

The Glorious past of the Nandi monolith at Lepakshi (Duration: 3:15)

Welcome to Lepakshi, 400 years ago! Look all around you. Such greenery - What led such a land to become one of the most arid today?

Turns out that during the British Raj, forest lands were razed in large numbers, with the wood used to develop the railway coaches and wooden sleepers below the tracks. With time, the ecosystem that the forests housed went extinct making the land today arid. From a Bear Land to a Bare Land. Why Bear, you ask? You shall see soon.

What you see is Lepakshi, 400 years ago – you have time-travelled! A topography that is absolutely calm and pristine with her natural springs - this used to nest mighty elephants and bears prowling the nights from their rocky dens. This is just one of the many dark secretes, that the Rayalseema forest hides from plain sight.

Amidst these wonders sits an equally unexplainable mass of stone but with the technology and art of ancient architecture - the monolithic Nandi of the Lepakshi adding further awe to our senses.

Presenting - the NANDI at Lepakshi!

What is it? Is it the king of the jungle? Is it the protector of our forests? Is it guarding a secret of a vanavasi, the forest dweller? What is it looking at? What's it doing in the middle of this forest? Who rides such a huge animal? The questions keep on rising in our minds.

This bull overlooks the temple of Lord Shiva, The Veerabhadra Swamy Temple, at a distance of 400 metres from here!

The stone carving here is done out of a single rock. It's amazing the technology the ancients had at hand. The bells, clappers and the flower garland on the Nandi denote resonance, vibration and energy. The stamp of the Vijayanagar empire who commissioned the work is also evident on the front.

The descriptions of this magnificent animal, which abound in both literature as well as in seals from the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization (also known as the Indus valley civilisation), can be traced to at least 5 Millennia ago.

Besides India, bull symbolism is widely prevalent in all ancient civilizations including Mesopotamia, Assyria and Egypt. According to noted historian Dr S Kalyanaraman, the humped bull on the seals of the Sindhu-Sarasvati Civilization signifies gold/wealth.

Nandi in Samskrt denotes joy and bliss. It also denotes one who belongs to Shiva. Naturally one who belongs to Shiva will have to be joyous and blissful.

Nand नंद in many Indian languages denotes a young one i.e. one who is yet to grow, one who is sure to grow. We thus have Nandankanan, Nandavan etc. meaning a forest clearing for children to play. Nand thus denotes offspring. Nandi, therefore denotes the innocence of a young one, who is to grow – grow not physically alone, but also mentally, intellectually and spiritually to see the vastness of scale in the Universe in comparison to the diminutive physical form of oneself.

Nandi stands as the symbol of ultimate strength and a much greater humility - a very important aspect in the journey of every seeker. In Indian belief system, the Nandi symbolises protection of knowledge and remover of obstacles in the way of cosmic knowledge. The Nandi acts as a gateway to the consciousness and to the much revered lord Shiva. The bigger the Nandi the deeper the siddhis or powers are, for the seekers!

This Nandi is huge - but not the biggest - check out the infographics to see other Large Nandis.

What does it have to say to you?

INFOGRAPHICS:

Significance of Vahana or Vehicles

This concept of *Vahana* can be understood from 2 perspectives – the divine perspective and a subtle, symbolic perspective.

From a divine perspective, we see the divine personage of Shiva riding on a bull called Nandi and using this Nandi as His transport. Nandi is also called the Commander-in-chief of Shiva's army.

Before we can relish its meaning from a subtle, symbolic perspective, we must first understand the Indian concept and practice of attributing a *Vahana* or a mount for the various divinities or Gods.

Many are now working and trying to unravel the mysteries in the concept of *Vahana* and to understand the symbolism behind it. One perspective to the concept of *Vahana* explains that, while *Vahana* as a word indicates that it is a vehicle or mount which the divinities ride, the aspect it denotes is not one of mounting or riding but more of surmounting or overcoming.

Thus *Vahana* implies a symbolic meaning of that which is controlled by the divinity.

Thus Vishnu who has conquered space uses Garuda the eagle, to denote His conquest of space, which is symbolised by the eagle Garuda, a bird that can fly high and long distances with its wide wings.

Ganesha who helps in overcoming ignorance and greed uses a mouse, to denote His conquest of ignorance, which is symbolised by the mouse, an animal that is greedy and bites into everything but is stupid enough to fall into a trap.

Shakthi or Durga who aids and bestows strength uses a Tiger, to denote Her conquest over power and fear, which is symbolised by the ferocious tiger.

Other Temples with large Nandi (include pic and temple name.location) - <http://www.walkthroughindia.com/walkthroughs/12-biggest-monolithic-nandi-statues-india/>

A Telling History

It is interesting how various regions of South India were called in yester years. In these forgotten names lie a lot of history, geography and ecology. Names in India have a lot to convey.

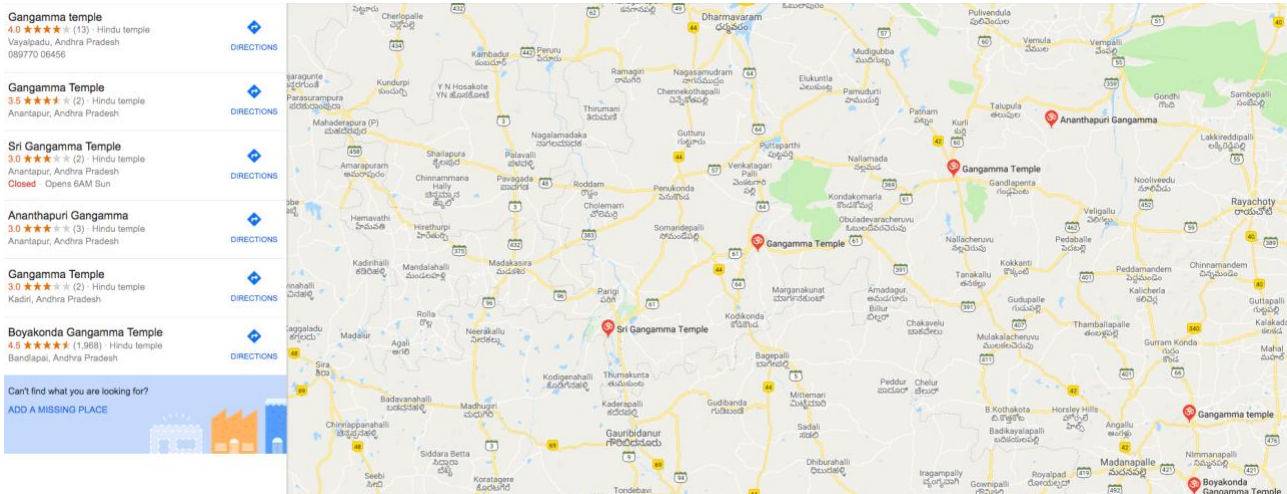
Along with the popular use of Karunadu, from which comes Karnataka, the region to the east of the western ghats, which is the non-coastal, plateau parts of Karnataka such as Bangalore, Mysore, Belgaum, Bellary etc. was called BayaluSeema. The word Bayalu means open space, open lands or simply, plains in Telugu and Kannada. This is what this region is indeed. Bayaluseema denoted the extent, *Seema* of the plains of Karnataka. The word Bayalu is simply, a variation of the Tamil wrd Vayal meaning “field.”

On the other hand, the region of South India lying where the 3 present day states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh meet, a region featuring some of the geologically oldest hills of peninsular India was called Rayalaseema. Rayalaseema means the *Seema*, border or extent of the famed Vijayanagara kingdom founded by Hakka and Bukka Raya and ably ruled by Krishnadeva Raya under whose reign it reached its heights of glory.

Gangamma Temples (in the vicinity)

The temples of Goddess Gangamma are accompanied with wells, and are natural reserves of water. The water from the well is believed to cure many skin ailments. In the map, Ananthapur

district, within which the town of Lepakshi lies, is replete with such water sources. Water sources in

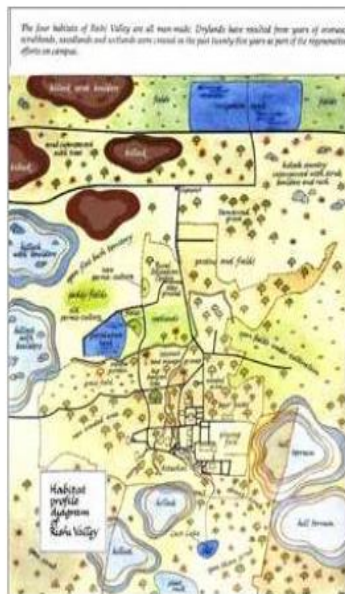


otherwise arid region? Proof that this area was once green and rich in natural resources.

The Rayalseema - a Rain Shadow Belt

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The rivers rising from the ranges in the west, continued to flow through both these lands bestowing prosperity until people started to dam rivers thus damning their bretheren.



Rayalaseema abounding in natural springs
Implying plenty of ground water which leads to forests leading to wildlife
A Habitat Profile Toposketch of Rishi Valley in Rayalaseema

The Rayalaseema region today spans across the mineral rich districts of Cuddapah, Kurnool, Chittoor and Anantapur, where lies Lepakshi and this beautiful Nandi. These hills are geologically some of the oldest hill formations on earth. In contrast to the more popular Himalayas, which is about 50 Million years old or even Alps which is younger than the Himalayas, these hills on the Deccan plateau were formed in the Pre Cambrian epoch i.e 3.8 billion to 540 million years ago. The hills in the Anantapur district where Lepakshi is located is called Seshachalam Hills. Achalam means hill. That which stands firm, A – *Chala* or does not move. Sesha is the way of referring to snakes in a divine way.