

**Two Day National Seminar on “Depiction of
Epic Stories in South Indian Art”**

Seminar Report

Date: 8th-9th March 2017

At

SVU Arts Block Auditorium

Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati

Organized by Indian Council of Historical

Research, Southern Regional Centre,

Bengaluru

Introduction

The seminar aimed to bring out the depiction of Indian Epics such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagvata Purana, Shiva Purana etc. Tradition of carving narrative sculptures of Indian epics in South India is found in early centuries of Christian era. The earliest narrative sculptures of Ramayana and Mahabharata are found at Chalukyan temples at Pattadakal, and Pallava temples at Mahabalipuram, etc.

The tradition of narrative sculptures also continued in the successive periods till the 17th century AD in South India. The local version of Ramayana and Mahabharata stories are found in the South Indian narrative sculptural art. The seminar aimed to document the local version of Indian epic stories such as Ramayana, and Mahabharata in the sculptural art of South India. For example the Kamba Ramayana story is found in the Vijayanagara sculptural narrative art. In the post Vijayanagara period the Girija Kalyana story was popular in sculptural as well as in painting traditions.

These narrative sculptures on the walls of temples, *mantapas*, etc. The tradition of narrative paintings on walls or in manuscripts was also found in post-Vijayanagara period. The seminar focussed on the documentation and study of these narrative sculpture and painting traditions.

Following sub-themes were identified:

Narrative sculptures of Epic stories from ancient period to Vijayanagara period.

Narrative sculptural art of Vijayanagra and Post Vijayanagra period in South India.

Tradition of narrative paintings in South India including Andhra Ramayana paintings, *Pata* paintings, Girija Kalyana paintings, etc.

The seminar captured the multifarious aspects of the epics and its impact on South Indian Art. A host of academics, archaeologists, indologists, epigraphist and scholars threw light on various aspects of the work. Among the well known scholars were Dr. R. Nagaswamy, Professor Kiran Kranth Choudary, Professor Nanditha Krishna, Professor Shrinivas V. Padigar, Dr. Meenakshi Jain, , Dr. T. Satyamurti, Professor V. Meena Kumari, Professor N. Krishan Reddy and many more.

Detailed Proceedings

The Southern Regional Centre (SRC) of Indian Council of Historical, Bengaluru organised Two-Day National Seminar on Depiction of Epic Stories in South Indian Art at the Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati. The seminar was inaugurated on 8th March 2017 by Chairman of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams who was invited as Chief Guest for the inaugural session. The programme started with the warm reception of the Chief Guest Dr. Chadalawada Krishnamurthy, Chairman, TTD and Keynote speaker Professor Nanditha Krishna, Director, C.P.R Aiyar Foundation and Member Council, ICHR followed by the lightening of traditional lamp which officially marked the beginning of the event. Also as a token of acknowledgement and respect bouiques, memento and traditional shawl were presented to the guests. The proceedings further progressed with the visionary address of the Professor Y. Sudershan Rao, Chairman ICHR. (Speech in Telugu). In his presidential remarks, he called for more research in this area since they were not paid due attention in the past years. He further said “ Historians did not study religious aspects quite intently although it is an important aspect of our lives and a useful tool to understand our society and its past.He added that the Purana is the product of a serious and deep enquiry into the unknown times of this Creation while the Epics demonstrated the same theme i.e. Dharma through contemporary great events only to assure us of its all time paramountcy and infallibility.

The programme included the release of the Southern Regional Centre’s epigraphical volume the *Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Vol. VI [Sanskrit Inscription]* edited by Shrinivas H. Ritti. The volume was released by the *Chief Guest* **Dr. Chadalawada Krishnamurthy**, Chairman, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, Tirupati.

The Inaugural programme progressed further by felicitating **Professor S.S. Ramachandra Murthy (Tirupati)** as the ICHR National fellow for the year 2016-18 for his distinguished and untiring efforts to the studies in Indian History, Culture & Epigraphy. He was honoured by Professor Y. Sudershan Rao, Chairman, ICHR with a shawl, memento and the certificate.

Professor D. Kiran Kranth Choudary, Convener of the Seminar, introduced the theme of the Seminar and played a big role in successfully organizing the two day national event. *Keynote Address* was delivered by **Professor Nanditha Krishna**, Council Member, ICHR & Director, C.P.R Aiyar Foundation. The programme was followed by the *Chief Guest’s Address* by **Dr. Chadalawada Krishnamurthy**, Chairman, Tirumala Tirupati

Devasthanams, Tirupati.(Speech in Telegu). Prof..... Vice Chancellor, SVUniversity, Tirupati, graced the inaugural as a special guest and wished the program a success.

The two-day National Seminar was divided into **five academic Sessions** apart from the Inaugural and Valedictory programmes. Total **NINE papers** were submitted in the academic sessions.

First Day i.e. on 8th March 2017, the Inaugural programme was followed by the academic session. Four papers were presented in two sessions. The details are as follows-

The First Session [2.00-3.30 p.m.] was Chaired by Professor Nanditha Krishna, Council Member, ICHR & Director, C.P.R Aiyar Foundation. Professor D. Kiran Kranth Choudary, Former Principal and Dean, Professor Emeritus, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, was the Academic Coordinator and Dr. Niharika K. Sankrityayan, Post-Doctoral Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Mandi) was the *Rapporteur* for the Academic Sessions. Following papers were presented

Paper 1	Dr. R. Nagaswamy Eminent Historian, Archaeologist & Epigraphist.	<i>Paper on Depiction of Epic Stories in South India</i>
Paper 2	Professor N. Krishan Reddy Head, Dept. of AIHC & Archaeology, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati.	<i>Influence of Epics on Epigraphy</i>

The Second Academic Session [3.45 – 5.00 p.m.] was Chaired by Dr. R. Nagaswamy, Eminent Historian, Archaeologist & Epigraphist and the following papers were presented-

Paper 3	Dr. Meenakshi Jain Council Member, ICHR & Eminent Historian and Political	<i>Mobility of Gods on Medieval India.</i>
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	Scientist, Associate Professor of History, Gargi College, Delhi University.	
Paper 4	Professor Shrinivas V. Padigar ICHR Senior Academic Fellow & Former Professor and Chair, Dept of A.I. History and Epigraphy, Karnatak University, Dharwad.	<i>Epic Themes in the Narrative Sculpture of the Chalukyas of Badami</i>

A Visit to *Chandragiri Fort* to view the Sound and Light show was arranged at the end of the day.

On Second day i.e. 9th March 2017, five papers were presented in three academic sessions.

The Third Academic Session [10.30 – 11.30 a.m] was chaired by Dr. Meenakshi Jain, Council Member, ICHR & Eminent Historian and Political Scientist, Associate Professor of History, Gargi College, Delhi University and Dr. Niharika K. Sankrityayan, Post-Doctoral Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Mandi, was the *Rapporteur* for the Academic Sessions. Following papers were presented.

Paper 5	Professor D. Kiran Kranth Choudary Former Principal and Dean, Professor of Emeritus, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati	<i>Impact of Regional Ramayanas in the Depiction of Episodes in Art: (Sapta Tala (Sala) Bhedana)</i>
Paper 6	Dr. T. Satyamurti Eminent Archaeologist.	<i>Cultural Migrations Reflected in Art.</i>

The Fourth Academic Session [11.45 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.] was Chaired by Professor Shrinivas V. Padigar, ICHR Senior Academic Fellow & Former Professor and Chair, Dept of A.I. History and Epigraphy, Karnatak University, Dharwad. Following paper was presented

Paper 7	Prof.V.Meena Kumari (Retd) Dept. of A.I.H.C. & Archaeology, Osmania University, Hyderabad.	<i>Bhagavata Themes in Shorapur Miniature Paintings.</i>
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The Fifth Academic Session [2.00-3.30 p.m.] was chaired by Professor N. Krishan Reddy, Head, Dept. of AIHC & Archaeology, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati. The following papers were presented-

Paper 8	Ms. Lathashree Public Archaeologist	<i>A Mind set in stone-interpreting the role of the artist as an individual: a case study of narrative panels based on the epics in the temples of Bengaluru area.</i>
Paper 9	Dr. Niharika K. Sankrityayan Post-Doctoral Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Mandi.	<i>The Ramayana Panels on the Khetapai Narayana Temple at Bhatkal.</i>

First Day- 8th March 2017

On the first day the academic session started with first paper by **Dr. R. Nagaswamy** on the Ramayana miniatures panels. Dr. Nagaswamy pointed out that the story of Ramayana not just belongs to India but extend beyond the boundaries of Indian subcontinent. Dr. Nagaswamy cited inscriptions of Cambodian kings and their strong practice of Rama legend as a model. He also brought out the four categories essential for understanding the nuances of temples and religion. He showed miniature paintings of Chola period with themes ranging from *putrakameshthi yajna* to Sita's abduction, and other important events from the Ramayana. He

pointed out that the panels depicting the Ramayana scenes followed a sequence. Dr. Nagaswamy further suggested that apart from Valmiki's Ramayana, Kamban's Ramayana was also used as a source for depiction on the temples built during the time of the Cholas.

The second paper was presented by **Prof. N. Krishna Reddy** on the influence of epics on epigraphy. He also focussed on the influence of the Ramayana and Mahabharata on our daily lives. He suggested that the composer of the inscriptions took inspiration from the epics and used them while engraving on stone. These composers acknowledged the authors of the epics, Valmiki and Vyas. Prof Reddy cited epigraphic record mentioning the donations made to the recitation of the epics and Puranas in the temples. Prof. Reddy in his paper talked about a comparison between Satavahana kings in particular and epic heroes like Rama, Arjuna, and Kesav. He also pointed out the role played by agraharas, mathas and temples.

The third paper was presented by **Dr. Meenakshi Jain** on mobility of gods in medieval India. Dr. Jain talked about the link between the temple and the deity and how it is broken when the temple comes under attack. She cited several examples as case studies where the deity was relocated or re-appropriated. Dr. Jain also traces the movement of the image of the deity and construction of temples, sometimes bigger than the earlier ones. She stresses on the role played by temple priests and servants in protecting images of the temples. Dr. Jain has referred to numerous travellers accounts to understand the entire relocation process.

The last paper of the session was presented by **Prof S. V. Padigar** on epic themes in the narrative sculpture of the Chalukyas of Badami. Prof. Padigar talked about the Ramayana depiction during the time of the Chalukyas of Badami in particular. He points out that the narrative friezes in the caves of Badami have influences from Harivamsa Purana. Prof. Padigar also points out that how some episodes are overlooked and the focus mostly was on Sita's abduction. He further pointed out that most of the Ramayana depictions were on the south wall temple, for example Virupaksha and Papanatha temples at Pattadakal. He also talked about certain gestures which were portrayed in the epic narrative like helpful gesture of Suparsva. He brilliantly brought out the notion of dharma/adharma through the depiction of Vali-vadha. He highlighted the moral values which were embedded in the epic narrative and were profusely used by the Chalukyas of Badami

Second Day – 9th March 2017

On the second day of the seminar, the first paper was presented by **Prof. V. Meena Kumari** on Bhagavata themes in Shorapur miniature paintings. Prof. Kumari talked about the evolution of Deccani paintings into various forms and styles. According to Prof. Kumari, the Shorapur miniatures focus on Bhagavata themes which also have Islamic influence. According to her, these miniatures at times consist of entire story. In her talk she highlighted the various themes of the miniature which mostly included Krishnacharita scenes. She pointed out that although the influence of the Deccani and late Hyderabad schools play a prominent role in the miniatures of the samsthanas, each of the samsthana schools has a unique character to it. Prof. Kumari also discussed about the movement of the artists and the patronage they received for the local rulers.

The second paper was presented by **Prof Kiran Kranth Choudary** on impact of regional Ramayana in the depiction of episodes in art. Prof. Choudary in his presentation stressed on the relevance of literature in understanding art. His entire presentation stressed on the illustration of Rama cutting the seven shala trees. Prof Choudary argued that apart from Valmiki Ramayana, Kamban Ramayana and folk versions of the epic were used in choosing themes for the depiction on temple walls. Regarding the story of Rama cutting seven shala trees, he suggested both tala and shala are mentioned in the thirty two different manuscripts used in the Kishkinda kanda.

The third paper was presented by **Dr. T. Satyamurthi** on epic themes as cultural migration reflected in art. He pointed out that in Tamil country, the reference to epics and the characters from the epics are found in Sangam literature; the depiction of epic scenes appear during the time of the Pallavas. He stressed on two broad categories which were designed by the artisans and Silpa texts were referred to in image worship. He further argued that although various themes were used for depiction on temple walls, Kiratarjuniyam and other stories from Mahabharata were most revered. Moving to the Cholas, Dr. Satyamurthi talked about early Chola temples with Ramayana scenes which had similarity with Valmiki Ramayana.

The fourth speaker Ms **Lathashree K. S.** presented on the role of artist as an individual. She pointed that narrative panels of the epics becomes landmark in the landscape of the temples. She further suggested probable reason why certain panels have been represented on the temple walls while few never get picked for illustration.

The last paper was presented by **Dr. Niharika K. Sankrityayan** on the Ramayana panels in the Khetapai Narayana temple at Bhatkal, Karnataka. She focussed on the Ramayana episodes which acquire importance in the temple, the validation for its choice and the factors which were perhaps responsible for the exclusion of several relevant scenes in the temple.

Valedictory Function

The two day seminar ended with grand valedictory function. On the occasion Padma Bhushan Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam, Legendary Indian Classical Bharat Natyam, Maestro was the Chief Guest. She is a rare combination of a dancer, research scholar, choreographer, music composer & musician, teacher, author and indologist. Dr. R Nagaswamy, Eminent Historian and Archaeologist and Professor M. Devarajulu, Registrar, Sri Venkateswara University graced the occasion as the Guests of Honour.

Dr. Niharika K. Sankrityayan gave a brief report of the seminar and presented insights of the papers presented in the seminar. *Guests of Honour* **Dr. R. Nagaswamy**, Eminent Historian, Archaeologist & Epigraphist and **Professor M. Devarajulu**, Registrar, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, delivered their *Messages*.

The Chief Guest Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam emphasized that Epics recount histories of nations via long narrative poems conveying the roles played by men, women, and Gods along with creatures of the animal and spirit worlds. The dance depicts conflicting situations faced by characters from the epic stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

Professor Y. Sudershan Rao in his concluding remarks at the valedictory function extended his special thanks to the Convener of the Seminar Professor Kiran Kranth Choudary and to Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam for gracing the occasion.

The seminar ended with Vote of thanks to all the guests and participants by the Convener of the Seminar, Professor Kiran Kranth Choudary. Prominent among those who made substantial contributions in making the two day national event a grand success were ICHR, Southern Regional Staff and Research Assistants from Sri Venkateswara University and Dr. Hema, Dept of AIHC&A, deserved special thanks for managing the function at the technical end.

Overall for the lover of history, culture, art, literature and mythology, the seminar was an intellectual and cultural treat.

Photo Gallery of the Seminar



Professor Y. Sudershan Rao , Dr. C. Krishnamurthy, Professor Nanditha Krishna, and Professor Kiran Kranth Choudary and Dr. S.S. Ramchandra Murthy lighting the auspicious lamp



Book Release of ICHR latest publication “Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Rulers (Sanskrit Inscriptions) Vol.VI edited by Professor S. Ritti by Professor Y. Sudershan Rao ,Chairman ICHR, Professor Nanditha Krishna, Dr. C. Krishnamurthy Chairman TTD , and Professor Kiran Kranth Choudary



Felicitation Ceremony of Dr. S.S. Ramchandra Murthy , ICHR Nation Fellow (2016-18) by Professor Y. Sudershan Rao and Dr. C. Krishnamurthy, Chairman TTD and Professor Kiran Kranth Choudary



Professor Y. Sudershan Rao honouring Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam Maestro Indian Classical Bharata Natyam



Professor Y. Sudershan Rao delivering Presidential address



Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam delivering valedictory address



Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam being presented a memento by Professor Rao



Professor Y. Sudershan Rao presenting a shawl to Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam

