

An Imperial Capital

Vijayanagara

(C.Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century)

Vijayanagara

Vijayanagara or “**city of victory**” was the name of both a city and Empire. The Empire was founded in the 14th century by **Harihara and Bukka** in **1336**.The Empire stretched from the river Krishna in the north to the extreme south of the peninsula.

Hampi

Hampi is another name for Vijayanagara Empire. The name Hampi is derived from the local mother goddess, **Pampadevi**.The local people remember Vijayanagara Empire as Hampi.The remains of Vijayanagara Empire have been found at the modern Hampi in Karnataka.

Sources

Oral traditions, inscriptions, monuments and other records helped historians to reconstruct the history of Vijayanagara Empire.

The discovery of Hampi

- The ruins at Hampi were brought to light in 1800 by an engineer and antiquarian named **Colonel Colin Mackenzie**.
- He was born in 1754 and became an engineer, surveyor and cartographer.
- In 1815, he was appointed as the first Surveyor General of India and remained in the post till his death in 1821.
- In order to understand India’s past to make governance of the colony easier he surveyed many historic sites.
- He thought that regional customs and traditions will benefit the English East India Company in its administration.
- As an employee of the English East India Company, he prepared the first survey map of the site.
- He conducted his studies first based on the memories of priests of the Virupaksha temple and the shrine of Pampadevi.
- Subsequently, from 1856, photographs began to record the monuments which enabled scholars to study them.
- As early as 1836,epigraphists began collecting several dozen inscriptions found at this and other temples at Hampi.The information thus collected was corroborated with the accounts of foreign travellers and other literary works.

Founding of the Empire

- According to tradition and epigraphic evidence, two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336.
- Guru Vidyaranya inspired them to establish the empire.
- The empire included different people who spoke different languages and followed different religious traditions.

The rulers with whom the Vijayanagara kings competed

- On the northern frontier, the Vijayanagara kings competed with contemporary rulers such as the Sultans of the Deccan and the Gajapati rulers of Orissa for control of the fertile river valleys and the resources that were brought by overseas trade.

Karnataka Samrajyamu

Karnataka Samrajyamu was the name used by the contemporaries to describe Vijayanagara Empire.

Kings and traders

Trade on horse during Vijayanagara rule

- Cavalry was very important part of warfare during this period.
- The import of horses from Arabia and central Asia was important for the kings.
- This trade was initially controlled by Arab merchants.
- Local merchants who were involved in the horse trade were known as **kudirai chettis** or horse merchants.
- From 1498 other actors such as Portuguese arrived on the scene.

Markets in the Vijayanagara Empire

- Markets in the Vijayanagara Empire were known for its spices, textiles and other precious stones.
- Trade was a status symbol for cities in the empire and boasted of a wealthy population that was in need of high value exotic goods such as precious stones and jewellery.
- The revenue that came from the trade was used for the development of the state.

Vijayanagara under the rule of Krishnadeva Raya

- The first dynasty of the Vijayanagara Empire was the **Sangama dynasty** founded by Harihara and Bukka. They ruled the empire till 1485.
- They were replaced by the **Saluvas**, the military commanders who remained in power till 1503.
- The saluva dynasty was replaced by the Tuluva dynasty. **Krishnadeva Raya** belonged to the **Tuluva dynasty**.

- Krishnadeva Raya's rule was characterized by full expansion and consolidation.
- He brought under his control the land between the Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers called the Raichur doab in the year 1512.
- He defeated Pratap Rudra of Gajapati dynasty, the ruler of Orissa in 1514 and the sultan of Bijapur in 1520.
- His rule is credited with building of fine temples and attractive gopurams to many important south Indian temples.
- For example, the gopuram of the Brihaddishwara temple at Tanjavur.
- He also founded the suburban township near Vijayanagara called **Nagalapuram** named after his mother.

Condition of Vijayanagara after Krishnadeva Raya

- After the death of Krishnadeva Raya in 1529, his successors faced problems created by rebellious nayakas or military chiefs.
- By 1542 the control of the empire came under another ruling lineage, the **Aravidu**, which continued till the end of the 17th century.

The battle at Rakshai-Tangadi or the battle of Talikota

- The military ambitions of the rulers of Vijayanagara and the Deccan sultans resulted in shifting alignments.
- Eventually it resulted in an alliance of the sultanates against Vijayanagara.
- In **1565**, the **battle of Talikota** started and the army was led by Rama Raya, the chief minister of Vijayanagara.
- The army of Vijayanagara defeated by the combined armies of Bijapur, Ahamad nagar and Golkonda.
- The victorious armies sacked the city of Vijayanagara. The city was abandoned within a few years.
- After the defeat the Aravidu dynasty shifted its focus to the east and ruled from Penukona later from Chandragiri near Tirupati.

Relationship between the Sultans and the Rayas

- The sultans were the reasons for destruction of the city of Vijayanagar in the battle of Talikota in 1565.
- But the relationship between the sultans and the Rayas was not always hostile in spite of religious differences.
- For example Krishnadevaraya supported some claimants to power in the sultanates and took pride in the title "establisher of the Yavana kingdom".

- Similarly, the sultan of Bijapur intervened in an attempt to resolve the succession dispute in Vijayanagara following the death of Krishnadeva Raya.
- According to historians, the Vijayanagara kings were keen to ensure the stability of sultanates and vice-versa.
- But due to the adventurous policy of Rama Raya and his attempt to play off one sultan against another, the sultan came together and defeated him decisively.

The nayakas in the Vijayanagara Empire

- In the Vijayanagara Empire, the nayakas were military chiefs who exercised power and controlled forts and had armed supporters.
- These chiefs often moved from one place to another and many a times were accompanied by peasants looking for fertile land in order to settle.
- The nayakas spoke Telugu or Kannada. Many nayakas were under the control of the kings of Vijayanagara but often rebelled and faced military action by the kings.

The amara-nayaka system

- The amara-nayaka system was a major political innovation of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- Most probably many features of this system were derived from the Iqta system of Delhi Sultanate.
- The amara-nayakas were military commanders. They were given territories to govern by the raya.
- Their duty was to collect taxes and other dues from peasants, craftsmen and traders in the area.
- They kept part of the revenue for personal use and for maintaining a stipulated contingent of horses and elephants.
- Some of the revenue was also used for the maintenance of temples and irrigation works.
- They sent tribute to the king annually and personally appeared in the royal court with gifts to express their loyalty.
- Kings asserted their control over them by transferring them from one place to another.
- In course of time, they established independent kingdoms. This was one of the causes of weakening and declining of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Features of the water resources

- Vijayanagara was located in the natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra which flows in the north-easterly direction.
- Large granite hills formed a girdle around the city.
- A number of streams flowed from these rocky outcrops to the river.

- Embankments were built along these streams to create reservoirs of different sizes.
- Since Vijayanagara was one of the most arid zones of the peninsula, elaborate arrangements were made to store rainwater to be used in the city.
- **Kamalapuram tank** is the most important tank built in the early years of the 15th century.
- Water from this tank was used not only to irrigate the fields but also to channel water into the royal centre.
- **The Hiriya canal** was one of the most prominent waterworks. This canal drew water from a dam built across the Tungabhadra and irrigated the cultivated fields that separated the “sacred centre” from the “urban core”. This canal was built by kings of the sangama dynasty.

Features of fortification

- The accounts of **Abdul Razzaq** about the walls of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- Abdul Razzak was an ambassador sent by the ruler of Persia to Calicut in the 15th century.
- He was greatly impressed by the fortifications and mentioned seven lines of the forts.
- He says that the forts were encircled not only the city but also its agricultural hinterland and forests.
- The outermost wall linked the hills surrounding the city. The masonry construction was slightly tapered.
- No mortar or cementing agent was employed anywhere in the construction. The stone blocks were wedge shaped, which held them in place.
- The inner portion of the walls was of earth packed with rubble. Square or rectangular bastions projected outer wards.
- The most important feature of the Vijayanagara fortification was its **incorporation of the agricultural tracts**, because the rulers were well prepared to face the sieges and its consequences.
- Abdur Razzaq noted that “between the first, second and the third walls there are cultivated fields, gardens and houses”
- **Why the agricultural lands were incorporated within the fortified area?**
- During the medieval period, the major objective of the sieges was to starve the defenders into submission.
- These sieges could continue for months and sometimes even years. Rulers were ready to face it with proper arrangements by building large granaries within fortified areas.
- The rulers of Vijayanagara adopted a more expensive and elaborate method of protecting the agricultural belt itself by incorporating agricultural tracts in the fort.
- A second line of fortification went around the inner core of the urban complex.
- A third line surrounded the royal centre, within which each set of major buildings was surrounded by its own high walls.
- The fort was entered through well-guarded gates leading to the major roads.

- Gateways were with defined architectural features. The arch on the gateway leading into the fortified settlement as well as the dome over the gate is regarded as typical features of the architecture introduced by the Turkish Sultans.

The urban core

- Archaeologists have studied roads within the city and those leading out from it. These have been identified by tracing paths through gateways and finds of pavements.
- Moving along roads leading into the urban core, there is little archaeological evidence of the houses of ordinary people.
- Archaeologists have found fine Chinese porcelain in some areas of the urban core. They suggested that these areas may have been occupied by rich traders.
- Tombs and mosques located here have distinctive functions. The ordinary people of the Vijayanagara Empire lived in ordinary houses.
- This is how the 16th century **Portuguese traveler Barbosa** described the houses of ordinary people.
- Field surveys indicate that wells, rainwater tanks and temple tanks of the various small shrines scattered throughout the urban core, might have served as sources of water for the ordinary dwellers.

The Royal Centre of the Vijayanagara Empire

- The royal centre was located in the south-western part of the settlement. It included 60 temples.
- The patronage of temples was important for rulers, because they were trying to establish their authority through association with the divinities housed in the shrines.
- About thirty buildings have been identified as palaces.
- The difference between temples and secular buildings was that temples were constructed entirely of masonry work whereas materials used in the secular buildings were perishable.

The mahanavami dibba

- Based on the form of the buildings as well as their functions some of structures have been assigned some names. The “king’s palace” is the largest of the enclosures but was not used as royal residence. It has two platforms:

1. The “audience hall”

2. The mahanavami dibba

The audience hall is a high platform with slots for wooden pillars at close and regular intervals. It had a staircase going up to the second floor, which rested on these pillars.

The mahanavami dibba is a massive platform rising from a base of about 11,000sq ft. to a height of 40 ft. There is evidence that it supported a wooden structure. The base of the platform is covered with relief carvings.

The significance of Mahanavami festival in the Vijayanagara Empire

- The mahanavami festival was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Vijayanagar Empire.
- Literally, mahanavami means the great ninth day. Mahanavami is a ten day Hindu festival (during September and October) known variously as Dusehra (northern India), Durga Puja (in Bengal) and Navaratri or Mahanavami (in Peninsular India).
- The Vijayanagara kings displayed their prestige, power and suzerainty on this occasion.
- The ceremonies performed on the occasion included worship of the image, worship of the state horse and the sacrifice of buffaloes and other animals.
- Dances, wrestling matches, and processions of caparisoned horses, elephants and chariots and soldiers, as well as ritual presentations before the king and his guests by the chief nayakas and subordinate kings marked the occasion.
- These ceremonies were imbued with deep symbolic meanings.
- On the last day of the festival the king inspected his army and the armies of the nayakas in a grand ceremony in an open field. On this occasion the nayakas brought rich gifts for the king as well as the stipulated tribute.

Other buildings in the royal centre

- One of the beautiful buildings in the royal centre is the **Lotus Mahal**. According to Mackenzie, it may have been a council chamber, a place where the king met his advisers.
- One of the most spectacular buildings found in the royal centre is the **Hazara Rama temple**. This was probably meant to be used only by the king and his family.

The sacred centre

Traditions about the sacred centre

- The hills of northern region sheltered the monkey kingdom of Vali and Sugriva mentioned in the Ramayana.
- Other traditions suggest that Pampadevi, the local mother goddess, did penance in these hills in order to marry Virupaksha, the guardian deity of the kingdom, also recognized as a form of Shiva.

Features of the temples of Vijayanagara

- The Vijayanagara kings encouraged temple building as it conveyed a divine association between the deity and the king. The Vijayanagara kings claimed to rule on behalf of the god Virupaksha.
- All royal orders were signed “Shri Virupaksha”, usually in the Kannada script.

- Rulers also indicated their close links with the gods by using the title “Hindu Suratrana”. This was a sanskritisation of the Arabic term Sultan, meaning king, so literally meant Hindu Sultan.
- The Vijayanagara kings made grants to temples. Temples developed as centres of social and cultural activities. The king’s visits to the temples were important occasions and he was accompanied by nayakas.
- During this period, certain new features were evident in the temple architecture. These included structures of enormous size that must have been built to mark the imperial authority.
- One of the best examples is rayas gopurams or royal gateways that often dwarfed the towers on the central shrines. These gopurams signaled the presence of the temple from a great distance. These towering gateways also reminded about the power of the king who could command the resources techniques and skills that was required to construct them.
- Another distinctive feature of the temple architecture was **mandapas** or pavilion and long, pillared corridors that often ran around the shrines within the temple complex.
- One of the best examples is the Virupaksha temple. The Virupaksha temple was built over centuries. Inscriptions suggest that this shrine date to the ninth-tenth centuries. On the occasion of his coronation, Krishnadeva Raya built the elaborate hall in front of the main shrine. The hall was adorned with delicately carved pillars. Eastern gopuram was also built by him.

Importance of halls in the temple

- The halls in the temple were used for a variety of purposes.
- In some spaces, images of gods were placed to witness special programmes of music, dance, drama, etc.
- Others were used to celebrate the marriages of the deities, and yet, others were meant for the deities to swing in.
- On such occasions, small images other than those kept in the central shrine were used.
- In the Vitthala temple, the principal deity was Vitthala, a form of Vishnu generally worshipped in Maharashtra. This temple has several halls and a unique shrine designed as a chariot.
- A characteristic feature of the temple complex is the chariot streets that extended from the temple gopuram in a straight line.
- These streets were paved with stone slabs and lined with pillared pavilions where merchants set up their shops.

Various steps involved in the mapping of the site at Hampi

- The first step was to divide the entire area into a set of 25 squares, each designated by a letter of the alphabet.
- Then; each of the small squares was subdivided into a set of even smaller squares.

- Each of these smaller squares was further subdivided into yet smaller units.
- These detailed surveys have been extremely painstaking, and have recovered thousands of structures—from tiny shrines and residences to elaborate temples.

Buildings as source of information

- Buildings provide useful information in understanding the past.
- Buildings that survive tell us about the ways spaces were organized and used, how they were built, with what materials and techniques.
- We can assess the defence requirements and military preparedness of a city by studying its fortifications.
- Buildings also tell us about the spread of ideas and cultural influence if we compare them with buildings in other places. They convey ideas which the builders or their patrons wished to project.

Travellers who visited the Vijayanagara Empire

Several travellers visited the city of Vijayanagara and left their travel accounts. Notable among them are,

- Italian trader **Nicolo de Conti**, an ambassador named **Abdur Razzaq** sent by the ruler of Persia and a merchant named **Afanasii Nikitin** from Russia. All of them visited the city in the 15th century.
- Portuguese travellers like **Duarte Barbosa**, **Domingo Paes** and **Fernao Nuniz** visited the city in the 16th century.

- ❖ **Amuktamalyada**: A work on statecraft composed in Telugu by Krishnadevaraya
- ❖ **Amara**: The term amara is derived from the Sanskrit word samara, meaning battle or war. It also resembles the Persian term amir, meaning a high noble.
- ❖ **Yavana**: Yavana is a Sanskrit word used for the Greeks and other peoples who entered the subcontinent from the North West.
- ❖ **House of Victory**: Domingo Paes called the audience hall and the mahanavami dibba together as the House of Victory.