1. Preamble:

As already been made it clear in the preface, this study is divided into two parts. A brief account of the political history of the dynasties that ruled Andhra Desa from the fall of Satavahanas to the rise of Early Chalukyas and comprehensive study of the Vishnukundins, including their genealogy and chronology, their capital, their contribution to language, literature and education, etc., based on literary, epigraphical and archaeological evidences, are included in the first part. The second part consists of settlement and structural pattern, religious and secular architecture, art, religion, material culture including pottery, coinage etc., social and economic conditions during the Vishnukundin period.

Part I of the thesis has been devoted entirely for highlighting the political and cultural history of the early dynasties of Andhra Desa during the period under consideration with particular references to the Vishnukundins where the sources from literature, epigraphy, published and unpublished works of eminent scholars have been utilised. Archaeological evidences have also been used to some extent wherever it was found necessary.

The second part of this work is mainly based on archaeology rather than other traditional historical evidences. The chapters in this part have been so divided as to give a clear understanding
to the reader® and also to distinguish how Archaeology contributes to History in bridging up the lacunae.

Keeping this in view, the division of chapters, has been made in this work taking care to avoid repetitions, overlappings, etc., etc.,

In this process there may appear to be some repetitions but since they are based on different sets of evidences and corroborate each other, they are to be stated.

Now, the highlights of this work are elucidated below.

2. The antiquity of the Andhras:-

The Andhras of the past have left some glorious monuments which are looked with reverence and pride by the people of the country and it will be in the fitness of things if the history and religious and cultural ideals of their founders are studied in a more scientific manner and greater detail. The Andhras form a distinct territorial and cultural entity, making rich contributions to the stream of Indian History. From the earliest times Andhra has been a centre of great political, economic and cultural activity. It has played a prominent part in the fusion of the cultures of the north and the south and in the development of the Indian culture. The antiquity of the term "Andhra" has been traced to the epics¹, Puranas², rock-edicts of Asoka³, Buddhist literature⁴, early Tamil literature⁵, Sanskrit literature⁶, early prakrit Inscriptions⁷, and accounts of foreign travellers⁸,
leading to the conclusion that the Andhras were a powerful nation ruling over a portion of the Deccan, south of the Vindhyas ever since the Mauryan period or even earlier from the days of the Brahmanas.

3. The pre-Chalukyan history of the Andhra Desa since the disappearance of the Satavahanas is a period marked by the mushrooming of several royal dynasties. The south western parts of the empire came under the Chutus and after them the Kadambas, the Andhra-desa fell under the less powerful and short lived dynasties. In less than four and half centuries it saw the Ikshvakus, the Brihatphalayanas, the Salankayanas, the Ananda gotras and the Vishnukundins rise and fall in quick succession.

4. Name of the dynasty which is correct:

The Vishnukundins rose to power on the down fall of the Ikshvakus in the early decades of the 4th century and ruled upto the end of the sixth century of the Christian era over lower Deccan' and coastal Andhra. One recent scholar suggested that the name of this dynasty is "Vishnukundi" and not "Vishnukundin" as has been usually taken. An attempt is made in this work to prove that the above argument is not correct and that the eminent scholars like HULTZSCt, SEWELL, Dubreuil, K.V.Laxmanarao, D.C.Sircar, K.Gopalachari, N.Venkataramanayya did not err in calling the name of the dynasty as "Vishnukundins" or "Vishnukundinulu".
5. Successors of the Ikshvakus:

At Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati, Yeleswaram, Nelakondapalli etc., the post-Ikshvaku period is characterised by the Vishnukundin coins, pottery, etc. Recent digs have yielded copper coins of Vishnukundins right over the Ikshvaku period at Yeleswaram and Nelakondapalli. If the statement that the last king of the Ikshvakus ruled till the first quarter of the 4th century A.D. is accepted, then there may not be any difficulty in admitting that the first king or founder of the Vishnukundin dynasty was a contemporary of the Ikshvakus of Nagarjunakonda or Vijayapuri according to the archaeological evidences now available. The archaeological finds discovered during the excavations conducted at Yeleswaram on the banks of river Krishna, proved that the Ikshvakus were succeeded by the Vishnukundins.

6. Origin:

Scholars are divided into two groups, some contending that the Vishnukundins were outsiders who came to Telugu country along with some invaders and established themselves there as its rulers; while others upholding the view that they were the indigenous to this region who rose to power and fame by their own efforts. It has been proved that the Vishnukundins originally belonged to a royal family of central India, gradually came down and settled in Andhra country as ordinary feudatory chiefs and subsequently rose to power by their own efforts and heroism by reducing to subjection other petty kings and annexing their lands. It is
quite probable that the Yishnukundins rose to power in the present Telangana region which was not under the sway of any royal family and this must have happened under the influence of Vakatakas.

7. **Extent of their Empire:**

The epigraphical evidences supported by the archaeological and numismatic discoveries show that the Yishnukundins kingdom at its zenith extended from the western sea, upto River Narmada on the north, and river Pennar in the south and Srikakulam on the east (See Map).

8. **Genealogy and Chronology:**

The genealogy and chronology of the Yishnukundin dynasty have become a subject of controversy among the scholars. The discovery of the Tummalagudem copper plates has led to the re-examination of the subject by many scholars. S. Sankaranarayana propounded a new theory, setting aside all other theories regarding the genealogy and chronology of the Yishnukundins, on the basis of the reasons given by him and on the known regnal years of the kings of the family.¹⁰(a) His scheme is stated to be based on the facts supplied by the old and new source materials; is free from unnecessary assumptions and minimise the gap between the dates of the two sets of the Pulomburu plates; that the total period allotted to the eight ruling monarchs is only 225 years in average about 28 years for each monarch and that it is not unreasonable.
V.V. Mirashi did not agree with the views of S. Sankaranarayanan, and differed from the latter especially in placing the Tummalagudem grant I of Govinda Varmen before that of grant II of Vikramendrabhattaraka. Of all the theories propounded by several scholars the genealogy and chronology formulated by N. Venkataramanayya appears to be the most reasonable and nearer to the facts. According to him, the Vishnukundins' rule must have begun with Indravarna in 358 A.D. and ended in 594 A.D. during the reign of Madhavavarman IV. This theory is therefore accepted in this monograph.

9. Influence of Satavahanas on Vishnukundin's Culture:

Of all the dynasties that ruled over Andhra Desa after the fall of mighty Satavahana empire, the Vishnukundins proved to be their true successors in respect of culture, religion, language, art and architecture, etc., though there is a gap of the two dynasties! This is discussed at length in part I chapter III(iii).

10. Royal titles and emblem of Vishnukundin:

An exhaustive study of the growth of Ancient Indian Kingship through the changing royal titles and epithets has been made basing on the literary and epigraphical sources available. The Vishnukundin kings did not attach much importance to the titles like Maharaja, etc.; and even though they were supreme kings they did not always consider themselves supreme.
The emblem of the Vishnukundins and its significance has been established. The lion emblem of Vishnukundins was represented on the seals of their charters from Tummalagudem, Ramathirtham, Chikkula, etc. The lion signifies fierce energy and undaunted courage, which are the very qualities necessary for success in war. The lion was the Andhra emblem and their successors, the Vishnukundins, might have retained it. The lion device was perhaps Buddhist in origin and that the lion motif at Amaravati is sufficient evidence for this view.

11. Capital of Vishnukundins:

None of the records furnish us with any definite information regarding the capital of these rulers. Scholars have identified different places as capital city of the Vishnukundins each propounding his own theory basing themselves on circumstances or the law of weight of probability. Vainamonda, "Amaravati", Lendulura (modern Denduluru), Tewar, were some of the places identified as their probable capitals. Even Tiruvur, Velpuru, Indrapalangaram, are not spared from the position. But we have more reliable and solid material evidence for the identification of the site of their capital city.

The outer and inner fortification walls, numerous religious and secular structures inside the fort, the coins, the pottery, and other concomitant finds all datable to the Vishnukundin period brought to light in course of excavations at Keesaragutta, are evidences enough to prove that "Keesaragutta" was
once the capital of the Vishnukundins. There can be no doubt that their epithet 'Sriparpvata svami padakudhyata" is apt when the topographical features of the hillock at Keesara are considered.

12. Language, Literature and Education:—

The inscriptions of the Vishnukundins, tell us that there were Brahmins who were conversant with the Vedas, and Vedangas during the times besides Buddhist scholars. All the Vishnukundin kings patronised Sanskrit literature and Telugu language. They donated Agraharas to the Brahmins who were scholars and poets. The language of the Vishnukundin records is simple, chaste and direct and are almost free from errors. It is not unreasonable to think that the influence of the Vakatakas was there on the Vishnukundins in respect of poetic style in writing the inscriptions. Ghatika denoted an educational institution where the knowledge of the Vedas was imparted to the Brahmins. The establishment of a Ghatika was regarded as a pious act which had to be performed according to certain regulations prescribed by tradition and law. It was regarded as a meritorious act which secured happiness to its founder in the heaven.

13. "KESARAGUTTA" Excavations:—

Archaeological investigations carried out on the top of the hill-Keesaragutta revealed fortification wall with gates, secondary fortification wall, palace complex, square brick shrines, rows of Siva lingas, etc., besides valuable antiquities
including red-ware pottery, beautiful terracottas, stuccos, beads, etc., all belonging to the Vishnukundin period. This is the only fortification wall that has been brought to light by the spade of archaeologist next to the fortification traced at Nagarjunakonda. The fortification wall, now in ruins, on the top of the hill at Keeraman, encompassing the huge brick structure of religious as well as secular buildings show that it was a hill-fort (Giri-Durga) constructed in the post-Satavahana period by the Vishnukundin rulers following the canons of Hindu Science of architecture as enunciated by the ancient writers viz., Kautilya, etc.

14. Results of the recent excavations at other sites in Andhra Pradesh:

Archaeological excavations brought to light clear evidences of habitation belonging to the Vishnukundin period at Nelakondapalli of Khammam District, and Yeleswaram of Nalgonda district on the northern bank of the River Krishna. About ten Buddhist sculptures were discovered at Nelakondapalli in a private land while digging for pati earth. The pit where the idols were discovered was extended and exposed the brick structures constructed with 50 cm. x 25 cm. x 8 cm. size bricks nicely lime plastered to a thickness of over an inch. In course of the operation, hidden and visible sculptural wealth consisting of a number of broken fragments essential for moulding the broken idols were collected. Very interesting brick structures
relating to the manufacture and preservation of the marble Buddhist Idols were traced out. A trough measuring 4.45 mts. x 1.96 mts. x 0.80 mts. appears to have been intended for preserving the idols under lime plaster and that they were subsequently given high polish. Similar trough-like structures three in alignment separated by a drain were also brought to light. A thick deposit of lime is noticed in the tubs. The stratigraphy of the trial trenches dug in the mound has shown two brick structures one over the other separated by a layer containing morrum and fine sand. The first phase of the construction was made with brick mud and mortar. The brick wall in the second phase was constructed with lime mortar. The flooring and the walls were thickly plastered with lime. A Vishnukundin coin with lion on the obverse and a kalasa flanked by a lamp stand on either side inside a rayed circle on the reverse was recovered from this layer. Fragments of pottery met with at the site include decorated and designed storage jars, water jars and vessels, of red polished ware and the fabric varying from coarse to fine. A beautiful terracotta human figurine with two horns on either side of the head is found which resembles the horned dvarapalakas in the cave and other structural temples of the Vishnukundin period.

The excavations carried out at Rajahmundry have brought to light a brick wall, on the bank of the Godavari near the old stair case intended for the bathing ghat. The wall was constructed with brick of the size of 50 cm. x 25 cm. x 8 cm. The structural
activity of the earliest period consists of the remains of a wall-like structure encompassing a circular structure in brick which is superimposed by the square cellas. The inner length and breadth of the cella is 2.3 mts. x 1.7 mts. There is a wall running east to west, a few metres away on the north from the above cella. This wall must be an enclosure wall but its construction was abruptly stopped for reasons unknown. This incomplete wall is seen in bits in the same alignment, each bit having ends with successively receding courses. Mud has been used as bonding material.

Yoleswaram, a village located in a valley on the bank of the river Krishna contiguous to Nagarjunakonda valley, caught the attention of the pre-historic man who settled down here before the dawn of civilisation and it remained a cradle of culture in historical period. Once it was a flourishing city at the time of Ikshvakus. The excavations carried out at Yoleswaram yielded a hoard of Vishnukundin coins right over the post-Ikshvakus period and it can be inferred that this valley came under the suzerainty of Vishnukundins after the Ikshvakus. An enclosure wall was brought to light pertaining to this period. A brick structure appeared to have been intended for some ritualistic import as sockets were made at regular intervals around a raised pedestal for the erection of wooden columns to support a canopy. A brick structure something like a chamber was discovered which functioned probably as a votive shrine for
installing a Bana linga. Another brick structure of the nature of votive shrine installed with a Banalinga was found. The enclosure wall was renovated during this period in the same alignment and the stratum was full of fallen debris. The brick structure referred to above continued in this period and was installed with Banalinga connected by an abhisheka drain. The most noteworthy finds of the period are the five miniature votive shrines found near the temple complex at Yeleswaram. These shrines have a low adhistana, flat karota and vimana of two steps surmounted by a semi-circular Sikhara incised with an inscription, the characters of which resemble some of the characters of the inscriptions of the Vishnukundin period datable to circa 4th century A.D. It has a Linga on the vedi inside.

15. **Their constructional activities:**

During the period of Vishnukundins the constructional activities were on the increase as is evidenced from their copper plate grants viz., Tummalagudem Set I and II. The Vishnukundins inherited the artistic traditions of both the Ikshvakus, whom they succeeded and the Vakatakas with whom they came into contact. The cave temples of Vijayawada, the structural temples such as Satyavolu, Kadomalakalava, Mukhalingam go back to the Vishnukundin period. The palace complex with massive enclosure walls, brick shrines etc., all constructed with bricks measuring 50 x 25 x 8 cms. at Keesaragutta, show that the building architecture flourished during that period.
and that the ancient Silpa Sastras were followed in all respects. To cite an example, the shape of the palace complex is like the "MAULIKA" mansion described in MANASARA. The Maulika mansion is shaped like a winnowing basket and consists of three rows of buildings. It is likely that two more building complexes consisting of a number of mansions inside existed continuous to the above palace complex as evidenced from the two compound walls exposed outside the enclosure wall, in the recent excavations. Such constructional activities have also been noticed at Yeleswaram, Nelakondapalli, Rajahmundry, Gummadam, Gollathagudi, etc. in Andhra Pradesh.

The Vishnukundin contribution to art and architecture hardly won the recognition it deserves at the hands of scholars who devoted themselves to the study of Indian art and architecture.

16. Art:-

The Vishnukundin period witnessed a round progress in the field of fine arts. The votive shrines with or without Bana-lingas inside these shrines found in the Yeleswaram excavations, A beautiful sculpture of Vishnu whose head and feet are mutilated found at Yeleswaram, the early sculpture of Narasimha showing Vishnu in anthropomorphic form and also in animal form, discovered over a hillock at Kondamotu, a stone-plaque of mother Goddess, the decorated globular pot recovered from Keesaragutta are the best examples of Vishnukundin's art. Beautifully modelled human and animal stucco figurines used for decorating the walls of the buildings were exhumed at Keewaragutta. A terracotta figure finely depicting a mother holding a child in her left
The hand has been found. The head of the figure is broken. The collection of the stuccos include a stucco with floral designs, head of a lion, head of a swan-like bird, animal face with circular eyes, a head of a tiger with nose, mouth and two incisors prominent. Some stuccos are painted in ochre, yellow and green.

Chiselled or carved semi-circular, rectangular bricks, some of them plastered with lime one painted in ochre, yellow and green have been met with.

17. **Religion:**

The age of the Vishnukundins is a transitional period in the religious history of the country. Though the early kings of the Vishnukundin dynasty like Govindavarman I and Vikramendra-bhattaraka followed Buddhism, the later rulers of the family were staunch followers of Brahmanic Hindu Dharma, they styled themselves as *'Parama-maheswaras'* and their family deity was "SRI PARYATA SWAMIN". They also worshipped Ganapati, Siva, Vishnu, Devi (Durga) as evidenced from the carvings of the Vijayawada groups of cave temples, with special preference to Siva. They built a number of temples, throughout their kingdom in honour of Siva which includes innumerable miniature votive shrines found at Yeleswaram and the row of lingas at Keesaragutta. All the Vishnukundins appear to be staunch followers of Pasupata sect influenced by Agamas, and also patronised the doctrine of "Panchayatana". The worship of Vishnu, the cult of mother goddess, along with Buddhism and Jainism were also popular during the Vishnukundin period as the kings were known for their religious tolerance.
Buddhism which appears to have been dominant during the
time of the Satavahanas began to show signs of decay under the
Ikshvakus, who succeeded them as rulers of the coastal Andhra.
Though the stupas and viharas were still built for the Buddha
by the ladies of the royal family, several of the kings and
their officials followed the Brahmanic Hindu Dharma, under the
Vishnukundins. Buddhism continued to lose ground steadily
until it became practically extinct by the end of the Vishnukundin
period.

The Vishnukundins strove hard to uphold the dharma, and
spent much of their wealth in promoting goodness. They built
stupas, viharas, temples, etc., and made gifts, of land and
money for their upkeep.

18. Metallurgy:

The art of working in metals during the Vishnukundin period
was excellent. A flat iron piece with rivet measuring eleven
centimetres in length and three centimetres in breadth, probably
used as hinges for the doors and an iron spear head or a similar
war weapon, 12.5 cms. in length and one centimetre in breadth
have been recovered from the excavations at Keesaragutta.
Another iron object 5 1/2 cms. long, slightly bulging in the
middle has also been met with.

The emergence of the historical period marked the maximum
usage of iron particularly during the Ikshvaku and the
Vishnukundin periods.
The iron objects recovered from Yeleswaram during the excavations threw abundant light on the well-flourishing iron industry.29

Large number of Vishnukundin coins have been reported from several ancient sites in Andhra Desa and Maharashtra as well. A.M. Shastry has stated that the coins recovered in Maharashtra, at first glance, give an appearance of being copper coins and look rather heavy in proportion to their size and that a recent metallurgical analysis has revealed a peculiarity of their metallic composition in as much as they comprise an iron core with the coating of a thin sheet of copper on the surface.30
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