

VIJAYAWADA is practically the centre of Andhra in all its aspects. It is an important junction in the Madras-Calcutta, Madras - Delhi routes, and probably the foremost town of Andhra. It contains three ancient temples viz., the Kanakadurga temple, the Malleswaraswamy temple and the Vijayeswaraswami temple. These are the three temples of Vijayawada.

Vijayawada is known in mythology as Vijayavata, and is mentioned in some inscriptions as Rajendracholapura also. It is a famous place of pilgrimage on the river Krishna, and 'has a temple dedicated to Lord Siva in his aspect of Malleswara or Jayasena. Sage Agasthya is said to have been the greatest devotee of this deity and admirer of the deity's several leelas. The origin or installation of Kanaka - durga Devi at Vijayawada is unknown. She is said to be Swayambu or selfmanifest. She also takes the aspect of Chandi or destroyer of the demon Durgama who was causing havoc among the peace - loving inhabitants of Dakshinapatha.

Mallikarjuna or the Malleswara as he is known in the Puranas is said to have been installed by Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pancha Pandavas, as a token of their victory of the South. Thribhuvana Malla, Western Chalukya King of the 10th century A.D, historically constructed the temple.

The installation of Vijayeswara is said to have been done by Arjuna, one of the Pancha Pandavas, to commemorate his victory with Lord Siva in the shape of Kirata or hunter.

The place Vijayawada is surrounded by many hillocks and the most important of them is Seethanagaram, while the less important is called the Kanakadurga or Kanaka konda. On the southern side of the Kanakadurga temple, is a hillock with sculptures bearing inscriptions, indicating the names of Gods and Goddesses cut below them. Most of these figures are forms of the Goddess in her aspect of Durga, which are dealt with in the Mantra Sastras. Traditionally these hills were originally continuous and at the command of the Lord, they got separated, making enough space for the river Krishna to pass through.

One of these hills is called Indrakila, which is a famous hill mentioned in the Mahabharata as the place where the Pandava hero Arjuna obtained from Lord Siva an important weapon called Pasupatastra. The aspect of Lord Siva who appeared before Arjuna for granting him the boon is Kirata or the hunter. Bharavi in his celebrated Kavya "The Kirtarjuneeya" has immortalized this. The temple of Vijayeswara is attributed to Arjuna to commemorate the event of obtaining Pasupatha. The shrine has the representation of this and many other events of the Mahabharata commemorated in sculpture.

The legend is as follows:

During their wanderings in the forest, the Pancha Pandavas came to Darukavana, where Vedavyasa met them, and told them that one of them should perform Tapascharya in praise of Lord Siva, and obtain from him, the Pasupatastra as a boon, so that they may easily conquer their enemies. Arjuna was chosen for this task and he betook himself to the top of the Indrakila hill (which is said to be the same as the Indrakila hill of Vijayawada) and was performing intense Tapascharya, with his arms upraised, and standing on one foot, and surrounded by the Pancha Agnis or five fires, with four artificial fires around him, and the fifth being the Sun God himself

above him. Being pleased with the great Tapascharya of Arjuna, Lord Siva wanted to further test his sincerity, before granting him the desired boon, and therefore took the form of a Kirata or hunter. Parvati also dressed herself as a huntress and the Sivagana of the Lord also came in several disguises. Accompanied by all these, Lord Siva was hunting on the Indrakila bill, driving a wild boar in front of him.

The wild boar came to the side of Arjuna, and Arjuna being a great warrior, took up his bow, and shot it with a single arrow. At the same time, Lord Siva who was following it also shot it with an arrow, and being struck by both the arrows, the boar fell down dead in the middle. Both the Lord and Arjuna claimed the boar as their kill, and a -controversy arose between them, as to whom the boar should belong. Words led to physical quarrel shortly, and the Lord and Arjuna began to wrestle with each other. An experienced and powerful wrestler though he was, Arjuna was no match before the Lord himself, and was soon exhausted. Even in the midst of that desperate struggle, he never lost his one-pointedness of mind and devotion to the Lord.

The wild boar came to the side of Arjuna, and Arjuna being a great warrior, took up his bow, and shot it with a single arrow. At the same time, Lord Siva who was following it also shot it with an arrow, and being struck by both the arrows, the boar fell down dead in the middle. Both the Lord and Arjuna claimed the boar as their kill, and a -controversy arose between them, as to whom the boar should belong. Words led to physical quarrel shortly, and the Lord and Arjuna began to wrestle with each other. An experienced and powerful wrestler though he was, Arjuna was no match before the Lord himself, and was soon exhausted. Even in the midst of that desperate struggle, he never lost his one - pointedness of mind and devotion to the Lord.

To invoke divine aid in his favor, he made a Shivalinga out of the earth, worshipped it, and offered prayers to it. He saw the flowers, with which he worshipped the Linga, as physically falling on the hunter before him and he thereupon realised that the hunter was none other than the Lord himself. The hunter immediately disappeared and the Lord appeared himself before Arjuna, in all his glory. Arjuna prayed to him and his prayer was granted, and Pasupatha was given to him by Lord Siva, As a commemoration of this great event, Arjuna is supposed to have installed the Vijayeswara temple here, in the Indrakila hill.

In the Indrakila there are several rock-cut temples. These were supposed originally to be ancient temples, but during the course of time, they were completely buried under debris. When quarrying for stone and road metal was done, they were revealed, and the rock-out temples were preserved as protected monuments. There is in the temple an excellent stone sculpture, which contains in all its four faces the story of Kiratarjuneeyam.

There are interesting legends about the origin of the Malleswaraswamy temple also. It is stated that, prior to the Kaliyuga, the sage Agasthya had named the Lord at Vijayawada as Jayasena. The Mahabharata hero Arjuna, who was a great wrestler or Mallayoddha, called the Lord as Malleswara. The thus famous Lord Siva so goes the legend, graces with his presence and blesses the town Vijayawada on the banks of the sacred Krishna River.

There is another legend about this in which it is stated that in the Kaliyuga, as early as Saka year 117, there was a king famous on earth by name Madhava Varma. The son, of this Icing

once killed by accident the child of a woman who eked her livelihood by selling the fruits of tamarind trees (Intrini-Jeevini). The king, who meted out justice according to the principles of Dharma, sentenced his own son to be banged, in order to uphold the principles of justice. Pleased at this impartial attitude and the adherence to principles of Dharma, of this king, God Malleswara came down and showered gold on him, which brought back to life the deceased prince and the dead child.

Thus the great Lord Malleswara. Established in this world, the name of the great King Madhava Varma. Later on a pious devotee by name Panditharadhya came here, and proclaimed to the world that the devotees of Lord Siva were superior even to the sages. He illustrated the truth of this, by bundling up live, coal in a piece of cloth, with the tender twig of a Sami tree, without burning it. God Malleswara was pleased with it and manifested himself to this devotee. This Lord according to the popular legend, is Mahadeva Malleswara, "the endless one ' the lover of his devotees and worshipping whom the lords of the earth prospered of old".

There is an inscription in the temple, of the 9th century A.D., in the usual Telugu script. The inscription is strangely recorded from bottom upwards. Its purport is to say that a certain Thrikoti Boyi or Trikotu Boyu, the son of Kaliyama-Boy of Pechchevada, set up the pillar as a commemoration of his own fame, in order to secure distinction for his race. The Thrikoti Boyi is identified in the inscription with a Guhyaka Yaksha, who in Dwaparayuga was directed by Indra to direct Arjuna to Indrakila hill, where Arjuna should worship the Lord Siva in order to obtain Pasupatha from him.

Besides being a religious centre, Vijayawada is also the very centre of Andhra culture. The Chalukyas of Kalyani once conquered this place, and the famous Chinese Huin. Tsang had visited this place in 639 A.D. when Buddhism was at its zenith. Vijayawada that is a famous centre of Andhra thus enshrines three important and ancient temples and the temple of Kanakadurga is especially a sacred and powerful one, which attracts a large number of pilgrims even now.