

The Marvellous Ramappa Temple

By

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Abstract

Most ancient temples are named for their main deities, or for the kings or rulers who built them. However, an ancient temple in Palampet, built as a tribute to Ramalingeswara (the Shiv ling installed by Lord Rama, and worshipped by him before the siege of Lanka) 77 kms from Warangal, in the state of Telangana, is probably the only temple to be named after the artisan who actually sculpted the temple. Ramappa, who originally hailed from Karnataka, is believed to have toiled for forty years to create the temple that is even today, a mind-blowing masterpiece. An inscription in the temple says that it was built in the year 1213, under the supervision of General Rudra Samani, the chief commander of the Kakatiya king Ganapatideva. The Kakatiyas, who started out as feudal lords of the Chalukyas, eventually became rulers themselves and ushered in a golden era between the 11th and 14th centuries.

Keywords

Temple, Rama, Ramappa, Kakatiyas

Introduction

The Ramappa Temple is a fine example of the Kakatiyan architectural style, and clearly shows the Kakatiyas' love for art, music, and dance. The temple's sandstone pillars have been carved with different poses of a dancing style, called Perini Shivatandavam. Perini Shivatandavam is an ancient dance form of the Kakatiyas that was performed primarily by male dancers (to inspire and invigorate warriors before going to the battle field). In fact, it was the postures of the sculptures and figurines engraved on the walls, pillars, and ceilings

of the Ramappa Temple that inspired Acharya Nataraja Ramakrishna, a celebrated dance guru, to revive and reconstruct this powerful and vigorous, purely masculine dance style. The Kakatiyas were very artistic, and were great builders, and in some parts of the Ramappa Temple, the elaborate sculptures are so intricate that a needle or single strand of hair can be passed through them. However, this exquisitely crafted temple is so strong that it is still standing, more than eight centuries after its construction. It has withstood numerous wars, invasions, and natural calamities. There was a major earthquake during the 17th century which shook the area and other nearby temples, but the Ramappa Temple stood firm against this mighty onslaught of nature.



Image 1: Ramappa Temple



Image 2: Ramappa Temple Complex

The Ramappa Temple is placed on a six-foot-high star shaped platform. This is based on the ancient religious sentiment that everything connected to God is sublime, and must therefore be kept at a height, well above everything that is common and mediocre. This ensured that the rituals and customs observed during the worship of the deity were untarnished and pure. The walls, ceilings and pillars of the temple are intricately adorned with rich carvings and sculptures from Hindu mythology. The main sanctum faces a huge hall of pillars. Each pillar is engraved with exquisite carvings, and these pillars are placed in such way that light and space are effectively used.

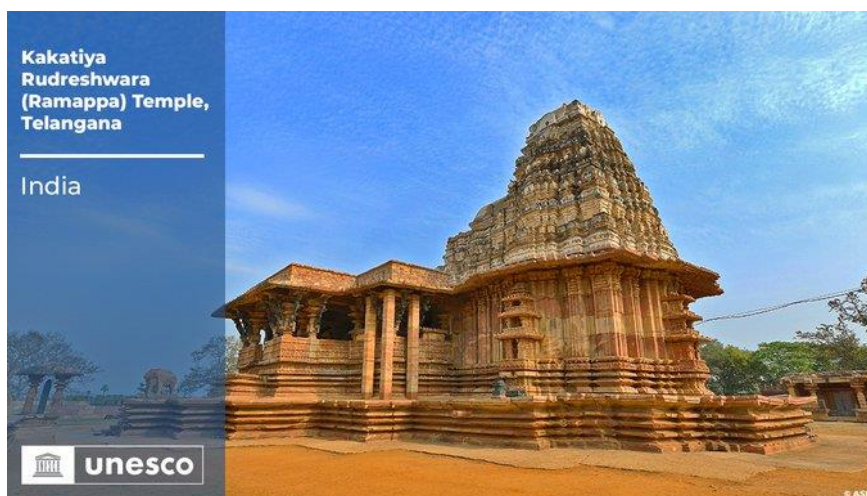


Image 3: Ramappa Temple

The temple's outer walls are carved with elephants along its surface. They are carved in such a way that all the elephants appear to be walking around the temple. There are around 520 elephant carvings on the wall, and surprisingly, no two elephants are identical! There are other examples of superb Kakatiya craftsmanship in this stunning temple. The amazing carvings include a flute at the entrance of the sanctum, which when hit, makes the sound sa-ri-ga-ma. The roof of the temple's innermost sanctum, where the main idol is placed, has a pyramid shaped roof or vimana, that is built with bricks that are so light, that they float on water. This has given the temple the name of 'the temple of floating bricks.'



Image 4: Ramappa Temple Stairs

The Italian explorer Marco Polo who visited the Kakatiya empire during the thirteenth century, described the Ramappa temple as "the brightest star in the galaxy of temples." On 25 July 2021, the Kakatiya Rudreshwara (Ramappa) Temple, Telangana, was declared a 'UNESCO World Heritage site.'

About the Author

Ms. Santhini Govindan is a widely published, award-winning author of children's literature in English. She has written more than fifty books for children, and has received two fellowships from the Government of India for research projects connected to Children's Literature in India.

