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COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN TAMIL NADU (From 14th century to 18th century) – A Study

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ABSTRACT

Communal riot, a sudden and spasmodic incident was an aspect of social pathology and it is caused due to the prevalence of a communal atmosphere generated by religious or caste feelings. Communal conflict is a struggle of values of claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain desired values but also to establish their power. Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive in compatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from other in achieving their goals. Inequalities embedded in the social structure led to violence and conflict. Unless those underlying inequalities are solved then violence will continue. The Prime example is that lower class people are dying because health care resources are granted to the upper – class. Communal violence is one that perpetrates across ethnic or communal lines. The violent parties feel solidarity for their respective groups, and victims are chosen based upon group membership. The term conflict includes riots, disputes, problem, issues and other forms of violence between communities of different religious faith or ethnic groups.

Key Word: Communal, Riots, Conflicts, Valiance, Fanaticism, Persecution, Equality, Disparity.

VIJAYANAGAR PERIOD

In view of the challenges that Muslim militarism and religious fanaticism presented to Hindu culture, the Rayas of Vijayanagar, as the defenders of the Brahminical order, endeavoured to preserve and protect the traditional values and practices. As a result the social iniquities that were getting accumulated over the centuries found a new source of strength under the Vijayanagar regime.^[1] Because of the policy of the rulers social rigidity that was based on the Brahminical doctrine of *Varnasrama Dharma* assumed rigorous proportions. Caste titles were attached to personal names to indicate internal solidarity of particular communities. As in the past the Hindu priests presided over a vast system of mutual hatred and untouchability, generated through caste distinctions. The Telugu Brahmins by virtue of their religious hold and linguistic affinity exercised an overwhelming influence over the rulers.^[2]

However the Vijayanagar period witnessed a revival and growth of

Hinduism, for it is in the hour of gloom religion flourished most and at the same time widening rift among rival sects came to prevail. The Rayas rebuilt the religious establishment, restored the idols that were removed for safety during Muslim invasions, provided for regular worship and enriched them with gifts of land, jewels and money.^[3] With the ascendancy of Hinduism under royal patronage it faced no serious challenge from Islam. As a result there developed splits and counter splits. Most of the Hindu were Saivites, while the rulers and others were Vaishnavites. The Saivites were divided into *Advaitins*, *Pasupatas* and *Vira Saivas*. Their differences were centered on the use of Sanskrit and the Vedas and the interpretation of the dogmas. The Vaishnavites were divided into *Vadakalai* and *Thenkalai*. The *Vadakalai* sect used the Sanskrit Vedas as religious texts and upheld caste differences. The *Thenkalai* sect followed the Tamil *Prabandhas* as their religious texts and indifferent to Caste system.^[4] Vedanta Desikar was a great scholar of the *Vadakalai* sect. Jainism and Buddhism continued to exist in the Tamil

Country but their following dwindled greatly due to continued persecution and over taxation by the Hindu rulers.^[5]

While there were grave circumstances of social and religious unrest, the Vijayanagar rulers examined the problem and decided the issue by taking due care to consider the *Sastraic* basis of doubtful cases demanding settlement.^[6] In Madurai for instance, the *Sourashtras*, who had settled there in large numbers, attempted to raise themselves in the social scale by assuming *Brahmin* caste names and performing the Brahminical ceremony of “*Upakarma*”, or the annual renewal of the sacred thread. There was a great agitation over this practice and the Governor of Madurai arrested 18 members of the *Sourashtra* community for performing such acts.^[7] Managammal (1689 to 1706 A.D) the ruler of Madurai, took cognizance of the situation and convened a meeting of men learned in the Sastras to investigate into the question of the right of the *Pattunulkarans* to perform this ceremony. This assembly, after going

into the details of the subject, declared in favour of the practice, and on their advice Queen Mangammal granted a *Sasanam* authorizing the *Pattunulkarans* to follow the rights prescribed for *Brahmins* in regard to “*Upkarma*”.^[8]

A few years earlier Virappa Nayakka (1609 – 1621) of Madurai proclaimed that the five divisions of the *Kammalans* (artisans) should not intermingle. This order was issued by the ruler to facilitate the separation of the communities from one another in their own interests and because a regulation was needed from the Government. In all these cases the *sastraic* sanctions were examined in all their details and only if there was sufficient sanction for legislation in social and religious matters and the people were prepared to receive the slight innovations cheerfully and allowed the state interfere in such matters.^[9]

On questions, which demanded fact and diplomacy on the part of the rulers for effecting compromises between rival creeds or religions, the Vijayanagar sovereigns took personal

interest and solved them successfully. In 1368, a great-dispute arose between the *Vaishnavas* and the Jains were emerged with regard to the use of the five great musical instruments and the *Kalasa* (holy water pot) on ceremonial occasions and processions. The question went up to the head quarters where Bukka I (1356 – 1377 A.D)^[10] was ruling. He called the leaders of both the sects, investigated the question with their help and issued a proclamation to the effect that there was no difference between the *Darsana* of both of them and taking the land of the Jains placed them under the protection of the latter. He declared that the Jains were entitled to use the five great drums and that they should not consider each other as different. He also appointed a special officer to carry out this order and made him responsible for it. Thus such communal and religious questions which were the cause of much disorder in the empire were decided amicably.^[11]

NAYAKS PERIOD

Muslim expansions to the south had its reaction in the rise of a Hindu empire in Vijayanagar. The whole of southern India was under the sway of Vijayanagar prior to 15th century. At that time Telugu Nayaks were the real rulers of Tamil Nadu from the second half of the 16th century until the middle of the 18th century. During this period communal conflict occurred in Tamil Nadu for the establishment of social and religious justice.^[12]

The arrival of Portuguese into Tamil Nadu offered a death blow to the appearance of the Danish, Dutch, French and English traders in the southern seas. It led to the increase of the Christian population in Vijayanagar Empire.^[13] St. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ, had already reached the Malabar coast and then proceeded to the east and preached Christianity at Mylapore by mid first century A.D. But he was killed by the local people.^[14] But after a lapse of nearly fifteen centuries the portion had changed.

The Hindus of the south resolved to make the endeavour to put an end to

the Muslim atrocities and save their indigenous religion and culture. Kapaya Nayaka was the leader of the war of Liberation.^[15] The arrival of Portuguese on the west coast of India in 1482 A.D. was an important event in the history of Tamil Nadu. They directly professed friendship with the emperor of Vijayanagar. But they indirectly professed enmity with them. The Vijayanagar rulers patronised Hinduism because they followed the policy of revival of Hinduism in Tamil Nadu. The Muslim onslaught was heavy Christian missionaries had done their Evangelical works rapidly. During that period Vaishnavism was formally established in the south as a result of the onslaughts on Jainism and Saivism. Sometimes Christians were protected by the rulers while occasionally some of the Christians were persecuted by them^[16]

Vijayaraghunatha's (1689-1730 A.D) attitude towards Christianity was very favourable in the beginning. But soon the *Sethupathi* seemed to have changes in his policy, as the Jesuits complained of bad treatment from him.

He gave orders to his soldiers to enter the houses of Christians and destroy all traces of their faith.^[17] The missionary activities of the Portuguese on the pearl fishery coast of Tuticorin was also one of the causes of the expedition. They not only converted a large number of *Paravas* but also induced them to transfer their allegiance to the king of Portugal. The Franciscan Friars and the Jesuits demolished temples and constructed churches in the coastal areas. The Portuguese Governor of Goa was also organizing a plundering raid on the rich Hindu temples of Kanchi. Vittala took severe action against the Portuguese and brought them under the control of Vijayanagar.^[18] Rama Raya received complaints about the Christians of Mylapore that they 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 in A.D.1535. He also ordered his cousin Vittala to make simultaneous attack on Goa to prevent help reaching St. Thome. The expedition was a success

and Rama Raya was able to get 1,00,000 (one lakh) pagodas as tribute.^[19]

In their attempt to discover his tomb the Portuguese Jesuits reached Santhome. The Jesuits preached Christianity and gained converts. However it was the conversion of the *Paravas* of the Fishery Coast that swelled the Christian population. To the conservative Hindus the *Paravas* were among the most wretched, yet the rulers of Vijayanagar considered them useful as a source of revenue. After the fall of the Madurai sultanate (1371 A.D), many of the Muslims moved to the Coast and gained control of the fisheries. They imposed restrictions on fishing, gained a monopoly in the sale of pearls, made exactions and oppressed the *Paravas*.^[20] In 1532 there broke out clashes and the Muslims massacred the fishermen. Yet the rulers of Vijayanagar extended no aid or relief to the suffering *Paravas*. There upon, on a suggestion made by Christian from Malabar fifteen Pattangaltis, as the *Parava* head men were called, went on a mission to the Portuguese at Kochi, sought their aid and agreed to become

Christians. Accordingly 20, 000 *Paravas* embraced the catholic religion.^[21] Now a Portuguese fleet appeared off the Fishery Coast, destroyed the Muslim ships, and drove out the Muslims from the Coast. As a result the Portuguese established their authority in the Coast and claimed the *Paravas* as their own subjects. From the Fishery Coast Christianity spread to Thanjavur and to Travancore. Francis Xavier and other missionaries made a significant contribution in this regard. Alarmed at the spread of this religion, the *Brahmins* of Triuchendur appealed to the Emperor for intervention. Thereupon, Vithala led a series of expeditions to the Fishery Coast.^[22] Gaining the co-operation of the Muslims, he suppressed the Christians. After the decline of Empire, the Nayaks launched persecution against the Christians. Despite the fall of the Madurai Sultanate and rise of a Hindu Empire in Vijayanagar, Islam survived in the Country. The rulers of Vijayanagar needed their support not only for the import of horses but also of their sea power for the persecution of the

Christians. This enabled the Muslims to settle down as traders, sailors and army men.^[23]

COMMUNAL RIOTS IN TAMILNADU (16TH CENTURY – 18TH CENTURY)

Tamilagam was open for missionary activities on a large scale in the sixteenth century by the Jesuits father of the Padroado or Patronage system. The decline of the Portuguese and their defeat by the Dutch in 1658 was followed by period of troubles for the Jesuits. The fathers were arrested and imprisoned. Even in Madurai in 1677 A.D. Fr. Boniface was ill-treated and arrested by the men of Chokanatha Nayak (1659-1682 A.D). When the Nayak came to know of it, he punished the officers responsible for it. But outside the Nayak country of Madurai, the kings also joined with the persecutors. The king of Thanjavur was greedy for money and never spared the foreign *Sanyasis*.^[24] The Jesuit letters adduce plenty of evidences regarding the vindictive measures of the Thanjavur Nayak and Maratha Kings.^[25] Yet the untiring missionaries founded Christian settlements in many parts of Thanjavur. The base of operation of the Jesuits in Thanjavur was Madurai Country. The condition became worse during the reign of the Maratha King Shahji (1684-1712). He was the bitter enemy of Christians. He ordered the arrest of Christian women

and sold them as prostitutes. It was considered that attitude most unbecoming of a king. On a feast day, in 1702, Shahji arrested 10, 000 Christians along with two Fathers, namely, Joseph Carvelho and Michael.^[26] The Marava ruler Ragunatha Sethupathi (1645-1670 A.D) wanted to root out Christianity from his soil. It was in this country John De Britto opted for missionary work. In the words of Fernando, “Ragunatha Sethupathi was a most cruel tyrant, a relentless persecutor of the Christians and ordered John De Britto not to preach the gospel in his country. A conversion of a *Marava* Prince aroused the anger of Sethupati and his order to fetch De Britto was instantly executed with all vigour. The Jesuits wanted to stop the execution of Britto through Queen Mangammal (1689-1706 A.D) But the representation of Queen Mangammal and other chiefs were overlooked and Britto was executed on 4th February 1693.^[27] Thus it was a period of storm and stress with regard to religion.

CONCLUSION

Communal Conflict In Tamil Nadu From 14th century to 18th century occurred mainly between low caste and high caste people, Hindus and Christians. During the period of Vijaya Nagar the rulers concentrated to revive Hinduism in Tamil Nadu and they patronized Brahmins to do rituals and ceremonies in Temple. This was the main reason for the

Communal Conflicts. The communal feelings should refer to the need to share social, economical and political rights and opportunities among all people, for their wholesome development. But the history of human civilization has to its record, innumerable instances of the powerful enslaving the weak, the rich exploiting the poor, fair colour subduing the dark colour, the superior race overpowering the inferior race, the high caste depriving the rights of the low caste and one religion the other religion.

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