

RELIGIOUS HARMONY UNDER THE QUTB SHAHI OF GOLCONDA - (1518-1687)

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Abstract: The Qutb Shahi Sultans ruled over a society which comprised of people of different origins, different faiths and different languages. In order to bring harmony in the kingdom, the rulers extended equal treatment and respect to all their subjects irrespective of their religion, class and creed. The people enjoyed not only freedom of worship, but also occupied administrative positions at different levels. The rulers thus promoted religious harmony in the society. The harmony is also known as toleration. It is recognition of right of others in the religious matters, or liberty to uphold one's religious beliefs without any interference and discrimination.

Keywords: religious harmony, religion, class and creed, worship.

1. INTRODUCTION

Appointment of Hindus in the State Services:

The Qutb Shahi rulers did not show any discrimination in appointments to the public services based on religion, caste and creed. The Hindus and Muslims were equally eligible to all the posts starting from the lowest rank to the highest post of Prime Minister. Men of caliber were given preference and assigned important jobs. The instances of Rama Raju, under Sultan Quli Qutb-Ul-Mulk, Jagadev Rao under Jamshid Quli, Murahari Rao alias Rai Rao under Ibrahim Qutb Shah and Akkanna and Madanna under Abul Hassan Tan shah are noteworthy. These people of talent and ability could rise to the highest position, under the enlightened rule of the Qutb Shahi Sultans, next to the king in the State.

The Hindus who formed the bulk of the population received magnanimous treatment from Sultans of Golconda. The nobility of the kingdom, which exercised considerable influence on the government, was made of the Naikwaris of the hereditary Hindu Zamindars. They formed important part of the Qutb Shahi administration and held positions of trust and responsibility from the beginning of the Qutb Shahi Rule. Contemporary records confirm that the Nayakas were the important indigenous social group to participate in the central political system of both civil and military organizations. Civil department was managed more or less exclusively by the Hindus. These people occupied positions from the humble clerkship in the provincial Daftar to the highest Minister ship of the State.

The civil and military annals of the Qutb Shahi period mention the names of several illustrious, able and daring generals. Enkoji and Hanna Nayaka were the two celebrated generals of Sultan Quli, played an important and pivotal role in the military conquest in Telangana region during the early period of the Qutb Shahi kingdom. Jamshid Quli (A.D.1543-1550) honored Jagadev Rao with the title of Gana Nayaka as reward for his daring and splendid military exploits in the service of the monarch against Barid Shah (Bidar) which was mentioned in the contemporary records.

Ibrahim Qutb Shah's reign (A.D.1550-1580) was set on stable foundation by the efforts of Rai Rao, Enkoji, Jagadev Rao and Murahari Rao. During his period only, Jagadev Rao and Murahari Rao were made the commanders of 2000 and 1000 cavalry respectively as a reward for yeoman services rendered by them. Aseer Rao, the commander in chief of the Sultan Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah (A.D.1580-1612) served the kingdom with utmost sincerity. In addition to these officers, Dharma Rao, Jagapathi Rao, Sri Rao, Babji Bhole Rao, Mukunda Rao, Harichand, Ramachander and Krishna Rao were the trusted Hindu officers of Sultan Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah. Ambaji Rao and Narayan Rao were able and trusted

officers and military generals of Abdulla Qutb Shah (A.D. 1627-1672). Abul Hassan Qutb Shah had also appointed many Hindus in his government. Popular among them were Pingili Madanna (Prime Minister), Pingili Akkanna, (Defence Minister), Kancharla Gopanna, (Tahasildar of Nelakondapalli of Khammam District), (Visanna Qiledar of Warangal fort), Venganna (Patwari of village Hanamkonda) ,Podili Linganna (Governor of Karnataka region).

The regional aristocracy i.e. Rajus, Velmas, Kammas and Kapus (Reddies) played an important role in the socio-economic and political system of the later medieval eastern Deccan and they formed the dominant land-controlling stratum in every village. On the next upward level, they functioned as local chiefs and Rajas of varying importance. By their grip on land and surplus agricultural production, these warrior /cultivators wielded immense political, economic and military power in the countryside. In order to tap agricultural production effectively, the Qutb Shahis had either to remove these groups or come to terms with them. But the Qutb Shahi rulers preferred to build a new system with the co-operation of the local warrior classes and aristocracy .These classes served as the ‘back-bone of the kingdom.

As Dr. Syed Ayub Ali says ‘‘the Sultans of Golconda could get the support of the local aristocracy because, they did not disturb or interfere in their local economic, social and religious matters. During the Qutb Shahi period, a memorable chapter in the history of medieval Andhra started towards a unique gesture of good will between the two sections of the people‘‘. This goes to prove that there was no restriction on the Hindus to prosper economically and thus, they had say in the administrative machinery. All sections of the society were involved equally in the process of works and who ultimately glorified the regime of Golconda rulers. During Qutb Shahi period, Hindu officers discharged their duties as faithfully as Muslims. They never wavered in their loyalty even in the most trying circumstances, when they were called upon to face the rival Hindu power.

Some of the Qutb Shahi rulers proved themselves ‘as secular by marrying Hindu women. For example Ibrahim Qutb Shah married one Bhagirati, whose son became successor of the kingdom by name Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah. And the latter also married a Brahmin girl Baghmata on whose name, the city of Hyderabad was founded and whose daughter was Hayat Bakshi Begum, a royal lady of strong character. Apart from them, Abdullah Qutb Shah maintained conjugal life with two dancing girls Tharamati and Premamati .

Contribution of Sufi Saints to Religious Harmony:

The Sufis of Golconda contributed richly towards the formation of a society based on communal harmony. They preached and practiced tolerance in the folds of Islam. Their devotees belonged to all religions and sects. The Hindus believed in them as much as Muslims. For example, when Shah Chirag came and settled down at Chichalam, there were no Muslims in the village. The Hindus more so of Brahmins of the village looked after him and provided him with all facilities. His living among them, accepting their offers, confirms the liberal attitude of the Sufis towards Hindus and also the Hindus towards Sufis. It was just not one Sufi saint; the practice was common to all. Even now, their *dargahs* are the meeting places of the people of all religions. The Hindus fully or partially built most dargahs. For example, A Hindu named Kumar Raju built the outer Dalan of Meer Momin’s Tomb.

M.L.Nigam writes that the most powerful religious institutions which helped in socializing the *Shia* sect in the Deccan were the *Ashur Khanas* which became extremely popular among the Muslims and also non-Muslims. It was nearer to Hinduism, in so far as it provided concrete and visual object of worship, like the Hindu idol, in the form of Alam, which was installed in a closed shrine and worshipped. Hence, the Ashur Khanas and Alam, which stood as embodiment of Imam Husain, the martyr of *Karbala*, presented an identical situation to Hindu devotees who were familiar with the relic worship. Alams represent the conventional copy of the banner of Imam Hessian thus formed the relic, which aroused a strong emotional appeal. The Hatheli or the open palm raised upward.’Panjetan’, which was an integral part of Alam, symbolized Abhaya mudra of the Hindu pantheon, granting divine protection to devotees. Thus, the Shia Alam and Ashur Khanas, being analogous to Hindu mode of worship and the emotional involvement similar to that of the Bhakti cult attracted a large number of Hindus particularly from the rural areas.

Fairs and Festivals-Communal Harmony:

Fairs are the faces of devotion with periodical marketing centers where fancy and other articles are available for sale. Festivals are the days / times of the religious social merriment. These provide occasion to develop mutual understanding, unity and harmony among the different sections of the people.

The Hindu Temples and Fairs:**Mahakali Jatara:**

Mahakali Jatara in the name of *Mankal Maisaram* was performed annually during the Qutb Shahi rule. It seems that the word Mahakali becomes Mankal and the place name Mahesvaram becomes Maisaram due to the Persian influence on local people. The Muslim ruler Abul Hasan Qutb Shah had extended his support to the Hindu temple Mankal Maisaram by the influence of his Hindu Ministers Akkanna and Madanna. The common people including Muslims in and around Mankal Maisaram used to attend the Jatara with Hindu people side by side. According to the inscriptional sources, Abul Hasan also attended the *Jatara* along with Akkanna and Madanna to pay homage to the Goddess *Mahakali*.

Abul Hassan Qutb Shah donated ten thousand Hons for the completion of Hindu Uddemari Temples, and also participated in the celebrations of Uddemari Jatara with Hindus. The inscription appearing in Telugu and Persian languages at Podur Siva temple is an evidence to say that Muslim people attended the Podur Jatara. By the consent of Abul Hassan, Akkanna and Madanna granted three villages for the maintenance of this temple. A royal Farman in Persian language with the signature of Abul Hassan indicates that he gave consent to erect Sri Venkateshwara temple at Golluru on the request of Akkanna and Madanna. The Sultan himself paid homage to Sri Venkateshwara by offering 'Nivedya' in Hindu fashion. Muslim people also used to attend this Golluru Jatara.

The *Bonala Pandaga* was also celebrated in Telangana region that to at Secunderabad, known as Mahankali *Bonala Pandaga* with religious fervor. According to an anonymous writer of the contemporary period, in some places there held an annual gathering, somewhat like country fair which is called 'Teertham' with a great assemblage of people in honor of their idols which are very numerous, some with extraordinary human figures, with many arms and heads. Another famous tribal (Hindu) festival was *Sammakka* and *Saramma Jatara* celebrated in February once in a couple of years at Tadvai Mandal in Warangal District with pomp and gay.

Basant:

Basant or Vasant Utsav is an ancient Hindu festival celebrated to mark the change in season in the middle of March and ending at the end of May. This festival gave much scope for the mutual understanding and mingling of people of different social groups. The Reddies and Rayas who ruled Andhra desa during 14-17th centuries, also encouraged the celebration of this festival, Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah also celebrated this festival with much gay, who composed beautiful poetry to welcome the season and enjoyed it in accompaniment of music and mirth. Along with the king, his nobles with their retinue also enjoyed it and this had percolated down to the masses living in lanes and streets, where both Hindus and Muslims sang, danced and enjoyed the season.

All the people enjoyed this special occasion even though they believed in different faiths and spoke different languages. The kings and nobles took keen interest in this festival and it was celebrated year after year on a grand scale. Wazir Hassan, the author of the drama Chand Bibi Sultana, while describing this festival, mentioned how it was celebrated enthusiastically by the pretty wheat complexioned damsels of Telangana near the Lunge House of Golconda, while the members of the royal family and nobles looked at them from the roofs and balconies of their palaces.

Sri Rama Navami:

During the period of Abul Hassan Tan shah, this festival gained a great significance with the construction of a temple at Bhadrachalam by Kancherla Gopanna, a revenue official of Palvancha Paragana. The people used to visit Sri Rama temple at Bhadrachalam and witness the divine marriage of Sita and Rama. Abul Hassan, the Golconda king started the practice of sending 'Mutyala Talambalu' every year at the time of Sri Rama Navami. Further, he donated three villages i.e. Bhadrachalam, Palvancha and Sankaragiri for its maintenance.

The policy of the Qutb Shahi government, towards Hindu pilgrims, was every clear and liberal. The Hindus, including those from other parts of India, were allowed to visit their holy places in the kingdom of Golconda without any fear and hindrance. There was no pilgrim tax at any time during the Qutb Shahi period for visiting any temple. Tavernier, a French traveler, describes his meeting with a party of 4,000 pilgrims, in September 1652, going from Burhampur to some temples in the south. He met another procession of 2,000 persons at Daulatabad who were on their way from Tatta to Tirupati. Tavernier says that Tirupati was considered as one of the most holy places of India.

Muslim Festivals:

A religious festival serve two purposes i.e., social and religious. Idd for example, starts with prayers, a purely religious duty, but it was also an occasion to celebrate. The wearing of new clothes, preparation of sweets, meeting people and visiting relatives and friends are all social activities.

Dr. Zore writes in his book entitled Sultan Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah used to celebrate fourteen festivals in a year wherein not only the king. And his nobles but also the people at large took keen interest. Some of these comprised of Idd-e-Ramzan, Shab-e-Barat, Shab-e-Meraj and birth-day of Sultan Mohammed etc. The festivals like Nauroz and Birth day of Sultan were considered utmost important which were celebrated by both the Hindus and Muslims. The policy that the Qutb Shahis adopted was simple to understand. They never compelled any one to participate in a purely religious duty if he did not like to do so. Instead, they universalized the social traditions of the religious festivals and invited people irrespective of religion, caste and creed to participate in them.

Moharram:

Moharram was observed with great devotion in Deccan during the Qutb Shahi times. The king had more than thirty palaces in the capital and each of them competed with the other in these arrangements. In fact, the Moharram is not a festival. It is a mourning time. Hence, the drinking of wine as well as eating meat, cutting of hair, even the sale and purchase of betel-leaf, was prohibited for fifteen days. It is further specifically stated that the first ten days of Moharram were held sacred not only by the Muslims, Shias and the Sunnis, but also by the Hindu.

According to Prof. H. K. Sherwani, there are different kinds of Telugu songs, connected with the Moharram festival, such as Jang nama, Panch thani pak and Murtiyas, which mean respectively the story connected with the war, the five sacred personalities and the dirges. These are his words; "The gusto with which these songs are sung to this day by the villagers is most remarkable... There is no doubt that the songs are the result of the mutual understanding between the two great sections of Hindus and Muslims. Prof. K. Ruknuddin says about the concept of integration that "though historically and culturally Moharram belongs to Muslims, all over the world, the people in Deccan come together to celebrate Moharram festival irrespective of their caste and creed. From the beginning to the end, each family in the village feels happy and enjoys the festival with a feeling of piety. Mostly, non-Muslims lift the *Peerilu*. Those who lift savari, they tried to be pure or tidy for these ten days. They do not touch meat and alcohol. They offer *prasadam*, play around Alva, and play drum and dress up in different characters. Village people make arrangements for money for this occasion"¹⁰ thus, Moharram festival is an example of integration which brings Hindu and Muslim people together.

Nauroz:

Essentially 'Nauroz' is the festival of spring, just like the *Basant*. In fact, it seems that the Muslims have taken a leaf out of the calendar of Hindu festivals... The similarity of *Nauroz* with *Basant* was obvious in many respects as both were festivals of the spring and both were essentially Aryan in their origin. In response to the secularism shown by the king and his Persian nobles towards the native festivals, the people in general took active part in this festival in the same manner as they enjoyed the *Basant*. This festival of the season was marked with full enjoyment, including music and dance and social gatherings.

The religious festivals celebrated during the Qutb Shahi Period served as an instrument to achieve the purpose around which the religious policy of the Qutb Shahis was drawn. They helped them to create harmony in society sharing each other's joy and sorrows tolerating each other's religious traditions, beliefs and customs. It speaks of the wisdom of the Qutb Shahis that they were successful in using these occasions without hurting the feelings of any section of the society. They neither interfered in the established traditions of the festivals nor tried to interfere in the religious functions. Instead, they created a culture around them which was flexible in nature and could accommodate the socio-religious values, customs and traditions of all those who constituted the Golconda society.

Donations to Hindu Temples and Persons:

The temples got patronage from the benevolent Qutb Shahi rulers as they consolidated their rule; they found it expedient to adopt a policy of toleration, and even of encouragement to Hinduism and the Hindu subjects. No doubt, we notice cases of destruction of temples and construction of mosques in their places but they were few and on the other hand, there are several cases of kings and their subordinates donating liberally for temples.

The Qutb Shahi government also granted lands to the trust boards to maintain temples in the kingdom. We have an inscription dated A.D. 1530 at Kondapally of Bezwada Taluq, Krishna District, issued by Qutb-ul-Mulk. It deals with the grant of 26 places of land (*Stalamulu*) each to Kavuru and Kidrabad to maintain the trust house of a temple (not known).

Kollampudi village inscription of Narsaraopet Taluq, Guntur District by Kollampudi Singaraju deals with the construction of Nilakantesvara temple for merit to his parents in A.D. 1565. Another Eepru village inscription of Vinukonda Taluq, Prakasham District dated 1574 A.D. mentions that one Chennappa, donated Kesariyalakuchela land to meet the expenditure of Alladanatha temple's Dasami festival for every year.

Some of the temples were also repaired and some Hindus got donations from the Qutb Shahi government. It is confirmed by an inscription found at Jugutti village, Tanuku Taluq, East Godavari District by the order of Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah that one Someshwarudu and his auntie Lachamma arranged to renovate the temple and consecrated Arcaka idol of Lord Vasuki by Ravi Somalingam in A.D. 1583. Another example is that Abdullah Qutb Shah granted a field as Amaram in the village of Cundi, situated in Kandukuri Sima to a Hindu Person belonging to the Valmiki caste in order that "he may keep in good repair the temples in our Sima".

An inscription from Jagarlamudi village, Tenali Taluq, Guntur District of the period of Mohammed Quli registers donation of the land for the maintenance of Sri Sangameswara temple. And another inscription found at the temple in Simhachalam village, Vishakhapatnam Mandal records the grant by Sarvappa Asvarayudu, who donated Narva village lands for the maintenance of Simhadri Narasimha Swamy temple, in A.D. 1604.

An inscription found at Macherla village, Guntur Mandal registers the grant of a land by Ramadaka Rama Chandrudu, for the maintenance of Chennakesava Swami temple, in A.D. 1619. Another inscription of Kuvvam village, Chengalpattu District (T.N) deals with the donation of banana tope of Lepakshi village, Hindupur Taluq Ananthapur District to Tervikkolesvara Swamy temple for its maintenance, in A.D. 1670. An inscription registers the grant of land by the local Reddies and Karunams for the maintenance of Satna Nandeswara Swami temple of the same village.

Bhadrachalam temple owes its origin to Gopanna (Ramadasu) whose famous story reveals the construction of the temple, his imprisonment in Golconda and his release. Tan shah had endowed three villages, Bhadrachalam, Palvancha and Sankaragiri patti for the maintenance of the temple. It was founded in March 1652. Abul Hassan Tan shah on the occasion of Sri Rama Navami started the practice of sending *Mutyala Talambralu* every year.

The three villages, Bogavaram, Cherukuru and Veerannapatnam were endowed to Bramaramba Malleswara Swami Temple of Srisailam for its maintenance, which is situated on the bank of Krishna. A Farman (18th February 1684) of Abul Hassan Tan shah, confirms the award of Jagir assignment to Bhadrachalam temple and Bramaramba Malleswara Swami temple situated on the banks of Godavari and Krishna rivers respectively resounds the magnanimity of his heart.

Asvarao, a general of Mohammed Quli, donated Srikurmam to the temple of Kurmanatha under the orders of the king. Hassan Beg, the son of the Sultan, ordered the construction of a sluice and stone steps to the tank attached to the temple at Palivela, East Godavari District, besides planting a Palmyra grove.

We have an interesting example of stipend in cash by the Qutb Shahi government to temples in the State. Tariq-e-zafra refers to Rs. 64,925 was allocated for the temples in the State as stipend for the year A.D. 1685-1686 and it might have been continued for the year of A.D. 1686-1687 also.

Not only temples, but also 'Agraharas' were granted to Brahmins by the rulers and their subordinates. One Lal Khan presented Uppunutula village as an Agrahara to three Brahmins for the religious merit of Mohammed Quli Padsayaningar, the act of piety of Seku Isa (Sheikh Isa). Mir Jumla Amir Mohammed Sayyed Nawab granted Madhurapura in the Krishna District as an Agrahara to a Brahmin for having performed the sarvatomukha yajna at the instance of Mangalagiri pantulu. Sultan Abdullah granted a plot of land as Inam to Appakonda, belonging to a village situated in the Subah of Hyderabad.

2. CONCLUSION

The Qutb Shahi Sultans did not show any discrimination in the government appointments on the grounds of religion, caste and creed. The Hindus and Muslims were equally eligible to all posts starting from the lowest rank of a clerk to the highest post of Prime Minister. The Sultans of Golconda have opened the corridors to the men of talent and caliber. They were given preference and assigned important jobs. Merit was the criteria for all purposes. The foresighted and benevolent Qutb Shahi Sultans liberally granted lands and cash to the maintenance and construction of Temples and 'Agraharas'.

Festivals were the days / times of the religious social merriment. They provided an occasion to develop mutual understanding, unity and harmony among the different sections of the people. The Hindus could worship their village deities without fear, participated in fairs, festivals, and made pilgrimages. The Qutb Shahi government permitted them to visit their holy places without imposing any tax. The Hindus enjoyed their religious freedom of conscience as that of their Muslim brethren with pomp and gaiety. Both Hindus and Muslims celebrated the festivals like Moharram and the Birth Days of Sultans amicably with great joy. *Peerilu* were installed at almost all the villages of Telangana region. These celebrations are continuing even today. It is interesting to note that during the period of Abul Hassan Tanishah, a new practice of sending the '*Mutyala Talambralu*' to the temple at Bhadrachalam on the day of Sri Rama Navami was launched. Since that time, till today, this tradition has been in vogue. These festivals were a hallmark of unity in diversity and communal harmony of those times.

In the words of Prof. A. M. Siddiqui "All the Qutb Shahi kings were tolerant, humane and just, their guiding principle was benevolence. They treated their Hindu subjects as liberally as they treated the Muslim community. They even went to the extent of declaring Tuesday as a weekly holiday. They donated Jagirs and large tracts of arable lands for the upkeep of Hindu temples and for the performance of religious ceremonies".

In the words of Dr. N. Venkataramanaiah regarding Sultan Quli "the policy which he adopted in his relations with his Hindu subjects was based on two fundamental principles namely, tolerance in religious matters and lack of discrimination in the exercise of political rights...(the Qutb Shahi Sultans) believed that it was expedient to allow a large measure of freedom to the Hindus who formed the bulk of the people, subject to their rule, so that they might establish their power on firm and lasting foundations. This fact perhaps explains why they condemned the acts of intolerance perpetrated occasionally by some of their over-zealous subordinates".

We, find the Qutb Shahis, after consolidating their power, did not hesitate to patronize the religious and charitable institutions of their subjects for promotion of good will in the Society. During the rule of the Qutb Shahis, there was a close interaction between the Hindu and Muslim people. The celebration of Hindu and Muslim festivals by both the sections of the people led to cultural synthesis and religious harmony in the society.

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