

Chola Temple in the Heartland of Karnataka – A Study

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Abstract

There is no unanimity among scholars regarding the nature of the Bhakti cult. K.A.N. Sastri observes that this movement was strongly theistic in its character and definitely aimed at putting down Jainism and Buddhism in Davanagere. R. Champakalakshmi points out that the religious changes of the 7th to 9th centuries are hence viewed as a revival of orthodox forms, though not strictly a revival of Vedic religion per se. The Bhakti movement in Davanagere has often been characterized as a popular movement of dissent or protest against the social hierarchy of the Brahmanical order. Present paper looks at the temple architecture of Davanagere district Bhakti movement represented an ideology which sought to reflect and legitimize the emerging socio-political order which developed as an unpremeditated by-product of the new Brahmanical agrarian settlements centred on temples, partly as a means of fulfilling their missions and partly as an antithesis. Whatever may have been the objective and nature of the Bhakti movement, an ardent personalized devotion to Siva and Vishnu become deep-rooted in the psyche of the common people. The Saiva saints are known as Nayanars and the Vishnava saints are known as Alvars. We have references to 63 Nayanars and 12 Alvars. Soul-stirring songs 158 The Post-Gupta Period in the Deuan and the Peninsula were composed in Tamil in praise of Siva and Vishnu and sung in temples. The most important of the Nayanars were Tirunavakkarasu, a Vellala, Jnanasambandar, a Brahmin and Sundaramurthi, another Brahmin. Nambi Anadr collected the hymns of the above three in a canonical work called Theuaram. Another Saint Nayanar Manikkavasagar was also very popular. We also come across a female Nayanar from Karaikkal, Nandanar, and a pariah, whose hymns attracted the attention of many devotees. The well-known Vaishnav Alvars were Nammalvar, Timmankaiavar and well-respected and revered woman-poet Andal. The Vaishnav saints' compositions are collected in a canonical work called Nalayirajaprabandham. Although there were some Brahmins, among the saints, most of them were of the lower castes, belonging to the community of cultivators and artisans.

Keywords— Davanagere, Bhakti cult, temple, Siva and Vishnu and Sakthi, Gupta, Chalukya.

Introduction

Innumerable lithic records and some copper plates and literary texts like Vikramankadevacharita, Manasoltasa and Vikramankabhyudctya of Bhulokamalla Somevara, Mitakshara of Vignaneswara, Merutunga's Prabandhachintamani and Ranna's Gadayuddha and Ajitapurana are very helpful to a student of history in reconstructing the historical and cultural edifice of the times of Kalyani Chalukyas. The sacred texts of the Divyaprabhandam reveal that Vaishnavism had its major centres in the northern and southernmost parts of Tamil Nadu and a few in the Kaveri region. Contrary to the Vaishnava impact the Saiva centres had their greatest concentration in the Chola region, i.e., Kaveri valley, in around the Pallava and Pandya capitals Kanchipuram and Madurai and their centres appear to be more than the Vishnava centres. By the time of the Cholas, Saiva centres proliferated beyond the Kaveri region. Saivism could acquire a more popular and stronger base through the incorporation of mother-goddess worship, along with tribal and popular forms of worship. The inclusion of Murugan, a

tribal deity into the Saiva pantheon was also a clever move which made Saivism very popular. While Saivism gained ground among agricultural and artisanal groups belonging to lower social order, Vaishnavism was popular among the dominant peasant groups and ruling elite.

Objective:

The present paper seeks to study the architecture of Davangere temples in historical context and contributions of various kingdoms to the development of temple architecture.

A Chola Temple in the Heartland of Karnataka, Bethuru, Davanagere

There are quite a few temples in this region and Northern Karnataka built by the Cholas in the post Badami Chalukyan era. Earlier this year, we got a chance to visit Sri Basaveshwara temple at Hallur of Bagalkot district, also built by the Cholas around 8th century. Thus, it was quite intriguing to explore more Chola temples in the heartland of Karnataka, which otherwise is dominated by the Art and Architecture of the Hoysalas and Chalukyas. Bethuru is a small village lost in oblivion, and the was evident as many of my local friends were totally ignorant and uninformed of its location and whereabouts. Though this village popped up on the google map, we were surprised that the locals were unaware of its existence owing to its close proximity to Davanagere. However, we were displeased to witness such a beautiful temple in a sheer state of neglect, without any care or maintenance.

Kalleshwara temple

While we were moving around, a person came by and introduced himself as the caretaker of Sri Kalleshwara temple, though an unofficial one. He visits the temple daily to do the necessary cleaning of the temple and decks up the god here with the flowers he collects. Though there are no daily pujas/rituals being performed here, he tries his best to keep the temple alive by lighting deepas (lamps) everyday. He shares his personal experience about how doctors gave up hope on his survival due to his chronic diabetic condition and that he would survive only for a few days. But ever since he started visiting this temple daily, he has only felt better, without facing any major health issues. He went on to explain that nobody in the village is interested in the upbringing of the temple and its maintenance, and whatever little money was raised to restore the temple was taken off by a few greedy people who ran away from the village and never returned. A lot of snakes happen to visit this temple regularly and embrace the Shiva Linga here, with one such incident having occurred recently during the Dasara festival.

This temple was built by the Cholas between the 8th and 9th centuries, post the weakening of the Badami Chalukyas and before the rise of Rashtrakutas. Later in the 11th century, this temple under went a few additions under the Kalyana Chalukyas. Many hero-stones found here which are now kept near the temple belong to the Kalyana Chalukyas. The most pleasing sight here is that of a beautiful carving on the ceiling panel of 'Gajasura Samara/ Gajasurasamhara' (depiction of Lord Shiva slaying the elephant demon Gajasura) in the central portion, surrounded by the Ashtadikapalas. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva in the form of a Linga, with murtis of goddesses Saraswathi and Sapthamatrikas and Lord Subramanya kept in the Navaranga of the temple. The Shikara of the temple is a perfect example of early Cholan architecture. This temple definitely needs and deserves more care and maintenance in order to be preserved for future generations.

Western Chalukyas: Bagali

Bagali also known as Balgali during the medieval period, was an important agrahara right from the times of the Western Chalukyas of Kalyana who were succeeded by the Hoysalas and Vijayanagara. The main temple was constructed during the reign of the western Chalukyan King Ahavamalla in 987 AD and consecrated by Duggimayya. Inscriptionally the main deity is known as Kalideva. The temple, facing east, is constructed close to the embankment of huge tank of the village Bagali to its north. The temple on plan consists of a garbhagriha, an antarala, a mahamandapa with an entrance in the south and east, a huge open sabhamandapa, a shrine for Surya with an astylar mukhamandapa built slightly away from the main entrance, all in east-west orientation. A shrine of Narasimha with an antarala and a passage exists to the north of the sabhamandapa. The sabhamandapa is well-known for its fifty ornate pillars supporting the highly decorated ceiling. Of these twenty four pillars are constructed over the jagati provided with kakshasana. The temple is also known for intricately carved doorways. The eastern end of the sabhamandapa accommodates a couchant bull. There are eight shrines built around the main one. The late Chalukyan sculptures, kept in the mahamandapa of the temple, include Siva, Umamahesvara, Ganesa, Karttikeya, Surya, Anantasayana, Sarasvati and Mahishamardini. There are thirty six inscriptions in the temple assignable to the 10th -11th century AD which record donations to the gods Kalideva and Narasimha.

Santhebennur: magnificent structures of South India

The name of Santhebennur town in Davangere district brings to mind images of a historical pushkarini (sacred pond), which is known for its architectural beauty. In fact, the history of Santhebennur is closely linked to the pushkarini. The region was a part of the Vijayanagar empire, and Kenga Hanumantappa Nayaka, a local palegar, built a Rama Temple and a pushkarini here in the 16th century. God Rama was the family deity of the Nayaka rulers. Now, even after five centuries, the structure remains intact. Today, the pushkarini with a majestic mantapa at the centre is considered to be one of the magnificent structures of South India. Indo-Arabic style It is said that the Vasanta Mantapa, at the centre of the pushkarini, was built to commemorate Kenga Hanumantappa Nayaka's victory over the rulers of Bijapur. The sides of the pushkarini, also known as Santhebennur Honda, are veneered with granite steps. There are 52 granite steps from the main entrance in the west direction and 44 steps in other three sides. Initially, there were eight towers at the cardinal points (representing eight directions). However, of these eight, only six remain intact now.

The pond spans over an area of about 250 feet (length) and 240 feet (width), with a depth of over 30 feet. The Vasantha Mantapa is a symmetrical pillared tower and exhibits Indo-Arabic style of architecture. The multi-level mantapa covers an area of about 34 square feet. While the arches, vaults and domes of the mantapa represent the Arabic style; its columns, pyramidal towers and carving embody Indian style of architecture. The mantapa is built in such a way that, for an onlooker on the banks of the pushkarini, it appears to be floating on water. It is said that the mantapa has a water storage facility at its base and supplies water to an inbuilt working fountain. This feature of the mantapa gives it another name — karanji mantapa (fountain mantapa). Different geometrical figures, specifically flowers, adorn each floor, enhancing its beauty. These artworks exhibit the ingenuity of artists of that era. The first floor has similar openings on all four sides. The top floor has a hemispherical dome embedded with carvings. Local people say that when the pond is full, the water can cover the mantapa

till a height of 10 feet. The pond was used to perform teppotsava, or floating festival, of the deity. As per the ritual, the utsava murthi of the main deity was taken out of the temple and was placed on a decorated platform on a boat and taken around the pushkarini. It is said that scores of people from across the region used to gather to witness this colourful festival and the family members of the Nayaka rulers would witness the festival from the mantapas on the banks of the pushkarini. A place to rest According to historical records, later in the 17th century, the army of Bijapur sultan led by commander Ranadullakhan invaded Santhebennur. Ranadullakhan, along with his followers Pettekhan and Faridkhan, constructed a musafirkhana (a place to rest) on the bank of the pond. The spacious building with a dimension of 150 feet length and 40 feet width exhibits Muslim architectural style and is made of granite stones. A large, pillared hall with pointed arches and attractive inlay work was probably used as a prayer hall as well. The entrance to the hall is flanked by many arched windows. The entrance is arched and can be identified by its large width. These are built in the Indo-Arabic style. Artistic stone pillars with columns on four sides can be seen supporting the roof inside this building. The interiors of the building with pillars placed in three horizontal and eight vertical lines makes it a geometrically-perfect design.

Conclusion

The Anamalai Wildlife Sanctuary that is home to different species of animals and birds like the wild boar, leopards, giant squirrel, Malabar whistling thrush and grey jungle fowls is a popular tourist destination. The Siruvani waterfalls and Dam are also worth seeing. Built hundreds of years ago, the Durgambika temple was built during the rule of Chalukyas and quite popular among tourists. So Hindus consider the building of temples an extremely pious act, bringing great religious merit. Hence, kings and wealthy men were eager to sponsor the construction of temples, notes Swami Harshananda, and the various steps of building the shrines were performed as religious rites. The four-century-old building is still strong and the minars carved on the edges of the front part of the building add to the beauty of the building. Floral sculptures are embossed on the walls while intricate designs decorate the windows. Entry to the building, which was also used as a military store for sometime, is restricted now. One can see similar buildings in Vijayapura too. It is said that in the due course, Ranadullakhan built a masjid here. Thus, now one can see both Rama Temple and a masjid together near the pushkarini, representing communal integrity. The premises of the pushkarini is being maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India — Bengaluru Circle (ASI). Within this premises, one can find a beautifully maintained garden as well. If you are looking to visit the pushkarini, Santhebennur is around 250 km from Bengaluru and 30 km from Davangere. Other places of interest in the region include Bathi Gudda, Shantisagara Dam and Kundawada Tank. Temples such as Harihareshwara Temple, Eshwara Temple and Bagali Kalleshwara Temple are popular as well

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