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## Theory of Origin, Administration and Decline of the Great Vijayanagar Kingdom in South Asia

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### ABSTRACT

The Vijayanagar Empire is one of the most prominent and well-known empires of South Asia. The empire had arisen in the times of the Delhi Sultanate and sustained for more than a period of three Centuries. It saw four dynasties and its share wars and conflicts with neighboring Muslim forces. Vijayanagar Empire also had an admirable administration system, in the sense that it is counted as highly centralized, just and elaborate. This research paper seeks to examine the administrative and political structure of the Vijayanagar Empire and various nuances related to the same. In this research explores various facets of Vijayanagar's grand history by critically examining various historical interpretations, including nationalist, colonial, and postcolonial perspectives. The approach seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex factors that influenced its ascent and subsequent decline. It seeks to examine the view foreign travelers like Ibn Batuta, Fernao Nuniz and Dominigos Paes and accounts of prominent historians Ferishta that lived during the time of Vijayanagar like to the modern Scholars like Robert Sewell and Nilakanta Sastri in order to present comprehensive historiographical understanding on the Vijayanagar empire. The Vijayanagara Empire's profound and enduring impact on the historical and cultural milieu of South India has left an indelible imprint across various domains, including art, architecture, literature, and societal practices. Through a meticulous examination of the ascendancy and decline of this ancient civilization, one can glean invaluable insights into the intricate processes underpinning the formation and disintegration of polities in premodern South Asian contexts. This research paper uses a variety of sources to shed light on the administrative and political conditions of the Vijayanagar Empire. It also sheds light on the changes in State Structure across the four dynasties, the impact of the administrative system on Justice, the impact of religion on State Politics and finally, the political factors that ultimately led to the end of the Greatest South Indian Empire in the Country.

### INTRODUCTION

Vijayanagar, derived from the Sanskrit words "Vijaya" meaning victory and "Nagara" meaning city which signified both an urban settlement and a vast empire. Founded in 1336 by Harihara I and Bukka Raya I, the Vijayanagar Empire emerged as a formidable power in India during the fourteenth century. Referred to as the Karnata Empire in King Krishna Devaraya's literary work "Jambavati Kalyanam. It encompassed modern-day regions of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, and parts of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. Previously, it extended from the Krishna River in the north to the southernmost part of the peninsula. The empire was established by five siblings—Harihara, Kumpa, Bukka, Marappa, and Muddappa—with the purpose of counteracting advancing Islamic aggression in South India. Kumara Kampana, the son of Bukka, expanded the empire southward to Madura, overthrowing the Sultan of Madura.

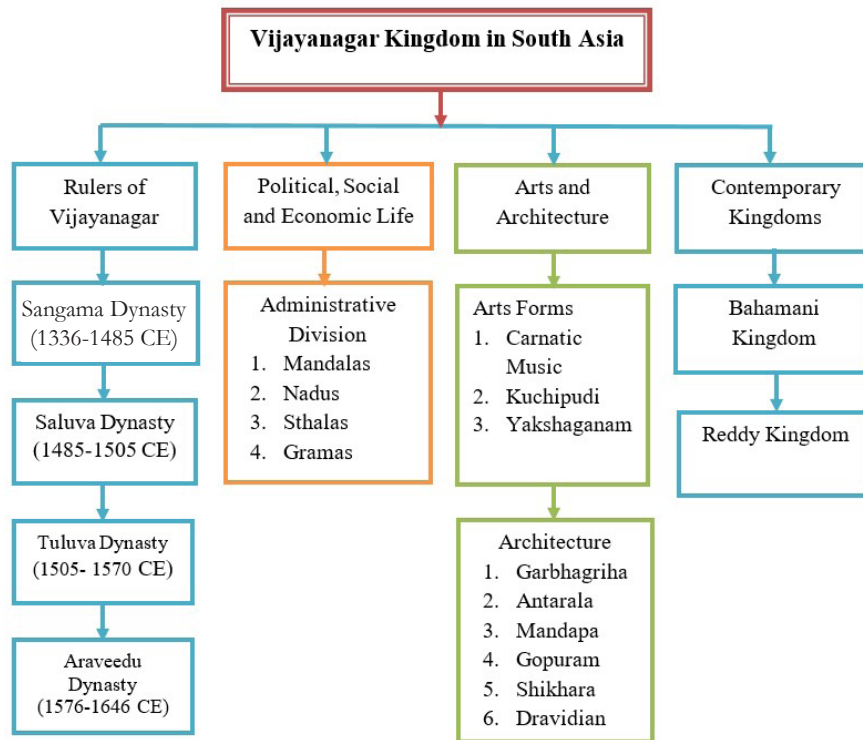
Administratively, the empire was divided into several provinces, including Rajya, Mandala, and Chavadi. These provinces were further subdivided into Venthe, a territorial division higher than a Nadu; Nadu, a territorial division higher than a village; Sima, comprising several fields and

villages; and Sthala, a division higher than Parru, which in turn is higher than Nadu. Each province was governed by a viceroy, Nayaka or Naik, who could be a member of the royal family, a prominent noble, or a descendant of previous governing houses. Viceroys held authority over civil, military, and judicial matters within their designated areas but were required to provide regular, detailed financial reports to the central government and offer military assistance when necessary. They faced severe penalties from the monarch if found guilty of treason or mistreatment of the populace, including the seizure of property if they failed to remit one-third of their earnings to the king.

The Vijayanagar Empire progressively established a centralized administration, meticulously organizing all its branches. The king held supreme authority in the Vijayanagar State, possessing expertise in civil, military, and judicial matters, and frequently intervening to resolve social conflicts. This administrative structure played a crucial role in the state's overall success. Under the leadership of its various rulers, the state experienced substantial progress in economic, cultural, political, and social domains the Vijayanagar Empire ruled by four main dynasties during its existence. The empire

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**Figure 1:** Vijayanagar Kingdom in South Asia

of Vijayanagar lasted until 1646 A.D. However, it lost majority of its power and influence in 1565 A.D. after a significant military defeat at the hands of the Deccan Sultanates (Hulagappa, 2015).

**Significance of the Study**

The Vijayanagar Empire arose at a critical junction in history. It was a time where a great shift in religion and politics could be felt across the Indian Subcontinent that was a conflict between Islam and Hinduism. Its first rulers Harihara I and Bukka I were themselves followers of Islam before converting back to their ancestral religion of Hinduism. The administrative and political structure of the Vijayanagar empire stands as one of the most significant ruling administrative structures where we can see the decentralization of the administration. The Vijayanagar Empire ruled for three centuries, unified by a strong resolve to protect themselves and their traditions against Islamic invasion. There lies great significance in studying this Empire because of a plethora of reasons, some of which are listed as follows: -

A. One of the primary reasons why the Vijayanagar Empire was able to grow into the strongest South Indian Empire of its time was their staunch defense capabilities against the Muslim Sultanate invaders of the North (Britannica, 2022).

B. The Second reason is its excellent administrative system which provided for smooth and seamless functions of the State and swift justice machinery.

C. The Third reason is that under the Vijayanagar Rulers, the Sanskrit language and other regional literatures were allowed to flourish, which also, indirectly, reflects

upon the most significant reason i.e. the method in which the Rulers of the Empire impeccably handled the various exchanges of power that happened throughout the course of the Empire’s history and helped the Kingdom thrive in unexampled peace and prosperity.

D. In conclusion, the Vijayanagar Empire holds great significance in history due to its impeccable upholding of its defense, administrative and political institutions successfully for a period of more than 300 years and this report has been made to elucidate and highlight the achievements of the biggest South Indian Empire.

**Objectives of the Study**

Following are some objectives of the study on Origin and Decline of the Great Vijayanagar Kingdom in South Asia Region.

1. To discuss about the circumstances that lead to the formation of the Vijayanagar Empire.
2. To analyze the Political structure, administrative and Judicial System of the Vijayanagar Empire.
3. To examine the impact of the religion on the State Politics and nature of state of Vijayanagar.
4. To investigate the influence of Political factors in the decline of the Vijayanagar kingdom.
5. To examine the changes nature of State Structure of the Vijayanagar kingdom etc.

**METHODOLOGY**

The objectives of the study outline the questions of research laid out in this paper about the ‘Theory of the Origin and Decline of the Great Vijayanagar Kingdom in South Asia Region’. This paper employs the Historical

Method of research, primarily utilizing secondary sources of qualitative data. The qualitative data used in this research includes books, articles, secondary reports, and accounts from various foreign travelers who visited the Vijayanagar Empire during the relevant time periods. The research methodology is explained in strict accordance with the study's objectives and the paper's theme.

### Review of Literature or Thematic Discussion

The Literature Review has been made following the Theoretical Approach of Study. It has been made following the lines of the Research Methodology. It focuses on the Central Themes as outlined in the preceding.

### Theory of Origin of the Vijayanagar Kingdom

The first theory that is the most widely discussed theory regarding the Origin of the Vijayanagar Empire.

1- Dr. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri thoroughly examines this theory in his book titled "A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar." According to Sastri, Harihara and Bukka were employed by the Sultanate following the downfall of Kampili (now known as Anegondi). They were subsequently dispatched back to Kampili to assume control from Malik Muhammad and suppress the growing Hindu rebellion in the region. He further mentions that their Muslim faith fails to fully convince the people to accept them as their new rulers initially. However, they followed a policy of conciliation and only used force when absolutely necessary. This pacified the people to some extent (Sastri, 1975).

2- After the brothers successfully gain power in the region, it is the opinion of many historians that they approached the Sage Vidyanaraya (12th Shankracharya of the Sringeri Mutt) who converted them back to Hinduism after which they proceeded to create the Vijayanagar Empire (India, 2021).

3- The Sringeri Mutt, to which Sage Vidyanaraya belonged, claims that the brothers were directed to him through a dream while he was engaged in deep meditation on Matanga Hill. According to this account, they were compelled to adopt Islam upon being imprisoned. Upon their return to the Deccan, they sought to exploit the situation to establish their autonomy. Under the guidance of Sage Vidyanaraya, they founded the empire and initially positioned its capital to the west of the Tungabhadra River. Subsequently, they relocated the capital to the eastern bank of the river, naming it Vidyanagar in honor of their spiritual mentor (Mutt, 2020).

The Second Theory is propounded by Dr. U. Suryanatha Kamath, prominently called the Kannadiga Origin Theory.

1- According to this theory, the founders of the Empire were originated from the Kannada-speaking region and had a familial connection to the Hoysala Dynasty. They also mention Sage Vidyanaraya who is said to be the Patron-Saint of the kings being the 12th

Shankracharya of Sringeri in Karnataka (Kamath, 2018). There is not much more that is mentioned about Sage Vidyanaraya by Dr. U. Suryanatha Kamath. However, he does say that the Empire maintained a vibrant Hinduism Culture philosophically, musically, intellectually and architecturally despite having some Islamic influence in the form of architecture (Srinath, p. 3). It is a well-known fact acknowledged by many historians, Dr. Kamath included, that under the Vijayanagar Rulers or Rayas (As the Rulers of Vijayanagar were addressed), different cultures co-habited in peace with each other.

The Third Theory, propounded by Dr. Robert Sewell, prominently known as the Telugu Origin Theory. This theory states that:

1- The founders of the Empire were in-charge of the Kakatiya Dynasty Treasury and when the Kingdom had fallen to the Sultanate, they fled. Here, they met Sage Vidyanaraya, who advised them to establish the Vijayanagar Empire in order to safeguard the Hindu Dharma. (Sewell, 2010) This theory about the two kings initially serving under the Kakatiya Ruler before the fall of Warangal was originally proposed by Muslim Scholars like Ferishta, Ziauddin Barani and foreign traveller, Ibn Batuta (Sadasyula, 2014). A notable statement made by Dr. Sewell in his book has been that the first Emperors didn't call themselves 'King', they were merely addressed as 'chiefs'. This is because the Historian says that their lineage were the Chieftains of a small principality called Anegundi (presently, Koppal District, Karnataka, India). He uses an inscription found on Harihara I, which is dated around 1340, as supporting evidence. In this inscription, Harihara I is mentioned as "Hariyapa Vodeya", a name that is considered less prestigious than Harihara and implies a lower rank as a chieftain ("A Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagar; A Contribution to the History of India"). He referred to Sage Vidyanaraya as Sage Madhava and says that a temple too, has been built in regard for the saint, a fact which is corroborated by many foreigners including Nuniz and Dominigos Paes too (Sewell, 2010).

### Political and Administrative Structure

"Its rulers, however, in their day swayed the destinies of an Empire far larger than Austria, and the city is declared by a succession of European Visitors in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to have been marvelous for size and prosperity- A city with which for richness and magnificence no known western capital could compare. Its importance is shown by the fact that almost all the struggles of the Portuguese on the Western coast were carried on for the purpose of securing its maritime trade; and that when the Empire fell in 1565, the prosperity of Portuguese Goa fell with it never to rise again." Dr. Robert Sewell, The Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagar- The following theme is divided into two sections for the purpose of better dissertation of each topic. These shall be: 1-Political Structure, 2- Administrative Structure etc

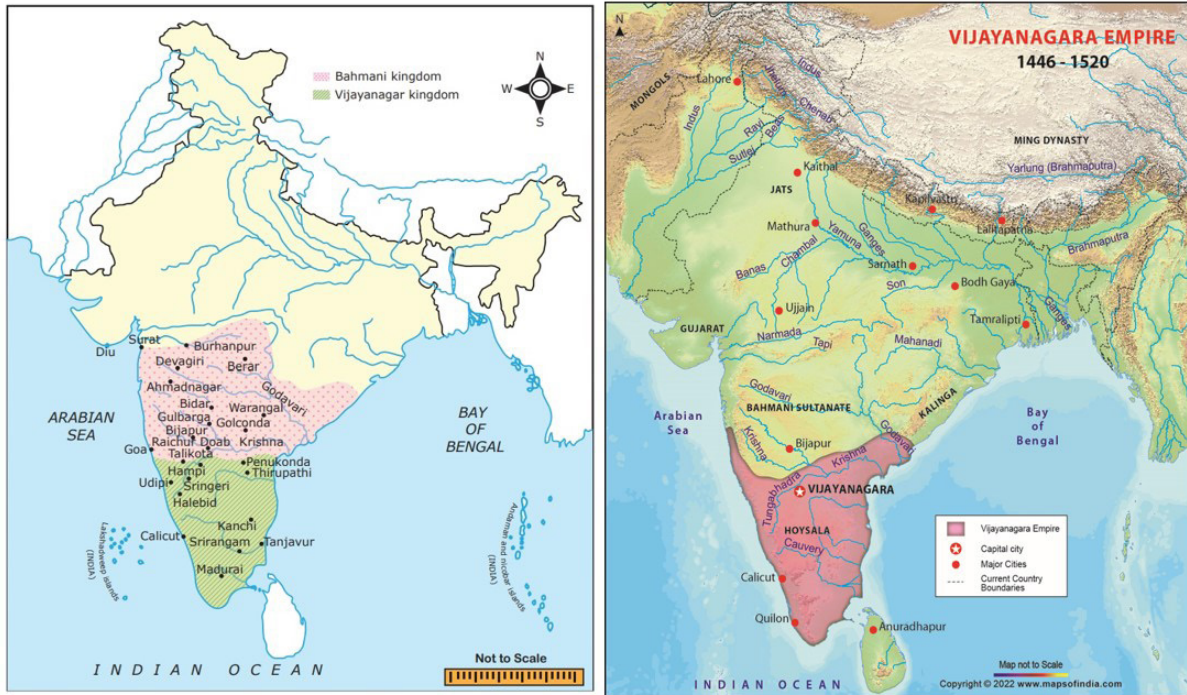


Figure 2: Maps:1 and 2- Political and Geographical Location of Vijayanagar Kingdom

### Political Structure

At the helm of the Political affairs was the King. He was the primary political figure → and treated as God’s direct representative on Earth (Divine Rights Theory). Nuniz outlines four crucial functions of a monarch: collecting taxes, serving as the center of trade, managing finances, and administering justice. For instance, Nuniz notes that during the nine days of Navaratri, the king receives all the rent and claims ownership of all the land.

“Within these nine days the King is paid all the rents that he receives from his kingdom; for, as already said, all the land belongs to the King, and from his hand the captains hold it . . . they have no land of their own, for the kingdom belongs entirely to the King”- Nuniz

This passage shows the extent of the King’s power in the Empire. Similarly, as the King is head of business transactions, it shows that the King is involved in all important transactions directly (especially those of horses, since horses, were extremely useful in defense against the Muslim Invaders) (Barodawala, 2007).

Nuniz also delineates the King’s pivotal role as the primary financier in the Kingdom. He elaborates on how the monarch acquires Arabian horses from the Portuguese and adeptly manages his operational funds by procuring the horses on credit shortly before the month of September. In September, the king collects his annual taxes from his officers and rewards them with a portion of the horses acquired. The king pays off his obligation to the Portuguese at the end of the month.

Mentioning how disputes are solved in the Kingdom, Nuniz remarks that whenever someone wishes to show their suffering or represent themselves to the King in the Court, they must lie flat on their faces on the ground till

such time that the King asks them what they seek. They then make their complaint to the King, who without delay assigns the Captain of that particular region on the task. He gives an example and says that if a man was robbed, then the King would send the captain of that region to apprehend the thief immediately. If the Captain fails to do so, then he shall be seized along with his property. Ministers were crucial contributors to the Political Structure of the Kingdom. The Ministers held a significant and influential position as the King frequently relied on them for matters of administration and politics. They served as kingmakers, educators, governors, and advisors. The primary responsibility of ministers was to act as “Kingmakers,” influencing the process of selecting a monarch. The circumstances surrounding the ascent of Krishna Deva Raya clearly exemplify this influence. While on his deathbed, the monarch of Vijayanagar, who was the brother of Krishna Deva Raya, asked his minister, Salvatinica, to assassinate Krishna Deva Raya. The purpose of this was to ensure that the king’s eight-year-old son would become the ruler of the kingdom. The minister deftly avoided taking on this task, resulting in Krishna Deva Raya becoming the monarch of the empire. Consequently, the minister became the second-in-command. The second crucial function of the Ministers was to serve as educators, providing guidance to the King on topics pertaining to Dharma. On his first day, Krishna Deva Raya famously instructed his ministers to serve as his counsellors and enlighten him on the most effective methods of governing his kingdom in accordance with the principles of Dharma. The ministers’ third and paramount responsibility was to serve as the governor of the kingdom. The Portuguese

term for a governor, as used by Nuniz, is “regeedor,” derived from the verb “to rule” or “to govern.” Although the monarch was responsible for managing the territories, the rulers were not the most suitable people to serve as day-to-day administrators for various reasons. Under such circumstances, the ministers played a crucial role as the rulers of the kingdom, possessing substantial power to exert influence and control over the king. The ministers performed a significant role as advisors to the King, assisting him in many affairs, particularly those of high urgency. The ministers were required to exhibit a composed and collected demeanour in order to provide the King with the most effective counsel during critical situations. Additional individuals in the Kingdom’s court comprised of Captains, Merchants, Aspirants, and even Queens. These people also had a significant impact on the political landscape of the Kingdom, albeit in a subordinate capacity.

### Administrative Structure

The state comprised seven components according to the Sapthag Theory, with the King being the most significant among them. The seven elements mentioned are Swami (King), Amatya (Minister), Janapada (Territory), Durga (Fortification), Kosa (Treasury), Danda (Punishment), and Mitra (Ally) (Mahalingam, 1969). The king possessed the utmost authority and wielded ultimate control over the judicial, executive, and legislative domains (Onlyias, 2021). The Empire was partitioned into distinct Administrative Units known as Mandalams, Nadus, Sthalas, and Gramas. The governor of Mandalam was bestowed with the honorific title of Nayak or Mandaleswara. They possessed the power to make independent decisions separate from the Kings of Vijayanagar (Anon., 2020). There were two categories of assemblies: larger and smaller in size. The Empire consisted of six provinces, each governed by a Nayaka who retained their position on a feudal basis. It is probable that they were part of the king’s broader council.

In addition to them, individuals such as foreign visitors, adjacent princes, traders, and Amarnayaks (military commanders assigned territories for governance by the Rayas) would also be in attendance (Mahalingam, 1969). Subsequently, a more diminutive council was established. The king frequently had to seek their advice on administrative matters of the Empire. The Council was a permanent body that exerted influence on the king’s policy. The local administration was bifurcated into two systems - the Nayankara System and the Ayagar system.

### Nayankara System

A crucial attribute of the Vijayanagar Organisation was its vitality. The individuals who occupied this role were referred to as Nayaks and Amarnayaks, denoting chiefs and military commanders, respectively. In the sixteenth century, two Portuguese individuals named Fernao Nuniz and Domingo Paes travelled to India during the reigns of Krishnadeva Raya and Achyut Raya from the Tuluva

dynasty. They conducted a thorough examination of the nayaka system. They perceive the nayakas as simply representatives of the Rayas (central government). Nuniz’s testimony regarding the tribute paid by the nayaks to the Rayas brings up the question of feudal obligations. The nayakas, as mentioned in the Vijayanagar inscriptions and later Mackenzie papers, were recognised as powerful landowners who harboured political aspirations that occasionally conflicted with the objectives of the monarchs. N.K. Sastri made a distinction between nayakas who existed before 1565 and those who existed after 1565. The former were entirely dependent on the rulers, while the latter were partially autonomous. One of his works characterises the Vijayanagar kingdom as a military confederacy consisting of multiple chieftains who work together under the leadership of the most powerful among them. The Vijayanagar monarchs adopted a military and religious stance in response to the increasing threat posed by Islam. Krishnaswami considers the nayak system to be feudal.

Nevertheless, Venkataramanayya contends that essential aspects of European feudalism, such as loyalty and tribute, were absent in the Nayak system. In contrast to the feudal perspective, D.C. Sircar argues against it and characterises it as a form of landlordism. According to Sircar, this type of landlordism is a variation of feudalism, where land was assigned to the amaranayaks in return for their military support to the monarch. According to D.C. Sircar and T.V. Mahalingam, the nayakas of Vijayanagar are considered as soldiers who were given a government position (kara) by the central authority in return for their military service. Amarenayankan was a designation given to a military leader or chief (nayak) who had authority over a specified number of soldiers. The nayaks possessed exclusive rights to the money generated from specific land or region, referred to as amaram (amaramakara or amaramahali). Approximately 3/14th of land was allocated under this phrase in both the Tamil nation and the Vijayanagar kingdom.

According to Krishnaswami, the commanders of the Vijayanagar army, who were previously under the rule of Krishnadeva Raya, finally established independent nayak kingdoms based on the Mackenzie texts. In order to safeguard themselves against such dangers, the Vijayanagar rulers endeavoured to acquire more authority over coastal marketplaces involved in the trade of horses. Their objective was to establish a monopoly on the procurement of top-notch horses by offering a premium price for them. In addition, they constructed fortified garrisons staffed by reliable warriors. Consequently, while the Telugu nayaks provided strength to the Vijayanagar state, they also acted as its adversaries.

### Ayagar System

Curiously, the inscriptions from that era do not provide any indication of the implementation of such a system throughout the Empire. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Nadu and Nattar powers experienced a

fall, resulting in the rise of the Karnataka-Tamil Country system. The Ayagars were rural employees or officials and comprised of clusters of households. The individuals mentioned were village headmen, accountants, and watchmen. They were allocated a plot of land in a community that was predominantly exempt from Many or taxes, except for occasional fixed rent. Occasionally,

village functionaries were compensated for their services through direct payments delivered in the form of goods or services. The distinguishing characteristic of the Ayangar System was the introduction of a unique arrangement whereby village servants holding an office were granted a distinct allotment of income from land and specialised monetary payments.



**Figure 3:** Virupaksha Temple at Hampi the Capital City of Vijayanagar Kingdom

### Nature of Vijayanagar State

A variety of interpretations have emerged regarding the degree of administrative centralization within the Vijayanagar state, drawing upon diverse source materials such as official inscriptions, accounts from foreign travelers like Nuniz and Paes, and contemporary texts like Krishnadeva Raya's *Amuktamalya*. Scholars such as Nilakanta Sastri and Ishwari Prasad advocate for the portrayal of Vijayanagar as a centralized Hindu state, positing it as a bureaucratic, hereditary monarchy that developed in a manner reminiscent of the Chola polity. According to this perspective, the king wielded comprehensive authority over the nayakas and regional governors, implying a hierarchical structure with centralized control. The evidentiary basis for this interpretation largely stems from the writings and testimonies of Portuguese explorers Paes and Nuniz, who depicted the nayakas as representatives and officials of the state, thereby suggesting a centralized administrative apparatus.

Sastri's scholarly contributions further expound upon this perspective by elucidating aspects such as taxation systems, land assessment procedures, and other revenue sources, including levies on professions, residences, transportation, market fees, and judicial fines. Moreover, Sastri provides detailed insights into the intricate legal and military structures of the state, spanning from the upper echelons of governance to grassroots levels. However, objections have been raised against this interpretation, with historians questioning the plausibility of a highly

centralized state given the presence of numerous institutional safeguards, including the autonomy of the nayakas and external threats to the empire. In response to such criticisms, Sastri emphasized the increasingly fragmented nature of the Vijayanagar kingdom, highlighting its adoption of a newly articulated ideological objective.

When assessing the Vijayanagar political system through the frameworks of feudalism, segmentary organization, and integrative structures, a nuanced understanding of its characteristics emerges. Each framework offers unique insights into the administrative dynamics, power distribution, and governance mechanisms prevalent within the Vijayanagar realm.

### Segmentary State

Burton Stein's classification of the Vijayanagar state as a segmentary state delineates a hierarchical political structure wherein the central authority retained total political sovereignty, while subordinate entities, such as the nayakas and Brahman commanders, held symbolic or "ritual sovereignty" in the periphery. This segmentary model, as articulated by Stein (1999), conceptualizes the Vijayanagar state as comprising various segments arranged in a pyramid shape, with allegiance to the central authority diminishing as distance from the core increases. Stein applies Aidan Hall's segmentary state paradigm to analyze Vijayanagar's political organization, wherein the king's authority is ceremonial, encompassing activities such as gift-giving, tribute collection, and military

patronage. The Mahanavami festival serves as a focal point for the demonstration of the king's ritual authority, as evidenced by elaborate ceremonies and offerings.

Stein draws upon Hocart's concept of the monarch as a ceremonial performer and underscores the symbolic unity of the temple and city in Vijayanagar. The expansion of Vijayanagar's control across South India, according to Stein, was facilitated through various methods, including organized raids by Telugu warriors, the appointment of local leaders as nayakas, and garnering support from sectarian factions. The Vijayanagar state is structured with multiple tiers of authority, including the core region represented by the king, provinces (mandalam), districts (nadu), and villages (grama), reflecting a pyramidal hierarchy with the central authority at its apex. Specific core locations, particularly in fertile riverine areas like the Tungabhadra region, served as centers of absolute royal power.

However, Stein's segmentary model has faced criticism for its conceptual nature and the lack of substantial empirical evidence supporting its applicability to the Vijayanagar state. Critics highlight the problematic emphasis on the king's ritual position, which may overlook Vijayanagar's significant military focus and the pragmatic exercise of political power.

### **Integrative State**

The integrated model represents a distinct approach to state formation in early medieval India, diverging from the feudal model by explicitly addressing political dynamics beyond the confines of the Ganga Valley. This model prioritizes a comprehensive understanding of the political processes unfolding in various regions, with particular emphasis on areas outside the Ganga Valley. Consequently, it endeavors to delineate novel governmental and societal frameworks, paying significant attention to localities and sub-regions within larger geographical entities.

In addition to political and governmental realms, integration under this model extends to economic, social, and cultural spheres. This holistic approach underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of different facets of society, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of integration processes across various domains. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of integration, this model seeks to capture the complexity of state formation and societal development in early medieval India.

### **Vijaynagar Integrative Model**

To comprehend the political process, it is crucial to analyze existing norms and the fundamental elements of state structure. This involves the transformation of pre-existing political entities into fully developed states, as well as the amalgamation of smaller local political entities into a larger organization that transcends regional boundaries. Firstly, the expansion of royal dynasties in early medieval India is viewed as a mechanism for societal advancement.

The Samanta system exemplifies the decentralized concentration of authority, leading to a hierarchical relationship between an overlord and their subordinate.

Secondly, the political organization that operates on a hierarchical system involves varying degrees of access to central authority and modifications to the ranking system. The integrative model aligns more closely with the concept of a segmentary state, emphasizing hierarchical ranking.

Thirdly, the integrative model draws connections between political processes and contemporary economic, social, and religious developments, such as the lateral migration of rural agricultural communities.

Fourthly, the predominant concept of a social hierarchy based on varna division has expanded horizontally.

Finally, integrating regional customs, sacred sites, and religious sects into a broader framework enhances the overall cohesiveness of the state structure.

### **Feudal Model**

Some academics, such as Burton Stein (1989), attempt to elucidate the nature of the Vijayanagara state within the context of a feudal framework. They contend that the act of bestowing new land concessions exclusively to Brahmans played a significant role in the emergence of feudal divisions. The frequency of these land allocations bolstered the status of the Brahmans (Karashima, 1994). Consequently, they experienced a significant level of self-governance, had authority over administrative matters, and had control over the financial resources within their communities. According to scholars such as Burton Stein (1989), Noboru Karashima (2002), and T.V. Mahalingam (1969), the kings of Vijayanagara aimed to safeguard Hindu dharma, which resulted in the establishment of new Brahman communities (Pandey, 1970).

Moreover, the military extended its presence into the Tamil region, leading to the establishment of feudal territories governed by amaranayakas (warriors) and other prominent officials. Amaranayakas were individuals who inherited and held land as a matter of family tradition. These individuals demonstrated their respect and loyalty to the king by honoring him and fulfilling their military duties, similar to the samantas of northern India (Pandey, 1970). The vassals thereafter began bestowing land concessions upon their subordinates, initiating the practice of sub-infeudation. Due to the vast size of the empire and the lack of efficient transportation and communication, the emperors had to delegate power to feudal portions to run the empire effectively (Stein, 1989; Karashima, 2002). During the process of conquest and consolidation, resistant chieftains were brought under control and their land was divided among newly appointed chiefs, although some senior leaders were also allowed to remain in the new system.

Additionally, D.C. Sircar and Krishnaswami Aiyangar have proposed another idea attributing the formation of the Vijayanagara state to a feudal system. These researchers analyze the depictions of nayakas by Nuniz and Paes individually. They conclude that the nayakas

operated under a feudal system, based on their military support to the king's army and financial contributions to the treasury. Sircar considered Nayankara to be a form of subinfeudation and amaram as a type of feudal tenure. Aiyangar extensively employs the term 'feudal revenue' and consistently refers to various subordinates as 'feudal vassals'. Nevertheless, Burton Stein argues that the utilization of this paradigm conceals the inadequacy in effectively addressing the incomplete writings of the Vijayanagara Empire

### Other Interpretations

N.K. Sastri interprets the Vijayanagar state as primarily a Hindu monarchy that played the crucial duty of safeguarding Hindu culture against the Muslims of the Bahmani kingdom and its subsequent kingdoms, fulfilling an ideological (religion-political) function. The hypothesis of the militaristic nature of the Vijayanagar state originates from this. According to him, the Vijayanagar state was primarily focused on warfare.

### Impact of Administrative System on Justice

In this portion of the research paper, the salient features of the Judicial System under the Vijayanagar Empire would be discussed and its effectiveness will be analyzed. Here, Nuniz's account of the Justice system in Vijayanagar certainly proves helpful.

"When any one suffers wrong and wishes to represent his case to the King, he shows how great is his suffering by lying flat on his face on the ground till they ask him what it is he wants . . . he makes his complaint to the King; and it is there and then settled without more ado, and the King orders a captain . . . to do at once what the supplicant asks. If he complains that he was robbed . . . the King sends immediately for the captain of that province . . . and the captain may be seized and his property taken if he does not catch the thief" (Barodawala, 2007, 28).

Although the King served as the primary source of

justice, regular courts and specialised judicial authorities also played a role. Occasionally, conflicts were resolved by collaboration with the appropriate local authorities. The court system adhered to traditional practices and strictly obeyed the laws of the Brahmins. It was common to witness the imposition of heavy punishments for criminal offences. The punishments encompassed a wide range of consequences, including fines, ordeals, confiscation of property, and the Death Sentence (Devaraj, 2006).

The penalty for crimes such as theft, adultery, and treason were either death or mutilation. In ancient times, criminals were occasionally executed by being placed in front of an elephant, which would then use its knees, trunk, and tusks to kill them. The Pradhani could be regarded as the Chief Justice. Village caste courts, temple trustee courts, and guild courts were overseen by caste elders, guild leaders, and temple trustees, respectively. These tribunals adjudicated both civil and criminal issues, however the monarch had the authority to consider an appeal in such situations (Chander, 2020).

### Was this System of Justice Effective?

We do not know whether this Justice System was completely effective or not. We know the motivation behind such harsh punishments was to set a deterrence and eradicate evil. The Rulers had a proper yardstick to measure the punishment of a convict and according to books on the Vijayanagar dynasty, King Krishnadeva Raya supported allowing death row inmates to petition for mercy three times (Chander, 2020).

### Influence of Religion on State Politics

Religion and State Politics were aligned closely with each other and played an important role in the shaping of the policies in the Vijayanagar Empire.

### Ritual Kingship

A. The State promoted the concept of Dharma, but



Figure 4: King Built Rath Temple in Hampi at Vijayanagar Kingdom

frequently opposed Hindu rulers such as the Gajapatis of Orissa.

B. The contingents that were strategically positioned were under the command of Muslim leaders. King Devaraya II used Muslim archers. The Rulers' triumphant military accomplishments prompted them to adopt the title of Digvijayans.

C. The Kingship in Vijayanagar was symbolic, indicating that the rulers exerted their dominance over a territory beyond their main base of authority through their overlords.

D. An instance of Ritual Kingship is evident in the celebration of Mahanavami, a nine-day event that takes place between September 15th and October 15th. The Vijayanagar Kings demonstrated their authority through this celebration, which was attended by the rulers of all the surrounding regions of the Empire. The King personally conducted the majority of rituals, although the Brahmins took part in the ceremony, but their role was not prominent.

### Political Role of Brahmins

A. The role of Brahmins as political and secular individuals rather than ceremonial leaders was a distinguishing element of the Vijayanagar kingdom. The majority of durga dannaiks (fort commanders) were Brahmins. Literary sources support the contention that fortifications were important during this period and were put under the supervision of Brahmins, particularly those of Telugu descent.

B. During this time, the majority of educated Brahmins sought to work for the government as administrators and accountants, which provided them with strong employment opportunities. The Royal Secretariat was entirely staffed by Brahmins. These Brahmins were distinct from the rest of the Brahmins because they belonged to a sub-caste known as the Telugu niyogis. They were not extremely orthodox in their religious practices (History, 2020). They were also potential legitimizers.

C. The Sangama brothers' ministers were the Brahman Vidyanaya and his kinsmen, who gave their reign legitimacy by admitting them back into the Hindu fold.

D. The Brahmins were also important military leaders in the Vijayanagar army. For example, being an inherent element of the governmental system, Krishnadeva Raya Brahman Timma got economic assistance. The Brahmins built and controlled strongholds around the empire for which they were assigned revenue from some crown villages, Bhandaravada. Crown villages were distinguished from Anuam villages.

### Relationship between Kings and Temples

The Vijayanagar Kings enlisted the support of Vaishnava sectarian leaders from the Tamil region to establish strong authority over the remote Tamil province. In order to legitimize their control in the Tamil realm, which they were outsiders in, it was crucial for the kings to establish connections with the principal Tamil religious institution - the temples.

Four statements can be made to elucidate the connection between kings, sects, and temples:

1. Temples played a crucial role in upholding the authority of the monarchy.

2. Sectarian leaders acted as intermediaries between kings and temples.

3. Local sectarian organizations were responsible for the regular monitoring of temples, while the king had the authority to settle any issues related to the temples.

4. The king's response in the previous circumstance was of an administrative nature rather than a legislative one.

The monarchs of the early Sangama dynasty were followers of the Saiva sect and made significant contributions to the Sri Virupaksha temple at Vijayanagar. The Saluvas were mostly followers of the Vaishnava tradition and provided patronage to both Siva and Vaishnav temples. Krishnadeva Raya, the Tuluva monarch, constructed the Krishnaswami temple, a place of worship dedicated to Vaishnava, and provided financial support for Siva shrines. The Aravidu kings also presented donations to Vaishnava temples.

### Influence of Political Factors in Decline

The termination of the Vijayanagar Empire in 1650 A.D. was preceded by the pivotal Battle of Talikota on January 26, 1565 A.D., which played a seminal role in its decline. A comprehensive examination of the final Aravidu Dynasty, as highlighted by Morrison (2013), is essential for understanding the factors culminating in this significant event and the subsequent unraveling of the Hindu ruling dynasties within the Vijayanagar Empire. The confrontation in 1565 A.D. marked a consequential victory for the Deccan Sultanates, where Sadasiva Raya held nominal sovereignty, with effective power vested in his Minister, Rama Raya. Rama Raya pursued a policy of destabilizing the Deccan Sultanates through provocation of internal conflicts. However, the sultanates, recognizing this stratagem, united to form a coalition against the Vijayanagar state, as discussed by Srinath and Morarji (2016). This coalition swiftly launched a coordinated assault on the kingdom, resulting in widespread devastation and plunder.

### Declined Cause of the Battle

Again, we find dissecting views regarding the main causes of the Battle. One theory stated that Rama Raya's undue interference in the affairs of the Bahmani Kingdom were the Prime reason, while other scholars say that Rama Raya merely took advantage of the disunity between the Bahmani Rulers to the advantage of the Vijayanagar Kingdom and yet others say that the empire's complacent and overconfident pride in its might aided the cause of the conflict.

### The Battle

The Battle of Talikota unfolded within the Deccan expanse of southern India, where the military forces

under the Hindu ruler of Vijayanagar confronted the unified armies of the Muslim sultans hailing from Bijapur, Bidar, Ahmadnagar, and Golconda. Transpiring on January 23, 1565, this confrontation transpired in a southeastern locale proximate to Bijapur, which presently lies within the northern precincts of Karnataka state. Both sides marshaled vast military contingents, comprising considerable cohorts of war elephants, with preparations commencing as early as late December 1564. The conflict ostensibly reached its denouement through the strategic deployment of Muslim artillery, culminating in the apprehension and subsequent execution of the Hindu minister, Rama Raya. Subsequently, the capital city of Vijayanagar underwent capture, despoliation, and enduring abandonment, a process spanning a duration of five months.

### Consequences of the Battle

The hegemony of the Vijayanagar kingdom in South Indian political forums waned, precipitating a decline in its sway. Concurrently, entities such as the Nayakas of Vellore and Keladi, alongside the Kingdom of Mysore and several contiguous territories, asserted their independence from Vijayanagar suzerainty. This fracturing of authority facilitated the Mughal ascendancy, as internal strife within the Deccan Sultanates weakened their defenses, enabling Mughal conquest.

### Changes in State Structure

The change in State Structure observes the changes experienced in Vijayanagar post the fall of the Hindu dynasties and the taking over of the Kingdom by the Bahmani Sultans, as discussed in the preceding Central Theme. The Vijayanagar Empire was based on a shared power model, however, the Bahmani Kingdom was an authoritarian regime wherein, the Sultan was considered the Judge, Jury and Executioner. In the Vijayanagar Empire, the Council of Ministers held a certain sway and political influence which was absent in the Bahmani Kingdom. The post of ministers was sometimes hereditary and they were also hired from the ranks of Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the Vijayanagar Empire. In addition to the ministerial positions, the administrative apparatus of the State encompassed a diverse array of officials, including the chief treasurer, custodians of the royal jewels, overseers of the State's commercial interests, prefects of police tasked with crime prevention and upholding law and order within the city, chief masters of the horse, as well as various subordinate functionaries such as the 'bhats' responsible for extolling the king's virtues and the betel-bearers who attended to the king's personal needs (College, 2020, 3-6). Within the Bahmani Kingdom, the monarch assumed a multifaceted role, embodying the earthly manifestation of divinity. Symbolic artifacts such as the throne, the chhutr or royal umbrella, the regal standard for minting gold coins, the ceremonial striking of the royal naubat (drum) at prescribed intervals, and the recitation of the Khutba in the sovereign's

name were tangible expressions of the king's supreme authority. The early part of the day was typically devoted to intellectual pursuits, engagement with poets, and receiving updates from messengers dispatched from various corners of the realm. The monarch maintained a cadre of journalists overseen by the head of government, tasked with furnishing reports on events unfolding across the kingdom and conveying official correspondence from provincial officials to the capital.

Save for Fridays, the king convened a Darbar each day of the week, presiding with unquestioned authority. Despite the theoretical extent of his power, practical decision-making often relied on the council of ministers in formulating state policies. The chief minister, commonly known as 'vakil-us-Sultanates,' assumed the pivotal role of transmitting and sanctioning all royal decrees. The finance minister, referred to as 'Amir-i-Jumla,' oversaw fiscal matters, while external affairs fell under the purview of the 'Nasir-I-Ashraf.' Allauddin Hasan Bahman Shah implemented a system of territorial governance, dividing his domain into four Tarafs, each governed by a Tarafdardar. Mahmud Gawan, upon assuming the prime ministerial position, expanded administrative divisions by establishing eight Tarafs to curtail the authority of the Tarafdars. Provinces or Atrafs were further subdivided into Sarkars for administrative efficiency, with Sarkars in turn segmented into Paraganas. At the grassroots level, the village served as the fundamental administrative unit, with numerous villages comprising a pargana

### Analytical Discussion

The following debate will be divided into six parts, each part representing a detailed critical analysis of each of the Central Themes.

### Origin of the Vijayanagar Kingdom

There are three of the more prominent theories regarding the Origin of the Vijayanagar Empire.

➤ The first theory states that the brothers were under the Employment of the Sultanate of Delhi and once they were sent to Kampili to quell the Hindu Rebellion, they met Sage Vidyaranya who helped them convert back to Hinduism and advised them to form the Vijayanagar Empire.

➤ Now, this theory seems rather incongruous. The Sringeri Mutt of which Sage Vidyaranya was the 12th Shankracharya are of the opinion that the brothers were forcefully converted to Islam and that he only helped them gain autonomy from the Sultan's influence.

➤ However, this theory can be rejected on the basis of the fact that this is a mere story which is backed by no other evidence apart from what the Sringeri Mutt claims. The theories that can be supported are the ones given by Dr. Kamath and Robert Sewell → as both of their theories have supporting evidences. For e.g. Robert Sewell's theory is supported by direct evidences given by foreign travellers and historians and by the inscriptions found in the UNESCO site of Hampi in Karnataka.

### Political and Administrative Structure

It can be well-established that the Administrative System under the Vijayanagar Empire was a system based on shared power. Although some doubt arises over the existence of the Ayagar System as it is not mentioned in any inscriptions of the time, its existence is well-documented among other sources. It can also be confirmed through the writings of many historians that the Ministers in the Vijayanagar Empire enjoyed considerable political Influence and could act as Kingmakers.

### Impact of Administrative System on Justice

It is well-documented that the punishments in Vijayanagar were harsh for those that committed crimes, now the point of debate that arises herewith is whether the Harsh punishments were really necessary? To this point, I would argue in strong opposition. The Punishments should be given to reform a person, however, the punishments given in the Vijayanagar Empire were wholly inhuman and the balance of justice wasn't equally held on both sides.

### Influence of Religion on State Politics

There are two most important things to note here. First, the Brahmins held no power to perform ritualistic functions and the king performed them himself. This shows the King's supremacy over the Brahmins. The second thing to note here is that at the same time, the King had to work in tandem with the temples and the Brahmins so as to legitimize his rule as a king. Overall, it shows a Symbiotic relationship between the king and the priestly class. It shows that they both needed each other in order to legitimise their power in the kingdom.

### Influence of Political Factors in Decline

Here, it is appropriate to argue that the main cause of the Battle of Talikota was due to the high interference of Rama Raya in the Bahmani kingdom as it is the most relevant and widely discussed theory behind the cause of the war.

Another reason that could potentially contribute to the political factors that led to the decline of the Vijayanagar Empire was the immense power granted to the local governments who eventually announced their autonomy from the Empire post the battle.

### Changes in State Structure

As discussed previously, the Empire of Vijayanagar underwent many changes in its state structure. Personally, if I were to favor a state structure, I would combine some elements from both kingdoms to form a new one. For example, I would adopt the shared power model of the Vijayanagar Empire and incorporate the system where the king had an army of reporters under the command of the Prime Minister. This combination would not only help the ideal ruler in seeking the best possible advice for his citizens but also keep him informed about rebellions and issues among the public, allowing him to address them efficiently.

### CONCLUSION

The Empire was a highly centralized and meticulously planned Hindu empire in the South. The contemporary scholars try to portrait the Vijayanagar empire as secular which replicates the practice of Islamic rulers in the region. But the traditional scholars are still relevant while looking at the nature of the Vijayanagar Empire. As Vijayanagara was the capital of a wealthy and powerful Hindu empire in southern India. For more than two centuries, its rulers effectively resisted the spread of Islam, maintaining Hindu religious practices and cultural traditions, and creating efficient social and governmental systems. Many of Vijayanagar ruler guided by Vaishnavite teachers like Vyāsātūrtha which induced the ruler the essential teachings of Hinduism. The Vijayanagar rulers were also influenced by Vedantic teaching. Subsequently that helped the Vijayanagar ruler act against Muslim bulwark.

The Vijayanagara Empire reached its zenith through strategic alliances, military conquests, and cultural patronage, notably under rulers like Krishna Devaraya. However, internal political rivalries, external threats from the Deccan Sultanates, and administrative challenges destabilized the empire, leading to its eventual decline. Despite its collapse, the empire significantly influenced South Indian history and culture, with its architectural achievements, literary contributions, and religious traditions demonstrating the resilience and creativity of the Deccan plateau's populace. The legacy of Vijayanagara highlights the complexities of empire-building and the enduring effects of historical legacies on contemporary society.

However, no empire reached its zenith without faults, as highlighted in this article. The decline of the empire was primarily due to its weak successors who failed to assert their power in court, eventually becoming puppet rulers controlled by ministers. A significant portion of the blame can also be attributed to flaws in the kingdom's administrative system, which granted excessive power to governors, leading to the empire's disintegration. Despite these issues, the empire had an impressive administrative, political, and military system, and it is remarkable to see how it managed to survive amidst constant political upheaval. In conclusion, the Vijayanagar Empire, an empire built on warfare and military competition ultimately perished in the warfare itself. This research paper has merely touched upon its study and has endeavored to partially reveal the excellence of what was undoubtedly South India's greatest and most magnificent empire."

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