

## THE VIJAYNAGAR EMPIRE

Founded in 1336 by the brothers Harihar and Bukka who were feudatories of Kakathiyas of Warrangal. They were probably kinsmen and revenue officials of Pratapa Rudra Deva II, the ruler of Warrangal. When kingdom of Warrangal was over run (1323) by the Tughlaq, two brothers were taken captive to Delhi. They were subsequently released by Muhammed bin Tughlaq. In 1336 with the assistance and blessing of Vidyaranya of Sringeri they established Vijayanagara Empire. Harihara became the first ruler and on his death in 1356, was succeeded by Bukka. Harihara conquered the Hoyasala and Kadamba kingdom and Madura. His wife Ganga devi wrote '*Madura Vijayam*'. Harihara II was a reputed scholar and earned the title of '*Vidyavilasa Karnataka*'

The empire of Vijayanagara lasted for 230 years and produced four dynasties

- Sangama dynasty -1336-1486 by Harihara and Bukka
- Saluva dynasty-1486-1503 by Saluva Narasimha
- Tuluva-1503-1569 by Veera Narasimha
- Aravidu dynasty-1569-17 th Century

### **Krishnadeva Raya 1509-29**

He belonged to Tuluva dynasty. Albuquerque the Portuguese governor asked for permission to build a fort at *Bhatkal* and the same was granted. He assumed the title *yavanarajyasathapancharya* and was also known as *Abhinav Bhoja*, *Andhra Pitamaha*, *Andhra Bhoja* etc. He wrote a work in Telugu on political Theory and administration known as *Amukthamalyada* and *Jambavati kalyanam* in Sanskrit. There was group of 8 poets known as *ashtadiggajas* in his court

## RELIGION AND POLITICS

### **Ritual Kingship**

It is generally emphasized that the principle of strict adherence *ta dham* was the chief constituent and distinguishing feature of the Vijayanagar state. But very often it were the Hindu rulers against whom the Vijayanagar rulers had to fight, e.g.

the 'Gajapatis of Orissa. The most strategically placed contingents of the Vijaynagar army were under the charge of Muslim commanders. The Muslim archers were employed by King Deva Raya. These Muslim contingents played an important role in the victory of Vijaynagar against its Hindu rivals.

The successful military deeds of the Vijaynagar rulers led them to assume the title of digvijayans. Vijaynagar kingship was symbolic in the sense that the Vijaynagar rulers exercised their control through their overlords over a region beyond the prime centre of their authority. This symbolism was manifested through the instrument of religion which was used to ensure loyalty from the people. For example, ritual kingship is best exemplified in the mahanavami festival. This was an annual royal ceremony lasting for nine days between 15 September and 15 October. It culminated in the dusserah festival on the tenth day. Important personages (e.g., military commanders) from the peripheral parts participated in the festival. Through this festival, recognition of the sovereignty of Vijaynagar rulers by peripheral parts of the empire was strengthened. Though the Brahmans participated in the festival, their role was not predominant. The ritual rites of the festival were largely performed by the king himself.

### **Political Role of the Brahmans**

A distinct feature of the Vijaynagar state was the importance of the Brahmans as political and secular personnel rather than ritual leaders. Most of the durga dannaiks (in charge of forts) were Brahmans. Literary sources substantiate the theory that fortresses were significant during this period and were placed under the control of the Brahmans, especially of Telugu origins.

During this period, the majority of educated Brahmans desired to become Government servants as administrators and accountants which offered them good career prospects. The Imperial Secretariat was totally manned by the Brahmans. These Brahmans were different from the other Brahmans: they belonged to a sub caste called the Telugu *niyogis*. They were not very orthodox in performing religious rites. They also worked as potential legitimizers. The Brahman Vidyaranya and his kinsmen were the ministers of the Sangama brothers: they provided legitimacy to their rule by accepting them back into the Hindu fold. The Brahmans also played an important role as military commanders in the Vijaynagar army. For example, under Krishnadeva Raya Brahman received economic support as he was an integral part of the political system. The brahmans constructed and commanded fortresses in different parts of the empire for which they were assigned revenue of some crown villages, bhandaravada. Differentiation

was made between crown villages and villages whose income was under the 'charge of the local military chiefs.

### **Relationship between Kings, Sects and Temples**

To establish effective control over the distant Tamil region, the Vijaynagar rulers sought the help of the Vaishnava sectarian leaders who hailed from the Tamil country. For legitimising their power in this region, it was necessary for the rulers, who were aliens in the Tamil region, to establish contacts with the basic Tamil religious organisation-the temples. The relationship between kings, sects and temples can be explained in terms of four assertions:

- 1) Temples were basic for sustaining kingship.
- 2) Sectarian leaders were the connecting links between kings and temples.
- 3) Though the routine supervision of the temples was done by local sectarian groups, the task of solving disputes concerning temples was in the hands of the king.
- 4) The intervention of the king in the above matter was administrative, not legislative.

During 1350-1650, numerous temples sprang up in south India. Through grants or gifts to the temples in the form of material resources (a part of the agricultural produce of specified villages), a particular type of agrarian economy evolved under the Vijaynagar rule.

The rulers of the early Sangama dynasty were Saivas who made additions to the Sri Virupaksha temple of Vijaynagar. The Saluvas were basically Vaishnavas who gave patronage to both the Siva and Vishnu temples. Krishnadeva Raya (the Tuluva 'ruler) constructed the Krishnaswami temple (Vaishnava shrine) and also gave grants to Siva temples.

### **LOCAL ADMINISTRATION**

Local institutions of the earlier period (e.g., sabha, nadu and ur). The powers of the territorial assembly (nadu) as well as the village assemblies (sabha and ur) were weakened during the time of the later Cholas. During the Vijaynagar period, these institutions did not completely disappear when the nagaka and ayagar systems came into prominence.

## **The Nayankara System**

The nayankara system was an important characteristic of the Vijaynagar political organisation. The military chiefs or warriors held the title of nayaka or amaranayaka. It is difficult to classify these warriors on the basis of definite office, ethnic identity, set of duties or rights and privileges

The institution of nayaka was studied in detail by two Portuguese-Fernao Nuniz and Domingo Paes, who visited India during the reigns of Krishnadeva Raya and Achyut Raya of Tuluva dynasty during the sixteenth century. They regard the nayakas simply as agents of Rayas (central government). The evidence of Nuniz for the payments made by the nayakas to the Rayas brings up the question of feudal obligations. The Vijaydagar inscriptions and the later Mackenzie manuscripts refer to the nayakas as territorial magnates with political aspirations which at times conflicted with the aim of the rulers. N.K. Sastri (in 1946) drew a distinction between the nayakas before 1565 and those after 1565. The former were totally dependent upon the rulers while the latter were semi-independent. However, later he modified his views by pointing out that the nayakas before 1565 were military leader holding military fiefs.

In a more recent work (Sources of Indian History), he views the Vijaynagar empire as a military confederacy of many chieftains cooperating under the leadership of the biggest among them. He emphasized that the growing threat from Islam led the Vijaynagar rulers to adopt a military and religious stance. Krishnaswami considers the nayaka system as feudal. But Venkataramanayya feels that important features of European feudalism such as fealty homage and sub- , infeudation were absent in the nayaka system. D.C. Sircar similar refutes the feudal theory; instead he explains it as a kind of landlordism, a variant of feudalism in which land was allotted to the amaranayakas for military services rendered by them to the king.

Thus, D.C. Sircar, and T.V. Mahalingam consider the nayakas of Vijaynagar as warriors holding an office (kara) bestowed on them by the central government on condition of rendering military service. Amarenayankan was a designation. Conferred on a military officer or chief (nayakal who had under his control a specified number of troops. These nayakas possessed revenue rights over land or territory called amaram (amaramakara or amaramahali). In the Tamil country and also in the Vijaynagar empire, the area of land thus alienated under this tenure was about 3/4th. The obligations and activities of the nayakas were among others, giving gifts to temples, repair and building of tanks, reclamation of wasteland and

collection of dues from temples The Tamil inscription, however, do not refer to dues given to the king or his officials by the nayakas.

Krishnaswami, on the basis of Mackenzie manuscripts, opines that the commanders of Vijaynagar army (formerly under Krishnadeva Raya). Later established independent nayaka kingdoms. To guard against such dangers, the Vijaynagar kings tried to establish greater control over coastal markets dealing in horse trade. They attempted to monopolies the purchase of horses of good quality by paying a high price for them. They also built strong garrisons fortified with trustworthy soldiers. Thus, on the one hand, the Telugu nayaks were a source of strength for the Vijaynagar empire and, on the other, they became its rivals

### **The Ayagar System**

During the Vijaynagar period, autonomous local institutions, especially in the Tamil country, suffered a set-back. In pre-Vijaynagar days in Karnataka and Andhra local institutions possessed lesser autonomy as compared to Tamil country. During Vijaynagar period in Karnataka too local territorial divisions underwent a change but the ayagar system continued and became widely prevalent throughout the macro-region. It spread in the Tamil country during 15-16th century as a result of the declining power of nadu and nattar.

The ayagars were village servants or functionaries and constituted of groups of families. These were headmen (reddi or gauda, maniyam), accountant (karnam senabhova) and watchmen (talaiyari). They were given a portion of or plot in a village. Sometimes they had to pay a fixed rent, but generally these plots were manya or tax-free as no regular customary tax was imposed on their agricultural income. In exceptional cases, direct payments in kind were made for services performed by village functionaries. Other village servants who performed essential services and skills for the village community were also paid by assigning plots of land (like washerman and priest). The village servants who provided ordinary goods and services were leather workers whose products included leather bag used in lift-irrigation devices (kiapila or mohte), potter, blacksmith, carpenter, waterman (niranikkar: who looked after the maintenance of irrigation channels and supervised bankers and money-lenders). The distinguishing feature of the ayagar system is that special allocation of income from land and specific cash payments were for the first time provided to village servants holding a particular office

## ECONOMY

### Land and Income Rights

Rice was the staple crop. Both black and white variety of rice was produced from Coromandel to Pulicat. Besides, cereals like gram and pulses were also cultivated. Spices (especially black pepper) coconut and betel-nuts were other important items of production. Land-revenue was the major source of state's income. Rate of revenue demand varied in different parts of the empire and in the same locality itself according to the fertility and regional location of the land. It was generally 1/16th of the produce, but in some cases it was even more ranging up to 1/4th. But on Brahmans and temples it was 1 / 20th to 1/ 30th respectively. It was payable both in cash and kind. We find references to three major categories of land tenure: **amara**, **bhandaravada** and **nianya**. These indicate the way in which the village income was distributed. The **bhandaravada** was a crown village comprising the smallest category. Some part of its income was utilized to maintain the Vijaynagar forts. Income from the **manya** (tax-free) villages was used to maintain the Brahmans, temples, and **mathas**. The largest category was of the **amara** villages given by the Vijaynagar rulers to the **amaranayakas**. Their holders did not possess proprietary rights in land but enjoyed privileges. The **amara** tenure was primarily residual in the sense that its income was distributed after deductions had been made for support of the Brahmans and forts. Three quarters of all the villages came under this category. The term **amaramakni** is considered by most historians as referring to an 'estate' or a fief, but it literally means one-sixteenth share (**makani**). Thus, it points to the fact that the **amaranayakas** could claim only a limited share of village income. The **manya** rights underwent a transformation during this period. Land tenures continued to be given by the state to individual (**ekabhogan**) Brahmans and group of Brahmans as well as to **maths** including the non-Brahman Saiva and Vaishnava gurus. But there was a great increase in **devadana** grants (conferred on temples) made by the state as compared to other grants. Besides land-tax, many professional taxes were imposed. These were on shopkeepers, shepherds, washer men, potters, shoemakers, musicians etc. There was also **tax** on property. Grazing and house taxes were also imposed. Villages were also supposed to pay for the maintenance of the village officers. Besides, **sthala dayal**, **marpdayam** and **manula dayam** were three major transit dues.

Another category of land right through which income was derived was a result of investment in irrigation was called **dasavanda** in Tamil country; and **Kathr-Kodage** in Andhra and Karnataka. This kind of agrarian activity concerning

irrigation was undertaken in semi-dry areas where hydrographic and topographic features were conducive for carrying out developmental projects. The **dasrvanda** or **Kattu-Kodage** was a share in the increased productivity of the land earned by the person who undertook such developmental work (e.g. construction of a tank or channel). This right to income was personal and transferable accruing from the increased productivity also went to the cultivators of the villages where the developmental work was undertaken.

### **Economic Role of Temples**

During the Vijaynagar period, temples emerged as important landholders of villages were granted to the deities which were worshipped in the large temple-. The temple officers managed the **devadana** villages to ensure that the grant was utilized properly. The income from **devadana** villages provided sustenance to the ritual functionaries, It was also utilized to provide food offerings or to purchase goods (mostly aromatic substances and cloth) essential for carrying out the ritual rites. Cash, endowments were also made by the state to the temples for providing ritual service.

Temples took up irrigational work also. Large temples holding **devadana** lands had under them irrigation department for properly channelising money grants made to the temples. Those who gave cash grants to temples also received a share of the food offering (**prasadam**) derived from (the increased productivity). In fact, temples in South India were important centres of economic activity. They were not only great landholders' but they also carried on banking activities. They employed a number of persons. Mahalingam refers to an inscription which mentions a temple which employed 37servants. Temples purchased local goods for performance of ritual services. They gave loans to individuals and village assemblies for economic purposes. The loan were given against lands whose income went to the temples. Cash endowments made by the state to the Tirupati temple were ploughed back in irrigation. The income thus attained **was** used to carry out and maintain ritual services. At Srirangam Temple, cash grants were used to advance commercial loans to business firms in Trichnopoly. Temples had their trusts which utilised its funds for various purposes. Thus, the temples functioned almost as an independent economic system encompassing persons and institutions that were bound together by economic links.

## Foreign Trade

We get information about foreign trade from the **Amuktamalyada** of Krishnadeva Raya, Domingo Paes and Nuniz. They give vivid description of home trade. The role of the Indians in the overseas carrying trade **was** minimal. Barbarosa mentions that Indian overseas trade was completely controlled by Muslim merchants. They used to get special treatment from the rulers. He **says** that on returning from the Red Sea the king assigned them a bodyguard, a **chief** accountant and a broker for help in local transactions. Such was their status that, at Kayal, even royal monopoly of pearl-fisheries was given to a Muslim merchant. The Arabs and later the Portuguese controlled horse trade. Horses were brought from Arabia, Syria and Turkey to the west-coast ports. Goa supplied horses to Vijaynagar as well as the Deccani Sultanates. Importation of horses was of great military importance for the southern states as good horses were not bred in India. Besides, Vijaynagar's conflict with the northern Deccan Muslim states restricted the supply of horses from north India that were imported from Central Asia. Besides horses, ivory, pearls, spices, precious stones, coconuts, palm-sugar, salt, etc. we see also imported. Pearls were brought from the Persian Gulf and Ceylon and precious stones from Pegu. Velvet was imported from Mecca and satin, silk, damask and brocade from China. White rice, Sugarcane (other than palm-sugarcane) and iron were the major exports. Diamonds were exported from Vijaynagar. Nuniz states that the diamond mines were the richest in the world. The principal mines near Krishna river and in Kurnool and Anantapur. This led to the development of a great industry for cutting and polishing precious stones like diamonds, sapphires and rubies in Vijayanagar and Malabar.

## Internal Trade and Urban Life

The contemporary foreign accounts show that local and long distance trade increased under the Vijaynagar rulers. Roads and roadside-facilities for travelers between towns were excellent. Carts were used for the transport of grains over short distance. Riverine shipping especially the backwater-system on the west-coast has also been referred to. Pack-animals were used for long distance transport. In some places armed guards for long distance transport were employed. Local magnates **13<sup>th</sup> 15<sup>th</sup>** Century realized the importance of trade and gave encouragement to town based trade and auxiliary trade in regular and periodic fairs. Regular and periodic fairs took place along the main roads leading to big temples during festival times. These fairs were conducted by trade associations of a nearby town and under the-supervision of the leader of trade association called

pattamswami. Fairs which gave impetus to urban trade were also held at the orders of the local magnates, e.g. gaud. or chief of a nadu. The literary and inscriptional evidences of the 14th to 16th centuries reveal the existence of 80 major trade centres. Some towns were religious; others were commercial and administrative centres. Inside these towns were many bazars where business was carried on by merchants. They paid rents to the towns. There were separate markets for particular commodities. Markets for agricultural and nonagricultural products were separate in accordance with the left and right hand caste affiliations. Trade in consecrated food for pilgrims and the sale of the right of ritual functions and offices were important aspects of temple-related urban commerce. The merchants and artisan organisations in Andhra got identities with certain cities, e.g. the Telugu oil-pressers and merchants were associated with the city of Berwada (in Krishna district). In these towns, the transit duties, shop and house-rents provided income to the towns. The temple-records refer to the prosperity and prestige of merchants and artisans. The Vijaynagar state possessed an urban quality which is not witnessed in any other South Indian state of the time. The capital city integrated within its precincts markets, palaces, temples, mosques, etc. This urban quality was, however, completely destroyed by the middle-16th century.

## **SOCIETY**

The social structure of the South Indian macro-region (Vijaynagar empire) is a unique variant of the Indian society. The uniqueness of the social structure was three-fold :

- Secular functions of the South Indian Brahmans
- Dual division of lower social groups
- Territorial segmentation of the society.

The Brahmans lived in localities where they controlled land, and their prestige and power was also derived from their control over those dependent on land. They also enjoyed prestige due to their sacral functions as a priestly class. The emergence of a large number of Vedic temples endowed with villages (devadanas) gave the Brahmans as temple functionaries the power to exercise ritual control over all other castes and enjoyed religious institutions. As managers of these religious centres, the Brahmans great secular authority.

Territorial segmentation of society applies that social groups in the Tamil country were divided on the basis of natural sub-region and occupational patterns associated with them. Social groups in South India had less interaction with groups at some distance from their locality. They gave preference to cross-cousin and maternal uncle-niece marriages.

Another characteristic of the social structure was the dual division of lower castes referred to by the right and left-hand designations (Vaishnavas corresponding to the right hand division and the Saivites corresponding to the left hand castes). In most cases, the right-hand 'castes were involved primarily in Agricultural production and local trade in agricultural commodities whereas left-hand castes were engaged in mobile artisan production and extensive trade in non-agricultural products.

During the Vijayanagara period, the peasant was the basis of the social order, on whom all other sections of the society depended. The satkams, the Tamil poetic genre, regard the leading peasantry as pure sudras. They claimed ritual purity and respectable secular rank for them.

Temples played an important role in delineating or determining special space of groupings who were the participants in the worship of a particular deity. An important characteristic of lineage in the South Indian kingship is marked by the common devotion to the lineage tutelary. The non-Brahman priests of the peasants' tutelary shrines (e.g. **amman**) also participated in the management of great shrines of Siva and Vishnu where the Brahman priests predominated. The **matha** the seat of sectarian organisation located at great shrines, consisted of persons of both the Brahman and non-Brahman orders. Thus, the social organisation of this period comprised of the Brahmans, the left and right-hand castes which included respectable agricultural castes, namely **vellals** and lower castes like the **weavers**.