

Grant of Agrahara Villages to Brahmanas in Medieval Andhradesa— An Epigraphical Study

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Abstract: *The study is about the Grant of Agrahara Villages to Brahmanas in Medieval Andhradesa. A few agrahārās trace their origin to epic times and ancient kings to indicate their antiquity. On the other hand, there are enough evidences to show that many agrahārās were founded by kings, generals, ministers and pious persons and those they were granted to Brāhmiṇs for their sustenance. Many villages were granted as an agraharas to the Brāhmaṇās by the kings, generals, ministers and pious persons for their sustenance and sometimes use as educational institutions (Mathas). In Medieval Andhradesa, the kingdoms established several agrahārās to Brāhmiṇs. Initiated a great project for writing the bhashyas (commentaries) on the four Vedas, and invited eminent scholars in the Vedas and sastras from all over the country by offering them agrahārās or villages as grants.*

Keywords: *Agrahara Villages, Medieval Andhradesa, Vedas and sastras, Brahmanas*

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Introduction

This paper makes an attempt to study Grant of *Agrahara* Villages to Brahmanas in Medieval Andhradesa an Epigraphical Study. A village granted by a king or chief to one or many Brāhmaṇās is called an *agrahāra*. During the period under study some of the grants were made to Brāhmiṇs as an *agrahārās*, large number of *agrahārās* was established perhaps, for the belief that the foundation of *agrahara* was an act of great merit and it was classed among the *sapta-santanās* or seven kinds of progeny that perpetuate a person. Some *agrahārās* were newly established and granted to Brāhmiṇs

at their request or in recognition of their *vedic* scholarship. A few *agrahārās* trace their origin to epic times and ancient kings to indicate their antiquity. On the other hand, there are enough of evidences to show that many *agrahārās* were founded by kings, generals, ministers and pious persons and those they were granted to Brāhmiṇs for their sustenance. Usually, the *agrahāra* villages were surrounded by cultivated lands rippling with bouncing harvests and rich fruits and flower gardens and areca-nut plantations. Generally, the uncultivated lands were situated in the corners of the villages away from the residential quarters. They were protected by a fort and moat or an enclosure of a wall or fencing. Invariably it had a temple in the center. There were gardens, *ghatikas* or *vedic* schools, *mathas* and residential quarters for servants attached to the temples. Streams, canals and tributaries issuing from adjacent ponds, tanks and rivers flowed close to the villages and *agrahārās* and irrigated the lands and gardens. Further, there were roads, pathways, embankments and bridges, which facilitated transport and communications with far and near places. Many Brāhmaṇas in medieval Andhradesa received endowments, because they were associated with a temple in some manner. When a temple was established and attached Brāhmaṇa village was frequently, set up or separate plots of land were given to the Brāhmiṇs, the Brāhmiṇs were now subsidiary to the temple. The kings were still the important sources of religious patronage but they were now overshadowed by the hundreds of non-royal donors.

Inscriptions are the best sources to know about the *agrahāra* villages consisted of some or all the following parts and structures as gathered from epigraphs.

1. The residential area.
2. Temples.
3. Water-shed (*chalipandiri*).
4. Cow-pen or cattle-stand.
5. Pasture-land including swamps and waste-land or dry waste land.
6. Shops of betel-leaves, areca-nut, turmeric etc.
7. Industrial places where the people of 18 *jatis* viz., potter, oil-miller, blacksmith, goldsmith, brass-smith, barber, basket-maker etc., resided.
8. Charitable houses like *matha* for feeding *sanyasis* and other choultry for feeding students, travelers and others, hospital.
9. Store-houses or water-houses, go-downs and sheds.
10. Sacred tank or tanks, ponds, canals, streams, embankments and bridges.
11. Royal granaries in some villages and towns, the threshing-floor and also barn (a house or plot of ground for atoning husk), which were used in common by the people existed in all or some villages.
12. Wet and dry lands, gardens forests and vacant sites.
13. Hay-stacks in yards adjacent to residential area or a little father in field.
14. A fort and moat.
15. Building accommodating government offices like the departments of tax collection etc.¹

The establishment of an *agrahāra* was considered as an act of piety and an encouragement to Brāhmiṇ scholars and Brahmanical religion. An epigraph² at Vollala in Suryapeta taluk of Nalgonda district dated 1097 C.E in the reign of Western Chalukya King Tribhuvanamalla Vikramaditya VI mentions, the grant of an *agrahāra* village to the Brāhmanas by Choda Malla and then there is a reference to a Vijayadityadēva, who probably granted some land as *Devabhoga*. The Mallavaram³ Copper plate inscription of King Parantaka dated 1116 C.E registers, he granted Alavēlinilayam village to 288 Tamil Brāhmiṇs as an *agrahāra*. An inscription⁴ engraved on three faces of a pillar set up to the east of the dark room of the Tripurantakēśvara temple at Tripurāntakam in Kurnool district dated 1122 C.E refers itself to the reign of the Western Chālukya king Tribhuvanamalladēva, who after his conquest of the Pandyas, Kuntala, Yadavas, Konkanas, Sevana, Malava, Pallikote, Nalluru, Panchala, Vidarbha and Kalinga to have been ruling from Jayantipura, he made a grant of several villages as an *agrahāra* for feeding Brāhmaṇas and the services of the god Tripurantakēśvara and other pilgrims. Another inscription⁵ from Peddamudiam in Jammalamadugu taluk of Kadapa district dated 1124 C.E referred Western Chālukya Tribhuvanamalla ruling from Jayantipura, Atyanachoda-Mahārāja feudatory, the *Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara* Chiddana Chōla Maharaja is stated have made a grant of the village Mudivēmu as *agrahāra* to the Brāhmiṇs of that place, the grant was made in the presence of god Narasimhadēva of Ahobala.

A record⁶ engraved on a stone pillar lying in the Pachchala Somesvara Temple at Panugallu in Nalgonda district dated 1124 C.E during the reign of Kanduri Chōda King mentions that, on the occasion of Solar eclipse Mailambika wife of Tonda Nripa granted an *agrahāra* called Choda Bhimanarayanapuram to 108 Brāhmiṇs. Another record⁷ engraved on a pillar in the temple of Kēsavasvami at Guggirala in Guntur district dated 1134 C.E refers that Bhima, chief of Kandravadi who was the son of Pandambika made a grant of the village of Duggarelapundi *agrahāra* to a number of Brāhmiṇs and invokes the blessings of Sessa and other seven great Nagas on the chief. The inscription⁸ engraved on a slab up near the Kalkantharaya temple at Karakanthapura, a hamlet of Peddatumbalam in Anantapur district dated 1148 C.E in the reign of the Western Chalukya king Jagadekamalladēva refers that, the *Mahapradhana* Bammanayya's son Recharasa, who was ruling over Sindavadi-1000 made a grant of the *agrahāra* village Tohi in Kavatala-12, after dividing it into *vrittis* to learned Brāhmiṇs. The *vrittis* were not saleable or mortgage able, what is noteworthy here is that some of the Brāhmiṇs are known as *Arasas* and *Nayakas*, through observing Vēdic rites.

The Pikira record⁹ from Nellore district, it issued from the royal camp at Menmaturu in the fifth year of the reign of the Pallava King Maharaja Simhavarman, registers the grant of the village Pikira as an *agrahāra* in Munda-*rashtra* to Vilasasarman, a Brahmin of the Kasyapa-*gotra* and the Taittiriya-*sakha*. An epigraph¹⁰ at Vilavatti in Nellore district, in the reign of tenth year of Pallava King Simhavarman, registers a royal grant of the village Vilavatti as an *agrahāra* in Munda-*rashtra* with all the taxes due on it, to Vishnusarma a Brahmin of the Gautama-*gotra* and the Chhandoga-*sutra* for securing long life strength of arms and victory to the king. Another epigraph¹¹ at Errabalem in Guntur district dated 1167 C.E states that a certain Jillya Boya made grant of the village of Krapagarapuri *agrahāra* free of all taxes to the Brāhmiṇs (Mahajans) of Undavelli for the merit of Rajendra Kulottunga Chodaraja. A record¹² at Karimnagar dated 1171 C.E in the reign of Kākatiya King Rudradēva registers, the grant of Dimdomta village as *agrahāra* to the Brāhmaṇas and the construction of Trikuta temple to the god Siva by Gangadhara. Another record¹³ engraved on the third pillar in the outer *mandapa* of the temple

of Ramalingēsvara at Vēlpuru in Sattenepalli taluk of Guntur district dated 1182 C.E mention that Kota Ketaraju granted several villages as *agrahāras* in Konda Nathavadi Kondapadumati and Doddi Kandravadi countries to Brāhmiṇs for the merit of his mother Sabbambika, his father Bhimaraju, his brother Chodaraju and himself. According to An undated epigraph¹⁴ at Upputuru in the Bapatla taluk of the Guntur district says that, Trilochana Pallava granted Lavanapura or the modern Upputuru as an *agrahāra* to 1000 Brāhmiṇs, the followers of Yajnavalkya who are said to have come from the town of Ahichchatrapura on the banks of the Ganga.

The inscription¹⁵ of Manthena in Karimnagar district dated 1199 C.E in the reign of Ganapatidēva refers to the establishment of two *agrahāras*, and the village Kotapalli was made grant of land to the priest (Brāhmiṇs) to build a village by Manchibhattopadhyaya, again this priest received some land from Allumprolaraju, a *mandalika* ruling in the Chennuri-*desa* at the instance of the king Ganapatideva. This inscription clearly refers to the four boundaries of the land thus received. Manchinarya built a village in that land and invited Brahmanas from Mantrakuta, to live in the new village; formation of an *agrahāra* is mostly individual. Each Brahmin was allotted a piece of land and endowed with hereditary rights. Another inscription¹⁶ from Kondaparti in Warangal district dated 1203 C.E in the reign of Kakatiya Prataparudra states that, the construction of temple dedicated to the god Siva and installation therein of a Linga called Chaundesvara named after him by Chaunda-*senapati*, this Chaunda granted an *agrahāra* named Chaundapura to the Brāhmiṇs. An epigraph¹⁷ engraved on a pillar planted before the temple of Chennakesavasvami at Idupulapadu in Bapatla taluk of Guntur district dated 1209 C.E says that the village of Idupulapadu in the Karma-*rastra* as an *agrahāra* was originally granted by Trinayaka Pallava (Mukkanti Pallava) to certain Brāhmiṇs of *Kanva-sakha* and learned in *Vēdas* exempt from all taxes. Probably the *agrahāra* was deserted by them later due to some calamities. Hence, Kakatiya king Ganapatidēva revived and re-granted it to the Brāhmiṇs.

The Kundavaram¹⁸ inscription dated 1210 C.E states that, Kundamamba the daughter of Kakati Mahadeva and wife of Natavadi Rudra I granted the village Vemulatonta remaining it as Kundavaram to several Brāhmiṇs as a *agrahāra*. An epigraph¹⁹ at Nidigonda in Jangaon taluk of Warangal district dated 1219 C.E in the reign of Kākatiya Ganapatideva states that, the construction of the temple and granting of some endowments to the same by Kundamāmba wife of Natavadi Rudra and sister of Kākatiya Ganapatidēva. She consecrated the god Rudresa after her husband's name Madhava endowed them with part of the village Kundavaram, the remaining parts of which being granted to Brāhmaṇas as *agrahāra*. Incidentally it is also stated that Kundamāmba constructed temple to the god Siva at Kalesvaram on Hidimba Mountain at Jeedikallu, Srisailam and Mantrakuta and granted an *agrahāra* named Kundavaram on the banks of Gautami to the Brahmanas. There are two *agrahāra* of the same name, one in Chennuru taluk of Adilabad district, on the bank of Godavari and the other in Jangaon taluk of Warangal district, the inscriptions mentions, at both the places are set up by Kundamāmba. An inscription²⁰ at K.B.Museum in the village of Jalalpuram in Nalgonda district dated 1253 C.E during the reign of Kakatiya king Ganapatidēva registers, Keta a subordinate of Kākatiyas, grant of villages Lenjinta and Surepalli as *agrahāras* to Brāhmiṇs named Vishnudevarya and Brahmesa, who reside at the *paschima dvara* (Western Gate) of Srigriri (Alampur). A Goruvankapalli copper plate inscription²¹ dated 1292 C.E states that sent four Brāhmiṇs to Gaya to perform *Sraddha* of his father and granted Goruvanakapalli village as *agrahāra* to them for the service rendered.

The Uttaresvara copper plate inscription²² dated 1299 C.E states that Viddhanacharya granted an *agrahāra* for Brāhmiṇs on the lands situated near the villages of Dachapalli and Puluparru in the west Godavari district. Another copper plate inscription²³ dated 1334 C.E in the reign of Allayavēma Reddi of Rajahmundry mentions, grant of the villages of Mahendravada and Vedurupaka to Brāhmiṇs after combining those villages into an *agrahāra* by Alladareddi Vemavaram. *Agrahāra* had proper lay-out with streets and houses built for Brāhmiṇs of the Vedic schools. Generally, they were provided with basic comforts, though some enjoyed excellent amenities. Where Brāhmiṇs led a comfortable life during the reign of Virabhadra Reddi (1423-48 C.E) of the Rajahmundry kingdom. On the banks of the Krishna, Gundlakamma, Pennar and Swarnamukhi flourished many *agrahāra*, all of them had temples, tanks, cattle stands or Cowpens, pasture-grounds etc. apart from the religious desire of getting merit, secular motives like the extension of land cultivation, reclamation of waste land and realization of more agricultural yield and rent led to the foundation of *agrahāras* by the rulers. The Manchalla copper plate inscription²⁴ dated 1340 C.E throws lights on the size of house-sites; it states that Prolaya Vēma Reddi granted the village of Manchalla as a chief and important *agrahāra* or *atimuhyagrahara* and as an *ekabhoga* to a Brāhmiṇ by name Yalakuchi Vallabhasishta. Vallabhasishta kept a few shares of land and two house-sites for himself and re-granted the other lands and house-sites to some learned Brahmins. His fore-arm was taken as the unit of measurement for house-sites; his house-site was 50 cubits in length and 50 cubits in width and square in shape. It was a big house-site and the small one was 3 cubits in length and 5 cubits in width. Generally, houses were built in *agrahara* and village according to the traditional principles of architecture. A record²⁵ in 1346 C.E Kapaya Nayaka of the Koppula family granted the village of Prolavaram as an *agrahāra* to a Brāhmiṇ scholar named Kandaya Peddibhatta.

The land belonging to an *agrahāra* and its resources were administered by the assembly of the Brāhmaṇas known as *Brāhmasabha* or *Mahajanulu*. The inscription²⁶ from Mōpūru dated 1354 C.E during the reign of Harihararāya I refers to grant of the village Aluvala as *stōtriya-sarvamānya* to Sahajadambu *ayyagāru* a Brāhmiṇs by Savanna Odēya for the merit of his father Kamppanna odeya and his mother Mengadēvi. The fourteenth century Vilasa record²⁷ issued by Musunuri Prolayas *nāyaka* on the occasion of a lunar eclipse, while granting the village Vuilasa in Konasima as an *agrahāra* to a Brāhmiṇ scholar Vennaya, rechristening it after himself, (Vennaya gave away many *agrahāra* lands to other Brāhmaṇas well versed in the *Vēdas* as *Sāstras* settled them in that village), enumerates the achievements of his short rule. In 1371 C.E Bukkarāya Mahārāya constructed a tank at Sunkēsala village and donated a village Sunkēsala as an *agrahāra* to the Brāhmiṇ Śrisama Dēvaguru.²⁸ Another *agrahāra* mention in the Kraku inscription²⁹ of Harihara II dated 1376 C.E granted to 63 Brāhmiṇs well versed in the *Vēdas* and *Sāstras* including *jyōtisha* and *Ayurvēda*. The grant village is situated in Pakanadu and it was granted for the religious merit of Harihara II. The copper plate record³⁰ corroborates the statement that Harihara II granted villages as *agrahāra* to scholars who helped the sage Vidyaranya in writing the commentaries or *Vēdas*. Vidyāranya and Sayanacharya are credited with having written some books on the *sāstra* including a commentary on *parasara smriti* called *parasara madhaviya*, *prayaschitta sudhanidhi*, *yajnantantra suddhdnidhi* and many other works on *advaita Vēdanta*. Sayanachārya son Mādhava was also a great scholar who wrote a book on some important philosophies (*darsanas*).

A undated record³¹ from Timmancherla in Gooty taluk of Anantapur district it refers itself to the reign of Harihararāya, it states that he made gifts according to *Hemadri-sastra* and made grant of the village Chimmanakere as *agrahāra*, situated in Guttivalita to the learned Brāhmiṇ Gopalaradhya son of Vithalaradhya. The small epigraph³² incised on a stone near the Channakēśava temple at Tudumaladinne in Kadapa taluk is an interesting record as it states that the village Tudumaladinne was granted by Praudhadevarāya as *ēkabhōga-agrahāra* to Nāchana Sōma a Brāhmiṇ. An inscription³³ at Somireddypalle in Badvel taluk of Kadapa district dated 1403 C.E records the grant of the village Mādanapalli in Siddhavata-sima in Sakali-pāya as *agrahāra* by *Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara* Gundayadēva Mahārāja who bears the titles of Tribhuvanamalla, Bhuvanatrīnētra-jagaddāḷa, Pāṇḍyarāya-gajakēśari and niśsamka-Pratāpa, renaming it as Jyōtirājapura after Jyōtirā (the father of the donor), to his preceptor (Guru) Śrīmat Aghōra Śivāchārya *ayyagāru*. The grant was made in the presence of Tripurāntakadēva for the merit of his parents Jyōtirāja and Maldēvi. The record³⁴ from Chiyyavaram in Rajampet taluk of Kadapa District dated 1405 C.E refers to the grant of the village Chiyyavaram as *agrahāra* in Pudukurunāḍu to a Brāhmiṇ named Shaddaršana-Sthāpanāchārya Nallan Tivaṅgara-Chakravarti son of Nallān Chakravarti by Misaragaṇḍa Sāḷuva Kamparāju. An inscription³⁵ found on pillar lying in the field in front of the Varadarajasvamin temple at Peddavelagaturu in Punganur taluk of Chittoor district dated 1408 C.E in the reign of Vijaya Bhupati (Bukka III) registers, the grant of the village Hiriya Velagamturu in Velumalina-nadu as *sarvamanya* by the prince for the daily offerings and worship of the god Mallikarjunadeva and of the goddess Bhramaradevi of Sriparvata and for feeding daily 10 Brāhamanas thereat.

The record³⁶ engraved on a slab set upon the way to the Pamuleti Narasimha temple at Upper Ahobalam in Sirvel taluk of Kurnool district dated 1410 C.E reveals that Katamareddi Vemareddi made grant of several villages as an *agrahāra* to Brāhmiṇ. Another inscription³⁷ at Ulimella in Pulivendula taluk of Kadapa district dated 1426 C.E reveals that, grant of the village Ulimella as *agrahāra* to a Brāhmiṇ Chennakēsavaperumal by Sambeta Bammayadēva Maharaja. The Vēmāvaram Copper plate inscription³⁸ dated 1434 C.E states that, the village Vēmāvaram in the Ramachandrapuram taluk of the East Godavari district granted by Allaya Vēmāreddi to some Brāhmiṇs as *agrahāra* consisted of many groves of coconut palm, areca-nut, jack, mango, plantain, sugar-cane, paddy, sesame, chickpea and kidney-bean. The Panyam epigraph³⁹ of Nandyala taluk of Kurnool district dated 1510 C.E registers the grant of village Budidepadu as an *agrahāra* in Panyam-sima by Honnapa-nāyaka son of Bokkasam Dēvapa-nayaka to the priests (Brāhmiṇs) Ramajiyya and Virajiyya and others of the temple of Panikesvara of Panyam for the Amritapadi service of the god. During the reign of Sadaśivadēva Mahārāja granted the name of village Kallutla, as a *Sarvamānya agraḥāra* to the Tallapaka Brāhmaṇās.⁴⁰ When Śrī Krishṇadēvarāya was ruling Gaṇḍikōta granted a village named Pottipāḍu as *Sarvamānya agraḥāra* to the Brāhmiṇs.⁴¹ During the reign of Sadaśivadēvarāya, he granted the village Allidona as a *Sarvāgraḥāra* to the Brāhmiṇs. During the reign of Vijayadēvarāyalu son of Praudadēvarāya was ruling Udayagiri region, his wife Narayanamma built a temple to Narayanaswamy (Vishnu temple) and granted a village as *agrahāra* to the twelve Brāhmana families.⁴²

In 1515 C.E Śrī Krishṇadēvarāya reroute his eastern military campaign visited Amaravati, by this time he accomplished the difficult task of subjugating the *giri durgas* and *sthala durga* located at Addanki, Vinukonda, Bellamkonda, Nagarjunakonda, Tanggeda, Kētavaram etc. he also captured

Virabhadrarāya son of Pratāpadudra Gajapati and Narahari-Pātrudu son of Kōmara Hamvira and some *patra samantas* and Mannemvaru granted them protection (*jivagraham ganu pattukoni variki abhayadanam icchi*). As a mark of his grateful obeisance to the god Amaresvara of Dharanikota, situated on the southern bank of the Krishna, the emperor performed the *tulapurusha mahadana* and at his instance his queens Chinnadevi and Tirumaladevi performed *ratna dhenu- mahādāna* and *sapta sāgara- mahādāna* respectively. On the same occasion Krishṇadēvarāya granted two villages to as *manya* as 108 Brāhmaṇās who were proficient in all the four Vēdas as *agrahāra*. He also granted one village each to his two *purohitas* (Brahmanas).⁴³ An inscription⁴⁴ at Srisailam in Nandikotkur taluk of Kurnool district dated 1529 C.E during the reign of Sri Krishnadevaraya registers, the king presented a golden *kahala* and a silver *panavattam* to the god and consecrated Demayalinga to the north of Mallikarjuna and set up a golden pillar in front of it and having built a bath near the Virabhadra temple at Nagaluti at the foot of the hill, consecrated another Demayalinga there and granted the *agrahāra* Demasamudra to Brāhmaṇas.

An inscription⁴⁵ at Minnakallu in Narasaraopet taluk of Guntur district dated 1546 C.E registers, the grant of the *agrahāra* village Minnikallu in Vinukonda-*sima* of Kondaviti-*durga* as *sarvamanya* to Annamayya a Brāhmaṇ son of Tallapaka Tirumalayya by the king. Another inscription⁴⁶ from Gurijavolu in Narasaraopet taluk of Guntur district dated 1546 C.E states that grant of the village Goramjavrolu in Kondaviti-*sima* as *agrahāra* to Tallapaka Tiruvengalanathayya a Brāhmaṇ son of Tirumalayya of Bharadvaja-*gotra* Asvalayana-*sutra* and Riksakha. The Palem inscription⁴⁷ in Gooty taluk of Anantapur district dated 1558 C.E refers that, grant of half the village of Murtirayapuram to god Vithaladeva excluding the other half of it which was already an *agrahāra* granted to the Brāhmaṇas by Vithalarajayyadeva maharaja grandson of Kandanaoli Ramaraju for the merit of his parents Murtiraju and Tirumalamma.

The Vadigepalli inscription⁴⁸ in Hindupur taluk of Anantapur district dated 1573 C.E during the reign of Srirangaraya I registers, the grant of the village Vadigepalya as *sarvamanya* to a Brāhmaṇ Tirumala Komara Tatachraya of Penugonda by the king for the merit of his mother Venggalaji. An epigraph⁴⁹ at Kondavidu in Narasaraopet taluk of Guntur district dated 1577 C.E during the reign of Srirangaraya I registers, the grant of the village Gorijavolu called Srirangarayapuram in Kondaviti rajya as a *sarvamānya agrahāra* by the king to a Brāhmaṇ Jatikarta Virupaksha son of Markonda. Another epigraph⁵⁰ from Gooty in Anantapur district dated 1627 C.E registers that, grant of the village Turukapalle as *agrahāra* in Gutti to *Jatikarta Nārāyana* a Brāhmaṇ by Biravoli Tiruvengalanatha Rajulayyavaru.

Conclusion

Thus, the above account shows that many villages were granted as an *agraharas* to the Brāhmaṇās by the kings, generals, ministers and pious persons for their sustenance and sometimes use as educational institutions (*Mathas*). The practice of donating an entire village or a part therein or a group of villages to Brāhmaṇās was widespread during the medieval times. As such *agrahāras* may be considered as a class of landowners. In Medieval Andhradesa, the kingdoms established several *agrahāras* to Brāhmaṇs. Initiated a great project for writing the *bhashyas* (commentaries) on the four Vedas, and invited eminent scholars in the *Vedas* and *sastras* from all over the country by offering them *agrahāras* or villages as grants.

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