CHAPTER V

THE MAHAJANAS

The meaning of the term Mahajana:

We have seen in the earlier chapter that the Agrahāras were administered by the Mahājanas of those places. The term Mahājana literally means a great or respectable man. Yet in relation to the Agrahāras, this term acquires a special connotation and is used to mean a brāhmaṇa who was one of the recipients of the grant land and the resident of the Agrahāra village.1 The synonym for Mahājanas in Tamil is perumakkal. The term perumakkal means "members of an assembly or committee as great men".2 In north, especially in Saurāstra, the term Mahattara is used for this word Mahajana.3

There is ample evidence to show that the Mahājanas were brāhmaṇas. Records eulogise them as learned in various branches of learning. For instance, a record from Kalas, dated 929 A.D. of Rāṣṭrakūṭa Govinda IV, while describing the qualities of the residents of the place, refers to vipras i.e. brāhmaṇas and at the end of the inscription, we find them referred to as Mahājanas.4 Another Chālukya inscription which records the gift of Modeyanūr, as an Agrahāra, mentions 20 learned brāhmaṇas
who were the Mahājana of that place. The 84 Mahājana of Belavanīge, i.e. the present Belavanīki in Rūn taluk of Dharwar district has also been mentioned as ārijas in a Chālukya record of Vikramādiya VI, dated 1102 A.D.

Dr. Altekar also holds the view that in some cases at least, the Mahājana included persons other than brahmanas. In support of this view, he refers to the following statement in Rādhānpur plate of Rāstrakūta Govinda III, which mentions 40 Mahājana. Among whom, according to him, ten named in the record were brahmanas. To quote the passage here —

Mādhavairiyappu-Vittapu-Dēvana iyyabhātta-
Rōjajyyabhātt- śty-evamādi-pramukhaṁ(naṁ)
vṛa(brā) ṭmaṇānāṁ chattvariṁśad-mahājana-
samanviṁśam".....

But this statement does not give this meaning. It only tells us that the village was donated to forty (chātvirationḥ) Mahājana prominent among whom were the brahmanas enumerated in the record. It does not mean that only those ten who
are mentioned by name alone were brāhmaṇas and others were not. Dr. Dikshit, who has accepted Dr. Altekar, in toto, concludes that "in the beginning" the Mahājanas were a cosmopolitan body and only gradually did that body come to consist exclusively of brāhmaṇas. This is also not correct. Further, his opinion that the expression Mahājana indicated that the body included members belonging to all communities is also wrong. The term Mahājana simply means the Nagaras and the Mahājanas, Nagar standing for Nakharas or merchants. Thus the original view of Fleet that the Mahājanas were a collective body of brāhmaṇas still stands.

Local Assembly:

From a study of the available source material it becomes clear that these Mahājanas also constituted the local assembly of the village and often they met and discussed matters of administration, decided issue involving civil and criminal justice, made and received grants and thus carried on the administration of the Agrahāra.

In this connection it may be noted that the village assembly, in the further south, in the Pallava and Chōla countries, had developed almost to perfection
as local bodies. The famous inscriptions from Uttaramērūr give us a great deal of information regarding such assemblies. Not only do we know that the assemblies were representative in character, for elections were held to choose the members from different localities in a village, but also that after elections, several committees like tank committee, garden committee, committee for looking after sluices, cultivation committee, road committee, gold committee etc., were set up to look after the different works of public welfare. Uttaramērūr, a village, constituted twelve hamlets and thirty wards, each of which obviously formed a separate locality and from each of which representatives were elected to the assembly of the village. It is also well-known that elaborate rules were laid down not only regarding the elections and the formation of the committees, but also with regard to the qualifications of their representatives. The members, thirty in number, were elected annually by casting votes. It was laid down that the members who were found guilty of loose character should be removed from office and even the relatives of such guilty members were disqualified to hold any responsible post.

Compared to this information, the information
about village assemblies in Karnataka is scanty. We
do not know for instance how the elections were held or
on what basis the representatives elected, what were
their qualifications prescribed and so on.

Number of Mahājanas:

When the Agrahāras were created, generally the
number of brāhmaṇas to live therein and to enjoy the
gift was fixed. Some times such grants were being made
to one individual who was to apportion the entire land
of the village among a number of brāhmaṇa residents
therein. There are also instances when grants were made
to a group of individuals mentioning all of them by name
and fixing the share given to each of them. The Kōṭavum-
achige inscription dated 1012 A.D. for example, refers
to the grant of Umāchige as Sarvanamasya Agrahāra by
Dandanāyaka Kesāvayya, to Maunara Sridharabhatṭa of Rūna,
who in turn, distributed it to the 104 Mahājanas of the
place. Even in cases where the shares allotted to
each donee are not specified, it will have to be inferred
that such a system was followed, for when a village or
land is granted to a group of people it is but natural
that each member of them received a specified share.
Inscriptions of Karnataka generally specify the number
of Mahājanas in an Agrahāra. To give a few examples, we
find 12 Mahājanas in Guḍigere Agrahāra. 12 Twenty Mahājanas are found in Madinur Agrahāra, which is Madinur in Raichur district. 13 It is known from a record from Benṭūr in Dharwar district, that the number of Mahājanas at Benṭavura Agrahāra were 30. 14 Fifty Mahājanas are found to have lived in Bāgali Agrahāra. 15 The number of the Mahājanas of the Agrahāras Rō̱h and Bōlūr 17 was 84 and 108 respectively. 120 Mahājanas of Kaṭṭinakere have been mentioned in a record from that place. 18 A record dated 1099 A.D. from Harapanahalli mentions 200 Mahājanas of that place. 19 Three hundred Mahājanas of Belavatti Agrahāra have been disclosed in a record dated 1053 A.D. 20 from the village Belavatti. The number of Mahājanas at Jambukhandi Agrahāra i.e. the present Jamakhāndi was 400. 21 In Kaḍakere Agrahāra we find 500 Mahājanas. 22 There were 700 Mahājanas in the Agrahāra Hocavūru. 23 Hirēkerū Agrahāra had 1000 Mahājanas. 24 The number of Mahājanas of Lōkkigundi Agrahāra was 1000. 25 The largest number figures in Talagunda inscription which refers to as many as 32000 Mahājanas. 26

The examples cited above show that the number of Mahājanas were different in different Agrahāras. There was probably no definite criterion laid down for fixing the number of the Mahājanas. It is also difficult to
say that the number depended upon the extent of the Agrahāra, for, the donor might have, according to his own desire, donated a greater portion of land among a small number of brāhmaṇas each of whom obviously got a bigger share. Or, he might as well have distributed a smaller area among a greater number in which case the donees got smaller holdings. Hence, we have to surmise that the number of Mahājanas in each Agrahāra depended upon the number of donees selected for the grant. But, what does such a figure denote? Does it denote the number of all the brāhmaṇas of that village or the number of such families? Dr. Altekar has discussed this question at some length, although he has not been able to arrive at any definite conclusion. For instance, in one place he says that the number stood for the heads of the families. In another place he says that it stood for almost all (italics mine), the heads of the families. In yet another place, he also states that the Mahājanas represented all the adults of a village. But none of these statements is correct. A careful study of the inscriptions shows that the number stood for the heads of the brāhmaṇa families to whom originally the Agrahāra was granted.

As noted above, in some Agrahāras, the number of such Mahājanas was as large as 32000 and in some others
it was as small as 50, 40 and even the number is reduced to 12. If we accept the opinion of Dr. Altekar that the Mahājanas represented all the house holders in the village, we will have to presume that in some villages there were only 40 - 50 or 12 house holders. This is very unlikely. From this point of view also it follows that the Mahājanas represented the heads of brahmana families alone and not all the house holders of the village.

Further he bases his view that the Mahājanas included all the adults of a place on the following statement in an inscription dated 902 A.D. of Naniwadige in Bijapur district

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...... Dvaram pratiste geyda tad-dinad-andu Kapilarishī samānṛ-appa tamma mūruṁ
modala mahājanam sa-bālā-vriddhēm-ilcu
mūḍa na polada pu(? )limgeya bāgi......
... bittar......
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This statement does not lend itself to such an interpretation. It only means that the Mahājanas and all others including the old and the young, assembled on an occasion specified in the record. If these young and
old were a part of the body of the Mahājanas, they would not have been mentioned separately along with the Mahājanas.23

It is interesting to note that some bigger Agrahāras were divided into different parts like the wards of the present day and each ward had its own Mahājanas. The Mahājanas of all such wards constituted the body of the Mahājanas of the whole Agrahāra. For example, an inscription from Naragund in Dharwar district refers to the four wards ( kēri ) of Naragunda,30 and the names three of them viz., Hēmāgeri, Mekkēgeri and Paḍuvagēri. The number of the Mahājanas is also specified as 55 in Hēmāgeri,31 35 in Mekkēgeri32 and 55 in Paḍuvagēri.33 The number of the Mahājanas of the Agrahāra Naragunda being 220, we can assume that the number of the last ward to be 75.

Thus the number of the Mahājanas in different Agrahāras varied according to the number of the original recipients of the Agrahāra. Generally, such number in a particular Agrahāra did not change through the passage of time. For centuries it remained constant. To give a few examples, the Mahājanas of Midugundi Agrahāra in Dharwar district who were 400 in number in 1170 A.D.34 remained the same in 1244 A.D.35 also. The number of Mahājanas of Tiliwalli was 1000 in 1072 A.D.35a and 1155 A.D.36 In 1054 A.D. the number of Mahājanas at Hirekerūr
Agrahāra was 1000. We come across the same number in an inscription of 13th century A.D. The number of Mahājana of Posevadaṅgile Agrahāra which was 120 in 849 A.D. continued to be the same even in 1212 A.D. Same was the case with Bālguli Agrahāra. The number which was 50 in 956 A.D. remained the same in 1332 A.D. also.

This phenomenon of the number of the Mahājana of a place remaining constant for centuries indicates that the land once received as donation was enjoyed by a family for generations in the order of succession. Further, the joint family system prevalent till recently in our social structure explains this phenomenon. Under the system the property, for our purpose, the landed property, was held in trust by the head of the family, which sometimes might have comprised of even fifty individuals. All the earnings were pooled together. The head of the family was the final authority in making divisions etc. He was obeyed by all the others. It is in this background that we will have to explain the unchanging character of the number of Mahājana. It was the head of the family who represented the family and he alone was considered as a Mahājana. Even when there were break up in the family, the individual who broke away had no place in the body politic. Hence, it did not result in an increase in the number of the Mahājana.
However, we come across some rare instances where we see some change in the number of Mahājanas. In Kukkanur, in 1172 A.D. there were 1000 Mahājanas. While within a decade, by 1181 A.D. the number increased by 2 and there were 1002 Mahājanas. This increase may probably be due to the fact that two more families came to settle in the Agrahāra and it might have resulted in the redistribution of the land and the recognition of two new families. But, two centuries later, in 1379 A.D. we once again see that there were only thousand Mahājanas in that Agrahāra. By this time the Agrahara of Kukkanur had gone to ruins, and the Vijayanagara King Harihara II at the instance of the royal preceptor Kriyāśakti endowed the entire village of Kukkanur to the Gaṇḍina Bhaṭṭappayya, the priest of the Mahāmāya temple and who was the chief of the 1000 Mahājanas of that Agrahāra. The donee received the grant on condition that he would take suitable steps for its rehabilitation, to renovate the temples and make arrangements for the worship of the deity therein and the like.

While in the example cited above, we see only a very small rise in the number of Mahājanas, there are some instances where the rise was quite big. For instance, in Ṛṇa, in 971 A.D. there were 84 Mahājanas.
But in 1021 A.D. we find that the number rose up to 104. Similarly, in Soratur there were 50 Mahajanas in 867 A.D. while in 1071 A.D. we find 200 Mahajanas there. In these cases it is quite possible that more grants of land were made to the Agrahara, they being donated to other brahmanas who were to live in the same Agrahara. In fact we have a very clear example of this type in the Agrahara of Nilgund. In 1087 A.D., the Chalukya king Vikramaditya VI made a grant of the village Nilgunda to 300 brahmanas coming from the Dravida region at the instance of the Pandya chief, Palapandya. Later, in 1123 A.D. two more hamlets of Krishnapallika and Adityapallika came to be added on to Nilgunda Agrahara, making provision for 200 Mahajanas more.

The case of Chikkagrejyur Agrahara is a bit peculiar one. From inscriptions of that village we learn of the existence of 1000 Mahajanas in 1048 A.D. and also 1077 A.D. However, in a record dated 1083 A.D. we have a reference to only 500 Mahajanas of the place. But in another record dated 1130 A.D. once again there is a reference to the 1000 Mahajanas of the place. The records do not offer any explanation for the sudden fall in the number or its restoration within a short period, in this Agrahara. It should however be noted that such instances are very rare.
Qualifications of the Mahājanas:

The Mahājanas were very learned persons and scholars of repute. They were also known for their noble character. Inscriptions speak highly of their qualities.

To give a few examples here — a record dated 1049 A.D. from Poombuḷcha i.e., modern Hombal in Gadag taluk describes them as learned in Vēdas, Vēdāṅgas, Vēdānta Purāṇa, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Āgama etc. Another inscription describes the 32000 Mahājanas of Tālagunda as being proficient in Vēda, grammar, logic, Mīmāṃsā etc.

yama-niyama-svādhyāya-dhyāna-dhārana
maunānushtēna-japa-semādhi-sīla-sampannar
auvāsan-agnihotra dvija-guru devatā pūjā-
tattparaṟum-sat-tarkka-mīmāṃsā-anēka
śāstra viśāradarum.....sthana guḍha-grānada
mūvattirchōsirvar mahājanagalu.

The thousand Mahājanas of Hirekerur are described as a sacred mark on the forehead of the country of Banavāsi. They not only possessed the qualities like restraint, self control, self-study, meditation etc. but also were well versed in logic, grammar, history, poetry, drama and the like. They are compared to the swans in the lakes of nyāya.
vaisesīḍhā, lōkāyata, sāṃkhya, bauddha and arhata, and also have been mentioned as frightful elephants to the wicked people, and protectors of the righteous and brave in carrying out the work. 58

The Mahājanas of Kuppatur Agrahāra were reputed for their knowledge of several languages as can be seen from their description ( bhāsha-parijāna ). It is interesting to note that in this eulogy there is a reference to their attainments in the field of literature and fine arts. They are described as learned not only in Vedas, and Vedānta, but also in Kavya (poetry), drama, and Alamkāra. Further they were also proficient in medicine ( bhaishajya ). 59 The Mahājanas of Yelawatti were specialised in grammar ( sabda-śāstra ) and arthaśāstra (polity) besides, of course, other branches of study. 60 An inscription from Davanagere refers to the Mahājanas of that place as well versed in tarkta (logic), mantra and tantra. 61 Brāhmaṇaś of Haruvamahalli i.e., Somanāthapura are mentioned as acquainted with the rules of prosody, and were students of science and great poets. 62 Tālirūr inscription dated 1200 A.D. refers to the ascetic qualities of the Mahājanas of Tālirūr Agrahāra who were devoted to the worship of gods, brāhmaṇaś and guru, and were learned in several branches of knowledge like the Vedas, Sastras,
logic, grammar, poetry, dramas and music. It also speaks of their acquaintance with the languages of various countries like Karnāṭa, Lāṭa and Dravila and the scripts of many countries.

**FUNCTIONS OF THE MAHĀJANAS**

**Trustees of the Donations:**

We have seen in the preceding chapter that the Mahājanas were very much concerned with the administration of the Agrahāras. A study of the abundant source material that is available, enables us to get some ideas about the functions of the Mahājanas. Often times grants made to the Agrahāras or to any institution in the Agrahāra like a temple, a matha or a feeding house, was made over to the Mahājanas of the Agrahāra. They were the custodians of the grants of land. They thus acted as trustees of the grants. Hence, it was the most important function of the Mahājanas to look after the proper maintenance and use of such grants. It was their duty, to see that the grants were used for the purposes for which they were made. They thus acted as custodians of such endowments.

A few examples would help us to understand this duty of the Mahājanas. Urodeva Nagadēva made a grant of
land to Banarasiyajmatha at the Agrahara Tumbige and this grant was entrusted into the hands of 100 Mahajananas of that place. According to a record of 1083 A.D. an individual, Gangara Bachimayya by name, made a grant of land to Chandrabhushana pandita, the acharya of the temple of Mulasthanadeva at Sayidi for the worship of and offerings to the God and for the feeding the ascetics therein. The record states that the 400 Mahajananas of the place were to administer this grant. 500 Mahajananas of Bagavadi were placed in charge of the land granted for the repairs of the temple of Someśvara by the Chalukya queen Maïaladëvi.

It was not only in the form of lands, but also the monetary income that came under the control of the Mahajananas. To give an example Kesiraja described as Sandhivigrahi of Dandenayaka Sellapayya, who was the sarvadhikari of a tax called Jaragnađere made a gift of a part of the income from this tax as also from Doniyaterere and others to god Daseśvara of Mahagrahara Kuritakunte. Members of the guild called Doni-1000 received the gifts. But, it is stated in the record that not only this guild but also the 200 Mahajananas of that Agrahara were to protect the gift of the grant. It is obvious that in this case the Mahajananas, along with
the members of the guild held the gift of money income in some sort of joint trust. A record from Tambaragundi registers a grant of 42 gadyanäs of money by Dasimayya, who was administering the Agrahāra of Kisugunći, (same as Tambaragundi) as Mannevä√ñamya, to the gods Mulasthāna, Kalidēva and Vīshnudeva of that place for various services in the temple. This grant was entrusted to the 50 Mahājana of the place. It is interesting to note that in this grant, we find specified provisions made for worship and offerings, for feeding and also for purchasing firewood. And all this was to be from out of the interest received from the capital amount made over and it was the duty of the Mahājana to see that this grant was properly maintained. From these examples it becomes clear that one of the functions of the Mahājana was to receive grants and manage them as trustees in the way specified by the donor or when there were no such specification in the way they thought fit.

As seen above, sometimes the Mahājana received monetary grants and were allowed to make use of only the interest accruing thereupon for the specific purpose like maintaining a perpetual lamp or feeding ascetics or students and the like. In such cases it was the
responsibility of the Mahājanas to invest the capital amount properly and to see that the interests out of the same, were regularly collected and made use of for specified purposes. The records do not generally say in what way the money was to be invested. But they speak of interest accruing on the amounts. Obviously the Mahājanas in such cases became money lenders and charged interest upon the money which they lent. They had the onerous task of collecting the interest amount regularly. This meant that the Mahājanas were to keep proper records of the amounts invested and interest received thereupon and its disbursement.

Donating of Grants:

Sometimes the Mahājanas themselves used to make grants of land and money for various purposes. Many times, there used to be such disturbances as border disputes among villages, cattle lifting, thefts or even raid of an enemy's army. In such cases, the youths of the village used to voluntarily come forth to fight out the danger. And in such acts, many lost their lives also. The Mahājanas, the guardians of the villages as they were, used to hail them as martyrs and take upon themselves the responsibility of maintaining the dependants of the deceased. They used to set up the memorials
usually with the elegy on it narrating the brave deed of the hero and his sacrifice for the sake of his people. They would also grant lands on such occasions to the members of the family of the deceased hero. Such grants were known as Nettarudeli or Nettara noduge i.e., grants meant for the blood spilt by the hero. Numerous hero-stones scattered throughout Karnataka speak of the heroic deeds of the Kannada youth on the one hand and on the other, the responsible role played by the Mahājanas.

Following are a few examples: A Ganga grant from Bellur in Mālūr taluk, dated 800 A.D. mentions one Āla, who is mentioned as "died in a fight, while rescuing the cattle, which pleased the Mahājanas to grant 540 kologas of wet land for him."69 In a boundary dispute at Salagave, one Gūma laid his life in the fight. The Mahājanas of the place granted some land to his family member in recognition of the service rendered by the deceased warrior for the sake of the defence of the village.70 Grant of land and a house site made by the 36 Mahājanas of Benātavura to Madimayya, a hero, who died while securing the cattle for one Madirāja, who had captured them unjustly and was driving them to Annigeri, is referred to in a record of 1049 A.D.71 Mādara masaniga of Malleyanāyakanahalli, which was attached to Chikkāreyur Agrahāra, was given a grant of land by the Mahājanas and
others of the place, for his sacrificing his life while rescuing the cows carried away by some Nayakas of South.\textsuperscript{72}

An epigraph dated 1194 A.D. of Hoysala Viraballāla informs about the grant of land made by the Mahājanas to Chandayyanayaka for the recognition of service rendered to them in fighting with the thieves.\textsuperscript{73} The Mahājanas honoured them by setting up memorial stones and by giving canopy, palanquin etc. Mahājanas of Svayam-prakāshapura i.e. modern Kuruvange in Chikmagalur district, made a gift of palanquin and canopy to the children of Bachisetti who fought and died on behalf of that Agrahāra.\textsuperscript{74}

On some occasions, the Mahājanas themselves used to persuade the valiant one to face the invaders and drive them out. In such cases the responsibility of the Mahājanas was all the more great.\textsuperscript{75} For instance, a person named Bomma seems to have died in a fight at the instance of 1000 Mahājanas of Tīlivalli Agrahāra, who made a grant of land in memory of the deceased.\textsuperscript{75} In another instance, it is reported that Permai Butayya who was governing Gangavāḍi 96000, Belvola 300 and Puligere 300 divisions laid seize to the Agrahāra of Rōṇa for collecting certain incomes like Bhattāya and also for establishing the right of use of village threshing floor. The Mahājanas of the place were dissatisfied
at this act and at their instance an individual, Rāchapayya of Vājikula, opposed the army of the chief and in the fight that followed, lost his life. 76

When they made grants of lands, it appears that, for some purposes, they used to purchase land from the others. The Mahājanas of Halsūr for example purchased land which they later granted to a priest named Sānkamayya. 77 Similarly the Mahājanas of Udbhavanarasimhapura i.e., Balugachchi, purchased land and granted the same to the god Panchikēśvara for Agravujj. 78

Power to sell Lands:

We have also examples to show that they sold lands to others for such purposes. Sānkanaśārayaṇa bhaṭṭa of Naragunda is mentioned as making a grant of land to Kīrtināraśayana of the place after purchasing the same from the Mahājanas of Hiriya Naragunda. 79 Similarly, Sīrīdhara Kravitā and others purchased land from the 1000 Mahājanas of Mahāgraṇām-Piriya-Kereyūr in 1054 A.D. and made a gift of the same for the feeding of the visitors to the village. 80 In 1069 A.D. the 56 Mahājanas of Chinchila sold land free of encumbrances to Mahāsandaradēvanā who later made a gift of the same to the temple of Nāgēśvaradēva. 81 Likewise we find
Talliga Jakkiyabbe purchasing land from 200 Mahājanas of Soratavura and donating the same for a feeding house.

Here the question arises as to how the Mahājanas could sell a piece of land belonging to the village. It is true that such land was donated to the Mahājanas. But did they hold such land jointly or did they effect such transactions jointly? Probably not. Because we generally see that the donated land was divided into different shares and given to different individuals. Obviously, these individuals were the owners of such shares. What appears therefore is that whenever the Mahājanas effected such deals, they could do so with the permission of the individual owner. It is also to be noted that such transactions were made by the Mahājanas only when they pertained to charitable purposes.

Acts of Public Welfare

Mahājanas also undertook activities of Public Welfare. It was their duty to maintain and upkeep public works. We have a number of instances to show that the Mahājanas made grants for the upkeep of wells and tanks.
meant for public use. The 200 Mahājanas of Kurtakōṭi
for instance, made a gift of land for the tank of the
place, in 1032 A.D. It is mentioned in a record of
Jayakēśi of the Kadamba family dated 1144 A.D. that
the Mahājanas of Palleyaḷa (modern Halyāḷ in North
Kanara district) made a grant of land for the upkeep
of a local tank called Devīgerē. The 200 Mahājanas,
of Yaraguppe the Aruvattōkkalu and Patta garasamaya and
others are said to have made certain grants to a well
that was constructed by an individual Kesimayya. In
this instance we see that the well was constructed by an
individual for the use of the public. The fact that
the Mahājanas and others jointly made grants to the
well (arabhāvy, i.e. for the maintenance of the well)
suggests that after having got the well constructed,
Kesimayya entrusted the same to the Mahājanas and they
were made responsible for its upkeep. Another record
dated 1227 A.D. from Gijeyahalli in Arsikere taluk
registers a gift of wet land as Kodīga to Ekkalasetti
and his descendants by the Mahājanas of Yelavāse, alias
Kēśavapura for having built the tank called Ekkalasamudra.
Here also we see that Ekkalasetti got excavated a tank
which he named probably after himself and thereafter
made it over to the Mahājanas for public use. It may be
noted here that the gift was made to the individuals and
his descendants by the Mahājanas. Perhaps it was either to compensate the individual for the expenses he incurred or, more likely, to honour the individual for his generous act that the Mahājanas made such grants.

Similarly, the Mahājanas also received grants made over by others for such purposes. In a record from Ambili dated 1106 A.D. it is stated that when Anuka Pallavarāyā Dandanāyaka was in charge of the Vaddaravula and hejjanka taxes of Nāmbavadi-32000, at his instance, his subordinate officers Keśirāja and Kalimarasa, made a gift of parts of income from taxes like Pannāva, Vaddaravula and hejjanka, to the Mahājanas of Ammele for carrying out repairs and maintaining the Hiriyakere of that place. They also confirmed grants made earlier for that purpose besides giving some land, free of taxes. Likewise, a record from Konnur dated 1149 A.D. refers to the gift of a house made to the Mahājanas of Konaganur for maintaining a water shed and a picotta. Some times Mahājanas requested persons for such activities. For example, we find the Mahājanas of Erekere asking Chattayya Pirumāladeva for building steps to the Dāsi-setṭi tank of the place, which was named after the donor as
Pirumāla-samuāra by the Mahājanas.\(^{39}\)

The Mahājanas shouldered the responsibility of running educational institutions also. The Ālur inscriptions of 1124 A.D. refer to a grant of land together with some gold, house sites etc. to the Mahājanas of the Mahāgrahara Mahādālur by Daṇḍanāyaka Sūrigeya Hermādyarasa for the maintenance of a school for the study of Rīgveda.\(^{90}\) Another instance of grant made to the Mahājanas for the foundation of a school is found in a Chalukya record of Vikramaditya VI.\(^{91}\)

Appointing Officers for Different Purposes:

When such were the duties of the Mahājanas they would appoint officials under them to maintain records and for other purposes.\(^{I}\) We find the Mahājanas of Hāvēra appointing Senabova Lokkisetti as the hegāde of Kabbūr village in 1251 A.D.\(^{92}\) as revealed from a record of the Śeuna king Kannaradeva.\(^{I}\) As the guardians of the Agrahāras, they used to take adequate steps to protect the villages. For this they used to appoint guards or protector(\(s\)) as in the case of Savanūr. It is said in a record from this place that the Mahājanas appointed Madhusūdana for the protection (kāpige pēldalli) of the fort Savanūr.\(^{93}\) A record dated 1135 A.D. from Kaginelli in Hīnekehuṇ
taluk of Dharwar district mentions a person named Rajanna was asked by the Mahajanas to guard the Agrahara Hahanur. Maintaining peace and order in the Agrahara was another duty. They took preventive measures against those who caused trouble to the residents. Thus we find the Mahajanas and the temple authorities making arrangements for the prevention of robbery in that village.

These officials were paid either in cash or most often in kind in the form of grant of lands. A reference may be made in this regard. Mahajanas of Gorur made a grant of wet land to the watchman, who collected the funds for the purpose of building a new village temple in that place. Grant of 10 pons for the village watchman (nadikaval) by the Mahajanas of Madimangalam is mentioned in a record 1284 A.D.

Temples and the Mahajanas:

In the period of our study, Temples in Karnataka as in other parts of the country, were centres of all socio-religious activities of the village. Here, the villagers met regularly and discussed the matters of common interest and day to day affairs. Many temples of importance were centres of pilgrimage and people from
far and near used to visit them. Ascetics also used
to reside in temples, worshipping the gods and imparting
education. Again it was in the temples that the feeding
houses and water sheds used to be instituted for the
benefit of the pilgrims and the visitors. (Naturally the
Mahājanas who were directly concerned with the affairs of
the village, took keen interest in the construction and
maintenance of temples along with their associate
institutions. We have seen above that they received
grants made by others to the temples and acted as trustees.
Along with looking to the continuance of worship in the
temples, they also looked after the feeding houses that
were attached to them. They received grants from others
meant for this purpose and maintained them properly.
For example, a Chālukya record of Tribhuvanamalla states
that a grant of 40 matter of land and a house site was
made to the Mahājanas of the Agrahāra Sirivolālu for the
expenses towards the feeding of travellers and students
of the place. 400 Mahājanas of Niṃgūndī made a grant
of money for the entertainment of the Mahājanas arriving
from other places. Arrangements made for feeding the
ascetics at the Agrahāra through a grant made jointly
by the 84 Mahājanas of Kīsuvāvi Agrahāra and 42 Mahājanas
of Honneyūr Agrahāra is referred to in a record of 1150 A.D.
The perpetual lamps that were burnt in the temple were not to be allowed to flimmer out. Hence we see grants specifically made for the purpose of burning the lamps continuously in the temple. A record from Posavandanglel refers to the grant of an oil mill, for the service of the god, made by the Mañjanas of the place.\textsuperscript{101} Grant of wet land made by the Mañjanas of Banur Agrahara, for a house, perpetual lamp and food offerings to god Vishnu set up in the village by Kapayya bhattopadhyaya is mentioned in a record dated 1067 A.D.\textsuperscript{102} 130 Mañjanas and others of Kattinakere are said to have made grant of land for the decoration and illumination of the God of the place.\textsuperscript{103} 

It was the duty of the Mañjanas to see that renovation were carried out to the temples. For instance, 20 Mañjanas of Modeyanur are said to have renovated the temple of Traipurusha and made provision for the daily rituals of the deity, of the place.\textsuperscript{104}

We also see that sometimes the Mañjanas themselves got temples constructed. 300 Mañjanas of Sedimba constructed a temple in honour of the deity Santi Natha tirthankara and made suitable gifts for its upkeep and also for conducting daily worship and other rituals.
A temple was constructed at a village Malur in 892 A.D. by the 1000 Mahājanas of the place. An image of Vishnu installed by the 200 Mahājanas of Soratūr during the time of Chalukya Vikramaditya VI is noted in a record from Soratūr.

Mahājanas sometimes maintained records pertaining to grants made to persons. For instance, the Mahājanas of Hiriyarasanakere or Chōla Chaturvedimangalam records the details about the vrittis enjoyed by the persons connected with the temple.

Judicial Functions:

It is well known that a peculiar feature of the administrative system of ancient days was its local administration. The villages were the smallest units of administration and the assemblies in such villages looked after the administration including judicial matters. In the Agrahāra, the Mahājana constituted such a body. It is seen above that by the dint of their ability, learning and character, they commanded the respect of all and in matters of judicial administration their role was not small. May be they did not form a judicial court constituted by the state, but, their position in the village enabled them to sit on judgment
in many a case. Their verdict had the value of a judgment and it was honoured. We have a number of instances to show that when disputes regarding land, monetary transactions, or the breach of order and law and the like were referred to them and they tried such cases and gave the judgment. To quote a case here: a Hoysala record from Mattighaṭṭa, in Hassan district refers to one Sōmağauḍa, who demanded the document of loan, on repaying the debt together with interest, from one Nāgauṇa, from whom Sōmağauḍa had borrowed the money, pledging his land. Nāgauṇa refused to return it and this was brought to the notice of the Mahājanas. The Mahājanas of Hariharapura Agrabāra were required to settle a dispute pertaining to a land in that place. The record being mutilated, no details however are forthcoming. It is known from a record from Kittūr that the Mahājanas of Dēgāmve convened an assembly for the settlement of a dispute. When a dispute arose between two persons named Kalagaṇḍa and Kereyaṃasetti of Elebali regarding a field in that place, they were brought before the king by a 'royal commission' consisting of sarvādikāri Kāduva Mahanta, senabova Chandrasē, pandita Maḥāṣūḍhana, manneva Bommiṇēvarasa, adhikāri Rāmaya and Mallayya, where Kereyaṃasetti swore that he had purchased the vṛitti in dispute by paying money to
Kālagauḍa's great grand-mother Jakkigauḍi and Gaḷeyac-chaṭṭayya, the fact which had been denied by Kālagauḍa. Then the case was referred to the Mahājanas of Tāṇagundūru, Malprabha Bommisettī, Savantā Muddayya, Nakharas, Mummuridandas and others who were called Dharmadhyakṣhas. As a result of this, Kālagauḍa had to undergo the ordeal from which he emerged successfully.¹¹² In another instance, a dispute arose about the land granted to a god. The dispute seems to be between eœ Ballarasa who looked after the land and Kancharasa who later on succeeded him. Due to incompleteness of the record it is difficult to get any further information about this case.¹¹³

(Generally, the Mahājanas used to meet in an assembly for carrying on such judicial and other transactions and to look after other affairs of the villages. They met in the sabhamantana or the central hall of a temple. For instance, the Mahājanas of Hāruvanshali (in Hassan district) assembled in a sabhamantana of a temple.¹¹⁴ 50 Mahājanas of Bāgalī meeting at a temple settle the collection of grains and salt to conduct a feeding house for four persons every day is mentioned in a record from Bāgalī in Bellary district.¹¹⁵
That such assemblies were looked with a sense of veneration is clear from the fact that these sabhās quite often have been described as the abodes of the goddess of learning. A Seuna inscription from Haveri extolls such a sabhā thus:

Brahmavasasamāsēśa-Vēdanilayam vidyādharair-
evritam prithvīmandala-mandanām Nalajuri-
rajaṛddviyaṇam mahātrakhyata pratibhēpara-
pravībūdha-pramanika-prāśnika-prastutyam
pratīvyāsara-pratimuhuh prodyat sabhāmandalam

When the residents of the Agrahāra indulged in indisciplinary acts, the Mahajanas took prompt action against them and punishments were meted out to such of them. A record from Kotavumachige may be noted in this connection. It refers to the fines imposed on those who went against the rules of the Agrahāra. It is mentioned that the penalty (danda) imposed for abusing was (orbar-orbaram bavdade) 2 panas, for assault (badidade) 12 panas, for drawing out the dagger (surigesīltade) 3 (muru) gadyānas, for stabbing (iridade) 12 panas, and this would have imposed considering the distinction of caste, for bachelor (meni) committing adultery (meni suli gedade) 3 (muru) gadyānas. 3 gadyānas
Thus we find that the function of the Mahājanas included the general welfare of the Agrahāra. Essentially, they were learned men and efficient teachers, and they also founded and maintained charitable institutions. They acted as men of justice. They readily fought for a noble cause and did not hesitate to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of the Agrahāra.

**Position of the Mahājanas:**

By their learning and experience they also commanded respect. Here and there, now and then, there might have arisen points of difference between the state officials and the Mahājanas. But, very soon they were resolved either by *mutual* discussions or by appeal to a higher authority, often the king himself, who looked into the problems more sympathetically.

That the Mahājanas held a very high position in the society would be all the more clear when we see that in several cases of grants made, the donor, either a private individual, or an official or a royal personage or the king himself, required their presence and even they sought the formal permission and approval of the
For example, a gift of gōsāca, a tank and a garden made by an individual after washing the feet of 56 Mahājanas of Chimohila is mentioned in a record dated about 873 A.D. An officer named Dasimayya, who was administering the Agrahāra Kisugundi is said to have made grant of gold to the temples of Kalidevasvāmi and Vishnudeva for burning lamps and offerings in the presence of 50 Mahājanas of the Agrahāra Kisugundi.

It is disclosed in a record dated 1124 A.D. that the king Tribhuvanamalla of the Chalukya family made a grant of land to the god Kali in the presence of 260 Mahājanas of Virarājendra Chaturvedi maṅgala, which is the present Kabbūr in Davanagere taluk of Chitradurga district.

The Mahājanas true to the name they bore, were really great men. Though they were donees, by their learning and character they commanded the respect of all the people. They were held in veneration by even the ruling kings who sought their blessings.

Through them education spread and religion prospered. They were largely responsible for the establishment of harmony in society, a society where caste system was an accepted fact, but where secularism also was practiced. If there was religious toleration
in Karnataka and if people of different faiths could live together harmoniously, irrespective of their faiths, it was mainly due to the effective role of the Mahājanas who played a very important part in the life of the ancient and medieval Karnataka.
References and Notes

1. Dr. Sircar has defined the term Mahājana as the brahmaṇa residents of the entire village; all the members of the village assembly; or a general body of the sabhā or village assembly or a member of a council. Indian Epigraphical Glossary, p. 177.


3. Rāshtrakutas and their times, p. 205.

4. EI., XIV, p. 332 ff.

5. ARIE., 1953-54, Bk. No. 235.

6. BKI., I, No. 151.

7. EI., VI, p. 246 (11 47-49)


Dr. R.C. Majumdar takes the term Mahājana to mean merchants. (Ed. A.R. Wadia: Social Work in Ancient and Mediaeval India, p. 32) It is not correct.


11. EI., XX, p. 69.

12. SII., XX, No. 193.

13. HAS., 18, p. 57 ff.
Following Dr. Altekar, Dr. Dikshit also concluded that the assembly of the Mahājana included all the householders of the Agrahāras (op. cit. pp. 97-98). In support of this view, he also refers to the term mahājana praje occurring in a record from Chipparagi (SII., IX, No. 48). According to him this term indicates that 'the Mahājana were not representatives, but householders of the place' and therefore, Mahājana assembly is consisted of all the householders in an Agrahāra. This is thoroughly wrong,
because the term simply means the Mahājanaś and the praśe i.e., the Mahājanaś and other people of the Agrahāra.

30. **XX., V, p. 40 (1.18)**
32. Ibid., p. 43 (1.47).
33. Ibid., p. 36 (1.27).
34. **SII., XV, No. 114.**
35. Ibid., No. 180 (1. 66-67)
35(a) **XI., II, p. 20.**
36. Ibid., p. 78.
37. Ibid., IV, p. 61.
38. Ibid., p. 70.
39. **SII., IX, No. 291.**
40. Ibid., No. 330.
41. Ibid., No. 66.
42. Ibid., No. 344 (1.35)
43. **IA., XII, p. 221.**
44. Ibid.,
45. **Andhra Pradesh Government Archaeological Series, No. 9, p.32.**
46. **IA., XII, p. 256.**
47. **III., p. 223.**
48. **BKI., I, No. 12.**
49. Ibid., No. 111.
50. **EI., XII, p. 154 (1.64).**

51. **ARIE., 57-58, Bk. No. 253.**

52. **Ibid., No. 250.**

53. **Ibid., Bk. No. 242.**

54. **Ibid., Bk. No. 235.**

55. The change in number in the inscription of 1083 A.D. may be due to a scribal error also.

56. **BKI., I No. 84.**

57. **EC., VII, Sk. 185.**

58. **KI., IV, p. 72.**

59. **EC., VIII, Sb. 249.**

   *Rig-Yajus-Samātharyavāde-Vedāntānēkādayam.*

   *sthāṇapā Smrīti-Purāṇa-bhrīdu Bharatavāda Vatsāyya,*

   *pa-karma-bhaṃśa pariṇāna prasannarum-anēka*

   *kāvyā...kāṇṭaka-ālamkāra-harābhava-bhaishajya-sastra.*

   *vnapaptēdāram...hat karma niratarum-saranāgata*

   *vajra-pāñjarāram...'rīmat sarvanamasyad-enādi-
agrahāra Kuppātūrāsēsha-mahājanaḥesaḥ.*

60. **S&CP. Ins., (II), iii.**

61. **EC., XI, Dg. 36.**

   *vodavīḍa Vēda-nikhyāgama-tat-pāda-mentra-
tantra-tarkkada-nīya-nītya-kṛma-kīrīta punyada*

   *vajña-visuddha tatparatvādā sujanatvad-
ūrijitāda vipra-varṇārjinaḥ-inti chalumettud-enaḥ.*
62. Ibid., V, Ak. 123 (1237 A.D.).
63. Ibid., Ak. 130.
64. SII., XV, No. 524 (1014 A.D.)
65. BKI., II, No. 129.
66. Ibid., I, No. 83 (1049 A.D.)
67. Ibid., II, No. 200.
68. Ibid., I, No. 92 (1054 A.D.)
69. MAR., 1913, p. 38.
70. Ibid., 1926, No. 47.
71. BKI., I, No. 81.
72. EC, VII, Sk 175.
73. SII., IX, No. 321.
74. EC., VI, Cm. 44.
75. KI., IV, p. 71 ff.

Also see S&CP. Insc. No. 17, p. 4.
76. BKI., I, Int. p. VII.
77. EC., VI, Tk. 2.
78. Ibid., V, Cm. 269 (1276 A.D.)
79. ARIP., 33-34, Bk. No. 72.
80. KI., IV, No. 25.
81. BKI., I, No. 108.
82. Ibid., II, No. 137.
93. ARIE., 52-53, Bk. No. 64.

नामम् ग्रामादाम रक्षिषाल दाक्षानुम समार्थानुम- 
वानाक्कुम एंड-एलोचिसि गुनागना ...... दत्या 
सांद्हीचालोपेना-धार्य्यानवाणी एंड-एनिके- 
गलुम्बे-वादा गुनादिम मधुसूदनानुर्य्यवरोत्ना- 
माम् ||गोऱ्त्रम पारशाका ....... वाजी-वनिसाब्जा 
रूजी मित्रा साहि कुल्लदा पेञ्चित्दरोड़देरकदि 
... कारेदु-प्रिमविनुर्य्यvara पराकेयुंनुत्ता- 
हदि मुद्गिराम ग्रामा सम्रक्षानारथोदि ...

94. ARIE., 33-34, Bk. No. 31.

मल्लिकर्जुनदेवारो आग्रहारा हानुराकपिगे 
पेल्लली
95. ARSIE., 46-47, Bk. No. 70.
96. MAR., 1936, p. 63.
97. EC., X, Bp. 79.
98. ARIE., 58-59, Bk. No. 639.
99. BKI., I, No. 117 (1076 A.D.)

agrahāraṁ niḍugundiyā mahājanam nālmūrvarum
pūrvvasthitīyim nađeva parikṣāvadā honge
mūrvarve visavāmaṁ parasthānāda mahājanad-

abhyāgata pūjege bittaru.

100. SII., XV, No. 13.
101. Ibid., IX, No. 118.
102. MAR., 1929, p. 122.
103. EC., V, Ak. 68.
104. ARIE., 53-54, Bk. No. 236.
106. MAR., 1929, No. 43.
107. SII., XV, No. 10.
108. ARIE., 46-47, Bk. No. 70.
109. MAR., 1924, p. 38.
110. EC., Ak. 120.

yi-halliya chatu-sīme yālagulla bhūmi-
sīma-vivāda bandadē mahājanamgalu parīharisi
komduvaru....
A dispute regarding the land belonging to the God Achalēśvara by the Mahājanaś, and others is referred to in an inscription from Nareyamgal. ARIE., 46-7. Bk. No. 231.

agraharam Pūrīna Padangileya Komārasvāmi
dvēdibhatta....pramukhavāgī mahājanam bandū
ślokarthamam pērdāsīrvvadamam kottode
mechondide-bedikollivene....