



## MANMATHA VIJAYA PAINTINGS OF HAMPI AND AMMINABHAVI, KARNATAKA

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### ABSTRACT

*The episode of Shiva reducing the Indian cupid Kamadeva or Manmatha to ashes is known variously as Kama Dahana, Kamantaka, Manmatha Vijaya, Madanari or Madananantaka. There are a good number of sculptural depictions of this episode found in India art and also in the temples of Karnataka. But it is in the delineation of this episode in paintings that the artists of Karnataka display a great deal of imagination. The Manmatha Vijaya (or the defeat) of Manmatha culminates in the death of Manmatha and later leads to the marriage of Siva with Girija or Parvati. The paintings on the ceiling of the Maharangamantapa of the Virupaksha Temple at Hampi vividly depict three interconnected episodes found in the Puranas and other ancient texts, namely, the death of Sati, the burning of the Indian cupid Kamadeva, and the marriage of Siva and Girija. Similar paintings are also found at Amminabhavi. It is proposed to discuss the unique features of these paintings based primarily on field study.*

**Key Words:** *Kama Dahana, Virupaksha Temple, Amminabhavi*

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The story of Manmatha and Siva is beautifully narrated in the *Kumara Sambhavam* of Kalidasa a Sanskrit poet who flourished in the fifth century CE.<sup>2</sup> In Karnataka a twelfth century CE poet Hari Hara, who lived in Hampi composed a work called *Girija Kalyana*<sup>3</sup>. This text more or less follows Kalidasa's path in narrating the story of Siva and Girija's

wedding. However, since Harihara lived in Hampi and he was a great devotee of the deity Virupaksha, it is believed that Virupaksha was the hero of the *Girija Kalyana* work and that Girija in the form of Pampambika or Pampadevi was the bride. The text thus appears to delineate the wedding of Virupaksha and Pampambika. But the noteworthy aspect of

the paintings is the very mode of narration of the characters in the composition.

The paintings on the ceiling of the *Maharangamantapa*<sup>4</sup> of the Virupaksha Temple at Hampi record the earliest painted visual depictions of Kama Dahana Siva, the wedding of Siva and Girija and also Siva as *Tripura Samhara*. These three episodes are synoptically painted as syncretic versions upon the ceiling of the *Maharangamantapa* and are also closely connected both thematically and textually. The texts like *Matsya Purana*, *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, *Markandeya Purana* and *Siva Purana* provide a detailed narration of *Kama Bhasma* or *Kama Dahana*, i.e. the Burning of Kama the Indian Cupid.

The tale of *Kama Dahana* is closely associated with the wedding of Siva and Girija and also the birth of Kumara (Kartikkeya), who was destined to kill Tarakasura. The Puranas also provide descriptions about the *Yajna* of Daksha and death of Sati, following which Siva withdraws in grief, from the world of the householder and becomes an ascetic. Siva's penance leaves the divine world in great trouble as the demon Tarakasura had a boon that he may be killed only by the offspring of Siva. As Siva was lost in a trance and totally engrossed in meditation, Tarakasura took the opportunity to terrorise the *devas*. The *Devas* therefore appealed to Vishnu, Brahma and Indra to save them from the demon. Finally Vishnu and all the other gods decided to disturb Siva's penance and influence him to marry once again. Meanwhile Sati had been reborn as Girija, the daughter of the Himavanta, (Himalaya Mountains). She was an ardent devotee of Siva and wanted to win the deity as her spouse. So Vishnu and the other gods convinced Kama to take this opportunity to create lust in his mind as he is the god of *Shringara*. Kama and his consort Rati (Passion) both agreed to this request in order to save the divine world.

Kama and Rati came to the Hemakuta hill where Siva was in penance. Girija was also seated in meditation nearby, waiting for Siva to awaken from his penance and notice her. Kama with his sugarcane bow, along with Rati, mounted on his *ratha* (chariot) driven by his parrot, shot his arrow at Siva's heart. Pierced by the arrow of Kamadeva,

Siva opened his eyes and saw Girija (Bhavani). Immediately, there arose a feeling of love for her. But, at the same time, he was also angry and wanted revenge on the person responsible for disturbing his penance. When Siva realized that Kamadeva was the culprit, he opened his third eye, and Kama was burnt to ashes by Siva's fiery gaze. This event, described in the Puranas as Manmatha Vijaya or Kama Dahana, became a popular subject for the artists to depict in paintings.

This episode of Manmatha Vijaya painted on the ceiling of the *Maharangamantapa* at the Virupaksha temple Hampi has an interesting style of narration (**Fig. 1**). The artist executing the painting appears to have had a good knowledge of the subject. A major portion of the composition is occupied by Kama and Rati mounted on a chariot drawn by a parrot, both facing left, within a rectangular space. The figure of Siva is set to his left, in the upper right hand rectangular space of the composition. Siva's *vahana* (mount) Nandi the Bull as well as Girija along with her father are set below Siva in the lower rectangular space. As mentioned in the text, Siva is seated in meditation; his hair locks are matted and have grown long. He is in seated posture, and wears a loin cloth. His hand gestures also are quite interesting, they appear to be in *dharmachakra pravartana mudra*,<sup>5</sup> as seen in Buddha images. (**Fig. 2**) His body is painted white so as to depict him covered with *Bhasma* (ashes). His eyes are wide open, although in the texts it is said he should be meditating with his eyes closed. Apparently, the artist wanted to portray the impression that Siva's meditation has been broken and he has opened his eyes. The artist has also added a landscape behind Siva, to give the feel of a forest with birds and animals. In the foreground, at the bottom of the composition we find wavy lines depicting a river with fishes swimming in it.

The figures of Kama and Rati are particularly painted as protagonists. The *ratha* has two sections. Kama in *alidha* posture with his bow and ready to shoot his arrow is set in the frontal section. Rati in standing posture is painted to the rear side of Kama as his supporter. The *ratha* appears like

a double sectioned *mantapa*. The *ratha* has a *sikhara* reminiscent of contemporary Dravidian architecture. The *ratha* is very beautifully executed and quite realistically painted with two

side wheels, drawn by the parrot. On the lower right corner, as mentioned earlier, we find the figures of Nandi, Girija and her father Himavanta (Fig. 3). Nandi is galloping as his master has come out of his meditation and Girija is eagerly waiting for Siva to see her and give his consent for marriage.



Figure 1: Manmatha Vijaya Ceiling Virupaksha Temple, Hampi



Figure 3: Girija-Himavanta - Detail of Manmatha Vijaya



Figure 2: Siva - Detail of Manmatha Vijaya

The *Manmatha Vijaya* episode culminates in the marriage of Siva and Girija<sup>6</sup>(Fig-4). Artists at Hampi also depicted an elaborate narration of the marriage episode. The figures in standing postures cover the entire central space in an oblong shaped composition. The narration is divided into sections, where the figures of *devatas* and *rishis* are accommodated. Brahma as the *purohita* chants and performs the marriage ritual. All figures are in standing posture. They appear to be actively involved in the performance of the marriage. A tree is depicted in the centre, symbolically representing the *Shami vriksha* which is used as a witness of the marriage. Each section is decorated with shrines on the upper strata of the figures. These shrines give the feel of as if the episode is taking place in a temple.

It is noteworthy that the entire composition brings in the then contemporary practice. It is also associated with Hampi as there are places that are, even today, identified with the characters

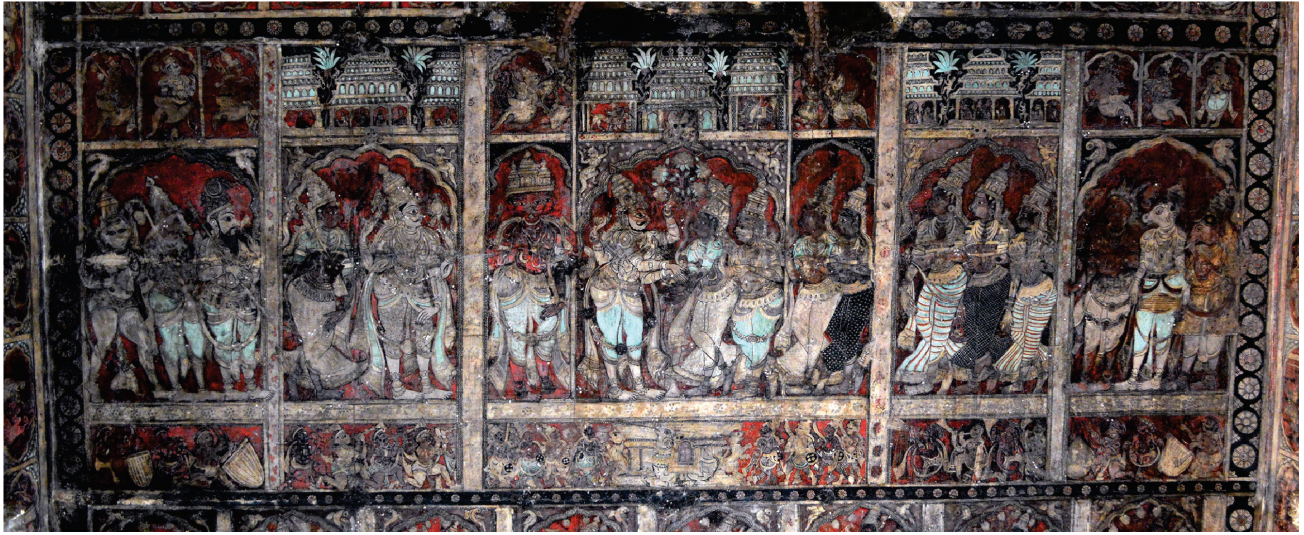


Figure 4: Girija Kalyan, Virupaksha Ceiling. Hampi

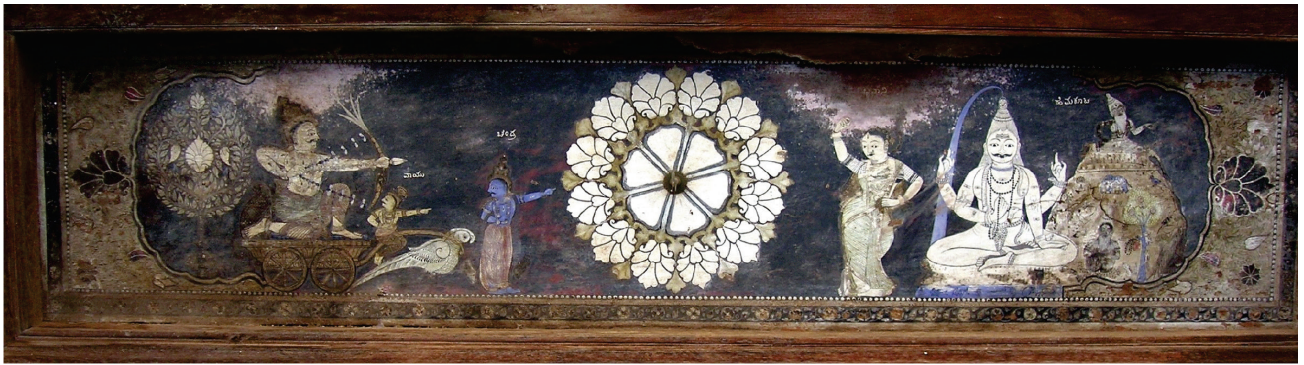


Figure 5: Manmatha Vijaya- Amminabhavi.

in the painting. Hemakuta is located next to the Virupaksha temple where some old temples are situated. The Manmatha Kunda is a pond adjacent to the Virupaksha temple, and *Girija Kalyana* – the wedding of Virupaksha and Pampambika is performed as an annual ritual even today at the temple at Hampi. The painting and architectural representations go very well with the local myths and legends that have become an inseparable part of the socio-religious practices of the temple.

An interesting narration of Manmatha Vijaya is also found in the late nineteenth century CE Sri Shanteshwara Mutt - a Veerashaiva Lingayat Mutt at Amminabhavi near Dharwad<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 5). Here, the paintings are found on the wooden canopy - *chajja* of the inner courtyard of the Mutt. The artist employed the same theme but the mode of depiction is different. Kamadeva is mounted on a *ratha* and the charioteer is the God of Wind, Vayu;

while the Moon Deity Chandra is guiding Kama to shoot the arrow. The figure of Kamadeva's consort Rati is missing in this narration. Shiva is seated in *yogasana* with his body covered in ashes. The river goddess Ganga emerges from his *jata*. Interestingly Girija as Bhavani is standing in a dance posture. The entire narration takes place in a most synoptic manner as the artist has limited the figures to very minimal numbers. Interestingly, the figures of Vayu and Chandra are new additions to this narration. The figures are composed in interesting designed frames.

Thus, from the above discussion it is evident that the episode of *Kama Dahan* or *Manmatha Vijaya* finds an important space in Indian art. Especially in Karnataka, Kama and Rati images have been carved in many temples as auspicious figures, and hence many temples have depictions of Kama-Rati on walls and on door jambs; while

paintings are found on the ceilings of the *mantapas*. The texts and myths have inspired the artists in the depiction of such subjects, which have resulted in the creation of beautifully executed paintings that represent individual artistic interpretations and expressions of the episode.

## Notes

1. *Kumara Sambhavam* of Kalidasa has a beautiful narration of Manmatha's role in disturbing Siva's penance. In Canto-03 of the *Kumara Sambhavam*, Kalidasa illustrates how Manmatha prepared for the venture. Indra was given the task of persuading Manmatha for this task, and Manmatha had assisted Indra secretly in several such acts. It also postulates that the daughter of Himavant is already serving Siva while he was in penance, as she is devoted to him and desires to win him as her husband. Manmatha agreed upon to help Indra and decides to go ahead with plan of making Siva fall in love with the daughter of Himavant, who is Sati reborn.
2. Harihara was a twelfth century Kannada poet who was born in Halebidu in the Hoysala kingdom and flourished during the reign of Narasimha-I. He moved to Hampi where he compiled several works in *Champu*. *Girija Kalyana* was one of the premier works of Harihara, others being *Basavarajadevara Ragale* and *Shivaganada Ragale*.
3. The Maharangamantapa paintings of Hampi have been dated differently by various scholars. Sivaramamurthy dated the paintings to the fifteenth century CE. A. Dallapiccola opined that these paintings were executed as late as the nineteenth century. However, the Maharangamantapa was constructed in the year 1509 CE by Krishnadeva Raya to commemorate his coronation ceremony. So the paintings must have been painted only after 1510 CE. I have dated them based on art historical and stylistic studies to 1515-20 CE.
5. The *Dharma Chakra Pravartana mudra* is usually associated with Buddhist iconography to denote the enlightened Buddha in teaching posture. The artist has used similarly looking form of hand gestures here in the painting of Siva. Siva in *Dhyani mudra* categorically suggests that the deity is seated in the posture of meditation.
6. The episode of *Girija Kalyana* has been narrated in Indian art from very early period. Earliest examples can be seen at Elephant in the great Siva cave. This is followed by similar representations at Ellora. At Badami Cave -1 we find a narrative of *Girija Kalyana* on the lintel. The images in Badami are very small in size while at Elephanta and Ellora they are larger than life figures.
7. Amminabhavi is a historic village dating from the tenth century onwards, and is located on the outskirts of Dharwad city. The paintings are found on the canopy of the central open space of the mutt (temple). They possibly date from 1870s onwards. Stylistically they follow traditional features. There is a strong *Maratha* influence in the painting style. For a detailed discussion see: R. H. Kulkarni's Amminabhaviya Shanteshvara Mathada Bhatti Chitragalu, (Dist. Dharwad) and "*Dharawada Jilleya Itihasa Mattu Puratattva*" Edited by Dr. R. Gopal, published in 2008, by the Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Mysore.