



## Rashtrakutas

**For Prelims:** Rashtrakutas' prominent rulers, art and architecture.

**For Mains:** Rashtrakutas' way of administration and their polity, Importance of Art and Architecture.



**Who were the Rashtrakutas?**

- The **Rashtrakuta Empire** dominated the Deccan for almost **200 years** till the end of **10<sup>th</sup> century** and also controlled territories in north and south India at various points of time.
- It was not only the most powerful polity of the time but also acted as a bridge between north and south India in economic as well as cultural matters.
  - It promoted and expanded north Indian traditions and policies in south India.
- Significantly, India touched new heights of stability and achievements in the field of polity, economy, culture, education and religion.
- There was no power in northern India strong enough to interfere with the affairs of the Deccan which provided an opportunity for the emergence of **Rashtrakutas**.

## What was the Polity of Rashtrakutas?

- There were several branches of the **Rashtrakutas** ruling in different parts of India in the early medieval period.
- The earliest known ruling family of the **Rashtrakutas** was founded by **Mananka** in **Malkhed**, having the **Palidhvaja banner (flag)** and the **Garuda-lanchhana** (bird symbol).
- Another **Rashtrakuta** family was ruling in the **Betul** district of **Madhya Pradesh**.
- The **Antroli-Chharoli** inscription bearing the **Garuda seal** dated **757 CE** mentions four generations: **Karka I**, his son **Dhruva**, his son **Govinda**, and his son **Karka II** belonging to a collateral branch of the **Malkhed** line holding sway in the Lata country in Gujarat.
  - Lata is identified as the area between Mahi River in the north and Narmada or Tapi River in south. Bharuch is a major city and former capital of the region.

## Who were the Prominent Rulers of Rashtrakutas?

- **Dantidurga:**
  - **Dantidurga** was the founder of the **Rashtrakuta** empire who fixed his capital at **Manyakheta** or **Malkhed** near modern Sholapur.
  - He seems to be the contemporary of **Karka II**.
  - **Dantidurga** attacked **Kanchi**, the capital of the **Pallavas**, and struck up an alliance with **Nandivarman Pallavamalla**.
  - **Dantidurga** captured the outlying territories of the extensive **Chalukyan empire** in **753 CE** and then assaulted the heart of the empire and easily defeated **Kirtivarman**.
  - The **Samangadh** inscription of **754 CE** records that **Dantidurga** overthrew the last **Chalukya** ruler of **Badami** called **Kirtivarman II** and assumed full imperial rank and described himself as:
    - **Prithivivallabha,**
    - **Maharajadhiraja,**
    - **Parameshvara, and**
    - **Paramabhataraka.**
  - **Dantidurga** describes his territory as comprising four lakhs of villages, which probably included his sway over a little more than one half of the **Chalukyan Empire** of **Badami**.
  - **Dantidurga** died childless, which led to a dispute between **Krishnaraja I** his uncle and other family members.
- **Krishnaraja I:**
  - **Krishnaraja, I** succeeded in seizing the throne in **756 CE** because of his popularity.
  - He had the titles **Shubhatunga (high in prosperity)** and **Akalavarsha (constant rainer)** mentioned in **Bhandak** Inscription of **Krishnaraja I** of **772 CE**.
  - The newly established **Rashtrakuta** kingdom expanded in all directions under him.
  - He started with the overthrow of the **Chalukyas** of **Badami**.
  - The **Bhandak plates of 772 CE** show that the whole of **Madhya Pradesh** had come under his rule.
  - **Southern Konkana** was also conquered and brought under his sway by **Krishnaraja I**.
  - He also expanded his empire in the southern direction by establishing lordship over the **Ganga kingdom**.
  - The **Rashtrakuta** empire under **Krishnaraja I** may, thus, be taken to have extended over the whole of the modern Maharashtra state, a good part of **Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh**, with **Vengi** farther east acknowledging its supremacy and a large portion of **Madhya Pradesh**.

- **Krishnaraja, I** died sometime between **772 CE** and **775 CE** and was followed on the throne by his son **Govinda II**.
- **Govinda II:**
  - **Govinda II (774-780 CE)** bears the titles **Prabhutavarsha (profuse rainer)** and **Vikramavaloka (the man with a heroic look)**.
  - His name is omitted in some of the later grants of the line.
  - It was due to civil war for the throne between him and his younger brother **Dhruva** ruling in the region of **Nasik** and **Khandesh** as governor.
  - The first war between brothers ended disastrously for **Govinda II**.
- **Dhruva:**
  - **Dhruva (780 - 793 CE)** assumed the titles:
    - **Nirupama (unequaled)**
    - **Kali-vallabha (fond of war)**
    - **Dharavarsha (heavy rainer)**
    - **Shrivallabha (the favourite of fortune)**
  - **Dhruva** severely punished all kings who assisted **Govinda II** in the late civil war after securing the throne.
  - He made his **younger** but ablest son **Govinda III** king during his lifetime.
- **Govinda III:**
  - **Govinda III (793-814)** became one of the greatest **Rashtrakuta** rulers who had the titles of:
    - **Jagattunga (Prominent in the world)**
    - **Kirti-Narayana (The very Narayana in respect of fame)**
    - **Janavallabha (Favorite of the people)**
    - **Tribhuvanadhavala (Pure in the three worlds)**
    - **Prabhutavarsha (The abundant rainer)**
    - **Shrivallabha**
  - He first quelled the rebellions of his elder brothers in the south.
  - In the north, after a successful expedition against **Nagabhatta of Kanauj** and the annexation of **Malawa** along with **Kosala, Kalinga, Vengi, Dahala** and **Odraka**, **Govinda III** again turned to the south.
  - Performing better than his father's expectations, he spread the fame of the **Rashtrakuta** empire literally from the **Himalayas to Cape Comorin** through his skills both in diplomacy and on the battlefield.
  - **Govinda's** successor became his only son **Maharaja Sarva** better known as **Amoghavarsha I**.
- **Amoghavarsha I:**
  - **Amoghavarsha I (814-878 CE)** like his father, proved himself as one of the greatest of **Rashtrakuta** monarchs.
  - He had the titles:
    - **Nripatunga (exalted among kings)**
    - **Atisayadhavala (wonderfully white in conduct)**
    - **Maharaja-shanda (best of the great kings)**
    - **Vira-Narayana (the heroic Narayana)**
  - He was genuinely interested in the religious traditions of contemporary India and used to spend his time in the company of Jaina monks and other forms of spiritual meditation.
  - His inscriptions count him among the most prominent followers of **Jainism**.
  - He was not only an author himself but also a **patron of authors**.
  - **Jinasena**, the **author of Adipurana**, was among the **Jaina preceptors** of **Amoghavarsha I**.
  - He not only promoted Jainism but also the Brahmanical religion and also performed several rituals for the welfare of his subjects.
  - His death was followed by the accession of his son **Krishna II** in about **879 CE**.
- **Krishna II:**
  - **Krishna II (878-914 CE)** had the titles **Akalavarsha** and **Shubhatunga**.
  - He was not wholly successful in curbing rebellions.
  - The only success of his reign was the termination of Lata viceroyalty.
  - The wars he undertook against **Vengi** and the **Cholas** got him on the whole nothing but **disaster, disgrace, and exile** for some time.

#### ▪ **Indra III:**

- **Indra III** became king in **915 CE**. Indra III had the titles:
  - **Nityavarsha (constant rainer)**
  - **Rattakandarapa**
  - **Kirti-Narayana**
  - **Rajamarathanda**
- **Amoghavarsha I's** grandson **Indra III** re-established the empire.
- The advance of the **Rashtrakuta** forces through **Lata** and **Malawa** right up to **Kalpi** and **Kanauj** and the dethronement of **Mahipala** were, no doubt, significant military achievements of **Indra**.
- After the defeat of **Mahipala** and the sack of **Kanauj in 915 CE**, **Indra III** was the most powerful ruler of his times.
- Indra III's reign comes to a close towards the end of **927 CE**.
- He was followed on the throne by his son **Amoghavarsha II** and reined for one year according to the **Bhandana** grant of **Silahara Aparajita (997 CE)**.

#### ▪ **Krishna III:**

- **Krishna III** was the last in a line of brilliant rulers.
- **Krishna III** defeated the **Chola king Parantaka I (949 CE)**, annexed the northern part of the **Chola empire** and distributed the **Chola kingdom** among his servants.
- He, then, pressed down to **Rameshwaram** and set up a **pillar of victory** there and built a temple.
- After his death, all in late **966 CE** or very early in **967 CE** his opponents united against his successor half-brother Khottiga. The Rashtrakuta capital **Manyakheta** was sacked, plundered and burnt in **972 CE** by the **Paramara kings** and the **emperor** was forced to abandon **Manyakheta**.

### **What type of administration did Rashtrakuta have?**

- The warrior kings of the **Rashtrakutas** created a vast empire in south India which was touching the northern parts of India comprising approximately seven and a half lakh villages.
- The **Rashtrakutas** not only won and created a vast kingdom but also maintained it well.
- **Monarch and Feudatories based administration:**
  - A powerful monarchy was the core of the empire, assisted by a large number of feudatories.
    - Interestingly, the realm was getting feudalized more and more with the maturity of the reign of each **Rashtrakuta** king.
  - The system of administration in the realms was based on the ideas and practices of the **Gupta Empire** and the **Harsha's kingdom** in the north, and the **Chalukyas** in the Deccan.
  - As before, the monarch was the fountainhead of all powers including the head of administration and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
- **Law and Order:**
  - The king was responsible for the maintenance of **law and order** within the kingdom and expected absolute loyalty and obedience from his family, ministers, vassal chiefs, feudatories, officials, and chamberlains.
- **System of Hereditary Succession:**
  - The king's position was generally hereditary, but the rules about succession were not rigidly fixed.
  - The eldest son often succeeded, but there were many instances when the eldest son had to fight his younger brothers and sometimes lost to them.
    - Thus, the **Rashtrakuta** ruler **Dhruva** and **Govinda IV** deposed their elder brothers.
  - Kings were generally advised and helped by many hereditary ministers chosen by them from leading families.
- **Important Administrative Positions:**
  - From **epigraphic and literary records**, it appears that in almost every kingdom there was a **chief minister**, a minister of foreign affairs, a **revenue minister** and **treasurer**, **chief of armed forces**, **chief justice**, and **purohita**.
- **Division of Administrative Area:**

- In the **Rashtrakuta kingdom** the directly administered areas were divided into:
  - Rashtra (province)
  - Vishaya
  - Bhukti
- **Administration of divided Area:**
  - The **Vishaya** was like a modern district under **Visayapati**, and the **Bhukti** was a smaller unit than it.
  - A body of assistants called the **Rashtramahattaras** and **Vishayamahattaras** respectively assisted provincial governors and district level governors in the **Rashtrakuta** administration.
  - The roles and powers of these smaller units and their administrators are not clear.
  - It seems that their primary purpose was the realization of **land revenue** and some attention to **law and order**.
  - It appears that all officials were paid by giving them grants of **rent-free land**.
  - The village was the basic unit of administration. The village administration was carried on by the village headman and the village accountant whose posts were generally hereditary.
  - **Grants of rent-free lands** were paid to them.
  - The headman was often helped in his duties by the **village elder** called **grama-mahajana or grama-mahattara**.
  - In the **Rashtrakuta kingdom**, particularly in **Karnataka**, there were village committees to manage local schools, tanks, temples and roads in close cooperation with the headman and received a particular percentage of the revenue collection.
  - Towns also had similar committees, in which the heads of trade guilds were also associated.
  - Law and order in the cities and areas in their immediate vicinity was the responsibility of the **koshta-pala** or **kotwal**.
  - The petty chieftainship and the increased hereditary elements weakened the power of village committees. The central rule also found it difficult to assert his authority over them and to control them. It implies that the government was becoming feudalized.
- **Defense instalments of the Rashtrakuta:**
  - The **Rashtrakuta kings** had large and **well-organized infantry, cavalry**, and a **large number of war-elephants** mentioned in the **chronicles of Arab travelers**.
  - The large armed forces were directly related to the glamor and power of the king, which was also essential for the maintenance and expansion of the empire in the age of wars.
  - The **Rashtrakutas** were famous for a large number of horses in their army imported from **Arabia, West Asia, and Central Asia**.
  - The real power of the **Rashtrakutas** is reflected from their many forts garrisoned by special troops and independent commanders.
  - The infantry consisted of regular and irregular soldiers and levies provided by the vassal chiefs.
  - The regular forces were often hereditary and sometimes drawn from different regions all over India.
  - There is no reference to war chariots which had fallen out of use.

## How did art and architecture develop during Rashtrakutas regime?

- The **Rashtrakutas** contributed heavily to the Deccan's architectural legacy.
- **Maharashtra** reflects **Rashtrakuta's** contributions to art and architecture through magnificent **rock-cut cave temples** at **Ellora** and **Elephant**.
- Among the 34 Buddhist caves that were built in the **sixth century**, **Ellora** is one. At the **Ellora**, **Jain monks also** resided.
- In addition to renovating the **Buddhist caves**, the **Rashtrakutas** decided to devote themselves to the rock-cut temples.
- **Amoghavarsha I** practiced **Jainism**, and **five Jain cave temples at Ellora** date from his reign.
- The monolithic **Kailasanatha temple** at **Ellora** is the most magnificent and lavish creation of the **Rashtrakutas**.
  - The walls of the temple are adorned with spectacular sculptures of **Hindu mythology** figures including **Ravana, Shiva, and Parvathi**.
- **Kailasanatha Temple:**

- The **Kailasanatha temple** is the largest of the **rock-cut Hindu temples** at **Ellora Caves in Maharashtra, India**.
- After **Rashtrakuta** rule expanded into South India from the Deccan, **King Krishna I**, commissioned the **Kailasanatha Temple project**. **Karnata Dravida** is the architectural style adopted.
- The main shrine, an entry gateway, the **Nandi pavilion**, and a **courtyard with courtyards encircling** are the **temple's four principal components**.
- The **Kailasa temple** is an architectural wonder with its amazing sculptures. The sculpture represents the **Buffalo monster** being slain by the **Goddess Durga**.
- Ravana was attempting to move **Mount Kailasa, Siva's home**, in another sculpture. The walls were also covered with **Ramayana images**. The **Kailasa temple** has a more **Dravidian aspect**.
- **Elephanta Caves:**
  - The **Elephanta Caves**, located on an island, which is known as **Sripuri** (It was previously named Sripuri, but the inhabitants called it Gharapuri) near Mumbai.
  - It was later named for the **big Elephant sculpture** held.
  - **Ellora caves** and the **Elephanta caves** have lots of similarities that demonstrate the continuity of artisans.
  - The **elephanta caves'** entrance includes enormous **dwara-palaka sculptures**.
  - On the wall enclosing the **prakara** around the **Sanctum** are **sculptures of Nataraja, Gangadhara, Ardhanarishvara, Somaskanda, and Trimurti**.
- **Navalinga Temple:**
  - **Amoghavarsha I** or his son **Krishna II**, a ruler of the **Rashtrakuta Dynasty**, constructed the **Navalinga temple** complex in the **ninth century**.
  - **Kukkanur** is the town where the temple is situated. It is situated in the **Koppal district** of the Indian state of **Karnataka**, north of Itagi and **east of Gadag**.
  - The **nine temple clusters** in South India were built in the **dravidian architectural style**. Its name, **Navalinga**, comes from the presence of a **linga**, the common representation of **Shiva in Hinduism**.