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EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL GROUPS AND ECONOMIC CHANGES UNDER THE HOYSALAS

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Abstract: In the circumstances of Indian history the early medieval period has been identified as an important phase of socio - economic transition. During this period fundamental changes occurred in the social, economic, political and ideological spheres. This phase of Indian history has generated a potential for research focusing more on the nature of the socio economic structure of early medieval India. In order to initiate our understanding of the socio - economic structure of the early medieval South Karnataka under the Hoysalas this study, intended to the analysis of the social groups. Hoysala ascendancy during the early medieval period presupposes a lenient and liberal ideology which is accommodative of a variety of social groups. The rise of social groups and feudal social formation was well established under the Hoysalas, could have had a adverse effect on the religious, social, political, economic and cultural conditions of Karnataka. The Medieval Karnataka under study formed a very important role in the economic as well as the social life of people.

Keywords: Hoysala, Social Groups, Economic Changes, Feudal & Religion

Introduction: In the context of Indian history the early medieval period has been identified as an important phase of socio - economic transition. During this period fundamental changes occurred in the social, economic, political and ideological spheres. This phase of Indian history has generated a potential for research focusing more on the nature of the socio economic structure of early medieval India. In order to understand the complexities of the social formations of this period importance is being attached to analysis of social and economic history as the firm ground on which political and the ideological expressions could be based. We have in this connection a few serious attempts by scholars such as R.N. Nandi, M.G.S. Narayanan, Burton Stein, Y. Subbarayalu, R. Champakalakshmi, Herman Kulke, Noboru Karashima, who have enhanced the importance of micro level studies in the context of South India. All these studies have significant bearing on our understanding of the regional variations of the complex social relationships in early India. The Southern part of Karnataka region has not been able to attract enough attention from historians and we still find rather descriptive and compartmentalized versions of the historical formation of the region.

Objectives: In order to initiate our understanding of the socio - economic structure of the early medieval South Karnataka under the Hoysalas this study, intended to the analysis of the social groups. Since the social groups and their relationships are the expression of the interplay of the existing structural phenomena, their study enjoins an integrative analysis of the economic, political, ideological and the social forces under consideration.

In the course of the study, we observe that those groups that had an access to landed property possessed the privilege of acquiring both the political and ideological control over the numerically larger section of those social groups, who did not have any control over the means of production and were deprived of any access to landed property. This gradually leads to the evolution of two broad categories of social groups with a highly stratified element giving rise to complex social relations of economic interdependence between them, as also within them Hoysala ascendancy during the early medieval period presupposes a lenient and liberal ideology which is accommodative of a variety of social groups. Such hegemonic control was inevitable for the fulfillment of the territorial ambitions of the Hoysalas.

The Epigraphy Records: The epigraphic evidence of the period under consideration suggests the fact that royal patronage, the conciliatory policy, the granting of land, the allotment of revenues and the right to collect taxes were given to the brahmanas by the Hoysala monarchs resulting in the emergence of the brahmanas as a very strong force in the social ladder. The establishment of brahmapuris, agraharas and temple complexes denotes the willingness of royal authority to recognize the high ritual status of the brahmanas in society. Brahmanas were considered the custodians of vedic brahmanic ideas of polity and learning, through their lucid exposition of philosophical doctrines and mastery over the sacred texts¹. Hence, brahmadeya land had to be instituted for their livelihood². As a powerful land owning aristocracy, the brahmanas enjoyed sufficient local autonomy as mahajanans of the brahmadeya villages. They were influential members of the government and wielded substantial political and economic power from the highest to the lowest level.



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Land Grants: Generally, individual brahmanas were granted land and only on certain occasions they received it collectively. An inscription of 1061AD of Chikkamangalur taluk states that Vinayaditya made a grant of the Periya Muguli agrahara to brahmanas devoted to penance, fasting, reverence, private prayer and other virtues³. The record of 1049 A.D states that one Nagalate, daughter of Sandhi- Vighrahi Echimaya, gave the paddy fields of kalichur for the whole of the Kalachatti agrahara under the supervision of Poysaladeva⁴. In 1130 AD, Vishnuvardhana created an agrahara in Devaligenad⁵. In 1291, Banavar was transferred to 74 brahmanas by Hoysala Ballaladeva,⁶ Ballalapura was assigned to 120 brahmanas⁷, and Dindigur to 155 brahmanas by Hoysala Ballaladeva⁸. Hoysala Narasimha is said to have created an agrahara for brahmanas after bringing together the two villages, Settigere and Hosagere in Asandinad⁹. Ballala III, in 1295 AD, formed an agrahara by joining two villages, Homma and Alur, in the district of Hadinad in the division of Torenad, which was later named as Arasugonda Ramachaturavedimangala¹⁰. This inscriptional evidence reveals that the Hoysala rulers attempted to satisfy the aspirations of dominant brahmana social groups.

The Hoysala rulers, in fact, believed that the granting of lands to brahmanas was an act of religious merit as well as a means to establish acquaintance with them, and in return they expected loyalty from them. The formation of agraharas was the result of a complex play of socio -- economic and political forces -- a fact not adequately comprehended by historians generally. While conventional interpretation of agraharas has grossly underrated the importance and complexity of the institution.

Agraharas: For an example of the former interpretation is the study of S. Leela Shanthakumari¹¹ who rather facetiously speaks of the formation of agraharas as motivated by the desire for acquisition of punya for oneself and for promoting the cause of spreading education and culture. The priestly class commanded a very high social status and enjoyed royal patronage and protection. Thus, the creation of brahmadeya and Agrahara land for brahmanas lead to the emergence of one of the important social groups in Medieval Karnataka.

Warrior Class: The military aristocracy or warrior class also enjoyed the royal patronage of the Hoysalas in the political sphere. They are described in the Hoysala records as dandanayakas¹², manneyas¹³, and garudas¹⁴, who together constituted a considerable force in society. The custom of military service in return for a grant of land, which formed the basis of political relationship in medieval South India, is mentioned widely in the inscriptional sources. They were part and parcel of the Hoysala administration, which defended as well as expanded the boundary of the Hoysala Empire in all directions. But there existed a hierarchical position in this military aristocracy, especially among dandanayakas. Some of them are simply called dandanayakas while others are referred to as sandhivighrahi¹⁵, mahapradhana¹⁶ and sarvadhikari¹⁷. Manneya denotes the chief commander of the army and garudas refer to warriors, who were closely associated with the king.

The warrior class actively took part in the civil and military administration and received grants of land, in lieu of remuneration, which they held on an hereditary basis. Annexed territories were ruled by the dandayakas are described in the inscription as nadalvas¹⁸, of the nadus which was a fixed geographical region.

Ministers: A few examples may be noted here. Manaverggade Kundamarasa, the Prime minister of Ereyanga, in 1094 AD, held the offices of mahapradhana and mahamatya and was governing Tavarekere in Mayse-Nadu¹⁹. Mariyane and his brother Bharata, under Vishnuvardhana, were in office as sarvadhikaris, treasures of the jewels, judges, chief advisors and commanders of the life guard²⁰. Gangaraja, under Vishnuvardhana, obtained the highest rank of the general and a minister, as can be informed from inscription²¹. The warrior Chinna was also a servant of Vishnuvardhana, and was the governor of Manikke —12²². Punisamayya dandanayaka was sandhivighrahi under Vishnuvardhana²³. Similarly, Dasavanta dandanayaka, the great minister and senadhipathi under Ballala II in 1217 AD, was posted as sarvadhikari of Banavasi- nad at the Uddare fort²⁴.

There were chieftains of petty rulers, who held small principalities, but who soon lost their administrative sovereignty and were forced to acknowledge the over lordship of some more powerful rulers. The administrative officials enjoyed a share in the revenue collected from the area they were governing or had, land grants given to them in lieu of their services. Military personnel working under the military service were also receiving land grants from the rulers. In this way, the warrior class had acted as dedicated servants of the state for the maintenance of a stable political structure, a priestly class, and the military aristocracy also secured a high social status among social groups. Thus, Hoysala monarchs within a short span of time gain the confidence of administrative officials and their dream of establishing strong empire was fulfilled.

Merchant Class: In the Hoysala inscriptions, the merchant class occupies a prominent place as a skilled community in commercial activities. Since trade and commerce yielded good revenue to the state exchequer, the Hoysala rulers had shown a keen interest in increasing the volume of trade by extending royal patronage. There were merchants, who were friends of rulers²⁵, and were working for



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the increased prosperity of the state²⁶. An epigraph of 1177 AD speaks of two merchants, Hoysala setti and Nemi setti, who were the royal merchants in the court of Vishnuvardhana²⁷. Likewise, there are innumerable examples of chief merchants, who wielded political influence while they worked for the welfare of society. A rich merchant, Hoysala setti, was the pattanaswami of Belligame in 1181 AD²⁸. The mahavadda vyavahari, Kammatamalla Setti, the governor of a large district during the reign of Vira Ballala II²⁹. During the reign of Vira Ballala II the two brothers Chatta setti and Dasa Setti of Banavara in Arasikere Taluk engaged in extensive trade³⁰. Damodara Setti was the trusted merchant prince of the Hoysala ruler Narasimha II³¹.

Thus merchants, in the Hoysala polity, profited from the political system and gained social and administrative positions as nagarapattanaswamis. They attained prosperity during the reigns of the Hoysalas and played a significant role in the organization of Hoysala economy.

Artisans: The Hoysala inscriptions speak eloquently of the role of artisans, who were considered as the backbone of temple building activity in Hoysala period. The artisans were also a privileged class in society and enjoyed greater royal patronage. The entire temple building activity, spreading over 300 years of Hoysala reign was undertaken by a vast community of artisans, consisting of scribes, sculptors, architects, carpenters, smiths, and jewelers. Scribes were needed by the ruling class for the writing of records relating to their achievements in the political and cultural arena to commemorate the heroic death of warriors, the self immolation of satis and the ritual deaths of pious Jainas³². The epigraphs of this period also mention that the artisans were assigned the task of defence, whenever necessary and of promoting the religious and social interests of the ruling family.

For their services to the state, artisans were honoured by the royal family by 'rewards' grants' and payments as recorded in the Hoysala inscriptions. Generally, they were offered land grants, or a right to collect dues of a particular village, as a reward as also as a means to maintain their standard of life. A record from Tumkur states that a gavunda granted one khanduga to the artisan who constructed a tank and a temple, and 10 kolaga to another artisan for the construction of a temple in the 12th century³³. Another record of 1186 AD states that a Raja gavunda — deva offered 150 kamma of paddy field to Bisadoja, Chavoja and Singoja for erecting "the mantapa of the God Kedara"³⁴. Further, it says that they were entitled to enjoy the right to own their land "as long as sun and the moon endured". They were also granted Siruvolal in Beduge - 70 along with property rights for future generations. In this way artisans were motivated to engage in the activities of temple building. The inscriptional evidences reveal that artisans enjoyed a privileged status in society, on account of the services rendered to the state and emerged as one of the important social group in society.

Peasants: The lower rung of the Hoysala society was adorned by peasants. They were the backbone of agricultural activity. The epigraphs of the period refer to them as bhumi karas³⁵. Okkalu or besavakallu were other terms used in the inscriptions denotes the position of peasants³⁶. It is true that peasants were the major force behind the achievement of economic stability and were needed for agricultural activity in the newly acquired fertile land of Hoysala kingdom. They were assigned to cultivate the land which was legally owned by the temples, agraharas and individual brahmanas. However, peasants were denied most of the privileges that were enjoyed by the higher social groups. Thus peasants were enjoys lowest rank among social groups.

Some institutions also acquired the social status through the land donated to them along with some administrative privileges and economic benefits. This category included temple organizations, mathas, basadis, and trade guilds. This period witnessed an increase in the number of land owning temples and mathas. In Karnataka temples possessed more property than individual priests. The Hoysala rulers granted more villages to the temples. The villages of Togaravadi and Bhuvanahalli were granted by the king Narasimha in 1162AD for the maintenance of the Kesava temple³⁷. For the daily services and repairs of the temple Viranarayana and Achyutesvara, the village Mudigere was granted by the king Ballala II in 1186 AD³⁸. In AD 1256 king Ramanatha made a gift of the village Padiyakanur to his temple at Sonnaligoyapura³⁹. Thus, under Hoysalas temples emerged as important intermediaries in land grants.

Educational Institution: The mathas formed different types of educational institution in ancient and medieval periods. In the modern times the matha is considered as a religious institution, its scope being restricted to imparting of religious instructions and to conduct of religious activities. Kodiya matha of the Kedareshvara temple was a renowned religious institution during 11th and 12th century AD. It gained importance as a center of education and religious activities. A record dated 1192 AD refers to a gift of village to the matha by the Hoysala Ballala II⁴⁰.

Religious Institution: Hoysala rulers and their queens were the follower of Jaina faith made a liberal donations to Jaina religious institutions. A record of 1123 AD states that Shantaladevi chief queen of Vishnuvardhana, granted with exemption from all imposts (the village) Mottenavile of Kolkannadu to her preceptor. She caused Vilasanakatta to be built as a tank and granted to the Savati Gandha



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Hasti Basadi at Belgola. She also obtained from Vishnuvardhana Poysaladeva a garden of 50 Kolagas of wet land in the middle plain below the Ganyasamudra and granted some to Svati gandha Basadi which she had caused to be erected. She founded the Jaina temple of Savati Gandhavarana at Sravana Belgola⁴¹. A record of 1159AD says king Narasimha visited the Jaina Gommata and Parsvanatha, as also the shrine of Chaturvimsati villages and granted for them Savaneru, Bekke and Keggere⁴². An inscription on a pillar at Kogali records the gift of gold to the Jaina temple of Channa Parsva at Kogali by Vira Ramanatha Deva⁴³.

Trade Guilds: There were trade guilds to organize trade within the Hoysala Empire. They worked hand in hand for the welfare of the people. The government granted several rights and privileges to the trade guilds, and in return, they collaborated with the state in the administration of cities and villages. The epigraphs of the Hoysala period mention several merchants and their activities. The inscriptions of the period often refer to many trade guilds, such as the 500 Svamis of Ayyavale, Nanadesis, Settis, Settiguttas, Mummuridas, Gavares and Gatrigas⁴⁴. They encouraged trade activities and in return gets several land grants to their services. Thus temples, mathas, basadis, and guilds were liberally granted by the Hoysala monarchs. It leads to Jaina, Shiva, Brahmanas and traders to attain high privileges in the social hierarchy.

Economic Changes: Economic changes of the period under study has been postulated to have been dominated by the features of decline in the urban economy of towns, leading to a subsistence economy of agriculture, based largely on rural settlements. In such a situation a lot of significance began to be attached to landed property as can be attested by the growth in the grants of lands of various measurements found mentioned in the Southern Karnataka. It reveals the mechanisms of surplus appropriation and distribution adopted by the privileged sections of the society of the period. This, in fact, is the basis in the understanding of the socio- economic setup of the period and the interaction of these material forces with the political and the ideological ones which decides the status of various social groups in the hierarchical social structure of early medieval South Karnataka. The practice of making grants of uncultivated land was probably an economic policy of the state to bring waste and fallow land under cultivation. This resulting in the growth of agricultural productivity and expansion of the very base of Hoysala agrarian economy.

Another feature in the economic sphere was that, with the emergence of the Hoysalas, one notices that the rural settlement was exposed to a series of changes. In fact, while defining the geography of the 10th century Hoysala empire, Derrett presumed that the Mysorean plateau comprised considerable portions of the present Hassan and Chikkamangalur districts, parts of Tumkur, Mysore and Mandya districts, characterized as an economically underdeveloped tract⁴⁵. However, the Hoysala records between the 11th and the 13th century give a graphic picture of a definite attempt towards improving existing patterns of cultivation. This reveals that the Hoysala rulers bestowed great care and attention on the question of land administration and adopted certain definite methods of encouraging production by affording good irrigational facilities, reclamation of virgin lands and the establishment of new villages, Land reclamation and the clearance of vast tracts of forests, practiced by the Hoysalas from the very beginning, was intended to bring waste land under intensive cultivation and to promote the cause of agricultural production by patronizing the construction of new tanks, canals, wells, ponds, digging of embankments and canals for irrigation and drinking water.

There were many instances of the clearance of forest lands, waste lands and dry lands for cultivation, the excavation of tanks and the establishment of villages. A record of 1232 states that several gavundas founded a village called Bankihalli and also built a tank and temple⁴⁶. Again, a Belur record of 1183 speaks of one Adi gavunda, who at the request of all the mahajanas of the agrahara Kondali, cut down the forests, with the help of his brothers and sons, founded a new village and excavated two tanks⁴⁷. Even during the time of Ballala II, vast tracts of land were reclaimed by cutting down the forest and such land was used for establishing new towns and brahmana settlements⁴⁸. Many of these took names after the ruler and come to be called Ballalapur. A record dated 1186 AD from Belur, for instance, tells us that the great minister, Sarvadhikari Vira- dandanayaka, having cut down the forests, founded a village Viraballalapura and constructed four tanks, named Rudrasamudra, Gangasamudra, Acyutasamudra and Virasamudra.

Economy: From the economic point of view, such a process of land reclamation served two main purposes. Firstly, it provided the means for the community to cope with the pressure of population in the form of new village settlements that were founded on the tracts reclaimed. Secondly, larger areas of uncultivated land were brought under cultivation resulting in the growth of agricultural productivity and the expansion of the very base of the Hoysala agrarian economy. The peasantry necessarily devoted more attention to raising greater yields and improve their livelihood.

The Hoysala rulers were given grants to the construction of roads, public buildings and temples. The distribution of reserve food and exemptions from taxes during the droughts and famines and other natural calamities. Festivals, like Yatras, served as social



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gatherings and a market place for local traders and crafts- man as also provided opportunities for the landlords to levy taxes and customs duties on goods sold there.

Conclusion: The rise of social groups and feudal social formation was well established under the Hoysalas, could have had a adverse effect on the religious, social, political, economic and cultural conditions of Karnataka. Dr. G.R. Kuppuswamy asserts that economic ideas and institutions were in a most developed forms, from earlier times, the agrahara pattern of living and guild type of industrial organization have along with others still survived in Karnataka. This happened because they made liberal land grants to social groups. They encouraged agrarian expansion and it resulted in the growth of economy. The economy was very well established and it was in a prosperous condition. The medieval Karnataka under study formed a very important role in the economic as well as the social life of people under Hoysalas.

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