



Kannada Literature and Culture in Western Chalukya Empire (973–1189)

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ABSTRACT: The Western Chalukya Empire ruled most of the western Deccan, South India, between the 10th and 12th centuries. This Kannadiga dynasty is sometimes called the Kalyani Chalukya after its regal capital at Kalyani, today's Basavakalyan in the modern Bidar District of Karnataka state, and alternatively the Later Chalukya from its theoretical relationship to the 6th century Chalukya dynasty of Badami. The dynasty is called Western Chalukyas to differentiate from the contemporaneous Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, a separate dynasty. Prior to the rise of these Chalukyas, the Rashtrakuta empire of Manyakheta controlled most of Deccan and Central India for over two centuries. In 973, seeing confusion in the Rashtrakuta empire after a successful invasion of their capital by the ruler of the Paramara dynasty of Malwa, Tailapa II, a feudatory of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty ruling from Bijapur region defeated his overlords and made Manyakheta his capital. The dynasty quickly rose to power and grew into an empire under Someshvara I who moved the capital to Kalyani.

Keywords: Kannada literature, Kannadiga dynasty, Manyakheta, Paramara dynasty of Malwa, Someshvara, Western Chalukya Empire

I. INTRODUCTION

The two empires of Southern India, the Western Chalukyas and the Chola dynasty of Tanjore fought many fierce wars to control the fertile region of Vengi. During these conflicts, The Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, distant cousins of the Western Chalukyas but related to the Cholas by marriage took sides with the Cholas further complicating the situation. During the rule of Vikramaditya VI, in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, the Western Chalukyas convincingly contended with the Cholas and reached a peak ruling territories that spread over most of the Deccan, between the Narmada River in the north and Kaveri River in the south. His exploits were not limited to the south for even as a prince, during the rule of Someshvara I, he had led successful military campaigns as far east as modern Bihar and Bengal. During this period the other major ruling families of the Deccan [1], the Hoysalas, the Seuna Yadavas of Devagiri, the Kakatiya dynasty and the Southern Kalachuris of Kalyani, were subordinates of the Western Chalukyas and gained their independence only when the power of the Chalukya waned during the later half of the 12th century.

The Western Chalukyas developed an architectural style known today as a transitional style, an architectural link between the style of the early Chalukya dynasty and that of the later Hoysala empire. Most of its monuments are in the districts bordering the Tungabhadra River in central Karnataka [2]. Well known examples are the Kasivisvesvara Temple at Lakkundi, the Mallikarjuna Temple at Kuruvatti, the Kallesvara Temple at Bagali and the Mahadeva Temple at Itagi. This was an important period in the development of fine arts in Southern India, especially in literature as the Western Chalukya kings encouraged writers in the native language Kannada, and Sanskrit.

II. CULTURE

The fall of the Rashtrakuta empire to the Western Chalukyas in the 10th century, coinciding with the defeat of the Western Ganga Dynasty by the Cholas in Gangavadi, was a setback to Jainism. The growth of Virashaivism in

the Chalukya territory and Vaishnava Hinduism in the Hoysala region paralleled a general decreased interest in Jainism, although the succeeding kingdoms continued to be religiously tolerant. Two locations of Jain worship in the Hoysala territory continued to be patronaged, Shravanabelagola and Kambadahalli. The decline of Buddhism in South India had begun in the 8th century with the spread of Adi Shankara's Advaita philosophy. The only places of Buddhist worship that remained during the Western Chalukya rule were at Dambal and Balligavi. There is no mention of religious conflict in the writings and inscriptions of the time which suggest the religious transition was smooth.

Although the origin of the Virashaiva faith has been debated, the movement grew through its association with Basavanna in the 12th century. Basavanna and other Virashaiva saints preached of a faith without a caste system. In his Vachanas (a form of poetry), Basavanna appealed to the masses in simple Kannada and wrote "work is worship" (Kayakave Kailasa). Also known as the Lingayats (worshippers of the Linga, the universal symbol of Shiva), these Virashaivas questioned many of the established norms of society such as the belief in rituals and the theory of rebirth and supported the remarriage of widows and the marriage of unwed older women. This gave more social freedom to women but they were not accepted into the priesthood. Ramanujacharya, the head of the Vaishnava monastery in Srirangam, traveled to the Hoysala territory and preached the way of devotion (bhakti marga). He later wrote Sribhashya, a commentary on Badarayana Brahmasutra, a critique on the Advaita philosophy of Adi Shankara. Ramanujacharya's stay in Melkote resulted in the Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana converting to Vaishnavism, a faith that his successors also followed.

"The impact of these religious developments on the culture, literature, and architecture in South India was profound. Important works of metaphysics and poetry based on the teachings of these philosophers were written over the next centuries" [3]. Akka Mahadevi, Allama Prabhu, and a host of Basavanna's followers, including Chenna Basava, Prabhudeva, Siddharama, and Kondaguli Kesiraja wrote hundreds of poems called Vachanas in praise of Lord Shiva. The esteemed scholars in the Hoysala court, Harihara and Raghavanka, were Virashaivas. This tradition continued into the Vijayanagar empire with such well-known scholars as Singiraja, Mallanarya, Lakkana Dandesa and other prolific writers of Virashaiva literature. The Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu dynasties of the Vijayanagar empire were followers of Vaishnavism and a Vaishnava temple with an image of Ramanujacharya exists today in the Vitthalapura area of Vijayanagara. Scholars in the succeeding Mysore Kingdom wrote Vaishnavite works supporting the teachings of Ramanujacharya. King Vishnuvardhana built many temples after his conversion from Jainism to Vaishnavism.

The rise of Veerashaivism was revolutionary and challenged the prevailing Hindu caste system which retained royal support. The social role of women largely depended on their economic status and level of education in this relatively liberal period. Freedom was more available to women in the royal and affluent urban families. Records describe the participation of women in the fine arts, such as Chalukya queen Chandala Devi's and Kalachuris of Kalyani queen Sovala Devi's skill in dance and music. The compositions of thirty Vachana women poets included the work of the 12th century Virashaiva mystic Akka Mahadevi whose devotion to the bhakti movement is well known. Contemporary records indicate some royal women were involved in administrative and martial affairs such as princess Akkadevi, (sister of King Jayasimha II) who fought and defeated rebellious feudals. Inscriptions emphasise public acceptance of widowhood indicating that Sati (a custom in which a dead man's widow used to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre) though present was on a voluntary basis. Ritual deaths to achieve salvation were seen among the Jains who preferred to fast to death (Sallekhana), while people of some other communities chose to jump on spikes (Shoolabrahma) or walking into fire on an eclipse.

In a Hindu caste system that was conspicuously present, Brahmins enjoyed a privileged position as providers of knowledge and local justice. These Brahmins were normally involved in careers that revolved around religion and learning with the exception of a few who achieved success in martial affairs. They were patronised by kings, nobles and wealthy aristocrats who persuaded learned Brahmins to settle in specific towns and villages by making them grants of land and houses. The relocation of Brahmin scholars was calculated to be in the interest of the kingdom as they were viewed as persons detached from wealth and power and their knowledge was a useful tool to educate and teach ethical conduct and discipline in local communities. Brahmins were also actively involved in solving local problems by functioning as neutral arbiters (Panchayat) [4].

Regarding eating habits, Brahmins, Jains, Buddhists and Shaivas were strictly vegetarian while the partaking of different kinds of meat was popular among other communities. Marketplace vendors sold meat from domesticated

animals such as goats, sheep, pigs and fowl as well as exotic meat including partridge, hare, wild fowl and boar. People found indoor amusement by attending wrestling matches (Kusti) or watching animals fight such as cock fights and ram fights or by gambling. Horse racing was a popular outdoor past time. In addition to these leisurely activities, festivals and fairs were frequent and entertainment by traveling troupes of acrobats, dancers, dramatists and musicians was often provided.

Schools and hospitals are mentioned in records and these were built in the vicinity of temples. Marketplaces served as open air town halls where people gathered to discuss and ponder local issues. Choirs, whose main function was to sing devotional hymns, were maintained at temple expense. Young men were trained to sing in choirs in schools attached to monasteries such as Hindu Matha, Jain Palli and Buddhist Vihara. These institutions provided advanced education in religion and ethics and were well equipped with libraries (Saraswati Bhandara). Learning was imparted in the local language and in Sanskrit. Schools of higher learning were called Brahmapuri (or Ghatika or Agrahara). Teaching Sanskrit was a near monopoly of Brahmins who received royal endowments for their cause. Inscriptions record that the number of subjects taught varied from four to eighteen. The four most popular subjects with royal students were Economics (Vartta), Political Science (Dandaniti), Veda (trayi) and Philosophy (Anvikshiki), subjects that are mentioned as early as Kautilyas Arthashastra.

III. LITERATURE

The Western Chalukya era was one of substantial literary activity in the native Kannada, and Sanskrit. In a golden age of Kannada literature, Jain scholars wrote about the life of Tirthankaras and Virashaiva poets expressed their closeness to God through pithy poems called Vachanas. Nearly three hundred contemporary Vachanakaras (Vachana poets) including thirty women poets have been recorded. Early works by Brahmin writers were on the epics, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata, Puranas and Vedas. In the field of secular literature, subjects such as romance, erotics, medicine, lexicon, mathematics, astrology, encyclopedia etc. were written for the first time.

Most notable among Kannada scholars were Ranna, grammarian Nagavarma II, minister Durgasimha and the Virashaiva saint and social reformer Basavanna. Ranna who was patronised by king Tailapa II and Satyashraya is one among the "three gems of Kannada literature" [5]. He was bestowed the title "Emperor among poets" (Kavi Chakravathi) by King Tailapa II and has five major works to his credit. Of these, Saahasabheema Vijayam or Gada yuddha Sangrah of 982 in Champu style is a eulogy of his patron King Satyashraya whom he compares to Bhima in valour and achievements and narrates the duel between Bhima and Duryodhana using clubs on the eighteenth day of the Mahabharata war. He wrote Ajitha purana in 993 describing the life of the second Tirthankara, Ajitanatha.

Nagavarma II, poet laureate (Katakacharya) of King Jagadhekamalla II made contributions to Kannada literature in various subjects. His works in poetry, prosody, grammar and vocabulary are standard authorities and their importance to the study of Kannada language is well acknowledged. Kavyavalokana in poetics, Karnataka-Bhashabhushana on grammar and Vastukosa a lexicon (with Kannada equivalents for Sanskrit words) are some of his comprehensive contributions. Several works on medicine were produced during this period. Notable among them were Jagaddala Somanatha's Karnataka Kalyana Karaka.

“A unique and native form of poetic literature in Kannada called Vachanas developed during this time. They were written by mystics, who expressed their devotion to God in simple poems that could appeal to the masses. Basavanna, AkkaMahadevi, AllamaPrabhu, Channabasavanna and Siddharama are the best known among them” [6].

In Sanskrit, a well-known poem (Mahakavya) in 18 cantos called Vikramankadeva Charita by Kashmiri poet Bilhana recounts in epic style the life and achievements of his patron king Vikramaditya VI. The work narrates the episode of Vikramaditya VI's accession to the Chalukya throne after overthrowing his elder brother Someshvara II. The great Indian mathematician Bhaskara II. flourished during this time. From his own account in his famous work Siddhanta Siromani (1150, comprising the Lilavati, Bijaganita on algebra, Goladhaya on the celestial globe and Grahaganita on planets) Bijjada Bida (Bijapur) was his native place.

Manasollasa or Abhilashitartha Chintamani by king Someshvara III (1129) was a Sanskrit work intended for all sections of society. This is an example of an early encyclopedia in Sanskrit covering many subjects including medicine, magic, veterinary science, valuing of precious stones and pearls, fortifications, painting, music, games, amusements etc. While the book does not give any of dealt topics particular hierarchy of importance, it serves as a

landmark in understanding the state of knowledge in those subjects at that time. Someshwara III also authored a biography of his famous father Vikramaditya VI called Vikraman-Kabhyudaya. The text is a historical prose narrative which also includes a graphic description of the geography and people of Karnataka.

A Sanskrit scholar Vijnaneshwara became famous in the field of legal literature for his Mitakshara, in the court of Vikramaditya VI. Perhaps the most acknowledged work in that field, Mitakshara is a treatise on law (commentary on Yajnavalkya) based on earlier writings and has found acceptance in most parts of modern India. An Englishman Colebrooke later translated into English the section on inheritance giving it currency in the British Indian court system. Some important literary works of the time related to music and musical instruments were Sangita Chudamani, Sangita Samayasara and Sangita Ratnakara [7].

The local language Kannada was mostly used in Western (Kalyani) Chalukya inscriptions and epigraphs. Some historians assert that ninety percent of their inscriptions are in the Kannada language while the remaining are in Sanskrit language [8]. More inscriptions in Kannada are attributed to Vikramaditya VI than any other king prior to the 12th century, many of which have been deciphered and translated by historians of the Archaeological Survey of India. Inscriptions were generally either on stone (Shilashasana) or copper plates (Tamarashasana). This period saw the growth of Kannada as a language of literature and poetry, impetus to which came from the devotional movement of the Virashaivas (called Lingayatism) who expressed their closeness to their deity in the form of simple lyrics called Vachanas. At an administrative level, the regional language was used to record locations and rights related to land grants. When bilingual inscriptions were written, the section stating the title, genealogy, origin myths of the king and benedictions were generally done in Sanskrit. Kannada was used to state terms of the grants, including information on the land, its boundaries, the participation of local authorities, rights and obligations of the grantee, taxes and dues, and witnesses. This ensured the content was clearly understood by the local people without any ambiguity.

In addition to inscriptions, chronicles called Vamshavalis were written to provide historical details of dynasties. Writings in Sanskrit included poetry, grammar, lexicon, manuals, rhetoric, commentaries on older works, prose fiction and drama. In Kannada, writings on secular subjects became popular. Some well-known works are Chandombudhi, a prosody, and Karnataka Kadambari, a romance, both written by Nagavarma I, a lexicon called Rannakanda by Ranna (993), a book on medicine called Karnataka-Kalyanakaraka by Jagaddala Somanatha, the earliest writing on astrology called Jatakatilaka by Sridharacharya (1049), a writing on erotics called Madanakatilaka by Chandraraja, and an encyclopedia called Lokapakara by Chavundaraya II (1025).

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