

Paintings on Manifestations of Shiva in Lepakshi Temple, Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract: This article focuses on fourteen manifestations of Shiva, painted in Ardhamandapa in Virabhadraswami temple at Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh in south India. It is the best preserved panel and a very lengthy panel of 70 feet in length. The fourteen manifestations of Shiva were meticulously rendered as per the canons of Indian paintings, Hindu iconography, and theory of Shadanga. Each manifestation has been depicted with different colour complexions to Shiva as cited in Vishnudharmottara. Though the temple flourished in twelve years, we may find different styles employed by Tamil, Nayaka, and Jain painters. The paintings in Ardhamandapa seem as if they were painted by Tamil painters, and their style also resembles the paintings in the Brihadeeswara temple of Tanjore. The murals were executed in fresco-Secco style with locally available pigments with the help of coconut water as the binding medium. Now we need the preservation of these paintings for future generations as our cultural heritage

Key Words: Lepakshi, Ardhamandapa, Shiva, Iconography, Shadanga, Aesthetics.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Lepakshi (13.81°N 77.60°E) is a small village in Hindupur in the erstwhile Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. It has attained significance from the historical, artistic, and archaeological points of view. The place is renowned as the repository of the best mural paintings, architecture, and sculptures of the Vijayanagara Kings of 16th century A.D. The Lepakshi consists of three shrines dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and 'Virabhadhra'. It was commissioned and supervision by two brothers Viranna and Virupanna between 1530 A.D -1548 A.D (Gopala Rao.A,1969).

A.H. Long Hurst discovered these mural paintings at Virabhadhra Swami Temple at Lepakshi in 1912-1932(Sivaramamurti, C, 1985). In 1935, the cousin of C. Sivaramamurti and Collector of Ananthapuram, Dewaan Bhahadur Vishwanadha Rao, was so fascinated by the charm of the Lepakshi mural and invited C. Sivaramamurti to copy them. Later, C. Sivaramamurti recognized their greatness and documented it in 1936. The technique adopted for the execution of murals is fresco-Secco (Olle Nordmark, 1947) which I am going to discuss in detail further.

Theme:

The subject matter of Lepakshi murals is religious. As Ajanta paintings intertwined with Buddhism, the Lepakshi at South has served as a vehicle for the Hindu religion. The central theme runs with incarnations of Siva and Vishnu from Hindu mythology. The Ardhamandapa is completely painted with manifestations of Shiva.

Technique

The technique of these paintings is "Fresco-Secco, which" is a somewhat superficial process that dispenses with the complex preparation of the wall with dry plaster. The finished walls are soaked with limewater and painted while wet. The colours do not penetrate into the plaster but form a surface film, like any other paint. Secco has always held an inferior position to true fresco, but it is useful for retouching the latter. The artist adopted the locally available material for the preparation of ground. They are mainly executed on the ceilings and walls, as in the case of Lepakshi mural paintings executed on the ceilings. The surface coating of plaster presumably made of local material is material of sandy clay collected from rivers and lime powder, finely grounded and mixed with honey. This information was obtained from the local reports that they have used the liquid molasses as a binding medium instead of honey. This mixture was applied to the ground surface in the thickness of 1/8 of an inch, then made smooth with a towel. A white wash of lime coat was applied to the polished surface and kept ready for sketching. It was prepared as it was cited in the Chithra sutra of

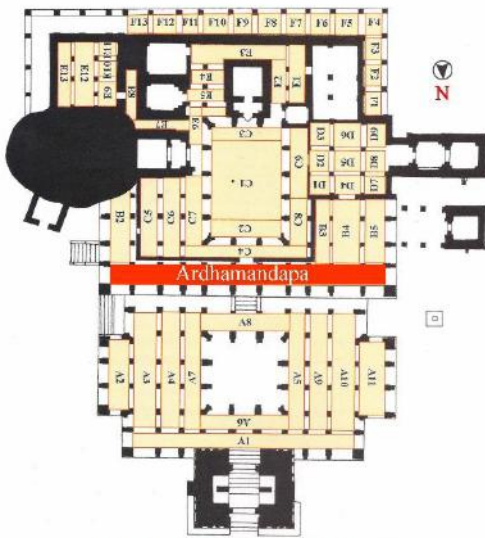


Fig. 1 Temple Ceiling Plan of Murals at Lepakshi
Image Courtesy: Areas 1: Palapachokkinglu; Khair; Rajulu and Ganga; Mikkil
with area P&L (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th)

Vishnudharmottara. Paramasivan, in his chemical examination, unfolded the details of the Lepakshi murals from which they had been executed. According to him, they are executed “*Fresco-Secco*” on granite covered with lime plaster (Secco) of thickness ranging from 2.5 mm to 12.5 mm used as lime as binding medium. The principal pigments are yellow ochre, red ochre, carbon and lime. Several experiments in chemical analysis revealed that making identification of pigment is almost impossible; this indicates that the carbonization process took place and pigment particles are completely surrounded by calcite.

Colour Scheme:

The colour palette is very limited to vermilion red, red ochre, chalk white, or Khadi matti; green and yellow and red ochre are predominant. We can notice different kinds of grays by mixing more than one colour with green. Gold was occasionally used for the decoration of borders of dhotis and saris. Pigments are obtained by the minerals, prepared by the locally available minerals.

Identification of Murals:

The paintings in the murals are executed on the ceiling of the temple (**Fig. 1**). The paintings on temple walls have hardly survived and faded. The temple is divided into three parts, such as Natyamandapa, Ardhamandapa, and Mahamandapa. It is also known for its elegant murals, which depict the various manifestations of Shiva. The murals here are full of vitality. Mention must be made of depictions of Kiratarjuniya, Dakshinamurti, and the divine wedding of Shiva and Parvathi. The Natyamandapa has a 60-foot-long panel, which bears paintings narrating the legend of Manunidhicholan. The Natyamandapa bears paintings depicting Krishna as a child (Vatapathrasai) and scenes from the Mahabharata illustrating Draupadi’s wedding along with Shaivite themes. The Ardhamandapa of (70 feet in length) Lepakshi temple bears paintings of fourteen manifestations of Shiva (Lingodhbavamurti, Andhakasurasamharamurti, Dakshinamurti, Chandesanugrahamurti, Bikshatanamurti, Hariharamurti, Ardhanariswara, a form of Shiva (difficult to identify), Kalyanasundaramurti, Thripurantakamurti, Nataraja, and Gowri which was painted extreme right in the panel.

They are more line drawings with little attempt at modelling. The upper portions of the paintings were decorated with hangings made of decorated cloth, which are common characteristics of Lepakshi paintings. In general, the Lepakshi paintings are highly decorative. Various types of backgrounds served for the composition. They are mainly two types. Former is trees represented to the division of the space as compartment. The trees are stylized in an umbrella shape. The latter is the background, which is decorated with ornamental hangings, flying apsaras, clouds, hills, flowers, etc. The elements loose flower decoration is the distinctive feature in this tradition. Circular, semi-circular, bell-shaped, and multi-curved hangings and some floral festoons are arranged on the upper section of the panel, giving the semblance of a stage. Sometimes they are provided floral festoons and lotus petal motifs. All the panels are enriched by textile designs as a border painting. Similarly, the Nayaka paintings of Tiruvalanjuli have been painted with borders of textile designs. Every manifestation is marked with the tree or building setting but presents the panel as a whole.

Paintings in Ardhamandapa:



Fig.3. Fragment of Panel 2/4, Ardhamandapa



Fig.2 . Panel Fragment 1/4 , Ardhamandapa

The most worth study of the noticeable paintings of the Vijayanagara period is found in Ardhamandapa (panel BI), where the ceiling adorned with rich murals describes the fourteen manifestations of Shiva found on the ceiling of Ardhamandapa.

The paintings here are not related to any story or episode but illustrate the different manifestations of Shiva. This panel shows fourteen aspects of Shiva and one aspect of Devi, painted as per the Hindu iconography and Indian texts. It is running east to west (left to right) along the entire length of the ceiling. The length of this panel measures 73.96 feet in length and 3.95 feet in width. We find exactly 93 figures, which can be read from left to right. Each aspect of God is flanked by the sages (rishis) and semi-divine human beings with different hair styles. These are worked as elements of continuity for the entire panel. It is observed from the right side of the entrance to Mahamandapa; the paintings have been crudely restored, and a thin fungus film is formed on the paintings. Especially on the Nataraja image, some small-sized layers are peeled off. Among those incarnations of “*Lingodbhavamurti*” is painted as 6th figure, “*Andhakasura samharamurti*” is 15th figure, Shiva as “*Dakshinamurti*” image is painted at 27th image, “*Chandesanugrahamurti*” is depicted as 35th image, “*Bikshatanamurti*” is 39th image, Shiva as “*Harihara*” is painted as 44th image, incarnation of “*a form of Shiva (difficult to identify)*” is 50th image, Shiva as “*Ardhanariswara*” as the 53rd image, Shiva as “*Kalyanasundaramurti*” is painted as 58th image, and “*Thripurantakamurti*” as the 63rd image incarnation of “*Gangadhramurti*” is painted as 69th image, “*Natarajamurti*” as 77th image, Shiva as “*Vrishabharudamurti*” is painted as the 86th image; Shiva is painted as “*Virabhadra*” at the 89th image; and “*Chandrasekharamurti*” is painted as the 92nd image. The last three images are completely faded and beyond recognition. Its unidentified said to be known as Goddess (fig.5) may be Parvathi (Dallapiccola, Khan Majlis, George, 2019), but the right part of this scene is damaged to identify but finally recognized as Parvathi.

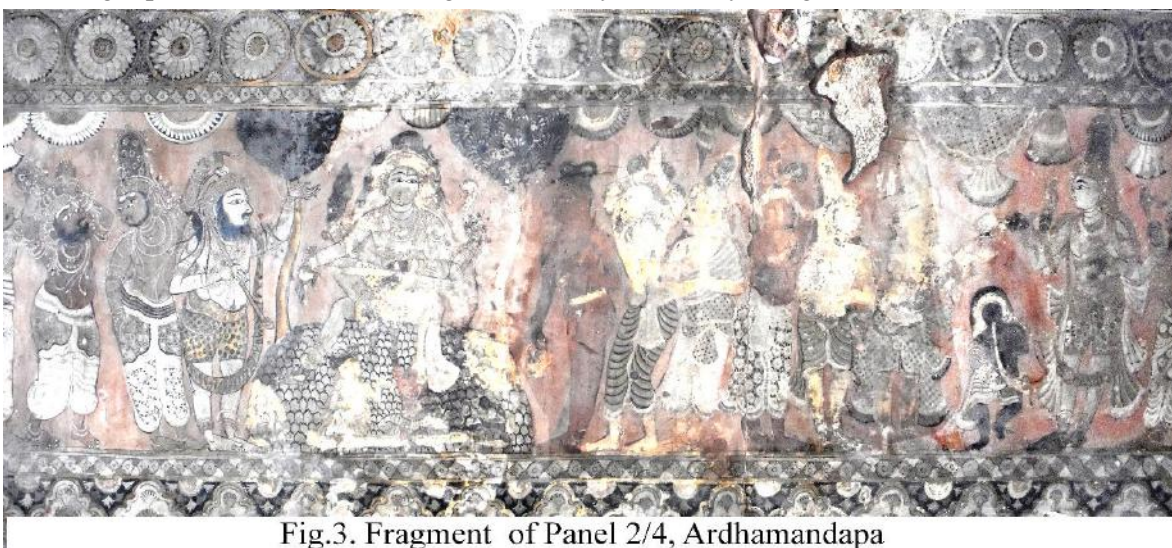


Fig.3. Fragment of Panel 2/4, Ardhamandapa



Fig.5 , Fragment 4/4, Ardhamandapa

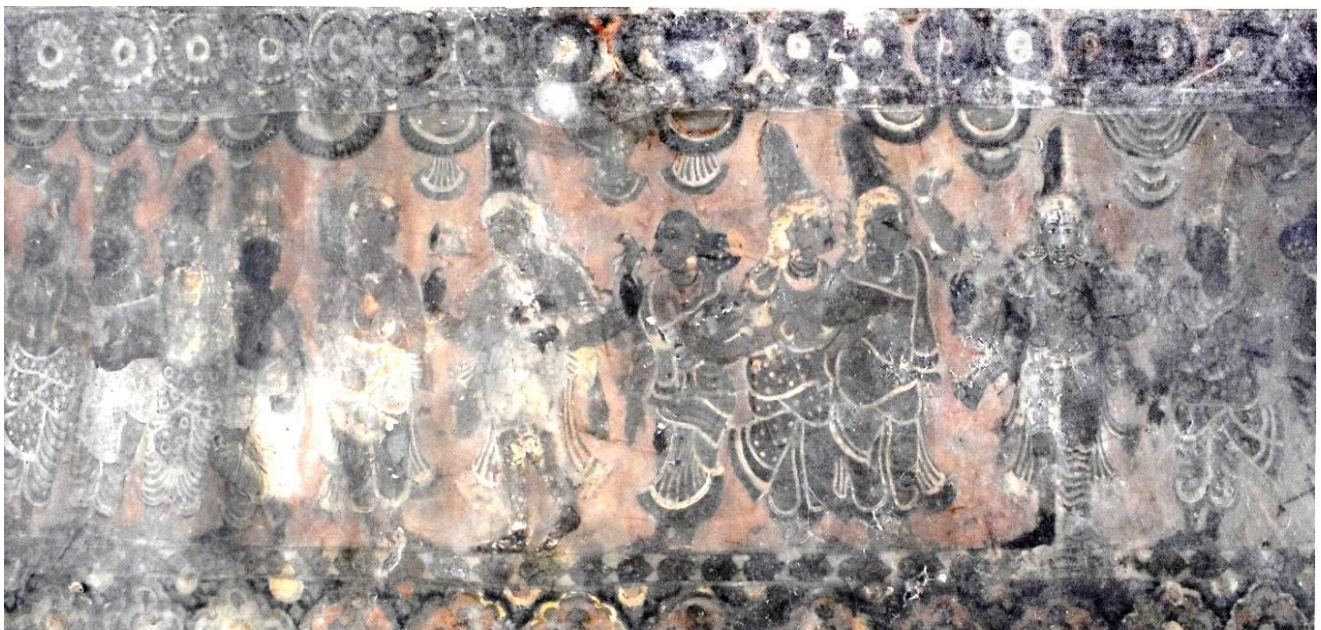


Fig. 4. Fragment of Panel 3/4

Lingodbavamurti: The first image in the panel (fig.6), the cultic representation of Shiva as Rudra, the mythology behind this image as mentioned in the Lingapurana, the Kurmapurana, the Vayupurana, and the Shivapurana, narrates that Shiva appeared in the form of a flaming pillar of indeterminable size, which the Brahma, creator, and Vishnu had an argument as to who was the architect and creator of the universe. As we knew from the puranas, it might be a moment of repelling of Yama who came to take his life. The absence of Yama is seen here. The body of the Shiva up to the waist is not visible. Shiva is shown with four arms and holds parasu in the upper right arm, flame in the upper left arm, and keeps the lower right arm in abhaya mudra and the lower left in varada. Shiva is shown in kirita, and other ornaments are shown in dark complexion. Whereas C.Sivaramamurti considered this Shiva as Markandeyangraha murti (Gopala

Rao, A, 1969). We find many sculptural representations in this picture. A loose sculpture of Lingodhbavamurti is found in the Vaidyanadhasvami temple at Pushpagiri. Shiva represented up to ankle level in the oval-shaped slit portion. A similar representation is found in relief in the Mukkantiswara temple on the north wall at Peddamudiyam of Kadapa district. The Brahma and Vishnu are not represented. The Lingodbhava form of Shiva is a popular theme in the mediaeval temples; a good example is seen in Andhra Pradesh at Undavalli (Rajendra Prasad, B, 1980). But in the temples of Vengi Desa, during the Chalukya period, the Lingodbhava form is not represented. But in the temples of Southern Andhra during telugu chodas, the Lingodhbavamurti is frequently represented (Rama Rao, M, 1970)

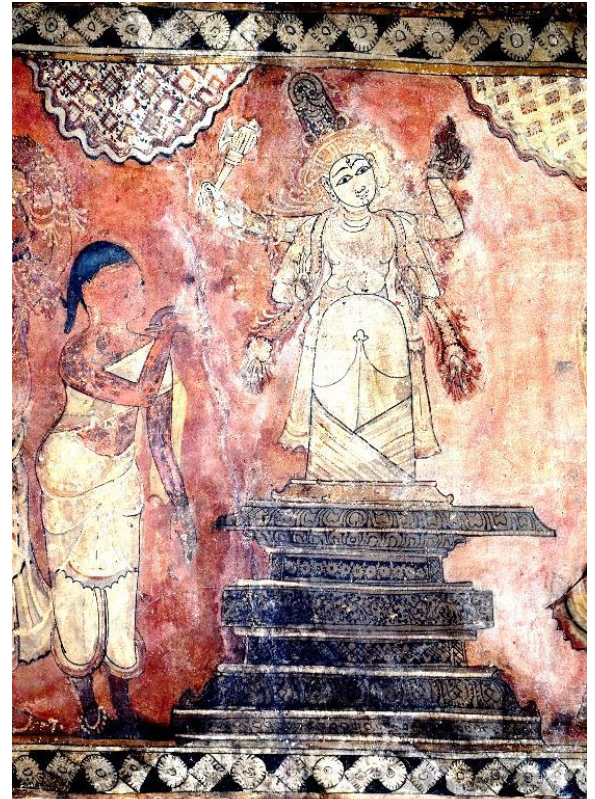


Fig.6, Lingodhbavamurti,

Andhakasurasamhara murti:

Next to the Lingodhbavamurti, we find Shiva shown as killing a demon of ignorance known as Andhakasura. Whose colour is horrid in contrast to Shiva in lustrous white symbolizes the agitation mood and calm in another. Andhaka, one of the sons of Kashyapa by his Diti, was a powerful king of demons. Through his austere penance he propitiated Brahma and got several boons. Owing to these boons, he became invincible and worsted the god at every step. Thereupon the gods approached Shiva and complained to him of their woes. While Shiva was listening to their troubles, Andhaka invaded Kailasa and carried away Parvathi. This enraged Shiva and set out ganas to vanquish Andhaka. He stuck the earth and gave rise to another Andhaka demon. Thereupon Shiva thrust his trident (trisula) into the body of main Andhaka and started to dance. To stop the falling blood on the earth, Shiva created Shakti in female form called Yogeswari to catch all drops of blood as they fell from the demon and to stop further multiplication of Andhaka. Shiva stands on the demon known as Andhakasura. Again, here Shiva, shown in four arms, holds parasu in the upper right hand and flame in the upper left hand. Shiva is dancing on a demon whom he is piercing his trident (trisula) with two lower arms into the body of the demon. Shiva is shown in a pink complexion with protective head gear. The devotees are flanked on either side. The posture of the Shiva is poised by his grace; his body is supported by the trident, which was drawn in the direction of the left diagonal line, which created the rhythm, energy, and dynamism to the image of Siva besides his graceful posture.

Dakshinamurti:

This painting is the most remarkable and has attained supremacy in execution and is a favourite theme in South India. Akin to the style compared to found in Ellora in Kailasanatha temple and also both Pallava and Chola sculptures. Shiva is depicted as a divine teacher of yoga, music, and other science. It is depicted Shiva as Dakshinamurti seated on *yoga patta* in virasana on a hillock under the tree. T.A. Gopinadha Rao explains the etymology of the name "Dakshinamurti" as because he was seated facing south when he taught yoga and gnana to sages, he came to be known as Dakshinamurti. C.Sivaramamurti also referred to him as Yoga Dakshinamurti. Shiva is shown in four hands, as usual. He holds flame in the upper right arm and snake in the jatamakuta upper left arm. Images of Shiva are enriched by the high decoration with elements like kundalas, keyuras, gravaikyas, and tiger skin around the loins. He has three eyes and is flanked by the devotees on either side. The panel of Dakshinamurti is superior to the same one on the ceiling of Natyamandapa, which clearly shows how obviously coarser the draftsman ship is. This panel of Dakshinamurti is superior in quality and is on the ceiling of the Natyamandapa. In Lepakshi, we may find Yoga Dakshinamurti can be represented in three forms. In the first form, he sits with his legs crossed in swasthikasana, carrying a rosary and lotus flower in the upper right hand and left hand, respectively. The lower right hand is kept near the chest in yoga mudra, and the lower left hand rests on the lap. In the second form, he sits in utkutikasana with a yoga patta around the body and leg. The right leg hangs down. The upper right and left hands carry the rosary and kamandalum, respectively. Both lower hands are stretched and rested on the knees.

The sculptural representation of the seated figure of Dakshinamurti is also found on the pillar of Mukhamandapa of the Agasthyeswara temple at Chilamkuru in Kadapa district. The deity is represented in four hands, seated on a lotus pedestal in virasana with the left leg folded and placed on the pedestal and the right leg hanging down the pedestal. The lower right hand rests on the knee of the right leg while the lower left hand holding Agni is placed on the folded left leg. In the grivakostha of Parasurameswara temple at Attirala, Dakshinamurti is depicted in Virasana posture. In the southern girbhagriha of Sangameswara temples at Animela, a loose image of Dakshinamurti is preserved. Another Dakshinamurti is found in an exterior niche of the north-eastern shrine of Chennakesava temple at Pushpagiri. Here the four-handed deity sits in Virasana posture with the right leg placed on Apasmarapurusha. The god carries damaru and rosary in his upper hands. The lower left hand carries a book, and the lower right hand is held in gnana mudra. The deity ornamentation is jatamakuta, kundalas, haras, keyuras, valayas, kankanas, etc. The Dakshinamurti form of Shiva is repeated in two places in Lepakshi. One painting is noticed on the western half of the Natyamandapa. Another found on the ceiling of Ardhamandapa

Chandesanugrahamurti:

The Shiva was depicted as Chandesanugrahamurti which is a famous theme in the Chola sculpture throughout south India. Chandesa is a gana of Shiva. Before he was made a gana of Shiva, he was a Brahmin boy in the south called '*Vichara Sharma.*' Vichara Sharma was tending the cows of Brahmins. After Vichara Sharma took the minding of these cows, they began yielding unusually large quantities of milk. So the boy made Shiva lingas of sand and used the extra milk to bathe them. Hearing this, his father was furious that the boy was wasting the milk and belongs to other Brahmins. Went to the place where the boy was bathing the lingas of sand with the milk, reprimanded him, and kicked one of the lingas. The boy was enraged and cut off the legs of his father with the axe he was holding. Shiva was pleased and appeared on the scene with Parvathi, who offered his grace and made him his gana. The same was rendered in paintings, may be the first time. Here holding mriga in the upper right arm and flame in the upper left arm. Personified weapons should have their respective symbols on their heads(Sivaramamurti, C, 1978). Shiva was shown giving parasu to Chandesa with his lower right arm and keeping the lower left arm in lalata hastha. He is clad in the tiger's skin. He wears kirita makuta, graiveyakas, and yajnopavita. Chandesa was shown as he is receiving parasu from Shiva, flanked by the devotees.

Bikshatanamurti:

The *Amsumabedhagama*, the *Kamikabedhagama*, the *Karanagama*, and the *Silparatna* describe the iconography of Bikshatanamurti(Myneni, 2013). Bikshatanamurti (fig.7) is the aspect of Shiva as he went about begging for food to atone for the sin of *Brahma hatya* with the skull of Brahma, whose head he cut off. Shiva was depicted as Bikshatanamurti standing in a thribhanga stance with a slightly bent left leg and the right leg slightly lifted up. The tip of the sandals touches the foreground. Usually here also Shiva was shown in four arms. He holds damaru in the right upper arm and trisula in the upper left arm. He carries the begging bowl in the lower left arm, and the right arm is in lolahasta. He wears tiger's skin around the loins and wooden sandals. The wives of sages (rishipatnis), are shown offering him food in a state of mind with intense love and passion. A black dwarf attendant stands to the bottom left of the Shiva, carrying a begging bowl in his hand. To the right of Siva, a lady is shown in the posture of putting rice into the begging bowl. She has a dark complexion while Shiva is a light colour, and the woman was unaware of the dropping clothes on her body due to the feelings of passion and joy on seeing Shiva. As per the iconographic text, Shiva should be shown without any clothes, but in Lepakshi, Shiva is shown in a dress. Shiva is painted in wearing an ardhoruka that is tied around his waist and covers the lower body up to his knees. Shiva is decorated with a long sacred thread, or yajnopavita, and several rows of pearl strings around the neck and armllets, anklets, and ear

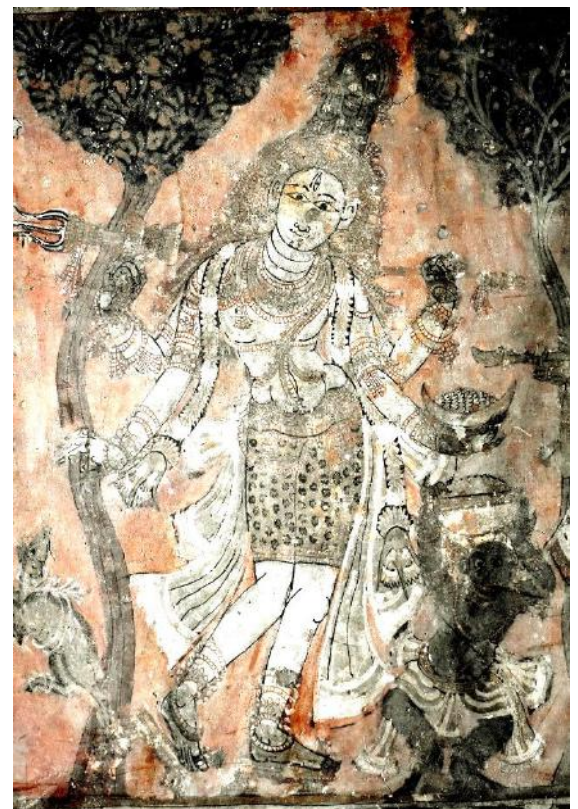


Fig.7. Bikshatanamurti

ornaments. Ornamented bands adorned on his forehead and hair are arranged a tall jatamakuta over his head and studded with flowers. Uttariya is shown as hanging over the shoulders. The graceful bends and curves of the body of Shiva added beauty and charm to the beauty of the image of Shiva. To the left, another image of a lady was depicted in a white sari with Vibhuthi marks on her forehead. The Darukavana is suggestively depicted by carefully drawn two trees in meticulous renderings. In the background, two tall trees with slender and curved trunks are depicted with full foliage, just like a freehand sketch in a more conventionalized manner. The same was in the form of sculpture in Natyamandapa in the temple.

Hariharamurti:

Hariharamurti is a most remarkable iconic image that unfolds the compromise between Shaivite and Vaishnavite cults during the time of Vijayanagara kings. The theme adopted from the *Vamana Purana* is that, according to that, Vishnu is reported to be one. We both are living in one. This incarnation stands for creation and destruction of the universe. It reminds us of the identical theme of Ardhanariswara. The left half represents Vishnu, and the right half represents Shiva. The right half is in terrific and the left is in Pacific according to the iconographical features of gods Shiva and Vishnu in Indian texts. The Shiva as Chandrasekharamurti with Parvathi depicted in dvibhanga posture holding parasu in the upper right arm and mriga in the upper left arm. The poses for lower arms were lacking visibility.

Ardhanarisvaramurti:

According to *Saura Purana* and *Shiva Purana*, Brahma got distressed to create when the subjects created by him failed to multiply. It is said that Brahma first forgot a number of male beings; the Prajapathis commanded them to create various other beings. They were found unfit for the task of Brahma, felt uneasy, and contemplated Maheswara. Shiva appeared before Brahma in the composite form of half male and half female. At the sight of this form of Maheswara, Brahma realized his mistake; with the help of the female half of Shiva, he created female forms and completed the act of creation. The description of Ardhanarisvaramurti is given in *amsumabedha*, the *kamika*, the *suprabedha*, the *Silparatna*, and a few other ganas (Kameswara Rao, 1981). The images are depicted as a combination of Shiva and Parvathi, half man and half woman. The right half represented Shiva, and the left half represented Parvathi. This may be treated as Shiva and Shakthi or 'Purusha and Prakruti'. Both in the form of matter and energy, Shiva and Shakthi existed in the light of tantric philosophy (J. A. H. R. S., XXXIX, pp. 79–80). This fusion of Shiva and Parvati is referred to in South Indian myths as the strong devotion of Sage Bhringi, who owed everything to Shiva and did not have any concern for women. *Skandapurana* mentions the penances of Bhringi and the advice of Parvathi to practice them in Mahakalavana so that he could realize the real form of Shiva. Finally, Bhringi realizes that Shiva and Parvathi are actually one and it is wrong to view them as separate.

Kalyanasundaramurti:

Kalyanasundaramurti is depicted as the Shiva and Parvathi standing in Dvibhanga position, holding mriga in the upper right arm and parasu in the left upper arm. His lower right arm was stretched forward gently to hold the Parvati's hand. The lower left hand is in lolahasta. The both divine couple seems in a celebration mood. Parvathi dressed in a sari of a square-designed pattern. Shiva is usually sown in *kiritamakuta* and wears tiger skin around his loins with three eyes. To the right side of the Shiva image, Brahma is depicted in a sitting stance, cross-legged by holding kamandalum in the upper right arm and shrunk in the upper left arm. To the left side of Parvathi, two men are flanked. One of them holds a plate containing flowers or akshatas (sacred rice) in her arms. There is a male devotee figure depicted on the side of Shiva as usual procedure to complete the group for a composition.

Thripurantakamurti:

Shiva in this form destroyed three demons. This story is mentioned in *Karnaparva* of the Mahabharata. Different descriptions were given in many texts. The *Amsumabedhagama* alone gives eight descriptions, but there are not many points of material difference between one form and another. Of the eighth form of Shiva to be represented driving a chariot. His right leg should be slightly raised and be resting on the part of the chariot. In the chariot there should be a part called *mukula*. Below the *mukula*, the charioteer Brahma should be seated in the middle of the *mukula*; below the *mukula*, there should be a standing white bull. The bull is symbolized as Vishnu, who got down from the arrow temporarily to study the chariot, which was giving away under the weight of Shiva. Chariot should be shown as sailing in the air.

According to *Uttarakamikagama*, the image of Shiva should have three eyes. In its ear there should be makara kundalas. The Lepakshi painter followed the text as it is. Shiva is shown in ferocious form in order to destroy the three demons from his chariot wheels, the sun and moon, and Brahma being the charioteer. One should recollect the same theme in early Vijayanagara art. A demon named Tarakasura had three sons who, after getting their boon from Brahma, occupied three castles and were harassing sages and devas. Devas failed to win over the sons of Tarakasura and approached and prayed to Shiva for help. Shiva undertook the task of killing demons and assumed a gigantic name as Mahadeva. Vishnu became his arrow, Agni as into barb. Yama its feather. The fourth Veda became his bow, Vasuki became his bowstring, Brahma the charioteer. Thus equipped, Shiva destroyed three castles and three demons. Thenceforth, Shiva came to be known as Thripurantakamurti (fig.8). The sculptural form of this depiction is beautifully carved on the southern wall of the antarala exterior of the Sangameswara temple at Animela.



Fig.8. Tripurantaka murti

Gangadhramurti:

It is one of the finest paintings in Lepakshi. The whole credit goes to the painter who composed it in a beautiful manner. Here one can notice the fusion of action and repose anger and calm. Sensuous curves created the beauty and rhythm to the image. We notice that the Parvathi was pronounced in an emotional state. Shiva is depicted in dvibhanga pose with the legs slightly bent at the knee and feet shown in profile. His body leans towards Parvathi, who stands in a flexed pose in the manner of as if she is trying to move away from Shiva. By pronouncing her displeasure by the presence of Ganga on the head of Shiva in the form of water. Unlike the sculptural representation of Chola, Vijayanagara period, in which the figure of Ganga is depicted. In this mural, the humanized form of Ganga is not shown. Parvathi stands to the right of Shiva with his rejected face turned away from Shiva. While Shiva tries to pacify her anger by consoling her by touching her chin with his left hand. Shiva holding parasu and mriga in the two upper hands, passing the right arm behind the head of Parvathi and gently touching above her forehead. He wears nicely executed kiritamakuta and dresses in usual tiger skin around the waist. Parvathi stands to the left of the Shiva in the thribhanga position, holding flowers in each arm. Her sari is striped, and the waistcloth is in a separate pattern. Ganga is shown as descending from the jata of the Shiva, which is like a curved cascade at the top, starching in a wider waterfall as it proceeds down with several fish, aquatic bodies, and flowers, flanked by devotees on either side in the composition. This kind of representation is possible only in the paintings rather than the sculpture. Because the flexibility of stone might not yield the minute details depicted in a painting. To the left of Shiva stands, in a row, one village man, followed by the six sages. The village man is depicted in very small size, holding a stick and anjali mudra, compared to the sages. As per the narration, the first sage might be the Bhagiradha, who is persuading Shiva in anjali mudra to release Ganga to the earth. Almost five out of six sages were depicted as having long hair in the *jata-bhandana*. The gestures of the next three people seem to indicate that they are discussing themselves. The villager, who is depicted in small size, is inserted between the fifth and sixth sages, wearing a long white coat that runs up to his ankles. Uttariya are tied at waist level, and all the sages are

shown wearing dhotis and uttariya, which are patterned with different textile design motifs. The sixth one, like other sages, is also shown in moustaches that run vertically besides the beard. As usual, we notice the Shaivite marks on the foreheads. The iconographic representation of Gangadhramurti is a good example, in accordance with texts like Amsumabedhagama and Silparatna, but such charms of small domestic squabbles are absent in the earlier representation by artists from the court of Pallavas. In the earlier representation at Elephanta Caves, we may not find much quality and grace in the Lepakshi image. But in Gangadhara at Kodumbalur, probably from the earliest Chola, Shiva was never shown having even a single jata of Ganga.

Nataraja:

Shiva is a great master of dance. The Lord Shiva dances in Bhujangatrassa pose with his right leg bent at the knee and resting on the back of Apasmarapurusha and the left thrown across to the right. He holds damaru in the upper right arm and flame in the upper left arm. And keep the lower right hand in abhayamudra and the lower left in karihasta. Shiva was depicted in a fair complexion. He wears a kirita makuta with a crescent moon to the right and the sun to the left. He is shown with three hands. Three long jatas spread to the sides from under the lower portion of the kirita makuta. The Apasmarapurusha is shown crawling and holding a short dagger in the left arm. His eyes are bulging, and his eyebrows are like an arch. Shiva wears two garlands of big beads and another of six skulls, which are enriched by the devotees on either side.

Vrishabharudamurti:

Another incarnation of Shiva was *Vrishabharudamurti* as Shiva and Parvati seated on the bull. She wears kiritamakuta and patrakunadala, graiveyakas, and garlands of big beads. Shiva holds mriga in the upper right arm and parasu in the upper left arm. The lower two arms were stretched forward. Parvati was seated behind Shiva, holding the lotus in the right arm and keeping the lower left arm in lolahasta. The Nandi is depicted as moving, achieved by lifting the Nandi's right leg up. The horns and hoofs of Nandi are painted jet black. Some celestials had shown themselves flying above the bull. Four devotees are saluting the deities. A similar image has been used in the Manunidhicholan narration. The bull is portrayed as a human being.

Parvati:

The last figure is not visible in detail in this panel; the further part of the panel is completely damaged and defaced. This figure defies all attempts at iconographical identification. She is perfect and one of the most beautiful women painted not only in the temple but in the whole of south Indian art. This form rivals Prajna Parimita, which many critics say represents the ideal form of Hindu womanhood. The Devi is painted blue and, on the other hand, holds a lotus while sitting in padmasana on the beautiful throne, adorned with several jewels and garlands. She looks beautiful and dignified. We may notice that in most Telugu mythological movies about goddess Devi, Devi is portrayed with a blue complexion.

Observations: Besides the common characteristics of the Lepakshi paintings, according to overall observation on style and development at Lepakshi, these paintings can be classified into three groups as follows, even though the temple was patronized for a short time. But it is observed that there are three styles of works that can be grouped as follows: This categorization is done based on the styles, colours, and compositions. The group I includes the paintings of this group on the ceiling of Mahamandapa (panels E1 to E13, except the extreme right part of the E3 panel) and around the Virabhadhra shrine and its outer walls. The paintings executed in Ardhmandapa (panel B1), where the manifestations of Shiva and Devi were painted, are a little bit earlier than the ceiling paintings in Natyamandapa from panels A1 to A11, which are also to be inserted into this group II. The remaining painting panels are categorized into Group III. These figures are drawn with fluent and continuous sweeping lines with delicacy and spontaneity, with soft tones of ochre and vermilion reds and browns and rare usage of green and greys. A very meticulous degree of work was executed with the pearl decoration. Devi painting (the last image, from left to right on the ceiling of Ardhmandapa) is the most beautiful and mature style of the Vijayanagara paintings, which differed from the rest of the images of Shiva. The colour treatment seems fresh and retouched at a later stage. Perhaps the patron might change and adopt artists from Tamil Nadu for the novelty of their paintings when compared to Natyamandapa and Mukhamandapa. The layer of painted film in Ardhmandapa is thicker than the rest of the paintings in the temple. One can notice the artist applied thick colours and a colourful palette.

2. Conclusion:

Lepakshi Murals are the best-preserved murals in the state of Andhra Pradesh and were left over by Vijayanagara Kings as their legacy. The paintings differed from the painting style of Natyamandapa, especially in the Kiratarjuniya episode. The total incarnations of Shiva were cleverly rendered on the basis of the theory of shadanga. We may notice that the image of Shiva was depicted in dvibhanga, thribhanga, and athibhanga postures to create dynamism in the panel. Artists cleverly distinguished images of Shiva in different complexions to elevate each image in terms of pictorial language. It resembles the style of Tanjore paintings in the Brihadeeswara temple. Which means Tamil artists were employed. This is evident in the Bikshatanamurti, Dakshinamurti, and Parvathi images. The sweeping lines and jewellery, emphasized by pearl bands, are distinguished features of this panel. Today, paintings are in a sad state of preservation. In many places, plasters are peeling off and colours are fading. They are in need of better maintenance and expert restoration. As a result of human negligence in cleaning, damping, and leakage, water sank through the cleavages of ceilings, causing the painting to deteriorate. An NGO, The International Institute for Art, Culture, and Democracy (IIACD), Bangalore, under the leadership of Prof. Vijay Chandru and Uma Chandru, has made a wonderful contribution to this great tradition by documenting paintings.

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