

## Absence of Nose Ornaments in the Paintings of Lepakshi Temple

Dr. Asmita Hawaldar

Independent Researcher, B-42, M.I.G. Colony, Ravishankar Nagar, Indore - 452011, Madhya Pradesh, INDIA.

Corresponding Author: [asmita.hawaldar@gmail.com](mailto:asmita.hawaldar@gmail.com)



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### ABSTRACT

In Andhra Pradesh, in the village of Lepakshi, there is a temple dedicated to Veerabhadra. This temple, from the Vijayanagara Empire, is located in the Hindupur taluk of the Anantapur district. The murals from the Vijayanagara Empire are a specialty of this place. If one wants to witness the amalgamation of Vijayanagara's art, architecture, and temple craftsmanship in one place, then this temple is the most suitable. Here, there are many paintings and sculptures depicting various subjects. In the glorious Vijayanagara Empire, the allure of adornments is evident on all men and women, but the nose rings are nowhere to be seen. This is the subject of research undertaken in this essay.

**Keywords-** Lepakshi, paintings, nose ornaments.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Lepakshi is a small village in Andhra Pradesh where the Veerabhadra Temple is situated. This temple, located in the Hindupur taluk of the Anantapur district, was constructed during the prosperous era of the Vijayanagara Empire. Many temples were built during this period of Vijayanagara rule. The murals of Vijayanagara Empire era i.e. 15th century are seen only in this temple. While the murals in Virupaksh temple Hampi belong to 19th century as confirmed by Dr. Anna Dallapiccola.<sup>1</sup>

### II. ABOUT THE VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE<sup>2</sup>

The Vijayanagara Empire was established in 1336 by Harihara and Bukka. It was expanded and enriched by the four dynasties: Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, and Aravidu. However, after the defeat in the Battle of Talikota in 1565, the empire started declining, Hampi was sacked, and its grandeur faded. Subsequently, the empire diminished into a smaller entity over the following decades.

### III. HISTORY OF LEPAKSHI TEMPLE

During the reign of the Tuluva dynasty's Achyuta Deva Raya, veerana and veerupanna two nayaks in his court were ruling in this area<sup>3</sup>. They undertook the restoration of this temple. This area was part of a trade route. Veerabhadra was a deity revered in local tradition, which is why this temple existed along this route. This temple held significant importance for the Shaivite sect. It is believed that the sage Agastya<sup>4</sup> established this temple. It's also believed that Sri Rama requested ocean to divert his path through this region, leading to the establishment of the Linga of Papanasheshwar here. The main story depicted here involves the integration of Sati's narrative into Veerabhadra's. In this tale, Shankara resurrects Veerabhadra and Bhadrakali from his strand of hair. Veerabhadra disrupts a sacrifice and slays Daksha. Through this act, Veerabhadra embodies the fierce aspect of Shiva.

### IV. HISTORY OF LEPAKSHI

Before coming under the Vijayanagara Empire, this region was under various rulers, including the

Mauryas around 300 BC<sup>5</sup>. Subsequently, it came under the control of the Satavahanas, Pallavas, Chalukyas of Badami, Chalukyas of Kalyani, Kadambas, Banavasi, and Hoysalas. Later, it was conquered by Harihara and Bukka, integrating it into the Vijayanagara Empire.

## V. LEPAKSHI'S ASSOCIATION WITH THE RAMAYANA

It is believed that there is a connection between Lepakshi and the Ramayana. When the bird Jatayu encountered Rama, Rama placed his hand on Jatayu's back, and said, "Lay Pakshi" ("Arise, bird"). This is how the name Lepakshi came into being. There are several other stories associated with it as well.

The small temple housing the three deities Papanasleshwara, Veerabhadra, and Bhadrakali was initially a modest structure, later renovated by Veerupanna nayak. Subsequently, the Raghunatha Temple was annexed to it. The temple complex includes various structures such as the Mahamandapa, Natya Mandapa, Kalyana Mandapa, kitchen, Somavara Mandapa, and several other small temples and pavilions. Sculptures and paintings adorn all these places. The Natya

Mandapa features beautiful paintings, while the Kalyana Mandapa, Mahamandapa, and Natya Mandapa display intricate sculptural art on their pillars, along with narrative panels depicting stories. Even the smaller sculptures convey narratives.

The social life of the Vijayanagara Empire can be understood through its art and architecture, portraying various aspects of society such as deities, kings, courtiers, scholars, and common people, reflecting diverse economic levels and social statuses. Particularly noteworthy are their adornments. The citizens of the Vijayanagara Empire were highly attracted to jewelry. Various types of adornments are depicted in their sculptures and paintings. However, nose rings are conspicuously absent.

There is a prevailing opinion that artists and sculptors were unable to depict nose rings in their work. But it's not a difficult task for the artists of such high merit. The absence of nose ring adornments has led to efforts to explore the reasons behind it in this essay.

## VI. THE HISTORY OF NOSE RING ADORNMENTS IN INDIA





Paintings in Lepakshi Temple showing various ornaments except nose rings

Mentions of nose ornaments appear in the writings of foreign travelers in India during the 17th to 18th centuries. Edward Terry<sup>6</sup> described nose rings in his writings around 1790, referring to them as "Hindu nattha."

The author Tavenier<sup>7</sup> wrote about very large size of nose ornaments worn by Arab women. They were large enough to allow the fist of hand to pass through them.

Hanway<sup>8</sup>, another writer, described the nose ornaments worn by Persian women.

Gode has written that nose rings and other nose adornments came to India with the advent of Muslim rule<sup>9</sup>. Hence, this practice is not indigenous to India but originated in Arabia and spread here due to Muslim influence. Depictions of nose ornaments in art and literature are seen after this period.

K.N. Chatterjee<sup>10</sup> wrote that under the guidance of Indian artists, temples were built in Southeast Asian countries, such as Borobudur in the 8th century and Prambanan in the 9th century, but nose ornaments are not visible in the sculptures from these periods. There are also no such depictions in the Dunhuang Temple.

Even in Akbar's Razmnama<sup>11</sup> (Book of War) written between 1534 and 1605, there is no mention of nose ornaments.

The Kolis, a community, also did not use this adornment.

They have shown through an observation that the spread of ornaments in India occurred primarily through trade with Burma, Malaya, Bali, Borneo, Thailand, and China<sup>12</sup>. However, nose ornaments are not visible in the eastern regions. They are absent in pictorial arts as well. However, they are seen in the Muslim states of the west.

From this, they have concluded that nose ornaments spread from western India to the eastern regions and were introduced by Muslim rulers.

The nose ring arrived from Muslim rule. They say this ornament is a symbol of slavery. In Arabstan,<sup>13</sup> it was a symbol of slavery.

In the 15th century, this ornament became popular in North India from the Mughal court. However,

it did not spread to South India, where people adhered to their traditions.

In the 16th century, nose rings are visible in miniature paintings.

The nose ring, now popular, started being used in the 19th to 20th centuries.

From this, they have concluded that nose ornaments are foreign decorations.

Anant Alatekar<sup>14</sup> has studied nose ornaments and has made some observations:

1. Wearing a nose ring is considered auspicious. However, there is no mention of nose rings or nose ornaments in Bhartmuni's Natyashasta<sup>7</sup>.
2. There is no mention of nose ornaments in Sanskrit literature.
3. There are no words in Sanskrit for nose ornaments.
4. Words like "nattha," "nathiyā," "natthā," etc., come from the Prakrit language, meaning nose string used for controlling an animal.
5. Nose ornaments from places like Udayagiri, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, Bihar, Patna, Bodh Gaya, Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh, Sanchi, Vathura in Uttar Pradesh, Takshashila in Punjab, Anjanta, Verul, Badami, Madras Presidency, and Amaravati do not appear, but other ornaments are abundant.
6. It is understood that nose ornaments were not prevalent during the Hindu empires in all of India.
7. The tradition of Muslim rule in Puri and Rajasthan began to show nose ornaments in art.
8. Nose ornaments came from Muslim culture.

The book named "Sangrah Chudamani" by Govindacharya, famous around 1750, is a musical work. It contains musical compositions like Rag Nasamani and Rag Nasika.

In the sculpture of Bhavani Mata in Pratapgad,<sup>15</sup> a nose ring is visible. This period refers to the 17th century, the time of Shivaji Maharaj.

The Sanskrit poetry "Saundaryalahari" <sup>16</sup>was written in the 8th century by Shankaracharya, and it mentions nose ornaments. However, Gode has shown that this poetry was not composed in the 8th century but after the 10th century. Therefore, references to nose ornaments come from later centuries. In the "Lilacharitra," Chakradhar Swami describes the nose ring of Mhalsa Devi.

At the Kolkata Museum, a nose ring with four pearls is seen in the statue of Parvati made by Rajput artists. Edward Terry describes nose ornaments when describing Muslim women from 1616 to 1619 during his detailed observation.

## VII. THE ABSENCE OF NOSE ORNAMENTS IN THE LEPAKSHI TEMPLE

The renovation of the Lepakshi Temple took place between 1530 and 1542. In the 16th century, nose ornaments were seen in sculptures and paintings in other parts of India. Still, the influence of Tamil literature and culture is evident in Lepakshi. The painting of Girija Kalyanam in Hampi is based on the poetry of Kumarasambhav by Kalidasa, but the one in Lepakshi is based on Harihara's poetry. Therefore, the influence of Tamil culture on these paintings is evident.

## VIII. INFLUENCE OF TAMIL CULTURE

1. Stories like Siriya, Manunidi Chola, Raja Muchukunda, and Kanappa Nayanar are more popular in Tamil culture. All these stories are depicted in Lepakshi.
2. Although stories like Siriya Charitram are popular in the Kannada and Telugu regions, they are slightly different. The stories depicted here closely resemble the Siruthondar Nadagam of Tamil drama. Hence, Kannada and Telugu cultures were closer to Tamil culture.
3. When Pallava King Narasimha Varman defeated the Pulakeshin II, the king of Vatapi, his general was Paranjyoti. The king was delighted to see the bravery of his general in battle. Paranjyoti was originally from the village mentioned by Saint Tirujnanasambandar in the king's court, where they encouraged him to worship Lord Shiva. He had a son named Siriyalan.
4. Tamil theater focuses more on the rasas of karuna (compassion) and veera (courage). There is a lack of romance and humor. Consequently, romance and humor are absent in Lepakshi's paintings and sculptures, but the rasas of karuna and shoka (sorrow) are evident.
5. Vijayanagara's influence in Karnataka and Telugu regions led to cultural exchanges. There were

military, economic, and cultural ties with Tanjavur. Therefore, the influence of Tamil theater is seen in these paintings.

It is thus evident that nose ornaments were influenced by Tamil culture in Lepakshi. However, Islamic culture had a minimal influence on Tamil Nadu and the states to its south<sup>17</sup>. Hence, although nose ornaments began to be depicted in sculptures and paintings from the 16th century, the influence of Islamic culture in Tamil Nadu was minimal.

A nose ornament is seen in the picture of Saraswati in the Tirubambadi temple of Padmanabha Swamy temple<sup>18</sup>. Gode gives the date as 14th century. But the Tirubambadi temple was built in the 16th century when King Martanda Deva Varma renovated this temple. Therefore, the picture of Saraswati was painted in the 16th century or later.

From the 12th century, the Islamic sultanate began in Delhi. Later, Islamic culture started influencing Indian regions. Nose ornaments were also included in this influence. Andhra Pradesh and Hyderabad used more pearls in nose ornaments. Hence, nose ornaments became visible. However, Tamil Nadu did not see much influence from Islamic culture. Nose ornaments were smaller in size there. Attention is not paid to them; they are so small. They were used only during wedding ceremonies and Bharatanatyam performances. Hence, even though the Lepakshi Temple underwent renovations in the 16th century, nose ornaments are not visible in the sculptures and paintings due to the minimal influence of Islamic culture in Tamil Nadu.

In Tamil Nadu since the 20th century, a pebbled nokkupottu or muthu<sup>19</sup> studded with saffron and diamonds has been in daily use. Currently, the most popular nose ornament is a crescent shaped nose with stones and a fringe of pearls. Chamki is also popular.

## IX. CONCLUSION

In Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, during the Vijayanagara Empire period, at the Virabhadra Temple in the village of Hindupur Taluka, women's nose ornaments are not visible in the paintings. Due to the economic prosperity of the Vijayanagara Empire, various ornaments are visible in the sculptures and paintings of both men and women. Nose ornaments came from Islamic culture to India. They spread across India from the 16th century onwards. Although the temple was renovated in the 16th century, nose ornaments are not visible in the sculptures and paintings of Lepakshi Temple due to the minimal influence of Islamic culture in Tamil Nadu.

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