Chapter 16: Turning Tides: 11th and 12th Centuries

Questions — Questions and Activities

Q1 Why is the period under consideration in this chapter regarded as a major transition in Indian history? Give two examples each of change and continuity from this period.

SOLUTION

The 11th and 12th centuries are regarded as a major transition because, unlike the Arab incursions of earlier centuries that had little overall impact on India, the invasions by Turkic powers penetrated much deeper into north India and led to lasting foreign rule in parts of the Subcontinent. Muhammad Ghuri's conquest of Delhi and large portions of the Gangetic plains, and the establishment of his generals' control after his death, marked the start of a new political order that would develop into the Delhi Sultanate. The period also saw the destruction of major centres of learning such as Nalanda and Vikramashila, which contributed to the decline of Buddhism in India.

Two examples of CHANGE:
1. Establishment of Turkic rule: Muhammad Ghuri and his generals, unlike the raiding Mahmud of Ghazni, sought permanent territorial control. After defeating Prithviraja III at the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192, Muhammad left commanders like Qutb-ud-din Aibak to consolidate Ghurids' gains in north India.
2. Destruction of centres of learning: Bakhtiyar Khilji's campaigns in eastern India resulted in the destruction of Nalanda and Vikramashila, causing the decline of Buddhism in India and the dispersal of scholarly traditions.

Two examples of CONTINUITY:
1. Trade and economy: Despite political disruptions, India's trade with China and Southeast Asia continued to grow. Merchant guilds survived and adapted; agriculture remained the mainstay of the economy.
2. Art, architecture, and culture: Large parts of northern India and all of south India remained outside Turkic control, and monumental temple architecture, literary and scientific compositions (such as Bhaskaracharya's works), and elements of Indian culture continued to thrive and spread abroad to Southeast Asia.

Answer: The period is a major transition because Turkic invasions penetrated far deeper than earlier Arab incursions, leading to permanent foreign rule in parts of north India. Examples of change: (1) establishment of Turkic territorial control under Muhammad Ghuri and his generals; (2) destruction of major Buddhist centres of learning like Nalanda. Examples of continuity: (1) India's trade with China and Southeast Asia kept growing; (2) art, architecture, and culture continued to flourish across southern and parts of northern India.

Q2 Observe Fig. 3.27 in the previous chapter and draw a similar 'star of dynasties' gathering all or most of the dynasties that appear in this chapter.

SOLUTION

This is a drawing activity. Here is guidance on what to include:

Draw a central circle labelled '11th–12th Centuries'. Draw lines radiating outward, each ending in a box naming a dynasty from this chapter:
North/Northwest: Hindu Shahis, Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Chahamanas (Chauhans), Paramaras
East: Senas, Eastern Gangas, Kakatiyans
South: Cholas, Hoysalas, Western Chalukyas, Chaulukyas (Solanki)

You may add the region or capital city in each box, for example: Paramaras — Dhara (Malwa), Cholas — Thanjavur (Tamil Nadu).
Use the maps (Fig. 4.4 and Fig. 4.10) in the chapter to check that you have not missed a dynasty.

Answer: Drawing activity — guidance: Draw a central circle labelled '11th–12th Centuries' with spokes for each dynasty from the chapter: Hindu Shahis, Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Chahamanas, Paramaras (north/northwest); Senas, Eastern Gangas, Kakatiyans (east); Cholas, Hoysalas, Western Chalukyas, Chaulukyas (south). Add region or capital in each box using Fig. 4.4 and Fig. 4.10.

Q3 Taking a map of the Subcontinent, draw a geographical tour that covers all or most dynasties in this chapter (you may draw inspiration from some of the 'travels' the chapter's narration follows).

SOLUTION

This is a map-drawing activity. Here is a suggested tour route:

Start in the northwest at Ghazna (Afghanistan) — Ghaznavids and Ghurids.
Move east to Punjab — battles of Tarain (Taraori, Haryana), Hindu Shahis.
Travel south to Ajayameru (Ajmer, Rajasthan) — Chahamanas.
Head east to Dhara (Dhar, Madhya Pradesh) — Paramaras.
Continue east through Kannauj and Mathura — sites of Mahmud's raids.
Go further east to Nalanda and Vikramashila (Bihar) — destroyed by Bakhtiyar Khilji.
Move to Nadia (Bengal) — Senas.
Descend the east coast to Puri (Odisha) — Eastern Gangas; Konark Sun temple.
Continue south to Orugallu (Warangal, Telangana) — Kakatiyans.
Move further south to Kalyani (Karnataka) — Western Chalukyas.
Visit Belur and Halebidu (Karnataka) — Hoysalas.
End at Thanjavur / Gangaikondacholapuram (Tamil Nadu) — Cholas.

Mark each dynasty's capital on the map and draw arrows tracing the tour route.

Answer: Map-drawing activity — suggested route: Ghazna (Ghaznavids/Ghurids) → Tarain/Punjab (battles, Hindu Shahis) → Ajmer (Chahamanas) → Dhar (Paramaras) → Mathura/Kannauj (Mahmud's raids) → Nalanda/Bihar (Bakhtiyar Khilji's destruction) → Nadia (Senas) → Puri/Konark (Eastern Gangas) → Warangal (Kakatiyans) → Kalyani (Western Chalukyas) → Belur/Halebidu (Hoysalas) → Thanjavur (Cholas). Mark capitals and draw arrows on the map.

Q4 With the help of a map of India and Southeast Asia, can you calculate the approximate distance that Rajendra I's fleet of ships had to navigate to reach their objective?

SOLUTION

This is a map-measurement activity. Here is the method to use:

Objective: Rajendra I's navy sailed from the Chola coast (near Nagapattinam or Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu) across the Bay of Bengal to attack the Srivijaya Empire's capital, which was located in parts of present-day Malaysia and

Indonesia — likely in the region of the Strait of Malacca (between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra).

Method:
1. On the map, locate the Chola starting point — the Coromandel Coast (around Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu).
2. Locate the approximate destination — the Strait of Malacca / Srivijaya capital (Sumatra, Indonesia or Malay Peninsula).
3. Use the map's scale bar to measure the straight-line distance between these two points.
4. Note that ships would not travel in a straight line; they would follow sea currents and coastal routes. The actual sailing distance is longer than the straight-line distance.

Approximate straight-line distance (for reference): roughly 2,000–2,500 km from the Coromandel Coast to the Strait of Malacca. The actual navigated route would be somewhat longer.

Answer: Map-measurement activity — method: Locate the Chola starting point (Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu) and the Srivijaya capital (Strait of Malacca region, Sumatra/Malay Peninsula) on the map. Use the scale bar to measure the straight-line distance, then note that the actual sailing route (following sea currents) is longer. Approximate straight-line distance: roughly 2,000–2,500 km.

Q5 Match these two pairs:
(a) Eastern Gangas — (i) Belur
(b) Chandellas — (ii) Brihadishvara temple
(c) Paramaras — (iii) Konark Sun temple
(d) Hoysalas — (iv) Kandariya Mahadeva temple
(e) Cholas — (v) Bhojeshwar temple

SOLUTION

The correct matches are:

(a) Eastern Gangas — (iii) Konark Sun temple
The Eastern Ganga dynasty initiated the construction of the Jagannatha temple at Puri, and in the mid-13th century, built the grand Sun temple at Konark.

(b) Chandellas — (iv) Kandariya Mahadeva temple
The Chandellas constructed dozens of temples at Khajuraho, including the

Kandariya Mahadeva and the Lakshmana temples.

(c) Paramaras — (v) Bhojeshwar temple
Bhoja Paramara built the impressive Bhojeshwar Temple, which remains an architectural marvel even though it was never completed.

(d) Hoysalas — (i) Belur
Velapura (today's Belur) and Dvarasamudra (Halebidu) were the Hoysalas' capitals. Their temples at Belur and Halebidu are among UNESCO world heritage monuments.

(e) Cholas — (ii) Brihadishvara temple
Rajaraja Chola built the Brihadishvara (also known as Rajarajeshvaram) temple at Thanjavur, a masterpiece of architecture and engineering.

Answer: (a) Eastern Gangas — (iii) Konark Sun temple; (b) Chandellas — (iv) Kandariya Mahadeva temple; (c) Paramaras — (v) Bhojeshwar temple; (d) Hoysalas — (i) Belur; (e) Cholas — (ii) Brihadishvara temple.

Q6 Working in groups, compare the dynasties in this chapter and in the preceding one; create a table to list the dynasties present in both, those that disappear from the preceding period, and those that appear in this chapter's period.

SOLUTION

This is a group activity. Here is guidance on how to create the table:

Create a table with three columns:
Column 1 — Dynasties in BOTH chapters (Chapter 15 and Chapter 16): Pratiharas, Palas, Rashtrakutas, Cholas, Eastern Chalukyas, Western Chalukyas.
Column 2 — Dynasties that DISAPPEAR after Chapter 15 (not in Chapter 16): Gurjara-Pratiharas (in decline), Rashtrakutas (absorbed by Chalukyas), Arab rulers of Sindh.
Column 3 — NEW dynasties that APPEAR in Chapter 16: Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Senas, Eastern Gangas, Kakatiyans, Hoysalas, Chahamanas (Chauhans), Chaulukyas (Solanki), Paramaras.

Note: Refer to both chapters carefully — some dynasties may be mentioned briefly in one and discussed in detail in the other. Discuss in your group before finalising the table.

Answer: Group activity — table guidance: Column 1 (in both chapters): Pratiharas, Palas, Rashtrakutas, Cholas, Chalukyas. Column 2 (disappear after Ch.15): Rashtrakutas, Arab rulers of Sindh. Column 3 (new in Ch.16): Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Senas, Eastern Gangas, Kakatiyans, Hoysalas, Chahamanas, Chaulukyas, Paramaras. Discuss in groups before finalising.

Q7 Using the chapter and any additional reading, prepare a short note explaining (1) why centres of learning like Nalanda were important; (2) how their destruction may have affected education and culture in India.

SOLUTION

1. Why centres of learning like Nalanda were important:
Nalanda Mahavihara was one of the greatest universities of the ancient world. Its famous library was spread over three multi-storey buildings and contained lakhs of manuscripts covering diverse branches of knowledge. Scholars and students from across Asia — including Chinese pilgrims such as Yijing and Xuanzang — travelled to Nalanda to study texts and select manuscripts to carry back to their countries. It served as a living repository of India's intellectual and religious traditions, transmitting knowledge in mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and Buddhist thought across generations and across civilisations.

2. How the destruction affected education and culture:
Bakhtiyar Khilji's campaign through Bihar led to the destruction of Nalanda and Vikramashila. The library at Nalanda is said to have burned for months. Tibetan scholars who were teaching and studying there fled back to Tibet carrying as many manuscripts as they could. A historian writing sixty years later described the 'fortress' (the university) as a place where all its inhabitants — identified as monks — were slain and great booty was collected. Historians of Buddhism have reached a consensus that this destruction of the large centres of learning precipitated the decline of Buddhism in India. Al-Biruni had earlier observed a similar impact from Mahmud of Ghazni's campaigns: 'Indian sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us.' The loss of these institutions meant the dispersal or extinction of accumulated learning that had taken centuries to build.

Answer: Nalanda was important as a major international centre of learning, housing lakhs of manuscripts and attracting scholars from across Asia. Its destruction by Bakhtiyar Khilji — the library burned for months, monks were slain, Tibetan scholars fled with manuscripts — precipitated the decline of Buddhism in India and caused a severe loss of accumulated knowledge and scholarly traditions.

Q8 Why do you think Mahmud of Ghazni carried out repeated raids from Afghanistan into India, while Muhammad Ghuri sought territorial expansion into India and long-term control? Write a short note on how their motives shaped the outcomes of their campaigns.

SOLUTION

Mahmud of Ghazni's motive — plunder and religious zeal:
Mahmud conducted 17 campaigns into India, and after each one he returned to Ghazni with huge amounts of booty. Historians have noted that the larger temples often held immense wealth accumulated from centuries of devotees' offerings, making them prime targets for plunder. Contemporary sources such as Mahmud's court historian al-Utbi record that Mahmud was keen to spread his version of Islam: 'Wherever he went, Mahmud plundered and sacked the country … destroying their temples, their sacred buildings, built mosques instead, making the light of Islam visible.' Mahmud assumed the title of 'sultan' and used the wealth extracted from India to fund his empire. He did not seek to establish a permanent base in India beyond Punjab.

Muhammad Ghuri's motive — territorial conquest and lasting control:
Unlike Mahmud, Muhammad Ghuri sought territorial expansion and long-term rule in India. After defeating Prithviraja III at the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192, he did not simply plunder and withdraw; instead, he captured Delhi and left behind trusted military commanders — most notably Qutb-ud-din Aibak — to consolidate his gains. His system of governance granted temporary land assignments to officers in return for revenue collection and military service, laying the groundwork for the Delhi Sultanate.

How motives shaped outcomes:
Because Mahmud's primary goals were plunder and ideological assertion, his campaigns caused immense destruction but did not result in lasting political change beyond Punjab. Muhammad Ghuri's ambition for permanent dominion, by contrast, fundamentally altered the political landscape of north India. His generals

extended Ghurids' control across the Gangetic plains and into Bengal, and their authority endured after his death in 1206, forming the foundation of a new era in Indian history.

Answer: Mahmud of Ghazni's motives were plunder and the spread of his version of Islam — he conducted 17 raids, extracting enormous wealth and destroying temples, but never sought permanent rule beyond Punjab. Muhammad Ghuri aimed at territorial conquest: after defeating Prithviraja III in 1192, he left commanders like Aibak to consolidate his gains. These different motives produced different outcomes — Mahmud's raids caused destruction without lasting political change, while Ghuri's campaigns permanently altered north India's political order and laid the foundation for the Delhi Sultanate.