



A BRIEF HISTORICAL OBSERVATION OF GANGAS OF TALAKADU

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Abstract

Western Ganga dynasty or The Gangas of Talakadu (ತಲಕಾಡು ಗಂಗರು) constitute one of the most enduring and celebrated royal dynasties of Karnataka. The Observation evidences about Ganga dynasty are more reliable after the ascension to the throne of Avineetha. Among these kings **Durvineetha, Bhuvikrama, Sripurusha, Saigotta Shivamara, Marasimha-2 and Rachamalla-2**. Succession to the throne was hereditary but there were instances when this was overlooked. The kingdom was divided into **Rashtra** (Region) and further into Visaya (1000 villages) and **Desa**. Inscriptions have revealed several important administrative designations such as prime minister (sarvadhikari), treasurer (shribhandari), foreign minister (sandhivirgrahi) and chief minister (mahapradhana). The prabhu constituted a group of elite people drawn together to witness land grants and demarcation of land boundaries. The gavundas who appear most often in inscriptions were the backbone of medieval polity of the southern Karnataka region. The plains to the east were the flat lands fed by Kaveri, Tungabhadra and Vedavati rivers where cultivations. Pasupatas and lokayatas (followers of Pasupatha doctrine) who flourished in Gangavadi, indicating that Shaivism was also popular. King Madhava and Harivarma were devoted to cows and brahmins, King **Vishnugopa** was a devout Vaishnava, **Madhava-III's** and Avinita's inscriptions describe lavish endowments to Jain orders and temples and King Durvinita performed Vedic sacrifices prompting historians to claim he was a Hindu.

KEYWORDS: Gangas, Talakadu, Kodagu, Tunga Bhadra, Durvineeta, Ragi, Jola, Shivamara, Vishwa, Punnada.

INTRODUCTION

Western Ganga dynasty or The Gangas of Talakadu (ತಲಕಾಡು ಗಂಗರು) constitute one of the most enduring and celebrated royal dynasties of Karnataka. They provide vital clues about the relations that existed between the Tamilian culture and Karnataka. This paved the way for a better understanding of the Dravidian antecedents of the culture of Karnataka.

This dynasty came in to being as early as the fourth century. (350 A.D.) The speculation that the dynasty was found under the guidance of the Jaina saint Simhanandi Acharya is not firmly established. The early Gangas belonged to the vaidic religion. The dynasty was found by Kongunivarma and its capital was kuvalALapura which is now known as Kolar. However the capital was shifted to Talavnapura which is Talakadu in the modern parlance. This shift took place during the regime of the king Avineetha. (469-529 A.D.) This region was thickly infested with jungles and that probably is the reason for the elephant which happens to be the royal emblem of Gangas. Not much is known about the early kings of this dynasty. A sizable part of the inscriptions were declared as suspects that has added to the uncertainty. Many historians have opined that Talakadu was the capital of Gangas right from its inception to the end.

Some of the major monarchs that have ruled the Ganga kingdom are as follows:

1.	Kongunivarma	(325-350A.D.)	10.	Sripurusha	(725-788)
2.	Madhava	(350-375 A.D.)	11.	Siagotta Shivamara-2	(788-812)
3.	Aryavarma	(375-400 A.D.)	12.	Rachamalla	(816-843)
4.	Madhava-3	(440-469)	13.	Neethimarga Ereganga	(843-870)
5.	Avineetha	(469-529)	14.	Rachamalla-2	(870-919)
6.	Durvineetha	(529-579)	15.	Ereganga	(886-920)
7.	Shrivikrama	(629-654)	16.	Butuga-2	(936-961)
8.	Bhuvikrama	(654-679)	17.	Marasimha-2	(963-974)
9.	Shivamara-1	(679-725)	18.	Rachamalla=3	(974-999)

The Observation evidences about Ganga dynasty are more reliable after the ascension to the throne of Avineetha. Among these kings **Durvineetha, Bhuvikrama, Sripurusha, Saigotta Shivamara, Marasimha-2 and Rachamalla-2** were more renowned. They played crucial roles in expanding the kingdom and preserving the territories. There were constants strifes with Cholas, Pallavas, Rashtrakootas and Chalukyas. Small kingdoms such as Punnatas were usually in good terms with Gangas. Durvineetha had to wage wars with Pallavas and Kadambas and secured creditable victories. His kingdom extended from Coimbatore in Tamilnadu up to Bellary in the north. He was patron of literature and arts and was a poet by his own merit. He is the author of a work called 'Shabdavatara' and he has a written a commentary for Bharavi's 'Kiratarjuneeya'. He is credited with translating Gunadhyas 'Vaddakathaa'. Bhuvikrama is known for his confrontations with Pallavas. Sripurusha ranks among the more important Ganga kings. He was known for his military prowess. He defeated Nandivarma Pallavavarma on the one hand and sent back the Rashtrakuta as far as Kampili in Bellary district.

He could implement many administrative reforms and he is the author of 'Gajashastra'. After Sripurusha, Gangas had to concede their absolute powers to Rashtrakutas and become their feudatories. Saigotta Shivamara had a chequered career and he was a pawn in the political feuds among the kings of the Rashtrakuta clans and spent a considerable part of his life in detention. He has authored 'Gajashtaka' and 'Sethubandha'.

He was the first Ganga king to adopt Jainism. Marasimha-2 was an able supporter of Rashtrakuta kings and won many battles for them. Gradually Gangas lost their hold on the political situation. The Chalukya and Chola kings became dominant and that marked the end of Ganga dynasty. Chavundaraya who served three different Ganga kings was a well known warrior and a patron of art and literature. He is associated with the Gommateshvara idol at Shravanabelagola and his patronage to Ranna the famous Kannada poet.

Ganga Kingdom comprised of Kolara, Mysore, Bangalore, Tumkur and Mandya districts of present day Karnataka. This region was known as Gangavadi. However at different points in its reign it had control over Shivamogga, Hassan, Chikkamagalur, Coorg, Bellary and Dharawar districts. Occasionally they occupied Coimbatore and Selam districts of Tamilnadu. Talakdu was their capital and Manne (maNNemAnyapura) and Mankunda (mAnakunDa) were their regional capitals. They practiced the Vaidic religion to begin with and later they adopted the Jaina religion. They were essentially secular and encouraged all religions. They encouraged agriculture by building canals and supported trade by adopting proper policies of taxation. Many of them had literary accomplishments and all of them were patrons of art and culture.

Administration

The Western Ganga administration was influenced by principles stated in the ancient text arthashastra. The praje gavundas mentioned in the Ganga records held responsibilities similar to those of the village elders (gramavridhdas) mentioned by Kautilya. Succession to the throne was hereditary but there were instances when this was overlooked. The kingdom was divided into **Rashtra** (Region) and further into **Visaya (1000 villages)** and **Desa**. From the 8th century, the Sanskrit term Visaya was replaced by the Kannada term Nadu. Examples of this change are Sindanadu-8000 and **Punnadu-6000**, with scholars differing about the significance of the numerical suffix. They opine that it was either the revenue yield of the division computed in cash terms or the number of fighting men in that division or the number of revenue paying hamlets in that division or the number of villages included in that territory.

Inscriptions have revealed several important administrative designations such as prime minister (sarvadhikari), treasurer (shribhandari), foreign minister (sandhivirgrahi) and chief minister (mahapradhana). All of these positions came with an additional title of commander (dandanayaka). Other designations were royal steward (manevergade), master of robes (mahapasayita), commander of elephant corps (gajasahani), commander of cavalry (thuragasahani) etc. In the royal house, Niyogis oversaw palace administration; royal clothing and jewellery etc. and the Padiyara were responsible for court ceremonies including door keeping and protocol.

Officials at the local level were the pergade, nadabova, nalagamiga, prabhu and gavunda.

The pergades were superintendents from all social classes such as artisans, gold smiths, black smiths etc. The pergades dealing with the royal household were called manepergade (house superintendent) and those who collected tolls were called Sunka vergades. The nadabovas were accountants and tax collectors at the Nadu level and sometimes functioned as scribes. The nalagamigas were officers who organized and maintained defense at the Nadu level.

The prabhu constituted a group of elite people drawn together to witness land grants and demarcation of land boundaries. The gavundas who appear most often in inscriptions were the backbone of medieval polity of the southern Karnataka region. They were landlords and local elite whom the state utilized their services to collect taxes, maintain records of landownership, bear witness to grants and transactions and even raise militia when required.

Inscriptions that specify land grants, rights and ownership were descriptive of the boundaries of demarcation using natural features such as rivers, streams, water channels, hillocks, large boulders, layout of the village, location of forts (kote) if any in the proximity, irrigation canals, temples, tanks and even shrubs and large trees. Also included was the type of soil, the crops meant to be grown and tanks or wells to be excavated for irrigation.

Inscriptions mention wet land, cultivable land, forest and waste land. There are numerous references to hamlets (palli) belonging to the hunter communities who resided in them (bedapalli). From the 6th century onwards, the inscriptions refer to feudal lords by the title arasa. The arasas were either brahmins or from tribal background who controlled hereditary territories paying periodic tribute to the king. The velavali who were loyal bodyguards of the royalty were fierce warriors under oath (vele). They moved with the royal family and were expected to fight for the master and be willing to lay down their lives in the process. If the king died, the velavali were required to self immolate on the funeral pyre of the master.

Economy

The Gangavadi region consisted of the malnad region, the plains (Bayaluseemae) and the semi-malnad with lower elevation and rolling hills. The main crops of the malnad region were paddy, betel leaves, cardamom and pepper and the semi-malnad region with its lower altitude produced rice, millets such as ragi and corn, pulses, oilseeds and it was also the base for cattle farming.

The plains to the east were the flat lands fed by Kaveri, Tungabhadra and Vedavati rivers where cultivations of sugarcane, paddy, coconut, areca nut, betel leaves, plantain and flowers were common. Sources of irrigation were excavated tanks, wells, natural ponds and water bodies in the catchment area of dams.

Inscriptions attesting to irrigation of previously uncultivated lands seem to indicate an expanding agrarian community.

Soil types mentioned in records are black soil in the Sinda-8000 territory and to red soil Cultivated land was of three types; wet land, dry land and to a lesser extent garden land with paddy being the dominant crop of the region. Wet lands were called kalani, galde, nir mannu or nir panya and was specifically used to denote paddy land requiring standing water. The fact that pastoral economies were spread throughout Gangavadi region comes from references to cowherds in many inscriptions. The terms gosahasra gasara (owner of cows), gosasi (donor of cows), goyiti (cowherdess), gosasa (protector of cows) attest to this.

Inscriptions indicate ownership of cows may have been as important as cultivable land and that there may have existed a social hierarchy based on this. Inscriptions mention cattle raids attesting to the importance of the pastoral economy, destructive raids, assaults on women, abduction of women by bedas (tribes); all of which indicate the existing militarism of the age.

Lands that were exempt from taxes were called manya and sometimes consisted of several villages. They were granted by local chieftains without any reference to the overlord, indicating a de-centralized economy. These lands, often given to heroes who perished in the line of duty were called bilavritti or kalnad. When such a grant was made for the maintenance of temples at the time of consecration, it was called Talavritti. Some types of taxes on income were kara or anthakara (internal taxes), utkota (gifts due to the king), hiranya (cash payments) and sulika (tolls and duties on imported items). Taxes were collected from those who held the right to cultivate land; even if the land was not actually cultivated.

Culture

The Western Gangas gave patronage to all the major religions of the time; **Jainism** and the Hindu sects of **Shaivism**, **Vedic Brahmanism** and **Vaishnavism**. However scholars have argued that not all Ganga kings may have given equal priority to all the faiths. Some historians believe that the Gangas were ardent Jains. However, inscriptions contradict this by providing references to kalamukhas (staunch Shaiva ascetics),

Pasupatas and lokayatas (followers of Pasupatha doctrine) who flourished in Gangavadi, indicating that Shaivism was also popular. King Madhava and Harivarman were devoted to cows and brahmins, King **Vishnugopa** was a devout Vaishnava, **Madhava-III's** and Avinita's inscriptions describe lavish endowments to Jain orders and temples and King Durvinita performed Vedic sacrifices prompting historians to claim he was a Hindu.

Jainism became popular in the dynasty in the 8th century when the ruler King Shivamara-I constructed numerous Jain basadis. King Butuga-II and minister Chavundaraya were staunch Jains which is evident from the construction of the GOMMATESHWARA monolith. Jains worshipped the twenty four TIRTHANKARS (Jinas) whose images were consecrated in their temples.

The worship of the footprint of spiritual leaders such as those of Bhadrabahu in Shravanabelagola from the 10th century is considered a parallel to Buddhism. Some brahminical influences are seen in the consecration of the Gomateshwara monolith which is the statue of Bahubali, the son of Tirthankar Adinatha (just as Hindus worshipped the sons of Shiva). The worship of subordinate deities such as yaksa and yaksi, earlier considered as mere attendants of the tirthankars was seen from the 7th century to the 12th century.

Vedic Brahminism was popular in the 6th and 7th centuries when inscriptions refer to grants made to Srotriya Brahmins. These inscriptions also describe the gotra (lineage) affiliation to royal families and their adherence of such Vedic rituals as ASVAMEDHA (horse sacrifice) and hiranyagarbha. Brahmins and kings enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship; rituals performed by the brahmins gave legitimacy to kings and the land grants made by kings to brahmins elevated them in society to the level of wealthy landowners. Vaishnavism however maintained a low profile and not many inscriptions describe grants towards its cause. Some Vaishnava temples were built by the Gangas such as the **Narayanaswami** temples at Nanjangud, Sattur and Hangala in modern Mysore district. The deity VISHNU was depicted with four arms holding a conch (sanka), discus (cakra), mace (gada) and lotus (padma).

From the beginning of the 8th century, patronage to Shaivism increased in every section of the society; the landed elite, landlords, assemblies (samaya), schools of learning (aghrahas) and minor ruling families such as the Bana, Nolamba and Chalukya clans. The Shaiva temples contained a Shiva linga in the sanctum sanctorum along with images of the mother goddess, **SURYA** (Sun god) and **NANDI** (a bull and attendant of Shiva) which was normally enshrined in a separate pavilion facing the sanctum. The linga was manmade and in some cases had etchings of **GANAPATI** (son of Shiva) and **PARVATI** (consort and wife of Shiva) on it. Due to the vigorous efforts of priests and ascetics, Shaiva monastic orders flourished in many places such as Nandi Hills, Avani and Hebbata in modern Kolar district.

The '**Architecture and sculpture of Gangas**' do not have many distinctive features even though many temples and Basadis were built during their regime. The temples at Manne, Narasamangala, Kolar, Kitturu, Nandi and the Chavundaraya Basadi at Shravana Belagola are the more important ones among them. The inscriptions of Gangas constitute copper inscriptions, stone inscriptions and memorial stones. The debate about the spuriousness or otherwise of the copper inscriptions makes decisions difficult. Generally the copper inscriptions are in Sanskrit and the stone inscriptions are in Kannada. It is possible to trace the evolution of Kannada script with their help because they cover a long interval of time. The subject matter of the memorial stones is varied. 'Athakuru Inscription' is erected to honor the fidelity of a dog. Gangas have not contributed much to the numismatics of Karnataka either. There are certain branches of Ganga dynasty other than the Gangas of Talakadu. Gangas of Kadaravalli (kAdaravaLLi), Mandali Gangas of Shivamogga, Gangas of Asandi near Kadur, and the Tamilu Gangas of Kolar are the important ones among them.

Society

The Western Ganga society in many ways reflected the emerging religious, political and cultural developments of those times. Women became active in local administration because Ganga kings distributed

territorial responsibility to their queens such as the feudal queen Parabbaya-arasi of Kundattur and the queens of King Sripurusha, Butuga-II and feudal king Permadi. Inheritance of fiscal and administrative responsibility by the son-in-law, the wife or by the daughter is evident. The position of prime minister of King **Ereganga-II** and position of **nalgavunda** (local landlord) bestowed upon Jakkiabbe, the wife of a fallen hero are examples. When Jakkiabbe took to asceticism, her daughter inherited the position.

The devadasi system in temples was prevalent and was modeled after the structures in the royal palace. Contemporaneous literature such as Vaddaradhane makes a mention of the chief queen accompanied by lower ranking queens and courtesans of the women's royal quarter. Some of the courtesans and concubines employed in the harem of the kings and chieftains were well respected, examples being Nandavva at whose instance a local chief made land grant to a Jain temple. Education in the royal family was closely supervised and included such subjects as political science, elephant and horse riding, **archery, medicine, poetry, grammar, drama, literature, dance, singing** and use of musical instruments. Brahmins enjoyed an influential position in society and were exempt from certain taxes and customs due on land. In turn they managed public affairs such as teaching, local judiciary, functioned as trustees and bankers, managed schools, temples, irrigation tanks, rest houses, collected taxes due from villages and raised money from public subscriptions.

By virtue of a Hindu belief that killing of a brahmin (Bramhatya) was a sin, capital punishment was not applicable to them. Upper caste kshatriyas (satkshatriya) were also exempt from capital punishment due to their higher position in the caste system. Severe crimes committed were punishable by the severing of a foot or hand. Contemporary literary sources reveal up to ten castes in the **Hindu caste system**; three among kshatriya, three among brahmin, two among **vaishya** and two among **shudras**. Family laws permitted a wife or daughter or surviving relatives of a deceased person to claim properties such as his home, land, grain, money etc. if there were no male heirs. If no claimants to the property existed, the state took possession of these properties as Dharmadeya (charitable asset). **Intercaste marriage, child marriage, marriage of a boy to maternal uncles daughter**, Svayamvara marriage were all in vogue. Memorials containing **hero stones** were erected for fallen heroes and the concerned family received monetary aid for maintenance of the memorial.

The presence of numerous Mahasatikals indicates the popularity of Sati among royalty. Ritual death by sallekhana and by jalasamadhi were also practiced. Popular clothing among men was the use of two unrestricted garments, a **Dhoti** as a lower garment and a plain cloth as upper garment while women wore **Saris** with stitched petticoats. Turbans were popular with men of higher standing and people used umbrellas made with bamboo or reeds. Ornaments were popular among men and women and even elephants and horses were decorated. **Men wore finger rings, necklaces, bracelets and wristlets**. Women wore **a nose jewel nose ring, bangles and various types of necklaces**. During leisure, men amused themselves with horse riding, watching wrestling bouts, cock fights and ram fights. There existed a large and well organized network of schools for imparting higher education and these schools were known by various names such as agraharas, ghatikas, brahmapura or matha. Inscriptions mention schools of higher education at Salotgi, Balligavi, Talagunda, Aihole, Arasikere and other places.

Language

The Western Gangas used **Kannada** and **Sanskrit** extensively as their language of administration. Some of their inscriptions are also bilingual in these languages. In bilingual inscriptions the formulaic passages stating origin myths, genealogies, titles of Kings and benedictions tended to be in Sanskrit, while the actual terms of the

grant such as information on the land or village granted, its boundaries, participation of local authorities, rights and obligations of the grantee, taxes and dues and other local concerns were in the local language.

The usage of these two languages showed important changes over the centuries. During the first phase (350–725), Sanskrit copper plates dominated, indicating the initial ascendancy of the local language as a language of administration and the fact that majority of the records from this phase were brahmadeya grants. In the second phase (725–1000), lithic inscriptions in Kannada outnumbered Sanskrit copper plates, consistent with the patronage Kannada received from rich and literate Jains who used Kannada as their medium to spread the Jain faith.. Recent excavations at Tumbula near Mysore have revealed a set of early copper plate bilingual inscriptions.

The genealogy of the kings of the dynasty is described in Sanskrit while Kannada was used to describe the boundary of the village. An interesting inscription discovered at Beguru near modern Bangalore that deserves mention is the epigraph that refers to a Bengaluru war. This is in Hale Kannada (old Kannada) language and is the earliest mention of the name of Bangalore city. The Western Gangas minted coins with Kannada and Nagari legends; the most common feature on their coins was the image of an elephant on the obverse and floral petal symbols on the reverse. The Kannada legend Bhadr, a royal umbrella or a conch shell appeared on top of the elephant image. The denominations are the pagoda (weighing 52 grains), the fanam weighting one tenth or one half of the pagoda and the quarter fanams.

CONCLUSION

Western Ganga dynasty or The Gangas of Talakadu constitute one of the most enduring and celebrated royal dynasties of Karnataka. They provide vital clues about the relations that existed between the Tamilian culture and Karnataka. This paved the way for a better understanding of the Dravidian antecedents of the culture of Karnataka.

This dynasty came in to being as early as the fourth century. (350 A.D.) The speculation that the dynasty was found under the guidance of the Jaina saint Simhanandi Acharya is not firmly established. The early Gangas belonged to the vaidic religion. The dynasty was found by Kongunivarma and its capital was kuvalALapura which is now known as Kolar.

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