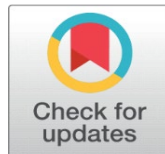
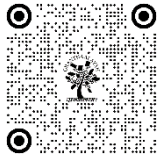


# BEAUTY THROUGH TOUCH AND SIGHT: THE SCULPTURES OF THE SRI LAKSHMI VENKATESWARA TEMPLE, KADAPA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara temple, located in Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh, India. The temple has a rich history, with influences from various dynasties that ruled the region. The focus of the paper is on the art and sculptures found on the pillars of the Ranga Mandapa. These sculptures depict a variety of subjects, including religious figures, social and cultural activities, and scenes from daily life.

The paper also discusses the concept of beauty in sculptures, drawing a distinction between free beauty and adherent beauty. Free beauty can be appreciated through sight and touch, while adherent beauty is related to the purpose or function of the sculpture. The paper concludes by acknowledging the importance of the temple for the local community and its role in preserving history and culture.

**Keywords:** Devuni Kadapa, Iconography, Art and Aesthetics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Kadapa region of Andhra Pradesh boasts a rich history and a legacy of artistic expression evident in its numerous temples. Among these architectural gems stands the Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara temple, nestled in Devuni Kadapa, a mere 7 kilometres from Kadapa city. This sacred site holds significance not only for its religious reverence but also for the exquisite sculptures adorning its walls and pillars.

This exploration delves into the historical and artistic tapestry of the Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara temple. We will embark on a journey through time, tracing the temple's origins to the Vijayanagara era and examining the artistic influences that shaped its design. Our focus will be on the captivating sculptures that adorn the Ranga Mandapa, the pillared hall facing the temple entrance. These intricate carvings depict a captivating blend of religious iconography, social scenes, and depictions of the Vijayanagara dynasty's lifestyle.

Through a detailed analysis of these sculptures, we will explore the concept of beauty in temple art. We will delve into the interplay between touch and vision in appreciating these three-dimensional works and how they evoke aesthetic experiences. By examining the sculptures depicting deities, courtly life, and even erotic scenes, we will gain a deeper understanding of the artistic sensibilities of the Vijayanagara period and the social and cultural milieu it reflected.

This exploration goes beyond mere art appreciation. It aims to unravel the stories etched onto the temple walls, offering a glimpse into the lives of the people who built and worshipped here. By understanding the temple's art, we gain a richer understanding of the history and cultural heritage of Kadapa and the wider Rayalaseema region.

## 2. DEVUNI KADAPA

The Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara Swamy temple resides in the Kadapa region of Andhra Pradesh, just a short distance from both the Kadapa railway station (7 kilometers) and bus station (4 kilometers). Devuni Kadapa, which translates to "entrance for Lord Venkateswara Swamy," is also known as "Tirumala Tholi Gadapa" due to its historical significance as a stop for pilgrims on their way to Tirumala [TTD Seva \(2022\)](#). The influence of the Vijayanagara Empire is evident in the temple's architecture, particularly the *mandapas* (halls), *antharalayam* (inner sanctum), and separate shrines for goddesses. This legacy is further solidified by the presence of both epigraphic and sculptural art forms throughout the temple complex.

## 3. HISTORICAL AREAS

*Raya gopura*, *garbagriha*, *antharayala*, *ranga mandapam*, *vaahana mandapa*, *dwajasthamba*, *Kalyana mandapa*, and *bali peetam* are all part of the temple. *Ranga mandapa* in Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple has beautiful and straightforward sculptures ([Figure 1](#)). Apart from Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, Sri Lakshmi shrine, which has a brass lizard in relief attached to *ranga mandapa* roof, was still left for us. [Naik & Reddy \(2007\)](#)

Kadapa was ruled by various dynasties, Pallavas, Cholas, Kakatiyas, and others. However, this temple, along with a few other historic temples in the Kadapa region, was heavily ruled by the Vijayanagara empire by Matli Kings (C.1336 A.D-1520 A.D). The Telugu inscription also states that Matli Anantabupaludu built *raja Gopura* and Kripacharya, a saint, installed Venkateswara Swami during the year C. 2nd century [Reddy \(2020\)](#), p.36. The inscription also says that the Venkateswara Swamy sculpture is housed in the Anjaneya Swamy temple, which Jambavantudu built [Reddy \(2020\)](#), p.37. Even today, we can find Anjaneya Swamy in Hanuman form ([Figure 4](#)) carved on granite stone on the back of Venkateswara Swamy.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to tradition, literary sources, and art evidence, the artists carved the surface with granite. The images have expressionless limbs, crudely finished forms, ornaments, patterns, etc [Dallapiccola & Verghese \(1998\)](#), p.12. Inscriptions in the locally spoken Dravidian language, Telugu can be found on the outer walls of the mandapa and inside the *antharalayam*. The inscription is carved on a rough surface with a single line, making decoding the text difficult. This could be due to the granite's hardness and large grain size [Dallapiccola & Verghese \(1998\)](#), p.15. It may take a lot of effort to express.

The *ranga mandapa*, which faces north from the temple's entrance, is made up of 16 pillars. Relief sculptures of Shiva and Vishnu associations, social and cultural activities, king's lifestyles, and erotic sculptures adorn each pillar. There are also a few empty pillars. At the entrance to *ranga mandapa*, couples are welcoming the devotee. In detail, the lower section visuals on the four pillars in the centre represent *nritya Ganapati*, goddess *Saraswati*, *asura* or *Kaali ma*, court dancers, Dashavataras, Garuda, king on an elephant, Thumburu (musician), hanuman, a man riding a horse, man killing a lion, couples, erotic scenes of animals and humans, and so on. The lower section visuals may differ from one pillar to the next.

In c.1517, the epigraphs on the walls of Sri Venkateswara swamy temple were written in Telugu. There are approximately 10-15 lines on each side of the walls. Mentions that "during the formation of the Vijayanagara empire in Rayalseema, Sri Krishna Devaraya and Timma Bhupala made donations to lord Tiruvengalanada in Kadapa village." donations of rice, greengram, ghee, yams, jaggery, and castor oil for lord Akhanda Tirupati, as well as castor oil for *homams* (Sacred fire rituals) and sacrifices on Chaitrasuddhapadyami day, to also known as Telugu new year/Ugadi [Panthula \(2020\)](#), p. 91. The temple received land donations from the city outskirts of Donka, Telagudi, Timmapuram and donated erotic garden by Vijayanagara empire kings. *rokam* (money) was given for the bhogam mela (women dancers) that was held on temple grounds". [Reddy \(2020\)](#), p.41. Dr. Chintakunta Siva Reddy, Pantula Pavan Kumar (journalist), and [Hanumachastri \(1997\)](#) from the C P Brown library and memorial trust had conducted extensive research on Sri Venkateswara swamy temple, Devuni Kadapa. P V Parabrama sastry was the first to decode the Sri Venkateswara swamy temple, Devuni Kadapa inscription.

To discuss in-depth, I'd like to describe sculptures on pillars that contain religious, demons, artists, Vijayanagara dynasty lifestyle, and so on. Along with these images, I'd like to include a few references to help you understand the concept of beauty in sculptures.

#### 5. AESTHETICS IN SCULPTURES

Sculpture is distinct in that it is directed toward and appreciated through touch rather than vision [Rachel \(2009\)](#), p. 286. A painting can be seen in a single frame, but a sculpture requires continuous viewing to comprehend the entire subject. Touch and vision are important senses for identifying the form, weight, volume, and solidarity of a sculpture. In the *critique of judgment*, According to Kant, beauty is divided into two categories namely *free beauty* and *adherent beauty* [Hammermeister \(2002\)](#), p. 26. Adherent beauty is meant to be in purposeful things or expertise, whereas free beauty is found in natural things.

There are numerous relief sculptures in the temple, of which I would like to highlight a few. *nrthya Ganesha* in the stanaka position appears to be dancing

Ganesha and rubbing his stomach (Figure 6) The sculpture of the goddess Saraswati holding the Veena, Vedas, and mala is common, but in this temple, other than the veena, no other musical instruments were prioritised (Figure 7). A saint sits on top doing meditation while holding an *akasa mala* (Figure 2), and a court dancer in the centre depicts *vitarka* Gupta & Asthana (2002), p. 110, (Figure 2) hasta mudra while musicians play drums beside her. A relief sculpture of *Virabhadra* Dallapiccola, & Verghese (1998), p. xviii, holding a Khadga and a anthropomorphic form of horse in a *namaskara* mudra (Figure 5). The court dancer is adorned out in beautiful jewellery *kankana* (a simple bracelet) and Stutely (2019), p. 40, a long and thick braided hairstyle. On pillar 2, the visual of the king's arrival on elephant appears royal and moves to the right side (Figure 3). The elephant is simply decorated, and there is a decorated seat/window on the back of the king. The Gopikas were hiding their private parts with their hands and conversing with Krishna of the well-known story, *Gopika vastrapa haranam* (Figure 8). A man on a horse riding to the right, holding a weapon. (Figure 9) The depicts lord Hanuman, who is painted orange and standing to the right, raising his right hand and resting his other hand on his thigh Dallapiccola, & Verghese (1998), p. xx, (Figure 10). Another relief depicts of a fight between a human and a tiger from their dynasty (Figure 11). This demonstrates the existence of a sports activities and their surrounding environment.

While temple sculptures are traditionally admired for their form and imagery Dehejia (2021-2022), the ability to touch them enhances their "free beauty" for some. Even those who don't believe in the deities depicted can appreciate the sculptures' historical and artistic value. Though touching is often restricted in Indian temples, it can be a way to experience the inherent beauty of the artwork. Temples can also embody "adherent beauty," as seen in the reverence given to Lord Ganesha during rituals and daily life.

Museums showcase diverse collections within their glass displays. While regulations prevent touching the objects, visitors can still appreciate them visually. Students might focus on detailed observation for drawing or study, while others simply enjoy the aesthetic experience. This appreciation of the inherent beauty of the objects embodies the concept of "free beauty." However, a personal connection to the collection, perhaps due to its historical significance or cultural relevance, can also evoke a sense of "adherent beauty."

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Elevation of Temple, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Kadapa (Dt), Andhra Pradesh.  
Source Chaganti Durga Prasad, 2021.



**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Saint; Dancer and Musicians in the Court, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Kadapa (Dt), Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** P Sri Kavya, 2021.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** Arrival of King on Elephant, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara temple, Kadapa (Dt), Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** P Sri Kavya, 2021.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Raj Mohan, Lord Anjaneya Swamy and Lord Venkateswara, Oil on Canvas, 6 x 4 Feet, 2017, Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara Temple.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5** Lord Virabhadra form with Weapons, Pillar 1 Left Side, Sri lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** Kavya, 2022

**Figure 6**



**Figure 6** Lord Ganesha, Pillar 1 Left Side, Sri lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** Kavya, 2022

**Figure 7**



**Figure 7** Goddess Saraswathi, Pillar 1 Left Side, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** Kavya, 2022

**Figure 8**



**Figure 8** Krishna with Gopikas, Pillar 2 Right Side, Sri lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** Kavya, 2022

**Figure 9**



**Figure 9** Man Riding Horse, Pillar 2 Right Side, Sri lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** Kavya, 2022

**Figure 10**



**Figure 10** Lord Hanuman, Pillar2 Right Side, Sri lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** Kavya, 2022

**Figure 11**



**Figure 11** Fighting Scene, Pillar 2 Right Side, Sri lakshmi Venkateshwara Temple, Devuni Kadapa, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh.

**Source** Kavya, 2022

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara temple in Devuni Kadapa offers a captivating glimpse into the artistic heritage of the Vijayanagara era. The intricate sculptures adorning the *ranga mandapa* depict a fascinating blend of religious iconography, social scenes, and depictions of the dynasty's lifestyle. By examining these sculptures, we gain a deeper understanding of the artistic sensibilities of the period and the social and cultural milieu it reflected.

The concept of beauty in temple art is multifaceted. While some appreciate the sculptures' form and imagery for their inherent "free beauty," others find their reverence in religious practice enhances their appreciation ("adherent beauty").

The exploration of this temple goes beyond mere art appreciation. It unveils the stories etched onto the walls, offering a glimpse into the lives of the builders and worshippers. Understanding the temple's art enriches our understanding of the history and cultural heritage of Kadapa and the wider Rayalaseema region.

This analysis has highlighted the importance of appreciating art within its specific context. Whether in a temple, museum, or art gallery, the way we experience art is shaped by our knowledge, purpose, and the space itself. Touch and sight, while both important in appreciating art, are governed by the established norms and respect for the artwork's preservation.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper stems from a visit to the captivating Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara swamy temple in Andhra Pradesh, India. It delves into the concept of beauty as it manifests in the temple's sculptures, particularly the intricate carvings adorning the Ranga Mandapa.



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