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RESEARCH ARTICLE

VIJAYANAGAR KINGSHIP AND GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

What was the idea of Vijayanagar kingship because it is a difficult to express the full concept of kingship has it existed that point of time it was secondly not tirely moblshed by the expertective it was monarchy tempted with dharma the Vijayanagar rulers was to be understand in relation to the times in which the ruled the Vijayanagar rulers didn't adapted this source of harson they have atmost at mention solving law and traditions it was the moral law which was very much a part of culture this was consider has dharma by the Vijayanagar rule it was use a moral law that act has a conduct to use over which entire hindu culture was bridge

Keywords: Vijayanagar, Goverments, Dharma, Foundation, Tradition, Culture, Kingdom, Promotion, Administration, Discussion, Principles, Custom, Religion, Philisophy, Dynasty, Statement, Territory, Treasurer, Executed, Monarchy, Abdul Rasik, Saluva Narasimha, Harihara, Devaraya, Krishnadevaraya etc..., Mahaprathana, Council, Mahamandalam, Nadu, Kottam, Hindu, Chieftains.

Introduction

The rulers of Vijayanagara (from about 1336 A.D.) were inspired by a number of ideals which they tried to implement during their rule in South India. The three important ideals were protection, preservation and promotion of people's rule besides providing patronage to the development of indigenous culture and soical institutions. Religious institutions, traditional learning and arts and literature flourished in all its glory. Inscriptions and contemporary literature reveal that the Vijayanagara rulers were

steadfast in their devition to the implementation of these ideals which resulted in the emergence of a benign monarchy that was backed by the common people.

Vijayanagara Kingship and the Government

The raja dharma of the Vijayanagara times was based on the king's conscience and the need to uphold justice and truth. The ideal of monarcy is based on factors like law, tradition and expediency. Expediency as the word itself means is an action which is an outcome of speedy decision often not based on any set of rules. The decision is one of

solving the immediate needs of the situation or else it would lead to disorder and chaos. Expediency is not based on law or precedence or tradition or principle. The Vijayanagara rulers did not adopt this course of action. They gave almost attention to following law and tradition. It was moral law, which was very much a part of our culture. This was considered as dharma by the Vijayanagara rulers. It was this moral law that acted as the foundation over which the entire edifice of hindu culture was built .

Several records of the period reveal the implementation of this moral law by the kings. He was guided by the principle of providing good government to the people. He governed the kingdom like a further putting down the evil and upholding the good (Dushtha nigraha sishtha-pratipalana). He is described in records as the protector of the oppressed and the benefactor of the poor .

This principle of protection to the people was the guiding force for the king's activities. He was constantly reminded of the fact that in the happiness of his subjects he should seek his own happiness. Although he was surrounded by pomp and pangentry which was part of the monarchy, the Vijayanagara king was generally free of pride, haughtiness and conceit. The law of the land, tradition, custom, the council of ministers and dharma acted as restraints and guided the king to work for the benefit of the people. In this, religion played a significant part. In medieval India religion was linked with philosophy and this code of philosophy was nothing but dharma which a king could not ignore.

Another important feature of the Vijayanagara kingship was its organic nature which had unified kingship in the structure of the state. It was a part and parcel of the system and yet had a unique and distributive function of its own. Its paramountcy was accepted by all, and all other functionaries, whether Yuvaraja, Queen, Mahapradhanas or Upa-pradhanas were all subsidiary to him. The king functioned only in unison with saptanga or seven characteristics of the state viz. the King, the Ministers, the Priest, the Army, the Territory, the Treasurer and the Ally. Few dynasties of Karnataka exhibited greater harmony among the

successful functioning of the saptangas than the dynasties that ruled over Vijayanagara.

The Vijayanagara record is exceedingly refreshing. Although four different dynasties ruled over Vijayanagara a majority of the rulers could be rated as top monarchs. Judged particularly in the context of the time and the opposition from the neighbouring rulers, these monarchs played the political game with utmost skill and strictly in accordance with the rules and regulations laid down by the ancient thinkers like Manu, Kautilya, Yajnavalkya and others. This is amply borne out by the observations made by the foreign visitors to Vijayanagara empire. Suffice it to mention here the statement made by the persian visitor Abdur Razzak that the eye has not met another city like this. The prosperity in the capital, in the provincial towns and in villages was largely the result of the leadership given by the Vijayanagar monarchs and complimented well by other constituents of the state. The King was only a part in it, although a very important one . Suffice it to recall here , that some of the great rulers like Harihara-I, Bukka-I, Devaraya-I, Devaraya-II, Saluva-Narasimha, Krishnadevaraya, Achyutaraya and the defacto ruler Ramaraya contributed to the efficient functioning of Kingship in Vijayanagara State. Therefore, the King was an integral part of the system and he did not function on his own independent of other factors, while at the same time giving leadership to the functioning of the other constituents of the state.

Some of the writers have confidently asserted that the proprietary right on the soil according to the Hindu view, always vested with the sovereign. The fact on the otherhand is, that it is exactly the reverse of the Hindu theory on the subject. Inscriptions of the times clearly establish the prevalence of private property. The provincial governors and their subordinates and the private individuals owning landed property made grants of villages and lands for the benefit of the Brahmins and temples. The person who owned the landed property also had the right to dispose it at his will. The Tiruppalakhuli inscription of Devaraya-II registers the interesting fact that the lands concerned which were service in ams were neither to be sold nor mortgaged by the parties concerned and also that whoever sold or mortgaged the land would

suffer the punishment that a traitor to the king suffers. The king had the inherent powers to resume the devadaya and the Brahmadaaya grants in the event of the abuse of the same.

The king was always assisted in his counsels by a Chief or a Prime Minister who is called in epigraphs as "Mahapradhana". The term Mahapradhana appears in the inscriptions of Bukka-I for the first time. The principal duty of the Prime-Minister was to advise the king both in peace and war. He was invariably the generalissimo of the forces of the king. There were Upapradhanas or Deputy Ministers who assisted the king in state matters .

The king ordinarily in consultation with the Council of Ministers either severally or collectively or both ways, made appointments of governors and nayaka chieftains to administer the various provinces and principalities in the Vijayanagara empire. Particularly the amaranayaka system that was evolved by the Vijayanagar rulers was highly innovative and suitable in the then prevailing political context. These governors and amaranayakas while administering their own provinces and principalities gave almost support and the best of help whenever the king required the same. One notices here while making a survey of the provincial rule under Vijayanagara, the prevalence of aristocracy under the benign patronage of monarchy.

A study of South Indian politics is incomplete without a reference to the village administration. Each village was administered by a village assembly, normally elected by the villagers. The village assemblies had enormous functions relating to property and taxation. Further, these bodies exercised the functions of a trustee, which accepted the management of charitable endowments both in kind and coin. These assemblies did enjoy a large measure of democratic spirit.

Another important self governing institution of the Vijayanagara times the temple was a good example of the excellent workmanship of the South Indian architect besides being a centre of South Indian culture. Innumerable inscriptions of the Vijayanagara

times throw a flood of light on the administrative aspects of a temple.

The South Indian temple was a powerful economic and social entity besides being a source of religious inspiration. It was one institution that was common both to the ruler and the people. enjoying the fullest advantages of their healthy cooperation, for by its very origin the temple was a corporation founded with full cooperation of the local public and the ruling monarch and his local subordinates. Royal patronage and popular cooperation took many forms but the most common thing was giving of villages and lands for the benefit of these temples. Whenever there were cases of embezzlement, by temple officers there were commissions appointed by the ruling king or his subordinates for enquiry and proper punishment of the culprits.

The Vijayanagar empire which was large in its extent was dotted with many inland towns and port towns both in the east and the west besides the provincial and district headquarters. These towns were administered ably by the officers and guilds. That there flourished hundreds of towns in the Vijayanagara empire is a clear proof of the prosperity that the whole empire enjoyed under the leadership of the Vijayanagara kings .

After examining in brief what the Vijayanagara state. I should like to share with you some of my own understandings of the Vijayanagara State relating to what it was not. It was not a policeraj or a military state or a dictatorship or despotism because it never rested on the mere physical force without roots in the soil or support from the masses. I should like to substantiate this point by making references to the titles assumed by the Vijayanagara monarchs as these titles clearly proclaim that the Vijayanagara monarchs never subscribed to any of these non-popular systems.

A perusal of the Vijayanagara epigraphs reveal that the rulers assumed many titles though none of them give the king a military halo. The early ruler Harihara-I in addition to usual titles called himself a Mahamandaleswara; Harihara-II assumed the epithets Maharajadhiraja and Rajapameshvara; Saluva

Narasimha called himself Misara-gandakatar Saluva; Krishnadevaraya assumed, in addition to the usual titles, the epithet Muru-rayara-ganda and Yavanarajya- sthapanacharya. Often the Vijayanagara rulers called themselves Sri-virav-pratapa. These titles reveal the indisputable sovereignty of the king.

Emperor Krishnadevaraya observed that “a king should always rule with an eye towards dharma. So skillfully fulfilling your dharma You get rid of your threefold debt and attain fame among your equals.” Thus the guiding policy of the monarch was the welfare of his subjects. Further, it is also very difficult to agree with the description of Vijayanagara as the nearest approach to a war-state. It is true that the Vijayanagara rulers required a large army to fight against the rulers who were keen on making inroads into Vijayanagara territory in the eastern parts, in the northern parts, the western parts and also the southern parts. The Reddis and the Gajapatis, the Bahmani Sultans, the Sultans of Madurai and the Portuguese were always on their toes to jump into the Vijayanagara territory.

As such the monarchs of Vijayanagara State had to keep the heads of the enemies down at the frontiers so that the larger part of the state enjoyed peace and progress. The rayas had literally to march from one battle field to another and to the third and so on. That was the political situation obtaining then. It was to the credit of the Vijayanagara monarchs that they were able to roll back the invading forces on many occasions. It was again the sagacity of the Vijayanagar monarchs to have created the nayankara system which enormously reduced the financial burden on the central treasury. The Amaranayakas had to maintain their own army and supply the same whenever the king required it. Besides, the Vijayanagara monarchs were wise enough to enlist for the war purposes the support of the hill tribes and the forest tribes who were not required to be maintained by the royal treasury. Mention be made of a large force provided to the king by the beda contingents in the Vijayanagara State. In view of these it is not biggest among them”. Further Stein observes that Shastri too perceived the state and society of Vijayanagara as fundamentally continuous with previous South Indian monarchies and societies,

appropriate to describe Vijayanagara as a war state. While the rulers and the commanders of the army were engaged in marching their troops, the subordinates of the king, the village and municipal administrative bodies and the guilds in the empire maintained peace and contributed to the progress of the people.

The very fact that the Vijayanagara monarchs chose Sri Virupaksha as their sign manual bears testimony to the faith that the rulers viewed god as the source of all inspiration and strength. As such the Vijayanagara rulers could never become dictators, despots and tyrants. The conformity achieved by the Vijayanagara rulers with the other constituents in the state at the central, provincial and local levels clearly shows that the rulers of Vijayanagara at no time harboured such wild concepts like a dictatorship or a police-raj or a despotic rule. Quite contrary to this the history of Vijayanagara bears eloquent testimony to the sharing of power by the monarchs with the other constituents of the state. Thus when all the saptangas were functioning fully in their respective spheres there was no scope even for any kind of a rule that had no roots in the popular support.

In his recent formulations about Vijayanagara in the work peasant state and society in Medieval South India, focussing his perspective from an earlier point in the medieval age of South India, the Western scholar Burton Stein viewed that the state and society of Vijayanagara, in basic structure was continuous with the preceding centuries of the medieval age i.e., Vijayanagara remained a “Segmentary” state and society; its kings - rayas exercised ritual sovereignty over an underpolity of great and small chieftains.

Leaving aside his oft-repeated segmentary terminology Stein saw the Vijayanagara age as harmonious with the view of K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, especially in his late characterisation of Vijayanagara polity as a “military confederation of many chieftaincies operating under the leadership of the though with some reservations. As a Tamil historian, he noted the decline of earlier institutions, and he attributed importance to the generalised threat posed by the Deccan Sultanates to Hindu societies in the

south which, among other things, resulted in Vijayanagara being “the nearest approach to a war state ever made by a Hindu Kingdom.”

These formulations namely segmentary state and society, the nearest approach to a war-state need a more careful analysis before agreeing or disagreeing with the same. A historian while arriving at such formulations relating to a state of any given period must take into account the compelling variables obtaining under given point of time which go to shape the nature of the state at that time. Another point that a historian writing on Indian history must keep in mind is the political thoughts, and institutions that span over centuries across the country that shaped the nature of the state and the life of the people, while at the same time accommodating changes within their folds. At no time were the Indian political institutions remained uninfluenced by the changing conditions and the societies remained unaffected by the changes taking place around them.

Conclusion

In the light of these, it is very difficult to agree with both the formulations. The “Segmentary” state and society formulation is too simplistic while the other “the nearest approach to a war state” is an overstatement. True, that Vijayanagara had a series of satellites operating and assisting the monarch. But

these chieftains were the creations of the monarch himself. These chieftains were given territories in return for regular payments of tributes and military services whenever called for. Any default in this regard on the part of the chieftain did not go unpunished by the Vijayanagara monarch. There have been instances where the chieftains were dispossessed of their chieftaincies, whenever the royal orders were disobeyed. Hence to call Vijayanagara state as a military confederation of many chieftains operating under the leadership of the biggest among them is apparently an overstatement. The king was the creator and the chieftains were the created ones.

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