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‘*PANCHANAMVARU* IN MEDIEVAL ANDHRADESA DURING THE VIJAYANAGARA PERIOD’: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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One important craft guild which was that of the *Panchanamvaru* or the *Panchanamvaru* or the *Pancanulu*. According to Lexicographers “*Pancananam*” the word means “the united five castes of carpenter, brazier, goldsmith, blacksmith, and stone-cutter”.¹ Their names usually end with *achari* or *acharya*. The earliest references to the architect are to Kalagarabharanacharya² of Vengidesa in the 7th- 11th century A.D. The *Panchanamvaru* appear to have been known in Andhradesa also as *Pancalas*. One inscription from Amaravati describes the *Pancanamvaru* as belonging to the *Visvakarma-vamsa*. According to a legend of the origin of the *Vira-Pancalas* contained above inscription *Visvakarma*, son of *Brahma* was the progenitor of the architects and was the father-in-law of the Sun. Members of the *Visvakarma-kula* even today trace their ancestry “to the five sons of *Visvakarma* of whom the firstborn *Manu* worked in iron, the second *Maya* in wood, the third *Tvastram* in brass, copper, and alloys, the fourth *Silpi* in stone and the fifth *Visvajna* was a gold and silver smith and jeweler”³ Crafts were a part of the everyday vocabulary of the Indian people. The artisan community of the medieval times everywhere, whether in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamilnadu, Telangana, or Andhra held the view that they were the descendants of the five sons of *Visvakarma*. The name *Panchanamvaru* applied to the artisan community of Andhra, like the name *Panchala* applied to the artisans of Karnataka is said to be

a corruption of the word *Pancahana*, meaning five faces, ascribed by the tradition to the legendary *Visvakarma*.⁴

The Vijayanagara period in the history of India in general and in South India in particular has a unique place. Vijayanagara Empire occupies a prominent place in the study of medieval Indian history. The Vijayanagara rulers were the defenders of the traditions and customs. They enforced strict rules for the maintenance of *kuladharma* and *vritti dharma* in accordance with *dharma sastras*. The emperors and many of their feudatories were not only learned and patrons of scholarship, but they were mostly to learn in their religious outlook and that is why within their empire different types of arts like Dance, Music, Drama, Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting flourished. The creators of the art of Vijayanagara were the craftsmen who pertained to various classes which cannot be precisely determined.

In general, two categories of producers appear most commonly in the inscriptional records of the Vijayanagara period; weavers and smiths. Weaving castes included Kaikkolars, Devangas, Sailas, and Jedaras among others. These groups differed in location, language, religious affiliation, weaving technology, and social status. The distribution of their products was largely regulated by merchant guilds, though during the Vijayanagara period.⁵ Weaver-merchants also began to play important roles in artisans' community. Most smiths belonged to a caste known as the *Kammalars*, or *Panchalas*, a rather unusual community since it included five intermarrying occupational sub-groups- blacksmiths, gold smiths, copper smiths, stone carvers, and carpenters, who shared ideological traditions that attributed to themselves Brahman or Kshatriya origins and status. Almost every *Sima* or *rajya* or *vishya* had a temple where these people found service and respectable status.

The growth of temple-town was due partly to the active patronage of Vijayanagara kings. These temples were huge architectural complexes with numerous small shrines and enclosures, and gradually these temple towns became the centres of large-scale artisan activity as evident from the various streets assigned to different artisans in these towns of Tirupati, Srikalahasthi, Simhachalam, Vijayawada, Annavaram, Ahobilam, Srisailam, Kadiri, and Lepakshi are some leading examples of Andhradesa during the Vijayanagara period. Besides temple servants, such as the Priests, Dancers, Musicians, and *Panachananamvaru* were settled in the *tirumdaivilagam*, that is, the area around the temple. The artisans settled in the temple towns did not cater only to the temple or the court but also to a wider market. One of the inscriptions found on the northern wall of the *garbhagriha* of Vedavallidevi of the Vedanarayana Swamy temple, Nagalapuram in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, dated *Saka* 1501, *Pramadi, Chaitra*, corresponding to 1579 A.D., is in the reign of Sri Rangadevaraya. The epigraph is engraved in Tamil language. It records an agreement between *panchanamvaru* and Sri Rangadevaraya in the presence of the village elders of Nagalapuram. The above-mentioned *panchanamvaru* were willing to relinquish the honours of the temple such as *paridai*, and *paripattam*. It also mentions that hereafter they may be permitted to cultivate the temple lands as well as agricultural lands given to them as *many as* independently. The inscription further records the witness as Venkappan and Srinivasan and also records imprecatory verses.⁶

Occasionally, however, mention is made of the five classes of craftsmen of the artisan communities, without mentioning their specific names for instance in an inscription of Ranga Raya II. In certain cases, some inscriptions refer to some of them like the engravers, *kammalars* (carpenters), and the *pancalas* during the Vijayanagara Period. They were not only mere craftsmen or artisans but they formed themselves into separate guilds. Many of such artisans lived in

Vijayanagara itself and were noticed by some of the visiting travelers or ambassadors like Abdur Razzak, Barbosa, Nuniz, and Paes. An inscription from Dongalasani in Sidhavatam taluk of Kadapa district referred *Panchanamvaru*.⁷ An inscription from Udayagiri records a gift by the *Pancahanamvaru* of Udayagiri, Nellore, Koratur, Gandavaram, and a number of other places in the *Rajya* of Udayagiri and the *Pancahanamvaru* of the 74 *Ahanas* of the world.⁸ Here we seem to have a reference to *Ahanaalike* in the sense of a craft and a territorial division. The best way of reconciling these different meanings of the word *Ahana* applied to the same guild seems to be to assume that the *Pancahanam* was a guild of workers in the crafts of carpentry, brazier, goldsmith, blacksmith, and stone-cutter and that they were organized into a number of regional federations. The number 74 which according to the above epigraph represented the number of *Ahanas* in the *Rajya*, may be taken as some kind of a conventional number. Thus, the instances mentioned above may be taken to signify the occupational and territorial aspects of this organization. From the evidence of the Udayagiri record mentioned above it is clear that while the *Pancahanamvaru* of each village and town were organized into a separate and distinct unit, the various town and village units in a '*Rajya*', a well-known territorial division of the Vijayanagara Period, were united in a kind of regional federation.

The Amaravati epigraph, referred to above, registers a gift to a temple by the *Padunalugu-tapala-Panchanamvaru* from the region between the hills of Kondapalli and Bezawada. Since Bezawada and Kondapalli are situated about 8 to 10 miles from each other no territorial divisions of any denomination could have existed in that area. It is possible that this small area bound by the hills of Kondapalli and Bezawada and consisting of 14 villages constituted a territorial division. It would thus appear that the reference here is to a federation of 14 town or village units of the *Panchanamvaru*.⁹ Another inscription from Amaravati records a gift to a temple by the *Panchanamvaru* of Srirangarajukonda-sima and

of Nandigama and other places in Nantavadi. Nantavadi, a variant of Natavadi, was a well-known territorial division of this period and corresponded roughly to the modern Nandigama taluq in the Krishna district.¹⁰ There is a place called Srirangarajukonda in the Guntur district. *Sima* like the *Sthala* and *Nadu* was a well-known territorial division and Srirangarajukonda- *Sima* was probably a territorial division of this type which included Srirangarajukonda and the neighbouring region. The *Panchanamvaru* mentioned in this record might be taken as a federation that included the town and village units of Natavadi and Srirangarajukonda-*sima* or as two federations one of Natavadi and the other of Srirangarajukonda-*sima*. Even if they were two federations since the gift was a joint gift of a tax levied by the Guild of *Panchanamvaru* some kind of liaison between the two would have to be assumed.

Black-Smith: The *Kammaras* or the Black-smith was the caste that took up the profession of making tools, implements, and wares of Iron. It constituted the prime sub-caste of the *Panchananam* community. The *Perusomula kaifiyat* for instance, says that the *Kammaras* were considered superior to the other four subdivisions of the *Panchananam* community. In the craft of the Black-smiths, the women are allowed to work the bellows while they are not permitted to forge the Iron.

Carpenter: the *rathakaras* who claim descent from *Viswakarma* and are proficient in the Vedas and claim even superior to Brahmanas. The *vadrangi* or the Carpenter formed the sub-sect of the *Panchanamvaru* community. With the increase in the building of houses and in the use of furniture, as a result of the Anglican influence their importance, increased manifold in the eighteenth century.¹¹

Brass-Smith: The *Kancharas* or the Brass-smiths also formed a part of the *Panchanam* community. The *Kancharas* seem to have prepared their wares and sold them during the festivals and fairs. That their services were significant to society is revealed by the fact that they were at times given tax remissions. An inscription of 1645 A.D. says that Chief Venkatapatiraya Nigaru of Madala *Gotra* remitted all taxes and tolls payable by metal- dealers that sold their wares in Srigeri during festivals and other days.

The Engravers: Scribes or engravers are mentioned in the inscriptions belonging to the period from the 9th century A.D. onwards. Among the five artisan communities mentioned in the inscriptions and literature engravers were, in one way or the other, connected with the development of Vijayanagara art and among these, the engravers were probably the most important. In the 16th century, as in previous years, families of sculptors and engravers came into existence. One of them became prominent with the emperor Achuta Raya. He had been an engraver under Sri Krishna Devaraya, the renowned emperor, and composed his first inscription in 1511 A.D. with “soft expressions” at the request of his master. Besides attending to the general public, they also helped in the construction and repair of temples and chariots, making and repairing temple ornaments, supplying vessels, and making images. They had, during the Vijayanagara kings, asserted for themselves certain temples honours and privileges, especially on the occasion of the temple car festival. They got such privileges as coming in front of chariots and offering *puja* by mounting on the chariots, in their traditional dress. They had become economically prosperous and to come up the social ladder they donated various items to several temples. In 1619 A.D. a man from the *Visvakarma kula* donated land for the upkeep of a perpetual lamp in the temple of Chennakesava of Mahadevicherala. They were becoming popular as belonging to the *Visvakarma kula* or *Viswabrahmins* sect.

Gold, Silver-Smith: Similarly, the gold smiths figure not only as manufacturer of ornaments, but also at the mint (*akkasala*) and writer and executor of copper plate grants. The *Agsala* or the Gold smith constituted the most important sub-division of the *Panchananam* community. They were one of the twelve village *ayagaras*. Locally they were also known as the *Kamsalis*. In jewelry making among the Gold-smiths and the Silver-smiths women are engaged in the tasks of polishing, fine cutting, and embellishing the designs but are not allowed a primary role in the designing or making of the ornaments. The Gold-smith community called '*Bayala Akkasaliga*', literally 'itinerant Gold-smiths' seems to have trained both men and women in the art of goldsmith. The copper plate inscriptions from Gooty taluq in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, the money changer called *sarabu*, and the goldsmith called *akkasali* are listed separately, interestingly, both of them seem to be part of the village economy. As regards metalwork, gold jewelry, and other ornaments were in great demand in the temples and the court, as well as generally among the upper classes. Besides jewellery, gold and silver as well as other ceremonial symbols were in demand in the temples and the royal court. However, the common people, except the very poor, also wore gold ornaments. To quote Abdur Razzaq: 'All the inhabitants of the country, whether high or low, even down to the artificers of the bazaar, wear jewels and gilt ornaments in their ears and around their necks, arms, wrists and fingers.'

The *Panchananamvaru* were one of the five types of craftsmen, they were extremely well-organised and their guild meetings were held in an exemplary manner. In Vijayanagara times the *Panchalas* or *Panchananamvaru*, without any doubt, they were flourished. Temples of the period also gave patronisation to the *panchanamvaru*. Temple construction may be regarded as a traditional work par excellence of this period. The *panchanamvaru* were permanently maintained by the temples as an artisan. In one inscription dated 1372, they issued an interesting eulogising their own guild. They called themselves *Mahamandalesvaras*, the

original representatives of the Manu race, and considered their character “incomparable”. They delighted not only in *Parabrahma* but were also the creators of the fourteen worlds. There were evidently different types of craftsmen even among a particular class of skilled workers. Thus, mention is made in inscriptions of *Vira Panchalas*, whose precise connotation cannot be determined but, as their designation *Vira* (brave) suggests, they probably occupied a prominent place in the *Panchala* hierarchy.

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