

Religious Festivals in the Temples of Medieval Kadapa Region of Āndhradēśa (1000 AD – 1600 AD)

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Abstract: *The temples of the medieval Kadapa region of Āndhradēśa (1000 AD – 1600 AD) served not only as centres of religious worship but also as vital nuclei of social, cultural, and economic life. This study explores the nature, evolution, and significance of religious festivals celebrated in these temples, drawing upon epigraphic records, temple inscriptions, literary sources, and architectural evidence. The period under review, spanning from the late Chola and Kakatiya influence to the Vijayanagara and Nayaka dominion, witnessed the flourishing of temple culture marked by elaborate ritual calendars and festival traditions (utsavas) dedicated to deities. The study of the temple festivals during medieval Kadapa were not merely devotional observances but also dynamic expressions of socio-political power, cultural continuity, and economic organization.*

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Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to highlight the festivals conducted in the medieval Kadapa region of Āndhradēśa from 1000–1600 AD, which includes the period of Chālukyās, Kākatiyās and Vijayanagara rulers. The temples formed a centre and pivot of the religious life of the people. The people used to come to temples in large number for offering worship or for participating in the ceremonies and festivals. There developed a varied and complex routine of rituals sustained by the rich accumulations of land, money and gold as result of religious gifts. Gods were offered, special *pūjās* during the festivals

for the merit of the donors, parents, ancestors, etc. The festivals based on religion are celebrated in temples depending upon the economic resources in a big way; the temple festivals attract people in large number. The main deity as well as processional deity is adorned with garlands of fragrant flowers and rich jewellery, thus presenting a grand look. Temples and houses are also decorated with festoon of mango leaves and flower garlands. Apart from this, a special *puja* is offered to God who rendered the whole atmosphere filled with devotion. The ritual practices also underwent change from simple to elaborate and complex processes stretching from early morning to midnight accompanied by singing, dancing, etc.

During the festival times, the god is taken in procession on chariot, so that people of every social group can see the god. According to tradition, those who have the good fortune of seeing the god on the chariot will be rid of the cycle of birth and death. The periodical festivals were occasions marked by fairs, contests of learning, and every other form of popular entertainment. The large endowments in the form of land, cash, gold, silver, etc., conferred on each temple by successive generations of pious donors tended to make it at once a generous landlord and as a banker whose aid was always to those who needed it. The festivals celebrated near the temples were known as *tirunallu* or *jataras*. At that time the recitation of *Vēdās* and religious discourses, musical concerts, dance performances, etc., of public interest would be arranged to educate, entertain and spiritualize the people. Cock-fights, rams fights, wrestling, acrobatics and other forms of amusements would be additional attractions during the festival days. These celebrations would create religious awareness and unity among the people¹. Festivals like *Mahāśivarātri*, *Vaikuntaēkādaśi*, *Śrīrāmanavami*, *Janmāshtami*, *Nāgulachavithi*, *Daśara*, etc, are religiously important and they are celebrated in the temples. These festivals occur once a year, celebrated in some temples for a week or ten days annually. These are known as annual festivals. Inscriptions are the best source material to know about the festivals celebrated in temples and various places in medieval Kadapa region. There are many inscriptions mention the donations to celebrate festivals in the temples². It is worthy to state the donations were given to temples on auspicious days i.e. festival days. In the case of donations or gifts made to the temples for acquiring religious merit, the donors particularly selected festival days when the donors expected the religious merit of their parents and their ancestors, they donated lands, gold, etc; to the temples on the particular days like solar eclipse, lunar eclipse and *Makarasankrānti*.

On the occasion of an eclipse gods were worshipped by devotees after having a bath in a river and making several gifts. The earliest reference to this custom in the district was made in an epigraph of the reign of Western Chālukya king Kirtivarman Satyāśraya. It mentions a gift of one *maruttu* of land at Malavūru to the god Āditya Bhatāra by Perbanadhirāju on the occasion of an eclipse³. An epigraph dated 1319 A.D. at Chenduvāyi (Siddhavattam taluk of Kadapa district) during the reign of Kākatīya Pratāparudra, refers to Rudrayalemka, the younger brother of Mahāpradhāni Juttayalemka, having taken a sacred bath on the day of the lunar eclipse granted, for the merit of the king several incomes such as the *rachasrotriyam*, the *arigoru-pannu*, *karnika* etc, in the village of Chenduvayi, situated in the Sakali bhūmi, for the mid-day offerings of the god Siddhanātha⁴. A Saluva chief of the Vijayanagara period also made the gift of land on the occasion of a lunar eclipse for the merit of his father⁵. A record dated 1518 A.D. mentions, the village Kōkatam was granted to Allasani Peddana by the Vijayanagara king Krishnadēvarāya as *Sarvamānya*. This grant was made on the banks of river

Krishna at Bezwada on the occasion of a lunar eclipse⁶. Another record from Chintakommadinne dated in 1556 A.D. during the rule of Sadāsivarāya mentions the grant of land made on the occasion of a solar eclipse to the temple of Janardhanaperumal by the *Kāryakarta* Yallappa-Nayaningaru for the merit of his overlord⁷.

The earliest reference to the *Dasami mahōtsava*, in the inscriptions of the Kadapa district, was made in 1517 A.D. It knows that the *Dasami utsavas* were not celebrated earlier since about the 15th century A.D., all the festivals have assumed prominence, and with the increase in the income of the temples, the celebrations acquired a growing splendour. A record from Nemalladinne, dated 1517 A.D. In the reign of Krishnadevaraya, mentioned the confirmation of a former grant of the *Sthalasunka* made by Vidvan-Mahajanas of the village Nemalladinne by *Rāmarāya* for the *Dasami mahotsavas* of the Perumal⁸. Another record from Aguduru in Pulivendla taluk of Kadapa district dated 1544 A.D, in the rule of Sadāsivadēvarāya, mentions, the grant of the *sthala-sunka* of Avuduri-penta for the conduct of *Dasami-tirunala* and *Utlā-tirunala* festivals to god Chennakesvara of Avuduri by *mahāmandalēśvara* Sammaka Rangayadēva Mahārāja⁹. An inscription from Koduru in Kamalapuram taluk of Kadapa district dated 1548 A.D. refers to the gift of the tolls named *pentasunkamu* due from the village Amdiraju Koduru for conducting the festival like *Dasami* and *Srijayanti* for daily offerings to the god Chennakesvara by *mahāmandalēśvara* Pasupula Timmayadeva¹⁰.

Another inscription¹¹ from Golladinnepalli in Kadapa district dated 1554 A.D., records certain Dommari Sangamanaya gifted two *varahās* towards offerings during the *dasami* festivals to the gods Mallikārjunadēva and Mādharāyadēva of *agraharam* of Golladinnepalli. Of the twelve *Sankrantis*, the *Makarāsankranti* and the *Karkatasankranti* is considered more auspicious as it's mark the beginning of Uttarayana, the most sacred half of the year. According to the Gandikota inscription, dated 1557 A.D., the gift of land in the village Komirla on the northern side of the river Pinakini in Gandikotāsima for conducting various offerings like *dadhyodana* (rice with curds) and two perpetual lamps. The festivals like *Makarāsankranti*, *teppa-tirunala*, *topu-tirunala*, *kota-tirunala* etc., were celebrated to the god Raghunāthā nāyaka of Gandikota, *mahāmandalēśvara* Nandyala China Avubalēśvaradēva Mahārāja¹². A record from Koduru in Kamalapuram taluk of Kadapa district dated 1548 A.D., the gift of the tolls named *Penta Sunkamu* due from the village AndirajuKoduru for conducting the festivals like *Sankranti*, three *manedus* for daily offerings i.e., *anga-bhoga* and *ranga-bhoga* to the god Chennakesvara by *mahāmandalēśvara* Pasupula Timmayadeva Mahārāju¹³. *Ranga-bhoga* and *anga-bhoga* is defined in the Indian *epigraphical glossary*; as it can be found on ancient and medieval inscriptions commonly written in *Sanskrit* and *Prakrit*.

Sivaratri or *Maha Sivaratri* festival is dedicated to Lord Śiva, celebrated annually on the 14th night of the lunar month of *Phalguna* (February/March). It has great significance, who observe fasting, perform special *pūjās* and offer prayers to seek Siva's blessings. The temples received some gifts on the occasion of *Sivaratri* and *ratha-saptami* for the daily worship of the god and for conducting *utsavas*. In 1543 A.D., Guruvaya Dēvachōda Mahārāja gifted the villages of Animela, Nandimandalam, Vempalli and Polela to the Sangamesvara temple at Animela on the occasion of *Sivaratri*¹⁴. Sri Krishna was born on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month Sravana when the star was Rohini. This auspicious day is known as *Sri Krishnajayanti* or *Krishnastami*. The Hindus, particularly Vaishnavites celebrated *Krishnajayanti* in a grand way. Many kinds of sweets and particularly butter are offered to Lord Krishna

on that day. Inscriptions mention that the donations were made on the occasion of *Sri Krishnastami* and *Sri Krishnajayanti*. An inscription from Bollavaram in Proddatur taluk of Kadapa district dated 1542 A.D. during the reign of Sadasivarāya mentioned that the grant of tolls *penta-sunkam* of the village Bollavaram in Giddaluru-sima by Papa Timmayadeva Mahārāju of lunar race and *Atreya-gotra* to god Gopikantha-Perumal for offerings on the occasion of *Sri Krishnastami*¹⁵. Another record from Potladurti in Kamalapuram taluk of Kadapa district dated 1546 A.D., during the reign of same ruler states that the gift of income derived as local taxes called *Stavara* and *grāmakatnās* like *angadi stavara*, *magga-stavara*, *chakra-stavara*, *idiga-stavara* and *pemjini-stavara* due from Potladurti village included in Nallaballithane, the Sumkha-mamgani of the donor, for conducting *Pallakiseva* on the occasion of *Krishnashtami* festival to the god Chennakesava by Andugula Mallappa and Tippalagiri Timmayya and Surayya, the tax collecting officers of *Mahāmandalēśvara Nandyala Timmayadeva Mahārāju* of Gandikota *amaramagani*¹⁶. The inscription from Peddamudiyam in Jammalamadugu taluk of Kadapa district dated 1551 A.D., records the gift of *Vīramusti-pannu* for the lamps to the god Somesvaradeva of Mudiya alias Trilochanapuram in Rēnati-sima of Gandikota-rajaya by Chena Basuvayya and disciple of Bhikshavrittiyya for the merit of *Vīramushti* society, and *purantakulu* on the occasion of *Sri Krishnajayanti*¹⁷.

Sri Ramanavami, one of the most popular festivals celebrated on a grand scale in India. In some parts of the Andhra Pradesh, the festival is celebrated for as many as nine days. Rama was born on the 9th day of the bright fortnight of the *Chaitra* month and hence the *Jayanti* is celebrated on that day. In fact, coronation of Rama in Ayodhya, after the fourteenth year exile, the Rama *Pattabhishekam* is also celebrated on that day. It is interesting to note that temples of Rama and Hanuma came to be constructed more in number during the Vijayanagara period. Inscriptions indicate different types of donations made to the temples of Rama at different places. Another record dated 1555 AD, registers a gift made on the holy occasion of *Srirama navami*¹⁸. The festivals celebrated on auspicious days every month in the temples are monthly festivals. An epigraph dated 1548 AD, in the reign of Sadasivarāya, registers grant of certain taxes to the god Chennakesava of Moyillacheruvu on the day of *rathasaptami* for the service in the temple¹⁹.

The festivals also celebrated on auspicious days every month in the temples are called monthly temples. The auspicious days may fall on *Pouranami* i.e. full moon day, *Amavasya*-dark day, the change of *nakshatras* (stars) on the days of the religious preceptors or other items²⁰. These festivals were often tied to the lunar or solar calendar marking seasonal changes, harvests and significant religious events. The Vontimitta inscription dated 1554 A.D. during the reign of Sadasivadevaraya refers to a gift of the villages Pulapaturu and its hamlet Renutumpalle by Gutti Tirumalayyadeva Mahārāja and Bugepalle in Vontimitta by Kanchiraju Yarraju, and some wet lands in Vontimitta to god Raghunayaka of Vontimitta for celebrating monthly festivals and daily worship²¹. Another inscription from Agraharam in Pulivendula taluk of Kadapa district dated 1554 A.D. records the gift of two varahās for the offering to the gods Mallikarjunadeva and Madhavarayadeva of Agraharam, by golladinnapalli in nituri-Sima by Dommari Sangamanayaka for the merit of twenty-four castes of Dommari. The gift is intended for the offerings and monthly festival for the deities²². The Porumamilla record dated 1555 A.D. mentioned, the gift of some wet land and gardens to a certain Narasaya for conducting the offerings to the Vaishnavas during the *tirunakshatras* of *Alvars* -Vaishnava devotees in the Krishna

temple at Porumamilla. These *nakshatras* were the *janmanakshatras* of *Alvars*, in addition to these, all days in particular months may be observed as festival days. The month of *Margoli* (*Margasira*) and the month of *Purattasi* (*Badrapada*) are important festival months in Saiva and Vaishnava temples respectively. During these months the devotees congregate in the temples and provide for perpetual lamps, additional food offerings, etc. It is believed that *Badrapada*, *Kartika* and *Margasira* are favourite months of the god Siva and Vishnu generally and god Vishnu particularly. An inscription from Sambaturu²³ in Kadapa district dated 1557 AD, mentioned, a gift of land costing twenty two *varahās* to conduct festival in the month of *Asvayuja* to the god Kesavadeva of Sambaturu by Chinna Ahobalesvaradeva Mahārāja. To the same god, another tract of land costing fifteen *varahās* also was donated to conduct festivals in the month of *Vaisaka* and another piece of land costing ten *varahās* to conduct the festivals of *Gribhashyakara* (Sage of Meditation) in the temple of Kesavadeva in the months of Chaitra.

Inscriptions from Kadapa region mentioned various festivals and donations to temples. The donations were given to the temples on auspicious days, i.e., festival days. A record from Rayachoti of Kadapa district dated 1534 A.D., mentioned the gift of income derived as *Kavali-mera*, due to him from the village of God Viresvara of Rachavedu at the rate of one *tume* (grain measure) of rice for worship and *naivedya* in the third *jamu* and a perpetual lamp to the god Viresvara by Kumara Venkatadrinayaka on the occasion of *Pradhama ekadasi*²⁴. The record shows that *Ekadasi* is celebrated in the temples. In addition to these festivals, the records also mentioned summer festivals²⁵. *Tirunali-Tirunalu*, *Dasami* festival, *Ugadi*, and *Deepavali*, *Chaitra* and *Pavithra* festivals, *Paruveta-utsavam*, *Danavaparva-utsavam* and *Nuliparva utsavam* to be celebrated in the temples²⁶.

The periodical festivals often marked seasonal changes, religious events or local traditions and featured music, dancing, story-telling and community gatherings. In some of the temples of this region, the periodical festivals are celebrated even today. Special *pūjās* and festivals are observed during *Kartikam* (October-November), *Asviyuja-suddhasami* (September-October), *Pushyami* (December-January) etc. Sangamēśvara temple located at Animela, a festival is celebrated on *Mahasivaratri* i.e., on *Magha-bahula Chaturdasi* (February-March). Special *pūjās* are performed on Mondays in *Kartika masam*. The festival of Sri Kodandaramaswamy temple at Vontimitta is celebrated from *Chaitra-suddha navami* to *bahula-panchami* (April-May) for a period of 12 days, during which a car festival is also celebrated²⁷.

The *Brahmotsavam* of the Chennakesvaraswami at Pushpagiri is celebrated for 10 days from *chaitra-bahula trayodasi* to *vaisakha-sudha saptami* (April-May). *Ankurarpanam*, *dhvajarohanam*, *simhavahanam*, *purushamruyam*, *hanumadvahanam*, *garudotsavam* *gajarohanam*, *rathotsavam* and *alakaladopu* are the ritual observed for the first 9 days, one each day. The festival concluded with *chakra snanam* (Wheel bath) and *vasantotsavam* (sprinkling of colored water) on the 10th day. The festival at Mopuru Bhairavesvaraswami temple is celebrated annually for 12 days from *jaishta-suddha panchami* (May-June). The *kalyanotsvam* (Marriage celebration) of Siva with Parvati is the main ritual of the festival. These and several other festivals of each temple are of old origin and still continued²⁸. During the reign of Achyutadēvarāya, a record from Mopuru in Pulivendla taluk of Kadapa district, dated 1530 AD., records the gift of 235 *varahās* per year for the car festival on *Molakala-Pournami* and *anga-ranga vaibhavas* to the god Bhairavesvara of Mopuru by Ayyapa-Rasu for the merit of his

master Achyutaraya²⁹. A car festival can refer to the *ratha-yatra* or chariot festival, where large wooden carts decorated with flowers and flags and pulled by devotees throughout the streets. According to the Rayachoti inscription dated 1534 AD, in the reign of above mentioned ruler, the gift of income is derived as *Kavali-mera*, from the villages to the god Viresvara of Rachavidu included.

The Jillella inscription in Proddatur taluk of Kadapa district dated 1549 A.D refers to a gift of the income derived out of the *kanika* and other taxes collected at Jillella, a gift village of Ahobala Narasimhadeva temple, to god Virabhadra at Jillella, by *Mahāmandalēśvara* Chinna Timmaraju Kondayyadeva Mahārāju , for the *Paruventa* festival³⁰. The *Paruventa* festival or *Paruveta utsavam* is a traditional mock-hunting festival celebrated in Ahobilam in Andhra Pradesh and other temples of Lord Narasimha swamy. It commemorates Lord Narasimha's mythological hunting expedition and the victory of good over evil, fostering communal harmony by bringing the deity to tribal villages, where the Chenchu tribe participated in the procession and reenacts the aspects of the divine hunt. The festival is known for its unique 40 days duration at Ahobilam, showcasing deep community ties and cultural richness. According to Kosinepalle record in Jammalamadugu taluk of Kadapa district dated 1554 A.D. during the reign of Sadasivadevaraya a gift of the *tyaga-vartana* collected by them from the mahajanas of Kosinepalle alias Harihararayapuram, a *sarvamanya agraharas* situated in *Chennurusima*, for the *cherapu-tirunalu* (sirapput-tirunal) festival to god Tiruvengalanatha of Kona by a number of *Vipravinodins*³¹.

The Bhimagundam inscription in Jammalamadugu taluk of Kadapa district dated 1555 A.D. records the gift of income derived as *tyaga-vartanas* in the village Bhimagundam, for conducting *Teppa-tirunalu*, *Utlamahotsava* and *Paruveta* to the god Chennakesvara of the village by the Vipravinodis named Vallabhayya, Parvatayya and other of various gotras³². The Gandikota record dated 1557 A.D. during the reign of Sadasivadevaraya reveals that the gift of land at Pedakomerla in Gandikota-sima in Udayagiri-rajya for conducting the various festivals such as the floating festival (*teppadiyotsavam*), the swing festival, etc., and for offering to god Raghunayaka of Gandikota by China Avubhalesvaradeva Mahārāja³³. Another inscription from Peddasettipalli in Proddatur taluk of Kadapa district dated 1558 A.D. refers to the gift of two *khandukas* and three *magamu* of *madi* (wet land) near the upper *vamgn* for conducting festivals and *patrabhogas* to the god Kesava of Settipalle included in the *vumbalika* granted by Aliya Ramaraja to the donor, *Mahāmandalēśvara* Ramaraja Kondayyadeva Mahārāju³⁴. From these records we know the kings and other officials of medieval Kadapa region; liberally granted gift of lands and other items to perform festivals, *pūjās*, *tirunalas*, etc., the people engaged more in religious activities.

Conclusion

To sum up, the epigraphical evidences helps us to know the religious festivals in the temples of Kadapa region. The temples acted as religious centres of religion and different religious ceremonies and festivals. These ceremonies and festivals were conducted in the temples which attracted people from the surrounding areas, villages, towns, etc. They contributed lavishly to the temples. The study gives that the inscriptions issued in the Kadapa region record from the early part of the 16th century and ended in the mid of the same century. The period observed the reigns of Achyutadēvarāya (1529-1542) and Sadāśivarāya of Vijayanagara dynasty³⁵. Who donated lavishly to the temples under the

supervision of their subordinates for conduct of daily, monthly and annual festivals. Through the Vijayanagara rulers were the followers of Vaishnavism, they made gifts and donations to both Saiva and Vaishnava temples. Not only the rulers but also the other officials played a significant role in temple activities and conducting festivals in the temples. The devotees, in fulfilment of a vow before the god, used to conduct free feedings on important festivals and other occasions. This custom is still prevalent at many temples; the people made liberal grants to the temples. Apart from the people in general, several communities like *Dommaris*, *Virabalinjas*, *Vipravinodins* etc. granted a part of their income to the temples. The festival and festivities in the temple provided an opportunity not only to express devotion and offer special worship to the god. Apart from this, artists like musicians, dancers, folk artists entertain the public with their performances, the theme of which is of course, religious. These festivals also provide some form of social exchange. A study of temple festivals in detail helps us to understand the social and cultural life of the people of those times.

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