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HOYSALA COURT DURING KING VISHNUVARDHANA'S REIGN

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ABSTRACT

The Hoysalas have played a dominant role in the Political and Cultural History not only in Karnataka but also in South India. Their contribution to the political history, administration, Religion, Literature, Art and Architecture are varied and interesting. The Hoysala dynasty had the great fortune of having a very illustrious king Vishnuvardhana, who made Hoysala dynasty politically and culturally great. The Hoysala Court consists of the complete activities of kings, queens, prince and princess, ministers, commanders, scholars, artists, dancers, musicians, etc.

Key Words: Court, Harmony, Feudatories, Assembly, Hiranyagarba, Asvamedha.

INTRODUCTION

An attempt is made in this article to explain about Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana court. Vishnuvardhana acquired a large territory, and assumed the dignity of a first rate ruler; but such a vast state evidently needed a powerful organization to keep it in harmony and peace. The duty of a Hindu king, according to ancient precepts, is to rule not for his own glory but for the peace of his subjects; "for putting down the evil and upholding the good". This was the motto of the Hoysala kings. But Vishnuvardhana's was a peculiar position. During the whole period of his reign he was engrossed in military campaigns and the absorption of the conquered territories into his empire. For these purposes he was residing at various places such as Talakad, Yadavapura and Bankapura. Hence we see that his kingdom was split up into various territories, each under the control of a Dandanayaka, or a scion of an ancient ruling line, or even his Queen. This brings us in touch with a large number of feudatories and generals who took part in the welfare of Vishnuvardhana's kingdom.

The highest family that had connections even with the royal line was that of Mariyane. His ancestor, the senior Mariyane, had given his three daughters in marriage to Ballala I in A.D. 1103.¹ On him was conferred the territory of Sindigere for wet nursing, as a renewal of the grant given by Echala-Devi, the Queen of Ereyanga, when she gave Adekavve, probably her relative, in marriage to him. Mariyane and his brother Bharata, on account of their connection with the royal family, were considered to be of the "line of

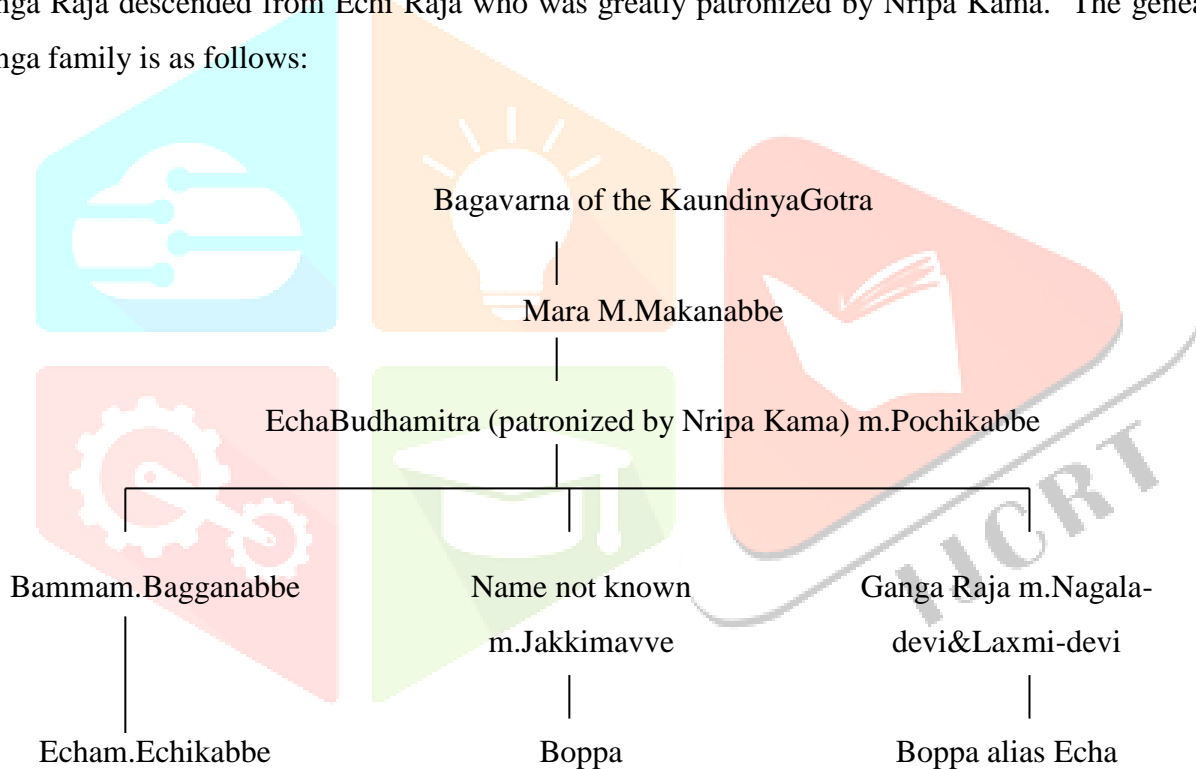
the capturer of Kanchi, vikrama-Ganga Vishnuvardhana-deva”; and were in office as Sarvadhikaris, treasurers of the jewels, judges, chief advisers and commanders of the life guard. Looking upon Mariyane as his pattadane (State elephant), King Vishnu appointed him as the commander of his army. The Sarvadhikari, it should be understood, was the prime minister and was at the head of the Cabinet of five ministers at the Hoysala Court. In this case the two brothers Mariyane and Bharata occupied that honoured post together, since “they were one in thought”. As the commander of the army Mariyane assisted the King I the capture of Talakad. They belonged to a Jaina family, their guru Bharatesvara being MaghanandiBratipati. Both the bothers survived Vishnuvardhana and were the important ministers and counselors of Narasimha I. An inscription I ChikkamagalurTaluqua informs us that Bharata married the daughter of “Maraya”, which word Mr.Rice mistakes for “Maharaya”, and accordingly wrongly concludes that he was the son-in-law of Vishnuvardhana.² Maraya was a Maha-Samanta, who is said to have defeated many kings. More famous than these was the general Bittiyana or Vishnu Dandadipa, the son of Mariyane. We have seen that Vishnuvardhana had sent him in A.D. 1136 to collect tribute from Kongu after which he returned back victorious carrying with him the spoils of war.

From his childhood general Bittiyana was a favourite of the King. We are told that at his birth the ministers Mariyane and Bharata gave him the name of Bittiyana; and while the King was at Dorasamudra, they presented a gift of 1000 honnu at his feet and obtained from him under his own hand. Sindigere in Asandi-nad with Begavalli, for butter for his (the child’s) mouth and the lordship of Dindinakere in Kalikavi-nad. From his childhood the young Bittiyana seems to have shown the characteristics of genius, and the King was particularly partial towards him, probably even making him his foster son. For an inscription of A.D. 1136 says: “Vishnuvardhana treating him like a son, himself and his upanayana performed with great festivities. And after seven or eight years of age, when he had become proficient in all the science of arms, obtaining for him a virgin-jewel, the daughter of his own chief minister distinguished by all auspicious marks and well-born, that Vishnuvardhana Deva himself lifted a golden kalasa, and pouring water on his hand, gave away the virgin thus providing him with a marriage of unimagined happiness. At the age of ten or eleven, having become as sharp as kusa grass in intelligence, and perfect in the four tests of characters, Vishnuvardhana noting this and praising him with his own hand invested him with the title of Mahaprachanda-dandanatha, with double confidence, and giving him all authority, he became the Sarvadhikari and the benefactor of all the people...the Immadidandanayaka.” Immediately after his return from the expedition to Kongu he built the Vishnuvardhana-Jinalaya, to which the King seems to have given grants.³

Ganga Raja was another general of Vishnuvardhana, who by dint of his military prowess assumed perhaps the highest rank at the Hoysala Court. We have seen that he achieved a glorious conquest in the battle of Hanungal in A.D. 1116, when Vikramaditya VI had sent a large army under his feudatories to subjugate the Hoysalas. Ganga Raja then presented to Vishnuvardhana the stores and vehicles of those captured in battle. The King being pleased with his prowess, said: “I am pleased; ask for a boon”; whereupon Ganga Raja asked for, and obtained from the King the village Parama and granted it to the Jaina temples erected by his other Pochala-devi and his wife Laxmi. He had taken, as we know, the most

prominent part in the expedition of A.D. 1116.⁴ The conquest of Talakad and other Chola territories such as Kongu and Chengiri have been ascribed to him. After he had routed and driven away the Cholas from the fort, and had “brought the whole nadu under the dominion of a single umbrella, the King offered him a boon.” Though Ganga Raja knew that the King would give him anything he asked, he only asked him the land Govinda-vadi and granted it to the god Gommatesvara. This reward was promised to him by the King even before he started for the conquest of Talakad.

From the inscriptions, we find that Subhachandra played an important part in the family of Ganga Raja, who was his disciple. His wife Laxmi-devi and his sister Demati were the lady disciples of the guru. The devotion and fervor of Ganga Raja for the Jaina faith won him great regard from the people and he was considered by them as a saint. They said that even the Kaveri flood did not touch him when crossing the river. Ganga Raja was born in a family that were from time immemorial the upholders of the Jaina faith. It was one of those few families that supported the tottering religion for a time from its inevitable grave. Ganga Raja descended from Echi Raja who was greatly patronized by Nripa Kama. The genealogy of the Ganga family is as follows:



There was inter-relationship between Ganga Raja’s family and Mariyane’s family. Ganga Raja was the brother-in-law of the senior Mariyane, and the two brothers, junior Mariyane and Bharata, were the brothers-in-law of Ganga’s son Bharata. Ganga Raja’s brother Bamma-deva and his wife Bagganabbe are also greatly praised for their charitable disposition. Their son Echa raised “Jaina temples in Kopana and other holy places and in Belgula, of great celebrity, which people said, captivated with their richly sculptured walls the hearts of the spectators.” Another sister-in-law of Ganga Raja Jakkimavve was equally a great Jaina enthusiast. She caused many Jaina images to be built as well as a tank which is known as JakkiKatta. In A.D. 1120, Ganga Raja’s mother, the wife of the famous Echi Raja of Nripa Kama’s time, died perhaps at a ripe old age, by the performance of the rite of Sallekhana. It is wonderful that a woman of such an advanced age could have died in rigorous asceticism. “Adopting sanyasana, observing the rule of

lying on one side only, uttering the five salutations she went to the world of gods. Having amassed endless merit and spread her fame throughout the world, so that her attendants and learned men being fully satisfied, always blessed her, and having caused to be erected numerous Jaina temples of Belgola and many other places... triumphing over the effects of being a house-holder and a woman and of the present times easily took possession of the world of gods by the perfection of the rite of Sallekhana.”⁵

In spite of the disparity in religion the friendship between Vishnuvardhana and Ganga Raja was unalloyed. He gave a vast number of rewards and donations and encouraged him to renovate the ruined temples of Gangavadi. In return Ganga Raja offered his faithful service to the Hoysala kings. Whatever territories he conquered he gave them over to his king. He considered that to live in treachery to a lord was a Naraka (hell). Under Vishnuvardhana he obtained the highest rank of a general and a minister as can be inferred from his titles: “Obtainer of the band of five great instruments, Maha-samantadhipati, Mahaprachanda-dandanayaka.” Ganga Raja died in A.D.1133,⁶ when the king was at Bankapura and had just slain the Kadamba general Masana in the battle at Hanungal. His son Boppa then erected a Jaina temple of rare beauty at Dorasamudra to his memory, naming it DrohagarattaJinalaya, after one of his father’s titles, and having it consecrated by Nayakirti. The priests then took the consecrated food to Vishnuvardhana at Bankapura; which he received with great favour and ascribed his victory and the birth of his son Narasimha to the favour of their god and accordingly besides granting them endowments gave to the god the name Vijayana Parsara. The temple is to this day known as Parsvanatha Basadi.

Bappa or Echa, as he was sometimes called was the son of Ganga Raja by his wife Nagala-devi. Like his father he was a faithful servant of the king and became a great general. We have seen with what glorious success Bappadeva carried the Hoysala arms to the mountainous Nilagiris and subdued the tribes. He was an able support of his king towards the latter part of his reign and had the titles of his father to his credit. He was also a great Jaina devotee and erected many basadis of great splendour. Besides the Parsvanatha Basadi he built another called the Santesvara Basadi at Kambadahalli at the same time, and in A.D.1138⁷ he built the Trailokyaranjana Jinalaya also called the Boppana-Chaityalaya. In A.D. 1135 he raised an epitaph in memory of his elder brother (cousin) the general Echi Raja, as an act of reverence.

Another great general and minister of Vishnuvardhana that figures as a prominent person in the government of the country is the general Punisamaya or Hunisamaya. We have seen that he had carried a victorious expedition to the Nilagiris and had defeated the hill tribes such as the Todavars. He had also carried his arms to the Maleyala and utterly defeated them. He was a Jaina and a devout disciple of Ajita-Munipati, and “in the manner of the Gangas he decorated the basadis of the Gangavadi Ninety-six-thousand”. The Parsvanatha-basadi of Chamarajanagar and a ruined temple at Bastihalli owe their existence to him. His charitable disposition is described in this manner: “The ruined trader, the cultivator with no seed to sow, the ousted Kirata (chief) with no power left who had become his servant, he gave them all what they had lost and supported them.”

Bokkana, another general of Vishnuvardhana, figured in the battles with the hill tribes, and subjugated the Changalvas, the Kongalvas and the Tulus. He was the son of Babimayya or Babbaya a great minister looking after the customs. He subsequently became an important person in the court of Narasimha I and held the posts of great minister, general, and senior master of the robes.”

Besides these important generals there were a large number of others of minor importance. Rayanadandanatha was a nobleman of Vishnuvardhana's court. He claimed royal blood, having descended from Chamunda Raja. In A.D. 1130 he created an agrahara in Devalige-nad and erected the god Kesava there, the King having lavishly given grants for the purpose.⁸ Koneya-Sankara-Dandanatha was another Vaishnava patriot, who built Vishnu temples in Aranimale, Korati, Kolala, Areyatti-Bagalatti, Kunangil, Tamarecharu, Halasur and Kantapura and an agrahara in Nirgundanad. He survived Vishnuvardhana and continued to be a general under his son. He is said to have successfully encountered the Maleyalas. Then there was the general Kedhalta Nayaka who was also a Vaishnava. Manisamayadandanayaka was another servant of Vishnuvardhana. He was a Jaina and a great minister and continued to serve under Narasimha I. The warrior Chinna was also a servant of Vishnuvardhana, and was the governor of the Manikike Twelve.

Minister Madi Raja was the accountant of Vishnuvardhana's Court. By his power of Elocution he seems to have made a great impression in the assembly. He was a great Jaina patriot. Binnande was the governor of Mudugere. In A.D. 1138 he set up a linga in the Gangesvara temple in memory of his parents.⁹ Echannadandanayaka was a minister of Vishnuvardhana and he received from him the chieftainship of Nanalakere. Minister Bamma Gauda was the governor of the Talige-nad thousand. Sarigeya Nayaka was also a minister, under whom Naraya-Veggade was the customs officer. The great minister Babimaya of Binnigere was the customs officer. Under him Ramayya was looking after the customs of Nolambavadi and Banavasi. His province was subdivided into various small districts; one of such districts, the Nagarkhanda Seventy was under Sunka-vergade (the Heggade of customs) Devapayya Nayaka.

There was another branch of subordinates to the king who, though not serving him directly were helpful to him in the time of war. They represent the modern zamindars and petty chiefs, paying annual tribute to the king, and having a hereditary claim to their property. But many of them were created by the king himself from motives of diplomacy. Thus we see that as soon as he conquered the old Ganga territory, now represented by Kolar and Mulbagal, he appointed Ganga Princes of the ancient line to rule the province.

There was another important line of Ganga chiefsruling Asandi-nad. They had the high sounding titles of their fore-fathers: Kongulivarma-Dharma-Maharajadhiraja, boo lord of Kolalapura, etc. They had continued to be the feudatories of the Hoysalas from the time of Ereyanga. The rulers of the time of Vishnuvardhana were Barmmarasa (A.D.1130) and Vaijarasa (A.D.1141). While a part of Nolambavadi and Nirgunda, west of Hosadurga, were ruled by the Kongas as the tributaries of Vishnuvardhana.

Similarly we find many Chola chiefs and governors ruling in Salem and Coimbatore Districts, which then comprised the Kongu country or the Vikrama-Sola Mandalam. In A.D.1116 we find Virunta-roya-Bayankara Alvan ruling Mannainadu in Vikrama-Sola Mandalam. It is probable that Vishnuvardhana had defeated him, but soon after restored him to his position as a Hoysala feudatory. In A.D.1128 we find Ganda-Manikka Bramadirajan ruling Kaivara-nad as a feudatory of Vishnuvardhana. In A.D.1135 we find a feudatory by the name of Karikama alias Valava Raja under the same King. Vishnuvardhana entered into an agreement with him to redeem certain villages which were a devadhana of the god Tiru-Nandesvaram-udaiya Mahadevar and which evidently Vishnuvardhana had absorbed within his territory during his conquests over the Cholas. We notice that even the language of the inscriptions is Tamil, which continued to be the State language of the Chola country under the Hoysalas. The retention of Chola principalities and the continuation of Tamil as the State language indicate Vishnuvardhana's conciliatory attitude. The granting of self-government to these newly conquered people and hence the political leniency shown towards them evidently won their affection for the crown. Vishnuvardhana incurred little trouble from those quarters till the end of his reign.

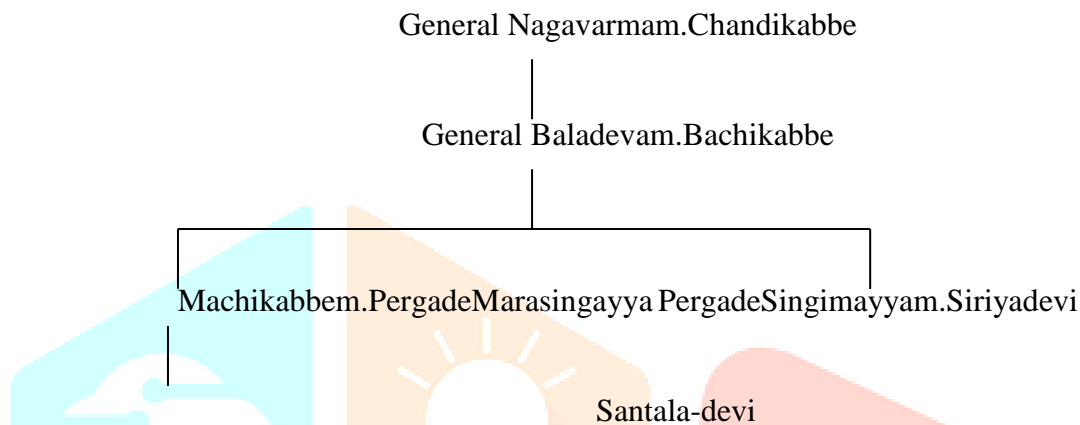
Among the feudatories under Vishnuvardhana was Huliya Chatta, who though a Samanthal at the beginning soon acquired first rate importance especially in the time of Narasimha I. The principality ruled by Chatta at the beginning comprised only the Huliya Twelve. But on account of the help given by him to the King during the siege of Uchchangi, he soon rose to power. He had sent his general Chamadeva, the son of Oda Rayendra (or Orissa king) to the battle. Another general of his, Heggade Getana, seems to have conquered many battles for the King and hence he had received a badge of honour and a head-piece for his elephant, together with the rent free estate of Mattavuru. Towards the end of Vishnuvardhana's reign the Huliya chiefs acquired great power having under them the Magurenad Three Hundred with Huliya as the capital.

We find a host of other chieftains scattered throughout the Hoysala empire. There was the Maha Samanthal Maraya who was a great warrior of the King. His office of Maha Samanthal was hereditary. Samanthal Naganna, a Vaishnava. Samanthal Soma of Kalakaninad, a Jaina patriot that caused many edifices to be built. On the death of his son Marudeva his wife went "to swarga with him". Maha-Samanthal Machayanna was ruling Arakere, Kaligunda, Beluvali, Karividi, Hinchannur, Mannambaru, Karadihalu, Alariguppe, Kundur, Bala-samudra, idagur, Patana, and Belugere. He was learned in logic, grammar and the scriptures, and he was a Saiva by faith. He was succeeded by Maha-Samanthal Gandaraditya. In A.D. 1130 Maha-Samanthal Singarasa was residing at Arasiyakere. But the same year he was given Kalikatte in Magure Three Hundred to govern, where he was asked to remove. He seems to have descended from a line of important feudatories under the Nolamba Kings.

The family of Vishnuvardhana forms an interesting part of his history. He had probably many wives, among who have come to light the Senior Santala-devi, the Junior Santala-devi, Bammala-devi, Rajala-devi, Laxmi-devi, and Devaki-devi; and his children Kumara Ballala and Harialabbarasi by the senior Santala-devi, and Vijaya Narasimha by Laxmi-devi. An inscription of A.D.1120 informs us that he

made a grant to a temple erected by his avvi (mother or grand-mother) Talevala-devi on the death of her brother.¹⁰

It is not known when the King married his first wife Santala-devi; but the inscriptions mention her name as far back as A.D. 1116. It is to be supposed that he had married her shortly after his coronation or even before. An inscription of A.D.1120 informs us that she assumed the crown with the permission of the King she is said to have sprung from the city of Balipura.¹¹ She did not come from a royal family, her father Marasingayya being only a Pergade. Her mother was Machikabbe whose geneology is as follows:



Marasingayya was a Saiva, but his wife Machikabbe was a devout Jaina, and so was Santala-devi. Though Vishnuvardhana became a Vaishnavite in about A.D. 1117, Santala remained a devout Jaina till the end of her life and patronized her faith to a great extent. In A.D. 1123 she erected the SavatigandhavaranaBasadi at Belgola in order to provide for the worship and gifts of food to the assembly of ascetics, together with a grant free of all imposts. She was the crowned consort of the King, but her relationship with the co-wives was not happy, since she was said to be “a rutting elephant to ill-mannered co-wives”. She was an expert in singing, instrumental music and dancing, and very generous in the distribution of food, shelter, and medicine and learning. The praises of the Queen in Vaishnava inscriptions bespeak her cosmopolitan mind. In A.D. 1121 she was present when the king gave grants to the Jayagondesvara temple. She is even said to have received a boon from Dharmmesvara, and to have erected the Ramesvara temple of Isapura.

In A.D. 1131 Santala-Devi died at Sivaganga and in her memory the Santesvarabasadi was built there. The same year both her father and her mother died by the Jaina rites of Samadhi. The death of the mother is graphically described: “The queen as attained the state of the gods, I cannot remain (behind)”, thus saying her mother the proficient Machikabbe came to Belugola, and adopting the severe sanyasana, she too renounced the world. The half closed eyes, the repetition of the five expressions, the method of meditating on the Jinendra, the dignity in taking leave of relatives, evidencing sanyasa, Machikabbe, cheerfully for one month, easily attained the state of the gods by Samadhi, in the presence of all the blessed.”

An inscription of A.D. 1129 informs us that Vishnuvardhana's "eldest son" Srimat Tribhuvanamalla Kumara Ballala-Deva, was ruling the world, and that his "eldest younger sister" was Hariyabbarasi who was married to the lord of Singa. "Eldest" indicates that Hariyabbarasi was not the only daughter of the king. Probably Kumara Ballala died before the birth of Narasimha I in A.D.1133, who was crowned from the day of his birth. Hariyabbarasi, we are told, was the upholder of Jaina religion and had erected at Hantiyur in Kodangi-nad a lofty Chaityalaya, with the gopuras surmounted by rounded pinnacles set up with all manner of jewels. Her husband Singa was probably the Mahasamanta Singarasa who was ruling Arasiyakere and who belonged to the Nolamba family.

An inscription in Hassan Taluk brings to light another Queen of the name of Santala, who was the daughter of Keteya-Nayaka and Jakkiyabbe. "She by her beauty attracted the King, as the daughter of the milk ocean (Laxmi) attracted Purushottama (Vishnu), and obtaining his regard, had a lovely daughter Chikka-Santale."¹² In A.D.1135 when she was ruling the kingdom she and her child expired Jakkiyabbe in memory of her daughter and grand-daughter set up a Siva temple at Elegunda in Niragunda-nad, and the King gave liberal donations to the same. Devaki-devi was another Queen of Vishnuvardhana who assumed the crown as Queen in A.D.1140. But no details are available regarding her. The most important of all queens of Vishnuvardhana was Bammala-devi, who took part in public life. She came from the Pallava-kula and was the daughter of King Govinda and Chavundabbarasi. Soon after the death of Santala-Devi she became the crowned Queen. From A.D. 1136 she became an important helpmate of the King in the administration of the country. In A.D. 1136 and 1138 she was governing Asandi Five Hundred and Nirgunda Three Hundred, and under her the great feudatory, the Nal-prabhu Eraka-Gavunda was ruling Kisur and Hruvanahalli. In A.D. 1140 she was ruling, by kindness of the King, "the Kingdom of the world", and was the senior Queen and crowned consort, "glorious with the pomp and insignia of the royal queen, the white conch, lofty umbrella, golden rod and multitude of chamaras." She was then residing at Hangal. It was just Vishnuvardhana's final capture of the Hanungal fort in A.D.1139 that he resided with his Queen there. The same year, we know, the fort was attacked by Jayakesi II's soldiers, but they were promptly repulsed. In inscription of the same date in Arasiyakere Taluqa informs us that Bammaladevi had a crown riding school, of which Anantapala was the sahani or trainer. This shows her keen interest in horsemanship and cavalry. She was a zealous follower of the Hindu faith and under her patronage many temples were built. In A.D.1135 she with the permission of the King gave grants for the repairs and maintenance of the Sankara-Narayana temple in Nagamangala. In A.D.1140 together with her husband she created the Brahmapura agrahara in Nirgunda-nad.

In A.D.1141 another Queen, Rajala-devi, received the rank of senior Queen of Vishnuvardhana. She was the sister (or cousin) of Bammala-devi. Her uncle was the mandalika Manchi-arasa, the governor of the district attached to Harijaladhi. He is said to have been "an ornament to the Chalukyavamsa." Laxmi-devi or Lakuma-devi, another Queen of Vishnuvardhana, should be given importance only for the reason that she gave the King an heir to the throne. She was a contemporary of Santala-devi and does not seem to have been a favourite of the King, being only a junior Queen. Santala-devi was a "rutting elephant to ill-

mannered co-wives”, Laxmi-devi probably being one of such co-wives. She gave birth to Narasimha I in A.D. 1133, when Vishnuvardhana was returning from the battle at Banavasi after slaying Masana. Ganga Raja had just died and the Jaina priests had carried the consecrated food to the King, who was then at Bankapura, from the Parsvanatha basadi, which was newly erected by Boppa-deva in memory of his father. Vishnuvardhana “being thus filled with joy on account of both his victory and the birth of a son, seeing the priests who had brought the sandal water and consecrated food from the consecration of the god Parsva, he ordered them to approach and rising to meet them, saluted them with joined hands to his forehead, and took the sandal water and consecrated food, saying: ‘By the merit of the consecration of this god I have obtained both a victory and the birth of a son, and have been filled with joy’. He therefore gave to the god the name of Vijaya-Parsva, and to his son the name of Vijaya-Narasimha-Deva.”

CONCLUSION

Thus the prosperity and greatness of Vishnuvardhana can be understood from the inscriptions and sculptures which show the splendor of his court. In A.D.1117, after his glorious conquests in the South, he had performed the hiranyagarbha (having made a golden cow large enough to admit his crawling through it; and after that ceremony breaking it and distributing it to the Brahmins), the talupurusha (weighing himself against gold and distributing it among the Brahmins) and the asvamedha or the horse sacrifice. All these were rare performances and signified the greatness of a king.

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