

Religion under Vijayanager Rules

R.Krishna Moni

Assistant Professor of History

Khadir Mohideen College, Adirampattinam ,

Thanjavur District, Bharathidasan University Pin:614701

ABSTRACT

The rise of the Vijayanagar kingdom in the 14th century A.D. was inter alia due to the universal desire that fell all over south India among all classes of Hindus to protect their *dharma* against their enemies. The fragmentary character of Vijayanagar politics could be ameliorated but not overcome, by any administrative structure as long as the lordship itself continued to be segmentary. The Vijayanagar rulers subdued the enemies of Hinduism, the alien rulers. When the second Pandya royal authority was displaced in the the16th century by that of Vijayanagar commanders and other military adventurers from Andhra and by petty Marava chieftains and during the period of disorder and confusion that the southern region continued to be controlled by the Brahmanas and Vellalas. The rulers of Vijayanagar were staunch Hindus and they always encourage the Hindu religion in several ways. Under their rule, both Saivism and Vaishnavism flourished. Vaishnavism was the most popular religious sect of Hindus during the reign of the Vijayanagar rulers. The Vijayanagar rulers, who acted as the custodians of Dharma, not in the pragmatistic but the larger sense of the term lived up to this Hindu ideal. The liberal religious spirit of the Vijayanagar emperors has generally been attributed to the influence of the eminent Advaita philosopher Madvacharya. The ruler of Vijayanagar also gave protection not only to Muslims but also to Christians. The Vijayanagar rulers accorded a warm welcome to the Missionaries. The Vijayanagar rulers proved themselves to be noble example of the spirit of toleration and the policy of equal treatment of all subjects by recruiting Muslims into their army and giving them responsible positions. The Vijayanagar rulers encouraged the construction of *dargahs*. They endeavored to maintain amicable relations with their Muslim neighbours when Ramaraya last one of his sons, his wife adopted Ali Adil Shah as her son.

KEY WORDS : Vijayanagar – kingdom – commanders – Hinduism – chieftains – Saivism – Vaishnavism – Dharma – philosopher – Advaita – Madvacharya – Missionaries – Muslims -Brahmanas – Vellalas.

Introduction:

The ideological impetus attributed to the formation of the Vijayanagara kingdom in the 14th century A.D. was met by 1450 A.D. when the reign of Devaraya II ended. Then and thereafter, Vijayanagara was itself a successful conquered state with much of Tamil country, Karnataka and Andhra under Telugu and Kannada chiefs whose ruling authority was based upon

military service to Vijayanagar kings. When the second Pandya royal authority was displaced in the 16th century by that of Vijayanagar commanders and other military adventurers from Andhra and by petty Marava chieftains and during the period of disorder and confusion that the southern region continued to be controlled by the Brahmanas and Vellalas. They enjoyed the right of *Kani* or communal ownership of land. The rise of the Vijayanagar kingdom in the 14th century A.D. was inter alia due to the universal desire that fell all over south India among all classes of Hindus to protect their *dharma* against their enemies. The Vijayanagar rulers subdued the enemies of Hinduism, the alien rulers

Historical Background

The fragmentary character of Vijayanagar politics could be ameliorated but not overcome, by any administrative structure as long as the lordship itself continued to be segmentary. The Vijayanagar Empire was the outcome of the revolutionary movement which had begun in Deccan for the expulsion of Muslims from that part of the country. Ever since the conquest of Deccan by Malikafur in the reign of Ala-ud-din-Khilji the vanquished Hindu rulers had nursed a feeling of deep resentment against their Musalman oppressors. The musalmans had caused much havoc in the country destroying human lives desecrating sacred shrines and robbing the people of their wealth. The fall of the Kakathiyas in 1327 A.D and the weakness of the Hoysalas made the rise of a new power possible. And the Vijayanagar Empire soon rose as a mighty alternative against its Muslim counterparts of the north. The circumstances of its birth determined its future policy regarding the administration and to the last day of its existence, the Vijayanagar remained essentially a military state with a strong theocratic or religious basis. The Kingdom was founded by Hari Hara and Bhukka about 1386 A.D. They belonged to the Sangama dynasty. The last ruler of this dynasty was dethroned by Narasimha, a minister in 1490 A.D. After this usurpation, the Vijayanagar came under the Saluva dynasty. In 1505 the Saluva dynasty was replaced by the Tuluva dynasty and the most distinguished ruler of the dynasty was Krishnadevaraya. After the death of Krishnadevaraya, the empire faced its decline. The Bhamini Sultans formed a quadruple alliance against the Hindu kingdom. At the battle of *Talaikotta* in 1565 A.D., the Vijayanagar army was completely routed and the city was sacked. This was a decisive victory and the Vijayanagar Empire was extinguished and chaos prevailed in the kingdom.

Religious Condition

The rulers of Vijayanagar were staunch Hindus and they always encourage the Hindu religion in several ways. Under their rule, both Saivism and Vaishnavism flourished. Along with them, other religions were also tolerated. Such a policy was not so successfully followed by any other dynasty before Vijayanagar. Religious persecution on a vast scale and wars in the name of a particular sect were less frequent. The emperors followed the non-intervention policy in religious affairs.

Saivism

Saivism was the most popular religion during the reign of the first dynasty. It enjoyed the patronage of Kings and Courtiers and had a fairly large following drawn from all classes in society. Vidyaranya, the chief architect of the Vijayanagar Empire, was a great teacher of Advaita. He made notable contributions through his philosophy of Advaita. The Sangama rulers were followers of the orthodox school of Saivism known as *Pasupata*, and considered the pasupata teacher *Kriyasakti* as their guru and regarded Virupaksha as their tutelary deity. The fact that Kriyasakthi guru himself granted some lands to the local Vishnu temple speaks of the Catholicism of the preceptors, who guided the rulers.

Vaishnavism

Vaishnavism was the most popular religious sect of Hindus during the reign of the Vijayanagar rulers. The Vaishnava temples, Vaishnava religious preceptors and followers of the Vaishnava were patronized by the Sangama rulers. The learnings of Devaraya II towards Vaishnavism are more known than those of other monarchs. During his hunt in Machanahalli, he visited the temple of Rama and was granted a village with an income of 20 *Varaha* and also land in Haneyanad. A Copperplate dated 1427 A.D. records the grant of the village of Pandamangalam together with the sub-village of Tirunallur and Sunepuhanallur, for the merit of his mother to the god Sri Ranganatha of Srirangam. Vaishnavism gained a stronger hold during the latter half of the 16th century commencing with the reign of Sadasivaraya. The aspect of Vaishnavism, associating as it does with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth with her divine consort, Lord Vishnu in granting *Mukthi* to the spiritual aspirant, had a great appeal to the imagination of the unsophisticated as well as the intellectual. Royal patronage was another factor that greatly contributed to the popularity of the Vaishnava faith in the empire.

The extension of the sway of the Vijayanagar emperors over the Tamil country was another factor for the popularity of Vaishnavism. The popularity of the faith in the empire was in no small measure due to the extension of several Vaishnava divines and teachers. The pride of place among these belongs to the members of the Tallapakam family of poets and the Bhattars of Srirangam. Because of these factors, the *Visistadvaita* School of Ramanuja as well as the *Dvaita* School of Madhva became popular and attracted a large number of adherents in the Vijayanagar Empire. Ramanuja who flourished in the early part of the 12th century A.D. was the founder of the *Visistadvaita* School. Srirangam was the main center of his missionary and philosophical activities. He made a holy visit to important religious centers of the time. He converted the Hoysala ruler to the Vaishnava faith. Ramanuja established the sole supremacy of Vishnu and emphasized selfless service and devotion to him. As a result, Vaishnavism gained many adherents without any reference to caste, sex, or colour. The emphasis on service to God was accepted in theory and practice by his disciples. They rendered service to Lord Vishnu by maintaining flower gardens and ensured a regular supply of flowers

in the sanctum.²⁰ Generally the religious teachers managed the flower gardens. It was on account of Ramanuja's efforts that the Alvars were deified and special shrines were constructed.

The recitation of *Nalayira Divya Prabandam* composed by the Alvars became a regular feature in the Vaishnava temples. So Long as Ramanuja's powerful personality was there, there was unity

in the ranks of the followers of *Visistadvaita*.

But after his death in 1137 A.D. the *Visitadvaita* divided into two groups known as the *Vadagalai* and the *Tengalai*. These differences continued during the Vijayanagara period. The *Vadagalais* are so-called because they favoured Sanskrit philosophical literature and the *Tengalais* are so-called because they followed the *Divyaprabhanda* of the *Alvars*. They differed regarding the caste system also. The *Vadagalai* believed that the *Varnasrama Dharma* was essential for Bhakti Yoga whereas the *Tengalais* contended that *Prapatti* transcends all caste and creed barriers. There were differences in the observance of religious ceremonies also. While the *Vadagalais* offered food only to God on the *Sraddha* day, the *Tengalais* offered to the *Nityas* and *Acharyas* also. For the *Vadagalais* sacrifices were meritorious to secure a place in heaven. But the *Tengalais* considered it a sin to kill animals for human ends. With these differences, it was but natural that the *Vadagalais* and *Tengalais* developed and organized their temples and institutions, according to their precepts and practices for the spread of their religious tenets. The early Kings of the Vijayanagara were Saivas guided by the Advaita and Kalamukha teachers. But they were tolerant of the other sects like Jaina and Vaishnava also. However, in the latter half of the 5th century, Vaishnavism superseded the other religious sects and came to occupy the place of Saivism as the religion of the ruling family. Krishnadevaraya II was known for his eclecticism as evidenced by his patronage to the Vaishnava temples and teachers.

Jainism

The philosophy of the Jaina was called *Syadvada*, which was found mention in the inscriptions of the Vijayanagar period. The Jaina system did not look upon any philosophy as wholly true or wholly false. Probably this eclectic tendency of the doctrine helped the spread of Jainism in the Vijayanagar Empire. True to their eclecticism and like their Hoysala predecessors, who favoured Jainism even after the conversion of the Royal family to Vaishnavism in the reign of Vishnuvardhana. The Vijayanagar rulers not only offered protection but also gave unstinted patronage to Jainism and its institutions. The Ramanuja edict of 1368 A.D. records how a dispute arose between the Jains and Vaishnavas regarding their civil rights and how Bukka I effected an amicable settlement and brought about reconciliation between them. It is stated that he summoned the leaders of the Jains of all the *Nadus* including Srirangam and Tirupati.

He entrusted the Jainas to the care and protection of the Srivaishnavas and declared that there was no difference between the *Vaishnava Darshana* and the *Jaina Darshana*. He also confirmed the right of the Jainas to enjoy the *Pancha Maha Sabda* or the five great musical instruments and the *Kalasa* or holy waterpot on all ceremonial occasions. During the time of Vijayanagar, Jainism originally an anti-Vedic movement came closer to theistic religions due to the changing environment, especially in Karnataka. The doctrine gave no other support, so the religious feeling of the laity clung to the founder of it, *Jina*, and with him his mythical predecessors became gods. In many of their hymns in honour of Jina they appeal to him with as much favour as the Brahmana to his gods, and there are often expressions in them contrary to the original teaching, ascribing to *Jina* a creative power. Instances of Jainas accepting services in the army of the Vijayanagara rulers and their feudatories are not wanting. Some expressions indicate the changed attitude of Jainism to maintain its existence in the face of the growing

Religion under Vijayanager Rules

influence of rival faiths like Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Buddhism

Buddhism in the Vijayanagar empire, although in a lingering condition was predominant in a few places like Kanchipuram and Nagapattinam. This may be inferred from the existence of sculptures of the Buddha and epigraph registering grants of villages for the worship of Buddha. In some places, Buddha was worshipped in the local name of *Kachikar Nayakar*. There was a temple dedicated to Buddha in Tiruvalandurai. Buddha was considered to be an avatar of Lord Vishnu. A contemporary literary work, *Amukta Malyada* also includes Buddha among the incarnations of Vishnu. According to one legend, Lord Vishnu assumed the avatar of Buddha and destroyed the three cities of Tripurasura with the help of his son, Manmatha. Vishnu performed the great feat of destruction appearing as Buddha suggests that he was not only accepted as the supreme being incarnate but was also credited with possessing the supernatural and miraculous power of God.

Islam

The Vijayanagar rulers entertained Muslims in their services and granted *Jagirs* to them. The Kingdom of Vijayanagar was founded among other Kingdoms to protect Hindu *Dharma* and Hindu Culture against Islam, but this did not prevent the monarchs from accepting Muslims as their subjects and giving them adequate protection. Devaraya was careful not to offend the feelings of his Muslim subjects in the discharge of their duties. Sadasivaraya followed the policy of Devaraya by permitting the Muslims to offer obeisance to him with a Koran on his desk. Prominent among the Muslim officers in his service were Amirkhan and Ain-ul-Mulk Gilani. The Vijayanagar rulers proved themselves to be noble examples of the spirit of toleration and the policy of equal treatment of all subjects by recruiting Muslims into their army and giving them responsible positions. The Vijayanagar rulers encouraged the construction of *dargahs*. They endeavored to maintain amicable relations with their Muslim neighbours when Ramaraya last one of his sons, his wife adopted Ali Adil Shah as her son. The spirit of accommodation and goodwill between the two faiths is also indicated by the fact that a mosque was constructed by a Hindu in 1537 A.D. for the benefit of the Muslims. The Vijayanagar rulers also encouraged, Muslims to settle down and follow their social and religious practices as is evident from the existence of religious toleration. There were several structures constructed as in the model of Islamic architecture. A distinct influence of Islamic architecture is discernible in other monuments found in the capital city of Vijayanagar.

Christianity

The Roman Catholic missionaries indulged in philanthropic activities on the coast of Tamilnadu. They converted the Parava community into Christianity. The converts intoxicated with the tenets of the new faith began to demolish Hindu temples. The ruler of Vijayanagar also gave protection not only to Muslims but also to Christians. The Vijayanagar rulers accorded a warm welcome to the Missionaries. Krishnadevaraya entertained his guests in a

benefitting manner by making lavish arrangements for food and accommodation. He was not biased against people of other religions or races and did not hesitate to seek their cooperation and friendship. Although it was the policy of the Vijayanagar rulers to protect and preserve traditional Hinduism, they showed immense tolerance to other religious faiths.

Religious Tolerance

Religion in India has never been a dogmatic belief but a progressive rational synthesis absorbing into its fold the ever-rising currents of new conceptions. The Indian mind has been traditionally trained to adopt a catholic outlook and a spirit of religious toleration. The Vijayanagar rulers, who acted as the custodians of Dharma, not in the pragmatistic but the larger sense of the term lived up to this Hindu ideal. The liberal religious spirit of the Vijayanagar emperors has generally been attributed to the influence of the eminent Advaita philosopher Madvacharya. The Sangama rulers were followers of the orthodox school of Saivism known as *Pasupata* and considered the Pasupata teacher Kriyasakti as their Guru and regarded Virupaksha as their tutelary deity. They showed respect to the other *darsanas* by making benefactions to temples and other religious teachers. The fact that Guru himself granted some lands to the local Vishnu temple speaks of the Catholicism of the preceptors, who guided these rulers. Some of the Generals of Vijayanagar were followers of Vaishnavism. Prominent among them were Gopana and Saluva Mangu, who had taken a leading part during Kampana's invasion of Madurai.

Grants Made to Temples

The Emperors of Vijayanagar generally made grants of lands at a very low rent to individuals as well as to institutions. The *Brahmadeya* grants usually took the form of land either small in size or whole villages. It was known as *agraharas* which were granted to Brahmins either as a reward for their learning or to enable them to impart religious and spiritual knowledge to the younger members of the community. The *devadana* grants were made to the temples to carry on daily worship and festivals to deities to whom they were dedicated. The *mathapura* lands were granted to the Saivite, and probably also to the Vaishnavite temples and *madas* to enable the religion of the respective sects to study theology and spread their respective tenets among the laity. The rise of religious sects like Vaishnavism and Lingayatism which inculcated the belief in a personal god whose service was considered one of the chief means of obtaining salvation gave a fresh impetus to temple building. The rulers of Vijayanagar and their subordinates built hundreds of new temples, repaired several old ones and endowed them richly with lands and money so that the daily worship might be carried on in them without interruption. The gods in whose honour these temples were built, were believed to have the same needs as persons occupying exalted stations in life such as Kings and Princes.

The *archaha* had to bathe the idols and dress them properly before he offered them food. In the evening, the musicians were required to entertain the deity with their music both instrumental and vocal. Flowers, sandal paste and costly jewels were required for adorning him and his consort. Even to carry on the ordinary daily worship of the temple, the service of several people was needed. The musicians, dancing women, flower gardener, *archaha* and other menial servants

Religion under Vijayanager Rules

had to co-operate in looking after the comforts of the deity presiding over a temple. Besides, there were monthly festivals during which the god and his consort had to be taken in a procession.

The *Brahmotsava* or the annual festival had to be performed for ten days continuously in a grand manner. For all these a heavy amount of money was needed. Many came forward to pay willingly the expenses of the gods, however heavy they might be. The temple endowments did not always come from the Raya and his nobles. Ordinary men and women made grants of land and money to gods to acquire merit for themselves and their relations in the next world. The endowments, therefore, came from several sources. Mostly, they took the form of landed property, but money was also frequently donated. The bigger and more famous temple was richer because of its endowments. The grants had to be properly managed by somebody on behalf of the gods and goddesses.

Grants Made by the Emperors

The period of the 16th century marked the zenith of territorial expansion and political sway of Vijayanagar rule in Tamil country. The Vijayanagar kings had made gifts for their merit. Achutadevaraya made a gift of the village for the merit of Vasava Nayak in 1534 A.D. The inscriptions record that grants were made for the merit of father, mother, brother, wife, ancestors and other individuals. There is an inscription that records the usage of a prefix called *Swami* for whose merit the gift was made through addressing the person in the most respectable form. According to Hindu *dharma*, the gift which was made for the merit of a person helped the individual to secure a coveted place in heaven and this gift absolved of all his sins accumulated in his life advertently. Land and money were gifted to gods for the merit of persons to attain *Swarga* as gleaned from epigraphs. The rulers of the first Sangama dynasty appear to have been great patrons of Saivism. A line of *Kalamukha* divine is the *Kriyasakthi* which figure prominently in the records of the Vijayanagar rulers. The entire line of teachers of the Vijayanagar period assumed only the distinctive *Kriyasakti* suffix. Inscriptions belong to 12 century A.D., mentioning Kalamukha Saivism, support the above contention. The cult of the Vidyeshvaras appears to have been borrowed by the *Saiva Siddhanta* system from the mention of the concept of the Vidyeshvara in their system.

Conclusion:

Religion is a set of common beliefs and practices generally held by a group of people, often codified as prayer, ritual and religious law. It is a very powerful and purposeful factor in society. It is an institution which has grip over the people in all civilized societies. Religion and spirituality are not interchangeable terms, even though they have faith, believe in a set of values and traditions, and applying the principles to a way of life, describe the millions of religious people around the world. In ancient era was the witness when religious practices flourished the most and temples became the world's storehouse of knowledge and culture. The temples are more than mere places of worship. They are sacred buildings of ultimate grace and eternal happiness. The temples and other religious places built then were symbolic of the ruler and his richness and devotion. India has many splendid temples that have found a place in World

Heritage list.

REFERENCE

1. Appadurai, S., *Economic Conditions in Southern India*, (1000-1500 A.D.), Madras, 1990.
2. Bhandarkhar, R.G., *Vaishnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Poona, 1982
3. Chandrababu, B.S., *The Land and People of Tamilnadu.*, Madras, 1996.
4. Heras., *The Araveedu Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, Madras, 1984
5. Hultzch, *South Indian Inscriptions*, Volume I, II, Delhi, 1983.
6. Krishnaswamy Ayyengar, S., *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, Madras, 1924.
7. Krishnaswamy, A., *Tamil Country Under Vijayanagar*, Chidambaram, 1986.
8. Mahalingam, T.V., *Economic Life of the Vijayanagar Empire*, Madras, 1989.
9. Pillay, K.K., *Social History of the Tamils*, Madras, 1975.
10. Radhakrishnan, S., *Religion and Culture*, New Delhi, 1968.