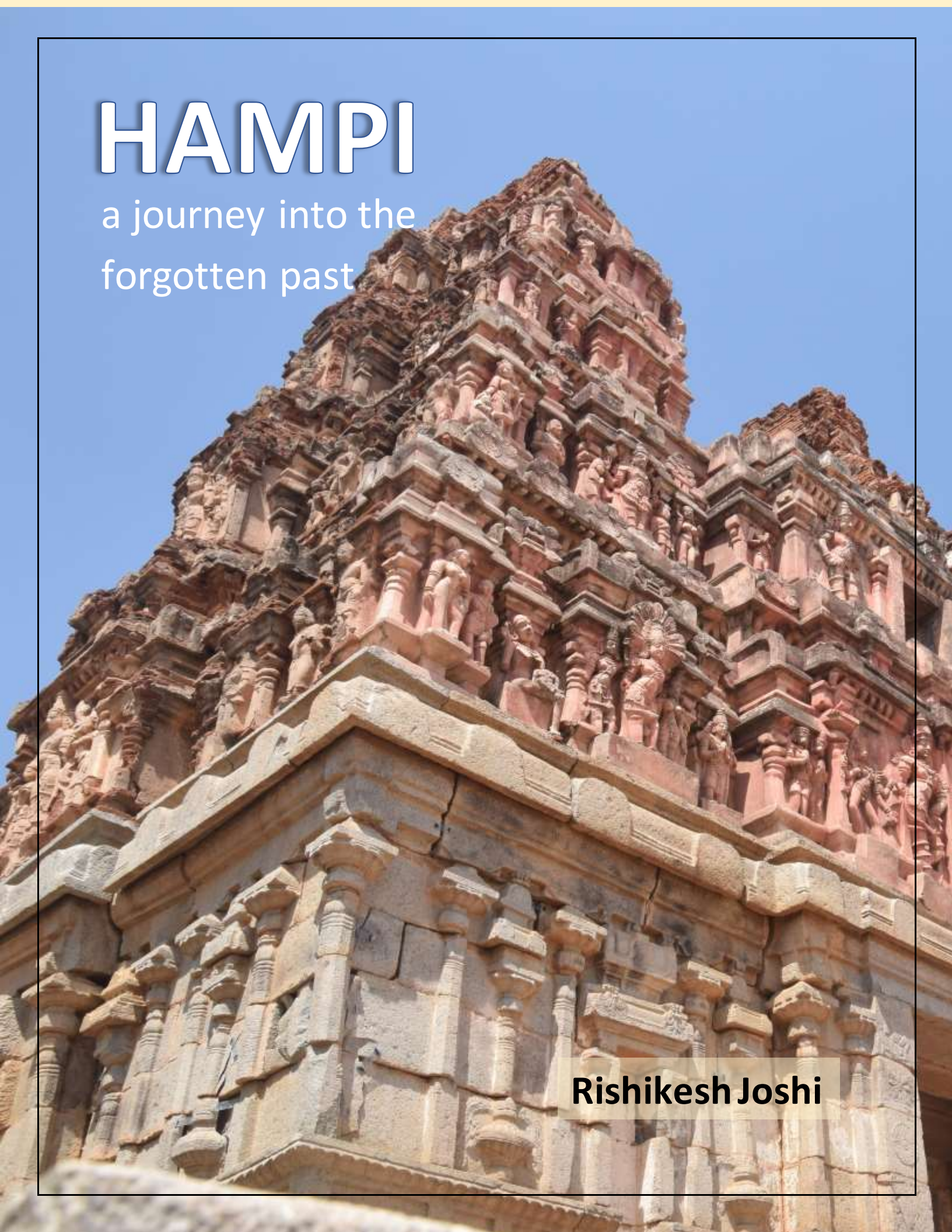
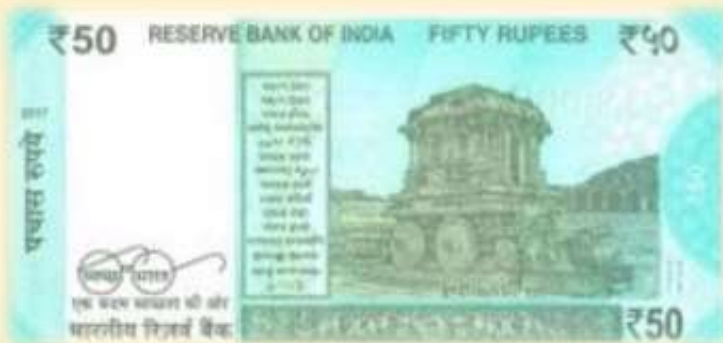
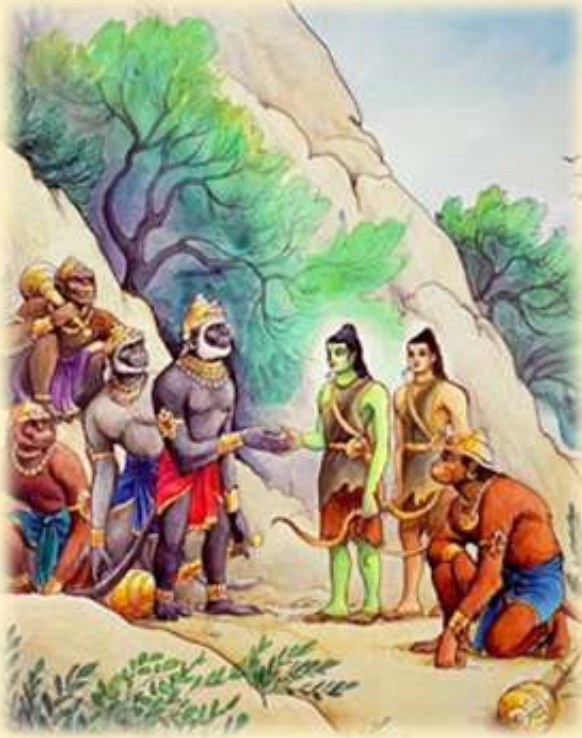


HAMPI

a journey into the
forgotten past

Rishikesh Joshi





Kishkindha described in Ramayana, Emperor Krishna Dev Raya and a new ₹50 note, all connect to this amazing place, Hampi

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All pictures clicked on my Nikon D500 and few on iPhone6

HAMPI- A JOURNEY INTO THE FORGOTTEN PAST

Hampi had been on the wish list for long, a curiosity to explore this city, which was once a sprawling capital of Vijayanagar empire. It is intriguing that Hampi doesn't appear high on "*things to see*" in India, even when you talk about Karnataka State, Mysore takes precedence. Now that I was in Bangalore, my resolve to visit this place further strengthened. Dussehra is a big festival in Karnataka which offered a four-day long weekend. That presented opportunity to plan a trip with my friend Rajeev.

Hampi, located on Karnataka- Andhra Border is far from any place. From Bangalore, the state capital, it is 370km, Hyderabad is also around 370km and Pune much farther at 560km. We were rather relaxed, "Who would travel that far in a short holiday"? However, when Rajeev started looking for hotels, we realized that many others thought the same way, as a result most hotels were running full. Being from travel industry, Rajeev managed to book all of us at Hyatt Place in Toranagallu, Vijayanagar Steel Township, about an hour from Hampi.

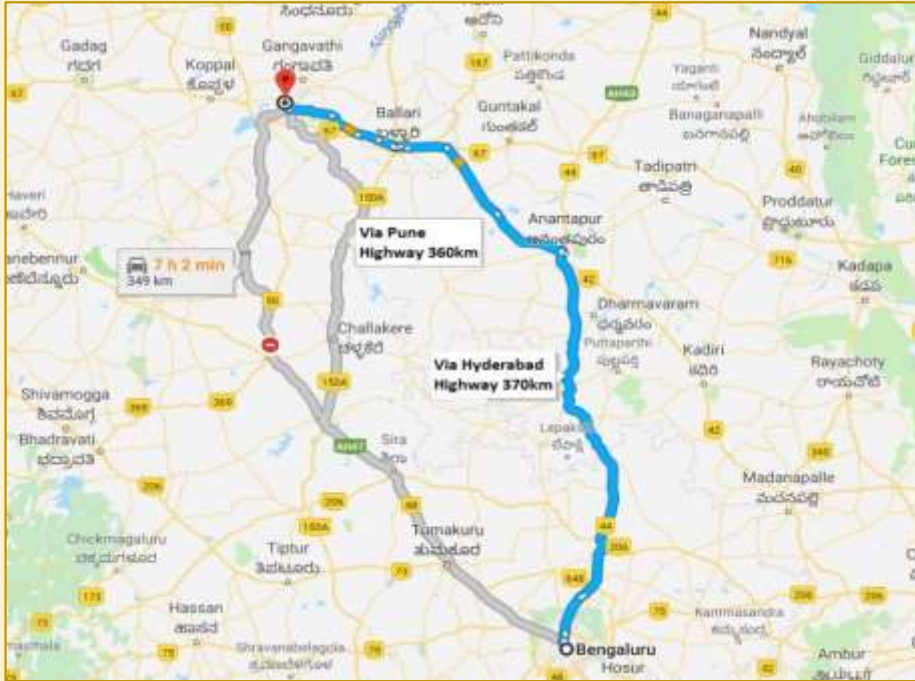
The Vijayanagar airport is next to the hotel, which has flights from Bangalore and Goa each day, but that wasn't on our agenda. As such one can go by train also to Hospet, the base for Hampi. What we had in mind, was to drive down, and anyways who would give us tickets in holidays season?

The Journey

Archana came over from Mumbai the previous day and we were set for travel. Morning, we picked-up Rajeev and Jyoti to begin our journey. There are two routes to Hampi from Bangalore, one via Pune Highway and another through Hyderabad Highway, we picked-up Pune Highway. Having started early in the morning, we aspired to beat the city traffic, which we only partly succeeded. The

queue at toll plaza so early took us by surprise. Later it was smooth ride and we took first halt was near Tumkur, for a sumptuous buffet breakfast at Kamat's.

After about 2.5 hours, our route separated from Pune highway near town of Sira and we were on a State Highway (SH). The SH was also good and smooth, though not as busy as National Highway (NH). Finding a good place for a cup of tea was tough, unlike NH. Finally, we settled for a small shop though didn't dare trying his



Routes from Bangalore to Hampi- Courtesy- Google Maps

greasy 'bhajia'. As we continued further, we reached a place called Rampura, which had a board prompting us to turn for Hampi, and we promptly turned.

Things turned different after we took the turn. We were now on a district road, it was wide enough just for one vehicle. The road almost passed through some houses as we crossed villages. We thought, it would connect us to another highway, but road continued to remain so even after few of intersections. This bumpy and deserted road was making us anxious, fortunately after an hour we started seeing iron ore mines on way and dumpers loaded with ore. This was



Deserted district road, perhaps a shorter route to Hampi.

indication of the steel city being nearby. These dumpers must be a real menace for villagers, as each village had erected speed breakers like a hurdle race. These might be sponsored by motor mechanics and makers of leaf springs and shock absorbers. Eventually the road merged into a main road and we were in Toranagallu, the JSW (Jindal) Vijayanagar Steel City.



Check-in at hotel was efficient, multiple levels of hotel were bit puzzling, but we found the rooms. Priority was to have lunch before the buffet closes. Post lunch, we inquired with the reception about places to visit. It must be a popular question because he quickly pulled a printout with places marked for us. Explained what was inside the campus including a museum and exhibition, which we weren't much inclined.

He explained that Hampi ruins close by sunset and it was an hour away from hotel, which made equation difficult. Tungabhadra Dam (TB Dam) was another option, which remains open till late. I had read about a 'Light and Sound Show' at this dam, which seemed encouraging. Having left early morning, a quick nap was must before we embark another journey, so we set the departure at 4.30PM.

Tungabhadra Dam

TB Dam, as it is popularly known is near Hospet town. We adapted the shortest route prompted by Google, which gave some anxious moments again before we touched NH67, which is under expansion. Crossing Hospet town was another

task, still we reached the parking lot of TB Dam much before sunset. Time permitted luxury of a cup of tea, full of sugar at the cafeteria.

TB Dam was still some distance away, but private vehicles had to be parked here. There are mini buses run by dam authority, which take you to a viewing point near the top of the dam and later to the gardens. As we walked to the bus stop, we realized why hotels were full, everyone seemed to have descended here. The queue was serpentine and frequency of buses infrequent.

It was obvious that, if we wait in the queue, we would see the sunset at bus stop itself which wasn't an appealing idea. After some deliberation and we gave-up idea to view the viewing point. The gardens were supposed to be 20-minute away by walk and that's where the light and sound show is held at 7.30 and 8.30 pm.

Recollecting our school text books, TB Dam is an icon of the independent India along with Bhakra Dam and Steel Plants of Bhilai, Bokaro, Rourkela and Durgapur. This dam was planned during British time to provide relief to famine affected



Nandanvana Gardens at TB Dam

areas of neighboring districts. However, construction was taken-up in

Independent India, which commenced in 1949 and completed in 1953. TB Dam was one of the largest projects of its time, providing irrigation and hydroelectric power. The workshop here provides gates and sluices for major dam projects.

The sprawling Nandanavana Gardens are located below the dam running parallel to it. Spread over an area of about 6 acres, this garden resembles Brindavan Gardens at KRS, Mysore. Garden is constructed in four levels. Variety of flowers, plenty of fountains and streams using dam water make entire setting pleasant. It was quite relaxing for us to spend time and appreciate the gardens. We could also get a magnificent sunset view over the dam.



*Garden and
Sunset over
Tungabhadra
Dam*

Light and Sound Show- Minor Disappointment

A disappointment was in store for us, when we reached the location for Light &



Sound Show. It wasn't a show like you would see at Lal Kila in Delhi or at Golkonda Fort near Hyderabad. It was just a musical fountain show, which we had seen at many places, no longer a novelty. As such after seeing many of them, I am suspicious if music, lights

and fountains have much to do with each other. Possibly, with expectations already set, our mind views them in concert to conclude that fountain was melodious!

Our hotel was good 1.5 hour away and we better get back to catch-up some good rest for the big day ahead tomorrow. For return journey we tried a different route, which took us via Sandur, where major iron ore and Manganese mines are located. The road was good, but speed breakers were daunting.

Hampi- the place

This being *raison d'être* for our trip, we got ready early, finished breakfast and before 9AM were on way to this historic town. While the place is called as **Hampi Ruins**, psychologically I had not been comfortable to use that suffix. The route



was good, and we did not have to cross Hospet town, much before there was turn, taking us straight to Hampi.

As soon as you enter the town, guide book vendors and tourist guides throng you. Taking a guide was a good idea, however we found that we can't match his enthusiasm as well as price tag. His

estimate needed us to be there till about 6pm and cost ₹ 2,000/-. Being

managers, in typical management style, we decided to defer the decision and proceed to popular place, the Virupaksh temple.

Brushing-up History

History hasn't been my favorite subject but some information about the place is must. As per mythology, the Kishkindha city described in Ramayana, where Lord Ram met Bali, Sugreev and Hanuman is supposed to be this place. There are locations testifying existence of Kishkindha including Pampa Sarovar, where Rama met them first time.

Much later in history, it was the capital of Vijaynagar Empire during from 0136 to 1565, a period of over 1,400 years!! There were three dynasties that ruled Vijayanagar empire during this period. Among the emperors we all have heard about great Sri Krishna Dev Raya and intelligent Tenali Raman from his court.

Hampi was a major center for arts and trade. As large as Rome, it was the world's second-largest medieval-era city after Beijing and probably India's richest. Hampi's descent started in 13th century when Alauddin Khilji and successive invaders attacked the city. These invaders of middle east origin looted the city and destroyed it. Eventually in late 15th century, the city ceased to exist as a capital and what was left were the ruins. That's is why the suffix "ruins" follows Hampi.



Pampa Sarovar and some of the hills hold Story of Kishkindha

Going Around Hampi

The city and its monuments are spread over an area of 26 square km. Almost anywhere you see, you would find the remains of a temple or a structure from era bygone. It dawned on us that viewing it in full wasn't feasible in one or even two days. Understand, research scholars spend about a month to get full insight into



Auto Rikshaw Ride

Vijayanagar empire. We decided to make most of the time (and energy) we had.

There is a huge parking lot near Virupaksh Temple, number of cars and buses indicated this to be a "tourist season". Parking space was plenty, though we had to park a bit far. A cup of tea was necessity before we start, the tea stall offered to make without sugar "specially" for us. As he was making tea, we

bought a book on Hampi and surfed through

it, which left us more confused. Here comes our enterprising auto rikshaw driver, he offered to take us around Hampi town and, also double up as a (basic) guide.

Idea was good, but we were four and how to sit in 3-Seater auto rikshaw? Driver showed the way. Remembering our college days, I agreed to sit next to him. What was routine in college days, looked heroic now considering only 50% of me was inside the auto.

Vitthal Temple Complex

When someone mentions Hampi or Vijaynagar empire, the first picture that comes-up before eyes is of the magnificent Stone Chariot. That is the most prominent place in Hampi. There was trek along river Tungabhadra from our parking, about 4 km long. However, having taken an auto, we proceeded with him on a 10km drive. During auto ride, I realized that we came back all the way form where we started. He brought us to another big parking lot, near Vitthal Temple.



Battery Operated Carts driven by ladies

The temple complex is about 2 km from the parking, there are battery operated (golf) carts to take people to complex at nominal charge of ₹ 20. However, the queue there was competing with the queue we saw at TB Dam yesterday. Result- go walking.

Using Electric Vehicles (EVs) to protect the monument from pollution is a noble idea, wish the numbers were more on a peak day. All these EVs were driven by ladies, which was appreciable, considering we were at an interior place and not at a metro city.



Stones kept by visitors

A walk of 15 minutes brought us to a point, from where the temple complex was visible. The grandeur of the place is to be experienced, words would be

inadequate to describe. As we approached, we crossed smaller structures and what used to be a big bazar (market) in its heydays. Another interesting sight we had was stones kept over one another by visitors, replicating the mountain formations you see in this region. Probably there is some belief behind this.



Lord Vitthal

Lord Vitthal (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu) is revered in Maharashtra as well as in Southern India. This was the biggest and grand temple of Vitthal. The famous stone chariot is part of this temple complex. Unfortunately, there are many

temples amongst the ruins of Hampi but no deity in them, just structures, barring one exception. After the attacks by the Khilji clan, the Vitthal deity was moved out of here to Pandharpur in Maharashtra, which is famous pilgrimage now.



Approach to Vitthal Mandir Complex. Remains of Old Bazar can be seen on the way

Stone Chariot-the biggest draw

The stone chariot is indeed the biggest draw at Hampi. The famous Konark temple is supposed to have been inspired from this place. The place draws even more people after demonetization in 2016! Puzzled? Well, it has nothing to do with black money. The new ₹ 50 notes carry the picture of this stone chariot on them. That makes it a big attraction among tourist of all age groups.

This chariot is a testimony to the craftsmanship of that era. The carvings depict the traders of various countries that used to visit this place. The wheels of the chariot are real and understand they could be rotated, however considering safety of the monument they have been locked now.



Stone chariot was the busiest place to click pictures, you must be patient for your turn when only you can be in the frame. There were many people clicking pictures with the new ₹50 note. My friend also used the opportunity.

Main Temple and Kalyan Mantap- Musical Pillars

The main temple can be seen only from outside, as the structure has become weak and entry is prohibited. This is rather unfortunate as this temple has musical pillars. Each stone pillar creates a different note and one could create a music by knocking various pillars. How could someone destroy such object d'art? You can feel the anger within.

The archaeological department had started work to restore the structure by



Vitthal Temple

newly built pillars, however it was rejected by the heritage committee. The Hampi ruin is an UNESCO heritage monument. One can take some solace by visiting Kalyan Mantap, a marriage hall from that era, which is in a better shape. There are few musical pillars at Kalyan Mantap, our guide helped us by sounding the



Brail information panel at temple- praiseworthy



New pillars to restore- rejected by Unesco?

pillars, though on a crowded day like this it was tough to hear them well.



Musical Pillars inside the Kalyan Mantap

The Vitthal Mandir complex itself took more than two hours but, this place gives you the feel of what this place was like in earlier days and what it lost. There were many more places on way, we decided to go a bit “fast forward”.



Queen's Bath- Are all queens the same?

This stopover on the way turned out to be disappointing. It isn't as old, made of mortar as compared to other stone structures. Such baths you would see at number of historical places. Wonder, why all the queens used to indulge in such an elaborate bath?



Queen's Bath, with somewhat modern inscriptions on the walls!

Sad part was that walls were full of names (of lovers?) inscribed by visiting tourists, a hobby that we as a country could do away with.

Good part was that this place had decent public toilets, which were missing at Vitthal Mandir complex. The lawns were lush green, looked to be popular with picnic goers for having lunch.



Hazara Ram Temple

Amongst ruins, this place is in a better shape, though there is no deity here too. The walls have beautiful carvings from Ramayana. The complex has few other smaller temples too. It was interesting to go around this place, we could click some good pictures too.



Near the Hazara ram temple were Lotus Mahal and Stepped Wells, which one could cover if he has more time. Mahal is an empty structure, shaped like a



*Ramayana
inscription
s at the
Hazara
Ram
Temple*

blooming Lotus flower. While our guide was enthusiastic, we weren't feeling same.

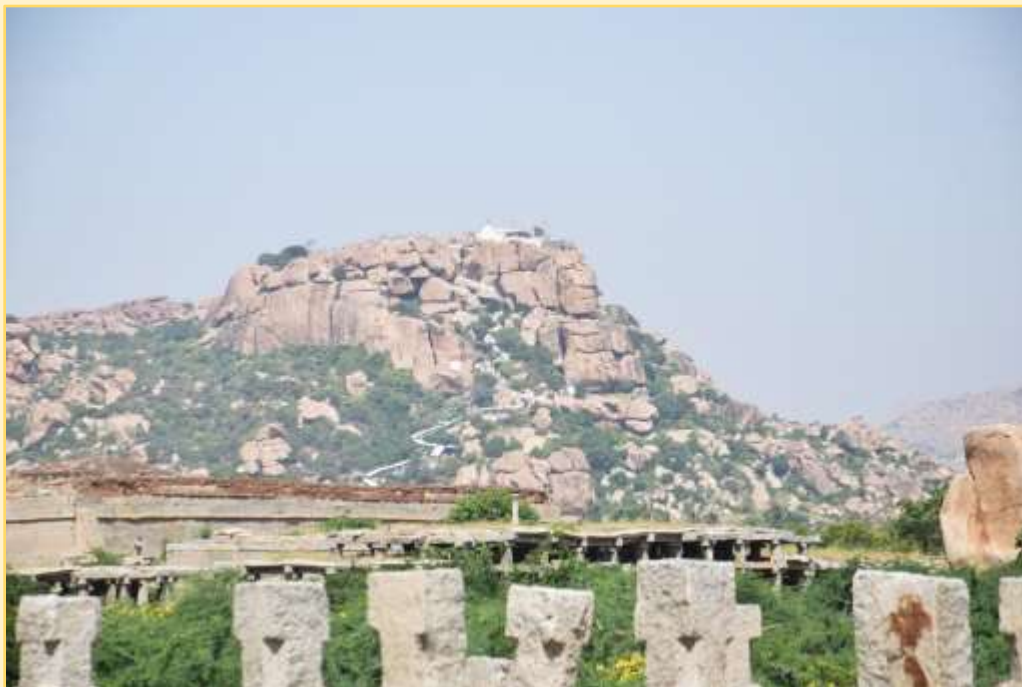
En- route

As such everywhere you would see some of other structure, when you move through the place, we captured glimpse of some of them as we travelled back to the Virupaksh Temple complex. Our intent to return early was foiled by a mad



Traffic Jam amidst Ruins?

traffic jam on the way. The road passes through some of the monuments and is narrow at places, vehicles coming from either side created a gridlock. Our driver being a local, could do some maneuver with steering handle and words.



If you have time and inclination, you can walk up that incline of Matangi Hill

Virupaksh Temple- Only place with a deity

By the time we reached Virupaksh Temple, its doors were closed for a break and we had another hour with us. Our driver cum guide dropped us at the nearby market and suggested that we have food at Mango Tree restaurant, popular among tourists.



The restaurant was in a nice setting inside the lanes of the temple town, good décor. There was option to have food in semi-traditional style by sitting on the floor or on table chairs, we preferred later. While the ambience was good, wish the food was as good.

October heat could be felt now with stone structures all around. There was still some time for temple gates to open



Left: Virupaksh Temple in mid day, Right: Few temples on way

We went around the market which was selling wares meant for foreign tourists. My eyes were set on buying a replica of the stone chariot, however the good ones were very costly and affordable ones were not up to the mark. Finally gave up the idea in favour of preserving ₹ 50 notes instead which had the chariot.



Virupaksh Temple

Virupaksh temple is the only temple in Hampi from that era which has the deity in place and regular pooja is held. Tourists as well as devotee throng to see this temple, there is an annual car festival too. As per a mythological story, lord Shiva is called Pampapati and the city was also known as Pampapuri.

By this time, we were tired, and it was time to head back to the hotel. On the way we could have seen few more monuments, but we weren't having energy to appreciate them.

Resorts and Resorts

While driving to Hampi we had seen signboards of this resorts which was highly recommended and decided to explore on way back. Idea was to have a cup of tea and see some rooms.

Resort manager was more than happy to arrange a tour for us. The place was amazing, “smaller” rooms had a jacuzzi apart from a tub bath, a living room and bedroom. Larger cottages had a family swimming pool attached to each of them.

There were heritage ambassador cars for moving within the campus and modified open Mahindra Scorpios for sightseeing around Hampi. Something that one can really enjoy.



Ambassador at the jazzy resort



Our hotel was also hosting a group of Harley Davidson Bikers



As such our hotel was also quite good, we were impressed to see a big Harley Davidson biker’s group parked for night. We had a relaxing evening taking a stroll around the hotel and visiting the temple in township. One thing that worried while moving around the Vijayanagar Steel city was impact of pollution.

When your mobile screen says “unhealthy air quality” it can be a cause of worry. Otherwise the stay was comfortable, we experimented a local restaurant for dinner, it turned out to be good.

Rounding-up Hampi

While we zip past many monuments or just glance at the carvings, imagine the time and efforts it would have taken for the sculptors to make them. The monuments of Hampi are full of such carvings which might have taken decades to finish. This page is dedicated to some of those.



Ladies of two ethnicity welcoming at Vitthal Temple.



Carving at Hazara Ram Temple



Periphery of the main Vitthal Temple

Way back

Having experienced Pune Highway route, we decided to explore alternate route through Bellary city. Idea was to see few places on way to Bangalore. The road up to Bellary was same NH67, which was being expanded, it had some good and some fair patches.



Passing through Bellary, an abandoned cinema theater

However, after Bellary we hit a bad patch of 30km, where we wished for the **Stone Chariot** instead of a luxury car. While the road improved once we touched Andhra border, it had already ruptured our car tire beyond repairs.

We were stuck in a small village, with a small tire shop. Tire shop guy was helpful but, expressed inability



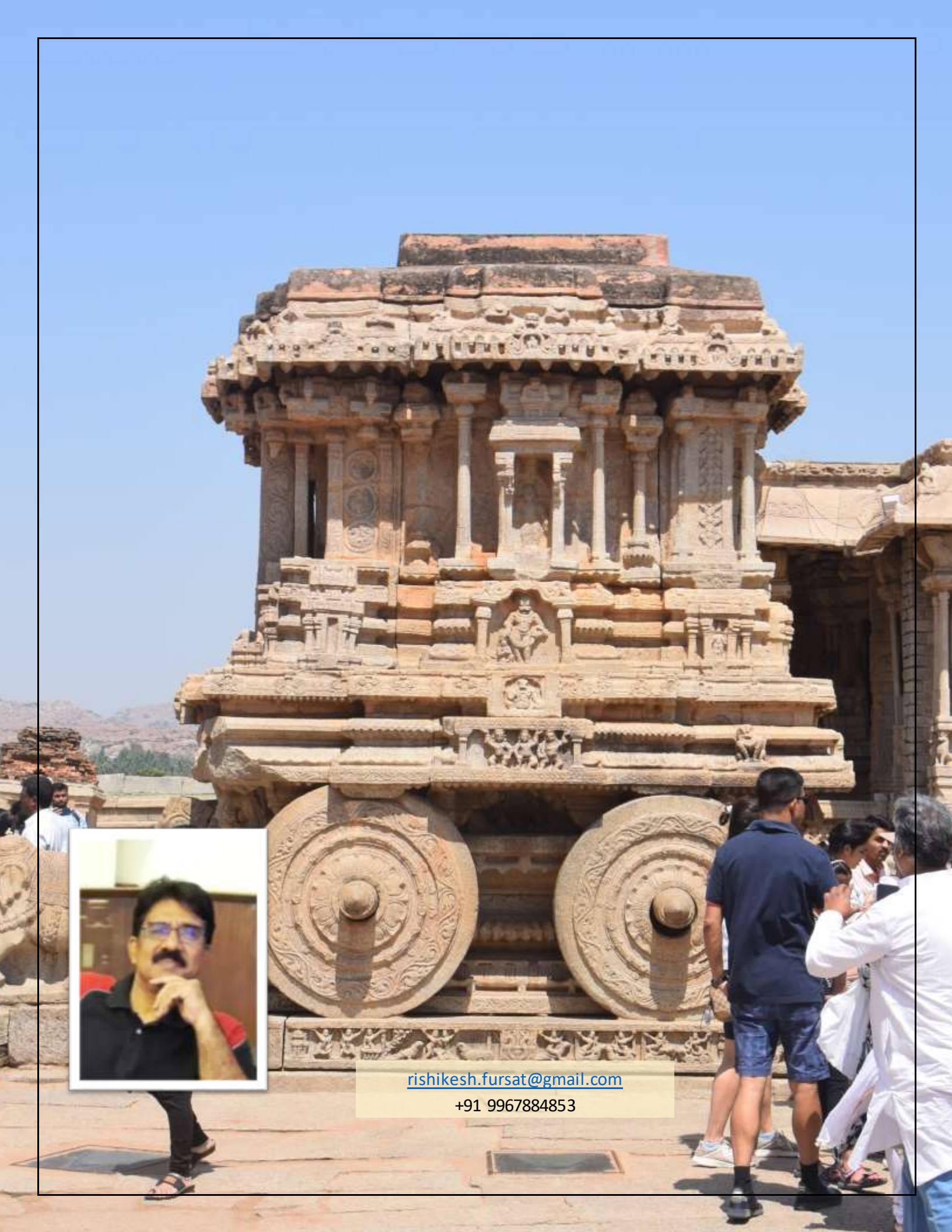
Oh God! Tire gone!!

to repair. He removed the tire and suggested us to take it to Bellary. An auto driver offered to take us to Bellary and bring back (for a price). The thought of travelling on same bumpy road, now in a Mahindra rickshaw was scary, but we had little choice.

Rajeev offered to sit next driver this time, compensating for my turn yesterday, though this road was more demanding. With some luck we were able to get a tire remedy, which would survive till Bangalore. However, four hours were lost in this ordeal, shutting any chance of sightseeing on the way.

As if this wasn't enough, we had a narrow escape near Bangalore airport, when a driver of Toyota Fortuner was trying to take-off on highway itself. Gods were great! By the time we reached home it was past 10.00pm. We ended the day with resolve to retain only good memories and visit Hampi again, soon.





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