

THE RISE OF SMALL KINGDOM-STATES

(Year 650 to 1200 A.D.)

(Year 650 to 1200 A.D.)

King Harshavardhana died in the year 647 A.D. After that for the next 600 years there were no large empires in India. The country was divided into many small kingdoms. Why did this happen? From where did these small kingdoms arise? Who were the famous kings of the time? How did they manage to maintain large armies to protect their kingdoms and conquer more territory? What went on in their royal courts? We shall learn about these things in this lesson.



Look at Map 1.1. It shows the many small kingdoms established during this era. Identify the different kingdoms in Chattisgarh and write the names of the dynasties that ruled them.

How new kings and dynasties were formed?

Many kings used to inscribe their orders and edicts on rocks and copper plates. Poets and bards also wrote songs of praise to their kings in this way. We come to know more about the history of those times by reading what is written on these rocks and copper plates.

The inscriptions and copies of the near by rocks and copper plates shows that there were many powerful kings ruled in different parts of India around the year 650 A.D. who got victory over their surroundings areas and included into their empires. These rulers were constantly at war with each to extend their empires. But the descendents of these powerful kings were weak and incapable rulers. Once they conquered more territory, they appointed their army generals and senior officers to govern these new regions and establish their authority over them. Many of the governors refused to accept their authority. For example, in a state of western India there was rule of the Rashtrakutas dynasty who were officers of the Chalukya kings. But the Rashtrakutas became so strong that they declared themselves as kings in the 8th century and began ruling independently.

Sometimes warrior, a strong warrior would take the help of his friends to attack weak tribals and stamp his authority over them. Later he would invite brahmins, merchants and peasants from other places to settle in the area he had conquered and declare himself king. A stone inscription found at Ghatiyala near Jodhpur in Rajasthan gives one such example. It says that the Pratiharas established their rule in the region in this way. In Chhattisgarh, the Kalchuris became rulers of the Tripuri kingdom near Jabalpur in a similar manner.

There were more ways to become king and kingdom like. Some families would settle in an area and acquire a lot of land for farming. They would dig

wells, ponds and *bawadis* to irrigate the land to get a good crop. As their harvests increased, these families would become wealthy and powerful. Their grandeur would increase and other people would seek their help and advice. The people would pay obeisance to them and listen to whatever they said. To establish their superiority and authority, these families would tell people they were descended from a lineage of gods and *rishis*. The Pala dynasty of Bengal and the Kalchuris of central India established their supremacy in this way.

If someone wants to become a king according to this today, will the other people accept him as a king ?

The role of Brahmins and Bhats

Brahmins helped powerful families establish royal dynasties and guided the new kings in governing their kingdoms. In those days, the brahmins were known for their wisdom, learning and knowledge of religion. They were also respected for their understanding of governance and statecraft. That is why kings in north and south India invited brahmins, who lived on the banks of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, to settle in their kingdoms .

In return, the kings would donate entire villages or the revenue collected from several villages to these brahmins. They kept a record of these donations by inscribing their orders on copper plates.

There was another reason why kings made such generous donations to the brahmins. To establish their supremacy in society, the kings would get the brahmins prepared a lineage for kings, showing that they were descended from the sun, moon or some great *rishi*. They would also ask them to perform

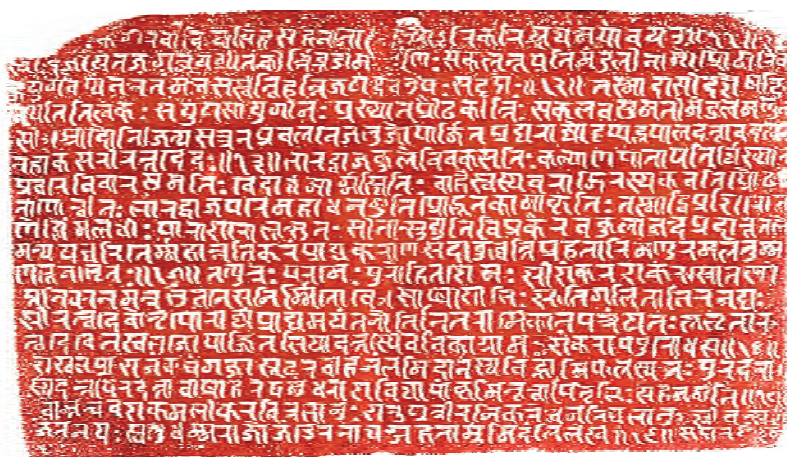


FIG : 1.1 THE DANPTRA OF KING RATNADEO IIIrd (12th CENTURY)
THE KHARAUD STONE INSCRIPTION. IN WHICH THERE IS
Reference of offerings

Rajsuya, Ashwamegh and other types of *yagnas* to show how powerful they were. A Copper plate was found in Chhattisgarh showing the donations made by the Kalchuri king Ratnadev III.

The *bhats* also played an important role in establishing the royal lineage. The *bhat* tradition prevailed in the entire north Indian region during this time. They were court poets who sang songs in the local language praising the kings and his ancestors. These songs would instill a feeling of respect and pride for the king among the people. In Chhattisgarh this tradition can be seen in the form of the Charan poets.

One such poet was Dalram Rao, who lived in the court of Raja Lakshmi Nidhi of Khairagad. He was the first person to use the name 'Chhattisgarh' in one of his poems of praise to the king.

Monarchs and Feudal kings

As the number of small kingdoms grew, the wars between them also increased. Each king fought his neighbours to expand his territory. But, as we saw in the case of Emperor Samudragupta, the victorious king usually returned the land to the vanquished under certain conditions. The defeated king had to accept his conqueror as his king and master. The victor became the *adhipati* or monarch, while the vanquished became his *samant* or feudal vassal. To establish the victor's authority further, the defeated king was made to write his name in the following manner: *Mahasamant Shri Kshitipal, whose place is at the feet of Parambhattarak Parmeshwar Maharajadhiraj Shri Bhoja Dev.*

The feudal vassals would also give precious gifts to the monarch to show their loyalty and gratitude. When ever the monarch went to war, the feudals had to go with his armies to assist him in the battlefield.

What benefits did a victorious king get by returning the kingdom to the defeated king?

Some important dynasties

Between the years 800 to 1000, three influential dynasties ruled in north,

east and south central India. The Pratiharas were in the north, the Palas in the east and the Rashtrakutas in south India. The kings of these dynasties were at war with each other for nearly 200 years, trying to establish their sovereignty over north India and the kingdom of Kannauj. This constant warfare weakened all three kingdoms.

1. In which areas of India are the kingdoms of the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas in Map 1.1.
2. Locate Kannauj in the map.
3. Why did these kingdoms wage war with each other to annexe Kannauj?

During this period, Chhattisgarh was ruled by the Kalchuri dynasty (Haihya lineage). Some important kings of this dynasty were Kalingaraj, Ratnadev and Jajalldev. Kalingaraj ruled over the whole of southern Kosala around the year 1000. He established his capital at Tumman and ruled independently for many years. Ratnadev made Ratnapur his new capital and developed it into one of the biggest cities of the time in the Mahakosala region. In those days there were no town equal to Ratanpur in mahakosala region.

The Kalchuri kings considered themselves *Rajputs*. There were several other influential Rajput dynasties in north, north-west and central India. Prominent among them were the Chauhans, Tomars, Parmars, Gurjars and Pratiharas. Members of these royal lineages established independent kingdoms at different places.



Figure: 1.2
Coins used during ratnadeo
ruler (12th century)

The Parmar dynasty ruled over central India. Bhoj was the most renowned king of this lineage. He was a mighty warrior with a powerful army who established a vast empire over which he ruled from 1000 to 1035. Apart from being an influential ruler, he was also deeply interested in the sciences, literature and architecture.

At that time, there was a powerful ruler in

central Asia called Mahmud Ghaznavi. He invaded north India several times from Afghanistan between 1000 and 1025, plundering and looting the land and its people. A great scholar from his kingdom, called Alberuni, visited India during this period. He came to study mathematics, astronomy and the different religions that flourished in the country. He learned Sanskrit during his stay and studied many ancient manuscripts. After returning to his home country in 1030, he wrote a book in Arabic titled *Tahkik-e-Hind*. We get a lot of information about the people of India, their customs, religions, traditions, sciences, mathematics, astronomy, etc from this book.

Identify the kingdoms of the Parmar and Kalchuri kings in Map 1.1

Another foreign traveller came to India to study before Alberuni. You read about him in Class VI. What was his name and from where did he come?

Feudal policies of the kings

Because kings were constantly at war with each other, the importance of army increased the kings did not have large armies. Instead they depended on their senior officers and feudal landlords to provide soldiers to fight in battle. It was during this period that armies began to increasingly use cavalry and elephant troops, in addition to infantry, in warfare.

This arrangement had its advantages as well as drawbacks. Among the advantages was that these officials did not have to pay regular salaries from kingdom. Instead, he gave them large tracts of land or even several villages from which they were entitled to collect revenue. In return, they would send their armies to help the king whenever he needed them in battle.

However, the disadvantage was that once these feudal vassals began earning a lot of money from their villages, they became economically strong and started to disobey the orders of the king. Since they had their own armies, they did not fear the king and tried to become more independent.

1. In Class VI you learned about the methods used by the Mauryas to govern their empire. What differences do you see between the Mauryan methods and the way the kings governed during this period?

2. What are the advantages/disadvantages of giving a regular salary to senior officers or allotting land/villages to them?

Major dynasties of south India

The Cholas were the most powerful dynasty in south India. The important kings of this dynasty were Rajaraja Chola, Rajendra Chola and Kulottung Chola. They not only held sway over the whole of south India but they conducted military campaigns in Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Bengal, defeating and plundering these kingdoms and establishing a vast empire. Their naval fleet invaded Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and Maldives. A large part of Sri Lanka remained under Chola rule for a long period.

The Cholas were successful in war because they had a powerful army and navy. They built magnificent temples with the wealth they amassed. They installed gods in these temples linked to their names. For example, we find inscriptions like '*Rajaraja Chola built the Rajarajeshwar temple*'.

The Cholas imposed taxes on their subjects to pay for the maintenance of their army and for other administrative expenses.

Taxes on land and its produce and taxes on trade were their main sources of revenue. The tax on land could be up to one-third of the value of the produce. When public works like building roads, tanks and canals had to be constructed,



Fig.: 1.3 The Tanjawoor Vrihadishwar (Rajarajeshwar) temple

villages were expected to undertake the work without payment. It was during this era that village administration and local self governance were developed.

EXERCISES

I. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) The _____ dynasty ruled Chhattisgarh from the year 800 to 1000.
- (b) _____ was the most famous Parmar king.
- (c) Alberuni wrote a book in Arabic titled _____.
- (d) The most powerful dynasty of south India was the _____.
- (e) The famous Rajarajeshwar temple was built by _____.

II. Which of the following statements are true or false:

- 1. India was divided into many small kingdoms after the death of Harshavardhana.
- 2. Brahmins were famous for their knowledge of religion and governance.
- 3. Mahmud Ghaznavi ruled over the whole of north India.
- 4. The Cholas established their rule over Kannauj.

III. Answer the following question:

- 1. Why did Alberuni come to India?
- 2. Which countries did the navy of the Cholas invade?
- 3. Which dynasties were at war for long time to capture Kannauj?
- 4. What did the kings donate to brahmins to make them settle in their kingdoms?
- 5. What did powerful families do to establish their greatness?
- 6. What is written in the book titled *Tahkik-e-hind*?
- 7. Who was Bhat? What was their role?
- 8. What differences were there between the military campaigns of Mahmud Ghaznavi and the Cholas?

Things to do

Make a list of important dynasties and their kings in north, east and central India from the year 800 to 1000.

