

# THE RAJA RAJESHWARA TEMPLE: A TEMPLE OF EXCELLENCE

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**Abstract:** *The Raja Rajeshwara temple is situated at Vemulawada, Rajanna Siricilla district of Telangana state. Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy Devasthanam – Abode of Lord Shiva is one of the ancient and famous Shivite temples. The shrine deserves a special mention in terms of its architectural grandeur and spiritual sanctity and is one of the famous Shivite Temples in Telangana State. Existence of this shrine is lost in the mists of antiquity and even Puranas mention the existence of the Deity. The presiding Deity – Lord Raja Rajeshwara in the form of “Neela Lohitha Siva Lingam is known for his boundless benevolence in fulfilling the wishes of the devotees.*

**Key Words:** *Dakshina Kasi, Vemulawada Rajanna, Dharmagundam, Shivalingam*

## **Sthalapuranam:**

Bhavishyothara Purana mentions that the Sun-God [Surya Bhagavan] recovered from disability by praying at the shrine here and so this shrine is termed “Bhaskara Kshethram”. And, Indra- the King of Astadikpalaka by devoutly worshipping Lord Sri Raja Rajeshwara-the presiding deity of the shrine, purified himself from Brahmahatya Dosham.

## **1. Introduction:**

*Everything is designed. Few things are designed well. - Brian Reed*

The presiding deity of the temple is Sri Raja Rajeswara Swamy who is locally popular as Rajanna who is adorned on both the sides by the idol of Sri Raja Rajeswari Devi on the right side and to the left is the idol of Sri Laxmi Sahitha Siddi Vinayaka. The Vemulawada temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and the main deity is called Raja Rajeshwara who resides here with his consort Raja Rajeshwari. The legend says that this temple was built by Raja Narendra, who recovered the Shivalinga from the temple tank, Dharmagundam while meditating for Lord Shiva. King Raja Narendra, the great grandson of Arjuna, installed the Shivalinga and did penance for Shiva. Lord Shiva appeared before him and relieved him from Brahmahatya dosha (the curse of killing sage's son)

From the inscriptions, it is known that Vemulawada Chalukyas ruled this region by making this place as the capital city of their kingdom during 750 A.D. and 930 A.D. This temple received huge contributions from Chalukyas and other major dynasties.

The temple is famous for ‘kodemokku’, it is believed that pradakshinam around the temple with kode (young ox) will be blessed with good fortune. Kala sarpa dosha also performed in this temple. It is believed that Lord Shiva blesses devotees who sleep for a night in the temple.

## **2. History:**

The Vemulawada Chalukyan dynasty was a branch of the Chalukyas of Badami ruled Telangan region as Rashtrakuta Vassals. One peculiarity with this family is that it traced its descent from the Sun, while many other Chalukya families considered themselves as of lunar descent. Vemulawada Chalukyas history is defined by 3 inscriptions, Kollpara copper plates of Arikesari I, Vemulawada rock inscription of Arikesari II and the Parbhan copper plates of Arikesari III. According to the kollipara inscription of Arikesari-I Satyasraya Ranavikrama was the founder of vemulawada chalukya dynasty. Vinayaditya Yuddhamalla was the real founder and first celebrated king of Vemulawada Chalukya dynasty.

Tradition associates this place with famous Telugu poet Bhima Kavi, but there is more definite proof of the famous Kannada poet Pampa having lived here as the Court Poet of Arikesari II and dedicated his royal patron his famous work *Bharata* or *Vikramarjuna Vijaya*. Vemulawada is referred to in the inscriptions as Lembu-lavataka and Lembulawada. It was the capital of a dynasty of Chalukyas. The Chalukyas of Vemulawada or Lemulawada ruled a considerable area as the feudatories of the Rashtrakutas.

An epigraph engraved on the four faces of rectangular stone pillar standing to the left of the sanctum of the Bhimeshwara (old Baddageshwara) temple in Vemulawada is of the King Arikesari II, who ruled from 930 A.D to 955 A.D. The inscription cites no specific date. It records that Peddana, the tentapala of King Arikesari II, built a temple of the God Aditya (the Sun). At the request of Peddana the king made a gift land. Reference is made to the Sthanadhipathis of the four temples of Rajeshwara, Adityagrah, Baddageshwara and Nagareshwara. Another inscription refers to the reign of the Kalyani Chalukyan King, Vikramaditya IV. It is dated 1083 A.D. and registers a gift of land by the king's feudatory Mahamandaleshwara erected by him in his capital Lembulavade. Two inscriptions dated 1106 A.D. and 1108 A.D. respectively record gifts to the God Harikeshwara.

### 3. The Temples:

'Vemudu' is a Prakrit word meaning 'Deity' and 'Vemulawada' means 'Place of Deities', though this is not the name by which the place is known in early records. The place has extensive remains of temples and sculptures. The principal temples in Vemulawada are the following:

1. Raja Rajeshwara Temple
2. Nagareshwara Temple
3. Sitala Temple
4. Bhimeshwara Temple
5. Venugopalam Temple
6. Kedareshwara Temple
7. Mahalakshmi Temple
8. Kanaka Durga Temple
9. Nrsimhaswamy Temple

Raja Rajeshwara Temple is now by far the most popular of all the temples of the place which is hence known as Raja Rajeshwara Kshetram. There is a sthalapurana for the temple, which is known as 'Vemulawada Rajeshwara Mahatmyam'. An inscription in the temple, to which reference has been made above, states that Mahamandaleshwara Rajaditya who was governing the areas of Kosavala – one and a quarter lakh and Chabbijoyi – Seventy – one thousand from his capital Lembulawade and won victories over the Cholas installed Rajadityesvaradeva and built a huge temple for it. Rajaditya's over lord was Tribhuvanamalla and the date of the inscription is 1083 A.D. But the temple as it exists today contains several structural and sculptural additions of later times. Reference here is made to some important parts and features of the temple.

To the north of the temple there is a large tank which is fed through a channel from rivulet of the village called Mallaram, about four miles off Vemulawada. On the tank-bund there are some loose sculptures. A special portion of the tank is called 'Dharmagundam'. It is said:

'Srisaile darsanananmuktih kasyantu maranad dhruvam  
Anyatra tapasa ksetre dharmakundasya namatah'

One gets liberation by the Darshan of Srisailam, and by giving up one's body at Kasi. At other places one gets liberation only by penance, but the mere name of Dharmakunda will confer liberation. Pilgrims have divine bath in the holy tank before proceeding for darshan and these holy waters are believed to have medicinal properties. There are many Buddhist Jain and Hindu deity sculptures in the precincts of the Raja Rajeshwara temple. In the Bala Tripura sundari temple there is an image of Devi who has four hands holding in them bow, arrows, noose and ankusa and with lion as the vahana. In the Ananta Padmanabha Swami shrine there is an image of Vishnu and Sayanamurti. Among the images in the Raja Rajeshwara temple, the noteworthy ones are those of Chandikeshwari, Panchanana Shiva, Annapurna, Saptamatrukas, Varahi and Lakshmi Maha Ganapati. The garbhagraha of the temple has a fine dooeframe of the Kalyani Chalukyan type.

There is an image of Sitala Devi in the courtyard of Sitala or Baddi Pochamma temple. She has four hands having in them trisula, broomstick, agnikundam and damaru. The figure of a child is carved standing by her side. The image in the garbhagruha of Sitala is a simple one, but with two hands holding in them khadga and drinking bowl. The Bhimeshwara temple has carving on the adhishtana, pillars and has for the garbhagruha a fine doorframe. The antarala of the temple contains a good sculpture of Mahisasuramardani. The Raja Rajeshwara, Bhimaeshwara and Kedareshwara temples at Vemulawada are the more important ones for art-historians

#### 4. Conclusion:

The Raja Rajeshwara is an undoubtedly a temple of archaeological excellence. The various kingdoms like Chalukyas of Vemulawda, Rashtrakutas have contributed huge amounts of money and gave number of grants. The temple complex also houses Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple, Seetha Rama Temple, Anjaneya Temple, Kasi Visweswara Temple, Dakshina Murthy Temple, Subramanya Temple, Bala Tripura Sundari Devi Temple, Someshwara Temple, Uma Maheshwara Temple, Mahisasura Mardhani Temple, Kotilingalu and Kala Bhairava Swamy Temple. It houses several temples dedicated to other deities including Lord Rama, brother Lakshmana, Goddess Lakshmi, Lord Ganapathy, Lord Padmanabha Swamy and Lord Bhimeshwara.

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