



MANIKA IAS

TURNING ASPIRANTS INTO ACHIEVERS

MEDIEVAL INDIAN HISTORY

FOR UPSC PRELIMS & MAINS

EXAM-ORIENTED

CONCEPT -CENTRIC

STRUCTURED & SIMPLIFIED

“Medieval India: An era of power, culture, and synthesis.”

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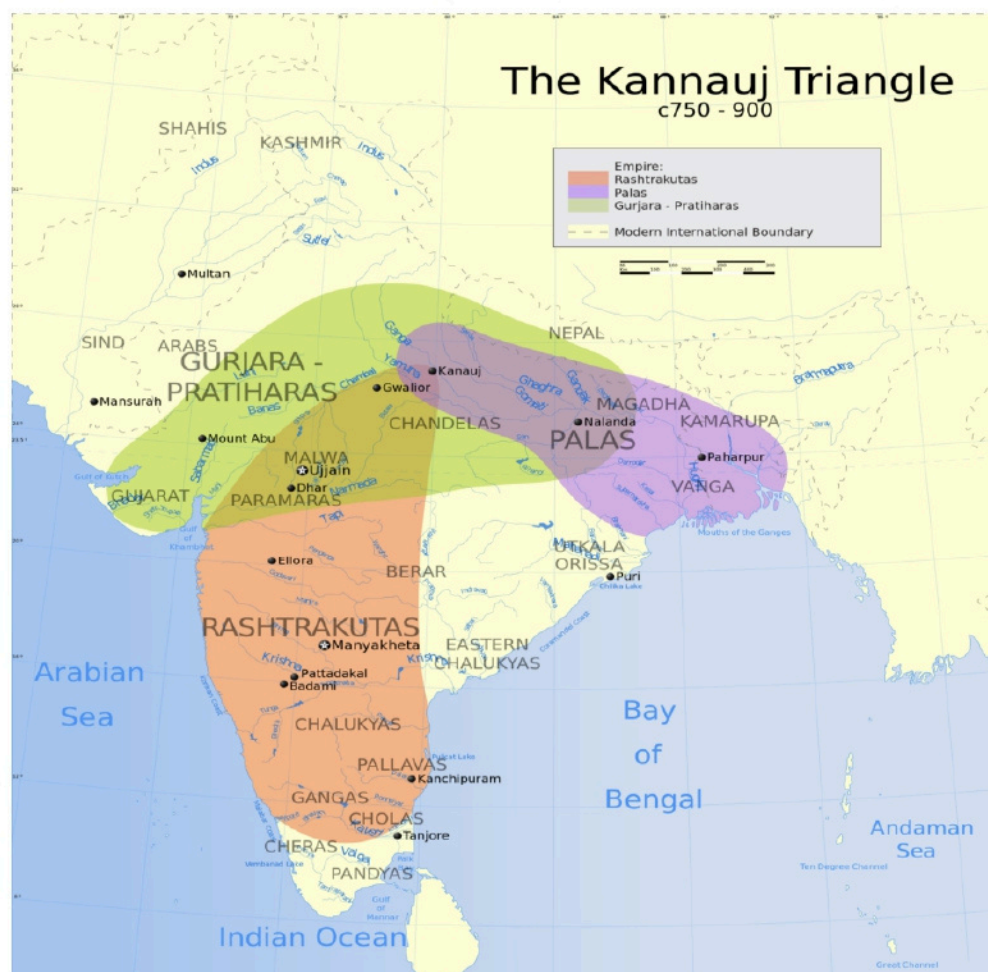
1. EARLY MEDIEVAL INDIA (700–1200 AD)

1.1. Introduction

The period between 700 and 1200 AD, often referred to as Early Medieval India, marked significant political, social, and cultural transformations in the Indian subcontinent. Following the **death of Harshavardhana in 647 AD**, North India fragmented into numerous regional kingdoms, leading to a decentralized political structure. This era, characterized by the rise of regional dynasties and the emergence of Rajput clans, is often described as the "highest stage of Indian Feudalism" due to the proliferation of small kingdoms and land-based power structures.

1.2. Political Fragmentation and Regional Kingdoms

- **Post-Harsha Disintegration:**
 - After Harshavardhana's death in 647 AD, North India fragmented into numerous small kingdoms, with estimates suggesting as many as 1200 regional entities.
 - The political vacuum led to the rise of regional powers competing for dominance, particularly over the strategic city of Kannauj, which replaced Pataliputra as the center of power and prestige.
- **Kannauj as a Power Center:**
 - Kannauj, previously Harsha's capital, became the focal point of political ambition due to its strategic location and economic significance.
 - The struggle for control over Kannauj, known as the **Tripartite Struggle**, involved three major dynasties: the Palas of Bengal, the Gurjara-Pratiharas of North India, and the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan.



1.3. The Tripartite Struggle (Late 8th to Early 10th Century)

Overview:

- The Tripartite Struggle was a prolonged conflict among the **Palas, Gurjara-Pratiharas, and Rashtrakutas** for control over Kannauj, a symbol of political supremacy in North India.
- The wars were often disastrous for all three dynasties, leading to weakened political structures, though the Rashtrakutas survived the longest until the 10th century.

Key Dynasties Involved:

1.3.1 Gurjara-Pratiharas (730–1036 AD):

- **Origin and Foundation:** Founded by Nagabhata I around 730 AD in the region around Jodhpur, the Pratiharas (meaning "doorkeeper," symbolizing their role as protectors) were devotees of Lord Vishnu.
- **Key Rulers:**
 - **Nagabhata I:** Successfully resisted Arab invasions in the 8th century, earning praise from Arab travellers like Sulaiman.
 - **Vatsaraja (780 – 800 AD):** Captured Kannauj and made it the capital, initiating conflicts with the Palas and Rashtrakutas.
 - **Mihir Bhoja (836–885 AD):** The most prominent ruler, known for his victories in the Tripartite Struggle, took the title **Adivaraha** (devotee of Vishnu). His court was visited by Arab traveler Al-Masudi, who referred to him as "King Baura".
 - **Mahendrapala (c. 885-910 AD):** Expanded the empire and assumed the title **Maharajadhiraja of Aryavarta**. The son of Mihira Bhoja, his court was adorned by the famous poet and dramatist Rajashekhara, who wrote works like *Karpuramanjari* and *Kavyamimamsa*.
- **Cultural Contributions:** The Pratiharas developed the **Maru-Gurjara** style of temple architecture, later known as the **Solanki style**, and patronized Sanskrit poet Rajshekhara, who wrote *Karpurmanjari* and *Kavyamimansa*.
- **Decline:** The dynasty began to decline after the Rashtrakuta king Indra III sacked Kannauj in the early 10th century. Further weakened by invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century. The last ruler, Rajyapala, was killed by the Chandela king Vidyadhara for his cowardice in fleeing from Mahmud of Ghazni. The dynasty was succeeded by Rajput clans like the Chauhans, Parmaras, and Solankis.

1.3.2 Palas of Bengal (8th–12th Century):

- **Origin and Foundation:** Founded by Gopala around 750 AD in Bengal to end the anarchy following King Sasanka's rule. Gopala was an elected king, a unique feature of the dynasty. According to the Khalimpur copper plate inscription, he was elected by the people to end the state of anarchy (*matsya nyaya*) that prevailed after the fall of the Gauda kingdom.
- **Key Rulers:**

- **Gopala (c. 750-770 AD):** The first Buddhist king of eastern Bengal, stabilized the region.
- **Dharmapala (Late 8th Century) (c. 770-810 AD):** The greatest Pala ruler, only Pala ruler to conquer Kannauj briefly and took the title **Uttarapathaswami** (Lord of the North). He revived Nalanda University by granting 200 villages for its upkeep and founded Vikramshila near Bhagalpur, Odantapuri, and Somapura Mahavihara.
- **Devapala:** Expanded the empire and maintained diplomatic ties with the Sailendra dynasty of Java, allowing the construction of a Buddhist monastery at Bodh Gaya.
- **Rampala:** Associated with poet Sandhyakar Nandi, who wrote **Ramcharita**, a work blending the stories of Lord Rama and Rampala in the **Shlesha** style.
- **Cultural Contributions:**
 - The Palas were the last major patrons of Buddhism in India, promoting **Vajrayana**, **Mantrayana**, and **Tantrayana** sects. Scholars like Atish Dipankar spread Buddhism to Tibet and Ladakh.
 - They pioneered miniature painting based on Buddhist themes and supported artists like Dhiman and Bitpala.
 - Both Bengali and Sanskrit literature flourished, with translations of Sanskrit texts into Tibetan.
- **Decline:** The Palas were succeeded by the Sena dynasty after Lakshman Sena was defeated by Bakhtiyar Khilji, who destroyed Nalanda University.

1.3.3. Rashtrakutas of the Deccan (8th–10th Century) (753-982 CE)

- **Origin and Foundation:** Founded by Dantidurga in the early 8th century, the Rashtrakutas were initially feudatories of the Chalukyas of Badami. Dantidurga performed the **Hiranyagarbha** ritual to enhance his social status.
- **Key Rulers:**
 - **Dantidurga:** Established the dynasty by defeating Chalukya king Kirtivarman and founded the capital at Manyakheta (Malkhed) on the banks of the Godavari.
 - **Krishna I (c. 756-774 AD):** Built the **Kailasanatha Temple** at Ellora, a monolithic rock-cut structure considered an architectural marvel.
 - **Dhruva (c. 780-793 AD) and Govinda III (c. 793-814 AD):** Participated in the Tripartite Struggle, defeating the Palas and Pratiharas to briefly control Kannauj.
 - **Amoghavarsha (814–878 AD):** The greatest Rashtrakuta ruler, known as the "Ashoka of the South" for his patronage of peace and culture. He wrote **Kavirajmarga** (Kannada) and **Ratnamalika** (Sanskrit), patronized Kannada literature, and was a follower of Jainism. Arab merchant Sulaiman described him as one of the four greatest kings of the world.
 - **Krishna III:** Defeated the Chola king Parantaka in the Battle of Takkalom.
- **Cultural Contributions:**

- The Rashtrakutas excelled in **rock-cut architecture**, with notable sites like **Ellora (UNESCO World Heritage Site)** and **Elephanta**, famous for the Trimurti sculpture.
 - **Kannada literature** flourished under poets like Pampa, Ponna, and Ranna, known as the "**three jewels**" of Kannada literature.
 - Trade with Arabs was encouraged, with Arab traders allowed to settle and build mosques.
- **Decline:** The dynasty ended with the defeat of the last ruler, Tailapa, by the Chalukyas of Kalyani.

Though no single dynasty achieved lasting dominance, the struggle highlighted the decentralization of power and the rise of regional kingdoms. It also led to military innovations and shifting alliances, shaping the political landscape of the time. Ultimately, the Tripartite Struggle paved the way for new political dynamics and set the stage for future regional empires in Indian history.