Pre History :

Karnataka has a hoary past. It is blessed with innumerable inscriptions, memorial (viz. Hero, Mahasati and Self immolation) stones and monuments of rich historical and cultural heritage. It has many sites of Prehistoric period and most of them are found scattered on the river valleys of Krishna, Bhima, Malaprabha, Ghataprabha, Cauvery, Hemavathi, Shimsha, Tungabhadra, Manjra, Pennar, Netravati etc. and their tributaries. It is very interesting to note that the Pre-historic studies in India started with the discovery of ashmounds at Kupgal and Kudatini in 1836 by Cuebold, a British officer in Bellary region, which then formed part of Madras Presidency. Subsequent discoveries have revealed the existence of stone age man with innumerable Pre-historic sites in Karnataka. The Pre-historic culture of Karnataka viz., the Hand-axe culture, compares favourably with the one that existed in Africa and is quite distinct from the Pre-historic culture of North India. Places like Hunasagi, Gulbal, Kaladevanahalli, Tegginahalli, Budihal, Piklihal, Kibbanahalli, Nittur, Anagavadi, Kaladgi, Khyad, Nyamati, Balehonnur and Uppinangadi (Lower Palaeolithic) ; Herakal, Tamminahal, Savalgi, Salvadgi, Menasagi, Pattadakal, Vajjala, Naravi and Talakad (Middle Palaeolithic); Kovalli, Ingaleshvara, Yadwad and Maralabhavi (Upper Palaeolithic); Begaumpur, Vanamapurahalli, Hingani, Ingaleshwara, Tamminahal, Sringeri, Jalahalli, Kibbanahalli, Sanganakal, Brahmagiri, Uppinangadi, Mani and Doddaguni (Mesolithic); Maski, T. Narasipur, Banahalli, Hallur, Sanganakal, Hemmige, Kodekal, Brahmagiri, Kupgal, Tekkalkote, Kurnal, Srinivasapura,Beeramangala, Frenchrocks (Pandavapura) and Uttanur (Neolithic and Chalcolithic); Rajana Kolur, Bachigudda, Aihole, Konnur, Terdal, Hire Benakal, Kumaranahalli, Tadakanahalli, Maski, Banahalli, Badaga-Kajekaru, Belur, Borkatte, Konaje, Kakkunje, Vaddarse and Hallingali (Megalithic) are some of the important Prehistoric sites of Karnataka. The ragi grain is found commonly in Pre-historic sites of Africa and Karnataka. The early inhabitants of Karnataka knew the use of iron, far earlier than the North and iron weapons dating back to circa 1500 B.C have been found at Hallur, now in Hirekerur Tq. of Haveri district.

Traditionally, it is believed that parts of Karnataka subjected to the rule of the Nandas and the Mauryas. Maurya Chandragupta (either Chandragupta I ‘Ashoka’s Grandfather or Samprati Chandragupta, Ashoka’s Grandson) is believed to have visited Shravanabelgola and spent his last years there. Fourteen Ashokan (10 minor and 4 major) Rock Edicts are found in Karnataka (two each at Nittur and Udagolam in Bellary district; one at Maski in Raichur district; one each at Gavimutt and Palkigundu in Koppal district; one each at Brahmagiri, Jattinga Rameshwara and Siddapura in Chitradurga district; and four (viz., 13th and 14th) major edicts at Sannati in Gulbarga district) testify to

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the extent of the Mauryan Empire. It is interesting to note that, Emperor Ashoka's name occur for the first time in his Maski minor rock edict wherein, his familiar epithet "Devanampiya Piyadasi" is accompanied with his personal name Ashoka. Hence his Maski edict has a unique place among all his royal edicts. The language used in these Ashokan inscriptions is prakrit and the script used therein is Brahmi. Brahmi, has been regarded as the mother of all Indian scripts, including the Devanagari script. Places like Brahmagiri, Chandravalli, Maski, Sanganakallu, Piklihall, Banavasi, Hallur, T.Narasipur, Vadagoan-Madhavapur, Banahalli, Sannati, etc., have yielded rich remnants of Early (Proto) historic period, datable to C 3rd Century B.C. - 1st Century A.D.

The Shatavahanas

The Shatavahanas (circa 30 B.C to 230 A.D.) of Paithan (also called Pratishtana) in Maharashtra have also ruled over extensive areas in Northern Karnataka; some scholars even argue that this dynasty hailed from Karnataka, as in early times, Dharwad and Bellary districts were called Satavahanihara (or the satavahana region). Some of their rulers were called kings of Kuntala. At Sannati in Gulbarga district, Vadgaon-Madhavpur near Belgaum, Hampi in Bellary district, Brahmagiri in Chitradurga district and several other places, remains of their period have been found. Banavasi in Uttara Kannada has an inscription of their queen, and at Vasana in Nargund Tq. remains of a brick temple of Shaiva order is noticed. Kanaganahalli near Sannati has the ruins of Buddhist Stupas of their times covered with sculptures on them. Among the findings at Sannati, images of Lord Buddha (both in sitting and standing postures) is significant.Moreover the figures of eight Satavahana rulers is also unearthed from this place. Later, Karnataka fell into the hands of the Pallavas of Kanchi. Their feudatories, the Chutu Satakarnis, ruling from Banavasi after the fall of the Shatavahanas, also seem to have accepted the overlordship of the Pallavas. Pallava domination was ended by two indigenous dynasties, namely the Kadambas of Banavasi and the Gangas of Talakad, who divided Karnataka between themselves.

Kadambas of Banavasi (C.345-C.540)

The Kadamba Dyanasty was founded by Mayuravarma, son of Bandhushena in c. 345 A.D. He was a brahmin student from the celebrated Talagunda Agrahara (an Agrahara is a settlement of scholarly brahmins, engaged in religious and academic pursuits) in Shikaripur taluk of Shimoga district. He had gone with his grand father Veerasharma to the Ghatika of Kanchi for higher studies. Subjected to some kind of humiliation at the Pallava capital Kanchi, Mayuravarma gave up his hereditary priestly vocation (but his brahmin origin has been questioned often by several research scholars in recent days) and took to the life of a warrior and revolted against the Pallavas. The Pallavas were forced to recognise him as a sovereign, when he

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crowned himself at Banavasi in Uttara Kannada district. His Chandravalli inscription speaks about the construction or repair of a tank at Chandravalli by mayura varma near Chitradurga. One of his successors, Kakustha Varman (c. 435-55) was such a powerful ruler that even the Vakatakas and the Guptas cultivated marital relationship with this family during his time. The great poet Kalidasa seems to have visited his court. The earliest Kannada record found at Halmidi (C.450 A.D.) in Belur Taluk, Hassan district, was issued by this dynasty. The Kadambas built fine temples and bastis and the Kadamba Nagara style stepped Shikharas is their contribution. They also created first rock-cut shrines of Vedic tradition at Aravalem (in Goa which was then under their control) in a laterite hill range. The tanks at Chandravalli and Gudnapur are among the many irrigation tanks they built. They had Lion as their royal insignia.

They were overthrown perhaps by the Chalukyas of Badami in c. 540 and at later stages, two branches of Kadamba family (one from Hanagal and the other from Goa) ruled during medieval period, as subordinates of the Chalukyas of Kalyana. A branch of the Kadambas was also ruling from Orissa as subordinates of the Gangas of Kalinga in medieval times.

Alupas of Tulunad:

The Alupas who ruled over parts of coastal and adjacent region between 4th and 16th century A.D. with Udyavara, Mangalore, and Barakur as their capitals, had good cultural contact with the contemporary imperial dynasties of Karnataka like the Chalukyas of Badami, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas of Kalyana and other subsequent dynasties, is worth mentioning. Inscriptions of this dynasty found at Kadri, Someshwara, Udyavara, Barakur, Belmannu, Vaddarse etc. speak about their rule in coastal Karnataka. The metal sculpture of Avalokeshwara seen in the Manjunatha temple at Kadri near Mangalore, installed by Alupa Kundavarma in 968 A.D. is unique in South India.

Gangas of Talakad (C.350-C.1024 A.D.)

The Gangas seem to have started their rule in c. 350 from Kolar and later their capital is said to have been shifted to Talakad (Mysore district). Elephant was their royal insignia. Till the advent of the Badami Chalukyas, they were almost a sovereign power. Many Ganga princes were not only scholars and writers, but also great patrons of scholarship. Later they continued to rule over Gangavadi (which comprised major parts of South Karnataka and parts of Tamilnadu) till the close of 10th century, as subordinates of the Badami Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas. It is the Gangas who withstood the onslaught of the Pallavas and the Cholas, who tried to subjugate South Karnataka. Durvinita (c.529-579) was one of the great kings of this dynasty. He, being a scholar wrote both in Kannada and Sanskrit. The Sanskrit poet Bharavi is said to have lived in his court for some time. The ancient Punnata Kingdom (the modern Heggadadevanakote taluk

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region) was merged in his Kingdom. His great grandson Bhuvikrama (c.654-79) was a strong ally of the Chalukyas, and at the Battle of Vilande (c.670) which was fought between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas, he helped the former to gain victory over Pallava Parameshwara Varman and snatching as a war trophy, the Pallava ruler's necklace called 'Ugrodaya' for himself. Mankunda in Channapatna taluk is said to have been his royal residence for sometime.

A later prince of this family, Sripurusha (c.725-88) was not only a strong ally of the Chalukyas, but also resisted the Rashtrakutas who tried to subdue him, after the overthrow of the Chalukyas of Badami by them in 753. Sripurusha, as a Chalukyan ally killed Pallava Nandi Varman II at Vilande in 731 and assumed the Pallava ruler's title Permanadi. This great ruler also wrote a Sanskrit work ' Gajashasthra', a treatise on theme of taming the elephants. He shifted his capital to Manne (Manyapura) in Nelamangala Taluk. His son Shivamara II (788-816) and grandson Rachamalla I (816-53) continued to resist Rashtrakuta power. In the end, Rashtrakuta Amoghavarsha Nrupatunga I (814- 78) sought reconciliation with the Gangas by marrying his daughters to the Ganga princes. At a later date, when the Cholas became strong, the Ganga king Butuga II (938- 61) allied himself with the Rashtrakutas against the Cholas, and helped Rashtrakuta Krishna III (939-67) to humiliate the Cholas by killing the Chola crown prince Rajaditya in the battle held at Takkolam (949) as elucidated in Atkur inscription, a unique memorial stone erected to commemorate the demise of Kali, a hound, while fighting against a wild boar, now displayed in the Bangalore Visveswaraya museum. Finally their territory came to be subdued by the Cholas in 1004, and thus the Ganga rule ended. The Cholas who ruled major part of Gangavadi-96,000 with Talakadu as its provincial head quarters, were ultimately expelled from Gangavadi in 1114 by Vishnuvardhana. However, a branch of the Gangas ruled from Orissa from 496 A.D. and became celebrated in history as the Eastern or the Kalinga Gangas. Among their feudatories, the Nalambas played a vital role in the regional politics in accordance with the political vicisitudes of the day. Gangas dotted the country with many tanks. Kolar, said to be the core country of their initial rule, and Mysore district have many irrigational sources of their times. Ganga Hero Stones found at Begur, Doddahundi etc and the masti stones found at places like Mankunda, Settihalli etc. are worth mentioning. Their fine temples are seen at Kolar, Talakad, Begur, Nagavara, Gangavara, Nandi, Aretippur and Narasamangala. The last named has wonderful stucco figures of remarkable beauty. They also built Jaina bastis at Kambadahalli and Shravanabelagola. The tall Gommata monolith at Aretippur near Koolagere in Maddur Taluk. of 10 ft. erected in 918 AD; and the other at Shravanabelgola, 58ft. in height is the creation of their minister Chavundaraya in c. 982 A.D. are

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outstanding. Excavations held during the preceding decades at Talkad, have brought to light rich remnants of Ganga Period.

Chalukyas of Badami (C. 540-757)

It is the Chalukyas of Badami (also called Vatapi in inscriptions) who brought the whole of Karnataka under a single rule. They are also remembered for their contributions in the field of art and architecture. Their monuments are concentrated at Badami, Nagaral, Aihole, B.N. Jalinal, Pattadakal, old and new Mahakuta in Karnataka and at Alampur, Gadwal, Satyavolal and Bichavolu in Andhra Pradesh. They are both rock-cut and structural, with wonderful sculptures wrought in hard red sandstone. Their Shiggaon copper plates, speak of 14 tanks in Haveri district. The first great prince of the dynasty was Polakeshi I (c. 540-66 A.D) who built the great fort of Badami and performed Ashwamedha Yaga (horse sacrifice) as elucidated in his Badami cliff inscription of 543 AD (so far the earliest saka dated (Saka 465) inscription of Karnataka) after subduing many rulers including the Kadambas. His grandson, Polakeshin II (c.608-42 A.D.) built a vast empire, which extended from the Narmada in the north, to the Cauvery, in the south. In the east, he overthrew the Vishnukundins and appointed his younger brother Vishnuvardhana, as the Viceroy of Vengi. This prince founded the Eastern Chalukya Dynasty which ruled for five centuries in Andhra. (A later prince of this Vengi line, Kulottunga, even succeeded to the Chola throne in 1070). Harsha of Kanauj was defeated by Polakeshin II. The Chalukyan army has been called 'Karnatabala' and described as invincible in contemporary inscriptions. He exchanged embassies with Persia and the Chinese piligrim Hiuen Tsiang visited his court. Ultimately, the Pallavas conquered Badami in c. 642 A.D. after defeating Polakeshin II's army. His Aihole inscription, a prashasti composed by his courtpoet Ravikirti in 634 A.D. not only eulogises the political campaigns of Polakeshi II in glorious terms but also refers to poet Kalidasa of early times. Later his son Vikramaditya I (655-81) reconquered the Chalukyan capital and reorganised his father's empire and restored the fame of their army 'Karnatabala' as 'invincible'. The earliest representative carving of a measuring rod of 18 spans of his period found on a rock (Kattebande) at Kurugodu in Bellary Taluk, an unique example even now visible. Vikramaditya I's son Vinayaditya (681-96) defeated the ruler of Kanauj, who claimed to be the paramount lord of the North (Sakalottarapathanatha). He even sent an expedition to Cambodia. He was succeeded by Vijayaditya (696-733). The Arabs who had conquered Sindh (711) under the leadership of Mohamed Khasim, tried to make inroads into the Deccan. They were defeated by the Chalukya feudatory in South Gujarat called Avanijashraya Polakeshin in 739. The Arabs were forced to leave Sindh after this defeat. The Chalukyan empire included not only the whole of Karnataka and Maharashtra, but a greater part of Gujarat,

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