

UNIT 35 KINGDOMS IN THE DECCAN AND SOUTH INDIA

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35.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to learn about:

- the kingdoms that arose in the Deccan and South India with special reference to the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas of Kanchi,
- the relations between these kingdoms,
- the role of geography in understanding the political history of our period, and
- how people were governed in these kingdoms.

35.1 INTRODUCTION

People often speak of India south of the Vindhyas as South India or the Deccan. This division has been made for a long time, indeed as early as ancient India when the area south of the Vindhyas was called **Dakshinapatha** or the Southern Territory. **Dakhina** became the **Dakkan** of medieval times, from which in turn the term Deccan is derived. But historians and geographers have found it more useful to distinguish the Deccan proper from the rest of south India. The Deccan consists of Maharashtra and northern Karnataka, and as far as the double deltas of the Godavari and the Krishna. Following this usage, we shall speak of the Deccan and south India as the two regions south of the Vindhyas while the term 'southern India' will stand for both the regions and as distinct from 'northern India.' You will appreciate the value of these distinctions more and more as you go deeper into the study of the history and society of this area.

In Block-7 you have read about the political development which took place in the Deccan and south India in the Mauryan and post-Mauryan period. You have noticed that while the Deccan was included in the Mauryan empire, the major chiefdoms of south India, i.e. those of the Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras and Satiyaputras were friendly neighbours of the Mauryas. In the post-Mauryan period, initially minor chiefs assuming the title of **raja** or King

appeared in the Deccan and the Deccan was politically integrated by the Satavahanas who called themselves 'Lords of the Deccan'. In the south, too, the chiefdoms were going through important changes resulting in the emergence of State systems in the subsequent period. In this Unit you shall be reading about the political situation which developed in the Deccan from the post-Satavahana period (beginning of the third century A.D.) to the eighth century A.D.

35.2 POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE DECCAN TILL THE MID-SIXTH CENTURY A.D.

After the decline of the Satavahanas the political control of the Deccan under one dynasty came to an end. A number of kingdoms arose in different regions as successors of the Satavahanas. In northern Maharashtra we see the Abhiras, who for a time served as army commanders in the Saka kingdoms, founding a kingdom in mid-third century A.D. The founder of this line was one Isvarasena, who began an era in A.D. 248-49. This era became very important later and came to be known as Kalachuri-Chedi Era.

35.2.1 Vidarbha (Maharashtra)

The Maharashtra plateau soon came to be dominated by the Vakatakas. They began as minor kings from the last quarter of the third century A.D., but rapidly gained in power and extended their sway over most of Maharashtra and adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh. There were two lines of Vakataka kings ruling in different areas. The main line ruled from eastern Maharashtra (the Vidarbha region) while a collateral branch, called the Basin branch of the Vakatakas, ruled in southern Maharashtra. The most famous Vakataka King was Pravarasena-I of the main line, who alone had the title of **Samrat** among the Vakatakas. He performed several Vedic sacrifices and issued a large number of landgrants to brahmanas. The Vakatakas seem to have been peace-loving people on the whole and had formed matrimonial and diplomatic ties with their powerful neighbours such as the Guptas in the north, the Vishnukundins in eastern Deccan and the Kadambas in the south. But the break-up and weakening of the kingdom could not be prevented as the Kalachuris and the Kadambas carved out their territories at its cost in the first-half of the sixth century A.D. By the mid-sixth century they were supplanted by the Chalukyas of Badami as the major power in the Deccan.

35.2.2 Karnataka

In the coastal strip of northern Karnataka (North Kanara) and adjoining areas a small kingdom was carved out by the Chutus. They ruled till about the mid-fourth century A.D. when they were supplanted by the Kadambas. This kingdom was founded by the famous Mayurasarman, who was an expert in guerrilla warfare and compelled the Pallavas of Kanchi to recognize his sovereignty. He then performed horse sacrifices (**asvamedha**) and became Mayuravarman from Mayurasarman, that is, a kshatriya from a brahmana (Varman was a typical kshatriya surname while 'sarman' was a brahmana surname). Early in its history there was a division of the Kadamba kingdom into two parts between the two lines of the family, with Vaijayanti (Banavasi) and Palasika (Halsi) as the capitals. The two lines were never in peace with each other, and both were threatened by their more powerful neighbours—the Pallavas, the Western Gangas, and, above all, the Chalukyas of Badami. The Chalukyas gradually ate into their territory, and by about 575 A.D. completely vanquished them.

35.2.3 Eastern Deccan

Politically the most disturbed region in the post-Satavahana Deccan was the fertile Krishna-Godavari delta (Andhra delta) in the east. Here the Satavahanas were succeeded by the Ikshvakus who were in control of this region from 225 A.D. There was a break in their rule by the coming of Abhiras from the west, but it was a brief interregnum, and the Ikshvakus came back and ruled for the next fifty years or so. Then the area was apparently split up into a number of principalities. From copper-plate inscriptions we come to know of the kings of Brihatphaláyana **gotra** followed by those of Salankayana **gotra**, while the Allahabad Pillar Inscription or the Prayagaprasasti (See Block 8, Unit 32) which praises Samudragupta,

informs us about half a dozen kingdoms in this area about 350 A.D. These included kingdoms of Vengi; of Kurla, with capitals at Pishtapura and at Avamukta of Devarashtra, and so on.

Political stability returned to the Andhra delta from the mid-fifth century with the coming of the Vishnukundins. They had good relations with the Vaktakas, but had prolonged, continued conflicts with the Western Gangas of south Karnataka. Madhavarman-I (440-60 A.D.), the founder of the line who performed many horse sacrifices, and Madhavavarman-II (556-616 A.D.) are among the famous rulers of the line. The Vishnukundins ruled till about the first quarter of the seventh century A.D. when the Chalukyas came in.

35.2.4 South Karnataka

In south Karnataka there arose a dynasty at the beginning of the fifth century A.D. The kings of this dynasty are called Gangas or Western Gangas to distinguish them from the Eastern Ganges of Orissa. The Western Gangas ruled over south Karnataka for the next six hundred years: because of such a long association the area came to be called Gangavadi. Gangavadi is an isolated territory surrounded by mountains and is relatively less prosperous agriculturally. Both these factors allowed the Gangas to rule without much interference from outsiders for such a long time. They were, however, very advantageously situated from a military point of view. They were to play a very important role in the mutual conflicts between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas of Badami mostly as subordinate allies of the latter, as well as in the conflict between the Pallavas and the Pandyas. They did not generally have cordial relations with the Pallavas, who they were well placed to harass from their lofty mountain fortress of Nandidrug.

35.3 POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH INDIA

The Sangam period in Tamilnadu and Kerala drew to a close about the end of the third century A.D. The history of this area from the fourth to the mid-sixth century A.D. is very obscure. The early history of the Pallavas belongs to this period. We have their copper-plate charters that were issued from Kanchi. Pallava rule was traditionally associated with the Kanchi region (Palar river valley) or Tondaimandalam (**tondai** is Tamil for **Pallava**). But it seems that during this period the Kanchi region was not under their effective control as they had been pushed north by mountainous tribes called Kalabhras

In fact, from the end of the Sangam period to the mid-sixth century A.D., Tamilnadu and Kerala were dominated by the Kalabhras. We do not know much about them, but it has been inferred from the scanty evidence that they were against brahmanical institutions and favourably disposed towards Buddhism and Jainism, that they put an end to the rule of the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas of the Sangam age, and that they were non-agricultural hill tribes who caused great havoc among settled agricultural population. The Kalabhra threat seems to have extended to the borders of the Chalukyas kingdom which emerged in north Karnataka for they too claim to have defeated them. This period is known as the 'Kalabhra Interregnum'.

35.4 THE RISE OF THE CHALUKYAS, THE PALLAVAS AND THE PANDYAS

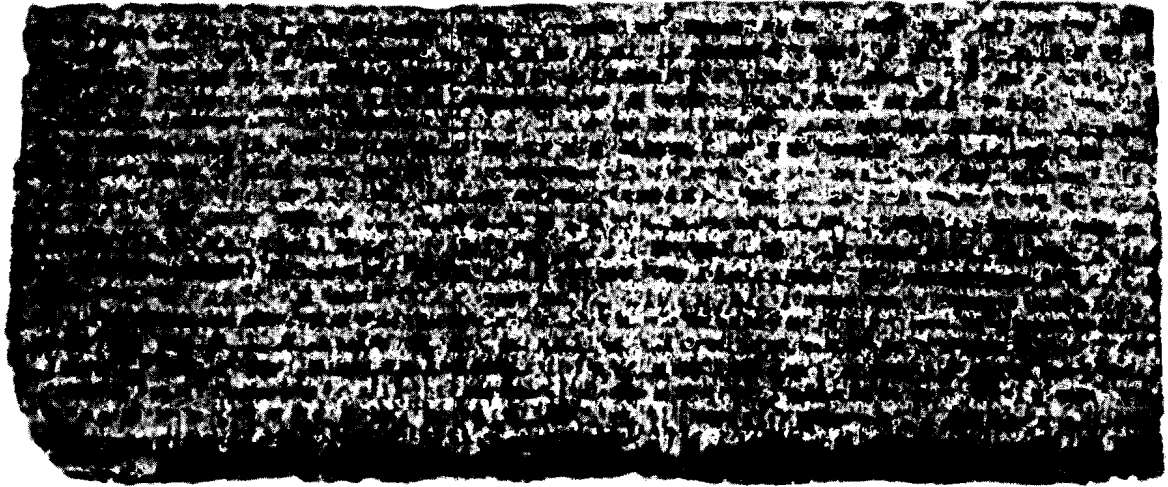
From the mid-sixth century A.D. the political scene in the Deccan and south India was dominated by the activities of three powers: the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi, and the Pandyas of Madura.

35.4.1 The Chalukyas

The Chalukyas became a sovereign power with Pulakesin-I. He laid the foundations of his kingdom by making the hill near Badami in the Bijapur district of Karnataka into a strong, fortress in 543-44 A.D. and performed a horse sacrifice. His successors overthrew the Kadambas and annexed their kingdom gradually, and also subjugated the Mauryas of Konkan (the coastal strip of Maharashtra). With the expeditions of Pulakesin-II the

Chalukyas became the Paramount power in the Deccan as the Western Gangas and the Alupas in the south and the Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras in the north offered their submission to him. The army of Pulakesin-II checked the forces of Harshavardhana on the banks of the Narmada.

Pulakesin-II also defeated the Vishnukundins of Andhra delta. But he was not satisfied with demanding just offers of submission as the Krishna-Godavari delta with almost one million acres of rich arable land was too valuable a possession. So about 621 A.D. he sent his younger brother Vishnuvardhana to consolidate the conquest and take over the area. In 631 A.D. Vishnuvardhana was allowed to form his own kingdom. Thus, began the line of the Chalukyas of Vengi or Eastern Chalukyas, who remained in control of the area for more than five hundred years.



9. Aihole Inscription of Pulakesin-II

35.4.2 The Pallavas

The rise of the Pallavas began with Simhavishnu about the middle of the sixth century A.D. He put an end to the Kalabhra Interregnum in Tandaimandalam (Kanchi Region), and extended his kingdom southward up to the Kaveri delta. He was succeeded by Mahendravarman-I, who annexed territories in the north up to the river Krishna. The Pallava kings also secured submission from the neighbouring chieftains and kings, and thus reached the zone of influence of the Chalukyas of Badami, and of the Pandyas. Even the Pandyas had to accept their overlordship briefly. Thus by the middle of the seventh century A.D. the Pallavas had set up a powerful regional kingdom in south India. Their power began to weaken from the mid-eighth century when the Chalukyas were being replaced by the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. By the early tenth century A.D. the Pallava rule came to an end when Aparajata was defeated by Aditya Chola-I.

35.4.3 The Pandyas

The Pandyas come to light with king Kadungon towards the close of the sixth century A.D. when he suppressed the Kalabhras. The Pandyas ruled in the southernmost districts of Tamilnadu, with the Vaigai river basin as the heartland of the kingdom. They constantly tried to extend their sway over the Kaveri delta in the north and Cera country (Kerala) in the southwest.

35.4.4 Other Powers

The Gangas continued to rule in Gangavadi in south Karnataka. Besides, there were several other small kingdoms and chieftaincies in the Deccan and south India at this time, such as the Nolambas, the Banas, the Silaharas, etc. Unlike in northern India there are no continuous stretches of river valleys and plains here. The major river valleys such as the Raichur Doab (between the Tungabhadra and the Krishna), the Krishna-Godavari delta, the lower Kaveri valley and the Vaigai valley are separated from each other by rugged mountainous

territories. Moreover, there were vast tracts of forests in the hilly and mountainous areas. All this encouraged political fragmentation and allowed small political units to survive in isolated pockets of habitation. The above-mentioned important river valleys could and did support greater kingdoms such as the Chalukyas of Badami (Raichur Doab), the Pallavas (Palar river valley), and so on. But it was a difficult task for any one of the regional kingdoms to extend its sway over the rest, much more difficult than in the case of northern India. This comes out very clearly in the following account of the mutual conflicts of the Chalukyas, the Pallavas and the Pandyas.

35.5 CONFLICTS BETWEEN DIFFERENT POWERS

The political history of this period is marked by frequent wars between the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas, and between Pandyas and the Pallavas. Hostilities began with the raid of Chalukyas Pulakesin-II, who defeated Mahendravarman and occupied the northern part of Pallava kingdom. In another campaign he vanquished the Banas (the 'feudatories' of the pallavas in Rayalseema) and once again threatened Kanchi. But he was badly defeated in several battles by Narasimhavarman-I, who had succeeded Mahendravarman. Narasimhavarman then attacked the Chalukyas, captured Badami and probably killed Pulakesin-II. The situation was saved by the latter's son Vikramaditya-I. He drove out the Pallavas, formed an alliance with the Pandyas, and repeatedly raided into Pallava territory. The reign of one of his successors, Vikramaditya-II, is especially marked in this connection, for he is said to have overrun and looted Kanchi three times.

Without going into the details of particular wars and battles, we may note that the Pallavas had to engage in battles with the Pandyas too.

It is remarkable that in these conflicts it was always the Pallavas who were the target of attack. This was not just because they were situated between the Chalukyas and the Pandyas, but mainly because they were the most prosperous of all. It is significant that it was always the Chalukyas who attacked the Pallavas and that the Pallavas concerned themselves mainly with driving them back into their territory. The only exception was the raid of Narasimhavarman-I into Chalukyan kingdom and his occupation of its capital. But this was a retaliatory move, and was made only once in the entire history of the conflict. Another time Pallava Paramesvaravarman-I launched an expedition into Chalukyan kingdom as a diversionary move. Paramesvaravarman wanted to get rid of the Chalukyan forces occupying his kingdom by diverting their attention.

The same is true of the Pandyas, who fought repeatedly with the Pallavas for the control of the Kaveri delta. The Sangam literature as well as the account of Hiuen-tsang suggests that the Vaigai river valley—the core of Pandyan kingdom—was relatively poor agriculturally. The Pandyas must have realised that if they wanted to be rich and powerful, they would have to control the rich Kaveri delta. They seemed to have fought the Pallavas with this purpose in mind, and by the early ninth century A.D. they eventually came to control this area.

35.5.1 The Role of the Minor Kings

The lesser kings and chieftains took part in the conflict of the regional kingdoms as subordinate allies of one or the other of these powers. Pulakesin-II had to subdue the Banas—allies of the Pallavas—before attacking Narasimhavarman-I. Similarly, Pallava general Udayachandra engaged in battles with Sabara king Udayana and Nishada chieftain Prithivyaghra, who probably sided with the Chalukyas. These subordinate allies shared not only in the plunder but could add new areas to their realm as well.

When we look at the smaller principalities individually, we do not find them worthy of attention. That is because each small kingdom by itself was insignificant, a non-entity. But taken together, they no doubt represent a political force to reckon with in the affairs of the Deccan and south India. Equally striking is the inability of any King from the fourth to the ninth century A.D. to establish his hold over the Deccan and south India. For these six centuries political disunity was the norm despite the energetic efforts and ambitions of a number of kings. As already noted, the broken geography of southern India had a role to play here, in political disunity as well as in the importance of lesser kings and chieftains.

- 3) Discuss the nature of conflicts amongst the powers of south India. What role did the minor kings play in it? Answer in about ten lines.

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35.6 POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Let us briefly discuss the political organisation of these kingdoms.

35.6.1 The King and the Higher Stratum of Administration

We shall now proceed to discuss the patterns of administration that prevailed in these kingdoms. In theory the king was the source of all authority. He assumed high sounding titles such as **maharaja**, **bhattaraka**, **dharmamaharaja** **dhiraja**, etc. In the beginning kingship was governed by the Vedic ideal. We find kings proclaiming in their inscriptions that they performed horse sacrifices (**asvamedha**) and other Vedic sacrifices such as **vajapeya**, **rajasuya**, etc. During this period these sacrifices did not have the social significance they had in the later Vedic period. But they had a special political meaning as they served to underline the independence of a particular king and justified his right to rule. Thus Pulakesin-I, the founder of the Chalukya kingdom performed a horse sacrifice to mark the beginning of his dynastic rule. The same was done by many other kings. Gradually, however, as the religious milieu changed, the ideal of kingship changed too and the practice of making royal Vedic sacrifices fell into disuse.

The King was helped by his ministers at the court. Members of the royal family including the crown prince (**yuvaraja**) took an important part in running the government at higher levels. Then there were a number of officials of various ranks who discharged various administrative duties in the name of the King. An important part of their job was to collect taxes. There was a principal tax on land amount to one-sixth or more of the produce, in addition to a number of miscellaneous taxes such as those on weavers, draught cattle, marriage parties and so on. Besides collecting taxes the state officials maintained law and order and adjudicated cases of crime and civil disputes that came before them.

35.6.2 Administrative Units

The kingdom was divided into a hierarchy of administrative units. In the Deccan these units were called **vishaya**, **ahara**, **rashtra**, etc. From the eight century A.D. there developed a trend in the Deccan of dividing kingdoms into a hierarchy of the multiples of ten villages. Less often a district consisted of twelve villages. In the Pallava kingdom the **nadu** emerged as the main, lasting unit of administration.

The Kings of this period realised the importance of agriculture, the revenue from which was the main basis of their wealth and strength. It is significant that **nadu**, the basic political unit in Pallava (and later in Chola) times, also meant arable land in contrast to **Kadu**, non-cultivable waste. Therefore, the state made all attempts to encourage the extension of agriculture. King Mayurasarman of Kadamba dynasty is said to have brought vast tracts of virgin land to the plough by inviting brahmanas from afar. For probably the same purpose a Pallava King gave away a thousand ploughs. Moreover, as agriculture depended a great deal

on irrigation in south India, the Pallavas took great interest in the provision and maintenance of canals, tanks, lakes and large wells.

35.6.3 Local Associations

A characteristic feature of south Indian polity, especially Pallavan, was the importance of local corporate units in most important aspects of the lives of people. There were innumerable local groups and associations based on caste, craft, profession or religious persuasion. Thus there were associations of handicraftsmen like the weavers, oil pressers etc., of merchants like the Nanadesis, the Manigramam and the Five Hundred of Ayyavole, of students, of ascetics, of temple priests, etc. In addition, there were three important territorial assemblies: **ur**, **sabha** and **nagaram**. **Ur** was a non-brahmanical village assembly, **Sabha** was a village assembly consisting only of brahmanas, and **nagaram** was an assembly where merchantile interests predominated (**nagaram** had some agricultural interests too, however). The members of an assembly used to meet annually while the day-to-day tasks were looked after by a smaller executive body. Each group functioned autonomously in accordance with its own constitution based on custom and usage, and took care of the problems of its members at the local level. In matters affecting people of more than one assembly or association, decision was taken by mutual deliberation.

Local administration through the corporate units greatly lightened the burden of the government. It not only gave a chance to population to air its grievances and problems, but also fixed responsibility on the people themselves for redressing the grievances and solving the problems. This strengthened the basis of the state by minimising opposition to it as the people could not hold the government responsible for these matters.

That is why we do not find the Pallava kings trying to encroach upon the functioning of the local autonomous corporate groups. But they did seek to strengthen their own base by bringing in brahmanas and creating privileged brahmana settlements by making landgrants to brahmanas, either directly (called **brahmadaya** or in the name of a temple (called **devadana**). These brahmana settlements were created all over the core areas of the Pallava kingdom. The 'core areas' were the most prosperous areas based on irrigated rice cultivation, on the prosperity of which the strength of the Pallavas depended. As we have seen, the village assembly of **brahmanas** was called **sabha** or **mahasabha**. During the late Pallava period the **sabha** developed the system of governance through committees. This is known as the committee or *variya*m system. It became a hallmark of self-government in brahmana settlements in south India. The **sabha** managed a number of tasks mostly through these committees—maintenance of tanks and roads, management of charitable donations and of temple affairs, and regulation of irrigation rights.

In the Deccan, the role of local associations and assemblies was less conspicuous. In place of corporate institutions it was the local notables called **mahajanas** who took part in local administration in villages and towns in Chalukya times. In villages the mahajanas had a leader called gamunda (headman). These notables did not enjoy the same kind of autonomy as was the case with south Indian assemblies, but were closely supervised by state officials.

Brahmana settlements, however, were to be found all over the Deccan as well as in South India. We do not know precisely how the brahmanas in the Deccan managed their collective affairs. But since they were all a creation of kings and chiefs they must have looked after the interests of the government in the locality.

35.7 RELATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF RULERS

The relations between big kings and their lesser allies is a matter of controversy. Broadly there are two views about the relations between powerful kings, and minor kings and chieftains. First, it is said that smaller kings and chieftains regarded a big king, especially the Pallavas, as their overlord on religious grounds. The Pallava kings used to participate in elaborate religious ceremonies which gave them a high ritual status. It was this high ritual status that was respected by lesser kings and chiefs. This theory is not supported by historical evidence. It cannot explain how these minor kings could shift their respect from the Pallavas to the Chalukyas, or why they should stop respecting any high ritual status king

in volatile political situations and declare their independence, or why they should again be made to respect the ritual status by force.

The alternative view regards these smaller kings and chieftains as the 'feudatories' of major powers. But 'feudatory' is a technical term which stands for a special kind of relationship that existed in medieval western Europe. We are not sure whether the same relation was there between the Pallavas or the Chalukyas and the lesser kings and chiefs. That is why, we have preferred a neutral term "subordinate ally" to describe the relation of minor political powers with the major ones.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the role of local associations in administration. Answer in about ten lines.

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2) Highlight the relations between different categories of rulers. Answer in about ten lines.

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35.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about the political situation in the Deccan and south India upto the mid-sixth century A.D. After this period we find that the Chalukyas, Pallavas and the Pandyas were the major political powers in the region. There were certain minor powers also but their role was not very significant. The major powers were constantly in conflict with each other and the minor powers did side with one or other major power during these conflicts.

As far as the political organisation is concerned the king remained the central figure of administration and was helped by other officials. A significant feature was the role of local associations in the day-to-day administrative work.

35.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) × b) √ c) √ d) √ e) ×
- 2) Base your answer on Sec. 35.4
- 3) Base your answer on Sec. 35.5

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Base your answer on Sub-sec 35.6.3.
- 2) Base your answer on Sec. 35.7.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Agarawal Ashvini, *Rise and Fall of Imperial Guptas*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi 1989.

Gupta, P.L. *Imperial Guptas*, Varanasi

Nilakanta Shastry, K.A. *A History of South India*, Oxford, N. Delhi. 1974.

Thapar Romila, *History of India* V.I. Pelican, 1983.