

MATERIAL – CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF VIJAYANAGARA HISTORY: RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

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The material-cultural approach to Vijayanagara historiography has not only focused on the material remains, it has also been interdisciplinary and collaborative in nature. The last three decades of research on Vijayanagara has involved historians, epigraphists, art historians, religious historians, geographers, geologists, astronomers, anthropologists and archeologists, who were interested in understanding questions concerning the nature, organization and history of the Vijayanagara Empire from the 14th century to the 17th century as the largest and most effective polity in pre-colonial South India. The approach of this collaborative community of Vijayanagara scholarship has differed from that of earlier historians.

For most of the early generations' scholars on Vijayanagara it was the texts that mattered-whether they were inscriptions, travelers' accounts, poetic works, sacred texts, chronicles and so forth. It was these that told the story of the lost grandeur of the Vijayanagara Empire. In their view, the material remains might have been impressive, but their role was largely secondary in nature, serving merely to illustrate the stories told by the texts.

Since the late 1970's there has been an upsurge of interest in Vijayanagara archaeology. The focus of attention has been particularly on the city of Vijayanagara. Some work has also been done during the last few years in studying the monuments and material remaining in the wider areas of the empire in order to understand Vijayanagara history, art and culture.

For the scholars engaged in the recent approach to the study of Vijayanagara, the material remains, whether the monuments, sculpture, pottery or even carvings on the rocks, speak loudly.

The recent scholars raise a whole range of questions not touched upon in the written sources. They speak about the organization and construct of space and the kinds of activities that took place in the spaces that were created; about the labour and work; about structures of power and methods of force; about structures of power and methods of seeking legitimation of power won by force; about beliefs and religious practices; of how food was grown and craft products manufactured ; of the processes of cultural assimilation, synthesis,

transformation, creation and dissemination that were at work resulting in a great mobility of ideas, of content, and form and of new trends in art and architecture, religious practices and courtly styles. The textual material is not ignored by these scholars; it is used as corroborative and supportive to the data provided by the archaeological remains.

This interest, beginning initially with the remains of the present-day Hampi, the erstwhile city of Vijayanagara, the capital of Vijayanagara Empire and later widening its scope to the larger area of the empire. The important recent investigations are, the work of a Indian-French team under Vasundhara and Pierre Filliozat at Hampi, the architectural and inscriptional study of Vithala Temple; Seminar in Germany at the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University on Hampi, which was resulted in the publication of the two-volume book, *Vijayanagara: City and Empire*. This included essays on the new insights and discoveries made about the site within the wider context of the empire.

The important scholars who involved in this approach are Carla M. Sinopoli, M.S. Nagaraja Rao, John M. Fritz, and George Michell. Carla M. Sinopoli, who has been a part of the Vijayanagara Community of Scholars from the early 1980's, highlights three aspects that have made the *new wave* of Vijayanagara scholarship so distinct; the sustained nature of the work; the respect for interdisciplinary perspectives; and the creation of a mutually supportive scholarly community. She describes some of the new insights into Vijayanagara history offered by this recent scholarship that has combined a serious engagement with both material remains and written records. For example, new understandings of the complex history of the empire as a whole and of religious practices and beliefs in the Vijayanagara period in South India; important insights into the agricultural economic foundations for urban growth and imperial expansion, and about communication and movement across the Vijayanagara landscape and so forth.

John M. Fritz, has been instrumental in bring Hampi to the attention of a wide audience worldwide. Kathleen Morrison, who joined the community of Vijayanagara scholars as a young student in the early 1980's and who, along with Carla M. Sinopoli, pioneered the Vijayanagara Metropolitan Survey, on the regional setting of the city of Vijayanagara. Nagaraja Rao was very active in surface archaeology, and mapping, excavations, conservation work, epigraphically studies of Hampi. Naline Thakur, an architectural conservationist, was directly involved with the drawing up of an Integrated Management Plan for the Hampi region. Thakur believes that every heritage site has the potential of unifying the community the heritage place and its historic dimension into one programme.

The scholars in the field of material culture like John. Fritz and George Michell also support the sectarian conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The appropriation of the sectarian trope is reflected in the work of John Fritz and George Michell who claims Vijayanagara's material history is primarily a reflection of 'Hindu' character. Fritz and Michell argue that Vijayanagara was the 'greatest of all medieval Hindu capitals in India' and that the 'power and magnificence of its rulers were the envy of the Muslim rulers'. They support this position by arguing that layout, monuments, and landscape of Vijayanagara represent a 'symbolic system that can be comprehended only within a framework of Hindu myth and culture'. Central to their argument is the location of the Ramachandra Temple at the center Vijayanagara's royal enclosure. According to Fritz and Michell this structure represents a 'state chapel'. By locating a state chapel at the center of the royal enclosure, they deliberately attempt to collapse the realms of religious so that the former eclipses the latter. A feature of this force or Hinduism according to Fritz and Michell is that religious and non-religious matters are never separate; it is unimaginable that any activity, impulse, or process is without some connection with the divine. Hinduism encompasses the complete spectrum of Indian life, from the very day of agricultural labour of the villager to the transcendental speculation for the philosopher. Fritz and Michell conclude that the let-out of the royal center is symbolic of the "meeting of king and God", and as such representative Vijayanagara's Hindu character. They point two important points relating to the Vijayanagar kingship' First, they argue that the 'Vijayanagara ruler was ritually identified with Ramachandra, the divine hero-king'. Secondly, they state there was a vague analogy between the empire of Vijayanagara and the kingdom of Ayodhya, the overall equivalences is the assertion that the king manifests the same heroic and regal qualities as that of the God'.

In contrast historian Burton Stein argues that Hindu-Muslim conflict actually played a relatively minor role at Vijayanagara when compared to strife among Hindus. Actually, those who bore the brunt of Vijayanagara military power were most often Hindu rulers, not Muslims. And, ironically perhaps, the most strategically placed military units of the Vijayanagara military formation were composed of Muslims. He further problematizes the historical basis of the sectarian trope by noting the 'founding brothers of Vijayanagara had served in Muslim armies and that Devaraya II kept a copy of Koran beside his throne so that his Muslim soldiers could properly swear allegiance. He further says that although Fritz and Michell use material evidence to support the validity of the sectarian trope, the argument that Vijayanagara is understandable only from within the framework of Hindu myth, is also questionable from a material culture perspective. While discussing the symbolic character of Vijayanagara, Fritz and Michell fail to address the fact that Islamic architecture exists less than a hundred meters from the city's 'sacred 'Hindu center, the Ramachandra Temple. Furthermore, located in the *danaik* or governor's enclosure, these buildings are in fact closer to the Ramachandra Temple than any of the palace structures. Also, while Vijayanagara's heavily fortified wall system encompasses the Ramachandra Temple, it excludes the vast majority of the city's sacred sites; ironic for a city based on Hindu cosmology. This fact is

surpassed in irony only by the fact *all* the city's mosques are located within the Vijayanagara's walls. In short Burton Stein argues that, Fritz and Michell's sectarian trope fails to result in a better understanding of Vijayanagara.

The other scholars were B. Sarathchandra, George Michelle, Alexander Greenlaw, S. Rajashekara, Anna.L. Dallpiccola, Anila Varghese, Alexandra Mack, Richard Shaw, Crispin Bran foot, Brigitte Khan Majlis, Barbara Mears, and Chudamani Bandagopal etc. George Michell is an architectural historian came to Vijayanagara in 1980 and started detailed documentation of the standing monuments.

COSMIC CITY CONCEPT

The literal meaning of *Cosmic City* is related to the regions of the universe distinct from earth. It can also be defined as vast or immeasurably extended in space or time. In other words, *cosmic city* means, a coming together of heads of government to take up the cosmic business of nations. The word *cosmos* comes from the Greek *Cosmos* meaning a well ordered whole.

Carla M. Sinopoli and Kathleen D. Morrison have identified *cosmic* natures in the Hampi the capital City of Vijayanagara Empire. According to him Vijayanagara imperial control as its capital through a consideration of variable contexts for and objects of imperial control. Imperial control of production and reproduction may be divided into two broad categories, like the control of humans, their labour as well as social and biological reproduction; and the control of access to a wide variety of non-human resource. Among the latter are land, raw materials and tools, as well as the ability to mobilize resources through taxation, tribute gifts, markets or plunder. According to John Fritz, the alignments of Vijayanagara roads also play an important role in the 'cosmic city' thesis. Vijayanagara Empire was the largest and most effective empire in pre-colonial South Indian history. Pre-existing political and economic structures, sacred beliefs and social frameworks, though modified during the Vijayanagara period, were integral to ideological, social and economic practices and organization. They argue that the strategies of control were ideology, militarism and movement, production and distribution.

EPIGRAPHIC SOURCES

More than 5100 inscriptions have been discovered in Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit. They are found in different parts of *South India*. They throw considerable light on the Vijayanagara empire. The number of epigraphically records of the Vijayanagara period is very large and they shed a flood of light on various activities of the rulers and the people. A few instances may be cited here. An inscription from Badami shows that in 1340 A.D, Harihara I was wielding power in Badami area, north of the Tungabhadra and he is described as the lord of the eastern and western seas. The Sringeri inscription of 1346 A.D, which describes the visit of the five Sangama brothers to this religious centre to celebrate their historic achievement of subjugating the enemies, is of great value as it

proves beyond doubt that these chiefs by this time completed the work of founding the new kingdom. The Shravanabelagola inscription of Bukka I, dated 1368 A.D, makes known the religious catholicity promoted by the rulers and the protection given to the minorities in the empire. Really it is a record of great significance. A number of epigraphs in Andrapradesh throw light on Krishnadevaraga's Kalinga expedition.

When we talk about the epigraphic evidences of Vijayanagara Mackenzie's manuscripts should not be neglected. As the Surveyor-General Mackenzie took much interest in South Indian history and institutions. He conducted systematic antiquarian survey of the country. At his instance, his assistants visited all the villages, took eye-copies of inscriptions on stone and metal, and collected all the historical traditions current among the villages which they recorded in their reports. After Mackenzie's death, his papers were acquired by the East India Company who deposited all the records written in the South Indian languages in the Oriented Manuscripts Library at Madras. Most of Mackenzie's records have been recopied at the instance of famous Telugu scholar, C.P. Brown, who, having discovered their value, rescued them from destruction. The copies made under the supervision of C.P. Brown are generally known as the *Local Records*.

Inscriptions related to monuments at Vijayanagara play a major role in the reconstruction of Vijayanagara History. The majority of the inscriptions refer to grants given to the temples by kings, queens, officers and devotees. Those inscriptions that refer to the construction of temples and additions made to them during the Sangama, Saluva and Tuluva periods help us to work out a fairly accurate chronology of the monuments.

Monuments bear irrefutable testimony to the aspirations and achievements of the rulers and people of Vijayanagara. During the rules of Rayas of Vijayanagara, Karnataka architecture and sculpture attained a certain fullness and freedom of expression in keeping with the general consciousness of the great task of the empire. The numerous buildings constructed by the rulers of Vijayanagara and people are distributed throughout the country, south of the Tungabhadra. But the finest and the most characteristic group of temples is to be found in Vijayanagara itself, now known as Hampi. The important among them were the Virupaksha temple at Hampi, the Vithala Swami Temple at Hampi, the Krishnaswami temple and Achyutaraya temple and the Hazara Ramaswami temple etc.,

Coins also play a major role in the study of Vijayanagara history. The important coins of the period were silver *Taras*, copper *gani*, gold *Varaha* or *hun*, latterly referred as a *pagoda*. The coastal pad of Vijayanagara supported by a range of baser gold coins called *Fanam*. Vijayanagara can be considered the one polity from India's medieval age that demonstrated an awareness of the propaganda value of the images chosen for their coins. A good example of this found in a coin of Devaraya II (1422-1446). He was well known as a strategist, and his title *Gajagandabherundra* or hunter of elephants was both reference to his look of this sport and a metaphor for his victory over the Gajapatis of Orissa. A copper coin struck for circulation in coastal Tamilnadu, not only features

this title as a reminder of victory in the lands just to the north, but also in corporate an elephant, homologous with royalty on coins of the region.

Further evidence for this was manifested quite early at the capital, if the *pagoda* and *half-pagoda* coins naming *Pratapa Harihara*, can be safely attributed to the period 1377-1404 when Harihara II held sway. The religious freedom evident from inscriptions and archaeological remains in the capital and by taking of names such as Harihara by early rulers (Hari equating to Vishnu and Hara to Shiva), is further demonstrated by the fact that these coins come in three types, their deities being identified by their attributes as either Vishnu and Laxmi, Shiva and Parvati or Brahma and Saraswathi.

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