Revision Notes
Chapter – 2
New Kings and Kingdoms

Several major ruling dynasties emerged in different parts of the subcontinent between the seventh and twelfth centuries.

The Emergence of New Dynasties:

(i) By the 7th century, there were big landlords or warrior chiefs in different regions of the subcontinent.
(ii) Existing kings often acknowledged them as their **samantas** or subordinates.
(iii) They were expected to bring gifts for their kings or overlords, be present at their courts and provide them with military support. As samantas gained power and wealth, they declared themselves to be maha-samanta, mahamandaleshvara (the great lord of a "circle" or region) and so on. They also asserted their independence from their overlords.
(iv) Initially, the Rashtrakutas were subordinate to the Chalukyas of Karnataka.

- In the mid-eighth century, Dantidurga, a Rashtrakuta chief, overthrew his Chalukya overlord and performed a ritual called hiranya-garbha (literally, the golden womb).
- When this ritual was performed with the help of Brahmanas, it was thought to lead to the "rebirth" of the sacrificer as a Kshatriya, even if he was not one by birth.

(v) In other cases, men from enterprising families used their military skills to carve out kingdoms. For instance, the Kadamba Mayurasharman and the Gurjara- Pratihara Harichandra were Brahmanas who gave up their traditional professions and took to arms,. They successfully established kingdoms in Karnataka and Rajasthan respectively.

Administration in the Kingdoms:

(i) Many of these new kings adopted high-sounding titles such as maharaja-adhiraja (great king, overlord of kings), tribhuvana-chakravartin (lord of the three worlds) and so on.
(ii) However, in spite of such claims, they often shared power with their samantas as well as with associations of peasants, traders and Brahmanas.

(iii) In each of these states, resources were obtained from the producers, that is, peasants, cattle-keepers, artisans, who were often persuaded or compelled to surrender part of what they produced.
(iv) Sometimes, these were claimed as “rent” due to a lord who asserted that he owned the land. Revenue was also collected from traders.
(v) These resources were used to finance the king's establishment as well as for the construction of temples and forts. They were also used to fight wars, which were in turn expected to lead to the acquisition of wealth in the form of plunder, and access to land as well as trade routes.
(vi) The functionaries for collecting revenue were generally recruited from influential families, and positions were often hereditary. This was true about the army as well. In many cases, close relatives of the king held these positions.

Prashastis and land grants:

(i) Prashastis tell us how rulers wanted to depict themselves – as valiant, victorious warriors, for example. These were composed by learned Brahmanas, who occasionally helped in the administration.
(ii) Kings often rewarded Brahmanas by grants of land. These were recorded on copper plates, which were given to those who received the land.
(iii) Unusual for the twelfth century was a long Sanskrit poem containing the history of kings who ruled over Kashmir. It was composed by an author named Kalhana. He used a variety of sources, including inscriptions, documents, eyewitness accounts and earlier histories, to write his account. Unlike the writers of prashastis, he was often critical about rulers and their policies.

Warfare for Wealth:

(i) For centuries, rulers belonging to the Gurjara-Pratihara, Rashtrakuta and Pala dynasties fought for control over Kanauj. Because there were three “parties” in this longdrawn conflict, historians often describe it as the “tripartite struggle”.
(ii) Rulers also tried to demonstrate their power and resources by building large temples. So, when they attacked one another’s kingdoms, they often chose to target extremely rich temples.
(iii) One of the best known of such rulers is Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, Afghanistan. He ruled

from 997 to 1030, and extended control over parts of Central Asia, Iran and the north-western part of the subcontinent. He raided the subcontinent almost every year – his targets were wealthy temples, including that of Somnath, Gujarat.
(iv) Much of the wealth Mahmud carried away was used to create a splendid capital city at Ghazni. He was interested in finding out more about the people he conquered, and entrusted a scholar named al-Biruni to write an account of the subcontinent.
(v) This Arabic work, known as the Kitab-al Hind, remains an important source for historians. He consulted Sanskrit scholars to prepare this account.
(vi) Other kings who engaged in warfare include the Chahamanas, later known as the Chauhans, who ruled over the region around Delhi and Ajmer.

- They attempted to expand their control to the west and the east, where they were opposed by the Chalukyas of Gujarat and the Gahadavalas of western Uttar Pradesh.
- The best-known Chahamana ruler was Prithviraja III (1168-1192), who defeated an Afghan ruler named Sultan Muhammad Ghori in 1191, but lost to him the very next year, in 1192.

The Cholas:

From Uraiyur to Thanjavur:

(i) Cholas were from a small family of Uraiyur. Vijayalaya, who belonged to the ancient chiefly family of the Cholas from Uraiyur, captured the delta from the Muttaraiyar in the middle of the ninth century.
(ii) He built the town of Thanjavur and a temple for goddess Nishumbhasudini there.
The successors of Vijayalaya conquered neighbouring regions and the kingdom grew in size and power. The Pandyan and the Pallava territories to the south and north were made part of this kingdom.
(iii) Rajaraja I, considered the most powerful Chola ruler, became king in 985 and expanded control over most of these areas. He also reorganised the administration of the empire.
Rajaraja's son Rajendra I continued his policies and even raided the Ganga valley, Sri Lanka and countries of Southeast Asia, developing a navy for these expeditions.

Splendid temples and bronze sculpture:

(i) The big temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram, built by Rajaraja and

Rajendra, are architectural and sculptural marvels. Chola temples often became the nuclei of settlements which grew around them.
(ii) These were centres of craft production. Temples were also endowed with land by rulers as well as by others.
(iii) The produce of this land went to maintain all the specialists who worked at the temple and very often lived near it – priests, garland makers, cooks, sweepers, musicians, dancers, etc.
(iv) In other words, temples were not only places of worship; they were the hub of economic, social and cultural life as well.
(v) Amongst the crafts associated with temples, the making of bronze images was the most distinctive. Chola bronze images are considered amongst the finest in the world. While most images were of deities, sometimes images were made of devotees as well.

Agriculture and irrigation:

(i) Although agriculture had developed earlier in other parts of Tamil Nadu, it was only from the fifth or sixth century that this area was opened up for large-scale cultivation.
(ii) Forests had to be cleared in some regions; land had to be leveled in other areas. In the delta region, embankments had to be built to prevent water to the fields. In many areas two crops were grown in a year.
(iii) In many cases, it was necessary to water crops artificially. A variety of methods were used for irrigation. In some areas wells were dug. In other places huge tanks were constructed to collect rainwater.
(iv) Irrigation works require planning – organising labour and resources, maintaining these works and deciding on how water is to be shared. Most of the new rulers, as well as people living in villages, took an active interest in these activities.

The administration of the empire:

(i) Settlements of peasants, known as ur, became prosperous with the spread of irrigation agriculture. Groups of such villages formed larger units called nadu.
(ii) The village council and the nadu had several administrative functions including dispensing
justice and collecting taxes.
(iii) Rich peasants of the Vellala caste exercised considerable control over the affairs of the

nadu under the supervision of the central Chola government. The Chola kings gave some rich landowners titles like muvendavelan (a velan or peasant serving three kings), araiyar (chief), etc. as markers of respect, and entrusted them with important offices of the state at the centre.

(iv) **Types of land:**

Chola inscriptions mention several categories of land.

- vellanvagai- land of non-Brahmana peasant proprietors
- brahmadeya- land gifted to Brahmanas
- shalabhoga- land for the maintenance of a school
- devadana, tirunamattukkani- land gifted to temples
- pallichchhandam- land donated to Jaina institutions

(v) We have seen that Brahmanas often received land grants or brahmadeya. As a result, a large number of Brahmana settlements emerged in the Kaveri valley as in other parts of south India.

(vi) Each brahmadeya was looked after by an assembly or sabha of prominent Brahmana landholders. These assemblies worked very efficiently. Their decisions were recorded in detail in inscriptions, often on the stone walls of temples.

(vii) Associations of traders known as nagarams also occasionally performed administrative functions in towns.

(viii) Inscriptions from Uttaramerur in Chingleput district, Tamil Nadu, provide details of the way in which the sabha was organised. The sabha had separate committees to look after irrigation works, gardens, temples, etc.

(ix) Names of those eligible to be members of these committees were written on small tickets of palm leaf and kept in an earthenware pot, from which a young boy was asked to pick the tickets, one by one for each committee.