

Veṅkaṭeśvara - Origin of the Deity According to the Purāṇas

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One of the most celebrated and worshipped forms of Viṣṇu is that of Veṅkaṭeśvara or Veṅkaṭācalapati or Bālājī, the presiding deity of the sacred mountain Tirumalā at Tirupati. The worship of Veṅkaṭeśa occupies a great significance in the *Kali-Yuga* as vouched by the Purāṇas. A traditional verse states that Viṣṇu manifested himself as Varadarāja in the *Kṛta-Yuga*, as Raṅganātha in the *Tretā-Yuga*, as Jagannatha in the *Dvāpara-Yuga* and Veṅkaṭeśa in the *Kali-Yuga*, referring to the advent of the *arcā* forms enshrined at Kāñcīpuram, Śrī Raṅgam, Purī and Tirupati respectively¹. Yet another verse referring to the various *avatāras* of Viṣṇu as the *pratyakṣa-devatas* during the different yugas, states that Veṅkaṭeśa is *pratyakṣa-devatā* of the *Kaliyuga*². The sacred mountain is known by various names such as Śrīśaila (Sanskrit equivalent of Tirumalā), Śeṣāśaila, Tīrthādri, Puṣkarādri, Vṛṣādri, Kanakādri, Nārāyaṇādri, Vakunṭhādri, Simhācala, Añjanādri, Varāhādri, Nilagiri, Śrīnivāsagiri and Ānandādri after several incidents that are believed to have taken place during several eons. Of these, the *Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa* enlists the principal names of the mountain as Vṛṣādri, Añjanādri, Śeṣāśaila and Veṅkaṭācala in the *Kṛta*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpara* and *Kali* yugas respectively³. Śrīnivāsa, the deity is named Veṅkaṭeśvara after the sacred mountain. The *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Bhaviṣyottara Purāṇas* explain the word Veṅkaṭa as ‘that which destroys sins’, where ‘*veṅ*’ refers to sins and ‘*kaṭa*’ to its burning”. The *Varāha-Purāṇa*, on the other hand explains the word as ‘the union of immortality and opulence’ ‘*veṅ*’ implying immortality and ‘*kaṭa*’ as opulence. The Lord is also known by names such as Śeṣādrinātha, Śrīśailanātha, Vṛṣādrīśa etc, after the other names of the mountain. Veṅkaṭācala is also one of the 108 *Divya-dēśas* glorified in the hymns of the Ālṅvār saints. Speaking of the greatness of the deity, the *Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa* declares, “Veṅkaṭācala is verily Vaikuṅṭha, the river Suvarṇamukharī is Virajā, the transcendental river and Vāsudeva i.e Veṅkaṭeśa is the consort of Lakṣmī (Vaikuṅṭhanātha)”⁴

It must be noted that the Puranic texts speak of several manifestations of the Lord in the sacred mountain during different eons. The first manifestation of Śrīnivāsa, according to the *Brahma-Purāṇa* is said to have taken place in the first *Kṛta-Yuga* of the *Brahma-Kalpa* on the *Ekādaśī* day of the month of *Bhādrapada* under the *Śravana* asterism in response to the prayers of *Brahmā* and other Gods⁵. Other descents of the Lord include his

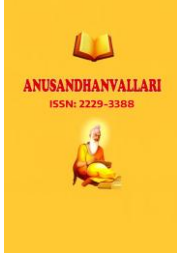
¹ कृते वरदराजस्तु त्रेतायां रङ्गनायकः। द्वापरे तु जगन्नाथः कलौ वेङ्कटनायकः॥

² कृते तु नरसिंहो भूत्त्रेतायांरघुनन्दनः। द्वापरे वासुदेवश्च कलौ वेङ्कटनायकः॥

³ कृते वृषाद्रिं वक्ष्यन्ति त्रेतायामञ्जनाचलम्। द्वापरे शेषशैलेति कलौ श्रीवेङ्कटाचलम्॥
(*Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa. Veṅkaṭācala-Māhātmya.I.37*)

⁴ सुवर्णमुखरी नाम नदी सा विरजा नदी। वैकुण्ठो वेङ्कटगिरिवासुदेवो रमापतिः॥
(*Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa. Veṅkaṭācala-Māhātmya.IV.23*)

⁵ इत्यमात्मभुवः कल्पे हार्दाम्भोजभुवो हरेः। आदौ कृतयुगे जम्बूद्वीपे भारतवर्षके॥
गङ्गाया दक्षिणे भागे योजनानां शतद्वये। पञ्चयोजनमात्रे तु पूर्वाम्भोधेस्तु पश्चिमे॥
मासे भाद्रपदे विष्णुतिथौ विष्णुसमन्विते। सिद्धयोगे सोमवारे गिरौ नारायणाह्वये॥
स्वामिपुष्करिणीतीरे पश्चिमे भूत्यपश्चिमे। वृन्दारकाणां वृन्दैस्तु प्रार्थितो लोकरक्षकः॥



manifestations to grace Agastya, Śeṣa, a king named Śaṅkha etc,. However the most popular of all his descents and the one closely connected with the present day rituals and festivities at Tirumalā is that which is known to have taken place in the present eon, i.e the 28th Kali-Yuga wherein the celebrated wedding of Padmāvati and Śrīnivāsa is mentioned to have taken place. This account is described in the *Varāha* and *Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇas*, albeit with slight variations. Exhorted by the assembly of sages, Bhṛgu had resolved to visit the abodes of Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu to test their virtues. Finding the defects in the form of ignorance and anger in Brahmā and Śiva respectively, Bhṛgu reached Vaikuṅṭha where he found Viṣṇu reclining on his serpent bed and in anger struck him with his foot on his chest. Although Viṣṇu received the sage with due respects, Lakṣmī, enraged by the sage's act of striking the chest of Viṣṇu, her abode, left Vaikuṅṭha and resided at Karavīrapura (Kolhāpur) on the earth. In his search for Lakṣmī, the Lord resolved to reside at Venkaṭācala, awaiting his reunion with Lakṣmī and chose an ant-hill as his abode. The local king who was amused to find the milk of his cow mysteriously flowing at the mouth of the ant-hill wherein Śrīnivāsa was meditating, raised his axe in anger to strike the cow. Śrīnivāsa, out of his compassion for the cow, bore the assault upon himself. In his pursuit of herbs to heal his wounds, Śrīnivāsa met Varāha, the presiding deity of Venkaṭācala who assented to his stay in the sacred hills and in return, Śrīnivāsa promised that the devotees visiting his shrine in future, would first offer their respects to Varāha. Varāha sent Vakulamālikā as a nurse to attend to Śrīnivāsa. Vakulamālikā in her previous birth was Yaśodā who was promised by Śrī Kṛṣṇa that, in her next birth she would receive the fortune of witnessing his wedding⁶. Then, the region was ruled by a king named Ākāśarājā who remained childless for several years and had resolved to perform a sacrifice for progeny. The king found a female child in a thousand petalled lotus as he ploughed the surface of the earth for the sacrifice and named her Padmāvati. He was also shortly blessed with a son. Padmāvati was none other than Vedavati, the daughter of a sage who had impersonated as Sītā and stayed in Laṅkā as Sītā was under the care of Svāhā, the wife of Agni. During the Agniparīkṣā which took place after the killing of Rāvaṇā, two Sītās emerged and Śrī Rāma, identifying his consort enquired about the other woman, to which Sītā, having narrated the happenings, exhorted Śrī Rāma to accept her. Reiterating his resolve of fidelity (*Ekapatnīvrata*) towards her, Śrī Rāma promised to grant her desire in the 28th Kali-Yuga⁷. During one of his hunting expeditions, Śrīnivāsa met Padmāvati who was gathering flowers and fell in love with her. The Purāṇas further narrate how the mutual love grows between the couple culminating in the celestial wedding that took place on the Daśamī day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaiśākha which is celebrated every year till date⁸. Yet another incident mentioned in

आविर्बभूव भगवान् श्रीनिवासः परः पुमान्॥ (*Padma-Purāṇa. Kṣetra-Kāṇḍa. XXXIII.123-126*)

⁶ तस्याः प्रीत्यै वासुदेवो ह्यष्टाविंशो कृते युगे। आविर्भूय यशोदाय तेषकैर्गुणकर्मभिः ॥
कीडन्नास्ते जगद्योनिः निदषोऽपीश्वरोऽपि च । दैत्यानां वञ्चनायैव सुराणां मुक्तिहेतवे ॥
स्वभक्तानां हितार्थाय विरक्तान विशेषतः। मुक्तिमापादयन् देवः क्रीडते प्राकृताऽकृतिः ॥
इयेवे करणादेव यशोदा वकुलऽभवत् । सा करिष्यति कल्याणं हरेर्वेङ्कटनासिनः ॥

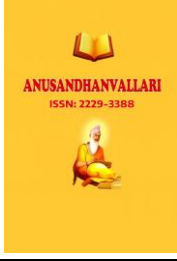
(*Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa. Venkaṭācala-Māhātmyam V. 42-45*)

⁷ एकपत्नीव्रतं मेऽद्य कृतं जानासि भामिनि । द्वापरेऽङ्गीकरोमीति बहूनां वरदो यतः ॥
तव वाक्यं करिष्यामि त्वष्टाविंशो कलौ युगे । तावदेषा ब्रह्मलोके ब्रह्मणा पूजिता भवेत् ॥

(*Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa. Venkaṭācala-Māhātmyam VIII. 67-68*)

⁸ मा कुरुष्वत्र सन्देहं कन्यार्थं पुरुषोत्तम । वैशाखशुक्लदशमीभृगुवारे शुभे दिवे ॥
बन्धुभिः सह सम्प्राप्य मामुद्धृत्य गर्णैः सह । हर्षेण पाणिग्रहणं कर्तव्यं मे मनोगतम् ॥

(*Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa. Venkaṭācala-Māhātmya. IX. 171-172*)



the Purāṇas is about debt borrowed by Śrīnivāsa from Kubera, which the former promises to repay along with interest within thousand years after the marriage⁹. Purāṇas further mention of the battle between Vasudāna, the brother of Padmāvati and Toṇḍamān, her uncle after the death of Ākāśarājā in which Śrīnivāsa allies with his brother-in-law and the terrible battle is ended when Śrīnivāsa is injured by the attack of his devotee Toṇḍamān. Then, Śrīnivāsa, unwilling to stay at the abode of his in-laws, requests Taṇḍamān to build an abode for him on the Śeṣācala on the Southern bank of Svāmipuṣkariṇī, where the temple stands now. The Purāṇas also mention that Toṇḍamān in his previous birth was a devotee named Raṅgadāsa, an attendant of sage Vaikhānasa who once failed to discharge his duty of preparing garlands for the sage's worship of Viṣṇu at the appropriate time, since his mind was momentarily overcome with lust. He was ashamed and remorseful when the sage enquired about the reason for his delay. Then, the Lord comforted Raṅgadāsa that it was under the influence of his māyā that he was deluded and was blessed with a boon that in the next birth he would be born as a king who would construct the great temple¹⁰. The descent of Śrīnivāsa in Kali Yuga was therefore to grace Yaśodā, Vedavati and Raṅgadāsa, bearing testimony to the Purāṇic statements on Veṅkateśvara as the *pratyakṣa-devatā* of Kali Yuga..

The image of Veṅkateśvara is generally depicted with four arms with the upper right and left hands holding the *cakra* (disc) and *śaṅkha* (conch) respectively. The normal right hand is downward facing, pointing towards the feet of the Lord, while the normal left hand is placed on his waist, as if suggesting that the devotees are drowned in the ocean of material existence only up to their waist. The chest bears the distinguishing marks of Viṣṇu viz., the Śrīvatsa and Lakṣmī¹¹. The image sports a typical conical crown and round ear-rings and is characterized by

⁹ ऋणग्राही श्रीनिवासो धनदायी धनेश्वरः ॥

अस्मत्कार्यनिमित्तं तु कल्याणार्थं कलौ युगे । वैशाखे शुक्लसप्तम्यां विलम्बे चैव वसरे ॥

निष्काणां राममुद्राणां लक्षाणि च चतुर्दश।द्रव्यं दत्तं धनेशेन वृद्धिग्रहणकरणात् ॥

सवृद्धि दित्सता मूलं स्वीकृतं चक्रपाणिनाविवाहवर्षमारभ्य सहस्रान्ते धन पुनः ॥

दातव्यं यक्षराजय श्रीनिवासेन शार्ङ्गिणा। एकः साक्षी चतुर्वक्त्रो द्वितीयस्तु त्रिलोचनः ॥

तृतीयोऽश्वथराजस्तु वेति सर्वमिदं दृढम्। इत्येतदृणपश्रतु श्रीनिवासोऽलिखत्स्वयम् ॥

(Bhaviṣyottara-Purāṇa. Veṅkaṭācala-Māhātmya.XI.120-125)

¹⁰ लज्जया किं रङ्गदास ! मया त्वं मोहितो ह्यसि । न तावज्जितकाभस्त्वं धीरो भव महामते ! ॥

गन्धर्वराजवद्राजा भविताऽसि महीतले । तत्र भुक्त्वा महाभोगान्भक्तिमान्मयि सर्वदा ॥

प्राकारं च विमानं च कारयिष्यसि मे तदा । तत्र मुक्तिं प्रदास्यामि प्रीत्या परमया युतः ॥

अत्रैव कुरु सेवां त्वमाशरीरविमोक्षणात् । मद्भक्तानां सकामानामेवं मुक्तिर्भविष्यति ॥

इत्युक्त्वा भगवान्विष्णुः पुननवाच किञ्चन । श्रुत्वा तद्रङ्गदासोऽपि चकाराऽराममुत्तमम् ॥

(Varāha-Purāṇa. II. 9.43-47)

¹¹ ऊर्ध्वं हस्तौ यदीयौ सुररिपुदलने बिभ्रतौ शङ्खचक्रे

सेव्यावङ्घ्री स्वकीयावभिदधधरो दक्षिणो यस्य पाणिः ।

तावन्मात्रं भवाब्धिं गमयति भजतामूरुगो वामपाणिः

श्रीवत्साङ्कश्च लक्ष्मीर्यदुरसि लसतस्तं भजे वेङ्कटेशम् ॥

