

# A Study on the Political System of the Tuluva Dynasty of Vijayanagara

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This paper attempts to examine the political system of the third (Tuluva) dynasty of Vijayanagara during the first half of the sixteenth century with special emphasis on its foundation, the *Nāyaka* system, mainly based on the contemporary inscriptions and the travel books of two Portuguese merchants who visited the royal capital, Vijayanagara.

In the *Nāyaka* system, kings assigned *nāyakas* few tracts (*sīmes*) as their fiefs (*nāyakatanas*) on the condition of military service and tribute. Kings had strong political control over *nāyakas* who were obliged to stay in the royal capital and daily attend the royal court and whose fiefs were transferred from one place to another in a rather short period of time. *Nāyakas* did not have their own power bases in the specific province, as has been generally understood. The *Nāyaka* system functioned systematically as “the so-called actual mechanisms of state power” throughout the period of the Tuluva dynasty. Thus the Vijayanagara kingdom of the Tuluva dynasty can never be defined as a “segmentary state” which, in principle, denies kings any political control over their segments (*nāyakas*).

On the other hand, the state-wide administrative and military organization under the direct control of kings was in an immature state. The royal demesne seemed to be small as compared with the total of all *nāyakas*' fiefs. The strength of the kingdom depended largely on the personal ability and

resource of *nāyakas*, who were assigned the major role both in the provincial governance and the military mobilization. As shown by the frequent occurrence of the internal conflict involving powerful *nāyakas*, kings could not take for granted the loyalty and submission of *nāyakas*. A factor which encouraged *nāyakas* to behave autonomously and independently *vis-à-vis* kings was the possibility of political career the former could expect in other states such as Deccan Muslim kingdoms which were in intermittent conflict with the Vijayanagara kingdom and in need of men with ability and mobile resources like *nāyakas*.

Under the Tuluva dynasty we see the sophistication and intensification of royal performances which show off the personal dignity and prowess of kings. They might serve to compensate for the weakness and vulnerability of kings inherent in the political system.