

# THE “NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN VIJAYANGARA EMPIRE”

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Vijayanagara empire represented a magnificent epoch in the history of South India. The Ruins at Hampi, even in their desolate condition, give us a glimpse of the ancient grandeur of the capital. Travelers have described that the city had seven enclosures. The visitor comes across a number of gigantic ramparts, at times stretching across rocks and mountains, reminding one of the China Wall in miniature. At times the natural rocks themselves are used as parts of the fortification. The open space in between two rocks is filled by patches of walls made of huge boulders, cut into rectangular shapes. The lofty tower of Virupaksha, and those of the innumerable shrines, kissing the azure sky, whether from open plain or from the tops of hills like Hemakuta or Matanga, the broad street in front of the Virupaksha temple, flanked by rows of stone pavilions which once housed shops humming with activity, the Kamalamahal, the elephant stable, the platform going by the name Mahanavami Dibba and the remains of the once magnificent palaces, speak volumes of the glory and grandeur of one of the greatest cities of the contemporary world. The European travelers compared it to Rome. It looks as though it had a population of over one million in its hey days.

The temples of Vithalswami, Hazara Ramaswamy, Kodandarama, Achyutaraya and many other scattered over a wide areac, and innumerable smaller shrines, the ruins of streets and townships in the city stun the visitor by their vastness. The remains of the queens’ the minds of the onlookers, the events that must have taken place in the precincts of these places. “No remains of the city recall more vividly the story of the forgotten empire of Vijayanagara than these massive terraces, still impressive examples of architecture in spite of their mutilated super-structure”, says Brown while speaking of the platform of the audience hall at the centre of the city. He adds, “for here the ruler of this region sat in state

on his golden throne to view the pomp and pageantry symbolizing the greatness and wealth of his possessions”.

The descriptions give by the contemporary travelers to the empire like Nicolo Conti, Abdur Razzak, Barbosa, Paes and Nuniz of the city and the magnificent festivals like Dasara, and the size of its colourful army gives us a better picture of the glory of the empire. It was an effort to project the king as “God on Earth”. Abdur Razzak says the “the pupil of the eye has never seen a place like it and the ear of intelligence has never been informed that there existed anything to equal” this city in the world.

Nicolo Conti (1420-21) says that the city had a circumference of 60 miles. He speaks of the elaborately constructed water channels which the kings caused to be cut to irrigate lands. Barbosa, who came in the days of Krishnadevaraya, says that the empire, “is ver rich, and well supplied with provisions, and is very full of cities and large township”. He speaks of the square and wide streets of the capital. “They are constantly filled with an innumerable crowd of all nations and creeds”, says he and adds that there was an infinite trade in the city. He speaks of the trade in jewels, diamonds, pearls, seed-pearls and silk brocades which were in plenty on its streets.

Domingo Paes, who gives a longer account of trade in the city, says that “all sorts of rubies and diamonds and emeralds and pearls and seed-pearls and cloths and every other sort of things on earth is there that you may wish to buy”. He speaks of the abundance of foodstuffs, vegetables, fruits and animals like pigs and fowls being sold in profusion in the markets of the city at cheap rates. He claims Vijayanagara to be “as large as Rome and very beautiful”. “This is the best provided city in the world”, he adds. Nuniz also expresses a similar view: “The markets are always overflowing with very abundance of fruits” and he adds that they were “very cheap”.

While speaking of Mahanavami festival and the army parade that followed it, Paes says the following: “To see the grandeur of the nobles and men of rank I cannot possibly describe it all, nor should I be believed if I tried to do so; then to see the horses and the armour that they wear, you would see them so covered with metal plates that I have no words to express what I saw”. The traveler is short of words while giving expression to his

impressions regarding the parade: “to try and tell of all I saw is hopeless, for I sat along with my head so often turned from one side to the other that I was almost falling backward of my horse with my senses lost”. “Cost of it all is not to be wondered at, as there is so much money in the land, and chiefs are so wealthy”, paes adds. Description given by the travelers clearly create an impression that lands in India were better cultivated, animal husbandry well developed, and industry and trade were flourishing and the empire was more prosperous than contemporary Europe. The travelers are surprised over the well-populated villages and towns which was clearly as sign of prosperous conditions.

Hampi (and Pattadakal) in Karnataka have been include in the list of World Heritage Monuments by the UNESCO.

