

The Kings of Vijayanagara



In the previous chapter, 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.

Vijayanagara means the ‘City of Victory’. It was located on the banks of Tungabhadra River in Karnataka. According to history, it was founded by two brothers named Harihara Raya and Bukka Raya around 1336 CE with the blessings of a sage named Vidyananya. The kings of Vijayanagara worshipped Sri Virupaksha (Shiva). The Vijayanagara empire lasted for above 300 years though it was not ruled by kings of the same family. After the family of Harihara Raya and Bukka Raya of Sangama dynasty, Saluva, Tuluva and Araviti families ruled the empire one after the other. Some of those kings spoke the language Kannada. But Sri Krishna Devaraya gave due importance of Telugu language.

On the north of the Tungabhadra river, some new kingdoms called the Bahamani kingdoms arose. Initially, it was one large kingdom with its capital in Gulbarga. Later on, between 1489 and 1520 CE, it broke up into five smaller kingdoms. Of these five kingdoms, Bijapur and Golconda ruled

over large parts of the present day Karnataka, Telangana 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, 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

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

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 organizations 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 CE, Abdul Razzak the Persian trader who visited in 1443 CE, the Portugese traveller Domingo Paes, who visited it in 1520 CE and Nuniz who wrote in 1537 CE.

The City of Vijayanagara

The city of Vijayanagara was built on the banks of the river Tungabhadra next to the 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 clothes of every sort on the earth... In the evening you have a fair where they sell horses, vegetables, fruits, wood, etc.”

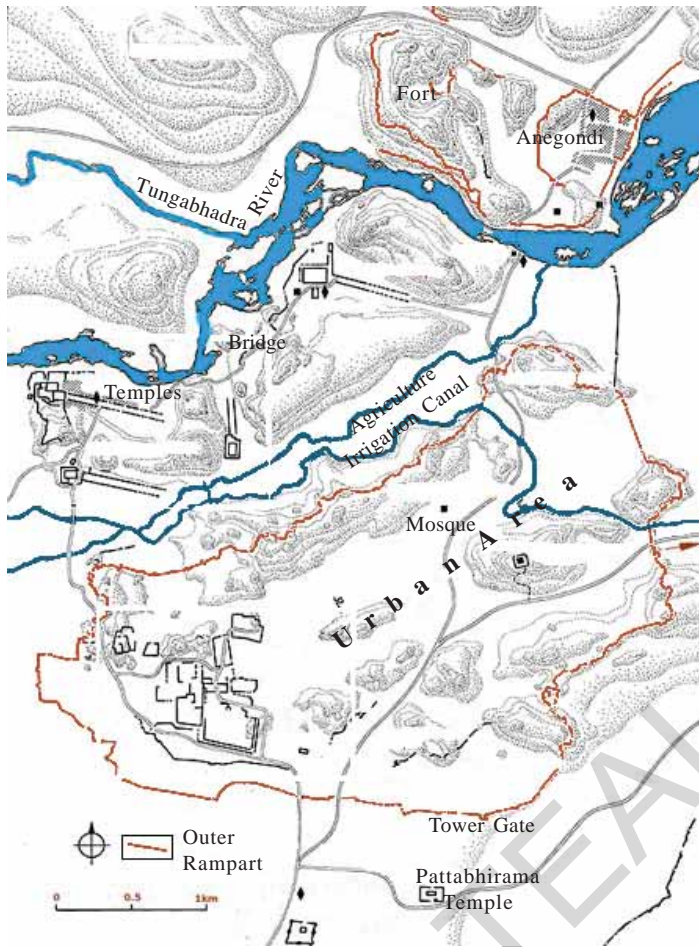


Fig 13.1 Bronze images of Krishnadeva Raya and his two wives installed in Tirumala Temple.

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

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

- ◆ Compare Vijayanagara with Warangal to point out the similarities and differences between them.



Map 1: Vijayanagara City

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

Armies and Military Leaders

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

- ◆ 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 a lot of money 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 started using 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. Let us find out who they were and what they did. Read the following account left by Domingo Paes about Vijayanagara during Krishnadeva Raya’s period:

“This king has a million fighting troops, which include 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 about a million 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 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 have to do for



Fig 13.2 Stone Chariot at Hazara Rama Temple

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 charge of 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. They had judicial powers too (the power to judge criminals and give punishments). 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 control of 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 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 the VI class, you 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?

Krishnadevaraya - The Ruler

Krishnadevaraya ruled from 1509 CE to 1529 CE. 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 on the south of river Krishna and especially, the 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 firearms 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, Srisailam and Ahobilam. He also donated to a large number of temples.

Krishnadevaraya's inscriptions state that he had distributed the great treasure gained



Fig 13.3 Relief on Hazara Rama Temple. Can you write a story based on this image?

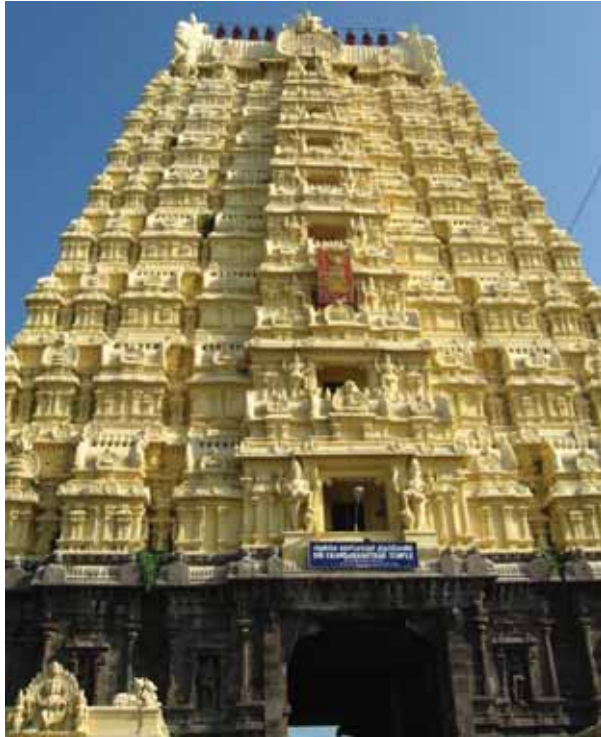


Fig 13.4 Gopuram of Ekambareshwar Temple in Kanchipuram.

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 generosity assured that his name would be remembered for long among the people of south India. He also built some beautiful temples in Vijayanagara city.

Krishnadevaraya was also a patron of Telugu literature and he himself composed the poetic work *Amuktamalyada* on the life of Andal, the Tamil Bhakta poetess. His court was adorned by 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

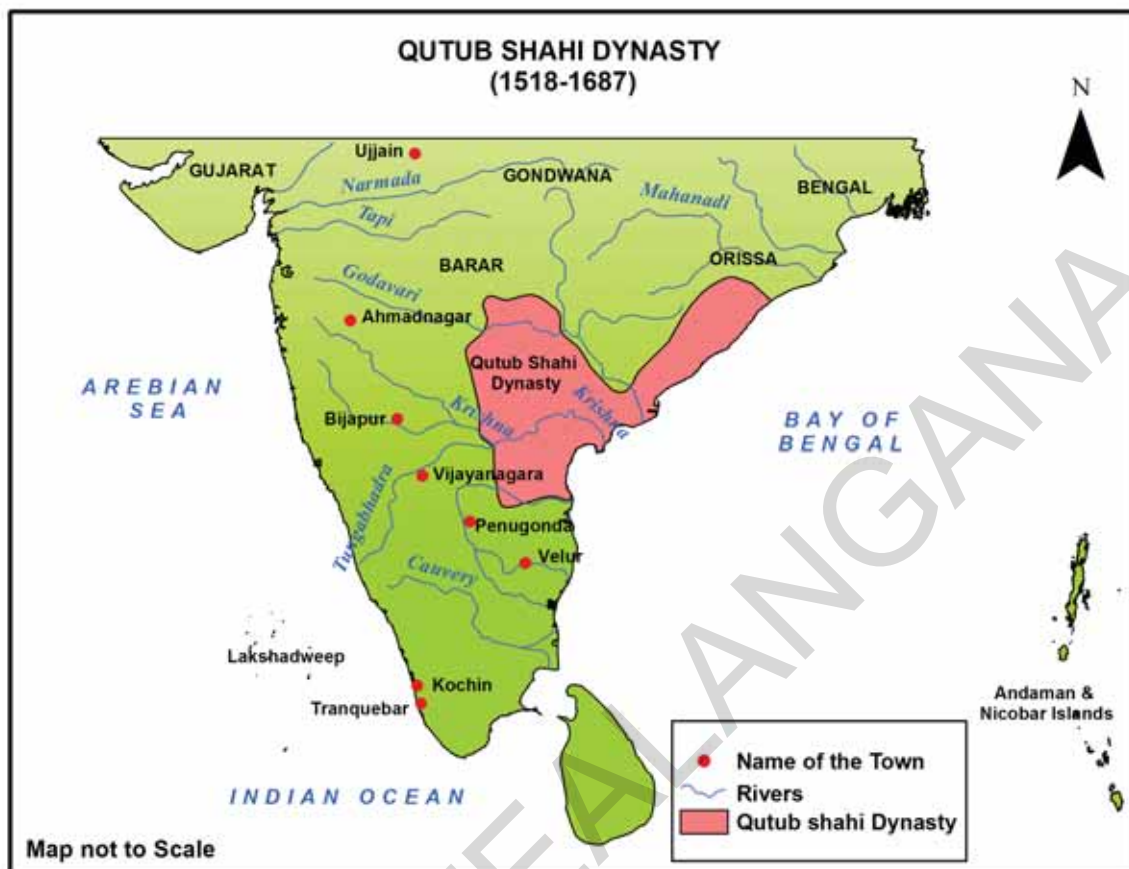
unable to fight the Vijayanagara individually, by 1565 AD, all the five Bahmani kingdoms joined together and defeated Rama Raya in Rakkasi tangadi war also known as Tallikota war. They looted and destroyed the city of Vijayanagara. The emperors who succeeded him shifted their capital to Chandragiri near Tirupati, but never regained the glory of earlier times. While a part of the empire came under the control of the Sultans, the chiefs and Nayakas became independent in other parts.

Qutub Shahis of Golkonda, 1512 – 1687

Qutub Shahis - Timeline

Quli Qutub Shah	(1512-1543)
Jamshed Quli	(1543-1550)
Ibrahim Qutub Shah	(1550-1580)
Mohd Quli Qutub Shah	(1580-1612)
Mohd Qutub Shah	(1612-1626)
Abdullah Qutub Shah	(1626-1672)
Abul Hasan Tanashah	(1672-1687)

In the previous chapter, we read about the Kakatiya kingdom in the Telangana region. After the end of the Kakatiya kingdom, some of their subordinate nayakas established independent kingdoms. Of these, the Velama kingdoms of Rachakonda and Devarakonda were very strong and challenged the authority of the Vijayanagara emperors and the Bahamani kings. Around the year 1512, Quli Qutub Shah who was a governor of the Bahmanis in Telangana region declared independence and established the Qutub Shahi dynasty of Golconda. Quli Qutub Shah extended his rule by capturing forts at Warangal, Kondapalli, Eluru, and Rajahmundry. The main part of Golconda State was Telangana. His successors ruled up to 1687.



Map 2: Qutub Shahi Dynasty

Sultan Ibrahim Qutub Shah (1550–80) patronized Telugu literature, supported Brahmins and temples and engaged in large-scale irrigation works like the Kakatiya kings. Famous Telugu poets of Ibrahim Qutub Shah's period were Singanacharyudu, Addanki Gangadharudu, Kandukuru Rudrakavi and Ponnaganti Telaganarya were patronized by Ibrahim Qutub Shah. Ibrahim Qutub Shah was praised by poets as "Malkibha-rama." He also took into his service many *nayaka* chieftains who proudly claimed descent from warrior-supporters of the Kakatiyas, especially those serving Pratapa Rudra. Ibrahim allowed them considerable autonomy in the agrarian sphere while also entrusting them with the command of great forts.

The Qutub Shahi rulers quickly understood the regional ecology and decided to continue the Kakatiya pattern of irrigation system to widen the agrarian base in core region of Telangana. Since they lived in capital Golkonda built Hussain Sagar Lake in 1562 during the reign of Ibrahim Qutub Shah. It was named after Sufi Saint Hazrat Hussain Shah Wali who helped to design it. It was developed as an artificial lake that holds water perennially fed into Musi river. It became main source of drinking water to Hyderabad. Another tank at Ibrahim Patnam was also built by him. It is however well known that puranapul was also built across river Musi.

Ibrahim's son Mohammed Quli was a great visionary and was responsible for the planning and building of Hyderabad city.

Mir Momin Astarabadi, was the Architect of the City of Hyderabad during his time. As the Prime Minister of Quli Qutb Shah he played an important role in preparing the layout plan for the Charminar along with that of the



Fig 13.5 Charminar

new capital city. Mohammad Quli Qutub Shah built Mecca Masjid and Jama Masjid. It was built on the model of the grand mosque of Mecca. Quli Qutub Shah commissioned bricks to be made from the soil brought from Mecca, and used them in the construction of the central arch of the mosque, thus giving the mosque its name. A room in the Mosque also contains hair of Prophet Mohammed. Quli Qutub Shah also constructed the Charminar, the most recognizable symbol of Hyderabad. He was also an accomplished poet in Persian and Urdu. The Deccani Urdu acquired the status of literary language due to his contributions.

Hayat Bakshi Begum was the daughter of Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah. She built Hayat Bakshi Mosque located in Hayathnagar, near Hyderabad. She was also known as Maa Saheba, Masab Tank is a distorted version of Maa-Sahaba Tank.

Abdulla Qutub Shah was a lover of poetry and music. He invited and honoured Kshetrayya, the famous *padam* writer to his court. Abul – Hasan Tana Shah was the last and the most popular ruler of Qutub Shahi

Dynasty. He appointed Kancharla Gopanna (also known as Ramadasu) as Tahasildar (head of the revenue department) of Palvancha county. Ramadasu was accused that he diverted the public funds to construct Lord Rama temple in Bhadrachalam and got the jewellery for the idols of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. Tani Shah found Ramadasu guilty of diverting of public funds and put him in jail and released him after realisation.

During the Qutub Shahi period, Golconda was known all over the world for its famous diamonds. At that time, Machilipatnam became a major port from where trade was carried out with South East Asia, China, Persia, Arabia and Europe. Great caravans travelled from the coastal region to Golconda carrying merchandise, gold and silver from different countries.

The tombs of the seven Qutub Shahi rulers in the Ibrahim Bagh are located close to the famous Golkonda Fort in Hyderabad. The tombs mark a unique architectural style which is a mixture of Persian and Hindu. Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor was impressed by the architecture of the Qutub Shahi tombs and built the Taj Mahal with white Marble. The tombs are structures with intricately carved stonework and are surrounded by landscaped gardens.

Right from the times of Ibrahim Qutub Shah, the Mughals were keen on conquering this wealthy kingdom and eventually succeeded under Aurangzeb when he captured the fort of Golconda in the year 1687.

The Mughals did not follow the inclusive

policy of the Qutub Shahis and removed the local people from positions of power and brought in more people from outside. They also tried to extract maximum revenue from this region and adopted the system of revenue contract. Under this system, the government auctioned the right to collect revenue from a region to the highest bidder. These were usually the locally powerful people or moneylenders and they oppressed the peasants and artisans to get maximum income. This caused widespread distress, including famines, migration and depopulation.



Fig 13.6 Golconda Fort

- ◆ Look at the map of Qutub Shahi kingdom and identify Golconda, Machilipatnam, Bhadrachalam etc.
- ◆ Why do you think did the economy of Golconda kingdom prosper under Qutub shah while it declined during the early Mughal rule?

- ◆ Find out about the famous diamond mines of Golconda kingdom and the trade in these diamonds.

Keywords :

1. Amara Nayaka
2. Amir
3. Iktha
4. Archeological Scientists
5. Raya Gopuram

Improve your learning

1. Why did the kings of Vijayanagara live in a separate quarter and not in the middle of the city as in Orugallu?
2. Why were the *amaranayakas* very powerful?
3. Compare the *amaranayakas* with the old chiefs of Kakatiyas. Were they different or similar and in what way?
4. Why was the Vijayanagara army dependent on imports from the western coast?
5. Krishnadeva Raya fought against several enemies in order to consolidate his kingdom. Make a list of all of them.
6. What services were rendered to Telugu literature by the Vijayanagara Kings?
7. Locate the following in the India map.

a) Hampi	b) Bijapur	c) Tirupati
d) Golkonda	e) Kanchi	f) River Tungabhadra
8. Discuss the support of various kingdoms to Telugu literature?
9. Describe the art and architecture of the Qutub Shahis rules.

