

## DEVADAYA GRANTS DURING VIJAYANAGARA PERIOD

**Bi Bi Ameena**

Research Scholar,

Department of Studies and Research in History, Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru

**C Ramegowda**

Chairman, Associate Professor,

Department of Studies and Research in History, Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru

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### INTRODUCTION

An attempt is made in this research article to explain about Devaraya Grants during Vijayanagara Period. Devadaya land tenure or the lands granted to temples. During the period under review, most of lands of which grants have survived were endowed to temples. Most of the donations were made by kings, queens, or their officials or by private persons or by village communities.

As in the case of Brahmadaaya lands, here also we notice the fact that the main purpose of granting lands to temples was to acquire religious merit. Though this was the common purpose, we get references to many interesting purposes for which lands were granted to temples.

Kings usually granted lands to temples with a view to 'secure a strong empire'<sup>1</sup> or kings' birthday presents to temples in lands and villages with an expectation that their government might continue as long as sun and moon.<sup>2</sup> To record their visits to temples, they often granted lands and villages.<sup>3</sup> People donated lands to temples to secure the four objects of human desire, namely Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, or in order that merit and prosperity might accrue to the donors' relatives.<sup>4</sup> But, however, temples received lands for specific services to be conducted in temples. Besides, usual services to the deities, we get interesting references to services that were conducted in temples. Among them mention may be made of the following: (a) for those who played tambourine,<sup>5</sup> Nagaswaras and drums,<sup>6</sup> (b) for dancing girls in temples,<sup>7</sup> (c) for continual recitation of the Vedas, Puranas and Shastras in temples,<sup>8</sup> (d) for conducting the car-festival of the gods of the temples,<sup>9</sup> (e) for white-washing and sweeping,<sup>10</sup> (f) for the management of the land of the temples. The manager of the temple was known as Sthanika.<sup>11</sup>

From the above we can conclude that services in temples for which lands and villages were granted by the donees in this period, took several forms. These services may be classified into two: (a) occasional and (b) continual. Under occasional services come, services such as conducting car-festival, white washing, or sweeping and repair etc. Management of temple lands, reciting Vedas, Shastras, Puranas in temples, playing musical instruments, drums etc. come under continual services.

On holidays like Shivarathri or auspicious days like the Sun's Eclipse lands were granted to temples as it was considered to be an act of merit.<sup>12</sup> With pouring of water and a coin very commonly, lands were granted to temples.<sup>13</sup> However, the same practice was followed in the case of all the land-grants. The composers and engravers of land grant of temples often received lands from the donors.<sup>14</sup>

Besides the gifts and endowments received 'from kings and private persons, the temples of Karnataka acquired property in various other ways. Many people who had so sons bequeathed their property to the temple.<sup>15</sup> Besides, temples were acting as land mortgage banks. Many inscriptions substantiate this point. Whenever cultivators fell short of money to carry out agricultural operations, they used to

borrow money from the temple treasury.<sup>16</sup> When the time of the mortgage was expired, the temple fortified the lands to the treasury. Thus an inscription records that some persons (named) borrowed 22½ varahas from the temple treasury, through Appaji Senabova of Koppa. They pledged an areca garden (specified). But the inscription further records the time expressed in these agreements have expired, Appaji Senabova assigned the lands as endowments to the temple.<sup>17</sup> The record of such agreements was known as Bhogyadiyapatra or “Deed of Mortgage”.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes parents pledged their lands to temples in order to meet the expenses of the marriage of their children and for other purposes.<sup>19</sup> Whenever lands were granted to temples the grantee had to provide details regarding how he acquired such lands. For example, one Pandya Nayaka set up a God and granted the following lands to provide the offerings: the details of the property of Svastivivara, runs thus:-

(a) Manjavalligalli Hostage Navu-Kadidu madisida bhumi Bijavari Kha 6 (b) Bharadvaja gotrade etc .... Narasamangala Kayyiyari Kryakke Kond-bhumi.... kraya gadyana 42 varaha: (c) Bommarasa Heggade Kyi (Yalli) Krayakke konda gadde.<sup>20</sup>

The village assemblies also created Devadaya land tenures during the Vijayanagara period. A few examples may be given:

Chakkare village was situated in Barakura-rajya. It has an Uru (assembly). In A.D. 1364 the thirty families of the village Chakkare and other made a gift of 12 honnus and plots of dry and wet-fields (specified) for the service of the God Kotisvara.<sup>21</sup>

Kundapura, situated in Barakura rajya had an assembly. In A.D. 1425, the inhabitants of Kundapura or Gramajagattu assembled at the instance of the officer (governor), Narasimhadeva Odeya, and restored the land, once granted by Devanna Senabova of Kudekur for the service of the God Kundesvara.<sup>22</sup>

In A.D. 1429, the village Gajanur was gifted with all the rights by the Gaudas of the village Honganniyahalli for the service of food offerings and perpetual lamp for the God Divyalingesvara of the village Haradanahalli in Yennenad. The expression used in the inscription is Halligramada Samasta Gavudugalu.<sup>23</sup>

An epigraph records the grant of a plot of land for the services of the God by Narapagavuda of Avati for the merit of his father in the reign of Devaraya, king of Vijayanagara. The gift was made with the consent of the inhabitants of the village Kakati (Prajegala Anumatiyinda).<sup>24</sup>

The Maddur assembly appears to have continued to function under the Vijayanagara rulers as before. The Mahajanas and Gauda Prajegal of Maddur granted some land and tax collections of the village Maddur for the services of feeding pilgrims, recitation of Vedas, etc., in the temple of Desinatha.<sup>25</sup>

Again in A.D. 1506, the Gauda Prajegal of Chikkahalli made a grant of land for the God Mallikarjuna of their village.<sup>26</sup>

An epigraph from Kadur Taluk records that in A.D. 1540, the subjects and farmers made a grant to the God Virabhadra of Kadur.<sup>27</sup>

Thus these temples had acquired, (at least some of them, though not all) a huge landed property. They may be compared with big land-lords. As the owner of a vast agricultural lands, temple was also a large employer. Thus for instance, an inscription from Kolar District, informs us that a particular temple had employed fifty two families for service in it and that it remunerated them by grants of land.<sup>28</sup>

An landlords, temples leased out lands to tenants on various conditions. Temple lands were managed by Sthanikas. They gave saguvaliya vole or cultivation roll to the men who under took cultivation of

the temple lands, with a description of quality, measurement and the share of the produce to be given by the tenants. According to the rule for cultivation of rice-fields to the temple, lands under tanks were granted on contract for cultivation on half-share. When the water in the tank failed and crop was lost, the temple and tenants agreed to share equally the loss. "If the water in the tank is insufficient, and it has to be lifted, we (temple authorities) will reduce the contract in the same proportion as those in the neighbourhood". For sugarcane, ginger and turmeric the rates were mentioned.<sup>29</sup> This type of agreement between the landlords and tenants was known as *Vara*<sup>30</sup> or the crop-sharing system which continued throughout the period. Buchanan at the end of A.D. 1800 noticed this system in different parts of Karnataka. This system was the best mode of assessment in a country where the quantity of rain was uncertain. If the rains did not come, the tenant could not pay his rent and vice-versa.<sup>31</sup> Temples received shares from tenants both in cash and in kind every year.<sup>32</sup>

Besides the rent, for the occupation of temple lands, the tenant had to pay certain dues. Such dues in Karnataka during the Vijayanagara period were collectively known as *Dhanyadaya*. *Dhanyadaya* consisted of eleven dues and they were: (1) Tirumala-Kanike, (2) Haludu, (3) Hostu, (4) Gramavechcha, (5) Bitti, (6) Birada, (7) Sollage, (8) Avudu, (9) Bedige, (10) Bijavari, (11) Solage.<sup>33</sup> We can assume that roughly the same number of dues must have been collected by temples in other parts of Karnataka also.

The attention of temples was not merely confined to the collection of rent and dues, they also paid attention to the maintenance of irrigation works. According to an inscription dated A.D.1442 the *Sthanikas* or managers of a certain temples granted lands to a certain person in connection with a virgin tank.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes agreements concerning who should maintain irrigation works were recorded between temples and tenants. But before such agreements were reached, it was essential, during the Vijayanagara period to take the consent of the King.<sup>35</sup>

Temples were, in one way, instrumental in extending agriculture. Because, often kings by restoring the ruined villages, granted them to temples. It not only provided employment to many, but it also helped many tenants who got liberal leases from temples.<sup>36</sup> Thus in away, the restoration and subsequent donation of villages, which though considered to be an act of religious merit, acted as an economic improvement by adding more arable lands to the lands that had already been under cultivation.

The rulers of Vijayanagara were very careful to see that whether the income of lands was properly utilized by temple authorities for the purposes for which it had been granted. Thereby they used to control the temple administration concerning lands. Thus, for instance, when Devaraya II granted some lands, he asked one Ramanujayya to remain in the Matha, and be responsible for the distribution of food, the offering to the goddess, and payments to servants. If any funds left over, he should use them for white-washing, sweeping and keeping the place clean.<sup>37</sup>

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