

Just an hour away from the city is a gorgeous centuries-old temple which not only spellbound the visitor but has also featured in over 400 movies because filmmakers believe even a scene here brings luck!

Millenium Temple

Five kilometres from the Shamshabad Bus Station is a quiet little village called Ammapalli. In this almost forgotten leafy corner of the city's outskirts is an old temple that has long been popular with movie makers and has yet eluded mainstream popularity. Believe it or not, but over 400 Telugu movies have been shot here, and even a few Hindi and Tamil ones. A general belief in the Tollywood fraternity is that a movie with even one scene shot here at this temple, will have a successful run at the box office for 100 days at the least.

Locally known as the Ammapalli Temple, this is the Sri Seeta Ramachandra Swamy temple in Shamshabad. Spread over 250 acres, it was built sometime in the 11th century by the Eastern Chalukyas. Like most of the prominent temples dedicated to Lord Rama in our country, this 1000-year-old temple too marks the spot where he once stopped to rest during his journey in the historic *Dandakaaranayam*.

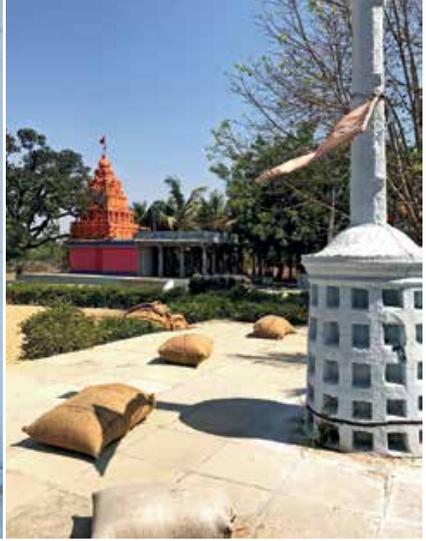
Tree lined roads, manicured lawns and clearly sectioned off sandy areas lead you from the archway to the wide parking ground right outside the main temple. Along the way there are two smaller temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Hanuman, a couple of *mandapams* and abandoned looking structures; and a beautiful step-well hidden in a grove of coconut trees. If you love discovering beauty in little details, then this step-

well is where you should start your exploration of the temple from. Corridors that start off in the Hindu style of pillared *mandapams* transition into Islamic arches as they go around enclosing the step-well. This was once the *koneru* where the *Brahmostavams* were held and people of all faiths would watch from these very corridors the ongoing festivities.

Sri Rama Navami is celebrated in a big way here and the Seeta Rama *kalyanam* is attended by thousands of people annually. As you walk along the grounds, it becomes evident that the *kalyanam* has been but an age old tradition of the temple. For most of the structures on the grounds outside the main temple complex are built for this reason. From the two-storied *kalyana mandapam* to the *edurukolla mandapam* and even the *Nagaar Khana* where the musicians would be seated to play the wedding tunes, they are all laid out for this specific purpose.

Set against these structures is the main temple complex entered through a *Gali Gopuram* of 90 feet. Like every other aspect of this temple, the architecture of this too is strikingly unique with its colorful Seshashayee Vishnu carved into an otherwise drab brown tower. Then there is the bright white *prahari* or the boundary wall, which doubles up as a two-storied corridor with benches on the upper level built into it. To serve as yet another viewing gallery undoubtedly.

TOURIST INFO



For all its splendor though, what stands out the most about the Ammapalli temple are the *ekashila* (single stone) idols and the story behind them. These are doubly unique in the fact that, firstly, this style of carving the deity with the surrounding *makaram toranam* from a single stone was prevalent only for a brief period of time in history, making them rare and invaluable today.

Secondly, they date back to a time when Lord Rama hadn't yet met Hanuman, making this a Kodanda Rama temple, where Lord Rama is depicted devoid of a bow and a Hanuman next to him. And adding to the intrigue is the Abhaya Anjaneya sculpted into the *dhwaja stambham* (pillar) opposite the inner sanctum. On command from Lord Rama, he, Hanuman is said to fulfill the wishes of those devotees who seek it there and this is why when you go here to pray do not block the view between them! ■



TEXT AND PHOTOS: NEEHARIKA SATYAVADA

DID YOU KNOW?

This temple was extensively featured in the 2001 blockbuster *Murari*, the very same movie that launched actor Mahesh Babu's career towards superstardom. The central theme of the movie revolves around an ancient temple and its powerful presiding goddess. Little surprise then that this Seeta Ramachandra Swamy temple in Ammapalli makes frequent appearances right from the opening credits to the very climax.

DON'T MISS

Every month on the day that falls under Lord Rama's birth star, *Punarvasu*, a *Seeta Rama kalyanam* is held in the morning followed by a *Pallaki Seva* and lunch. Otherwise quiet, these are the days that bring people to this temple.

GETTING THERE:

Take the PVNR Expressway from the city. Around 8 kilometers before the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, take the right adjoining the Shamshabad Bus Station. Another 5 kilometers on this straight road and you will find an archway leading to the Sri Seeta Rama Chandra Swamy temple on your left.

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