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A brief history of the kingdom of Vijayanagara

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Why in News: Just six months after being grievously injured by a young religious fanatic, Salman Rushdie is back with his latest novel, Victory City. The book is a fictionalised telling of the story of the Vijayanagara Kingdom, narrated by a sorceress and poet named Pampa Kampana, who, over more than two centuries, witnessed Vijayanagara's many victories and defeats.

About Vijayanagara Kingdom

The Vijayanagara kingdom has long been a subject of historical and political interest.

From their capital, now known as Hampi, on the banks of the Tungabhadra River, the kings of Vijayanagara at the peak of their power ruled over a territory of more than 360,000 sq. km.

Founded in 1336, the kingdom of Vijayanagara lasted for more than three centuries, a period in which it withstood multiple political stresses, and saw significant advances in art and economy.

Over the course of its existence from 1336 to 1646, the kingdom saw various ups and downs.

Founded by Harihara I of the Sangama dynasty, Vijayanagara expanded from a strategic position on the banks of the Tungabhadra River. By the 15th century, it had become a force to reckon with.

The kingdom reached its peak under Krishna Deva Raya (reign 1509-1529), a period in which it enjoyed military superiority to its rival kingdoms such as the Bahmani Sultanate, the Golconda Sultanate and the Gajapatis of Odisha.

At its peak, the kingdom stretched from Goa in the Konkan coast to parts of southern Odisha in the east and all the way to the very tip of the subcontinent in the south.

In 1565, at the Battle of Talikota, the army of Vijayanagara was routed by an alliance of the Deccan sultanates. Rama Raya was killed in the Battle of Tallikot and his head (the real head) annually covered with oil and red pigment has been exhibited to the pious Mahomedans of Ahmudnuggur till 1829.

The foundations of the kingdom

While the economy of the kingdom was largely dependent on agriculture, trade thrived in its many ports on either coast.

Traveller Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi chronicled how "the ports of Mangalore, Honavar, Bhatkal, Barkur, Cochin, Cannanore, Machilipatnam, and Dharmadam saw traders from Africa, Arabia, Aden, the Red sea, China and Bengal and also served as ship building centres".

The empire's principal exports were pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, myrobalan, tamarind timber, anafistula, precious and semi-precious stones, pearls, musk, ambergris, rhubarb, aloe, cotton cloth and porcelain.

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Razzaq also chronicled the high degree of monetisation in the Vijayanagara kingdom. In his classic History of South India, K A Nilakanta Sastri wrote that coins were minted by the state as well as by merchant guilds using gold, silver, copper and brass, and their value depended on material weight.

Vijayanagar's contributions to culture and architecture

This was a period when poetry and scholarship flourished, both in sacral and secular contexts.

Literature in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada as well as Sanskrit was produced in the kingdom, with new writing styles and methods emerging.

In architecture, Vijayanagara saw various enduring constructions. According to art historian Percy Brown, Vijayanagara architecture is “a vibrant combination and blossoming of the Chalukya, Hoysala, Pandya and Chola styles, idioms that prospered in previous centuries.”

The Prasanna Virupaksha temple of Bukka I and the Hazara Rama temple of Krishna Deva Raya are striking examples of Vijayanagara's characteristic style and intricate artistry.

Vijayanagara's capital Hampi is a UNESCO World Heritage Site today, known for its sophisticated fortifications as well as innumerable temples and other architectural marvels.

From accounts of foreign travellers, by the beginning of the 16th century, Hampi-Vijayanagara was probably the second largest urban settlement on the planet (after Beijing) and among the most prosperous.



atism”, when classical forms of Hinduism were
ent, especially the North.