

Part-II: CHAPTER 3
AN IMPERIAL CAPITAL VIJAYNAGARA
(c. fourteenth to sixteenth century)
Revision Notes

Key concepts in nutshells

- The Rayas, Nayakas and Sultans - Harihara and Bukka asserted their independence of the Delhi sultanate and established the kingdom of Vijaynagar on AD 1336.
- Kings and trading class - The warfare depended mainly upon powerful cavalry. The Portuguese settled on the west coast of India in attempted to establish their trading and military stations.
- The climax and decline of Vijay Nagar empire - Krishadeva Raya was an able administrator, He built dams for irrigation. He builds magnificent places and temples. Its ruler Rama Raya was miserably defeated on the battlefield of (Rakshasi - Tangadi) Talikota in A.D.1565. The victorious armies plundered and destroyed the city of Vijaynagar.
- Vijaynagar Hampi Architecture - The Vijaynagar architecture (Hampi Architecture) of the period (1336-1365) was unique building style evolved by the imperial Vijaynagar empire.
- Hampi Bazar - Portuguese travellers Paes and Nuntiz visited Hampi in the mid 1500 century. They give an account of Hampi Bazar thus "in this street lived many merchants and there you will find all sorts of rubies, diamonds pearls and cloths that you may wish to buy.
- Building and places - we know today about the Vijaynagar palaces and buildings are derived from the archeological excavations at Hampi as no royal palace structures have survived.
- Kings royal enclosure - Another important building at Hampi is the kings royal enclosure. Paes tells against the gate there were two circles in which there were the dancing women richly arrayed with many jewels of gold and diamonds and many pearls.
- Mahanavami dibba - The Mahanavami dibba is located on one of the highest points in



the city. It is a very large platform rising from a base of about 11000 feet to height of a 40 feet. It seems that is supported a wooden structure.

- Forts of Vijay nagar - in the constant struggle for power, fort and fortified settlements were a potent symbol of authority. The rulers of Vijaynagar empire created the cities with the main object of protection against invasions. The city itself was a fortress and designed as such in every manner.
- Vijayanagara or “city of victory” was the name of the both a city and an empire. The empire was founded in the fourteenth century.
- In 1565 the city was sacked and subsequently deserted.
- One of the most prominent water work to be seen among the ruins in the Hiriya canal.
- In terms of temple architecture, by this period certain new features were in evidence.
- Best exemplified by the raya gopurams or royal gate ways that often dwarfed the towers on the central shrines, and signaled the presence of the temple from a great distance.
- The halls in the temple were used for a variety of purposes.
- Buildings that survive tell us about the way spaces were organized and used, how they were built, with what materials and techniques.

History of Vijayanagara

Vijayanagara or “city of victory” was the name of both a city and an empire. The empire was founded in the fourteenth century. In 1565 the city was sacked and subsequently deserted. Although it fell into ruin in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries it remained in the memories of people living in the Krishna-Tungabhadra doab, as **Hampi**, a name derived from that of the local mother goddess, Pampadevi.

1. **The Discovery of Hampi:** The ruins at Hampi were brought to light in 1800 by an engineer and antiquarian named Colonel Colin Mackenzie. An employee of the English East India Company, he prepared the first survey map of the site. Much of the initial information he received was based on the memories of priests of the Virupaksha temple and the shrine of Pampadevi.
2. **Rayas, Nayakas and Sultans:** According to tradition and epigraphic evidence two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336. This empire included within its fluctuating frontiers peoples who spoke different languages and



followed different religious traditions. The Vijayanagara kings competed with contemporary rulers – including the **Sultans** of the Deccan and the Gajapati rulers of Orissa – for control of the fertile river valleys. The rulers of Vijayanagara, who called themselves **rayas**.

3. The warfare depended mainly upon powerful cavalry. The Portuguese settled on the west coast of India in attempted to establish their trading and military stations.
4. **Trade in Vijaynagar:** Vijayanagara was also noted for its markets dealing in spices, textiles and precious stones. Trade was often regarded as a status symbol for such cities, which boasted of a wealthy population that demanded high-value exotic goods, especially precious stones and jewellery.
5. **The climax and decline of Vijaynagar empire:**
 - i. The first dynasty, known as the Sangama dynasty, exercised control till 1485. They were supplanted by the Saluvas, who were replaced by the Tuluvas in 1503.
 - ii. Krishnadeva Raya belonged to the Tuluva dynasty. His rule was characterised by expansion and consolidation.
 - iii. Krishnadeva Raya is credited with building some fine temples and adding impressive gopurams to many important south Indian temples.
 - iv. Strain began to show within the imperial structure following Krishnadeva Raya's death in 1529. His successors were troubled by rebellious nayakas or military chiefs.
 - v. During this period, as indeed earlier, the military ambitions of the Deccan Sultanates resulted in shifting alignments. Eventually this led to an alliance of the Sultanates against Vijayanagara.
 - vi. Although the armies of the Sultans were responsible for the destruction of the city of Vijayanagara, relations between the Sultans and the rayas were not always or inevitably hostile.
 - vii. In fact the Vijayanagara kings were keen to ensure the stability of the Sultanates and vice versa.
6. **The rayas and the nayakas:**
 - i. Nayakas were military chiefs who usually controlled forts and had armed supporters. They moved from one area to another, and in many cases were accompanied by peasants looking for fertile land on which to settle. They usually spoke Telugu or Kannada. Many nayakas submitted to the authority of the kings of Vijayanagara but they often rebelled and had to be subdued by military action.



- ii. The amara-nayaka system was a major political innovation of the Vijayanagara Empire. They were military commanders who were given territories to govern by the raya. They collected taxes and other dues from peasants, craftspersons and traders in the area.
- iii. These contingents provided the Vijayanagara kings with an effective fighting force with which they brought the entire southern peninsula under their control.

Vijayanagara - The Capital and its Environs

Vijayanagara, was characterised by a distinctive physical layout and building style:

- i. **Water Resources:** Vijayanagara had the natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra which flows in a north-easterly direction. A number of streams flow down to the river from the granite hills. Embankments were built along these streams to create reservoirs of varying sizes. For the most arid zones of the peninsula, elaborate arrangements had to be made to store rainwater. The most important such tank was built in the early years of the fifteenth century and is now called Kamalapuram tank. One of the most prominent waterworks to be seen among the ruins is the Hiriya canal.
- ii. **Fortifications and roads:** Abdur Razzaq, an ambassador sent by the ruler of Persia to Calicut (present-day Kozhikode) in the fifteenth century, was greatly impressed by the fortifications, and mentioned seven lines of forts which encircled not only the city but also its agricultural hinterland and forests. What was most significant about this fortification is that it enclosed agricultural tracts. The archaeologists have also found evidence of an agricultural tract between the sacred centre and the urban core. This tract was serviced by an elaborate canal system drawing water from the Tungabhadra. A second line of fortification went round the inner core of the urban complex, and a third line surrounded the royal centre, within which each set of major buildings was surrounded by its own high walls. Roads generally wound around through the valleys, avoiding rocky terrain. Some of the most important roads extended from temple gateways, and were lined by bazaars.
- iii. **The urban core:** Archaeologists have found evidence of the houses of ordinary people along the road. Fine Chinese porcelain were also found from Muslim residential quarter. Tombs and mosques were located there but had their architecture like that of the mandapas found in the temples of Hampi. Field surveys indicate that the entire area was dotted with numerous shrines and small temples which proves a variety of



cults existed and were supported by different communities.

The Royal Centre

The royal centre was located in the south-western part of the settlement. About thirty building complexes have been identified as palaces. One difference between these structures and temples is that the latter were constructed entirely of masonry, while the superstructure of the secular buildings was made of perishable materials.

- i. **The mahanavami dibba:** The “king’s palace” has two of the most impressive platforms, usually called the “audience hall” and the “mahanavami dibba”. The entire complex is surrounded by high double walls with a street running between them. The audience hall is a high platform with slots for wooden pillars at close and regular intervals. Located on one of the highest points in the city, the “mahanavami dibba” is a massive platform rising from a base of about 11,000 sq. 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. Rituals associated with the structure probably coincided with Mahanavami (literally, the great ninth day) of the Hindu festival during the autumn months of September and October. The Vijayanagara kings displayed their prestige, power and suzerainty on this occasion.
- ii. **Other buildings in the royal centre:** One of the most beautiful buildings in the royal centre is the Lotus Mahal, so named by British travellers in the nineteenth century. While most temples were located in the sacred centre, there were several in the royal centre as well. One of the most spectacular of these is one known as the Hazara Rama temple.

The Sacred Centre

- i. The sacred centre was situated on the rocky northern end on the bank of the river Tungabhadra. According to local tradition, these hills sheltered the monkey kingdom of Vali and Sugriva mentioned in the Ramayana.
- ii. Temple building in the region had a long history, going back to dynasties such as the **Pallavas, Chalukyas, Hoysalas and Cholas**.
- iii. Rulers very often encouraged temple building as a means of associating themselves with the divine – often, the deity was explicitly or implicitly identified with the king. Temples also functioned as centres of learning.
- iv. The rulers and others often granted land and other resources for the maintenance of



temples. temples developed as significant religious, social, cultural and economic centres.

- v. It is likely that the very choice of the site of Vijayanagara was inspired by the existence of the shrines of Virupaksha and Pampadevi. In fact the Vijayanagara kings claimed to rule on behalf of the god Virupaksha.
- vi. In terms of temple architecture, by this period certain new features (like Gopurams and mandapas) were in evidence.
- vii. The raya gopurams or royal gateways that often dwarfed the towers on the central shrines, and signalled the presence of the temple from a great distance.
- viii. Other distinctive features include mandapas or pavilions and long, pillared corridors that often ran around the shrines within the temple complex.
- ix. The Virupaksha temple was built over centuries. While inscriptions suggest that the earliest shrine dated to the ninth-tenth centuries, it was substantially enlarged with the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- x. Just as the nayakas continued with and elaborated on traditions of fortification, so they did with traditions of temple building. In fact, some of the most spectacular gopurams were also built by the local nayakas.

Conclusion:

Buildings that survive tell us about the way spaces were organised and used, how they were built, with what materials and techniques. Although wooden structures are lost, and only stone structures survive, the descriptions left by travellers allow us to reconstruct some aspects of the vibrant life of the times. They convey ideas which the builders or their patrons wished to project.

Time Line 1 Major Political Development	
C. 1200 1- 1300	Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (1206)
c. 1300 –	Establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire (1336?): establishment of the Bahman



1400	kingdom (1347): sultanates in jaunpur, Kashmir and madura
c. 1400 – 1500	Establishment of the Gajapati kingdom of Orissa (1435); establishment of the sultanates of ahmadnagar, Bijapur and berar (1409)
c. 1500 – 1600	Conquest of Goa by the Portuguese (1510); collapse of the Bahmani kingdom, emergence of the sultanate Golconda (1518); Establishment of the Mughal empire by Babur (1526)
Time Line 2 Land marks in the Discovery and Conservation of Vijayanagara	
1800	Colin Mackenzie visits Vijayanagara
1856	Alexander Green law takes the first detailed photographs of archaeological remains at Hampi
1876	J.F Fleet begins documenting the inscriptions on the temple walls at the site
1902	Conservation beings under John Marshall
1986	Hampi Declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO

