### About the Journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal DOI</th>
<th><a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal Home</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chitrolekha.com">www.chitrolekha.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included in</td>
<td>ProQuest, Art Full-text (H.W. Wilson), EBSCO, Google Scholar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### About the Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Volume 6, Number 2, 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection Editor</td>
<td>Soma Ghosh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue DOI</td>
<td><a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOC</td>
<td><a href="https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v6n2">https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v6n2</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### About the Article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>The Dynamics of Placement and Re-placement: Art-works and Mysore AmbaVilasa Palace Durbār Hall Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author/s</td>
<td>Chandan Kashyap S K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Christ (Deemed to be) University, School of Architecture, Kengeri Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>No funding was received. Published free of any charge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article DOI</td>
<td><a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62.v6n204">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62.v6n204</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages</td>
<td>1-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-text HTML</td>
<td><a href="https://chitrolekha.com/v6n204">https://chitrolekha.com/v6n204</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-text PDF</td>
<td><a href="https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v6n2/v6n204.pdf">https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v6n2/v6n204.pdf</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article History</td>
<td>First Published: December 25, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright</td>
<td>Aesthetics Media Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing</td>
<td>Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Dynamics of Placement and Re-placement: Art-works and Mysore AmbāVilāsa Palace Durbār Hall Space

Chandan Kashyap S K
Assistant Professor, Christ (Deemed to be) University, School of Architecture, Kengeri Campus, Bengaluru-560060. chandansmg@gmail.com

Abstract
Out of three large collections of RLF Rāja Ravi Varma’s paintings, those are in Vadodara, Thiruvananthapuram and Mysuru, Mysore Oṭeyar’s collection was executed in his last years. Princely Mysore AmbāVilāsa palace patronised Rāja Ravi Varma to produce these excellent mythological oil paintings for the (public) durbār hall wall. However, at present, this series is displayed in the Jayacāmarājendra art gallery in Mysūru. In the lieu of (t)his corpus of works a series of a canvas depicting mother goddess images executed by Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi is visible. What was the reason for this re-placement? Did the architectural intervention cause this change and offered an opportunity for Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi to contribute to the same wall space? How Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi contributed to redefining the relationship of paintings with the (public) durbār hall space? Corpus of Rāja Ravi Varma’s paintings and Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi’s paintings are studied in the context of (public) durbār hall space. Letters and catalogues from archival sources pertinent to the commission (art)work in the context of (public) durbār hall wall and ceiling design competition are carefully scrutinized. The architectural aesthetic reason caused the relocation of Rāja Ravi Varma’s paintings in the Jayacāmarājendra art gallery, which facilitated an opportunity for Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi to propound his redefinition of the relationship of (his series of mother goddess) paintings and the (public) durbār hall space, which he had already executed through the ceiling design.

Keywords: Raja Ravi Varma, Shilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swamy, Mysore palace, iconographic images, Shilpa Shastras, Jayachamarajendra art gallery, patronisation of paintings, Mysore Wodeyars, Ambavilas durbar hall.

Ambā Vilāsa palace in Princely Mysore (henceforth A. V. palace) needed artworks, for which, with great honour, Rāja Ravi Varma (henceforth R. Rv. Varma) was invited to accomplish this task. R. Rv. Varma received royal treatment in Mysore and through this royal assignment R. Rv. Varma produced a series of nine mythological paintings for A. V. Palace (see figures 1, 2, 3, 4). This body of works was later relocated to Jagannāhana palace in Mysore (henceforth J. M. palace), which later got transformed into an art gallery that is now known as Jayacāmarājendra art gallery (henceforth J. A. Gallery). In the lieu of R. Rv. Varma’s paintings, a painting series depicting mother goddesses executed by Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi (henceforth S. S. S. Swāmi) is visible

1 Jagannāhana palace was constructed in 1861 by King Krishnraj Wodeyar III and it was used as an alternative residential place for some time apart from A. V. palace
(see figure 5). What was the reason for the relocation of R. Rv. Varma’s paintings? Did this relocation offer an opportunity to contribute further? How the relationship of paintings with the (public) durbār hall space was redefined? R. Rv. Varma’s mythological paintings series and S. S. S. Swāmi’s painting depicting mother goddesses are studied in the context of (public) durbār hall space (see figure 6). Letters and papers from archival sources in connection with the (public) durbār hall wall commission (art) work and ceiling design competition are carefully examined to know the answer(s). This research seeks to understand, firstly, how R. Rv. Varma was patronised by Krśnarāja Oḍeyar IV for the mythological painting series for the (public) durbār hall wall, next, the reason for which R. Rv. Varma’s paintings were relocated in J.M. palace. Furthermore, to understand how S. S. S. Swāmi contributed to redefining the articulated relationship between the paintings and the (public) durbār hall space.

Figure: 1, “Rama Breaking the Sacred Bow of Siva before the Marriage with Sita” painted by Rāja Ravi Varma, oil on canvas in the Ambā Vilāsa palace collection
Figure: 2, “Ravana Carrying Off Sita and Opposed by Jatayu” painted by Rāja Ravi Varma, oil on canvas in the Jayacāmarājendra art gallery collection.

Figure: 3, “Swan Messenger” painted by Rāja Ravi Varma, oil on canvas in the Jayacāmarājendra art gallery collection.
The Dynamics of Placement and Re-placement: Art-works and Mysore AmbāVilāsa Palace Durbār Hall Space

Figure: 4, painted by Rāja Ravi Varma, oil on canvas in the Jayacāmarāንjendra art gallery collection

Figure: 5, Gāyatrī (with Trāṣaktī) painted by Śīla Siddhānti Siddhalinga Swāmi, oil on canvas in the Ambā Viṣā palace collection
I. Patronisation of the artwork for Amba Vilāsa palace

Raja Ravi Varma the royal painter

R. Rv. Varma was a highly renowned artist with international repute and this can be witnessed by the fact that his canvases represented “Indian culture” in Chicago— the International Exhibition (1893) organised by the World’s Colombian Commission, this reminds the “participation of Śvāmy Viśēkānanda in the famous ‘Parliament of World’s Religion’” at Chicago in 1893. The certificates of the award (for R. Rv. Varma), now adorn the wall of the Śrī Citra Art Gallery in Thiruvananthapuram, are the evidence. His oleographs and their influence were immense, ranging from the French version of his oleographs in the west to the Japanese version in the east are observed. When he was invited to Mysore to paint for the palace, he as well as the Mysore palace was conscious of the significance of his works. R. Rv. Varma, while conveying his thanks to Mahārāja he expressed, “the kind patronage His Highness has(d) extended to me (R. Rv. Varma) and Indian art” as a noble deed. This alludes to the significance of R. Rv. Varma and his works to the Indian art scenario.

The story of Oḍeyar’s patronization of the artist is narrated herewith by gleaning archival sources. According to the letter written by R. Rv. Varma to the palace, he had visited Mysore twice, at first, he had visited the (old) palace in the late 1880s during Cāmarāja Oḍeyar X’s period. Next, he visited the “new palace” (under construction) in 1904 during Kṛṣṇāja Oḍeyar IV’s era. In between the two visits to Mysore R. Rv. Varma had executed a significant body of works for the Baroda royal family. He wrote a letter to the Mysore palace mentioning his accomplishment of the (mythological) series for “HH the Gaekwar of Baroda” (’15 years ago) for which he had received Rs. 1500/- for each painting (smaller ones). Hence, for the entire Mysore A. V. palace assignment, he quoted the amount of Rs. 25000/- and that was accepted.

Stately patronisation of the royal painter

After the approval of the A. V. palace commission project, R. Rv. Varma received royal treatment. First of all, arrangements at Bangalore to receive him were done by Gurikāra Bettānna. A

---

2 Ganesh V. Shivaswamy, Raja Ravi Varma, his imprint in time: Celebrating 125 years of the print legacy, a slide talk presentation on Friday, (Bengaluru, National Gallery of Modern Art, 12 July 2019 at 6.00 pm)
4 Mysore Wodeyars’ family ruled the Mysūru/ Mysore area since pre- Vijayanagara era till Indian independence.
5 A letter from R.R. Varma to Palace dated 10 July 1904 during his stay at Mysore, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
6 Dated 10 November 1904, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
7 Similar hospitality was provided to him at several places across India, Vāḍōdara was one among them.
8 A letter from Superintendent (Gurikara Bettanna) to (Assistant Private Secretary to H.H. The Maharaja of Mysore) P. Raghavendra Rao dated 7 July 1904, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
government carriage ("Victoria") was arranged to receive him and his people in Bangalore and another carriage ("Victoria") was provided for their use. To prepare coffee and food a Brahmin cook was engaged. Later, when he arrived at Mysore, it is stated that he stayed at (Dewān) "Sir K. Sheshadri Iyer’s House". As per records, he came with his brother C. Rāja Rāja Varma, “five to six servants including cooks” (probably his son Rāja Rāma Varma) also accompanied. Since R. Rv. Varma and Rāja Rāja Varma were very keen to listen to “Mysore music”, a music concert was organised to entertain them. As a letter from Karikal Toṭṭi states Vine Śeshanna and Vine Subbanna for vine performance, Bōdāra Kṛśnaappa and Vāsudēvācar for vocal performance and Gulāb Jānī for Hindusthani vocal music performance were planned.

In the palace, the Engineer Mr Maconochie had accompanied R. Rv. Varma and shown the allocated spaces at the A. V. palace (public) durbār hall for his paintings, for which R. Rv. Varma and his brother immediately geared up to work. In addition, it is stated that the Varma brothers were preparing watercolour character sketches in which they wished to include various types of Mysoreans, in this regard “classes of Palace servants” were expected to be arranged for modelling. After their stay in Mysore, some days later the royal artist guest with his men went back (to Kerala) and began the series. In 1905, he writes that he was about to finish the "pictures for the durbah hall" before the visit of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales to Mysore.

**Logistics of Raja Ravi Varma’s artworks**

He further states that after the completion of the paintings, he packed them into two parcels and sent them by the goods train on 29 October 1905 to Bangalore. Furthermore, in the same letter, three entries are recorded, one dated 06/12/1905 and another two dated 11/12/1905, stating that all of the paintings were received and stored in Bangalore carefully and awaited further communication from R.Rv. Varma. As per communication, he came to Mysore again in January 1906 and treated the canvases with his finishing touches. Under the supervision of Engineer Mr Maconochie, the paintings were received and handed over to the Maharaja. As per the contract

---


10 Dated 16 July 1904, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.


13 Name Bangalore represents till the renaming as Bengaluru in 1 November 2014

R. Rv. Varma was paid the amount of Rs 25000/- for the “series of nine paintings” that was regarded under the “general cost of constructing the Amba Vilasa palace”.15 16 17

As E. M. J. Venniyoor states (Venniyoor, 2006, 61) R. Rv. Varma, before going back (on 8 February 1906) witnessed his works displayed on the walls of J. M. palace Mysore (as a temporary display till the completion of the new A. V. palace (public) durbar hall construction work).18 Next, within a short duration again he visited Mysore on the occasion of the Prince of Wales George V’s visit. According to a letter dated 21 January 1906 written by R. R. Varma he had received the invitation to attend the most elite gathering and “garden party” in Mysore on the occasion of Prince (George V) and Princess of Wales’s visit. As Erwin Neumayer states (Neumayer & Schelberger, 2005, 316) R. R. Varma was one of the VIPs for whom the newly imported cars were employed during George V’s visit to the Khejda operation site.19

The connoisseurship of the patron

On 21 January 1906 R. R. Varma by addressing the Mysore palace writes that his series of paintings were ready for the “exhibition” during the visit of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. In addition to this Venkataramaiah (Venkataramaiah, 1941, 416-418) maintains that on the same occasion, when Prince of Wales George V was about to visit the display, meanwhile, Kriṣṇarāja Oḍeyar IV is believed to have visited and politely pointed out a correction in the painting “Krishna’s Embassy to Duryodhana”.20 In the painting, the hand of Kṛṣṇa holding Arjunā’s hand was found elongated extra. This “rectification” is believed to have been accepted by R. Rv. Varma as his “failure” and within “some days” said to have corrected that. This fascinating anecdote points out the “lack of proportion” as the well-known criticism idiom revolving around R. Rv. Varma’s works. A similar one in the context of his other painting is stated (Venniyoor, 2006, 23) to have been “rectified” by

---

15 A letter dated 8 November 1905 (Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore) from R.R. Varma states due to health hazards R.R. Varma was unable to paint two out of ‘series of nine paintings’; ‘Kusha and Lava accompanied by Valmiki and chanting the story of the Ramayana in the Yagashala’ and ‘Draupati Taunting Bhima for His Cowardice in Proposing Peace’ are not visible in the display either at J.A. Gallery or A.V. Palace.

16 Letter dated 12 November 1904 (Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore) addressing Mr Krishna Murti

17 A letter from (Palace Engineer) Mr. Maconochie to Krishna Murthy dated 19 February 1906, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.


Rabindranath Tagore also; similarly, *Kśńarāja Oḍeyar* IV also is attributed to have ‘rectified’.\(^{21}\)

Thereby, this “rectification” forms a criterion for the image construction of the “connoisseurship” spirit of the *Mahārāja*.

Since Mysore *Dasara* Exhibition was a prestigious platform for art/industry trade & commerce and cultural events in the State as well as the Nation. As maintained by *Venkataramaiah* (Venkataramaiah, 1941, 416-418) in the section “Chitralekhanā Prema” R. Vv. Varma’s mythological series (painted for A.V. Palace) was exhibited in the Mysore *Dasara* exhibition in 1906. However, during *Dasara*, the artist was not present.\(^{22}\) As Erwin Neumayer states (Neumayer & Schelberger, 2005, 316) R. Vv. Varma fell ill on 20 September.\(^{23}\) He was diabetic and passed away on 2 October 1906 in *Kilamānūr* Palace.\(^{24}\) There was only five days gap between his death in *Kilamānūr* in Kēraḷa and the *Vijayadaśami* festival that had occurred on the 27 September (Mysore Dasara Calendar: Year-1906), this makes it impossible to believe the presence of the artist in Mysore *Dasara* Exhibition in 1906 September.\(^{25}\)

II. Placement of Raja Ravi Varma’s “Puranic” paintings in the *AmblaVilās* palace

Several letters confirm that the commission work of a series of nine paintings was intended to be fixed as the (interior) decoration of “the rear wall of the (public) durbar hall of the new Palace at Mysore”.\(^{26}\)\(^ {27}\) As per the list of nine paintings of the “Puranic” (*Purānic*) theme, in which seven paintings with dimensions of 7’.10” X 5’ and two paintings of 5’.4” X 4’ were listed in the records under the section “(public) Durbar Hall”. These paintings, commissioned on his second visit to Mysore, constituted the body of his mythological painting series, which was executed for the *Oḍeyar* collection in Mysore, was stated as follows:

1. “Rama Breaking the Sacred Bow of Siva before the Marriage with Sita”. (see figure 1)


\(^{24}\) Indian Telegraphs addressing Palace Private Secretary sent by (R .R. Varma’s son) Rama Varma and received in Mysore on 04-10-1906 informs R .R. Varma’s demise on second of October 1906 Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.


\(^{26}\) From Private Secretary to the Maharaja of Mysore to R.R.Varma dated 12 November 1904 another letter to Krishna Murti dated 12 November 1904 are some of the examples (Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore).

\(^{27}\) Letter dated 12 November 1904 addressing Mr Krishna Murti, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
2. “Ravana Carrying Off Sita and Opposed by Jatayu”. (see figure 2)
3. “Rama Threatens the Ocean God Varuna on His Not Making Way for Him”.
4. “Indrajit Presenting to His Father Ravana the Trophies of His Conquest of Swarga (Heaven) (Mahabharat and Bhagavata)”. (see figure 4)
5. “Krishna Releases His Imprisoned Parents After Killing Kamsa”.
6. “Krishna’s Embassy to Duryodhana”.
7. “Draupati Taunting Bhima for His Cowardice in Proposing Peace”. (Not on display in J. A. gallery)*
8. “Bhishma’s Great Self Sacrifice”.
9. “Kusha and Lava accompanied by Valmiki, and chanting the story of the Ramayana in the Yagashala”. (Not on display in J. A. gallery)*

* Rather, instead of these compositions “Swan Messenger” (see figure 3) and “Draupathi” are visible in the J. A. gallery.

Several letters confirm that these works were about to be displayed on the wall of A.V. palace (public) durbār hall. A letter from the Executive Engineer and another letter addressing Rāmakrishna Rāo (palace controller) informs about the task of preparing “a brief history in Kanarese (Kannada language) inscribed in the panels below each painting” (basic information about the theme of the painting). Another letter shows how they were in search of an illustrated portfolio of R. Rv. Varma’s paintings to prepare the information panels. A letter from S. Sīnīvāsa Iyer tells us that Mr Hardaker reported to the King about the plans and arrangements at the palace done for the Dasara celebrations of 1910, among them, the wall mounting of R. Rv. Varma’s paintings on the west wall of (public) durbār hall of A.V. palace were also listed. In addition to these letters, the absence of this corpus of artworks in Jaganmōhana Citraśāle (J. A. gallery) becomes very crucial to support the argument further. In this direction, another letter in 1913 with three estimations for the re-framing work for the images at Jaganmōhana Citraśāle (J. A. gallery) lists a majority of paintings. In which Raja Rama Varma’s “Hari(s) Chandra & Taramati in the Street”, which was executed after the R. Rv. Varma’s “nine mythological paintings”, was listed

28 A letter addressing Ramakrishna Rao Garu (Palace Controller) dated 10 of July 1908, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
29 A letter from The Executive Engineer, Palace Division to The Officer in charge, Palace Establishments, Mysore, dated 13 of August 1907, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
30 Another gentle reminder to Ramakrishna Rao Garu (dated 28 of July 1908), Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
31 A letter from S. Sreenivasa Iyer For Executive Engineer, Palace Division to Maharaja of Mysore approved by P. Raghavendra Rao, Huzur Secretary, Mysore (22-09-1910), Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
but any of the Rv. Varma's paintings were absent from the list.\(^{32}\) This confirms that, by then, they were not in the Jaganmōhana Citrāsāle (J. A. gallery).

### III. Re-placement of Raja Ravi Varma’s ‘Puranic’ paintings

#### Relocation of Raja Ravi Varma’s “Puranic” paintings

The A.V. palace (public) durbār hall western wall had high cultural-political significance, thus it demanded items of high cultural value for its “decoration”. R. Rv. Varma’s canvases fulfilled this demand. With all the efforts and patronisation, finally, as a grand project, R. Rv. Varma’s “Puranic” painting series of international fame was produced for the western wall of (public) durbār hall. However, at present, these works are not in the A.V. palace (except “Rama Breaking the Sacred Bow of Siva before the Marriage with Sita”, see figure 1), instead, they are displayed in the J. A. gallery.  

Wherein, this corpus of artworks was subjected to the art gallery context (rather than the palace (public) durbār hall).

Author Venkataramaiah (Venkataramaiah, 1941, 421-425) in the section “Mysurina Aramane” maintains that on the “Sejje Gode” (A.V. Palace, Western wall) the series of mythological paintings were mounted, “Samudrajagaravabhanga” (“Rama Threatens the Ocean God Varuna on His Not Making Way for Him”), “Sitaapaharana” (“Ravana Carrying Off Sita and Opposed by Jatayu”, see figure 2), “Bhishmapratigne” (“Bhishma’s Great Self Sacrifice”) and “Krishnadautya” (“Krishna’s Embassy to Duryodhana”) are mentioned among them.\(^{33}\) According to the author, (the year of the book release is 1941) R. Rv. Varma’s painting series was part of the (public) durbār hall wall.

The most convincing reason for the relocation of the works is the fact that A.V. palace (public) durbār hall extension works and additional works began and the significance of old “Sejje Gode” diminished to a considerable extent. Its significance with the explicit visibility was dislocated, thus the wall seized to be the actual “backdrop” of the royal Mysore throne. A letter dated 7 January 1932 written by the palace architect (P. S. Subramanyam) addressing the chairman of the durbār hall committee explained this effect and stated as follows: \(^{34}\) (see Annexure)

> … if required by screening off the old Sajje arches and keeping the pillars only visible... if the pillars are to have an individuality of their own substantial enough to give an appearance all alone, they should be placed no more than ten feet apart considering the height of the pillars, which are about fifteen feet, thus causing the arches of the old Sajje almost hidden...

At present (public) durbār hall (extended) is a huge interior space with non-load bearing ornamental pillars. It has a huge wall that stretches horizontally from the south on the left side of

\(^{32}\) A letter with three estimates from (Picture Frame Workers) 1) H.G. Lingannah & son 2) H.G.Siddaligappah & Co. to M.P. Subramanyaraj Urs dated 02/04/1913, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.


\(^{34}\) Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
the hall to the north on the right side. This wall has niche spaces, which were allocated for R. Rv. Varma’s paintings, each flanked with marble ornamental pilaster at both sides which culminates in a multi-foil arch at its top and these niches are separated by the big pilaster in between. Each pilaster that separates the niche space supports the multi-foil arch echoing the niche space and perpendicularly connects the pillar in the next row which runs parallel to the stretch of the wall, by echoing the same, further rows of pillars are connected. Each row of the pillars is aligned with the grid of the plan from south to north as well as west to east. (see figure 7) The pillars, as intended by the architect, almost block the view of the already existing niche spaces of the wall. From the view of the audience’s position(s), only the rows of pillars are visible rather than these niche spaces, thereby, dramatically reducing the significance of the “Sejje Gode” (western wall). In addition, the location of the royal Mysore throne has been pushed far ahead from this wall towards the east (see figure 6). This reduced significance caused the wall to be unsuitable for R. Rv. Varma’s paintings. Nevertheless, the walk-through space in front of the wall, with the proximity, offered some scope for appreciation of the paintings on the wall. Thus, it retained its cultural value to some extent, for which S. S. S. Swāmi executed a series of paintings depicting the images of mother goddesses. (see figure 5)
Re-placement of Raja Ravi Varma’s ‘Puranic’ paintings

R. Rv. Varma’s painting series got re-place in two different ways. On one hand, this body of artwork was relocated to the J.M. palace, and thus got re-place. On another hand, R. Rv. Varma is credited also for the works executed by S. S. Swāmi that re-place his works. In the first case, the 1943 catalogue of J. A. Gallery (Gallery of Indian Paintings Catalogue, 1943, viii, ix) mentions “Raja Ravi Varma Room” (as it is visible today) and locates it in the key plan on its first floor, which confirms the re-placement that happened by then in J. M. palace.35 36 Turning to the other case, even after his death (1906), not only his work maintained an intense impact on the local art scenario, but there was a strong imprint on people's memory as well that R. Rv. Varma’s paintings adorn the (western) wall of (public) durbār hall in A.V. palace. Thereby, R. Rv. Varma’s authority is re-place. However, the specific compositions in the “Puranic” series produced by R. Rv. Varma is not re-evoked, instead, his name is associated with the paintings that were not produced by him and this can be witnessed in other instances as well, the popular perception of S. L. Hadankar’s “Glow of Hope” (“Woman With The Lamp” in J. A. gallery) is one such instance. A noteworthy fact is that some scholars too, in their perception, remember R. Rv. Varma for the painting series executed by S. S. Swāmi for the “Sejje Gode” of A.V. palace durbār hall wall. The description of (public) durbār hall found in Vikram Sampath’s “Splendours of Royal Mysore: The Untold Story of the Wodeyars” (Sampath, 2008, 698) is an example. Even among the mass audience, it is quite common to their

35 By 1940 Maharāja Kṛṣṇāraṇa Oḍeyar IV expired and immediately after a month Maharaja Jayacāmarājendra Oḍeyar’s tenure begins.

36 Gallery of Indian Paintings Catalogue, (Mysore, Jaganmohan Palace Chitrásala, 1943), pp. viii, ix
memory that those paintings on the (public) durbār hall wall are unquestionably painted by R. Rv. Varma (actually done by S. S. S. Swāmi).³⁷

IV. Further opportunities provided by this relocation

**Śākta Iconic imageries: The feeling of divine “power” back-up**

According to the myth preserved and circulated among some Mysore folks R. Rv. Varma’s life-size canvases (“series of nine mythological paintings”) at the backdrop of the King’s throne in the (public) durbār hall were sensed as “unethical” and “inappropriate for the space”.³⁸ R. Rv. Varma’s calibre was weighed metonymically with his oleographic image of “Vishvamithra Rejecting his Baby Shakuntala” (see figure 8), by this reference to the corpus of his nine mythological paintings, the unethical aspect of the irresponsibility of (generalised) man was pointed out. Which, was argued as dishonourable and not suitable for the (public) durbār hall space that was responsible for the ideal relationship between the king and his people.

S. S. S. Swāmi is said to have thoughtfully depicted Dēvi Śakti images relevant to the Kingship.³⁹ Author Shivalingappa (Shivalingappa, 2013, 2-12) contextualises these images with the category of Citrābhāsa mentioned in the Śilpa Śāstras.⁴⁰ ⁴¹ S.S.S. Swāmi is considered an ingenious artist with a sacred aura. His execution of the painting series (iconic images) comprises Rājarājeswari, Aśṭabhujā Kālikādēvi, Navadurgadēvi, Mahīśamardhini, Saraswathi, Mahālakshmi, Bhuvenēswaridēvi, Gāyatridēvi (with Triśaktidēviś) (see figure 5) as several forms of Dēvi pertinent to the Śākta tradition “Śri Vidhya upāsana”. These are life-size oil on canvas paintings that re-place R. Rv. Varma’s paintings, for which, like his predecessors, S.S.S. Swāmi too followed iconographic aspects. However, he distinguished himself with his compliance to iconometry in his paintings (borrowed from Śilpa Śāstra).⁴² The fact that any painted iconic image (oil on life-size canvas) following iconometric proportions in the academic realist style is hardly found, makes S.S.S. Swāmi’s iconic images unique.

S.S.S. Swāmi’s shared social and cultural platform of modernisation and, in reciprocation, his contributions to it are visible in his body of works. His contribution to the representation of divine beings by exploring modern materials and modes of representation is significant. The use of oil colours on canvas and European academic realism, especially, R. Rv. Varma’s trajectory that had modernised the iconic representation are some of the major shared aspects. While visualising

---


³⁸ people belonging to traditional artists community of old Mysore link

³⁹ personification of energy

⁴⁰ Prescribes the wall murals (bhitticitra) at temples.

⁴¹ L. Shivalingappa, *Shakapurusha Siddhalingaswamigalu* (Bengaluru, Karnataka Shilpakala Academy, 2013), pp. 2-12.

⁴² Potential area for further research.
the divinities, he followed the tradition of R. Rv. Varma and other conventions of representations (Tanjore and Mysore’s traditional paintings are among those traditions) and painted a typical blouse and sari. According to T.A. Gopinath Rao *Dharmaśāstrās* (Rao, 1914, 23) prefer an unstitched cloth to be represented.43 44 Furthermore, As Gnanananda says (Gnanananda, 2020) *Śilpa Śāstras* prefer the drapery as “alamkārā” (enhancement of divine beauty) similar to the jewellery used as embellishment, rather than concealment.45 46 *Hoysala* period sculptures are excellent examples of the representation of minimal “Kaṭibandh” or “munḍu”, and it is in agreement with *Āgamic* canons (see figure 9).47 These (eight) canvases stand for their sacred value that provides a different spiritual experience to the faithful. The printed images of these paintings, today, are in circulation among devotees and are used for religious events as well as household worship.

![Rāja Ravi Varma’s oleographic print depicting Viśvāmitra, Mēnaka and newborn baby Sākuntala](image)

43 “Kucapati”


45 G. Gnanananda, *Concept of Vastra in Shilpa Shastras*. (Interviewed by Chandan Kashyap S K), (Bengaluru, 2020, 08 16)

46 This is paradoxically parallel to the Platonic paradigm of Ideal beauty, believes that any natural form in the creation is considered as beautiful, art follows this beautiful form, hence, in representation cloth is avoided from hiding this beauty.

47 A small piece of rectangular unstitched cloth that covered the lower abdomen area.
Celestial blessings: The ceiling design competition

The huge ceiling covers the hall sitting arrangement, by extending (east to west) from the front of the facade to the middle of the hall, as well as stretching from the left side (south) to the right side (north) of the hall. As per myth, it is believed that the ceiling had the images painted by R. Rv. Varma (“obscene” realistic female nudes), with specific reference to the image of “someone strips off a lady nude” (see figure 4). 48 49 S. S. Swāmi and his team were believed to have over-painted with the images of Indra Sabha (see figure 10), Families of Trinity, Ashṭadigpālakās, Navagrahās, Dvādaśa rāśi and most importantly Čāmundēswari were considered to be appropriate for the palace ambience as Śilpa Śāstrās prescribes them as part of the iconographic program of the temple ceilings.

Apart from this mythical anecdote (which is crucial to understand unwritten ambience), archival records inform us that the portion of the “Rajputāna dome” was newly constructed, towards the east of the A.V. palace (public) durbar hall. 50 In conjunction with this, a “Ceiling Design

48 As told by people belonging to the traditional sculptors’ community of old Mysore link.

49 points at “Indrajit Presenting to His Father Ravana the Trophies of His Conquest of Swarga (Heaven) (Mahabharat and Bhagavata)”, which is an oil painting on canvas displayed in J. A. gallery

50 Constructed in 1930s and it is important to note that R.R. Varma died in 1906. Hence, this is an aspect of ‘de-chronologisation’ that is part of the myth construction.
Competition” was organized by the durbār hall committee. S. S. S. Swāmi’s participation in this competition was decisive for his professional path ahead. Regarding this competition, proceedings of the durbār hall committee meeting inform us about the decisive role of the palace architect with the design comprising the detailed drawing and model mapping of the allocation of ceiling space divisions with the location of coves, domes and panels. Based on this ceiling design, the competition was planned to decorate the allocated ceiling spaces, for which entries were recorded at the national level.

The competition was tough, wherein, Percy Brown’s design was juried as “the next in order of merit (compared with S. S. S. Swāmi)” and “the highest consolation prize of Rs. 750/-” totalling 750/- was awarded for which he was deeply upset. He bypassed the durbār hall committee and contacted British government officer (Maharājā’s private secretary) Sir Charles Todhunter as well as the Dewān and raised his concern, several archival papers record this incident. Percy Brown demanded the second prize, and then within the committee, there aroused differences of opinion. The Chairman (M.G. Rangaiah) had no objection to the second prize, but the Member (Mr Lakshminarasappa) argued strongly for the cancellation of any prize to him, in addition, abiding by the “rule 13” of the competition an “error was discovered” by the Secretary (N.V. Bapat). Then the committee decided to retrieve the prize amount from him so that his drawings could be returned to him, but he did not reply to this. Finally, as per the suggestion of the member Mr Lakshminarasappa, he was informed to retain the prize amount and he will get his drawing back. Furthermore, it is stated that other contestants agreed to receive consolation prizes, and with their consent, their drawings were retained by the committee. A list of consolation prizes was also furnished as follows:

| 1. | Mr P.C. Mitter | Calcutta | Rs. 400/- |
| 2. | “ J.K. Mehta | Bombay | Rs. 300/- |
| 3. | “ Ramakant | Bombay | Rs. 200/- |
| 4. | “ Chitale | Madras | Rs. 200/- |
| 5. | “ Kalabhai Karson | Bombay | Rs. 200/- |
| 6. | “ Lakshmanakrishna Rao | Mysore | Rs. 100/- |
| 7. | “ S. Nagaraju | Mysore | Rs. 100/- |

---

51 Handled this extension work activities at A.V. Palace public durbar hall.

52 Proceedings of the Durbar Hall Committee meeting held on Thursday the 8 June 1933, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

53 Proceedings of the Durbar Hall committee meeting held on Friday the 11 May 1934, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

54 Proceedings of the meeting of the Durbar Hall committee held on 17 June 1935, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

55 This was agreed on 13-07-1935, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.
8. “S. Subramanyaraju Mysore Rs. 100/-

9. “A.R. Sheriff Mysore Rs. 100/-

The “Proceedings of the Durbār Hall Committee meeting” informs that S.S.S. Swāmi was awarded the second prize, for which, lack of “proper cross-sections and details of panels etc” was stated as the reason, and thus considered an incomplete design and the second prize was found sufficient. However, proceedings dated 30-01-1935 inform us that the first prize was granted to S.S.S. Swāmi based on King Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV’s recommendation to the committee. His design appealed as entirely “original” and was found suitable to the context. The committee declared “Mr K.S. Siddalingaswamy’s (S.S.S. Swāmi) drawing” as the best out of the thirteen drawings received. None of the entries was considered for the second and third prizes, thus getting cancelled.

![Ambavilasa palace durbār hall ceiling paintings designed by Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi](image)

(Śilpa) Śāstrās as the area of competence

S.S.S. Swāmi emerged successful with this ceiling design project that was patronised by Krishnaraja OδeyarIV, later during Jayachamarajendra Oδeyar’s era he grew more influential and achieved the status of “Rāja Guru” and mentored the Maharāja in his spiritual journey. He headed the Sanskṛta Vidhvan Maṇḍali formed in A.V. palace and produced a huge body of translations/ compilations of Vēdic texts, which included “Rig Vēda and twenty-four Purāṇās” with Kannada translation. This

---

56 Proceedings of the Durbar Hall committee meeting held on Friday the 11 May 1934, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

57 Proceedings of the Durbar Hall Committee meeting held on Wednesday 30-01-1935, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

58 Which is available in CD (Rig Vēda and 24 Purāṇās) in Bengaluru. Rig Vēda with Kannada translation is published by Kannada Pustaka Pradhikar of Kannada Bhavana in Bengaluru.
The Dynamics of Placement and Re-placement: Art-works and Mysore AmbāVilāsa Palace Durbār Hall Space

corpus of literature is a product of his scholarship and the influence he had achieved. He had established “Śaiva Śilpa Brahmarśi Gurukulā” in the mid-1940s and composed “Śilpaśāstra”- a canonical text for the school (workshop) to equip several sculptors with the skill set and knowledge pertinent to devālaya Śilpa (traditional sculpture). Kāmakāmēśwari temple at Mysore is evidence of his spirit and energy to revive the tradition in the (then) modern context. Sculptures sheltered in this temple are of exceptional aesthetic quality and iconographic/ iconometric value and indicate the calibre of the master and his guild (students).

S. S. S. Swāmī’s fame was far-reaching so he was approached by scholar Prasanna Kumar Acharya, for whom he prepared twenty-two iconometric drawings for the book (Acharya, 1994, xviii) “Architecture of Manasara” in 1934.59 In this context while acknowledging him Acharya provides a lengthy list of places that he had visited across India to get iconometric drawings done, wherein, some are mentioned to have “miserably failed” after some trials. Bombay, Baroda, Delhi, Lahore, Lucknow, Allahabad, Ajmer, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Calcutta, Shillong, Cuttack, Puri, Madras, and Bangalore are those places named. Acharya praises S. S. S. Swāmī as the only one who accomplished the task. Apart from this, it worth noticing is that before this K. Venkatappa and Nandalal Bose had already contributed some iconometric drawings to the book “Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy” by Abanindranath Tagore (Tagor, (n.d).) (approximately in 1914).60 However, Venkatappa’s professional journey was in a different direction, whereas, for S.S.S. Swāmī’s art practice Śilpa Śāstras and Āganic cannons formed the major premise.61

In conclusion, even though the “puranic” series was executed by R. Rv. Varma, which was a grand project, its relocation to J. M. palace happened due to architectural aesthetic reasons. This relocation provided further scope to S.S.S. Swāmī to contribute to the palace art scenario with the painting series of the goddesses’ images that occupied the place allocated for R. Rv. Varma’s canvases. R. Rv. Varma’s corpus of artworks was re-placed in J. A. Gallery. S.S.S. Swāmī had successfully convinced the Mahārāja that his images are more apt (for the (public) durbār hall space). However, in the popular collective memory R. Rv. Varma’s name and authority are re-placed in their “original place”, in other words, the relocation of his works never mattered, rather, in the popular collective memory R. Rv. Varma is credited for the artworks accomplished by S.S.S. Swāmī as well. S.S.S. Swāmī contributed with unique oil-painted images by implementing iconometric proportions (of Śilpa Śāstras) into the figures modelled as per academic realism based on the R. Rv. Varman trajectory of painting. S. S. S. Swāmī’s artistic talent and his enormous cultural capital in terms of Śilpa Śāstras and Vedic/Āganic Knowledge enabled him to be successful. In addition, his organisational capability made him influential, thus he overshadowed his

---


60 Abanindranath Tagore, Some Notes On Indian Artistic Anatomy. (n.d).

61 K. Venkatappa and S.S.S. Swamy were contemporaries and work for the Amba Vials Palace, Mysore till Venkatappa left Mysore in 1940s and established his own studio in Bengaluru.
contemporaries in terms of the palace art activities. Eventually, his contribution to the redefinition of the painting- (public) durbār hall space relationship based on Śilpa Śāstraś and Āgamic cannons is noteworthy.

Acknowledgement
I am very grateful to the Divisional State Archives in Mysuru for their support. I convey a ton of thanks to BMS School of Architecture in Yelahanka and School of Architecture in Christ University in Kengeri for the encouragement. I am thankful to Dr. G. Gnanananda and Mr. Manjunath for sharing their knowledge. I thank, last but not least, Radhika my wife (family) who supported throughout the article writing.

Image references
Figure 1. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/84/Ravi_Varma-Rama-breaking-bow.jpg
Figure 2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raja_Ravi_Varma#/media/File:Raja_Ravi_Varma_Jatayu_vadha_1906.jpg
Figure 3. https://uploads0.wikiart.org/images/raja-ravi-varma/swan-messenger.jpg
Figure 4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indrajit#/media/File:Victory_of_Meghanada_by_RRV.jpg
Figure 5. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/ಶ್ರೀ_ಗಾಯತ್ರಿ_ದೀವಿ..jpg
Figure 6. Drawn by the author
Figure 7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysore_Palace#/media/File:Grand_Interiors_of_Mysore_Palace.jpg
Figure 8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menaka#/media/File:Raja_Ravi_Varma_-_Mahabharata_-_Birth_of_Shakuntala.jpg
Figure 9. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d5/Sthambha_buttalika_sculpture_in_Chennakesava_temple_at_Belur.jpg
Figure 10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysore_Palace#/media/File:Roof_design.jpg

References
(1943). Gallery of Indian Paintings Catalogue. Mysore: Jaganmohan Palace Chitrasala. viii, ix

Shivalingappa, L. (2013). *Shakapurusha Siddalingaswamigalu*. Bengaluru: Karnataka Shilpakala Academy. 2-12

Tagor, A. ((n.d.). *Some Notes On Indian Artistic Anatomy*.


Appendices next page

Pages written by the Palace Architect P. S. Subramanyam discuss the implementation of “arch treatment” and the architectural aesthetics involved in it.
- 3 -

The existence or the nonexistence of the pillars at such long intervals make practically no difference, and in all the conditions noted above the arches of the old Sajjai alone play an important part.

This statement may be verified if required by screening off the old Sajjai arches and keeping the pillars only visible. It will be noticed then that the pillars present but a poor show.

If the pillars are to have an individuality of their own substantial enough to give an appearance all alone, they should be placed no more than ten feet apart considering the height of the pillars, which are about fifteen feet, thus causing the arches of the old Sajjai almost hidden. Then and then alone the pillar treatment will have any claim to dominate the treatment of the frontage of the Ladies Galleries. But the condition is impossible.

However it is pointed out, that the Hall Room of the Lalitha Mahal as well as the Karikal Thotti of the Old Palace have pillar treatments inside.

Surely they have, but the conditions are different in the case of the new Durbar Hall.

In the Hall Room of the Lalitha Mahal and the Karikal Thotti, the halls are enclosed by rooms or verandas on all the four sides and the audience are seated inside the halls only, and see the same view almost on every side.

But in the case of the new Durbar Hall though it is enclosed on three sides the fourth side is completely open and the people view the Durbar Hall mostly from outside. They see the actual frontage of the Durbar Hall, the old Sajjai arches inside including the pillars and also the frontages of the Ladies Galleries.

Under the circumstances, the Durbar Hall proper can only be considered as part of the frontage of the Main Palace, roofed at top for the sake of protection from Sun and Rain. The main frontage of the Palace having arch treatment throughout no pillar treatment can have any access in the scheme.
To bring about a similarity I may point out here that the frontage of the Ladies Gallery stands in the same position as that of the treatment between the nave and the aisle of a Gothic Church where the introduction of the pillar treatment is strictly forbidden and if introduced it should be used with strict caution, so that it may not effect the peace or the individuality of the guiding feature of the scheme, the arch treatment.

Hence, in this case and in the case of the old Sajjai, where the towers interfere with the proper introduction of arches, on both ends, I would prefer the arch treatment, to take the places of pillars, in front of the old Sajjai as originally designed, then disturb the harmony of the Palace frontages by giving prominence to the foreign pillar treatment.

Then again I may mention here that the setting back of the intermediate floor of the Ladies Gallery is dependent on the distance apart the pillars or arches, are placed. In the case of pillars or arches placed 10 or 12 feet apart in a floor 18 feet high, the intermediate floor need not be set back at all. But in the case of pillars placed 24 feet apart as suggested by the Professor the frontage of the Ladies Galleries, would look intolerable unless the intermediate floor is set back sufficiently.

Hence the suggestion made by the Professor to set back the intermediate floor is only to remove that intolerable appearance that would be caused by the introduction of the pillars at such long intervals of 24 feet, where as there is no necessity for setting back the intermediate floor in the case of the arch treatment where the pillars are closer together.

The illustrations given in page 180 of the History of the Indian and Eastern Architecture Part 2 and pages 526-527 and 8 & 9 in the Architectural Record Volumes LXXXII Part 2 and LIII Part 2 respectively, where very nearly similar treatments are pictured may kindly be perused.

"Copy" Signed

P. S. Subramanyam
Palace Architect

Pages written by the Palace Architect P. S. Subramanyam discuss the implementation of “arch treatment” and the architectural aesthetics involved in it.
Chandan Kashyap S K is currently working as an assistant professor in the School of Architecture of Christ University in Kengeri campus in Bengaluru. Research interests comprise the art and cultural aspects of Karnataka/India/South Asia. In this pursuit several research articles are authored and presented, Indian Art History Congress, Karnataka History Congress, CAVA in Mysuru and National Gallery of Modern Art in Bengaluru among those places. Some articles are published in journals, Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design and Kala- the Journal of Indian Art History Congress are among those. A lifetime member of the Indian Art History Congress and recipient of Dr. Veena Shekar Award for Art History by Sameeksha Art, Research, Media, in Bengaluru.