

PUNNAT CHIEFS

(SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BASAVANAPURA COPPER PLATES)

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ABSTRACT

Punnata (Punnata Dynasty) was a minor kingdom in South Karnataka dating back to the 5th century A.D. However, there are many empirical evidences that take back the antiquity of this kingdom to pre Christian era. Ptolemy (127 A.D.) the well-known Greek geographer writes about 'Pounnata' and declares that it was famous for emeralds. Pliny (23 A.D.-78 A.D. too mentions the emerald stone of 'Pounnata'. The fact that emeralds are still found in Coiambattore region which was possibly a part of Punnatadesha as also the discovery of Roman coins in the vicinity lend credibility to this statement. Some Egyptian documents contain the word 'punt' which archaeologists aver is a reference to Punnata. An inscription found in Chandravalli states categorically the Mayurasharma the Kadamba king defeated Punnatas in the 4th century A.D... Recently DrS.Settar the eminent historian and archaeologist has made many interesting observations about this dynasty and tries to create a very vital link between the Dravidian culture and Punnata dynasty, He has unearthed many references to this dynasty in the Tamil Sangam literature. He has delineated these facts in his celebrated book, 'ShangamTamilagammattu Kannada Nadu Nudi' (2007)

INTRODUCTION

Punnata was a kingdom of fast changing boundaries what with its itinerant battles with Kadambas and Gangas. However it was based in the fertile region irrigated by the rivers Kaveri and Kapini. Keerthipura or Kitthipura was the capital of this kingdom. (Presently it is a small village called Kittur in the Heggadadevanakotetalluk of Mysore district. During its included many parts of Coorg, Hassan, Coiambattore and Bangalore districts.

At Basavanapura in NajangudTaluk of Mysore district is found an engraved copper plate. This record registers a grant of the village Muttalaviyur to a Brahmin, DvivediKottammasarma by the king Skandvarma

who was ruling from his victorious camp at Chavalapura. The record does not specify the region over which this Skandvarma was ruling. But the gift village was situated in Edettorenadu, near the River Kappuni now the Kapila to the east. The record gives an explanation for the name Tamrakasyapa when it says to Mika was born in the early days, However the members of this family have been referred to as belonging to kasyapa-kula in the Komaralingam plates of Ravidatta published by Fleet. Therein the genealogy is given, Rashtravarma--Nagadatta--Bhujamaga—Skandavarma--Ravidatta. In the Mamballi grant which is the earliest of the records of these chiefs it is stated that Rashtravarma was the king of Pumrashtra(Punnat) and belonging to the Tamrakasyapa family. The genealogy as given in this record is Vishnudasa-Rashtravarma-Prithipati. The record contains a description of pumrashtra, whose fame is said to have been sung by the learned in several countries and whose “village were full of wealthy people, who possessed she-buffaloes, cows, horses, woolen blankets, gems, gold, silver, pearls and coral”. It was adorned by the river Kaveri and Kapini.

We have seen that the Basavanapura record does not refer to the region over which Skandavarma was ruling, although the gift village was situated near river Kapini. Obviously, this Skandavarma, as also Ravidatta of the Komaralingam plates were rulers of Pumrashtra. In the Mamballi plates, Prithipathi is said to be the eldest of the three sons of Rashtravarma. This latter name is common to all the records and may perhaps be identified with his namesake, son of Vishnudasa, as state in the Mamballi grant. The three sons of Rashtravarma are also known from the three records as Prithvipati, Skandavarma and Nagadatta. Vishnudasa's name is revealed in the Mamballi grant while his predecessors are named in the Basavanapura grant. Yet, it is difficult to make out the relationship between Rajaditya and Vishnudasa and probably some links are missing here.

Three sets of records of these chiefs, the authenticity of the Komaralingam grant has been questioned by Fleet. The faulty language and orthographical errors go very much against the genuineness of the grant. There are far more errors in the present plates than in the Komaralingam plates of Ravidatta although these errors are considered to have been due to the ignorance of the engraver who did not understand the import of the Sanskrit stanzas. On grounds of paleography the Komaralingam plate assigned to the Basavanapura grant is assigned to 700 A.D. The Mamballi plates have been assigned to 550 A.D. by Narasimhachar.

Records of other dynasties also refer to the relationships they had with the chiefs of this family. We have seen that the Basavanapura plates say that Rāshṭravarma married Prabhāvati of the Kadamba family while according to the Māmbaḷli record he married Prabhāvatī, a princess of the Hārīta family. Since the Kadambas are described as Hārītiputras, it is possible to surmise that the queen mentioned in the two records is identical and belonged to the Kadamba family. Further, in the Komaralingam grant Bhujanga, son of Nāgadatta, is stated to have married a daughter of Simhavarma. Durvinīta, the Ganga king, is known to have been the daughter's son of Skandavarma, the king of Punnāṭa, and later became the ruler of the Punnāṭa country by inheritance since his grand-father had no other heir to succeed.

Taking these relationships into consideration Govindapai has suggested a chronology for these chiefs according to which Rāshṭravarma who married Prabhāvati, daughter of Kadamba Ravivarman (c. 353-397 according to him), ruled between 365-390 A.D., while his grandson, Bhujanga, a son-in-law of the Pallava king Simhavarman ruled from c. 425 to 440. Ravidatta ruled from c. 470-495 A.D. whereafter Punnāṭa came to be inherited by Durvinīta (478-520 A.D.). But the paleography of all the three records of these chiefs goes very much against this chronology. As seen above, the earliest record itself is assigned to c. 550 A. D.

The chronology of the Gangas as suggested by **Pai** is not acceptable and is full of problems, which cannot be discussed here. We have suggested another chronology according to which Durvinīta ruled during c. 529-579 A.D. If this is accepted, then we will have to surmise that Punnāṭa came to be inherited by Durvinīta sometime by the middle of the 6th century, after the death of his maternal uncle Ravidatta.

Considering the information that these records supply, it is possible to rearrange the chronology of these chiefs thus: Vishōudāsa (405–430) --Rāshṭravarma (430—455)--Prabhāvati of the Kadamba family --Prithvipati (455–470) --Skandavarma I (470—485) --Simhavarma--Nāgadatta (485-500) --Bhujanga (500-525) --Skandavarma II (525 – 550) --RavidattaA daughter m AvinītaDurvinīta (529 - 79)

Prabhāvati whom Rashtravarma had married might have 10 a daughter of Kadamba Kākutsthavarman. From the Talagunda inscription we learn that this Kadamba ruler had matrimonial alliances with a number of royal families. It is held that Skandacupta had married one of his daughters. Ajjhita-bhattārikā, wife of

VākāṭakaNarēndrasēna appears to have been another of his daughters while Lakshmi, a third, had married an Āḷupa chief. Hence, we may surmise that Prabhāvati, the Kadamba princess, whom Rāshṭravarma had married, was another of the daughters of Kākutsthavarma.

Bhujanga is said to have married a daughter of Simhavarma who might be the grandson of KadambaKrishṇavarma I. Skandvarma II, the Punnāṭa chief gave his daughter in marriage to Avinita, the Ganga, whose son Durvinita inherited the Punnāṭa country, as a dauhitra. Obviously, Ravidatta, the only son of Skandavarma II must have predeceased his father. Presently in this article it is learned that the Punnata kings who were a local royal family had matrimonial relations with the contemporary royal families like Gangas, Pallavas and Kadambaras and ruled the region between Kaveri and Kapila rivers for a long time and later merged with the contemporary kingdoms. The family tree of this small royal family is known from this inscription.

References and Notes

1. EC Vol. III
2. 1A., XVIII, p. 366
3. MAR., 1917. p. 33 and 40-41; EC., Vol. IV (ed: B.R. Gopal, 1975). YI, 167
4. MAR., 1936, p. 134
5. The name has been read as Prajāvati by Narasimhachar.
6. A Volume of Studies in Indology, 1941, pp. 308 ff.
7. Karnataka Historical Review, II, pt I, pp. 1-36 and pt II, pp. 17-26
8. A History of Karnataka (ed: P.B. Desai), p. 82-83