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**THE RAJPUTS (AD 650-1200)**

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After Harshavardhana, the Rajputs emerged as a powerful force in western and central India and dominated the Indian political scene for nearly 500 years from the seventh century. They emerged from the political chaos that surfaced after the death of Harshavardhana. Out of the political disarray prevalent in North India, the Rajputs chalked out the small kingdoms of Gujarat and Malwa. From the eighth to twelfth century they struggled to keep themselves independent. But as they grew bigger the infighting made them brittle, they fell prey to the rising domination of the Muslim invaders. Among them the Guptas of Pratihara, the Gahadwals of Kanauj, the Kalachuris of Chedi, the Chauhans of Ajmer, the Solankis of Gujarat and the Guhilotas of Mewar are important.

The first Gupt-Pratihara ruler was **Nagabhata I**. He was the ruler of Awanti in AD 650. The kings who succeeded him were **Vasturaja** (AD 775-860); **Mihira Bhoja** (AD 836-885); **Mahindrapala I** (AD 886-910); Mahipala (AD 912-944); **Rajyapala** (AD 944-948). The later kings became weak and the kingdom began to deteriorate.

After the Pratiharas, the Gahadwals of Kanauj surfaced during AD 1085 under **King Chandradeva**. He died in AD 1100 and his son **Madanpal** came to power. Madanpal was repeatedly harassed by **Masaud III** (King of Ghazni), but it was his son, **Govindachandra**, who drove Masaud III out of India. **Lakshmi Dhara**, a scholar (author of *Kritya Kalpataru*), was a minister in his court. In AD 1154 Govindachandra made his son **Vijayachandra** the king. **King Jayachandra** was the son of Vijayachandra. Kanauj was later destroyed by Muhammad Ghori in AD 1192.

Chandela kingdom was founded by **Yashovarman** of Chandel in the region of Bhajek Bhutika (later came to be known as Bundelkhan). Their capital was Mahoba. Their prominent kings were **Dhanga** and **Kirthivarma**. The last ruler from the dynasty merged with **Prithviraj Chauhan** in AD 1182.

Kirthivarma the Chandela ruler defeated the Chedi ruler in the eleventh century. Later, Lakshmanaraja emerged as a powerful Chedi Rajput ruler. His kingdom was located between the Godavari and the Narmada and his capital was Tripura (near Jabalpur).

Like Kanauj, Malwa was the symbol of the Rajputana power. Krishnaraja (also called King Upendra) founded this kingdom. Their capital was Dhar (Madhya Pradesh). The prominent kings from this dynasty were **Vakpatiraju- Munjana II. Bhoja I, Bhoja II**. In Malwa, the Parmars ruled and the most famous of them was King Bhoja.

The Chauhans were an important clan of the Rajputs. They ruled in Ajmer and Sambar. The Ajmer Rajputs left a significant mark on Indian history. Among the Ajmer Chauhans **Vigraharaja IV** and **Prithviraj** were the most prominent. Vigraharaja is remembered for conquering Delhi and defeating Toramana. Prithviraj Chauhan ruled over Delhi and Agra and fought two important battles, the **First Battle of Tarain**, fought in AD 1191 between the forces of Prithviraj Chauhan and Muhammad Ghori, in which the latter was defeated and the **Second Battle of Tarain**, fought in AD 1192 when Muhammad Ghori again invaded India, in which Prithviraj Chauhan was defeated, captured and later on slain. The kingdom of Delhi fell to Muhammad Ghori. The Battles of Tarain had great significance in the Indian political scene as they led to the establishment of Muslim rule over North India and subsequently in the south for several centuries. **Jai Chand Rathor** was the last

Rajput king who was also defeated and killed by Ghori in AD 1194.

The Mewar Rajput Dynasty was founded by **Sri Guhadattan**. Its capital was Chittoor. **Shaktamara** was their most powerful ruler. The contribution of his successor **Chaitrasimha** is also considerable as he is remembered as the only Rajput who gave a death blow to the Muslim invasions. His son **Ratnasimha** succeeded him as the king of Mewar, whose queen, Rani Padmini, was a woman of awesome beauty. The Muslim ruler, Ala-ud-din Khalji was besotted by her beauty and in an attempt to capture her, he besieged Mewar. Other notable rulers from this clan are Rana Sangram, **Rana Pratap Singh** and **Rana Raja Singh**. But all of them were dominated by the Moghul rulers who had set their feet firmly in the Indian soil by that time.

Malwa was the most important Rajput kingdom. **Rana Kumbha** was the famous ruler of this state. He defeated Mohammed Khalji and erected the **Tower of Victory** in Chittoor.

The Pala kings ruled in Bihar and Sena kings ruled in Bengal.

### The Ceylon Kings: I

On the Island of Lanka (Ceylon), the 58th and the last king listed in the Mahavamsa was **Mahasena** [ruled 334-362]. The first of the 125 kings listed up to 1815 in the Culavamsa, **Srimeghavarna**, repaired the monasteries destroyed by Mahasena. **Mohanoman** (ruled 409-431) married the queen after she murdered his brother, **Upatishya**. **Buddhaghosh** was converted to Buddhism and went to Lanka during the reign of Mahanaman. There he translated and wrote commentaries on numerous Buddhist texts. His *Visuddhimagga* explains ways to attain purity by presenting the teachings of Buddha in three parts on conduct, concentration and wisdom. **Buddhaghosh** also collected parables and stories illustrating Buddhist ethics by showing how karma brings the consequences of actions back to one, sometimes in

another life. One story showed how a grudge could cause alternating injuries between two individuals, from life to life. Yet if no grudge is held the enmity subsides. In addition to the usual views of killing, stealing, adultery and a judge taking bribes, occupations that could lead to hell include making weapons, selling poison, being a general, collecting taxes, living off tolls, hunting, fishing and even gathering honey. The Buddhist path is encouraged with tales of miracles and by showing the benefits of good conduct and meditation.

### The Ceylon Kings: II

The clan chief **Dhatusena** (ruled 460-478) became the king of Lanka and expelled foreigners from the island, but his eldest son **Kashyapa** (ruled 478-496) took him prisoner and usurped the throne, but lost it with his life to his brother, **Maudgalyayana** (ruled 496-513) who had the coast guarded to prevent foreign attacks and gave his umbrella to the Buddhist community as a token of submission. His son, **Kumaradasa** (ruled 513-522), was succeeded by his son who was quickly deposed by a usurping uncle, who was soon killed by **Upatishya** (ruled 522-524), who was succeeded by his son, **Shilakala** (ruled 524-537). **Maudgalyayana II** (ruled 537-556) had to fight for the throne, but he was a poet and was considered a pious ruler who was loved by the people. Two rulers were killed before **Agrabodhi I** (ruled 559-592) and **Agrabodhi II** (ruled 592-602) built monasteries and dug water tanks for irrigation. A revolt by the general **Maudgalyayana III** (ruled 602-608) led to a series of civil wars and succession battles suffered by the Lankan people that continued until **Manavarman** managed to rule Lanka for 35 years (ruled 668-703).

## **SALIENT FEATURES OF THE RAJPUT KINGDOMS**

The country remained free of invasions but lost foreign contact. The caste system was rigid. The Rajputs were proud, warlike people but hospitable. Culturally, many great fortresses and temples were built by them such as Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh, Bhubaneswar in Orissa, Sun temple at Konark, the Jagannath temple at Puri and the Dilwara temple at Mt Abu. **Jayadeva** was the great court poet of this era.

Lack of unity and foresight, caste system and defective military organization were some of the causes for the downfall of the Rajputs.

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