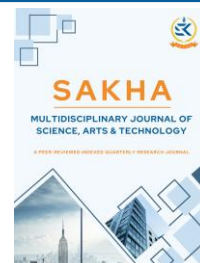




Vol. 1, No. 3; Jul – Sep (2025)

SAKHA: Multidisciplinary Journal of Science, Arts & Technology

Available at <https://sakha.co.in/journals/mjsat>



The Devaraya II Reign is the Golden Age of the Vijayanagar Empire Revealed by Inscriptions

Dr. R. Janaki^{1a}

¹Assistant Professor, Department of History, C. Kandaswami Naidu College for Women,
Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

In the history of Vijayanagara Empire the period of Devaraya II's rule is considered to be the golden age. Normally in the history of Vijayanagara Empire, the only name we think of is the king Krishnadevaraya. All others are ignored or neglected in the shadow of his personality. Before him there was another dynasty that put foundation to this great empire. The rulers Harihara II and Devaraya II of the Sangam dynasty with their efforts extended the Vijayanagar kingdom and made the people to live happily and with comfortable. After them the subsequent rulers continued to build the great empire. In the region of Devaraya II there are around three hundred inscriptions found in different part of his empire for different reasons like his expedition, victory donations to temples and communities.

Introduction

In the history of Vijayanagara Empire the period of Devaraya II's rule is considered to be the golden age. Normally in the history of Vijayanagara Empire,

^a Corresponding Author: janakirajasri5@gmail.com

the only name we think of is the king Krishnadevaraya.¹ All others are ignored or neglected in the shadow of his personality. Before him there was another dynasty that put foundation to this great empire.² The rulers Harihara II and Devaraya II of the Sangam dynasty with their efforts extended the Vijayanagar kingdom and made the people to live happily and with comfortable. After them the subsequent rulers continued to build the great empire.³

As many historians accepted, this dynasty was established in 1336 A.D by Sangam brothers Harihara, Kamppana, Bukka I, Marappa and Muddappa to protect the Hindu culture and the Hindu religion. Then it was ruled by rulers like Harihara II, Virupaksha, Bukka II, Devaraya I, Ramachandra, Vijayaraya, Devaraya II, Prathapa Devaraya, Mallikajuna, and Virupaksha II. Among these Sangam rulers Devaraya II was considered to be the greatest and made the Vijayanagara Empire to reach its zenith.⁴ As Abdur Razak expressed that Devaraya II is the greatest ruler of that period in India and Vijayanagara is one of the greatest cities of that period in the world.⁵ During the period of Devaraya II more than three hundred inscriptions, contemporary travelers' writings, literature, all say that he was a great, extraordinarily popular ruler, who promoted art and architecture and also made an attempt for religious tolerance for the first time he gave the opportunity to Muslim soldiers in his army. He assumed with many titles like Maharajadhiraja, Rajaparamashvara, Virapratapa, Deva Raya Maharaya, Srimadrajadhiraja, Rajaparameshvara, Gajabentekara, Devaraya Maharaya, Darma Charitra, Sathkala Boja, Viveke Narayana, Sathya Harishchandra, Udayabalabaskara, Mahamandaleshvara, Veerapraphapa kumara devaraya maharay⁶ etc.

The study of Vijayanagara History had some difficulty in determining the period of the region of Devaraya II, as sufficient material was not available then. Relying on the epigraphical evidence and foreign traveler's notes, Robert Sewell tried to fix the reign of Devaraya II between A.D 1419 to 1444⁷. C.Hayavadana Rao has fixed the reign of Devaraya II between A.D. 1424 to 1446.⁸ The Shravana Belagola inscription A.D. 1446 gives us a precise account about the death of Devaraya II.⁹ From the available evidence Devaraya II, appears to be ruled between February 10, 1423 and ended on May 24, 1446.

T.V. Mahalingam has pointed out Devaraya II held sway over the whole of South India except the southern portion of west-coast and the extreme northwestern

parts of Madras Presidency.¹⁰ Comprised of South India from the banks of Tunga bhadra and the Krishna Rivers to south as far Cape Comorin except the Malabar Coast in the west and Kalinga in the north-east. The Tamil country under Devaraya II consists of the region of North Arcot and Chingalpet districts known as Padaividu rajay. The regions of South Arcot and Salem districts known as the Tiruvadi rajay and Rajagambhira rajay consisting of the Pandya territory.¹¹ During the Devarya II's reign, the sovereignty of Vijayanagara was extended through the Tamil country, except in the extreme south which was ruled by the Pandyas of Tenkasi.¹²

In the region of Devaraya II there are around three hundred inscriptions found in different part of his empire for different reasons like his expedition, victory donations to temples and communities. Among these inscriptions there are forty inscriptions in Tamil and it was found in different parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh datable between 1424 and 1446 A.D. All these inscriptions of Devaraya II were issued by his subordinates, commanders, viceroys, and officers for the contribution of donations for utsvas, donation to development of temples and to certain communities. Among these inscriptions the first ever inscription of Devarya II found in Tamil is at Tirumulaivayal mscnpt on at Sidapet taluk, Chingelpet District, in Tamil Nadu issued in 1424 September 30th and the last inscription of Devaraya II found at Puthal patu at Chitur taluk, Chitur district, Andra Pradesh. These inscriptions not only give information about the Devaraya s contribution, his donation but also name of certain taxes collected in local level, some measurements used by the local people etc.

The taxes were like Sodimumgamparvai, Angashalaikal, Sampadam, Vishshaadayam, Arishikanam, Nallerudu, Narpanuvetti, Kattayam. Taxes were collected for day to day celebration of Lord Vayurvanayinar and Maheswara. Donations given in the name of Prathapa Devaraya mentioned in the inscription of Tirumulaivayal of 1430 A.D.¹³ The inscription of Thevur 1426 A.D mentions a tax of Mugamai fixed to give as a donation to certain community of Pandaravadai, Erayellipatru, and Amaram and for their literary life.¹⁴ In the inscription of Tiruparkadal 1442 A.D mention is made of the tax of Shulavare a duel tax donated to Perumal Palekondu temple.¹⁵

Another interesting note of Devaraya's inscription is about the mentioning of certain measurements used by the local men like Asamghadagandankol probably this was used to measure irrigative lands. This was mentioned in the inscription of Tirumulaivayal of 1424 A.D, it says that donation of four thousand kuli land was given for the celebration of Tirutopu in the temple of Udainayinar which even included the irrigative lands of Periyeri tank.¹⁶ In another inscription of Kalahasthi dated 1435 October 10th, also say that officer Chikkarasa by measuring the land using the Devadana measure stick and donated hundred kuli land and constructed a well to the temple of Kalahasthi.¹⁷

Other inscriptions of Devaraya II in Tamil say about the donations for developments of temples and for the daily worship. As like the other Vijayanagara rulers Devaraya II was also a great devotee of Srirangam, in his time there are nine inscriptions issued for temple as well as for the local communities. The inscription of 1429A.D. says a village of Hasthi Cholendra Mangalam was given as donation to the temple for daily worship.¹⁸ Another inscription of 1430A.D. which explains Devarayas gift of donation to Lord Ranganatha starts with the date 1424 April 17th Monday one thousand gold Kalanju was given for lunch, dated 1425 December 30th Sunday establishment of Daivapulluvararu continued dated 1427 July 19 Saturday one thousand Kalanju was donated for the lord pita, dated 1427 October 15th Wednesday one thousand gold Kalanju was donated for standing golden lamp, dated 1428 November 3rd Wednesday for the golden plate one thousand gold kalanju was granted, 1430 January 24th Tuesday pearl ornaments were donated, 1430 February 24 Friday one thousand gold kalanju was given for golden plate. Like this, inscription carries seven different donations donated in different dates. The last donation issued was mentioned as 1430 February 24th Friday.¹⁹ Inscription of 1434 January 1st says that Villages like Tenkaray Rajagomberanadu and shithaluru was donated for daily offerings like Garland, ghee and sugar to Lord Sri Ranganatha and at the time of festival one elephant and 30 cows were also donated.²⁰ Another inscription of Srirangam dated 1435 December 31 says that in the presences of Chikka Wodeyar the brother of Devaraya II the village of Sendan palan Kannamgudi was donated to Lord Ranganatha for daily offerings.²¹

The next inscription dated 1430 A.D. says under the rule of Devaraya Maharayas officials like Bemmanna Nayaka, Rama Nayaka and Manika Ganganna Nayaka donated the village of Vadakilliyuru to the treasury of Lord Sriranganatha.²² The next inscription dated 1430A.D. says that Lakkanna Wodeya donated a land worth of six hundred pratapa hana to Lord Sriranganatha.²³ Another inscription dated 1432A.D. mentions village Vallavanallur worth of four hundred ponnu donated to Lord Sriranganarayana.²⁴ The next inscription dated 1445A.D. mentions Periya Tiruteru Mantapam was made to Lord Sriranganatha by Tiruparai Vittanna.²⁵

As like Srirangam the Vijayanagara rulers were also the great devotees to Thirupati. Devaraya II continued his donation to the temple of lord Venkateshwara. Inscription dated 1430 says that Veera Prathapa Devaraya donated auspicious pepper water and turmeric water was donated to the Karthik festival.²⁶ Another Inscription dated 1433 A.D. says two thousand panna was donated to Lord Tiru Venakata and on the same day four thousand two hundred panna was also donated. Interesting point of this inscription is that names of the donors and the witness were also clearly mentioned.²⁷ The inscription of Tirumanikuli dated 1435 March 2nd says that Devaraya's commander Lakkanna Danda Nayak donated a land in the remembrance of his Sea Expedition.³⁰ Another interesting inscription of Devaraya II is Tiruvannamalai inscription was issued in two languages, Kannada and Tamil, dated 1437 July 24th say that Amdi, Punnaiya Terayan, Kaling Rayan, Kalappalan, Kunthakaar, Pallathalji manai and Arunagirinathan donated seven villages to the temple.²⁸ The Copper plate inscription of Pirinmalai says that donation was made to the temple for the daily puja. Tiruvaruru inscription dated 1440 September 12th says that a Gopura was constructed to the temple of Valmikanatha.²⁹

There are other inscriptions that give information of Devaraya II which mentions that he also extended his donations to certain communities. One of the inscriptions of Srirangam dated 1427 A.D. says that a land was donated to Shri Vaishnavas to perform the daily pujas.³⁰ In Tirupathi there are three inscriptions which carry one matter of donation was given to Twenty four Mahajans of Shri Vaishnava communities of Srinivasapura. Inscription dated 1433 November 22nd says that donation of two hundred was fixed for every year to the Mahajana of

Shri Vaishnavas communities in Srinivasapura to perform the Vedic chanting. Also the tax on gold and grains were collected and it was enjoyed by that community.³¹

Like this the Tamil inscriptions of Devaraya II found in different parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh gives a complete picture of his rule in this region and his contribution through the donations to the temples, communities, etc... These inscriptions also provide the different aspects of local practices like festivals, offerings, taxes and beliefs. These inscriptions were issued by the officials and relatives of Devaraya II. Inscriptions also enlighten the personality of Devaraya II and his religious tolerance.

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