

VIJAYANAGARA ARCHITECTURE: HAMPI AND VIRUPAKSHA TEMPLE – A STUDY

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Abstract:

This paper examines the Hampi and Virupaksha Temple under Vijayanagara Architecture. Vijayanagara architecture, exemplified by the city of Hampi and its iconic Virupaksha Temple, represents a pinnacle of artistic achievement and cultural expression in medieval South India. Flourishing from the 14th to 16th centuries, the Vijayanagara Empire's architectural style evolved from earlier Dravidian traditions, characterized by grandeur, intricate craftsmanship, and spiritual symbolism. Hampi, as the empire's capital, served as a vibrant hub of commerce, culture, and religious devotion. Its urban layout and monumental structures, such as temples, palaces, and markets, reflect the empire's strategic planning and artistic vision. The Virupaksha Temple, dedicated to Lord Virupaksha (a form of Lord Shiva), stands as a prime example of Vijayanagara architecture's magnificence. The temple complex features a towering gopuram adorned with intricate sculptures depicting celestial beings and mythological narratives. Inner sanctums and mandapas (halls) within the temple are elaborately carved with scenes from Hindu epics, showcasing the empire's dedication to religious expression through art.

Architecturally, Vijayanagara temples like Virupaksha exhibit a distinctive Dravidian style characterized by pyramid-shaped gopurams, pillared halls, and meticulous attention to detail in sculptural ornamentation. The Virupaksha Temple's sanctum houses a sacred linga, symbolizing the divine presence of Lord Shiva and serving as the focal point of daily rituals and religious festivities. Beyond its architectural splendor, Vijayanagara architecture at Hampi embodies a cultural and social ethos, hosting festivals, performances, and gatherings that united diverse communities under a shared spiritual heritage. Today, Hampi and the Virupaksha Temple are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, preserving their historical and cultural significance for future generations and continuing to inspire admiration for the artistic achievements of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Keywords: Hampi, Virupaksha Temple, Vijayanagara, Architecture, UNESCO etc.

INTRODUCTION:

The Vijayanagara Empire, flourishing from the 14th to 16th centuries in South India, stands as a testament to cultural vibrancy, architectural splendor, and military prowess. Founded in 1336 CE by Harihara I and Bukka Raya I, the empire's capital, Hampi, emerged as a center of political authority, trade, and religious patronage. Spanning much of present-day Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, the Vijayanagara Empire thrived under a succession of capable rulers, notably Krishna Deva Raya, whose

reign epitomized the empire's zenith. The empire's strategic location along major trade routes facilitated cultural exchange and economic prosperity, fostering a cosmopolitan atmosphere where diverse religious and artistic traditions flourished.

Vijayanagara's architectural legacy, particularly evident in monumental structures like the Virupaksha Temple and the Vittala Temple's iconic Stone Chariot, exemplifies the empire's commitment to artistry and devotion. The Dravidian architectural style, characterized by towering gopurams, intricately carved pillars, and expansive temple complexes, reflects a harmonious blend of Hindu spiritual ideals and artistic innovation. Despite facing challenges from regional rivals and external invasions, the Vijayanagara Empire's legacy endures through its contributions to literature, music, dance, and governance. Its impact on South Indian culture remains profound, resonating in the region's artistic traditions and religious practices to this day.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

This paper examines the Hampi and Virupaksha Temple under Vijayanagara Architecture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study is based on secondary sources of data such as articles, books, journals, research papers, websites and other sources.

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HAMPI

Hampi, located in the modern-day state of Karnataka, India, was the capital city of the Vijayanagara Empire from the 14th to 16th centuries. Nestled amidst rocky terrain and the Tungabhadra River, Hampi served as a vibrant center of culture, commerce, and religious activity during its heyday. Today, it stands as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, revered for its archaeological and architectural splendor.

Historical Background

Foundation and Growth of the Vijayanagara Empire

The Vijayanagara Empire was founded in 1336 by Harihara I and Bukka Raya I, two brothers who were generals in the Kakatiya dynasty's service. They established their kingdom on the banks of the Tungabhadra River, strategically positioned to control trade routes and agricultural lands. Over the next centuries, the empire expanded under notable rulers like Krishna Deva Raya, reaching its zenith in the 16th century.

Cultural and Religious Landscape

Hampi's cultural milieu was enriched by the convergence of Hinduism, Jainism, and Islamic influences. The empire's patronage of arts and literature flourished, with Kannada, Telugu, Sanskrit, and Tamil languages thriving. The rulers were avid supporters of Hindu traditions, and Hampi became a significant pilgrimage center, particularly for devotees of Lord Virupaksha (Shiva) and other deities.

Architecture of Hampi

Vijayanagara Architecture

Vijayanagara architecture is celebrated for its grandeur, scale, and intricate craftsmanship. It evolved from earlier South Indian architectural styles and reached its zenith during the empire's rule. Key features include:

- **Dravidian Influence:** Characterized by pyramid-shaped gopurams (gateway towers), pillared halls (mandapas), and intricate sculptures of gods, goddesses, and mythical creatures.
- **Monumental Structures:** Temples, palaces, markets (bazaars), and water infrastructure (such as tanks and aqueducts) adorned the cityscape, reflecting both functional and aesthetic considerations.
- **Royal Enclosures:** Palatial complexes like the Lotus Mahal and the Elephant Stables showcased the empire's architectural prowess and royal lifestyle.

Virupaksha Temple: Jewel of Hampi

The Virupaksha Temple stands as a testament to Vijayanagara architecture's splendor and spiritual significance:

- **Architecture:** Dedicated to Lord Virupaksha (a form of Shiva), the temple features a towering gopuram adorned with intricate sculptures and a series of mandapas leading to the sanctum.
- **Cultural Hub:** Beyond its religious functions, the temple served as a cultural and social center, hosting festivals, performances, and gatherings that brought together people from diverse backgrounds.

Other Prominent Structures

- **Vittala Temple:** Known for its iconic Stone Chariot and musical pillars that produce melodic sounds when struck, the Vittala Temple exemplifies the empire's artistic and architectural achievements.
- **Hampi Bazaar:** A bustling marketplace lined with pavilions and shops, reflecting the city's commercial vitality and cultural diversity.

- **Royal Enclosures and Palaces:** Structures like the Queen's Bath, Hazara Rama Temple, and the Zenana Enclosure provide insights into the empire's administrative and residential architecture.

Art and Literature

- **Patronage of Arts:** The Vijayanagara rulers were avid supporters of literature, music, dance, and visual arts, fostering a vibrant cultural environment.
- **Literary Contributions:** Kannada and Telugu literature flourished under royal patronage, producing notable works that continue to influence South Indian literary traditions.

THE VIRUPAKSHA TEMPLE

The Virupaksha Temple is located in Hampi, Karnataka, India, and is dedicated to Lord Virupaksha, a form of Lord Shiva. It stands as one of the oldest and most significant temples in India, with its origins dating back to the 7th century CE. Over the centuries, it evolved into a major pilgrimage site and cultural hub under the patronage of the Vijayanagara rulers.

Foundation and Early History

The exact foundation date of the Virupaksha Temple is unclear, but it is believed to have been originally built during the reign of the Chalukya dynasty in the 7th century. The temple underwent expansions and renovations under successive dynasties, including the Vijayanagara Empire, which significantly contributed to its current grandeur and architectural form.

Vijayanagara Patronage

During the Vijayanagara period (14th to 16th centuries), the temple received extensive patronage from rulers such as Krishna Deva Raya, who contributed to its expansion and embellishment. The empire's support not only enhanced the temple's architectural splendor but also solidified its role as a major religious and cultural center in South India.

Architecture of the Virupaksha Temple

Dravidian Architectural Style

The Virupaksha Temple exemplifies the Dravidian style of architecture, characterized by its distinctive features:

- **Gopuram (Gateway Tower):** The temple's main entrance is marked by a towering gopuram adorned with intricate sculptures depicting gods, goddesses, celestial beings, and mythological narratives. The gopuram serves both a functional and symbolic purpose, symbolizing the transition from the mundane world to the sacred realm of the temple.

- **Mandapas (Halls) and Courtyards:** The temple complex includes multiple mandapas and courtyards, each with its own architectural and artistic significance. These spaces were used for rituals, gatherings, and celebrations, reflecting the temple's role as a social and cultural hub.
- **Sculptural Artistry:** The outer walls of the temple are adorned with elaborate sculptures depicting episodes from Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as scenes from the Puranas. These sculptures serve not only a decorative purpose but also convey religious teachings and moral values to devotees.

Sanctum and Inner Sanctum

The sanctum sanctorum of the Virupaksha Temple houses the main deity, Lord Virupaksha (Shiva), in the form of a linga. The inner sanctum, accessible only to priests and authorized personnel, is a sacred space where daily rituals and offerings are performed according to Vedic traditions.

Religious Significance and Practices

Pilgrimage and Devotion

The Virupaksha Temple is revered as a sacred pilgrimage site for devotees of Lord Shiva. Pilgrims from across India visit Hampi to seek blessings, perform rituals, and participate in religious festivals held throughout the year.

Festivals and Celebrations

- **Virupaksha Rathotsava:** An annual chariot festival celebrated with great pomp and fervor, during which the temple deity is taken out in a grand procession on a chariot adorned with flowers and garlands.
- **Mahanavami Festival:** Celebrated during Navaratri (nine nights dedicated to the Divine Mother), Mahanavami at Virupaksha Temple includes special rituals, cultural performances, and offerings to the deity.
- **Other Rituals:** Daily rituals such as puja (worship), abhisheka (ritual bathing of the deity), and arati (offering of light) are performed by priests, maintaining the temple's spiritual sanctity and continuity of worship.

Artistic Elements and Iconography

Sculptures and Carvings

The Virupaksha Temple is renowned for its exquisite sculptures and carvings, which adorn its walls, pillars, and ceilings:

- **Gods and Goddesses:** Sculptures of Hindu deities such as Lord Shiva, Parvati, Vishnu, Lakshmi, and other celestial beings decorate the temple, reflecting the richness of Hindu iconography.

- **Mythological Narratives:** Scenes depicting episodes from Hindu epics and mythological stories are intricately carved, illustrating the divine exploits and moral teachings embedded within these narratives.

Iconography and Symbolism

- **Shiva Linga:** The central icon of the Virupaksha Temple is the Shiva Linga, representing Lord Shiva's divine presence and cosmic energy. Devotees offer prayers and perform rituals to seek blessings and spiritual fulfillment.
- **Nandi (Bull):** A prominent sculpture of Nandi, the sacred bull and vehicle of Lord Shiva, is positioned in front of the sanctum sanctorum, symbolizing devotion and steadfastness in Hindu mythology.

Cultural Impact and Legacy

Cultural Hub and Social Center

Beyond its religious significance, the Virupaksha Temple served as a vibrant cultural and social center during the Vijayanagara period:

- **Literary and Artistic Patronage:** The temple attracted poets, scholars, artists, and musicians who contributed to the flourishing of literature, music, dance, and visual arts under royal patronage.
- **Community Festivities:** Festivals, cultural performances, and religious rituals brought together people from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and shared cultural identity.

Architectural Legacy

The architectural legacy of the Virupaksha Temple extends beyond its physical structure:

- **Influence on Vijayanagara Architecture:** The temple's design and architectural elements influenced other religious and secular structures built during the Vijayanagara period, contributing to the empire's architectural legacy.
- **Inspiration for Contemporary Art:** Artists, architects, and scholars continue to draw inspiration from the temple's aesthetic principles, sculptural artistry, and spiritual symbolism, preserving its legacy in contemporary art and cultural discourse.

Conservation and Tourism

Preservation Efforts

The Virupaksha Temple and its surroundings are subject to ongoing conservation efforts to protect its architectural heritage and cultural significance:

- **UNESCO World Heritage Site:** Hampi, including the Virupaksha Temple, is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, highlighting its global importance and the need for sustainable preservation practices.
- **Archaeological Surveys and Documentation:** Archaeologists and conservationists conduct surveys, documentation, and restoration work to maintain the temple's structural integrity and historical authenticity.

Tourism and Visitor Experience

- **Tourist Attractions:** The Virupaksha Temple attracts tourists, pilgrims, historians, and art enthusiasts from around the world, offering them a glimpse into the rich cultural tapestry of ancient India.
- **Visitor Amenities:** Facilities such as guided tours, information centers, and cultural programs enhance the visitor experience while promoting awareness of Hampi's cultural heritage and conservation efforts.

CONCLUSION:

Vijayanagara architecture, as manifested in Hampi and the Virupaksha Temple, stands as a monumental testament to the empire's cultural richness and architectural prowess. The empire's capital city, Hampi, and its religious center, the Virupaksha Temple, not only showcase the grandeur of Dravidian architecture but also embody the spiritual and artistic aspirations of a flourishing civilization. The Virupaksha Temple, with its towering gopuram, intricate sculptures, and sacred sanctums, continues to inspire awe and reverence. It serves not only as a place of worship but also as a cultural and social hub where festivals and rituals have united devotees for centuries. The architectural legacy of Hampi, including other notable structures like the Vittala Temple's Stone Chariot and the Lotus Mahal, reflects the empire's commitment to craftsmanship and religious devotion.

As UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Hampi and the Virupaksha Temple hold global significance, drawing visitors and scholars alike to explore their historical narratives and architectural splendor. Their preservation underscores their enduring legacy, ensuring that future generations can appreciate and learn from the artistic achievements and cultural heritage of the Vijayanagara Empire, a beacon of South Indian civilization.

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