

# New Kings and Kingdoms

Several major ruling dynasties emerged in different parts of the subcontinent between the seventh and twelfth centuries.

## The Emergence of New Dynasties

- By the 7th century, there were big landlords or warrior chiefs in different regions of the subcontinent.
- Existing kings often acknowledged them as their samantas or subordinates.
- They were expected to bring gifts for their kings or overlords and provide them with military support.
- The main ruling dynasties were Gurjara-Pratiharas, Palas, Rashtrakutas and Chahamanas in North India and the Chola, Pandyas and Chalukyas in South India.

## Administration in the Kingdoms

- The kings at apex adopted big titles like Maharaja-adhiraja.
- The kings shared power with their samantas, and with an association of peasants, traders and Brahmanas.
- Resources were obtained from the producers who were persuaded to surrender part of what they produced.
- These resources were used to finance the king's establishment and construct temples and forts.
- Functionaries for collecting revenue were recruited from influential families.

## Prashastis and Land Grants

- Prashastis tells us how rulers wanted to depict themselves as valiant and victorious warriors.
- The kings often rewarded Brahmanas by grants of land. These were recorded on copper plates, which were given to those who received the land.

## Warfare for Wealth

- For centuries Gurjara-Pratihara, Rashtrakuta and Pala's dynasties fought for control over Kannauj.
- The long drawn conflict is known as a tripartite struggle as three parties were involved in it.
- Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni raided the subcontinent seventeen times between AD 1000—AD 1025. His sole purpose was to plunder the wealth

- of India. He looted temples like Somnath, Gujarat, Mahmud entrusted a scholar named al-Biruni to write an account of the subcontinent.
- Other kings engaged in warfare were Chauhan, who ruled over the region around Delhi and Ajmer.
  - Chauhans were engaged in conflict with Chalukyas of Gujarat and the Gahadavalas of western UR
- Prithviraj III was a popular Chauhan ruler who defeated Afghan ruler Ghori in 1191 but lost to him in 1192.

## The Cholas

- Cholas were from a small family of Uraiyur. The successors of Vijayalaya conquered neighbouring regions and the kingdom grew in size and power.
- Rajaraja I was considered the most powerful Chola ruler and expanded control over most of these areas.
- His son Rajendra I, conquered Sri Lanka and countries of Southeast Asia.
- Cholas were big temple builders. Two famous temples were in Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram.
- Agriculture was well developed along with various methods of irrigation.
- Settlements of peasants called or became prosperous with the spread of irrigation in agriculture. The village council and the Nadu performed several administrative functions
- Association of traders known as nagarams also performed administrative functions in the town.
- Inscriptions also mention about sabha. The Sabha had separate committees to look after irrigation works, gardens, temples, etc.

During the period of seventh and twelfth centuries, many new dynasties emerged in different parts of the subcontinent.

The new rulers were previously the big landlords or warriors working under the existing kings as subordinates or samantas. They gradually gained power and wealth and thereafter declared themselves to be maha-Samanta, maha-mandleshwar (the great lord of the circle or region). They were now independent lords.

Dantidurga, a Rashtrakuta chief, overthrew his Chalukya overlord and performed a ritual known as hiranya-garbha (literally, the golden womb). It was done in order to transform one's identity as kshatriya, even if one was not one by birth.

Some other lords like Kadamba Mayurashrman and Gurjara-Pratihara Harichandra, brahmanas by birth, used their military skills to establish their kingdoms in Karnataka and Rajasthan.

Many of these new kings adopted high-sounding titles like maharaja-adhiraja (great king, overlord of kings), tribhuvana-chakravartin (lord of the three worlds), though they shared power with their samantas as well as with associations of peasants, traders and Brahmanas.

The producers—the peasants, cattle-keepers, artisans—were the main feeders to these states. The land was owned by the lords and so the producers were compelled to pay rent to the owners whereas traders were to pay revenue to the lords.

These resources were used to finance the establishment of the king, construction of temples and forts, and also for fighting wars which were also done to expand resources through plundering, acquiring land and finding trade routes.

The revenue functionaries were recruited from influential families, and positions were often hereditary. Similar was the case with army positions. In most cases, such posts were held by the close relatives of the king.

Prashastis were composed by learned Brahmanas in praise of the rulers. It used to depict the rulers as valiant, victorious warriors.

Brahmanas were also rewarded by grants of land.

Kalhana's long poem in Sanskrit recorded the history of kings who ruled over Kashmir. He usually used a variety of sources, including, inscriptions, documents, eyewitness accounts, and earlier histories, in order to present his accounts.

Ruling Dynasties were based in a particular region.

Kanauj was a prized area in the Ganga valley. There was a tripartite struggle among Gurjara-Pratihara, Rashtrakuta and Pala dynasties over Kanauj.

Rulers used to build large temples in order to demonstrate their power and resources. So temples were the first target of when one ruler attacked over the other. One prominent reason for this was that the temples were often very rich.

Sultan Mahmud Ghazni of Afghanistan (997–1030) extended his control over parts of Central Asia, Iran and the north-western part of the subcontinent. During his attacks he targeted wealthy temples, of which the temple of Somnath in Gujarat was the most prominent.

Al-Baruni's Kitab al-Hind, an Arabic work written on the request of Sultan, is an important source for historians. al-Baruni also consulted the Sanskrit scholars while preparing this book.

Some other notable kings engaged in war were Chahamanas, later known as Chauhans, ruled over the region around Delhi and Ajmer and made efforts to expand their control to the west and the east. They were opposed by the Chalukyas of Gujarat and Gahadavalas of Uttar Pradesh.

Prithviraja III (1168-1192), who defeated an Afghan ruler Sultan Muhammad Ghori in 1191, but lost to him the very next year, in 1192, was the most popular of the Chahamanas.

Muttaraiyar, the subordinates to the Pallava kings of Kanchipuram, held power in the Kaveri delta.

Vijayalaya, a member of the ancient chiefly family of the Cholas from Uraiyur, captured the delta from the Muttaraiyar in the middle of the ninth century. The town of Thanjavur and a temple for goddess Nishumbhasudini there were some of his major creations.

Vijayalaya's successors expanded their kingdom in size and power adding the Pandyan and the Pallava territories to the south and north to their kingdom.

Rajaraja I was the most famous and powerful Chola ruler who became king in 985 and thereafter expanded control over most of these areas. He was known also for his reorganization of the administration of his empire. His son Rajendra I also added to the glory of his father.

The big temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikonda-cholapuram, built by Rajaraja and Rajendra, are architectural marvels.

The temples of Cholas were the nuclei of settlements that grew around them. They were also centres of craft production and were also endowed with land by rulers as well as others.

The produce of the land were spared to maintain the specialists working at the temple and usually lived near it. They were the priests, garland makers, cooks, sweepers, musicians, dancers etc.

Temples were not only the place of worship but they were the hub of economic, social and cultural life as well.

The making of bronze images of the deities was the most distinctive of the crafts associated with the temples. Chola bronze images are still considered the best in the world.

The development of agriculture contributed much to the achievements of the Cholas.

Although agriculture had developed earlier in other parts of Tamil Nadu, it was only from the fifth or sixth century that this area was opened up for large scale cultivation.

Forests had to be cleared in some areas while land had to be levelled in some other regions.

Embankments were built to prevent flood and canals were constructed to carry water to the fields. In many areas two crops were grown in a year.

A variety of methods like digging of wells, placing huge tanks were used for irrigation.

Most of the new rulers, as well as people living in villages, were actively involved in these activities.

The administration of the empires was also well organized. Ur, the settlement of peasants grew prosperous with the spread of irrigation agriculture. Groups of such villages formed larger units called nadu performed several administrative functions including dispensing justice and collecting taxes.

Rich peasants of the Vellala caste controlled over the affairs of the nadu under the supervision of the central Chola government. Some rich landowners were honoured with the titles like Vendavelan (a velan or peasant serving three kings) Araiyaar (chief) etc. and they were also entrusted with important offices of the state at the centre.

As Brahmanas often received land grants or brahmadeya, a large number of Brahmana settlements emerged in the Kaveri valley as in other parts of south India. Each brahmadeya was looked after by an assembly or sabha of prominent Brahmana landholders which worked efficiently. Their decisions were recorded in detail in inscriptions on the stone of walls of temples.

Associations of traders known as nagarams also occasionally performed administrative functions in towns.

Inscriptions from Uttaramerur in Chingleput district, Tamil Nadu, tell us the way in which the sabha was organised. There were separate committees to look after different works like that of irrigation, temples, etc. The allocation of work was decided through a lottery system.

**Samantas:** The subordinates of kings or overlords who used to bring gifts for their kings or overlords.

**Maha-Samanta or Maha-mandaleshwara:** The Samantas who gained power and wealth declared themselves Maha-Mahabaleshwar or Maha-samantas i.e. the great lord of a circle or region.

**Maharaja-adhiraja:** A high sounding title used for great king, overlord.

**Tribhuvan-chakravartin:** Lord of the three worlds.

**Rent:** The part of the product that the producers—the peasants, cattle-keepers, artisans- were compelled to pay to the lords.

**Revenue:** The tax traders had to pay to their lords.

**Prashastis:** A literary composition often in verse written in praise of the ruler depicting him as a valiant, victorious warrior. It was mainly done by the Brahmanas who were often rewarded by grants of land for such jobs. This reward was recorded on copper plates and given to those who received the land.

**Sultan:** An Arabic term used for the ruler.

**Ur:** Settlements of peasants.

**Nadu:** Group of Urs i.e. villages formed a large unit called Nadu.

**Brahmadeya:** The land given to the Brahmanas as a grant.

**Vellanvagai:** The land of non-Brahmana peasant proprietors.

**Shalabhoga:** The land for the maintenance of a school.

**Devadana/Tirunamattukkani:** The land gifted to temples.

**Pallichchandam:** The land donated to Jaina institutions.

**Nagarams:** Associations of traders.

**Sabha:** The assembly of Brahmanas.

**7th century** – Rise of the new dynasties.

**Mid-eighth century** – Rise of Rashtrakuta chief as Kshatriya.

**1168-1192** – Prithviraja III ruled over the regions around Delhi.

**1191** – Prithviraja III defeated Muhammad Ghori.

**1192** – Prithviraja III lost a battle and was finished by Muhammad Ghori.

**985** – Rajaraja I became a great Chola ruler.

**5th/6th century** – The area of Tamil Nadu was opened up for large-scale cultivation.