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The kingdom or 'empire' of Vijayanagara takes its name, 'City of Victory', from its capital on the Tungabhadra River, near the centre of the sub-continent. Its rulers over three centuries claimed a universal sovereignty – 'to rule the vast world under a single umbrella' – and they also, more modestly, referred to themselves as the rulers of Karnata, modern Karnataka. This seemingly humble reduction of the scope of their suzerainty from the world to a small portion of the Indian sub-continent is somewhat deceptive. Vijayanagara kings seemed to have had the sense that the kingdom established in the fourteenth century revived an earlier universal sovereignty in Karnataka, that of the Chalukyas of Badami (ancient Vatapi in Bijapur district of modern Karnataka). Vijayanagara kings adopted the emblem of the Chalukyas, the boar, or *varaha*, and perhaps quite consciously modelled their capital on the Chalukyan capitals of Vatapi and Aihole of the sixth to eighth centuries, though Vijayanagara in 1500 was a great fortified place covering 10 square miles, dwarfing the Chalukyan cities. Even so, the first temples which they built in the city were somewhat enlarged replicas of those found at Chalukyan capitals.

Also as with the Chalukyas, there were several distinct lineages, or dynasties, of Vijayanagara rulers. The first of these was sometimes called Yadavas, but was more often known as Sangamas, for the chief whose sons established the kingdom around 1340. Descendants of one of the sons of Sangama, who ruled as Bukka I (reign, 1344–77), expanded the city and realm until the late fifteenth century when a second, or Saluva, ruling line was established briefly by a Vijayanagara generalissimo, Saluva Narasimha. In 1505, a third dynasty came into being called Tuluvas, suggesting that they came from the coastal part of Karnataka called Tulu. Under their four decades of rule, the realm reached its greatest extent and its rulers their greatest power. The last Vijayanagara dynasty, of the Aravidu family, assumed authority in 1542; it was named for another generalissimo, Aravidi Bukka, whose sons founded a line of rulers; members of this family held diminished imperial authority until the

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late seventeenth century when, as a result of repeated invasions from Muslim states to the North and civil wars within, Vijayanagara authority was fragmented among a set of smaller, independent regional domains tracing their ruling credentials from the kingdom.

Among Indian kingdoms, a rule of three centuries is very long, and this together with the large territory over which Vijayanagara kings reigned makes it one of the great states in Indian history. The realm can be defined by the provenance of royal inscriptions over some 140,000 square miles, about the same area as the Madras Presidency in 1900, when the first histories of Vijayanagara appeared.

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However, a century before, when the presidency was taking the shape that it was to have until 1947, two partial accounts of Vijayanagara were presented to the English-speaking world, the first by Mark Wilks in 1810 and the second by Colonel Colin Mackenzie in 1815. It was to be another century before Vijayanagara history was taken up again, by Robert Sewell, in 1900.

Wilks's work was prepared while he was the political agent ('resident') for the East India Company at the court of the rajas of Mysore, after the Wodeyar rajas had been reinstalled in 1799 on a throne seized some forty years before by Haidar Ali Khan. The basis of Wilks's reconstruction was an eighteenth-century Kannada language work, written on a cotton scroll, by a Brahman savant known as Pootia Pundit. Colin Mackenzie, a military surveyor turned antiquarian, collected this and other accounts as well as making copies of numerous inscriptions from all over Madras and Mysore. He was aided by a set of learned Indians who copied and translated temple inscriptions and 'traditional histories' around 1800, which became the first sources of the reconstruction of early Indian history; they also collected artifacts that became exhibits in the first museums in India.

Mackenzie only once offered an interpretation of these sources; this was in an address he delivered to the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 5 April 1815, though not published in the journal of the Society until 1844. However, the direct participation of Indians in the

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Mackenzie collections makes their writings of historical accounts of Vijayanagar among the first in which Indians presented something of their own history.

Sewell, like his two English predecessors, was an official, and as a member of the Madras civil service he was charged with collecting information about the south Indian past and with publishing works on inscriptions and antiquarian remains in the Madras Presidency. This task he carried out, like Wilks and Mackenzie before him, with the help of Indians, whose knowledge of Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam – the historical and modern languages of the southern peninsula – was essential and whose experience with Sewell prepared some of them to carry out independent researches which were published during the early years of the twentieth century. All of this continued investigations begun a century before under Mackenzie and with the same purpose.

These Britons at opposite ends of the nineteenth century sought to devise an historical past not for the sake of pure knowing, but for the purpose of controlling a subject people whose past was to be so constructed as to make British rule a necessity as well as a virtue.

This intention is exemplified in the only popular work published by Sewell in 1900, *Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar)*. Here, an outline of the genealogical and chronological evidence on the dynasties of Vijayanagara was briefly presented, followed by two long and historically configuring translations of the accounts of two sixteenth-century Portuguese visitors to the city. These Portuguese merchant adventurers knew no Indian languages well enough to correct their visual impressions through understandings obtained from verbal or written views of Indians. Vijayanagara kings of the sixteenth century were presented as oriental despots whose authority consisted partly of sacred power founded upon, or regenerated by, royal sacrifices and partly on feudal relations between them and great territorial lords ('captains'). Finally, to these was added the orientalist notion of the fabulous riches of Asia which was supported by the splendours of the city itself, its vastness, its monumentality, and the wealth of its citizens.

Chronicles of the sixteenth-century Portuguese visitors have become important fixtures in the historiography of Vijayanagara, and rightly, because these were not mere inventions. The royal

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ceremonies they described have since been authenticated by enactments in numerous royal courts in South India as well as by texts pertaining to them that were being brought into European knowledge in Sewell's time. Moreover, the vivid descriptions of the city have since been verified by archaeological research that has been carried out at Hampi, the site of Vijayanagara, by contemporary scholars from India and Europe, as well as by photography of the site that goes back to 1856.

Still, the orientalisising intention of men like Sewell cannot be set aside. Though much of the epigraphical and textual analyses of Sewell and other European founders of pre-modern history in South India was done by Indians such as S.M. Natesa Sastri, H. Krishna Sastri, and S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, it was a European intentionality that prevailed. Harsh oriental despotisms and factious local magnates were seen to have led to the dominion of Muslims in the North of India and they threatened the South as well. Despite the peril to Hindu institutions posed by Muslim powers in peninsular India after the fourteenth century, Indians, in this view, could not overcome the flaws in their political institutions. This task awaited the British; what even the great Mughals failed to achieve in India, the British would to create order and progress over the entire sub-continent.

Such views were bound to change as Indians seized control of their history. The earliest and most influential successor to Sewell was S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar. After completing his post-graduate degree in 1897 and teaching in a Bangalore college for a decade, he initiated the chair in Indian History and Archaeology established at the University of Madras in 1914. He saw Sewell's last works on the inscriptions and historical chronology of South India through publication, on the Englishman's recommendation, and by the mid-1920s Krishnaswami Aiyangar had published extensively on topics in Vijayanagara history.

He departed in two important ways from the historiography inherited from Sewell and other Europeans. One was his emphasis on Hindu-Muslim conflict as being the cause and principal shaper of the Vijayanagara kingdom and the claim that resistance to Islam was the great vindication of Vijayanagara. This view is evident in his first major historical publication, *Ancient India* (1911), which was

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based on his MA thesis of 1898; in later work, especially in his *South India and her Muhammadan Invaders* (1921), the view about Hindu–Muslim conflict is fully worked out. There he spoke of how the last ruler of the Hoysala kingdom of Karnataka, Vira Ballala III, ‘made a patriotic effort to dislodge the Muhammadans from the South ... fell in the effort, and brought his dynasty to an end in carrying on this great national war of the Hindus’ and of how Vijayanagara succeeded to this ‘patriotic national’ mission.

This early orientation to Hindu–Muslim conflict had another important manifestation. This was a perception, held by him from 1897, that the patriotic mission of Vijayanagara was passed directly to the next great defenders of Hindu dharma, the Maratha kingdom of Sivaji. An historical connection with Vijayanagara was claimed through Shahji, Shivaji’s father who had served his Bijapur sultanate masters for many years in Bangalore, the heart of the waning Vijayanagara kingdom in the seventeenth century.

Vijayanagara historiography also changed because of Krishnaswami Aiyangar’s insistence that literary evidence of that period should have as much standing in the interpretations of historians as epigraphy and archaeology. From the very beginning, his writing on Vijayanagara followed this methodology. Poems of praise (*kavya*) and genealogical accounts of great families (*vamsavali*) in Sanskrit and other languages marked a return to the sources that Wilks and Mackenzie considered the most important; this shifted the focus of the previous generation of historians. Sewell and others had concentrated upon the royal families of Vijayanagara in their great capital and had relied on Portuguese chronicles and Muslim accounts such as that of Muhammad Kasim Firishtah which had been translated in 1910. Krishnaswami Aiyangar turned to the study of the numerous magnates in Karnataka and elsewhere in the ‘empire’, but his historical reconstructions, while based on literary sources, were always attentive to evidence from inscriptions. He insisted that the latter could only provide the ‘barebones’ of historical study, literary sources must do the rest. This approach was passed to his own students at the University of Madras until his retirement in 1929.

By that time, and thanks to Krishnaswami Aiyangar, the field of Vijayanagara history was well established, though it was beginning to reflect new emphases and concerns of that time. Among the more

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important was the rise of regional nationalism in parts of the large Madras Presidency, especially among Kannada and Telugu speakers. The important works of two young historians of the 1930s manifest this: B. A. Saletore writing on Karnataka history and N. Venkataramanayya writing on Andhra. They adopted Krishnaswami Aiyangar's reliance upon literary evidence, but differed from him in that they looked at Vijayanagara history from the core of the kingdom, in the border region between Kannada-speaking Karnataka and Telugu-speaking Andhra, rather than from either Tamil country or the perspective of the peninsula as a whole.

For Saletore, the Vijayanagara kingdom of the fourteenth century was created by the release of 'the latent energy of the Hindu Dharma in southern India' by Muslim conquest and humiliation. This view had already been given prominence by Krishnaswami Aiyangar in Madras, as well as by the Reverend Henry Heras teaching in Bombay, whose student Saletore had been. But Saletore went further with this argument. He made Vijayanagara an expression of Karnataka nationalism. Thus, in the founding of the new kingdom by the five sons of the chief Sangama

did Karnataka vindicate to the rest of the Hindu world her honour by sending forth a little band of five brothers . . . Karnataka by birth and Karnataka in valour, as the champions of all that was worth preserving in Hindu religion and culture.¹

Saletore also insisted that 'ancient constitutional usage' in Karnataka (*purvada mariyade*) was maintained by rulers of the new kingdom even to the extent that by doing so the seeds of the kingdom's destruction were sown. Here, again, Saletore was indebted to predecessors like Krishna Sastri and Krishnaswami Aiyangar who had said that the ultimate defeat of Vijayanagara resulted from the failure of its rulers to strengthen central administrative control by diminishing the ancient authority of village and locality institutions and their leaders ranging from village headmen to 'feudatory families'.

Even as Saletore was completing his University of London doctoral thesis in 1931, from which the above quotations come,

¹ B. A. Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire* (Madras: B. G. Paul, 1934), vol. 1, p. 39.

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Venkataramanayya was preparing a monograph denying the Karnataka-centred views of Saletore and Heras.

Two of his monographs appeared in 1933 and 1935 challenging both Karnatak historians. These works presented the counter-interpretation that the Sangama brothers who founded Vijayanagara were not Kannada speakers (or Kannadigas) but were Telugus from the Andhra coast of the Bay of Bengal and that the boar emblem that was thought to connect Vijayanagara with the ancient Karnatak kingdom of the Chalukyas of nearly a thousand years before was really borrowed from the Telugu Kakatiya kingdom of the fourteenth century. He also argued that two of the foundational institutions of the Vijayanagara state were introduced by the Telugu conquerors of Karnataka on the model of the Kakatiyas; these were the distinctive form of military land tenure called the *nayankara* system and the distinctive form of paid village servants called the *ayagar* system.

By 1940, the historiography on Vijayanagara had passed through three stages. European orientalisists, using earlier Indian accounts and with the help of Indian subordinates, opened the field by having identified its major literary and inscriptional sources and its broad chronology. This largely technical phase lost its orientalist colouring and assumed another ideological overlay during the intermediate custodianship of scholars like Krishnaswami Aiyangar and Heras who, in their somewhat different ways, imbued Vijayanagara historiography with an anti-Muslim and broad nationalistic bias. From them, and with their benedictions, Vijayanagara history passed into a third phase when scholars like Saletore and Venkataramanayya saw in that history a basis for the narrower nationalism or regional patriotisms of Karnataka and Andhra.

New scholars were slowly being recruited; one was T. V. Mahalingam. Encouraged by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, who succeeded Krishnaswami Aiyangar in the history chair at the University of Madras, Mahalingam undertook work on administrative and economic aspects of Vijayanagara history. This followed some of the pioneering work of Krishnaswami Aiyangar on Vijayanagara, but more especially Nilakanta Sastri's own work on the Tamil Chola dynasty of the ninth to thirteenth centuries in which administrative history was accorded new saliency. Mahalingam and others

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added to the rich, detailed, and diverse historiography on Vijayanagara that had emerged by the 1940s; they explored the rise and fall of numerous chiefly families everywhere, their alliances and their oppositions to the Vijayanagara imperial order as well as the conquests of its kings, or rayas,² and their occasional humiliations. But none had yet surpassed the breadth of vision of Krishnaswami Aiyangar during the early years of the twentieth century.

In 1919, he had inaugurated the University of Madras historical series with the publication of *Sources of Vijayanagar History*. The latter work consisted of one hundred texts and translations from inscriptions and literary works, including chronicles on various Vijayanagara kings and great families of the age. The historical series was ably continued under Nilakanta Sastri as professor of Indian history and archaeology from 1929 to 1947; it became the vehicle for major publications on Vijayanagara during the 1930s and 1940s, and all reflected the imprimatur of its distinguished editor.

The impact of Nilakanta Sastri upon Vijayanagara history was profound, though he published no monographic research in the field. He had taken up one of the strands of Krishnaswami Aiyangar's wider-ranging scholarship – that on Chola administrative history – and made it the focus of his major work on the Chola kingdom. Nilakanta Sastri's scepticism about historical sources other than inscriptional ones made some of his writings different from that of Krishnaswami Aiyangar and from that of some of his own students at Madras. Venkataramanayya and Mahalingam, for example, depended heavily on literary sources; both used the local traditions collected by Colin Mackenzie during the early nineteenth century where it was maintained at the Oriental Manuscripts Library of the University of Madras; both also used poetical works as well as Muslim and Portuguese chronicles. In that, they and their younger colleagues seemed to be defying Nilakanta Sastri's efforts to construct a history of pre-modern South India free from the quirks of Indian literary evidence that had drawn the disdain of European historians from Macaulay in the 1830s onward. To Nilakanta Sastri, the way to a historiography that Europeans could admire was through reliance upon the relatively chaste, datable, and locatable epigraphical records, of which tens of thousands had been

² The Sanskrit 'raja' and its derivative 'raya' mean 'king'.

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collected in South India, and by casting interpretations of these fragmentary data in a universal frame that showed medieval South Indian administrative institutions to be of the same quality as European ones. This ambition was partially manifested in the delineation by Venkataramanayya and Mahalingam of so-called 'central', 'provincial', and 'local government' administrative levels in Vijayanagara times, though they managed no better than their teacher to resolve contradictions posed by these variously perceived levels.

Nilakanta Sastri's major contributions to Vijayanagara history were of another sort. One was his sponsorship of a three-volume *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History* in 1946, edited jointly with Venkataramanayya; another was his long, synthetic chapters on Vijayanagara in his *A History of South India*, first published in 1955.

Further Sources followed the pattern of Krishnaswami Aiyangar's collection of sources in 1919; it was justified on the grounds that 'Hindu literary sources' corrected the bias of Muslim chronicles and 'foreign' accounts. This justified the use of the 'Mackenzie Manuscripts'. The first volume of *Further Sources* consisted of a 369-page introduction to the document by Venkataramanayya and constituted one of the few general histories of Vijayanagara since the early works of Sewell and Krishnaswami Aiyangar; the pioneering scholarship of the latter received little notice from Venkataramanayya except for minor corrections. Still, this 'introduction' harked back to Krishnaswami Aiyangar's political understandings in two ways. One was in seeing Vijayanagara history as a heroic struggle to protect dharma from Islam – 'the last glorious chapter of the independent Hindu India of the South'; the other was in seeing the polity of Vijayanagara to be about relations among great warrior families, rather than about conventional, centralized administration. In the latter view, Venkataramanayya implicitly repudiated Nilakanta Sastri's conception of the medieval south Indian state, in particular, the latter's interpretation of Chola history as having precociously anticipated the modern centralised, bureaucratic state. Such a Chola model still lurked in the characterisation of the Vijayanagara political system of Nilakanta Sastri's *History of South India*, but different conditions were seen to have made for different political arrangements. Hence, Nilakanta Sastri took Vijayanagara

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as a centralised, 'hereditary monarchy', which was prevented from achieving full central authority because of the constant threat from Muslim states and the 'intransigence of [its] feudatories'. Both external and internal threats to Vijayanagara produced 'the nearest approach to a war-state ever made by a Hindu kingdom'. And though central authority failed to be realised, autonomous local Tamil institutions, which Nilakanta Sastri admired, were fatally weakened, having 'suffered abridgment as their officials came to be linked more and more closely with the central government'.

Nilakanta Sastri's efforts in the 1950s to make Vijayanagara out to be a centralised empire has influenced subsequent writing on in two ways, both negative. One was in A. Krishnaswami Pillai's *The Tamil Country under Vijayanagara* (1964). The politics of the kingdom are seen by him as 'feudal' everywhere in the southern peninsula, but especially in Tamil country on which his work concentrated. His was an attempt to provide a positive foundation for the Vijayanagara state, something better than Nilakanta Sastri's, which rested weakly on a conception of flawed centralism. However, Krishnaswami Pillai's appliqué of feudalism is unpersuasive and diminishes a monograph otherwise rich in detailed analysis, whose main thrust recalls the earlier works of Krishnaswami Aiyangar and Venkataramanayya. A second negative reaction to Nilakanta Sastri's treatment of Vijayanagara came from the present author in his *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* of 1980. The latter work on Chola history was concerned to present an alternative to the centralised political conception of Nilakanta Sastri. Accordingly, the idea of a 'segmentary state' was proposed as appropriate for the Cholas as well as for Vijayanagara.

In broad terms, that argument of several years ago is still considered valid, and it informs the present historiographical discussion and the rest of this study of late Vijayanagara. There are differences between my 1980 formulation and the present study that should be noted here. One certainly is an acknowledgement of criticism of some aspects of the argument in the Vijayanagara sections of *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* prompting certain corrections. Another is the incorporation here of the work that has been achieved in several different international collaborations on Vijayanagara in recent years: the impressive joint