

## LAND GRANTS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL GOA

by

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As in certain other parts of India,<sup>1</sup> so in Goa too, the brahmana community has played a very significant role in the development of the economy, polity and society. The brahmanas in Goa were given land grants by the various dynasties, like the Bhojas, the Mauryas of the Konkan, and the Kadambas of Goa. By the gift of lands to the brahmanas, the State perhaps expected a specific contribution from the brahmanas towards the maintenance of social order in the State and the legitimization of the ruling dynasties. This role of the brahmanas is overtly and covertly suggested by the nature of the land grants given by the different dynasties to the temples, to brahmanas and to the Buddhist monasteries.

### **The Nature of State and Polity in Medieval Goa**

Before the study of the role of the brahmanas in Medieval Goa is undertaken, it is essential to discuss the nature of the State<sup>2</sup> and the political structure. The dynasties which ruled Medieval Goa were the Bhojas, the Mauryas of the Konkan, the Chalukyas of Badami, and the Kadambas of Goa. For a limited period, the Vijayanagara rulers also controlled Goa, for in one of the Vijayanagara inscriptions it is stated how one Vijayanagara governor from Goa was sent to another Vijayanagara territory of Barkur.<sup>3</sup> For all these dynasties, Goa was a part of their larger empire.<sup>4</sup> Thus, they introduced the same administrative structure which was in vogue in other parts of their empire. Hence, the grants of land

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1. Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmana Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies* (Calicut, 1978); Nagendra Rao, "The Historical Tradition of South Kanara and the Brahmanical Groups: A Study of *Gramapaddhati* and *Sahyadri Khanda*", Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Mangalore University, 1995.
  2. A general debate regarding the nature of the State in India during the pre-Modern period is found in Hermann Kulke (ed.), *State in India 1000-1700* (Delhi, 1997).
  3. *South Indian Inscriptions (SI)*, (Mysore, 1986), Volume VII, No. 349.
  4. Each empire or kingdom consists of a core and peripheries. These kingdoms considered Goa as a periphery.

to brahmanas, which was a common phenomenon in their empire, was also introduced in the area of Goa. Since most of the rulers belonged to a region outside Goa, perhaps they needed an agency to provide them legitimacy through which they could consolidate their position in the locality. As a result, they tried to obtain the support of the brahmana community. It is also possible that many of the brahmanas may have been brought from outside the area and provided with facilities to settle in the region of Goa. The State officials would give them certain instructions. These instructions, when carried out, would fetch rich dividends for the State in the form of enhanced agricultural production which would thereby increase the revenue of the State.

### **The Brahmanical Traditions**

According to the brahmanical traditions, as mentioned in *Sahyadri Khanda*,<sup>5</sup> which is supposed to be a part of *Skanda Purana*, the brahmanas claimed that the brahmana settlements on the western coast of India, including in Goa, were established by Parasurama. It is said that Parasurama made the sea to bequeath land and this same land was offered to the brahmanas.<sup>6</sup> This tradition has been presented in different regions of the western coast even though the form of representation of this tradition varies from one region to another. Thus the brahmanical literature tries to assert the hegemony of the brahmanas on villages that were traditionally given to them by the sage Parasurama. This claim seems to have been authenticated by the land grants that were given to the brahmanas by the different dynasties. It is possible that the rulers might have encouraged the migration of brahmanas to those regions where there was a lower population of brahmanas. A sizeable brahmana population was necessary for the kings to obtain legitimacy and thereby to be able to administer the areas with greater ease and control.<sup>7</sup>

### **Details of Brahmanical Gotras in the Land Grants**

One significant feature of the land grants in Goa is the elaborate details recorded concerning the brahmanical *gotras*.

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5. Nagendra Rao, "Reconstructing the Social History of South Kanara: A Study of the *Sahyadri Khanda*", *Indica*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (September, 1999), pp. 81-88.
  6. For a critical analysis of brahmanical traditions, see D. D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* (Bombay, Reprint, 1994).
  7. Also see Hermann Kulke (ed.), *State in India 1000-1700*.

These details, when compared with the references to *gotras* in the inscriptions of South Kanara,<sup>8</sup> do seem to indicate an enhanced prominence that the brahmanas may have gained during this period. The details regarding the brahmanical *gotras* may be presented in the form of following table:

Inscription	Date	Gotra
Shiroda plate of Bhojas	3rd-4th century AD	Bharadwaja
Bandora plate of Bhojas	5th century AD	Agniveshya
Bandora plate of Bhojas	5th century AD	Bharadwaja
Bandora plate of Bhojas	5th century AD	Kamboja
Shivapur plate of Mauryas	6th-7th century AD	Hariti

The above table seems to illustrate that there were a few inscriptions which did mention the *gotras* of the brahmanas of Goa to whom the land grants were made. They do not mention whether these brahmanas were the indigenous people or whether they had migrated from another part of India. This may indicate that by the time the land grants were issued by the kings to the brahmanas, these had become an integral part of the State. It is also possible that the brahmanas themselves had perhaps forgotten from which area they had migrated to Goa. The reference to the *gotras* indicates that the officials and the kings gave importance to the *gotra* status of the brahmanas and the fact that often both the personal names and their *gotras* are mentioned together, does seem to confirm this view.

This may mean that the kings had accepted the reality of the *varna*-based society where there prevailed a social stratification devised and patronized by the brahmana-dominated law codes in society. Interestingly, the period from 4th century AD to 7th century AD roughly corresponds to the classic age of feudalism as envisaged and elaborated by R. S. Sharma, who claims that this was the heyday of feudalism.<sup>9</sup> Sharma explains that feudalism meant the creation of a separate group of landed intermediaries between the actual cultivator and the State. In simple terms, feudalism implies the development of a new relationship between the landlord and the peasant.

8. Nagendra Rao, "Gotras in the inscriptions of South Kanara", *Research Bulletin of Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute*, Vol. 1, (December 2002), pp. 176-180.

9. R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* (Delhi, 1980), pp. 1-56.

Sharma further suggests that initially the land grants were made mainly in the peripheries of a kingdom rather than in the core territories. If we apply this theory in the case of Goa, this could mean that Goa was often a part of a larger empire like that of the Bhojas or the Mauryas and that Goa was situated on the periphery of these kingdoms. By gifting land to the brahmanas on the periphery of their kingdoms, the kings tried to gain the support of the brahmana population in those regions but, in the process, they also created landed intermediaries between the State and the actual cultivators. In this sense, we can suggest that Goa was becoming part of the feudal system. This needs further justification in the form of inscriptional evidence with an analysis of the evidence available.

### Study of the Land Grants

The earliest known record of the Bhoja ruler of Goa was found at Siroda. On the basis of paleography, this record is supposed to belong to the 3rd or 4th century AD. It was issued from Chandrapur (modern Chandor) in the Salcete taluka. Devaraja, of the Siroda plate, is the first known ruler of the Bhoja dynasty of Chandrapur. Rahasya Adhikari or the private secretary of the king, Prabhakara, is said to have composed it. It is written in southern Brahmi. The royal emblem of the elephant is seen on the seal. It records the grant of some tolls from the village Thanniyarka-Kottinakayya, in the country of the division of Jiyaya, to two brahmanas, Govinda Swami and Indra Swami, of the Bhardwaja *gotra*, along with the income accruing in the village and also the income realised on things brought into it, evidently articles of merchandise, together with a house site and some pasture land for cows, to each of the above-mentioned brahmanas. The charter further enjoins the proper supply to the donees of the grass from the pastures and also of fuel. From the wording of the record, it appears as if the king proclaims his ratification or sanction of the above mentioned gifts made by Prabha Naga Bhogikamatya for the acquisition of his own spiritual salvation.<sup>10</sup> The place may be identified with the village Thana Cortalim. The fact that this inscription was written in southern Brahmi indicates the influence of north Indian elements in Goa. The practice of land grants might also have been the result of such an influence, though there is sufficient evidence that in South India too, there existed the practice of land grants, for example, under the Pallavas in the Tamil region.

10. *Epigraphia Indica*, (Henceforth *EI*), XXIV, pp. 143-144; V. T. Gune, (ed.), *Gazetteer of the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu*, District Gazetteer, Part I: Goa, Panaji, 1979 (Henceforth, *Gazetteer*), p. 65.

There are two grants of king Prithivimallavarman which were found at Bandora (Bandiwadi), in Ponda taluka.

The first one refers to the grant of a field surrounded by blue hills from a village Bhagala-pallika from Kupalapa-kotaharadesh to a brahmana, Madhavarya, of the Agniveshya *gotra*. The grant was made for the merit of the king's mother, Chetasadevi, at the request of his brother, Satrudamana. Chetasadevi is described as Nellikabalika.

Another grant of Prithivimallavarman was issued from the victorious Prithiviparavata. The place may be identified with the village Parvat near Chandor. It is addressed to the present and future *bhogikas*, *ayuktas* and *sthayinis*. It records the grant of a field named *kapoti khajjana* situated in the village Malar, included in the Kupalakatadesha, to a brahman, Damarya, of the Bhardwaja *gotra*, who is also called Agniveshya. The above two records may belong to the later half of the 5th century A.D.<sup>11</sup>

R. S. Panchamukhi has discovered another copper-plate inscription of the Bhojas of the 7th century AD. It registers a gift of land made by Dharmamaharaja Kapalivarman of the Bhoja family to a certain Svamikaraja who, in his turn, granted it to a brahmana named Bhavarya. The land was situated in the village of Sivapuraka. The grant was issued from the king's camp at Pamasakhetaka.<sup>12</sup>

There are two copper-plate grants of the Maurya kings found in the Goa territory: (1) Shivapur plates of Chandravarman and (2) Bandora plates of Amirjitvarman. On paleographical grounds, they are dated to the 6th and 7th century AD.

The Shivapura plate records the donation of some land to the Mahavihara i.e. monastery situated in Shivapur. Shivapur is identified with Shiroda.

The Bandora plates from Goa were issued by Maurya Maharaja Amirjitavarman from Kumaradwipa. i.e. modern Cumburjua found in Tiswadi taluka. It is addressed to the inhabitants of twelve villages as well as to the present and future officials such as *bhojas*, *ayuktas* and *sthayins*. The record registers the king's grant of one *hala* of *khajjana* land as well as a piece of land, which includes a house site, a garden and a tank, belonging to an unnamed Rashtrakuta, to a brahmin. Hastarya. of the Hariti *gotra*. He is described as

11. V. T. Gune (ed.), *Gazetteer*, pp. 65-66.

12. *EI*, XXVI, p. 339.

*ukta niyoga* and *grihita sahasra*. The expression seems to have been used to indicate his learning of the *Samaveda*, which is supposed to have a thousand branches. In addition to this, some land was to be reclaimed by clearing the forest, *asanga-karsana*, and by employing four batches of workers, *preshya-kula* was also granted. The gift was made for securing merit and the final bliss for the king. The gift was exempted from all taxes i.e., *panga*. The donee, Hastarya, was to enjoy the produce of the land by putting up a bund to prevent salt water from entering the field on the seashore.<sup>13</sup>

The Neru inscription records a grant of land by Vijayamahadevi, Queen consort of Chandraditya, in the 15th year of Vikramaditya's reign, to brahmana, Aryaswami Dikshit, the son of Chaturvedi, the son of the Grihaspati of Vatsa gotra, from a village Tarakagara. The village Parishvasu on the southern border of land grant can be identified with the present village Parcem, of the the Pernem taluka of Goa.<sup>14</sup>

Under the Kadamba kings, one can notice a continuation of the above practices. An inscription, belonging to AD 1059, registers the grant of a deserted village called Laghumorambika, situated in Gopaka-dvipa-vishaya, to Chhadama, chief of the king's body guards, for the purpose of populating that region. The donee was to pay annually thirty-five Bhairava *nishkas*, but no other levy was to be collected from him. One may note that Chhadama belonged to the family of the sailors of Chemulyapura and belonged to the Tajya race.<sup>15</sup> This inscription thus indicates that this grant was given to the traders who showed some interest in the proper administration and development of the land. The land grant thus fetched some revenue to the State.

Another Kadamba inscription, belonging to Saka 1028, refers to a well protected settlement of brahmanas called Brahmapuri. The inscription provides details regarding the twelve families of brahmanas who were invited to reside in the new settlement. The Kadamba subordinate official, called Kelima, made several benefactions in favour of the brahmanas, hailing from different parts of the country. This was carried out in the presence of the king, along with his priest, the chief minister, and some representatives of the town and the rural areas (*paura-janapada*). We find details

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13. V. T. Gune (ed.), *Gazetteer*, pp. 71-72.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

15. B. Sheikh Ali (ed.), "Sources of Karnataka History: Volume I, Kadambas", Unpublished Project Report (Mysore, 1974), pp. 133-134.

regarding the various fields, gardens and houses purchased by Kelima in different places in the Goa region for the maintenance of the brahmanas. Kelima formulated certain rules for the equitable enjoyment of the properties by the beneficiaries and their successors as also the fines to be enjoined upon those who violated these rules. The fact that a subordinate official was given the right to give land grant to the brahmanas indicates delegation of political authority to feudatories during this period.

The twelve brahmana families belonged to gotras like Sankha, Bhaladana, Bharadvaja, Atri, Vatsa, Sandilya and Kausika. The record enumerates three generations of each donee and the hereditary offices held by them, which were generally associated with the royal house-hold, such as the *pauranika*, astrologer, superintendent of religious affairs, priest, preceptor, educational instructor and specialist in sacrificial lore.

All the lands and the houses were to be treated as common property and the income obtained was to be distributed equally among the twelve families. The seller and purchaser of a part of it were liable to a fine of five-hundred coins. A member was entitled to his share so long as he remained a part of the settlement. In case he left the place, his portion was to be enjoyed by the rest, and the deserter was also liable to a fine, if he claimed his share. A new person could be accommodated in the vacant house with the consent of all the residents. The violation of this rule invited stern punishment.<sup>16</sup>

Another Kadamba inscription belonging to AD 1179 records a gift of land by the king to the goddess, Arya Bhagavati. The beneficiary of the gift was a brahmana of the Bharadvaja *gotra*, named Govinda, who was well versed in the science of astronomy. The donees family is described for four generations.<sup>17</sup>

### Signs of Feudalism found in the Land Grants

The land grants, mentioned above, have been seen as belonging to the period from the 4th century to the 9th century AD., which period corresponds to the age of feudalism. In fact, R. S. Sharma argues that the origin of feudalism can be traced to such land grants<sup>18</sup> and the political decentralization that went

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16. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-138.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

18. R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*; Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, (Bombay, 1995).

along with the land grants. The land grants of Goa included certain extra privileges to the beneficiaries. For instance, the Siroda plates mention the grant of tolls to a brahmana. This reveals the fact that the brahmanas were taking an interest in performing even secular functions in society. For, even though this was obviously a grant on religious grounds, the beneficiary was called upon to perform the secular duty of collection of tolls. However, this power to collect revenue might have strengthened the social position of the brahmanas to a great extent.

This grant also mentions the grant of a house site and pasture lands to the beneficiary. The reference to a house site may indicate that along with land, the peasants on the land were also transferred to the donees. This is one of the earliest references indicating the emergence of serfdom in Western India. The grant mentions the name of the brahmanas and their *gotras* which meant that their status was recognised by the donor. The donees were also allowed to claim ownership over grass, as also, other materials needed for the purpose of fuel. This grant was given by an official, named Bhogikamatya, and ratified by the king. Perhaps the official had not become independent from the authority of the king and, as a result, he had to seek permission from the king before bestowing these grants on the brahmanas.

The Bandora Grants address the officials like *bhogikas*, *ayuktas* and *sthayinas*. Perhaps it was necessary to obtain their support so that they would not disturb the beneficiaries of the grant. The Bhoja Grant of the 7th century AD is a clear example of feudation and sub-infeudation in early medieval Goa. When the Bhoja king granted land to Swamikaraja, he grants the same land to a brahmana.

The kings and benefactors also donated land and villages to both temples and Buddhist monasteries. This might have facilitated their emergence as landed institutions. This obviously needed the service of peasants to till the land and this was provided for by transferring the land along with the labour thereon. This indicates that by the 7th century AD, the feudal social formation had come to stay in Goa.

The Bandora plates also mention the grant of land in the forest area and the beneficiaries were expected to reclaim the forest with the help of peasants supplied by the benefactor. This indicates that the State tried to encourage agricultural production in the peripheries and the brahmanas can be considered as pioneers who converted the forest area into lands suitable for cultivation.



Usually the land granted to the brahmanas was exempt from taxation. One inscription mentions that just one *hala* of *khajjana* land was granted which seems to indicate that large tracts of fertile land was not available at that time. This suggests the fragmentation of landed property. However, when we discuss about proprietary types in Goa, we should note the existence of the village community system, wherein certain dominant sections of the village population owned the land as community property. This may be one reason why large areas of fertile land was not available.

An analysis of the above land-grant reveals that certain features of feudalism, which are found in other regions of medieval India, were also found in the case of early medieval Goa.

### **Other information available from Inscriptions**

From the clear references to various villages by name, one can surmise that the land-grants are executed in a pre-dominantly rural society. The transition from a pre-dominantly rural society to a pre-dominantly urban society might have taken place much later, perhaps during the rule of the Kadambas of Goa, since it is during their rule that references can be found to various urban terms in their inscriptions. In fact, Gopakapattana is known to have been an important political and trade centre under the early rulers of the Kadambas of Goa.

Accepting the tradition that some brahmanas were encouraged to migrate to Goa, this could have been done in order to legitimize the position of the kings who also perhaps belonged to an outside region. If one studies the polity of the Bhojas and of the Mauryas of the Konkan, one discerns that Goa was hardly a core territory and hence the kings might have encouraged land grants in this region on the periphery of their kingdoms. The region was already populated as the land grants mention the people residing in those villages.

Significantly, when the Kadambas<sup>19</sup> usurped power in the 10th-11th centuries in Goa, there is a change in the nature of the inscriptions. The basic nature of the inscriptions now seems to be to glorify the achievements of the kings. The inscriptions of this period are replete with the genealogy and the glorification of the Kadambas. Land grants to the brahmanas and religious institutions become rare during this period even though there is

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19. G. M. Moraes, *Kadamba Kula: A History of Ancient and Medieval Karnataka* (New Delhi, 1990).

a reference in one or two inscriptions granting lands to brahmanas and other secular beneficiaries.

This period also witnessed an age of maritime expansion. There was revival of international trade during this period and Goa became one of the important trade centres on the western coast. Expansion in trade and commerce is also noticed during the period when there was conquest of this region by Vijayanagara and Bahamani kings.

The thesis that feudal social formation evolved in medieval Goa is also suggested by the studies done by D. D. Kosambi on the village communities of Goa.<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

The records examined thus demonstrate that in early medieval Goa, the brahmanas were given land grants with certain privileges and certain responsibilities. The details recorded in the land-grants concerning the brahmanical *gotras* seem to indicate the enhanced prominence that the brahmanas had gained during this period. The land-grants obviously strengthened their social and economic position in society in which they were enjoined to act as both religious and secular functionaries.

The policy of the State seems to have been to enter into an alliance with the brahmana community so that the State may attain legitimization in that society and thus be able to maintain a control over the whole region without the use of force. Goa was often a part of a larger empire like that of the Bhojas or the Mauryas and was situated on the periphery of these kingdoms. By gifting land to the brahmanas on the periphery of their kingdoms, the kings tried to gain the support of the brahmana population in those regions but, in the process, they also created landed intermediaries between the State and the actual cultivators. The brahmanas, who became landlords, seem to have utilised the services of the peasants to develop and cultivate the land received by them under the land-grants and this contributed towards the increase in the agricultural production of the region. These factors gradually led to emergence of feudalism in early medieval Goa.

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20. D. D. Kosambi, "The Village Community in the 'Old Conquests' of Goa", in *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* (Bombay, Reprint, 1994).