CHAPTER III

Sringeri and the Keladi Rulers

Introduction

The decline of the Vijayanagara Empire upset the political stability of Karnata. There was no strong power left to continue the process of uniting the whole of the southern peninsula. The rise of the five Muhammadan kingdoms in the Deccan, revolutions and dynastic changes, besides creating political instability, weakened the influence of the Sringeri Matha. It was during this critical period that the Matha lost some of its lands. The times also witnessed the growth of many other religious orders like the Viraśaiva and the Vaiṣnava.

One of the most prominent feudatory families which rose to power under the Vijayanagara rulers and finally established an independent state of their own was that of the Nāyakas of Keḷadi. Keḷadi is now a small town in the Sāgar Taluk of the Shimoga district. The Keḷadi rulers (in all eighteen) had their sway in the mid-west of Karnata roughly for a period of two and a half centuries (A.D. 1499 – A.D. 1763). Though the Nāyakas were followers
of the Virasaiva School, they were still devoted to the Sringeri Matha. To meet the changing threat to their kingdom, they ruled the kingdom from various capitals like Keladi, Ikkeri, Bidur and Bhuvanagiri Durga.

Like the Vijayanagara Emperors, the Keladi rulers visited the Sringeri Matha and made land grants and other valuable presents. On many occasions, they invited the Jagadgurus to their capital and received their blessings. Whenever there was a breakdown in the administrative system of the Matha, the Nayakas came to its rescue. They passed orders to the tenants of the Matha to remit the revenue to the Matha promptly. They made all possible arrangements and created facilities for the smooth journey of the Jagadgurus from one place to another. The Gurus also had a high regard for the Nayakas.

Sources:

Though the inscriptions are most important with regard to an understanding of the relationship between Sringeri and Vijayanagara, they are not of as much importance concerning Sringeri and Keladi relations. Towards the close of 16th century, copper-plate and stone inscriptions were substituted by the kadatas. Besides
epigraphy, Guruvaṃśa kāvyya, Keladiśripaśṭijayam and Sivatataratnākara, are some of the important literary sources of this period. There are over 70 documents spread-over in about 25 kadaṭas. Besides establishing the relation between Śrīṅgērī and Keladi they shed light on the political, administrative, economic, religious and social conditions prevailing in those times. A detailed account of the sources pertaining to Keladi history is given in Keladi Polity by K.N. Chitnis. 4

The relationship and its nature

A few instances illustrating the relationship between Śrīṅgērī and Keladi may be given here.

The reign of Sadāśiva Nāyaka (A.D. 1513 - A.D. 1563), the son of Chaudappa, marks the beginning of the association of the Keladi Nāyakas with Śrīṅgērī. From Keladinripa-Vijayam one can infer about Sadāśiva Nāyaka's relation with Śrīṅgērī. Śrī Rāmachandra Bhārati (A.D. 1517 - A.D. 1560) was the contemporary of Sadāśiva Nāyaka.

Venkaṭappa Nāyaka I (A.D. 1582 - A.D. 1629), the son of Doḍḍasankaṭha Nāyaka (A.D. 1563 - A.D. 1576), was perhaps the ablest and the greatest among the Keladi rulers. Besides being an intrepid warrior, he was a patron of
religion and learning. The predecessors of Venkaṭappa were feudatories of the Vijayanagara Emperors; but Venkaṭappa became completely free from their control and was thus the first independent king of the dynasty. The Italian traveller Pietro della Valle who visited Ikkēri in A.D. 1623 affirms this view. 6

Venkaṭappa Nāyaka I was known for his religious catholicity. He invited Śrī Abhinava Narasimha Bhāratī I (A.D. 1599 - A.D. 1622) the pontiff of the Śrīṅgērī Maṭha to his court in Ikkēri and honoured him with presents. Śrī Abhinava Narasimha Bhāratī I was an erudite scholar who wrote a commentary on the Śiva Gītā. 7 In memory of his Guru, he founded an agrahāra named Narasimhapura. 8 For the accommodation of the venerated Guru, Venkaṭappa put up extensions to the Maṭha building in Śrīṅgērī, 9 founded an agrahāra and granted land yielding more than 50 pagodās in Makkarnāḍ. 10 For having done this noble job, he earned the title "Re-establisher of Śrīṅgērī". 11 Venkaṭappa Nāyaka I received the title of Visuddha Vaidikādvaita Siddhānta Pratishṭhāpaka, 12 from the Śrīṅgērī Guru. By his noble deeds, the Nāyaka improved conditions in the Maṭha and thereby attained great fame. 13 Venkaṭappa was tolerant in his religious attitude. He granted lands
to a Matha of the Rāmānuja sect (Vaishnava) and to God Venkaṭeśa. He gave a gift even to a Muslim mosque in Bhuvaṇagiri Durga.

During Virabhadra's reign (A.D. 1629 - A.D. 1645), both Ikkēri and Śrīṅgēri fell victims to repeated hostile incursions. Bhairava, chief of Kaḷasa, attacked Ikkēri and snatched away some places measuring six yōjanas (24 miles) including Śrīṅgēri. Three times, Bhairava attacked Śrīṅgēri and plundered the Matha. But Virabhadra successfully repelled the attacks of Bhairava on Śrīṅgēri. For the third time, when Bhairava attacked the Matha, Śrī Sat-chidānanda Bhāratī I (A.D. 1622 - A.D. 1663) retired to meditation and strangely enough the very next day Bhairava left Śrīṅgēri due to some unknown reason. In order to commemorate this victory, Satchidānanda Bhāratī is said to have composed Rāmachandramahodava, Gurusataka and Mīnākṣai Sataka.

The authorities of the Śrīṅgēri Matha made a complaint to Virabhadra Nyāyaka, when the Svāmī of Tīrthahālli was displaying insignia to which he was not entitled. The Nyāyaka prevented the Svāmī from displaying it and sent a letter to the Jagadguru of Śrīṅgēri, granting him the privilege of receiving homage from other Sanyāsīs.
When the Svāmī of the Kūḍli Matha tried to gain the villages of Harakere and Maṇḍali by influencing the Bijapur authorities, Virabhadra Nāyaka wrote to the Bijapur officers,²³ that Śrī Satchidānanda Bhārati's possessions should not be disturbed.²⁴ The Nāyaka also passed an order to the citizens of 32 villages to recognise the control of the Śrīnīgērī Svāmī over Dharmasthala and other mathas.²⁵ Virabhadra Nāyaka had a broad religious outlook. He gave a gift of land to a Muslim mosque at Tāwaregere pond of Maḷalagopa in the Ānandapura Sīme.²⁶

Sivappa Nāyaka (A.D. 1645 - A.D. 1660), grandson of Chikkasankanna Nāyaka and son of Siddappa, like his predecessors was a patron of religious institutions. Though a staunch Vīrāśaiva, he patronised the Śrīnīgērī Matha and made gifts to Brahmins. He was a great systemiser and was well-known for his 'Sīstu'²⁷ (standard land assessment).

The Nāyaka's contemporary on the pontifical throne of Śrīnīgērī was Śrī Satchidānanda Bhārati I (A.D. 1622 - A.D. 1663). His Holiness had sent an Āśīrvāda patrike (A letter of blessing) to Sivappa Nāyaka requesting him to set right the matter pertaining to the Matha's property, where the tenants were making profits without remitting the due sum of money to the Matha. Accordingly, Sivappa
Nayaka enquired into the matter, put an end to the malpractice and restored the lands to the Matha.²₈

Bhadrappa Nayaka II (A.D. 1661 - A.D. 1663), 10th in the Keladi pedigree, restored to the Matha, Kerehalli and Gavaturu fetching an aggregate annual revenue of about four hundred and sixty pagodas.²⁹

Somasêkhara Nayaka I (A.D. 1661 - A.D. 1677), wrote a letter to Sri Satchidananda Bharati I acknowledging the right of the Matha to teach proper lessons to the offenders and to maintain Dharma.³⁰ For the worship of Sri Chandra-maulisvara and Sri Saradamba, the Nayaka confirmed the grant of lands of the value of 300 varahas in Yarehalli (situated in Kandikere) village.³¹ On the occasion of the Dipavali festival, he sent presents to the Jagadguru.³²

A copy of the nirupa³³ issued by Rani Chennammaji (A.D. 1661 - A.D. 1697), wife of Somasêkhara Nayaka I, to a person named Bhadrayya, states that Angalapura Grama (situated in Kaâlluru Simé), should be given back to the Svamiji of Sringeri, Sri Narasimhabhârati VI (A.D. 1663 - A.D. 1705), for the maintenance of the Matha's Dharma. When the Rani came to know that duties were demanded of the Sringeri Matha by the maniyagara (local manager) in
respect of the Matha's Sarvamanya villages in Makkarnabd, she issued orders to the officers concerned cancelling them as irregular collections (A.D. 1691-92) and instructed that the Matha's privileges should be left free to be enjoyed by it without any hindrance. Chennammaji advised her adopted son Basavappa Nayaka to know the essence of the Advaita Siddhanta as expounded by the Sringeri Matha. She also issued orders to the toll collectors, not to collect toll on articles meant for the Matha.

Basavappa Nayaka I (A.D. 1697 - A.D. 1714), 13th in the line, followed in the footsteps of his mother in patronising the Sringeri Matha. He issued orders to his officers directing them to help the Sringeri authorities to collect their perquisites from the Matha's disciples in matters of achara vichara (ceremonial observances etc.).

The next ruler Somasekhara Nayaka II (A.D. 1714 - A.D. 1739) was deeply interested in religion and patronised mathas and temples. He visited Sringeri and met Sri Satchidananda Bharati II (A.D. 1705 - A.D. 1741) at the holy feet of Sri Saradamba and stayed there for four days. The Sringeri Matha was in heavy debts and it was
Somasekhara Nayaka II who cleared them off. When two Vīraśaiva mathas were established in the heart of Śrīnērī, much to the displeasure of the Jagadguru, the Nayaka passed orders for their removal after being persuaded to do so by the Peshwa and others, as will be made clear. This is a clear indication of the extent the Nayaka was tolerant towards other religious faiths. The Nayaka made a land grant to the Matha of the value of 360 varahas and 4 hanas for worship at the shrines and issued orders to the officials instructing them not to collect tolls on articles meant for the Matha. He made a number of free gifts of land to the Matha.

The kadatas are of immense value in knowing about the relation between Śrīnērī and Keladi, particularly from the times of Basavappa Nayaka II (A.D. 1739 - A.D. 1754), successor and nephew of Somasekhara Nayaka II. At the time of Basavappa Nayaka's accession, Śrī Satchidananda Bharati II was the head of the Śrīnērī Matha. Basavappa Nayaka's relation with the Matha can be known from some of the letters of correspondence as recorded in the kadatas. When the Nayaka came to know about the ill health of Śrī Satchidananda Bharatī, he sent sugar, sugar-candy, grapes etc. and anxiously awaited replies from Śrīnērī concerning
how the preceptor was faring.45

A copy of the Asirvāda patrike46 from the scholars of Vidyāraṇyapura to Basavappa Nayaka is of great importance, for it mentions that Śrī Satchidānanda Bhārati, owing to ill health, gave Sanyāsa to Śrī Tippābhāṭṭa, the son of Śrī Tirumala Avadhāni and accepted him as his disciple and successor with the new name of AbhinavaSatchidānanda Bhārati, on Friday, Jyeshtha Bahula, 3, Durmati Samvatsara (22nd May, 1741). The letter also records the demise of Śrī Satchidānanda Bhārati on Jyeshtha ba. 10, Thursday at 3 p.m. (28th May, 1741). On Monday, Aṣāḍha ku. 6 an auspicious day of the Durmati Samvatsara (8th June, 1741) the installation of Śrī Abhinava Satchidānanda Bhārati took place. The ill health of Śrī Satchidānanda Bhārati and the subsequent events are narrated in some other documents also.47 In fact Basavappa Nayaka assisted Śrī Satchidānanda Bhārati in nominating the successor to the pontifical throne of Śrīṅgeri.48

To what extent the Keladi rulers took care of the Śrīṅgeri Matha can be surmised from an undated copy of a binnavattale found in a kadata.49 A person named Saçakṣara-yya of Bidānur, perhaps one of the officials of Basavappa Nayaka II, wrote a respectful letter to Śrī Abhinava
Satchidānanda Bhāratī I (A.D. 1741 - A.D. 1767), stating that he had come to know about the detrimental activities of some people who had given wrong information about the Matha to Bālāji Bājjirao, the Peshwa. He further requests His Holiness to send a letter of blessing to Bālāji Bājjirao and convey the truth to him.

After Basavappa Nāyaka II, his adopted son Chennabasavappa Nāyaka (A.D. 1754 - A.D. 1757) ascended the throne. He too, like his predecessors, sent presents to Śrī Abhinava Satchidānanda Bhāratī and sincerely wished to preserve the greatness of the Dharma-Samsthana, which had flourished through the ages.50

Chennabasavappa Nāyaka was succeeded by his adoptive mother Vīrammāji who had in fact been exercising the real power even during the former's reign. Keladinripavijayam says that Vīrammāji invited Śrī Abhinava Satchidānanda Bhāratī51 to her capital and after giving him a hearty reception, presented him with a crystalline symbol of Śiva (Sphatika linga) and an image of Gōpālakṛṣṇa set in rubies (Ratnakachita Gōpālakṛṣṇa mūrti), together with a gift of land valued at 74 varahas. The queen also endowed the Matha with another rent free land valued at 300 varahas.
and arranged for the liquidation of its debts.\textsuperscript{52} Somasekhara Nayaka III (A.D. 1757 - A.D. 1763),\textsuperscript{53} the adopted son of queen Virammaji, was the last in the Keladi dynasty to patronise the Sringeri Matha. His contemporary on the pontifical throne of Sringeri was Sri Abhinava Satchidananda Bharati I (A.D. 1741 - A.D. 1767). Somasekhara Nayaka III in A.D. 1761-62, issued an order, renouncing the Government revenues over articles of import and export, connected with the worship of Sri Saradamba during the Navaratri (Dasara) festival.\textsuperscript{54} The Nayaka made land endowment to God Vidyāśāṅkara of Sringeri.\textsuperscript{55} To meet the requirements of Parjanya (a religious ceremony where the Rain God is prayed to bring rain), to be conducted at the holy feet of Betti Mallikarjuna Dēvaru (God Mallikarjuna in Sringeri), he sent various articles like coconut, fruits, rice, betel leaves etc.\textsuperscript{56}

Thus the Keladi rulers right from Sadasiva Nayaka to Somasekhara Nāyaka III, maintained good relations with the Sringeri Matha. Sri Rāmaṅandra Bhāratī, Sri Narasimha Bhāratī III, IV and V and Sri Abhinava Narasimha Bhāratī I, Sri Satchidananda Bhāratī I, Sri Narasimha Bhāratī VI, Sri Satchidananda Bhāratī II and Sri Abhinava Satchidananda Bhāratī I, were the Jagadgurus of the Matha during the Keladi Nāyaka's rule.
The Keladi rulers after a reign of nearly two and a half centuries were overpowered by Hyder Ali in A.D. 1763.
Notes and References

1. The Imad Shahis of Berar, the Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, the Baril Shahis of Bidar and the Kutb Shahis of Golkonda.


5. KNV, Canto II, No. 58, p. 40.


7. EC., VI, Sg. 22.

8. Ibid., Sg. 2; ARMAD., 1933, No. 22.

9. KNV., Canto V, No. 61, p. 82.

10. EC., VI, Sg. 5; ARMAD., 1928, pp. 15 ff; and Sg. R., 11.

11. EC., VI, Sg. 5.


13. KNV., Canto V, V. 74, p. 85.

14. EC., VIII, Ng. 79.

15. Ibid., T. 1, 38.
16. Grandson and successor of Venkatappa Nayaka I.
17. GVK., Canto X, VV. 18-19.
19. GVK., Canto X.
20. Ibid., V. 40, p.108.
21. Ibid., V. 60, p.110.
26. EC., VIII, Sagar 108.
27. Chitnis, KP., p.133.
28. Kd. 50, No.5; This copy of Sivappa Nayaka's binnavattale breathes the same spirit as of the copper-plate Sāsana as recorded in EC., VI, Sr.11.
29. ARMAD., 1916, p.67; Sg.R., 16.
30. Kd. 89, No.27; Sg.R., 17.
32. Sg.R., 19.
33. Kd. 175, p.4.
34. Sg.R., 20.
35. STR., VIII, 8.
36. Sg.R., 21.
37. Ibid., Nos. 22-26 inclusive. As mentioned in the sources, in A.D. 1709, Basavappa Nayaka I composed Śivaśatakam, the last encyclopaedic work in Sanskrit which sheds light on the relations between Śringeri and Keladi.
38. ARMAD., 1927, No.62; BC., Sh.98.
39. KNV., Canto X, No.53, p.185.
40. GVK., XVII, VV.38, 45 and 48; For further details see the Chapter Śringārī and the Marathas in the present thesis.
41. SK.R., 27.
42. Ibid., 28 and 29.
43. KA. 101, Nos. 3, 21 and 22.
44. KA. 20, Nos. 66, 76 and 78; KA. 51, Nos. 21, 42 and 43.
45. KA. 51, No.42; KA. 20, No.66.
46. KA. 20, No.78.
47. Ibid., No.76; KA. 51, No.43.
49. KA. 88, No.39.
50. KA. 45, No.53; KA. 113, No.72; KA. 147, No.11. (The same copy of the letter appears in these three kadatas).
51. According to inscriptions (MG., V, p.1179), the Guru of the Śringārī Matha has to be identified with Narasimha Bhāratī, who became the Jagadguru in A.D. 1758. However, the Śringārī Matha list identifies the Guru with Abhinava Satchidananda Bhāratī (A.D. 1741 - A.D. 1767). According to the Matha's list, Narasimha Bhāratī's reign is from A.D. 1767 - A.D. 1770 (See MG., I, 307). However, the information in the Matha's list and the inscriptions, sometimes do not tally.
52. **KNV**, Canto XII, Vv. 5-9, pp. 221-223.

53. The dates of all the Keladi rulers as mentioned in this chapter are taken from Dr. K.N. Chitnis's book, *Keladi Polity*, Karnataka University, Dharwar, First ed., 1974.


55. **Kd.** 113, No. 116.

56. **Kd.** 45, No. 116.