



THE CONDITION OF TAMIL COUNTRY ON THE EVE OF KAMPANA'S EXPEDITION

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Introduction

Medieval historiography of India is concerned with the history of dynasties and political events like the rest of the other periods. Medieval South Indian history is not exempted from this. It focuses on dynasties like the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandiyas, and later the Vijayanagara Empire. The area of the northern part of Sri Lanka and modern period Tamil Nadu was called the Tamil country. This region has a vast and very complex historical background, particularly during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. In this period, society witnessed significant political, economic, and cultural developments as well as the emergence of new political powers. A military invasion by the Vijayanagara Empire, by King Kampana (Kamparaya/ Kampanna) marked a lot of changes and stability in the region. This article explores the political conditions of the Tamil country, the socio-economic problems that motivated Kampan's invasion, the rise of Vijayanagara, the activities of local chieftains, and the decline of local powers.

Historical Context

During the reign of the Hoysala ruler Ballala III Vijayanagara emerged as another empire. Right after this, they had to build and expand their borders and power. In this situation, Vijayanagara rulers try to conquer the Southern Indian parts. Let's see the historical scenario of the region and the incidents that inspired Kampana's expedition and the condition of the region in the early medieval history. The Vijayanagara inscriptions are available in the three lingual territories: they are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

Emergence of the Vijayanagara Empire

The Vijayanagara Empire was built by Harihara I and Bukka Raya I in 1336. It was a major turning point in southern Indian Politics. The Vijayanagara kings tried to conquer the whole of south India and tried to unite the regions of southern India administratively and politically. This helped them to expand their power and influence. A. Krishnaswami Pillai's The Tamil Country under Vijayanagar is a study based on the study of Vijayanagara inscriptions states that the Vijayanagara Nayakas didn't change the social and political landscape of the region. Hayavadana Rao, a historian writes that

Sangama and the foundation of the Vijayanagara as the legitimate successors of the Hoysalas of medieval Karnataka.

Evanishment of the Local Kingdoms

The Pandya and Chola dynasties had declined in the late 13th century which had once dominated the Tamil country. The Pandyas were known for their contributions to art and literature, began to lose their hold due to the internal enemies, from the Kakatiyas (Vijayanagara owes its origins to this Kakatiya Kingdom of Warangal) and the Delhi Sultanate. The Chola dynasty also had started to lose control because of its division into the smaller kingdoms and the rise of Sambuvarayar of Padaividu was directly proportional to this decline. Queen of Kumara Kampana, poetess Gangadevi writes in her Sanskrit mahakavya Madhura Vijayam: "The Sambuvaraya is the leader of the Vanniyar. If you destroy him, you will succeed in cutting down the tree with several branches". This Chola history of the early medieval period of South Indian history has attracted the attention of scholars, but unfortunately Vijayanagara couldn't.

Political Division

Right after the declination of these kingdoms the local chieftains referred to as 'Nayakas' or 'Kavundars' started to divide the region and started to rule. This filled the power vacuum. These leaders started to fight against one another and sometimes were not ready to unite and fight against external enemies. This inspired opportunistic conquests like the Delhi Sultanates and the Vijayanagara Empire to invade the Tamil Country. In 1334 A.D. Jalal-ud-din Ashan Shah took advantage of the distance and separated Madurai from Delhi and became an independent ruler and succeeded by Ghiyas-ud-din Damghani. At the same time, Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya II started to rule in Kanchipuram. According to Thiruvengkatachari, Kampana started his first campaign towards the Tamil Country in 1352 A.D. In 1362 A.D., Kampana established his strong hold on Sambuvaraya and Kanchi. While staying in the Kanchipuram a mysterious lady appears in front of him and gifts a sword to vanish the Muslim invaders from the Tamil soil.

Military Campaigns and Expansionist Interests

Historians beginning with Robert Sewell have focused on the political history of Vijayanagara. The first historian who studied the Vijayanagara inscriptions and focused on the location details was Krishna Sastri H. In 1911, he collected the inscriptions of the Sangama dynasty and published an article about the territories and the personages related to them.⁸ Sangama kings were tasked to expand their kingdom and their political influence and establish stability in their rule. Kampana, one of the military leaders and sons of Bukkaraya I sent to southern India to realize the dream. However, gaining trust and getting help from the Tamil populace was not an easy task for him. But right after his invasion, he started to reform the contemporary condition.

Political Rivalries and Enemies

The local chieftains and the political powers were always trying to gain control of one another. Most of the time, they were trying to fight with themselves or uniting themselves to fight with the other local chieftains. In this context, the Nayakas of Tanjore and the Nayakas of Madurai were the prominent names. These local powers had great knowledge of guerrilla tactics and knowledge of the local terrain. This led them to unite and show the resistance against the Vijayanagara kings. Burton Stein analyses the condition of South India in terms of contemporary anxieties of regional and religious identity.⁹ An inscription of Sambuvaraya found in Polur taluk dated A.D. 1375 traces that Sambuvaraya was politically active and visible, in the second half of the 14th century.¹⁰ As per the hypothesis practiced for a long, Sambuvaraya accepted the hegemony of Vijayanagara rule.

Pressures from the Outer Lands

The increased pressure and threats from the outer lands like the Delhi Sultanate have made a lot of changes in the political atmosphere of the Tamil Country. Delhi Sultanate aimed to expand its empire towards the southern Indian territories. So they more often started to attack on the south Indian dynasties. This formed alliances among the local chieftains and united them to stand against the Vijayanagara Empire too.

Agriculture and Trade

Near and around the Kaveri River the land was fertile and means of wealth. This area was the main key point to the trade relations with the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the other parts of India. In this situation Kampana tried to invade and succeeded; local civilians decided to support him to gain the overall stability of the region, especially the economic revival and stability.

Religious and Cultural Factors

Religious and cultural factors played an important role in forming the polity of the Tamil country. Temples emerged as the centers of political power, and spiritual and cultural expression. Also became hubs of economic transactions, education, and cultural events. The Vijayanagara Empire tried to construct and restore the Saivite and Vaishnavite temples. This helped them to realize their political agenda and a grip on political power and gain the trust and loyalty of the local population. North Indian conquerors were identified as the Muslim invaders and the Hindu character of Vijayanagara has been emphasized by the historian Robert Sewell.

Economic Conditions

Because of political and socio-cultural instability in the Tamil country agriculture, trade, handicraft traditions, and all the other economic things started to get disturbed. People started to expect the stability promise from the Vijayanagara kings. Madhura Vijayam of Ganga Devi mentions a lot of Dananayakas. These Dananayakas combined military, revenue, and judicial services.¹² They were also picturized by Ganga Devi as equal to Kampana.

Kampana's Expedition: A Turning Point

Kampana's main aim was to defeat the rivals and chieftains of the Tamil country and gain the hearts of the populace. He directly or indirectly promised the revival of Tamil cultural heritage and culture. He used his all military strategies and succeeded. Also he gained the hearts of the Tamil people by building and restoring the temples and heritage centres. And its disrupted agriculture and trade routes were also reformed. And the economic conditions of the society were improved. But the historian A. Krishnaswamy portrays the Vijayanagara's territorial expansion as a disruptive incident.¹³ But some other historians say it is a continuation of the Chola state.

Conclusion

The political condition of the Tamil country on the eve of Kampana's expedition was characterized by fragmentation, rivalry, and the threat of external invasions. The decline of traditional powers and the rise of the Vijayanagara Empire created a unique opportunity for the consolidation of power. Kampana's military campaigns sought not only to subdue local chieftains but also to restore cultural and economic stability to a region marked by chaos and uncertainty. The complex interplay of local politics, cultural dynamics, and economic conditions highlights the rich historical narrative of the Tamil country during this transformative period.

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