



Cover Page



## LEPAKSHI TEMPLE: A MASTERPIECE OF VIJAYANAGARA DYNASTY ARCHITECTURE -A STUDY

<sup>1</sup>B.Prabhakar and <sup>2</sup>Dr.D.Sahadevudu

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Dept. of History, S.K. University, Ananthapuramu

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor & Lecturer in History, Government College (A), Ananthapuramu Affiliated to S.K. University, Ananthapuramu

### Abstract

The Lepakshi Temple stands as a testament to the unparalleled fine arts and architectural brilliance of Medieval India. Lepakshi is situated in Sri Satya Sai district in Andhra Pradesh State. This temple was built by Virupanna during the Vijayanagara Empire, showcases mesmerizing stone carvings that leave visitors in awe. The temple's construction, attributed to the sage Agastya and later Virupanna, boasts remarkable sculptures of various deities like Veerabhadraswamy, Ganesha, Nandi, and others.

Legend has it that Lepakshi derives its name from a moment in the Ramayana, symbolizing valor and devotion. The temple's intricate carvings and sculptures narrate stories of mythology, including the marriage of Lord Shiva and Parvati, depicted in the unfinished Kalyana Mandapa. Noteworthy features include the Natya Mandapa adorned with life-sized sculptures of musicians and dancers, along with the colossal monolithic Nandi sculpture, a masterpiece of ancient craftsmanship.

Moreover, the temple houses statues of Dikpalakas, representing the cardinal directions, each crafted with exceptional detail. Unique depictions of Yama, Kubera, Indra, and Agni adorn the temple's pillars, showcasing rare artistic elements. The murals are within the temple, though ravaged by time, offer glimpses into the rich artistic heritage of the Vijayanagara era.

Lepakshi's significance lies not only in its architectural grandeur but also in its cultural and historical importance. The temple's central pavilion and ritual halls exude a divine aura, inviting pilgrims and art enthusiasts alike. Despite the challenges of time, Lepakshi remains a beacon of South Indian artistry, deserving of preservation and admiration.

**Keywords:** Lepakshi Temple, architecture, sculpture, Vijayanagara, Dikpalakas, paintings

### Introduction:

The purpose of the study titled " **Lepakshi Temple: A Masterpiece of Vijayanagara Architecture -A Study** " is to explore and analyze the architectural and artistic magnificence of the Lepakshi temple, particularly focusing on its significance in Vijayanagara architecture and South Indian art.

The rationale of the study lies in the unique cultural and historical importance of the Lepakshi temple, known for its exquisite stone carvings, impressive sculptures, and intricate architectural design. The temple serves as a remarkable example of the architectural brilliance and artistic prowess of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Previous studies may have provided some insights into the Lepakshi temple's architecture and history, but the present study aims to delve deeper into various aspects such as the symbolism behind the sculptures, the significance of the



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi/2023/12.10.100.2>  
[www.ijmer.in](http://www.ijmer.in)

temple's layout, and the cultural context of its construction. It seeks to address lacunae or deficiencies in previous research by offering a comprehensive analysis that incorporates both historical narratives and architectural details.

Specifically, the study aims to shed light on:

1. The historical background of the temple, including legends and stories associated with its construction and significance.
2. The architectural features of the temple, such as the layout of different mandapas (halls), the design of pillars, and the symbolism behind various sculptures.
3. The artistic elements of the temple, including mural paintings and sculptural representations of mythological figures.
4. The cultural and religious significance of the temple within the context of Vijayanagara architecture and South Indian art.

By examining these aspects in detail, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the Lepakshi temple as a masterpiece of Vijayanagara architecture and a testament to the rich cultural heritage of South India.

### A Brief Historical background of Lepakshi Temple

Nestled within the Sri Satya Sai district, approximately 63 kilometers from the district headquarters, lies the resplendent Lepakshi Temple—a testament to the unparalleled fusion of fine arts and architectural magnificence. Renowned for its intricate stone carvings that evoke a sense of mesmerizing wonder, this temple stands as a pinnacle of artistic achievement, leaving visitors awe-inspired by the boundless talent of its sculptors.

Among the 108 Divyashaivakshetras gracing our nation, Lepakshi holds a distinguished position. The Veerabhadraswamy Temple, also known as Papanaseshwara Kshetra, stands as the jewel of Lepakshi's cultural heritage. Commissioned by Virupanna, an esteemed official under the reign of Vijayanagara's Achyutadevaraya, this architectural marvel beckons with its awe-inspiring sculptures and ornate pillars, each bearing testament to the craftsmen's unparalleled skill and dedication.

Legend intertwines with history in the narrative of Lepakshi's origins. According to one tale, as Sita was being abducted by Ravana, Sri Ramachandra encountered the valiant Jatayu, who, despite his injuries, attempted to thwart the kidnapping. It is said that upon witnessing this courageous act, Sri Ramachandra uttered the words "Le Pakshi," prompting Jatayu to rise, thus lending the temple its name.

Another legend speaks of Virupanna's devotion and sacrifice. Tasked with overseeing the temple's construction, Virupanna dared to utilize government funds without royal consent. When his transgression came to light, rather than face the king's punishment, Virupanna chose to bear the consequences himself, symbolically casting his own eyes against the temple's southern wall. Today, locals point to the crimson marks on the wall, a poignant reminder of Virupanna's sacrifice and the origin of Lepakshi's name, derived from "lopa-akshi," meaning "without eyes."

Perched upon the gentle slopes of Kurmasailam, aptly named for its resemblance to a tortoise in Telugu, the Veerabhadralayam Temple stands as a testament to centuries of architectural and cultural legacy. Dating back to 16<sup>th</sup> Century, this magnificent edifice owes its creation to the visionary brothers, Virupanna and Veeranna, once esteemed servants of the Vijayanagara kings. However, amidst historical accounts, whispers of Puranic lore suggest a divine hand in its inception, attributing the temple's genesis to the sage Agastya.



Cover Page



During the zenith of the Vijayanagara Empire, Lepakshi burgeoned into a thriving hub of trade and spirituality. Under the reign of Achyutadevaraya, who held sway over the empire from 1530 to 1542, the temple flourished, as evidenced by inscriptions etched upon its walls, bearing witness to the grandeur of its construction during his reign.

## Lepakshi Temple- Architecture

The architectural marvel of Lepakshi Temple unfolds in three distinct sections: the grand 'Mukha Mandapa,' also known as the 'Nitya Mandapa' or 'Ranga Mandapa,' the sacred 'Artha Mandapa' and 'Garbha Griha,' and the illustrious 'Kalyana Mandapa.' Within the confines of the 'NatyaMantapam,' adorned with 70 resplendent pillars, lie sculpted marvels depicting celestial beings like Rambha, Narada, and Tumburu. Yet, amidst this splendor, one pillar stands as an enigmatic marvel—a pillar without a base. Legends tell of British engineers' futile attempts to unlock its secret, inadvertently causing the collapse of adjacent pillars, hinting at the pillar's pivotal role in supporting the entire pavilion.

The allure of Lepakshi extends beyond its architectural grandeur, encompassing intricate paintings adorning the roof of the dance hall, vibrant with natural hues that continue to mesmerize visitors. Among these artistic wonders, the depiction of Lord Krishna holds a captivating quality, seemingly gazing back at the beholder from any angle, inviting contemplation and reverence.

Embedded within the sanctum sanctorum lies the Maha Lingam, adorned with a majestic seven-headed nagu umbrella, a symbol of divine sovereignty. From the vantage point of the revered Nandi idol, one can marvel at the intricacies of this sacred artifact, evoking a sense of awe and reverence for the temple's spiritual significance.

As the temple's construction commenced, the divine presence of Lord Ganesha graced the auspicious beginnings, laying the foundation for a journey steeped in spirituality and architectural splendor.

Within the annals of history, Lepakshi Sri Veerabhadralayam emerges as a testament to both architectural splendor and enduring devotion. Commissioned by Virupanna during the reign of Achyutaraya, this sacred abode bears witness to a tale of sacrifice and unwavering faith.

As Achyutaraya's reign yielded to that of his son-in-law, a cloud of turmoil descended upon Virupanna. Accused of depleting the royal treasury under erroneous counsel, Virupanna, foreseeing his impending fate, resorted to a drastic act of self-sacrifice. Plucking out his own eyes, he cast them against the temple's walls, where they left indelible marks—a testament to his unyielding devotion and resolve. This act, steeped in both tragedy and piety, brought construction to a halt, leaving the Kalyan Mantapam, intended as a hall of benevolence, forever incomplete.

Yet, amidst the unfinished symphony of stone, the Kalyana Mantapam stands as a testament to divine union. Adorned with sculpted scenes depicting the nuptials of Lord Shiva and Parvati, one finds intricately carved motifs symbolizing the eternal bond between the divine couple. Notably, the depiction of Shiva clasping Parvati's hand with four fingers signifies the encompassment of the four Vedas and cardinal directions.

In the heart of the temple, amidst the solemnity of devotion, lies a marvel of ingenuity—the famed cow figurine with three heads. A testament to the ancient sculptors' skill, this monolithic masterpiece reveals three distinct forms when viewed from different angles, evoking awe and wonder in equal measure.



Cover Page



Venturing beyond the confines of the temple's sanctum, one encounters a rock bearing sculptures of Vigneswara and Nagalinga, steeped in myth and legend. As folklore tells, a young sculptor, eager to serve his family, carved these figures with astonishing speed and skill. Yet, as his mother marveled at his talent, a crack marred the rock, a poignant reminder of human imperfection amidst divine craftsmanship.

Amidst the grandeur of Lepakshi Temple, the towering Shivalinga, adorned by a colossal snake, commands reverence, while pillars and mandapams bear silent witness to the artisans' mastery. Today, as pujas continue to reverberate within its hallowed halls, Lepakshi stands as a timeless tribute to the enduring spirit of devotion and artistic genius of ancient India.

### Lepakshi Temple - Dikpalakas

**Yama:** In the revered precincts of Lepakshi Sri Veerabhadralayam, Yama, the southern direction's ruler and lord of Yamaloka, commands reverence. As the arbiter of dharma, Yama embodies justice with a formidable presence distinct from gentler deities. Within the unfinished Kalyana Mandapam, the idol of Yama showcases divine craftsmanship and enigmatic allure. Carved meticulously, Yama's fierce countenance, with large, bulging eyes and rounded eyebrows, reflects his role as a dispenser of justice. Adorned with traditional insignia like the gada and pasha, the statue exudes authority and power. Notably, the absence of the sacred Yajnopaveeta adds to its mystique, making it a rare gem in depictions of Yama.

**Kubera:** In Lepakshi's sacred precincts, Kubera, the northern direction's ruler, emerges as a figure of fascination. Revered as the king of the Yakshas, Kubera's depiction at Lepakshi deviates from tradition, featuring a majestic horse as his vehicle. Crafted with meticulous detail, the idol embodies grace and elegance, exuding authority and benevolence with its four hands adorned with symbolic gestures. The absence of the conventional pot-shaped stomach adds to its aesthetic refinement. In Lepakshi's sanctuary, the portrayal of Kubera stands as a testament to artistic ingenuity and invites admiration for its unique interpretation.

**Ishanyu:** Within Lepakshi Sri Veerabhadralayam, Ishanyu's depiction offers a rare glimpse into Dikpala worship. Adorned with celestial attributes, Ishanyu's form exudes grace and authority, mounted atop a bull, his divine vehicle. Crafted with exquisite detail, the statue captivates with its beauty and grace, radiating benevolence and reassurance through symbolic gestures. Below Ishanyu's image, a plaque depicting Nandi symbolizes the timeless bond between master and mount. In Lepakshi's sacred enclave, Ishanyu's depiction serves as a beacon of divine guidance and grace.

**Agni:** In the sanctum of Lepakshi Sri Veerabhadralayam, Agni's image holds special significance, carved upon a pillar in the unfinished Kalyanamandapam. Adorned with two faces and four hands, the statue exudes assurance and protection, deviating from convention by lacking a beard. Notably, the portrayal of a two-faced Agni is exceedingly rare, emphasizing the statue's uniqueness. In Lepakshi's sacred space, Agni's image invites devotees to kindle the flame of spiritual devotion.

**Indra:** Within Lepakshi Sri Veerabhadralayam's Asampurti Kalyana Mandapam, the depiction of Indra commands attention as a prominent figure. Adorned with a vertical third eye and Vajrayuda, the statue exudes divine prowess and authority. Stone pillars adorned with intricate designs further enhance the temple's splendor, showcasing the artisans' skill and creativity. In Lepakshi's sanctuary, Indra's statue invites devotees to marvel at its beauty and contemplate the mysteries of Hindu mythology.



Cover Page



## Lepakshi Temple- Paintings

Within the sacred confines of Lepakshi Temple, the sculptures and mural paintings adorning the Natya and Kalyana Mandapams stand as testament to the exquisite beauty and artistic mastery of ancient artisans. These architectural marvels transport visitors to a realm where myth and legend intertwine, depicting scenes from Hindu mythology with unparalleled skill and detail.

Among the myriad sculptures gracing the temple, depictions of mythological puranic episodes such as 'Ananthasayana', 'Dattatreya', 'Chaturmukha Bramha', 'Tumburu', 'Narada', and 'Rambha' take center stage, offering glimpses into the rich tapestry of Hindu lore. Each sculpture tells a story, invoking a sense of awe and reverence for the divine.

At the heart of Lepakshi Temple lies a tribute to Lord Veerabhadra, whose legend is intricately woven into the fabric of its existence. According to ancient lore, the Kalyana Mandapa witnessed the celestial union of Lord Shiva and Parvati, immortalized in the temple's sacred architecture.

The Natya Mandapa, dedicated to dance and worship, emerges as a masterpiece of architectural ingenuity. Adorned with sculptured pillars depicting life-size musicians and dancers, this sacred space transcends mere stone and mortar, evoking a sense of divine presence and celestial harmony.

In the sacred enclave of Lepakshi, the temple stands not only as a monument to faith but also as a testament to the enduring legacy of artistic expression. Through its sculptures and paintings, it beckons visitors to immerse themselves in the timeless tales of Hindu mythology and discover the beauty of the divine.

## Lepakshi Temple- Nandi

In the annals of Lepakshi's storied history, one name reigns supreme—Basavanna. Synonymous with the ancient town of Lepakshi, the name 'Lepakshi Basavanna' resonates deeply within the hearts of pilgrims and visitors alike, beckoning them to pay homage to this iconic figure.

At the heart of this reverence lies the majestic monolithic "Nandi" sculpture, a towering testament to divine craftsmanship and artistic prowess. Standing at an impressive height of 6 feet and stretching over 8 meters in length, this magnificent depiction of Nandi is hailed as the largest monolithic Nandi in India—a symbol of Lepakshi's ancient glory and architectural splendor. The sheer grandeur and intricate detailing of the sculpture evoke a sense of wonder and awe, captivating the imagination of all who behold it.

Archaeological estimates place the dimensions of Lepakshi Basavanna at a staggering 8.1 meters in length and four and a half meters in height, dwarfing other Nandi idols across the country. Adorned with ornate decorations such as bells and metal straps, the sculpture also features two Garuda birds adorning Nandi's neck, symbolizing power and majesty.

Noteworthy are the intricate engravings of Nrisimhaswamy's face on either side of Nandi, adding a touch of divine presence to the sacred space. From Nandi's vantage point, one can catch a glimpse of the seven-legged statue of Nagaraja in Veerabhadralayam, a testament to the interconnectedness of Lepakshi's sacred sites and the rich tapestry of its spiritual heritage.



Cover Page



Amidst the hallowed halls of Veerabhadralayam, adorned with exquisite murals depicting scenes from Hindu mythology, Lepakshi Basavanna stands as a beacon of divine presence and eternal grace, inviting devotees to immerse themselves in the timeless legacy of faith and devotion.

### Significance of the Lepakshi Temple

At the heart of Lepakshi Temple lies a central pavilion, serving as the focal point that embraces all three shrines within its sacred precincts. Connected to this pavilion are intermediary halls and ritual dance spaces, creating a seamless flow of spiritual energy and devotion. Surrounding the main hall is a vast open court, accessible from the east, offering devotees a tranquil space for reflection and prayer.

One of the most striking features of Lepakshi Temple is perhaps its possession of the largest monolithic structure of Nagalinga in India, a testament to the architectural grandeur and divine craftsmanship that defines the temple's sacred space. As visitors traverse the temple grounds, their gaze is inevitably drawn to the exquisite statue of Lord Ganesha, a captivating symbol of divine blessings and auspicious beginnings.

Stepping into the temple's interiors reveals a veritable treasure trove of artistic mastery, with impressive sculptures adorning the granite pillars in intricate half-relief. From depictions of celestial dancers and divine musicians to the iconic imagery of Lord Brahma playing drums and Lord Shiva engaged in the cosmic dance of 'Ananda Tandava', every carving is a testament to the divine creativity and devotion of its creators.

In the intermediary hall, a mesmerizing frieze captures the imagination, portraying geese with lotus stalks in their beaks—a symbolic representation of purity and transcendence. Throughout the temple, flawless carvings adorn every surface, each executed with painstaking attention to detail, ensuring that every corner exudes an aura of divine splendor.

But perhaps the most celebrated aspect of Lepakshi Temple lies in its splendid paintings, although many have succumbed to the ravages of time. Among them, a colossal painting of Virabhadra in the central hall commands attention, while the 'Hall of Dance' boasts eight panels depicting timeless Puranic legends on its ceiling.

As a repository of artistic expertise on the brink of extinction, Lepakshi Temple stands as a testament to human creativity and devotion, beckoning visitors to marvel at its timeless beauty and immerse themselves in the sacred legacy of faith and devotion. In essence, the temple is not just a place of worship, but a living work of art that transcends time and space, deserving of reverence and admiration for generations to come.

### Conclusion

The Lepakshi Temple stands as a testament to the unmatched beauty and ingenuity of Vijayanagara architecture and South Indian artistry. Lepakshi temple captivates visitors with its rich fine arts and architectural magnificence. The mesmeric quality of the stone carvings leaves one in awe of the talent possessed by the ancient sculptors.

The temple's history, intertwined with legends and myths, adds to its allure. The Veerabhadraswamy Temple is a masterpiece adorned with magnificent sculptures and intricate carvings. From the majestic Nandi sculpture to the awe-inspiring monolithic Nagalinga, every aspect of the temple exudes grandeur and reverence.



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2023/12.10.100.2>

[www.ijmer.in](http://www.ijmer.in)

The architectural layout, divided into sections like the Mukha Mandapa, Artha Mandapa, Garbha Griha, and Kalyana Mandapa, showcases the meticulous planning and craftsmanship of its builders. The Natya Mandapa, adorned with 70 sculptured pillars depicting musicians and dancers, stands as a symbol of artistic brilliance.

Moreover, the temple's significance extends beyond its architectural splendor. It serves as a repository of exquisite mural paintings, depicting Puranic legends and celestial beings. Despite the ravages of time, these paintings continue to mesmerize visitors with their vivid depiction of divine narratives.

In essence, the Lepakshi Temple represents a pinnacle of artistic achievement, blending spirituality with aesthetic beauty. It stands as a timeless monument to the rich cultural heritage of South India and remains a must-visit destination for admirers of art and architecture.

### References:

1. Lepakshi Temple Inscriptions period of AchyutaRaya A.D.1534, A.D.1535, A.D.1537, A.D.1538
2. Mahajan V.D. Medieval India, S.Chand & Co New Delhi, 2008
3. Rao, D Hanumantha. *Lepakshi Temple – A Cultural and Architectural Study*. Bhartiya Kala Prakashan. New Delhi. ISBN 8180900266, 2004
4. Sastry. K.A.N.; History of South India Oxford, Bombay, 1952
5. Sivaramamurti, C. *South Indian Paintings*. Publication Division, Government of India. New Delhi. ISBN 8123000529, 1968.
6. Sivaramamurti, C. *Vijayanagara Paintings*. Publication Division, Government of India. New Delhi, 1985.
7. Sivasankaranarayana. Bh, Andhrapradesh District Gazetteers, Anantapur, Government Secretariat Press, Hyderabad, 1970
8. Rao P.R. Ancient and Medieval History of Andhrapradesh ISBN 81 207 1709 0, SPPLtd, New Delhi., 1996