



# Damerla Ramarao, A legendary Artist of India

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## ABSTRACT

The artistic glory of Rajamahendravaram, a historical town of Andhrapradesh, Sri. Damerla Rama Rao, who has achieved fame at the international level in the field of Painting and art. Damerla is a great artist and a great painter who brought modern Andhra painting to life by combining modern traditional painting styles by exploring western art styles. Damerla followed the path of Raja Ravivarma, the Pictorial creator of the Indian Gods and the gem of Indian art. Damerla was a step ahead of Raja Ravivarma who drew pictures of a woman by seeing a lady standing in front of him as a model. He also painted portraits, nature paintings, mythological and social paintings. 8th March is Damerla's 125th birth anniversary, on the same day that he had completed his training in painting in Bombay and returned to Rajamahendravaram in the year 1922 and started painting at his will and on his own accord. Exactly one hundred and twenty-four years have passed on this day. On this occasion, let us look at Damerla's artistic life and its essence which elevated the fragrance of the art of painting style of Andhrapradesh to the entire world.

**Pic – 1.1**



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

In this method data has been procured from various publications research books and papers. It has been analyzed and the essence has been taken from the analyzed extract.

### DATA AND SOURCES OF DATA

Information about the Damerla Ramarao, A great Telugu painter in the field of Art is the main Data obtained from and various Publications; Research Books and Papers are the sources of Data.

### MAIN CONTENT

#### A GREAT BOON TO THE INDIAN ART

The minds of Telugu people are always thrilled with joy and happiness when they remember the name of Rajamahendravaram, a historical town of Andhrapradesh. The sacred life is the heritage of River Godavari and the Telugu ancient Political and Literary giants like Rajaraja Narendradu, Nannayya, Kandukuri, Chilakamarthi, Sripada, Madhuna Pantula. We have one more specific cultural and the artistic glory of this land Sri. Damerla Rama Rao, who has achieved fame at the international level in the field of Painting and art. Damerla is a great artist and a great painter who brought modern Andhra painting to life by combining modern traditional painting styles by exploring western art styles.

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Pic – 1.2



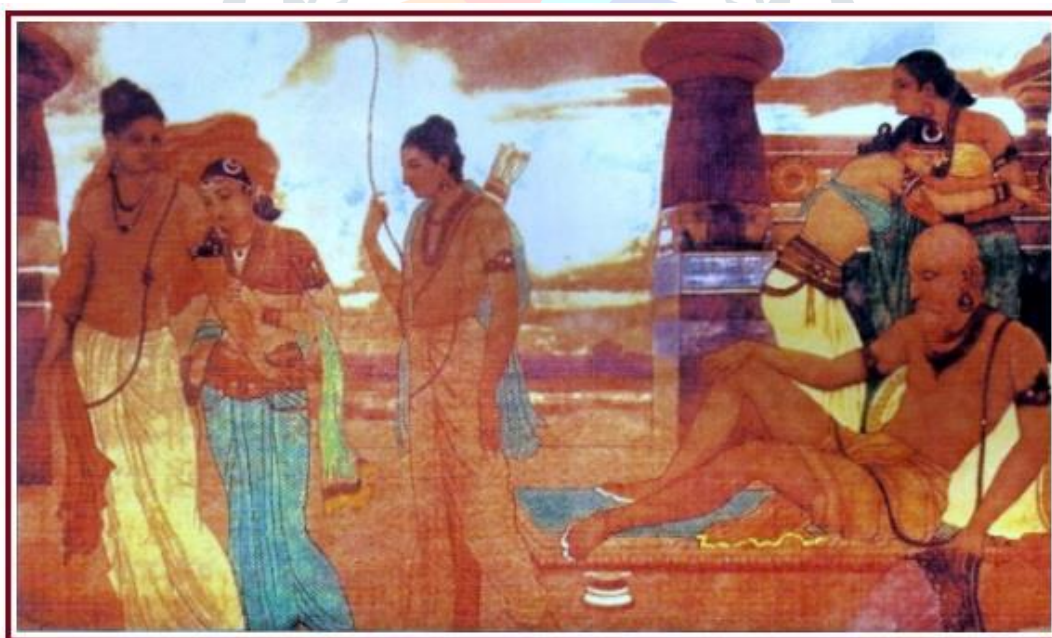
## BASIC DETAILS OF DAMERLA RAMARAO'S LIFE

Rama Rao was the second child among the five daughters and four sons born to Ayurvedic doctor Venkata Ramana Rao and his better half Lakshmi Devi in Vankayalavari Street on the banks of the Godavari. His uncle Gadicharla Satyanarayana was also a familiar artist at that time. Rama Rao was encouraged to learn the art of painting from his childhood by his maternal uncle Satyanarayana.

At the time when Rajahmundry was flourishing as a theatre centre, the Hindu Theatrical Company brought in a painter named AS Ram from Bangalore to paint the curtains for the stage plays creatively. The art of creating these curtains with beautiful images inspired many aspiring painters in Rajahmundry. Damerla also spent many evenings by studying the art of decorating curtains with beautiful pictures. At the same time Asward Jenning Couldre from England came as the principal of the local government college. He is also a singer, actor, writer, and a painter too. Damerla's brother Venkata Rao, who was studying in that college, introduced Rama Rao to Couldre. He was impressed by Rama Rao's paintings. From that moment he became Rama Rao's Teacher in painting and art. Along with Rama Rao, he also trained Varada, Bhamidipati Kameswara Rao, Kavikondala Venkata Rao, Adavi Bapiraju and Ankala Venkatasubba Rao in the art of painting.

Once Couldre went to Ajanta and Ellora caves along with Rama Rao. Due to the rain, they both left the luggage at the station and went to the caves with only the sketch books and the other necessary related material only. Rama Rao, who was weak, could not walk far with Couldre. Hence Couldre lovingly put him on his shoulders and showed him the art by moving around in the entire caves. A British citizen and a government employee, Couldre's treatment of his student without showing any discrimination is a proof of his friendliness. It was said at that time that this was a symbol of the bond of friendship and love between the two of those the teacher and the disciple. In fact, many say that an English officer carrying an Indian student on his shoulders and showing her around the Ajanta Ellora caves is a rare event in the history of India.

Pic – 1.2



Noticing Rama Rao's perseverance and interest, Couldre thought that he should be sent to the JJ school of art and be trained as a competent professional painter. He convinced the family members of Ramarao, they sent their child to the world famous J.J. School of art in Mumbai in the month of July 1916. Mr. Couldre specially wrote a letter of recommendation to the Dean of the College, Cecil Burns, requesting that his beloved student be admitted there. Rama Rao showed Burns a letter of recommendation from his mentor Couldre and a picture he himself had drawn in the past. Dean Burns was astonished and very much impressed by seeing that art work done by Ramarao. He appreciated the Rama Rao's talent and directly admitted him to the third year. It is not so simple to get admission directly to the third year without writing the entrance exam and the first two years exams. During his college days, Rama Rao met famous painter Padma Shri Ravi Shankar Ravel. Both used to go to Nasik, Lonavala, Kalyan, Kadga and other places on holidays and make different kinds of sketches. Later Rama Rao travelled to Gujarat along with another friend Badika. The beauty of the Village Women called "Golla Paduchus" in the

Telugu language and Girnad forests of Kathyawad has been brought to life on canvas with water colours by Ramarao at that time were some of the most beautiful paintings drew by him.

At the same time, Bhavnagar Maharaja Diwan Patwari Saheb recognized Rama Rao's talent and invited him to the palace of the Maharaja. With the encouragement of Ravala and Badekala, Rama Rao painted portraits of court singers, diwans, etc. with water, oil colours and pastels, and got the appreciation of the great king and accepted the gifts given by him. During this period, his painting 'Kunja Vanam' was placed in an exhibition organized in London and it was bought by the people there. In those days, when Vishwakavi Rabindranath Tagore was giving a speech at Dakshina Murthy University in Gujarat, Rama Rao made a pencil sketch of Rabindra's image on a white paper instantly and received his blessings also visited Santiniketan on Tagore's personal invitation later.

## DAMERLA, A LEGENDARY ARTIST

Rama Rao got married to Satyavani in the month of June 1919. She was 12 years old then. Sitting in front of the better half, Rama Rao's has painted the auspicious Hindu traditional rituals of a bride, Seemantam etc. In the final examinations held in the following year, Rama Rao passed in the college examinations with the first rank. He was the topper of the college in those examinations. He did fellowship there for a year. At that time, he was invited to take up the post of Vice Principal in Lucknow School of Arts. Rama Rao, who felt that freedom and independence are hope and breath for an artist, politely refused to take up that invitation. Later he travelled all over the country and studied the art of painting styles of different regions with the minute observations and specifications. He used to arrange his art exhibition wherever he go on those days.

Pic – 1.3



## INTERNATIONAL FAME

He has given his paintings “Rishyasringabhangam” and “Godavari in the Eastern Ghats” to an art exhibition organized by the Oriental Society of Calcutta. In that art exhibition, the movie “Rishyasringabhangam” was awarded cash prize by the Viceroy of India. It is remarkable that the painting was sold on the spot. Vaishroi Lord Reading, who attended to that exhibition and keenly watched the Rama Rao's films with great interest and bought the painting of "Godavari".

Rama Rao, who traveled all over the country, settled in Rajahmundry in 1922. Along with friends Varada Venkataratnam, Bhagirathi, Chamakura, Butchikrishnamma and others, he founded the Andhra Society of Indian Art. It was during this period that Rama Rao made the painting of "Siddhartha Raghodayam". A rich man from Sri Lanka bought this painting. Later, Rama Rao made many changes and made many experiments and painted

the same painting in various forms. Desoddharaka Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu bought his picture "Bharati" and published it as the cover of his "Bharati" monthly magazine.

## DAMERLA'S ART EXIBITIONS

Rama Rao successfully organized a National Art Exhibition in Rajahmundry in 1923 and 1924 through the Indian Arts Institute which he founded. During those days he painted the famous paintings of "Krishna Leelaas" and "Ajanta Vihara kapotas". The Krishna Leelalu was exhibited in an exhibition in Delhi and at the Imperial Gallery of Arts in London was appreciated by world-renowned painters. That was one of the 12 paintings selected from India for that exhibition at that time as it was indeed a source of pride for all Indian artists. "The British Empire Review" had specially highlighted this and praised the workings of Ramarao at that time.

Rama Rao created a new trend in painting by adding western style to the Indian tradition. We can clearly see the customs, and traditions of the surrounding areas of Rajahmundry in his paintings. He used to paint the primary colours flat and light in the local style primarily. After that, he used to play with the colours on those primary basic scathes very tactfully and artistically by displaying his handiwork. That is why the human figures in his paintings are very elegant and natural. He used water colours, oil paints and pastels to paint figures as per the requirement of those artistic paintings.

Pic – 1.4



## AN EVEREST IN THE FIELD OF ART

Rama Rao's life span was 28 years. After returning to Rajahmundry from Bombay, he stayed in his hometown for barely three years. There are many wonderful works of art that have come to life from the end of his brush in such a short period of time. Some of them were sold, some were gifted to others, and some of them were missed somewhere. In the end, 34 oil paintings, 129 water colour pictures, 250 pencil sketches and 28 sketch books only remained among his paintings. All these are now in the art gallery of Damerla Rama Rao Memorial Government Chitra Kala Mandir near Godavari Railway Station. This memorial was built in 1954 by his fans. In fact, it is also the first art gallery (Chitra Kala Mandiram) built by the Telugu people. Many celebrities like former President VV Giri, former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, former Chief Minister Kasu Brahmananda Reddy, Bapu, Sri Sri, Puripanda, Chalam, Thenneti Viswanatham visited this art gallery.

All the pictures in this gallery have been digitized and made into CDs by a renowned art lover Mr. Kalkyavataram in collaboration with the Fine Arts Academy. A short film titled "Rhythm of Life" produced by renowned director Mr. Sanjeeva Reddy on this Art Gallery many years ago won the best award. It would be greedy some affair to want Rama Rao's water colour paintings to remain the same even after a hundred years. That is why it is very necessary for the government and the artists to work together to preserve them to pass on that artistic glory to the next generations. The pictures painted by him are still talking to the world and expressing their rich feelings of

the great art, even after a hundred years of Rama Rao's death. We are talking about them and seeing them even today with great admiration and love. Hence the art lovers reading this research article will understand and firmly say that there is nothing greater than the Indian art in the entire world.

## DEDICATION AND DEVOTION

Before his death in 1925, Damerla went to Tirumala Tirupati (Punya Kshetra), the divine place along with his wife Satyavani and drew a few pencil sketches related to the beauty and vicinity of the temple in his sketch book. He fell ill on the return journey and died due to the smallpox. Hundreds of enthusiasts from Godavari district who are still striving to be modern painters, art teachers and art visionaries are being inspired from Damer's paintings even today. Hence the fans of Damerla are requesting the Government to declare the paintings of him as a national asset and do the needful to preserve them for the future generations on occasion of his 125th birth anniversary.

## CONCLUSION

There is no exaggeration in saying that, Sri. Damerla Ramarao has dedicated his entire life to the art of painting, who has achieved fame at the international level in the field of Painting and art. Damerla is a great artist and a great painter who brought modern Andhra painting to life by combining modern traditional painting styles by exploring western art styles. His workings are exemplary and an asset to the future generations and to the entire nation.

## RESULTS AND DESCRIPTION

We can say this is all about the basic history and findings of the proper, keen, and specific research done by the author of this research Paper/Article Mr. Marupu Venkatesam about the “Damerla Ramarao, A great Telugu painter Artist”. The contents of this research can be applied and adopted for the research or study in Painting and Sculpture discipline. The information gathered for this research can be utilized freely at the will of the research scholar to get the best results further.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Primary data collected from the bellow mentioned Research References, Books and Dictionaries and being analysed to write this Research Paper/Article. This is my own writing about the parts mentioned in the index.

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