



A Study on Role of Vijayanagar and Bahmani Sultans in Karnataka History

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INTRODUCTION

The fourteenth century witnessed the emergence of powers in South India against the North, which is hugely responsible for protecting the distinct cultural identity of the region.¹ The disintegration of the Tughlaq Dynasty in South India and in the Deccan region led to the birth of the Vijayanagar Kingdom in South India and the Bahmani Sultanate in Central India, both of which dominated the south of the Vindhyas for a period of more than 200 years before they were subdued by the Mughal Empire.² It is relevant in this light to understand the nature of Vijayanagar-Bahmani relations, which comprises the area of concern for this paper. Such understanding shall aid to comprehend the effects of these relations on the political scenario in the region, following long even after the weathering of the two kingdoms.

The Vijayanagar Kingdom (later, Vijayanagar Empire) was established in the year 1346 A.D, around the same time as Bahman Shah founded the Sultanate.³ The Vijayanagar Empire had considerable hold in South India in areas including the Tamil country and that of the Cheras (Kerala). However, it continued to face a constant threat in areas north of the Tungabhadra River in the shape of the Bahmani Sultanate.⁴ Unfortunately, this period in history is remembered more for the wars

that marked the nature of the relations between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate rather than for the developments they brought about for the region in which they were present.

The researcher will commence by giving a very brief introduction of the establishment of the two kingdoms to set the ground for exploring the nature of the relationship. The researcher will then identify the bones of contention between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate, which played an important role in assessing the reasons for the strained relationship between the two kingdoms. The researcher also seeks to comprehend the internal relationship between the ruler and the local overlords in the kingdoms to understand the ways in which it affected the conflict. Finally, the researcher will look into the effect of the conflict on the two kingdoms, culminating with the Battle of Rakshasa-Tangadi (also known as Battle of Talikota) in 1565 and leading to the decisive defeat of the Vijayanagar Empire.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the project is to comprehend the nature of the Vijayanagar-Bahmani relations and to study their effect on the political geography of South India and the Deccan.

The objective of the paper is to assess the reasons that led to conflict between the Vijayanagar Empire and Bahmani Sultanate. The researcher wants to study the effect that the conflict had on the two kingdoms, which shall aid in understanding the political scenario in the region. The researcher also

¹ K. A. N. Sastri, THE ADVANCED HISTORY OF INDIA, 403(1982).

² Satish Chandra, HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL INDIA (800-1700), 139(2009).

³ Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermond, A HISTORY OF INDIA, 182 (1990).

⁴ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 139.

aims to provide a critique of the theory providing a communal outlook to the conflict between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the paper extends to and is somewhat limited by the writings of the various historians and the travellers on the functioning of the two kingdoms, with a focus on the reasons for the strained relationship between Vijayanagar Empire and Bahmani Sultanate.

The paper does not give emphasis to the history of the formation of the two kingdoms and tries to avoid going into depth into the areas like the social structure of the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate, which were not directly responsible for the conflict, in order to prevent shifting of focus from the topic.

Research Questions

1. What was nature of the Vijayanagar-Bahmani relations?
2. What were the reason for the conflict between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate?
3. What were the effects of the conflict on the internal functioning of the two kingdoms?
4. How did the nature of the two kingdoms affect the relationship between the two kingdoms?

Sources of Data

The research paper makes use of secondary sources such as books and journal articles to facilitate the research. The researcher looks at various historians having different interpretation of the same history to be able to present different viewpoints without getting limited by any one version of history.

Mode of Citation

The National Law School Guide to Uniform Citation has been followed.

Methodology

The researcher will commence by trying to answer the basic questions such as why and how, which arise in the mind while reading the history presented by various historians. The researcher will then look critically at the sources presented by the various historians in the light of their different ideological backings and the period of time in which they are writing their version of history. The research looks at the various aspects related to the two kingdoms such

as their historical origins, the process of their establishment, the political structure present within the two and the geographical importance of the region in which the two kingdoms are situated in order to bring out the reasons for the strained relationship between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate.

Chapterisation

The research paper is divided into three chapters. The first chapter briefly describes the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate to give a context in which the conflict between the two kingdoms takes place. The second chapter presents the areas of conflict and reasons given by various historians regarding the conflict. It then goes on to assess them in light of the political scenarios within the two kingdoms. The third chapter analyses the effect that the conflict had on the politics of the two kingdoms and the subjects present within them. It also assesses the way in which the conflict was shaped by the internal workings and power struggles within the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate.

FOUNDATION OF THE TWO KINGDOMS

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the establishment of the two kingdoms, also the way in which the kingdoms expanded in order to have more political and economic power in the region. Firstly, the paper looks at the Vijayanagar Kingdom, which went from controlling a small portion of land in Southern India to becoming the most powerful Empire in history of South-East Asia. Then, it describes the history of Bahmani Sultanate, the way in which the Bahaman Sultan emerged as the ruler of the Deccan by undermining the authority of the Tughlaq Dynasty. The researcher mainly focuses on the aspects, which are important in order to understand the nature of the relationship between the two kingdoms.

The City of Vijayanagar is generally supposed to have been founded around the year 1336 A.D. by the two of the five sons of Sangama.⁵ The story related to the foundation of the kingdom is disputed and still continues to be a matter of debate. The Vijayanagar Kingdom gradually expanded under the rule of Harihara and Bukka. It is described to be a kind of

⁵ Robert Sewell, A FORGOTTEN EMPIRE (VIJAYANAGAR): A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF INDIA, 16 (2002).

cooperative commonwealth in its initial days.⁶ According to some writers, it emerged as a Kingdom and subsequently as an Empire in order to stem the growth of Muslim power in South India and as an effective way in which the Hindu powers could come together as one single state.⁷ However, this seems to be false in light of the resistance shown by the various kingdoms when the Vijayanagar kingdom tried to gain control of them and also due to the frequent infighting for political supremacy between different Hindu rulers to establish control over one another. The rise of Vijayanagar's powers and its need to increase influence brought it into clash with many rivals in both the southern and the northern side of the kingdom.⁸ However, the largest rivals that emerged were the Bahmani Sultans on the northern side of the river Krishna that emerged during the same period and were expanding more or less because of the same reasons. The Bahmani Sultanate and subsequently the succession states remained the single largest enemy of the Vijayanagar till its debacle in 1565 after the Battle of Rakshasa-Tangadi.⁹ The origin of the Bahmani Sultanate is much less an issue of debate than the origins of its archenemies, the Vijayanagar Empire. The Sultanate originated around 1345 A.D. after Muhammad Tughlaq left Daultabad, the city was conquered by one Zafar Khan who was later known as Ala-U-Din Hasan Bahman Shah or Bahman Shah.¹⁰ Despite their ambitious campaign, the Sultans could not expand much of their Sultanate as in the north they faced the Delhi Sultanate, on the eastern side, the Gajapatis of Orissa and in the south they had the formidable Vijayanagar Empire with which they had frequent wars over control of the Tungabhadra-Krishna doab and the surrounding areas. The area was never in constant control of any one side but changed hands frequently and was the bone of contention for the two kingdoms.¹¹ It was not only a contentious issue for these two kingdoms but for many rulers who were present in the

region in the ancient times.¹² The sultans made Gulbarga their capital and divided the Sultanate into *tarafs* (provinces) each under a *tarafdardar* (governor).¹³ Over a period of time, the governors of the *tarafs* became rebellious and the Bahman Sultan was left with no power of his own.¹⁴ Around the year 1526 AD, the provinces declared their independence, which led to the foundation of the five Bahmani succession states. The states of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Berar, Bidar and Golconda came into existence after the collapse of the central administration, which was strengthened under the rule of Mahmud Gawan. The Sultans of these succession states were the governors of the provinces who promoted party strife among the Sultanate and became rebellious after the execution of Mahmud Gawan.

This division, to a large extent, increased the power of the Vijayanagar rulers who promoted the infighting between these kingdoms in order to maintain their supremacy over the region and to expand their territory northwards. However, the five Sultans realized the game played by Aliya Rama Raja, formed a confederation and handed a defeat to the Vijayanagar empire in 1565, taking away all that the rulers built over a course of 200 years, destroying the bastion that held together South India for a considerable period of time. However, before the debacle of the two kingdoms, they had achieved what no other kingdom preceding them did, which was to integrate their respective territories under a single throne. The Vijayanagar and the Bahmani rulers also played a very important role in limiting the power and the reach of the Delhi Sultanate.

THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

In this chapter, the researcher assesses the nature of the conflict between the Bahmani Sultanate and the Vijayanagar Empire. The researcher firstly establishes the contentious areas in which the wars took place between the two kingdoms. After determining the areas, the researcher analyses the

⁶ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 139.

⁷ K.A.N. Sastri, THE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF SOUTH INDIA, 144 (2009).

⁸ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 139.

⁹ K.A.N. Sastri, *supra* Note 1, at 425.

¹⁰ Kulke, *supra* Note 3, at 182.

¹¹ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 140.

¹² Romila Thapar, THE PENGUIN HISTORY OF EARLY INDIA: FROM THE ORIGINS TO AD 1300, 327 (2002).

¹³ S.A.A. Rizvi, THE WONDER THAT WAS INDIA, Vol. II, 80 (1993).

¹⁴ *Id.*

reason as to why they were important for the two kingdoms. The researcher also analysis the internal dynamics of the two kingdoms in order to be able to better comprehend the importance of the contentious areas.

The Vijayanagar rulers and the Bahmani Sultans fought at least ten wars between themselves from 1336 AD till the Battle of Talikota in 1565. The chroniclers present in the two regions such as Firishhta tried to give communal reasons for the conflict; however over a period of time it has been realized that the conflict was mostly political in nature.¹⁵ The conflict was localized to mainly three separate areas, which were of great importance to both the kingdoms. The interests of the two kingdoms lay in the regions of the Tungabhadra doab, in the Krishna-Godavari delta and in the Marathwada country.¹⁶ The most important of these was the region between the rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra, which consisted of 30000 square miles.¹⁷ The region was fought over so often not only by the Vijayanagar and Bahmani kingdoms but also by rulers in ancient India primarily because of its economic resources and wealth.¹⁸ The region was to an extent responsible for the rise and fall of kingdoms in the region as the economic wealth of agrarian kingdoms was largely influenced by the control they had over the Raichur doab region.¹⁹ The researcher has looked at the geography of the Vijayanagar and the Bahmani kingdoms in order to understand the importance of the region for the two kingdoms specifically. The Bahmani Sultanate faced a drought in its territory and was in severe need of the water and the fertile lands present in the region to increase its economic strength and at the same time to sustain their Sultanate. On the other hand, the Vijayanagar territory had large areas, which received very low rainfall.²⁰ The Vijayanagar Empire and the

Bahmani Sultanate in order to sustain their respective kingdoms needed to both provide sources of water to the nearby regions for agriculture to produce enough food grains to maintain their Kingdoms and also to generate revenue to fulfill their military and trade needs. Deva Raya-I constructed a dam across the Tungabhadra River to relieve the regions in the Vijayanagar Empire that faced shortage of water and to promote agriculture, which led to increase in revenues by 350000 pardos.²¹ This clearly meant that the region was important in terms of economic value for the Vijayanagar Empire as the empire had total revenue of only 600000 pardos.²² The conflict in the Maratha country was due to a similar reason however it also had an added incentive to it.

The second reason for the conflict was regarding the Konkan region. It directly affected the amount of control that the kingdom had on the numerous ports present in the region and also on the extremely fertile land strip, which in effect meant the control that a kingdom had over the trade in the region.²³

The ports were important for the Vijayanagar kingdom as the horse trade between the Portuguese and the Vijayanagar rulers took place at these ports. This trade also meant that the Vijayanagar rulers could avoid trading with the Arabs who charged a high price for good mounts.²⁴ The Vijayanagar rulers needed good imported horses in order to maintain their military supremacy over their neighbors, as the Indian breeds could not match the ones in hands of the Bahmani Sultans.

The region was also of great importance, as it served as a ground for expansion further into the territories of the two kingdoms. The Bahmani Sultans had more or less the same territory since their establishment and to expand their territory further into the South they needed to have control over this region, which would serve as base for launching attacks deeper into the Vijayanagar territory. Similarly, the Vijayanagar rulers needed to maintain control over this piece of

¹⁵ Rizvi, *supra* Note 13, at 77.

¹⁶ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 140.

¹⁷ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 140.

¹⁸ Thapar, *supra* Note 12, at 327.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib, THE CAMBRIDGE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF INDIA, Vol. I, 7 (1987).

²¹ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 143.

²² Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 152.

²³ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 140.

²⁴ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 143.

land to fulfill their ambition of conquering territory in the northern region and also to protect the territory that they possessed.

Some authors have tried to link the strained relationship between the two kingdoms to the diamond mines present in the region surrounding the Tungabhadra River.²⁵ The region was a very important supplier to the world market and is famous for producing diamonds which shaped the destiny of kingdoms.²⁶ The researcher is however of the view that diamond mines formed only a minor reason for

the conflict as the amount of money spent by the two kingdoms on maintaining the armies was far greater than the financial benefit that could have accrued from the mines.

Finally, Kulke adds another dimension to the conflict by putting forward his theory that the Hindu kingdoms tried to assert control over the Raichur Doab region as it formed an important sacred centre.²⁷ The region in which the two rivers, Krishna and Tungabhadra confluence needed to be protected from the Bahmani Sultanate, as it would prevent the pilgrims from the Vijayanagar kingdoms to visit the ancient temples present in the region increasing the discontent among the Hindu population of the Empire. Similarly, controlling the western coastal region was important for the Bahmani Sultans to prevent harassment of the ships carrying the pilgrims to the holy visit to Mecca. This has been given as a reason because of which Mahmad Gawan captured the port of Goa, in order to facilitate the journey for the Muslim subjects in the kingdom.

The reasons given in this chapter refute the communal image offered by the historians present in the two kingdoms and at the same time establish the economic and political reasons behind the conflict.

THE CONFLICT AND THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS

This chapter commences with discussing the ways in which the two kingdoms were affected by the strained

relationship and the frequent wars between the two kingdoms. It then goes on to review the way in which the domestic functioning of the state affected the conflict at large. In this part of the chapter, the researcher essentially looks at the internal feuds present in the kingdom, which shaped the nature of the wars that were fought.

The strained relationship between the Bahmani Sultans and the Vijayanagar Rulers affected the way in which the kingdoms functioned, in multiple ways. Firstly, the frequent wars with the Bahmani Sultanate made Vijayanagar require a standing army at all times.²⁸ For the purpose of maintaining an army, which was remunerated in cash, there was a rise in the rate of taxation.²⁹ Also, the Vijayanagar kings believed that their losses to the Bahmani Sultans occurred due to inferior nature of their horses and in order to improve their army, the Vijayanagar Empire started procuring imported horses from the Arabs and later from the Portuguese. This created a heavy burden on the state exchequer and was also responsible for a high taxation rate. The inscriptions from the period are an important source of assimilating a list of taxes imposed on the villages by the state. From them we also get to know that land was the principal source of revenue.³⁰ The high rate of taxation is known to have caused widespread discontent among the peasantry and owing to this a number of villages revolted against the empire itself however, these conflicts were localized and never made a major threat to suzerainty of the Vijayanagar Empire. Within the fragmented nature of the Vijayanagar Empire every magnate looked to increase his power with respect to the neighboring overlords.³¹ These conflicts within the Vijayanagar Empire did play an important role in the empire's defeat at the hands of the Bahmani Sultans as the forces of the empire needed to be divided in order to keep a check on the growing power of the *nayakas*. The revolts in the provinces were frequent and needed to be kept in control in order to maintain supremacy of the central rule. The frequent wars also led to a positive development in the Vijayanagar

²⁵ P.N. Chopra, *MEDIEVAL HISTORY (A.D. 1206-1761)*, 33 (1988).

²⁶ Raychaudhari and Habib, *supra* Note 20, at 431.

²⁷ Raychaudhari and Habib, *supra* Note 20, at 431.

²⁸ K.A.N. Sastri, *supra* Note 1, at 431.

²⁹ K.A.N. Sastri, *supra* Note 1, at 432.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ Burton Stein, *THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA I-VIJAYANAGARA*, 91 (2011).

Empire as they realized that another reason for their frequent loss in wars was that their archers were not able to match the capabilities of the Muslim archers in the Bahmani army. In order to improve on this aspect, Devaraya II enlisted Muslims in the Vijayanagar army and for this purpose he built a mosque in the city of Vijayanagar and kept a Quran in front of the throne. These steps greatly helped to remove the feeling of hostility in the hearts of Muslim subjects present in the State. Also, Vijayanagar's military modernization campaign transformed the Empire into the most powerful non-Muslim polity in India in their time.³² The Bahmani Sultans faced similar problems in terms of maintaining an army against its neighbors as the resources available with them were even more limited. The *tarafdars* or the nobles, who needed to maintain a specific number of soldiers and horses in

return for specific payment,³³ started to get discontented due to the exaggerating demands made by the sultans and began rebelled against central authority leading to the division of the Sultanate into five parts. Together the two kingdoms had to pay a heavy toll for the frequent wars with each other to control a piece of tract, in spite of the fact that neither of the kingdoms made any significant advance into other's territory.

The nature of the relationship between the two kingdoms left a significant effect on both the kingdoms. At the same time the Vijayanagar-Bahmani relations were also to a large extent, shaped by the internal politics and circumstances present in the two kingdoms. One of the reasons for the defeat in wars to the Bahmani Sultanate in the late 15th century can be attributed to the frequent uprisings within the Vijayanagar Empire as the rulers were not able to give enough attention to the conflict outside the state boundaries, instead they needed to stay focused on maintaining suzerainty over its own territories. The Chola and Chera rulers under the Vijayanagar Empire arose against the domination by the Vijayanagar rulers. The reason for the uprising of the Cholas and the Cheras was due to the weakening of

the autonomous powers they possessed such as the power to have village self-government, the power to have their own courts and also due to the high tax extracted by the Vijayanagar rulers.³⁴ Also, the growth of hereditary *nayakships* in the Vijayanagar Empire curbed the freedom of the local rulers, which compelled them to rise in revolt against the Empire. The frequent uprising by the local rulers compelled Narasa Nayak to march towards the south and subdue the region up to Cape Comorin to reassert the power and authority of the Vijayanagar Empire.³⁵ This allowed the Bahmani Sultan, Yusuf Adil Shah, to seize the fortress of Raichur and Mudgal while the Vijayanagar rulers were busy handling internal conflicts. Also, the *nayakas* formed a powerful section of the Empire making it difficult for the rulers to control them, which was another weakness of the Vijayanagar Empire which led to its subsequent disintegration.³⁶ The domestic problems were not limited to the Vijayanagar Empire only but were also present in the Bahmani Sultanate. The Bahmanis faced problems of their own in the form of a divided nobility within the Sultanate. The nobles comprised of people from two different ethnic groups who were involved in a power struggle. One group of nobles comprised of the Turks, Afghans, and Persians who were generally Shias while the other group of Muslims from the Deccan region was traditionally Sunnis. The rival factions had within them racial and religious differences that weakened the Sultanate and led to its downfall.³⁷ The conflict also led to the execution of Mahmud Gawan who was a brilliant statesman and held the *taraf* present in the Bahmani Sultanate together.³⁸ This set off the events that ultimately led to the division of the Sultanate.

Meanwhile, the Vijayanagar Empire faced a power struggle between different ruling lines which allowed the Bahmani succession states to grow in power and assert control over significant areas of the debatable land depriving the Vijayanagar Empire of important sources of revenue as long as the internal feud

³² Burton Stein, A HISTORY OF INDIA, 154 (2002).

³³ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 148.

³⁴ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 152

³⁵ K.A.N. Sastri, *supra* Note 7, at 175.

³⁶ Chandra, *supra* Note 2, at 148.

³⁷ K.A.N. Sastri, *supra* Note 1, at 432.

³⁸ Rizvi, *supra* Note 13, at 80.

continued. The internal power struggle for the throne of Vijayanagar till 1542 also weakened the control of the rulers over the Vijayanagar Empire. Aliya Rama Raya aiming to control the Vijayanagar throne captured Achyutadeveraya, however his attempts failed after the nobility of the Empire reacted negatively against the attempt to seize power. However, later when he came to power after the death of Achyuta, he dismissed the ancient nobles and raised his own family members to high administrative posts increasing the discontent among the local populace, which led to frequent revolts.³⁹ Similarly, the Bahmani Sultanate faced a power struggle of its own after the execution of Mahmud Gawan, the period being interspersed with frequent power struggles between the people in line for the throne. The Bahmani Sultan just remained at the centre as a puppet ruler.⁴⁰ The governors of different *tarafs* started exercising the real power and had frequent struggles with each other, which was exploited by Rama Raya in order to keep the powers of the Bahmani succession states in check.⁴¹ However, Adil Shah discovered the idea

behind the scheme of things and initiated a process, which led to the formation of the confederation, and defeat of the Vijayanagar Empire that took away its glory.⁴²

CONCLUSION

The Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate were responsible for the smooth transition from the India's medieval past into the modern future. As the researcher removes layer on layer and goes deeper into the reasons for strained relationship between the Empire and Sultanate, the conflict between the two kingdoms, which, at the surface, looks like a struggle for the protection of the Hindu identity turns out to be a complex battle for establishing political supremacy over the region. The two kingdoms established at almost the same time led to the consolidation of the region, making it free of multiple kingdoms fighting amongst each other and thereby stabilizing the region.

³⁹ K.A.N. Sastri, *supra* Note 7, at 187.

⁴⁰ K.A.N. Sastri, *supra* Note 1, at 409.

⁴¹ Rizvi, *supra* Note 13, at 82.

⁴² Rizvi, *supra* Note 13, at 82.

The researcher understands the nature of the Vijayanagar-Bahmani relations by identifying the regions of conflict, which were centered around the Tungabhadra-Krishna Doab. He then goes on to highlight and comprehend the reasons for the strained relationship between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate, and argues that they were strictly based on political and economic lines. The researcher for lack of any concrete evidence has criticized the communal outlook being put forward by some chroniclers and historians regarding the nature of Vijayanagar-Bahmani relations. It is argued that the Vijayanagar-Bahmani relations were based on political factors and not on religious influences. The researcher also establishes that the reasons for the largely localized conflict that are built around the requirement of economic wealth needed for the purpose of strengthening and expanding the political authority of the two Kingdoms. The researcher also brings out the effects of the conflict on the functioning of the two kingdoms, which include increasing discontent among the local populace due to the despotic nature of the rulers in order to extract high revenues needed for the purposes of the war. The strained relationship between the two kingdoms also led to rise in frequent feuds within the local kings who rose against the Empire in order to prevent curbing of their autonomous powers. Finally, the researcher has analysed the way in which the nature of the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate affected the relationship between them. The researcher contends that the frequent uprising of the local rulers, the internal struggle for the throne and the party strife within the two kingdoms affected the political and military power of the two kingdoms, which continually altered the dynamics of the relationship between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate.

Thus in conclusion, with the findings presented in the paper, it can be said that there are many fallacies present in the argument given by some historians and chroniclers regarding the communal nature of the conflict between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bahmani Sultanate. It can also be said that the nature of the relationship and the reasons for conflict, which are political and economic in nature, are very similar to that of the other kingdoms that existed in medieval India.

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