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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEMPLES DURING THE VIJAYANAGARA DYNASTY

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ABSTRACT

Temples, being the place of cultural and spiritual incorporation, fascinated by a massive inflow of pilgrims from far away places, thereby advocating inter and intra-regional mobility, intimate contacts and good relations developed in different sects. Vijayanagara rulers started hectic temple construction activity in their regime. They had been dedicated to promoting religion and its institution. The construction of shrines was mainly carried out by sovereigns, the family of the royal harem, feudal lords, feudatories, army commanders, wealthy people and rich business people of the society, etc., during the Rayas regime. The construction of temples was considered as one of the noble deeds. The temples became centres for worship and the grand celebrations of festivals. These religious practices have a profound influence on the social, cultural and economic life of the people. It is an incredible impact shown on people, religious, cultural and social lives. The shrines appeared as the centre for artisans, where they were able to project their artistic proficiency and also get a livelihood. The temple stood as the stage for music, dancing, play, and hectic activities that were performed in the shrine premises. The temples also worked as banks, an institution of education, and a place of justice and provided a platform for essential discussions. They gave accommodation to the spiritual monks, Brahmin community, students, visitors, and devotees. As a result, "the temple emerged as a considerable socio cultural-religious and economic centre". Their magnificent sculptural, as well as architectural brilliance, also infatuated the travelers from distending lands. Hence, shrines remained as multi-dimensional centres which brought harmony amongst diverse people.

Keywords: Hectic, Incredible, Profound, Infatuate, Magnificent, Regime, Mobility.

Introduction

Vijayanagara rulers started hectic temple construction activity in their regime. They had been dedicated to promoting religion and its institution. The construction of shrines was mainly carried out by sovereigns, the family of the royal harem, feudal lords, feudatories, army commanders and wealthy business people of the society, etc., during the Rayas regime. The construction of temples was considered as one of the noble deeds. The temples became centres for worship and the grand celebrations of festivals. These religious practices have a deep influence on the social, cultural and economic life of the people. The shrines appeared as the centre for artisans, where they were able to project their artistic proficiency and also get a livelihood. The temple stood as the stage for music, dancing, play and hectic activities were performed in the shrine premises. The temples also worked as banks, an institution of education, and a place of justice and provided a platform for essential discussions. They gave accommodation to the spiritual monks, Brahmin community, students, visitors and devotees. As a result, the temple emerged as a considerable socio cultural-religious and economic centre.

Temples, being the place of cultural and spiritual incorporation, fascinated by the massive inflow of pilgrims from faraway places, thereby advocating inter and intra-regional mobility, intimate contacts and good relations developed in different sects. Their magnificent sculptural, as well as architectural brilliance also infatuated the travellers from distending lands. Hence, shrines remained as multi-dimensional centres which brought harmony amongst diverse people.

The kings of Vijayanagara showed a keen concentration in building large temples. They employed skilled artisans from Tamila Nadu to construct temples. Vitthala, Virupaksha, Balakrishna, Hazara Rama temples of Hampi are large in size and magnitude. The area of the shrine fascinated the rulers to construct small temples inside the temple premises. Religious traditions and customs also encouraged the building of massive shrines. Realizing the religious significance, emperors, people in business, rich people and guilds made munificent donations to shrines. Particularly the rulers on particular occasions like crowning function, triumph in wars, provided funds to the existing shrines and often initiated the construction of new ones. For instance, at the time of coronation function, Krishnadevaraya made several generous grants to Virupaksha temple and he was also responsible for the construction of a new Gopuram and changed the appearance of the shrine by constructing a mandapa and renovates the old one. To celebrate his triumph over Orissa, he made up his mind to build the temple for Lord Balakrishna and installed the image of lord Balakrishna which he brought as a war trophy from Udayagiri. During the Vijayanagara regime, the temple became the centre for religious practices, functions and festivals in the temple premises.



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Shaivism and Vaishnavism were notable religions in the Vijayanagara kingdom. The adherents of Shaivism offered prayers to Lord Mallikarjuna and Virupaksha whereas the believers in Vaishnavism worshipped Lord Vishnu in the form of Vittala, Krishna, Narasimha, Venkateswara, Tiruvengalanatha, Anantasayana, etc. The temples had been built for all deities irrespective of the mode of worship and different names attributed to the gods. This kind of religious sentiment prompted the kings to provide accommodation to tiny temples around the sanctum sanctorum within the temple complex. We find mini temples in the vast shrines Virupaksha, Hazara Rama, Vitthala and others. So, this model of building temples fascinated the huge gathering of pilgrims from all corners of the kingdom. The artistic brilliance brought the people of different faiths also to visit shrines and took part in divine activities.

Temples as religious centers

During the reign of Vijayanagara kings, the kings constructed the temples and devoted to various cults like Saiva, Vaishnava and Jaina. This is an indication of their religious catholicity and it benefited them in maintaining tranquility and harmony in the kingdom. The divine practices, i.e., festivals, ceremonies, worship, had been held regularly in the Vijayanagara temples. People belonging to different faiths participated enthusiastically in the activities of religion. The festivals like Vasantotsavam, Mahanavami, Holi, Dipavali, Car Festival, and Swing Festival were performed with religious fervour and cheerfulness.

The number of prominent shrines located in Hampi are Vitthala, Virupaksha, Hazara Rama, Balakrishna, and Patabhi Rama. The 16th century shrines celebrated Mahanavami festival, i.e., yearly festival and it was conducted for ten days from September to October. ¹ The Dasara festival also popularly known as Navaratri. The foreign visitors Paes and Nuniz were given a vivid account of the celebration of the Mahanavami festival in the Capital with zeal and gaiety. The grand merriment of the festivals was conducted on the throne Platform, i.e., Mahanavami Dibba, for nine days. The competition in sports, dance and songs were arranged to please the people. All the pleasure-seeking activities were performed in the presence of the king.

The Brahmins were employed as priests to worship the deities in the temples. They performed pujas and were aided by devotees of various sections of the peoples executing various functions. The rulers of the Vijayanagara dynasty gave financial aid to temples to expand their activities to make sure the wealth of the kingdom. Krishnadevaraya, after building the temple of God Balakrishna, announced the grants generously and lands to the Brahmin community of Nelalahunise Agrahara. To enlighten common subjects on various spiritual aspects, the astrologers, reciters of epics, timekeepers, mantrapushpa reciters, and eminent scholars stayed in temple premises. The Rulers gave huge funds to the clergies involved in various activities performed in the shrines. Some persons were specially appointed for the timely supply of flowers and garlands. Drum players, belonging to the lower community, were appointed to assist the priest at the time of puja. The king made liberal donations to preserve and protect religious beliefs.

Thus, people from all sections of the society like priests, cultivators, merchants and common people, etc., showed active participation in conducting and augmenting rituals in the temple. This naturally provided ample capacity to keep alive communal harmony in the Vijayanagara society. The religious ceremonies were widely observed in the shrines. The shrines were primarily responsible for the development of religious sentiments in the minds of the peoples.

Temples are Repositories of all Arts

Religion and art are indispensable to each other. Religion was considered as the basis for all arts. Temples provided platforms for the exhibition of the arts. The sacred custom of worshipping god inside the shrine, as revealed in the number of inscriptions, consisted of both Angabhoga and Rangabhoga. Anga means the body and bhoga mean service or enjoyment. Angabhoga, therefore, refers to every service performed to the god-like decoration with flowers, smeared with sandal paste, bathing, flaming incense, and lightning lamp. ² Rangabhoga means external service besides the body. Including the offering, Archana, dhupa, dipa, naivedya and performance of singing, dancing and enactment of drama in the Rangamantapam, i.e., an elevated floor in the centre of Sabha mandapa, a hall in front of the sanctum sanctorum. According to some inscriptions, Srikarya means the combination of both Rangabhoga and Angabhoga performed inside the abode of the deity.

Being highly learned and deeply spiritual kings of the vast empire, they constructed the number of shrines of various faiths in the Capital. Some of the prominent shrines like Balakrishna, Achyuta, Virupaksha, Vitthala, Hazara Rama, became burning institutions for patronizing the all-fine arts. Profession artists in various fields and literary giants also rendered their services in the king's court. The temples served as an excellent platform for skilled artists to show their abilities. Since these temples were patronized by the kings, the patronage and support were provided as also to those who mainly depended on it.

The structure of the shrines was generally significant. The typical temple possesses of a sanctum, (antarala) ardha-mantapa, sabha mandapa having entrances on three sides, Mukha-mantapa or front pillared hall, a Kalyana-mantapa, parivara temples or



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temples for attendant gods and an enclosed prakara (Courtyard) with entrances to be adorned by lofty gopuras (gateways). Besides these parts of a temple, a balipitha, a flagstaff and lamp-pillar were also found. ³ However, the shrines in the Tamil region during the Vijayanagara period continued to have additional structures in the Vijayanagara city. An epigraph of A.D. 1521 revealed by an officer, Timmaraja, informs that he constructed an “Utsava-mantapa” to keep the idols of gods in the Hazara Rama temple this shrine did not have the additional Utsava-mandapa. Another epigraph found in the Vithala shrine of A.D. 1554, during the rule of Sadasiva Maharaya, records that Udagiri Thimmarajayadeva Maha-arasu, for the benefit of his father, constructed a “Uyyale-mandapa” in the temple premises. Many mandapas were also in existence at the Vithala temple, but this Uyyala-mandapa was a new addition to the temples of Vijayanagara in the Tamil region.

All most in every shrine of Vijayanagara dynasty, we find Sabha Mandapas built exclusively to conduct music and dance performances, for example, Krishnadevaraya constructed Rangamantapa in the Virupaksha temple as referred in an inscription dated A.D. 1510. According to an inscription in Telugu dated A.D. 1545, Rangamantapa constructed specially to hold dance and vocal and instrumental music in the temple premises. The vast walls with massive pillars in the Vithala, Tiruvengalanatha (Achyutaraya) temples were built for recreation purposes inside the temple complex.

Temples as a Source of entertainments

The element of dance and music was vital in public rituals and festivals. The dancing girls got appointed in the shrines mainly to dance and sing in front of the deities. To accomplish their task, they were given proper training in music and dance by experts and financial assistance for training was provided by the temple administration. The foreign travelers left vivid descriptions about the female dancers and their role in processions as well as in temple services and court festivals. After paying a visit to the court and royal palace of Devaraya, Domingo Paes clinically delineates the hall where women were taught dancing. ⁴ we comprehend through the foreigner's account that the dancers were divided into two groups, one being attached to the temples and the other belonged to the royal court.

Dancing girls at the temple actively involved in the celebration of the Maharnavami festival at the court. These girls did their best to keep the art of dancing alive. During morning times on the eve of the festival Maharnavami, they performed outdoor of the temples when Krishnadevaraya was in the chapel of the House of triumph. Their active involvement in the car festival is commendable. On every Saturday, Dance program had to be conducted in front of the deities in all the shrines of the city, and during afternoons they had to wrestle. ⁵

Devadasis had been employed to render their service in religious shrines. They were young, pretty, fascinating and accomplished professionals in dancing, singing and were intimate with the public. They were assigned specific tasks such as music and dance performances in temples. ⁶ They enjoyed a very high social position. Some of them were honoured and special privileges were conferred on them in recognition of their invaluable services. We also find some noble dancing girls, like ‘Mangayi’ of Belgula, a lady disciple of “Charukirti Panditacharya,” who was popularly known as a “Raya-Patra-Chudamani,” a crown jewel of royal dancing girls. ⁷ Devadasis liberally donated funds to temple for their maintenance, one of them built a Vasanta-mandapam and natakashala. Being professionals in fine arts, they entertained the devotees in shrines, and their presence added immense joy and vigor to the processions of the gods in the city. They proved to be sources of motivation and inspired the sculptors too.

The courtesans did find proper recognition and regard in society as well as in the Royal Court. Their job was not limited to prostitution alone. They got excellent training in dancing and singing since their childhood. ⁸ Some of the prominent foreign visitors Nuniz and Paes were astonished to see excellent glamour of dancing girls and athleticism in their activities. A courtesan had to be perfect in different fields, and ought to be an intellectual, a talented musician, a wise gambler and an intelligent conversationalist to attract the attention of men of wealth and distinction. Considerable, a number of them had been placed in the royal court to entertain the king and were very active in the celebration of festivals, particularly on the eve of Maharnavami. On certain important occasions, they danced the temple premises also. The variation between courtesans and temple girls was that the former led an independent life at the Capital and the latter were confined to temples to earn their bread and butter. ⁹

The dancing girls in the shrines were highly regarded and rewarded adequately with grants by the king. According to epigraphical evidence dated A.D. 1531, the title “Vidvatsabha-Raya-Ranjakam,” was bestowed a Kuppasani, a temple dancer. ¹⁰ A few Inscriptions of TTD state that the dancers of high calibre were present in the Capital City. Sometimes, the rulers employed the proficient dancers and later deputed them to different temples located in various parts of the empire. Achyuta Devaraya, a staunch devotee of Lord Venkateswara, deputed some of the prominent dancers to render service at Tirupati and notable among them was “Muddu-Kuppayi,” the devotees of Kuppasani as revealed in an inscription of A.D. 1531. Another inscription dated A.D. 1540



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reveals that Uddida Timayana's daughter Hanumasani had been deputed to serve in the abode of Sri Venkateswara. They also exhibited their philanthropic spirit by announcing a large number of gifts for the welfare of the public.

Temples as an employment source

The dimension and grandeur of the shrines located in the capital shows speak their significance as well as the influence they exercised on every angle of human life. Their activities covered every aspect of human life. The temple needed the services of many people for its number of activities, i.e., worship, meditation, education, banking, financial matters, cultivation, fine arts, etc. The employees of the temple, irrespective of caste or creed performed their duties on various capacities and were usually referred to as “Pada-mula- parivara.”

During the Vijayanagara rule, temples were given more employment to the people after the state government. However, more considerable employees were recruited in a temple depending on its size and financial feasibility. Many workers were kept in the work of the authorities of the temple for its different needs. Some of the notable staff like priests, reciters of mantras and holy books, decorators, musicians, cleaners, chouri bearers, etc., were assigned the interior work and some of them discharged the external work. Among them, we find torch-bearers, security persons, bearers of vehicles, gardeners, garland makers, goldsmiths, tailors, carpenters, treasurers, sthanikas, etc.

A considerable number of Brahmins were appointed to perform the daily pujas and chant mantras. For instance, the king Krishnadevaraya employed 37 Brahmins and assigned different works in the Balakrishna shrine. The Acharyas (teachers) and priests performed the daily worship in sanctum sanctorum, Purohitas (The Priests) recited epics, astrologers forecast future events, and Sadasyas looked after rituals and sacrifices and Brahmins acted as a chief priest for temple festivals. The epigraph dated around A.D. 1534 available in Tiruvengadanatha shrine mentions the services rendered by clergymen. It also mentions the appointment of paricharikas (attendants) to assist the priests, the temple workers, participate in the procession of deities and swayampakas prepared prasadam for offering for deity and distribution. The Ghaliyara (the Watchman of the shrine) and the Katigeya (a temple servant who also takes part the processions of the gods) ¹¹ Swayampakas (cooks) who made food offerings for the gods or disbursement in the Ramanuja-Kutas or temple Chattras.

A few numbers of epigraphs bring out the remuneration paid to the workers employed in the kitchen to attend to the menial works like grinding wheat and providing of rice and some of them got appointed to decorate the interior and exterior parts of Vittala temple and chariots on the festive eves. Probably these workers were engaged temporarily on special occasions and Vittala temple inscriptions also reveal the presence of temple dancers and musicians. An inscription from the Achutharaya shrine shows the list of workers meant to discharge their assigned duties in the temple premises. The priests had been appointed to perform abhisheka, mantrapushpa, for recites Itihasas, as a security man, Bhagavatars, Katigas and Swayampakas, Senabovas. Epigraphical evidence in the Vitthala temple also tells us the nature of the task in the temple, and the men involved in the activities of the temple with their names like Sthanikas of the temple, Narasayya, Virappa, Chikka Virappa and Purushothama. Senabova was posted in the temple to take care of the temple and it was revealed in an epigraph by name Konappa. The other essential persons, such as Nattuvaranga, Swayampaka, Ghaliyara, etc., are also referred to in the inscription of the shrine. Probably in massive shrines, we can find another kind of employee, such as the bearers of the processional deities mounted on the vehicles, light-bearers and the remaining others about whom, however, the contemporary evidence has not given any description about them.

Temples are sources of Revenue

In Karnataka during the ancient and medieval times, temples and business guilds extended their financial services by providing loans to borrowers and receiving deposits from the public. In the Vijayanagara empire, large temples had been constructed to conduct all religious celebrations. Hence, there was a continuous flow of revenue to temples. As a result, much currency poured in to temple exchequer. The trust board of the temples of temples gradually resolved to make use of accumulated money for the public service. So, they invited the prominent business people to utilize that amount and in turn, they need to pay a certain amount as the interest it. Thus, the temples rendered financial services to the business community. The steady inflow of currency strengthens temple exchequer and accelerated financial activities. Usually, the interest rate was considerably high. Some of the inscriptions reveal the banking activities of Balakrishna and Vitthala temple. During the reign of Achutharaya, the interest per month was five ghatti gadyana and 50 chakra gadyana per month on an amount of 200 gadyanas. The accumulated interest was enough to carry out pooja arranged in the name of the king in the temple. It is revealed in an inscription of Vitthala temple and dated A.D. 1536.

Another epigraphical evidence dated A.D. 1536 informs that Varadappa nayaka gifted ten ghattivaras to the temple exchequer for the merit of king Achyutaraya. The interest of eleven chakra gadyana and anas was used to perform regular worship of



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God Vitthala. Thus, before the emergence of the banking system, the concept of co-operative in finance was developed in the city. Before, these merchant guilds played a significant part in financial affairs. In this way, the temple also acted as a centre of social service, thereby, fascinated people on a large scale. Thus, the temples gained immense popularity as the institutions of education, fine arts, religion and banking. This becomes possible as the Vijayanagara kingdom was headed by able kings for a long period. Before the battle of Tallikota, as Vijayanagara kingdom was well safeguarded by the strong military force and also aided by the strategic geographical features. This must-have was given an ample chance to the kings of Vijayanagara dynasty to construct large shrines in various areas of the city. Because of natural protection, towns were developed systematically. Thus, the temples were the hearts of the puras and symbols, socio-cultural and economic activities.

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