

GAMES AND AMUSEMENTS IN THE VIJAYANAGARA TEMPLE ART

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Games and Sports afford pleasure to the mind, and without our knowledge, they exert a most beneficial influence on the body. They help to make the body healthy, strong, active and handsome too. Dance and drama, play and pastime all of them contribute to recreation, and whereas sports as well as formal exercises serve to make man fit physically. Of the above two, games and sports have to be preferred to formal physical exercises and the Vijayanagara kingdom which is exactly considered as the most important resurgence for native cultural traditions, has impressive temple ruins surrounding modern Rayalaseema of Andhra Pradesh.

During the Vijayanagara period, several amusements were represented in art and the then contemporary sculptures enlighten us regarding the role played by various amusements and pastimes in the daily life of the different classes of people.

The sculptures of Vijayanagara period are substantially supplemented by the literary descriptions found in the works like Krishnadevaraya's *Amuktamalyada*, Allasani Peddana's *Manucharitra*, Tenali Ramakrishnas *Pandurangamahatyam* etc. the temples had a comprehensive role to play in the everyday life of the people. We have several of these popular games and amusements preserved in sculptures of the time.

GAMES:

The people of Vijayanagara were fond of Games and Sports more of out-door than of in-door pastimes. In the latter category, their games were Dice, Chess, Puppet-play, falconry with which they were familiar.

ARCHERY

All the epic heroes of India were great in archery. There were contingents of archers in Indian armies right from the Pre-Maurya and the Maurya age down to the period of the Rayas of Vijayanagara. A large number of archers are noticed in the sculptures and paintings of the Vijayanagara temples. The archers were also observed by foreign travelers of the period like Paes, who seems to have been extremely impressed by the decorations on the bows and arrows (Saletore 1982, 44). Archery is tough branch of warfare. It requires systematic training for battle. Those archers who rode on their horses to battle had to be endowed with an extraordinary skill in managing their horses and in shooting with their bows at their foes at the same time. There is a fascinating carving of an Amazon on a pillar of the mahamandapa of the Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadipatri. The sculpture of this lady is seen leaning to her left by supporting herself on a bow longer than herself. She holds the upper end of the bow with her

upraised right hand and the middle of the bow with her right foot; she appears to be bending the bow to string it.

Overall, the carving brings out the energetic case with which the Amazon strings her bow, which is larger than that of the soldiers (Harrison 1929, 44). The Lepakshi paintings of the *Kiratarjuniyam* story include hunters with bows and arrows. However, in them, the details of the arrows are not clearly visible.

HUNTING

During the Vijayanagara period, people were fond of fowling and hunting. Renowned travelers of the Vijayanagara Empire such as Nicolo De Conti, Barbosa and Nunez have also testified it. They recorded that there were reserved hunting grounds for sporting during this period. In fact, hunting was patronised by kings and queens.

Hunting was evidently of tigers, boars, deer and elephants, but the sculptures of the elephant hunting are seldom noticed. In many sculptures hunting dogs too can be seen on panel chasing animals. The rulers themselves were great hunters and this can be conspicuously perceived from Devaraya II being conferred with the title *Gajabetakara* (Mahalingam 1969, 64-8) (hunter of elephants). Contemporary Kannada poet's also recorded that there existed even women hunters.

The poets Viruparaja in his poem *Tribhuvana Vilasa* and poet Saluva in *Ramabhyudayam* praised the beauty of hunting women in superlatives and hyperbolic terms. These women accompanied their men folk in their hunting expeditions. The sculptures and paintings of the period corroborate the poetic evidence. The paintings of Lepakshi clearly show the nature and colour of the dress worn by the women hunters.

In the panel depicting the *Kiratarjuna* story, a woman of common folk wearing a breast cloth of green colour and a waistband that is wrapped around her loins is crystal clearly visible. *Manucharitra* also describes the hunters preferred to wear green colour dress or green leaves as their costume at the time of hunting in order to conceal themselves behind trees and shrubs, so that the wild animals may not recognize them.

A panel in the Srisailam Mallikarjuna temple reveals a huge boar being shot by a woman standing with a bow and arrow. The gigantic boar, which is throttled by a comparatively small dog of the chase, has before it a riding huntsman who also attacks it with a spear. There is a panel in the temple in which two adventurous and intrepid young women on horseback are furiously chasing a mighty boar. Probably, they are princesses as two horse-riding women accompany them. The princes pierce the wild boar from behind with long spear and the boar rises on its haunches and turns towards them to hurl itself on them.

A very rare scene of bird hunting is depicted in one of the panels on the southern outer wall of the Mallikarjuna temple, Srisailam. The panel shows a bird hunter standing with a falcon

sitting on his right wrist. He supports his right hand on a shaft or a long stick. He wears a *dhoti* with a central knot, a chain, armlets, anklets and wristlets. His hair is combed backwards and is arranged like a bun. He is shown again releasing the falcon from his left hand. The falcon is again shown as flying.

This sculpture projects the man for the third time with a raised left hand approaching the falcon shown in front clutching a dove between two trees. The position of the hunting bird reveals the keen observation power of the sculptor (Prasad shodhganga@ INFLIBNET 2017).

Another eye-catching sculpture of this period is a hunter with a bow and arrow attended by a male attendant and this is a common phenomenon in the temple carvings of the Vijayanagara period. A pillar of the *mahamandapa* at Nagalapuram in Chittoor district bears a hunter figure with bow and arrow at whose feet sits a male attendant.

CHATURANGA

Among the indoor games most popular with men was chess. In Andhra, it is known as '*chaturanga*'. The *Chaturanga* or Chess game was a favorite Vijayanagara court game. Indians taught *chaturanga* game to Persians and the conquering Arabs spread this game in the Middle East. Soon, the crusaders borrowed it from the Muslims and spread it in Europe. The chess retained and gained its' present form by the late middle ages. By the time Aleberuni came to India, he witnessed that the Arab and the Indian modes of playing chess were mostly different.

The game of Chess was one in which Sri Krishnadevaraya's daughter appears to have been an expert (Mysore Archaeological Report 1914, 59) as Sri Krishnadevaraya used to many a times play chess with his daughter Mohanangi. It is said that Bodducherla Timmana was proficient in the game and he used to play with Sri Krishnadevaraya and won many times. He also got *Koppolu* village as gift due to his victory in this game.

Among the other indoor games that were very popular in India and possibly in Andhra *Gambling* was one. Kings, Princes, Zamindars and well-to-do people used to play this game to recreate themselves. It was a common game for courtesans to practice this game, both for pleasure as well as to entice customers as gaming is a weakness, from which only a few people can overcome in any age or any time.

During the Vijayanagara period, acrobatics, puppet show, magic-show, and monkey game were other popular pastimes. Acrobats moved from place to place and entertained kings and commoners alike. Abdur Razzak graphically describes the feat of elephants, which were made to climb thirty feet high and beat time with their trunks to the tune of music. There were Acrobats who set up the poles for ropewalk and attracted village-folk by beating the drum. There were also Jugglers who were called as *vipravinodins* during these times.



Rapid Ropewalk

The Snake charming by the charmers was always another favorite pastime of the villagers. The figure of a snake charmer found on a pillar of the *kalyanamandapa* of Lepakshi temple. A snake charmer playing on a shallow-drum wearing a short tunic, a shirt and a nicker, over which a sort of girdle or waistband of leaves design is visible in the carvings of the Vijayanagar at many places. A sculpture of Jester on a pillar of the corridor, near the *natyamandapa* of Lepakshi is shown playing on a drum with both his hands. One can witness him blowing this instrument by holding it with both the hands. The carving also shows the cobra playing in response to the music of the pipe (Govindu 2015, 77).

All the sports like *jalakreeda* (water sporting), *vayukreeda* (air sporting), *bhukreeda* (land sporting) etc. were played in specially constructed arena and sports fields. Abdur Razzak had noticed the same between the nine-storied, nicely ornamented edifice and the pavilions. There was an open space beautifully laid out, in which artisans and sports persons exercised their respective arts. Historian Paes described in his writings about the specially constructed stadium for the celebration of the *Mahanavami* festival. Also, water games were played by all the people of all the ages irrespective of sex. *Vasucharitra* describes in detail the various forms of *jalakrida* i.e., swimming as an aquatic sport and the general recreational activity of the women of higher families during the Vijayanagara period.

AMUSEMENTS:

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the weekly fairs. Court performances were patronized by the rulers such as dance and music. A good number of sculptures of the period depict different types of physical exercises and acrobatics that were then in vogue.



Amusing Acrobatics

Exercise was a very popular practice among men in royal palaces. Every city had a gymnasium and during the peacetime, armies and their commanders were ordered to train others. The gymnasium at Chandragiri had a yard in centre, the pavement of which was covered with a layer of lime so smooth that it looked like a mirror; there was a walk area around it, which is spread over with red sand and on this wrestlers rested as they rest on a soft bed. During evenings, lights and torches were lit around the arena in such a way that the whole area was bright with illumination as the day.

Wrestling

Among the various aspects of social life depicted in Vijayanagara sculpture, wrestling is one. It was certainly popular in that times (Saletore 1934, 122) there seems to have been two types in wrestling: one, the game of strength, which has come down to the present day, and the second one that was violent and resembled modern boxing. Krishnadevaraya the emperor was himself a wrestler and Paes has borne out that he wrestled daily with one of his athletes. Women also participated in such games, as many as twelve thousand women bodyguards and they were of Amazonian physique and were highly skilled in the use of word, shield, and wrestling. Dancing girls also wrestled.

Wrestling is well represented in Vijayanagara sculpture. Different carvings depict wrestlers in various postures. Inside the octagonal band running around the southwest pillar in the *mukhamandapa* of Prasanna Venkateswara temple, Devuni Kadapa a wrestling scene is depicted on the east phase in two panels. In the first panel, pair of wrestlers is ready for about

with raised fists. In the second panel, they are locked in a wrestling post. They appear almost naked.

Kings and their subordinates encourage martial arts in their dominions as they promote bravery and courage in the public. Saluva Narasimharaya encouraged his generals and officials to settle their disputes in duels (Hanumantha Rao 2012, 392). On the south *prakara* of the Srisailam temple, such theme is found in one panel. Inside a pillared hall, a king seated cross-legged on a pedestal while his attendants stand behind him. In front of him, two wrestlers are engaged in a wrestling bout.

Fencing & Dueling

Fencing and dueling were the passions among the nobles. There was a great honour attached to those who fought the duel and the dead man was given to the survivor. According to Nunez, no one could fight a duel without first asking leave of the minister, which was however very formal, for it was forthwith granted (Sewell 1962, 383-4). Barbosa, says that one and another challenged to duels, and when the challenge was accepted, the king gives his permission, and the day of the duel was fixed by the persons challenged, the weapons to be used must be according to measure; the king appointed a field for the fight. The contenders went naked, covered only with some cloth wrapped round their waist, with very cheerful faces. In a few strokes, it was over as they were bare and this was a common practice (Dames 1918, 190-1).

Horse Riding

Horse riding was also a pastime of the Vijayanagara people. The carvings on the temple walls representing men riding on horses shows that to great extent horses were used in wars. This is again symbolic of the exercise of power (Subhamiah Pantulu 1808).

The women in Vijayanagara, apart from being good-looking and even beautiful, could ride horses, corroborated by the panels. These women are shown riding horses that are smaller than those riders used by men. During the Vijayanagara period, along with Horse Riding, Cockfight, Ram-fight, Buffalo-fight seems to have been popular. Cockfight is mentioned in Krishnadevaraya's "*Amuktamalyada*" and "*Bharatadesa Vaibhava*".

Kolatam

Game of sticks (*Kolata*) is essentially an indoor game of the female folk of those times. Nevertheless, on days of festival and enchanting weather, men also play it in the open grounds. The unique feature of this game is that each person carries a pair of painted sticks and the players form a circle and move clockwise or anti clock wise, striking the sticks with those of the adjacent player. They also sing folk or traditional *Kolata* songs in tune to music and beat each stick with another stick that they are holding in their hands (*kolu*) (Reddeppa 2000, 16).

In a big team, they fan in and out in concentric circles, which provide a grand spectacle to the spectators. Usually this is a team game but, it could be played by two members as well. In sculptures depicting *Kolata* scenes, participants usually wore tight and gorgeous dress, which allowed free movement of limbs. Expert players performed acrobatics such as touching their hair buns with their toes, while playing *Kolata*.

The Vijayanagara temples are abound in *kolattam* scenes, which are depicted as decorative friezes on the lintels of entrance *gopuras* (a large pyramidal tower over the entrance gate to a temple precinct), walls, *adhithana* ([the raised base on which a temple stands](#)) etc.



A Sculpture showcasing women immersed in playing Kolattam

The Chintala Venkataramana temple, Tadipatri, has these friezes on the wall of the main shrine. The temples of Lepakshi, Ahobilam, Somapalem, Kadiri, Tirumala, Tirupati etc., also have many examples of such friezes. Apart from these, during the Vijayanagara period there were a number of amusements in which the royalty and the commoners participated and took active interest. To them, this stemmed from a lively sense of well-being, down to earth joy for living and a balanced view of life.

In the period of Vijayanagara, stone carvings in many temples, indicate that they were places for public life of the people in their day to day life. Certain games that appear to that of the Vijayanagar period are still practiced till date, however, others are yet to be identified. After the establishment of the British rule in India, western i.e., foreign habits and ways of living have deeply influenced the Indian society.

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