

Hampi (Part- 3) Lotus Mahal: When Architecture Cared for Women

While walking through the ruins of Lotus Mahal, I felt something unusual. This place did not speak about war, power, or victory. It spoke about care. In a kingdom known for strength and wealth, this structure quietly tells a softer, deeper story-how women were thought of, protected, and respected.

The Lotus Mahal was built during the time of Krishnadevaraya, one of the greatest rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire. This palace was designed as a summer residence for his two queens, located inside the Zenana enclosure, a private space meant exclusively for royal women.

What surprised me most was not its beauty, but its intelligence.

The structure is designed with natural air-conditioning. Arched windows, open corridors, and airflow passages allow cool air to circulate throughout the palace. In the hot climate of Hampi, this was not luxury-it was thoughtful planning. At the centre, chandan (sandalwood)-based construction helped keep the space cool, making summers bearable without any machines or electricity.

Standing inside, I imagined the queens resting here, away from political noise, surrounded by calm architecture that cared for their comfort. This was not a place of confinement it was a place of dignity.

What makes this even more powerful is the surroundings. Nearby stood Jain temples, showing that all religions were given equal importance. The Vijayanagar Empire was not built on one belief it stood on mutual respect. Historical accounts also mention that transgender communities were given recognition and roles, something that feels progressive even today.

Close to the Mahal were the royal elephant stables, where 11 jumbo elephants were kept. These elephants were symbols of power, yet they stood alongside a palace meant for peace showing how balance existed between strength and sensitivity.

It is said that around 43 sandalwood houses once surrounded this area, meant for the king and his family. From the Lotus Mahal, these houses were visible-creating a sense of togetherness, safety, and connection.

As I stood there, one thought stayed with me:

This empire did not only know how to rule land.

It knew how to care for people.

The Lotus Mahal reminds us that true progress is not just about grand monuments or military victories. It is about how thoughtfully a society designs spaces for its women. even in ruins, the Lotus Mahal stands graceful-quietly telling today's generation that respect, comfort, and inclusion are signs of real civilisation.

