



Vijayanagara Empire Administration: An Epigrammatic Review

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History of Vijayanagara Empire:

The **Vijayanagara Empire**, was established in 1336 by the brothers Harihara I and Bukka Raya I of the Sangama dynasty, members of a pastoralist cowherd community that claimed Yadava lineage. The empire rose to prominence as a culmination of attempts by the southern powers to ward off Islamic invasions by the end of the 13th century. At its peak, it subjugated almost all of South India's ruling families and pushed the sultans of the Deccan beyond the Tungabhadra-Krishna river doab region, It lasted until 1646, although its power declined after a major military defeat in the Battle of Talikota in 1565 by the combined armies of the Deccan sultanates. The empire is named after its capital city of Vijayanagara, whose ruins surround present day Hampi, now a World Heritage Site in India. The wealth and fame of the empire inspired visits by and writings of medieval European travelers such as Domingo Paes, Fernão Nunes, and Niccolò de' Conti. These travelogues, contemporary literature and epigraphy in the local languages and modern archeological excavations at Vijayanagara has provided ample information about the history and power of the empire.

Vijayanagara Empire's Legacy:

The empire's legacy includes monuments spread over South India, the best known of which is the group at Hampi. Different temple building traditions in South and Central India were merged into the Vijayanagara architecture style. This synthesis inspired architectural innovations in the construction of Hindu temples. Efficient administration and vigorous overseas trade brought new technologies to the region such as water management systems for irrigation. The empire's patronage enabled fine arts and literature to reach new heights in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit with topics such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine,

fiction, musicology, historiography and theater gaining popularity. The classical music of Southern India, Carnatic music, evolved into its current form. The Vijayanagara Empire created an epoch in the history of Southern India that transcended regionalism by promoting Hinduism as a unifying factor.

Theories of Origin of Empire: Its invasions and expansion

Two theories have been proposed regarding the linguistic origins of the Vijayanagara empire. One is that Harihara I and Bukka I, the founders of the empire, were Kannadigas and commanders in the army of the Hoysala Empire stationed in the Tungabhadra region to ward off Muslim invasions from Northern India. Another theory is that Harihara and Bukkaraya were Telugu people, first associated with the Kakatiya Kingdom, who took control of the northern parts of the Hoysala Empire during its decline. They were believed to have been captured by the army of Ulugh Khan at Warangal. Historians agree the founders were supported and inspired by Vidyananya, a saint at the Sringeri monastery, to fight the Muslim invasion of South India. In the first two decades after the founding of the empire, Harihara I gained control over most of the area south of the Tungabhadra River and earned the title of "master of the eastern and western seas" (*Purvapaschima Samudradhishavara*). By 1374 Bukka Raya I, successor to Harihara I, defeated the chieftom of Arcot, the Reddys of Kondavidu, and the Sultan of Madurai, and had gained control over Goa in the west and the Tungabhadra-Krishna River doab in the north. The original capital of the empire was in the principality of Anegondi on the northern banks of the Tungabhadra River in today's Karnataka. It was moved to Vijayanagara during Bukka Raya I's reign because it was easier to defend against the Muslim armies, who were persistently attacking from the northern lands.

With the Vijayanagara Kingdom now imperial in stature, Harihara II, the second son of Bukka Raya I, further consolidated the kingdom beyond the Krishna River and South India was controlled by the Vijayanagara Empire. The next ruler, Deva Raya I, was successful against the Gajapatis of Odisha and undertook works of fortification and irrigation. Firuz Bahmani of Bahmani Sultanate entered into a treaty with Deva Raya I in 1407 that required the latter to



pay Bahmani an annual tribute of "100,000 huns, five maunds of pearls and fifty elephants". The Sultanate invaded Vijayanagara in 1417 when the latter defaulted in paying the tribute. Such wars for tribute payment by Vijayanagara repeated in the 15th century. By 1436 the rebellious chiefs of Kondavidu and the Velama rulers were successfully dealt with and had to accept Vijayanagara overlordship. After a few years of tranquility, wars broke out with the Bahamani Sultanate in 1443 with some successes and some reversals. The Persian visitor Firishta attributes Deva Raya II's war preparations, which included augmenting his armies with Muslim archers and cavalry, to be the cause of the conflict. Contemporary Persian ambassador Abdur Razzak attributes the war to the Bahamani Sultan capitalizing on the confusion caused by an internal revolt within the Vijayanagara Empire, including an attempt to assassinate the Raya by his brother.

Deva Raya II was succeeded by his elder son Mallikarjuna Raya in 1446. The Gajapati king removed the Vijayanagara control over the Tamil country by occupying the Reddi kingdoms of Rajahmundry, Kondaveedu, Kanchi, and Tiruchirpalli. His governor Saluva Narasimha reduced the loss of territory by holding almost all of coastal Andhra Pradesh south of the Krishna river, Chittoor, the two Arcots and Kolar. Saluva Narashimha defeated the Gajapatis and held Udayagiri, drove out the Pandyas from Tanjore, and took procession of Machilipatnam and Kondaveedu. He later defeated Bahmani forces and recovered most of the empire's earlier losses. After the death of Virupaksha Raya II in 1485, Saluva Narasimha led a coup that ended the dynastic rule while continuing to defend the empire from raids by the Sultanates created from the continuing disintegration of the Bahmani Sultanate in its north. Saluva Narasimha left his two adolescent sons under the care of general Tuluva Narasa Nayaka who ably defended the kingdom from their traditional enemies, the Gajapati king and the Bahamani Sultan. He also subdued rebelling chiefs of the Chera, the Chola and the Pandya territories. Despite many attempts by nobles and members of the royal family to overthrow him, Narasa Nayaka retained control as a regent king till 1503.



In 1503, Narasa Nayaka's son Vira Narasimha had prince Immadi Narasimha of the Saluva dynasty assassinated and took over the rule in a coup thus becoming the first of the Tuluva dynasty rulers. This did not go well with the nobles who revolted. Seeing internal troubles grow, the Gajapati king and the Bahamani Sultan began to encroach on the empire even as the governors of Ummattur, Adoni, and Talakad colluded to capture the Tungabhadra-Krishna river doab region from the empire. The empire came under the rule of Krishna Deva Raya in 1509, another son of Tuluva Narasa Nayaka. Initially Krishnadevaraya faced a many obstacles including dissatisfied nobles, the rebellious chief of Ummattur in the south, a resurgent Gajapati kingdom under King Prataparudra, a growing threat from the newly formed Adil Shahi Sultanate of Bijapur under Yusuf Adil Khan and Portuguese interest in controlling the west coast. Not one to be unnerved by these pressures he strengthened and consolidated the empire, one victory at a time. He was an astute king who hired both Hindus and Muslims into his army. In the following decades, the empire covered Southern India and successfully defeated invasions from the five established Deccan Sultanates to its north.

Administration



The rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire maintained the administrative methods developed by their predecessors, the Hoysala, Kakatiya and Pandya kingdoms. The King, ministry, territory, fort, treasury, military, and ally formed the seven critical elements that influenced every aspect of governance. The King was the ultimate authority, assisted by a cabinet of ministers (*Pradhana*) headed by the prime minister (*Mahapradhana*). Other important titles recorded were the chief secretary (*Karyakartha* or *Rayaswami*) and the imperial officers (*Adhikari*). All high-ranking ministers and officers were required to have military training. A secretariat near the king's palace employed scribes and officers to maintain records made official by using a wax seal imprinted with the ring of the king. At the lower administrative levels, wealthy feudal landlords (*Goudas*) supervised accountants (*Karanikas* or *Karnam*) and guards (*Kavalu*). The palace administration was divided into 72 departments (*Niyogas*), each having several female attendants chosen for their youth and beauty (some imported or captured in victorious battles) who were trained to handle minor administrative matters and to serve men of nobility as courtesans or concubines.

The empire was divided into five main provinces (*Rajya*), each under a commander (*Dandanayaka* or *Dandanatha*) and headed by a governor, often from the royal family, who used the native language for administrative purposes. A *Rajya* was divided into regions (*Vishaya Vente* or *Kottam*) and further divided into counties (*Sime* or *Nadu*), themselves subdivided into municipalities (*Kampana* or *Sthala*). Hereditary families ruled their respective territories and paid tribute to the empire, while some areas, such as Keladi and Madurai, came under the direct supervision of a commander.

On the battlefield, the king's commanders led the troops. The empire's war strategy rarely involved massive invasions; more often it employed small-scale methods such as attacking and destroying individual forts. The empire was among the first in India to use long-range artillery, which were commonly manned by foreign gunners. Army troops were of two types: the king's personal army directly recruited by the empire and the feudal army under each feudatory. King Krishnadevaraya's personal army consisted of 100,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalymen, and over 900 elephants. The whole army numbered over 1.1 million soldiers, with up to 2 million



having been recorded, along with a navy led by a *Navigadaprabhu* (commander of the navy). The army recruited from all classes of society, supported by the collection of additional feudal tributes from feudatory rulers, and consisted of archers and musketeers wearing quilted tunics, shieldmen with swords and poignards in their girdles, and soldiers carrying shields so large that armour was not necessary. The horses and elephants were fully armoured and the elephants had knives fastened to their tusks to do maximum damage in battle.

The economy of the empire was largely dependent on agriculture. Sorghum (*jowar*), cotton, and pulse legumes grew in semi-arid regions, while sugarcane, rice, and wheat thrived in rainy areas. Betel leaves, areca (for chewing), and coconut were the principal cash crops, and large-scale cotton production supplied the weaving centers of the empire's vibrant textile industry. Spices such as turmeric, pepper, cardamom, and ginger grew in the remote Malnad hill region and were transported to the city for trade. The empire's capital city was a thriving business centre that included a burgeoning market in large quantities of precious gems and gold. Prolific temple-building provided employment to thousands of masons, sculptors, and other skilled artisans.

According to Abdur Razzak, much of the empire was fertile and well cultivated. Most of the growers were tenant farmers and were given the right of part ownership of the land over time. Tax policies encouraging needed produce made distinctions between land use to determine tax levies. For example, the daily market availability of rose petals was important for perfumers, so cultivation of roses received a lower tax assessment. Salt production and the manufacture of salt pans were controlled by similar means. The making of ghee, which was sold as an oil for human consumption and as a fuel for lighting lamps, was profitable. Exports to China intensified and included cotton, spices, jewels, semi-precious stones, ivory, rhino horn, ebony, amber, coral, and aromatic products such as perfumes. Large vessels from China made frequent visits and brought Chinese products to the empire's 300 ports, large and small, on the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal regions on those days. The ports of Mangalore, Honavar, Bhatkal, Barkur, Cochin, Cannanore, Machilipatnam, and Dharmadam w



ere important for they not only provided secure harbors for traders from Africa, Arabia, Aden, the Red sea, China and Bengal but some also served as ship building centers.

Decline of Vijayanagara Empire

The Vijayanagar Empire declined significantly during the rule of a despot named Adil Rama Raya who wrested power from the rightful heir to the throne Sadashiva Raya, nephew of Krishna Deva Raya. Aliya Rama Raya was killed and the city of Vijayanagar destroyed. The empire was severely crippled.

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