INTRODUCTION

Among the several religious cults in India, the cult of Saptamātrikas or Seven Divine Mothers (Brāhmaṇī, Mahēśwari, Kaumāri, Vaishṇavi, Vārāhi, Indrāni and Chāmuṇḍa) is an important and popular one. There are numerous centres of worship of Saptamātrikas spread in different parts of our country. But this cult is more widely spread in Andhra Pradesh and a very large number of panels and figures of Saptamātrikas are found in the temples all over Andhra Pradesh. The innumerable number of Saptamātrika panels and images found in the temples of Andhra Pradesh reveals that the cult of Saptamātrikas was very popular in Āndhradēśa in the early medieval and medieval periods.

Review of the Literature

The present Andhra Pradesh comprising Telangāṇa, Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema is a land of temples. It is studded with the Early Chāluṅka, Eastern Chāluṅka, Rāstrakūṭa, Noḷaṁba, Chōla, Kākaṭiya and Vijayanagara temples, which are rich in variety and artistic merit. Most of the scholars in Andhra Pradesh have worked upon the architectural and iconographical aspects of major Saivite and Vaishnavite deities only. The Saptamātrikas either separately or in a group are found in abundance in the Early Chāluṅka, Eastern Chāluṅka, Rāstrakūṭa, Noḷaṁba, Chōla, Kākaṭiya and Vijayanagara temples in Andhradesa. Excepting a few scholarly articles on Saptamātrikas by Dr.P.N.Naidu\(^1\) and a brief notice of the Saptamātrikas in the works of Douglas Barrett\(^2\), C.Sivaramamurti\(^3\), M.L.Nigam\(^4\), M.RadhaKrishna Sarma\(^5\), K.Krishnamurthy\(^6\) and Prof.M.Krishnakumari\(^7\), no other scholars have studied the origin, antiquity and growth of Saptamātrika cult in Āndhradēśa and also the evolution of the iconographic features of the Saptamātrikas found in the temples of Āndhradēśa.
There are some general works on the iconography of Saptamātrikas. The important works are: *Iconography of Śakti* (Delhi, 1978) by Balram Srivastava, *Hindu Goddesses* (Delhi, 1987) by David Kinsley, *Indian Iconography* (Bombay, 1973) by R.S. Gupta, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (Delhi, 1971) by T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Iconography of some important Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities* (New Delhi, 1975) by Bhagwant Sahai, *Hindu Iconography* by S G Tewari etc. In these works, only a brief account of the Saptamātrikas is given.

There are also a few published works exclusively dealing with the iconography of the Saptamātrikas viz., *Iconography of Saptamātrikas* (New Delhi, 1989) by O.P. Misra, and *Saptamātrikas in Indian Religion and Art* (New Delhi, 1995) by V.R. Mani.

From what has been said above, it is clear that a systematic and an exhaustive survey and study of the iconographical features of the sculptural panels and loose stone sculptures of Saptamātrikas found in the temples of Andhra Pradesh has not been undertaken by the scholars so far. As such there is a need for a comprehensive work on "Saptamātrikas in the temple Art of Āndhradēśa" and therefore this has been selected for my research work.

**Scope and Aim of the Study**

The main aim of the study is (1) to study and reconstruct the aspects of origin, antiquity and growth of Saptamātrika cult and also (2) to study the evolution of the iconographical features of the Saptamātrikas in the temples of Āndhradēśa from the early Chālukya to the Vijayanagara period (A.D. 6th to 17th century). The reasons for starting the study from A.D. 6th century are that firstly, before that date, there are only stray references to Saptamātrika worship from which it is difficult to trace out the development of the cult of Saptamātrikas in Āndhradēśa and regular
references to the worship of Saptamātrikas have been available only from A.D.6th century Secondly, it is from that century onwards the Saptamātrika panels and images have been available in the temples of Āndhradēśa. Thirdly, it was in A.D.6th century that the cult of Saptamātrikas spread in Āndhradēśa as is evidenced by the earliest Saptamātrika panel from Yellēśvaram which is now preserved in the State Museum at Hyderabad. The early Chālukyas who ruled the tracts of Āndhradēśa, had contributed much for the growth of the cult of Saptamātrikas. After the early Chālukyas, the successive dynasties such as the Eastern Chālukyas, Rāṣṭrakūṭas, Noḷamābas, Chōlas, Kākaṭiyas and the Vijayanagara rulers also contributed their mite for the growth of the cult. In the temples, we find that there has been a steady increase in the number of Saptamātrika panels and images in Āndhradēśa from A.D.6th century i.e., from the Early Chālukyan period onwards. The work concludes with the study of the iconographical features of Saptamātrikas in the Vijayanagara art for the following reasons. Firstly, it was in the A.D.17th century that the Vijayanagara empire which became famous as the saviour of Hindu religion, had finally come to an end. The last known Saptamātrika group of images is from Samudāyam, Chittoor district. The depiction of Saptamātrikas in the temple art of Āndhradēśa came to a halt with the decline of the Vijayanagara empire in A.D.17th century. Thus, the beginning and closing years of A.D.6th and 17th centuries respectively, witness the beginning and end of the vigorous development of the cult of Saptamātrikas in Āndhradēśa.

Sources
The primary sources for the study of the iconographical features of Saptamātrikas from A.D.6th to 17th century in Āndhradēśa are principally Archaeological and literary. Of these again, the collection of data from the available (1) inscriptions and (2) Saptamātrika panels and loose stone sculptures found in the temples from the early Chālukya to the Vijayanagara period and from the Museums in Andhra Pradesh constitutes the major portion.
1. **Archaeological Sources**

   (A) **Inscriptions**: There are some inscriptions engraved in the temples and on the copper plates, attesting the patronage of the cult of Saptamātrikas. The inscriptions supply valuable details by mentioning the name of the king, date and purpose of the grant and charitable contributions to the temples. To quote examples, the Early Chālukyas of Bādāmi are referred to in their inscriptions as the worshippers of the Saptamātrikas. The copper plates of Early Chālukyas state that they were nourished by the Saptamātrikas. For instance, the expression that is invariably met with in the invocatory verses of the copper plate grant of Pulakēsin-I, dated Śaka 411 (A.D.489-90) is **Putrānām Sapta (10) Kamātribhis-Saptamātribhik abhivardhitānām abhivardhitānām kārttikeyapari-rakshanaprāpata**. A few Chola inscriptions also refer to the worship of Saptamātrikas. An inscription from Ālambākkam dated in the thirty first year (A D 1049-50) of Chola king Rājādhirāja mentions endowments to the temple of Saptamātrikas for the conduct of their worship. Another inscription from Vēlachchēri dated in the tenth year of Parthivēndravarma refers to the temple of the Saptamātrikas and gift of lands for offerings. There are many inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries recording grants for the worship of **Parivāra** deities including the Saptamātrikas.

   (B) **Saptamātri
tika Panels and Images**: We have numerous Saptamātri
tika panels and loose stone images in the temples and museums attesting the prevalence of the cult of Saptamātrikas in Āndhradēśa under study. The Saptamātri
tika panels and images in the temples withstanding the ravages of time till speak of the past glory of the Saptamātri
tika cult. The survey of Saptamātri
tika panels and images in the temples and museums of Āndhradēśa shows that the mātrikas are represented either in group or separately with two, four and eight arms, with
vāhanas and without vāhanas, with associate deities Virabhadra and Ganēśa and without them and with local and chronological divergencies. They serve as the data for the study of the evolution of the iconographical features of the Saptamātrikas in the temple art of Āndhradeśa and form an authentic source material for this study.

2. Literary Sources

Details regarding the worship and iconography of the Saptamātrikas are to be found in a wide range of devotional literature which may be classified into the following categories:

i. Purānas;

ii. Āgamas;

iii. Samhitās; and

iv. Tantras

Of the Purānas, mention must be made of the Vāyu, Agni, Matsya, Vāmana, Bhāgavata, Skanda, Bhavisyottara, Brahmāṇḍa, Vishnu, Varāha, Devi and Mārkaṇḍeśa. The Āgamas include Uttarakaraṇāgama, Suprabhēdāgama, Pūrvakaraṇāgama, Aṁśumadbhēdāgama, Vishnudharmottara, Rūpamaṇḍana, Samarāṅgasūtradhāra, Aparājita-prichcha, Karāṇāgama, Kāmikāgama, Vaiṣhānasāgama, Mayamatra, Vāṣṭuśāvallabha, Mānasāra, Kāsyapāśilpasāstra, Prayōgamaṇjari and Śilparatna. Of the Samhitās, mention must be made of the Brihatāṃśhita and one of the important among the tantra works is Hayaśīrsapāṅcharātra.

Baring a few, we cannot be precise about the dates of other Āgamas. The Vishnudharmottara and Vaikhānasāgama are taken to be assignable to the period from the 7th to 9th centuries. Kāmikāgama is a work of about the 9th century. Samarāṅgasūtradhāra was
written by Bhōjarāja and hence can be assigned to the 11th century. Vāsturājavallabha and Mayamata both written by Mandana, are of the 15th century. The Śilparatna was composed by Śrīkumāra in the 16th century. Though the Āgamic, Puranic and other devotional works dealing the Saptamātrikas are considerably large, attention is focussed here only on a few that deal with the iconographic details of the Saptamātrikas in a fairly elaborate manner. The iconographic features of Saptamātrikas are found in greater details in the Agṇipurāṇa, the Aṁśumadbheḍa-gāma, the Pūrvakaraṇa-gāma, the Matsya-purāṇa, the Rūpāvatāra, the Rūpamaṇḍana, the Visvakarma-sastra, the Śilparatna, the Śrītattvanidhi, the Devimahātmya, the Markaṇḍeṣyapurāṇa, the Vishnudharmottara, the Kāsyapa-silpa-sastra, the Manasa and Devi-purāṇa.

Besides the devotional literature we have some general published works on the iconography of Saptamātrikas. These modern works contain useful information on the subject. To trace the similarities and dissimilarities and also the local and chronological divergencies in the depiction of Saptamātrikas, the iconographic details found in both the devotional literature and the modern published general works are highly useful for the comparative study.

Research Design and Methodology

The methodology followed for this study is as follows:

To study the iconographical features of Saptamātrikas and to take photographs on the Sculptural panels and loose stone images of Saptamātrikas, a systematic field survey has been conducted to cover the temples and museums in Andhra Pradesh. All the sculptural panels and loose stone images of Saptamātrikas, ranging from the Early Chāḷukya to the Vijayanagara period (A.D. 6th to 17th century) are studied in two ways.
The iconographical features of each of the Mātrikas are studied.

The iconographical features of group of Mātrikas are studied.

The sculptural panels in Situ and also those preserved in the State and District Government Museums are also studied.

**Dating**

Some sculptural panels and loose stone images of Saptamātrikas have been dated approximately on the basis of stylistic features. Other Saptamātrika panels and images which are found in the temples are dated on the basis of date and the architectural style of the temple. In this case we cannot blindly date the panel or image with the help of the foundation inscription and style of the temple because there are many examples where the main shrine of the temple alone was built at one time and other structures and images added considerably later. In such cases, corroboration from the iconographic features is absolutely essential. The iconographic features help us to fix the probable date to a particular panel or image. Hence, great caution has been taken in identifying and assessing the stages of evolution of Iconographic features of Saptamātrikas and in dating them. The details, involving the use of technical terms and unavoidable repetition off and on are important on their own account as basic facts but more so as they serve as a means of studying the iconography of a particular group of goddesses in the larger contest of Indian iconography as a whole down the ages. The details help to a clearer understanding of the evolution of the iconographic features of the Saptamātrikas (Seven Divine Mothers). The detailed study of the iconographic features of Saptamātrikas also help a stark contrast between the sculptural panels and images of Saptamātrikas in Andhradesa and those which are radically different in details, belonging to another area.
The research design of the thesis is as follows:

The thesis has Six Chapters. The first chapter 'Introduction' deals with the review of literature, scope and aim of the study, sources and Research design and Methodology.

The second chapter deals with the 'Origin and Antiquity of the Saptamātrikas'.

The third chapter deals with the 'Prescriptions of Saptamātrikas in literature' Agamas and Puranas.

The iconographical features of the Saptamātrikas in the temples of the Early Chālukya, Eastern Chālukya, Raṣṭrākūṭa and Noḷaṁba with a brief historical and cultural background are dealt with in chapter four 'Saptamātrikas in the temple art of Andhradēśa' (A.D.6th to 10th century).

The fifth chapter 'Saptamātrikas in the temple art of Andhradēśa' (A.D.10th to 17th century) contains a study of the iconographical features of the Saptamātrikas in the temples of Chola, Kākatīya and the Vijayanagara periods with a brief historical and cultural background.

The last chapter (Chapter: VI) 'Conclusion' deals with the modes of representations, dynastic characteristics and iconographic peculiarities of Saptamātrikas in the temple art of Andhradēśa. This chapter also deals with the comparative study of the iconographic features of Saptamātrikas, to trace the similarities and dissimilarities of the Saptamātrikas from the prescriptions of the iconographic texts and also the local and chronological divergences in the depiction of the Mātrikas in the temple art of Andhradēśa.
The appendix contains the Tabular statements of (1) Saptamāтриka panels and Images in Āndhradēśa, (2) The weapons of Saptamāтриkas as mentioned in the literature (3) Modes of representations of Saptamāтриkas in the temple art of Āndhradēśa and (4) The weapons of Saptamāтриkas in the temple art of Āndhradēśa from the Early Chālukya to the Vijayanagara period.

This Thesis is substantially illustrated. Figures of postures, makuṭas, ornaments and weapons of the Saptamāтриkas and Eighty nine plates relating to the Iconography of the Saptamāтриkas are appended at the end of the thesis. Most of these have not been published so far and had to be specially prepared by me. Glossary of Technical terms and Bibliography have also been added at the end of the thesis.
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