CHAPTER – I
INTRODUCTION

**Introduction:**

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 A.D although its power declined after a major military defeat in 1565 A.D by the Deccan Sultanates\(^1\). 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\(^2\).

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\(^3\). 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\(^4\). The Vijayanagara Empire’s patronage enabled fine arts and literature to reach new heights in the language...
of Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and Sanskrit, while Carnatic music evolved into its current form. The Vijayanagara Empire created and epoch in South Indian history that transcended regionalism by promoting Hinduism as a unifying factor.

Most information on the social life in Vijayanagara Empire has come from the writings of foreign visitors and evidence that research teams in the Vijayanagara area have uncovered.

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. The next ruler, Dev Raya-I, emerged successful against the Gajapatis of Orissa and undertook important works of fortification and
irrigation. Dev Raya-II popularly called as ‘Gajabetekara’ succeeded in 1424 A.D and was possibly the most capable of the Sangama Dynasty rulers. He quelled rebelling feudal lords as well as the Zamorin of Calicut and Qullon in the south. He invaded the island of Lanka and became overlord of the kings of Burma at Pegu and Tanasserim. The empire declined in the late 15th century until the serious attempts by commander Saluva Narasimha Deva Raya in 1485 A.D and by general Tuluva Narasa Nayaka in 1491 A.D to reconsolidate the empire. After nearly two decades of conflict with rebellious chieftains, the empire eventually came under the rule of Krishnadevaraya, the son of Tuluva Narasa Nayaka.

In the following decade the Vijayanagara Empire dominated all of southern India and fought off invasions from the five established Deccan Sultanates which were the five off-shoots of Bahmani kingdom. The Vijayanagara Empire reached its peak during the rule of Krishnadevaraya when Vijayanagara armies were consistently victorious. The empire annexed areas formerly under the sultanates in the northern Deccan and the territories in the eastern Deccan, including Kalinga, while simultaneously maintaining control over all its subordinates in the south. Many important monuments were either completed or commissioned during the time of Krishnadevaraya.

Krishnadevaraya was followed by Achyuta Raya in 1530 A.D and in 1542 A.D by Sadashiva Raya while the real power lay with Aliya Rama Raya, the son-in-law of Krishnadevaraya, whose relationship with the Deccan Sultans who allied against him has been debated.
The sudden capture and killing of Aliya Rama Raya in 1565 A.D at the battle of Talikota, against an alliance of the Deccan sultanates, after a seemingly easy victory for the Vijayanagara armies, created havoc and confusion in the Vijayanagara ranks, which were then completely routed. The sultanates army later plundered Hampi and reduced it to the ruinous state in which it remains; it was never re-occupied. Tirumala Raya, the sole surviving commander, left Vijayanagara for Penukonda with vast amounts of treasure on the back of 550 elephants.

The empire went into a slow decline regionally, although trade with the Portuguese continued, and the British were given a land grant for the establishment of Madras. Tirumala Deva Raya was succeeded by his son Sriranga-I later followed by Venkata-II who made Chandragiri his capital, repulsed the invasion of the Bahmani sultanate and saved Penukonda from being captured. His successor, Ramadeva took power and ruled till 1632 A.D after whose death, Venkata-III became king and ruled for about ten years after which Vellore was made the capital. The empire was finally conquered by the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda. The largest feudatories of the Vijayanagara Empire in the Mysore kingdom, Keladi Nayaka, Nayaks of Madurai, Nayaks of Tanjore, Nayaks of Chitradurga and Nayaks of Gingee declared independence and went on to have a significant impact on the history of South India in the coming centuries. These kingdoms of Nayaka hasted into the 18th century while the Mysore kingdom remained a princely state until Indian independence.
in 1947 although they came under the British Raj in 1799 after the death of Tipu Sultan.

**Scope of the Study:**

The present study covers thematically the structure of the society during the Vijayanagara Empire. Chronologically it covers the study of society during the Vijayanagara Empire from 1336 to 1600 A.D.

Though studies were conducted on various aspects of social life, this research work restricts itself to social divisions of castes and classes, dress, ornaments and robes, family life, houses, amusements, cultural activities, dance and music, hunting, education and position of women etc. A few paintings and drawings are illustrated and their numbers are mentioned in brackets. Along with this, a list of temples which are important in the research work also mentioned.

The establishment of the famous Vijayanagara Empire in the fourteenth century A.D. constitutes an event of great significance in the history of India. It filled the political vacuum created due to the downfall of the powerful dynasties like the Hoysalas, the Sevunas and the Kakatiyas. The Vijayanagara Empire has left a permanent impression of its existence in fields of religion, literature, social order and administration.

Vijayanagara kings not only constructed new temples but also substantially they did not miss a single opportunity to depict contemporary
social life on independent panels on pillars, verandahs, and foundations of buildings.

Hence it becomes most important to study and research the social contributions of the Vijayanagara rulers.

**Aims and objectives:**

The aims and objectives of the present research work are:

1. To analyze the social divisions of castes and classes during the Vijayanagara Empire.
2. To study the dress and ornaments, life of people during Vijayanagara Empire.
3. To study the sports and games of the kings and the people under Vijayanagara Empire.
4. To study the cultural activities such as, dance, music, wrestling, dueling, fight with animals during fairs and festivals.
5. To study the different fairs and festivals celebrated during Vijayanagara Empire.
6. To study the different popular amusements, hunting, etc. during Vijayanagara Empire.
7. To analyze the position of women during Vijayanagara Empire.
Hypothesis of the study:

1. The Hindu caste system was prevalent and rigidly followed, with each caste represented by a local body of elders who represented the community.

2. Untouchability was part of the caste system and these communities were represented by leaders (Kaivadadavaru).

3. The caste system did not however, prevent distinguished persons from all castes from being promoted to high ranking cadre in the army and administration.

4. The practice of Sati was common, though voluntary, and mostly practiced among the upper classes.

5. The Devadasi system existed as well as legalized prostitution relegated to a few streets in each city.

6. By this time South Indian women had crossed most barriers and were actively involved in matters hitherto considered the monopoly of men, such as administration, business and trade, and involvement in the fine arts.

7. The popularity of harems amongst men of the royalty is well known from records.

8. The commoners whose lives were modest, the lives of the kings and queens were full of ceremonial pomp in the court. Queens and Princesses had numerous attendants who were lavishly dressed and adorned with fine jewellery, their daily duties being light.
9. Physical exercises were popular with men and wrestling was an important male preoccupation for sport and entertainment. Even women wrestlers are mentioned in records.

10. As in most Indian societies, jewellery was used by men and women and records describe the use of anklets, bracelets, finger-rings, necklaces and ear rings of various types. During celebrations, men and women adorned themselves with flower garlands and used perfumes made of rose water, civet, musk or sandalwood.

**Research Method:**

During recent years the research in history is being pursued by several new approaches methods like oral documentation. Annals traditions subaltern studies quantitative analysis, besides the traditional Historical method which is the most suitable methodology requires in developing historical perspective in the present study.

Historical method signifies the establishment of the historical truth purely based on the contemporary records the validity and authenticity of which are proved by means of internal and external criticism. The literary sources constitute the main evidences.

As for a synthesis in concerned with the conventional methods has been adopted the Chapterisation of the thesis is primarily based on the scientific approach followed by chronological order for the exposition is concerned a simple style of narration has been followed and evidences have been followed
quoted more from the secondary sources. A good number of inscriptions and paintings have been incorporated to ensure the research value of the thesis.

**Evaluation of the sources:**

Concerned to the subject a large number of original unpublished and published sources are available in Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada and English. In this research work an extensive use of such sources is made. In addition, the study is supplemented also by an epigraphical and numismatic source as the secondary sources.

Regarding the nature of sources concerned they are scattered and not exclusively meant for present topic. The scattered sources are properly studied and channelized. This has been realized only by travelling widely. I have tapped the sources from the National Archives and Archeological Survey of India Library, the Andhra Pradesh State Archives, the Salar Jung Museum, the Oriental Manuscript Library and Research Centre Hyderabad. In accordance with the history of Vijayanagara Kingdom the evaluation of sources is made.

The published books will constitute the secondary sources whereas, the inscriptions published in epigraphia Carnatica, epigraphia Indica, accounts of the foreign visitors during Vijayanagara period such of Barbosa, Nicolo Conti, Domigo Paes, Afnasey Nikitin, Abdur Razzaq, etc. and the writings of contemporary poets and writers such as Ganga Devithe Queen of Kampanna, Vidyaranya, Srinatha Deva Raya-II, Krishnadevaraya Rama Amatya Praudha Devaraya Sayana will constitute the primary sources.
The most authentic sources pertaining to the socio-religious structure of Vijayanagara period are obviously the epigraphs. A good number of epigraphs refer to the land and money grants to the temples and establishment of various institutions. Quite a few inscriptions of the Vijayanagara rulers are found installed in the Srisailam temples. The inscription dates 1378 A.D refers to construction of flights of steps at Ahobila and Srisaila for the benefit of pilgrims by the Reddy Kings Prolaya Vema and Annaya Vema. An epigraph at Srisaila dated 1393-94 A.D during the time of Harihara-II records the constructions of Patalaganga according to the instructions of the God Mallikarjuna in a dream by Vitthalamba the queen of Harihara-II. An inscription at Srisaila belonging to the reign of Proudadevaraya records donation made by one Muktinatha. Several inscriptions of the time of Krishnadevaraya mention about his visit to Srisailam, construction of Mantapas and grants of money and land. There are innumerable inscriptions spread over the length and breadth of the Vijayanagara Empire which record the money and land grants to the temples, constructions and renovations of the temples of Andhra and Karnataka.

1. Narrative of Domingos Paes was written probably about 1520-1522 A.D. Its translation has been published by Swell Robert in “A Forgotten Empire”. Paes visited Vijayanagara at a time when it was at the height of its grandeur and he has something to say about relations of Vijayanagara with Bijapur. It has proved a valuable document and is a good supplement to the history of Ferishtah so far as it refers to Vijayanagara’s relations with Bijapur.
2. Chronicle of Fernao Nuniz was written about 1536-1537 A.D and its translation has been published by Robert Swell in “A Forgotten Empire”. It possesses peculiar and unique value for it contains the traditional history of the country gathered first hand on the spot. In many important events that took place in Vijayanagara either he himself was present or he knew them from those persons who were present. His account corrects many a mistake of Ferishtah regarding the history of Vijayanagara and at many places supplements and corroborates Ferishtah’s account. It has been found very valuable in tracing the relations of Bijapur with Vijayanagara.

The literary records of this period consist of chronicles, general literature, administrative records and etc. including for more fruitful source than epigraphs and numismatic. Among the literary sources of Kala-Janana occupies a primary place. Although they pretend to be prophecies of the future by inspired seers and exaggerate many things, they offer many clues to the real course of history.


4. The Vidyaraya Kala-Jananas composed before the close of the 15th century describes within a brief compass the history of Vijayanagara and light upon some of its dark corners.
5. *Madhuravijayam* was written by Gangadevi, the wife of the hero Kumara Kampana describing in epic fashion his conquest of Madura and the overthrow of the Sultanates.

Work of general literature written under the patronage of the Raya’s have also their contribution to make. The Kuara Ramanna Kathe is a poem describing the conditions of South India on the eve of the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire.

6. Father Louis, who was a priest belonging to the order of Francies was sent as ambassador by Albuquerque to Vijayanagara. His dispatch is interesting as it contains information regarding Vijayanagara and the Sultan of Bijapur. One part of this account is certainly accurate while the other tells us about Krishnadevaraya’s activities during this period of which we know regarding from any other sources.

Renowned Scholars like Prof. Nilakanta Shastri, Dr. Krishnaswami Ayingar, Dr. George Michell, Robert Swell, H. Heras, A.H. Longhurst and others have brought to light much new material on the history of the Vijayanagara Kingdom, through their numerous articles on new inscriptions published by them. The account of foreign travelers constitutes valuable sources on the history of the Vijayanagara Kingdom. The sources are rich in volume, variety and interest and gives details about the life, customs, and traditions of the people under the Vijayanagara rule.
Research Design:

- The first chapter serves as an introduction to the entire thesis. It lays down the aims and objectives of the study, justification for the selection of the topic, nature and scope of the study, research method employed and the sources of the study.
- The second chapter gives a political history of Vijayanagara Empire from 1336 – 1600 A.D.
- The third chapter throws light on the caste system during Vijayanagara Empire.
- The fourth chapter reviews the education system during Vijayanagara period and also discusses about development of language and literature.
- The fifth chapter gives information about the position of women during Vijayanagara rule.
- The sixth chapter discusses the various amusements viz, wrestling, animal fighting, hunting, dance and music etc. during Vijayanagara Empire.
- The seventh chapter throws flood of light on fairs and festivals with celebrations of every festivals and fairs in the Vijayanagara Empire.
- The eighth chapter will draw the conclusion and epilogue of the entire thesis.
REFERENCES:

2. *Ibid*, p.15
4. Robert Swell, *A Forgotten Empire*, p.41
5. *Ibid*, p.208
7. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol-III, p.188
8. Heras, H., *Beginnings of Vijayanagara History*, p. 15
10. *Ibid*, p.50
12. *Ibid*, p.43
13. *Ibid*, p.45
14. *Ibid*, p.81