

NEW KINGS AND KINGDOMS MODULE –1/3

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW DYNASTIES.

HANDOUT

After the seventh century AD many new dynasties emerged in the Indian subcontinent. By the seventh century there were big landlords or warrior chiefs in different regions of the subcontinent. Existing kings often acknowledged them as their subordinates or samantas. As samantas gained power and wealth, they declared themselves to be maha-samanta, maha-mandaleshvara (the great lord of a “circle” or region) and so on. Sometimes they asserted their independence from their overlords. The Rashtrakutas in the Deccan were subordinate to the Chalukyas of Karnataka. In the mid 8th century, Dantidurga, a Rashtrakuta chief, overthrew his Chalukya overlord and performed a ritual called hiranya-garbha (literally, the golden womb) with the help of Brahmanas. This ritual was thought to lead to the “rebirth” of the sacrificer as a Kshatriya, even if he was not one by birth.

In other cases, men from enterprising families used their military skills to carve out kingdoms like the Kadamba Mayurasharman and the GurjaraPratihara Harichandra. They were Brahmanas who gave up their traditional professions and took to arms, successfully establishing kingdoms in Karnataka and Rajasthan respectively.

In the sphere of administration, many of these new kings adopted high-sounding titles such as maharaja-adhiraja (great king, overlord of kings), tribhuvana-chakravartin (lord of the three worlds) and so on.

In each of these states, resources were obtained from the producers – that is, peasants, cattle-keepers, artisans – who were often persuaded or compelled to surrender part of what they produced. Sometimes these were claimed as “rent” due to a lord who asserted that he owned the land. Revenue was also collected from traders.

This module also focuses on Prashastis and land grants in the Seventh Century AD. Prashastis composed by learned Brahmanas. Kings often rewarded Brahmanas by grants of land, which were recorded on copper plates. These plates were given to those

who received the land. In the 12th century a long Sanskrit poem containing the history of kings who ruled over Kashmir composed by an author named Kalhana who was often critical about rulers and their policies