

RAMAYANA IN ORISSAN ART WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A RAMAYANA
SCENE DISCOVERED WITHIN LINGARAJ
COMPLEX IN BHUBANESWAR

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The epic Ramayana is not merely a scripture depicting life & message of Sri Rama (Nara-rupi Narayana) or Lila of Lord Vishnu in the form of human being born in Ayodhya as son of King Dasaratha and Kaushalaya, but a document per excellence of the ideals of a perfect human being (Purushottama) based on respect for truth, righteousness and obedience to parents, spiritual experience, an eternal source of religious inspiration and spiritual awakening of masses.

Ramayana is held in high esteem throughout the length and breadth of our country i.e., Bharatvarsha and subsequently traveled beyond its borders viz. Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Indo-China, Cambodia, Java, Malayasia and gained popularity among the masses of the above referred countries.

The original Valmiki Ramayana, though undergone with changes in post Valmiki period composed by various writers and regional influences are figuring prominently, but its popularity and sanctity never waned at any point of time which has been exemplified with the Tamil Kamban Ramayana, Ranga Ramayana in Telugu, Rama Katha patu in Malayalam, Ram Charita Manasa in Hindi and Krutibas Ramayana in Bengali language etc.

The above noted Ramayanas throw much light on the social conditions prevailed in those remote past.

Though Archaeologists and scholars are not unanimous about the date or period of Ramayana but its popularity is well recorded at least from the Pre-Christian era through Buddhist Jataka stories viz. Anamaka Jatakas and Dasaratha Jataka speak influence of Ramayana on other religious Texts also apart from its own popularity within the Hindu community of the country. But in the classical period onwards sculptural depictions of stories are inscribed on the walls of the Temple of that period.

Popular scenes from Ramayana are also reported from the outer walls of many early Temples of Orissa viz. Maya Mriga badha in Swarnajaleswar temple Ravananugraha in Satruganeswar and Parasurameshwar, Bali Sugriva Yuddha, meeting of Rama-Sugriva with Banara Sena (Warriors) in Swarnajaleswar, Sita Harana (abduction) and scene of

Setu Baandhana in Varahi temple at Chaurasi, and Ramayana scene of Manikeswar and Simha Nath Temple in Distt. Cuttack and within the vicinity of Viraja Temple at Jaipur are note worthy. Ramayana scenes are also found/reported in the palm leaf manuscript. Orissa is also well known for her palm leaf manuscripts. Even wall painting and pata paintings are not left out for incorporation of Ramayana, drawings related with Ramayana are also encountered in the Odissi paintings.

Throughout India the Legends are prevalent connected with the epics irrespective of geographical barrier. The scene of Ramayana are also inscribed on the outer walls of many early temples of Orissa as stated above.

Ramayana scenes are not available on the outer walls of the present Lingaraaj temple, but a chance discovery in November 1995 attest the fact that prior to construction of present Lingaraj temple, within the complex some early temple was in existence with sculptural panels on Ramayana which might have got dilapidated and the stones (raw-materials) reused for future construction, as has been experienced by the Author from a number of temples in Bhubaneswar and Jajpur area while conservations works undertaken.

An attempt is made here to highlight a very popular Ramayana scene which was discovered from the southern side courtyard lying underneath the existing stone paved floor of Lord Lingaraj temple, Bhubaneswar.

While restoration work of much undulated southern part of the courtyard was undertaken by the Bhubaneswar Circle of Archaeological Survey of India, an unique panel depicting Rama and Lakshmana recovered. The stone slab holding this valuable scene from the Ramayana was acting as mere flag stone of the existing floor in upside down condition was part of an unknown early temple like that of Parasurameshwar and Swaranajaleshwar etc.

At the time of construction of stone pavement, the above slab (panel) was reused by the massons, without knowing its importance and got it chiseled on all four sides to get a desired shape and size by damaging the original sculpture and used its smooth back portion to lay over the floor and for centuries together the panel remained unnoticed underneath the floor of the courtyard. It is needless to say that such instances (re-use of raw materials) have come to the notice of the author in many other places also while undertaken repairing work of temples, to meet out the necessities of raw materials, valuable sculptures, architectural members dressed and refixed inside wall or floor being ignorant of their importance.

A brief detail of the extant panel are as follows :

The size is roughly 45 C.M. X 70 C.M.

On the extreme left side of the panel, the figure of Lakshmana is carved, seated in vilasa pose on raised platform. The left leg rests on the Asana (seat) and the right leg in hanging downwards. He is holding his bow by both arms. The right shoulder of

Lakshmana is chiseled out and badly damaged for making required size for placing it on floor. The right shoulder and right knee too got damaged and lost. Lakshmana is having a usual Jatamukuta, prominent eye brows and elongated ears and oval face with sharp nose, drooping eyes, fine lips and chin. Stylistically it is of Gupta origin of 5-6 C.A.D. Next to Lakshmana towards further right a group of four monkeys or Banara Sena are carved. One monkey close to Lakshmana is standing in usual pose with folded hands. Three of them shown carved in between figures of Rama and Lakshmana in standing pose and 4th one shown seated near the Asana of Lakshmana and looking at Rama, may be Hanumana. The figure close to Rama is holding a garland by his both arms and he is bedecked with jewels like bangles, girdles, ear-rings and chain of beads speaks of his status and identified as Sugriva, the King of Banaras of Kishkindhya. The lower legs below knee of Sugriva too lost due to the process of merciless dressing by the masons or stone dresser.

The figure of Rama on the extreme right side of the panel is highly dignified size is bigger compared to other figures and having divine look. He is shown seated on a raised platform. An umbrella is also carved above Rama's head close to right side speaks of his status of a Divine person or the King. The half of the left side portion of Rama is completely damaged due to chiseling. But his right hand shown close to chest and holding a fruit like object possibly offered to him by Sugriva and his accompis to Lord Rama. In the neck of Rama a chain made out of several beads is added and bangle is seen on right arm. Even a gold chain is shown tied with the waist over lower garments.

If this panel could have been in intact condition more realistic scene could have been visible. But even after the damages on top bottom and sides, the scene speaks of an important episode from Ramayana i.e. Rama and Lakshmana ultimately reached to Risvamukha parvata in search of Sita who was abducted by Demon King Ravana. And while reached to the land where Sugriva was living in exile due to fear of his brother Bali, the King Sugriva accompanied by his banara Sena, welcomed Rama and Lakshmana and hospitalities were extended by offering them Uttama Asana, a suitable seat for dignified Rama and his beloved brother Lakshmana. A fruit is offered to Rama out of devotion and finally a garland is arranged to welcome Shri Rama held by Sugriva in his both arms in the pose of garlanding Shri Rama within short while.

The realistic representation of the scene, the sentiments, the expressions of each individual are superb and depicting a very- very heart-touching scene from Ramayana (Kishkindhya Kanda).

Stylistically the sculpture could be datable to 5th-6th century A.D.

References :

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