

Review of Dr J. D. M. Derrett's
“The Hoysalas: A Medieval Indian Royal Dynasty”
by
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Many factual errors found on almost every page

THE HOYSALAS. (A medieval Indian royal dynasty) by J. Duncan M. Derrett.
(Oxford University Press. 1957. Price Rs. 12. Pp. 257).

The Hoysalas of Mysore occupy an important place in the annals of South India for nearly two and a half centuries. South India was divided between the two great empires of the Western Chalukyas of Kalyani and the Cholas at the rise of the Hoysala power in Southern Mysore and the Hoysalas in the south and the Chalukyas, the Yadavas of Devagiri, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Kalachuryas and minor dynasties, before the Muslim invasions. The Hoysalas themselves were destined to be eclipsed by the Vijayanagara Empire, which for the first time brought the country south of the Krishna under a single rule.

The long reign of Vikramaditya VI saw the rise of powerful subordinate dynasties like the Yadavas of Devagiri in the northern part of Karnataka, the Kalachuryas in the centre, the Hoysalas in the south and the Kakatiyas in the east. To reconstruct the history of the Hoysalas the whole context should be kept in view and the sources, literary and archaeological, should be critically evaluated. Since Fleet and Lewis Rice collected the Karnataka inscriptions, numerous epigraphs and literary works in Samskrit, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil, as well as Persian and Arabic, have come to light. Dr. Derrett acknowledges that the vast material should be carefully sifted before a full-scale work on the dynasties of Karnataka will be possible. Further he has not utilised important Kannada works and the articles published in Kannada. Even the Persian and Arabic sources like the writings of Amir Khusru and Ibn Battuta have not been critically studied in the light of Kannada sources and inscriptions. Chronology is very important because the reconstruction of the history of the contemporary dynasties depends upon it. To take one instance, the battle of Soratur is an important landmark in the history of the Hoysalas. Ballala II defeated Yadava Bhillama in that battle and assumed imperial titles for the first time in Hoysala history. There is absolutely no warrant for the assumption that the Yadavas of Devagiri were Mahrattas making war on Kannadigas. The Yadavas down to Yadava Kannara use Kannada in their inscriptions and only from the time Kannara and Mahadeva we have short Marathi inscriptions.

Dr. Derrett says that the battle of Soratur took place in 1192, but Ballala had begun to use imperial titles from 1191-2 itself. He attributes the Jagannatha Vijaya to 1219 but does not note the significance of the word Parameswara. Now this victory over Bhillama is also alluded to in Rajaditya's mathematical works. The exact date of the battle has been determined as December 23, 1190, Sunday (Dg. 25, E.C. XI). From the Tungabhadra to the Krishna, Ballala II pursued the Yadava army as described in Kannada inscriptions. Dr. S. K. Iyengar and R. C. Majumdar in the recently published “Struggle for Empire” by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, say that the last date for Vishnuvardhana is 1152 or 1157. Dr. Derrett places the death of Vishnuvardhana in March 1142, at the age of 74. Similarly the initial year of

Vishnuvardhana is given variously: as 1106, 1108, and 1111 by different scholars. Dr. Derrett has made no attempt to fix the date more accurately. If at his death Vishnuvardhana was about seventy years old in 1142, he must have been born in about 1070 A.D. and at his accession was about 40 years old. But according to the Kannada inscriptions, even as a young boy, Vishnu displayed his valour before Manikya Devi of Chakrakuta. Dr. Derrett places the Chakrakuta expedition in about 1090, when according to his own reckoning, Vishnu was about 20 years old. Dr. Derrett gives Ereyanga a rule of five years up to 1120 after the death of Vinayaditya in 1097-8. But S. K. Iyengar and K. A. N. Sastri, whom Dr. Derrett hails as "twin giants" differ most radically. According to S. K. Iyengar and R.C. Majumdar, Vinayaditya died in 1101 and was immediately succeeded by his grandson Ballala I. K. A. N. Sastri has generously given two years of independent rule, from the death of Vinayaditya in 1098 to 1100 to Ereyanga and to Ballala I, 1100 to 1110 A.D., when Vishnu succeeded his brother. The utter irresponsibility of these "scholars" is a sad reflection on the state of Karnataka history today.

Dr. Derrett characterises the Hoysala incursion in the Chola politics as an "aberration", which finally brought about the collapse of the empire. It is difficult to accept this judgment for, from the time of Ballala II to the last days of Ballala III, for more than a century, Kannada power was dominant in the Tamil country. The Hoysalas were liked by the Cholas and even the Pandyas had relations with the Hoysalas. Whether the Hoysalas ought to have confined their attention to the Kannada country only, carrying on the war with the Yadavas of Devagiri is not so easily disposed of. The Cholas under Rajaraja, Rajendra and Kulottunga had wrought havoc in Karnataka and had been stopped by Vikramaditya VI. With the decline of the Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Hoysalas had to take up the mission of Karnataka even as the Badami Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas had done and as Vijayanagara was destined to do after the Hoysalas. Dr. Derrett has not properly dealt with the problems of the two Perunjingas and Sambuvarayans. The Hoysala intervention was an absolute necessity to protect religion, since the Cholas and Pandyas were quite helpless. Dr. Derrett places the death of Ballala III in about the middle of August. 1343, not in 1342. He endorses the view that Ballala III himself did not establish Vijayanagara in his son's name, but it was established by Vidyaranya and called Vidyanagara and only later as Vijayanagara, a view quite opposed to the opinions of many scholars.

Dr. Derrett's book is mainly concerned with the dynastic history of the Hoysalas. He has, however, added a chapter on Hoysala administration drawing heavily, without acknowledgement from two articles on the "Economic conditions under the Hoysalas" and "Hoysala Administration" published in the Mysore University Journal, 1928-9. We are told that Dr. Derrett's thesis underwent the "meticulous supervision" of L. D. Barnett and owes corrections to Prof. K. A. N. Sastri. But it is disappointing to find that many errors of fact are to be found on almost every page. It is indeed a pity that even after the unification of Karnataka, neither the two Universities nor the State Government in Mysore have realised the urgent necessity of bringing out a sound and reliable history of Karnataka. A comprehensive history of the Hoysalas, dealing with the social and economic conditions, literature, art and architecture, religious and philosophical movements, has yet to be produced. The glory of Hoysala architecture and sculpture is known throughout the world. But there is nothing of all this in this book. However Dr. Derrett should be congratulated on the production of a fairly readable account of the political history of the Hoysalas.