

Iconography of Adhithana-Vedibhandha of Lakshmana Temple: A Valence of Religion and Beauty

Dr. Ritu¹

¹Assistant Professor, Department of History & Archaeology, Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa (Haryana), India

Abstract: The Lakshmana Temple is one of the oldest and most beautiful of Khajuraho's western temples. The main temple is built on an extremely high adhithana that includes a pitha and a vedibandha. It has two moulding series. The bottom series for the plinth (pitha) comprises of plain bhitta and decorative bhitta with stencilled scrolls. The upper level of moulding for the vedibandha is made up of khura and kumbha with a central projecting band of grasa-pattika. There are nine major vedibhandha niches containing Graha-mandala encircling the temple, each having an interesting set of divinities running from Ganesha in the south to Durga-devi- Kshamankari in the north.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Lakshmana Temple is one of the oldest and most beautiful of Khajuraho's western temples. This eye-catching temple faces the Varaha and Devi Mandapa. It is nearly as tall as it is long, measuring around 29.87 x 13.79 metres (98' x 45'3"), and is comparable in layout and design to the Kandariya Mahadeva temple, which it appears to have preceded by nearly a half-century. The temple has only one entrance, which is located at the top of the stairs on the east side. Above the entry to the porch is a lovely torana or stone garland. A Chandella stone inscription affixed to the porch wall states that Yasovarman, also known as Laksaverman, the seventh Chandella monarch, built a temple to house a Vishnu image sent to him by his Pratihara overlord, Devapala, who was possibly the ruler of Kannauj. The image was originally brought from Tibet. Vaikuntha is Lord Vishnu's glorious four-armed, three-headed form. The temple's deity is variably named Lakshmana, Ramachandra, or Chaturbhuj, attesting to its Vaishnava dedication.

The Lakshmana temple was constructed just before 954 A.D. The temple is a five-shrined or panchayatana complex, with the main temple of Vaikuntha standing in the centre of a high platform and four subsidiary shrines in the corners, each of which is a complete temple in its own right, with a sanctum and a portico of two pillars in front and similar sculpture ornamentation. The small shrine facing the temple may have formerly held Garuda, the mount of the God Vaikuntha, but it now houses the figure of Brahmani, commonly known as Devi. In Khajuraho, this is the only temple that has preserved the subsidiary shrine and platform terrace with its original features and ornaments. This is also one of India's few surviving and well-preserved Vainkunth-Vishnu temples.



Fig. 1 :Front face view of Lakshmana temple

The spiral superstructures of the Khajuraho temple adhere to a northern Indian shikhara temple architecture and, in certain cases, a panchayatana plan or layout. The Lakshmana temple is a pancharata sandhara prasada of the sanctuary. Except for its triangular sanctuary and other minor deviations in the spire and façade, this temple architecturally exhibits all of the features of a mature temple type (Mishra, 2001)

The temple's entire dimensions are 85' x 44', and its height is 80'. The elevation of the temple is divided into three sections: the plinth or basal story or adhishtana, the wall or jangha, and the roof or spire or shikhara. Furthermore, the temple features a high basal storey with a succession of ornate mouldings showing human activities (narathara), masks of glory (grasapattika), and geometrical motifs. (Deva, 1959)

II. ADHISTHANA OF LAKSHAMAN TEMPLE

The main temple is built on an extremely high adhishtana that includes a pitha and a vedibandha. It has two moulding series. The bottom series for the plinth (pitha) comprises of (i) plain bhitta and (ii) decorative bhitta with stencilled scrolls. (iii) karnika (iv) bhitta embellished with lotus petals with a beaded band below (v) jayda-kumbh carved with stencilled tamala-patras below and thakarikas above (vi) small recess (antara-patta) ornamented with kunjaraksha pattern (vii) garasa-patti (viii) broad gaja-pitha exhibiting projecting fore (ix) Kapotapali with thakarakas on top and gagarakas emerging from the lotus petals on the bottom.

The upper level of moulding for the vedibandha is made up of (i) khura (ii) kumbha with a central projecting band of grasa-pattika (iii) kalasa (iv) a recessed course (antara-patta) showing a procession of elephants and horses with or without riders, warriors, musicians, dancers, acrobats and devotees and miscellaneous domestic (v) a pair of minor pattikas decorated with a frill of triangles and gagarkas respectively (vi) kapota decorated with thakarikas and (vii) projecting pattika decorated with processional frieze, disposed in compartments. The nine principle niches of this basement facade invariable, start above the kapotapali i.e. top moulding of the lower series. These niches are framed by pilaster and crowned by an elegant pediment of chaitya-arches which contains an important series of images. Smaller niches showing the figures of Gods and Goddesses and canopied by tall pediments are also addorsed to the kumbha and kalsa courses.



Fig 2: Adhishtana of Lakshmana temple

An investigation of the east side of the adhishtana indicates that the top section, the balustrade, the niches, and even a large portion of the frieze embellishing the platform at a man's height have clearly been replaced with stone blocks of recent date. However, the bottom half, which follows two lines of the plan closely, seems to be original (Deva, 1987)

III. IMAGES OF ADHISTHANA-VEDIBHANDHA NICHES

There are nine major vedibandha niches encircling the temple, each having an interesting set of divinities running from Ganesha in the south to Durga-devi- Kshamankari in the north.

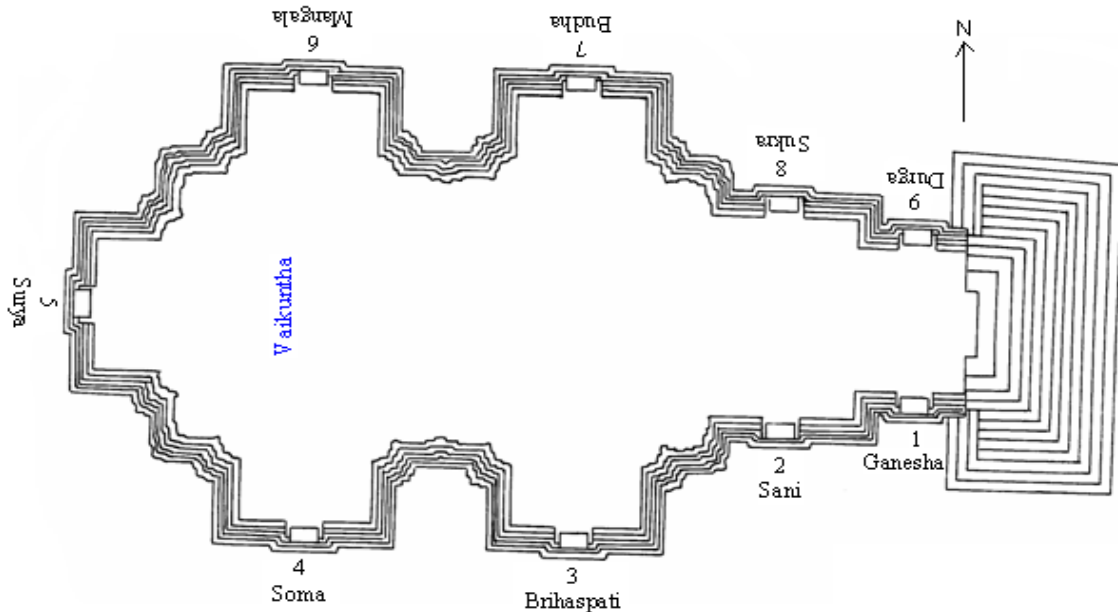


Fig. 3: Placement of divinities in the vedibandha niches of Lakshmana Temple

These vedibandha divinities have been recognised as Navagraha by Devangana Desai. Seven of these grahas are shown in the lovely niches. Astrologers believe that grahas have an impact on the auras and brains of beings connected to the earth. The energies of the grahas are linked to the individual auras of humans as they take their first breath in a certain nativity and remain with natives of the earth throughout the duration of their present body's life. Thus, in Hindu religion and mythology, these Navagraha are said to have a tremendous impact on people's life. As a result, a Hindu worships these planets as deities.

According to Hindu tradition, the Navagrahas are normally arranged in a single square with the sun in the centre and other deities around Surya, with no two of them facing each other. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navagraha> Their images may be seen in all major Saiva temples in south India. Grahas are also the guardians of the quarters. These grahas are housed in the vedibandha of the Lakshmana shrine. These images' specifics are as follows:



Figure 4: Dancing Ganesha

Niche I: Beginning on the southern side, there is the first niche, which depicts an eight-armed dancing Ganesha (Naritya Ganapati). The supreme deity, Ganesha, is worshipped as the Lord of Beginnings and the Destroyer of Evils and Obstacles (Vignেশa). Ekadanta is depicted as a pot-bellied Ganesha (one-tusked). At the shoulder level, the trunk is twisted to the left. He bears a shell, rosary, lotus, goad, serpent, hand was broken, dance gesture, and lower left hand on waist as a dance motion clockwise. He is standing in a really dynamic position. He is dressed in lower clothes connected by a belt with jewelled loops and tassels and wears a jewelled headpiece, torque, necklace, keyuras, and wristlets. His mount rat is not shown. A male dholak player and another dancing figure are carved to the right of the God, while a drummer is etched to the left. On either side of the halo, two feminine figures are represented.

Niche II: Sani, the two-armed standing goddess, is housed in this niche. Despite the fact that his original both hands are damaged, his preserved right hand with rosary is in the preaching mudra. His left leg is slightly bowed and resting on a tiny footrest with a lotus design. Sani is one of Hindu astrology's nine major heavenly deities. Devangana Desai identifies this figure as the planet Sani (Desai, 1996). He is dressed with jata-mukuta, kundalas, torque, hara, upavita, keyuras, and undergarments, which are held together by a

jewelled belt with tassels and loops. On each side of God's feet are two seated feminine figures in anjali-mudra. A female attendant holding khatvanga on the right and another female carry some object which is mutilated on the left of the God. Number of the figures is carved in the frame.



Fig.5: Sani



Fig.6: Brihaspati.

Niche III: The four-armed standing Brihaspati is shown in this Vedibhandha niche. He is the Purohita of the Gods, the Guru of Devas, the personification of piety and religion, the commanding officer of prayers and scarifies. His preserved right hand holds a varada-cum-rosary, while his upper left hand holds a text and the other two arms are broken. In the halo, two bearded guys are represented on the left, while two standing male figures with folded hands and a standing female behind them are depicted on the right. On each side of the God, vayalas are engraved. His vahana hamsa with broken hand is represented at the bottom right of the niche, and on the left is a sitting kid carrying some manuscript. God is dressed in jata-mukuta, kundalas, hara, torque, yajnopavita, and undergarments secured by a jewelled belt with tassels and loops. On the far right and left bottom, there are two standing males.

Niche IV: Soma (moon) appears to be the divinity in this vedibhandha niche, since he wears a crescent moon in his jata (matted hairs)(Desai, 1996). He is a lunar god. He is characterised as youthful, attractive, and fair; two-armed, holding a club and a lotus (Agarwal,1964). However, in one niche, the god is shown as four-armed, with the upper right hand holding a club, the lower right hand in preaching mudra while the lower hand is broken, and the upper left hand holding a scroll but the arm is damaged. He is dressed in jata-mukuta, kundalas, and other traditional jewellery. Vyalas are also depicted on the south sides of the god in the frame. Three figures have been carved on each side of the god at extreme corners.

Niche V: Surya is housed in this niche on the western facade. According to Hindu tradition, the navagraha are normally arranged in a single square with Surya in the centre and other deities surrounding it. Surya is positioned at the centre of the Vedibadha pictures. Surya is the supreme being, the solar deity, one of the Adityas, and the son of Kasyapa. Surya is frequently seen as an aspect of Shiva and Vishnu by Shaivities and Vaishnavas, respectively. He holds chakra, padma, padma, and shankha in his four hands like a Surya Narayana. However, because he is represented as two-handed in the niche, his all hands are shattered. His chariot is drawn by a team of seven horses. As a result, on either side of the deity, two horse-faced Asvinikumaras are shown in frame. Vyalas is also depicted above it. On the pedestal in front of the god is a standing goddess. On each side of the deity, two animal-faced figures stand, and behind these figures stand more masculine servants. On either side of the deity, a person with a bow and seated on knee in ready stance represents the holo. God is dressed in karanda-mukuta and other traditional jewellery.



Fig 7: Soma



Fig 8: Surya

Niche VI: Mangala is the deity in this Vedibandha niche. According to Gopi Nath Rao, four-handed depictions of this god should feature sakti, gada, and trisula, with the first hand in the Varada stance and goat vahana (Rao,1971). One has a rosary club, a book (manuscript), and a water jug in an abhaya stance (Aggarwal,1964). The deity has the same features in the niche, but his fourth hand is shattered. Mangala is the Mars deity. Mars is also known as Angaraka or Bhauma, the son of Bhumi (Prithvi). He possesses the Aries and Scorpio signs. The god appears to be cognizant of lamb in the alcove under the lotus pedestal. On each side of the deity, two female attendants are shown. God is dressed in jata-mukuta and other traditional jewellery and clothing.



Fig. 9: Mangala



Fig.10: Budha

Niche VII: Budha is represented by this northern nook. Budha is the deity of Mercury and the son of Tara and Chandra (the moon). In the niche, He is shown as four-armed, holding a text in one hand while all of his other hands are broken. Budha is shown with his mount Sarpa in Vastu texts. However, he is portrayed here with an elephant. God is dressed in jata-mukuta and other traditional jewellery. A sitting devotee appears to the god's right, while two females stand to the

left. Two other figurines are carved to the god's right. Vyalas is also shown in the frame. On each side of the deity, two standing representations (one male and one female) are shown.

Niche VIII: The Sukra standing on the pedestal depicts divinity in this Vedibandha niche. Sukra is the name of the son of Bhrigu and Usahana, as well as the teacher of Daityas and the guru of Asuras, who is associated with the planet Venus. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navagraha> He is four-armed, holding a lotus and a scroll in his upper right and left hands. While the lower right hand is in preaching mudra with the rosary and the lower left hand is mutilated. Vyalas are shown on both sides of the god in the frame. On each side of the god, a sitting picture with a book listening to the lecture appears on a pedestal. The frog is also represented with consciousness. Three figurines to the deity's right and two representations to its left are also present in the halo.



Fig. 11: Sukra



Fig. 12: Yogeshvari

Niche IX: Yogesvari, a kind of Ambika, is shown in this niche facing north. Yogesvari may be represented by the ten-handed figure with Lion Vahana. Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol. II, Part II, p. 350 [Gopinath Rao, Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol. II, Part II, p. 350] Vrada is carried by her with a rosary, sword, ghata, trisula, dagger, bell, shield, distinguishing item, and her remaining two hands (one left and one right). The goddess is wrapped in lower clothes tied by a belt with jewelled loops and tassels and wears anklets, torque, hara, keyuras, and wristlets. Her Vahana Lions are shown on both sides of the goddess. On either side of the goddess, two feminine servants appear behind the Lions. Three ascetics on either side of the god is represent in halo.

Small Niche Deities

The basement's garaspattika row has twenty-four small niches. The series begins with Ganesha and continues with Kubera, Lakshmi, Vaishnavi, Shiva, and other deities.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Lakshmana Temple is one of Khajuraho's oldest and most exquisite western temples. The main temple is built on a very high adhisthana with a pitha and a vedibandha. There are two moulding series. The plinth (pitha) bottom series consists of plain bhitta and ornamental bhitta with stencilled scrolls. The vedibandha's upper level of moulding is formed of khura and kumbha, with a central projecting band of grasa-pattika. Encircling the temple are nine large vedibandha niches housing Graha-mandala, each with an interesting group of divinities ranging from Ganesha in the south to Durga-devi-Kshamankari in the north forming seven grahas. Hence the temple is blend of religion and beauty.

V. REFERENCES

- [1] Agarwal, U. (1964), Khajuraho Sculptures and Their Significance, 1964, S. Chand & Company, New Delhi.
- [2] Deva, K. (1987), Khajuraho, Brijbasi Printers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.



- [3] Deva, K. (1959), Temples of Khajuraho in Central India, 1959, Ancient India, No. 15.
- [4] Desai, D. (1996), The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho, 1996, Mumbai.
- [5] Desai, D. (2010), Khajuraho, 2010, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [6] Mishra, P.K (2001), Khajuraho: with Latest Discoveries, 2001, Sandeep Prakashan, New Delhi.
- [7] Rao, T.A. Gopinath (1971). Element of Hindu Iconography, Indological Book House, Vol. 2, Varanasi, 1971.
- [8] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navagraha>
- [9] <http://www.info2india.com/astrology/9-graha-effect.html>.