INTRODUCTION
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"Ananta Kalyāṇa Gunās or endless noble qualities are attributed to the Almighty, though He is nirguna or devoid of any qualities. Such great qualities could only be associated with the Immortal one, capable of turning into immortals those that assiduously acquired and practiced them. It is with this idea that the various iconographic forms of deities were thought of, conceived and propagated in hymns, glorifying the forms in sculpture in the round and relief high and low and in paintings so that in the language of the poet and in the parlance of the sculptor, the abhinaya language of the dancer and even in folk art the appeal of these qualities could be easily achieved" (C. Sivaramamurti – Ethical Fragrance in Indian Art and Culture – p.23.).

The same idea is more emphatically put forth through narrative art, which elaborately explains the different forms of 'the formless one.' Mythology which describes in detail these qualities in god manifest in his various forms is mostly in the form of literature and hence was out of the reach of common people most of whom were illiterates in the ancient and medieval periods. Religious discourses or purāṇa sravana has a short life as the people are likely to forget what they listen. If the same mythology is translated into sculpture or paintings it gets a long life and will have a long lasting influence on the mankind. Such sculptures or paintings form part of the temples, which the people visit time and again. By looking at these sculptured panels or paintings of the god in his various forms and the noble qualities practiced in each form the people are constantly reminded of the need to develop such qualities. They will acquire fear of sin and love of dharma and lead a righteous life. It is the goal of all religions. Thus the narrative art serves as the vehicle of communication in the service of the religion. It is with this idea all the religions used narrative technique either in sculpture or paintings.
The Buddhist stupas, the Jain Basadis and the Hindu temples all over the country are replete with such narrative art. This technique is more seen in sculpture than in paintings as the former has more life than the other.

AIM OF THE STUDY:

Rāyalaseema, the southern part of Andhra Pradesh comprising the four districts of Anantapur, Chittoor, Cuddapah and Kurnool is replete with many temples, which were mostly built, in the medieval times. Most of them were built during the Vijayanagara period. To many more earlier temples structural additions such as mukhamandapas, mahāmandapas, prākāras and others were added by the Rāyas of Vijayanagara. Narrative technique was popular in this time. Besides such temples, this region consists of temples built by the Chōlas at Suruṭupalli, Śrīkālahasti, Punganur and other places, temples of the Rēnāti Chōlas at Chilamakūru, etc., the Vaidumba temple at Kalakaḍa, the Nōlamba Pallava temples at Hēmavati, temples built during the Kākatiya and Kāyastha rule at Pushpagiri and other places. These temples also have many narrative panels. But no attempt, so far, is made to study the themes and style of narrative art of the entire region. Such attempt is the aim of the study. To study the origin, growth and decline of the narrative art in sculpture is also the aim of the study.

WORK DONE SO FAR:

The art and architecture of Rāyalaseema did not get the attention it deserved by the Art Historians and Critics until recent times. Dr.M. Rama Rao, a Pioneer in this field generated interest in this area through his monograph on the Śrīśailam temple and other works. Dr.V. Kameswara Rao, another Pioneer in this field, studied the Vijayanagara temples of Rāyalaseema and brought to lime light the architectural, sculptural and
iconographic wealth of this area. Parabrahma Sastry, Dr.M. Rama Rao, Dr.A. Suryakumari and others worked extensively on the inscriptions of Rayalaseema. Temples of Cuddapah district by Dr.A. Gurumurti, A comparative study of the Chôla and the Vijayanagara Art in the temples of Chittoor district by Dr.P.N. Naidu are some other reputed works in this field. The attention of all the scholars was drawn to architecture, sculpture or iconography and hence they could not fully divert their attention to the narrative panels in Rayalaseema. But their study had glimpses of the wealth of narrative art of this region. Inspired by their works this present study is taken up.

**METHODOLOGY:**

To proceed with the work sufficient knowledge of Hindu mythology is essential. So original works on epics, their translations into Telugu were first consulted. Literary works in Telugu produced during the medieval times such as Panditârâdhyâ Charitra, Ranganâtha Ramâyana, Āndhra Mahâbhârata, Āndhra Mahâbhâgavatam, Navanâtha Charitra and others were also consulted. Books written in prose such as Ushasri Bhârata were referred to besides the Sthalapurânas of places like Śrîśailam, Animela, Râmagiri and other places. Pûrvagâdhâlahari, Purâna Padakôsam, which are encyclopedias on Hindu mythology, provided additional information.

In the second step the District Gazetteers of the four districts of Rayalaseema, Indian Antiquiry, and Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture were consulted to select the temples where narrative panels are available. The publications of Archaeological Survey of India, Dept. of Archaeology, Andhra Pradesh provided much information.

To arrange the temples selected in chronological order the South Indian Inscriptions, Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh, Cuddapah district, Madras Epigraphical
Reports and others provided necessary information. This was supplemented by consulting the published works on the temples of this region. To understand the themes and methods of depiction the books on Indian Art written by eminent scholars - both foreign and Indian - were consulted.

With this background knowledge the fieldwork was taken up as the source material mostly comes through on the spot study of the panels in the temples. Knowledge of photography is essential to take photographs of the panels selected. About forty temples are visited in the four districts of Rāyalaseema. At some places photography became almost impossible as the walls and pillars were thickly coated with lime or smeared with turmeric powder.

During the fieldwork it was observed that the themes in the panels differed from the description in original works. The depiction is also erroneous and against the literary description. To make the identification easy at many places the originality was sacrificed. It seemed that the craftsmen came under the influence of contemporary social conditions while proceeding with their work. To understand the influence of the society on the narrative art of this region literary works, published works on socio-economic history of the region and inscriptive evidence were examined. The findings formed a separate chapter known as 'Narrative art and the Society.'

After the collection of data, the subject matter is divided theme-wise, place-wise, and time-wise. It forms the body of the thesis. Nearly one thousand photographs collected out of which two hundred photos are included as plates picking a few from each place. Before description of the panels under each head a list of all panels is given first. Important panels both theme-wise and style-wise are selected for description. They are discussed as far as possible in chronological order. Whenever possible they are
compared with such panels found elsewhere in this region or outside the region. Critical remarks are made at the end of the description of the panels.

LIMITATIONS OF THE WORK:

Surprisingly hundreds of panels narrative in character are found all over the region. They covered all themes of Hindu mythology and also secular themes. Complete description of every panel with its mythological background runs into thousands of pages. So only important panels are discussed. Besides the monuments visited there may be many more in the region, especially in Kurnool district. It is learnt that a few of them have not seen the limelight so far as they are situated in remote villages. Future study in this direction may cover such monuments.

The area selected is vast and themes found are plenty. Though a sincere attempt is done to do justice to all the panels covering all the themes better justice can be done if one or a few themes only are selected for study. Certain themes are narrated in paintings in the temples at Lēpakshi, Sōmapālem and other places. But most of them are beyond recognition now. So to identify such themes published works on these temples had to be consulted. Keeping the vast area to be covered places like Alampur, Tripurāntakam, which had been in Kurnool district until recent past and went over to Mahaboobnagar district later could not be covered. They contain many more narrative panels.

The prākāra of the Śrīśailam temple has abundant panels of Saivite themes. A few of them such as Adisankara renouncing the world, Siva protecting Markandeya, Kannappa and the story of Śrīkālahasti and others are labeled in recent times. Such popular themes, especially Saivite, are covered with a casual note. But there are many panels depicting Basavapurāṇa and Periyapurāṇam, which are yet to be identified. Similarly the panels depicting Siva blessing Vishnu with chakra and other panels at the
top of the outer walls of the sanctum, antarāla and mukhamanḍapa of the Sangamēśvara temple at Animela are not covered as they are shrouded in darkness and covered with thick film of dust over decades. Similarly all the 160 Rāmāyana panels found in the Venkataramana temple, Tādipatri, cannot be fully described for want of space. Only those which are not identified so far and which depict important and rare themes are described.

FINDINGS OF THIS WORK:

This work brings to light the vast wealth of narrative art in this region. The number and variety of themes depicted will astonish the reader. A few themes are identified for the first time. The panels depicting Purushāmriga, Jalamāyamūrti, Hanumān subduing the pride of Garuḍa, Nārada, Tumburu and Sudarsana and Bhīma fighting with Kubera for Sougandhika flowers are such themes. All the panels of Rāmāyana in the Venkaṭaramana temple, Tādipatri are identified. An earlier work on these panels left much to be desired. The story of Kirāṭārjunīyam covering twenty six panels in the Sangamēśvara temple, Animela is identified panel by panel. Similarly all the panels at the same place covering the marriage of Parvati are identified and described. This work brings to light the Rāmāyana panels on the inner walls of a little known ruined gopura at Timmēpuram in Chittoor district. Similarly the Rāmāyana panels of Chukkalūru are also identified.

Rare themes like Trināsura vadha, Pralambasura vadha, Rukmini kalyānam, Kēsi and Vyōmāsura vadha from Krishnalīla panels depicted in the Tādipatri temple, a few stories of nāyanaars found on the prakāras of Śrīśailam are identified and described in this work. Documentation of a few secular and historical themes also is the result of this study. Yet this work is only to be considered as a humble attempt in the study of the
narrative art of Rāyalaseema. Similar works in another regions of the state may bring out the wealth of narrative art of Āndhra.

CHAPTERISATION:

The thesis is divided into seven chapters besides the introductory note. In the first chapter the narrative art in the country found in sculpture and paintings is described in brief. This is divided into five parts viz., (1) Buddhist themes, (2) Jain themes, (3) Secular themes, (4) Saivite themes and (5) Vaishnavite themes. The last mentioned is again divided into four parts viz., (a) Bhāgavata themes, (b) Rāmāyana (c) Krishnalīla and (d) Mahābhārata. These panels under each theme are discussed as far as possible in the chronological order.

The second chapter is devoted to the study of the influence of the socio-economic and cultural conditions on the art of Rāyalaseema. It is an accepted fact that the art of a region reflects its civilization. Rāyalaseema is no exception to it. How the narrative art of this region is influenced by the political uncertainty, its socio-economic backwardness, and its cultural contacts with the neighbouring Tamil and Kannada regions etc., is discussed in this chapter.

The next four chapters deal with the narrative art of Rāyalaseema. The third chapter is allotted for the study of Saivite themes. It is in two parts. The first part deals with the stories from Sivapurāṇa, Periyapurāṇa and Sthalapurāṇa of Saivite temples. In the second part Kirātārjunīyam panels, which are more than hundred in number, are described. There are a few paintings in some temples describing Saivite themes. They are also described in brief.

The fourth chapter describing Bhāgavata themes is divided into two parts. The first part describes episodes such as Gajendramoksha, Garuḍa garvabhanga and the
miracles performed by Vishnu in his incarnations such as Mastya, Kūrma, Varāha, Narasimha, Vāmana and Parasurāma. The second part deals with Krishnalīla themes.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the study of epic themes. It also has two parts. The first part describes the Rāmāyana panels and second deals with Mahābhārata themes. The sixth chapter is allotted to the secular themes. Themes describing the performing arts, the story of Sārangadhara and historical episodes are described in this chapter. Tables are prepared to show the list of panels available or selected for study under each head.

The last chapter summarises the findings of the study. It brings out the merits and demerits of the narrative art of Rāyalaseema and tries to prove the place of this region in the narrative art of the country. An appendix is provided to list the temples or monuments studied. Monuments whose dates are not recorded in epigraphs are dated as per the opinions of the scholars of this region who studied them. A list of primary and secondary sources is given under bibliography. 100 plates containing 200 photographs of narrative sculpture are included at the end of the work.