Identification of Sannyasis in Paintings of Lepakshi Temple

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ABSTRACT

Lepakshi is a small town situated in Hindupur taluka of Anantpur district, Andhra Pradesh. It is famous for Veerbhadra temple built during Vijaynagar empire era having monumental temple architecture. The walls and ceilings of the temple were extensively decorated with Vijaynagar style. Now some of the paintings are deteriorated.

One of the mural paintings in Mahamandapa depicts Dakshinamoorti Shiv, one of the forms of Shiv. There are two sadhus in the same mural whose sects are unidentified yet. In this paper I have tried to prove that these sadhus are Dandi sannyasis of Dashnami shaiva sampradaya.

Keywords- Lepakshi, Murals, Dakshinamoorti Shiv, Dashnami Sampradaya, Dandi Sannyasi.

I. HISTORY OF LEPAKSHI

Vijaynagar Empire was the glorious empire in south India. In this period many huge temples were built in south India. Veerbhadra temple, Lepakshi is one of the main temples restored by Veerupanna the nayaka. He was in Tuluv king Achyutraya’s court. Lepakshi is a small village in Hindupur taluq of Anantpur district. Veerbhada is the god of traders so the temple was built in this area which was trade root in medieval India. The murals in this temple are world famous and are the only surviving paintings of the empire as murals in Virupaksh temple Hampi belong to 19th century and the paintings found in some other places are not in good condition and beyond recognition. Small shrines of Veerbhada, Bhadrakali and Papnasheshwar were present since ancient times. Veerupanna nayak restored and expanded the temple in Vijaynagar architecture style.

II. TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

There are three enclosure walls- inner, middle and outer prakara. The inner prakara has entrance on the north. Vijaynagar style gopur with some steps are near the north entrance. Papnasheshwar, Veerbhada 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 shrine are other parts of the temple premises. The hanging pillar, huge Nagling and Nandi are the attractions for the viewers but the most important part of the temple is the murals.

The art of painting was in a glory during Vijaynagar period as mentioned by foreign travellers in their accounts. 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.

Paintings in the veranda of the mahamandap depicting different aspects of shiv

It is the longest mural in the mahamandap (22.82 m). It covers northern bay of the veranda. Fourteen aspects of shiv are painted in this panel. Each painting shows social and economic condition through various figures decorated with clothes having beautiful designs and heavy jewellery. The attendants, consorts, worshippers, some other deities are shown along with Shiv. Some paintings are destroyed due to fungus and unable to restore to make them identifiable.

Dakshinamoorti

In every Vijaynagar style painting, the main deity occupies the centre of the painting. Here Shiv is
sitting on the mount kailas (shown as pile of rocks). He is sitting under the tree. His jata showing face of Ganga and moon on the left side. He has four hands. He is holding snake in the left upper hand and fire in right upper hand. Lower left hand in on the bent knee. Lower right hand is in chin mudra. There are 8 rushis altogether on both sides of him. On the right-side Narada with veena has raised hand. He may be singing. The rushi next to him is looking back and the third rushi too appears to be reciting something. They are wearing kulavi cap. Third rushi is having jata. He is in anjali mudra. There is a sadhu standing next to him. It is the last figure on the right side. The sect of this sadhu is not identified yet.

Vijaynagar style paintings are not true frescos. The main figure of the painting is always in the centre. Other figures are slightly bent, never overlapped. Fresh and bright colours are used for the painting with black colour for the border. These salient features are seen in this painting too.

Sadhu on left side
1. Kamandalu (Water pot) in right hand
2. Tripundra on forehead
3. Koupin
4. Dand in left hand
5. Ash bands
6. Jata
As they are having tripundra on the forehead and are worshipping shiv they are shaiva sadhus. **Shaiv sadhus**

Shaiv Siddhant, Kashmiri shaiv, Lingayat (Veerashaiv), Dashnami, Nath sampradaya and some folk sects are sub sects of Shaivism. Aghori, kapalik etc are some sects of shaiva sadhus.

III. *TYPES OF SHAIV SANNYASIS*

**Dashnami, Naga, Paramhansa, Brahmachari**

Brahmacharya is one of the four ashrams according to Dharmsastra. One has to surrender staff (danda) while leaving Gurukul (teacher’s home). Brahmacharis are not Dandies as described in dharmsashastra.

According to Manusmriti, the one who accepts sannyasa is Dandi. Patanjali says, ”Just as one on seeing smoke issuing from a particular place infers that there is fire, on seeing staff infers as ascetic.” The brahman sannyasi using suffix Ashram, Bharti, Tirth and Sarswati are dandi sannyasi.

Shankaracharya has unified all sannyasis under Dashanami sampradaya.

**Dashanami sampradaya**

The three largest sampradaya- Ramanandi of Vaishnav sect and Dashnami and Nath of shaiv sect. Shankaracharya, the great adwait philosopher has unified ten branches of ascetics under Dashnami
Dand- Ekdandi or dandi sannyasi uses danda representing the union of the soul and mind. Sometimes danda is wrapped with saffron cloth with axe head attached to one end. Sometimes he wears sacred thread. He wanders and begs but not more than seven houses.

Dandi and Paramhansa sanyasi bow only to the sannyas of higher grade. They do not bow even to the deity. Brahman sannyasi using Bharti, Sarswati Teerth and Ashram as suffix have to carry staff (danda).

**Attributes of Dashanami sanyasi**

- Wear orange, ochre or saffron coloured cloth
- Hair may be shaven, short, long, dreadlock. They do not wear top knot or choti.
- Wear Tripundra (three horizontal lines) on forehead.
- Fire tong, blanket, leopard or tiger skin, kamandalu, small jholi. Sacred thread is concealed below dress.

**Dakshinamoorti and Dashanami sampradaya**

Dakshinamoorti strotam is composed by Shankaracharya. It is a hymn expounding vedas composed in Shardulvikridita. A hymn that explains the metaphysics of the universe from the perspective of Adwait Vedanta. Dakshinamoorti shiv is the master of yoga, vidya etc. Philosophical men meditate on this form. There is a story that shiva assumed this form to preach Adwaita Vedanta so Shankaracharya composed this hymn. There are shaiavite monks near the idol.

Dakshinamoorti Upanishad is Upanishad of krishna yajurveda itself. Shriingeri peeth follows Yajurweda. In this Upanishad, Markandeya muni says that one worships this form of shiva to attain Brahmadayan, the supreme knowledge.

The idol in this picture is in Dnyan mudra. Dnyanmoorti teaches philosophy.

This lends credence to the argument that the sadhus shown in the picture are Dashanami sannyasis.

Amongst the sannyasis of Dashanami sampradaya, the description dandi sanyasi matches with that of description of sannyas in the picture.

**They are not**

- Naga sannyasi because they are not naked and have not applied ash to the whole body.
- Paramhans because Paramhansa sanyasi don’t wander alone.
- Bahudak or Kuchidak as they are holding single danda.
- Bahudak or Kuchidak as they are holding single danda.
- Nath sampradaya sannyasi because they are not wearing black wool, earrings, horn as pendant, waist band.
- Lingayat or Veershaiv because they are not wearing shivling as pendant and earrings.
- They are not in Anjali mudra or bowing to the deity because Dashanami sannyasi can bow only to the sannyas of higher grade.

The sannyasi have not tied knot on the head.

Shankaracharya has composed Dakshinamoorti strotam to praise Dakshinamoorti form of Shiv. He has advised Dashanami sannyasi to pray to this form of shiv. So, it can be concluded that the sadhus in this picture are Dashanami dandi shaiv sannyasi.
V. CONCLUSION

Veerabhadra temple in Lepakshi was built in Vijayanagar Empire era by Veerupanna nayak in the court of Tuluv king Achyutraya. Lepakshi is situated in Hindupur taluq of Anantpur district in Andhra Pradesh. In the mahamandap of Veerabhadra temple there is the largest mural panel of fourteen incarnations of Shiv. In the mural, the third incarnation Dakshinamoorti shiv is depicted which contains picture of two sadhus. They are Dashanami Dandi shaiv sannyasis. They are Dandi Dashanami shaiv sannyasis because they are wearing tripundra on forehead, koupin, leopard skin on shoulder, kamandalu, ash bands and danda i.e. staff. They are not in Anjali mudra and they are worshipping Dakshinamoorti form of shiv.

It can be concluded that the sadhus in Dakshinamoorti mural in mahamandap of Veerabhadra temple, Lepakshi are shaiv sannyasis of dandi Dashnami sampradaya.

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