SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

TRIPARTITE CONFLICT IN ANCIENT INDIA FROM 8TH TO 10TH CENTURY

Mr. Lavkumar Chimansing Harami[1], Mr. Rajesh Madhukar Sonkusare[2]
[1]*Assistant Professor (Political Science), Arts and Commerce Night College, Nagpur*
[2]*M.A.(History), NET, SET*

ABSTRACT
In the history of India 8th to 10th century struggle between three great powers, the Gurjar Pratiharas, the Palas, and the Rashtrakutas for control of the important center of Kannauj in northern India is known as the Tripartite Struggle. Considering the social, economic and cultural importance of Kannauj, all these three empires tried to establish dominance there.

The aim of these three empires was to gain control over the rich trade routes of northern India, including the Ganga Yamuna Doab region. Therefore, this struggle was not limited to imperial expansion but had economic, social and cultural consequences.

The Gurjara-Pratihara empire extended its power from the north-west. He repelled Arab invasions, thus increasing his influence. On the other hand, the Rashtrakutas entered North India from the Deccan and challenged the Pratiharas for political control of Kannauj. While the Pala Empire claimed northern territory from Bihar and Bengal, making the two rivals for Kannauj. As a result, Kannauj became the main focus of this tripartite conflict.

In this long-lasting struggle, all three empires sometimes won and sometimes retreated. Rashtrakuta kings Dhruva and Govinda III made successful campaigns in the north, but Nagabhatta II and Mihirabhoja of the Pratiharas resisted them. Dharmapalas and Devapalas of the Pala Empire maintained their influence in Eastern India. In the end the conflict was inconclusive, but the Pratiharas won the final victory over the Kannauj. But the power of all three empires gradually declined.

The tripartite conflict strengthened the regional monarchy in India. Cultural interaction between Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism increased and new changes were seen in architecture, trade and military system. Hence, this conflict is considered as an important symbol of the political dynamics and cultural evolution of ancient India.

KEYWORDS: *Tripartite, Conflict, Pratihara, Rashtrakuta, Pala, Vatsaraja, Dhruva, Govinda III, Nagabhata II, Mihirabhoja.*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important political events in ancient Indian history was the tripartite conflict between the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas. This conflict mainly took place between the 8th and 10th centuries. Kannauj was the center of conflict. It is a very strategically, economically and culturally important city in North India. He who held Kannauj was considered as the ruler of North India.

Three powerful empires were involved in this conflict:
1. Pala Empire (Bengal - Bihar)
2. Gurjar Pratihara Empire (Rajasthan - North India)
3. Rashtrakuta Empire (South-West India)

The aim of all the three empires was to gain political and economic dominance of Kannauj. The Pratiharas gained control of Kannauj first, but were often pushed back by the Rashtrakutas' northern campaigns. Dharmapala also tried to gain control over Kannauj, but his efforts were not successful due to the Rashtrakuta-Pratihara conflict. Overall, the tripartite struggle was the decisive power-struggle in Indian history, which forever shaped the political map of medieval India.

The result of this conflict was a prolonged period of political instability in North India. Economic resources were depleted as military expenditure increased. All the three empires gradually weakened due to long wars and after the 10th century the Kshatriya dynasties began to decline. This weakness was later exploited by the Turko-Afghan invaders.

A well-used verse in modern Sanskrit-poetry on the tripartite conflict is

पालैः प्रतिहार राष्ट्रकूट नृपतिप्रौढैः कनोजाधिपे
लब्धुं शक्तिपरम्परा परिणता युद्धैकधारा पुनः।
एवं त्रिप्रभवोऽभवत् प्रतिदिनं संघर्षवेगो महान
येनोद्वत्यमपि क्षयोऽभवत् त्रिष्वेव राज्ञां कुले॥

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

It means in English
The mighty kings Pala, Pratihara and Rashtrakuta continued to test their strength again and again to gain the dominion of Kannauj. The conflict intensified day by day and eventually the power of all the three dynasties weakened.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF KANNAUJ IN TRIPARTITE CONFLICT

The city of Kannauj was very important in the tripartite conflict. Because it was an important commercial and political center, it was also situated in the Ganges valley and on important trade routes. Therefore, it was easy for the king who controlled Kannauj to control North India.

The following are the reasons why Kannauj grew in importance in the tripartite conflict:

- **Trade Centre:** Kannauj became an important trade center due to its location on the banks of the Ganges. Traders used to come here from various places and due to this the economic condition of the city was good.
- **Politically important:** Kannauj being the center of North India, its political position was very important. A king who controlled this city found it easy to control the surrounding regions.
- **Capital of Empire:** Many kings tried to make Kannauj their capital. Because by gaining control over Kannauj, they could flourish their empire.
- **Clash of empires:** All three empires, Pala, Pratihara and Rashtrakuta, made great efforts to conquer Kannauj, which further increased the importance of the city.
- **Cultural Centre:** Kannauj was also an important cultural center. Many scholars and artists lived here, which gave the city a unique significance.

3. THREE MAJOR DYNASTIES INVOLVED IN THE TRIPARTITE CONFLICT

3.1. Rashtrakuta Dynasty

The Rashtrakuta dynasty mainly ruled the region of present-day Maharashtra and Karnataka. In Sanskrit, the name Rashtrakuta means country (Rashtra) and chieftain (Kuta). The word Rathika occurs in the edicts of Ashoka (Mansera, Girnar and Dhavli), who may have been the ancestors of the Rashtrakutas. However, their rise in a.d. It began in 753, when Dantidurga, a Chalukya feudatory of Badami, defeated their king Kirtivarman II. In 753, according to Dantidurga's Verul record, he proclaimed himself king over the local feudal lords and assumed the title Rajadhiraja. Eventually, the Rashtrakutas controlled the entire Deccan and Central India and became the most powerful dynasty in India.

3.2. Pratihara Dynasty

The Gurjar-Pratiharas ruled mainly in the area of present-day Rajasthan and Gujarat. Pratiharas at Mandavyapura (today Mandor near Jodhpur) first appeared in the sixth century. By the eighth century they emerged as the powerful Gurjara Pratihara dynasty, which ruled from the mid-eighth century to the eleventh century.

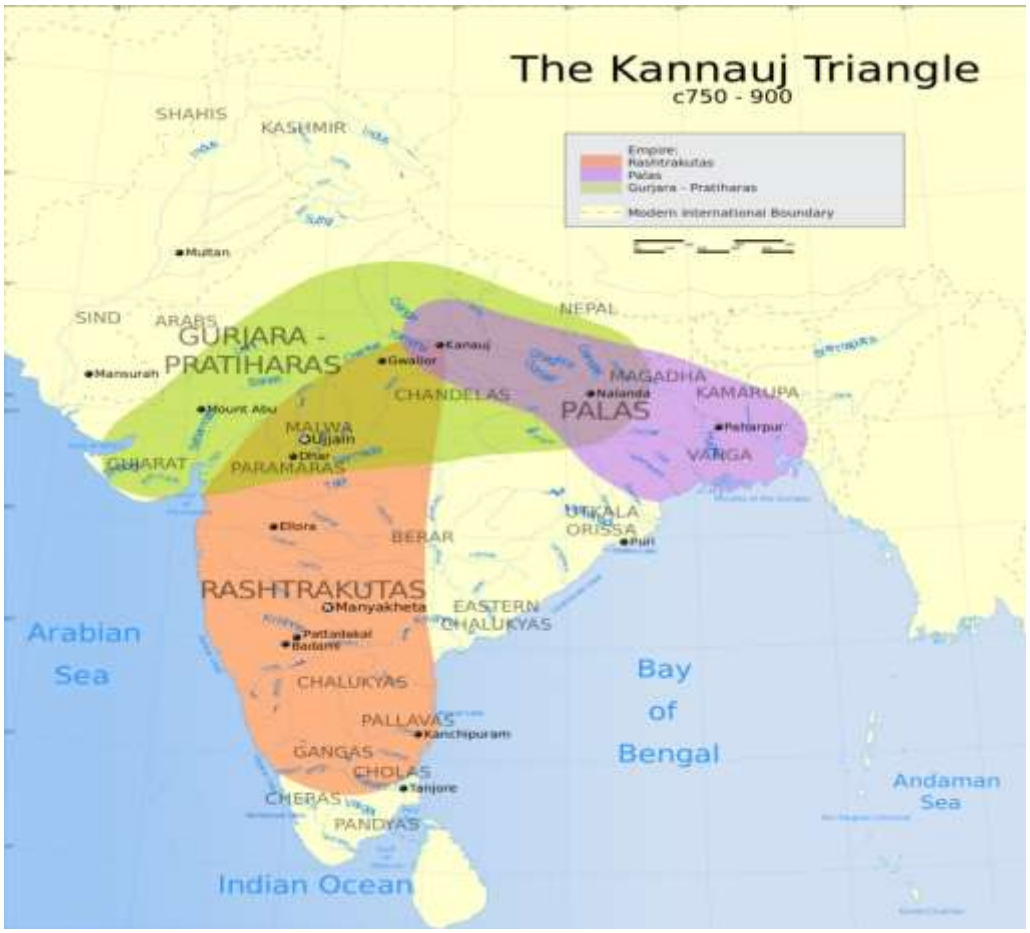
Mythology

Chander Bardai mentions in Prithviraj Raso that the Pratiharas came out of the fire pit in the yagna performed by sage Vashishta on Mount Abu. Pratihara literally means gatekeeper. They are believed to be descendants of Lakshmana, who served as a gatekeeper to his brother Rama, hence the name Pratihara. Nagabhatta-I was the founder of the Gurjara Pratihara dynasty. He is believed to have ruled between about 730 and 760. However, as mentioned in Banbhatt's Harshacharita and Ravikirti's Aihole inscription, the Gurjars existed before Nagabhatta-I. In all such inscriptions, they are mentioned as Gurjars, though they call themselves Pratiharas, but Mihir Bhoja, the hero of the Gwalior Prasath, is considered its greatest ruler.

3.3. Pala Dynasty

The Pala dynasty mainly ruled the territories of Bengal and Bihar. Soon after the death of the Gauda king Shashanka, chaos broke out in the northern and eastern parts of the country, allowing the Palas to gain control and establish the Pala Empire. After Gopala was elected as king by his feudatories in AD. Established the Pala Empire in 750 AD. He founded Odantapuri University in Bihar Sharif. Its greatest ruler Dharmapala established the Vikramshila University in Bhagalpur and a Buddhist monastery in Gaya. They controlled Bengal and Bihar for almost 400 years from the eighth to the twelfth century. The rulers of this dynasty had Pal in their name, which means protector.

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal



4. CAUSES OF TRIPARTITE CONFLICT

- **Prestige:** During medieval times, Kannauj was seen as a symbol of prestige and authority, as control over it represented political hegemony in northern India. It was also connected to the Silk Road, an ideal location for trade and commerce.
- **Control of resources:** Control of Kannauj also meant control of the central Gangetic basin, which was rich in resources and therefore strategically and commercially important.
- **Weak rulers:** From the end of the 8th century to the first quarter of the 9th century, Kannauj was ruled by three kings. Indrayudha, Vijrayudha and Chakrayudha. However, these kings were very weak and could easily be defeated.
- **Desire to control Uttarpatha:** The desire to become Sakalottarapathanath (lord of all Uttarpatha) attracted the Rashtrakutas to Kannauj. The Palas wanted the title Uttarapathaswamy (Lord of the Northern Path).

5. OPINIONS OF VARIOUS AUTHORS REGARDING TRIPARTITE CONFLICT

- **R.C. Majumdar:** According to Majumdar the tripartite struggle was the most decisive power struggle in the early medieval history of India. This struggle for the possession of Kannauj was decisive for the political future of the north. According to him, due to this conflict, no single empire could remain dominant and this led to political disintegration.
- Romila Thapar: According to Romila Thapar the struggle was not only for geographical territory but for supremacy of the concept of “Emperor”. He feels that the three empires of Pratihara, Rashtrakuta and Pala competed for political prestige and cultural influence. They also emphasize the broader cultural implications of conflict.
- **D.D. Kosambi:** According to Kosambi, economic factors are more important than military or political factors in understanding the tripartite conflict. The economic location of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and Kannauj was the root cause of the conflict. He described the conflict as "a long-term struggle for control of trade routes and resources".
- **A.L. Basham:** According to Basham, this struggle is the turning point of the Indian Middle Ages. He feels that the strategic geographical position of the Rashtrakutas and Pratiharas was decisive in this conflict. The struggle led to the independent rise of many regional empires in India.
- **Vincent Smith:** According to Smith, the tripartite conflict prevented North India from having a unified leadership. He called the conflict a "political vacuum-creating factor". He also points out that its instability paved the way for later Islamist invasions.
- **Kashiprasad Jaiswal:** According to Jaiswal, the Gurjar-Pratihar successfully held back the Arab advance, giving the conflict geopolitical significance. He sees the tripartite conflict as the "pillar of the North Indian defense structure".

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

- **Harishankar Sharma:** According to Harishankar Sharma, the conflict was not only for Kannauj, but three empires clashed for the complete cultural-economic supremacy of the Gangetic basin. The conflict changed the regional spread of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions.
- **Upendra Thakur:** According to Thakur the tripartite struggle was the supreme expression of the political ambitions of the three empires. He has analyzed in detail the impact of this conflict on the Buddhist tradition of the Pala Empire.
- **Ramsharan Sharma:** According to Sharma the tripartite conflict represents a major stage in the process of feudalization. Wars over territory, revenue and administrative control indicate the strong roots of Indian feudalism. The conflict increased the burden on the society and increased the pressure on the peasantry.
- **Wilson Hunter:** According to him the conflict created a multi-polar political structure in Indian history. This conflict led to the development of the administrative and military systems of all three empires.

6. IMPORTANT RULERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE TRIPARTITE CONFLICT

1) Gurjara-Pratihara Empire

Spread over Rajasthan-Malwa-Gujarat. The empire emerged as a major power in the north during the reign of Raja Nagabhatta and later Mihirbhoj.

Important rulers involved in the tripartite conflict	Time period
Vatsaraja	783-795
Nagabhata II	795-833
Ramabhadra	833-836
Mihirbhoj I	836-885
Mahendra Pal	885-910

2) Rashtrakuta Empire

The most powerful empire in the Deccan. Dantidurga, Krishna II, Govinda III and Amoghavarsha increased the glory of the empire.

Important rulers involved in the tripartite conflict	Time period
Dhruva	779-793
Govinda III	793-814
Amoghavarsha I	814-878
Krishna II	878-914

3) Pala Empire

Part of Bengal-Bihar-Odisha. The influence of the Palas increased during the reigns of Raja Gopal, Dharmapala, Devapala. He was known as the protector of Buddhism.

Important rulers involved in the tripartite conflict	Time period
Dharmapala	770-819
Devpal	819-855
Vigrahapala	855-860
Narayanapal	860-915

7. DIFFERENT PHASES IN THE TRIPARTITE STRUGGLE

First Stage

During this phase the Gurjar Pratihara ruler Vatsaraja, the Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva and the Pala ruler Dharmapala faced each other. A.D. In 785, the Pratihara ruler Vatsaraja defeated Indrayudha, the Ayudha ruler of Kannauj, and expanded his empire into northern India. The Pala ruler Dharmapala was worried by the expansion of the Pratihara ruler Vatsaraj's empire and a war broke out between the two in which the Pratihara ruler Vatsaraja was victorious. In the conflict between Vatsaraja and Dharmapala, Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva laughed and defeated Vatsaraja.

Rashtrakuta was the first power in South India in the tripartite conflict, which interfered in North Indian politics and invaded North India. Dhruva left for South India with immense wealth. In the first phase of the tripartite conflict, the Rashtrakuta kingdom was victorious. But this victory was short-lived.

Second Stage

In the second phase of the tripartite struggle in 792 there was a conflict between the reality Pala ruler Dharmapala and the Gurjar Pratihara ruler Vatsaraja. At this time, there was a power struggle between Indrayudha and Chakrayudha, princes of the Ayudha dynasty of Kannauj region.

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

Chakrayudha was assisted by the Pala ruler Dharmapala and Indrayutha was assisted by the Pratihara ruler Vatsaraja. But success came to Pal Naresh Dharmapala. In the eleventh century Champukavaya "Udaya Sundari" story, Dharmapala is mentioned as Uttarapatha Swami.

Third Stage
During this phase the Gurjara Pratihara ruler Nagabhata II (son of Vatsraj) in AD. In 796, he defeated the Pala ruler Dharmapala, patron of Chakrayudha, near Munger. After this defeat, Dharmapala sought the help of Rashtrakuta ruler Govinda III. Govinda III attacked and defeated Nagabhata II, mentioned in the Sanjan copper plate. But Govind III had to return to the south.

As Govinda III returned to the south, the Pratihara ruler Nagabhatta II established his suzerainty over Kannauj and made Kannauj the capital of the Gurjar Pratihara empire.

Fourth Stage
At this stage In 864 the Rashtrakuta ruler Govinda III invaded northern India. He conquered Gurjar, Malwa, Kosala, Vanga regions. These victories are mentioned in the “Sanjam” copper plate of Amoghavarsha I. But due to internal problems, Govind III had to return to the south

Fifth Stage
At this stage 834 was influenced by the Pala ruler Devapala] as his contemporaries the Gurjara Pratihara ruler Ramabhadra and the Rashtrakuta ruler Amoghavarsha suffered from internal problems. Devpal conquered most of northern India.

Sixth Stage
The tripartite conflict ended around 915 AD. The Pratiharas won the final victory in this struggle. At the end of the tripartite conflict, the Pratihara ruler Mihir Bhoja emerged victorious. He won the final victory over Kannauj. But Mihirbhoj I was initially defeated by Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna II. But after this failure, Mihirbhoj I defeated Krishna II on the banks of Narmada and conquered Malwa. Thus, finally ended the tripartite struggle.

8. CONSEQUENCES OF TRIPARTITE CONFLICT

- **Destruction of all the three dynasties:** The major consequence of this conflict was the decline of the power of all the three great powers of Pala (Bengal), Pratihara (North India) and Rashtrakuta (Deccan). This continuous war, which lasted for about 150 years, caused them heavy economic losses and weakened their military strength.
- **Political instability:** Kannauj was considered a symbol of the sovereignty of North India at that time. However, this struggle did not lead to the establishment of any stable and central authority in North India. This created a situation of political chaos.
- **Emergence of regional states:** Taking advantage of the weakening of central authority, many Mandalik kings and feudatories declared themselves independent. This led to the emergence of many small independent states in different parts of India. For example: Parmars of Malwa, Chandels of Bundelkhand, Chalukyas (Solanki) of Gujarat.
- **Paving the way for foreign invasions:** Tripartite conflict left India's north-west border vulnerable. Being preoccupied with internal strife, Indian kings neglected border security. Taking advantage of this, later in the 10th and 11th centuries, Turkish invasions (eg Mahmud Ghazni and Muhammad Ghori) came to India and the resistance of the Indians weakened.
- **Economic Losses:** Constant wars caused huge losses to agriculture, trade and industries. Public works and development were neglected as the state treasury was spent on war itself.

9. CONCLUSION

The tripartite conflict between Pratihara-Pal-Rashtrakuta is a very important and far-reaching sequence of events in Indian medieval history. This conflict determined the political destiny of North India for about 150 years. All three empires made successive campaigns to gain control of the economically important city of Kannauj. But no empire was able to gain permanent and uninterrupted supremacy through this long struggle.

Prolonged wars eroded the economic, military and administrative power of all three empires. As a result, political fragmentation took place in northern India and many small dynasties emerged. Most importantly, this conflict weakened India's defenses on its western and north-western borders and allowed Turkish and Afghan invaders easy access to India in later years.

However, this period of struggle saw significant changes in art, architecture, religion, culture and political organization. All the three dynasties, Pratihara, Pala and Rashtrakuta, left an indelible mark on Indian culture, but due to their internal conflicts, they failed to build long-lasting empires.

SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2026 - Peer Reviewed Journal

10. REFERENCES

1. *शर्मा, रामशरण. (2018). भारत का प्राचीन इतिहास, पेज 276 से 283. ऑक्सफोर्ड युनिवसीटी प्रेस.*
2. *पाटील, य. (2018). भारतीय इतिहासाची रूपरेषा, पेज 210 से 218. नूतन प्रकाशन.*
3. *बेंद्र, वै. (2012). प्राचीन भारतीय इतिहास, पेज 192 से 199. महाराष्ट्र राज्य पाठ्यपुस्तक मंडळ.*
4. *काळे, रा. (2009). प्राचीन भारताचा राजकीय इतिहास, पेज 165 से 173. सुजाता बुक डिपो, पुणे.*
5. *प्रसाद, विष्णु. (2011). भारत का राजनैतिक एवं सांस्कृतिक इतिहास, पेज 188 से 196. लक्ष्मी नारायण अग्रवाल प्रकाशन, आगरा.*
6. *Sharma, R. (2005). India's Ancient Past, Pages: 303 To 309. Oxford University Press*