



### Genealogies:

Most prashastis also mention the ancestors of the ruler. This one mentions Samudragupta's great grandfather, grandfather, father and mother. His mother, Kumara Devi, belonged to the Licchavi gana, while his father, Chandragupta, was the first ruler of the Gupta dynasty to adopt the grand title of maharajadhiraja, a title that Samudragupta also used. His great grandfather and grandfather are mentioned simply as maharajas. It seems as if the family gradually rose to importance.

### Harshavardhana and the Harshacharita:

Harshavardhana, who ruled nearly 400 years, was one such ruler. His court poet, Banabhatta, wrote his biography, the Harshacharita, in Sanskrit. This gives us the generosity of Harsha, and ends with his becoming king. Xuan Zang, about whom you read in chapter 10, also spent a lot of time at Harsha's court and left a detailed account of what he saw.

Harsha was not the eldest son of his father, but became king of Thanesar after both his father and elder brother died. His brother-in-law was the ruler of Kanauj and he was killed by the ruler of Bengal. Harsha took over the kingdom of Kanauj, and then led an army against the ruler of Bengal.

Although he was successful in the east, and conquered both Magadha and Bengal, he was not as successful elsewhere. He tried to cross the Narmada to march into the Deccan, but was stopped by a ruler belonging to the Chalukya dynasty, Pulakeshin II.

### The Pallavas, Chalukyas and Pulakeshin's Prashasti:

The Pallavas and Chalukyas were the most important ruling dynasties in south India during this period. The kingdom of the Pallavas spread from the region around their capital, Kanchipuram, to the Kaveri delta, while that of the Chalukyas was centered around the Raichur Doab, between the rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra.

Aihole, the capital of the Chalukyas, was an important trading centre. It developed as a religious centre, with a number of temples. The Pallavas and Chalukyas frequently raided one another's lands, especially attacking the capital cities, which were prosperous towns.

The best-known Chalukya ruler was Pulakeshin II. We know about him from a prashasti, composed by his court poet Ravikirti. This tells us about his ancestors, who are traced back through four generations from father to son. Pulakeshin evidently got the kingdom from his uncle.

According to Ravikirti, he led expeditions along both the west and the east coasts. Besides, he checked the advance of Harsha. There is an interesting play of words in the poem. Harsha means happiness. The poet says that after this defeat, Harsha was no longer Harsha! Pulakeshin also attacked the Pallava king, who took shelter behind the walls of Kanchipuram.

But the Chalukya victory was short-lived. Ultimately, both the Pallavas and the Chalukyas gave way to new rulers belonging to the Rashtrakuta and Chola dynasties.

How were these kingdoms administered?

As in the case of earlier kings, land revenue remained important for these rulers, and the village remained the basic unit of administration.



## 6<sup>th</sup> – New Empires and Kingdoms II



There were some new developments as well. Kings adopted a number of steps to win the support of men who were powerful, either economically, or socially, or because of their political and military strength. For instance:

- Some important administrative posts were now hereditary. This means that sons succeeded fathers to these posts. For example, the poet Harishena was a mahadanda-nayaka, or chief judicial officer, like his father.
- Sometime, one person held many offices. For instance, besides being a mahadanda-nayaka, Harishena was a kumar-amatya, meaning an important minister, and a sandhi-vigrahika, meaning a minister of war and peace.
- Besides, important men probably had a say in local administration. These included the nagara-shreshthi or chief banker or merchant of the city, the sarthavaha or leader of the merchant caravans, the prathama-kulika or the chief craftsman, and the head of the kayasthas or scribes.

### **Assemblies in the southern kingdoms:**

The inscriptions of the Pallavas mention a number of local assemblies. These included the sabha, which was an assembly of Brahmin land Owners. This assembly functioned through sub-committees, which looked after irrigation, agricultural operations, making roads, local temples, etc.

The Ur was a village assembly found in areas where the land owners were not Brahmins. And the nagaram was an Organisation of merchants. It is likely that these assemblies were controlled by rich and powerful landowners and merchants.

### **Ordinary people in the kingdoms:**

Kalidasa is known for his plays depicting life in the king's court. An interesting feature about these plays is that the king and most Brahmins are shown as speaking Sanskrit, while women and men other than the king and Brahmins use prakrit. His most famous play, Abhijnana Shakuntalam, is the story of the love between a king named Dushyanta and a young woman named Shakuntala.

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