CHAPTER – VII

CONCLUSION
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"A man with no taste in arts, music and literature is a beast without a tail and a pair of horns." ¹ The people in this country, perhaps, strongly believed this statement. Hence their taste in arts, particularly in sculpture, is manifest in the thousands of relief panels adorning the temple walls and the pillars narrating a variety of themes both secular and religious. These panels as objects of art are like "documentaries of a thought world that has departed. These creations have possessed the thought forms of by gone ages with all the vitality and inspiration of the consciousness that brought unending social and religious endeavour of devotees to depict the forms of the gods and goddesses they worshipped".² The religious conditions in India underwent many changes during the course of its history and so did its mythology. All such changes and developments found permanent place in the narrative art of the country.

The first chapter brings out such changing aptitudes and developments of forms of gods and goddesses as seen through the narrative sculpture and paintings of India. Narrative technique started with Buddhism and was later adopted by the Jains. Numerous Jātaka tales and incidents from the life of Buddha were narrated in sculpture at Bārhut, Sāンchi, Sāранāth, Amarāvati and in Gāndhāra and Mathura schools of art. Episodes from the Jain lore were narrated in the caves of Udayagiri, Khandagiri and in the temples of Mount Abu etc. The Buddhist themes were also delineated in the paintings of Ajanta. The Jain themes were narrated in the palm leaf manuscripts of western India and other places. In Rāyalaseema sculptured panels depicting Buddhist or Jain mythology are not found now.

Narrative art is more appreciated and patronised by the Hindus. Panels depicting the epic and mythological themes are found in large number in all parts of the country.
They can be divided into Saivite and Vaishnavite panels. Saivite panels are seen even from the Guptas age. Siva receiving Ganga, Kirātārjunīyam, Siva killing Andhaka, Tripurasuras etc., Rāvana shaking mount Kailāsa, the marriage of Siva and Pārvati and Siva blessing various gods and sages are the themes popularly depicted in the country. The stories of nāyanārs are narrated all over the south. The growth of Vaishnavism, especially in the medieval period, led to its domination of the narrative art in the country. The growth of Vaishnavite mythology, literature, growing popularity of the epics and the rapid growth of the cults of Rāma and Krishna resulted in rapid expansion of Vaishnavite narrative art.

The Vaishnavite themes may be divided again into the Bhāgavata, Rāmāyana, Krishnālīla and Mahābhārata themes. Among Bhāgavata themes Gajendramoksha, Varāha, Narasimha and Vāmana seem to be very popular. The earliest depiction of Gajendramoksha is found on the walls of the Dāsavatāra temple, Deogarh. Even in Rāyalaseema these themes are very popular. Rāmāyana and Krishnālīla themes are represented more in sculpture than other themes. The same pattern is observed even in Rāyalaseema. Detailed narration of these themes is found even in the Guptas period. The temples at Deogarh, Nāchana Kuthāra, Apshad etc., contain many such themes. Krishna’s childhood pranks and his heroic deeds attracted the attention of the craftsmen all over the country. Themes from the Mahābhārata are also narrated at many places. Episodes related to Bhīma and Arjuna are mostly narrated. Bhīshma lying on the bed of arrows, Arjuna hitting the fish target and Bhīma engaged in club fight in Kurukṣetra are some popular themes found in sculpture. Even in Rāyalaseema we find a few Mahābhārata themes.
The Indian sculptor possessed a flair for narrating episodes from daily life and historical events. Tales from Panchatantra, secular themes, music and dance in various regions and hunting are vividly described in sculpture. Historical events are found as early as the Sunga and Sātavāhana periods. The life of Kharavela depicted in the caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri, narration of the history of the Pallavas in the Vaikunṭha Perumāl temple, Kanchi, episodes from the history of Eastern Gangas, the Chōlas, the Chandēlas, the Hoysalas are some of the historical themes narrated. The Vijayadasami festivities and the Maharnavami processions during the Vijayanagara period depicted on the prākāras of Ramachandra temple, Hampi were identified by A.L. Dallapiccola, J.M. Fritz, George Michell and S. Rajasekharā. A few historical themes are found even in the Vijayanagara paintings. Even in Rāyalaseema many secular and historical episodes are narrated in sculpture.

In the second chapter the influence of the contemporary society on narrative art is discussed. The political uncertainty, socio-economic backwardness and cultural contacts with neighbouring regions thoroughly influenced the narrative art of Rāyalaseema. This region had peculiar political conditions. It was mostly under the control of major powers of South India whose capitals and interests were outside this region. The local dynasties such as the Rēnati Chōlas, the Bānas, the Vaidumbas and the Nōlamba Pallavas shifted their alligiance to these major powers so often that they could not rule independently for some time. The land changed hands frequently from one dynasty to the other. It had been a battleground for centuries and was used as a buffer state between warring powers. The numerous memorial stones for the heroes who died in battles are examples of the political uncertainty of Rāyalaseema. On some of them
the battle scenes are narrated. The shattered peace of this war-torn land resulted in its economic backwardness.

Even the nature was unkind to Rāyalaseema. This region did not have adequate water, much fertile lands and not even good number of cows and buffaloes. The people produced and ate millets, reared sheep and goats, wore coerce cotton cloth and ornaments made of inferior metals. They were burdened with heavy taxation. The ever-increasing difficulties of the daily life forced them to depend more on god for solutions and salvation. Most of the temples in Rāyalaseema were built at places where there was adequate water. Many temples were built on the banks of river Penna. As the cows were rare they were treated as precious and were even deified. It was believed that the cows had the talent of locating hidden deity figures and were said to be in the habit of emptying their milk on them. Such scenes are portrayed in sculpture in many temples. Vishnu in the form of Gōpalakrishna, i.e., Krishna the cowherd is worshipped by all.

During the Vijayanagara period Rāyalaseema received better attention. The ruler's investment in small scale irrigation improved its economy which resulted in the patronage of temple art. So it is said that during Vijayanagara era irrigation technology and temple building are linked to one another. The increase in trade in this period also contributed to the growth of temple building and narrative art. All temples built by the merchant guilds and the ruling class exhibited perfect carvings. Even the poor and lower middle class made donations to temples in cash and kind. Inscriptions of this region refer to many such donations.

The economy of this region influenced its social and cultural conditions. In Rāyalaseema caste differences were many. Social evils ruled the society. Education was limited. The learned brahmins and the men of letters did not love to live here. As
Rayalaseema is located in the midst of fertile Telugu area, Tamil and Kannada regions. It came under the influence of surrounding regions. Every religious and cultural movement started in the neighbouring areas strongly influenced Rayalaseema. Migration from other regions, mostly during the Vijayanagara period, also influenced the society here. The interaction with the Tamil brahmins, the alwars and the vīra Saivites brought many new themes. As a result we find themes such as Jalamāyamūrti, nāyanār themes, Gajendramoksha etc., in the narrative art here. The cult of Chennakēśava from Karnataka and the influence of Hoysalas also dominated the temple art in this region.

The people did not have enough knowledge of their religion and mythology. The religious literature in Sanskrit could not reach them. The development of vernacular literature also did not reach the common folk who were uneducated. So the people here created and added many episodes to the popular epic and puranic themes to suit their tastes. The craftsmen adopted all such local, variant versions in their art. But rare themes and themes from the original Sanskrit works were narrated in the temples of Pushpagiri, Śrisailam and Ahobilam as these places were educational centres. Temples at Penukonda, Tadipatri, Lepākshi and Animela also exhibited such panels as these places were centres of trade. The wealthy business encouraged men of letters. The guidance of these scholars must have encouraged the craftsmen to depict many interesting themes in sculpture. The attempt to bring the forest dwellers into the fold of Hindu society resulted in creation of interesting stories connecting Siva and Narasimha with Chenchu women. Such themes are also found in sculpture. The general trends of medieval sculpture also had their bearings on the narrative art of Rayalaseema. Thus we find the impact of the society on the narrative art of this region.
The next four chapters deal with the narrative art of Rāyalaseema. Many temples in this region are filled with relief panels depicting mythological themes. As elsewhere even in Rāyalaseema “the temple was the centre of religious and cultural education. The sculpture and paintings that adorned the walls of the temple and the icons on the corridors attracted the masses and practically imparted audio-visual education.” For the uneducated masses the temple thus acted as a school. The numerous mythological sculptures on the walls and pillars are so many aids for their concentration.

In the third chapter Saivite themes depicted in the temples of this region are discussed. About thirty-five different themes are selected for study. The lives of the nāyanārs described in Periyapurānam, Basavapurānam and Panditārādhya charitra are narrated on the outer walls of the Mallikārjuna temple, Śrisailam and in the Siva temples at Attirāla, Penukonda and Lēpākshi. Fifteen such stories are discussed. While the Śrisailam panels are very brief, the panels at Penukonda and other places are elaborate. The most important episodes from the life of each nāyanār are depicted at Śrisailam. Very rare themes, some of which are not identified so far and not known to the people now, are narrated in Rāyalaseema. The story of Bhima inviting Purushāmrīga to come to the sacrificial hall of Dharmarāja is one such which is identified for the first time. This theme is found at twelve places in this region. In all the places the devotion of Purushāmrīga to Siva is highlighted. At Attirāla the last part of the story i.e., the impartial judgement of Dharmarāja is given importance.

Jalamāyamurti is another such theme found mostly in the later Chōla temples of Tamilnadu. Surprisingly this theme is found at six places in this region. The narration at Śrisailam is the best among all such panels. Siva lying in the lap of Pārvati, dazed after consuming Hālāhala, while the celestial world watches him anxiously and prays for his
safety, is a very rare theme, which is not reported from other regions. This theme is narrated in the sanctum, and on its four inner walls of the Nilakantēśvara temple, Surutupalli. The anxiety of the goddess and the gratitude of the gods expressed in the panels touch the heart.

Siva and Kāli competing with each other in tāndava dance and the goddess conceding her defeat while Siva enacts Urdhvatāndava is another rare theme, which is not yet reported from the other regions. Siva wearing his fallen manāira and earstud while in dance without the notice of anyone is another rare theme. R.N. Saletore and A.Gurumurti identified it as Siva getting ready for his dance. Both the themes are skillfully portrayed in sculpture in the Chennakēśava temple, Pushpagiri. Vināyaka circumambulating his parents to claim ganādhipatya is another rare theme found in the same temple. Siva killing Vyaghṛasura, narrated on the outer wall of sanctum of the Siva temple, Attirāla is also not reported from other regions. Ādisankara seeking permission from his mother to renounce the world, detailed narration of Sarabhēsa subduing Narasimha, disruption of the sacrifice of Daksha by Virabhadra, Visvakarma proving the superiority of a jangam (Siva devotee) are other rare themes found in the Śrīsailam temple. The last mentioned is identified as Visvakarma weighing a balance by earlier scholars.

The marriage of Siva and Pārvati is a popular theme in Rāyalaseema. The most beautiful depiction of the theme is found at Śrīsailam. The most elaborate depiction of the theme is found in the Sangamēśvara temple, Animela in thirty panels. Siva mesmerizing all the onlookers around him in his Bhikshātanamūrti form is found in the Siva temples of Hēmavati, Attirāla, Śrīkālahasti and Śrīsailam etc. Sthalapurāṇa themes are found at many places. A cow emptying its milk on a Sivalinga is found in the
Kapileśvara temple, Tirupati, Siva temples at Śrīśailam, Animēla etc. The most detailed narration of the Sthalapurāṇa of Śrīkālahasti and the story of Kannappa are found in the Kāsivisvēśvara temple, Penukonda. In the Śrīśailam panels its Sthalapurāṇa is narrated in detail.

Kirātārjunīyam is the most popular Saivite theme in this region. More than hundred panels are found in Rāyalaseema. The most elaborate narration is in the Sangamēśvara Temple, Animēla where it is found in twenty-six panels. It is followed by the Siva temple, Penukonḍa (twenty panels) and Vīrabhadra temple, Lēpākshi (fourteen panels). The best narration is found in the Chennakēśava Temple Complex, Pushpagiri. The local variant versions of the theme dominate the depiction in Rāyalaseema. Different versions of the theme found in the Mahābhārata, Bhāravi’s Kirāṭārjunīyam etc., are skillfully merged with the local traditions while depicting the theme. The paintings in the Vīrabhadra temple, Lēpākshi include a few paintings depicting Kirāṭārjunīyam and Manuchōla themes. The educational and religious atmosphere of Pushpagiri and Śrīśailam must be a guiding force for the craftsmen at these places. So we find rare and attractive themes in these places. The prosperity of Attirāla, Penukonḍa, Animēla and Lēpākshi and the patronage of the merchant guilds of these areas must have contributed to large-scale depiction of Saivite themes.

In the fourth chapter the Bhāgavata themes are discussed. Gajēndramōksha is a popular theme in Rāyalaseema. Every Vaishnavite temple in this region contains at least a couple of panels depicting Vishnu descending on Garuḍa and protecting the elephant from the deadly clutch of the crocodile. Narration of the theme at many places is a result of the influence of ālvars over Rāyalaseema. The most attractive depiction is found in the Varāhaswami temple, Tirumala.
Hanuman subduing the pride of Nārada, Tumburu, Garuḍa and Sudarsana is a very rare theme. The earliest narration of the theme in the region is found in the Agastīśvara temple, Chilamakūru. It is found in the Hōysala temples of Belur and Halebid. But even there Hanuman subduing the pride of Garuda is only shown. In the Śrīsailam temple Hanuman subduing the pride of Nārada and Tumburu by singing a rock-melting tune is elaborately depicted. Garuḍa’s futile attempts to break open the rock in which Hanuman placed the cymbals of the divine musicians is depicted at many places in the region. The Chennakēśava temple, Chukkaluru contains a similar panel in which even Sudarsana, the wheel of Vishnu, also participates to cut open the rock but fails to do so. Though the carving is crude is here the theme and vigorous action depicted are worthy of praise.

The ten incarnations of Vishnu are depicted all over Rāyalaseema. Vishnu in Mastyāvatara killing the demon, who stole the four vedas is beautifully depicted in the Venkataramana temple, Tādipatri and Rāma temple, Onṭimitta. The former is the best representation of the two. Sāgaramadhana, the churning of the milky ocean, is portrayed in a peculiar style, not observed by earlier scholars so far. Instead of the gods and the demons the gods and the monkeys churn the ocean, which is against all literary descriptions of the theme. It is surprising to note that even at Ahōbilam where there was Ahōbilamatha, a famous seat of learning, the theme is depicted erroneously. So is the case with the panel of the Gōvindarāja temple, Tirupati, a place where Rāmanuja lived for a considerable time spreading religious knowledge. Errors in the sculptural portrayal of the theme bring out the socio educational backwardness of this region.

The story of Vishnu assuming the form of Varāha is not popular here. Only in the Rāma temple, Penukonḍa the detailed narration of the theme in three panels is
noticed. Narasimha is a popular theme of the craftsmen. It is also due to the influence of the ālwarṣ who praised the man-lion form as Singaperumal. In most of the places Narasimha overpowering the demon and killing him are shown in two or three panels. A local version connecting Narasimha with a tribal girl (Chenchulakshmi) is a peculiarity found in Rāyalaseema and Karnataka. It is more popular in Kurnool district. The Navanarasimha temples at Ahōbilam contain many panels depicting Narasimha wooing Chenchulakshmi and leading a hunter’s life with her. Narasimha removing a thorn from the foot of his tribal wife is depicted at many places. The Narasimha panels of Penukonda, Tirumala and Alipiri are attractive. The Chukkalūru panels are crudely chiselled.

Vāmana is another popular theme here. The Agastiśvara temple, Chilamakūru contains the earliest representation of the theme in three panels in this region. Here the three panels grow in size just as Vāmana grows up as Trivikrama. In the Venkataramana temple, Tādipatri Trivikrama is shown with three legs, which does not have agamic sanction. The water with which Brahma washes his upraised leg is shown as coming down as a river in which a few fish are also shown. It is depicted similarly but in a crude way in the Chukkalūru temple. In another narration at Tādipatri Vāmana is shown with a small beard, which is also against agamic descriptions. Vāmana should always be shown as a young lad. The story of Parasurāma is not popular here. Rēnuka, the mother of Parasurāma is worshipped mostly as a village goddess of fertility. The Kāsivisvēśvara and Rāma temples at Penukonda contain Parasurāma themes such as Parasurāma subduing Kārtaviryārjuna etc. A sculpture of the Kalkyāvatāra is found on a pillar in the mahāmandapa of the Venkaṭaramana temple, Tādipatri.
The second part of the chapter deals with Krishnalīla themes, which are most popular all over the region. Hundreds of panels are noticed in Rāyalaseema. But continuous, thematic narration of the life of Krishna is found in the Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tādipatri and Rāma temple, Penukonda. There are thirty-three panels on the outer walls of the sanctum, antarāla and mukhamandapa of the Tādipatri temple. They describe Krishna’s life upto his marriage with Rukmini. On the pillars of the mahāmandapa Krishna’s heroic deeds and his encounters with the demons sent by Kamsa are narrated. The narration seems to be strongly influenced by Pōtana’s Āndhramahābhāgavatam as the literary description and sculptural portrayal perfectly tally with each other. Krishna eating butter while Yāśōda is churning, Krishna teasing young gōpikas, yamālārjuna episode, Pralambāsura vadhā and Rukmini kalyānam are the masterpieces here. The difference in the style of carving indicates the hands of more than one craftsman. The craftsmen here are not mere imitators of the styles or themes found elsewhere. They adopt a novel method and add something special in rendering popular themes. The continuity is maintained in all the panels. The relief is bold, contours are pleasing, dress and ornaments of the figures are attractive and emotions and expressions rendered are natural.

On the pillars of the mahāmandapa certain rare themes such as Trināvarta vadhā, Vyōmāsura vadhā and Krishna showing the Universe in his mouth are depicted. The imaginative skill of the artists in rendering almost an impossible theme of Trināvarta vadhā is praise worthy. It is found only in the Khajuraho temple in sculpture and in the Pahari paintings in the entire country. If the panels are meant to attract the devotees to the temple and educate them in Hindu mythology then the artists here are totally successful in their mission.
The narration in the Rāma temple, Penukonda gives more importance to the birth of Krishna. Vishnu appearing in the dream of Dévaki in the jail of Kamsa, Vasudēva carrying the newborn child to Brindāvan, exchange of babies and Kamsa's attempt to kill the baby are delineated here with consummate skill. Balarāma killing the demon in the guise of a bull, the cowherds worshipping Mount Gōvardhana, gōpikas serving food to Krishna, Rāsalīla and coronation of Ugrasēna are narrated at Peukonda. These are not found at Tādipatri. The Penukonda craftsmen made a sincere attempt to excel their counterparts of Tādipatri. In most of the panels describing Krishna's encounter with the asuras the asuras fall dead upside-down in their original form. Similar style is noticed in the panels in the T.T.D. Museum and Gōvindarāja temple, Tirupati. The relief is better than that at Tādipatri. But the figures are a bit bulky. The swords are larger. Krishna is shown not with a tuft as at Tādipatri but with long matted hair, which is peculiar. Krishna killing Kuvalayapīḍa, the elephant and Kamsa vadha panels are the best here.

At most other places only important episodes from Krishna's life are depicted. Vēnugōpāla panels at Attirāla, Chennakēśava temple, Pushpagiri and Siddhavatam are the most attractive among such panels. Vēnugōpāla, Gōvardhanagiridhāri, gōpika mānalōla, Kāliyamardana are the most popular episodes depicted in Rāyalaseema. In Gōvardhanadhāri panel of Śrīkālahasti Krishna is shown with his right hand in abhaya, which is rare. Incidentally similar style is noticed in a panel in the Hazara Rāma temple, Hampi. The Hōli festival at Brindavan depicted in the Gōvindarāja temple, Tirupati is also unique in this region. Hōli is a popular festival in the Vijayanagaragama empire. The foreign travelers noted that the people did not spare even the king or queen from the innocent mischief of spraying coloured water. Krishna killing a lion, Krishna and his
consort riding Garuḍa to bring Pārijāta are some rare themes found in the Rāma temple, Onṭimittā. Such scenes are also seen in the Hoysala temples. In all the panels at Onṭimittā which describe Krishna's encounter with the asuras the power and ease with which the lord performs the miracles are shown clearly. The asuras do not stand a match to him at all. Popular episodes are shown here in a different style. In Pūtana vadha panel, Pūtana is shown as a woman from an aristocrat family. At other places she is shown as an ugly woman reduced to skin and bones. In the yamalārjuna episode Krishna is shown as pulling a tree with both hands and pushing another with his back. In the Vēnugopāla panel even a snake entwined to a tree listens to Krishna's music. In the T.T.D. Museum panel at Tirupati, Krishna's encounter with various demons is given more importance. Here he is shown as kicking each demon with all his force. In the Vēnugopāla panel the women are shown as so much immersed in his music that they even forget their sarees slipping down. Krishna breaking the bow in Kamsa's Yāgāśāla, Krishna forcefully taking the royal clothes from the washerman, Ugrasēna's coronation are very rare themes depicted in this large panel.

On the whole every incident is narrated from Krishna's life. If a few are not shown at one place they are found at another. The Attirāla, Pushpagiri, Tādipatri, Penukonda and Siddhavaṭam panels are very attractive and they stand comparison to any other panel of the same theme in the country. Even at Chukkaluru where crude carving is noticed, Krishnalīla panels received better attention. It reveals the popularity of this theme in this region.

The fifth chapter deals with the epic themes. Rāmāyana has profound influence on the culture and narrative art of Rāyalaseema. Not less than five hundred panels are noticed in Rāyalaseema. The panels at Attirāla are some of the oldest in this region
They are carved almost in the round exhibiting excellent workmanship. One such depicting Hanuman’s encounter with Simhika is one of the best panels of this region. In the Chennakeśava temple, Pālagiri, the ring of Rāma reaching Sītā in Asōkavana is depicted in three panels. They exhibit constant movement and continuous action. Some of the best Rāmāyana panels, which depict rare themes, are found in the Chennakeśava temple, Pushpagiri. Sravana kumara episode, Rāma killing Vālī, Vibhīshana seeking asylum, Sāgara saranāgati are the best panels here. The last mentioned is found only here in the entire region. Diversity in the designs of dress and jewellery is skilfully achieved. Minute details are taken care of. The carving is bold and intricate. At Āhobilam and Gōvindarāja temple, Tirupati Saptatālabhanjana and incidents from Sundarakānda are given preference. In the temples of Tirupati Rāmā’s coronation is depicted at three places. A detailed narration of Rāmāyana is seen in the Kōdanḍarāma temple, Tirupati and on the inner walls of a ruined gopura at Timmapuram. In the Rāma temple panels Bālakāṇḍa, Sundarakāṇḍa and Yuddhakāṇḍa are described more elaborately than the other parts of the epic.

At Timmapuram, the most detailed narration of the epic in entire Chittoor district is noticed. It is depicted in seventy panels here. Most of these panels closely resemble the Hazāra Rāma temple, Hampi. Attendants carrying the bow of Siva, Rāma breaking the bow, the golden deer episode, Saptatālabhanjana, Vālī vadha and the battle scenes are some such panels, which are similar to the Hampi panels. Visvāmitra pointing a deer to Rāma and Lakshmana, Ahalya bidding farewell to Rāma and others, Rāma carrying a dead deer after killing Mārīcha to lull the fears of Sītā are some panels which reveal the imaginative ability of the craftsmen. Sage Agasthya teaching Ādityahridaya to Rāma during the latter’s battle with Rāvana is a very rare incident. It is found only here in the
entire region. The golden deer episode, Hanuman’s encounter with Simhika, Parasurāma challenging Rāma etc., exhibit vigorous action and constant movement. All these panels are identified for the first time.

The depiction in the Kōdanḍarāma temple, Onṭimiṭṭa is more faithful to Rangaṇāḍha Rāmāvana. Yuddha-kāṇḍa gets top priority. Hanuman’s encounter with Kālanēmi is vividly described on the pillars. The depiction perfectly tallies with the description in Rangaṇāḍha Rāmāvana. Nowhere else in this region this episode is so effectively portrayed. These panels are also identified for the first time.

A detailed narration of the epic is found on the lintel of kalyāṇa-maṇḍapa of the Tirumala temple in twenty panels. The courtesans of Dasaradha alluring Rishyasringa and taking him to Ayodhya are very rare episodes. At other places such as Tāḍipatri, Hampi etc., Rishyasringa performing the sacrifice alone is shown. The above episodes are found in the Chennakēśava temple, Chukkalūru, besides Tirumala. The victory celebrations in Ayōdhya and Rāma’s coronation are given more important in the Tirumala temple.

The best and the most elaborate narration is found on the outer walls of the sanctum, antarāla and mukha-maṇḍapa of the Chintala Venkaṭaramana temple, Tāḍipatri. About one hundred and sixty panels describe the theme with minute details. The sculptors bestowed equal attention to the first five kāṇdas of the epic. Among Bālakāṇḍa panels, the queens of Dasaradha sitting with their children, Visvāmitra giving divine weapons to Rāma, Ahalya sāpaviṁochana, Parasurāma challenging Rāma are the best. Ayodhyakāṇḍa is described in detail only in this temple. Kaikēyi entering kōpagrīha, kaikēyi demanding her boons, Sīta’s passionate request to come to forest along with Rāma are the best representations in sculpture. Among Aranyakāṇḍa panels,
mutilation of Sūrpanakha, celestials showering flowers on Rāma, Rāma and Lakshmana talking with a tribal woman deserve special praise. The vānaras meeting Sampāti, Svayamprabha, Śīta in Asākavana, Hanuman tied by Indrajit, the Madhuvana episodes and Lakshmana showing the Amritabhānda to Rāma after the death of Rāvana are other interesting and attractive panels here.

The different styles of carving suggest that two or three craftsmen worked on the panels. The sizes of the figures are based on the age and importance of the characters depicted. The main characters are a shade taller, possess better dress and jewellery and occupy prime positions in the panels. A pleasing variety is shown in the designs of dress and crowns. The figures are never idle. They exhibit vigorous action and reveal all human emotions superbly. The craftsmen used the pilasters skillfully to depict minor characters. Sculpture and architecture are beautifully merged with each other. The craftsmen are more faithful to the vālmīki version. But they know exactly when to deviate to other versions to create more interest in the theme. The Tādipatri temple “with its sculpture and architecture occupy an important place in the evolution of Vijayanagara art. The temple is a lyric in stone. The reliefs act as a restrained decoration on the wall surface. The temple may be described as a jewel box.”

Another detailed narration in forty-eight panels are seen on the outer walls of Rāma temple, Penukonda. But the panels do not reveal considerable artistic talent and are not as good as the Tādipatri panels. Rāma killing Kabandha and Sabari offering fruits to Rāma are two episodes, which are found only here in entire Rāyalaseema. The Tādipatri panels might have inspired the craftsmen. An attempt to excel their counter parts at Tādipatri can be seen here but it did not yield good results.
The Chennakesava temple, Chukkaluru contains about forty Rāmāyana panels. They are but poor imitations of the Tādipatri panels. The closely built pilasters did not provide enough place for comfortable depiction. Hence the figures appear to be jammed between the pilasters. The few panels depicting the marriage of Rāma are better than the other panels here. All the panels at Tādipatri, Chukkaluru, Penukonda and Timmapuram are identified in this work. A previous work on Rāmāyana panels of Andhradesa also covers a few of them but leaves much to be desired. Some panels are wrongly identified and many others are not mentioned at all in that work.

The next part of the chapter deals with the Mahābhārata themes. As noticed earlier this epic, though popular among the people, is not a favourite theme of the craftsmen because of the difficulties involved in depiction. Nineteen panels are selected for study. Among them, ten panels deal with the battle of Kurukshetra. Among these panels, four panels describe the fight between Bhīma and Bhagadatta. Bhīma and Bhagadatta theme is found in some Hoysala temples. The earliest panel is found in the Attirāla temple followed by Trikūtēśvara, Rudrapādāla and Chennakesava temple complex panels at Pushpagiri. The best is the Attirāla panel and the most elaborate description is found in Chennakesava temple complex, Pushpagiri. In the latter the fight between Bhīma and Bhagadatta is noticed by Arjuna who decides to help his brother. The figures of Arjuna as the warrior and Krishna, adorned with the peacock feathers in his crown, as the charioteer are activated with life and instinct with such vitality that their beauty and realism cannot be easily forgotten.

Nine panels dealing with the Mahābhārata are found in the Chennakesava temple complex. Krishna preaching Gītā to Arjuna is unique and reveals the narrative skill of the craftsmen of this area. "It is a rare representation in Indian Art. The serene grace
shown in Krishna’s face is remarkable. Arjuna’s face and his stance reveal the reverential attitude.” But the fingers of Krishna appear a shade longer and hence are disproportionate to his physique. Bhīma’s encounter with Kubēra during his attempt to fetch Sougandhika flowers is another unique representation found here. It reveals good skill. But the absence of uniformity in the designs of garments, jewellery and weapons is a flaw, which can be noticed only by close observation.

The fight between Arjuna and Karna is another masterpiece in this temple, which exhibits fine conception and excellent execution. Bhīma and Dussāsana fighting and Bhīma and Duryōdhana engaged in club fight are the other episodes from Kurukṣetra. Two more panels in the same temple depicting Krishna signaling to Bhīma to break the thighs of Duryōdhana and Bhīma following the advice are crudely carved in the narrow gala in the adhishtana. They must be the work of an amateur. The fingers of the figures are disproportionately long. The Śrīsailam temple contains a panel showing Arjuna proceeding on his chariot to Kurukṣetra. But the presence of a woman seated in the lap of Krishna, the charioteer, is an error found here. The story of Sibi found only at Śrīsailam in this region and is yet to be reported from other regions is a rare representation in Indian art, which is neatly executed even in low relief. The Mahābhārata panels of Kāsivisvēśvara temple, Penukonda are in very low relief but the craftsman clearly brings out the humiliation of Draupadi on the rugged surface of the wall.

The ten panels describing Arjuna shooting the piscine target to win the hand of Draupadi, found in the Venkataramana temple, Tādipatri, are in better relief and reveal the sculptor’s ability to carve in detail an important episode on the small place available on the pillars. The same theme found in the paintings of nātyamandapa of the Lēpākshi
temple stand testimony to the artistic skill of the Vijayanagara painters. Identical sculptural representations are found in the Hoysala art. Another very rare theme describing Krishna showing visvarūpa is found on a pillar in the Soumyanādha temple, Nandalūr. Thus we find that all the panels are related to Bhīma, Arjuna or Krishna. Though the panels are limited they exhibit rare themes.

The sixth chapter deals with the secular and historical themes. The craftsmen in the Vijayanagara period were also interested to describe day-to-day life in their art besides religious themes. “Possibly never before secular, everyday scenes, such as courtly life, processions, kingly figures and portraits of actual persons, have been so frequently represented in temple sculpture. There is an unmistakable interest in rendering of everyday activities.” But such scenes are found even before the Vijayanagara period. In the early medieval period the constant battles and cattle raids were recorded on many memorial stones erected in honour of the heroes who died in the battles. Some of them contain inscriptions and carvings describing the battles. The Vandādi inscription described in this work is one such example of political uncertainty of this period.

Ganḍa Trinētra Vaidumba Mahārāja renouncing the world to embrace vānaprastha is found depicted in a panel in the Atirāla temple. The Portuguese bringing the horses for sale in Hampi, found in a panel in the Narasimha temple, lower Ahōbilam, is another event of contemporary history. Such scenes are found among the sculptures of the temples of Hampi. In some of the paintings on the ceiling of a nātyamandapa in the Virabhadra temple, Lēpākshi, Virūpanna and his brother Viranna along with their retinue visiting the Lēpākshi temple is depicted. Contemporary dress and ornaments are faithfully portrayed in these paintings. In the Chennakēśava temple, Chukkalur, we
find three panels describing the visit of Vīranarasimha, his brother Krishnarāya along with the prime minister Sāluva Timmarasu visiting the Venkataramana temple, Tādipatri or perhaps the nearby Chukkalūru temple.

The people in Rāyalaseema are very much interested in dance. Bharatanātyam is greatly appreciated by them. The dance is portrayed in sculpture at a few places in this region. The earliest and the best panel is found in the Doddēśvara temple, Hēmavati. The panels in the Venkatēśvara temple, Dēvunicuddapah are the smallest among such panels but they are full of life and vigour. The Śrīsailam Bharatanātyam panels show the dancers aesthetically immersed in their dance. The panels in the Narasimha temple, lower Ahōbilam deal with the commencement of the dance. The dancer is ready with flowers in her hand to offer to Naṭarāja, the lord of dance, while the orchestra is ready with the musical instruments. Köḷātam, a popular folk dance, is also represented in sculpture at a few places. The Dēvunicuddapah and Śrīsailam panels are the best among such panels. Such scenes are also found in the temples of Humpi.¹⁹

Hunting is a popular sport in Rāyalaseema. The five panels describing the royal hunt on the prākāra of the Śrīsailam temple narrate in detail the people complaining to the king about the menace of the wild animals and the king and his retinue getting ready for the massive hunt. A panel depicting bird hunting found in the same place, which is again a rare representation in Indian art, is a beauty to watch. Women hunting the wild animals are also depicted in this temple. It reveals the courage of the women during the Vijayanagara period. The foreign travellers visiting Vijayanagara are eyewitneses to women wielding weapons and hunting.²⁰

Wrestling is an important pastime and a popular sport in the Vijayanagara period. Two panels depicting the wrestling in the Dēvunicuddapah temple are full of life and
action. Another panel, showing a king watching the wrestling in his court, found at the Śrīsailam temple remainds us the efforts of the Vijayanagara rulers to promote bravery among their subjects. "It was state policy to promote martial feelings among the people. Viranarasimha encouraged his nobles to settle their disputes by duelling." 21 We also find a literary theme among the panels of Śrīsailam. The story of Sārangadhara, which is very popular even now, is described in five panels at Śrīśailam.

The following table shows the breakup of narrative panels selected for study in each district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Cuddapah</th>
<th>Kurnool</th>
<th>Anantapur</th>
<th>Chittoor</th>
<th>Total No. of Panels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secular themes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saivite</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirātārjuniyam</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāgavata</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krishnalīla</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmāyana</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhārata</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>1182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One thousand one hundred and eighty two panels are studied from all the four districts of Rāyalaseema. Of them, four hundred and ninety five are from Anantapur, two hundred and seventy one from Chittoor, two hundred and fifty three from Cuddapah and the remaining one hundred and sixty three are from Kurnool district. Anantapur has more panels than the other three districts. Narrative sculpture seems to be popular here. It is, perhaps, due to its proximity to Humpi, the capital of Vijayanagara. Most of these panels belong to Vijayanagara period. Chittoor and Cuddapah have almost same number of panels. Kurnool district contains the least number of panels. Even these panels are
found at Śrīśailam and Ahōbilam only. Little is extant in the temples of Mahānandi and Pānyam. The Sivanandīśvara temple at Kādamakāluva contains a few Rāmāyana panels but most of them are badly mutilated. 22

The Cuddapah district contains one hundred and fifteen saivite panels closely followed by Anantapur with one hundred and twelve panels. All the fifty-seven panels found in Kurnool district are only from the Śrīśailam temple. In Chittoor district, Saivite panels are limited when compared to the Vaishnavite panels. Out of its two hundred and seventy one panels, two hundred and twenty eight panels depict Vaishnavite themes. It is due to the influence of Rāmānuja, who lived sometime in Tirupati and Tirumala and also due to the influence of ālvars from the Tamil country over Chittoor district. Anantapur appears to be more inclined to Vaishnavism as we notice three hundred and seventy seven panels depicting Vaishnava mythology out of its four hundred and ninety five panels. The Cuddapah and Kurnool districts seem to have an equal and impartial outlook towards Saivism and Vaishnavism as half of the panels in the two districts deal with Vaishnavism and the other half with other themes.

The influence of Chōlas and the nāyānārs on Rāyalaseema is manifest in the import of many themes from the Tamil country such as Jalamāyamurti, Siva and his consort competing in dance, Siva wearing his fallen ornaments while dancing, Sarabhēsa subduing Narasimha, the stories of Sundara, Manuchōda, Siriyāla etc. The influence of ālvars is seen in the depiction of Gajēndramōksha and Narasimha themes. Most of these themes are also found in the Chōla temples of Tamilnadu. The impact of Vīrāsaivism over this region can be observed in the large-scale depiction of nāyānār themes. The influence of Hoysala art over Rāyalaseema is observed in many Bhāgavata, Bhārata and Krishnalīla themes. Hanuman subduing the pride of Garuḍa, Bhīma and Bhagadatta
fighting, Krishna riding a lion, Krishna bringing Pārijāta are examples of the Hoysala influence. The interaction with the Kannada region resulted in depicting a variant version in Kirātārjunīyam theme.

The craftsmen have to depend on literary works rather than iconographic rules in narrative art. The influence of Periyapurānam, Ranganātha Rāmāyana, Āndramahābhārata, Āndramahābhāgavatam can be clearly noticed in the narrative sculpture of this region. The craftsmen faithfully followed these works most of the times. In the story of Siriyāla, according to Periyapurānam, Siva demands that the killing of the child (Siriyāla) should be performed as a ritual – while the mother holds the child the father should cut the body to pieces.23 The Śrīsailam panels of this theme faithfully followed the description. Sometimes the craftsmen even excelled the literary description. Arjuna worshipping a Sayana Vishnu image and praying at many Siva temples while proceeding to do penance for Pāsupata weapon, a tribal woman talking to Rāma and Lakshmana after Sīta’s abduction, Rāma worshipping Ganapati before his battle with Rāvana, Lakshmana showing the amritaabhānda to Rāma after the death of Rāvana are some such examples. These panels reveal the imaginative ability of the craftsmen.

The sculptors displayed two types of skill. They could very briefly narrate a theme in one single panel as seen in the nāyanār themes. They could also elaborate any theme without letting out the interest in the story. Sometimes they include subtle humour to maintain interest. Kirātārjunīyam and Parvati’s marriage at Animēla are such examples. The craftsmen must have discussed and analysed the themes many a time before execution. When narrating popular themes they must have meticulously consulted the original works or taken the advice of scholars in mythology. Otherwise
scenes such as the celestials showering flowers on Rāma, Kālanēmi assuming different forms during his fight with Hanuman, Krishna killing Trināvarta, Vyōmāsura and Balarāma killing Pralambāsura and others might not have been depicted. Rāmāyana, Krishnālīla and Kirātārjunīyam appear to be most popular in this region.

The craftsmen of this area must be close observers of the society and nature as they depicted many social and religious customs such as talambrālu, kanyādāna, pindāpakrādhāna etc. The hunting and dance scenes reveal their keen observation of the arts, sports and nature.

The study reveals increasing popularity of narrative art during the course of the history of Rāyalaseema. Panels belonging to pre-Vijayanagara period are limited. In the early Vijayanagara period the number of panels increased and in the later period the number further increased. It was because of the increasing number of temples built during this period. Even the nobles and the officers at far off places vied with each other to construct a temple and to make their importance enhanced in the eyes of the common folk.24

The relief is at times bold but generally it is shallow. The Attirāla and Hēmavati panels are carved almost in the round. Some panels in the Kāsivisvēsvara temple, Penukonda and many in the Chukkalurū temple appear as outline sketches. The chiselling here is crude. But generally the craftsmen “could illustrate even on a rugged granite convincingly.” 25 The panels at Attirāla, Hēmavati, Pushpagiri, Śrīsailam and Tādipatri are the best in the region. The beginning of narrative art can be seen at Chilamakuru, Hēmavati and Attirāla. The art blossomed at Pushpagiri, Śrīsailam and Tādipatri. The panels at these places are known as “splendid examples of Vijayanagara art.” 26 The variety of themes represented is an achievement of the craftsmen.
"Probably in the whole range of South Indian Sculpture it will be difficult to find a match to vie with the variety of Vijayanagara sculpture." 27

The figures depicted are never idle. They move, run, fight, dance, teach and display all sorts of vigorous action. The movement of hands suggests the actions very skillfully. They exhibit all kinds of emotions from mercy to anger. All the figures look alike instinct with life, vigour and freshness which are unforgettable. 28 Over crowding is generally avoided. Minimum details to identify the panels are given. The architectural numbers such as pilasters are excellently utilized blending sculpture and architecture perfectly. The craftsmen showed pleasing diversity in the designs of garments, ornaments and weapons. They decided the size and the place for the figures according to their age and importance in the panels.

Still owing to the socio-economic backwardness and cultural conditions the narrative art of Rayalaseema reveals certain flaws. They are as follows:

Certain themes are delineated erroneously. The vānaras churning the ocean instead of the demons in the Sāgaramadhana panels (Ontimitta, Tadipatri), Trivikrama shown with three legs, Vāmana with a beard (Tadipatri), Rāma and Lakshmana wearing crowns and royal attire during their vanavāsa (Tādipati, Timmāpuram etc.), Pāṇḍavas shown as kshatriyas but not disguised as brahmins during Draupadi Swayamvara episode (Tādipatri and Lēpākshi paintings.) and the presence of Krishna’s consort in the chariot of Arjuna (Śrīsailam) reveal the educational backwardness of this area. These panels sacrifice originality.

The weapons such as mace in the Mahābhārata panels are too short and disproportionate. The arrows look too big in some of the Kiratārjunīyam panels. The
fingers of some of the figures in the Pushpagiri panels are too big and hence disproportionate.

Continuity, though maintained at many places, is sacrificed at times. The designs of dress, ornaments and weapons change from panel to panel, sometimes in different parts of the same panel, which could have been easily avoided.

The relief is not uniform throughout the narration of Rāmāyana (at Tādipatri), Kīrātārjunīyam (at Animela and Penukonda), Parvati’s marriage (at Animela) and nāyānar themes (Siriyāla story at Penukonda). Two or more craftsmen working without proper supervision of a master sculptor and the lack of co-ordination might be the reasons for such errors.

But for the flaws the narrative of this region might stand comparison to some of the best of such art in the country. Still the area, which is politically disturbed and socially and economically backward, produced some great and attractive narrative panels depicting rare and a variety of themes. “Though the political conquests fettered the body of men, subdued their minds and crippled their spirit, the culture of the region strengthened the tradition of the people, stimulated their nerve and instincts, expanded their minds and enkindled their spirits.” 30 The enkindled spirit, the strong passion of the people for religious knowledge and anxiety to protect their culture resulted in the birth and growth of narrative art in Rāyalaseema.
FOOT NOTES


