

Chaturvidha Abhinaya in the Door Panels of Lepakshi

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Right before the entrance of any Indian temples or even before the Garbhagriha/Sanctum, we can find the beautiful decorative design which is called by the name- Door panels. The designs on the door panels can be of various kinds. Different patterns and styles can be witnessed. Sometime it simply adorned with Flora and Fauna structures and sometime it is with beautiful sculptures. One such beautifully carved door panels which makes us to experience the all four Chaturvidha abhinaya is in Lepakshi Virabhadra temple.

Lepakshi Temple is situated in a village named Lepakshi which is in the Sri Sathya Sai district of Andhra Pradesh, India. This temple was built by the brothers Virupanna and Viranna in the Vijayanagara empire. This temple is dated back to 1583CE with Vijayanagara style of Architecture. The temple is famous for its hanging pillar where a stone pillar holds itself off the ground. The temple also has many paintings on the roof which has scenes of Krishna's story, Ramayana scenes and some Mahabharata scenes as well.

These two structures caught my eyes!! Yes, Lepakshi temple welcome us with beautiful Dwarapalikas/Dwarapalakas (Gate-keepers); which are also most common sculptural patterns found in every Vijayanagara era built temples.



The above pictures are images of Dwarapalikas in Lepakshi Temple. As we can see in both the picture Dwarapalikas decked up with beautiful ornaments and the skirts. It's absolutely gorgeous !! We can also see that the Dwarapalike is standing holding a branch of a tree. These Dwarapalikas are Salabhajinkas who adore the trees. The branch (Shakha) of the tree is going all the way up to the other sculptures creating a leaf kind of circle structure (Patra). So the structure above her head can be considered as Dwarashakha/Dwara Patra.

Her way of holding the branches and also resting another hand on the thigh is so gentle. In the first figure, her right foot is resting on the wall, which can be also interpreted as Swastika position. In the second picture, it can be interpreted that her legs are in Agrathala Pada and she's in a squatting like position with both her knees facing opposite direction. This position is called Manadala position in Dance Treatises of medieval period.



In this picture, you can see a lady sitting in Ardha-Padmasana postions, playing a wind like instrument, Tabla on both right and left side. This picture can be seen right above the Dwarapalika in the door panels of Lepakshi Temple.



In the next Dwarashakha, we can see two ladies holding two sticks in their hand and dancing. This kind of dance is called Kolata in Southern states, Dhandiya/Garbha in North India etc. The twist of their Torso is also beautiful and aesthetic.



In the next Dwarashakha, we can find two people playing two instruments. One wind instrument and the other is a string instrument. We can also see that the person playing the wind instrument is a male and the other person holding string instrument is a female.



From this picture, we can see that there are people, male and female, one of them playing the Mrindangam, an Avanaddha instrument and the other person playing the Tala is a Ghana instrument. This Shakha comes right after two people playing two instruments.



In this Dwarashakha, is a dancing sculpture where there are two dancers dancing. As a dancer, it can be interpreted that one of their leg is in Agrathala and they are sitting in squatting like position called Mandala Sthanaka in the Dance Treatise. Their hands can be interpreted as Dola and Rechita hasta on top.



Above that Dwarashakha, is a sculpture where the dancer is doing a split and bent his entire upper body to one side and the twist of the upper body can be felt and the sculptor has done such a wonderful job in this. As a dancer, this movement can be interpreted as one of the 108 Karanas in Natyashastra, that is, Suci.



Above that Dwarashakha, is a sculpture where there is a bowl/plate type and can be interpreted that the dancer is standing on that and dancing. Now this kind of dance are more prominent in Kuchipudi, an Andhra region based performing art form.

In the next Dwarashakha, (from a dancer's point of view) we can see that a lady is standing with Rechita hasta and Anchita Head. Hands are also carries a prop/instrument. This also can be interpreted as a dancing sculpture with vigorous movement.

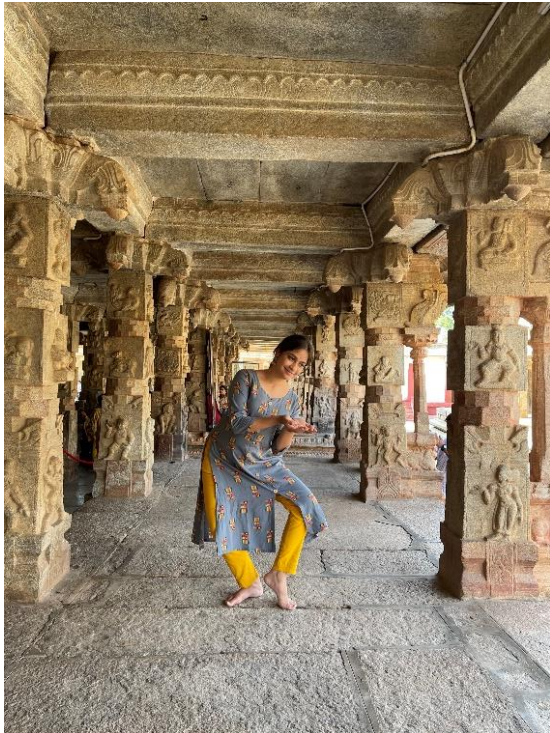


As we all know, there are four types of Abhinayas, i.e, Angika, Vachika, Aharya and Satvika. In this particular panel, we can find Angika Abhinaya, more prominently along with the Vachika means various musical instruments. Aharya Abhinaya, that is the ornaments, hair styles and the costumes are also evident on sculptures. and Sathvika Abhinaya is the core element in any art which makes us to experience the beauty and elegance. Sculptor has done his job with full of aesthetics! Just cannot take our eyes off the sculptures !!

References:

Rohini Manjunath's Article: Flora and Fauna sculptures found in Lepakshi Temple.

<https://www.noopurabhramari.com/flora-and-fauna-in-lepakshi-temple-sculptures>



About the author

Shishira P Vittal started learning Bharatanatyam at the tender age of four under the guidance of her mother Shalini P Vittal. She further pursued training under the guidance of Prof. M.R. Krishnamurthy, founder of Kalakshithi School of Fine Arts. Since the last 11 years, she has been undergoing training in Bharatanritya under the able guidance of Dr. Shobha Shashikumar. She completed her Rangarohana in the year 2021. She is being trained in the Karanas of Natyashastra and is on the verge of completion of the course. She has completed a short-term certification course on the topic 'Indian Aesthetics (Natyalankara)', organized by Noopura Bhramari. She is also pursuing a course on Natyashastra, organized by Noopura Bhramari. **She is also an intern in Nrityashilpa Yatre -a temple study programme by Noopura Bhramari.**

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