



RELIGIOUS GRANTS OF MORASU VOKKALIGA PALEGARS

Kavitha K. M.¹ and Dr. L. P. Raju²

¹Assistant Professor, Government First Grade College,
Malur, Kolar District, Karnataka.

²Research Guide, Department of Studies and Research in History
and Archaeology, Tumukur University, Tumkuru.



ABSTRACT

In the medieval inscriptions of South Karnataka, there are numerous references to religious grants bestowed to the temples, Agraharas and Brahmanas of the region. These grants were made by kings, Palegars, traders, trade guilds, artisans and other social groups. The purpose of this paper is to inquire into the religious grants made by Morasu Vokkaliga Palegars, rulers of South-Western part of Karnataka having their ruling seats at yelahanka, Suguturu, Avati, Harapanayakana halli, Chikkaballapura. It is argued that grants were made due to justifiable devotion and to attain legitimacy and religious sanction. An endeavor is made here to interpret the different types of religious grants made to the temples, Agraharas and Brahmanas in South Eastern part of Karnataka.

KEYWORDS : *Suguturu, Avati, Harapanayakana halli, Chikkaballapura.*

INTRODUCTION

The temple is a vehicle of religion built for the fulfillment of the spiritual desires of the people. It was and is a powerful social and economic entity and a source of religious inspiration for the people. The Hindus give more importance to danam., i.e., gifts. It is ordained in the dharmasastras of the Hindus that a portion of earnings of every man should be set apart and devoted to charity. Making a gift of land or donations in the form of service of gift etc., to an individual or institution was considered to be highly meritorious. In the early period the beneficiaries of land gifts were brahmanas. Donating land to brahmanas and temples for propagation of Vedic dharma and conducting various services to the gods in the temple was a common practice. The Anusasana Parva of the Mahabharata devotes a whole chapter to the praise of granting bits of land (bhumidana prasamsa). In fact the Dharmasastras consider the gifting of land as highly meritorious. It is well to recall here the famous episode wherein Lord Vishnu in his Vamana incarnation requested the king Bali to offer him three steps of lands as gift extolling the greatness of bhudana, as the common belief is that the land contains all the wealth (ratnagarbha).

In the medieval society monarchy, religion and temples were inseparable part of society. Monarch was considered either the representative of god or next to god. Before the emergence of god as an entity the monarchs considered themselves to be living gods on earth. It was their duty to protect the interest of the people.. In course of time the monarch wanted to perpetuate this by justifying the ways of god to men through the institution of religion by constructing temples and maintaining them by grants. Making a gift of land to an individual or institution was considered to be highly meritorious. In the early period the beneficiaries of land gifts were brahmanas. Donating land to brahmanas and temples for propogaton of Vedic dharma and conducting various services to the gods in the temple was a common practice. Temple became a major institution, hence required a high income. Temples seem to have been well placed because of the grants made by the kings, royal family members, chieftains, officials, corporate bodies such as sabha, ur, nagaram and rich and poor individuals.

OBJECTIVES

The present study is meant to fulfil the following specific objectives.

1. To know in detail the land grants and other gifts made by Morasu vokkalu palegars
2. To understand the purpose behind these sgrants

METHODOLOGY

Historical and analytical method is used in the present study. The entire study is mainly based on primary source of information. Secondary data is also used to supplement the information gleaned from primary sources.

Grants and gifts were made to promote the Hindu religion of both Saivism and Vaishnavism and to develop the resources of the temple and to carry out the temple activities uninterruptedly like performing puja, celebrating festivals, etc. Temple became a centre of socio-cultural festivities and a place of philosophical discourses. It not only take up society's religious interest but also served as cultural, educational and economic institution.

The numerous inscriptions of the period under study speak about the various occasions of making gifts. There was an immense variety in the purpose for which the grants and gifts were made to the temples with the conditions to maintain the specified services in the temple from the interest or income of the donated item such as Religious merit, food offerings, perpetual lamps, supply of article of worship, celebration of festivals, recitation of holy texts, feeding of Brahmanas and ascetics, repair and renovation.

The items of grants include village grants, land grants, money grants, grant of animals (cow, sheep) utensils, ornaments, articles necessary for worship and grants of various dues and taxes.

Land grants to religious institutions were called Brahmadeya, (i.e. donated to Brahmins) Devadana (donated to Gods) and Agrahara (Settlement – of priests). These lands donated to the temples and monasteries apart from being used as normal tenancy also carried a right vested with the temple authorities to call for unpaid labour (called Vishti) as a religious service to the temple from the tillers on the donated land.

Lands were given as brahmadeya either to a single Brahmana or to several Brahmana families which ranged from a few to several hundreds or even more than a thousand, as seen in the South Indian context. Brahmadeyas were invariably located near major irrigation works such as tanks or lakes. Often new irrigation sources were constructed when brahmadeyas were created, especially in areas dependent on rains and in arid and semi-arid regions. When located in areas of

intensive agriculture in the river valleys, they served to integrate other settlements of a subsistence level production. Sometimes, two or more settlements were clubbed together to form a brahmadeya or an agrahara. The taxes from such villages were assigned to the Brahmana donees, who were also given the right to get the donated land cultivated. Boundaries of the donated land or village were very often carefully demarcated. The various types of land, wet, dry and garden land within the village were specified. Sometimes even specific crops and trees are mentioned. The land donations implied more than the transfer of land rights. For example, in many cases, along with the revenues and economic resources of the village, such as peasants (cultivators), misans and others were also transferred to donees. There is also growing evidence of the encroachment of the rights of villagers over community lands such as lakes and ponds. Thus, the Brahmanas became managers of agricultural and artisanal production in these settlements for which they organized themselves in to assemblies.

This paper focusses on the different types of religious grants made by Morasu Vokkaliga Palegars, which indicates importance given by the Palegars to religion, education and to the agriculture and also to the Brahmanas who were the main personalities in charge of religious functions of the temples.

The regions consisting of Kolar, Bangalore, chikkaballapura, Hosur, Dindigal and kanchi were known as Morasu Nadu or marasu is authenticated by number of inscriptions. It is good to take the term as marasu which means to hide, to keep oneself out of view according to Kittel . It shows that Marasu region had been hilly place. Kannada literary works mention about hunting tribe of marasu region were known for warfare skills. The Vokkaligas of this region would have got the name Morasu Vokkaligas.

The Palegars of Morasu Vokkaliga community came into prominence after the decline of Vijayanagar Empire. They were the subordinates of Vijayanagar empire and became powerful by the end of 16th century. For more than 250 years they ruled the south eastern part of Karnataka. They were able to establish an organized and stable administration during this period. They were responsible for the rise of many cities, towns, forts, agraharas, maths, temples and many more.

The important chieftains or Palegar families who ruled at different places of Kolar, Bangalore rural and Chikkaballapur district and their religious grants are as follows :

1. MASTI PALEGARS
2. YELAHANKA NADAPRABHUS
3. PALEGARS OF SUGUTURU
4. AVATI NADAPRABHUS
5. HARAPANAYAKANAHALLI PALEGARS

There are many references about the religious grants made by Yelahanka Nadaprabhus, Palegars of Suguturu and Avati Nadaprabhus and this paper has focused on these grants belonged to three palegar families

YELAHANKA NADAPRABHUS

The Kempegowda family is the prominent feudatories of Vijayanagara who were the rulers of Bangalore-Magadi. Originally they were Yalahanka Nadaprabhus, later having Bangalore as their headquarters. The Yelahanka Nada Prabhus were Gowdas or tillers of the land. They belonged to the morasu vokkaliga sect, The ancestors of which were migrate from canjeevaram. They were not

akin to the Gangad Gowdas of other parts Karnataka the denizens of the soil. After the Adilshahi campaigns in 1637-38 A.D they shifted their headquarters from Bangalore to Magadi and Savanadurga from where they ruled till they were over thrown by Mysore Dynasty in 1728 A.D. It is this family of Kempegowda which laid the foundations of the modern city of Bangalore. It is described them as hailing from Yenamanji Puthur near Kanchi in Tamilnadu and also as decedents of the founder of the Avati Nadaprabhus.

Kempe Gowda-II's reign was noted for the establishment of many Agraharas- endowed Hamlets- and bestowal of munificent grants to the temple priests. A copper plate from Magadi of the year 1630 A.D shows grant of 2 villages namely Kanchugarahalli and Shingahalli to Rameshwara temple. Daughter- in -law of Kempe Gowda-II donated Venkatakrishna Sagar Agrahara to seventeen Bramanahas to get for the acquisitions of merit to her father-in-law and mother in law. In 1605 A.D. forty eight occupations were donated to Kempapura Agrahara and to Ivarakantapura Agrahara. Vyasraya matha of sosale was donated with 5 villages near sondekoppa and a tank by name vyasaraya somudra for the aquisition of merit to his father.

Born to Kempamma the first wife of Kempe Gowda-II, Kempe Gowda-III was a devotee of Lord Shiva and a great devotee. Kempe Gowda-III donated Kotagara siddappanahalli by naming it as Srinivasapura in the presence of his beloved god Veerabhadra Swami. The establishment of maths and of installation of Lingas and the construction of tanks reached its heyday during his period. Apart from the establishment of a holy kashi Math, Alalukuppe the village of Magadi Seeme was donated for its betterment. According to a copper inscription the villages Hanchikuppe, Vota, Atimagere and Kempapura of Magadi Seeme were donated to the service of god Veereshwara. He became popular as Malekemparaya as he saved the people from drought by worshipping lord shiva. Along with construction of Kempasagara tank to overcome drought situation, he granted agrahara to twelve brahmanas and for the workers(Bhovies) buffaloes were granted in Halashettahalli and Sripathihalli.

Venkata Krishnamma, the wife of Hiriya kempe Gowda-II, son of Kempegowda II uplifted the tradition by establishing Venkata Krishna sagara agrahara and donating it to the Brahmanas to get the merit for her in - laws.

Dodda Veerappa Gowda, son of Kempe Gowda III donated Kallikere of Eleyuru Hobli, and Donkanapura village to fifteen brahmanas to get merit to his parents. He granted seegekuppe to Shringeri matha, Arebedarahalli to Kukke Subramanya and Allalukuppe to Kashi matha , while constructing a tank. The tax of the village has been exempted for the Rathotsava of god. Donations to Hindu maths such as Kashi and Sringeri might have a political intention for his existence.

Kempaveerappa Gowda, the last ruler of the Yalahanka dynasty of Magadi combined all the sub villages of Kallikere of Dankanapura, which his father had already donated, renamed them as Mummadi Doddaveera Sagar and donated them to fifteen brahmanas to gain merit to his parents. He combined Kadasinganahalli, Kvagala, Tatasamudra villages together, named it as mummadi kempa veera sagara and donated it to sixteen brahmanas. A grant inscription [devashasana] which refers about grant of Honnappa Bedarahalli after naming as subbarayapura gives in full detail the lineage of yelahanka prabhus. It appears kempaveerappa Gowda had renamed his father's endowments. During the establishment, Krishnapalya of Kalya was assigned for services, Jattahalli villages and Shirupathihalli were assigned for Deeparadhane and the village Shiranahalli were assigned for Rathotsava.

During the establishment of Someshwara temple at Magadi , he had donated land for the mahajanas of twentyfour occupations and gave importance to the educational developments. For

the service of Gavigangdhareshwara of Magadi and for the local Panchanga , Ungasagara Agrahara was donated by him.

PALEGARS OF SUGUTUR

This family was known as the palegars of suguturu having the centre at suguturu and gradually extended their control from shidlaghatta in north to bilagondanahalli in south and in east till Kolar, Mulabagal and Punganur. There are about 105 inscriptions available about this family from 15th century to 19th century. Many inscriptions talk about temples structure, renovations and installation of deities, conducting of festivals and day to day pujas. Chennakeshava temple of Sugutur is their main contribution. Halasara, the elder sister of Chikkaraya Tammegowda, has offered pinda to the ancestors as evidenced from an inscription by engraving 16 gods single foot line drawing and mentioning below the names of Devatas and Rishis as Vishnu, Rudra, Rama, Seethe, Karthikeya, Kamadeva, Dakshinagni, Aahavaniya, Grihaspatya and Valmiki, towards the north of Dhanushkoti Tirtha on the Avani hills the place which she has described as gods appeared before Seethabhagavathi.

Bettenahalli inscription dated 1559 AD from Kolar taluk refers to a land grant given to priest Nanjaiah for rendering services at the temple of god Veerabhadra in Beethanahalli. An Inscription dated 1556 A.D. found at Nandagudi village of Hosakote taluk speaks about attributing tank, ponds, entire suvarna income, grains of a village to meet out the expenses of Amruthapadi naivedya [food offering]. The inscription dated 1560 A.D. found in Anupahalli tells that Anupahalli was gifted as endowment to the Prasanna Gangadhara Linga temple of Shivaganga for preparing Amruthapadi Naivedya [food offering]. In the same manner 3 villages Mugabalu, Rama gowdanahalli, Kilu hosahalli were endowed to the priest Nilakantaiah diverting the different income of village Mugabalu of Hoskote taluk to prepare Amruthapadi, Deepotsava, Ratotsava for the Veerabhadra and Someshwara Deities. The inscriptions of these chieftains reveal about village of land endowment to Gopalaswami deity of Kendatti village of Kolar taluk, Eshwara temple of Nelavagila village of Hosakote taluk and Ekambaranatha and Kamakshamma temple near Antaragange on Kolar hills to meet the expenses of occasional rituals. Thus Suguturu chieftains have showed their religious interest not only in the construction of temples but also enduring endowments for performing day to day pujas and other rituals.

Inscription dated 1574 AD tells that Rayasamudra and Thammapura village were granted for the time being to Ashesha Veeramaheshwaras. Inscription dated 1609 AD of Busanahalli gives information about Mummadi tammegouda gifted the village Busanahalli to Devanaradhya of gurumatha. An inscription dated 1662 AD records the gift of Doddanallur village to sadabasadevaraiyah by Tammappagowder of Sugutur. Thus the suguturu rulers being devotees of veerashaiva religion patronised number of veerashaiva gurus and Sharanas through gifts, grants and endowment.

AVATINADA PRABHUS

The rulers of Avathi are popularly known as Avathinada Prabhus, having Karagadamma as family goddess, Bhairava as ancestral god were basically agricultural class, play a major role from historical point of view. Avati, now a village in Devanahalli taluq was once the seat of a small principality which originated as a feudatory dynasty during Vijayanagara times. It was formerly known as Ahuti.

Bhairava Bhupalaka , son of the founder of this palepattu Doddabhiaregowda, made proper arrangements in all the temples of the surrounding areas of Nandihills to perform day to day pujas and other rituals continuously through grants and endowments. An inscription records the grant of the village Kuduvatti, by Bhairava the ruler, to his guru Nadeeshvara of Nandi. Sonnappa Gowda was the Avatinadu prabhu under the ruler Veerasadashivaraya of Vijayanagar. At the orders of Vijayanagar ruler he made Mudigere village as endowment to Chennakeshava temple of Mudigere for the performance of amrutapadi, deeparadhane, panchapara, ratotsava and other services. At Nandi few inscriptions issued by Marayya Gowda state that he had left behind a gift to god venkateshwara, desiring merit might accrue to his father and mother. Around 8-9 inscriptions dated 1697 A.D were found in Begur, Devanahalli, Somanahalli and Singarahalli vilages of Devanahalli Taluk and Maluru and Veluru villages of Shidlaghatta taluk. These inscriptions record that Immadi Sonnabairegowda endowed many villages and also lands for offerings and services in the temple of Sri Madanagopalaswamy of Devanahalli .

Doddabairegowda continued his family custom of setting up Agraharas, endowments to the temples. The inscription dated 1716 A.D tells that he donated Mavalipura village to a brahmin Subba Bhatta by changing it's name as Doddabairasagara and converting it as Agrahara . In the year 1792 A.D, Agatta village was endowed to the Chennakeshava temple at Vadigenahalli for conducting ritual activities of the temple.

Avathinadu consisted of people following different religions for example: Shaivism, Veerashaivism and Vaishnavism. The rulers were religious benevolent towards all the religious people. They were benevolent towards all the religious gurus who came their contact and also grants had been made to them with the intention of well being of father, mother and of the people. Among them after performing Shivarathri pooja the income of the village Karepura towards the south of Nandi hills was granted to Nandishwara gurukula one of the famous priests was one such example for this.

Information about Avathinada prabhush had made endowment of Mulegasu seeme to stone maths at Tippuru village constructed by Namah Shivaya Kempisetti has been inscribed. The inscription dated 1651 A.D at Budihalu village tells that Immadi Baichegowda of Avathinadu prabhu has gifted Budhalu village to Srimath Sajjana Guru Sadacharasampanna Srilinga Chakri as puradharma from 1638 A.D till 1696 A.D .

In 1697 A.D Gopalagowda, son of Immadi Sannabaire Gowda prabhu of Avathinadu had granted number of villages for the performance of poojas and rituals for ever. This information can be seen in many inscriptions found in Madanagopalaswamy temple at Devanahalli and also in the villages which were granted for the temple. The names of villages endowed can be seen in the inscriptions as Sometihalli, Madluru , Sethuhalli, Sagepahalli, Savakkanahalli, Hosakere, Upparahalli, Gopalasagar, Baijapura, Bairapura, Avarahalli, Singarahalli, Hiriyaakere, Chikkonahalli, Hosapete, Mavalipura etc. As noted in the inscription main pooja rituals followed in temples were Nityotsava, Pakshotsava, Masotsava, Somavatsa rathotsava, Parvakala, Mugulu rathotsava etc. Further steps were taken for regular lightening of lamps gits and food distribution as told by the inscriptions. An inscription also informs about endowment of Upparahalli village to a bramhin after converting it to Agrahara and renaming as Gopalasagar and creating 25 occupations in the village. Along with the regular pooja performing priests, priests who were chanting mantras, performing yagnas and decoration of god and shyanubhogas were assigned different occupations in Gopasagara Agrahara. Inscriptions also tell about endowment of lands in Baichapura and Bairapura villages for the service of pallakki, chatra and Chamara . An inscription tells tat in 1729 A.D Doddabaire Gowda son of

Gopala Gowda had donated the revenues of Settihalli and Angatta grama to the Chennakeshava temple of Vadigenahalli for the performance of Nityostava, Pakshotsava, Masotsava and rathotsava for the god.

An inscription records that during the period of Venkatapatidevaraya of Vijayanagara kingdom (1610 A.D) Haveli Bairappagowda II of Avathinadu donated Byrapura village to Puttannapandita and Timmannapandita after converting it as one Agrahara for the merit of his father Bairappa Gwda

An inscription records that Doddabairappa Gowda son of Gopala Gowda donated Doddabairasagara to Subbabhata by combining two villages Kurubarahalli with sub-village Mavalipura and converting it as one Agrahara . Though Avathinadu came under the control of Mughals, they continued with their donations and endowment of Agraharas. One inscription refers that in 1792 A.D Ramaswamy son of Chennamma and Doddabaire Gowda of Avathinadu donated wetlands near Nagarakatte of Sadali village to a brahmin.

CONCLUSION

Thus from the above discussion we can come to the following conclusion.

Firstly, the society was hierarchically organized during medieval period i.e., when Morasu pategars were in power and for various reasons these pategars encouraged and promoted selected social forces as important agencies as legitimizing political groups. Pategars of Morasu Vokkaligas, to begin with, hailed from remote areas, and towards the end of 15th century, they emerged as a territorial power in and around South- eastern part of Karnataka in the present Bangalore rural, Kolar and Chikkaballapura districts. Since they were the new comers to the land and being the subordinates of Vijayanagara rulers in the beginning were greatly influenced by monarch's religious and other benevolent activities. They had occupied the plain and economically potential zones afresh, they at least need the support of the people who should approve their political identity. For that, the Pategars also knew that they had rely upon the most prominent social groups such as brahmanas. Therefore, they started to identify those people who have been enjoying so much influence over larger sections of the society.

Secondly these land grants were not only towards brahmanas but also to other religious groups such as veerashaiva groups. Thus emerged different forms of tenures such as brahmadeyas, devadanans etc. This practice plays an important role in the creation of Brahman settlements such as agraharas, temples, mathapurans and ghatikas. But it also reflects the trend towards the formation of privileged groups in the social structure. Thus continued the hierarchically ordered society which is one of the features of feudal social formation which started from the period of Hoysalas. Since brahmanas were the most privileged sections of the society, their predominance also depended largely on the assistance of ruling powers. It eventually resulted in the development of interdependent relationship.

Thirdly, the formation of brahman settlements and the granting of lands to brahmanas and temples also had serious repercussions on economic development. And lastly, the newly formed agencies such as agraharas and temples, sometimes independently, and sometimes, on behalf of reigning monarchs, actively involved in the agrarian expansion at the village level.

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