



Lepakshi - Town of Veerabhadra Temple - An Epigraphical Study

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ABSTRACT: Lepakshi which is a small town that lies between Latitude $13^{\circ} - 48^{\circ}$ N, Long $77^{\circ} - 36^{\circ}$ E, situated 15 Kms East of Hindupur, a former taluka of Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh. Both from the Historical and Archeological point of view, Lepakshi is the most important place not only in Anantapur District but also in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It is famous for its temples of Veerabhadra, Papaneswara, Raghunatha and Durga of which the Veerabhadra temple is most important. Apart from iconography and numerous sculptures, it has rare paintings, murals and portraits of the brothers Virupanna and Viranna who built these magnificent temples. The style of architecture, sculpture and paintings suggests that this temple belonged to the Rayas of Vijayanagara, the most famous south Indian dynasty. In this paper an attempt is made to trace the Historical background of the temple as well as contributions of the Rayas of Vijayanagara by taking in to consideration of the stone inscriptions and Copper plate grants that are found at Lepakshi and elsewhere and to identify inscriptional villages with modern parallels as accurately as possible. The paper is divided in to four sections, section one deal with Antiquity of the temple, section two deal with Historical background of the temple. Section three deal with life of the Author of the temple and his relations with the king Achyuthadevaraya and finally section four of the paper examined the endowments made to the temple.

Key Words: Lepakshi architecture- Epigraphical sources- Antiquity – Historical background – Penukonda Virupanna – contributions of the Rayas of Vijayanagara

1. Introduction:

The Vijayanagara rulers given importance to make structural additions like mandapas, prakaras to the temples of the earlier periods in many places, although there are instances where temples were newly constructed. Among these Lepakshi temple in Anantapur district of Rayalaseema, a part of the present Andhrapradesh state is a magnificent one. It is a notable example of the Vijayanagara style of architecture. The present structure is said to be the work of two brothers, Virupanna and Viranna during the reign of Achyutadevaraya, who ruled the Vijayanagara empire from 1530 to 1542 A.D. Lepakshi Temple is constructed over a low rising hill referred in inscriptions as the Kurmasila (Tortoise shaped hill) to the south of the village and faces north. An inscription dated 1535¹ from Veerabhadra Temple refers this Kurmasila as Dakshina Kailasa which suggests that this area was considered as sacred

as the Kailasa, the original abode of Shiva. This town is referred as Lepakshinagara² in the Vijayanagara inscriptions. In 1346 A.D. Harihara made Lepakshi as his second capital marking the start of the Vijayanagara rule over the town³.

As stated in an epigraph dt 1537A.D.⁴ Lepakshi was located in Sadaliventhe, which was included in the Roddanadu, a subdivision of the Penugonda rajya. Sadali, the Headquarters of the Division can be identified as modern Sadali in Sidlaghatta taluka in Chikkaballapur district of Karnataka state. Hence, sadaliventhe division can be located in the region between Lepakshi and Sidlaghatta. The Lepakshi Sthala is referred to in one of the inscription dt1680 A.D.⁵ found at Penukonda. It is thus evident that Lepakshi was not only a flourishing town but also the head quarters of a Sthala. Number of monographs has been written by different scholars about this place in different points of view. As far as an Epigraphical study on Lepakshi, no work has been done so far. Hence, In this paper an attempt is made to traces the Historical background of the temple and the Endowments made to the temple.

Objectives and Methodology:

The paper is based on the primary and secondary source. The inscriptional data is collected from various sources published by Archaeological survey of india, Government of Andhra Pradesh, S.V.University,Tirupathi. The main objective of the paper is to analyse the contributions of the Rayas of Vijayanagara , Royal officials and private individuals by taking in to consideration of the stone inscriptions and Copper plate grants that are found at Lepakshi and elsewhere and to indentify donated inscriptional villages with modern parallels as accurately as possible. Modern counter parts of the donated inscriptional villages are identified with the help of district census hand books on the basis of existence with the same or similar names, distortions/linguistic variations in the area corresponding to the find spot. The paper is divided in to four sections, section one deal with Antiquity of the temple , section two deal with Historical background of the temple. Section three deal with life of the Author of the temple and his relations with the king Achyuthadevaraya and finally section four of the paper examined the endowments made to the temple.

Antiquity of the Temple:

Lepakshi has its long antiquity. A reference is made in Skandapurana, Lepakshi as one of the 108 important Saivakshetras in India⁶. According to a Local legend reputed sage Agastya performed Tapas behind a big boulder on the Kurmasila hillock and installed two shrines of Papaneseswara and Raghunatha each in opposite Direction⁷, which can be identified in the temple.

The temple had its root in the remote past, which is evident from four pillars, two at the Eastern end and two at the Western end of the Mukha Mandapa are not square with hexagonal shape as the rest of the 56 pillars, but nearly round in shape with the stupa and other abstract designs carved on them. Door -lintels also eschewing any figurative art. In this respect the earliest Lepakshi sculptures are allied to earlier Jain or Buddhist religious art. The Conversion of this original Jain or Buddhist temple in to saivate temple and the construction and re-construction of

further structures, were made during the period of Vijayanagara⁸. Thus it seems that Lepakshi had been in existence for a long ago.

Historical Back Ground of the Temple:

18 stone inscriptions and 5 copper plate grants are found in around this Temple. ranging the period from 1424 to 1678 A.D., out of which two belongs to praudha Devaraya, one inscription related to Saluva Narasimha, eighteen belongs to Achyutadevaraya, one related to Sadasivaraya, and one belongs to qutubsahis, but, none of them date the construction of the temple. All the inscriptions are about gifts of land and villages to the temple of Veerabhadra at Lepakshi. many donations were by Virupanna. Six lithic inscriptions and two copper plate grants from veerabhadra temple complex enumerated the endowments made by virupanna for the expences of daily worship and offerings and of special festivals.

According to an inscription dated 1531A.D.⁹ found on the inside of the outer wall of the temple that, Virupanna in conjunction with his younger brother Virana nayaka built the prakara walls of the Veerabhadra Swamy temple. But an inscription found by ASI, Southern circle on the Adistana of the main temple referred to certain repairs by the Salauva king Narasimha¹⁰. It may be presume that a small temple existed here, some time before Saluva Narasimha. It may be reasonably inferred that, the work of enlarging the temple and beautifying it with sculpture and painting was begun by Virupanna by about 1530 A.D, because he was a subordinate officer of Achyutaraya by that time.

Life of Virupanna, the author of the temple:

Penukonda Virupanna, a distinguished royal officer of Achyutaraya, the Vijayanagara king, was the son of Lepakshi Nandi Lakkisetty and Muddamamba and grandson of Maniksetty. Rohini is the birth star of virupanna. He was a royal officer belonging to the personal staff of Achyutaraya. Virupanna first entered in to the service of the king as an ordinary door keeper of the palace (Achyutaraya Maharaya Vasal)¹¹. From his original post of the door keeper of the palace and some time a Talavara (Security Officer) of Vidyanagara (Vijayanagara)¹² He must have been promoted to the governorship or slightly subordinate office in the provinces of Penukonda and Chandragiri¹³. Some royal Grants in different villages to several temples and gifts of money on a large scale together with presentations of gold and silver vessels by Virupanna ensuring his high position in the state. Besides the construction of temple, Penugonda Virupanna not only made several grants of Villages, Lands but also made the king Achyutadevaraya and his Lieutenant such as Achyutarya Mallapanna to make similar grants to these deities for the expenses of daily worship and offerings and of special festivals.

Virupanna relations with Achyutadevaraya:

The local tradition states that, Virupanna, the author of the veerabhadra temple used the public funds for the construction of the temple. He did not even secure prior permission from the emperor for the same. Hence Achyutaraya announced the punishment that Virupanna to be blinded. Being a loyal servant Virupanna plucked out his own eyes and hit them on a wall near kalyana mandapa¹⁴. Two dark strains are shown on the west wall of the southern entrance of the inner

enclosure, which are said to be the marks made by his eyes when he clashed himself against the wall. This appear to be a fiction rather than a fact.

We have got epigraphical evidences¹⁵ to prove that Virupanna maintained cordial relations with the emperor and also made the emperor to donate villages namely Chelavindala, Hambana halli, Kousuvari palli, Timmaganahalli, Modaya between 1531 to 1535 A.D. for the services of the Veerabhadreswara Temple at Lepakshi. Hence, no credence need be given to the legendary account that Achyutadevaraya was averse to the construction of the temple or antagonistic to Virupanna. There are inscriptions mentioning the gifts made by him as late 1542 A.D, which attest to the fact that he was alive up to that date. The reign of Achyutadevaraya also ended in 1542. There are four portraits, said to be of Virupanna among the paintings and sculptures of this Temple. One at antharala, second one at artha mantapa, third one at mukha mantapa. The fourth one is a sculptural representation on a front pillar of the muka mantapa. It is clear that Achyutaraya fought many wars during his region. This might have affected the financial stability of the empire, which in turn left the Kalyanamandapa unfinished

Endowments of the Rayas of Vijayanagara to the temple:-

A number of inscriptions which found in the temple of Lepakshi and the places like Gorrepalli, Cheluvendula and Choutakunte palli in the Anantapur district throw some light on the contributions of the Vijayanagara rulers to the Lepakshi Temple. In addition to the King and Virupanna; merchant guilds, Mahajanas of Agraharas, Royal officers, private individuals at the instance of Virupanna and his brother Viranna made liberal grants of villages, part of villages, lands and tolls for the maintenance of temple, to perform daily services and to conduct various temple festivals.

An inscription found on the Rocky floor of the second Prakara of the Veerabadra Temple at Lepakshi dated 1531 A.D¹⁶. states that at the request of Virupanna, son of Nandi Lakki Setty and Muddamamba, the king made a gift of the village Chelivindla,(modern chalivendula in Hindupur mandal) surnamed Achyutendrapura in the presence of god Virupaksha on the bank of the Tungabadra for the service of the gods Veerabadra, Ragonatha and Papavinasa of Lepaksh

A copper plate grant dated 1533 A.D¹⁷, records that at the request of Virupanna, the emperor Achyutharaya made a gift of three villages namely Hambana halli(modern Hampasandra,Gouribidanur taluk of chikkaballapur district;) Kancharala halli, (modern kencherlahalli,Chintamani taluk of chikkaballapur district) and Timmagondana halli(modern timmanahalli in Gudibanda taluk of chikkaballapur district,) in the Penugonda rajya to the temple of Veerabhadra for the offerings and worship. The villages were all surnamed Venkatadrisamudra after prince venkatadri.

Another inscription dated 1534 A.D¹⁸ found at Lepakshi temple registers a gift of tolls collected by the Merchants at the fair held every Sunday in the hamlet of Viresvaradevara pura belonging to Lepakshi, of tolls raised in Harunadu and Hosurunadu and of other incomes for oblations to be offered in three shrines. The grant was made at the instance of Virananayaka, brother of penugonda Virupannaya. Virannanayaka was the administrator of Harunadu(it can be identified as the region around modern Parigi of Anantapur district.) Hosurunadu(it is the region around

modern Hosuru, which is in the border of the Sira taluk of Tumkur district of Karnataka and Agali mandal of Anantapur district.)

Another inscription found on the Eastern of the wall of the Second Prakara of Veerabadra temple at Lepakshi dated 1535 A.D¹⁹ records that the king made a gift of the village Modaya,(modern Moda in Parigi mandal of Anantapur district) for the service of god Veerabadra of Lepakshi.

An inscription found on the Eastern wall of the second prakara of the Veerabadra temple dated 1537 A.D²⁰ records that the chief Achyutaraya Mallappanna purchased a Manya village Nandi Cherla near Karakalike(modern Karekallahalli inGouribidanur taluk) in Burudakunte Rajya(the headquarters of Rajya is identified as Burudugunte in Chintamani taluk of chikkaballapur district) and presented it for the service of the god Viresa. The donated village is not identified, Hence,donated village may be located around the village Karekallahalli.

An inscription found on a boulder to the west of the village Chautakuntapalli dated 1537 A.D²¹ states that a copper plate grant was issued regarding the gift of the village Kanchakara halli for the services of the god Papavinasa, Virasa and Raghunatha at Lepakshi by Virupanna son of Nandi Lakkisetti. Inscriptional village is not identified,but find spot of the inscription is modern Chowtakuntahalli in Gouribidanur taluka.Hence,inscriptional village may be around the find spot of the inscription.

An Inscription found at Lepakshi temple dated 1537 A.D²² mentions the sale of land to three shrines by the Mahajanas of the Sarvamanya Agrahara Village of Kanchisamudra(modern Kanchisamudramu in Lepakshi mandal) which was given to them as a free gift by Pratapadevamaharaya

An inscription found in the temple at Lepakshi dated 1537 A.D²³. records the gift to the shrines of Papavinasana and Raghunathadeva and Viresvaradeva by the Mahajans of Nagaregera alias Krishnaraya samudra agrahara, a village in Rodda nadu, a subdivision of the penukonda Rajya.(Nagarigera is in,Gouribidanur taluk of chikkaballapur district;)

An inscription found on the East wall of the second prakara of the Veerabhadra temple at Lepakshi, dated 1537 A.D²⁴, records that Penugonde Virupanna purchased for 551 varahas and one dharana from certain Brahmanas some vrittis in the village of Kalanuru,(present Kalluru, Lepakshi mandal) surnamed Triyambakanarayanapura and gifted them to the god Vireswara of Lepakshi for maintaining sacred food offerings.

An inscription found on the wall of the Varandah round the Veerabhadra temple at Lepakshi dated 1538 A.D²⁵ records that Penugonda Virupannayya made a gift of the village Chikkanandicheruvu surnamed Devarayapura, near village Depparu in Sadali-sthla of Chelura chavadi which he purchased for 400 ghatti varahas from certain Brahmas to the god Vireswara for maintaining sacred food offerings. The donated village is not identified. neighbouring village Depparu is identical with modern Dibburahalli in Sidlaghatta taluk. Sadali is also in Sidlaghatta taluk.the headquarters of the division Cheluru is in Bagepalli taluk.Hence, the donated village may be in Sidlaghatta talukof Chikkaballapur district.

An inscription found on the Southern wall of the Prakara of the Lakshmidivi temple at Gorrepalli dated 1538A.D.²⁶ records that the king granted the village Modaya for the service of the gods Vireswara, Papavinasadeva and Raghavesvara.

An inscription found on the wall of the Varandah round the Veerabhadra Temple, Lepakshi dated 19th August 1538 A.D.²⁷ records that Penugonde Virupannayya purchased from two Brahmns half of the village Sadasivapura,(may be Sadasivanahalli in Gouribidanur taluk)surnamed Devarayapura for 108 varahas and made a gift of it for the service of the god Veerabhadra of Lepakshi.

An inscription found on the wall of the Varandah round the Veerabhadra temple at Lepakshi dated 1538 A.D.²⁸ records that Penugonde Virupannayya along with his younger brother Viranna purchased some vritti lands for 150 varahas in the village Nagaragere surnamed Krishnaraya samudra from certain Brahmns and made gift of them for offering sacred food to the god Veereswara of Lepakshi

A Copper plate grant no of 18 of 1937-38 dated 1539²⁴ registers the gift of the village of Kotturu (modern Kotnuru in Hindupur mandal) after purchasing it from several Brahmns, whose ancestors got it from the king Devaraya by Viruppanna mahipati for offerings and worship to god Virabadra of Lepakshi for the merit of the king.

he copper plate grant no 19 of 1937-38 dated 1541³⁰ registers the gift of the village of Sirivara along with its Hamlets Manchena halli and Mayinayakkahalli for the Annual Car festival and daily worship of god Virabadra of Lepakshi at the request of Virupanna.(Sirivara is identical with modern Sirivaram in Lepakshi mandal,Manchenahalli is inGouribidanur taluk)

Conclusion:

To sum up, the above mentioned inscriptions show the great reverence god Veerabadra had in the region and around Lepakshi. The donated villages for offerings and worship and to conduct annual car festival to god Virabadra are located in Gouribidanur taluka,Chintamani taluka, Gudibanda taluka,Sidlaghatta taluka in Chikkaballapur district and Sira taluka of Tumkur district of Karnataka State ;Parigi, Hindupur mandals of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

It also shows that Achyutaraya inspite of his leanings towards Srivaishnavism, didn't overlook the efforts for the development of Saivism also. This shows the policy of Religious toleration followed by the Vijayanagara rulers particularly Achyutaraya. Virupanna like his over lord Achyutaraya made it a policy to maintain religious harmony though his personal faith was saivism ,he showered his favour on Saivaite and Vaishnavite temples alike.All these endowments are stated to have been made for the religious merit of the king Achyutaraya.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS ARTICLE;

A.R. Annual reort ; TTDI.Tirumala Tirupati Devastanams Inscriptions;
IAPCD; Inscriptions of andhrpradesh cuddapah district

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