanical religion and the Gupta rulers were tolerant towards it.

Indian mind and talent blossomed forth and stupendous intellectual progress was achieved. Numerous well-known literary creations of great merit were composed. Poets like Kalidasa whose fame reached far and wide, celebrated dramatists like Vishakhadatta and Shudraka wrote their works in Sanskrit and enriched Sanskrit literature with their original contributions. Alongside them, popular Buddhist philosophers and writers such as Vasubandhu, Asanga, Dignaaga, Aryadeva and Jaina scholars like Siddhasena also flourished during this era.

Non-fictional works on a range of scientific subjects like astronomy, medicine and mathematics were also penned in Sanskrit. Certain *Puranas* and the Epics were finally compiled and given their form in which they have come down to us.

15.4 GROWTH OF LITERATURE

The zealous patronage of Gupta kings to Sanskrit led to an all-encompassing expansion of Sanskrit literature. An efflorescence of religious literature was witnessed. The intelligentsia of this time presented, explained and wrote precepts and doctrines of "neo-Hinduism", philosophical thoughts, ethics etc. in the form of *Smritis*[4], *Puranas*[5] and Epics. These *shastras* (rulebooks/law-books) were

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[4] Law books in which social and religious norms were written in verse. They contain and prescribe rules, regulations and duties for general public as well as for the kings and their officials. These were composed between *c*. 200 BCE and 900 CE. They set out rules for marriage and property. They also prescribe punishments for persons guilty of theft, assault, murder, adultery etc.

[5] A category of Hindu texts attributed to Vyasa. They are dated to the Gupta and post-Gupta period. There are 18 *Mahapuranas* and numerous *Upapuranas* (supplements or appendices to the *Puranas*). Their content indicates that these were heterogeneous, encyclopedic works of various hands encompassing multifarious topics. For example, the range of topics covered by the *Agni Purana* (*c*. 8th-11th centuries CE) include ritual worship, cosmology and astrology, mythology, genealogy, law, politics, education system, iconography, taxation theories, warfare and organization of army, theories on proper causes for war, martial arts, diplomacy, local laws, building public projects, water distribution methods, trees and plants, medicine, design and architecture, gemology, grammar, metrics, poetry, food and agriculture, rituals, geography and travel guide to Mithila (Bihar and neighboring states), cultural history etc.

authored for education, edification and culturing of the masses. Many digests on moral and social conduct such as *Vishnu Smriti*, *Narada Smriti*, *Yajnavalkya Smriti*, *Katyayana Smriti* and *Brihaspati Smriti* were composed during Gupta times.

The *Puranas* initially belonged to the bardic literature. In Gupta and post-Gupta periods they came in the hands of Brahmin authors who added to the histories of royal dynasties the portions glorifying, praising and venerating the *Trideva* (Trinity): Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma. The most important of the 18 *Maha-Puranas* were given their final form during this period. They were:

i)   *Markandeya Purana*,

ii) *Brahmanda Purana*,

iii) *Vishnu Purana*,

iv) *Bhagavata Purana* and

v)   *Matsya Purana*.

Some of the finest compositions in Sanskrit come from this phase. The epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are believed to have been redacted around 4th-5th century CE. The *Mahabharata*, the authorship of which is traditionally ascribed to Vyasa, was expanded from the original 24,000 verses to 100,000 verses. It acquired the status of *Pancha-Veda* (fifth Veda). There is much common material in this Epic and other *shastras*. For example, some portions of the *Manusmriti* appear identically in the *Shantiparva* of the *Mahabharata*.

The greatest Sanskrit poet Kalidasa – one of the "nine luminaries/gems" (*navratnas*) of the court of Changragupta II – wrote dramas like *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram*, *Vikramorvashiyam* and poetic works such as *Raghuvamsham*, *Ritusamhaara*, *Kumarasambhavam* and *Meghadutam* which show the unsurpassed and unrivalled literary standards achieved during this time. They are unmatched in their verbal and metrical perfection. It is said that Kalidasa was acquainted with the various branches of Brahmanical learning. He is believed to have acquired knowledge of the entire Vedic corpus, philosophical systems like *Yoga* and *Sankhya* along with fine arts like drawing, painting and music.

If, on the one hand, his story of Shakuntala and her ultimate reunion with her lover – king Dushyanta – is his best creation that remains the supreme achievement of ancient Indian literature and stagecraft, on the other hand his *Meghadutam* (Cloud Messenger) came to be reckoned as the most fascinating poetry that was ever written in Sanskrit. The *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam* has been touted as one of the best 100 literary compositions of the world. It was also one of the earliest Indian literary pieces to be translated into European languages, the other being the *Bhagavadgita*. It is interesting that the *Bhagavadgita* is a part of the *Mahabharata* which was redacted also in the Gupta period, as mentioned earlier.

The *Meghadutam* was lyrically composed in over 100 stanzas. In this literary marvel the exiled Yaksha conveys thorough the cloud his love, conjugal devotion and pain of separation from his beloved wife. It is adorned with human sentiments and striking figures of speech. The similes used by him appeal to the reader/listener on the merit of their imagination, variety and appropriateness. In

describing feeling, passion and emotion he stands unmatched. In *Raghuvamsham* he extols the all-round victories of Rama and is said to be indirectly pinpointing some Gupta conquests too. The *Kumarasambhavam* is a tale about the courtship of Shiva and Parvati and the birth of their son Skanda. The *Ritusamhaara* elucidates six seasons and this piece is full of the elements of *shringaara* (decoration and ornamentation). Among other things, his *Malavikagnimitram* gives a complete definition of *naatya* and the attributes of a proficient dancer.

Bhasa wrote 13 plays. Another great poet Bhairavi belonged to this period. He wrote *Kiratarjuniyam*. Vishakhadatta is known for his *Mudrarakshasa* whose plot revolves around the tactfulness and schemes of the canny Chanakya. As mentioned earlier, Vatsyayana wrote *Kamasutra*: a treatise on pleasure (*kama*). Shudraka, believed to be of royal lineage, composed the *Mrichchhakatika* (the Little Clay Cart). Its theme is the love affair between the poor Brahmin Charudatta and the beautiful, cultured, accomplished and wealthy courtesan Vasantasena. The life of the royal court is amply reflected in these Sanskrit poems and plays, with the only possible exception of the *Mrichchhakatika*.

This period also witnessed development and refinement of Sanskrit grammar on the foundation prepared by Panini (*c*. 6th-4th century BCE) and Patanjali (*c*. 2nd century BCE). The lexicographer Amarsimha – another pride of Chandragupta Vikramaditya's court – penned the most popular Sanskrit dictionary *Amarakosha* (also called the *Namalinganushasana*). It has remained an indispensable lexicon of Sanskrit till our times. It is memorized by students and scholars to this day in learning Sanskrit.

Besides high intellectual taste, Indians of the Gupta age also possessed scientific spirit of enquiry and pursued scientific subjects. Great push was given to scientific studies. "Zero" and the subsequent evolution of the decimal system are credited to be the path-breaking discoveries of this period. Brahmagupta, Aryabhatta and Varahamihira were, in truest sense, the earliest and foremost mathematicians and astronomers of the world. Varahamihira wrote *Brihat Samhitaa* that deals with astronomy, astrology, botany, natural history and physical geography. His *Panchasiddhantika* throws light on five astronomical theories (*siddhanta*), two of which bear thorough familiarity and close resemblance with Greek astronomical practice. The two creations by him on horoscopy – *Laghu-Jataka* and *Brihaj-Jataka* – were widely consulted from the Gupta period onwards.

Aryabhatta wrote *Aryabhattiyam*: a famous work on geometry, algebra, arithmetic and trigonometry. He belonged to Pataliputra. He was an expert in various kinds of calculations. He carefully studied and scanned the methods and works of Greek astronomers as well as his Indian predecessors in the field. But, he did not follow them blindly. He evolved his own concepts and established his own facts. In his words, "I dived deep in the ocean of astronomical theories, true and false, and rescued the precious sunken jewel of true knowledge by means of the boat of my own intellect". In his *Surya Siddhanta* he has analysed and explained the causes of solar and lunar eclipses. He calculated the size of the Earth nearly accurately. Contrary to the existing beliefs, he was the first to find out and declare that the Earth revolves round the Sun and rotates on its axis. He also threw considerable light on the variations in planetary motions and relevant information on the Sun, the Moon etc. He was also the first to evolve "sine" functions and utilize them in calculations. His pioneering efforts resulted in the making of astronomy as a separate discipline. Earlier it was a part of mathematics. He was also the first to use the decimal place-value theory.

The notable creations on medicine include *Charaka Samhitaa* and *Sushruta Samhitaa*. An all-round progress in literature and knowledge-production was manifest during this time. The *Hastyayurveda* by Maharshi Palakapya is the first systematic and meticulous exposition of veterinary science.

This period became a milestone in the evolution of philosophical ideas. The continuing philosophical debate was now centered on the following six schools/systems of thought:

1) *Nyaaya* (analysis)

2) *Vaisheshika* (individual characteristics)

3) *Sankhya* (enumeration)

4) *Yoga* (application)

5) *Mimamsa* (enquiry)

6) *Vedanta* (last portion of the *Vedas*).

The Jaina preachers of this period, Bhadrabahu II being the most prominent among them, also began authoring commentaries on their sacred treatises that were called *Niryuktis* and *Churnis*.

In sum, one can assert that this phase was also a benchmark in the history of classical literature. Sanskrit developed an ornate style which was different from the simple, archaic Sanskrit.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the contribution of Kalidasa to Sanskrit literature.

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2) Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (X)?

i) The earliest of extant Gupta temples is the Deogarh temple.   ( )

ii) The Gupta period marks a mature phase of temple construction in India.   ( )

iii) The Shiva temples of Gupta period are found at Bhumara and Khoh.

iv) Bhitargaon temple has the *Nara-Naranaya* relief, the *Gajendramoksha* relief and "Vishnu on Shesha" relief.   ( )

v) The Buddhist University at Nalanda was founded by Samudragupta.

vi) The representation of Hari-Hara shows syncretic union of Vishnu and Shiva.   ( )

vii) The Varaaha from Eran and Udayagiri have striking similarity. ( )

viii) Curly hair of the Buddha statue was a feature of the Kushana style.   ( )

ix) The Jaina sculptures from Durjanpura belong to the reign of Chandragupta II.   ( )

x) Ajanta frescoes are the best specimen of Gupta painting.   ( )

xi) Ajanta paintings do not include narratives from *Jatakas*.   ( )

xii) Even Buddhist scholars, particularly those of *Mahayana* Buddhism, started composing their texts in Sanskrit in the Gupta period. ( )

xiii) The *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam* and the *Bhagavadgita* were translated into European languages.   ( )

xiv) Aryabhatta wrote *Brihat Samhitaa*.   ( )

xv) Charaka Samhitaa and *Sushruta Samhitaa* were notable creations of the Gupta period on mathematics and astronomy.

15.5 SUMMARY

We have seen that the reign of Gupta rulers is characterised by a high watermark of glory and splendour in the cultural sphere. Under them India entered a new epoch of culture and civilization. Indian intellect blossomed best and was at full display. This is reflected in the unprecedented growth of art, language and literature which gives a fair idea of the multifaceted cultural accomplishments of this time. The ideas and faculties of human mind operated freely and it led to the creation of innumerable literary and artistic masterpieces that we have discussed in this Unit.

Temple architecture began and traditions of image-making evolved systematically. Definite types and styles were developed, techniques were perfected and ideals of beauty were laid down with precision. Gupta sculpture reached a new level that shows expertise of combining depth of insight with greatest skill. The Buddhist and Brahmanical images of beauty, charm, grace and refinement clearly showcase rhythmic quality and mastery over depicting human expressions. Foreign influence visible in the Gandhara school of art was completely shaken off and the sculpture acquired true "Indian" character. The Ajanta frescoes show unique refinement of beauty and taste, harmony of form in the context of postures and attitudes of human figures, and excellent reproduction of various scenes from both religious and secular life. The Ajanta painters have left evidence of consummate skill in delineating animal as well as human figures. A panorama of the lives of a range of categories of people comes to light by looking at these paintings. The use of Pali and Prakrit was discouraged and discarded in favour of Sanskrit. With the rise of the Gupta rulers to power, Sanskrit got a favourable ambience to grow and develop. They were ardent admirers and patrons of Sanskrit and the intellectual urge that characterized this age can be seen in the authoring of myriad fictional and non-fictional accounts in this language. Kalidasa was truly a gem of this period and the impressive progress in scientific disciplines is evidenced in the writings of Varahamihira and Aryabhatta.

15. 6 KEY WORDS

Bodhisattva : any person who is on the path towards Buddhahood (the condition or rank of the Buddha/enlightenment/supreme state of life). It also means the "awakened one". In *Mahayana* Buddhism it means a sentient person who is able to reach *nirvana* but delays it due to his compassionate heart for his fellow suffering beings.

Brahmanical : of or pertaining to the Brahmins/*Brahmanas*, their doctrines, precepts, ethos or worship.

Frescoe	:	the technique of painting on a moist plaster surface with colours mixed in water or a limewater mixture; a picture painted in this way.
Mural	:	a large picture painted or affixed directly on a wall or ceiling.
Tirthankara	:	the Jaina preachers who acquired supreme knowledge.

15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) See Sub-section 15.2.1 or 15.2.2

2) See Sub-section 15.2.3

Check Your Progress 2

1) See Section 15.4

2) i) X, ii) X, iii) √ iv) X, v) X, vi) √ vii) √ viii) X, ix) X, x) √ xi) X, xii) √ xiii) √ xiv) X, xv) X

15.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 16   RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS TRENDS: *C*. 300 CE TO 1206*

Structure

16.0   OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this Unit is to introduce the changes in the field of religion in early medieval India. It focuses on the *Bhakti* movement and Tantrism. After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- understand the rise of Puranic Hinduism in various forms;

- understand the conditions that gave rise to the *Bhakti* movement;

- understand the trajectory of the *Bhakti* movement;

- learn how *Bhakti* ultimately did not bring about a drastic change in social conditions;

- understand the rise of Tantrism and its assimilation; and

- learn how Tantrism has a lasting legacy in different traditions.

12.1   INTRODUCTION

You have learnt about the evolution of Hinduism in previous Units. The 6th century BCE witnessed the rise of several heterodox traditions including Buddhism, Jainism and the *Ajivikas*. The spread of Brahmanism continued throughout the subcontinent as well. The period preceding this witnessed the incorporation of local and tribal deities into the Puranic, Brahmanical pantheon. Brahmanism was reinforced and pushed forward primarily through the granting of land-grants by rulers to the *Brahmanas*, allowing their penetration into tribal

lands and the expansion of the kingdom and administration. Certain elements within Brahmanism had become oppressive and the religious practice was focused on external rituals. The people belonging to the lower castes and women in general suffered due to this religious oppression. It was under these circumstances that the *Bhakti* movement and Tantrism arose.

It is important to consider how such an oppressive system came into being and consolidated itself. The prevailing allocation of resources like land supported the hegemony of an elite section of society. Thus, economic exploitation extended to socio-religious domain as well. Women were viewed as impure. Their abilities to evoke desire and procreate were viewed as impediments to the spiritual progress of men. The perpetuation of such patriarchal beliefs curtailed their participation in ritual life and other spheres as well.

Both Bhakti and Tantrism are umbrella terms for wide ranging phenomena with a variety of manifestations. Historians differ greatly on what each term constitutes. Yet a few common threads may be generalized upon. The various movements espousing *Bhakti* aimed at transcending caste, class and gender difference to a varying degree. The emphasis was on love and devotion rather than textual knowledge as a means to salvation. Tantrism began as a series of beliefs and practices where the feminine in the form of the principle of *Prakriti* and goddesses came to be the focus of worship. It later merged with different mainstream traditions.

16.2 PURANIC HINDUISM

With the decline of Vedic Brahmanism, several sects emerged which together constituted Puranic Hinduism. Puranic Hinduism is, therefore, a belief system and formalized religion with multiple strands that went on absorbing and synthesizing local religious cultic beliefs and practices. This enabled it to bring people belonging to diverse groups under its fold over a vast geographical area. We know that multiple strands make up Puranic Hinduism because of the large pantheon of gods and goddesses. Puranic Hinduism existed along with Tantric beliefs and practices.

The transition from the existing Vedic Brahmanism to Puranic Hinduism was not sudden or quick, but rather it was a slow process of assimilation, negotiation and incorporation of local cults. The transition to a new system did not mean that all old ideas relating to Vedic Brahmanism were entirely abandoned. Yet, the difference between Vedic Brahmanism and Puranic Hinduism is easily identifiable when we look at the differences between textual accounts of both. You have examined the sources of Vedic Brahmanism in the previous Units. The sources of Puranic Hinduism are a class of texts called the *Puranas*. The *Puranas* started getting composed from 3rd and 4th centuries CE. Their composition continued till early modern times. We, therefore, understand the transition from Vedic Brahmanism to Puranic Hinduism by looking at the differences between the *Vedas* and the *Shastras* on the one hand, and the *Puranas* on the other. Since pre-existing thought did not completely disappear, it may be said that Vedic Brahmanism remained as one of the constituents of Puranic Hinduism.

You may ask the question: why was such incorporation and assimilation necessary? One of the answers to this question is tied to the economic conditions

prevailing at the time. The *brahmanas* had received land-grants of *brahmadeyas* and it was important for them to engage local people and assimilate their cultic beliefs and practices. Recognising and incorporating local gods and goddesses, therefore, was a key method of expanding Brahmanism and the reason behind its large pantheon.

Mythology and folklore were also important means to bring the cults within the Brahmanical fold. We know this because the *Puranas* are full of mythological stories that could appeal to a wide audience. The contents of the *Puranas* are more popular than didactic.

There were several changes that took place in religious activity in the transition from Vedic Brahmanism to Puranic Hinduism. This period witnessed many changes, like an increase in ritual activity and now the rituals performed were also distinctly different from the Vedic performances. The performance of *puja* and collective rituals became central as the importance of performing sacrifices decreased. Image worship and worship within temples also became important. The inclusion of leaves and flowers of plants found in forest areas in *puja* activities is a marker of the relationship between Brahmanism and the cults it imbibed. Similarly, the act of making pilgrimages and pilgrimage places gained prominence. We know this from the *Puranas* that mention a vast number of pilgrimage sites. The placement of such pilgrimage sites was also strategic in that they were specifically located in areas away from the core Brahmanical zone. This was a step towards the engagement of Brahmanism with local cults.

The main sects of Puranic Hinduism will be discussed here. They are: Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. All three were able to absorb many local cults and traditions into their respective folds. Local deities were explained as incarnations of the three main gods.

16.2.1 Vaishnavism

The first mention of Vishnu comes in the *Vedas*, where a few hymns are dedicated to him. More mention is made of him in the class of texts called the *Brahmanas*. These texts treat Vishnu as the highest god. While it spread extensively in the sub-continent, it was particularly prominent in eastern parts of the sub-continent.

As has been discussed above, local cults were absorbed into each of the three strands of Puranic Hinduism. Vaishnavism came to imbibe the cults of Narayana, Jagannatha, Venkateshwara and others. The different incarnations of Vishnu represent a medium for the inclusion of cults. Some historians argue that the inclusion of the Buddha as an *avatara* of Vishnu stems from attempts to bring Buddhists within this fold. Similarly, a Jaina *Tirthankara* was also added.

Vaishnavism gained prominence from the two important *avataras* of Vishnu – Rama and Krishna – which was primarily promulgated through the *bhakti* movement. The Krishna tradition of the *Mahabharata* and the Rama cult of the *Ramayana* assimilated social groups by incorporating their folk narratives in the Epic narratives. But, their deities were always subservient to the Brahmanical deities.

16.2.2 Shaivism

Shaivism gained prominence in several parts of the sub-continent, particularly in Kashmir. The process of assimilation in Shaivism was different. Cults assimilated by Shaivism are identified by the adding of the prefix *Isha* or *Ishvara* in front of the name of a local god, like Bhuteshwara or Chandeshwara. Some historians argue that the children of Shiva were actually major gods of local cults who were incorporated into the larger Puranic narrative. Thus, his son Skanda, also known as Kumara, is worshipped as Subrahmanya, Murugan and Kartikeya. Similarly, his wife Parvati is said to have originally been a mountain goddess.

Another way of identifying cultic incorporation within Shaivism is by looking at the bodily ornaments of Shiva as well as his attire. His attire has also been described as of tribal origin by some historians. They point to the snake as being an essential part of the person of Shiva. Further, Shiva's strong association with fertility may have been derived from local fertility cults and their practices.

16.2.3 Shaktism

Unlike the other two sects, Shaktism did not begin by revolving around a deity. It originally began as the female principle – Shakti – in Brahmanism. As a principle, she was the consort of the three chief gods. Thus, she was Saraswati to Brahma, Lakshmi to Vishnu and Parvati or Durga to Shiva. It was only in the early centuries of the Common Era that Shakti became Devi and was worshipped as such in a cult dedicated solely to her worship. Since the worship of the female principle as mother goddess is believed to have been common among groups that were as yet untouched by Brahmanism, the Shakti cult developed a large following and further was central to Tantrism. The prime text of Shaktism is the *Devi Bhagavata Purana*.

There is no prominent female deity in the *Vedas*. The brief mention of female deities in early literature is not independent of male deities. While the idea of Energy in the consort of Indra does exist, it does not come to completion till a later time. We are, therefore, able to determine the non-Brahmanical origins of the goddess figure from the fact that earlier Brahmanical texts do not mention her. The goddess is named in several *Puranas* and most notably in the *Devi Mahatmya*. The multiple goddesses from various cults gradually came to be identified as one main goddess. While Shaktism employs the female principle as a universal divine figure, whether this improved the condition of women is debateable.

Thus, Vedic Brahmanism was replaced by Puranic Hinduism. The resultant change led to the creation of an enlarged pantheon and a new system of belief. This system was made up of elements of various cults that vastly expanded the scope of Puranic Hinduism. Changes also occurred in religious performance as modes of worship, the nature of rituals and the space for performance were altered. Tantric elements also started seeping into Hinduism around this time. The new ideas brought on by Puranic Hinduism were propagated by various mediums but mainly through the *Bhakti* movement, which will be discussed in the next section.

16.3 THE *BHAKTI* MOVEMENT

The *Bhakti* movement is of crucial importance in studying the history of Indian religion because it was one of the most extensive and widespread religious movements in the sub-continent. They never united into a single phenomenon at a particular time and place.

It spread from the South to the North. It was started by the Shaiva *Nayanars* and the Vaishnava *Alvars* in present-day Tamil Nadu around the 6th century. Thus, the earliest *Bhakti* movements were led by the *Alvars* who were devotees of Vishnu and the *Nayanars* who were devotees of Shiva. In the initial phase the *Bhagavata* movements of the South consisted of very few non-Brahmins and women, but this changed later. These early movements were co-terminus with the rise of early medieval kingdoms like those of the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras who supported it. In north India, on the other hand, heterodox traditions did not receive political patronage at this time.

The *Bhakti* movement had various perspectives on god and the relationship between god and the devotee. *Bhakti* involved devotion to a personal god. The main point was that the relationship between a devotee and his or her god was not mediated through a priest. Thus, the *Bhakti* movement did away with the middleman. In certain *Bhakti* traditions god was considered to be so close that he became a part of the individual.

Love and devotion to god is envisioned in terms of different relationships. For the *Warkaris* the relationship is envisaged as that of a child (the devotee) with that of its parents, primarily the mother. Sometimes, it is separation from god or pain of that separation (*viraha*) that drives devotee's actions. In the Vaishnavite and Shaivite traditions the desire of the soul for god is viewed as a relationship of love. The concept of *viraha* provided an avenue to incorporate folk songs dealing with conjugal separation.

Prior to this, the stress had been on the ritual performances of the householder or the abstention of ascetics. This new alternative focussed more on personal devotion to a supreme deity. *Bhakti marga* involved deep devotion and love towards the supreme. Similarly, modes of worship ranged from internal spiritualism to worship and rituals in temples. So, while many *bhakti* traditions rejected externalised religious practices, all did not. Some poet-saints, thus, advocate seeing god in all human activities rather than in purely ritualized ones.

Hence, *bhakti* cannot really be generalised upon. Each *bhakti* group was different in the beliefs it espoused. The literature of each tradition bears a common thread but each is different in style and tone of composition. The leaders of the *bhakti* movement came from different groups and genders. Several of its leaders were non-Brahmins. They were different from renunciants. While their relationships with their families did not end, they were detached from all ties. In this sense, they looked down upon the family and sometimes, upon women from the angle of conjugality. While they did not associate with the performance of magic, miracles were a part of their hagiographies.

Some would argue that one of the connecting features between all the movements that make up the larger *bhakti* movement is the centrality of the saint-poets to each of these traditions. The hallmark of the traditions is that their composers

were saint-poets who expressed themselves through spoken words and songs in regional languages. Thus, they expressed themselves in the language of ordinary people. Their poems and songs were compiled by followers after their demise. As these traditions were formed, followers kept removing old ideas that were no longer meaningful and adding new ones. Most of the sources come down through an oral tradition, transmitted from one person to the other. These movements opened up a sacred space for the traditionally underprivileged in their respective contexts. This space had traditionally been closed to them, since being illiterate they had no access to written religious texts, and could thereby only access them via mediators. Hence, an important contribution of the *bhakti* movements was providing spiritual knowledge in a vernacular medium and the strengthening of oral traditions through musical and poetic compositions. The northern tradition used short poems called *pads* that could be set to *ragas*. Therefore, some historians argue that the aim was not to overturn the existing social order but to create new sacred spaces within the existing social order.

Important Points

- *Bhakti* practitioners espoused complete devotion to a supreme god.

- Salvation was no longer restricted to upper caste men and was open to women and men of lower castes.

- The religious leader changed from *Brahmana* officials to saint-poets.

- Sanskrit was no longer the only language for religious texts and texts were translated to and composed in vernacular languages.

- Both Brahmanical hegemony and patriarchy were challenged but not overthrown.

- The *Bhakti* movement emphasized lived experience over doctrine.

16.3.1 The *Nayanars* and the *Alvars*

As has been previously mentioned, the *bhakti* movement began with the movements of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*. They espoused devotion to Vishnu and Shiva respectively. As the movement progressed, local cults with tribal deities were assimilated into Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Murugan, a tribal deity, was brought under the Brahmanical fold as a part of this process. Mayon was the tribal deity included in Vaishnavism. Local chiefs from both traditions were incorporated as lesser *Brahmanas*. For its ability to encompass more extreme sects, Shaivism developed a broader base. Some historians argue that those following Shaivism came from the lower rungs of society as compared to Vaishnavism.

These sects received political patronage which was seen in the construction of temples and the installing of idols. These sects vociferously opposed all other traditions including the Buddhist and Jaina traditions. Some historians argue that this may have been the case because all traditions were competing for political patronage. The Chola rulers, for example, supported both Brahmanism and *bhakti* by providing land-grants and constructing temples. Although initially asserting their similarities, the traditions of the *Alvars* and the *Nayanars* later became quite hostile towards each other as well.

They received support from the peasant masses. The hymns of the *Alvars* and *Nayanars* were written in the metre of folk songs and, hence, were part of the

more popular musical tradition. The vernacular medium was stressed against the use of Brahmanical Sanskrit in order to promote the relationship of the individual with god without a *Brahmana* intermediary.

One of the direct consequences of these *Bhakti* movements was the rise of Tamil linguistic consciousness cutting across various divisions.

16.3.2 The *Virashaivas*

In Karnataka, the *bhakti* movement arose under the *Virashaivas*. Started by Basavanna in the 12th century, its followers came to be known as the *Lingayats*. They were against caste hierarchy and the notion of pollution attached to certain groups. It stood against Brahmanical superiority and to a certain extent patriarchy. Once Basavanna became a minister under the Kalachuris, the *Brahamana* orthodoxy strove hard against his egalitarian movement leading to bloodshed and banishment.

It was far more successful than others in rising against Brahmanical oppression and patriarchy. However, as far as the larger picture was concerned, it only succeeded in affecting the pre-existing structures to a certain extent. This movement was based on the belief that women and men of the lower castes were closer to divinity than upper caste *Brahmana* men. The ultimate goal in terms of gender was transcending it by becoming androgynous. Therefore, Virashaivism did not believe in gender and caste distinctions. Its earliest founders included Basava, a Brahmin, Satyakka, a sweeper and Kakkayya, a butcher.

Thus, while religious equality was stressed, equality itself did not extend to economic or occupational equality. The lack of belief in caste and gender hierarchies was visible from birth. While Brahmanical initiation ceremonies were restricted to *Brahmana* males, in Virashaivism each baby received a *Shivalinga* and had the Shiva *Panchakshari* whispered into their ears irrespective of caste and gender.

16.4 GENDER IN THE *BHAKTI* TRADITION

Along with its objections to caste, *bhakti* also broke down prevailing notions of gender. While it did challenge these notions, it never succeeded in overthrowing patriarchal oppression. The various *bhakti* traditions dealt with gender in various ways and the extent to which patriarchy was questioned and challenged, differed.

As per the Virashaivite tradition women bear no pollution since the *Shivalinga* removes all impurity. Yet, in practice women did not assume religious equality. They could not conduct religious ceremonies and could not head the religious institution of the *matha*. However, women saints did exist and came from all caste groups. In fact, several women saints were *shudras*, including untouchables. Some were unmarried while others were married with husbands equally devoted to Virashaivism. It is important to note that Virashaivism had the largest women following of all the traditions.

The trope of bridal mysticism in which the devotee envisioned themselves married to god, was an important device. Andal was the only woman saint of the *Alvars*. Her love for Krishna took on the form of bridal mysticism since she imagined herself as the bride of her god in a spiritual marriage.

Gender was also transcended by imagining Shiva as the eternal bridegroom and the devotee a virtuous wife. Hence, Basava also wrote of himself as a bride. Shiva as *Ardhanarishvara* (half male and half female) represented the first goal to be attained while the ultimate goal was transcending sex to the point of androgyny and asexuality. Akka Mahadevi herself stated that she was female in form but male in principle.

Akka Mahadevi is also important for the sheer extremism of her belief in Virashaivism. She attained the ultimate goal of transcending sexuality. Another example may be sought from the Shaivite tradition. Karaikkal Ammaiyar, a female Shaivite saint, took her asceticism to an extreme where she assumed skeletal dimensions. Thereafter, she has become incorporated into the Brahmanical mainstream as a goddess whose boons provide children.

Another trope for posing an indirect challenge to patriarchy was by opting out of the traditional roles in the household. Where the worldly husband was rejected, Shiva was declared as spiritual husband. This may be seen in the instances of Akka Mahadevi and Karaikkal Ammaiyar given above. In spite of challenging patriarchy by choosing to be spiritual rather than householders, several women still viewed their spiritual existence as members of a family.

16.5 DECLINE OF *BHAKTI* MOVEMENT

In terms of its expansion the movement had a lot of success. It spread over vast parts of the sub-continent and incorporated people from various sections of society. In the process it succeeded in diminishing the influence of Buddhism and Jainism in the south. However, the movement ultimately ended as it gradually got subsumed under the patriarchal, Brahmanical order it had arisen against.

Various reasons have been given to explain the lack of success of the *Bhakti* movement in enabling large-scale social mobility. Some historians argue that it may have been because the democratic values espoused by the movement were far too alien for people to engage with. Some others argue that in a way *bhakti* did not challenge the *varna* hierarchy strongly enough. Some strands allowed a *shudra* to assume Brahmanical knowledge, but the problem remained since it did not challenge Brahmanical supremacy and made Brahmanical learning the ultimate aim. The extent of rejection of external practice varied.

As has been discussed, the southern *bhakti* movements received political patronage, unlike the northern ones. It is this political patronage extended to the *Nayanars* and the *Alvars* that may have resulted in the movement losing the values it espoused. Gradually, the hegemonic groups of *Brahmanas* and the landed class returned as ritual officiants. Thereby, the original intent of the movement to remove the middle man between god and the devotee was lost.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What were the conditions that gave rise to the *Bhakti* movement?

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2) How successful do you think the *Bhakti* movement was?

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16.6 TANTRISM

All the religions that existed in the sub-continent at that time developed a Tantric form. This goes to show the special ability of Tantrism to seep into and become a part of mainstream religion. So, it cannot really be called a parallel tradition. It created new religious systems like Shaktism under Hinduism and *Vajrayana* under Buddhism. Mother goddess cults also found favour owing to the Tantric emphasis on fertility.

Connections are often drawn between tribal rites and rituals and Tantrism, particularly those relating to mother goddess cults. The origin of Tantrism is often traced to these. Some historians trace Tantric rituals to *Ajivika* practice that later got embedded in the *Pashupata* sect. Despite these murky origins, the first strands of Tantrism began around 500 CE and the first texts called the *Tantras* were composed around 800 CE. Prior to this, the earliest indirect textual evidence comes from the 7th century in Sanskrit texts like Banabhatta's *Kadambari* and *Harshacharita*, Mahendravarman's *Mattavilasa* and Dandin's *Dashakumaracharita*. The earliest epigraphical evidence is an inscription of Vishvavarman found at Gangadhar in Rajasthan and dating to 423 CE. The Tantric religion seems to have thrived between the 8th and 18th centuries. The effect of Tantrism on mainstream practices could be seen by *c*. 1000 CE. The Tantric religion is derived from the *Tantras*, *Agamas* and *Samhitas*. Since these texts are composed in Sanskrit, it is assumed that their main audience was literate and urban and hence belonging to the upper castes. Yet Tantrism was more than that. It included popular magic based practices, including those drawn from the *Shakta* and *Hatha Yoga* traditions. The sources for these traditions are also vernacular and, hence, gave access to a wider audience. Therefore, Tantric religion would also have included members of lower castes and even people from rural areas. It was mainly followed in the northern parts of the subcontinent, with less evidence from the south. Its greatest following was in present-day Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Kashmir, Nepal, Tibet, Punjab and Rajasthan.

Just as with *bhakti* it is important to trace the reasons for the rise of Tantrism. Some scholars contend that mainstream religion had become incomprehensible. It could no longer adequately satisfy the religious needs of the people. This paved the way for the rise of Tantrism.

Tantrism involved the introduction of folk elements of religion into the mainstream. This also included cultic and tribal practices. Thus, Tantrism saw the introduction of tribal goddesses and practices into the mainstream. Another reason particularly for the inclusion of goddesses is related to the Tantric focus on the female principle.

Tantric Buddhist monasteries flourished in Bihar during the 7th century CE. The Tara cult is an important part of Tantrism. She is considered to be the Shakti female counterpart of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara. Tantric elements entered Vaishnavism as a tantric mother goddess was brought in as the consort of Vishnu. The *matrikas* are also a part of Vaishnavism in that Vaishnavi is said to be one of them. Various categories of practice can be included under Tantric religion. These include shamanic and yogic ones, *Shakta* worship, worship of the *Matrikas* and Tantric forms of Brahmanical and Buddhist goddesses, and those of the schools of the *Kapalikas* and the *Kaulas*. The *matrikas* are a group of seven goddesses considered to be mothers. The Tantric sect of the Shaiva *Siddhantas* was called *Agamanta* Shaivism. It flourished in the 11th century and had the Chola kings as patrons.

As with *Bhakti*, Tantrism is an umbrella term for a variety of beliefs and practices. However, commonalities between the various strands of Tantrism are less nuanced and far easier to identify. There are two basic principles that form the basis of all Tantrism:

1) Firstly, Tantrism does not accept the authority of the *Vedas*.

2) Fertility.

As has been argued above, Tantrism arose to satisfy the religious needs of the people which were not being met by intellectual religion or elaborate ritual. In Tantrism, in general, the female principle of *Prakriti* is of greater importance than the male one (*Purusha*). Each principle is conceived as man or woman and the union of the two leads to creation.

The other principles that differed from one tradition to the other may be briefly discussed. It began rejecting the caste system and patriarchy. Some of their most prominent teachers came from the lower rungs of society. Liberation was to be attained by sincerity to work and profession irrespective of what that was. Menstrual blood was not considered polluting but instead considered sacred.

Tantra did not believe in idol worship because the body served as a microcosm of the universe. The human body contains both the female and the male principle and it is achieving the union of the two that is the ultimate goal of Tantric practice. Hence, the maintenance of the body was crucial and, ultimately, death was to be overcome.

Women could become spiritual leaders in Tantric cults. They were, thus, conversant with principles and beliefs in Tantrism. Caste lines were to be transgressed. The Shakti in Tantrism has been identified as the consort of mainstream gods like Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu; Radha, the consort of Krishna; Devi, the consort of Shiva and the different goddesses associated with the *Bodhisattvas*.

The outreach of Tantrism cannot be gauged. It did have some success in enabling Brahmanical expansion into new places, including tribal communities. Some historians credit Tantrism with bringing women into Buddhism and Jainism.

Important Points

- The word *Tantra* was initially used to refer to a guiding principle, but it later came to be used in a religious sense.

- *Deeksha* (initiation) was an important part of Tantric belief, and it was looked upon as a sort of rebirth.

- *Tantra* treats the human body as the epitome of the universe. It was extensively associated with medical, alchemical and other sciences closely associated with the body.

- Time was central in Tantrism.

- It rejected Vedic asceticism.

- Fertility cult was central to it and this extended to the fertility of the land.

In the course of time Tantrism began to discriminate on the basis of class. Legitimate learning coming from texts, it started to drive away the illiterate. In its later days it was mainly followed by more economically privileged individuals. It was not restricted purely to the realms of the spiritual but extended to more mundane day-to-day activities. Tantrism ended as it gradually got Sanskritised and received royal and political patronage. So, whilst its legacy is visible, its larger appearance has diminished and vanished.

Check Your Progress 2

1) How did Tantrism differ from other traditions in its treatment of women?

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2) Why did Tantrism merge with other religious traditions?

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16.7 SUMMARY

Bhakti movement critiqued the oppression of the social order but never the social order itself. The importance of the *bhakti* movement lies in its providing a powerful ideology and the integration of various social groups. Transgression and transcendence went hand in hand in the *bhakti* movement. Thus, *Bhakti* critiqued the social conditions that existed at that time. It established that the importance of people lay in what they did and not what they were born into.

Tantric practices did not discriminate between people on the basis of caste or gender. Women attained a different kind of prominence as it had a large number of female deities. Tantrism allied itself with various religious traditions ultimately continuing down in mainstream practice and belief.

The two phenomena are similar in some ways. The figure of the religious leader changed from the *Brahmana* to the saint-poet in *Bhakti* whilst Tantrism looked to be inclusive by emphasizing the folk and the female. The medium changed from Sanskrit scripture to the vernacular and popular. It initially stood against Brahmanism and for social equality. However, towards the end it came to be used by the ruling elites for reinforcing and justifying social inequality. The radical flavour of the movement was, thus, lost towards the end. Similarly, Tantrism initially stood against Vedic dominance and patriarchy but political patronage reduced its radical strain.

The path of salvation that was once open only to men of the three upper *varnas* now came to be open to all through a different path. Ultimately, both traditions attempted to provide for equal opportunities to worship for all. Their popularity prompted change in Brahmanism and other traditions.

16.8   KEY WORDS

Deeksha	:	initiation in Tantrism.
Prakriti	:	the female principle.
Purusha	:	the male principle.
Shaivism	:	the cult of Shiva and its regional manifestations.
Vaishnavism	:	the cult of Vishnu with its regional manifestations.

16.9   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) See Sec. 13.2

2) See Sec. 13.5

Check Your Progress 2

1) See Sec. 13.6

2) See Sec. 13.6

16.10   SUGGESTED READINGS

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Notes

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