



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631(UIF)

VOLUME - 11 | ISSUE - 8 | MAY - 2022



THE DYNASTY OF PARMARA

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ABSTRACT:

The Paramara dynasty was an influential Indian royal lineage that ruled the Malwa region in central India from the 9th to the 14th century. Originating from the Agnivanshi Rajputs, the dynasty is best known for its capital at Dhar and its most famous king, Bhoja, who was a patron of art, literature, and culture. The Paramaras played a significant role in the political landscape of medieval India, engaging in conflicts with neighboring dynasties like the Chalukyas, Solankis, and Kalachuris. Despite their eventual decline, the Paramaras left a lasting legacy through their contributions to temple architecture and Sanskrit literature.



KEYWORDS: Paramara Dynasty, Malwa Region, Agnivanshi Rajputs, King Bhoja, Medieval India, Temple Architecture, Sanskrit Literature, Political Conflicts, Dhar Capital, Chalukyas, Solankis, Kalachuris.

INTRODUCTION

The Paramara dynasty was one of the prominent ruling dynasties in medieval India, known for its rule over the Malwa region, which is now part of modern-day Madhya Pradesh. The dynasty is believed to have originated from the Agnivanshi Rajputs, a warrior class claiming divine ancestry. The Paramaras rose to prominence in the 9th century, establishing their capital at Dhar, which became a significant cultural and political center under their reign.

The dynasty reached its zenith under King Bhoja (1010-1055 CE), one of the most celebrated rulers of medieval India. King Bhoja was not only a formidable warrior but also an exceptional scholar and patron of the arts. His reign marked a golden age in Malwa, characterized by advancements in literature, science, and architecture. Bhoja's contributions to Sanskrit literature and temple architecture are particularly notable, with works like the *Sarasvati-Kanthabharana* and the construction of the Bhojeshwar Temple standing as testaments to his legacy.

The Paramaras, throughout their rule, were involved in various conflicts with neighboring dynasties such as the Chalukyas, Solankis, and Kalachuris. These conflicts often shaped the political landscape of central India during the medieval period. Despite their military prowess, the Paramaras eventually faced decline due to the combined pressures of internal strife and external invasions, most notably by the Delhi Sultanate.

The legacy of the Paramara dynasty is evident in the cultural and architectural imprints they left behind. Their contributions to the development of Malwa, particularly in the realms of art, literature, and religion, continue to be remembered as significant aspects of India's rich historical tapestry.

The **Paramara Dynasty** was an Indian dynasty that ruled Malwa and surrounding areas in west-central India between 9th and 14th centuries. They belonged to the Parmara clan of the Rajputs.

The dynasty was established in either the 9th or 10th century, and its early rulers most probably ruled as vassals of the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta. The earliest extant Paramara inscriptions, issued by the 10th-century ruler Siyaka, have been found in Gujarat. Around 972 CE, Siyaka sacked the Rashtrakuta capital Manyakheta, and established the Paramaras as a sovereign power. By the time of his successor Munja, the Malwa region in present-day Madhya Pradesh had become the core Paramara territory, with Dhara (now Dhar) as their capital. The dynasty reached its zenith under Munja's nephew Bhoja, whose kingdom extended from Chittor in the north to Konkan in the south, and from the Sabarmati River in the west to Vidisha in the east.

The Paramara power rose and declined several times as a result of their struggles with the Chaulukyas of Gujarat, the Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Kalachuris of Tripuri, Chandelas of Jejakabhukti and other neighbouring kingdoms. The later Paramara rulers moved their capital to Mandapa-Durga (now Mandu) after Dhara was sacked multiple times by their enemies. Mahalakadeva, the last known Paramara king, was defeated and killed by the forces of Alauddin Khalji of Delhi in 1305 CE, although epigraphic evidence suggests that the Paramara rule continued for a few years after his death.

Malwa enjoyed a great level of political and cultural prestige under the Paramaras. The Paramaras were well known for their patronage to Sanskrit poets and scholars, and Bhoja was himself a renowned scholar. Most of the Paramara kings were Shaivites and commissioned several Shiva temples, although they also patronized Jain scholars.

Ancestry

The Harsola copper plates (949 CE) issued by the Paramara king Siyaka II mentions a king called Akalavarsha, followed by the expression *tasmin kule* ("in that family"), and then followed by the name "Vappairaja" (identified with the Paramara king Vakpati I). Based on the identification of "Akalavarsha" (which was a Rashtrakuta title) with the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III, historian as D.C. Ganguly theorized that the Paramaras were descended from the Rashtrakutas. Ganguly tried to find support for his theory in *Ain-i-Akbari*, whose variation of the Agnikula myth (see below) states that a predecessor of the Paramaras came to Malwa from Deccan. According to *Ain-i-Akbari*, Dhanji - a man born from a fire sacrifice - came from Deccan to establish a kingdom in Malwa; when his descendant Putraj died heirless, the nobles established Aditya Ponwar - the ancestor of the Paramaras - as the new king. Ganguly also noted Siyaka's successor Munja (Vakpati II) assumed titles such as Amoghavarsha, Sri-vallabha and Prithvi-vallabha: these are distinctively Rashtrakuta titles.

However, there is a gap before the words *tasmin kule* ("in that family") in the Harsola inscription, and therefore, Ganguly's suggestion is a pure guess in absence of any concrete evidence. Moreover, even if the *Ain-i-Akbari* legend is historically accurate, Aditya Ponwar was not a descendant of Dhanji: he was most probably a local magnate rather than a native of Deccan. Critics of Ganguly's theory also argue that the Rashtrakuta titles in these inscriptions refer to Paramara rulers, who had assumed these titles to portray themselves as the legitimate successors of the Rashtrakutas in the Malwa region. The Rashtrakutas had similarly adopted the titles such as Prithvi-vallabha, which had been used by the preceding Chalukya rulers. Historian Dasharatha Sharma points out that the Paramaras claimed the mythical Agnikula origin by the 10th century: had they really been descendants of the Rashtrakutas, they would not have forgotten their prestigious royal origin within a generation.

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The later Paramara kings claimed to be members of the Agnikula or Agnivansha ("fire clan"). The Agnikula myth of origin, which appears in several of their inscriptions and literary works, goes like this: The sage Vishvamitra forcibly took a wish-granting cow from another sage Vashistha on the Arbuda mountain (Mount Abu). Vashistha then conjured a hero from a sacrificial fire pit (*agni-kunda*), who defeated Vishvamitra's enemies and brought back the cow. Vashistha then gave the hero the title Paramara ("enemy killer"). The earliest known source to mention this story is the *Nava-sahasanka-charita* of Padmagupta Parimala, who was a court-poet of the Paramara king Sindhuraja (c. 997–1010). The legend is not mentioned in earlier Paramara-era inscriptions or literary works. By this time, all the neighbouring dynasties claimed divine or heroic origin, which might have motivated the Paramaras to invent a legend of their own.

A legend mentioned in a recension of Prithviraj Raso extended their Agnikula legend to describe other dynasties as fire-born Rajputs. The earliest extant copies of Prithviraj Raso do not contain this legend; this version might have been invented by the 16th-century poets who wanted to foster Rajput unity against the Mughal emperor Akbar. Some colonial-era historians interpreted this mythical account to suggest a foreign origin for the Paramaras. According to this theory, the ancestors of the Paramaras and other Agnivanshi Rajputs came to India after the decline of the Gupta Empire around the 5th century CE. They were admitted in the Hindu caste system after performing a fire ritual. However, this theory is weakened by the fact that the legend is not mentioned in the earliest of the Paramara records, and even the earliest Paramara-era account does not mention the other dynasties as Agnivanshi.

Some historians, such as Dasharatha Sharma and Pratipal Bhatia, have argued that the Paramaras were originally Brahmins from the Vashistha gotra. This theory is based on the fact that Halayudha, who was patronized by Munja, describes the king as "Brahma-Kshtra" in *Pingala-Sutra-Vritti*. According to Bhatia this expression means that Munja came from a family of Brahmins who became Kshatriyas. In addition, the Patanarayana temple inscription states that the Paramaras were of Vashistha gotra, which is a gotra among Brahmins claiming descent from the sage Vashistha. However, historian Arvind K. Singh points out that several other sources point to a Kshatriya ancestry of the dynasty. For example, the 1211 Piplianagar inscription states that the ancestors of the Paramaras were "crest-jewel of the Kshatriyas", and the *Prabha-vakara-charita* mentions that Vakpati was born in the dynasty of a Kshatriya. According to Singh, the expression "Brahma-Kshatriya" refers to a learned Kshatriya.

D. C. Sircar theorized that the dynasty descended from the Malavas. However, there is no evidence of the early Paramara rulers being called Malava; the Paramaras began to be called Malavas only after they began ruling the Malwa region.

Original Homeland

Based on the Agnikula legend, some scholars such as C. V. Vaidya and V. A. Smith speculated that Mount Abu was the original home of the Paramaras. Based on the Harsola copper plates and *Ain-i-Akbari*, D. C. Ganguly believed they came from the Deccan region.

The earliest of the Paramara inscriptions (that of Siyaka II) have all been discovered in Gujarat, and concern land grants in that region. Based on this, D. B. Diskalkar and H. V. Trivedi theorized that the Paramaras were associated with Gujarat during their early days. Another possibility is that the early Paramara rulers temporarily left their capital city of Dhara in Malwa for Gujarat because of a Gurjara-Pratihara invasion. This theory is based on the combined analysis of two sources: the Nava-sahasanka-charita, which states that the Paramara king Vairisimha cleared the Dhara city in Malwa of enemies; and the 945-946 CE Pratapgah inscription of the Gurjara-Prathiara king Mahendrapala, which states that he recaptured Malwa.

Early Rulers

Whether or not the Paramaras were descended from the Rashtrakutas, they were most probably subordinates of the Rashtrakutas in the 9th century. Historical evidence suggests that between 808 and 812 CE, the Rashtrakutas expelled the Gurjara-Pratiharas from the Malwa region. The Rashtrakuta king Govinda III placed Malwa under the protection of Karka-rajya, the Rashtrakuta chief of Lata (a region bordering Malwa, in present-day Gujarat). The 871 Sanjan copper-plate inscription of Govinda's son Amoghavarsha I states that his father had appointed a vassal as the governor of Malwa. Since the Paramaras became the rulers of the Malwa region around this time, epigraphist H. V. Trivedi theorizes that this vassal was the Paramara king Upendra, although there is no definitive proof of this. The start of the Paramara rule in Malwa cannot be dated with certainty, but they certainly did not rule the Malwa before the 9th century CE.

Siyaka is the earliest known Paramara king attested by his own inscriptions. His Harsola copper plate inscription (949 CE) is the earliest available Paramara inscription: it suggests that he was a vassal of the Rashtrakutas. The list of his predecessors varies between accounts:

Paramara is the dynasty's mythical progenitor, according to the Agnikula legend. Whether the other early kings mentioned in the Udaipur Prashasti are historical or fictional is a topic of debate among historians.

According to C. V. Vaidya and K. A. Nilakantha Sastri, the Paramara dynasty was founded only in the 10th century CE. Vaidya believes that the kings such as Vairisimha I and Siyaka I are imaginary, duplicated from the names of later historical kings in order to push back the dynasty's age. The 1274 CE Mandhata copper-plate inscription of Jayavarman II similarly names eight successors of Paramara as Kamandaludhara, Dhumraja, Devasimhapala, Kanakasimha, Shriharsha, Jagaddeva, Sthirakaya and Voshari: these do not appear to be historical figures. HV Trivedi states that there is a possibility that Vairisimha I and Siyaka I of the Udaipur Prashasti are same as Vairisimha II and Siyaka II; the names might have been repeated by mistake. Alternatively, he theorizes that these names have been omitted in other inscriptions because these rulers were not independent sovereigns.

Several other historians believe that the early Paramara rulers mentioned in the Udaipur Prashasti are not fictional, and the Paramaras started ruling Malwa in the 9th century (as Rashtrakuta vassals). K. N. Seth argues that even some of the later Paramara inscriptions mention only 3-4 predecessors of the king who issued the inscription. Therefore, the absence of certain names from the genealogy provided in the early inscriptions does not mean that these were imaginary rulers. According to him, the mention of Upendra in Nava-Sahasanka-Charitra (composed by the court poet of the later king Sindhuraja) proves that Upendra is not a fictional king. Historians such as Georg Bühler and James Burgess identify Upendra and Krishnaraja as one person, because these are synonyms (Upendra being another name of Krishna). However, an inscription of Siyaka's successor Munja names the preceding kings as Krishnaraja, Vairisimha, and Siyaka. Based on this, Seth however identifies Krishnaraja with Vappairaja or Vakpati I mentioned in the Harsola plates (Vappairaja appears to be the Prakrit form of Vakpati-rajya). In his support, Seth points out that Vairisimha has been called Krishna-padanudhyata in the inscription of Munja i.e. Vakpati II. He theorizes that Vakpati II used the name "Krishnaraja" instead of Vakpati I to identify his ancestor, in order to avoid confusion with his own name.

The imperial Paramaras

The first independent sovereign of the Paramara dynasty was Siyaka (sometimes called Siyaka II to distinguish him from the earlier Siyaka mentioned in the Udaipur Prashasti). The Harsola copper plates (949 CE) suggest that Siyaka was a feudatory of the Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna III in his early days. However, the same inscription also mentions the high-sounding Maharajadhirajapati as one of Siyaka's titles. Based on this, K. N. Seth believes that Siyaka's acceptance of the Rashtrakuta lordship was nominal.

As a Rashtrakuta feudatory, Siyaka participated in their campaigns against the Pratiharas. He also defeated some Huna chiefs ruling to the north of Malwa. He might have suffered setbacks against the Chandela king Yashovarman. After the death of Krishna III, Siyaka defeated his successor Khottiga in a battle fought on the banks of the Narmada River. He then pursued Khottiga's retreating army to the Rashtrakuta capital Manyakheta, and sacked that city in 972 CE. His victory ultimately led to the decline of the Rashtrakutas, and the establishment of the Paramaras as an independent sovereign power in Malwa.

Siyaka's successor Munja achieved military successes against the Chahamanas of Shakambhari, the Chahamanas of Naddula, the Guhilas of Mewar, the Hunas, the Kalachuris of Tripuri, and the ruler of Gurjara region (possibly a Gujarat Chaulukya or Pratihara ruler). He also achieved some early successes against the Western Chalukya king Tailapa II, but was ultimately defeated and killed by Tailapa some time between 994 CE and 998 CE.

As a result of this defeat, the Paramaras lost their southern territories (possibly the ones beyond the Narmada river) to the Chalukyas. Munja was reputed as a patron of scholars, and his rule attracted scholars from different parts of India to Malwa. He was also a poet himself, although only a few stanzas composed by him now survive.

Munja's brother Sindhuraja (ruled c. 990s CE) defeated the Western Chalukya king Satyashraya, and recovered the territories lost to Tailapa II. He also achieved military successes against a Huna chief, the Somavanshi of south Kosala, the Shilaharas of Konkana, and the ruler of Lata (southern Gujarat). His court poet Padmagupta wrote his biography Nava-Sahasanka-Charita, which credits him with several other victories, although these appear to be poetic exaggerations.

Sindhuraja's son Bhoja is the most celebrated ruler of the Paramara dynasty. He made several attempts to expand the Paramara kingdom varying results. Around 1018 CE, he defeated the Chalukyas of Lata in present-day Gujarat. Between 1018 CE and 1020 CE, he gained control of the northern Konkan, whose Shilahara rulers probably served as his feudatories for a brief period. Bhoja also formed an alliance against the Kalyani Chalukya king Jayasimha II, with Rajendra Chola and Gangeya-deva Kalachuri. The extent of Bhoja's success in this campaign is not certain, as both Chalukya and Paramara panegyrics claimed victory. During the last years of Bhoja's reign, sometime after 1042 CE, Jayasimha's son and successor Someshvara I invaded Malwa, and sacked his capital Dhara. Bhoja re-established his control over Malwa soon after the departure of the Chalukya army, but the defeat pushed back the southern boundary of his kingdom from Godavari to Narmada.

Bhoja's attempt to expand his kingdom eastwards was foiled by the Chandela king Vidyadhara. However, Bhoja was able to extend his influence among the Chandela feudatories, the Kachchhapaghatas of Dubkund. Bhoja also launched a campaign against the Kachchhapaghatas of Gwalior, possibly with the ultimate goal of capturing Kannauj, but his attacks were repulsed by their ruler Kirtiraja. Bhoja also defeated the Chahamanas of Shakambhari, killing their ruler Viryarama. However, he was forced to retreat by the Chahamanas of Naddula. According to medieval Muslim historians, after sacking Somnath, Mahmud of Ghazni changed his route to avoid confrontation with a Hindu king named Param Dev. Modern historians identify Param Dev as Bhoja: the name may be a corruption of Paramara-Deva or of Bhoja's title Parameshvara-Paramabhattacharaka. Bhoja may have also contributed troops to support the Kabul Shahi ruler Anandapala's fight against the Ghaznavids. He may have also been a part of the Hindu alliance that expelled Mahmud's governors from Hansi, Thanesar and other areas around 1043 CE. During the last year of Bhoja's reign, or shortly after his death, the Chaulukya king Bhima I and the Kalachuri king Karna attacked his kingdom. According to the 14th-

century author Merutunga, Bhoja died of a disease at the same time the allied army attacked his kingdom.

At its zenith, Bhoja's kingdom extended from Chittor in the north to upper Konkan in the south, and from the Sabarmati River in the west to Vidisha in the east. He was recognized as a capable military leader, but his territorial conquests were short-lived. His major claim to fame was his reputation as a scholar-king, who patronized arts, literature and sciences. Noted poets and writers of his time sought his sponsorship. Bhoja was himself a polymath, whose writings cover a wide variety of topics include grammar, poetry, architecture, yoga, and chemistry. Bhoja established the Bhoj Shala which was a centre for Sanskrit studies and a temple of Sarasvati in present-day Dhar. He is said to have founded the city of Bhojpur, a belief supported by historical evidence. Besides the Bhojeshwar Temple there, the construction of three now-breached dams in that area is attributed to him. Because of his patronage to literary figures, several legends written after his death featured him as a righteous scholar-king. In terms of the number of legends centered around him, Bhoja is comparable to the fabled Vikramaditya.

Bhoja's successor Jayasimha I, who was probably his son, faced the joint Kalachuri-Chaulukya invasion immediately after Bhoja's death. Bilhana's writings suggest that he sought help from the Chalukyas of Kalyani. Jayasimha's successor and Bhoja's brother Udayaditya was defeated by Chamundaraja, his vassal at Vagada. He repulsed an invasion by the Chaulukya ruler Karna, with help from his allies. Udayaditya's eldest son Lakshmadeva has been credited with extensive military conquests in the Nagpur Prashasti inscription of 1104-05 CE. However, these appear to be poetic exaggerations. At best, he might have defeated the Kalachuris of Tripuri. Udayaditya's younger son Naravarman faced several defeats, losing to the Chandelas of Jejakabhukti and the Chaulukya king Jayasimha Siddharaja. By the end of his reign, one Vijayapala had carved out an independent kingdom to the north-east of Ujjain.

Yashovarman lost control of the Paramara capital Dhara to Jayasimha Siddharaja. His successor Jayavarman I regained control of Dhara, but soon lost it to an usurper named Ballala. The Chaulukya king Kumarapala defeated Ballala around 1150 CE, supported by his feudatories the Naddula Chahamana ruler Alhana and the Abu Paramara chief Yashodhaval. Malwa then became a province of the Chalukyas. A minor branch of the Paramaras, who styled themselves as Mahakumaras, ruled the area around Bhopal during this time. Nearly two decades later, Jayavarman's son Vindhavarman defeated the Chaulukya king Mularaja II, and re-established the Paramara sovereignty in Malwa. During his reign, Malwa faced repeated invasions from the Hoysalas and the Yadavas of Devagiri. He was also defeated by the Chaulukya general Kumara. Despite these setbacks, he was able to restore the Paramara power in Malwa before his death.

Vindhavarman's son Subhatavarman invaded Gujarat, and plundered the Chaulukya territories. But he was ultimately forced to retreat by the Chaulukya feudatory Lavana-Prasada. His son Arjunavarman I also invaded Gujarat, and defeated Jayanta-simha (or Jaya-simha), who had usurped the Chaulukya throne for a brief period. He was defeated by Yadava general Kholeshvara in Lata.

CONCLUSION:

The Paramara dynasty, with its origins in the Agnivanshi Rajputs, was a defining force in the history of central India during the medieval period. Their rule over the Malwa region, especially under the leadership of King Bhoja, marked an era of cultural and intellectual prosperity. The Paramaras made significant contributions to temple architecture and Sanskrit literature, leaving a legacy that continues to influence Indian culture.

Despite their achievements, the Paramaras were eventually weakened by internal conflicts and external invasions, leading to their decline and eventual absorption into the expanding powers of the time, such as the Delhi Sultanate. However, their impact on the political, cultural, and religious landscape of medieval India is undeniable. The remnants of their architectural marvels and the literary works they patronized stand as enduring symbols of their reign. The story of the Paramara dynasty is a testament to the complexities of power, the fragility of empires, and the lasting influence of cultural patronage.

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