



## Significance of Yali in South India with Reference to Rayalaseema Temples

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to describe Yali, a decorative motif in Indian temple architecture. It's a composite animal of the body of a lion and the head of other animals, such as an elephant, sculpted on the pillars and pilasters across the temples of South Asia. The image of Yali traveled from the Indus Valley civilization to the Vijayanagara Empire of the 15th century through various transitions with refinement. It is prevalently found in temples in Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, especially in Rayalaseema, Karnataka, as well as in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa. This article accounts for Yali sculptures in the Rayalaseema region, such as Kadapa district (Gandikota, Vonttimitta), Kurnool district (Ahobilam, Srisailam, and Mahanandi), Anantapur district (Tadipathri, Lepakshi, and Kadirī), and Chittoor district (Tirupati, Sri Kalahasti, and Somapalem). Yali sculptures have reached supreme quality in all the temples built during the rule of the Vijayanagara kings in the Rayalaseema region. There were several kinds of yalis, each has its significance.

**Keywords:** Temple, Architecture, Sculpture, Vyala, Pallava, Vijayanagara, Rayalaseema.

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## INTRODUCTION

The word "Yali" is surmised from Sanskrit and Tamil words "fierce monster." Yali is a mythical animal that has the body of a lion but the trunk of an elephant. Yali has been considered as the integral part of the Indian pillar and evolution. The power of yali is considered as more than the lion and elephant. (Ancient India No. 4 1948).

In its widest sense, Yali signifies the "Grotesque," which is often called *vikata* in literature. It is synonymous with *gana*, *pramatha*, *bhuta*, *yaksha*, and *rakshasa* in the Puranas. From Indian mythology, a few typical forms conveying this idea were evolved, e.g., Ganapati (an elephant's head joined to the human body), Hayagriva (a horse head), Hanuman or Vrishakapi (a monkey head), Nrisimha (a man-lion), Nri-Varaha (a boarheaded man).

Mostly, Yali appears in Hindu temples, carved as part of the pillars, which have been extensively used as an element in the south Indian sculpture. The earliest yali sculpture known to have been produced during the reign of Pallava in the early seventh century. It appears that the architects working in the different schools of Orissa, Khajuraho, Western India, Rajasthan, and south India entered into a healthy rivalry in creating new forms of yali shapes placed in all positions and in many instances. Their study is an attractive chapter of Indian temple sculpture, and as such, the Silpa texts have taken due notice of their varied existence.

## YALI, THE PROTECTOR

Yalis are to be believed as energetic and powerful than the lion and elephant. It is known as an Indian dragon. One logical reason that we have come closer is that, according to Hindu tradition, these ferocious creatures are believed to protect and guard the temples. This is the reason why you can find them in the entrance halls (mandapa) of temples. According to the Vastu Shastra, *Gaja Yali* is found in the Rayalaseema Temples in south India and the Meenakshi Temple in Tamil Nadu.

## HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF YALI

Early signs of the emergence of the Yali image can be traced to the Pallava reign in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Yali, sometimes also known as *Varala*, *Virala*, and *Viralika* in Vastu texts, was also prominent in the decorative devices of the Andhra-Sunga and Kushana-Kshatrapa eras. The tiger cave at Saluvankuppam is a remarkable sign of the arrival into Indian art and significance of yali during Rajasimha's reign. The facade of Rock Hewn Cave was carved of rampant lions together with monstrous heads. (Flyson, D.R., 1949). In the post-Gupta era, it transgressed the territorial limits of India; it was used with the seeds of many arts from India to Lanka and the fertile soils of Southeast Asia, especially Java.



Fig. 1: Evolution of Yali

The evolution of the Yali image started with Pallavas. It has been noticed that in the Buddhist art element of the Asoka pillar, “lion capital,” a sitting lion was always on top of the shaft of the column may be the source of inspiration in creation of yali. The Pallava sculptor placed an image of a lion as the base and carrying shaft of the column on top of its head. The Pallava sculptor cleverly used the same element of Mauryan art for the pillar design of the Hindu temple (Fig. 1). It may be said that this is the early start of the creation of yali. It later underwent many changes during Chola times, with high decoration and very large sizes, and reached its pinnacle during Vijayanagara art. As a result, a gigantic

and ferocious yali emerged (Fig. 2). During the medieval period, Yali appeared in different contexts. From the coping stones of stupas of the later Andhra and Ikshvaku periods, the Yali traveled westward and reappeared in the basements of some of the earliest Karnatic temples. In fact, in Karnataka, it continues in the Simhatara temples of the Hoyasala period. Perhaps, under Karnatic influence or as an inheritance from the monuments of the Pallava period, it was also present in the adhisthanam of the temples of the Chola period. It has been reported on pillar bases in rock caves at Undavalli and Mughalrajapuram, a feature followed by sculptors of the Pallava period from the mid-7th century onwards in rock caves and monolith shrines at Mahabalipuram. Structural temples at Kanchi and elsewhere.

In instances of Yali appearance in Pandya period structures, like Meenakshi temple Madurai, we may find Yali images as pillars. In the buildings built under the reign of Vijayanagara kings, however, Yali gained supreme significance in Indian art. Almost to the siege level, when they occupied only the pillar-capitals and bracket-struts of the pillars, they brought down and occupied the shafts of the peripheral pillars of pavilions. And I subscribed to such a tropical fantasy to a lesser degree in Kalyanamandapa in Vijayanagara, Vellore, and Viranchipuram.

In the temples of North India, the story, though slightly different, is by no means less interesting. The association of Yali in door-frames such as Yalisakha or Sinhalakha in northern Gujarat (c. 7th century) and Roda (c. late 8th century) and its further continuation in temples of the 9th, 10th, and 12th centuries in Gujarat are now known as stages of Indian architecture. Alampur" occurs on the wall-face (kati) of some ornamental temples such as Vishwa-Brahma and Svarga-Brahma (1st quarter of the 8th century) of the Yali Nagara class. So it appears on Vaitala Devas (late. 8th century)" and at Kalinga. Mukteshwar Temple at Bhubaneswar (mid-10th century). But from the beginning of the 10th century onwards, their universal locations throughout northern India were deep recesses (recesses) in the wall



**Fig. 2: Yali at Virinchipuram**

of the shrine-wall and the closed hall. The Mohenjo-Daro seal depicts a composite animal with a pair of horns, ivory tusks and trunk, a lion's mane, the graceful body of a deer, the hind legs of a tiger, and a straight snake-like tail. This leaves no doubt that the Indus people were familiar with the symbolism of Yali. This shows that many aspects of Hindu sacred art have their origins in the art, culture, and religious beliefs of the Indus people (Dhaky.M.A.1965).

They featured in temple complexes commissioned under the Tuluva dynasty in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, often in Mandapas at the Virupaksha shrine, Hampi (1510), the Chintala Venkataramana temple at *Tadipathri*, the Veerabhadra temple, Lepakshi, the Kodandarama temple at Vonttimitta, the Govindaraja temple in Tirupati, the Tirumala Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati and the Vidyashankara temple in Sringeri (16th century). Also, the Temple of Pampapati, the Hazara Rama temple, and the Vittalaswami temple are the best examples of Vijayanagara architecture; these all have pillars carved as rearing Yali. Such pillars became standard features in the extensive Mandapas and monumental processional corridors erected by the Nayak governors of Gingee, Madurai, and Tanjore. The governors were installed by the Tuluva dynasty. (Anna L. Dallapiccola, George Michel & Anila Varghese, 2014).



Fig. 3: Simahayali & Gajayali images at Tadipatri Temple

## TYPES OF YALIS

According to Vastu Shastra ("Science of Architecture"), there are 16 types of Yalis that were created in Indian art. The mythical Yali's function is to define space and is woven onto the temple art with the intention guarding the temples against the evil eye or lending a sense of the sacred to ritual occasions. And one of the most powerful symbols of protection found on the temples is the yali, which is most often depicted as part lion, part elephant, and part horse. In this time of uncertainty, we find solace in the beauty of the south Indian temples, through the rich symbolism of the yali (Aneesha Bangera,2024).

The important Slipa texts represents sixteen types of Yalis, for a total of 256 forms, as stated in all of the Slipa texts. These figures gained popularity in temple design during the Middle Ages.

## YALI IN RAYALASEEMA TEMPLES

The traditional text like Samaradgana Sutradhara of (11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) cited 16 types of yalis. These are Harina (deer), Gridhraka (vulture), Mtsuka (parrot), Kukkuta (cock), Simha (lion), Sardula (tiger),

Vrika (wolf), Aja (goat), Gandaki (Rhinoceros female), Gajah (elephant), Kroda (beer), Asva (horse), Mahisha (buffalo), Svana (dog), Markata (monkey), and Khara (Ar.Meenal Kumar,2018). (Donkey). Out of 16 yalis, in the Rayalaseema region temples, we may notice five types of yalis recurrently appearing.

1. **Simhayali:** The Simhayali, one of the most famous forms, is thought to be the temple's guardian. Additionally, it is one of the designs woven into the kanjivaram drape, which offers protection to the wearer and is viewed as a common feature in all of the Rayalaseema region's temples.
2. **Gajayali:** The *Gajayali* is composed of an elephant head and lion's body, standing and poised to leap into the air. *Gajayali* can be seen in Tadipathri, Tirupati, Ahobilam, Srisailam, and Sri Kalahasti temples.
3. **Sardulayali:** The *Sardulayali* bears head of a tiger. The tiger is a symbol of enormous power and beauty, and this form of the yali is depicted standing atop an elephant. This type of yalis are mostly appears us in Srisailam and Tirumala temples.
4. **Asvayali:** The Asvayali is the combination horse's head and Lion body standing on elephant's back seems as it is leaping into the air. The horse stands for power and vitality. These kind of Asvayali is found in the Sri Kalahasti temple.
5. **Sarpayali:** The Sarpayali is the combination of Serpent head with lion's body. The serpent is symbolized for guardianship and reparation, and the terrifying yali is a symbol of immense strength. These kinds of Yalis are mostly seen in Sri Kalahasti temples.
- 6.



Fig. 4: Simhayali and Sarpa yali at Vontimitta Temple, Kadapa

The Yali in Rayalaseema temple architecture is often accompanied by a kneeling knight engaged in an encounter. The knight is often thrown into inaction under the spell of terror cast by roaring and balancing. Such a dramatic composition of Yali is only seen in Rayalaseema temples. Yali is most frequently seen on an elephant mount. Sometimes the yali even appears as though trampling an elephant (*gajakranta*) seen in Rayalaseema temples; such forms are known as Gajavidala. Such Gaja-Simha pairs are known from Tadipathri and Vonttimitta, Lepakshi, Tirupati, Srikalahasti, Srisailam, and Ahobilam temples, answering perhaps the well-known metaphors of Sanskrit poets; these are

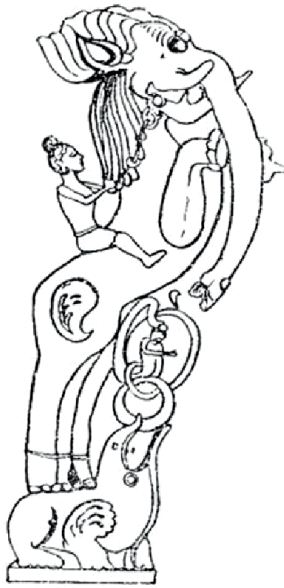


Fig.6(a) Gajayali in Sri Venkateswara temple, Tirumala, Tirupati.



Fig.6(b) Sardulayali in Sri Mallikarjuna temple, Srisailam.



Fig. 5: Simhayali at Lepakshi

emblematic of the iconic concepts of Gaja yali and Simha yali. Earlier, as at Alampur, Bhubaneswar, the Yali were seen tamed or irked by a rider on a flight. Simha yali figures prominently in Vastu sastras. This prominence corresponded to the pillars of the temples, where they, along with Gajayali and Simhayali, are more frequently on the scene. Simhayali represents an example from the Chintala Venkataramana temple, a 15th-century temple at Tadipathri.

Gajayali, Asvayali, and Simhayali from Sri Venkateswara temple Tirumala in Kalyanamandapa can be noticed. 16 Gajayali pillars piled one up on another for a mandapa of more height. The Vrishayali sculpture at Govindaraja temple was carved in front of the entrance; this type of yali is seen only in this temple at Rayalaseema. Pillars at Chintala Venkataramana Temple in Tadipathri were engraved with images of yali, or hippogriffs.

In the Rayalaseema, the most frequently appearing yalis are the lion-headed Simhayali, Gajayali, with the head of an elephant. In the Rayalaseema region, two types of Yalis are found in Chintala Venkataramana temples: *Simhayali* and *Gajayali* sculptures, which appear at temples in Tadipathri temples. The Yali sculpture of Vijayanagara has attained refinement, as have the Chalukya, Hoyasala, Pandyas, and Chola sculptural qualities. This Yali pillar at Kodandarama temple in Vonttimetta, constructed by Vijayanagara kings, is dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. All the Yali pillars in this Kodandarama Temple are Simhayali, which are full of lavish decorative ornamentation. The Asvayali and Gajayali prominently appear in Sri Kalahasti temple. As the mandapa is supported over 32 pillars, 4 double yali pillars, the colonnades in the mandapa have been carved as yali pillars, figurines of attendant apsaras.

## CONCLUSION

The sculptures in the temples of South India are infused with amazing creativity; each character was portrayed from Indian mythology. Yali represents immense strength and ferocity. And the combined strength of an elephant, lion, and horse. It is noticed that the *Yali* sculptures are one of the most

attractive elements of the temples and act as supporting pillars of the heavy ceilings of the mandapa as an engineering aspect to create ambience in halls. These *Yali* sculptures became more prominent along with warrior sculptures. During the early 15<sup>th</sup>-century Vijayanagara rule, Yali was introduced into Rayalaseema. The Yalis were symbolized to emphasize the fighting spirit of the Hindus. There were sixteen types of Yalis found in the temples of India. Out of these sixteen, five prominently appear in temples in the Rayalaseema region: Simhayali, *Gajayali*, *Asvayali*, *Sardhulayali*, and Sarpayali. The way the sculptures have paid attention to even the smallest details is mind-blowing. These are not just sculptures but also served as load-bearers, supporting pillars of the heavy temple ceilings, as a sign of engineering marvels for Indian sculptors as well as architects. Yali may nicely fit into the pantheon of hybrid animals in Hindu mythology. We can take the weird and grotesque stone images as the pinnacle of human creative imagination, but the ability to give expression to such a strange concept in stones is unique. This kind of art form in hard stone is a difficult task that requires amazing chiselling skills with dexterity. V. Senthilikumaran has written a wonderful article on yali with wonderful illustrations in pen and ink that are highly appreciable. The connectivity with south Asia dates from Pallava times; this yali also appears on the both sides of balustrade of Sri Lankan temples.

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