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Tadapatri: ChintalaVenkataramana Temple and its Unique Narrative Sculptures

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ABSTRACT

The ChintalaVenkataramana Temple in Tadapatri, Andhra Pradesh, holds a significant role in the history of Vijayanagara Art. The temple built in the last quarter of the fifteenth century is a treasure house of exquisite craftsmanship. The magnificence of the Vijayanagara dynasty is not merely due to the magnitude of the temples but also for its artistic and decorative richness. ChintalaVenkataramana Temple and BuggaRamalingeswara temples are the finest examples displaying the richness of the Vijayanagara kings at Tadipatri.

The ChintalaVenkataramana Temple is unique as it differs from the norm when compared to other temples of the Vijayanagara dynasty in few aspects. This temple, unlike the others are not very big in size and neither the pillars in the mandapas are so martial and huge. The notable feature of the temple is the stone chariot. The outer walls of the ardhmandapa and the shrine contains exquisite reliefs of narratives from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The sculptures, most of them narratives offer a visual treat of the episodes from the epic, the Bhagavata and from other mythological events making the temple unique and special.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the narrative sculptures which are unique. The iconographical panels which refers to the epics and scenes from mythology will be discussed along with the artistic content.

KEYWORDS: ChintalaVenkataramana, Iconography, Narratives, Ramayana, Bhagavata.

Tadipatri is located on the southern bank of the river Pinakini in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh which 'takes the northern channel, or becomes Uttara Vahini, and is hence considered sacred. Tadapatri was a rather large settlement during the prehistoric period, according to archaeological findings (Indian Archaeology:1980, 3). The first epigraphical reference to Tadapatri is dated to A.D. 1198 (S.I.I., IV: No.798) (Jayapradha: 1888, np). Tadapatri was ruled by the Hoysalas from the 11th

century until the establishment of the Vijayanagara empire. Between the 11th Century A.D. and the defeat of Somesvara IV the last ruler of the Chalukyan dynasty by Ballala II, Tadapatri was under the KalyaniChalukyan rule. The Hoysala rule over the territory was enhanced under Ballala III's reign, and a Governor was stationed at Penukonda. Tadapatri was reigned by the Vaidumbas, local leaders who swore allegiance to the Hoysalas during this time (Jayapradha: 1888, np).

With the foundation of Vijayanagara kingdom by Harihara and Bukka in A.D. 1336 with the capital at Hampi, a new era was heralded. The Anantapur district enjoyed great attention in all aspects of life. According to the Tadapatrikaifiyat, JillelaChalapati Raju was designated by Bukka I to take care of the affairs of Tadapatri (TadapatriKaifiyat, Record No.1116).

Following Harihara's death in A.D.1404 there was a succession dispute between BukkaII and Virupaksa I. Devaraya I eventually ascended to the throne in 1406 and reigned until 1422. During Devaraya's reign, the Bahamanis and the Reddis of Kondaviduwaged wars often.Devaraya II succeeded ViraVijaya or VijayaBukka who ruled after the rule of his father DevarayaI.TadapatriKaifiyat states thatDevaraya II sent PemmasaniTimmanayudu to overseeGutti - Gandikotarajyaandtherebythehistory of Tadapatri is closely associated with the affluences of Pemmasani chiefs (Jayapradha: 1888, np).

TadapatriKaifiyat credits YeraTimmanayudu, youngest among the sons of PemmasaniTimmanayudu as the builder of ChintalaTiruvengalanatha temple i.e., the Venkataramana temple at Tadapatri (TadapatriKaifiyat, Record No.1116). The grants by PemmasaniYeraTimmanayudu to Vaishnava temples indicate that he was a devotee of the Vaishnava faith.

The earliest inscription dated to A.D. 1551 in the Venkataramana temple, registers the gift EnumalaChintala village by CinaTimmanayudu, son of PemmasaniTimmanayudu (M.E.R. 439 of 1940-41).PemmasaniTimmanayudu in

A.D. 1578 gave a gift of 3 puttis of land (Inscriptions of Madras Presidency: 211, 30). PemmasaniNarasimhanayudu in A.D. 1587 donated land for the supply of Tulasi garlands and flower service (Inscriptions of Madras Presidency: 214, 30). Land gifts were recorded in the epigraphs dated In A.D. 1663 and 1664 by the local chieftains Timmanayudu and Lingamma, the son of Krsnamaraja (Inscriptions of Madras Presidency: 209-212, 30) (Jayapradha: 1888, np).

The monarchs of Vijayanagara and their feudatories were prolific temple builders. The Vijayanagara dynasty built a huge number of temples in the Andhra region.The temples at Tadapatriespecially the Venkataramana temple and the Ramalingeshwaratempleare exquisite examples of their workmanship.

The temple structure, halls, entrances, and enclosure walls made from granite is the most notable element of Vijayanagara temple architecture. The Vijayanagara architects, on the other hand, favored brick and mortar and stucco sculptures for the superstructures. The temples of the Vijayanagar period show preference for an upapitha which can be noticed at the Devi shrine intheVenkataramana temple at Tadapatri. The employment of mancabandha, Padmabandha, and Kapota-bandha type adhistanas in the temples of Tadapatri highlights the impact of late Colanadu tradition as well as pre-Vijayanagara architectural traditions in Andhra. In the temples at Tadapatri, the highly reverted tips of the padma, katakavrtakumuda characterize the base (Kamalakar: 1976, 240).

Legend

According to the mythology, a huge noise erupted from a tamarind tree, and as the villagers gathered to figure out the reason for the noise, they discovered an idol of Lord Vishnu that had emerged from the tamarind tree. Later that day, Lord Vishnu appeared to Timma Naidu, the ruler of that region, in his visions and instructed him to construct a temple by installing the idol found inside the tamarind tree. As a result, the temple acquired the name Chintha, which means tamarind and the temple came to be known as Chintala Venkataramana (Jayapradha: 1888, np).

Chintala Venkataramana Temple

The Venkataramana Temple is one of the most important Vijayanagar temples. The temple, built with granite and bricks for the superstructure and gopuras, is exquisite, and the Sikhara is a two-storey brick superstructure. The complex houses the shrines of Venkataramana, Devi, Varaha, Lakshminarayana and Ramanuja.

The Venkataramana temple consists of frangamandapa, mukhamandapa, antarala and garbhagriha, Garuda shrine in the shape of ratha, and the temple measures 41 mts. in length and 16.19 mts. in breadth (Jayapradha: 1988, 64). The temple stands on a well moulded adhisthana. The Padmabandha type of adhisthana in the Venkataramana temple exhibits the late Colanadu style. The walls of the mukhamandapa, antarala and garbhagriha are richly embellished with sculptural panels in between the pilasters and niches. Salabhanjikas, Vyalas, standing females, and creepers adorn the bases of

the pilasters and in between the central pilasters the kumbhapanjara is carved (Jayapradha: 1988, 64).

The bas-reliefs at the Venkataramana temple are grouped in three registers. The display of the entire Ramayana epic on a succession of engraved panels showcases the narrative art and the artistic workmanship on the walls of the temple. The narrative sculptures of Chintala Venkataramana temple were influenced by the Ramayana and the Bhagavatapurana. Ramayana has been depicted in the panels, beginning with the Putrakameshti episode to the Pattabhisheka, each panel with a label inscription in Telugu characters from the 16th century. A textual study of Telugu version of Ramayana, the Ranganatha Ramayana and the Valmiki Ramayana display local variations in the narrative of episodes. The Ranganatha Ramayana, a popular work of 13th Century A.D. seems to have been followed in the sculptural rendering by the sculptors (SubramanyaSarma: 1949).

Few Narrative scenes are rare and unique in the Chintala Venkataramana temple. Inscriptions can be seen on few of the panels which narrates the episode sculpted. The story of the Ramayana is beautifully elucidated in the panels and the narrative aspect almost transforms the spectator into the age of the epic.

Tataka Vadha

The scene of Rama killing Tataka in the south wall to the right of Kumbhapanjara of the antarala.

Story: Vishvamitra directs Rama to slay Tataka because she along with her husband Sunda and son Maricha were

causing havoc to the hermitages and causing trouble to the sage Agastya

The slaying of Tataka, Yaksha Suketu's daughter, is depicted in this scenario. Rama is depicted holding a bow with his two hands and shooting at an asura lady, probably Tataka (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

Ahalya Shapa Vimochana

The narrative is represented on the garbhagriha's south wall of the central niche.

Story: Ahalya was Brahma's most beautiful creation and the name which meant 'the one with no ugliness' in Sanskrit. Brahma sent Ahalya to the monastery of Sage Gautama until she reached adolescence, knowing that Indra would desire her. When she grew up, Sage Gautama returns her to Brahma. Pleased with the sage's asceticism Brahma bestows Ahalya upon him as his wife.

Indra is infatuated by Ahalya but feels abandoned when she is married to Gautama. He plans his union with her. One day when Gautama is away, he enters the hermitage disguised as Gautama and requests intercourse with her. The sage returns in the meantime, catching the disguised Indra and Ahalya making love. Outraged he curses Indra to be covered in a thousand female genitals and Ahalya to be turned to stone. Ahalya begs for his forgiveness. Moved, he endows her a boon that she would be released from her curse (stone form) when the sacred feet of the son of Ayodhya touch her. He reduces Indra's curse as well, reducing the genitals to thousand eyes.

Centuries later, Lord Rama, on his way to Mithila for Sita's Swayamvara passes through the hermitage, the dust from his feet touches the stone that is Ahalya. The

curse is broken and Ahalya returns to her human form. Lord Rama touches her feet, proclaiming her innocence. Gautama is moved when he hears Lord Rama's proclamation and takes her back as his wife. Ahalya is thus delivered at the hands of Lord Rama.

The narration is on the south wall of the garbhagriha to the right of the niche and in the middle. The foreground in the panel portrays standing figures of Rama and Lakshmana, as well as Ahalya in anjali mudra. Ahalya is also depicted as a stone in the corner. Rama's left hand is on his waist, while his right hand is held sideways in suchimudra. Lakshmana's left hand is holding the bow, but his right hand is free. Ahalya is in the anjali mudra in front of them (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

Kausalya tying Raksha to Rama

Inscription: Kausalya
Kumarunikidivihchiraksagattinathavu
The narration is on the north side of the mukhamandapa in the middle, at the west wall from the south to the right of the Kumbhapanjara.

The scene depicts Kausalya holding the right hand of Rama and ties Raksha to his hand. The sanctified thread is tied by Kausalya for protection as Rama leaves for his exile (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

Manthara and Bharata

The Narration is on the north wall of the mukhamandapa.

Story: Manthara is the maid who persuaded Queen Kaikeyi that the throne of Ayodhya belonged to her son Bharata and that her stepson crown-prince Rama should be exiled from the kingdom (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

Bharata is shown clutching Manthara's legs in the panel, Manthara is shown in an

inverted position. Bharata in a violent rage over Rama's banishment, assaults her.

Mutilation of Shurpanaka

Inscription: Lakshmana
Shurpanakamukkukosinathavu

The narration is on the mukhamandapa's east wall, to the left of the door that leads to Harantara's north side, and to the right of kumbhapanjara.

Story:Shurpanaka, the sister of Ravana, smitten by Rama's youthful good looks and wishing to have him as her husband adopts a beautiful form to entice him, but Rama kindly rejects her advances, telling her that he was faithful to his wife Sita and thus would never take another wife.Shurpanaka approached Lakshmana, who told him that he was second best to Rama and hence unworthy of her. Shurpanaka, ashamed and envious of their dismissals, reverted to her demonic form and attacked Sita, but Lakshmana stopped her by cutting off her nose.

The narration depicts Lakshmana and Shurpanaka standing. In his left hand, Lakshmana holds the sword, which he keeps on Shurpanaka's head, while in his right hand, he clutches Shurpanaka's hand. In her original appearance, she is seen without a nose.

The story continues on the east wall of the mukhamandapa on the right-side panels. At the top of the panel are Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita in standing position.

Starting from the north to the right of the bhadra niche, on the east wall of the mukhamandapa, left side of the door. Rama holds a bow in his left hand at the top and is depicted in tribhanga.

On the east wall of the mukhamandapa, to the left of the door harantara, right of Kumbhapanjara, in the middle Shurpanaka

is in tribhanga, her right hand relaxed and her left hand held sideways in suchi. Her breasts are engorged, and her hair is pulled back and hanging sideways.

Mayamrga

Story:Marichawas the son of Demon Sunanda and Tadaka and the uncle of Ravana. Ravana approaches Maricha to avenge Surpanaka's ill-treatment at the hands of Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana makes Maricha take the form of a golden deer to lure Sita. Sita who saw the golden deer asks Rama to get it. Rama after chasing the deer for some time feels suspicious and shoots at the deer. The deer falls down shouting 'Ha Lakshmana' in the voice of Rama to mislead Lakshmana and Sita. Marichadies at hands of Rama.

The story is narrated in the north wall of the mukhamandapa.

The narration on the lower part of the north wall of the mukhamandapa, to the right of the porch bhadra, right of niche and left to Kumbhapanjara, depicts mayamrga with its forelegs uplifted.

To the left of the niche in the middle portion witnesses Rama standing with a bow and an arrow and the mayamrga is depicted in the foreground.

At the top of the mukhamandapa, south wall, to the right side of the porch and left of Kumbhapanjara, Rama is in walking posture with a bow in the left hand, and his right hand held above (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

In the lower portion of the north wall of the mukhamandapa, to the right side of the porch, right of Kumbhapanjara, Rama is shown aiming an arrow at a deer.

The lower portion depicts mayamrga, Maricha as half human pierced with an arrow, throwing up both the hands.

Trisirasuhdu

Inscription: Trisirasuhdu

The narration is on east wall of north of the mukhamandapa, next to the door.

Story: Trishira, the three-headed asura, marches towards Rama after receiving the command from Khara with the roars of a gigantic drum. Rama pierced Trishira's chest with fourteen serpent-like arrows. Rama struck him on the chest with an arrow imbued with the force of a thunderbolt. Rama then quickly fires three razor-headed arrows which chopped off the demon's three heads, and the heads rolled on the ground. Trishira's huge body fell like an uprooted tree (Dharma: 1998, 179)

Trisirasuhdu with three heads is depicted standing with a sword in his right hand and his left hand held sideways. The narration continues in the middle of the same panel.

Ins: Trisirasunijampinathlavu (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

The panel depicts Rama shooting an arrow towards the Asura. Trisira's three heads are shown separated from the body.

Ravana at the Ashrama of Maricha

Inscription:

Ravanasurundumamaricumbhinum.

Story: Maricha was living on the shore in a lonely hermitage. Ravana visits Maricha to notify of Khara's, Dushana's, and their army's deaths, as well as Surpanakha's insult. Maricha was commanded to transform into a golden deer with silver markings and graze near Rama's ashram. Sita would undoubtedly notify Rama and Lakshmana to catch the deer if she saw one. When the brothers leave Sita alone in pursuit of the deer, Ravana would abduct her. Rama, saddened by the grief of Sita's separation, would be easily killed by Ravana.

Starting from the north side in the middle, the narration is on the east wall of the mukhamandapa to the left side of the door. Ravana is depicted with ten heads and fourteen hands, standing on a horse-drawn chariot with the charioteer. His right hand holds the sword and the left hand slightly uplifted. A sage stands by the side of Ravana in anjali hasta. He is shown in three-quarter profile. An asura is seated in between the Ravana and the sage. The panel represents Ravana in Marichaashrama (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

Ravana and Hanuman

The narration is on south wall of the mukhamandapa.

Story: Hanuman jumped over the sea to Lanka, in quest of Sita, who had been kidnapped by the Asura Ravana. He let himself get apprehended by Ravana's guards so that he might meet Ravana and convey a message to him. "Treat me like a messenger," he told Ravana and asked for a place to sit. Ravana laughed, and his guards made fun of the Vanara, they said, "sit on your tail if you're that desperate to sit". Hanuman retaliated by extending his tail, coiling it into a column, and leaping on top of it. As a result, Hanuman built a seat that towered over Ravana's. He who had always sat at Rama's feet, made a point of sitting on top of Ravana's head.

The depiction shows Ravana the king of Lanka seated on the throne endowed with ten heads and twenty arms. In front Hanuman is shown seated on his coiled tail in the form of a throne, higher than the seat of Ravana. Hanuman's right hand is uplifted (Jayapradha: 1988, np).

Sita Agni Pravesha

The panel is on the south porch of the Kakshasana door.

Story: After the defeat of Ravana, Lord Rama asks Sita to prove her purity and loyalty, by undergoing the Agni Pariksha (the fire test).

The scene of SitaAgnipravesa is represented on the architrave.Sita is being presented to Rama, Sita's left hand is held by Rama. The trinity are witnessing this. Indra is depicted on Iravata, Siva on Nandi and Brahma with three heads on horse and Agni is shown with two heads. Dasaratha, the father of Rama is shown above, Lakshmana and the Vanaras are depicted next to them.

The sculptural representation in the temple is largely located in the niches, walls, pillars, doorways, gateways and enclosure walls, a stylistic aspect from the Vijayanagara period. The use of full-size statues in niches are rare. Small figures are housed in narrow and tall niches. Prominence is given more to the narrative panels and figures of divinities on the wall. The practice to display narrative panels in three registers, with gods and goddesses interspersed is a convention from the Vijayanagara period.

The narrative panels at TadapatriChintalaVenkataramana temple are not shallow reliefs, but three-dimensional carvings with a high projection.The rich detailing, the depth of modeling and the agility of the characters either on the walls, pillars or the gopuras is perhaps due to the green schist stone.Several themes of contemporary life are depicted which includes warriors, wrestlers, hunting scenes, monkeys, horses, and shepherd apart from the deities, in their diverse aspects and manifestations.

The exquisite detailing of the narrative panels at Tadapatri displays a high artistic quality. The visual display of the anecdotes from the epic Ramayana and the Bhagavata are animated and graphical to absorb the spectator. The representation narrates the entire episode frame by frame giving a detailed story board and immersing the spectator into a sacred space.

Photographs



Chintala Venkataramana Temple



Ahalya Shapa Vimochana Kausalya tying Raksha to Rama



Manthara and Bharata



Tataka Vadha



Ravana at the Ashrama of Maricha Ravana and Hanuman



Mutilation of Shurpanaka Mayamrga



Trisirasuhdu

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