

BY MAHESH VISWANADHA, PPSA

The Eternal Grandeur of Kakatiya Dynasty

As a photographer, my journey has always been about finding stories that withstood the test of time, capturing the essence of history through the lens of my Leica 24-90 camera. For the past decade, my focus has been the architectural marvels of the Kakatiya Dynasty, particularly the Ramappa and Thousand Pillar Temple. These structures are not just relics of the past but are testaments to our ancestors' ingenuity and artistic prowess. This journal reflects my journey, an attempt to save these stories through my camera and tell the world about the unparalleled grandeur of the Kakatiya architecture.





Sanctum Sanctorium of
Ganapeswara Temple, Ghanpur

The temples built during the Kakatiya period were more than just places of worship; they were also centres of education, art, and community life.

The history of the Kakatiya Dynasty is a rich tapestry woven with tales of courage, devotion, and architectural brilliance. The Ramappa Temple, a recent addition to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, stands as a beacon of this legacy. Constructed in 1213 AD by Recherla Rudra, a general of the Kakatiya King Ganapati Deva, this temple is an ode to the intricate artistry and advanced engineering techniques of the time. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, where Lord Ramalingeswara is worshipped, and is named after its chief sculptor, Ramappa – which was truly a rarity in the history of Indian temples. Adding to the pride of Kakatiyas is the Thousand Pillar Temple, built by King Rudra Deva, further exemplifying the dynasty’s dedication to religious and cultural harmony, with its trinity of shrines dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and Surya.

The Allure of Ancient Masterpieces

My first visit to the Ramappa Temple was nothing short of a revelation. As I stood before the six-foot high, star-shaped platform, I was mesmerised by the sheer complexity of the carvings that adorned

the walls, pillars, and ceilings. The temple’s unique pyramidal Vimana, adorned with exquisitely decorated beams and pillars made of granite and dolerite, took centre stage. Each mythical creature, each dancing figure, seemed to leap out of the stone, telling stories of an era long gone.

The Thousand Pillar Temple, or Rudreswara Swamy Temple, in Hanmakonda, is another jewel in the crown of Kakatiya architecture, a symphony of stone and space. The temple’s name is derived from the myriad pillars that support its structure. Each pillar is a work of art, intricately carved with motifs of dancing figures, deities, and floral designs, telling a story of devotion, skill, and artistic excellence. The doorways of the Shivalinga and the Nandi are adorned with exquisite decorations, reflecting a high degree of craftsmanship.

In capturing the Thousand Pillar Temple, my goal was to highlight not just the architectural brilliance but also the spiritual ambiance that pervades the space. Each photograph was an attempt to convey the serenity and the grandeur, the devotion and the artistic excellence that this temple embodies.

The Art of Preservation

In an era where rapid urbanization often overshadows historical preservation, the Ramappa and Thousand Pillar Temples stand as reminders of our rich heritage. Photographing these sculptures was a humbling experience. The mythical animals, the celestial dancers, and the various deities all tell stories of a time when art and devotion were intertwined. My work aims to encapsulate this multifaceted legacy, offering a glimpse into a world where architecture was a means to achieve both divine and earthly aspirations. Through countless visits, extensive research, and numerous photographs, I have come to appreciate the holistic vision of the Kakatiyas, whose temples are repositories of knowledge, art, and spirituality.

A Testament to Engineering Excellence

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Ramappa Temple is its resilience. The temple survived a major earthquake in the 17th century, a testament to the advanced engineering techniques employed by the Kakatiyas. The sandbox foundation, the use of lightweight floating bricks, and the meticulous construction ensured that the temple could withstand natural calamities.

The Kakatiya Dynasty, which flourished in southern India, was not only known for its architectural achievements but also for its cultural and religious contributions. Initially patrons of Jainism, the Kakatiyas later embraced Shivism and Veerashivism, leaving behind a rich legacy of religious and cultural diversity. The temples stand as symbols of a society that transcended caste and religious divisions, focusing instead on unity and collective progress. This message is particularly relevant in today’s world, where divisive ideologies often overshadow the common cultural heritage that binds us.

The temples built during the Kakatiya period were more than just places of worship; they were also centres of education, art, and community life. The Ramappa Temple and the Thousand Pillar Temple are prime examples of how these structures served multiple purposes.

By capturing these architecture marvels, I aim to continue telling their stories, preserving their legacy, and sharing their brilliance with the world. My photographs are a humble attempt to honour the past, celebrate the present, and inspire the future. With every click of the shutter, I strive to capture not just the physical beauty of these temples but the spirit of a civilization that valued art, knowledge, and harmony above all else.



Nandi Mandapa from the Ruins of Swayambhu Temple at Warangal Fort



View of Ramappa Temple

Journey to the Timeless Temples

Reaching these magnificent temples is a journey that combines the convenience of modern travel with the allure of exploration. The closest international gateway is Hyderabad’s Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. From here, a three-hour drive will take you to Warangal, the historical city that houses the Thousand Pillar Temple. From Warangal, a scenic two-hour-and-thirty-minute drive leads to the Ramappa Temple in the Mulugu district. While June



Sunset at Kotagullu Temple



One of the Four Splendid Gateways Kakatiya Toranam



Carved Pillar Depicting Indian Dance



Group of Temples at Kotagullu

to August sees the region drenched in monsoon rains, making photography challenging, the post-monsoon period reveals the temples in their freshly-washed glory, enhancing their aesthetic appeal.

In addition, it's essential to secure permission from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for photography, affirming that the photos are for non-commercial purposes. Equip yourself with a versatile kit lens (24-120mm) and a wide-angle lens (12-16mm) to capture the architectural grandeur in its entirety. The golden hour, just after sunrise or before sunset, offers the best lighting conditions, casting a magical glow on these ancient masterpieces, making your photographic journey truly unforgettable.

A Dancer with Details of Hasta Mudras



Mahesh Viswanadha, PPSA

As a software engineer by profession, Mahesh carries a great passion for photography. He has also established himself as a columnist and writer. Mahesh has worked as a press photographer for a reputed newspaper and has been featured in prominent publications such as Telangana Today, Sakshi, Andhra Prabha, Andhra Bhoomi, and Andhra Jyoti. His accolades include the Platinum Jubilee Image Award from the Andhra Pradesh Photography Akademi (2022) and an Honourable Mention Award with Blue Ribbon from the Telangana Photography Akademi (2020). He has also been recognized as an "Awarded Photographer" and "Published Photographer" by 1x.com. His exhibitions and accolades are numerous. As a visual artist, Mahesh is always seeking new learnings and shares his knowledge with fellow photographers to make the journey more collaborative.



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Bracket Figures Supporting the Roof Elements



Intricate Carvings on Pillar at Ramappa Temple