

CHAPTER 7

THEME SEVEN

An Imperial Capital Vijayanagara

(c. fourteenth to sixteenth century)

1. Vijayanagara Empire

- The name of both a city and an empire.
- Founded in the fourteenth century.
- It stretched from the river Krishna in the north to the extreme south of the peninsula. (Krishna-Tungabhadra doab)
- In 1565 the city was sacked and subsequently deserted.

The Discovery of Hampi

- Ruins were discovered in 1800
- Hampi, a name derived from that of the local mother goddess, Pampadevi.
- Initial information was based on the memories of priests of the Virupaksha temple and the shrine of Pampadevi.

2. Rayas, Nayakas and Sultans

- Two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336.
- Vijayanagar empire northern frontier, rulers –Sultans of the Deccan and the Gajapati rulers of Orissa
- They competed with these rulers for control of the fertile river valleys and the resources generated by lucrative overseas trade.
- At the same time, Interaction between these states led to sharing of ideas, especially in the field of architecture.
- The rulers of Vijayanagara borrowed concepts and building techniques which they then developed further.
- Some of the areas that were incorporated within the empire had witnessed the development of powerful states such as those of the Cholas in Tamil Nadu and the Hoysalas in Karnataka.
- Ruling elites in these areas had extended patronage to elaborate temples such as the Brihadishvara temple at Thanjavur and the Chennakeshava temple at Belur.

- The rulers of Vijayanagara, who called themselves *rayas*, built on these traditions and carried them,

Kings and traders

- The import of horses from Arabia and Central Asia was very important for rival kingdoms.
- This trade was initially controlled by Arab traders.
- Local communities of merchants known as *kudirai chettis* or horse merchants also participated in these exchanges.
- From 1498 Portuguese, who arrived on the west coast of the subcontinent attempted to establish trading and military stations.
- Vijayanagara was also noted for its markets dealing in spices, textiles and precious stones.

The apogee and decline of the empire

- The first dynasty, known as the Sangama dynasty, exercised control till 1485.
- They were supplanted by the Saluvas, military commanders, who remained in power till 1503 when they were replaced by the Tuluvas.
- Krishnadeva Raya belonged to the Tuluva dynasty.
- Krishnadeva Raya's rule was characterised by expansion and consolidation.
- This was the time when the land between the Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers (the Raichur doab) was acquired (1512), the rulers of Orissa were subdued (1514) and severe defeats were inflicted on the Sultan of Bijapur (1520).
- Krishnadeva Raya is credited with building some fine temples and adding impressive *gopurams* to many important south Indian temples.
- He also founded a suburban township near Vijayanagara called Nagalapuram after his mother.
- After the death of Krishnadeva Raya in 1529 the control at the centre had shifted to another ruling lineage, that of the Aravidu

- Aravidu remained in power till the end of the seventeenth century.
- In 1565 Rama Raya, the chief minister of Vijayanagara, led the army into battle at Rakshasi-Tangadi (also known as Talikota), where his forces were routed by the combined armies of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda.
- The victorious armies sacked the city of Vijayanagara.
- The city was totally abandoned within a few years.

The *rayas* and the *nayakas*

- Military chiefs exercised power in the empire
- These chiefs were known as *nayakas* and 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.
- The *amara-nayaka* system was a major political innovation of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- It is likely that many features of this system were derived from the *iqta* system of the Delhi Sultanate.
- The *amara-nayakas* 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.
- They retained part of the revenue for personal use and for maintaining a stipulated contingent of horses and elephants.
- These contingents provided the Vijayanagara kings with an effective fighting force with which they brought the entire southern peninsula under their control.
- The *amara-nayakas* sent tribute to the king annually and personally appeared in the royal court with gifts to express their loyalty.
- Kings occasionally asserted their control over them by transferring them from one place to another.
- However, during the course of the seventeenth century, many of these *nayakas* established independent kingdoms.
- This hastened the collapse of the central imperial structure.

3. Vijayanagara The Capital and its Environs

Water resources

- Natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra which flows in a north-easterly direction.
- Embankments were built along these streams to create reservoirs of varying sizes.
- As this is one of the most arid zones of the peninsula, elaborate arrangements had to be made to store rainwater and conduct it to the city.

- 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. This canal drew water from a dam across the Tungabhadra and irrigated the cultivated valley that separated the “sacred centre” from the “urban core”.
- This was apparently built by kings of the Sangama dynasty.

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.
- Most significant about this fortification is that it enclosed agricultural tracts.
- Between the first, second and the third walls there are cultivated fields, gardens and houses.
- From this first circuit until you enter the city there is a great distance, in which are fields in which they sow rice and have many gardens and much water, in which water comes from two lakes.
- 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.
- Instead of making larger granaries the rulers of Vijayanagara adopted a more expensive and elaborate strategy of protecting the agricultural belt itself.

The urban core

- There is relatively little archaeological evidence of the houses of ordinary people.
- These areas may have been occupied by rich traders.
- This was also the Muslim residential quarter.
- Tombs and mosques located here have distinctive functions, yet their architecture resembles that of the *mandapas* found in the temples of Hampi.
- This is how the sixteenth-century Portuguese traveller Barbosa described the houses of ordinary people, which have not survived:
- The entire area was dotted with numerous shrines and small temples,
- Prevalence of a variety of cults, perhaps supported by different communities.

4. The Royal Centre

- The royal centre was located in the south-western part of the settlement.
- It included over 60 temples.

- The patronage of temples and cults was important for rulers
- About thirty building complexes have been identified as palaces.
- These are relatively large structures that do not seem to have been associated with ritual functions.
- 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.

The mahanavami dibba

- The “king’s palace” is the largest of the enclosures but has not yielded definitive evidence of being a royal residence.
- It has two of the most impressive platforms, usually called the “audience hall” and the “*mahanavami dibba*”.
- 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 ten-day Hindu festival.
- 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.

Other buildings in the royal centre

- One of the most beautiful buildings in the royal centre is the Lotus Mahal - Not quite sure what the building was used for.
- While most temples were located in the sacred centre, there were several in the royal centre as well (eg. Hazara Rama temple).
- This was probably meant to be used only by the king and his family.

5. The Sacred Centre

Choosing a capital

- Rocky northern end of the city on the banks of the Tungabhadra.
- Temple building in the region had a long history, going back to dynasties such as the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Hoysalas and Cholas.
- Rulers very often encouraged temple building as a means of associating themselves with the divine
- Temples also functioned as centres of learning.

- Temples developed as significant religious, social, cultural and economic centres.
- 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.
- 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 it literally meant Hindu Sultan.

Gopurams and mandapas

- In terms of temple architecture, by this period certain new features were in evidence.
- Structures of immense scale (eg. *raya gopurams* or royal gateways - signalled the presence of the temple from a great distance.
- Other distinctive features include *mandapas* or pavilions and long, pillared corridors that often ran around the shrines within the temple complex.

Virupaksha temple

- The Virupaksha temple
- It was built over centuries.
- The earliest shrine dated to the ninth-tenth centuries, it was substantially enlarged with the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- The hall in front of the main shrine was built by Krishnadeva Raya to mark his accession.
- He is also credited with the construction of the eastern *gopuram*.
- The halls in the temple were used for a variety of purposes.

Vitthala temple

- Here, the principal deity was Vitthala, a form of Vishnu generally worshipped in Maharashtra. The introduction of the worship of the deity in Karnataka is another indication of the ways in which the rulers of Vijayanagara drew on different traditions to create an imperial culture.
- This temple too has several halls and a unique shrine designed as a chariot
- A characteristic feature of the temple complexes 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 in which merchants set up their shops.

Exercise

Level – 1

1. The most striking feature about the location of Vijayanagara is the natural basin formed by the which of the following rivers?
(a) Tungabhadra (b) Bhima
(c) Krishna (d) Godavari
2. The surrounding landscape of Vijayanagara was characterised by which of the following physical layouts?
(a) Granite hills
(b) Arid zones of the peninsula
(c) Western ghats
(d) Eastern ghats
3. The sixteenth-century traveller Barbosa described the houses of ordinary people, which have not survived Traveller Barbosa came from which of the following countries?
(a) Portuguese (b) Spain
(c) Persia (d) Egypt
4. Gajapati rulers ruled in which of the following regions?
(a) Orissa
(b) Gujrat
(c) Rajasthan
(d) Madhya Pradesh
5. The rulers of which of the following regions called themselves *rayas*?
(a) Cholas in Tamil Nadu
(b) Hoysalas in Karnataka
(c) Vijayanagara
(d) None of the above
6. The ruler of which of the following country sent Abdur Razzaq to Calicut in the fifteenth century?
(a) Persia
(b) Afghan
(c) Egypt
(d) Arab
7. There is archaeological evidence of Muslim residential quarter in which of the areas of the Vijaynagar empire?
(a) First circuit
(b) Between the first and second walls
(c) Urban core
(d) None of the above

8. In the Vitthala temple of Vijaynagar empire, the principal deity was Vitthala, a form of Vishnu generally worshipped in which of the following states?
(a) North India (b) Maharashtra
(c) Andhra Pradesh (d) Karnataka
9. Vijayanagara was inspired by the existence of which of the following shrines
(a) Virupaksha (b) Pampadevi.
(c) Vitthala temple (d) Both (a) and (b)
10. The Vijayanagara Empire was founded in 1336 by who among the following ?
(a) Harihara (b) Pampadevi.
(c) Bukka (d) Both (a) and (c)
11. Kudirai chettis were
(a) merchants
(b) Priests
(c) *nayakas*
(d) *Amara*

Level – 2

12. Find the true statement about Hazara Rama temple of Vijaynagar empire
(a) It was situated in the sacred centre
(b) It was meant to be used only by the king and his family.
(c) Sculpted panels on the walls include scenes from the Mahabharata
(d) None of the above
13. Which of the following waterworks of Vijaynagar empire drew water from a dam across the Tungabhadra and irrigated the cultivated valley that separated the “sacred centre” from the “urban core”?
(a) Kamalapuram tank
(b) Hiriya canal.
(c) Both (a) and (b)
(d) None of the above
14. Find the true statement about the fortification of Vijayanagara empire
(a) Between the first, second and the third walls there are cultivated fields
(b) The fortification encloses agricultural tracts.
(c) Evidence of an agricultural tract between the sacred centre and the urban core.
(d) Both (b) and (c)

15. Find the incorrect statement about the agriculture practices of the Vijayanagar empire
- Agricultural tract was serviced by an elaborate canal system
 - The canal system draws water from the Tungabhadra.
 - They adopted a more expensive and elaborate strategy of protecting the agricultural belt itself
 - Both (a) and (b)
16. A characteristic feature of the temple complexes is the chariot streets that extended from the temple *gopuram* in a straight line. The above statement best describes which of the following temples?
- Virupaksha temple
 - Vitthala temple
 - Jaina temples
 - None of the above
17. Military chiefs were known as
- nayakas*
 - rayas*
 - amara-nayakas*
 - None of the above*
18. Krishnadeva Raya composed a work on statecraft in Telugu known as
- mahanavami*
 - Amuktamalyada
 - Suratrana
 - None of the above
19. Krishnadeva Raya belonged to which of the following dynasties?
- Tuluva dynasty
 - Rakshasi-Tangadi dynasty
 - Talikota dynasty
 - None of the above
20. Find the true statement about Krishnadeva Raya's rule
- It was characterised by expansion and consolidation
 - He is credited with building *gopurams* to many important south Indian temples
 - He founded a suburban township near Vijayanagara called Nagalapuram
 - All of the above
21. After the death of Krishnadeva Raya the control at the centre had shifted to which of the following rulers?
- Aravidu
 - Rama Raya
 - Amara-nayakas*
 - Raya*
22. Raichur doab is between which of the following rivers?
- Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers
 - Krishna rivers and Godavari rivers
 - Tungabhadra and Cauvery rivers
 - Krishna and Cauvery rivers

Answers

Level-1

1. (a) 2. (a) 3. (a) 4. (a) 5. (c) 6. (a) 7. (c) 8. (b) 9. (d) 10. (d)

11. (a)

Level-2

12. (b) 13. (b) 14. (d) 15. (c) 16. (a) 17. (a) 18. (b) 19. (a) 20. (d) 21. (a)

22. (a)

Explanations

Level – 1

1. a • Natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra which flows in a north-easterly direction.
2. a • The city was characterised by stunning granite hills that seem to form a girdle around the city.
3. a • Tombs and mosques located here have distinctive functions, yet their architecture resembles that of the *mandapas* found in the temples of Hampi.
 - This is how the sixteenth-century Portuguese traveller Barbosa described the houses of ordinary people, which have not survived:
4. a • On their northern frontier, the Vijayanagara kings competed with contemporary rulers – including the Sultans of the Deccan and the Gajapati rulers of Orissa
5. c • The rulers of Vijayanagara, called themselves *rayas*
6. a • 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.
7. c • In Urban core area there is relatively little archaeological evidence of the houses of ordinary people.
 - These areas may have been occupied by rich traders.
 - This was also the Muslim residential quarter.
8. b • The Vitthala temple - Here, the principal deity was Vitthala, a form of Vishnu generally worshipped in Maharashtra.
9. d • 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.
10. d • According to tradition and epigraphic evidence two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336.
11. a • Local communities of merchants known as *kudirai chettis* or horse merchants

Level – 2

12. b • 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. This was probably meant to be used only by the king and his family.

- Sculpted panels on the walls survive.
 - These include scenes from the *Ramayana* sculpted on the inner walls of the shrine.
13. b • One of the most prominent waterworks to be seen among the ruins is the Hiriya canal. This canal drew water from a dam across the Tungabhadra and irrigated the cultivated valley that separated the “sacred centre” from the “urban core”.
 14. d • Most significant about this fortification is that it enclosed agricultural tracts.
 - Between the first, second and the third walls there are cultivated fields, gardens and houses.
 - 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.
 15. c • 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.
 - The rulers of Vijayanagara adopted a more expensive and elaborate strategy of building large granaries within fortified areas.
 16. a
 17. a • Military chiefs exercised power in the empire
 - These chiefs were known as *nayakas* and they usually spoke Telugu or Kannada.
 18. b • Krishnadeva Raya (ruled 1509-29), the most famous ruler of Vijayanagara, composed a work on statecraft in Telugu known as the *Amuktamalyada*.
 19. a • Krishnadeva Raya belonged to the Tuluva dynasty.
 20. d • Krishnadeva Raya's rule was characterised by expansion and consolidation.
 - Krishnadeva Raya is credited with building some fine temples and adding impressive *gopurams* to many important south Indian temples.
 - He also founded a suburban township near Vijayanagara called Nagalapuram after his mother.
 21. a • After the death of Krishnadeva Raya in 1529 the control at the centre had shifted to another ruling lineage, that of the Aravidu
 - Aravidu remained in power till the end of the seventeenth century.
 22. a