

Nature of the Vijayanagara State:

There is a great deal of debate among historians about the nature of the Vijayanagara state. In the last three decades and more, debate on state-formation and its apparent nature has come to occupy a key position in discourses on Indian history. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, a traditional historian, regards the Vijayanagara state as an example of a war state. Satish Chandra however argues, Vijayanagara was a war state only in the sense that all medieval states had to be constantly ready for war.

There is also a view that the Vyayanagara state was a loose association of semi-autonomous military and territorial leaders and that it was not a centralized state like that of the Delhi Sultanate. In this connection, Satish Chandra distinguishes between Amaram and Iqta and holds that Amaram cannot be equated to the Turkish Iqta system.

Further, Burton Stein regards the Vijayanagara state as a segmentary state and suggests that absolute political sovereignty rested with the centre and symbolic or ritual sovereignty rested with the Nayakas and the Brahmin commanders in the periphery. He also thinks that the relationship between the segments and the centre was pyramidally arranged and the distance between the segments and the centre decided the nature of relationship between the two.

Disagreeing with the view of Burton Stein, R.S. Sharma, D.N. Jha and R. Champakalakshmi try to fix Vijayanagara state in the model of a feudal polity and society. These scholars stress that the practice of giving land grants to Brahmins was an important factor that led to the rise of feudal segments and these feudal lords in turn gave lands to their subordinates and thus paved way for subinfeudation. The proponents of feudal model argue that the extent of the empire and the absence of adequate means of transport and communication made it necessary for the rulers to delegate power to these feudal segments and to depend on them. Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu also noticed feudal elements in the Vijayanagara state to a certain extent.

At our present state of knowledge, it is not easy to fix in a certain model, the pre-colonial medieval supra-regional powers like Vijayanagara. The debate is still going on regarding the nature of the state of Vijayanagara as well of medieval and late medieval state structures of south India and the accepted view so far is a monarchical system based on the loose association of supra-local leaders or Samantas and vassals.