

AN ANALYSIS OF THE BATTLE OF TALIKOTA

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Abstract: One of the most significant battles in southern part of India that resulted in a huge blood shed among both the forces is the Battle of Talikota. Roughly 1.5 lakh of warriors died along with the destruction of the medieval city of Vijayanagara. This battle that happened in the year 1565 marked the beginning of the Hindu-Muslim dispute in the southern part of the country. The battle of Talikota not only resulted in the destruction of Vijayanagara but also many other surrounding territories'. With the data provided by famous researchers and by a thorough analysis on the subject, the Battle of Talikota is one of the most significant battles etched in South Asia's history. The battle led by the famous king Rama Raya against a frontier of Muslim coalition saw the defeat of the Hindu army by a well-planned Sultan attack. The defeats say the Hindu armies fall in two centuries.

Keywords: Talikota, Vijayanagara, Indian history.

INTRODUCTION

From the year 1565 AD this battle was fought between Vijayanagara kingdom and the Sultanates of Deccan. The Vijaynagar kingdom was defeated in the battle fought near the villages of Rakshasi and Tangdi. At the time of the battle, the ruler of Vijaynagar kingdom was Sadasiva Raya. However, he was a puppet ruler. The power was used by his minister Rama Raya. With this, he tried to destroy the Deccan sultanates by creating difference amongst them. However, they got a hint of his plan and formed an alliance against Vijayanagar kingdom. Soon, the kingdom was attacked by them and everything was looted and destroyed. Around 80 Km southeast of Bijapur city is where Talikota is located. Throughout the onslaught of invading armies of Muslims, Mughals, and Christians, the Hinduism of southern India remained strong and resilient. Even after Muslim sultanates defeated the armies of the Vijayanagara empire in the 1560s C.E., devastating the royal city and sacred sites, Hinduism remained the strongest religion of the Indian continent.[2]

GEOGRAPHICAL OUTLOOK AND EMPIRE

The establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire was in 1336 C.E. which was a turbulent period of India's history, which ultimately went on to include all of South India. During this time, the old order in South India was swept away by the invading Delhi Sultanate, established in 1206 C.E. in North India because of the actions taken by Muhammad of Ghor in today's Afghanistan. Many ancient dynasties collapsed in

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South India, during the early 14th century like the Tamil Pandyas, Andhra Kakatiyas, and KannadigaHoysalas because of Muslim invasions. However, Hindus continued to rule over South India under two brothers who first swore allegiance to Delhi and then revolted: Harihara and Bukka.. After a century, Vijayanagara went on to be South India's largest empire. [1][2]



Figure 1: Regions where the battle had its influence
Ref: <http://thediplomat.com>

Like many empires of its time, a transition between the medieval and early modern periods was witnessed in Vijayanagara,. Although dividing history with this method is primarily European, it is useful to talk of an early modern period everywhere in the world due of its distinct features. These features were found in Hindu India around 1500 C.E. Vijayanagara, which included expanded sea trade, gunpowder, and cosmopolitanism. Vijayanagara was rich for its cities and wealth. Islamic influence also started in Vijayanagara in terms of architecture. The place was also known for its art and literature, especially in the Kannada and Telugu languages, which were the main languages spoken among its populations and ruling classes. Many famous poems of these languages come from this period. When much of the subcontinent came under Islamic rule, Vijayanagara was able to provide a bastion of Hinduism. However, the historians had no doubt that Hinduism would have survived anyway – after all, it was the dominant religion in North India where Muslims ruled – but in Vijayanagara, Hinduism remained vibrant in a more pristine form philosophically, intellectually, musically, and architecturally. South India had the most notable Hindu intellectuals of this time. However, it does not mean that interesting developments and fusion did not occur in North India as well.

The Bahmani Sultanate was located mainly in Maharashtra and Telangana; it was however ruled by Muslim elite where most of its population was Hindu. Goa, was one of its main ports, and it was captured by Portuguese in 1510 with the help of Vijayanagara. The fragmentation of the Bahmani Sultanate was caused due to the success of Vijayanagara, which caused it to be divided into five daughter states by 1518. [2][3]

EARLY INCIDENTS LEADING TO WAR

There were several incidents that eventually lead to the talikota war of 1565. The main theories proposed by the scholars were that Rama Raya the successor to the the throne of the Vijayanagara Empire from the former king Achyuta, did not rule wisely. His interference in the affairs of the neighboring Muslim Sultanates could be a prime reason. Other scholarly opinions tells us that another possible reasons could include the king Rama Raya used the disunity of the Sultans to the advantage of Vijayanagara. In the future he sealed the bonds by allowing inter-family marriages between Sultans which solved many internal conflicts .The complacent and over confident pride of the empire in its strength also added to the cause of the battle.

THE BATTLE

The first battles broke out by 29 December 1564, when Qutb Shah and Nizam Shah decided enter Tirumala Deva Raya's division by leading their own. This inflicted a crushing defeat on the Muslims and the Sultans by the Hindu army. They eventually fled losing thousands of soldiers in the unplanned encounter. The

Sultans were shaken by this encounter and wanted Adil Shah to help them for the intended Hindu counter-attack.

The Sultans arranged a secret meeting and decided that the only way to win was to resort to some cunning scheme. Nizam Shah and Qutb Shah thus decided to hold a conference with the opposing side which was planning a huge counter to discuss terms. During these happenings Adil Shah had sent a fake message to the Hindu commander which claimed that he didn't want to take sides in the conflict. Due to these discussions Rama Raya had to delay his counter thrust which gave a small but needed time for the Muslims to regroup. Sultan of Berar made the first sign by attacking the Krishna ford. At the fort Tirumala Deva Raya's division fell to the hands of the sultan who viciously attacked with his full force. The Raya armies regrouped and were able to make a short and effective encounter which destroyed the Sultan's army. However, Nizam Shah, Qutb Shah, Barid Shah on one side and Adil Shah on the other used this distraction to cross the Krishna and attack the main Hindu divisions.

The Rama Raya army were completely taken by surprise, but were able to respond without any delay. The king had to join the war in order to bring order and discipline back in the Hindu army. He led from the front. Seeing the king the Hindu army responded to the threat. The king led the attack against the Nizam Shah's division. His brother Tirumala led the left wing of the Hindu army that was countered by Adil Shah who had come to an understanding with the Maharatta chief Raja Ghorpade. His second brother Venkatadri led the Hindu right wing against the forces led by the team of Qutb Shah and Barid Shah, which was strengthened by Nizam Shah's auxiliaries as the battle progressed.

On the 23th of Jan 1565, the two armies clashed with their entire forces on the plains near the villages of Rakshasi and Tangadi. The Hindu king's second brother, Venkatadri struck early. Two hours into the battle the Hindu armies right flank fired constantly to destroy the ranks of Barid Shah. Qutb Shah had also failed against the Hindu army. Meanwhile, Nizam Shah was facing a stiff force by a heavy gunfire team from Rama Raya's division. At this stage the Sultans had no choice but to signal their Muslim partners to launch a subversive attack. Now the tides had turned, the king of Vijayanagara was by the surprise attack led by the 2 Muslim divisions in his ranks turning against him. About one and a half lakh Muslim troops had started a vigorous attack on the Hindu army. They had managed to capture several key artillery positions. There was no return from the Rama Raya led army from that point. The sultan's fired several cannon shells near the elephants, Ramaraya fell from one of them as his mount was struck by a cannon shard. The king was left with no room for recovery as Nizam Shah who wasted no time made a dash to arrest him. After the fall of the king the sultanate army wasted little time as they put all their forces together to kill Venkatadri. Tirumala the lone wolf at

the center tried to reduce the damage but at that point the whole division of Adil Shah that was waiting to make the final blow. By then Adil Shah's artillery forces had managed to capture the Vijayanagar artillery had by then been exhausted. The king was taken prisoner and was produced before the Sultanate. As a sign of victory the Muslim troupe beheaded Rama Raya's head and displayed it publicly. Seeing their defeated king the army of lakhs of soldiers were panic strike and confused. The Muslim soldiers chased Hindu troops who were far away from their capital city and butchered them heartlessly while they were fleeing for dear life. More than a lakh soldiers were killed that day. Meanwhile people at the capital city did not believe the news that the army had failed them first time in the past two hundred years.

Seeing the route of the battle Tirumala retreated as quickly as possible in order to empty the treasury. He later fled the capital taking with him the Royal family and the minor crown prince at that time, Sadasiva Raya. He went south towards Penukonda. The looting of Hindu capital by the successful Muslim sultanates supposedly went on for six months, after which they set the city in flames. The heat from the burning was so devastating that people believe it to be the cause of the cracks in the granite hills.[4][5]

A. Assessment of the Battle's Outcome

From various sources historians have stated that the key reasons for the fall of the Rama Raya led army were as follows,

- The betrayal by the Gilani Brothers army at a crucial point in the battle was the primary cause.
- The Hindu led armies had fewer cavalry riding horses found themselves depended on their elephant riding commanders, making them inefficient in the battle. The Muslim led troupes had a good array of horse led attacking fronts which were used by key sections of the army and commanders. This gave them an significant advantage over the opposition.
- The major commanders of the Hindu forces, were aging compared to the forces of the Sultanate armies.
- The quality of the weapons also played a major part in the defeat. The Rama Raya led front depended on bows made of bamboo barks while their counterpart used crossbows made of good metal. Another factor were that the Muslim army used longer spears which reduced the damage in the frontal end of the battle formations of the Sultanate army.
- The Muslim army had prepared a better artillery division who had a higher skill level compared to the Rama rays led army.

B. The Battle of Talikota: its Consequence

- The Vijayanagar kingdom lost its influence in South Indian political meetings.
 - The Nayakas of Vellore and Keladi, Kingdom of Mysore along with many other provinces declared their independence from Vijayanagar.
 - The Sultanates of Deccan lost to the Mughals due to internal disputes.
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AFTERMATH

The sultanate destroyed the city of Vijayanagara which could never completely recover from the onslaught. The unsuccessful resurgence with its capital at Penukonda. Tirumala did not satisfy the locals. Tirumala failed to lay claim over Vijayanagara. He became regent through local support and after a six years gap he claimed regency over the former capital. During this time, anarchy had spread. A reason for family feuds and rebellion is that Aliya Rama Raya had a habit of nominating relatives to key. During this time in order to show their friendship the Vijayanaga empire had to give independence to the Nayakas of Vellore and Keladi Kingdom of Mysore along with many other provinces. The collapse of the Vijayanagara empire led to the disintegration of the political system of the southern areas.

For the Sultanates and Muslim rulers, victory was only temporary as they continued their squabbling and fighting amongst themselves by which they fell as easy prey to the Marathas and later on to the British Empire. Historians believe that Tirumala, had made attempts to revive the city but had no succeeded. It is believed that there was a conflict between him and Pedda Tirumala over the control of the city. The argument was so intense that out of anger Tirumala decided to abandon it. Later on Tirumala seized horses from the Portuguese horse traders to raise a cavalry. He made Penukonda his capital and eventually started heavily fortifying preparing it for defensive war. Adil Shah did not lose hope he later on, marched southwards the second time in 1567 to continue the conquest of the Vijayanagar empire. Chennappa, the commander of the Hindu army put up a strong resistance at Penukonda and repulsed the Muslim. After some well-planned strategies Tirumala successfully claimed the title “Reviver of the decadent Karnataempire”. In 1572, he felt he was too old to rule and retired to a religious life of Vishnubhakti (Devotion to God Vishnu). The war still went on as Adil shah launched a “non stop attack” strategy to attack Penukond from different directions. With the help of Yamaji Rao the Hindu army somehow defeated the sultanate. During the 1580’s there was an intense tension in the air between Sriranga I and Ibrahim Qutb, due to internal conflict with his brothers, who had refused to cooperate in the national struggle. Qutb Shah took advantage of this and was able to capture Kondavidu firmly.

In 1586 Sriranga I had passed away and his younger brother Venkata II became the king. Venkata was faced with the new Qutb Shah. Realizing the deep crisis that had dawned on the Hindus Venkata II decided to resort to stratagem. After proper discussions they managed to fool the Shah stating that he was suing peace only to reinforce and start a well thought off battle strategy. The following that took place a through onslaught of the Muslim Groups, over a lakh of heads fell and they had no escape as the monsoon tides of the Krishna river had cut off their escape pathway. Venkata II led army managed to conquer the fort at Guttit, Udayagiri. The Hindu army also managed to give a sound thrashing to the Muslim counter attack by their ace commander Rustam Khan and liberated it from the stranglehold of the Muslim troops.. The next 28 years the vijayanagara empire led a peaceful life of no defeats. After his death Sriranga III ascended the throne. He was too weak and was driven into exile by Adil Shah who had sent Abdul Wahabi to attack Kurnool. The sultanates did not last long as another huge Hindu army in the form of the Marathas had dominated most of the entire Indian subcontinent from 1649 to 1761. Thus Hinduism survived in India.[5][6]

CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of the battle of Talikota, instead of attempting to hold onto the capital, the rulers fled the city. This led to the destruction of the city of Vijayanagara in the next 5 months and today it is mostly in ruins. Even though Vijayanagara managed to survive till 1646, most of it is fragmented into independent kingdoms such as Mysore and Madurai. Finally, the political and cultural evolution of South India was brought to an end by the debacle of Vijayanagara.

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