



Chapter 8 Education and Social Life



Chapter 8

Education and Social Life



Traditional gurukula

In the ancient period of Karnataka, a strong network of educational institutions called *agraharas*, *mathas* and *ghatikas* existed. An *agrahara* was a settlement of scholarly *brahmins* endowed with land, houses and other facilities, in order to enable them to commit themselves to academic pursuits which were a part of the *shatkarmas* expected of them. These included the six-fold duties, i.e., *yajana* (performance of sacrifices), *yaajana* (officiating as priests in sacrifices), *adhyayana* (engaging oneself in studies), *adhyapana* (teaching), *daana* (giving gifts) and *pratigraha* (receiving gifts).

Ancient inscriptions state the existence of an average of three or four *agraharas* in every taluk and hundreds of *agraharas* in Karnataka. These were founded under Vijayanagara rule and continued to be set up under Nayakas of Keladi and Wodeyars of Mysore. The *agraharas* were generally set up by kings, queens, generals and other rich persons. It was considered a benevolent act similar to the construction of a temple or a tank.



A row of agraharas



A specific number of *brahmin* scholars were invited to an existing village where agriculture was flourishing. These lands were purchased and distributed among these scholars. In some major cities and towns, certain areas called *bramhapuris* were allotted exclusively to these scholars. While Belagami (Balligavi) in Shimoga district had seven *bramhapuris*, Badami in Chalukyan times had 2,000 *brahmins* at its *bramhapuri* and Aihole (Ayyavole) had a *bramhapuri* with 500 scholars.

Agraharas were not exclusive institutions of Karnataka as even Kautilya mentions them. A few *agraharas* appear to have been founded by the Satavahanas and Talagunda in Shimoga district was one among them. Every *agrahara* had a school for primary education and a scholar would be specially endowed with land or a financial deposit for the purposes of *akkarigavritti*, *balashikshe* or *karnatashikshe*. The teachers were called *karnata-pandita* or *kannada-upadhyaya*. At the *agraharas*, the subjects taught included the study of the *Vedas*, *Vedangas*, *Vedanta*, *Purana*, *Nyaya*, *Mimamsa*, *Agama*, *Yogasutra*, *Natyashastra*, *Kamasutra*, astrology, grammar, mathematics, languages, polity, etc.

These *agraharas* in Karnataka continued to conserve the traditions in scholarship, as elsewhere in India. Religious centers like Sringeri, Udupi, Gokarna, Melkote, etc. and hundreds of Virashaiva *mathas* continued to foster traditional learning. Jain *bastis* also continued this tradition. Pietro Della Valle, an Italian traveller who came to Karnataka in 1623 A.D. gives an interesting description of a school run in a temple in

Shimoga district, where the boys learnt multiplication through the melodious recitation of tables. One boy led the singing of tables and the other boys repeated what he sang and thus, learnt the lesson. They also wrote with their fingers on sand spread in front of them.

Details of the *agrahara* system are available in an inscription of 1150 A.D. which states that Talagunda *agrahara* in Shimoga district was a famous center for eight centuries. There were 48 students and eight teachers of different subjects such as *Vedas*, *Vedanta*, *Rupavatara* (grammar), *Prabhakara* (*Mimamsa* philosophy) and prosody. There were also arrangements to teach Kannada at the primary level (*kannada-akshara-shikshe*).

The queens of Karnataka also played a leading role in establishing the *agraharas*. Queen Kamaladevi, wife of the Kadamba king Sivachitta, wanted to set up an *agrahara* in Degamve (Belgaum district) and informed the king of her desire in the audience hall. According to an inscription, the king put the proposal before his council of ministers who accepted it. The queen herself selected a number of *brahmins* who were well-versed in different subjects. This inscription explains the setting up of an *agrahara* and the care taken to recruit only those *brahmins* who could prove worthy of royal patronage.

Brahmapuris and Mathas

The *brahmapuris*, as the name indicates, were areas earmarked in parts of cities or towns for the *brahmins* to impart education to the young. Kings and generals, while on tour, arranged *dharma-prasangas* or religious discourses by *brahmin* scholars. If they were impressed, they gave grants and at times established new *brahmapuris*. Balligave in Shimoga district had seven *brahmapuris* and Annigeri had five, where education was provided both at the primary and higher levels.

A *matha* was a boarding house attached to a temple school or

mathahchhatradinilayam, according to Amarakosha, but grew into a center of learning by the middle of the 8th century A.D. Several *kalamukha mathas* came up in the 10th century A.D. *Kalamukha Saiva* teachers played an important role in the spread of education throughout the country. They arrived in Karnataka from Kashmir through Gujarat around the 7th century A.D. and since they daubed their foreheads liberally with *bhasma* (sacred ash), they were nicknamed *kalamukha* or 'black-faced' by the locals.

The most famous *matha* was *Kodiya matha* at Balligavi (Shimoga district), attached to the Kedaresvara temple which provided shelter to many sections of society. Besides providing free education, lodging and boarding to the student community, the *matha* imparted instruction in all the branches of learning. The *matha* distributed food to the poor, the destitute, the lame, the blind and the deaf. Artists, such as singers, drummers, flute players, dancers and orators were also accommodated, confirming that the *matha* was a repository of fine arts. Ascetics of different orders including Ekadandi, Tridandi, Hamsa, Paramahamsa and also the Jaina monks visited this great institution, not only from other parts of Karnataka but from different countries as well. The *matha* provided shelter, food, security and arranged medical treatment for all visitors as well.

Kodiya matha boasted of a long line of distinguished gurus. Vamashakti II was the head for more than 46 years and through his scholarship, attracted the attention of the royalty, who in turn endowed the *matha* with liberal grants in the 11th century A.D. Other than in Balligavi, places like Kuppatur, Sudi, Huli, Muttage and Srisaila also had famous *kalamukha mathas*. Besides *svadhyaya*, (self study) *adhyapana* (teaching) and *vyakhyana* (discourse) in all traditional lore, some *mathas* provided vocational education as well. Some of them taught students only to read and write (*odisuva-matha*), some taught spinning and weaving (*sale-matha*), while others provided instruction in agriculture, medicine and smithy. Students were taught drawing and painting on palm

leaves and preparing *kadatas* (permanent folding black boards). Some old palm leaf books and *kadatas* in *mathas* mention a number of tools required in different arts and crafts and describe modes for manufacturing them. The *kalamukha mathas* which became Virasaiva establishments in course of time, continued the secular tradition of education.

Even among those *mathas* that imparted literary education, there was specialisation. For instance, *Koolimatha* invariably taught the three R's (reading, writing, and arithmetic). In *Shabdamanidarpana matha*, grammar was the main subject. The *Teekina matha* dealt with different commentaries on the *smritis* (law and philosophy) and *Tippani matha* trained people in the interpretation and analysis of books on law. *Sampadane matha* which taught interpretation and editing, also attracted a large number of students. *Sanjeya matha*, mentioned in inscriptions, functioned in the evenings. The recitation of the *puranas*, which was a common practice in temple-schools, was practised here. It is likely that people gathered at leisure in the *matha* to learn about religion and social duties which formed part of the adult education of those times.

In undivided South Kanara district, Jaina *mathas* and *aigala mathas* existed and continued to flourish until the end of the 19th century. In addition to the three R's, Kannada, Sanskrit classics and Yakshagana *prasangas*, i.e. enactment of anecdotes, were also taught.

In the *mathas*, besides Vedic lore and traditional *darshanas* and *smritis*, secular subjects such as arts and crafts were taught. In this way, the *mathas* tried to meet most of the local educational needs of those times. The administration and maintenance of *mathas* was the responsibility of the particular community to which the *matha* belonged. Communities such as Jainas, Vaishnavas, Virasaivas, etc. ran the *mathas*, but education was available to all communities.

Women in Karnataka

It is an established fact that there was no gender discrimination in the Vedic age in imparting education. Boys and girls alike had initiation (*upanayana*) ceremony before they started their studies in a *gurukula* or hermitage. A majority of the girls preferred a cosy



Shasanasundari, Jalasangi,
Bidar District

home-life, cultivated various arts and crafts and became good housewives. They were known as *sadyovadhus*. Among those who took to the serious study of realisation of God in a *gurukula*, some excelled in all ways of learning and especially in disputations regarding the nature of the *brahman*. They were known as *brahmavadinis* and remembered as visionaries and composers of *mantras*.

The part played by women in the realm of art, architecture, literature and propagation of knowledge seems to have been as noteworthy as the men of Karnataka. This is based on the abundant testimony of literary and epigraphical records. Ravikriti, a poet comparable to Kalidasa and Bharavi, and other poets and academicians adorned the court of the great Chalukyas of Badami. Among them was Queen Vijaya, who was eulogised by Rajashekara as being endowed with poetical ability of a high order. Familiar

with all branches of knowledge and mastery over many languages, she enjoyed a stature worthy of emulation. Vijaya, also known as Vijayambika, Vidya or Bijjaka, might have been the wife of Chandraditya, son of Pulikesi II.

Queen Attimabbe of 11th century A.D. was reputed for the construction of Jaina temples and propagation of Jaina faith through the distribution of a thousand copies of Ponna's *Shantipurana* to the scholars. Attimabbe was called *Dana-Chintamani* (divine jewel bestowing gifts). She was noted for saintliness, religious earnestness and fervour and moral piety. Bilhana, in his *Vikramankadevacharitam*, has immortalised the *svayamvara* of Chandralekha, the daughter of a Silahara chief of Karad, with Vikramaditya VI, and from the panegyrics of this great princess and references, such as *Abhinava Sharada*, *Sarasvati*, *Nritya-vidhyadhari*, it is evident that she was proficient in several branches of learning and in the fine arts. During the administration of the Chalukyas of Kalyana, many royal ladies of the imperial family or of their feudatories, like Akka Devi, sister of Jayasimha and Jakala Devi, queen of Vikramaditya VI, distinguished themselves in the field of knowledge and administration as well as in the field of battle. Nilanjane, whom Pampa has immortalised, and Santala Devi, the Hoysala queen, are spoken of in many inscriptions as the greatest exponents of the theory of art, music and dance. They were the most celebrated among Karnataka dancers. Several Ganga and Hoysala princesses were famous for their proficiency in fine arts.

In the 10th century A.D., a woman succeeded her husband to the post of *nadagavunda* after his death, and on her death, the post was inherited by her daughter. Women were appointed as administrators and many ladies of royal blood were appointed as governors. Vijayanka administered a province under her brother-in-law, Chalukya Vikramaditya I, and was known as *Ranabhairavi*. The Hoysala queen Umadevi led the armies and won wars. In the 13th century A.D., Ballamahadevi ruled independently over Alupa kingdom. Later, when *aliya-santana* or succession through female

line became popular on the west coast, heroic queens like Abbakka of Ullala (who fought against the Portuguese) and Chennadevi and Chennabhairadevi of Gerusoppa ruled. The latter was called the 'Queen of Pepper' by the Portuguese.

Women in Karnataka enjoyed more freedom than elsewhere in India. They could inherit property, bequeath it and stand as witnesses (as testified by a record from Hassan district dated 1156 A.D). In the Vijayanagara period, they even worked as guards and palanquin bearers in the palace and there is also evidence of women wrestlers. Many women were engaged in trade in the capital city. "Women in south India had practically transgressed the limits which the law-givers had imposed on them, as regards activities not pertaining to domestic life," says Dr. B.A. Saletore, a distinguished historian of India. This is true of women of Karnataka too.

Among the lower castes, widow remarriage was common. Polygamy was also known to prevail, but mostly among the kings and the well-to-do. *Salankrita-kanyadana* or marrying a daughter bedecked with jewellery was the general practice and this later led to payment of dowry. The evil of paying a bride price also existed and a record of Vijayanagara times states a meeting of various *brahmin* castes to assert themselves strongly against the practice. Prostitutes were found in all towns and cities, according to literary sources. Kings proudly called themselves as *veshyabhujanga* and *vitachakravarti*, indicating that the profession enjoyed royal patronage. Temples were provided with dancing girls and other female servants like *chauri* bearers. The former were called *kuniyuva sule* and the latter were called *chamarada sule*.

Epigraphs clearly explain that women in medieval Karnataka occupied respectable positions in the religious, political and social spheres, and played important roles and made significant contributions to the culture of Karnataka. However, it is also true that they did not figure prominently in the field of Kannada literature till the appearance of the unique mystic and poet

Akka Mahadevi and other great *vachanakartis* (women composers of *vachanas*) in the latter

part of the 12th century A.D. Of the *vachanakartis* who adorned the firmament of Kannada literature, Akka Mahadevi had a brilliance of her own. She was 'Karnataka's sister superior' and 'India's foremost woman mystic'.

The greatest woman saint of Karnataka, Akka Mahadevi, a contemporary of Basaveshvara in the court of Kalyana Kalachuri Bijjala, was an ardent devotee of Channa Mallikarjuna. Akka believed that those to whom Channa was gracious need not care for the body and its requirements. Akka was prepared to mortify the flesh and suffer unending and ceaseless torture for the sake of her lord. For Akka, without Channa Mallikarjuna, speech, action and freedom were illusory and if you realised His omnipresence, *moksha* could be attained.

Akka Mahadevi is an invaluable gem in the spiritual and literary



Savinirmadi Memorial, Bangalore Museum

spheres. She was aptly named Akka Mahadevi – Akka, the elder sister, and Mahadevi, the great soul. Her invaluable contribution to the fields of literature and religion are the wonderful *vachanas* which are revered as aphorisms. They serve mankind as the lighthouse of guidance, knowledge and experience, showing man how to cross the sea of *samsara* safely. Using the language of the man on the street and other similar elements that are well-known to the common folk, Akka has expressed in very simple and short sentences, a profound practical philosophy and wisdom so lucid and vivid, that everyone can understand it easily. She has explained very clearly the Omnipotence, Omniscience and Immanence of the lord-the *Saguna* and *Nirguna Brahma*.

Fine Arts in Daily Life

Fine arts such as dancing, singing and instrumental music were considered to be great accomplishments among the women of noble families. The musical instruments that were in use were

the flute, *samudraghosa*, *katu-mukha vaditra* (a kind of trumpet) and the band of instruments *tantri*, *tal*, *nakara*, *bije*, *jhanjh* and *turya*, *veena* and drum.

Dancing was accompanied by singing, drum beats and instrumental music. Proficiency in several types of dancing such as *Bharathi*, *Satvaki*, *Kaisiki* and *Arabhate* was considered to be a mark of distinction. Bhuchaladevi, a perfect dancer, attracted the king by her dance and earned titles such as *patrajagaddale* (head of the world of dancers). Dancing halls with stone pavements were constructed in courts and temples and embellished by kings and the rich who were great patrons and promoters of music, dance and the decorative arts.

Women from noble families were also taught painting and decoration (*alekya krama*) and the use of brush and needle. In painting, portraiture was popular because portraits were expressions of form, recollection of appearances and delineation of character as these attempted to establish the identity of individuals. *Chitra-*



Dollu kunita

phalakas or prepared mediums applied over slabs of terracotta or pieces of wood were used for painting. The conception, expression, perfect grace and the complete mastery of the materials in the Ajanta frescoes testify the centuries of artistic development of the nation. For the painting of animals and birds and for representations of human scenes, the artists found their inspiration in the human and animal life surrounding them.

Dress and Ornaments

There is no significant difference between the past and the present, as far as the dress and ornaments of the people is concerned. *Manasollasa*, the Sanskrit encyclopaedia of the 12th century A.D. has a chapter on the subject, beginning with *ratnapareeksha* or appraisal of precious stones. It classifies diamonds as *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* and *shudra*, the first being white, second red, third yellow in tinge and the last being black. Women wore *hamsatilaka* resembling the pipal leaf on their forehead, earrings of pearl (*mukta tadaka*), *kundala*, etc. and necklaces like *muktavali* (of pearl), *varnasara* (of sapphire, ruby and pearl) and other kinds of one, two or more strings, called *ekavali*. *Kanchidama* was the girdle sometimes reaching upto the thigh. Bracelets, bangles, rings (studded with one, two or many precious stones) and *anduka* or *kadaga* (anklet) were the other ornaments of the women, as described in this Sanskrit work. Nose rings appear to have become popular only during later centuries. Men too, wore similar ornaments and vied with women in this respect. The poor wore similar ornaments made of silver. Kannada literary works and sculptures are our sources on this subject.



Men wore *dhotis*, shirts (*angika*) with side buttons (*bagalu bandi*) and turbans or a cap (*kulavi*). Women wore sarees and blouses. Silk sarees were popular with the rich and they had brocade designs called *latavali*, *pushpavali* and *chitravali*. *Kanchulike* was a short and tight blouse worn by women in Karnataka. Kalhana, in *Rajataranagini*, says that king Harsha of Kashmir introduced this special blouse worn by Karnataka women into his own country. Both men and women decorated their heads and necks with garlands made of perfumed flowers. Men too grew long hair, like the women.

Marriage

The Hindus generally give the daughter as *kanyadana* to the bridegroom. Usually, the marriage rites are performed at the bride's house or sometimes at a temple, or *matha*, or a *choultry*. The marriage ceremonies include the *vilyada shastra* (betel leaf ceremony), *nischitartha*, when the proposal of marriage is finalised, the *devadruta*, when the blessings of God and the ancestors of the couple are invoked, and the *chappara* (or *elevasa*) which involves the erection of the marriage pandal. Among the *brahmins* and those who follow their customs, such as *vaishyas*, *varapooje* i.e., honouring of the bridegroom by the bride's parents, is done when the groom arrives at the marriage venue, *naandi* which invokes the ancestors of the bridal couple, *kankana-dharana* (tying of wrist-bands) which symbolises the couple's entry into the state of marriage, *akshata*, the strewing of a few grains of stained turmeric rice by the couple on each other's heads, tying the *mangalasutra* (sacred thread, with black beads) which is the most important sacrament, *dhare*, the pouring of milk on the joined hands of the couple by relatives and friends, *sese*, the pouring of a handful of rice by couples on the bride and the bridegroom, *lajahoma* (worship of sacred fire by offering *laja* or parched rice) and *saptapadi* (going round the sacred fire in



*Mural Painting at Khajina
Gowdra Wade, Raichur
District*



*Mural Painting at
Jaganmohana Art
Gallery, Mysore*

seven steps) are the main rituals of the marriage ceremony. This is followed by *bhuma*, the newly married couple eating together, the *nagavali*, the searching for an idol in a vessel containing red-coloured water, the *kankana visarjana*, the untying of wrist-bands from the hands of the couple, and finally the *gaddige* (or *simhasana puje*, the worship of the throne.

Polygamy was not uncommon in the higher strata of society. Marriage was a matter of religious necessity rather than of individual choice. The custom of *svayamvara* was occasionally observed by the princesses, as was the case in Chandralekha's choice of Vikramaditya and Punnata's choice of Avinita.

Many foreign and aboriginal races had embraced Hinduism and there was intermingling of the people from the north with the people in the south. This created new social groupings and this explains the prevalence of inter-marriages between people of different religions.

Recreation

Hunting, wrestling and acrobatics seem to have been the favourite pastimes of the kings and the people. One of the inscriptions of 982 A.D. describes the unparalleled skill displayed by Rashtrakuta Indra in a game of ball, probably polo, indicated by the mention of the use of horses in the game. According to one account, "Indra alone is capable on earth of making the various movements such as *Sukhara*, *Dushkara*, *Vishama* and *Vishama Dushkara*, in the four directions; he knows like Ratta Kandarpa, the beauty of making movements with great velocity inside, outside, to the right and to the left without missing the circuit, avoiding such defects as going in a circle, ascending, turning round and retreating, and hitting the ball (*girige*) exactly with the stick, neither going beyond nor coming short of it."



Bridal finery

The rich found recreation in their beautiful orchards and groves. The trellised walks closely covered with fragrant flowers and slender stems, impervious shades of the areca and champak trees and the little gushing rills afforded cool retreats from the harsh sunlight. Often in summer, the king and the princes had elaborate baths in *snana-grihas* constructed of black marble or crystal. *Ankakarars* massaged their bodies and fair maidens rubbed them with scented oils mixed with different herbs.

The outdoor amusements of the people in the towns were confined to those at weekly fairs (*sante*) and festivals where they congregated in large numbers and enjoyed various games and the festivity. It was common for people to undertake pilgrimages and visit temples. The temples were supported by the state, endowments from benevolent citizens and contributions from different industrial and commercial classes. There was heavy expenditure involved in the maintenance of a large establishment in the temples which included bodyguards, dancers, cooks, drummers, goldsmiths, decorators, *pergade*, *puranikas* and *acharyas*. This was partly met by visiting fees and tolls levied on merchants and farmers, interests on endowments, taxes on articles, and partly by guilds of oil mongers, rice merchants and others who regularly supplied oil, rice and other requisites to the temple. The apprehension of being doomed to eternal perdition and the fear of their race becoming extinct, goaded the merchants to make regular endowments.

People always gathered in temples on festive occasions where music, dancing, pantomime, lectures and displays, acrobatic feats relieved the humdrum monotony of life. The big festivals were the *Uttarayana*, *Dakshinayana*, *Chaitra*, *Tulapurusha*, *Suggi* and *Deepavali* and *Nulu Habba* among weavers. *Suggi* and *veelya* were offered to God and the temples were decorated and illuminated. The dripping pot, a kind of mechanism for reading time, seems



**Sati Memorial,
Hirekerur**

to have been provided in the temples so that the authorities could conduct their morning and evening prayers regularly.

Magic and omens

The love of magic and the supernatural and belief in the potency of the *mantras* and *tantras* seem to have been strong in the minds of the people. In order to guard the cattle against famine and epizootic diseases, the kings set up *yantra* stones all over the country. These had mystical diagrams carved on them in 32 small squares with 32 letters of a *sarvatobhadra* verse and the syllable *hrim* repeated 12 times.

Mantravadins were employed for exorcising spirits. Different kinds of medicines were prepared for curing ills of the body and mind. A kind of collyrium, when applied to the eyes, was believed to create the ability to discover hidden treasure.

Sights of conflagration, black cloth, oil, naked monks, dishevelled women, blind people, cobras and hares were considered to be very inauspicious, especially before undertaking a journey. *Sudra* mendicants appeared early in the morning at the houses with a small rattle drum in their hands, made predictions and ascribed them to pingala birds.

Self-sacrifices

Jain *sravakis* and nuns endowed with ascetic qualities often starved themselves to death by the rites of *sallekhana*. People who had undertaken vows or were suffering from incurable disorders indulged in self-immolation by leaping into the fire or by plunging into a river.

Vows of self-sacrifice were undertaken by royal servants and chiefs with the object of attesting undying attachment and fidelity to their masters. These were accomplished either by entering into a fire and being burnt to death or being buried alive under the master's body and becoming his *kilgunte*. Vows of self-destruction were not merely undertaken to vindicate love or fidelity for others but sometimes for the fulfillment of a cherished desire. Devoted servants, who took vows not to survive their masters, even offered their heads to be cut off on the death of their masters.

Looking at death

In the multitude of votive offerings which filled the local shrines, the characteristic Hindu tendency towards anthropomorphism was common. In the same way, the custom of erecting memorial stones with carving scenes in memory of dead heroes and *satis* and setting them up by the wayside, formed a national gallery of sculpture showing the perfect assimilation of art to the national temperament. Separation, loneliness, sorrow, resignation, fortitude, all the suggestions awakened by death and also the immortal suggestions of spiritual hope and a life beyond mortality were depicted in these sculptures.

The culture of Karnataka has not changed much through successive generations. Only a few modifications and transformations have crept in gradually and the people have remained tolerant and receptive of these changes.



**Self-immolation
Memorial,
Kaujageri, Gadag
District**



Chapter 9 Religion and Philosophy

