



THE BATTLE OF RAICHUR: THE SPIRIT FOR FIGHT

Dr. Venkatrao Palati

Associate Professor and Chairman,
Department of Studies and Research in History,
Davanagere University, Davanagere.

ABSTRACT :

The Battle of Raichur, was waged in the summer of 1520 for control of the strategic city of Raichur. This fortified center is located in the middle of a rich sliver of land between two rivers that run through the heart of the Deccan Plateau.

KEYWORDS : *strategic city, agricultural fertile tract.*



1. INTRODUCTION :

. For several centuries before this battle took place, sultans of the Bahmani kingdom to the north of Raichur fought with rulers of the Vijayanagara kingdom to the south over control of this agricultural fertile tract, with the town of Raichur located right in its center.

2. BACK GROUND OF THE BATTLE OF RAICHUR:

Actually, this region had been a contested zone even before the Bahmani and Vijayanagara states came into being. In the late 1284 AD, a Kakatiya King, Rudra, had seized this tract of land and built the imposing complex of walls and gates that encircle the core of Raichur city. With their massive slabs of finely dressed granite, these walls were, in their own day, considered an engineering marvel. Even today, residents of Raichur imagine them to have been built by gods, not men.

However, in the early 1323 AD, rulers of a mighty north Indian empire, the Delhi Sultanate, invaded the Deccan plateau, swept away all the states of the region, and Systematically colonized the northern Deccan with settlers transplanted from north India. At the same time, the invaders subcontracted governance of the central and southern Deccan, including the Raichur region, to local client-chiefs.

But in 1327, one of these client-chiefs threw off allegiance to his northern overlords and carved out a new state that sprawled over the entire southern half of the Indian peninsula. This was the kingdom of Vijayanagara, a powerful kingdom governed from the sprawling metropolis of the same name, located just south of the Raichur plain. Several dynasties of kings ruled from this splendid city, which by the 1400s was described by Europeans as larger than either Rome or Lisbon. Here we see some of the surviving monuments of this great metropolis, a stunning site even today in its ruined.

But Raichur did not for long remain in southerners' hands. In the confusion that surrounded the expulsion of imperial rule of the Delhi Sultanate in 1347, the Raichur plain fell to the other power that simultaneously arose on the ashes of Delhi's failed attempt to colonize the Deccan. This was the Bahmani sultanate, which ruled from a series of capitals north of Vijayanagara. For 150 years, rulers of Vijayanagara and the Bahmani sultanate fought bitterly for control of the agriculturally rich Raichur plain. But for most of this period the plain remained under northern control. During this period, in 1469, Bahmani engineers,

capitalizing on technology imported from north India and the Middle East, built an entirely new wall. Here one sees the city's new, outer wall, which crawled up the hill leading to the hill-top citadel.

But shortly after completing these fortifications, dissensions within the Bahmani ruling class led to factional struggles, and by the year 1500 the kingdom had fragmented into five new successor states. The one that inherited control over Raichur was the kingdom of Bijapur, which also inherited control of the western half of the plateau, including the strategic seaport of Goa.

But by the opening of the 16th century, the balance of power between the northern and southern Deccan was swinging back to the south, meaning the great, sprawling state of Vijayanagara. For one thing, the fragmenting of the old Bahmani sultanate into five successor states naturally meant that Bijapur, which inherited control over the Raichur plain, would be weaker than its larger, parent state. For another, in 1509 the man who ascended the Vijayanagara throne was Krishnadeva Raya, one of the most famous conquerors in Indian history. Under him, Vijayanagara annexed the entire peninsula down to the southern cape, thereby amassing immense manpower and capital resources.

The were Portuguese mariners who, following Vasco da Gama's voyage from Lisbon to India in 1498, built up a powerful commercial and military presence on coastal India. Moreover, having driven Muslims out of Europe, these conquistadors were especially hostile to Muslims in Asia. And since Bijapur was ruled by a Muslim sultan, Portuguese strategists naturally made overtures to Krishnadeva Raya, the Hindu ruler of Vijayanagara.

The Portuguese possessed several assets in their drive for political and commercial dominance along coastal India. First, by achieving control over the Arabian Sea, which connects the Middle East with India, the Portuguese monopolized control over the valuable trade in warhorses, which Indian rulers had imported from Arabia and Iran for centuries.

Second, the Portuguese introduced new kinds of gunpowder technology to the Deccan plateau. To be sure, gunpowder was known and used in India before the advent of the Portuguese. In the 1470s, Bahmani engineers used explosive mines in their wars of Vijayanagara. And in the early 1500s, Muslim engineers in the Deccan were using artillery and matchlocks in their campaigns. A major infusion of gunpowder technology reached western India in the years after 1508, when Ottoman Turks sailed into the Arabian Sea to engage Portuguese warships off the Indian coast. Following that engagement, some Turkish gunsmiths stayed behind and took up service with the sultanate of Bijapur, working in the Goa arsenal. This would explain why, when the Portuguese attacked and conquered the seaport of Goa in 1510, the victors found that the Bijapuri defenders had already established their own munitions plant in the city.

3. THE BATTLE:

We now come to the battle itself, waged between Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagara and Ismail Adil Khan of Bijapur. Two sources can guide us here. One is Muhammad Qasim Ferishta, who in 1611 dedicated his monumental Persian-language history, *Tarikh-i Ferishta*, to Ismail's great grandson as ruler of Bijapur. The other is the Portuguese chronicler Fernao Nunes, who around 1531 wrote a history of Vijayanagara's kings based on local traditions and his own interactions with Indians. Nunes, who was a horse trader who resided in metropolitan Vijayanagara for three years, might have lived in coastal India since 1512, in which case he would have heard first-hand reports of the battle shortly after its conclusion.

It is also possible that he recorded remembered traditions some eight years after the event, most likely from participants. Most intriguing is the possibility that he was an eye-witness to the battle, which is suggested by the sense of immediacy with which he described the battle. Of these two sources, Ferishta is the less trustworthy, not only because he was writing 90 years after the fact, but because he had to account for the crushing defeat of his patron's own great grandfather.

a. Description of Raya's Army:

Fifty thousand scouts went three leagues (5.556 km is one league) in front of the army. Their job was to spy out the country in front and always maintain that distance. On the flanks of the scouts two thousand

horsemen armed with bows advanced. A great number of merchants with necessary supplies for the army also accompanied. The army consisted of about a million of men, if the camp-followers be included. The fighting men numbered about 736,000 with 32,600 horses and 550 elephants.

b. Initial Phases of Raichur Campaign:

The chief of the guard Pemmasani Ramalinga Nayaka (also known as Cama Nayak) led the advance with thirty thousand infantry (archers, men with shields, musqueteers and spearmen) and a thousand horse and his elephants. After him went the contingents of Timmappa Nayaka, Adapa Nayaka, Kumara Virayya, and Ganda Raya, the governor of the city of Vijayanagar. The other well-known nayakas were Rana Jagadeva, Rayachuri Rami Nayudu, Hande Mallaraya, Boya Ramappa, Saluva Nayudu, Tipparasu Ayyappa Nayudu, Kotikam Viswanatha Nayudu, Chevvappa Nayudu, Akkappa Nayudu, Krishnappa Nayudu, Velugoti Yachama Nayudu, Kannada Basavappa Nayudu, Saluva Mekaraja, Matla Ananta Raja, Bommireddy Nagareddy, Basava Reddy, Vithalappa Nayudu and Veerama Raja. All their soldiers were well armed, the archers and musqueteers with their quilted tunics and the shieldmen with their swords and poignards in their girdles. The shields were so large that there was no need for armour to protect the body.

The horses were in full clothing and elephants had large howdahs from which four men fight on each side of them. The elephants were completely clothed. Sharp knives were fastened to their tusks. Several cannon were also taken. About twenty thousand washermen and courtesans accompanied the army. In the rear with the king, but always on the road in front of him, twelve thousand men with leather water bags placed themselves along the road to give water to those in need.

The King proceeded until he arrived at the town of Mallayyabanda (Maliyabad), which is a league from the city of Raichur. A royal tent was pitched behind a makeshift hedge of brush-wood and thorns. The army was given rest to overcome the fatigue of the march.

According to Nunes, Krishnadeva Raya entrusted one of his Muslim merchants with 40,000 gold coins to buy warhorses from the seaport of Goa, then under Portuguese control. But instead of doing that, the merchant absconded with the money to Bijapur. This so enraged Krishnadeva Raya that he decided to use the incident as an excuse to invade the fortified city of Raichur, which he and his predecessors at Vijayanagara had long coveted. So in early 1520 the king moved north with an immense force of 27,000 cavalry and over a half million infantry. The bulk of the army consisted of archers, swordsmen, war elephants, and only "several" cannon.

By contrast, Ismail Adil Shah had fortified Raichur with 200 heavy cannon and many smaller cannon, positioning these artillery between the thirty bastions of the fort's outer wall. Whereas the fort's defenders fired on Vijayanagara's forces with their cannon and matchlocks, the besiegers used no artillery against Raichur's walls. Instead, Krishnadeva Raya ordered his commanders to offer their men monetary inducements to approach the walls directly and dismantle them with crowbars and pickaxes, paying them in sums proportionate to the size of the stones they dismantled. Of course, many were killed as they hacked away at the walls by hand.

In this dreary manner, the siege dragged on for three months. Then in early May, while the siege was still in progress, Krishnadeva Raya learned that Ismail Adil Khan had marched down from Bijapur to relieve the embattled fort and was camped on the northern side of the Krishna river. Suspending the siege of Raichur, the king moved his army up to the Krishna river to prevent the sultan's forces from entering the Raichur plain.

c. The battle proper:

The army upon nearing the fort of Raichur pitched the camp on the eastern side of that citadel and began the siege. After an interval Raya received intelligence of the arrival of Adil Shah on the north side of the Krishna, with an army of 140,000 horse and foot. The sultan rested his troops for a few days, crossed the river, advanced to within nine miles of Raichur and entrenched himself there leaving the river about five miles behind him.

On Saturday morning, May 19, in the year 1520 AD the forces became engaged. Krishnadevaraya ordered an advance to his immediate front of the two forward divisions. Their attack was successful and the Muslims were driven back to their trenches. The Sultan opened fire from the guns that he had previously held in reserve and caused great loss in the close ranks of the Hindus. The Raya's troops fell back in face of formidable bombardment and at once the Muslims charged them. The retreat was changed to a rout, and for a mile and a half to their direct front the Sultan's cavalry chased the Raya's forces belonging to the first line.

Krishnadevaraya, who commanded the second line, rallied the troops, collected about him a number of the nayaks, and determined to face death with the bravery that had always characterized him, plunged into the battle. Mounting his horse, he ordered a forward movement of the whole of his remaining divisions, and charged the now disordered ranks of the Muslims. This resulted in complete success and the Sultan's army got scattered and fled before the Hindu onslaught way back to, and into the river, where a great slaughter took place.

Krishnadevaraya then crossed the river and seized the Shah's camp, while the Shah himself with the help of Asad Khan escaped and fled from the field on an elephant. While being driven back towards the river, Salabat Khan, the Shah's general, made a valiant attempt to retrieve the fortunes of the day. Salabat Khan lost his horse, but at once mounted another and pressed on. The little force was, however, surrounded and annihilated. The general was made prisoner. Like Firishta, Nunes reports the horrific slaughter that then took place by the river, in the midst of which Isma'il jumped on his elephant and barely escaped with this life.

It is clear that Ismail had brought considerable ordnance from Bijapur down to the battlefield, for Nunes reports that his retreating army had to abandon 400 heavy cannon and 500 small cannon, in addition to 4,000 warhorses and 100 elephants. In fact Ismail boldly crossed the Krishna River because he was confident that the great strength of his artillery would give him a quick victory over his adversary's cavalry and infantry. And in fact, the sultan's opening barrage did give him temporary field advantage. On the other hand, Krishnadeva Raya, who crushed his opponent in that engagement, used no artillery or matchlocks. Similarly, in his siege of Raichur, which was heavily defended with cannon, the king of Vijayanagara used no cannon to bombard the fort's walls. Rather, he paid his men to claw it down with crowbars and pickaxes.

So when Krishna Raya returned to Raichur, he resumed this same, laborious method of besieging the fort. Except this time a new factor enters the stage. This is the appearance of a group of twenty Portuguese mercenaries who, led by one Cristovao de Figueiredo, had joined Krishna Raya's forces as matchlockmen. Noticing how fearlessly Raichur's defenders roamed about the fort's walls, fully exposed to the view of the besiegers, de Figueiredo and his men began picking them off with their matchlocks, doubtless the Indo-Portuguese guns recently manufactured in nearby Goa. Significantly, Nunes reports that up to that point the defenders had never seen men killed with firearms. This is dramatic evidence of the earliest appearance of gunpowder in the Indian interior.

A turning point in the siege came on June 14, when the governor of the city, seeking a better view of exactly where the Portuguese snipers were positioned, unwisely leaned out in front of one of the battlements and was instantly killed by a matchlock shot that struck his forehead. This snapped the morale of Raichur's defenders, who promptly abandoned the wall. The next day the fort's defenders opened the city gate and filed out, beginning for mercy. And the following day, June 16, Krishna Raya rode into the city and spoke to the gathered townspeople, generously assuring the city's leaders that their property would be respected. He even gave them the option of leaving the city with their movable property, if they so wished. Thus ended the battle's military phase.

d. Post Conflict Diplomacy:

Upon returning from Raichur to Vijayanagara, Krishnadeva Raya devoted himself to several weeks of non-stop festivities to celebrate his crushing defeat of Ismail Adil Khan. When this was over, an ambassador

from the sultan's court arrived at his court to negotiate a final settlement between the two kings. Krishnadeva Raya clearly relished this moment of triumph.

First, he kept the ambassador waiting for a full month before admitting him for private audience. When he finally got his audience with the king, the ambassador conveyed to the king an extraordinary request from Ismail Adil Khan, namely, that the sultan would remain the king's enduring and loyal friend if only Krishna Raya would restore to Ismail the city of Raichur, together with all the artillery, tents, horses, and elephants that the sultan had lost in the battle.

Considering that the sultan had been thoroughly defeated both on the battlefield and at Raichur fort, this was a stunning request, which took a lot of chutzpah to make. Most diplomats would have been turned out of court for making such an outrageous request. But Krishna Raya, basking in his triumph, decided to play the ambassador by agreeing to all the requests of his defeated adversary. Indeed, he went one more. He even offered to return to the sultan his highest ranking officer, Salabat Khan, who had been captured in the debacle by the Krishna River and was now in languishing in the Vijayanagara jail.

But there was one catch. To close the deal, Ismail Adil Khan would first have to come down to Vijayanagara and kiss the king's foot.

When this proposal was conveyed to the sultan, Ismail replied through his ambassador that he was "of full mind joyfully to do that which the King wished." Regrettably, though, it was not possible for him legally to enter another king's sovereign territory. Therefore, he would not be able to kiss the king's foot.

On hearing this, Krishna Raya graciously offered to accommodate the sultan's concerns by meeting him at their common border near the fort of Mudgal, located midway between Bijapur and Vijayanagara. There, on the border, the sultan could kiss the king's foot. He made immediate preparations to proceed straight to the border town of Mudgal. Accompanying him north was a formidable army, doubtless intended to focus the mind of the sultan. But Ismail, who had no intention of journeying to Mudgal or of ever enduring the humiliation of kissing the king's foot, stalled and prevaricated while his messengers notified Krishnadeva Raya that the sultan was at that very moment on his way and would reach Mudgal very soon.

However, when it became clear that Ismail was not going to present himself at the border, Krishnadeva Raya opted for an alternative course of action, namely, of bringing his foot to the sultan, so that the latter could kiss it in his own domain – indeed, in his own palace – without having to travel anywhere. So the king and his army entered the sultan's territory, moving all the way up to the capital city, Bijapur city, which the sultan prudently vacated before the king's arrival. With Ismail absent, Krishnadeva Raya's men proceeded to damage several of the city's prominent houses, on the grounds that they needed firewood. When Ismail protested, through envoys, Krishna Raya replied that he had been unable to restrain his men from their destructive activities. Eventually the king, satisfied that he had humiliated his adversary sufficiently, left Bijapur and returned to his own capital of Vijayanagara.

4. AFTERMATHS:

The victory caused other Sultans in Deccan to come together and consider a combination by the aid of which the Vijayanagar Empire was finally overthrown (Battle of Tallikota).

Furthermore, the victory greatly affected the Hindus by instilling in them a spirit of pride and arrogance, which added fuel to the fire, caused them to become intolerable to their neighbours, and accelerated the downfall of Vijayanagar.

The war also affected the fortunes of the Portuguese on the west coast. Goa rose and fell simultaneously with the rise and fall of the Vijayanagar dynasty because their entire trade depended on Hindu support. This is a point frequently left unnoticed by writers on Portuguese colonial history.

When Vijayanagar, with its grandeur, luxury, great wealth and its enormous armies, was at the height of its power, the foreign traders were eminently successful and when Vijayanagar fell, and the city became desolate and depopulated, the foreign traders had no market for their goods, and trade decayed. Thus, Battle of Raichur is one of the highest watermarks of Indian Kings against invading Muslim rulers.

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