

CUET · HISTORY · CLASS XII · CODE 314

# An Imperial Capital

CUET unit: Theme VII — Vijayanagara Empire: Politics, Economy and Architecture

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## Snapshot

- The Vijayanagara Empire (c. 14th–16th century) was a major south Indian polity stretching from the Krishna river to the southern tip, founded by Harihara and Bukka in 1336 and ruined after the 1565 battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi (Talikota).
- Four dynasties ruled — Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu — with Krishnadeva Raya (1509–1529) as the political and cultural apogee.
- Uses the city of Hampi/Vijayanagara as a case study in archaeological reconstruction (Colin Mackenzie 1800, epigraphs, traveller accounts, ASI surveys).
- Analyses the city's tripartite spatial layout — sacred centre, urban core and royal centre — and Indo-Islamic + Dravidian architectural synthesis (raya gopurams, mandapas, Lotus Mahal, elephant stables).
- CUET tests political chronology, the amara-nayaka system, named monuments (Mahanavami dibba, Virupaksha, Vitthala, Hazara Rama), water-works, and source-criticism (Paes, Nuniz, Abdur Razzaq, Nicolo de Conti).

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

- Vijayanagara meant both a city and an empire; the city was sacked in 1565 and lived on in local memory as Hampi, named after the mother goddess Pampadevi (NCERT intro, p. 170).
- The ruins at Hampi were first surveyed by Colonel Colin Mackenzie, an English East India Company engineer-antiquarian, in 1800; he prepared the first survey map of the site (NCERT §1, p. 170).
- From 1856 photographers began recording the monuments, and from 1836 epigraphists started collecting inscriptions at Hampi temples; historians combined these with accounts of foreign travellers and literature in Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Sanskrit (NCERT §1, p. 170).
- Mackenzie, born 1754, was appointed the first Surveyor General of India in 1815 and held the post till his death in 1821 (NCERT §1 Source 1, p. 171).

- Two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336 (according to tradition and epigraphic evidence); contemporaries called it the karnataka samrajyamu (NCERT §2, p. 171).
- The empire's northern rivals were the Deccan Sultans and the Gajapati rulers of Orissa; in popular Vijayanagara tradition the Deccan Sultans were termed ashvapati (lord of horses), the rayas narapati (lord of men), and the Gajapatis literally "lord of elephants" (NCERT §2, p. 172).
- Warfare depended on cavalry, so horses were imported from Arabia and Central Asia, initially through Arab traders and local kudirai chettis (horse merchants); from 1498 the Portuguese with their muskets became major players (NCERT §2.1, p. 172).
- The four dynasties were Sangama (till 1485), Saluva (military commanders, till 1503), Tuluva (Krishnadeva Raya) and Aravidu (from 1542, lasted till end of 17th century) (NCERT §2.2, pp. 172–173).
- Krishnadeva Raya (ruled 1509–1529) acquired the Raichur doab (1512), subdued the Orissa rulers (1514) and defeated the Sultan of Bijapur (1520); he built fine temples, added gopurams to many south Indian temples and founded the suburban township of Nagalapuram after his mother; he composed the Telugu work on statecraft, the Amuktamalyada (NCERT §2.2, pp. 172–173).
- In 1565, Rama Raya (chief minister) led the Vijayanagara army at Rakshasi-Tangadi (also called Talikota), where he was routed by the combined armies of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda; the city was sacked and abandoned within a few years (NCERT §2.2, p. 173).
- After the defeat the Aravidu dynasty ruled from Penukonda and later Chandragiri (near Tirupati) (NCERT §2.2, p. 174).
- Krishnadeva Raya took the title "establisher of the Yavana kingdom" — Yavana being a Sanskrit word for Greeks and other peoples entering from the north-west — showing rayas–Sultans relations were not always hostile (NCERT §2.2, p. 174).
- The amara-nayaka system was a major political innovation; many features were likely derived from the iqta system of the Delhi Sultanate. Amara-nayakas were military commanders given territories to govern; they collected taxes, retained part of revenue for personal use and to maintain horses/elephants contingents, sent annual tribute and appeared in court personally with gifts (NCERT §2.3, p. 175).
- The word amara is believed to come from Sanskrit samara (battle) and resembles the Persian amir (high noble) (NCERT §2.3, p. 175).
- The city's natural basin is formed by the river Tungabhadra (flowing north-easterly), surrounded by stunning granite hills; embankments on streams created reservoirs in this arid zone (NCERT §3.1, p. 177).
- The Kamalapuram tank (built early 15th century) irrigated nearby fields and supplied the royal centre; the Hiriya canal, built by the Sangama dynasty, drew water from a

dam across the Tungabhadra and irrigated the valley separating the sacred centre from the urban core (NCERT §3.1, p. 177).

- Abdur Razzaq, Persian ambassador to Calicut in the 15th century, recorded seven lines of forts; the outermost enclosed agricultural hinterland and forests, was built of wedge-shaped stone blocks without mortar, slightly tapered, with square/rectangular bastions (NCERT §3.2, p. 177).
- Including farmland inside the fort was an expensive defensive strategy against long sieges (whose normal aim was to starve defenders) — instead of relying on granaries, the rayas protected the agricultural belt itself (NCERT §3.2, p. 178).
- The fortification arch and dome (Fig. 7.6) are typical Indo-Islamic features introduced by the Turkish Sultans, evolved through interaction with local building practices (NCERT §3.2, p. 178).
- The north-eastern urban core had Chinese porcelain (suggesting rich traders) and a Muslim residential quarter with tombs and mosques whose architecture resembles the mandapas of Hampi temples (NCERT §3.3, pp. 178–179).
- Barbosa (Portuguese, 16th century) described the ordinary houses as "thatched, but nonetheless well built and arranged according to occupations, in long streets with many open places" (NCERT §3.3, p. 179).
- The royal centre lay in the south-western part and included over 60 temples; about 30 building complexes have been identified as palaces — secular structures had perishable superstructures while temples were entirely masonry (NCERT §4, pp. 179–180).
- The "Mahanavami dibba" sits on one of the highest points; it is a massive platform on an 11,000 sq. ft base rising to 40 ft, with relief carvings at the base and once supporting a wooden structure (NCERT §4.1, p. 180).
- Mahanavami (the great ninth day) is associated with the ten-day Hindu festival known variously as Dusehra (north), Durga Puja (Bengal), Navaratri/Mahanavami (peninsular India); ceremonies included worship of image and state horse, sacrifice of buffaloes, dances, wrestling, processions of caparisoned animals and review of armies; on the last day the king inspected nayaka armies and received tribute (NCERT §4.1, pp. 180–181).
- The Lotus Mahal was so named by British travellers in the 19th century; Mackenzie's map suggested it may have been a council chamber; its arches reflect Indo-Islamic technique (NCERT §4.2, pp. 181–182).
- The Hazara Rama temple, probably reserved for the king and his family, has sculpted panels including scenes from the Ramayana on the inner walls of the central shrine (images now missing) (NCERT §4.2, p. 183).
- Local tradition holds that the rocky northern hills sheltered the monkey kingdom of Vali and Sugriva from the Ramayana, and that Pampadevi did penance there to marry Virupaksha (a form of Shiva), guardian deity of the kingdom; the marriage is

celebrated annually at the Virupaksha temple; Jaina temples of the pre-Vijayanagara period also exist (NCERT §5.1, p. 184).

- All royal orders were signed "Shri Virupaksha" usually in Kannada script; rulers also used the title "Hindu Suratrana" — a Sanskritisation of the Arabic Sultan, literally "Hindu Sultan" (NCERT §5.1, p. 184).
- New temple features included raya gopurams (royal gateways often dwarfing the central shrine towers), mandapas (pavilions) and pillared corridors around shrines (NCERT §5.2, p. 185).
- The Virupaksha temple's earliest shrine dates to the 9th–10th centuries; Krishnadeva Raya built the hall in front of the main shrine to mark his accession and is credited with constructing the eastern gopuram (NCERT §5.2, pp. 186–187).
- The Vitthala temple's principal deity Vitthala is a form of Vishnu generally worshipped in Maharashtra — its introduction in Karnataka shows the rayas drew on diverse traditions; the temple has a unique chariot-shaped shrine; chariot streets paved with stone slabs and lined with pillared pavilions (where merchants set up shops) extended from temple gopurams (NCERT §5.2, pp. 187–188).
- Foreign travellers who described the city: Nicolo de Conti (Italian trader), Abdur Razzaq (Persian ambassador), Afanasii Nikitin (Russian merchant) — all 15th century; Duarte Barbosa, Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz (Portuguese) — 16th century (NCERT §3 box, p. 176).
- Hampi was preserved by the ASI and Karnataka Department of Archaeology; declared a site of national importance in 1976; in the early 1980s a major documentation project mapped the site using a grid of 25 squares each lettered (NCERT §6, pp. 188–189).
- Hampi was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1986 (NCERT Timeline 2, p. 193).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Karnataka samrajyamu	Contemporary term used for what historians call the Vijayanagara Empire	171
Gajapati	"Lord of elephants" — a powerful 15th-century Orissa ruling lineage	172
Ashvapati	"Lord of horses" — popular Vijayanagara term for the Deccan Sultans	172
Narapati	"Lord of men" — popular Vijayanagara term for the rayas	172
Kudirai chettis	Local communities of horse merchants	172
Raya	Title used by the kings of Vijayanagara	172
Nayaka		175

Term	Definition	Page
	Military chief, usually Telugu/Kannada-speaking, controlling forts with armed followers	
Amara-nayaka	Military commander given territory to govern in lieu of cash; derived possibly from samara (Sanskrit, "battle") or amir (Persian, "high noble")	175
Iqta	Delhi Sultanate institution from which features of the amara-nayaka system were likely derived	175
Yavana	Sanskrit word for Greeks and other peoples entering the subcontinent from the north-west	174
Amuktamalyada	Telugu work on statecraft composed by Krishnadeva Raya	173
Hindu Suratrana	"Hindu Sultan" — title used by Vijayanagara rulers, a Sanskritisation of Arabic Sultan	184
Raya gopuram	Royal gateway tower often dwarfing the central shrine's tower	185
Mandapa	Pavilion / pillared hall in a temple complex	185
Mahanavami dibba	Massive 40-ft platform in the royal centre used during the ten-day Mahanavami festival	180
Kalyana mandapa	Mandapa meant to celebrate divine weddings	186
Indo-Islamic	Architectural style growing from interaction of Turkish Sultanate forms (arch, dome) with local practices	178

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Map 1 (p. 174):** South India c. 14th–18th century — locate Vijayanagara on the Tungabhadra, Bijapur, Golconda, Bidar, Ahmadnagar, Gulbarga, Goa, Chandragiri (Aravidu capital), Penukonda, Madurai, Thanjavur, Ikkeri, Mysore, Chitradurga (nayaka centres).
- **Fig. 7.4 Plan of Vijayanagara (p. 176):** identify three zones — sacred centre, urban core, royal centre; channels connecting to the Tungabhadra; multiple fortification walls; note the sacred centre was NOT fortified in the same fashion.
- **Fig. 7.5 Aqueduct into the royal centre (p. 177):** illustrates water conduction from tanks into the royal area.
- **Fig. 7.6 Gateway in the fortification wall (p. 178):** dome and arch — typical Indo-Islamic features.
- **Fig. 7.7 Gopuram (p. 178):** raya gopuram type — tall tapering tower defining temple entrance.
- **Fig. 7.11–7.12 Mahanavami dibba and relief carvings (p. 180):** the platform's base is covered with relief sculpture.
- **Fig. 7.13–7.15 Lotus Mahal (pp. 181–182):** nine towers (one central + eight along the sides); arches inspired by Indo-Islamic technique.

- **Fig. 7.16–7.17 Elephant stables (p. 182):** elevation and plan close to the Lotus Mahal.
- **Fig. 7.20–7.21 Virupaksha temple aerial and plan (p. 185):** two major gateways shaded in black; rows of pillars defining halls and corridors.
- **Fig. 7.24 Vitthala temple chariot shrine (p. 187).**
- **Fig. 7.27–7.30 Detailed survey grid (pp. 189–190):** 25 squares (one alphabet letter not used), each subdivided.
- **Timeline 1 (p. 193):** Delhi Sultanate 1206, Vijayanagara 1336, Bahmani 1347, Gajapati Orissa 1435, Ahmadnagar/Bijapur/Berar 1490, Portuguese Goa 1510, Golconda 1518, Babur's Mughal Empire 1526.
- **Timeline 2 (p. 193):** Mackenzie 1800; Greenlaw photographs 1856; Fleet inscriptions 1876; conservation under John Marshall 1902; UNESCO World Heritage 1986.

## 2.5 Timeline / Key events

Year / Period	Event	Significance
1206 CE	Delhi Sultanate founded by Qutbuddin Aibak	Indo-Islamic political background (NCERT timeline 1, p. 193)
1336 CE	Harihara and Bukka found Vijayanagara on the Tungabhadra	Foundation of the empire (NCERT §7.1, p. 173)
1347 CE	Bahmani Sultanate founded in the Deccan	Vijayanagara's northern rival (NCERT p. 193)
1347–1485	Sangama dynasty rules Vijayanagara	Earliest ruling line (NCERT p. 173)
c. 1410	Hiriya canal completed under Sangama	Major hydraulic work (NCERT p. 177)
1435 CE	Gajapati kingdom of Orissa established	Vijayanagara's eastern rival (NCERT p. 193)
1485 CE	Saluva dynasty takes over	(NCERT p. 173)
1490 CE	Bahmani breaks up — Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Berar founded	Deccan Sultanates emerge (NCERT p. 193)
1503 CE	Tuluva dynasty established	(NCERT p. 173)
1509–29 CE	Reign of Krishnadeva Raya	Apex of Vijayanagara; composes <i>Amuktamalyada</i> in Telugu (NCERT §7.1, pp. 173–174)
1510 CE	Portuguese take Goa	(NCERT p. 193)
1518 CE	Golconda Sultanate founded	(NCERT p. 193)
1526 CE	Babur founds the Mughal Empire	

Year / Period	Event	Significance
		Beginning of Mughal rule (NCERT p. 193)
1542 CE	Aravidu dynasty assumes power at Vijayanagara	Last dynasty (NCERT p. 173)
1565 CE	Battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi (Talikota); Vijayanagara routed by combined Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Golconda	Sack and abandonment of Vijayanagara (NCERT §7.1, p. 173)
1565–1600s	Aravidu rulers shift capital to Penukonda, later Chandragiri	Decline (NCERT p. 173)
1800 CE	Colonel Colin Mackenzie surveys Vijayanagara	Beginning of modern documentation (NCERT timeline 2, p. 193)
1856 CE	Alexander Greenlaw's photographs of Vijayanagara	Earliest photographic record (NCERT p. 193)
1876 CE	J.F. Fleet collects inscriptions from the site	Early epigraphy (NCERT p. 193)
1902 CE	Conservation begins under John Marshall as DG ASI	Systematic protection (NCERT p. 193)
1986 CE	Hampi (Vijayanagara) declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site	Global recognition (NCERT p. 193)

## 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Talikota vs Rakshasi-Tangadi** — the 1565 battle has both names; NTA may use either, and trap students who think they are different battles.
- **Bidar is NOT in the 1565 alliance against Vijayanagara** — only Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda are explicitly named (p. 173). NTA may insert Bidar/Berar as a distractor in "which Sultanates combined?" questions.
- **Sequence of dynasties** — Sangama (till 1485) → Saluva (till 1503) → Tuluva (Krishnadeva Raya) → Aravidu (from 1542). Don't swap Saluva and Tuluva.
- **Amuktamalyada is in Telugu, not Sanskrit** — and is by Krishnadeva Raya himself (p. 173).
- **Hiriya canal was built by the Sangama dynasty** (p. 177), not by Krishnadeva Raya. The Kamalapuram tank dates to the early 15th century; a separate large tank is the one Paes saw Krishnadeva Raya constructing.
- **Pampadevi is the local mother goddess** — Hampi is derived from Pampa, not from Hampi being a Sanskrit word.
- **Virupaksha is a form of Shiva**, while Vitthala is a form of Vishnu generally worshipped in Maharashtra — don't swap.

- **Aravidu capital was Penukonda first, then Chandragiri (near Tirupati)** — not Chandragiri first.
- **Seven lines of forts** were noted by Abdur Razzaq (Persian ambassador to Calicut), not Domingo Paes.
- **"Hindu Suratrana"** is a Sanskritisation of Arabic Sultan (not Persian) — literal meaning "Hindu Sultan", not "Hindu warrior".

## Practice MCQs

## PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a high-yield CUET (UG) topic from Themes in Indian History — Part II, typically generating about 15 MCQs per year across the 2023–25 cycle. Past papers favour (a) factual recall of dynasties, dates and the 1565 battle, (b) source-criticism questions naming travellers (Razzaq, Paes, Nuniz, Conti, Nikitin, Barbosa), (c) identification of monuments (Mahanavami dibba, Lotus Mahal, Virupaksha, Vitthala, Hazara Rama, elephant stables) and (d) statement-based or assertion–reason items on the amara-nayaka system, water-works (Hiriya canal, Kamalapuram tank) and the spatial layout (sacred centre / urban core / royal centre).

### CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.17 (CUET 2023)** According to tradition and epigraphic evidence, who were the two brothers who founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336?

- A) Harihara and Bukka B) Babur and Humayun C) Krishnadeva Raya and Achyuta Raya D) Alauddin and Muhammad Tughlaq **Tests:** Foundation of Vijayanagara by Harihara and Bukka (1336) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.18 (CUET 2023)** Who brought to light the ruins at Hampi in 1800?

- A) Alexander Greenlaw B) J. F. Fleet C) John Marshall D) Colin Mackenzie **Tests:** Rediscovery of Hampi — Colin Mackenzie (1800) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.19 (CUET 2023)** The Amara-Nayaka system of Vijayanagara was similar to which system of the Delhi Sultanate?

- A) Iqta System B) Zamindari System C) Ryotwari System D) Mahalwari System **Tests:** Amara-Nayaka system and its parallels with the Iqta system **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.20 (CUET 2023)** Hampi was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in which year?

- A) 1964 B) 1982 C) 1986 D) 1990 **Tests:** Hampi as UNESCO World Heritage Site (1986) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.21 (CUET 2023)** Which dynasties were related to the Vijayanagara Empire? A. Sangama B. Aravidu C. Tuluva D. Hoysala

- A) A, B and C B) A, C and D C) B, C and D D) A, B, C and D **Tests:** Dynasties of Vijayanagara — Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, Aravidu **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.76 (CUET 2023)** The Vijayanagara Empire was located in:

- A) Northern India B) Eastern India C) Southern India D) Western India **Tests:** Foundation and location of Vijayanagara in the south **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.77 (CUET 2023)** The famous ruler of the Vijayanagara Empire was:

- A) Krishnadeva Raya B) Babur C) Sher Shah D) Alauddin Khalji **Tests:** Krishnadeva Raya and the height of Vijayanagara **Answer:** Not in extracted key

### CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.3 (CUET 2024)** Which among the following travellers visited the city of Vijayanagara during the 15th century? (A) Domingo Paes (B) Abdur Razzaq (C) Afanasii Nikitin (D) Fernao Nuniz (E) Nicolo de Conti Options:

- A) (B), (C) and (E) only B) (C), (D) and (E) only C) (A), (B) and (D) only D) (B), (C) and (D) only **Tests:** Foreign travellers to Vijayanagara — Paes, Razzaq, Nikitin, Nuniz, Conti **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.7 (CUET 2024)** Who founded the Vijayanagara Empire?

- A) Krishnadeva Raya B) Harihara and Bukka C) Raja Raya D) Rajendra II **Tests:** Foundation of Vijayanagara by Harihara and Bukka **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.42 (CUET 2024)** Match List-I with List-II. List-I List-II (A) Alexander Greenlaw (I) Documenting the inscriptions on temple walls (B) John Marshall (II) Visits Vijayanagara in 1800 (C) J. F. Fleet (III) Conservation works of Vijayanagara began under him (D) Colin Mackenzie (IV) Detailed photography at Hampi Choose the correct answer:

- A) (A-III), (B-IV), (C-II), (D-I) B) (A-IV), (B-III), (C-I), (D-II) C) (A-IV), (B-I), (C-III), (D-II) D) (A-I), (B-IV), (C-III), (D-II) **Tests:** Rediscovery and documentation of Hampi — Mackenzie, Greenlaw, Marshall, Fleet **Answer:** Not in extracted key

### CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.13 (CUET 2025)** Why were agricultural tracts incorporated within Vijayanagara's fortified area?

- A) Protect agricultural belt B) Provide fruits and vegetables to royal family C) Beautify capital D) Use fields as line of defence **Tests:** Vijayanagara fortifications and the agricultural belt **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.14 (CUET 2025)** In Vijayanagara, water from which structure was carried through channel to the royal centre?

- A) Lotus tank B) Hiriya canal C) Vijaya canal D) Kamalapuram tank **Tests:** Water management — Kamalapuram tank and Hiriya canal **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.39 (CUET 2025)** The rulers of Vijayanagara called themselves:

- A) Rayas B) Nayakas C) Kudiraigas D) Samrajyapatis
- Tests:** Vijayanagara rulers — title  
**Answer:** Not in extracted key

