Class 12 History Chapter 7: An Imperial Capital: Vijayanagara - Notes, Important Questions and MCQs (2026-27)

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Class 12 History Chapter 7, An Imperial Capital: Vijayanagara (c. fourteenth to sixteenth century), studies the capital of one of the largest empires of medieval south India and how historians reconstruct it from its ruins at Hampi.

These notes cover the rediscovery of Hampi, the rulers and their rivals, the amara-nayaka system, the city's water resources and fortifications, the royal and sacred centres, temple architecture and the work of mapping the site.

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Chapter Overview

Vijayanagara, "city of victory", was both the name of a city and an empire founded in 1336 by the brothers Harihara and Bukka. Its capital was sacked in 1565 and later deserted, but its memory survived locally as Hampi, named after the goddess Pampadevi.

Historians rely on the ruins, inscriptions, accounts of foreign travellers and literature in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and Sanskrit to understand the city.

Important Topics and Concepts

The Discovery of Hampi

- The ruins were brought to light in 1800 by Colin Mackenzie, an engineer and antiquarian who became the first Surveyor General of India.
- He relied on the memories of priests of the Virupaksha temple and the shrine of Pampadevi.
- Photographers began recording monuments from 1856, and epigraphists collected inscriptions from the Virupaksha temple and other sites.
- Historians collated this with accounts of foreign travellers and literature.

Rulers and Rivals

- Four dynasties ruled: Sangama (till 1485), Saluva (to 1503), Tuluva and Aravidu (17th century).
- Rulers called themselves rayas. They competed with the Sultans of the Deccan and the Gajapati rulers of Orissa for control of the fertile river valleys and the rich overseas trade.
- The best-known ruler, Krishnadeva Raya (Tuluva, ruled 1509–29), expanded and consolidated the empire, built temples and gopurams, founded a suburb called Nagalapuram after his mother, and wrote the Telugu work Amuktamalyada.
- In 1565 the army led by Rama Raya was routed at the battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi (Talikota) by the combined forces of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda; the city was sacked and abandoned.
- Relations with the Sultans were not always hostile; alliances and shifting interests marked their history.

Trade and the Horse Trade

- Warfare depended on cavalry, so importing horses from Arabia and Central Asia was vital. Local merchants who traded horses were called kudirai chettis.
- The Portuguese arrived on the west coast from 1498 and set up trading and military stations, adding to the competition.
- Vijayanagara was famous for markets dealing in spices, textiles and precious stones; trade brought wealth to the city and status to merchants.

The Amara-Nayaka System

- A major political innovation: the amara-nayakas were military commanders given territories to govern by the raya.
- They collected taxes and dues from peasants, craftsworkers and traders, kept part for personal use and to maintain horses and elephants, and supplied a fighting force to the king.
- They sent tribute to the king annually and appeared at court with gifts; the king sometimes transferred them.
- The system was probably derived from the iqta system of the Delhi Sultanate. In the seventeenth century many nayakas set up independent kingdoms, hastening the collapse of central authority.

Water Resources

- The city lay in a natural basin formed by the river Tungabhadra flowing north-east, surrounded by granite hills.

- Embankments created reservoirs; the most important, the Kamalapuram tank (early 15th century), irrigated nearby fields and supplied the royal centre through a channel.
- The Hiriya canal, drawing water from a dam across the Tungabhadra, irrigated the cultivated valley.

Fortifications and Roads

- Persian ambassador Abdur Razzaq (15th century) described seven lines of forts encircling the city, hills and forests.
- The outermost wall linked the hills; between walls were agricultural fields, gardens and orchards – useful during sieges when the city had to be self-sufficient.
- A second line surrounded the urban core, and a third the royal centre.
- Gateways had arches and domes, an architectural feature introduced by the Turkish Sultans (Indo-Islamic style). Roads followed valleys and linked temple gateways to bazaars.

The Royal Centre

- Located in the south-western part of the settlement, with over 30 building complexes identified as palaces; it also had about 60 temples.
- The Mahanavami Dibba, a massive platform of about 11,000 square feet rising to 40 feet, was associated with the Mahanavami festival (Dussehra/Navaratri in September–October), when the king displayed his power through rituals, processions and inspection of troops.
- The Lotus Mahal was given its name by British travellers; Mackenzie suggested it may have been a council chamber.
- The Hazara Rama temple was probably used only by the king and his family; its walls show sculptures of the Ramayana.
- Elephant stables and residential complexes have been identified nearby.

The Sacred Centre

- The rocky northern part near the Tungabhadra was associated with local traditions – hills here were believed to shelter the monkey kingdom of Vali and Sugriva of the Ramayana.
- The Virupaksha temple, a form of Shiva and the guardian deity, had shrines for Pampadevi; the hall in front was built by Krishnadeva Raya to mark his accession.
- The Vitthala temple was dedicated to Vitthala, a form of Vishnu worshipped in Maharashtra – showing integration of traditions.
- Temples had chariot streets for processions, flanked by pillared pavilions where merchants set up shops.
- Rulers claimed to rule on behalf of the god Virupaksha and signed orders as “Shri Virupaksha”.

Temple Architecture

- Two new features: the raya gopurams – huge gateways that dwarfed the central shrine and signalled royal power; and mandapas – pavilions and long pillared corridors around shrines.
- The kalyana mandapa was used for celebrating the marriage of deities.
- Temples were centres of learning and of the economy; rulers made grants to them.

Mapping and Preservation

- Detailed mapping began in 1976 when Hampi was recognised as a site of national importance.
- Teams divided the 25 sq km area into squares and recorded every structure; archaeologists, architects and historians worked together.
- Hampi was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986.
- Historians note gaps: we know little about where ordinary people lived, because their houses were of perishable material.

Map Work: Vijayanagara

Practise locating:

- Vijayanagara / Hampi on the Tungabhadra
- Rival kingdoms: Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmadnagar, Bidar, Gajapati Orissa
- Ports on the west coast linked with the horse trade: Goa, Calicut

Important Travellers and Visitors

Accounts used by historians:

- Nicolo de Conti (Italy, 1420s)
- Abdur Razzaq (Persia, 1440s)
- Afanasii Nikitin (Russia, 15th century)
- Duarte Barbosa, Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz (Portugal, 16th century)

Key Structures of Vijayanagara

Structure	Zone	Significance
Mahanavami Dibba	Royal centre	Platform for Mahanavami festival rituals
Lotus Mahal	Royal centre	Possibly a council chamber
Hazara Rama temple	Royal centre	Used by the royal family; Ramayana panels
Virupaksha temple	Sacred centre	Guardian deity; hall built by Krishnadeva Raya
Vitthala temple	Sacred centre	Vitthala from Maharashtra; chariot street
Kamalapuram tank	Urban core	Supplied water to fields and royal centre

Important Definitions and Terms

Term	Meaning
Raya	Title used by Vijayanagara rulers, meaning king.
Amara-nayaka	Military commander granted territory to govern.
Kudirai chetti	Local merchant dealing in horses.
Gopuram	Monumental gateway of a temple.
Raya gopuram	Royal gateway built by Vijayanagara rulers.
Mandapa	Pillared hall or pavilion in a temple.
Kalyana mandapa	Hall for the marriage ceremony of deities.

Term	Meaning
Mahanavami	Festival of nine nights in September–October.
Gajapati	“Lord of elephants” – title of Orissa rulers.
Ashvapati	“Lord of horses” – title associated with Deccan Sultans.

Short Answer Questions

Q1. Who rediscovered Hampi and how?

Colin Mackenzie, the first Surveyor General of India, prepared the first survey map in 1800, relying on the memories of priests of the Virupaksha temple and Pampadevi shrine.

Q2. Who founded Vijayanagara and when?

Brothers Harihara and Bukka founded it in 1336.

Q3. What was the amara-nayaka system?

Military commanders received territories from the raya, collected revenue, maintained troops and paid tribute to the king.

Q4. Why was the horse trade important?

Cavalry was crucial in warfare. Horses were imported from Arabia and Central Asia through kudirai chettis.

Q5. How did Vijayanagara meet its water needs?

By building embankments and tanks like the Kamalapuram tank and canals such as the Hiriya canal drawing from the Tungabhadra.

Q6. What was the Mahanavami Dibba used for?

It was a platform linked with the Mahanavami festival, where the king performed rituals, watched processions and inspected his army.

Q7. Mention two features of Vijayanagara temple architecture.

Raya gopurams – huge gateways signalling royal authority – and mandapas or long pillared corridors around the shrine.

Q8. What happened at Rakshasi-Tangadi?

In 1565 the combined forces of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda defeated the Vijayanagara army led by Rama Raya, and the city was sacked.

Long Answer Questions

Q1. Describe the fortifications of Vijayanagara.

Abdur Razzaq described seven lines of forts. The outermost wall linked the hills and enclosed agricultural tracts, gardens and orchards.

This allowed the city to withstand sieges by keeping food supplies within. A second wall encircled the urban core and a third the royal centre.

The walls were built of stone without mortar, and gateways showed Indo-Islamic arches and domes, reflecting the exchange of architectural ideas.

The sacred centre lay near the Tungabhadra and was linked with local myths, such as the monkey kingdom of the Ramayana and the goddess Pampadevi.

The Virupaksha temple was the guardian deity's shrine; rulers issued orders in his name. The Vitthala temple brought a Maharashtrian deity into the city.

Raya gopurams, mandapas and chariot streets reflect how rulers used temples to display power, gain legitimacy and integrate diverse traditions.

Q3. How have historians reconstructed the history of Vijayanagara?

Mackenzie's survey, photographs from 1856 and the collection of inscriptions laid the foundation.

Accounts of travellers like Abdur Razzaq, Domingo Paes and Nuniz describe the city's markets, festivals and fortifications.

From 1976, detailed mapping of the site recorded every structure; literature in several languages adds further detail. Yet the houses of ordinary people remain largely unknown.

MCQs with Answers

1. Vijayanagara was founded in:(a) 1336 (b) 1398 (c) 1509 (d) 1565Answer: (a) 1336

2. Who prepared the first survey map of Hampi?(a) John Marshall (b) Colin Mackenzie (c) Alexander Greenlaw (d) CunninghamAnswer: (b) Colin Mackenzie

3. Amuktamalyada was written by:(a) Harihara (b) Krishnadeva Raya (c) Rama Raya (d) BukkaAnswer: (b) Krishnadeva Raya

4. Krishnadeva Raya belonged to the ___ dynasty.(a) Sangama (b) Saluva (c) Tuluva (d) AravidуAnswer: (c) Tuluva

5. Kudirai chettis traded in:(a) Spices (b) Horses (c) Textiles (d) DiamondsAnswer: (b) Horses

6. Seven lines of forts were described by:(a) Nuniz (b) Abdur Razzaq (c) Paes (d) BarbosaAnswer: (b) Abdur Razzaq

7. Lotus Mahal was named by:(a) Vijayanagara kings (b) British travellers (c) Portuguese (d) Bahmani SultansAnswer: (b) British travellers

8. The Vitthala temple deity is a form of:(a) Shiva (b) Vishnu (c) Durga (d) GaneshaAnswer: (b) Vishnu

9. Hampi became a World Heritage Site in:(a) 1976 (b) 1986 (c) 1996 (d) 2006Answer: (b) 1986

10. Kalyana mandapa was used for:(a) Royal court (b) Marriage of deities (c) Storage (d) DanceAnswer: (b) Marriage of deities

Quick Revision Points

- Founded 1336 by Harihara and Bukka; sacked after 1565.
- Dynasties: Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, Aravidu.
- Krishnadeva Raya (1509–29): Amuktamalyada, gopurams, Nagalapuram.
- Rivals: Deccan Sultans and Gajapatis of Orissa.

- Horse trade – kudirai chettis; Portuguese from 1498.
- Amara-nayakas – derived from iqta.
- Water: Tungabhadra, Kamalapuram tank, Hiriya canal.
- Seven lines of forts – Abdur Razzaq.
- Royal centre: Mahanavami Dibba, Lotus Mahal, Hazara Rama temple.
- Sacred centre: Virupaksha and Vitthala temples; raya gopurams, mandapas.

Chapter Summary

Vijayanagara, founded in 1336, grew into a powerful empire competing with the Deccan Sultans and the Gajapatis. Its rulers used the amara-nayaka system, controlled trade including horses, and built a magnificent capital on the Tungabhadra with reservoirs, canals and massive fortifications.

The royal centre with the Mahanavami Dibba and Lotus Mahal, and the sacred centre with the Virupaksha and Vitthala temples, show how power and religion were linked. After its defeat in 1565 the city was abandoned; its ruins at Hampi were rediscovered in 1800 and are now a World Heritage Site.

Exam Tips and PYQ Pattern

- Source extracts often come from Abdur Razzaq on fortifications or Domingo Paes on the Mahanavami festival.
- Organise answers into the royal centre, sacred centre and fortifications.
- Map: mark Vijayanagara and neighbouring Sultanates.
- Remember 1336, 1509–29, 1565, 1800, 1976 and 1986.
- Use terms like raya gopuram, mandapa and amara-nayaka precisely.
- Mention gaps in evidence for higher-order answers.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this chapter in the 2026-27 CBSE syllabus?

Yes. It is part of the Part II of the NCERT Class 12 History textbook Themes in Indian History, prescribed in the CBSE 2026-27 syllabus.

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Why is Vijayanagara called Hampi?

The site’s ruins are known locally as Hampi, derived from Pampadevi, the local mother goddess.

What were the causes of the decline of Vijayanagara?

Defeat at Rakshasi-Tangadi in 1565, the sack of the capital, and later the growing independence of the nayakas.

Is the map of Vijayanagara asked in boards?

Yes. Vijayanagara and the neighbouring Deccan Sultanates are part of the map list.

Conclusion

An Imperial Capital: Vijayanagara brings a ruined city back to life. Revise its zones, structures and rulers with the tables above, practise the map and download the free PDF for revision.

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Author Bio: Written and reviewed by the Nextoper Editorial Team, a group of CBSE history educators who build chapter notes directly from the NCERT textbook and past board paper patterns.

Freshness Note: These notes follow the NCERT Class 12 History textbook, Themes in Indian History (Parts I, II and III) (NCERT reprint 2026-27, rationalised syllabus), and the CBSE syllabus for the 2026-27 session. Last checked on 28 November 2026.