

## Chandella kingdom: The builder and patrons

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### Abstract

The Chandella dynasty rose to power during the early 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and survived as a powerful independent royal family until the close of the 13<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Before coming to the power, they were vassals under the imperial Pratiharas. The decline of Imperial Pratiharas gave a golden opportunity to Harsha and Yashovarman to establish their sovereignty over the central India by capturing the important forts of Kalanjar and Chitrakuta. The period of transition and political readjustment which had always intervened between the fall of one imperial power and the rise of another in medieval India had already begun. This paper portrays the developments in the different spheres of life under the Chandella Kingdom.

**Keywords:** dynasty, inscriptions, Vindhya, vassal etc.

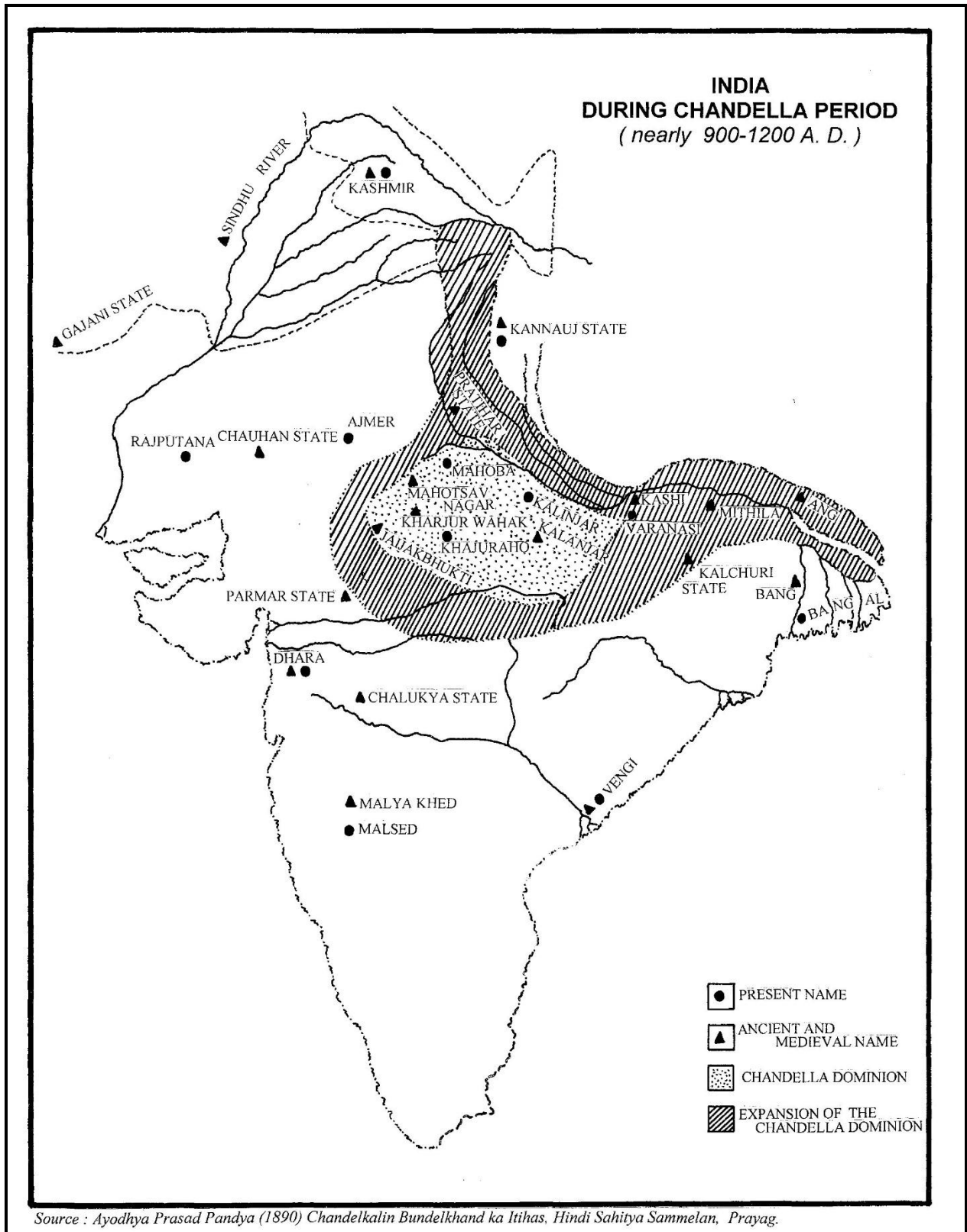
### Introduction

The Chandella dynasty rose to power during the early 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and survived as a powerful independent royal family until the close of the 13<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Before coming to the power, they were vassals under the imperial Pratiharas. The decline of Imperial Pratiharas gave a golden opportunity to Harsha and Yashovarman to establish their sovereignty over the central India by capturing the important forts of Kalanjar and Chitrakuta <sup>[1]</sup>. The period of transition and political readjustment which had always intervened between the fall of one imperial power and the rise of another in medieval India had already begun <sup>[2]</sup>.

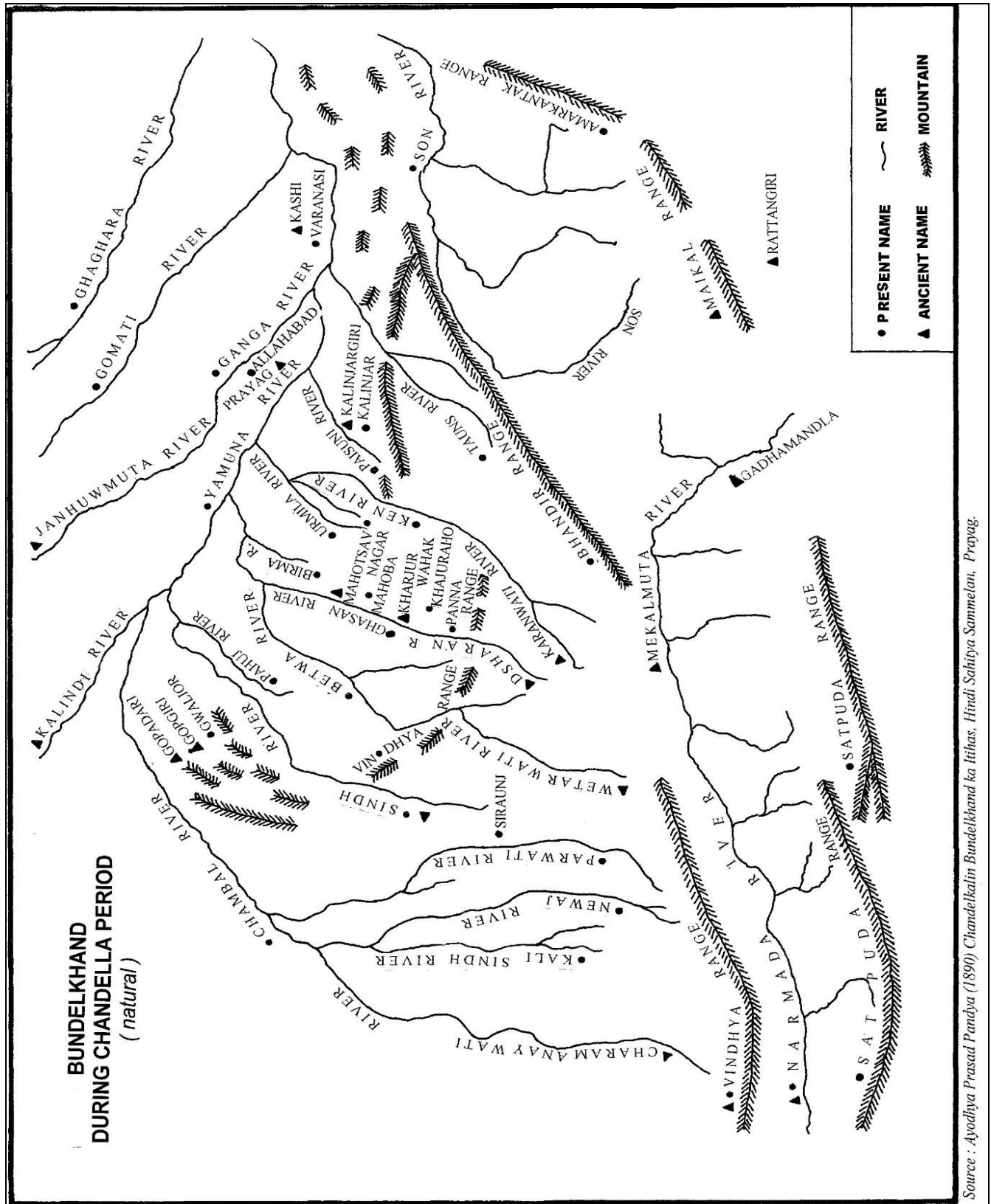
The land of the Chandellas was known as *Jejakabhukti* (Modern Bundelkhand). The boundaries of the Chandella dominion vary from time to time, but it always included *Mahoba* (Ancient Mahotsava Nagar), *Kalanjar* (Modern Kalinjar), *Khajuraho* (Ancient Kharjurvahaka) and *Ajaygarh*. The area comprising in its wider extent all the country to the south of Yamuna and Ganga, from the Betwa river on the west

to the South and Narmada on the south. Almost the whole of the eastern part of central India known as Bundelkhand is marked by the outlying branches of the northern range of eastern Vindhya. Figure-1 shows India and Figure-2 shows Bundelkhand during Chandella period <sup>[3]</sup>. Chandella claimed to be the descendants of the moon (Chandravanshi). It can be inferred from the historical accounts that the Chandellas were Hindu Rajputs and were one of the 36 Rajput clans who traced their descent from the Sun, the Moon and Sacred fire. Per Rawlinson, many central Asian tribes invaded the country and after they had become rulers. They were admitted to the Hindu fold <sup>[4]</sup>.

Modern research seems to show that the Rajputs are mainly the descendants of the Gurjara, Huna and other central Asian tribes who found their way across the northwest frontier in the fifth/sixth centuries. These invaders carved out kingdoms for themselves and eventually settled down in the country taking Hindu wives <sup>[5]</sup>.



**Fig 1:** India during Chandella period (nearly c. 900-1200 C.E.)



Source : Ayodhya Prasad Pandya (1890) Chandelkhalim Bundelkhand ka Itihas, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag.

Fig 2: Bundelkhand during Chandella period

According to *Mahoba Khand* (c.18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> C.E.) tradition traces the rise of Chandellas from Hemavati, the daughter of Brahmana Hemraj, the Purohita of the Gahadawala ruler Indrajita of Banaras. When Hemavati went to bathe in the Rati

Talab as tradition has it Chandrama enticed by her beauty embraced her and hastened back to the skies. When Hemavati who knew not how to hide her dishonor cursed him, he consoled her by saying that she should offer her son as a gift

at Khajuraho and perform sacrifice. As prophesied by the Moon God, the son became a great ruler of Mahoba and the builder of the famous fort of Kalinijara <sup>[6]</sup>. The Mahoba inscription and Ajaygarh, rock inscription describe that the Chandellas are the direct descent from the Moon <sup>[7]</sup>. Similar mythological details about the lunar origin are generally found in the records of other ruling families, namely; the Kalchuris, the Yadavas of East Bengal <sup>[8]</sup>.

He is said to have forced the enemy princes to bow down their heads and conquered host of enemies. He was succeeded by his son Vakapati. Vakapati had two sons Jayashakti and Vijayshakti, both appear to have been closely associated in consolidating their political status Jayashakti the elder brother who ruled first was also called Jejak and from this name the region ruled by Chandellas acquired the name Jejakabhukti. Next Jejakabhukti Rahila, the son of Vijayshakti succeeded. He is mentioned in the inscriptions as a great warrior. He undertook works of public interest by excavation of tanks and lakes, construction of temples etc. The remnants of which are still visible at Ajaygarh and Mahoba. Ajaygarh temple bears some stone inscribed with his name and an old lake with a fine cruciform granite temple on its bank near Mahoba is still called Rahilya Sagar after his name. The period of rule of Rahila is said to be of twenty years and is credited to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. He was succeeded by his son Harsh Dev around 900 C.E <sup>[9]</sup>.

#### **Nannuka (c. 831 - 845 C.E.)**

The earliest prince of the Chandella dynasty was Nannuka. He is also mentioned as Nripa and Mahipati in the Khajuraho inscription <sup>[10]</sup>. Unfortunately we do not have any definite data about him. Only two Khajuraho inscriptions dated v.s. 1011 and v.s. 1059 speak something about him. But information given by them is not of historical value. The first inscription given a description of his victorious career, appealing personality and widespread fame. He is described as a touchstone to test the worth of the gold, playfully decorated the faces of the women of the quarter with the sandal of his fame. His enemies bowed down before his power and chivalry. This inscription mentions him as Nripa. The second inscription mentions him as Mahipati and compares his with Arjuna for his valour and bowman ship. It also describes him as sun, jewel and store house of modesty <sup>[11]</sup>. The humble title Nripa or Mahipati suggest that he was not an independent ruler but a feudatory <sup>[12]</sup>.

Nannuka was probably a feudatory of Pratihar king Nagbhatt II (c. 815-833).

Nagbhatt's son successor Rambhadra was a weak ruler, Pratihar king Bhoj's son Gwalior inscription mentions that Rambhadra freed his empire from cruel enemies <sup>[13]</sup>. Per R.C. Majumdar the enemies referred here were Palas. Being a weak king Rambhadra was not able to face the danger so his feudatories helped him <sup>[14]</sup>. Perhaps Nannuka one of these feudatories. This may have increased his power. But it doesn't mean that he enjoyed independent sovereign power. In short, we can say that he was only a powerful vassal of the Pratiharas.

#### **Vakpati (c. 845 - 865 C.E.)**

Nannuka's son Vakpati was his successor. The two

inscriptions mentioned above are again the only source that tells something about the existence of Vakpati. The first inscription stated that Vakpati's spotless fame spreads in all the three worlds. He defeated all his enemies and made the Vindhyas his pleasure-mount <sup>[15]</sup>. The second inscription glorifies him by comparing him with mythical kings Prithu and Kakastha for their valour and wisdom <sup>[16]</sup>.

#### **Jayashakti and Vijayshakti (c. 865 - 885 C.E.)**

Vakpati had two sons Jayashakti and Vijayshakti. They ascended the throne one after the other. Jayashakti the elder brother was the first who succeeded his father. He was also called Jejak and from this name the region ruled by Chandellas acquired the name Jejakabhukti. Jayashakti had only daughter and no son, so his brother Vijayshakti ascended the throne after him. Khajuraho inscription tells that he undertook some expeditions and reached even the southernmost part of India <sup>[17]</sup>.

Per Dr. R.C. Majumdar, Vijayshakti undertook this expedition to help an ally. The term 'Bhukti' means part of a kingdom because two brothers ruled over Bhukti. So, they were also feudatory like their ancestors.

#### **Rahila (c. 885 - 905 C.E.)**

After Vijayshakti's death his son Rahila succeeded him. Dhanga's stone inscription says that Vijayshakti had a son named Rahila. His enemies afraid of his name <sup>[18]</sup>. It praises him as a brave and great warrior, who destroyed his enemies with his anger. Another inscription says that he helped his friends and punished his enemies <sup>[19]</sup>. Parmala Raso tells that he founded the city Rasina or Rajavasini. The town was situated on a road leading from Banda to Kalinjara <sup>[20]</sup>.

He undertook work of public interest by excavation of tanks and lakes, construction of temples etc. The remnants of which are still visible at Ajaygarh and Mahoba. Ajaygarh temple bears some stone inscribed with his name and old lake with a fine cruciform granite temple on its bank near Mahoba is still called Rahilya Sagar after his name. The period of rule of Rahila is said to be of twenty years and is credited to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. He was succeeded by his son Harshdev around 900 C.E <sup>[21]</sup>.

#### **Harshadev (c. 905 - 925 C.E.)**

Among the early rulers of Chandella Harsa was the notable prince. He succeeded Rahila and made a steady progress towards the attainment of a significant status in the political history of northern India. By his achievements, he attained a memorable place in the history of Chandella rulers. In the 25 years of his rule he extended his territory and enhanced the prestige of his dynasty. During his reign, when the Rashtrakuta King Indra III invaded and captured Kannauj. It was Harshdev who helped the Pratihara King Mahipal-I to regain his Throne of Kannauj. This achievement was probably commemorated by him by the construction of the Matangesvara temple, which was the earliest sandstone temple at Khajuraho. The allusion to his important political incident in the Khajuraho records is a clear indication of the growing power of the Chandellas as an independent power from political subservience to the imperial status. Harshdev consolidated his position by marrying Kanchuka, a princess of

Chauhan Clan of the Malwa region Harshdev died in 925 C.E.

#### **Yashovarman (c. 925 - 950 C.E.)**

Yashovarman the illustrious son of Harshdev and his Chahman queen Kanchuka succeed him. He is also known as Lakshvarman <sup>[22]</sup>. Yashovarman was the first independent ruler of the Chandella dynasty. In the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. the dismemberment of two empirical dynasties (Gurjara-Pratihara and Rashtrakutas) gave a golden chance to subsidiary powers to take the best advantage of this situation. Yashovarman did not miss the chance and he engaged himself in military operation with a view to expend his boundaries. He captured Klinjar hill. It was a great achievement for him who enhanced the prestige of Chandellas and they immersed as a great political power Yashovarman undertook several campaigns in northern India, from the Himalayas to Malwa and from Kashmir to Bengal <sup>[23]</sup>. Yashovarman not only undertook several great campaigns but also took adequate measures for the well-governance of his state. All this made possible for him to take military expeditions.

In his political career, Yashovarman achieved a significant position. From a petty subordinate of Pratiharas he liberated himself and declared himself as an independent ruler. His influence felt by all contemporary powers of north and central India <sup>[24]</sup>. Several inscriptions tell his tales of military conquests. He engaged himself in many expeditions and proved to be an able general and a brave warrior.

#### **Dhanga (c. 950 - 1002 C.E.)**

Dhanga the son of Yashovarman became the most powerful king of north India. He ruled over Khajuraho from 945 C.E. to 1002 C.E. Under his rule the Chandella dynasty reached the zenith of their power. He was a great ruler and conqueror. Epigraphic records of his reign and of his successors throw ample light on his achievements. Just as his father Yashovarman captured Kalinjar fort, he occupied Gwalior fort and brought glory for his clan. This was one of his major achievements.

#### **Ganda (c. 1002 - 1015 C.E.)**

After the death of his fatehr Dhang, Ganda ascended the throne in 1002 C.E. No source throws much light on him. He has been mentioned only in fragmentary inscriptions from Mahoba <sup>[25]</sup>, composed after the reign of Kirtivarman, the grandson of Ganda, the Mau stone inscription of Madanvarman <sup>[26]</sup>, the grandson of Kirtivarman. He ruled for 15 years only. He could maintain the prestige and power of the kingdom. He constructed Jagadamba and the Chitragupta temples.

#### **Vidyadhara (c. 1015 - 1036 C.E.)**

Vidyadhara, one of the greatest rulers of Chandella family was son and successor of Ganda. The strange thing about this great ruler is that not even a single inscription of his reign is found so far. We should depend on epigraphic records of his successors for all the information about him. Mahoba inscription mentions that Vidyadhara defeated Kanya Kubja ruler Narendra. Vidyadhara defeated his country against the attack of Mahmud of Ghazni. He also won Kalchuris and Parmaras. Vidyadhara is considered an important and strong

king of Chandella dynasty. Historical records of Muslim writer Abdul Akhir tells that he had a large army of 56000 horsemen, 194000 foot soldiers and 786 elephants. This army proved his strength as an emperor and helped him to become a great warrior and much dread king. Two copper- plates of Devavarman mention Vidyadhara's title viz. Paremabhattacharak Maharajadhiraj and Parameshvara.

He was undoubtedly the most remarkable ruler of his age. The Muslim chroniclers describe him as the greatest ruler of Indian Territory. His largest army frightened even Mahamud. His greatness is not only because of his conquests but also his reign marks the zenith of the power of the Chandellas who emerged as the greatest power in northern India after the collapse of Gurjara Pratihara Empire <sup>[27]</sup>. The range of his influence was much wider than the extent of his territory. The Kandariya Mahadeva temple was built by him. He died in 1029. After the death of Vidyadhara the Chandella power gradually declined.

#### **Vijayapala (c. 1036- 1050 C.E.)**

Per the Mau Stone inscription of Madanavarman Vijayapala, the son Vidyadhara ascended the throne after his death. Unfortunately, we do not find any inscription of his reign, so we don't have much information about his political career. He is mentioned in the inscriptions of his successors. The Nanyaura and Charkhari copperplates of his son Devavarman give him the usual titles viz. Paremabhattacharak Maharajadhiraj and Parameshvara. The Mau stone inscription tells us that he eliminated all the wicked gladdened all good men and put an end to the Kaliyuga <sup>[28]</sup>.

However, all these inscription throws any light on the political events of his reign.

The only political incident mentioned in Mahoba inscription is that he had conflict with Gangeyadeva of Kalchuri dynasty <sup>[29]</sup>.

#### **Devavarman (c. 1050 - 1060 C.E.)**

Deva Varman was the son and successor of Vijayapala. He was not an influential ruler. He is mentioned only in his two inscriptions one dated v.s. 1107, found at Nanyaura in Uttar Pradesh and other dated v.s. 1108 found from charkhari Darbar in central India. Both these records do not give political information about the king. They only praise him in conventional manner and contain only eulogistic verses <sup>[30]</sup>.

#### **Kirtivarman (c. 1060 - 1100 C.E.)**

Kirtivarman ascended the throne after the death of his elder brother Devavarman. He was an important ruler of his time. His greatest achievement was regaining of his ancestral kingdom. He had a victory over Kalchuri king Lakshmi-karna. Kirtivarman was not only a soldier but also a man of head and heart. He was a patron of art and letters. The philosophical drama Prabodhchandrodyam was composed and staged in his patronage.

#### **Sallakshanvarman (c. 1100 - 1110 C.E.)**

Kirtivarman's successor was his son Sallakshan Varman. He is also mentioned as Hallaksana Varman on the coins minted by him. Perhaps he ruled for a short period and we do not have definite evidences of his military achievements. In the

records of his successor he is mentioned as leader of those versed in the sacred lore, a kinsman of the virtuous, a store of arts, and an abode of good conduct and of paradise to all suppliants for support <sup>[31]</sup>.

#### Jayvarman (c. 1110 - 1120 C.E.)

Jayvarman became king after the death of his father Sallakshan Varman. The Mau inscription praises him for the qualities of generosity, truthfulness and heroism <sup>[32]</sup>. He was as graceful as rising sun. He deprived the other princes of their luster, but his own reign had little luster. Most probably he was conquered by the Gahawar ruler Govind Chandra who captured part of Chandella territory in 1120. By this event he felt so insulted that he gave up his throne and started living in a jungle on the bank of river <sup>[33]</sup>.

#### Prithivarman (c. 1120 - 1128 C.E.)

Perhaps Jayvarman died childless so his uncle Prithvi Varman ascended the Chandella throne after him. His reign was of a short duration of ten years. Mau stone inscription states that Prithvi Varman could maintain the integrity of the state and it without any damage pass it to his son and successor <sup>[34]</sup>.

#### Madanavarman (c. 1128 - 1165 C.E.)

Madanvarman, son of Prithivarman succeeded to the throne and ruled for a long period. Literary and numismatic evidences throw light on his achievements. He launched a vigorous policy in reviving the strength and organization of the Chandella power and restoring respect for it among other contemporary powers of the adjacent regions, namely the Chedis, the Paramaras the Gahadvalas and the Chalukyas <sup>[35]</sup>. Thus Madan Varman tried to consolidate the Chandella dynasty. His kingdom was expended up to Yamuna in north Betwa in south-west, Rewa in east and Narmada in the south. During his reign Chandella dynasty become a prominent power of central India <sup>[36]</sup>.

#### Yashovarman -II

Yasho Varman II succeeded Madan Varman. Bateshver inscription of Parmardindeva is the only source which throws light on the exitance of this ruler. This king had a very brief reign only of two years.

#### Parmardin Dev (c. 1165 - 1203 C.E.)

After untimely death of Yasho Varman, his son Parmardin Dev became king. He was the last great ruler of Chandella dynasty. He ruled about 35 years. The first few years of his reign were of peace. The disaster came in the shape of a battle with Prithviraj Chauhan, who was returning to Delhi after marrying the daughter of Padam Singh. On the way, he was attacked by Turkish army. Chauhan army fought bravely and beat back the enemy. In this process, they lost their way and reached Mahoba. Unknowingly they entered the royal garden and killed the Gardner. Parmardin Dev sent his soldiers to teach a lesson to the murderer. In this battle thirty Chandella soldiers were killed and seventeen injured. Parmardin Dev took this incident seriously and with the help of tribal chief Udal and Aalaha he attacked on Prithviraj Chauhan. The battle ended in defeat of Parmardin Dev.

#### Trailokyavarman (c. 1203 - 1245 C.E.)

Per Rewa Bronze plate inscription Parmardin Dev was succeeded by Trailokyavarman. Ajaygarh inscription mentions that he regained Kalinjar and extended his kingdom upto the Son River per Garha Bronze inscription this ruler died in a battle. During the reign of Trailokyavarman Malik Nasuru-ud-din attacked Kalinjar, but no contemporary Muslim records support this fact <sup>[37]</sup>.

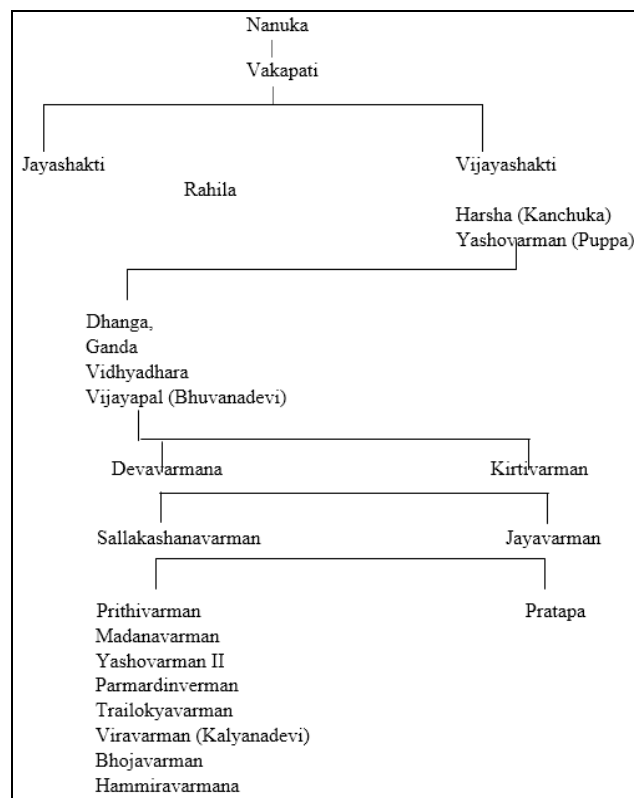
#### Virvarman (c. 1245 - 1285 C.E.)

After Trailokyavarman his son Vir Varman ascended the throne. His predecessor expanded his kingdom eastwards and he expanded it westwards <sup>[38]</sup>. Ajaygarh rock inscription refers that Chandella established their authority over tribes named Bhils, Shabra and Pulind. During the reign of Trailokyavarman his army chief Anant played crucial role in controlling these tribes. Trailokya's son Virvarman successfully continued his policy. He established a relationship with king Maheshwar by marrying his daughter Dadhichi <sup>[39]</sup>.

#### Bhojvarman (c. 1285 - 1288 C.E.)

The next ruler was Bhojvarman. He ruled for a brief period. Three inscriptions of his reign have been found. None of them gives much information about the achievements and history of Bhojvarman. We are unable to determine the relationship of Bhojvarman with other ruler of the dynasty <sup>[40]</sup>.

#### Genealogy of the Chandella Dynasty



#### Hamirvarman (c. 1288 - 1311 C.E.)

The last known ruler of Chandella clan was Hamirvarman. We

have three inscriptions of his reign, viz. Charkhari copper plate (v.s. 1346), Bamhni Sati record (v.s. 1365) and Ajaygarh sati stone inscription (v.s. 1368). These inscriptions prove that he had a long reign of about 22 years. But these inscriptions throw no light on political career of Hamirvarman. Bamhni Sati record mentions Sultan Alaudin as reigning king. It means that the region was occupied by Alaudin and thus Chandella power came to an end <sup>[41]</sup>.

### **Administrative Organization of Chandella's**

Chandella government was wholly of monarchical type, in which king was the pivot of administrative system. Without king state had no existence. He was assisted by chief minister, a group of ministers and secretaries. All appointment was made by the king. For appointment, there was no democratic system.

### **King**

Usually the eldest son of the royal family would be declared as king. In Chandella dynasty a son never disrespect the choice and wish of his father. There is no evidences of fighting for the throne Chandell kings used the titles as Maharajadhiraj, Parem Bhattwak, Paremshwar, Rajan Mahipati etc <sup>[42]</sup>. As for as the personal qualities of a king was concerned he should be a man of learning, impressive personality have love for art and poetry, devoted to dharma, bold, brave and generous. The king enjoyed the supreme position in the state. All matters of military and administrative system rested with him <sup>[43]</sup>.

### **Minister**

A council of ministers was appointed to assist the king in administration; Ministers were called Mantri, Sachiv or Amatya. For the selection, hereditary system was not followed but per Mau stone inscription some ministers some served the royal family on hereditary basis. Learning, experience, power of judgement and capacity of leadership were some essential for the post of minister.

The Mukhya Mantri was to give advice to the king. The heads of judicial system were learned Brahmins, but the chief justice was king. Kayastha, Karnik and Lekhakar were some other officer for correspondence record keeping and other ministerial works 'Akshya Padataik' was one who held the office of accounts. Chief of the army was 'Senapati' and his junior officer was called 'Hemtya Aboresh', 'Dwarpalas' were for the security of forts. The treasury was under the control of the Lord of the treasury (Koshadikaradhipati).

### **Division of State**

Per inscriptions the whole state was called Jejakabhukti, and was sub-divided into many districts called Visayas or Mandalas. Again, these were divided into grams. A group of several grams was called 'Pattalas'. We do not have sufficient details about the administration of these sub-divisions. Most probably Visayas or Mandalas were ruled by vassals or samantas of the king. Villagers were ruled by village council. Brahmins, Vaidyas and other respectable persons were the members of this council <sup>[44]</sup>.

### **Social Life**

Chandella inscriptions contains very little about the social life of the people. There we find the name of four Varnas- the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Kayastha and Shudra.

**Brahmin:** The positions of the Brahmin were highest in the society. Brahmins were indulging in religious studies and rituals. They were devoted to sat-karma <sup>[45]</sup>. Chandella king offered grants of land and other precious gifts to the Brahmin on auspicious occasion like solar eclipse, lunar eclipse, full moon day and death anniversary of parents. Brahmins were also engaged in administrative duties. The office of the court poet was generally held by Brahmins. Services of the Brahmins were valued in the field of justice <sup>[46]</sup>.

**Kshatriya:** Chandella kings regarded themselves true representatives of Kshatriya caste. They were descended from the moon. Certain qualities were expected for being a true Kshatriya. Top most objective of a kshatriya was welfare of the master. It was believed that if required a warrior should lay down his life <sup>[47]</sup>. If one died fighting for the king, he would have a place in the heaven. To kill or strike a soldier already wounded was considered a sin <sup>[48]</sup>.

**Kayastha:** Smritis mention Kayasthas as royal official indulge in the act of scribes, writing state documents or maintain public accounts. Chandella inscriptions show that by the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Kayasthas had become one of the main castes in this region of India. Rewa stone inscription gives an account of the origin of the Kayastha caste <sup>[49]</sup>. Chandella inscriptions give accounts of the duties of the Kayasthas. In addition to their usual functions of scribing, writing documents and keeping accounts they were also given highly responsible duties related to the offices of the sachiv, Pratihara and Koshadikaradhipati <sup>[50]</sup>.

**Shudra:** There is no mention of the Shudra in the inscriptions. It means that the people of the low castes were known by their professions not by their class. 'Dahi Plate' of Viravarman supports this fact. For making a land grant he called all Brahmins, Kayasthas, Harkaras, cow-herds, goat-herds, orchard-keeper and all other high and low classes <sup>[51]</sup>.

### **Religion**

The Chandella kings were ardent followers of Shiva and Vishnu. Many inscriptions of theirs begin with the invocation of the two gods and majority of the temples are dedicated to them. The three important religions at that time were Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism. The largest followers were of Brahmanism that's why majority of the temples were dedicated to them. Jainism was also prevalent among the people and there were many Jain temples which are now vanished. But Buddhism was on decline at that time. There is no temple at Khajuraho which is dedicated to the Buddha. Only a single image of the Buddha has been found. There are five main sects of Brahmanism- Shaivas, Vaishnavas, Saktas, Ganpatyas and Saurapatas <sup>[52]</sup>.

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