Some Religious Endowments of the Vijayanagara Rulers

Dr. JAGADEESH KIVUDANAVAR
HEAD, DEPT. OF STUDIES & RESEARCH IN HISTORY.
COORDINATOR, DEPT. OF MASTER OF TOURISM ADMINISTRATION, KARNATAK UNIVERSITY’S KARNATAK ARTS COLLEGE, DHARWAD-01

ABSTRACT: The people and kings of Vijayanagara gave too much prominence to the minutest details of public or private conduct to be traced to their inherent orthodox nature. What appears to foreigners as pagan formalities were really indispensable ceremonials to the Hindus, who were under the abiding influence of their classical doctrines. Most of the charitable activities were conducted by the Vijayanagara rulers, other royal family members, merchants, rich individuals etc. They made rich endowments for conducting educational activities, religious, construction of tanks for irrigation and drinking water and other charitable activities. They were always accompanied with the great scholars and royal priests, who were always guide to the rulers to conduct such activities. We can have a large number of such instances in the inscriptions, by which they pleased their gods in view to establish peace, law and order and prosperity in the state.

Keywords: Religious Endowments and Charitable Activities, Corporate Religious Activities

Religious Endowments and Charitable Activities.

Nuniz relates to us that: "The king of Bisenaga is a Brahman; everyday he hears the preaching of a learned Brahman, who never married nor ever touched a woman" (Sewell, 1988, p. 390). Although Nuniz is wrong in stating that the emperor of Vijayanagara, Achyuta Raya, was a Brahman, yet he suggests in his words an important feature of everyday life of the Hindu kings. This feature was the company of learned men among whom they passed a part of their time. The learned Brahman mentioned by Nuniz is identified with Vyasaraya, the great Vaishnava teacher (Somanatha, 17). Somanatha in his Vyasayogicharitam tells us that Narasa Nayaka, Vira Narasimha and Krishnadevaraya were daily being instructed in Dharma by that celebrated Vaishnava leader. Somanatha says about Narasa Nayaka: “Eva meva bhaktaya sambhavayantam rahasyenam dharmapadopadesena prayyah manurghramanamu” (Somanatha, 59).

Vira Narasirhha was likewise devoted to the same raja-guru and he referred as Punyakirtanena vasudhahipena hamenseva kamalakarah pratyahasa upasenya (manah)” Somanatha, 64).

Krishnadevaraya’s noble example of devotion to Vyasaraya is unique;

“Tena Krishna mahipalena trisanghya kaladevatayamiva mukutatatamalatikusumasekharikriyamanam nakhamayusajate mahanabhave... Vyasayogitii... “ (Somanatha, 67-68).

An inscription dated A.D. 1463 of the times of Immedi Praudha Devendra (Mallikarjuna Raya) informs us how he got himself ready for an occasion of granting gifts: “He being moved to make grants, having bathed in water from the sacred Tirthas, attired in purified flaxen garments, united with Brahmins who had performed the religious baths, the great king (with titles) named Immedi Praudha Devendra on his birthday (natal star), in the pure Bhaskara Khsetra at the foot of the Hemakuta Hill, on the bank of Tuhgabhadra, in the presence of the god Virupaksha in holy place, at an auspicious time in the presence of the god Chandramaui in the Barakuru kingdom, gave the villages belonging to Chaturmandi... for the offerings to the god Ramachandra (E.C., VIII, Nr,79). According to Dr. B.A.Sailetore, this inscription evidently is to be interpreted in the sense that the king gave the villages, which were in the Tuluvra-raija, according to the usual custom in the temple of Virupaksha at Hampi (Sailetore, 1934, p. 231).

The inscription belongs to the reign of Harihara II gives more detail about the manner in which grants were made, which may be noted in this inscription. In A.D. 1410 “Harihara Deva II, seated on his hereditary throne in the city named Vijaya.. (Vijayanagara) examined the dana sasana made by Dharmaraja in the Dwapara-Yuga... granted of his own accord, with pouring of water and presentation of gold coins, flowers and akshate” the village Dharmesvarapura on the bank of the Kshirandai in the Gajakonapuri (Anegundi) kingdom for the worship of the god Dharmesvara. Although the copper-plate inscription looks suspicious because of its wrong date (E.C., IX, Ht, 34), the statement that the dana-sasana was made by “Dharmaraja in the Dwapura-Yuga...” nevertheless contains one point about which all inscriptions agree. This refers to the ceremony of pouring water and the presentation of a gold coin. Krishnadevaraya in A.D. 1514-15, at the time of making a gift, was surrounded by his purohitas and a number of Brahmins well versed in the Srauta learning; and he also gave many gifts with the pouring of water together with the presentation of a gold coin (E.I., XVIII, p. 165). The references to this detail of the ceremony are found in almost every record of the times. It may be observed here that even on occasions of remission of customs and other dues, the provincial rulers observed the same formality. Mallinatha-Odeyar, who was in charge of Bemmattanakallu, raised an upper storey of stones for the god Siddhanatha of that locality, constructed other works of merit, and in order that this work of merit might continue forever, presented Chikkapura in Bemmattanakallu, with the pouring of water, for the decorations, illuminations, and offerings of the local deity (E.C., XI, Cd, 2).
Corporate Religious Activities

We shall now learn about the corporate activities of the people of Vijayanagara in matters related to the religious sphere of life. The record dated A.D. 1556 tells us that, by order of the Maha-arasu, the Mahanayakacharya Nidugal Timmanna Nayaka, and subjects of the Nidugal-Sime(a great number named), and other Goudas and subjects, with the Setti-Pattana-svami had purchased the Tumukunte village in the Nidugal kingdom, and placing Guti Tirumala Rajayya’s seal bearers (Mudremenushyara) in front of Kenchappa Nayaka, granted the village for the services and festivals(specified) of the god, in order that merit might accrue to Guti Tirumala Rajayya Deva Maha-arasu (E.C., XII, Si, 31).

The following epigraph dated A.D. 1588 suggests that the donors were not forced to make endowments by the officials of the Government. Appaji-Senabova of Koppa (descent stated), having set up the god Gopalakrishna on the bank of the Tungabhadr in Nari in Koda-nad, bought certain specified lands and presented them for the offerings of the god. The epigraph contains the following interesting information-witness, who will see to the carrying out of this work of merit: all the nad officers of Koppa-Koda-Nad-4000; all the cultivators of the two Angadi of Koppa; the Brahmanas of Bommanapur, Nagalapura, Narasimhapura, Belgula, New-agrahara, Mangalapura and Somalapura. The agreement was written with the approval of both parties by Sankappa Senabova of Koda-nada (E.C., VI, Kp, 57).

The Kurudimale temple priests (sithanikara) granted to Siddappa’s son Timmanna, a dharma sasana or a deed of sale, in A.D. 1442, in connection with the construction of a virgin tank named Siddasamudra in the Kurudimale-Sime, the rice fields to be formed in the land under the embankment being in Tadugatta-Sime. The price at which the land was sold was for 50 honna (E.C., X, MI, 259; E.C., VI, Gu, 4). In A.D. 1515, the three Hebbars of the Kalasa-1000 village, and outside the village seventeen persons (named), and all the elders (muligaru) of Nuju, agreeing among themselves, sold the village of Nuju to Surappa Senabova, excepting certain specified dues, for certain services to be provided to the god Viranarayana and Kalasanatha (E.C., VI, Mg,88).

The harmony that existed between different religious sections of the people is to be specially seen in the epigraphs relating to the activities of the Brahmanas, the sainikas and the Jainas. In A.D. 1368 certain Goudas (named) of Uyyanapalli, together with all the Brahmanas of Kesavapura or Nagar and other Goudas (named) of various villages, granted from each family the petty taxes, the tank and lands of Mattruhalli, to provide for the service of the god Anilesvara of Haradanahalli. The concluding lines of the epigraph tell us that agreeing among themselves, and of their own accord, in the presence of the officer Siviyanna, they granted them, with presentation of a coin and water to the god Anilesvara (E.C., IV, Ch,113). According to an effaced inscription dated about A.D. 1372, all the Brahmanas of a certain agrahara conferring among themselves made (an agreement) regarding a loan of 150 gadyana to be given to their ryots from the treasury of the god Ramanatha (E.C., IV, Gu, 33b).

The Panchalas and the Settis too could express their devotion to the local gods by jointly giving gifts of land. All the Panchalas of the Yenne-Nad in A.D. 1398, in order to provide for the necessaries of worship and decoration for the god Anilesvara, announced an offering at the rate of one hana in the several villages. The Raya Pettis of the customs dues, by both roads, granted 11 Varaha, 18 hana realized from the old godage, included in the customs dues paid by the oil mongers as oil mill tax to provide for the perpetual lamp of the god Channakesava of Anekanakere. The epigraph, however, contains the information that it was granted by order of Lakkanna Odeyar in A.D.1399 (E.C., V, I, Cn,175). In A.D.1475 certain Goudas (named) bought land (specified as forty-five gadyana) from Kanchi Sambhu Deva’s son Govinda Deva, for the god Kesava of Kasaraguppe in Ede-nad in Chandragutti (E.C., VII,Sb,527).

The great minister Gaureya Damayaka and Settis and others (not named), granted specified lands in Bhagirathapura for the offerings of the god Varadaraja (E.C. XI, Ht, 128). Certain Settis (named) together with “the existing Brahmanas” (named) of the agrahara Vishnusamudra also called Kereyasathe, caused a bhogamahatapa to be erected in front of the temple of the god Janardhana, and granted it to all the wet land under the Chamanahalli pond, “except what had previously been granted, - and of the land under the water course from the eastern sluice, one half to the temple and one fourth to the Brahmanas.

From an effaced inscription dated A.D. 1533 we learn that the temple of the god Chandramulesvara having built on the bank of the tank formed in the Arkavati river, and “having brought a Kasi Linga(or Linga from Benares) set up the god Chandramulesvara, Nandikesvara and Vighnesvara and on making a petition to the Brahmanas, many learned Brahmanas of various gotra, surta, and names, at the auspicious time of consecration, granted specified land for the offerings of the god, together with land for an enclosure to the temple, house for the priest, and a street with the land adjoining it (E.C., IX, NI, 31).

In A.D. 1534 the temple of the god Tirumala of Chakkere in the Kudal of Sirigirinatha Odeyar gave up the house she was in, together with wells and fruit trees for the nineteen Brahmanas for whom the nada people had provided in the cchhatra, ” the Brahman, who attends to them, and two women to clean up, for these thirteen persons, who ever is the manager of the Brahman cchhatra will collect from the nada people the amount specified and provide the bhatta (or rice) required for the whole thirty -two persons.” The inscription does not, however, enlighten us on the question whether the nada people themselves authorized the collection of the specified fee (E.C., VIII, TI, 33).

As regards the orthodoxy of high officials, who were not of the priestly class, we may cite the evidence from an inscription dated A.D. 1629, which speaks of Immadi Tammaya Gouda, who was the grandson of Sugatur Tammaya Gouda of the
fourth gotra. We are told that he and his wife, and certain Goudas had the agnisthoma (sacrifice) performed by Krishna Somayaji (E.C., X, Mb,62). According to an inscription dated A.D. 1358 he performed various works of merit, e.g.; getting tanks and channels dug, planting areca-gardens, constructing golden palanquins, chamaras, and umbrellas for gods; and in addition to these he made sluices to the tanks he had constructed, planted lines of trees on the four sides, and performed the ceremony of upanayanam to the pipal trees planted at the four corners (E.C., III, MI, 22). Thus, by making endowments to the gods, the Vijayanagara kings, nobles, people and merchants were always supporting religious activities without any discrimination and expecting anything from the society. It shows their great charity and generosity, which should be model to this warring world.

References & Abbreviations
3. E.C. – Epigraphia Carnatica Volumes
5. E.I.- Epigraphia Indica Volumes