

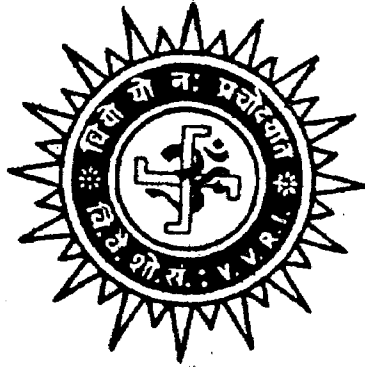
Vol. 1

December 2002

RESEARCH BULLETIN

VISHVESHVARANAND VEDIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Editor
Ashvini Agrawal



Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute
P.O. Sadhu Ashram, Hoshiarpur - 146 021, India

GOTRAS IN THE INSCRIPTIONS OF SOUTH KANARA

Nagendra Rao

Introduction

In the ancient times *gotras* played a significant role in determining the social status of an individual in the society. Earlier the brahmans enjoyed the advantage of connecting their genealogy with ancient sages. Later this advantage was extended to non-brahman communities as well, particularly the *kṣatriyas*. The brahman *gotras* were exogamous. Apart from claiming social status, *gotras* were essential to enter into the institution of marriage. *Sagotra* marriage, i.e., marriage within the same *gotra*, was a taboo. As Romila Thapar says *gotras* served a distinct social function and underlined the status of the brahmans and indicated that the knowledge of ritual was a crucial aspect of social status. At the point where it became socially necessary there was a rush to systematize the lists and connections. Further Thapar says that for the brahmans the maintenance of such a system was necessary when new members had to be recruited who were not from the old kinship groups.¹ Thus through *gotras* the brahmans claimed that they were connected to great sages like *Vaśiṣṭha*, *Viśvamitra*, *Kaśyapa*, *Bhāradvaja*, etc. In the rituals the brahman had to accept the gift after introducing himself to the people that he belonged to a particular *gotra*. As in other parts of India, in South Kanara too one can find large number of landgrants that were made to brahmans by kings and rich members in the society with the purpose of legitimatizing their position in society. However, only few inscriptions mention about the *gotras* of the grantees and grantors. Here we inquire as to why only few land grants mention the *gotras* of brahmans. The content of the inscriptions would help us to know that when a detail was left out, this was done deliberately so as to fulfill a particular objective of the land grant.

Land grants in South Kanara

Several land grants were made to the brahmans of South Kanara. These grants were made both by the king or his subordinates and sometimes by rich members of the society like traders and rich agriculturists. Land was either given to the brahmans or it was given to temples which would be administered by important members of the society. Some land grants of South

Kanara mention the arrangement made to provide food to a particular number of brahmans. In most of these cases names and *gotras* of these brahmans are not mentioned.² This is because the people of the locality were not unaware of these usual arrangements and there was no need to elaborately give all details of grantees.

Reference to *gotras*

In South Kanara inscriptions mention *gotras* when land grant was made to a brahman who was newly introduced to the region. In order to make the people of the locality to adjust with him, his details were given in the inscriptions. The Mangalore inscription belonging to A.D. 1420³ states that Karaṇika Hariyarasa of Mangalore made a land grant to some brahmans. Hariyarasa originally belonged to an *agrahāra* of Harihara and he belonged to Bhāradvāja *gotra*. Here the grantor is introduced to the locality by mentioning his *gotra*.

A Jain inscription belonging to Mudabidre mentions that the Salva king belonged to Kaśyapa *gotra*.⁴ Thus not only the brahmans, but kṣatriyas also claimed that they belonged to a particular *gotra*. By the medieval period the need of the *kṣatriyas* or kings to claim a particular *gotra* had become an all India phenomenon. South Kanara was not an exception to this development. The Barkur inscription belonging to A.D. 1431 mentions the grant given by Viṣṇu Bhaṭṭa and Saṅkara Bhaṭṭa who belonged to Haiverājya. It is stated that they belonged to Kaśyapa *gotra* and *Yajur* branch.⁵ Haiverājya now comprises the present North Kanara district of Karnataka. Haive was known for the Havyaka brahman settlements. During the later period many Havyakas migrated to South Kanara and they participated in arecanut cultivation.

The Barkur inscription belonging to A.D. 1434 mentions the grant made by Devarasa Upādhyaya who belonged to Hārīta *gotra* and *Yaju* branch.⁶ Another Barkur inscription belonging to A.D. 1440 mentions that Annappa Odeya, the governor of Barkur, made a land grant to Timire Dandana Ayya who belonged to Harita *gotra* and *Yajur* branch.⁷ Yet another Barkur inscription belonging to A.D. 1440 mentions that Annappa Odeya made a land grant to Joyiṣa Rāmanna who belonged to Maudgalya *gotra* and *Rk* branch.⁸

One inscription discovered near the Kundesvara temple,

Kundapura dated A.D. 1451 states that a gift of 48 *honnus*, which was the income from salt pans in Kundapura, was made to Joyiṣa Hariyappa of Maudgalya *gotra* and *Rk śākha*.⁹ Hariyappa belonged to Hemmadi.

Another Barkur inscription belonging to A.D. 1499 mentions the land grant made by sons of Sovanna of Vasudhare to one Narana deva. They belonged to Viśvāmitra *gotra* and *Asvalāyana Sutra*.¹⁰ Another Mudabidre inscription belonging to A.D. 1515 mentions Ratnappa Odeya as belonging to Daṇḍadhīpa *gotra*.¹¹ Thus even the Jains claimed to belong to certain *gotras*. This shows that it was difficult for Jains to remain in seclusion independent of developments in a brahmanical society. The Paḍuva Panamburu inscription¹² belonging to the reign of Devarāya II mentions the land grant made by the local Banga Prince Paṇḍyapparasa to Govindadeva's sons who belonged to Kolaturu. The inscription mentions that they belonged to *Atreya gotra*.

An inscription found near Kṛṣṇa Matha Udupi belonging to A.D. 1614 mentions that Lingappaya made grants to the Kṛṣṇa matha. It is stated that Lingappaya belonged to Śāṅkuvali *agrahara* of Kolapi *grama*. He belonged to Bhāradvāja *gotra* and *Rk* branch (*śākha*).¹³ Another inscription found in the same place belonging to A.D. 1614 mentions that Damarsa Prabhu, the son of Dama Prabhu belonging to Maṭhagrāma made a grant to the temple. It is stated that Damarsa Prabhu belonged to Kauśika *gotra* and *Rk* branch. Maṭhagrāma was a part of Saṣaṣṭigrāma of Goa. Maṭhagrāma was one of the important eight villages of the locality. It is possible that Damarsa Prabhu belonged to Sārasvata brahman community and he maintained contact with Kṛṣṇa temple and gave offerings to the *Matha*.¹⁴

The above references to *gotra* suggests that when land grant was made to the brahmins of the locality there was no need to specify their details which were known to the people. Thus *gotras* are mentioned to introduce the person to the society and thereby get legitimacy. There are references to brahmins from Harihara, Haiverājya and Goa.

Secondly, all these references belong to the Vijayanagara period and post Vijayanagara period. During this time there were many land-grants which were made by the kings either directly or indirectly through the governors at Barkur and Mangalore. It was

this encouragement given by the kings and officials which was responsible for the creation of brahman settlements in South Kanara. In fact it was during this period that the brahmanical traditional chronicle *Grdmapaddhati* was written and became popular in the brahman households. Thus Vijayanagara and post Vijayanagara period represented the expansion of the brahman settlements in South Kanara. This suggestion is also supported by the fact that not only brahmans but there was migration of traders, artisans and other communities to South Kanara. Therefore, when the gotras were mentioned in the inscriptions there was a specific purpose in doing that.

References :

1. Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History : Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1979, PP. 289-290.
2. For instance, see *South Indian Inscriptions* (henceforth *SII*), Vol. VII, Nos. 270, 296, etc.
3. *SII*, VII, No. 187.
4. *Ibid*, No. 207.
5. *Ibid*, No. 311.
6. *Ibid*, No. 382.
7. *Ibid*, No. 313.
8. *Ibid*, No. 318.
9. *SII*, Vol. IX, Part II, No. 455.
10. *Ibid*, No. 364.

11. **Ibid, No. 212.**
12. **Ibid, No. 265.**
13. **Ibid, No. 301.**
14. **Ibid, No. 302.**