



Research Paper

## Political History of Vijayanagara Empire

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### Abstract

In south India Vijayanagara empire was established in 1336 A.D by two brothers Harihara-I and Bukka Raya-I sons of Sangama, it lasted until 1646 AD although its power declined after a major military defeat in 1565 AD by the Deccan Sultanates'. The empire is named after its capital city of Vijayanagara, whose impressive ruins surround modern Hampi, now a world Heritage Site in Modern Karnataka, India. The writings of medieval European travelers such as Domingo Paes, Fernao Nuniz and Niccolo Da Conti and the literature in local vernaculars provide crucial information about its history. Archaeological excavations at Vijayanagara have revealed the empire's power and wealth.

The Vijayanagara Empire's legacy includes many monuments spread over south India, the best known being the group at Hampi. The previous temple building traditions in South India came together in the Vijayanagara Architecture style. The mingling of all faiths and vernaculars inspired architectural innovation of Hindu temple construction, first in the Deccan and later in the Dravidian idioms using the local granite. Secular royal structures show the influence of the northern Deccan Sultanate architecture. Efficient administration and vigorous overseas trade brought new technologies like water management systems for irrigation.

In the first two decades after the founding of the empire, Harihara-I gained control over most of the area south of the Tungabhadra river and earned the title of Purvapaschima Samudradhishwara (master of the eastern and western seas). In 1374 A.D Harihara-I succeeded by his brother Bukka Raya-I had defeated the chiefdom of Arcot, the Reddy dynasty of Kondavidu, the Sultan of Madurai had gained control over Goa in the west and the Tungabhadra-Krishna Doab in the north. The island of Lanka paid tributes and ambassadors were exchanged with the Ming Dynasty of China. The original capital was in the principality of Anegondi on the northern banks of the Tungabhadra River in today's Karnataka. It was later moved to nearby Vijayanagara on the river's southern banks during the reign of Bukka Raya-I".

With the Vijayanagara kingdom now imperial in stature, Harihara-II, the second son of Bukka Raya-I, further consolidated the kingdom beyond the Krishna River and brought the whole of south India under the Vijayanagara dominion.

**Key Words:** Establishment of Vijayanagara Empire, Harihara-I (1336-1356 A.D), Virupaksha (1465-1485 A.D)

### I. Introduction

The ancient names given to Vijayanagara in the inscriptions are these: Hampe. Anegondi, Hastinavati or Hastini, Kunjarakona or Kunjarakonapuri. Some of these forms at least, if not all, are in the inscriptions identified with the word Vijayanagara. Thus in an inscription of the time of Harihara-I, dated 1395 A.D, he is called "the supreme lord of the royal city Hastinapura Vijayanagara". And another inscription of the year 1432 A.D states that Devaraya-II "was in the residence of Hampe-Hastinavati, which is Vijayanagara"

Nevertheless there are other inscriptions that seem to be a little more accurate and do not completely identify Vijayanagara with that ancient town. Thus an inscription of 1309 A.D says that Harihara-II "was in the residence of Vijayanagara in the Hastinavati fort". And in another inscription of the year 1420 A.D Devaraya is said to be "in the residence of Vijayanagara belonging to Anegondi-durga, which is Hampe-Hastinavati".

Hence Hampe and Hastinavati are different names of Anegondi, and Vijayanagara is said to be in Anegondi. This does not mean that Vijayanagara was a kind of a suburb of Anegondi. Rather Anegondi was a suburb of Vijayanagara. Robert Swell says "The granite piles of a bridge over the river", or "stones marking the limit of the causeway, are to be seen opposite Hampi".

Philology confirms this identification. Hastinavati seems to be the Sanskrit form of Anegondi, i.e., "Elephant Pit". The same is to be said of the name Kunjarakona. Hampe or Hampi is nothing else but the

Kanarese form of the ancient Sanskrit name Pampa spoken of in the Mahabharata. Hence it is probable that this word is the oldest name of the Vijayanagara

### **Establishment of Vijayanagara Empire:**

The Vijayanagara Empire was founded by a bond of five brothers in the second quarter of 14th century A.D to check the onrush of aggressive Islam into South India. The main object of the founders was to protect the Hindu culture and Dharma from being molested by the alien invaders. Thus Vijayanagara Empire came into existence for the purpose of saving South India from being completely conquered by the Muslims, to save Hindu religion and give it a chance for its natural development.

The entire history of the establishment, but, the fact cannot be denied. For the sources attribute the foundation of Vijayanagara Empire to the two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, who were the sons of Sangama a chieftain in the Hoysala dominions. These two brothers and thus the five Sangama brothers were the founders of the Vijayanagara Empire".

Vijayanagara Empire was established with Hampi as the capital in 1336 AD For more than two centuries, the Vijayanagara Empire was ruled by one dynasty or another. For instance, the Sangama dynasty consisting to nine rulers ruled from 1336 to 1485 A.D. Next the throne was usurped by Saluva dynasty which ruled from 1485 to 1496 A.D. the advent of Saluva dynasty was the second usurpation which took place in 1496 A.D and ruled till 1565 A.D by six rulers belonging to this dynasty. Due to the third usurpation the Aravidu dynasty came into power in 1565 A.D and ruled up to 1644 A.D.

Let us now try to trace in the history of each dynasty with its rulers".

### **Sangama Dynasty (1336-1485 A.D):**

#### **Harihara-I (1336-1356 A.D):**

Harihara-I was the first ruler of the Sangama dynasty. He ascended the throne in the year 1336 A.D and ruled for nearly two decades with the co- operation of his four brothers. Harihara-1 extended his kingdom from the Nellore in the south-east to Dharwad and Badami in north Karnataka. But unfortunately the kingdom and his position was insecure due to the powerful enemies around his kingdom such as Sultan of Madura, Reddis of Kondavidu, Ballala-III and the Bahmani kingdom in the north. Despite these enemies Harihara-I proved to be the most successful monarch of the Sangama dynasty'

Taking advantage of Ballala-III's instability in the Hoyasala kingdom and his series of wars against the Sultan of Madura, Harihara-1, brought many principalities and divisions of the Hoyasala territories like Penukonda, Hasan, Shimoga, Kolar, Mysore and Chitradurga under his control.

After this grand victory of Harihara-1 Vijayanagara army marched against the Kadambas of Goa on the coast of the Konkan. The Kadambas offered shelter to Ballala-IV. Under this pretext Kadambas were defeated and vast Kadamba territory including Chandraguti was annexed in 1347 A.D. Next Harihara-I turned towards Madura to sue the Hindu subjects and to release Sambhuvaraya the chieftain who had been taken prisoner by the Sultan of Madura under this protest armies of Vijayanagara marched against Madura and succeeded in their task.

A great challenge was posed by the newly founded Bahmani kingdom in 1347 A.D. Alauddin Hasan Bahmani came into conflict with Vijayanagara. Harihara-I seems to have succeeded in retreating the Muslim forces. These initial hostilities between two kingdoms grew day by day and continued ceaselessly for the generations up to the collapse of both the kingdoms. Thus Harihara-1 is credited not only with the foundation of new state but also for setting up good Government and ensuring peace security in his dominions. Hence he may called as a worthy successor of Ballala-III and had placed the nascent imperialism of Vijayanagara on a firm ground before his death in 1356 A.D.

#### **Bukka-1 (1356-1377 A.D):**

In 1356 AD Harihara I passed away. He was succeeded by his brother Bukka-1 as he did not have male issue to mount the throne of Vijayanagara The accession of Bukka-I opened a glorious chapter in the history of Vijayanagara Empire. The moment Bukka-I ascended the throne his first and foremost task was to consolidate

his position and power by replacing his own sons in place of his nephew over the provinces secondly he had to wage war on two fronts viz., the Bahmani and the Sultan of Madura. Besides this another task was to destroy the Sambhuvaraya chief Rajanarayana who was restored by Harihara-I who had declared his independence.

Bukka-I entrusted this work to his son Kumara Kampana. Kumara Kampana led a campaign against the Sambhuvaraya chieftain and defeated him. Then Kumara Kampana annexed Tondaimandalam Chinglepet north and south Arcots to the empire. These victories had brought Kumara Kampana directly in conflict with Sultan of Madura under Sultan's rule Hindus symbols like temples Brahmanas and cows were on the verge of destruction to protect these from the clutches of Sultan. Kumara Kampana led a grand campaign against Madura. In a severe battle Sultan was defeated and killed Kumara Kampana annexed the whole kingdom of Madura comprising of Srirangam Kannanur Koppam and Trichanapally.

Thus with this campaign the whole of South India came under the sway of Vijayanagara extending up to Rameshwaram. This victory is one of the greatest land marks in the history of Vijayanagara's territorial expansion".

Bukka-I was soon involved in war with the Bahmani Sultans, once during the period of Muhammad Shah-I the son and successor of Alauddin Hasan Bahman Shah. After severe battle a treaty was concluded between two kingdoms and this peace treaty continued up to Mujahid Shah son and successor of Muhammad Shah-I. During his reign he violated the treaty and invaded the Vijayanagara but failed to gain anything.

In the meanwhile he was murdered in the camp. Hence during the reign of Bukka-I Vijayanagara was free from the danger of Bahmani Sultans. The last campaign of Bukka-I was against the Reddy kingdom. With the defeat of Vira Anapota Ahobalam and Vinukonda were permanently annexed to Vijayanagara.

The most significant event in the reign of Bukka-I was the reconciliation of religious difference between the Vaishnavas and the Jains. He was a great patron of learning and literature. Therefore he assumed the title "Vedamarga Pratrishapaka" ie, the establisher of the path of the Vedas. He retained and renovated the temples and patronized Hindu learning.

Bukka-I was great ruler. He carried on the traditions of the Vijayanagara Empire and infused a new life into stagnant Hindu society. For the first time in the history of foreign relations Bukka-I sent an embassy to China. Bukka-I remarked his country was well preserved and the subjects were submissive to his authority. The Rayas of Malabar Ceylon and other countries kept ambassadors at his court and sent annually rich presents.

Bukka-I died in 1377 A.D, he was one of the greatest rulers of the age. Though the empire was founded by Harihara-I he became the real architect of it. He prepared the ground for his successors to accomplish the cherished goals of the founders.

Harihara-II (1337-1404 A.D):

Bukka-I was succeeded by his son Harihara-II who ascended the throne in the year 1377 AD Hanhara-II had a long and eventual reign of 27 years during which period he introduced many reforms in the administrative setup. His long rule of 27 years enriched the empire to greatest extent Harihara-II was the worthy son of a worthy father. Hence he was the first ruler of the Sangama dynasty who assumed the imperial titles of "Maharajadhiraja" and "Raja- Parameshward" which indicated his political status.

Soon after his accession to the throne the Bahmani Sultan declared war on Vijayanagara in 1377 A.D on account of the rejection of his demand by Harihara-II. The outcome of this war is not known except Ferishtah's account. But anyhow Vijayanagara army seems to have succeeded in following the Bahmani design.

Taking advantage of political anarchy in the Bahmani kingdom owing to the murder of Mujahid Shah, Vijayanagara army invaded southern Konkan and northern Konkan. These victories made Harihara-II master of the entire western coast of the Deccan in 1391 A.D. Internal dissensions in Reddy kingdom made Harihara-II to invade that country. Deveraya, the governor of Udayagiri attacked and annexed Reddy territories viz, Addanki and Srisailam districts. While doing so, the Velamas of Rachakonda having league with Bahmani Sultan declared war on Vijayanagara. But this was nipped in the bud by the prompt action of Devaraya.

In the year 1398-99 A.D he witnessed another war waged by the usurper, Firoz Shah Bahmani after the death of Muhammad Shah 11 of the Bahmani kingdom, owing to the severe famine, it is said that Harihara-11 was defeated and that he agreed to pay heavy war indemnity to Firoz Shah Bahmani to secure the old boundaries of the kingdom. The closing year of his reign was peaceful and undisturbed. In the year 1404 A.D he passed away.

Harihara-II was a man of great ability and military genius. These qualities helped him to lead the empire on a path of further progress. He became supreme lord of the eastern, western and the southern ocean. An inscription says, "By the grace of Vidyanaraya Muni, he acquired the empire of knowledge unattainable by other kings". Harihara-II's death led to internecine wars between his three sons, viz., Bukka-11, Virupaksha-1 and Devaraya-1. Finally, Devaraya-I succeeded and crowned himself king on 1424 A.D.

#### **Devaraya-I (1404-1422 A.D):**

Devaraya-I assumed power in the midst of a foreign invasion and a civil war at home. His rule of 16 years was spent constantly fighting against the Bahmanis, the Velamas of Rachakonda and the Reddys of Kondavidu. Almost these difficult tasks proved him capable of retaining his control over the vast territories inherited by him. His rule of 16 years is unique in the history of Sangama dynasty because his rule inaugurated an era of continuous wars against the traditional enemies of the empire.

He thus succeeded in increasing the extent of the kingdom by annexation of fresh territories. In 1406 A.D Firoz Shah the Bahmani Sultan invaded Vijayanagara to save a gold smith's daughter (Parthal) of Mudgal from Devaraya-1. In course of the campaign he laid waste the capital. Taking advantage of his defeat of Rays, the Reddys of Kondavidu invaded the Vijayanagara territories of Puttapinadu and Pulugulanadu. Then Mysore chief rebelled against the empire. But Devaraya dislodged them from these places in 1413 A.D. Then peace was established

To rescue and to restore the throne of Rajamundri to Kataya Vema brother-in-law of the late king, Vijayanagara army was lead against the usurper of Rajamundri throne of Pedakomativema and his ally Bahmani, Vema and Bahmani forces re-treated the army of Vijayanagara. In this battle Katayavema lost his life. To avenge his previous defeats, Devaraya invaded Nalgonda and Pangal.

He seized the capital of Firoz Shah's ally and cut-off communications Firoz's attempt to recover these territories was foiled by Devaraya, with which Devaraya could re-established his authority over the entire Krishna and Tungabhadra Doab in 1419 A.D. Devaraya's intervention in the affairs of Rajamundri brought Orissa under Bhanudeva. But this conflict was averted by the ex-diplomacy of Allada, the Prime Minister of Rajamundri.

It opened a new chapter in the history of foreign relations of Vijayanagara and marked the beginning of the rivalry between Rayas and Gajapatis for about a century and quarter. Devaraya was the first monarch, recognized the whole army and realized the importance of the cavalry in protecting the empire with this end in view he purchased large number of horses from Arabia and Persia and to manage them he recruited for the first time 'Muslim' soldiers in the army by providing them with liberal grants and facilities.

Devaraya held an important position among the kings of Vijayanagara. He was a great diplomat. During the reign of Devaraya, Vijayanagara became a 'Vidhyanagara' the city of learning, and the abode of Saraswati.

Nicolo D' Contian Italian traveler visited the kingdom. In 1422 A.D Devaraya-I passed away. Then his sons Ramachandra and Viravijaya succeeded him. They ruled one after another. Viravijaya succeeded his son Vijaya-1. During his reign of five years traditional enemies, Ahmed Shah Bahmani and Gajapati invaded and disturbed the kingdom". Eventually the crown passed to Devaraya-II son of Vijaya-1 in 1424 A.D.

#### **Devaraya-II (1424-1447 A.D):**

Devaraya-II was also known as Prauda Devaraya ascended the throne in the year 1424 A.D. He was the son of Vijayaraya. His accession to the throne marked an era of achievements in all sphere of empire. He had taken active part in the campaign as well as in the administration of the kingdom under his father. The premature death pitched him head long into the politics of the Deccan in the south. Devaraya-II himself was a man of virtue and vision which made him to emerge as one of the greatest rulers of Sangama dynasty.

Throughout his reign he dedicated his life in enhancing the glory and prosperity of the empire. 'People believed that he was the very incarnation of Lord Indra'. To take revenge of his predecessors defeat at the hands of Devaraya-II, Bahmani Sultan Ahmed Shah-I invaded the Vijayanagara territories. Devaraya with his league, with the ruler of Warangal initially succeeded but later he was forced to accept peace treaty. But the fact that Ahmed Shah shifted his capital from Gulbarga to Bidar implies the defeat of the Muslim ruler at the hands of Devaraya-II. After this, Devaraya-II hurried to the rescue of Rajamundri and Kondavidu and at last in a severe battle he vanquished Banudeva and he required the two provinces in 1427 A.D.

On account of Raya's failure to pay the tribute to Bahmani Sultan Alauddin-II invaded and laid waste the country. Raya had no alternative, but to sue for peace by offering huge wealth in 1435 A.D once again in 1443 A.D war broke-out between Bahmani Sultan and Devaraya-II. Ferishtah held that Devaraya-II succeeded in capturing Mudgal Doab and plundered the Sultan's territories. At last Devaraya-II was defeated and forced to accept the peace treaty. Devaraya's General Lakkanna succeeded in extracting tribute from Ceylonese king. Then Devaraya-II for the second time defeated and compelled Kapilendra Gajapati who had attacked the Reddy kingdom in 1443 A.D. Devaraya also carried his arms into Kerala, subjugating the rulers of Quilon and other chieftains. He died in the year 1446 A.D.

Devaraya-II was a great monarch, perhaps the greatest of all kings who sat on the throne of Vijayanagara Empire perhaps surpassed only by Krishnadevaraya. Despite many defeats and successes he succeeded in maintaining the integrity of the empire" Mallikarjuna (1446-1465 A.D):

Devaraya was succeeded by his son Mallikarjuna. In the history of Sangamas, the rule of Mallikarjuna was marked by a sudden decline of power and prestige of the Sangama on one hand and significant victories for the Bahmanis and Gajapati's on the other. Between 1446 and 1485 A.D the kingdom suffered on account of internal rebellions and external aggressions.

"He led an easy go lucky life". He was weak ruler too the weakness resulted in inviting internal as well as external aggressions. As usual the traditional enemy Bahmani Sultan Alauddin-II invaded the country but was driven back in 1449 A.D. In latter period coastal fortress Choul and Dabhol in Konkan area passed into the hands of Bahmanis in 1453 A.D.

Planned to finish in troubled water, Kapileshwara of Gajapati sieged Rajamundri and Kondavidu by driving away the Vijayanagara nobles in 1454 A.D. elated with this victory Gajapati conquered Udayagiri, Chandragiri, Kanchi and advanced up to the river Kaveri. The loss of these provinces weakened the empire". And failure on the part of the Rayas to offer successful opposition to the Gajapati ruler lowered the prestige of the former, after this Mallikarjuna died in 1465 A.D.

#### **Virupaksha (1465-1485 A.D):**

In 1465 A.D the death of Mallikarjuna gave an opportunity to Virupaksha to usurp the throne of Vijayanagara. Unfortunately Virupaksha proved to be the most ineffective and incompetent ruler in enforcing authority over the empire. He could not pay the least possible attention to the affairs of the state when his greatest vigilance was needed. "He cared for nothing except wine and women" Exploring the weakness of the king, his subordinates became so powerful in almost all parts of the empire as to assert the throne for the master.

Among them was Saluva Narasimha. Saluva became too powerful that he usurped the throne. Greatest blow to the empire was the loss of Goa and Belgaum to the Bahmani Sultan during the reign of Virupaksha.

Virupaksha's wickedness, cruelty brought the loss of power and prestige to Sangama dynasty. Ultimately he was murdered by his own son, and renounced the throne to his younger brother. This prince was different unlike his father paving the way for Saluva Narasimha to usurp the throne in 1485 AD with this usurpation the sun of the Sangama dynasty shut for ever which had risen to zenith of its glory under the genius efforts of Harihara and his successors.

Most of the rulers of the Sangama dynasty if not all of them exhibited a lively interest in the affairs of the state and extended patronage to men who devoted their energies to the development of arts and sciences. Their armies

occasionally suffered defeats but, they were generally victorious from small beginnings their kingdom expanded into a huge empire. It was the guardian and champion of Hindu Dharma and learning.

Signs of decay and decline became conspicuous by the increasing internecine strife for power in the royal family. Mallikarjuna's weakness was fully exposed by the Uriya armies. The eastern and central districts of the empire were lost. In the wake of foreign invasion, local unrest, in Tamilnadu burst into a revolt headed by Bhuvanika Vira Samar Kolahala. The authority of the Vijayanagara ruler was successfully challenged.

The Bahmani Sultan Muhammad Shah-III seized portions of the west coast including the Island of Goa. He spread his tentacles far and wide to the east coast. His troops advanced into the very heart of the Vijayanagara Empire. In the midst of anarchy confusion and rebellion Narasimha the governor of Chandragiri remained steady fastly loyal to the throne. His men bore the brunt of the struggle against the invaders and the rebels.

His courage leadership and service saved the empire from possible disintegration and destruction. But for Narasimha the empire might have become a thing of the past calamities were turned into opportunities, to renew the strength of the state.

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