



THE ROLE OF GARUDAS IN HOYSALA POLITY**Dr. S. Shivaramu****Associate Professor, Dept. of History,
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Of the Several dynasties which ruled the Kannada Country, South India, the Hoysalas stand forth as an important dynasty. Being great conscious of the political thought of past age, they enforced the ancient principles of the art of Government to the best of their ability. The moral law of Dharma or righteousness and tradition characterised their government. Among some of the innovations in administration, the Garuda System was some thing unique.



KEYWORDS: Several dynasties , important dynasty, ancient principles.

INTRODUCTION:

We find the existence of a body of men, who had taken the oath of allegiance to die with the king. These personal body guards of the king were called the Garudas, signifying the same kind of unsullied, unshakable devotion that the divine bird Garuda has towards God Vishnu. Garuda is the divine vehicle of god Vishnu. The belief that they would go to heaven if they died on the battlefield, induced them to render unstinted loyal service to the king. They had the special responsibility of guarding the life of the king. This was their life long responsibility. They believed that their existence after the death of their king had no measuring or purpose.

A large number of the inscriptions of the period reveal how cheerfully they laid down their lives for the sake of the king and the country. They were not only the class of the most loyal soldiers, but also a sort of slaves. They were not only obedient and faithful to the members of the Hoysala royal family, but also to their subordinate rulers. They had close contact with both. To be loyal, faithful, unsullied and unshakable to the king was the sole aim of their life.

The soldier who desired to be a Garuda, had to take oath of loyalty and obedience to the king.¹ When the King was in danger and when he died, he had to undertake the oath that he •.would give up his life and be loyal as long as he lived, only after taking this oath he could become a Garuda. As a sign of this he would wear an ornament an anklet around his left ankle, having small bells which would produce tinkling sound. This ornament was called "Ganda Pendar".² Whenever these Garudas died, their wives and servants would also give up their lives.³

The Garuda's wife (wives) was similarly very faithful to her husband and would take similar oath. Moreover, she used to wear a different kind of ornament around her ankle.⁴ Such a wife was called "**Lenki**". The subordinates of the Garuda would also undertake similar oath of allegiance to their master. They were known as "**Lenka**"⁵.

The Jaina poet Janna has given a vivid description of the Garuda system in his work, 'Anantanatha Purana'. According to him, soon after hearing about the death of their master Garuda, they would cut off their heads.⁶ Many inscriptions have depicted the picture of this action.⁷

Among the several families of Garudas of the Hoysala period, the Garuda family of Mugilu is noteworthy. They were Garudas for nearly seven generations exhibiting their unflinching loyalty to the Hoysalas. This Mugilu family of Garudas hailed from Agrahara Bachahalli, Krishnaraja Pet Taluk, Mandya District, originally the members of this family were merchants, but later on embraced military service and were ruling the region of the then Kabbhahunadu. So, the inscriptions describe them- Nana desiyim settivattarm taleda gandanarayanarum Kannadiga Moneyalamgeyva nayaka 'and¹ Vairi Samanta Garuda Narayanarum basege tappada lenkara gandru, nosege madoduva lenkara gandarum" They are described as, Dhanamana Pranagalolu Siranu Vaguva Lenkara gandarum.⁸ They had the responsibility of protecting agrahara and villages. They had their own armed associations.

They are three Garuda Pillars established in memory of those Garuda who gave up their lives, to the south of the Hunasesvara Temple of Bachahalli. Each Pillar is about 15 ft. high, and 1.5 meter thick. The upper portion of the Pillar has the sculptured figures of Airavatha, Garuda and three heroes. The lower portion of the pillar has an inscription. According to a record of 1256 AD, after the death of Hoysala king Somesvara, Kanneya Nayaka, his three wives, ten lenkis and 21 lenkas gave up their lives as Garudas.⁹ The inscription of someshvara on the first Garuda pillar, Agrahara Bachahalli, describes the circumstances leading to Kanneya nayaka's self sacrifice as follows "Saka Varsha 1179, Nala Samvatsarada Vaisakha masada Sukla Pakshada aaraneya Sanivara Kanneyanayaka tanna hendathiyarada Vummavve, Javanavve, Kallawe, hatthu manisa lenkitiyaru, ippanthohdu manisa lenkarodane sen gaja mastakadalli aarubaari Garudanappi bhasheyannu pooraisidaru. Tale Kattarisalpattiddaroo tappassu maaduthindantho gocharisuthidda haagu aatana yadagalina kalanduge samanta KanyanaVyaktitvakke mattashtu meragu needi phala phala holeyuthittu. Ee drushyavannu bandha janaru beragagi veekshisuttiddagale aatana Pathniyara aatana pandale aaratiyethi tamma Kechedeyannu Prakatisidaru" ¹⁰

Another Hoysala inscription describes the heroism of Ranganayaka, son of Kannaya nayaka" Along with his wives ketavve nayakitti, Manchavve nayakiti, Honnavve Nayakiti, ten lenkis and twenty lenkas, he embraced the Garuda on the head of the elephant six times in 1291 AD, he kept up word given to Hoysala king Narasimha III ¹¹.

The other two Garuda Pillars belong to the reign of Hoysala Narasimha III (1291 AD). The inscription of 1291 AD gives full information about seven generations of Garudas¹². According to an inscription of 1200 AD of the reign of Veera Ballala, when Garuda Kuvara Lakshmana died, 1000 lenkas loyal to him gave up their lives. His wives also gave up their lives¹³. Though Dr. Chidananda murthy has not expressed any doubt regarding the self sacrifice of 1000 lenkas of Kuvara Lashmana, Dr. M.M. Kalburgi opinions that the number of 1000 indicates only the considerable number of Garudas ¹⁴. Kalburgi says that the name Garuda indicating the self sacrificing heroes is not proper. It should be lenka and lenkavali. But this cannot be accept, because the Garudas were loyal to the king and the lenkas were loyal to the Garudas. But '**Lenkiyaru**' indicates the loyal wives of the Garudas.

The interesting point to be noticed in the family tree of the family of Garudas is that the word setti indicating merchant family is deleted and instead, the word nayaka indicating military service is used. Probably, this may be on account of the change of profession. The self sacrifice of this family has been described as follows :

Hoysala setti's son was well known as Kooreya Nayaka. By his heroism he made the world love him- says the inscription.¹⁵ The concept of Garuda began in the time of Hoysala Ereyanga. Ereyanga wanted to strengthen and build up a powerful kingdom. At that time, he had to face two powerful competitors, the Chalukyas and the Cholas, So, he was in need of a strong army. It was difficult for the Hoysalas to know who were their foes and friends. Hence, the need for faithful bodyguards and servants and heroic soldiers to protect the Hoysala Kingdom,. So, they used to appoint only such loyal soldiers ¹⁶.

During the Hoysala period, Garudas used to be sent to defeat the enemies. These Garudas would be victorious in wars and sometimes used to give up their lives in protecting the life-of the king. An

inscription of the times described this and speaks about Oabbeya Nayaka, son of Hoysala setti. He was a great subordinate. He was like the lion to the titled enemy in toxicated elephants, and Bherunda to Sarabha like chiefs.

The Hoysala king Veera Ballala Deva residing in the capital Dora samudra invited him and offering betelnut and leaves sent him to fight against the army of Sankamadeva. Considering it as a great favour this feudatory fought against the chiefs and killed them. But he was struck by the enemys weapon and embraced the heaven of heros.¹⁷

Several invaluable inscriptions found in Agrahara Bachahalli, K.R. Pet Taluk, throw light on how the Garudas served the kings of Hoysala dynasty and gave up their lives when the kings died. These inscriptions shed light on the dharmic self-sacrifice of the Garudas and also how they served in the army as well as on other occasions and the characteristics of their generations.

The Garuda system which evolved during the Hoysala Period about the value of the concept, can be said to have evolved from a kind of system of slavery. Unquestionable, firm unflinching loyalty to the king and discharging their duty strictly were the most important duties of this system. This type of feudal slavery, the Garuda system reached its zenith in the 13th century. As they were feudatories, they were also called "**Samantha Garudas**" ¹⁸. As they were also connected with wars, they had the title "**Sangrama Garuda**" ¹⁹. There can be no doubt about their loyalty to the master like that of Garuda to Mahavishnu. Without these loyal Garudas in the 12th and 13th centuries, it would not have been possible for the Hoysalas to expand and build up their empire. The role of the Garudas in the system of administration was truly great and they were the important pillars of the kingdom.

Looking at the system from the modern times, it may not be far from truth that we Indians are adopts in carrying any concept to the extremes. It is very difficult to say whether this innate character is a point of strength or weakness. To think of the Garudas, their subordinates and families committing wholesale dharmic suicide is not a happy, joyful event to swallow. It makes us very sad indeed, perhaps, the batch of policeman who go round the areas of cities is named Garuda Police, in memory of the Hoysala Garudas!

FOOT NOTES

- 1) E.C-5. (old) Bl-112-1200 A.D.
- 2) E.C-5. (old) Bl-112-1200 A.D.
- 3) Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy - *Kannada Sasanagala Samskritika Adhyana*. PP-308-310
- 4) E.C-5. (old) Bl-112-1200 A.D.
- 5) E.C-4 K.R. Pet - 1257 A.D & 10-1292 A.D.
- 6) Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy - *Ibid*. PP-308-309
- 7) Dr. M. M. Kalburgi - *Samadhi Balidana Veeramarana Smarakagalu*. PP-58-59
- 8) E.C.-6 (new) K.R.Pet- 82-1179 and *Agrahara Bachahalliya Garudaru*- Sudha (Weekly)-May-4, 2000.
- 9) E.C.-6 (2nd Ed.) Kr. 82, P-66
- 10) E.C.-6 (New series) Kr. 82.1179
- 11) E.C.-6-Ibid-
- 12) E.C.-6 (2nd Ed.) Kr. 82, P-66
- 13) E.C. 4, Bl-112-1200 A.D.- K.R. Basavaraju - *History and Culture of Karnataka-Dharwad*-1984, P-461
- 14) Dr. M. M. Kalburgi - *op cit*- PP-58-59
- 15) E.C.-6 (New series) Kr. 82. 1179 A.D.
- 16) Dr. M.B. Rajamani- *The Garuda System in Karnataka Society* (A micro Sociological analysis) J.H.S. Mysore, Vol 19-1985, P-30.
- 17) E.C.-6 (New series) Kr. 77-1074- A.D.
- 18) S.I.I. 9, 1-115-1054 A.D
- 19) B.K.I. 1-1, 113.-1074 A.D.