

# LAST DAYS OF VIJAYANAGAR

BY

Prof. K. A. NILKANTA SHASTRI

---

Reprinted from the Sardesai Commemoration Volume  
Published by Keshav Bhikaji Dhawale, Bombay 4

---



1938

# THE LAST DAYS OF VIJAYANAGAR

BY

Prof. K. A. NILAKANTA SASTRI

The reign of Venkatapati Deva Mahârâya (1586 to 1614 A. D.) marked the last flicker of the Vijayanagar Empire before it went out finally under his successors. He was not in the direct line of succession, but he was chosen deliberately 'by the unanimous vote of all the classes'—as a contemporary Jesuit letter puts it. There was need for a strong ruler, and even the nobles of the realm felt it. To curb the forces of disorder in the Empire and to combat the increasing insolence of the Muslim states of the Deccan, strong and vigorous leadership was required, and Venkaṭa furnished this for nearly three decades. He brought the rebellious poligars under control and waged successful war against the Muhammadans, from whom he took back much of the territory that had been lost under his predecessor. In civil administration he strove to sustain the failing strength of the village assemblies, and to administer impartial justice and promote economic welfare by resuscitating agriculture which had suffered much from the inroads of Muslim armies. After him, however, came the deluge.

Venkaṭa had many wives but no son. And his love for one of these ladies had led him to wink at a fraud she practised on him, borrowing a baby of one of her maids and calling him her own. Hoping to stop the mischief from going further, Venkaṭa nominated a nephew of his, Śrīranga, as his successor to the throne. But the presence of the putative son was a complication, and Śrīranga was no paragon of strength or wisdom. The nobles fell into two camps; the party of the 'son' was headed by his maternal uncle Jagga Rāya, who took Śrīranga by surprise and imprisoned him with his family. When Yācama Nāyaka, the leader of the other party, succeeded in removing prince Rāma, son of Śrīranga from the prison, and began further to exert himself for the release of Śrīranga, Jagga Rāya answered by putting to death Śrīranga together with the rest of his family still in prison.

But nothing daunted, Yācama proclaimed Rāmadeva Emperor, and shortly after Jagga Rāya met his fate in the battle of Toppūr, but the civil

war continued to disturb the peace of the country for long. The Nāyaks of Madura and Gingee had taken sides against Yācama and Rāma, and Jagga Rāya's brother Etirāja and his other allies were still at large. The death of the pretender, the so-called son of Venkaṭa, led to a peace which was not to Yācama's liking. Rāma married the daughter of Etirāja who thereupon went over to his side. But Yācama felt that Etirāja had not been punished adequately and had an eye on Pulicat which belonged to Etirāja : and the Nāyaks of Madura and Gingee now became jealous of Etirāja's influence at the Court, and kept up their opposition. And the European powers established in the ports, particularly the Portuguese and the Dutch, occasionally joined in the fray; and thus there was much sporadic fighting in various parts of the country. The kingdom of Vijayanagar, or rather Karnāṭaka as it now comes to be called, was but the shadow of a great name.

After a decade and a half of much struggle, Rāma and his father-in-law Etirāja, succeeded by about 1629 in restoring the semblance of imperial authority once more over a considerable part of the Empire. But much had been lost in the interval, and Kurnūl had been conquered permanently by Bījāpūr in 1624 after two invasions and a tough fight. Rāma died in 1630 at the early age of twenty.

Another disputed succession and civil strife followed. Rāma had nominated a cousin of his, Peda Venkaṭa, to the succession ; but Rama's uncle Timma Rāja, disputed his right and confined him to his native place Ānegondi for a time. But the great Nāyaks of the South favoured Venkaṭa, who was also ably assisted by his nephew Śrīranga. Timma, however, ceased to be a source of trouble only with his death in 1635, after which date Venkaṭa, felt free to go and live in Vellore, the capital of the Empire at the time. But Venkaṭa had no peace. For reasons that are not clear to us, his nephew Śrīranga, once so loyal to him, now rebelled and actually engineered two invasions from Bījāpūr in 1638 and 1641; on the first occasion Venkaṭa bought off the enemy by surrendering large amounts of treasure, and the southern Nāyaks came to his aid in 1641. The Sultan of Golconda chose the occasion for laying hands on the coastal districts of the Telugu country. Venkaṭa died in the midst of defeat and disaster, a refugee in the forests of the Chittoor district, in October 1642.

Śrīranga, the rebel nephew of Venkaṭa, now became his successor. But as king he was not equal to undoing the mischief he had started as rebel. For a time jealousy among the Muslim states appeared to

provide Śrīranga a chance, and he repelled Golconda once in 1643-4 with the aid of Bijāpūr troops. But the turbulence of the Nāyaks, the persistence of Golkonda, and the formation of an alliance between Bijāpūr and Golkonda under the auspices of the Grand Mughal to partition the Karnāṭak Empire, led to the inevitable end. The armies of Bijāpūr and Golkonda swept everything before them, and by 1648-9 Śrīranga was reduced to a penniless refugee in the courts of his feudatories who were reduced to submission one after another by the Bijāpūr forces. He fled from Vellore to Gingee, and from Gingee to Tanjore, and finally repaired to Mysore, where he kept up his court with the aid of the Keladi chiefs till death came to him as a relief sometime about 1675.

But the fall of Karnāṭaka was not the fall of the Hindu cause. For even as Bijāpūr was ravaging Karnāṭaka and driving Śrīranga into exile, Śivāji commenced his eventful career, and Śrīranga did not come to his end before Śivāji had been crowned as Chhatrapati.

In the foregoing sketch of the last fifty years of Vijayanagar history I have followed, besides the well-known indigenous sources, some indications given by contemporary Dutch records; and in the rest of this paper I shall cite and comment on the various treaties concluded during the period between the Dutch East India Company and the court of Karnāṭaka. These treaties will be seen mostly to concern the affairs of the important Dutch factory at Pulicat. The texts of the treaties will be found in Heeres—*Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum* Vol. I (1596-1650) which forms Vol. 57 (1907) of *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-Landen Volkenkunde Van Nederlandsch-Indie*.

‘The foundation of Pulicat’, observes Moreland,<sup>1</sup> ‘possesses peculiar interest for students of commercial history, because it was the first fort in India to be held by the merchants of a European Company, and it led directly to Armagon and to Madras.’ The first charter relating to Pulicat was granted on the 24th April 1610 by Venkaṭapati Rāya to Captain Arent Maertszoon.<sup>2</sup> It permitted the Dutch to build a stone house on some land given to them in Pulicat where they could store all ammunitions of war, anchors, sails, merchandise, etc., and protect them from fire, robbers and other mishaps; and to pay 2 % duty on all goods imported to and exported from Pulicat—a payment which was to be made only once on any set of goods and from which rice and other necessities for use in the ‘house’ were to be exempt. The king was to forbid

1. *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* pp. 228-9.

2. Heeres, xxxvii pp. 83-5.

the Portuguese to dwell or trade at Pulicat, and not to allow any European to trade without a permit from the Dutch. Neither side should raise any question or dispute on matters of religion. The king shall restore to the Dutch any man who having done wrong takes refuge with him or in his country. All the traders of the Dutch East India Company were to be free to trade without let or hindrance, and the Dutch Captain Resident in Pulicat for the time being was to have power to catch and to put in chains defaulting painters and weavers, and the king was to help them in this. The Dutch were to supply to the king at the earliest opportunity any European goods or war material he might want from Holland and at the prices prevailing for them in Holland. Trade was the primary object of the Dutch; but they meant to run no risks, and even under Venkaṭa II, a powerful monarch, they stipulated for freedom to organise their own defence and to be judges in their own cases against the industrial population of the country with whom they carried on business.

The express exclusion of the Portuguese from Pulicat only roused the hostility of this nation, long settled in St. Thomé, against the new Dutch settlement, and after some unsuccessful attacks upon it, the Portuguese finally destroyed it on the 9th June 1612. The next charter to the Dutch from Venkaṭa, dated 12th December 1612 and issued at Vellore was in fact rendered necessary by this mishap. It says in the preamble: 'As on the 9th June of this year, the Portuguese of St. Thomé razed to the ground the counting house at Pulicat, killed some people, and carried as prisoners to St. Thomé, the senior merchant Adolf Thomasson and others, it has been necessary to conclude the following contract with the above mentioned king.' This charter,<sup>3</sup> negotiated by Wemmer van Berché'm, Director of the Dutch possessions on the Coromandel coast, repeats all the terms of the old one, with one difference, viz., that the customs rate was to be  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. for imports and 2 per cent. for exports as against the uniform 2 per cent. of the earlier charter. The effects of the recent hostilities with the Portuguese are reflected in the terms of the charter. A regular fort in Pulicat had become a necessity, and it was stipulated that the king was to allow his queen Bāyamma to complete at her cost the fort begun by her at Pulicat – afterwards the famous fort Geldria; the fort was to be under the protection of her people, but the Dutch were to have the use of one half of it, and the keys of the gates were to be handed over to them every evening, and the doors opened in the morning by two porters

3. Heeres-xliii pp. 100-104. cf. Moreland *op. cit.* pp. 229-30.

together—one appointed by the Dutch and other by the queen. And the Dutch were to be free to pursue hostilities against the Portuguese in Pulicat, St. Thome' and all the ports and places in the king's territory, without any obstruction from his officers. The last clause in this agreement is of particular interest to us. It runs: 'And because the abovementioned Pulicat lies far from the king, it is hereby agreed, that besides him, we shall stand under the protection of Jagarāja who will in all difficulties and accidents protect us against all ill-wishers and enemies that should cause us trouble by violence or otherwise,—for which the above mentioned Jagarāja shall grant us a *cowle* for our security and peace.' Jagga Rāya was the brother of Bāyamma, the queen of Pulicat, and was chief minister at this time, and Berchem thought it worth his while to go to Kolār and get Jaga Rāja's *cowle* before he returned to Pulicat.<sup>4</sup>

All the European Companies trading in India learnt soon enough that the grant of the *de jure* sovereign of the country was worth nothing without the good will of the minister or governor who was the real power in his territory.

The treaty of December 1612 was not observed. The fort Geldria was completed at the cost of the Dutch Company and garrisoned by them in 1613, and to secure even this was no easy task. Then came Venkaṭa's death and the war of succession, in which Jagga Rāya died (1616). The next document in our collection<sup>5</sup> is an agreement between the Etirāja, the brother of Jagga Rāya, and the Dutch governor of Pulicat, and is dated 28th August, 1620. In it Gobbūri Etirāja (Gouber Interagie or Jttiragie) calls himself governor over 40 Hindu miles of territory, and states that he was on a visit to Pulicat, when he gave this letter of authority (brief van credentie) to the Dutch captain. He appoints Pedarāja his visitor at Pulicat, and requires him to govern the city as in the time of Bāyamma (Obayama). The Dutch were to carry on as usual, and Etirāja promises to protect them with all his might against enemies. The term of the contract is said to be three years in the preamble. It falls in the period following the alliance between Rāma and Etirāja mentioned above.

Differences seem to have arisen between Pedarāja and the Dutch, and evidence that these were eventually composed in an amicable manner

4. McLeod: *De oost Indische Compagnie*, i pp. 127–8.

5. lxviii pp. 158–60. Some words in this record are difficult to understand though the general sense is clear.

is furnished by a treaty of peace and perpetual alliance between Pedarāja and his friends on the one side and the Dutch governor of Coromandel on the other. The treaty is dated 19th August 1624.<sup>6</sup>

Rāmadeva, ably assisted by his father-in-law Etirāja, so far regained his control over his vassals and the kingdom by 1629, as to call to order the European Companies trading on the Coast. The Portuguese visited him first, as usual with complaints against the Dutch at Pulicat, and offered a considerable sum of money to induce the king to expel them. Ijsbrantsz, the Dutch governor of Pulicat at the time, sent Carel Reniers and Chinnana Chetti to meet the king at Tirutani where he lay encamped with a large army of 65,000 men. They met the king on the 26th October 1629, and among the presents offered were a young elephant, sandal, mirrors, white sugar, red lac, a Japanese box and so on. The king reported to them what the Portuguese of San Thome', had told him and insisted on peace being observed in his territory and San Thome' being left alone by the Dutch. At the same time, the king revived the levy of duties at  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on imports and 2 per cent. on exports that Berchem had accepted in 1612, but had been allowed to fall into disuse in the confusion that followed when, Pulicat, in the strength of Fort Geldria, had been a law unto itself. Finally as a result of the Dutch Mission agreeing to give an undertaking to respect the king's peace, they were let off the tolls and were given a *cowle* excusing them from the payment of all customs duties on imports and exports at Pulicat.<sup>7</sup> The *cowle* is dated 14th November 1629.

As Rāmadeva died soon after, in May 1630, Ijsbrantsz sought and obtained confirmation of the privileges granted by him from his successor, and the brief charter is dated on the full moon day in October 1631.<sup>8</sup> The name of the king does not occur, but we may suppose it was Venkaṭa III, for we have another charter issued by him at the same time relating to the 'great ūngam (groote sioncan van Palleacatta) of Pulicat.'<sup>9</sup> This *ola* is addressed to the Dutch governor and Malaya Chetti. It is short and mentions many facts otherwise unknown. It reads: "Before this Rāma Deva Rāya gave you the villages of Karunguḷi (Carongoer) and Perambūr (Perombur), and I gave you Araśūr (Aresour); in place of which three villages, I now give you the great great ūngam (sioncan) of Pulicat,

---

6, lxxx pp. 193-5.

7. xcii pp. 230-1. McLeod, i pp. 488-9.

8. cii. p. 250.

9. ciii. p. 251. Malaya Chetti was an *alias* of Chinnana Chetti.

būmi śunkam (bhornij sionkan). What this brings in, you must share as you did before in regard to the villages."

We now have a long gap in the charters issued by the Vijayanagar rulers to the Dutch; but we may note in passing the existence of some charters issued by other rulers, feudatories in name, of the Vijayanagar kingdom, as these charters show the stages in the contraction of the area under the sway of the kings of Karnāṭaka. The English left Armagon for Madras in the beginning of 1640; and the Dutch received a *cowle* from Velugoṭi Venkaṭapati enabling them to go and trade at Armagon (Durgarāyapatnam) and other places in his territory. This chieftain had made himself master of the North-east part of the Vijayanagar kingdom during the time of Rāmadeva, offered a discreet submission, when in 1629 Rāma prepared to march against him with a large force,<sup>10</sup> and, doubtless, reasserted his independence at the earliest opportunity. He was an ally of Śrīranga who rebelled against Venkaṭa III and seized the government in 1642.<sup>11</sup> There are two charters and a letter from Tupāki Krishnapa Nayak to the Dutch governor of Coromandel, all dated in the year 1643. Tupaki Krishnapa was at this time the influential general and *de facto* ruler in the province of Gingee; the *cowle* of March 17, 1643<sup>12</sup> allows the Dutch freedom of trade in all the territory of Gingee and gives them besides a house at Tegenapatam, and a letter from Krishnapa to Arent Gardenijs written at the same time (Panguni 13, Chitrabhānu) conveys to him, in addition to a house and garden at Tegenapatam, the whole village of Tondamānattam.<sup>13</sup> Then two *cowles* dated 3rd November 1643 reiterated all the privileges mentioned in the first, and gave jurisdiction to the Dutch over the residents of Porto Novo, Pondicherry and Tegenapatam, and Krishnapa swears by his father Venkaṭapanaick's name that he will abide by the terms of the *cowles*.<sup>14</sup>

It is thus clear that the Vijayanagar kingdom whose rulers gloried at one time in the title of 'rulers of the three seas' had lost all control of the extensive sea board of Southern India.

All was not over yet. In Pulicat the writ of Vijayanagar ran for some time more. Śrī Ranga visited Pulicat on the 28th April 1643

10. McLeod i. p. 487.

11. *ib.* ii. p. 395.

12. Heeres clii pp. 394-99.

13. *ib.* pp. 399-400.

14. Heeres, clix pp. 417-19. This Venkatapa is different from the Velugoti Venkatapa mentioned above.



and was received in Fort Geldria with honour, and in his turn he made a present to the Dutch company of one half of the tolls collected in Pulicat on all incoming and out-going goods.<sup>15</sup> This was in addition to the freedom from all tolls for the company's own trade. The *cowle* conveying the gift is dated April 29, 1643, (Subhānu, Viśākham, new moon). But the Dutch found that difficulties cropped up with the leaseholders who held the lease of the other half of the tolls of Pulicat, and there was also much trouble due to the invasion of the Golconda forces. In spite of a bilateral agreement with the lessees concluded in September 1644,<sup>16</sup> the Dutch seemed to have gained little out of this gift. Once more Śrī Ranga had to regulate the affairs of Pulicat in April-May 1646. The Dutch had stood by him in his war with Golconda, and the king gave evidence of his gratitude and of his good sense in the arrangements he made. He gave the Dutch the entire lease of Pulicat for an annual payment of 8000 pardaos, of which they were to keep 2000 as compensation for damages they had suffered in the past and remit the remaining 6000 to him. Besides, he gave them the usufruct of the income of seven villages round about Pulicat, a privilege which other lessees had enjoyed before, and only stipulated for an addition of two horses and some 'rarities' to the usual annual present of an elephant, a horse and so on.<sup>17</sup>

The last occasion on which Śrī Ranga dealt with the Dutch at Pulicat was in October 1646 when, for reasons not quite evident, he once more confirmed all the *cowles* and gifts granted before; but the days of his overlordship of Pulicat were numbered, and by the end of the year Pulicat definitely passed under Golconda, and the first *cowle* from Mir Jumla to Arnold Heussen, the then Dutch governor of Pulicat, is dated 'the last day of 1646 A. D.'<sup>18</sup>

---

15. Heeres cliii pp. 403-5. McLeod, ii p. 180.

16. clxiii pp. 426-9.

17. clxxvi. pp. 472-4. McLeod ii p. 402.

18. Heeres clxxx. p. 486.

