

The Chalukya Dynasty

The Chalukya Dynasty was an ancient Indian empire that reigned over the Deccan Plateau [Deccan comes from the Sanskrit word *dakshina* meaning “the south”] in southern India (Pruthi 69). They controlled this region for over 600 years, between the sixth and twelfth centuries. This empire ruled as three close but separate dynasties. The earliest dynasty, the Badami Chalukya or early Western Chalukya Dynasty ruled from its capital of Vatapi (modern day Badami, in the state of Karnataka) from 543 to 757 CE (Hoilberg 307). The Eastern Chalukya or Vengi Chalukya had their capital in Vengi (near present day Eluru in the state of Andhra Pradesh) from 626 to 1070 CE (Hoilberg 307). The later Western Chalukya or Kalyani Chalukya ruled from the city of Kalyani (modern day Basavakalyan in the state of Karnataka) from 975 to 1189 CE (Hoilberg 307). At the close of the Kalyani Chalukya Dynasty, their reign extended from the state of Gujarat in the north to the Kaveria Basin in the south (Sen 387).

Dr. D.C. Sircar believes the origin of the Chalukyas dates back to an indigenous Kannada family, coming from the state of Karnataka in the southern part of India, who had obtained the status of *kshatriyas* (the nobility caste in Hindu society) (Mahajan 167). This theory is thought to be accurate since the Chalukyan kings wanted the Kannada [one of the oldest and well known Dravidian languages spoken in southern India] dialect to be used in both their language and literature. Inscriptions found throughout the Chalukya temples are written in Kannada, as well as in Sanskrit [ancient Indian language used in the sacred writings of the Vedas] (Dikshit 297). Professor N. Laxminarayana Rao notes that some of the names of the Chalukya princes end in a typical Kannada regal suffix, *arasa*, (king or chief) (Kamath 57). However, Dr. A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, an Indologist,

believes their language is of a non-Sanskrit origin, as Chalukya is derived from a Turki root, *chap* (to gallop) (Hoernle 1906). The family name Chalukya is spelt in their ancient records [inscriptions have been found recorded on rocks, caves, pillars, temples, images, walls, slabs, and tablets (Dikshit 8)] in various ways, such as, Chalkya, Chalikya, and Chalukya. Sircar believes the original name of their ancestors was Chalka, whereas Nilakanta Sastri suggests Chalkya was the original form and was later embellished to Chalukya (Dikshit 19).

The Chalukya reign began under King Jayasimha Vallabha (500-520 CE) and his son, Ranaraga (520-540 CE) (Tripathi 395). However, the true founder of the Chalukya Dynasty was Pulakesin I (535-566 CE). Pulakesin I of Badami was a feudatory to Krsna Varman II, a Kadamba king; however, Pulakesin I overpowered his ruler and took control of the Kadamba empire in 540 CE (Kamath 35). Upon gaining independence, Pulakesin I established a small hill-fort kingdom with Vatapi (Badami) as its capital (Dikshit 2). He unified the Deccan region through his political prowess and knowledge of the *Laws of Manu* [or *Manava Dharama Shastra*, sacred book given to Manu, an ancient guru, by Brahma, that deals with religious and social aspects of ancient Indian life (Buhler 1886)] (Sen 359). Pulakesin I performed sacrificial rituals such as the *asvamedha* (horse sacrifice) to assert his dominance over other empires (Sen 359). He also performed *agnistoma* (the praise of Agni) [a ritual carried out once a year during the spring, including a feast for all the gods where hymns from the *Sama Veda* were recited] and *vajapeya* [a ritual to become a successful emperor and achieve complete domination over other rulers] (Orissa 28) which illustrated his deep faith in the Vedic religion [historical Hindu religion originated during the Vedic Period 1- 6th century BCE] (Dikshit37).

Pulakesin II (608-642 CE) is considered the greatest ruler of the Chalukya Dynasty as he transformed the small Chalukyan kingdom into an extensive empire (Thorpe 58). His many victories in battle enhanced his prestige and made him the absolute sovereign of southern India. He followed a technique of conquer and then dominate bordering empires that enabled him superiority over his enemies (Jayapalan 147). The rulers of neighboring kingdoms (Kosala and Kalinga) were so terrified of Pulakesin II that they immediately surrendered to him, instead of doing battle with his armies (Chaurasia233).

The newly won territory of the eastern Deccan [former region of the Kalinga Empire] was placed under Pulakesin's II younger brother, Kubja Vishnvardhana (Dikshit 5). Vishnvardhana eventually formed the Eastern Chalukya Dynasty in 624 CE and made Vengi his capital (Madras 32). The Eastern Chalukya Dynasty's domain was the coastal land between the rivers of the Mahanadi and the Godavari (Dikshit 5). The Vengi Chalukya Dynasty came to an end when Vijayaditya VII died in 1070 CE (Bhatt 24).

The *Aihole Prasasti* (634 CE) written by Ravikirit, a Jain court poet, gives a detailed account of Pulakesin's many military accomplishments (Jayapalan147). Pulakesin II was also a notable statesmen, he established diplomatic relations with the king of Persia (Iran) (Tripathi 399). Furthermore, he was considered a great administrator as he had succeeded in unifying a large part of south India under his rule (Jayalapan 147). In 637 CE, Pulakesin II took the title of *parameswara* (paramount overlord or lord of lords) (Dikshit 68). The Pallava leader, Narashimba Verman I stormed Vatapi in 642 CE and killed Pulakesin II ending the Chalukya's reign over much of southern India (Chaurasia 234). The Badami Chalukya Empire then came under the control of the

Rashtrakuta Dynasty who ruled large parts of central and northern India between the sixth and tenth centuries. However, in 967 CE the Rashtrakuta Empire was defeated by Somesvara I, king of Western Chalukya, and the Chalukyan capital was moved from Vatapi to Kalyani (Sinha 169).

Vikramaditya VI (1076-1126 CE) was considered the greatest of the later Western Chalukya rulers. He was believed to have been the ideal king; noble, generous, who ruled solely for the sake of his people. Although he was known for his military successes, his reign was also a time of peace. Vikramaditya VI reign marked the end of the use of the Saka Varsha (Indian calendar, the Saka Era) as he introduced a new period of time known as the Chalukya-Vikrama Varsha Era. (Sen386). Many Hindu temples were built during his rule, such as the Mahadeva Temple (1112 CE), which is dedicated to Siva and contains an inscription, which reads *Devalaya Chakravarati* (Emperor Among Temples) (Kamath 117). He improved his region's administrative system and gave great attention to the welfare of his subjects; legend states that he gave land away to the needy everyday (Bhatt 20). Vikramaditya VI encouraged the development of art and literature and was a well-known patron of learning (Sen 386). The Sanskrit poet, Bilhana, wrote *Vikramankedeva Charita*, a Kavya (literary style of writing used by Indian court poets) which details the adventures of his patron king (Sen386). Bilhana considered Vikramaditya's VI rule as *ramarajya* (reign of righteousness), "no single rule of Karnataka prior to Vikramaditya VI has left so many inscriptions as this monarch and of these records, a large majority are grants to scholars and centres of religion" (Bhatt 20). The Chalukya Dynasty came to a close in 1189 CE. The Seuna Dynasty captured the northern portions of the Chalukya territories, and the rest of the Chalukyan kingdom was

captured by the Kakatiya and the Hoysala Empires (Bhatt 21). “The Chalukyan rulers strove for the welfare and happiness of their people. Though kings had unbridled authority, they could not have behaved like tyrants for that would have provoked rebellion” (Dikshit 205).

Brahmanical Hinduism was the official religion throughout the Chalukya Dynasty (Smith 354). *Yajna* (sacrificial fire rituals) received special attention during this period, as well as, *vrata* (religious vows performed, such as fasting or mantra repetition) and *dana* (the generous giving of gifts) (Sastri 391). Rock cut cave temples and elaborate structural temples were erected throughout the state of Karnataka, testifying to the Chalukyan kings’ great faith in Hinduism (Smith 354). The ritual sovereignty, a king was believed to have divine, sacred powers that were established through his Brahmanical legitimization in the temple, therefore large temple complexes were built as centres for the regional kingdoms (Flood 114). Each of these ancient temples was dedicated to one of the major deities, such as, Siva or Visnu (Flood 114). Both Saivism (worshippers of the god Siva) and Vaishnavism (followers of the god Visnu) flourished during the Chalukya period (Chopra 191).

Today, throughout the state of Karnataka hundreds of temple structures still dot the landscape. Temples play an important role in Hinduism as these structures are sacred dwellings where spiritual knowledge is obtained. Hindu temples are centres where the boundaries between man and the divine can be explored. The temple is the heart of the intellectual and artistic life of the Hindu community, serving as a holy place of worship, but also as the focal point where all artistic activities are established (Michell 58).

Badami, Aihole, and Pattadakal are considered the earliest group of the ancient temple complexes; today, Badami is still regarded as a place of pilgrimage (Hardy 65). These early monuments were built to showcase the king's outstanding power and skill, as well as, the region's courage and strength. In Pulakein's I fortress of Vatapi (Badami) there are three beautiful rock cut cave temples that have been carved out of the side of a sandstone cliff (Javid 108). The Chalukya sculptors were among the greatest creators of Hindu iconography and many of the Hindu gods were depicted in stone for the first time (Kulke 120). The three cave temples are of the Hindu faith and contain many mythological sculptures, exquisite carvings, beautiful murals, and inscriptions describing in detail the achievements of the Chalukya kings. Cave One was carved in 578 CE and is dedicated to Siva, featuring a sculpture of an eighteen-armed Siva as Nataraja (The Lord of Dance) and also Harihara (half Siva and half Visnu) (Burgess 413). Cave Two is dedicated to Visnu where he is depicted in various *avatars* (incarnations) (Burgess 412). [Visnu is the defender of the world and the restorer of *dharma* (righteous order) and his ten *avatars* appear on earth when there is chaos.] Cave Three, also called The Great Cave, is almost twenty-two metres wide, and is dedicated to Visnu (Burgess 410). This cave contains a sculpture of Visnu seated on the body of the great snake Ananta (Burgess 407). Visnu is also represented in the cave as Chaturbhuj (four armed) holding a *sankha* (conch shell), a *saranga* (bow), a *padma* (lotus), and a *chakra* (discus) in his four hands with Garuda (the king of birds) as his *vahana* (vehicle) (Burgess 408).

The Chalukya Dynasty started a new style of architecture called Vesara (to blend or a mixture) that was used primarily in the construction of their temples (Gupta 2566). The Vesara style contains elements found in both Dravida (pyramid shaped temples of

southern India) and Nagara (beehive-shaped and multi-layered tower temples of northern India) architecture (Gupta 2567). An example of Verara architecture can be found in Pattadakal at the Virupaksha Temple that has been functioning uninterrupted since its completion (Javid 136). The temple was constructed by Queen Lokamahadevi to commemorate King Vikramaditya's II (733-747 CE) victory over the Pallava rulers (Javid136). Inside the temple are carvings of Siva, whom the temple is dedicated to, as well as elaborate carved scenes from the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (Michell 389).

The Chalukyan kings supported and promoted knowledge and higher education for all their subjects. They encouraged the development and growth of the Kannada literature which reached great heights under the Chalukyan rulers (Reddy 68). During the ninth century, Durgasimba (a Brahman scholar, foreign minister under Jayasimba II) wrote the *Panchatantra* (Five Principles), translations from the tales of *Baital Pachisi* that had first appeared in the Indian epic *Brihatkatha of Gunadhya* (Asiatic Society 12). Pampa, Ponna, and Ranna were called *Ratna-Traya* (the three gems) of Kannada literature, as they contributed greatly to the advancement of Kannada literature (Reddy 68). Pampa, considered the Father of Kannada Poetry, (Kamath 18) was called the *adi* (first) *kavi* (poem or poet) and wrote the *Vikramarjuna-vijaya* (Victory of the Mighty Arjuna), a narrative of the epic *Mahabharata*, with Arjuna as the hero (Garg 67). Ponna (939-968 CE) wrote both in Sanskrit and in Kannada, and was given the title of *ubhaya-kavi-chakravarti* (imperial poet of two languages) (Singh 29). In 950 CE, Ponna wrote *Ramakatha*, a secular epic based on the *Ramayana* adventure (Garg 67). Ranna authored the *Gadayuddha* [which is considered one of the greatest works of Kannada literature] an

epic describing the Chalukya rulers' fight for power and control of the surrounding land around Karnataka (Garg 67). Ranna received the title *kavi-chakravarti* (emperor of poets) from King Tailapa for his masterful writings (Narasimhachar 68). Also, furthering the progression of Kannada literature was Nagavarma I, a Jain poet and author of *Chandombudhi* (Ocean of Prosody) (990 CE), which is an early study of poetic metres (Reddy 68). Nagavarma I also wrote *Karnataka Kadambari* that explains the concept of the *chandalas* (untouchables) in the Hindu caste system (Naronakar 8). Basava (1106-1167 CE) a philosopher and humanitarian introduced *Vachana* literature to convey high philosophical ideas to the common man in simple language (Reddy 68). In this example of a *Vachana* by Basava, the message of the poem states the fact that even a poor individual can contribute to temple building.

Those who have means will not devote them to the building of a temple to God Siva. Then I, though a poor man, will build Thee one, O Lord.
My legs shall be the pillars, my body the shrine, my head the golden finial.
Hearken, O Kudala Sangamadeva! [important temple for pilgrimages]
The fixed temple of stone will come to an end; but this movable temple of the spirit will never perish (Rice 57).

Brahmasiva, being a court poet of Western Chalukya was well versed in the Vedic scriptures, the Puranas (ancient Hindu religious texts) and the religious texts of Saivism (Datta 2006:576). Brahmasiva wrote the *Samayapariksa*, the first satirical work in the history of Kannada literature, which criticizes other religious faiths (Datta 576) and in 1100 CE he received the title *kavi-chakravarti* with honours from Chalukya King Trailokyamalla (Narasimhachar 68). Vijnaneshwara, a scholar in the Western Chalukya court during the twelfth century and author of *Mitaskshara* (a legal treatise on inheritance), introduced Hindu law to the citizens of Karnataka. The *Mitaskshara* was

used during the time the British administrated the law in India and today the book has become one of the most important texts used in Hindu law (Manek 25).

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http://www.search.com/reference/Badami_Cave_Temples

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