

Conflict between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas.

The principal interest in the political history of peninsular India from the sixth to the eighth century centres around the long struggle for supremacy between the Pallavas of Kanchi and the Chalukyas of Badami.

The Pandyas, who were in control of Madurai and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu, joined this conflict as a poor third.

Although both the Pallavas and the Chalukyas championed Brahmanism, performed Vedic sacrifices, and made grants to the brahmanas, the two quarrelled with each other over plunder, prestige, and territorial resources. Both tried to establish supremacy over the land lying between the Krishna and the Tungabhadra. This doab was again the bone of contention in late medieval times between the Vijayanagar and the Bahmani kingdoms.

Time and again, the Pallava princes tried to cross the Tungabhadra, which formed the natural historic boundary between many a kingdom of the Deccan and the deep south. The struggle continued over a long period with varying fortunes. The first important event in this long conflict took place during the reign of Pulakeshin II (ad 609-42), the most famous Chalukya king. He is known to us from the eulogy written on him by the court poet Ravikirti in the Aihole inscription. This inscription is an example of the poetic excellence achieved in Sanskrit, and despite its exaggeration is a valuable source for the life of Pulakeshin.

He subjugated the Kadamba capital at Banavasi and compelled the Gangas of Mysore to acknowledge his suzerainty. He also defeated Harsha's army on the Narmada and checked his advance towards the Deccan. In his conflict with the Pallavas, he almost reached the Pallava capital, but the Pallavas purchased peace by ceding their northern provinces to Pulakeshin II.

Around ad 610 Pulakeshin II also conquered the entire area between the Krishna and the Godavari, which came to be known as the province of Vengi. Here, a branch of the main dynasty was set up and is known as the eastern Chalukyas of Vengi. However, Pulakeshin's second invasion of Pallava territory ended in failure. The Pallava king Narasimhavarman (AD 630-68) occupied the Chalukya capital at Vatapi in about ad 642, when Pulakeshin II was probably killed in a battle against the Pallavas. Narasimhavarman assumed the title of Vatapikonda or the conqueror of Vatapi. He is also said to have defeated the Cholas, the Cheras, the Pandyas, and the Kalabhras.

Towards the end of the seventh century, there was a lull in this conflict, which was again resumed in the first half of the eighth century. The Chalukya king Vikramaditya II (AD 733—45) is said to have overrun Kanchi three times. In ad 740 he completely routed the Pallavas. His victory ended the Pallava supremacy in the far south although the ruling house continued for over a century thereafter. However, the Chalukyas were unable for long to enjoy the fruits of

their victory over the Pallavas because their own hegemony was brought to an end in ad 757 by the Rashtrakutas.

Besides the performance of Vedic sacrifices, the worship of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, especially of the last two, was becoming popular. From the seventh century onwards, the Alvar saints, who were great devotees of Vishnu, popularized the worship of this god. The Nayanars rendered a similar service to the cult of Shiva. From the seventh century onwards, the cult of bhakti began to dominate the religious life of south Indians, and the Alvars and Nayanars played a great part in propagating it.

The Pallava kings constructed a number of stone temples in the seventh and eighth centuries for housing these gods. The most famous of them are the seven ratha temples at Mahabalipuram, at a distance of 65 km from Chennai. These were built in the seventh century by Narasimharman, who founded the port city of Mahabalipuram or Mamallapuram.

This city is also famous for the Shore Temple, which was a structural construction erected independently and not hewn out of rock. In addition, the Pallavas constructed several such structural temples at their capital Kanchi. A very good example was the Kailashanath temple built in the eighth century. The Chalukyas of Badami erected numerous temples at Aihole, which has as many as seventy, from about ad 610.

The Chalukya-Pallava war began with Pulkasini II and ended with the collapse of both the dynasties significantly, the power that rose thereafter, the Rashtrakutas and the Cholas, continued the same sort of struggle. This was because the Chalukya-Pallava struggle was to a great extent determined by the geographical location of the Chalukya and Pallava kingdoms. After the first bout was over, the Pallavas avenged their defeat during the days of Narasimharman I. He captured the lost territories. In this he was assisted by the king of Ceylon. He entered the capital of Badami in 642 A.D. and assumed the title of Vatapikonda, that is, the conqueror of Vatapi.

After that, for the next twelve years there was a respite; the Pallavas were involved in naval wars while supporting the Ceylonese kings, and the Chalukyas were troubled by their feudatories. After the Chalukyan house was set in order in 655, they re-occupied the territories lost to the Pallavas. This was the third phase. Soon the tables were reversed. There was a rift in the Chalukyan royal family. Taking advantage of this, the Pallavas once again entered Badami. Details relating to this campaign are to be found in the Pallava grant found near Kanchi. This was the fourth phase.

The fifth phase started when the Chalukyas and the Gangas united in 731 to attack the Pallavas. The reigning Pallava king was killed and Kanchi was occupied. Later, the council of ministers chose Nandivarman II.

In the last phase the ball was in the the court of Pallavas. At this time, the neighbours of the Pallavas in the south, that is, the Pandays, Joined the conflict. The Pandyas of Madura were not well disposed towards the Pallavas. In the meantime the Chalukyas wre threatened by the Arabs, the latter already being in occupation of Sing. While the Chalukyas were engrossed in the threat from the north, one of their feudatories Dantidurga, broke away from the but they, too, within a century ment their end, the last of the Pallavas was assassinated by the son of a feudatory.