



OFFICERS OF THE AGRAHARA AND AGRAHARA AS A FEUDAL INSTITUTION DURING VIJAYANAGARA PERIOD

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An attempt is made in this research article to explain about Officers of the Agrahara and Agrahara as a Feudal Institution during Vijayanagara Period. The system of masaveggade or monthly headmen, which corresponded to the gaunda or the headman in a village, appears to have been in existence in some parts of Mysore and Mandya districts in the beginning of the fourteenth century. The asaveggades held their offices in the agraharas by monthly rotation. In 1365¹ C.E, the Brahmans of Maddur, made a grant to five persons during the month's headship of the Tantra-mantra-chintamani, the Sravanappacharya Vighnesvara Dikshitopadhyaya. Another inscription of the same place, of 1366² C.E gives the term for the month's headship which is missing in the former inscription. In 1366³ C.E, all the Brahmans of the all-honoured great agrahara Upendrapura, during the month's headship (masaveggade tanadalu) of Asama deva, made a grant to six persons for the purpose of building Upendrapattana anew in the dry fields of Chiraduvu. Further, in 1367⁴ C.E, all the Brahmans of the same agrahara, during the month's headship of Karatti of Udugundur, gave a stone charter to one Mamboja. Saletore observes, "We may not be far wrong in assuming that the custom of holding office by monthly rotation, atleast so far as Upendrapura alias Maddur was concerned, must also have been in vogue in Vijayanagara times." In the absence of more examples from Vijayanagara times, we cannot generalize about this institution. It can be reasonably presumed that this custom prevailed in Upendrapura. The advantage of this system was that it would get the cooperation of all the members of the group.

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Buddhivantaru

The term buddhivantaru is commonly used in the inscriptions of the area covered by the present Koppa, Mudagere, Tirthahalli and Nagar Taluks. For example, in 1468⁵ C.E, Bairappa-heggade purchased a paddy land and granted it to the God, and the grant was executed by the Prabhugalu and buddhivantaru. (namma chavadiya buddhivantaru) Again, an inscription of 1569⁶ C.E belonging to the matha at Hariharapura of the Samartha sect of Brahmans refers to the term buddhivantaru. It mentions four important personages of different places who were contemporaries - namely, Srirangaraya, the chief of Karakala, Narasimhabharati, the Pontiff of Sringeri (1569 C.E – 1570 C.E)⁷ and Madhavasarasvati, the ascetic head of the Hariharapura matha. It is recorded that a disciple of this guru paid the value of 78 Varahas to the matha and purchased lands which were subsequently handed over for service in the Narasimha temple at Hariharapura. The witnesses for this transaction were the mahajanas of Hariharapura, the buddhivantaru in the service of the king of Karakala, Timmaya-Senabova of Beltore and the inhabitants of the nadu. Buddhivantaru were the wisemen of the locality.

Gramahebbaruva, Hebbarvakkalu, Hebbar, Prabhu, Odeya

The Gramahebbaruva was the chief of the Brahmans. The mahajanas were known as Hebbaruvas (Hebbaruvaru). For example, in 1371⁸ C.E, Virupanna-Vodeyar made a grant to the Brahmans of the Brahmapuri of the God Kalasanatha. In order that the Brahmans should conduct the anointing, prayers and other ceremonies he granted 13 shares to the Hebbars (Hebbaruvagalu). In 1472⁹ C.E one Yaduvanna was the hebbar of the village Harahu. Another inscription dated 1473¹⁰ C.E records a grant of money which was invested in land from the income of which a Brahman was to be fed during Budrapuje in the temple of Kalasanatha. The money was paid in the presence of the grama hebbaruva or chief of the Brahmans in the village. There were Hebbaruvas in Mavinakeri, Hosakeri and Gulakeri which were obviously streets or parts in Kalasa. This is in addition to the Brahmapuri of the Brahmans. In 1574¹¹ C.E, Bhayirarasa-Vodeyar made a grant for the God Kalasanatha in the presence among others of the hebbar families of the Keris or streets mentioned above.

The emolument for the office was a manya or rent-free land. An inscription of 1475¹² C.E records the gift of some lands made by a woman for the service of food offering to the God Kalasanatha. The grant was made in the presence of the hebbarvakkalu of the village

and also the hebbarvar of Hiriya-makkiya Manaki. Hebbarvakkalu may mean hebbars who were tenants (or who held tenancies) in the village or may merely mean the tenants of the hebbars. Other terms used to denote the chief of the village were mahaprabhu and heggade. In 1476¹³ C.E, the maha-prabhhus of the 59 agraharas of the Satalige Thousand in the Araga-Vente, and all the nadu Brahmans agreeing among themselves granted a Sasana. In 1477¹⁴ C.E, Bomma-deva-heggade and the Brahmans of Harandur made a grant of lands to Ahobhali-bhatta. Similarly, in 1478¹⁵ C.E, all the Brahmans of Chidiravali, Harikara Bommana-heggade and others, made a grant of lands. Another inscription of the 16th century registers the fixing of certain dues or taxes to be collected during the annual fair held, in honour of the Goa Siva Gangadhara devaru at Sivagange with the consent of the Prabhu-gavudas, heggades, etc. of the district of Sivagange. The term odeyaru is used to denote the head of the agrahara. Another term used to indicate the elders in an agrahara was muligaru. An inscription of 1579¹⁶ refers to the three hebbars of the Kalasa Thousand Village as muligaru. Evidently, they were the three elders or leaders of the Brahmans there. The ayagars who worked in villages, presumably worked in the agraharas also.

It is interesting to observe a special feature of the agraharas under Vijayanagara kings. In spite of the autonomy given to the Brahmans which will be discussed later, it appears that the state imposed its own officials over the agraharas. In 1380¹⁷ C.E Harihara appointed as manager of the agrahara Bukkarajapura, Devesvara Pandit. In 1381¹⁸ C.E Harihara appointed as manager of the agrahara Bukkarajapura, Devesvara Pandit. In 1582¹⁹, Annamagasa-hebbar of Balagula was appointed manager to the two agrahara villages of Pura. An inscription of 1583²⁰ C.E records that, at the time of setting up the God Yoga Narasimha in the Durggagrahara, Ramayya, son of Hara Mallayya, of Pidave in the Adavani country, the seal bearer of Mallarasa-ayya, the head minister of Singappa Nayaka held the parupatya (manager-ship) of Durggagrahara, caused the sacred spot to be excavated and restored.

We have seen that, sometimes the proprietor, who was granted an agrahara, divided it into vrittis (shares) and distributed them among other Brahmans. In such cases, sometimes, the proprietor appointed himself as manager of the agrahara. For example, in 1384²¹ C.E, Bukka Raya gave to Soma who was versed in the meaning of the 18 Puranas, and a poet in eight languages, Bukkarayapura on the bank of the Pinakini, in the Guttidurga kingdom. The done made it into 110 shares, and keeping 36 for himself as manager, gave the rest to Brahmans.

The Agraharas were the centres of Brahmana settlement and these places were assigned to learned Brahmanas for their livelihood. As followers of Purvamarade or ancient traditions and customs, the Vijayanagara rulers continued to grant villages to these Agraharas. Further the feudal chiefs and other individuals also granted land to the Agraharas. The Brahmana shareholders of these Agraharas were known as Mahajanas and they managed the affairs of the Agraharas by themselves. “An important fact that contributed to the rise and growth of land-owning monastic institutions was the grant of the Agrahara by the king for religious and educational purposes.

The following inscriptions give information as to how the king and their subordinates established the Agraharas in different parts of the empire. For the spiritual guidance of Vidyaranya, the Vijayanagara ruler, Harihara and his brothers gave the land grants and founded the Agrahara of Sringeri and Vidyaranya-pura in 1385²² C.E. In 1386²³ C.E. Harihara established an agrahara namely Muddadandanayakapura or Chikka Hadalla in Kudlur which belonged to Uchchangidurga. He divided it into 36 shares, in which 12 shares were given to God Harihara and the remaining 24 shares were distributed among the Brahmanas. Harihara II established an Agrahara in Hariharapura near Sringeri in 1387²⁴ C.E. When Bukka was the ruler of Vijayanagar, Vithanna Vodeyar was the chief of Araga-fiefdom. At that time one Agrahara was established in Kesare village in 1488²⁵ C.E. One Mallappa played an important role in the establishment of an Agrahara namely Narasimhabharatpura. In 1489²⁶ C.E. when Deva Raya was the ruler. Vithanna-Vodeyar was the chief of Arga fiefdom. At that time Virupanna made a grant of Alugavali and Kauriyabhage to Brahmanas and formed an agrahara namely Jammapura. Vithappa-dannayaka established an agrahara namely Hemambikapura agrahara and divided it into 12 shares in 1490²⁷ C.E. The inscription dated 1430 describes the feudal chief of Kukkala-nad namely Bukka Nayaka. He granted Bommanahalli free of all impost to an agrahara. In 1591²⁸ C.E. Krishnadeva Raya established an agrahara in Hospet Taluk. Again the same ruler established another agrahara in Nagamangala area. (in the present Mandya district). The inscription dated 1592²⁹ C.E. describes that during the time of Krishnadevaraya, Somanna Nayaka granted Malur village in the Araga fiefdom to the Brahmanas for the establishment of an agrahara. Another agrahara was established during the time of Krishnadevaraya in Bayirapura in Malenahalli-Sime in 1593³⁰ C.E. The inscription dated 1594³¹ C.E. describes that the Vijayanagara ruler Achuta Raya established an Agrahara in Hosakota Sime and made land grant for the agrahara.

The above instances clearly show how the agrahara were established and lands were given to the Brahmana share-holders in each agrahara. (These Brahmana shareholders could not cultivate the land themselves). They mainly depended upon the peasants for cultivation. The word Hebbarvokkalu or tenants of the Hebbar clearly shows that land was given to the tenants for cultivation. When the land was distributed among the peasants it led to sub-infeudation. Further when the surplus value was taken away from the tenants in the form of feudal dues, it definitely paved the way for the feudalization of that institution. The feudal element began to operate within itself. According to R.S.Sharma the agraharas or villages granted to Brahmanas bear some resemblance to manors of Medieval Europe.

The Agrahara received the land mainly for religious and education purposes. Most of these grants were made free of taxes and revenue. The important works of these Brahmanas were reading Vedas, Puranas and Sastras in holy places, performing astrological work imparting religious instructions and working as Priests in the temple. As the protectors of Hindu Dharma, the Vijayanagara rulers fully supported the development of these religious institutions.

From the above studies we may draw the following conclusions. The Agraharas formed another type of feudal segment in the Vijayanagar empire. They came into being as a result of the land grant made by the rulers, chiefs and other individuals. The Brahmana shareholders of these agraharas known as Mahajanas looked after the affairs of these Agraharas. They were mainly engaged in religious and educational works. The autonomy of this feudal institution was not disturbed either by the rulers of Vijayanagara or by their subordinates.

References

- 1) SII, X, II, 484.
- 2) EC B.L.79.
- 3) EC VIII, Nagara 73, 1511 A.D.
- 4) Ibid.,VII, P.I.Shikaripura, 25, 1515 A.D.
- 5) Ibid., X D.B.30.
- 6) MAR 1934, 18.
- 7) R.S.Sharma, Indian Feudalism p.74.
- 8) EC, XI, D.G.68.
- 9) Ibid, 67, 1354 A.D.
- 10) E.C. X Gd.No.78.
- 11) SII, IX (ii) No.484.
- 12) MAR 1914-15, para 92.
- 13) E.C.VII, S4. No.1.
- 14) MAR, 1919, Para 90.
- 15) EC., III, Tn No.78.
- 16) EC., IX, Db. No.30.
- 17) EC X, GD. No.25.
- 18) EC III, Tn.64.
- 19) EC IX, Bn.123.
- 20) EC IX, Ma.11.
- 21) EC III, Tn.42.
- 22) MAR 1919, Para 86.
- 23) EC VIII, Tl.222.
- 24) EC XII, Kg.29.
- 25) SII, IX (ii) No.440.
- 26) EC X, Mb.7
- 27) MAR 1928, NO.90
- 28) EC IV, Yl.40.
- 29) Ibid, 39
- 30) Ibid. 38.
- 31) Saletore: Social and Political Life II, p.141.