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Temples and Legends
of
Andhra Pradesh

By
N. RAMESAN

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BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
CHAUHATTY : BOMBAY

आ नो भद्राः क्तवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, 1-89-1

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

General Editors

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98

**TEMPLES AND LEGENDS
OF
ANDHRA PRADESH
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N. RAMESAN**

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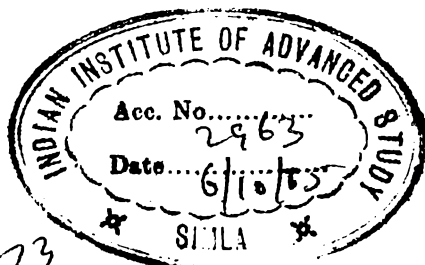
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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan — that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay — needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2/-.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting itself to the utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions that allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order, we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspirations which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books from other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, besides the movements of the Indian mind, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita*, by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who does not know it does not know the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas the climax of which is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone, the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI:
October 3, 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

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Map of Andhra Pradesh showing the Temples *Frontispiece*
 Ground Plan of Srisailam Temples *Facing p. 18*

This book is respectfully dedicated to
Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathy Swamy of
Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Pitam,
By whose grace, I am what I am.

समर्पणम्

व्यक्तो ऽ व्यक्तः परात्मा सगुण इति तथा निर्गुणो वेति सन्तः
वेदान्तैस्संवदन्ति ; प्रियगुरुकृपयाऽऽक्रान्तचित्तस्य पुंसः ।
सर्वं तत् व्यर्थमाभात्ययमनुभवति ब्रह्मभावं गुरौ यत्
दीव्यत्यानन्दवार्धौ; परमगुरुकृपाशक्तिरेषा हि लोके ॥ १ ॥

पापं मज्जन्म लेभे विजयमसदृशं कामकोटीयतीन्द्रम्
लेभेऽहं दैवतं यत्; जननमरणतो यत्कृपा मुक्तिदात्री ।
मद्दैवं मद्गुरुः मच्छरणं अयमहं चार्पयन् माममुष्मै
धन्यं मन्ये जनुर्मे यदिह गुरुकृपा दैवशक्तेर्हि शक्ता ॥ २ ॥

आन्ध्रियां देवदेवालयकथनकृतिं जीवते दैवताय
श्रीकाञ्चीकामकोटीयतिवरगुरवे भक्तिपूर्णोऽर्पयामि ।
सत्याद्वैताध्वदृष्ट्या चरमचरमिदं ब्रह्मरूपं यतोऽस्मात्
मूर्तिर्वा सत्पुमान् वा न भजति हि भिदां अस्मदद्वैतमार्गे ॥ ३ ॥

ON TEMPLES

ARYAVARTA is a land of holy temples and shrines and sacred rivers and mountains. The people inhabiting this hallowed land are religious by nature and have given expression to their religious emotions in various ways. The "Hindu Dharma" or the "Sanatana Dharma" is the eternal law of these people. The earliest scriptures called this law of life as "Rita" as opposed to "Anrita."

The Hindus owe allegiance to the Vedas, which are their holy scriptures. The Vedas present a complete and panoramic view of life in all its facets. They contain within themselves, not merely the philosophical conclusions of the great Vedic rishis but also a detailed record of conduct for ordinary man.

The Vedas are divided into four parts viz., the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. The Samhitas are hymns sung in exquisite poetry, in praise of the Vedic Gods, like Indra, Agni, Varuna etc. The Brahmanas are the liturgical portion of the Vedas, and contain details about the yagas and sacrifices to be performed by every one. Aranyakas are the mature thoughts of persons, who having tasted life in all its aspects, and not being satisfied with the transient pleasures of the senses, seek the salvation of the spirit, in the quietude of the Aranyas or the forests. The Upanishads, otherwise called the Vedanta, represent the quintessence and acme of the philosophic thinking, and mystic realisation of the ancient seers. All these four portions, put together, present a pattern of life, to

which the Hindus, right up to the present day, still owe their allegiance broadly.

According to these ancient ideals, a man's life is a sum total of the result of all its actions or Karma in his previous lives. Every Karma leaves its own Vasana which in its own turn, produces another resultant Karma. To get over this vicious circle, every one has to perform his Dharma, with mental detachment, when no Karma accrues. Dharma is a duty, which every one has to discharge, according to the circumstances in which he finds himself placed, whether he likes it or not. This has to be performed with complete detachment and as an act of total surrender to the Lord. Consecrated action kills the effect of Karma, thus leading to liberation. What is Dharma, is defined in the various Sastras and one has only to follow them with faith and perform his appointed task as a consecration to the divine. Thus the theory of Karma and the theory of Dharma together give us a theoretical and practical way of life in which mental peace and quietude leading to liberation become possible, since a man's position in life, is conditioned by his own previous actions, and since whether he likes it or not, his religion enjoins upon him to follow the avocations of the circumstances in which he finds himself.

In Hindu India, life and religion are so entirely mixed up that it is difficult to separate them. Next in importance to the Vedas, the Puranas, which are the records of the ancient history of India, interspersed with religious matters are the important sacred books of the Hindus. The sage Suta is said to have expounded these to the sages assembled in the Naimisaranya, which is the same as Nimsar of modern Oudh. It was the practice in ancient days for learned scholars, to read out these works to ordinary people and explain their meaning. Nine aspects of piety are enjoined

upon all Hindus as part of their Dharma which every Hindu has to perform.

1. 'Satsanga', or association with the virtuous;
2. 'Harikatha' or recitation of sacred hymns and songs;
3. 'Iswarabhakti' or love of God;
4. 'Tirtha Yatra' or a pilgrimage to shrines and holy places;
5. 'Guru Puja' or worship of the preceptors;
6. 'Dhyana' or meditation;
7. 'Bhakta Seva' or worship of the devotees of God;
8. 'Japa' or constant repetition of the Lord's name; and
9. 'Loka Kalyana' or love to all the created beings of the world.

The temples from ancient days are the places where every Hindu has to do his puja and worship to the divine. One famous dictum of the great Tamil Saint 'Avvayar' enjoins that one should not live in a town where there is no temple. The temples are the hallowed ground of the Hindus, from which divine blessing issues to all. Various rules have been laid down in the Agamas and the Sastras regarding the construction of temples, the selection of the site for location of the temple, the shape of the image to be installed therein, the time in which puja is to be conducted, the qualification of the priest etc., etc. Worship of Gods in temples purifies the heart, controls the passions, and enables the devotees to remember the Lord always.

The temple is so built and so adorned that a devotee feels an air of sanctity as soon as he enters the temple. The Garbha Griha or main shrine is generally semidark and is bare of other sculptures, except the figure of the Lord. This is to ensure meditation and 'ekagrata' in the devotee. According to one tradition, the gateway of the temple is intended to stand for the universe, and the vigraha of the

Lord inside for the supreme spirit. There is always a curtain before the Lord, which according to the Vaishnavite texts should be of three colours, white, red and black, representing the three gunas, Satva, Rajah and Tamas. When the veil of the gunas is lifted, the resplendent Lord is seen. According to another tradition, the temple is just like a human body, which is conceived of as a walking temple of God, with the Jiva in the centre. The top of the temple is the head; the Garbha Griha is the neck; the front mantapa is the stomach; the prakara walls are the legs; the gopura is the feet and the Lord is the Jiva in the body. Thus every part of the temple is conceived of as the body of the Lord and so should be treated as sacred. The above conception of a temple is contained in the following verse:

शिखरं शिर इत्याहुः गर्भगेहं गलस्तथा
मण्डपं कुक्षिरित्याहुः प्राकारं जानुजङ्घकम्
गोपुरं पाद इत्याहुः ध्वजो जीवनमुच्यते

In another text, the temple is compared to a lotus pond containing a flower.

जलं विमानं ध्रुववेरकन्दं कूर्चं तु नालं कुसुमं च कौतुकम्
बल्युत्सवं च स्नपनं च पत्रकं देवालयोऽयं कमलालयः स्यात्

The vimana is the water in the tank; the Dhruvamurthy, the root of the lotus; the Sambandha kurcha or the connecting line is the stalk of the lotus; the Kauthuka murthi is the lotus; and thus the devalaya is symbolised as a kamalalaya.

In the temples, there are generally two idols, one that is permanent and called the Mulabera, and the other that is taken out in processions etc., and is called the Utsabera. In some temples there are different idols for Abhisheka, Utsava etc. The Saivite texts declare that the Mula-

bera is the Sukshma Linga, and the Utsavabera called Balibera is the Bali Linga. The Vaikhanasa Agama texts, that prescribe the rituals to be followed in the temples, divide the Paramatma into five 'Vyuhās' or aspects, called Vishnu, Purusha, Satya, Achyuta, and Aniruddha. These five aspects are represented by a different idol each, called the Mulabera, the Kauthukabera, the Utsavabera, the Snapanabera and Balibera, each idol being worshipped for a particular purpose. The Mulabera is worshipped for the good of the world i.e., Loka Kalyana, the Kauthukabera for the archana for the benefit of the individual worshipper, the Utsavabera for the processions, the Snapanabera for abhishekam and the Balibera for offerings. This is clear from the following text:

धुबं च लोकरक्षार्थं, अर्चनार्थं च कौतुकम्
 औत्सवं उत्सवार्थं च बल्यर्थं बलिबेरकम्
 स्नपनं स्नपनार्थं च, पञ्चबेराः प्रकीर्तिताः

Thus Hinduism teaches its devotees, that there are twin aspects of the God, with form and without form and the symbolism of the Hindu Temple is an important means to constantly keep this in mind.

Almost all the temples have Sthala Puranas which reasonably and ingeniously furnish us explanations for the sayings in the sacred books. They give us details of the local history of the place and of the temples, and the Puranic legends on which they are built. These may be said to be the legendary history of the temples and places of pilgrimage. They describe the circumstances under which the place originally acquired its sanctity, the period when it became a hallowed ground, the foundation of the first temple, the different dynasties of the kings who worshipped the Gods and Goddesses, the renovation done in the present age, the

marvels which have resulted from the worship of the Gods etc. Thus the Sthala puranas or Mahatmyas give important details about the temples from ancient history. In addition to the above, we have the various inscriptions of the various Hindu kings who have donated offerings to the temples and which are recorded in the epigraphs to be found in the temples and these give us valuable historical data regarding the temples.

In the case of the temples of Andhra, the main shrine is generally situated in the centre of the temple, and the other accessory buildings stand inside a rectangular enclosure. At the eastern enclosure is always a lofty 'gopura' which is seen generally from miles apart even. The tower over the main shrine is called the 'Vimana' and is generally ornamented with plaster figures right up to the top. The inner shrine is called the 'Garbha Griha' which is enclosed in a circular or square building, leaving a covered 'Pradakshina patha' for the devotees to go around. In front is a passage or what is called the 'Ardha mantapa.' The 'Ardha mantapa' is square or rectangular with a tower on the sides. In front of the Ardha mantapa is what is called the Maha mantapa consisting of one pillared building with entrance door, and space on the three sides. Besides these, there are other mantapas like the Kalyana mantapa, the Natya mantapa etc. On either side of the main entrance of the Ardha mantapa, generally two dwarapalakas are found. In front of the sanctum is located the Nandi or the bull in the case of Saiva temples, and the Garuda in the case of the Vaishnava temples with a Bali Peetha and a Dhawaja stambha, in front. Thus the principal features of the temple are the following:

1. The Garbha Griha containing the sacred God with a tower called Vimana over it.

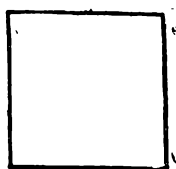
2. The Ardha mantapa and the Maha mantapa which are in front of it.
3. The Gopura which is an entrance tower.
4. The verandah attached to the inside walls of the Pradakshina patha.
5. Tirthas i.e., tanks and wells which are hallowed or sacred, for purposes of bathing.
6. Subsidiary shrines dedicated to various other minor gods each in its proper place.

The image of the Lord is generally made of stone, and the sculptor has to execute it with complete fidelity to the rules laid down in the Silpa Sastras. The Sastras declare that before bringing out the image of the Lord, the sculptor should meditate upon the Lord, and that his success will be in proportion to the strength of his meditation. There are various contemplating verses called 'Dhyana slokas,' to help him in the process. Deities have to be carved out in the 'Samabhanga' or the 'Tribhanga' posture. In addition to the main images, the walls of the temples are decorated with exquisite sculptures depicting the puranic stories.

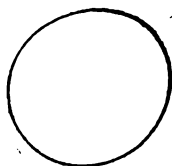
In ancient times, the temples were the busiest part of the village, and the life of the community was centred upon the routine of the temple. The festivals during the twelve months of the year were all conducted in the temples. All that was best in the life, was offered to the deity as a sacrament, and was only then enjoyed by the others. The Agamas that give details regarding the rituals and other ceremonies to be performed in the temples, mention three important things of a temple, the 'Sthala' or the place, the 'Tirtha' or the sacred water and the 'Murthy' or the deity. They have also given particulars of trees, which are known as Sthala Vrikshas which are to be planted in different temples.

So far as the main shrine and Vimana goes, it can be built on three plans viz., Square or Circular or Apsidal. The Square pattern is called the 'Sthandila' and the Circular is called the 'Mandala.' These two plans are actually derived from the Vedic tradition in which two different kinds of fire altars viz., namely the 'Ahavaniya' and the 'Garhaspatya' which are square and circular in their shape, are mentioned. Even now in the Sraddha ceremonies that we perform, the Pithris and the Viswa devas are given two different types of asanas, the Pithris the Mandala type and the Viswa devas the Sthandila type.

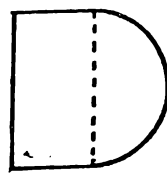
The apsidal form of temple is rather rare, and only one important temple of Andhra desa namely the Kapotheswara temple of Chejerla is built in this model. This is also probably on the Dakshinagni altar model. The plan below gives a clear picture of these.



Sthandila
(Ahavaniya)
Plan



Mandala
(Garhaspatya)
Plan



Apsidal
(Dakshinagni)
Plan

As regards the style of temple architecture, there are three styles, called the Nagara, the Vesara and the Dravida types. According to the Agamas, the Nagara styles are quadrangular from the neck to the top, the Dravida types orthogonal from the neck to the top, and the Vesara style round from the neck to the top. The temples in Andhra Desa furnish examples of all the three types of this temple architecture.

The Gods that are worshipped in the temples are varied and almost all the Gods of the Hindu pantheon find a place here. Siva in Linga rupa, Siva in other aspects, Vishnu, Ganapati, Subrahmanya, Bhagavati, Durga are all worshipped in the various temples of Andhra. The recent excavations at Nagarjunakonda have brought to light a Pushpabhadraswamy Alaya dedicated to Lord Siva, with a Dhvajastambha. This is probably the earliest temple in India of which we know. Andhra Desa is rich in sacred temples and Tirthas and also represents a cross-section of the various styles of temple architecture right from the earliest days to the most modern days. We can by a study of the Architectural styles and the Iconography of the temples trace their evolution in course of time.

The life of the community was centred round the temples. Labour in a temple was equally divided among the inhabitants. In several mantapas of the temples, expositions on the Puranas and Itihasas were given. The Dharma Sastras were also explained there. Recitation of scriptures was also done. In some temples there were Ranga mantapas, where dances and music were inaugurated. Kings performed Tulabhara and Hiranyadana in the temples. Temples were also educational institutions where devotional songs and scriptures were sung. Moreover all the twelve months of the year were interspersed with various festivals, like the 'rathotsava', the 'vasantotsava' etc., and these festive occasions provided an opportunity to the people to congregate and do communal work. In some temples, the Lord is looked upon as a reigning king, and due regal honours are done to him. In the Tirupathy temple for example, the almanac is read out every day before the Lord and a statement of accounts also submitted as in a royal court.

Thus the temples in our land are a unique institution, the like of which is not seen anywhere else in the world. The temple is the very hub round which the life of the community is built and thus the entire life of India is religion-based. Here one can meet a variety of life as nowhere else; the Yogi seeking the Kundalini, the Jeevanmukta contemplating the divine, the dancer and the musician surrendering their art as an offering to the Lord, the devotee lost in ecstatic contemplation of the divine, the poet pouring his heart out in divine hymns of liquid beauty, the householder submitting his grievances to the Lord for redress, the diseased praying for health, the healthy praying for wealth, the wealthy praying for power, the powerful praying for peace, the king desiring peace and renouncing life and the renounced yogi desiring nothing but good to all, all can be met with in the temples and all attentive to the central figure viz., the divine Lord. The temple is thus a literal storehouse of the life of the community and without a knowledge of it, a knowledge of life itself is incomplete.

Andhra is replete with temples of various Lords and a story of the temples and legend of Andhra as part of the temples and legends of India has an immeasurable value to every devout Hindu.

CHAPTER II

SRISAILAM

SRISAILAM is situated in the thick and inaccessible forests of the Nallamalai hills, in the north eastern portion of the Nandikotkur taluk of Kurnool District. It lies on a straight line west of Vijayawada, right as it were in the centre of South India. It is 73 miles north of Nandyal Railway Station. On leaving Nandyal, one has to proceed to Atmakur which it at a distance of 38 miles by road, and from Atmakur to Nagaluti which is 10 miles off. There are two routes to reach Srisailam from Nagaluti. One goes via Pedda Cheruvu, and across the hills, and through dense forests by foot-path, and the other by road to Dornal, and from Dornal to Srisailam, by the recently opened ghat road. The road from Nagaluti to Pedda Cheruvu is paved with a remarkable series of stone steps, and the forest scenery, and the ravines of the rock are magnificent and hallowed.

This important and religious shrine is situated, on what is called the 'Rishabhagiri' hill, on the southern bank of the sacred river Krishna, and is famous as Srisaila or Sri-parvata, which is one of the several aspects of the Lord Shiva. The sanctity of this place is claimed both by the Hindus as well as by the Buddhists. In the samkalpas, i.e., the recitations on the occasion of religious baths, the name of this sacred place is mentioned along with the other holy places of India. In almost all the Hindu puranas, mention is made of this ancient place.

Srisailam is a sacred place of pilgrimage which has been known from ancient times in India. A reference to this place in Mahabharata in the Vanaparva is as follows:

श्रीपर्वते महादेवो देव्या सह महाद्युतिः
 न्यवसत् परमप्रीतो ब्रह्मा च त्रिदशैः सह ।
 तत्र देवद्वन्द्वे स्नात्वा शुचिः प्रयतमानसः
 अश्वमेधमवाप्नोति कुलं चैव समुद्धरेत् ॥

“At Sripurvata on the Srisailam mountain, the resplendent Lord Siva abides with his consort Parvati, immersed in divine delight. Brahma also stays there along with other Gods. One bath in the sacred lake, with purity and self-control of mind, has the same efficacy as the performance of an Asvamedha sacrifice. Not only the pilgrim is benefited, but his entire race is also liberated.”

On the top of the Srisaila hill, is the famous temple of Lord Siva, known as Mallikarjuna which is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas. The Lingapurana also refers to the Jyotirlinga here. The Goddess is known by the name of Bhramaramba. The place is one of the eight main sthanas of Lord Siva and there is a great Sakti peetha of the Goddess here.

Sri Adi Sankara, the great Advaita teacher who reestablished the Hindu religion in this land, has during his pilgrimage all over India, visited Srisailam and stayed at this spot for some time. It was during his stay here, that Adisankara composed those exquisite verses in praise of Mallikarjunaswamy in his celebrated work Sivanandalahari. It was also during his stay here, that he sang in praise of Goddess Bhramaramba, in his Bhramaramba Astaka. Sri Sankara has sung in praise of Lord Mallikharjuna in his Dwadasalingastotra as follows:

श्रीशैल शृङ्गे विविधप्रसङ्गे शेषाद्रिशृङ्गेऽपि सदा वसन्तम्
 तमर्जुनं मल्लिकपूर्वमेनं नमामि संसारसमुद्रसेतुम् ॥

“I bow before Lord Mallikharjuna, who helps men to get over, as if by a bridge, the great ocean of Samsara, and

who always resides on the Srisailam hill and the Seshadri hill.”

The Bhramaramba Astaka has the following verse of Adi Sankara in exquisite metre with the letter ‘GA’ repeated everywhere.

गायत्रीं गरुडध्वजां गगनगां गान्धर्वगानप्रियां
गम्भीरां गजगामिनीं गिरिसुतां गन्धाक्षतालङ्कृताम् ।
गंगागौतमगर्गसंनुतपदां गां गौमतीं गोमतीं
श्रीशैलस्थलवासिनीं भगवतीं श्रीमातरं भावये ॥

“I meditate on the divine and auspicious mother, residing at Srisailam. She is Gayatri. She has the banner of the eagle. She moves in the skies and is fond of the music of the angels. She is majestic and moves with the royal gait of an elephant. She is the daughter of the great Himalaya, and she is beautified with sandal paste and rice. She is worshipped by Ganga, Gauthami and Garga, and she is called the Gauthami and the Gomathi.

The Sthalamahatmyam of the temple has a very interesting story, regarding the origin of the temple, where a princess called Chandravathi who was the daughter of a Gupta king called Chandraguptha, is said to have offered daily a garland of Jasmine flowers to the God in Srisailam and eventually married him. This legend embodied in the Sthalamahatmyam is partly represented in detail in one of the stone records of the 16th century in this temple. The popular story runs as follows:

“Years ago, there lived a princess named Chandravati who was the daughter of a rajah who ruled from the Chandragupta patnam, on the northern bank of the Krishna river. Her father was a valiant warrior who used to be absent from his court quite often due to his other pre-occupations. The Princess Chandravati grew up into a beauti-

ful maiden. She was very pious and devoted by nature and due to a domestic calamity, she went to the forest of Srisailam on the southern side of the river for prayer and penance. She took nothing with her except a faithful herdsman and some cattle.

The princess was living with the herdsman and the cattle, and living mainly on the forest produce, and upon the milk produced from the cows. She noticed that, one black cow out of her herd, was not giving any milk at all. She there-upon instructed the herdsman to find out the reason for this, and to watch the cow. The herdsman hid himself behind the cow, and watched its movements and came back and reported, that it was not yielding any milk, because it gave up all its milk during the course of its wanderings, on a black stone image of Siva in the form of a Linga. The princess also witnessed the scene. That night Lord Siva appeared in a dream before her and told her, that the black stone lying in the forest was nothing but a manifestation of the Lord Himself. He enjoined upon the princess, the necessity for building a temple round his own linga. This is said to be the origin of the first temple in Srisailam.

Among the numerous bas-reliefs that were built on the outer side of the courtyard there are two panels which illustrate this legend in stone.

There is another legend concerning the origin of this temple, among the tribal population, called Chenchus, who live in this part of the hills. According to this legend prevalent among the Chenchu tribes, Lord Siva came once to Srisailam on a hunting expedition, and fell in love with a beautiful Chenchu woman, whom he married, and who used to accompany him in his hunting expeditions to the neighbouring forests. Hence even today Lord Mallikarjuna is

known among these tribes as "Chenchu Malliah." This tribal legend is beautifully borne out by an interesting bas-relief, on the prakara of the temple, in which a tiger is shown as being killed by Lord Siva with a thrust of his trident. In this Lord Siva is shown as being followed by Parvati dressed as a forest woman with arrows and four dogs. It is interesting to note, that the Chenchus have free permission, even today, to go into any part of the temple, including the Garbha Griha, enshrining the sacred Linga. It is in fact, this tribal people, that help to drag the car in the big ratha festival of the temple and also at other minor services within the temple. During the great Sivathri festival, when thousands of people congregate here, to bathe in the sacred waters of the Pathalaganga and worship Lord Mallikarjuna, the Chenchus also go and worship inside the Garbha Griha independent of all the priests. To this day, caste, creed or sex, does not prohibit any one, providing he or she is a Hindu, from doing Abhiseka to the Lord from the waters of the Pathalaganga or to do Archana with flowers directly. Such a catholic form of worship is unknown anywhere else in Andhra, except at Srisailam, and this custom probably dates back to the Buddhist period when caste rules were not so rigid.

Srisailam may be traced back to the Buddhist period and perhaps even earlier than to the Mahayana school of the Buddhism which is known to have flourished during the 1st century A.D. The Buddhist pilgrims, Fahian and Hieuntsang have made references to the Sripavatha hill which is in the Nagarjunakonda valley of the same river Krishna.

After the decline of Buddhism, the Hindu religion would appear to have re-established its authority, probably due to the efforts of Adi Sankara and Srisailam which is a seat of

Hinduism, is now counted as one of the sacred Kshetras with an important seat for Sakti in the name of Madhavi which later on came to be called as Bhramaramba. Srisailam is also a principal seat of the Jangams and is one of the five main mathas of the Veera saivas. Both the Brahmins and the Lingayats called as Jangams worship the 'Swayambu Linga' of Mallikarjuna calling it as Linga chakravarthi. The Jangams have one of their five important monasteries on the Srisailam hill, the most prominent of which appears to have been the Veerasaiva Siddhi or Bhikshatana vrithi monastery mentioned in the inscriptions. Even today, the Lingayats wear around their necks, the Linga stones obtained from the bed of the Pathalaganga at Srisailam, preserving them in little caskets made of wood or silver.

The lithic records, preserved in the temple, however, do not take us back earlier than the 14th century A.D. when the Kakathiya king, Prataparudra was ruling at Warangal. The earliest inscriptions of the temple refer only to his reign. The Vijayanagara kings greatly improved the temple, and Harihara the second in 1405 A.D., constructed the Mukhamantapa in front of the shrine chamber. Proud-hadeva Raya of the same dynasty, also visited the temple. The Saluva line of kings built some tanks in the temple. Krishnadeva Raya, the famous Vijayanagara king visited the temple, and built a row of houses on either side of the Car street, and presented tax-free villages to the temple and also remitted the toll on horses, bullocks and asses. His subordinate, Chandrasekhara Raya presented golden images of Nandi and Bhringi to the shrine and a certain chief named Santhalinga constructed a water channel for the benefit of the pilgrims and also bestowed many villages to the Jangam brahmins. He also repaired with gold the

eaves of the Mukha mantapa and also repaired the doors at the gateways.

The main festivals of the temple last from February to the end of May and during this period, the temple is under the management of the Pushpagiri Math of Cuddapah district, whereas on the other days, the management is left to a Jangam priest assisted by the local Chenchus. The festivities of Sivarathri as at present conducted, are not, as is seen from the inscriptions that are available, as magnificent as in olden days. On the festival night, a big piece of unbleached cloth over a hundred yards in length is wrapped round the prominent figure of the Nandi along the roof line and the pinnacle of the temple, unobserved by the expectant crowds. The Chenchus take the leading part in the festivals both before and after Sivarathri. Goddess Bhramaramba whose festivals come a month or two after Sivaratri attracts even larger crowds consisting of Lingayats. Goddess Bhramarambika is really a form of Kali and is said to be one of the eighteen leading Sakthis of India.

The temple stands in the little hollow on the top of Srisailam hill overlooking the sacred river Krishna and surrounded on all sides by beautiful forest. On the eastern side of the temple, the causeway from Nagaluti is carried straight on, down the hill, to the bed of river Krishna, which is here known as Pathalaganga, and is regarded as a very sacred river for pilgrims. The river Pathalaganga is about two miles from the temple, with a flight of stone steps leading to it. An inscription in the temple records shows that these steps were built by a Reddi king of the Kondaveedu Reddi dynasty which ruled in Andhra Desa in the 15th and 16th centuries A.D.

As Srisailam is one of the most famous and important of all the temples in Andhra, it will be worthwhile to study its

structure and formation in detail. The site plan of the Srisailem temple is given.

The enclosure to the temple forms roughly a square measuring five hundred feet from east to west and six hundred feet from north to south. On the northern, southern and eastern sides are lofty gateways. In the centre of the outer enclosure, is a stone enclosure containing the main temple. The main temple of Lord Mallikarjuna stands in the centre of this inner courtyard and is surrounded by a number of minor shrines. The temple of Bhramaramba or the Amman temple as it is popularly known is in a separate enclosure west of the inner courtyard.

The main temple is a little structure, consisting of a cell enshrining the Lord in the form of a Linga and with a small pillared porch attached to the front. The main temple of Mallikarjuna is a stone built structure, and in front of the shrine, is the exquisitely carved Mukha mantapa or the pillared hall built by the Vijayanagara king Harihara the second in 1404-1405 A.D. It contains several beautifully sculptured stone pillars and ornamental stone eaves. The most valuable and sacred object within the temple is an exquisitely carved bronze image of Lord Siva, in the form of Nataraja. The idol is a masterpiece of craftsmanship, and induces bhakti and devotion by its mere presence.

Between the Mallikarjuna temple and the eastern gateway of the courtyard are two handsome pillared halls one of which contains the Nandi. On the northern side of the temple under the shade of a 'Vata vriksha' is another shrine dedicated to Mallikarjuna, and local legends say that this shrine contains the original linga over which the black cow of the princess Chandravati gave its milk.

On the northern side of the pillared mukhamantapa, is a little Siva temple containing a carved stone Linga called

the Sahasra Linga. This famous representation of the Lord is made by the stone being divided into twenty-five facets each of the latter having a representation of forty lingas thus making a total of one thousand Lingas. The three-headed Naga is coiled round the breast of the Linga and is mounted on a beautiful stone pedestal. A remarkable feature of this temple is that originally the stepped tower over the shrine chamber, the door frames and the eaves of the pillared hall in front of it, and the figure of the bulls etc., were all encased in copper gilt plates and ornaments.

In the temple in addition to the stone carvings, there is an important bronze image of Siva. This is one of the most exquisite bronze images of Andhra Desa. It represents Lord Siva in the dancing pose. A mere photograph gives one a very poor idea of the surprising beauty of this image. The superb modelling of the body, limbs, hands and feet, and the artistic treatment of the flowing girdle around the waist, could hardly be surpassed. It represents Lord Siva, in the Tandava pose. The right upper hand is holding the Damaruka, while the lower presents the raised palm of protection or 'Abhaya hasta'. The left upper hand holds a flame of fire, and the lower arm is inclined across the breast in the 'Gaja-hasta' pose. The right foot stands on the back of the demon 'Apasmara' and Lord Siva is seen whirling around wearing a lofty head-dress. This dance of Lord Nataraja symbolises the action of cosmic energy in creating, preserving and destroying the visible universe. There is also another bronze image of Lord Siva as Soma-skandha, which shows Siva and Parvati seated together on a lotus pedestal, with the child Skandha standing in between them.

Srisailam is also famous for its wonderful bas-reliefs depicted on the outer sides of the courtyard wall. The

most interesting are situated on the southern and eastern walls. The scenes, figures and portraits are numerous and varied, and a detailed account of them would fill a large volume by itself. The Srisailam bas-reliefs are a valuable museum and library rolled into one. All the popular forms of Lord Siva are represented here and the legends connected with them are illustrated in detail, and at considerable length. A few of them only are described below.

In one of the upper panels, the story of Lord Siva as 'Bhikshatana' is represented. The puranic legend runs as follows. When Lord Siva cut off one of the heads of God Brahma, he committed the sin of Brahmahatya, and hence the skull of Brahma stuck to his hand and would not be removed. In order to get rid of the sin, and the skull, it was ordained that Lord Siva should wander on earth as a naked wanderer, called 'Bhikshatana', till he reached the sacred spot on the Himalayas known as 'Brahmakapalam,' where he would be released simultaneously from the sin and the skull. This legend is portrayed in stone in Srisailam. Here Lord Siva is shown as accompanied by two ganas carrying an umbrella and a tower, and a small boy in front carrying a begging bowl. The Damaruka and the Trident are shown in his upper hand. Bhikshatana in whatever form he may be, is still the divine Lord, and he possesses divine beauty in his face and figure. So much so, when he reached the Darukavana forest, some of the Rishi-pathnis forgot themselves in contemplating on the divine beauty of the form of Lord Siva. This scene is also depicted here and the two conventional trees to the right of the panel denote that the incident took place in a forest, viz., the Darukavana.

There is another panel with an inscription which says:

“This is the place where the bridegroom was brought to be shown to Himavanta.”

This has a reference to the marriage of Goddess Parvati as the daughter of Himavanta with Lord Siva. Lord Siva in order to test the strength of the devotion of Paravti appeared before her in the diskuse of a tottering old man, supported by Brahma and Vishnu, and presented himself to Paravti and her parents. In spite of this disguise of the Lord, Parvati was able to recognise the Lord of her dreams and worshipped him. The panel in stone depicts Himavanta, with a tall head-dress, and with one hand on his daughter's shoulder, calling her attention to the distress of her mother at the prospect of her marriage with such a decrepit old man.

In another inscribed panel, the bas-relief portrays Viswakarma, the architect of the universe, with a pair of scales weighing Lord Siva in one pan, against all the other Gods in the other.

There is also a good representation of the Kiratarjuniya story in one panel. When Arjuna, the hero of the Mahabharata, was doing penance to obtain from Lord Siva, the powerful Pasupatha, Lord Siva in order to test his power of devotion, appeared before him, in the guise of a wild hunter, accompanied by Parvati, similarly dressed, and with the retinue of Sivaganas in the same guise. They drove a wild boar towards Arjuna who was performing the penance. Arjuna on seeing the charging boar, and being a skilful warrior, shot it dead with his arrow. At the same time, Lord Siva also shot the boar with his arrow, and since both the arrows struck the boar, a dispute arose between the hunter and Arjuna as to who had actually killed the boar. The controversy became bitter, and Lord Siva as the hunter, and Arjuna started wrestling. Naturally no one could stand

the blows of the Lord himself and being sore and tired, Arjuna, unaware that his opponent was the very lord of his devotion and prayers, started praying to Lord Siva to give him enough strength in the struggle against the hunter. Curiously, the flowers that he dropped upon a clay Sivalinga that he had set up hurriedly to pray, fell upon the hunter, his own opponent, and thus Arjuna knew that the test was nothing but an act of grace by the Supreme Lord. The bas-relief shows the entire sequence of the story, and it is interesting to note that Parvati is, in this bas-relief, dressed as a Chenchu woman.

Just behind the Kiratarjuniya panel, there is the story of Lord Siva in the form of Bhujanga-Lalita, which is another form of Nataraja.

There are many other interesting bas-reliefs depicting Siva and Kali as dancing together, Siva as Gajaha Murthy i.e., slayer of the demon in the form of an Elephant, and Durga as Mahishasura Mardani i.e., slaying a demon in the form of a buffalo, Siva saving the boy Markandeya from the death noose of Yama, and a number of other Saivite scenes from the puranas. There is also a carving of the serpent Sesha whose body is coiled and interlaced representing the Hindu symbol of eternity.

Srisailem is also a principal seat of Veerasaivas. The term 'Veerasaiva' itself shows that their sect came into existence at a time when the people had to defend their faith with valour. Veerasaivas used to wear the Sivalingas in open defiance of the Jains who persecuted them, and hence the lingas came to be called as Pranalingas, since they had defended them with the very prana of the wearer. Veerasaivas do not accept the Adhyasa theory of Sankara and regard the Visistadvaita theory of Ramanuja also as self-contradictory. They believe that Pasu or Jeeva is tied to

the three impurities of Mala, Karma and Maya, and that liberation means freedom from these impurities only. Their initiation or Diksha is by the Siva Panchakshari Mantra after which they have to wear the Sivalinga continuously on their bodies. Even ladies can have this initiation.

Thus Srisailam with its ancient and holy tradition is a very important and ancient temple of Andhra and to this day attracts large number of pilgrims. Its sanctity dates back from the days of the Mahabharata. Even the puranas declare this as the place where Vrishabha or the sacred bull of the Lord Siva himself performed penance and that to please him Lord Siva appeared in the form of Mallikarjuna with his consort as Bhramaramba. This temple with its wonderful bas-reliefs containing many Saivite stories and legends attracts the archaeologist, the sculptor, and the devotee in an equal measure.

There are good travel facilities to the temple. From Kurnool, Guntur and other places direct buses now go to Srisailam. The ghat road from Dornal, recently opened, takes one straight to the temple by road. There are excellent choultries built by the temple Devasthanam in which poor pilgrims can stay free of cost. Cottages with all amenities are also provided by the Devasthanam at a rent of five rupees a day. There is a very good guest house also here with all modern amenities. The Devasthanam has provided protected water supply and the place is also served with electricity. All facilities are extended to the pilgrims who come here in large numbers, by the Devasthanam, and Srisailam, which, a few decades ago, was almost inaccessible, is now easily reached and bides to become the second important shrine of Andhra, the first of course being the shrine of Lord Venkateswara at Tirupathy.

CHAPTER III

AHOBALAM

AHOBALAM is a religious centre of very great antiquity. It is situated at a distance of thirty miles from Nandyal Railway station of Kurnool District. There are good bus connections from Nandyal and some other district centres of Andhra to this place.

There are three routes reaching Ahobalam. Pilgrims from the north can get down at Nandyal which is a Railway junction from Kurnool, and travel by bus to Allagadda and Ahobalam which is only thirty miles from Nandyal. The second route is from Dhone which is another railway station and from which one can reach Ahobalam via Banganapalli and Koilakuntla. The other and easy route is to get down at Cuddapah which is a district headquarters and an important railway station in the Madras-Bombay route. From Cuddapah one has to travel to Allagedda which is forty miles over and from there by bus to Ahobalam.

This place is also known as Singavel Kundram, and is dedicated to Lord Narasimha, i.e., the lion aspect of Lord Vishnu, which he took on, in order to kill the demon Hiranyakasipu. There are a number of places in which the Narasimhavatara of Lord Vishnu is worshipped, but it is only at Ahobalam that all the nine forms of the Lord Narasimha i.e., the Nava Narasimhas are worshipped.

As soon as the foot of the hills is reached there is the temple of Prahladavarada Narasimha, i.e., the aspect of Lord Narasimha as blessing Prahlada. This temple lies in the centre of three prakaras which are built in the Vijayanagara

style. About a furlong from this temple is the Alwar Koneru, which supplies good drinking water. About a mile and a half from the temple is the Chatravata Narasimha. The deity here is surrounded by thorny bushes and the image is installed under a pippal tree.

From the foot of the hill one has to ascend up the hill, to reach what is called Upper Ahobalam. The hill path is about six miles, and is cut across virgin hills and forests, and served by several cascades of exquisite natural beauty. Several shrines of Narasimha are installed here. There is a shrine of Karanda Narasimha and another called Yogananda Narasimha. The popular legend is that after destruction of Hiranyakasipu, Lord Narasimha taught Prahlada his disciple, several yogic postures and the Lord in this aspect is called Yogananda Narasimha. At this sacred spot the Gobhila and Bharadwaja rishis are also said to have done tapascharya in order to rid themselves of the sins that they had committed.

The upper Ahobalam is a plateau 2,800' above sea level. The two crests of the hill are being called Vedadri and Garudadri, through which the sacred Bhavanasani Tirtham flows. The tirtham divides into two and joins Kumadavati and Pennar. The tirtham is said to be an Antarvahini i.e., a river which flows inside during part of its course. In a southern slope of the hill the Lord in his fierce aspect called Ugra Narasimha is worshipped. The temple is a magnificent one, with a mantapa and gopura. Very near is the shrine of Guha Narasimha, at the entrance of which is a huge pillar. The popular belief is that in the famous puranic story of Prahlada, the pillar which Hiranyakasipu kicked asking his son whether Lord Vishnu was immanent in that pillar too was this same pillar, and that out of this pillar, Lord Vishnu finally emerged as Ugra Narasimha, and

killed the demon. Three furlongs from this shrine is the shrine of Kroda Narasimha, where the Lord is worshipped in the form of a boar. It is stated that if Narayana satakshari japa and Parayana of Varahakanda is done at this shrine for three days, it bestows immense spiritual benefit to the devotee.

Two miles from thereof is a famous shrine of Malola Narasimha. The deity here is a Santaroopa, always in sport with the divine mother Lakshmi. The famous Kakatiya King Prataparudra has donated the Utsava vigraha made of gold which is under worship by the great spiritual seers of Ahobalam called the Ahobala jeers. Then, higher up, is the Jwala Narasimha shrine, where the Ugrakala of the Lord is seen, and this is said to be the actual spot, where the fierce anger of the Lord reached its climax when he tore asunder Hiranyakasipu. Nearby, is the Pavana Narasimha, where worship in the Shakta form of the worship of the Lord, is said to be done. Thus all the Nava Narasimhas, namely 1. Prahladavarada Narasimha, or Lakshmi Narasimha, 2. Chatravata Narasimha, 3. Karanda Narasimha, 4. Yogananda Narasimha, 5. Guha Narasimha, 6. Kroda Narasimha, 7. Malola Narasimha, 8. Jwala Narasimha and 9. Pavana Narasimha are worshipped here.

The lord in upper Ahobalam is said to be a Swayambhu i.e., self manifest. There are two popular legends for the derivation of the word Ahobalam. It is stated that the Devas, while witnessing the Ugrakala of the Lord and the terrific aspect he took on in order to tear to pieces Hiranyakasipu, sang in his praise

‘नरसिंहं परमं देवं अहो बलं अहो बलं’

and hence the place has come to be known as Ahobalam. The other version is that because of the great cave, the Ahobila, where Garuda worshipped and realised the Lord,

the place itself is come to be called Ahobila. There are a number of popular legends about the Lord which are prevalent among the Chenchus who are a peculiar tribal people that live in these hills. The Chenchus are associated with Srisailem as well as Ahobalam. The popular legend is that when Lord Narayana took on Narasimhavatara, the Goddess Lakshmi was born in the Chenchu tribe, and both were living here happily. On account of this, the Lord is said to have refused to go back to Vaikuntam also. This love of Lord Narasimha with Goddess Lakshmi as Chencheta, a Chenchu bride, is famous in many folk songs of the place.

There are a number of holy tirthams round the place, the most important of which is Rakthakundam. It is stated that Lord Narasimha after killing the demon Hiranyakasipu washed his gory hands at this tirtham, and hence the water is still reddish in appearance. There is another hill tirtham called Lanjakoneru, which is two miles to the north east of the shrine, *en route* to Bhargava. It is said that once upon a time a courtesan, on having the mere darshan of the Lord here, repented of her ways and built the tirtham to wash off her sins. This has its own sanctity. The Ramatirtham is a tank that has sacred associations and is five miles from lower Ahobalam.

The temple goes back in its history to ancient days. There are inscriptions to say that the great Vikramaditya of the Western Chalukyan Kings of Kalyan (1076-1106 A.D.) worshipped the Moola vigraha of this temple. As already stated above, Prataparudra deva, who was the last and most powerful of the Kakatiya kings, installed the Utsavavigraha of this temple. On his return from Srisailem, Prataparudra halted at a place called Rudravaram which is sixteen miles distant from Ahobalam. It was at this place, that the idol of the Lord was cast, and in order to commemorate his devotion

the famous poem called Prataparudriyam was composed. King Krishnadevaraya had also visited this shrine on his return from the conquest of Kalinga and made offerings to the deity of a diamond necklace, wristlet, a gold plate and thousand pieces of gold. The popular legend about Prataparudra is that the King wanted to cast a gold Sivalinga but whatever be the cast, the final figure that emerged was the figure of Lord Narasimha. The King was deeply perturbed at this experience, and during his meditation the Lord appeared before him, and told him that it was futile to make a distinction between Siva and Vishnu and asked him to worship the Lord in upper Ahobalam, as the Lord was the same in whatever shape he was worshipped.

Ahobalam is a great centre of religious and spiritual activities. It is a seat of a famous Math which has extensive following among Vaishnavite devotees. The spiritual heads of this are called Jeers. The first spiritual Jeer of this Math is stated to have been born in 1379 A.D. to one Kesavacharya a Srivaishnava of Tirunarayanapuram near Melkota Devagiri. The Lord revealed himself to this boy, Srinivasacharya, who, at the bidding of the Lord, came to Ahobalam where Sri Mukundaraya, the then Chieftain, received him. The Lord himself in the shape of a Yogi initiated him and hence the jeer is known as Satagopa Yati. This is commemorated in the following Mangalasloka.

अहोबले श्रीनृसिंहः
 प्रेषमन्त्रं स्वयं ददौ ।
 योगिरूपेण यस्यास्मै
 शठकोपाय मङ्गलम् ॥

The jeers of the Math, who are spiritual heads, are a source of spiritual benefit to all people. Tallapaka Annamacharya,

the great Telugu musician, also received initiation from the jeers of Ahobalam.

The important festival of this place is the annual Brahmotsava which takes place in the first fortnight of Phalguna Month, a fortnight after Sivarathri. This festival which has a peculiar custom, shows clearly the love of the people towards their Lord. The Padmasalis of the place claim the divine consort as a maiden of their own class, and so they claim the right to perform the Kalyanotsava to the Lord. An interesting custom has grown around this legend. The utsava vigrahas of both the Lord and the Goddess are brought out to the Kalyanamantapam, and negotiations for the marriage of the Goddess who is said to be born among their class are started between the representatives of Padmasalis and the divine Lord himself. The Padmasalis have formed themselves into a group, and lots are cast to select a person who should perform the marriage ceremony of the Goddess and the Lord. If the lot falls to anyone, it is considered to be the most divine and auspicious event in the life of that person.

Ahobalam is an ancient and sacred place and there is a passage in the Puranas which mentions that the entire Nallamalai hills from Kurnool to Chittoor District are a personification of Lord Adishesha himself whose tail end is Srisailam, whose middle is Ahobalam and whose head is Tirupathi. The place is a sacred place and sung by the famous Vaishnavite saints of the South called Alvars, who refer to this place as Singavelkunram. The Tirumangai Alwar, who was a famous Vaishnavite saint, has sung the glory of this Lord in ten immortal verses in his famous stotra Tiruvaimozhi. As the nine shrines are situated within a radius of five Krosa or 10 miles, this tirtham is also known as Panchakrosa tirtham. Ahobalam is a famous place of

pilgrimage especially as this is the only place where the nine aspects of the Lord or the Nava Narasimhas are worshipped.

The Nava Narasimhas or the nine varieties of this form of the Lord Vishnu are worshipped at Ahobalam. In the Upanishads it is stated that the Narasimhavatara form is very well suited for worship. It is of the angry type, filled by Veera, and is all-pervading but it gives way to Mangala. Nammalwar who is a great South Indian Vaishnavite saint was very much moved by this form of the Lord, and identified Narayana at Vaikunta with this form. Perialwar who is also a great Vaishnavite saint treats this form in the same manner. Sri Sankara in his Karavalambana Stotra says that the Lord of Kshirodadhī is Lord Narasimha. Tirumangai Alwar in his Periya Tirumoli equates Narayana with Narasimha.

According to the Pancharatrastavam of Vaishnavism, for the Vasudeva Chaturmurti there are four main primary aspects namely, Vasudeva, Sankarshana (Lion), Pradyumana (Boar) and Aniruddha. The four faces of Lord Vishnu mentioned in the Vishnu Dharmottara passages are taken to stand for the above four vyuhas. Thus the Narasimha type of manifestation is an important vyuha of the Lord. It is stated in the Nrisimha Purvathapani Upanishad that God appeared before Brahma as Narasimha first, and gave him the mantra viz., the Narasimha Anushtup, with which he was able to develop the four Vedas later. The Anushtup is as follows:—

उग्रं वीरं महाबिष्णुं ज्वलन्तं सर्वतोमुखम्

नृसिंहं भीषणं भद्रं मृत्योर्मृत्युं नमाम्यहम् ॥

In the above Anushtup, there are nine forms of Narasimha-swamy which correspond to the Nava Narasimhas. Those are the Ugra or the angry, the Veera or the fighting, the

Mahavishnu or the Lakshmi Narasimha, the Jwalantha or the figure emitting flames, the Sarvathomukha or the Narasimha with a number of faces, the Narasimha or the ordinary Narasimha, the Bhishana or the frightful, the Bhadra or the terrible and the Mrithyormrithyu or the killer of death.

It is of interest to note that no Yantrapratishtha can be complete without this Narasimha Anushtup engraved upon it. Thus this is the very basis for all yantras. It is also interesting to see that Arjuna's prayer when he saw Lord Krishna in his Viswaroopa in the Bhagavatgita seems to be more or less in relation of the various words, Ugra, Veera etc., in the same sequence as in the mantra above. A close study of the slokas twenty to thirty one of chapter II of Bhagavatgita reveals a direct connection between them and the mantra starting from Ugra and ending with Namam-yaham.

Thus it will be seen that the Upanishads, the Divyaprabandhams, and the Gita all mention the greatness of Narasimha Mantra. Though there are other very important kshetras dedicated to Lord Narasimha, still Ahobalam is the premier place among them and it is the only place where all the nine forms of the Lord are worshipped. Besides it is a place sanctified by the Alvars, and the Jeers. Ahobalam is therefore a great place of spiritual and religious significance.

CHAPTER IV

ALAMPUR

NEAR the sacred confluence of the Tungabhadra and the Krishna, and situated on the border between Kurnool and Mahaboobnagar Districts of Andhra Pradesh, is Alampur which houses a number of sacred shrines like those of Sangameswara and the Nava Brahma temples.

The Alampur temples are situated on the western bank of the Tungabhadra river. Alampur can be reached from Hyderabad by railway on Hyderabad Bangalore route. By road, one has to go to Raichur from Hyderabad and then go by the newly opened bridge over Tungabhadra. From the Alampur railway station to the town proper, is six miles, and though transport facilities are a little difficult, still the beauty and the sanctity of the place are well worth the difficulties. Alampur is still a place of sacred worship.

The principal temple is a cluster of shrines dedicated to the Nava Brahmas. It is situated in a fortress and bears a striking resemblance to the Papanatha temple at Pattadakal. The sikharas of these shrines have a curvilinear form outwardly, and are decorated with a network of miniature architectural devices such as Amalakas etc. The Amalaka decoration occurs at the angles of the towers of Alampur and has a beautiful effect, since it naturally blends with the crowning masonry of the tower.

The inner plan and decoration of the Alampur temples bear no affinity to the temples of Orissa, though they bear striking exterior resemblance. On the other hand, they have a close similarity to some of the rock-cut temples of Western India.

There are nine temples here. The shrines are square in plan and have a passage for pradakshina around them. The interiors of the temples are in imitation of the rock-cut temples, closed. Carvings on the pillars are identical with the cave temples of Western India, and in the interior of these temples, one is often likely to wonder whether he is in a rock-cut shrine or in a structural temple.

The main entrance of the Brahma temple which is at the extreme north end, has excellent sculptures carved on it. The story of a deer hunt mentioned in the sthalapurana is carved here. The hunter is represented as shooting an arrow at the deer. In another, he is shown as representing in respectful attitude, something to the king. Just below this, there is another panel in which the king is shown as feeding the deer. In the panels facing the temple, the figures of the Gods and the linga have been carved.

The architecture of the temples of Alampur is interesting from more points than one. The form of their towers shows distinct influence of the north, while the inner plan is characteristic of the rock-cut temples of Western India. The shrines, although situated on the border of the Dravidian country, have little in common with the architecture of that place. On the other hand, their sculptures and decoration are often reminiscent of the classical grace of the Gupta art. This style, apparently owing to the growing influence of the style of the South, did not find much acceptance, for in the medieval (Chalukya) temples of the Deccan, the spire shows the distinct influence of the storied gopuram of the South.

Mention may also be made of another group of shrines, associated with the name of Papanatha. They are situated in a beautiful grove on the right bank of the river Tungabhadra at a distance of about a mile to the south of the town. The architecture of these temples is poor. The:

towers are square in plan and arranged in stories which gradually decrease in dimensions as the tower rises. The tops are crowned with Amalakas, massive circular coping stones, supporting a vase-like finial called the Amrita Kalasa. The temples have been built at different periods.

The principal temple, which is situated in the middle, consists of a pillared hall with three openings towards the east and west, and two cells towards the north and south. The pillars are somewhat short and their carvings are not of high order. Some of them represent religious episodes, while on two, inscriptions are found. In the ceiling the Navagraha and Siva dancing the Thandava have been shown. A niche contains the figures of Mahishasura and the sanctuary is occupied by the linga. In the cells towards the south the seven Mothers (Saptamatrikas) are carved.

The Skandapurana describes Alampur elaborately and the sthalapurana of the holy place is given in that purana in great detail covering nearly five chapters.

Alampur is said to be the western gate of Srisailam which is one of the most important of the 12 Jyotirlingas in India. Bala Brahmeswara is the presiding deity here. It is stated that Brahma performed a great penance at this place for thousands of years, and pleased Lord Siva who conferred the powers of creation on him. Hence the deity is called Brahmeswara. The goddess is called Yogini or Jogulamba which is a synonym for Parvathi.

There are several other holy places round about the Brahmeswara temple. The following are the most important of these:—

1) *Papavinasana Tirtha*: This is a spot in Thungabhadra about half a mile up the river from the Brahmeswara temple. There is a temple of Papanaseswara at this place. The

sanctity of this place is so great that popular belief is that those who bathe here once will attain the same virtue, which can be acquired by bathing in the Ganges for one year. Any kind of sin will be purified by bathing at this sacred place.

2) *Ganika Siddheswara temple*: This is a place in Tungabhadra where the Gandharvas and Siddhas bathe and worship Lord Siva. It is stated that those who have their sacred bath here will inevitably succeed in all their achievements.

3) *Raja Rajeswara Tirtha*: This is a spot where Kubera performed penance and pleased Lord Siva.

There are as many tirthas here as in Kasi and hence this is said to be Dakshina Kasi. Tungabhadra is a confluence of the two rivers Tunga and Bhadra. River Tunga is the aspect of Lord Vishnu and the river Bhadra is the aspect of Lord Siva. Hence the confluence of the two, which is the confluence of both Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva is said to be very sacred.

There are two goddesses at Alampur which are described in the sthalapurana. One is that of Yellamma, the grama Devatha and the other is of Bhudevi. The story behind these, and the popular legend connected with these is as follows: —

Renuka was the faithful and chaste wife of Rishi Jamadagni. She used to bring water from the river Tungabhadra every day for the puja of her husband, and she made out of the clay of the river Tungabhadra the pot in which she used to bring the sacred water. This power of moulding clay and sand into a pot, was acquired by her due to the great power of her Pati Bhakthi. One day, while engaged in her daily work, she chanced to glance at a king and

queen who were bathing in the river. This caused a little amount of mental disturbance in Renuka, and this was enough to disturb her equanimity and hence she was not able, that day, to make a pot out of the clay. She, therefore, came back empty handed to the Ashram.

Rishi Jamadagni who was aware of the powers of his wife understood that she had resiled from her path and therefore ordered his sons to kill her at once. All of them kept quiet, but Parasurama alone was so dutiful to the commands of his father, that he carried out at once the cruel orders of his father. Rishi Jamadagni was very much pleased with Parasurama's filial affection, and asked him to select any boon. Parasurama immediately asked that his mother be brought back to life. Jamadagni told him that her head could not be attached to her body, as it fell on some impure place, and he gave her a boon that the head would be worshipped by all classes of people under the name of Yellamma, and the body would also be equally renowned in the name of Bhudevi. Thus, these two goddesses came to be situated at Alampur and these are not seen anywhere else except at Alampur.

The last chapter of the Sthalapurana deals with the story of the construction of all the temples at Alampur. It is said that once there was a widow by name Punyavati in the holy city of Banaras. She was a great devotee of Lord Siva. She earnestly prayed to God to favour her with a male child. The God who was pleased with her devotion, granted her the boon, and in due course of time, she gave birth to a male child. But all the people in the village mistook her and abused her for begetting the child who had no father. The child also, as it grew up, became the object of derision to the others. He was teased by the others, as a fatherless son. The mother thereupon instructed him to

approach Lord Siva himself and ask him for help. Accordingly, the boy did penance to Lord Siva and Lord Siva instructed him to go to Brahmeswara Kshetra, the western gate of Srisailam, and construct temples for all the Goddesses there, and that he would have the necessary help by the grace of Brahmeswara, Jogulamba and Ganapathy. The boy who was known as "Rasa Siddha" came to Alampur, and built the temples with the help of the above Goddesses and Gods. While Rasa Siddha was engaged in the construction of these temples, a king named Vilasat Raja, who was a Nastika, invaded this place and ruined many of the temples. He tried to snatch away the pot containing Siddha rasa (miracle juice) from the Rasa Siddha. This juice was said to possess the capacity of converting stone into gold. But the Siddha who knew this, cursed the King who lost all his army and wealth.

One day the King was wandering in the forest with thirst and hunger, and asked a bhila to give him some food. The hunter went into the forest in search of some food. He saw a deer and tried to kill it. The deer, however, requested him not to kill it, and told him that it would go and come back after giving milk to its young ones. The deer also told the hunter to believe in its words and that if it did not act up according to its words, it was prepared to suffer the same sin as that of King Vilasat who ruined Siva temples. The hunter left the deer and told this news to the King. The King followed the hunter and came to see if the deer would come back. The deer, which came back as per its words, on seeing the King Vilasat, turned its face away from the King, saying that it would not see such a sinful man. The King repented for his sins and begged the deer to tell him as to how he could get rid of them. The deer told the King that he should go to Brahmeswara Kshetra and do penance

there for some time and re-construct all the temples, if he wanted to get over his sins. On one of the sculptures of the temple, this story is depicted. The deer also told him that by the time when the image of the King on the stone becomes spoiled in course of time, the King would be relieved of the great sin.

Besides the above sthalapurana, the greatness of this Siva Kshetra is mentioned in detail in the Telugu book "Panditha-radhya Charitra" of Palkuriki Somanatha, a great Telugu poet of the 12th century A.D.

The nine Brahma temples here are known as Bala Brahma, Kumara Brahma, Arka Brahma, Veera Brahma, Viswa Brahma, Taraka Brahma, Garuda Brahma, Swarga Brahma, and Padma Brahma. These nine aspects are peculiar to this temple alone, and are not found anywhere else in India.

Daily hundreds of pilgrims visit this holy and sacred place. Those who go to Srisailam, generally visit this place also as this is said to be the western gate of Srisailam. In addition to these temples here, there is the sacred Sangameswara which is the meeting place of Tungabhadra and Krishna. The temple of Bala Brahmeswara is situated on the banks of Thungabhadra amidst scenes of natural beauty and charm. The temple is famous for its sanctity as well as for the greatness of sculptures here.

CHAPTER V

LEPAKSHI

LEPAKSHI is a small village which lies nine miles east of Hindupur in Anantapur District of Andhra. Hindupur is a railway station on the main metre-gauge line between Hyderabad and Bangalore, and from Hindupur there is a good metalled road to Lepakshi on which several good bus connections exist. There is a dak bungalow at Hindupur, as well as at Lepakshi, where pilgrims can conveniently stay. Lepakshi is famous for its temple of Veerabhadra, and is also a renowned place where the best specimens of the mural paintings of the Vijayanagar kings are available.

This temple is a notable example of the Vijayanagar style of architecture, and is built on a low rocky hill which is called Kurmasaila so called because the hill is like a tortoise, in shape. An inscription on the exit of the outer wall of the temple records that it was constructed by one Virupanna in the 16th century.

In Lepakshi we have Lord Papanaseswara, Lord Rama, Lord Veerabhadra and Durga all being worshipped in the same place. In the Skanda Purana, there is a reference to Lepakshi as one of the hundred and eight important Siva kshetras.

The temple is said to have been established by saint Agastya himself. This shrine was later developed into the present exquisite temple, by the pious zeal of Virupanna who was the treasurer of the Vijayanagar kings. In the temple, a shrine of Lord Siva faces that of Lord Vishnu, while in the centre is the Lord Veerabhadra. Thus these three form a

triangle with a common mantapam. The temple is surrounded on all sides by an outer enclosure. There is a second inner enclosure containing the main parts of the temple. The Natyamantapa and the Ardhmantapa are the finest parts of the temple. The Natyamantapa is decorated with excellently sculptured pillars bearing life size representations of musicians and dancers carved with spirit and vigour. The Kalyana mantapa is an exquisite specimen of the Vijayanagar art and is left unfinished. There is a shrine of Siva Papanaseswara here, and in the west is the entrance in front of the Rameswaraswamy shrine. There is another shrine dedicated to Gopalaswamy standing to the north of the Rama temple. To the south of the main shrine is the huge nagalingam shaded by a great naga with its base split.

Two hundred yards east of the temple is a colossal Nandi which is the largest Nandi in India. It is carved out of a monolithic rock, measuring twenty feet in height and thirty feet in length. It is a remarkable piece of work and has been done with great care.

There is a popular legend about the temple which runs as follows:

Virupanna was the king's treasurer and was the chief of the merchant guild at the time of the famous Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagar. He conceived the idea of installing a temple here, because the image of Veerabhadra was found here. He proceeded to put into execution this plan and fully used the tribute of the king also for this purpose while the king was away at Vijayanagar. He had practically finished the building and was actually supervising the completion of the Kalyana mantapa, when the king returned and found his treasury empty. The king ordered, as a punishment to this heinous crime, that he should be blinded. The treasurer

being a loyal servant carried out on the spot with his own hands this order and, to this day, two dark stains are shown upon the wall near the Kalyana mantapa, which are said to be the marks made by his eyes which he himself dashed against the wall. The builder of the temple did not survive long after this, and hence the Kalyana mantapa was left unfinished. Hence it is that the village is called Lepa-akshi=Lepakshi, i.e., a village of the blinded eye.

Apart from the huge monolithic Nandi which is the largest sculpture of Nandi in India, Lepakshi is famous for its exquisite Vijayanagar style of sculpture which is found in the Natyamantapa and the Kalyanamantapa as well as from the mural paintings that are found in the upper part of these walls. These sculptures depict a number of Puranic legends and epics and a study of the temple sculptures is an education by itself in the Puranas as well as in the legends.

There are excellent sculptures of Ananthasayana, life size figures of Virupanna and images of Dattatreya, Chaturmukha Brahma, Tumburu, Narada and Rambha in the Rangaman-tapa. The musical instruments, costumes, the gestures and the ornaments of the Gods have been delineated here with great accuracy. Especially beautiful are the sculptures of Annapoorna, Mrutyunjaya and Padmini.

On the outer walls of the temple bas-reliefs depict the legends of the famous Siva bhaktha Sriyala, and the story of Kiratarjuniya. These two legends are quite famous. The story of Sriyala is a famous one and is as follows.

The parents of Sriyala were devotees of Lord Siva. In order to test the strength of their devotion the Lord took on the appearance of an old mendicant and came to their house seeking alms. He was received with great veneration, and he was offered bhiksha at the house. Since he had

come there to test their devotion, he 'declared that he would be satisfied with nothing else than the flesh of their only son Sriyala, which, he desired, should be cooked by the mother herself. Though the misery of the parents was very great, still since their adherence to the rules of hospitality was very strict, they promised to do so, and in fact put the plan into execution, the mother holding the boy, and the father severing the head. The mother, in order to remind herself of her dear son, kept his head away. But the Lord insisted that it should also be disposed of. When the food was about to be served, the Lord asked them to call out their son, and when they came and called out Sriyala, the lad came from outside due to the divine mercy. Thereupon Lord Siva gave them his darsan and disappeared.

This famous story of Siva bhakthi is depicted in the bas-reliefs on the outer wall of the temple, with a fineness and vigour that is rarely met with. Similarly the story of Kirat-juniya or the story of the fight of Arjuna with Lord Siva, while performing his tapascharya on the Indrakila hill in order to obtain the Pasupatastra, is also depicted here in the bas-reliefs of the temple.

The walls of the sanctum of the temple of Veerabhadra, the ceilings of the Rangamantapa shrine and the part of the Mukhamantapa joining the shrine of Siva are full of mural paintings of the Vijayanagara period. Here also the scenes are all from the Puranas. The marriage of Parvathi, the image of Dakshinamurthy, Sri Rama, and Lord Krishna as Vatapatrasayi, are some of the important mural paintings in this temple.

In the Ardhmamantapa of the temple there are a number of panels representing puranic legends. The first represents Lord Siva as arising from the Linga. Markandeya who was frightened of Lord Yama is shown here. Lord Siva is shown

as dancing over the demon whom he had pierced with his trident. In the next panel Dakshinamurthy is shown as seated on a hillock under a pair of Vata Vrikshas and surrounded by sages. The next panel depicts Lord Siva in his Anugraha attitude presenting his axe or Parasu to Chandikeswara. The next scene represents Lord Siva as Bhikshatana when, to expiate the sin of having severed the head of Brahma, he had to wander as a Bhikshatana, till he reached the Himalayas, where he was relieved of his sin. The Rishi Patnis are shown here as offering him food in a state of mind, where their entire personality was suffused with a deep love and affection, at the divine beauty of the body of the Lord. The poise of the Lord as Bhikshatana is as noble and majestic as that of the Sivagana going before him is quaint and funny. There is also a panel here showing the Hariharamurthy. Another scene shows Siva as Kalyana-sundara, who is being married to Parvati. The best painting here is that of Siva (Gangadhara) as Gowriprasada appealing Gowri. There is in this painting a happy blend of action and repose, anger and calm.

There are in the mukha mantapa also, a number of mural paintings showing the story of the Kiratarjuniya, Lord Krishna as Vatapatrasayi etc.

There is an excellent painting of the famous story of the legendary king Manuchola, granting justice to a cow at the cost of the life of his own son. This is also found painted in the temple at Tiruvalur in the South. The story which is a popular one is as follows.

Manuchola was a great king who was noted for the even-handed justice meted out by him. In order that he should be available at all times of the day and night, to any one who sought justice, he had a large bell erected at the out-

side of his palace, which any one could ring at any time, if he wanted to attract the personal attention of the king for any injustice done to him. One day the bell rang furiously, and the king ran out to see a cow ringing the bell. He followed the cow and found that the calf of the cow had been accidentally killed by the chariot driven by the king's son and in its deep sorrow at the death of its calf, the cow was weeping and seeking redress at the hands of the king. The king felt the justice of the demand, and ordered that, just as the chariot of his own son ran over the calf and killed it, similarly his own son should be laid at the foot of the same ratha, which should be driven by the cow, and his own son should be sacrificed just as the calf was sacrificed. This adherence to the principles of justice even at the cost of the life of his own son pleased the Lord Siva who appeared before the king and gave back the life to his son and to the calf. The story has been painted here in a series of panels with great vividness.

The Ardhamantapa is particularly famous for its paintings of the different manifestations of Lord Siva. Here Siva is depicted in various ways as Natana murthy, as Andhakasura dhwamsa trampling over the demon Andhakasura, as Dakshinamurthi with a Kankana, Keyurahara and Kiratapatta etc. etc. The Chandikesanugrahamurthy depicts Lord Siva with a long Kapalamala and having a tiger skin wrapped round him. The Bhikshatana showing the Lord in the Darukavana is another piece done with exquisite skill.

The temple is a famous one, and attracts a large number of pilgrims during the Sivaratri and other Saivite festivals. The temple is a veritable treasure house of Vijayanagar sculpture and paintings and a literal museum and art gallery where the entire puranic legends of Lord Siva are translated

into stone and painting. The temple is still a very powerful one and attracts the pilgrim, the devotee, the archaeologist, the sculptor and the painter in a like measure.

CHAPTER VI

TADPATRI

TADPATRI of Anantapur District, is a railway station on the Raichur-Madras line and is 47 miles from Guntakal, which is an important junction on it. One can reach Tadpatri from Guntakal either by road or by train. There are two important and famous temples at this place, 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 Ramalingeswara temple, the entire Siva Purana is carved in stone on the walls with delicate skill and in elaborate detail.

Both these temples are situated on the banks of river Pinakini, which at this place takes the northern course, or becomes Uttara Vahini, and hence is considered as very sacred at this spot. The Siva temple facing west is more ancient. It is stated that the area in which this place is situated was formerly known as Bhaskara Kshetra, to the south of which, there existed a thick forest consisting of plenty of palm trees. Hence it was called Tamlapalli (Tati Vanam). During the time of one Pemmasani Ramalinga Naidu, who was a local chieftain, under the great Vijayanagara king, Proudha Devaraya, this place was renamed as "Tadpatri" and hence the name Tadpatri still stands.

The local legend has it, that, at the very same spot, where the Ramalingeswara temple stands, Lord Parasurama lived and performed penance and Tapascharya worshipping Lord Siva in his Lingakara. There is in the temple a perennial

underground force from which water always oozes into the Garbha Gruha, exactly at the spot where the Siva Lingam is consecrated. The icon of the Lord is uncut and roughly formed and hence the popular tradition is, that the Linga is Swayambhu or self manifest.

The Kaifiat collected by Col. Mackenzie and also the other epigraphical details of the temple furnish us with a history of the place. It is stated that the Swayambhu Linga, in course of time got obscured, and was covered by ant-hills, and was thus lost to the devotees. It was then discovered only by means of a cow which used to come every day to the spot, and give its milk as an offering to the Lord. The Kaifiat records that with the royal patronage of the Vijayanagara king, Sri Ramalinga Naidu built the western, northern and southern gopurams of the temple and also the Mahadwara gopuram on the south. To the east of the temple at the spot where Lord Parasurama is said to have done his penance, there is a temple installed with the idol of Sri Rama and this is known as Rama Padam.

The gopuram of the Sri Ramalingeswaraswamy temple, is not merely massive, but is also built with a great deal of attention and care. It has been chiselled and polished with such attention, that the totality of the impression that it creates is something majestic and magnificent. The Kaifiat records that a sculptor by name Yellanchari was brought all the way from Benaras in order to do the work thoroughly.

The other temple, namely, Chintala Venkataramana Murti temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. The tradition has it that this was built by Sri Timma Naidu, son of Ramalinga Naidu, who built the Siva temple and that this was also built under the orders of the Vijayanagara kings so that people may have the facility of worshipping both Lord Siva

and Lord Vishnu at the same place. The temple has been built strictly in accordance with the Silpa Sastra, and with the Garbha Griha, the Madyaranga, the Astana Mantapa, the Antarala Gopura, the Prakara, the Yagnasala, the Kalayana Mantapa etc. These contain sculptures from the Ramayana and Bharata epics. Originally the temple was called after the Lord Chintala Tiruvengala Nathaswami. The word Chintala was used to describe the Lord, since the Moola Bhera was discovered at the foot of a tamarind tree.

The main Gopura facing the east is a solid huge structure, built partly of stone and partly of brick. The stone part contains exquisite figures of Vidyadharas, Apsaras and Avataras in neat and well arranged rows. Just above the line of threshold, there are two horizontal lines of carvings one showing the elephantal procession and the other the procession of horses, all going from one end to the other. Inside the temple, every wall is covered with beautiful and delicately delineated pieces of artistic sculpture. A stone chariot which is a masterpiece of architectural design, is also available. Two holes are carved into the chariot and it is stated that twice a year the Sun's rays are reflected through these to the foot of the deity.

There is a Rangamantapa covered with forty pillars in the Vijayanagar style of architecture. Beyond the Rangamantapa is the Mukhamantapa, 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 Rama and Sita is especially a beautiful piece of architecture. It depicts the Devatas on the west, the Vanaras on the east, and in between, Agni as testifying to the sanctity of Sita; and Rama and Sita standing hand in hand. On the southern and western walls of the temple, scenes from the Bhagavata, depicting the life of

Sri Krishna and his Leelas are sculptured. We have also rare sculptural specimens of the various Avataras of Lord Vishnu. One particularly interesting piece of sculpture is that of Lord Narasimha, not in his usual posture of killing Hiranyakasipu on his thigh, but shown as wrestling with him. The sculpture of Vamanavatara is also a beautiful one, showing one foot on the head of Bali, and the other compassing the entire universe.

To the north of the main temple, are shrines of the Goddesses. Adjacent to these is the Paryanka griha which is built in the shape of an octagon. There are figures and forms that are sculptured on this, which are said to have been carried out by Timmanayudu, out of the presents given to him by the Vijayanagara king Sri Aliya Ramaraju. The temples have many important festivals, the most important being the Narakachaturthi and Brahmotsava that fall in the month of October. In the Siva temple, the Vijayadasami and the Brahmotsava are celebrated in September and February.

The temples are standing examples of the tradition in our country, where the best in every aspect of life whether of art or of architecture is consecrated to the divine. The temples are perfect specimens of the Vijayanagar art, and the stone sculptures stand as a testimony to the importance which the Vijayanagar line of kings attached to this. The temples are also powerful and famous ones and attract large number of pilgrims even now. They are easily approached and are well worth a visit both for their sacredness as well as for their architectural beauty.

CHAPTER VII

MAHANANDI

‘ओं नमो नन्दिने’

THE Eastern Ghats stretching along the eastern side of the Deccan abound in many important and sacred shrines like Tirupati, Ahobalam, Srisailam and Simhachalam. The common feature of these temples is the thick forests in which they are situate and the peaceful and calm surroundings in which the devotee can worship the Lord with one-pointed concentration. Across the Kurnool district the ghats run in two parallel ranges. The range that lies towards the east is called the Nallamalai, and Mahanandi is situated in one of these hills. It can be approached from Nandyal, which is a railway station in Kurnool District, by a good motorable road, as it is only ten miles from Nandyal. The place lies in a natural gorge of ravishing beauty surrounded on all sides by green foliage of thick forest and served by a sacred tirtha.

The temple is situated at the foot of the hill from under which perennial mineral springs flow out into the fields. There are as many as five such springs, which flow from beneath the Linga of the temple into the tank in front of it. The sacred shrine is surrounded by Mantapas on all sides.

The temple is unique in many respects. The Vimana over the Garbhagriha is built purely in the Nagari style, which is characteristic of North India. Like the several Jain temples it has a Sikara at the top, shooting up to the skies in vertical lines. The popular legend is that a Rasa Siddha of the north built the Vimana and to pay the wages for the labourers, he made the workers put up sand mounds and by his Mantra sakthi produced wealth equal to the ser-

vices rendered by them. Consistent with this version, the main gate of the temple faces the west which generally is indicative of Deva or Rishi Pratishta. The popular legend also says that the temple was built at the time of King Nanda under the direction of a Himalaya Rasa Siddha.

Mention is made of Mahanandi as Mahanandi-tirtha in a copper plate inscription of Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagar line of kings, where it is stated that Mahanandi-tirtha is one of the sacred places to which the King's brother Narasimha Deva Raya made valuable gifts. There are references to this place in the inscriptions of Hampi also. There is an inscription of Sivananda dating back to 1046 A.D. and it mentions Mahanandi-tirtha.

The architectural beauty of the temple, the arrangement of the tank in front and such other peculiarities that we find in the temple show that it is an ancient temple dating back to the hoary past and that it was repaired and rebuilt through successive ages by many kings. Mahanandi formed part of Kurnool Circar over which the Nawab of Kurnool was exercising sway in the 17th and the 18th centuries. The Nawab used to spend from his treasury money for the Sivaratra festival at Mahanandi. This speaks volumes to the sanctity and popularity of the temple to which even Muslim governors of the province paid some attention.

Mahanandi is not only a place of pilgrimage but also a picnic spot, in view of the natural scenery in which the temple is set. By its proximity to the hills, by the presence of perennial mineral courses all round the temple, and by its air of detached sanctity, the place attracts pilgrims all through the year. It is rightly called the beauty spot of the Nallamalais.

The tirtha of the temple is famous for its curative properties, and it contains warm or tepid mineral water right

through the year. The main tirtha is in front of the Mukhamantapa of the Lord's temple. It is a sixty feet square tank with a mantapa in the centre. The inlets and outlets of the tank are so arranged, that the depth of the water is constantly kept only at five feet, thus enabling all pilgrims to have a plunge. The source of supply of water to this tank has not been traced up to now. The water is seen flowing into the tank through some inlets that have been built. But their exact location is still a matter of doubt. The five springs from out of which the tirtha is supplied with water are called, Srisailadhara, Narasimhadhara, Daivodhinidhara, Nanditirtha and Kailasatirtha. The water is crystalline pure and is ever tepid.

The Mula vigraha of the Lord in Lingakara is very unique, and unlike any of its counterparts in India, it is like a rough un-cut rock, with two sockets. But it is considered to have great spiritual value since it contains saligramas which are of immense value to the Vaishnavas also. As at Srisailam, here also the Linga is seen just above the earth's surface without the three Peethams underneath. All can touch and worship the Lord to their heart's content.

The Sthalapurana of the temple contains interesting information about the present form of the Lord. The legend runs as follows. Nanda was ruling over the domain of Navanandis in which Mahanandi is situated. The king once conceived the idea of anointing the idol of the Lord and performing abhishekam in milk to it. Herds of cows were therefore brought from far and near to supply the required milk. A herd of cows from Gopavaram which came there contained a black cow. It used to be the main supply of milk to the king. This cow used to travel freely and graze in the forest. In course of time, it was noticed that the cow was absenting itself for long periods of time in the

forest, and that its milk supply also tended to decrease considerably. One day the cowherd followed the cow to the forest to find out why the milk supply was diminishing. He found the cow grazing round an ant-hill and, after some time, it stood right over it. The milk was flowing into the ant-hill and, at last the form of a young child in the form of Lord Krishna peeped out of the ant-hill and gave Darshan to the cow, after which the cow returned to the cowherd. The news was carried to the king and the king guessed correctly that the child was the Lord himself who had come to test his faith. The next day the king also followed the cow and, hiding himself in a dense bush, was lying there deep in meditation, and expecting to have a glimpse of the Lord. The cow arrived and circled round the ant-hill, being wrapped in devotion to the Lord. The Lord in the form of child appeared and accepted the offering of the milk from the cow. The king in his amazement trampled upon some leaves and, being disturbed in its devotion, the cow became nervous and stepped on the ant-hill in its fright. The child disappeared and, as though the ant-hill was made of moist clay, the hoof of the cow was imprinted on the ant-hill. The king being frightened that he had unwittingly committed Devapachara, prayed for forgiveness to the Lord, and the Lord, being pleased with the king's repentance, ordained that the ant-hill trodden by the cow would cool down itself and would become a Swayambhulinga at Mahanandi. Hence it is that the two signs on the top of the Linga at Mahanandi are still visible.

A huge Nandi lies in front of the Lord's shrine and possibly the place is called as Mahanandi tirtha because of this Nandi. The tank lying behind is known as Rudra gundam and there are two more tanks called Vishnu gundam and Brahma gundam.

By the side of the main shrine is the shrine of the Goddess. The Srichakra in front of the deity is said to have been installed by Adisankara himself. The popular belief is that if one concentrates and meditates upon the God and at the eyes of the Mother, he gets a Darsan befitting his samskara. The mukhamantapa of the Devi is a recent construction at the instance of Bairavajosyula Mahanandayya garu.

Behind the main shrine are three small sub-shrines each containing a Sivalinga. It is stated that these if worshipped, will take one beyond the Sthoola, Sookshma and Karana Dehas to the Turiya stage.

Within a radius of ten miles of Mahanandi there are nine Nandi temples called 1. Padma Nandi, 2. Naga Nandi, 3. Vinayaka Nandi, 4. Garuda Nandi, 5. Brahma Nandi, 6. Surya Nandi, 7. Vishnu Nandi, 8. Soma Nandi and 9. Siva Nandi. In fact the word Nandyal itself is a corruption of the word Nandi Alayam.

The Sivaratri is the most important of the festivals here and pilgrims who come to Srisailem usually visit this place. In the Kartika masa, devout pilgrims start in the early morning, first worship in the shrine of Mallikarjunaswamy and then worship in the shrine of Padma Nandi which is two miles thereof. They then come to the Naga Nandi which is a mile to the west and from there proceed to Brahma Nandi, Soma Nandi, and Siva Nandi which are all near about. They then go to Krishna or Vishnu Nandi, three miles to the north east and from there complete the pilgrimage by worshipping Vinayaka Nandi, Maha Nandi, and Surya Nandi. The traditional belief is that the worship of these Nava Nandis should be finished in a day before sun-set.

There are two popular legends as to why the place came to be called Nava Nandi. One version is that in the begin-

ning of Kitayuga one Parvata had two sons called Silada and Nandi. The eldest son Silada got his name due to his strict tapascharya in which he gave up eating any food except Sila or stone. The Lord was so pleased that he converted Silada into a holy hill and began to live upon him. Thus it is said that Silada as a famous shrine in the same range of hills came into existence. In the same manner, the second son Nandi also meditated upon the Lord Siva, and the Lord converted him as his Nandi or his vahana. The place where Nandi conducted his tapascharya is considered to be the portion where the present Mahanandi exists. The other version is that a dynasty of local kings, known as Nandas, ruled here in the 11th century A.D. and they built a number of temples and worshipped their tutelary deity namely the Nandi. Temples here have received the patronage of kings of several dynasties including those of the famous Vijayanagar kings.

There are good facilities for pilgrims. In fact Mahanandi is not only a place of pilgrimage but also a place of picnic. The main festival is of course Sivaratri during the Magha-bahula Chaturdasi in February. The other festivals like Dasara, Ugadi etc., are also important.

The temple has been attracting pilgrims from far and near and, though it has suffered some eclipse during the periods of internecine political warfare in the country, its sanctity has never been dimmed. Mahanandi is a symbol of staunch faith which flourishes despite the ravages of time and circumstances. In mute eloquence it stands looking with detachment upon the human cycles of fortune and misery, chanting as it were, the glory of the Vedic religion.

ओं तत्पुरुषाय विद्महे
चक्रतुण्डाय धीमहि
तन्नो नन्दी प्रचोदयात्

CHAPTER VIII

TIRUPATI

TIRUPATI is the most sacred Vaishnavite temple of Andhra Desa. 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.'

Tirupati lies in the midst of the Seshachalam Hills at a distance of seven miles from the Tirupati East Railway Station. To reach it, one has to branch off at Gudur, which is the last but one main station before Madras on the Delhi-Madras route, and take a train to Renigunta and Tirupati and then go by road from the foot to the top of the Tirupati Hill, which is called Tirumalai. Direct buses from Madras and other centres also ply to Tirumalai. Till ten years ago, the pilgrims had to walk up to the top of the hill, by means of steps, but now a regular ghat road has been laid round the hills, and one can reach the top of the hill directly by road.

The Tirumalai Tirupati Devasthanam is one of the richest Devasthanams of Andhra, as Lord Venkateswara, who is the presiding deity of the shrine at the top, attracts thousands of pilgrims, who pay large sums to the deity as their offering. Any number of Chatrams and Choultries are available, both at the foot of the hill and on the top of the hill, for the convenience of the passengers. In addition, the Devasthanam authorities also encourage the construction of self-contained cottages on the top of the hill, so that people who seek solitude may live in complete solitude and in peace. If any devotee contributes six thousand rupees, the Devasthanam will pay an equal amount and a cottage con-

sisting of three rooms with a bath-room and kitchen is constructed in the name of the devotee. When the devotees do not reside in them, they are available for rent for others. There are nearly five hundred such cottages, on the top of the hill, and these are available at a daily rent of four rupees or so per day. There are also Government Guest Houses as well as Devasthanam Guest Houses both on the top as well as at the foot of the hill, where distinguished visitors can come and stay.

Lord Venkateswara, with the income of the temple, is actually maintaining the University called 'The Venkateswara University' in which sciences and arts are taught. In addition, there is an 'Oriental Manuscripts Library' at Tirupati, where research into ancient manuscripts is carried on. The temple is still very active and live, and is probably the richest temple in Andhra Desa, and perhaps in the whole of India.

Tirupati lies in the midst of seven peaks or groups of hills in the Eastern Ghats Range, and lies in the North Latitude $13^{\circ}41'$ and East Longitude $79^{\circ}24'$. The Eastern Ghats break up into a number of parallel ranges in the region south of the river Krishna. The central group is called Nallamalais in the Kurnool District, and these meet the Eastern Range, round the group of hills at Tirupati. The top of the Tirumalai Hill is two thousand feet above sea level, and the great temple of Lord Srinivasa or Venkateswara, as he is otherwise called, is on the top of the peak. The group of hills is also called Seshachalam Hills and these seven peaks are said to represent the seven hoods of Lord Adishesha the king of serpents. The consort of Lord Srinivasa is not with him on the top of the hill, but is worshipped at Alamelumangapuram, at the foot of the hills. The shrine of Lord Venkateswara stands over a cluster of seven

hills which are said to form the Meruparvatha. According to the legends, this temple is a sacred place in all the four yugas, and was known as Vrishabhachala in the Krithayuga, Anjanachala in the Tretayuga, Seshachala in the Dwapara-yuga and Venkatachala in the present Kaliyuga. There is a beautiful legend that the seven Tirupati hills represent the seven heads of Adisesha, Ahobalam, where Lord Narasimha Murthi is worshipped, representing the centre of Adisesha, and Srisailam representing the tail end of Adisesha.

One of the legends current at the temple is that a contest once arose between Adisesha, the God of serpents, and Vayu, the God of winds. Lord Vayu tried as a part of the contest to blow out all the thousand peaks of Meru Parvatha but Lord Adisesha covered them with his thousand heads and protected them. Lord Vayu being disappointed in his attempts to destroy the mount, feigned exhaustion, and discontinued his blowing. Adisesha, thinking that all was safe, raised his head, when Vayu once again blew out the peaks, one of which fell at the spot of Venkatachala or Tirupati. This beautiful legend accounts for the connexion of Tirupati hills with the Meru Parvata, though geographically they are somewhat distant.

The puranic conception of the hills is that they represent the body of Adisesha on which Lord Vishnu, the Protector of the world, is said to rest. The seven hills of Tirupati are said to represent the seven hoods of Adisesha on which Venkatachalapati dances, and Adisesha, with his several coils, denotes limitless time as a cosmic concept.

It is generally believed that in some hilly and sacred centres, the Supreme Spirit, the Paramatma, makes a manifestation *Suo Moto* without any initial invocation and such a shrine is known as 'Swayam-vyakta' or self-manifest God.

The foremost instance of this is the shrine of Sri Venkateswara in Tirupati. According to the Visishtadvaita system of Philosophy of Sri Ramanuja, who was the patron saint of the Vaishnavas, the Parabrahman or the Supreme Spirit, though it is universal, still has to have a seat, which is called Sri Vaikuntham. In Vaikuntham, every thing is good, and there is all knowledge and no ignorance. This centre of centres of the divine is Tirupati. Srivaikuntham is the place manifest as Tirupati Hills and the Parabrahman is the Lord manifest as Lord Venkateswara.

The popular belief is that the first Archa form, which the Supreme being divulged for the benefit of human meditation, was in the Tirupati shrine. Hence it is that the Dhruva bera of the Mula vigraha presents all the three facets of the Lord and is a Trinity in unity, though only two aspects are physically visible in the manifested form. The Brahma aspect representing creation is unmanifest and the other two aspects of the Lord, namely Vishnu and Siva, are manifest to us in the Dhruvabera. The Jata in Kiritam and the Nagabharanam on the right fore-arm of the Lord recall to us Lord Siva, while Mahalakshmi on the right breast. and the other general features of the image, present us a vision of Lord Vishnu. In other words, this idol combines in itself the Vyakta Vishnu, the Avyakta Brahma, and the Vyaktavyakta Siva, and hence the Lord may be described as the Vyakta form of Paramatman itself. It is generally believed that this spiritual influence is kept up here by the daily worship, not of human Archakas, but of the Nitya Suris, who are the ever-present angels. This is still reflected in the custom of the temple, where every night the vessels used for worship are filled with Punya Tirtha, which is distributed as Prasada the next day, as it is said to be the Abhihseka Tirtha used by the Nitya Suris.

Some centuries ago, there would appear to have been some dispute about the identity of the Lord. Saint Ramanuja, the great Vaishnavite reformer of the twelfth century, is said to have settled the dispute and established the worship of Lord Srinivasa here. The idol of the Lord is in the standing posture, with the left hand extended to the left thigh, as if proclaiming that a steady devotion to the Lord's feet will achieve any object. The right hand is in what is known as Varadahasta. The idol is a complete representation of the Supreme Being in all its aspects. At the Dhruva Bera, is a small silver idol or the Kautuka, which is used for the daily Abhishekam. There is adjacent to this idol, the Snapana Srinivasa Murthy, and this Murthy is taken out only once in a year on the Kautuka Dwadasi day at four A.M., and taken back to the temple before sun-rise. The idea is that the Parabrahman represented by the Dhruva Bera in constant conjunction with the Purusha viz., the Kautuka Bera and the Pradhana viz., the Snapana Murthy, is the cause of the creation and sustenance of the world. There is also an Utsava Bera, or the image of the Lord that is taken out for all the festivals and processions.

In this temple, unlike other Vishnu temples, we find no minor shrines or idols of Vaishnava saints, viz., the Alvars and the Acharyas. In this temple, they exist in their original form, as Nitya Suris, and hence there is no other shrine for them. There is only a temple for Sri Ramanuja, the great Vaishnavite saint, who is said to have added the Chakra and Sankha to the Lord. The popular legend is that originally the Sankha and Chakra were not in the idol, and that when a dispute as to whether the idol was a Vaishnavite or Saivite one arose, Sri Ramanuja proposed that the Sankha and the Chakra, which are the emblems of Lord Vishnu should be placed before the deity during night, after worship,

and that the Lord himself might choose between the two, and declare as to what form he has. It is said that Sri Ramanuja, who is considered to be the Avatara of Adishesha, took the form of a cobra, and went in through the opening intended for the Abhisheka Tirtha, and prayed to the Lord, whereupon the Lord himself took up the two emblems of Lord Vishnu. The pathway through which a great Saint like Ramanuja passed, was then closed and to this day the Abhisheka Tirtha is being taken out only in vessels.

In the temple there are two very important customs, namely, anointing the body of the Lord with camphor, and offering all the hair on the head of the devotee as a sacrifice to the Lord. The custom of anointing the body of the God with camphor has its origin from the fact, that at one time an old Brahmin devotee took up a vow to dig a tank near the temple. Since he was a very poor man, he himself did the work, and also pressed into service his wife who was fully pregnant. When the lady began to feel the pangs of labour, the God himself, in the disguise of a Brahmin youth, began to share with her the labour of carrying the earth. On noticing this, the old man became jealous, at some other man sharing the good fortune of service to the Lord, and so hit him with his crow-bar. Then within the temple when he went to pray to the Lord he found, to his surprise, blood pouring out at the exact spot from the body of the idol, where the blow fell on the body of the youth. He then discovered that the Lord himself had graced him, by coming to share his labour, and he immediately began to dress the wound of the Lord with camphor. From that time the practice of anointing the body of the deity with camphor has come into vogue. The origin of the other custom which is very famous and popular, viz., offering the hair on the devotees' head as a sacrifice to the Lord, is shrouded in

mystery, and exactly when and how this custom began nobody is able to account for satisfactorily.

There is a work called 'Venkatachala Itihasa Mala,' in which the main items for the conduct of worship at Tirupati are laid down. This work is divided into seven parts, the first three parts being concerned with the Vaishnava characters of the image and the other four being concerned with what Sri Ramanuja, the famous Vaishnavite Saint and, after him, his disciple Sri Anantaraya, did for the temple. Sri Ramanuja, restored the rituals of worship according to Vaikhanasa Agama, after performing the purificatory rite, and after repairing the Vimana over the main Shrine which is called the Ananda Nilaya. Ablutions to the God on every Friday were arranged in accordance with the Ananda Samhita Vaikhanasa Agama. The face mark for the Lord, or the Urdhva Pundra, was prescribed to be a mixture of camphor, for four days, and for three days from Monday white earth, generally called Namam. All the jewels and ornaments of the Lord were to be removed on Thursday and the God was to be dressed only with flowers on that day. Ramanuja also arranged for the recitation of Nachiyar Tiruppavai, a famous collection in the Prabandhas, for the proper worship of the temple. In the temple, he entrusted the work to an early Vaikhanasa priest called Bimbadhara. Sri Ramanuja also had the temple of Sri Govindaraja built. Sri Ramanuja also restored the two wells for the temple service and on the bank of the step-well he set up images of Srinivasa and Bhodevi, and arranged that the flowers used for the temple service should be thrown into the well. Sri Ramanuja's attention was also drawn to a Naga jewel which was worn on only one arm of Sri Venkateswara. It was stated that a Gajapathi king by name Veera Narasimha was at Tirupati in the course of pilgrim-

age, and arranged for the construction of a tower. At this stage, Lord Adishesha appeared before him in a dream, and told him that, since the whole hill was his own body, the weight of the tower was increasing the load on him. The king thereupon stopped the tower and, in token of the Lord Adishesha appearing before him, got a representation of Adishesha made as a jewel and placed it on one of the arms of the God. There was another tradition that, not one but a pair of Naga jewels was presented to Lord Venkateswara on the occasion of his marriage with Padmavati, by his father-in-law, Nagaraja. Sri Ramanuja also installed within the temple of Srinivasa, an image of Sri Rama as giving refuge to Vibhishana. This manifestation of the Lord was made in response to the prayer of a certain yogi, by name Viswambhara, who lived on the banks of the river Kritamala. Owing to disturbances in that locality, the image was taken for protection to Venkatachala, and Sri Ramanuja arranged to set up the image of Rama and the image of Sitha also. Sri Ramanuja also enforced the old time worship of Varaha on the west bank of Swamipushkarini, as in Venkatachalam. Ramanuja also ordained at the temple of Venkateswara that, after the performance of the last item of worship, garlands should be preserved in the temple of Vishwakshena, the guardian deity. Sri Ramanuja also laid down regulations regarding the residence of the people of Tirupati. He laid down that only those who were engaged in the immediate service of the Lord should reside on the top of the hill and that all other devotees should live only at the foot of the hill. The pilgrims that came to the top of the hill should take for food whatever was provided by the temple after the temple service was over. No flowers should be grown for household worship, but all should be dedicated to the worship of the temple only. No animals

or birds should be killed in hunting and no one should be allowed to die on the top of the hill but brought down. A distance of seven to eight miles round the Swamipushkarini was marked off as reserved for the Lord and within that limit no other temple should be constructed. These are said to be the various reforms introduced by Sri Ramanuja, as seen from the Venkateswara Itihasa Mala. There are many inscriptions in which these are referred to and we can therefore take it that many of these injunctions were in existence either before the time of Ramanuja, or were newly brought by him and placed on a footing of permanence.

The exact period at which the temple was founded is unknown, and tradition has it that the temple is Swayambhustala. The earliest reference that we have to the temple is from the Tamil poet Mamulanar, who is a celebrated poet of the Sangam period. There are any number of references to the temple in the literature of the Alwars and Acharyas, of whom the greatest was Ramanuja.

The Vimana or the Ananda Vimana, as it is called, is the most sacred spot over the Lord Venkatesa. From an inscription of the Varadaraja temple of Conjeevaram, we learn that one Tatacharya built the Vimana of Lord Venkateswara with gold in the year Pramodoota, corresponding to 1492 Saka Era or 1570 A.D. This Tatacharya was the General Superintendent of the temple affairs of the Vijayanagar king Venkatapathi Deva Maharaja. He was also the spiritual guru of the king and the king is said to have offered his entire kingdom to him in his admiration for the Acharya.

Lord Vishnu as Varahaswami has his shrine on the banks of the Swamipushkarini Tirtha. At Lower Tirupati the temple is dedicated to Govindaraja Perumal in contradistinc-

tion to the Venkatachalapathi shrine at the top of the hill. There is also a tower called Galigopuram, which is famous. In the Gopura downhill many puranic legends are commemorated in sculptures. The wealth of epigraphic details in Tirupati takes us to the times of the later Cholas, Yadavarayas, and Vijayanagar and Saluva dynasties.

In the lower Tirupati we have the temple of Sri Kodanda Ramaswami. In Tiruchanur, which is two miles from Tirupati, is the temple of goddess Alamelumanga, the consort of the Lord on the top of the hill. A visit to Tirupati will not be complete unless a Darsan of this Goddess is also had.

Sri Adisankara in the course of his tours is said to have established a Dhanakarshana Yantra at Tirupati. This is established by the fact that even today the income of the temple from the offerings of the devotees is going up by leaps and bounds. Lord Venkateswara is a 'Pratyakshamurthi' and any prayer made to him in sincerity and utter surrender is never denied. Many instances of miracles said to have been done by prayer to the Lord are current in the place.

The Puranas are full and replete with the great deeds of the Lord. The Lord is worshipped with one hundred and eight names, each one of which has a reference to the Puranas. As the shrine of Lord Venkateswara is one of the most celebrated shrines in India, a few of the Puranic legends which are well known are given below:

According to one legend, the Lord is known as Vrishabhasurahari and is worshipped with the Mantra

‘ओं वृषभासुरहारिणे श्रीवेङ्कटेशाय नमः’

The Puranic legend on the above is contained in the Brahmanda Purana, in which, the sport of the Lord in hunting

in the forests, and in killing Vrishabhasura is described. Vrishabhasura was a great Bhakta of Siva, and was living in South Tirupati, and was giving trouble to the Rishis etc. Suddenly one day he found a hill growing up, and Vrishabhasura, thinking that it must be the result of some magic, wanted to give battle to whoever it was that created that hill. He therefore went in search of the creator of the hill, and found the Lord who was hunting in the forests of the hill, and mistook him for the creator of the hill and started giving battle. The Lord with the help of Vishwak-sena destroyed the entire army of Vrishabhasura. There-upon Vrishabhasura created a second huge army through his Maya, and himself disappeared into it. The Lord thereupon began to attack that army with his Chakra. Vrishabhasura then understood that it was Lord Narayana who was his opponent and, being a good Bhakta, thought that death at the hands of the Lord would lead him to salvation. Therefore he prayed that the Lord should kill him. Accordingly the Lord killed him with Chakrayudha and got the name Vrishabhasurahari. This legend is given in Brahmanda Purana. The main Slokas with which Vrishabhasura prayed to God in exquisite poetry are as follows and are taken from the Brahmanda Purana.

क्षमस्व मत्कृतं सर्वमपराधं सुदुस्सहम्
 कृतागसां त्वादृशेषु प्रणामः खलु निष्कृतिः
 जीवितं तु न याचेऽहं क्षद्रं पापस्य कारणम्
 अतो यास्यामि निहतचक्रेण परमां गतिम्
 तस्मात् क्षमस्व भगवन् ! श्रीनिधे ! करुणानिधे !
 त्रातारं वै न पश्यामि त्वां विना मधुसूदन !

(Brahmanda Purana 4-41-43)

This same legend is given in Bhavishya Purana in a different manner. According to this Purana, Vrishabhasura was

doing daily puja with Tapascharya for five thousand years to a Saligrama idol created by Lord Narasimha at Tirumalai. Every day he cut off his own head and offered it as a sacrifice to the Lord and every day a fresh head began to grow through the grace of the Lord. Lord Srinivasa who was pleased with his austerity appeared before him, and asked him what he wanted. Thereupon Vrishabhasura, who was a great Bhakta, wanted Yuddha Bhiksha, or an opportunity to fight with the Lord, so that he might attain salvation at the hands of the Lord. His request was granted and so the Lord was known as Vrishabhasurahari.

In the above story there is a reference to the name of the hill which is Vrishabhachala. In Tretayuga the same hill is called Anjanachala and corresponding to this the Lord is known as Anjanagotrapati and is worshipped with the following Mantra.

‘ओं अञ्जनागोत्रपतये श्रीवैकटेशाय नमः’

The legend about this is given in Brahmanda Purana, and the legend is as follows:

In Tretayuga there was an Asura called Kēsari who was a great Siva Bhakta. He did Tapascharya and wanted from the Lord the boon of a son. The Lord however told him that he was not destined to have a son, but only a daughter, through whom he would get a grandson. The daughter was called Anjana and when she became of age a Vanara, also called Kesari, sought the hand of Anjana and this was granted. However, Anjana Devi did not have a child for long, and one day the Dharma Devata came in disguise and told her that she would have a child provided she did Tapascharya on the banks of Akasa Ganga in the Venkatachala hill. She did Tapascharya for seven thousand years, and every day Lord Vayu gave her a fruit as food. Pleased with her

Tapascharya Lord Siva and Parvathi gave her the boon of a child, and in Sravana masa and Sravana nakshatra at the time of sun-rise, she gave birth to Anjaneya, who was otherwise known as Hanuman. The child saw the beautiful rising sun in the sky and, thinking it to be a ripe fruit, flew towards it and, not being able to bear the heat, fell back to the earth. The Purana therefore declares that, since Anjana Devi gave birth to her child on account of Tapascharya on this hill, the hill is called Anjanachala. The following verses from the Brahmanda Purana give us the legend, and tell us how the hill came to be named as Anjanachala.

पुत्रं सूतवती यस्मात् लोकत्रयहिताय वै
 प्रसिद्धिं यातु शैलोर्यं अञ्जने ! नामतस्तव ॥
 अञ्जनाचल इत्येव नात्र कार्या विचारणा
 इति तस्यै वरं दत्वा देवाः ब्रह्मपुरोगमाः
 स्वं स्वं स्थानं समुद्दिश्य यथागतमथो ययुः ॥

Brahmanda Purana (6-66-6)

There is also a reference in the Brahmanda Purana about how the hill came to be called as Vrishabhachala. Vrishabhasura at the time of his death represented to the Lord that, since he died on the top of the hill, the hill should be named after him as Vrishabhachala, and this boon was also granted by the Lord. This legend is seen from the following verses of Brahmanda Purana.

वृषभासुर ! मद्भक्त्या विमुक्तिं यास्यसि ध्रुवम्
 गिरिशचायं भवन्नाम्ना प्रसिद्धिमधिगच्छतु ॥
 गोविन्दोऽपि दयासारो वरं दत्वाऽसुराय वै
 पुनरभ्येत्य शेषाद्रौ यथास्थानं स्थितो मुने ! ॥

Brahmanda Purana (5-44-51)

The religious service in the temple is conducted in a very elaborate manner. There are morning Darsans of the Lord

known as Tomalaseva and Archana. This is followed by a free Darsan to all the worshippers. This is again repeated in the evening ending in another free Darsan. Special services are performed on payment of proper sacrificial offerings by the pilgrims. In the morning, there is a special service to the Lord under which the daily accounts are rendered to the Lord and the Almanac or the Panchangam is also read out to Him. This is in recognition of the fact that the Lord is a king and all royal honours should be shown to him. The most important festival here is the Brahmotsava Festival which lasts for ten days.

There are a number of Tirthas in the hills on top and below, which are deemed sacred, namely Sri Swamipushkarini near the temple of the hill, Akasa Ganga, four miles from the hill, from which water is taken daily for religious use and Kapila Tirtham, a sacred tank a mile and a half distant from Tirupati, where Lord Siva is said to have blessed Sage Kapila with a vision of himself and his consort etc.

The temple of Lord Venkateswara is the most famous temple in the whole of Andhra Desa and is a renowned temple in the whole of India to which pilgrims from all quarters flock. This is a temple in which the presence of the Lord is actually felt, and where any prayer is still answered provided there is sincerity and devotion in the heart of the pilgrim. There are excellent travel facilities and direct bus connections from almost all nearby places. The Devasthanam also provides very good boarding and lodging, free in the case of poor pilgrims and on payment in the case of people who can afford to pay. This is a temple to which Saivites and Vaishnavites and people belonging to all other sub-sects go for their prayer.

CHAPTER IX

KALAHASTI

KALAHASTI is a town in the Chittoor District of Andhra, and it is a Railway Station on the Renigunta-Gudur section. It has a temple dedicated to Lord Siva, and is famous throughout Andhra as a sacred place and a place of pilgrimage. This religious centre, which is situated between two steep hills, called Sripuram and Mummicholapuram, is said to have formed part of Seshasaila or Mount Meru, in the ancient days.

The temple and the town are situated in beautiful natural surroundings. The river Suvarnamukhi flows on one side of the town, which on the other side is bounded by hills. The temple is a huge and a beautiful one, with magnificent Gopuras.

The Siva Linga of Kalahasti is one of the five supreme Lingas representing the five great Elements. These are installed in five great Kshetras. These Kshetras are dedicated to the five Elements, namely, Water, Fire, Air, Ether and Earth. The Vayu Linga is said to be installed in this Kshetra. In proof of the above, it can be seen that in the Garbhagriha of the temple there is a light which to this day is flickering even though there is no loophole for the air to enter the temple.

The Linga here is said to have been worshipped in the ancient days by a spider, a snake and an elephant. The spider worshipped the Lord by spinning a web over it, the snake by placing a gem over it, and the elephant by washing the Linga with water. These three are said to have

attained Moksha in the temple by their devotion to the Lord. The marks of these three are still pointed out on the central Linga which, together with the ancient Nandi in front, is white in colour, and hence held to be Swayambhu or self-manifest.

The river Suvarnamukhi takes a northerly course at Kalahasti and the river washes almost the west wall of the temple. The main entrance of the temple is on the south, though the God faces the west.

The Puranic version for associating Kalahasti with Mount Meru is, that, as a result of an altercation between Adishesha, the serpent God, and Vayu, the God of the Air, three blocks separated themselves from Mount Meru and fell at different places. One of these is Kalahasti. The other is at Tiruchirapalli of the south and the third is at Trincomalee in Ceylon. Since Kalahasti is thus a chip which fell off Mount Meru, it is said to form part of it, though geographically Mount Meru and Kalahasti are very far off.

Kalahasti is surrounded by two sacred hills, and the one in the north has a temple of Durgamba, and the other in the south has the shrine of Kannabeswara, in memory of Sage Kannappa, who sacrificed one of his eyes as an offering to the Lord, and who when in the act of offering the other eye also was prevented by the Lord himself. The temple of Kalahastiswara is situated to the west of Kalahasti hill. The two entrance Gopurams of the shrine are very imposing. In the second court of the temple is an underground cell, where Lord Ganapathi, called here as Patala Vinayaka, is worshipped. This shrine which is 30 feet beneath the surface, is said to mark the level of the river that passes by. The sculptures of Sage Kannappa, Sakti Vinayaka, as well as the bronze figures of the Nayanars or Saivite saints in the temple are very ancient and beautiful.

To the South, on the slope of the Kannappa hill, is a small shrine dedicated to Brahma in which the Linga figures with four faces in different directions. Close by on the boulders are bas-relief sculptures of Saivite mythology. The Manikanteswara shrine which is also close by, is of very ancient origin with an important inscription. The rock-cut Mantapa to the south-east of the temple is called the Manigānniagattam, in memory of a woman having been blessed with the holy Taraka Mantra by the Lord Siva himself, whispering it into her right ear. Even now the pious and devout bring persons on the point of death, and place them upon their right side with the ear resting upon the ground here. At the moment of death, the body turns round upon its left side, while the spirit escapes out of the right ear of the body.

The beginnings of the temple are lost in immemorial times. We have reference to Kalahasti in the Skanda Purana where Arjuna is said to have visited the place during his Tirthayatra, worshipped Kalahastiswara Swami, and visited the great sage Bharadwaja Maharshi on the top of the hill, which was called Kailasagiri, from whom he heard the Sthalamahatmyam of the place, and the sacredness of the river Suvarnamukhi.

The historical reference to this temple occurs in the work of Nakkeerar, who is a celebrated Tamil poet and who flourished in the Third Century B.C. during the last Tamil Sangam period. He has sung about this place in exquisite poetry calling it Southern Kailas. Four great Tamil Saivite saints, namely, Sambandar, Appar, Manikkavasagar and Sundaramurti have visited Kalahasti during their pilgrimage and have sung about the Lord here. The later day Tamil saints, namely, Pattinathar and Sri Ramalinga Swami of

Vadalur have also visited this place, and have sung about Lord Kalahastiswara.

Adi Sankara, the great religious reformer who re-established the Shanmathas in this land, has specifically sung about Sri Kannappa Nayanar in his famous mystic poem Sivananda Lahari.

The temple was built at the foot of Kailasagiri by the Pallava kings and later by Tondaman Chakravarti. The Chola kings renovated and built the main temple. Kulotunga Chola, the great Chola king, superintended the Galigopuram which is the main entrance facing south, in the Eleventh Century A.D. In the Twelfth Century A.D., King Veeranasimha Yadavaraya built the present outer Prakaras, and the four Gopurams connecting the four entrances of the temple. Next, the Vijayanagar rulers developed the Mantapams inside the temple and, from an inscription of Krishnadevaraya, we find that he built in 1516 A.D. the Hundred Pillared Mantapam and the Galigopuram, which are facing west to east. Sri Achutaraya of the Vijayanagar dynasty, got his coronation performed in the presence of Lord Kalahastiswara in 1529 A.D., before he finally celebrated it for the third and last time at Vijayanagar, his capital city. Finally, the Natukottai Chettiers of Devakottai who are famous for their charity, gave the final shape to the temple in 1912 at a cost of nearly nine lakhs of rupees.

The main entrance of the temple begins from Bikshala Galigopuram. Close to this and facing the east, is a temple dedicated to Kasi Viswanatha Swami and Annapurna. Passing this we enter the temple Prakara, called Bala Gnana-nanda Gopuram. Next to this is the temple of Patala Ganapathi. There are two wells called Surya Pushkarani and Chandra Pushkarani and adjacent to these Pushkaranis

is a Suryanarayana temple. Close to the western gate there is a temple of Subrahmanyaswami and also of Sadyo-mukti Ganapathi. The Krishnadevaraya Mantapa, the Jalakoti Mantapa, the Palagar Mantapa etc. are all situated close by. Adjacent to these on the southern side, there is a pathway which leads to the Bharadwaja Ashram, Kannappa Hill and the Manikarnika temple.

The main gate of the temple proper faces south, and this is clear proof that the temple is dedicated to Dakshinamurthy, who is a manifestation of Lord Siva. Entering the temple, we then have the Vighneswara temple to our west. There are also idols of Appar, Sundarar and Manikka-vasagar who are famous Saivite Nayanar saints. Next comes the sacred shrine of Sri Kalahastiswara and just before the main entrance is the idol of Kannappa, the great devotee, who removed his eyes as an offering to the Lord. Many rare icons like Vallabha Ganapati, Mahalaxmi Ganapati and Sahasralingeswara Swami also exist in the temple.

The main Lingam has a pedestal and is in the shape of the trunk of an elephant with tusks on either side and a figure of the spider at the bottom. Looked at from the top, it presents the appearance of a snake with five hoods. The name of the spider is 'Sri', the serpent is called 'Kala' and the elephant is called 'Hasti'. Hence these three forms combined into one goes by the name, Srikalahasti which is held to be one of the Panchabhutalingas of the South. As stated above, the Pancha Bhutas are the Earth, the Water, the Fire, the Wind, and the Ether. Corresponding to these there are five Lingas which are worshipped in five famous Kshetras, of which Kalahasti is one, representing the element of Vayu. The Pancha Bhuta Kshetras are Kanchipuram representing Prithvi or earth, the Jambukeswara representing Appu or water, Arunachala representing Tejas

or light, Sri Kalahasti representing Vayu or air, and Chidambara representing Akash or ether. There is a light in the innermost Garbhagriha of the temple which is always flickering, as if it is being blown by wind, even though there are no holes or windows anywhere there. This is said to represent the Vayu element from which the temple is derived.

There are many legends about this temple, one of which states that the spider, the serpent and the elephant, performed Puja to the main Linga in the Krita yuga. While the spider wove a net above the Lingam to protect it from the Sun and rain, the elephant with its trunk used to get water from the river and perform Abhishekam, while the serpent worshipped the Lord with his Phani.

The legend goes that the serpent was unaware of the worship of the spider and elephant. One day during its Puja the serpent found some Bilva leaves and some Abhisheka tirtham near the Lord. It therefore thought that some one was harming the Lord, and hence surrounded the Lord to observe the mischief maker. Next day the elephant as usual came with water in his trunk to perform the Puja. Thinking that the elephant was spoiling the sanctity of the Linga, the serpent got into its trunk. The elephant unable to resist the pain dashed its trunk against the Lingam, thereby crushing the serpent and the Spider, and itself being unable to bear the pain it also died on the spot. Lord Siva gave Mukti to all the above three, being satisfied with their devotion, and hence it is that the Kshetra is called Sri Kalahasti. The Linga contains in it traces of these three also.

There is another very interesting and devotional legend connected with Kalahasti, namely the story of a great Saivite Bhakta called Kannappa. Kannappa was a hunter

who was called Tinnappa before he became a saint, and he lived in the forest hunting animals. He was a great Bhakta of the Lord, and he used to offer the flesh of the animals to the Lord first as sacrament after tasting if they were good enough to be offered to the Lord. To test his sincerity and devotion, the Lord one day made it appear as if water was dropping from the eye of the Lingam. Tinnappa thought that some one had harmed the Lord, and immediately without any hesitation removed one of his own eyes and offered it to the Lord in place of the one from which water was flowing. The water from the eye of the Lord stopped at once. After some time Tinnappa noticed that the other eye of the Lord was also affected. He at once began to remove his other eye also to offer it to the Lord as he did with his first. Since on removal of both his eyes he would become blind, and would not be able to locate the Lord's eye, he with his left foot marked the place of the Lord's eye, so that by feeling the eye of the Lord with his leg he could locate the exact spot where the Lord's eye was and replace it with his own eye. At that time the Lord, pleased with the strength of his devotion, gave him Darsan and restored his eye-sight and also gave him the name "Kannappa," that is, one who gave his eyes to the Lord. Pleased with his devotion the Lord also ordained that he should be near the Lingam permanently. Therefore we find the idol of Kannappa near the Lingam and Pujas are first offered to him and then only to the Lord. On the top of the hill there is another temple of Kannappa Nayanar.

The Goddess here is called Gnana Prasannamba and is said to be the sister of Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati. She is called Gnana Prasannamba, because she bestows Gnana or the Supreme knowledge of reality, on those who wor-

ship her with devotion. She was the first to inform Indra, king of Devatas, of the nature of Parabrahma and hence she is so named. There is a small anecdote about this in the Gnana Upanishad.

Kalahasti and the hill Kailasagiri are famous in the Puranas. According to the Skanda, Saiva, and Linga Puranas, the idol of Sri Kalahastiswara is said to have been brought by Brahma the Creator from Mount Kailas as a gift from Lord Iswara. According to the instructions of the Lord, he kept the idol and worshipped the same, so that he may by his worship recollect the process of creation, which was forgotten by him. Hence it is that the hill is called Kailasagiri.

In the Kalahasti Sthalapurana it is clearly stated as to which Rishis worshipped which Lingam in each of the four yugas in order to attain salvation. The Sthalapurana states that when Brahma the Creator began to perform penance in the presence of this Linga, Lord Siva left Kailas and took his abode in this idol. Goddess Parvati finding that she had been left along herself, also came to this Linga and began her Pujas and penance. During this period Durga was her attendant. After the completion of the penance of Brahma and Parvati, Lord Siva gave Darsan to them. Durga, the attendant, was also granted a boon, and according to her wish she was converted into a Goddess. Hence there is a hill here called Durga hill. The Lord and the Goddess are taken out in procession on two occasions—on the ninth day of Mahasivaratri festival and on Makarasan-kranti day.

The following tirthas within the Kailasagiri hills are famous and sacred. 1. Harahar Tirtham, which is three miles from Kalahasti, 2. Kalinga Tirtham, which is five miles from

Kalahasti towards the east, 3. Sahasra Linga Tirtham which is five miles south-west of Kalahasti, 4. Markandeya Tirtham, six and a half miles from Sahasra Linga Tirtham, 5. Mayura Tirtham, named after Mayura Maharshi, 6. Bharadwaja Tirtham, which is three and a half miles from the main temple, 7. Narada Tirtham in the centre of the town, 8. Saraswati Tirtham, which is said to have the property of making the dumb people speak if they take the water of this as Prasada for forty days, 9. Suka Tirtham after Suka Maharshi, 10. Brahma Tirtham, 11. Manikarnika Tirtham and 12. Tatwa Prakasa Tirtham.

The river Suvarnamukhi is also a famous one in the Puranas. In the Puranas it is stated that this sacred river was brought to earth by Agastya Maharshi. It is a perennial river. It is also called Uttara vahini, as it flows from south to north at this spot, which is a rare phenomenon. It is stated that Lord Indra got rid of his curse from Maharshi Gautama after taking his bath in this river. Nakkeerar, the great Tamil poet of the Sangam Age, is also said to have rid himself of a fell disease after taking his bath in this river.

The main Lingam in the shrine is untouched till today even by the priest. Abhisheka is being performed with Panchakarpura, or camphor mixed with water, milk and Panchamruta. The Linga is said to be Swayambhu or self-manifest and hence has not been touched by human hand up to now. Even this Panchakarpura Abhisheka to the main Linga is to be performed only by the priests belonging to Bharadwaja Gotra of Apastambha Sutra and who have undergone the prescribed Diksha initiation in the temple. Flowers, sandal paste and the sacred thread are being offered only to the Utsava murthy but not to the main Linga.

The most important festival in this temple is that of Mahasivarathri which lasts for ten days in February and March. The fifth day of the festival corresponds to Sivarathri proper, when the pilgrims bathe in the river and keep vigil all throughout the night, fasting throughout day and night. Another big festival is on the third day in Sankranti when the deity is taken in a procession round the hills which is a circuit of nearly twenty miles. There are in all eighty-five festivals in this temple in the year

Kalahasti is thus an ancient place mentioned extensively in the Puranas. Its historical background runs to ages and it has been sung by famous mystic poets. It is only thirty miles by road from Tirupati and one can reach it easily by road from Gudur on the Madras-Vijayawada line. The temple is a famous and sacred one and attracts pilgrims and devotees by thousands even now.

CHAPTER X

CHEZERLA

THE village Chezerla is situated at a distance of 15 miles west of Narasaraopet in the Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. There is a good metalled road for a part of the way and for the rest one can reach the village only by Jeep and that too only in fair weather. The village stands in the plains and is surrounded by a low range of rocky hills and is covered by scrub jungle. The temple here is dedicated to Lord Siva. The deity is called Kapotheswara, after the famous story of Sibi mentioned in the Mahabharata, where, he is said to have sacrificed a part of his own body, as an offering to an eagle, which was pursuing a pigeon or a Kapotha, in order to save it from destruction.

This story is a renowned one not only in Hindu mythology, but also in the Buddhist Jataka tales, which give us the lives of Siddhartha, the Buddha, in his previous Janmas. The Sibi Jataka is as hoary and sacred to the Buddhist, as an embodiment of 'Saranagata vatsala,' as Sibi Chakravarthi is to the Hindu, as a supreme symbol of 'Rajadharma' which enjoins a king to protect the refugee even at the cost of his own life. This is probably the only temple in the whole of India dedicated to Lord Siva as Kapotheswara.

Till very recently there used to stand outside the south wall of the courtyard of the temple, an enormous Boabab tree, which was 56 feet round the trunk, and which was very hollow inside. The tree collapsed in 1917, and formerly it was much venerated by the pilgrims who visited the temple.

The deity is in Lingakara. Siva is here represented as Kapotheswara, who gave a portion of his own body in order to save a pigeon that took refuge with him. Curiously, in the image of the Linga there are even today large cavities as if portions have been scooped or cut out, and these are said to be the places of the body, from which the Lord cut off his own flesh, in order to save the life of the Kapotha. The image is said to be the image of the 'Kalebara' of Sibi, with the head cut off, and on top of the Linga, there are still two large vertical cavities. One of these cavities helps to drain off the Abhisheka tirtha to an unknown place and even today the smell of raw flesh and blood comes out of this since the God here is a very powerful one.

The temple is of the greatest importance to us from the point of view of temple architecture. There are, as is well known, three types of temple architecture, called the Nagara, the Vesara and the Dravida, and the main distinguishing features of these are to be seen only in the Vimana over the main shrine of the temple. The temple of Chezerla is a rare exception and this is a temple on the apsidal model. This apsidal plan and barrel vaulted structure, is classified in the Vastu sastra, as 'Hasti prasta' or elephant back. These were originally Buddhist Chaityas and were readjusted for the purpose of Hindu worship, by the introduction of internal walls and upper storeys to seclude the Garbha Griha from the rest of the building. The end of the temple takes the form of an apse and in its centre is a white marble Linga. The fact that the temple of Sibi is sacred to Buddhism and Hinduism and is built in a unique style, conforming both to the Chaitya hall designs and the Silpa Sastra rules, is proof positive that the temple must have come into existence, at a period of mutual tolerance between Hinduism and Buddhism. This is further supported

by a famous inscription in the temple by Satsabhamalla, the son of Avanitalantavati Mahadevi, the daughter of the king Kandara of the Ananda gotra line of kings. The Kandara line of kings is a rare one, and they ruled round about the 4th or the 5th century A.D. The provenance of this inscription, therefore, shows that this temple is in existence from the 5th century A. D. even.

There are hoary traditions and legends about the temple, which is a famous one in Andhra. The following legend concerning the origin of the temple will be of interest.

In Kashmir, one of the largest and richest of the ancient kingdoms of India, a king named Sibi Chakravarthi, son of Mandhata and grandson of Yayati Maharaja, who were famous kings of the Mahabharata, was ruling the world peacefully and justly. He had two brothers named Mehadambara and Jeemutavahana. One day Mehadambara asked Sibi to give him permission to go on a pilgrimage to all the sacred places, shrines and rivers of South India. The king was much pleased with the piety of this brother, and not merely gave him the permission gladly, but also made arrangements for a retinue of one thousand and five hundred persons to accompany him. Mehadambara visited a number of holy places and tirthas, and at last came to a place called "Cherum Chorla" where many yogis were doing tapascharya in the caves of a hill called Devarakonda. Mehadambara was so moved by the piety of the yogis, that he stayed away at the place for a long time, spending his days in Satsanga, with the yogis. He thereby lost all interest in wordly affairs, and he himself began to renounce the world and take to yoga and tapascharya. Some time later he died and his body was buried on the summit of the hill. Due to his tapascharya his body would not perish, and assumed the form of a linga. The people who saw this, built a shrine

upon it and called the linga Mehadambheswara. The retinue of the prince who came along with him went back to Kashmir and told the story to king Sibi.

The King became very sad and consulted with his younger brother. Thereupon Jeemutavahana started with an equal number of escort in order to somehow bring back his brother. After spending many days on the way, Jeemutavahana reached "Cherum Chorla" and when he verified that his brother has been converted into a linga, he too decided to follow his footsteps. He dismissed his escort and sat as a yogi in tapascharya. The force of his penance was so great that his body reached Kailasa.

The retinue once again went back to Kashmir and informed the king Sibi that his brother Jeemutavahana also had gone the same way as his other brother Mehadambara. The king now fell into a deep sorrow over the loss of both of his brothers, and handed over the kingdom to his ministers who were instructed to govern the kingdom carefully for some months, so that he himself might visit the place.

The king ultimately reached the place, and on seeing the 'Linga sareeram' of his brother, he determined to perform a hundred yajnas, since the place was so holy and hallowed, that he considered it to be the fittest place for the performance of a hundred yajnas. If a devotee completes hundred yajnas, the merit that he would get by it, would entitle him to reach the realm of Brahma. Hence the Gods decided to test whether King Sibi was really pious and steadfast in his devotion, and whether he had that amount of mental detachment, that is necessary for attaining the realm of Gods.

The three Gods, Brahma, Rudra and Vishnu descended to Bhuloka at a spot called Rupanaguntla, which was named

so, since the three murthis made themselves visible to the mortal world at that place. They then transformed themselves, Lord Siva as a hunter, Lord Brahma as an arrow, and Lord Vishnu as the bird 'Kapotha pakshi.' Lord Siva as a hunter with his arrow, ran and jumped about, desiring to shoot the bird. The bird, however, flew rapidly and found refuge in the hands of the king Sibi, seeking his protection. At that time, Sibi was doing his hundredth yajna. The hunter thereupon appeared before King Sibi and told him thus:

"My Lord, I am a hunter who according to my Dharma has to live on the flesh of birds and animals. I have since this morning been pursuing the bird to whom you have just now given refuge. I am hungry and thirsty and since according to my Dharma I am to live on flesh, please release the bird, so that I may kill it and eat it."

The king Sibi replied, that his Raja dharma was to give protection to any one, who sought refuge with him, and that it would not be possible for him to release the bird. Thereupon the hunter remonstrated that the king's dharma and his swadharma were at variance and he asked the king himself to find a solution for it. The king saw the justice of the demand of the hunter, and told him that he would not renounce his dharma, but at the same time he would not allow the hunter to starve and therefore, as a compromise he would give flesh from his own body, equal in weight to that of the bird. Thereupon Sibi placed the bird on one scale and with his own hands tore off portions of his body, and placed them in the other scale. Since this incident occurred because the Lords wanted to test Sibi's sincerity, any amount of flesh from the body of Sibi would not balance the weight of the bird. Thereupon King Sibi procured a long knife, and cut his body into two pieces and had one

half placed on the scale. The three Lords, Brahma, Rudra and Vishnu assumed their real shapes and appeared before Sibi and restored his yajna and also his life. Lord Sibi desired the place of Kailasa for himself, and for the escort who had followed him and endured with him the hardship of the tapascharya, and also desired that all their bodies should be transformed into lingas to remain for ever in the holy and sacred "Cherum Chorla" kshetra. Lord Siva granted these requests and the bodies of Sibi and his followers were transformed into Lingas. A temple was erected over Sibi's Linga under the name 'Kapoteswara' since he gave up his life in support of a kapotha bird.

In support of the legend, it is still pointed out that the white marble Linga has two large holes on the top and small sword marks on the sides. The place Chezerla is full of Sivalingas and these are said to represent the Lingakara sareeras of Lord Sibi's escort.

The main shrine of the Lord is a long apsidal building with a barrel roof. The floor is below the level of the courtyard. There is only one small entrance in front which faces the east. The end of the building takes the form of an apse. In the centre of the apse is the 'murty' of the Lord, with the two holes on its crown. There is no hole on the north wall of the temple, which normally exists in every Saivite temple as an exit for the Abhisheka tirtha. Here the two holes of the Linga themselves serve the purpose and the Abhisheka tirtha is drained off to an unknown place.

There are a number of halls attached to the front of the main shrine and one of these contains a large 'Nandi' facing the entrance. There are any number of small shrines round the main temple which contain lingas. On the north-east side of the temple, there is an excellent specimen of the

'Sahasra linga,' and on the other side of the temple, is a carved stone image representing the 'Saptha Matrikas' or the Seven Mothers.

The main festival of this temple is the Shivarathri festival, and the other festivals which are usually conducted in other Saivite temples are also observed here, though on a small scale. The temple, though it is slightly off the main road, is still a famous one from the points of view of antiquity, architecture and sanctity. As stated above this is perhaps the only extant temple in India of the Lord Siva as 'Kapoteswara.' The Lord is also said to be a powerful one, and the local legends state that any prayer that is done with sincerity and purity is generally granted here.

CHAPTER XI

AMARAVATI

AMARAVATI has made Andhra sculpture a byword among the plastic arts of the world, since the Amaravati Buddhist sculptures are world famous as the most perfect example of what is called the Andhra or the Amaravati type of sculpture. This place, which is situated in Sattenapalli Taluk of Guntur District, is also famous as the seat of a temple to Lord Siva worshipped here as Lord Amareswara. Amaravati is situated twenty miles northwest of Guntur and is connected with it by a good motorable road. One can reach Guntur by getting down at Vijayawada which is a main junction in the Madras-Delhi and Madras-Calcutta line and from which excellent buses take one to Guntur. There are good bus connections from Guntur to Amaravati. At Amaravati, there is a Public Works Department Travellers Bungalow, some choultries and sheds for pilgrims' stay.

Amaravati and Dharanikota which is adjacent, were the seats of the ancient Andhra Emperors and the place is full of antiquities of the greatest archeological value. The lofty temple of Amareswara stands on the bank of the holy river Krishna, and is situated at a spot on the river Krishna where it takes a north to south course, while the main river flows from west to east. Such spots where the river takes a different course for short distance are considered to be very holy places, where temples are normally built.

The origin of the temple is shrouded in mystery, though there are many legends, Puranic and historical, about it. But the sanctity and the holiness of the place attract even now thousands of pilgrims.

The temple is situated right on the bank of the river Krishna and is surrounded on all the four sides by towering gopuras of the usual Dravidian type. The vimana of the temple also shows the same style of architecture. There is one legend that the temple was originally Buddhist in origin and later on this was readapted for Hindu worship. There is some force in this contention, since in the Amareswaraswamy temple, the foundations are laid with the characteristic Buddhist slabs only. Just above the Mula Virat in the Garbhagriha, one can see still a white marble lotus Medallion, done in the delicate and ornate style of the early Buddhist silpas.

The Mula Virat is a long vertical cylinder made of white marble which is so extensively used in the Buddhist monuments. The height of the linga is about 15 feet or so and another legend has it that this was originally an Ayaka Stambha or an Ayaka pillar, which later has been consecrated and brought into use as symbolic of the Sivalinga. The temple as it stands now is a perfect specimen of the Dravida type of temple architecture. These gopuras came into prominence only in the medieval times, and the absence of any stone epigraph earlier than the 11th century A.D. in the temple would suggest that the temple itself was of a comparatively late origin.

From the legendary point of view, Amaravati and the Amareswara temple have had an ancient past. The Skanda Purana gives a complete picture of the place and the temple. There is a Sthalapurana for the temple which is also equally interesting. The popular legend and the Sthalapurana are as follows.

At the end of Dwaparayuga, and the beginning of Kaliyuga i.e., 5053 years ago, Maharshi Narada was once asked by the Sounakadi rishis as to the best means of obtaining

liberation. In other words, the Sounakadi rishis prayed for instructions on the Mukthi marga from Maharshi Narada. Then Rishi Narada told them that Lord Krishna had created the river Krishna, and he advised the Sounakadi rishis to live very near the river Krishna and to have constantly their bath in its holy water in order to attain their own salvation. Then Rishi Narada narrated the Sthala-purana of Amareswara as follows.

Amareswaram is situated on the southern bank of river Krishna, and is on the south-eastern side of the Srisailem temple. Amareswaram is important because in that place are three sacred things, viz., the Krishna river, an important kshetra with a Sthala mahatmyam and the Sri Mahalinga Murthy, which are three sacred principles embodied in one.

The desires and the Kamanas of the pilgrims and devotees who worship the Amareswaraswamy on the banks of the river Krishna will be fulfilled, because at the request of the Devatas, Lord Siva manifested himself as Amareswara here and was residing here for the specific purpose of fulfilling the Kamanas of his devotees. Lord Indra and Kapilamahamuni also worshipped Amareswara here, and as such this is the most sacred of all the Kshetras. There is no Punarjanma if any devotee worships the Lord here. Many other holy waters join the Punya tirtha of this river and all the sins of those devotees who worship Lord Amareswara and have a bath in the holy river will be washed off completely.

In this Punyakshetra, Lord Siva is in the form of five lingas, viz., Pranaveswara, Agasteswara, Kosaleswara, Someswara and Parthiveswara. If a devotee remains at this Kshetra for more than three days and worships Lord Amareswara with faith and devotion in his heart, after a bath in the holy river Krishna, he will straightaway attain the

Sivaloka. If any devotee dies here, he will be absorbed in Lord Siva.

There are also legends about the Kshetra Mahatmyam and the Kshetramurthy Mahatmyam here. The Sthalapurana has the following to say about this.

Once there was a town called Dhanyakatakam. Dhanyakatakam is the same as Varanasi or the holy Kasi. Lord Amareswara is no other than Lord Viswanatha and the river Krishna at this spot is no other than the river Ganga. So far as the Sthala Mahatmyam goes, the same results will be obtained by reaching Amaravati, having a bath in Krishna river, and worshipping Lord Amareswara, as any devotee will get, if he reaches Benaras, has a bath in the river Ganges, and worships Lord Viswanatha. Lord Siva with his Pramatha ganas was residing in Dhanyakataka. He was also called as Crounchanathudu. The capital of this Crounchapuri is called Amaravati. The legend goes on to say that once, the Devatas were defeated by the Rakshasas and, after getting the boon of Lord Siva, that he would kill the Rakshasas, the Devatas in refuge came to reside in this Dhanyakataka and from that time onwards it is called Amaravati, or the abode of the Amaras.

The legend goes on to say that once there was a fight for ten thousand years between Lord Indra and a Rakshasa by name Taraka. Ultimately Taraka won the battle. The Devatas then got frightened and went to Lord Maha Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu told them that Tarakasura was a great Siva Bhakta and a worshipper of Lord Siva, and that he derived much of his strength from his worship of Lord Siva, who was greatly pleased with it, and as such, it would not be proper for Lord Vishnu to kill Tarakasura who was a Siva Bhakta of a high calibre. Therefore Lord Vishnu advised the Devatas to go and pray to Lord Siva himself,

and represent their grievances to him. Lord Siva who heard the Devatas also told them that it would not be possible for him also to kill Tarakasura because, whatever might be his other shortcomings, Tarakasura was a great Siva Bhakta and that Lord Siva himself was unable to harm a sincere Siva Bhakta. This interesting legend shows how the efficacy of Bhakti so completely overwhelms the Lord, that the Lord himself finds himself not competent to deal with one who is a great Bhakta. Finally Lord Siva deputed Kumaraswami to lead the army of the Devatas for a fight with Taraka.

Kumaraswami at the head of the army of the Devatas gave battle to Tarakasura. The fight went on continuously and Kumaraswami also found himself unable to deal with Tarakasura properly. They once again had necessarily to go back to Lord Siva and pray to him for succour. Lord Siva then told the Devatas that Tarakasura being a great Siva bhakta had so identified himself with the Lord that he carried a Siva Linga in his own throat, and his very life was in the Siva Linga. Hence he suggested that if they could break that Siva Linga, then Tarakasura would die, since, to him life without his Lord was meaningless. Lord Siva also told them that the pieces of the Linga would grow in the kshetras where they fell, and that as soon as the pieces from the Linga fell, the Devatas should all go to those places and establish those Lingas with consecration and worship, so that the further growth of the Lingas might be arrested.

Accordingly, Kumaraswami broke the Linga in the throat of the Rakshasa and the Linga broke into five pieces which fell in five different Sthalas. Lord Indra with his Guru Brihaspati went to the place where the biggest and the first piece of the Linga had fallen so that he might establish the worship as ordained by Lord Siva himself. Lord Indra

asked his Guru Brihaspati as to the way in which he should establish that white-coloured Linga which was growing from the earth to the Akasa. Thereupon Brihaspati advised Indra to consecrate the Linga on the Aswayuja Suddha Dasami, on which day there would be Sumuhoorta. Lord Indra established the Linga on that day and named the Lord as Amareswara and worshipped it.

The Guru of the Rakshasas, Sukracharya, came to that place and asked Brihaspati as to how he could establish the Amareswara Alaya at that place where it was likely to be drowned by the floods of the river Krishna. Then Brihaspati recalled that there was a mountain called Crouncha which was deep in the earth up to Patala and the first piece of the Lingam fell on that mountain and was growing from that spot. Hence even if the river Krishna flows in floods nothing will happen to that mountain and that the river will have to take some other side to flow. Hence it is that the river Krishna flows north to south at this place.

According to Brihaspati's instructions, the Devatas established the other minor shrines like the Ambika, etc., near Lord Amareswara as Parivara devatas. The Yakshas and Kinnaras also lived there in Amaravati. Since the Devas or Amaras lived there for a long time, the place itself came to be called Amaravati. The other four places where the four pieces of the Linga from the throat of Tarakasura fell, are Bhimarama or Bhimavaram in Kakinada, Ksheerarama or Palakollu in West Godavari, Draksharama in East Godavari, and Kumararama which is Kotipalli in East Godavari District.

The Lord Amareswara here is worshipped with his consort Bala Chamundika who is considered as the fourth of the

18 goddesses. There are also many important minor deities inside the temple.

The present temple of Amaravati owes much to Raja Sri Vasireddi Venkatadri Nayudu who was a great leader of the 18th century. The popular legend has it that once during the course of putting down a rebellion in his land he had to have recourse to a massacre of the Chenchus, whereupon he lost his mental peace, which he regained only when he came to Amaravati. Raja Vasireddi Venkatadri Nayudu built Jaggayyapet in memory of his father, Acchampet in memory of his mother, and Rajapet in his own name. He shifted his place from Chintapalli to Amaravati in 1796, and devoted his entire life, time and revenues to building temples to Lord Siva. He renovated the Amareswaraswamy temple here, got nine learned archakas to be brought for the daily archanas of the Lord, and provided them with all the needs of livelihood, including the ground of 12 acres of land to each. The temple as it stands owes much to him.

Amaravati temple has also a wealth of inscriptions on its walls like those of the Kota chiefs of Amaravati, the Kondaveedu Reddis, and others. There is also an inscription of Sri Krishnadevaraya on the erection of a mantapam here. On a pillar in the Mukhamantapam the wife of Proli Nayudu, who was a dependent of Koppara Kesanivarma, has left an inscription.

Any account of Amaravati will not be complete without reference to the world famous Buddha stupa here. For sheer beauty of execution, for the perfection of calligraphy in the several inscriptions, for that fine delineation of human emotions in stone, as for example the conversion of Nanda on the eve of his marriage to Prajapati Goutami, the moving scene of the great renunciation or the Mahabhinishkramana,

the subjugation of the intoxicated elephant Nalagiri by Lord Buddha, and other scenes from Buddha's life which are depicted in the Amaravati style of sculpture, there is no other to compare. There is evidence to show that at Amaravati there was a flourishing Vidyapitha where students from China, Japan, Tibet, Siam and Ceylon were studying.

Amaravati can be reached either by bus from Guntur or by steam launch from Vijayawada across the river Krishna which is only twenty miles away. There are excellent choultries, in addition to a travellers bungalow, for the convenience of pilgrims, with facilities of boarding and lodging.

The main festivals in the temple are the Mahasivaratri which comes in the Magha Bahula Dasami and the Navaratri and the Kalyana Utsavas. Amaravati is thus an important kshetra situated at a particularly sacred spot of the holy river Krishna and is a consecrated place of worship, of importance to both Buddhism and Hinduism.

CHAPTER XII

MANGALAGIRI

MANGALAGIRI is situated on the Bezwada-Guntur road and is about 8 miles by road from Vijayawada. On the top of the Mangalagiri hill there is a famous temple called the Panakala Nrusimhaswamy temple, which has been attracting pilgrims from a very long time, and from all parts of the country.

The nearest railway station is Mangalagiri on the Guntur-Vijayawada line but to visit the temple, the better course would be to get down either at Vijayawada or at Guntur and take bus connections.

There are three choultries of this temple in addition to a local fund choultry, a vaisya choultry, a Madhva choultry and a Brahman choultry. The pilgrims are given all facilities for comfortable stay here.

The Lord that is worshiped here is Lord Narayana in Narasimha Swamy incarnation. The peculiarity in this temple is that jaggery water, or what is locally known as Panaka, is given as an offering to the Lord. The jaggery water is actually poured into the mouth of the Lord, and Lord Narayana shows that he has fully satisfied himself, when half of the water is thrown back as a prasada to the devotees.

While the jaggery water is being poured into the mouth of the Lord a gurgling sound is clearly audible as if the Lord is actually drinking it, and the sound becomes shriller and shriller, as and when the Lord is drinking, till at last the sound stops, and the balance of the jaggery water is thrown

out. This phenomenon happens not once in a day, but once for every pilgrim who visits the temple. In addition, in spite of the fact that so much of jaggery and jaggery water are thrown out, there is not a single ant that is seen near the hill. It is on account of this special characteristic that the temple has acquired the name of Panakala Nrusimhaswamy temple.

The history of this famous shrine is recorded in the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, which is one of our ancient Puranas. Mangalagiri hill means an auspicious hill, and it is a part of the Eastern Ghats. This place is one of the eight important Mahakshetras of India, which was meant by the Lord to be taken as His own abode, for the redemption of humanity from sin. The origin of this temple with its presiding deity known as Panakala Nrusimhaswamy is traced to the Kritayuga. The temple is situated midway on the side of a hill.

The mountain itself is in the shape of an elephant as seen from a distance. Even to-day the hill presents the appearance of a reclining elephant. The Sthalapurana and the legend of the temple are as follows.

Pariyatra, who was an ancient king, had a son called Hrusva Sringi who was born with a number of bodily deformities. Hrusva Sringi, in order to cure himself of his bodily deformities, went on a long pilgrimage and finally came to the hill of Mangalagiri and stayed there for three years doing tapascharya. All the Devas advised him to continue at Mangalagiri and do penance to the Lord. King Pariyatra was not very happy at this intense tapascharya of his son, and therefore came to the hill in order to dissuade him from taking to the rigours of penance, and wanted to take him away to his own kingdom. Hrusva Sringi, not being

in a position to decline his father's overtures, assumed the shape of an elephant and became the mountain Mangalagiri, so that his body might serve as the abode of Lord Narasimha in his Lakshmi Narasimhaswamy akara. Since the intense devotion of a bhaktha who offered his own body as an abode of the Lord is immortalised here, Mangalagiri is said to be a very holy mountain.

Later on Lord Vishnu in the aspect of Lakshmi Narasimha killed the great demon called Namuchi with his chakra and installed himself on this hill. The popular legend is that the offerings to this Lord were, honey in Kritayuga, ghee in Dwaparayuga, milk in Tretayuga and Panaka or jaggery water in this Kaliyuga. This offering of Panaka is made even now, by pouring the offering into the mouth of the Lord with a Sankha or a conch and only half of the quantity is accepted by the Lord while the rest is left to the devotee as prasada. The mountain Mangalagiri itself appears in an elephant's shape and the temple is situated just at the mouth. The two peculiarities of the temple are that the offering of jaggery water is made, and that too directly into the mouth of the Lord, and secondly that there is no other idol in the temple except that of Lord Narasimhaswamy, whose face alone is sculptured in the hill itself.

There is another legend that, in the Tretayuga, Lord Rama could not get liberation in spite of strict observance of the Dharma and therefore he was advised to visit this temple to get Mukti. That is why this hill is also called the Totadri. In the Kritayuga, when the ocean Ksheerodadhi was being churned by the Mandara hill, Sri Mahalakshmi came out of it. The Devas constructed a Pushkarani by bringing the waters from all the ancient and holy rivers of the land, and Sri Mahalakshmi after a bath in this holy Pushkarani offered herself to Lord Narayana as his

beloved consort. This Pushkarani is said to exist in Mangalagiri and hence it is even now called as Lakshmi Pushkarani.

There is another temple at the foot of the hill, which traces its origin to the time of Yudhistira the eldest of the Pandavas. In Vijayawada itself, which is eight miles from Mangalagiri, there is a hill called the Indrakila Parvata, in which Arjuna is said to have done his tapascharya in order to obtain Pasupata from Lord Siva. This hill Indrakila is said to be the scene of the Kiratarjuniya where Lord Siva in the form of a hunter had a fight with Arjuna. Hence there is legendary connection between Vijayawada and Mangalagiri which is very near and the five Pandava brothers. Yudhistira is said to be the founder of this temple, and the deity here also is called Sri Lakshmi Narasimhaswamy.

The Kshetrapalaka of this place is Sri Anjaneya. It is stated that Anjaneya wanted to follow Lord Rama to Vaikunta but the Lord advised him to stay at Mangalagiri with his blessings so that he may remain for ever in the world for the Lokakalyana. Hence Sri Anjaneya is said to have taken his abode at this place.

Lord Chaitanya has visited the temple in the year 1312 A.D. and the imprints of his feet and a verse dedicated to his honour are still to be seen in the temple. At the foot of the hill, there is also an inscription of the time of Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagar dynasty who had visited the temple. On the eastern gate of the lower temple a beautiful gopura has been built over 170 years ago by Sri Vasireddi Venkatadri Nayudu, who was a famous figure in Andhra ruling from Amaravathi. The gopura has eleven stories with gates facing east and west and is an excellent example

of a solid construction with big proportions. There is also an ancient ratha or car belonging to the temple, with ornamental wood carvings depicting the scenes from the great national epics of Bharata, Bhagavata and Ramayana.

The important festivals of this temple are the Brahmotsavam which lasts for twelve days in March and the other usual festivals like the Vaikunta Ekadasi day, Sriramanavami, Hanuma Jayanti, Narasimha Jayanti etc. The temple with its imposing gopuram in the south and the sacred Lord Narasimhaswamy at the top is still attracting pilgrims in large numbers. It is one of the most sacred spots in Andhra and is noted both for its sanctity as well as for its historical importance.

CHAPTER XIII

VIJAYAWADA

VIJAYAWADA is practically the centre of Andhra in all its aspects. It is an important junction in the Madras-Calcutta, Madras-Delhi routes, and probably the foremost town of Andhra. It contains three ancient temples viz., the Kanakadurga temple, the Malleswaraswamy temple and the Vijayeswaraswami temple. These are the three temples of Vijayawada.

Vijayawada is known in mythology as Vijayavata, and is mentioned in some inscriptions as Rajendracholapura also. It is a famous place of pilgrimage on the river Krishna, and has a temple dedicated to Lord Siva in his aspect of Malleswara or Jayasena. Sage Agasthya is said to have been the greatest devotee of this deity and admirer of the deity's several leelas.

The origin or installation of Kanakadurga Devi at Vijayawada is unknown. She is said to be Swayambhu or self-manifest. She also takes the aspect of Chandi or destroyer of the demon Durgama who was causing havoc among the peace-loving inhabitants of Dakshinapatha.

Mallikharjuna or the Malleswara as he is known in the Puranas, is said to have been installed by Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pancha Pandavas, as a token of their victory of the South. The temple historically was constructed by Thribhuvana Malla, Western Chalukya King of the 10th century A.D.

The installation of Vijayeswara is said to have been done by Arjuna, one of the Pancha Pandavas, to commemorate his victory with Lord Siva in the shape of Kirata or hunter.

The place Vijayawada is surrounded by many hillocks and the most important of them is Seethanagaram, while the less important is called the Kanakadurga or Kanaka konda. On the southern side of the Kanakadurga temple, is a hillock with sculptures bearing inscriptions, indicating the names of Gods and Goddesses cut below them. Most of these figures are forms of the Goddess in her aspect of Durga which are dealt with in the Manthra Sastras. Traditionally these hills were originally continuous and at the command of the Lord, they got separated, making enough space for the river Krishna to pass through.

One of these hills is called Indrakila which is a famous hill mentioned in the Mahabharatha as the place where the Pandava hero Arjuna obtained from Lord Siva an important weapon called Pasupathastra. The aspect of Lord Siva who appeared before Arjuna for granting him the boon is Kirata or the hunter. This has been immortalised by Bharavi in his celebrated Kavya "The Kiratarjuneeya." The temple of Vijayeswara is attributed to Arjuna to commemorate the event of obtaining Pasupatha. The shrine has the representation of this and many other events of the Mahabharatha commemorated in sculpture. The legend is as follows:

During their wanderings in the forest, the Pancha Pandavas came to Darukavana, where Vedavyasa met them, and told them that one of them should perform Tapascharya in praise of Lord Siva, and obtain from him, the Pasupatastra as a boon, so that they may easily conquer their enemies. Arjuna was chosen for this task and he betook himself to the top of the Indrakila hill (which is said to be the same as the Indrakila hill of Vijayawada) and was performing intense Tapascharya, with his arms upraised, and standing on one foot, and surrounded by the Pancha Agnis or five fires, with four artificial fires around him, and the

fifth being the Sun God himself above him. Being pleased with the great Tapascharya of Arjuna, Lord Siva wanted to further test his sincerity, before granting him the desired boon, and therefore took the form of a Kirata or hunter. Parvati also dressed herself as a huntress, and the Sivagana of the Lord also came in several disguises. Accompanied by all these, Lord Siva was hunting on the Indrakila hill, driving a wild boar in front of him. The wild boar came to the side of Arjuna, and Arjuna being a great warrior, took up his bow, and shot it with a single arrow. At the same time, Lord Siva who was following it, also shot it with an arrow, and being struck by both the arrows, the boar fell down dead in the middle. Both the Lord and Arjuna claimed the boar as their kill, and a controversy arose between them, as to whom the boar should belong. Words led to physical quarrel shortly, and the Lord and Arjuna began to wrestle with each other. An experienced and powerful wrestler though he was, Arjuna was no match before the Lord himself, and was soon exhausted. Even in the midst of that desperate struggle, he never lost his one-pointedness of mind and devotion to the Lord. To invoke divine aid in his favour, he made a Sivalinga out of the earth, worshipped it, and offered prayers to it. The flowers with which he worshipped the Linga, were seen by him as physically falling on the hunter before him and he thereupon realised that the hunter was none other than the Lord himself. The hunter immediately disappeared and the Lord appeared himself before Arjuna, in all his glory. Arjuna prayed to him and his prayer was granted, and Pasupatha was given to him by Lord Siva. As a commemoration of this great event, Arjuna is supposed to have installed the Vijayeswara temple here, in the Indrakila hill.

In the Indrakila there are several rock-cut temples. These were supposed originally to be ancient temples, but during the course of time, they were completely buried under debris. When quarrying for stone and road metal was done, they were revealed, and the rock-cut temples were preserved as protected monuments. There is in the temple an excellent stone sculpture which contains in all its four faces the story of Kiratarjuneeyam.

There are interesting legends about the origin of the Malleswaraswami temple also. It is stated that, prior to the Kaliyuga, the sage Agasthya had named the Lord at Vijayawada as Jayasena. The Mahabharatha hero Arjuna, who was a great wrestler or Mallayoddha, called the Lord as Malleswara. The thus famous Lord Siva, so goes the legend, graces with his presence and blesses the town Vijayawada on the banks of the sacred Krishna river.

There is another legend about this in which it is stated that in the Kaliyuga, as early as Saka year 117, there was a king famous on earth by name Madhava Varma. The son of this king once killed by accident the child of a woman who eked her livelihood by selling the fruits of tamarind trees (Intrini-Jeevini). The king, who meted out justice according to the principles of Dharma, sentenced his own son to be hanged, in order to uphold the principles of justice. Pleased at this impartial attitude and the adherence to principles of Dharma, of this king, God Malleswara came down and showered gold on him, which brought back to life the deceased prince and the dead child. Thus the great Lord Malleswara established in this world, the name of the great King Madhava Varma. Later on a pious devotee by name Panditharadhya came here, and proclaimed to the world that the devotees of Lord Siva were superior even to the sages. He illustrated the truth of this, by bundling up live coal in a piece of cloth, with the tender twig of a Sami tree,

without burning it. God Malleswara was pleased with it and manifested himself to this devotee. This Lord, according to the popular legend, is Mahadeva Malleswara, "the endless one, the lover of his devotees and worshipping whom the lords of the earth prospered of old".

There is an inscription in the temple, of the 9th century A.D., in the usual Telugu script. The inscription is strangely recorded from bottom upwards. Its purport is to say that a certain Thrikoti Boyi or Trikotu Boyu, the son of Kaliyama-Boy of Pechchevada, set up the pillar as a commemoration of his own fame, in order to secure distinction for his race. The Thrikoti Boyi is identified in the inscription with a Guhyaka Yaksha who in Dwaparayuga was directed by Indra to direct Arjuna to Indrakila hill, where Arjuna should worship the Lord Siva in order to obtain Pasupatha from him.

The inscription says that that Yaksha was born as Thrikoti Boyi as a result of a curse. The Punya accruing from the help he rendered to Arjuna in his form as Yaksha, gave Thrikoti Boyi "purva gnanam" and hence he could recognise the Indrakila hill, on which he set up his pillar at the very spot where Arjuna did his penance and acquired Pasupatha from Lord Siva in the previous yuga. The advent of the Guhyaka Yaksha who led Arjuna to Indrakila finds a place in Bharavi's Kiratarjuneeyam but not in the Mahabharatha. Hence this is earlier than Bharavi's time.

Besides being a religious centre, Vijayawada is also the very centre of Andhra culture. The Chalukyas of Kalyani once conquered this place, and the famous Chinese Huin Tsang had visited this place in 639 A.D. when Buddhism was at its zenith. Vijayawada which is a famous centre of Andhra thus enshrines three important and ancient temples

and the temple of Kanakadurga is specially a sacred and powerful one which attracts a large number of pilgrims even now.

CHAPTER XIV

AKIRIPALLI

AKIRIPALLI which is in Nuzvid of Krishna District is the seat of an important and sacred temple dedicated to Lord Sobhanachala Swami. The deity is Vyaghra Narasimha, who was incarnated in a cave on the top of the hill. Sri Malleswaraswamy was also incarnated at a flat portion on the top of the hill. To reach Akiripalli the easiest route is to get down at Vijayawada which is an important junction in the Madras-Delhi and the Madras-Calcutta lines and from there take bus. There are public choultries at the place, where convenient accommodation for pilgrims is provided.

The temple has also a tank called Varahapushkharini, from which Bindi tirtham is drawn for drinking and cooking purposes. The temple is an ancient and famous one. There are a number of popular legends and Sthalapuranas about it. The local zamindars are the hereditary trustees of this temple.

Sri Sobhanachalaswamy temple is built at the top of the hill, amidst picturesque surroundings. From the bottom of the hill, there are regular and well-built steps going up the hill. Lord Siva is said to have incarnated himself as Sri Malleswaraswamy at a flat portion on the top of the hill. Lord Vishnu is said to have incarnated himself in a cave on the top of the hill, as Sri Vyaghra Nrisimha otherwise called as Sri Sobhanachalaswamy. There are the temples of the Goddess Rajyalakshmi and temples dedicated to all the Alwars or the Vaishnavite devotees. Down to the temples of Sri Sobhanachalaswamy, there is a temple of Sri Venkata-

chalaswamy also here. There is another temple to Sri Venugopalaswamy here. Behind the big gopuram at the bottom of the hill, there are a group of hills called the Diguva Tirumala of Sri Swamivaru. Sri Sobhanachalaswamy temple has a holy tradition. The popular legend runs as follows:

Once upon a time, there lived a king called Subhavratha in the Kritayuga. He meditated upon Lord Vishnu for a long time, and was carrying on his austerities with great perseverance. Lord Vishnu, pleased with his penance, appeared before him, and granted him a boon. Subhavrata requested the Lord Vishnu to incarnate in him, with the Goddess Sri Mahalakshmi. Thereupon Lord Vishnu instructed him that he should do penance for Lord Siva also, so that both of them could bless him with what he wanted. The king conducted severe penance for both the Lords Hari and Hara.

At the end of the penance the king turned to a hill after whose name the hill is called Sobhanadri or Sobhanagiri. As a result of his penance, Lord Siva and Kesava took their permanent residence at the top of the Sobhanadri and kept their promise to king Subhavrata.

This renowned temple in Andhra which attracts thousands of worshippers every year, has also got certain historical connections.

In the seventeenth century two people named Devulpalli Atchyutabhaktudu and Anantabhaktudu were spending their lives, devoting most of their times to the worship of Atithi and Abhyagati, i.e., they worshipped the Lord and the guest. One day, the Lord appeared in a dream to Atchyutabhaktudu and told him that he was buried in darkness on the Sobhanadri hill and that Atchyutabhaktudu should resuscitate him and make arrangements for the con-

duct of the regular worship. Immediately Atchyutabhaktudu got up from his dream and was pleased by the Lord's grace in having given him an opportunity to be of service to the Lord. He intimated the facts of the previous night's dream to Anantabhaktudu and to his astonishment he learnt from Anantabhaktudu that he too had the same experience on the previous night in a dream. The news soon spread, and every one who heard the news was much astonished. With the help of the villagers, these two people, Atchyutabhaktudu and Anantabhaktudu, searched the entire hill track with Bhajan and other rites. At last they found on the top of the hill the spot where the Lord had incarnated himself in the shape of Siva and Kesava. With great joy, these two people performed Abhishekam to the Lord, with a tumbler of water, but to their astonishment they found that the tumbler became suddenly empty. They then realised that it was a miracle of the Lord, and when they further searched they could find water in the vicinity from a tank by name Varahapushkarani and performed the Abhishekam of the Lord with that water.

From that day onwards Atchyutabhaktudu and Anantabhaktudu made arrangements for the daily conduct of worship, for the two lords, on the hill. Thus Puja and worship was carried on for several years undisturbed, and in the early part of the nineteenth century, the trusteeship was passed on to the hands of the local zamindars who were great devotees of Lord Sobhanachala.

There are records to show that a revenue officer of the Nizam's Government, by name Indupudi Narayanarao, granted Akiripalli village as a free Agraharam to Lord Sobhaneswara in 1626 A.D. A Dharma Sasana to that effect was inscribed in a copper plate and the Agraharam was left to the care of Devulapalli Atchyutabhagavantulu, the founder

of the institution, for the performance of the festivals of Sri Sobhanachalaswami and for the benefit of temple services. Another grant by Venkatadri Apparao in 1697 A.D. which is also inscribed in a copper plate states that Akiripalli was granted as an Agraharam for the festivals of the temple and for the maintenance of the temple services. From the Kaifiat issued by one Tadeipalli Chandra Kulakarni, it is known that the village was dedicated to one Paidimarri Darmannagaru for the worship of the temple. Their descendants transferred this Agraharam to the temple. From another Kaifiat issued by one Anumanchi Atchyutaramaiah it is seen that some local zamindars had also endowed some villages for the benefit of the Lord.

On the west of the Sobhanagiri there is a huge tank called Varaha Pushkarani, which is nearly a hundred acres in extent. On the eastern edge of this Pushkarani a Koneru was constructed with regular steps on its four sides, with a beautiful small Mantapam in between. The Koneru is two furlongs by three furlongs. Pilgrims who attend the Maghotsavam have their bath in this every year.

It has always been the convention to bring water from this tank to the temple for the worship of the Lord, which is known as Bindi Tirtham. The tank is also being used for Teppa Tirunalla thrice a year in Kartika, Magha and Phalgun when a floating car is taken round the temples with great public enthusiasm.

There is a popular legend about this Varaha Pushkarani, that Lord Vishnu during the period of his third incarnation as Adi Varaha dug this and hence it is named after Lord Vishnu in his Varahavatara. Since the word 'Kiri' represents Varaha and the village came into existence only after

the said Vāraha Pushkarani was constructed, it is said that the village is named as Akiripalli.

There is a stone epigraph found in the pillar of the Mukhamantapam of the Sri Malleswaraswamivari temple, on the Indrakila hill at Vijayawada, which gives the tale of this Pushkarani. It is stated that Akiripalli was constructed by one Malagunta Koonisetty who raised a loan of twelve hundred Tankams from one Sri Kumara Telungu Rayalu by giving a third party security of one Pinakuna Batchabattudu. He failed to repay the amount within the stipulated period and therefore the matter was brought before the public of Suravaram to decide. As per the decision given by Suravaram Panchayat, Koonisetty had to execute a palm-leaf document for the original sum and had to dedicate his Sukritams and Tirtha Phalams to Batchabattudu.

One of the Sukritams is the digging of the Akiripalli Pushkarani. From the inscription it is seen that it belongs to the fifteenth century and hence the Varaha Pushkarani and Akiripalli have been famous from those days even.

The temple has got a temple car which is dragged every year on Rathasaptami day. It has a Pushpavanam of seven acres extent from which flower is taken for the worship of the Lord.

The main festivals are the Maghotsavam or the Nammalwars' Adhyayanotsava which falls between Pushya Bahula Ekadasi to the Magha Suddha Saptami. On every day the Lord will be carried out, and Adhyayanotsavam will be conducted. Afterwards Gramotsavam on Vahanams will be conducted. On the Rathasaptami day the temple car also will be taken out. The Kartika Pournami which falls in November is also an important festival day when Viseshha Deeparadhana will be conducted from the top to the bottom

of the temple. The temple is famous as representing the unity of Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva and still attracts thousands of pilgrims.

DRAKSHARAMA

ओं नम उग्राय च भीमाय च नमः

DRAKSHARAMA is situated at a distance of four miles from Ramachandrapuram which is a taluk headquarters of East Godavari District of Andhra. One can reach it either from Rajahmundry or from Kakinada by road. There are excellent bus connections to this place both from Rajahmundry and Kakinada. The place is very famous as the seat of a temple of Bhimeswaraswami. The temple is noted not only for its architectural beauty and historical importance, but also for its sanctity and holiness, and attracts pilgrims in thousands every year.

The temple depicts in its architecture, a perfect and harmonious blend of both the Chalukya and the Chola styles of temple architecture. In its wealth of inscriptions on its walls, it stands unrivalled by any other place. The epigraphy on the walls of the temples is perhaps the richest amongst all the temples of Andhra. There are as many as 381 inscriptions ranging from Saka 1002 (1080 A.D.) to Saka 1356 (1434 A.D.). There are inscriptions here of the eastern Chalukyan kings, western Chalukyan kings, the Chola and Kalinga kings and queens, in addition to innumerable votive offerings of their own ministers and generals. This wealth of inscriptions helps us to solve many a knotty problem about the political history of the Godavari tract during the 11th and 12th centuries A.D.

The name Draksharama is said to be a corrupted form of 'Daksha' 'arama' or the garden of Dakshaprajapathi. The

place is said to depict the well known puranic legend of Dakshaprajapathi's yagna. According to this, Dakshaprajapathi's daughter Dakshayani had married Lord Siva, though Dakshaprajapathi was not very happy over it. Once Dakshaprajapathi performed a great yagna, to which, out of his 'dambha' and 'darpa', he did not invite Lord Siva. Dakshayani was anxious to attend this yagna of her father, but at the same time could not openly attend it inasmuch as her Lord viz., Lord Siva, had been deliberately excluded from it. She was thus torn between two compelling desires. Finally, she resolved to attend the sacrifice even though she too had not been invited as the consort of Lord Siva. Dakshaprajapathi's pride increased all the more by this visit of Dakshayani, since he thought that his fame was so great that the consort of Lord Siva himself had to attend it, although uninvited, since his Yagna was such a famous one. In his extreme pride, he did not receive his own daughter Dakshayani properly, and did not give her the proper respects. Dakshayani's self-respect was thus wounded, and not being able to bear with equanimity and calmness, the insults offered not only to her, but also to her supreme Lord, she plunged into the fire, and thereby ended her life. Lord Siva, when he heard the news, was extremely furious and began to sweat profusely. Out of the sweat, was born Veerabhadra, who killed Dakshaprajapathi, and thus avenged the insult to Lord Siva. Daksha Arama or the modern Draksharama; is said to be the seat of this famous Yagna of Dakshaprajapathi, and in memory of it, even to-day orthodox Brahmins do not perform any Yagna or such ceremonies, within the premises of Draksharama.

There is yet another popular legend about the origin of this temple. In this temple, Lord Siva is worshipped in Lingakara. The shape of the Mula Virat, is a long cylindri-

cal pillar some 20 or 25 feet high. The legend is, that these are parts of an original Linga which broke off into 5 pieces and fell at five different places or Aramas viz., Bheemarama or Bheemavaram in Kakinada, Ksheerarama or Palakollu in West Godavari, Amararama or Amaravathi in Guntur, Daksharama or Draksharama in East Godavari and Kurmarama which is Kotipalli in East Godavari District. The original lingam which broke into five pieces, is said to have been originally erected by the Lord Sun himself, and worshipped by the seven sages who are still said to be present as the seven branches of the Godavari in its march to the sea. The rishis are Kasyapa or Tulya, Atri, Gowtama, Bharadwaja, Kousika or Viswamitra, Jamadagni and Vasishta. The Bharadwaja, Viswamitra and Jamadagni Godavaris are no longer in existence but the other branches remain. The seven sages are said to have each brought the waters from their respective rivers to the Tirtha at Draksharama which is called Sapta-Godavari-Tirtha. It is customary for the pilgrims and the pious to undertake a bath in these seven Godavaris or the Saptasagara Yatra, which is said to confer liberation.

The third legend about these temples is that the temple was originally a Buddha Chaitya and that during the course of the revival of Hindu worship, it was converted into a Hindu temple. The Mula Virat or the Linga is said to be one of the Ayaka Stambas of the original Buddha Chaitya. Chaityas or stupas in Buddhist methods of worship, are mounds raised over the corporeal relics of Lord Buddha or a great Acharya. Buddhist stupas and Chaityas are spread all over India, but one of the main characteristics of the Andhra type of Chaityas and stupas, is the existence of the five vertical pillars, called the Ayaka Stambas, which are erected in the four cardinal directions viz., East, South, West

and North. In all the Chaityas of Andhra, this is a peculiar characteristic which is found. These Ayaka Stambas which are five in number, are said to represent the five major incidents in the life of Lord Buddha viz., Janana or Birth, Mahabhinishkramana or the great renunciation, Samyak-Sambhodi or the perfect realisation, Dharma Chakra Pravarthana or the setting in motion of the wheel of Dharma, and Mahaparinirvana or the final absorption of Lord Buddha into the Infinite. The Ayaka Stambas are generally vertical pillars made of white marble stone. Andhra Desa and especially the Krishna river basin has been a famous seat of Buddhism, and many stupas have been found in this valley as for example at Amaravathi, Goli, Jaggayyapeta, Gantasala etc., not to speak of the Mahachaitya at Nagarjunakonda. During the period of the revival of Hindu worship, some of these Chaityas have been converted and re-adopted to Hindu worship. For example, in the Garbha Griha of the Amarswara temple of Amaravathi in Guntur District, there is a typical white marble lotus medallion slab of the Buddhist type. The peculiar characteristic Buddhist type of bricks are also found in the temple. It is therefore possible that the Buddhist Chaitya and the Ayaka Stambas have been re-converted into a Hindu temple and adapted for linga worship. There is nothing irregular about this, since in whatever form one worships the Lord, the place still retains its greatness.

Draksharama is also called as Dakshina Kasi or the Southern Banaras. Vedavyasa is said to have founded this temple, and the Ravi tree and Lingam said to have been founded by him, are still shown. Within the temple is a curious well, the mouth of which is in the shape of a strung bow. It is called the Rudra Tirtha and a Lingam at the site of the

Western gate is said to be making a daily pilgrimage to Banaras.

There are many popular legends and Sthalapuranas regarding the sanctity and sacredness of this place. In the Saptagodavari, Lord Siva himself is said to have manifested himself, in the form of a Linga, under the name Bhimeswara Swami. Seeing this Swayambhu manifestation of the Lord, the Sapta rishis went to Godavari in order to bring its waters, for performing Abhishekam to the Lord before sunrise. But on their way back to Draksharama, near the river Saptagodavari they were halted by Tulya Maharshi, who was performing a Yagna and who feared that his Ashrama and his entire Yagna, will be washed away by the floods of the Godavari. The Sapta rishis and Tulya Maharshi were thus arguing with each other, when Vedavyasa himself, a great sage, intervened and told them that the waters of the Sapta Godavari would come to Draksharama as "Antar Vahini" i.e., as flowing under ground, and form themselves into a Pushkarini Tirtha, by name Sapta Godavari, before Lord Bhimeswara Swami, for the purpose of Abhisheka. In the meantime, the sun rose, and as the Sapta rishis were late and could not arrive before sunrise at Draksharama, the Lord Sun himself came and performed the first Archana to Lord Bhimeswara who had manifested himself as the Swayambhu here. Thus Pushkarini Sapta Godavari came into existence, and the waters are being used for the Abhishekam of the Lord.

The Sapta Godavari has the Pakasasanalaya on its West. The legend about this is, that at the time of the manifestation of Bhimeswaraswami in Lingakara, and when the Sapta rishis were performing the Archana to the Lord, all the thirty-three crores of the Devatas came to have the darshan of the Lord, when a divine voice ordained that "whoever,

at that auspicious moment, instals a Linga at any place near Sapta Godavari Pushkarini will get eternal bliss." Thereupon Lord Indra installed a Linga, over which a temple was raised under the name Pakasasana Devalaya. Innumerable Lingas by other Devatas were also installed here.

There is a temple called Sri Sankara Narayanaswami temple at the pathway to the Eastern Gopura. To right in front of the Dwajastambha are two big trees, one the Ravi tree, and the other, the Neem tree, which are intertwined together. At the foot of this, there is a Sivalinga and also Vishnu Vighraha called Sankara Narayana Swami. This is said to be a symbolical representation of the oneness of Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu. Popular belief is that if Pradakshina in the prescribed manner is done to this the barren people are blessed with children.

Right at the main entrance of the temple, there is the image of Ganapathi, who has been praised by devotees as the fulfiller of the wishes and desires of his Bhakthas. There is also here a Navagraha shrine and the shrine of the Ashta Dikpalakas in the eastern Mukha mantapa.

There is also in the temple a Vighraha of Sri Lakshmi Narayana Swami. This is said to have been installed by Sri Ramachandra as the Kshetrapalaka. It is generally believed that a Divya Sthala becomes a Punya Sthala, only when there is a Vishnu image in Sivalaya, and a Siva image in Vishnalaya. Hence, the importance of this.

In its architecture, the Draksharama temple shows a beautiful and harmonious blend of the Chola and Chalukya styles and shows a catholicity in adaptation, which can only result by decades of close admixture. The vimanas over the main Garbha griha, with its horizontal motif, and with an octagonal type is a good specimen of the Dravida type

of temple architecture. The Western gopura is an amazing structure with seven stories, and is clearly of Chola origin, and reminds one of the many Chola temples of the South. There are beautiful pillared mantapas all round the shrines, and these must have come into existence at a later date. In the Mukha Mantapa, there are pillars with scenes depicted in sculpture, which clearly must be only Chalukya in origin. The very important and interesting feature of this temple is that we have in Draksharama, probably the only remaining piece of evidence as to how the artisans of the past constructed their temples. There is a small 'model temple' made out of a single stone, and built exactly according to the type of the original temple. It is thus clear that originally when a big temple was conceived of, a model on a small scale was first done, and then, it was later amplified into a main temple, according to scale.

The wealth of inscriptions and epigraphical details that can be glanced from the walls of Draksharama are a haven of paradise for the epigraphist and the historian. There are inscriptions of the western Chalukyan, Eastern Chalukyan, later Cholas, and later Gangas in this temple. Many an unsolved problem of Andhra history is solved by a close study of these inscriptions.

Draksharama is one of the famous temples of Andhra and the place is sacred not only to the Hindus, but also to the Muslims. There is a tomb in Draksharama of a Muslim saint by name Saiyid Shah Bhaji Aulia with a mosque attached to it. This Muslim saint is said to be a contemporary of Mira Saheb of Nagore who is said to have lived 500 years ago. He was born, according to tradition, at Gardez near Madina in Arabia, and came to Draksharama with his disciples during the course of his tours. Being hungry, they slaughtered the temple bull of a Saivite mutt at Draksharama

and ate it. In the dispute that ensued, the relative greatness of the saint and the local Saivite head of the mutt was called into question, and to settle the matter, a Sivalingam was thrown into the pond, by name Lingala cheruvu, and both the Muslim saint and the Saivite Mathadhipathi were asked to bring back the Linga by the power of their worship. The Muslim saint, it appears, prayed to the infinite Lord who is the same for all, irrespective of all differences, and the Lord being pleased with the depth of his devotion acceded to his request. The Muslim saint who won in the contest was then given the Mutt to live in, and he converted it into a sacred mosque. The descendents of this saint are said to be still living in Draksharama.

Two Dutch tombs also stand in the village in what is called "Olland Dibba" (Holland Mound). The tombs are dated 1675 and 1728 and are covered with the sculptured slabs which are characteristic of Dutch tombs.

There are many important festivals in the temple like the Devi Navarathri, Kalyanam and Mahasivarathri. The most important festival is in the month of Magha and lasts five days beginning on the 11th day after the Amavasya. There are a number of choultries in this place in which pilgrims can conveniently stay.

This religious place, formerly called Taksha Tapovanam, or Taksha Vatika, and which was founded by Vedavyasa, which event is still commemorated by an annual festival in February and March, is an important one in the Godavari tract of Andhra. The temple is a standing specimen of a catholic admixture of many schools of temple architecture and in the wealth of its epigraphical details, and the sacredness of this place, it is perhaps unrivalled in these parts.

CHAPTER XVI

KOTIPALLI

KOTIPALLI which is in Ramachandrapuram taluk of East Godavari District is famous as the seat of an ancient temple where Lord Siva is worshipped as Sri Someswaraswamy. The Goddess is Sri Rajarajeswari Ammavaru. The old Rajahs of Vijayanagar are the hereditary trustees of this temple also along with those of Simhachalam.

Kotipalli is situated on the banks of the sacred Godavari at a point where it joins the sea. It can be reached from Kakinada or from Rajahmundry which are important stations on the Madras Calcutta line and from which regular buses ply to Kotipalli.

There are three choultries at Kotipalli to cater to the amenities and conveniences of the pilgrims who visit the temple. Kotipalli is considered to be very sacred place as it stands more or less at the confluence of the river Godavari with the sea. Large number of pilgrims flock to this temple, especially during the Mahasivaratri day, which falls in Magha Bahula Amavasya in February or March when thousands of pilgrims visit this temple and have a bath in the holy Godavari.

Kotipalli, otherwise known as Kotitirtham, is an ancient place where Lord Siva is worshipped as Someswara. Popular legend has it, that whoever has his 'Punya snana' at this tirtham will get salvation immediately. There are a number of popular legends and sthalapuranas connected with this famous temple and tirtha. They are as follows.

Once in the pleasant valley of Kashmir, there lived an old man called Subharita, in the town of Kalyanapura. He had a young wife by name Durmadhani and to them was born a son called Sumitra. Subharita died when his wife was quite young. The widow who was lustful by nature was unable to resist the temptations of the flesh and erred. The villagers came to know of this, and public opinion against her conduct was so great that she had to leave the village. She went out and settled in a distant village called Somaprabha. The young boy Sumitra was thus deprived of both his father and mother. He completed his education on public bounty, and started wandering all over the country and came to Somaprabha village during his tours. One day while passing along the street Durmadhani, who was his own mother, happened to see him, and they both fell in love with each other, being unaware of the fact that they were mother and son. Next morning Sumitra found, as soon as he got up from his bed, that his whole body was full of leprous sores. Hiding them in shame, he went and bathed in the river Godavari and to his surprise found that all the sores had disappeared and that he had regained his full health. At the same time Sumitra was not aware of the fact that the leprosy sores had come about because of his incestuous love for the woman who was his own mother, though he was unaware of it. He thought that the waters of the river Godavari had some curative properties, and therefore he carried on with Durmadhani for some time and every time he was afflicted by leprosy and every time he came and cured himself by a bath in the sacred Godavari.

This fact was noticed by a rishi called Romasu, who was also in the habit of coming to the sacred Godavari at about the same time when Sumitra came there for his bath. Rishi Romasu who saw the young boy afflicted every day with

leprosy asked him one day as to how it was happening and what sin he was committing. The boy replied that he was an orphan and had no living parent and that while leading a wandering care-free life he came across a beautiful woman in the village and that her company produced the leprosy sores. The rishi then advised the youth to ascertain from the woman when he next met her, as to what family and country she belonged to, and what her antecedents were.

Sumitra did so, on the same night when Durmadhani revealed to him all the incidents of her past life. Sumitra then, with a conscience stricken with deep grief and agony over his incest, recognised in the woman his own mother and fell on the floor weeping and crying. Durmadhani who could not recognise the reason was astonished by it and asked him the reason for the same. Sumitra then revealed to her that she was none other than his own mother, and that he was repenting and feeling sorry for the heinousness of the sin that he had committed, and as to how best he could atone it, if at all. Durmadhani also became ashamed and both spent the whole night in deep prayer. The day dawned and the sun rose. Both of them went to Rishi Romasu and confessed the sins to him and begged him to indicate some means of washing off their sins. Rishi Romasu informed them that a bath in the holy and sacred river Godavari would purify them from all sins, and make them chaste and virtuous again, since Godavari possessed such greatness of remedial powers.

Rishi Romasu narrated to them an ancient previous instance in connection with this. He said that the Lord Moon, once committed a heinous sin, whereby he lost his natural brilliance and lustre and came down to earth lamenting for his sins. He approached the place of Siddhalingam who at the mere sight, ensures success in all attempts and wipes

out all impurities. He bathed in the Kotitirtham by which he became perfect and regained his lustre. He installed in his own name the Someswaralinga to the south of the Kotitirtham and close to Siddhalingam, and went back to his original abode, being cured of all his sins. The Kotitirtham became famous on account of this, since the like of it existed nowhere else on the earth and since a bath in these holy waters and worship of the powerful Lord here, would wash off all dreadful and heinous sins.

Rishi Romasu therefore advised both Durmadhani and Sumitra to have their bath in Kotitirtham and offer their prayer and worship to the Saviour of all Souls, the Lord Someswara, and thus purify themselves of their heinous sins. All persons who visited, bathed and worshipped at this sacred place of pilgrimage, would get the benefits of several sacrifices, construction of temples etc. So saying the Rishi vanished. The mother and son scrupulously obeyed the instructions of Rishi Romasu and reaped the full benefits of the bath in the Kotitirtham and were relieved of their sins.

There are also a number of legends about the temple and the greatness of the Lord also known as Koteeswara Siddha Janardana. Sounaka and other great rishis once went to the learned Suta, and requested him to narrate to them the wondrous powers of Koteeswara and the grandeur of Siddheswara. Suta then narrated to Sounaka and other rishis the following description of the Lord.

Rishi Narada once went to the Heavens, and approached Lord Brahma respectfully and asked him to clear off some of his doubts and tell him how Goutami and Kotitirtham acquired such sanctity as to attract Lord Someswara to take his permanent residence there. Lord Brahma answered him that the land comprising an area of three to four miles to

the south of Kotitirtham and near Mukteswaram is a very sacred place, and at Goutami and Kotitirtham they all meet together in the holy Vishnutirtham, the Brahmatirtham, and Maheswaratirtham and the Ramatirtham.

Once the benefactor of the devatas, Pundarikaksha, thought the place to be quite suited for silent meditation and performed his tapascharya there for many ages. King Bali, son of Virochana, who was the Lord of the Rakshasas, conquered Indra and other Devas, acquired the heavens, and ruled over all the three worlds. Thereupon Agni, Indra and other Devas approached the Lord in meditation at Kotitirtham, and represented to him that King Bali was performing a great sacrifice, and that some method may be employed to prevent its successful completion lest Dharma should be completely rid out of the land. King Bali invariably granted all the gifts that were asked of him by any one and therefore the Devas represented that the Lord himself should go to the place of sacrifice and obtain gifts from Bali and save the Devas. Kasyapa also came there and prayed to Narayana who was in deep tapascharya to save the Devas.

Lord Narayana informed Kasyapa that he was greatly pleased with Kasyapa's prayers and that he may ask him a boon which he will readily grant. Kasyapa then asked the Lord to get up from his tapascharya, and be born to him as his son and brother to Mahendra and thereby help the Devas at the time of their grief. The Lord acceded to this, and was born to Diti and in his Avatara of Vamana entered the sacrificial place of King Bali and asked for enough land which will be covered by his three feet. He covered the entire universe with his two feet and for the third foot he placed it over the head of Bali and sent him down to

the netherworlds. Having thus achieved his purpose, he returned back to Kotitirtham and continued his tapascharya.

The Devas expressed their deep gratitude to the Lord in many prayers and Kasyapa founded this temple in the name of Janardana Siddheswara for the benefit of all devotees.

Ever since the Lord became famous as Siddheswara or a giver of boons and the sacred Kotitirtham or Siddhakshe-tram became a holy place of pilgrimage.

There are also other popular legends about the sanctity and greatness of the place. According to one legend, once upon a time, Indra fell in love with Ahalya who was the wife of Rishi Gautama, who was highly respected by all the devas. Since Ahalya was known for her impregnable chastity, Indra adopted a device and assumed the form of a cock and crowed at dead of night. Rishi Gautama took it as the usual cock's crow at dawn, woke up from his bed, and proceeded to the river Godavari for his bath. Indra then assumed the disguise of Rishi Gautama and entered the house and was enjoying the company of Ahalya in the guise of her husband. In the meantime, Gautama found out at the river bank that it was midnight and returned to his house without his bath and called on his wife to open the door. Ahalya was perplexed at the trick that was played on her, and became silent with grief. Indra then assumed the guise of a cat and was trying to get out of the window. This was noticed by Gautama who called on him to stop and let him know what he was doing. Indra, knowing fully well the great powers of the Rishi, stood trembling before him. The rishi who could by his divine power see what had happened cursed that Ahalya should be turned into a stone and that Indra should be punished with torment of his body in several ways. Ahalya prayed to her husband and

represented that she had not misbehaved intentionally and that she was a victim of a trick. Rishi Gautama consoled her saying that Lord Narayana himself would be born to king Dasaratha at Ayodhya as Srirama-chandra and that during his wandering in the forest, Srirama will come to her, and the mere touch of his feet will make her regain her original shape. Indra also prostrated before Rishi Gautama and implored him to save him from the curse, whereupon Gautama Rishi instructed him to go to the sacred Godavari river, offer penance, prayers and worship at Kotitirtham and be constantly worshipping the great Lord Siddheswara, install Lord Siva in the name of Koteeswara with all rites, and thus save himself from the evil effects of the curse. Indra dutifully carried out all the instructions of Rishi Gautama and realised the several blessings that accrue out of a bath in Kotitirtham and worship of Lord Siddheswara. Thus Brahma told Narada that Kotitirtham will confer all kinds of boons, and will give beneficial results to every devotee, and purify every sinner and remove his sins. Hence it is, that it is visited even by Gods and is therefore known as Rudra Kotitirtham, and became the abode of Koteeswara.

There are also several legends about the greatness of Lord Someswara. The sthalapurana mentions that once there lived an old king called Sudhakara. In the month of Aswayuja, he had the worship of Goddess Mahalakshmi performed by his queens. All the women attended it and the king gave them many valuable gifts of elephants and horses as offerings. Sudhakara fell in love with the wife of his own Guru, who was a chaste and pious lady and who happened to come there, and made overtures to her. Since he had violated a strict rule of conduct and cast covetous glances at the Gurupatni he fell disease-stricken. The king

thereupon repented for his misbehaviour, and being unable to bear the suffering from his disease prayed to the Lord to save him from his troubles.

Lord Narayana took pity on him, appeared before him, and asked him to let him know what he wanted and learnt that he wanted to be relieved from the torment. The Lord thereupon directed Sudhakara to go to Kotitirtham and to bathe there and pray to Lord Siddheswara. Then he was told that he will be free from the disease and be restored to his good health. Sudhakara accordingly went to Kotitirtham, bathed there and was relieved of his pain after worshipping Lord Siddheswara and Koteeswara. Ever since this incident, this tirtham became famous as Somatirtham and Lord Someswara settled there permanently.

Kotipalli is thus a very famous and ancient place which attracts thousands of pilgrims even to this day. The most important festival of this shrine is the Maha-Sivaratri, which falls on Magha Bahula Amavasya day. On that day, at night there will be a great and sacred festival at Kotitirtham, when the visitors will be purified of all their sins. Those who bathe in the river, and worship the Goddess Parvati here on that day, will derive numerous other benefits. People who bathe in the river, worship the Lord and distribute offerings, will be rid of all their sins, and will enjoy the blessings of Lord Siva. Those who make gifts of salagramas on this day will attain salvation and Mukthi. Performance of funeral rites and feeding of poor will accordingly benefit the forefathers and ancestors. The worship of Eswara with sincerity and devotion at this Kshetram will make one pure and virtuous.

Two hours before sunrise, one should bathe in the river, on that day, and he will be freed from all his troubles and

sins, and success will attend all his dealings. The bath in the river is the most effective and beneficial of all the kinds of services which one can render the Lord even on ordinary days. Particularly is it a great benefit if a bath is done in the months of Visakha and Magha. One should perform the baths in the month of Karthika to derive benefits.

Kotipalli with its ancient temples, is thus a very sacred spot and is attracting pilgrims in large numbers. It is also situated at a picturesque spot and one can visit it as much for the beauty of the natural surroundings as for the sanctity of the place.

CHAPTER XVII

ANNAVARAM

ANNAVARAM which is situated in the East Godavari District, of Andhra Pradesh, is famous as the seat of a temple, to the Lord Sri Veera Venkata Satyanarayanawami varu. The name of the Goddess is Anantalakshmi Satyavathi Amma-varu.

Annaram can be reached by the Southern Railway and the Grand Northern Trunk Road. The nearest railway station is Annaram which is two miles from the temple. The mail does not stop at Annaram, and the nearest mail halting stations are Tuni and Peddapuram, which are at a distance of eleven and sixteen miles respectively from Annaram. There is a regular bus service to this village. Buses running from Kakinada to Tuni, Rajahmundry to Tuni, and Yeleswaram to Tuni, pass through Annaram, touching the foot of the hill where the temple is situated. The distance from the foot of the hill to the temple is about four furlongs. From the foot of the hill, to the top of the hill, there is a proper path, well laid out with stone steps.

In popular esteem temples and tirthas that are famous for their holy antiquity are reckoned as manifesting the divine far more in abundance than places of recent origin. Yet the grace of the Lord is an ever flowing one, and its strength cannot be tested merely by the age of temple. Just like any other institution, a temple also appears to have a cycle of its own. There are temples which have a very hoary tradition, and which have sunk into oblivion, whereas

many comparatively recent temples have assumed holy and sacred importance. The Annavaram temple is an instance of the latter kind, and is an example of a temple, which is not ancient, and which is at the same time very powerful in its influence.

The temple is of recent origin. There is no *sthala mahatmyam* for the temple. There are also no worthwhile epigraphic records in the temple. In short, there is nothing particular to mention about the temple. All the same the temple is a famous one in Andhra and attracts pilgrims in very large numbers since the Lord here is a powerful one.

The Devasthanam has got its own choultries for the convenience of the pilgrims. There are also two public choultries in the village known as the Kirlampudi choultry and the Vyasa choultry where pilgrims can come and stay. There are also some rooms upon the hill which are used as guest rooms. All these places are available for lodging and boarding.

The river Pampa which is considered a sacred river is running close to the temple and is a furlong away from the foot of the hill. Generally before going to the temple pilgrims will have their bath in the river. There is no *pushkarini* or temple tank in the temple.

There is a *pathasala* attached to the temple where free boarding and lodging is provided to the students. Religious discussions are arranged during *Kalyanam* days and other important festival days, at the place.

The popularity and importance of the temple has been growing by leaps and bounds in recent years, and pilgrims have come to consider Annavaram as a second Tirupathi in Andhra. The income from the *Sannidhi* collections has gone up from 1.2 lakhs to nearly Rs. 2.6 lakhs over a period

of five years and this itself is an indication of the popularity of this temple.

There are many important festivals of this temple like the Kalyanam festival in May, Devi Navarathri festival which occurs in September, the Svayamvara Vardhanti of Sravana Suddha Ekadasi Day, Srirama Kalyana, the Kanakadurga Yatra, the Prabha Utsavam, the Teppa Utsavam and the Jalatoranam. In addition to the above Dharma Sevalu and Ekadasi Sevalu are also performed.

Bhishma Ekadasi is particularly sacred and important for this shrine, as the day when Bhishma, the great hero of the Mahabharata, voluntarily gave up his life on the battle field of Kurukshetra. It was just before this that he initiated Yudishthira into the most powerful and efficacious of all mantras viz., the Vishnu Sahasranama. This mantra is so holy and so powerful, that Adisankara, the great Advaitic teacher, has thought fit to write a commentary on it, just as he did on the other important scriptures like the Prasthanas trayas. There is a vratam called the Satyanarayana vratam, which actually puts into practice, this sacred mantra, and this vratam is one of the most popular and powerful of all the vratams of the Annavaram temple. Hence the Satyanarayana vratam which is specially dedicated to Vishnu Sahasranamam, has to be performed on the Bhishma Ekadasi day, and Annavaram temple which is dedicated to Lord Satyanarayanaswamy, is the very shrine in which the vratam is performed with great sanctity. Hence literally thousands of pilgrims flock to the temple on the Bhishma Ekadasi day and perform this Satyanarayana vratam in the direct presence of the Lord.

The hill on which the temple is built is called Ratnagiri, and the small river that encircles the hill is called Pampa after the famous lake of the Ramayana. A mahatmya of the temple

was written in recent times by a great Telugu poet, and he referred to this Pampa river as Viraja of Goloka who melted in her ecstasy of faith, and took the shape of this rivulet to remain eternally in the presence of the Lord, and dedicated herself to the services of the Lord by ever washing his feet with her holy waters.

There is an interesting and popular legend about the discovery of the main idol of the Lord. The legend goes that the Lord revealed himself in a dream, where he told the local people that his vigraha was left abandoned on the hill without worship and that the local people must trace it and reconsecrate it. Thereupon, all the local residents and the then Zamindar searched and discovered the idol at the foot of a tree. The worship was performed and the idol was installed a little higher at the present spot. The holy ground where the tree under which the idol of the Lord was discovered is now covered by Sri Ramalaya a little to the north east of the main temple.

There is in the Annavaram temple a famous and a unique yantra the like of which does not exist anywhere else in India. The yantra is based on the Tripad Vibhuti Narayana upanishad, which is a part of the Devarshi sakha of the Adharva veda. The shrine is constructed in two stories, the lower one containing the Yantra and the upper one containing the vigrahas of the Lord. The Garbha griha of the Lord has four entrances. In the centre thereof, like a Panavattam under the Sivalinga, Tripeethas are constructed, and on the top of them over the Meru portion, the Beejakshara-Samputi of the Yantra is chiselled. At the apex thereof which forms the Bindu, a monolithic pillar is constructed and on the top of the pillar the image of the Lord is in the centre, the image of the Goddess is in the right and a Siva-

linga is on the left. The idols are of exquisite grace and beauty and are encased in gold Kavachams.

Thrikala archana is performed every day both to the Yantra as well as to the idols. Salagramams of great value and efficacy and Sri Chakram in crystal are also worshipped along with the main idols. On the ground floor of the Garbhalaya the idols of Aditya, Ambika, Gananatha and Maheswara are installed in the four corners and all these with the main idol of Lord Satyanarayanawamy in the centre form the Vishnu Panchayatanas.

The main temple is constructed in the form of a chariot with the four wheels at each of the four corners. In front of the main temple is the Kalyana mantapa, constructed and decorated with modern pieces of architecture. As we go down the way, we come across Ramalaya and then the shrines of Vana Durga and Kanaka Durga. Goddess Vana Durga is held in great veneration and the Devi is said to be seen even to this day, in the nights, going about the holy precincts perpetually guarding the Lord.

The Akriti of any temple is, according to the Agni Purana, merely a manifestation of the Prakriti. This idea is further developed in the ancient texts, and the entire Silpa Sastra is based on the principle that the walls and the Vimana of the temple should be so constructed as to remind a devotee of the universe, and the Lord inside representing the Supreme Spirit, which is the core and being of the entire universe. According to these texts, the chariot is intended as a symbol of the seven Lokas underneath, and the seven Lokas above, with the Garbhalaya of the Lord, at the heart's centre ruling over the entire universe. The temple at Annavaram has been constructed to depict this idea concretely. The front side of the temple depicts the chariot. The Meru on the floor

with the pillar at the centre, and the idols at the top are intended to bring forth the idea that the Lord not only remains at the heart's centre but also permeates the entire universe. The wheels depicting the Sun and the Moon serve to remind us that this Juggernaut moves on the wheels of time, and goes on for ever and ever. Thus the Annavaram temple satisfies both the ritualistic values and the spiritual aspirations of its devotees.

Year to year, the offerings of the devotees go on increasing, and the temple authorities are effecting improvements for the greater facilities of the public. A choultry at the station on the same lines as at Tirupathi, a choultry at the foot of the hill, a suit of rooms well furnished for distinguished visitors, and similar provisions on the top of the hill, are all conveniences intended for the pilgrims. To facilitate the performance of the Satyanarayana vrata, which is the most important vrata of the temple, two huge Vratasalas are being constructed. Near the Pampa river a bathing ghat is constructed with rooms to change the clothes, and with residential quarters also.

Though the hill is a small one, and the total number of steps do not exceed 250, still a ghat road is being constructed, so that the old and the infirm, can go by road and have Darshan of the Lord. The entire temple is constructed in ideal surroundings, and a pleasing panoramic view of the countryside can be had from the top of the temple.

Annavaram is a standing example of the growing popularity of temple worship in Andhra. Even though it does not have any ancient or holy past, pilgrims are ever going to the temple to have a vision of the Lord, and the income from the offerings is also going up enormously. The popu-

larity has become so great that Annavaram has come to be looked upon as a second Tirupati where many important religious performances like the Satyanarayana Vratam etc., are all performed.

SIMHACHALAM

SIMHACHALAM, also called Simhagiri, is about ten miles to the north of Visakhapatnam, which is a District Headquarters of Andhra. One can reach Simhachalam either by train which goes up to Simhachalam Railway Station, or more easily by bus from Visakhapatnam. Visakhapatnam is an important junction in the Madras to Calcutta line, and is also connected by air from Hyderabad.

The shrine which is dedicated to Lord Narasimha or Vishnu in the aspect of a lion is built on the top of a hill which is about 800 feet above the sea level. A flight of steps runs all the way from the foot to the top of the temple, and a Ghat road is also under construction by which intending pilgrims can reach the temple by road also.

At the foot of the hill there are spacious choultries and sheds for the comfortable stay of the pilgrims, with all the amenities like water and lighting. Pilgrims may also have a bath in the sacred Pushkarani, which is about a furlong from the foot of the hill. The way up the hill to the temple runs through picturesque trees etc. Near the top of the northern side of the hill, in a wooded hollow surrounded by a wide circle of higher ground resembling an amphitheatre, is the temple of Lord Narasimha. This is a famous and rich temple of the Northern Circars.

The Puranic legend of the temple takes us to the time of Hiranyakasipu and Prahlada, who are famous figures in Indian mythology. It is said that Hiranyakasipu, the king of the Rakshasas, in order to punish his son Prahlada, who

was firm in his devotion to the Lord, threw his son into the sea, and then placed the Simhachalam hill over his head in order to crush him completely. Prahlada was a great Bhakta of Lord Narayana. Lord Narayana in his aspect of Narasimha who went to the rescue of Prahlada, stood by the side of the hill and tilted it up a bit so that Prahlada may escape from the bottom of the hill. Later on, in memory of the incident, Prahlada is said to have founded this shrine.

One of the pillars in the Mukhamantapa of the temple is named Kappam Stambham or the pillar of tribute. This attracts large number of pilgrims, since the popular belief is, that this pillar has the power of curing cattle disease, and also barrenness among women.

The image of the deity in the shrine is overcovered with a thick coating of sandal paste, which is said to have appeased the fury of the Lord after the destruction of Hiranyakasipu. This coating is removed only once a year, on the Visakha day in May, and that day is considered to be specially sacred, and people from all over the country visit the shrine to have Darshan of the Lord on this day.

Lord Narayana took on the incarnation in the aspect of Lord Narasimha in order that he may kill Hiranyakasipu without violating the many boons that Hiranya had obtained from various other gods by the power of his Tapascharya. Even after the destruction of Hiranyakasipu, the fury of the Lord did not abate, and this caused trouble and fear to all the Devas. Thereupon Lord Siva assumed the shape of a bird or Sarabha and pacified Lord Narasimha. The consecration of this image of the Lord in this form is said to destroy enemies, secure success in battles, cure all ailments, and procure every good.

The temple comprises of a square shrine, surmounted by a high tower or Gopura and Mukhamantapa with a small circular tower over it. There are also a square sixteen-pillared Mantapa, called the Natyamantapa, and a stone car drawn by two horses, enclosed by a veranda, in which there are sculptured scenes from the Vishnupurana. Outside the enclosure and to the north of the temple, is the Kalyanamantapa, with ninety-six exquisitely carved pillars with different ornamentations, where the Lord's Kalyana Utsava is performed on the eleventh day of the Suklapaksha, Chaitramasa in every year. There are here representations in sculpture of Lord Vishnu as Matsya and of Dhanvantri and Varuna. There are also numerous Murthis of Narasimha here.

There is a perennial spring, locally called Gangadhara, on this hill, and it is said to have medicinal properties also. The temple has got valuable gold and gem-set jewellery valued at nearly six lakhs of rupees, the most important and interesting being the gold ornamental Kavacham valued at a lakh of rupees and a gem-set emerald Patakkam offered to the Lord by the famous Vijayanagar king Krishnadevaraya in commemoration of his victory over the Kalinga king.

There is a Sthalapurana for the temple which is divided into thirty-two chapters, and the original is said to be given in the Skanda Purana by Sri Vedavyasa Bhattaraka through Jaimini Maharshi. The Sthalapurana consists of an account of the foundation of the temple, and relates the well-known story of Hiranyakasipu and Prahlada describing how Prahlada was thrown into the sea and how Simhachalam hill was placed on top of him and how Lord Vishnu went to his devotee's rescue and tilted up the hill, so that his Bhakta could crawl out, and how Prahlada in his gratitude founded

the shrine, where the Lord in his Narasimha aspect can be worshipped for ever. In subsequent ages this temple which was a favourite resort of the Devas fell into disuse and decay.

The Sthalapurana then goes on to mention as to how the temple which thus fell into decay was renovated. The legend runs as follows.

In the Chandra Vamsa, there was a king called Pururavas. On account of his devotion and worship of Lord Brahma, he got as a boon a Pushpaka Vimana in which he was wandering all over the world. During his tours he came to mount Kailasa, the residence of Lord Siva with its pleasing gardens, refreshing spray of waters, and beautiful trees. King Pururavas, being enchanted with the beauty of the place, went there and sat on a boulder. Urvasi, one of the Apsaras who was then coming to Lord Siva's temple, saw Pururavas, and fell in love with him. The king also fell in love with her and they remained there for a number of years. After some time Pururavas and Urvasi got into the Pushpaka Vimana, and went south, where the king pointed out to Urvasi, the beautiful Simhadri hill, with its pleasing sight of trees and fields. They both became enamoured of the hill, and landed there. Urvasi and Pururavas thereupon decided to spend the rest of their lives there, since they were so much taken up with the beauty of the place.

Urvasi, who was a divine Apsaras, then recalled her past, and informed Pururavas that she had come to the Simhadri hill previously when lord Narayana took on the aspect of Narasimha in order to save Prahlada. She therefore suggested that the Lord whose temple had by then fallen into decay and disuse, must be lying hidden somewhere and that if they renovated and worshipped the Lord, they would

be rendering a lot of service to the people. Urvasi and Pururavas thereupon went in search of the Lord and found the Gangadhara rivulet flowing west, in a pleasant garden full of delightful trees. They were so much enchanted by the natural beauty, that they got into the river and refreshed themselves in it.

Pururavas at that time conceived the idea that, in order to look out for the Lord, he must do some penance. He therefore spread the Darbhasana across, on a flat rock and along with his beloved Urvasi he entered upon a Prayopavesa meditating all the time upon the Lord, and praying for the Lord's Darshan, and was thus doing tapascharya without food or water. The king was in deep meditation for three days, and at the end of it, he saw the Lord in his dream, who told Pururavas that there was an ant-hill in front of the king in which the Lord's image was buried and that the king should offer all sacred things like flowers, sandal wood, music, lighted lamps, scented smoke etc., to the Lord. The king woke up from his Samadhi, searched the ant-hill and renovated the temple and consecrated the worship also. But in spite of his best efforts, he could not find the Lord's feet to worship. Then an Akasavani spoke out to the king, that the Lord's feet will not be visible to any of them, and that they are hidden in earth, as salvation will be attained by the mere sight of the Lord. Lord Narasimhaswamy should not be seen always in his pristine form, but only as covered with sandal paste, except for one day of the year, namely the Akshaya Tritiya day, when a mere sight of the Lord in his pristine form will bestow salvation.

Even to this day, the Chandana yatra festival is performed on the third day of the Sukla paksha of Visakha, corresponding to the Akshaya tritiya day. On this day, the

sandal paste which covers the image of the Lord is removed, and the darshan of the Nijaswarupa of the Lord can be had by the devotees. Since mere Darshan of the Lord in his original form bestows liberation upon the people, thousands of pilgrims go over to the temple for this festival.

The inscriptions engraved on the walls and pillars of this shrine give us a flood of light on the vicissitudes of the temple during historical periods. There is an inscription of 1099 A.D. of the great King Kulottungachola, who conquered the Kalinga country. Another of the Velnati Chief, Gonka III, 1137 A.D., says that he covered the image of the Lord with gold. There are a number of inscriptions of the Eastern Ganga kings of Kalinga. King Narasimha I of this dynasty is said to have constructed the central shrine, the Mukhamantapa, the Natyamantapa etc., in 1267 A.D. The Reddy king of Rajahmundry, the Vishnu-Vardhana Chakravarthins of Panchadarla and others, have all contributed to enrich the temple. Krishnadevaraya the famous Vijayanagara king visited this temple twice in 1516 and 1519 A.D. and the jewellery offered by him to the Lord is still in existence.

The temple is maintaining a number of charitable institutions like the Agama pathasala, a hospital, a poor home etc.

The main festival of the temple is the Chandanayatra which falls in the first week of May and which is peculiar to this temple. The Vyasapournami and the Ashadhapournami days, and the Kalyanotsava in the first week of April are the other important festivals. This temple, for which the Vijayanagara Rajahs are the hereditary trustees, is an important and sacred one in the northern limits of Andhra and attracts pilgrims in large numbers, even now.

CHAPTER XIX

ARASAVALLI

AT ARASAVALLI, which is practically the same as Srikakulam, the headquarters of the northernmost district of Andhra, there is a temple of Lord Surya. Temples dedicated to the worship of Lord Surya are rare in our country. Surya worship is not peculiar to the Hindus alone but is common even to the Buddhists who depict Marichi as an emanation of Dhyana-Buddha-Vairochana at the advent of early morning. Marichi is depicted as a standing deity, with three faces, symbolic of morning, noon and the evening, on a chariot drawn by seven boars, and driven by a Goddess without legs, which is very similar to the Sun God of Hindus, who rides on a chariot drawn by seven horses.

The worship is as old as the Vedas and the most sacred Vedic verse, Gayatri, is also addressed to the Sun God. Lord Narayana is often described as being seated in the midst of the disc of the Sun-- सवितु मण्डल मध्यवर्ति । In later times, this worship was merged with the worship of Lord Vishnu and most of the images of Surya are practically identical with those of Vishnu except for some slight variation in symbolism. In fact Lord Vishnu is also worshipped with the epithet of Suryanarayana, which is very significant.

The description of Lord Sun is given in great detail in the Viswakarma Silpa as follows:

एकचक्रं सप्तदशं ससारथमहारथम्
हस्तद्वयं पद्मधरं कञ्चुकच्छन्नवक्षसम्

द्विहस्तस्थसरोजन्मा शबलाद्वरथस्थितः

दण्डश्च पिङ्गलश्चैव द्वारपालौ च खड्गिनौ ॥

According to this his chariot should have one wheel and the Lord should have a lotus in each hand and the chariot should be drawn by seven horses. According to the Bhavishya Purana, on the right side the figure of Agni should be depicted and on the left that of Skanda. The Lord's chariot is called Makaradhwaja. His two gate-keepers Danda and Pingala have swords in their hands.

In the Bhavishya Purana it is stated that Lord Surya began to burn Asura's with his heat, who thereupon attacked him. The other Gods felt that they should help Lord Surya and with this object they placed Skanda on the left of Surya and Agni on the right. Lord Skanda is the punisher of all the wicked in the Universe and hence he is called Dandanayaka. Agni being reddish-yellow in colour is called Pingala. The same Purana states that the Aswini deities should be made to stand one on each side of Surya. In the temple of Surya, Soma and other Grahas should be established.

The existence of Sun temples or Aditya Grihas is known from very early days. As early as 400 B.C., Ktesias mentions a place about 6 days' journey from Mount Abu, where people worshipped the Sun and the Moon. There are also some ancient temples in India dedicated to Lord Sun like the Marthand temple of Kashmir, of the 9th Century A.D., Modhesh temple of Gujarat, of 1026 A.D., and the renowned temple of Konarka, of 1026 A.D., in Orissa.

However, in Andhra, though setting up of images of Lord Surya is often mentioned along with other Navagrahas, still a temple dedicated wholly to the worship of Lord Surya is

very rare. The Salankayanas of Vengi who ruled in Andhra from the 4th century A.D. styled themselves as "Chitrarathaswamy Padanudhyataha," and possibly they were Sun-worshippers.

Sun worship has been prescribed from ancient days as a means of attaining worldly prosperity. Agastya Maharshi is said to have taught the Aditya Hridaya, or prayer to Lord Sun, to Rama on the eve of Lord Rama's fight with Ravana. In the Bhavishya Purana, it is stated that Samba, son of Srikrishna, was cured of his leprosy by his constant worship of the Sun God. Mayura, who lived in the court of Harshavardhana in the 7th century A.D., composed Surya Sataka or hundred verses in praise of Lord Sun in order to cure himself of blindness, while in Malati-Madhavam, Bhavabuti, the great Sanskrit poet, makes the Sutradhara invoke the rising Sun for the purification of sin.

The temple of Lord Suryanarayana at Arasavalli near Srikakulam is an ancient and powerful temple. Local legend has it that the temple was founded by Lord Indra himself. The sthalapurana of the place narrates all the events connected with the foundation of the temple and the installation of the Lord in it. The legend runs as follows.

Once upon a time Indra, the Lord of Heaven, attempted to force his way into the temple of Koteeswara at an untimely hour and the gate-keeper Nandi kicked him and turned him out. Indra, humiliated and crest-fallen, fell back about two miles away, unconscious. While in his unconscious state, he in his Antaratma perceived Lord Surya who told him that he would be cured of his pain if he enshrined the Sun God and had a big temple built at that place. After regaining his consciousness Indra remembered the dream and at once installed the idol of Lord Surya at the very

place where he lay and established a beautiful temple which was designed by Maya the chief architect of the Gods. This is said to be the Arasavalli temple.

The idol of the Lord is excellently carved out of black granite stone, and shows the Lord with two lotuses held in both his hands as laid down in the Agamic injunctions. The hood of Adishesha is spread over the figure of the Lord. On the other side are carved the figure of Usha, Padmini and Chaya, the three consorts of the Lord. At the base of the figures of Pingala and Danda, who are his gate-keepers, there are the divine saints Sanaka and Sananda holding two chamaras in their hands. The God is represented as riding in a chariot drawn by seven horses and driven by Anoorā.

All the Puranas speak of the Lord Sun as an embodiment of the three Lords Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. In the Rigveda the Sun God is spoken of as Lord Brahma till mid-day, Lord Siva in the afternoon, and Lord Vishnu in the evening.

Anoorā, popularly known as Aruna, the charioteer of the Lord, is the elder brother of Garuda, the son of Vinata and Kasyapa. He lost the lower half of his body and became the charioteer of Lord Surya while his younger brother Garuda became the charioteer of Lord Vishnu.

There are many legends about the three consorts of the Lord Surya.

The first queen of the Lord Surya is described in the Rigveda as Usha. She is spoken of as a fair and beautiful daughter of the queen Night, and is dressed in a gold cloth decorated with a number of stars. The next queen of Lord Surya is Padmini or the Lotus. And hence it is that the Lotus blooms when the Lord Surya rises in the east. The

third queen is Chaya the daughter of Maya. There are many legends in the Puranas about her.

The original name of Chaya was Ganga. Maya her father gave her in marriage to Lord Surya, and out of their union were born twins, Yama and Yami, a boy and a girl. After some time, her life became miserable due to the excessive heat of the Sun and, unable to bear his heat, she returned to her father's house. Maya the divine architect intervened and requested the Lord Sun to reduce his heat, and sent his daughter to her husband again. She still found the heat unbearable and, knowing that her father would never permit her to live apart from her husband, she created another woman exactly like her in every respect and asked her to take her place. After this substitution, she went away from the house. The new substitute was named Chaya, since she was a shadow of the original consort. Chaya conceived some children from Lord Surya, and in addition she had the original two children of the Lord's first consort. Her affection to her own children was greater than her affection to the children of the first consort. One day when her children and the first consort's children were quarrelling, she naturally took sides with her children, and cursed Yama to become a Chandala and Yami to run away from the house. Thus Yama, the Lord of Hell, became an outcast, and Yami or Yamuna became a running river. The husband Lord Surya got suspicious since no mother would curse her own children, and so he found out the deception after enquiry. Lord Surya discovered the original abode of his consort, and went to her to bring about a compromise and reconciliation. After the reconciliation, they brought out a set of twins namely the Aswins who are the divine physicians. Such is the legendary story of Chaya.

There is enough of historical evidence to show that the temple at Arasavalli has been existing from a long time. One epigraph from an Eastern Kalinga king, which dynasty ruled over Kalinga in an unbroken line from the 4th to the 14th century, reveals that Aditya Vishnu Sarman and Bhanu Sarman were brothers, and sons of Narayana Bhattu who was greatly attached to Lord Surya at Arasavalli. There are also inscriptions by a General of the king, Srikarana, who had donated five puttis of land to the Sun God, to run a school and a hostel there for the education of pupils studying Sanskrit. This clearly shows that the temple has been in existence from ancient times.

The original temple seems to have fallen into disuse, and the present temple was reconstructed by one Yelamanchili Pullaji Panthulu in the year 1778 A.D. At the time of the reconstruction of the temple certain modifications were effected and some more minor deities were installed. The Sastras enjoin the worship of the Panchayatanas consisting of Aditya, Ambika, Vishnu, Ganesa and Maheswara, one of the five being made the principal deity, and the remaining the subsidiary deities. At Arasavalli, Lord Suryanarayana forms the central figure, while the others occupy minor positions. In addition an image of Indra has also been installed here.

The temple is very famous for its great sanctity and holiness. It is also very near to Srikakulam, the district headquarters, being only one mile off from it. One has to get down at Srikakulam Railway Station which is a main Station in the Madras-Calcutta route and which is very near Vizag. From Srikakulam Road, there are excellent bus connections to Arasavalli and there are decent places to stay at Srikakulam also.

The temple is still a very powerful one and devotees from far and near visit the shrine for the redress of their grievances. Many incurable ailments such as leprosy, blindness and barrenness among women have been miraculously cured, and the sufferings of people removed here. They thus become devoted to the Lord and regularly visit the temple.

There is one extant example of a miracle that has happened in this temple in the recent years. A young lad of 20 years from the Godavari districts was affected with leprosy and his whole body became diseased and sore. Being disgusted with himself he left his native place for Benaras to end his life in the sacred waters of Ganga. There he met a learned sage who advised him to go to Arasavalli and spend his days in religious conduct for forty days. He came to Arasavalli and bathed in the holy waters of the tank and did one hundred and eight pradakshinams every day. He continued this austerity for thirty days, when most of his sores were healed. At the end of the forty days of rigorous life, he became completely healthy. He went back to his own village and also got married and has children now. He regularly visits the temple with his family once a year in the Visakha month and offers thanks to the Lord who has cured his disease. The Lord is known as Kali-varada, a granter of the boons in the Kaliyuga.

CHAPTER XX

SRIKURMAM

SRIKURMAM is a famous temple situated at a distance of about twelve miles east of Srikakulam at the extreme south of the taluk and very near the coast. To reach the place, one has to get down at Srikakulam Railway Station, which is an important station on the Madras-Calcutta route, and from there take bus. There is a good metalled road from Srikakulam Railway Station to Srikakulam and from Srikakulam to Srikurmam also. There are choultries and pilgrim centres in the temple where intending pilgrims can stay.

The village Srikurmam derives its name from the temple which is dedicated to Lord Vishnu in the Avathara of Srikurmam viz., the Avathara of tortoise, and hence the deity itself is called Srikurmanatha. The temple has beautiful pillared mantapas and some of the pieces of sculpture done in granite are masterpieces of workmanship. The Vimana of the temple is built in the characteristic Chola type of architecture, though the outer gates beyond the prakara are much later.

The temple is said to have been originally a Saivite one which was changed into a Vaishnavite one, by Sri Ramanujacharya. References to this incident are available in the Sanskrit work Prapannamritha. Many interesting stories and legends are told in the place about a great debate between Ramanuja and the other thinkers of that time. Sri Ramanuja won in the debate easily. The temple is of very great sanctity, being the only important temple to Lord Vishnu in the Kurmavathara in the whole of India.

Any number of inscriptions in the temple which throw a flood of light upon the political and social history of this tract are available. The legends of the temple speak of the life of Sri Naraharitirtha, a famous disciple of Madhwajacharya, who revived the religious fervour of the people, in Kalinga. Sri Naraharitirtha was a disciple of Anandatirtha who in turn was a disciple of Purushothama Mahatirtha. In his Purvasrama, Naraharitirtha was known as Syama Sastry, and he was born in one of the ministerial families of Kalinga. There is a Stotra, Narahariyati Stotra, which is included in the Sanskrit work called Stotra Mahodadhi, in which the life of Naraharitirtha, which is closely associated with the temple of Srikurmam, is given. According to this, he received initiation from one Purna Prajna, who ordered him to go to the court of the Gajapathi king and be a ruler there. Naraharitirtha who had learnt the true import of the Bhashyas and the Upanishads from his teacher, wanted to become a sanyasin and therefore remonstrated with his master that nothing useful was to be gained by his trying to acquire a kingdom. His master thereupon replied that in the Gajapathi kingdom, the images of Rama and Sita were available and that Narahari must acquire them, so that the worship to these idols may be restored. Narahari accordingly went to the Kalinga country and was received there with great enthusiasm by the people as a fit ruler for them. He ruled Kalinga for twelve years as a regent to the minor prince. When the prince attained majority Narahari returned the kingdom to him and took as Gurudakshina the idols of Rama and Sita which were his real treasure, and gave them to his master Anandatirtha. The latter worshipped the images for eighty days and made them over to his disciple Padmanabhatirtha, who in turn worshipped them

for six years and gave them once again back to Naraharitirtha.

Having thus acquired the images, Naraharitirtha went about touring and preaching. During his tours, one night he dreamt that an image of Lord Vishnu was submerged near a tank near the town where he was staying. He made arrangements to bring out that image, and also made arrangements for its proper worship and retired to the banks of the Tungabhadra where he lived till his end.

This legendary story of Naraharitirtha is fully borne out by many of the inscriptions and epigraphs that are available at the Srikurmam temple.

The presiding deity of the temple, Lord Vishnu, goes by the name of Srikurmanatha. There are several sacred Tirthas within the temple. The popular legend is that the Lord is said to have first appeared here to bless king Swetamahipathi. It is said that the bones of the deceased if thrown into the Swetapushkarani tank get converted into tortoises or kurmas, and hence unclean persons are forbidden to touch the water from the tank.

There is one important inscription in Srikurmam which has led to a controversy over the authenticity or the authorship of the Telugu Bharata, which is attributed to the great Telugu poet Nannaya who was the court poet of the great Eastern Chalukyan king Rajarajanarendra. A prince of the same Chalukya dynasty by name Vijayaditya has left an enigmatic inscription in Srikurmam in the year 1273 A.D. which reads as follows:

“श्रीराजराजनृपतिः प्रविशालकीर्तिः
यः सूरिभिस्सह किल स्मृतिजालसारम्
आन्ध्रीचकार वरभारतवंशवृत्तम्”

The inscription as it stands would appear to mean that the king mentioned there translated the great Mahabharata into Andhri or Telugu, though it might also mean that the king got it translated into Andhri. It is however clear that Rajarajanarendra was a great patron of arts and Nannaya Bhatta, the famous Telugu poet, was his court poet. Whether the relationship between Rajarajanarendra and Nannayabhata was like the relationship between Harsha and Bana is not known, but it is a fact that Telugu literature reached one of its peaks during their time.

There is a famous Kshetramahatyam in this temple which was told by Rishi Dattira to Vyasa. The Sthalapurana says that the sage heard in his dream from Lord Hari himself the details about the greatness of Sri Kurmam. According to this Sthalapurana, there was a mountain called Swetachala in which King Suta was ruling. The queen was a pious lady and the king approached her on a Suddha Ekadasi day, which was a day dedicated by her to prayer and meditation. The queen prayed to the Lord that her Vrata should not be broken, and Lord Sri Kurmanatha, ordered Gangatirtha to flow in between the king and the queen, so that the queen's Vrata may be fulfilled. The king, thus separated from the queen, lived on the banks of the Vamsadhara river, where one day Rishi Narada met him, and told him that he could bring upon himself the blessings of Sri Hari by doing proper penances. The king thereupon went to the place where the Vamsadhara river joined the sea, and prayed to the Lord that he should have the blessed Darshan of the holy feet of Sri Hari. Rishi Narada taught the king the Kurma Mantra and asked him to remain in Tapassamadhi, meditating upon it. The king performed intense Tapascharya, repeating the Lord's name, in the Kurma Mantra, and Lord Sri Hari, assuming the form of Sri Kurmavatara, and decorat-

ed with the Sankha, Chakra, Gada and Padmam, gave Darshan to the king. Rishi Narada, King Suta and Sri Kurmanatha then proceeded to the neighbouring hill where a rishi called Vakrangamaharshi was living. On the way, the Lord, seeing a sacred spot, thought it fit to create, through his Chakra, the brilliant tank known as the Ksheera Samudram. Mahalakshmi came to that sacred spot and then said that she would reside there. The sacred spot is said to be Srikurmam or Kurmagundam.

By the grace of the Lord, a bath in the Ksheerasamudram at this place would remove all impurities and imperfections in men. After sometime a Bhil woman who was hungry and thirsty came there, and bathed in the tank and was elevated, and reported her experience to her husband. Her husband also came and was blessed by the Lord and, being a pious man, and seeing Lord Sri Kurmanatha with the Sankha, Chakra, Gada and Padmam there, he constructed a temple to the Lord. The king Suta also built a temple with golden walls and, in consultation with Narada and Brahma, first consecrated Srikurmanatha with the Sudarsana Mantra. Thereupon the Lord took on his various aspects, and, in order to pacify him, the Gopala Mantra was also consecrated, and Srikurmanatha was pacified and became his old benevolent self.

The Sthalapurana has also some legendary reference about the temple for some centuries after its first construction.

One legend is as follows. The Rajakumar of Anandapuri chased a golden-faced deer and came to Sudhagundam near Srikurmam. He went to Srikurmanathaswami temple and there saw the divine Apsaras Tilottama who was dancing before the Lord. The king fell in love with her, but Tilottama, who had consecrated herself to the services of the Lord

alone, grew angry with him and cursed him. The king had not up to then seen the Lord and when Tilottama cursed him the king remained there doing Tapascharya for three hundred years. Finally he was cured by his penance to the Lord, and the king also remained there permanently in the service of the Lord.

There are many important Kshetras round about Srikurmam. To the west, there is a Sivite temple by the name of Sundareswara, at Pippala village. To the east, where the Vamsadhara river joins the sea, there is a famous temple of Karpureswara and to the west on the banks of the Langulya there is the temple of Koteeswara. There are also many Tirthas near Srikurmam like the Vakratirtha in which Rishi Jabala is supposed to have lived, Chakratirtha, Sudhagunda, Astatirtha etc.

The sthalapurana also mentions that the worship of the Lord will bestow the following blessings. The devotee will be purified of his sins and will have no rebirth. He will get the same benefit as from a pilgrimage to Mathura, Benaras, Amaravati and Ayodhya. He will have Mukti and reach heaven. He will be helping his Pitru devatas by a bath in the Sudhakundam, near Srikurmam, which will completely wipe off all past karmas. Baths in the sacred waters of these Tirthams and services to each of the Gods and visits to the shrines in the hill will ennoble and purify men, satisfy their legitimate desires and help them to attain salvation.

Srikurmam is an important and a sacred place and still attracts large number of pilgrims. The temple is famous for its architectural beauty, and more so for the wealth of inscriptions which give us practically a complete picture of the life of the Eastern Ganga dynasty that flourished in Kalinga from the fourth century to the fourteenth century.

CHAPTER XXI

BHADRACHALAM

BHADRACHALAM is a famous temple dedicated to Lord Sri Ramachandra and situated on the banks of the sacred river Godavari. One can reach Bhadrachalam, from Burgampad, from the northern side of the river Godavari. From Burgampad, boats ply over the river to Bhadrachalam. One can also reach it from Rajahmundry which is an important railway station on the Madras-Calcutta line, and from which it would be 40 miles or so by steamer over the river Godavari. The temple cannot thus be reached by easy means of communication, and has to be reached only by a difficult boat journey over the river Godavari.

The story of Sri Ramachandra which has been sung in immortal verse by Sage Valmiki and which has been the main repository for all the later Kavyas to draw their themes is very well known. At the spot where the Bhadrachalam temple stands, it is said, Sri Ramachandra himself lived for some time, before Seetha was carried away by Ravana. The popular legend is that at this spot a sage by name Bhadra was living at the time of Sri Rama's sojourn, and Sri Rama, being pleased with the intense Tapas and Bhakthi of this sage, came here specially to give him Darshan and liberation. That is why the place is called Bhadrachalam in memory of the Saint Bhadra.

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. The same story has been sung and popularised by Tulsidas in Hindi

in his Ramcharit Manas and by Kamban in Tamil. Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa also has as its main theme the life and history of the Ikshwaku race in which Sri Ramachandra was born.

In the Atharvaveda there are two Upanishads, one called the Rama Tapini Upanishad, which glorifies the name of Sri Rama, and another called the Rama Rahasya Upanishad, where several Rama Mantras are revealed for the first time.

The greatness of Sri Rama's life is that it is an intensely human story, where the Lord had assumed the human form, and shown us the correct path of rectitude which we should adopt in the day to day conduct of our lives. Apart from its sacred appeal, Sri Rama as a human being has an unique appeal, in which his character as an ordinary mortal with an uncompromising adherence to the correct code of conduct at the cost of anything that may happen to him, serves as a beacon light of guidance for us. The reactions of Sri Rama to any set of circumstances, whether they be prosperous or adverse, are themselves a guide of conduct for ourselves in our human interrelations. The character of Sri Rama progresses stage by stage as the story of Sri Rama unveils itself. The brotherly affection of Lakshmana to Rama, the fidelity of Sita to Rama, and the adherence to his father's word of honour by Rama, even at the cost of his own kingdom, and his adherence to the great dharma of a true warrior in warfare, where he would not kill his enemy Ravana when he was dis-armed, but asked him to go and come the next day fully prepared and armed, his adherence to the demands of social customs so that even Sita herself had to demonstrate her fidelity by such a terrific ordeal like the fire ordeal etc., all show a humanness of approach to the problem of life, and steadfast adherence to the rules of ethics, that they move us even to this day by their essentially

human appeal. In addition to all these, Sri Ramachandra, with Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman has been the theme of innumerable poets and has been the object of veneration and devotion of thousands of devotees. The numerous Rama Bhakthas like Kabir, Ramadasa, Thyagaraja, Ramagopanna and Purandharadasa, etc. were so much over-whelmed by the intensity of their devotion to the Lord, that they lost themselves in rapture and have given expression to their mystic joy in uncomparable verse and music.

Bhadrachalam is a very sacred place, with its temple dedicated to Lord Rama. The Vighrahas of Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha in the Sri Rama temple there are beautiful pieces of sculpture and are captivating by the sheer beauty and excellence of the workmanship. Sri Rama is represented as a charming person, of handsome beauty, and well-built physique, wearing in his two hands, the Dhanus and the Bana, and standing in the 'Thribhanga' attitude as opposed to the 'Samabhanga' pose. Sita stands near him, also in the Thribhanga attitude, with a lotus in one hand and the other hand shown in the 'Katyavalambita' posture. If there is any temple in which the devotees are captivated by the sheer magic of the beauty of the icon of the Lord, it is at Bhadrachalam.

In India, there are thousands of temples dedicated to Lord Sri Rama, from Ayodhya, his birth place in Uttar Pradesh, down to Rameswaram at the southernmost tip of the country. Bhadrachalam, out of all these, is remarkable in its own way, for the sheer beauty of the icon of the Lord. Like most of the temples in the country, Bhadrachalam does not claim to have a Sthalapurana culled out of various Puranas, nor can it claim to have been constructed by Devas or Rishis. In fact, it is a temple consecrated by a very human being, and is called 'Manushya Pratishtha', since the

local legends trace the first beginning of this temple to a Bairagi or mendicant who came here from Ayodhya. He took up his abode on the small hillock which overlooks the mighty and majestic Godavari. It was he that carved out the image of Srirama and built a small temple over it. To-day, this temple is famous not only in Andhra but throughout India, and in spite of the difficulty of its approach, the magical charm of the idol attracts thousands of pilgrims every year.

Bhadrachala Ramaswami temple has also become famous, by its association with a great Rama Bhaktha, Saint Ramadas, who was very closely and intimately associated with the temple. Saint Ramadas was originally named as Gopanna and was the nephew of Akkanna and Madanna, who were Hindu civil servants in the reigns of the last Kutub Shahi king Tanashah. Ramadas was a taluk official who was sent here to collect the revenues for his masters. He collected the revenues, but instead of remitting them to his masters, he thought that the money could be better used for constructing a temple for Srirama, and hence without any thought for the consequences, he spent all the money, by enlarging the small temple and by conducting several festivals in the temple. He was found guilty of embezzlement of State funds and was sentenced to be imprisoned by Tanashah. Tradition has it that he was imprisoned for about 12 years.

Ramadas was a Bhaktha and a mystic of a very rare calibre, and he had merged his own individuality in the contemplation of the Divine Ramachandra. He had become one with the Lord and in fact he had his being in the Lord. He was therefore not affected by the imprisonment of his own body, and was spending his time in ecstatic contemplation and prayer of the Lord.

Sri Rama was so pleased with the devotion of this great Bhaktha, that he himself appeared before Tanashah the Kutub Shahi ruler, in the form of Gopanna alias Saint Ramadas and showered, by his grace, lakhs of rupees equivalent to the amount that had been spent by Ramadas. Tanashah was taken aback in amazement at this divine miracle. He was a great king who, though a Muslim, was catholic in his approach to the other religions, and recognising the greatness of Saint Ramadas, released him and encouraged him in his pious work. He also allowed Saint Ramadas to mint gold coins, popularly known as 'Ramatangi', in the same shape in which Lord Ramachandra showered the coins before Tanashah. Saint Ramadas has composed several beautiful Telugu Kritis in praise of Sri Ramachandra. In a famous verse in the Anandabhairavi ragam, he says that it is not possible for him to forget Sri Rama even if he wanted.

“Paluke bangaraniaye pilachina palukavemi
Kalalo Ni namasmarana maruvanu chakkani thandri
Yentha vedinanu niku sunthyna daya radu
panthamu cheya Ne nenthativadanu thandri.”

He was thus a mystic who had become saturated with the Lord's name and had lost himself in the contemplation of the Lord.

Ramadas, in addition to expanding the temple and constructing Mantapas and Gopuras, also made suitable arrangements for conducting several festivals to the Lord and particularly Sri Rama Navami Utsavam which is even to-day being conducted on a grand scale here.

Saint Ramadas was succeeded in his office by Tumu Lakshmi Narasimha Rao who remitted a part of the local collections to the State Treasury and devoted the rest to

finish the work which the great Saint had begun. He also commenced another temple for Sri Ranganathaswamy, which is still existent. At this stage a merchant named Varadarama Das brought two lakhs of rupees to Bhadrachalam, and helped him in completing his work. This temple which is so closely associated with Tanashah, the last of the Golconda Nawabs, came within the political purview of the Asaf Jahi dynasty which ruled from Hyderabad. The temple was till recently getting an endowment of Rs. 20,000/- from the Nizam's treasury, for the maintenance of the worship of Sri Rama. This itself is proof of the popularity of the temple amongst the followers of various religions.

The temple is situated on the right bank of the Godavari on an elevated hillock about 40 steps high. It may be said to stand practically on the bank of the Godavari river. The main entrance of the temple is crowned by a tall inspiring Gopura, which takes one into the inner Prakara of the temple. The main shrine houses the image of Lord Srirama and adjacent to this stands the Utsava Vighraha of the Lord with Goddess Seetha and Laxmana on either side. This particular image of Sri Rama is peculiar and differs from the usual figure of Sri Rama found elsewhere. Normally Sri Rama is depicted in the Thiribhanga or Samabhanga pose with two hands only, holding in one hand the bow and in the other the arrow. Sri Rama at Bhadrachalam has got four hands and is called "Chaturbhuj Rama." The Lord holds the usual Sarnga (or Kodanda bow) and Bana in his front two hands, and in the two rear hands holds the Sankha and the Chakra which are characteristic of the images of Lord Vishnu. Such manifestations of 'Chaturbhuj Rama' are rare and are very significant for ritual worship.

There is nothing particular about the architecture of the temple, and the edifices are built rather sturdily than ele-

gantly. However, the images of Lord Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are arresting by their divine beauty and anyone who meditates before the deity would feel that the image has not been made merely as a piece of sculpture, as an icon of the Lord, by an ordinary Sthapathi, but has been done by some great mystic, in a moment of complete and ecstatic oneness with the Lord. Such arresting beauty in sculpture is not known anywhere else.

Bhadrachalam is thus the most famous temple not only in Andhra but in the whole of India, of Sri Ramachandra. There are only two other temples of Sri Ramachandra in the whole of Andhra viz., the Kodandaramaswami Alayam at Tirupathi, and the Rama Mandiram at Ontimitta in Cudapah District where Bhaktha Potana got inspiration.

Bhadrachalam is also one of the famous places of pilgrimage on the river Godavari, the other being the Panchavati on its steps. The entire river Godavari running for 900 miles from the Nasik hills down to the sea near Rajahmundry, is holy ground for the Hindus, with its association with the life of Sri Rama. It was at Bhadrachalam that Sri Rama lost Sita, and it was here that he manifested himself to save his devotee Ramadas. The Puranic tradition, the historical facts and the local legends are so inextricably intertwined that the sanctity of the place has been enhanced rather than diminished. The great concourse of the pilgrims who flock to Bhadrachalam during Sri Rama Navami days is nearly as much as of those who visit the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna in the north. Especially in April endless streams of pilgrims make up the famous Bhadrachala Yatra.

The journey is romantic, because it is so difficult even now. The Yatra has to be accomplished through a serpentine track which creeps up many an ancient hill and

passes through many dales and woods which comprise the great Dandakaranya forest which was a silent witness to the woes and wanderings of Sri Rama during his exile. From Burgampahad, pilgrims cross the river Godavari by ferry boats, like sinful souls crossing the Vaitarani river, and at the end of it, there comes into sight the tall Gopuram of the temple surrounded by twenty-four other temples.

There are interesting and popular local legends about the finding and building of this temple. The legend runs as follows. When Abul Hasan Tanashah, the last Kutub Shahi ruler, was reigning at Golconda, an unlettered woman, by name Dammakka, was living in a hamlet near the hill of Bhadrachalam. She saw in a vision the images of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana lying, sheltered from prying eyes, in an unfrequented spot on the top of the hill. Next day, she and her daughter climbed up the hill and discovered the idols on the spot which she had seen in her dream. Dammakka had a small Mantapa constructed on the top for housing the idols. At that time, in a neighbouring village called Nelakondapalli, one Gopanna, who was the nephew and son-in-law of the King's Minister Akkanna, was living. This Gopanna became famous later as Saint Ramadas. One day, Gopanna joined a small group of pilgrims climbing up the hill, and came across Kabir Das, a Muslim devotee, who was also proceeding to pay his homage to the deities. The Hindu servants of the temple objected to the Muslim devotee entering the temple, and Saint Kabir who was denied darshan of the Lord felt sad and miserable. Since he was denied a vision of the Lord, at that moment, the deities also vanished from view. Gopanna observed that the Lord did not attach any importance to the external form of worship, or the religion to which a person belonged, but rather to the inner sincerity and strength of devotion. Thereupon he

requested the Archakas to permit Kabir also into the temple, whereupon the Lord also re-appeared. Gopanna then received Upadesam from Kabir, and assumed the name of Ramadas or the servant of Rama.

Thus Bhadrachalam has a unique feature, where the sanctity and sacredness of the place have been increased by the mixture of tradition and history. This is perhaps the solitary and unique instance of Muslim patronage of a Hindu temple, which was continued till very recently. Under the Nizam's rule, the Tahsildar stationed at Burgampad was responsible for the maintenance of the temple, and for the preservation of its treasures. The Hyderabad Government was spending Rs. 20,000/- out of its State revenues for the upkeep of the temples. Bhadrachalam has thus the happy and unique tradition of Muslim patronage of a Hindu temple. It is sanctified by its association with Saint Ramadas and is a famous and sacred shrine of Andhra, well worth a visit.

CHAPTER XXII

YADAGIRI

THE present Andhra Pradesh consists not merely of the whole of the Andhra State, but also of 9 districts of the erstwhile Hyderabad State. These nine districts are popularly known as Telengana area. There are, in these districts of Telengana, as many as 641 temples, the highest being in the Mahaboobnagar District and the lowest in Hyderabad District.

Yadagiri or, as it is popularly known, “Yadgiri-gutta”, is one of the important and holy places of Nalgonda District. It is in Bhongir Taluk of that district. Bhongir was, in ancient days, called as Bhuvanagiri. Yadagirigutta is about 40 miles from Hyderabad, and is connected with Hyderabad by a very good metalled road. To reach Yadagiri one has to either travel by road from Hyderabad, or go up to Raigir R.S. on the Secunderabad Kazipet section of the Central Railway, and travel about 2 miles to reach the actual village. The temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu as Narasimha, and is situated on the top of the hillock which is 300 ft. high. The god here is known as Laxminarasimhaswamy.

This temple, like Annavaram in East Godavari District, is a very popular temple, though not very ancient. There are no inscriptions or recorded material available to give the history of the temple. There are, however, Puranic and traditional accounts which are widely popular among the devotees, about this temple. There is mention about the origin of this temple in the Skanda Purana, one of the famous 18 puranas. The legends are as follows:—

In the Tretayuga, there was a rishi by name Vibhandaka. His son was the famous Rishyasringa, who had a son by name Yadava. From the childhood onwards, Yadava was devoted to Lord Vishnu and was hungering to have a darshan of the 'sakshatkara' of Lord Vishnu, in his Swarupa of Lord Narasimha. In order to achieve and realise his heart's desire, he selected this secluded hill for doing his penance. There is a tradition in our country, that secluded spots unvisited by men are particularly susceptible of inducing great peace and concentration since there will not be the impact of the vibrations of the human mind in these lonely and sacred places. Yadagiri-gutta is one such secluded place and Yadava was carrying on his penance or Tapascharya with one-pointedness of mind, and with complete Ekagrata with a desire to have darshan of Lord Vishnu as Narasimha. Lord Vishnu was pleased with the intensity, patience and perfectness of his penance, and appeared before Yadava to confer boons on him. Yadava then begged the Lord to show him the three supernal forms of the Lord which had captivated his heart viz., the Swarupas of Lord Vishnu as Jwala Narasimha, Gandabheranda Narasimha and Yogananda Narasimha. Accordingly, Lord Vishnu granted the boon, and gave darshan of the above three forms of the Narasimha Avatara to Yadava. But Yadava was still not fully satisfied with this fleeting view of the Lord, and the hunger in his soul required that he should constantly remain in the presence of the Lord himself. He, therefore, begged of the Lord to remain permanently in the hill in those three forms. The Lord, who was well pleased with the devotion of Yadava, acceded to his request, and began to live there permanently on the hill in the above three forms of Lord Narasimha. Thus, the hill got its name as Yadavagiri, the corrupted form of which is Yadagiri.

The three forms of Lord Narasimha are to be seen at three plots in the premises of the present temple provided one searches for them with devotion and sincerity.

These places in course of time were deserted and were covered by dense forest. The Lord appeared in a dream one night to a village officer of that place and revealed to him his presence at the top of the hill and ordained that arrangements for regular worship of the idol should be made. Accordingly, the village officer went with some people in search of the Lord on the top of the hill. There, under a huge rock, they found the images of the God, which they resuscitated and consecrated for worship, and also appointed a priest to conduct the daily Puja.

There is also another legend, which has also got wide circulation, about this temple. According to this, at first the Lord manifested himself at a place two miles distant from this hill. That place is now called as the Old Narasimhaswami temple site. After the above dream incident etc., which are common to this legend also, the God deserted that place and came to the present hill spot since the present spot was more conducive to concentration and meditation.

The temple is situated at the top of the hill which is about 300 ft. in height. At the foot of the hill, there is a gateway with Gopuram which is called popularly as "Vaikunta Dwaram". As one gets up half the way above one will find a number of choultry buildings which have formed themselves into a hill town. There are about 150 such choultries constructed by many devotees of the Lord for the convenience of the pilgrims who visit the temple.

After entering the Simhadwaram of the temple, there is a Hanuman temple on the right side. Exactly beneath the

Hanuman image, there is a horizontal rock gap of about 10 inches width and about 60 sq. ft. in area. This horizontal narrow cave is said to be the spot where the Lord manifested himself in his Swarupa of Lord Narasimha as Gandhabherunda, one of the three Narasimhas who appeared before Yadava. The oil lamp, always kept here, is still burning, indicating the importance of the site.

Then, turning to the left, we enter a big hall where generally all devotees sit. Again, on the left side, there is the temple proper. The front pillar of the temple is a constructed sculpture whereas the rear pillars where the actual shrine of the God is situated, viz., the Garbha Gudi, is a natural cave of about 30 ft. length and 12 ft. width cut into a hill. The cave is formed under a huge rock which forms a sloping roof into a height of just 5 ft. in the middle for the passage inside. While going through this constricted passage one has necessarily to lower his head slightly. Thus the very natural formation of the cave itself makes one bow involuntarily to the Lord.

On the left of the passage, there is a Peetha where special Pujas are performed. At the end of the cave, there are the actual images of the Lord. We see there two rocks fastened to each other and forming a vertical cup of about one foot between them. On the other side of the rock, we can see the image in the shape of a serpent head and ending like its tail. This is said to be the aspect of God known as Jwala Narasimha, the second of the manifestations of Lord Vishnu to Yadava. Popular tradition has it that a divine serpent still moves about the image.

On the opposite rock, there is another image of a figure seated in meditation and this is said to be the image of Yogananda Narasimha, the third of the manifestations of Lord Vishnu to Yadava.

These rocks form an integral part of the cave, and so there is no possibility of having any modern structure in between them, without dismantling the natural structure. As these two images of the Lord are not clearly visible to the worshippers, the icons of Goddess Laxmi and Narasimha are made in silver and kept near the original Vighraha for darshan and worship. The superstructure of the temple is based on the huge rock which forms the cave. There is at Yadagiri a temple to the left of the front pillar, dedicated to the Goddess, known as Andalamma temple.

The hill town of Yadagiri-gutta is always densely flocked by pilgrims. The place has great importance and attracts devotees throughout the year. It is said that the Lord here is so powerful that all incurable diseases also get cured if the devotees worship the Lord for a week or fortnight or forty days, with full confidence and faith in the Lord's power, and with sincerity and devotion in their heart. This power of curing diseases is so widespread that the temple has become very famous within the last 40 or 50 years. It is also said that no devotee, who comes to the temple and prays to the Lord for any desire, goes in vain. The Lord in the Gita has stated that there are four types of people who come to worship Him:

“आर्तो जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ”

1. Arta i.e., a man in distress, 2. Jignasu i.e., a man with inquisitiveness to know the reality, 3. Artharthi i.e., a man aspiring for wealth and 4. Gnani i.e., an enlightened man with no desires.

Thus, the Gita itself recognises that a man in distress has necessarily got to go to the Lord for relief and that relief is immediately granted when the mind of the devotee becomes helpless and feels 'Niradhar' from any other human

source. This type of devotee is fully satisfied at this sacred shrine if only there is faith in him.

There is a Siva temple also on the hill as if to prove to the world that Hara and Hari are both aspects of the same Lord. A Sanskrit Pathasala is maintained in the temple of the hill where students are given coaching for oriental examinations.

There are important festivals at this place besides all the usual Vaishnava festival days. The Kalyana of the Lord is celebrated for ten days in the month of Phalguna every year from Suddha Dwiteeya to Suddha Dwadasi. In these ten days, thousands of pilgrims flock in endless stream to Yadagiri and it sometimes happens that they have to lodge themselves in the fields under the trees for want of accommodation. All the religious ceremonies and festivals are done according to the Pancharatra system of the Agamas. The management of the temple is now under the control of the Government of Andhra Pradesh which functions through an Executive Officer and a Board of Trustees.

Yadagiri is situated on the top of the hill and a hill town has grown up here, on account of large number of pilgrims and devotees that flock here. This hill town is equipped with all modern amenities such as electricity, water supply, drainage etc. Apart from the sanctity of the place, one can command an impressive view of the forest scenery from the top of the hill. Yadgiri has become a place for picnics also for the devotees residing in Hyderabad. There are a number of excursion parties that go from the city, spend one or two days on the top of the hill, enjoy the sceneries also, and drink and dip in the fountain of sanctity which the hill offers.

This hill place, which has a pleasing and homogeneous blend of modernity and antiquity, is well worth a visit.

CHAPTER XXIII

VEMULAVADA

VEMULAVADA is in Karimnagar District of Andhra Pradesh and is situated about 20 miles from Karimnagar on the road from Karimnagar to Kamareddy. The village is an ancient one and has been in existence from the time of the Western Chalukyas, as is evident from the inscriptions that are now available at this place. Vemulavada is famous as the seat of a Western Chalukya temple known as the Rajeswaraswami temple. There is also another temple called the Vaddegeswaraswami temple which is also in a good state of preservation. The Rajeswara temple is obviously so named, either because it was built by Rajaditya which was the Biruda of Narasimha I, of the Chalukyas of Vemulavada, who was the grandson of Vinayaditya Yuddhamalla I, or is named after him. There is a big tank which is on the northern side of the Rajeswara temple, called Dharmagundam. This is fed by a big stream flowing by the side of the village.

As regards the origin of this famous and ancient temple, we are on very sure grounds. An inscription in the temple states that Rajaditya, who was a vassal of the Western Chalukya King Thribhuvanamalla, had done the Pratisthapanam of this God and constructed this temple in the 9th year of Chalukya Vikrama Era. In another inscription which is available it is stated that King Arikesari, the Lion of the Chalukyas of Vemulavada, had a titular name of Rajaditya. These feudatory kings lived round about the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. and hence the temple is nearly 1000 years old.

Besides many other Sivalingas in the place, there are also a few Buddhist and Jain images found in the premises of the temple. But all these images seem to be later additions. Similarly, there is one Seshasayi temple just behind the Rajeswara temple in the same compound. In addition to these, there are two other temples called the Bhimeswara temple and the Kedareswara temple, in the same village. These two temples are of great importance and antiquity, and have been famous even before the present Rajeswara temple was constructed.

It is mentioned in the book "Rajeswara Mahatmyam" that Bhimeswara himself took the form of Rajeswara since the time when a king by name Narendra constructed the later temple. It is said that Vemulavada Bhimakavi, who is a well-known Telugu poet, acquired all his talents due to the grace of the Lord of this place.

The precise chronological sequence of the chieftains called the Chalukyas of Vemulavada cannot be formulated at the present stage of our knowledge. The present theory is based upon the Vemulavada temple inscription and the material available in Pampa's Vikramarjunavijayam. According to this, the dynasty starts with Vinayaditya I, who was followed by Arikesari I and by Narasimha Varma Rajaditya. The relationship between the kings is also not clearly known. Hence we can only arrive at a general conclusion that this temple must have been built by Narasimha-varma Rajaditya I, who was the third king in the above line, as the Rajeswara temple is obviously so named, either because it was built by Rajaditya (a Biruda of Narasimha I) or named after him.

There is a Sthalapurana for the temple, which is known as Vemulavada Rajeswara Mahatmyam. According to this,

the Puranic background of this God has to be traced from the Bhavishyottara Purana. The legend connected with the temple is as follows:—

Once there was a great king by name Narendra, who was the grandson of Arjuna, the great Pandava hero. One day, he went out hunting into the forest, and by mistake shot dead a rishi, while the latter went to a pond to fetch water. The king repented much for the unwitting crime that he had committed. But the Brahmahatya Dosha still stuck to him and, to get rid of it, he wandered over many holy places, but in vain. At last, he came to Vemulavada and drank accidentally three handfuls of water from the tank Dharmagundam. He was at once relieved of the great sin of Brahmahatya Dosha. The God in the same night appeared before him, and told him that a shrine of Lord Siva by name Rajeswara was at the bottom of that Dharmagundam and that the king should bring it up and consecrate it on the banks of the tank for purposes of worship. The king accordingly searched for the Linga in the Dharmagundam, got it, and consecrated the God on the banks of the same tank. Since that time, the God is known as Rajeswara-swami.

It is also said in this connection that Indra, who was also suffering from the sin of Brahmahatya Dosha due to his killing the demon Vritrasura, was also relieved of his great sin only after bathing in Dharmagundam according to the instructions of Brihaspati.

There is another legend about the greatness of the Dharmagundam. Once Dakshaprajapati was performing a great sacrifice called Yagnajita with a view to excel all other Gods. Other Gods naturally got perturbed at this important Yagna by Dakshaprajapati and, in order to deprive him

of the full benefits of it, Sun God abruptly came to the sacrifice and tried to snatch away the 'havis'. But as soon as he touched the 'havis', his hands were cut off and he became handless. Thereupon, he sought the advice of the other Gods for remedy. Other Gods advised him to go to Dharmagundam and perform penance for hundred years. The Sun God did accordingly and got back his golden hands. The Dharmagundam is said to have been in existence prior to the building of the Rajeswara temple. The following sloka reveals the greatness of the temple:—

श्रीशैले दर्शान्मुक्तिः काश्यांतु मरणाद्ध्रुवम्
अन्यत्र तपसा क्षेत्रे धर्मकुण्डस्य नामतः”

(One gets liberation by the Darshan of Srisailam, and by giving up one's body at Kasi. At other places one gets liberation only by penance, but the mere name of Dharmakunda will confer liberation).

Vemulavada with the Rajeswara temple, is one of the most famous of the Siva temples of Andhra Pradesh. Thousands of pilgrims from all parts of the State flock here to have darshan of the Lord. In the months of Magha and Phalguna, the stream of devotees becomes endless and reaches thousands. At the time of Maha Sivaratri, the crowd becomes very big. The Kalyanotsavam of the Lord here is celebrated on the Purnima day of the Phalguna month every year. There are days when thousands of devotees come and offer their homage and sacrifice to the Lord. The income to the temple is said to be nearly 3 to 4 lakhs of rupees which is collected practically during the course of these few days.

One peculiar ritual of this temple is that, in addition of the usual homages which devotees pay to the Lord in other temples, there is a peculiar custom in this temple called the

Sahasra Suvarna Abhisheka by which the Lord is worshipped with 1000 golden pieces. The Lord is also worshipped with the offerings of bulls and thousands of bulls are being offered as votive offerings by devotees to the Lord here.

The management of the temple is at the moment being done by the Government of Andhra Pradesh who are running a choultry in the temple and a Sanskrit Pathasala also. There are about 120 learned families in this place which receive a grant of about 5-6 thousand rupees every year and their duty is to take part in the daily Puja and Abhishekam of the Lord.

It is a pleasing and elevating sight to see all these devotees gathering at the feet of the Lord and offering their Pujas to the Lord. Vemulavada is thus a place of great historical importance and is attracting thousands of pilgrims even now with the sanctity of its temple.

CHAPTER XXIV

DHARMAPURI

DHARMAPURI is one of the oldest villages in Andhra Pradesh situated in Karimnagar District of the Telengana region. This is situated on the western bank (right bank) of the sacred river Godavari which flows here southwards forming a natural boundary between Karimnagar and Adilabad districts. Dharmapuri is situated in the Jagtial taluk of Karimnagar District and is about 30 miles from Jagtial town.

The place is rather difficult of access. There is a bus service from Karimnagar to Kapparaopet, which is 10 miles distant from Dharmapuri, from which one has either to walk or to go on a country cart. Alternatively, one has to get down at Mancherial Railway Station which is in the Bezawada-Nagpur section of the Central Railway and from there go up to Venkatapuram village by bus, and then walk six miles and cross the river Godavari to reach Dharmapuri. By either of these routes, it is difficult to reach Dharmapuri, but the sanctity of the place is such that pilgrims flock here in large numbers in spite of the difficulty in communication.

Dharmapuri is not only one of the oldest villages of Andhra Pradesh but also comparatively a big one considering its inaccessibility. It has about 2,000 houses which are built in the old fashion. The village is a famous and renowned one, as a centre for Vedic studies, and for several centuries in the past Sanskrit pandits have emerged from this village. The tradition and environment of the place prove that it was a great seat of learning of Vedic and Sanskrit studies in the past.

The most important temple in Dharmapuri is the temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu as Narasimhaswami. This holy place with its presiding deity is mentioned in the Brahmanda Purana. There is an un-published palm leaf manuscript in Sanskrit with the title "Dharmapuri Kshetra Mahatmyam" describing the Puranic story and the greatness of this Lord in great detail.

The Avatara of Lord Vishnu as Lord Narasimhaswami is a famous and important one. To save Prahlada, who was a great devotee, the Lord took on the incarnation of Narasimhaswami and killed Hiranya Kasipu. While fighting with this God, Hiranya Kasipu, who was a great devotee of Lord Siva, prayed to Lord Siva to save him in the last moment. Lord Siva who, by nature, cannot but respond immediately to a call in distress on the part of his sincere devotees, immediately rushed to the aid of Hiranya Kasipu and took the shape of a Sarabha and fought with Lord Vishnu and at last died at the hands of Lord Vishnu. Since Sarabha was none other than Lord Siva himself, Lord Vishnu had to exert himself tremendously and had to evoke all his powers before he could kill Sarabha. To do this, Lord Vishnu evoked the full wrath and fury of which he was capable and hence, even after killing Sarabha, the wrath of the Lord was so great that he could not control himself and was wandering with that fearful aspect in the forest of Dandakaranya. All the Gods became very much frightened at this terrific aspect of Lord Vishnu, which is known as Ugra Narasimha, and approached Lord Brahma to suggest some means to pacify the Ugra Swarupa of Lord Vishnu somehow or other.

Lord Brahma did penance for a long time in the Dandakaranya. Once, during that period, a king by name Dharma Varma, who was ruling that part of the land, was very eager

to know about the most important of all the four Purusharthas. With this desire, Dharma Varma went to a pious man named Vishnu Sarma, who taught him that there was no salvation in this world for any one who did not worship Lord Vishnu. Accordingly, Dharma Varma set out for penance with strong faith and determination. He was instructed by Vishnu Sarma to pacify Lord Brahma first, as only through him could Lord Vishnu in the form of Narasimha be approached. So, Dharma Varma first pacified Lord Brahma with his penance. Brahma appeared before him and invited Lord Narasimha in a sacrifice. This place is at present called the Brahma Pushkarini.

Lord Vishnu was pleased with Brahma and Dharma Varma and appeared before them in the shape of Narasimha. Brahma thereupon requested him to remain there permanently in his Soumya Rupa and not in Ugra Rupa and to restore to him (Brahma) his worship etc. which he lost due to the curse of Rishi Bhrigu. Narasimha granted these two boons and accordingly established himself in his Soumya Rupa at the same spot. This is called the present village of Dharmapuri.

The Dhruvabhera of the Lord in this temple is seated in Padmasana position with palms extended downwards on the knees. The appearance is in the yogic form and not in the Ugra Rupa. This Kshetra since that time is called Dharmapuri after the name of Dharma Varma who actually strove for the vision of the Lord. Brahma also came to be worshipped in this temple, since Dharma Varma first did penance to Brahma, and hence in the temple of Dharmapuri there is the image of Lord Brahma which is very rare in temples.

The other important deities of this temple are a big idol of Yama at the gate and an idol of Murali Krishna, and

another of Balarama, the two latter being kept at the inner gate. There are also eight idols of Lord Hanuman around the temple. The Brahma idol is a big one about 6 feet high with four faces.

As per the above Puranic narration, Lord Narasimha is said to be existent even prior to the manifestation of the river Godavari itself. So many of the Puranic Kundas are now only traditionally recognised in the river bed which is full of rocks. There is a small stream called Bhadra falling into the river Godavari. It is said in the above-quoted Purana that it was the emblem of a lady who once performed penance in order to marry Lord Vishnu, and finally took this shape to remain for ever by the side of Lord Narasimhaswami. Many other such spots in the river are attributed to many tales of the Puranas.

There are four other temples at Dharmapuri which are equally important. There is a Ramalingeswara temple which is very near to the Narasimhaswami temple. It is stated that Lord Rama, while returning from Lanka after the conquest of Ravana, visited this place which is a part of Dandakaranya, and consecrated here God Siva as he did in Rameswaram. The Linga is said to be of sandstone and the Siva temple which has an equally hoary past is now in good condition and daily worship of the Lord is also being done here.

There is another temple called Nutana Narasimhaswami temple. This is also very near to the main Narasimhaswami temple. It is stated that a Brahmin of the village found this idol in some cave at a place about 20 miles from this village and brought it here and consecrated it. This temple is also a powerful one and is extremely popular with the pilgrims. The third temple of Dharmapuri is the Gomateswara temple,

which is a Siva temple and is said to have been consecrated by Gowtama Rishi while bringing Godavari to this Kshetram. There are finally one Dattatreya temple and one Rama temple on the banks of Godavari which are said to be of later origin. There is no mention of these two, in the Puranas.

The Kalyanotsavam festival of this temple is celebrated in the Phalguna month when thousands of pilgrims visit this place and witness the festival.

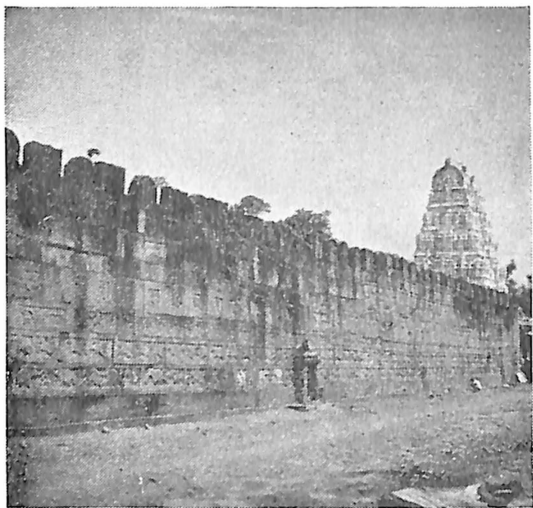
Yoga Narasimhaswami is one of the nine types of Narasimhaswami known by prefixes as Jwala Narasimhaswami, Ugra Narasimhaswami, Laxmi Narasimhaswami etc. The worship of Lord Vishnu in this aspect of Narasimha is done mainly for the attainment of Moksha, whereas the other forms are intended for worldly benefits. It is therefore clear that in the ancient days, by the side of the holy and sacred river Godavari, in the midst of thick forest, far away from human habitation and difficult of access, holy men had selected this place for consecrating this aspect of Lord Narasimha so that they might contemplate in peace and calmness on the divine. Dharmapuri, which has a hoary tradition and has been the seat of famous centres of culture, is thus well worth a visit.

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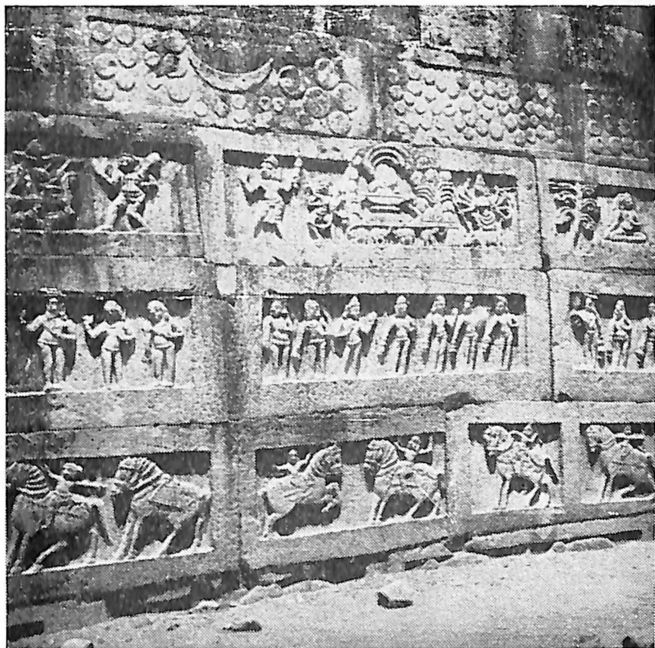
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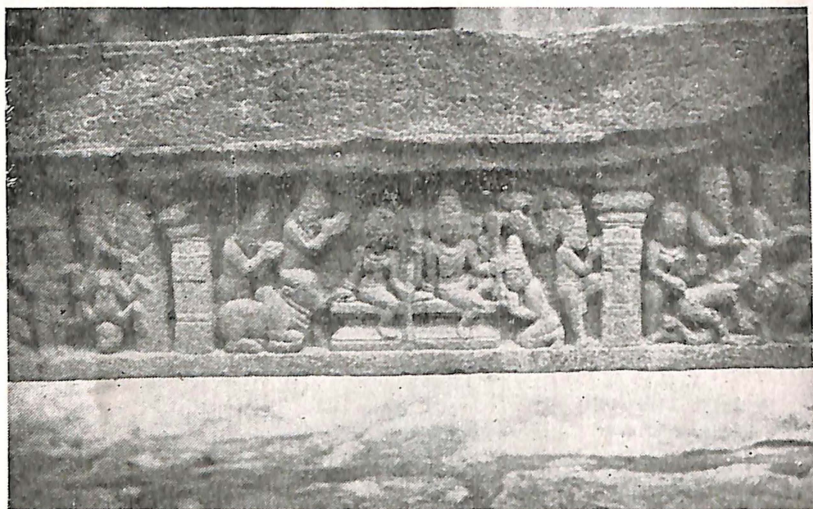
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Prakara with bas-reliefs



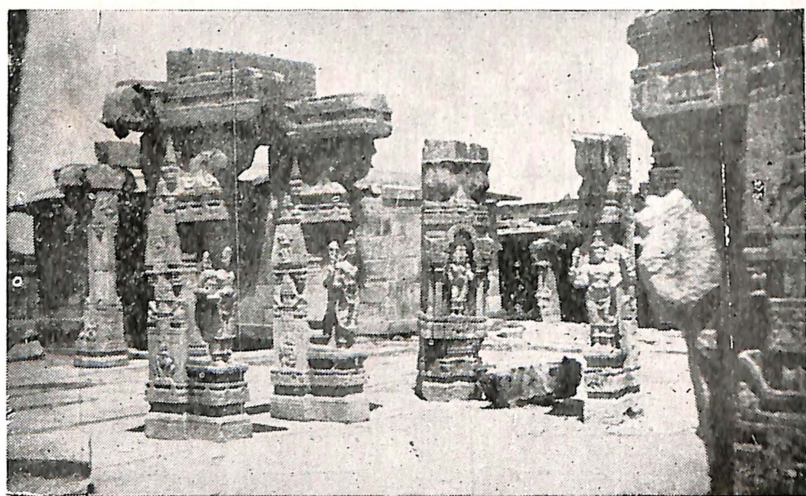
3. A bas-relief in Srisailem Temple



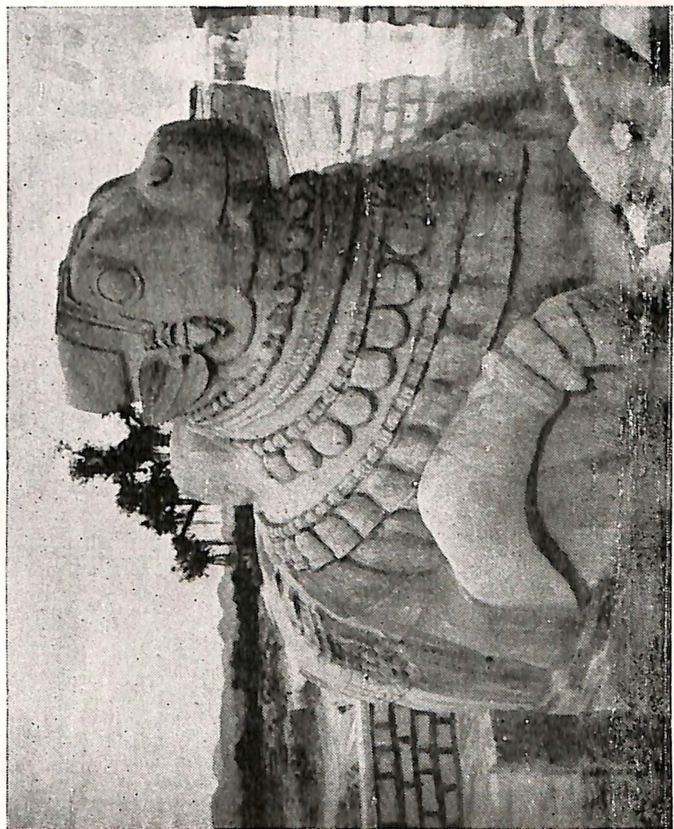
4. Srisailem Temple: Bas-reliefs on outer Prakara of
Puranic Stories and Martial Scenes



5. Alampur Temple: A frieze depicting the Kiratarjuneeya story



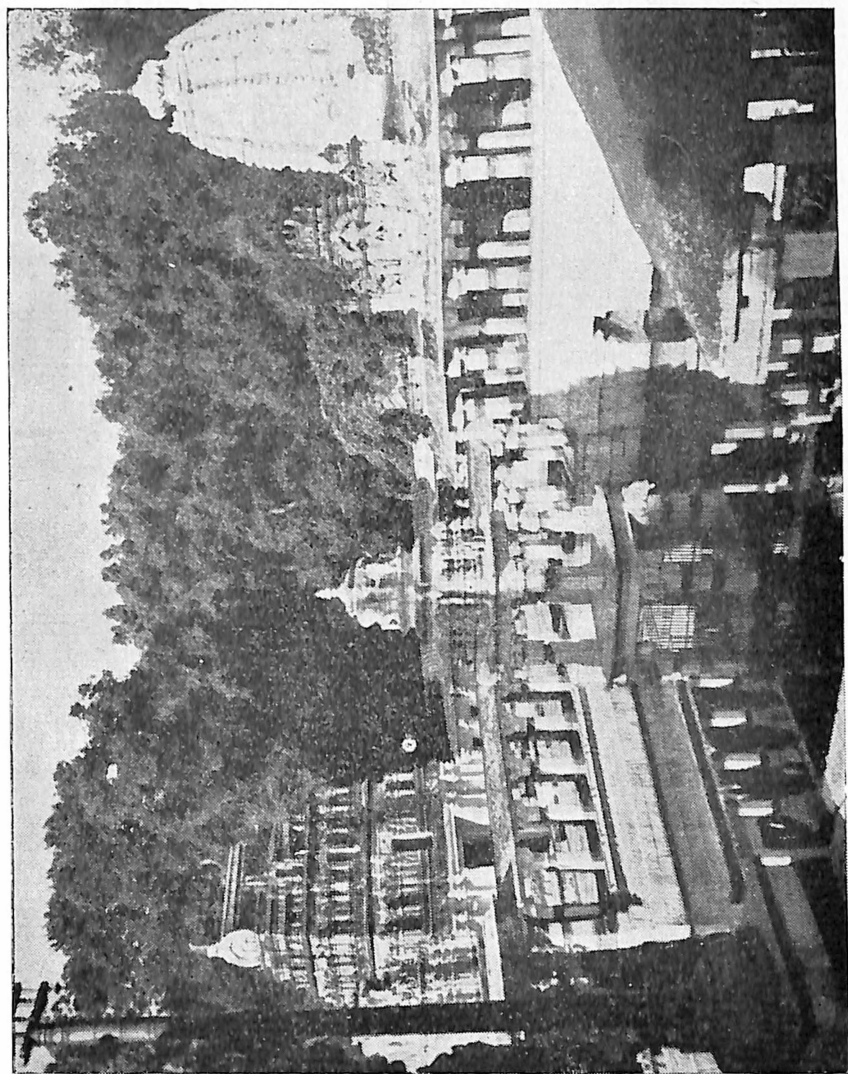
6. Lepakshi Temple: Kalyana Mantapa



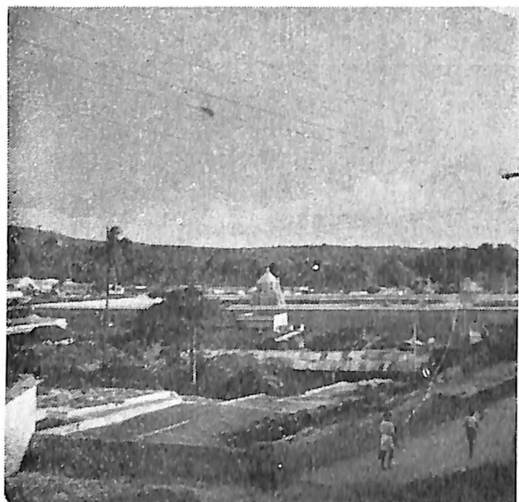
7. Lepakshi: Nandi



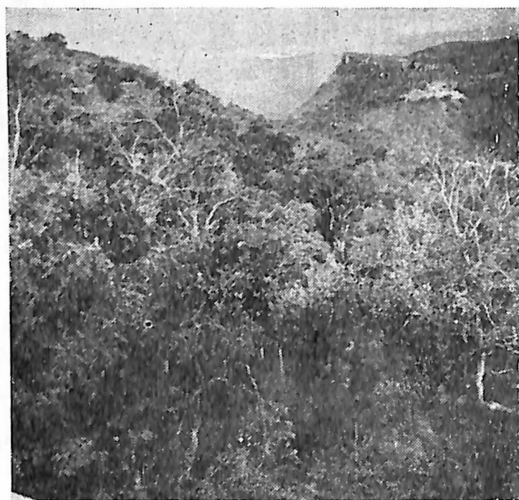
8. Lepakshi Temple: Stone Sculpture depicting a scene from the Bhikshatana story



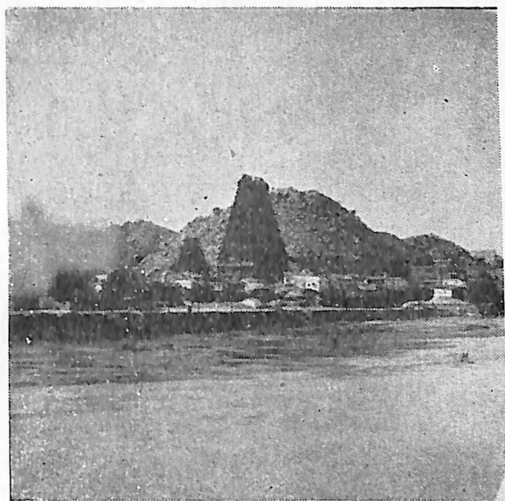
9. Mahanandi Temple: General View



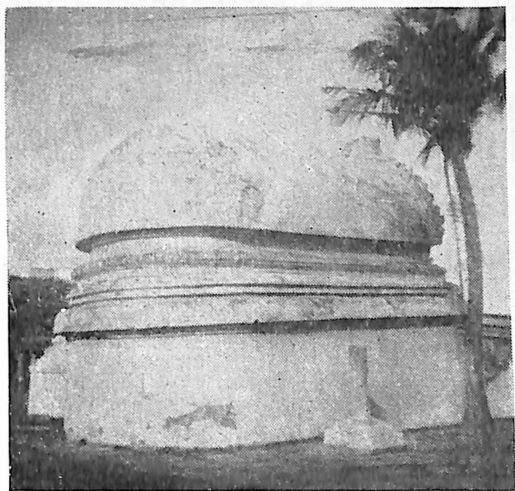
10. Tirupati: In the Centre is the
Ananda Vimana



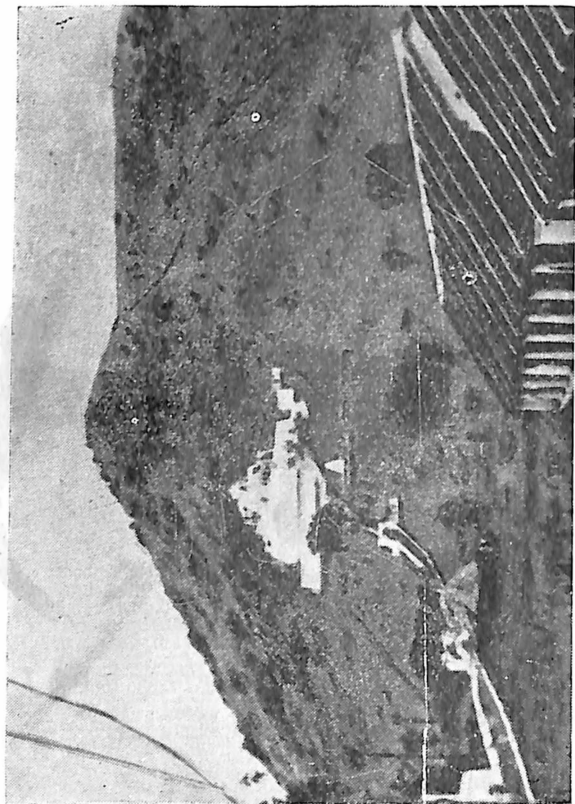
11. Tirupati: View of Tirthas



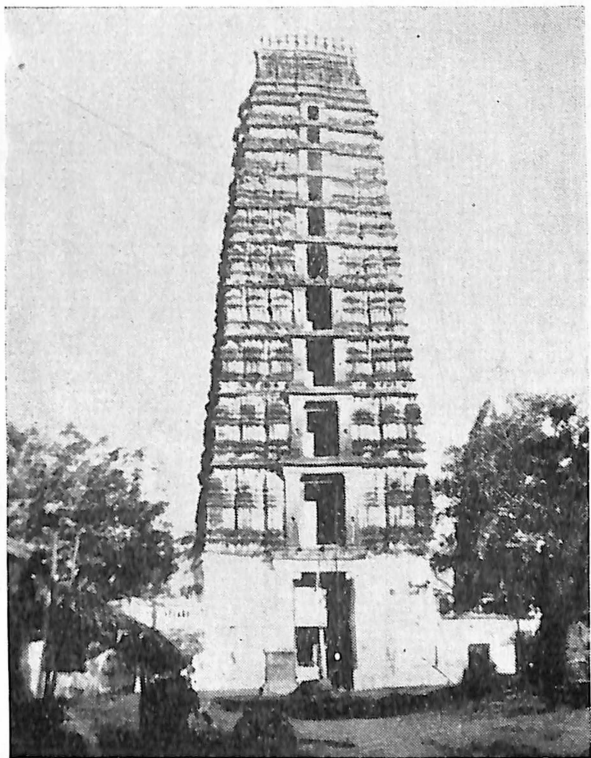
12. Kalahasti: Temple and
River Suvarnamukhi



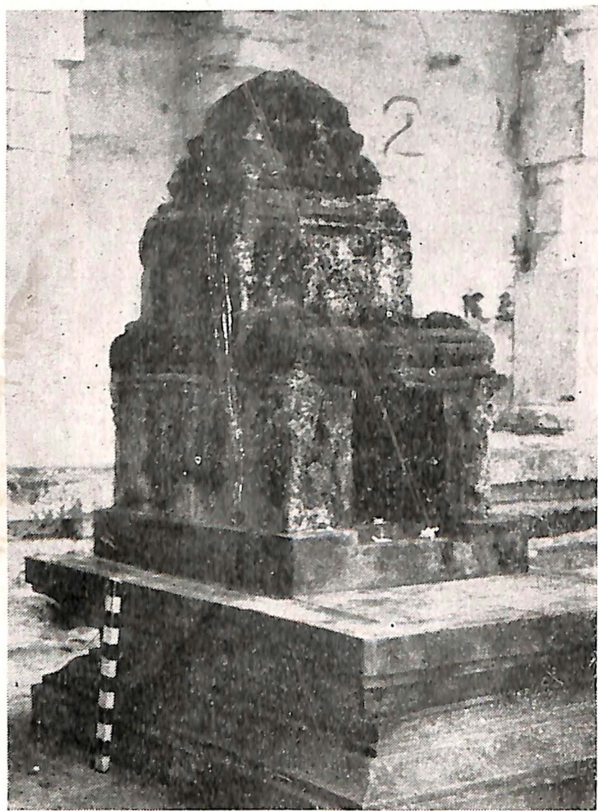
13. Chezerla Temple



14. Mangalagiri Temple: Setting



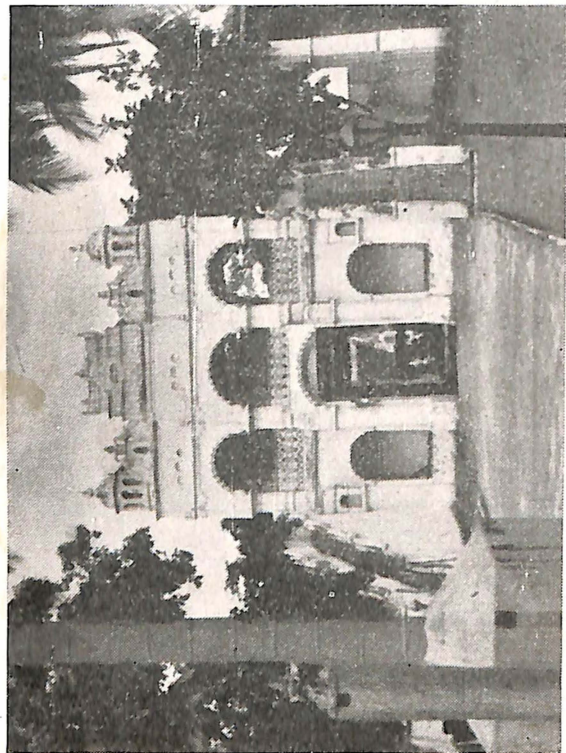
15. Mangalagiri Temple: Gopuram



16. A Model of the Temple found in Draksharama



17. Draksharama Temple: General View



18. Arasavalli Temple: Gopuram



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