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Address

• Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
• Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512 (MS.)
• (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 8999250451

Email

• aairjpramod@gmail.com
• aayushijournal@gmail.com

Website

• www.aairjournal.com

CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

N.Lakshminarayana Rao

Dr. S.G. Chalawadi

Asst. Professor

Dept. of A.I. History and Epi.

K.U.Dharwad

E-mail: drsgchalawad@gmail.com

Life Sketch

Nelamangala Lalcsbminarayan Rao was born in Hebbur (Tumkur District) on May 15, 1898. Sri Subbanna and Smt. Lakshmiddevamma were his parents. Having had his early education in Chikkaballapur and Bangaluru, he secured his M.A. Degree from the Maharaja's College at Mysore. In 1921 he joined as the Kannada (Language) Assistant (Epigraphical Assistant) of the Madras Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India. Later on he was selected to the position of Assistant Epigraphist in the Office of the Government Epigraphist for India. He retired as the Government Epigraphist in 1957 at Ootacamund having served for 37 years.

Rao, after retirement, was associated with the Kannada Nighantu project, a series of volumes of Kannada dictionary, brought out by the Kannada Sahitya Parishattu. Because of his expertise in Kannada inscriptions he could make several suggestions in bringing out that dictionary. His study of epigraphs brought him great name. His opinions were considered final in respect of most of the controversies in interpreting inscriptions. He was honoured by the Mythic Society of Bangaluru in 1973 at he time of its Diamond Jubilee Celebrations. The Epigraphical Society of India in its first conference held in the Karnatak University at Dharwad in 1975 honoured him by presenting a copper plate prashasti in recognition of his contribution to the field of epigraphy.

After his retirement Rao lived with his elder son for many years at Nagpur and Kolhapur. He passed away on January 14,1979 at Kolhapur.

Man of discipline in life and work

Among the scholars who had the good fortune of learning epigraphy under N.L.Rao were Dr. Shrinivas Ritti and Dr. B.R.Gopal. They recall how disciplined a man both in life and work Rao was. At Ootacmund his house was the residence cum his office. He would enter the office punctually, clad in full office suit comprising of an inner waist coat, matching trousers and a turban. While writing anything he was careful never to make a mistake, and if an inappropriate word crept in while writing he would simply restructure the sentence to suit the use of that word. He was never in a hurry to write anything unless he was convinced of what he was writing and thought it worthwhile to wait until sufficient information was forthcoming for the simple reason of need for accuracy. When he was in Nagpur after his retirement he agreed to train the students of the department of Ancient Indian History and Culture in early Indian Paleography for which he refused to accept honorarium. Hie students of the Nagpur University used to go to his house for classes. "He showered on them paternal affection", writes Dr. Ajaya Mitra Shastri.

"An epigraphist is one who is able to decipher inscriptions of his chosen field. All others who write on such printed text of inscriptions to pool the information on any aspect of history are also

epigraphists only by courtesy. It is possible that some of the latter may be capable of deciphering an inscription but scholars of the former group are supposed to be dedicated to inscriptions when they are numerous. It is therefore necessary for an epigraphist to be sure of his reading when he publishes texts of inscriptions intended for the use of researchers". This was the gospel of N.L.Rao announced to Shri K.G.Krishnan. Rao's writings stand testimony to what he preached.

The works of Rao

N.L.Rao's area of study covered not only Karnataka but also spilled over Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. His focus was principally on editing and publishing new inscriptions, re-editing the already published inscriptions, historical reconstructions based on epigraphs and, to a an extent, study of coins. He had great concern for Kannada which is amply demonstrated by his numerous writings in that language.

As a part of his official duty, N.L.Rao toured in northern Karnataka for copying inscriptions in the then Bombay Karnataka region. His first epigraphical sojourn was in Dharwad Taluk (1925 June). When in service, Rao edited four volumes of the South Indian Inscriptions (Vols. IX, X, XI and XVIII and parts of Epigraphica Indica Volumes (VoLXXVII, XXIX and XXX) and Annual Reports on South Indian Epigraphy for the years 1939 to 1950 (save a few). He published nearly 50 research papers in various journals. He authored jointly with R.S.Panchamukhi the book titled Karnatakada Arasumanetanagalu (1946). He wrote two long articles on the Chalukyas of Badami one published in the Karnataka Darshana {R.R.Diwakar Festschrift) and another in the Maharashtra Gazetteer (1967). There were papers by him on the Pallavas, Nolamba- Pallavas, Keladi Nayakas and so on. These, in addition to the numerous inscriptions which he edited, such as the Siroda plates of Bhoja Devaraja, Gokak plates of Dejj Maharaja, Haldipur plates of Pallava Gopaladeva, the Jura Prasasti of Krishna in, etc. He has also contributed to the Journal of the Mythic Society and Epigraphia Indica. His publications have been appended to this paper.

Rao as meticulous editor of inscriptions

Rao was first an epigraphist and only next a historian. Correct reading of the text of an inscription was of utmost importance for him. Understanding and interpretation came only next to that. His meticulous concerns for the script, orthography, palaeography, phonetics and grammar are all demonstrated by his papers on the inscriptions edited by him, such as the Gokak plates of Dejjamaharaja, Annigeri inscription of Kirtivarma II,, Koilkona pillar inscription, Haldipur plates of Gopaladeva, etc. In his note on the Siroda plates of Devaraja, he showed, on grounds of palaeographic comparison of characters from the same inscription, how Mr. Krishnamacharlu had incorrectly read the dynastic name of Devaraja as Gomin of what in reality was Bhoja. He linked Devaraja to the line of rulers of the Bhoja dynasty of Goa region. While editing the Jura Prasasti of Krishna HI, he took this Kannada epigraph as proof of the northern conquests of the Rashtrakuta after he had conquered Cholas, and showed how it must have been issued in 963-64 A.D. In his note on the famous Aijunavada inscription of Yadava Kannara, he corrected the tenth verse of the inscription which had been edited by Srikantha Sastri, and made its meaning clear as "Sangana-Basava's elder brother who was absorbed in the linga was Devarajamunipa; to his son [Kajvarasa, who was a touchstone to the Jangamas, was born the dear son Kalidevarasa". Similarly, while editing the Kap Copper plate of Keladi Sadasiva-Nayaka of Saka 1479, he demonstrated that Sadasiva Nayaka must have reigned during 1550-1562 A.D., and not 1513-1545 A.D. as assigned by Rice

earlier. To Rao, inscriptions were the most reliable historical documents whatever their antiquity. Hence he discussed the significance of two Tamil epitaphs of two soldiers, viz. Ramasami and Daniel, who fought on the British side during the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857 found at Sleemanabad (Jabalpur District, Madhya Pradesh). He observes, "Whether we regard them as loyal soldiers or as men who lacked patriotism, the fact that the inscriptions are in Tamil, proves amply the burning love of the Tamil soldier for his mother tongue, however far he might be from his own native province." He eschewed putting forth possibilities before the reader when he was not sure of something. Rather he made statements such as "I am unable to suggest a definite date", "I am unable to identify", etc. under such circumstances.

Karnatakada Arasumanetanagalu

Karnatakada Arasumanetanagalu (Dynasties of Karnataka), (Written on the basis of primary sources like Inscriptions etc; from the early times to 10th Century) Vol.1 (1946), was a joint enterprise of N.L.Rao and R.S.Panchamukhi. Its history goes back to 1926, when both the scholars were working together at Ootucmund as Kannada Assistants in the Office of the Government Epigraphist. Completed as early as in 1929, it was first submitted for publication in 1931 to the Karnataka Itihasa Samshodhaka Mandala located in Dharwad. But due to various reasons, the Mandala could not take it up for publication. The authors approached the publication section of the University of Mysore and it was decided to publish it in installments in the Prabuddha Karnataka. Accordingly the first chapter of the work on the Kadambas was published in two installments (Vol.20, pt. 1 and 2). Meanwhile, the Karnataka Itihasa Samshodhaka Mandala approached the authors again expressing their desire to publish the work in one volume early. In 1939, the manuscript was sent to the Mandala, but the Second World War caused further delay. It was only when the conditions improved that the work came out in book form in 1946. In the preface to the book the authors have regretted that the new material that came out during the 16 years after its writing, could not be incorporated, but that the new discoveries during that period did not counter the conclusions drawn in the book.

Karnatakada Arasumanetanagalu was an early important work on the history of Karnataka after Fleet's *Dynasties of Kanarese Districts* and B.L.Rice's *Mysore and Coorg from Inscriptions*. It aims at thoroughly and critically examining the then available epigraphic and other sources to reconstruct the history of dynasties of Karnataka up to the 10th Century. It considers the dynasties of Kadambas, Chalukyas, Gangas of Talakadu,

Nolambas and Banas in five separate sections, but exclude the Rashtrakutas, for reasons explained by the authors. Though the first section opens with the Kadambas, which is described here as the first dynasty to have founded an independent kingdom in Karnataka, it also briefly attempts to reconstruct the pre-Kadamba history of the region from the Maurya as to the early Pallavas of Kanchi, through Satavahanas and Chutus, in addition to tracing the background of the political situation in the Deccan about the time of the establishment of the Kadambas. Fixing the chronology and genealogy of the dynasties, listing the inscriptions of various rulers with their brief content and delineating briefly the religious and social conditions have drawn primary attention of the authors. Some of the significant contributions of this work are the suggestion that after Kakusthavarma the Kadambas may have fragmented into three lines, use of the term Chalukya for the dynasty which ruled from Badami, tracing of the Chalukya line down to Taila II of the Chalukya dynasty of Kalyana, attempt at locating ancient administrative divisions and identifying the modern equivalents of their

headquarters, importance given to the Banas, brief account of the religious conditions and the inclusion of photographic illustrations of monuments and inscriptions. There is an attempt in this work to indicate that apart from political developments, cultural dimensions also have to be considered in writing history. Like any authentic research work, this includes extensive notes and discussions appended to the various parts. The work apparently treats contemporary geographical limits of Karnataka to delineate history of dynasties and hence places outside its purview the significant dynasties like the Satavahanas. The authors had planned for a second Volume covering the dynasties that ruled from the 10th Century onwards, which however did not materialise.

Other aspects of Rao's contributions

Rao's mastery of the knowledge of various periods of south Indian history is more than demonstrated in his introductions to the South Indian Inscriptions Volumes edited by him. He very objectively presents the material and deals with regional and sub-regional chieftaincies. In this respect, Rao deserves applause for giving attention to the micro-regional histories. He has located and identified the ancient and medieval administrative divisions of Karnataka with great precision along with the modern equivalents of the headquarters' of those divisions.

One of the concerns of the contemporary south Indian historians then was the original linguistic and geographical affiliation of the various dynasties. Rao was also in this race. In his paper on the Chalukyas of Badami published in the Maharashtra Gazetteer, he puts forth the view that the Chalukyas were a dynasty of Kannada origin. This he does by pointing out the names Chalukya kings such as Katti-arasa (Kirtivarma), Polekesi, Bittarasa, etc. One of the most significant propositions of Rao in this respect is related to the original home of the Kakatiyas. In a paper published in Karnataka Historical Review XIII, he ably demonstrated that the Kakatiyas of Warangal must have hailed from Kakati near Belgaum in Karnataka.

So far his coin studies are considered, though they are few, the papers exhibit the abilities of Rao to weigh the positive and negative evidence for arriving at an appropriate conclusion. The best example is his paper on "A Rashtrakuta Coin (?)" published in Satabda Kaumudi, the Centenary Volume of the Central Museum, Nagpur (1964). In this paper, he first reads the legend properly (Dharmma-mahibhara-dhaval), identifies the characters to be Kannada of 10th Century, and then proceed to relate this legend to the Rashtrakutas, on the basis of the such titles as Tribhuvana-dhaval (Govinda HI) and Atisaya-dhaval (Amoghavarsha I), and suggests the epithet on the coin to be that of Krishna ILL After this he goes on to show how the figure of the bull on the coin does not counter its assigning to the Rashtrakutas, by citing parallel examples. He further argues why the coin cannot be of the Eastern Gangas of Kalinga and Kalachuris of Kalyana.

In this short paper, one cannot expect a review of all the writings of N.L.Rao. All that we can say here is that he was a meticulous researcher and that like his contemporaries his main concerns were with facts of history than any theoretical frame for explaining history. His researches not only enriched the field of Karnataka history but helped to set at rest many of the discrepancies that plagued its details.

Important Works of Rao

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- South Indian Inscriptions Vol. XI, part I (Bombay Karnatak Inscriptions)

- South Indian Inscriptions Vol. XI, part II (Bombay Karnatak Inscriptions)
- South Indian Inscriptions Vol. XVIII, pp. i-xxx

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2. A Note on the Nalajanampadu Inscription, Epigraphia Indica Vol. XXVII, pp.206-08
3. Honnudiike Inscription of Sripurusha, Studies in Indian Epigraphy, Vol.1, pp. 17-20
4. Haldipur Plates of the Pallava Chief Gopaladeva, Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XXI, pp.173- 79
5. Annigeri Inscription of Kirtivarman (II), the Sixth Year, Epigraphia Indica, Vol XXI, pp.204-06
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9. Talangere Inscription of Jayasimha, Epigraphia Indica XXIX, pp. 203-09
10. Two Inscriptions on Copper Plates from Nutimadugu, Epigraphia Indica Vol. XXV, pp. 186 ff
11. A Note on the Aijunawada Inscription of Yadava Kannara, Epigraphia Indica Vol. XXI, pp. 16-17
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16. Genealogy and Chronology of the Nolamba-Pallavas, Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, pp. 1-15
17. A Note on Nolamba Polalcora n, Indian Culture, Vol.VIH, pp.365-68 A Rashtrakuta Coin (?), Satabda Kaumudi, Centenary Volume of the Central Musuem, pp. 164-65, Nagpur, 1964
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20. An Interesting Reference to Music in a Kannada Inscription, QJMS. Vol. LXV, No.3, pp. 1-4
21. The Country of Sapadalaksha, Journal of Oriental Research, Vol. XVIII, pp.39-42
22. Geographical Notes, QJMS., LXIV, Nos. 1 -4.
23. Eminent Women of Karntaka, QJMS. Vol. XLV, No.I
24. The Family of Arikesarin, Patron of Pampa, QJMS. VolLXLV, pp. 212-28.
25. Karntakada Arasumanetanagalu, Kannada Research Institute, Dharwad, 1946 (Jointly with Sri R.S.Panchamukhi)