

## Fashion of Vijayanagara Kingdom with reference to Lepakshi Murals

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**Abstract:** *The Lepakshi murals are the best at preservation and quality in execution in South India. These paintings are highly decorative in quality executed in early 16<sup>th</sup> century in the reign of Vijayanagara king Atchyutha Devaraya by his minister Virupanna for his great devotion towards their tutelary God Virabhadhra. All the panels are enriched by textile designs as a boarder painting. The contemporary costumes and jewelry were meticulously rendered as part of the paintings which unfolds how importance for jewel dresses and fashion was given priority in the royal patronage as well as the social strata of the people of Vijayanagara dynasty. The Choli must be made of diaphanous material which was intentionally selected to emphasis on the beauty of woman. The “pallu” (end piece of sari) of the 6 yards lengthy sari is the remarkable signature of the painting. In overview this article deals with material culture of the Vijayanagara society with reference to fashion and textile designs form the Lepakshi Murals.*

**Key Words:** *Lepakshi - Fashion - Tantuvayins - Diaphanous - Textile – Sari – Kulavi – Kalamkari.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Art is a mode of documentation of any civilization or a culture which is evident from the prehistoric ages. In the later ages, art was linked with religious cult which is supposed to propagate the cult of religion within the parameters of strict iconographic rules. Gradually painters of later times deviated from the canons of Hindu strict iconography rules by taking much freedom at the time of execution. This is noticed in the best preserved murals on ceiling of at Virabhadra swamy temple at Lepakshi of Hindupur Taluq of Ananathpuram district of Andhra Pradesh in early Sixteenth Century. The work was executed by Virupanna Naik, the subordinate of King Achyutharaya during 1530 A.D to 1542 A.D<sup>1</sup>. The Vijayanagara rulers has given much freedom to painters in their creative task without intervention. In result, artist had begun to adopt his immediate surroundings in the process of his task. The contemporary life style has begun to reflect in the murals. It is evident from Ajanta murals to Vijayanagara murals.

Fashion means “a manner of doing something”, it may be passionate to an European but it is habitual, integral part of material culture of Indian life from birth to death in various contexts of life. It is general to be appearing beautiful and attractive has been a natural desire for both men and women. Women perhaps have this desire a little more than men. Basis for this is unlimited variety in the range of costumes, hair styles and ornaments, these fashions are subjected to change time to time and cyclic. The costumes not only serves the purpose of covering the body but enhances the beauty and elegance of the person. Throughout the history of the civilization it was manifested to attempt to celebrate, glorify the feminine beauty in all possible means. Poets, dramatists, painters and sculptors had shown utmost attention in highlighting the charm of the women and their dress, coiffure and personal ornaments. The repertoire from visual narratives of Lepakshi provide substantial information on fashion, master skills in weaving and craft work with high degree of creativity of the late medieval India.

The subject matter of Lepakshi murals is religious. As Ajanta paintings intertwined with Buddhism, the Lepakshi murals at South has remained as the vehicle for the Hindu religion. The central theme runs with incarnations of Siva and Vishnu from the Hindu Mythology. Technique of these paintings is “fresco – Secco<sup>2</sup>”.

All the panels of Lepakshi murals are enriched by marvelous textile designs. The contemporary costumes and jewellery were meticulously rendered. This manifests how jewellery, dresses and fashion were given priority in the royal patronage as well as the contemporary life of the people of Vijayanagara society. The artists of Lepakshi had scrupulously documented the socio- economic and political strata of the Vijayanagara dynasty in their creative pursuit.

### 2. Fashion and Textile with reference to murals :

By reading the visual literature of Lepakshi murals, one can understand that it is rather difficult to identify the tactile quality and intricate designs on the cloth are in sculptures, but Lepakshi painter has provided us with

elaborative design of textile in vogue in that contemporary times. Lepakshi painter has cleverly utilized the advantage of painting medium such as multicolor planes, minute details and textures which are not possible in sculpture. The murals of Lepakshi, we find variety of fabric, textile designs and colours worn by male and females. Some of them were richly embroidered with gold and silver flowers. Pictorial language of Lepakshi murals regarding attires, clothes of the contemporary to 16<sup>th</sup> century coincides with the observations of western visitors and ambassadors to the court of Vijayanagara dynasty. Barbosa, Paes, Nuniz had documented the social life of Vijayanagara dynasty in all aspects. According to Barbosa “the women of Vijayanagara are very beautiful and bold. Further they wear the white garment of thin and fine quality or colorful silk cloth up to 6 yards to enhance their beauty. In the side of the nostrils, they make a small hole though they put fine gold wire with a pearl, sapphire, or ruby. Their ears are bored well and in them they wear ear rings set with many jewels and very fine coral beads, bracelets of gold and precious stones and god quality coral beads are fitted to their armllets. The most part of the Vijayanagara people were very wealthy. The beauty of the women confirmed by foreign travelers, Paes, Abdur Razaq, Barbosa.

The Brahmin women were most beautiful in the Vijayanagara society. The dress of Vijayanagara women was elucidated by Barbosa. They have rich and fine clothes. They wore high caps, embedded with pearls. Besides this many strings of pearls were adorned on the lower part of the arms, many bracelets till the half of the upper arm. On waist many girdles of may gold and precious stones which girdle hang in order of one below one another till the half of the thigh. The dress of the women at court has mentioned by several writers, mentioned three principle garments constituting a lady dress. petty coat of saffron colour, thin muslin mantle (*paita*) and they liked bodice (*ravika*) to be a close fitting known as modern fashion terminology skin fit as possible, hold up my idea of diaphanous cloth worn by the women in the paintings of Girijakalyanam. The queens and numerous women of zenanan dressed themselves as well as courtesans. But common women wore only a long sari with bodice. The sari of the women of cultivating class had on them squares and other design printed in bright colours. Similarly Boya tribe women had simple garments (Kiratarjuniya episode) it has finest texture. People has on the whole, a partiality for colored garments. The common folk have to satisfy with cotton cloth only. Their Variety indicates a range of techniques and places of manufacture. The principal places of production were along the coromandel coast of the Bay of Bengal, partly under the Vijayanagara control during the sixteenth century and also in Gujarat which was another famous, long established centre of textile production<sup>3</sup>. The royal and rich women loved to dress themselves in silk fabrics with borders of gold lace. They were great connoisseurs of dress and paid particular attention to the texture of the cloth. In Lepakshi murals we hardly find the common women but almost rich and court people as the murals were depicted religious theme rather than the social events.

In the mural painting “Viranna and Virupanna and their retinue” the clothing of royal court was exactly recorded. For the depiction of maiden of Parvathi, Lepakshi artist took the court women as inspiration. It is also an indirect documentation of contemporary life style. Through paintings we can able to read ornamentation which was common to both male and female. They were much fond of Necklaces, anklets, armllets. Jeweled belts and ear rings might be included in the same class. Pearl is predominant element in their jewellery for both sexes. Especially men attached to great value to a particular kind of anklet known as Gandapendera, not much known in the account of material of which it was made. Its roots can be traced back from the time Amaravati via Chalukya, Pallava and Chola style. All women are portrayed in youthful appearance are the typical character of the Lepakshi paintings. Most of the sari fabrics appear to be in white with stripes or cheques as an ornamentation or a band of blossoms along the borders. Some of



Fig 1



Fig.2

the material is very fine, displaying the outlines of the legs. Still today chequers and stripes are a choice ornamentation of saris and other textiles in South India.

The painting (fig.2) “*Maids in attendance on Parvathi*”, is very informative on the present topic. The beautiful form of women have been infused with life by palpitating breasts and thin waist were elegantly shown in the sari draping. The “pallu” (end piece of saree) of the 6 yards lengthy sari goes round the body twice for good covering. It was the remarkable fashion trend of the times of Medieval India at south. In the most cases, women appear as they does not wear the choli. Even Brigitte Khan Majlis brought forth the same assumption. But when we carefully examine, the Choli must be made of diaphanous material was intentionally chosen along with loose flower decoration on the blouse and dress is remarkable feature.

The first woman in the extreme right in the painting appears in the full sleeve blouse of transparent cloth, embellished by the lose flower motifs. It appeared as a recurrent element on which the colour of blouse is akin to the skin tone of the woman. We may notice the second female figure wears a kind of full sleeves blouse in torques blue is strengthens my idea of use of diaphanous material in the Vijayanagara society. The skin tightened blouse having short “u” neck and long sleeve up to wrists, adorned with pearls and jewellery against the red ochre complexion of faces, in the rest of the women, we may notice the suggestive lines at the neck and wrists, it give the feeling of skin tight garment having skin tone of a particular woman. The all sari deigns of nine participants along with Parvathi are very different, no similarity and repetition can be found. Artist meticulously tendered the designs with the consciousness of fashion. The most important innovation in the sixteenth century fashion is high necked and full sleeved close fitting. It has no collar and button downed in the front. This item of jacket either waits length or full length seems to have been popular mostly in the courts. The Choli must be skin tight and made of diaphanous material was intentionally selected to emphasis the beauty of woman can be witnessed in the painting “*Maids in attendance on Parvathi*”. In some cases the blouse colour was matched with the complexion of the Parvathi’s attendants to unfold the seductiveness and glamour to the visual narrative. A woman in green tight blouse is the best example and supports the above said.

A thin muslin bodice worked upon with various patterns of gold lace is noticed in a painting. There was not much of a difference between queens and ordinary women in their mode of dress. But, there was certainly great difference in the material of their costumes. Even the palace maids wore rich garments. In 1520-22 A.D, Paes who visited the Vijayanagara court as the traveler has noticed and cited that the queens wore rich and fine silk clothes<sup>4</sup>. These women came everyday mostly richly attired, taking pleasure in showing themselves in such things and in making a display what they possessed. The diaphanous nature of the cloth is evident in paintings which was also been captured from sculpture of the Lepakshi by a thin line at the arms and on waists. The graceful elegance of the sari and multiple folds are well rendered by the sculptor as well as painter. In Kiratarjuniya story, female hunters were depicted with short skirt with garland of leaves and barks and their brasseries are decorated in floral designs to resonance the articulations of a tribe.

In some cases, the pallu passes through left arm while covering breasts, rests ultimately on the right. In some cases it passes through right shoulder goes behind back of woman and rests on left shoulder. The upper part of the body seems covered with elaborated jewellery comprising pearls. The fan shaped fringes of the under garments and crescent shaped tilaka on the forehead of the woman tell the fashion followed by youth of south Indian tradition.

This unfolds the fashion trends followed by the genre of the medieval India at south. All the design are having semblance of cotton woven but also silk (as per tactile quality) with intricate designs woven on the loom. Almost the white cloth was used with different patterns. In some occasions, we find coloured cloth. The technique of the dyeing was already adopted for that time. This might happened due to the Persian influence. Brigitte Khan Majlis, Cologne; has done a wonderful study of “the Fashion and Textile Design in the Murals of Lepakshi”. She said, “The costumes worn by the figures in the paintings demonstrate that distinct costume pieces and headgear were worn according to gender and status.” She was overwhelmed by the abundantly decorated textiles gracing the figures of the narrative panels. It will be impressive by their display a wealth of garments, jewelry and accessories of fashion. She remarks that the textile patterns in the pictures seem to be sufficiently detailed to take them as examples of real



Fig.3

textiles; and connect them with possible textile techniques in practical. The textiles shows a wide spectrum of patterns. Some of them bear a close similarity to extant cotton textiles, produced along the Coromandel Coast for export to Indonesia in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century”. Further, while researching into the textile fashion designs depicted in the Lepakshi paintings<sup>5</sup>. The pleating hair is seen in the figure of “Parvathi at Toilet”, but it does not appear as the habit in the whole series of paintings. A gathered hair into a knot was a habit of ladies is recurrent feature of these paintings. Instead of garlands, loose flowers on the knots but also seen on the upper garments.

“Bhaurnya” (nose ornament was not all shown . large size studs were adorned as the ear lobe of the women. Pearls strings were often seen on the parting the hair which starts from forehead is favorite ornament of this period. This feature is commonly appearing in Indian Art from the times of Amaravati Sculpture of 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D. It is also noticed for both male and female the pearl garlands are highly adorned.

The women of the times of Vijayanagara dynasty can be classified into many categories; queens , wives of nobles, flywhisk bearers, attendants, common women, dancing girls , musicians, maids, courtesans etc. According to Linschoten who observed the dress of a Brahmin women in 1583 A.D. was mentioned the “ women when go forth but cloth about their bodies; which covers the hands and hangeth down up to their knees; rest of the body is naked. In these observations they seem to refer to the sari usually worn by the woman of the period. According to Barbosa that woman wear cloth of very fine cotton or silk of variety of colors which may about six yards long is the remarkable feature of Lepakshi woman<sup>6</sup>.

. The common women of the times wore sarees in more or less the same manner as their richer and more fortunate sisters. In the sculptures sometimes, creases and the shawl-like projection of their saris are seen. They could not afford to imitate the style of the royalty and nobility. The Lepakshi paintings portray faithfully the dress of the common women. The pallu of the sari is taken twice round the body for good covering. In some cases, the end piece of the saree partially covers the breasts ,passes from above the left arm and rests ultimately on the right shoulder. In other cases , the end of the sari passes over the right shoulder , goes behind the back of the women . the arrangement of the long end of the saris is different from that of others . Different types of saris are represented in the paintings .in most cases one end of the saris is mode to cover partly the bosom of the lady. The saris were decorated with square designs floral patterns , horizontal and wavy line and dotted motifs plain saris are also noticed. The borders of saris have a variety of designs commercial and floral patterns , dominate border decorations in some cases the saris are worn in the manner of dhotis as worn by men .



Fig.4

### 3. Male attire:

Men seems without garments to cover the body from above the waist. Men wear turban woven with crest jewels. The chieftains and princes wear a long conical caps of the Persian influence. The Viranna and Virupanna and their retinue wearing the long clothes which we may see in the Deccan miniature. The paintings reveal quite accurately how the pleated part of dhoti was pulled between the legs and tucked in at the back. The dhotis are usually depicted in plain white with stripes, tiny dots or of a chequered material. A second more ornate hip cloth was worn atop of the dhoti, encircling the hips at least twice, with the ends flowing gracefully in the air or one part tucked in under one. This was the dress given to the Kings and noble persons . a long Uttariya an upper garment draped across the chest or around the shoulder. The same costume is continued in the case of Kings and Gods. Whereas noble personalities and ministers and chiefs were depicted in long coat extended up to ankles with full sleeves and embroidered collars. They also wear a long piece of cloth known as Uttariya wrapped around the waist, keeping one end hanging either on front or on the side of



Fig.5

the hip. Their status has been distinguished with variety of cloth the different caps.

**Head Dress:** Out of the all the most remarkable feature is the “kulavi” is a Kannada term. These caps are known as “*Kulayi*” in Kannada. Such kind of caps were worn by Kings and chiefs, and Royal people. Though they look similar in shape they differ in ornamentation and material used. Thus kulavi was changed in terms of shape and design and in decoration based on the rank of the court. As per the study of art of the history, the kulavi is hailed from the Pallava kingdom. The same can be seen as kulayi shaped head gear at the top of the idol of Lord Venkateswara at Tirupathi. We find different types of *kulavis* such as round caps, round with point projection, round cap with blunt projection, high cap with round top, round cap with straight sides, common men is depicted as wearing the turban over their head. The long upper garment was used as turban. Some portion of cloth left for the hanging at back and remaining portion was wrapped circularly. From the narrative painting “Kiratarjuniyam” narrators with their attendants were shown by wearing the bunch of leaves as the head dress. Usually hunters and tribe were shown in this manner. The goddesses shown in the paintings wore some richly adorned head dresses “kirita” or makutas. According to some scholars assumed that no head dress and kullayi was used by women but scholar like Paes (1520 A.D. -1532 A.D.) witnessed and stated that woman occasionally maid of honor wearing the conical caps on ceremonial occasions. The Barbora has confirmed this tradition in his observation prior to the Paes in 1504 A.D. it was usual to that woman had covered their heads during the festive occasions. Little knowledge of foot wear is traced from the paintings as well sculptures. According to Domingo Paes, in Vijayanagara dynasty, to be barefooted seems to have been a custom. The foreign visitor Varthema writes the Kulayi worn by famous Narasimha is of gold brocade, Two spans in length. It is also told Kulayi of venkatapathi was fully ornamented with complicated flower design with a kudu emblem in front. Whereas cap of Krishnadevaraya is plain. Nuniz and another foreign visitor states that each of such Kulayi was brocade. and so rich were these kings that when Achyutharaya took it of his head, he never put it again<sup>7</sup>. some royal personalities wearing ornamental caps on many pillars in the Mahamandapa ceiling, nobles like Viranna and Virupanna and his officials wear the same type of high conical caps but differs in design and details. Those worn by the nobles were provided with two flaps at the back, while the others do not have such provision. In another instance a low conical cap made of some material tied with a band of cloth of the bottom worn by the male attendant of royal –ladies and *dvarapala*. Similarly a conical cap having in turned loops and decorated with beaded strings.

#### 4. Decorative motifs:

The methods of “Transformation of nature into Art” and Transformation of art into design “are evident in the entire works of Lepakshi. The painters often used exquisite textile designs for figuration and background as well as the borders is the unique feature of these paintings. The paintings provides the idea of textiles in vogue during in the time of Vijayanagara dynasty. They depict a variety of fabrics, different designs and colours. Some of them were richly embroidered with gold and silver flowers. The decorative motifs were used for textiles in the Lepakshi murals were Squares formed by horizontal and vertical lines, Diamond shapes formed by cross lines, Composition of dots and flower motifs, vertical and horizontal bands, patterns of curved lines, squares filled with flower motif. Flower is common element of decoration in these paintings. The Vijayanagara painter has often adopted the patterns with flowers. Wavy line having dots in between, Intertwining creepers, Combination of flowers and dots, Diagonally arranged triangles, Vertically arranged Circle, Organic design of leaf motif, Combinations of Circles and squares and Inscribed flower in the square. Each cloth was provided with different design as borders with adaptation of different techniques of dying and colours. Here we can observe the cleverness of Vijayanagara painter as how he has converted the art into design in order to achieve the decorative quality. The impact of Jain painting s predominant in all aspects of Indian painting and Lepakshi is not an exceptional. Jains also introduced borders in their manuscript illustrations, perhaps adopted from Persian influence. It is later became stock motif in subsequent Indian wall painting tradition<sup>8</sup>. We find exquisite borders under the wall paintings of many centres in Rajasthan, especially in Kotah fort. The later tradition of Rajasthan in Kotah and Amber also broke up the horizontal panels with vertical panels of human and animal figures. This became stock fashion for displaying scarves in both miniature and wall painting<sup>9</sup>. The bright patterns of the painted and woven textiles is a unique feature of jain painting seems to have been carried further northwest to Ladakh from Gujarat. Gujarat was not only a great exporter of textiles but also supplied textiles to the southern states under the reign of Vijayanagara as part of internal trade. This tradition has spreaded to Virupaksha temple in Vijayanagara. Jain wall paintings had already been created in the Vijayanagara kingdom at Tirupattikurnam in the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D and artist and patrons were conversant with this style.

The weavers of the period are known as “*tantuwayins*” and dyers are “*vasthra –bedakas*”<sup>10</sup> ” The Weaver firmly followed the principles of designs for his creative works which were transformed by the artist simultaneously and strictly followed pattern, balance, rhythm, harmony in all paintings.

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Fig 6 (a) Decorative Border Design



Fig 6 (b) Decorative Border Design

Here we can observe the cleverness of Vijayanagara painter as how he converted the art into design in order to achieve the decorative quality. This process involves two steps such as transformation of nature in to Art and transformation of art into design. Removing details in an object cleverly without losing character and to achieve the semblance of decorative quality is a difficult task. The Indian painter has succeeded in this and left it as his legacy for their next generations.

## 5. Conclusion:

I have noticed an interesting feature in Indians than the rest in the world that is to “desire of filling empty space” with bold and designs for daily utensils. It is a sub-conscious trait of “*horrorvacui*”<sup>11</sup> means fear of empty space may be said as a psychological desire of “filling space” which we can experience in Indian life. For example an Indian woman is always passionate to wear the for the draping sari which covers whole body with strong contrast colours and bold patterns, adorned neck with jewel with different colour stones. Even the wall and floor of Indian home will be filled with lots of furniture, kitchen will be with lot crockery units, filling pooja room with the photos of different gods and saris and dresses with bold patterns of flowers etc.

Two major inventions are noticed through the paintings. They are the log scarf thrown over one arm, forming a loop near left shoulder and kulavi, the headdress worn by the Royal figures. It is witnessed since the times of Sri Krishnadevaraya’s sculpture as wearing his head cap of brocade in Tirumala temple and design of kirita of Lord Balaji is also akin to kulavi. Jewellery is also lavishly seen rather than the earliest phase of Vijayanagara costumes. Hair styles are also more diverse. Long plaits and low buns are seen occasionally but are apparently out of fashion. Head ornaments are conspicuous; pins, studs and chains are also in vogue.

Historically its importance lies in its influence on the later Muslim painting in the Deccan kingdom. The paintings provide a glimpse of the richness and color of a cosmopolitan society; its styles and fashions. The costumes of men and women, colored and embroidered sarees, jewelry, hair styles, tall headwear (Kulavi) etc. now serve as a resource for the textile and fashion designers, as they provide details of costumes etc of a distant past. The artist meticulously rendered the contemporary jewellery and dresses of different categories of people in the painting. They have influenced the surviving craft form of Kalamkari has its roots from the Lepakshi murals and later Islamic kings at Deccan. The birds, beasts and foliage depicted in its paintings and sculptures have spawned a style that decorates the block-printed Indian textiles and rugs; popularly referred to as the Lepakshi motifs. Even today, the cheques and stripes are a choice for saris as well shirts and other textiles in South India.

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