

VIJAYNAGAR EMPIRE

Architecture in the Vijaynagar Empire

The Vijaynagar Empire ruled in South India from 1336 until 1646 and left a lasting legacy of architecture, sculpture, and painting.

Background: The Vijaynagar Empire

The Vijaynagar Empire was a Hindu empire based in the Deccan plateau region of South India. Established in 1336 by Harihara I (who ruled from 1336–1356 CE), it enjoyed its greatest political and cultural prominence under Emperor Krishna Deva Raya (who ruled from 1509–1529 CE) and lasted until 1646, when it was conquered by the Muslim Sultans of Bijapur and Golkonda.

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. There were great innovations in Hindu temple construction during this period, and many diverse temple building traditions and styles in South India came together in the Vijaynagar style of architecture, the finest examples of which are to be found in the capital Hampi.

Vijaynagar Architecture

Vijaynagar 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.

Temples

Vijaynagar temples are surrounded by strong enclosures and characterized by ornate pillared *kalyanamandapa* (marriage halls); tall *rayagopurams* (carved monumental towers at the entrance of the temple) built of wood, brick, and stucco in the Chola style; and adorned with life-sized figures of gods and goddesses. This *dravida* style became popular during the reign of Krishnadeva Raya and is seen in South Indian temples constructed over the next two centuries.

Vijaynagar temples are also known for their carved pillars, which depict charging horses, figures from Hindu mythology, and *yali* (hippogriffs). Some of the larger temples are dedicated to a

male deity , with a separate shrine intended for the worship of his female counterpart. Some famous temples exemplifying the Vijaynagar style include the Virupaksha Temple at Hampi and the Hazara Rama temple of Deva Raya I.

Palaces and Courtly Architecture

No royal palace structures from the Vijaynagar period have survived intact, and most of what is known about them has been drawn from archaeological excavations at Hampi. Most of the palaces faced east or north and stood within compounds surrounded by high, tapering stone and earth walls. They were built on raised granite platforms with multiple tiers of mouldings decorated with carved friezes . Palaces usually spanned multiple levels and had tall flights of stairs flanked on either side by balustrades carved with *yali* and elephants. Pillars and beams were made of wood and the roofs of brick and lime concrete. The courtly architecture of Vijaynagar was generally made of mortar mixed with stone rubble and often shows secular styles with Islamic-influenced arches, domes, and vaults.

Sculpture in the Vijaynagar Empire

Vijaynagar sculpture can most commonly be seen in the reliefs, pillars, and monolithic statues of temples.

Vijaynagar Sculpture

The Vijaynagar Empire's patronage enabled its fine arts and literature to rise to new heights. 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 Material

Preferred for its durability, local hard granite was the building material of choice for architecture; however, soapstone, which was soft and easily carved, was commonly used for reliefs and sculptures. While the use of granite reduced the density of sculptured works, granite was a more durable material for the temple structure. Because granite is prone to flaking, few pieces of individual sculptures reached the high levels of quality seen in previous centuries. In order to cover the unevenness of the stone used in sculptures, artists employed brightly painted plaster to smooth over and finish rough surfaces.

Temple Sculpture

Sculpture was integrally linked with architecture in the creation of Vijaynagar temples. Large life-size figures of men, women, gods, and goddesses adorn the gopuram of many Vijaynagara

temples. Temple pillars often have engravings of charging horses or hippogryphs (*yali*)—horses standing on 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.

Another element of the Vijaynagar style is the carving and consecration of large monolithic statues, such as the Sasivekalu Ganesha and Kadalekalu Ganesha at Hampi; the Gommateshvara (Bahubali) monoliths in Karkala and Venur; and the Nandi bull in Lepakshi. Examples of this style can also be seen in the Vijaynagara temples of Kolar, Kanakagiri, Shringeri and other towns of Karnataka; the temples of Tadpatri, Lepakshi, Ahobilam, Tirumala Venkateswara, and Srikalahasti in Andhra Pradesh; and the temples of Vellore, Kumbakonam, Kanchi, and Srirangam in Tamil Nadu.

Painting in the Vijaynagar Empire

Painting in the Vijaynagar Empire, which evolved into the Mysore style of painting, is best illustrated in the elaborate wall paintings of temples.

The Vijaynagar School and Mysore Painting

In addition to architecture and sculpture, the Vijaynagar emperors were enthusiastic patrons of painting. The Vijaynagar school of painting was renowned for its frescoes of Hindu mythological themes on temple walls and ceilings. The rulers of Vijaynagar encouraged literature, art, architecture, religious, and philosophical discussions. With the fall of the Vijaynagar 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.

Absorbing the local artistic traditions and customs, the Vijaynagar school of painting gradually evolved into many styles of painting in South India, including the Mysore and Tanjore schools of painting. Mysore painting, an important form of South Indian classical painting, developed out of Vijaynagar painting and originated in the southern town of Mysore, in Karnataka, during the reign of the Vijaynagar emperors.

Characteristics of Vijaynagar Painting

Mysore paintings are known for their elegance, muted colors, and attention to detail. Popular themes include Hindu gods and goddesses and scenes from Hindu mythology. The paintings are characterized by delicate lines, intricate brush strokes, graceful delineation of figures, and the discreet use of bright vegetable colors and lustrous gold leaf. More than mere decorative pieces, the paintings are designed to inspire feelings of devotion and humility in the viewer. The painter's individual skill in giving expression to various emotions is therefore of paramount importance to this style of painting.

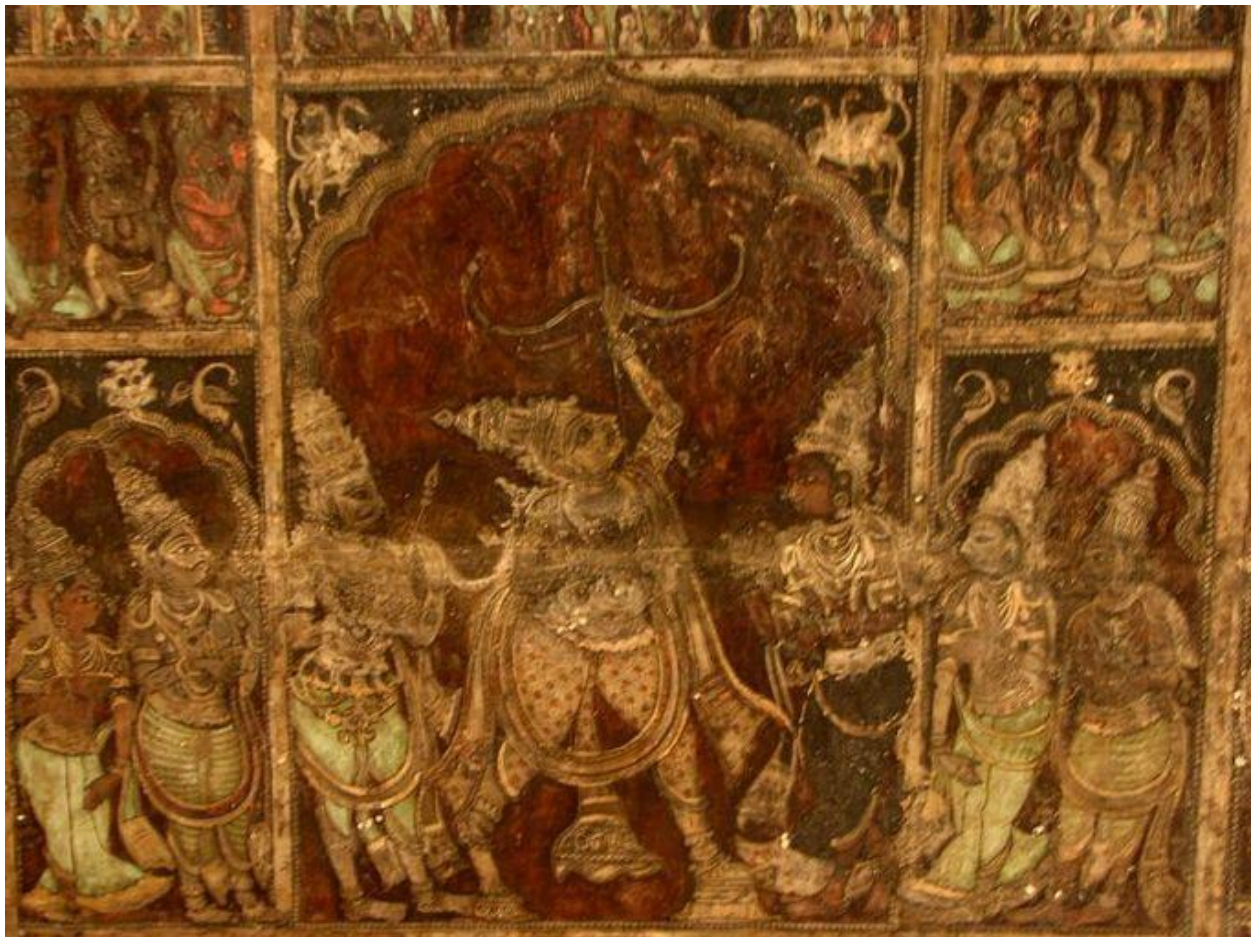
The ancient painters in Mysore prepared their own materials. The colors were from natural sources of vegetable, mineral, leaves, stones, and flowers. Brushes were made with squirrel hairs

for delicate work, and for superfine lines, a brush made of pointed blades of a special variety of grass was used. Due to the long lasting quality of the earth and vegetable colors used, the original Mysore paintings still retain their freshness and luster even today.

EXAMPLES

Wall Paintings

Vijaynagar art includes wall paintings such as the Dashavatara (the Ten Avatars of Vishnu) and the Girijakalyana (the marriage of Parvati, Shiva's consort) in the Virupaksha Temple at Hampi; the Shivapurana murals (the Tales of Shiva) at the Virabhadra temple at Lepakshi; and those at the Kamaakshi and Varadaraja temples at Kanchi.



Painted Ceiling, Virupaksha Temple: 15th century painting, depicting scenes from Hindu mythology in red and gold.

Manuscripts

The most famous of the manuscripts detailing the various nuances of the Mysore school is the *Sritattvanidhi*, a voluminous work of 1500 pages prepared under the patronage of Mumtaz Ali Wodeyar. This pictorial digest is a compendium of illustrations of gods, goddesses, and mythological figures with instructions to painters on an incredible range of topics concerning composition placement, color choice, individual attributes, and mood. The seasons, eco-happenings, animals, and plant world are also effectively depicted in these paintings as co-themes or contexts.

Other Sanskrit literary sources such as the *Visnudharmottara Purana*, *Abhilasitarthacintamani*, and *Sivatatvaratnakara* also highlight the objectives and principles of painting, methods of preparing pigments, brushes, qualifications of the *chitrakar* (the traditional community of painters), and the technique to be followed.