CHAPTER I
SOURCES, NATURE AND SCOPE

Agrahāra is a very familiar term to most of the Kannada people even today. It is generally understood to connote a brahmana locality in a village or town. But this is not the exact meaning of the term nor does it denote the exact nature of the institution. Agrahāra is an institution of great antiquity. It is one of the few institutions which flourished in the early and mediaeval days and survived till a very recent period of history. Though it is known that this institution played a vital role in the educational, religious and social life of early and mediaeval Karnataka, no exhaustive study, with a view to understand the exact nature, formation and working of this institution has been done so far. An attempt has, therefore, been made in the present thesis, to focus attention on the different aspects of this institution and to bring out as clear a picture of it as possible.

Though the subject is interesting, the study is beset with difficulties. The institution is neither too unfamiliar nor the references to it too scanty. Yet, it is difficult to find out the exact nature, formation
and functions of this important institution, for, the source material at our disposal does not bear out any direct evidence on such questions.

The main sources, rather, one can even say, the only sources for the study of this topic are the inscriptions. Reference to Agrahāras is not that scanty in literature but, such references as are available, hardly throw much needed light which would help us to get answers on basic questions related to the topic. At best, these literary sources could be used as corroborative evidence of this institution. Therefore, one has to entirely depend upon the epigraphs for any useful information in this regard. A large number of inscriptions from the 4th century onwards refer to this institution in some way or the other, especially as an institution receiving donations for various purposes. But, not all of them help us to know how these Agrahāras were formed and how they functioned. Fortunately, however, there are at least a few records which give some useful indications as regards these points. As has been detailed in the succeeding chapters, this institution was formed in a number of ways such as by converting a village into an Agrahāra or by joining two or more villages for this purpose. The motive behind this act was mainly to acquire...
merit for oneself but it served the very important cause of the spread of education and culture. These institutions functioned in a refreshingly democratic manner though not in form but certainly in spirit, when they were managed by their own representatives, with little or no interference from outside. The Mahājana who formed the pillars of these institutions had wide powers and by their learning and character they commanded the respect of even the ruling class. They had varied functions to perform and varied responsibilities to shoulder.

Interesting information about all these points which have been dealt with in detail in the chapters that follow is fortunately available in some epigraphical records of the region to which the study pertains viz., Karnataka. A few of such useful sources of information have been noted below. The Tālagunda inscription of Kākusthavarma is one of the earliest records of Karnataka. In course of narrating the fact that a number of brāhmaṇas from Ahichchhatra were invited to come and settle in Tālagunda, the record hints at one of the methods of formation of an Agrahāra viz., bringing the learned brāhmaṇas from outside and settling them in a particular place, donating land for their maintenance, so that they could carry on their functions without hindrance of any sort. Incidentally, the record takes back the antiquity
of this institution to a very ancient period.

An inscription from Viradevanahalli of a later period, viz., 1123 A.D., is also interesting in this regard. It tells us how an officer named Virayya dandanayaka established a new township altogether, by cutting down the forest and formed it into an Agrahāra housing the brahmanas therein. The record says:

Virayya-dandanayakam tanna nie-svāmi
Sri Viroma-Ballāla-Dēvara rājvahiyādavārthavāri
tāne karavittu kāda kačiđu mēdi djā 'Sri-
Viraballāla puradolu...2

Yet another record from Kyāsāpura belonging to the Rashtrakūta king Nityavarsha dated 968 A.D. discloses the interesting fact that an Agrahāra was formed by bringing together two adjoining villages, viz., Biravur and Bidiravalli.3 When the existing Agrahāras went into decay, care was taken to revive them by rehabilitating the people in the same place or even by shifting them to another. A record from Kallangere,4 for example, tells us that the brahmanas of Kōḍanγanūr Agrahāra, which was a gift of Janamejaya, were shifted to the Agrahāra Kallangere with the promise of providing better facilities.
Quite a number of records refer to the revival of the Agrahāras fallen into disuse and the rehabilitation of the people.

Educational centres as the Agrahāras were, their activities in this regard have been described in quite a few inscriptions. A large number of them extol in a conventional way, the intellectual abilities of the Mahējanas and their attainments in several subjects ranging from the Vēdas and philosophy to grammar, literature and fine arts. But some of them at least speak of the specialization of some teachers in some particular subjects and the Agrahāras, where stress was laid on these specialized subjects. For example, Lokkigundi was known for the teaching of Prabhākara system of philosophy. A school was established in Patna particularly for the teaching of the works of Bhāskarāchārya.

Interestingly indeed, at least some records refer to the books that were prescribed for study. For example, a record from Gadag, belonging to Chalukya Vikramēditya VI, refers to the work Sūtra Charche as being taught in the Lokkigundi Agrahāra. The Kondguli inscription of 1132 A.D. mentions Rūpadātāra as one of
the books taught in that Agrahāra. It is well known that this work on grammar written by Dharmakīrti was meant for the beginner. That this work was quite popular in this area is indicated by yet another reference to this work in one of the inscription from Tālagunda dated 1158 A.D. Apart from these we come across references like Kaumāra vyākarana, Hiriyagrantha, Hiriyagrantha and also the four Vedas and other subjects.

The primary concern of these educational institutions was to look after the students and teachers as well. Some inscriptions give us an idea as to how this was attended to. Adequate remuneration was paid to the teachers in the form of grants of land, depending upon the responsibilities the teacher had to shoulder. Generally, the teacher teaching advanced students was granted more land than the one taught the lower classes. It is of course true that this cannot be stated as a rule strictly adhered to in those days, although references to this effect bear such a surmise. A record from Kōtavumachige for example, makes such a distinction between the different cadres of teachers. A teacher teaching subjects like Nyāsa and Prābhākara was given 50 mattars of land and was called bhatta, while the one teaching mathematics and other subjects was given 25 mattars.
of land and he was called *akkariga*. Students were obviously not to pay for their education. Instead, provision was made for their food, clothing and even medical treatment. A large number of inscriptions refer in general way to the provision made for the *āśaṇa* and *āchōhādana* of the *chchhātraā*, i.e., the food and clothing of the students. But some of them give more interesting details. Tālagunda inscription, for example, speaks of the cooks and grants made to them as remuneration for cooking and feeding the students and teachers. Bhaishajya, or medical aid for the students finds a mention in quite a few inscriptions. In the Tālagunda record mentioned above we find reference to even such minor details as the weekly oil bath of the students and the record registers a provision made for that purpose. The famous Sālotgi inscription goes a step further and in addition to making provision for food and clothing of students, gathering there from far and near (nānē-janapada) lays down that the citizens should invite them for food or festive occasions and pay a stipulated amount of money to the institution on such occasions. Though few, such examples go to show how great an importance was given to education by the authorities and the public as well. As has been pointed out in the chapters below, one feature of education, worthy of note in these early days was that it was not so much a statutary
subject to be compulsorily looked after by the government as such, but, it was the concern of all. Imparting of education and spread of knowledge was a meritorious act. It yielded a two way profit — it earned merit for the sponsor of this cause and it spread the light of knowledge.

One cannot have a clear idea about the system of education such as the primary education and higher studies. But, even here though in a small way, some inscriptions throw useful light. For example, they contain such terms as Bālāśikṣa, 13 Karnātaka Bālāśikṣa, 14 Karnadakshara śikṣe 15 etc., indicating how the young children were educated at the primary level. Subjects like Prābhākara, Nyāsa, Tarkā, Vyākarana, Mīmāṃsā and so on were taught at a higher level.

The inscriptions of Nāgāi have a special importance in view of the fact that in addition to mentioning the different number of students studying different subjects, one of them pointedly mentions six sarasvati-bhandārīgās or the librarians, indicating the size and importance of educational institution therein.

It is generally believed that the Agrahāras were exclusively brāhmaṇa villages. But it has been shown
below, with evidence, that though they were villages granted to the brāhmaṇas, people of other communities following different professions also lived in such villages. The administration of such villages was not also the exclusive business of the donors or the Mahājanas. It is shown below that though, of course, these people were mainly concerned with administration of such villages, the government officials also had a part to play. Generally there used to be cooperation between the two but instances of discord and dispute are not altogether wanting. For example, a record from Bāgāli speaks of the high-handedness of an official in raising the tax of a village. The Mahājanas protested against the action and appealed to the king and got the redress. In yet another case the atrocities committed by an officer were strongly protested by the Mahājanas and an award was given by the king in their favour relieving the officer concerned of his charge of that village. Such instances are few, but they indirectly at least, speak of the rights given to the people.

As regards the other types of educational institutions like Brahmapuri, Ghatikasthana and Matha, some inscriptions give interesting details. Inscriptions at Kadalevād, Ngāi, and Balligāve especially, are very much useful in this regard.
The above inscriptions and a considerably large number of others including the unpublished ones, have been studied afresh critically in presenting this work, with the following scheme.

In the second chapter entitled "The Formation of the Agrahāra", an attempt is made to know the exact connotation of the term Agrahāra and also the antiquity of this institution. The methods of forming these institutions are also studied. The main object of instituting such Agrahāras by the donors like the kings, queens and state officers and the rich people was to earn merit or punya but it served the larger interest of education. Different nomenclatures describing the Agrahāras also are examined. The third chapter deals with the functions of the Agrahāra. It is pointed out that the main function of the Agrahāra was to conduct educational activities. Points like the maintenance of the teachers and their qualifications, arrangements for the maintenance of the students, subjects taught, course of study or method of study and the like have been discussed here. Chapter four deals with the 'Administration of the Agrahāra'. It has been shown here that though the Mahājanas were mainly concerned with the administration, they were assisted by the state
officials. Peculiar features and status of the Agrahāra have also been studied. In Chapter five, entitled 'The Mahājamas' an attempt is made to study the various aspects of this important body of people, who played a vital role in the education of Ancient Karnataka. Their duties, functions and position have also been examined. Chapter six is like a supplement to the study. Brahmāpuri, Ghaṭikāsthāna and the Matha, were simultaneously played a vital role as educational institutions. They have many similarities in their nature and have practically identical functions. Hence it was though essential to present an account of these institutions here. The seventh chapter describes some important Agrahāras that flourished in the Ancient Karnataka. A map showing some of the important Agrahāras has been appended. I only beg to submit that the caption of the map should read some Agrahāras in Ancient Karnataka instead of Some Agrahāras in Ancient and Mediaeval Karnataka as it is printed.

A word may be said about the limitation of the present work. As pointed out above, this institution, Agrahāra, came into existence in a very early period of history and continued to flourish till recently. Therefore, in view of the vastness of the material it became essential to restrict the scope to a limited period viz., the
Ancient Karnataka. For the sake of proper treatment of the subject matter, the ancient period is extended to 13th century A.D. Therefore, even inscriptions belonging up to the 13th century have been taken here into consideration. Such a restriction has a justification from the point of view of the political events in Karnataka also.

As is well known, from about the 4th century till the end of the 13th, a number of dynasties like the Kadambas, the Chālukyas of Bādāmi, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa, the Sēṇas and the Hoysaḷas ruled over this vast territory between the Gōḍāvari and the Kāvērī. But in spite of the changes in the ruling dynasties the pattern of administration and the social and religious orders did not undergo any marked change. However, the position becomes different from the later period. All the institutions administrative, religious and social were rudely shaken by the Muslim invasions towards the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century followed by the Muslim occupation of almost the whole of Karnataka. The Vijayanagar empire that emerged subsequently followed the earlier traditions in reviving these institutions but, the pattern was altered to an extent during these periods.
Thus, this long period from the 4th to the 13th century forms one compact unit in the political history of Karnataka and it is so in the cultural history also. So, naturally it forms one convenient unit of period for the study of such institutions like the Agrahāras also. Hence, the restriction. It is, however, to be noted that reference has been made to the records of later periods whenever it was found necessary for the clarification and elucidation of certain points.

Another point to be noted here is that the present dissertation, restricts itself to the study of this institution of Agrahāra as it existed and flourished in ancient Karnataka. But, I am not unaware of the existence of similar institutions outside, in the contemporary period. A detailed study of them would however, too much widen the scope and make the study a bit too unwieldy. Hence it was not attempted, although reference has been made to such institutions outside Karnataka whenever there is relevance to it.
References and Notes

1. EC., VII, Sk. 176.
2. Ibid., V, Hn. 116.
3. Ibid., XII, Od. 50.
4. Ibid., V, Ak. 110.

paddedu suprasiddha Janamejayadatti Kodanganure nor
ppade kadu-rayyan appudidakam migilappudan
uran iven endedan
odagondu bandu vineyangalin aggada vishnu-
bhubujam kude padded illi kollagore
sobhisatirppparu viprar ellarum

5. EI., XV, p. 356 ff.
6. Ibid., I, p. 338 ff.
7. ARSIE., 32-33, Bk. No. 102.
8. EI., XXXVII, ii, p. 189 ff.
9. EC., VII, Sk. 185.
10. EI., XX, p. 64 ff.
11. EC., VII, Sk. 185.
12. EI., IV, p. 62.
13. EC., III, Th. 27.
15. Ibid., Ch. 2.
16. HAS., 8, p. 15 ff.
17. SII., IX, No. 76.
18. Ibid., No. 163.