

Provincial Kingdoms of Medieval India (Vijayanagara & Bahmani Kingdoms)

At its zenith, the Delhi Sultanate included states like Bihar, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, the Deccan states of Warangal, the Yadavas of Devagiri, Telangana, the southern state of the Hoysalas of Dwarasamudra, the Pandyas of Madurai and various states of Rajputana like Jalore, Ranthambore, Ajmer, Nagore. However, the process of disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate started around the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq (after the 13th century) due to internal instabilities. Some of the provincial kingdoms declared independence from the rule of the Delhi Sultanate and the Vijayanagara Kingdom, the Bahmani Kingdom, the Sultanate in Gujarat, Bengal, Malwa and Jaunpur near Varanasi emerged as powerful provincial kingdoms of medieval India.

In this article, you can read all about the two important provincial kingdoms that emerged namely, the Vijayanagara and the Bahmani kingdoms. This is an important part of the [UPSC exam](#) medieval history segment.

Deccan and Southern India [Medieval India]

Two important kingdoms that emerged in the aftermath of the Delhi Sultanate's disintegration are the Vijayanagara and the Bahmani kingdoms.

Vijayanagara Kingdom (c. 1336 - 1672 CE)

Four dynasties ruled the Vijayanagara Kingdom - Sangama (c. 1336 - 1485 CE), Saluva (c. 1485 - 1503 CE), Tuluva (c. 1503 - 1570 CE) and Aravidu (till the end of the 17th century). Many foreign travellers like the Moroccan Ibn Batuta, Persian [Abdur Razzak](#), Venetian Nicolo de Conti and Portuguese Domingo Paes who visited the kingdom have given valuable accounts on the socio-economic conditions of the kingdom. There are archaeological, literary and numismatic sources available that help in understanding the various aspects of the Vijayanagara Kingdom. **Srirangam Copper plates of Devaraya II** provide the genealogy and achievements of its rulers. The Hampi ruins and other monuments depict the cultural aspects of the period. The kingdom included people from different cultural regions (Karnataka, Telugu and Tamil) who spoke different languages and had different cultures. In the south, the Sultans of Madurai were the main opponents of the Vijayanagara Kingdom. By c. 1377 CE, the Sultanate of Madurai was wiped out and the [Vijayanagara Kingdom](#) included the whole of south India, up to Rameshwaram, including Tamil country as well as Cheras (Kerala). In the north, they were in constant conflicts with the Bahmani Kingdom.

Sangama Dynasty

Harihara and Bukka (c. 1336 - 1377 CE)

- The Vijayanagara kingdom was founded by Harihara and Bukka who belonged to a family of five brothers.
- According to a legend, they had been the feudatories of the Kakatiyas of Warangal and later became ministers in the kingdom of Kampili in modern Karnataka. When Kampili was overrun by Muhammad bin Tughlaq for giving refuge to a Muslim rebel, Harihara and Bukka were imprisoned and converted to Islam and appointed to deal with the rebellion there. Later they forsook their new master and returned to their old Hindu faith at the initiative of saint Vidyaranya. The two brothers founded a new city, Vijayanagara (city of victory), on the south bank of river Tungabhadra.
- The dissolution of the Hoysala kingdom enabled Harihara and Bukka to expand their tiny principality. By c. 1346 CE, the whole of the Hoysala kingdom had passed into the hands of the Vijayanagara rulers. In this struggle, they were aided by their brothers and by their relations who took up the administration of the areas conquered by their efforts. The Vijayanagara kingdom was, thus, a kind of cooperative commonwealth at first.
- Bukka succeeded his brother to the throne of Vijayanagara in c. 1356 CE and ruled till c. 1377 CE.
- The rising power of the Vijayanagara empire brought it into conflict with many powers both in the south as well as in the north. In the south, its main rivals were the Sultans of Madurai. By c. 1377 CE, the Sultanate of Madurai had been completely wiped out.

Harihara II (c. 1377 - 1406 CE)

- The Vijayanagara empire undertook the policy of expansion towards the eastern seacoast under Harihara II. He extended his empire through a series of conflicts against the Reddis of Kondavidu for the control of Andhra between Nellore and Kalinga. Harihara II conquered the Addanki and Srisailem areas as well as most of the territory between the peninsula to the south of the Krishna river, which eventually brought him in confrontation with the Velamas to fight for Rachakonda (Telangana).
- According to legends, the ruler of Warangal had helped Hasan Gangu (Bahmani Sultanate founder) in his struggle against Delhi, but his successor had invaded Warangal and seized the stronghold of the Kaulas and the hill fort of Golconda. The Bahmani Sultan fixed Golconda as the boundary of his kingdom and promised that neither he nor his successors would encroach Warangal any further. The alliance of the Bahmani kingdom and Warangal lasted for over 50 years and was a major factor in the inability of Vijayanagara to overrun the Tungabhadra doab, or to stem the Bahmani offensive in the area.
- Harihara II was able to maintain his position in the face of the Bahmani-Warangal alliance. His greatest success was in wresting Belgaum and Goa in the west from the Bahmani kingdom. He also sent an expedition to north Sri Lanka.

Deva Raya I (c. 1406 - 1422 CE)

- Early in his reign, there was a renewed fight for the Tungabhadra doab. He was defeated by the Bahmani ruler, Firoz Shah and had to pay a huge indemnity. He also married his daughter to the Sultan. However, this peace was short-lived and later Deva Raya I entered into an alliance with the ruler of Warangal which shifted the balance of power in the Deccan towards Deva Raya I. In c. 1420 CE, Firoz Shah invaded Pangal which had been taken by Vijayanagara but this time Deva Raya I inflicted a shattering defeat on Firoz Shah Bahmani. By c. 1422 CE, Deva Raya I annexed the territory up to Krishna-Tungabhadra doab including Pangal.
- Deva Raya I constructed a dam across the Tungabhadra so that he could bring canals into the city to reduce the shortage of water. He also built a dam on the river Haridra for irrigation purposes.
- He was a secular ruler in matters of administration and had thousands of Muslims in his army.
- Nicolo Conti, an Italian traveller and Nikitin, a Russian merchant who authored the book 'Voyage to India' visited the kingdom during his reign.
- He patronised Kannada literature and architecture. An excellent example of Deccan architecture, Hazara Rama temple was built during his reign.

Deva Raya II (c. 1425 - 1446 CE)

- He is considered to be the greatest ruler of the Sangama dynasty. In order to strengthen his army, he reorganized it and incorporated many features of the armies of the Delhi Sultanate. His large cavalry and standing army made Vijayanagara empire a more centralized polity than any of the Hindu kingdoms in the south.
- Deva Raya II crossed the Tungabhadra river in c. 1443 CE and tried to recover Mudkal, Bankapur, etc which were south of the Krishna river and had been lost to the Bahmani rulers earlier. Three hard battles were fought, but in the end, the two sides had to agree to the existing frontiers.
- According to Nuniz, a Portuguese traveller of the 16th century, the kings of Quilon, Sri Lanka, Pulicat, Pegu and Tenasserim (in Burma and Malaya) paid tributes to Deva Raya II.
- The Persian traveller Abdur Razzaq visited Vijayanagara during the reign of Deva Raya II. He considers Vijayanagara to be one of the splendid cities in the world.
- Deva Raya was a man of letters and authored Sobagina Sone and Amaruka in the Kannada language, and Mahanataka Sudhanidhi in the Sanskrit language. He also wrote a commentary on the Brahmasutra.
- He was titled 'Gaja Betegara' which literally means 'hunter of elephants' that explained his addiction to hunting elephants or a metaphor referring to his victories against enemies who were as strong as elephants.

The next dynasty, **Saluva** was founded by Saluva Narasimha which reigned for a short period from c. 1486 - 1509 CE.

Tuluva Dynasty

Vira Narasimha Raya (c. 1505 - 1509 CE)

- The Tuluva dynasty was founded by Vira Narasimha Raya.

Krishna Deva Raya (c. 1509 - 1529 CE)

- He is considered to be the greatest of the Vijayanagara rulers. He was known as Andhra Pitama, Andhra Bhoja and Abhinava Bhoja.
- He fought wars against the independent kingdoms (Deccan Sultanates) that came upon the ruins of the Bahmani kingdom. The Muslim forces were decisively defeated in the Battle of Diwani. Then he invaded Raichur Doab which resulted in the confrontation with the Sultan of Bijapur, Ismail Adil Shah. Krishna Deva Raya defeated him and captured the city of Raichur in c. 1520 CE. He also set free the three Bahmani princes who were imprisoned there. He thus restored the Bahmani Sultanate to Muhammad Shah. Krishna Deva Raya's Orissa campaign was also successful. He defeated the Gajapathi ruler Prataparudra and conquered the whole of Telangana. He had friendly relations with the Portuguese and King Albuquerque sent his ambassadors to Krishna Deva Raya.
- He himself was a Vaishnavite but showed respect for all faiths.
- Krishna Deva Raya was known for his intellectual abilities and was a great patron of art and literature. His royal court was adorned with eight eminent scholars known as 'Ashta diggajas'. Allasani Peddanna was the greatest scholar and was known as Andhrakavita Pitamaga. His important works include Manucharitam and Harikathasaram. Pingali Suranna and Tenali Ramakrishna were other renowned scholars. Krishna Deva Raya himself authored a Telugu work, Amukthamalyadha and Sanskrit works, Jambavati Kalyanam and Ushaparinayam.
- He constructed the famous Vittalaswamy and Hazara Ramaswamy stone temples at Vijayanagara. He also repaired many south Indian temples and built a large number of Rayagopurams or gateways to many important south Indian temples. He also built a new city called Nagalapuram near Vijayanagar.

Achyuta Deva Raya (c. 1529 - 1542 CE)

- After the death of Krishna Deva Raya, his younger brother Achyuta Deva Raya ascended to the throne.
- During his reign, a Portuguese traveller Fernao Nuniz visited India.
- His son Venkata I succeeded him. He was a weak ruler and was murdered six months later. Then, Krishna Deva's son Sada Siva Raya ascended the throne. Being a minor, the real power lay in the hands of Aravidu Aliya Rama Raya, son-in-law of Krishna Deva Raya (the word, Aliya means son-in-law in the Kannada language). Rama Raya was an efficient army general who led many successful campaigns during the reign of Krishna Deva Raya.

Sada Siva Raya (c. 1542 - 1570 CE)

- He was the last ruler of the Tuluva dynasty.
- The whole empire was run by Aliya Rama Raya and Sada Siva Raya acted merely as a puppet.
- Rama Raya tried to balance the Deccan powers by playing one against the other. He constantly changed sides to improve his position which prompted the Deccan states (Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Golkonda and Bidar except for Berar) to form an alliance. They combined to inflict a crushing defeat on the Vijayanagara armies at Bannihatti in the **Battle of Talaikotta (Talikota)** in c. 1565 CE. This battle is also called Rakshasa Thangadi. Rama Raya was imprisoned and immediately executed.
- Vijayanagara was looted and left in ruins. The Battle of Bannihatti is generally considered to mark the end of the Vijayanagara Empire (Caesar Fredrick visited Vijayanagara after the battle of Talaikotta).

The Vijayanagara kingdom continued to exist under the Aravidu dynasty for about another century. The dynasty ruled from Penukonda and later from Chandragiri (near Tirupati). The last ruler of the kingdom was Sri Ranga III (c. 1642 - 1646 CE).

Vijayanagara Kingdom Administration

- The king was the absolute authority in judicial, executive and legislative matters.
- Succession to the throne was largely based on the principle of heredity, however, sometimes usurpation to the throne also occurred (when Saluva Narasimha ended the Sangama dynasty and founded the Saluva dynasty).
- In the Vijayanagara kingdom, the king was advised by a council of ministers which consisted of the great nobles of the kingdom.
- The kingdom was divided into rajyas or mandalam (provinces), below which were nadu (district), sthala (sub-district) and grama (village).
- The Chola traditions of village self-government were considerably weakened under Vijayanagara rulers.
- The growth of hereditary nayakships tended to curb their freedom and initiative.
- At first, the royal princes served as the governors of the provinces. Later, persons belonging to vassal ruling families and nobles were also appointed as governors.
- The provincial governor enjoyed a good measure of autonomy, for example, they had the power to appoint their own officers, held their own courts and had their own armies. At times, they even issued their own coins, though in small denominations.
- The term for a governor depended largely on his abilities and strength. The governor also had the power to levy taxes or remit old ones. Each governor paid a fixed contribution in men and money to the central government.

- Land revenue, tributes and gifts from vassals and feudal chiefs, customs collected at the ports, taxes on various professions were the various sources of income to the government. Land revenue was generally fixed at one-sixth of the produce.

Army and Military Organisation

- The Vijayanagara army was well organized and quite efficient. It consisted of the cavalry, artillery, infantry, and elephants.
- The Vijayanagara rulers imported high-quality horses from Arabia and other Gulf regions.
- The Malabar port was the main centre of this trade and other luxury items.
- The Amara-Nayaka system was prevalent in the Vijayanagara kingdom.
 - The top-grade officers were known as Nayaks or Poligars or Palaiyagars.
 - They were granted land in lieu of the services while the soldiers were usually paid in cash.
 - The Nayaka had the power to collect taxes in his area which was utilized in maintaining his army, elephants, horses and warfare weapons that he had to supply to the Vijayanagara ruler.
 - The Amara-Nayakas sent tributes to the king annually and personally appeared in the courts with gifts to express their loyalty.
- In the 17th century, some of these Nayakas such as those of Tanjore and Madurai claimed independence and established their separate states. These states weakened the structure of the Vijayanagara kingdom contributing to the defeat of the Vijayanagara Empire in the battle of Talaikotta.

Social Life

Four castes were existent in the Vijayanagara society - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Foreign travellers have left vivid accounts of the splendour of buildings and luxurious social life in the city of Vijayanagar. Paes mentions the beautiful houses of the rich and the large number of their household servants. Nicolo Conti refers to the prevalence of slavery. Mainly silk and cotton clothes were used. Gambling, wrestling, dancing, music and cockfighting were the means of entertainment among the masses.

The Sangama rulers were mainly Shaivites and Virupaksha was their family deity while other dynasties were Vaishnavites. The Srivaishnavism of Ramanuja was very popular. However, all kings were tolerant towards other religions. Barbosa referred to the religious freedom enjoyed by everyone. There were Muslims in the administration who were allowed to practise their religion and build mosques. Deva Raya II enrolled Muslims in his army and also allotted lands to them. A large number of temples were built during this period and a number of festivals were celebrated.

The position of women did not see any improvement. However, some of them were learned such as Gangadevi, wife of Kumarakampana, who wrote the famous work Maduravijayam. Hannamma and Thirumalamma were the other two famous poets. Nuniz mentions that a large number of women were employed in the royal palaces as domestic servants, dancers and palanquin bearers. The practice of sati (Sahagaman) was honoured. The attachment of dancing girls to temples (devadasi) was in practice. The royal family also practised polygamy.

Economy

The foreign travellers have mentioned the Vijayanagara kingdom to be one of the wealthiest kingdoms of the world at that time. Agriculture continued to be the main occupation of the people. The Vijayanagara rulers facilitated the growth of agriculture by providing better irrigation facilities like new tanks were built and dams were constructed across rivers like Tungabhadra. Nuniz refers to the excavation of canals.

There were numerous industries and they were organised into guilds. Metalworkers and other craftsmen flourished during this period. Kurnool and Anantapur districts were famous for diamond mines. Varaha was the chief gold coin but weights and measures varied from place to place. Inland, coastal and overseas trade contributed to the prosperity of the kingdom. There were a number of seaports on the Malabar coast, the chief being Cannanore. The kingdom had trade links with Persia, Arabia, South Africa and Portugal on the west and with Burma, the Malay peninsula and China in the east. Cotton, silk, iron, saltpetre, spices and sugar were the main items of export. Horses, copper, pearls, China silk, mercury, coral and velvet clothes were the items of import. The art of shipbuilding had developed.

Cultural Contributions

- A number of temples were built and the main characteristics of the Vijayanagara architecture were the construction of tall Raya Gopurams or gateways and the Kalyanamandapam with carved pillars in the temple premises.
- The sculptures on the pillars were carved with distinctive features (mostly horses).
- Large mandapams contain one hundred pillars as well as one thousand pillars in some big temples.
- Also, many Amman shrines were added to the already existing temples during this period.
- The Vijayanagara style temples were found in the **Hampi ruins** or the city of Vijayanagar.
- The important examples of this style of temples were Vittalaswamy and Hazara Ramaswamy.
- The Varadharaja and Ekamparanatha temples at Kanchipuram speak about the grandeur of the Vijayanagara style of temple architecture.
- The Raya Gopurams at Thiruvannamalai and Chidambaram speak about the glorious epoch of Vijayanagar.
- They were continued by the Nayak rulers in the later period.

- The metal images of Krishna Deva Raya and his queens at Tirupati are examples of the casting of metal images.
- The Vijayanagara rulers also patronised music and dance.

Languages like Telugu, Sanskrit, Kannada and Tamil thrived during this period. Sanskrit and Telugu literature witnessed great development. The literary achievements were at their peak during the reign of Krishna Deva Raya. He himself authored Amukthamalyadha in Telugu and Jambavati Kalyanam and Usha Parinayam in Sanskrit. Allasani Peddanna was his court poet who was a distinguished Telugu scholar. Thus, Vijayanagara rulers contributed immensely to the art and culture of the period.

Bahmani Kingdom

In the 14th century, another powerful kingdom known as [Bahmani Sultanate](#) emerged in south India. Earlier, the Deccan region was part of the provincial administration of the Delhi Sultanate. During the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Amiran-i-Sada also known as Sada Amir (administrative heads of hundred villages) was appointed to establish a stable administration in the Deccan. From c. 1337 CE, the conflict between the officers in the Deccan and Delhi Sultanate intensified which led to the establishment of an independent state in the Deccan with its capital at Gulbarga in Andhra Pradesh. The founder of the state, Hasan Gangu assumed the title Alauddin Hasan Gangu, as he traced his descent from the mythical hero of Iran, Bahman Shah and the kingdom was named the Bahmani Sultanate after him. Later, the Bahmani sultans controlled other regions too, an important one being Dabhol, an important port on the west coast.

Alauddin Hasan Bahman Shah (c. 1347 - 1358 CE)

- The founder of the Bahmani kingdom. His original name was Hasan Gangu and he was an Afghan adventurer.
- The military conflicts between the Vijayanagara and the Bahmani kingdom were almost a regular feature and lasted as long as these kingdoms continued.
- The Bahmani kingdom also had conflicts with the Warangal state. Hasan Gangu led his first campaign against Warangal in c. 1350 CE and forced its ruler Kapaya Nayaka to cede to him the fortress of Kaulas.
- Towards the end of his reign, the kingdom stretched from the Wenganga river to Krishna and east to west from Bhongir to Daulatabad.

Muhammad Shah I (c. 1358 - 1377 CE)

Taj-ud-din Firoz Shah (c. 1397 - 1422 CE)

- He was the most remarkable figure in the Bahmani kingdom. He was well acquainted with the religious sciences (commentaries on the Quran, jurisprudence, etc) and was fond of natural

sciences like botany, geometry, logic, etc. He was a good calligraphist, poet and also composed extempore verses. According to Ferishta, he was well versed in many languages, Persian, Arabic, Turkish and also Telugu, Marathi and Kannada.

- He started the Bahmani expansion towards Berar by defeating the Gond Raja, Narsing Rai of Kherla. Rai had to pay a huge amount of gold, silver and other valuables, also a daughter of Rai was married to him.
- The most remarkable step taken by Firoz Shah Bahmani was the induction of Hindus in his administration, particularly revenue administration.
- He encouraged the study of astronomy and also built an observatory near Daulatabad.
- He gave much importance to the principal ports of his kingdom, Chaul and Dabhol which brought in luxury items from all parts of the world.
- He emerged victorious against Vijayanagara in c. 1398 CE and c. 1408 CE but later, received a setback in c. 1420 CE when he was defeated by Deva Raya I.

Ahmad Shah Wali (c. 1422 - 1435 CE)

- The defeat of Firoz Shah Bahmani in c. 1420 CE weakened his position and he was compelled to abdicate in favour of his brother, Ahmad Shah, who is called a saint (wali) on account of his association with the famous Sufi saint Gesu Daraz.
- He continued the struggle for domination of the eastern seaboard in south India. In the previous battle, the ruler of Warangal had sided with Vijayanagara and in order to avenge the defeat, Ahmad Shah invaded Warangal, defeated and killed its ruler and annexed most of its territories.
- In order to consolidate over the newly acquired territory, he shifted his capital from Gulbarga to Bidar. After this, he was interested in Malwa, Gondwana and the Konkan.

Humayun Shah (c. 1458 - 1461 CE)

- Humayun Shah appointed Mahmud Gawan as a minister who introduced many reforms. After Humayun's death, Gawan became the regent to his minor son prince Nizam Shah (c. 1461 - 1463 CE) and governed the kingdom. However, the young sultan died in c. 1463 CE and his brother Muhammad Shah III who was only nine years old, succeeded him (c. 1463 - 1482 CE) and Mahmud Gawan served as his prime minister. The Bahmani kingdom reached its peak during the reign of Muhammad Shah III due to the efficient governance by Mahmud Gawan.

Mahmud Gawan (c. 1461 - 1481 CE)

- The Bahmani kingdom reached its height of power and territorial limits during the prime ministership of Mahmud Gawan. He was a Persian trader. He was granted the title of "Malik-ut-Tujjar" (chief of merchants) by the ruler Humayun Shah. Later, he was made wazir (prime minister) due to his capabilities and was given the title of "Khwaju-i-Jahan".

- He extended the Bahmani kingdom by making further annexations. He conquered Vijayanagara territories up to Kanchi. Mahmud Gawan's major military contribution was the over-running of the western coastal areas, including Dabhol and Goa. The control over Dabhol and Goa led to further expansion of the Bahmani overseas trade with Iran, Iraq, etc.
- Mahmud Gawan also tried to settle the northern frontiers of the kingdom. With the help of the ruler of Gujarat, he defeated Mahmud Khalji of Malwa over the control of Berar.
- He carried out many internal administrative reforms. He divided the kingdom into eight provinces or tarafs and each taraf was governed by a tarafdar. Only one fort of each province was under the direct control of the provincial tarafdar and the remaining forts of the province were under the control of a Qiladar or commander of the forts who was appointed by the central government.
- He patronised art and built a magnificent madrasa or college in the capital Bidar. Some of the famous scholars of the time belonging to Iran and Iraq came to this madrasa.
- There was discord among the nobles in the Bahmani Sultanate. The nobles were divided into two groups - long-established Deccanis and the newcomers who were foreigners (Afaqis). Being an Afaqi, it was difficult for him to win the confidence of the Deccanis. Though he adopted a broad policy of conciliation, the party strife could not be stopped. Deccanis plotted against him and induced the young sultan to punish him with a death sentence and had him executed in c. 1482 CE. Mahmud Gawan was over 70 years old at that time. Later the Sultan regretted and buried him with full honour.
- After the execution of Mahmud Gawan, the party strife became more intense. The various governors became independent. Soon the Bahmani kingdom broke into five principalities - the Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, the Qutub Shahis of Golconda, the Imad Shahis of Berar and the Barid Shahis of Bidar which were collectively called "the Deccan Sultanates". Of these, the kingdoms of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda played a leading role in Deccan politics till their absorption into the Mughal empire during the 17th century.

Bahmani Administration

The administration in the Bahmani kingdom was well organised. The sultanate was divided into four administrative units called taraf/provinces (till the rule of Mahmud Gawan who divided it into eight tarafs or provinces). These provinces were Gulbarga, Berar, Bidar and Daulatabad. Every province was under the control of a tarafdar who was also called a subedar. In every province, a belt of land (khalisa) was set apart from the jurisdiction of the tarafdars and it was used to meet the expenses of the king and the royal household. Nobles were paid either in cash or in the form of land or jagir. The Bahmanis were acquainted with the use of firearms and they employed Portuguese and Turkish experts to train the soldiers in the latest weapons of warfare.

For military support, the Bahmani rulers were dependent on their amirs and they were grouped into two - the Deccanis (immigrant Muslims) who had been staying in the Deccan for a long period and the

Afaqis or pardesis who had come from Central Asia, Iraq, Iran and had settled in the region recently. These two groups were always in a state of conflict with each other for higher administrative posts. These internal feuds led to the instability of the sultanate and the Bahmani kingdom began to disintegrate.

