

Chandella Dynasty

The Chandella Dynasty began in the first quarter of the 9th century C.E.. They controlled an area known as Jejakabhukti, the capital city of which is believed to be Khajuraho. Khajuraho is well known for its extravagant temples and buildings erected during the reign of the Chandellas. The Chandellas were of the Ksatriya class but their origin is greatly debated. Legend says that they descended from Hemavati's union with the moon (Dikshit 3). It is thought that the legend is used to explain the questionable status of the Chandellas. Historians believe that they originated from aboriginal tribes such as the Gonds, Gahawars and the Bhars (Bose 8). There is no way to come to a definite conclusion but theory supports an ancestry of the Bhars, because of similar traditions, especially evident in their buildings (Bose 9).

Texts found tell us that the founder of the dynasty is known as Nannuka or Candravarman. The small community that he created for the Pratiharas was gradually expanded with each generation (Prakash 4). The dynasty was maintained by Nannuka's descendents for almost a century until Harsadeva. Harsa reigned from around 905 until 925 C.E., and in this time he contributed to many great changes that occurred in Northern India. By assisting in a dispute between two very influential brothers, Harsa increased the power of the Chandella name in India. Harsa's grandson Dhanga, who reigned from about 950 to 1008 C.E., continued to expand the Chandella territory. He also cut off ties with the Pratiharas, of whom the Chandellas had previously been vassals. According to many inscriptions, Dhanga was a very powerful leader and had control over many other kings. Although there are minimal records of his reign, Dhanga's grandson Vidyahara is portrayed by Muslim historians as incredibly powerful. The most important changes in central to north-western India in the early 11th century are attributed to him (Bose 22-51). Vidyahara's son, of whom we can only speculate, is thought to be credited

with the decline of the Chandellas (Bose 68). The decline continues until Kirtivarman's reign from approximately 1060 to 1100 A.D.. There is a story in which Visnu is incarnated into Gopala to help Kirtivarman revive the dynasty (Bose 74). Kirtivarman's revival lasted until the reign of Jatavarman from 1115 to 1120 A.D. when it began to collapse again. Decline and wars continued until around 1308 when the dynasty collapsed. Some of their land was retained and the Chandella name is still around today as in central India (Bose 115).

Chandella society appears to have been separated into four different classes or *varnas*, the Brahmanas, Ksatriya, Vaisya, and Sudras. Those in the Brahmana *varna* were responsible for religious studies and were often used as ministers and counsellors to the rulers (Bose 151, Mitra 169). Brahmanas often counselled for their benefit, both to enjoy many privileges of the high class and to maintain their foothold of power. The Ksatriya *varna* is seldom mentioned, but it was known to exist. It appears as though maintaining class divisions declined in importance during this time and gave way to the prominence of Kula, or family. More mention is made of highly regarded family names than of the specific classes they belonged to (Bose 152). Little evidence of the lower classes is known, which implies that, like Kula, individuals put more emphasis on their profession rather than class (Bose 154).

Religious views varied largely. There are temples found in Khajuraho constructed for different deities ranging from Hanuman, Nanda and Ganesh to Siva, Visnu, and Sakti. Siva appears to have accumulated the greatest number of worshippers. Sakti, the Great, Supreme or Mother Goddess seems to have been as popular as Siva. She is often seen as Siva's consort as well as having many different names (Prakash 137). Visnu was the next most popular deity of the time. All ten of his incarnations are present but not all were equally regarded (Prakash 139). Some evidence of Jainism and Buddhism has also been found. Buddhism seems to have

had a small following but was dying out (Prakash 142). Small images have been found but nothing of great significance. Jains had a much larger following and a substantial number of temples were present in Khajuraho (Prakash 141). Religious tolerance would have been very important during this time and in these areas because of so many different beliefs. This is apparent in the occurrence of Brahmanical deities in Jaina temples as well as in temples of different deities (Prakash 144).

References:

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