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Sri Krishna Devaraya



Tuluva Sri Krishna Deva Raya (1509-1529 CE), was the famed Emperor of the Vijayanagara Empire. Presiding over the empire at its zenith, he is regarded as an icon by many Indians, particularly by Tuluvas, Kannadigas and Telugus. Emperor Krishna Deva Raya earned the titles Kannada Rajya Ramaa Ramana, Mooru Rayara Ganda meaning King of three kings and Andhra Bhoja. Much information about his reign comes from the accounts of Portuguese travelers Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz. Krishna Deva Raya benefited from the able Prime minister Timmarusu, who was regarded by the king as a father figure and was responsible for his coronation. Krishna Deva Raya was the son of Nagala Devi and Tuluva Narasa Nayaka, an army commander under Saluva Narasimha Deva Raya, who later took control of the empire to prevent its disintegration. The king's coronation took place on the birthday of Lord Krishna, and his earliest inscription is from July 26, 1509 CE. He built a beautiful suburb near Vijayanagara called Nagalapura in memory of his mother.

The rule of Krishna Deva Raya marks a period of great military success in Vijayanagar history. On several occasions, the king was known to change battle plans abruptly and turn a losing battle into victory. The first decade of his rule was one, of long sieges, bloody conquests and victories. His main enemies were the Gajapatis of Orissa, who had been involved in constant conflict since the rule of Saluva Narasimha Deva Raya, The Bahamani Sultans (who, though divided into five small kingdoms, remained a constant threat), and the Portuguese, a rising maritime power which controlled much of the sea trade. The feudal chiefs of Ummatur, Reddys of Kondavidu and Velamas of Bhuvanagiri intermittently rebelled against Vijayanagar rule.

Success in Deccan

The annual affair of the raid and plunder of Vijayanagar towns and villages by the Deccan sultans came to an end during the Raya's rule. In 1509 Krishna Deva Raya's armies clashed with the Sultan of Bijapur at Diwani and the Sultan Mahmud was severely injured and defeated. Yusuf Adil Khan was killed and Kovilkonda was annexed. Taking advantage of the victory and the disunity of the Bahamani Sultans, the Raya invaded Bidar, Gulbarga and Bijapur and earned the title "establisher of the Yavana kingdom" when he released Sultan Mahmud and made him the de-facto ruler.

He subdued local rulers: Reddys of Kondavidu and Velamas of Bhuvanagiri, and seized lands up to the Krishna river. Ganga Raja, the Ummatur chief, fought Krishna Deva Raya on the banks of the Kaveri and was defeated. The chief drowned later in the river Kaveri in 1512. The region was made a part of the Srirangapatna province. In 1516-1517, he pushed beyond the Godavari river. He defeated the Gajapatis of Orissa who were in occupation of Andhra region and most of Telengana region in six campaigns. The success at Ummatur provided the necessary impetus to carry his campaign into Telangana region which was in control of Gajapati Prathapa Rudra Dev. The Vijayanagar army laid siege to the Udayagiri fort in 1512. The campaign lasted for a year before the Gajapati army was routed. Krishna Deva Raya offered prayers at Tirupati thereafter along with his wives Tirumala Devi and Chinna Devi. The Gajapati army was then met at Kondavidu where after a siege of a few months, Krishna Deva Raya along with Saluva Timmarusu inflicted another defeat on Prathapa Rudra. Saluva Timmarusu took over as governor of Kondavidu thereafter. The Vijayanagar army then accosted the Gajapati army at Kondapalli area and laid another siege. This was the final defeat for the Gajapati king who offered his daughter Jaganmohini in marriage to Krishna Deva Raya. She became his third queen.

He established friendly relations with the Portuguese, who set up the Portuguese Dominion of India in Goa in 1510. The Emperor obtained guns and Arabian horses from the Portuguese merchants. He also utilized Portuguese expertise in improving water supply to Vijayanagara City.

The complicated alliances of the empire and the five Deccan sultanates meant that he was continually at war; in one of these campaigns, he defeated Golconda and captured its commander Madurul-Mulk, crushed Bijapur and its sultan Ismail Adil Shah and restored Bahmani sultanate to Muhammad Shah. The highlight of his conquests occurred on May 19, 1520 where he secured the fortress of Raichur from Ismail Adil Shah of Bijapur after a difficult siege during which 16,000 Vijayanagar soldiers were killed. The exploits of the chief

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military commander, Pemmasani Ramalinga Nayudu, during the battle of Raichur were suitably rewarded by the grateful emperor. During the campaign against Raichur, it is said that 703,000 foot soldiers, 32,600 cavalry and 551 elephants were used. Finally, in his last battle, he razed to the ground the fortress of Gulbarga, the early capital of the Bahmani sultanate. His empire extended over the whole of South India.

In 1524 he made his son Tirumalai Raya the Yuvaraja though the crown prince did not survive for long. He was poisoned to death. Suspecting the involvement of Saluva Timmarusu, Krishna Deva Raya had his trusted commander and adviser blinded.

Krishna Deva Raya was not only a monarch de-jure, but he was also a de-facto sovereign with extensive powers and strong personal influence. With the active cooperation of Saluva Thimmarusu he administered the Kingdom well, maintained peace in the land and increased the prosperity of the people. The administration of the empire was carried on along the lines indicated in his Amuktamalyada. He was of the opinion that the King should always rule with an eye towards Dharma. His concern for the welfare of the people is amply proved by his extensive annual tours all over the empire, during which he studied everything personally and tried to redress the grievances of the people and to punish the evil doers.

The Portuguese Chronicler Domingo Paes praises Krishna Deva Raya as, "the most feared and perfect King... a great ruler and a man of much justice". Though a follower of Vaishnavism he showed respect to all sects and petty religious prejudices never influenced him either in granting gifts or in his choice of companions and officers. According to Barbosa, "The King allows such freedom that every man may come and go live according to his own creed, without suffering any annoyance".



The statues of Sri Krishna Devaraya and his queens at Tirupati Lord Venkateswara's temple

The rule of Krishna Deva Raya was an age of prolific literature in many languages, although it is also known as a golden age of Telugu literature. Many Telugu, Sanskrit, Kannada and Tamil poets enjoyed the patronage of the emperor. Emperor Krishna Deva Raya was fluent in many languages including his mother tongue Tulu.

He patronised Kannada poets Mallanarya who wrote Veera-saivamrita, Bhava-chinta ratna and Satyendra Chola kathe, Chatu Vittalanatha who wrote Bhagavatha, Timmanna Kavi who wrote an eulogy of his king in Krishna Raya Bharata. Vyasatirtha, the great saint from Mysore belonging to the Madhwa order of Udipi was his Rajguru. Krishna Deva Raya's Dinachari in Kannada is a recently discovered work. The record highlights the contemporary society during Krishna Deva Raya's time in his personal diary. However it is not yet clear if the record was written by the king himself. Krishna Deva Raya patronised Tamil poet Haridasa.

In Sanskrit, Vyasatirtha wrote Bhedojjivana, Tatparya-chandrika, Nyaya-mrita (a work directed against Advaita philosophy) and Tarka-tandava. Krishna Deva Raya himself an accomplished scholar wrote Madalasa Charita, Satyavadu Parinaya and Rasamanjari and Jambavati Kalyana. Krishna Deva Raya's ("Desa bhashalandu telugu Lessa") reign was the golden age of Telugu literature. Eight poets known as **Ashtadiggajalu** (eight elephants in the eight cardinal points such as North, South etc.) were part of his court (known as Bhuvana-vijayamu). According to the Vaishnavite religion there are eight elephants in eight corners in space and hold the earth in its place. Similarly these eight poets were the eight pillars of his literary assembly. Who constituted Ashtadiggajas is not certain. But, it is popularly believed to include these : Allasani Peddana, Nandi Thimmana, Madayyagari Mallana, Dhurjati, Ayyalaraju Rama Bhadrudu, Pingali Surana, Ramaraj bhushanudu and Tenali Rama Krishna.

Among these eight poets Allasani Peddana is considered to be the greatest and is given the title of Andhra Kavita Pitamaha (the father of Telugu poetry). Manu-charitramu is his popular prabandha work. Nandi Timmana wrote Parijata apaharanamu. Madayya-gari Mallana wrote Rajasekhara Charitramu. Dhurjati wrote Kalahasti Mahatmyamu and Ayyalaraju Ramabhadhrudu wrote Rama abhyudayamu. Pingali Surana wrote the still remarkable Raghava pandaveeyamu, a dual work with double meaning built into the text, describing both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Battumurthy alias Ramaraja bhushanudu wrote Kavyalankara sangrahamu, Vasu charitramu, and Harischandra nalopakhyanamu. Among these works the last one is a dual work which tells simultaneously the story of King Harishchandra and Nala and Damayanti. Tenali Ramakrishna first wrote Udbhataradhya Charitramu, a Shaivite work and later wrote Vaishnava devotional texts Panduranga Mahatmyamu, and Ghatikachala Mahatmyamu. The period of the Empire is known as "Prabandha Period," because of the quality of the prabandha literature produced during this time. Tenali Rama remains one of the most popular folk figures in India today, a quick-witted courtier ready even to outwit the all-powerful emperor.

'Amuktamalyada'

Sri Krishna Deva Raya wrote the Amuktamalyada in Telugu, beautifully describing the pangs of separation suffered by Andal (one of the twelve bhakti-era alvars) for her lover Lord Vishnu. He describes Andal's physical beauty in thirty verses; using descriptions of the spring and the monsoon as metaphors. As elsewhere in Indian poetry: Sringeri - the sensual pleasure of union extends beyond the physical level and becomes a path to, and a metaphor for, spirituality and ultimate union with the divine. One of the main

characters is Periyalvar, the father of Andal. Lord Vishnu commands Periyalwar to teach a king of the Pandya dynasty the path of knowledge to moksha. Amuktamalyada is also known by the name Vishnu-chitteeyam, a reference to Vishnu-chittudu, the Telugu name of Vishnuchittar alias known as Periyalwar. Several other short stories are included in Amuktamalyada in the course of the main story of Godadevi, the Sanskrit name of Kothai Naachiyar alias known as Andal, which is used throughout the tome. Krishna Raya was also well-versed in Sanskrit, Tamil and Kannada. Jambavati Kalyanam is his Sanskrit work. He strove for the welfare and the uplifting of Telugu people.

Religion and culture

Krishna Deva Raya respected all sects of Hinduism, although he personally favoured Vaishnavism, as evident in his literary tomes, and lavished on the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple numerous objects of priceless value, ranging from diamond studded crowns to golden swords. Additionally, he is known to have commissioned the making of statues of himself and his two wives at the temple complex. Krishna Deva Raya was formally initiated into the Vaishnava Sampradaya by Vyasatirtha and other vedanta scholars of that time.



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