

## The Meaning of Ritual and Ceremony in a Political Context : An Analysis of Architectural Reliefs

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**Abstract:** *The subject and meaning of the reliefs on the monumental structure, Mahānavamī Dibba at Vijayanagara, have been a conundrum, especially in the context of royal ceremony and religious ritual. The paper examines political power in the context of the mahānavamī festival as recapitulated in the reliefs on the Dibba. Another significant aspect of the inquiry entails the social and political uses of ritual ceremony and its relation with the formal structure of society. Finally, one may even discern a meaning in the workings of society through the ceremonial or that of the ceremonial for state stability.*

**Keywords:** *Mahānavamī, Ritual, Ceremony, Hampi, sculpture, architecture*

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## Introduction

The fortified city of Vijayanagara, (The City of Victory) was the capital of the kingdom of Vijayanagara which ruled South India from 1336 to 1565 CE. The present city is a vision of conglomerations of built forms: magnificent temples, palaces, shrines, gateways, walls, platforms and bazaars. The grandeur of its structural environment and the vast urban setting of the city are a testimony to the accounts of Domingo Paes, who wrote that it was “as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight...the best provided city in the world...”<sup>1</sup> However, when the city was ransacked by the collective forces of the Moslems in c. 1565 A.D., to 1565 CE the empire also came to an end.<sup>2</sup> The violent sack of the city has left its indelible mark on the architectural remains of the city: treasure hunters and forces of nature have caused widespread destruction, altering the original urban-built environment of this glorious capital.<sup>3</sup> But the “ruins” still contain a vast number of religious and secular structures in the form of lofty temples, large palace complexes, bazaars, fortified walls, gateways, towers, tanks, aqueducts, streets and platforms which reflect the power and prestige of its rulers. There exist a large number of written documents in the form of inscriptions, accounts of foreign travelers and contemporary texts, which provide rich material for this study. Royal inscriptions in Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit, engraved

on temple walls, boulders, shrines, gateways are primarily donative, but some furnish information about the contemporary political and historical events. Contemporary works by kings, queens, saints and poets that supply important historical and social information include, *Madhura Vijaya*<sup>4</sup> by Gangadevi, wife of Kampana and *Kṛṣṇa Raya Vijayam* by Dhurjati which describes the victories of Kṛṣṇadeva Raya,<sup>5</sup> *Rayavachakamu*,<sup>6</sup> *Amuktamalyada*, *Achyutarayabhudayam*, the *Saluvabhyudayam* by Rajanatha Dindima and *Virupaksa Vasantotsava Campu* by Ahobala which help us to reconstruct and explain the meaning of royal imagery.

In addition, accounts of foreign travelers who visited Vijayanagara provide a graphic description of the city, customs and rituals, festivals and celebrations, court life and important contemporary events. Among the accounts those by Domingo Paes, Fernao Nuniz, Abdur Razaaq and Nicolo di Conti are chronicles. The detailed and vivid accounts by the Portuguese travelers, Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz, found in the *Chronicas dos reis de Bisnagar*, paint a picture of grandeur and magnificence of the royal city. While Paes is observant about the customs, the city, its architecture, palaces, the activities of the king, Nuniz concentrates on the history of the political events and dealings of the king with the Portuguese. Abdur Razaaq, who visited Vijayanagara during the reign of Deva Raya II (1423-1446 A.D.), was the Persian ambassador who stayed in the city in c.1442 CE. Fascinated by the grandeur of the city, he left us a detailed account of the capital, especially about the *mahānavamī* festival celebrated there.<sup>7</sup> The Italian traveler, Nicolo di Conti, who visited Vijayanagara in c.1420 A.D., gives as well an account of the celebrations,<sup>8</sup> The Mahānavamī Dibba (fig. 1) is a massive platform was described as the Throne Platform and identified with the festival of *mahānavamī* by Longhurst, who was the earliest scholar to present a functional description of the monuments at Hampi.<sup>9</sup> The term, *mahānavamī* means the “great nine-day (festival)”,<sup>10</sup> but is also known as *daśara* (ten day festival) or *navarātra*<sup>11</sup> (nine nights). The large platform was described by the Portuguese traveler, Domingo Paes, as the House of Victory, attributing the construction of the platform to Kṛṣṇadeva Raya after his victory over the Gajapatis of Orissa. But, in fact, it was first constructed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and later reconstructed twice by the Vijayanagara kings and located in the Royal Area, in the innermost fortification wall of the city.<sup>12</sup> The platform is spatially related to the Audience Hall and the Rāmacandra temple as well as the surrounding civic structures, water works, tanks, baths, the large stepped well, but stands out distinctly by its massive dimensions and unique architectural form.<sup>13</sup> Such a secular, permanent building constructed for an annual royal festival was previously unknown in South India.

### Description of the Reliefs

The high walls of the platform, faced with granite and chlorite slabs are largely carved with reliefs in four to six registers, except for the large figures of the elephant and the *vyāla* (leonine figure) on the balustrade of the staircase on the south side. The reliefs are small in scale running in laterally continuous bands consist of figures of warriors, elephants, horses, camels, female dancers, wrestlers, musicians, processions, hunting scenes and kings. For our purposes, only those reliefs having to do with the figure of the king and his activities, military forces, emblems, and royal ceremony will be described. These scenes are found mainly in the first phase and are in the form of kings witnessing wrestling contests, receiving homage from “foreigners” and gifts of horses, of being approached by processions of horses, elephants, soldiers, dancers and musicians. He can be identified by *lakṣaṇas*, especially by the seated posture of *vīrāsana* (one leg on the knee, the other on the ground), similar to the posture of Rāma in the Rāmayana panels on the Rāmacandra temple. (fig. 2) There are royal scenes as well on the eastern wall, south side and in one of them, a king is approached by a row of elephants and soldiers; in another, a king (probably with two nobles) is receiving “foreigners”; in yet another he

is witnessing a dance scene,<sup>14</sup> he is also seen riding on a horse with a state umbrella which occurs on the southern wall, south side. Thus, there are more than a dozen scenes with the figure of the king. The eastern and northern enclosure walls of the Rāmacandra temple (fig. 3) have similar royal scenes to those on the Mahānavamī Dibba. They relate very closely to the Dibba reliefs, in style and subject, and thus appear to share their meaning and function as well. They depict rows of elephants, horses with their attendants, foot soldiers, female dancers and musicians. On the eastern end of the northern wall, the king appears in two rows, seated in *vīrāsana* with his attendant; in the second row from below, he is seen receiving two men who appear to be paying homage to him while attendants with their horses proceed towards the king, while in the third row, the king is probably with his queen, witnessing a wrestling match and being approached by foot soldiers and probably a chief on a horse.

### The *Mahānavamī* Festival

The similarity of the reliefs in subject and imagery between the Dibba and temple reliefs, suggests that the temple was involved in the king's activities. The reliefs on the Mahānavamī Dibba and the Rāma temple, including those in which the king is depicted, are in subject and intent connected to the *mahānavamī* festival. Luckily, we have considerable information about this great festival, both from historical sources and from contemporary celebrations. The ten-day festival occurs during the lunar month of *āsvini*, which is normally between September and October<sup>15</sup> and is dedicated to the worship of the goddess, Durga to secure wealth and happiness for everyone, especially for the king to insure victory over enemies.<sup>16</sup> The festival consists of a number of ritually performed ceremonies, each day being associated with a *pūjā* rite. Among the ten days, the last three days are particularly significant. The most important ritual, shared throughout India, is the worship of the goddess Durga on the eighth day (*durgastami*).<sup>17</sup> The worship of the weapons and implements, *āyudha pūjā* takes place on the ninth day (*mahānavamī*); and the victory of Rāma is celebrated on the tenth day (*vijaya daśamī*), when God Rāma is believed to have achieved victory against the demon, Rāvaṇa. All three rituals (Durga worship, worship of arms and *vijaya daśamī*) are celebrated throughout India, but their importance vary according to the region. The festival was especially important for *kshatriyas*<sup>18</sup> or the ruling caste and the Vijayanagara rulers were perhaps the first kings in South India to celebrate the festival on a national scale.<sup>19</sup> For a knowledge of the celebration of the festival by the Vijayanagara rulers, an important source is the graphic and detailed accounts of foreign travelers who witnessed the celebration. Nicolo Conti, the Italian traveler was the first European to record the *mahānavamī* festival (c.1440 CE) and Abdur Razaq, the Persian ambassador left a brief account (c.1442). But the most elaborate descriptions come from the Portuguese travelers, Domingo Paes, probably written between 1520 and 1522 CE, and Fernao Nuniz, composed between 1530 and 1537 CE. However, all these accounts are fragmentary and the foreign travelers did not always understand the significance of the ritual in the Indian context.

The festival of *mahānavamī* is a series of rituals accompanied by ceremonies,<sup>20</sup> such as music and dance.<sup>21</sup> The two are often integrated, but by rituals, I understand them as private acts of the king, while ceremonies are public acts by the king, although it is difficult to know which aspect is a ceremony and which particular aspect is a ritual. The major part of the festival consists of worship of different deities, such as Durga, Saraswati, Rāma and the worship of weapons and tools. The festival celebrated by Vijayanagara and Mysore royalty, consisted of the enactment of rituals and celebrations which defined the role of the king, who was the chief festival celebrant. Hence, in this context, ritual may be defined as private acts of the king performed during the festival and witnessed by a small, selected private audience while ceremonies were public acts of the king during the festival associated with the people.

The festival entailed both private and public acts (ritual and ceremonial) that incorporated a variety of interests, royal, religious, political, military and popular. The ritual aspect of the festival included worship of the goddess, of horses and elephants, worship of the throne, sword and weapons, as was the enactment of the enthronement of the king. They were highly structured, controlled by advice from the priests (who followed the texts) and had specific religious goals for kings and kingship. The ceremonial aspect consisted of more open pārticipatory activities, in which the king lent his presence towards involving his followers and people. These included holding of audience by the king, giving of gifts and honors, receiving of gifts, viewing processions, watching contests, performances and going in a procession. The festival, as performed in Mysore during the twentieth century can be reconstructed from four primary sources: the 1921 description by Rāmakrishna Rao, my interview of the son of the *guru* of the Mysore Mahārāja, the present descendant of the Mysore Mahārāja and my interview with eye-witnesses to the festival. From an analysis of the various accounts, it appears that there was no variation in the way the festival was celebrated each year at Mysore. Hence, the question of the performance of the festival on a specific year does not arise here.

A comparison of ritual events at Mysore and Vijayanagara, as we know from the accounts, reveals commonalities between the two. The sword and arms were kept near the king's throne, which was of great importance throughout the festival. The throne was worshipped by the king; it was "mounted" by the king in an elaborate ritual at Mysore; and it was from the throne that the king gave audiences and witnessed events both at Mysore and Vijayanagara. The ritual and ceremony connected with the throne had a significance for the nature of kingship. Firstly, rituals associated with the throne were a reenactment of the coronation (*pattabhisekha*) of the king when he was mounted with due ceremonies. At Vijayanagara, there was a symbolic enactment of delegation of authority by the provincial rulers. According to the *Achyutarayabhyudaya*, in the consecration ceremony, kings who ruled various provinces held symbolic emblems, the one from Kalinga held a golden vessel, another a gem studded sandals, the one from Lanka, a ceremonial sword etc. The lesser kings showered golden petals on the new king to show their allegiance, then gave him the gifts they held, and honored him. At Mysore, it was not the showering of the king with golden petals, but more symbolic such as the "touching of the coin" by the king.<sup>22</sup> Thus there was symbolic anointment, crowning, recognition, and honoring as the ideal of *dharma*. At the same time, at Vijayanagara, the queen, Varadambika and his son, China Venkatadri were consecrated to ensure the continuation of the line. This was a reenactment of the coronation ceremony (*pattabhisekha*) of the king. It is not surprising to find numerous coronation scenes of Rāma on the Rāmacandra temple. The throne was a source of power and animation for the king. Only when the king was seated on the throne could he hold audience and be in a position to receive the homage and respect of the nobles. Hence, it was not the king as an individual, but kingship as symbolized by the throne, that was sacred. The throne, sword, crown and anklet were symbols of kingship and the king was animated by possessing them and gains his powers from them. The sword was entrusted to the goddess during the ten days so that it would be infused with the cosmic and sacred energy (*śakti*) of the goddess.<sup>23</sup> By the infusion of religious power into the king's sword, kept near the throne and later near the goddess, the ritual secured the re-appointment of the king by god. The coronation was symbolically a union of spiritual and temporal authority which was enacted ritually during the annual festival, and hence the throne ritual became symbolic of rejuvenation of kingship.

### **The Role of the Goddess in the MahāNavamī Festival**

It is appropriate that the rejuvenation of powers occurs during the Durga festival, as it was the goddess Durga who possessed physical powers to destroy and gain victory over the demon, Mahiṣāsura.

Goddesses are important sources of worship during *mahānavamī*, and at Mysore the goddess assumed importance, being identified with the family goddess, Chamundeswari.

### The Ninth and Tenth Day Ceremonies

On the ninth day, the worship of tools and weapons took place. This ritual, known as the *āyudha pūjā* (worship of weapons) includes the worship of tools and implements according to one's profession.<sup>24</sup> They may be the plough of the farmer, or bow and arrow of the warrior, the horses and elephants and sword of the king, and in modern days, worship of people's cars, autos, bicycles, and other vehicles. It was significant to the *kṣatriya* caste, especially the king, whose power depended on military might. In Mysore, on the ninth day, worship of swords, bows, arrows, horses and elephants (symbolically, the state horse and state elephant) took place. At Vijayanagara, the *āyudha pūjā* took place in the form of worship to the horses and elephants, but perhaps privately as well, which Paes was unable to witness. He describes some aspects of the *āyudha pūjā*:

After the king has entered inside he comes out, and with him a Brahman who takes in his hand a basket full of white roses and approaches the king on the platform, and the king, taking three handfuls of these roses, throws them to the horses, and after he has thrown them he takes a basket of perfume and acts towards them as though he could sense them; and when he has finished doing this he reaches towards the elephants and does the same to them.<sup>25</sup>

10<sup>th</sup> day The tenth day, known as *vijaya daśamī*, (tenth day of victory) was very significant, indicating when Rāma gained victory over Rāvaṇa. In a similar way, on that day the kings undertook their wars (*yudha jatra*) because if they did, they would become victorious like Rāma.<sup>26</sup> A picturesque description of the tenth day of the festival performed at Vijayanagara is given by Paes. He says that the king pitches a tent away from the city, where the idol is brought. From the tent to the palace are arranged the kings' forces, his elephants, horses and soldiers, all richly attired. The king rides on a horse (with two state umbrellas), accompanied by his soldiers and a cage with the idol in it, holding a review of the forces amidst cheers and shouts, and then the king then returns the same way. In the words of Paes:

From this tent to the king's palace the captains range themselves with their troops and array, each one in his place according to his rank in the kings' household. Thus the soldiers stand in line; but it does not appear to you to be only one line but in some places two or three, one behind the other... Those on foot stood in front of those on horses, and the elephants behind the horse.... The king leaves his palace riding on the horse... clothed in the many rich white cloths, with two umbrellas of state all gilded and covered with crimson velvet, and with the jewels and adornments... Then to see the grandeur of the nobles and men of rank, I cannot possibly describe it all....

There went in front of the king many elephants with their coverings and ornaments,... about twenty horses... Close to the king went a cage... and in it is carried the idol of which I have already spoken. Thus accompanied the king passed along gazing at his soldiers, who gave shouts and cries and struck their shields; the horses neighed, the elephants screamed, so that it seemed as if the city would be overturned, the hill and valley and all the ground trembled with the discharges of arms and mesquits; and to see the fire-works over the plains, this was indeed wonderful. Truly it seemed as if the whole world were collected there.<sup>27</sup>

If this detailed evidence is compared against the procession held by the Mysore Rajas in 1920's, the description of Paes appears very factual. On the morning of the tenth day the Mysore king led a procession on the state horse accompanied by royal elephants and horses a short distance, returned in a palanquin and then witnessed a wrestling contest. In the evening was the royal procession to the Banni Mandapa (a pavilion with the *banni* tree, where images of goddesses which were worshipped in



the different temples, were brought) led by the king (accompanied by the Crown Prince or *Yuvaraja*), mounted on a decorated elephant over which was held an umbrella (*howdah*). At the Banni Mandapa the king reviewed the troops and after *pūjā* to the *banni* (might be leaf or tree or *mandapa*) in one of the inner apartments, listened to the verses of the palace *vamsavali*, or genealogy. This was read out in Sanskrit. The reader of the genealogy (*sheristedar*) handed over consecrated *banni* leaves as blessed food (*prāsāda*) to the *Diwan* (Prime Minister) and the principal officers and the palace staff. The weapons (meaning perhaps the sword and spears) were carried in the State Palanquin. The king returned on the elephant, and after his return to the palace, a short *darbār* took place.<sup>28</sup>

At both Vijayanagara and Mysore, the tenth day was celebrated with great pomp and magnificence with illuminated lights, contests (especially wrestling), dances, music and festivities. The ritual of the procession was of special significance. The king setting out on the horse, which is the vehicle of the warrior, signified the setting out of the king for conquest.<sup>29</sup> Traditionally, the kings set out on the tenth day of the festival for *digvijaya*, during the month of *aśvinī*, after worshipping their weapons and military forces on the ninth day, believing that if they did they would be victorious like Rāma. Hence, the act of the review of the forces which were lined up between the king's palace and his tent in Vijayanagara, while in Mysore, it took place before the kings' palace. The shooting of the arrows by the king in the four directions signified his conquest of the four quarters. The procession of the king is the procession of victory, announcing his triumph, and as honor to his forces, the nobles and himself. The holding of contests, illumination of the palace and lights, waving of lights (*ārti*) to the king and reading of the *slokas* on victory celebrated the joyous occasion of victory. The reading of the genealogy probably signified the descent by the king and emulating his forefathers. The witnessing of wrestling combats was the enactment of a ritual combat in which the king gained victory, as he has done in war.<sup>30</sup> This stemmed from the practice of holding wrestling competitions during religious festivals.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, he witnessed wrestling contests all the ten days while being seated on the throne. The presence of the Horse and Elephant when he was on his throne implied that military power (inclusive of physical power) were the king's insignias, similar to the sword.

The visit to the Banni Mandapa (with its Banni tree) by the king of Mysore, signified the peace which he ensured to his people after the victory. The *banni* tree was believed to have provided shade to Pārvatī; the images of the goddesses in the temples of the city are also taken to the Banni Mandapa in order to "cool" her. The *banni* tree was also considered sacred as Rāma is said to have circumambulated the tree in his search for Sita and then secured her.<sup>32</sup> The visit by the king to the Banni Mandapa was a gesture of victorious thanksgiving to the goddess who has now been cooled (after giving her powers). Receiving the leaves of *banni* meant the establishment of peace and its distribution meant the sharing of peace with his nobles and officials, who had shared their power. Thus the festival consisted of enactment of military war, celebration of victory, peace, worship and thanksgiving to god; signifying a sacral form of kingship with ritual, and military aspects.

### The Importance of Rāma in the Festival

While many features of the festival are shared by Vijayanagara and Mysore, unique to Vijayanagara is the strong evidence of the incorporation of god Rāma into the festivity. Furthermore, reliefs similar to those on the Dibba were carved on the Rāmacandra temple. The location and style of the reliefs indicate that the temple may have been the scene of one of the events during the celebration. Perhaps the display of troops was performed in that area outside the Rāma temple or that the king visited the temple some time during the triumphal procession or even at the end of the procession. That the Rāma temple was built at the same time that the Kṛṣṇa temple was built (1513 CE), indicates

that the victory over the Gajapati of Orissa was a major event which made the king give additional importance to Rāma, the victorious God. In order to connect the victory of Rāma to that of worship of the goddess, the *Puranas* constructed the story of Rāma having performed the *pūjā* to the goddess before his victory. Such a mythical story was made possible at a place such as Vijayanagara, where the site was associated with many events from the Rāmayana. However, the uniting of the two aspects was part of the process of Sanskritisation<sup>33</sup> (or spread of *brahmanical* ideas) when the mingling of local deities (such as the local goddess) with Vedic gods (such as Rāma) was taking place in South India.

The incorporation of Rāma within the festival was probably an innovation by Vijayanagara kings during the sixteenth century, perhaps by Kṛṣṇadeva Raya who built the Rāmacandra temple. This may have been due to the growing popularity of Rāma in medieval India.<sup>34</sup> Some of the medieval works were the 13<sup>th</sup> century work, *Rāmayana* by Ranganatha and 14<sup>th</sup> century work, *Bhaskara Rāmayana* of Hulakki Bhaskara.<sup>35</sup> In the *sthalapuranas* and local histories, Rāma was a popular figure.<sup>36</sup> It appears that the Rāma legend lent itself to social and political imagination, especially the demonization of Moslems,<sup>37</sup> and as the paradigm of royal identity for kings. Whenever there was an opportunity to praise the ruling king, the king was compared to Rāma in valor.<sup>38</sup> Several characteristics of Rāma made him attractive to Kṛṣṇadeva Raya and to the Vijayanagara kings. Rāma was an ideal king, an unconquerable protector, an example of *dharmaraja* (protector of *dharma*) and his *rāmarajya* was the ideal kingdom.<sup>39</sup> Hampi and its surroundings were associated with the activities of Rāma, and the *sthalamahatmya* of the place led to the consecration of a number of images of Rāma and his devotees, Parasurāma, Sugriva and Hanuman. The Vijayanagara rulers constructed temples dedicated exclusively to the worship of Rāma.<sup>40</sup> Built in c. 1513 CE, the Rāmacandra temple at Hampi was a temple for the royal family; evidenced by the private doorway that led to the temple from the palace. As the Fritz-Michell- Nagaraja Rao team interprets the temple, it was the center of the city, towards which all roads converged.<sup>41</sup> The platform and the temple were connected by a narrow alley ending in the south enclosure of the temple. The concept of Rāma as the victorious king, a *dhārmic* ideal and a divine being, greatly influenced the later Vijayanagara kings, who saw him as a god of victory in the *mahānavamī* festival.

### **Visual Imagery and the Mahānavamī Festival**

If we associate the important features of the festival with the visual imagery of the reliefs on the platform, it is possible to understand the reliefs from the point of the *mahānavamī*. The king, in four of the Dibba reliefs and in one of the Rāmacandra temple reliefs, is the focus of the ceremonial procession. Rows of horses, elephants, foot soldiers and female dancers parade towards the king who is seated facing the oncoming animals and soldiers. The south-west corner of the Dibba was perhaps the central meeting point of two directions of movement, or it could be the place for the beginning of the procession or even review of troops. From the south side moving west are the foot soldiers, horses, camels and elephants (arranged from top to bottom), while from the west side, moving southwards, is another flow of troops, which comprised of horses and elephants moving towards the king who is portrayed in registers one and three on the south side. As described in the beginning of the chapter, the animals took part in the procession on the tenth day and were displayed for a review by the king. The horses with their riders, some with banners recall Paes' description of riders with banners. Figures of horses and elephants within the square panels, are merely standing, perhaps taking part in the ceremony of the review of the troops. Others, in large rectangular panels, seem to be in procession. One of the panels on the west wall depicts a royal rider, with the royal umbrella above him. Both in the ritual as well as for the defense and maintenance of the empire the horse<sup>42</sup> and the elephant were especially

valued. Although the animals follow the iconographic tradition of South Indian temple art, by their placement on the plinth of the temple, they are here represented in a narrative context, as galloping fast victoriously with banners. The foot soldiers are shown carrying a variety of objects, such as the bow, arrow and the spear and lead the animal forces in a royal parade, suggested by the posture of their right foot. Thus the functional elements of the kings' army, the horses, elephants, foot-soldiers, all of which we know took part in the celebration, have been faithfully reproduced.

There are a number of foreigners depicted in the reliefs of the Dibba (and on the plinth of the Vitthala temple), which include Persian merchants, Arab women, Turkish dancers and Muslim horse-grooms. It is interesting to find that, while Vijayanagara was in constant conflict with the expanding Moslem kingdoms, foreign Moslems were a vital part of the country. Vijayanagara relied on them for the import of war horses from Sindh, Persia and Arabia which played a decisive factor in Vijayanagara military.<sup>43</sup> The concern of the Vijayanagara kings to ensure a continuous supply of horses, brought them in contact with both the Portuguese, and the Moslem traders.<sup>44</sup> The *mahānavamī* involved a true festive atmosphere. Dancing and music were major components, adding both to the celebratory nature and to the general popular appeal of the festival. Depicted on the reliefs are a variety of dancers, musicians and entertainers, all of whom participated in the procession.

### ***Mahānavamī* and Kinship at Vijayanagara**

The festival of *mahānavamī* expressed in ceremony and art, the heroic, *dhārmic*, religious and ritual aspects of Vijayanagara kingship. The heroic aspect was reflected in the importance given to weapons of war-swords, spears, royal forces - foot soldiers, horse-riders, horses, camels and elephants, some of which were even emblems of royalty. The coins of Deva Raya II depict the king with the elephant and sword. The ritual of the procession on the tenth day, symbolizing conquest by the king, expressed the military and political aspect of kingship. The events of the tenth day of the festival, the king's visit on a horse accompanied by weapons, the ritual shooting of arrows, the return of arms in a palanquin, reveal the king in the role of a conqueror as Rāma. The king's procession on the decorated elephant, the waving of lights, and crying of "jaya" recall a victorious military return from conquest. The greeting of crowds on the tenth day appears as a reenactment of the victorious entry of the king into the city after a military victory. Then, when the king visited the Banni Mandapa, and distributed the *banni* leaves, he brings peace to his kingdom. As a protector of his subjects and a provider of peace, the king played the role of maintainer of *dharma*. He visualized himself in the traditional role of the ideal king, Rāma, who was the embodiment of *dharma*. The ordered display of military forces gave the image of a well ordered kingdom. The ceremony gave the character of an established order or might have represented the victory of an established order. In a way, the function of the king as performing his role of *rajadharma* was implicit in the festival.

The religious character of kingship was predominant in the worship of the goddess which took place throughout the festival and ultimately in the procession of the idol along with that of the king. Its worship in the Banni Mandapa by the king, just before the enactment of war, as well as the keeping of the sword near the goddess for eight days, all signify the close blend of the sacred and secular aspects of kingship. The ceremony (or reception) of the king that took place before the Rāma temple stressed his *dharma* to protect, and thus legitimized his acts. It was an occasion for establishing a bond between the king and the divine and between the king and the people.<sup>45</sup> The nobles honored the king and acknowledged his supremacy and in turn the nobles were acknowledged as part of the large well-knit community. The ritual aspect of kingship, such as the king mounting the throne, worshipping the throne and reviewing the royal forces had a rejuvenating effect. In addition, the royal throne was sacred



and charged with the power of the *śakti* goddess which installed awe and fear among the people.

The festival had a much wider political significance as it was an occasion to command allegiance of the powerful *nayakas*. It was also an occasion to present tributes to the Vijayanagara king by the powerful local chiefs. The king's power over the local *nayakas* was largely ritualistic. The subordination of local vassal kings, consisted in paying the king homage, keeping a military force for his use and giving him annual tributes. The paying of tributes to the king was important to the king's treasury. It contributed an important source of revenue for the king and helped the king maintain the empire. Hence the *mahānavamī* was an occasion when the local chiefs could proclaim and exhibit their subordinate status and pledge allegiance. The *nayakas* and *palaiyagars* had to maintain an army for the king which they had to raise in times of war. The feudal lords were often rebellious. The *mahānavamī* was an occasion to pay allegiance to the king and for such an allegiance the display of force was essential. The display of wealth of the royal court coupled with the show of military strength must have struck terror in the hearts of those who planned rebellions.

A historical reason for the ritual splendor might have been the instability of the regime which was undermined from within by coups and usurpation and assailed from without by successful waves of invaders. Despite the change in dynasties, one thing that remained unchanged was the royal ritual which established the dynastic succession for the usurper and emphasized the continuation of traditional order. It was a fluid situation when anyone could become a king, and it was important for the king to emulate conspicuously his successful predecessors in order to demonstrate that one's acts were precisely like those of a king who had found approval on an earlier occasion. It may not be incorrect to view the ceremonials as developments or extensions of widespread commonplace religious festivals and rituals and it was this which gave royal display its compelling force. As the number and splendor of religious rituals in the temple towns increased (such as processions, marriages of gods and goddesses), the king constructed rival royal rituals with the king, not merely as a participant but as playing the central role. Thus the royal spectacles of a religious ritual was one step further; a logical development of a traditional popular religious festival. The construction of the ritual (especially the processional aspect) grew out of different compelling forces: the instability of the regime, integrative role in political economy, especially over the *nayakas*, and of the power of grand royal ceremonials over the city and empire.

The opulence and grandeur of the city during the ten day ceremonies was unparalleled. The procession, which was central to the spectacle displayed the king accompanied by the armed forces musicians, dancers, horses, camels, elephants displaying their war trophies, symbols, emblems, gold and glitter within and around an imperial setting - all expressed the power of the ceremonial. Whether it was meant only for the officials and chiefs or for the entire city is difficult to know. But the fact that a tax was collected for the festival indicates that the people knew about it and did view at least a part of it. However, the "non-mentioning" of the festival in indigenous sources similar to the descriptions by the foreign visitors poses a problem. It is probable that the ritual ceremonies had grown to be a part of annual celebration or that the women writers could not view the king's role in the ritual. But, it is undoubted that it was a royal annual program in which elite and the public viewed the king and the city. The festival connected the king with the city and the empire through the chiefs. It was also an occasion when the citizens of Vijayanagara could catch a glimpse of royalty and appreciate its grandeur and wealth. Even the Audience Hall, the Rāmacandra temple and the Dibba, which were not ordinarily accessible to the ordinary citizen, was on view. However, the main actor and participant was the king. The Dibba reliefs capture the grand and kingly spectacle and was an important part of the splendor of the scene. It also, however, expressed basic notions associated with Vijayanagara kingship. Indeed, the Dibba reliefs literally supported the king and recapitulated the celebration that sustained

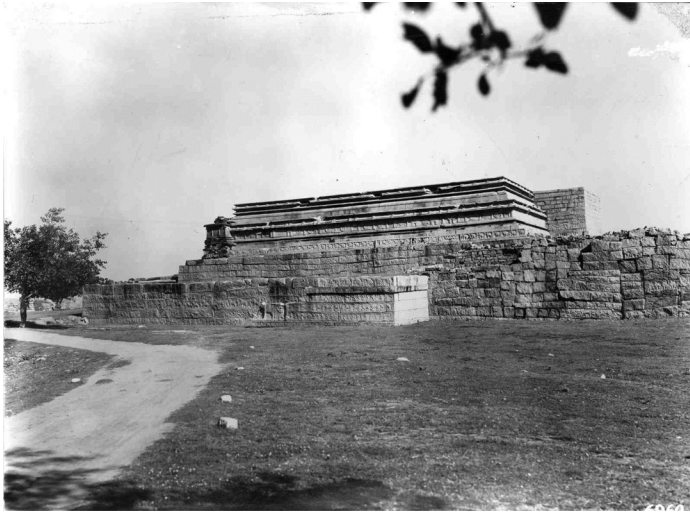


Fig. 1

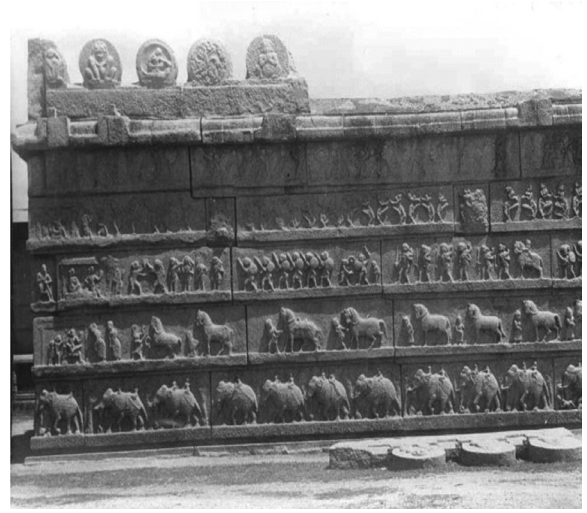


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Vijayanagara kingship.

### Notes

1. Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*: 256-257.
2. Sewell writes, "Never perhaps in the history of the world has such havoc been wrought, and wrought so suddenly, on so splendid a city..." *Ibid*: 206-208.
3. John Fritz and George Michell, "The Vijayanagara Documentation and Research Project: A Progress Report," in *South Asian Archaeology*, ed. B. Allchin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981):295-304.
4. Gangadevi, *Madhura Vijaya*, ed. S. Tiruvengkatahari (Annamalainagara: Annamalai University, 1957). Also see Bibliography, Contemporary Literary Works.
5. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, ed., *Sources of Vijayanagar History*: 111, 129.

6. *Ibid.*: 110.
7. John Dowson, comp. and ed., *History of India as Told by its Own Historians. The Muhammedan Period*. Edited from the Posthumous Papers of Sir H. M. Elliot, 8 vols. (London: Trubner and Co., 1872), vol. 4: 88 ff.
8. For the description by Conti see Edward Farley, *European Travellers in India during the 15th, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17th Centuries* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1909).
9. A. H. Longhurst, (Madras: Govt. Press, 1917; reprint, *Hampi Ruins: Described and Illustrated* New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1988): 56.
10. Burton Stein: "Medieval and Modern Kingly Ritual in South India," in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed., Bardwell L. Smith (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 67-90.
11. The festival was known as *dasara* by the Maharajas (Wodeyars) of Mysore and as *navaratri* by the Rajas of Ramnad.
12. Fritz, Michell and Nagaraja Rao, 1984: 99-102.
13. John M. Fritz, George Michell, and M. S. Nagaraja Rao, *Where Kings and Gods Meet: The Royal Centre at Vijayanagara, India* (Tucson: The University of Arizona, 1984): 146 ff.
14. There are some more scenes of "foreigners" in the Vitthalaswami Temple, whom Heras identified as Portuguese fidalgos. They occur all along the foundation of the main shrine in an endless procession of horses and men. The Portuguese wear boots, trousers, coats and bonnets. Their most characteristic feature is their beards and moustaches. In 1512, after the conquest of Goa by the Portuguese, Krishnadeva Raya sent an embassy to Albuquerque to obtain all the horses that might come to Goa from him. Albuquerque willingly granted the favor. He sent Gaspar Chanoca to Vijayanagara with some horses as presents to the great Hindu emperor. This meant much to Krishnadeva Raya who received the first arrival of the Portuguese horses. Thus the horses are represented on the foundation of the Temple.  
  
Heras has also claimed to identify the Franciscan Friar, Fray Luis, in a similar scene of procession of men and horses. The priest at the Catholic Church or "padra" is bearded and dressed in a long gown falling down to his feet; his head is covered with a queer bonnet, and he holds a long staff. Fray Luis came to Vijayanagara as the first ambassador of Albuquerque in 1510. He remained here for a year but was finally killed by an emissary of the Sultan of Bijapur, whose purpose was to impede the prospective trade in horses between Vijayanagara and Goa. According to Heras, in order to commemorate the embassy to Vijayanagara as the tragic end, his image was carved on the foundations of the temple. Heras, "Historical Carvings," Plate opposite page 87.
15. Jagadish Ayyar gives the reason of nine days as duration of the festival. According to him, the numeral nine contains within it all the other numbers of one digit but is contained in none of them. Similarly, Devi contains within her the whole universe and no finite form with limitation can contain her who is without any limitation. P. V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Festivities* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982): 35.
16. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 2nd ed., vol. 5, (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973): 156-157.
17. The festival is also known as *Durgotsava*. Durga Puja in Eastern India is an occasion of great festivity.
18. It may be noted that any caste that assumed royal power was known to belong to the *kshatriya* caste.
19. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. 3., p. 190.
20. All rituals performed in the royal court were accompanied by music and dance
21. This is testified by the account of Paes. Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*: 262.



Even in modern times, worship and other important events, such as marriage, is accompanied by ceremonial performances, such as music, beating of the drums etc.

22. This was performed during the coronation of the Mysore king, Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar. We do not know about Vijayanagara times, although it is most likely that the ceremony took place in a similar manner.
23. The coins of Kakatiya king Prataparudradeva shows a sword before a sun, moon and boar. See P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, *Kakatiya Coins and Measures*, gen. ed., N. Ramesan (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1975): 9 ff.
24. In South India the ritual is known as *ayudha puja*, *ayuta pucai* in Tamil Nadu. During the *ayudha pucai*, tools and implements of one's profession are worshipped. Cars and buses are decorated with flowers; sugarcanes are given and offerings of coconuts, fruits and cooked rice are made. Carl Gustav Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose: Studies on Rites and Rituals in South India* (Lund: C W K Gleerup, 1956): 170.
25. Sewell, 1988: 266.
26. Frederique Apffel Marglin, *Wives of the God-King: the Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985): 167.
27. Sewell, 1988: 275-279.
28. Rao, "The Dasara Celebrations": 301-311.
29. According to Fuller, god Vishnu Alakar set out for conquest on this day. Traditionally, kings set out for *digvijaya* on this day. C. J. Fuller and Penny Logan, "The Navaratri Festival in Madurai," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, Part I, (1985): 79-105.
30. Wrestling was popular with royalty and the masses. Kings were glorified with titles: *ahavamalla* (warrior wrestler) and *tribhuvanamalla* (wrestler of three worlds). It was a reflection of the emphasis of royal ritual competition -- found in the mythic theme of competition in the Vedic sacrifices. See Kaplan, *Ideal Kingship and the Feminine Power*: 70 ff.
31. Wrestling was a common royal pastime. In the *Kathasaritasagara*, there is a reference to a wrestler from the Deccan who defeated all the local wrestlers in a contest held at Varanasi on the occasion of a religious festival or *devayatra*. The raised hand of the king which is also depicted in the wrestling scenes of the Dibba, was not uncommon; it denoted the signal of the king to commence the combat. For a detailed description of wrestling, see Jyotsna K. Kamat, *Social Life in Medieval Karnataka* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1980): 68 ff.
32. The *banni* tree (called *Vanni* in Tamil) is the *Prosopis Spicigera* worshipped on this occasion. The Pandavas are said to have concealed their arms in this tree when they had to lead their lives in incognito. Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose*, p. 142.
33. See M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962): 48 ff.
34. *Trishashtilaksahna Mahapurana* (978), *Ramacandra Carita Purana* (1140) were some of the Ramayanas.
35. J. L. Brockington, *Righteous Rama* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984): 274.
36. A. V. Narasimha Murthy, "Sri Rama in Karnataka Art and Literature," in *Sri Rama in Art, Archaeology and Literature*, ed. B. P. Sinha (Patna: Bihar Puravid Parishad, 1989): 106-113.
37. Sheldon Pollock, "Ramanayan and Political Imagination in India," pp. 153-208, in David N. Lorenzen: ed. *Religious Movements in South Asia 600-1800*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi, 2004
38. Some of the words which occur in the inscriptions are *sangrama rama*, *parakrama rama*, *pratijna rama*. Ibid.

The Aravidu rulers of Vijayanagara, especially Tirumalaraya I (1570-71), minted gold and copper coins with Sri Rama on his varaha coins of gold. On the obverse are depicted Rama and Sita with Lakshmana, standing behind. Rama wears a tall *kirita*, and his hand is in *abhaya mudra*. On the reverse is the script in



Nagari legend, Sri Triumalaraya written in three lines.

*Ibid.*

39. Frank Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rama* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980): 39, 75, 159 ff.
40. Narasimha Murthy, "Sri Rama in Karnataka Art," 106-113.
41. Fritz and others, 1984: 149 ff.
42. They replaced the lion of the Hoysalas.
43. The Portuguese were interested in building forts at Bhatkal. Krishnadeva Raya is said to have continued Deva Raya II's policy of not alienating the Portuguese in order to obtain a continuous supply of horses yet he did not concede anything to them. Rama Rao, *Krishnadevaraya* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1971): 67. Also see Sewell, 1988: 381.
44. Gurti Venket Rao, "Krishna Deva Raya and the Portuguese," *Journal of Indian History* 10, parts 1-4 (1936-37): 73-85.  
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45. Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose*: 179.

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