

**History Optional Test Series:** OPEN TEST - 1

**Q. No:** Evaluate the significance of Vijaya Nagar Empire in the history of medieval India. (**OPSC 2019 Paper 1 question No: 8.**)

**Word limit:** Up to 1000 words along with diagrams (60 Marks)

**: Maintain INTRO-BODY-CONCLUSION format when possible**

**: Use Heading and Subheading for answer clarity (better presentation and understanding)**

**: Stick to the Keywords (what the question demands?)**

**: Use Maps / diagrams/ flowcharts to enhance the quality of content.**

**: You must practice writing in timely and economical manner (60 MARKS: APPROX. 6 PAGES OR 1000 WORDS)**

**: Use paragraph style of writing instead of bullet form**

**Note:** The model answers may exceed the word limit sometime. Thus, whenever you are writing you can shorten the answers through writing crisp answers (eliminating detailed explanation). Otherwise, you can use map, diagram or chart to explain the same answers in short.



## OPSC STUDY: History Optional (UPSC & OPSC)

**Demand of the question** - significance means you have to write down the positive attributes of the Empire.

**What you can write**- Features of the Empire and its importance in medieval history

**Don'ts**- don't criticize in this type of answer

don't get carried away from the question

**How you can plan??** INTRODUCTION-BODY-CONCLUSION format is best suited for this type of questions.

**How to Introduce ??** Just give a brief description of how Vijayanagara empire started.

**Body**- Divided the topic into different dimensions like political- geographic-economic-social-cultural etc and demarcate word limit as per the dimensions.

**Conclusion**- Conclude with contemporary relevance of the topic or quote any historians or thinkers or traveller's work.

### FORMAT

- Introduction
- Political Setup
- Administrative structure
- Economy
- Society
- Cultural and Architectural development
- Conclusion

### Answer-

The inception of Vijayanagara empire is attributed to two brothers **Harihara and Bukka** in the early fourteenth century. Initially Harihara and Bukka had been in the service of Kakatiyas of Warangal but after the fall of Kakatiyas at the hand of Delhi sultanate both were embraced Islam and joined the service of sultanate. Very soon they became favourites of the sultanate.

A political turmoil arose in Deccan when Hoysalas took over Kampili, a sultanate province. Harihara and Bukka were sent to restore the situation. After the



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restoration work is done both brothers converted back into Hindu fold by saint Vidyanaraya then they declared independence and established the powerful Vijayanagar kingdom at Vijayanagara (present day Hampi) on the south bank of Tungabhadra.

The Vijayanagar kingdom was successively ruled by four dynasties over a period of more than three hundred years: the Sangama dynasty, the Saluva dynasty, the Tuluva dynasty and the Aravidu dynasty. Because of such long rule the significance of vijayanagara empire can be attributed to many field . *It's political setup, bureaucratic structure, economic lifestyle, social setting and cultural & architectural developments have it's own significance in the history of medieval times.*

### **POLITICAL SETUP**

The polity of Vijayanagara was of religious nature but they are known for their unique features like -

**1) Ritual kingship:** Adherence to Dharma was the distinct features of vijayanagara rulers. Vijayanagara kingship was symbolic in the sense that the rulers exercised their control through their overlords over a region beyond their authority. This was done by means of religion which ensures loyalty from the public. In major festivals like **mahanavami** where important personnel were participated, king himself have to perform all the ritual rites which act as a medium for recognition of the sovereignty of vijayanagara rulers.

**2) Kings, sects, temples:** Vijayanagara rulers in order to legitimize their power over distant Tamil region sought the help of vaisnavite leaders of the locality. Whereby these local sectarian leaders act as a bridge between rulers and the temples through routine supervision in the name of the sovereign power. In this way temples act as an institution for sustaining kingship.

**3) Political and Secular role of Brahmanas:** The most distinct feature of vijayanagara state was the secular roles of Brahmanas. They were in charge of forts , compete for administrative posts. Literary sources mentioned that imperial court was full of Brahmanas. Apart from that Brahmanas also played an important role as military commanders.

### **Administrative structure**

The king was the ultimate authority in the kingdom. He was also the supreme commander of the army. He was assisted by several highranking officers. The chief minister was known as the **mahapradhani**. He led a number of lower ranking



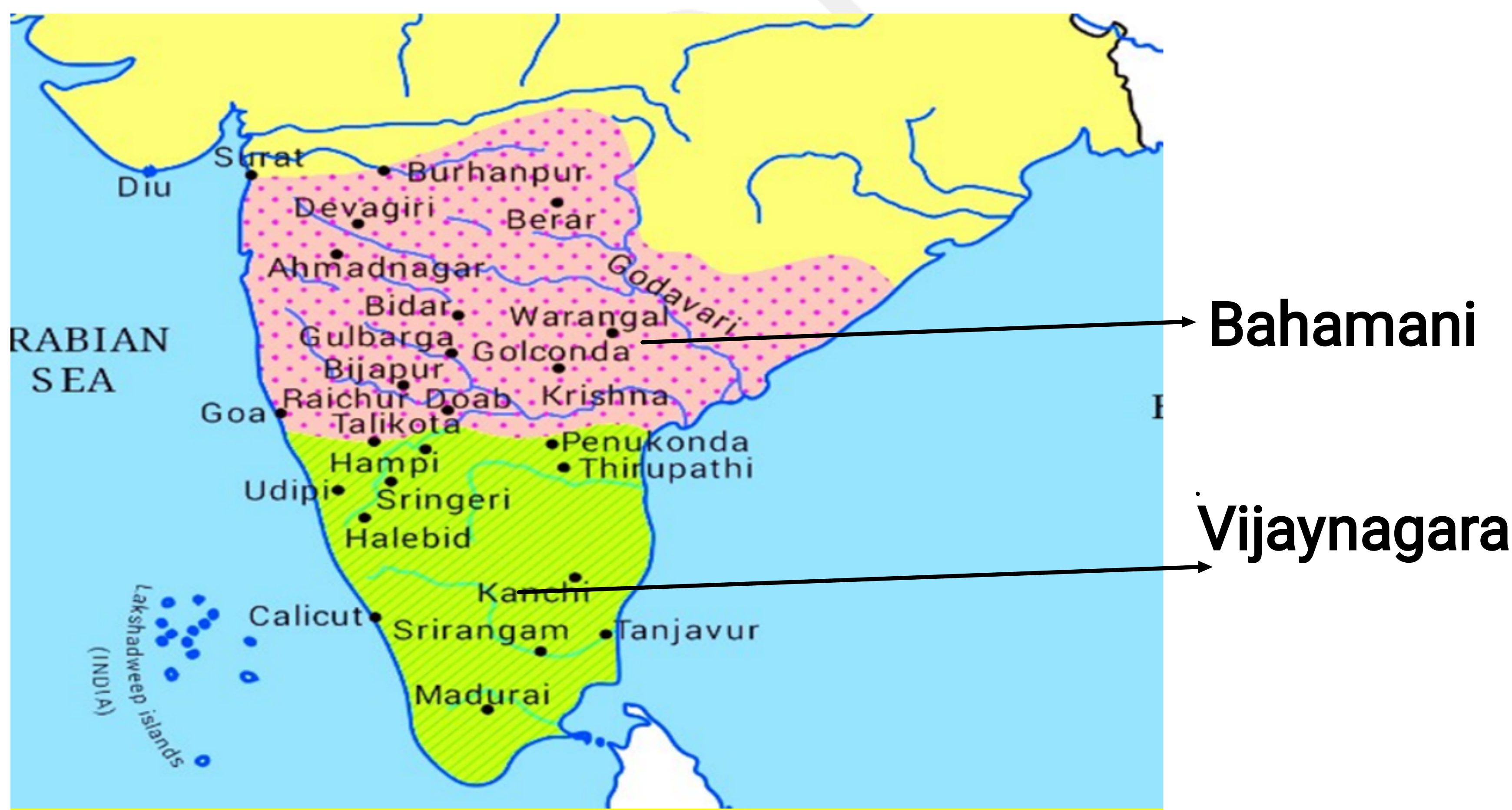
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officers for the functioning of the state but Nayakar and Ayagar system are the important characteristics of vijayanagara empire.

**1) Nayak System:** The institution of Nayaka was studied detailed by two Portuguese Traveller Fernao Nuniz and Domingo Peas.

Nuniz stated that the Vijayanagar kingdom at that time was divided between more than two hundred Nayakas and they were compelled to keep certain number of military forces (horses and foot soldiers) to serve the king in times of need: they were also required to pay certain amount of the revenue to the king in particular times of a year, like during the nine-day Mahanavami festival.

Historians like D.C.Sircar and Mahalingam opined that amara-nayakas were military commanders who were given territories to govern by the Raya. They collected taxes and other dues from peasants, craftsmen and traders in the area. They retained part of the revenue for personal use and for maintaining a stipulated contingent of horses and elephants. These contingents provided the Vijayanagara kings with an effective fighting force with which they brought the entire southern peninsula under their control.



**2) Ayagar system:** Ayagars were village servants or functionaries and constituted of group of families. They work as village headman, accountant, watchman. They were given a portion of plot mostly manya (tax free) lands where no agricultural tax was imposed. The distinguishing feature of the system is that special allocation of income from land and specific cash payments were provided to village servants holding a



particular office. In this way rural administration was also taken into consideration.

### **Economy**

**1) Land revenue:** Land-revenue was the major source of state's income. Rate of revenue demand varied in different parts of the empire, it was generally 1/6th of the produce, but in some cases it was even more ranging up to 1/4th. It was payable both in cash and kind. As per the data provided by **surveyor Colin Mackenzie**. There were three major categories of land - **Bhandaravada and Manya, Amara**.

The Bhandaravada was a crown village comprising the smallest category some part of its income was utilised to maintain the Vijaynagar forts.

Income from the Manya (tax-free) villages was used to maintain the Brahmans, temples, and mathas.

The largest category was of the Amara villages given by the Vijaynagar rulers to the amaranayakas. Their holders did not possess proprietary rights in land but enjoyed - privileges over its income only. 3/4th of all the villages came under this category.

**2) Economic Role of Temples:** During the Vijaynagar period, temples emerged as important landholders. Many villages were granted to the deities which were worshipped in the large temple. Temple officers managed the devadana villages to ensure that the grant was utilised properly. The income from devadana villages provided sustenance to the ritual functionaries.

In this way temples emerged as an important centre of economic activity. They were not only great landholders but they also carried on banking activities. They employed a number of persons. Temples purchased local goods for performance of ritual services. They gave loans to individuals and village assemblies for economic purposes.

Thus, the temples functioned almost as an independent economic system encompassing persons and institutions that were bound together by economic links.

**3) Trade:** We get information about foreign trade from the **Amuktamalyada of Krishnadeva Raya, Domingo Paes and Nuniz**. They give vivid description of horse trade. The role of the Indians in the overseas carrying trade was minimal. **Barboaa** mentioned that Indian overseas trade was majorly controlled by Muslim merchants but Local communities of merchants known as chettis also participated in these exchanges.

In **Amuktamalyada, Krishnadeva Raya** mentions the duty of king toward the traders. He stated that A king should improve the harbours of his country and so encourage its commerce that horses, elephants, precious gems, sandalwood, pearls and other articles are freely imported. He should arrange that the foreign sailors who land in his country on account of storms, illness and exhaustion are looked after in a



suitable manner.

These accounts shows that local and long distance trade was increased under vijayanagara rulers.

### **Society**

The social structure of the vijayanagara empire was a unique variant of the Indian society. The uniqueness of the social structure was Territorial segmentation of the society and Dual division of lower social groups.

**1) Territorial segmentation of society** implies that social groups in the Tamil country were divided on the basis of natural sub-region and occupational patterns so social groups in South India had less interaction with groups at some distance from their locality. They gave preference to cross-cousin and maternal uncle-niece marriages.

**2) Dual division of lower castes** referred to by the right and left-hand designations (Vaishnavas corresponding to the right hand division and the Saivites corresponding to the left hand castes).

In most cases, the right-hand castes were involved primarily in Agricultural production and local trade whereas left-hand castes were engaged in mobile artisan production and extensive trade in non-agricultural products.

**Alssani Peddana in his work Manucharitram** referred to the existence of four Castes (brahamana, ks htriya, vais hya, sudra) in vijayanagara society.

**Nicolo Conti witnessed** the presence of slavery and practicing of sati system.

**Domingo Paes** refers to the flourishing Devadas i system.

### **Cultural and Architectural development:**

**1) Temples-** The Vijayanagar rulers were great builders. During this period, palaces, temples, huge halls (mahamantapa), forts, towers, public buildings, dams, tanks and canals were constructed.

South Indian art and architecture attained a new fullness. The Vijayanagar rulers produced a new style of architecture called as **Dravida style**. The chief characteristics of the Vijayanagara architecture were the construction of tall **Raya Gopurams** or gateways and the **Kalyanamandapam**. The sculptures on the pillars were carved with distinctive features. The horse was the most common animal to be depicted on the pillars.

Krishnadeva Raya was a great builder. He founded a town Nagalapura in memory of his mother, Nagamba and built tanks, gopurams and temples in various



parts of empire. The most famous among these temples are the Vittalawamy temple and Virupaksha temples, Hazara temple.

**2) Irrigation system:** Apart from temples other developments like irrigation system was well established during vijayanagara times. The most striking feature about the location of Vijayanagara is the natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra which flows in a north-easterly direction. Embankments were built along the streams to create reservoirs of varying sizes. As this is one of the most arid zones of the peninsula, elaborate arrangements had to be made to store rainwater and conduct it to the city. The most important such tank was built in the early years of the fifteenth century and is now called **Kamalapuram tank**. Water from this tank not only irrigated fields nearby but was also conducted through a channel to the “royal centre”.

**3) Fortification of city:** It was another striking feature of the empire was fortification of the empire. **Abdur Razzaq**, an ambassador sent by the ruler of Persia in the fifteenth century was greatly impressed by the fortifications, and mentioned seven lines of forts. These encircled not only the city but also its agricultural hinterland and forests. The outermost wall linked the hills surrounding the city. No mortar or cementing agent was employed anywhere in the construction. The stone blocks were wedge shaped, which held them in place, and the inner portion of the walls was of earth packed with rubble.

**4) Literary developments:** The Vijayanagara rulers were also great patrons of literature. The rulers encouraged Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada literatures and languages. The literary development reached its peak during the reign of Krishnadeva Raya. He was also a great patron of art and literature, and was known as ‘Andhra Bhoja’.

Eight great poets adorned his court. They were known as **Ashtadiggajas**. Allasani Peddanna was the greatest and he was often described as ‘**Andhrakavita Pitamaha**’. Allasani Peddanna was the author of Manucharitam. Krishnadeva Raya himself wrote Amuktamlayada and Jambavati.

Literary developments in southern India reached its zenith during the vijayanagara rule.

Vijayanagara empire's uniqueness in the field of Polity, economy, society, architectural developments creates its distinct space in the medieval history. Vijayanagara empire constitutes peoples from different religious beliefs, different linguistics orientation, different cultures, different geographies still it remain intact for four hundred years which shows the **social tolerance** of the Vijayanagara society. Because of all such features it has its own significance in the medieval history of India.