

## 1

TRACING CHANGES THROUGH  
A THOUSAND YEARS**Map 1**

A section of the world map drawn by the geographer al-Idrisi in the twelfth century showing the Indian subcontinent from land to sea.

Take a look at Maps 1 and 2. Map 1 was made in 1154 CE by the Arab geographer Al-Idrisi. The section reproduced here is a detail of the Indian subcontinent from his larger map of the world. Map 2 was made in the 1720s by a French **cartographer**. The two maps are quite different even though they are of the same area. In al-Idrisi's map, south India is where we would expect to find north India and Sri Lanka is the island at the top. Place-names are marked in Arabic,

**Cartographer**

A person who makes maps.

### Map 2

The subcontinent, from the early-eighteenth-century Atlas Nouveau of Guillaume de l'Isle.



and there are some well-known names like Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh (spelt in the map as Qanauij). Map 2 was made nearly 600 years after Map 1, during which time information about the subcontinent had changed considerably. This map seems more familiar to us and the coastal areas in particular are surprisingly detailed. This map was used by European sailors and merchants on their voyages (see Chapter 6).



Look at the areas in the interior of the subcontinent on Map 2. Are they as detailed as those on the coast? Follow the course of the River Ganga and see how it is shown. Why do you think there is a difference in the level of detail and accuracy between the coastal and inland areas in this map?

Equally important is the fact that the science of cartography differed in the two periods. When historians read documents, maps and texts from the past they have to be sensitive to the different historical backgrounds – the *contexts* – in which information about the past was produced.

## New and Old Terminologies

If the context in which information is produced changes with time, what about language and meanings? Historical records exist in a variety of languages which have changed considerably over the years. Medieval Persian, for example, is different from modern Persian. The difference is not just with regard to grammar and vocabulary; the meanings of words also change over time.

Take the term “Hindustan”, for example. Today we understand it as “India”, the modern *nation-state*. When the term was used in the thirteenth century by Minhaj-i-Siraj, a chronicler who wrote in Persian, he meant the areas of Punjab, Haryana and the lands between the Ganga and Yamuna. He used the term in a political sense for lands that were a part of the dominions of the Delhi Sultan. The areas included in this term shifted with the extent of the Sultanate but the term never included south India. By contrast, in the early sixteenth century Babur used Hindustan to describe the geography, the fauna and the culture of the inhabitants of the subcontinent. As we will see later in the chapter, this was somewhat similar to the way the fourteenth-century poet Amir Khusrau used the word “Hind”. While the idea of a geographical and cultural entity like “India” did exist, the term “Hindustan” did not carry the political and national meanings which we associate with it today.

Historians today have to be careful about the terms they use because they meant different things in the past. Take, for example, a simple term like “foreigner”. It is used today to mean someone who is not an Indian. In



Can you think of any other words whose meanings change in different contexts?



the medieval period a “foreigner” was any stranger who appeared say in a given village, someone who was not a part of that society or culture. (In Hindi the term *pardesi* might be used to describe such a person and in Persian, *ajnabi*.) A city-dweller, therefore, might have regarded a forest-dweller as a “foreigner”, but two peasants living in the same village were not foreigners to each other, even though they may have had different religious or caste backgrounds.

## Historians and their Sources

Historians use different types of sources to learn about the past depending upon the period of their study and the nature of their investigation. Last year, for example, you read about rulers of the Gupta dynasty and Harshavardhana. In this book we will read about the following thousand years, from roughly 700 to 1750.

You will notice some continuity in the sources used by historians for the study of this period. They still rely on coins, inscriptions, architecture and textual records for information. But there is also considerable discontinuity. The number and variety of textual records increased dramatically during this period. They slowly displaced other types of available information. Through this period paper gradually became cheaper and more

### The value of paper

Compare the following:

(1) In the middle of the thirteenth century a scholar wanted to copy a book. But he did not have enough paper. So he washed the writing off a manuscript he did not want, dried the paper and used it.

(2) A century later, if you bought some food in the market you could be lucky and have the shopkeeper wrap it for you in some paper.



*When was paper more expensive and easily available – in the thirteenth or the fourteenth century?*

widely available. People used it to write holy texts, chronicles of rulers, letters and teachings of saints, petitions and judicial records, and for registers of accounts and taxes. Manuscripts were collected by wealthy people, rulers, monasteries and temples. They were placed in libraries and **archives**. These manuscripts and documents provide a lot of detailed information to historians but they are also difficult to use.

There was no printing press in those days so scribes copied manuscripts by hand. If you have ever copied a friend's homework you would know that this is not a simple exercise. Sometimes you cannot read your friend's handwriting and are forced to guess what is written. As a result there are small but significant differences in your copy of your friend's work. Manuscript copying is somewhat similar. As scribes copied manuscripts, they also introduced small changes – a word here, a sentence there. These small differences grew over centuries of copying until manuscripts of the

### **Archive**

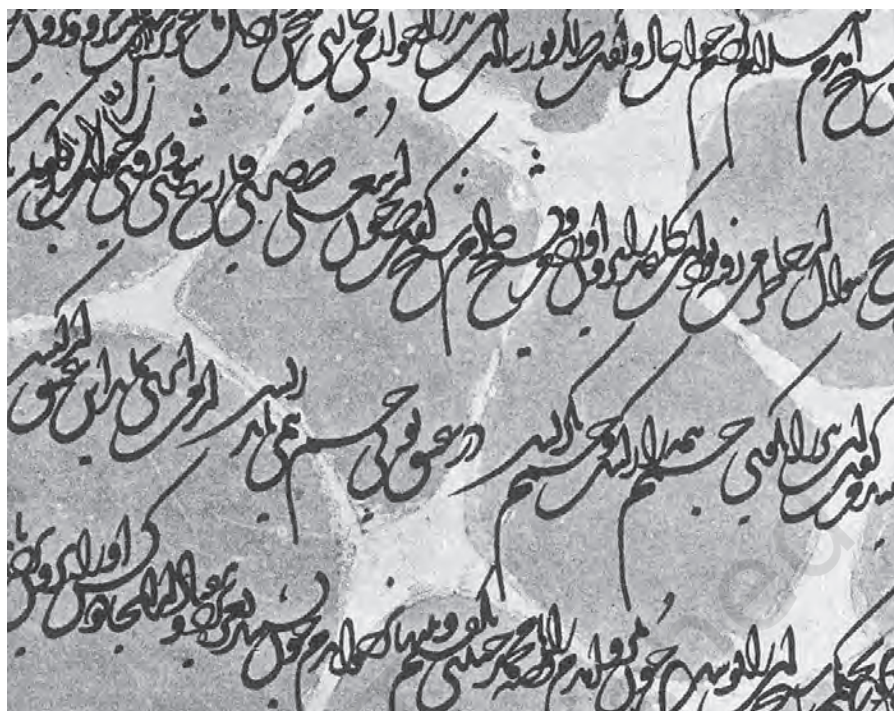
*A place where documents and manuscripts are stored. Today all national and state governments have archives where they keep all their old official records and transactions.*



**Fig. 1**

*A painting of a scribe making a copy of a manuscript. This painting is only 10.5 cm by 7.1 cm in size. Because of its size it is called a miniature. Miniature paintings were sometimes used to illustrate the texts of manuscripts. They were so beautiful that later collectors often took the manuscripts apart and sold just the miniatures.*





**Fig. 2**  
Different kinds of handwriting could make the reading of Persian and Arabic difficult. The nastaliq style (on the left) is cursive and easy to read, the shikaste (on the right) is denser and more difficult.

same text became substantially different from one another. This is a serious problem because we rarely find the original manuscript of the author today. We are totally dependent upon the copies made by later scribes. As a result historians have to read different manuscript versions of the same text to guess what the author had originally written.

On occasion authors revised their chronicles at different times. The fourteenth-century chronicler Ziyaaddin Barani wrote his chronicle first in 1356 and another version two years later. The two differ from each other but historians did not know about the existence of the first version until the 1960s. It remained lost in large library collections.

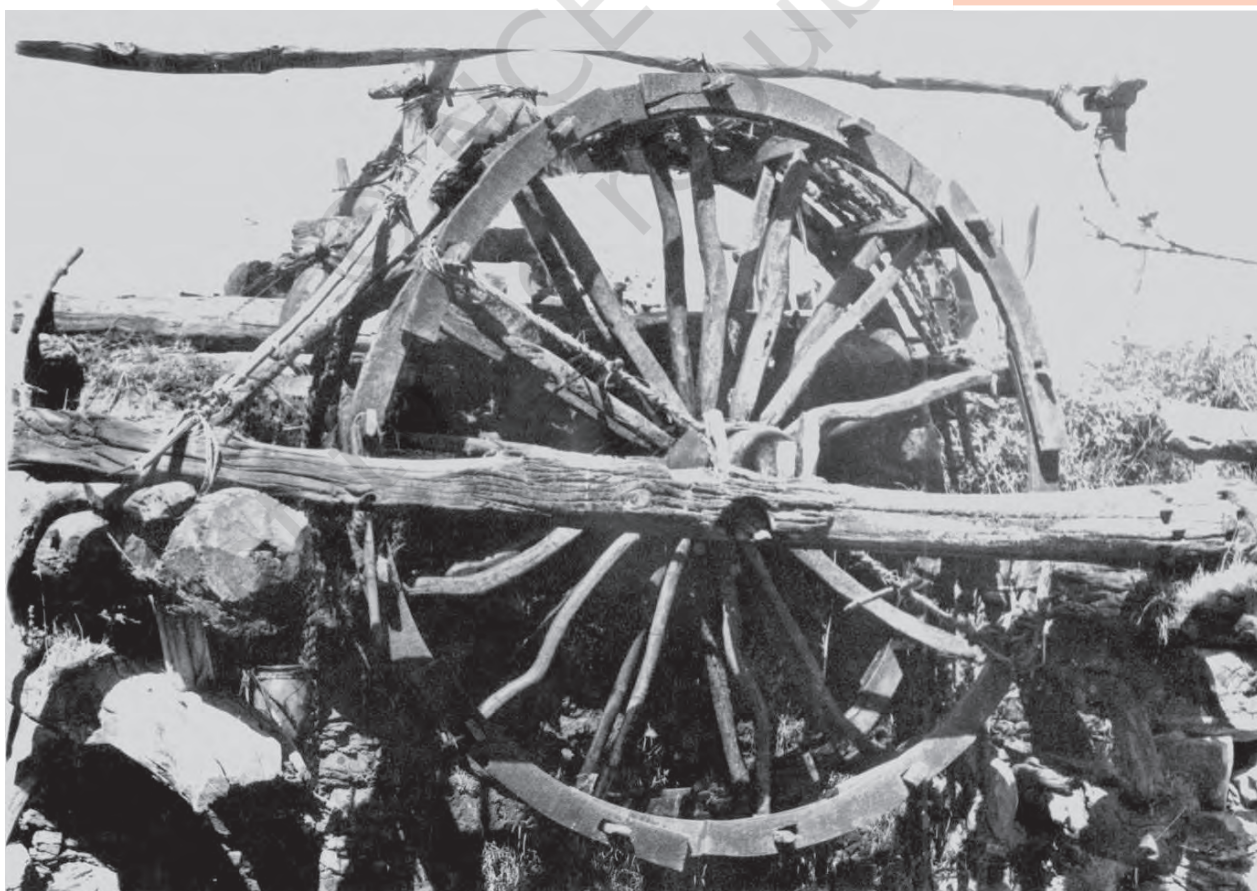
## New Social and Political Groups

The study of the thousand years between 700 and 1750 is a huge challenge to historians largely because of the scale and variety of developments that occurred over the period. At different moments in this period new technologies made their appearance – like the Persian

wheel in irrigation, the spinning wheel in weaving, and firearms in combat. New foods and beverages arrived in the subcontinent – potatoes, corn, chillies, tea and coffee. Remember that all these innovations – new technologies and crops – came along with people, who brought other ideas with them as well. As a result, this was a period of economic, political, social and cultural changes. You will learn about some of these changes in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

This was also a period of great mobility. Groups of people travelled long distances in search of opportunity. The subcontinent held immense wealth and the possibilities for people to carve a fortune. One group of people who became important in this period were the Rajputs, a name derived from “Rajaputra”, the son of a ruler. Between the eighth and fourteenth centuries the term was applied more generally to a group of warriors who claimed Kshatriya caste status. The term included

**Fig. 3**  
*The Persian wheel.*





### **Habitat**

*Refers to the environment of a region and the social and economic lifestyle of its residents.*



Of the technological, economic, social and cultural changes described in this section, which do you think were most significant in the town or village in which you live?

not just rulers and chieftains but also soldiers and commanders who served in the armies of different monarchs all over the subcontinent. A chivalric code of conduct – extreme valour and a great sense of loyalty – were the qualities attributed to Rajputs by their poets and bards. Other groups of people such as the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, Ahoms and Kayasthas (a caste of scribes and secretaries) also used the opportunities of the age to become politically important.

Throughout this period there was a gradual clearing of forests and the extension of agriculture, a change faster and more complete in some areas than in others. Changes in their **habitat** forced many forest-dwellers to migrate. Others started tilling the land and became peasants. These new peasant groups gradually began to be influenced by regional markets, chieftains, priests, monasteries and temples. They became part of large, complex societies, and were required to pay taxes and offer goods and services to local lords. As a result, significant economic and social differences emerged amongst peasants. Some possessed more productive land, others also kept cattle, and some combined artisanal work with agricultural activity during the lean season. As society became more differentiated, people were grouped into *jatis* or sub-castes and ranked on the basis of their backgrounds and their occupations. Ranks were not fixed permanently, and varied according to the power, influence and resources controlled by members of the *jati*. The status of the same *jati* could vary from area to area.

*Jatis* framed their own rules and regulations to manage the conduct of their members. These regulations were enforced by an assembly of elders, described in some areas as the *jati panchayat*. But *jatis* were also required to follow the rules of their villages. Several villages were governed by a chieftain. Together they were only one small unit of a state.



## Region and Empire

Large states like those of the Cholas (Chapter 2), Tughluqs (Chapter 3) or Mughals (Chapter 4) encompassed many regions. A Sanskrit *prashasti* (see Chapter 2 for an example of a *prashasti*) praising the Delhi Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban (1266-1287) explained that he was the ruler of a vast empire that stretched from Bengal (Gauda) in the east to Ghazni (Gajjana) in Afghanistan in the west and included all of south India (Dravida). People of different regions – Gauda, Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat – apparently fled before his armies. Historians



I	Siwistan	VII	Sarsuti	XIII	Kara	XIX	Gujarat
II	Uchch	VIII	Kuhram	XIV	Awadh	XX	Devagiri
III	Multan	IX	Hansi	XV	Bihar	XXI	Tilingana
IV	Kalanaur	X	Delhi	XVI	Lakhnauti	XXII	Talanj
V	Lahor	XI	Badayun	XVII	Jajnagar	XXIII	Dvarasamudra
VI	Samana	XII	Qannauj	XVIII	Malwa	XXIV	Ma'bar

**Map 3**

Provinces of the Delhi Sultanate during Muhammad Tughluq's reign according to the Egyptian source *Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik al-Amsar* of Shihabuddin Umari.



Why do you think rulers made such claims?

regard these as exaggerated claims of conquests. At the same time, they try to understand why rulers kept claiming to have control over different parts of the subcontinent.

## Language and region

In 1318 the poet Amir Khusrau noted that there was *a different language in every region of this land: Sindhi, Lahori, Kashmiri, Dvarsamudri (in southern Karnataka), Telangani (in Andhra Pradesh), Gujarati (in Gujarat), Ma'bari (in Tamil Nadu), Gauri, (in Bengal) ... Awadhi (in eastern Uttar Pradesh) and Hindawi (in the area around Delhi).*

Amir Khusrau went on to explain that in contrast to these languages there was Sanskrit which did not belong to any region. It was an old language and *"common people do not know it, only the Brahmanas do"*.

*Make a list of the languages mentioned by Amir Khusrau. Prepare another list of the names of languages spoken today in the regions he mentioned. Underline names that are similar and circle those that are different.*



*Did you notice that the names by which languages are known have changed over time?*

By 700 many regions already possessed distinct geographical dimensions and their own language and cultural characteristics. You will learn more about these in Chapter 9. They were also associated with specific ruling dynasties. There was considerable conflict between these states. Occasionally dynasties like the Cholas, Khaljis, Tughluqs and Mughals were able to build an empire that was pan-regional – spanning diverse regions. Not all these empires were equally stable or successful. Compare, for example, Table 1 in Chapters 3 and 4. What was the duration of rule of the Khalji and Mughal dynasties?

When the Mughal Empire declined in the eighteenth century, it led to the re-emergence of regional states (Chapter 10). But years of imperial, pan-regional rule had altered the character of the regions. Across most of the subcontinent the regions were left with the legacies of the big and small states that had ruled over them. This was apparent in the emergence of many distinct and shared traditions: in the realms of governance, the management of the economy, elite cultures, and language. Through the thousand years between 700 and 1750 the character of the different regions did not grow in isolation. These regions felt the impact of larger pan-regional forces of integration without ever quite losing their distinctiveness.

## Old and New Religions

The thousand years of history that we are exploring witnessed major developments in religious traditions. People's belief in the divine was sometimes deeply personal, but more usually it was collective. Collective belief in a supernatural agency – religion – was often closely connected with the social and economic organisation of local communities. As the social worlds of these groups altered so too did their beliefs.

It was during this period that important changes occurred in what we call Hinduism today. These included the worship of new deities, the construction of temples by royalty and the growing importance of Brahmanas, the priests, as dominant groups in society.

Their knowledge of Sanskrit texts earned the Brahmanas a lot of respect in society. Their dominant position was consolidated by the support of their **patrons** – new rulers searching for prestige.

One of the major developments of this period was the emergence of the idea of bhakti – of a loving, personal deity that devotees could reach without the aid of priests or elaborate rituals. You will be learning about this, and other traditions, in Chapter 8.



Find out whether and for how long your state was part of these pan-regional empires.



Do you remember what Amir Khusrau had to say regarding Sanskrit, knowledge and Brahmanas?

### **Patron**

*An influential, wealthy individual who supports another person – an artiste, a craftsman, a learned man, or a noble.*



This was also the period when new religions appeared in the subcontinent. Merchants and migrants first brought the teachings of the holy *Quran* to India in the seventh century. Muslims regard the *Quran* as their holy book and accept the sovereignty of the one God, Allah, whose love, mercy and bounty embrace all those who believe in Him, without regard to social background.

Many rulers were patrons of Islam and the *ulama* – learned theologians and jurists. And like Hinduism, Islam was interpreted in a variety of ways by its followers. There were the Shia Muslims who believed that the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, was the legitimate leader of the Muslim community, and the Sunni Muslims who accepted the authority of the early leaders (Khalifas) of the community, and the succeeding Khalifas. There were other important differences between the various schools of law (Hanafi and Shafi'i mainly in India), and in theology and mystic traditions.

## Thinking about Time and Historical Periods

Historians do not see time just as a passing of hours, days or years – as a clock or a calendar. Time also reflects changes in social and economic organisation, in the persistence and transformation of ideas and beliefs. The study of time is made somewhat easier by dividing the past into large segments – periods – that possess shared characteristics.

In the middle of the nineteenth century British historians divided the history of India into three periods: “Hindu”, “Muslim” and “British”. This division was based on the idea that the religion of rulers was the only important historical change, and that there were no other significant developments – in the economy, society or culture. Such a division also ignored the rich diversity of the subcontinent.

Few historians follow this periodisation today. Most look to economic and social factors to characterise the major elements of different moments of the past. The histories you read last year included a wide range of early societies – hunter-gatherers, early farmers, people living in towns and villages, and early empires and kingdoms. The histories you will be studying this year are often described as “medieval”. You will find out more about the spread of peasant societies, the rise of regional and imperial state formations – sometimes at the cost of pastoral and forest people – the development of Hinduism and Islam as major religions and the arrival of European trading companies.

These thousand years of Indian history witnessed considerable change. After all, the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries were quite different from the eighth or the eleventh. Therefore, describing the entire period as one historical unit is not without its problems. Moreover, the “medieval” period is often contrasted with the “modern” period. “Modernity” carries with it a sense of material progress and intellectual advancement. This seems to suggest that the medieval period was lacking in any change whatsoever. But of course we know this was not the case.

During these thousand years the societies of the subcontinent were transformed often and economies in several regions reached a level of prosperity that attracted the interest of European trading companies. As you read this book, look out for signs of change and the historical processes at work. Also, whenever you can, compare what you read in this book with what you read last year. Look out for changes and continuities wherever you can, and look at the world around you to see what else has changed or remained the same.

## KEYWORDS

manuscript

*jati*

region

periodisation



### Imagine

You are a historian. Choose one of the themes mentioned in this chapter, such as economic, social or political history, and discuss why you think it would be interesting to find out the history of that theme.

### Let's recall

1. Who was considered a "foreigner" in the past?
2. State whether true or false:
  - (a) We do not find inscriptions for the period after 700.
  - (b) The Marathas asserted their political importance during this period.
  - (c) Forest-dwellers were sometimes pushed out of their lands with the spread of agricultural settlements.
  - (d) Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban controlled Assam, Manipur and Kashmir.
3. Fill in the blanks:
  - (a) Archives are places where \_\_\_\_\_ are kept.
  - (b) \_\_\_\_\_ was a fourteenth-century chronicler.
  - (c) \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were some of the new crops introduced into the subcontinent during this period.
4. List some of the technological changes associated with this period.



## The Emergence of New Dynasties

By the seventh century there were big landlords or warrior chiefs in different regions of the subcontinent. Existing kings often acknowledged them as their subordinates or *samantas*. 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*, *maha-mandaleshwara* (the great lord of a “circle” or region) and so on. Sometimes they asserted their independence from their overlords.

One such instance was that of the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. Initially they 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.

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, successfully establishing kingdoms in Karnataka and Rajasthan respectively.

## Administration in the Kingdoms

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. However, in spite of such claims,



**Fig. 1**  
Wall relief from Cave 15, Ellora, showing Vishnu as Narasimha, the man-lion. It is a work of the Rashtrakuta period.



Do you think being born as a Kshatriya was important in order to become a ruler during this period?



In what ways was this form of administration different from the present-day system?

they often shared power with their *samantas* as well as with associations of peasants, traders and Brahmanas.

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. Sometimes these were claimed as “rent” due to a lord who asserted that he owned the land. Revenue was also collected from traders.

### Four hundred taxes!

The inscriptions of the Cholas who ruled in Tamil Nadu refer to more than 400 terms for different kinds of taxes. The most frequently mentioned tax is *vetti*, taken not in cash but in the form of forced labour, and *kadamai*, or land revenue. There were also taxes on thatching the house, the use of a ladder to climb palm trees, a cess on succession to family property, etc.



*Are any such taxes collected today?*

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.

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

*Prashastis* contain details that may not be literally true. But they 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.

## The “achievements” of Nagabhata

Many rulers described their achievements in *prashastis* (you read about the *prashasti* of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta last year).

One *prashasti*, written in Sanskrit and found in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, describes the exploits of Nagabhata, a Pratihara king, as follows:

*The kings of Andhra, Saindhava (Sind), Vidarbha (part of Maharashtra) and Kalinga (part of Orissa) fell before him even as he was a prince ...*

*He won a victory over Chakrayudha (the ruler of Kanauj) ...*

*He defeated the king of Vanga (part of Bengal), Anarta (part of Gujarat), Malava (part of Madhya Pradesh), Kirata (forest peoples), Turushka (Turks), Vatsa, Matsya (both kingdoms in north India) ...*

Kings often rewarded Brahmanas by grants of land. These were recorded on copper plates, which were given to those who received the land.



Also, see if you can find some of the areas mentioned in the inscription on Map 1.

Other rulers made similar claims as well. Why do you think they made these claims?

**Fig. 2**

This is a set of copper plates recording a grant of land made by a ruler in the ninth century, written partly in Sanskrit and partly in Tamil. The ring holding the plates together is secured with the royal seal, to indicate that this is an authentic document.



## What was given with the land

This is part of the Tamil section of a land grant given by the Cholas:

*We have demarcated the boundaries of the land by making earthen embankments, as well as by planting thorny bushes. This is what the land contains: fruit-bearing trees, water, land, gardens and orchards, trees, wells, open spaces, pasture-land, a village, anthills, platforms, canals, ditches, rivers, silt-laden land, tanks, granaries, fish ponds, bee hives, and deep lakes.*

*He who receives the land can collect taxes from it. He can collect the taxes imposed by judicial officers as fines, the tax on betel-leaves, that on woven cloth, as well as on vehicles. He can build large rooms, with upper stories made of baked bricks, he can get large and small wells dug, he can plant trees and thorny bushes, if necessary, he can get canals constructed for irrigation. He should ensure that water is not wasted, and that embankments are built.*



*List all the possible sources of irrigation mentioned in the inscription, and discuss how these might have been used.*

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

You may have noticed that each of these ruling dynasties was based in a specific region. At the same time, they tried to control other areas. One particularly

prized area was the city of Kanauj in the Ganga valley. For centuries, rulers belonging to the Gurjara-Pratihara, Rashtrakuta and Pala dynasties fought for control over Kanauj. Because there were three “parties” in this long-drawn conflict, historians often describe it as the “tripartite struggle”.

As we will see (pp. 62-66), 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 temples, which were sometimes extremely rich. You will read more about this in Chapter 5.

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. Much of the wealth Mahmud carried away was used to create a splendid capital city at Ghazni.

Sultan Mahmud was also interested in finding out more about the people he conquered, and entrusted a scholar named Al-Biruni to write an account of the subcontinent. This Arabic work, known as the *Kitab ul-Hind*, remains an important source for historians. He consulted Sanskrit scholars to prepare this account.

Other kings who engaged in warfare included 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.



Look at Map 1 and suggest reasons why these rulers wanted to control Kanauj and the Ganga valley.

**Sultan**  
An Arabic term meaning ruler.



Look at Map 1 again and discuss why the Chahamanas may have wanted to expand their territories.

## A Closer Look: The Cholas



**Map 2**  
The Chola kingdom  
and its neighbours.

### From Uraiyur to Thanjavur

How did the Cholas rise to power? A minor chiefly family known as the Muttaraiyar held power in the Kaveri delta. They were subordinate to the Pallava kings of Kanchipuram. 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. 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.



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**

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. These were centres of craft production. Temples were also endowed with land by rulers as well as by others. The produce of this land



**Fig. 3**

*The temple at Gangaikondacholapuram. Notice the way in which the roof tapers. Also look at the elaborate stone sculptures used to decorate the outer walls.*



went into maintaining all the specialists who worked at the temple and very often lived near it – priests, garland makers, cooks, sweepers, musicians, dancers, etc. In other words, temples were not only places of worship; they were the hub of economic, social and cultural life as well.

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**

Many of the achievements of the Cholas were made possible through new developments in agriculture. Look at Map 2 again. Notice that the river Kaveri branches off into several small channels before emptying into the Bay of Bengal. These channels overflow frequently, depositing fertile soil on their banks. Water from the channels also provides the necessary moisture for agriculture, particularly the cultivation of rice.

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. Forests had to be cleared in some regions; land had to be levelled in other areas. In the delta region embankments had to be built to prevent flooding and canals had to be constructed to

**Fig. 4**

*A Chola bronze sculpture.*

*Notice how carefully it is decorated.*

*To find out how these images were made, see Chapter 6.*





carry water to the fields. In many areas two crops were grown in a year.

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. Remember that 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**

How was the administration organised? Settlements of peasants, known as *ur*, became prosperous with the spread of irrigation agriculture. Groups of such villages formed larger units called *nadu*. The village council and the *nadu* performed several administrative functions including dispensing justice and collecting taxes.

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 *muwendavelan* (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.

**Fig. 5**

A ninth-century sluice-gate in Tamil Nadu. It regulated the outflow of water from a tank into the channels that irrigated the fields.

A sluice gate is traditionally a wood or metal barrier which is commonly used to control water levels and flow rates in rivers and canals.



## 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

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.

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. Associations of traders known as *nagarams* also occasionally performed administrative functions in towns.

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. Names of those eligible to be members of these committees were written on small tickets of palm leaf; these tickets were put into an earthenware pot, from which a young boy was asked to take out the tickets, one by one for each committee.

## Inscriptions and texts

Who could be a member of a sabha? The Uttaramerur inscription lays down:

*All those who wish to become members of the sabha should be owners of land from which land revenue is collected.*

*They should have their own homes.*

*They should be between 35 and 70 years of age.*

*They should have knowledge of the Vedas.*

*They should be well-versed in administrative matters and honest.*

*If anyone has been a member of any committee in the last three years, he cannot become a member of another committee.*

*Anyone who has not submitted his accounts, and those of his relatives, cannot contest the elections.*

While inscriptions tell us about kings and powerful men, here is an excerpt from the *Periyapurāṇam*, a twelfth-century Tamil work, which informs us about the lives of ordinary men and women.

*On the outskirts of Adanur was a small hamlet of Pulaiyas (a name used for a social group considered “outcastes” by Brahmanas and Vellalas), studded with small huts under old thatches and inhabited by agrarian labourers engaged in menial occupations. In the thresholds of the huts covered with strips of leather, little chickens moved about in groups; dark children who wore bracelets of black iron were prancing about, carrying little puppies ... In the shade of the marudū (arjuna) trees, a female labourer put her baby to sleep on a sheet of leather; there were mango trees from whose branches drums were hanging; and under the coconut palms, in little hollows on the ground, tiny-headed bitches lay after whelping. The red-crested cocks crowed before dawn calling the brawny Pulaiyar (plural) to their day’s work; and by day, under the shade of the kañji tree spread the voice of the wavy-haired Pulaiya women singing as they were husking paddy ...*



Do you think women participated in these assemblies? In your view are lotteries useful in choosing members of committees?



Were there any Brahmanas in this hamlet? Describe all the activities that were taking place in the village. Why do you think temple inscriptions ignore these activities?

## China under the Tang dynasty

In China, an empire was established under the Tang dynasty, which remained in power for about 300 years (from the seventh to the tenth centuries). Its capital, Xi'an, was one of the largest cities in the world, visited by Turks, Iranians, Indians, Japanese and Koreans.

The Tang empire was administered by a bureaucracy recruited through an examination, which was open to all who wished to appear for it. This system of selecting officials remained in place, with some changes, till 1911.



*In what ways was this system different from those prevalent in the Indian subcontinent?*



**Imagine**

You are present in an election for a *sabha*. Describe what you see and hear.

### Let's recall

1. Match the following:

Gurjara-Pratiharas

Western Deccan

Rashtrakutas

Bengal

Palas

Gujarat and Rajasthan

Cholas

Tamil Nadu

2. Who were the parties involved in the "tripartite struggle"?

3. What were the qualifications necessary to become a member of a committee of the *sabha* in the Chola empire?



4. What were the two major cities under the control of the Chahamanas?

### Let's understand

5. How did the Rashtrakutas become powerful?
6. What did the new dynasties do to gain acceptance?
7. What kind of irrigation works were developed in the Tamil region?
8. What were the activities associated with Chola temples?

### Let's discuss

9. Look at Map 1 once more and find out whether there were any kingdoms in the state in which you live.
10. Contrast the "elections" in Uttaramerur with present-day panchayat elections.

### Let's do

11. Compare the temple shown in this chapter with any present-day temple in your neighbourhood, highlighting any similarities and differences that you notice.
12. Find out more about taxes that are collected at present. Are these in cash, kind, or labour services?

### KEYWORDS

▼  
*samanta*  
temple  
*nadu*  
*sabha*  
▲



# 3 THE DELHI SULTANS

In Chapter 2 we saw that regions like the Kaveri delta became the centre of large kingdoms. Did you notice that there was no mention of a kingdom with Delhi as its capital? That was because Delhi became an important city only in the twelfth century.

Take a look at Table 1. Delhi first became the capital of a kingdom under the Tomara Rajputs, who were defeated in the middle of the twelfth century by the Chauhans (also referred to as Chahamanas) of Ajmer. It was under the Tomaras and Chauhans that Delhi became an important commercial centre. Many rich Jaina merchants lived in the city and constructed several temples. Coins minted here, called *dehliwal*, had a wide circulation.

**Map 1**  
Selected Sultanate  
cities of Delhi,  
thirteenth-fourteenth  
centuries.



The transformation of Delhi into a capital that controlled vast areas of the subcontinent started with the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Take a look at Table 1 again and identify the five dynasties that together made the Delhi Sultanate.

The Delhi Sultans built many cities in the area that we now know as Delhi. Look at Map 1 and locate Dehli-i Kuhna, Siri and Jahanpanah.

# THE RULERS OF DELHI

Table 1

## RAJPUT DYNASTIES

### Tomaras

**Early twelfth century-1165**

Ananga Pala

1130-1145

### Chauhans

**1165-1192**

Prithviraj Chauhan

1175-1192

## EARLY TURKISH RULERS 1206-1290

Qutbuddin Aybak

1206-1210

Shamsuddin Iltutmish

1210-1236

Raziyya

1236-1240

Ghiyasuddin Balban

1266-1287



*Iltutmish's tomb*



*Alai Darwaza*

## KHALJI DYNASTY

**1290-1320**

Jalaluddin Khalji

1290-1296

Alauddin Khalji

1296-1316

## TUGHLUQ DYNASTY 1320-1414

Ghiyasuddin Tughluq

1320-1324

Muhammad Tughluq

1324-1351

Firuz Shah Tughluq

1351-1388

## SAYYID DYNASTY

**1414-1451**

Khizr Khan

1414-1421

## LODI DYNASTY

**1451-1526**

Bahlul Lodi

1451-1489



*Firuz Shah Tughluq's tomb*



## Finding Out about the Delhi Sultans

Although inscriptions, coins and architecture provide a lot of information, especially valuable are “histories”, *tarikh* (singular) / *tawarikh* (plural), written in Persian, the language of administration under the Delhi Sultans.

**Fig.1**

Four stages in the making of a manuscript:

- A. Preparing the paper.
- B. Writing the text.
- C. Melting gold to highlight important words and passages.
- D. Preparing the binding.



The authors of *tawarikh* were learned men: secretaries, administrators, poets and courtiers, who both recounted events and advised rulers on governance, emphasising the importance of just rule.

### The circle of justice

Fakhr-i Mudabbir wrote in the thirteenth century:

*A king cannot survive without soldiers. And soldiers cannot live without salaries. Salaries come from the revenue collected from peasants. But peasants can pay revenue only when they are prosperous and happy. This happens when the king promotes justice and honest governance.*



Do you think the circle of justice is an appropriate term to describe the relationship between the king and his subjects?

Keep the following additional details in mind: (1) the authors of *tawarikh* lived in cities (mainly Delhi) and hardly ever in villages. (2) They often wrote their histories for Sultans in the hope of rich rewards. (3) These authors advised rulers on the need to preserve an “ideal” social order based on **birthright** and **gender distinctions**. Their ideas were not shared by everybody.

In 1236 Sultan Iltutmish’s daughter, Raziyya, became Sultan. The chronicler of the age, Minhaj-i Siraj, recognised that she was more able and qualified than all her brothers. But he was not comfortable at having a queen as ruler. Nor were the nobles happy at her attempts to rule independently. She was removed from the throne in 1240.

### What Minhaj-i Siraj thought about Raziyya

Minhaj-i Siraj thought that the queen’s rule went against the ideal social order created by God, in which women were supposed to be subordinate to men. He therefore asked: “In the register of God’s creation, since her account did not fall under the column of men, how did she gain from all of her excellent qualities?”

On her inscriptions and coins Raziyya mentioned that she was the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish. This was in contrast to the queen Rudramadevi (1262-1289), of the Kakatiya dynasty of Warangal, part of modern Andhra Pradesh. Rudramadevi changed her name on her inscriptions and pretended she was a man. Another queen, Didda, ruled in Kashmir (980-1003). Her title is interesting: it comes from “didi” or “elder sister”, an obviously affectionate term given to a loved ruler by her subjects.



*Express Minhaj’s ideas in your own words. Do you think Raziyya shared these ideas? Why do you think it was so difficult for a woman to be a ruler?*

#### **Birthright**

*Privileges claimed on account of birth. For example, people believed that nobles inherited their rights to govern, because they were born in certain families.*

#### **Gender distinctions**

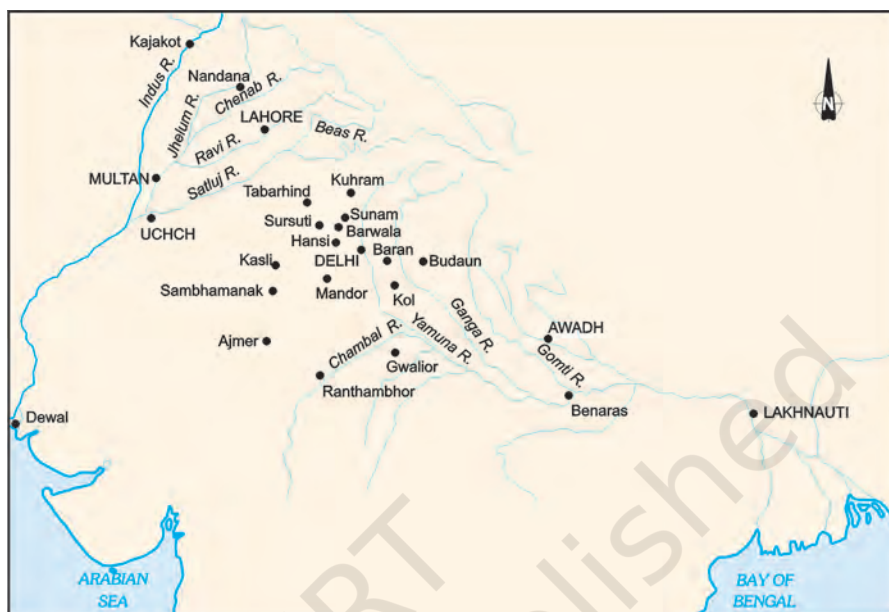
*Social and biological differences between women and men. Usually, these differences are used to argue that men are superior to women.*



## From Garrison Town to Empire: The Expansion of the Delhi Sultanate

### Map 2

Major cities captured  
by Shamsuddin  
Iltutmish.



### Hinterland

The lands  
adjacent to a city  
or port that supply  
it with goods and  
services.

### Garrison town

A fortified  
settlement, with  
soldiers.

In the early thirteenth century the control of the Delhi Sultans rarely went beyond heavily fortified towns occupied by garrisons. The Sultans seldom controlled the **hinterland** of the cities and were therefore dependent upon trade, tribute or plunder for supplies.

Controlling **garrison towns** in distant Bengal and Sind from Delhi was extremely difficult. Rebellion, war, even bad weather could snap fragile communication routes. Delhi's authority was also challenged by Mongol invasions from Afghanistan and by governors who rebelled at any sign of the Sultan's weakness. The Sultanate barely survived these challenges. Its consolidation occurred during the reign of Ghiyasuddin Balban and further expansion under Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq.

The first set of campaigns along the "internal frontier" of the Sultanate aimed at consolidating the hinterlands of the garrison towns. During these campaigns forests were cleared in the Ganga-Yamuna doab and hunter-gatherers and pastoralists expelled from their habitat.



These lands were given to peasants and agriculture was encouraged. New fortresses, garrison towns and towns were established to protect trade routes and to promote regional trade.

The second expansion occurred along the “external frontier” of the Sultanate. Military expeditions into southern India started during the reign of Alauddin Khalji (see Map 3) and culminated with Muhammad Tughluq. In their campaigns, Sultanate armies captured elephants, horses and slaves and carried away precious metals.

By the end of Muhammad Tughluq’s reign, 150 years after somewhat humble beginnings, the armies of the Delhi Sultanate had marched across a large part of the subcontinent. They had defeated rival armies and seized cities. The Sultanate collected taxes from the peasantry and dispensed justice in its realm. But how complete and effective was its control over such a vast territory?



**Map 3**  
Alauddin Khalji's  
campaign into  
south India.