

Agrarian System of the Hoysalas

*Shivaramu S

Department of History

Government College for Women (Autonomous), Mandya, Karnataka, India

*For correspondence (e-mail: drsshivaramu@gmail.com)

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 8

Special Issue: 1

Month: February

Year: 2021

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Impact Factor: 3.025

Citation:

Shivaramu, S.

“Agrarian System of the Hoysalas.” *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 8, no. S1, 2021, pp. 133–37.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v8iS1-Feb.3943>

The reign of Hoysalas forms a brilliant chapter not only in the of Karnataka but also in the history of entire India. This dynasty had the good fortune of having illustrious kings. The period is also marked by political supremacy, administrative efficiency, economic prosperity, social solidarity, religious harmony and architectural glory inaway the end Hoysala period marks the beginning of new phase in the history of Karnataka.

Agriculture and Classification of Land

Agriculture being the main stay was the most important occupation of the people. Cattle and sheep rearing was among the other subsidiary occupations. ¹Peasantswere considered as the children of mother earth.² it was believed that the world continues to exist. The economic conditions of a society mostly depended on several factors such as the soil, natural resources. Level of technology etc., The Hoysala empire consisted of the valleys of the three main rivers. The Krishna in the north, the Tungabhadra in the middle and the Kaveri in the south. These main rivers and its tributaries afforded great facilities for cultivation from the early days. As the soil was fertile, The agricultural output was immense. In this connection a grant of Baligame in Shikaripur Taluk. describesthat ‘kuntala which is an ornament of Bharatha is filled with prosperous people. abundance of flowers, agreeable occupations, Splendid streams and tanks³ this suggests that there was surplus of food grains and other agricultural products as revealed by the many grants of the period.

Classification of Land

Administration of land revenue during this period consisted of two stages, assessment and the actual collection. The first principle of such an assessment is that the revenue payable by the cultivator should be determined mainly by the quality of soil and kind of cultivation. Arable land was divided into gadde (wet land) beddalu or hola (dry land) and thota (Garden Land)⁴ Rice and sugarcane were grown on gadde and dry crops were grown on beddalu whereas fruits. flowers and Vegetables were grown in the thota and land was classified on the basis of the nature of the soil like black soil, red soil, limesoil, yellow soil, and gravel land⁵ This Indicates that the principle

of differential taxation was followed with regard to land. That is levying land tax according to the relative productivity of the arable lands was taken into consideration for assessment.

Land Tenure

On the basis of the study of the epigraphs of the period, it can be noted that land tenure was of two main types. Common or joint ownership and individual ownership. Land was divided into shares and granted to several donations called *vrittidas*. These shareholders acted together and managed the lands. Each shareholder received his share of produce in this case. The community held the lands in common. Very often arable lands were divided. While the wasteland for grazing purposes was kept common. In the case of individual ownership different portions were held individually and there was no community of interest in them.

The best instance of the first category of common ownership i.e., complete ownership in common, is provided by the Hirenallur inscription of 1215,⁶ It is related to a settlement between the Brahmins of anagrahara of Hirenallur in 1215. As the settlement runs of the 30 shares of wetland under the Heggade tank in Tuyyalurkere all the money rent and grain-rent belongs to the Brahmins who hold these shares. The fixed rent that is received from palace by the villages was to be divided equally between the holders of sixty shares. This inscription does not give a complete picture of all the conditions governing this sub-category of common ownership. The practice of combining smaller shares of lands of different qualities prevailed in Karnataka. The Turuvekere inscription of Hoysala Vira Narasimha III dated 1263,⁷ refers to the formation of the agrahara of Turuvekere by dividing it into 95 shares and as per the agreement there were to be 8 blocks at the rate of 12 shares per block and each block was held responsible for either constructing new tanks or maintaining existing ones. A number of regulations governing such points as tenants, cart-passages and water distribution have been mentioned. Before the division was actually made all categories of land both dry and wet were pooled together. Even ponds were put for equal division. Each tiller would be getting something of every variety of land. One of the interesting points in the agreement was that while constructing tanks care was to be taken to see that no loss or destruction was caused to the neighboring block. Similarly for old tanks if melankana was put nobody should object that it would lead to pressure of water. Regarding cart – passages in use. No obstruction was to be caused on the ground of disputed ownership of land over which the passage was made.

The third type of tenure was that of land held part severally and part common. Under this system each house-holder had his allotted share of land which he enjoyed without any common control. An inscription of 1291 A.D. informs of a permanent agreement entered by the Brahmanas. Executed in the presence of Harihara Danadanayaka in order to prevent the land going into ruins. It also speaks of settlement of water disputes and ensuring equal distribution and prevention of wastage. This is an example of the existence of co-operative and peaceful life. Share-holders were encouraged to construct tanks and channels. Separation exchange or alteration of boundaries were prevented by providing identifiable boundary marks. Another record of 1226 A.D. gives an instance of separation. The mahajanas of Lakshmi narasimhapura came to an agreement with the only common hold being undigeor free permit. The cultivators were allowed to construct tanks and channels and carry on cultivation in the plots allotted separately in accordance with permit issued to them. They were also allowed to plant gardens.⁸

Irrigation Projects

In the Hoysala period the importance of irrigation was well recognized. There was a well-balanced development of a sound irrigation system. Tanks were considered the most important source of irrigation and hence they received the maximum attention. Great attention was paid to their construction and maintenance and importance was given to ponds, kattes and channels. A large number of records of this period show that much interest was evinced by individuals, officials

and kings in the construction and maintenances of tanks. which were regarded as acts of great merit and acts of public benefit people honored such individuals with gifts and grants. The Hoysalas bestowed careful attention on the construction and maintenance of irrigation works. Building of a tank, a satra and water shed like the creation of agraharas was considered an act of religious merit.⁹ An epigraph of 1062 A.D. records that king Vinayaditya constructed sluice for the Tank at Dorasamudra. The Belur inscription dated 1186.¹⁰ records that the great minister Virayyadanayaka was responsible for the prosperity of the kingdom. He excavated four tanks. namely Dorasamudra, Gangasamudra, Achyuta Samudra and Virasamudra Besides the kings officials¹¹ and individuals and institutions such as the village assembly and the temple also took up the works of construction of irrigation works. Private undertakings were often encouraged by grants of land and exemption from taxes.¹² The Hoysala government paid great attention to constant operations and repairs of breached tanks and broken Sluices. Sometimes the problem was solved by replacing early work. Brick work and stone-work undertaken by the farmers both individually and collectively in their respective domains. On certain occasions repairs were undertaken jointly by the lords and farmers and tenants and brahmana free holders. Such collaboration is also traced between the overlord and village headman. It is noticed that in A.D.1074 one Hoysalagavunda made extensive repairs of tank in Basavanahalli¹³. Further, a record of A.D.1155 mentions the good work of a village chief dandanayaka by name Chokimayya, who repaired a tank when it was breached.¹⁴ In another example an official of the rank of mahapradhanadandanayaka repaired the tank at Arasikere.¹⁵ A record belonging to Narasimha I also states that he repaired the Hararu irrigation Channel.¹⁶

A Hoysala record¹⁷ of 1300 A.D. found near Halebid speaks of channel drawn off from the Elaci (Yagaci) river. The remains of cutting made for the channel can be seen even today in some parts bear testimony. According to an expert opinion to the engineering skills of those days were excellent.

The Construction maintenance of tanks was considered to be either a duty on the part of the administrator or an act of piety on the part of the individual resulting in the economic welfare of the society. The growing interest among the ruling class towards reclamation of forgotten lands gradually caused the expansion of the very base of the agrarian economy. More and more forgotten lands were brought under cultivation and they resulted in the growth of agricultural productivity and this accumulation of surplus production was directly responsible for the revival of trade and commerce due to the agricultural innovations one can notice the emergence of peasants as the wealthiest community in the social order who began to challenge the land owning aristocracy, because though they were the real cultivators though land was owned by the landed aristocracy. As a matter of fact there arose social differentiation which we shall discuss eventually after observing the kind of land ownership during the Hoysala Period.

Land Reclamation and Extension of Cultivation

Land reclamation was practiced in south India from an early period. With a view to bring more and fresh land under the plough and thus to promote the cause of agricultural production. It is important to note that such a process of reclamation is important from the economic point of view. It served mainly two purposes; on the one hand, it provided the means for the community to cope with the pressure of population in the form of new village settlements that were founded on the tracts reclaimed; and on the other larger areas of uncultivated land were brought under the plough, as a result of which the state's revenue also increased. Hoysala agrarian policy was the reclamation of waste lands. From a study of the inscriptions,¹⁸ it is found that the Hoysala Kings encouraged a policy of progressive reclamation of land, by offering inducements by way of exemption from taxes. Not only the purpose but also the very procedure of bringing a vast area under cultivation formed an important part of Hoysala agrarian policy. This policy led to increase of the Hoysala land revenues.

Land was thus reclaimed by cutting down forest for village 'as also for the founding of new settlements and constructing tanks and temples. Quite often, the state itself undertook such an operation. Apparently through its village and district officers, either on its own initiative or at the request of the people. Thus a Hoysala record of 1232 A.D. States that several Gavudas founded a village called Bankihalli and also built a tank and temple there.¹⁹ The Belur record of A.D.1183 speaks of one gavunda, who at the request of all the Mahajanas of the agrahara Kondali. cut down the forests with the help of his brothers and sons founded a new village, and excavated two tanks there.²⁰ Even during the time of Ballala II Vast tracks of land were reclaimed by cutting down forests and such land was used for establishing new towns and settlements.²¹ Many of these took names after the ruler and came to be called Ballalapuras, Similarly a Hoysala Gavunda of Basavanahalli. In the presence of the king and the chiefs of the locality from whom he had obtained some land, erected a cause way to an embankment in that land. Constructed a bund and made a canal to it in A.D. 1074. He also constructed a Temple, tank and formed wet fields in its bed.

Land Survey

Numerous references found on the measuring poles point out that a regular system of land survey and measurement was in vogue during this period. There seems to have been not much difference between the systems of measurement that were in vogue in Karnataka. The practice was to fix a measuring pole according to the royal foot and name them accordingly. The poles were named after titles of the king. The Gangapole has been popularly mentioned. The other poles were the Bherunda Pole. Ottolapole, The Droharanallapole and the Bachividipole of 46 spans. Various poles of different lengths were used. Inscriptions of this period refer to poles of 14,27,33,35 spans.²² Which were used to measure the land. In addition to these units were other units too like kamba, salage. Vali and guli which were used in connection with land measurement.²³ It is interesting to note that the term salage was used in connection with wet land. Vali in the case of dry land and guli in the case of garden cess.²⁴ Those differences were due to local variations and differences in measuring poles were used in different parts of the country.²⁵

Lands were not only surveyed but boundaries were also marked for the purpose of assessment. According to an inscription from Mysore district dated 1290.²⁶ Certain fee was also charged for marking the boundary. 'Moreover inscriptions, recording grants of land occasionally define the boundaries of the land that was so granted'²⁷ Thus we may conclude that the cultivated lands were generally divided into small plots demarcated with well-defined boundaries. Records of the period refer to boundary disputes that arose between two parties or villages, resulting in some cases, even in death of persons involved. Thus an undated Hoysala record,²⁸ refers to the death of Madagaunda in a fight for the boundary of the village Bayalahalli during the reign of vira Narasimhadeva.

Taxation

It is difficult 'however to ascertain exactly the incidence of taxation on land during the period. The varying practices and the different rates were charged at different times to meet the varying needs of the government. The normal procedure was however to charge 1/6th of the produce as the land tax. An inscription from kolar district dated 1067 A.D. Shows that one fifth of the Produce of dry lands was to be paid as land-tax. It seems probable that the assessment of land tax was made on the gross produce of the land.

Land tax was collected both in kind and cash. Some inscriptions of the period refer to the tax on land to be paid by cash. It was often paid in the form of gold (Suvarnaya) or in coins such as gadyanas. panas etc. But the incidence of taxation on land is difficult to ascertain as the acreage under cultivation is not exactly known. An epigraph of 1253 A.D. from Bangalore for instance shows that land tax on 70 plots or shares was 140 gadyana i.e. 2 gadyanas on each share; For shares would be almost always equally divided.

In addition to land tax proper, various taxes such as katte, kalurekere and nirkuli, river tax and sluice tax were to be paid by a peasant. But these were the demands on the land collected on the authority of government, the proceeds of which were mostly utilized for maintaining irrigational works such as tanks and canals and were not likely to reach the central government.²⁹

Conclusion

The Hoysalas wielded much wealth during the heyday of their period. Hence they promoted agriculture. The Hoysala Kings encouraged a policy of reclamation of land whenever and wherever necessary. This policy led to increase of the Hoysala land revenue, the assessment and collection of which was based on scientific principles- successful schemes were executed to mitigate hardships on account of insufficient water supply by constructing tanks. Digging canals and making sluices and embankments. All this is a proof of the attention bestowed by the Hoysala Kings for the improvements of Agriculture throughout their country. In addition to kings, individuals and village assemblies promoted agriculture, Thus the Hoysala period witnessed the growth and expansion of agriculture.

References

1. E.C.111.Sb.175
2. E.C. VI. Kd. 28
3. E.C.VI.Sk.197
4. Epigraphia Indica. XIV.P.227
5. E.C.V. Bl.86
6. E.C. VI.Kd.132. P.118
7. E.C. III. Tp.83
8. Shaik Ali. B.(Ed) Hoysala dynasty P.155
9. E.C. Kd.36.1203A.D.
10. E.C.V. Bl.175
11. MAR.1913. Para 85
12. E.C. IX. An 80
13. E.C.VI.Cm.15
14. E.C.X.B.P.9
15. MAR.1911.P.8.Para 35
16. E.C.III.Sr.154
17. MAR.1911 P.51Para.110
18. E.C.V.Bl.137.175
19. MAR.1941 No.26 P.177
20. MAR.1926.P.40
21. E.C.VI.Tk.45
22. E.C.VII. Ci.52
23. MAR.1936.No.38.P.166
24. E.C.III. Mi.95
25. MAR.1916 P.50 Para.70
26. E.C. II Tn.27
27. E.C. V.Bl.175
28. MAR.1936.No.54 P.66
29. E.C.III.Sr.54