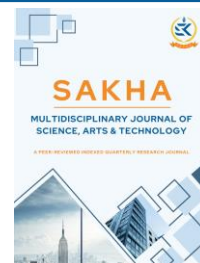




Vol. 2, No. 1; Jan – Mar (2026)

## SAKHA: Multidisciplinary Journal of Science, Arts & Technology

Available at <https://sakha.co.in/journals/mjsat>



# Hindu Festivals in the North Arcot District Under Vijayanagar Rule: A Historical Study

Dr. S. Boopalan<sup>1a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of History & H.O.D, Gonzaga College of Arts and Science for Women  
Kathampallam, Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu, India.

### Abstract

*The Vijayanagar Empire made a lasting contribution to the religious and cultural history of South India through its extensive patronage of Hindu temples and festivals. In the North Arcot district, temples became important centers of religious worship and social life during the Vijayanagar period. Hindu festivals conducted in these temples were not merely religious observances but also played a vital role in promoting social cohesion, economic activity, and cultural continuity.*

*This paper studies Hindu festivals in the North Arcot district under Vijayanagar rule, focusing on their organization, ritual practices, and social significance. Both Saivite and Vaishnavite festivals were actively celebrated, reflecting the religious tolerance of the empire. Epigraphical records and literary sources provide evidence of royal grants, temple management, and community participation in festival celebrations.*

*The study highlights how festivals strengthened the relationship between the state, temple institutions, and local society. It also emphasizes that Hindu festivals functioned as dynamic cultural expressions that preserved tradition while adapting to changing historical conditions. Through this analysis, the paper demonstrates the enduring influence of Vijayanagar-era festivals on the cultural identity of Tamil Nadu.*

---

<sup>a</sup> Corresponding Author: [balansaran58489.bs@gmail.com](mailto:balansaran58489.bs@gmail.com)

**Keywords:** *Vijayanagar Empire, North Arcot District, Hindu festivals, temple institutions, royal patronage, medieval Tamil Nadu.*

## **Introduction**

The Vijayanagar Empire (c. 1336–1565 CE) occupies a prominent place in the history of South India for its political strength, cultural achievements, and active patronage of Hindu religion. During its expansion into the Tamil country, the empire brought large regions, including the North Arcot district, under its administrative and cultural influence. Religion played a vital role in the Vijayanagar state, and Hindu temples emerged as powerful institutions supported by royal grants, land endowments, and ritual patronage. Hindu festivals were not merely religious observances but also social and cultural events that reinforced collective identity and political authority. In the North Arcot district, temple festivals under Vijayanagar rule reflected the interaction between imperial policies, local traditions, and popular religious practices. This paper attempts to study the nature, organization, and significance of Hindu festivals in the North Arcot region during the Vijayanagar period and to understand their role in shaping religious and social life.

## **Historical Background of Vijayanagar Rule in North Arcot**

The Vijayanagar Empire was established in the 14th century by the brothers Harihara and Bukka with the primary aim of protecting Hindu political authority, religious institutions, and cultural traditions in South India. At a time when many regions were experiencing political instability, the Vijayanagar rulers sought to create a strong centralized empire that could preserve indigenous traditions while ensuring effective administration. As the empire expanded southward, it brought vast areas of present-day Tamil Nadu under its control, including the strategically important North Arcot district.

North Arcot occupied a significant position due to its fertile agricultural lands and its location along important trade and communication routes. To administer such regions efficiently, the Vijayanagar rulers introduced a decentralized administrative system. Provinces were governed by royal officers and later by Nayakas, who were responsible for revenue collection, military defense, and maintaining law and order. While these officials exercised local authority, they remained loyal to the central power of the empire.

Temples played a crucial role during the Vijayanagar period and functioned as more than religious institutions. They acted as centers of administration, economic activity, and cultural life. The rulers provided generous patronage to temples through land grants, donations, and tax exemptions. This royal support enabled temples to conduct daily rituals, organize grand festivals, and support artists, priests, and other service groups. As a result, temple rituals and festivals became integral to the religious, social, and cultural life of North Arcot, reflecting the close relationship between state authority and religious institutions under Vijayanagar rule.

### **Temple Institutions and Festival Organization**

During the Vijayanagar period, temples occupied a central position in Hindu religious and social life. They were not merely places of worship but powerful institutional centers supported by the state. Vijayanagar rulers, nobles, and local elites provided generous endowments to temples in the form of land grants, gold, lamps, and agricultural produce. These grants ensured the regular performance of daily rituals as well as special ceremonies connected with festivals. Numerous inscriptions engraved on temple walls in Tamil Nadu record donations specifically allocated for annual festivals, processions, lighting of lamps, feeding of devotees, and payment of temple servants.

Temple festivals were highly organized events that required careful planning and coordination. Priests conducted ritual worship according to agamic prescriptions, while musicians, dancers, and other artists performed during festival occasions. Artisans were responsible for preparing festival chariots, images, ornaments, and decorations. Local communities actively participated by offering services, materials, and voluntary labor, making festivals collective social events rather than purely religious activities.

The administration of festivals was managed by temple authorities such as trustees and committees, who ensured the smooth conduct of rituals while accommodating local traditions and regional practices. The participation of various social and occupational groups in festival activities promoted social cohesion and strengthened the temple's role as the cultural and social nucleus of villages and towns under Vijayanagar rule.

### **Major Hindu Festivals Celebrated in North Arcot**

During the Vijayanagar period, the North Arcot district witnessed the celebration of numerous Hindu festivals that reflected the religious diversity and tolerance of the empire. Both Saivite

and Vaishnavite traditions flourished side by side, supported by royal patronage and temple institutions. These festivals played a significant role in religious worship, social life, and cultural interaction.

### **1. Saivite Festivals**

Saivism enjoyed widespread popularity in North Arcot during the Vijayanagar rule. Shiva temples served as important centers for Saivite festivals, which were celebrated with elaborate rituals and large public participation.

- Maha Sivarathri was one of the most significant Saivite festivals. Devotees observed fasting and night-long vigils while special abhishekas and prayers were performed to honor Lord Shiva.
- Tiruvathirai was celebrated to commemorate the cosmic dance of Shiva, involving special offerings and devotional hymns.
- Pradosham, observed twice a month, featured evening worship and processions of the deity, emphasizing regular communal participation.

These festivals strengthened devotional practices and reinforced the importance of Shiva worship in the region.

### **2. Vaishnavite Festivals**

Vaishnavism also flourished under Vijayanagar patronage, and Vishnu temples in North Arcot became important centers for Vaishnavite festivals.

- Ramanavami, celebrating the birth of Lord Rama, involved recitation of epics and special temple rituals.
- Vaikunta Ekadasi was marked by elaborate ceremonies and the ceremonial opening of the Vaikunta Dwara, attracting large gatherings of devotees.
- Krishna Jayanthi celebrated the birth of Lord Krishna through devotional singing and symbolic rituals.

These festivals promoted Vaishnavite theology and devotional traditions among the people.

### **3. Brahmotsavam and Temple Processions**

The Brahmotsavam was the most important annual temple festival during the Vijayanagar period. Lasting several days, it involved grand processions of the temple deity mounted on different vahanas such as the lion, elephant, and chariot. Kings, local officials, and devotees actively participated in these celebrations.

Brahmotsavams attracted devotees from nearby villages and towns, transforming temple spaces into vibrant centers of religious, cultural, and economic activity. These festivals also provided opportunities for music, dance, drama, and trade, making them significant cultural events.

#### **4. Social and Cultural Importance of Festivals**

Hindu festivals in North Arcot served as platforms for social interaction and cultural expression. They brought together people from various castes and occupational groups, fostering social harmony. Through ritual performances, music, and dance, festivals helped preserve both classical and folk traditions.

#### **5. Religious Tolerance under Vijayanagar Rule**

The coexistence of Saivite and Vaishnavite festivals reflects the religious tolerance practiced by the Vijayanagar rulers. By supporting multiple religious traditions, the empire ensured stability and unity across diverse communities.

##### **Social and Cultural Significance of Festivals**

Hindu festivals during the Vijayanagar period played a vital role in shaping the social, cultural, economic, and political life of society. Though religious in nature, these festivals extended far beyond temple worship and became instruments of social integration, cultural expression, and state legitimacy.

##### **1. Social Integration and Community Participation**

One of the most important functions of Hindu festivals was the promotion of social harmony. Festivals brought together people belonging to different castes, occupations, and social groups in a shared religious space. Participation in rituals, processions, and communal activities encouraged interaction and cooperation among various sections of society.

Different occupational groups such as priests, musicians, artisans, potters, weavers, and merchants contributed their services during festivals. This collective participation strengthened community bonds and reinforced a sense of shared cultural identity. Festivals thus acted as unifying forces in village and urban life under Vijayanagar rule.

## **2. Promotion of Art, Music, and Performing Traditions**

Festivals provided a major platform for artistic and cultural expression. Temple festivals included performances of classical music, devotional songs, dance forms, and dramatic presentations based on epics and puranic stories. These performances contributed significantly to the preservation and development of both classical and folk traditions.

Dancers, musicians, and storytellers received patronage from temples and rulers, enabling the transmission of artistic skills across generations. As a result, festivals became key institutions for sustaining cultural heritage and creativity during the Vijayanagar period.

## **3. Economic Importance of Festivals**

Economically, festivals stimulated local and regional trade. Large gatherings of devotees created demand for goods such as food, clothes, ornaments, ritual items, and souvenirs. Merchants and traders set up temporary markets near temple complexes during festival times. Artisans and craftsmen benefited from the production of festival-related materials such as chariots, images, decorations, lamps, and musical instruments. Performers and service groups also earned livelihoods through festival activities. Thus, festivals contributed to the economic vitality of towns and villages.

## **4. Political Significance and Royal Patronage**

From a political perspective, festivals were used by Vijayanagar rulers as instruments of legitimacy and authority. By patronizing major temple festivals through grants and donations, rulers projected themselves as protectors of dharma and upholders of Hindu traditions.

Royal participation in festivals and processions symbolized the close relationship between the state and religious institutions. This strengthened loyalty among subjects and reinforced the moral authority of the rulers, helping maintain political stability within the empire.

## **5. Cultural Continuity and Identity**

Festivals helped preserve religious traditions while allowing adaptation to changing historical circumstances. By combining ritual practices with local customs, festivals ensured cultural continuity across generations. They played a crucial role in shaping the collective cultural identity of society under Vijayanagar rule.

### **Epigraphical and Literary Evidence**

The study of Hindu festivals under Vijayanagar rule relies heavily on epigraphical and literary sources. These sources provide direct and indirect evidence regarding temple activities, royal patronage, and the organization of religious festivals. Together, they help reconstruct the religious and cultural life of the period with greater accuracy.

#### **1. Importance of Epigraphical Evidence**

Inscriptions are the most reliable and authentic sources for understanding Hindu festivals during the Vijayanagar period. Found on temple walls, pillars, and copper plates, inscriptions were official records issued by kings, nobles, and donors. They were intended to be permanent and publicly visible, ensuring the authenticity of the information they contained.

Tamil and Sanskrit inscriptions frequently record grants of land, gold, lamps, and agricultural produce specifically meant for conducting festivals. Many inscriptions mention endowments for daily worship, annual celebrations, processions, special offerings, feeding of devotees, and payment to temple servants. These records help historians understand the scale, regularity, and economic foundation of temple festivals.

#### **2. Information Revealed by Inscriptions**

Epigraphs provide detailed information about the organization of festivals. They record the names of festivals, the deities involved, the ritual procedures to be followed, and the resources allocated for their performance. Inscriptions also mention the role of temple authorities, priests, musicians, and other service groups.

Through these records, historians gain insights into the relationship between the Vijayanagar state and temple institutions. Royal donations for festivals highlight the rulers' role as patrons of religion and culture, while local donations reveal popular participation in religious life.

### **3. Literary Sources and Religious Life**

Literary works of the Vijayanagar period also contribute valuable information about Hindu festivals. Devotional literature, temple chronicles, and religious texts describe festivals, rituals, and acts of worship in vivid detail. These works reflect the spiritual atmosphere of the period and the importance of festivals in sustaining religious devotion.

Bhakti literature, in particular, emphasizes emotional devotion and community participation during festivals. Such literary sources help us understand how festivals were experienced by devotees beyond their administrative and economic aspects.

### **4. Temple Chronicles and Contemporary Accounts**

Temple chronicles and traditional records maintained by temple institutions offer additional insights into festival practices. They describe the sequence of rituals, special occasions, and the involvement of local communities. Contemporary accounts by travelers and scholars also provide observations on temple life and religious celebrations.

These sources complement epigraphical evidence by presenting the social and cultural dimensions of festivals.

### **5. Value of Combined Sources**

While inscriptions provide factual and administrative details, literary sources offer descriptive and devotional perspectives. Together, they present a comprehensive picture of Hindu festivals under Vijayanagar rule. This combined approach enables historians to understand festivals as both institutional practices and living cultural traditions.

## **Conclusion**

The study of Hindu festivals in the North Arcot district under Vijayanagar rule clearly reveals the close and dynamic relationship between religion, society, and state authority in medieval South India. Festivals were not confined to spiritual observances alone; they functioned as vital institutions that shaped social organization, cultural expression, and political legitimacy. Through the celebration of festivals, religious beliefs were translated into collective experiences that strengthened community identity and social cohesion.

Royal patronage played a decisive role in the flourishing of temple institutions and festival traditions. Vijayanagar rulers provided extensive endowments to temples, enabling them to conduct elaborate rituals, grand processions, and large-scale festivals. This patronage strengthened the economic base of temples and transformed them into centers of administration, culture, and social interaction. Festivals also encouraged economic activity by supporting artisans, merchants, performers, and service groups, thereby contributing to regional prosperity.

The Vijayanagar contribution to Hindu festivals left a lasting cultural legacy that continues to shape religious practices in Tamil Nadu even today. Many festivals, rituals, and processional traditions established during this period remain integral to contemporary temple worship. Studying these festivals from a historical perspective allows us to appreciate the enduring cultural foundations of the region and highlights the central role of religion in shaping the social and cultural fabric of South Indian society.

### References

1. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, Oxford University Press.
2. Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagar*, London.
3. N. Venkatammanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagar*.
4. *South Indian Inscriptions*, Archaeological Survey of India (Annual Reports).
5. Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara*, Cambridge University Press.
6. R. Champakalakshmi, *Religion, Tradition and Ideology: Pre-Colonial South India*, Oxford University Press.