

# History of Akka Mahadevi in Srisailam – A Study

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**Abstract:** Akka Mahadevi was born in Udutadi near Shivamogga in the Indian state of Karnataka. She was born to a couple named Nirmalshetti and Sumathi who were both devotees of Para Shiva. A local Jain king named Kaushika sought to marry her, but that she rejected him choosing instead to fulfil the claims of devotion to the deity Para Shiva. Seeing the conditions of her parents Akka Mahadevi thought of a trick and said that the king pays three demands she can get married and if she breaks any of them, she will go away as a free woman. King Kaushika violated the conditions she had laid down Akka Mahadevi left the place renouncing all her possessions including clothes to travel to Srisailam home of the God Para Shiva. She is believed to have travelled towards the end of her life to the Srisailam mountains where she lived as an ascetic and eventually died. Akka Mahadevi suggests that towards the end of her life king Kaushika visited her there and sought her forgiveness.

**Keywords:** Akka Mahadevi, Nirmalshetti, Kaushika, Para Shiva, Shivamogga, Sumati, Udutadi.

## 1. Introduction

Srisailam played a dominant role in our religious cultural and social history from ancient times. According to pre-historic studies the habitational history of Srisailam goes back to about 30,000-40,000 years. Stone tools of that period were abundantly found at various places of Srisailam there is a common belief that it is in vogue that this holy kshetram exists from times immemorial.

The prominence of this Divya kshetram is highlighted by the fact that while performing our daily rituals we specify place of location of our existence with reference to Srisailam. According to Agni puranam, in the Krithayuga the Demon king Hiranyakasyapa did penance at the kshetram and worshipped God Mallikarjuna swamy. This kshetram was his puja mandiram and Ahobila kshetram which was about 220 km from Srisailam was his sabha mandapam.

According to Skanda Puranam in the Tretayuga lord Rama with Sita Devi during their banishment has visited this kshetram and consecrated sahasra lingas (one thousand lingas) here.

The epic literature articulates that in the Dwaparayuga Arjuna, while on pilgrimage and Pandavas during their exile spent some time in the kshetram and worshipped deities there. Even now there is a pond at the foot of Srisailam called as Bheemuni kolanu.

The epigraphical evidences reveal that the history of

Srisailam begins with the Satavahanas who were the first empire builder in South India and also the earliest rulers of Andhradesa. The earliest known historical mention of the hill station can be traced to Pulomavis Nasik inscription 2nd century A.D. Malla Satakarni, an early member of Satavahanas got his name after Mallana the deity on this sacred hill. The Ikshvakus A.D 200-300 ruled from their capital Vijayapuri about 50 km from Srisailam and so this kshetram must get their patronage. The Vishnukundins A.D 375-612 were the devotees of God Sri Parvatha swamy who was none other than Mallikarjuna swamy, the presiding deity of Srisailam kshetram. The Pallavas and the Kadambas are also ruled this region. Apart from the inscriptions, the architectural features of the temple complex of Srisailam at least the patronage of Chalukyas A.D 624-848.

The Kakatiyas A.D 953-1323 contributed much for the growth of the Temple. Several steps in regulating temple management were taken during this period in the reign of Kakatiya Prataparudra datable to 1313 AD the gift of 54 villages to Srisailam temple made from time to time by several emperors' kings etc., was executed properly for the maintenance of the temple Mallamadevi, sister of Ganapatideva is said to have constructed the Vemana Gopuram of Mallikarjuna Garbhalayam.

The period of Reddi kingdom (1325-1448) is the golden age of Srisailam that almost all rulers of this dynasty did celebrated service for the temple. Prolaya Vema Reddi the Reddi king constructed stepped path way to Srisailam and also Pathalaganga. Anavema Reddi constructed Veera Siromandapam in which the Veera Saiva devotees cut off their hands, tongue, limbs with devotion and this practice is known as Veeracharam. The Velama chiefs constructed flight of steps at jatarevu the route from Uma Maheswaram to Srisailam.

The major contributions and renovations at Srisailam were taken up by Vijayanagara rulers (AD 1336-1678). The second Harihaaraya of Vijayanagara empire constructed the mukha mandapam of Mallikarjuna temple and also raised a gopuram on the southern side of the temple complex Sri Krishnadevaraya visited the shrine in 1516 A.D. on his return journey after a war with Gajapathis and constructed Salumandapas on the both sides of the car street. The fall of Vijayanagara empire witnessed Srisailam lost its glory.

A good number of studies in Andhra Pradesh in recent years have brought to light the heritage of art and architecture of

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Andhra. Sivarama murthy (1957) has given detailed information on early eastern Chalukya sculptures. Ramarao, has covered whole of Andhra Pradesh regional and dynastic wise sundaram (1969) has contributed to the origin and development of Simhachalam temple architecture. Gangooly (1970) gives a survey of the sculptures of Andhra Pradesh. Radhakrishna Sarma (1972) has given detailed information about the temples of Telangana. V.Kameswara rao (1976) has made detailed study to Vijayanagaram art and architecture of select temples, B.Rajendra Prasad (1978-1980) study is a contribution to the art of A.P from seventh sixteen century A.D particular and south India in general In adding to the above works the Studies on individual and group of temple by Masthanaiah, M. Krishna kumara, A. Gurumurthi, Nageswara Rao. Kamalavasini etc. and to the rich heritage of art Andhra. Sharma has made an attempt to bring out the saiva art and architecture of Andhra.

Srisailam an important saiva sacred complex has also been studied from art architectural dimension by Rama Rao (1967) Anuradha (1988) white passage reference is made by Kameswara Rao (1976) the rich literary back ground epigraphs traditions and above all extensive art on the Prakara have not received the full attention of the scholars. Particularly the art historians.

The foregone review clearly indicates that the studies are mostly descriptive oriented. Hither to no serious attempt has been made for Akkamahadevi so far. So, the present study is undertaken.

## 2. Places of Interest

There are several places of interest in a round Srisailam such as sikharam. This most sacred spot is located at about 8 km from the main temple at a height of 2830 feet above the mean sea level. It is the highest peak of Srisailam. "Srisaila sikharam drustva punarajanma na vidyathe". 2.Hatakeswaram, 3. Sakshi Ganapati, 4. The temple of Istakameswari, 5. Bhemuni kolanu, 6. Bhairava sela, 7. Nagalooty, 8. Akkamahadevi caves, 9. Kadalivanam, 10. Bramaramba cheruvu, 11. Mallela Theertham.

### A. Akka Mahadevi Caves

The Nallamala hills ranges studded with innumerable natural caves and caverns which were over a million of years old. Some of them became more famous and played a role in the significance of Srisailam and one such among them the Akkamahadevi caves. These are naturally formed caves just above the flow of the river Krishna up stream is about at a distance of 10 km from Srisailam. The Akkamahadevi caves are endowed with a natural Rock arch which stands majestically without any support. The surroundings of the caves and its journey through the river Krishna from Srisailam provides a wonderful experience to one and all. The people of Karnataka and Maharashtra make it point of visit in their pilgrimage of Srisailam particularly during the time of Ugadi the telugu year day.

The study of Akkamahadevi is depicted p. 10R/14 on eastern wall towards north of the Gopuradwara a woman is shown standing nude in front of the shiva linga. Ahand in abhaya

mudra emerging from shivalinga is shown. The woman is wearing beaded necklace. Bracelets. Her hair is left free, she is holding rosary with her right hand and kuniya with in her hand.

Akkamahadevi was born to Nirmalshetti and Sumati in a village Udatadi near Balliguri in the Shiva Mogga district in Karnataka state. Both the parents were devotees of siva mahadevi often used to Mallikarjuna temple with her parents and friends. She devoted love for Mallikarjuna Gradually finally decided to marry lord siva only.

One day the looti king, Kamsika, during his return journey from Vysali, saw mahadevi standing front of her house. The king was impressed by her charm and beauty. He decided to marry her under any circumstances. The king (personally) sent his representatives to parents. The parents left the decision to Mahadevi alone. The king personally sent message to Mahadevi, promised to fulfill all the desires of Mahadevi. After hearing the king's promise, she went the king's house and asked the king to become a devotee of siva king expressed unwillingness because he was of Jaina faith immediately she removed her clothes, and become nude, she said that human body was nothing but flesh and blood. She advised him to have faith in lord Mallikarjuna. The king realized and embraced Saivism.

Mahadevi returned home and requested her parents to bless her to merry god Mallikarjuna. The parents blessed her, she left her house and wandered to meet Mallikarjuna. She faced several problems. Finally, she reached kalyana. She faced saviour, physical test of kennarayya. After that, she met Basavaswara. Again, she faced the test to the king Allamma prabha of kalyana. She was meditating in the house of basaveswara described the way and said that after reaching the Trikatamahagiri. She would find every big open space where kadali vanam would be located. The down point of the kadali vanam she would find a light, that was the place of God Mallikarjuna. After facing many problems Mahadevi finally reached down part of kadali vanam and prayed siva. Siva appeared and accepted her desire. Siva gave moksha took her into sivalingam Akkamahadevi, is not in a tradition but a historical fact.

Hither to no serious attempt has been made on Akkamahadevi life history and her contributions to religious social philosophy of the contemporary times. So, far the present study is attempting to focus the above said all aspects with the help of available archaeological and literary, folk and oral traditions.

Previous works on the subject India has a very rich hent age of temples art and architecture extensive patronage given by different dynasties all through the historical period and religious ethos entangled with day-to-day life of the people all through the ages, resulted in the growth of innumerable sacred complexes rich in art and architecture across the length and breadth of India.

Naturally the studies on Indian art and architecture also are many some are of general nature trusting the Hindu-Buddhist Jain art and architecture. General studies were also made on dynastic wise regional wise group individual monument wise.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper is presented a study history of akka mahadevi in srisailam

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