

History of The Deccan In Ancient Period

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Introduction:

The Deccan (Dakshinapatha or South land) was the latest part of India to be overrun by the Indo-Aryans. In epics this part is described as covered by dense forests and haunted by “demons” and aboriginal tribes, Rakshasas and the Dasyus. To the early Aryans the Vindhya seemed so lofty as to “shut out the sun”. A legend states that the vedic sage Agastya was the first to introduce the Ramayana that Rama when banished from Ayodhya went to Dandakaranya forest where he fought with many demons. He is supposed to have spent some time at Panchavati near Nasik on the river Godavari. We may roughly conclude that the penetration of the south began by about the 7th century B.C.

The Indo- Aryan invaders drove those who resisted them into jungles where as they intermarried with the rest and incorporated them in their fold. The aborigines thus were brought into close contact with the Indo-Aryans. The original settlers learnt the language of their conquerors though they preserved their own. This led to the formation of Maharashtri Prakrit, the parent of modern Marathi.

At this time the main settlements of the Aryans were in Vidharba or Berar, the rest of the country still remained in a wild state. The major part of the Deccan consisted even by the 1st century A.D. of “desert regions and vast mountains, swarming with wild beasts of every description leopards, tigers and elephants, huge snakes, hyenas, and monkeys of various kinds”. Fa-hien who visited India between A.D.399 and 414 described these parts as precipitous and dangerous”. The earliest historical event in the history of the Deccan was the despatch by Asoka in 256 B.C. of a Buddhist mission to the Rashtrikas, Andhras and others of these parts of India. “The Rashtikas, later called Maharashtrikas or Maharathas the ancestors of the Marathas, were the people inhabiting the country round poona; the Pitenikas were the inhabitants of the district of Paithan and the Bhojas were the people of Berar”. It appears that at the head of this mission sent by Asoka was a monk named Rakhita who penetrated the south as far as Banavasi in Dharwar district. Hiuen Tsang found about 100 monasteries at Banavasi with 100,000 monks.

Andhras:

The Andhras were probably Dravidian speaking Telugus originally living between the deltas of the rivers Godavari and Krishna. The Andhras extended their sway quickly over the whole of the Deccan. Their principal towns were Sri, Kakulam (near Musulipatam), Dharanikota

or Amaravati, Paithan and Nasik. There is a reference in Pliny's accounts to Andhras who, he tells us, were having thirty walled towns, numerous villages and an army of 100,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry, and 1,000 elephants. The Andhras made frequent wars with the neighbouring kings namely the Kalingas of Orissa and the Saka Satraps of Ujjan. The Andhras or Satakarni dynasty ruled from about 225 B.C. to 255 A.D.

At the height of their power, the Andhras governed practically the whole of the Deccan. They held many ports on the western coast and were naturally very prosperous Paithan was a great emporium for the distribution of trade from the Bay of Bengal and from Arabian Sea. A Jain chronicler described Paithan as a prosperous town with splendid temples and palaces and wide streets surrounded by high walls and a moat. Communications must have been fairly easy, for Nasik caves record donations from the people of Sind while Bharhut stupa near Allahabad records donations from merchants at Nasik. Though the Andhra kings were orthodox Hindus, they gave liberal patronage to Buddhism, making grants of lands for the maintenance of monasteries. The Hindus and the Buddhists freely mixed together without even a hint of antagonism between the two religions.

Chalukya

The great Chalukya dynasty appears on the scene by about the year 550 A.D. The history upon the fortunes of the Chalukyas. They were a line of kings possibly of Hun origin who had settled in Gujarath and had become Rajputs. The most famous among the dynasties of the Deccan of the times, the dynasty was founded by Pulakesin I in the middle of the 6th century A.D.

Pulakesin II: His grandson Pulakesin II who ruled from 608 A.D. to 642 A.D. was contemporary of Harsha of Kanaji(606 A.D. to 648). He occupied a paramount position in the Deccan, a position similar to that of Harsha in northern India. We have already seen that when Harsha sought to bring the Deccan under his subjugation about the year 620 A.D. , Pulakesin proved too strong for him and repelled Harsha's attack successfully. The Nerbada remained the border between the two empires of Harsha and Pulakesin II.

Conditions under Chalukyas: At first the capital of the Chalukya kings was at Vatapi (modern Badami) in Bijapur district. The caves and temples at Badami bear testimony to its former glory. The sovereign of the Deccan was visited by Hiuen Tsang in 641 A.D. at Nasik. He was much impressed by the power of Pulakesin II and the loyalty of his warlike vassals. The Chinese traveler experienced much difficulty in crossing the robber-infested jungles of the Western Ghats. Then as now, this part was known as Maharashtra. Though there were Buddhists with their monasteries, majority of the people did not follow the Buddhist religion. The fame of

Pulakesin extended even to distant court of Persia which exchanged embassies with him. This inter-course with Persia is commemorated in the frescoes at Ajanta caves.

Rashtrakutas:

Pulakesin II was utterly defeated and slain in 642 A.D. by Narasimhavarman the Pallava king of Kanchi. For some time, the Pallava king proved to be the most powerful monarch in the Deccan. But this defeat was avenged in 674 A.D. by Pulakesin's Son who captured Kanchi. The conflict between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas continued for some time and with varying the Pallavas continued for some time and with varying fortunes until 757 A.D. when a Rashtrakuta chieftain overthrew the Chalukya dynasty which had been paramount in the Deccan for about two hundred years. The position of paramountcy over the Deccan was to be enjoyed hereafter by the Rashtrakutas for nearly two centuries and a quarter (757 A.D. to 973 A.D.) It was during this period that Buddhism finally disappeared from the Deccan.

In 973 A.D. the Rashtrakutas worn out by incessant wars came to an end. "As a light extinguished by a fierce flame of the once flourishing Ratta rule, there remained only the memory."

Conclusion;

Andras, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas played vital role in history of Deccan, when fortunes of Indian culture were flourished. These dynasties constantly fought amongst each other. Satavanas formed a cultural bridge they are credited for establishing peace in the country after the fall of the Mauryan empire. Chalukyas created the Chalukyan style of architecture. Then Rashtrakutas involved in a three-way power struggle for control of the Gangetic plains with the Pratihara of Gujarat and Palas of Bengal.

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