



# Emergence Of The Palegara'war Lords' In South India

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Palegara a word derived from 'Paleya'. It means Military Camp Palegara means leader of the Army, or those who were ready to war along with Army. However, later on which was known as a Administrator. Palegaras were entirely different from Royal Administrators, those were maintained a separate Army and their own Paleyapattu (Administrative unit). During later phase of Hoysala Kingdom palegara system was born took place in South India<sup>1</sup> but which was came into forefront during Vijayanagara kingdom. Vijayanagara Kings were established supremacy over entire South India through this system and palegaras were called by different names such as Poligar in English, Palegara in Kannada, Pallegadu in Telugu, Palaikkaran in Tamil, palegars in Marathi.<sup>2</sup>

After the defeat of Ramaraya the Vijayanagara De facto King in 1565 at the hands of the Adilshahis. The region to the North of the Tunga Bhadra river basin came under the rule of Bijapur Sultanate.<sup>3</sup> While the region to the south of it remained by and large unconsolidated despite one or two major southern campaigns by the Sultans, while the northern part remained under the rule of the Bijapur Sultanate till 1684, when Aurangzeb conquered the region.<sup>4</sup> We would here prefer to confine ourselves to discussing the nature of social development in southern Karnataka during this period. The sole cause for the fall of Vijayanagara has so far been attributed by a Hindu Communal perception of history to the war with the Adilshahis alone without looking at the other factors that contributed in fair measure at weakening the rule of the empire.

Firstly, there were several Peasant insurrections against feudal rule. K,Vishwanath provides evidence of more than fifty peasant uprisings, which Weakened Vijayanagara. These were largely due to heavy taxation and feudal oppression under the Nayakas,<sup>5</sup> Kanakadasa's [famous social reformer and poet of Medieval Karnataka] Kirtanes reflect this simmering In some places the Nayakas joined hands with discontent of the peasantry. Peasants in fighting against Hampi rule (Hampi was capital city of Vijayanagara Kingdom).<sup>6</sup>

The Second internal reason for the collapse of Vijayanagara lay in the feudal roots of its political structure, which obviously militated against centralization. Burton stein writes "Dissemination of this assemblage" of militarily superior means not only made Nayakas the most powerful local and supra local chiefs South India had known, but almost assured conflict between them and the Raya overlords of the macro region, such conflict was an early feature of Vijayanagara rule in South India and is ultimately responsible for the decline

of the state in the early part of the seventeenth century, when civil wars rent the southern peninsula, conflict between the Vijayanagara Kings and the powerful Nayakas is another element of discontinuity which is significant.<sup>7</sup> Thus the basis for emergence of Vijayanagara, i.e., the Nayaka system itself ultimately turned into the very basis for the collapse of the kingdom and the fragmentation of the once centralized empire. The reason for this was that the forces of centralization created by the Vijayanagara State was nominal and unending as it was based on a primarily feudal structure of fief holders

The Nayakas, strengthened by the body of the kings troops under their Command, artillery, cavalry and modern techniques of warfare, became an insurmountable force and a common sources of dissolution for the Vjayanagara kingdom<sup>8</sup> The defeat at Talikote coincided with simultaneous uprisings by the Nayakas, thereby paralyzing and ultimately contributing to its break up. Further, the Nayakas themselves had to contend with several such similar rebellions by the feudal vassals who governed below them, there by further reducing them to the position of Petty Chieftains, every vassal assumed the title of “Nayaka” and thus the entire southern and coastal regions of Karnataka were consigned to interline war fare and feudal anarchy<sup>9</sup> Thus the rule of the Palegars came to stay with Hampi depopulated and no particular center discernible, the next century and more consisted of this state of conflict and warlordism.<sup>10</sup>

The feudal layer which mediated between the Nayakas and the village Gowdas emerged with their proclamation of independence as the Palegaras of Southern Karnataka, each of these Palegaras controlled anything from ten to fifty villages. They maintained an armed body of horseman and artisans, and retainers. They imposed a levy on the peasantry, artisans, and merchants in their Principalities. They normally built small hill fortresses or durgas, which preserved and protected them from attacks by neighboring Palegars or in some instances, from the people themselves. The dispensable of these forts was so widespread that survey for Chitradurga district alone listed a total of 120 such forts.<sup>1</sup> The civil Strife which was introduced by the rise of rapacious warlordism gradually began to acquire a sense of direction. Vanished Palegaras were to bow to the victors and were compelled to cough up tributes to them. gradually at different points across the vast terrain of south and coastal Karnataka. Certain centers emerged one such center was carved out by the Wodeyars of Mysore, shepherds by origin, while some others say potters. The Wodeyars assumed control over sixteen villages in Mysore's Nanjanagud taluk about time before the Vijayanagara Empire could be established. This brought them recognized as fief holders. They based themselves in the village of Hadinaru, their original capital (Hadinaru, meaning Sixteen)<sup>12</sup>

The Wodeyar vassals kept portion of the tax they collected from the Peasantry for themselves and dispatched the rest to the Nayaka who was firmly established not far away in the island fort of Srirangapatna. Ruling over a region watered by the Kabini River, the Wodeyars put their resources to best use and in a series of offensive and defensive wars, after the collapse of Vijayanagara, took Srirangapatna in 1640 A.D by ousting the effete nayaka who resided there. In 1630 A.D., they defeated Jagadevarayana and Nagamangala absorbing them into the Mysore State<sup>13</sup>

Thus by 1625, various such centers sprung up across the region, Lewis Rice provides us information about the extent to which this process of realignment had reached by 1625 A.D. Fourteen such stable centers had emerged. Among them the Lingayat Nayakas of Ikkeri, had at least 40 Palegaras below them paying tribute. The Beda Nayakas of Chitradurga and Wodeyars of Mysore were biggest.<sup>14</sup> in the same manner hundreds of Palegars emerged in Andrapradesh and Tamilnadu. on the eve of European conquests South India was ruled by these Palegars.

## THE IMPORTANT PALEGARAS SOCIAL BACKGROUND

1 The Mysore Wodeyars	Potters or Shepherds
2 KeladiNayakas	Agriculture Veerasaivas
3 SodePalegaras	Veerasaivas
4 ChitradurgaPalegaras	Valmiki Hunting Tribe
5 HarapanahalliPalegaras	Valmiki Hunting Tribe
6 HaratiPalegaras	Valmiki Hunting Tribe
7 SanthebennurNayakas	Valmiki Hunting Tribe

**Foot notes**

1. Puttanna M.S (2003) Paleyagararu, pp 10-11
2. Nicholas B. Dirks (1987) Hollow Crown: Ethno history of South Indian little Kingdom, pp 30-39
3. Robert Sewell (1982) A Forgotten Empire , pp 150-51
4. Saki (1998) – Making History, pp-172
5. Viswanatha. K (1990) Peasants Revolts in Medieval Karnataka, ppl63.
6. Saki (1998) Opp.cit,pp 38.
7. Burton Stein (1994) Vijayanagara, pp 109-110
8. Noboru Karashima (2002) A Concordance of Nayakas , pp 20. 9. Saki (1998) opp. Cit, pp 40
10. Burton Stein, opp cit pp115-116
11. Puttanna H.S (1987) Chitradurga Palegaras, pp 30-31.
12. Hayadana Rao.C [1943] History of Mysore part -1 pp 10-11
13. Ibid-pp 15-16.14 Rice B.L. (1986) Mysore and Coorg from the inscriptions, pp 90-92.15.
14. Saki (1998) opp Cit,pp 51.

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2. Karashima, Noboru: **Concordance of Nayakas** , Oxford University Press, New Delhi2002.,
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: **Palayagararu**, Sahitya Bhandara Prakasana, Mysore- 2003,
4. Rao, Hayavadana C: **History of Mysore, part I**, Govt Press, Bangalore, 1943.
5. Rice. B L: **Mysore and Coorg From inscriptions**.Govt. Press,Bangalore , 1902.
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8. Stein, Burton: **Vijayanagara**, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi. 1993.