



An Estimate of Dhruva – The Rastrakuta Emperor (780-793 A.D.)

Sampath Kumar B.E.

Assistant professor of History.

Department of History

Vijaya College, Mulki, India

Abstract: Dhruva is one of the greatest monarchs of the Rashtrakuta dynasty and was principally responsible for giving a new trend to the imperial policy of the Rashtrakutas. During his time, there was no power in India to challenge the supremacy of the Rashtrakutas.

Index Terms - Dhruva, Rashtrakuta, Southern conquests, Northern expeditions, Great military figure.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dhruva is one of the most illustrious monarchs of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. His accession to the throne marks a turning point. His reign witnessed certain epoch-making events which raised the dynasty, whose fortunes had sunk low in the previous regime, to the status of a great imperial power, so much so that every contemporary royal house in India was struck with a sense of fear and anxiety. Though his period of rule was not very long, yet it is significant from several points of view. He moved like a whirlwind and conducted lightning campaigns against the Gangas of Talkadu, Pallavas of Kanchi, Chalukyas of Vengi, the Gurjara Pratiharas and the Palas, the last two being the great powers of the north. All these powers were compelled to acknowledge the supremacy of Dhruva and forced to pay tribute to him. Not merely in the domain of military activity, but also in administration and in education he made substantial contribution.

It has to be confessed that historical material on the reign of Dhruva is meagre, which makes the task of a historian all the more difficult. Nevertheless, the little that we possess in the form of epigraphs help us to form a fairly good account of his reign. The important inscriptions of his period are the Pimpri plates, the Dhulia plates and the Bhor State Museum plates. But these were issued either prior to his accession or immediately after his accession and hence they do not contain much information relating to his conquests. Therefore we have to largely depend upon the inscriptions issued by his successors. The most important of them are Radhapur and Wani Dindori plates of Govinda III, Sanjan plates of Amoghavarsha, and Baroda grant of Karka II. Several other inscriptions of the later Rastrakuta monarchs also give some details about the events of the regime of Dhruva; but these do not differ much from the ones contained in the inscriptions of Govinda III and Amoghavarsha.

Govinda II and Dhruva were the two sons of Krishna I. Both were given training in the art of warfare and administration. Dhruva was appointed as the governor of Nasik and Khandesh. Govinda succeeded his father in 773 A.D. But Govinda II soon after his accession preferred a life of ease and pleasure, and left the responsibility of government to his younger brother, Dhruva. It is stated in inscriptions that "sensual pleasures made Govindaraja careless of the kingdom and entrusting fully universal sovereignty to his younger brother, Nirupama, he allowed his position as sovereign to become loose". Dhruva who was sincere in his duties could not tolerate the ineptness of his brother.

II. CIVIL WAR WITH GOVINDA II

The indifference of Govinda II towards the administration of the kingdom provided an opportunity for Dhruva to assert himself as the sole administrator in the best interests of the kingdom. As a preliminary measure in this direction he started issuing grants in his own name, the famous Pimpri plates being the first among them. However, at an early stage Govinda realised what his brother was aiming at; consequently a friction developed between the two brothers. Govinda succeeded in removing Dhruva and installing a man of his choice as the ruler. The result was the outbreak of a civil war between the two brothers who were supported by several feudatories. Govinda II sought the help of the rulers of Vengi, Malwa, Kanchi and Gangavadi. But before this help could arrive Dhruva defeated Govinda and occupied the Rastrakuta throne. Though there is dearth of information about the battles that took place between Dhruva and the rulers who had come to the rescue of Govinda, it is definite that the armies of these rulers retreated when Dhruva's troops marched against them. Following this victory Dhruva ascended the throne in 780 A.D. Following this, most of the later Rastrakuta records also refer to this important event.

At the time of accession in 780 A.D. Dhruva was already an experienced and a mature man of about 50; for, when Dhulia plates were issued in 779 A.D., his son Karka Suvarnavarsha was a grown up man invested with the panchamahashabd and taking an active part in the administration of the kingdom. Dhruva proved himself to be one of the ablest kings of Rastrakuta Dynasty.

After his accession he subdued the refractory feudatories and established peace and order in the kingdom. This was followed by a series of campaigns against the neighbouring kings who had come to the succour of Govinda II.

III. SOUTHERN EXPEDITIONS:

He take revenge and to put himself in a secure position Dhruva resolved to punish the rulers of Ganga, Vengi, Malwa and the Pallava kingdoms, who had sided against him in the civil war. Altaker is of the opinion that Dhruva proceeded to the northern campaigns only after vanquishing the southern kingdoms.

Dhruva first invaded the Vengi kingdom. The Jetwai plates of Silamahadevi, the princess of Vengi and the queen of Dhruva, issued in 786 A.D. clearly indicate that Dhruva fought against the Vengi ruler much earlier than his encounter with the Ganga. It is reasonable to argue that it was only after the subjugation of the Vengi ruler that his daughter was given in marriage to Dhruva and that she in the capacity of a queen issued the grant. Regarding the date of the war it can be suggested that it occurred somewhere between 780-83 A.D. definitely not later than 786, in which year the Jetwai grant was issued. The victory against Vengi emboldened Dhruva to launch an attack on Gangavadi. The ruler had been one of the first persons to go to the help of Govinda II in the civil war. Hence, he too was an arch enemy of Dhruva. But the latter's task of subjugating the Ganga ruler was not easy. Sripurusha was a forceful and dynamic king and frustrated all attempts of Dhruva. But the opportunity came to Dhruva in 788 when Sripurusha passed away and Shivamara came to the throne. There is sufficient authentic information which throws light on the fact that the Ganga ruler was defeated right at his gates and was captured and taken prisoner by Dhruva. This fact is confirmed by the Ganga records also, according to which there was a 'crisis' in the Ganga country at this time. This is just an indirect hint suggesting that evil days had fallen on the Gangas.

Altaker's contention of the defeat of the Ganga king Sri Muttarasa (Sripurusha) and imprisonment of the crown prince Sivamara II does not seem to be correct when we carefully and closely study the events that led to the accession of Sivamara. Before his accession to the throne he had to wage a war against his brother Duggamara who was also an aspirant to the Ganga throne. The probable dissension in the Ganga kingdom soon after the civil war would have come as a fine opportunity for Dhruva to intervene and defeat Shivamara, who was exhausted in the war and who had no time to consolidate and organise himself to face Dhruva. P.B.Desai's opinion that Dhruva defeated Shivamara II, probably soon after his accession in 788 A.D. in the battle of Mudugundur, in spite of the latter's claim of having won the battle is quite tenable. In the light of the above facts it can be concluded that Shivamara II was defeated soon after his accession and was taken as captive by the Rastrakuta ruler. Gangavadi was acceded to the Rastrakuta Empire and Stamba (Kumba), the elder son of Dhruva was appointed its viceroy.

Dhruva after establishing his suzerainty over Vengi and Gangavadi turned his attention towards Dantivarman, the Pallava monarch, who was in league with Govinda II, hence an enemy of Dhruva. He could not withstand the attacks of Dhruva. Therefore, he sued for peace. He paid tribute to Dhruva and remained on the Pallava throne by accepting the supremacy of the Rastrakutas. Thus Dhruva by 789 A.D. came out of a challenging task successfully. He crushed the Vengi ruler, annihilated the Ganga dynasty and humiliated the Pallava might by inflicting a decisive blow. None could stand against him and none did he spare among his enemies in the south. The Rastrakuta banner was floating over the entire south by 789 A.D. His resources increased and his power was fully consolidated which was bound to have its impact on the affairs of the north.

The emergence of Dhruva as a great military figure in the south and the consolidation of Rastrakuta power between the Cauvery and the Narmada were bound to have their impact on the north. It was wrought with serious consequences for the powers of Indo-Gangetic area. The association of the ruler of Malwa with Govinda II in the civil war came in handy to Dhruva to launch an expedition. Further the disturbed political condition in the north assured him of an easy victory. He mobilised his resources, gathered a strong army and prepared himself for an expedition against the Gurjara Pratiharas.

IV. NORTHERN CONQUESTS:

The political condition in the north was not conducive to prevent an attack from the Deccan. Political unity was conspicuous by its absence, though for sometime imperial Kanauj had acted as a centrepetal force. Gurjara Pratiharas and the palas had become deadly enemies of each other. Mutual jealousy and rivalry existed between them. Very frequently they clashed in order to gain political supremacy in the Gangetic valley. Between them Kanauj had become a bone of contention. Kanauj was ruled by a weak and incompetent ruler, Indrayudha of the Ayudha dynasty. Vatsaraja the Gurjara Pratihara king marched against Kanauj and occupied it without resistance. But he desisted from annexing Kanauj and allowed its ruler to govern as a vassal. Dharmapala of the Pala dynasty was greatly annoyed at this development and at once marched against Vatsaraja only to face severe reverses at the hands of Vatsaraja. His victories were shortlived and his joy was ephemeral. Probably he had not thought of a strong threat from the Rashtrakuta quarter.

In the troubled political waters of the north, Dhruva took pleasure to fish. Under such conditions he brilliantly conceived the campaign and executed it resolutely. The expedition speaks of his strategic skill and diplomacy. Dhruva with his huge army marched against the Gurjara Pratihara country. He crossed the Narmada and without much difficulty occupied Malwa. Vatsaraja was forced to withdraw his army from the Doab to meet the new danger. Both the armies met near Jhansi. A decisive battle was fought between the two. Finally Vatsaraja was defeated and fled from the field and his leaderless army was dispersed. The Wani Dindori and Radhanpur inscriptions describe this brilliant victory thus. "Vatsaraja was driven into the tractless desert by Dhruva (Dhruva) who took away from him not merely the two Gauda umbrellas but also his fame." Inspired by this remarkable victory against Vatsaraja, Dhruva decided to much further and measure his strength against Dharmapala, who was camping in the Ganga-Jamuna doab. The Rashtrakuta armies marched against Dharmapala and easily defeated him. The Baroda plates of Karkaraja refer to the defeat of the Gauda King of Bengal at the hands of the Rashtrakuta. The Sanjan plates throw light on the fact that Dhruva snatched away the royal umbrella and parasols of the king Gauda, as he was fleeing between the Ganga and Jamuna. This agrees with the information given in the Baroda plates that Dhruva became the overlord of the territory between the Ganga and Jamuna. The victor spent sometime on the banks of the holy Ganga and Jamuna and as a memento of his sojourn, these famous rivers were incorporated in the Rashtrakuta imperial banner.

This North Indian campaign took place between 789 and 792 A.D. This expedition of Dhruva did not bring any territorial additions to the Rashtrakuta empire in the north, it was just a glorious military exploit. However, it brought wealth, name and fame to Dhruva. Rastrakutas became an all India power recognised and feared by the rulers of the south and the north alike. This

expedition eclipsed the rising power of the Gurjara Pratiharas and the Palas, and thereby helped to maintain a balance of power in the north. Though the expedition was a glorious event without any tangible results, it provided an inspiration to the succeeding rulers of the Rashtrakutas to invade the north time and again to establish supremacy among the rulers of that region. Dhruva was a practical man and was aware of the limitations of his power. He knew that it would be impossible to establish his direct rule over the north from the Deccan. Hence, he did not annex any territory in the Doab. Instead, he restored the defeated powers. He was satisfied by imposing his overlordship over the north and collecting tribute from the fallen powers.

In contrast to this, he followed a different policy altogether with the powers surrounding his empire in the south. He reduced some of the southern kings to so much of subjection that they could not follow any independent policy of their own in his lifetime. As a matter of fact he had hit upon a different plan to bring the Ganga dynasty under the control of the Rashtrakutas. The Ganga king was arrested and taken captive and Gangavadi became a province of the Rashtrakuta empire under the governorship of his son Stamba. A similar fate befell Gujarat also. These regions were close to his empire and he could directly rule over them, but the far south and the far north were not annexed since that would prove to be unwieldy and unmanageable.

Dhruva was also a good administrator. He established good administrative system and brought political stability to the region. Much before he became the king he had rendered yeoman service under his brother Govinda II, whom he overthrew. In fact he was the de facto sovereign during Govinda's regime. His training and experience in administration was as good as in military leadership and warfare. He knew how to control the levers of administration.

The Rashtrakuta Kingdom had been divided into various provinces for the sake of proper administration. But with new annexations during Dhruva's regim the kingdom assumed the shape of an empire. He appointed his sons as governors of the newly annexed territories. He had four sons Karka, Stamba, Govinda III and Indra. Karka, the eldest son, predeceased him. Stamba and Indra were made governors of Gangavadi and Gujarat respectively, while Govinda was nominated crown-prince and stayed at the capital and rendered assistance to his father. Dhruva was a good judge of men. He tasted the ability and capacity of his sons, and deviated from the usual practice of nominating the eldest as the crown prince. To him Govinda appeared to be a much better choice than Stamba, who should have become the Yuvaraja on the death of Karka. Probably to pacify him, he was made the viceroy of Gangavadi. Dhruva also appointed his cousin Sankaragana as the governor of Berar, another important division of his empire. Dhruva's administration was known for its efficiency. He worked for the common weal. It is stated in the Pimpari inscription that he sent certain officials as dutakas to see that his orders were effectively implanted and that there was no lapse on the part of the subordinates.

IV. SUMMARY:

Dhruva was one of the greatest monarchs of the Rastrakuta dynasty and was principally responsible for giving a new trend to the imperial policy of the Rashtrakutas. In the realm of thought and intellectual activity, this was the period of incubation and Dhruva was largely responsible for this. Dhruva died in 793 A.D. and was succeeded by Govinda III. He assumed the titles, Nirupama, Kalivallabha, Dharavarsha and Srivallabha.

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