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VIJAYANAGARA RULE : PROCESS OF COLONIZATION OF TAMIL COUNTRY

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Abstract:

The conquest and colonization of the Tamil Country by the Kings of Vijayanagara have not received sufficient attention in the field of South Indian History. How and when the Tamil Country was conquered and what kind of administrative system was introduced by them, remain interesting problems. The generally accepted date of the foundation of Vijayanagara is A. D. 1336 during the Reign of the Hoysala Ruler, Ballala III. After his lamented death in A. D. 1342 in his struggle with Sultan Ghias-ud-din of Madura (1341-42) at the Battle of Kannanur-Kuppam and after the mysterious disappearance of his son, Ballala IV, in about A. D. 1346, Harihara I regarded himself as the natural heir to the Hoysalas in the Karnataka Region which formed the nucleus of the Kingdom of Vijayanagara. The Rise of Vijayanagara coincided with the establishment of two Independent States in Tamil Country - Rajagambira Rajyam by the Sambuvarayas and Madurai Sultanate by the Afghans.

KEY WORDS:

Vijayanagara, Kingdom, Mabar , Tamil Country, Nayak, Portuguese, Badagas, Bakan

INTRODUCTION:

RISE OF HINDU EMPIRE

The Muslim Expansion to the South, was challenged by the rise of a Hindu Empire in Vijayanagara. The Sangama Brothers, Harihara and Bukka I, were determined to uphold the Hindu Dharma and founded Vijayanagara, the City of Victory, in 1336 on the banks of the River Tungabhadra as the Capital of their tiny Kingdom of Kampili.¹ It grew into a great empire and extended its sway from the land of the Kannadigas to the land of the Telugus and Tamils. As the Capital of the vast empire which extended throughout most of Southern India, Vijayanagara was inhabited by diverse people from different provinces.² The City of Vijayanagara, far north of Tamil Country, became the Centre of all Political Activities in the once independent Tamil Country.³

SOURCE FOR THE COLONIZATION OF TAMIL COUNTRY

Multi-ethnic composition of the City's inhabitants was manifested in a variety of languages, social customs and religious beliefs, which replicated, in a microcosmic form, those of the whole Empire.⁴ Place names, inscriptions in different languages, works of art, monuments of architecture, a vast wealth of

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literature in Sanskrit, Telugu and other languages and accounts of foreign travelers, form an abundant source of information for the history of Tamil Country under Vijayanagara.

KAMPANA'S EXPEDITION

It was after Ballala IV that Harihara I assumed royal powers and it must be after A. D. 1346 that parts of the Tamil Country came under his Rule. The two important States that possessed political power simultaneously with the rise and growth of Vijayanagara were the Sambuvaraya Kingdom of Padaividu and the Sultanate of Madurai. Parts of the modern Districts of Chittoor, Chingleput, North and South Arcots formed the Sambuvaraya State. Roughly, the region south of the River Coleroon as far as Ramesvaram was under the Sultanate of Madurai.⁵

The Muslim Historian Shamsi-Siraj-Afif, who wrote the history of the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlak (1351-1388), mentions an important event connected with the history of the Sultanate of Madurai. "Soon after his accession (Firoz Shah) while the Sultan was at Delhi attending to the affairs of his kingdom, ambassadors from Mabar⁶ came to state a grievance to him. One Qurbat Hasan Kangu was the Sultan of Madurai, when Sultan Firoz Shah succeeded Muhammad-binTughlak, made himself despicable in the eyes of his subjects by decking himself with female ornaments and making himself notorious by other indecent actions. So, the people of Mabar rose in revolt against the Sultan.

A neighbouring chief, Bakan, at the head of a body of men and elephants, marched into Mabar and made Qurbat Hasan Kangu prisoner; he (Bakan) made himself master of all Ma'bar which had belonged to the Muslims, their women suffered violence and captivity at the hands of the Hindus and Bakan established himself as the ruler of Mabar".⁷

Bakan was identified with Kumara Kampana and regarded Qurbat Hasan as the Last Sultan of Madurai who ruled from A. D.1353 to 1371.⁸ But this identification of Bakan with Kumara Kampana is a far fetched one and it is not possible to prove that Qurbat Hasan was the Sultan of Madurai from A. D. 1353 to 1371. It was maintained subsequently that Kumara Kampana did not invade Madura before A. D. 1371 and that the Sultan who was defeated by him was not Qurbat Hasan but one Fakhruddin Mubrak Shah. The name Bakan, mentioned by Shamsi-Siraj-Afif agrees with Bukka who seems to have been sent by his elder brother against Madurai.

Harihara I regarded himself as the elevator of the House of the Hoysala Ballala and it became his bounden duty to avenge the death of Ballala III at the Battle of Kannanur-Kuppam. Therefore, the earliest invasion of the Tamil Country happened between A.D. 1344 and 1356, which is the period of the break in the coinage under Madurai Sultanate and it was after this successful campaign that Harihara I must have issued his Komal Grant.

This is a solitary Copper Plate Grant of Harihara I, hailing from Komal (Mayavaram Taluk, Tanjore Dt.). Only the last plate of this Grant is available and other details about the donor and the date are not available. All that could be said about the Grant is that it registers the gift of the village of Chittamuru to some Brahmins.⁹ At any rate, this epigraphical evidence could be used to maintain that the earliest invasion of the Tamil Country happened during the reign of Harihara I (1336-1355) under the leadership of his younger brother, Bukka I. But this conquest of Madurai by Bukka I during the time of Qurbat Hasan was a short lived one.

Adil Shah, who ruled Madurai from 1356-1367, asserted himself soon after the withdrawal of the Vijayanagara Army under Bukka. Even before the first invasion against Madurai in the south, the region around the Tirupati Hills in the Tamil Country seems to have come under the early rulers of the Sangama Dynasty.

Savana Udaiyar, the son of Kampa I, was ruling from Udayagiri from A. D. 1347 as the "Lord of the Eastern Ocean," In the Tamil Country and his inscriptions are dated from his 4th to his 16th regnal years, and they are found at Tirupalaivanam, Tiruvotriyur and Neyyadippakkam in the present Chingleput District and at Kalahasti. Nos. 178 and 179 of the Tirupati Inscriptions belong to the early period of the reign of Bukka I.¹⁰ It maintained that the northernmost part of the Tamil Country, the region around Tirupati, must have formed part of Vijayanagara, right from the time of Harihara I. The territory must have passed under his Rule automatically after the decline of the Hoysalas.¹¹

The Hoysalas made a determined attempt to liberate the Madurai Country from Afghan tyranny but failed. The Rayas of Vijayanagara, as a power from Karnataka, considered themselves as the logical successors of the Hoysalas and decided to complete the task that the latter left unfinished in the Tamil Country. Further, what the Sultans of Madurai did in the country appeared intolerable, for they desecrated the temples, raided the agraharas and offended Hindu sentiments. As Champions of the Hindu Faith, the Rulers of Vijayanagara took it as their duty to respond to appeals from Hindu Chiefs of the far south and destroy the Muslim Authority. Added to these, the Rayas were guided by an ambition to extend their

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imperial sway to the entire Peninsula.

This required the annexation of the Madurai Sultanate as well as the Hindu States in Tondaimandalam and Kongu Nadu as well. The forces of Vijayanagara undertook a series of expeditions for the suppression of the powers in the Tamil Country. Bukka I, the Emperor, entrusted the task of conquest to his son, Vira Kampana. Ganga Devi, wife of Kampana, in her Madura Vijayam and Rajanatha in his, Saluvabhyudayam, describe Kampana's exploits, though they were mostly exaggerated.

The Madampakkam Inscription too refers to Kampana's Invasion of the Tamil Country. According to Ganga Devi, Bukka advised his son to march against the Sambuvaraya and establish himself at Kanchi. "If you subdue the Vanniya Ruler, it would be easy for you to break the power of the Muslims at Madurai".¹² Accordingly, in 1362, Kampana led the army against the Sambuvarayas and attacked their Capital, Virinchipuram.

The defenders escaped to their stronghold in Rajagambiramalai but were forced to surrender. After this victory, Kampana occupied Tiruvannamalai and Kanchi. These developments marked the end of Sambuvaraya Supremacy in Tondaimandalam.¹³

By different stages, Kampana occupied Kongu Desa and Cholamandalam. There are two inscriptions of Kumara Kampana in Kongu Desa and two in Thanjavur. These indicate that Kampana acquired possession of Kongu Desa before he marched to Madurai and he annexed this territory a decade after his victory over the Sambuvarayas. These territorial gains prepared the ground for the expedition to Madurai.

CONQUEST OF MADURAI

The Madura Vijayam of Ganga Devi refers to the atrocities committed by the Sultans of Madurai and gives legitimacy to Kampana's Expedition to the Far South. According to a tradition given in this work, a mysterious lady appeared before him, narrated the wicked deeds of the Muslims and produced a mighty sword, the symbol of Pandya Sovereignty.¹⁴ Then she said, "Now the Pandya line has lost its powers, Sage Agasthya despatched this to be placed in your strong Hands".

After blessing Kampana in his mission, she disappeared.¹⁵ Accordingly in 1370, Kampana marched from Senji on his southern expedition. After restoring worship in Srirangam Temple, the army entered Madurai Country. In the battles at Samayavaram and Kannanur- Kuppam, the invading army defeated the Muslim Forces.

Then he restored God Sriranganatha at Srirangam and Hoysaleswara at Kannanur-Kuppam and marched towards Madurai. Near Madurai in 1371, the Muslims again suffered a defeat and the Sultan died fighting. From a break in the issue of coins from Madurai, it is believed that the victim was Sultan Mubarak Shah. Yet the Sultanate was not destroyed. The successors of Mubarak Shah continued to hold possession of parts of the territory. The last Sultan was Sikandar Shah. Emperor Harihara (1376- 1404) of Vijayanagara defeated and killed the Sultan and completed the conquest of Madurai Country by 1378 A.D.¹⁶

The Viceroyalty of Kumara Kampana was regarded as the brightest chapter in the History of Vijayanagara Rule in the Tamil Country. Kampana saved the land from Muslim Misrule, protected temples, established Hindu dharma and restored peace and order. But these were not very real. True that he extended the Vijayanagara Rule to the South. Yet as a conqueror, he made no distinction between the Hindu Sambuvarayas and the Muslim Afghans. Besides, he failed to safeguard the interests of his subjects, for he gave away their lands for the benefit of temples and agraharas.

The Hindu Dharma meant the preservation of caste based social inequality, but this was a reactionary concept, calculated to harm social progress. Restoration of law and order was a myth, for he and his successors had to send a series of expeditions to quell Tamil Uprisings. At the most, he brought about a change and it was from one foreign rule to another, as a result of which the Tamil Country continued to languish under Kannada - Telugu Domination.¹⁷

VIJAYANAGARARULE

Nevertheless, by the last decade of the Fourteenth Century, the City state of Vijayanagara transformed itself into an Empire. Harihara II (1379-1406), the third ruler, assumed imperial titles. The Tamil Country was formed into a Province or Mahamandala under a Mahamandaleswara or Viceroy with Headquarters at Mulbagal.

In subsequent times, Chandragiri was made the Capital of the Province. Kampana Udaiyar served as the first Mahamandaleswara of the Tamil Province from 1352 to 1374 and since then, Virupanna Udaiyar upto 1400. At different times, Kampana, his son Empana and his nephew Prakasa were in charge of local administration at Madurai. Kampana left behind him as many as 132 inscriptions in the Tamil Country.

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They usually refer to the gifts that he made to temples and agraharas.

Kampana conquered the Tamil Country and reorganised the administration. Though he defeated the Sambuvarayas, he allowed their chief Rajanarayana to rule over the territory as a Vassal of Vijayanagara. Upon the death of this ruler, Kampana established his direct authority over the region. There is a version that he searched for the Pandyas and restored them to the Throne of Madurai. But there is no evidence to support this view. With the fall of Madurai to the Muslims, the Pandyas fled the Capital and by 1371 there were no Pandyas at Madurai.

The Madurai Sthala Varalaru makes it clear that from the year 1371, Kampana, his son Empana and his nephew Prakasa Udaiyar, ruled over Madurai for a period of thirty three years. The Tirukkalakudi Inscription states that "Kampana Udaiyar came on his southern expedition, destroyed the Tulukkans and established orderly government throughout the country. He appointed many Nayakkanmars for inspection and supervision, so that worship in all temples might be revived as of old". Thus, Madurai passed under Vijayanagara Rule, with temples gaining importance in their administration.

However, internal and external threats presented challenges to the extension and consolidation of Vijayanagara Authority. The Cholas reorganised their declining resources and sought to re-establish their influence. The Rulers of Thennarasu Nadu in Tiruchirapalli - Ramanathapuram Area defied the overlordship of the Rayas. The Paravas of the Fishery Coast embraced Christianity and transferred their loyalty to Portugal. The Pandyas were divided into two branches-one at Tenkasi and another at Kayattar.

The frequent conflicts between the two houses created disorder in the land. While the Pandyas of Tenkasi accepted the overlordship of Vijayanagara, the Pandyas of Kayattar allied themselves with the rebel powers.¹⁸ In the south-western region the chiefs of Travancore, referred to as Pancha Tiruvadis, not only warred against each other but also committed aggressions on the Pandya Country eastward. The Raja of Venad in South Travancore, occupied a large part of Tenkasi and established a Second Capital at Kalakkad. As a result, the Rayas of Vijayanagara could not for long assert their authority in the Far South. The task appeared difficult as the Gajapatis of Orissa and the Sultans of Bahmini Kingdom committed aggression on Vijayanagara across the northern frontier.

During the reign of Emperor Harihara II, his Viceroy Virupanna fought against the Cholas and the Pandyas, as they made a bid to revive their power. But they were defeated and reduced to submission. By mid Fifteenth Century, the Gajapati of Orissa and the Sultan of Bahmini Kingdom made deep inroads into Vijayanagara. The forces of Orissa overran Udayagiri and advanced to Kanchi.

They looted the temples and returned with a rich booty. The Banas, led by their Chief Banadhirayan, occupied Kanchi, but they were driven out by Narasimha Saluva, the Governor. This was followed by a Bahmini Invasion. The forces of Sultan Muhammed III advanced to Kanchi and looted the temples. Despite threats from the north and in view of the disturbed conditions in the Far South, Narasa Nayaka, Ruler of Vijayanagara, led an expedition to Madurai in 1497.

He subdued the Maravas and the Pandyas and collected tribute. However, after his return, the Tamil Powers defied the Imperial Authority. Therefore, Emperor Krishna Deva Raya (1509-30) sent his forces under the command of three generals, Vaiayppa Nayaka, Vijayaraghava Nayaka and Venkatappa Nayaka, directing them to re-establish order in Senji, Thanjavur and Madurai respectively. They subdued the rebel powers, enforced the Imperial Authority and assumed power as Nayaks in these areas. As a result, the Tamil Country was divided into three Nayakships, with Headquarters at Senji, Thanjavur and Madurai while the northern region with Chandragiri as Capital, continued under the Imperial Rule. Yet, due to hostile combinations, military operations had to be resumed.

RESISTANCE OF THE TAMILS

Sellappa Seluva Nayaka, the Governor of Cholamandalam, Tumbichi Nayaka of Paramakudi and Udaya Martanda Varma of Trivancore formed an alliance against Vijayanagara. Sellappa supported Achyuta Raya against Rama Raya to become the Emperor. But after succeeding to the throne, he settled the differences with his rival Rama Raya and ignored Sellappa. Enraged at this, Sellappa turned a rebel. Defeated by the imperial forces, he fled southward and supported by Travancore, occupied Tenkasi from the Pandyas. Sri Vallabha, the Pandyan King, appealed to Achyuta Raya for protection. Accordingly, the Raya marched to Tiruvannamalai and directed the military operations against the rebel powers. Taking command of the army, Chinna Tirumala defeated the Travancore Forces at Aramboli, restored Sri Vallabha to the Pandyan Throne, and forced Sellappa and Tumbichi Nayaka to surrender. The grateful Sri Vallabha gave his daughter in marriage to Achyuta Raya.

During the period of internal trouble that followed the death of Achyuta Raya, the Southern Powers made another bid to overthrow the authority of Vijayanagara. Therefore, Rama Raya, the Minister of Emperor Sadasiva Raya, sent a powerful expedition under the joint command of two brothers, Rama

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Raya Vitthala and Chinna Timma in 1544. Marching from Chandragiri, the army reached Nagore and commenced operations against the Catholics.

The forces raided and plundered the Christian Settlements. With the booty that they collected, they reached Srirangam and donated it to the deity. Crossing the Kaveri, the army took the field against the rebel powers of Thennarasu Nadu, subdued them and forced them to pay tribute. Advancing further south, the invading forces defeated the Pandyas of Kayattar and restored the territories that they occupied, to the Pandyas of Tenkasi. Through Aralvaimoli, Vithala, with his forces, entered Trivancore and wrought havoc. Francis Xavier had given an account of the loss to life and property.

TAMBRAPARANI PILLAR

The Badagas, as the Vijayanagara Forces were referred to, desolated the villages and committed atrocities. The inhabitants were put to death or were forced to find refuge in forests. Two inscriptions on the Suchindram Temple indicate that the forces of Travancore took their stand at Kottar, but they were defeated. The Raja accepted loyalty to Vijayanagara, paid tribute and ceded his territories on the eastern side of the hills to the Pandyas of Tenkasi. Vithala erected a pillar of victory on the banks of the Tambraparni to commemorate this victory.¹⁹

RAID ON PEARL FISHERY COAST

In 1545, Vithala marched to the Fishery Coast. The Portuguese had their settlements at Manappadu, Punnaikoil, Vambar and Tutucorin. They converted the Paravas to the Catholic Religion, secured their loyalty and collected taxes. The loss of revenue from pearl fisheries and the complaints of the Brahmins of Tiruchendur against the Christians, irked the Rayas. The letters of Francis Xavier suggest that the Badagas overran the Fishery Coast and raided the villages. Yet no major victory could be won, as the Christians escaped to the forests and islands. On the withdrawal of the forces, the Portuguese and the Paravas returned to the coast.

The Portuguese now dared to collect taxes from the pilgrims going to Rameswaram. Therefore, Vithala won the aid of a Muslim Pirate of Malabar by name, Irapali, for a joint operation against the Portuguese from land and sea. In 1553, as a result of simultaneous operations from land and sea, the Portuguese were defeated. Their shops were destroyed and settlements were captured. The Paravas now agreed to pay a tribute of 70,000 pagodas to Vijayanagara.

Thereupon, the Portuguese sent a relief expedition from Kochi, defeated the Muslims and secured the release of the prisoners of war. This came as a serious blow to the prestige of Vijayanagara and emboldened the Raja of Travancore to defy the Imperial Authority. Vithala sent an expedition to Travancore, but it suffered reverses.²⁰ The military operations undertaken on a large scale indicated the increasing opposition that the Badagas encountered in the Tamil Country. The repeated expeditions caused destruction of property and loss of life on an extensive scale. Though they made their advent as saviours against the Muslims, the Rayas did nothing to win the confidence of the Tamils. They could maintain their authority so long as they could maintain their military presence in the country.

In 1565, the Deccan Sultans defeated the forces of Vijayanagara near Talikota. As a result, the Rayas lost much of their influence and the Empire entered the stage of decline. Sanjay Subrahmaniam says, exchange of insults, "wide ranging and non-sectarian," particularly between Ramaraya and Husain Nizam Shah had precipitated the battle.²¹ The local governors, the Nayaks, took advantage of the situation and asserted their independence. The result was the rise of the Nayak Kingdoms of Senji, Tanjore and, Madurai in the Tamil Country.²²

The Vijayanagara Kingdom ruled a substantial part of the Southern Peninsula of India for three centuries, beginning in the middle of the Fourteenth, and during this epoch, this Indian Society was transformed from its medieval past toward its modern, colonial future.²³

To conclude, the Vijayanagara Period spanning more than three centuries forms an important Chapter in the history of Tamil Country. In its heyday of colonization, it comprised the whole of the four southern provinces of Karnataka, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The general history of the Vijayanagara period has been studied in good detail by many scholars. It is no more a 'Forgotten Empire' as it was certainly so in the 1920s when Robert Sewell wrote his *A Forgotten Empire*. The first half of the Fourteenth Century following the fall of the Pandya Empire was a period of confusion and Tamil Country was subjected to three Muslim attacks from the north. There were some chiefs ruling here and there. Then followed a short-lived Muslim Sultanate at Madurai. Within a couple decades of the establishment of the Vijayanagara rule in 1336, Tamil Country was colonized and became a part of the Vijayanagara Empire and continued to be so until the time of Krishnadevaraya. Thereafter the local Nayaks asserted their

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independence and the ties between Tamil Country and Vijayanagara became a nominal one. The successors of Krishnadevaraya ruled over most parts South India until the fateful battle of Talikota in 1565 which put an end to the glory of Vijayanagara in Tamil Country. The question whether it can be considered as a separate province is difficult to answer. If there were such provinces, there is no word in inscriptions to denote them. But Tamil Country may be treated as a province in the sense of a separate administrative division, from the fact that a mahamandalesvara was separately in charge of this.

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