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Kara-Śāsanas: A Distinct Form Of Village Donations During The Early Medieval Period Of Dakṣiṇa Kośala.

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Abstract

The early medieval period Dakṣiṇa Kośala witnessed two different kinds of village/land grants, which were in practice. The traditional type includes the villages that were handed to the Brāhman donees, as well as to their religious institutions, with perpetual character and exemption from all taxes. Throughout the period, such religious village grants were in vogue, which the royalty commonly used to legitimize their political authority. However, we have come across a special provision of *Kara-Śāsanas* mentioned in their land grant charters the Somavaṁśins, as per which the donations were made to the donees with an obligation to pay a yearly fixed amount. These were the second types of village/land donation practice regularly found in the land grant charters of the Somavaṁśins and the Later Eastern Gaṅga dynasty.

Keywords: Kara-Śāsanas, Dakṣiṇa Kośala, Brāhmanas, Agrahāras, Grāma-grāsa, Bhāga, Bhoga, Uparikaras, Hiranya, Nidhis, Upanidhis, Palas, Churnni, Rūpya, Murās, Māḍas.

The early indications of *Kara-Śāsanas* type of village/land grants can be found in the land grant charters of the Śarabhapurīyas too. In contrast their later character, the Pipardulā plates of Mahārāja Narendra the very first Śarabhapurīyas village grant charter which we have studied, contain no references to their permanency or tax exemption.¹ Despite the fact that the future *bhoga-patis* (district officers) were requested to protect the gifted village, and the residents were asked to obey the donee and pay him all the taxes (*pratyāya*), the donation lacks its perpetual character without a term referring to it. Similarly, the Amgura Plates of Mahā-Jayarāja which records the grant of a village called Rājyagrāma to a brāhmana Viṣṇusvāmin by the king himself, does not contain the term for the tax exemption (*sarvva-kara-viśarjitaḥ/sarva-kara-sametaḥ*).² Despite the fact that the residents were required to pay the usual taxes *bhāga* and *bhoga* to the Brāhman donee, the discontinuation of

¹ 'Pipardulā plates of Mahārāja Narendra', Shastri, *ISPS: Part II (Inscriptions)*, 1995, pp. 5-7; Acharya., *CPIO*, 2014, pp. 29-30.

² "Amgura Plates of Mahā-Jayarāja", Shastri, *ISPS: Part II (Inscriptions)*, 1995, pp. 14-16; Acharya., *CPIO*, 2014, pp. 32-33.

previously mentioned taxes indicates that those were being collected by some other personnel or royal institutions. The situation may have imposed extra burden on peasant communities, which in turn indicates the creation of a coercive mechanism in play for the revenue extraction. Under existence of this coercive mechanism the peasant communities may have resorted to the endeavors resulting in agrarian expansion, so that they could meet the two-fold revenue requirements imposed upon them by the royalty and the Brāhmins. These illustrated land grants were uncertain in terms of their outcomes over a period of time, but they can also be considered as analogous to the Somavamśins and Later Eastern Gaṅgas *Kara-Śāsanas*, in which the donors were compensated with an annually fixed amount or, in the above cases, extra taxes were collected by the donor himself.

The first instance of such settlements from the Somavamśins dynasty have been noticed in the Vakratentali grant of Mahābhavagupta I Janamejaya, dated to around last quarter of the 9th century CE, issued in his 3rd regnal year from the victorious camp (*vijaya-skandhāvāra*) situated in the Suvarṇapura which has been identified with the modern Sonepur in the district of Suvarṇapura of Odisha.³ The charters record the grant of a village called Vakratentali located in the Lupattarā-*khaṇḍa* (division) to a brāhmaṇa named Bhaṭṭaputra Jātarūpa.⁴ The granted village has been identified with the modern Bantentuli or Bantentily situated sixteen miles away from the town of Sonepur whereas the administrative division Lupattarā-*khaṇḍa* identified with modern Lepta, six miles south-east of Bolangir district of Odisha.⁵ By granting the present charter, the awarded village was transformed into a rent-free holding (*sarvo-parikarādāna-sahitaḥ*) indicating that it had not previously been freed from taxes. The charter awarded the Donee a growing number of rights over the granted hamlet, in addition to the regular privileges. The donee was given the right of ownership over the pits and barren lands (*sa-gatoṣraḥ*), mango and *madhuka* trees (*sa-amṛ-madhukaḥ*), waters and land (*sa-jala-sthalaḥ*) and the right to collect all the additional tax (*uparikaras*) of the unfixed nature.⁶ Despite the fact that we have not found specificities of the *Kara-Śāsanas* in the current charters, although it was evidently acting as such, the granted village was converted into a rent-free holding through the provision of the present charter.

One among the two Patna plates of the Mahābhāvagupata I Janamejaya, which was issued in the 6th regnal year and dated to the last quarter of the 9th century CE, have similar does not mention the term *Kara-Śāsana*. The charters, however, have illustrated an obligation of the payment of eight *palas* (four *karṣas* or 320 *rattis*) of silver as a fixed amount to be paid annually by a group of donees.⁷ The group of four brāhmanas Bhaṭṭaputra Dāmāka, Bhaṭṭaputra Vāsudeva, Koṇḍadeva and one unnamed so of Narapaganda were entitled to enjoy this village grant of Vakavedda along with the usual taxes of *bhāga* (share of the produce) and *bhoga* (periodical

³ 'Vakratentali grant of Mahābhavagupta I Janamejaya' Mazumdar, B.C., EI: Vol-XI (1911-12), ASI, 1981, pp. 93-95; Shastri., *ISPS: Part-II (Inscriptions)*, 1995, pp. 167-71, 169, 22n.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Mishra, B., *Dynasties of Medieval Orissa*, 1933, p. 66.

⁶ Shastri., *Ibid.*

⁷ 'Patna plates of the Mahābhāvagupata I Janamejaya', Fleet, J.F., EI: Vol-III (1894-95), ASI, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 340-44; Shastri., *ISPS: Part-II (Inscriptions)*, 1995, pp. 172-78; Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmasāstras: Vol-III*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1973, 120-21.

offerings), *kara* and *uparikara* (extra tax), *hiranya* (cash payment) and rights of *nidhis* and *upanidhis* (major and minor treasures).⁸ The grant claims to be a rent-free donation before being granted to the donee.

The second Patna plates of the above-mentioned king reveal the term *kara-sāsanas* and have described that the granted village called Pāsitalā given to a couple of Brāhmana brothers named Bhaṭṭaputra Keśava and Apya was meant to be compensated by the payment of *five-palas* of silver per annum.⁹ However, the charter though its provision have converted the present settlement into a rent-free possession.

Among the above-mentioned Patna plates land grant charters, the first one which records the grant of a village called Vakavedḍā included in the Oṅgātata-*viṣaya* (*district*) to a group of four brāhmanas representing different *gotras*, *pravaras* and *caranas* and the residence. Hira Lal has identified the granted village with Bakti approximately 15 miles north of Bolangir, while B. Mishra has located it in the modern Vankavira situated in the erstwhile Sonepur town.¹⁰ The district or the *viṣaya* where the granted village was situated in has been located on the bank of the river Oṅgā, a tributary of the river Mahanadi.¹¹ The second charter records the donation of a village called Pāsitalā attached to the Potā-*viṣaya* (*district*) which was given to the two brāhmana brothers namely Bhaṭṭaputra Keśva and Apya. Both the grants were made from a victorious camp (*vijaya-kaṭaka*) called Mūrasīma. Shastri has identified the granted village with the modern Pointalā about 2 miles away east of Balangir town whereas the Potā-*viṣaya* identified with the Porā in the east of Sonepur town now included in Balangir district.¹² The place from where the grant was issued Mūrasīma has been identified with Muringa or Moorasima, situated about 13 miles south-west of Balangir and situated on the bank of the river Ong.¹³

Another addition from the same dynasty, the village grant recorded in the Degaon copper-plates charters of a Rāṣṭrakūṭa feudatory chief named Mugdhagondala which has been traced back to the time of Mahābhāvagupta I Janamejaya, gives us the similar instance of *Kara-Śāsana*.¹⁴ The charter records the grant of a village called Kiraṅkelā located in the Telātata-*viṣaya* to a Brāhmana named Bhuvanāga. The granted village is not yet identified, however the *viṣaya* where it was situated in have been located on the bank of the river Tel, a tributary of the river Mahanadi.¹⁵ Like the above, this land grant charter was issued on the agreement of a payment amounted *three palas* of pure silver (*śobhana-rūpya*) every year by the donee. Two of the above-mentioned charters while gives the example of revenue assessment in terms of silver rather than in silver coins raised the possibility of payment of the dues in silver lumps or ingots. This may be a precursor of the payment of revenue in terms of *churnni* (cowry shells) or dust currency. But the granted village recorded in the third charter subjected to the payment of revenues in terms of pure silver coins (*śobhana-rupya*) which stand contrasting to

⁸ Shastri., *Ibid*.

⁹ 'Patna plates of the Mahābhāvagupta I Janamejaya', Shastri., *ISPS: Part-II (Inscriptions)*, 1995, pp. 179-83.

¹⁰ Mishra, B., *Op. Cit.*, 1933, p.66; Hira Lal., *EI: Vol-XI (1911-12)*, ASI, New Delhi, 1981, p.198.

¹¹ Shastri., *ISPS: Part-II (Inscriptions)*, 1995 p.176, 47n.

¹² Shastri., *Ibid*, 1995 p. 182; Mishra., *Op. Cit.*, 1933, p.66.

¹³ Misra, *Op.Cit.*, 1933, p. 66.

¹⁴ Shastri., *ISPS: Part-II (Inscriptions)*, 1995, pp. 348-53.

¹⁵ Shastri, *ISPS: Part-II (Inscriptions)*, 1995, p. 353, n 55a.

the above possibility. Furthermore, the term *rūpya* itself was denoted by Sircar as silver coins.¹⁶ Most of the villages which were donated by Somavamśin rulers are of this nature, according to which the grants were converted into rent-free personal properties certified by the kings by the means of issuing the copper-plates charters. This conversion of property into revenue-free settlements also alluded to past agreements based on the *Kara-Śāsana* system, under which beneficiaries were obligated to pay a specific sum to their donors or overlords. These geographical locations suggest that the practice of such *Kara-Śāsana* grants were prevalent in the region of early medieval Dakṣiṇa Kośala. This provides significant support for our ongoing argument, which emphasizes on the existence of a coercive revenue extracting mechanism.

In addition to the villages bestowed to the Brāhmaṇa donees in perpetuity (*agrahāras*), there are charters also referring to the *Kara-Śāsana* type which comes from the period of Later Eastern Gaṅgas dynasty. One such occasion documented in the Arasavalli plates of Vajrahasta III which records the grant of the villege of Harisavēlli anlong with an adjoining village of Māvendi.¹⁷ With the absence of the term denoting to the tax exemption, the current donation appears to be a *Kara-Śāsana* type as well. The charter in a unique instance records that the villages were granted to the son and three daughters (Viddāma, Mēḍama and Pōtama) of Mahāpradhana (chief minister) Dālamapeggaḍa and his wife Mavanaka.¹⁸ The charter suggests that the grant was further divided into four parts and were given to Śiriyapa-nāyaka, Vajjināyaka, Guṇḍamanāyaka and Numkamanāyaka who were the sons of Nadupana-nāyaka, a Kāyastha of Kāśyapa gotra, and his wife Paitapā.¹⁹ This part constituted the unit called Puṇḍi-niyōga and Pāmchāli-niyōga which further sub-divided into many other parts and distributed among the members of the Kāyastha and Śūdras.²⁰

The Chikkavalsa plates of Vajrahasta III which records the grant of village called Kuddam.²¹ The charter describes the present donation as not a revenue free-grant, and the donees, which in this particular case, also includes a member from Vaiśya (merchant) community along with three hundred brāhmanas, were asked to pay the king one hundred *murās* of paddy and eight *māḍas* silver or gold coins.²² Such instances of secular village grants, including members of the non-brāhmanic affiliation, are meager to be found throughout the period, and mostly fall under the category of *Kara-Śāsana*, required to be compensated to the donor.

The Galavalli Copper-plate inscriptions of Rājarāja I Dēvēndravarmān (Śāka Year 998) issued in on the occasion of the vishuva saṅkrānti in the month of Chaitra, the day of the vernal equinox corresponds to march 23, 1077 AD.²³ The charters records the grant of a village of called Bṛihat-Kōḍilagrāma situated in the Varāhavartanī *viśaya* to three hundred Brāhmaṇa belonged to the Āitrēya gōtra, three *pravaras* (Atrī, Archanānasa and Śyāvāśva) and Chandoga *charaṇa*.²⁴ The charter has not described the granted village as

¹⁶ Sircal., *IEG*, 1966, p. 282.

¹⁷ 'Arasavalli plates of Vajrahasta III', Gai, *EI: Vol. XXXII* (1957-58), 1962, pp. 311-16.

¹⁸ Gai, *EI: Vol. XXXII* (1957-58), 1962, pp. 311-16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ 'Chikkavalsa plates of Vajrahasta III', Sircar, *EI: Vol. XXXIII* (1959-60), 1987, pp. 141-45.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ 'Galavalli Copper-plate inscriptions of Rājarāja I Dēvēndravarmān', Sircar., *EI: Vol. XXXI* (1956-60), No. 24, pp. 191-96.

²⁴ Sircar., *EI: Vol. XXXI* (1956-60), No. 24, pp. 191-96.

revenue-free settlement, the term *grāma-grāsa* appears in this context instead of the term *agrahāra*, thus the donees appears to have been liable to pay rent or cess for their holdings.²⁵

The Kara-Śāsana type of village grant settlements indicates to a politico-economic structure of an over lordship in which the donors (kings/royalty) were required to be periodically paid. The framework was best to give rise to a coercive power structure to extract revenues. The weight of which fallen heavily on the shoulders of the peasantry, who were subjected to a system of exploitative and viciously punitive taxation. All this village grants, whether religious or secular, *Kara-Śasanas* or *agrahāras*, tagged along with the rights to enjoy all the water and land bodies (*sa-jala-sṭhalah*) and were exclusively placed on the hand of the Brāhmaṇa donees. The inhabitants of the granted village were instructed to respect and obey these Brāhmaṇa landed benefactors, pay their assigned taxes on time and live happily. Future kings and administrative personnel were also given instructions to protect the arrangement from any future harm. Various imprecatory cursing and benedictive verses were, further, added to these village donations, elevating them to a sacred status and praising the practice of such gifts while strictly instructing not to be disturbed any anyone. All of these provisions which safeguarded the rights of the donees over their respective granted village resulted the brahmana and their temple institutions emerging as landed magnets, and transforming the local tribal population into agriculture-practicing peasantry.

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²⁵ Sircar., *Opt. Cit.*, pp. 191-96.