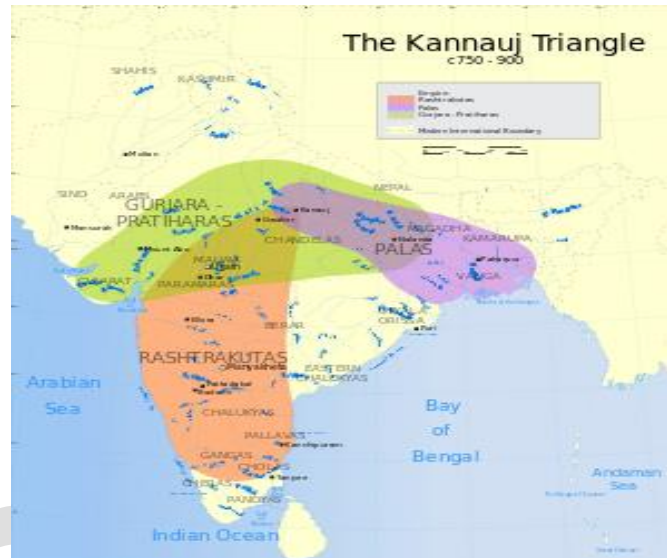


CHAPTER THREE - KINGDOMS OF THE NORTH (A.D. 800-1200)

The post– Gupta period in northern India was mainly the age of small kingdoms. There were three large kingdoms in the period from about A.D. 750 to 1000 which continually fought each other and tried to gain control over northern India. None of them succeeded for any length of time.



STRUGGLE FOR KANNAUJ

Many of the campaigns in northern India were fought over the city of Kanauj. This had been the capital of Harasha and remained an important city. It was well-situated in the northern plain because whoever captured Kanauj could control the Ganga valley. Three major kingdoms were involved in this struggle, and they occupied Kanauj in return. The three kingdoms were those of the **Rashtrakutas, the Pratiharas and the Palas**.

RASHTRAKUTAS

The Rashtrakutas were ruled in the northern Deccan in the region around Nasik. Their capital was at Malkhed. They had been fighting in the peninsula with the Pallavas and the Chalukyas. But they had an ambitious king, **Amoghavarsha**, who attempted to control the north by capturing Kanauj.

PRATI HARAS

The Pratiharas ruled in Avanti and parts of southern Rajasthan. They had once been a family of local officials but were now an independent dynasty of kings. They first became powerful after defeating **mlechchhas**. The term '*mlechchha*' refers to a person who is a barbarian or outcaste, and it was used to describe most foreigners. Probably, the reference is for the Arabs.



PALAS

- The Palas ruled for about four hundred years and their kingdom consisted of almost the whole of Ben- gal and much of Bihar. The first Pala king was Gopala.
- **Gopala I** was succeeded by his son **Dharmapala** (770–815 CE) who made the Pala kingdom a force to reckon with. Dharmapala proved to be a great patron of Buddhism. He founded the Vikramasila monastery in Bhagalpur district in Bihar, which developed into a great centre of Buddhist learning and culture.

Palas did not hold Kanauj for very long. The Pratiharas recovered their strength during the reign of King Bhoja. He ruled from about A.D. 836 to 882 and was the most renowned king of northern India at that time. He was a mighty warrior and recaptured Kanauj for the Pratiharas. However, when Bhoja tried to attack the Rashtrakutas, he was defeated by the famous Rashtrakuta king, Dhruva.

In 916, the Rashtrakutas reorganized their power and again attacked Kanauj. But by now, all three kingdoms were exhausted by their continuous struggle. Within a hundred years, all three kingdoms had declined.

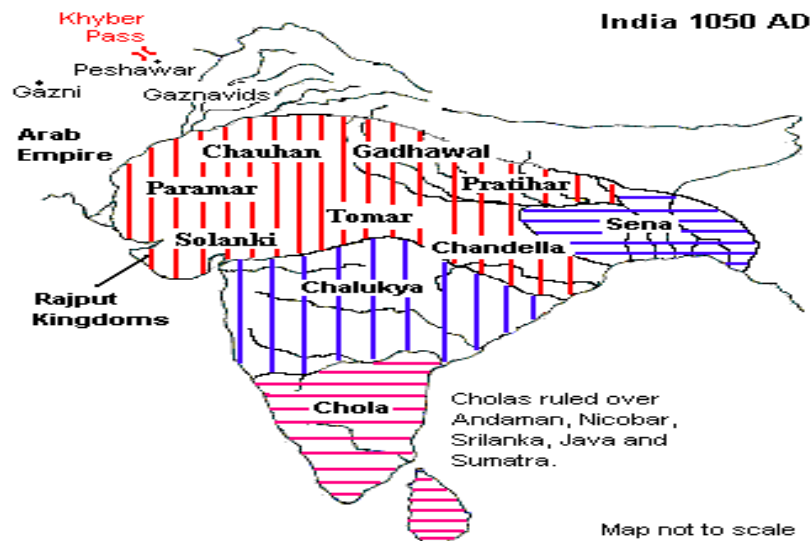
THE RAJPUTS

ORIGIN AND EXTENT

- Historians believe that some of the Rajputs belonged to certain Central Asian tribes which settled in India after the Huns had invaded northern India.
- They were divided into **clans**. The Rajputs always insisted that they were of the **Kshatriya** caste. Their kings ordered family histories to be written which connected them with either the sun-family (**surya-vamshi**) or the moon-family (**chandra-vamsha**) of ancient Indian kings.
- There were four clans which claimed that they had not descended from either of these two families, but from the fire-family (agni-kula): **Pratiharas** who ruled over Kannauj , **Chauhans** ruled in central Rajasthan, **Solankis** ruled in Kathiawar region and **Parmaras** (Pawar) ruled in the Malwa region.
- Other minor rulers also became powerful and gradually built small kingdoms in various parts of northern India; example **Tomars**, who ruled in areas of Harayana and Delhi region. Tomaras built the city of Dhillka (Delhi) in A.D. 736. Prithviraj III, who is the hero of the famous ballad Prithviraja-raso composed later by the Hindi poet Chandbardai, defeated Tomars.

These kingdoms were always fighting each other largely to show off their strength. All these battles made them weak. When they were threatened by invasions from the north-west, they could not defend themselves properly. The first of these invaders was **Mahmud of Ghazni**.





MUSLIM INVADERS

MAHMUD OF GHAZNI

- Ghazni was a small kingdom in Afghanistan which was founded by a Turkish nobleman. One of its decedents **Mahmud** wanted to conquer power in Central Asia. For which, a well-maintained army was required, which in turn, need finances. For this, he planned on raiding India in order to bring back wealth and thus, build a large army to conquer Central Asia.
- The **first raid began in A.D. 1000**. In a short period of twenty-five years, Mahmud made **seventeen raids**. Between A.D. 1010 ad 1025, Mahmud attacked only the temple towns of northern India.
- One of the famous raids was the destruction of the temple in Somnath in western India.
- In addition to this, Mahmud was a patron of arts. He was a patron of the famous Persian poet. His poet, **Firdausi**, wrote the epic poem **Shah Namah**. Mahmud also sent the control of his general Qutb-ud-din Central Asian scholar **Alberuni** to India, who wrote an excellent book on India, describing the country and the condition of the people.

MUHAMMAD GHORI

- Later towards the end of the twelfth century, came the **invasion of Muhammad Ghori**, who was the ruler of a small kingdom in Afghanistan. But he was interested in conquering northern India and adding it to his kingdom, and not merely in getting gold and jewellery.
- His most important campaign in India was of northern India against the Chauhan ruler, Prithviraj. Muhammad defeated him in the **second battle of Tarain in 1192**.



- He thus consolidated his power in Delhi, but he was killed in 1206. He had left behind a slave Qutubddin Aibak who came to control Delhi and laid the foundation of Delhi Sultanate.

STATE OF SOCIETY

In a short period of fourteen years, the Turks had succeeded in conquering many of the important cities and trade routes of northern India. The answer lies not only in the political activities of the north Indian kingdoms but in the way their economy and society were organized.

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

FEUDALISTIC ORGANIZATION

- In the Medieval period, many officers had begun to claim that they owned the land as well. The systems of paying salaries by grants or revenue of land increased in the medieval period. Persons who received such grants, that is, the grantees of feudatories came to be called by various titles, such as thakur.
- Another big group of grantees were brahmins and learned men who were often actually given the land as well as the right to collect the revenue from the land. Such grants were called agrahara or brahmadeya grants.
- As the number of grantees increased, more and more land went into the hands of the grantees. Therefore, the total amount of revenue which came to the king decreased.
- Also, feudatory often fought among themselves and often when they felt powerful, broke away from the kingdom.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

- Attendees of the court of the king were not only the **feudatories** but also the **wealthy brahmins**. Land-owning brahmins lived in great comfort as they did not even cultivate the land themselves. It was cultivated by the **shudra peasants** for them.
- Of all the groups in society, the shudras had the most difficult life. They were the poorest because most of them were either cultivators or peasants.
- Apart from the shudras, there were the **untouchables** who continued to do the lowly work.
- People living in towns were still mainly **artisans and traders**. Trade with the Mediterranean world and western Asia was well developed largely due to the Arab traders living on the west coast of India.

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

- The Brahmins were responsible not only for performing religious ceremonies but also for teaching. The schools were held in the temples where the higher caste children were taught.



- The interest in science was declining; Indian scholars were not interested in making new discoveries. Discoveries by Aryabhatt were mixed up with ignorant and superstitious ideas about astrology.
- In the Arab countries and in China, there was a great advancement in knowledge during this period. India was, therefore, getting left behind.
- Sanskrit was still the language of learning and of literature. The most popular works in Sanskrit were the **Katha-saritasagara**, a collection of stories, Bilhana's **Vikramankadeva-charita**, **Kalhana's** remarkable history of Kashmir called the **Rajata rangani**.
- The worship of Krishna had increased in northern India and the story of the love of Radha and Krishna became very popular. Many poems were written on this theme and **Jayadeva's Gita Govinda** was one of these.
- In addition to Sanskrit, other languages were developing.

RELIGION

- The development of these new languages was helped by the spread of **bhakti teaching** in Hinduism.
- This was begun by the **Tamil devotional saints** in south India and it slowly spread northwards. The bhakti teachers generally **used the languages of the region** because they frequently **preached to the lower caste people**.
- It was the increasing popularity of the bhakti movement, which led to the decline of Buddhism. When the Turks attacked the monastery at Nalanda, the Buddhist monks fled to various parts of South-East Asia.

ARCHITECTURE AND PAINTING

- The temples at Khajuraho in Central India were built by the Chandella kings, Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- Mt. Abu (in Rajasthan), an impressive group of Jaina temples, was built in white marble.
- The Pala kings were patrons of Buddhism and Hinduism. Their religious buildings were ornamented with images of various deities either made of bronze or carved from local black stone.
- Apart from architecture and sculpture, the art of painting was also practised. The older tradition of mural painting continued to be used to decorate the walls of temples and palaces.
- Another type of paintings which was started during this period was **miniature painting, i.e.,** painting tiny pictures as illustrations to books. The Jaina monks of western India and the Buddhists in Nepal and eastern India were very fond of illustrating their manuscripts.

