
UNIT 3 THE POLITICAL SCENARIO II– RASHTRAKUTAS AND PALAS¹

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss about the origin and emergence of the Rashtrakutas and the formation of Rashtrakuta and Pala empire. Later, we will also explore the organization and nature of Rashtrakuta polity. After studying the Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- major and minor kingdoms that were ruling over different territories of south India between 8th and 11th centuries;
- emergence of the Rashtrakutas as a dominant power in Deccan;
- the process of the formation of Rashtrakuta empire and contributions of different kings;
- the nature of early medieval polity and administration in the Deccan;
- the Palas and the nature of their polity; and
- Kaivarta rebellion.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

India witnessed the emergence of three powerful kingdoms between c. 750 and 1000 CE: Palas, Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. These kingdoms fought with each other to establish their hegemony. Historian Noboru Karashima treats the empire as a new type of state, i.e. feudal state showing both discontinuities and

¹ This Unit has been taken from BHIC 132, Unit 10 and MHI 04, Block 2, Unit 5.

continuities with states that had emerged in these areas from 3rd century CE onwards. Rashtrakuta Empire dominated the Deccan for almost 200 years till the end of 10th century and also controlled territories in north and south India at various points of time. Amongst the three it lasted the longest. It was not only the most powerful polity of the time but also acted as a bridge between north and south India in economic as well as cultural matters. It also promoted and expanded north Indian traditions and policies in south India. Significantly, India touched new heights of stability and achievements in the field of polity, economy, culture, education and religion in this phase.

Later in the Unit we will be discussing the Palas. Bengal had been part of the Maurya and Gupta empires. For long stretches of its early history Bengal is not known to have played an important role in the political history of India even after the decline of the Guptas. The first significant ruler of Bengal was Sasanka who ruled roughly between 606-637 CE. His death led to the coming to power of Gopala who founded the Pala dynasty. The Palas are also known for Kaivarta rebellion which took place under their rule and was responsible for considerably weakening the position of Palas.

3.2 THE RASHTRAKUTAS: NOMENCLATURE AND ORIGINS

The word ‘Rashtrakuta’ means the chief of *Rashtra* (division or kingdom). It is possible that they were a class of provincial officers, as the designation appears in the inscriptions of many dynasties. We may say that the Rashtrakutas were high officials, either provincial chiefs or some kind of administrators. For example, a Rashtrakuta Govindaraja, son of Shivaraja acting as *vijnapati* (petitioner), is mentioned in the Naravana plates of Chalukya Vikramaditya II of Badami. Romila Thapar also opines that Dantidurga - founder of the main branch of the Rashtrakutas — was one of the subordinates of Chalukyas and a high official in the administration.

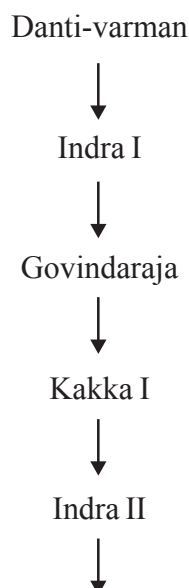
Historians are still not clear about origin of Rashtrakutas and its branches. Following the tradition of devising Puranic pedigrees, the Rashtrakutas also claim in their inscriptions that they belong to the Satyaki branch of *Yaduvamsha* and the line of Tungas. Historian Nilakantha Shastri, based on the study of inscriptions, claims that the Rashtrakutas were of Kannada origin, and their plates indicate that Kannada was their mother tongue despite the extensive use of Sanskrit. Also, the standard title *Lattalura-puravareshvara* (“the eminent lord of the city of Lattalura”) assumed by Rashtrakuta princes of both the main line and of the secondary branches indicates their original home. Lattalura has been identified with Latur in the Bidar district of Karnataka. In this way, we can say that Deccan was the original home of the Rashtrakutas, which generally means the whole region occupied by the Telugu speaking population as well as Maharashtra with certain parts of northern Karnataka (Kannada speaking).

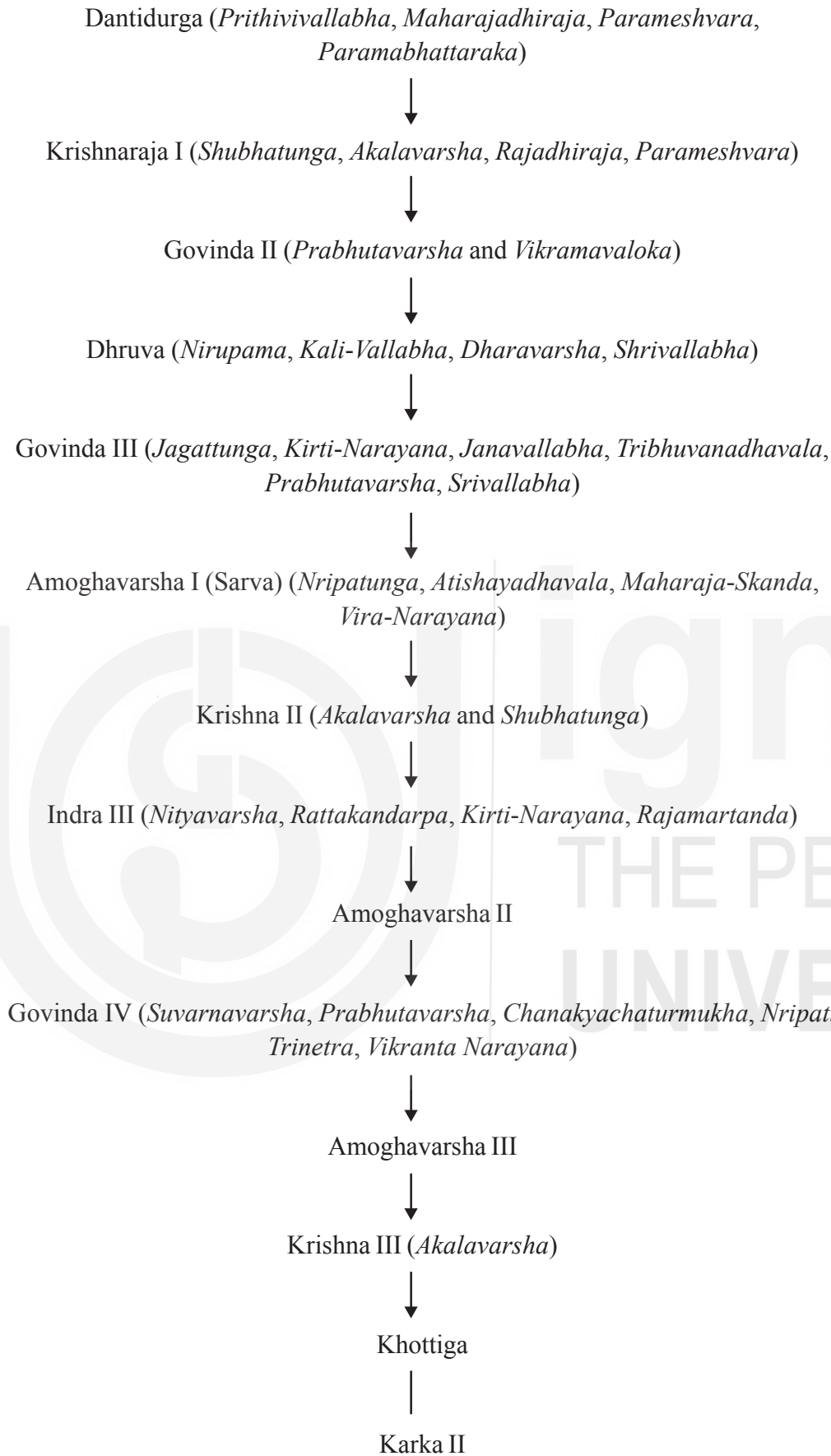
The Rashtrakuta dynasty is known for a long line of brave warriors and able administrators, which helped them in the formation of a vast empire. They fought continuously with the Pratiharas, Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi (in modern Andhra Pradesh), Cholas, Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai. The Pallavas

were in decline and their successors — the Cholas — were emerging powerful. Weaknesses of these kingdoms became helpful in victories and the establishment of Rashtrakuta polity. There was no power in northern India strong enough to interfere with the affairs of the Deccan which provided an opportunity for the emergence of Rashtrakutas. Thapar argues that the geographical position of the Rashtrakutas, i.e. in the middle of the Indian subcontinent led to their involvement in wars and alliances with both the northern and, more frequently, the southern kings. It resulted in the expansion of their empire in all directions. Historian Karashima argues that one of the crucial factors for the formation of Rashtrakuta power might have been an environment within their territory favourable to the growth of agriculture. Thapar also explores favourable economic factors and mentions that the Rashtrakutas had the advantage of controlling a large part of the western seaboard and, therefore, trade with West Asia, particularly with the Arabs, provided the wealth to back their political ambitions.

3.3 THE RASHTRAKUTA POLITY

There were several branches of the Rashtrakutas ruling in different parts of India in the early medieval period. The earliest known ruling family of the Rashtrakutas was founded by Mananka in Malkhed, having the *Palidhvaja* banner and the *Garuda-lanchhana*. Another Rashtrakuta family was ruling in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. The Antroli-Chharoli inscription bearing the *Garuda* seal dated 757 CE mentions four generations: Karka I, his son Dhruva, his son Govinda, and his son Karka II belonging to a collateral branch of the Malkhed line holding sway in the Lata country in Gujarat. Dantidurga was the founder of the imperial Rashtrakuta line. He seems to be the contemporary of Karka II. The exact relation of these kings to the Malkhed line cannot be decided with certainty, though it is not impossible that Karka I of the charter of 757 CE was identical with the grandfather of Dantidurga himself. The kingdom was founded by Dantidurga who fixed his capital at Manyakheta or Malkhed near modern Sholapur. Manyakheta branch of the Rashtrakutas soon became dominant by assimilating other branches in due time. We can prepare a dynastic chart of the imperial line of Rashtrakutas with their titles as follows:





We now come to the main line of Rashtrakutas. Dantidurga, a strong and able ruler, was the real founder of a lasting empire. The earliest record of his reign – the Ellora inscription of 742 CE – mentions the titles *prithivivallabha* and *khagavaloka* (he whose glances are as keen as the edge of a sword) for him. Lata and Malava were in a disturbed condition after the Arab invasions and taking that

advantage Dantidurga took control of the territories. Dantidurga also attacked Kanchi, the capital of the Pallavas, and struck up an alliance with Nandivarman Pallavamalla to whom he gave his daughter Reva in marriage. The war-like monarch Dantidurga captured the outlying territories of the extensive Chalukyan empire and then assaulted the heart of empire and easily defeated Kirtivarman. The Samangadh inscription of 754 CE records that Dantidurga overthrew the last Chalukya ruler of Badami called Kirtivarman II and assumed full imperial rank and described himself as:

Prithivivallabha,

Maharajadhiraja,

Parameshvara, and

Paramabhattaraka.

Kirtivarman continued to rule with diminished glory until the reign of Dantidurga. Dantidurga describes his territory as comprising of four lakhs of villages, which probably included his sway over a little more than one half of the Chalukyan Empire of Badami.

Dantidurga died childless, which led to a dispute between Krishnaraja I — his uncle — and other family members who succeeded in seizing the throne for a while but whom Krishnaraja I overthrew easily in 756 CE because of his popularity. He had the titles *Shubhatunga* (high in prosperity) and *Akalavarsha* (constant rainer) mentioned in Bhandak Inscription of Krishnaraja I of 772 CE. The newly established Rashtrakuta kingdom expanded in all directions under him. He started with the overthrow of the Chalukyas of Badami. The Bhandak plates of 772 CE show that the whole of Madhya Pradesh had come under his rule. In other inscriptions, he is said to have overcome Rahappa and thereby gained the *Palidhvaja* banner and the imperial title *Rajadhiraja Parameshvara*. Historian Sastri treats Rahappa as Kakka II of Lata which may be taken to mark the end of the first Lata branch of the Rashtrakutas. Southern Konkana was also conquered and brought under his sway by Krishnaraja I. He also expanded his empire in the southern direction by establishing lordship over the Ganga kingdom. Also, his son and *yuvaraja* Govinda compelled Vijayaditya I of the Vengi branch of Chalukya for formal submission. The Rashtrakuta empire under Krishnaraja I may, thus, be taken to have extended over the whole of the modern Maharashtra state, a good part of the Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, with Vengi farther east acknowledging its supremacy and a good portion of Madhya Pradesh.

Krishnaraja I died sometime between 772 CE and 775 CE and was followed on the throne by his son *yuvaraja* Govinda II. Govinda II bears the titles *Prabhutavarsha* (profuse rainer) and *Vikramavaloka* (the man with a heroic look) in the Alas plates. His name is omitted in some of the later grants of the line. It was due to civil war for the throne between him and his younger brother Dhruva ruling in the region of Nasik and Khandesh as governor. The first war between brothers ended disastrously for Govinda II. He then allied with the Pallava ruler of Kanchi, the Ganga king, the king of Vengi and the ruler of Malava who were traditional foes of the Rashtrakutas, but got defeated in a battle and Dhruva assumed sovereignty. Dhruva assumed the titles:

Nirupama (unequalled),
Kali-vallabha (fond of war),
Dharavarsha (heavy rainer) and
Shrivallabha (the favourite of fortune).

Dhruva severely punished all kings who assisted Govinda II in the late civil war after securing the throne. He made his younger but ablest son Govinda III king during his lifetime.

Govinda III (793-814) became one of the greatest Rashtrakuta rulers who had the titles of:

Jagattunga (prominent in the world),
Kirti-Narayana (the very Narayana in respect of fame),
Janavallabha (favourite of the people),
Tribhuvanadhavala (pure in the three worlds),
Prabhutavarsha (the abundant rainer), and
Shrivallabha.

He first quelled the rebellions of his elder brothers in the south. In the north, after a successful expedition against Nagabhatta of Kanauj and the annexation of Malawa along with Kosala, Kalinga, Vengi, Dahala and Odraka, Govinda III again turned to south. We are told in the Sanjan inscription that Govinda “terrified the Kerala, Pandya and the Chola kings and caused the Pallavas to wither. The Gangas of Karnataka, who became dissatisfied through baseness, were bound down with fitters and met with death.” Govinda’s southern campaign seems to be no more than a *digvijaya*: the traditional proclamation of superior power by a triumphant march across the territory of the neighbouring rulers demanding tokens of their submission. Performing better than his father’s expectations, he spread the fame of the Rashtrakuta empire literally from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin through his skills both in diplomacy and on the battlefield. It is said that the Rashtrakutas became as unassailable as the Yadavas after the birth of Sri Krishna.

Govinda’s successor became his only son *Maharaja Sarva* better known as Amoghavarsha I (814-878 CE) who, also like his father, proved himself as one of the greatest of Rashtrakuta monarchs. Amoghavarsha ruled for 68 years, but by temperament he preferred *digvijaya* in the sphere of religion, literature, and architecture better than in war. He had the titles:

Nripatunga (exalted among kings),
Atisayadhavala (wonderfully white in conduct),
Maharaja-shanda (best of the great kings), and
Vira-Narayana (the heroic Narayana).

He was genuinely interested in the religious traditions of contemporary India and used to spend his time in the company of Jaina monks and other forms of spiritual meditation. His inscriptions count him among the most prominent followers of

Jainism. He was not only an author himself but also a patron of authors. Jinasena, the author of *Adipurana*, was among the Jaina preceptors of Amoghavarsha I. He not only promoted Jainism but also the Brahmanical religion and also performed several rituals for the welfare of his subjects. He was also a great builder and is celebrated in the inscriptions Nos. XXIV, XXV, and XXVI as the maker of the capital city Manyakheta.

There were many rebellions in the far-flung Rashtrakuta empire under his long reign. His death was followed by the accession of his son Krishna II in about 879 CE. Krishna II had the titles *Akalavarsha* and *Shubhatunga*. He was not wholly successful in curbing rebellions. The only success of his reign was the termination of Lata viceroyalty. The wars he undertook against Vengi and the Cholas got him on the whole nothing but disaster, disgrace, and exile for some time. His son Indra III became king in 915 CE. Indra III had the titles:

Nityavarsha (constant rainer),

Rattakandarapa

Kirti-Narayana

Rajamarathanda.

Amoghavarsha I's grandson Indra III re-established the empire. The advance of the Rashtrakuta forces through Lata and Malawa right up to Kalpi and Kanauj and the dethronement of Mahipala were, no doubt, significant military achievements of Indra. After the defeat of Mahipala and the sack of Kanauj in 915 CE, Indra III was the most powerful ruler of his times. According to Al-Masudi who visited India at that time, the Rashtrakuta king Balhara or Vallabharaja was the greatest king of India and most of the Indian rulers accepted his suzerainty and respected his envoys.

Indra III's reign comes to a close towards the end of 927 CE. He was followed on the throne by his son Amoghavarsha II and reigned for one year according to the Bhandana grant of Silahara Aparajita (997 CE). His younger brother, the ambitious Govinda IV, celebrated his coronation with great pomp. Govinda IV had the titles:

Suvarnavarsha (rainer of gold),

Prabhutavarsha,

Chanakyachaturmukha,

Vikranta Narayana

Nripati Trinetra.

He was not a good king. His life, rule and acquisition of throne provoked resentment among the feudatories. They became united for a revolution which ended with the defeat and dethronement of Govinda IV and the transfer of the crown to Amoghavarsha III in 934-35 CE for saving the fair name of the royal family. Amoghavarsha III had a short reign of four to five years. He was a gentle, peaceful and wise king and strongly marked by a religious turn of mind. He engaged himself in the promotion of the royal family by granting many villages to brahmanas and building many temples of Shiva. His son and *yuvaraja* Krishna III managed all other affairs of the state. His greatness as a soldier is indeed attested by the early

wars he waged as crown prince on behalf of his brother-in-law Butugga, and perhaps by the success of Rashtrakuta arms in the confused struggles that went on the Vengi kingdom. The Deoli and Karhad plates (Nos. XXIV and XXV) indicate that Krishna III became king after his father's death in 939 CE and bestowed with the particular imperial title *Akalavarsha*.

Krishna III was the last in a line of brilliant rulers. He was engaged in a struggle against the Paramaras of Malava and the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi. The Karhad plates (No. XXV) issued from the king's camp at Melpadi in the North Arcot district mention that he also undertook one of the earliest but extensive military conquest against the Chola ruler of Tanjore, who had supplanted the Pallavas of Kanchi. Krishna III defeated the Chola king Parantaka I (949 CE), annexed the northern part of the Chola empire and distributed the Chola kingdom among his servants. He, then, pressed down to Rameshwaram and set up a pillar of victory there and built a temple. After his death, all in late 966 CE or very early in 967 CE his opponents united against his successor half-brother Khottiga. The Rashtrakuta capital Manyakheta was sacked, plundered and burnt in 972 CE by the Paramara kings and the emperor was forced to abandon Manyakheta. Karka II succeeded Khottiga, who was overthrown by Tailla II, Chalukya. The Bhandana grant of Aparajita (997 CE) and the Kharepatan plates dated 1008 CE state that Tailapa, the Chalukya defeated Karka in battle and the *Rammarâjya* ceased to exist. It marked the end of the Rashtrakuta Empire.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Read the following sentences and write True or False.
 - a) The Rashtrakuta kingdom survived longer than the Pratiharas and the Palas which ruled over the Deccan for more than two centuries. ()
 - b) All the Rashtrakuta princes assumed the title of *Lattalura puravareshvara*. ()
 - c) The Deccan was not the original home of the Rashtrakutas. ()
 - d) The Rashtrakutas were high officials; either provincial chiefs or another kind of administrators. ()
 - e) The warrior Rashtrakuta kings established and expanded their empire supported by the growth of agriculture, the control of western seaboard, and the trade with the Arabs. ()
- 2) Fill in the blanks.
 - a) The Rashtrakutas often struggled with their contemporary kingdoms such as:

- 3) Note down five favourable factors in the formation and expansion of the Rashtrakuta Empire.

- 4) How did Krishnaraja I and Govinda III contribute to the expansion of the Rashtrakuta Empire?

3.4 RASHTRAKUTA ADMINISTRATION

The warrior kings of the Rashtrakutas created a vast empire in south India which was touching the northern parts of India comprising approximately seven and a half lakh villages. The Rashtrakutas not only won and created a vast kingdom but also maintained it well. A powerful monarchy was the core of the empire, assisted by a large number of feudatories. Interestingly, the realm was getting feudalised more and more with the maturity of the reign of each Rashtrakuta king. The system of administration in the realms was based on the ideas and practices of the Gupta Empire and the Harsha's kingdom in the north, and the Chalukyas in the Deccan. As before, the monarch was the fountainhead of all powers including the head of administration and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The king was responsible for the maintenance of law and order within the kingdom and expected absolute loyalty and obedience from his family, ministers, vassal chiefs, feudatories, officials, and chamberlains. The king's position was generally hereditary, but the rules about succession were not rigidly fixed. The eldest son often succeeded, but there were many instances when the eldest son had to fight his younger brothers and sometimes lost to them. Thus, the Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva and Govinda IV deposed their elder brothers. Kings were generally advised and helped by many hereditary ministers chosen by them from leading families. We do not know how many of them were there and how they worked. From epigraphic and literary records it appears that in almost every kingdom there was a chief minister, a minister of foreign affairs, a revenue minister and treasurer, chief of armed forces, chief justice, and *purohita*.

In the Rashtrakuta kingdom the directly administered areas were divided into:

Rashtra (province),

Vishaya, and

Bhukti.

The head of a *Rashtra* was called *Rashtrapati* (governor) who sometimes enjoyed the status and title of a vassal king. The *Vishaya* was like a modern district under *Visayapati*, and the *Bhukti* was a smaller unit than it. A body of assistants called the *Rashtramahattaras* and *Vishayamahattaras* respectively assisted provincial governors and district level governors in the Rashtrakuta administration. The roles and powers of these smaller units and their administrators are not clear. It seems that their primary purpose was the realisation of land revenue and some attention to law and order. It appears that all officials were paid by giving them grants of rent-free land.

The feudatories played an essential role in the formation and administration of the Rashtrakuta empire. We know that the Rashtrakutas won many battles and expanded the empire which was not possible without the help of feudatories. The lords from the Ganga kingdom were primarily known for their valour in the expeditions of Rashtrakutas. The kings regularly rewarded these chiefs with land-grants for their loyalty and bravery that resulted in the emergence of lords as powerful as the king. For example, the position of Taila and Ganga Butugga in the reign of Krishna III. Sastri mentions from the study of inscriptions that Butugga was ruling Belvola 300, Purigere 300, Gangavadi 96000, Kisukad 70, Bagenad 70 and Banavasi 12000. The empire consisted of the areas administered directly and areas governed by the vassal chiefs. The areas ruled by the vassal chiefs were autonomous as far as internal affairs were concerned and had a general obligation of loyalty, paying a fixed tribute and supplying a quota of troops to the overlord. The vassal chiefs or their son were required to attend the *darbar* of the overlord on special occasions, and sometimes they were expected to marry one of their daughters to the overlord or one of his sons.

The Rashtrakuta kings had large and well-organised infantry, cavalry, and a large number of war-elephants mentioned in the chronicles of Arab travellers. The large armed forces were directly related to the glamour and power of the king, which was also essential for the maintenance and expansion of the empire in the age of wars. The Rashtrakutas were famous for a large number of horses in their army imported from Arabia, West Asia, and Central Asia. The real power of the Rashtrakutas is reflected from their many forts garrisoned by special troops and independent commanders. The infantry consisted of regular and irregular soldiers and levies provided by the vassal chiefs. The regular forces were often hereditary and sometimes drawn from different regions all over India. There is no reference to war chariots which had fallen out of use.

Below these territorial divisions was the village. The village was the basic unit of administration. The village administration was carried on by the village headman and the village accountant whose posts were generally hereditary. Grants of rent-free lands were paid to them. The headman was often helped in his duties by the village elder called *grama-mahajana* or *grama-mahattara*. In the Rashtrakuta kingdom, particularly in Karnataka, we are told that there were village committees to manage local schools, tanks, temples and roads in close cooperation with the headman and received a particular percentage of the revenue collection. Towns also had similar committees, in which the heads of trade guilds were also associated. Law and order in the cities and areas in their immediate vicinity was the responsibility of the *koshta-pala* or *kotwal*. The petty chieftainship and the

increased hereditary elements weakened the power of village committees. The central rule also found it difficult to assert his authority over them and to control them. It is what we mean when we say that the government was becoming feudalised.

3.5 THE PALAS²

Bengal had been part of the Maurya and Gupta empires. For long stretches of its early history Bengal is not known to have played an important role in the political history of India even after the decline of the Guptas. The first significant ruler of Bengal was Sasanka who ruled roughly between 606-637 A.D. Sasanka is considered the first historically known ruler of the area that constituted Bengal. He was also the first in this region to have extended his political sovereignty over areas that lay far beyond the geographical boundary of Bengal. Sasanka had become the master of the whole of Bengal with his capital at Karnasuvarna (near Murshidabad), and had perhaps extended his rule as far as Odisha. He even advanced against Kanauj which was occupied by the rulers of the Maukhari dynasty at that time. Sasanka's military adventures proved successful and this ultimately led to the growth of hostilities between him and the rulers of Thanesar. Harshavardhana, who eventually became king of Thanesar, set out to defeat Sasanka but was unsuccessful. Ultimately, Harsha succeeded in his conquest of Sasanka's empire only after the latter's death.

The death of Sasanka was followed by a period of political decline in the fortunes of Bengal. It was attacked by Yasovarman of Kanauj and Laitaditya of Kashmir and later on perhaps by the king of Kamrupa. It resulted in the weakening of central authority and the rise of independent chiefs. It seems that the prevailing anarchy led the chiefs to elect someone called Gopala as the ruler of the whole kingdom. Gopala, who went on to become the founder of the Pala dynasty in Bengal, consolidated his rule over Bengal and brought the much needed stability and prosperity to the region. The date of his accession is not known in definite terms but is generally believed to be in the second half of the 8th century A.D. He died in about 780 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Dharmapala.

R.C. Majumdar describes Dharmapala as one of the greatest kings that ever ruled in Bengal and one who raised the glory of the kingdom to great heights. It may be mentioned that in the famous tripartite struggle between the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas, to establish control over northern India, Dharmapala played a very crucial role. In fact for a while he managed to attain a supreme position in north India. According to R.C. Majumdar, Dharmapala spent his whole life in military campaigns. After having suffered defeat at the hands of Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas, he went on to establish an empire that embraced a considerable part of northern India. Details about his reign are known mostly from copper plate inscriptions found at a place called Khalimpur. Apart from his military campaigns, Dharmapala is also known for his patronage of Buddhism. He founded many Buddhist monasteries but, it was the famous Vikramshila University founded by him, that earned him a lot of fame.

² This part has been taken from MHI 04, Block 2. It is based on selected sections.

Dharmapala was succeeded by his son Devapala who ruled for about 40 years. According to R.C. Majumdar his fame had reached as far as the distant isles of the Indian Archipelago. Devapala also emerged as a powerful king. Devapala was the last among the line of powerful kings of the Pala dynasty. He was succeeded by Vigrahapala, who ruled for a short period. It is said that Vigrahapala preferred an ascetic life to an aggressive military career. He was followed in succession by Narayanapala, whose reign saw the decline of the glorious rule established by the Palas.

Of the Pala kings, both Dharmapala and Devapala, won fame and glory through their victories in the famous Tripartite struggle. This was a struggle amongst the Pratiharas, Palas and Rashtrakutas for gaining victory over the imperial capital of Kannauj and for establishing control over northern India.

About the same time that the Palas had established a strong monarchy in Bengal, the Pratiharas under their king, Vatsaraja, seemed to have ruled over large parts of Rajputana and central India. While the Palas were expanding in a westward direction, the Pratiharas were expanding their kingdom towards the East. Conflict between the two powers was thus inevitable. By the time the first encounter between the two took place, the Palas seemed to have extended their kingdom at least as far as Prayagraj (earlier Allahabad). It is not clear who the Pala king was at that time. It may have been either Gopala or Dharmapala.

In the meantime, rulers of the Rashtrakuta dynasty, who had already established their supremacy in the Deccan were trying to extend their dominance over north India. The Rashtrakuta king Dhruva having crossed the Vindhya, first defeated the Pratihara king Vatsaraja and then advanced upon Dharmapala and defeated him. With this encounter which took place somewhere in the Ganga Yamuna *doab*, began the Tripartite struggle for supremacy between the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas.

Though the Rashtrakutas achieved complete triumph in the beginning, the death of Dhruva was followed by chaos in the Rashtrakuta kingdom. Dhruva's son Govinda III was engaged in a struggle against an alliance of twelve kings of south India. The Palas and Pratiharas made use of the respite that this development gave them. Of the two, Dharmapala was quick to recover. He took advantage of this and made his suzerainty to be acknowledged by almost all important states of north India. He managed to capture Kannauj and place his own nominee on the throne. He held a great imperial assembly in the presence of a large number of vassal kings at Kannauj. In this assembly he consecrated himself as the overlord of the whole of northern India. At this time Dharmapala's suzerainty was accepted in areas covering central Punjab, and probably extended upto the Sindhu, Kangra valley, East Punjab, Jaipur, Malwa and probably also Berar. This is inferred from the list of vassal chiefs who attended his imperial assembly. With this event, Bengal emerged from oblivion and rose to the position of a supreme power in north India. The king of Bengal became the supreme head of an empire that stretched from the western part of north India to the east up to central India.

However, this situation did not last for long, given the ever-changing nature of political control during this period. The Pratiharas managed to recover under the leadership of Nagabhata, the son and successor of Vatsaraja. Nagabhata attacked

and defeated the nominee whom Dharmapala had placed on the throne of Kannauj, which resulted in a conflict with Dharmapala himself. In a battle fought against Dharmapala, Nagabhata emerged victorious. After this success, Nagabhata conquered several territories, including a large portion of the territories under the control of Dharmapala.

In this situation, Dharmapala probably sought the aid of Govinda III, the Rashtrakuta king, to check the advances of Nagabhata. Govinda III, either in response to this or on his own initiative, undertook a military expedition to north India. Nagabhata who was unable to resist such an onslaught was forced to flee. His territory was overrun by the Rashtrakutas who then proceeded northwards. However, even after establishing an empire that stretched from south to north Govinda III was unable to sustain his conquests, due to internal dissensions within the empire. In this scenario, Dharmapala managed to gain the upper hand. He seems to have recovered his empire to a large extent. At the time of his death around 815 C.E., his son Devapala became the undisputed ruler of a large part of north India. He is said to have defeated the Dravidas, Gurjaras and Hunas and conquered Utkala and Kamarupa. The court poet described his empire as extending from the Himalayas in the north to the Vindhya in the south and from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian sea in the west.

We have already discussed how the power of the Palas gradually declined after the reign of Devapala. The Palas henceforth ruled as a local power in eastern India. They continually faced invasions and occasional raids by the Kalachuris, Candellas and Rashtrakutas who sometimes conquered portions of their territory. North and west Bengal were occupied by the Kambojas in the latter half of the 10th century. Taking advantage of this the Kalachuris advanced against the Palas as far as Mithila. Around the same time, the Chola king Rajendra Chola and a Chalukya king also invaded the Pala territories. It goes to the credit of Mahipala I, the reigning Pala king of the time, to have defended his kingdom successfully against the Kalachuris, Cholas and Chalukyas and also to have recovered territories from the Kambojas. But south and west Bengal were ruled by several independent chiefs and was not under the control of the Palas.

However, Mahipala's successor, Nayapala and his successor Vignahapala III continued to be engaged in a constant struggle against the Kalachuris of Tripuri. Vignahapala III was succeeded by his son Mahipala II whose reign witnessed a lot of upheavals. Some of the vassal chiefs rose against him. Mahipala II tried to resist these vassals, but was defeated and killed. Divya, an official who belonged to the Kaivarta caste established control over north Bengal. Mahipala II's brothers Surapala II and Ramapala took shelter in Magadha. Surapala II died soon after and Ramapala took over, but by this time practically the whole of Bengal had passed out of Pala control. A dynasty of kings with names ending in Varman, ruled over east Bengal, while Divya the rebel Kaivarta chief ruled over north Bengal. The remaining territories of Bengal were under the control of different independent chiefs who perhaps still nominally acknowledged the overlordship of the Palas.

Ramapala was able to mobilise the support of a large number of chiefs who helped him to defeat and kill the son of Divya and wrest back north Bengal. Ramapala also forced the Varman ruler of east Bengal to submit to his authority. He also

conquered Kamarupa and sent an expedition against the Gahadavalas. He also interfered in the politics of Odisha. In short, Ramapala was successful in restoring the strength and prestige of the Pala kingdom to a large extent. However, the Pala kingdom disintegrated during the reign of his two sons Kumarapala and Madanapala.

After going through this brief sketch of political events of the early medieval period in north India you may be wondering how to make sense of all these details of dynastic accounts, battles, victories and defeats. After all, the study of history goes far beyond mere listing of political events, and deal mainly with the analysis of political processes and social and economic formations. Of what use, then are these sketches of dynastic histories of the different regions, to a modern day historian. Well, as B.D. Chattopadhyay points out, “Even the seemingly bewildering variety of details of the political history of early medieval India – the absurdly long genealogies, the inflated records of achievements of microscopic kingdoms, the rapidity of the rise and fall of centres of power – are ultimately manifestations of the way in which the polity evolved in the period and hence is worthy, not so much of cataloguing, but of serious analysis.”

3.6 THE NATURE OF POLITY UNDER THE PALAS

The Pala kings (referred to as *Parambhattaraka*, *Parameshwara* and *Maharajadhiraja*) gave land grants to brahmanas, priests and temples. These grants were permanent. They also bestowed land grants on Buddhist monasteries. The land grants carried with them various economic and administrative perquisites. The Pala grants are specifically related to maintenance of law and order and of administration of justice. A Pala grant (802 A.D.) mentions an official in north Bengal called *Dasagramika* who was given one kula of land as inferred from Manu. Land grants were also given to *Kaivartas* who were peasants. The Pala records (land charters) refer to *rajas*, *Rajputras*, *Ranakas*, *Rajarajanakas*, *Mahasamantas*, *Mahasamantadhipatis*, etc. They were probably feudatories who were given lands in lieu of military services. There is no evidence for sub-infeudation under the Palas. Royal officials are mentioned in the inscriptions who seem to have administered the kingdom comprising of Bengal and Bihar. Some of the titles used for Pala officials are *Maha-daussadhasadhanika*, *Maha-kartakrtika*, *Mahasandhivigrahika*, etc. The Palas operated from several loci of power viz. Pataliputra, Mudgagiri, etc., all located on the Ganga. The victory camps of the Palas were visited by the tributaries. Villages under the Palas were grouped into units of one and ten under the charge of *Gramapati* and *Dasagramika*. They were royal officials responsible for the administration for these units. We have very few epigraphic evidences related to service grants under the Palas.

3.7 KAIVARTA REBELLION³

The rising in revolt of Kaivartas against the Pala kings occurred in the last quarter of the eleventh century. It formed the main theme of Sandhyakaranandin's Ramacharita. This so-called rebellion occupies an important place in the history

³ This section on Kaivarta Rebellion is written by Dr. Suchi Dayal, Academic Consultant, SOSS, IGNOU.

of Bengal. This rebellion overthrew the Palas, ousting from their ancestral territory of Varendra. Soon after with the weakening of the control of the Palas, the Senas emerged victorious and took the place of the Palas. They were successful in integrating almost all the sub-regions of Bengal. Various kinds of studies have been done on this rebellion. The early works considered it a revolt of *samantas* which occurred due to the weakening of the Palas. R.S. Sharma, on the other hand takes it as an instance of peasant revolt which emerged due to feudal suppression.

The Kaivarta chief Divya rose in revolt against the reigning Pala king Mahipala. The Palas were ousted from Varendra, their ancestral stronghold and the king was killed. His younger brother Ramapala tried to get the support of the *samantas* to recapture Varendra. Thereafter Sivaraja, a subordinate of the king raided Varendra and captured and devastated parts of it. This was followed by an onslaught by the Pala army. Ramapala invaded Varendra and confronted Bhima, the nephew of Divya. He succeeded in recapturing Varendra and executed Bhima.

Recent research on Kaivartas has revealed that the rebellion underlined the fluctuating power relations between the Palas and the *samantas*. The *samantas* were ambitious enough to plot the weakening of the Pala power at the apex that would allow them to encroach upon royal rights and prerogatives. These included the control over the donated tracts of land to religious institutions. Donations of land to religious bodies was a royal prerogative and by ousting the Palas the *samantas* hoped to assume control over these assets. The Pala attempts to curtail the power of the *samantas* by changing the nature of land grants also became a cause for friction. In the later phase of the rebellion other social groups extended their support to the rebels and the rebellion assumed the character of a mass uprising. The social cause of unrest was the taxation imposed by the Pala regime. The growing power of the brahmana donees afforded them greater control over the labour power and the agrarian resources of the countryside. Besides this, the brahmana functionaries assisted the royal administration in assuming a tighter fiscal control enabled by the accurate estimation of production. The *samantas* had to wrestle with the brahmanas who as agents of royal power exercised control over the localities. The rebellion forced the Palas to follow a policy of appeasement of the cultivators and they tried to resume regular cultivation. Though the Palas were successful in recapturing their stronghold, Varendra, and crushing the rebellion, their position weakened considerably due to their continued dependence on the *samantas*. As a result they were ousted out of Bengal and the next rulers, the Senas, were able to successfully come to power.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Describe the polity and achievements of the Palas in the early medieval period.

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- 2) Write a note on Kaivarta rebellion.

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3.8 SUMMARY

The history of the Rashtrakutas is considered as an important phase in the history of India. From the collapse of the Chalukyas of Badami to the revival of Chalukya power under Taila II at Kalyani is roughly two centuries, and during this long interval the line of Rashtrakutas started by Dantidurga continued to rule western Deccan. The circle became complete. Their direct rule was confined to the area that is called Rattapadi seven and a half lakhs in Tamil inscriptions. In the north, the Pratiharas and the Palas were defeated in wars by the Rashtrakutas, and the Paramaras became their vassals. In the south, the Ganga country was a viceroyalty under the Rashtrakutas for many years, and the rising empire of the Cholas suffered a severe loss. In the eastern half of the Deccan, the Rashtrakutas tried to bring the Chalukyas of Vengi under control. A series of battles strained the resources of the state and gave rise to feudal conditions and the growth of mighty vassals who disturbed the peace of the realm and ultimately overthrew the Rashtrakuta power. The tripartite struggle among the three powers – Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas — was an important political development of this period. The nature of polity under the Rashtrakutas and the Palas helps us to understand the characteristic features of the polity of this period. These included land grants issued by the state for religious and secular purpose, emergence of feudatories within the state system and the transformation of lineages into ruling groups who established supra-local state structures.

3.9 KEY WORDS

<i>Palidhvaja</i>	: Royal banner.
<i>Paramesvara</i>	: Devotee of Shiva.
<i>AGungajivita</i>	: Award for extraordinary military service.
<i>Rashtramahattara</i>	: Official of province.
<i>Agrahara</i>	: Brahmin village.

3.10 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) (a) True (b) True (c) False (d) True (e) True
- 2) The Pratiharas, the Palas, the Cholas, the Pallavas, the Eastern Chalukyas.
- 3) See Sections 3.3.
- 4) See Section 3.3.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See Sections 3.5 and 3.6.
- 2) See Section 3.7

3.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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