

# The Peninsula: Establishing Authorities and Structures

C. AD 900-1300

## The Politics of the Peninsula

The late first millennium AD saw a changed situation in the Indian subcontinent. Regional states, earlier seeking recognition, were now taking shape and the imprint of their identities was becoming clearer. Dynasties would change but successor kingdoms retained a relatively consistent core area. The trends that continued included some degree of political decentralization, an emphasis on extending agriculture, the induction of erstwhile marginal groups as castes, the interface between Vedic Brahmanism and the Puranic and Shamanic religions, and new cultural articulations drawing on these tendencies. Despite the appearance of similar patterns, each region retained its own strong identity. That this is not a contradiction lies in the nature of these regional forms.

The scene in the peninsula was dominated by the Tamil identity, forged under the Cholas. This period of south Indian history with its impressive corpus of inscriptions has been widely discussed in recent years. There have been diverse theories and many new interpretations about the nature of the Chola state. These enable one to speak of it as yet another classical period, should one choose to use the label. The classicism of the Chola period drew less on political authority and more on the institutions established at this time, together with the articulation of cultural forms. In many spheres of cultural life, whether of social institutions, religion, or the fine arts, the standards established during this period came to dominate the pattern of living in the south, and to partially influence the patterns existing elsewhere in the peninsula. There was also an active intervention in south-east Asia to a greater degree than before, in the commerce of the region and in its cultural forms.

In the ninth century the Pallavas succumbed to a combined attack from their southern neighbours, the Pandyas, and those tributary to them such as the Cholas. An agrarian foundation to kingdoms in Tamil-nadu had begun more systematically with Pallava land grants to brahmans. The subsequent expansion of newly cultivated areas encompassed pastoral regions and forests. Brahman settlements established Vedic Brahmanism, sometimes parallel to and sometimes intersecting with the religion of the Vaishnava and Shaiva sects.

The Cholas emerged as the dominant power in the south. The core region of their control – Cholamandalam – was the area around Tanjavur up to the eastern coast, the Coromandal of later times. Their early conflict was with the declining Rashtrakutas, whose place was then taken by a revived branch of the Chalukyas, now known as the Later Chalukyas, rising to power in the western Deccan. During this period the Deccan was divided into smaller kingdoms of similar status, with

some of which the Cholas were occasionally at war. Political relations involved not only the Later Chalukyas, but also the Yadavas of Devagiri (northern Deccan in the region of Aurangabad) and the Kakatiyas of Warangal (in Andhra Pradesh). Further south there was competition with the Gangas (south Karnataka) and later the Hoysalas of Dorasamudra (in Karnataka), as well as with the Pandyas of Madurai and the Cheras in Kerala. In their last years the Cholas were weakened by the continued incursions of the Hoysalas and the Pandyas into Chola territory.

Mention of Chola chiefdoms goes back to the turn of the Christian era in the *Shangam* poems. Towards the middle of the ninth century, a chief claiming Chola ancestry conquered the region of Tanjavur, the heart of Tamilaham. He declared himself the ruler of an independent state, and sought to establish his status by claiming descent from the Suryavamsha or solar lineage. In AD 907 the first important ruler of the Chola dynasty, Parantaka I, came to power and ruled for almost half a century. He secured the southern frontier of the kingdom by campaigning against the Pandyas and capturing their capital, Madurai. This brought him into contact with Sri Lanka with which the Pandyas had had close relations. The ensuing hostilities lasted several decades. The later part of Parantaka's reign saw Chola defeat at the hands of the Rashtrakutas, who occupied some of the recently acquired northern districts of the Chola kingdom. There followed a period of thirty years in which a succession of weak kings brought about a decline in the power of the Cholas. However, this situation was eventually reversed. The Rashtrakutas in the Deccan were being harassed by the Chalukyas, who had once been subordinate to them and were to be their future overlords. In the confusion, Chola territory earlier lost to the Rashtrakutas was gradually recovered. Chola power was firmly established with the accession of Rajaraja I (985-1014) and of his son and successor, Rajendra, which allowed about half a century for the Chola kingdom to be consolidated and stabilized.

The reigns of both father and son were filled with extensive campaigns in almost every direction. Rajaraja began by attacking the alliance between the Cheras in Kerala, Sri Lanka, and the Pandyas, in order to break the monopoly of trade held by these kingdoms with west Asia. The Arabs had established themselves as traders on the west coast of India, and some had been integrated into local society in Malabar and the Konkan. The Cholas would have been aware of potential Arab competition in the south-east Asian trade, and they tried to strike at the root of this competition by bringing Malabar under their control. At a later date, Rajaraja conducted a naval attack on the Maldive Islands, a staging-point in the Arab trade. The Cholas, although unable to strike directly at the Arab trade, led a campaign in Sri Lanka devastating the existing capital, Anuradhapura, and moved to Pollonnaruva. At the same time campaigns against the rulers of the Deccan states continued apace. Echoes of the old Pallava-Chalukya conflict over the rich province of Vengi were heard now in wars between the Cholas and the Later Chalukyas over the same area.

Rajendra I ruled jointly with his father for two years, succeeding him in 1014. The policy of expansion continued with the annexation of the southern provinces of the Chalukyas, the rich Raichur *doab* and Vengi. Campaigns against Sri Lanka and Kerala were also renewed. But Rajendra's ambitions had turned northwards. An expedition set out, marching through Orissa to reach the banks of the Ganges. From there, it is said, holy water from the river was carried back to the Chola capital. Bringing back the water through conquest symbolized ascendancy over the north. But Rajendra did not hold the northern regions for long, a situation parallel to that of Samudra Gupta's campaign in the south almost 700 years earlier.

Even more ambitious was Rajendra's overseas campaign, involving both the army and navy against the kingdom of Shrivijaya in south-east Asia. It has been suggested that this major undertaking arose from a desire for an overseas empire. Had this been so, however, the campaign would have been

followed by Indian colonization of the coastal areas and an attempt to conquer the hinterland. Since this did not happen, the cause of the war was more likely a desire to protect Indian commercial interests. By the tenth century merchants in China and south India had trading relationships. Ships passed through the seas held by the kingdom of Shrivijaya (the southern Malay peninsula and Sumatra) which controlled the Malacca and Sunda Straits. The rulers of Shrivijaya realized that it would be more lucrative for local traders if the China-India trade had to terminate in Shrivijaya, with local middlemen taking the goods to their eventual destinations. But when Indian merchants in Shrivijaya territory were threatened this raised the wrath of the Chola, who may have had his own investment in this trade, and the result was an attack on Shrivijaya. From the viewpoint of its own mercantile interests, Shrivijaya's interference in the China-India trade was justified, but in this case military power decided the issue. The campaign was successful in that a number of strategic places along the Straits of Malacca came under Chola control, and, for a while at least, Indian shipping and commerce were safe in their passage through Shrivijaya territory.

The successors of Rajendra I turned their attention to conflicts within the peninsula, primarily with the Chalukyas, reviving the competition to control the province of Vengi. The old pattern of lightning raids into each other's territory was repeated. A Chola raid into the heart of Chalukya territory saw the sacking of the capital at Kalyani. This was avenged in 1050 by the Chalukya king. Rivalry was less intense during the reign of the Chola King Kulottunga I (1070-1118), perhaps because of kinship links between the royal families, and this introduced a new element into the relationship. The old enemies of the far south, the Pandyas, Cheras and Sri Lanka, meanwhile remained hostile, but Shrivijaya was peaceful, although still smarting under its defeat by Rajendra. This permitted a steady improvement in the commerce of south India and better communications with the Chinese, to whom Kulottunga sent an embassy of seventy-two merchants in 1077.

Rajaraja I and Rajendra believed that their political status was higher than that of Amoghavarsha the Rashtrakuta ruler or Vishnuvardhana the Hoysala. The unobtrusive titles used by the early Chola kings were replaced with high-sounding ones, such as *chakravartigal* (emperor, the equivalent of the northern *chakravartin*). The cult of the god-king was encouraged through the worship of images of the deceased rulers, together with the building of temples as monuments to dead kings. This carries echoes of Kushana practices. The royal household was run on an elaborate scale and royal patronage was lavish. The political role of the *purohita* (priest) as known to northern Indian politics underwent a modification in the Chola system. The *raja-guru* (priest of the royal family) of the Cholas became a confidant and adviser in all matters temporal and sacred. In their support for Shaivism, the temple at Chidambaram was an important location, the Shiva-nataraja (Shiva as the lord of the cosmic dance) was the icon and the *Periya Puranam* was the revered text.

By the latter part of the twelfth century Chola ascendancy was waning. Neighbours were annexing territories at the fringes of the kingdom. The power of the subordinate rulers in the Deccan increased as central control weakened. Frequent campaigns had exhausted Chola resources and, although they finally succeeded in establishing their supremacy, it was at the cost of their own stability. Furthermore, the eventual breaking of Chalukya power by the Cholas was to recoil on the Cholas themselves since it removed the controlling authority of the Chalukyas over their tributary rulers. The latter then set up independent kingdoms and made preparations to gnaw at the Chola kingdom, prior to more substantial attacks.

Among these the most powerful were the Yadavas, the Hoysalas and the Kakatiyas. The Yadavas kept mainly to the Deccan, and their contribution to the final disintegration of the Cholas was less significant. The Hoysalas and the Kakatiyas became active from the twelfth century onwards. The

latter, having won their independence from the Chalukyas, retired to enjoy it, except for the periods when they were in action against the Cholas. Kakatiya power became visible when the Kakatiyas moved from the fortress of Hanamkonda to the plains in its vicinity, establishing their capital at Warangal. The city and the power that it encapsulated was largely the work of the thirteenth-century King Ganapatideva and his daughter, Rudrammadevi, who succeeded him. The city was enclosed in a series of circular fortifications. Its core, where the roads going in cardinal directions intersected, seems to have been the location of the palace and the royal temple. This would have conformed to the theoretical plan of a capital city. The Kakatiyas wished to annex Vengi, which would have given them a substantial seaboard, for they were well aware of the profits from the ports in the area.

The main attack on the Cholas from the west came from the Hoysalas, whom the Cholas were able to resist. But their older enemy, the Pandya kings of Madurai, saw this as an ideal opportunity to revive hostilities. The Chola strength therefore had to be diverted to two fronts, the western and the southern. The rise of the Hoysalas is in many ways representative of some dynasties of the Deccan from this period. The family began as hill chiefs whose main source of revenue was brigandage, an unfailing source in the higher regions of the plateau. Owing to the political confusion during changes of dynasty, the hill people were eager to gain protectors. Their support to the early Hoysalas enabled the latter to move down into the plains, from where an even more reliable source of revenue – tribute – was given by the people of the plains to buy off the attacks from the hill chiefs. The regular payment of tribute established the legitimacy and authority of the receivers. Tribute sometimes led to political loyalty, and the former hill chiefs gradually found themselves the possessors of small kingdoms, on the basis of which they established a dynasty. Not all such dynasties survived, the older kingdoms annexing the territories of some.

It was Vishnuvardhana who established a kingdom for the Hoysala family. He ruled during the first half of the twelfth century, when the Hoysalas were still in principle subject to the Chalukyas. The core of the kingdom was at Dorasamudra, near modern Mysore, and Vishnuvardhana prepared the way for political independence by consolidating his strength around his capital. Vishnuvardhana is also remembered for his interest in the teachings of the Vaishnava philosopher, Ramanuja, said to have persuaded the king to forsake Jainism for Vaishnavism. The consolidation of the Hoysala kingdom was continued by Ballala II, the grandson of Vishnuvardhana, and resulted in the domination of the southern Deccan by the Hoysalas.

Chola power weakened in the thirteenth century. A Hoysala king claimed to have rescued the Chola king who had been captured by his tributary raja. This raja had attacked the kingdom and destroyed the temples to Shiva and places sacred to Vishnu. According to another inscription, the Hoysala army attacked villages, cut down the forest, burnt the ports along the sea and seized the women. To the north, however, the Hoysalas met with opposition from the Yadavas of Devagiri, who had also expanded their kingdom at the expense of Chalukya territory. By the thirteenth century the Yadavas had laid claim to Gujarat, but they could not hold this for long. The Yadavas and the Hoysalas were to last until the fourteenth century, when new arrivals in the politics of northern India, the Turkish and Afghan sultans of Delhi, intervened in the affairs of the Deccan. The intervention led to other dynasties and different political alignments. Further south, the Pandyas had superseded the Cholas as the dominant power in the Tamil country, and might have maintained this position in the subsequent century had it not been for attacks from the rulers of the Deccan. The Pandyas remained local rulers and subject to the changing politics of the region. Marco Polo claimed to have visited the Pandyan kingdom in 1288 and 1293, and has left a vivid description of the richness of the land and the prosperity of its trade.

Political developments on the opposite coast, that of Kerala, were of a quieter nature. The Chera kingdom had alternating friendly or hostile relations with the Cholas, but the political ambitions of its rulers became apparent only during the reign of Ravivarman Kulashekhara at the end of the thirteenth century. Although unsuccessful, he set out to acquire a larger kingdom, building on the ruins of the existing southern kingdoms. But there was little economic pressure to encourage territorial conquest, the Malabar coast being naturally rich and obtaining an adequate income from trade with west Asia.

It was during this period that another group of people from the west came to India. Copper-plate charters of the Cheras, generally dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries, granted land to Jewish traders, such as Joseph Rabban – the earliest evidence of a Jewish community settling in India, although tradition has it that a previous settlement in Cochin dates to the early centuries AD. This parallels the chronological uncertainty of the arrival of the Syrian Christians. It is possible that this later group had links with the Jewish commercial community in Alexandria, or with the later trade between Aden and ports in the southern part of the west coast, such as Mangalore. The settlements in India were in pursuit of trade. The Cairo Geniza records contain many letters of a personal nature, as well as pertaining to business, written by Jewish traders active in commerce with India towards the end of the first millennium AD. Indians were partners, or representatives of Jewish merchants, and some of the latter spent time in India and married locally. The area associated with this group of traders was Kodungallur or Cranganore, identified by some scholars with the ancient site of Muziris, a port that had been active in the Roman trade. The frequency with which later traders from the west located their settlements in the vicinity of those used by earlier traders from the west is quite striking. Doubtless it was not coincidental, being connected with safe harbours and access to cargo. The arrival of new groups was part of the pattern of trade connections between the west coast and other commercially active parts of Asia. Subsequent to the persecution of the Jews in Europe in later centuries some Jews came to Kerala, already familiar from trading contacts, and made it a part of the Jewish diaspora.

Further north in the western Deccan, the Rashtrakutas were being gradually unseated by their *samantas*, the Shilaharas. The Shilaharas took the title of ‘Lords of the West’, presumably referring to their control over the trade with west Asia. So firm was this control that in one case an association of merchants was required to pay a regular and substantial sum to the royal family, from the revenue of a village donated to it. One inscription suggests that the commercial hinterland of the Konkan extended as far as Rajasthan. The Shilaharas, wanting a monopoly over trade, discontinued the employment of Arabs as part of their higher administration.

Apart from the families constituting the main dynasties, there were lesser rulers of smaller areas in the Deccan and some of these claimed descent from the lineages of the main dynasties. These often began as subordinate rulers of earlier kingdoms, or as landed magnates promoting the settling of new lands through clearing forests, extending agriculture and constructing irrigation tanks. Possibly some were chiefs of forest tribes, converted to cultivation and caste, and were claiming high status. The status sought was *kshatriya*, and the link was either with the Chandravamsha, or lunar line, or the Suryavamsha, or solar line. Land rights also had to be claimed and these required relationships with the ruling dynasty. The dynasty would bestow title and rank on those performing administrative functions. Taxes on a variety of produce were collected and some were transferred to the central administration. This inevitably meant that peasants were frequently under severe pressure to provide more wealth to the landholder.

Change in the agrarian system was noticeable throughout much of the peninsula in the late first millennium AD. The pattern of change carried some similarities with parts of the north, although the

process in Tamilaham in south India had variations. This may be the result of the more detailed studies of this region. The economic backing given to political power in the south is apparent, and to that extent makes an interesting comparative study with other parts of the peninsula.

## **Structures of an Agrarian System**

The Chola kingdom was initially described as a centralized bureaucratic state, the standard description of virtually every large kingdom in India. Recently, historians have been exploring the different ways in which states were formed and the social and economic links to changes in politics. The Chola state has been the subject of such attention. The most extensively discussed have been the concepts of the segmentary state and, on a broader level but with less intensive study, forms of feudalism for states of the peninsula. As pointed out in Chapter 1, the segmentary state model is untenable largely because of its insistence on a dual sovereignty – political and ritual. In the three zones envisaged – central, intermediate and peripheral – political control gradually fades out to be replaced by ritual sovereignty, moving from a smaller to a greater degree, from the first to the third. Inscriptions are described as expressions of ritual sovereignty rather than political sovereignty. Yet ritual encodes symbolism and ritual symbolism need not indicate a weakening of political sovereignty. The changes that led to the consolidation of power in the Chola state were reflected in ways not conforming to the segmentary state, such as in official titles especially at higher levels of administration, the tendency to reorganize administrative units territorially, standardization of taxation, and the gradual replacement of chiefs by high-status officers. The theory of a segmentary state also minimizes the impact of the merchant associations, some of which functioned across the administrative units, as well as the trade that developed in both the peninsula and south-east Asia to bring in a substantial commercial revenue. Although the spread of the Tamil devotional movement and the subsequent major changes in religion focused on the temple and sacred centres, temples were not a-political as is evident from their rivalries and competition for royal patronage when they functioned as major religio-political institutions. This would not have supported the concept of ritual sovereignty as distinct from political sovereignty.

Another theory argues that Chola wealth was acquired through campaigns that were essentially plunder raids. This also has not found support, in view of the impressive network of revenue collection from both agricultural and commercial activities. Virtually all campaigns at one level were plunder raids, but such raids could not have sustained a state as complex as the Chola kingdom.

The model of a feudal state has encouraged some forays into the social and economic history of south India, but it requires further investigation. The theories giving priority to agrarian change are those that emanate from various hypotheses originally relating to feudalism. Although in many respects they are closer to the evidence, the paradigm label of ‘feudalism’ for this period of Indian history is still being debated. However, these debates have led to a more precise understanding of social and economic change. Terms such as feudatory or feudal cannot be equated with their use in European history, where in any case the particular part of Europe under discussion would have to be specified. There are some similarities and some divergences. A clarification of the specific use of such terms in the context of the data is always helpful. The nature of the relative autonomy of local organizations, for example, is a theme receiving far more attention than it did when it was thought that the ruler alone exercised political control. In the currently emerging picture of agrarian and

commercial structures, their relationship to hierarchies of authority is a central question.

Much of the argument hinges upon the changes introduced through the granting of land to religious beneficiaries or persons rewarded for their services to the king. The land granted was often 'wet land' which was already under cultivation and had irrigation facilities. Sometimes wasteland was also given in a grant. Wherever land had to be cleared before cultivation, and irrigation tanks constructed, this was done on a fairly substantial scale that would have changed the landscape. The density of population in the 'wet zone', for example the fertile and well-watered Kaveri Valley, indicates a preference. In the later Chola period, grants were made in the dry zone when presumably the extension of irrigation was more common. The ecology of an area was significant to its economic use. The two landowning groups were the brahmans and the *velalas*, the latter ranging from the wealthy to those less so. These two categories had superior rights over tenants and cultivators, although the range of tenurial rights complicates any easy descriptive label. In some cases tenants could even be dispossessed and earlier grants of land excluded. Artisans and cultivators formed yet another category at a lower level.

The *brahmadeya*, or the *agrahara*, introduced Sanskrit culture which included the norms of social organization as laid down in the *Dharmashastras*. The integration of the *brahmadeyas* and *agraharas* into existing agrarian communities led to some innovations. Negotiations were required between the existing peasants and the new landowners. Since the latter came with royal backing, and often with advanced knowledge of organizing agriculture and other technologies, they had a distinct edge over the existing peasants or those recently converted to peasant status.

*Brahmadeya* donations remained unchanged in pattern from those of Pallava times, as is evident from the Chola grants, such as the Anbil grant of Sundara Chola recording the donations of land to the brahman Anirudha Brahmahiraja.

We marked [the boundaries of] the land thus defined by erecting mounds of earth and planting cactus. The several objects included in this land – such as fruit-yielding trees, water, lands, gardens, all upgrowing trees and down-going wells, open spaces, wastes in which calves graze, the village site, ant-hills, platforms [built around trees], canals, hollows, rivers and their alluvial deposits, tanks, granaries, fish-ponds, clefts with bee-hives, deep ponds included; and everything else on which the iguana runs and the tortoise crawls; and taxes such as the income from places of justice, the taxes on [betel] leaves, the cloths from looms, the *kanam* [of gold] on carriages,... the old tenants being evicted, everything that the king could take and enjoy – all these shall be made over to this man. He shall be at liberty to erect halls and upper storeys with burnt bricks; to dig wells, big and small; to plant southernwood and cactus; to dig channels in accordance with watering requirements: not to waste surplus water but to dam it for irrigation; no one shall employ small baskets [for lifting such water]. In this wise was the old order changed and the old name and old taxes removed, and an *ekabhoga brahmadeya* (land granted to a single brahman) under the name of Karunakaramangalam was constituted.

'The Anbil Plates of Sundara Chola', in K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas* (Madras, 1955), p. 577

Knowledge of agriculture included assessing irrigation. This involved tanks, reservoirs with sluices, canals and wells, which were built and maintained with local expertise available in the villages. The

more impressive irrigation works of the Cholas, consisting of dams and anicuts on rivers, would have been directly controlled by the state. But whether under local or central control, irrigation involved organizing labour at both the village level and across villages. Landowners would have had enough control over the peasants under their jurisdiction to demand forced labour from them. Labour over longer periods would largely have been from the landless or from the lowest castes. Such subservient groups had existed for a long time in many parts of the subcontinent, and would be a short step from what some might call bonded labour or even slave labour, and slaves – *atimai* – are referred to. Even if not identical to forms of slavery in other societies, the terms of the bond were such that generally people were unable to regain their freedom. Bonded persons were liable to be transferred together with the transfer of land through a grant. The system would doubtless have been intensified in the later period of Chola rule when individual ownership of land became more frequent than the control of land by a village.

There are few instances of peasant revolts in Indian history. Sources of the earlier period suggest that discontented peasants migrated to a neighbouring kingdom or an area outside the jurisdiction of the current ruler, although such migration was not permitted. This would be a feasible protest causing a decline in the revenue of the ruler. But its feasibility was possible only while land was available. From the early second millennium there are sporadic instances of revolt, generally as objections to some aspect of administration. Possibly the availability of easily cultivable land had declined and the number of small kingdoms increased.

Village assemblies were crucial to Chola administration. Those living in the usual peasant villages met in an assembly called the *ur*, whereas those from the *brahmadeya* villages used the superior title of *sabha*. Royal officials were present at the meetings of the *sabha* but do not appear to have played a commanding role. Their participation in village affairs was more as observers and advisers. This permitted continuity in local growth and development without too much interference from political changes at the upper level, and the degree of apparent autonomy at village level deserves to be underlined.

Large villages could be divided into wards, each with a smaller assembly representing its households. Given the layout of the village and the tendency for people in similar occupations to be located in the same wards, the latter came to represent professional groups, such as carpenters, potters, smiths and so on. The assemblies controlled production through consultation with the heads of the peasant families, the *velalas*, who were their members. This necessitated discussion on a range of matters, including those of crucial importance, such as the setting up of irrigation facilities. Rights in land were insisted upon and among these were the *kani*, or hereditary rights.

Villages were grouped together within a *nadu*, a defined territory. Agrarian organizations of the *brahmadeyas*, temples, and the commercial associations linked to centres of exchange, such as the *nagaram*, functioned within the *nadu*, although some had connections traversing the *nadu*. Members of the associations of the *velala* handling agricultural products, such as the Chitrameli Periyannadu who were referred to from the twelfth century onwards, traversed the area more widely. The *nadu* was not an autonomous peripheral area but was under central control. This enabled the centre to regroup the *nadus* into units called the *valanadu* and the *mandalam*, especially as the *nadus* were not of a uniform size. Such a rearrangement was an indicator of control over the territories.

Agricultural expansion in the *valanadu* became associated with brahman settlers receiving grants of land, as in the Tamraparni Valley of the far south. Where the land was already under cultivation there had to be agreements between the cultivators and the grantees, obviously to the advantage of the latter. Other units such as *mandalams* could also be re-aligned to determine revenue demands,



administrative controls and the needs of cities in the region. The population of the *mandalam* consisted of peasants, as well as the settlements of forest and hill peoples in their proximity.

If the *brahmadeya* and the temple were important players in the restructuring of the economy during the Chola period, it was not merely because of their ritual authority, but was also a result of their administrative and functional control over productivity. Ritual is important but does not exist in a social void and, more often than not, is also tied to social and economic realities and ambitions. The grantees themselves were beholden to the king for the grant, and the king's officers were required to allocate temple resources and audit temple accounts. As was the case with Buddhist monasteries, the temple complex could only survive where it had some control over resources from agriculture, or from revenue generated by the regular fairs and festivals which became surrogate markets. This necessitated temple control over agriculture and irrigation, together with some participation in commercial exchange.

The working of these assemblies differed according to local conditions. The *ur* was open to male adults of the village, but in effect the older members such as heads of households took a more prominent part, some of them forming a small executive body for routine matters. The *sabha* had the same system and, in addition, could constitute smaller committees of any size from among its members for specialized work. Election to the *sabha* sometimes appears to have been by lot from among those who were eligible, though amendments to the working of the *sabha* could be made whenever necessary. An inscription from the temple wall at Uttaramerur (a *brahmadeya* village) gives details of how the local *sabha* functioned. It dates to the tenth century and reads:

There shall be thirty wards. In these thirty wards those that live in each ward shall assemble and shall select each person possessing the following qualifications for inclusion for selection by lot:

He must own more than one quarter of the tax-paying land. He must live in a house built on his own site. His age must be below seventy and above thirty-five. He must know the *mantras* and *Brahmanas* [from the Vedic corpus].

Even if he owns only one-eighth of the land, his name shall be included provided he has learnt one *Veda* and one of the four *Bhashyas*.

Among those possessing these qualifications only such as are well conversant with business and are virtuous shall be taken, and one who possesses honest earnings whose mind is pure and who has not been on any of the committees for the last three years shall also be chosen. One who has been on any of the committees but has not submitted his accounts, and his relations specified below, cannot have their names written on the tickets:

The sons of the younger and elder sisters of his mother.

The sons of his paternal aunt and maternal uncle.

The uterine brother of his mother.

The uterine brother of his father.

His uterine brother.

His father-in-law.

The uterine brother of his wife.

The husband of his uterine sister.

The sons of his uterine sister.

His son-in-law.

His father.

His son.

One against whom incest or the first four of the five great sins are recorded. [The five great sins being killing a brahman, drinking alcohol, theft, adultery, and associating with criminals.] All his relations specified above shall not be eligible to be chosen by lot. One who has been outcaste for association with low people shall not have his name chosen until he performs the expiatory ceremonies.

One who is foolhardy...

One who has stolen the property of others...

One who has taken forbidden dishes...

One who has committed sins and has had to perform expiatory ceremonies of purification...

Excluding all these, names shall be written on tickets for thirty wards and each of the wards in these twelve streets shall prepare a separate covering ticket for thirty wards bundled separately. These packets shall be put into a pot. When the tickets have to be drawn a full meeting of the great assembly including the young and old members shall be convened. All the temple priests who happen to be in the village on that day, shall, without any exception whatever, be caused to be seated in the inner hall where the great assembly meets. In the midst of the temple priests, one of them who happens to be the eldest shall stand up and lift that pot, looking upwards so as to be seen by all people. One ward shall be taken out by any young boy standing close who does not know what is inside and shall be transferred to another empty pot and shaken loose. From this pot one ticket shall be drawn and made the arbitrator. While taking charge of the ticket thus given to him, the arbitrator shall receive it on the palm of his hand with the five fingers open. He shall read out the ticket thus received. The ticket shall be read by all the priests present in the inner hall. The name thus read shall be put down and accepted. Similarly one man shall be chosen for each of the thirty wards.

Of the thirty men thus chosen those who had previously been on the Garden Committee, and on the Tank Committee, those who are advanced in learning and those who are advanced in age shall be chosen for the Annual Committee. Of the rest, twelve shall be taken for the Garden Committee and the remaining six shall form the Tank Committee. The great men of these three committees shall hold office for full 360 days and then retire. Anyone on a Committee found guilty of an offence shall be removed at once. For appointing the committees after these have retired, the members of the Committee for Supervision of Justice in the twelve streets shall convene an assembly with the help of the arbitrator. The Committees shall be appointed by drawing pot-tickets...

For the Five-fold Committee and the Gold Committee, names shall be written for pot-tickets in the thirty wards (and the same procedure followed). One who has ridden an ass (i.e., been punished) or who has committed a forgery shall not be included.

Any arbitrator who possesses honest earnings shall write the accounts of the village. No accountant shall be appointed to that office again before he submits his accounts to the great men of the chief committee and is declared to have been honest. The accounts which he has been writing he shall submit himself, and no other accountant shall be chosen to close his accounts. Thus, from this year onwards as long as the moon and the sun endure, committees shall always be appointed by lot...

We, the assembly of Uttaramerur *chatur-vedi-mangalam* made this settlement for the prosperity of our village in order that wicked men may perish and the rest may prosper. At the order of the great men sitting in the assembly, I, the arbitrator Kadadipottan Shivakkuri Raja-malla-mangala-priyan, thus wrote the settlement.

Other inscriptions refer to similar general procedures, though there are variations in qualifications and requirements and in the sanction of expenditure. The making of rules through amendments from time to time, and the attempts to ensure that factions were kept at a minimum, are striking features of this inscription. The assembly was summoned by the beat of a drum and generally met in the precincts of the temple. Interchange and co-operation among village assemblies was not unknown.

The village assembly was responsible for collecting the assessment for the government and, where stipulated, the taxes on land and produce. In some cases it was collected as a joint assessment on the entire village. In addition, the assembly could make a levy for a particular purpose: for example, the construction of a water tank. Such local funds were kept separate from the taxes collected for the state. The activities of the assembly included the keeping of records, particularly those pertaining to charities and taxes, and the settling of agrarian disputes such as conflicts over tenure arrangements or irrigation rights. The larger assemblies kept a small staff of paid officers, but in the smaller assemblies most of the work was done on a voluntary basis. Professionals were appointed for special purposes at the *nadu* level as well. The higher officials were often drawn from among the better-off *velalas*, thus creating a link between state and local administration that enlarged the possibilities of upward mobility, incidentally providing a base for those with political ambitions. The latter part of the Chola period saw greater activity among revenue officials, with an increase in the number of taxes. The degree of autonomy at village level prevented shifting relations in the upper levels of the administrative and political structure from interfering to any large extent with the routine life of the village.

Property rights varied as did the method of paying taxes, depending on whether ownership was individual or whether a collective tax from the village was preferred. Sometimes dues were remitted, partially or totally, in return for some service, but this was generally on a very small scale, such as a remittance of tax to the temple in lieu of fetching the water for bathing the deity. In later centuries this tax included military service. Unlike temple service, involving proximity to the deity, military service could be performed by low-caste groups. The recipients of *brahmadeya* grants, as well as temples receiving grants, were treated as regular landowners where questions of rights were involved. There was a sharp distinction between those with land who paid tax, and those who did not, with the agricultural labourers working for a wage. The distinction was largely that the labourer was not included in the village assembly and could not hold a position of responsibility in local administration. Many were employed on temple estates, yet being of low caste they were not permitted entry into the temple. Reclamation of wasteland and the clearing of forests were regular work carried out by peasants and labourers, which was encouraged by the ruler since it increased the land under cultivation. Cattle-raising had by now become a subsidiary occupation except in the uplands.

Tax on land and its produce, whether in cash or kind, was a substantial source of income for the Chola state, although other taxes were also collected, such as those on mines, forests, salt, professional taxes, customs dues and tolls, judicial fines and the equivalent in forced labour (*vetti*). The assessment of land-tax was based on the quality of the land and the facilities to irrigate it. Two or even three crops of paddy per year were regarded as normal, though the yield varied. The tax could rise to one-third, which is high by any standards, though in exceptional circumstances remission or commutation was permitted by the king.

Permanent assessment of land for tax purposes was known, but was apparently not usual.

Assessment required land surveys at frequent intervals. Land-tax, together with the local dues levied by the assembly or the temple, must have been a strain on the cultivator for whom there were few alternatives to paying the tax. He could in theory either appeal to the king for remission or reduction of the tax if conditions were difficult at a particular time, or else move away to a different area. The latter was an extreme step, since mobility among cultivators was restricted even if land was available. In the case of a village assessed as a unit, the return from the non-taxable land was deducted from the total revenue of the village. Non-taxable land consisted of the residential area, temples, tanks, irrigation channels, areas where the artisans and outcaste population lived, and the cremation ground.

In the Hoysala kingdom in Karnataka, the key figures in the rural areas were the landholders, the *gavunda/gauda*, and the *heggade*, mentioned in inscriptions referring to land transactions in villages, the maintenance of irrigation, the collection of taxes and the work of the village council. References to them go back to Ganga inscriptions where they seem to have been the heads of the families of the original settlers. Their standing and status is indicated by their prefix. For example, the *praja-gavunda*, literally, the *gavunda* of the people, was economically and socially of a lesser status than the wealthy *prabhu-gavunda*, literally, of the lord. Their numbers varied and were sometimes determined by their dual role of being both representatives of the village and appointees of the state. Some judicial functions were also included, such as the raising of a militia when required. Initially the grants were made to brahmans and Jainas, whose activities included the clearing of forest land and the reclaiming of wasteland to extend cultivation. This also required the building and maintenance of tanks for irrigation. The increasing numbers of peasants were drawn both from the forest-peoples converted to cultivation and from migrations of peasants from the Tamil area after the campaigns of the tenth century.

The evolving of the status of landholders followed a fairly common pattern. Intermediary landholders and *samantas* changed the ecology of the neighbourhood through expanding agriculture, secured through the construction of irrigation tanks. Sometimes the grant of land was to the family of a hero who had died defending village property. The identity of the landholder was further emphasized by his establishing his family deity in the locality. This was also part of the two-way process of introducing new deities into Puranic Hinduism and superimposing existing Hindu deities on local ones. The installing of the new deity was not solely a religious act and should not be mistaken for ritual sovereignty. It accompanied the grant of land and was equally significant as an intervention of administrative rights and identity. With the coming of brahman settlements and the creation of *agraharas*, the picture changed further. Occasionally there were some confrontations between brahman settlers and existing cultivators and the terms of revenue collection had to be sorted out. Peasant protests in the peninsula are heard of from the thirteenth century, occasionally with religious undertones. The balance between state administration and the powers of local landowners, together with the requirements of cultivation as a support to royal power, became characteristic of kingdoms at this time.

In an area such as Warangal (Andhra Pradesh), with its less fertile tracts, major investments in clearing wasteland and building tanks and canals were required to establish agriculture. Deserted villages were reclaimed by order of the Kakatiya rulers and new villages were established, involving colonization or encroachments into forests. This was actively encouraged by the Kakatiyas and their tributary rulers through grants of land, especially to brahmans.

As a contrast to this, settlement in Kerala followed the fertile 'wet lands'. The earlier brahman settlements of the mid-first millennium AD, said to be thirty-two in number, expanded in this period.

The alliance between rulers and brahmins was also related to a large number of temples being established, each of which controlled substantial land. Brahmin control over temple management meant that they controlled land both as individual holders and as managers of temples. In some cases the two categories may have been distinct if the brahmins associated with the *Vedas* held land from earlier grants, whereas those who were only priests in the temples derived an income from their functions in the temple. The management of temples could have included wealthy non-brahmins, such as merchants and administrators. A hierarchy of tenants cultivated the lands of the temple and parallel to this were the artisans, also employed by the temple. Agricultural activities at various levels were controlled by a nexus between the brahmins and those claiming aristocratic status, pre-eminently the caste of Nairs. The wealth of the temple was such that many temples employed experts in the martial arts, who acted as a militia in times of trouble. Control over both the village assembly and the council managing the temple was tight, particularly when supervising tenants and craftsmen.

References to local militias were now more noticeable, but so too were increasing numbers of hero-stones. Some had a frame that suggested an imitation of a small shrine, and the sculptured panels became more professional. Their adornment underlined the status of the hero. There were also occasions when the memorialized hero either came from a family of landholders or else his kinsmen aspired to that status. In the former case, his kinsmen's aspirations to political power could be supported by both their landholding status and their relationship to a dead hero. The cult of the hero was further elaborated. It was believed that a hero's death would automatically lead him to heaven, and if his wife became a *sati* she was deified. The emphasis on what the individual gained by these acts also underlined the need for a village to be self-reliant in some situations. Memorials in coastal areas recorded defence against attacks from the sea or at sea. The depiction of ships on such hero-stones points incidentally to an improvement in shipping technology compared to their depiction in earlier sculpture. Hero-stones of this period could therefore be seen as comments on the structure of power at local levels, particularly where the state did not have a readily available presence or thought it unnecessary to mark such a presence.

The tendency to hoard wealth was not characteristic of village life. Apart from those in markedly rich villages, most village members had little wealth to hoard. The average holding yielded enough to feed and clothe a family with little surplus. Food was simple, rice and vegetables in the main. But diet could change with caste. Brahmins, who had once eaten meat, were now generally vegetarian. A non-vegetarian diet became customary among some higher castes, and meat of all kinds was eaten by others, provided it was affordable. Housing was relatively cheap, since the climate did not call for elaborate structures. Nevertheless, the wealthy lived in well-appointed houses. The richer members of rural society kept their wealth employed through economic advantages in schemes to reclaim land, improve irrigation or invest in trade. Equally, there was much religious merit to be acquired by donations towards the building of a temple or the endowing of a *matha*. Wealth was used in forms that would enhance the prestige of its owners.

## **Towns and Markets**

The nuclei of urban centres were generally formed by exchange centres in rural areas where local produce was brought, administrative centres, places of pilgrimage where large numbers gathered and goods were regularly exchanged, or the locations of recurring festivals and fairs. Rural markets were

recognized by chiefs and administrators as potentially important to generating revenue. The military camp, often set up as part of a regular tour of inspection, continued to be a precursor to a town, particularly if the location was repeated year after year. Towns that had existed prior to the tenth century often grew as a result of expanding trade during this period. In Karnataka and Tamil-nadu, towns referred to as *pattanam* began as commercial centres, often maritime. Sometimes the main occupation was specified in the name, for instance, Banajupattana, a town of traders. But prior to this they could have been focal points of local administration or places of pilgrimage. Shravana Belgola, for example, began as a pilgrimage centre in the seventh century and by the twelfth century was an important settlement of merchants that maintained a number of Jaina establishments. Trading associations and professional merchants often had their beginnings in rural centres of exchange or of administration.

Parallel processes occurred in the domain of the Later Chalukyas. Merchants and wealthy landowners wielded authority in the administration of cities. Elsewhere, weekly village markets sometimes developed into towns. On occasion the *gavundas* and *heggades* were also associated with positions of urban authority. A designation of wider use familiar in many parts of the subcontinent was *mahajana*, literally, the big men, used sometimes for wealthy brahmins in their secular roles as landholders, and eventually for those involved in commerce that sometimes coincided with urban administration. Those who worked at the senior levels of urban administration were recompensed by permission to keep a percentage of the levies collected from householders. Towns went through periods of vicissitudes but from about the tenth century there was predictable growth.

The market centre, known as the *nagaram*, where traders gathered, was the focus for exchange of the produce of the region and also had links with the temple. Administered by the *nagarattar*, it was also taxed, particularly on its profits from overseas trade. Merchants and guilds paid tolls and customs duties. Inscriptions carry details of these taxes, and of the levels of tax collection which ranged from the local to the central. Inscriptions from Karnataka record customs taxes on the import of horses, on commodities made of gold, on textiles and perfume, and on produce such as black pepper, paddy, spices, betel-leaves, palm leaves, coconuts and sugar. This was produce that came from various parts of the peninsula and was more than just a regional trade. Corporate trading enterprise was particularly noticeable from the eleventh century onwards. Inevitably, the presence of a hierarchy in the bureaucracy was also recorded. In the transition from rural to urban, tax concessions were sometimes introduced by the local administration but were replaced with tolls, taxes and dues when commerce was profitable.

Overseas trade was among the strengths of the Chola merchants. Nagapattinam, Mahabalipuram, Kaveripattinam, Shaliyur and Korkai, on the east coast, had elaborate establishments controlling the south Indian trade eastwards. The port at Vishakhapattinam was named Kulottunga-chola-pattinam, after the King. Trade to the east received encouragement from a Cambodian mission to the Chola court in the early eleventh century. Maritime trade with China reached an unprecedented volume during these centuries. It became a state monopoly in China, the Chinese government not wishing to lose the income from it. Sung period sources from China refer to the presence of Indian merchants in the ports of southern China. Apart from trade, the earlier lively interest among Chinese savants in Indian astrology and alchemy continued, with some startlingly exaggerated stories in Chinese texts on the transmutation of stone and metal from worthless matter to valuable items by visiting Indians!

With the Mongols controlling central Asia, merchandise from China was transported by sea, particularly from southern China to western Asia and Europe. South India exported textiles, spices, medicinal plants, jewels, ivory, horn, ebony and camphor to China. The same commodities were also

exported to the west, to ports such as Dhofar and Aden and, in addition, Siraf received cargoes of aloe wood, perfumes, sandalwood and condiments. Persia, Arabia and Egypt were the destinations of those trading with the west, with Siraf on the Persian Gulf as an entrepôt, and Cairo as well as Alexandria involved in the trade across the Arabian Sea. Quilon, on the Malabar coast, channelled Chera overseas trade westwards.

Marco Polo, who like many others at the time claimed to have visited India, commented on the continuing and huge trade in horses which brought vast fortunes to both the Arabs and the merchants of south India, who between them had organized a monopoly of the import of horses. For a variety of reasons, India never took to breeding horses of quality, possibly because the climate, soil conditions and natural pasturage were not suitable. This extremely expensive commodity therefore always had to be imported. Marco Polo Wrote:

Let me tell you next that this country does not breed horses. Hence all the annual revenue, or the greater part of it, is spent in the purchase of horses; and I will tell you how. You may take it for a fact that the merchants of Hormuz and Kais, of Dhofar and Shihr and Aden, all of which provinces produce large numbers of battle chargers and other horses, buy up the best horses and load them on ships and export them to this king and his four brother kings. Some of them are sold for as much as *500 saggi* of gold, which are worth more than *100 marks* of silver. And I assure you that this king buys 1,000 of them or more every year, and his brothers as many. And, by the end of the year, not a hundred of them survive. They all die through ill-usage, because they have no veterinaries and do not know how to treat them. You may take it from me that the merchants who export them do not send out any veterinaries or allow any to go, because they are only too glad for many of them to die in the king's charge.

Marco Polo, *Travels* (Pelican edition), p. 137

Allowing for Marco Polo's usual proneness to exaggeration, there is nevertheless some truth in these remarks. However, there were veterinaries familiar with the medical treatment of horses and elephants, both important to the cavalry and elephant wing of the army, and Sanskrit texts were written on the subject. If it is true that horses died in such large numbers, the reasons have to be sought elsewhere.

The continuing interference by coastal pirates was an impediment to maritime trade. *Shangam* poetry had referred to pirates attacking Yavana ships and similar references continue. On the west coast piracy was sometimes organized by local chiefs to plunder the merchants active in the Rashtrakuta kingdom. Hero-stones from the Konkan carry graphic representations of the hero warding off the pirates. Such disturbances occurred in many coastal areas of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the South China Seas. In contrast, the less disturbed ports provided a rich potential for trade and merchant associations made large profits. The Kakatiya king issued a special charter in the thirteenth century to protect merchants trading at the port of Motupalli on the coast of Andhra. The inscription in Sanskrit and Telugu stated that only a fixed duty was to be taken from merchants and their safety was to be guaranteed. According to Marco Polo, the exports from Motupalli were diamonds and muslin, both of the finest quality. The larger associations maintained their own force to protect the goods and the traders, a tradition going back to earlier times.

Most production was for local consumption but trade, particularly overseas, provided an additional incentive to an existing market. Elephants, horses, spices, perfumes, precious stones and superior quality textiles were the commodities involved in large-scale trade, with metalware, jewellery, pottery and salt (produced in salt pans from sea water) being of lesser importance. Merchant associations, often described as guilds, controlled much of the trade. They may not have traded collectively although they belonged to an association. The more frequently referred to were the Manigramam, Ayyavole, Nanadeshi, Nagarattar, Anjuvannam and Valanjiyar. They did not all deal in the same items or trade in the same regions. The Manigramam were smaller bodies than the Ayyavole, while the Anjuvannam was particularly active in Kerala. Long-distance contacts and activities are evident from the fact that the Ayyavole, originating in Aihole and constituted of brahmans and *mahajanas*, was active in the trade of the Deccan and the Chola centres. Such brahmans were sometimes from *agraharas* and had the wealth to speculate in trade, ignoring the prohibition on brahmans being traders except in dire necessity, or for that matter the prohibition on crossing the seas. Members of this association were known as the 500 *svamis* of Ayyavole and they claimed that they also protected the customary law of their members. Intervention in the trade within the peninsula would inevitably have meant some intervention in overseas trade as well. Such associations are referred to in inscriptions in south-east Asia. The power of these associations in the economic life of the period is indicated by their access to any region irrespective of the boundaries of kingdoms, and by the fact that they could finance local projects, for example, the construction of a temple, or provide a loan to the king.

Local merchant associations, the *nagaram*, were probably affiliated with the larger ones that acquired goods at the place of manufacture to distribute through an elaborate network. State support was not a condition of their ventures into overseas trade, but if necessary and where the state felt that it could interfere effectively on their behalf, as in the case of Srivijaya, it came to their assistance. Even on such occasions, however, the purpose of interference was not to acquire centres of raw material or markets but to remove the obstructions placed on the trade. Kings and higher officers of state may have invested in this trade, or else were provided with exclusive presents by the guilds to ensure support where required.

Given the wealth and commercial ramifications of the large merchant associations, it is curious that they did not aspire to greater political power. The brahman element in these guilds was probably averse to challenging the political authority of the king, since they derived their financial capital from the land granted to them by the king, and the possibility of revoking the grant could have been a threat. Urban structures supporting the potential for an independent power-base, built on the ambitions of a range of professional organizations, seem not to have asserted greater independence. By now the concept of monarchy as the legitimate form of political authority was strongly rooted. Moreover, many guilds had overseas interests and were therefore dependent in the last resort on the military and naval strength of the Chola state. Those who bestowed legitimacy on the system would certainly have used every effort to curb the political power of the guilds. Merchant associations were more powerful, however, in the smaller maritime kingdoms which were largely dependent on mercantile prosperity.

Barter continued in rural areas as a means of exchange, the major items in these transactions being paddy, domestic animals and cloth. Copper coins continued to be in circulation and used in markets. Gold and silver coinage was naturally reserved for buying and selling goods of high value, for long-distance trade and occasionally for the paying of taxes. The Cholas minted some silver coins from time to time, but gold remained the metal of high-value currency. The gold *kalanju*, sometimes valued



in terms of the *gadyana* of the Deccan, was used in expensive transactions and the *kashu* for lesser ones. One of the advantages of merchant guilds having bases in various parts of the country was that, as in earlier times, the use of promissory notes encouraged long-distance trade.

The circulation of gold coin was unrestricted, although some appear to have been debased from the eleventh century onwards. However, this is a debatable point since the gold content of coins varied from region to region. Differences in weights and standards compelled the gold committee of the assemblies, for instance, to constantly evaluate gold and gold currency. The use of coins encouraged an income from usury, by now a generally acceptable activity indulged in even by brahmans and the managers of temples. Presumably it was justified in these cases as helping in the propagation and prosperity of the religion.

## The Temple as an Institution

There is a striking increase in the number of temples built at this time. This is unlikely to have been purely the result of a greater interest in worship. The temple would have performed other functions as well. Temples built from royal donations were not only closely connected to the court, but were also perceived almost as surrogate courts. As such, they could draw on resources from anywhere within the kingdom, for example, the Tanjavur temple which received revenue from villages in Sri Lanka. This encouraged a greater intervention of the court in local matters, although in many cases physical distance from the court and the immanence of local authority, required concessions to local opinion. The hymns of the Alvars and Nayanars underlined the parallels between the deity and kingship, and by endorsing the one they endorsed the other. Temples were visualized as palaces, and rituals marking the daily routine of the deity imitated those of the king. The temple received offerings and tribute and the service of the worshippers.

Temples built through royal donations could be located in the capital and intimately associated with the court, as was the case with the Rajarajeshvara temple at Tanjavur and the Rajendreshvara at Gangaikondacholapuram, both built in the eleventh century and celebrating the reigns of kings. The temple at Tanjavur had a commanding location and acquired the aura of the leading ceremonial centre. Sometimes worship came to focus on the king, thus helping to imprint divinity onto kingship. Ritual was another channel of authority, at times subtle and at other times obvious, particularly as it was not in itself sufficient and required reinforcing by more tangible sources of power. The rhetoric of ritual was not intended in a literal sense but as reflective of symbolic power. Puranic Hinduism did not require the king to be the patron of the Vedic sacrifice, but, being symbolic of the deity, he was thought to participate in the grace of the deity and this encouraged the devotion of the worshippers. The king, therefore, did not always have to proximate deity and in some situations it was sufficient if he was just the ideal *bhakta*, a devotee. Doubtless the king and the court, irrespective of religious conviction, were not unaware of the political edge of *bhakti*.

As in all such structures, the assumed presence of the deity converted the temple into a sacred space where a relationship between the deity and the devotee could be sought. But implicit in this space and in the rituals were questions relating to authority and the establishing of rights and duties. The temple of Puranic Hinduism provided social and political space for the working out of such concerns over a large social spectrum, although the lowest social groups were excluded. The managers of temples represented political and economic interests and religious concerns, as is

apparent from a close reading of temple inscriptions. Royal grants were a form of distributing wealth and acquiring supporters, even if the ostensible purpose of donations was to please the deity. There was a continuous tradition of giving gifts and donations – *dana* – and, although the form of the gift changed, the intentions were similar.

Temples built from resources other than those gifted by the royal family had also evolved into complex institutions, related not only to religious requirements but also to fiscal, political and cultural needs. This can be seen more easily in the functioning of the larger temples in rural areas. Land owned by the elite was donated or, alternatively, land was purchased and then donated to the temple. The fiscal role of the temple became even clearer in later Chola times when both temples and merchants were the most frequent purchasers of land. As an institution, the temple became the location for many kinds of routine exchange, the focal point for many professions to whom the temple gave employment either directly or indirectly, a symbol of authority as a landlord who could intervene in the lives of rural people, a rural bank, a channel of various forms of legitimation and, not least, the focus of a particular sectarian religion. In rural areas, temples were the locations of the village assemblies and of formal education for upper-caste boys.

Whereas the *brahmadeyas* were often grants to brahmins who were specialists in Vedic studies, the temples were closely associated with the belief and practice of Puranic religions. The juxtaposition of the two brought the rituals into proximity, but at another level demarcated the difference between them. New rituals and deities, incorporated through the assimilation of local cults, could be given respectability if introduced into temple ritual and the creation of new myths. Cults that were refused such admission were generally those associated with the marginalized groups, such as untouchables and certain lower castes, and their places of worship were segregated.

The architecture, plan and embellishment of the temple marked a departure from the earlier monuments. Rock-cut temples gave way to free-standing temples, small to begin with but eventually reaching an immense size, as dictated by institutional functions. By the late Chola period, large temples were laid out in an extensive area with multiple courtyards, incorporating many lesser shrines within the parameters of the main temple. The presence of the *brahmadeyas* in the locality encouraged brahmin control over temples even if the temple had been financed by an independent grant. The location was frequently at a nodal point of exchange or trade, or an administrative centre. Where it was the former it attracted merchants, some of whom were associated with the administration of the temple in addition to the brahmin management. Small temples in the cities were built and maintained through the donations of guilds and merchants and would therefore be associated with a section of the city's residents. As in the case of Buddhist *stupa* complexes, the wealthier temples also had a wide geographical reach among their patrons and this was reflected in the donations that they received from merchants and landowners.

The income of the temple came from the wealth and land acquired as donation, from contributions by the village assemblies, from taxes that it was permitted to collect as part of the grant, from offerings of devotees and from its function as a banker in rural areas. The temple maintained the priests who performed the rituals, as well as the record-keepers, accountants and administrators who looked after its management. There were others who serviced the buildings and guarded them. Professional herdsmen took care of the animals owned by the temple. And those involved at a lesser level with the ritual and the entertainment were the cooks, garland-makers, musicians, dancers and *devadasis*. Many were encouraged to offer their services free as a form of devotion, but others were also dependent on the temple for their livelihood. Since temples had access to surplus resources they attracted traders and craftsmen, among whom were bronze-workers, stone-cutters and the makers of

textiles.

The process of building a large temple, over many years, altered economic relationships within the area with the provision of building materials, labour, skilled artisans and those employed in its long-term maintenance. When this extensive patronage towards maintaining a temple ceased, the temple would fall into disrepair and even be deserted. Temples could be in ruins because of the collapse of the authority responsible for maintaining them, not necessarily only as a result of conquest and deliberate destruction. The decline of a temple, therefore, as of other large monumental structures, could be caused by a variety of changes.

The maintenance of temples compares with that of any large-scale institution. The temple at Tanjavur, which took almost a decade to build and was possibly the richest during this period, is said to have had an average income of 500 lb troy of gold, 250 lb troy of precious stones and 600 lb troy of silver, which was acquired through donations, income from taxes and the revenue from about 300 villages. It also maintained temple staff, consisting of about 600 employees, among which were the *devadasis*, 212 attendants – which included treasurers, accountants, record-keepers and watchmen, 57 musicians and readers of the texts, quite apart of course from the craftsmen of various categories (such as carpenters, braziers, goldsmiths, tailors) and the many hundreds of priests who also lived off the temple. A number of these were allotted land to live permanently in the vicinity, and inevitably an urban centre emerged alongside the temple. It became imperative for the temple authorities to keep the income flowing in. Temples did this in part through financing various commercial enterprises and through acting as banker and money-lender to village assemblies and similar bodies, loaning money at the generally accepted rate of 10 to 15 per cent per annum. In this the temples were now following the tradition of the wealthier Buddhist monasteries.

## Caste and Sect

The *brahmadeya* also acted as an agency of political integration, the well-being of the elite being a primary concern. The system introduced the *varna* hierarchy into an area where it may have been new or may have become more dominant than before. Social distinctions of earlier times that drew on kinship connections were giving way to caste. Nevertheless, although caste was adopted as a form of social stratification there were adjustments of exclusion and inclusion of certain social categories that were related to regional forms and functions. The *velalas*, who in *varna* terms were often equated with *shudras*, were second in importance after the brahmans, but the *velalas* spanned a large economic range. The rest of society was gradually shuffled into a caste hierarchy.

Vedic Brahmanism had declined somewhat but was still the privileged practice of brahmans and kings. Its insistence on exclusivity confined it to the upper castes. The centrality of the temple grew with the growth of the Shaiva and Vaishnava sects. Those who managed the temple, especially in rural areas, were inevitably the brahmans and the wealthier *velalas*. These identities congealed into what had begun earlier as the brahman and the *shudra*, forming the two main social groups. Temples and Shaiva monasteries also followed the pattern of Buddhist and Jaina institutions and sought the patronage of merchants. This competition for patronage led to shifts and realignments among the sects, sometimes of a hostile and violent kind. The earlier rivalry between the Buddhists and Shaivas was extended to antagonism between the Jainas and the Shaivas. Compositions such as the twelfth-century *Periya Puranam*, with its hagiographics of Shaiva devotees, fuelled these rivalries, accompanied by

attempts to convert Jaina temples to Shaiva use. It was said that kings achieved greater glory through association with Shiva, an idea also captured in painted and sculptured depictions of the king as a royal devotee of the god. Kings tended to give greater support to the more widespread religion, which in many areas was Shaivism. These changes also led to some confrontations with the Vaishnavas, who were attempting to reorient their rituals to bring in a wider range of worshippers and were also competing for patronage. The *Bhagavata Parana* projected a Vaishnava world-view. The *Agamas* provided information on the liturgies of the Puranic religions.

By the twelfth century the wealthier *velalas* were often the powerful functionaries of the temple. Caste consciousness was becoming a marked feature in social relationships, but the normative *varna* pattern does not seem to have been dominant in practice. The main distinction in the ordering of castes appears to have been the division of society into brahmans and non-brahmans. Compared to other regions, among the non-brahmans there was little mention of *kshatriyas* and *vaishyas*, but the *shudras* were prominent. The *shudras* were divided into the clean *shudras* – whose touch was not polluting – and the unclean *shudras*, who were debarred from entry into the temple, *jatis* are referred to in association with artisans and craftsmen. Slavery was an established category and although some slaves were used in agriculture and craft production, most were employed in domestic work. Many such persons were sold to the temple, particularly those impoverished or without an income during a famine.

The temple could also act as a conduit of social mobility. In coastal Andhra, a large herd of cows was donated to the Draksharama temple. The herd was a considerable asset in terms of revenue from dairy produce, and was cared for by the local Boya tribal community. In the course of time, and because they were looking after temple property, these Boyas rose in status from outcastes to *shudras*. As *shudras* they entered the lower echelons of administration and gradually some attained high office.

The new activities had generated a range of items required for exchange. Inevitably those in the business of procuring raw materials, producing finished goods and distributing these, now acquired social importance. This affected the potential for social mobility in caste society. It took the form of the emergence of two new groups referred to as the Right- and Left-Hand groups – the *valangai* and the *idangai*. This was a social division among the non-brahman and the non-*velala* groups, which included those agricultural labourers who were performing services for the upper castes. The division began in the Chola period but became more evident from the thirteenth century onwards. Since the Right-Hand was considered superior to the Left, those anxious to attain a higher status made attempts to move from the Left- to the Right-Hand. It sometimes took the form of special organizations bestowing privileges on certain occupational groups, such as blacksmiths and carpenters. Some agricultural groups were also part of the scheme. Merchant associations were more concerned with the status of the artisans assisting in producing what was required for commerce. This was a new set of caste alignments arising out of a context in which the links between merchants and artisans were of mutual advantage. Inevitably the division into Left-Hand and Right-Hand, and the statuses associated with each, was to lead to caste rivalries.

Economic interests could overlook the norms of *varna*. Brahmans who were merchants readily crossed the seas, while special privileges were occasionally granted to those who worked for the court, like the engravers of the copperplate charters of King Rajendra, or the weavers of Kanchipuram who wove the textiles for the royal family, or the stone masons working on the royal temple or palace. All these were exempt from paying certain dues, and although some of them, such as the weavers, were of low status, they were regarded with greater respect than other members of their

castes. References are occasionally made to mixed castes, which would suggest that although the rigidity of caste rules was being emphasized, in practice lapses were common.

Among the donations to the temples that were recorded, a fair number came from women devotees. These were larger in the ninth and tenth centuries, after which they declined and finally petered out after the thirteenth century. Presumably these were women who came from families that were financially comfortable, although donations from *devadasis* are also recorded.

The institution of *devadasis* attached to the better-endowed temples came to be seen as an additional source of income for the temple. Some *devadasis*, where they were reduced to being merely temple attendants, came to be regarded as women of easy virtue. Others, however, who were highly accomplished women, were treated with deference. Because of their accomplishments, such women had a certain freedom of movement in that they could distance themselves from social conventions to a greater degree than most other urban women. Part of the reason for this was that they were educated and professionally trained in the arts, particularly music and dance. Women of royal families were also often educated, which encouraged self-confidence.

One of the more notable features of royal patronage in the peninsula was the frequency with which queens were not only patrons but took an active interest in administration, for instance, among the Ikshvakus, Pallavas, Gangas, Cholas and Later Chalukyas. In the literature of the royal courts women are often projected as retiring, romantic and unconcerned with matters of state, as in the eleventh-century *Vikramanka-deva-charita* written by Bilhana at the Chalukya court. But contemporary Chalukya inscriptions sometimes referred to queens not only as patrons but as administrators overseeing specific areas. Such women participated in the activities of the court that related to governance. Their decisions carried weight and their governance was firm.

At the other end of the scale, peasant women had a limited access to movement being partners in the family occupation. The most liberated women were the poets and singers of hymns dedicated to the worship of Vishnu or Shiva, who rejected conventional restrictions. This rejection became part of their devotion, as in the poetry of Akkamahadevi writing in the twelfth century. But it is significant that this freedom was allowed them only because they were accepted as true worshippers who had taken on a degree of asceticism in their worship.

## Language and Literature

The temple continued to function as a place for formal education in Sanskrit. Pupils were either taught by the temple priests, as in the smaller village temples, or else trained at a more advanced level in the *ghatikas* or colleges attached to the larger temples. Brahmans who were thus educated were absorbed either into the temples as priests or, being literate, into the administration of the region. Jaina and Buddhist monasteries also educated novice monks or even some lay persons, but as the number of monasteries decreased their impact lessened. Because the medium of instruction was Sanskrit, formal education became distanced from everyday life. Professional education was still maintained through the training given to apprentices in guilds and among groups of artisans. Where this was combined with a greater demand for technical expertise, with some training in Sanskrit, the status of professionalism rose. Oral instruction in the poetry of devotion serves as a reminder that audiences were not necessarily literate.

This period witnesses the more extensive use of regional languages and their consequent

development for multiple purposes. The impetus towards this change came from the devotional movement that used these languages to express the ecstatic experience of closeness to the deity. At another level, the official archive used the regional language for recording locations and rights relating to grants of land. Books were written on palm leaves that were then tied together. Interpolations therefore required the untying of the book and the insertion of what was new. Books were stored in the libraries of the Jaina monasteries and the *mathas*.

Literary works in Sanskrit were largely grammars, lexicons, manuals, works on rhetoric, commentaries on the older texts, prose fiction, drama and poetry. These adhered to the classical conventions of composition, and experimenting with new forms was limited. This tended to place a premium on linguistic proficiency and a somewhat laboured description of mood. Kings continued to be described as authors of literary works and some may actually have been so. But the concept of learning had moved beyond creative literature. The *Manasollasa* of the Chalukya King Someshvara, for instance, takes on the character of an encyclopaedia.

A few works had their counterparts in Tamil, where the models of literary composition were sometimes taken from Sanskrit literature. Tamil literature of this period showed great liveliness and vigour, as in Kampan's version of the *Ramayana*. It was earlier thought that all the many *Ramayanas*, composed as part of the oral or literary tradition in various parts of India, by and large followed the Valmiki version. Further studies of these versions now reveal that the location and language of composition, the intended audience and the treatment of gender all point to noticeable variations. The narratives diverge according to the symbolic meaning intended by diverse authors for various audiences, which imbue the narratives with new events and sensitivities. For instance, the treatment of the personality of Ravana in the Kampan version is far more sympathetic to his predicament than in the Valmiki *Ramayana*.

The language of the inscriptions provides a perspective on wider historical change. Bilingual inscriptions increasingly became the norm in recording grants. The exclusive use of Prakrit for inscriptions had given way to Sanskrit by the fourth century. But the change to bilingual records dates to a few centuries later. The introduction of Sanskrit into a Tamil-speaking area is illustrated in the bilingual Sanskrit-Tamil inscriptions. The formulaic passages in these, stating the origin myths, genealogies, titles of the king and benedictions, tend to be in Sanskrit. The royal genealogies were sometimes fabricated, as they were in many kingdoms, in order to give legitimacy to the makers of the grant. But the actual terms of the grant were in Tamil, so that they were well understood in the locality. This covered information on the land or village granted, its boundaries, the participation of local authorities, the rights and obligations of the grantee, his taxes and dues, the witnesses to the grant and any other matter of local concern. The two languages had a purpose, the content of each being significantly different. Both sections were important to the legality of the document, but the description of the land in Tamil ensured that there was no ambiguity about the location of the land and the rights of the grantee.

The more extensive use of Sanskrit coincided with educated brahmins seeking employment and migrating to various parts of the subcontinent. Where they were successful they were given employment and a grant of land. This may on occasion have taken them into interior areas where Sanskrit would be a new language, requiring the grantee to become bilingual. The two languages of many inscriptions were Sanskrit and the regional language, such as Tamil or Kannada.

The Sanskrit section of the grant therefore had a political agenda, publicizing royal authority and legitimizing the titles and status of the king, along with his connections to ancient heroes and earlier rulers. The capturing of history became significant. By appropriating the compositions of the *suta* or

bard – the traditional keepers of history – and editing these in a new format, the authors of the texts could control the use of the past and thereby the status of the rulers. The *Puranas*, claiming to record the past, were now authored by brahmins and written in Sanskrit, although there was often a pretence that they were still being recited by the bard who was placed formally in the role of the original composer.

The audience for this political agenda was the world of kings and courts. The forms in which the past was represented and their links with the present were not confined to a particular language or region. The genre of *charita* literature or historical biographies, inaugurated by Banabhatta's *Harsha-charita*, became fashionable in various courts. Bilhana travelled from Kashmir to various places seeking fortune and employment until he was given a position at the court of the Later Chalukyas, where he wrote the *Vikramanka-deva-charita*, the biography of Vikramaditya VI. This was again a defence of a king who had usurped the throne of his elder brother.

Apart from inscriptions that were virtually the annals of history at this time, attempts were also made to provide historical details of some dynasties in the form of *vamshavalis*, chronicles. That the notion of seeking historical legitimacy had filtered down fairly extensively would seem evident from some of the shorter chronicles on lesser dynasties, for example, the *Mushaka-vamsha-kavya*, composed by Atula in the eleventh century on a little-known dynasty from Malabar. The structure of such chronicles remained similar irrespective of whether they were written in the state of Chamba in the Himalaya or in Malabar, and could take the form of a dynastic chronicle or the history of a region. Some of the myths were virtually identical. The chronicle moved from mythological beginnings to founding ancestors to more authentic genealogical history. A point of departure marked the establishing of a kingdom, which was accompanied by specific changes: more areas were opened to cultivation; a capital city was founded with a royal temple, and was connected to other places by a network of routes; the presence of an administrative hierarchy and an army were indicated; and inscriptions were issued to give the official version of royal activities. Subsequent to this, events of importance were recorded in the chronicle. Kalhana's history of Kashmir, the *Rajatarangini*, frequently described as unique, is actually rooted in the *vatnshavali* form, although admittedly it is an extraordinarily fine example. The authors of these texts, allotting historical antecedents to dynasties, reiterated their hegemonic status in caste society. It underlined their role as the creators of a trans-regional Sanskritic network across the subcontinent, including even south-east Asia. Sanskrit inscriptions in south-east Asia date to approximately the same period. These gradually became bilingual, the second language being the local one.

Bilingualism, however, became less frequent from about the fourteenth century when records were written more often in the regional language. Reiterating the difference between the language of the court and that of local administration may have led to this. Where local administrators became rulers, they probably carried their language with them. This would be parallel to installing the family deity as a cult deity by a new dynasty. Adventurers establishing kingdoms would also tend to use the regional language, and if this sufficed to explain their change of status then Sanskrit might not have been required. The large element of rhetoric in the Sanskrit section of inscriptions would, if expressed in the local language, carry the same message. There are eleventh-century records of endowments of land given to those who recited the hymns of the Alvars and Nayanars. This was extending patronage to Tamil.

The performance of Vedic rituals was now mentioned less frequently. The growth of Vaishnavism and Shaivism required different rituals, as well as the use of the regional language, even if some of the literature of the religious sects was being written in Sanskrit. The latter bestowed prestige on the

text and an elite readership. Brahmans who had taken to other professions, such as trade, would have been less proficient in the Sanskrit used in Vedic rituals. The change may also suggest that regional authority was asserted with more confidence. Paradoxically, the ensuing regional diversity of identity and language created a condition common to the subcontinent.

Other regional languages such as Kannada and Telugu, also stemming from a Dravidian linguistic base, were widely used and bilingualism with Sanskrit led to some vocabulary being borrowed. But the memory of this derivation became distant as the languages came into current use. Telugu took shape and form in the Andhra region with texts from the eleventh century. The origins of Kannada in Karnataka go further back to the sixth century AD, with texts dating to the ninth century. Kannada had both royal patronage and support from the influential literate Jainas. It eventually became the language of the twelfth-century Virashaiva or Lingayat movement, which still had a significant religious and social identity. Many of the *vachanas* or verses composed in Kannada by the Lingayats had lower-caste authors, ensuring a popular appeal for both the language and the message. Malayalam as the language of Kerala evolved somewhat later, drawing on both Tamil and Sanskrit and with texts going back to the early second millennium AD.

Marathi, the language current in the western Deccan, had evolved from local Prakrits and retained closer links with Sanskrit. It received encouragement from the Yadava rulers. But its wider development grew from its becoming the language of a popular devotional movement, in some ways parallel to the Alvars and Nayanars, which soon became established in the western Deccan. This involved not only the composition of poems in Marathi but also the exposition of older religious texts, such as the *Gita*, in a language understood by common people. Such expositions naturally introduced innovations in interpreting these earlier texts and the religious concepts endorsed by them.

The literary forms of these languages were initially translations and adaptations from works in Sanskrit that were thought to encapsulate high culture. But the translations were infused with local variations in narrative and action and were not identical with the original. Adaptations gave way to new texts and forms in the regional languages, which helped establish these languages as the media of intellectual discourse. Meanwhile, Sanskrit was essentially the language of brahmanical activity, although it became more widely used by Buddhists and Jainas at this time. As a prestige language, Sanskrit also appealed to sectarian movements with social ambitions.

## Religion and Ideologies

Buddhism had become less visible by the end of this period in all but eastern India, with the Buddha even being incorporated into Vaishnavism as an incarnation of Vishnu, an incarnation that never caught the popular imagination. Jainism survived with a following in Karnataka and western India. In Karnataka Jaina monks received handsome endowments, enabling them to have tenants cultivate their lands and even on occasion to make donations to other monasteries. Jaina merchants were prominent donors, as were Jaina officials, some of whom were military commanders. The Yapaniya sect of Jainas was popular as it was less austere than the well-established Digambara. The Yapaniyas supported the setting up of convents for nuns and even allowed senior nuns to tutor monks. The animosity between the Shaivas and the Jainas flared up on occasion.

The decline of Buddhism and Jainism is partly linked to the popularity of religious devotionalism. The hymns of the earlier poets were collated and the immense appeal of their theism inspired fresh



compositions. The more philosophical treatises traced the origin of theism to Upanishadic sources, which in a sense attempted to bring Vedic Brahmanism and devotionism closer, even if some of the differences were irreconcilable. Some of the Vaishnava *acharyas* and Shaiva *mathas* maintained the momentum of the Alvars and Nayanars. This also coincided with the rise of non-brahman castes in sectarian movements from the thirteenth century, a large number of which would be counted as members of the *shudra* castes. That they were specifically mentioned reflects the status that these castes had acquired. The untouchables, although not excluded, had a less visible presence.

The devotional movement had a form of worship and a concept of deity different from that of Vedic Brahmanism. The act of worship was open to a larger range of castes. Yet this change was almost conformist and conservative when compared with some of the more extreme sects that now had a concurrent following. Possibly the one was acting as a counterweight to the other. There were a variety of sects, such as the Tantric and Shakta, and those of the Kapalikas, Kalamukhas and Pashupatas, some more and some less esoteric than the others, which by this time had gathered supporters in various parts of the subcontinent. Some among them practised unusual rites, involving the remains from cremated bodies or ritualized sexual intercourse, which were evidently designed for those for whom non-conformity and the supposed power of magic was attractive, apart from its appeal for those who treated it as a statement of social confrontation. This disregard of even minimal social obligations among them became a necessity on certain ritual occasions. Such rites were also practised in other parts of the subcontinent, and had an underlying organization and message.

The deliberate deviation from accepted social norms was a form of protest, their extreme nonconformity providing the publicity that was desired; but these acts were also claimed as religious ritual possessing magical qualities. The Kalamukhas ate food out of a human skull, smeared their bodies with the ashes of a corpse, and were generally seen carrying a pot of wine and a club. Rumours had them behaving in strange ways and such rumours were associated with those of whom the orthodoxy disapproved. For some, nonconformity was also a genuine protest against the limitations placed on thought and knowledge by orthodoxy. The interest in magic, for instance, was not merely sensationalism, but could also result from a curiosity to experiment with objects and inquire further than was permitted by the custodians of knowledge. Experiments in alchemy, the attempt to change base metal to gold, or the concept of transmutation, are not unassociated with magic in its early stages. Yet for the most part, as it has been suggested, followers of these sects seem to have led a normal life, indulging in the cult rites only on certain occasions. For them, these rites were probably a catharsis.

There seem to have been three broad trends in religious belief and practice apart from the Shramanic that were becoming recognizable. Vedic Brahmanism, frequently enveloped in the theological discussions of philosophers, remained the religious concern of a minority – brahmins in the main, with some attention from Buddhist and Jaina scholars. It was influential in creating wealthy institutions of learning and writing theological discourses in Sanskrit, with only a limited influence on religion at a more popular level. The second and more popular trend was that of the Puranic religions, Vaishnavism and Shaivism, whose maximum appeal was through devotionism. This drew a large number of people who were cultivators or craftsmen or in related professions. A variety of cults were assimilated from a range of sources, the assimilation being closely tied to the particular social groups observing the religion. The third trend was a scatter of cults of various kinds, some labelled as Tantric. These either continued to be observed independently or they became part of yet another set of religious beliefs and practices, formalized as the Shakta religion. This became an addition to the Puranic religions, and even influenced aspects of Buddhism. The three trends were not

self-contained but were juxtaposed and therefore some elements were borrowed by one from another. There was an inherent and continuing flexibility in the belief and the practice of at least the second and third trends, which was characteristic of religion in India. The Alvars and Nayanars had echoed some of the social concerns earlier addressed by the Buddhists and Jainas, and this had won them much of the potential following of the latter.

Not all protests were expressed in aberrations of social norms. Other Shaiva sects were far more closely tied to social institutions. Among these was the Lingayat or Virashaiva sect that emerged in the twelfth century with some advocacy of social reforms, possibly influenced by other current religious thinking. The founder, Basavanna, an apostate Jaina, was associated with the Kalachuri court at Kalyani in the Deccan. He had, on occasion, a certain satirical strain in his statements that lent sharpness to the point he wished to make.

The lamb brought to the slaughter-house eats the leaf garland with which it is decorated... the frog caught in the mouth of the snake desires to swallow the fly flying near its mouth. So is our life. The man condemned to die drinks milk and *ghi*... When they see a serpent carved in stone they pour milk on it: if a real serpent comes they say, Kill. Kill. To the servant of the god who could eat if served they say, Go away. Go away; but to the image of the god which cannot eat they offer dishes of food.

Th. De Bary (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 3 57

The Lingayats differed from the devotional cult in that they did not rest content with preaching devotion to a single deity, but actively attacked religious hypocrisy. Much of their early teaching questioned Brahmanism, the theory of rebirth and the norms of caste as maintained in brahmanical thought and practice. The idea of some groups being socially polluted was unacceptable. The Lingayats laid emphasis on the need for a social conscience and encouraged certain social practices disapproved of in *Dharma-shastra* norms, such as late post-puberty marriages and the remarriage of widows. Although advocating a better status for women, there was nevertheless a bar on women becoming priests. Brahman landlordism was seen as exerting excessive pressure on the cultivator to pay rent to the landlord, as well as tax to the state. Not surprisingly, the Lingayats came under attack from the brahmins. Such ideas had an appeal for non-brahman groups and reflect similarities with Shramanic thinking. Shiva was worshipped in the form of the *lingam* or phallic emblem, each member of the sect carrying a miniature *lingam*. They replaced cremation with the burial of their dead, the form generally adopted by ascetics, and this was again opposed to brahmanical ritual. Their more liberal social attitudes brought them the support of the lower castes. Eventually, however, the Lingayats themselves evolved into a caste.

Those who were excluded from worshipping at temples, such as some lower castes and the untouchables, had to find their own places and forms of worship, some of which could be incorporated into the ritual and mythology of a sect, presumably when the caste status of those who were low had improved. Sometimes this led to incorporating the worship of local deities not initially included in the Puranic pantheon. Among these was the cult of Panduranga or Vitthala at Pandharpur in western India, which came into prominence in the thirteenth century. Its origin may have been in the hero cults of the borderlands between Maharashtra and Karnataka, the image of Vitthala being similar to the local hero-stones. The god was identified with Vishnu on entering the Vaishnava pantheon.

Pandharpur became one of the centres of the devotional movement in the Deccan, attracting in a later period preachers and hymn writers such as Namadeva, Janabai, Sena and Narahari (by profession tailor, maidservant, barber and goldsmith), who composed their hymns in Marathi and gathered around them the local people. These cult centres also became the foci of pilgrimage and exchange.

At a still more local level were the village deities. Among these a prominent deity in Tamil-nadu was Ayannar, whose shrine on the outskirts of the village was guarded by clay horses of varying sizes. The shrine may have been humble but the horses gave it a striking presence. They have now become characteristic features of the Tamil-nadu countryside and Ayannar is worshipped in many places as the son of Shiva and the Mohini incarnation of Vishnu. Variants occur in other parts of India where the worship of local deities and spirits prevails. This was sometimes parallel to Puranic Hinduism and sometimes overlapping with it, and where it overlapped it became an avenue of transaction between the religion of the elite and popular cults. This was the opposite end of the spectrum from the philosophical speculation current in many places.

Discussions on philosophy were largely the prerogative of the brahmans except in the few centres where Buddhists and Jainas joined the debates, in addition to focusing on their own philosophical schools, and in some Shaiva *mathas* where the non-brahman *velala* were prominent. Debates were held in the various *mathas* and colleges throughout the subcontinent, the link between them being the common language, Sanskrit. But their intellectual influence on the wider society was restricted. Unlike the early Buddhists who held open public debates in the parks close to towns, the Sanskrit discourse tended to include only recognized scholars, even if the debates and controversies involved scholars from various parts of the subcontinent. This resulted in some fine-tuned philosophical ideas among the rather exclusive groups of scholars. Shankaracharya's ideas continued to be developed and honed, and theories of other teachers were also discussed, some of which were opposed to the ideas of Shankara. Foremost among his critics was the eleventh-century Vaishnava philosopher, Ramanuja.

Ramanuja was a Tamil brahman who spent a considerable part of his life teaching at the famous temple at Shrirangam (Thiruchirapalli), eventually being regarded as the founder of the Shri Vaishnava movement. He disagreed with Shankara's theory that knowledge was the primary means of liberation from rebirth. According to Ramanuja, it was merely one of the means and was not nearly as effective or reliable as pure devotion, giving oneself up entirely to the deity, who was projected as loving and forgiving, as in the devotional cult. Although the relationship was expressed in philosophical terms it was viewed as essentially personal. Some of his followers argued that one must strive for this forgiveness, but others supported the notion that the deity selects those who are to be liberated – a concept curiously close to that of the Calvinists. Some of his ideas drew on the *Upanishads*, such as the need for the *atman*/the individual soul to unite with the *Brahman*/the universal soul for the attainment of liberation from rebirth. The emphasis on the individual in this relationship was not only a major feature of *bhakti*, but carried something of the flavour of Shramanic thought. Ramanuja thus was an effective bridge between the devotional movements and Brahmanical theology, attempting as he did to weave together the two divergent strands.

Madhva, a thirteenth-century theologian, made further attempts to synthesize the ideas of bhakti with brahmanical theology. He was also a Vaishnava and his concept of Vishnu was that the deity granted his grace to free the souls only of the pure, which implies selection. However, the selection was not quite as arbitrary as was believed by some of Ramanuja's followers. Some of Madhva's ideas suggest that he may have been familiar with the teachings of the Christian church of Malabar. Thus, Vishnu bestows his grace on a devotee through his son Vayu, the Wind-god, an idea that is alien to Brahmanical and Puranic belief but parallels that of the Holy Spirit in Christianity.

Ramanuja, while accepting special privileges for the higher castes, was nevertheless opposed to excluding certain categories of *shudras* from worship in the temple. He pleaded for the throwing open of temples to all *shudras*, though without much success. The growing strength of the devotional movement and the attempts at syntheses by theologians such as Ramanuja and Madhva did, however, force the orthodox to recognize the need for compromise. Although the temple was not opened to all *shudras*, the deities and rituals of a large number of subsidiary cults had crept in. This was an inevitable process if the temple was to retain its vitality as the centre of social and religious life, at least in caste society. The area of the temple was enlarged to accommodate new shrines and images. Economic prosperity led to larger and more ornate structures. Even the lesser dynasties invested in impressive religious monuments that would raise their status in the eyes of their peers and their subjects.

## Religious monuments

Domestic buildings have unfortunately not survived from this period; only temples have remained. These tended to follow two main styles in the peninsula. The Deccan had temples built in what is generally referred to as the Vesara style, as in the Durga temple at Aihole or the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal. In south India the Dravida style was more common but was regionally distinctive. In Kerala, for example, temple architecture takes a form specific to Kerala, the style changing because of building in wood rather than stone and because many temples were circular in form – the circular sanctum being surrounded by concentrically arranged areas. Despite many common features the imprint of regional architecture is apparent.

The early Chola temples were still relatively small, and superb in their simplicity. One example is the ninth-century temple at Narttamalai, freestanding, facing some earlier rock-cut caves, and from its perch on the hillside dominating a landscape of rice fields. From the eleventh century the Chola kings began to build their spectacular royal temples. The balanced proportions of the different components of the temple gave the structure its aesthetic quality. The central chamber of the shrine could be easily located, surmounted as it was by a tall *shikhara* or corbelled tower broadly pyramidal in shape. It was approached through one or more halls, the number depending on the size of the temple, and the surrounding courtyard was enclosed in a cloistered wall. The latter often had a colonnade of pillars on the inside, as at Tanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram. The entrances, or *gopurams*, were elaborate gateways reflecting the style of the *shikhara*, and these were gradually given more and more emphasis until they overwhelmed the *shikhara*, as in the case of the later temples at Madurai and Shrirangam. In the temples of the Deccan the antechambers tended to be large, perhaps imitating Buddhist *chaitya* halls. Congregational worship was not a feature of Puranic Hinduism, but the increasing popularity of the recitations of the *Puranas*, and of the epics now converted to sacred texts, would have drawn large audiences.

Stone sculpture was used in the temples largely as an adjunct to architecture, in niches or as a decorative motif in friezes and in the ornamentation of pillars and balustrades. It was, however, in bronze sculptures that the Chola craftsmen excelled, producing images rivalling the best anywhere. They were mainly images of deities, donors and the poets of the devotional movement. Made by the *cire perdu* or lost-wax process, they were kept in the inner shrine of the temple and some taken out in procession on special occasions. The Shiva Nataraja images were produced in fair number, yet the

early examples of these are stunningly beautiful as are the icons of Shiva and Parvati with their son Skanda. Symbols of attributes were incorporated with incredible subtlety, given that by now a forest of symbols was sometimes required to represent what were thought of as the local, transregional and cosmic levels of a deity. These images, more than anything else, indicate the sculptural genius of the southern craftsmen.

To begin with, the temples of the Deccan preserved the earlier tradition of the Chalukya style. Gradually they became more ornate, a tendency which was accentuated by the extensive use of soapstone, a softer stone than the earlier sandstone. The temples built by the Later Chalukyas and Hoysalas changed the ground-plan and elevation from that common to both the northern or Nagara style and the southern or Dravida styles. The finest examples are the Hoysala temples at Halebid (the old Dorasamudra), Belur and Somnathapura. The ground-plan of some temples was no longer rectangular but was star-shaped or polygonal, the whole complex being built on a raised platform. Since there was not the same emphasis on towers and gateways as in the Chola temples, the elevation gave the impression of being more flat. This effect was emphasized by a series of narrow panels running horizontally right around the temple walls, carrying frieze decorations of animal and floral motifs, musicians, dancers, battle scenes and the depiction of well-known events from religious literature. The star-shaped plan provided more wall space for sculpture and bas-relief than would a rectangular plan. Perhaps the most curious feature of these Hoysala temples are the wide, circular pillars which give the impression of having been lathe-turned. Obviously considerable skill went into their making.

Sculpture and architecture were on occasion identified with either the name of an individual *shilpin*/craftsman, or an association of sculptors and builders. This became a feature in many buildings in other parts of India as well. It is possible to link some builders with their patrons and their buildings. The notion that architects and artists remained anonymous is belied by the presence of apparently much respected architects and sculptors, for example, Kokasa. Both the demand for expertise and the high professionalism of what had earlier been regarded as a craft doubtless encouraged individuality in style and enterprise. The *sutradhara*, literally the one who holds the thread and therefore the one who superintends, had an exalted position as supervisor in the construction of a building. The *stapathi* was the master builder or the highly skilled craftsman. They were respected for their knowledge and expertise and sometimes described as belonging to the *Vishvakarma-kula*, literally the family of the deity of craftsmen, Vishvakarma. Some received grants of land and their descendants took to other professions. Among the manuals on constructing a building were the *vastu* texts that set out the requirements for the orientations of a building, some of which may have been based on technical understanding although others were quite arbitrary. There were other efficient manuals that described not only the methods to be used in constructing a building, but also the making of images. The information was so detailed that it gave the optimum size of the nail of the small finger in proportion to the hand and the figure. These *shilpa-shastra* texts were often written in Sanskrit, perhaps an indicator of the improving status of the profession.

The temples had a wider symbolism in that they were monuments to royal grandeur as well as to a deity. Moreover, the variation in style gave the architecture a regional character, as distinct as the language and literature of the region. Again, while the style was local, the plan and elevation had features recognizable throughout the subcontinent. The political ascendancy of the Cholas, although resented by the powers of the western and northern Deccan, serves to force home the fact that the centre of power in the subcontinent was not confined to one region: it could and did shift spatially. The classicism of the south saw the birth of new ideas and experiments. The evolution of local civic

responsibility, the multiple roles of the temple as an institution, the philosophy of Shankaracharya and Ramanuja, and the new religious forms of the devotional movement, were all part of the changes of this time. Equally noticeable was the further growth of mercantile activity, involving a more extensive Indian participation in the commercial economy of Eurasia. At many levels, therefore, this was a period when the south was in the ascendant and set the pattern for cultural forms in the subcontinent.