

The Cults of Pampa and Virupaksha at Hampi-Vijayanagara

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Hampi was a Shaivite religious centre prior to the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire with its capital at this site. Even prior to the founding of the Vijayanagara polity, Virupaksha, a form of Shiva, had emerged as the principal deity of the site. Vijayanagara monarchs, who ruled from the city of Vijayanagara, adopted Virupaksha as the patron deity of their capital and empire. The Virupaksha cult survived the defeat of the Vijayanagara forces in the battle of Talikota in 1565 CE and the subsequent abandonment of the site. Even in the present times, the principal deity of Hampi is god Virupaksha and the great Virupaksha temple is the main centre of cult and worship. However, even older than the cult of Virupaksha and that of any other Shaiva deity at the site of Hampi-Vijayanagara is the cult of a local goddess called Pampa, who gradually in the pre-Vijayanagara period came to be assimilated into the Virupaksha cult by being transformed into the consort of Virupaksha. Thus, the earlier cult of Pampa was absorbed into the cult of Virupaksha and the goddess was no longer worshipped as an independent deity.

Pampa

Pampa is the local goddess and the most ancient deity of the Hampe or Hampi area. This is evident from the fact that the place, the pilgrimage area, the river and a lake are named after her and even the principal male deity of the city, namely Virupaksha, is often referred to as Pampapati (i.e. the lord or husband of Pampa). In this connection, it must be mentioned that generally throughout southern India the original deities of villages were local goddesses.¹

The word Hampi or Hampe is derived from Pampa or Pampe. The letter 'P' in old Kannada is often replaced by 'H' in modern Kannada. Indeed the goddess herself is at times referred to as Hampa-devi and the city as well as the river Tungabhadra as Pampa. For example, according to the *Pampamahatmya*, which is the *sthalapurana* (i.e. a text which recounts the story of a sacred site or temple) of the site, "the great city of Pampa is situated on the south bank of the river Pampa". The pilgrimage area around the Virupaksha temple was generally referred to as Pampa-*kshetra*, although it was also known as Pampapura, Virupaksha-*kshetra*, etc. The river Tungabhadra is mentioned by the name Pampa not only in the *Pampamahatmya* but also in some inscriptions which record grants made on "the banks of the Pampa". The Pampa lake or Pampa-*saras* is mentioned both in the *Pampamahatmya* and in epigraphs.²

It is difficult to determine the antiquity of this local goddess Pampa. Possibly her cult goes back to very early times. It is probably anterior to the seventh century CE from which period there is an epigraph of the Chalukyan king Vinayaditya, which refers to a royal camp on "the banks of the Pampa".³ There are also Chalukyan inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries that mention "by Pampe" and the "tirtha of Pampapura".⁴

There is not sufficient evidence for us to determine the exact nature and origin of the local goddess Pampa. But, it is significant that the earliest references to the word "Pampa" in the Chalukyan inscriptions that have already been mentioned are either to the river or the lake. This hints at the possibility of the genesis of Pampa as an aquatic deity, probably a river goddess, who, in course of time came to be personified as the local goddess of the site. The fact that the river Tungabhadra is considered very holy further strengthens this supposition. It is referred to as the "Ganges of the South" in an eleventh century inscription⁵ and in a Vijayanagara record⁶ and this view prevails even to the present times.

As happened to most of the other folk or local goddesses of South India, the goddess Pampa, too, came to be 'Sanskritized' in the pre-Vijayanagara period by marriage to Virupaksha, a form of Shiva. Marriage to Shiva or one of his incarnations was the almost universal and favourite method in South India of

absorbing local goddesses into the Brahmanical pantheon, a good example would be that of the goddess Minakshi of Madurai who became the consort goddess of Sundareshvara, a form of Shiva. Through this process, the goddess Pampa came to be considered an incarnation of the goddess Parvati and is, therefore, often referred to as Pampambika, Ambika being another name of Parvati. The story of Pampa and Virupaksha follows the typical pattern of south Indian *sthalapuranas*, the central element in which is the myth of the marriage of the goddess to the god. Most of these *sthalapuranas* adhere to the classical Shaiva mythology of the goddess using *tapas* or penance as a means of winning Shiva as her husband, and the gods sending Kama, the god of love, to wound Shiva with the arrows of passion. The important exception being that in these *sthalapuranas* the local goddess usually performs her austerities in a particular local spot and not on the Himalayas, her usual place of penance. Thus, the *Pampamahatmya*, the local *sthalapurana* of Hampi, describes how the goddess Pampa, the 'mind-born' daughter of Brahma, performed penance at Pampa-saras, to win the love of Virupaksha who was seated in deep meditation on Hemakuta hill.⁷ As a result of Pampa's marriage to Virupaksha, the latter came to be known as Pampapati, the husband of Pampa. It is noteworthy that among the painted scenes on the ceiling of the *maharangamandapa*, or the front pillared hall, of the Virupaksha temple at Hampi important panels portray Kamadeva shooting his arrow at Virupaksha (or Shiva) who is seated in deep meditation (Fig.1) and the depiction of the divine marriage of Pampa and Virupaksha (or Parvati and Shiva).⁸ To this day, the most important annual festivals in the great Virupaksha temple are the *Phalapuja* or betrothal of Pampa and Virupaksha (celebrated sometime around the month of December) and the *Kalyanotsava* or the marriage festival (commemorated sometime in April).

As a result of this process of Sanskritization, the goddess Pampa lost in importance and from her former position as the pre-eminent deity of the Hampi area she was gradually reduced to the position of a minor deity, a mere consort goddess. This is proved by the fact that at present there is only one small shrine dedicated to Pampa, namely the small and rather insignificant one in the



Fig.1 : Kama shooting an arrow at Virupaksha, Ceiling painting, Virupaksha temple

Virupaksha temple complex, where to the north of the main shrine of Virupaksha there are the two consort shrines of P a m p a and Bhuvaneshvari; of the two, the Bhuvaneshvari shrine is the more elaborate one.

Not only is there no other shrine to

Pampa, except for this small consort shrine in the Virupaksha temple complex, of the Vijayanagara or post-Vijayanagara periods in Hampi-Vijayanagara, but iconographically too, she is hardly ever represented. The present *murti* or image of the goddess Pampa in her small shrine within the Virupaksha temple complex depicts a standing goddess with a lotus in her right hand and the left arm hanging down. There is nothing exceptional in this iconography for this is the traditional way in which Vijayanagara-period goddesses are depicted at Hampi-Vijayanagara. Perhaps, the relief of a goddess in the standing pose, with a lotus in her right hand and left arm hanging down, that is carved by itself in a small temple set amidst the rocks just by the side of the Tungabhadra River at Koti-*tirtha* may be that of the goddess Pampa (Fig.2). The similarity of this relief with the *murti* of the goddess that is in the consort shrine dedicated to Pampa within the Virupaksha temple and the proximity of this small temple to the river supports this supposition. Sometimes this small temple gets flooded with the waters of the Tungabhadra and then the links between this relief of the goddess and water is even further emphasized. It is also worth mentioning that besides this relief of the goddess, there are no other deity images carved in this small temple, but only some devotee figures.

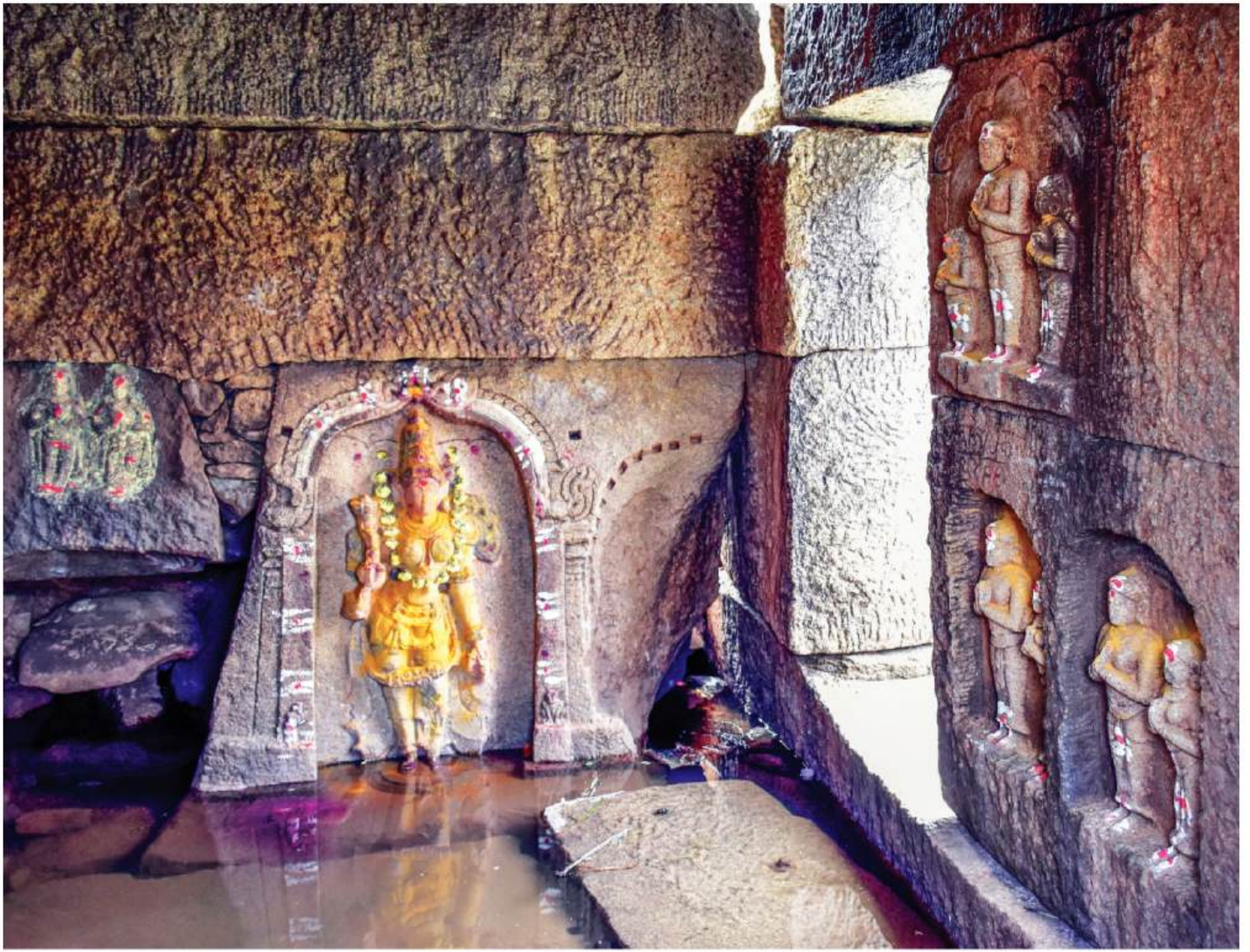


Fig.2 : Relief of a goddess in a temple by the side of the Tungabhadra

There are only a few epigraphical references to the goddess Pampa (Hampa-devi) at Hampi-Vijayanagara. The most important one, dated CE 1199,⁹ is on a well engraved inscription slab (Fig.3) that is fixed at one side of the open *mandapa* of the small temple to the north of the Virupaksha temple complex, facing the Manmatha tank, which is at present dedicated to Durga-devi (Fig.4). This epigraph records the gift made by the wife of a local chief to Virupaksha, Pampa and Mahakaladeva (Bhairava). From the Vijayanagara period, Harihara II in 1385 made a grant in the presence of "Tunga, Pampa and Virupaksha".¹⁰ There is an undated inscription from the site in which a small gate is named "the gate of Hampa-devi",¹¹ evidently after the goddess. The most important inscription is the Sanskrit inscription of the early fifteenth century engraved on the outer east wall of the *rangamandapa* of the Ramacandra temple which invokes the blessing of

Pampa on King Devaraya just as other goddesses had blessed earlier legendary kings. It reads “just as Vani was gracious to Bhoja Raja, Tripuramba to Vatsa Raja and Kali to Vikramarka, just so is Pampa now gracious to king Devaraya”.¹²

Thus, Pampa was the most ancient and originally the most important deity of Hampi. However, by around the twelfth century CE she had lost her preeminent position to Virupaksha and gradually came to be relegated to the minor status of a consort goddess.

Given the relative insignificance of the Pampa shrine in the Virupaksha temple complex, it appears unlikely that it was the original shrine or temple to Pampa-devi when she was the most important deity of the Hampi area. If so, which was the temple originally dedicated to her? Phillip Wagoner has identified the present-day Durga-devi shrine as the original temple of Pampa-devi.¹³ The Durga-devi temple, unlike the vast majority of temples at the site which are built of granite, is of red sandstone which, unlike granite, is a material not



Fig : Stone-slab with the inscription dated CE 1199



Fig.4 : Durga-devi temple

locally available. This small temple, which comprises only a sanctum, an antechamber and an open pillared hall, is not in the local Deccan style, in which most of the pre and early Vijayanagara temples are built, but in the Rashtrakuta style which followed more the Dravida style of temple construction.¹⁴ It is dated to the ninth-tenth centuries CE and is one of the earliest temples at the site. From the point of view of its architecture and its location (facing the Manmatha tank and not far from the Tungabhadra) this temple was obviously an important one at the site in the pre-Vijayanagara period. It is likely that the inscription slab that is now in the temple is associated with it, for in the Deccan prior to the Vijayanagara period inscriptions were often inscribed on stone-slabs which were inset into the temple they refer to. The inscription of CE 1199 from this temple refers to two male gods, Virupaksha and Mahakaladeva, and also to Pampa. In all likelihood by the time of



Fig.5 : Durga-devi temple, temples adjacent to it and the Manmatha tank

this record of 1199 there was already a shrine to Virupaksha at the site of the present temple. Hence, the temple in which the inscription was set up could have been either to Pampa or to Mahakaladeva. According to Wagoner, the fact that nowadays a female deity, namely Durga, is worshipped in this temple indicates the likelihood that the original deity of this temple was a female divinity, in other words Pampa.¹⁵ Also, the relative proximity of this temple to the river would have been in keeping with Pampa's original identity as a river-goddess, and her association with water would have been further reinforced by the presence of the Manmatha tank to the east of the temple (Fig.5).

Virupaksha

Hampi is the centre of the Virupaksha cult. This god had emerged as the principal deity of the site before the founding of the empire. He continued to enjoy

this position of preeminence in Vijayanagara City throughout the empire period (except briefly during the later Tuluva times when the Vitthala cult temporarily eclipsed the cult of Virupaksha in the city) and Virupaksha continued as the main deity of Hampi post-1565 to this day. Although there are temples dedicated to Virupaksha elsewhere, the original centre of the Virupaksha cult was and is Hampi-Vijayanagara. Indeed, it was the growing importance of this temple from the twelfth century CE onwards that resulted in temples being built to Virupaksha in many other locations in southern India. Thus just as the original centre of Shiva as Nataraja is Chidambaram or of him as Vishvanatha is Kashi or Varanasi, Hampi is the locus of the Virupaksha cult.

The name Virupaksha literally means “he with oblique eyes” or “of misformed eyes”. The Virupaksha-linga on Hemakuta is included among the sixty-eight *svayambhu lingas* (i.e. *lingas* that are 'self manifest' or, in other words, not fashioned by human hands). Indeed, the god is often referred to as the 'Virupaksha-linga'. Domingo Paes, the Portuguese visitor to the city of Vijayanagara in CE 1520 has described the principal deity of the Virupaksha temple as “a round stone without any shape”.¹⁶ Shiva as Virupaksha is not portrayed in the iconic form. In fact, the iconic *utsava-murtis*, or processional images of the Virupaksha temple, are known as Shiva and Parvati and not as Virupaksha and Pampa-devi. The latter names seem to be reserved for the *linga* within the sanctum and the image of the goddess within her sub-shrine in the Virupaksha temple complex. The *svayambhu* Virupaksha-linga is usually covered with a face-mask. That this was the practice even in earlier times is evident from a panel of the ceiling murals in the front pillared hall of the Virupaksha temple in which the Virupaksha-linga covered with a mask, with Nandi in attendance before him, is shown. What is also interesting in this depiction of the Virupaksha temple and its main *murti* are not just the deity and Nandi, but also the monkeys that are portrayed on and around the temple (Fig.6). There are numerous monkeys in this temple in the present times; interestingly, the mural reveals that this is not a recent phenomenon!



Fig.6 : Virupaksha temple and linga, Ceiling painting, Virupaksha temple

Virupaksha is called "the lord of Hemakuta".¹⁷ In inscriptions there are some variations as to the relations between the Virupaksha temple and Hemakuta. For Virupaksha in some epigraphs is said to be "in Hemakuta",¹⁸ in others "in the region of Hemakuta",¹⁹ and in still others "at the foot of Hemakuta"²⁰; while according to the *Jambavati-kalyanam*, the drama supposedly written by Krishnadevaraya, Virupaksha resides "on the top of Hemakuta".²¹ In fact, as seen today, the temple itself is not on the Hemakuta hillock but at the foot of it. However, there is no contradiction in the different ways in which the temple's location is mentioned, for 'Hemakuta' itself can be understood in two ways: firstly it refers to the sacred hill located near the south bank of the river Tungabhadra. Secondly, it also means the entire pilgrimage area, comprising not just the city and its suburbs but also the surrounding region, for in the *Pampamahatmya* it is mentioned that "Hemakuta has a circumference of nearly ten to twelve miles";²² in other words it is equated with Pampa-*kshetra*. The Virupaksha-linga is considered to be at the centre of the *kshetra*. He is the ruler or presiding deity of Pampa-*kshetra*. If in a wider sense Pampa-*kshetra* includes the entire pilgrimage area, in a more limited sense it refers only to the sacred area on the south bank of the Tungabhadra.

There is literary and epigraphical evidence of the existence of the Virupaksha cult and temple at Hampi from the twelfth century onwards. The earliest references are in the mid-twelfth century works of the Virashaiva poet Harihara and his nephew Raghavankka. In Virashaiva hagiography, Harihara is mentioned as being a native of Pampa-*kshetra* and is called Hampeya-Harihara. In his writings, Harihara often mentions Hampeya-Virupaksha (i.e. Virupaksha of Hampi) and he was so devoted to this deity that he claimed to be the god's son. There is a story related to Harihara which states that while he was employed in the court of the Hoysala king Narasimha I (who ruled from CE 1152 to 1173), Harihara performed the miracle of extinguishing a fire that had begun to burn a screen in the far off temple of Pampa-Virupaksha and raising his hands and rubbing them frantically. According to the story, the king had the incident of the fire confirmed. This story and the writings of Harihara testify to the existence of a temple to Virupaksha in Hampi in the twelfth century. After this incident of the fire, Harihara left the service of the Hoysala king and returned to Hampi here he spent his time in writing and teaching in the

shadow of the Virupaksha temple till the end of his life. Harihara's literary masterpiece, *Girija-kalyana*, celebrates the *sthalapurana* of Hampi for it recounts the marriage of Shiva (Virupaksha) and Parvati (Pampa). This work begins with the praise of Pampa-Virupaksha and ends with salutations to this deity. Harihara's *Pampashataka* is a poetic piece in praise of Pampa-Virupaksha while his *Rakshakavacha* is a collection of 101 stanzas, each of which ends with the exhortation, "let god Virupaksha, the lord of Pampapura, protect me".²³

Raghavanka, the nephew and disciple of Harihara, was also a native of Hampi. In his literary work called *Harishchandrakavya* he begins with the praise of Pampa-Virupaksha and at the end he again invokes the Virupaksha-linga. He mentions his name in this work at Hampeya-Raghavanka.²⁴

Since the Virupaksha cult and temple at Hampi were first highlighted by these two Virashaiva poets of the twelfth century, it is possible that this cult of Virupaksha was deliberately fostered by the Virashaivas and its origin or rise to importance coincided with the Virashaiva reform movement of the twelfth century CE. It is likely that the conflation of the earlier Pampa tradition with the new one of god Virupaksha took place in or just before the twelfth century and that the Pampa-Virupaksha cult was formalised in the twelfth century with the construction of a temple to god Virupaksha at Hampi.

The existence of the Virupaksha temple in the twelfth century is also proved by the inscription of CE 1199 inscribed on the polished slab now in the Durga-devi temple, which refers to a grant of land made to seven hundred Brahmins of Hampi and for the worship of the deities of the place such as Virupaksha, Hampa-devi (i.e. Pampa) and Bhairava. Another pre-Vijayanagara inscription that refers to the Virupaksha temple is one dated CE 1236 and it records a gift made by king Someshvara of the Hoysala dynasty of the revenue of a village for conducting the worship of Virupaksha at Pampa-*kshetra* and feeding the Brahmins in the *chatra* (or feeding house) attached to the temple.²⁵

Hampi was already a Shaiva holy site prior to the Vijayanagara period. This is indicated by the presence of a number of pre-Vijayanagara Shaiva temples on Hemakuta hill and all the way from the hill to the river. These pre-Vijayanagara

temples are small comprising only a sanctum and an antechamber and sometimes also a small pillared hall. The original Virupaksha temple must have been one such small temple, but no architectural details are available of it since it has been completely enveloped or replaced by constructional additions or extensions of the Vijayanagara period. It is fairly certain that there was no enclosure wall around it. A north-south pathway would have linked it with the shrines to its south on Hemakuta hill and those on its north up to the river. This is indicated by the presence of the double-storeyed north and south gateways on Hemakuta hill. The northern gateway no longer serves any purpose since it fronts the enclosure wall of the Virupaksha temple, built probably in the early sixteenth century during the expansion of the temple during Vijayanagara period (Fig.7).

Even though the Virupaksha temple existed in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, it rose to prominence only after the founding of the Vijayanagara Empire with its capital at Hampi. The foundation myths of Vijayanagara City and empire



Fig.7 : Northern double-storey gateway on Hemakuta hill which now abuts the enclosure wall of the Virupaksha temple

reveal that the selection of this site as their capital by Harihara and Bukka, the sons of Sangama, was not accidental. For, besides the strategic importance of this spot, on the southern banks of the Tungabhadra and protected by hills and boulders, its links with Virupaksha was a prime reason for the choice. The five sons of Sangama, of whom Harihara and Bukka were the two eldest, adopted Virupaksha as their family deity as is clearly revealed in an inscription of CE 1347 which describes Virupaksha as the supreme deity of the family.²⁶ The dynasty, the capital city and their kingdom were placed by the Sangamas under the protection of Virupaksha. As a result the Virupaksha cult and temple gained immense popularity and Pampa-*kshetra* became one of the renowned pilgrimage spots in southern India. The rulers of the three later dynasties, namely, Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu, were Vaiṣṇava in affiliation unlike the Shaiva Sangamas. However, though the personal and family deities of the monarchs of these later dynasties were Vaishnava divinities, they retained Virupaksha as the patron deity of the empire as long as Hampi remained the capital and even for a couple of decades after the shift of the capital further south after the disastrous defeat at Talikota in 1565.

The first Vijayanagara ruler, namely Harihara I, adopted 'Shri-Virupaksha' as his sign-manual and this was continued by the subsequent Sangama rulers and even by the Saluvas, Tuluvas and first two Aravidu kings.²⁷ Many, though not all, of the inscriptions of Vijayanagara monarchs end with this sign-manual, which took the place of the signature of the respective ruler. The belief that the principal god of Hampi-Vijayanagara was the patron deity of the empire seems to have been so deeply engrained in the Vijayanagara psyche that even after the capital shifted from Hampi-Vijayanagara the Aravidu ruler, Shriranga I (1572-1586) who ruled from Penukonda still signed in the name of Shri-Virupaksha. It was only with Venkata II (1586-1614) that this tradition was broken and the sign-manual changed from 'Shri-Virupaksha' to 'Shri-Venkatesha'. Perhaps this may be explained by the fact that in 1592 the capital had shifted to Chandragiri which is very close to Tirumala-Tirupati, the great Vaishnava temple site of the Vaishnava deity Venkateshvara.²⁸

During the Vijayanagara period, the Virupaksha cult and temple reached the peak of favour and popularity from the mid-fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century, i.e. from the foundation of the empire till the reign of Krishnadevaraya. The temple was greatly expanded with the addition of *mandapas*, sub-shrines, pillared galleries, *gopuras*, etc. so that from the small shrine that it had been in pre-Vijayanagara times it developed into a large temple complex. However, there is inscriptional evidence only of the date of the constructions and repairs carried out by Krishnadevaraya in 1509-1510.²⁹ The dating of the rest of the expansion of this temple has to be done either on stylistic grounds or with reference to the dated structures.

Already in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, the original pre-Vijayanagara temple must have been enclosed by the building of a closed circumambulatory passage and one or more antechambers as well as an open, pillared passage on the three sides of the shrine. The closed *rangamandapa* (namely the closed pillared hall with three doorways adjoining the main shrine and its antechambers) was probably built before the sixteenth century. This is indicated by an inscription, engraved on the plinth moulding on its north wall, to the west of its north-side door, which refers to 'minister Saluva Narasayya'.³⁰ The person mentioned must be Saluva Narasimha, who was a minister of the last Sangama rulers before he usurped the throne in CE 1485. The granite base of the northern *gopura* with its flat pilasters can be stylistically assigned to the fifteenth century.

In CE 1509-1510, on the occasion of his coronation, Krishnadevaraya built the elaborate *maharangamandapa* (i.e. the open front pillared hall) which has composite pillars and the *gopura* to the east of this hall, and he also had repaired the great east *gopura* (Figs.8 and 9). Evidently, the outer east *gopura* was already in existence prior to the reign of Krishnadevaraya for the inscription of 1509-1510 clearly mentions the repair of it (and not its construction). Composite pillars appear probably for the first time in the innovative *maharangamandapa* that Krishnadevaraya donated to the Virupaksha temple on the occasion of his coronation for such pillars are not evident in structures prior to this.³¹ The pillared



Fig.8 : The *maharangamandapa* of the Virupaksha temple constructed by Krishnadevaraya on the occasion of coronation

gallery around the inner enclosure of the Virupaksha temple and the pillared hall in the south-west corner of the outer courtyard, which have composite pillars, are also probably of the early sixteenth century. The long chariot-street (Fig.10) which is 732 metres long and about 10.6 metres wide, with pillared galleries on either side, was in existence by CE 1520 when Domingo Paes visited the city of Vijayanagara because he has described this street in his travel account.³² Thus, by the early sixteenth century the Virupaksha temple was a large complex, comprising an outer and an inner courtyard, three *gopuras*, pillared halls, a kitchen, galleries, a temple-tank, a chariot-street, the principal shrine and a number of sub-shrines.

Inscriptions found within the Virupaksha temple and elsewhere in the city and empire highlight the importance of this temple during the Vijayanagara period. The earliest epigraph of the empire period is that of the gift of a village for



Fig.9 : Inner and outer east *gopuras* of the Virupaksha temple



Fig.10 : Virupaksha temple chariot-street

the service of god Virupaksha that was made in 1366 by Virupanna Vodeyar, the son of Bukka I. Another record of the same year mentions the grant of land to god Virupaksha by a high official. An inscription slab located in the north *gopura* of the Virupaksha temple records the gift of land made to the temple by King Harihara II in CE 1379. A copper-plate epigraph of the same king, dated CE 1394, mentions the gift of a village in which shares two shares were allotted to god Virupaksha. A record carved on a rock to the south of the Virupaksha temple notes a gift made by a private donor in the year 1406 for offerings to god Virupaksha. Another copper-plate grant records the gift of a village by Devaraya II in 1435 to Brahmins with certain shares of land being set apart for god Venkateshvara of Tirumala-Tirupati and Virupaksha of Hemakuta. The grant of Krishnadevaraya of 1509-1510, besides mentioning the constructional and repair activity of the king in the Virupaksha

temple, also records the gift of a village and a number of golden and silver objects to Virupaksha. It is significant that only the Virupaksha temple received such donations from this king on the occasion of his coronation. An inscription that is engraved on the wall of the *maharangamandapa* refers to the gift of land made in CE 1510 by Bukkajiamma, the grandmother of King Krishnadevaraya. Carved on both sides of the south side door of the *rangamandapa* of the temple is another inscription of Krishnadevaraya; dated CE 1513 it records the donation of several villages and some golden and silver items to the Virupaksha temple on the occasion of a solar eclipse. The last inscription from within the temple complex itself is of 1529; carved on the inner enclosure wall, to the south of the east *gopura* it mentions a gift of land to the temple by some private donors. Another epigraph, located within the city, records a land grant to the temple made in 1536 by a private individual. There is an interesting epigraph of King Sadashiva, dated 1543, located outside the capital it refers to the re-grant of a village to the Virupaksha temple by this king. The village had originally been gifted for the service of god Virupaksha by King Devaraya II, but due to the dying out of the family entrusted with the land, the village had lapsed to the Government treasury. The last dated epigraph of the Vijayanagara period of a donation to the Virupaksha temple is from Chitradurga district and is dated 1559. It mentions the donation of a village. Besides these, there are also three undated inscriptions from within the city that mention gifts of land to Virupaksha. There are also a few undated epigraphs that note the obeisance of certain individuals to god Virupaksha, or invoke his blessings.³³

During the Vijayanagara period there was the practice of kings and even others recording grants that they had made in the presence of a deity, in other words invoking him as witness to the donation made. A careful study of all such grants made in the presence of a deity in Vijayanagara City highlight the importance of Virupaksha for the vast majority of such grants were recorded in his presence. The only other deity of the city in whose presence a sizeable number of grants were registered is Vitthala. But this study also reveals a significant fact: Virupaksha was without any doubt the paramount deity in the city during the

Sangama period, while under the Saluvas and Tuluvas, Vaishnava divinities, particularly Vitthala, gained in importance. Prior to the reign of Krishnadevaraya, only three grants were recorded before Vitthala. In the first few years of Krishnadevaraya's reign the grants were recorded only in the presence of Virupaksha, but from 1516 onwards some were also registered in the presence of Vitthala. More than half of the grants thus recorded by King Achyutaraya, who succeeded Krishnadevaraya on the throne, were made in the presence of Vitthala, while under the last of the Tuluvas, namely Sadashiva, almost all such grants were recorded in the presence of Vitthala, who seems to have totally eclipsed Virupaksha temporarily in importance. The definite shift in court patronage from Virupaksha to Vitthala during the Tuluva period is also evident when studying donations made by the king and court officials to these two deities of the city. After CE 1513 there are no royal grants made directly to Virupaksha. Interestingly, the first grant to Vitthala is of 1513 and from this year onwards this Vaishnava divinity and his temple received a large number of benefactions from the king and court.³⁴

The importance of the Virupaksha cult during the Vijayanagara period is also reflected in the setting up of more temples dedicated to this god in the city as well as elsewhere in the empire. In the capital city itself there were at least two other temples dedicated to Virupaksha, both dating from the early Vijayanagara period. The first of these is the Prasanna Virupaksha temple, which is nowadays called the 'Underground temple'. Located within the royal centre of the city, it probably served the king and court. Its importance is indicated not only by its significant location, but also by the successive phases of its construction spanning from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth. The nucleus of this temple appears to be of the early Sangama period. Another temple to Virupaksha was built in CE 1398 on Hemakuta hill by two Brahmin brothers.³⁵ It is a small and rather insignificant structure, located to the north of the double-storeyed south gateway on the hill. It comprises only a sanctum, antechamber and a small open *mandapa* and there is a tank to one side of it. The fact that the foundation of both these temples in the capital was during the Sangama period indicates that the heyday of

the Virupaksha cult was during the early Vijayanagara times. Besides these two temples, there is currently another small temple on Hemakuta hill that is called the 'Mula-Virupaksha' temple. But there are no literary or epigraphical clues as to its original affiliation.

Besides the main Virupaksha temple and the others dedicated to this deity in the capital, there are numerous epigraphs of the Vijayanagara period referring to Virupaksha temples in the empire. Some of these are foundational inscriptions while others mention donation. Evidently, with god Virupaksha being adopted as the patron deity of the empire, temples to him were constructed in various places of the empire.

History of the Virupaksha temple post-1565 CE

The peak period of the Virupaksha cult and temple at Hampi-Vijayanagara was undoubtedly the Vijayanagara period, prior to the destruction of the city in CE 1565. After the defeat of the Vijayanagara forces in the battle of Talikota, the city of Vijayanagara was temporarily occupied, sacked and looted by the victorious armies of the Deccan Sultanates. The city ceased to be the capital and the vast majority of the temples was abandoned and fell into ruins, especially the Vaishnava temples, with the Vitthala temple suffering the severest damage. Surprisingly, a few Shaiva temples escaped despoliation. The Virupaksha temple was among these fortunate ones. Monumental evidence indicates that the Virupaksha temple did not totally escape damage in the post-1565 CE period. For, the great eastern *gopura* is evidently a post-1565 reconstruction in which stone pieces were reused in the restored granite base. The arched alcoves (Fig.11), very unusual in *gopura* architecture, within the passageway of this structure hints at it being a fairly late reconstruction. At the same time, however, there is no evidence within the temple of widespread damage, nor of the *linga* within the sanctum having been damaged. In the total absence of any literary or epigraphical data of what exactly happened within the city during the occupation period, it is difficult to come to any definitive conclusions explaining why the Virupaksha temple



Fig.11 : Arched alcoves in the outer east *gopura* of the Virupaksha temple

escaped the fate of the Vaishnava temples. Yet, even though worship survived in the great Virupaksha temple complex, it did not survive either in the Prasanna Virupaksha temple or the Virupaksha temple of CE 1398 on Hemakuta hill, both of which are now empty monuments.

Since CE 1565 to the present day, the sporadic information that is available about the temple and cult indicates that worship continued in the Virupaksha temple at Hampi more or less uninterruptedly. That Virupaksha continued to be of importance in the decades immediately following the defeat of 1565 is hinted at in the *Chennabasava-purana* composed in CE 1584 by the Virashaiva poet Virupaksha-pandita.³⁶ It begins with salutations to Pampa-Virupaksha, which seems to indicate that the worship of Virupaksha was extant. Further, even after the shift of the capital from Hampi-Vijayanagara, the Aravidu family that was in

power did not break of ties with Virupaksha, the patron deity of the empire. A copper-plate inscription, dated CE 1576, of the second Aravidu king, Shriranga II, records a grant made in "the presence of Virupaksha of Pampa-*kshetra*" and ends with the signature "Shri-Virupaksha".³⁷ This epigraph, as well as certain literary references, reveals the continuation of his worship in the great Virupaksha temple at Hampi during the Aravidu period. The Telugu work, *Ramarajiyamu* by Venkayya, which recounts the exploits of a number of Aravidu princes, mentions the visit of Chinna Venkata, a grandson of Ramaraya, who had been the regent of the last Tuluva king Sadashiva, to the temple of Virupaksha in the former capital city.³⁸ Even more significantly, it mentions that Tirumala, a nephew of Shriranga III, the last Aravidu monarch, built the tall eastern *gopura* of the Virupaksha temple which was almost ruined and he maintained the worship of Virupaksha.³⁹ Since reign-period of Shriranga III was from 1642 to 1685, the contribution made by his nephew Tirumala to the Virupaksha temple must have happened in the mid or late seventeenth century. Probably this prince carried out some extensive repairs to the outer *gopura* of the Virupaksha temple.

Very little information is available of the Virupaksha temple of Hampi in the eighteenth century. But the brick and mortar superstructure of the northern *gopura* of the Virupaksha temple is believed to belong to the eighteenth century⁴⁰ and is said to have been constructed by a chief of Kanakagiri, a place not far from Hampi. This indicates that the temple enjoyed fairly substantial patronage in the eighteenth century. In addition, Col. Colin Mackenzie visited Hampi and the Virupaksha temple in 1799 and he found a Sanskrit copy of the *sthalapurana* of the temple and site, entitled *Pampamahatmya*.

In the nineteenth century the Virupaksha cult and temple continued to be active. On stylistic grounds, the paintings on the ceiling of the *maharangamandapa* have been assigned to the early years of the nineteenth century. Also the northern *gopura* (Fig.12) was repaired in 1837 by the British Collector of the district for at that period temples that were under worship were under government control.⁴¹ That in the mid-nineteenth century the Virupaksha temple and its principal festival were attracting large crowds is testified in the account of the 'Hampi



Fig.12 : Northern gopura of the Virupaksha temple

festival' written by a British antiquarian.⁴² Worship in the Virupaksha temple continued in the twentieth century. Writing in the second decade of this century, A.H. Longhurst describes the Virupaksha or Pampapati temple as the 'most sacred Hindu temple in the city'. He also mentions two, fairly new, wooden chariots of the temple and the big annual ten-day car festival in spring which drew a crowd of some twenty thousand people.⁴³ At present the Virupaksha temple is the most important temple and pilgrimage spot in Hampi-Vijayanagara drawing numerous devotees daily and vast crowds for its principal festival.

Conclusion

Thus, Virupaksha had been the principal deity of the Hampi from at least the twelfth century CE. By or during the twelfth century he appears to have gained more prominence than the goddess Pampa, the original deity of Hampi. The hey-day of the Virupaksha cult and temple was during the Vijayanagara period, especially under the Sangamas, Saluvas and early Tuluvas. Virupaksha's status as the patron deity of the capital and the empire resulted in more temples being built in his honour in the capital city as well as elsewhere in the empire. However, in the sixteenth century, for a few decades prior to the destruction of Vijayanagara City in 1565, Virupaksha was temporarily overshadowed by Vaishnava deities and cults that were imported into the city, especially by that of Vitthala. But, god Virupaksha and his temple at Hampi-Vijayanagara was not dependent exclusively or even predominantly on royal patronage and connections, for they had enjoyed a following prior to the Vijayanagara period and have retained their significance at the site long after the Vijayanagara empire has been relegated to the realm of history.

Photo Courtesy : Figs.2,6-8 C. Ganesan; Fig.5 Lata Pujari; Figs.1,3-4,9-12 Author

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