

# Some Religious Endowments of the Vijayanagara Rulers

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**ABSTRACT:** The people and kings of Vijayanagara gave too much prominence to the minutest details of public or private conduct is 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.

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## Religious Endowments and Charitable Activities.

Nuniz relates to us that: "The king of Bisnaga 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 bhaktya sambhavayantam rahasyenam dharmapadopadesena pratyah manugrihanamu*" (Somanatha, 59).

Vira Narasimha was likewise devoted to the same *raja-guru* and he referred as *Punyakirtanena vasudhadhipena hamseneva kamalakaraha pratyahasu upasanya (manah)*" Somanatha, 64).

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

"*Tena Krishna mahipalena trisanghya kuladevatayamiva mukutatatamatikusumasekharikriyamana nakhamayusajate mahanubhave... Vyasayogiti...* " (Somanatha, 67-68).

An inscription dated A.D. 1463 of the times of Immadi 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 Brahmans who had performed the religious baths, the great king (with titles) named Immadi 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 Chandramauli 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.Saletore, this inscription evidently is to be interpreted in the sense that the king gave the villages, which were in the Tuluva-*rajya*, according to the usual custom in the temple of Virupaksha at Hampi (Saletore, 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 *Dvapara-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 Kshiranadi 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 *Dvapara-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 Brahmans 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 Gutti Tirumala Rajayya's seal bearers (*Mudremanushyaru*) in front of Kenchappa Nayaka, granted the village for the services and festivals (specified) of the god, in order that merit might accrue to Gutti 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 Tungabhadra 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 Brahmans 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 (sthanikaru)* 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 Tudaghatta-Sime. The price at which the land was sold for 50 *honnu* (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 (*muligar*) 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 Brahmans, the *stanikas* and the Jainas. In A.D. 1368 certain *Goudas* (named) of Uyyanapalli, together with all the Brahmans of Kesavapura or *Nagara* and other *Goudas* (named) of various villages, granted from each family the petty taxes, the tank and lands of Matruhalli, 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 Siriyanna, 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 Brahmans 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 necessities 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 *hanas* 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 Aneganakere. 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 *Gaudas* (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 *Dannayaka* with all the *Gaudas*, *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 Brahmans" (named) of the *agrahara* Vishnusamudra also called Kereyanthe, caused a *bhogamahtapa* to be erected in front of the temple of the god Janardhana, and granted to it 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 Brahmans.

From an effaced inscription dated A.D. 1533 we learn that the temple of the god Chandramaulesvara having built on the bank of the tank formed in the Arkkavati river, and "having brought a Kasi Linga (or *Linga* from Benares) set up the god Chandramaulesvara, Nandikesvara and Vighnesvara and on making a petition to the Brahmans, many learned Brahmans of various *gotra*, *surtas*, 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 Kudalur-*sthala*, also called Rajaraja-Chola-Chaturvedi *mangalam* in *Kelale-nad*, by order of the royal *treasurer (raya-bhandarada)* Timmappayya, was given to the Establisher of the path of the Vedas, the Chakrakolu Vijaya Chudamani Nalluru Timmaraya-Chakravarti-ayya's beloved disciple, the son of Ramayya and Ramanujamma, Narayanayya. And all the Hebbaruva Brahmans of Kudalur and Malalur, with the consent of all the farmers and subjects of these villages, gave to the temple priest (*sthanika*), Narayanayya, land (specified) for the service of the god Tirumala together with certain taxes (E.C., IX, Cp, 155).

In another effaced record dated about A.D. 1430 we are told that Srigririnatha Odeyar gave munificent donations for a new *chhatra* or rest-house of the god Srigriri Mallikarjuna. Sangama Devi (wife of Srigriri Odeyar?) gave up the house she was in, together with wells and fruit trees for the nineteen Brahmans for whom the *nada* people had provided in the *chhatra*, "the Brahman, who attends to them, and two women to clean up, for these thirteen persons, whoever is the manager of the Brahman *chhatra* 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 Gauda 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

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