

Identification of Animals and Birds in Lepakshi

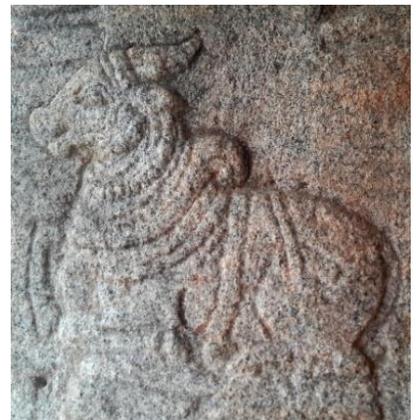
- Shravya K, Bengaluru.

Vijayanagara empire is one of those dynasties which has contributed abundantly towards art by building temples and showing their culture and daily life through sculptures. One such place that is renowned for the contribution of the Vijayanagara empire to the field of art and architecture is the Lepakshi.

Lepakshi in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh state is a famous historical tourist centre known for its Veerabhadra Swamy temple and its magnificent sculptures. This temple was built by Virupanna, who was the treasurer during the reign of Achyutaraya, brother of Krishnadevaraya.

Animals and birds are an integral part of our life, they also play a vital role in mythologies, superstitions and art and architecture. Their depiction in art gives a great impact on our values. It can also be said that hunting was one of the main occupations followed there.

A big monolithic statue of Nandi (bull) is found near the temple. The size of this idol is 4.5 meters in height and 8.23 meters in width, the largest Nandi idol in India. Also, being the vehicle of Lord Veerabhadraswamy (Shiva), they are found very commonly among the pillars inside the temple. The horns and face tell that it is a bull and the strips down clearly tell us that it is a decorated Bull.



1. Nandi (Bull)

Elephants are another generally found sculpture on the pillars. The elephants were used in rituals- ceremonies, in wars to strengthen the army, etc. Their importance can be seen evidently.



2. Walking Elephant.



3. A baby elephant playing



4. Elephant holding a human



Animals and Birds are also used as decorative sculptures. The above pictures show the wall surrounding the Natyamantapa and the Garbhagriha, which has been decorated with a line of ducks/peacocks and then a line of elephants.

Monkey, Parrot and Deer are another few commonly found animals inside the temple. The monkey (5) eating fruit and tail is certainly seen. The parrot (6) is recognized by the beak, eyes, and short legs. The horns shown in the figure tell us that it is a deer (7).



5. Monkey



6. Parrot



7. Deer

Tortoise, being an incarnation of Lord Vishnu (Koorma), is said to be found commonly in the pillars of the temple. Also, this temple is built on a turtle-shaped hill called Kurmashila. Even if the stones are attached from the side, there is no foundation or support for it. Only walls are built from all sides for support. Hence, it can also be the reason for many turtle sculptures to be found.



8. Tortoise



9. Vulture

Another unusual figure is a vulture shown in one of the pillars surrounding the temple. This can be indicative of the fact that this village is named after the story of Jatayu, who has fallen after the battle with Ravana until Lord Rama came and said 'Le-Pakshi' which means 'rise bird'. The face and the wings of the sculpture suggests that this is a fierce bird.

One of the unique sculptures found in the temple, depicts 3 cows together, which can be seen from different angles. Each cow illustrates a different position, it exhibits a cow standing still, eating by bending down and feeding the calf. This showcases visual hallucination and the utmost imagination of the sculptor.



10. Illusionary Cows



Another wonderful sculpture is seen on one of the pillars. The cow is seen worshipping the Shiva Linga with great devotion. The cow is the most venerated animal from ancient times till today. Here, an animal seen worshipping God can be marked as a speciality of the sculpture.

11. Cow worshipping God

Here are some unique sculptures found rarely in the pillars at the outer part of the temple.



12. Rabbit



13. Horse



14. Camel

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15. Lizard



16. Crow



17. Frog

The sculptures present here are a reflection of the society during that period. The name of the temple is only after a Bird, and the temple not only describes the Gods and other splendour but also informs us of the importance of fauna. It also teaches us that we need to protect and respect them as before.