

Pala Dynasty, Origin, Rulers, Administration, Map, Religion

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Pala Dynasty Origin

After the death of Harsha, the **Pratiharas** (Jalore-Rajasthan), the **Palas** (Bengal) and the **Rashtrakutas** (Deccan) engaged in a tripartite struggle for the control of the Ganga-Yamuna doab and the lands adjoining it.

- **Territories in Pala control:** The Palas controlled vast areas of the eastern **Gangetic Plain**. Apart from earning revenue from agriculture, Palas also derived income from their wide commercial contacts in Southeast Asia.
- **Accession to power by Gopala:** There was no centralized government in place after the Gauda kingdom fell, which resulted in ongoing conflicts between minor chieftains. So, in the year 750 CE, a group of chiefs chose Gopala, a "**Kshatriya chief**," to be their leader.
 - **Political authority:** Though Gopala did not have royal antecedents, he succeeded in acquiring a kingdom. Gopala's **political authority** was soon recognised by several independent chiefs.
 - His original kingdom was in Vanga. It was located in southern Bengal, with the core region including present-day southern West Bengal (India) and southwestern Bangladesh.

Pala Dynasty Map



Pala Dynasty Rulers

Pala Dynasty - Kings - Significance	
Period: 750-1150 AD	Capital: Muddagiri/Munger (Bihar)
Ruler	Significance
Gopala (750-770 CE)	• Founder of the Pala dynasty • Contribution to the architecture:

Odantapuri Monastery, Odantapura  Odantapuri Ruins	• Gopala founded the famous monastery at Odantapuri (Bihar). ◦ It is a prominent Buddhist Mahavihara. ◦ It is considered the second oldest of India's Mahaviharas after Nalanda and was situated in Magadha.
Dharmapala (770-810 CE)	• Expansion of the empire: Dharmapala transformed the Pala kingdom into a powerful adversary. ◦ Bengal and Bihar were directly ruled by him. ◦ The rulers of the Punjab, Rajaputana, Malwa and Berar accepted his suzerainty. Titles: He assumed titles like Paramesvara, Parambhattaraka and Maharajadhiraja . • Faith: He is a great patron of Buddhism. Contribution to Architecture

**Vikramashila
Monastery,**
Bhagalpur



- He founded the Vikaramasila monastery in the Bhagalpur district in Bihar.
 - It developed into a great centre of **Buddhist learning** and culture.

**Somapura
Vihara,
Paharapura**



- He built a grand vihara at Somapura in modern Paharapura (present-day Bangladesh).
 - Somapura Mahavihara is among the **best-known Buddhist viharas** or monasteries in the Indian Subcontinent.
 - It was designated as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 1985.
 - It is one of the most famous examples of architecture in pre-Islamic Bangladesh.

Devapala (810-850 CE)	• Expansion of the empire: Devapala extended Pala control eastwards up to Kamarupa (Assam). ◦ He defeated Amoghavarsha. • Faith: Devapala was also a great patron of Buddhism. ◦ He granted five villages to Balaputradeva, the king of the Sailendra dynasty of Suvarnadipa (Sumatra), to maintain a monastery built by him at Nalanda. ▪ Nalanda continued to flourish as the chief seat of Buddhist learning even during the Pala reign.
Mahipala I (988-1038 CE)	• Political achievements: The falling fortunes of the dynasty were revived by Mahipala I. ◦ The most important event of his period was the invasion of northern India by Rajendra Chola between 1020 and 1025 CE. ◦ The advance of the Cholas beyond the Ganges was checked by Mahipala I. • Contribution to the architecture: He constructed and repaired several sacred structures at Sarnath, Nalanda and Bodh Gaya.

Pala Dynasty Art and Architecture

Contribution of Palas to Art and Architecture	
• The Pala school of sculptural art was influenced by the Gupta art. • Painting: Two artists of this period were Dhiman, and his son Vitapala were two artists of this period. ◦ They were great painters, sculptors and bronze statue makers.	
Sculpture of Vishu 	Vishnu with His Consorts, Lakshmi and Sarasvati, 11-12th century, Bihar or Bengal

Crowned Buddha



- The sculpture is cast in **bronze**.
- It was found in Bihar and belongs to 10th-11th century

Nalanda University



- Nalanda is considered one of the first great universities in recorded history.
 - Mahayana sect of Buddhism was taught here.
 - It reached its height under the Palas.

Pala Dynasty Literature

Contribution of Palas to Literature

- **Buddhist literature:** The prominent Buddhist scholars of Vikramashila and Nalanda universities were **Atisha, Saraha, Tilopa, Dansheel, Dansree, Jinamitra, Muktimitra, Padmanava, Virachan and Silabhadra**.
 - Many Buddhist tantric works were authored and translated into Sanskrit.
 - The original tantric works comprise a varied group of Indian and Tibetan texts.
- The Palas also patronised **Sanskrit** scholars.
- The **“Mahipalageet”** (songs on Mahipala), a set of folk songs, are still popular in the rural areas of Bengal.

Author

Work

Sandhyakar Nandi:

- Wrote the epic, **Ramacharitam**.
 - It is a **biography** of a later Pala ruler Ramapala and describes how forest chiefs were brought into their alliance through lavish gifts.

Jimutavahana	• Dayabhaga, Vyavohara Matrika and Kalaviveka
Bhatta Bhavadeva	• Karmanushthan Paddhati, a work on philosophy
Sridhar Bhatta	• Nyaya Kundali, a work on philosophy
Gaudapada	• Agama Shastra, a work on philosophy
Chakrapani Datta	• Chikitsa Samgraha, Ayurveda Dipika, Bhanumati, Shabda Chandrika and Dravya Gunasangraha; works on medicine.
Sureshwara	• Shabda-Pradipa, Vrikkhayurveda and Lohpaddhati; works on medicine
Vangasena	• Chikitsa Sarsamgraha, a work on medicine
Gadadhara Vaidya	• Sushruta, a work on medicine

Pala Dynasty Administration

- **Monarchical rule:** The Pala rule was monarchical. The king was the centre of all imperial titles like **Parameshwara, Paramvattaraka, and Maharajadhiraja**. Pala kings appointed Prime Ministers.
- **Lineage:** The Line of Garga served as the Prime Ministers of the Palas for 100 years. They are Garga, Darvapani (or Darbhapani), Someshwar, Kedarmisra and Bhatta Guravmisra.
- **Provincial administration:** Pala Empire was divided into separate **Bhuktis** (Provinces). Bhuktis were divided into **Vishayas** (Divisions) and **Mandalas** (Districts).
 - Smaller units were Khandala, Bhaga, Avritti, Chaturaka, and Pattaka. Administration covered a wide area from the grass root level to the imperial court.

Pala Dynasty Religion

Buddhism was the dominant religion during the Pala dynasty, but Shaivism also flourished and was followed alongside it.

Buddhism:

- **Mahayana Buddhism:** The Palas were patrons of Mahayana Buddhism. A few sources written much after Gopala's death mention him as a Buddhist, but it is not known if this is true. The subsequent Pala kings were Buddhists.

- **Dharmapala:** Dharmapala made the Buddhist philosopher **Haribhadra** his spiritual preceptor. Taranatha credits him with establishing 50 religious institutions and patronising the Buddhist author Haribhadra.
- **Devapala's contribution:** He restored and enlarged the structures at Somapura Mahavihara, which also features several themes from the epics **Ramayana and Mahabharata**.
- **Mahipala I:** He also ordered the construction and repairs of several sacred structures at Saranath, Nalanda and Bodh Gaya.
- **Buddhist centres:** The Palas developed the Buddhist centres of learning, such as the Vikramashila and the Nalanda universities. Nalanda, considered one of the first great universities in recorded history, reached its height under the patronage of the Palas.
- **Reputation:** As the rulers of **Gautama Buddha's land**, the Palas acquired a great reputation in the Buddhist world as the kings of other regions approached them for permission to do any activity at **Bodhgaya**.
- **Ambassadors:** Balaputradeva, the Sailendra king of Java, sent an ambassador to him, asking for a **grant of five villages** for the construction of a monastery at Nalanda.
 - The request was granted by Devapala. He appointed the Brahmin Viradeva as the head of the Nalanda monastery.
- **Bengal as the centre of Buddhism:** Bengal remained one of the few places where Buddhist monasteries continued to exist. The kingdom, as well as Buddhism, soon suffered a decline because of **the large-scale conversion** of merchants and artisans to Islam.

Shaivism

- **Patronage:** The Palas continued to patronise Shaivism, and epigraphic evidence suggests that Mahipala I and Nayapala were initiated as Shaivites by their royal preceptors.
- **Vigrahapala III:** Vigrahapala III's **Amagachi inscription** describes him as "devoted to Siva worship", and this tradition continued under his successor Ramapala. Poet Sandhyakar Nandi describes Ramapala's son Madanapala as a devotee of Shiva
- **Shaiva ascetics:** The Palas supported the Saiva ascetics, typically the ones associated with the **Golagi-Math**. Besides the images of the Buddhist deities, the images of Vishnu, Siva and Sarasvati were also constructed during the Pala dynasty rule.
- **Shaivite temples:** Narayanapala's **Bhagalpur inscription** suggests that he built several Shiva temples and records his grant of a village to **Pashupatas**. Narayanapala also attended a sacrifice by his Brahmin minister.
- **Land grants:** Madanapala's queen Chitramatika, gifted land to a Brahmana named Vateshvara-Swamy Sharma as his remuneration for reciting the Mahabharata.

Pala Dynasty Decline

After 15 years of Mahipala's rule, four insignificant rulers followed, and it proved fatal to the continuation of the dynasty.

- **Last efforts:** Ramapala was the last ruler who tried to recover the lost glory of the dynasty. He ruled for about 53 years, and after his death, the presence of the Pala dynasty was confined to only **a portion of Mag**

- **adha** (Bihar) and continued to exist only for a short period.
 - **Rise of powerful rivals: Vijayasena** of the Sena dynasty, who had become powerful by then in northern Bengal, expelled the last ruler Madanapala from Bengal and established his dynastic rule.
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