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Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal

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Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal

The Virupaksha Temple at Pattadakal is the largest and most celebrated temple of the Chalukya group. This lesson covers its builder, plan, style and the exam question that listed it.

At a glance

Four key facts on this topic

01 **Pattadakal**Karnataka, on the Malaprabha.

02 **About 740**Built under Queen Lokamahadevi.

03 **Two traditions**Dravidian tower, northern features.

04 **PYQ**Listed in UPSC Prelims 2026.

Where is the Virupaksha Temple?

1 Where Is It?

1.1 Where is the Virupaksha Temple?

The Virupaksha Temple stands at Pattadakal in Karnataka. The village lies on the banks of the Malaprabha River, about 22 km from Badami.

Pattadakal is a group of monuments, and this temple is its best-known member. Visitors reach it most easily from Badami.



The Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal. Photo via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

1.2 Why does the site matter?

The Group of Monuments at Pattadakal is a World Heritage Site, inscribed in 1987. It is the high point of an eclectic art of the Chalukya dynasty.

The temples date to the 7th and 8th centuries. They show a harmonious blend of building forms from northern and southern India.

8. **Think it through:** Why do exams like Pattadakal? See answer ↓

Quick check 1. True or false: The Virupaksha Temple stands at Pattadakal in Karnataka. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: whc.unesco.org; karnatakatourism.org

Who built it and when?

2 Who Built It?

2.1 When was it built and by whom?

The temple was built about 740 by Queen Lokamahadevi. A museum record also dates it to 740, under Vikramaditya II.

The two accounts fit together. Lokamahadevi was the king's wife, so the temple is tied to both of them.

2.2 Why was it built?

It marks a victory over the southern kings. One record names the third victory of Vikramaditya II over the Pallavas and the capture of Kanchi.

Pattadakal was also a place of royal coronations for Chalukya kings. A temple here added to the glory of the dynasty.

> 9. **Think it through:** Queen or king: who gets the credit? See answer ↓

Who and why

Question	Answer from the sources
Builder	Queen Lokamahadevi
Ruler honoured	Vikramaditya II, her husband
Date	About 740
Victory marked	Over the Pallavas, with the capture of Kanchi

Both accounts point to the same events.

> **Quick check 2.** True or false: The Virupaksha Temple was built about 740. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au

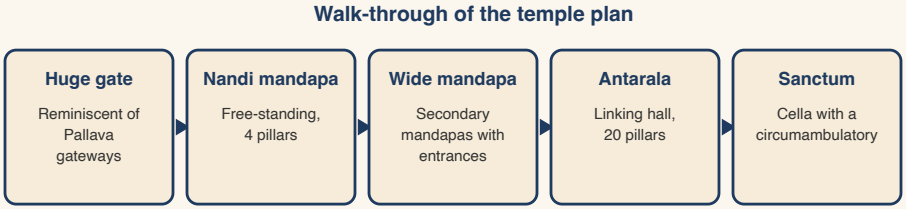
What is its plan?

3 Plan of the Temple

3.1 What parts does the temple have?

The temple has a Dravidian tower, a wide mandapa and secondary mandapas with several entrances. A gallery of small sanctuaries runs along the wall.

A mandapa is a pillared hall. The antarala is the linking hall between the hall and the sanctum.



Memory hook. The order of boxes is a simple aid, not a surveyed plan.

3.2 How big are the halls?

The antarala is highly developed and has 20 pillars. The separate hall for Nandi, Shiva's bull, has 4.

The sanctum has a circumambulatory, a passage for walking around the deity. A huge gate leads in, much like the gates of Pallava temples.

10. **Think it through:** What is a circumambulatory? See answer ↓

Quick check 3. True or false: The Nandi hall at the Virupaksha Temple stands separate from the main building. *(True or False?)*

See answer ↓

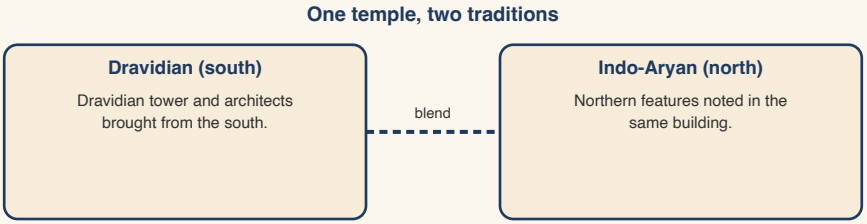
Which style is it?

4 Two Styles in One

4.1 Which style is it?

The temple shows both Dravidian and Indo-Aryan features. The tower is Dravidian, which is the southern form.

Pattadakal as a whole is a blend of northern and southern forms. So the temple does not fit one neat label.



Memory hook only.

4.2 Why a southern look?

Architects brought from the south helped to build it. The huge gate also recalls Pallava temples.

The Pallavas ruled in the south, and the temple marks a victory over them. Southern builders and a southern look became part of the victory story.

> 11. **Think it through:** Is it Nagara or Dravida? See answer ↓

Quick check 4. True or false: The Virupaksha Temple has a Dravidian tower. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What else is at Pattadakal?

5 The Pattadakal Group

5.1 What else stands there?

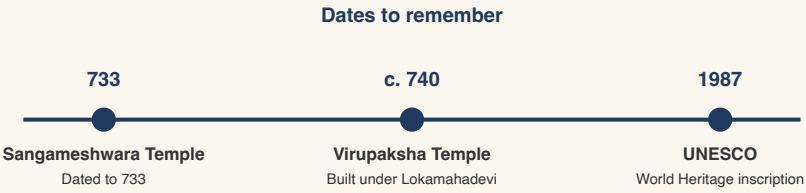
The site has nine Hindu temples and one Jain sanctuary. The Virupaksha Temple is the largest and most celebrated.

Other temples include Sangameshwara, Mallikarjuna, Papanatha and Galaganatha. A tall stone pillar with inscriptions also stands there.

5.2 Which temples blend styles?

Two of the temples in particular bring together elements of both schools. The Virupaksha Temple shows both Dravidian and Indo-Aryan features.

The Sangameshwara Temple is among the oldest and is a Dravidian structure dated to 733.



Memory hook. Years as given in the sources below.

12. **Think it through:** Which is older? See answer ↓

Pattadakal at a glance

Temple	Note from the sources
Virupaksha	Largest and most celebrated; built about 740
Sangameshwara	Dravidian; dated to 733
Mallikarjuna	Said to be built by a rival queen
Papanatha, Galaganatha	Other temples in the group

The Jain sanctuary stands apart from the Hindu temples.

Quick check 5. True or false: The Sangameshwara Temple is dated to 733, before the Virupaksha Temple. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: incredibleindia.gov.in

What was the place called earlier?

6 Names and Stories

6.1 What was Pattadakal called earlier?

The place was once known as Pattada-Kisuvolal. Other names include Kisuvolal and Raktapura.

Kisuvolal means valley of red soil. Ptolemy’s Geography is said to mention the place as Petirgal.

6.2 What stories surround the temple?

Tradition holds that the Mallikarjuna and Virupaksha temples were commissioned by rival queens. Tradition also holds that the Virupaksha Temple inspired the Kailasa temple at Ellora.

These are traditions, so treat them as popular stories, not proven fact. The firm points for the exam are the builder, the date and the style.

> 13. **Think it through:** How do you treat popular claims? See answer ↓

> **Quick check 6.** True or false: The Virupaksha Temple is used today as the venue of the Chalukya Utsav dance festival. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How was it tested in UPSC?

7 Exam Point of View

7.1 What did UPSC ask?

Item 4 is the Virupaksha Temple. It is a Dravida temple that also shows northern features, so check each item before you choose a code.

7.2 What should you remember for the exam?

14. **Exam angle:** The Virupaksha Temple is the largest temple at Pattadakal, built about 740 under Queen Lokamahadevi. It has a Dravidian tower and also shows northern features. See answer ↓

Quick check 7. True or false: The Virupaksha Temple was built to mark a victory over the Pallavas. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember this

- **Place:** Pattadakal, Karnataka, on the Malaprabha; UNESCO site since 1987.
- **Builder:** Queen Lokamahadevi, about 740, wife of Vikramaditya II.
- **Purpose:** marked a victory over the Pallavas and the capture of Kanchi.
- **Style:** Dravidian tower with northern features.
- **Trap:** do not call it a pure Nagara temple.

Explain it back: Say who built the temple, why, and which two traditions it joins.

Practice MCQs

1. The Virupaksha Temple is located at which place?

A. Aihole

B. Pattadakal

C. Hampi

D. Badami

See answer ↓

2. Who is credited by UNESCO with building the Virupaksha Temple about 740?

A. Queen Naiki Devi

B. Queen Lokamahadevi

C. Rani Durgavati

D. Queen Didda

See answer ↓

3. The Virupaksha Temple was built to mark a victory over which dynasty?

A. Rashtrakutas

B. Pandyas

C. Cholas

D. Pallavas

See answer ↓

4. Which statement about the style of the Virupaksha Temple is best supported?

A. It is a pure Nagara temple

B. It shows both Dravidian and Indo-Aryan features

C. It is a rock-cut cave

D. It is a Buddhist stupa

See answer ↓

5. The Group of Monuments at Pattadakal was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in which year?

A. 1983

B. 1985

C. 1993

D. 1987

See answer ↓

6. Which hall at the Virupaksha Temple is free-standing and houses a statue of Nandi?

A. The antarala

B. The huge gate

C. The Nandi mandapa

D. The circumambulatory

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.**
   It stands at Pattadakal in Karnataka, on the Malaprabha River.
   ↑ Q1
2. **B.**
   It was built about 740 by Queen Lokamahadevi.
   ↑ Q2
3. **D.**
   The temple marks the victory over the Pallavas and the capture of Kanchi.
   ↑ Q3
4. **B.**
   The temple shows both Dravidian and Indo-Aryan features, with a Dravidian tower.
   ↑ Q4
5. **D.**
   The date of inscription is 1987.
   ↑ Q5
6. **C.**
   A statue of Nandi is housed in a free-standing mandapa.
   ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** The Pattadakal group is in Karnataka, and the Virupaksha Temple is its standout masterpiece. ↑ 1
2. **True.** Both a heritage listing and an archive record date it to 740. ↑ 2
3. **True.** The statue of Nandi is housed in a free-standing mandapa. ↑ 3
4. **True.** A Dravidian tower is among its listed features. ↑ 4
5. **True.** Sangameshwara is dated to 733, while the Virupaksha Temple was built about 740. ↑ 5
6. **False.** The Chalukya Utsav is held at Pattadakal in February. No source names this one temple as the venue. ↑ 6

7. **True.** It is tied to the third victory over the Pallavas and the capture of Kanchi. ↑ 7
8. **Think it through.** It is a place where two temple traditions meet. A question can ask which style a Pattadakal temple belongs to. ↑ 8
9. **Think it through.** Say both. The queen built it, and it celebrated her husband's victory. That wording is safe in an answer. ↑ 9
10. **Think it through.** It is a path around the shrine room. Worshippers walk round it clockwise as a mark of respect. ↑ 10
11. **Think it through.** Call it Dravida with northern features. Do not call it a pure Nagara temple. ↑ 11
12. **Think it through.** Sangameshwara is dated to 733, and Virupaksha to about 740. Sangameshwara is the older of the two. ↑ 12
13. **Think it through.** Keep them as extra colour. Put the dated facts first in your answer. ↑ 13
14. **Think it through.** Match each listed temple to its own style before you choose a code. Do not lump all four together. ↑ 14

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