

Identification of Sannyasis in Paintings of Lepakshi Temple

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ABSTRACT

Lepakshi is a small town¹ 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 Veerupanna² nayaka. He was in Tuluv king Achyutraya's court³. Lepakshi is a small village in Hindupur taluq of Anantpur district. Veerbhadra 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 recognition⁴. Small shrines of Veerbhadra, Bhadrakali and Papnasheshwar were present since ancient times. Veerupanna nayak restored and expanded the temple in Vijaynagar architecture style.

II. TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE⁵

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, 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 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.

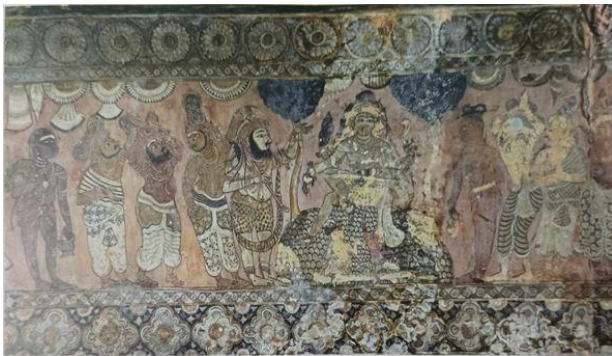
Paintings in the verandha of the mahamandap depicting different aspects of shiv

It is the longest mural in the mahamandap (22.82 m) ⁶. It covers northern bay of the verandha. 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 right side

Description of attributes

1. Tripundra on forehead
2. Loin cloth
3. Kamandalu (Water pot)
4. Holding leopard skin on left shoulder with hand

5. 11 ash bands on the body



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 shaiv sadhus.

Shaiv sadhus

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

III. TYPES OF SHAIV SANNYASIS⁷

Dashnami, Naga, Paramhansa, Brahmachari

Brahmacharya is one of the four ashrams according to Dharmshastra. One has to surrender staff (danda) while leaving Gurukul (teacher's home). Brahmacharis are not Dandies as described in dharmashastra.⁸

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 sampradaya⁹

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

sampradaya. Dashanamis are associated with Adwait philosophy.

One of the ten names is used as suffix to the original name.

Ten names -Giri, Puri, Tirth, Aranya, Ashram, Sagar, Parwat, Teerth¹⁰, Sarswati, Wan
He has established four peethas on the four parts of India¹¹

Gujrat -Dwarka

Uttaranchal -Jyotirmath /Joshimath Badrinath

Karnatak -Shringeri

Orissa -Jagannathpuri

Kanchipuram from Tamilnadu is also considered as one of the peethas.

Amongst them, Sringeri peetha was the part of Vijaynagar Empire. Vidyaranya swami of Sringeri had helped Harihar and Bukka¹², the founders of Vijaynagar for establishing the empire. Both of them have given generous grants to the peetham. Sringeri follows Yajurweda and their motto is 'Aham Brahmasmi'. Unlike ascetics of other traditions, Dashanami calls themselves as sannyasi. They use suffixes as Ashram, Puri, Sarswati.¹³

There are three subdivisions of Dashanami sannyasis¹⁴-

Dandi, Paramhans and Naga.

Sannyasis are graded according to their spiritual progress¹⁵- Kutichak, Bahudak, Hans, Paramhans.

Kutichak -They live in forest in hut. They do not beg and do not travel.

Bahudak -They are wandering ascetics. They do not stay at one place for more than 3 days.

Hans -They are versed in vedant philosophy. They remain in one place and practise yoga.

Paramhans -they have achieved the highest stage of spiritual evolution. Paramhans becomes the perfect master of philosophical knowledge.

Kutichak and Bahudak are tridandis following Ramanuj Vaishnav sect. Hans and Paramhansa are Dandi or Ekdandi belonging to Shaiv sect.

IV. TYPES OF SANNYASIS IN DASHANAMI SAMPRADAYA

Dandi, Paramhansa, Naga

Naga sannyasi- They are Astradhari (having weapons). They are naked and apply ash (Bhasma) to whole body. They don't use Danda.

Paramhansa -He represents the highest stage of spiritual evolution. He has merged himself to supreme soul. He is the highest religious teacher of the mankind. He does not wander but stays at one place. If he wants to go from one place to another, he is always accompanied by disciples. He has attained such high spiritual merit that it does not matter whether he follows Shaiv or Vaishnav sect¹⁶. He does not use Danda most of the times. He is Shastradhari (religious knowledge) sannyasi. He is Karpatri and Udarpatri.

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

Attributes of Dashanami sannyasis¹⁷

-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 sampradaya¹⁸

Dakshinamoorti stotram 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 shaivite monks near the idol.

Dakshinamoorti Upanishad is Upanishad of krishna yajurveda itself. Sringeri peeth follows Yajurweda. In this Upanishad, Markandeya muni says that one worships this form of shiva to attain Brahmadyan, 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 sannyasis 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 sanyasis don't wander alone.

-Bahudak or Kuchidak as they are holding single danda.

-Nath sampradaya sannyasis 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 sannyasis can bow only to the sannyasis of higher grade.

The sannyasis have not tied knot on the head.

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



Shiv Parvati playing dice game. (Pic. Surendra Kumar)

V. CONCLUSION

Veerabhadra temple in Lepakshi was built in Vijaynagar Empire era by Veerupanna nayak in the court of Tuluva king Achyutraya. Lepakshi is situated in Hindupur taluq of Anantpur district in Andhra Pradesh. In the mahamandap of Veerbhadra 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 Veerbhadra temple, Lepakshi are shaiv sannyasis of dandi Dashanami sampradaya.

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