

**B.A. (Programme)**

**Semester-II**

**HISTORY**

**DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC CORE COURSE**

**History of India c. 300 to 1200 CE**

**Unit 1-8**



**SCHOOL OF OPEN LEARNING**  
**University of Delhi**

**Department of History**

**Course Co-ordinator : Dr. Rajni Nanda Mathew**

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## **Course Objective**

The course provides a useful insight into the history of India from c. 300 to 1200 CE, a period characterized by significant changes in the political, social, economic, religious and cultural spheres. The course aims to underline and analyze the process of transition from ancient to medieval period. The period under study saw the emergence of regional kingdoms in different parts of the subcontinent. The invasion of the Arabs in the later phase of the period also brought about changes in the political, socio-economic and cultural milieu. The course has been divided into eight units with each focusing upon different aspects of the period.

## **Learning outcomes**

On successful completion of this course the students will be able to:

- Explain the historical importance and the practice of land grants and their significance.
- Describe the changes in the realm of polity and culture; puranic religion; the growth of vernacular languages and newer forms of art and architecture.
- Trace the evolution and growth of regional styles of temple architecture and the role of temples in socio-economic and political activities.

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**SURVEY OF THE SOURCES C. 300-1200 CE**

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**Structure**

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- 1.0 Objectives
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- 1.5 Conclusion
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**1.0 Objectives**

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**After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:**

- the sources of history for the period c. 300-1200 CE
- significance of sources for the reconstruction of our past
- limitations of different types of sources

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**1.1 Introduction**

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Sources are the various remains of past which help us in the reconstruction of history. The way they are studied, keeps on changing from time to time. In other words, the same kind of sources may be interpreted today in different ways to picturise the past. This makes the role of a historian important as he/she is the one who attempts to establish the connection between the past and the present. Thus, the sources act as the soul of historical interpretations. The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed important developments in the field of epigraphy, numismatics, and the study of art and architecture along with a major thrust on the translation of literary accounts. Surface collection, excavations and explorations have also brought to light many significant facts regarding our past. Different kinds of

sources, however, have their own limitations, and so the varied nature of these evidence calls for corroboration of the data obtained from both literary and archaeological sources.

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## 1.2 Literary Sources

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Literary sources are helpful in knowing about past because they contain a detailed narrative of events and themes. As the literary sources have certain limitations such as the problems associated with chronology, script, personal biases of authors etc., these can be supplemented with information from other sources such as epigraphic, numismatic or archeological for a better understanding of history. Literary sources may be broadly classified as religious literature, non-religious literature and foreign accounts.

### 1.2.1 Religious Literature

Major Puranas, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana* were compiled during the Gupta period. The *Narada*, *Vishnu*, *Brihaspati*, and *Katyayana Smritis* also belong to this period. The *Manjushri-mulakalpa*, a Buddhist Mahayana text, has a chapter on the history of India from the early centuries CE to the early medieval period. *Dharmashastra* works including the *Yajnavalkya*, *Narada*, *Katyayana*, and *Brihaspati Smritis* were composed in this period. New sections were added to *Brahmasutras*, *Yogasutras*, and *Nyayasutras*. Literature of the post-Gupta centuries includes philosophical commentaries, *bhanas* (monologue plays), *stotras* (hymn compositions), story literature, and anthologies of poetry. Historical and epic–Puranic themes were popular in the *kavya* style of literary tradition.

Puranas such as the *Bhagavata Purana* (c. 10th century), the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* (composed between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries), and *Kalika Purana* (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century) belong to this period. Sections on *tirthas* (pilgrimage), *vratas* (vows), penances, gifts, and the *dharma* of women were added to the older Puranas during this period. The Upapuranas mostly composed in eastern India are valuable for the information on popular beliefs, customs, and festivals. Literature of this period shows a clear distinction between law (*vyavahara*) and duty (*dharma*). A large number of important and influential *Dharmashastra* works, digests, and commentaries were written during this period. These compilations include *Chaturvimshatimata* which includes the teachings of twenty-four law givers. Jimutavahana wrote a work on procedural law called *Vyavaharamatrika* and a digest of laws on inheritance called *Dayabhaga*.

Major commentaries on *Manu Smriti* include those of Medatithi (9<sup>th</sup> century), Govindaraja (11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century), and Kulluka (12th century). Vijnaneshvara (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Apararka (12<sup>th</sup> century) wrote commentaries on *Yajnavalkya Smriti*. Vijnaneshvara's commentary titled *Mitakshara* discussed various aspects of law. Other important *Dharmashastra* works include Lakshmidhara's *Kritya-kalpataru* (12<sup>th</sup> century) and Devanabhata's *Smritichandrika* (11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century).

### 1.2.2 Non-Religious Literature

During Gupta period Sanskrit language acquired its classical form, both in poetry and prose or a combination of both. Important developments took place in the sphere of Sanskrit literature during 300-600 CE. Kamandaka's *Nitisara*, a work on polity addressed to the king, was composed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Fragments of the *Devi-Chandragupta*, a

lost drama written by Vishakhadatta, were found preserved in a manuscript of Bhoja's *Shringara-Prakasha* and are relevant for the information on political history of the Guptas. The *Kathasaritsagara* of Somadeva was a storehouse of popular folklore in Sanskrit. Besides the above-mentioned works, other treatises such as the *Kamasutra* (on pleasure) and the *Amarakosha* (a lexicon or dictionary) offer information on many aspects of contemporary society. The Tamil epics - the *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* dated to the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century CE are a rich source of information on the history of south India.

Kalidasa wrote dramas such as the *Abhijnanashakuntala*, *Malavikagnimitra*, *Vikramorvasi* etc. and lyrical poems including the *Raghuvamsha*, *Kumarasambhava*, and *Meghaduta*. These are considered masterpieces of Sanskrit literature. In the field of grammar, Bhartrihari (5<sup>th</sup> century) wrote a commentary on Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*. Vishnusharman's *Panchatantra* stories are amusing and satirical tales in which animals play important characters. Varahamihira's *Panchasiddhantika* (6<sup>th</sup> century) summarizes the astronomical works and ideas of the preceding centuries. His *Brihatsamhita* is an encyclopaedic work and gives an explanation of seasons and discusses meteorological issues such as the correlation between the clouds, winds, and amount of rainfall.

Aryabhata wrote two famous works - the *Aryabhatiya*, and *Aryabhata-siddhanta*. Aryabhata was the first astronomer to give a scientific explanation of eclipses that they were caused by the moon coming within the earth's shadow or between the earth and sun. Brahmagupta, an astronomer and mathematician of the late 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century, was the author of the *Brahmasputasiddhanta* (628 CE) and the *Khandakhadyaka* (665 CE). Their Arab translations and adaptations introduced Indian astronomy to the Arabs. Mahavira (9<sup>th</sup> century) was a famous mathematician of Karnataka who wrote a book called *Ganitasarasangraha* which dealt with various mathematical problems. Bhaskara II (12<sup>th</sup> century), author of *Lilavati* was another important mathematician, whose writings contain some important ideas of calculus.

The *Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhitas* are the earliest surviving texts of Ayurveda tradition. There is a nice interweaving of philosophical ideas like Samkhya, Yoga, and Vaisheshika in the medical texts. Charaka was considered a medical authority by the early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. The *Sushruta Samhita* was added to and edited over several centuries till about the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Vagbhata wrote *Ashtangahridaya* and *Ashtangasangraha* in 6<sup>th</sup> century while Kashyapa wrote in 7<sup>th</sup> century. The 14<sup>th</sup> century *Sharngadhara Samhita* offers a brief account of Ayurveda. The *Hastyayurveda* of Palakapya deals with the diagnosis and treatment of the major diseases of elephants.

The non-religious literature of post-Gupta centuries includes works on metre, grammar, lexicography, poetics, music, architecture, medicine, and mathematics. The growth of regional polities was accompanied by the composition of royal biographies by court poets. Banabhatta's *Harshacharita*, Sandhyakaranandin's *Ramacharita*, Padmagupta's *Navasahasankacharita* and Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacharita* are some of the important biographical works of this period. Hemachandra's *Kumarapalacharita* tells the story of Kumarapala, while the *Prithvirajavijaya* of Jayanaka gives an account of the victory of Prithviraja Chauhan over Muhammad of Ghor. Chand Bardai's *Prithvirajaraso* is an epic woven around the exploits of the same Chauhan king. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*

is a historical chronicle of the rulers of Kashmir from the earliest times till 12<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Apabhramsha works of this time include several texts on Jaina doctrines and saints, epic poems, short stories, and *dohas* (couplets). The devotional songs of the Alvars and Nayanmars were among the important Tamil texts. The *Lekhapaddhati*, a work in Sanskrit and Prakrit composed in Gujarat in 13<sup>th</sup> century contains models of various types of legal documents. *Krishi-Parashara* deals with agriculture. Jain folk tales (*dharma-kathas*) of western India are a useful source of information on trade and traders. During this period epics were translated into many regional (vernacular) languages such as Odia, Bangla, Telugu and Kannada.

### 1.2.3 Foreign Accounts

Foreign accounts on India in this period include *Christian Topography* written by Cosmas Indicopleustes in 6<sup>th</sup> century. Many Chinese monks travelled to India in order to collect Buddhist texts and visit important places related to Buddhism. Most popular writings are those by Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing. Faxian translated large number of texts he had collected from India. His account of travels is *Fo-kuo-ki (A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms)*. Many Indian monks also went to China but there are no accounts of their travels or experiences.

Chinese monks Xuanzang (600-664 CE) and Yijing (635-713 CE) visited India. One of Yijing's works gives an account of Buddhist doctrines and practices in India, while the other provides brief biographical sketches of 56 Chinese monks who visited India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The important Arab works include the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century writings of travellers and geographers such as Sulaiman, Al-Masudi, Abu Zaid, Al-Biduri, and Ibn Haukal. Later Arab writers include Al-Biruni, Al-Idrisi, Muhammad Ufi, and Ibn Batuta. Such accounts provide useful information on trading activities of the period. Al-Biruni in his book *Tehkik-i-Hind (Kitab-ul-Hind)* gives a detailed account of society during 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### Know Your Progress Exercise 1

#### A. State True or False.

- i. Gupta Period is known as the Classical Age for Sanskrit.
- ii. Vernaculars developed in Pre-Gupta Centuries.
- iii. Dharma and Vyavahara remained inseparable in Early Medieval Literature.
- iv. Literary sources of 300-1200 CE show that there was a lack of scientific literature.

#### B. Discuss the literary sources for the period 300-1200 CE.

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## 1.3 Archaeological Sources

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Archaeological sources include inscriptions, coins, seals, pottery, beads, sculpture and other kind of material remains found either through explorations and surface collections or in excavations. Like the literary evidence they also suffer from limitations



and therefore, a corroborative approach requires to be employed for the study of these antiquities.

### 1.3.1 Inscriptions

The study of inscriptions is known as epigraphy. An inscription is any writing that is engraved on stone, wood, metal, ivory plaques, bronze statues, bricks, clay, shells, pottery, etc. Epigraphy includes deciphering the text of inscriptions and analysing the information they contain. Palaeography is the study of ancient writing.

By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, Sanskrit gradually replaced Prakrit as the language of inscriptions in northern India. It gradually attained the status of a language associated with high culture, religious authority, and political power not only in the subcontinent but also in areas such as Southeast Asia. In the post-Gupta period, there was an evolution of regional languages and scripts. Even Sanskrit inscriptions show the influence of local dialects in spellings and words of non-Sanskrit origin. Tamil became an important language of South Indian inscriptions under the Pallava dynasty. Hundreds of donative Tamil inscriptions were inscribed on temple walls in various parts of South India in early medieval times. The earliest Kannada inscriptions belong to the late 6<sup>th</sup>/early 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. The late 6<sup>th</sup> century epigraphs of the early Chola kings mark the beginning of Telugu as a language of inscriptions. Malayalam inscriptions appear around 15<sup>th</sup> century. Marathi and Oriya inscriptions can be identified from 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Inscriptions in dialects similar to Hindi appear in Madhya Pradesh from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward, and Gujarati from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Inscriptions are usually dated in regnal years or eras. Many different eras were used in ancient and early medieval India. Inscriptions sometimes specify the month, lunar fortnight (*paksha*), lunar day (*tithi*), weekday (the civil day or solar day), and provide additional astronomical details. If an inscription is not dated, it can be assigned a tentative date on palaeographic grounds. Inscriptions can be classified on the basis of their content and purpose into different types such as official, donative, dedicative and commemorative inscriptions.

Royal land grants are an important category of donative records. There are thousands of such inscriptions, some on stone, but mostly inscribed on one or more copper plates. Most of them record grants made by kings to Brahmanas and religious establishments. Copper plate grants increased in number during early medieval period. Royal inscriptions include *prashastis* (panegyric/eulogy) which throw light on royal genealogies and political events. Most royal inscriptions (and some private ones too) usually begin with a *prashasti*. Some inscriptions are entirely devoted to eulogizing their subject.

Compared with literary sources, inscriptions have the advantage of durability. They are usually contemporary to the events they speak of and their information can be connected to a time and place. Changes and additions made to them can usually be detected without great difficulty. Inscriptions have been used as a major source of information on political structures and administrative and revenue systems. They also shed light on the history of settlement patterns, agrarian relations, forms of labour, and class and caste structures.

The epigraphic sources for the period 300-600 CE include inscriptions mostly on stone and copper plates of the imperial Guptas and other contemporary dynasties such as the Vakatakas, Kadambas and Varmans. Villages granted to Brahmanas were known as *agraharas*, *brahmadeyas*, or *shasanas*. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, the majority of royal land grants were made to the Brahmanas. Inscriptions continue to form a major source of information for the period 600–1200 CE. As far as the general characteristics of these sources are concerned, they mostly include *prashasti*, a condensed form of biographical literature (*charita*), which emerged as a popular form of literature in this period.

### **Know Your Progress Exercise 2**

#### **A. State True or False.**

- i. There is a shortage of epigraphic sources for the period CE 300-1200.
- ii. Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions.
- iii. Gupta period inscriptions are in regional languages.
- iv. Land Grants became very popular during CE 600-1200.

#### **B. Discuss the epigraphic sources for the period CE 300-1200.**

### **1.3.2 Coins**

The study of coins is known as numismatics. In modern times, money functions as a medium of exchange, a store of value, a unit of accounts, and a medium of deferred payment. Money is accepted for the exchange of goods or services. In the post-Satavahana period in the eastern Deccan, the Ikshvakus of the lower Krishna valley (3rd–4th centuries) issued lead coins similar to the Satavahana coins. The imperial Gupta kings issued well-executed die-struck gold coins with legends in Sanskrit. These coins known as *dinaras* have been mostly found in north India. The obverse depicts the reigning king in various poses, usually martial ones, but there are interesting instances of coins of Samudragupta and Kumaragupta I, showing them playing *vina* (a stringed instrument). The reverse of the Gupta coins have religious symbols indicating the kings' religious affiliations. There was a decline in the metallic purity of gold coins in the later part of Skandagupta's reign. The Guptas also issued silver coins, but their copper coins are rare.

Sometimes, numismatic evidence offers more than just the names of kings and provides biographical details. For instance, Gupta king Chandragupta I married a Lichchhavi princess, and this detail comes from coins commemorating the marriage. Coins have helped to prove that a Gupta king named Ramagupta ruled during the period between the reign of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. The performance of the *ashvamedha* sacrifice by Samudragupta and Kumaragupta I is recorded on their coins. The archer and battle-axe coin types of Samudragupta shows his physical prowess, while the lyrist type, which shows him playing the *vina*, represents a completely different aspect of his personality.

Coins and seals too were public message-bearing media, apart from being media of exchange or authentication. Gupta kings issued large numbers of gold coins known as *dinaras* (after the Roman *denarius*). These bore the names and epithets of kings, including metrical legends. The obverse generally had a representation of the king and the

reverse an image of a deity. Rulers such as Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta I, Skandagupta, and Budhagupta also issued silver coins, similar in weight and fabric to those of the western Kshatrapas. The obverse had the king's portrait, sometimes accompanied by a date; the reverse had a motif (e.g., a *garuda* or a peacock), surrounded by a circular legend. Copper coins of the Guptas are rare. The coins of contemporary dynasties include those of the Kadambas, Ikshvakus, Vishnukundins, and 'Nagas'. Large numbers of seals and sealings have been found at sites such as Basarh (ancient Vaishali), Bhita, and Nalanda.

The history of the early medieval period as reflected by the numismatic evidence is a subject of continuing debate. Some historians have described this period as a feudal order characterized by a decline in coinage along with the decline in trade and urban centres, followed by a revival in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This hypothesis, however, has been questioned in the light of recent studies.

A number of base metal alloy coin series were issued by dynasties in early medieval times. In the Ganga valley, billon coins circulated in the Gurjara-Pratihara kingdom, while other coin types circulated in Rajputana and Gujarat. Copper coins were minted by the Arab governors of Sindh between the mid-8<sup>th</sup> to mid-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Kashmir, copper coins were supplemented by bills of exchange (*hundikas*) denominated in terms of coins or grain, and the use of cowries. During the 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, kings of Bengal such as Shashanka issued gold coins. No coins of the Pala and Sena dynasties have been found. A number of silver coins known as Harikela coins were circulating in Bengal between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and these had a corresponding local eastern series, issued in the name of various localities.

In far south, coins with lion and bull motifs, some inscribed with titles, have been associated with the Pallavas. The tiger crest is the emblem on Chola coins. The seals of several Chola copper plate inscriptions show the tiger, fish (the Pandya emblem), and bow (the Chera emblem), indicating that the Cholas had achieved political supremacy over these two dynasties. In many parts of early medieval India, cowries continued to be used for small-scale transactions

### **Know Your Progress Exercise 3**

#### **A. State True or False.**

- i. Tiger is depicted as an emblem on the Chola coins.
- ii. Cowries were never used as a medium of exchange.
- iii. Only copper coins were in circulation during Gupta period.
- iv. The performance of the *asvamedha* sacrifice is depicted on the Gupta coins.

#### **B. Discuss the various kinds of numismatic sources for the study of the period 300-1200 CE.**

### **1.3.3 Other Archaeological Remains**

Although there are many architectural and sculptural remains of the period 300-600 CE, most of them are religious in nature. Excavations at sites such as Purana Qila,

Ahichchhatra, Basarh, Bhita, Arikamedu and Kaveripattinam have provided significant antiquities of the past. Archaeological data on cities of Gupta period, however, is extremely meagre. At Purana Qila in Delhi, there were remains of structures made of reused bricks. A terraced temple belonging to the early Gupta period was found at Ahichchhatra (Bareilly district, UP). Structural remains datable to the Gupta period were discovered at Hulaskhera (Lucknow district). Among the sites in the middle Ganga valley, a seal inscribed with Brahmi characters found at Rajghat is noteworthy. The remains of a Buddhist monastery were found at Kumrahar in Patna. In the lower Ganga valley, burnt brick fortifications were found at Mahasthangarh (in Bagura district of Bangladesh). Excavations at Basarh (ancient Vaishali) have yielded evidence of hundreds of seals and sealings.

The structures of Gupta period were large but made of broken bricks unlike those made of fresh bricks during the Shunga and Kushana periods. Bhita near Allahabad has structures of various periods, including those of c. 300-600 CE, mostly made of re-used or broken bricks. The presence of monasteries at the urban centres in various parts of the subcontinent suggests a relationship between the religion and trade. However, we also have to depend on the information from other sources for the reconstruction of the history of early medieval India due to the lack of systematic excavations at most of the archaeological sites of the period.

#### **Know Your Progress Exercise 4**

##### **A. State True or False.**

- i. Remains of a temple have been discovered at Ahichchhatra.
- ii. The buildings of Gupta period were mostly made of broken bricks unlike those of fresh bricks during the Shunga and Kushana periods.
- iii. The remains of monasteries were generally discovered in rural areas.
- iv. A seal bearing Brahmi characters was found from the excavation at Purana Qila.

##### **B. Discuss the different kinds of archaeological sources for the period CE 300-1200.**

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#### **1.4 Limitations of Sources**

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A meticulous and skilful analysis of the sources is the foundation of historical writings. These sources have their own merits and limitations which have to be taken into account by the historians. The study based on evidence from ancient texts and archaeological remains such as inscriptions, coins, etc. forms the basis for any kind of interpretation. One of the major problems we face with regard to the sources is regarding ascertaining the exact date of the various sources. Literary sources are associated with problems of dating and authorship while most of the inscriptions are very short and do not reveal much information. In the case of archaeological sources, we find that most of the sites have not been subjected to systematic excavation due to several problems such as those occupied by habitation at present. The vertical excavations at many sites although have revealed culture sequence at those sites but horizontal digging is required

for explicit information. Many excavated structures have also undergone subsequent decay with time. Many archaeological remains such as pottery, coins, sculptures, pillars, etc. are not found at the original place of their origin making it difficult to ascertain their real significance and context. These limitations, thus, continue to impact the understanding of the historical past for the period 600-1200 CE.

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## **1.5 Conclusion**

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The various kinds of sources are of immense help for understanding our past during c. 300-1200 CE. These evidences, nevertheless, reflect about the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural life in the contemporary period. The nature of sources also reveals about the level of human achievement in the field of literature, art, architecture and other fields. As these sources contain different kinds of limitations, the study of past requires the corroboration of information from varied remains available to us.

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## **1.6 Let Us Sum Up**

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- There are different types of sources for the study of our past.
- There was a greater development of Sanskrit language during the Gupta period.
- Post-Gupta centuries show a rise of vernacular languages and literature.
- Land grants became very popular during the period 600-1200 CE.
- Cowries became the most common medium of exchange during 600-1200 CE.
- The various kinds of sources have their own limitations.

### **Answers to Know Your Progress Exercise 1**

- A. (i) True (ii) False (iii) False (iv) False  
B. See Section 1.2 (1.2.1, 1.2.2 & 1.2.3)

### **Answers to Know Your Progress Exercise 2**

- A. (i) False (ii) True (iii) False (iv) True  
B. See Section 1.3.1

### **Answers to Know Your Progress Exercise 3**

- A. (i) True (ii) False (iii) False (iv) True  
B. See Section 1.3.2

### **Answers to Know Your Progress Exercise 4**

- A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) False (iv) False  
B. See Section 1.3 (1.3.1, 1.3.2 & 1.3.3)

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**The Guptas and Vakatakas: State and Administration, Economy  
Society, Religion, Literature and Art**

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**Structure**

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- 2.0 Objectives
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**2.0 Objectives**

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

- trace the administrative, economic and social developments from the fourth to seventh centuries of the Common Era
- identify the reasons for the rise and growth of the Gupta empire
- examine the process that led to the decline of the Guptas and the emergence of various political powers

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## **2.1 Introduction**

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The period from the fourth to the seventh centuries is important in ancient Indian history, as it was a transitional period in terms of political, social, economic, religious and cultural histories. The period has been debated and a rich historiography is available for the study of this period. A brief outline on the major schools of historical writings would familiarize us with the shifts in the study of India of the Guptas and Harsha.

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## **2.2 Historiographic Trends**

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The colonial or imperial historians like Vincent A. Smith of British India dubbed ancient India as a 'dark age', which enabled the Britishers to divide and rule India. The nationalists in their reactions against an unfair portrayal of ancient India borrowed the periodization of Indian history (Ancient India is equivalent to Hindu India, Medieval India is equivalent to Muslim India and British India is equivalent to British rule over India). Nationalist historians like R.C. Majumdar, K.K. Datta, H.C. Raychaudhuri highlighted the achievements of ancient India and coined the term 'golden age' for the Gupta period. To the nationalists, the Gupta period surpassed all other periods in ancient Indian history in its achievements in political unity, economic prosperity, art, architecture and literature.

In the post-independence era, the Marxist historians in a critique of the nationalist historiography postulated the theory of 'Indian Feudalism' from the Gupta period onwards. Marxist historians R.S. Sharma, B.N.S. Yadava, D.N. Jha etc. propounded that the Guptas began with the regular practice of landgrants to brahmanas with fiscal privileges and the post-Gupta rulers gave away administrative and judicial rights along with fiscal rights initially to brahmanas, temples and later to officials and even to merchants. Hence, the Guptas and their successors including Harsha perpetuated a feudal political structure in which landed intermediaries ruled rural society and politically fragmented and decentralized India. Landgrants brought feudal practices in economy as trade and urbanization declined in the post-Gupta period and peasantry was exploited with increasing burden of taxes. Obnoxious practices like Tantricism marked the cultural and religious aspects of Indian feudalism. As a critique of 'Indian Feudalism', B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Hermann Kulke forwarded the processualist model/integrative model of state formation for the study of the post-Gupta India or early medieval India. Chattopadhyaya and Kulke argued that landgrants to brahmanas and temples, instead of decentralization of the political authority of bigger and smaller states, legitimized the exercise of royal authority in the countryside and hence, integrated the territorial units and chiefs into the emerging local, sub-regional and regional states. B.P. Sahu refers to the integrative/ processual model of studying states in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. Nandini S. Kapur has demonstrated the integrative forces in the formation of two near contemporary states to the Guptas, the Vakataka state in Vidarbha and the Maitraka in Gujarat. Instead of disintegration, the integrative model highlights the integrative forces in political formation in ancient Indian history.

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## 2.3 The ‘Myth of Golden Age’

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Historians, who expounded the theory of the Golden Age, suggest that the Gupta period was a time in history when virtually every manifestation of life reached a peak of excellence. The Gupta period was selected largely because of impressive literary works in Sanskrit and the high quality of art, which coincided with what was viewed as a brahmanical ‘renaissance’. Since Indian civilization had early been characterized as Hindu and Sanskritic, the initial spread of brahmanical culture as ‘high’ culture on an unprecedented scale was described as golden period.

The distant past had an advantage, for it allowed greater recourse to imagination in recreating that past. Now that historians are commenting on all aspects of society, the notion of a uniformly Golden Age that encompasses an entire society has been questioned. The description of a Golden Age reflected the life of the wealthy and their activities alone characterized such an age. There are at least three epochs when artistic and literary expression achieved impressive standards – the post-Mauryan and Gupta period; the Cholas; and the Mughals. The precursor to the culture of the Gupta period was not restricted to northern India, since the Deccan shows a striking evolution of cultures.

The classicism of the Gupta period is not an innovation emanating from Gupta rule but the culmination of a process that began earlier. New artistic forms were initiated during the pre-Gupta in north India, such as those associated with Buddhism and which also found parallels in other religious sects, with the writing of texts on technical subjects and creative literature of various kinds. Much of the articulation is in Sanskrit, but it is of Sanskritic culture assumes certain kinds of social and cultural exclusivity and demarcates social groups it attempts a transition towards a uniform, elite culture, but in the process becomes a catalyst for many others. The description of the Gupta period as one of classicism is relatively correct regarding the upper classes that lived well according to descriptions in their literature and representations in their art. The more accurate, literal evidence that comes from archaeology suggests a less glowing lifestyle for the majority. Materially, excavated sites suggest that the average standard of living may have been higher in the preceding period.

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## 2.4 The Early Guptas

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Evidence on the origin and antecedents of the Gupta family is limited, as it seems to have emerged from obscure beginnings. It was thought that the family ruled a small principality in Magadha, but recent opinion supports the western Ganges Plain as a base. The name could indicate that they were of the *vaishya* caste, but some historians accord them *Brahman* status. The eulogy on a later king of the dynasty envisages many small states subsequent to the decline of the Kushanas, and theirs may have been one such.

### 2.4.1 Chandra Gupta I

The dynasty came into its own with the accession of Chandra Gupta I, who made his kingdom more than a mere principality. Chandra Gupta I married into the Lichchhavi family, an established *gana-sangha* of north Bihar. The marriage set a stamp of acceptability on the family and was politically advantageous for them, since Chandra



Gupta I made much of it in his coins. His rule extended over the Ganges heartland (Magadha, Saketa and Prayaga) and he took the title of *maharajadhiraja* (great king of kings), although this ceased to have much significance since it was now used by many rulers, major and minor. The Gupta era of 319-20 CE is thought to commemorate his accession.

### 2.4.2 Samudra Gupta

Samudra Gupta claimed that he was appointed by his father to succeed him about 335 CE, a lengthy eulogy on him was inscribed on an Ashokan pillar, now at Allahabad, which provides the basic information on his reign. The eulogy, if it is to be taken literally, provides an impressive list of kings and regions that succumbed to Samudra Gupta's triumphal march across various parts of the subcontinent. In the subsequent period such lists of conquests were often part of the courtly rhetoric, but in his case the exaggeration of a court poet may have been more limited. The emphasis seems to be on the paying of tribute rather than the annexing of territory. Four northern kings were conquered, mainly in the era around Delhi and the western Ganges Plain. Kings of the south and the east were forced to pay homage were captured and released. From the places mentioned, it appears Samudra Gupta campaigned down the east coast as far as Kanchipuram (near modern Chennai). Nine kings of Aryavarta, in northern India, were violently uprooted; the rajas of the forest-peoples of central India and the Deccan were forced into servitude. In a sixth-century inscription eighteen forest kingdoms of central India are said to have been inherited by a local ruler, which suggests that the conquest of these areas began earlier. Kings in eastern India, as well as small kingdoms in Nepal and the Punjab are said to have paid tribute. Nine of earlier *gana-sanghas* in Rajasthan, including the age-old Malavas and Yaudheyas, were forced to accept Gupta suzerainty. In addition, more distant rulers such as the Daivaputra Shahanushahi ('The Son of Heaven, King of Kings', clearly a Kushana title), the Shakas, and the King of Sinhala (Sri Lanka) also paid tribute, as did the inhabitants of all the islands.

An interesting feature of the conquests is their variety and number, from chiefdoms to kingdoms. Samudra Gupta broke the power of the chiefdoms in the watershed and northern Rajasthan, which led to an unfortunate consequence for the later Guptas when the Huns invaded north-western India. Apart from this the termination of these chiefdoms was the death-knell of the *gana-sangha* polity, which had held its own for a millennium as an alternative to monarchy. Regarding Sri Lanka, a later Chinese source provides evidence that Sinhala king sent presents and requested the Gupta king's permission to build a Buddhist monastery at Gaya. Such a request can hardly be termed tribute and it is probable that his relationship with other distant kings was similar. Who the 'inhabitants of the islands' were remains unclear and possibly refers to parts of south-east Asia hosting Indian settlements, with which contacts had increased. Samudra Gupta's conquests are well reflected in his having performed the horse sacrifice and proclaiming his victories in the Allahabad pillar inscription.

### 2.4.3 Chandra Gupta II

Of all the Gupta kings, Chandra Gupta II, the son of Samudra Gupta, is reputed to have shown exceptional chivalrous and heroic qualities. His long reign of about forty year from circa 375 to 415 CE had a rather mysterious beginning. A play written some

two centuries later, *Devi-chandra-gupta*, supposedly dealing with events on the death of Samudra Gupta, introduced Rama Gupta as the son who succeeded Samudra Gupta. The story goes that Rama Gupta defeated in battle by the Shakas, to whom he then agreed to surrender his wife, Dhruvadevi. His younger brother Chandra was incensed by this, disguised himself as the Queen and, getting access to the Shaka King's apartments, he killed him. This action gained him the affection of the people but created enmity between him and his brother Rama. Chandra finally killed Rama and married Dhruvadevi. The discovery of the coins of Rama Gupta and the inscriptions mentioning Dhruvadevi as Chandra Gupta's wife lend some authenticity to the story.

Furthermore, Chandra Gupta's major campaign was fought against the Shakas. The campaign led to the annexation of western India, commemorated by the issuing of special silver coins. Its significance lay not only in the western border of India being secure, but also in its giving access to the western trade since the ports were now in Gupta hands. The western Deccan, earlier held by the Satavahanas, was ruled by the Vakataka dynasty which emerged as a dominant power in the Deccan.

### **Check your progress exercise 1**

#### **A. Write Short Notes on:**

- (i) Samudragupta
- (ii) The 'Golden Age' of the Guptas.

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## **2.5 Gupta Administration**

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The Gupta kings took exalted imperial titles, such as maharaja-adhiraja, 'the great king of kings', parameshvara, 'the supreme lord', yet in the case of later rulers these titles were exaggerated since their claimants possessed limited political power when compared with the 'great kings' of earlier centuries. Such grand titles echo those of the rulers of the north-west and beyond and like them carry the flavour of divinity.

In the Ganges Plain, under the direct control of the Guptas, the king was the focus of administration assisted by the princes, ministers and advisers. Princes also held positions like viceroys of provinces. The province (*desha*, *rashtra* or *bhukti*) was divided into a number of districts (*pradesha* or *vishaya*), each district having its own administrative office. But for all practical purposes local administration was distinct from the centre. Decisions were generally taken locally, unless they had a specific bearing on the policy or orders of central authority.

This was significantly different from the Mauryan administration. Whereas Ashoka insisted that he be kept informed of all the happenings, the Guptas were satisfied leaving the responsibilities with the *kumaramatyas* and *ayuktakas*. Evidences from inscriptions and seals suggest that Gupta administration was decentralized with officials holding more than one office. Harsha's tours were similar to those of a royal inspector. He looked into the general working of administration and tax collection, listened to complaints and made charitable donations.

Villages were of various categories: grama, palli, hamlet; gulma, a military settlement in origin; khetaka, also a hamlet; and so on. They came under the control of rural bodies consisting of the headman and the village elders, some of whom held the office of the grama-adhyaksha or the kutumbi. In urban administration each city had a council consisting of the nagarashreshthin, the person who presided over the city corporation, the sarthavaha, the chief representative of the guild of merchants, the prathama-kulika, a representative of the artisans, and the prathama-kayastha, the chief scribe. A major difference between this council and the committee described by Megasthenes and Kautilya is that during Mauryan period, government appointed the committees, whereas in the Gupta system the council consisted of local representatives and even commercial interests predominated.

If the Mauryan state was primarily concerned with collecting revenue from an existing economy or expanding peasant agriculture through the intervention of state, the Gupta state made attempts at restructuring the agrarian economy. The system developed from the notion that granting land as a support to kingship could be more efficacious than the performance of a sacrifice, and that land was appropriate as a mahadana or 'great gift'. This investment by the king was also intended to improve the cultivation of fertile, irrigated lands and to encourage the settlement of wasteland. Peripheral areas could therefore be brought into the larger agrarian economy, and the initial grants tended not to be in the Ganges heartland but in the areas beyond. There was gradually less effort of the state in establishing agricultural settlements and recipients of landgrants were expected to take the initiative.

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## 2.6 Land Grants

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Grants of land were made to religious and ritual specialist or to officers. This did not produce revenue for the state, but it allowed some shuffling of revenue demands at the local level and created small centers of prosperity in rural areas that, if imitated, could lead to wider improvement. If the land granted to brahmins (whether as ritual specialists or as administrators) was wasteland or forest, the grantee took on the role of a pioneer in introducing agriculture. Brahmins became proficient in supervising agrarian activities, helped by manuals on agriculture, such as the *Krishiparashra*, which may date to this or the subsequent period. Some normative texts forbid agriculture to the brahmins except in dire need, but this did not prevent brahmanical expertise in agricultural activity.

Commercial enterprise was encouraged through donations to guilds, even if the interest was to go to a religious institution, and by placing commercial entrepreneurs in city councils and in positions with a potential for investment and profit. The range of taxes coming to the state from commerce was expanded, which in turn required an expansion in the hierarchy of officials. Although the granting of land was at first marginal, by about the eighth century CE it had expanded, gradually resulting in a political economy that was recognizably different from pre-Gupta times.

Kings who conquered neighbouring kingdoms sometimes converted the defeated kings into tributary or subordinate rulers, often referred to in modern writing as feudatories. Agreements were also negotiated with such rulers. The term *samanta*, originally meaning neighbour, gradually changed its meaning to a tributary ruler. This

implied more defined relationships between the king and local rulers, relationships that became crucial in later times with a tussle between royal demands and the aspirations of the *samantas*. Where the latter were strong the king's power weakened. But he needed the acquiescence of the *samantas* – the samanta-chakra or circle of samantas – to keep his prestige. *Samantas* were in the ambiguous position of being potential allies or enemies.

In addition to the tributary rulers, grants of land had created other categories of intermediaries. Grants to religious beneficiaries included some to temples, monasteries and brahmanas. Such grants to temples empowered to sects that managed the temples. Villages could also be given as a grant to a temple for its maintenance. This added local administration to the role of the temple in addition to being an area of sacred space. At a time when land grants were tokens of special favour the grant to the Brahman must have underlined his privileged position. The *agrahara* grant of rent-free land or a village that could be made to a collectivity of brahmans, the *brahmadeya* grant to brahmans, and grants to temples and monasteries, were exempt from tax. The brahmans were often those proficient in the Vedas, or with specialized knowledge, particularly of astrology. Gifts to brahmans were expected to ward off the evils of the present Kali Age, and recourse to astrology appears to have been more common.

Grants of land began to supersede monetary donations to religious institutions. Land was more permanent, was heritable and the capital less liable to be tempered with. Such grants were more conducive to landlordism among brahmans grantees, although the monasteries did not lag too far behind. Another significant feature of this period was that officers were occasionally rewarded by revenue from grants of land, which were an alternative to cash salaries for military or administrative service. This is mentioned in some land-grant inscriptions from this period onwards, and also in the account of Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang). Such grants were fewer in number. Not all grants to brahmans were intended for religious purposes since there were many literate brahmans performing official functions. Vassalage, involving a warrior class with ties of obedience and protection, is not commonly met with.

Such grants distanced the owners from the control of the central authority, thus predisposing administration to be more decentralized. Those with substantial grants of land providing revenue could together accumulate sufficient power and resources to challenge the ruling dynasty. If in addition they could mobilize support from peer groups and others such as the forest chiefs, or coerce the peasants into fighting for them, they could overthrow the existing authority and establish themselves as kings, at least on the fringes of the kingdom.

Brahmanas as religious beneficiaries were granted land, ostensibly in return for legitimizing and validating the dynasty, or averting a misfortune through the correct performance of rituals or the king earning merit. Lineage links with heroes of earlier times were sought to enhance status through a presumed descent. If the grant was substantial enough the grantee could become the progenitor of a dynasty through appropriation of power and resources. The grants were also part of a process of proselytizing where the grantee sought to propagate his religion. Many grants were made to brahmans proficient in the Vedas, but when they settled near forested areas, or in villages already observing their own beliefs and rituals, the very different observances of

the brahmins may have created tensions requiring a negotiated adjustment on both sides. In this situation the Puranic sects were useful mediators between Vedic Brahmanism and the religions of the local people. Even if the Brahman took over the ritual of the priest, he would have needed to incorporate local mythology and iconography into the flexible and ever-expanding Puranic sects.

## Check your progress exercise 2

### A. State True or False:

- (i) The Gupta kings took exalted imperial titles, such as *maharaja-adhiraja* (the great king of kings), *parameshvara* (the supreme lord).
- (ii) Gupta administration was akin to the Mauryan administration.
- (iii) The *sarthavaha* was the chief representative of the guild of merchants.
- (iv) Brahmanas became proficient in supervising agrarian activities during the Gupta period.
- (v) Grants of land were made to religious and ritual specialists or to officers.

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## 2.7 Socio-Economic Changes

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### 2.7.1 Social Changes

The conventional historiography projected continuation of the four-fold division of the Varna-System (*Chatuh-Varna*) in the Gupta and post-Gupta period. However, R.C. Hazra mentions that early Puranas offer descriptions of *Kaliyuga* in terms of foreign invasions, instability, social tension, struggle, teaching of hedonistic sects. But modern historians like Ram Sharan Sharma ascribes the origin of *Kaliyuga* to mixing of castes (*Varna Samkara*) and the rise of Shudras on the beginning of the fourth century. Hence it was a period of social crises. It was an age of enmity between brahmins and *shudras*, vaishyas refusing to perform *yojnas* on tax burdened subject population law and order problem, thefts, unsecured family and property, increasing materialism and decreasing religious rituals, sovereignty of *mlechha* (low-caste) kings. The inscriptions of the Vakatakas of *Vidarbha* and Pallavas of Kanchipuram are quoted to show that they acted together against *Kaliyuga*. Brahmanization of villages under the Vakatakas and Pallavas are supposed to indicate social disorder. It is assumed that the rulers set to order *Kaliyuga* from the fourth century onwards. The rise of the Vakatakas, Pallavas, Gangas and Kadambas are supposed to indicate brahmanical reactions against the shudras as these dynasties originated from brahmana families.

From the later half of the Gupta period and particularly the Vakatakas and Pallavas enforced strict rules according to Varna-order to deal with *Kaliyuga*. One of the chief mechanisms of continuing *Kaliyuga* was landgrants. We have already mentioned that the Guptas and their contemporaries began to grant land to religious donees, brahmanas and temple-priests, and later to secular donees, ministers, civil and army officers and even merchants. Thus, began the age of landed intermediaries intervening between states and peasants. Landgrants gave rise to a graded rural society and ranking status and ranks which did not fit into *Varna-order*: *Mahamandalika*, *Mandalika*,

*Mandaleshwara*, *Mahasamanta* etc as mentioned in *Aparajitaprachha* (a book of architecture) but a receipt (critique of the above thesis by Hermann Kulke, B.D. Chattopadhyaya and B.P. Sahu clearly indicate that the concept of *Kaliyuga* was popularized by brahmanas has to be viewed in the context of state formation process. Rural society had to be initiated in the norms of state society in regions where local state formation was taking place for the first time. Taxes and resources had to be mobilized for the first time from a rural population which was getting families with state and its administration and military institutions. The fear of *Kaliyuga* forced communities to conform to social and political order in regions, which were going through processes of state formation for the first time.

A detailed study of epigraphical records reveals that landgrants did not introduced a graded society for the first time. B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Nandini Sinha Kapur in their case studies have demonstrated a hierarchical rural society in Bengal, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat in which brahmana and non-brahmana landlords, peasants, artisans and landless labourers constituted rural society before the beginnings of the practice of landgrants. One of the most important social developments in this period was proliferation of castes or *jatis*. A large number of castes originated with incorporation of economic specialists, tribes and immigrants from central Asia into the Brahmanical Varna Society.

Categories of slaves were drawn more commonly from the lower castes and untouchables. The *Dharmashastras* of this time mentions details of slaves and indicate a greater use of slave labour. But hired labour seems to have been used on larger scale than before. Prisoners of war, debt bondsmen and slaves born to slave women formed the usual sources of slaves. The largest number of slaves seems to have been employed in domestic work. Bonded labour, hired labour and those required to perform stipulated jobs as a form of *vishti*, forced labour or labour tax constituted important part of agricultural labour. Caste regulations prevented the untouchables to be hired as domestic labour and untouchables constituted a permanent landless labour.

Fa Xian (Fa-Hien), a Chinese Buddhist monk, who was on pilgrimage to India in the years 405 to 411 CE, collecting Buddhist manuscripts, describes general happiness of ordinary people. But he also mentions practices like untouchables sounding a clapper in the street of the town to warn people of their presence as an upper-caste person had to perform a ritual ablution. Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang) states that butchers, fishermen, theatrical performers, executioners and scavengers were forced to live outside the city and their houses were marked so that they could be avoided. However, Chinese Buddhist marks offer an overall pleasant picture of the Indian society.

Another important indicator of social structure is the social construction of gender relations. Idealized form of women in literature and art tend to give the impression that women generally enjoyed a higher social status. But historians like Romila Thapar point out that such idealized women conformed to the male ideals of the perfect women and such ideals placed women in the subordinate position. Limited education was permitted to upper-caste women but certainly not to provide professional expertise. Women's access to property or inheritance was limited and varied according to caste, custom and region. Although matrilineal systems might have existed among some social groups in

the earlier times but normative texts supported patriarchy. Hence, groups wanting upward social mobility adopted patriarchy. Characteristic of the status of upper-caste women in later centuries was that early marriages were advocated. A widow was expected to live in austerity while a widow of the Kshatriya caste was expected to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband especially if he had died a hero's death this would make her a sati. The earliest historical evidence for this practice dates from 510 CE, when it was commemorated in an inscription at Iran. Subsequently, incidents of *Sati* increased. Small number of women chose to opt out of the 'normal' household activities required of woman, and became nuns, or trained to be courtesans or joined troupes of performers.

### 2.7.2 Economic Changes

The changes in the agrarian economy introduced in the Gupta period have been already noted in the section on administration. The most important innovation in the agricultural sector was the introduction of land grant economy. Initially, religious donees were exempted from payment of revenue (land-tax) and later received administrative judiciary rights over the villages. However, economic advantages of land-grant donated to religious specialists like Brahmanas were more important than the royal act of giving away since land to brahmanas and later officials. The astronomical knowledge of brahmanas in agricultural seasons, calendar, and agricultural manners brought considerable amount of land under cultivation. Thus, historians like R.S. Sharma have accepted the phenomenon of agrarian expansion for early medieval India. *Krishiparaghara* (agricultural manual) gives vivid descriptions of fields, and agricultural operations of this period.

Although revenue-free land grants to religious and secular donees did not bring immediate revenue to state these grants initiated rural prosperity and bound villages in a wider economic network. If the land donated to brahmanas was wasteland or forest, the grantee took the initiatives of introducing agriculture. This was especially true of forest and tribal areas. Brahmanas possessed technical and astronomical knowledge of agricultural operations.

One of the most important socio-economic changes was 'peasantization' of tribes in central Indian belt Orissa, Assam, part of western and southern India. As the brahmanas donees arrived in the forests and hills of tribal India, they began to initiate a section of the tribal society into agricultural activities. The process brought two economic advantages to state and society. More cultivable land was brought under agriculture generating more revenues for the expanding rural society and meeting increasing revenue demands. The part of the tribal society offered its labour for agriculture, forest and rural law and order, mining operations of public work in villages etc.

State revenue was derived from a variety of taxes from the land and from trade. The debasement of the later Gupta coinage has been interpreted as recording a fiscal crisis. Harsha divided the income of the state into four as mention by Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang)– quarter for government expenses another quarter for the salaries of public servants, a third quarter for the reward of intellectual attainments, and the last quarter for gifts.

It has been argued that there was decay in urban centers at this time, pointing to the Gupta period economy having feudal characteristics. Town not only declined, but many suffered a visible termination of commerce. Excavation levels of the Kushana period show a prosperous condition. The insufficiency of agricultural produce to maintain towns has been attributed to climatic change, with increasing desiccation and aridity of the environment. A decrease in rainfall and the ill effects of deforestation would also have affected agricultural production. A combination of these changes would have contributed to urban decline. However, the crucial question remains if this urban decline was sub continental or restricted to certain regions. It is important to note that some town certainly declined, but it was not a sub continental phenomenon and the reasons for decline varied. Apart from other environmental changes there may have been other economic changes. The rise of new centers of exchange may have re-routed trade routes. New towns sprang up in the eastern Gangetic plain while Kanyakabja (Kanauj) continue to flourish as town with a prosperous agrarian hinterland. Paunur in the Deccan flourished during the Vakataka period. Valabhi grew in commercial importance through the trade of the Arabian Sea in which affluent Arab traders were involved. The Indian merchants had become more assertive in central Asia and south-east Asia. In some parts of the sub-continent the Gupta age was the concluding phase of the economic momentum that began in the proceeding period. In other parts, the sixth century witnessed emergence of new groups of merchants on the west coast.

Sources of commercial wealth consisted of the produce from mines, plants and animals converted to items through craftsmanship. Gold was mined in Karnataka but panned in the mountain streams of the far north. The high-quality craftsmanship in gold is evident in the superbly designed and meticulously minted Gupta coins. They tend to be found in hoards and some are in mint conditions. High-value silk, and a farmillier weight standards facilitated commerce. The mining of copper and iron continued, being used for household items, utensils, implements and weapons. Among the most impressive metal objects of this period is the pillars of iron, now located at Mehrauli in Delhi, reacting a height of just over 23 feet and mode of a remarkably fine metal which has scarcely rusted. It carries an inscription referring to a kind called Chandra, identified by some as Chandra Gupta II. Equally impressive is the life-size, copper statue of the Buddha. Ivory works, pearl fisheries of western India, cutting and polishing of a variety of precions stones-jasper, agate, carnelian, quartz, lapis-lazuli and bead-malling of Ujjain and Bhokardan continued to flourish. The manufacture of various textiles had a vast domestic market dominating north-south trade within India, and there was also considerable demand for Indian textiles in Asian markets. Silk, muslin, Calico linen, wool and cotton were produced in quantity, and western India was one of the centres of silk weaving. However, in the latter half of the Gupta period the production of silk may have declined, since many members of an important guild of ill-weavers in western India migrated inland to follow other occupations. Guilds continued to be vital in manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise and had their own laws regarding their internal organization. The guilds provided socio-economic support in some ways parallel to that of *jati*. The excessively high rates demanded in earlier times on loans for overseas trade were reduced to a reasonable twenty percent, indicating a confidence in overseas trade. The lowering of the rate of interest also indicates the greater availability of goods and a possible decrease in rate of profit.



The campaigns of Samudra Gupta to the east and the south, and the repeated tours of Harsha, would have required efficient communication and movement of goods. Ox-drawn carts were common on the roads and pack animals were used on rough terrain and elephants in heavily forested areas. The lower reaches of large rivers such, as Ganges, Narmada, Godawari, Krishna and Kaveri were the main waterways. The ports of the eastern coast, such as Tamralipti and Ghanta Shala, handled the northern Indian trade, with the eastern coast and south-east Asia and those of the west coast traded with the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. The ports and production centres of peninsular India that were involved at this maritime trade appear not to have declined at this time, but these were outside Gupta control nor had the overland trade with central and west Asia declined between the fourth and the seventh centuries. There appears to have been appreciable rise in the import of horses, coming from Iran and Bactria centres in north-west India, or from Arabia by sea to the western coast.

### **Check your progress exercise 3**

#### **A. Give one word for the following:**

- (i) mixing of castes
- (ii) land grant to brahmanas
- (iii) a representative of the artisans
- (iv) the chief scribe
- (v) the village headman

#### **B. Write a brief note on the position of women in the Gupta period.**

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## **2.8 Religious Life**

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The Gupta period has been traditionally known as a period of brahmanical renaissance. A range of brahmanical religion was flourishing in this period. Buddhism was still prevalent in some parts of the sub-continent and its rivalry with shaivism had become well known. But Buddhism was being influenced by ritual of worship of other religions. Buddhism had a following beyond the frontiers of India in central Asia, China and south-east Asia. Religious practices current in these regions were accommodated in the practices of the newly established Buddhism. Jainism received support from the merchant communities of western India and royal patronage from Karnataka and the south. In the early part of the sixth century the second Jaina council was held at Valabhi, and the Jaina canon was defined subsequently as it exists today. The use of Sanskrit was on the increase as it had become the prestigious language of the elite in many areas. But it isolated the religious teachers from a wide following. The Jains had evolved a series of icons such as straight standing figures or the cross-legged seated figures of Mahavira and other *tirthankaras*. This long-drawn process of societal interactions with tribal societies in parts of the sub-continent brought important changes, among the tribal chiefs. The process of 'peasantization' invariably introduced forces of acculturation by the brahmanas and a large number of tribal chiefs hired turned to agricultural

entrepreneurship hired tribal labour and adopted some form of caste ranking and rituals from the brahmanical society.

Shaivism, Vishnuism, Shaktism and worship of Ganesha and Surya had become established in the form of Puranic religion by the Gupta period. In the post-Gupta period, the worship of the cult of Surya seems to have been confined to Gujarat and gradually disappeared. But the most important religious development in this period was the worship of Devi, all encompassing female deity. Devi subsumed many substratum female deities associated with notions of fertility. Female deities became the nucleus of a number of rites, imbued with magical properties which in a later form were foundational to Tantricism. Devi was supposed to be the initiator of action, and of the power and energy-Shakti-of Shiva (it was held that the male God could only be activated through union with the female). That these ideas were influential can be seen from the temples dedicated to the Yoginis, females endowed with magical power and sometimes linked to goddesses. These temples of Yoginis have mostly survived in central India. Some of the mythology linked to the worship of the goddess was brought together in the text famously known as the Devi-mahatmya. It is important that assimilation of the cult of goddesses popular among the tribal population also enriched Tantric religion.

The Shakti-Shakta cult became not only the fundamental belief in many religious sects, but gradually attained a dominant status. The consorts of male deities were worshiped in their own right, such as Lakshmi the consort of Vishnu, or Parvati Kali and Durga who were various consorts of Shiva. Buddhism was also influenced by Tantric beliefs and rites. Tantric influence on Buddhism can be seen in the emergence Vajrayana sect of Buddhism (the Thunderbolt Vehicle) with its centre in eastern India. Vajrayana Buddhism gave female counterparts, the cult of Taras, to the existing male figures of the Buddhist pantheon. However, Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang) noticed a decline in Buddhism at Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and some other places and mentioned the hostility of some rulers, such as Shashanka of Bengal towards Buddhism. Hence, Buddhism registered a decline on a sub continental scale by the seventh century. Three important aspects of Vaishnavism and Shaivism that took place in this period were important religious developments in Brahmanical religion. The image emerged as the focus of worship, and in this form of worship, puja to the idol superseded the Vedic sacrifice. Offering to the image, often food or in some cases an animal, remained a requirement of the ritual. The reduction of the emphasis on the priest compared to his role in the sacrificial ritual of Vedic Brahmanism gradually led to devotional worship-bhakti-becoming the most widespread form of the Puranic religion. Unlike the Vedic religion, the Puranic religion had a far wider appeal. The popular participation in religion included individual performance of rituals, traveling collectively to places of pilgrimage and promoting local mythologies. A few of the Puranas were written at this time, although it is difficult to date these precisely. Some of the Puranas are sectarian literature informing worshipper about the mythology, rituals of worship and observances associated with the particular deity to whom the Purana was dedicated. Some of the early Puranas like Vishnu Purana has a section on genealogies and dynasties of the past. It was an attempt at creating a historical tradition.

The interaction of northern culture with that of the south, with the circuits of traders and regular routes of armies as well as Brahman settlers, resulted in the

assimilation of some of the patterns, ideas and institutions of the north, while others were rejected or modified. The brahmanas settled in Tamilakam saw themselves as keepers of what they now regarded as sacrosanct Vedic tradition. As keepers of the Vedic traditions, brahmanas were venerated and gradually found patrons among kings of the peninsula. The performance of rituals by the king was an avenue to high status. Although orthodox brahmanas initially dismissed the devotional movement, the latter eventually proved more popular than other religious trends in the south and this was recognized even by royal patrons. The Tamil devotional movement was deeply affected by Vaishnavism and Shaivism in the choice of deity. These sects were among the early expressions of what has been called the Bhakti movement. Tamil devotional achieved a great wave of popularity in the hymns and poems of the Alvars and the Nayanars, the Vaishnava and Shaiva poets. The hymns dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu have been preserved in the *Nalayira divya-prabandha*. Appar was one of the most popular Shaiva poets while Nammalvar and Tirumankai Alvar and the much revered, woman poet Andal were important Vaishnava poets. Some philosophers revitalized Vedic philosophy and established mathas and ghatikas (monasteries and centres for Vedic learning).

The most effective way to make the Vedic philosophy acceptable and comprehensible to the educated was to reduce its obscurities. This was attempted by Shankaracharya, the proponent of new Vedanta philosophy, who accepted the challenges to Brahmanism from the Buddhists and the Jains and the popular devotional sects. He was born in Kerala and wrote and taught in the eighth-ninth centuries, although he could be of a later period. Temples evolved as the centre of socio-religious life in peninsular India in our period of study. From the Pallava period onwards the more prosperous temples maintained trained dancers, singers and musicians. This gave rise to the system of employing devadasis-the woman who served the deity-in many large temples, virtually all over India. Some among them became composers of devotional poems. Rock-cut temples were introduced in the Pallava period, the famous being monolithic temples at Mahabalipuram. Stone structural temples were built at Aihole in the sixth century (under the challenges of Vatapi), at Mahabalipuram-the famous shore temple-in seventh century, and at Kanchipuram.

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## **2.9 Art and Patronage**

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Very few examples of temple architecture have survived from the Gupta period. Architecture of the Gupta period temples was still in its formative period. Rock-cut Buddhist caves at Ajanta and Ellora are the best examples of architecture. These were inspiration for the later Vaishnava and Shaiva, rock-cut temples at Ellora, Elephanta and Aurangabad. Buddhist stupas at Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri and Udayagiri in Orissa continued to be built with patronage from rulers and merchants. The caves at Ajanta were decorated with sculpture, mural paintings depicted the life of Buddha and the Jataka stories literary references to painting are frequent.

The earliest temples were single cell housing the image, as at Sanchi, Aihole, Tigowa, Bhumara, Nachua Kothara, Lodh Khan and Deogarh among others worship in such temples was generally of Puranic deities-Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati, Durga and Varaha. The Dashvalara temple at Deogarh is, as the name implies, among the earliest dedicated to the incarnations of Vishnu. The architecture of the Shaiva and Vaishnava temples was

constructed around the sanctum cella, the garbha-griha (literally the womb-house) the room in which the image of the deity was placed. The Buddhists in the Deccan continued to excavate rock-cut chaityas and the Vaishnavas, Shivas, and Jains imitated these in later centuries, often excavating temples adjacentable to the Buddhist caves. Temples that were free-standing and not rock-cut were generally built in stone became the medium for the increasingly monumental style (although there is an early brick temple at Bhitargaon).

Classical sculpture reflecting a high aesthetic sensibility is visible, particularly in the Buddha images from Sarnath, Mathura, Kushinagara and Bodh Gaya. These sculptures inspired the portrayal of the more important Vaishnava and Shaiva deities as impressive coins. Vaishnava representations were either of the deity or of an incarnation, which allowed a wider range of images Shiva was most often represented as a lingam. Terracotta images continued to be popular and more accessible to masses. Stone sculptures were patronized by the rich only. A rare example Bronze sculpture of this period is the statue of Buddha found at Sultanganj.

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## 2.10 Literature

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We have already mentioned about the compositions of early *Puranas* such as *VishnuPurana*, *Vayu Purana*, *Bhagvata Purana*, *Brahmanda Purana* and *HarivamshaPurana* in this period in the section under religion. It has been noted that the *Puranas* are important sources not only for the study of brahmanical religions but also for royal genealogy and historical traditions. We have also mentioned the *Bhaktihymns* composed by the Vaishnava Alvar and Shaiva Nyamar Saints of South India for the study of religious developments in this period. It is also important to note that the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were codified first epics are important sources for socio-religious-political history. In this section, we shall highlight creative literature which became the source of studies of dramaturgy, poetry and literary theory the subsequent period. The famous *Natya-Shastra* of Bharata- a foundational treatise on dance, drama and poetry can be possibly be dated to these times. Literary, criticism and theory of *Rasa* emerged an important feature of creative literature. The ruling elite, the court and the aristocracy, the urban rich patronized poetry and prose in Sanskrit. Kalidasa, the poet in the court of Gupta emperor, Chandragupta II, was an extraordinary poet and dramatist whose work enhanced the prestige of the language and inspired later poetic forms. His play *Abhijnana-Shakuntala* and his long lyrical poem *Meghaduta* (cloud messenger) are considered examples in Sanskrit drama and poetics respectively. Following Kalidasa's works, Bharavi's *Kiratarjuniya*, Magha's *Shishupalavadha* and the *Bhatti-Kavya*, and somewhat later Bhavabhuti's *Malati-Madhava* are important examples of classical work in Sanskrit. The *Mrichchha-Katika* (the little day cast) by Shudraka provides glimpses of urban life. Vishakhadatta chose to dramatize past political events in his *Mudrarakshasha*, a play on the overthrow of the Nanda king, and in *Devi-Chandra-Gupta*, on the bid for power by Chandra Gupta II.

The fables of the *Panchatantra* and Subandhu's *Vasavadatta* are acclaimed for social message and literary quality respectively. Bana's *Harshacharita* is an excellent example of both biography and Sanskrit phrase and so his narrative Kadamabari.

Classical Sanskrit was the language of the court. The dominance of Sanskrit dates to the Gupta period and continued until about the early second millennium AD, after which the regional languages were widely used. In the times of Delhi Sultanate and Mughals, court language was Persian. But the local language and cultures were not abandoned. They can be glimpsed in the use of Prakrit in various contexts such as in some inscription and in the languages of religions sects. The *Natya-shastra* lists a number of languages and dialects, including those spoken by the lower castes and Chandalas. In addition to Sanskrit, literature in Prakrit also had its patronage among the Jaina merchants. The *Paumacariyam* of Vimalasuri, a Jain version of the Rama story is a good example of Prakrit and popular literature. We must note that high-status characters spoke Sanskrit whereas those of low social status and all the women spoke Prakrit in Sanskrit dramas.

#### **Check your progress exercise 4**

##### **A. Fill in the Blanks:**

- (i) Tantric influence can be seen in the \_\_\_\_\_ sect of Buddhism.
- (ii) Rock-cut Buddhist caves at \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are the outstanding examples of architecture of the Gupta period.
- (iii) \_\_\_\_\_ was the language of the court in the Gupta period.
- (iv) Rock-cut temples were introduced by the rulers of the \_\_\_\_\_ dynasty who also built the famous monolithic temples at Mahabalipuram.
- (v) According to legend, Kalidasa was a poet in the court of Gupta emperor \_\_\_\_\_.

##### **B. Give names of the composers of the following works:**

- (i) *Mrichchha-Katika* (ii) *Mudrarakshasha* (iii) *Meghaduta* (iv) *Kiratarjuniya*
- (v) *Harshacharita*.

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## **2.11 The Emergence of other States**

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### **2.11.1 The Vakatakas**

We shall now turn towards two near-contemporary states. The Vakatakas of Vidharbha were an important political power in central India and northern Deccan. We can envisage three tentative phases in the emergence of the state in Vidarbha under the Eastern Vakatakas (the Vakatakas of Nandivardhan while another branch, the Vakatakas of Vatsagulma rules in western Vidarbha). The first phase coincides with the early Vakataka rulers in the pre-Prabhavati Gupta regency period (Vindhyashakti to Rudrasena II) Who ruled mostly in the fourth century the second phase is that of Prabhavatigupta's regency initiating a rupture in the Vakataka dominance over Vidarbha and increasing Gupta influence in the Vakataka court and the third phase ran parallel to Pravarsena II's reign marking intensive territorial and political integrative process in the Vakataka state formation and legitimation of the Vakataka power. A study of Pravarsena II's twenty-four land grant charters clearly reveals step wise territorial integration of Vidarbha and political incorporation of local chiefs into the Vakataka state. The Vakataka age was also remarkable for the evolution of a distinct regional style of architecture and iconography in central India.

### **2.11.2 The Maitrakas**

A probe into the landgrant charters of the first seventy years of Maitraka rule reveals that Saurashtra witnessed the formation of a regional state for the first time in the sixth century. The inscriptions of this period suggest the difficulties of territorial and political integration and the mechanisms devised by the Maitrakas in their attempts to achieve the political unification of Saurashtra. A probe into the territorial distribution of the landgrants of the first seventy years clearly indicates the gradual integration of the areas that constitute the districts of Bhavnagar, Amreli and Kheda. The epigraphic evidence also suggests the integration of important non-Maitraka chiefs into the Maitraka state. Landgrants to brahmanas, Buddhist viharas and occasionally to temples, legitimized the authority of the Maitrakas in Bhavnagar, Amreli and Kheda, and facilitated the mobilization of resources from the countryside.

The landgrant charters carry the images and demonstrate the prerogatives of kingship and governmental power of the Maitrakas who were emerging as the first regional dynasty of Gujarat. Charters, when repeatedly read out in the countryside, would have not only introduced the Maitrakas as the new 'sovereigns' of the region with royal titles and an impressive genealogy, but would also have implied their territorial claims. The political motifs in the charters helped sanction royal status to the Maitrakas in their transition from 'chiefship' to 'kingship'. When the Maitrakas made grants of land for the first time in Saurashtra, they began the process of extending Maitraka sovereignty into the countryside of the region. As grants were made only in the districts of Bhavnagar, Amreli and Kheda in the first seventy years, their location indicates a neat pattern of step wise territorial integration. The titles of the Maitraka kings suggest the process of the political incorporation of local chiefs, which ran parallel to territorial integration. Lists of officials and taxes that form a part of these charters need not be understood as instruments for the exploitation of rural society; they could be interpreted as a means of familiarizing people with royal norms and the administrative apparatus of the newly emerging government of the Maitraka dynasty. Finally, the grants of Maitrakas were not responsible for the emergence of brahmana landlord; pre-Maitraka Saurashtra had a highly stratified rural society that already included brahmana and non-brahmana landlords.

### **2.11.3 The Deccan and Tamilakam**

With the passing of the Guptas and their immediate successors in Northern India, historical interest shifts southwards to the Deccan and to the areas referred to as Tamilakam. The political history of the Deccan and further south focused on the long years of conflict between two geographical regions, the western Deccan and Tamilakam - the vast plateau areas enclosed by mountains along the coasts on the one hand, and the fertile plain south of Chennai on the other.

The Vakatakas in the western Deccan gave way to Chalukya power with a base in Vatapi/Badami. A series of kingdoms, south from the eastern Deccan included those ruled by the Shalankayanas and later the eastern Chalukyas; the Ikshavakus in the Krishna-Guntur region, with Nagarjunakonda and Dharanikota as important centres, and with the Vishnukundins ruling close by. Control over Karnataka was divided between the Kadambas, Nolambas and Gangas. Hence the claim that some were of the brahman-kshatriya

caste – brahmins performing kshatriya functions or who could claim mixed Brahman and kshatriya ancestry.

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## 2.12 Conclusion

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For 300 years after the mid-sixth century three major kingdoms were in conflict. These were the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchipuram and the Pandyas of Madurai, all seeking to control the fertile tracts. The Chalukyas first came into prominence as subordinate rulers of the Kadambas, from whom they broke away. The Chalukya base was in northern Karnataka at Vatapi/Badami and adjacent Aihole, from where they moved northwards to annex the former kingdom of the Vakatas, centered in Upper Godavari. They also annexed some western coastal areas, presumably because these now hosted the traders from across the Arabian sea. The power from north was contained through the defeat of Harsha at the Narmada, by the Chalukya King Pulakeshin II, an event repeatedly referred to with pride in later Chalukya inscriptions. The eastern part of the Satavahana kingdom, the deltas of the Krishna and the Godavari, had been conquered by Ikshvaku dynasty in the third century CE. Ikshvaku rule ended with the conquest of this region by the Pallavas. The latter were also responsible for the overthrow of the Kadamba rulers and the annexation of their kingdom, which lay to the south of Chalukya kingdom.

### Check your progress exercise 5

#### A. Which of the following statements is/are False?

- (i) The Vakatakas of Vidharbha were important political powers in central India and northern Deccan.
- (ii) The Vakatakas in the western Deccan gave way to Chalukya power with a base in Vatapi/Badami.
- (iii) The Chalukyas first came into prominence as the subordinate rulers of the Kadambas, from whom they broke away.
- (iv) The Maitrakas of Valabhi were a strong power in the Saurashtra region.
- (v) Harsha defeated the Chalukya King Pulakeshin II.

#### B. Short Notes:

- (i) Art and patronage during the Gupta period
- (ii) Vakatakas

#### C. Long Questions:

- (i) Examine the main features of the Gupta society and economy.
- (ii) Discuss the development in religion and culture in the Gupta period.
- (iii) Describe the main features of the administrative system under the Guptas.

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## 2.13 Let Us Sum Up

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- From the beginning of the fourth century CE until the mid-sixth century, the Guptas, who were possibly of vaishya origin, ruled over north and western India.

- Samudragupta and Chandragupta II undertook extensive military campaigns and consolidated the power of the imperial Guptas
- Several factors such as the Huna invasion, dissension within the ruling family, reassertion of power by local chiefs, administrative weakness, etc. were responsible for the decline of the Guptas.
- In the post-Gupta period, many kingdoms came into existence of which the most important ruling family was that of the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar.
- After the collapse of Harsha's empire, regional powers consolidated themselves.
- In the following two centuries, The Palas, Gurjara-Pratiharas, and Rashtrakutas vied for political hegemony in North India.
- The Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai dominated the political scene in the Deccan from the mid-sixth century CE.

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

#### **A. Short Notes:**

- (i) See Section 2.4.2
- (ii) See Section 2.3

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

A. (i) True (ii) False (iii) True (iv) True (v) True.

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

A. (i) *varnasamkara* (ii) *brahmadeya* (iii) *prathama-kulika* (iv) *prathama-kayastha* (v) *grama-adhyaksha*.

#### **B. See section 2.7.1**

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 4**

A. (i) Vajrayana (ii) Ajanta and Ellora (iii) Classical Sanskrit (iv) Pallava (v) Chandragupta II.

B. (i) Shudraka (ii) Vishakhadatta (iii) Kalidasa (iv) Bharavi (v) Bana.

### **Exercise 5**

A. (v) False.

#### **B. Short Notes:**

- (i) See Section 2.9
- (ii) See Section 2.11.1

#### **C. Long Questions:**

- (i) See Section 2.7.1 and 2.7.2
- (ii) See Section 2.8
- (iii) See Section 2.5



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## CHANGES IN THE POST-GUPTA PERIOD, CHARACTERISING EARLY MEDIEVAL INDIA

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### Structure

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- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Polity
- 3.3 Economy
- 3.4 Society
- 3.5 Conclusion
- 3.6 Let us Sum up

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### 3.0 Objectives

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**After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:**

- The Nature of early medieval period in Indian History
- The Evolution of state formation and changes socio-economic structures
- Scholarly Debates

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### 3.1 Introduction

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Historians realized very early that the medieval period in Indian history began well before the Muslim rulers of the Delhi Sultanate. Vincent Smith dated the beginning of this medieval period from the death of Harshavardhana and termed its first phase as 'early medieval India'; this nomenclature was widely accepted and was sometimes called 'medieval Hindu India' or 'Rajput period'.

Over the last fifty years or so, the issue of the transition from ancient to early medieval period has been paid greater attention by historians, who now generally date it from the beginning of the Gupta period. However, they do not always agree with each other and have debated a number of issues. These may be called the debates over Indian feudalism, as they invariably began with questioning the view that the transition to the early medieval marked a transition to feudalism in Indian history. The controversies continue, but they have clarified a number of points, and it is clear that it is in agreement over several basic facts of the transition that makes possible debate over the rest. In this lesson, we shall not go into these disputes, which deserve to be studied separately, except when a reference to them becomes unavoidable.

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### 3.2 Polity

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The distinctiveness of the early medieval polities of our period, in opposition to that of the early historical ones, has been noted in several respects. In these discussions of the transition from the ancient to the early medieval, Mauryan state and administration provide a point of comparison of the ancient Indian states with the early medieval ones, beginning with the Gupta Empire. Unlike the ancient Indian polities as exemplified by the Mauryan state, the early medieval ones were decentralised structures. In earlier discussions, it used to be viewed in terms of a highly centralised Mauryan state versus the decentralised, ‘feudal’ set-up of the early medieval polities. Now that the terms of discussion are the degree of decentralisation rather than of centralisation, with a revised judgment of the overall character of the Mauryan state (which is now seen as far less centralised than earlier), the distinctive character of the early medieval states is now expressed differently. They are stated to have been ‘more decentralised’ than the Mauryan state.

A major indicator of the early medieval political transformation is seen in the nature of royal titles. In contrast with the practice in ancient India, when kings (including the mighty Mauryan monarchs) usually made do with the simple title of *raja* or ‘the king’, there was a tendency for the royal titles to become increasingly more magnificent and high-sounding in early medieval times, when even petty rulers were known as *maharaja*, ‘the great king’, and *maharajadhiraja*, ‘the supreme king of great kings’. The trend began early with the Gupta emperors. Although they were usually called *maharajadhiraja* in most of the inscriptions, from the time of Chandragupta II some of them were sometimes also called *paramabhattaraka maharajadhiraja*, ‘the most excellent great lord, the supreme king of great kings’, and *bhattaraka maharaja rajadhiraja* ‘the great lord, the great king, the supreme king of kings’. In continuation of this practice, Harshavardhana, like his father and grandfather assumed the title of *paramabhattaraka maharajadhiraja*.

About the same time, the Maitraka ruler Dharasena IV (641-650 CE), a powerful regional king of Saurashtra, though a lesser potentate than Harsha, added two more and equally high-sounding titles – *parameshvara*, ‘the supreme lord’, and *chakravatin*, ‘the universal emperor’. The Chalukyas of Badami called themselves variously *maharaja*, *parameshvara*, *rajadhiraja parameshvara*, or, most elaborately, *maharajadhiraja parameshvara paramabhattaraka*. Apart from these titles that are indicative of political status, these kings often had those of other types as well, more often indicating their religious affiliations (e.g. *paramamaheshvara* and *paramabhagavata*) but also referring to their other qualities. The seventh century Pallava ruler Narasimhavarman II is known to have assumed more than two hundred fifty titles! Among other things he was called *rajasimha* (‘lion among kings’), *sankarabhakta* (‘devotee of Shiva’), and *agamapriya* (‘lover of Shaivite scriptures called *agama*’). Both the high political status and religious commitment of the Pallava rulers was captured by their title *dharmamaharaja* or *dharmamaharajadhiraja*; the prefix *dharma* seems to be emblematic of their known inclination for Brahmanism and hostility to the non-Brahmanical religions.

These high-sounding political titles are interpreted as reflecting a qualitative shift in the nature of political organisation, apart of course from the growing ornateness of

Sanskrit language. Unlike the ancient kings of India, the paramount, imperial sovereigns of early medieval period like the Chalukyas and the Vardhanas did not directly administer their entire dominions with the help of officials, but only the central part of it. For the rest they ruled through their overlordship over a host of lesser kings. There was, in other words, a hierarchy of kings in a large political formation, and this hierarchy corresponded to a hierarchy of titles. There were many types of these subordinate kings, from big kings of large areas to petty chieftains, including tribal leaders. This structure did not prevail only in the biggest states of the times, namely those of the Vardhanas, Chalukyas or Pallavas, but could exist in smaller states as well. The regional kingdom of Kashmir in the seventh century, for instance, had a number of dependent states, including the kingdoms of Taxila, the Salt Range, and the lower hills.

These subordinate kings of the paramount sovereign, the *parambhattaraka maharajadhiraja*, were often known collectively by the term *samanta*. *Samanta* was an old word, but earlier it meant a neighbour, including a neighbouring king. Now it acquired a new meaning of 'subordinate king'. In the Madhuban Copperplate Inscription of Harsha, for instance, it is in this sense that a person named Ishvaragupta is called a *samanta maharaja*. In contemporary literature also we get numerous references to the political importance of these *samantas*. *Samantas*, it needs to be underlined, were no simple political allies of the paramount sovereign and thus outsiders but were important functionaries *within* his realm. They rendered valuable military service to him and were considered integral parts of his defence system. They accompanied their overlords in their expeditions, shared with them in the glories and spoils of victory, and paid for their defeats. Thus, the Chalukya king Pulakeshin II, in his campaigns against the Pallavas, had first to overcome the opposition of the Banas, who were the subordinates of the Pallavas. On being defeated, the Banas seem to have been transferred their loyalty to the Chalukyas as their principality, which figures as an administrative unit (*Banaraja-vishaya*, 'the *vishaya* of the Bana king') in a Chalukya record. The *samantas* attended the overlord's court regularly, and even performed valuable administrative duties directly under him. Ishvaragupta, for instance, was a keeper of records of Harsha.

*Samantas* have been identified as a major source of the political instability and turbulence that mark the early medieval period. Always a potential source of trouble, they were the first to take advantage of the problems and weakness of the centre and declare themselves independent and, if possible, even seize power from their overlords. Thus the Chalukyas were overthrown by the Rashtrakutas, who had been their subordinates, and the empire of Harshavardhana did not outlast him, and was followed by a long period marked by a multiplicity of independent small kingdoms.

How did the paramount sovereign and his subordinate rulers govern the areas under their direct control? In this respect also a number of differences with the earlier systems of administration have been pointed out. In general, royal control of affairs slackened. The early medieval kings, as typified by the Guptas, are supposed to have taken a less active part in government than the ancient rulers, as typified by the Mauryas: 'Whereas Ashoka insisted that he be kept informed of what was happening, the Guptas seemed satisfied with leaving it to the *kumaramatyas* and the *ayuktakas* [their officials].'

A number of official designations are seen for the first time in early medieval records. Some of these, such as *sandhivigrahika* and *dandanayaka*, appear early and soon became very important offices in most polities all over India. There was also a strong tendency to elevating these offices by adding the prefix *maha* to them and making them *mahasandhivigrahika*, *mahadandanayaka*, and so forth. In a great majority of cases our records do not provide the details of these numerous designations, so that their exact nature is often no more than a matter of reasoned guesswork. However, the plethora of these new names indicates a certain reorganization of the administration, some of which was clearly necessitated by the growing importance of the new concerns of the state. For instance, the practice of creating *agraharas* through land grants called into existence the office of *agraharika*; in early medieval Assam the task seems to have been divided between two officers, the *lekhayitri*, who was in charge of getting the grants recorded, and *shasayitri*, whose duty was to get them executed.

However, it is not easy to say if the large numbers of designations that are seen in the early medieval records represent an increase in the total number of state functionaries. For one, these designations pertain to the records of different kingdoms so that not all of the known functionaries worked as part of the same state apparatus. For another, in a number of cases we see the same person holding a number of high offices. In fact, on two sets of grounds it is thought that there was a shrinkage of officialdom during the early medieval period as the state began to withdraw from a large number of activities. One is the practice of land grants, the other being local autonomy in administration.

By the time of Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang), officials had begun to be paid commonly through grants of land (or a share in local taxes) instead of salaries. This saved the government the heavy duty of organizing the collection of resources for conversion in cash for the disbursement of salaries. During this time, the state also began to grant in perpetuity fiscal, judicial and administrative rights on a considerable scale to religious functionaries and institutions. The fiscal, judicial, and administrative administration of the villages over which such authority was granted consequently no longer remained the headache of the government. In a further contrast with the Mauryan state, in early medieval polities the government now stopped taking an active role in the development of agrarian economy, and instead began granting land to 'individuals, who were expected to act as a catalyst in rural areas.'

The grantees became an additional source of the decentralisation of the polity. In fact, they are supposed to have added to the ranks of the *samantas*. Examples such as of *samanta maharaja* Ishvaragupta, who was a keeper of seals in the court of Harsha can be, and have in fact been, interpreted in a different way than we have done above. It was not necessarily a case of a *samanta maharaja* who served as a keeper of seals but could as well have been one of a keeper of seals who had risen to the rank of *samanta* by means of land grant. In the context of *samanta*-making power of land grants, some historians believe that a Brahmana king in early medieval India must have been the descendants of some donee Brahmana, and that his ancestors might have enjoyed the first access to political power by means of land grants.

A further curtailment of state activities resulted from local autonomy in administration, both at village and town levels. This has been identified as a major

development in early medieval India, although it did not develop in the same way everywhere. In ancient India the committees or persons supervising local government were appointed by the state, as in the Mauryan set-up; later local representatives came to be entrusted with these tasks. Where the villagers were allowed to manage their own affairs, as in the Sangam period, they did so only in a limited and adhoc sort of way; it is only in later times that a developed and well-organized system of local autonomous bodies, entrusted with a large number of tasks, emerged gradually.

In South India, local assemblies and/or councils must have been in existence during the post-Sangam period, but their activities in the Tamil country remained obscure to us for a long time. However, from the late eighth and early ninth centuries when inscriptions begin to refer to three types of them – *ur* (non-Brahmana assembly), *sabha* (assembly of Brahmanas), and *nagaram* (generally mercantile corporation) – they already appear with all or most of their known features. It follows that, if their growth was not sudden but gradual (as was probably the case), it must have occurred during this period.

As to the rest of India, a fourth century record from Andhra Pradesh refers to village officials, and village headmen such as *gramabhojakas* and *gramakutas* figure in a number of records, but in general local notables seem to have played an important role in rural administration on a regular basis, in conjunction with the state functionaries. At the time of issuing a charter in an area, it was usual for the king to inform these notables of it and their consent was deemed important for carrying out land transactions. In the western Deccan they were known as *gamundas* and *mahajanas*; elsewhere *mahattara* was the most common term for them during this period.

A typical feature of political life at the level of locality was the grant of varying degrees of autonomy to urban corporate groups by the king. This is seen for the first time in this period in a number of charters over a wide area from modern Gujarat to Maharashtra and Karnataka, from the end of the sixth till the first quarter of the eighth century CE.

Not everything was transformed, however, and we must be careful, when tracing the transition from the ancient to early medieval times, to note that administration continued to bear many similarities to earlier practices. Like Ashoka, Harsha is said to have built rest houses for travellers in his kingdom. Just as Ashoka undertook a regular tour of his realm, and Manu prescribed such tours of inspection as an important part of the king's duty, the early medieval kings, Harshavardhana for instance, are often seen to be moving about in their domains. As Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang) says of Harsha, "The king made visits of inspection throughout his dominions, not residing long at any place, but having temporary buildings erected for his residence at each place of sojourn; but he did not go abroad during the three months of rain-season retreat." However, historians who do not accept this observation as valid interpret this evidence very differently. They think that if the king had to do all this himself, he was behaving more like a 'royal inspector' than a king and he was not having a proper administrative machinery. In other words, Harsha relied more on personal supervision than on the assistance of an organized bureaucracy for the efficient rule of his vast empire. In a contradictory move, when the king's officials are seen to be doing the state's work, historians criticize the Gupta kings for leaving it to them rather than doing it themselves!

It should also be clear from the examples already referred to that things did not change in the same way everywhere. In fact, from royal titles to local administration, regional variations in the polities could be very marked. For instance, a general feature of early medieval kingdoms was the king's right to choose his successor and appoint him as heir apparent (*yuvaraja* or *yuvamaharaja*); the importance of these heirs apparent, however, seems to have varied significantly from one polity to another. Further, the line of royal succession was through males generally, but in the Kara kingdom of Orissa women rulers were quite as normal (and not something exceptional). While a number of designations for the state functionaries, such as *mahadandanayaka* and *senapati* were common everywhere, a greater number of them (at any rate in configuration) were specific to different regions. For instance, a revenue official called *dhruva* is not found outside Saurashtra, and *lekhayitri* and *shasayitri* were peculiar to the Assam region.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

#### A. State True or False:

- (i) The early medieval states are said to have been 'more decentralised' than the Mauryan state.
- (ii) By the time of Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang), officials had begun to be paid commonly through grants of land (or a share in local taxes) instead of salaries.
- (iii) The early medieval kings, as typified by the Guptas, took more active part in government than the ancient rulers, as typified by the Mauryas.
- (iv) There was a tendency for the royal titles to become increasingly more magnificent and high-sounding in early medieval times.
- (v) Whereas Ashoka insisted that he be kept informed of what was happening, Harshavardhana seemed satisfied with leaving it to the *kumaramatyas* and the *ayuktakas* (organized bureaucracy).

#### B. Discuss briefly about the role of *Samantas* in the polity of the early medieval period.

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### 3.3 Economy

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The economic aspects of the transition have been reconstructed mainly on the basis of the evidence of land-grant inscriptions, coins, and settlement archaeology, with some help from literary sources such as the account of the Chinese traveller. These may be studied under the following themes: continuous and unprecedented agrarian expansion; growth of a new class of landlords in the countryside along with corresponding changes in the status of peasantry; and decline in craft production, trade, and urbanisation. It is difficult to describe some of these changes without discussing the issues they involve relating to the changes that enable us to speak of a feudal or some other type of formation in early medieval India.

Agrarian regions had emerged all over the subcontinent by the first half of the seventh century CE at the time of Xuan Zang's (Hiuen-Tsang) visit. However, the economies of not all areas were equally or uniformly developed. People who practised pastoralism 'exclusively', for instance, inhabited a long stretch along the lower Indus.

Many other regions remained heavily forested, and in yet other areas, there had been a setback to past prosperity and land was lying desolate. These details, together with many others from other sources, show that there remained considerable potential for further agricultural development.

It is commonly argued that a major, probably the most important, way in which the early medieval states sought to tap this potential was by granting land to Brahmanas and temples. The increasing number of land grants in early medieval times is taken as spearheading the process of agrarian expansion. However, a recent reappraisal of the evidence cautions against this as a simplistic generalisation, and takes the position that only a handful of the grants were really about agrarian expansion, most being grants of revenue of already settled areas, that typically a land grant was the end product rather than a starting point of agrarian expansion. However, growing numbers of peasants continued to bring more and more land under the plough, and they got all possible encouragement from the state; for instance, in eighth century King Lalitaditya distributed water wheels for facilitating cultivation in Kashmir.

Extension of agriculture was a widespread phenomenon by all accounts, making possible the rise of kingdoms in new areas and integration of new communities during and after our period. The details for all areas for all periods are not equally available, but research has been adding to our knowledge. For instance, we are exceptionally well informed about the construction and upkeep of irrigation system in the Pallava kingdom. The Pallavas have long been reputed for building a number of tanks around Kanchipuram in the Palar valley through such a shrewd, close observation of the terrain as draws the admiration of the experts even today. The evidence for irrigation in southern Tamil Nadu in the Pandya kingdom – small epigraphs on granite sluices – remained neglected for some time. Their investigation has revealed several impressive irrigation projects that were successfully completed in the Pandya kingdom during the seventh-eighth centuries.

A new feature of the agrarian economy was the creation of a class of landlords by means of landgrants to religious men and institutions. The first instances of these grants date back to the Gupta period, but they are few, and it is only from the early medieval period that they began to be issued on a larger scale. The grantees were given away for all time the revenues of a village (sometimes a part of it, sometimes more than one village), the people of which were asked to be obedient to them and regularly pay them their dues. They were also authorised to collect judicial fines from them for many types of crimes (*aparadha*). In other words, the grantees came to represent the state in the granted area, and state officials were normally prevented from interfering with their authority.

There is a controversy over the implications of these grants for the peasantry. According to one view, by subjecting them to the authority of these landlords, the land grants led to an all-round depression of the status of peasants, who suffered from several constraints and were reduced to a state of servility. In the other opinion, this is exaggeration as the peasants now simply began to pay the grantees just what they had been paying so far to the state officials, and so they remained as 'free' as ever.

Paradoxically, this progress of the rural economy was not matched, according to some historians, by a similar progress of the non-rural one, i.e. of non-rural craft production and of trade and urbanisation. Villages came to be 'closed' or 'self-sufficient'

economies, meeting most of their needs through mutual, non-market agreements on exchanges in kind; e.g. the potter would provide pots to peasants in return of which he would be given a piece of land and/or a share in their harvest. As villages multiplied, this kind of arrangement led to a progressive reduction of trade and commerce, and with it to the decline of urban economy. It thus strengthened a trend that began with the decline of India's external trade, which was occasioned by the downfall of the Western Roman Empire and came to a near halt by the close of the sixth century when people in the eastern Roman Empire stopped importing silk from China through Indian traders. The trade with China and Southeast Asia was clearly inadequate to check this economic regression, as seen in the urban and currency scenario in early medieval India till about the end of the tenth century CE. Trade is reduced to a minimum, a much lesser number of coins is seen in circulation, prosperous cities of yore continue to decline with some being eventually deserted as urban professionals including priests and craftsmen move out in the countryside in search of livelihood.

The criticisms of this picture of urban decline have been numerous and varied. One is the outright rejection of the decline thesis in totality. According to the critics, foreign trade during the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods was in fact 'in an exceptionally flourishing state'. In another line of critique, a phase of urban and currency decline in general is conceded, but in the same light it is also argued that the decline occurred for a more limited period and on a lesser scale, and that it could not have been due to the decline of long-distance trade; no attempt is however made to explain what else was or could have been responsible for the decline. The third viewpoint seeks to delimit further both the spatial and the temporal extent of the decline of urbanism; it is believed that the case for urban decline has been made only for the Ganges valley but there is also a study showing urban decay for the whole of the subcontinent). Further, some scholars point out the problems with the concept of closed or self-sufficient economy, and while some others do not think there was a reduction in the number of coins in circulation in early medieval India, there are yet others who concede the paucity of coins but do not think that this necessarily amounts to shrinkage of trade.

To top it all, inner contradictions in the decline theses have also been brought out. We need only to add to it the variations and contradictions in the critics' standpoints (not to mention the responses to them by the protagonists of the decline thesis) to see how bad the overall situation is for arriving at a general, controversy-free understanding of the non-agrarian history of the period. Yet it seems safe enough to conclude from all this – although it is not much of a conclusion – that the transition to the early medieval period in the non-agrarian sector was anything but static, and that the confusing mass of evidence underlines a dynamism the precise nature of which awaits further research.

Now we shall survey the socio-cultural changes that marked the transition to early medieval India. Our sources for locating these changes remain to some extent the same as those for discovering political and economic ones, but for the better part they are different. Even when they remain the same, they have to be analysed differently. At times the links between the two sets of changes are not difficult to discern, as for example between changes in economic/political and social statuses, although the paucity or problems of historical data may make it difficult to establish the relationship. However, the connection is as often not so easily apparent or seems tenuous at best.



## Check your progress 2

Enumerate at least three main features of economic setup in the early medieval period.

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### 3.4 Society

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A number of important social changes have been identified in the transition to early medieval period. These changes are best approached through the composition, character and scope of the caste system, and the status of women within it. Jati is the basic unit in the caste system. People are grouped in endogamous Jatis, i.e. members of a Jati marry within and not outside their Jati. Often a number of Jatis in an area that are similar to each other in status and occupation make up a Jati cluster; and these Jatis and Jati clusters form part of one of the four *varnas* – Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. At the bottom of this caste hierarchy, i.e. Jati-based *varna* hierarchy, were the Untouchables, who were placed outside and in an inferior relation to the fourfold *varna* order.

Identifying the nature of caste society and the direction of social changes during the early medieval period demands a careful analysis of the sources. The terms *jati* and *varna* are not always used there in the sense of these categories, and their exact import has to be ascertained each time. A text by itself may give the impression of a static society, and it is only through a critical collation of all pieces of relevant information that one is able to see the processes of change.

A comparison of the evidence across early medieval period shows that state society – the society of kingdoms and empires, which was by and large caste society, as distinct from the non-state, casteless societies of hunter-gatherers and tribes – was expanding significantly during this period. First, a considerable number of immigrants from outside the subcontinent, such as the Hunas, the Gurjaras etc. were settling down. The Gurjaras, the ancestors of the present Gujar community, seem to have been particularly widespread in western and northwestern India. In some regions a gradual transformation of the original structure of Gurjara society was well under way during our period as at the end of it we see not only the emergence of a small section of them as rulers (the Gurjara-Pratiharas) but also the rest as humble peasantry. The recognition of the Hunas as one of the traditional thirty-six Kshatriya clans took a longer time. There were probably other peoples too. For instance, the Kalachuris who figure as an important political entity and had even founded an era called Kalachuri-Chedi Era are supposed to have been such immigrants, and the term ‘Kalachuri’ is interpreted as a derivative of the Turkish title ‘*kulchur*’.

Large parts of India continued to remain covered with forests, in which small, scattered groups of hunter-gatherers and tribal people practising pastoralism and/or primitive agriculture lived. For instance, in calling southern Andhra Pradesh a sparsely populated jungle territory infested by highwaymen, Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang) referred to one such area dominated by indigenous population, who did not lead a settled life and for whom plunder was a legitimate source of livelihood. Similarly, for an extensive country

in the northwest, he reports the presence of people who are stated to live solely by pastoralism, be very war like, and 'have no masters, and, whether men or women, have neither rich nor poor'. Quite a few of the indigenous groups were in regular touch with the members of caste society, and vivid descriptions of their lives are recorded, though not without bias, in contemporary works of literature, such as the *Dashakumaracharita* of Dandin and the *Kadambari* of Banabhatta.

Large number of indigenous population was also being assimilated in the caste society, some wholly, some in part. For instance, while the name 'Shabara' continued to stand for a tribe or a number of tribes till well after the early medieval period, the reference to a Shabara king with a Sanskrit name, Udayana, in the sources suggests the integration of a section of Shabara people into caste society. In general, the majority of the members of a tribe were converted into a Jati belonging to the Shudra Varna (some into an Untouchable caste), while a tribal chief, if he was sufficiently resourceful, could claim a Kshatriya status for himself and his close kinsmen.

The caste society was also being transformed from within in response to political, economic, and cultural-ideological changes. An interesting example is the crystallisation of the professionals called *kayastha* as a Jati. Kayasthas come into view as important officials from the Gupta period onwards, and just after our period are seen as a caste. Our sources suggest that they came from a number of communities, including tribes (especially Karanas) as well as Brahmanas. The names of a considerable number of Brahmanas in Bengal in the Gupta and post-Gupta inscriptions end with suffixes such as Vasu, Ghosha, Datta, Dama, etc., which are today the surnames not of Bengali Brahmanas but of Bengali Kayasthas. The absence of these surnames among the Brahmanas of the region suggests that it was the case not of people of lower Varnas adopting the surnames of their superiors in a bid for upward mobility, but one of the formation of a caste through fission of Brahmana and non-Brahmana *kayastha* families from their parent bodies and fusion into a caste of Kayastha. In other words, the Kayastha caste began to form as the families belonging to this profession started marrying among themselves and stopped marrying within their own original Jatis or tribes.

As you know, each Varna was associated with some specific functions; for instance, priestly functions were considered the preserve of Brahmanas. Historians have noted a remarkable change in this matter during the transition, which is registered both in the brahmanical treatises as well as attested by foreign observers. Agriculture, which was considered earlier generally the work of the Vaishyas, now comes increasingly to be seen as the occupation of the Shudras. However, the meaning of this is not easy to understand, or rather is capable of being understood in at least three different ways. First, this has been interpreted as amounting to a marked improvement in the status of the Shudras. From being slaves, servants, and agricultural labourers they now become landholding peasants like the Vaishyas. Second, this may represent the decline in the status of peasantry as a result of extensive land grants. There was, it is said, such a downgrading of the Vaishya peasants that they were considered no different from the Shudras. Third, this could refer to the phenomenon of the absorption of tribal people in caste society as Shudra peasantry. It is of course hypothetically possible that the different statements in the sources may collectively represent in some, hitherto unexplained, way the sum total of all these inferences. However, the point is that the problem of the exact correlation of this

shift in Varna theory with the historical reality, especially the mutually contradictory nature of the first two inferences, has so far not been realized by historians, and needs to be sorted out.

From about the third to the post-Gupta centuries, a number of developments take place in the history of untouchability. Although the practice had been known earlier, the term 'untouchable (*asprishya*)' for them is used for the first time now. The number of untouchable castes increases through the period, largely through the absorption of aboriginal (local) groups in the caste society. However, the Chandalas and the Shvapachas (literally, 'dog-cookers') remained the most conspicuous of them. The miserable life of these people seldom failed to attract the attention of shocked foreign observers. Early in the Gupta period, Fa Xian noticed it, and in the seventh century Xuan Zang (Hiuen Tsang) observed, "Butchers, fishermen, public performers, executioners, and scavengers have their habitation marked by a distinguishing sign. They are forced to live outside the city and sneak along on the left when going about in the hamlets."

The practice of slavery seems to have continued without much remarkable change. This may be inferred from the treatment of the subject in the legal digests called *shastras*: the topic is treated in more or less the same manner in a Gupta-period work as in a twelfth-century one, the *Mitakshara*, which is otherwise very particular about recording change. Slaves seem to have mainly been used as domestic labour.

As with the other social groups, the status of women did not remain unchanged during the transition to the early medieval period. The changes that are noticed mainly pertain to the womenfolk of the upper classes of society; of course these changes did not occur uniformly everywhere. The brahmanical attitudes betray certain unmistakable tendencies of further depreciation of women's status, one of the most intolerable things being a woman's attempt to have independence (*svatantrya*). There was an increasing tendency to club them together with either property or Shudras, just the Chandalas were coming to be bracketed with dogs and donkeys. Post-puberty marriages were deprecated, with one authority prescribing the age of the bride as one-third of the bridegroom's. Wives would considerably outlive husbands in such cases, and detailed provisions were accordingly made for regulating the lives of widows. An extreme provision was that she should become a sati, i.e. commit suicide with her husband's dead body on the funeral pyre (or without it if it had already perished, as Harsha's sister Rajyashri tried to do). Although not unknown in the earlier periods, the practice of sati gained ground steadily in early medieval times as instances of it begin to multiply. However, this did not win universal approval even in Brahmanism. Banbhata and Shudraka, the leading literary figures of the times, criticised it strongly, and the strongest protest was beginning to develop in tantrism, which was to declare it a most sinful act.

A general indication of the depreciation in the social standing of upper caste women is the deliberate erasure of their pre-marital identity after marriage. Till the Gupta period there is evidence that a woman did not need to lose her *gotra* identity and affiliation after marriage; thereafter, however, such marriages seem to have gone 'gradually gone out of use, at least among the ordinary people'.

Sometimes a certain 'improvement' in the status of women in early medieval times is perceived in the fact that they were allowed, like the Shudras, to listen to certain

religious texts and worship deities. However, this seems to have served, by making them religious-minded, mainly to strengthen the brahmanical religions and enhance the income of the officiating priests rather than to improve the quality of women's lives. Much cannot also be made of the increase in the scope of *stridhana*, i.e. the wealth that a woman could receive as a gift, for this did little to empower them in relation to men; their dependence and helplessness remained unaffected. While some authorities tried to get inheritance rights for the widow or daughter of a man dying sonless, actual historical instances make it clear that their prescriptions were routinely disregarded in favour of the contrary opinion by the early medieval kings, who would confiscate the property of such persons except for some privileged few; this provision, however, like those against widow remarriage and advocating sati, did not apply to the women of Shudra Varna. In fact, as in the previous and following periods, women of the labouring masses, simply for the reason that they had to work in the fields, pastures, etc. along with men in order to keep body and soul together, could not be subjected to the same kind of subordination and helplessness as was the fate of women of the privileged classes.

### **Check your progress exercise 3**

**Discuss briefly about the important social changes that took place in the course of transition to early medieval period.**

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## **3.5 Conclusion**

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The above discussion shows that early medieval centuries were characterized with major changes in economy, society and polity. These changes influenced the cultural life as well. The *samantas* played a very crucial role in political structures. Different approaches to look at these centuries have given rise to scholarly debates and greatly enriched our understanding of the changes in these centuries.

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## **3.6 Let us sum Up**

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- The early medieval centuries show expansion of state and society
- Major economic changes took place during these centuries and there was an expansion of agriculture.
- Rise of regional political powers led to the growth of regional architecture and literature.

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

**A.** (i) True (ii) True (iii) False (iv) True (v) False

**B.** See Section 3.2

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

See Section 3.3

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

See Section 3.2

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**VARDHANAS, PALLAVAS AND CHALUKYAS: POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Structure**

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- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Vardhanas, Pallavas and Chalukyas
  - 4.2.1 The Vardhanas
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  - 4.4.1 Mathematics and Astronomy
  - 4.4.2 Medicine
- 4.5 Conclusion
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up

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**4.0 Objectives**

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

- Recognize the changes in polity and society during this period
- Explain the cultural developments of this period
- Trace the developments in science, medicine and mathematics in this period

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**4.1 Introduction**

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History, as you know, is as much a story of continuity as of change. Taking a long-term view of the past and with the wisdom of hindsight, historians discover certain broad continuities for a long stretch of time that distinguish it from the preceding and succeeding stretches when there is a break in these continuities, i.e. when change occurs. These continuities become the characteristic feature of the particular stretch that is then called a period of history. In Indian history, three such major periods are known as ancient, medieval, and modern periods. The transition from the ancient to the medieval period in Indian history, the first subdivision of which is called 'early medieval', was a

long-drawn-out affair. This transition encompassed a series of significant changes over a wide spectrum of human activity and thought.

In this lesson we shall study the political and economic developments that mark this transition, with special reference to the Pallavas, Chalukyas, and Vardhanas. The lesson will also focus on the changes in society and culture that accompanied and were not infrequently related in various ways to the political and economic developments.

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## **4.2 The Vardhanas, Pallavas and Chalukyas**

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### **4.2.1 The Vardhanas**

In North India as the Gupta rule began to decline from the turn of the sixth century – to disappear eventually by the middle of it – a number of small kingdoms arose. Two of these were ruled by the Maukharis of Kanauj and the Pushyabhutis of Sthaneshvara (modern Thanesar in Haryana) respectively. The Pushyabhuti kings had the suffix *vardhana* at the end of their name, such as Prabhakaravardhana, Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana. That is why they are also known as Vardhanas. Princess Rajyashri from the Vardhana family was married to the Maukhari king. When he died, her brother, King Harshavardhana of Thanesar (Harsha in short), became the effective ruler of both the kingdoms, probably by virtue of his widow sister's claim to the throne; she, according to the Chinese sources, 'regularly took a seat of honour beside her brother Harsha, and shared in state deliberations'. Through a number of wars lasting over a number of years, Harsha formed a very large, but extremely short-lived, empire in North India; it fell to pieces immediately after his death in 647 CE.

### **4.2.2 The Pallavas**

The Pallavas were a dynasty of South India. They ruled for a very long time, for as many as six centuries from third century CE onwards. Initially they were a small power in what is now northern Tamil Nadu, with their capital at Kanchipuram. From the sixth century they figure as a major regional power, dominating a large territory that included the domains of several small rulers, and defending it in an almost continuous series of wars against the Pandyas of Madurai (southern Tamil Nadu) and the Chalukyas. Their power began to wane from about mid-eighth century.

### **4.2.3 The Chalukyas**

The Chalukyas emerged as rulers of northern Karnataka and adjoining areas of Maharashtra in the western Deccan in the beginning of the sixth century CE. They rapidly made themselves overlords of an extensive empire, ruling from their capital Vatapi (modern Badami). The Chalukyas of Badami were dislodged about mid-eighth century by the Rashtrakutas, their erstwhile subordinates. A junior branch of theirs, called Eastern Chalukyas, ruled in the Andhra delta region from 631 CE for about five centuries. There were other branches of the Chalukyas also in Indian history, but we shall here not be concerned with the Chalukya dynasties that ruled after the mid-eighth century.

These three empires well represented the three major divisions of India – North India (Vardhanas), the Deccan (Chalukyas), and South India (Pallavas)– they did not span over the same range of time in Indian history. The Vardhanas ruled for the shortest period, the Chalukyas ruled both before and after them, and the chronologies of both formed a subset of the Pallava period, which was the longest of all. Since our chief interest lies in the changes that historians have identified in the transition to the early medieval period in Indian history, we shall focus on the two centuries from circa 550 to 750 CE. The transitional aspects of the periods outside this time-bracket are usually discussed in the lessons on the preceding and succeeding periods of early Indian history, with special reference to the Guptas and the Palas-Pratiharas-Rashtrakutas-Cholas respectively. The focus on the transition also requires that we take into account other realms than those of the Vardhanas, Chalukyas and Pallavas.

### Check your progress exercise 1

#### A. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- (i) The Pallavas ruled for as many as six centuries from third century CE onwards.
- (ii) The Chalukyas emerged as rulers of northern Karnataka and adjoining areas of Maharashtra in the western Deccan in the beginning of the sixth century CE.
- (iii) The Chalukyas of Badami were dislodged about mid-eighth century by the Vardhanas.
- (iv) The Pushyabhuti kings had the suffix *vardhana* at the end of their name, such as Prabhakaravardhana, Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana.
- (v) Vincent A. Smith dated the beginning of the medieval period from the death of Harshavardhana and termed its first phase as ‘early medieval India’.

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## 4.3 Culture

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It is for the multi-faceted cultural activities that the documentation in our period – literary and monumental – is the richest, liveliest, and most vivid. It is best appreciated firsthand, visually via the sites of monuments or by reading up the literature rather than through an investigation into the transitional aspects of it. However, such investigation helps us place the creative-aesthetic-scientific achievements of the age in their proper historical contexts, enriching our sensibilities thereby, and therefore comes in very useful whenever we decide to descend on the monuments or dive in the literature. There exists a highly technical and voluminous scholarly output on the different aspects of these activities, and, in the limited space at our disposal, we can do no more than describe some broad trends.

### 4.3.1 Linguistic Developments

There were a number of significant linguistic developments. First, there was the onset and growth of the third stage of Middle Indo-Aryan languages, i.e. the Prakrits (Old Indo-Aryan languages include Classical and Vedic Sanskrit), from about 600 CE. This third stage of the Middle Indo-Aryan languages is termed Apabhramsha by the linguists,

out of which the New or Modern Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi and Marathi began to evolve from the tenth century CE. Second, the predominance of Sanskrit continued to grow as the official language of the states and one used for trans-provincial communication throughout the culture region of South and South-east Asia, apart from as a language of literature and religion; towards the end of early medieval period even the Jainas were beginning to give up their Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit in its favour. In the history of Sanskrit legal literature, this period marks a watershed, during which the last of the Smritis, the *Katyayana Smriti*, was composed, and towards the end of which the great tradition of Sanskrit commentaries on these Smritis made its first beginning with the commentary of Asahaya on the *Narada Smriti*.

Third, there was the continuing ascent of Tamil along with the foundations of Kannada and Telugu as a literary language. The growth of Tamil received a great fillip from the Bhakti movement. Although no extant works can be ascribed to this period, epigraphic references as well as the later literary ones show nevertheless that Kannada was flourishing as a literary language, aided by state patronage and royal participation. For instance, Durvinita, who is mentioned as a celebrated literary figure of the language, was probably the sixth-century Ganga king Durvinita of southern Karnataka. As for Telugu, the discovery of fragments of an early text on prosody, called *Janashraychhandas*, points to a strong likelihood that its rise as a literary language may have commenced as early as the first references to Telugu words in stone inscriptions of the fifth and sixth century CE.

#### **4.3.2 Religion**

In the field of religion, the Puranic temple based Brahmanical sects, about the nature and rise of which you have already read in the previous lessons, continued to be in the ascendant. Of these the Vaishnava and Shaiva sects were the most important. Taking the evidence of royal patronage as an indicator, the various Shaiva sects appear to have been moving ahead of the Vaishnava ones during this period.

A major new development of great importance was Bhakti movement in the Tamil south. The idea of bhakti or devotion to a deity was basic to most sects of the period, but it was in the south during this period that it was invested with an unprecedented emotional intensity and became the focus of a powerful religious movement. It was espoused by both Shaiva saints called Nayanars and Vaishnava ones called Alvars. They journeyed extensively in propagation of their faith; debated with rivals; sang, danced and composed beautiful lyrics in praise of their deities; and converted kings and commoners alike to their faith, exhorting them to bring disgrace to the other faiths. Besides fulfilling the religious cravings of the people, the idea of bhakti served to tone down the severity of the iniquitous caste system as well as helped, as the central doctrine of temple-based religiosity and in calling forth the unquestioning loyalty of the subjects, the monarchs to shore up their rule.

There is a perceptible decline in some areas of Buddhism, which had gradually been falling out of royal favour since the Gupta period. In many others, however, it continued to retain a substantial presence. There was a century of lavish royal patronage by the Maitraka state of Saurashtra in the west, and in the east the importance of Nalanda reached its peak during this time as the most outstanding of all the centres of Buddhist



learning, to which some more like Vikramashila, Oddantapuri, and Somapura were added. In Gujarat and Rajasthan regions, Jainism too seems to have done reasonably well among the people despite the dwindling royal support.

It is in the South that the two religions lost out to Brahmanism in a major way, although the Kannada territory remained a Jaina stronghold. There was never any love lost between them and the Brahmanical religions, and religious rivalry and persecution have long been identified as distinct features of the age, despite a certain general reluctance to accept it and a rather desperate bid by some scholars to see nothing but religious tolerance and harmony. There were no doubt kings during these centuries who were evenhanded in their attitudes to the various religions, but so were those with partisan views bordering on bigotry. For instance, the following quote from one of the earliest studies on South Indian Jainism by M.S. Ramaswami Ayyangar and B. Sheshagiri Rao (1922) represents a standard view of the downfall of the faith in the region, about which students of history tend to be unfamiliar these days: The vast remains in South India of mutilated statues, deserted caves, and ruined temples at once recall to our mind the greatness of the religion in days gone by and the theological rancour of the Brahmanas who wiped it out of all active existence. The Jains have been forgotten, their traditions have been ignored; but, the memory of that bitter struggle between Jainism and Hinduism, characterised by bloody episodes in the South, is constantly kept alive in the series of frescoes on the wall of the *mantapam* of the Golden Lily Tank of the famous Minakshee Temple of Madurai. As though this were not sufficient the whole tragedy is gone through at five of the twelve annual festivals at the Madurai temple.

Tantricism was well on way to becoming a salient feature of religious life all over the subcontinent. In Tantricism the cult of female divinities, who were in general known as Tara in Buddhism and Shakti or Devi in Brahmanism, was combined with a set of esoteric beliefs and magical practices. A graphic portrayal of Tantric religion is seen in the *Harshacharita*, where an ascetic from the South performs what may clearly be identified as a Tantric rite for Harsha's ancestor Pushpabhuti. The ascetic lived near an old temple of the Mothers (*matri*) and performed a fire-rite in the mouth of a corpse in an empty building near 'a great cremation ground' on the fourteenth night of the dark fortnight.

Among the other features of religious life in this period of transition, one was the coming of Islam on the west coast and in Sindh, and the other was the expansion of Christian communities from Malabar and some other places on the west coast in early sixth century to the east coast of the peninsula by the eighth.

Philosophy continued to be enlivened and enriched by debates and discussions. Apart from the six major schools of philosophy in Brahmanism, there were, as you already know, three 'heterodox', i.e. non-Brahmanical ones: Buddhist, Jaina, and Charvaka. No works of the Charvakas have come down to us and their views are known only through refutation by others. A major representative of this school was Purandara, who probably lived in the seventh century and is known to have composed texts on his school of philosophy. In the same century flourished Dharmakirti, the outstanding Buddhist philosopher. In Vedanta philosophy we have Gaudapada, who is reputed to have

been Shankaracharya's *paramaguru*, the teacher of his teacher. Some greatest names in Mimamsa philosophy also belong to this period: Shabara, Prabhakara, and Kumarila.

### 4.3.3 Art and Architecture

In stone architecture, there were two major forms: rock-cut and structural. Rock architecture, as you probably already know, refers to the creation of architectural forms in living rock. These rock-cut temples and monasteries usually look like artificial caves in hills and cliffs. These were distinct from 'structural' architecture, which refers to building freestanding structures with dressed-stone (or brick) masonry. Occasionally these two forms could be combined, but normally they remained separate, and have different chronological spans. Rock architecture, which over its long career was a virtually pan-South Asian phenomenon, goes back to the Mauryan period, but it is from about mid-fifth century (beginning at Ajanta and Ellora) that it entered its most active phase. By the end of this period the great age of rock architecture in Indian art history was by and large drawing to a close, even though its greatest achievement – the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora – comes just after it. It was during these centuries that construction of structural buildings in stone and brick got under way in an important way, but the really magnificent and classic phase of structural temples begins after the age of rock architecture was over. Generally speaking, there was an overlap between the two types of construction during this period, except in the south under the Pallavas, where the structural phase begins in the eighth century only after the rock-cut phase comes to an end in the seventh.

As the fine examples from Ajanta and Ellora testify, major advances were made as the artists stopped imitating wooden prototypes and achieved increasing perfection of design and execution; in some instances, it has been observed, 'lines are straighter, angles more correct, and surfaces more true than in any other examples'. Further, two monasteries at Ellora are the only examples we have of three storeys in rock-cut art. Till about the end of the sixth century Buddhism largely dominated the rock-cut mode of architecture, and then gradually Brahmanism became more important, followed by Jainism. Despite the different religious affiliations, the architectural style remained common, except for some adaptation for ritualistic purposes.

Examples of freestanding structures, built of stone or brick, are known from an earlier period. A most remarkable development of our period was the evolution of the typical brahmanical temple of the medieval era. The medieval temple was a very elaborate structure with several typical features. The process began, about the turn of the sixth century, with the addition of a tower called *shikhara* to the flat roofs of the shrine-rooms of the Gupta period. The earliest examples of such an addition come from Bhitargaon near Kanpur (brick) and Deogarh near Jhansi and Aihole near Badami (stone). The remaining features were gradually added till about 740 CE, when at the Vaikunthanath Perumal shrine at Kanchipuram we see a combination of all the standard attributes of the medieval temple. The evolution occurred at different pace in various regions. For instance, an important stage in the evolution was the connection of the pillared assembly hall called *mandapa* with the sanctum by means of a vestibule called *antarala*. As late as 700 CE this had not become a general practice as it is absent in both

the Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha at Kanchipuram (this Kailasanatha temple was used as an inspiration for the one at Ellora).

In sculpture, the classical tradition with its emphasis on fully rounded volume by and large continued. The medieval style, in which rounded volume and smooth convex lines give way to flat surfaces and sharp curves, is seen occasionally in isolated examples, such as in a sixth-century frieze at the Dhamek stupa at Sarnath, but it did not come into its own till a later period, and even then remained confined to certain regions only.

The same is true of painting. It was quite a developed art by the onset of this period, and the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, a contemporary text from Kashmir, provides a detailed account of its various aspects. Literary references show that there were both murals (paintings on walls and ceiling) of different types in private homes, royal palaces, and religious places as well as popular portable galleries of pictures drawn on textiles. However, although several examples of paintings from this period have survived, they all are all murals in religious establishments. The best-preserved specimens come from the sixth-century Buddhist caves (rock-cut halls) at Bagh in Madhya Pradesh, Ajanta, and Badami, the seventh-century rock-cut Jaina temple at Sittanavasal in Tamil Nadu (a good part of the extant paintings, it has now been found out, belong to the ninth century), and the seventh-century Shaiva Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram. Outside India, Sigiri in Sri Lanka furnishes beautiful instances. The tradition of classical painting continued in all these and many other cases through the seventh century and beyond. In the classical mode, there was an attempt at three-dimensional representation by employing several techniques, such as chiaroscuro (use of light and shade by means of colour shades and tones). Through these centuries, however, the medieval style, which was to find a foothold in many regions, was also developing; it appears in an eighth century Ellora painting with a completeness that suggests a long period of prior evolution. As in sculpture, the classical and the medieval coexisted in South Asia after this period.

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#### **4.4 Developments in the field of Science**

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##### **4.4.1 Mathematics and Astronomy**

In the scientific field, Brahmagupta is the most outstanding figure in this period. He made a number of seminal contributions in mathematics. He was the first mathematician in the world to recognize negative numbers, which he presented as ‘debts’ in contrast to positive numbers, which he called ‘fortunes’. In many other ways he was ahead of the mathematicians of the time. For instance, one of his methods for proving Pythagoras’ theorem remained unknown to the western world till the seventeenth century. Astronomy was closely linked to mathematics, the word for the mathematician – *ganaka* – being also the term for the astronomer. Like his equally eminent predecessor Aryabhata, Brahmagupta was thus an astronomer also. He headed a major observatory, and grappled with such questions as lunar and solar eclipses, conjunctions of the moving planets with each other as well as with fixed stars, etc.

The *Surya Siddhanta*, which provided the basis of medieval astronomy in India from the fifth century onwards by replacing the Vedanga astronomy, continued to undergo gradual changes; it was its later version, one that evolved between 628 and 960 CE that was to gain immense popularity. In Tamil region, an old system of astronomical

calculations by means of certain numerical schemes continued as a parallel tradition, as distinct from the trigonometrical tradition of the *Surya Siddhanta*. Apart from Brahmagupta, Bhaskara I, who was a contemporary of Brahmagupta and a disciple of the great Aryabhata, and Lalla (748 CE) were the leading astronomers of our times.

#### 4.4.2 Medicine

In medicine, Vagbhata claimed, or was claimed, to have become the leading authority for his age, rendering superfluous the previous masters. There are two Vagbhatas, the first of whom wrote a treatise called the *Ashtanga-sangraha*, and who flourished in the seventh century just before the visit of the Chinese pilgrim Yijing. Scholars place the other Vagbhata, the author of *Ashtanga-hrdaya-samhita*, about a century later. Both were Buddhists, and thus bear witness to the close links of Buddhism with the medical tradition; medicine was avidly studied in the monasteries of Nalanda and Vikramashila.

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#### 4.5 Conclusion

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In this lesson, you have studied how the lives of people in early India were being transformed in several significant ways over the two hundred odd years. Our concern was with identifying the dynamics of change rather than providing a detailed description of economy, polity, society, and culture. The purpose has been to discuss change, not narrate details.

The changes during this period did not occur in a uniform fashion all over the subcontinent. The transition to the medieval era occurred at different points of time in different spheres and regions, and the pace at which change occurred also varied. Moreover, historical change seldom occurs in a sweeping manner. Remnants of the past, including the remotest past, somehow manages to cling to us; the scientist D. D. Kosambi in fact would always urge historians to detect clues to the past in the present. All the same, the patterns of change that we have outlined above made early Indian society recognizably different about mid-eighth century from what it was about mid-sixth. As you read on, you shall see how the processes of transformation continued to operate in the times ahead.

#### Check your progress exercise 2

##### A. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) In \_\_\_\_\_, the cult of female divinities, who were in general known as Tara in Buddhism and Shakti or Devi in Brahmanism, was combined with a set of esoteric beliefs and magical practices.
- (ii) The Kailasanatha temple at Ellora is an example of \_\_\_\_\_ architecture.
- (iii) The literary work \_\_\_\_\_ provided the basis of medieval astronomy in India from the fifth century onwards by replacing the Vedanga astronomy.
- (iv) Modern Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi and Marathi have evolved from a stage of the Middle Indo-Aryan languages called \_\_\_\_\_.

- (v) \_\_\_\_\_ is the term used for both, astronomer and mathematician, shows close links between astronomy and mathematics.

**B. Short notes:**

- (i) Bhakti movement in South India  
(ii) Pallava art

**C. Long Questions:**

- (i) Discuss the contribution of Cultural contributions of Pallavas and Chalukyas.  
(ii) Assess the developments in scientific knowledge during the rule of Pallavas and Chalukyas.

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#### 4.6 Let Us Sum Up

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- Sixth and seventh centuries witnessed some striking developments in polity, society, economy, language, literature, script and religion.
- These changes marked a transition to a different type of society and economy dominated by landlords who now stood between the state and the peasants and also played a key role in shaping the course of society, religion, art and architecture, and literature in India from the seventh century onwards.
- Tantricism was well on way to becoming a salient feature of religious life all over the subcontinent. It influenced all the religious orders – Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism.
- New castes, like the Kayastha caste emerged from the Gupta period onwards. From the seventh century onwards every tribe or kin group was given the status of a separate caste in brahmanical society.
- From the sixth century onwards, there was a sharp decline in trade which led to the decay of towns.
- The early medieval period saw a great deal of philosophical writings related to the various *darshanas*.

**Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

- A. (i), (ii), (iv), and (v) are correct.

**Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

- A. (i) Tantricism (ii) Rock-cut (iii) *Surya Siddhanta* (iv) Apabhramsha (v) *Ganaka*

**B. Short notes:**

- (i) See Section 4.3.2  
(ii) See Section 4.3.3

**C. Long Questions:**

- (i) See Section 4.3  
(ii) See Sections 4.4

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## RASHTRAKUTAS, PALAS AND PRATI HARAS: THE TRIPATITE STRUGGLE

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### Structure

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- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Political Processes in Early medieval India
- 5.3 Rashtrakutas
- 5.4 Palas
- 5.5 Gurjara-Pratiharas
- 5.6 Tripartite Struggle between the Palas, Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas
- 5.7 Conclusion
- 5.8 Let us sum up

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### 5.0 Objectives

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

- understand the political processes and structure of early medieval polity
- trace the origin and extent of the Rashtakutas, Palas and Pratiharas
- explain the tripartite struggle between the Rashtakutas, Palas and Pratiharas

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### 5.1 Introduction

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The study of polity calls for analysis of the nature, organisation and distribution of power. Political set-ups differed from region to region due to different socio-economic and geographical potentialities of the regions. In India the period between eighth and thirteenth century was very significant not only from the point of view of socio-economic formations but also from the point of view of political processes. Numerous kingdoms and principalities emerged in India during this period due to lack of any single centralized authority and they continued to thrive before the formal establishment of the sultanate rule in the Indian subcontinent.

In this lesson we shall study the political structures of the three kingdoms of Rashtrakutas, Palas and Pratiharas and their clash over the possession of Kannauj.

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### 5.2 Political processes in Early Medieval India

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The early medieval period coincides with the phase when the Gupta Empire had declined and the Delhi Sultanate was yet to be established. It is the period of transition from the ancient period to the medieval period and thus is termed early medieval. Earlier,

scholars called it the dark period of Indian history as there was no centralized pan-Indian political structure. However, later researches show that significant changes were taking place during this period also. There were a number of states which emerged during this period like that of the Pratiharas, the Palas, the Cholas, the Chahamanas, Chandelas, Rashtrakutas and others in different parts of the Indian sub-continent. Some states survived for long with extensive areas under their possession while the others had control over smaller areas.

Early medieval India was marked by a lack of political unity, and hence the reason for the emergence of so many kingdoms in the country. It has been argued that this was the reason for the Arab and Turkish rulers to easily defeat the Indian powers, as the conditions were conducive for their invasion. Recent studies have focussed on the political processes which in turn led to such a fragmented history for this period. Infact, the study of the political processes also helps us to understand the political history of the period. It was only by the mid-twentieth century that focus shifted from explaining the emergence and decline of the various kingdoms as just a political development to finding explanation for the fact as to why no large empire emerged after the decline of Harsha's Empire.

Scholars like D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, B.N.S. Yadava and others following their contention found feudalism as the prominent socio-economic system that moulded developments in India during the period between the decline of Harshavardhana's empire and the emergence the Delhi Sultanate. D.D. Kosambi was the first to suggest about the two-stage development of the political formation namely, 'feudalism from above' and 'feudalism from below'. However, R.S. Sharma differed from Kosambi's two-tier approach to view the process and provided a different concept to explain Indian Feudalism. His notion was supported by scholars like B.N.S. Yadava, D.N. Jha, R.N. Nandi and others which characterized the political structures emerged during this period as feudal polities.

According to R.S. Sharma, the roots of the feudal elements in early medieval northern India can be traced to the practice of land grants made to Brahmanas, temples and monasteries. Although the epigraphic evidence for the same is datable to an earlier period, it increases with Gupta period with references to grant of villages along with their fields and inhabitants. It is important to note that now the fiscal, administrative and judicial rights over the donated land were also given to the religious beneficiaries. These grants were not confined to the priests but later extended to the warrior class, and the officials such as governors, judges, military commanders and other related state personnel were also assigned land in lieu of salaries in cash.

According to the scholars who support the aforementioned opinion regarding the feudal formation, religious and secular grants became increasingly popular with the emergence of local and self-sufficient economies marked by lack of commercial intercourse, decline of urban life and paucity of coins. The economic essence of Indian feudalism as argued by R.S. Sharma lay in the rise of the landed intermediaries which in turn led to the enserfment of the peasantry as there were restrictions on their mobility and freedom. The period witnessed the growth of self-sufficient economy due to the decline of urban centres, commodity production and foreign trade. Coins became scarce and

payments were now made through land assignments. R.S. Sharma finds that these traits were present in the regional polities of the early medieval period including the Pala and the Pratihara polities in northern India and in the Rashtrakuta polity in the Deccan. Thus, there was decentralisation of administration and revenue collection that led to the emergence of various intermediaries between the ruler and the ruled. This was clearly in sharp contrast to the Mauryan state which was described as a highly centralized state by Prof. Sharma himself. Thus, it was the practice of land grants which led to the decentralization of the authority and subsequent feudalization of these polities.

Epigraphic and literary sources indicate that rulers assigned villages as grants to feudal chiefs in northern India, particularly in modern day Uttar Pradesh, central India, Rajasthan, Malwa and Gujarat. Grants of land were also made to individuals for distinguished acts of valour. Chieftains were frequently reduced to submission after defeat in war and forced into accepting the overlordship of the conqueror by paying tributes. Such chiefs came to be known as the samantas, ranakas and rauts who apart from paying annual tributes and rendering mandatory military services also had to pay homage in person to the victorious overlord. There were various categories of such samantas, ranakas, etc. and as long as the chief remained a feudatory of the ruler he called himself the samanta. But he discarded such titles and adopted independent sovereign titles such as maharaja and maharajadhiraja once he became independent from the overlord.

D.N. Jha has tried to locate the feudal formation in the internal social dynamics of the time. He argues that there was a prelude to the feudalization of the Indian society. The Kali Age is characterized by *varnasankara* i.e. intermixing of *varnas* or social orders which implies that the vaishyas and shudras including the peasants, artisans, and labourers either refused to perform production functions or the vaishya peasants declined to pay taxes and refused to supply the necessary labour for economic production.

The concept of 'feudal polity' was widely discussed and examined by other scholars who observed certain limitations in this formulation. This led them to present alternative models to view the political formations in different regions. In 1980 Burton Stein applied the 'segmentary state model' to explain the political formations in the Chola and Vijaynagara kingdoms. According to him the political process in southern India had a segmentary structure without any fixed boundaries, wherein the basic socio-political segment was a local territory grouped into zones. These zones comprised major subdivisions which were again split into macro regions. All these segments together constituted the kingdom. The king exercised direct or actual control over the core region and ritual sovereignty over the peripheral zones. Thus, a very limited area was under the actual control of the central authority whereas the remaining peripheral zones owed only customary or nominal allegiance to the head of the state. This model, however, lacked focus on the issues such as those related to the administrative machinery in the nadus, and also the role of temples in the Chola polity. In this context, the alternative perspectives developed by the researches of R. Champakalakshmi, James Heitzman, Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayulu are noteworthy.

Another explanation which has been offered for the political processes of early medieval period is that of the 'integrative model' propounded by B.D. Chattopadhyaya. According to this, a polity integrated the graded hierarchy of samantas and that was a



‘prelude to the exercise of greater control by the medieval state through its nobility and its regulated system of service assignments’. The samantas were integrated into a political structure marked by the domination of the overlord-vassal relationships. It was this relationship which was dominant over the other levels of relation in the structure.

The integrative polity, like the feudal polity described earlier, views political process in parallels to contemporary economic, social and religious developments such as horizontal spread of rural agrarian settlements; horizontal spread of the dominant ideology of social order based on varna division; integration of local cults, ritual and sacred centres into a larger structure. According to B.D. Chattopadhyaya, any lineage or segment of larger ethnic group with a coherent organisation of force could successfully make a bid for political power and lay the foundation of a large state structure. He cites the example of Gurjaratara or Gurjarabhumi (land of Gurjars) which was the base from where emerged several lineages tracing descent from the Gurjars. The separation of the ruling lineages from the common stock is suggested by the general name Gurjara-Pratihara used by the lineages and while the base of one such lineage in the Jodhpur area seems to have been established by displacing pre-existing groups, in the Alwar area in eastern Rajasthan there is a clear indication of such a base having developed between Gurjara cultivators and the Gurjara-Pratihara ruling lineage. It is this base which worked as the foundation for the Gurjara-Pratihara ruling supra-regional power rooted in the expansion of one of the lineages that extended at one stage to as far as Bengal.

Chattopadhyaya further points out that the larger polities generally emerged in the ‘nuclear’ regions like Ganga basin, Kaveri basin, Krishna-Godavari doab so that they were facilitated by an agrarian resource base. Further, it was not essential that the polities would originate only in nuclear areas but by mobilizing their strength they could move towards the nuclear areas and hence result in the transformation of the political structure in the region. The examples can be seen in the movement of the Pratiharas from Rajasthan to Kannauj and of the Palas from south-east Bengal to the middle and lower Ganga basin. Thus, according to him the phenomenon of different foci of power was not particularly south Indian but cut across all political structures of early medieval period and this ‘foci of power’ is represented by the ‘samanta system’, an order which assumed the characteristics of a hierarchical formation.

Hermann Kulke has identified three stages in the emergence of the regional states. In his opinion, in the first stage a tribal chieftain would turn into a local Hindu princeling (ruler of a small area), in the second stage this prince would become a king surrounded by samantas and thus establish an ‘early kingdom’ and in the third stage, great rulers of ‘imperial kingdoms’ would emerge who controlled large realms and integrated the samantas into the internal structure of their realm. These three stages are respectively named as local/sub-regional and regional/supra-regional polities by B.D. Chattopadhyaya. Thus, Chattopadhyaya and Kulke have seen the early medieval polity not as decentralised polity of Indian feudal model where bases of power are created from above through individual or institutional agents nor have they explained it in terms of relationship of segment as explained by the segmentary state model but they have visualized these polities as integrative polities.

## Check your progress Exercise 1

### A. State True or False:

- (i) The transition from the ancient period to the medieval period is termed as early medieval India.
- (ii) The samantas adopted independent sovereign titles such as maharaja and maharajadhiraja once they became independent from the overlordship of the conqueror.
- (iii) The integrative state model suggests about the disintegration of the central power.
- (iv) The term Gurjaratara or Gurjarabhumi refers to the inhabitants of Gujarat.
- (v) Early medieval period includes the early Gupta period.

### B. Long Questions

- (i) How does the Indian Feudalism model characterize the early medieval period?
- (ii) Discuss the 'integrative polity model' with regard to the early Indian medieval polity.

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## 5.3 Rashtrakutas

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The power which rose to prominence after the fall of the Chalukyas of Badami was that of the Rashtrakutas. The Deccan was under the control of the Rashtrakutas from the early eighth century onward. The founder of the kingdom was Dantidurga who defeated the Chalukhya ruler Kirtivarman II and occupied Badami. He was succeeded by his uncle Krishna I, who is credited to have built the famous rockcut Kailasha temple at Ellora. Krishna I was succeeded by his eldest son Govinda II who turned out to be a failure as a ruler and was defeated by his brother Dhruva who finally occupied the throne.

Dhruva defeated the Ganga and the Pallavas rulers and also the ruler of the Vengi. These victories made Dhruva the undisputed overlord of the entire Deccan. He then decided to proceed towards the north and advanced towards Kannauj where he was successful in defeating the Pratihara ruler Vatsaraja. He then proceeded eastward to defeat the Pala ruler Dharampala. But he could not maintain his victories by marching upon and occupying Kannauj. He decided to return to south with a huge booty. At the close of Dhruva's reign, the Rashtrakuta power had reached its zenith.

Govinda III is said to be the greatest and ablest among all the Rashtrakuta rulers. He defeated the Pallavas of Kanchi and also repulsed the invasions of the Pratihara king Nagabhata II of Kannauj. While he was busy fighting in north, the Cholas, Pandyas and Pallavas formed a coalition against him. He was, however, successful in defeating all his opponents. His armies had conquered all the territories between Kannauj and Cape Comorin, and Banaras and Broach. Vengi was governed by his nominee and the power of the Dravidian kings in the extreme south was completely broken. Even the rulers of

Ceylon were compelled into submission. Never again did the prestige of the Rashtrakuta empire rise so high. Amoghavansha I, his son and successor was also an able ruler who enjoyed a long reign of sixty three years. He was also a great patron of arts. He founded his new capital at Manyakheta, the modern Malkhed of Andhra Pradesh. He was succeeded by his son Krishna II who was subsequently followed by his son Indra III. Indra III is known for his battle against the Pratihara ruler Mahipala. The later Rashtrakuta rulers were not much capable and thereafter the Chalukyas regained power again towards the end of the tenth century.

The period of the Rashtrakuta ascendancy in the Deccan from about 753 to 975 CE constitutes the most brilliant chapter in its history. Their role in the history of the Deccan can be compared with that played by the Marathas in the region during the later period. Three of the Rashtrakuta rulers, Dhruva, Govinda III and Indra III went to north India and inflicted crushing defeats upon its powerful rulers. Their success in the south was equally remarkable. They subjugated all the great powers of India, the Pratihara and Palas in north and the Eastern Chalukyas and Cholas in south. They did suffer reverses at times but on the whole, they succeeded against their powerful adversaries.

### **Check your progress Exercise 2**

#### **A. Long Question**

(i) Discuss the role of Govinda III in the expansion of the Rashtrakuta Empire.

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### **5.4 The Palas**

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There was anarchy and confusion in Bengal for almost a hundred years following the death of Harshavardhana. It is said that the people of Bengal elected a person named Gopala to become their ruler in order to put an end to the anarchy. Gopala ruled for about five years and he successfully laid the foundation of the Pala dynasty in Bengal. Thus, from the late eighth century to the early twelfth century the Pala dynasty controlled large part of Bihar and Bengal and was for some time the premier power of the north India. The political basis of the Palas was the fertile land of Bihar and Bengal and external trade relations especially with South-East Asia. Gopala's son and successor Dharampala was a warrior king who waged successful wars against neighbours and extended the boundaries of his kingdom. But when Dharampala ascended the throne he had to face many challenges especially from the Pratihara who were extending their territories towards the east and from the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan who also wanted to control the fertile plains of the north. Thus, Dharampala was soon involved in a struggle with these two powers.

The first encounter took place between the Pratihara ruler Vatsaraja and Dharampala which ended with Vatsaraja's victory. But before Vatsaraja could even celebrated his victory he was defeated by the Rashtrakuta king Dhruva and forced to take refuge in the desert of Rajpuatana. Dhruva then advanced to the Doab and defeated Dharampala but shortly after his victory he retreated to the Deccan. Thus, the Rashtrakuta invasion was in fact a blessing in disguise for the Palas because it destroyed the Pratihara power whereas Dharampala did not suffer much either in power or prestige. Dharampala took advantage of this situation and by a series of continuous campaigns made himself the suzerain of nearly the whole of northern India. This is amply demonstrated by the fact

that he held a huge darbar in Kannauj, which was now claimed by him after he defeated Indrayudha, a vassal of Vatsaraja, and placed his own person in the form of Chakrayudha on the throne of Kannauj.

The empire of Dharampala was broadly divided into three distinct parts. Bengal and Bihar which formed its nucleus were directly ruled by him. Beyond this, the kingdom of Kannauj was a close dependency whose ruler was nominated by and directly subordinate to him. Further to the west and south in Punjab, western Hill states, Rajputana, Malwa and Berar were a number of vassal states which did not form an integral part of the dominion ruled over by Dharampala but whose rulers acknowledged him as their overlord and paid homage to him. He was, however, challenged by the Pratihara ruler Nagabhata III and defeated by him. Once again, he was saved by the intervention of the Rashtrakutas who defeated the Pratihara ruler. But the Rashtrakuta ruler Govinda III soon left for Deccan and Dharampala was once free to peruse his imperial ambitions. When he died after a reign of 32 years or more, he left intact his extensive dominions to his son Devapala.

Devapala was also an able ruler. He not only maintained the empire inherited from his father but also extended its boundaries. He followed an aggressive imperialist policy and spent most of his life in military activities. He successfully fought with three generations of Pratihara rulers i.e. Nagabhata II, Ramabhadra and Bhoja and maintained Pala supremacy in northern India. He had a long reign of about forty years. He was patron of learning and a great architect who built many Buddhist monasteries and temples. The Mahabodhi temple at Bodhgaya is said to have been constructed under his patronage. But after the two great rulers Dharampala and Devapala, the Palas lapsed back into insignificance for sometime. Their power was restricted to their immediate domain around Patna and they completely lost their hold on Bengal. Only Mahipala (988-1038 CE) restored the greatness of Pala rule, although he was temporarily affected by the northern expedition of the Chola king, Rajendra I. Under his successors the Pala power was reduced by constant fights with the Kalachuris in the west. They also faced difficulties in the east by the Kaivartas until Ramapala put an end to Kaivartas power and thus he was able to restore Pala glory for sometime. But his weak successors could not stop the decline of the dynasty. In Bengal they were succeeded by the Sena dynasty in the twelfth century.

The policy of the Pala was within the framework of the monarchical set up and in this private and the state interests developed simultaneously. The empire witnessed of areas administered directly and areas administered by the vassal chiefs. Ramapala, the last important sovereign of the Pala dynasty, who ruled from 1080 CE to 1122 CE is known to have organized a control of uparika and districts (visaya) called Samantachakra (circle of vassal chiefs).

The importance of the Pala dynasty for eastern India is also on account of their contribution to the religious and cultural spheres. The Pala dynasty continued the tradition of royal patronage of Buddhist religious institutions. In Bengal, Mahayana Buddhism attained its specific tantric form, which was influenced by the cult of the Mother Goddess. Mystical and magical cults also grew in South-East Asia and in Tibet in this period under royal patronage and the Pala perhaps set this style. The old Buddhist

university (Mahavihara) of Nalanda retained its international reputation under the Pala rule and the new Buddhist university (Mahavihara) of Vikramshila was founded by Dharampala. Balaputra, the Shailendra king of Shrivijaya, arranged for the construction of a monastery for monks from his realm at Nalanda around 860 CE and Dharampala granted five villages to this monastery in the 39<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. With the spread of Mahayana Buddhism in Tibet and South-East Asia the style of Pala art also made an impact on those countries. The painting of Thangkas in Tibet and the sculptures of South-East Asia reveal the influence of the Pala art.

### **Check your progress Exercise 3**

#### **A. Fill in the blanks**

- (i) \_\_\_\_\_ was the first ruler of the Pala dynasty.
- (ii) Bhoja was a ruler of the \_\_\_\_\_ dynasty.
- (iii) \_\_\_\_\_ dynasty made donations for the maintenance of the monastery at Nalanda
- (iv) The tripartite struggle between the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas was for acquiring the control over \_\_\_\_\_.
- (v) The circle of the vassal chiefs under the rule of the Palas was called \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **B. Short Notes:**

- (i) Dharmapala
- (ii) Devapala

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## **5.5 Gurjara-Pratiharas**

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Gurjara-Pratiharas were a Rajput clan who were probably descendants of the Gurjaras who had settled in India in the sixth century CE. However, it is now believed that the Gurjara-Pratiharas were of indigenous origin and belonged to the kshatriya varna. Their progenitor was Harishcandra who married a kshatriya woman named Bhadra. The sons of Bhadra adopted her caste for all practical purposes. They were called Pratiharas for their progenitor seems to have acted as a doorkeeper. That the name of the dynasty is a mere outcome of the official designation Pratihara is proved by the fact that the family continued to bear the insignia of the office of Pratihara even after the acquisition of sovereignty. The Pratiharas were polytheists and they worshipped Vishnu, Shiva, and Bhagwati. Physically the Gurjaras were tall and good looking though dark in complexion. They were independent rulers of a small Rajputana kingdom during Harsha's reign increasing their power after his death by capturing Kannauj in the beginning of the eighth century.

The Pratihara Empire was probably one of the last great empires in northern India before the Muslim conquest. Western India, especially Gujarat and Malwa, was under the influence of the Gurjara-Pratiharas. Malwa was very fertile and Gujarat was a part of

internal and external trade network. The Pratiharas resisted incursions of the Arabs and were also drawn into the north Indian politics. But they are credited mainly for their successful resistance to the foreign invasions from the west.

The first great ruler of this dynasty was Nagabhatta during whose reign the Arab Muslims who had occupied Sind, invaded central India but were defeated and driven back. Nagabhatta was able to leave to his successors a powerful principality comprising Malwa and parts of Rajputana and Gujarat. Nagabhatta was succeeded by his nephews, Kakkuka and Devaraja, of whom nothing is known. Devaraja's son Vatsraja was however a powerful ruler. His kingdoms comprised both of Malwa and eastern Rajputana. He gradually extended his dominions in the north. He defeated Dharmapala, the Pala ruler of Bengal. He was also involved in the triangular struggle with the Palas and the Rashtrakutas for supremacy in northern India. But after his defeat at the hands of Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva, nothing much is known of him and it seems that his power remained confined to central Rajputana.

Vatsraja's son and successor Nagabhatta II regained the fortunes of his family. His earliest military exploits were the seizure of the hill forts of Anarta, Malwa etc. He also successfully won over the Saindhawa chiefs ruling in western Kathiawar and the rulers of Andhra, Kalinga and Vidarbha also submitted to him. He probably occupied Kannauj which later became the capital of the Pratiharas. Nagabhatta's success was however shortlived as he came into conflict with the Rashtrakuta ruler Govinda III who inflicted a crushing defeat on him and shattered his dreams of founding an empire. The reverses of Nagabhatta II gave an opportunity to Dharmapala and his son Devapala to re-establish the power and supremacy of the Palas and there was a decline in the Pratihara power for the time being. Nagabhatta II was succeeded by his son Ramabhadra who hardly ruled for three years.

It was Ramabhadra's son and successor Mihir Bhoja who proved to be the most powerful ruler of this dynasty. He succeeded in controlling Kannauj and made it capital. He also obtained mastery of the region around Kannauj which had probably been lost during his father's reign. Thus, Bhoja succeeded in re-establishing the fortunes of his family. But soon he was defeated by the Pala King Devapala. He then invaded the Rashtrakuta dominions but was once again defeated by the Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva. Therefore once again the growing power of the Pratiharas was brought to a halt by their traditional enemies, the Palas and the Rashtrakutas. He was also defeated by the Kalachuri king. There is no doubt that these defeats were big blows to his rising power.

But Bhoja once again renewed his aggressive career during the third quarter of the ninth century CE. He was helped by the fact that Devapala had died and the next two kings of the Pala dynasty were weak and peace-loving. Fortunately, for him the Rashtrakuta king Amoghvarsha was not aggressive and was of religious disposition, although the latter had raided the Pala dominions. Taking advantage of the weakness of the Pala rulers and their distracted condition due to the Rashtrakuta raids Bhoja inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Pala king Narayana Pala and conquered a considerable part of his western dominions. Bhoja was also engaged in a prolonged struggle with the Rashtrakutas. It was during the reign of the Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna II that he adopted offensive measures and gained considerable success. He defeated Krishna II, occupied

Malwa and advanced towards Gujarat. He also maintained supremacy over the whole Kathiawar peninsula. In the north-west his dominions extended to the Punjab, in the east the Kalachuris of Gorakhpur were his feudatories, and probably the whole of Awadh was included in his dominions. The Chandellas of Bundelkhand also acknowledged his overlordship. Thus, Bhoja consolidated a mighty empire in north India and raised Kannauj, his capital, once more to the position of an imperial city.

Bhoja, thus, proved to be a great ruler, general and empire builder. He was succeeded by his worthy son Mahendrapala, who like his father maintained the dignity of his kingdom, while patronising the arts. He also further expanded the kingdom towards the east. The Pratihara kingdom, however, began to decline after the death of Mahendrapala. His successors were weak and unable to protect their vast kingdom. By the mid-tenth century the kingdom was in deep crisis and its rulers found it difficult to curb the forces of disintegration which considerably weakened its political authority. Soon new minor kingdoms started emerging out of declining ones. Subsequently, the area under the direct rule of Pratiharas shrank considerably. The last blow came from Mahmud of Ghazni when he attacked and conquered Kannauj in 1018 CE. Though the Pratiharas re-occupied Kannauj after Mahmud's retreat, they had lost all their power and prestige by then, Kannauj having been reduced to a small principality. Later, yet another Rajput dynasty, the Rathors, came to occupy Kannauj during 1090.

#### **Check your progress Exercise 4**

##### **A. Long Question**

- (i) How did the Gurjara-Pratiharas establish their rule in northern India?

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#### **5.6 Tripartite struggle between the Palas, Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas**

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The triangular struggle between the Pratiharas, the Palas and the Rashtrakutas for the supremacy in northern India became an important factor in Indian politics for more than a century. The city of Kannauj which was raised to the position of imperial dignity by Harshavardhana became the prize coveted and won by each with varying degree of success. Kannauj became the centre of gravity due to its strategic and geographical potential. It was located in the middle of the Doab, thus, the control over Kannauj meant control over the eastern and western Ganga Valley. It was also interconnected with land and water routes. It was, therefore, not surprising that the three leading contemporary powers the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas made repeated attempts to control Kannauj.

From the late 8<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE interregional confrontations were particularly intense. The Pratiharas in north, the Palas in east and the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan emerged as powerful dynasties almost at the same time. Vatsaraja, the founder of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty conquered large parts of Rajasthan and North-Western India around 783 CE. On the other hand, the early Pala rulers - Gopala and Dharampala extended their sway westward from Bengal. A clash was then inevitable. Vatsaraja defeated the Pala king near Allahbad. In the meantime, the Rashtrakutas had consolidated their hold on the Deccan and were looking northwards. The third

Rashtrakuta king, Dhruva, invaded the Gangetic plains with a large army and defeated both Vatsaraja and Dharampala.

After Dhruva's death when Rashtrakuta power eclipsed for sometime, Dharampala conquered Kannauj. But soon Nagabhata (Vatsaraja's son) restored the glory of the Pratiharas, recaptured Kannauj and then proceeded to defeat Dharampala. This victory made the new Rashtrakuta king Govinda III very envious. He invaded the territory of Nagabhata who fled to the desert of Rajasthan while Dharampala quickly annexed Kannauj again. In the next generation of rulers, Dharampala's son Devapala was the most prominent. He enhanced his power and influence at the cost of contemporary Pratihara and Rashtrakuta rulers. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE the Pratihara kings Bhoja and Mahendrapala proved to be more powerful than their other contemporaries. Gradually, Kannauj became the main focus of power in India.

Towards the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE the Rashtrakutas gained momentary strength once more under their kings Indra III and Krishna II but declined soon. By the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Pratiharas, who also were almost forgotten, still managed to retain their capital Kannauj. The decline of the political unity in northern India was hastened by the invasions of the Muhammad of Ghazni from 1001 to 1027 CE. His attacks destabilized the whole political system in the region and north India did not recover from this onslaught until the Turks finally conquered it.

### **Check your progress Exercise 5**

#### **A. Long Question**

- (i) Discuss the course of tripartite struggle between the Gurjara-Pratihara, the Palas and the Rashtrakutas over the control of Kannauj.

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### **5.7 Conclusion**

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The early medieval period in India, besides characterized by marked socio-economic transformation, was very significant from the point of view of political processes. The reconstruction of early-medieval Indian political structure is broadly based on the three approaches of enquiry-feudal polity, segmentary state and integrative polity. Each has its own applicability and limitations with respect to different regions. The emergence of regional powers often led to clash between them to gain supremacy over one another. The tripartite struggle between the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Palas and the Rashtrakuta for the acquisition of Kannauj in order to claim as the master of north India is a vivid example of this. The invasions of Gazni, finally, sounded a blow to the socio-political and cultural environment of India.

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### **5.8 Let us sum up**

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- After the death of Harshavardhana there was confusion in Northern India and a large number of small kingdoms were established on the ruins of his vast domain.
- Early medieval Indian political structure can be studied on the basis of different types of models—the feudal polity, segmentary state and integrative polity.



- The Gurjara-Pratihara in north, the Palas in the east and the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan emerged as powerful dynasties almost at the same time.
- All the three powers clashed over the possession of Kannauj. The political boundaries of the three empires kept shifting from time to time in their attempt to acquire control over the Ganga plains.

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) False (iv) False (v) False.

B. Long Questions

(i) See section 5.2

(ii) See section 5.2

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

A. Long Question

(i) See section 5.3

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

A. (i) Gopala (ii) Pratihara (iii) Palas (iv) Kannauj (v) Samantachakra

B. Short Notes

(i) See section 5.4

(ii) See section 5.4

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 4**

A. Long Question

(i) See section 5.5

### **Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 5**

A. Long Question

(i) See section 5.6

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## EMERGENCE OF RAJPUT STATES IN NORTHERN INDIA: SOCIO-ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS

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### Structure

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- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Sources
- 6.3 Defining the term 'Rajput'
- 6.4 Origin Theories of Rajputs – Indigenous and Foreign
- 6.5 Recent Perspectives
- 6.6 Emergence of Rajput States in Northern India
- 6.7 Conclusion
- 6.8 Let us sum up

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### 6.0 Objectives

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**After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:**

- the different theories related to the origin of Rajputs
- the transformation of political structure during early medieval period
- the socio-economic aspects of state formation.

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### 6.1 Introduction

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Early medieval epoch in Indian history from 750 to 1200 CE has been a very significant period with regard to transformation in many spheres that took place in this transitional phase from the period of Gupta's decline up to the establishment of the Delhi Sulatnate. Many historians have debated the feudal character of state in this transitional phase leading to the rise of many newly emerged principalities like the Gurjara-Pratihara, Palas, Rashtrakuta and Cholas. One of the most important transformations that took place in this period was emergence of 'Rajputs' as a new Kshatriya clan. Early scholarly writings often refer to this period as 'Medieval Hindu India' or 'Rajput period'. The role that Rajputs played in shaping Indian history, particularly in western and central India, makes them very important element of the early and late medieval Indian political and cultural history. The term 'Rajput' did not refer to a single family or clan but for the group of this new warrior class. Prior to this we do not get reference to this term in the records. In the light of these developments, it becomes imperative to look for the origin of Rajputs, who were important political entities throughout the medieval period.

Many historians like V.A. Smith, D.R. Bhandarkar, C V Vaidya, G.H. Ojha, Dashrath Sharma, B.D. Chattopadhyaya and others have worked upon the aspect

regarding the origin of the Rajputs. Their views varied from that of the foreign origin to the tribes transforming themselves into a ruling class - Kshatriya Rajputs. We also come across contradicting views on the history of the Rajputs by different historians. Imperialist Historiography, for instance, perceived Rajputs as foreigners who migrated to the western parts of India and gradually became the ruling class. In this lesson emphasis will be on the various theories that are related to the origin of the Rajputs.

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## 6.2 Sources

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Literary and epigraphic records are the primary sources for the study of this subject as vast literature including the chronicles and bardic tradition, and also the inscriptional records in this context are available to us from this phase of early medieval India. Numismatic sources, although a few, are also very important because some like the Adi Varaha coins connect the Rajputs to the other ruling families of northern India.

There are a number of inscriptions which give the genealogical and chronological details of Rajputs. Gwalior inscription of Bhoja mentions the Pratiharas of Kannauj as the descendents of Laksmana of Ramayana. Harsha stone inscription associates the Chahamanas with Guvaka and records that they belonged to Suryavamsa (solar dynasty). Bijolia inscription (1169 CE) traces the genealogy of Chahamanas and suggests that earlier they were the *samantas* (feudatories) who later became *nrpa* (king). Similarly, the Udaipur prashasti mentions that the Paramaras belonged to the Vashishtha *gotra*. The Ghatiyala inscription of Pratihara Kakkuka provides the detailed genealogical record of the Gurjara-Pratihara clan, which is also supported by the Jodhpur inscriptions, dated 837 and 861 CE respectively. It also accounts about the *Brahamana-Kshatriya* origin of the Pratiharas. This inscription also suggests the transformation of the society from rural to urban with the mention of many *haats* and other marketplace. The Jodhpur inscription of the Pratihara kings trace their genealogy from Harischandra, which is also supported from the Guhila inscription of Mt. Abu (1285 CE).

Literary sources in different forms such as the *Vats*, *Vartas*, *Vachnikas*, *Raso Khyats* and *Vamshavalis* are of immense help in reconstructing the history of Rajputs. The literal meaning of the word *Khyat* is 'writing of the past'. This form of recording history became popular in Rajasthan around 9<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup> century. It initially started as writing about the kings and gradually acquired the form of *Vamshavalis* (chronological records of the genealogy of the king or the ruling house) in later period. For example, the *Nainsiri Khyat*, *Bankidasri Khyat*, *Shyamaldasri Khyat* etc. are some popular records. These were generally written under careful observation of the king and so reflected of an official nature. Most of this literature was in poetic and prose form to eulogize the past of the specific clan, branch or family of Rajputs.

These writing considered as bardic tradition is known as the *Charan sahitya*. This form of literature was written in a poetic form praising the patron by the author commissioned for the same. These are basically. A careful observation is required while analyzing the bardic literature as they have the tendency to eulogize the patron and also for they mainly contain the post-dated explanation of the kings' heroic and chivalrous deeds in order to validate and legitimize their position.

The early reference of Gurjara comes from the *Harshcharita* written by Banabhatta who states that the Prabhakaravardhana had defeated the Gurjaras along with the Huns. A famous bardic literature from this period is the *Prithvirajraso* authored by Chand Bardai. According to this classic work, four clans of Rajputs and particularly Chauhans (Chahamanas) had originated from *agni* (fire), thus, known as the *agnikula* Rajputs. In total the *Prithvirajraso* reports 36 Rajput clans. The same number is also mentioned in the *Kumarapalacharita*, *Varnaratnakara* and *Rajatarangini*. A Kashmiri poet Jayanaka wrote *Prithviraj-vijaya-mahakavya*, which gives us insight about Prithviraj Chauhan III. The *Hammirmahakavya* by Nyayachanda Suri states that the Chahamanas were *Suryavamshi* or Rajputs belonging to solar dynasty. Parts of this bardic literature are still very popular in oral forms that are sung in different parts of Rajasthan and Bundelkhand. The *Alha-Khand* is a very good example of the same and the other being the popular story of Prithviraj Chauhan and Samyogita which connects the Chauhana and Rathod (Gahadavala) history. The bardic records, although with certain limitations, provide valuable information about the political and socio-cultural milieu of the age.

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### 6.3 Defining the term ‘Rajput’

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In general, the term ‘Rajput’ represents a ruling and military class that was essentially Kshatriya. This term was used for a particular warrior class that emerged between the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. This was, however, not applicable to all the newly emerged ruling families but was restricted to the ones which originated in north-western part of India and gradually strengthened and expanded their political, social and cultural base in the next few centuries. The term ‘Rajput’ seems to be a corrupt form of word ‘*Rajaputra*’ (son of King). Although the kings generally belonged to the Kshatriya varna, the term was not applied to the ruling dynasties of all regions during this phase. Another expression used for the ‘*Rajaputra*’ is the ‘son of state’ who fought to protect his kingdom or motherland from invaders. The term, therefore, referring to a particular ruling group in north and western part of India should be understood in the context of the Arab invasions since 8<sup>th</sup> century followed by that by the Turks till early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Early studies considered the Rajputs as a mixed and impure caste, a result of the amalgamation of the different tribes or castes. All scholars, however, do not agree to the ascribing of mixed social identity to the Rajputs. C. V. Vaidya states that the word ‘Rajput’ means a highborn Kshatriya. It can be observed that the term having been used for the people of a specific region, thus, acquired a regional connotation with the passage of time, and even the region came to be known as the ‘Rajputana’. In later centuries even travelogues credited Rajputs mainly for their martial quality. For example, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveler of medieval India states that “These (Rajputs) are the only idolater who are brave and distinguish themselves in the profession of arms”. In this context, B.D. Chattopadhyaya suggests that by the early medieval centuries, the term ‘Rajput’ was the mark of ruling status more than the term ‘kshatriya’. He cites the examples from the inscriptional records indicating that the kshatriyas were opting for other professions too like *sutradhara* or *vanik*. So, the term was specifically applied as a status for the ruling class. The variants of this terms such as the Rana, Ranaka and Raut enable us to understand the fact of agrarian expansion and growth of a landed aristocracy which also promoted the process of ‘Rajputisation’ in different areas.

## Check your progress Exercise 1

### A. State True or False.

- (i) Prithvirajraso was written by Chand Bardai.
- (ii) The *agnikula* origin is associated with all kshatriya clans.
- (iii) Khyat sahitya are the genealogical records of the Rajput ruling families.

### B. Fill in the blanks.

- (i) The Hammiramahakavya was written by \_\_\_\_\_.
- (ii) The bardic tradition is also known as the \_\_\_\_\_.
- (iii) The term 'Rajput' seems to have derived from the word \_\_\_\_\_.
- (iv) The \_\_\_\_\_ written by Banabhatta who states that the Prabharakarvardhana had defeated the Gurjaras along with the Huns
- (v) The Bhoja inscription found at \_\_\_\_\_ mentions that the Pratiharas of Kannauj were the descendents of Laksmana of Ramayana.

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## 6.4 Origin Theories of Rajputs – Indigenous and Foreign

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Rajputs, the leading warrior class, emerged on the political front of the northern, western and central India around the period between 700 and 1200 CE. In this section, we will discuss about various theories regarding the origin of the Rajputs in order to understand more about this social category.

### 6.4.1 Indigenous Origin Theory

Agnikula theory traces the origin of Rajputs from fire. The Rajasthani bards and chroniclers have propounded the famous Agnikula myth regarding the origin of Rajputs. One of the best ways to understand this theory is through the work of Chand Bardai who in his *Prithvirajraso* called Chauhans (Chahamanas) the fire-born, i.e. belonging to *Agnikula*. According to the story, while Vishwamitra, Gautama, Agastya and other sages were performing great sacrifice on Mt. Abu, they were disturbed by the demons. To punish these demons sage Vashishtha created three warriors out of the sacrificial fire pit (*yajna kund*). These warriors were Pratihara, Chalukya and Paramara. But when the effort was in vain, Vashishtha performed sacred *yajna* again and created the fourth hero named as Chauhana (Chahamanas). This mythological story with minor changes is repeated several times by later bards, chroniclers in *Nanisiri Khyat*, *Hammirraso* of Jodhraj etc. and also in inscriptions like Sisana inscription of Bedla.

There is another popular story in the Ramayana according to which, sage Vashishtha created some heroes like Saka, Pahlavas, Kambojas, etc. to fight against Vishwamitra in order to get back his wish-fulfilling cow *Kamadhenu*. Similarly, Paramaras were created for the same purpose. In all these accounts, one thing is very clear that these were predominantly the aggressive warrior groups created to fight against the incursions. Imagining a human figure coming out of the fire appear to be symbolic

and later the popular versions, narratives and stories have been utilized by Col. James Todd, Vincent Smith and other imperialist historians to prove that Rajputs had a foreign origin. They interpreted these popular myths to show purification of foreign tribes and their accommodation into the Brahmanaical structure of the society.

In Gotrachara (a custom of announcing the names of the gotras defining the genealogy of ancestors), the Chauhans (Chahamanas) claimed themselves to be Somavamshi (lunar Kshatriyas) related to the family of Lord Krishna, whereas in few other sources they claim to have originated from solar family associated with Lord Rama. In works like the *Prithvirajvijaya*, *Hammirmahakavya*, *Surjaancharita* etc., the Chauhans have been described as Suryavamshi (solar Kshatriya). Harsha stone inscription also supports the solar origin of the Chahamanas. Such high claims could be the result of the desire of the kings to be associated with the respectable inheritance and a decent genealogical background.

Sevadi plate inscription of Ratanpal suggests that the Chauhans originated from God Indra but no other inscriptional or literary record has corroborated this fact. Dasharath Sharma differs from the argument for the Indra origin for the Chauhans as there is only one reference for this theory and not supported by any other contemporary record. He states, "The theory of Indra origin is supported by only one solitary epigraph; and even regarding that we are not sure whether the writer ever meant Indra by the word, *prachidikpat*". He suggests that the writer of the inscription must have used this expression to express the Sun instead of Indra. Other scholars have not given much emphasis on this theory. According to Dashratha Sharma these expressions have a very late origin around 11th and 12<sup>th</sup> century and also lack any solid foundation. Moreover, in the context of their solar origin also he opines that the first ever solar king was Ikshvaku, so the Chauhans who claimed to be born before the period of Ikshvaku cannot be considered as Suryavamsi. He further argues that Chauhans were fighting to save the realms and were considered as Kshatriya. Dashratha Sharma highlights the references regarding the Brahman origin of the Chauhans. In the midst of the diverse theories about their origin, it can be observed that the Rajputs emerged as a dominant social category during centuries when pan-Indian polities had disintegrated into several regional polities including some characterized as clan and lineage based.

## **Check your progress Exercise 2**

### **A. State True or False.**

- (i) Pratihara, Chalukyas, Parmaras and Chauhans originated from fire according to Chand Bardai.
- (ii) Gotrachara Chauhans claimed their Suryavamshi origin.
- (iii) Chauhans having originated from lord Indra has been corroborated by many sources.
- (iv) Harsha stone inscription states that the Chauhans were Suryavamshi.

### **B. Short Notes**

- (i) Agnikula Theory
- (ii) Theory of the origin of Rajput from Indra

### C. Long Question

- (i) Discuss the various theories of the mythical origin of the Rajputs.

#### 6.4.2 Foreign origin theory

In the *Archeological Survey Reports*, Alexander Cunningham states that Rajputs were the descendants of the Kushanas. For the first time in 19<sup>th</sup> century Colonel James Todd in his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* wrote about the history of Rajputana and the origin of Rajputs. Col. He pointed out that the Rajputs emerged from the foreign tribe such as the Sakas, Kushanas and Hunas. He opines that Rajputs are of Scythian origin that organized themselves into various groups in the Indian subcontinent. After becoming a part of the society, they assimilated into the Kshatriya varna and associated their lineages with that of solar and lunar families of mythological traditions. So, according to Todd, this theory suggests that the foreign tribes came and indianised themselves in course of time and superior among them became the Rajput rulers. Todd by making a comparison of traditions like *Ahwamedha Yagna*, worshipping artillery etc., connect the Rajputs to the people who came as a force in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. In this context, Todd states, “The Ashvamedha was practiced on the Ganges and Sarju by the Solar Princes, twelve hundred years before Christ, as by the Getae in the time of Cyrus and this worship and sacrifices of the horse has been handed down to the Rajput of the present day.” He also associated the Agnikula theory to support his argument of Rajput being of foreign tribe. He utilized this fire-born concept with that of purification of the foreign tribes in order to enter the sphere of brahmanical society.

Later, imperialist historians like Vincent Smith and William Crooke, supported Todd’s arguments. According to them, the early Rajputs like Gurjar-Pratihara belonged to the Gurjaras, who came along with the Hunas. Smith pointed out that the Rajputs were the Kshatriya of lower status and later gaining power acquired the status of kings. He opines that Chandels, Gaharwals and Rathores had emerged from tribes like Gond, Jhar and Kharwar. He believed that the Rajputs were the mixed race, which later acquired the status of Kshatriya. This theory was also supported by some Indian historians like Ishwari Prasad and D. R. Bhandarkar. Bhandarkar in his work “*Foreign elements in Hindu Population*” opines that the Gurjars, of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, were the earliest Rajputs and belonged to the Khazar tribe which came to Indian subcontinent along with the Sakas and Huns. The majority of the Rajput clans have developed from these Gurjaras. This argument is based on the coins of Vasudev Vahman and ‘Vahman’ here is taken to be a corrupt form of Chahmana who are believed to have belonged to the foreign priestly tribe of Khazars (tribe of south Armenia). Bhandarkar further states that foreign tribe transforming themselves into the indigenous culture and society was not new to Indian history. To support his argument, he gave example of Kushanas and how they imbibed into the *brahmanical* society. He was strongly criticized by other Indian historians like C. V. Vaidya and G. H. Ojha. The latter has suggested that comparison of the rituals and practices that authors have made to support the foreign origin theory is a faulty approach. Such practices were often adopted by the foreign tribes to impress the subject population for many different reasons. Losing ones’ identity and adopting the identity of the subjugated population may not have been a simple process. The development of Delhi

Sultanate is certainly a good example where the ruling class maintained a cultural identity distinct from that of the subject population.

Historians like C. V. Vaidya and G.H. Ojha have discarded the foreign origin theory of the Rajputs and on the basis of sources say that they were of local origin. C. V. Vaidya criticized Bhandarkar's identification of the Gurjars with Khazars and states that the Rajputs were the Vedic Aryan race. Vaidya by comparing the physical features, like sharp nose, tall stature, etc. of Rajput groups and that of Vedic Aryans claimed that Rajputs were the descendants of Vedic Aryans and not Khazars as argued by Bhandarkar. While discussing the Jats, Gurjars and Marathas, he says that the Gurjars "are men with finest noses in India and with long head and tall statures. The most important points to be observed in the Indo-Aryan series of measurement are the great uniformity of the type, and very slight difference between the higher and lower groups. And this type is so persistent that the Jats and the Gurjars wherever they are found present the same characteristics of head, nose and stature and even complexion. Under these circumstances ethnologically speaking the Jats and the Gurjars are Aryan in race and similarity of sound in names ought not to mislead us into believing them to be descendants of the Gaetoe or Khazar groups which were undoubtedly Mongolian in race". G.H. Ojha supports some of the contentions of Vaidya and goes on to say that the Rajputs were the descendants of ancient Vedic Kshatriya because of their generic specifications and physical features.

According to Dashratha Sharma Rajput was a developed class. They came into prominence during the foreign invasions on India. After analyzing the inscriptional sources such as Bijolia inscription he argues that Rajputs originated from the Brahmanas. Jan, a Muslim court poet of Chauhans, in his *Kyam Khan Raso* mentions Chauhana as a descendant of Vatsa of the *Jamadagnya* gotra. The Sundha inscription of Chandravati mentions that the first Chauhana was born from the eye and meditation of sage Vatsa. Although the Chauhana's *Gotrochchra* mentions them as *Vatsagotrin*, this by itself would be no strong argument, because the Rajputs and other social categories like the Kayasthas are known at times to have adopted the gotras of their purohitas. He opines that this association of Chauhanas with Brahmanas has been corroborated by many sources and hence can be accepted as authentic. Chauhana territory is identified with present day Sambhar area in Rajasthan, which was named as *sapadalaksa* in the records, from where they spread to the north. *Sapadalaksa* actually means one and quarter lakh, so perhaps it was the number of settlements in the area. The Nadol branch of the Chauhans has been associated with the Pali district of Rajasthan. Dashratha Sharma believed that in the wake of foreign invasions, the importance of Kshatriyas increased so as to protect the people and land.

Most of the above arguments are quite isolated and stern in their perspective. There is hardly any attempt to see them so as to classify the Rajputs as a group that emerged in the varying scenario of the political, economic and social changes. They were exceedingly formulated on the basis of one or the other source and speculating their theories around them.



### Check your progress Exercise 3

#### A. State True or False

- (i) C. V. Vaidya supported the theory of Rajput being a foreign tribe.
- (ii) Dasharath Sharma traces the origin of the Chauhans from Brahmans.
- (iii) D. R. Bhandarkar has associated Gurjars to the Khazars.
- (iv) C. V. Vaidya suggests of Rajputs being Vedic Kshatriyas.

#### B. Short Notes

- (i) Theory of foreign origin of the Rajputs.
- (ii) Theory of the Aryan origin of the Rajputs.

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### 6.5 Recent Perspectives

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The recent perspectives on origin of Rajput go beyond the concept of *Agnikula* and solar or lunar ancestry. It is not that the previous notions are completely discarded but a fresh outlook has been utilized and a more rigorous analysis of the concept has been done. An attempt has been made by scholars to perceive the emergence of Rajputs in the light of other developments that were taking place around the corner. Historians like R. N. Nandi, B. D. Chattopadhyaya, Dirk H.A. Kolff, D. C. Sircar, R. Thapar, R.S. Sharma and R. N. Nandi have worked out the transformation of martial groups and their acquiring the status of Kshatriyas during early medieval centuries. B. N. S. Yadava views these warrior groups as “mixed caste” and “petty chief holding estate” which developed into the Rajputs. He talks about 36 clans also suggested in the *Rajtarangini* by Kalhana. This notion of acquiring status can well be understood by the same epigraphical records and bardic literature that are full of genealogical documentation of the clans and family and tracing their origins back from the legends.

These scholars have analysed the mythological stories with a new approach and associated them with the concept of state formation and legitimacy sought after by the newly emerged states. One needs to go through the process of state formation to have a better understanding of all these changes that were taking place during this era of the Indian history. New researches in the field of agricultural economy open up new dimensions to understand this process of transformation in field of polity. These scholars have not completely put aside the theory of the earlier scholars but have tried to explain that the concept holds a different view in distinctive areas. Dirk H. A. Kolffin pointed out that Rajputs were armed groups which were seeking the patronage and showing their military tactics in the battlefield who gradually become rulers. He states, “Rajput identity was from an open status group of warrior ascetics who wandered over North India, (1300-1500) in search of military patronage”.

B.D. Chattopadhyaya talks about two processes: one, the expansion and colonization and other, the upward movement within the brahmanical hierarchy of *Varna system*. He states that this entire notion of emergence of Rajputs could better be

understood as a “process”, which he has called as process of ‘Rajputization’. He also suggests that the claims by different Rajput clans were actually a process to ‘dynasticize’, which was different for each clan in their respective region. Chattopadhyaya illustrated the growth of agriculture-based economy leading to new agrarian settlements that ultimately led to the making of new political groups, who in order to gain more power tried to legitimize their position through several means. This expansion led to the emergence of new lineages in the newly settled areas, for example Chahamanas settled in *sapadalaska* area gradually branched off into other lineages.

Chahamanas territory is identified with *Sakambhari (Sapadalaksa)*, present day Sambhar area in Rajasthan. *Sapadalaksa* actually means one and a quarter lakh, so perhaps it was the number of settlements in the area. Scholars like B.D. Chattopadhyaya discuss agrarian growth in the region during early medieval centuries and the emergence of Rajputs as controllers of large group of settlements which led to their growth as landed aristocracy. Gradually, there was an upward mobility in economic, political and social spheres as well. As land under their control increased, they branched off, leading to the rise of other ruling lineages. For example, the Nadol branch of Chauhanas moved to the Pali district of Rajasthan at a later period.

Expansion of agriculture in tribal areas marks an essential feature for development of new lineages. Peasantization of tribes led these tribes to become part of the mainstream. One can associate this with the expansion of Guhilas from Gujarat in southern Rajasthan by displacing the local tribal Bhils of the area. Similarly, the Nadol branch of Chahamanas displaced and assimilated the local Medas and Minas. This entire theory basically revolved around the concept of expansion of agriculture and better economy. This also leads to the concept of tribal’s acquiring the status of Kshatriya and hence becoming Rajputs.

Different lineages of Rajputs can be better understood by the process of political developments and stratification over a period of time. Throughout the period, lineages tried to seek legitimacy that was aided by the fabrication of genealogies drafted by their bards. The mythological traditions were acts of seeking legitimacy for rulers coming from obscure backgrounds. Lineages from the reputable ancestry were sought after by the new warrior classes to have them acknowledged in the society. Such attempts were also made by landed aristocracy to acquire upward social and political mobility. By landed aristocracy we mean the new social groups who acquired control over large tracts of agricultural lands. This obviously happened due to expansion of agriculture during early medieval centuries. Similar developments can also be seen in the case of other regions where dominant land-holding groups emerged over a period of time.

Upward mobility within the hierarchy of political structure can be explained by transformation from being a subordinate to an independent ruler. This basically related with the concept of attaining a Kshatriya status first, then a feudatory and ultimately a sovereign ruler. This upward mobility was basically associated with the growth of economic and military power. For example, Chahamanas, Guhilas and Chalukyas were subordinates of Gurjara-Pratiharas and later became independent rulers.

Chattopadhyaya also suggests that merely acquiring the status of Rajput was not enough but maintaining it by consolidating one’s position was also a feature of this

period. This was facilitated by the distribution of land among the kin and clan by which they ensured their expansion and acquiring of resources. This distribution of land was related to the expansion of their geographical territories as well as political authority. To consolidate it further, this process was aided by constructing fortresses on massive scale in order to have a defense mechanism and as well as a mark of authority on the nearby areas. To strengthen it further, they engaged themselves in matrimonial alliance with other clans and started a collaboration of social and political activities. This entire process of 'Rajputization' led to giving them a political status which gradually became hereditary. Thus, the recent perspectives on Rajputs have perceived the entire process of change as the result of interplay of several factors. At the same time, the processes were distinct for each region.

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## **6.6 Emergence of Rajput States in Northern India**

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The period of 150 years between Mahmud Ghazni's death in 1030 to the beginning of the Ghurid invasion towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century was one of great flux and confusion in North India. There was unceasing internecine warfare between many Rajput principalities in the region, all nurturing the ambition of territorial possession and expansion, without any emerging as a dominant power. Uncertainty, anarchy and disunity was the feature of Indian political life in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Following the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni on Kanauj, the already weak Pratihara power had collapsed, giving way to the rise of many small kingdoms. It was only towards the end of 11<sup>th</sup> century that a new dynasty, the Gahadvars or Gahadavalas arose in the doab with Varanasi as their seat of power. They fought with the Palas of Bengal, and the Tomars of Delhi. Another dynasty, the Chahamanas or Chauhans, who were vassals of the Pratiharas, became powerful in Rajasthan. The Chauhans constantly fought with the Chalukyas of Gujarat, and with the Paramars of Malwa. Another powerful dynasty was the Chandellas of Khajuraho who had a history of resistance against the Ghaznavids and whose rivals were both the Paramars of Malwa and the Gahadvalas of Varanasi.

The Chauhans were trying to expand towards Gujarat and also towards Delhi and Mathura. As such they had to bear the brunt of the plundering raids of Mahmud Ghazni's successors. Under the leadership of Vigraharaj, they captured Chittor. They also conquered Delhi from the Tomars in 1151, extending their sway upto the Siwalik i.e. the range of the hills upto Delhi and Hansi, which had been the bone of contention between the Tomars and the Ghaznavids.

The last representative of the Chahamanas dynasty, the legendary Prithviraj Chauhan, commenced a vigorous policy of expansion at the cost of smaller states in Rajasthan. His most famous expeditions were against the Chandellas of Khajuraho and Mahoba against whom he gained a significant victory. Between, 1182 and 1187 Prithviraj fought with the Chalukyas of Gujarat. The struggle was long drawn and the Gujarat ruler, Bhima II, who had earlier beaten off an invasion by the Ghurid ruler, Muizzuddin, defeated Prithviraj. This forced Prithviraj to turn his attention towards the Ganga valley and the Punjab. There was a tussle for the control of Delhi and upper Ganga doab between his territories and the Gahadvalas of Kannauj who had the most extensive kingdom in that area. Expeditions against all his neighbours, politically isolated Prithviraj and proved detrimental when he had

to face the Turkish armies of Muizzuddin Mohammad a few years later. The extent of the Ghaznavid territory in the north-west India is difficult to ascertain. Towards the north it included Sialkot and probably Peshawar. However, the southern limits of the Ghaznavids were steadily pushed back by the Chauhan Rajputs who re-established control over portions of Punjab.

The Period sees expansion of state and society in different parts of Northern and Central India. The rise of Rajputs and growth of these states coincides with each other. We get evidences of mutual fights between Gahadavalas and Kalachuris, Palas and Gahadavalas and Chauhanas. It was in the background of this constant warfare that Muhammad Ghaznavi and Muhammad Ghori make an entry into the political scene and change the course of Indian History.

#### **Check Your Progress Exercise 4**

##### **A. Fill in the blanks.**

- (i) The total number of Rajput clans mentioned in the *Rajtarangini* of Kalhana is \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (ii) Sakambhari (Sapadalaksa) identified with present day Sambhar area in Rajasthan was under the rule of the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (iii) \_\_\_\_\_ was the seat of power of the Gahadvars or Gahadavalas.
- (iv) The \_\_\_\_\_ conquered Delhi from the Tomars in 1151.
- (v) Khajuraho was under the rule of the \_\_\_\_\_ .

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#### **6.7 Conclusion**

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The origin and emergence of a new warrior class of the Rajputs around 7<sup>th</sup> century CE and their gradual expansion over the vast area of the Indian subcontinent in subsequent centuries marks a significant phase in the history of our past. Different theories concerning the origin of Rajputs have been propounded on the basis of the bardic literature and inscriptions. This transitional phase of Indian history holds importance for various reasons in terms of the socio-political and cultural changes and so the emergence of Rajputs too should be seen in terms of these changes. Because of the expansion of the agriculture and economy, new entities emerged and transformed themselves into bigger political units. The study of the social, political and economic mobilization as well as upward mobility of a warrior class provides us with the insight into the facet of proliferation of new caste and sub-caste as a result of the assimilation of the tribes into the ambit of the mainstream Brahmanical society.

#### **Check your progress exercise 5**

##### **A. State True or False.**

- (i) B. D. Chattopadhyaya considered expansion of agriculture as pivotal in formation of the new warrior groups of Rajputs.

- (ii) Seeking legitimacy through fabrication of the genealogies became important for the Rajputs.
- (iii) Dirk H.A. Kolff has called Rajputs as armed groups.
- (iv) Chahamanas of Nadol had never displaced Medas and Minas.
- (v) Acquiring the status of a Kshatriya was prerequisite to become Rajput.

**B. Long Question**

- (i) Discuss the recent perspectives on origin of the Rajputs.

**6.8 Let us sum up**

- Rajputs appears on the political scenario of Indian history around 7<sup>th</sup> Century CE onwards.
- They claimed to have originated from Agni, Surya and Chandra as per the bardic traditions of that time.
- Col. James Todd argued that the Rajputs were of foreign origin. Many other foreign as well as Indian scholars like William Crooke and Bhandarkar supported his argument.
- Contradictions of the foreign origin theory were highlighted by the nationalist historiography and writings of scholars like C.V. Vaidya who claimed that Rajputs were Vedic Aryan Kshatriyas.
- Recent writings of historians like B.D. Chattopadhyaya associate the emergence of the Rajputs with expansion of agriculture and state society.
- Expansion of agriculture played a pivotal role in the emergence of a new political system which transformed the political structure leading to a growth of several intermediaries.

**Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises**

**Answer to check your progress exercise 1**

- A. (i) True (ii) False (iii) True
- B. (i) Nyayachand Suri (ii) Charan sahitya (iii) 'Rajaputra' (iv) Harshacharita (v) Gwalior

**Answer to check your progress exercise 2**

- A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) True

**B. Short Notes**

- (i) See section 6.4
- (ii) See section 6.4

**C. Long Question**

- (i) See section 6.4

**Answer to check your progress exercise 3**

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) True

**B. Short Notes**

(i) See section 6.4.2

(ii) See section 6.4.2

**Answer to check your progress exercise 4**

A. (i) thirty six (36) (ii) Chahamana (iii) Varanasi (iv) Chuhans or Chahamanas (v) Chandellas

**Answer to check your progress exercise 5**

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) False (v) True

**B. Long Question**

(i) See section 6.5

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## THE CHOLAS: STATE AND ADMINISTRATION, ECONOMY AND CULTURE

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### Structure

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- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 Early Cholas
- 7.4 Chola State and Administration
  - 7.4.1 Nature of State
  - 7.4.2 Central Administration
  - 7.4.3 Provincial and Village Administration
- 7.5 Military
- 7.6 Economy
  - 7.6.1 Agriculture
  - 7.6.2 Trade
- 7.7 Society
- 7.8 Chola Culture: Art and Architecture
  - 7.8.1 Temples
  - 7.8.2 Sculptures and Painting
- 7.9 Conclusion
- 7.10 Let Us Sum Up

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### 7.1 Objective

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**After reading this Unit, students will be able to understand:**

- The rise and growth of Chola dynasty in South India
- Nature of the Chola State
- Nadu Administration
- Temple Economy
- Cultural interaction between India and South-East Asia

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### 7.2 Introduction

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The Chola dynasty was one of the longest ruling dynasties in Indian history. Under Rajaraja Chola I and his successors Rajendra Chola I, Rajadhiraja Chola, Virarajendra Chola and Kulottunga Chola I the dynasty became a military, economic and cultural power in South Asia and South-East Asia. Chola rule led to cultural contact

between India, China and South-East Asia. The frequent Chola merchant ships in Bay of Bengal led scholars to rename Bay of Bengal as “Chola Lake”.

The sources for the study of Chola history are large number of inscriptions, massive temple complexes and Bhakti literature in Tamil. Jayamkondar wrote *Kalingattuparani*, a semi-historical account on the two invasion of Kalinga by Kulottunga Chola I. Chola dynasty ruled from the later half of 9th century till the beginning of the 13th century. Cholas ruled over the fertile Kaveri river valley in present day Tamil Nadu. This was their core area and provided a rich agrarian resource base for an expanding state. They ruled a significantly larger area at the height of their power. The whole area south of Tungabhadra was united and held as one kingdom for a period of more than two centuries under the Chola kings.

The history of the Cholas falls into four periods: (i) the Early Cholas of the Sangam literature (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE-2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE) (ii) The interregnum between the fall of the Sangam Cholas (2-8<sup>th</sup> Century) (iii) The rise of the Imperial Cholas under Vijayalaya (848-1070) (iv) The Later Chola dynasty of Kulottunga Chola I (1070-1122)

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### 7.3 Early Cholas

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The earliest Chola kings are mentioned in the Sangam literature. Scholars generally agree that this literature belongs to the second or first few centuries of the common era. There is not much information about the transition period of around three centuries from the end of the Sangam age (c. 300) to that in which the Pandyas and Pallavas dominated the Tamil country. The Kalabhras invaded Tamil country, displaced the existing kingdoms and ruled during that time. They were displaced by the Pallava and the Pandyan dynasty in the 6th century. There is no evidence of Cholas during the succeeding three centuries until the accession of Vijayalaya in the second quarter of 9th century.

The founder of the Chola Empire was Vijayalaya, who was a subordinate of the Pallavas of Kanchi. He captured Tanjore in 850 CE and made it his capital. The Chola dynasty was at the peak of its influence and power during the early medieval period. The second Chola King, Aditya I, caused the end of the Pallava dynasty. In 907, his son Parantaka I succeeded him. He conquered Madurai from the Pandya ruler Rajasimha II. He assumed the title of Maduraikonda (captor of Madurai). Vijayalaya Chola (r. 848 – 870 CE) founded the imperial Chola Empire. He ruled over the region to the north of the river Kaveri. Aditya I (c. 891 – c. 907 CE), the son of Vijayalaya, was the Chola king who extended the boundaries of Chola kingdom by defeating Pallavas and Western Ganga Kingdom. Parantaka continuing the expansion started by his father, invaded the Pandya kingdom in 910. He captured the Pandyan capital Madurai and assumed the title Madurainkonda (Captor of Madurai). The Pandya king fled into exile in Sri Lanka and Parantaka completed his conquest of the entire Pandya country. At the height of his success, Parantaka I's dominions comprised almost the whole of the Tamil country right up to Nellore in Andhra Pradesh. It is clear from other Chola grants that Parantaka was a great military general who made extensive conquests. The internal administration of his kingdom was managed very well. He laid out rules for the conduct of the village assemblies in an inscription. The village institutions of South India date from a much



earlier period than that of Parantaka I but he introduced many reforms for the proper administration of local self-Government.

Rajaraja created a powerful standing army and a navy. A large number of regiments are mentioned in the Thanjavur inscriptions. These regiments were divided into elephant troops, cavalry and infantry. The Pandyas, Cheras and the Sinhalas allied against the Cholas and in 994 CE, Rajaraja destroyed the fleet of the Chera king Bhaskara Ravi Varman Thiruvadi in the Kandalur War. Rajaraja defeated the Pandya king Amarabhujanga and captured the port of Virinam. To commemorate these conquests, Rajaraja assumed the title Mummudi Chola. Mahinda V was the Sinhalese king when Rajaraja invaded Sri Lanka in 993 CE. Rajaraja captured only the northern part of Sri Lanka while the southern part remained independent. One of the last conquests of Rajaraja was the naval conquest of the islands of Maldives. Rajaraja initiated a project of land survey and assessment in 1000 CE which led to the reorganization of the empire into units known as valanadus. Rajaraja strengthened the local self-government and installed a system of audit and control by which the village assemblies and other public bodies were held to account while retaining their autonomy. To promote trade, he sent the first Chola mission to China.

In 1010 CE, Rajaraja built the Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple and the capital acted as a center of both religious and economic activity. The temple turned 1000 years old in 2010. The temple is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the “Great Living Chola Temples”, with the other two being the Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Airavatesvara temple.

Rajaraja was succeeded by his son Rajendra who proved to be a worthy successor. Rajendra invaded Sri Lanka in 1017 CE and annexed the entire island. The Sinhala king Mahinda V was taken prisoner and deported to the Chola country. In 1019 CE, Rajendra’s forces marched through Kalinga towards the river Ganga. The Chola army eventually reached the Pala kingdom of Bengal where they defeated Mahipala. The Chola army went on to raid East Bengal and defeated Govindachandra of the Chandra dynasty and invaded Bastar region. He constructed a new capital at Gangaikondacholapuram and took the title of Gangaikonda.

In 1025 CE, Rajendra led Chola forces across the Indian Ocean and invaded Srivijaya, attacking several places in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Chola forces captured the last ruler of the Sailendra Dynasty Sangrama Vijayatunggavarman. The Chola invasion was the end of Srivijaya. For the next century, Tamil trading groups from southern India dominated Southeast Asia. Rajendra Chola built a vast artificial lake, sixteen miles long and three miles wide which was one of the largest man-made lakes in India.

At its peak, the Chola Empire stretched from the island of Sri Lanka in the south to the Godavari-Krishna river basin in the north, up to the Konkan coast in Bhatkal, the entire Malabar Coast in addition to Lakshadweep, Maldives, and vast areas of Chera country. Rajendra Chola was a ruler with inexhaustible energy, and he applied himself to the task of governance with the same zeal that he had shown in waging wars. He integrated his empire into a tight administrative grid under royal control.

The Western Chalukyas mounted several unsuccessful attempts to engage the Chola emperors in war. Virarajendra Chola defeated Someshvara II of the Western Chalukya Empire and made an alliance with Prince Vikramaditya VI. Cholas always successfully controlled the Chalukyas in the western Deccan by defeating them in war and levying tribute on them. The Cholas under Kulottunga Chola III defeated the Western Chalukyas in a series of wars with Someshvara IV between 1185–1190. But the Cholas remained stable until 1215, were absorbed by the Pandyan empire and ceased to exist by 1279. Virarajendra Chola's son, Athirajendra Chola, was assassinated in a civil disturbance in 1070, and Kulothunga Chola I, the son of Ammanga Devi and Rajaraja Narendra, ascended the Chola throne. The Later Chola dynasty was led by capable rulers such as Kulottunga Chola I, his son Vikrama Chola, other successors like Rajaraja Chola II, Rajadhiraja Chola II, and Kulottunga Chola III, who conquered Kalinga, Ilam, and Kataha. The Cholas, under Rajaraja Chola III and later, his successor Rajendra Chola III, were quite weak and gradually the Chola empire came to an end.

### **Check your Progress Exercise 1**

Write Short Notes on

- (i) Rajaraja
- (ii) Rajendra Chola

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## **7.4 Chola State and Administration**

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The Chola state and administration had always been a matter of scholarly debate as we find powerful kings along with autonomous local governing bodies. Land grants in Kaveri valley led to the rise of land-owning class often called landed magnates and they played a very crucial role in Chola administrative structure.

### **7.4.1 Nature of Chola State**

Historians like Nilakantha Sastri have interpreted Chola state as a centralised State more like the Byzantine polity. The later researches highlighted the role of Nadus and local self-government under Cholas. Burton Stein has developed the 'Segmentary State' model to explain Chola polity. Stein's understanding of Chola polity as a ritual polity has been criticised by scholars as he overlooked the role played by local assemblies and Brahmana villages. Researches of scholars like R. Champakalakshmi, Y. Subbarayalu, Noboru Karashima, James Heitzman and Kesavan Veluthat have highlighted the role of Bhakti movement, Urbanisation, temples, trade, merchant Guilds, land grants and village assemblies to bring out a strong official hierarchy in Chola administration. Some scholars like G.W. Spencer have interpreted Chola expeditions as 'politics of plunder'. Hermann Kulke in a recent work has brought to light the cultural connection between South India and South-East Asia during Chola rule.

In the age of the Cholas, the whole of South India was for the first time brought under a single government. The most striking feature of the administrative system of the Cholas was their autonomous village and town administration. Emperor at the apex of administration was a crucial feature of Chola administrative structure. Worship of the dead rulers, and construction of temples as tributes to dead kings were a special feature of the Chola period. Such practices indicate the power and influence of Chola kings.

### 7.4.2 Central Administration

The Chola system of government was monarchical, as in the Sangam age. Aside from the early capital at Thanjavur and the later on at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Kanchipuram and Madurai were considered to be regional capitals in which occasional courts were held. King was the supreme leader and a benevolent authoritarian. His administrative role consisted of issuing commands to responsible officers when representations were made to him. Due to the lack of a legislature or a legislative system in the modern sense, the fairness of king's orders dependent on his morality and belief in Dharma. The Chola kings, built temples and endowed them with great wealth. The temples acted not only as places of worship but also as centres of economic activity, benefiting the community as a whole. The Chola temples played very crucial role in strengthening the political structure by providing legitimacy to the kings. Department of revenue played a very important role in regular collection of taxes and other dues.

### 7.4.3 Provincial Administration

Provincial administration involved division of empire into principalities (under vassal chiefs) and Mandalams (provinces under viceroys who were mostly royal princes). Provinces were further divided into Valanadus (divisions), Nadus (districts) and Kurmas (villages). The Chola Empire was divided into several provinces called Mandalams which were further divided into Valanadus and these Valanadus were sub-divided into units called Kottams or Kutrams. During the reign of Rajaraja Chola I, the state initiated a massive project of land survey and assessment and there was a reorganisation of the empire into units known as valanadus. Justice was mostly a local matter in the Chola Empire; minor disputes were settled at the village level. Punishment for minor crimes were in the form of fines or a direction for the offender to make some donation. Sometimes cleaning and de-silting of village tanks was also a popular punishment.

Autonomous administration for towns and townships was known as Tankurams. Town autonomy was quite similar to village autonomy and both were administered by assemblies. Villages with an inter-caste population payed taxes to the king. Brahmadeya or agrahara villages were granted to Brahmanas and were inhabited entirely by them. Devadana villages were granted to Gods and they functioned more or less in the same manner as the first type except that the revenues from these villages were donated to a temple. *Ur* consisted of the tax-paying residents of an ordinary village. Sabha's membership was restricted to the Brahmanas of the village, or it was found exclusively in villages gifted to Brahmanas. Nagaram was found more commonly in trade centres such as cities and towns. Their functioning differed from place to place.

The *Ur* was open to all the taxpaying male adults of the village, but in effect the older members played a more prominent role. The Sabha had the same system. Both usually constituted smaller committees of different sizes from among their members for specialised work. Election to the executive body and other committees of the *Ur* or Sabha appears to have been by lot from among those who were eligible. The Uttaramerur Inscription, belonging to 10th century, gives details about the functioning and constitution of the local Sabha. The assembly generally met in the precincts of the temple.

Matters primarily discussed by these assemblies included - collection of the assessed land revenue for the government or temple, additional tax for a particular purpose such as the construction of a water tank, settlement of agrarian disputes and maintenance of records. The larger assemblies kept a small staff of paid officials, but most of the work was done on a voluntary basis in the smaller assemblies. The nadus were the prime unit of social and agrarian organization and the very basis of the Chola state. The nadus stood over individual villages and therefore functioned as locality level centres. In their role as the local agency and the peasant macro-region the nadus are depicted as the real foci of Chola administration.

### **Check your Progress Exercise 2**

Write Short Notes on

- (i) Central Administration
- (ii) Provincial Administration

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## **7.5 Military**

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The Chola kings had a professional military, of which the king was the supreme commander. It had four elements, comprising the cavalry, the elephant corps, several divisions of infantry and a navy. There were regiments of bowmen and swordsmen while the swordsmen were the most permanent and dependable troops. The elephants played a major role in the army and kings had numerous war elephants. The Chola navy was the best of ancient Indian sea power. Chola kings were able to extend the boundaries of their empire because of the efficient army they commanded. Some scholars like Spencer have focussed more on the Chola raids and the role played by army therein.

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## **7.6 Economy**

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Land revenue and trade tax were the main source of income. The Chola rulers issued their coins in gold, silver and copper. Chola economy was based on three tiers at the local level, agricultural settlements formed the foundation to commercial towns nagaram. The Chola rulers actively encouraged the weaving industry and derived revenue from it. The most important weaving communities in early medieval times were the Saliyar and Kaikolar. During the Chola period silk weaving attained a high degree and Kanchipuram became one of the main centres for silk. Agriculture was the principal occupation for many people. Besides the landowners, there were others dependent on agriculture. The metal industries and the jewellers' art had reached a high degree of excellence. The manufacture of sea-salt was also carried on.

### **7.6.1 Agriculture**

The prosperity of an agricultural country depends to a large extent on the facilities provided for irrigation. Apart from sinking wells and excavating tanks, the Chola rulers made mighty stone dams across Kaveri and other rivers and cut out channels to distribute water over large tracts of land. Rajendra Chola dug an artificial lake near his capital. The various irrigation measures undertaken by Chola kings greatly added to the material prosperity of the society.

## 7.6.2 Trade

The Chola state excelled in foreign trade and maritime activity, extending their influence overseas to China and Southeast Asia. Towards the end of the 9th century, southern India had developed extensive maritime and commercial activity. The south Indian guilds played a major role in interregional and overseas trade. The Song dynasty of China, the Srivijaya empire under the Sailendras, and the Abbasid Khilafat at Baghdad were the main trading partners.

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## 7.7 Society

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Chola kings donated lands for public welfare as well. The Tirumukkudal inscription shows that a hospital was named after Vira Chola. The farmers occupied one of the highest positions in society. The Vellalas were also sent to northern Sri Lanka by the Chola rulers as settlers. The quality of the inscriptions of the regime indicates a high level of literacy and education. The text in these inscriptions was written by court poets and engraved by talented artisans. Tamil was the medium of education for the masses; Religious monasteries (matha or ghatika) were centres of learning and received government support. The extensive grant of land, including virgin lands in fringe areas, in favour of religious grantees certainly resulted in the expansion and proliferation of the agrarian society. The temple building activities by many early medieval dynasties are not viewed as instances of wasteful expenditure in an impoverished economy.

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## 7.8 Chola Art and Architecture

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Chola kings are known not only for their military exploits but also made major contributions in the field of art and architecture.

### 7.8.1 Temples

A prominent feature of early medieval urbanisation is the development of vast temple complexes into major temple cities. A new type of urban development began under the Pallava dynasty (sixth-ninth centuries), centred especially in the capital city of Kanchipuram. The developments originating in the Pallava period came to fruition during the subsequent reigns of the Chola kings, when many areas of Tamilnadu experienced growth of urban centres around the temples. The central place in the Kaveri River delta was the town of Kudamukku (present Kumbakonam). During the Chola period Kudamukku was a major site in the urban complex attached to Palaiyaru, a Chola capital, which spread over a large area to its south and west. Kudamukku functioned as the sacred centre having a number of temples. The twin cities were located on an important trade route and famous for bulk transactions in two items, areca nuts and betel nuts. There was also a concentration of metal workers in the area. These temples usually dominated the urban landscape. Though Thanjavur had already existed prior to the rise of the Cholas, its heydays began with the accession of Rajaraja I in late tenth century. At the very centre of Thanjavur stood the monumental temple, Brihadeeshvara. Around the temple was located the quarter for the political and priestly classes, forming the uppermost crust of the elites and thus occupying the urban space closest to the shrine. After this came the residential area housing other groups, including the residence of the merchants. By the time temple

construction reached its final stage, a veritable colonisation had taken place, indicating the implanting of a royal city, including a series of army contingents.

Chola kings built a number of Shiva temples along the banks of the river Kaveri. The Chola temple architecture has been appreciated for its magnificence as well as delicate workmanship. The Chola school of art also spread to Southeast Asia and influenced the architecture and art of Southeast Asia. Temple building received great impetus from the conquests and the genius of Rajaraja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola I. The maturity and grandeur to which the Chola architecture had evolved found expression in the two temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram. The Brihadeesvara Temple, the temple of Gangaikondacholisvaram and the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram were declared as World Heritage Sites by the UNESCO and are referred to as the 'Great living Chola temples.'

Temple architecture, particularly the dravida or south Indian style of architecture was developed by the Cholas. The chief feature of a Chola temple is the vimana or the storey, which was later eclipsed by the richly ornamented gopuram or gateway. Under the Cholas, temples became the centre of life. The village assembly invariably held its meetings in the temple mandapa (pavillion), which became an additional feature of the Chola temple architecture.

The Pudukkottai district in Tamil Nadu has an unusually large number of early Chola temples, which give us a good idea of the growth of the south Indian style of architecture from the Pallava period to the Chola period. Most important among them is undoubtedly the Vijayalaya Cholesvara temple at Narthamalai (also called Melamalai). Other important temples in this category are the Nagesvarasvami temple at Kumbhakonam, Kuranganatha temple at Srinivasanallur, the twin temples of Agastysvara and Cholesvara at Tiruvalisvaram.

The best example of Mature phase temples is the Siva (or the Brihadeesvara or the Rajarajesvara) temple, built in 1009-10 by Rajaraja I, at Tanjore. It is a fitting memorial to the material achievements of the Cholas under Rajaraja I. Apart from being the tallest (216 feet) of all Indian temples of the medieval period it is a masterpiece of south Indian architecture.

The temple of Gangaikonda Cholapuram (also dedicated to Siva or Brihadeesvara), excelled its predecessor in every conceivable way. Erected around 1030, the greater elaboration in its appearance attests to the more affluent state of the Chola empire under Rajendra I. It is larger in plan though not as tall as the previous one. Later Chola temples include the Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram (Tanjore District) and the Kampaharesvara temple at Tribhuvanam.

### **7.8.2 Sculpture and Painting**

The Chola period also witnessed great strides in the field of sculpture. The three main categories of Chola sculpture are portraits, icons and decorative sculpture. There are three well-preserved and nearly life-size portraits on the walls of the Kuranganatha temple at Srinivasanallur and several others in the Nagesvarasvami temple at Kumbhakonam. The Siva temple at Tiruvalisvaram is a veritable museum of superb early

Chola iconography. The walls of the Brihadeeshvara temples at Tanjore and Gangaikonda cholapuram contain numerous icons of large size and fine execution. The Chola sculptors started bronze-casting sometime around the middle of the 9th century. The Cholas are particularly known for their Nataraja bronzes (bronze statues of Nataraja or the dancing Siva) which are masterpieces of this art. The best example is the Nataraja image in the Nagesvara temple at Kumbhakonam. Decorative sculpture is exhibited in many forms—architectural motifs, floral and vegetal patterns, friezes of animals, birds, dancing figures and legendary and Puranic stories.

Chola wall paintings are found on the walls of the Vijayalaya Cholesvara and Rajarajesvara temples. On the walls of the Vijayalaya Cholesvara temple, large painted figures of Mahakala, Devi and Shiva are still visible. In the Rajarajesvara temple, scenes representing lord Shiva in his abode at Kailasa, as Nataraja and Tripurantaka are painted on the walls in large size.

### **Check your Progress Exercise 3**

Write Short Notes on

- (i) Chola Economy
- (ii) Chola Art and Architecture

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## **7.9 Conclusion**

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In the conclusion we can say that Chola state provided stability to south for several centuries when north Indian polities were disturbed by invasions. The nadu administration, overseas trade and massive temple complexes speak of the complex structure of Chola polity. The researches on Chola history have changed our understanding of the structure and the processes of evolution of Chola state and early medieval centuries in south.

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## **7.10 Let Us Sum Up**

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- Nilakantha Sastri understood Chola State as a strong bureaucratic state.
- Burton Stein developed the Segmentary State model where kings had ritual authority over the periphery.
- Cholas are known for Nadu and local administration.
- Rajaraja I and Rajendra I were the greatest Chola rulers.

### **Answers to Check your Progress Exercise 1**

- (i) See Section 7.3
- (ii) See Sections 7.3

### **Answers to Check your Progress Exercise 2**

- (i) See Section 7.4.2
- (i) See Sections 7.4.3

### **Answers to Check your Progress Exercise 3**

- (i) See Section 7.6
- (i) See Sections 7.8

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## THE ARABS, THE GHAZNAVIDS IN THE NORTHWEST, TRANS- REGIONAL EXCHANGE

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### Structure

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- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Sind in 8<sup>th</sup> century
- 8.3 Sind before the Arab Conquest
- 8.4 Reasons for the Arab Invasion
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  - 8.6.1 The Turkish advance towards India: Mahmud of Ghazni and the Hindu Shahis
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  - 8.6.6 Causes of the Turkish Success and Failure of the Rajputs
- 8.7 Conclusion
- 8.8 Let Us Sum Up

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### 8.0 Objective

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

- Get a detailed account of Arab invasion of western India and its impact
- Know about the advent of Islam in India and its long-term impact
- Understand the history of a peripheral region
- Understand the Turkish advance and developments in north-west.
- Understand the stages of conquest of Northern India by the Turks
- Understand the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate
- Analyse the causes of the Turkish success and failure of the Rajput kingdoms.



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## **8.1 Introduction**

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India witnessed the arrival of Islam and Islamic polity as early as the beginning of 8<sup>th</sup> century with the Arab invasion by Muhammad bin Qasim. Most invasions into India have taken place from the north western passes and this region seems to be ravaged all the times. In this chapter we shall read as to how and why Arabs came to Sind and how they were able to defeat the local rulers with rather ease. It was the time when feudalism had taken roots in north India and political and military dismemberment was a fact. While Arabs came with the zeal of invaders and neo converts, the rulers of Sind tackled it unprofessionally and rather casually resulting in loss of state, lives and wealth. The Arab conquest of Sind set the ground for future Islamic invasions though there is no direct link but it surely integrated Sind into the Islamic political ambitions.

Its consequences for India were direct, tangible and far reaching. Mahmud of Ghazni's invasions of India at the close of the 10th century, followed some 150 years later by the invasions of Muhammad Ghuri, were projections of the rise of the Turks in Central Asia and the political developments in that region. In this lesson, we will be looking at the conquest of India, by the Turks, leading to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, at the beginning of the 13th century. The rise of the Turks, their rapid conquests and expansion in Central Asia and the adjoining territories, between the 10th and 13th centuries, marks the beginning of a momentous period in history. We will also analyze the causes for the total victory of the Turks and the failure of the leading Rajput states of Northern India.

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## **8.2 Sind in 8<sup>th</sup> Century**

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Sind, a region in arid and semi-arid western parts of India, now in Pakistan, has been on the path of all invasions into India. Much bigger than the modern Sind of Pakistan, it almost covered the entire Pakistan except certain areas of north and west in Pakistan. Its importance was largely due to its strategic location on the trading route from China to Arab world and the west and hence its conquest became all the more lucrative to all involved. With very low rain fall and not very fertile land it was important to Indian history mostly as a border state. Largely populated by Hindus and Buddhists, it came under Buddhist influence early and by the time Arabs invaded the region people were largely Buddhists including the much of the ruling class.

One source that gives us very authentic but brief account of Arab invasion is Futuh of Baladhuri but information in details though little verbose comes from Chachnama by an unknown author who was almost a contemporary and given a fairly accurate account of the events from the period of the Sind ruler Chach to the Arab invasion. Written in Arabic and later translated in Persian in early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

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## **8.3 Sind before the Arab Conquest**

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Sind was part of larger Indian panorama and culturally fully integrated in various Indian empires from Mauryan onwards but also was eyed by Persians and Greeks for its strategic location for trading and the potential to benefit from the trades. Under Mauryan King Ashoka large scale conversion to Buddhism took place. One thing which was evident in every aspect of life and history of Sind is that lot of its regional and historical

identity was because of legendary Kushana king Kanishka who had converted to Buddhism and established the Buddhist identity of the region firmly. Later in 3rd century the region was conquered by Sassanids of Persia and then came under the control of Mighty Gupta empire. After a succession of powers finally it came under the control of Brahman Chach whose dynasty was replaced by Muslim invader Qasim.

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#### **8.4 Reasons for Arab Invasion**

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It is not easy to answer why the Arabs invaded Sind. From purely religious to imperial to territorial to trade, there are many reasons offered by chroniclers and historians that motivated the Arabs to reach the boundaries of Indian subcontinent. About the Arab invasion, the contemporary chroniclers have been telling and retelling one story that al Hajaj, the Umayyad Governor of Iraq got infuriated due to the incident where a Muslim entourage from Sri Lanka was heckled and plundered by the robbers of Sind area and they even abducted the women and the chief of the area, Dahir expressed his inability to get the women back as they were non state actors and he had no control over them. Dahir was a powerful chief but probably used to get share in the loot. Angered with such excuse, al-Hajaj sent his cousin and vassal Qasim to attack the region. This seems to be a very minor reason to launch a full-scale military operation. But territorial ambition defies logic and history. India had always attracted invaders for its fabled wealth. For any invader in north, the first port had to be Sind. With Islam expanding its reach beyond the usual Turko-Arab world, India and China were probably natural attractions, though both were difficult to conquer.

Some historians developed the argument that the Arabs who were the first to adopt Islam were the most powerful votaries of new religion till arrival of the Turks. Religion as principal reason held good as al Hajaj's letters to Qasim indicates that he was to win converts for Islam or annihilate them. Recent writings have suggested that Arabs may have been motivated by the trading potentials of Sind. Lying at the crucial junction of the major trading routes it definitely was an attraction for any political power looking for share in profits and control over the flow of goods. Derryl N. Maclean has argued that Sind fitted well in the scheme of things as the long and tedious trade route over the land from China could be cut short when traders took river Indus to reach Sind ports to take to sea for westward journey.

Maclean argues that given the trading background of the Muslims from prophet onwards, their deep interest in controlling trade routes should be easy to understand. Arabs had extensive trading relations with India and many other Asian countries. They were either end users of the product they traded in or were conduits for the European markets. They were good both at land and sea routes and were very familiar with the routes and what came with them. This may have been the reason that the Arab army could plan with so much detail and strike at will. The strong and active relations with traders always helped Arabs and other invaders, guiding them and kept them supplied with provisions. Maclean argued that the local ruler Dahir gave little importance to traders and even sided with robbers for benefits. This may have prompted the traders to extend support to the 'trade friendly' invaders.

### **Check your progress 1:**

**A. a) What is the main source for study of the Arab Invasion of Sind.**

**B. State true or false:**

1. Sind in 8th century was not having any role in overseas trade.
2. Arabs invaded Sind for its gold mine.
3. Arabs invaded Sind for its strategic location.

**C. Write Short notes on:**

- i) Reasons for Arab Invasion on Sind

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## **8.5 Muhammad-bin-Qasim and the Arab Invasion**

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Planning for attack over Sind was made at Shiraz where an organized and highly committed army of 6000 Syrian men were assembled. All preparations were made to last details including needles and threads for tents. While Qasim took the land route, he was joined at Daibul by another contingent via the sea route. This was done probably to avoid suspicion and also to keep troops free from fatigue. He adopted a mixed strategy of violent and conciliatory approach to expand its territorial acquisitions in Sind. They applied all brute force at places like Rawar, Brahmanabad, Isklandah and Multan where locals offered resistance and were conciliatory in places like Nirun, Siwistan, Armabil, Budhiyah, Bet, Sawardi and Aror. Such tactics worked successfully but was not always approved by masters who were sitting in Iraq as they found Qasim too liberal in granting peace even to people who were not really friendly or submitted to the new Arab rule.

The local ruler Dahir hardly offered any resistance to the invaders. Historian Ishwari Prasad says that the lame surrender of the Sind rulers was a fact and contemporary sources mention that the felling of the flag-post of the main temple by the catapults of the Arabs was a bad omen and signaled the withdrawal of divine blessings to the ruler. C.V. Vaidya writes that the Arab victory cannot be attributed to this pulling down of a talisman, but to better weapons of warfare which included skillful deployment of catapults in warfare by the Arabs. This technique was new to the the army of Sind and caused heavy destruction.

After defeating Dahir, Arabs established a colony at Daibul, built a mosque and left 4000 troops to control the conquered city before moving to conquer rest of Sind. Next target, Nirun fell without much resistance and the samani (Buddhists) offered wealth and were spared war. Arabs moved across the Indus river to Siwistan. While the ruler of Bachhra (Vastaraj), a cousin of Dahir was in a mood to offer stiff resistance, Buddhists wrote for peace with the Arabs. The divided Siwistan could not withstand the vigour and might of the Arabs and were defeated. Buddhists (Samanis) were spared and rest were ravaged.

Now the Arabs had to cross Indus to meet the ruler of Sind, Dahir. Crossing the river was tiring for Arab army and horses. At this juncture al-Hajaj sent enforcement of

2000 horses and an advice that enemy is won not only in battlefield but also by bribes and treachery. Qasim got the help of new governor of Bet who also helped in making a bridge of boats over Indus. On the other side Dahir waited with his sons and soldiers to fight the Arabs. During the course of war, Dahir fell from his elephant and was killed by the Arabs. Thus, in CE 712 and a new chapter in the history of India was written.

It should be kept in mind that the policies and strategies of the invaders were always aimed towards victory. Al Hajaj often advised Qasim, not to be liberal while 'aman' (sparing of life) but had advised his generals to grant 'aman' if the enemy had not shown any resistance and had agreed to accept Islam or pay *Jaziyah* (a tax to be paid by non-Muslims to avoid conversion). The new Arab government played safe and gradually consolidated its hold over the newly acquired territories. Influential sections of society were spared as their support was needed to rule.

Arabs killed in thousands and did not spare anyone who came in their way. The survival of Hinduism in Sind and almost total disappearance of Buddhism gives us reasons to believe that the two sections of society were treated differently by the invading Arabs. While the Hindus were generally involved in agriculture and were potential revenue payers and unlike the Buddhists who were mainly traders with long trading relations with Arabs appear not to have resisted the Arabs and escaped the brutality that Hindus suffered. Three reasons have been offered for the disappearance of Buddhists: one, they may have all migrated to non-Arab areas where Buddhists still had political control; second, they may have assimilated themselves with the Hindus as had happened in rest of India; third, they may have voluntarily or forcibly converted to Islam.

### **Check your progress 2:**

- A. 1. Who was the ruler of Sind at the time of Arab invasion?**
2. Which city was first reached by the Arabs in Sind?
- B. Write a short note on Dahir's battle with the Arabs.**

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## **8.6 Trans-regional Exchange**

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The end of the ninth century saw the disintegration of the powerful Empire of Abbasid Caliphate. This gave way to the emergence of a series of aggressive and expansionist states, which were independent for all practical purposes, although they accepted the nominal suzerainty of the Caliph, who legitimized their position by granting them a formal letter of recognition or *manshur*. The rulers of these new states were mostly Turks and were called *Sultans*. The Turks were nomads and were the product of the desert and steppe that encircled Central Asia, extending north and east of Transoxiana, called *Mawara-un-Nahar* (i.e. land across the Oxus-the fertile region carved out by the rivers Oxus and Jaxartes, the two most important rivers of Central Asia).

Since the 8<sup>th</sup> century, they had been infiltrating into the region of Transoxiana. The steppe background of the Turkish nomads had made them natural and formidable warriors, giving them exceptional skills of horsemanship and archery. Internal disturbances had often

prompted the Iranian rulers of the area, and the Abbasid Caliphs, to bring in the Turks as a counter balancing force by enlisting them as mercenaries. Some were made slaves, palace guards and were converted to Islam. This gave them a distinct identity. The Turkish military commanders assimilated the Iranian language and culture which was dominant in the region. Thus, the Turkish immigrants became Islamised and Persianised at the same time. These Islamised Turks later fought the Turkish tribes which had not yet converted to Islam, and later expanded into India.

The most powerful dynasties which rose in the region, after the fall of the Abbasids, were the Samanid dynasty (874-999) followed by the Ghaznavids (962-1186). The Ghaznavids were displaced by the Seljukids, and then by the Khwarizmi Empire, which in turn was destroyed by the Mongol chief Chengiz Khan, in the thirteenth century. These empires fought each other, and also tried to subordinate smaller kingdoms in the region. Just like Rajput rulers of Northern India they also always fought each other.

The aggression of the newly Islamised Turks was aided by a number of factors. First, they had at their disposal the finest horses bred in the steppes of Central Asia, which were used excellently in pitched. The mountains around Ghur were rich in metals and iron was available in large quantities. The people of Ghur specialized in the production of war weapons and equipment and exported them to neighbouring lands. West Asia was marked by the emergence of the *ghazis* –mercenary warriors who were fired, at least in theory, by the spirit of defending and spreading Islam. Depending upon plunder for their livelihood, they fought battles against the opponents of Islam. The *ghazi* spirit which was first used for fighting against the non-Islamic Turks was later used against the “nonbelievers” in India. Mahmud of Ghazni was amongst the first to be closely associated with the *ghazi* movement. People eagerly joined Mahmud because the Indian campaigns yielded riches and the exaggeration of this wealth made recruitment easier.

The institutions of *iqta* and slavery helped in the growth of the Turkish military power in Central Asia. The *iqta*, was the system of granting the revenue of a specified territory, in lieu of cash salary. In return, the holder of the *iqta* was under the obligation of maintaining a fixed number of troops with horses and equipment and furnishing them to the Sultan. The *iqta* was non- hereditary and transferable and the Turkish bureaucratic –military leaders remained completely dependent on the will of the Sultan who could deploy them, as and where he chose. It was this highly mobile and centralized military force, which became the main instrument of expansion of Turks into India. In addition, the Turkish ruling dynasties in Central Asia had made slaves the backbone of their military and administrative power. Captured in the course of continuous raids into the Central Asian steppes or purchased in the slave markets of Samarqand and Bokhara, these extremely loyal and talented slaves started their career in the service of their Sultans and steadily rose to the position of eminence.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

#### **A. State if True or False.**

- (i) The empires of Ghaznavids and Seljuqs were built on the ruins of the Abbasid Caliphate.

- (ii) The Turks were enlisted as slaves, mercenaries and guards by the Iranian rulers and the Caliphs.
- (iii) *Iqta* was a revenue assignment in lieu of cash salary.
- (iv) The Mongols were among the first and foremost to be associated with the *ghazi* spirit.
- (v) The Turks did not possess skills of horsemanship and archery.

### **8.6.1 The Turkish advance towards India: Mahmud of Ghazni and the Hindu Shahis**

Alaptigin, a Turkish slave and the Samanid Governor of Balkh, established an independent kingdom at Ghazni in Afghanistan, in 961. The Ghaznavid kingdom came into prominence in 977 when Subuktigin, who succeeded Alaptigin, annexed the adjoining parts of Central Asia and the Trans –Indus region of the Hindu Shahi kingdom. He inflicted a decisive defeat on Jayapala, the Hindu Shahi ruler of Eastern Afghanistan and Punjab in 990-91 and annexed the provinces of Kabul and Jalalabad to Ghazni. The important point is that by the end of the tenth century the outer bastions of India, Zabulistan and Afghanistan, had been lost and the invasion of India was therefore imminent.

Mahmud, who ascended the throne at Ghazni in 999 was driven by the ambition of making Ghazni a formidable power in Central Asia and the world of Eastern Islam. His interest in India was based on the proverbial wealth of the country and the fertility of the Punjab plains, which looked even more rich and attractive from the barren mountains of Hindu Kush. His incursions in India were largely plundering raids, aimed primarily at replenishing the Ghazni treasury, which would then enable him to consolidate his vast rule in Central Asia and expand further. The plundered wealth was used to finance armies, to maintain the Ghaznavid state. This also involved paying mercenaries, the employing of whom meant that the army was always ready for action. Where the plunder included capturing prisoners of war, these were sold as slaves. These raids were an annual feature and their success in widely separated areas reflected the mobility and effectiveness of Mahmud's army. Careful planning of the campaigns led to the arrival of the Turkish army in India during harvest and well before the monsoon rains. This largely eliminated the need for commissariat arrangements and enhanced the mobility of the army.

Mahmud led seventeen plundering expeditions into North India between 1000 and 1027. After his initial raids, against the frontier outposts, he won his first great victory in 1001 against the Hindu Shahis, defeating their ruler, Jayapala near Peshawar and ravaging the Shahi capital of Waihind (Udbhanda or Peshawar). Despite this setback, the Shahis continued to pose a serious obstacle to Mahmud's further advances into India. The Ghaznavids had to fight two serious battles, in 1006 and 1009 near Peshawar, against Anandapala who succeeded Jayapala, before they could penetrate into the Punjab. In 1015, Mahmud advanced upto Lahore and plundered it. Soon the Ghaznavid Empire extended upto the river Jhelum. Between 1004 to 1006 Mahmud repeatedly attacked the ruler of Multan, a town of strategic importance, in the middle of the Indus plains, with access to Sind. Multan was also a nodal point in the lucrative trade with the Persian Gulf and Western India. Thus,

the period from AD 990-91 to 1015 was a period of protracted struggle during which Afghanistan, and then Punjab and Multan were lost to the Ghaznavids. These conquests breached the outer defenses of India and provided a secure base for future Turkish invasions and expansion into the Ganga and Yamuna doab.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

#### **A. Short Question**

- (i) Briefly discuss the main objectives of Mahmud Ghazni's for invading India.

### **8.6.2 Mahmud Ghazni's raids into the Gangetic Valley**

The middle of the tenth century saw the almost simultaneous decline of the three rival and equally powerful states- the Gurjara- Pratiharas, Palas and the Rashtrakutas. The three powers, striving for political ascendancy, had continuously clashed from the eighth to the tenth centuries, over the control of the Ganga plains, especially Kanauj. Historians have encapsulated this contest in the phrase 'the tripartite struggle for Kanauj'. With their decline, a number of kingdoms arose, the most prominent among them being the Chandellas of Kalinjar and Mahoba, Chahamanas or Chauhans of Sakambhari in Rajasthan, the Paramars or Pawars of Malwa, and the Chalukyas or Solankis of Gujarat. These in turn, had many feudatories which at times, helped their overlords, but often aspired to become independent.

After annexing Punjab as his eastern province, Mahmud Ghazni undertook three expeditions into the Gangetic valley, in 1015, 1019 and 1021. The purpose of these raids was to acquire wealth for his Central Asian campaigns, as also to de-stabilize the states in the Gangetic valley so that later no coalition of powers could emerge against him. From 1010-26 the invasions of Mahmud were focused upon the temple-towns of Thaneshwar, Mathura, Kannauj and finally Somnatha. All of these were repositories of fabulous, immense wealth in cash, golden images, jewellery and revenues received from their land endowments. Some temples invested in trade and profits from this activity also came to the temple treasury. The looting of these temples provided Mahmud with ample booty besides making him a champion iconoclast. The concentration of wealth at Somnatha temple was known to all, making Mahmud's attack inevitable. Somnatha was also a significant centre for both inland and maritime trade. Its port, Veraval adjoined the city and was one of the major ports of the region, with the import of horses being the most profitable item of trade. According to Romila Thapar, an additional reason for Mahmud's determination to attack Somnatha may have been to intervene in the Arab supply of horses to Western India which would have threatened the earlier profitable trade in horses through Ghazni.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

#### **A. State True or False:**

- (i) Mahmud Ghazni led twenty-five plundering expeditions into India.
- (ii) Mahmud Ghazni attacked Sind in 1001.
- (iii) Mahmud Ghazni's first victory was against the Prithviraj III.

(iv) The three powerful states which declined in the middle of the tenth century were the Pratiharas, Palas, and the Rashtrakutas.

(v) Mahmud's last plundering raid was on Somnath.

**B. State the impact of Mahmud's expeditions into the Gangetic valley.**

### **8.6.3 The rise of the Ghurids (Muizzuddin Mohammad Ghuri)**

The middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century saw the final decline of the Ghaznavids and rise to power of the Ghurids at Ghur, a small isolated area, located in the north-western Afghanistan in the mountains between the Ghaznavid Empire and the Seljukids. Like their Ghaznavid predecessors, the Ghurids constantly fought with the Seljukids for control of the prosperous areas of Khurasan and Merv. The failure of the Ghurids in maintaining their authority in Khurasan which, was eventually captured by the Khwarizms, and their perpetual conflict with the Seljukids and the Turkish tribes across the Oxus, were factors which compelled the Ghurids towards India.

In 1173 Muizzuddin Muhammad ascended the throne at Ghazni and he engaged all his energies for a planned conquest of India. Having realized that he could gain nothing in Central Asia, Mohammad Ghuri, unlike Mahmud Ghazni, was thinking in terms of establishing a kingdom in India and not merely of indulging in looting raids. He entered the Indus plains from the Gomal Pass and not from the more commonly used Khyber Pass, further north. He began his Indian expedition, in 1175 by a successful attack on Multan which was under the Karamatis, who were spread on the borders of India and Iran. This was followed by the capture of Uchch, from the Bhatti Rajputs. Three years later, in 1178-79, he marched through Uchch and Multan to Nahrwala in Gujarat. However, the Rai of Nahrwala, Bhim dev II was too strong for him and inflicted a crushing defeat on Muizzuddin at Anhilwara.

The defeat of Anhilwara was lesson in military strategy for Muizzuddin. He realized the necessity of creating a suitable base in Punjab and Sindh before venturing on to the further conquest of India. Accordingly, he revised his entire plan of operation, shifting his attack from Rajasthan to the Punjab. He now launched a campaign against the Ghazavid possessions in Punjab. Conquering Peshawar from the Ghaznavids in 1179-80, he marched on Lahore in 1181-82 and also against Debal and conquered the whole area up the seacoast. In 1184-85, he occupied Sialkot. In 1186 he deposed the last Ghaznavid ruler, Khusrau Malik and occupied Lahore. Muizzuddin now had his military stations from Debal to Sialkot and from Peshawar to Lahore. That, this whole area was to act as one unit is clear from the fact that the *Sipah Salar* and *Wali* of Multan was stationed at Lahore.

### **8.6.4 The Battles of Tarain – 1191, 1192**

Having consolidated his position in Sindh and Punjab, Ghuri next embarked upon a war with the Rajput kingdoms controlling the fertile Gangetic plains. The conflict between Ghuri and Chauhans started with rival claims over Tabarhinda (Bhatinda). Muizzuddin attacked and captured the fortress of Tabarhinda in 1191, which was strategically important for the defence of Delhi and the Gangetic basin. Realising the grave danger involved in



allowing Muizzuddin the time to consolidate his position, Prithviraj immediately marched towards Tabarhinda to dislodge the Ghurids from this strategic fort. He attained a complete victory in the battle of Tarain in 1191. However, Prithviraj failed to take advantage of his victory and did not attempt to pursue the dispirited Ghurid army or to garrison the fort effectively. This could have been either because he did not want to venture into hostile territory far away from his base, or because he thought that, like the Ghaznavids, the Ghurids, too, would be satisfied to rule over the Punjab. Thus, in his lack of farsightedness he treated the siege of Tabarhinda only as a frontier fight and made little preparations for a future contest with the Ghurid chief, who returned in 1192 with a larger force and very careful preparations.

The Second Battle of Tarain in 1192 is regarded rightly as a turning point in Indian history, paving the way for the ascendancy of the Turks. Prithviraj suffered complete defeat. Ghuri annexed the territory upto Ajmer, Hissar and Sirsa and placed it under his trusted slave Qutub-ud-din Aibak.

#### **8.6.5 Turkish Expansion into the Upper Gangetic Valley – Battle of Chandawar- 1194**

Initially the Ghurids could not immediately take over the administration of all the conquered territories. Some local rulers continued to rule in subordinate capacities. However, this arrangement was tentative. Under Aibak's leadership, the Turks continued to make territorial advances in all directions. Aibak crossed the Yamuna to establish a military foothold in the upper Doab. Meerut and Baran (modern Bulandshahr) under the Dor Rajputs were conquered in 1192. Aibak occupied Delhi in 1193 and made it the main base of Turkish operations in India. Ajmer was occupied and a Turkish governor was placed in its charge. In 1194 Aibak crossed the Yamuna for the second time and captured Koil (Aligarh).

Having consolidated their position in the Delhi region, the Ghurids now attacked Jai Chand, the Gahadvala king of Kanauj. In the battle of Chandawar in 1194 (in the modern Etawah district), Jai Chand suffered defeat and Kanauj was finally annexed in 1198. Though the whole of the Gahadvala kingdom could not be brought under Turkish control, it provided an opportunity to establish military stations at many places like Banaras and Asni. Thus, the battles of Tarain in 1192 and Chandawar in 1194 laid the foundation of the Turkish rule in Northern India. However, it took the Turks another fifty years to eradicate all opposition, and to consolidate their hold in India. Turks tried to conquer the strategic forts between Delhi and Malwa. Muizzuddin occupied the formidable forts of Bayana from the Bhatti Rajputs, Gwalior from the Pratiharas, Anhilwara from Chalukyas in 1195-96, and Badayun in 1197-98. Around 1202, Kalinjar, Mahoba and Khajuraho were also occupied.

From 1203 onwards, the Turks entered eastern provinces. Bihar and Bengal was conquered by Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khalji, another general of Ghuri.

#### **Check Your Progress Exercise 4**

##### **A. Which of the following statements is/are correct?**

- (i) In the first battle of Tarain in 1191 Mohammad Ghuri emerged victorious against the Chandelas of Bundelkhand.
- (ii) The second battle of Tarain in 1192 was fought by Mohammad Ghuri against the Chalukyas of Gujarat.

- (iii) In the battle of Chandawar in 1194 Ghuri defeated the Gahadvala ruler Jai Chand
- (iv) Mohammad Ghuri left his Indian possessions in the hands of his trusted slave, Qutub ud din Aibak.

**B. Why did Mohammad Ghuri turn towards India rather than Central Asia?**

**C. State the importance of the second battle of Tarain in 1192.**

### **8.6.6 Causes of the Turkish Success and Failure of the Rajputs**

The victory of the Turkish invaders over the leading Rajput states of North India is a phenomenon which requires explanation. This is particularly so, because, many of the Rajput principalities of the time were superior, both in terms of size, population and revenue resources, to the Ghurids and the Ghaznavids. Except for a few fertile regions such as Khurasan, Transoxiana, Khwarizm, much of the terrain in the region was mountainous or arid and inhospitable. Moreover, it had been thoroughly plundered for long by the Ghuzz tribes across the Oxus. On the other hand, the tracts under the control of Rajputs, outside Rajasthan and Bundelkhand, were very fertile and productive. In terms of human resources or population, too, the Rajput-held areas were in an advantageous position. This explains why in any battle the number of soldiers on the side of the Rajput kings were far larger than those of the Turks.

The overriding element in the Turkish victory was their advanced military technology and tactics. Unlike the Rajput armies, the reinforcements of good Central Asian horses provided a better livestock for the Turkish cavalry, which were used excellently in battles. The Indian army had always suffered from an inferior breed of horses and was wary of using the cavalry. The heavily armored horsemen and mounted archer, using iron stirrups, had completely changed the mode of warfare in Europe and Central Asia, from the tenth century onwards. The Turks had become adept in this new style of warfare, which allowed greater ability to manoeuvre and which emphasized swiftness and light equipment. The iron stirrup made it possible for the cavalry men to advance and even retreat with rapidity, shooting spears or lances and bows from the saddle, without halting or dismounting and without being thrown off the horse as a result of the impact.

The Indian military strategy, on the other hand, gave greater importance to weight than to mobility. The Rajput forces, dependent on the elephant and infantry, were a heavy slow-moving mass. They believed in crushing rather than moving rapidly and striking. They proved immobile when pitted against the swift moving cavalry, which could attack the flanks and rear of the enemy forces. Also, the Turks tended to increasingly concentrate on capturing forts which had a strategic advantage and the Rajput army was therefore forced into defensive positions in hilly terrains. Guerrilla warfare could have been an effective means of harassing the Turkish armies, particularly when they were on the march, but this was not used effectively.

There was a basic lack of consciousness among the Indian rulers of the need to defend the north western passes. This lack of strategic consciousness is also explained by the absence of a dominant power in North India. After the fall of the Gurjara-Pratihara Empire there arose small independent powers like Gahadvalas in Kanauj, Parmaras in Malwa,

Chalukyas in Gujarat, Chauhans in Ajmer, Tomars in Delhi, Chandellas in Bundelkhand etc. These states were involved in endless battles and campaign against each other which exhausted their resources and energy.

The Rajput states were unable or unwilling to join hands to expel the Ghaznavids from the Punjab despite the rapid decline of the Ghaznavid power in West and Central Asia following the death of Mahmud Ghazni. On the other hand, the successors of Mahmud remained tactically on the offensive and continued to make raids into Indian territories in Rajasthan up to Ajmer and beyond and the Gangetic areas upto Kannauj and Varanasi.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 5

#### A. Fill in the Blanks.

- (i) Contemporary chroniclers like \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ attribute the Turkish victory to the 'Will of God'.
- (ii) Muizzuddin Ghuri's army was twice defeated by the Rajput states, Chalukyas of Gujarat in the battle of \_\_\_\_\_ and by Prithviraj Chauhan in the first battle of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (iii) The noted scientist and scholar from Central Asia, who spent ten years in India, studied Sanskrit and interacted with Brahmanas was \_\_\_\_\_.
- (iv) \_\_\_\_\_ was written by Al-Biruni.

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### 8.7 Conclusion

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Region from Sind upto Kashmir was won and the Arabs were able to rule for the next few centuries. Initially they imposed the Arab architecture on Sind as they were only familiar with that but much later, they started adapting the local style and assimilated it with the Islamic architecture. The major interest of Mahmud of Ghazni in India was its fabulous wealth which he used in building up a vast empire in Central Asia. The conquest of Afghanistan and Punjab by Ghazni destroyed the north-western defence of India and provided a base for further Turkish expansion in India. The invasions of Mohammad Ghuri from 1175 to 1206 also highlighted the failure of local rulers to develop a better fighting strategy to defend the north western passes.

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### 8.8 Let us sum up

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- In 712 CE Muhammad-bin-Qasim invaded Sind which was ruled by a Hindu ruler Dahir.
- Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India seventeen times between the period 1000 to 1027 for its fabulous wealth.
- Invasions of Muhammad of Ghur started from 1175 and led to the establishment of Delhi Sultanate in 1206.
- These invasions indicate that the north-western parts of India were not defended properly by the local rulers.

**Answers to check your progress Exercise 1**

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) False (v) False

**Answers to check your progress Exercise 2**

A. (i) See Section 8.6.1

**Answers to check your progress Exercise 3**

A. (i) False (ii) False (iii) False (iv) True (v) True

B. See Section 8.6.2

**Answers to check your progress Exercise 4**

A. (i) False (ii) False (iii) True (iv) True

B. See Section 8.6.3

C. See Section 8.6.4

**Answers to check your progress Exercise 5**

A. (i) Hasan Nizami, Minhaj-us-Siraj (ii) Anhilwara, Tarain (iii) Al-Biruni (iv) Kitab-ul-Hind

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