

OTHER FEATURES OF SOUTHERN DYNASTIES

Social

Despite inter-regional conflicts, local autonomy was preserved to a far greater degree in the south where it has prevailed for centuries. The absence of a highly centralised government was associated with the corresponding local autonomy in the administration of villages and districts. Extensive and well documented overland and maritime trade flourished with the Arabs on the west coast and with south-east Asia. Trade facilitated cultural diffusion in south-east Asia, where the local elite selectively but willingly adopted Indian art, architecture, literature and social customs.

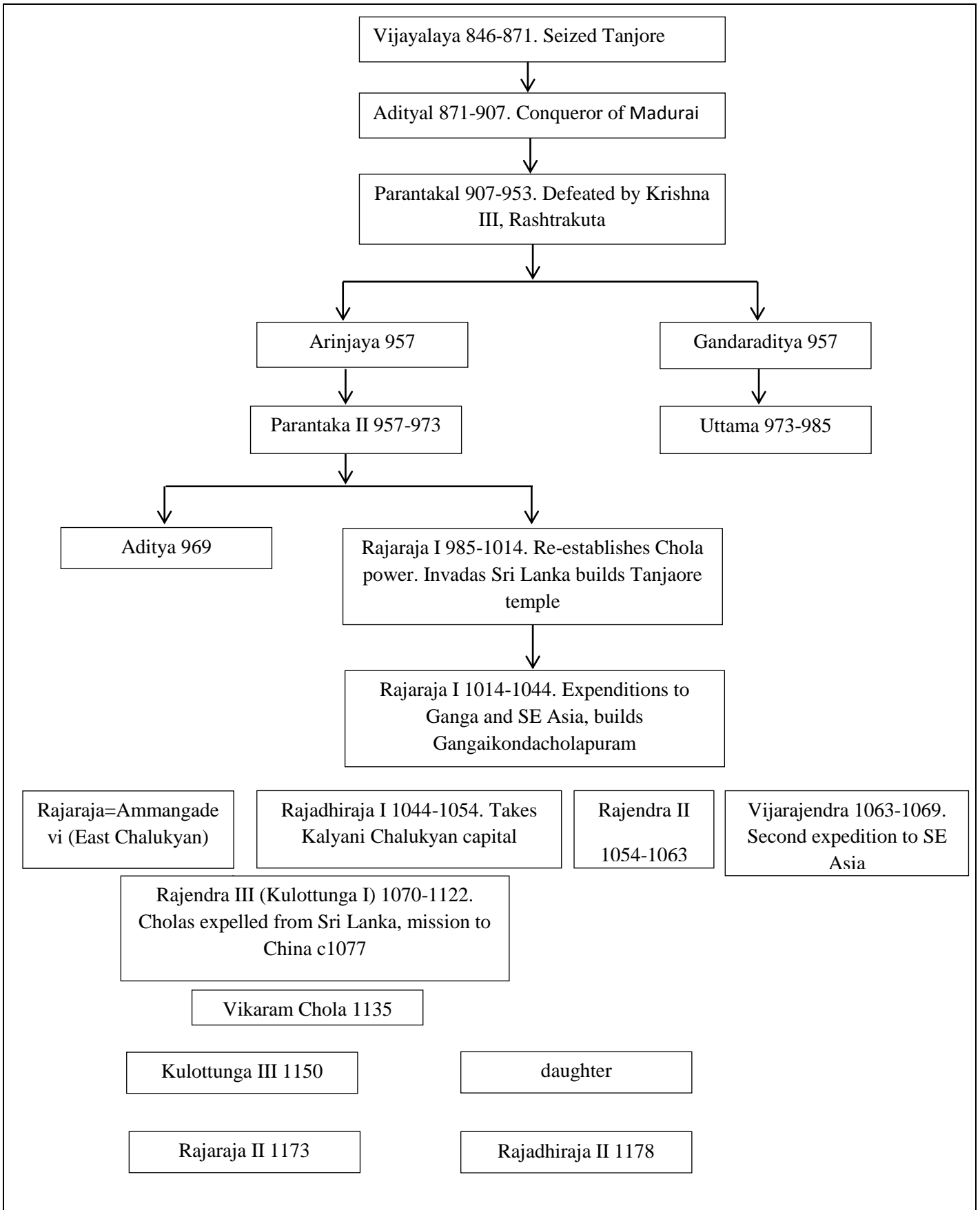
Religion

The inter-dynastic rivalry and seasonal raids into each other's territory notwithstanding, the rulers in the Deccan and South India patronised all three religions-Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. The religions vied with each other for royal favour, expressed in land grants but more importantly in the creation of monumental temples, which remain architectural wonders even today. The cave temples of

Elephanta Island (near Mumbai), Ajanta and Ellora (in Maharashtra) and structural temples of Kanchipuram (in Tamil Nadu) are enduring legacies of the otherwise warring regional rulers. By the mid-seventh century Buddhism and Jainism began to decline as sectarian Hindu devotional cults of Shiva and Vishnu vigorously competed for popular support.

Art and Literature

Although Sanskrit was the language of learning and theology in South India, as it was in the north, the growth of the bhakti (devotional) movements enhanced the crystallization of vernacular literature in all four major Dravidian languages: Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada; they often borrowed them and vocabulary from Sanskrit but preserved much of the local cultural lore. Examples of Tamil literature include the major poems, Cliappatikaram (Jewelled Anklet) and Manimekalai (Jewelled Belt); the body of Shaivite and Vaishnavite- Hindu devotional movements- devotional literature and the reworking of the Ramayana by Kamban in the twelfth century.



Kulottunga III 1178-1216. Defeats, and
is then defeated by Pandyas. Chola
Empire in decline

FIG. 1.6. The Chola Dynasty

The Cheras

Cheras were one of the historic Tamil chiefdoms of southern India, which controlled the middle Cauvery River valley. It first rose some time after the third century BC, with Karuvur-Vanchi as its inland political centre and Muchiri (Cranganore) on the Kerala coast as its port of trade, where merchants exchanged pepper for gold and wine from the Roman empire, the Cheras exercised a clan rule under different lineages. Its rulers apparently fought intertribal conflicts with the Cholas and Pandyas and subjugated minor chiefs of the Veir clan. The Chera kingdom of Makotai was established in the ninth century AD in the Periyar valley of Kerala, with Maktaipuram (Kodungallur) and Quilon as its first and second capital. The kingdom acquired an agrarian base through land grants to Brahmins and to Brahmin institutions), such as the temples of Shiva and Vishnu. Trading ventures with Arab and Jewish lands provided commercial resources. Contemporary texts give an account of the ruling dynasty's legendary origins and history. Makotai was supposedly hostile to the Panayas but friendly with the Mushakas of Kerala. Despite a series of defensive wars, constant invasions by the Cholas of Tanjavur led to the disintegration of the Makotai kingdom by the early twelfth century AD.

Elephanta Caves

These are a complex of six rock-cut temples on the Island of Elephanta, or Gharapuri, on the Mumbai harbour. They were begun in the middle of the sixth century, by either the Traikutaka or Kalachuri dynasties of Maharashtra, and more were added between the eighth and tenth centuries by the Rashtrakuta

Dynasty. Rather than being constructed from separate parts, they are, like the temples at Ellora, sculpted out of solid rock. The centrepiece of the group is a large temple of Shiva, some 40 m (130 ft) long, 37 m (123 ft) wide: and 5 m (18 ft) high. Its ceiling, supported by rows of pillars, was originally decorated with frescoes and on its walls is a series of panels representing the many aspects of Shiva: as Nataraja, lord of the Cosmic Dance; as Yageshvara, Lord of the Yogis; slaying the demon; Andnaka; marrying Parvati and restraining the waters, of the Ganga. The focal point of the temple is- the Maheshmurti [or Trimurti), a three-headed bust representing Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver and Shiva as the destroyer.

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