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## Style of Art and Architecture of Vijayanagar Temple in Tamilnadu

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### Abstract

*Vijayanagar architecture is a vibrant combination of the Chalukya, Hoysala, Pandya, and Chola styles, which evolved from prior empires in earlier centuries. It is also influenced by later Deccan and Dravidian styles. The empire's patronage enabled its fine arts and literature to rise to new heights, and its legacy of sculpture, painting, and architecture influenced the development of the arts in South India long after the empire came to an end. Vijayanagara architecture shows the cosmopolitanism of the great city is the presence of many secular structures bearing Islamic features.*

*While political history concentrates on the ongoing conflict between the Vijayanagara Empire and the Deccan Sultanates, the architectural record reflects a more creative interaction. The empire built a number of temples, monuments, palaces and other structures over South India, with the largest concentration located in its capital. The monuments in and around Hampi, in the Vijayanagara principality,<sup>1</sup> are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This Article throws light upon the art and architectural expansion made during of Vijayanagar Empire and the rulers of the empires were the inheritors of the rich traditions in art and architecture of the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Hoysalas.*

**Keywords:** Vijayanagr, Temple, Architecture, Art, Chalikyia, Structure, Chola, Sangam, Hampi,

### Introduction

Vijayanagar era architecture can be broadly classified into religious, courtly, and civic architecture. Its style is a harmonious combination of the Chalukya, Hoysala, Pandya, and Chola styles that evolved in earlier centuries and represents a return to the simplicity and serenity of the past. Preferred for its durability, local hard granite was the building material of choice, as it had been for the Badami Chalukyas; however, soapstone, which was soft and easily carved, was also used for reliefs and sculptures.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Howes, Jennifer (1998). *The Courts of Pre-colonial South India: Material Culture and Kingship*. Psychology Press. p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.66.

## Architecture

Vijayanagar Empire ruled Andhra and Karnataka in addition to Tamil Nadu. They patronised art and sculpture by constructing temples. Mandapams, Gopuram, Kalyana Mandapams and a few small temples. They followed Dravidian style of architecture, the Indo-Sarasonic elements also occupied a prominent place in it. Arts like Kanchi Varadharaja Perumal koil Kalyanamandapam, Vellore Thalakandasvarar temple Kalyanamandapam, Kuthiraimandapam in Thiruvaram temple were important and they constructed in a similar style. Important Gopurams like Kanchi Ekamparanathar koil Gopuram and Gopurams at Nadaraja temple and Thiruvannamalai were attractive.

Such huge Gopurams were called as Rajakopurams. Kanchi Ekambaranatha temple was constructed during the reign of Krishnadevaraja. The height of the Gopuram was 188 feet. He also constructed northern Gopuram of Chidambaram temple and Kalakastha koil Gopuram. These Gopurams were beautiful and highly attractive.

Again Kulams were constructed in the premises of the temples. Apart from Mandapa and Gopurams they constructed a number of huge and attractive buildings and palaces. They were big in size. The construction of eight angled Thamari Mahal, the curve shaped madams, Kaval Gopurams forts, palaces, bathing centres at various places during the reign of the Vijayanagara rulers revealed the artistic beauty and talent of the architects.<sup>3</sup>

## Sangam Period Architecture

From 580BCE - 300CE, the greatest accomplishments of the kingdoms of the early Chola, Chera and the Pandyan kingdoms included brick shrines to deities murugan, Shiva, Amman and Vishnu. Several of these have been unearthed near Adichanallur, Kaveripoompuharpattinam and Mahabalipuram, and the construction plans of these sites of worship were shared to some detail in various poems of Sangam literature.

One such temple, the Saluvannkuppan Murukan temple, unearthed in 2005, consists of three layers. The lowest layer, consisting of a brick shrine,<sup>4</sup> is one of the oldest of its kind in South India, and is the oldest shrine found dedicated to Murukan. It is one of only two brick shrine pre Pallava Hindu temples to be found in the state, the other being the Veetrirundha Perumal Temple at Veppathur dedicated to Lord Vishnu.

The dynasties of early medieval Tamilakkam expanded and erected structural additions to many of these brick shrines. Sculptures of erotic art, nature and deities from the Meenakshi Temple, and Ranganathaswamy Temple date from the Sangam period. Many of the temples of this time have been built on either bricks or granite stones but they didn't survive till modern times due to the destruction caused by the invasion of the Delhi Sultanate Empire under the leadership of Malik Kafur. Several brick structures dating to the Sangam era have

<sup>3</sup> Bridges, Elizabeth J. (2016). "Vijayanagara Empire". In Dalziel, N.; MacKenzie, J. M. (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Empire*. pp. 1–5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.165.

been unearthed at places across Tamil Nadu such as keeladi, adichanallur and kodumanal. The findings at these sites indicate that the buildings were built using burnt bricks.<sup>5</sup>

### Architecture in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu Nearly 33,000 ancient temples, many at least 800 to 2000 years old, are found scattered all over Tamil Nadu. As per Tamil Nadu Hindu Endowments Board, there are 38,615 temples. Most of the largest Hindu Temples reside here. Studded with complex architecture, variety of sculptures, and rich inscriptions, the temples remain the very essence of the culture and heritage of Tamil land, with historical records dating back to at least 3,000 years. The state also abounds with a large number of temple tanks. The state has 2,359 temple tanks located in 1,586 temples and also confluence of many architectural styles, from ancient temples to the Indo-Saracenic style (pioneered in Madras) of the colonial era, to churches and mosques, to the 20th-century steel and chrome of skyscrapers. Throughout Tamil Nadu, a king was considered to be divine by nature and possessed religious significance. The king was 'the representative of God on earth' and lived in a "koyil",<sup>6</sup> which means the "residence of God". The Modern Tamil word for temple is koil. Titular worship was also given to kings. Other words for king like "ko" ("king"), "irai" ("emperor") and "āṇḍavar" ("conqueror") now primarily refer to God. Tolkappiyar refers to the Three Crowned Kings as the "Three Glorified by Heaven". In the Dravidian-speaking South, the concept of divine kingship led to the assumption of major roles by state and temple

The Vijayanagar Empire was founded by Harihara and Bukka in AD 1336 and made Hastinavati (Hampi) as the capital city. They ruled over Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and parts of Kerala in southern India. Here, we are giving the gist of the cultural history of Vijayanagar Empire that will refine the knowledge about how architecture, art, music and literature developed under this kingdom.

The Vijayanagar emperors were enthusiastic patrons of painting. The Vijayanagar School of painting was renowned for its frescoes of Hindu mythological themes on temple walls and ceilings. The rulers of Vijayanagar encouraged literature, art, architecture, religious,<sup>7</sup> and philosophical discussions. With the fall of the Vijayanagar empire after the Battle of Talikota in 1565 CE, the artists who were under royal patronage migrated to various other places such as Mysore, Tanjore, and Surpur.

The Vijayanagara kings built many temples in Hampi or Vijayanagara, Sringeri, Tirupati, Tadipatri, Lepakshi, Bhatkal, Kanchi, Kolar, Srirangam, Chidambaram, Moodabidri & other places & the thousand pillared sculptured halls, pavilions & aisles were added to the old temples. The Vijayanagara temples at Sringeri

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<sup>5</sup> Gilmartin, David; Lawrence, Bruce B. (2000). *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*. University Press of Florida. pp. 300–306, 321–322.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.369

<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Talbot (2001). *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra*. Oxford University Press. pp. 281–282

constructed in about 1380 A.D.<sup>8</sup> in memory of Vidyashankara, guru of Vidyananya is the oldest temple. The plan of the temple is unique in India, having an apsidal back on a Hoysala pedestal & with a Hoysala tower.

Vidyananya constructed this temple on the srichakra plan & also with reference to some astronomical conceptions. The mantapa has 12 pillars with marks of 12 Houses of Zodiacs. So that the Sun's rays at the dawn of the first solar month falls exactly on the indicated pillar. The Vijayanagara rulers were great builders. They built large number of temples scattered all over the empire but the finest flowering of temple building activity could be noticed in the magnificent temples at Vijayanagara now known as Hampi such as the temples of Vittalaswamy, Hazara Ramaswamy, Krishnaswamy, Bhuvaneshwari, Achyutharaya, Virupaksha etc. Vijayanagar has been described as large as Rome or any biggest town in the western world at that time.

The city was surrounded by seven fortifications.<sup>9</sup> The space in between was used for various purposes such as laying gardens and growing vegetables etc.<sup>10</sup> The total area of the city was estimated at 64 square miles. There were beautiful lakes, open gardens, broad and well-laid roads and buildings. The Tungabhadra River had a dam which provided water for the 40 kilometer long canal of the city. The Vijayanagar rulers were also great patrons of literature.

Under their patronage, several religious as well as secular books were composed in different languages such as Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada and Tamil. The peak of literary development was reached during the reign of Krishna Raya, who is rightly called 'Andhra Bhoja'. Vijayanagar explores the cultural glorious epoch of Vijayanagara Empire. The kings of this empire were great patrons of music, literature and architecture which can see even today also. The empire's legacy includes many monuments spread over South India, the best known of which is the group at Hampi.

Different temple building traditions in South and Central India came together in the Vijayanagara Architecture style. The empire's patronage enabled fine arts and literature to reach new heights in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit, while Carnatic music evolved into its current form. The Vijayanagara Empire created an epoch in the history of Southern India that transcended regionalism by promoting Hinduism as a unifying factor.<sup>11</sup>

### **Vijayanagar Architecture**

Vijayanagar architecture is a beautiful combination of Chola, Pandya, Hoysala, and Chalukya styles. All these styles had evolved centuries before the Vijayanagar Empire and continued to have its impact on the Empire.<sup>12</sup> Vijayanagar era architecture can be broadly classified into religious, courtly, and civic architecture.<sup>13</sup> Its style is a harmonious combination of the Chalukya, Hoysala, Pandya, and Chola styles that evolved in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.365.

<sup>9</sup> Sen, Sailendra (2013). *A Textbook of Medieval Indian History*. Primus Books. pp. 103–106

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.315.

<sup>11</sup> Srivastava, Kanhaiya L (1980). *The position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate, 1206-1526*. Munshiram Manoharlal. p. 202.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,p.298

<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Talbot (2001). *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra*. Oxford University Press. pp. 281–282

earlier centuries and represents a return to the simplicity and serenity of the past.<sup>14</sup> Preferred for its durability, local hard granite was the building material of choice, as it had been for the Badami Chalukyas; however, soapstone, which was soft and easily carved, was also used for reliefs and sculptures.

The Vijayanagar Empire, a Hindu empire, was established by King Harihara I in 1336 and rose to prominence under King Krishna Deva Raya during the 16th century. Under the patronage of the empire, art and architecture reached new heights of brilliance. In fact, the influence of architecture was so great that it continued to have an impact on the development of temples, palaces, and shrines in south India long after the Empire saw its last days. The courtly architecture of the Empire was usually made from mortar and stone rubble. It showed influences of Islamic style with its vaults, domes, and arches. The elephant stables, watch towers, and Lotus Mahal palace offer the best examples of this. There were shrines made especially for Alwar and Vaishnava saints. They were architecturally different in the sense that these had an image of the saint in whose name it was built.

These shrines had an enclosure, a separate kitchen, and a feeding hall for the pilgrims. Madura style is the last phase of the Vijayanagar Empire. It continued flourish even after the Empire perished. The most notable specimens of this form can be seen at Ramesvaram, Madura,<sup>15</sup> Tiruvalur, Tinnevely, Chidambaram, and several other places in the extreme southern parts of India. Vijayanagara era temples in Karnataka that were built or received significant patronage by the kings and vassals of the Vijayanagara Empire during the period 1336-1646 AD. In Andhra Pradesh the empire built the Mallikarjuna Temple at Srisailam, Upper Narasimha Temple and Lower Narasimha Temple at Ahobilam, Veera Bhadra Temple at Lepakshi and Venkateswara Temple at Tirupati and others.

In Tamil Nadu the empire built the Vijayaraghava Permal temple modeled after the famous temples at Tirupati with statues of Krishnadevaraya in Thayar Sanithi pillars facing each other. preparing pigments, brushes, qualifications of the chitrakar (the traditional community of painters), and the technique to be followed. Shiva, is famous for its intricate South-Indian style architecture.<sup>16</sup> Virupaksha Temple celebrates three major festivals – Betrothal of Lord Shiva, “Phalapuja” festival which is the marriage of Lord Shiva with Pampa and Shivaratri. The Vijayanagar Empire’s patronage enabled its fine arts and literature to rise to new heights.<sup>17</sup>

Its legacy of sculpture, painting, and architecture influenced the development of the arts in South India long after the empire came to an end. The mingling of South Indian styles resulted in a richness not seen in earlier centuries, including a focus on reliefs in addition to sculpture that surpassed that seen previously in India. Sculpture was integrally linked with architecture in the creation of Vijayanagar temples.

Large life-size figures of men, women, gods, and goddesses adorn the gopuram of many Vijayagara temples.<sup>18</sup> Temple pillars often have engravings of charging horses or hippogryphs (yali) horses standing on

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.321.

<sup>15</sup> Chopra, Ravindran & Subrahmanian 2003, part II, pp. 22–24

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.,p.36.

<sup>17</sup> Sen, Sailendra (2013). *A Textbook of Medieval Indian History*. Primus Books. pp. 103–106

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.,p.198

hind legs with their fore legs lifted and riders on their backs. The horses on some pillars stand seven to eight feet tall. On the other side of the pillar are often carvings from Hindu mythology.<sup>19</sup>

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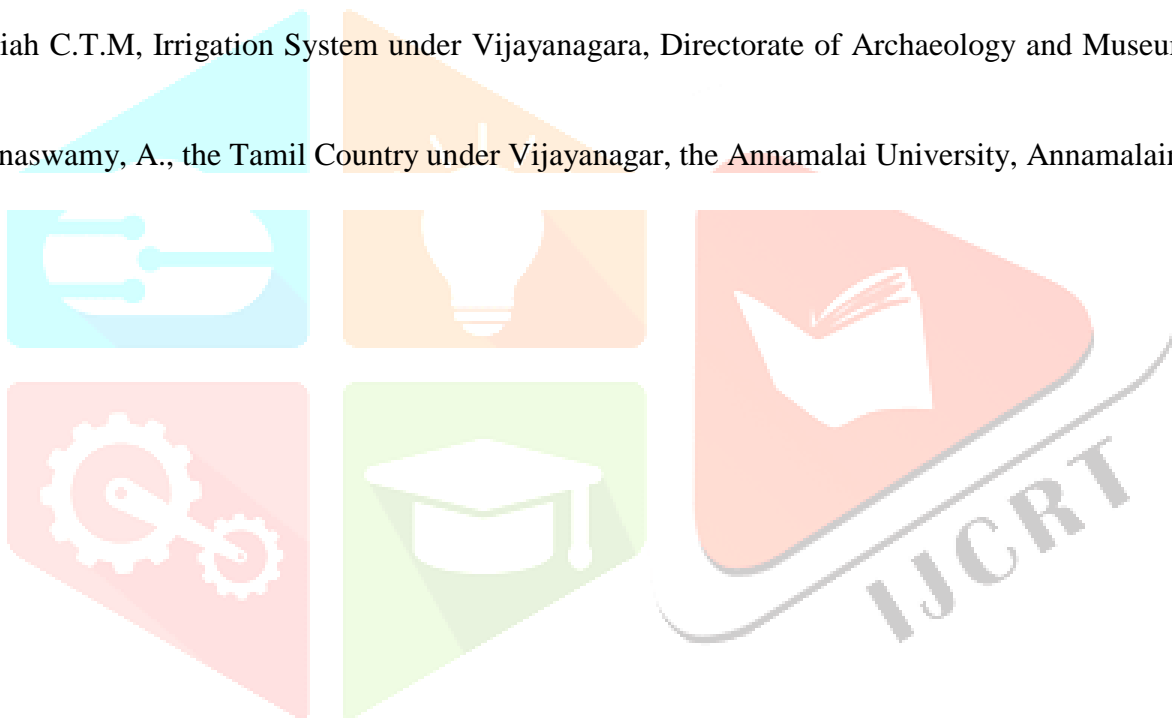
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<sup>19</sup> Davison-Jenkins, Dominic J. (2001). "Hydraulic works". In John M. Fritz and George Michell (editors). *New Light on Hampi: Recent Research at Vijayanagara*. Mumbai, p.163.