



A STUDY RELATED TO THE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE RAYAS OF VIJAYANAGARA AND THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNORS

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Abstract

The history of Vijayanagara empire occupies periods of well over three centuries from 1336-1650 A.D. It marks the culmination of the achievements, political and cultural life of the people of South India, when they had not fallen under foreign domination. The empire at its greatest extent covered practically the whole of the modern presidency of Madras, (the present Chennai) the Indian states in the area included and extended for a time to Ceylon and parts of Orissa.

The Vijayanagara empire had to pursue a vigorous and vigilant diplomatic policy calculated to strengthen its position Hemmed in by the Muslims on the north, the Gajapatis, on the north east the frontiers of the empire and by the Portuguese on the coastal regions on the west and the east, from the beginning of the 16th century. The Vijayanagara kings had a difficult task,of course, religious fanaticism and racial prejudice to some extent influenced their relations with the Muslims, but it must be said that the Vijayanagara kings did not fall below the standards set up by the kings of ancient India in their diplomatic policy. One of the striking features of their diplomatic policy was the maintainance of frontier governorships.

Introduction

It was quite necessary in those days in view of the constant menace of foreign invasions into the Vijayanagara dominions and rebellions fomented from abroad.

The Portuguese never had any empire in India. They had few coastal towns and their authority never extended beyond a few miles of their naval bases. The only territorial possession of any ruled was Goa-and it was an easily defensible island.

During the 16th century, Portugal was free from competition from the other European nations in the East. In 1493 A.D. Pope Alexander VI issued a Bull sanctioning the right of trading with the eastern countries exclusively for the Portuguese. Therefore the disciplined and well equipped Portuguese sailors, made a mark on the minds of the Orientals. Secondly, the rulers of Kerala cordially received the Portuguese traders, as the major part of their revenue was obtained from the commerce. The Rayas of Vijayanagara did not realize the menace of the Portuguese colonization primarily, but as the Portuguese were the enemies of the Muslims, towards whom they had traditional enmity, the Rayas of Vijayanagara maintained diplomatic relations with the Portuguese.

As amongst the rest of the European powers they had a monopoly of Indian trade for about a century which was based on naval supremacy. The Portuguese established their settlements in Daman, Salsette, Chaul and Bombay (In western part of India), and in St. Thome (Mylapore) near Channai, over a large portion of Ceylon(in the south) and in Hoogly (Bengal). They also succeeded in eliminating the Muslim merchants from maritime trade with India and established their monopoly over the eastern seas as well as eastern trade. W.W.Hunter describes the maritime supremacy of the Portuguese in the east thus:

“For exactly one century i.e from 1500 A.D to 1600 A.D. The Portuguese enjoyed a monopoly of oriental trade. From Japan and the spice islands of the Red Sea and the Cape of Good Hope, they were the sole masters and dispensers of the treasures of the East, while their possessions along the Atlantic coast of Africa and in Brazil completed their maritime empire”

Both foreign and indigenous sources throw light on the nature of sea trade in Coastal Karnataka or Kanara in the 16th century. These sources are the European records, traveller’s accounts, and few new papers. The nature of the Sea trade is discussed here under the following paragraphs.

South India has perennial rivers like Mahanadi, Tungabhadra, Cauvery, Godavari, Krishna, and Pennar. They served as river ports.

Apart from the above, there were several ports in the west coast namely: Mangalore, Honnavar, Basrur, (Barcalore), Goa, Diu, Daman, Salsette, and Bassein.

The above mentioned river ports and sea ports were located conveniently to carry on trade overseas. Thus trade relations existed between India, the Roman Empire, the European countries, China and South East Asia from the earlier times.

Section A

(1) Trade and Commerce.

Vijayanagara Empires trade and commerce played an important role in influencing the historical development of European countries. Vijayanagara supplied high quality of cotton textiles, pepper, cardamom, vermilion, coconuts, rice, sandalwood, betel-nut, sugar-cane and green chillies.

The European merchants did not confine themselves to the horse trade. Ceaser Fredrick says: 'The Merchandise that went every year from Goa to Vijayanagara, were the Arabian horses, velvets, Damaskus, and sathens, armesine from Portugal and pieces of China Clay. Saffron and Scarlets were imported to Vijayanagara from Turkey. Jewels and Pagodies were exchangeable for Ducats of gold.

The "Amuktamulyada" of Sri. Krishnadevaraya, mentions that horses, elephants, precious stones, sandals and pearls were imported into the ports. According to the "Atthavana Tantram" the principal commodities that imported were glass, broad cloth, indigo, lead, nutmeg, mace, silk, chinacigars, damask, camphor, quick silver and cloves.

In 1501 A.D, the Portuguese reached the port of Bhatkal, whose chief was a feudatory of Vijayanagara, peaceful commercial dealings went on for some time, but soon troubles cropped up as the Portuguese started showing cruelty towards the people. In 1502 A.D, Vasco-dagama reached the ports of Honnavar and Bhatkal, both belonging to Vijayanagara, burned their ships and towns. The chief of Bhatkal sued for peace and Vasco-da -gama agreed to grant it on condition saying him that he would submit to the Overlordship of the King of Portugal, who he said was the Lord of the Seas. He further demanded that all the ports where their ships frequented should obey the Portuguese king by paying tribute to his men, who manned his fleet, by paying tribute alone where the ports were free and safe in their trade and commerce; so that the ports should not trade in pepper, nor should admit Turks, nor allow ships from Calicut. He threatened that, if the chief did not abide by these conditions, he would burn their ships and the ports and would continue to do this act furthermore. The flabbergasted chief yielded and offered to pay an annual tribute of 1000 bags of fine rice for the offenders. Subsequently, Vasco-da-gama gave him a 'safe conduct' and then proceeded to the Malabar coast.

The Portuguese-Vijayanagara relations were regularized and made specific during the period of Francisco-de-Almeida, between 1505-1515 A.D. The Portuguese wanted the goodwill and support of the great Hindu Emperors, to carry out their designs against the Muslims in the South India, who were the common enemy of both the Kingdoms.

Almeida was instructed by the king to send an envoy to the Vijayanagara court, and to build a fort at the island of Anjediva (near Karwar). The Portuguese could gain control over Goa from the fortified Anjediva, which was within the jurisdiction of the Gersoppa chief. They sought nobody's consent to occupy the island and started constructing the fortress using the stones of temple, which they have destroyed there, and again this was razed down in two years later. Hostilities commenced between the chief of Gersoppa and the Portuguese on the question of the right of possession of some horses, which landed in Anjediva after a shipwreck. The chief sustained heavy losses and agreed to pay 23,000 Ashrafis as compensation to the Portuguese.

Saluva Narasimha Raya, the usurper of the Saluva dynasty (1485-1490 A.D). after assuming the throne, had to face troubles on all sides. There were internal disorders and chaos in the kingdom., this weakened his capacity to resist his foreign enemies.

It was already noticed that the western ports of Goa, Chaul and Dabul were lost to the empire during the reign of Virupaksha II, Narasimharaya I, who seems to have apparently kept up a brisk trade in horses, encouraging the merchants as no predecessor of this to have done. The Vijayanagara army was in dire need of horses as it was part of the army i.e cavalry. The king revived the trade by conquering the Tulu country in his own hands. Hence , Narasa nayaka became the 'defacto' ruler of Vijayanagara. He sat upon the 'diamond throne' and carried on the administration of the country in the name of the king.

It was during his period that the Portuguese on the west coast of India arrived i.e in 1498 A.D . It was an important event in the history of Vijayanagara. It seems that Narasa Nayaka did not realize the significance of the historical event. When in 1502A.D Vasco-Da-Gama imposed commercial restrictions on the chief of Bhatkal, the vassal of the empire, Narasa Nayaka did not extend to him any protection and appears to have left him to his fate, with the ascending of the throne of the Narasa Nayaka's death, his son Vira Narasimha, (1505-1509) took his place as regent, as the founder and first ruler of the Tuluva dynasty.

Vira Narasimha, increased the strength and efficiency of his army by purchasing horses of good breed and training his troopers by military exercises. He established friendly relations with the Portuguese who had captured the horse trade from the Arab and Persian merchants and were eager to set up a trade centre at Bhatkal. He sent an embassy to Almeida, the Portuguese governor of Cannanore with a view to the better training of his

armed forces and procuring of horses for his cavalry. When Almeida wanted to build a fort at Bhatkal he sent him no answer.

During Krishnadevaraya's reign, Almeida was the viceroy of the Portuguese settlement, but at the end of the year 1509 A.D. Albuquerque succeeded him under the title of Governor. They had already set up their fortified factories in Cochin and Cannanore. They even defeated the combined fleets of Calicut and Egypt in 1509 A.D. and established their superamacy over the Indian Ocean. The monopoly of the west coast trade especially of trading in horses passed into their hands, because of their command of the sea. While the Portuguese sought Krishnadevaraya's favour to obtain trading facilities in the numerous towns and cities of the empire, the King also was equally anxious to have friendship of the Portuguese for acquiring good Arabian horses on which depended the strength of his army.

In 1510 A.D, when their attempt to reduce Calicut ended in a terrible disaster, Albuquerque turned to Krishnadevaraya for help. He sent Friar Louis as ambassador to the Vijayanagara to negotiate an offensive alliance against the Zamorin and to give an assurance of the supply of Arabian horses. They used the supply of horses as a powerful weapon in their diplomatic dealings, but no answer was returned.

Although Krishnadeva Raya tried to maintain friendly relations, he never lent support to their political designs. This is very clear from the fact that Krishnadeva Raya declined to enter into an alliance with the Portuguese against the Zamorin of Calicut. This anxiety was to secure horses. He must have thought little of this foreign settlement on the coast as a political power but what he wanted was horses for his perpetual wars against Adil Shahis of Bijapur. Krishnadeva-raya did not like the conquest of the Portuguese on the mainland of Goa. He even sent a small force under Saluva Timma to show his protest against the Portuguese aggressions on the mainland. As soon as the war was over, normal relations of friendship were resumed. During the reign of Krishnadeva-Raya, a large number of Portuguese travellers, merchants and adventurers, flocked to the city of Vijayanagara in order to seek favours from the king. Friar Louis and Gaspar Chanoca came to the city on diplomatic mission. Duarte Barbosa, the cousin of the famous sailor Magellan, a Portuguese, adventurer, visited the city during the reign of the Raya and left an interesting account of the city and its wealth. The celebrated Portuguese chroniclers Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz visited the kingdom during 1520 and 1533 A.D respectively. During the great siege and the battle of Raichur in 1529 A.D. the Portuguese musketeers under the leadership of Christovao de Figueredo rendered valuable assistance. They shot down the

defenders of the fort with their harquebusiers. For this, the Portuguese commander was specially honoured by the king in the Mahanavami festival, in the capital. Krishnadeva-Raya after subduing Gajapati Prataparudra deva(Orissa King) turned his attention to attack Ismail Adil Shah of Bijapur, in 1520 A.D. He wanted to capture the disputed territories of Raichur-Doab which was then in the possession of the Sultan of Bijapur. Earlier, Narasa Nayaka could not fulfill his masters Saluva Narasimha's desire to capture these forts. Hence Krishnadeva-Raya attacked Raichur wherein the sultan Adil Shah, was beaten and he fled from the field. Still the enemy did not surrender the fort. Finally, however with the help of Portuguese horse dealer Christavo de Figueredo and his musketeers rendered valuable assistance in the battle. They shot down the defenders wall with their harquebusiers and thus enabled the besiegers to approach close to the lines of fortifications and to make breach in it. Driven to desperation and their governor having been slain, the garrison surrendered. The attitude of the Portuguese appears to have visibly changed towards the Vijayanagara empire after the death of Krishnadevaraya in 1529 A.D. when Achyuta Raya (1529-42) A.D the step brother of Krishnadeva Raya ascended the throne after his brother's death. During his reign, the Portuguese were busy establishing themselves at various places on the western coast and they built several forts for the protection of their trade. They had been constantly at war with the Zamorin of Calicut, and other feudatories of the Vijayanagara rulers but, they were on terms of friendship with the Rayas. Da-Cunha, the Portuguese governor of Goa early in 1536 A.D. seized the mainlands of Goa, which had been for ten years in the possession of Asad Khan, a feudatory of Bijapur. The Khan's three attempts for the recapture of the place ended in failure. Finally Asad Khan himself marched at the head of a large army. Thus, the Portuguese were compelled to retire after blowing up their fortress.

Although the Portuguese openly professed friendship with the emperor of Vijayanagara, they never hesitated to do treacherous deeds. Their duplicity is condemned by Robert Sewell in strong words thus: " Throughout the whole of their dealings with the Portuguese I find not a single instance where the Hindu kings broke faith with the intruders, but as much cannot, I fear, be said on other side. The Europeans seemed to think that they had a divine right to the pillage, robbery and massacre of the natives of India. Not to mince matters their whole records is one of the series of atrocities. It is sad to turn from the description given to us by Paes, of the friendship felt for the Portuguese, and especially for Christavo de Figueredo, by the gallant and perfect king Sri Krishnadeva Raya and then to read of the treachery of the viceroys towards the great Hindu

Government; with which the Portuguese had made alliances and treaties and for which they openly professed friendship.

For instance in 1545 A.D, the Governor of Goa, made ready a large fleet and a force of 3000 men. His intention was to sail round the coast to St. Thome near Madras(Chennai),and land his troops, march inland and sack the great temple of Tirumala or Tirupati, purely for lust of gain. Luckily, a severe storm prevented him from setting sail, but he plundered and destroyed some rich temples on the western coast and enriched himself with the spoil.

“This was a mere wanton attack on property belonging to the feudatories of the Vijayanagara empire, for there has never been any pretence that the peace loving Brahmins attached to these temples had in any way offended or interfered with the Portuguese”.

Disloyalty and defiance against Vijyanagara rule was rampant and its authority was challenged in the southern region.

The political conditions of Vijayanagara after the death of Achyuta Raya in 1542 A.D, went into troubled waters. This once again brought Rama Raya to the fore front and once again Sadasiva became a pawn in hands. Though Sadashiva(1542-1570) was appointed as the ruler by Rama Raya and his two brother's Tirumala and Venkatadri, the rulers of the last of Vijayanagara empire. Rama Raya(1543-65) being the son-in- law of the great king Krishnadeva Raya , enjoyed popularity in higher circles. Rama Raya ruled the country as a despot. He was an able statesman and he planned his foreign policy cleverly, cunningly and diplomatically. The distracted political conditions of the Deccan gave him a fine opportunity to interfere and to gain political profits. In the place of one mighty Bahamani kingdom in the Deccan there appeared to be five independent sultanates which were quarelling with one another. Rama raya cunningly followed the imperialistic policy of ‘divide’ and ‘rule’ and diplomatically assumed the position of an arbitrator. His interference in the quarrels among the Sultans of Deccan forming an alliance and playing off one against another hoping them to keep disunited, was quite sometime successful but ultimately it “ opened the direct road to the disaster of Rakkasa-Tangadi (Battle of Talikota) in 1565 A.D.

Rama raya paved the way for the downfall of the great Vijayanagara empire at the hands of the Bahamani Sultans of Deccan in 1565 A.D. Rama raya's relations with the foreign intruders, Portuguese were by no means always friendly. The new governor of Goa, Martim Alfonso DeSouza attacked and plundered the port of Bhatkal in 1542 A.D. it was he who organized the plundering raid on Kanchi also. But his successor Joao-de-castro tried to maintain friendly relations with Vijayanagara rulers. In 1547 A.D he concluded a treaty with Rama Raya by which he secured the monopoly of the horse trade. This peace and friendship lasted upto 1558 A.D. Rama Raya received complaints that the Christians of Mylapore had destroyed the temples, and he also heard of the vast riches of the area. In order to defend his religion and to prevent the plunder of the wealth, Rama Raya undertook an expedition to St Thome. The expedition was a success and Rama Raya was able to get 100,000 pagodas as tribute and the treaties of 1546 and 1547 A.D were concluded.

According to the treaty of 1546 A.D, Rama Raya confirmed the Portuguese in the possession of Salsette and Bardes, which they were to continue to occupy without fear of molestation. There was also to be eternal friendship between the two parties. Rama Raya followed up the treaty of 1546 by the dispatch, in the following year, of an ambassador to Goa to conclude a more elaborate treaty with the Portuguese. The embassy was well received and a fresh treaty was signed on Sept 19, 1547 A.D accordingly.

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