

**The Dynamics of Placement and Re-placement: Art-works and Mysore AmbāVilāsa Palace  
Durbār Hall Space**

**INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER**

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**About the Journal**

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

**About the Issue**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Volume 6, Number 2, 2022</b>
<b>Collection Editor</b>	Soma Ghosh
<b>Issue DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62</a> ↗
<b>TOC</b>	<a href="https://chitrolekha.com/nsv6n2">https://chitrolekha.com/nsv6n2</a> ↗

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<b>Title</b>	<b>The Dynamics of Placement and Re-placement: Art-works and Mysore AmbāVilāsa Palace Durbār Hall Space</b>	
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<b>Funding</b>	<b>No funding was received. Published free of any charge.</b>	
<b>Article DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62.v6n204">https://doi.org/10.21659/cjad.62.v6n204</a>	<b>Pages: 1-9</b>
<b>Full-text HTML</b>	<a href="https://chitrolekha.com/v6n204">https://chitrolekha.com/v6n204</a> ↗	
<b>Full-text PDF</b>	<a href="https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v6n2/v6n204.pdf">https://chitrolekha.com/ns/v6n2/v6n204.pdf</a> ↗	
<b>Article History</b>	<b>First Published: December 25, 2022</b>	
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# The Dynamics of Placement and Re-placement: Art-works and Mysore AmbāVilāsa Palace Durbār Hall Space

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## Abstract

Out of three large collections of *Rāja Ravi Varma's* paintings, those are in Vadodara, Thiruvananthapuram and Mysuru, Mysore *Odeyar's* collection was executed in his last years. Princely Mysore *Ambā Vilāsa* 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.

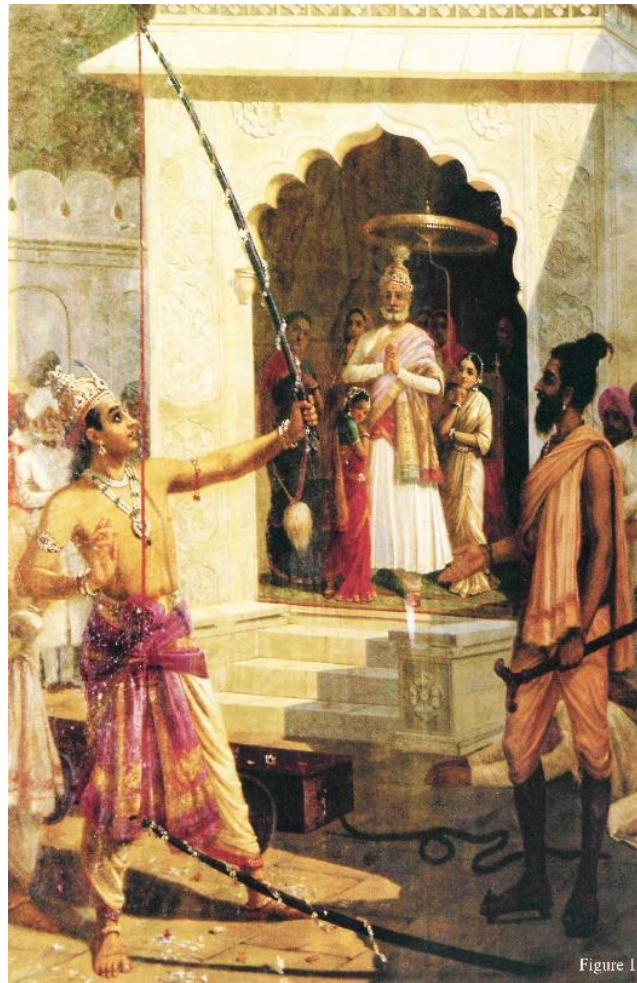
**Keywords:** Raja Ravi Varma, Shilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swamy, Mysore palace, iconographic images, Shilpa Shastras, Jayachamarajendra art gallery, patronisation of paintings, Mysore Wodeyars, Ambavilas durbar hall.

*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 *Jaganmōhana* 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).<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> *Jaganmōhana* palace was constructed in 1861 by King Krishnraja 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 *Kiṣṇarāja 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 *Jayāmarājendra* art gallery collection**



**Figure: 3, “Swan Messenger” painted by *Rāja Ravi Varma*, oil on canvas in the *Jayāmarājendra* art gallery collection**



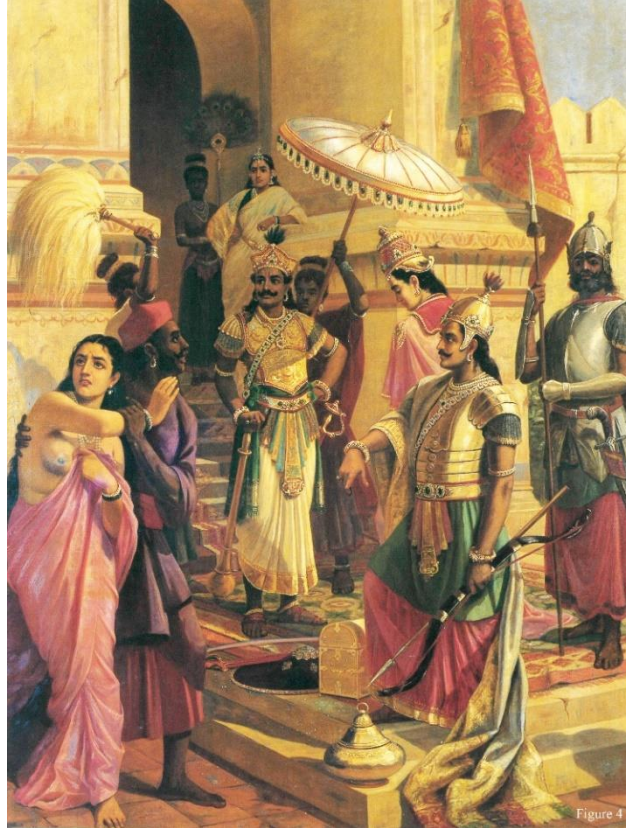


Figure: 4, painted by *Rāja Ravi Varma*, oil on canvas in the *Jayacāmarājendra* art gallery collection



Figure: 5, *Gāyatrīdēvi* (with *Trīśaktīdēvīs*) painted by *Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi*, oil on canvas in the *Ambā Vilāsa* 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 *Swāmy Vivēkānanda* 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 *Sñ 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> Next, he visited the "new palace" (under construction) in 1904 during *Kṛṣṇarāja 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).<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> First of all, arrangements at Bangalore to receive him were done by *Gurikāra Beṭṭanna*.<sup>8</sup> A

<sup>2</sup> 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)

<sup>3</sup> A letter from R.R. Varma to Palace dated 12 November 1904, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

<sup>4</sup> Mysore Wodeyars' family ruled the *Mysūru/ Mysore* area since pre- Vijayanagara era till Indian independence.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Dated 10 November 1904, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

<sup>7</sup> Similar hospitality was provided to him at several places across India, *Vaḍōdara* was one among them.

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 Śēshaṇṇa* and *Vine Subbaṇṇa* for *vīne* performance, *Biḍāra Kṛṣṇaappa* and *Vāsudēvācar* for vocal performance and *Gulāb Jāni* for Hindusthani vocal music performance were planned.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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 durbar hall" before the visit of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales to Mysore.<sup>12</sup>

### 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 *Mahārāja*.<sup>14</sup> As per the contract

<sup>9</sup> A letter by R.R.Varma to Mysore Palace dated 29 June 1904, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

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

<sup>11</sup> A letter from R.R.Varma to Maharaja of Mysore dated 13 July 1904, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

<sup>12</sup> A letter by R.R.Varma to Mysore Palace dated 8 November 1905, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

<sup>13</sup> Name Bangalore represents till the renaming as Bengaluru in 1 November 2014

<sup>14</sup> A letter from (Engineer) Mr. Maconochie letter to R.R.Varma dated 19 June 1906, Palace Maramath, 7-1904 box 3, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

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".<sup>15 16 17</sup>

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).<sup>18</sup> 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 *Kheḍḍa* operation site.<sup>19</sup>

### **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 *Venkaṭarāmaiah* (Venkataramaiah, 1941, 416-418) maintains that on the same occasion, when Prince of Wales George V was about to visit the display, meanwhile, *Kṛṣṇarāja Oḍeyar IV* is believed to have visited and politely pointed out a correction in the painting "Krishna's Embassy to Duryodhana".<sup>20</sup> 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

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<sup>15</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>18</sup> E.M.J. Venniyoor, *Raja Ravi Varma* (Trivandrum: Director, Museums and Zoos and Art Gallery, 2006), p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Erwin Neumayer and Christine. Schelberger, *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist: The Diary of C. Raja Raja Varma* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 316.

<sup>20</sup> C. K. Venkataramaiah, *Aalida Mahaswamiyavaru: Divangatarāda Sreemanmaharāja Sreemanaalvadi Sree Krishnarājendra Wodeyaravara Jeevana Charitre* (Banglore, Bangalore Press, 1941), pp. 416-418.



Rabindranath Tagore also; similarly, *Kṛṣṇarāja Oḍeyar* IV also is attributed to have 'rectified'.<sup>21</sup> 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 *Venkaṭarāmaiah* (Venkataramaiah, 1941, 416-418) in the section "*Chitralekhaṇa Prema*" R. V. 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.<sup>22</sup> As Erwin Neumayer states (Neumayer & Schelberger, 2005, 316) R. V. Varma fell ill on 20 September.<sup>23</sup> He was diabetic and passed away on 2 October 1906 in *Kilamānūr* Palace.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

## II. Placement of Raja Ravi Varma's "Puranic" paintings in the *AmbāVilās* 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".<sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup> As per the list of nine paintings of the "Puranic" (*Purāṇic*) 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)

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<sup>21</sup> E.M.J. Venniyoor, *Raja Ravi Varma* (Trivandrum: Director, Museums and Zoos and Art Gallery, 2006), p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> C. K. Venkataramaiah, *Aalida Mahaswamiyavaru*, pp. 416-418.

<sup>23</sup> Erwin Neumayer and Christine. Schelberger, *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist*, p. 316.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 'Mysore *Dasara* Calendar: Year-1906'. Drikpanchang, <https://www.drikpanchang.com/dasara/mysore/mysore-dasara-calendar.html?year=1906> (accessed 08 December 2020)

<sup>26</sup> 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).

<sup>27</sup> 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 (*Kannāḍa* language) inscribed in the panels below each painting" (basic information about the theme of the painting).<sup>28,29</sup> Another letter shows how they were in search of an illustrated portfolio of R. Rv. Varma's paintings to prepare the information panels.<sup>30</sup> A letter from S. *Sīnivāsa 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.<sup>31</sup> 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

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<sup>28</sup> A letter addressing Ramakrishna Rao Garu (Palace Controller) dated 10 of July 1908, Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> Another gentle reminder to Ramakrishna Rao Garu (dated 28 of July 1908), Palace Maramath, Divisional Archives Office, Mysore.

<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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, "Samudrajagarvabhanga" ("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.<sup>33</sup> 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:<sup>34</sup> (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

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<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> C. K. Venkataramaiah, *Aalida Mahaswamiyavaru*, pp. 421-425.

<sup>34</sup> 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)

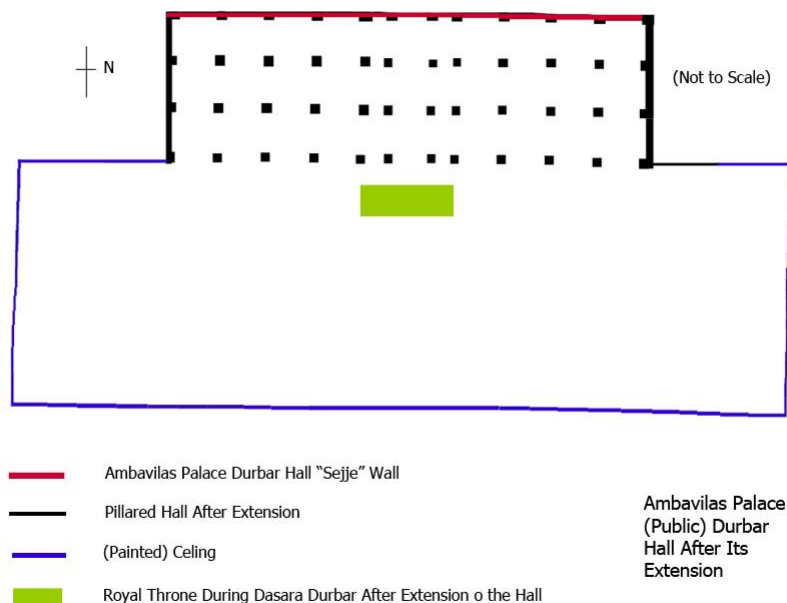


Figure 6



Figure: 7, *Ambavilās* palace pillared *durbār* hall (after extension)

### 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. 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.<sup>35 36</sup> 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. 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

<sup>35</sup> By 1940 *Maharāja Kṛṣṇarāja Oḍeyar* IV expired and immediately after a month *Maharaja Jayacāmarājendra Oḍeyar's* tenure begins.

<sup>36</sup> Gallery of Indian Paintings Catalogue, (Mysore, Jaganmohan Palace Chitrasala, 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*).<sup>37</sup>

#### 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”.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> Author Shivalingappa (Shivalingappa, 2013, 2-12) contextualises these images with the category of *Citrābhāsa* mentioned in the *Śilpa Śāstras*.<sup>40 41</sup> *S.S.S. Swāmi* is considered an ingenious artist with a sacred aura. His execution of the painting series (iconic images) comprises *Rājarājeśwari*, *Aṣṭabhujā Kālīkādevī*, *Navadurgadēvi*, *Mahīśamardhini*, *Saraswathī*, *Mahālakshmi*, *Bhuvanēśwaridēvi*, *Gāyatrīdēvi* (with *Trīśaktidēvīs*) (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*).<sup>42</sup> 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

<sup>37</sup> Vikram Sampath, *Splendours of Royal Mysore: The Untold Story of the Wodeyars* (New Delhi, Rupa. Co., 2008), p. 698.

<sup>38</sup> people belonging to traditional artists community of old Mysore link

<sup>39</sup> personification of energy

<sup>40</sup> Prescribes the wall murals (*bhitticitra*) at temples.

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

<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43 44</sup> Furthermore, As Gnanananda says (Gnanananda, 2020) *Śilpa Śāstras* prefer the drapery as "*alaṃkāra*" (enhancement of divine beauty) similar to the jewellery used as embellishment, rather than concealment.<sup>45 46</sup> 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).<sup>47</sup> 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**

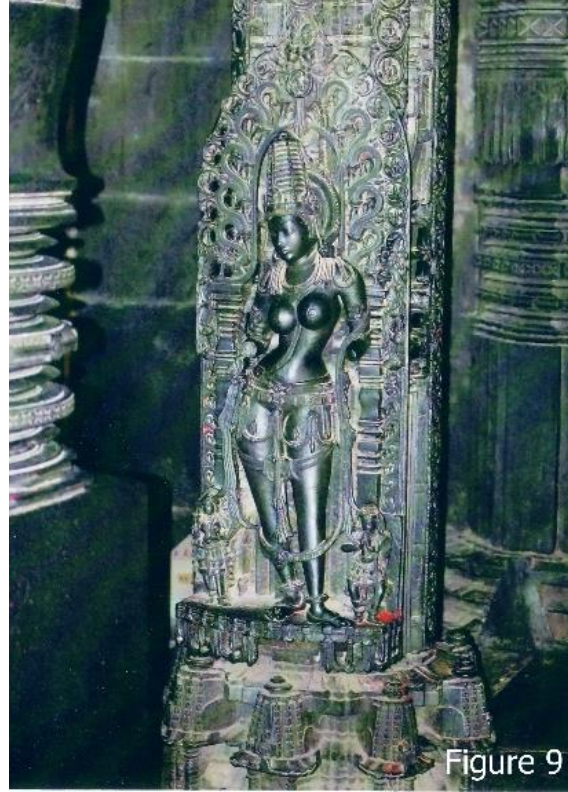
<sup>43</sup> "*Kuapaṭṭi*"

<sup>44</sup> T. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol-I, Part-I*, (Madras: The Law Printing House, 1914), p. 23.

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

<sup>46</sup> 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.

<sup>47</sup> A small piece of rectangular unstitched cloth that covered the lower abdomen area.



*House sculpture Cennakēśava temple Bēlūr*

### **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).<sup>48 49</sup> *S. S. Swāmi* and his team were believed to have over-painted with the images of *Indra Sabha* (see figure 10), Families of Trinity, *Asṭadigpālakās*, *Navagrahās*, *Dvādaśa rāśi* and most importantly *Cāmunḍēswari* 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 "*Rajputāṇa* dome" was newly constructed, towards the east of the A.V. palace (public) *durbār* hall.<sup>50</sup> In conjunction with this, a "Ceiling Design

<sup>48</sup> As told by people belonging to the traditional sculptors' community of old Mysore link.

<sup>49</sup> 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

<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> *S. S. S. Swāmī'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.<sup>52</sup> 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. Swāmī*)" 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 (*Maharāja's* private secretary) Sir Charles Todhunter as well as the *Dewān* and raised his concern, several archival papers record this incident.<sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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/-

<sup>51</sup> Handled this extension work activities at A.V. Palace public durbar hall.

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

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

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

<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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.



***Ambavilāsa* palace *durbār* hall ceiling paintings designed by Śilpa Siddhanti Siddhalinga Swāmi**

### **(Śilpa) Śāstrās as the area of competence**

*S.S.S. Swāmi* emerged successful with this ceiling design project that was patronised by Krishnaraja *Oḍeyar* IV, later during Jayachamarajendra *Oḍeyar'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 Maṇḍaḷi* 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 *Kannaḍa* translation.<sup>58</sup> This

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

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

<sup>58</sup> Which is available in CD (*Rig Vēda* and 24 *Purāṇās*) in Bengaluru *Rig Vēda* with *Kannaḍa* translation is published by Kannada Pustaka Pradhikar of Kannada Bhavana in Bengaluru.



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 "*Śilpādarśaha*" - 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.<sup>59</sup> 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).<sup>60</sup> However, Venkatappa's professional journey was in a different direction, whereas, for *S.S.S. Swāmī*'s art practice *Śilpa Śāstrās* and *Āgamic* cannons formed the major premise.<sup>61</sup>

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 Śāstrās*) 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 *Vēdic/Āgamic* Knowledge enabled him to be successful. In addition, his organisational capability made him influential, thus he overshadowed his

<sup>59</sup> Prasanna Kumar Acharya, *Architecture of Manasara Vol-IV* (New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), p. xviii.

<sup>60</sup> Abanindranath Tagore, *Some Notes On Indian Artistic Anatomy*. (n.d).

<sup>61</sup> 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 Śāstrās* 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.

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Figure 1. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/84/Ravi\\_Varma-Rama-breaking-bow.jpg](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](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](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\\_ವೇದಿ.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/ಶ್ರೀ_ಗಾಯತ್ರಿ_ವೇದಿ.jpg)

Figure 6. Drawn by the author

Figure 7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysore\\_Palace#/media/File:Grand\\_Interiors\\_of\\_Mysore\\_Palace.jpg](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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menaka#/media/File:Raja_Ravi_Varma_-_Mahabharata_-_Birth_of_Shakuntala.jpg)

Figure 9.

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Figure 10. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysore\\_Palace#/media/File:Roof\\_design.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysore_Palace#/media/File:Roof_design.jpg)

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### **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 Ball 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 Ball Room of the Lalitha Mahal and the Karikal Thotti, the halls are enclosed by rooms or verandahs 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 through-out no pillar treatment can have any access in the scheme.

- 4 -

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 isle 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 ed than 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 dependant 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 internals 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 LVIII Part 2 and LII Part 2 respectively, where very nearly similar treatments are pictured may kindly be perused.

"Copy"

Office Duplicate  
Palace Engineer Mysore  
7th Jan. 1932.

T.S.D.

I have the honour to be,  
Sir,  
Your most obedient servant,  
Sd/ 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.**



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