

Raya Gopuras or Vijayanagara Temple Towers at Hampi

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Hampi (Lat. 15°-20' N and Long. 70°-30' E), now a small village, is situated on the southern bank of the river Tungabhadra in Hospet taluk, Bellary district of Karnataka.¹ The word Hampe or Hampi is generally held to be a later Kannada form of the ancient term Pampā. During the medieval period, Hampi was also known as *Pampākṣetra*,² *Bhāskarākṣetra*,³ *Pampā Tīrtha* (of the *Rāmāyaṇa* fame),⁴ *Pampā*,⁵ and so on. References to the site in inscriptions, copperplate grants and literary works are numerous. A poetical account describes that "its rampart was Hemakūṭa, its moat the auspicious Tungabhadra, its guardian the world protector Virūpākṣa, its ruler the great king of kings, Harihara".⁶ The foundation of the Vijayanagara Empire in the 14th century was an epoch making event, not only in the history of Karnataka, but also of the whole of South India. Hampi became one of the important centers of Śaivism, much before Vijayanagara was found. The rulers of Vijayanagara were greatly tolerant towards all the religions and constructed many temples in and around Hampi and donated lands for the maintenance of these temples.

The *gopuras* are the first unit in the temple complex which not only provides the entrance but also indicates imposing structure dominating the landscape. The temple complex shows a central shrine proceeded by *maṇḍapas* and encircled by *prākāra* with *gopura*. In the beginning and early stages, the *gopuras* were modest in structure occupying in its size, a place secondary to that of *vimāna*. In the initial stages, the *gopura* was essentially a *dvāraśālā*, a rectangular structure ornamentally raised over the passage providing entry into the temple. Hence, the form of the superstructure built over the entrance as its constituent was also always rectangular. This is evident from the several bas-reliefs from Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, etc., wherein we find a superstructure over the entrances which are very simple.

In the early times, there were no circuits surrounding the temples with *prākāra* wall and piercing *dvārasālā* or *gopura*, but from 6th-7th centuries onwards, the *prākāras* were provided with wall enclosing the temples and entrance gateways were introduced. In the initial stages, there used to be only one *gopura* at the main entrance, but later, two, and still later, four *gopuras* were built in the cardinal directions.

The *śilpa* texts like the *Vaikhānasa*, *Mayamata*, etc., refer to *gopuras* and they do not furnish their elaborate description, but the later Āgamic works provide the fuller treatment. These texts also speak of *talas*, that is, if the *vimāna* of a temple rises to four storeys, the *gopura* should also have four storeys or *talas*. In other words, the number of storeys in the *gopura* tallies with the *talas* in the *vimāna*. The Sanskrit word *gopura* denotes the gateway, which developed as city and temple gates. Its plan is oblong; the storey on the ground floor has vertical walls and the passage leads through its centre. The simulate two storeys are separated from each-other by horizontal mouldings. It has an oblong pyramidal superstructure divided into storeys surrounded by *hāras*. At the top, it is crowned by a barrel vault with a row of *stūpī* or finials along its ridge. A doorway provides entrance in the middle of its longer side. The lower vertical part, made of solid stone masonry, provides a strong foundation, whereas lighter materials like brick, timber and mortar are used for pyramidal superstructure. Like the ground plan, the wagon-vaulted roof is oblong with a row of *stūpīs* on the top.

The *gopura* of Virūpākṣa temple at Pattadakal, Kailāsanātha temple at Kanchipuram and Shore temple at Mahabalipuram are the earliest examples in this regard. The *gopura* of Virūpākṣa temple at Pattadakal is obviously inspired by Pallava *gopura śālā*. In the beginning of 11th century CE, building of *gopuras* synchronized with many developments in temple architecture. One of them was elaboration of the *gopuras* changing from their modest size to great heights. The first experiment in this direction is seen in the Bṛhadīśvara temple at Tanjore where we find an inner and an outer *gopuras*. The inner *gopura* has three *talas* and outer has *pañca talas*. Both the *gopuras* contain not merely the conventional architectural designs like *kūṭas*, *śālās*, *alpanasikas*, etc., but also have sculptural embellishments. The sculptures seen here represent a variety of iconographic forms and sports of many deities. But in the later phases, the remarkable changes are noticed in the

gradation of magnitude of the *gopura*, which began to dominate the landscape relatively eclipsing the *vimana*. Another noteworthy development is multiple *gopura* layout in each of the circuits.

One of the main contributions of the Vijayanagara period was the tall and massive *gopura*, popularly known as “*Raya Gopura*”. The other contributions were multiple *maṇḍapas*, pillared halls, Amman shrines, *kalyāṇa maṇḍapas*, *utsava maṇḍapas*, etc. The Vijayanagara rulers not only constructed new temples but also renovated and enlarged the existing ones. They also allowed their officers, feudatories and common people to construct the temples in their territories.

The inscriptions refer to the erection of temples, construction of *maṇḍapas* and *gopuras*, etc., and renovation of existing earlier temples. These inscriptions help in dating the temples and their renovated parts and additions. The main entrance *gopura* of Virūpākṣa temple, known as Bistappayya *gopura* was built by Prolaganti Tippa, a general of Devaraya II.⁷ Another inscription near the main *gopura* of Virūpākṣa temple and also a record near the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* state that Krishnadevaraya constructed *raṅgamaṇḍapa* and a *gopura* in front of it and renovated the *Hire Gopura* to commemorate his coronation in CE 1509.⁸ Another inscription⁹ of Krishnadevarāya dated CE 1516 found in the Bālakṛṣṇa temple, popularly known as Kṛṣṇa temple, mentions the construction of this temple and the consecration of the image of Bāla Kṛṣṇa by the king. This temple, possessing sanctum with circumbulatory passage, anti chamber, an *ardhamaṇḍapa*, a *navaraṅga* and a large *mukhamaṇḍapa*, is an example of typical Vijayanagara style of architecture. The entire complex is surrounded by a high *prākāra* wall with entrance possessing *gopura*. The main entrance *gopura* is very massive but now in ruined condition.

Two inscriptions found in the Viṭṭhala temple mention the construction of *gopuras* by the two queens of Krishnadevarāya, Chinnadevī and Tirumaladevī in CE 1513.¹⁰ An inscription dated CE 1534,¹¹ kept on the left side of the north *gopura* of Acyutarāya temple, mentions the construction and consecration of the god Tiruveṅgalanātha with main *gopura* to the east and other two *gopuras* on the north and south sides.

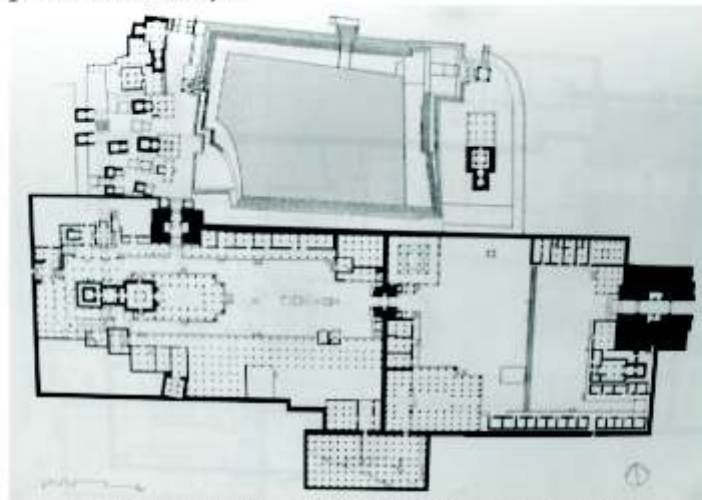
The Hampi *gopuras* are taller, wider and often very massive that dominates the entire temple complex. These *gopuras* are built over the entrance gateways and

are very conspicuous by their presence. The entrances are built of stone and the gateways are wide, lofty and massive. The side stone pillars of entrances are gracefully carved with river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā or female holding scrolls on either side of the passage. The *gopuras* are built of brick and mortar above these entrance gateways. The *gopuras*, as they soar into the skies, taper off and the number of storeys differ from one *gopura* to another. The front faces of the *gopuras* are worked with stucco reliefs of deities and architectural motifs like *kūṭas*, *śālās* and niches. The topmost members of the *gopuras* show huge gable shaped mouldings with lion masks decorating the sides. In the centre above the *śālā* decorated with finial.

(1) The Virūpākṣa Temple Gopuras

The Virūpākṣa temple existed from 7th century CE, and Lord Virūpākṣa is being worshipped till today without any break. Lord Virūpākṣa was tutelary deity of Vijayanagara kings and the original temple was completely re-built in Vijayanagara times with new additions. The temple complex was rebuilt in the Saṅgama and Tuluva periods.

The temple (Plan A) consists of a *garbhagr̥ha*, three anti-chambers, *sabhāmaṇḍapa* or *navaraṅga* and *mukhamaṇḍapa*. The whole temple complex is surrounded by a *prākāra* wall with pillared cloisters, entrances and small shrines in additions to pillared *maṇḍapa*.



Plan A : Virūpākṣa Temple Complex & Manmatha Tank Group

(a) The Bishtappayya Gopura (Fig.1)

The main eastern entrance *gopura*, popularly known as Bishtappayya *gopura*, was built during the times of Saṅgamas by one general Protaganti Tipka during the period of Devarāya II. It is of great size measuring about 52.6 meters in height. It is tall and rather slender considering its height; it rises in *Nava talas* and dominates the surrounding. It is decorated with *kūṭas*, deities and *pañjaras* in stucco. The top is



Fig.1 : Main Entrance Gopura by Bishtappaiah
Virūpākṣa temple, Hampi

dominated by a huge *śālā* crowned by a finial, *kalaśa*. The *gopura* was renovated by Krishnadevarāya in CE 1510 to commemorate his coronations.¹²

(b) The Raya Gopura (Fig.2)

This *gopura* was built by Krishnadevarāya in CE 1510 to commemorate his coronation in CE 1509. It leads to Virūpākṣa temple after the main entrance *gopura*. This *gopura* has three *talas* having decorations same as the eastern *gopura*.

(c) The Kanakagiri Gopura (Fig.3)

This *gopura* is on the north entrance gateway towards the Tungabhadra river



Fig.2 : Inner East Gopura



Fig.3 : Northern Colonnade with steps and Northern Gopura

side, and was built by Rayanāgarāja, one of the Chiefs of Kanakagiri under Krishnadevarāya and Achyutarāya. The exact date of the construction of this *gopura* is not known. This lofty *gopura* is decorated on the exterior with many clusters of pilasters.

(2) The Bālakṛṣṇa Temple Gopura (Fig.4)

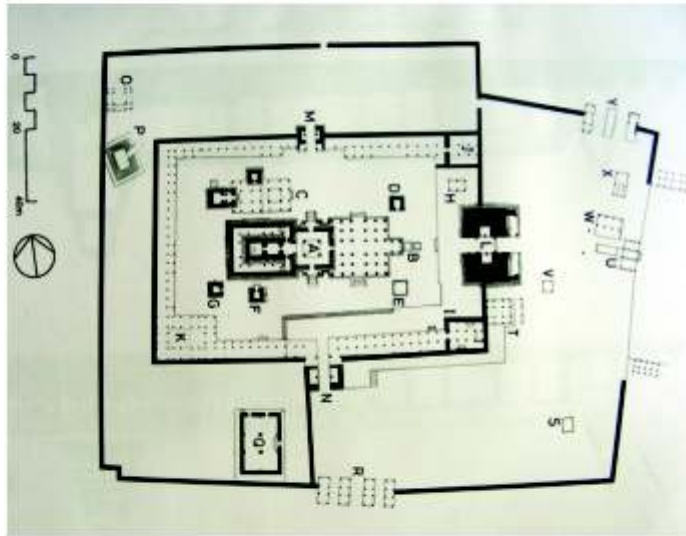
The Kṛṣṇa temple was built by the king Krishnadevarāya in CE 1514, where he installed the image of Bālakṛṣṇa on 16th February, CE 1515, to commemorate the



Fig.4 : Main Eastern Gopura, front view, facing east

campaign against Gajapatis of Orissa. This temple is one of the typical Vijayanagara in style and plan (Plan B), comprising of *garbhagṛha*, anti-chamber, *ardhamanḍapa*, *pradakṣiṇāpatha*, *navaraṅga*, *mahamanḍapa*, Amman shrine, *prākāra* wall with gateways on three sides - east, north and south.

The *garbhagṛha* is square and empty at present. It once enshrined the image of Bālakṛṣṇa, which is now shifted and exhibited in the Government Egmore Museum at Chennai in Tamilnadu. The image is prepared out of greenish black granite stone showing Kṛṣṇa as a child seated on a pedestal. The broken right arm once held a butter ball and the sculpture is about a meter in height.



Plan B : Balakrishna Temple Complex, Hampi

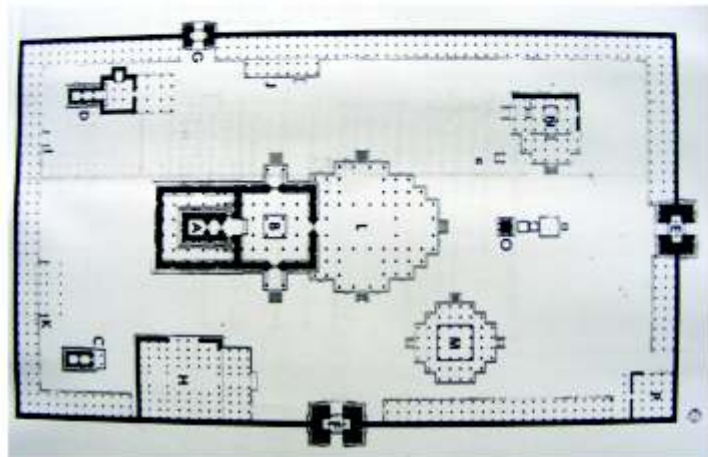
The main entrance *gopura* is lofty and mammoth in shape. The upper portion of the *gopura* is ruined and at present has only two *talas*. The sides of the entrance passage of the pillar show gracefully carved river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā holding scrolls. The stucco work reveals the mastery of artists in preparing graceful proportional figures. Some of the stuccos represent

Kṛṣṇa robbing the clothes of the *gopīs* and scenes from the Udayagiri (Orissa) conquest of Krishnadevarāya, etc.

(3) The Viṭṭhala Temple Gopuras

The Viṭṭhala temple, built on the bank of river Tungabhadra, is one of the biggest and best known example of typical Vijayanagara style and most ornate of the temples at Hampi. This temple originated in the Saṅgama period and underwent continuous constructional activities by the kings, queens, generals and also lay devotees.

The temple (Plan C) consists of *garbhagṛha*, *antarāla*, *pradakṣiṇāpatha* around *garbhagṛha* and *antarāla*, *sabhāmaṇḍapa* or *navaraṅga*, *mahāmaṇḍapa*, *kalyāṇamaṇḍapa*, *uyalamaṇḍapa*, *bhogamaṇḍapa*, Amman shrine, *parivāra* shrines, *vāhana* shrine in the form of a stone chariot and



Plan C : Viṭṭhala Temple Complex

enclosed by high-walled *prākāra* with three gateways on the East, North and South with *gopuras*. The whole complex occupies a vast area of 152.5 x 94.5 meters. The *garbhagrha* is square and empty at present, which was enshrined with Viṭṭhala and his wife Rukmina and worshipped till CE 1565.



Fig.5 : *Gopura*, main eastern, facing east



Fig.5a : *Dīpāstambha* in front of Main Eastern *Gopura* (copied from book)

The entire complex is surrounded by a huge *prākāra* wall with three *gopuras* on east (Fig.5, 5a), north (Fig.6) and southern (Fig.7, 7a) sides. The inscription dated CE 1513 states that the two queens of Krishnadevarāya, Tirumaladevī and Chinnadevī constructed *gopuras*.

The main eastern *gopura* is completely ruined and at present has two *talas*. It is decorated with stucco *kūṭas*, deities and *pañjaras*. The side pillars of the entrance passage show gracefully carved river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā holding scrolls in their hands.



Fig.6 : *Gopura*, Northern side, inner face

The southern and northern *gopuras* are also ruined and show the same features as the eastern one.



Fig.7 : *Prākṛa* wall with Southern *Gopura*, southern side

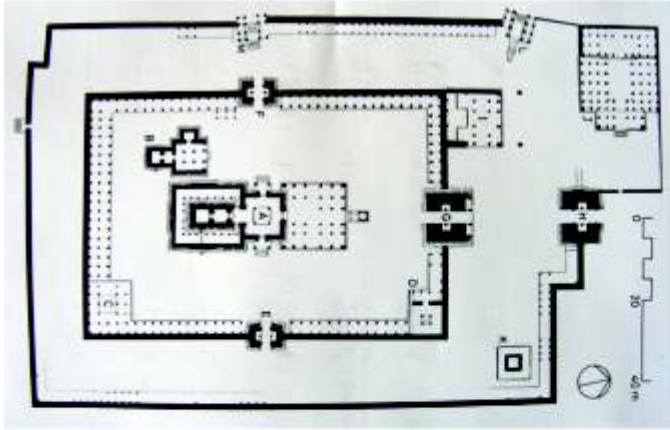


Fig.7a : Southern *Gopura*, inner side view with inner *Prākṛa*

(4) The Achyutarāya or Tiruveṅgalanātha Temple Gopura

The temple, dedicated to god Veṅkaṭeśa in CE 1534, is situated in a valley near Viṭṭhala temple at Achyutapura facing north. It was built during the reign of Achyutarāya of Tuluva dynasty of Vijayanagara.

The temple (Plan D) consists of a *garbhagr̥ha*, *antarāla*, *pradakṣiṇāpatha*, *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, pillared *mukhamaṇḍapa*, *kalyāṇamaṇḍapa*, Amman shrine enclosed by two *prākāra* walls with gateways and *gopuras*. The square *garbhagr̥ha* is empty at present, which was enshrined for the god Venkateśa, whom inscriptions refer to as Tiruveṅgalanātha.



Plan D : Tiruveṅgalanātha Temple Complex, Hampi



Fig.8 : First Northern Gopura, front view with outer Prākāra walls, facing north

The first main *gopura* (Fig.8) is ruined, show traces of two *talas* with all the regular components of this style. The other *gopuras* are also in dilated condition.

(5) The Paṭṭābhirāma Temple Gopura

The temple is situated on the way to Hampi Power House camp from Kamtalapur village. Facing west and dedicated to Rāma, it is assignable to 16th century CE, in the reign of Achyutarāya of Tuluva dynasty of Vijayanagara (Fig.9).

The temple consists of a *garbhagr̥ha*, an *antarāla*, a *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, a *mahāmaṇḍapa*, Amman shrine, *kalyāṇamaṇḍapa*, *prākāra* wall with gateways and *gopuras*. The *garbhagr̥ha* is square and empty at present, once enshrined with Rāma. The east facing main *gopura* has five *talas* in fairly good condition, which is decorated with brick and stucco *kūṭas*, deities and *pañjaras*. The top is surmounted by *śālā* and the finial is missing.

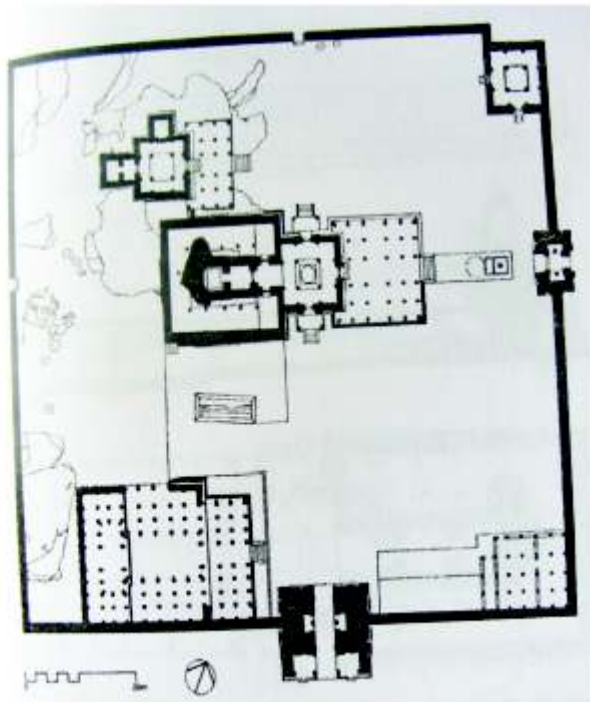


Fig.9 : Paṭṭābhirāma temple, *Mahādvāra* with *Gopura*, Kamalapura

(6) The Malyavantha Raghunātha Temple, Kamalapura

The temple is situated on the Malyavantha hill, on the way from Kampli to Kamalapur village. Facing east, it is dedicated to Rāma and assignable to Tuluva dynasty of Vijaynagara.

The temple (Plan E) consists of a *garbhagr̥ha*, an *antarāla*, a *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, *mukhamaṇḍapa*, Amman shrine, *kalyāṇamaṇḍapa*, *maṇḍapa*, *prākāra* wall with gateway and *gopura*. The *garbhagr̥ha* and *antarāla* are square and the walls are attached to the large natural boulder on which are carved large seated image of Rāma and Sītā with kneeling Hanumān and standing Lakṣmaṇa, all cut almost in round. There is a large five storied *gopura* on the south (Fig.10) and three storied *gopura* on the east.



Plan E : Malyavantha Raghunātha Temple Complex, Kamalapura



Fig.10 : Malyavantha Raghunātha temple
South Gopura, Kamalapura (copy)

References & Notes

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6. C. Hayavadana Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, Vol.II, part 2, Bangalore, p.1418.
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11. *Ibid.*, No.566.
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