Art & Culture · GS - I

Vijayanagara architecture exemplifies the amalgamation of past traditions with contemporary practices. Elucidate with examples.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2026	GS - I	Art & Culture

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Dravidian tradition, Chola-Pandya influence, Deccan traditions, Indo-Islamic elements, temple complexes, gopurams, mandapas, Raya Gopuram, Hazara Rama Temple, Vittala Temple, secular architecture, synthesis

Model Answer

Vijayanagara architecture represents a remarkable synthesis of established South Indian architectural traditions with contemporary innovations and influences emerging from the wider Deccan political and cultural environment.

The empire inherited the Dravidian temple tradition, particularly from the Cholas and Pandyas. This is visible in the monumental temple complexes, elaborate gopurams, pillared mandapas and enclosed courtyards. The Virupaksha Temple at Hampi, although older in origin, was substantially expanded under the Vijayanagara rulers. The Vittala Temple is renowned for its elaborate mandapas, musical pillars and the iconic stone chariot, reflecting architectural experimentation.

The Hazara Rama Temple demonstrates refined sculptural traditions through narrative panels depicting episodes from the Ramayana. Large temple complexes also served as centres of ritual, commerce and social activity, indicating the integration of religious and urban functions.

At the same time, Vijayanagara architecture incorporated contemporary Deccan and Indo-Islamic elements. The use of arches, domes, vault-like structures and certain decorative features can be observed in secular buildings such as the Lotus Mahal and elephant stables. The royal centre at Hampi also displays an interaction between indigenous and external architectural idioms.

Thus, Vijayanagara architecture was neither a mere continuation of earlier traditions nor an isolated regional style. It creatively combined inherited Dravidian forms with contemporary innovations, reflecting the empire's political power, cultural interactions and cosmopolitan character.

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