

# **Battle of Raichur**

**By**

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## Preface

The battle of Raichur was fought in 1520 CE between the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bijapur sultanate. Given the miserable state of our education system, this will be unknown to a vast majority of my countrymen. I have tried to give a Hindu perspective to the narration, as the narratives for the battle are only from Portuguese (Christian) and Muslim sources. The Portuguese narration based on an account by *Fernao Nunes* (a Portuguese horse trader) is the closest we can get to an eyewitness account. The Islamic narrative written by *Ferishta (Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah)* is unreliable, given his convenient habit of overlooking defeats sustained by the Islamic *Ghazis*.

You might ask: What about the Hindu narrative? Most likely these can be found in Kannada and Telugu records and published works. At present I am hampered in not being able to access the works written in these languages. Once I can get access to the relevant works, rest assured I will update this narrative. This is essentially a work in progress, I will keep updating and correcting as more details come to my knowledge.

There could be other reasons for the lack of Hindu records. The foremost that comes to mind is the destruction of records when the city of Vijayanagar was annihilated (there is no other word to describe the destruction wrought by the Islamic barbarians) by the confederation of Deccan sultanates in 1565 CE. Or the manuscript could be gathering dust in a family collection or lying unread in a library due to a lack of scholars to decipher it.

In the following passages I will endeavour to try and present details of the battle as given in Nunes account and do a critical analysis. I neither claim to be an expert nor a specialist; my endeavours are only motivated by the ardent desire to see our history written by us and not by foreigners.

**A note on the maps:** Except for the Google Earth Map and the shaded relief map of India (I have used as a background to show the extent of Vijayanagar empire, taken from [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India\\_relief\\_location\\_map.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_relief_location_map.jpg), many thanks to the person who took the trouble to create the shaded relief map) all the other maps have been drawn/traced by me using the US Army topographic map of Raichur. (Available for free download: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/>). I have tried to be as accurate as possible when depicting locations on the map, however errors will exist.

# 1. Raichur: Location & Significance

## 1.1 Where is Raichur?

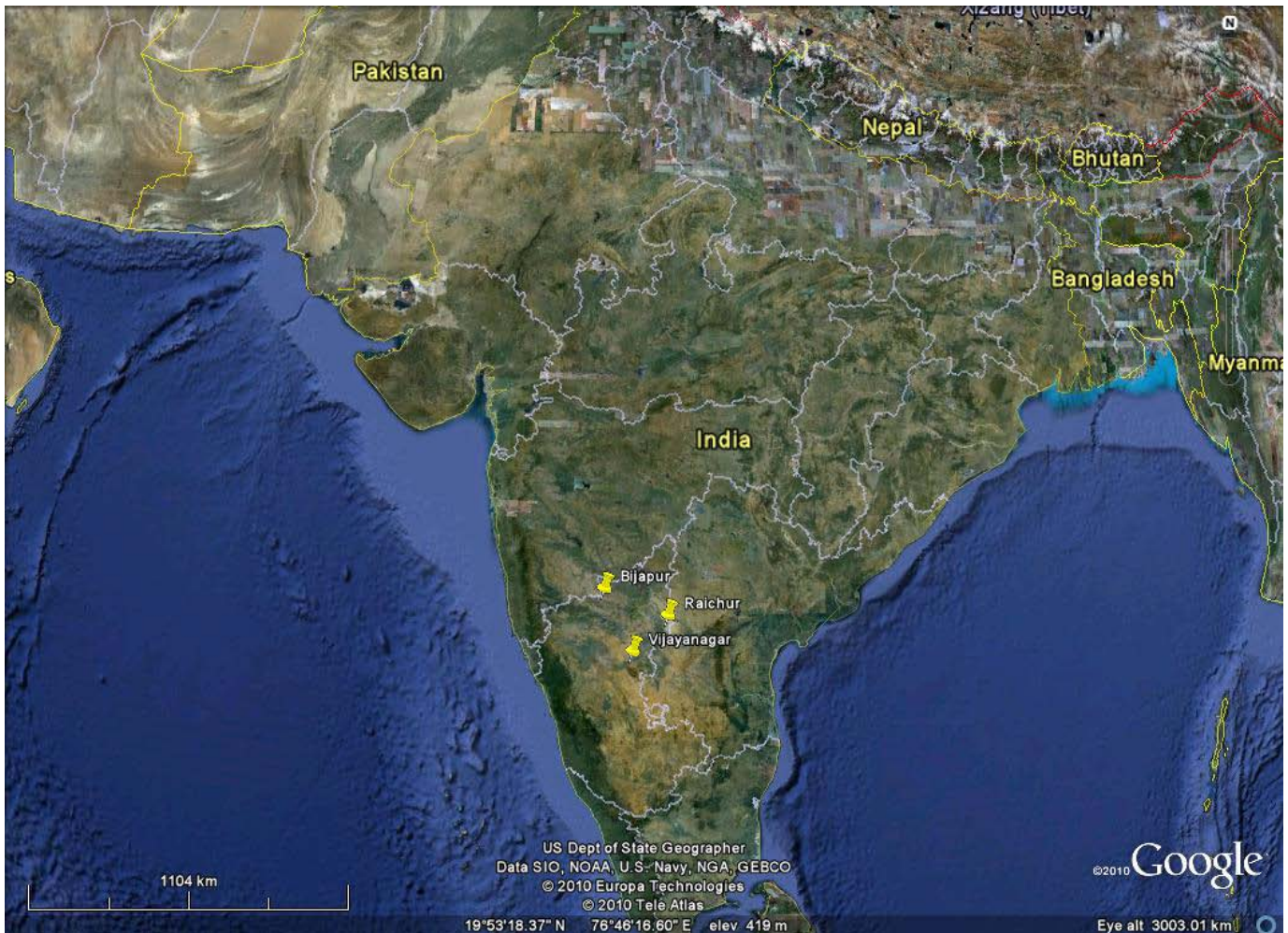


Figure 1 Location of Raichur, Vijayanagar & Bijapur

Raichur city is located in Raichur district in Karnataka (location coordinates: latitude 16.200000, longitude 77.370000). The Google Maps snapshot above gives a good idea of the location of Raichur relative to Vijayanagar and Bijapur.

## 1.2 Background & History

Raichur district falls in a doab created by Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers. The land is extremely fertile and yields many types of crops including oilseeds, cotton, sesame, sorghum, pulses, chillies, groundnut etc. Since historic times Raichur has been famous for growing cotton. Even today Raichur is primarily known for its cotton and cotton processing mills.

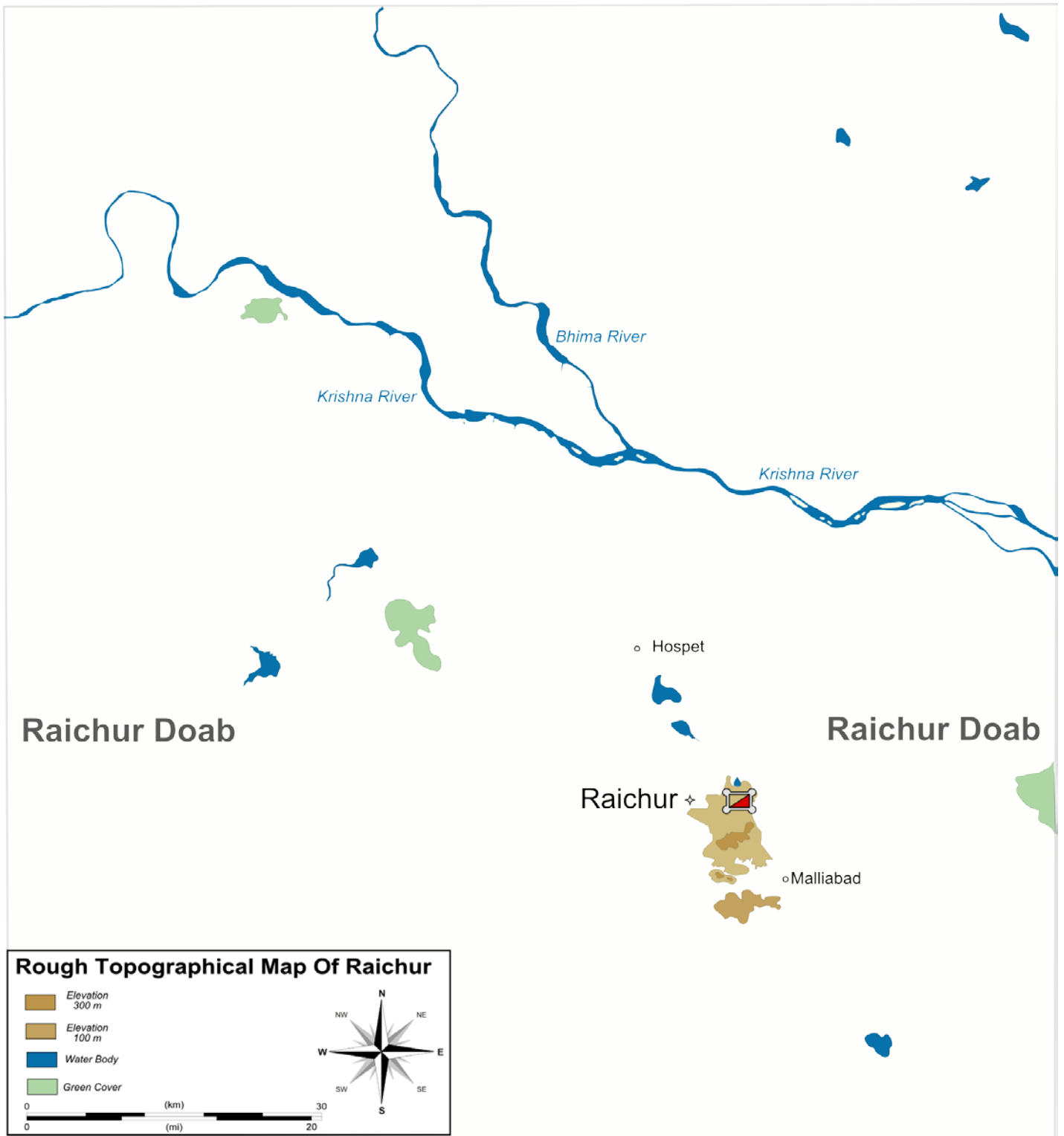


Figure 2 Rough Map of Raichur and Surroundings

Its fertility made Raichur a strategic asset for any Kingdom. Having control over the Raichur *doab* meant access to plentiful revenues. The key to controlling the *doab* was to have possession of Raichur city and its formidable fort.

Historically Raichur belonged to the Hoysala kingdom of Karnataka. After the dissolution of the Hoysala kingdom in the fourteenth century Raichur's possession was hotly contested by the Bahmani

Sultanate of Gulbarga and the Vijayanagar Empire. Starting from 1490 CE onwards the Bahmani Sultanate split into five different sultanates i.e. *Adil Shahi* (Bijapur), *Qutb Shahi* (Golconda), *Imad Shahi* (Berar), *Barid Shahi* (Bidar) and *Nizam Shahi* (Ahmednagar). The most powerful of these sultanates was Bijapur founded by *Yusuf Adil Shah*. *Raichur* changed hands many times in the course of two centuries till the battle of Raichur in 1520 CE and even beyond. Please see fig 3 below to get an idea of the extent of Vijayanagar empire and the Deccan sultanates.

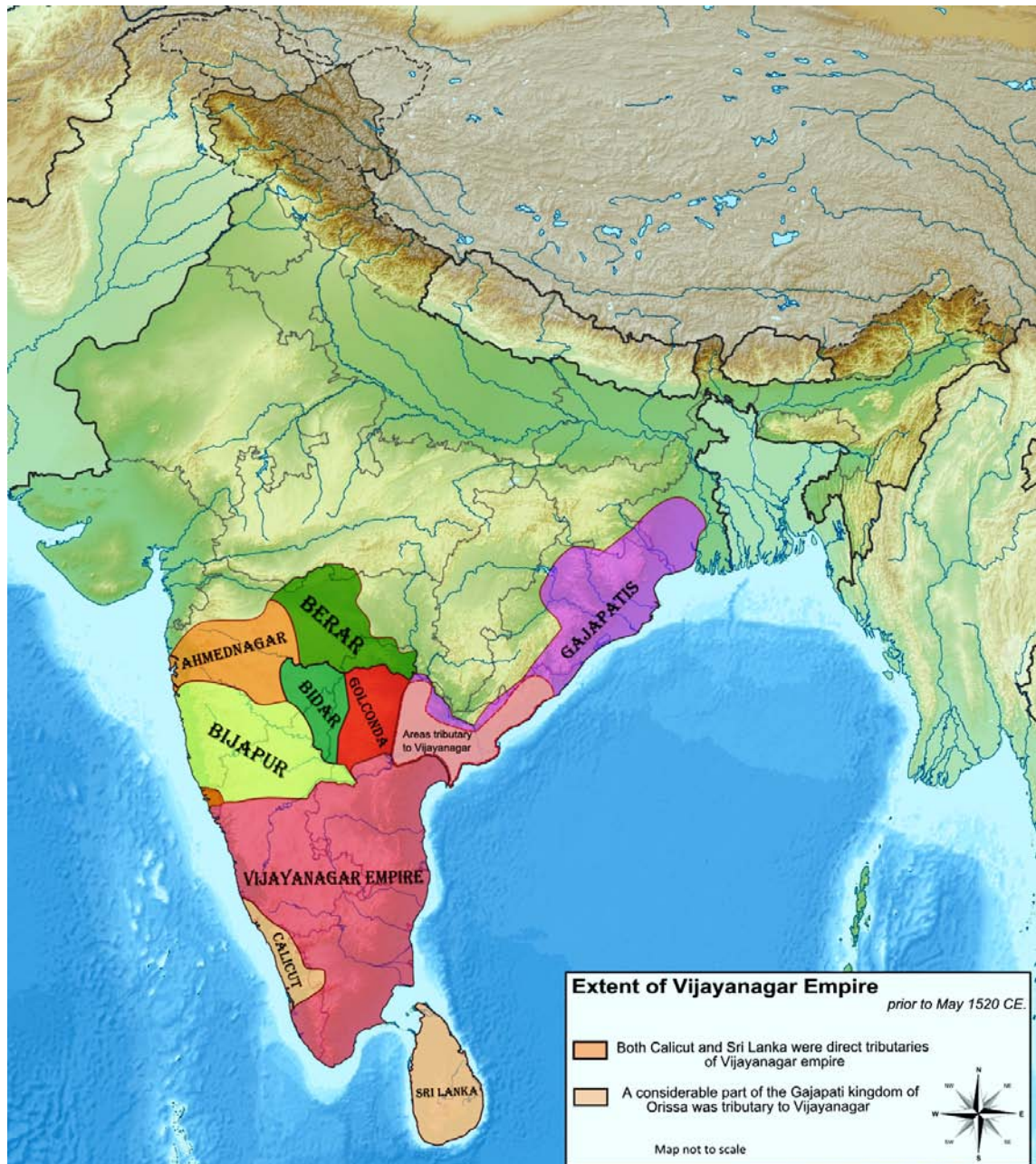


Figure 3 Extent of Vijayanagar Empire

## 2. What is the Importance of the Battle?

The significance of the Battle of Raichur in the history of India is due to the following factors:

## 2.1 Use of Modern Gunpowder Artillery

For the first time on the Indian mainland extensive use was made of European (Portuguese) and Ottoman Turkish artillery and firearms. This battle preceded the first battle of Panipat (between Babur and Ibrahim Lodi in 1526 CE) by six years. A general misconception has been created that gunpowder cannons were used for the first time by Babur. Gunpowder use was not unknown in South India. Both Vijayanagar and the Bahmani sultanate used explosive mines, cannons and firearms in their wars in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (FIRISHTA).

But this was the first time that the most technologically up to date artillery was used by both the opponents. The way in which artillery was procured by Vijayanagar and the Bijapur sultanate was different albeit arising from the same set of circumstances: the arrival of the Portuguese in India.

Bijapur was able to access the latest innovations in artillery by employing expert Ottoman gunners and manufacturers. How the Ottoman gunners came in Bijapur service is an interesting story.

### 2.1.1 Sources of European & Ottoman Artillery

The appearance of the Portuguese with their imperial ambitions led to the introduction of the latest innovations in artillery in India.

In the early 1500's the Portuguese were actively trying to gain control over the spice trade from India and the lucrative horse trade of the Arabs. To gain control over the spice trade they had to neutralize the power of **Saamoothirippād** (anglicised as *Zamorin*) who was the ruler of Calicut. The Saamoothirippād was a powerful Hindu sovereign and maintained excellent relations with the Muslims states such Egypt who were his partners in the spice trade. The Portuguese unsuccessfully tried to assault Calicut but were beaten back. However their superior ocean going ships managed to wreak havoc on the sea trade. They also terrorised fishermen and trade ships with senseless acts of brutality.

The Saamoothirippād realised early on that he could not take on the heavily armed Portuguese *caravels* (small highly manoeuvrable sailing ships, see fig.3) and *carracks*<sup>1</sup> (four masted ships, see fig.4) and. To decisively end the Portuguese menace, he asked for the aid of the Mamluk sultan *Al-Ashraf Qansuh al-Ghawri* of Egypt. Egypt was among the main trading partners of Calicut and in the scenario of the Portuguese gaining dominance over the spice trade they would suffer the most. Additionally Sultan *Mahmud Begada* (**Abu'l** Fath Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud Shah I) of Gujarat also allied with the Mamluk forces against the Portuguese.



Figure 4 A typical Caravel



Figure 5 . A typical Carrack

Mamluks lacking the sea power appealed to the Ottoman sultan of Turkey *Bayezid II*. The Ottomans at this point in history were the leaders in the application and development of gunpowder artillery. Their military might was threatening Europe itself.

Thus an alliance comprising of the Saamoothirippād's forces, Ottoman, Mamluk's and the Sultanate of Gujarat's forces prepared for a decisive face off with the Portuguese.

Subsequently two decisive naval engagements took place, one near the port of Chaul<sup>2</sup> (Maharashtra) in 1508 CE and the second one off the coast of Diu<sup>3</sup> in 1509 CE. The Portuguese were defeated in the first battle but were victorious at Diu in 1509 CE. This led to the dispersal of the Ottoman and Mamluk forces.

Many of the Ottoman gunners and craftsman then landed at Goa and took up service with the Sultan of Bijapur (Previously Goa was in the hands of the Bahmani Sultans, succeeded later on by the Bijapur sultans)<sup>4</sup>. A gun foundry was established at Goa and Ottoman gunners manned the Bijapur sultan's artillery.

The most direct impact of the Portuguese victory was that they came to control the trade in horses on which the Deccan sultanates and Vijayanagar Empire relied. In fact after the capture of Goa in 1510 CE the Portuguese viceroy tried to play the Sultan of Bijapur and Krishna Deva Raya in a bidding war for the horses!!

In 1510 CE with the tacit approval of Vijayanagar the Portuguese captured Goa (only the city known as *Velha Goa* or Old Goa) from Bijapur. On capturing Goa, the gun foundry established by the Bahmanis fell into their hands.

### 2.1.2 Artillery of the Sixteenth Century

Before going further, it would be pertinent to briefly understand the nature of artillery in the early fifteenth century. By artillery I am specifically referring to cannons.

When we think of artillery the picture that comes to our mind is of a large calibre gun which can fire off multiple rounds in quick succession. For e.g. the Bofors FH-77B 155mm self propelled howitzer which the Indian Army uses, can fire upto 10 rounds a minute<sup>5</sup>!!

The artillery of the early fifteenth century was nothing like this. The rate of fire was at most 8-12 rounds in an hour<sup>6</sup>. Plus due to imperfections in manufacture; cannons were liable to explode and kill the gun crew.

A large cannon was a logistical nightmare which could weigh hundreds (sometimes thousands) of kilos and require many animals to transport it to the battlefield. The cannons had to be mounted on carts and transported to the battlefield. (Nunes does speak of gun carriages being used in the Bijapur army. Whether these were modified carts or proper gun carriages is not known). Depending on its size a cannon would need anywhere between three and ten men to operate it. The Indian cycle of seasons meant they had to be used during the dry season. In the rainy season it was impossible to move and fire the cannons.

Being extremely heavy and immobile, artillery was vulnerable to attack by fast moving cavalry and infantry. Typically artillery was protected by means of erecting wooden stockades and trenches or placing it behind



carts and chaining the carts together (this tactic was used by Babur at the battle of Panipat in 1526 CE)<sup>7</sup>. Infantry had to be stationed to protect the artillery position.

Artillery was thus closely clustered together and its primary role was to deliver a devastating barrage and break up tightly packed masses of infantry/cavalry. Once the enemy was in a state of disorder, fast moving cavalry would mow them down<sup>8</sup>.

But here was the catch: if the first barrage did not have the intended effect, long reloading times made it possible for enemy cavalry to overrun the artillery position. The fleeing army usually used to leave the guns on the battlefield, as there would have been no time to retrieve them.

## 2.2 The Number of Men Involved

The total number of combatants involved exceeded one million. The table below gives the numbers of soldiers etc for the Vijayanagar Empire and the Bijapur armies.

Combatant	Infantry	Cavalry	Heavy cannons	Smaller Calibre Cannons	War Elephants	Camp Followers	Total Strength(includes only Infantry & Cavalry)
Bijapur	120,000	18,000	400	500 (?)	150	Unknown	138,000
Vijayanagar	581,000	60,600	Unknown	Unknown	551	Unknown	641,600 <sup>1</sup>

Table 1 A comparison of the Vijayanagar and Bijapur armies

From the above table it can be seen that the total number of fighting men on both sides came close to a million. The above figure does not include any camp followers. Adding camp followers the figure easily touches a million. Camp followers on the Vijayanagar side included 20,000 courtesans, 12,000 water carriers, merchants, washer men etc.

Each cannon would require a crew of at least ten men to operate it. Nunes mentions that several cannon were carried by the Vijayanagar forces into war, but does not elaborate on the exact number of cannon in the Vijayanagar camp.

The total number of cannon on the Bijapur side was nearly nine hundred. Nunes mentions the fact that the Bijapur army left all the artillery on the battlefield after the battle and that there were nine hundred gun carriages abandoned by the fleeing army.

## 2.3 Weakening of Bijapur

Ismail Adil Shah barely escaped with his life and his army was virtually annihilated in the course of the battle. Till he was alive he did not dare to make a move on Vijayanagar and the annual *jihad* was more or less abandoned. The extent to which he feared Krishnadeva Raya is illustrated by the fact that

<sup>1</sup> The total given by Robert Sewell for Vijayanagar comes to 736,000. I have come to the above by totalling the numbers given by Nunes in the translation by Robert Sewell. The higher number would be due to the other chiefs joining the main army on route to Raichur.

in 1523 CE Krishnadeva Raya marched upto Bijapur and occupied it, Ismail Adil Shah having fled in advance of the invading armies<sup>9</sup>.

## 2.4 Supremacy of Vijayanagar

This battle cemented Vijayanagar's power for another forty five years till the catastrophe at *Rakshaka- Tangadi* (better known as Talikota) in 1565 CE. Even after the destruction of Vijayanagar city in 1565 CE, the weakened empire protected Southern Hindus till the death of the *Sriranga III* in 1672 CE. Sriranga III was the last of this glorious line of the defenders of Dharma.

But by the time the exhausted Sriranga breathed his last he had the satisfaction of seeing Deccan back under Hindu rule after a span of three hundred years under the lion of Sahyadri: *Chatrapati Shivaji*. It is only due to the protection of Vijayanagar that Hindu culture remained intact in South India, remaining relatively uncorrupted from the influence of Islam. The extent to which Islamic rule can subvert and corrupt Hindu society is seen from those parts of North India which were under Islamic rulers for long periods of time.

## 3. The Main Protagonists

### 3.1 Tuluva Sri Krishnadeva Raya (ruled 1509-1529 CE)

*Kannada Rajya Rama Ramana* **Krishnadeva Raya** was one of the greatest emperors in Indian history who ruled over an empire that covered all of south India (including Sri Lanka) and parts of Orissa( see map above). He saved Vijayanagar empire at a critical juncture of its history. Sri Krishnadeva Raya was the second ruler of the *Tuluva* line (also known as the third dynasty) of Vijayanagar kings who ruled from 1505-1542 CE. He was chosen by his half brother Vira Narasimha (ruled 1505-1509 CE) to succeed him to the throne of Vijayanagar. His coronation day was on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1509 CE, which was *Janmashtami*.

Coronated in his early twenties, he was an extraordinary figure by all accounts. Almost every account left about this great king extols his virtues on and off the battlefield. To quote the Portuguese traveller *Domingo Paes*, Sri Krishnadeva Raya was "gallant and perfect in all things" (Sewell). Leading his armies from the front, Sri Krishnadeva Raya exhibited fearlessness in face of mortal danger. Loved by his people, he was a man of great justice. A master strategist and a humane ruler, Vijayanagar reached the zenith of its prosperity under his stewardship. His rule is considered to be the golden age of Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit literature in the middle ages. Fluent in many languages, Krishnadeva Raya authored many scholarly works. He reorganised the army and turned it into an effective fighting force.

The empire at the time of his coronation was in crises. The Bahmani sultanate which was nearing dissolution was still a powerful enemy. The Bahmani sultanate conducted a yearly *jihad* starting from 1501 CE against Vijayanagar, in which by some accounts 100,000 Hindus were slaughtered every year. The aggression by the *Gajapatis* of Orissa and the revolt of the chief of *Ummattur* only added to the empires troubles. The arrival of Portuguese on the scene further complicated matters.

The first task was to repel the Bahmani army which had entered Vijayanagar's boundaries in 1509 CE with intent to wreak large scale destruction. In an engagement near *Diwani* the Muslim army was routed and the Bahmani Sultan narrowly escaped being killed. The founder of the Bijapur dynasty *Yusuf Adil Khan* was killed in battle at Kovilkonda. This had the salutary effect of putting a stop to the annual jihad against Vijayanagar. Krishnadeva Raya did not stop here; in further engagements he took Raichur, Gulbarga and captured Bidar from the *Barid Shahi* sultan.

By 1512 CE the rebellious chieftain of Ummattur *Gangaraya* was subdued and died while trying to flee *Sivanasamudram*. The problem of the aggressive Gajapatis of Orissa was solved in a series of brilliant campaigns beginning in 1513 CE and culminating in the surrender by the Gajapati king *Prataparudra* in 1516 CE. However while the Orissa campaign was ongoing, Ismail Adil Shah (the Sultan of Bijapur) recaptured Raichur.

### [3.2 Ismail Adil Shah \(ruled from 1511-1534 CE\)](#)

*Ismail Adil Shah (Sultan Abul Fatah Ismail Adil Khan)* was the son of Sultan Yusuf Adil Shah. Like quite a lot of Muslim tyrants he was born to a Hindu mother. His mother was the sister of *Mukund Rao*, a Maratha chief who had risen against Yusuf Adil Shah. *Mukund Rao* was killed and his family captured by Yusuf Adil Shah.

Ismail came to the throne in the blood soaked fashion typical of the Muslim sultanates. After Yusuf's death in 1509 CE while fighting Krishnadeva Raya, Ismail was put on the throne of Bijapur. He was between 13 - 14 years old at this time. But the real power behind the throne was the regent *Kamal Khan*, a person who himself had imperial ambitions. Kamal Khan came very near to usurping the throne, but Ismail's mother had him assassinated in 1512 CE. Kamal Khan's son *Safder Khan* attacked the young prince in his palace but was killed in the fight that followed.

Meanwhile the fledgling Bijapur sultanate was already under attack from the Sultans of Berar, Ahmednagar, Golconda and Bidar. The combined forces of the four sultanates prepared to lay siege to Bijapur. The leader of this motley force was *Amir Barid*; the sultan of Bidar. The young Ismail faced his opponents with a force of 12,000 cavalry and in the battle that followed defeated them. With the rival sultans pacified he looked towards recapturing Raichur, which was now in the possession of Vijayanagar. The opportunity came in 1516 CE when the bulk of Vijayanagar forces were fighting in Orissa. The recapture of Raichur sowed the seeds for the decisive battle of Raichur in 1520 CE.

Ismail Adil Shah was no different from the other Deccan sultans in the persecution of Hindus. Much like the Muslim nobility of the Deccan he looked towards Persia and Turkey for inspiration. It must be remembered that for most part the Deccan ruling elite were either foreigners or Hindu converts to Islam (frequent fights used to occur between these two rival parties). Gribble has described him as a prudent, patient and generous man. He also is said to have been skilled in poetry and music<sup>10</sup>. These traits of character were reserved only for fellow Muslims, not for Hindus who formed the vast majority of his subjects.

The condition of Bijapur was such that the nobility used to live in great luxury whereas the numberless Hindu peasants of the countryside were barely able to survive. The lot of the Hindus under the Deccan sultanates was miserable with their lives at the tender mercies of the genocidal sultans.

#### [4. Causes of the Conflict](#)

##### [4.1 Possession of Raichur](#)

Raichur had historically been part of the Hoysala kingdom of which Vijayanagar was a natural successor. In the tectonic upheavals of Deccan in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries Raichur changed hands many times between the Vijayanagar and Bahmani Sultanates.

Krishnadeva Raya had recaptured Raichur in 1510 CE. But while he was on his Orissa campaign, Ismail Adil Shah saw his chance and recaptured Raichur.

##### [4.2 Syed Maraikar](#)

The most direct reason for the invasion of Raichur by Vijayanagar was the theft of 40,000 gold coins by a Muslim merchant called *Syed Maraikar*. Syed Maraikar had been entrusted by Krishnadeva Raya with buying horses from the Portuguese at Goa and was given forty thousand gold coins for this purpose.

But the faithless Maraikar promptly absconded to Bijapur with the money. An enraged Raya requested Ismail Adil Shah to hand over the merchant along with the gold. In spite of the peace treaty in force between Vijayanagar and Bijapur, Ismail on the counsel of his advisors refused to apprehend and hand over Syed Maraikar. His decision no doubt was based on the fact that Syed Maraikar was a Muslim. One cannot discount the possibility of the Sultan keeping some gold in return for giving Maraikar refuge.

Ismail also helped the merchant to escape to Dabhol (Goa). When the facts of the matter were brought to the Raya's notice, he decided to launch a major campaign to win back Vijayanagar's territory and teach Adil Shah a lesson.

#### [5. The Battle of Raichur](#)

The description given by Nunes is extremely graphic and as Sewell has pointed out it seems he was an eyewitness to the battle or knew someone who was present at the battle.

I have divided it into different stages to make for easier comprehension. I have quoted mostly ad verbatim from Nunes and have also attached my own analysis after the description of the battle.

## 5.1 Stage One: Departure from Vijayanagar & Arrival at Raichur

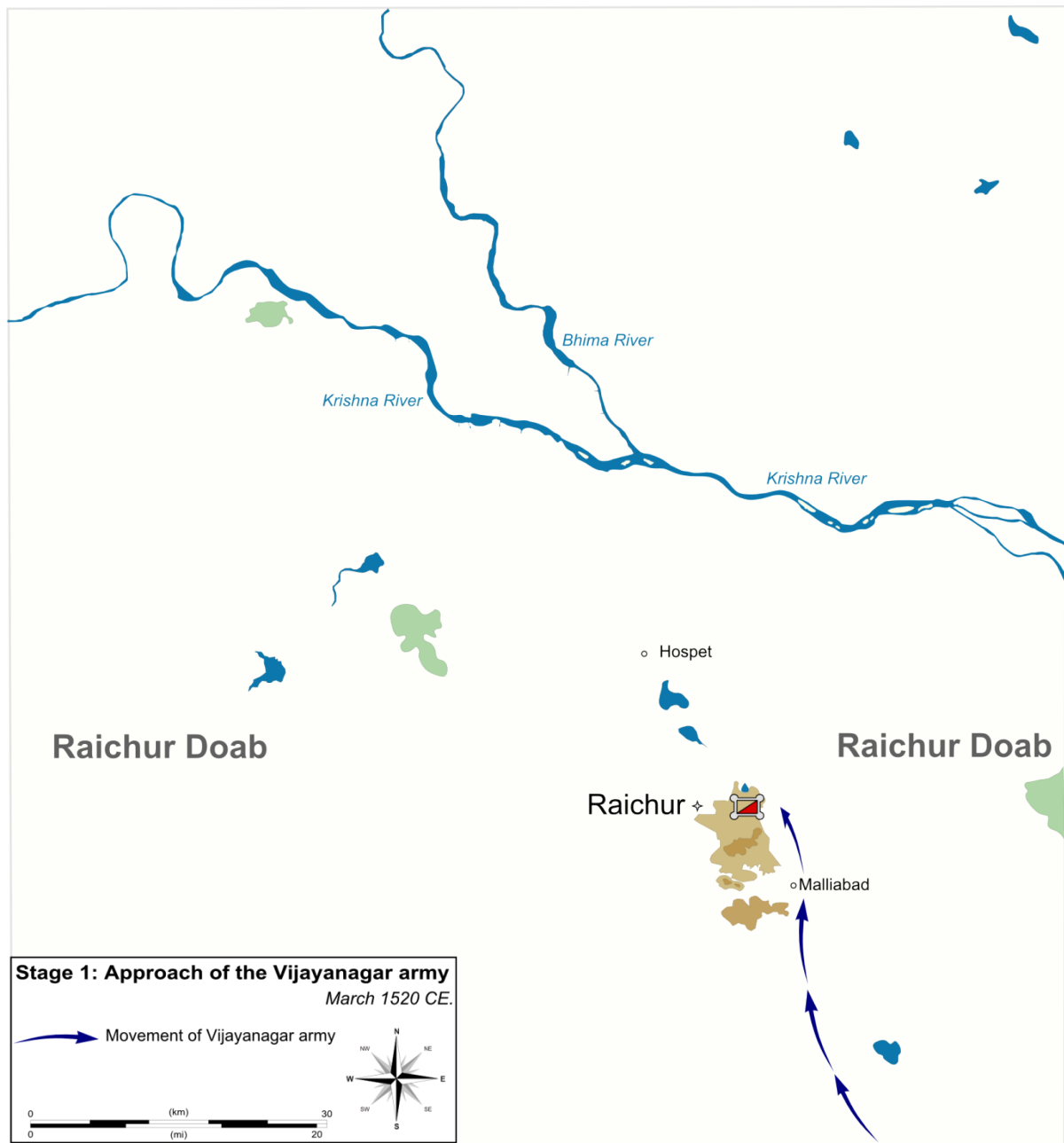


Figure 6 Stage One: Arrival of Vijayanagar army at Raichur

Sri Krishnadeva Raya seems to have left Vijayanagar sometime in early February 1520 CE <sup>11</sup>. The entire army was divided into different columns depending on the *Nayaka* (chief) who commanded them. The following table gives the order in which the different contingents marched, their break up and their *Nayaka*. The leading contingent is at the top and the last contingent to leave the city at the bottom.

Leader of Contingent	Infantry	Cavalry	Elephants	Notes
<i>Pemmasani Ramalinga Nayaka (Kama Nayaka)</i>	30,000	1000	6	Kama Nayaka was the Chief of guards (commander in chief)
<i>Trimbicara(?)</i>	50,000	2000	20	This is the Portuguese version of the Indian name .I have not been able to find the proper Indian name
<i>Timappa Nayaka</i>	60,000	3500	30	
<i>Adapa Nayaka</i>	100,000	5000	50	
<i>Comdamara(?)</i>	120,000	6000	60	This is the Portuguese version of the Indian name. I have not been able to find the proper Indian name
<i>Ganda Raja</i>	30,000	1000	10	Ganda Raja was the governor of Vijayanagar city
<i>Three eunuchs (?)</i>	40,000	1000	15	No names are given
<i>Krishnadeva Raya's page</i>	15,000	200	-	No name is given
<i>Kumara Virayya</i>	8000	400	20	Kumara Virayya was Krishnadeva Raya's father in law and the chief of Srirangapatanam
<i>Sri Krishnadeva Raya</i>	40,000	6000	300	

Table 2 Breakup of the Vijayanagar contingents.

In addition to the above were contingents of various chiefs, but Nunes has not given any names. From the Wikipedia article on the Battle of Raichur, I got the names of the following chiefs who accompanied the main army: *Rana Jagadeva, Rayachuri Rami Nayudu, Hande Mallaraya, Boya Ramappa, Saluva Nayudu, Tipparasu Ayyappa Nayudu, Kotikam Viswanatha Nayudu, Chevvappa Nayudu, Akkappa Nayudu, Krishnappa Nayudu, Velugoti Yachama Nayudu, Kannada Basavappa Nayudu, Saluva Mekaraja, Matla Ananta Raja, Bommireddy Nagareddy, Basava Reddy, Vithalappa Nayudu and Veerama Raja*<sup>12</sup>.

Also accompanying the army were dancing girls, washer men, water carriers and merchants. Twelve thousand water carriers stood at the sides of the road to supply water to the thirsty soldiers and camp followers. Approximately fourteen kilometres ahead of the main army were fifty thousand scouts who kept a watch for the enemy ahead of the army.

Nunes has given a detailed description of the armour and clothing worn by the warriors. To quote Nunes, "*All were equally well armed, each after his own fashion, the archers and musqueteers with their quilted tunics and the shieldmen with their swords and poignards (curved daggers) in their girdles; the shields are so large that there is no need for armour to protect the body, which is completely covered; the horses in full clothing, and the men with doublets, and weapons in their hands, and on their heads headpieces after the manner of their doublets, quilted with cotton. The war-elephants go with their howdahs from which four men fight on each side of them, and the elephants are completely clothed, and on their tusks they have knives fastened, much ground and sharpened, with which they do great harm. Several cannon were also taken*" (Sewell).

The army arrived near *Malliabad* and set camp there for a few days. Sri Krishnadeva Raya allowed his men to rest and set off for Raichur after the *Brahmana's* confirmed it was auspicious to do so. Fig.5 above shows the arrival of the army at Raichur.

## 5.2 Stage Two: Commencement of the Siege of Raichur Fort

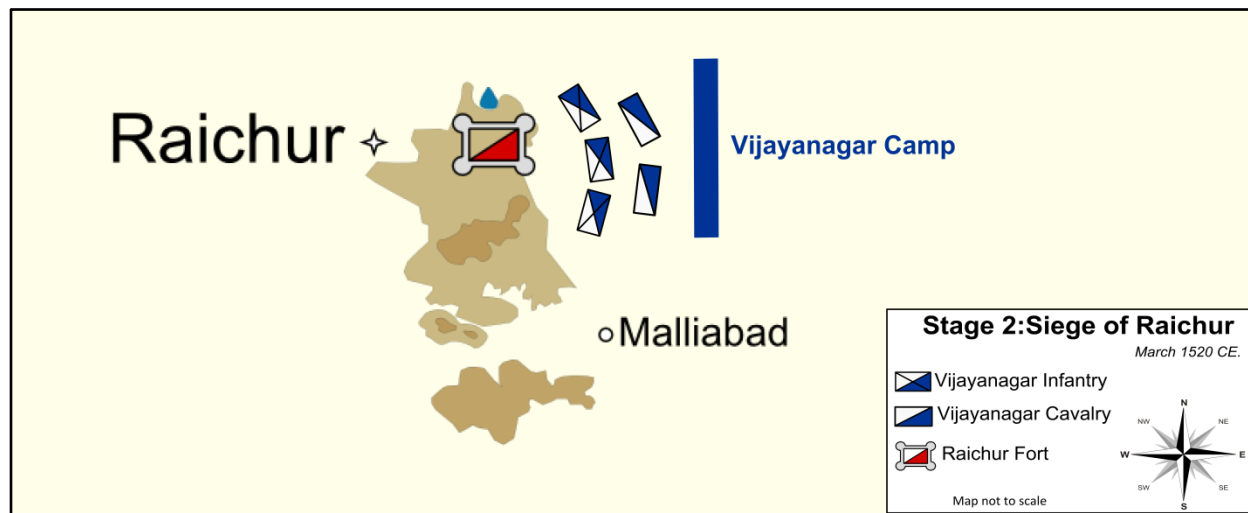


Figure 7 Siege of Raichur begins

As per Nunes, on arriving at the outskirts of Raichur, Kama Nayaka was the first to set up camp near to the defensive ditches which encircled Raichur fort. The siege was begun from the eastern side of the fort as it was here that the fort was weakest. He was shortly followed by other Nayakas (chiefs) and the siege of Raichur began in earnest.

Raichur was a heavily defended fortress with three lines of fortifications and the main citadel stood on top of a hill inside the fortifications. The fort was well provided with water due to a perennial spring which ran inside and fed many tanks and wells. The provisions inside the fort were enough to last five years. The garrison was composed of eight thousand men, four hundred cavalry, twenty elephants and thirty trebuchets (also known as *manjaniq-i-maghribi*). The trebuchets of that age could hurl stones between 1000-2000 kgs in weight causing great destruction in enemy ranks. More importantly the battlements and towers of the fort had over two hundred heavy artillery (cannons) and a number of smaller cannon (presumably for anti personnel use). Additionally the walls were manned by musketeers, archers and soldiers armed with flintlocks. All of these combined to launch a devastating battery on to the besieging army. The main gate of the city was sealed after letting in some reinforcements which had arrived from Bijapur.

As per the description given by Nunes, the firing of artillery from the fort took a heavy toll of the brave Vijayanagar soldiers who were trying to assault the city. The soldiers were apparently paid between 10-50 fanams (silver coins) to remove the stones from the fort walls. Many perished in the process due to the incessant fire from the fort battlements, but the courageous men continued their work relentlessly.

The siege continued in this manner for three months till the arrival of Ismail Adil Shah's army in May 1520 CE. Long sieges were normal for those times e.g. the Moguls with all their firepower and army were only able to capture the fortress of Jinji in Tamil Nadu after a long siege of seven years<sup>13</sup>!! This was in 1698 CE, more than a hundred and seventy years after the Battle of Raichur.

We will divert here for a brief description of the camp set up by the Vijayanagar army. The entire camp was more like a large city and was divided into different sectors to accommodate the different contingents. Along the streets were craftsmen and merchants who sold gold, jewels, clothes, weapons etc. The logistical

train was so good that there was no shortage of fodder for animals even in a barren terrain like Raichur. To quote Nunes, *“Indeed no one who did not understand the meaning of what he saw would ever dream that a war was going on, but would think that he was in a prosperous city”* (Sewell).

### 5.3 Stage Three: Arrival of Adil Shah

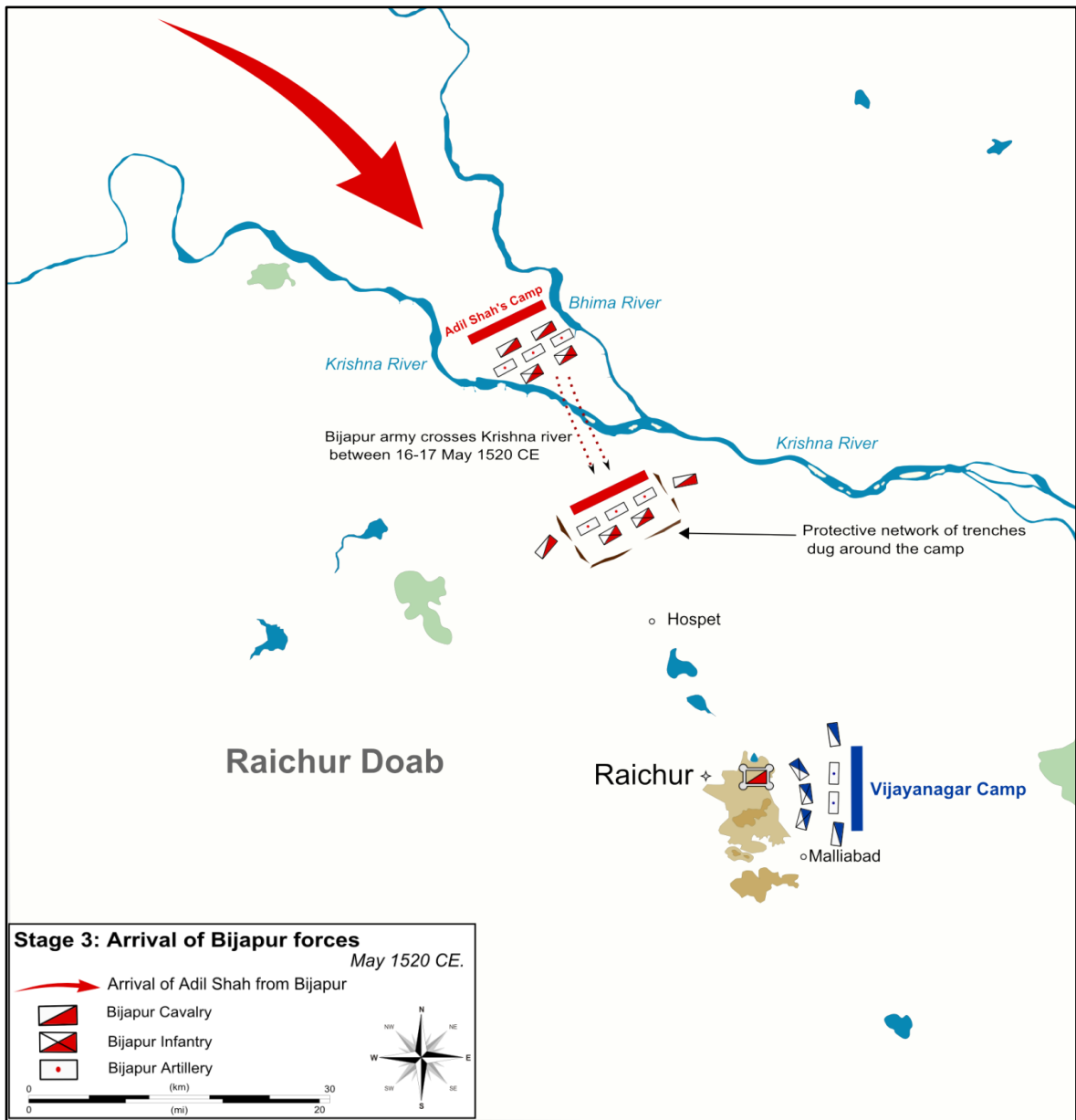


Figure 8 Arrival of Adil Shah

As the siege was in progress, news came that Ismail Adil Shah had arrived with his forces and was encamped across the Krishna River (see fig 8 above). The besieging Vijayanagar army was at this time 15 miles from the river. The movement of the Bijapur army was carefully monitored by Vijayanagar’s scouts.

It seems Adil Shah expected Krishnadeva Raya to attempt an attack as soon as he heard news of the arrival of Bijapur army. The Bijapur plan was to attack when the Vijayanagar troops would be in the middle



of the river crossing. But Krishnadeva Raya being a master strategist did not rise to the bait and on his part made no effort to make the first move.

This threw the Bijapur camp into confusion and after lengthy debates it was decided to cross the river and give battle. As enumerated in table 1 the Bijapur army was numerically inferior to the Vijayanagar forces, but qualitatively equal and in some aspects even better e.g. the Bijapur cavalry. From Nunes narrative it seems Adil Shah set great store on his artillery which numbered nearly nine hundred pieces, both big and small<sup>14</sup>.

Crossing the river Adil Shah pitched his camp close to the river bank to have ready access to water supplies. Strengthening his camp by digging large trenches around it, he arranged his cavalry and infantry in battle positions. Artillery which was supposed to deliver a decisive victory to Bijapur was positioned in the front line. As explained before with artillery of the age you could at most get 8-12 shots in an hour. This meant that the first artillery barrage had to be devastating enough to cause the maximum damage in enemy ranks.

#### 5.4 Stage Four: The Battle

Krishnadeva Raya divided his army into seven wings. *Kumara Virayya* who was his father in law as well as the Nayaka (chief) of Srirangapatnam was given the honour of commanding the vanguard of the army. Kumara Virayya with his sons (he had thirty sons as per Nunes) and his forces pitched camp about 4.8 km from Adil Shahs frontline.

On the advice of the Brahmana's it was decided to launch the attack on Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup> 1520 CE. The reason being it was an auspicious day. Krishnadeva Raya instructed the two divisions under Kumara Virayya to be battle ready at the first crack of dawn on Saturday morning.

While the Vijayanagar forces were preparing for battle, a small force of Bijapuri cavalry and infantry sneaked out from Raichur fort. It comprised of two hundred horses, unknown infantry and some elephants. The Bijapuri noble who led this troop was a eunuch and decided to shadow the Vijayanagar forces from a safe distance, all the while keeping close to the river bank. His plan seems to have been to ambush the Vijayanagar army at a turning point in the battle, either on its flanks or from the rear.

With the first crack of daylight entire atmosphere resounded with the sounds of martial music played by war drums, orders being shouted, excitement of animals and the trumpeting of elephants. Nunes describing this says, "*It seemed as if the sky should fall to the earth (because of the noise)*" and "*if you asked anything you could not hear yourself speak and you had to ask by signs (Sewell).*"

By the time the entire camp had moved forward it was already 8 or 9 am of Saturday morning. At this point Krishnadeva Raya ordered his two forward divisions to commence the attack and destroy the enemy.

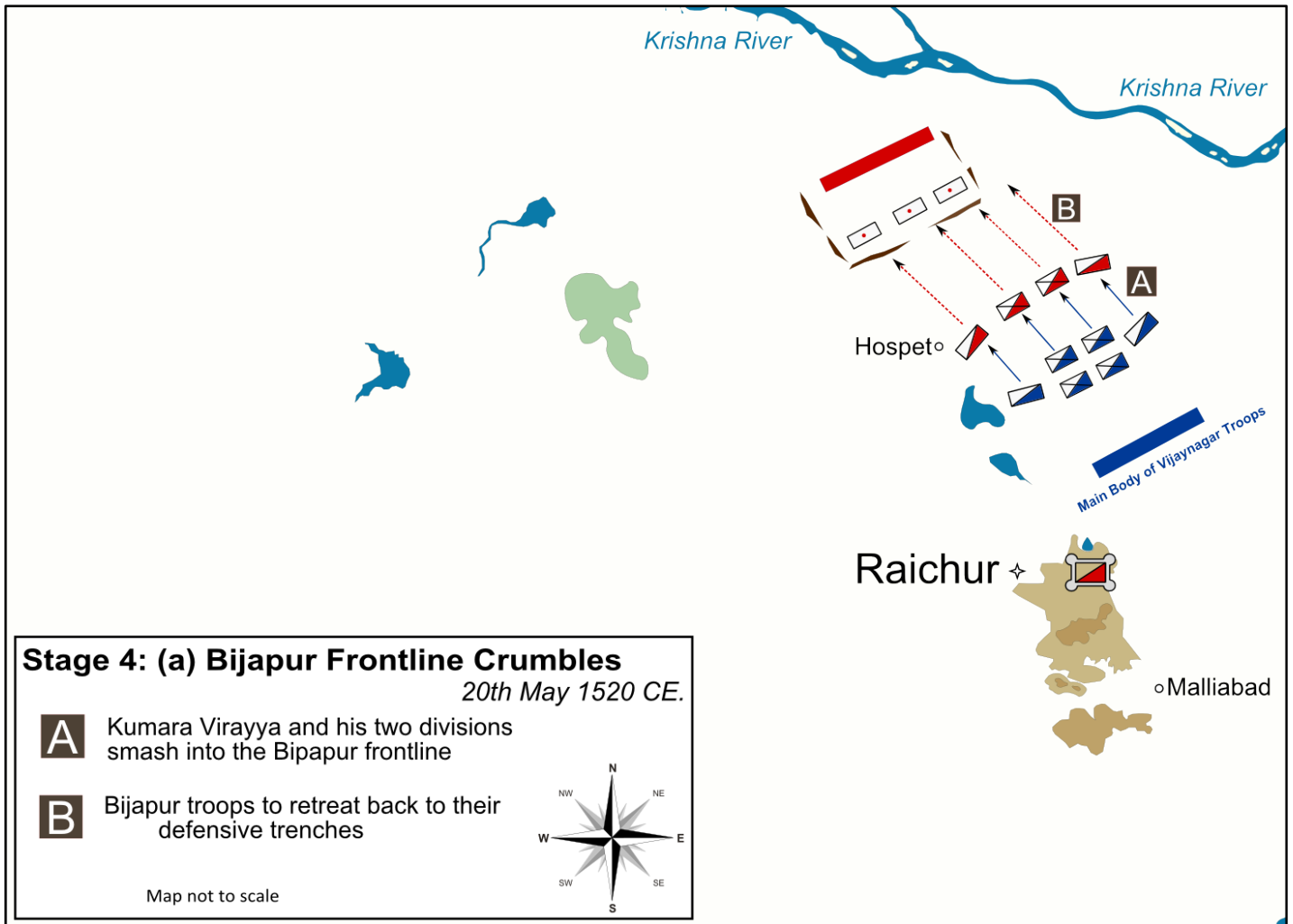


Figure 9 Kumara Virayya's attack on the Bijapur frontline

The brave Kumara Virayya launched a vigorous attack on the Bijapur army forcing it into the defensive trenches it had dug in the fields (see fig 9 above).

Adil Shah expected the great Raya to attack with all his forces and not just send two divisions in front. Adil Shahs game plan was to sacrifice a large part of his army to the Vijayanagar attack. He was certain that a large body of his troops would be cut to pieces in the initial onslaught. It is interesting to note that Adil Shah himself stayed safely at the back of his army and took no part in the battle.

Adil Shahs confidence rested on his trump card: his considerable artillery .At a crucial point in the battle when the main body of Vijayanagar troops including Krishnadeva Raya would be completely exposed, all the nine hundred large and small cannons would open simultaneous fire. This tremendous artillery barrage would could large scale destruction amongst the Vijayanagar troops and most probably quite a few of the leading chiefs would be killed. Krishnadeva Raya himself might be killed and the Vijayanagar troops would flee the battlefield.

But Krishnadeva Raya did not play by Adil Shahs rules and kept five divisions in reserve. Meanwhile the Muslim defences were crumbling under the vigorous attack by Kumara Virayya's forces.

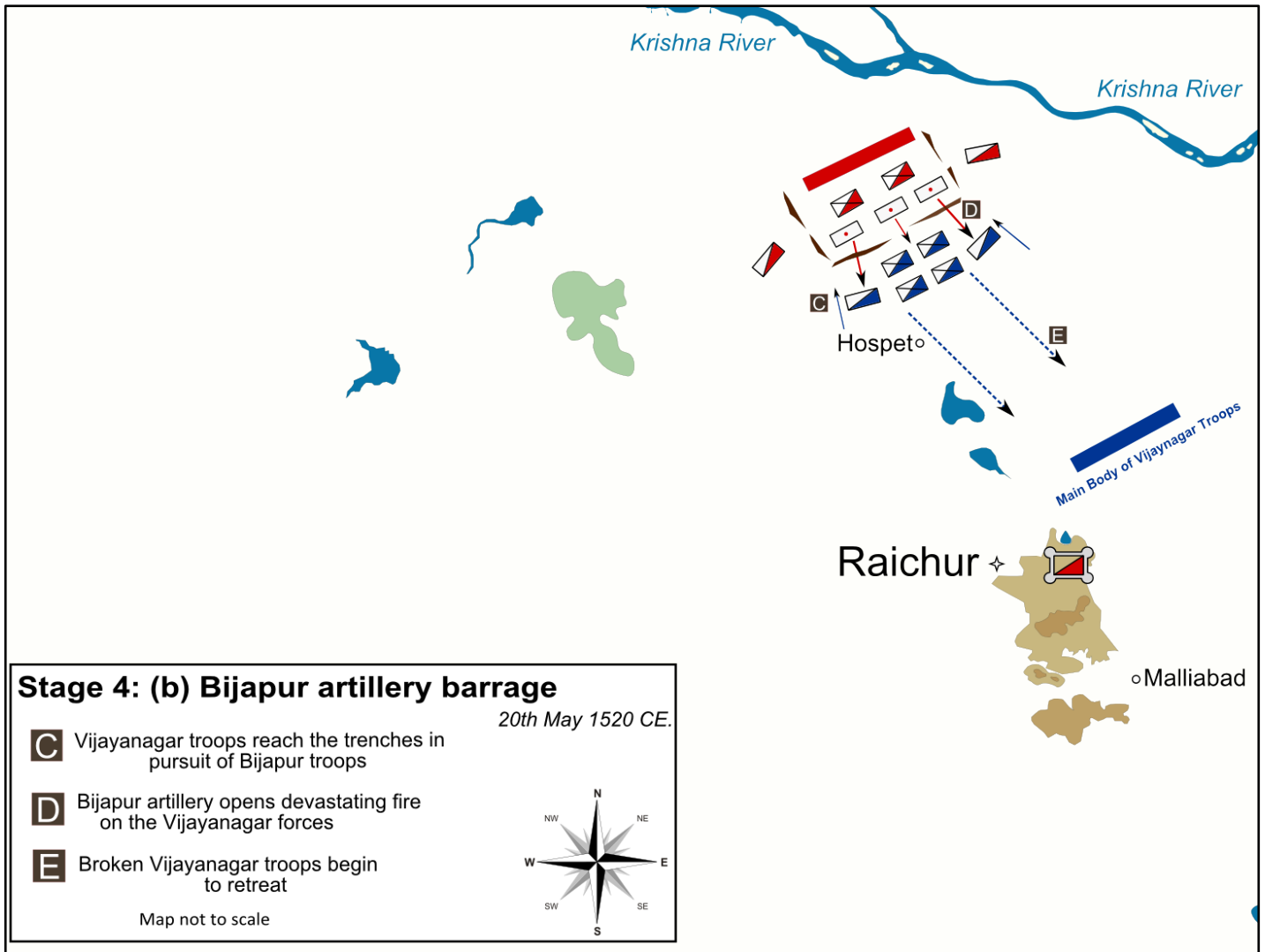


Figure 10 Bijapur’s devastating artillery barrage

Ismail Adil Shah saw that unless he brought his artillery into play now, he risked the complete rout of his army. Accordingly the entire Bijapur artillery opened simultaneous fire into the densely packed masses of Vijayanagar infantry, cavalry and elephants (see fig.10).

The artillery bombardment killed and wounded considerable numbers of Vijayanagar troops and as a consequence they began to retreat from the battlefield. Sensing victory, Bijapur cavalry and infantry pursued the retreating army, slaughtering everyone in their path.

At this crucial moment in the battle, the great Raya rallied all his remaining divisions and moved to attack the enemy (see fig 11 below). The fleeing frontline stabilised on seeing the entire army move forward. As per Nunes, Krishnadeva Raya gave orders to his troops to cut down any of the frontline that were fleeing the battlefield. This does not seem consistent with the Raya’s nature.

The fleeing frontline now turned back on its pursuers. Bijapur troops flush with the prospect of victory and in hot pursuit were in a complete state of disarray. They were swept aside much like the rising tide sweeps away flotsam.

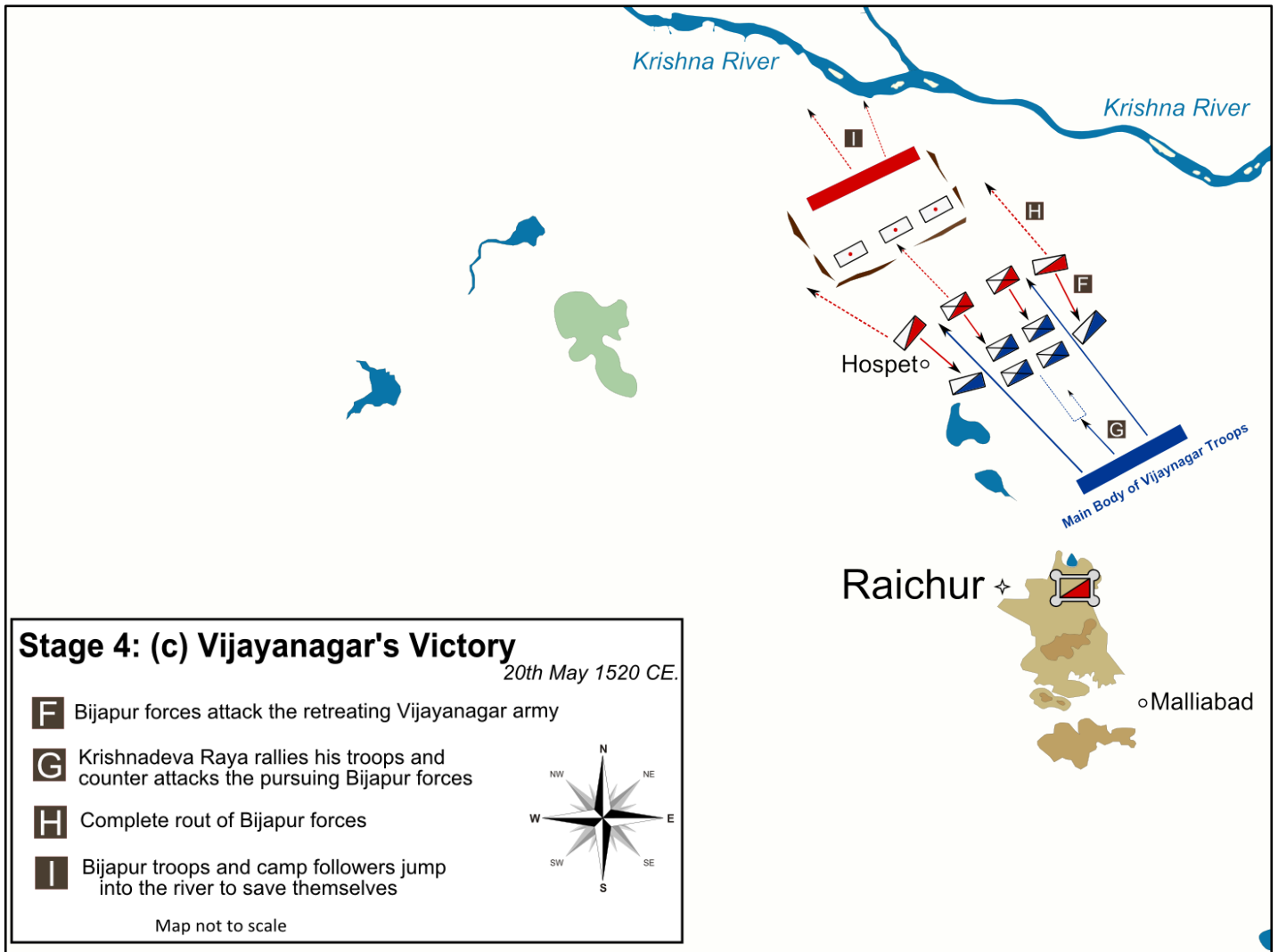


Figure 11 Vijayanagar's Counter Attack

Nunes says, "The confusion was so great amongst the Moors (Muslims) and such havoc was wrought (in their ranks) that they did not even try to defend the camp they had made so strong and enclosed so well; but like lost men they leaped into the river to save themselves. Then after them came large numbers of the King's troops and elephants, which latter worked amongst them mischief without end, for they seized men with their trunks and tore them into small pieces, whilst those who rode in the castles (howdahs) killed countless numbers" (Sewell).

The Bijapur artillery does not seem to have had the time to reload and fire a second barrage. Bijapur camp followers which included women fled towards the river. In the melee many were drowned and countless slaughtered by the Vijayanagar troops.

Salabat Khan who was the commander of the Bijapur forces tried in vain to stop his army from fleeing. He managed to collect a band of five hundred Portuguese mercenaries and in a desperate battle cut his way through the Vijayanagar army. This motley band almost reached near the Raya's personal bodyguard before it was exterminated. Salabat Khan was badly wounded and taken prisoner. Nunes is profuse in praising the bravery of Salabat Khan and the Portuguese.

While all this was going on, the "brave" Adil Shah had already fled the battlefield escorted by his confidant Asad Khan. The wily Asad Khan seeing that defeat was certain, helped the Sultan escape on an elephant. In

this he was accompanied by four hundred horsemen. Contrast the conduct of the great Raya who led his troops from the front and fought alongside them, with Adil Shah who did not participate in the battle at all!!

With the Bijapur army completely routed, Krishnadeva Raya occupied Adil Shahs tent and asked his Nayakas to desist from further slaughter of the defeated army. Even though general opinion amongst the Nayakas was to pursue and completely exterminate the Bijapur army, Krishnadeva Raya remained firm and tasked his men with getting back to besiege Raichur.

Befitting a man of his stature, Krishnadeva Raya was extremely humane with the captured prisoners. He made sure the captured women were not molested and made arrangements to return them. This was in stark contrast to the behaviour of the Muslims, for whom it was common practice to dishonour captured Hindu women and distribute amongst themselves ( the last time this took place on an enormous scale was during the partition riots of 1946-47 and during the genocide of nearly 2 million Hindus in Bangladesh in 1971).

The war booty captured was considerable, including four hundred large cannons, many small ones, nine hundred gun carriages, four thousand Arabian horses, countless pack animals (oxen, mules etc) and camp equipment (tents, pavilions etc).

The casualties on the Vijayanagar side were approximately 16,000 dead. There is no number for the dead on the Bijapur side, but taking even the most conservative estimate of 30% of their army being destroyed, it amounts to nearly 42,000 dead. Of course the real toll would have been much greater as many drowned in the river in the course of their desperate flight.

Sri Krishnadeva Raya oversaw that those warriors of Vijayanagar who had attained *Veeragati* were cremated with honour. The great Raya also distributed alms in memory of the martyrs.

#### 5.4 Stage Five: Raichur falls

After the battle, the Vijayanagar army got back to the siege of Raichur. As per Nunes at this point the entire complexion of the siege was changed by the arrival of *Christovao de Figueiredo* along with a troop of twenty musketeers. Christovao was a Portuguese captain who was in Vijayanagar to deliver horses. Seeing the defenders on the walls of Raichur fort firing with impunity upon the Vijayanagar soldiers, Christovao offered his services to Sri Krishnadeva Raya.

The Portuguese musketeers picked off the defenders on the battlements one by one, till it became near impossible for the defenders to use the wall without being shot. This allowed Vijayanagar soldiers to bring down portions of the fort wall without fear of getting shot. The cannons mounted on the fort wall were in fixed positions and could not be manipulated to fire on the Vijayanagar sappers working at the foot of the fort walls.

The governor of the fort was killed by a musket shot when he tried to look over the battlements in order to observe the Portuguese musketeers. This led to a complete collapse of moral within the fort and the city surrendered soon after.

According to the Nunes, Christovao was richly rewarded by Sri Krishnadeva Raya for his efforts. Sri Krishnadeva Raya treated the people of Raichur with great kindness and did not allow any looting to take place. Those soldiers who resorted to looting were suitably punished.

## 6. Aftermath

Sri Krishnadeva Raya departed for Vijayanagar after ensuring that the damage to the fort was repaired and leaving behind a strong contingent to guard the fort.

The complete defeat of Bijapur sent shockwaves throughout India, as it was known to be a powerful sultanate. The people most concerned were the other Deccan sultans i.e. Nizam Shah, Qutb Shah, Barid Shah and Imad Shah. Even though they had no love for Bijapur, they feared Sri Krishnadeva Raya would attack them next. Accordingly they sent a message to Sri Krishnadeva Raya asking him to return Raichur or they would combine in battle against him. Sri Krishnadeva Raya wrote back saying they should not take the trouble of marching to Vijayanagar, for he himself would come to their kingdoms!!

Ismail Adil Shah sent an ambassador to the Raya's court to demand that everything he had lost be restored. The ambassador had to wait a month before he was allowed to see Sri Krishnadeva Raya. Adil Shah's message was typically arrogant and put the blame for the conflict squarely on the Raya's shoulders. The great Raya replied that he would restore everything back to the Adil Shah if he came and kissed his feet!!

Predictably Adil Shah dilly dallied till Krishnadeva Raya marched onto Bijapur itself. But that goes beyond the scope of this article.

## 7. Analysis of Nunes Account

Nunes account of the siege raises serious doubts that he deliberately downplayed the role of Vijayanagar artillery to give undue importance to his fellow Portuguese. The following points have come to my attention while reading the translation done by Robert Sewell:

**Artillery:** On one hand Nunes is meticulous about the numbers he gives for the cannon/firearms in the service of Bijapur. On the other he says nothing about the number of cannon carried by the Vijayanagar forces, except a single statement that "there were many cannon"!! It is quite inconceivable that he would not have known the numbers of artillery carried by Vijayanagar. Artillery in that century much as today was definitely quantifiable. Nunes has gone to the trouble of putting precise numbers to the innumerable infantry, cavalry and elephants in the Vijayanagar army. But fails to put his finger on the nature of Vijayanagar artillery, even though he was clearly alive to the importance of artillery on the field.

Artillery required an extensive support mechanism, with large cannon taking up to ten people to maintain it and the slow movement of the artillery carriages slowed down the main army as well. What was the point of taking all the trouble to drag artillery to the battlefield and not use it? This is equivalent to India taking the trouble to develop the Arjun tank, deploy it on the borders and when war breaks out do nothing with it!!

**Siege of Raichur:** The mention of Vijayanagar soldiers being paid to chisel out stones from the fort walls is incomprehensible. By the 1500's siege weapons had already matured and Vijayanagar was definitely in possession of siege weapons such as trebuchets etc. These would have been complemented by teams of sappers to mine the fort walls. To assume that the richest empire in Asia (if not the world) did not have any siege machinery and had to rely on its soldiers chiselling out stones is unbelievable. And to further imply that a few Portuguese mercenaries were responsible for the fall of a formidable fortress is laughable to say the least!

Krishna Deva Raya was the most far sighted and visionary monarch of his time. It simply does not fit into his character that he would not use Vijayanagar's artillery to launch a counter bombardment of Raichur fort. He would have been alive to the fact that the Bijapur sultans had built up a formidable artillery arsenal. To counter this he would have secured up to date artillery from the Portuguese, who were eager to sell arms and horses to the highest bidder. Ferishta himself talks of cannons being used in the Vijayanagar-Bahmani sultanate wars of the late 1400's.

**The "Kiss my Foot" anecdote:** The incident of Sri Krishnadeva Raya asking Ismail Adil Shah to come and kiss his feet is inconsistent with the character of such a magnanimous and large hearted ruler. If Krishnadeva Raya wanted to humiliate Adil Shah he would have followed up immediately after the battle and completely destroyed Adil Shah. It must be remembered that Nunes was a horse trader and not an ambassador at the court of Vijayanagar. As such some parts of his narrative would be coloured by common gossip and rumours.

And supposing the great Raya did send this answer, I fail to see what is wrong with that. Muslim sultans are routinely excused of any excesses whether rape, mass murder or loot. Whereas a Hindu emperor who has won a brilliant victory is accused of arrogance when he asks his defeated adversary to come and submit to him. When Hindus assert themselves they are portrayed as arrogant, selfish and deserving of whatever bad happens to them!! Talk about intellectual perversion.

Directly related to the above is the opinion of historians like Robert Sewell, that the alliance of the Deccan sultanates which led to the defeat of Vijayanagar at Talikota in 1565 CE arose from the "arrogance" of the Hindus after Raichur.

This would be a complete misreading of the situation. The Deccan sultanates were offspring of the Bahmani Sultanate which was unremitting in its objective to carry out destruction of Vijayanagar. Even though the Deccan sultans fought amongst themselves and struck alliances even with Vijayanagar at times, their overall objective never changed i.e. the despoliation and destruction of Vijayanagar at the first opportunity.

In fact the prime cause of the defeat at *Rakshaka- Tangadi* (Talikota) can be directly traced back to the pursuit of a number of short sighted policies by *Aliya Rama Raya* (the then emperor of Vijayanagar and successor to Krishna Deva Raya) which included:

1. Hiring a large number of Muslims in the army and appointing them to strategic positions. This was the prime reason why the battle of *Rakshaka- Tangadi* (Talikota) was lost in 1565 CE. The Muslim contingents of the Vijayanagar army switched sides at a crucial moment at Talikota and attacked their former employer<sup>15</sup>. The confusion that followed enabled *Nizam Shah* of Ahmednagar to capture and behead Sri

Rama Raya, which was followed by the Vijayanagar army fleeing the battlefield. Another tragic occasion in our history when we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory!!

2. Instead of completely destroying the sultanates one by one, Sri Rama Raya kept playing them off against one another. It was only a matter of time before they united against the *kafir* Hindus!!

## 8. In Conclusion

It is telling of the double standards employed by western historians that Ferishta's account is rightly called into question, but Nunes is taken at face value!! Even for a person like me with a very superficial knowledge of Vijayanagar, entire parts of Nunes chronicle seem out of sync with contemporary reality.

This is what happens when foreigners whether whites or Muslims write our history. No wonder Hindus are cast as villains and ever ready to be conquered, when the reality is exactly the opposite.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrack>

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Chaul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Chaul)

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Diu\\_%281509%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Diu_%281509%29)

<sup>4</sup> Pg.157, The Book of Duarte Barbosa, Volume 1, Mansel Longworth Dames, retrieved from <http://library.du.ac.in/dspace/handle/1/2543>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Equipment/Artillery/354-155mm-Bofors-Fh-77b.html>

<sup>6</sup> Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, Jos Gommans, Routledge, 2002. The author states the rate of fire of Mughal artillery to be 2-3 shots every fifteen minutes. In the chaos of battle this would probably be lower.

<sup>7</sup> Pg.157, Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, Jos Gommans, Routledge, 2002

<sup>8</sup> Pg.62, Firearms: A Global History to 1700, Kenneth Chase, Cambridge University Press, 2003. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in why the western world was able to gain technological superiority in firearms.

<sup>9</sup> A History of South India, page 285, Prof KAN Shastri, Oxford University Press, Third Edition, 1966.

<sup>10</sup> Pg.167, History of the Deccan, J.D.B Gribble, 1896, available at <http://www.archive.org/details/ahistorydeccan00pendgoog>

<sup>11</sup> The distance from Vijayanagar to Raichur is approximately 165 km. Such large armies would have been very slow to move e.g. the rate at which a fully equipped Mughal army could march was only 6-8 km a day. Provided it was dry season and the ground was firm.

<sup>12</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Raichur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Raichur)

<sup>13</sup> Pg.50-109, History of Aurangzib, Jadunath Sarkar, retrieved from <http://library.du.ac.in/dspace/handle/1/7549>

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<sup>15</sup> A History of South India, page 295, Prof KAN Shastri, Oxford University Press, Third Edition, 1966