



## AGRAHARAS AND THEIR FORMATION DURING VIJAYANAGARA PERIOD

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An attempt is made in this research article to explain about Agraharas and their formation during Vijayanagara Period. The Agrahara was a village assigned to learn Brahmans for their sustenance. It existed in medieval Karnataka, Tamilnad and Andhradesa as in other parts of the country. The Brahman shareholders were known as the Mahajanas. The Mahajana assembly managed the affairs of the Agrahara. In the Vijayanagara times also, we have abundant evidence of their existence and corporate activity. Their various donations to the temples and other items of public welfare are clear evidence on the point. They looked after the general management and other municipal duties. The Agraharas served the purpose of small University centres managed by the Mahajanas. The Mahajanas were men of learning. The Agraharas were free from the encroachment of the soldiers and the tax collectors. They were supported by the kings, queens, nobles and by the rich and the poor. It has been rightly said, “the services rendered by these institutions in historical times are really marvelous and eminent.” The Agrahara was an autonomous institution in Vijayanagara times.

Agraharas were formed in various ways in the Vijayanagara period. The king, or with his consent his officers created them. Either the done was a single person, who, in his turn distributed shares to other persons, or the donor himself distributed the land among different shareholders. A few examples of the formation of such Agraharas are given below:

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- 1) In 1339<sup>1</sup> C.E, Virammaji Hiriya Pemmaya Nayaka granted to Ranganatha-bhatta's son Bhavabhuti, Jala in Elahakkanad as an Agrahara free of all imposts. In this instance, the donee was a single person.
- 2) There were Agraharas in Yedenad. An inscription of 1340<sup>2</sup> C.E. at Hejje, Sorab Taluk, records the gift of the village Heddase (Hejje in Sorab Taluk) by Prince Marapa, younger brother of Harihara I. It describes the circumstances that led to the establishment of the Agrahara. The king constructed a tank at the sacred spot Heddase and the river Varada, and made up his mind to create an Agrahara nearby. The donees, well versed in all the Vedas, came from Andhradesa, and the Agrahara was named Sangamapura. The names of the donees and the distribution of Vitis are given. The charter was got prepared in the presence of the principal chiefs of the province, and the leading men of the two Agraharas. Their names are given. "The Mahajanas of the two great Agraharas Elase and Kuppagadde in Edenad..... including the headmen (named), and the mahaprabhus among whom were the heads of villages (named), all these having assembled gave away the village Heddase in order that it might come under their guardianship though it had been previously granted by king Marapa." Here the donor himself distributed the land among different shareholders. Another inscription of 1341<sup>3</sup> C.E from the village Banavasi in Sirsi Taluk also refers to the joint activity of the mahajanas of these two Agraharas. When Mahamandalesvara Vira Bukkaraya was reigning in Hastinavatipura (Anegondi), and Madhavanka was ruling Banavase 12000, his servant Aubhalanatha (i.e., Ahobalanatha) sent word to the Gaudaprajagal in the 18 Kampanas of Gutti and held a meeting at Banavase. The meeting was attended by the chief citizens of Yedenad comprising the mahajanas of the Agraharas of Yelase and Kuppagadde, Tammagauda of Sorab, the chief citizens (names given) of villages of Tavanidhi, Kesalur, Hechchita in Kondavatinad, Baleyahalli, Kuppatur in Nagarakhand and Hurule. The meeting was called for conducting the services, personal decorations and festivals of the God in the temple forever, applied for help to the gaudapraja (village headmen) of 18 Kampanas (divisions) of Gutti.
- 3) In 1342<sup>4</sup> C.E Deva Raya II granted the village Kannenahalli near Devabetta situated to the south of Hagaharya in Kagaharya-Sthala of the Rayadurga kingdom, giving it another name Pratapadevarajendra-pura, to Lakshmidhararya, the knower of the purport of the Veda, Vedanta and all sciences, proficient in grammar, logic and

philosophy etc. The done formed the village into 160 vittis or srshares, retained 30 for himself and bestowed the remaining on learned Brahmins. This is an instance of a single person being the done, who, in his turn distributed shares to other persons.

- 4) In 1343<sup>5</sup> C.E, Madarasa of Mangaluru, under the orders of the King Vira-Bukkanna Vodeyar, made gift of the village Pudu-grama to certain Brahmins free of all taxes. Here the donor himself distributed the shares.
- 5) In another instance, the donees were Kasmir Brahmins. The Shikaripur inscription relates how in 1344<sup>6</sup> C.E Bukka's minister Madhava established an Agrahara. He petitioned the king, saying, "From the funds of my own property I will carry out your order; give me leave." After obtaining his permission, he purchased at the price of the day, Muchchundi, Palasapalli and Tevatta, situated in Nagarakhand and gave them the name of Vidyasvarapura. He summoned an assembly of learned Kasmir Brahmins, formed eighty shares, and granted them. We have also the sale deed of the villages above purchased in another inscription.
- 6) An inscription of 1345<sup>7</sup> C.E from Bachahalli in Krishnarajpet taluk records, that Harihara II made a grant with all the rights of possession, Bachayahalli village, with its 13 hamlets (named) belonging to the Kabahu district in the Hosana country, and of the village Dandematigatta with its 3 hamlets (named), and forming them into an Agrahara under the name of Immadi-Bukka-rajapura and dividing it into 60 Vittis bestowed the latter on various Brahmins.
- 7) The Satyamangalam plates of Deva Raya II records that in 1446<sup>8</sup> C.E, he bestowed on eight Brahmins the Agrahara of Chiteyatpura, which he named Deva Rayapura after himself.
- 8) In 1447<sup>9</sup> C.E, king Virupaksha made over the grant of Prasanna Channakesavapura to Krishna Bhatta, who distributed the forty shares of that Agrahara to the mahajanas. In this instance, the grant was made to a single person who distributed shares to others.
- 9) In 1448<sup>10</sup> C.E, the royal treasurer Devappa Nayaka's son Balanatha granted Narasambu Agrahara to Kaya Nanjinatha Dikshita's son Narasimha Dikshita. Here the done was a single person.
- 10) An epigraph of 1549<sup>11</sup> C.E, from Hampedevanahalli, Hospet Taluk, records the gift of the village, Hampedevanahalli, surnamed Krishnarayapura to various Brahmins. Here the king Krishnadeva Raya himself distributed the vritti after establishing the Agrahara.

- 11) According to an inscription of 1550<sup>12</sup> C.E from Dodda-Jataka in Nagamangala Taluk, Krishnadeva Raya granted the village Hiri-Jattiga, with its four hamlets surnamed Chinnadevipura to Srinivasadhvari. He having set apart 10 vrittis for himself, bestowed the remaining 20 vrittis on worthy Brahmans.
- 12) In 1551<sup>13</sup> C.E, Krishnadeva Raya, on the application of the minister Tippasoma granted to Visvesvara the village named Bhandaripalli.
- 13) In 1552<sup>14</sup> C.E, Krishnadeva Raya granted three villages, namely, Chikkabbehalli together with its three hamlets situated in the Nagamangala kingdom, Halayumarahosahalli situated in the Chennapattana kingdom and Vengenahalli in the Billagondanahalli kingdom, to the virtuous ascetic, vyasatirtha.
- 14) In 1553<sup>15</sup> C.E, minister Saluva-Govinda Raja made a grant of Madhavapura in the Umattur-Sime as an Agrahara to Nanjayarasu.
- 15) In 1554<sup>16</sup> C.E, Achyuta Raya granted to Venkatesvara-Varayajva, in the Hosakota-Sime, Sambapura as an Agrahara, giving it the new name Achutamaharayambudhi. Accepting the proprietorship of the agrahara, he formed it into 24 shares which he bestowed upon the mahajanas.

We come across the creation of agrahara “for the merit of the monarch.” A few examples may be given of such agraharas.

- 1) Narayana-Dev-Odeyar, son of Mahamandalesvara Mallappodeyar, in 1355<sup>17</sup> C.E, for the long life, health and wealth of his father (that is, uncle) Harihara-Maharaya, established an agrahara named Pratapa-Hariharapura at the village of Kolatur belonging to Channapattana, and dividing it into 35 shares, bestowed them upon the Brahmans.
- 2) In 1456<sup>18</sup> C.E, the mahamandalesvara Gode-Raya made, to the sons of Timmarasa, the temple priest and others (named), a grant of the Gangadihalli village in Kukkalnadu belonging to his Nayakship. He gave it another name Timmannarajapura, as an agrahara in order that merit might be to Immadi Narasinga-Raya-Maharaya.
- 3) According to a Magadi Taluk inscription in 1557<sup>19</sup> C.E, Saluva-Timmarasaya, granted for the merit of Krishnadeva Raya, Nagisetthalli to his aradhya Tataya’s wife Nalladayamma in sole possession, as an agrahara.
- 4) An epigraph from T.Narasipur Taluk records that in 1558<sup>20</sup> C.E, minister Saluva-Govinda-Raja, in order that merit might accrue to Krishna-Raya, named the village of Kalauru as Krishnapura, divided it into 37 shares, and presented them to Brahmans.

An inscription of 1359<sup>21</sup> C.E from Jodi-Lakkondanahalli records that the gauda-prajegal of Hullur were associated with the establishment of an agrahara Lakkagondanahalli alias Ramachandra-samudra. In 1460<sup>22</sup> C.E, all the farmers and subjects of the Araga Eighteen Kampana and those of the three cities agreeing among themselves established the agrahara Nagasamundra.

We have examples of nadu assembly creating agraharas to which reference will be made in a subsequent chapter dealing with the nadu assembly.

There is also an instance of the formation of an agrahara by dancing girls. An inscription of 1561<sup>23</sup> C.E from Kunigal relates, that Sringaramma of the Elahankanad Prabhu Immadi Hiri Kempaya Gauda's state dancing-saloon (Pattada-nataka-sale) founded Sringarasagara agrahara. Pattada-nataka-sale refers to the dancing hall.

Sometimes a village appears to have been founded by the mahajanans by reclaiming the forests. For example, an inscription at Rajabavanahalli Taluk, Bellary District records that in 1462<sup>24</sup> C.E, the mahajanans headed by Hariyanna were granted the village of Hariyasamudra for having founded it by reclaiming the forests, and constructed a tank. The land, under the tank was made free from certain taxes. In another instance, the Brahmans agreed to spend money to restore a dam which had been breached, and consequently were granted an agrahara. In 1463<sup>25</sup> C.E, the Arali dam breached. Several Brahmans agreed to expend money and restore the dam so as to form a tank and build there a village named Muluvayi-Nachipura. They were granted the tract of land in which they might cut down the jungle and form fields. It was divided into four parts. One part was given to the temple, and the remaining three parts were to form an agrahara. In this case the temple priests of Muluvayi Nachidevi agreeing among them made the grant. Obviously the land belonged to the temple priests. Muluvayi Chavadi consisted of eleven villages.

Thus during the Vijayanagara period not only were new agraharas established, but also many old ones which had gone to ruin were revived. An inscription of 1364 C.E to which reference was made earlier, gives the circumstances leading to the establishment of the agrahara of Heddase (Hejje in Sorab taluk) by Prince Marapa, younger brother of Harihara.

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