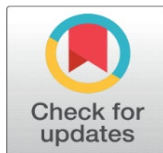
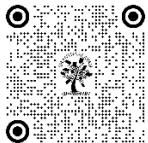


# “RAMAYANA THEMES DEPICTED IN THE TEMPLE ART OF ANDHRADESA” – A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RAYALASEEMA

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## ABSTRACT

The worship of Sri Rama is as ancient as temple worship in this land. The great Itihasa Ramayana by saint Valmiki itself has the sanctity of scripture to the Hindus. In India, there are thousands of temples dedicated to Lord Sri Rama, from Ayodhya, his birthplace in Uttar Pradesh, down to Rameswaram at the southernmost tip of the country. Temples of the Andhra Pradesh are treasure houses of sculptures and art forms representations of gods and goddesses and episodes from their mythologies. The Ramayana cult images found in the different dynasty's temples in the Andhradesa may be divided into Sculpture, Idol of Sri Rama and Sita, Sculpture and Paintings in Ramayana themes. Andhra Pradesh has a unique place not only in Indian History, but geographically located midway in subcontinent to receive the cultural impacts from the north and pass them on to Southern India. It has many ancient centers of art and culture. Some of them are indigenous in character. In this research paper discussed the cult of Sri Rama iconographic features of sculptures and images of Ramayana themes in important Vaishnava temples in Andhra Pradesh a special reference to Rayalaseema region.

**Keywords:** Sri Rama, Andhra Temples, Ramayana Themes, Sculpture, Images

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All over India the foundations of Indian culture were laid by the fusion of Indo-Aryan and Pre-Aryan elements in varying conditions and proportions; and in the languages, literatures and institutions of South there has survived much more of pre-Aryan India than anywhere else. The Hindu epic Ramayana (a work of 24, 000 Slokas or stanzas in length) chronicles in detail the story of Sri Rama, called Ramachandra or Ramabhadra to distinguish him from Parasurama. The object of this Avatar was to kill the ten-headed demon Ravana, the king of Lanka (Ceylon now this is Sri Lanka). Sri Rama, the hero of the epic, is the ideal prince, brave and accomplished, devoted to his duty and unflattering in his truth. In India, there are

thousands of temples dedicated to Lord Sri Rama, from Ayodhya, his birthplace in Uttar Pradesh, down to Rameswaram at the southernmost tip of the country. (Ramesan, N., 1969) The land of the Andhra's, it is generally believed that the territory originally inhabited by the Andhra's was a part of Dandakaranya of the Ramayana, a dark and inaccessible region in the wild forests of South India. (Chenchiah, P. 1928) The epic Ramayana, a vast store house of Hindu culture from which the kings and temple architects drew their material. Episodes or themes from the Ramayana, became popular depicted in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh, describes Sri Rama's valorous deeds, while Rama's obedience to his father Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya (Oudh) the faithfulness and womanly love of Sita, the loving devotion of Rama's brothers, Hanuman's exploits in Lanka, etc. The main aim and focused this research paper to reconstruct the aspects of antiquity and growth of the cult of Ramayana in Andhra Pradesh and also to study the mythological, sculptural and iconographical Vaishnava centers of Sri Rama in Andhra Pradesh.

In many South-Indian temples may be observed scenes from the Ramayana, either painted on the walls or cut into panels, forming continuous belts round the central shrine or the prakara wall. (Kishna Sastri, H., 1916) The state Andhra Pradesh has a hoary past with a place of its own in the history and cultural heritage of India. The Ikshvakus, the Vishnukundins, the Chalukyas, the Rashtrakutas, the Kakatiyas and the Vijayanagara rulers have left indelible impressions in the field of Andhra's language, literature, music, dance, drama, architecture, sculpture, painting and handicrafts-in fact in every walk of its rich and colorful life. The sculptures at Andhra Pradesh temples, particularly the little-known bas reliefs on the gopuram, are magnificent. Other sacred places are Undavalli, Tirupati, Simhachalam, Mangalagiri, Penukonda, Pushpagiri, Draksharamam, Ahobilam, Vontimitta, Kadiri, Vijayawada and other places are famous pilgrim centers in across South India. An outstanding feature of sculpture in the temples of Andhra Pradesh, with panels assembled in rows to illustrate popular myths and legends of Ramayana. The Ramayana seems to have been an inexhaustible source for Andhra sculptors. Tirupati is the richest shrine in India. It is particularly sacred to the Vaishnavas.

#### • Iconography of Lord Sri Rama

The Sri Ramavatara form of Visnu is usually sculptured in a standing posture. But occasionally seated figures of Sri Rama also found in the temples. The image of Sri Rama should be a standing one with three bends i.e. tribangha in the body should have two arms and hold bana (the arrow) in the right hand and dhanus (the bow) in the left. He should wear kiritamakuta and other ornaments. Sri Rama is always depicted as dressed in Purnoruka. (Gopinatha Rao, T.A., Hind. Ico., 1914) The figure of Sita should be shown to the right of Sri Rama. She should be holding a nilotpala flower in her left hand and hang the right hand freely. Her hair should be tied up in a knot and a karandamakuta should adorn her head. A fine figure of Sri Rama at Chennakesava temple in Markapuram, Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. The wall of the gopura inside a sala-kosta, Sri Rama stands in dvibangha and holds arrow in the right hand and bow in the left and wears kiritamakuta and other ornaments. Sri Rama image carved on a pillar of the rangamandapa at Chinna Ahobilam is richly adorned with ornaments and dressed in purnoruka. The adhovastra has stripes of beaded designs. Another marvelous example on a pillar in the mahamantapa the Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadpatri. Lord Sri Rama is seated in virasana pose with his right hand raised up and the left hand resting on the left thigh of the Sita. He wears kiritamakuta, makarakundalas, keyuras, graiveyakas, yajnopavita, channavira, girdle and purnoruka. Sita is seated with both her legs hanging on the left thigh of the god. She holds the nilotpala in the right hand and keeps the left hand

hanging. She wears karandamakuta, cakrakundalas, yajnopavita, girdle and purnoruka. Hanuman i.e. Maruti or Anjaneya stands to the bottom right with his hands held in anjali pose. In the same temple, on the wall of main shrine is a gracefully chiseled image of Sri Rama which shows him in the act of emancipating Ahalya, who has been under a curse. In this panel Sri Rama is draped in the purnoruka style. (Reddeppa, K., 2000)

Four copper idols of Sri Rama (known as Sri Raghunatha), Sita, Sugriva and Lakshmana find place in the sanctum sanctorum of Tirumala Balaji or Sri Venkateswara Temple, in Andhra Pradesh. The idol of Sri Rama is in the Madhyamata and tribhanga pose, the left arm raised to hold the bow and the right gracefully sloping downwards as if to hold the arrow. The idol is a standing or stanaka one and has a kiritam or crown on it. Goddess Sita is to the right of Sri Rama in a standing pose, her right hand gracefully extended downwards, the left holding a lotus bud. The idol of Lakshmana is a similar replica of the idol of Sri Rama. The figure of Sugriva is in the standing pose and the hands folded in an attitude of prayer. (Ramesan, N., 1981)

The Chennakesava temple, Somapalem in Annamayya district of Andhra Pradesh, ceiling illustrates Ramayana themes, but only a few episodes can be identified, such as Sri Rama bidding farewell to Dasharatha and Kaikeyi, and Rama slaying the ogress Tataka. (George Michell, 1922)

- **Themes of Ramayana**

During the Vishnukundin period the Undavalli caves near Vijayawada a large number of sculpture panels are erected, but badly some renovated and some sculptures are preserved, majority scenes carved from epic Ramayana. Especially the panel showing Sita seated on a stool and Hanuman with folded hands recalls Amaravati art in the seated posture of Sita. (Rajendra Prasad, B., 1980) Tadpatri of Anantapur district, there are two important and famous temples namely the Bugga Ramalingeswara temple and the Chintala Venkataramana temple. These are famous temples, famous both for their sanctity, as well as for their architectural importance. At the Chintala Venkataramana temple, the entire Vaishnava related themes are carved in stone on the walls with delicate skill and in elaborate detail. These contain sculptures from the Ramayana and Bharata epics. Another Ramayana reliefs in the Sri Rama temple at Penukonda in Sri Satya Sai district of Andhra Pradesh. The wall surfaces between the pilasters are filled with small groups of figures. The narrative moves in clockwise direction in three tiers around both the vimana and mandapa.

**1) Kaika, Kausalya, and Sumitra:** On the side wall connecting the south wall of the antarala and the south wall of the garbhagriha, Chintala Venkataraman temple, Tadpatri. Kaika is seated with a child may be Baratha seated on her lap. Kausalya is seated with a child may be Sri Rama seated on her lap. Sumitra is seated with a child seated on each of her laps may be Lakshmana and Satrugna. There is a woman attendant to the left of Sumitra. The hair of each of them is arranged in the shape of a bun behind the head.

**2) Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshmana:** Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and Hanuman figures found in many temples in Andhra Pradesh. This is found in the corridor mandapa of the Vimana Pradakshina in Tirumala Sri Venkateswara temple. This panel shows Sri Rama in a seated posture with one hand in the gnana mudra and the other placed on his thigh. Sita is holding a lotus. Lakshmana is standing with a bow. This is a rather curious depiction of Sri Rama not generally found elsewhere. Sita-Rama kalyana theme depicted on the north wall of the garbhagriha of the Chennakesava

temple at Pushpagiri of Kadapa dist. Here Sri Rama stands in the middle with a slight bend in the right leg and keeping the left leg firm on the ground. He is adorned with all the ornaments of a bridge groom. He holds the right hand of Sita with his left hand in the panigrahana ceremony. Sita attired in beautiful ornaments stands to the left of Sri Rama. She keeps the left hand hanging down. King Janaka, standing to the right of Sri Rama, holds a water vessel in his two hands pouring the holy water into the right hand of Sri Rama which is outstretched by him. At the bottom, below the palm of the right hand of Sri Rama is a dwarf holding a vessel on his head to receive the holy water, from the hand of Sri Rama.

- 3) **Rama killing Tataka (Tataka vadha):** On the south prakara wall, Mallikarjuna temple, Srisailam a famous Saivite temple of Two Telugu states i.e. Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Tataka is lying at the extreme left and in front of her is Sri Rama standing with Lakshmana behind. Tataka is shown with a dreadful face with the hair spreading to the sides. The arrow discharged by Sri Rama entered into her right shoulder. Sri Rama holds bow in the left hand and keeps the right hand raised up. He wears kiritamakuta, cakrakundalas, graiveyakas, long hara and purnoruka. Lakshmana has the bow hanging to his right shoulder which he is touching with his right hand. He wears kiritamakuta and other ornaments.
- 4) **Sri Rama Pattabhishekam:** The Ramayana theme of Sri Rama Pattabhishekam found in the door jamb near the Dwajastamba mandapa of Tirumala Sri Venkateswara Temple. Hanuman is shown on his knee in the ground. Sita is shown as seated to the left of the Lord Sri Rama. Sri Rama is shown seated on a platform in the Sukhasana pose. Only two brothers with bows in their hands are shown in the extreme right. (Ramesan, N., 1981) Chintala Venkata Ramana temple, Tadpatri the walls of rangamandapa and mukamandapa, in which, all the scenes of the Ramayana commencing from Putrakameshti Yagna of Dasaratha to the Pattabhisheka of Sri Ramachandra are carved. The scene of reconciliation of Sri Rama and Sita is especially a beautiful piece of art. It depicts the devatas on the west, the vanaras on the east, and in between, Agni as testifying the sanctity of Sita; and Sri Rama and Sita standing hand in hand. (Ramaswami, N.S., 1976)
- 5) **Rama protecting a sacrifice:** This theme is beautifully depicted on the north wall of the garbhagriha of the Chennakesava temple at Pushpagiri of Kadapa dist. In this, the great sage Visvamitra is shown seated on a pedestal with his left leg folded and resting on the seat and the right leg bent and held in the utkutika pose, in front of the sacrificial fire. He offers something like ajya with his right hand and keeps the left hand on the left knee. To the right of the sage, two young princes Sri Rama and Lakshmana are shown standing. They wear kiritamakuta and other princely ornaments. Both Sri Rama and Lakshmana hold each a bow in their left hands and arrows in their right hands. They are protecting the yaga performed by sage Vishvamitra. (Gurumurthi, A, 1990) On the south wall of the garbhagriha of the Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadpatri. A sage is seated before a sacrificial fire. Sri Rama discharges an arrow with the bow and arrow held in his two hands at the three demons who are hovering above the sacrificial fire.
- 6) **Sri Rama killing the Deer (Maricha):** On the vertical to the right of the entrance of the mukhamantapa of the main shrine, Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadpatri. This is in two sections. In the first section, Sri Rama is

shown standing in front of the deer holding bow and arrow in his hands. In the second stage he has discharged the arrow on the deer, and now Maricha assumes a form with the portion below the waist as that of a deer and that above as that of a human being. The arrow discharged by Sri Rama has gone into the stomach of Maricha and has come out from the other side. Maricha holds sword in the right hand and shield in the left. On the adhishtana of the mandapa in front of the Chennakesava group of temples, the episode of the golden deer and Sita is depicted in two panels. In the first one, Sita is shown seated on pedestal. She has two arms and holds a lotus in the right hand and keeps the left hand on her leg. The figure of Lakshmana is shown standing to her left and holds the bow and arrow in his two hands. To the right of Sita is Sri Rama attacking the golden deer shown running in front of him. He holds the bow and arrow in his two hands aiming at the deer. In the second panel, Sita is shown asking Sri Rama for the golden deer. To their left, Lakshmana is represented as standing and carrying bow and arrow in his two hands. Next to this scene Sri Rama is shown aiming his arrow at the golden deer which runs in front of him by turning its head back.

- 7) **Sculptures of Hanuman:** Hanuman, the monkey-God a great devotee of Vishnu intimately connected with the incarnation Rama-avatar. In Southern India he is very popular, even insignificant villages containing a shrine for Hanuman. He is represented in two postures. When included in the group of Sri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, he stands at a distance on one side, or opposite to them, in a humble and devotional attitude, with the two hands folded together, the tail hanging down close to his feet. (Krishna Sastri, H., 1916) In Dhvajastamba mandapa of Tirumala Temple, a rare image of the Hanuman carrying Sanjeevi Mountain. Normally such sculptures are shown with Hanuman in a flying pose. But here he is shown with his feet planted on the ground. Another figure of Hanuman probably in the battlefield as there are prostrate figures on the ground. Alternatively, the figure below may represent Sri Rama and Lakshmana when they fell down unconscious on account of Sannamini and who were revived later when Hanuman brought the Sanjeevi. In Tirumalaraya mandapa of Tirumala Sri Venkateswara Temple, a rare sculpture of Hanuman in the Anjali posture standing in a prabhavali, which is usually found in the Vaishnava temples of Andhra Pradesh. The urdhvapundra is also seen in the forehead of the Hanuman. At Penukonda, Sri Satya Sai district of Andhra Pradesh, there is a much-revered image of Hanuman, it is almost as tall as its prototype at the capital. It is claimed that Hanuman is represented in three postures. (Saletore, R.N., 1982) On a pillar of the mahamandapa of the Kodandarama temple at Vontimitta, the exploit of Hanuman in bringing Sanjivini to infuse new life to Lakshmana is depicted. Hanuman is shown giving Sanjivini leaves to Sri Rama to bring consciousness to Lakshmana. In this panel, a Rishi is shown seated under a tree. In front of the sage stands Hanuman keeping his two hands in adoration. It seems that the sage is advising Hanuman to give Sanjivini to Lakshmana. In the next scene Lakshmana is shown lying unconscious keeping his head on the legs of seated Sri Rama. Hanuman standing in front is giving Sanjivini leaves to Sri Rama. In the next scene Lakshmana is shown standing erect. Sri Rama is shown embracing Hanuman who stands to his left.
- 8) **Abduction of Sita by Ravana and attack of Jatayu:** The Chennakesava temple, Pushpagiri the adhishtana of the mandapa, the episode of the abduction of Sita by Ravana and attack of Jatayu is well represented. In this

panel Sita is shown seated on a chariot drawn by horses with a charioteer. To the left of this chariot is Ravana represented with three heads and ten arms. Instead of ten heads, Ravana has only three heads. He carries sword, trisula, gada, etc., in his hands. He is attacking a huge bird called Jatayu standing in front of the chariot and obstructing the movement of the chariot. On the vertical to the right of the entrance of the mukhamandapa of the main shrine, Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadpatri. Sita is giving alms to Ravana who came in the disguise of an old mendicant. Ravana who came in the disguise of an old mendicant. Ravana holds kamandalu in the right hand and a long stick in the left. Sita hair is arranged in the shape of a bun behind her head. In the same place another theme depicted in the fine sculpture i.e. Ravana abducting Sita. The chariot has three wheels and is driven by a charioteer. Ravana stands on the chariot. He has ten heads and several hands and holds bow in the lower right hand and arrow in the lower left. Sita is seated on the chariot in padmasana keeping her right hand hanging and the left stretched forward. Ravana and Jatayu theme also carved in the same place; Ravana stands on a chariot driven by a charioteer. He has ten heads and hurls a sword on Jatayu. Sita is seated on the chariot in padmasana with her right hand hanging and the left raised up.

- 9) **Vali and Sugriva:** On the adhisthana of the garbhagriha of Chennakesava temple, Pushpagiri, Vali and Sugriva are shown as engaged in a serious wrestling bout. To their right Sri Rama and Lakshmana are standing and seems to be looking for an opportunity to kill Vali the brother of Sugriva. They are holding bows and arrows in their hands as usual. On the pillar of the mahamandapa of the Ranganatha temple, Gandikota in Kadapa district. Vali the king of the Kishkinda is shown engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with his brother Sugriva. Both Vali and Sugriva are represented as men having monkey faces and tails. The Vedanarayana swami temple at Nagalapuram in Chittoor district contains some Ramayana themes sculptures. The west gopura inner left side of the wall is a panel showing Sugreeva, Lakshmana, Sri Rama, and Hanuman. Hanuman is shown under a tree. Sugreeva and Hanuman keep their hands in Anjali pose. The south gopura inside the passage, the vertical of the western side, above the salabhanjika contains many Vaishnava sculptures among one of the panel Vali and Sugreeva engaged in a hand to-hand fight. (Reddeppa, K., 1988)
- 10) **Sita in Asoka vana:** On the adhisthana of the mukhamandapa of the Chennakesava group of temples at Pushpagiri, there are two panels from the Ramayana in which Sri Rama gives his anguliya as a mark of identification to Hanuman when he was deputed to search for Sita and in the next scene Hanumana, after finding Sita in the Asokavana, receives another agnuliya from Sita. In the first panel Sri Rama standing in dvibhanga, holds the bow in the left hand and the arrow in the right hand. He is dressed like a sage in accordance with the description in Ramayana regarding the dress of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana while they were in forests during aranyavasa. The hair is arranged like a knot on the top of his head. He wears yajnopavita. To the left of Sri Rama is the figure of Hanuman standing with his two hands held in Anjali mudra. In the next panel, Sita is shown seated under a tree and with the right hand she gives an object (anguliya) to Hanuman standing to her right stretches his two hands to receive the object from Sita. On the south wall of the mukhamantapa of the Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadpatri. Sita is seated on a pitha under the Ashoka tree in padmasana keeping her right hand lifted up and resting

the left on the left knee. Ravana is standing before her. He has ten heads and eight hands. In the same place of the temple engraved other panel of sculpture Ravana is seated on a high pitha and has ten heads and ten hands. Hanuman is seated on his tail which is in several coils and serves the purpose of a high seat. And another engraved panel of sculpture of same wall of the temple Sita is seated under the tree in padmasana with her right hand stretched so as to receive an object which is being given by Hanuman. Her hair is arranged in the shape of a bun behind her head. Hanuman stands before Sita and gives something to Sita with his two hands stretched forward. In Tirumala Pratima mandapa a fine sculpture showing Sita in the Asoka vana. Hanuman is shown in the form of a monkey on the top of the Asoka tree and Sita is depicted in a seated posture. The head is inclined to the left and is being held by her left hand in a very sorrowful posture.

**11)Vibhishana joins Sri Rama:** In this panel in which Vibhishana joins Sri Rama is very well depicted on the Santana Mallesvara temple at Pushpagiri. Sri Rama is shown seated on a pitha with his left leg hanging down while the right leg bent and rests on the left leg. He keeps his right hand in Vyakhyana mudra and keeps the left hand on the bent left leg. To the left of Sri Rama is the figure of Hanuman standing on a pedestal. Just to the left of Hanuman is the figure of Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana. He is graced with ornaments of a king. He keeps his two hands in Anjali mudra. Towards the right of Sri Rama stands Lakshmana in tribhanga keeping his right hand on the bent waist or kati and a bow in the left hand.

**12)The theme of Lankadahana:** On the south wall of the garbhagriha, Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadpatri, the city of Lanka is shown in a conventional manner. Hanuman is flying above it and is setting fire with his tail.

**13)Rama Killing Ravana:** On the south wall of the mukhamantapa, Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadpatri, Sri Rama stands holding bow in the left hand and keeping the right hand hanging. Ravana is lying flat on the ground with his ten heads severed. An arrow is seen piercing his stomach.

## 2. CONCLUSION

The worship of Sri Rama is as ancient as temple worship in this land. The legend of Sri Rama the seventh avatara, fill a great part in Vaishnava image and painting, but they do not take a very prominent place in classical Indian sculpture now extant. Sri Rama in temple images and as a household god is the typical Indo-Aryan king. His faithful ally, Hanuman, the monkey-king whose devoted service enabled him to rescue Sita from the stronghold of the demon-king, Ravana, is often rendered with the sympathy and keen observation of animal life characteristic of the best Indian art. The themes from Ramayana are invariably represented on the temple walls, the temples of Tirumala, Tadpatri, Pushpagiri, Ontimitta, Penukonda, Sompalem, and other shrines are worth mentioning. Tirupati is the most sacred Vaishnava temple of Andhra Pradesh. It has a reputation not only in Andhra but all over India and the presiding deity Lord Venkateswara is worshipped by North Indian pilgrims as 'Balaji'. The mural tradition of the Andhra dynasty's is well known through the paintings in the Virabhadra temple at Lepakshi, Chennakesava temple at Sompalem. The Sita, Sri Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman bronzes of the Vijayanagara period are well distributed all over in the Vaishnava temples of Andhra Pradesh.

### Some Ramayana Line Drawings:

Figure 1

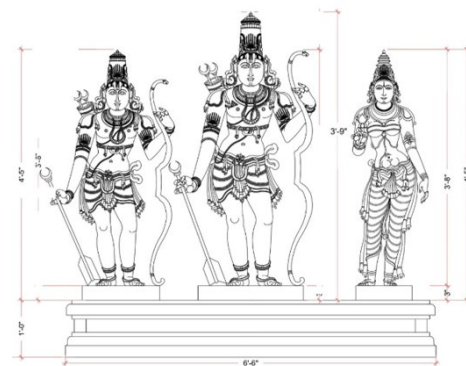


Figure 1 Sri Kodanda Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman

Figure 2



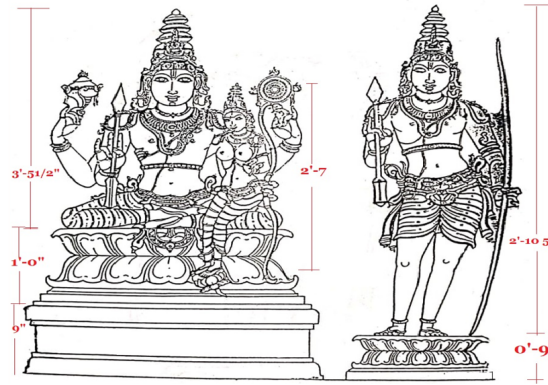
Figure 2 Sri Kodanda Rama Standing

Figure 3



Figure 3 Hanuman Standing

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Sri Sita Rama Sitting Along with Sri Lakshmana

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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