

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN IMPARTING EDUCATION DURING VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE

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.ABSTRACT

The meaning of education has undergone tremendous changes from time to time, but the origin remains the same. Panini in his 'Ashtadhyayi' opines that, 'what friendship and training human beings gets from the nature is education'. Education is the only treasure which cannot be stolen by others. It is immortal and imperishable. It gives immense pleasure and modifies behavior. The real aim of education, according to Manu, is the spiritual and intellectual development or attainment of Moksha or salvation. The education is aimed at building up of a good character. It brings lot of changes in a man. He becomes polite, from politeness he becomes sacred, from sacredness he earns wealth, from wealth, he learns to follow Dharma, from Dharma, he gets pure bliss. Vittala Odeya of Araga was a scholar who encouraged and motivated the scholars by his generous attitude and patronage. There are inscriptional evidences that agrahara's providing education in sixty four branches of knowledge to the students. There are instances that moral education was imparted by mothers to their children during their childhood. It signifies the necessity of moral education given to the children at the very young age so as to develop social consciousness, philanthropic spirit. The present paper is an attempt to study the role of religion and its influence on education during Vijayanagara period. The system of education under Vijayanagara state had unique feature and it left a deep indelible impression on the culture of Vijayanagara. Few viharas of Buddhist, the innumerable chaityas of Jainas and the myriads of mathas of lingayats were ever burning centres filled with abundance of knowledge. Both the Buddhist and jaina monks and the wandering lingayat Jangamas were both the torch bearers of learning and spiritual education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education has received much needed impetus during the rule of Vijayanagara Empire. All most all the rulers ruled Vijayanagara Empire, encouraged education and patronaged educational institutions and the religious centres played a very important role in imparting moral and ethical education in constructing the healthy society. The present paper tries to bring the status of education during Vijayanagara empire and how the religious centres influenced the growth of education in the empire.

The meaning of education has undergone tremendous changes from time to time, but the origin remains the same. Panini's 'Ashtadhyayi' opines that what friendship and training human being gets from the nature is education.¹ Education is the real treasure which cannot be stolen by others. It is immortal and imperishable. It gives immense pleasure and modifies behavior. According to Manu, the real aim of education is the spiritual and intellectual development or attainment of Moksha or salvation. Aryans gave utmost priority to spiritual education where as Spartans gave importance to physical education, bravery and discipline in the education system. The education is aimed at building up of a good character. It brings lot of changes in a man. He becomes polite. From politeness, he becomes sacred, from sacredness he earns wealth, from wealth, he learns to follow Dharma, from Dharma, he gets pure bliss.

An inscription belonging to the time of Harihara-II during 1403 AD states about the governor Vittala Odeya of Araga's charity on education as....

“Vidya parangata, Vidvajanarenda Tumbida Sarovarakke Chandronopadi, shastra Kalegalalli Yettida kai, sampattigu vidvattigu aagara vageeddanu.”²

It means Vittala Odeya of Araga was a scholar who encouraged and motivated the scholars by his generous attitude and patronage. An Inscription dated 1467 A.D, speaks about the Virupaksha agrahara providing education in Veda, Shastra, Saiva Sastra, Sankhya, meemamsa and sixty four branches of knowledge to the students. Lakshmi Dara, he was a minister under Devaraaya- I, narrates how his mother, while he was in her lap, advised him to introduce the welfare activities by establishing ponds, digging wells, and constructing temples, release the destitute that imprisoned and extend help to the friends and poor.³ This indicates the necessity of the

moral education given to the children at the very young age so as to develop social consciousness, philanthropic spirit and how to behave with the society and its members.

The basic education system during the days of Vijayanagara empire starts with Upanayana. Upanayana, was the first basic Samskara for a boy to enter into Vedic education. Along with Upanayana, the acharya used to give diksha on alphabets. Upanayana Samskara was performed in various ways by different castes. Brahmins used to perform the upanayana in the month of spring, Kshatriyas in the summer season and Vaishyas in the winter. Even the age for initiation ceremony varies from one caste to another. Brahmins performed their upanayana at the age of seven or eight with "Gayatri mantra", where as Jains performed the upanayana with "Om Namaha Siddha". According to the smritikaras the age to start the education was eight, eleven, and twelve respectively for the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas.⁴

In Karnataka many villages were granted to learned Brahmins for the maintenance of agraharas in imparting education. Like the Agraharas, the Brahmapuri also played a commendable role in imparting education in those days. In course of time, the Ghatikasthanas became highly popular and the figure was in greater number during 11th and 12th Century AD. Perhaps almost all the temples of later periods, seem to have had Ghatikas attached to them and they excelled as the institutions of learning. However, it may be noted that there are instances to show that there were more than one Ghatikasthanas in some places, Belligame stands as a good example of this type. From 10th Century AD onwards, it became so common to attach mathas or monasteries to temples. Amarasimha has defined Mathas as a place where students reside.⁵

Usually the temples were considered as the centers of primary education. But there were very few temples in Karnataka which were also centers of higher learning. The temples acted as the promoters of letters and arts. Provision was made in them for the recitation of devarams and other religious literature, the chanting of the Vedas and expounding of the epics and puranas became integral part of education. The Venkateswara perumal temple at Thirumukkudal is said to have run a school in one of the mantapas in the temple. As per the provisions of the temple, the study of the Vedas, Shastra, Grammar, Rupavatara etc. was made mandatory. A hospital and a hostel for the students were attached to the school. According to an inscription of dated 1433 A.D, the Sthanattar registered a deed executed by Mudaliyar Tirukkalikauridasan, one of the Sri Vaishnavas of Tirupati, in favour of twenty four mahajanas residing in Srinivasapuram agrahara.

During this period Jaina and Buddhist centers of learning prospered during this period. Needless to say that the Jaina basadis and Buddhist viharas go back to quite early periods and are probably earlier than the Hindu matas. It is really unfortunate to note that the inscriptions do not reveal the contribution of Jain and Buddhist centers towards education. In short, they do not furnish specific details with regard to the number of students and teachers, the subjects taught and the like. In these institutions, the pupils pursued their education at various levels from primary to higher courses of education. Kannada and Sanskrit languages were taught and cultivated. Sanskrit was a medium of higher studies owing to its rich treasure of traditional lores and sciences. Kannada was profusely used by the Jainas, followed by the Veerashaivas as a vehicle of expression.⁶ The sudden emergences of these institutions were due to the royal patronage extended by the kings, members of the royal families, feudatory chieftains and other state officials. Even some philanthropic people made generous contributions for the enormous growth of these institutions. As there was no external control over these institutions in the internal administration, the institutions progressed without any hindrance.

The education system of Vijayanagara state had her own unique features. It left a deep indelible impression on the culture of Karnataka which even today is seen glimmering here and there. The few viharas of Buddhist, the innumerable chaityas of Jainas and the myriads of mathas of lingayats were ever burning centres filled with abundance of knowledge. The Buddhist monks, the Jaina yatis and the wandering lingayat Jangamas were both the torch bearers of learning and spiritual leaders. The fortunes of Karnataka education affected the outside officials residing in this part of Karnataka. The ever victorious state of Vijayanagara was above all types of education. During 16th century AD., Vyasaraya, who solved the Kuhuyoga of Krishnadevaraya was an expert in Tarka, Vedanta and trained many disciples⁷, like Vadhiraaja, Purandara, Kanakadasa and Ramanujacharya. Vidwanas received the royal patronage during reign of Sangamas, Saluvas and Tuluva rulers. Kanaka's Guru Tirumala Tathacharya was a highly acclaimed scholar in Vishishtadvaita and was the Kulaguru of the Aravidu dynasty.

During the Vijayanagara period, the social life had undergone immense changes. The Brahmins were considered in high esteem by the people. In this way they busily absorbed in the study of Vedas and dharmik ceremonies. Education was the Monopoly of these Brahmins. On account of mastery over sastras, Brahmins were able to interpret the laws of the land properly and

advise the king and his judicial officers in legal matter.⁸ The Brahmins interpreted and explained in detail the complications prevailing in the law and thus it prevailed as the law of Brahmins in the empire, Ibn Batuta gives a beautiful expression of a Brahmin of the Vijayanagara period. In “civil and ecclesiastical life of the brahmins occupied a highly respected position, with the exception of the few who entered in to the state services, in the army and elsewhere. The generally devoted themselves to religious and literary pursuit and stood outside the race for wealth and power. They lived on voluntary gifts from all classes of people from the king onwards. hundreds of inscriptions proclaim the continued solicitude of kings, nobles and merchants for the maintenance and encouragement of a class of men who devoted themselves exclusively to learning and teaching, who were capable of detaching their king on all problems of social welfare and whose presence in every town and village was calculated to provide not only patterns of ethical and religious conduct for the rest of the population, but active helpers, and disinterested arbitrators in the numerous concerns of their daily life”⁹. In every house, there was the performance of ceremonies called as purana ghosties and it was considered the heaven for the earthly Devatas (suras), that is Brahmins. Even there was a provision to feed the poor students. In this way we can find the jyotishayas, asthabhasha kavis, vidwanas, primary school teachers (sannvaranu odutirupa kaseya kolannagalu) etc., in these bramhana settlements. But the one who gave a stiff competition in the field of education and Dharma were none other than the Veera saivas and the Jainas. The credit goes to the many veerashaiva mathas for popularizing education among the common people. Although Jainism was losing its hold, still it continued its great tradition in the field of education and learning.

The rulers of Vijayanagara were known in the annals of history of Karnataka and also in the history of South India as the patrons of learning and education. The Goddess of learning has already taken shelter in the state¹⁰. Though the king's themselves were not always as learned as Krishnadevaraya, they gave respect for learning and learned man. It was in the royal courts that scholars and philosophers of various schools of thought assembled to discuss their views on complex philosophical subjects and initiated debates and discussions. They displayed keen spiritual interest in such discussions and honored them by granting those rich presents and tax free villages. The religious attitude of the Rayas was a blessing in disguise to education. That is why Krishnaswamy Ayyangar says that this “religious attitude widened in to patronage of learning and literature”¹¹.

Veerashaivism and its impact on education

The Veerashaiva movement came to limelight with establishments of mathas to propagate the religion in a large scale. They were both the religious centers and important educational centers keeping more emphasis on Sanskrit language besides enriching the Kannada language and literature. The Pasupathas were one of the ancient Saiva sects in India, who while being strict worshippers of Pashupati, followed some repulsive practices. But in due course of time, and particularly after the revival of Hinduism in South India through the twin streams of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, led by the nayanars and alvars, it saw the growing influence of the Vedanta school and the increasing importance given to temples and mathas in the religious life of the country. The pashupatas like the kalamukhas and the kapalikas appeared to have adopted and implemented a mild and less repulsive ways in their religious practice. They are more interested in the organization of mathas and through them, they are aimed at the propagation of Saiva faith.

The Pashupatas were the worshippers of Pashupati and the observers of the Pashupatha-Vrata.¹² During Vijayanagara period also Pasupathas continue to exercise considerable influence in certain parts of South India and received the patronage of the kings along side with the Advaitins. The one great and fundamental differences between the Advaitins and the Pasupathas lies in the fact that while the former focused on the Vedas, the latter paid more emphasis on the Saiva Agamas though they did not go to the extent of rejecting the Vedas. Some of the early rulers of the Vijayanagara state were the followers of this school of Shaivism. The kulguru of the founders of Vijayanagara empire Harihara I and Bukka I was one Kasi Vilasa Kriyasakti who was a Pashupata, the great general of the army and minister Madhava who played a key role in the formation of Vijayanagara also had him for his guru as is borne out by one of the grants made by him in 1368 AD. It is said that at the insistence of Kriyasakti guru, Madhava carried out a special Saiva vow lasting for a year, at the end of which he made a gift from the funds of his own property to eight learned Brahmins from Kashmir who were well versed in Shiva rights and were the followers of the Saiva creeds.¹³ Till the end of the 16th century AD the members of the Pashupata cult acted as the in charge of temples and remained as bachelors since married men were not eligible for such offices. However, it was stipulated that an elder, both by virtue of age and learning, should be the head of the mathas (adhithana) and maintain brotherhood among disciples in the matha.

During the mediaeval period in south India, religious institutions of all denomination Shiva, Vaishnava and Jaina flourished either by the royal patronage or with the support of private benefactors. They actively involved in imparting religious education though incidentally they disseminated secular knowledge as well. Teaching, propagation of the teachings and the philosophy of the sect may also be considered as one of the duties. The mathas specially are indigenous in nature and intended to spread brotherhood among different localities. They are affiliated to a central and common seat of authority at the headquarters and monitored by it. The selection process of Swami to a matha is done properly and who are trained at Matha will be elevated to the post of swami. While selecting Swami either for a Pattada Matha or Virakta Matha, there are essential qualifications prescribed to the person who is to become the head of the Matha.

It was stated that both the temples and Mathas were played a very prominent part as places of learning. The monasteries played an important part in maintaining family stability as well as social solidarity, as they acted as the custodian of the traditional rules and regulations of the social life of the people. Moreover, the mathas had the other two important functions of education and initiations. In ancient days, when the government had not taken up the work of education, it was left for the private associations to shoulder the responsibility of education. After the establishment of Vijayanagara, we find the centers of veerashaiva activity in South Karnataka, one was established at Vijayanagara itself under the patronage of some generals like Jakkanna Raya and Lakhan Dandesha and the another near Kunigal, on the banks of Nagini river under the spiritual guidance of Tontada Siddalingayati. Both these centres were authoritarian and exerted powerful influence on the Veerashaivas community. They gave rigorous training to men and send them to different places to spread Veerashaivas in order to establish minor mathas all over Karnataka.

Dasa movement and its impact on education

Dasa movement was popularly known from the works of Purandara Dasa. From the lives and some of the works of Dasas, little information is available with regard to the system of education. The disciples stayed together with their gurus and did all the services and duties rendered to gurus as was in ancient days. From the life of Purandara Dasa, it is known that Purandaradasa as a student [shishya] had forgotten to keep drinking water on one night for his guru. On some important occasions and holidays usually the teachers distribute sweets among their students. Once Vyasaraaya gave all his students a plantain each with an instruction that it should be

eaten where there was none. KanakaDasa, one of the celebrated disciples, did not eat the fruit because, he always saw his guru and the lord Krishna everywhere. Therefore, he came back and said 'I could not eat it anyway. You told me that I should eat it unseen, where ever I went I felt god's eyes were on me".¹⁴

The Haridasa, the servants of Hari, are disciplined devotees of Vishnu. Dyvaita vedantha of Sri Madhvacharya is the philosophical basis for their teaching and most of the doctrines of Madhva were simplified and put in to in easy intelligible verse in the language of the masses, it is for the average kannadigas. Sanskrit happened to be the language of nobles and for the women and the lower strata of the society were not acquainted with the Sanskrit language. Haridasa, through their Kirtanas, made the common people to understand the very essence of Vedic teachings and learning. The difficult passages of the Upanishads had been rendered into simple Kannada through charming and melodious songs. Haridasa made all their efforts to make the Madhva philosophy popular by singing bhajans and songs of devotion at the doorstep of the people. Through songs, they tried their best to remove the disparities among the people and showed that every man is the fabricator of his own salvation.¹⁵

Shri Narahari Tirtha(1300 AD) a renowned disciple of Madhavacharya may be regarded by many as the pioneer of the movement although only a few of his songs in Kannada have come to limelight. Sripadaraya, the pontiff of the Madhva Matha at Mulbagal in the Kolar district, also known as Haridasa pitamaha(father of haridas), who was bold enough to compose such songs in simple Kanada language and popularize them as it meant resorting to a new form. The Haridasa movement received a great boost at the hands of Vyasaraaya who composed many songs in Kannada with his Ankita Nama (nom de plume) Krishna or Shri Krishna. Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa ,Vadiraja and Vijendra were his chief disciples.

The words Dasaru and Vyasaru first came into vogue in the time of purandaradasa and his religious receptors Vyasaraaya. Later on, the disciples of purandaradasa were called Dasakutas But later on the words Vyasakuta and Dasakuta acquired a different meaning altogether. Vyasakuta meant those who were well versed in Sanskrit and conversant with the knowledge of the Vedas and the different branches of philosophy, and on the other hand, Dasakutas meant those who conveyed the message of Dyvaita philosophy and religion through the vernacular.¹⁶

The extent and the type of philosophical teaching that one can be expected in the musical composition of a Vaishnava saint like Purandaradasa, he was not a system builder in philosophy, nor he was interested in logically establishing the truth of philosophical doctrines by means of augmentation on dialectical matters. In fact he rightly presumed that there were enough of such logical arguments already in existence, but they had proved to be fertile in so far as their impact on the actual life of the common man was concerned. His interest was, thus not theoretical, but practical, while deploring the fertility of merry theoretical learning by immoral people.

The most popular mode of communication with the masses was the vast body of lyrical literature popularly known as Dasara padagalu as many songs were on the tongue of the kannadapeoplein Karnataka. Theattempts are aimed at collecting these songs and printing them only indicate that there are still more to be collected. Some of them are regular Keertanas with definite musical tunes. ¹⁷

Haridasa literature exposes the knowledge of Vedika siddhanta (Philosophy).At the same time it was quite impossible for an ordinary man to understand the tenets of Vedas and Puranas. Sripada and his disciples wrote booksin Sanskrit.Since it was not possible for an ordinary man to understand the contents in Sanskrit, Kannada was used as a medium of instruction and through which they reached the Dyvaita philosophy to the door steps of the people. Purandara Dasa and Kanaka Dasa inspired by their guru Vyasaraya composed number of devotional songs in Kannada and established the institution of 'dasakuta'.

During the Vijayanagara period, poets dedicated their works not only to ministers, commanders, chieftains and friends but also to ordinary employees of royal court.¹⁸Tenali Ramakrishna Kavi dedicated his work 'Udbhataradya charita'to one of the officer who was an executive officer in the services of Nandendla Gopa, the governor of the fort of Kondaveedu. The same Ramakrishna Kavi dedicated his work 'Pandurangamahatyam'to one virurivedadri who was a copyist(vrayasakadu) in the service of Peda Singa Bhupala. Ramaraja Bhushan dedicated his work 'Kavyalankara Sangrahato ObhalaNarasaraja, the nephew of Aliya Ramaraya and Tirumalaraya before he could enter into their court.After succeeding in gaining favour of the king's through Obala Narasaraya, Ramaraja Bhushan dedicated his 'Vasu charitra' to Tirumala raya.

To sumup, during the Vijayanagara period the agraharas, ghatikas, mathas and temples played a very important role in importing moral and ethical education. Buddhist and Jaina monasteries also played a big role in the development of education during this period. Further, we infer from above that religion played a significant part in spreading education through the establishment of mathas and educational centres filled with spiritual preachers as well as intellectuals.

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