

Manmath Pooja

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ABSTRACT

Lepakshi is a small town¹ situated in Hindupur taluka of Anantpur district, Andhra Pradesh. Veerbhadra temple located in Lepakshi is famous for monumental temple architecture of Vijaynagar Empire period. The extensive mural paintings executed on the walls and temple ceilings are world famous. One of the painting 'Girija Kalyanam' depicts story of marriage of Shiv and Parvati. It is a narrative panel. It starts with the painting famously known as 'Parvati's toilet'. In this paper, I have tried to prove that it is not 'Parvati's toilet' but 'Manmath Pooja'.

Keywords- lepakshi, shiv, parvati, manmath, virupaksh, pampa.

I. INTRODUCTION

The main deity of Lepakshi temple is Veerbhadra and his consort Bhadrakali. The great Vijaynagar Empire was ruled by four major dynasties Sangam, Saluv, Tuluv and Araveedu. Amongst them, king Achyutraya belonged to Tuluv dynasty during whose period this temple was built. Veerana and Veerupana were his two nayaks who were devotee of Veerabhadra and staying in this province. Unfortunately, this temple remained incomplete till the date.

Lepakshi means lepa + akshi i.e. coloured eyes²; paintings in the temple depict eyes coloured in particular style. However, as inscriptions suggest, this village was known as Lepakshi prior to temple construction. There is a folklore regarding this name. Lepakshi means 'lay pakshi' in local language. While fighting with Ravan, Jatayu fell down at this place. When Shree Ram arrived, he held Jatayu's head and said, 'lay pakshi' (bird, get up).

In the temple premises there is a deep imprint of foot known as 'Seeta's foot' water gets accumulated in it on which birds satisfy their thirst.

II. HISTORY OF LEPAKSHI

Initially this place was Kurmshail mound. Sage Agastya visited this place and built temple of Papnasheshwara.³

Veerabhadra is incarnation of Shiva and is main deity of the most famous 'Veer Shaiv sect' of this area. Daksh, father of Sati did not invite her for sacrifice, as he disliked his son in law Shiv; but she went for the ceremony. She was insulted in ceremony so she jumped in fire altar. On hearing this Shiv got furious and he made Veerbhadra out of his hair streak.⁴ Veerbhadra beheaded Daksh and punished others.

Lepakshi is on the trade route. Veerbhadra is god of traders. Previously he was local deity further accepted by main religion.

III. TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE⁵

There are three enclosure walls- inner, middle and outer prakara. The inner prakara has entrance on the north. It is square shaped. Papnasheshwar, Veerbhadra and Raghunath are three main deities of this temple. Other small sanctums of lesser deities, main hall, kalyan

mandapam, huge boulder having carvings and Ganpati, gopuram, flagpost, Nagling, Hanuman are other parts of the temple premises.

IV. PAINTINGS OF VIJAYNAGAR EMPIRE

According to Vishnudharmottar Puranam "*Kalanam prawaram chitram dharm kamarth mokshdam Mangalyam prathamam chatad gruhe yatra pratisthitam*"⁶ Meaning 'Art of painting is the best amongst all arts. It leads us to salvation'.

The period of Vijaynagar Empire was golden period of arts. It was possible due to economic prosperity and meritorious kings. The art of painting was in a glory as mentioned by foreign travellers in their accounts; but now only few paintings are remaining. The paintings on not only perishable items like wood, cloth, paper but also on walls of temples & buildings are destroyed. Lepakshi temple paintings are important amongst the remaining paintings. One has to study Lepakshi temple paintings to understand the Vijaynagar style of paintings and Indian paintings too.

Three main periods of Vijaynagar empire period⁷-

1. Early phase
2. Middle phase
3. Late phase

Lepakshi paintings are categorized under third period.

Most of the Lepakshi paintings are on the ceilings. Paintings in Natya mandapam are in better condition so they can be identified. The paintings are on the varied topics revealing history of the particular period. The main topics are epics like Ramayan, Mahabharat and Puranas. The impact of the great epics is clearly seen here. The main influence is of Tamil literature⁸. The Tamil literature narratives like Manunidi chola, Pariya puranam, Siriyala charitram etc. are depicted here. Other narrative panels are of Droupadi swayamwar, 'Girija Kalyanam', Ram-Seeta wedding, ten incarnations of Vishnu etc. The ceiling of mahamandap holds the painting of Veerbhadra, which is the largest painting in India. Veerana and Veerupanna brothers are shown in this painting. On the ceiling of Raghunath temple, Dashawatar panel is depicted.

V. TYPES OF MURALS

There are 4 types of murals⁹-

1. Monoscenic
2. Sequential
3. Continuous
4. Conflated narratives.

The most important amongst them is narrative panel. Two aspects of narrative panels are the content or

the story and expressions. This is the challenge to the artist to convey emotions and meaning of the story to the beholder.

VI. STYLE AND TECHNIQUE OF PAINTINGS IN LEPAKSHI TEMPLE¹⁰

The Vijaynagar artists have borrowed many motifs from previous dynasties but they transformed it into their own style and established a new style.

The technique used for Lepakshi paintings is not true fresco. Each painting has elaborate process from the selection of the base, collection of material processing and preparation of plaster and its applications etc. The technique used in Lepakshi is fresco secco. The base or bhumibandh is prepared. Plaster, jaggery or honey and sand clay is mixed thoroughly and applied on the base achieving thickness of 3 mm. After drying colour pigments are added. The outline is drawn in black. Then it is painted using various colours and shades.

The repairing of these paintings has been done several times.

Salient features of Vijaynagar style-

1. Figures are slightly bent.
2. In narrative panels, the scenes are depicted one after the other. There is no separation between two scenes.
3. Narrative panels are horizontal.
4. Main figure is drawn larger than the others.¹¹
5. According to social status or economic status, clothes and ornaments are depicted.
6. No overlapping of two figures is seen.
7. Variety of ornaments, clothes, sarees and hairstyles are drawn in paintings.
8. In deities' figures both eyes are open; but in other figures one eye is open while the other eye is closed.

VII. PAINTINGS IN NATYAMANDAP

Natyamandap is in front of Mahamandap. There are steps to go from Mahamandap to Natyamandap. Natyamandap has seventy pillars and is cross-shaped. The sculptures are of life size and they appear to be alive. The ceiling is 4.2 m high. 'Girija Kalyanam' is one of the panels depicted on it. First one fourth part of the painting is 'Parvati's toilet'¹² and remaining ¾ th part is Panigrahanam. The ritual of Panigrahan i.e. accepting brides hand by groom is painted beautifully. Two main figures are shown in 'Parvati's toilet'; the one wearing green clothes is a topic of debate.

VIII. STORY OF SHIV PARVATI WEDDING¹³

Narada prophesied that Himalay's daughter Parvati would be married to Shiv, so relieved Himalaya sent her along with her friend to Shiva. Parvati fell in love

with him but Shiva's penance was on; so she started serving him willingly.

In battle with the demon Tarakasura, the gods were defeated. Tarakasura began to trouble the gods. When all gods went to Brahma, he said that only Shiva's son could kill Tarakasura. For that, Shiv Parvati marriage was necessary but not possible as Shankara's penance was on. So Kamdev was summoned to disturb the penance of Shiva. When Parvati was offering garlands to Shiva, Madana tried to shoot arrow. At that time, Shiva's mind was disturbed. When he saw Madana, he killed him and disappeared. Parvati now started penance. After some time compassion arose in Shiva's heart. He tested Parvati in guise of monk. Then Shiva married to Parvati. Parvati gave birth to Kartikeya.

This story is inspiration to many artists, sculptures, poems, dramas, paintings etc. The famous poem Kumar Sambhava by the great poet Kalidas is based on this story. Another great poet in 12th century is Harihara. He was in Hoysala's court. He has written poem 'Girija Kalyanam' based on this story. He is famous for his passionate narrative style. He settled down in Hampi. His many poems are famous.

In 'Girija Kalyanam' by Harihara¹⁴, the groom is not shiv but Virupaksh and bride Pampa. Pampa Mahatmye is one of his famous poems. This poet has vividly depicted the killing of Manmatha, the lamentation of Rati, and the marriage ceremony of Girija in champu kavya 'Girija Kalyanam'¹⁵.

Pampa is a local deity accepted by main religion. She is married to Virupaksh, a form of Shiva to be included in the mainstream. The original name of Hampi, the capital of Vijaynagar Empire, was Pampakshetra. Pampa, a girl sat and performed penance¹⁶ here to attain shiva. Shiva was pleased and they got married. After marriage, Shiv became Pampapati. There are some places like Pampa Lake in Hampi. Every year Pampa-Virupaksh wedding ceremony takes place here.

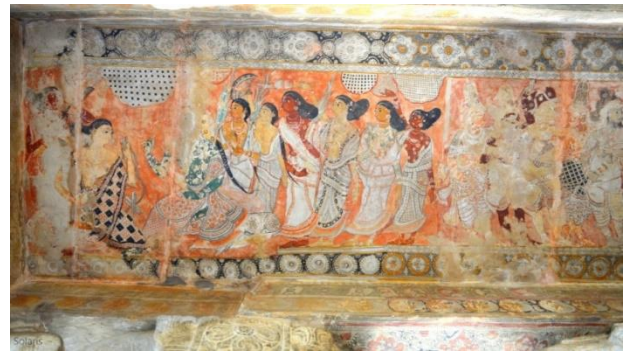
IX. ABOUT 'GIRIJA KALYANAM' NARRATIVE PANEL



Virupaksh Pampa wedding



Asht dikpals attending wedding



Parvatis's toilet

Panel 1

A woman (identified by some scholars as Parvati) is seated on the raised seat having cylindrical pillows at the back. She is accompanied by six maidens. They are all standing, holding either a fan, a chowry or sugarcane. They are richly ornamented. Except one, no one is wearing blouse. Their complexion varies from red, light yellow, brown. Four of them have their hair tied into bun. Two of them have their long hair plaited. The figure in green complexion has hair arranged in long plait. A woman sitting in front is holding palm leaves in one hand. Another woman is standing with Tambora in hand. Some scholars have identified a sitting woman as sooth sayer. The expressions and composition of figures are superb.

Scene 2

It is occupying 3/4th panel. There are 28 persons shown. The marriage hall has gopurams. The mandap pillars are decorated with plantain leaves and flowers. In the centre of the hall, Shiv and Parvati are shown standing, holding each others hand. Nandi is happy and looking at new bride. On the right side, two ladies are holding flowers. On the left side, Brahma is seated inside the pavillion in padmasana. He is the priest for marriage. King Himwan and Maina (his wife) are standing. They are standing in the act of attending kanyadan. Several gods and rishis are witnessing the ceremony. Ashtadikpals are standing in their usual attributes. Vishnu and Sadashiv are

standing on right side. Several rishis having long jatas are standing. Shiva is depicted as Kalyansundar moorti. He is wearing tiger skin, jatamukut, holding parashu and mriga in upper hands and lower hands are stretched towards Parvati.

X. SCHOLARS OPINION

1. According to Dr. Hanumant Rao's opinion, the figure in green is a woman. The painting is not clearly seen. The figure is having long plait so he may have identified it as a woman.¹⁷
2. According to the great historian Anna Dallapicola, this is figure of a man but cannot be identified. The part above shoulder is not seen clearly.¹⁸
3. One of the opinion is this is a figure of Lalitadevi. In South India, Lalitadevi stotram is recited by bride prior to marriage.¹⁹
4. Another opinion is this is figure of deity Meenakshi²⁰ or Ardhanarishwara or Parvati or Parvati's maid. As this painting is identified as Parvati's toilet, the lady's figures are identified as Parvati or her maid. Meenakshi in Madurai's Meenakshi temple has green complexion.

As it is clearly cannot be distinguished as man or woman, it may have identified as Ardhanarishwara.

XI. EXPLANATION

1. The figure was enlarged with the help of computer. It is clearly seen that it is not woman but a man. He is having sword attached to waist and having uparane, a cloth worn on upper body by men.
2. It cannot be Lalitadevi because Lalitadevi has four hands and she stands on wheel.
3. As clearly seen with the help of computer, it cannot be Ardhanarishwara.
4. She cannot be Parvati's maid because she is wearing rich ornaments and heavy saree. In Lepakshi paintings, cloths and ornaments are shown according to social and economic status, so this figure is not of an ordinary person.
5. This figure must be deity, god, king or someone having high social status. This is not Parvati because in scene 2, Parvati is shown lean and thin compared to this figure.

After looking at the whole painting, it is noticed that this painting is not influenced by Kalidasa's poem Kumar Sambhava or Shiv purana but by the poem 'Girija Kalyanam' by the twelfth century kannada poet Harihara. There is a difference between these two pictures.

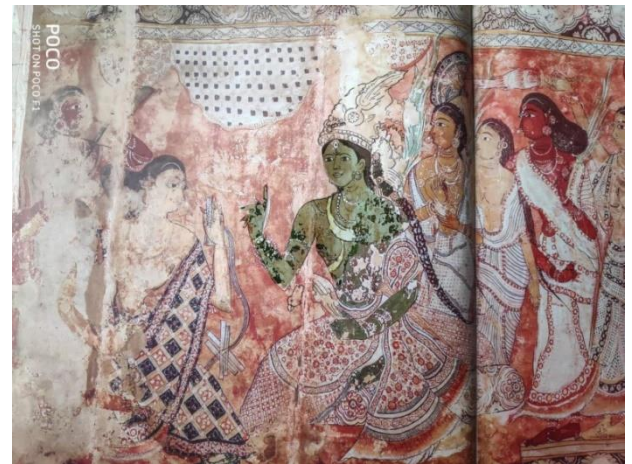
Virupaksha in this picture is very simple. He is wearing vyaghrarjin and not wearing any ornaments. According to the story of Shiv purana, in the painting of Hampi, Shiva is wearing rich clothes and many ornaments for marriage. According to original story, Parvati's mother Mena after having a look at that form of Shiva in

forest refuses to marry her daughter to him. Then Vishnu convinces Shiva to wear better cloths and ornaments to get ready for marriage. This story is not depicted here.

In the poem 'Girija Kalyanam' there is a narrative that ²¹ Girija, the bride is getting ready for the wedding. It says in the verse-

"Thus Parvati was adorned with pearls to limit the love of companionship, to intoxicate Hara's passion to perform Manmath pooja to earn his blessings. In the next verse it is said that everything about bride and Pashupati cannot be described but I will try my best to describe it with devotion. It is mentioned that his braids were like young corals. In the next verse Virupaksh is compared to Madana."

This narrative matches with this picture.



Reconstruction of the painting with the help of computer

XII. MANMATHA'S ATTRIBUTES²²

1. Manmath is always depicted in green or red colour.
2. His vehicle is parrot.
3. He holds bow and arrow.
4. He has sugarcane.
5. He wears many flowers and ornaments.

As this description matches with the figure in green, it feels like Parvati is worshipping Manmath because

1. The mention of Manmath Puja is clearly found in the 'Girija Kalyanam'.
2. The description of braids matches with the description in verse.
3. The figure in hand is not clearly visible but it may be parrot. It is definitely not couch or similar object. A sage in adjoining picture has parrot on the head. Manmatha's vehicle is parrot.
4. The women behind the figure are holding sugarcane in hand. One of the attributes of Manmath is sugarcane.

5. There is a sword attached to the waist. Even this is Manmath's attribute.
6. Manmath is getting worshipped so there is no purpose of showing bow and arrow.
7. Manmath is always shown green in colour.
8. Manmath /Kamdev is a god of fertility. He helps meeting two souls, so his presence in the wedding is necessary.
9. The bride worships Manmath before going to vivah mandap or before leaving fathers home.²³
10. According to story, Shiv killed Manmath. His wife Rati lamented and requested Parvati to give him life. Parvati requested Shiva; who agreed but said that he will be alive but will remain incorporeal. He will remain in the minds of people. Hence, his name is Atanu or Anang. Same Manmath was awakened in Girijas mind before marriage so she may have started imagining Virupaksha in the form of Manmath.

Since the picture is in poor condition, there is definitely room for doubt; but, from the above observation, it can be said that the figure in green colour is male and Manmath. The woman in front wearing ikkat saree is Parvati in the form of Pampa. Since her marriage is to be consummated with Virupaksha he should be pictured as Manmatha appearing to her, so this painting is not 'Parvati's toilet' but 'Girija performing Manmatha pooja'.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The narrative panel 'Girija Kalyanam' in Natya mandapam of Lepakshi temple is previously identified as 'Parvati's toilet'; but the name 'Girija engrossed in Manmatha worship' seems more suitable for this panel.

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