

The Kings of Vijayanagara

In the previous lesson we read about warriors and chiefs who had established control over villages and how the Kakatiyas tried to bring them under their control and built a kingdom. The efforts of the Kakatiyas ended when the Delhi Sultans conquered Warangal. But soon another kingdom was built by a family of warriors who laid the foundations of a large empire called Vijayanagara or Karnataka Samrajyam.

Vijayanagara means the 'City of Victory'. It was located on the banks of Tungabhadra River in Karnataka. According to tradition it was founded by two brothers named Harihara Raya and Bukka Raya around 1336 AD with the blessings of a sage named Vidyanarya. The kings of Vijayanagara worshipped Sri Virupaksha (Shiva) and greatly enlarged the temple. The Vijayanagara empire lasted for about 250 years - but it was not ruled by kings of the same family. After the family of Harihara Raya and Bukka Raya of Sangama Saluva, Tuluva and Araviti families ruled the empire one after the other.

On the North of the Tungabhadra river too arose some new kingdoms called the Bahamani kingdoms. Initially it was one large kingdom with its capital in Gulbarga, later on, between 1489 and 1520 AD, it broke up into five smaller kingdoms. Of these five kingdoms, Bijapur and Golconda ruled over large parts of present day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. These kingdoms were ruled by Sultans and

warriors many of whom came from Iran and Arabia. All these kingdoms were constantly at war with each other and trying to enlarge their own kingdoms. They also tried to recruit the local warriors and chiefs about whom we read in the last chapter. With their help they tried to establish control over the villages and towns and collect revenue from the farmers and traders.

Some Important Kings of Vijayanagara

Harihararaya	(1336-1357AD)
Bukkaraya I	(1357-1377AD)
Harihararaya II	(1377-1404AD)
Devaraya II	(1426-1446AD)
Saluva Narasimharaya	(1486-1491AD)
Krishnadevaraya	(1509-1529AD)
Achyutaraya	(1529-1542AD)
Aliya Rama Raya	(1543-1565AD)
Venkatapati Raya	(1585-1614AD)

How do we know?

We know much about Vijayanagara Empire from inscriptions, books and buildings of that period. We get insights into the daily life, the administration and the social organization of the kingdom. Of particular value are the detailed accounts left by travellers from several countries – Nicolo Conti from Italy who visited Vijayanagara in 1420 AD, Abdul Razzak the Persian trader who visited in 1443 AD, the Portugese travellers and Paes, who visted it in 1520 AD and Nuniz who wrote in 1537 AD.

The City of Vijayanagara

The city was built on the banks of the river Tungabhadra next to ancient temples of Pampadevi and Sri Virupaksha. Abdul Razzak says that the city had seven rings of fortifications. Some of these have been found by archaeologists.

Read the description of the city by Portugese traveller, Paes:

“The king has made a very strong city, fortified with walls and towers... These walls are not made like those of other cities, but are made of strong masonry... and inside very beautiful rows of buildings with flat roofs...”

You have a broad and beautiful street full of fine houses... and these houses belong to merchants, and there you find all sorts of rubies and diamonds, and emeralds and pearls... and cloths of every sort on the earth... In the evening you have a fair where they sell horses, vegetables, fruits, wood, etc.”



Fig 15.1 Bronze images of Krishnadeva Raya and his two wives installed in Tirumala Temple.

- ♦ Why were vegetables, fruits and horses sold in the evenings?

Archaeologists are of the opinion that the city had four separate divisions - first one devoted to temples, situated on rocky hills; second one on the valley where crops were raised using water from irrigation channels; third a royal centre in which royal palaces and residences of important nayakas were located and fourthly the residences of ordinary townsfolk. Each area was separated from the others as shown in the map.

- ♦ Compare the city of Vijayanagara with Warangal to point out the similarities and differences between them.



Map 1: Vijayanagara City

- ♦ Why do you think modern cities do not build fort walls of this kind?

Armies and Military Leaders

You would have heard and read about great wars being fought today and the powerful armies.

- ♦ Can you say what makes the armies of countries powerful?
- ♦ What kinds of arms and weapons do modern armies use?

Let us find out how it was in Vijayanagara times.

Vijayanagara rulers invested in building their military power. They imported a large

number of horses from Arabia and Iran which came in ships to their ports on the west coast. They recruited a large army and built many strong forts. One of the important rulers Devaraya-II of Vijayanagara started recruiting Muslim fighters to serve him and to train his soldiers in the new modes of warfare. He also permitted the construction of mosques in the capital city where the muslim soldiers were garrisoned. In those days guns and cannons had been newly introduced. The Vijayanagara kings adopted guns and cannons in their forces. The combination of firearms and cavalry (horse-riders) made them one of the most powerful armies in India.

- ♦ Horses in those days were important for fast movement of troops. What do you think has taken their place today?
- ♦ Elephants were slow moving but powerful in attack. What do you think has replaced them today?

‘Captains of the Troops’ - the Amaranayakas

The entire kingdom was actually controlled and administered by the commanders of these armies. Who they were and what they did, let us find out. Read the following account left by Domingo Paes, a Portuguese traveller who visited Vijayanagara during Krishnadeva Raya’s period:

“This king has a million fighting troops, in which are included 35,000 cavalry (horse riders) ready to be dispatched to any quarter whenever

necessary... He is the most feared king in these parts...

The captains of these troops are the nobles of his kingdom and they hold the city, the towns and the villages of the kingdom. There are captains among them who have a revenue of a million and a million and half gold coins, others two hundred, three hundred or five hundred thousand coins. The king fixes for each according to his revenue the number of troops which he must maintain, on foot, on horse, and elephants. These troops are always ready for duty, whenever they may be called out and wherever they may have to go. Besides maintaining these troops, each captain has to make his annual payment to the king.

Besides the troops supplied by the captains, the king has his own troops whom he pays."

Answer the following questions after reading the above passages carefully:

- ◆ Why was Krishnadevaraya the most feared king?
- ◆ Who controlled the towns and villages of Vijayanagara Empire?
- ◆ Did all of them get equal income?
- ◆ What did the captains do with the villages and towns under their control?



Fig 15.2 Stone Chariot at Hazara Rama Temple.

- ◆ What did the captains have to do for the king in return for these villages?
- ◆ Did the king depend only on the troops sent by the captains?

The 'captains' mentioned here were the nayakas. These nayakas held *amara* revenue assignments – that is they were given some villages and cities whose revenue they could collect and use. They had an obligation to maintain a certain number of troops for keeping the revenue of such assignments. They also administered the areas under their control and also had judicial powers (the power to judge criminals and give punishments, etc). This was quite similar to the system of the Delhi Sultanate whose nobles or *amirs* were given similar revenue assignments called *Iqtas*.

Most of the *amaranayakas* were Telugu warriors. They recruited their soldiers usually from among their own villagers or kinsmen and trained them. These armies were loyal to the Nayakas rather than to the king. Many powerful nayakas like Saluva Narasimha or Narasa Nayaka controlled vast areas and at times

could even challenge the Vijayanagara Kings. In fact some of them were so powerful that when a king died they took power in their own hands and themselves became kings.

Let us compare

You read about how the villages were administered in Chola kingdom by councils of landholding villagers and how the king collected revenue from villages with the help of these councils. Things had begun to change in Vijayanagara Empire as the power of the armies and nayakas increased. You saw that the control over the villages and town was given over to these nayakas.

- ♦ What impact do you think it would have had on the villagers? Discuss in your class.
- ♦ In a previous lesson you had read about how villages and towns are administered in our country today. Can you compare this with the Vijayanagara system and point out the differences?

Amaranayakas and Agriculture

Most of the Nayakas were Telugus and they led armies which were mostly composed of Telugu speaking farmers. As the Nayakas established control over different regions of south India these peasant soldiers also settled down and brought land under cultivation. They built irrigation tanks and canals. They thus settled down in various parts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, especially in regions with black soils.

All over the empire tanks / reservoirs for capturing rain water and other drainage water, were constructed by the kings, chiefs, nayakas and traders. Even temples invested their endowments in irrigation and were sharing the enhanced production with those who worked their lands. Look at portions of an inscription from Tirumala temple of 1494 AD:

“The authorities of Tirumala Temple executed this inscription in favour of Timmana Dandanayaka of Chandragiri as follows: whereas you have paid three hundred gold coins to the Temple treasury, this sum shall be invested for



Fig 15.3 Relief on Hazara Rama Temple. Can you write a story based on this image?

excavation of tank fed channels in the villages belonging to the temple and with the harvest reaped thereby certain offerings will be made to the deity.”

All these efforts resulted in the expansion of agriculture into new areas and tremendous increase in agricultural production. This in turn provided impetus to trade.

- ♦ In what way would the nayakas have benefitted from increase in agricultural production?

Trade and Cavalry

Trade in agricultural produce as well as craft produce like cloth increased manifold in Vijayanagara period. We find change in trade activity during this period. Trade centres were established on both of India's extensive coasts and these were under the administration of local merchants and others representing trader communities from other places: Arabs, Jews, Armenians and others. States were attracted to these ports for the revenue as well as for access to strategic commodities like horses. Knowledge of the breeding of horses appropriate for heavy cavalry tactics was lacking in India at that time. Through the ports, war horses from Arabia could be imported by chiefs and kings in the Indian peninsula. Guns were another strategic good that was obtained through the ports. While these goods were imports, Indian exports remained the same as earlier periods as textiles and spices and other craft items.

In addition to ports and market towns there were towns strategically sited for defence and administrative purposes. Some

towns attained considerable size and permanence as pilgrimage centres.

Krishnadeva Raya - The Ruler

Krishnadeva Raya ruled from 1509 AD to 1529 AD. He was a great general who led the Vijayanagara armies successfully against the Bahmani sultans and also against the Gajapatis of Odisha. He also subdued several chiefs who had revolted in Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil regions. This gave him control over the entire region south of river Krishna and especially control over the ports of the eastern coast.

During this period the Portuguese had established their power over some ports of the western coast like Goa. Krishnadevaraya established friendly relations with them in order to get exclusive supply of horses and fire arms from them. He also employed Portuguese troops in his wars.

Every year on the Vijayadashami day the King organised elaborate festivities and worship which concluded with a massive parade of his armies. On this day all the chiefs and *amaranayakas* of the empire brought their tributes to the King.

Krishnadevaraya paid special attention to the temples of his kingdom and personally visited many of them like Tirupati, Srisailem and Ahobilam. He also made big donations to a large number of temples.

Krishnadeva Raya's inscriptions state that he had distributed the great treasure gained in his successful wars to all the major temples of southern India. Towering temple gateways called 'Raya gopuram' were built in many of these temples in his honour. This munificence assured that his name would be remembered for long among



Fig 15.4 Gopuram of Ekamreshwar Temple in Kanchipuram.

the people of south India. He also built some beautiful temples in Vijayanagara city.

Krishnadevaraya was also patron of Telugu literature and himself composed the poetic work *Amuktamalyada* on the life of Andal the Tamil Bhakta poetess. His court was adorned with eight poets known

popularly as “*Ashtadiggajas*”. They are Allasani Peddana, Mukku Thimmana, Dhurjati, Ramaraja Bhushana, Tenali Ramakrishna, Pingali Surana, Ayyalaraju Ramabadrudu and Madayagari Mallana.

The power of the Vijayanagara kings grew further during the time of Krishnadevaraya’s successors Achyutadeva Raya and Aliya Rama Raya. As the Bahamani rulers were unable to fight the Vijayanagara individually, by 1565 AD all the five Bahmani kingdoms joined together and defeated Rama Raya in Rakkasi tangadi war also known as Tallikota war and looted and destroyed the city of Vijayanagara. The emperors who succeeded him shifted their capital to Chandragiri near Tirupati, but never regained the glory of earlier times. While part of the empire came under the control of the Sultans, the chiefs and Nayakas became independent in other parts.

Key words :

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| 1. <i>Amaranayaka</i> | 4. Amirs |
| 2. Iqta | 5. Raya gopuram |
| 3. Archaeologists | |

Improve your learning

1. Why do you think the Portuguese travellers were interested in knowing about the forts and armies of Vijayanagara kings?
2. Why do you think the kings of Vijayanagara lived in a separate quarter and not in the middle of the city as in Orugallu?
3. Historians feel that Vijayanagara state was a highly militarised – in what way do you think it would have affected the common people?
4. Why were the *amaranayakas* very powerful?
5. Compare the *amaranayakas* and the old chiefs you had read about in the lesson on Kakatiyas. Were they different or similar – in what way?
6. Why was the Vijayanagara army dependent upon imports from the western coast?
7. Krishnadeva Raya fought against several enemies in order to consolidate his kingdom. Make a list of all of them.