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**Farming Class and the Fragmented Polity: A  
Study of Yalahanka Nada Prabhus of  
Karnataka.**

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## **Farming Class and the Fragmented Polity: A Study of Yalahanka Nada Prabhus of Karnataka.**

Ancient and Medieval Indian Polity represented the monarchical states in which the dynastic powers controlled and managed the state affairs individually. In ancient India, the formation of state, its origin and kingship emerged out of attained status and power of the individual based community or claimed status with their extension of control over the reasonable area rather than by the Varna based on cast of Kshatriya Clan alone. Particularly in South India, state and kingship originated on the basis of profession and local hold of such a community who succeeded in establishing his control over the community and region. In India right from the days of Mauryas down to the days of Mughals and the Marathas almost all the dynasties including Rajputs were of the origin which are not exactly the so called Caste or Clan based Kshatriya as a Varna based ones but of different and various in their caste and professions of local in its nature. Even in South India beginning with the Chola, Chera, Pandyas and Particularly in Karnataka, from the Kadambas down to the medieval times including the dynastic rule of Vijaynagar empire all the dynastic histories speaks of their origin which is mysterious and traditional tag based claiming their status either with solar or lunar race. Besides when we take up the issues of inter state relations Kautilya in his Rajamandala theory enunciates the logic that every neighbor state in an enemy state and 'Enemy's enemy is enemy's friend' though of worse logic which is true to the nature. Perpetual hostility was a regular feature among the neighboring states all through these days down to the period of 18<sup>th</sup> century which led to the usurpations and over through of the dynastic hold. So in the Indian polity very particularly in South India, later in the medieval period witnessed the features of fragmented polity and variant tribal and professional classes who emerged in yielding power and managing the state affairs locally.

The battle of Talikota put a death knell to the Vijayanagara Empire, that too after the decline and disintegration of Vijayanagara Empire, many other class of society which is not of recognized one and which can be defined as backward classes of people who assumed the power in their land of region which was categorically called as Palayapattas

and the ruling class styled themselves as Palayagars. These Palyagars belonged to the different castes or professional classes. They were by profession; hunters, tillers of land, shepherds, pottery makers, and also such other professions which they followed in leading their community and leadership. In 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries they were more successful in their attempt to establish their independent power by taking advantage of disintegrated Vijayanagara Empire which was so vast in covering major region of south India (1).

The origin and emergence of this so called backward classes as ruling power and the existence such class before the Vijayanagara period or of during Vijayanagara period invariably makes us to understand about the concepts of Palaya, Palayagara and Palayapattus. Palaya literally means a stationed army in a strategic place and Palayagara is one who is looking after it and later Palayapattu which gained prominence as land of territory holding power and an army in required region with his own strength. Such stationed army, the power and the status of their leader were destined in establishing their control over regions and extended them drastically. The scholars and historians defined such dynastic histories of the region and enumerated them in a variant manner where the individual power and strength has crossed their limits by creating some sort of a public terror by looting the wealth of neighboring territory and conducting highway robbery through that they were responsible in the destruction of peace and order in the society. This sort of an understanding and enumeration is a mistaken identity of Palayagars and Palayapattus of the medieval situation. Instead a Palegar is one who controls an area with a substantial population which he generally treats it as his own and the land which he is holding control as his own Palaypatu. This defined power Palegar and his region during post Vijayanagar period became much popular almost identified themselves as rulers or Arasus equivalent to the dynastic rulers of ancient and medieval period by owing their allegiance to the supreme powers like Vijayanagara. It does not mean that in the early period there were no such local powers, but where such local powers existed were then called as Mandalesha, Samanthas, Dannayakas, Nada Prabhus, etc and were also holding some sorts of military and administrative powers who functioned as executive holds assisting their Lords all through the centuries (2). Specifically during the period of our

study that is, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and even earlier the Vijayanagar kings bestowed on or confirmed to these vassal chiefs, baring various titles, sundry tracts in Mysore and surrounding areas on the condition of payment of tribute and rendering of military service, which were placed under a viceroy whose seat of government was at Srirangapatna. Later, with the disintegration of Vijayanagara, the chiefs as had the power gradually broke loose of control and declared their independence (3). Invariably such were the class of people who belong to the lower strata of the society, very particularly the Bedas or Bedagangamas and the cultivators who owe their allegiance to shiva and vaishnava deities succeeded in establishing their power and strength over the regions. Among all these it is quite interesting that the forming class or the cultivator or the so called vokkaligas who were able to establish their rule at Yelahanka Nadu and they were called as Kempegowda family of Bengaluru with their capital at Yelahanka, then at Magadi and also at Bangalore the present capital of Karnataka.

Yelahanka Nada Prabhus who were popularly known as Kempegowdas or Red headmen were the prominent feudatories under the vijayanagara rule. Originally established their power as Paleyagars or Nada Prabhus with a palayapattu in Yelahanka nadu which is better known in the name of Morasa-Nadu which was bounded by parts of the modern Bangalore, Kolar and Tumkur districts, owe their origin to the Morasu-Vokaliga community (4). Speaking about the beginnings of the Yelahanka Nada Prabhus, Burtain Stain, theorizes the three phased development, of which the first phase includes the rise of this farming community to the status of revenue collection, defense of the owned region, for that they encouraged the extension of agriculture by cutting forests and enabling them for cultivation. Besides they also served as paramilitary forces meeting the contingencies and many a times moved from one region to neighboring once and settled with their hold over the territorial region depending on their strength of materialistic power (5). At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the historic family of Mallabhairegowda or Ranabhairegowda moved into this region was that of, a party of travelers who forced with situation consisting of seven members with their families, halted at the foot of a hill named Ramaswami Betta to the east of Nandidurga. From their having arrived in carts they were called the Bandi Koppallu (Vokkalu) or Cart ryots, which may either indicate

that carts were an unusual sight or have been equivalent to “Carriage people”, denoting the possession of greater wealth than those among whom they came to settle. Some scholars are of the opinion that they were of Telugu origin and subsequently became known as the Morasu Vokkalu which was most accepted even to this day, with a name still borne by a large section of ryots in the regions of Bangalore and Kolar (6). Worshippers of Baire Deva a family deity and Kempamma a female deity of the community followed the strange custom of amputating the ring and little fingers of the right hand of their daughters before marriage. The legend also alludes that the leader of the band was Rana Bhaire Gowda, who had been forced to fly from the village of Yanamanji near Kanchevaram, in order to protect his daughter Doddamma from misalliance with a powerful suitor of lower caste. The fugitives, escaping along danger of falling into the hands of their pursuers, when the girl who was the innocent cause of the fight invoking the aid of Ganga and casting her earring into the water as an offering, the river miraculously divided, allowing her whole party to cross and then interposed its swollen current to baffle the pursuers (7). The disputed argument by the scholars alludes that Yanamanji is the part of Mulabagelu in Kolar district and claims that the family is native of their origin with in the region of Karnataka (8). As far as the original founder of Yelahanka Nada Prabhus’ epigraphic evidences relates and proves that an inscription of 1367 A.D of Hoskote, “Yelahanka Nada Prabhu (Bhy)... rideva” refers that fritled expression is none other than Bhairi Deva i.e, Ranabhyregowda of Avati (9). Added to this another inscription of Subramanya confirms that belongs to the family of Ranabhairegowda, his brother Jayagowda was the founder of Yelahanka and his successors are Kempanachegowda, Hiriyakempegowda(founder of Bangalore city) and Immadi Kempabhopalla (10). These evidences justify that the founder of the dynasty belongs to the family of Ranabhairegowda, a farmer family moved to Avati region and established their power over the vast region with his brother, one such was Jayagowda or Jayappagowda who founded the dynasty of Yelahanka Nada Prabhus in the vicinity of present Bangalore region.

Jayagowda acquired the title of Yelahanka Nada Prabhu or the lord of the Yelahankanad and served as feudatory of the Vijayanagar sovereigns and ruled for 15 years. His son and

successor Giddegowda was being with out children, made a vow to Kuladevata Kempamma, the consort of Bhairdeva the family deity that if by her favor he be blessed with male issue, his descendents ever afterwards bear her name. Being blessed with her, he had a son whom in accordance with his vow was named has Kempananjegowda or Kempnachegowda, who governed his territory with benevolence and justice for the long span of 70 years from 1443 to 1513 A.D.(11). Kempegowda I, who succeed him in 1510 A.D, carried the favor of the Vijayanagar ruler Krishna Deva Raya and developed the settlement of Venkalar which later he had developed to the south of the Annamma temple and the big tank near by, seems to have supported a prosperous settlement along the southern highway. A survey of the landscape helps us to reconstruct the local history of lords, which was well protected by the strong hold by Savanadurga towards the east, the little fortress of Huliuradurga towards the west and the castle of Huttridurga with its seven encircling walls towards the north (12). Impressed by its strategic location and commercial importance Kempegowda decided to shift his capital from Yelhanka to Bangalore. As is related in such cases, the paradox of a Hare defying a dog convinced him that the site selected by him was gandubhumi (Heroic land) and eminently suitable for the erection of a fort, for which he had obtained the permission of Achutaraya to establish his capital there. Permission was accorded to construct a mud fort at Bangalore with protective earthen walls only because the Vijayanagara rulers never permitted their vassals to surround their towns with stone walls, as such forts would embolden local chieftains to defy Imperial authority (13). As a reward for his zeal and benevolent activity Achuta Deva Raya granted twelve hoblies earning revenue of 30,000 pagodas as a token of appreciation namely old Bengaluru, Varthur, Yelahanka, Beguru, Halasuru, Kengeti, Talagattapura, Jigani, Kanneli, Kumbalagodu, Banavara and Hesaraghatta (14). Kempegowda was a great visionary, who raised the Basavanagudi temple, expanded the Gavigangadhareswara and Someshwara temples and also credited with the construction of the Sampangi tank, the Kempambudhi and the Dharmambudhi tanks in Bangalore.

Kempegowda establishing his firm hold over the region usurped the prerogatives of royalty and established a mint (tankasale) and issued the Baire Deva coins called

Virabhadra Varaha. This earned him the wrath of Vijayanagara sovereign, who summoned him to his court to account for this and cast into prison. His territory being sequestered and added to the Chennapatnada Jayadevaraya's hold. After remaining in confinement at Anegundi for five years, he obtained release by the payment of a heavy fine and acquired territorial possessions were restored to him (15). His son Immadi Kempegowda succeeded and extended his territory westwards and obtained possession of Savandurga and Magadi. Kempegowda II after performing the rituals connected with the future development of the settlement of Bengaluru constructed the boundary towers in the four cardinal directions. These boundary cum watch towers were similar to the Kottalas of Vijayanagara were located on natural strategic elevated ground or boulder tops, both for internal vigilance as also for external security at Oyalidinne tower along Yelahanka road towards north, Halasur rock tower towards east, Lalbagh rock tower towards south and Kempambudhi tank tower towards south-west (16). He was credited with the expansion and continued patronage of the Ulsoor Someshwara temple, refurnished the Gavigangadharesvara temple and also credited with building the great Bull temple at Basavanagudi. As part of his civic drive, he built many tanks to hold rain water within the limits and on the perimeter of the Bangalore town. Both Hiriya Kempegowda and Immadi Kempgowda encouraged the growth of economy, particularly in trade and commerce for which they invited traders and artisans, especially viewers from outside to come and settle down in Bangalore.

In collusion with Seeryada Rangappa, Anantha Raja, Immadi Baira, Jagadevaraya. Aayamagowda, etc who were all jealous with Kempegowda joined their hands with Mohammed Adil Shah of Bijapur, who sent his general Ranadulla Khan and defeated Kempegowda II in 1638 and took him as prisoner and released him after the latter agreed to pay heavy royalty (17). Later Kempegowda II moved his capital to Magadi and ruled his territories including Bangalore and then onwards called himself as Magadi Kempegowda. Kempegowda II was succeeded by Mummadi Kempegowda who is also known as "Male Kemparaya". It is said that during a period of draught, he prayed god to bless his country with rain, resulted with downpour which relieved the farmers of their distress and even to this day in this region, he was popularly known as Male Kemparaya.

His son Dodda Veerappa Gowda and grand son Kempaveerappa Gowda who assumed the name of his grandfather as Mummadi Kempa Veerappa Gowda ruled from 1705 to 1728 A.D. During his reign, Marathas, the sira Nawabs and the Wodeyars of Mysore had an eye on the Magadi country. Kempaveerappa Gowda who strengthened his position by extending his territory further and expanded the town of Nelapattana (Earth town of Magadi) which was considered as impregnable fortress. However the change of faith towards Saivism by the Magadi Arasas strained the relations with Mysore and Dalavoy Devarajayya who attacked the Nelapattana of Magadi. The Mysore army made a breach in the outer fort at Chennaraya gate and entered the Nelapatna. In the fierce battle that was fought, Magadi Kempegowda and his general Veerabhadra Nayaka fought bravely but could not defend their fort. The Nelapattana was destroyed and occupied; both Veerabhadranayaka and Mummadi Kempaveerappa Gowda were captured and sent to Srirangapatna. The Savanadurga fortress was also captured and the Magadi was annexed to Mysore kingdom in 1728.

The term Vokkaliga, Vokkalu generally refers to farming section of the society, but many a times, it was referred as differently as Vokkaliga which is nothing but a single caste even though generally the class of cultivators and all cultivating class were called as vokkaligas. Besides, Vokkalu Makkalu was referred to those who were dependent on agriculture. In totality agricultural community, that too who were the class of cultivators performing all activities related to agricultural production were called as Vokkaligas. More over, Vokkaluthana is an qualified expression of representing cultivating family in a sanctified manner who were totally happy with agricultural life background (18). Like other different class of people who emerged as powerful in holding the power and rose to the status of rulers, Yelahanka Nada Prabhus were basically belongs to the Vokkaliga community succeeded in establishing their power as Mahamandaleshwaras followed the guidelines of there over lords of Vijayanagara sovereigns in their state and administration. Nadu Prabhus for their administrative purpose Mandalas or their state was divided into Nadus and sometimes referred as Seeme also, though Seeme was literally corresponds with border, but for administrative purpose Seeme and Nadus were a group of places referring to a vast region (19). Such Nadus and Seemes will have two types of

villages like Gramas and Agraharas which had Ayagaras for managerial administration at the village and local level. The king or the MahaMandaleshwara for his assistance in administration he had Mahapradhana, Dannayaka or Dandanayaka to look after the military and revenue affairs. Besides they also had officers in charge at all levels like Rajaprathinidhi, Karyakartha etc. Invariably Ayagars are traditionally twelve in number includes head of the villages like Gowda or Patela, Karnika or Shanubhuga, Talawera, Tothi, Neeraganti, Joisa, Kammara, Badagi, Kumbara, Agasa, Kshourika and Akasaliga performing different types of professions which fulfills all requirements of the village affairs (20). In the matters of judiciary Nada Prabhus followed the codes of Dharmasutras in dispensing the cases, however at the local levels trial by ordeal was followed with all promptness and efficiency (21). Even in the field of military administration feudal hold of great strength was the feature, and the Nada Prabhu succeeded in establishing their physical as well as material strength in carrying out the State affairs. All castes and classes of people were in defense forces, including Brahmins and many a times Brahmin leaders hold the position of Dannayakas. The military force had greater share of its force that belongs to cultivating class, who use to join the army at the times of wars and other contingencies and after the war time period they use to continue their regular profession of cultivation. As Francis Buchanan points out, much of the military forces of the Nada prabhus and other feudatories are more informal and at times of requirement they use to join the forces for the cause of their lord (22). Because of their status and power much of paleyagars and Nada prabhus including Yelahanka Nada Prabhus had to build the forts and fortifications to protect their military and material resources. Nadu Prabhus built, expanded and maintained the forts of Magadi, Savanadurga, Huttari durga, Ramagiridurga and Huliyuradurga.

Yelahanka Nadu of Kempegowda's society was multi caste structured, mainly having innumerable number of jaties like Vokkaliga, Kuruba, Golla, Besta, Tigala, Akkasali, Badagi, Kammara, Nekara, Kumbhara, Agasa, Uppara, Talavara, Ganiga, Nayinda, Bhovi, Medha, Domba, Jogi, Korama, Helava, Ediga, Madiga, Beda, Lambani, Holaya etc. Besides, there were the Brahmins and Veerashaivas who were also included in the caste society, functioning with varied degree of their own kind (23). The rural village

society and economy had the character of self sufficiency, in which each class or caste based group society performed their duties and contributed their own share for the up growth of State, Society and Economy. Yelahanka Nada Prabhu's base of economy which is more of agriculture oriented ones and invariably land and its production was the centre of gravity. Land of variant classified segments were referred in the records and inscriptions which includes, Kadarambha(dry cultivation), Neerarambha(wet cultivation), Kushki(dry land), Tari(wet land), Bhaghyat(plantation), Thota and Thudike(gardening), etc all speaks of their categories and contributions of their own share as the revenue to the State. Besides, regular cultivating section who is also the actual cultivator, there references of different land tenancies like Brahmadeya, Devadaya, Quit rent holders, Batayi, Jodidar lands as well as Inamdar lands were in existence (24). There were also different kinds of irrigational system, which was developed making use of rivers, Tanks, Ponds, as well as Wells by using their own skills of lifting water through different means. The State authorities also extended their cooperation in maintaining tanks and wells with their own appointed officials (25). The regional character and skill of these workers can be specified through the system of lifting the water from ponds and wells were called as Aetha neeravari, Ghatiya yanthra or Araghata and Kapile bavi which were the instances to explain about local skills of the people in the field of irrigation.

The Yalahanka Nada prabhush had maintained their own system of administration, which includes different departmental organizations called as Chavadis such as Attavani Chavadi (royal), Bokkasachavadi (treasury), Thanachavadi (police), Govinachavadi (cattle), and Sunkadachavadi (collection of taxes and tolls) ( 26). Tolls and taxes were collected on the basis of above said classification on wetland, dry land, plantation, as well as on the professions like Maggadere, Ganadhere, manehana, angadidhere, maduvedhere, cattle tax on oxen, buffalo, donkey, sheep and goats etc. The assessment, method of collection and fixing of rates were followed on the lines of Vijayanagara rulers with little modifications of their local holdings. Even in the field of religion and culture, Yelahanka Nada Prabhus were much more liberal in granting the lands to Temples and Brahmin Classes (27). They built temples expanded them, renovated and maintained them by making grants to all the religious temples and charities.

Thus, Yalahanka Nada Prabhus who had achieved their excellence as rulers of local and indigenous nature belonging to Vokkaliga and farming community who ruled for about 600 and odd years were worthy of their stock as rulers and administrators. They were outstanding in their administration and maintenance of State affairs on par with other contemporary powers of great recognition. They were great builders, constructed tanks and temples which was a desirous objective of any State power of the medieval situation. Their strong devotion to religious institutions and culture particularly they who devoted themselves for both Vaishnava and Shaiva deities and had left many great number of monuments, temples and Mathas to their credit. Above all, their interest in agriculture and irrigation, which was considered as a special feature of a system of tanks for irrigation, which is very unique in India.

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