Chapter V

CONCLUSION
The Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh comprising the districts of Anantapur, Kadapa, Kurnool and Chittoor, is very rich in temples and temples sculptures. They were all built over some centuries during the times of the early Chalukyas, Pallavas, Nolamba-Pallavas, Cholas and the Vijayanagara rulers who had their sway over region at different times. However the majority of them belong to the Vijayanagara times. Infact the region has come to be called Rayalaseema, because the Rayas of Vijayanagara made their greatest impact on it. All the temples of the region have sculptures depicting Puranic themes, both Saivite and Vaishnavite depending on the inclination of the ruling powers of the region. Significantly the rulers, can inspite of their personal preferences, by and large encouraged and supported temples of other sectarian faiths. In the foregoing chapters an attempt was made to examine in detail the Puranic themes depicted in the Rayalaseema temples. It remains now to recount by way of summing-up the main lines of argument developed in them, and the basis of a close field survey of the temples in the study region and also the studies of these temples already made by well known scholars.

The Puranas, eighteen in number and popularly believed to have been written by sage Vyasa, the author of the famous epic the Mahabharata, hold a very important position in the sacred and secular life and literature of the Hindus. They are reverenced as next only to the Vedas in importance, believed to be almost equal to them in antiquity and sanctity. They are also believed to have been written to make easily accessible the wisdom of the Vedas, the spiritual and ethical values of life embodied in them, to the people in general who had no knowledge of them. The method of the Puranas and the epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, is to present their subject matter countless form of countless mythological stories, episodes and anecdotes in addition to elaborating on their meaning and significance to life in general. The Puranas also deal with a variety of subjects, spiritual and secular, including iconography and iconometry and give detailed accounts of Pratimalakshana, Pratisthavavidhi, Devagrihanirmana, etc., all concerned with temples, sculptures and icons. It is believed that the several Agamic texts, themselves on which modes of temple worship and rituals are based, actually grew out of the several Agamas. The relationship between the Puranas and the temple art of
iconography is very intimate and explains why temples have been continuously chosen as the most appropriate places for plastic representation of the Puranic themes. Further, temples have always been places where people gather in very large numbers for worship and therefore have opportunities to watch the Puranic panels sculpted in them, and glean their message.

The sculpting of Puranic themes in the Rayalaseema temples of Vijayanagara times, can be better understood and appreciated if they are seen against the historical background similar themes depicted in India both North and South, in the centuries preceding them. From the very inception of temples in India sculpting Puranic themes in them in large numbers formed a part of their sculpture. These images are found in abundance and can be seen even today and the walls, pillars, vimānas, gopuras and ardhisṭhanas of temples belonging to the times of the Guptas, Rāṣṭrakūtas, the Gangas, etc., in North India, and the Satavahanas, the Pallavas, the Chālukyas, the Chōlas, the Nolanbhas, the Kākatiyas, the Hoyasalas, and the Vijayanagara rulers, in South India.

The Kushāns adopted both Śiva and Viśnū as their patron dynastic deities. Iconographically, the earlier known sculptural depiction of the Ardhanārīśvara form of Śiva is found in the Kushān reliefs found in the Mathura region. The Harihara image, fusing both Viṣṇu and Śiva, seems to have evolved during the Kushān age. More interestingly is the Kṛishna-Vāsudeva-Saṅkarṣaṇa cult which began then and developed into the Bhāgavata cult or Viṣṇavism in the Gupta age, had a profound influence on Indian art, especially temple art and sculpture. The imperial Guptas, who were champions of Hinduism in general, adopted Vaishnavism as their state religion, and promoted the worship of Viṣṇu in the country, without prejudice to the worship of Śiva and Śaivism. During the Gupta age many temples were built with panels depicting Puranic themes, and scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, and the Bhāgavata in particular. The Dāsāvātāras of Viṣṇu formed an Integral part of temple art and sculpture. Iconographic representations of Varāha and Narasimha, among the avatāras, became very popular from the Gupta times onwards, all over the country. The first two avatāras, Matsya and Kūrma, were not neglected and commanded a few representations. The Narasimhāvataṭara in particular became a most powerful sculptural theme during the Gupta times and continued to be so in South
India, well down to the Vijayanagara times. In North India, all the images of *Narasimha* commonly found are of the *sthauna type*. In the South the images from the Pallava times onwards show *Narasimha* first fighting with the *asura* Hiranya and then in the act of disembowelling him.

The *Vāmana-Trivikrama* incarnations of Viśṇu seems to have been fairly popular all over the land, as evidenced by the number of images found, like the *Varāha* and *Narasimha* forms of Viśṇu. The earliest representation of *Trivikrama* is found in the Daśāvatāra temple of the Gupta period at Deogarh. This temple also has many episodes sculpted on the Rāma and Kṛiṣṇa legends. Thus the Guptas were among the first to depict on a considerable scale the Puranic themes in their temples. The cult of Kṛiṣṇa was more in vogue than the Rāma cult, through the origins of the Kṛiṣṇa and Rāma myths go back to remote antiquity not easy to trace. The narrative representation of scenes from the *Ramāyaṇa* seems to have appeared first during the Gupta times. However only from the 10th Century onwards when the cult of Rāma developed, expanded, and grew the influential sequential representation of *Ramāyaṇa* events became popular. Episodes from Kṛiṣṇa’s life in sculptures are known from the 2nd century A.D. onwards in North India. In the South the depiction of *Kṛiṣṇalīlā* scenes are known from the 6th century A.D. (*Hādaṇī*). In Andhra Desha and Tamilnadu they appear in the first in the 7th century A.D. In the North India, occasionally the impact of Buddhist iconography on Viśṇu images may be noticed (as in image of Kēśava in Gujarat).

Though the Gupta monarchs were strongly in favour of Vaishnavism, they did not neglect Śaivism. Several Śiva temples with *lingas* enshrined in them were built. The captivating form of Śiva as *Natarāja* seems to have appeared in the façade of temples during this period. Similarly other famous forms of Śiva such as *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*, *Liṅgodbhavamūrti*, and *Gaṅgaśravamūrti* are also found in the Gupta temples. Of these forms the image of Śiva as *Gaṅgaśāstra* seems to have been more popular than the other. In Orissa, the worship of Śiva was more popular than Viṣṇu worship, which gained greater popularity later on. The early Śaiva temples there show affiliation to the *Pāṭhupata* sect, which was the earlier Śaiva sect. All the early Orissan Śiva temples have the *ūrdha* form of *Śiva liṅga* in the main shrine along with images of Pārvati, Śiva’s consort, and their sons Gaṅgēśa, and Kārtikeya. The
temples of Bihar and Orissa the 7th-8th century A.D depict a number of scenes from the *Rāmāyana*, which means that Vaishnavism had gained some ground there.

With the advent of the Raṣṭrakūṭas, who were mainly strong Śaivites, the Śiva faiths replaced the Vaiṣṇava faiths in the areas under their control. The temples at Ellora and Elephanta have beautiful representations of *Līṅgādhaṃvamūrti*, *Tripurāntakamūrti*, Naṭarāja, Kalyāṇasundara, and other forms of Śiva. Despite the Raṣṭrakūṭas being staunch Śaivites they also accommodated Vaiṣṇava deities in their rock-cut temples. Representations of Narasiṅha and Trivikrama are also found in them. With the Rāma worship becoming increasingly popular themes from the Ramāyana formed the subject for several panels at Ellora. Images of Kṛishṇa too made occasional appearance.

The Pallavas in the South, who ruled in the early years of the Christian era significantly contributed to the development of temple sculptures. Their capital city Kanchipuram stands even to this day as a glorious testimony to the temple sculpture. The Pallava rulers in general favoured Śaivism and Kapālika, Kālāmukha, Pāṇḍupata and such sub-sects of Śaivism flourished in their times. Their temple sculptures reveal this fact. Dhakshināmūrti, Bhikshātanamūrti, Kalarimūrti and Gajasurasamhāramūrti forms of Śiva were introduced by them. The Naṭarāja sculpture found in the Dharimarājaratha at Mahabalipuram seems to be the earliest Naṭarāja figure of Pallava art. All incidents of the Śivapurāṇa are found depicted in the different parts of the famous Kailāsa temple at Kanchipuram. A seated image of Ardhanaśīvavara also found there, which is rarity. The Pallava temples in general have sculptures based on the epics and the Purāṇas. At Mahabalipuram one finds large bas-relief of Arjuna’s penance. The *Kīrtārjunaḥya* episode for the *Mahābhārata* is found depicted at Mahabalipuram and Kanchipuram.

Images of Varāha, Narasiṅha, Rāma, all Vaiṣṇavite forms, and Kṛishṇa, are also found there. Under the patronage of the Pallavas a good number of Varāha temples came to be built. Infact the Varāhavatara seems to have specially appealed to the temple artists of the times of the Pallavas, Pāṇḍyas, Chāṇukyas and others as it did those of the times of the Guptas and Raṣṭrakūṭas. Of the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu the first two, *Matsya* and *Kūrma* have always had a limited appeal. There are one or two
places in Tamilnadu (Kanchipuram being one of them) and Andhra Pradesh (Gruksam) which have temples dedicated to the Kūṁāvatāras. The Narasimhāvatāra, which appealed greatly during the times of the Guptas, continued its appeal several times more in the South. Compared with the popularity of the Narasimhāvatāra, the Vāmana-Trivikrama incarnation has had only a limited appeal, as evidenced by its depictions in the temples. It is no rash generalization to say that in temple art none of the avatāras of Viṣṇu have achieved the appeal and popularity and influence of the subsequent two avatāras of Rāma and Kuṁśa.

The Chōlas who held sway over South India after the Pallavas are justly regarded as the finest temple-builders of South India. Not with standing their being Śaivites, the Chōla monarchs greatly contributed to the Viṣṇuavite temples. Several of the temples built by them have shrines of both Śiva and Viṣṇu side by side, the most famous instance being that of Chidambaram. Their temples have famous depictions of the Rāmāyan and the Bhāgavata themes. The Chola temples have depictions of Varāha and narrative reliefs of Narasimha. That the stories of Rāma and Kuṁśa fascinated them is shown by the countless depictions of episodes from both. However, that there was a conflict between Śaivism and Viṣṇuavism during the Chōla period is indicated by the emergence of the cult and figure of Śurabhā. Figures of this form of Śiva are found in Dārāsuram and Tribhuvanam in Tamilnadu, and Anumela and Śrīśailam in Andhra Pradesh. During the imperial Chōlas of Tanjore, the carving of Naṭarāja images reached perfection. The Chōla temples invariably depict the Śiva-Dakṣiṇamūrti form. Images depicting the different aspects of Śiva as well as the secondary Śaivite deities (Gaṇapati, Subramanya or Skanda) are found in their several temples.

In the Karnata region the Kirātarjunīya episode was first sculpted by the early Chālukyan artists. A very rare and the first depiction of this episode in which Śiva appears as a Kirāṭa and Pārvati as a Kirāti who first notices the auspicious birthmark on the back of Arjuna, is found at Alampur in Andhra Pradesh. It belongs to the 10th century A.D. As ardent devotees of Śiva, the eastern Chālukyas got built a number of Śiva temples in which they found room for Viṣṇuavite themes too. In the later Chālukyan temples one finds a building of the North and South Indian traditions especially in depicting Naṭarāja in which the presence of several arms of Naṭarāja
indicates the North Indian tradition and the presence of the *Apasmārapuruṣha* with a shield and sword, by the south Indians. At Puṣṭpagiri (Kaḍapa) an example of this image of Naṭarāja is found. The Noḷaṇḍhas who ruled important portion of the Chāluṇkya realm also favoured the blending of the two traditions. The Chāluṇkya temples also reveal the appeal of the *Varāha, Narasimha* and *Rāma* avatāras to their artists. The Nava-group of Chāluṇkya temples at Āḷāmpur have several scenes from the Rāmāyana carved on their pillars.

The Hōyāsalas of the Kārnātaka region built magnificent temples all at Bēḷūr, Halebīd, Sōmanāṭhapūr, and other places generally Vaishṇavite with exquisite carvings. But their iconographic depiction included images of dancing Gāṇeśa, Bhikshatānī, Liṅgodbhavamūrti, and episodes like Śiva's marriage with Pārvati and Rāma shaking the mount Kailāsa. The Hōyāsala temples are full of mythological content and replete with the depiction of the Rāmāyana episodes. Among the sculptures are also found images of Veṇugopāla who is two-armed.

The Kākatiya Monarchs (9th-13th century A.D.) were known for their religious tolerance, even whole being great devotees of Śiva and building several Śiva temples. While different Śaiva sects flourished, Vaishṇavism was not discouraged. Deities and Scenes from the epics and Purāṇas are depicted in their temples. In the Śiva temple at Pāḷānpeṭ there are highly narrative panels of Tripurāntaka and Gajāsurasannahāra. There are some Bhāgavata panels also there. The famous Rāmappa temple in Warangal district has several scenes from the Rāmāyana.

The Vījayanagara rulers were all devout Hindus. Their empire itself was built specifically to defend Hinduism against onslaughts from an Islam, and to strengthen as well as assert its glory and greatness. Therefore temple-building activity, renovation of neglected temples, and patronising all temples regardless of their sectarian affiliation became an active and established goal of the rulers. The early rulers of Vījayanagara were Śaivites. With the increasing impact of Vaishṇavism propagated by Rāmānuja, and of the rapidly expanding Bhāgavata cult, their several later rulers embraced Vaishnavism with a predilection for Veṅkateshwara of the temple at Tirumala. Under Krishṇadevaṛāya, Achyutaraṇya and Sadasivarāya, Vaishṇava temples and shrines received particular and magnificent attention. But the Śaiva shrines in their empire including those built by other rulers never failed to
receive respectful attention. Independent temples and shrines were built for the deities of their inclination. Stories and episodes from the Purāṇas, Śaivite and Vaishnavaite alike, were depicted on a large scale with great vividness and charm as never attempted before. And there was a rich harvest of temple sculptures, images of Gods and Goddesses appeared in plenty and the sanctum, inner and outer walls, prākāras, gopuras of the temples. These were depicted for their aesthetic as well as educative and ethical value. This objective is never lost sight of. A new phase in temple art and sculpture was thus ushered in during the Vijayanagara period, remarkable for its range, variety, distinctive style, and exquisite quality. It is no far-fetched claim that this period makes a golden age in the history of Andhra iconography.

Regarding the depiction of Śaivite and Vaishnavaite Puranic themes in the Rayalaseema temples, largely of the Vijayanagara time, it may be said that they are almost exhaustively covered, the focus of attention naturally being placed on the chief figures. In the depiction of the Śaivite Puranic episodes and themes, Śiva takes central stage, as it were. Almost every form of Siva as known to the Sivapurāṇa is represented. The Vaishnavaite Puranic themes and episodes offer greater scope to focus on more figures than in the Śaivite themes, because of the Daśavatāras of Viṣṇu. Each avatarā presents a distinct figure with a distinct role to play. There is plenty of scope for narrative panels, involving a number of figures. The Rāma and Kṛiṣṇa avataras seem almost inexhaustible for sculptural depiction, especially as narrative panels. The Vijayanagara sculptures seem to prefer the depiction of narrative panels may be because of the scope they offer for the play of their creative imagination. There is also scope for representing dynamic action.

In the representation of the Śaivite Puranic themes, almost every form assumed by Siva is depicted in the temples of the region: Different kinds of Liṅgodbhavamūrti, Daḵšiṇāmūrti (include a very rare instance of Daṁpatya-Daḵšiṇāmūrti at Surutupalli in Chittoor district) and Nāṭarāja, Pratyēkaṁūrtis such as Ardhanāṛiśvara, Gaṅgādharamūrti, Hariharamūrti, Kaṭaṇḍasundaramūrti, Bhikṣuṭaṇanamūrti, etc., Anugrahamūrtis such as Viṣṇūnugrahamūrti, Pasupatadanamūrti, and Rāvaṇanugrahamūrti, and such Samhāramūrtis as Kalarimūrti, Tripurāṃtakamūrti, Virabhadra, Gajasurasamhāramūrti, etc.,
The Vishnavaite themes depicted are drawn many from the Purānas, the Ṛṣabhyāna, and the Bhāgavata. Apart from the Rāma and Kṛṣṇāvatāra, which are extensively represented, the Varāha, Narasiṁha and Vāmana avatāras seem to have received particular attention from the Vijayanagara sculptures. These are depicted in different forms. In the case of depicting Narasiṁhāvatāra, the sculptures blend the Puranic details with local legends regarding Narasiṁhāvatāra (i.e., Chēṇḍulakshmi). In practically every temple of the region scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa and the Bhāgavata are depicted, either in the form of stray episodes or narrative panels. These figures, it must be noted, appear in Śaivite temples too. The depiction from the Bhāgavata concerning Kṛṣṇa is limited mostly to his bālyakṛṣṭas, ḫīlas, his innumerable seemingly innocent acts of mischief and playfulness, which at the same time reveal his divinity. There is variety in the depiction of the well-known scenes. The story of Rāma as told by Valmīki as well by regional poets finds represented as a series of sequential narrative panels in two outstanding temples of the region, the Chintala Veṅkataramana at Tadipatri and the Rāma temple at Penukonḍa, both in Anantapur District. The Tadipatri temple is without a parallel for its exquisite sculptures as well as for representing the entire Rāmāyaṇa and narrative panels from first to last. It is also remarkable for the number of depicting Kṛṣṇāḷīla figures.

\(\text{The Vijayanagara sculptors generally followed the Āgama and Śilpaśāstra texts in depicting the different Puranic themes. But they did not hesitate to devote from their prescription whenever they felt it necessary, their Endeavour being recreating the Puranic episodes and figures truthfully bringing out their significance. While they followed in general the traditions of their predecessors in sculpture, in the north and south, they evolved their own distinctive and original style.)\)