



New Kings and Kingdoms

PART - I

Many new dynasties emerged after the seventh century. Map 1 shows the major ruling dynasties in different parts of the subcontinent between the seventh and twelfth centuries.

- ◆ Locate the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Rashtrakutas, Palas, Cholas and Chahamanas (Chauhans).
- ◆ Can you identify the present day states over which they exercised control?



Map 1: Major Dynasties of Northern, Central and Eastern India, c.700-1100 CE

The Emergence of New Dynasties

By the seventh century, there were many influential landlords or warrior chiefs in different regions of the subcontinent. Existing kings often acknowledged them as their subordinates or *samanthas*. They were expected to bring gifts for their kings or overlords, be present at their courts and provide them with military support. As *samanthas* gained power and wealth, they declared themselves to be *maha-samantha*, *maha mandaleshvara* (the great lord of a “circle” or region) and so on. Sometimes, they asserted their independence from their overlords.

One such instance was that of the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. Initially, they were subordinate to the Chalukyas of

Karnataka. In the mid-eighth century, Dantidurga, a Rashtrakuta chief, defeated his Chalukya overlord and performed a ritual called *hiranya-garbha* (literally, the golden womb). It was thought to lead to the “rebirth” of the sacrificer as a Kshatriya, even if he was not a kshatriya by birth.

- ◆ Do you think being born in a particular *varna* was important in order to become a ruler during this period?

In other cases, men from enterprising families used their military skills to carve out kingdoms. For instance, the Kadamba Mayurasharman and the Gurjara-Pratihara Harichandra were brahmins who gave up their traditional professions and took to arms, successfully establishing kingdoms in Karnataka and Rajasthan respectively.

Prashastis and Land Grants

The invocation part of an inscription is *Prashasti*. *Prashastis* contain details about the ruling family such as their predecessors and the period to which they belonged. They also contain encomiums of rulers and their achievements. But they tell us about how rulers wanted to depict themselves, for example valiant, victorious warriors. These were composed by learned brahmins, who occasionally helped in the administration.



Fig 11.1 Wall relief from Cave 15, Ellora, showing Vishnu as Narasimha, the man-lion. It is a work of the Rashtrakuta period

The “achievements” of Nagabhata

Many rulers described their achievements in *prashastis*.

One *prashasti*, written in Sanskrit and found in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, describes the exploits of Nagabhata, a Pratihara king, as follows:

The kings of Andhra, Saindhava (Sind), Vidarbha (part of Maharashtra) and Kalinga (part of Odisha) fell before him. Even as a prince ...

He won a war over Chakrayudha (the ruler of Kanauj) ...

He defeated the king of Vanga (part of Bengal), Anarta (part of Gujarat), Malva (part of Madhya Pradesh), Kirata (forest peoples), Turushka (Turks), Vatsa, Matsya (both kingdoms in north India)

Find these areas in Map 1.



Fig 11.2 This is a set of copper plates recording a grant of land made by a ruler in the ninth century, written partly in Sanskrit and partly in Tamil. The ring holding the plates together is secured with the royal seal, to indicate that this is an authentic document

Kings often rewarded brahmins and others who served them by grants of land. These were recorded on copper plates, which were given to those who received the land.

In the twelfth century, a long Sanskrit poem containing the history of kings who ruled over Kashmir, was composed by an author named Kalhana. He used a variety of sources, including inscriptions, documents, eyewitness accounts and earlier histories, to write his account. Unlike the writers of *prashastis*, he was often critical about rulers and their policies.

What was given with the land?

This is a part of the Tamil section of a land grant given by the Cholas:

We have demarcated the boundaries of the land by making earthen embankments, as well as by planting thorny bushes.

This is what the land contains: fruit-bearing trees, water, land, gardens and orchards, trees, wells, open spaces, pasture-land, a village, anthills, platforms, canals, ditches, rivers, silt-laden land, tanks, granaries, fish ponds, bee hives, and deep lakes.

He who receives the land can collect taxes from it. He can collect the taxes imposed by judicial officers as fines, and the tax on betel-leaves, woven cloth, vehicles etc.

He can build large rooms, with upper storeys made of baked bricks, he can get large and small wells dug, he can plant trees and thorny bushes, if necessary, he can also get canals constructed for irrigation. He should ensure that water is not wasted, and that embankments are built.

- ◆ List all the possible sources of irrigation mentioned in the inscription, and discuss how they might have been used.

Administration in the Kingdoms

Many of these new kings adopted high-sounding titles such as *maharaja-adhiraja* (great king, overlord of kings), *tribhuvana-chakravarti* (lord of the three worlds) and so on. However, in spite of such claims, they often shared power with their *samanthas* as well as with the associations of peasants, traders and brahmins.

In each of these kingdoms, resources were obtained from the producers – that is, peasants, cattle-keepers, artisans and traders were made to surrender a part of what they produced and sold. Sometimes, these were claimed as “rent” due to a lord who asserted that he owned the land. Revenue was also collected from traders.

These resources were used to finance the king’s establishment, as well as for the construction of temples and forts. They were also used to fight wars, which were in turn expected to lead to the acquisition of wealth in the form of tribute, and access to land as well as trade routes.

The functionaries for collecting revenue were generally recruited from ruling families, and positions were often hereditary. This was true about the army as well. In many cases, close relatives of the king held these positions.

- ◆ In what ways was this form of administration different from the present day system?

Warfare for Wealth

You may have noticed that each of these ruling dynasties was based in a specific region. At the same time, they tried to control other areas. One particularly prized area was the city of Kanauj in the Ganga valley. For centuries, rulers belonging to the Gurjara-Pratihara, Rashtrakuta and Pala dynasties fought for control over Kanauj. As there were three “parties” in this long-drawn conflict, historians often describe it as the “tripartite struggle”.

Look at Map 1 and suggest reasons for the rulers wanting to control Kanauj and the Ganga valley.

Mahmud Ghazni :

One of the rulers, *Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni*, Afghanistan, ruled from 997 Common Era (CE) to 1030 CE, and extended control over parts of Central Asia, Iran and the north-western part of the subcontinent. He raided Northern India many times and plundered and destroyed wealthy temples, including that of Somnath in Gujarat. Much of the wealth that Mahmud looted was used to build the capital city at Ghazni.

Sultan Mahmud was also interested in finding out more about the people he conquered, and entrusted a scholar named Al-Biruni to write an account of the subcontinent. This Arabic work, known as the *Kitab al-Hind*, is an important source for historians. Al-Biruni consulted Sanskrit scholars to prepare this account.

Chahamanas (Chauhans)

Chahamanas, later known as the Chauhans, ruled over the region around Delhi and Ajmer. They attempted to expand their control to the west and the east, where they were opposed by the Chalukyas of

Gujarat and the Gahadavalas of western Uttar Pradesh. The best-known Chahamanas ruler was Prithviraja III (1168 CE-1192 CE), who defeated an Afghan ruler named Sultan Muhammad Gori in 1191 CE, but lost to him the very next year, in 1192 CE.

Look at Map 1 again and discuss why the Chahamanas may have wanted to expand their territories.

PART - II

The Cholas

Let us take a look at Southern India now.

Chola rule is one of the well documented in the history of the South. Let us see how they became successful rulers.

From Uraiyur to Thanjavur

How did the Cholas rise to power? A minor chiefly-family known as the Muttaraiyar held power in the Kaveri delta. They were subordinates to the Pallava kings of Kanchipuram. Vijayalaya, who belonged

to the ancient chiefly-family of the Cholas from Uraiyur, captured the delta from the Muttaraiyar in the middle of the ninth century. He built the town of Thanjavur and a temple for goddess Nishumbhasudini there.

The successors of Vijayalaya conquered neighbouring regions and the kingdom grew in size and power. The Pandyan and the Pallava territories to the south and north were made part of this kingdom. Rajaraja I, considered the most

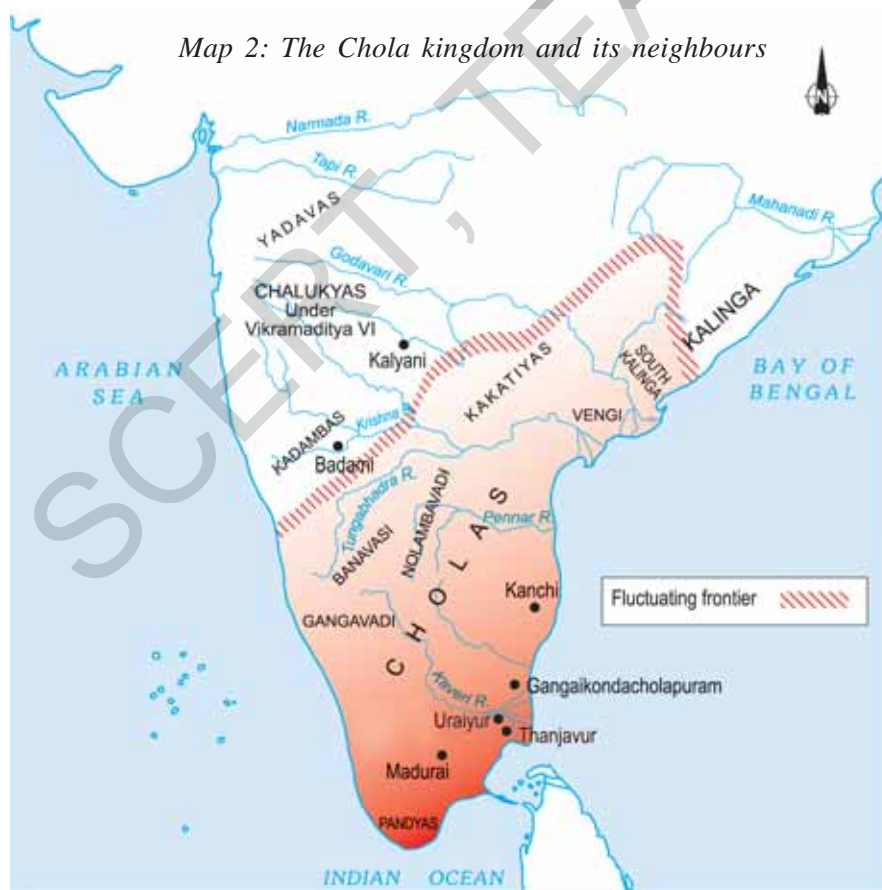




Fig 11.3 The temple at Gangaikonda-Cholapuram. Notice the way in which the roof tapers. Also, look at the elaborate stone sculptures used to decorate the outer walls

powerful Chola ruler, became the king in 985 CE and expanded his control over most of these areas. He also reorganised the administration of the empire. Rajaraja's son Rajendra I continued his policies and even conquered the Ganga valley, Sri Lanka and countries of Southeast Asia, developing a navy for these expeditions.

Splendid Temples and Bronze Sculpture

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

Chola temples often became the nuclei of settlements which grew around them. They were also the centres of craft production. Temples were also endowed with land by rulers as well as by others. The produce of this land went into maintaining

the specialists who worked in the temple and very often lived near it – priests, garland makers, cooks, sweepers, musicians, dancers etc. In other words, temples were not only places of worship, but also the hub of economic, social and cultural life as well.

Amongst the crafts associated with temples, the making of bronze images was the most distinctive.

Chola bronze images are considered to be the finest in the world. While most images were of deities, some images of devotees were made as well.

Agriculture and Irrigation

Many of the achievements of the Cholas were made possible through new developments in agriculture. Look at Map 2 again. Notice that the river Kaveri branches off into several small streams before emptying into the Bay of Bengal. These streams overflow frequently, depositing fertile soil on their banks. Water from the streams also provides the necessary moisture for agriculture, particularly the cultivation of rice.



Fig 11.4 A Chola bronze sculpture. Notice how carefully it is decorated



Fig 11.5 A ninth century sluice gate in Tamil Nadu. It regulated the outflow of water from a tank into the channels that irrigated the fields

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 regions; land had to be levelled in other areas. In the delta region, embankments had to be built to prevent flooding and canals had to be constructed to carry water to the fields. In many areas, two crops were grown in a year.

In many cases, it was necessary to water the crops artificially. A variety of methods were used for irrigation. In some areas, wells were dug. In other places, huge tanks were constructed to collect rainwater. Remember that irrigation works require planning – organising labour and resources, maintaining these works and deciding on how water is to be shared. Most of the new rulers, as well as people living in villages, took an active interest in these activities.

The Administration of the Empire

How was the administration organised? The king had a council of ministers to help him. He had a strong army and navy. The empire was divided into *mandalams* or provinces, further subdivided into *valanadus* and *nadus*.

Settlements of peasants, known as *ooru*, became prosperous with the spread of irrigated agriculture. Groups of such villages formed larger units called *nadu*. The village council and the *nadu* performed several administrative functions including dispensing justice and collecting taxes.

Rich peasants of the Vellala caste exercised considerable control over the affairs of the *nadu* under the supervision of the central Chola government. The Chola kings gave some rich landowners titles like *muvendavelan* (a *velan* or peasant serving

three kings), *araiyar* (chief) etc. as markers of respect, and entrusted them with important offices of the state at the centre.

Types of land

Chola inscriptions mention several categories of land:

vellanvagai

land of non-brahmin proprietors

brahmadeya

land gifted to brahmins

shalabhoga

land for the maintenance of a school

devadana, tirunamattukkani

land gifted to temples

pallichchhandam

land donated to Jaina institutions

We have seen that brahmins often received land grants or *brahmadeya*. As a result, 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. These assemblies worked very efficiently. Their decisions were recorded in detail in inscriptions, often on the stone walls of temples. Associations of traders known as *nagarams* also occasionally performed administrative functions in towns.

Inscriptions from Uttaramerur in Chingelput district, Tamil Nadu, provide details of the way in which the *sabha* was

organised. The *sabha* had separate committees to look after irrigation works, gardens, temples etc. Names of those eligible to be members of these committees were written on small tickets of palm leaf; these tickets were put into an earthenware pot from which a young boy was asked to take out the tickets, one by one for each committee.

Inscriptions and texts

Who could be a member of a *sabha*? The Uttaramerur inscription lays down:

All those who wish to become members of the *sabha* should be owners of land from which land revenue is collected.

They should have their own homes.

They should be between 35 and 70 years of age.

They should have the knowledge of the Vedas.

They should be well-versed in administrative matters and be honest.

If anyone has been a member of any committee in the last three years, he cannot become a member of another committee.

Anyone who has not submitted his accounts, including details of his relatives, cannot contest the elections.

- ◆ Do you think women participated in these assemblies? In your view, are lotteries useful for choosing members of committees?

While inscriptions tell us about kings and powerful men, here is an excerpt

from the *Periyapuranam*, a twelfth-century Tamil work, which informs us about the lives of ordinary men and women.

On the outskirts of Adanur was a small hamlet of *Pulaiyas*, studded with small huts under old thatches and inhabited by agrarian labourers engaged in menial occupations. In the thresholds of the huts covered with strips of leather, little chickens moved about in groups; dark children who wore bracelets of black iron were prancing about, carrying little puppies ... In the shade of the *marudu* (arjuna) trees, a female labourer put her baby to sleep on a sheet of leather; there were mango trees from whose branches

drums were hanging; and under the coconut palms, in little hollows on the ground, tiny-headed female dogs lay after whelping. The red-crested cocks crowed before dawn calling the brawny *Pulaiyar* (plural) to their day's work; and by day, under the shade of the *kanji* tree spread the voice of the wavy-haired *Pulaiya* women singing as they were husking paddy ...

- ◆ Describe all the activities that were taking place in the village.

Keywords :

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|
| 1. <i>Samantha</i> | 2. Temple | 3. Nadu |
| 4. Sabha | 5. Kingdom | 6. Sultan |

Improve your learning

1. Who were the parties involved in the “tripartite struggle”?
2. What were the qualifications to be a member of a committee of the *sabha* in the Chola empire?
3. Which two major cities were under the control of the Chahamanas?
4. How did the Rashtrakutas become powerful?
5. What did the new dynasties do to gain acceptance?
6. What kind of irrigation works were developed in the Tamil region?
7. What were the activities associated with Chola temples?
8. Contrast the “elections” in Uttaramerur with the present-day panchayat elections.
9. Collect the pictures of ancient temples and make an album.
10. Read the first two paragraphs of the section titled ‘Agriculture and Irrigation’ and comment on them.



Project:

1. Look at Map 1 and find out whether there were any kingdoms in Telangana.
2. Compare the temple shown in this chapter with any present-day temple in your neighbourhood.
3. Find out more about taxes that are collected now a days. Are these in cash, kind, or labour services?