

After the break up of the Gupta empire, there arose small kingdoms. Under Harsha Vardhana many of these kingdoms had been conquered. However after Harsha's death several new dynasties appeared on the scene. Most of them belonged to a common name Rajput in Northern India. The five centuries from 700 to 1200 are famous as Rajput period in Northern India. However, there is no mention of Rajputs in the early literature of ancient India.

The Emergence of New Dynasties

By the seventh century the kings used to recognize the big landlords or warrior chiefs in different regions as their samantas or subordinates. The samantas maintained small armies and supported their kings or overlords in the wars. They also brought gifts for their overlord in the court. As samantas gained power and wealth, they declared themselves to be maha-samanta, maha-mandaleshwara (the great lord of a circle or region). Sometimes they declared their independence from the weak successors of their overlords. For example, initially the Rashtrakutas were subordinates to the Chalukyas of Karnataka in the Deccan. In the mid-eighth century, Dantidurga, a **Rashtrakuta** chief, overthrew his **Chalukya** overlord and became the king. He was not Kshatriya by birth. The Brahmanas performed a ritual called Hiranya-garbha (literally, the golden womb) which was thought to lead to the 'rebirth' of the sacrificer as a Kshatriya.

In another instance, the **Kadamba Mayurasharma** and the **Gurjara-Pratihara Harichandra** were Brahmanas who gave up their traditional professions and established kingdoms in Karnataka and Rajasthan respectively after successful fights. The new dynasties built temples, performed yajnas and gave land to Brahmanas to gain general acceptance in the public and show their power and wealth.

The Rajputs

The origin of Rajputs is not confirmed. Historians differ on this subject widely. Some regard Rajputs as descendents of ancient Kshatriya ruling



Rajput king and queen with maids (A specimen of Rajput Paintings)



A specimen of Kangra Paintings

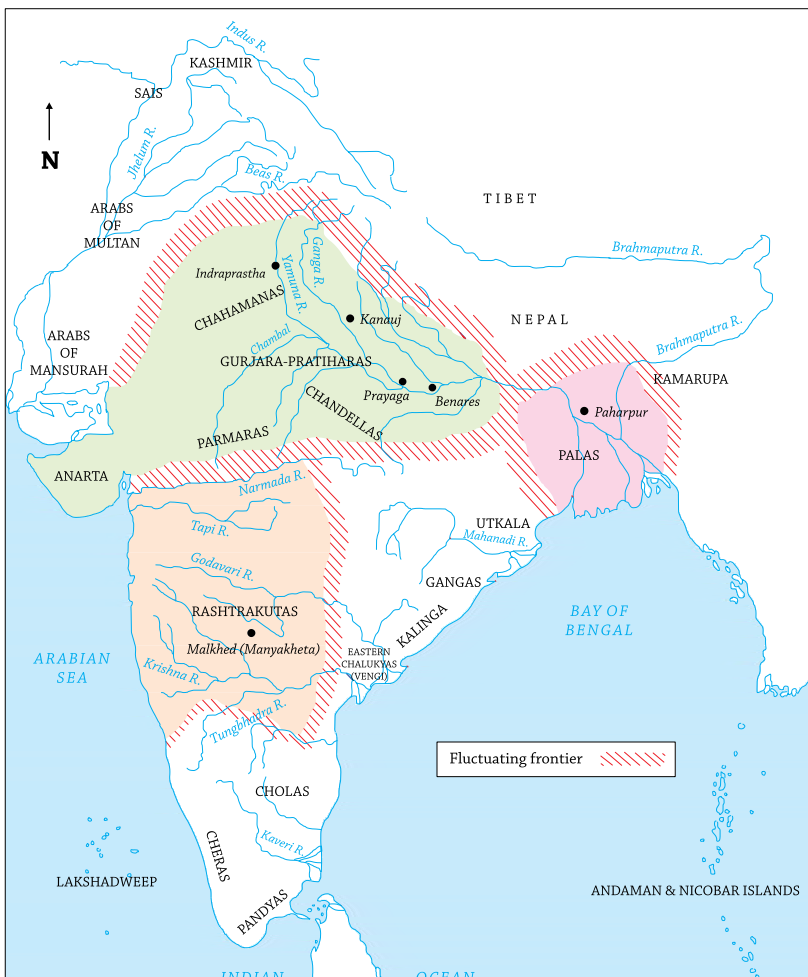
families. Some claim their descent from **Surya Vansh** or the Solar race. Others claim to have descended from **Chandra Vansh** or the lunar race. Another tradition is that they belong to **agnikulas**. The **agnikul** origin divides Rajputs into four clans namely Pratihara, Paramar, Chalukya or Solanki and Chauhan (or Chahamanas).

In all there were no less than thirty eight Rajput clans. Among the famous Rajput dynasties who ruled from eighth to twelfth century were Pratiharas of Gujarat and Kanauj, Paramaras of Malwa, Chandelas of Khajuraho, Chauhans of Ajmer, Guhilas in Mewar, Solankis in Kathiawar and Tomars in Haryana and Delhi.

The (Gurjara) **Pratiharas** ascended to power in Avanti (Rajasthan) near Jodhpur in about 725. They were small chiefs but gradually rose to power. They first rose to power after defeating the Arabs who ruled the Sind. Their great ruler Nagabhata II captured Kanauj in AD 725

and the rule of this clan continued till 1019. The Pratiharas ruled over Gujarat and south west Rajasthan and sometimes up to Kanauj. Mihirbhoja (836-882) was the greatest ruler of the Pratihara dynasty.

The **Chandelas** ruled in Bundelkhand region which they had captured in the 8th century. By 1000, their rule extended over the region between Narmada in the South and Yamuna in the North. The **Chauhans** had established their kingdom of Ajmer in the 8th century and later also captured Delhi from Tomars in the 12th century. The **Solankis** were the chiefs of the Pratiharas who had declared their independence in the middle of the 10th century. **Tomars** of Haryana and Delhi were small rulers under the Pratiharas. They declared their independence in early twelfth century when the Pratiharas were weakened by continuous fighting. They are credited with the founding of




Major kingdoms, seventh-twelfth centuries

Dhillika (Delhi) in 736. The **Paramaras** or Pawars ruled in Malwa with their capital at Dhar near Indore.

Administration in the Kingdoms

Besides the **Rajputs**, the other powerful rulers of 8th to 12th century were **Rashtrakutas** and **Cholas** in the Deccan and **Palas** in Bengal. We can also see some north-western part possessed by the **Arabs**.



Note The students of history must learn the various maps in detail. Compare these maps with the modern political map of India.

All these kings, more or less, used to rule in the same way. First of all they insisted to show their power and resources. The selfish and greedy courtiers also praised them endowing with false power and wisdom. Though the kings often shared power with their *samantas* as well as with associations of peasants, traders and Brahmanas, they adopted titles showing higher to highest powerful. For example, *maharaja-adhiraja* (great king, overlord of kings), *tribhuvana-chakravarti* (lord of the three worlds).

All the states collected tax or revenue in the form of cash or kind. Usually they charged **a part of the produce** of the peasants, cattle-keepers and artisans. They also collected revenue from the traders. Sometimes, the lords asserted that the land was owned by them. And the users of land in any form had to pay a 'rent'. The tax could be in the form of forced labour. Inscriptions of the Cholas in Tamil Nadu refers on four hundred kinds of taxes. These included taxes on thatching the house, use of a ladder to climb palm trees, etc.

The resources collected through taxes were used to finance the administrative network, maintenance of the army and constructions of forts and temples. The kings also used the resources in fighting wars for wealth (in the form of plunder), access to land as control of trade routes to earn high revenue.


The **tax collectors** and **army officers** were appointed from the close relatives of the king or influential families. The positions were often hereditary.

Prashastis and Land Grants

Most of the *Prashastis* found as inscriptions usually on pillars or walls contain false details. They depict the king brave victorious warrior. This false or exaggerated power show was perhaps to frighten people and neighbouring rulers. These were composed by learned persons who occasionally helped in the administration.

Kings often rewarded Brahmanas by grants of land. These were **recorded on copper plates**. The ring holding the plates together was secured with the royal seal, to indicate that this was an authentic document. The plates were given to those who received the land. The boundaries of the land, what the land contained — trees, wells, canals, tanks, etc. were engraved on the copper plates. It was also stated what the land receiver can do on the land — building houses, digging wells or canals, planting trees, etc.

In the twelfth century, **Kalhana**, a poet wrote the history of kings who ruled over Kashmir. The long Sanskrit poem was named as *Raja Tarangini*. He used a variety of historical sources, including earlier histories, eyewitness accounts, documents and inscriptions. What is unusual with the book that the author often criticized the rulers



and their policies. That is how he differs from the composers of the prashasties.

Warfare for Wealth

Attacking the neighbouring countries to annex them to their own kingdom, plunder and control of the trade routes was a common thing those days. But some big and famous wars for wealth and/or establishing their empire were the following.

Tripartite Struggle for Kanauj

The prime location of Kanauj city in the northern plain enabled its ruler to have complete control over the Ganga valley, a very fertile region. Kanauj had a strategic location because it was accessible by the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. This facilitated trade as these rivers served as waterways. It was also a test of power between the various kingdoms of this time. The city thus attracted many rulers and several campaigns to capture it were fought. Three kingdoms in particular involved in this struggle were the **Pratiharas**, the **Rashtrakutas** and the **Palas**. Because there were three parties in this long-drawn conflict, it is called as the tripartite struggle. It continued for about a century from 780 to 910.

The Pratiharas ascended to power in about 725 C.E. The Palas dynasty of Bengal and Rashtrakutas dynasty of western Deccan were founded in about 750. The possession of Kanauj shifted from one dynasty to another several times.

Turkish Invasions

The first Arab to invade India and occupy Sind in 712 CE was Muhammad bin Kasim. Prior to that, kingdoms in the south had trading relations with the Arabs. Of course, the Arabs always wanted to have sway over Indian territories but the Rajputs offered them stiff resistance. Also, at this time, the Arabian empire disintegrated into several smaller kingdoms. These kingdoms were later occupied by the Turks in the eleventh century who built a large empire there. The Turks were interested in the riches of India, so their invasions began.

Raids of Mahmud Ghaznavi

Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, Afghanistan ruled from 997 to 1030. He extended control over parts of central Asia, Iran and the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. His targets were wealthy temples, including that of Somnath, Gujarat. He led as many as 17 expeditions into the Indian subcontinent between 1000 and 1027 C.E. On many occasions Mahmud after raiding the cities and temples went back to Ghazni.

His expeditions of Punjab and Multan also led to their annexation. He appointed his own governors to rule these states. Al-Biruni, a scholar accompanied Mahmud during his raids. He wrote an account of the subcontinent *Kitab-al Hind* in Arabic language.

Battles of Tarain

The Chauhans (975-1192) or the Chahamanas are usually referred to as the Chauhans of Ajmer and Delhi. The Chauhan dynasty had been founded around the eighth century. In eleventh century their king Ajay Deva conquered Ajmer and another ruler Visaldeva (1158-1164) conquered Delhi. The Chauhanas attempted to expand their control to the west and the east, where they were opposed by the Chalukyas (Solankies) of Gujarat and the Gahadavalas of western Uttar Pradesh. Prithviraja Chauhan III (1168-1192) was their greatest ruler.

Shahabuddin Muhammad Ghori captured the throne of Ghazni, Afghanistan in 1173. He launched his first attack in 1175 and captured Multan and Sind. During two separate attacks in 1178, he was defeated badly at the hands of a Rajput ruler of Gujarat but succeeded in capturing Lahore from a Muslim ruler. The defeat and victory made Ghori more ambitious. He now turned his attention towards Delhi. In his first attempt in 1191, Muhammad Ghori was badly defeated and injured at the First Battle of Tarain by Prithviraja Chauhan. Muhammad Ghori returned again in 1192. At the Second Battle of Tarain, he defeated and killed Prithviraja Chauhan. Ajmer and Delhi passed into the hands of Turkish invaders. This was not only a great blow to Rajput power but also changed the course of India's history.

In 1194, Jaichandra Gahadavala of Kanauj, who had earlier helped Muhammad Ghori was also defeated and killed. In 1196, Gwalior and many other kingdoms also fell to Turkish invaders. These defeats of rulers of small kingdoms led to the foundation of Delhi Sultanate.

Case Study : The Cholas

The Cholas were powerful kings who brought glory to South India. The Chola dynasty was founded by Vijayalaya (846-871) with its capital at Thanjavur (Tanjore). He belonged to the ancient chiefly family of the the Cholas from Uraiyur. He captured the Kaveri delta from the Muttaraiyar, another chiefly family. They were subordinates to the Pallava kings of Kanchipuram. The successors of Vijayalaya conquered neighbouring regions and the kingdom grew in size and power.

Parantaka I (907-953) defeated the Pandyas and annexed Madurai. Rajaraja I (985-1016) subjugated the Cheras. He over ran the eastern Chalukya Kingdom of Vengi and also captured the Islands of Lakshadweep and the Maldives. Rajendra I (1016-1044) transformed the Chola kingdom into the mightiest kingdom in India by the middle of 11th century. He undertook military campaigns towards North India, crossing the river Ganga and defeating two northern kingdoms. To mark this victory, he assumed the title of Gangaikonda (the conqueror of the Ganga). He annexed the whole of Sri Lanka, established supremacy over the Pandya and Pala kings and expanded commercial contacts with the Malay Peninsula in the south-east Asia. He established his capital near Thanjavur and named it Gangaikonda-Cholapuram (the city of the Chola conqueror of the Ganga).



*The temple at
Gangaikondacholapuram*

The Chola Army

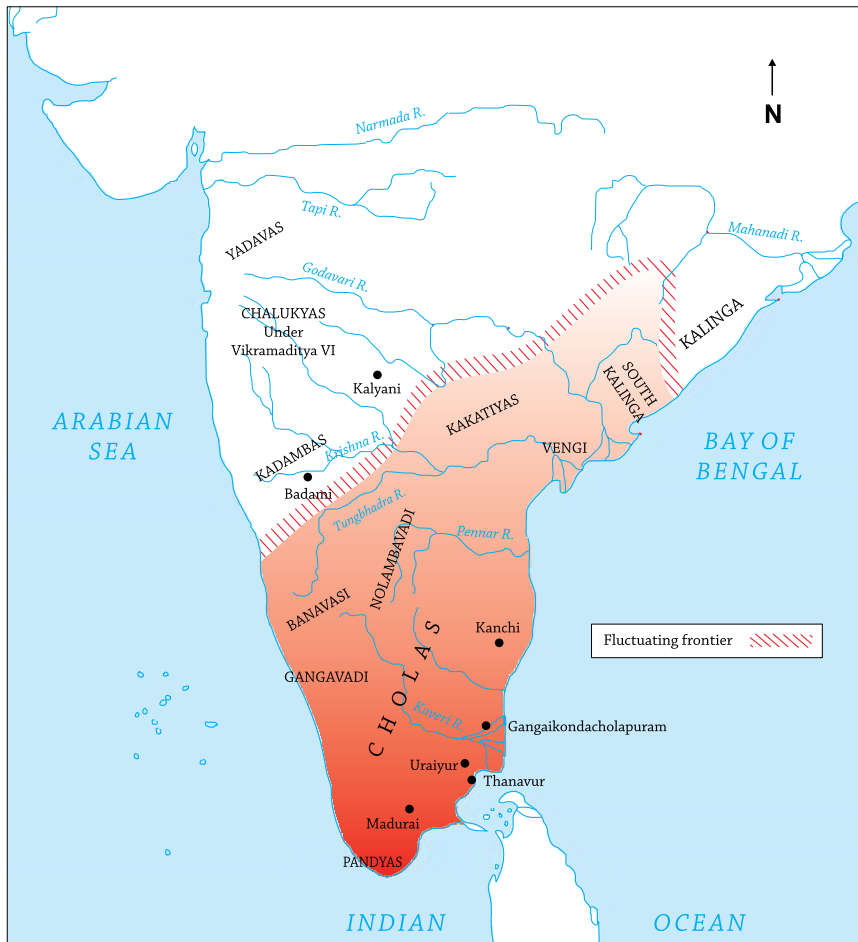
A Chinese traveller, Chau Ju-Kua went to Thanjavur in 1178. He writes, "This (Chola) country is at war with a kingdom (of the west) of India. The government owns sixty thousand war elephants, each one seven or eight feet high. When fighting, these elephants carry houses on their backs and these houses are full of soldiers who shoot arrows at long range and fight with spears at close quarters."

Architecture and Bronze Sculpture

Rajaraja I built the Brihadeshvara temple (also called Rajarajeshvara temple) at Thanjavur. Rajendra I

also built a temple at Gangaikonda-Cholapuram (Fig. 12.5). Both the temples are known for their wonderful architecture and sculpture. See the picture of the temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram. Notice the way in which the roof becomes gradually narrower towards the top. Also look at the elaborate stone sculpture used to decorate the outer walls.

Settlements grew around the Chola temples. These were centres of craft production. Temples were not only places of worship, they were the hubs of economic, social and cultural life as well. The specialists who worked at the temple very often lived near it — priests, garland makers, musicians, dancers etc. To bear the expenses of the temple and the people associated with it, the temples were provided



The chola kindom and its neighbours

with land. This was given by rulers as well as by others usually big landlords. The produce of this land went into maintaining the above specialists.

Making of bronze images (statues) was the most important among the crafts connected with the temple. Chola bronze images are considered the finest in the world. Images were made mostly of the deities but sometimes of the devotees also.

Making of Bronze Images

Bronze is an alloy made by mixing copper with tin and heating them to melt. Chola bronze images were made using the 'lost wax' technique. First, an image was made of wax with carvings of all fine details. This was covered with wet clay and allowed to dry. A tiny hole was made



A ninth-century sluice gate in Tamil Nadu

in the clay cover and it was heated. The molten wax was drained out through this hole. Then molten bronze metal was poured into the clay mould (cover) through the hole. It was put aside to allow the metal cool and solidify. Then, the clay cover was carefully removed, and the image was cleaned and polished. The advantage of this technique was that the artisan had to carve out designs on soft wax rather than on the hard metal.

Agrarian Expansion with Irrigation Agriculture

Prantak I defeated the Pandyas but was defeated by Krishna II of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. He realized that to be successful in war, he must have a strong kingdom. To build such a kingdom, people must have enough food and the necessities of life. Therefore, he and his successors laid much emphasis on the improvement of agriculture. They provided all facilities to encourage agriculture. They built canals and tanks for irrigation purpose. They ensured that no water was wasted and that embankments were built in the delta region to prevent flooding. Huge tanks were constructed in rocky plateau region to collect rain water. In areas of underground water (in deltas), wells were dug. The rulers as well as the elders of the village took an active interest to manage these irrigation works — organising labour and resources, maintaining these works and deciding on how water is to be shared. Sluice gates were constructed to regulate the outflow of water from a tank into the channels that irrigated the fields. The villages of peasants became prosperous with the spread of irrigation agriculture.

Organisation of the Administration

Settlements or villages of peasants were called *ur*. Groups of such villages formed larger units called *nadu*. Rich peasants of the *vellala* caste controlled the affairs of the *nadu* under the supervision of the central Chola government. The village council and *nadu* council performed several administrative functions including dispensing justice and collecting taxes. The Chola kings gave some rich land owners titles like araiyar (chief) and entrusted them with important offices at the centre.

Types of Land

The 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

pallichchandam : land donated to Jaina institutions

Besides, *periyannadu* was the land given for cultivation to commoners. It covered a wider territory.



A Chola Bronze Sculpture



There were a large number of *brahmadeya* or Brahmana settlements in Kaveri valley. Each brahmadeya was looked after by a *sabha* (assembly) of prominent Brahmana landholders. 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. The members of these committees were selected by what is called as lottery system today. As everyone thought himself superior, there was no way out. The decisions of the assemblies were recorded in details in inscriptions, often on the stone walls of temples.

Who could be a Member of a Sabha ?

'All those who wish to become members of the sabha should be owners of land from which land revenue is collected. They should be between 35 and 70 years of age and well-versed in administrative matters and honest. They should have knowledge of the Vedas and should have their own homes. 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.'

— Uttaramerur inscriptions

In towns, *nagarams* (the association of traders) also occasionally performed administrative functions.

However, the inscriptions do not tell about the lives of ordinary men and women. *Periyapuram*, a twelfth century Tamil work tells us about their lives in small huts under the old thatches in the outskirts of the towns. They were called *Pulaiyas* or 'outcastes' by the upper castes. But, in all their pitiable poverty, the children, women and men were busy and content in playing with animals, singing while husking paddy,.

In Other Parts of the World

The Tang dynasty established an empire in China which was in power from the seventh to the tenth century. Turks, Iranians, Indians, Japanese and Koreans visited its capital city, Xi'an. It was one of the largest city in the world. The Tang empire was administered by officers selected through an examination open to all.



Key Words

- » Sultan : an Arabic term meaning ruler.
- » Samantas : subordinates or chiefs of a king.
- » Nadu : a group of villages.
- » Sabha : an assembly of prominent Brahmana landholders.
- » Agrarian expansion : refers to development of agriculture in terms of area under crop cultivation.

SUMMARY

- ▶ The five centuries from 700 to 1200 are famous as Rajput period in Northern India.
- ▶ The samantas or subordinates of the kings maintained small armies and supported their kings or overlords in the wars.
- ▶ Some times, the samantas declared their independence from the weak successors of their overlords. Many samantas founded new dynasties in this way.
- ▶ The agnikul origin divides the Rajputs into four clans namely Pratihara, Paramar, Solanki and Chauhan.
- ▶ Besides the Rajputs, the other powerful rulers of 8th to 12th century were Rashtrakutas and Cholas in Deccan and Palas in Bengal. Some north-western part was possessed by the Arabs.
- ▶ All the states collected tax or revenue usually as a part of the produce of the peasants, cattle-keepers and artisans. Forced labour was also prevalent.
- ▶ There was a constant struggle for Kanauj among the Pratihars, the Rashtrakutas and the Palas, known as the 'tripartite struggle.'
- ▶ Mahmud of Ghazni raided Indian cities and temples 17 times. Muhammad Ghori established /laid the foundation of Delhi Sultanate.
- ▶ Vijayalaya founded the Chola dynasty in the middle of the 9th century with its capital at Thanjavur.
- ▶ Rajaraja I and Rajendra I were the powerful Chola rulers who extended its dimensions.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. The tripartite struggle took place over
 - a. Delhi
 - b. Kanauj
 - c. Thanjavur
 - d. Ajmer
2. The Brihadeshvara temple was built by
 - a. Vijayalaya
 - b. Prantaka I
 - c. Rajaraja I
 - d. Rajendra I
3. Who was the greatest ruler of the Pratihara dynasty ?
 - a. Prithviraj
 - b. Mihirbhoj
 - c. Harshvardhana
 - d. Jaichandra
4. Who wrote the history of the rulers of Kashmir ?
 - a. Al-Biruni
 - b. Kalhana
 - c. Kalidasa
 - d. None of these
5. The Uttaramerur inscriptions discuss the function of the
 - a. sabha
 - b. village assemblies
 - c. trader associations
 - d. Chola kings

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. The _____ maintained small armies and supported their overlords in wars.
2. All the states collected tax as a part of the _____ of the peasants, cattle keepers and artisans.
3. _____ raided Indian cities and temples 17 times.
4. _____ and Rajendra I were the powerful Chola rulers.
5. The Palas ruled over _____.



C. Match the Following :

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Chandellas | a. Bengal |
| 2. Cholas | b. Western Deccan |
| 3. Palas | c. Gujarat and Rajasthan |
| 4. Rashtrakutas | d. Tamil Nadu |
| 5. Pratiharas | e. Haryana and Delhi |
| 6. Tomars | f. Bundelkhand |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

1. Mahmud of Ghazni raided the Somnath temple and looted it.
2. Al-biruni wrote the book Kitab al-Hind.
3. Mahmud of Ghazni wanted to establish his kingdom in India.
4. Rajaraja Chola was the son of Rajendra Chola.
5. Muhmmad Ghori laid the foundation of Delhi Sultanate.

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

E. Define the terms :

- | | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Samanta | 2. Sabha | 3. Brahmadeya | 4. Agrarian expansion |
|------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|

F. Answer in one word or one phrase :

1. Where did the Rashtrakutas rule ?
2. What were the two major cities under the control of the Chahamanas ?
3. Who were the two great kings of the Chola dynasty ?
4. What was Ghazni ?
5. Where did the armies of Muhammad Ghori and Prithviraj Chauhan meet ?

G. Answer these questions briefly :

1. What did the new dynasties do to gain acceptance ?
2. Who were the parties involved in the 'tripartite struggle' ?
3. How did new dynasties emerge ?
4. What were the outcomes of the Turkish invasions ?
5. Write about the rise and fall of the Chauhanas.

H. Answer these questions in detail :

1. The period 700 to 1200 is known as Rajput period in history. Explain.
2. Compare the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghori.

PROJECT WORK

1. Find out more about taxes that are collected at present. Are these in cash, kind or labour services ?
2. Collect pictures of south Indian temples built during the medieval period.