

Vijayanagara

The four aspects of Vijayanagara that this paper will discuss are: its geographic context, its historical significance, its religious history, and its archaeological history. The city of Vijayanagara, more commonly known as Hampi, was the capital city of the Vijayanagara kingdom. It became the capital because it was built in a strategic area and it was powerful because of its positioning (Verghese 2004:421). It was constructed on a rocky area that opened up into wide valleys that further opened into fertile flat lands (see Verghese 2000:8-9). There is evidence that rulers were concerned with agriculture, and improving it. The available fertile lands of the region suggest why agriculture would have been such an important part of the ruler's concerns (Sinopoli and Morrison 92). Another major physical feature was the Tungabhadra River because it provided water for the people and for agriculture. The placement of the city near the waterway and the fertile land allowed it to grow into an important and powerful.

Historically the kingdom of Vijayanagara along with the capital city had been greatly influential. In 1328 CE South India was controlled by one common force but eventually independent states started to appear as a result of the successful revolts that were taking place (Verghese 2000:1). These independent states included the Vijayanagara kingdom and the Bahmani Sultanate (Verghese 2000:1). With the Vijayanagara kingdom emerging as a powerful kingdom the dominant and strategically placed city Vijayanagara, was named as the capital. Three dynasties ruled the Vijayanagara kingdom. They were the Sangama, Saluva, and Tuluva dynasties (Verghese 2000:1). The Sangama dynasty expanded the kingdom southward through a number of conquests and it was the first king, Harihara I, who built and expanded the kingdom from coast to coast (Verghese 2000:1). At the same time the Bahmani kingdom was emerging on the other side of the Krishna River. The emergence of this kingdom created an epoch of

constant warfare between the two (Verghese 2000:1). When Harihara II took the throne he continued with the success of Harihara I and expanded the Vijayanagara kingdom over all of Southern India (Verghese2000:1-2). Throughout the kingdom's existence it was ruled by many different kings, but of them all Krsnadevaraya was the greatest. He was a very good monarch and his armies were successful in every feat they took on (Verghese 2000:2). He and his brother Achuytadeveraya expanded and strengthened the kingdom (Sinopoli and Morrison 85). The great kings that headed the Vijayanagara kingdom were the reason the kingdom was so successful. One of the last kings to rule, King Ramaraya made alliances with the Deccan Sultanate which allowed the kingdom to expand even further. The kingdom's increasing power made the Deccan Sultanate uneasy and a battle soon broke out (Verghese 2000:3). The Vijayanagara army was defeated in January 1565 at the battle of Talikota, which resulted in the sacking of the capital city (Verghese 2004:417). This defeat led to the desertion of Vijayanagara along with the loss of the northern territories eventually causing the collapse of the kingdom because it was not able to recover (Verghese 2000:3).

The capital city was established in the fourteenth century and was similar to the kingdom because it became a very large and wealthy city relatively quickly. It is known as the "city of victory" which was named after the fabulous city that was built by Bukkha I (Sharma 1255 and Verghese 2000:42). The city eventually reached an area of three hundred and fifty square kilometers, which included everything from city houses to farm land. The city served as a major population center, a marketplace, a sacred place, and a military center (Sinopoli and Morrison 92). There were many temples found within the city; in fact most monuments were religious, civil, or military. There was also evidence of some Islamic influences found on these buildings and monuments (see Sharma 1255). The temples, upper class houses, and fortifications were

subsidized by the king or other upper class individuals (Sinopoli and Morrison 86). After the defeat at Talikota, Vijayanagara was looted and occupied by the enemies. The city was then sifted through by vandals and finally natural forces took over, leaving the city in a state of ruin, as it is today (Sharma 1255).

Religiously the city has numerous connections. The city contains numerous Hindu temples but also contains three Jaina temples (Sharma 1255). The most important Hindu temples are the Vaishnava Ramachandra and the Shaiva Virupkasha (Sharma 1255). The towers, pavilions, and stables contain the evidence of Islamic influence. Evidence also shows that for over one thousand years there was a lot of religious activity (Verghese 2004:416). [For more on religion within the kingdom see Verghese (2000)]. It is evident that public rituals were practiced in the city because processional routes and platforms were found (Sinopoli and Morrison 87). Concerning the history of the city, local beliefs tend to deviate from scholars' beliefs. This is seen in the belief that Vijayanagara is Kishkindha, kingdom of the monkey kings, from the great Hindu epic the *Ramayana* (see Verghese 2004:421). Locals believe this story and although there is a strong tie to Rama within the city there is no actual evidence that proves Vijayanagara is tied to the epic in any way. Along with a strong tie to Rama, Vijayanagara also has closely related sacred ties to Siva (Sinopoli and Morrison 85). There are a great number of opinions on the religious aspect of Vijayanagara but not all of them are proven.

Archaeologically the site is magnificent because it is rare for archaeologists to be able to study an entire city; usually they only get to study bits and pieces. The earliest archaeological documentation is from 1800 and by the 1970s there were some systematic research and documentation projects initiated (Sinopoli and Morrison 87). It was not until the 1980s that major excavations started to occur. These excavations included surface mapping and

documentation by the Karnataka Directorate of Archaeology and Museums and the Archaeology Survey of India (Sinopoli and Morrison 87). Archaeologists used two techniques: excavation and surface archaeology (Sharma 1255). In 1987 the Vijayanagara Metropolitan Survey studied unrecorded items and tried to look at the broader environment by looking at roads, irrigation networks, shrines, and temples (Sinopoli and Morrison 87). They provided a wealth of new information that could not be found in texts. Archaeological evidence proves that the city dates back to Neolithic times, based on the neoliths and handmade pottery found (Verghese 2000:9). Archaeologists also found that a number of the remains were burnt or heat cracked proving that the city or at least parts of it were burnt (Verghese 2004:417). Processional paths along with platforms were also discovered proving that there were ritual procedures occurring within Vijayanagara (Sinopoli and Morrison 87). Although the site was not really excavated until around 1975, it is fairly well preserved. The good preservation is a result of the capital's abandonment because there were no people left to change, modify or destroy buildings. Therefore, it is mostly natural forces that have affected the site. The city was robbed of all its treasures but the buildings are still in good shape and an archaeologist can find a lot of information from the remaining structures, soil, and debris. The city was important in antiquity and that importance carried on to the present as it is currently seen as a World Heritage Site.

References and Further Recommended Reading

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Related Topics for Further Investigation

Ramayana

Rama

Siva

Ayodhya

Noteworthy Websites Related to the Topic

www.vijayanagara.org

www.archaeos.org/html/vsite.htm

<http://hampionline.com/>

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