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Victory City: Rushdie's Magic Carpet

Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* is another magic yarn decked with bits of history, mythology, magic, fantasy, miracles, and a multiplicity of narrative techniques and styles. It is about Pampa Kampana, a woman who founded the city of Bisnaga and was **instrumental** in the founding of the vast city of Vijayanagar. She lived for 238 years, coinciding with the period of the umpire. 238 years is a long period for the life of an **individual** or an empire. Rushdie deals with both.

Pampa grew up with bitter memories of her early life. As a nine-year-old girl, she witnessed her mother embracing the raging fire in accordance with the Sati system prevalent in medieval India and thankfully banned by the British when they arrived in India. On her way back, Pampa feels that she possesses divine power, which spoke through her to say that she was blessed with long life and youth and would found empires, possess magical powers, and be called Pampa Kampina. It also asked her never to say no to life and resist bigotry. Pampa could not understand what was happening and believed that Goddess Pampa Kampana spoke through her. Walking in an inspired state of mind and feeling hungry, she arrived at the hut of a monk called Vidyasagar, who gave her food and shelter.

Vidyasagar was a learned man and had vowed abstinence, hence, the two slept in two corners of the hut. However, it could not last long, and Vidyasagar violated her chastity while Pampa remained silent. Pampa grew up into a beautiful woman. It was about time the Portuguese had come to India. Pampa fell in love with one of them, a very handsome horse dealer called Domingo Nunes. Pampa's

People were drawn to her beauty and magical powers, and she was soon able to establish the city of Bisnaga. **One** day, two cowherds, Hakka and Bakka, met her for royal favors. Pampa did not disappoint them and gave them a bag of magical seeds. Hakka and Bakka sowed them, and a barren land came alive. With their new-found prosperity, Hakka and Bakka founded the Vijayanagar empire, and Hakka became its founder king. Hakka pressed Pampa to be his consort. Pampa hesitated but finally agreed because she thought that the umpire must have successors, but with the rider, and that she would continue her relationship with the Portuguese. Hakka agreed because he was infatuated with her beauty. Pampa bore children from both of them. People could easily identify their fathers based on their skin color, habits, and temperaments. This was very humiliating for Hakka, and he became weary and began to seek spirituality. When he died, Pampa married Bakka, as she loved him more than she loved Hakka.

After the death of Bakka, the umpire was ruled by their successors. They were riven by jealousies and rivalries, but Pampa's position with the rulers remained unchallenged. Pampa does work to carry out what the goddess told her. She tries to ban the burning of widows to provide women with gender equality. She is self-critical of her duties to her daughters, by Domingo Nunes. She is worried that in spite of her constant pleading, the ruling king has not banned widow-burning. She is worried about the safety of the empire. She is also worried that there was a lot of infighting

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among the successors. As a result, she decides to go it alone and use her magical powers to build temples and defend the empire.

However, the neighbouring Sultanates of Muslim rulers attacked Vijayanagar and conquered and plundered it. They blinded Pampa with burning rods, and they desecrated the temples. The ruins of Hampi and its temple, declared world heritage by UNESCO, bear witness to its prosperity. Rushdie harps on magic and not human endeavours, human intelligence and courage. Vijayanagar is a historical place. Victory City is a myth. Minus myth, the society of Vijayanagar is hardly interesting.

Pampa, who witnessed Vijayanagar's victory and defeat, turned inward and recorded her feelings in a 24000-verse epic called Jayaparajay, which means victory and defeat. Fearing that it too might be plundered and defiled She kept it in an earthen pot and buried it in the royal enclosure. The epic, written in Sanskrit, was discovered four hundred and fifty years later, and it was translated into the language of the day by an unknown poet, though we suspect it is none other than Salman Rushdie. Here, Rushdie claims that its verses are better than the verses of the Ramayana, though not many readers would agree with Rushdie's claim.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Victory City* cover India from the north to the south, from the present to the past. Both novels depict India as a country that is falling apart, disintegrating, and degenerating. V.S. Naipaul also takes the same view and says it in no uncertain terms. But Rushdie takes a detour and obscures his message so much that it becomes difficult to see the wood for the trees.