ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE

- PRAKASH ARULAPPA

The Vijayanagara Empire had become famous for art, architecture, sculpture & fine arts like dancing and music. Percy Brown has called “Vijayanagara art as the supremely passionate flowering of the Dravidian style”.

The temples of Vijayanagara have borrowed many features from the earlier monuments of the Kadambas, the Cholas, the Chalukyas, the Pandyas and the Hoysalas.

Outstanding features of Vijayanagara temples:

1. The typical Vijayanagaratemple have a high stone enclosures around the temple, a high gateway with a very high gopura. The gateway is made of granite or hardstone & the gopura, the superstructure is made of brick, wood & stucco.

2. Every earlier temple had a large kalyanamandapa or Vasanthamantapa and a number of other mantapas.

3. The main temple has an additional garbagriha for the female deity.

4. Much of the intricacy & beauty of Vijayanagara temple style is reflected in the shape of pillars. In the words of Prof. K.A.Neelakanta Shastri “Infact the varied & complicated treatment of pillars was perhaps the most striking feature of the Vijayanagara style”. Even out of the huge rocks of stone with a 50 to 60 feet cross section in their original shape, these columns are the wonder for onlooker. On one side of the pillar is engraved a charging horse which stands on its backlegs, with its front legs lifted up in a jumping posture. In the mantapam of the Srirangam in Trichi, the horses rear furiously to a height of about 9 feet & they are so beautifully carved on a vigourous style & they look like works of hardened steel. The other side of the pillar have a variety of carvings, especially of gods.

TEMPLES

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

The Vijayanagara temples at Sringeri constructed in about 1380 A.D. in memory of Vidyashankara, guru of Vidyaranya 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. Vidyaranya 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 he 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.

The Virupaksha temple at Hampi was rebuilt by the early Sangama rulers, in 1509-1510 A.D. Krishnadevaraya built the Rangamantapa of this temple in order to commemorate his coronation.

The Vittalaswamy temple is the most ornate shrine at Hampi. This temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Its construction was started during the times of Devaraya II. The work was continued during reigns of Krishnadevaraya, Achyutharaya & Sadashivara & was constructed upto 1565 A.D. It was never completed. Its courtyard is 500 ft by 310ft. A triple row of pillars surrounds the courtyard. The 3 entrances leading to the courtyard, east, south and north are surrounded by gopuras.

The temple has 3 distinct compartments namely the Mahamantapa (an open pillared hall in the front), the Navaranga (a closed hall in the middle) and the Garbagriha. The Mahamantapa is noted for its rich appearance. There are 56 pillars inside, each 12ft high. The roof has lotus flower. Another notable feature of this temple is Kalyanamantapa, an open pavilion. There are as many as 48 pillars, each one is beautiful for its workmanship. The carved pillars & the images of Vittalaswamy temple are a tribute to the skill of Vijayanagara craftsmen who seem to have handled granite as though it was clay.

Facing the entrance to the Mahamantapa, near the Kalyanamantapa is the stone ratha or chariot. It houses mythical eagle ‘Garuda’. Its base and principal storey are carved out of a single block of granite with movable wheels.

The Hazara Ramaswamy temple is a small shrine but a highly ornamental shrine built by Krishnadevaraya in 1513 A.D. This temple is dedicated to Lord Rama. It was a royal chapel built for worship mainly by the royal family and members of royal court. It has a Garbagriha & a Kalyanamantapa. It is surrounded by a high wall of 24 ft height. The walls of the temple are decorated in relief with the scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata particularly Krishna & scenes relating to the killing of Ravana and Patrakamesti yaga, are noteworthy.

Two other monuments of structural importance are the Krishnaswamy temple and the Achyutharaya temple, built by Krishnadevaraya & Achyutharaya in 1513 A.D & 1539 A.D respectively.
They are constructed on a rectangular bases. They have Kalyanamantapas similar to those of Vittalaswamy temple. However, they have compound monolithic pillars ornamented with yati designs, floral carvings, & mythological subjects - all carved with almost the same as Vittalaswamy temple.

THRON PLATFORM OR MAHANAVAMI DIBBA :-

THRON PLATFORM or MAHANAVAMI DIBBA described by Paes as the House of victory. This monument was built by Krishnadevaraya in 1518.A.D. on his return from his victorious campaign against the ruler of Orissa. It is square in plan & in the diminishing stages the lower tier having a side of 132ft and the uppermost tier a side of 78ft. The highest stage of the platform is decorated with extremely beautiful moulding carved in a style similar to that of horses, elephants, camels, dancing girls, hunting scenes and conventional animals. This throne platform was used for private audiences.

SECULAR BUILDINGS

Krishnadevaraya restored many shrines throughout south India especially lavished wealth upon the temples at Tirupati, Srisailam, Kanche, and Tanjore. He added huge gopurams over the main gateways of these temples & hence they are called as Rajagopurams.

Another secular building within the citadel of Vijayanagara is the King’s audience Hall. The audience hall has hundreds of pillars arranged in 10 rows of 10 pillars each. The fragments of the pillars indicate that they had square bases, cylindrical shafts and bricked capitals.

Secular buildings of the Indi-Muslin style have also been unearthed at Hampi. They are Kamal Mahal, Queen’s Bath, Watch Tower, Elephant & Horse stables, Market place, Royal Mint (tankashala), and Royal Balance. (Rajatulabaram)

The Veereshwara or Papanaseswara temple built by Virupanna, a treasurer of Krishnadevaraya at Lepakshi in 1535.A.D. and Chintalaraya temple (1535.A.D) at Tadipatri are famous for their beautiful sculpture & painting. Both are situated in Andhra Pradesh. The temple at Lepakshi is described as Ajanta of Shaivas because of its exquisitely carved sculptures depicting incarnations of Shiva, Sapta Rishis, Ashtadikpalakas etc.

Little further from the Veereshwara temple is the huge monolithic Nagalinga. It is 25ft high, 7 hooded & with outstretched tongues. At its feet lies the beautiful shivalinga, just not found anywhere in South India.

Besides Nagalinga, there are many images which exhibit the remarkable sculptural arts. They are Ugranarasimha- height is 21ft, Kadalekalu Ganapathy- height is 25ft, Sasuve kalu Ganapathy- height is 22 ft. The enormous statue of Ugranarasimha is carved out of a single boulder of granite was executed in 1528.A.D.
PAINTINGS

The Vijayanagara rulers paid more attention towards paintings & fine arts like dance & music.

The ceilings of Kalyanamantapa of Virupaksha at Hampi have paintings which beautifully depict Dasavatara, Girijakalyana and other religious motifs. The Veerabhadra temple of Lepakshi has several hundreds of motifs on its ceilings which represent stories from Shivapurana. The story of Arjuna’s penance forms an excellent theme for a row of pictures & the painter has shown the various scenes. There is graphic representation of Parvathi’s marriage where many sages and gods like Vishnu, Vayu & Agni are shown as guests. The scene of Parvati before marriage & the scene of Shiva playing chess with his wife is quite interesting. But the finest is the panel showing Shiva as Gowriprasadaka or appeasing Gowri. In this there is a happy blend of action, repose, and calm. This shows that Vijayanagara paintings were of order.

Dance & Music are patronized by the Vijayanagara Kings. Karnataka music blossomed during this period. Vidyaranya was a great scholar, and wrote a work on music called “Sanggetasara”. Purandaradasa made Karnataka music popular by composing simple songs in Kannada & singing them.

A dance hall was attached to the palaces, where royal ladies were trained to the art of dance and music.

CONCLUSION ::

From the above account it is clear that Vijayanagara empire represented a magnificent epoch in the history of south India which can never be forgotten.

Paes claimed Vijayanagara or ‘the city of victory’, is the best provided city in the world. Now Hampi or Vijayanagara has been included in the UNESCO’s list of places of global significance and needs a master plan for its conservation. The government of Karnataka, together with the Archeological survey of India & assistance from UNESCO, the Smithsonian Institution and several countries has undertaken gigantic work of excavation in the city’s 26sq kms of area. Mapping of the principal remains & buildings are being done and many areas have been dug up to expose to view remains of temples, palaces, tanks & other structures that lay buried for centuries. Without interfering with their original shape, a number of structural remains & sculptures are being restored in addition to partial rebuilding & replacement of building elements.

Thus Hampi became a vast open air museum. To conclude in the words of the art critics “though the city became a victim of destruction and plunder, it retains its charm even in the ruins”.

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