



Karnataka History - Alupas

Special class

THE ALUPAS

The Alupas ruled the Western Coast of Karnataka, especially in Dakshina Kannada for a period of nearly one thousand years. Earlier, Mangalore was their capital, and later Udyavara near Udupi, and Barkur also became their capitals for some time. They do not appear to have been a sovereign dynasty, and were feudatories of the Kadambas, Chalukyas of Badami, Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas and the Vijayanagara Empire. But, they also issued coins called Gadyana from their mints at Barkuru and Mangalore.

If the place 'Olokhoira' mentioned by Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy is to be identified with Alvakheda, mentioned in later records as the territory of the Alupas, their rule dates back to the record century A.D., when Ptolemy wrote (130 A.D.). But, one Pashupathi of Alapagana, mentioned in the Halmidi Record (c.450 A.D.) of the Kadambas, can be identified with a member of the dynasty. The Alupas had double fish as their emblem. They called themselves as belonging to Pandyavamsha and Soma (lunar) Kula. A clear mention of the dynasty is in the Mahakuta and Aihole inscriptions of the Badami Chalukyas, who claim to have defeated the Alupas. The regular records of the Alupas are available from the seventh century onwards, beginning with the Vaddarase inscription. The Maratur Record in Andhra speaks of one Aluka Maharaja who had gone with his army to help the Badami Chalukyas. Dr. K.V. Ramesh assigns this record to the second half of the 7th century, whereas Dr. G.S. Gai assigns it to the first half of the 7th century. Dr. Gai tells that the daughter of this prince, Kadamba, was married to Pulikeshin II. The Alupas were also having control over Uttara Kannada and Humcha region in Shimoga district. Aluka Maharaja appears to have died at Kallur in Andhra Pradesh during an expedition. He was succeeded by Gunasagara (c.660-663) and his successor and son Chitravahana (c.663-730) was married to Kumkumadevi, sister of Chalukya Vijayaditya. This Jaina princess had built a Jinalaya at Lakshmeshwar. Chitravahana had driven back a Madurai Pandyan expedition which attacked Mangalapura (Mangalore) and wanted to make inroads into the Chalukyan empire. He is praised as the protector of Chalukyan glory for this heroic act.

His successor Aluvarasa II or Babruvahana quarrelled with the Chalukyas and lost considerable territory. His two sons, Chitravahana II and Ranasagara, ruled over Humcha and Alvakheda respectively. Later, the Rashtrakutas drove them away from Humcha, and Vimaladitya, who tried to be free from the imperial control of the Rashtrakutas, was subdued by Amoghavarsha in c.870.

Inscriptions speak of a son of Chitravahana II, called Shvetavahana. They were thrown out from Humcha. Prithvisagara and his son Ranasagara ruled in Alvakheda. Chitravahana II, when thrown out of Humcha, clashed with his brother Ranasagara in Alvakheda, and in the civil war that ensued, both of them and the former's son Shvetavahana were killed. Prithvisagara became the unquestioned master in c.810. Marama was his son and successor who tried to assume freedom. Vimaladitya was the son of the last named who was subdued by Amoghavarsha. During the 10th century, Alva Rananjaya and Dattalupa, two sons of Vimaladitya, ruled in Alvakheda, one after the other.

The first clearly dated Alupa inscription is of Kundavarma, son of Dattalupa, whose Kadire Inscription speaks of his having installed the famous bronze image of Lokeshwara (Avalokiteshwara) in 968 A.D. His capital, Mangalore, must have attracted many Overseas Buddhist traders including the Chinese, and Lokeshwara is believed by the Buddhists to be the protector of the sea-farers. Kundavarma's son Jayasimha had to face Chola inroads in the days of Rajendra Chola, but his son Bankideva threw the Cholas out in c.1020.

Bankideva's son and successor Pattiyodeya and grandson of Pandya Pattiyodeya (c. 1080-1110) had to face Hoysala attack from above the Ghats. By then the capital had been shifted to Barkur. In the days of Pattiyodeya's son, Kavi Alupendra, many Jaina feudatories from above the Ghats like the Santaras from Kalasa, the Bangas from Melbangadi (Mudugere taluk) and the Ajilas entered Tuluva and carved out their own territories. It was due to the expansionist policy of the Hoysalas that these changes were taking place. Alupendra's queen Pandya Mahadevi was playing a prominent role in administration.

Alupendra's son Kulashekhara I (c.1160-1220) married Jakaladevi, perhaps a Santara princess. Kundana (c.1220-1230) was his successor. Kundana's son Vallabhadeva Dattalupa followed him to the throne. He, in turn, was succeeded by Virapandya 1 (c. 1250), the latter's son. Virapandya's death in about 1275 saw his wife Ballamahadevi administering the Alupa territory and ruling for more than 15 years, and her son Nagadeva ruling for short while.

Those were the days when the Hoysalas were making inroads into Tuluva, and many Jaina princes like the Bangas, Ajilas, Santaras (Bairarasas), Tolahas, Chautas, etc., challenging the Alupa power. Power was seized by Virapandya's son-in-law (daughter's son also), Bankideva II in about 1285, challenging the authority of Ballamahadevi and her son Nagadevarasa. Bankideva II started ruling independently and became the sole inheritor of the Alupa throne. This was recognition of Aliya Santana coming into vogue in the area, that is, succession through female successor's children. The successor of Bankideva II, Soyideva, arranged the marriage of Kikkayitayi or Krishnayitayi, an Alupa princess, to Hoysala Ballala III, and the next ruler Kulashekhara II (c.1335-1346) was perhaps her son, for whose protection Ballala III left an army at Barkur.

When Hoysala Ballala III died in 1343 and his son Virupaksha Ballala in 1346, the Sangama brothers assumed power by establishing the Vijayanagara empire. When a grant was made by Harihara and his brothers to Bharatiteertha at Sringeri, Krishnayitayi was also present with Kulashekhara, and she also made a grant to the same sage on the same day. This was symbolic of the Hoysala support to the Vijayanagara empire, and the Alupa princess had the privilege of doing it as she was the queen of Ballala III. Alupa sway extended over parts of Uttara Kannada also during this time when her Shirali and Idagunji Records are taken into account.

Vijayanagara consolidated its power in Dakshina Kannada by appointing their governors at Mangalore and Barkur and later rulers Bankideva III, Kulashekara III (c.1355-1390) and Virapandya II were only feudatories of Vijayanagara, sharing power with other Jaina princes who were getting powerful in the areas, at times even challenging Vijayanagara empire. Virapandya II is the last ruler of the dynasty, and the Alupas are not heard of after the 14th century.

Of the dozens of Alupa inscriptions, one found at Vaddarase of the days of Aluvarasa I, is the oldest Kannada record of theirs. The Belamannu copper plate discovered by Dr. Gururaja Bhat is the only copper plate of the Alupas and it is the first copper plate in Kannada language. It belongs to the early part of the eighth century and has the double fish crest, the royal emblem of the Alupas, on the seal of its ring. The plates are of Aluvarasa II, making a grant to the Sabha (village assembly) of Belamannu (near Udupi) for the services of Vindhyavasini Devi (or Durga) of Belamannu. The land granted was in the Kundapura sub-division of the Alupa territory. It is this record which clearly states that the Alupas belonged to Pandya kula. 'Pandya' here perhaps means owners of sea-faring barges or 'Pandi' in Tulu.

CULTURE

The Alupas were Shaivas, but patronised Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism too. They had matrimonial relations with Jaina Santaras. Influence of Acharya Shankara is very much evidenced in the religious life as Skanda, Durga and Vishnu were popularly worshipped. Jainism must have made its advent in Alakheda in the days of Kumkumadevi, the Chalukya princess who had married Chitravahana. To please the Buddhist foreign traders, Kundavarma installed the Lokeshwara image in bronze, a highly artistic work, at the Buddhist Vihara at Kadirika (Kadire). They allowed Muslim traders of Arabic origin to settle down at Barkur, Mangalore, Bailur and other places, and Hanjamana (Anjuman) of these traders had place in the town assemblies of these places. The local assemblies had a prominent part in administration.

Their records are in Kannada and Sanskrit, and the Kadire Record (968) is in Sanskrit language and Grantha script. Kannada was undoubtedly the language of administration. Their gold Gadyanas with double fish crest are seen, and records speak of mints at Mangalore and Barkur.

Scholars have assigned the Panchalingeshwara temple of Barkur (8th century), the Brahmalingeshwara of Brahmavar, Kotinatha of Koteswara and the Sadashiva of Suratkal to the Alupas. All these are in apsidal ('Gajaprishta') plan like the Durga temple of Aihole. The Someshwara temple at Baindur is in typical Kalyani Chalukya style with fine image of Surya, Saraswati and other Gods. In sculpture, Badami Chalukya style is discernible in the Mahishamardini image of Kadiyali (Udupi) and similar images at Nandikur and Belamannu. Gopalakrishna image at Kotekeri and Barkur and Durga at Nilavar are in Hoysala style. Mangalore, Barkur, Malpe, etc., were flourishing commercial centres. The Alupas founded many Agraharas like the one at Brahmavara to cite an example.

Details on rice cultivation, gardens of areca and coconut etc., are seen in records. The Alupas enjoyed the rich income of overseas trade in rice, spices and other forest products. Dr. D.D. Kosambi feels that West Coast owed its prosperity then to the introduction of coconut tree from Malayan peninsula. May be it was introduced by the Divars (island people' or the Billavas - the toddy tappers from the island of Ceylon).