
CHAPTER FIVE: VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

The village administration was an interesting phenomenon in the administrative system of medieval Deccan. They were self-contained units with their own administrative set up managed by the local bodies which were formed by the representatives of various classes and communities.¹ In addition to their vocations, they looked after the political, social, religious and cultural affairs of the place. These bodies were known as Mahajanas, Nakharas, Settles and Settiguttas, Mummuridandas, Okkalus, Hittu and the like.

The institution of the village headman is an ancient one both in the south and in the north. He was the gramani of the Vedic times, the gramaswami of the Arthasastra of Kautilya, the gramakutaka of the Rashtrakutas, the grambhojaka or Urodeya of the later Chalukya period and gramakeya or mutada of the Tamil countries. In the Yadava period, he was designated as a gavunda. In the Kanarese record he is addressed both as gavunda and gauda.*

The gavunda was the village headman. He was the centre of the village administration. The office of the gavunda was bestowed either by the village, or the nadagavunda or the king's officer or the king himself upon a person who distinguished himself by rendering public service, particularly

* O.P. Verma - Yadavas and their Times.

in the village or villages over which he was appointed.* Further, it may be noted that these gavundas were men of distinguished qualities. Some villages had more than one gavunda. Sometimes these gavundas administered different parts of the village which understandably was large in its area. The modern term gauda and its equivalents Patel and Patil, are derived respectively from gramakuta and pattakila, early Sanskrit terms.²

As the chief executive, the gavunda shared all the responsibilities of the village assembly. But there were functions which were exclusively dealt with by him. He was the village ^amagistrate with powers to try petty criminal cases. The village militia was under his control. He organised the public works of the village by collecting funds from both the public and the government. The gavunda either individually or with other institutions helped the construction and maintenance of gateways, tanks, temples, guest-houses, aravattiges or drinking water-sheds.

Though the inscriptions are not very clear about the duties and responsibilities of the Gavunda, they indicate that his was a responsible office controlling all activities of the village. Security of the village was one of his important duties. In the event of cattle raids and border fights, he would send his men or himself proceed, to save the

* K. Basavaraja: History and Culture of Karnataka, p. 400

village property and prestige. His duties were also to see that the revenue due to the government was paid regularly and that grants made for the benefit of temples and other institutions continued without hindrance or interference. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to find him described as the father and mother of the village.³ The office of the Gavunda was hereditary and he was granted tax-free lands for his maintenance.⁴

Village headman of Yadava period was more a representative of the people than a servant or an agent of the central government. The truth of this observation will be realised when we see that a general of Singhana desired to gift away some land of a village had to first acquire it from the two Gavundas.⁵

The villages in the Yadava empire had at least one Gavunda. There are, however, records which speak of two, three and even twelve Gavundas. A Viragal record of the time of Singhana refers to a gift of land by 12 Gavundas⁶ of Bennevuru in memory of a certain hero. A record of the time of Ramachandra contains the names of Gavundas who made a gift of land to temple. In Dharwar record of Singhana, two Gavundas have been referred to as owners of a village, from whom Malli-sreshthi was required to purchase 180 nivartanas of land for making an agrahara grant. But among the donees,

three Gavundas have been mentioned. The large number of village headman may be perhaps due to the fact, as Altekar suggested, that some of these villages were big.

The village headman had no fixed remuneration but was paid for his services in many ways. He was usually given rent-free inam land, or Gavundagodage as in the Dharwar record of Singhana.⁷ Besides, he was given the privilege of enjoying the estate and income of the village donated by the people. A copper-plate grant of the reign of Mahadeva enumerates a number of privileges enjoyed by 32 Brahmanas. One of the privileges mentioned therein is Maulika,⁸ which means a traditional or customary tax. In a Kalachuri record these dues are mentioned as ^aMulika-arhanas⁹ perquisites of hereditary officers. According to Altekar,¹⁰ the headman of the village enjoyed the taxes in kind and received a share of the most of the articles produced or sold in the village. According to Basavaraja¹¹ the rent-free inam-land or Gavundagodage was the Gavunda's mainstay. His perquisites were a rent-free land, a house-site, free from sales and performance of rites like sacrifices, upanayanas and marriages and the fees paid on occasions of festivals. Voluntary contributions were made to the Gavunda for his services to his fellowmen.

Another office of equal importance in the village was that of Senabova. His duty was to keep the records. He would

also draft the texts of epigraphical records. There are many instances where Senabovas are the authors of epigraphs.¹²

Yet another office was that of the Rakshapala who was, as the very designation indicates, the Police officer in the village. His duty, obviously, was to maintain law and order in the area under his jurisdiction. An inscription from Nidugundi refers to one such officer of that place.¹³

The Village Councils: Mahajanas

The most important and popular local body was the assembly of the mahajanas of the Agrahara villages. Agrahara is a village given to the Brahmanas for their residence and all the householders of the Agrahara were the mahajanas. How the agrahara grant was made is described in the Behatti grant of Krishna.¹⁴ Chavundaraja, who was Krishna's viceroy of the southern kingdom, once happened to pass through the village of Kukkanuru which was located in the Belavola district. Being greatly impressed by the 1000 Brahmana dwellers of the village, who were thoroughly versed in all the fourteen sciences, Chavundaraja intended to present the village to them. He went to the king and having requested him, received the sanction. Such agrahara villages were well marked out in their boundaries, and were made free from all taxes payable to the king. The endowments also carried an assurance

that such Brahmana settlements would not be pointed at with the finger (of confiscation) by the king or his servants. Because of their high scholarship and spiritual attainments, these Brahmanas were regarded great and hence the term mahajana. Scores of epigraphic records from Maharashtra and Karnataka regions point out to the existence of several bodies of mahajanas. In the Tamil countries also the villages had a local assembly, called the sabha or mahasabha, though it differed from their Karnataka counterparts in the matter of their functions and constitution.

Local bodies played an important role in the village life. Most important of such bodies in the Deccan in the Yadava period was that of the Mahajanas. Just as the number of the villages included in a division was indicated by its very name, the number of Mahajanas in a particular place was also specified, such as the four hundred Mahajanas of Haveri, two hundred mahajanas of Mosalikal and the like. It follows, therefore, that the number of these persons varied according to the size of the village. For instance, flourishing towns like Lokkigundi had a thousand mahajanas and some smaller places had even as few as only eighteen. Further, records indicate that different localities in a particular place were represented by smaller bodies, which together, made one representative body for the entire place. For instance, there

were two hundred and fifty mahajanas at Narugunda (Nargund in Ron taluk of Dharwar district) of whom probably 55 represented Hemangeri, a locality in that town.¹⁵

An inscription from Bijapur district records a grant of 500 Mattaras of land for the village school given by the 500 mahajanas of Perur.¹⁶ The land is described as belonging to the 500 houses of Perur. It is clear in this instance that each mahajana represented a family in the village and that all the families were represented on the village council. Altekar on the contrary pointed out that the village mahajanas included practically all the heads of the village families and perhaps all the adult population as well.¹⁷

However, it does not appear from the Yadava records that the mahajanas comprised the entire adult population of the village, for there records which refer to only 12 mahajanas.¹⁸ It cannot be argued that these 12 mahajanas were the only adult population of the village families. The mahajanas who are mentioned as a body usually represented the Brahmanical section of the village population. The strength of this body never exceeded a thousand.

The mahajanas functioned as a body in the Agrahara villages. They were learned and proficient in all arts and sciences. Numerous epigraphical records speak highly of the

ability and character of these men. They formed the Sabha or the assembly and they used to assemble in the local temples to discuss matters concerning the village. A Yadava inscription calls such a Sabha as a dwelling place of the goddess of learning, Sarasvati.¹⁹

The meetings of the mahajanas are referred to in inscriptions as Sabhamantapadolu mahasabheyagi neredirdu, mahanadagi neredu, Varabyisanigeyagi Kullindu, ekastharagi and so on.

The mahajanas had powers to make grants. The mahajanas of Haveri, for example, granted land to a certain Chaudisetti who was their favourite and therefore, described as their 'son' (maga).²⁰ Individuals desirous of making grants had to obtain their consent. Rannugideva constructed a temple in honour of his father and made a grant of certain lands with the consent of the mahajanas and officers.²¹ In certain cases, when the land was to be granted by the donor, the price of that land was fixed by the Sabha. Saluva Tikkma, for instance, purchased the land at the rates fixed by the Sabha.²² The mahajanas also acted as the custodians of the grants made by the other. Numerous inscriptions recording such grants enjoin that the mahajanas and other people of the place should protect them. The mahajanas had authority to appoint village officers also. Thus the mahajanas of Haveri appointed Lakkisetti as the

Heggade of Kabbur.²³ They enjoyed judicial powers also and used to sit on trials and give judgements.

The assembly of the mahajanas was entrusted with the task of the administration of religious and charitable endowments. Invariably the gifts to the temples were given either to the mahajanas or to other individuals in the presence of the assembly of the mahajanas. In any case they acted as the trustees of the temples. In 1238 A.D. Singhana's subordinate Savanta Kalideva made a gift to the temple of Savanteshvara in memory of his father and entrusted it to the 1000 mahajanas of the famous Tilivalli Agrahara. Similarly another (Tilivalli) inscription mentions a grant made to a temple which was entrusted to the mahajanas of Koravura. In some other cases the grants used to be made in the presence of the mahajanas. Siriyanna of Hagartage made a grant to the god Tripurantaka in the presence of the 500 mahajanas of Nagartage. Similarly a gift to the god Svayambhu Sivalinga was handed over to the Acharya of the temple in the presence of the mahajanas of Vijayapura.

The mahajanas were also entrusted with other types of grants. The 12 mahajanas of Byammayahalli Agrahara received 18 Gadyanas of money and one matter of land for the construction of a watershed in a market place.

The mahajanas also took interest in irrigation works and construction of tanks. In 1247 A.D. the mahajanas of Nirili Agrahara were entrusted with the gift of a tank by Daseya Nayaka. The mahajanas also helped in deciding disputes arising out of the monetary transaction in the village. An inscription from Shimoga states that there arose a dispute between two individuals about the purchase of a land whether the money was paid or not. This dispute was settled in the presence of the mahajanas and a commission of royal officers.²⁴ Thus, the assembly of the mahajanas helped to foster a sense of unity among the people and helped the Agrahara to become centres of social and religious activities.

Nakharas formed another prominent local body in the village. As traders, they played an important role in the economic life of the country and as an organised body, they had much influence in the society. They used to set apart a good portion of their profits for religious and charitable purposes. The Nakharas of Mudgal, for example, imposed on themselves regular voluntary contributions to the god, on occasions like marriage and other social functions.²⁵ Like Nakharas, the settis, settiguttas and Mummuridandas were some of the other local bodies.

Okkalu, with whom also, like mahajanas, different numerical figures are associated, were a body of agriculturists.

We get references to bodies such as Aivatt-Okkalu²⁶ and Aruvatt-Okkalu²⁷ (i.e., fifty and sixty Okkalu). They formed a part of the village assembly.

Urodeyas

Another body that functioned simultaneously with the mahajanas was that of Urodeya. T.V. Mahalingam,²⁸ suggests that Urodeya was the leader of the mahajanas. According to Nilakanth Sastri,²⁹ Urodeya was the chief of the village officials. P.B. Desai³⁰ suggested that the elected or nominated head of the mahajans was called Urodeya. According to him Urodeya was the local administrative head of the non-agrahara villages also. Some times there are more than one Urodeyas which may be due to the large extent of the village which necessitated it. The appointment of more than one functionary was to cope with the greater amount of work.

The Urodeya was allotted 200 Mattaras of land and three house sites each measuring eight cubits broad and twentyfive cubits long. Besides, he was to receive as a permanent contribution certain payments including among others, one gadyana for a vedic sacrifice, 2 panas for a marriage, 1 pana for an upanayana and 1 gadyana for dipali.³¹

Hittukaras

A number of Yadava records refer to a body of persons

known as entu-hittus³² or eight hittus. Fleet³³ suggested that entu-hittu might mean eight guilds. In an inscription in the temple of Somesvara in Sonnahalli (Kadur district) dated Saka 1243, a goldsmith named Maroja gave a gift of land to the temple of Brahmesvara out of the land which belonged to his akkasaleya hittu,³⁴ which may mean 'out of the inam lands of a goldsmith'. Hittu may, therefore, appear as a profession and the entu-hittu may mean the representatives of eight professions. In some inscriptions the number of hittus is stated to be twelve.³⁵ What these professions were, is not indicated in the records. It is likely that in course of time, the number became purely conventional.

An inscription of Yadava Ramachandra records a gift of land to the chief priest of the temple of Mallikarjunadeva in the presence of eight hittus among others.³⁶ Another record of the same king states the grant of some other plots of land by the eight hittus and the people of the village with village headman at their head.³⁷ Earlier, a record of Bhillama-V mentions entu-hittus among others as donors for the benefit of god Somanatha.³⁸

It would appear then that the persons following different professions in the village also joined other sections of the village population in the matter of donating lands, gardens, money etc. to the village temples. We have very little

information about the working of this body. It has been suggested that hittu is an executive of a village assembly attached to the village headman.³⁹

Eighteen Samayas

Another village body in Yadava record was eighteen samayas.⁴⁰ It has been suggested that the Samayas stand for Prakritis. The eighteen Prakritis have been differently interpreted as people of offices. In the Damodarpur inscription,⁴¹ the word Prakriti has been used in the sense of people. However, in the Kanarese records, we find mention of eighteen castes instead of the entire people for whom the term praja has been distinctly used. It is difficult to state the names of these castes as the records are silent about it.

Alberuni⁴² refers to sixteen castes, the four well-known ones, five semi-untouchables and seven untouchables.

Hirelingadahalli inscription⁴³ refers to Malleya-nayaka of Aluru as the servant of eighteen samayas, who died fighting while capturing the fort of Tillivalli, in the presence of the great assembly of Nagara-Khanda. It was the duty of the Samayas to protect the gifts made in the village for the worship and offerings in the temples.⁴⁴

In addition to these specific bodies, there were many

others whose exact nature, however, is not clear. Some such are: Aidu huri, Ugura-munnurvaru, Doni-sasirvaru, Ubhayanadesi, Kuliya-ainurvaru, Samaya-sasirvaru and the like. These bodies functioned as village assembly, which was a strong and influential institution in the village. Its members were respected by the rulers and were worshipped by the subjects. Mayideva, the minister of Bhillama, for example, consulted such bodies before instituting the dharma-santhe at Bevinur.⁴⁵

Thus the village assemblies, composed of people of diverse professions, acted as a whole in harmony, for the well being of the village, looking after its defence. Settling disputes, making provision for religious and cultural activities and thus promoting the material and spiritual welfare of the people. It is interesting to note that such assemblies functioned even upto modern times, attracting the attention of the early British officers like Elphinstone who called them 'the little republic'.⁴⁶

Village Economy

The main source of income to the state was the land revenue. The land tax was fixed after a careful study and survey of land. Our sources neither give any reference to the rate of the land tax nor to the way it was paid. Probably, it was paid mostly in kind and partly in cash and depended upon

the nature and produce of the land.

There were special land tenures such as Sarvamanya, Ardhamanya, Namasya and Umbali. According to Altekar, Sarvamanya consisted of lands allotted to the Brahmanas and temples and were free from all types of taxes due either to the central government or to the local authority.⁴⁷ Most of the agrahara villages came under this type of tenure. Saluva Tikkama established a temple at Harihara and made it Sarvamanya. In the time of Krishna Sarvamanya grants were made to Kannareshvara temple in Chikkabidari. In the case of Ardhamanya grants exemption was given on the payment of the government taxes, but the local taxes including the dues of the inhabitants had to be paid. Namasya type of grants were generally made in favour of Brahmanas, partially free from taxes. Mallisetti granted a land as Namasya to the Brahmanas of various Gotras. Umbali was a grant in appreciation of heroic services. It was also a tax-free gift. In an inscription of the time of Krishna, Bommideva and Chattamadeva are said to have been given five mattars of land to Lakmagauda as a Umbali gift.

The local bodies levied and collected their own taxes for the welfare works of the towns and villages. Inscriptions provide interesting details regarding such taxes. An inscription of the time of Singhana from Raichur furnishes



the following details. It was stipulated that one Kani each from the seller and the buyer, was to be collected on all transactions of articles for the use of the local deities. Each goldsmith was to donate one Kani on every piece of gold or silver received for the preparation of ornaments. Collections of 50 betel leaves on every load, one santige of paddy from every shop, and one santige of oil from every oil mill, were to be made. When a marriage was celebrated in the family of local merchants one chaula was to be paid by the parties of the bride and the bridegroom. If the marriage was performed outside the town, one Haga was to be collected. Two Hagas were to be paid on various occasions such as attainment of puberty, birth of a son, initiation of a child, building of a new house and on certain festivals.*

Similarly, an inscription of the time of Ramachandra gives the details of the local taxes levied for the temple of Harihara.⁴⁸ The local bodies stipulated that one mana of rice had to be collected for every 50 bullock loads which moved in any direction; and one seer per shop in the village, for those articles exported or imported one solige per Hada, for one headload of betel leaves one hundred leaves, one solige of pepper cardamon and 50 areca nuts.

* Narasimha Murthy: The Sevunas of Devagiri, p. 164.

They also levied taxes on professions. Karuka was a tax on artisans and craftsmen.⁴⁹ Maulika was a customary or traditional tax. Other taxes collected for the maintenance of temples include sada, sarige, Ane and Gosane, the exact nature and significance of which are not known.⁵⁰

Administration of Justice

The administration of justice was carried on by the king and his ministers, in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Dharmasastras and the prevailing customs and traditions. Theoretically, the king was the fountainhead of justice and as such, the highest authority in administering it. But in practice, judicial powers were delegated to lower officers. The village assemblies also functioned as courts. Though non-official in character, they had the sanction of the government as well as of the society. Constituted as they were of various representative bodies, consisting of men of character, dignity and learning, their decisions naturally carried weight and were seldom challenged, since laws were part of Dharma, the judges were called the Dharmadhyakshas.

About the procedure in the trial of cases, not much material can be gleaned from our sources. The trials were held in the open. The disputing parties would present themselves before the judges. Generally, oral and documentary

evidences would play a vital part in deciding a case, sometimes divya issues. The Yadava record of 1241 A.D. reports one such case, where the parties were put to an ordeal and their truthfulness or otherwise was decided accordingly.⁵¹

When Mahamandalesvara Lakshmipaladeva was the governor of Nagarakhanda, a dispute arose between Kalagauda and Kereyamasetti of Elaballi regarding the ownership of land. The parties were brought before the authorities. Kereyamasetti swore that he had purchased lawfully the vritti in dispute, by paying money to Kalagauda's great-grandmother Jakkigaudi and Galeyachatteya. Kalagauda denied it. The case was then referred to the body consisting of the Mahajanas of Bandanike, Panchmathas, Mahajanas of Tanagunduru, Nalprabhu Bommisetti Savanta Muddana, Bammagauda and Muchagauda of Seleyahalli, Sovagauda of Yamanuru, Kitsetti of Belligave and the Nakharas and Mummuridandas. All these are called the dharmadhyakshas. The ordeal, probably of holding fire in hand,⁵² was set forth. Kalagauda underwent the test successfully and Kereyamasetti had to accept the decision in favour of Kalangaunda. The record is called Jayapatra i.e., a decree issued to the winning party.

Punishments

Excommunication from the society appears to have been one

of the punishments meted out to the wrong doers. An inscription recording a grant of land declares that the person denying the grant should be expelled from the hadinentu samaya i.e., probably eighteen communities and be treated as an outcast.⁵³ Imposition of fines was another type of punishment. A record of Singhana specifies that violation of grants would result in the paying of fines by the agriculturists. A noteworthy point in this connection is that the wrong done by a person of higher status was considered to be greater than the one done by the person of lower status. The fines were prescribed accordingly. The record states that the violator of the grant, if he was a superior agriculturist was to pay 18 gadyanas of fine, while the one of a lower status 12 gadyanas and the one of the lowest class, 5 gadyanas.⁵⁴ It appears that in addition to the consideration of the paying capacity of the defaulter, better conduct was expected of the people of higher classes.

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Altekar, Op. cit., p. 224 Kittel defines this as a land
liable to a trifling quitrent or altogether exempted from
taxes. Kittel's Kannada-English dictionary p. 1239.
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- 49
EI XXXII p. 31.
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Ibid., XXI p. 9.

51

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52

The expression in dibyava pididu, Dibya or Divya in general means ordeal and divyam-pidi means to undergo an ordeal. See Kittel's Kannada-English Dictionary, S.V. Divya. Rice however, translates the expression as holding the concenterated food.

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54

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