

# THE RASHTRAKUTAS (PART-1)

B.A. (HISTORY) PART-2  
PAPER-3

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# INTRODUCTION

The *Rashtrakuta* dynasty ruled over large portions of India from the 8th to 12th century A.D. India at the time was under the threat of invasion from the Arabs, who conquered Sind in 712 A.D. and were looking to expand to the west and control trade routes in the region. A royal family called the *Chalukyas* controlled this territory and successfully resisted Arab attacks. This significantly weakened their power. Seeing an opportunity an official in the *Chalukyas*' administration named *Dantidurga* declared his independence in 753 A.D. The dynasty that he and his family formed the core of was called the *Rashtrakuta*, with their capital based at *Manyakheta*. Geographically the *Rashtrakuta* kingdom located nearly in the middle of India along the top of the Deccan Plateau.

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This position afforded many opportunities for expansion. The *Rashtrakutas* took advantage of this and frequently interfered with both the northern and southern kingdoms of India. The northern kingdoms were particularly easy to prey on, as there was no one powerful enough to effectively repel the *Rashtrakutas*. The *Rashtrakutas* also controlled large portions of the western coast of India. The majority of the trade with West Asia came through these ports and much of the *Rashtrakutas* wealth along with it. Tea and cotton textiles were exported out of the kingdom and horses were imported to be sold further inland. The *Rashtrakutas* also maintained good relations with the Arabs in Sind and traded extensively with them. By the end of the 10th century the geographical advantages the *Rashtrakutas* had enjoyed turned to disadvantages,

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as new powers in the north and south emerged as threats. In the south the *Cholas* were becoming the dominant kingdom in the area. The *Chalukya dynasty*, whom the *Rashtrakutas* had originally overthrown, was regaining much of their former power and territory. With this new threat in the south the *Rashtrakutas* were unable to keep the *Cholas* from regaining their northern territories. Along with the threat of these two kingdoms was the rise of the *Shilaharas* in the north-western Deccan. They took over much of the western coast and port cities of Western India. In the end the *Rashtrakuta's* dynasty came full circle and was overthrown by the *Chalukyas*, from whom *Dantidurga* had claimed independence from hundreds of years ago.

# ORIGIN OF THE RASHTRAKUTAS

The origin of the dynasty is still a matter of controversy among historians. Several theories are put forward to explain the origin of the Rashtrakutas.

(1) It is said that they were indigenous people of the country claiming descent from the sacred Yadava family of Epic fame, especially considering their predominance in the Gujarat and Deccan region. Of the 75 inscriptions and copper grants of the Rashtrakutas of Deccan and Gujarat that have so far been discovered, only eight mention any connection between the Rashtrakutas and the Yadavas. The earliest one that connects the two dynasties is dated to 860 A.D., with all the earlier ones being completely silent on the issue. However, a copper grant dated to 914 A.D. states, Rashtrakuta Dantidurga was born in the line of Yadava Satyaki'.

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The book *Kavirahasya* by *Halayudha* also mentions the Rashtrakutas as being the descendants of Yadava Satyaki.

(2) Another theory is that Rashtrakuta was a title given to governors of provinces by the Chalukya kings and meant 'head of the region'. Since it was such a governor who established an independent kingdom, the dynasty itself came to be called the Rashtrakutas. On becoming more powerful, they also assumed the title of Prithvi Vallabha with the 'Vallabha' getting transliterated into 'Balharas' in the Arab chronicles of the time. Irrespective of the vagueness regarding the origins of the dynasty, their rise was rapid and relatively painless by the standards of the day.

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(3) The earliest reference to the Rashtrakutas is found in the Edicts of Asoka Maurya as *Rashtrika* and Rathika, who have been used to refer to a tribe at that time resident in the North-Western regions. It has been opined that Rashtrika refers to the same tribe as the *Arattas of Punjab*. The Arattas are mentioned in the *Mahabharata* and also in the account of Alexander's invasion of Gandhara. In the Asokan edict they are mentioned immediately after the Kambojas and Gandharas, giving credence to the belief that they were resident in the Punjab. The prominent historian *C.V. Vaidya* is of the opinion that the Rashtrakutas were initially settlers of Punjab who migrated south and carved out a kingdom in the Deccan, gradually becoming the Kshatriyas of Maharashtra.

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(4) Opinion of *Dr. A.S. Altekar* :- He has pointed out that the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta originally lived in the Karnataka country and their mother tongue was Kanarese. They used the Kanares script. Several inscriptions describe them as “Lord of Lattura”. This place is identified with Latur-in Bidar in modern Karnataka. Thus it is assume that the Rashtrakuta were initially served as the district officer under the Chalukya of Badami. With the passage of time when the early Chalukya lost their power, taking advantage of this situation the Rashtrakuta overpowered them and established their dynasty.



# SOURCES OF RASHTRAKUTAS HISTORY

The study of the history of the early Rashtrakutas and the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta has been made possible by the availability of

- **Inscriptions** :-spread all over the Deccan., most of them are *written in Sanskrit, Kannanda language and stone records.*
- **Literary sources** :- Such as ancient literature in Pali, contemporaneous Kannada literature such as Kavirajamarga (850 A.D.) and Vikramarjuna Vijaya (941 A.D.), Sanskrit writings by Somadeva, Rajashekara, Gunabhadra, Jinasena and others.
- **Notes of Arab travellers**:- Such as *Suleiman, Ibn Haukal, Al Masudi, Al Istakhri* and others.

(To be continued)