

THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE SHILAHARA DYNASTY OF KOPPAL

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ABSTRACT

Koppal district is historically, mythologically, and politically famous. As described in Sri Vijaya's Kavirajamarga, it was a celebrated place where the essence of the Kannada language resonated. Today, Koppal is an independent district. When observing from an ancient political perspective, no single independent dynasty took birth solely within the limits of this district; however, it is identified that many dynasties that took birth in other parts of Karnataka ruled here as subordinates to another independent dynasty. The Sindhas of Yelburga, the Shilaharas of Koppal, the Palegars of Anegundi, the Kings of Kampli, and the Palegars of Kanakagiri have given an extraordinary contribution to the political organization of Koppal. In this article, an attempt is made to examine the history of the Shilahara family which made Koppal city its headquarters for administration.

KEYWORDS: Dynasty, Inscriptions, Kings, Feudatory, Region.

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Introduction to the Dynasty

The Shilahara family of Koppal holds a prominent history in the state of Karnataka. The Shilaharas were one of the influential Dravidian dynasties of ancient South India and ruled in the regions of present-day Maharashtra and Northern Karnataka. The establishment of this family happened in 765 CE by a king named Shripulakesi (Mahaneva). They built forts on hills, established religious centers, and ensured the growth of the economy. By increasing their cultural strength, the Shilaharas encouraged local art. Virupaksha (1000-1025 CE) was a famous king of this Shilahara family. He made the present Koppal city (Surupu) his capital and conducted his administration. The Shilaharas experienced both negotiations and conflicts with the Badami Chalukyas, Cholas, Rashtrakutas, and several other influential kingdoms. The Shilaharas of Koppal maintained their power until the 12th century CE. During this time, the Hoysalas and the Kalyani Chalukyas occupied this region.

Meaning of the Word “Shilahara”

The origin of the word “Shilahara” comes from Sanskrit words, where “Shila” means stone and “Hara” means one who takes or wears. The literal meaning of this word can be understood as “The Taker of Stone” or “The Wearer of Stone.” When used in the name of the dynasty, this word also indicates a type of form or symbol of strength. Generally, Shilahara means those who reside in stone forts. This is how the word Shilahara is described.

Origin of the Shilahara Family

The dynasty originally started as feudatories (Samantas) of the Rashtrakuta dynasty which ruled the Deccan plateau between the 8th and 10th centuries. The Rashtrakuta King Govinda gave the kingdom of North Konkan (modern districts of Thane, Mumbai, and Raigad) to Kapardin (Sanskrit: Kaparda - meaning one who wears a peculiar knot of hair or braid; a term associated with Shiva or Rishabhanatha). He was the founder of the Northern Shilahara family, around 800 CE. From that day, North Konkan was called Kapardi-dwipa or Kavaridwipa. The capital of this branch was Puri, which is now called Rajapur in

Raigad district.

The Shilahara dynasty held the title Tagara-Puradhashwara, which indicates they originally came from Tagara (modern Ter in Osmanabad district). Around 1343, the Salsette island and finally the entire group of islands were transferred to the Muzaffarid dynasty. The Shilaharas of Southern Maharashtra in Kolhapur were the most recent of the three and were established during the downfall of the Rashtrakuta Empire. All branches of this family identify their lineage from the mythical Vidyadhara prince Jimutavahana, who sacrificed himself to save a Naga prince from the grip of Garuda. It is believed the family name Shilahara (Sanskrit: meaning "Food on the Rock") was born from this incident. Even the inscriptions have more than one form of the name; one contains three forms: Silara, Shilara, and Srillara. Similarly, the Shilahara family was identified as a subordinate family to imperial dynasties since ancient times. They ruled parallel to other dynasties including the Badami Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, and Kalyani Chalukyas. The rule of this family can be seen in parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Mention of Stone Inscriptions

The inscriptions of the Shilahara family of Koppal have turned out to be a major historical wealth. These inscriptions contain important information regarding the Shilahara administration, economic system, cultural contributions, and religious activities. Here are some major Shilahara inscriptions:

- **Aihole Inscription:** This belongs to the administration period of Mahamandaleshwara Malyavarma of the Shilahara's Tandava Mandala. Found in Ahur, this inscription explains the economic, social, and religious activities of the Shilaharas. There are mentions of temple construction and donations.
- **Koppal Inscription:** Found in Koppal, this provides information on the administration and religious activities of that time. It contains details regarding land grants, donations, and revenue.
- **Hulagi Inscription:** Found in Hulagi town, this explains the religious works of the Shilaharas. It provides information

about the prominent temples and religious activities of the Shilahara period.

- **Malaprabha Inscription:** Located near the Malaprabha river, this explains the administration and economic activities. It propounds the temporary Shilahara influence and their cultural contributions.
- **Hanumasagara Inscription:** Found in Hanumasagara, this provides information on the political and religious activities. It records land grants given to temples and religious institutions.
- **Kukkanur Inscription:** This explains the religious works, donations, and economic activities of the Shilaharas. It mentions details of donations given to temples and various religious practices.
- **Salotagi Inscription:** Salotagi, located 8 km southeast of Indi (the taluk headquarters of Vijayapura district), was a famous Agrahara during the time of Rashtrakuta Krishna III. Narayan, who was the minister and Sandhivigrahi of Krishna III, built a school and installed the deity Traipurusha in Pavittage, which was very famous among ancient educational centers. Students from various parts of the country used to come to this school. Donations were given to this school during any celebration in the village. There were 27 rooms here for the stay of students. For the lighting arrangements, 12 Nivartana (a unit of land measurement) of land was given, 500 Nivartana for students, and 50 Nivartana of land and a house were given to the teachers. In later centuries, when this school collapsed, the Shilahara King Kanchiga revived it, and records are found of many kings giving various donations and endowments. Because of this school, the village 'Savitige' became 'Shala-Pavittage' and in later days became Salotagi. Although this school is not visible in its full form today, it can be identified by the Pushkarni (holy tank) in Kulkarni's farm and the remains in the Shivayogeshwara temple.

Initially, due to the dominance of Sanskrit, the Kannada literary world had to struggle alongside it. All the books of

Brahmins were in Sanskrit for many centuries. However, because Buddhism and Jainism revolted against the Vedic religion, they did not write their books in Sanskrit (the main language of the Vedic religion) but used the local language and script, which helped in moving away from Sanskrit.

The Shilahara Family of Koppal

This Shilahara family conducted its rule in parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Among them, the Shilahara kings of present-day Koppal were famous for their powerful administration and achievements. Their strong administration played a significant role in the history of ancient South India. The Shilahara family was established in Koppal in 765 CE.

Political History of the Shilahara Family of Koppal The kings of the Shilahara family established this as a powerful dynasty through their administration and achievements. Some prominent kings of the Shilahara family are recorded as follows:

- **Mahashraya Shriphullakesi:** He was the founder of this family and established the Shilahara lineage in Koppal in 765 CE. During his rule, he included the surrounding areas of Koppal under his administration and took steps towards efficient governance. Afterward, the Shilahara family continued through some kings with less capable power. He is also called Mahaneva. During his reign, he took Koppal entirely under his control.
- **Jolliki Airappa:** Also known as Jollika Keshavaraya, he ruled for about 30 years from 970 CE to 1000 CE. Airappa fought wars to preserve the Shilahara family. Similarly, he achieved many religious works. He constructed temples. Since he built the Keshava Temple, he earned the name Keshavaraya.
- **Virupaksha:** After Keshavaraya, Virupaksha came to power as the chief head of the family. The highly capable Virupaksha made "New Koppal" his capital and ruled. He made achievements in his own way for the Shilahara family, protected the family appropriately, and ruled for 25 years.
- **Veera Huyya:** During his power, Veera Huyya gave more recognition to his army. Among the kings who ruled before

him, he built his army very strongly. Therefore, he emerged as a powerful king of his time. With his strong army, he brought the areas around Koppal under his jurisdiction.

- **Mallikarjuna:** During his tenure, Mallikarjuna gave more importance to the construction of religious centers, art, literature, and music rather than the extent of territory. He built religious centers and music schools in Koppal during his administrative period.
- **Veera Ballala:** During his administrative tenure, he increased political strength. He expanded the empire. Without fostering much hatred, he agreed to develop political achievements through a policy of coordination with local kings. In this way, Veera Ballala grew his achievements. Seeing his achievements, his name grew in many regions.
- **Trailokya Malla:** He grew this family to a great extent. He gave encouragement to commerce and trade and conducted the administrative system smoothly during his power. He built trade centers in Koppal. Because of this, he improved the economy of the family. Therefore, it was possible for the Shilahara family to survive in Koppal.
- **Raja Malla:** Rajamalla gave special attention to the protection of the empire during his rule. He built strong forts for the survival of the Shilahara family. During his time, they stayed in the Koppal fort for protection. They improved the provincial administration. Through provincial administration, they increased the growth of the empire. People of this family built the upper-level fort of the Koppal fort.
- **Kaviyedu:** Kaviyedu was the last capable king of the Shilahara family. Afterward, no capable king came to administration. During his administrative period, he took leadership in religious and military achievements. He built religious centers in the headquarters of his kingdom. After his life, due to subsequent incapable kings, the Shilaharas moved toward decline. The Shilahara family, after ruling in Koppal as a small dynasty, moved toward downfall under the subordination of later powerful kings.

Conclusion

This family played a main role in bringing political stability to Koppal in the history of Karnataka. Moreover, we see a great shortage of sources in the study of this family. It is an irony that while the above-mentioned inscriptions are found in places far from the center, no sources are found at the central location (headquarters).

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