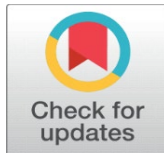
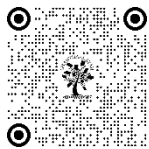


“ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION AND SOCIETY OF VIJAYNAGAR EMPIRE”

Dr. Anshuman Suman ¹✉

¹ Asst. Professor, T.N.B. College, Bhagalpur T. M. B. U., Bhagalpur



Corresponding Author

Dr. Anshuman Suman,
suman905540@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The education system in Vijayanagara was not materially different from the ancient Indian education system. Education was not directly encouraged, but temples, monasteries, Agradahs, etc. were the main centers of education.1 Primary schools or pathshalas were attached to temples and elementary education was provided there.2 Pathshalas were run in temples for education. Children were taught in their mother tongue. There was a system of higher education in Sanskrit Girls were also educated. Thousands of students pursued higher education in Madurai

1. INTRODUCTION

The education system in Vijayanagara was not materially different from the ancient Indian education system. Education was not directly encouraged, but temples, monasteries, Agradahs, etc. were the main centers of education.1 Primary schools or pathshalas were attached to temples and elementary education was provided there.2 Pathshalas were run in temples for education. Children were taught in their mother tongue. There was a system of higher education in Sanskrit Girls were also educated. Thousands of students pursued higher education in Madurai.

The education system of the Vijayanagar Empire was deeply rooted in traditional Hindu learning and was primarily centered around religious and temple institutions. It was designed to impart both spiritual and secular knowledge, ensuring the continuation of Indian intellectual traditions. Education was not universally accessible, as it was largely based on caste and social status, but the empire saw significant advancements in literary, philosophical, and scientific studies.3

Education in the Vijayanagar Empire was primarily conducted in temples, mathas (monastic institutions), and agraharas (Brahmin settlements). These institutions served as centers of higher learning, where subjects such as Sanskrit, philosophy, logic, and theology were taught. The famous mathas of Sringeri, Kanchi, and Hampi were well-

known for producing scholars and religious leaders. Agraharas, which were villages granted to Brahmins for educational and religious purposes, played a crucial role in preserving traditional knowledge. These places often housed Vedic schools (pathshalas) where students were trained in Hindu scriptures, rituals, and classical literature.⁴

The gurukula system was the primary mode of education, where students (shishyas) lived with their teachers (gurus) and received personalized instruction. The education was mostly oral, with students memorizing texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata), and legal treatises (Dharmaśāstra). Apart from religious studies, subjects like grammar, poetry, rhetoric, astronomy, medicine, and statecraft were also taught, particularly to those preparing for administrative roles.

The education system of the Vijayanagar Empire covered a wide range of subjects, ensuring both spiritual and practical knowledge. Vedic Studies formed the foundation of higher learning, focusing on the recitation and interpretation of the four Vedas—Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. Students memorized these texts and learned about rituals, hymns, and their philosophical significance. Philosophy and Theology were also integral parts of education, with scholars studying Hindu philosophical schools like Vedanta, Nyaya, and Mimamsa, along with Jain and Buddhist philosophies.⁵ These teachings shaped religious discourse and ethical governance. Mathematics and Astronomy were highly developed, drawing inspiration from scholars like Aryabhata and Brahmagupta. Students learned concepts such as algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, while astronomy played a crucial role in determining religious calendars and astrological predictions. Medicine (Ayurveda) was another important field, based on ancient texts like Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, covering herbal medicine, surgery, and diagnostic methods. Language and Literature flourished under royal patronage, with Sanskrit as the dominant scholarly language, alongside Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil. Poetry, drama, and historical writings were encouraged, leading to the creation of remarkable literary works. Political Science and Administration was a key subject for training future rulers and warriors, focusing on Arthashastra, law, taxation, diplomacy, and military strategies. Lastly, Arts and Music held a special place in education, with temple institutions and royal courts nurturing talent in music, dance, and painting. This comprehensive education system contributed to the intellectual and cultural prosperity of the Vijayanagar Empire.⁶

The education of women in the Vijayanagar Empire was limited primarily to the upper-class elite. Women from royal and aristocratic families received training in Sanskrit, literature, music, dance, and religious scriptures. Some women became poets and scholars, contributing to literature and temple culture. For instance, Tirumalamba, a prominent poetess, wrote in Sanskrit and Kannada. However, formal education for common women was minimal, with their learning largely restricted to household skills and religious teachings.⁷

Formal education was largely inaccessible to the lower classes, who relied on practical training rather than scholarly instruction. Farmers, artisans, and merchants typically learned their trades through apprenticeships within their families or guilds. Merchant communities, such as the Komatis and Chettis, trained their children in accounting, business practices, and foreign trade, which played a key role in the Vijayanagar economy.⁸ In rural areas, village schools (known as tol or pathshalas) provided elementary education, where basic literacy, numeracy, and religious teachings were imparted.

The Vijayanagar rulers were great patrons of education and scholarship. Kings like Krishnadevaraya encouraged the writing of literature in multiple languages and provided grants to temples and mathas for educational activities. Krishnadevaraya himself was a scholar and wrote the famous Telugu work Amuktamalyada, which discusses governance and Hindu philosophy.⁹ The rulers also supported Jain and Muslim scholars, demonstrating religious tolerance in education.

Many temples and mathas had extensive libraries containing palm-leaf manuscripts of religious texts, literary works, and scientific treatises. These libraries served as repositories of knowledge and were often attached to centers of learning. Scholars copied and preserved classical works, ensuring the continuation of India's intellectual heritage. However, the destruction of Vijayanagar in 1565 during the Battle of Talikota led to the loss of many such invaluable manuscripts.¹⁰

The education system in the Vijayanagar Empire was deeply connected to religious institutions and traditional learning methods. While Brahmins and the elite had access to advanced education in subjects like philosophy, mathematics, and literature, common people primarily received vocational training. Women from aristocratic backgrounds had some educational opportunities, particularly in the arts and literature. The empire played a crucial role in preserving Indian knowledge and promoting regional languages, laying the foundation for later developments in South

Indian education and culture. Despite its strengths, the system remained largely limited to privileged sections of society, leaving lower castes and rural populations with minimal formal education.

The society of the Vijayanagar Empire was diverse and hierarchical, influenced by Hindu, Jain, and Islamic traditions. Brahmins held a prominent position in religious and administrative matters, followed by the Kshatriyas, who were the ruling and warrior class. The Vaishyas were engaged in trade and commerce, while the Shudras and other lower communities worked in agriculture, crafts, and labor-intensive professions. The empire was known for its religious tolerance, allowing the coexistence of Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Jainism.¹¹ The capital, Hampi, was a flourishing urban center with grand temples, busy markets, and a strong presence of international trade. Women had a relatively better status compared to other contemporary societies, with some actively participating in literature, administration, and even military affairs. Festivals, music, dance, and temple rituals played a significant role in daily life, it seems to the base of Vedic and Classical Traditions of India.

The social structure of the Vijayanagara Empire in the greater South Indian region was a unique form of Indian society. Their social structure was very distinctive. This society was marked by secularism¹². The Brahmins lived in areas where they controlled land and prestige. They also controlled the people dependent on the land they owned. They also enjoyed prestige as a priestly class due to their sacred functions. A large number of Vedic temples were built from village endowments, which were given to the Brahmins. As temple functionaries, they had the power to exercise ritual control over all other castes. As managers of these religious centres, Brahmins were given the power to exercise ritual control over all other castes. They also enjoyed great secular authority. The territorial division of society reflects the social groups in the Tamil country. ¹³ The divisions were based on natural sub-regions and related occupational patterns. In South India, the social groups had less contact with the territory they lived in and preferred co-cousins and maternal uncles. Uncle - niece marriage was accepted. Another feature of the social structure was the dual division of the lower castes by right- and left-hand designations. The right- hand designations referred to Vishnu while the left-hand castes indicated Shaivism. In most cases, the right-hand castes were primarily involved in agricultural production. While the left -hand castes were engaged in trade and non-agricultural production. These people traded products extensively. In the Vijayanagar period, the peasantry was the base of the social order, the economy was based on it, all other sections of the society were also dependent on it. Satkam, the Tamil poetic genre, considers the leading peasantry as pure Sat-Sudras. They claimed ritual purity, respectable secular rank for them. Temples played an important role in demarcating or determining the special place of groups who were participants in the worship of a sacred deity. Thus the social organization of this period consisted of Brahmins, left and right-hand castes, in which Brahmins enjoyed a respectable position. This society also included agricultural castes, i.e. Vellalas and lower castes like weavers¹⁴.

Social tax was levied for the expenses of temples etc. Tax was also levied on marriages etc. When needed, defence tax was also levied for military expenses and maintenance of forts etc. The state also got a lot of income from the fines imposed on criminals in court cases. Forced labour was also taken from people for public works such as construction of canals and ponds for irrigation.¹⁵

Craftsmen and artisans had an important place in the rural society. craft Of Member Interracial community making Were. From this Them Strength Strong to And Political Representation and Business Benefit achieved to In Help ml Blacksmiths and carpenters had the highest status in the society. Weavers, potters, oilmen, toddy tappers and leather workers were next in rank. Shettys and Chettis had an important place among the middle class people. Most of the trade was done by them. Apart from trade, these people were also skilled in clerical and accounting work. Like Chettis, artisans who were skilled in trade were called 'Veer Panchal'. People who migrated from North India to South India were called 'Badva'. ¹⁶ Blacksmiths, carpenters, sculptors, goldsmiths and other metal workers and weavers came under the lower and smaller group. Weavers lived in the temple area and also helped in the temple administration and local houses.

The craftsmen were organised into guilds which safeguarded their interests. They worked for the merchant guilds almost like labourers, as the merchant guilds sold the craftsmen's raw materials and bought the finished goods. Most of the trade was local. However, it was expanding. Arab and other foreign merchants brought a variety of foreign goods.¹⁷ The merchant guilds were very powerful and were heard in the court. Economic matters and trade taxes were discussed with the merchants. The state gave due importance to foreign trade.

The status of women in the Vijayanagar Empire was a mix of privilege and restriction, shaped by social customs, religious practices, and economic factors. While the society remained largely patriarchal, women in different strata of society had varying levels of freedom and influence. Women from royal and noble families enjoyed significant privileges. Many were educated and played crucial roles in administration, diplomacy, and even military affairs. Historical records

mention several queens and princesses who actively participated in governance, temple-building activities, and literature.¹⁸ For example, Tirumalamba, a poetess of the Vijayanagar period, composed literary works in Sanskrit and Kannada. Royal women also had control over land grants and temple donations, highlighting their economic power.

The Vijayanagar Empire was a major center for art, culture, and literature, and women contributed significantly to these fields. Many were skilled poets, musicians, and dancers. The temple-centered tradition allowed women, especially those associated with religious institutions, to gain prominence in dance and music. The devadasi system, where women were dedicated to temple service, was widespread. While some devadasis held respected positions as temple dancers and musicians, others faced social and economic exploitation over time.¹⁹

Women were also involved in economic activities. Some engaged in trade, owned businesses, and participated in the local markets. Inscriptions from the period mention women as landowners and donors, indicating their financial independence in certain cases. They played a role in industries such as textile production, which was a major economic activity in the empire. Despite these privileges, Vijayanagar society imposed several restrictions on women, especially in terms of marriage and family life. Child marriage was a common practice, particularly among the upper classes. The system of dowry was also prevalent. Sati (the practice of a widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre) was practiced among some sections of society, though it was not widespread. Purdah (veiling) was not common among Hindu women but was observed by some women influenced by Persian and Islamic traditions.²⁰

Women from elite families had access to education, with some excelling in Sanskrit, Kannada, and Telugu literature. However, education for common women was limited, as their primary role was considered to be household management. Religion played a major role in shaping women's lives, with many actively involved in temple activities, religious rituals, and pilgrimages.

The status of women in the Vijayanagar Empire was relatively better compared to many contemporary medieval societies. Women, especially from noble and artistic backgrounds, had opportunities to participate in administration, literature, and trade. However, patriarchal norms still governed their lives, and practices like child marriage and sati remained in place. While some women enjoyed power and respect, others, particularly from lower economic backgrounds, faced social and economic limitations. Thus, Vijayanagar society reflected a complex and diverse picture of women's status, balancing between empowerment and restriction.²¹

The status of women was considered to be good. Women played many roles in the empire - they used to write down the deeds of the kings. They also used to calculate the income and expenditure. Women even participated in wrestling. They also used to do jobs like astrology, judging, dancing and singing. Purdah system was not prevalent in the society. The practice of Sati was considered sacred. Stone monuments were built in the memory of women who became Sati. Women generally enjoyed a high status in the society and there are examples of their active participation in the political, social and literary life of the country. Apart from this, women were trained in wrestling, sword and shield handling, music and other fine arts. They also received a fair amount of literary education. Nuniz writes: "They also have women who wrestle, and others who are astrologers and soothsayers; and they have women who write down the accounts of all the expenses incurred inside the gates and others whose duty it is to write down all the affairs of the state and compare their books with those of the writers outside; they also have women for music, who play instruments and sing. Even the wives of the king were proficient in music...It is said that they also had women for music to act as judges, as well as bailiffs and watchmen who guard the palace every night, and these are won over." Polygamy, i.e. polygamy,²² was a common practice, especially among the wealthy classes. Child marriage was also common. The evil practice of demanding dowry was very prevalent among them. Those who were rich were caught in the dowry system. People of all religions and castes lived in Vijayanagara. There was no discrimination against them by the state. There was a practice of polygamy in the kingdom. Kings, heroes and wealthy people had many wives. There was no practice of purdah in the kingdom. There were many courtesans or prostitutes in the kingdom.²³

They taught music to princesses in the palace besides singing and dancing in temples and festivals. The state sometimes intervened in social affairs to settle disputes between different communities.²⁴ The practice of Sati, or women burning themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres, was very common in Vijayanagara, and the Brahmins freely sanctioned it. Dramas, Yakshagana, chess, dice playing, gambling, sword fighting, jugglery, tamasha shows, fishing, painting, etc. were the means of entertainment for the people. People were both non-vegetarians and vegetarians.²⁵ Eating beef was prohibited. Brahmins did not eat meat. Cotton and silk clothes were in vogue. Men wore dhoti, kurta, cap and dupatta and women wore dhoti and choli. Women of the upper class wore petticoats. Only the rich wore shoes. Men wore a bracelet (gandapendra) on one foot.²⁶

The Vijayanagar Empire was a culturally and intellectually flourishing society, where education and social structure played a crucial role in shaping governance, religion, and daily life. The education system was deeply rooted in religious and traditional learning, with institutions like temples, mathas, and agraharas serving as centers of knowledge. Subjects such as Vedic studies, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, literature, and political science were taught, ensuring both spiritual and practical education.²⁷ While Brahmins dominated scholarly pursuits, regional languages like Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil flourished, promoting literary and artistic advancements. However, access to education was largely limited to the upper classes, with common people receiving vocational training rather than formal schooling.²⁸ The society of the Vijayanagar Empire was hierarchical yet dynamic, accommodating various social, religious, and economic groups. Brahmins played a key role in religious and educational matters, while Kshatriyas held political and military power.²⁹ The Vaishyas contributed to trade and commerce, making the empire an economic hub, while the Shudras and lower castes worked in agriculture, crafts, and labor. Women, particularly from royal and noble families, had better status compared to other medieval societies, with some excelling in literature, administration, and the arts. However, social restrictions such as child marriage, sati, and the devadasi system persisted, reflecting the patriarchal nature of society.

Overall, the Vijayanagar Empire fostered a rich intellectual and cultural heritage, with education and societal organization contributing to its prosperity. While its structured social system ensured stability, it also created barriers to equal opportunities in education and social mobility. Despite these limitations, Vijayanagar left a lasting impact on South Indian history through its advancements in learning, art, and governance, influencing later dynasties and regional traditions.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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