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Temple Culture in Telangana : Palampet and the Rudresvara Temple in Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The medieval Temple culture of Telangana evolved along the contours of religious dedication, political power, agricultural resources, and talented labourers. It is at Palampet, where the Rudresvara temple, commonly known as Ramappa, is located that it is evident more than ever else. The main inscription refers to the building of temples, settlements, a reservoir and permanent religious endowments that are linked to the public reputation of a military commander. The monument thus affords opportunity to consider the manner of integration of the sacred institution into the material and political structure of a locality. It is this combination that makes Palampet important and temple construction became a symbol of devotion as expressing and objectifying claims to resources, lineage, and legitimate authority.

This article focuses on Palampet and Ramappa temples and their significance in a study with respect to temple culture in Telangana.

Keywords: *temple culture; Ramappa; Palampet; historical perspective; symbol of devotion*

Introduction

The decade 800-1687 CE embraces decades before the documented date of foundation of Palampet, and decades after the demise of Kakatiya supremacy. It is not a continuous, equally well documented history of this special temple. The description of the regional background in the previous centuries, the strongest evidence for the local context is provided in the thirteenth century, and the later centuries give information about the shifting political landscape in which Kakatiya monuments functioned and evolved new meanings. Distinctive between local proof and a comparative region is of the major. Even though the two colonial sites were part of the same historical scene, they cannot always be identifiably connected from any point in the development. For instance, a development at Warangal cannot be taken over to Palampet without any distinction. It is from this Sanskrit pillar inscription, which was edited and translated by L. D. Barnett in 1919 that the principle source comes. It is dated to Saka 1135, which Barnett reckoned as 31 March, CE 1213. It singles out Recherla Rudra, an officer of Ganapatideva, as a focal figure among its patrons.

The earliest systematic record of the buildings comes from Ghulam Yazdani's archaeological study. There is recent work by Cynthia Talbot (2001) as well as an original work by Richard Eaton and Phillip Wagoner which sheds light on patronage and political memory. These sources vary in nature such as a donor's words of encouragement, an archaeological description and a historian's explanation satisfy different types of questions. When read as part of a group, some of these differences must be recognized instead of taken as an equal-levelled reflection of medieval experience (Eaton & Wagoner, 2013; Yazdani, 1922).

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The Regional Background of Palampet

During the period c 800–1200 this area that is currently Telangana was part of several concurrent political and cultural landscapes. It has a certain inscriptional heritage that includes Rashtrakuta, Vemulavada Chalukya and Western Chalukya records. This wasn't one such area where the Kakatiyas led the way in establishing religious life. Previously, traditions of sacred foundations, donations, learned religious communities and multilingual expression were established. However, the antiquity of the region does not make this Palampet temple necessarily in the eighth century. It has local evidence that is securely dated, and belongs to a later period. Having these chronological levels separate enables the long history of Telangana to shed light on Palampet and avoid creating an undocumented early history for the village (Lakshmi 2023).

It becomes very crucial in the sense that Jain evidences stand as a big barrier to the retrospective identification of the medieval Telangana with Shaivism. In the regional compilation of inscriptions, the inscription of a Jain patron by the name of Jinavallabha on Kurkiyala makes use of Sanskrit, Kannada and Telugu scripts for its religious texts. This material shows that relations of patron-cultivation and sacred-building were already globalizing in terms of language and religion. It provides an interesting contrast with the later Sanskrit writing system in a local script from Palampet. The comparison is with the kinds of culture, not a proclaimed institutional link between the two locations.

This early background gives a new perspective to understanding Kakatiya achievement. The temple at Palampet is an example of the focussing of resources and artistic skill at a time located along an already interconnected Deccan. It is not a suggestion to explain it by civilizing a new wilderness. Similarly, the resemblance between the architecture of various buildings does not prove that all workshops, rites and patrons were identical throughout. The question is how the choice of religious and architectural possibilities was made and how they were recombined in the service of the patron. It is this inscription's focus on foundation as an individual achievement, yet connected to a greater dynasty that provides a precise way into that problem. (Barnett 1919, verses 5-18)

Military Service or Religious Foundation

The Palampet text starts with prayers to deities, a reference to the divine as the creator of the world and another on the excellence of Ganapatideva, followed by a few words about the birth and feat of Rudra. It establishes the link between the notion of sovereignty and the authority of its subordinates in an explicit manner. Rudra is considered powerful benefactor, but his name and fame lie partly to the extent that he was loyal to the Kakatiya king. With the inscription, it provides more than a history of royal construction. It demonstrates the potential use of religious 'building' to create and maintain a more self-permanent spatial footprint in an encompassing political framework.

The genealogy lists previous relatives of Rudra, and links them to military service. It is a sequence which connects inherited honour, service, devotional virtue. Such statements must be interpreted as a reminder rather than as a kind of family register. Praise inscriptions were an attempt to establish special versions of the past as authoritative. Part of the historical significance of their value is because they can be seen to show the things that were remembered by the patrons. At Palampet, it is a memory that is desired, along with martial effectiveness, generosity and religious merit. Thus, the temple can be seen as proof of a political ethic that held that a good commander should be as well a protector, a donor, and a founder (verses 9–20, Barnett, 1919).

This record is also a record of the misfortunes of Kakatiya and attributes Rudra with bringing back security. It has a detailed image; some passages pose a challenge. It is wise to limit this subject to the military history, what he referred to as the greatest gift himself, rather than to detain oneself in searching for a full military biography, in the sense of poetry. It is important for this representation to be a part of the history of the temple. The same person, who was alleged to have taken away political evils, was alleged to have created sacred institutions. His generosity was presented in contrast to allow an audience to see his generosity as the positive result of his faithful service. This is likely to be the case because religious authority and military authority were both present in the layman's record of his life (Barnett, 1919)

This is not a hindrance to devotion of political manipulation. A commander may ask for religious merit as it was his heart's desire and might obtain his reputation as well. It is these purposes which are included in the same story by the inscription itself. The most important question from the historian is the question of how multiple intentions

were reinforced each other. Service to a deity might serve the purpose of revering one's ancestors, proclaim a sense of good fortune, and/or establish a patron's responsibilities to a community. Palampet is better than an explanation of one motive for this multiplicity. Its base was at the same time devotional and demanding recognition of Rudra's might that it would endure forever (Barnett, 1919, verses 33-54).

The Inscription as a Public Institution

According to Barnett (1919), the inscription is carved on the front/back and east/west sides of a smooth black basalt stone column. It uses the Sanskrit language and its characters are from the regional writing system. The role of literary language and script was different but also similar. Sanskrit inscribed the record in a hall of distinction in which religious and political language were equally valued, the written script in which they embedded the record belonged to the culture they served. Both are not examples of the languages that are spoken by all residents. The representation choices made by a patron and the specialists who wrote and inscribed his declaration are recorded in the pillar.

The emblems of the pillar are feature such as linga, cow and calf, sun and moon and Ganesha. The images are set around the written record with identifiable religious elements. Their presence indicates the possibilities for inscriptional power outside the range of those who could read a long Sanskrit poem. It spoke of two purposes, text, and monument. Its sacred connotations might be felt, if not its specific claims. This doesn't mean that everyone understood the symbols in the same way. That it was presented with a visually visible, material space, that is intended to endure in the religious complex, is one thing it does show (Barnett, 1919).

The end of the inscription is particularly important. Rudra asks the future rulers, either his own kings or other, to keep his mound untouched. This is followed by another verse that any act of kindness, even if it comes from an enemy, warrants protection. These injunctions are recognizing the fact that political power does flow. The donor wanted to offer his benefaction under a covenant that would transcend private and family enmities. The appeal was not meant to be a request for compliance but was an institutional desire; its identity as a sacred institution required obligations to be placed on anyone who succeeded it (Barnett, 1919, verses 49–52).

The cautionary factor of not taking donated land is another one. It casts light on the fragility of endowments and their alleged permanency. So, a threat towards future appropriators is understandable but only because appropriation was imaginable. This should be construed to mean that the inscription is for conservation and preservation purposes and not just as a proclamation of protectability for resources already in secure custody. Its religious sanctions were a means of supporting a future settlement. From this point-of-view, temple culture was also a construction of public statements to legitimate claims of possession, lineage, and ethical boundaries to political power (Barnett, 1919).

Benefactors Priests, Village Gifts and the Sacred Economy

Rudra's engraving singles out some of the religious works. It mentions the foundation of Rudresvara at Orugallu and the association with the village of Nekkonda. It then talks about another foundation, a reservoir, and another consecration of Rudresvara. Upparlapalli and Borlapalli are the names of the banks mentioned in the grant, specifically dated. Another passage mentions the creation of the endowment for Nradkude, Katesvara and Kamesvara at Atukuru. These shouldn't be reduced to a news release that each of the named villages had its own shrine in Palampet. These are not supposed to be condensed into a statement that each of the specified villages had its own shrine in Palampet. Throughout it is the internal differences of the foundations and gifts that are important, but not lost (Barnett, 1919 verses 33-54).

The indications in the village endowments are that religious institutions are expected to have a continuing material basis. The construction of a shrine and its function in the future were other issues. An enormous building could have no guarantee of providing everything necessary for worship and maintenance. That longer-term approach was dealt with by the act of providing resources. Even so, however, a village grant should not just be ‘translated' into the right of private ownership by each member of the village and of every field. The inscription does not provide a detailed survey of the fiscal situation or a list of the rights of cultivators. The evidence of the gift and its religious motive is as strong as all the means by which income was raised (Barnett, 1919, verses 34, 47-54).

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The foundation also makes it possible to differentiate between dependence and visibility. The name of the donor is rendered more prominent because of the inscription naming it. The labour that is used to grow the productive resources is far less prominent. This imbalance will not lead to dismissing the role of labour history. Instead, it defines the form of the record, that is, a point of view. The quasi-public aspect of a temple's image might focus attention on honouring a patron, but may rely in an equally material basis in events occurring outside the monumental sanctuary. The historian is thus compelled to question the attitude of a source, namely whom it honours and whom it has ignored. That question comes out of the evidence which is entirely needless if Palampet had to be assembled with the required number of new occupations.

Talbot's (2001) original study is a useful comparative study. She demonstrates that donations to the temple had different characteristics in different localities, different forms of endowment and different motivations on the part of donors. Patronage might entail social honour and advancement in political career, as well as religious good. Different patterns of giving were received by more recent interior foundations, while other, more significant, sacred centres received land. The South Indian temple might not be regarded as a single entity and an intended redistribution of the religion does not necessarily result in social harmony, her analysis cautions. While Palampet's village gifts fit in a recognizable regional pattern, local evidence is still needed to confirm how they actually functioned locally (Talbot, 2001).

Devotion was also linked with family remembrance by the names of Katesvara and Kamesvara. Barnett connects these names with those of persons related to Rudra's family history. Therefore, a sacred foundation was possible to secure a line through divine names and through the reiterated acts of worship. The argument is not restricted to one person alone; if family honour is important it attaches to an institution that future rulers must ensure its preservation. The inscription explains the significance of mapping family relations to the top of the page, military success to the bottom, and of the contribution of gifts from the town and religious commands. They present a connected statement of principle and believe that the role and activities of the patron don't end with the end of their career, but should endure (verses 53–54, Barnett, 1919).

Water and the Making of a Sacred Landscape

The very prominent position of the reservoir in the Palampet inscription is remarkable. There are a number of verses about its water, waves, birds, fish and reflections. The poet likens the seas to the sea and envisions the stars entering into the transparent surfaces of the sea. It seems to be words of literary praise, but for a man-made piece of water. The fact that the reservoir is so well seen suggests that the patron wished to have the waterworks included in the list of his notable works. A sacralising of construction was seen as part of a general transformation of place. But the foundation’s setting was not just a natural landscape the scenic backdrop of an independent religious story (Barnett, 1919, vss. 39–44).

The relationship of reservoir to settlement is also a significant one. This inscription on the water body regards it as a reflection of the city, while on the other side, it is depicted as an image of mutual reflection. This does not provide quantifiable numbers on cultivation, population or water distribution. It does, however, implicitly assert that the idea of settlement and of water were linked from the start in the commemorative account. With the village gifts read with the reservoir it implies a site with material possibilities that extended beyond its site. That is a stronger interpretation than any unsubstantiated statement as to the absolute number of acres the medieval tank supplied with water and the number of the households on the tank's water supply (Barnett 1919, verses 35–48).

The archaeological context is important and accentuates the need for studying the temple building in addition to its context. The complex is located close by to Ramappa Cheruvu in a farmland with greenery. ICOMOS considers the water storage and distribution system that surrounds it to be economically connected to the temple. This type of assessment serves to pay attention to the larger landscape, but not each aspect of hydraulic development throughout the Middle Ages. A historical account should therefore incorporate monument and water, and leave the dates and various activities of specific channels and repairs open to uncertainty (International Council on Monuments and Sites [ICOMOS] 2021).

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Waterworks also focus on the very issue of maintenance. Social tasks were still ongoing building a reservoir, ensuring that it remains operational. The foundation inscription records the accomplishment of the patron though this does not prove there were no interruption of the embankments and channels over centuries. Present use does not form according to itself foundations for the detection of unaltered medieval usages. Given Palampet's flora, geography and topography, the question of collective work, how resources are managed, and institutional longevity goes beyond the answers provided in the remaining local record. Acknowledging them is the first step to giving the monument a more historical background without beginning to make it historical.

With the surviving temple one is introduced to a third type of evidence. The materials, supports, sculptural surfaces and spatial configuration contribute to the preservation of the findings of organized craft production. The main building is mixed with soft sandstone and hard stones in significant elaborately-carved features, with the appearance of the upper structure being reduced by the lightweight, porous, rendered bricks. The materials used are part of the technical history of temple culture. They needed some hands-on experience in carving, adding and subtracting, weight, and how various materials would move. The monument, then, can be seen as created by the work of a single patron and as an example of coordinated expertise and a patron's religious agenda (Yazdani, 1922).

What is interesting about Yazdani's description is the nature of its historically intelligibility. He mentions entry porches on three sides and the sanctuary on the west side, a raised platform around the main building and the remains of an independent Nandi image pavilion. These also create a continuum of strategies, perspectives and variation of space. The platform also enabled the viewer to experience the sculptural elements on the exterior of the building on a circuit around the building, with the focus of the sanctuary being drawn towards the linga. This interpretation is based on a known layout, not that all medieval visitors travelled exactly the way listed below. While the surviving evidence does not explicitly indicate the exact nature of the movements of the individual worshipper, opportunities and expectations were provided in the architecture (Yazdani, 1922).

That was the basis for the public significance of the building. A person would have to find the means of materialising an intention, and skilled in doing so, through effort would be a donor, a temple builder. Historiological explanations must not fail to mention the craftsmen due to the concentration which is found in the inscription on Rudra. On the other hand, people who like craftsmanship do not support the manufacture of his complete develop. At the same time, the appreciation of craftsmanship does not also mandate for his complete development to be fabricated. Individual artisans don't serve to make a more secure identification of the patron as the contemporary record does here. This distinction between patronage and manufacture enables the existence of both without dubiously identifying the individuals responsible for creating the structure, in terms of their names, working environment and personal lives (Barnett, 1919; Yazdani, 1922).

Body movement and performance are topics worthy of special attention given in the form of sculptures. These show that more could be conveyed in the visual culture of the shrine than simply a static presence of deities. But despite being a picture of a dancer, this image doesn't form an account of any specific show or dance. It can, however, tell nothing of the social identity or daily requirements of an actual woman at Palampet, nor can it determine whether the women were actually employed. This difference is significant as the sculpture in architecture can easily be perceived as a straightforward image of medieval society. A more delicate reading finds elements of artistic tradition, piety, patron taste and workshop practices and may contain elements of real practice as well as artistic allusions (Yazdani, 1922).

The text of the inscription provides more solid documentation for the cultural world that its patron desired to elicit. It lists instrumental, women singing, verse recitation, Vedic and learned discussion as its description of the settlement. The text is good, but it is idealizing, yet revealing of the mix of sounds. These various aspects of life coexist in the same flourishing world of military training, leisure activities, religious instruction and artistry. More solid than the number of performers or scholars living there are these descriptions setting the values of the foundation. It was part of the cultural significance of the temple of making such an ordered and cultivated world imaginable, the role of the Temple in making an ordered and cultivated world imagine (Barnett, 1919, verses 35-38).

Yazdani (1922) also mentions images of Krishna and Shiva as well in the monument. This observation suggests a context for reading alongside the invocations which is visual and literary, where there was no single divine

story to the exclusion of others. It does not make a claim to have made the building owner or manager equally the master of each devotional community. On the contrary, it suggests that, aside from the name of the deity it is dedicated to, the iconographic programme of the shrine was ample enough to provide a wide selection of the sacred repertoire. It must be noted, however, that religious identity can only be reconstructed by arranging and combining the pieces of evidence, not just from the contemporary description of a monument, although it is important to start with such a label. (vs 176–177).

Religious Identity and Social Limits

Worship of Lord Shiva is highlighted as the main deity and the repeated Rudra foundations emphasize on the centrality of the worship of Shiva in Rudra's religious program. The line of prayer begins with the worship of Ganesha, Sarada, Shiva and Vishnu at the same time. This has extendable religious terminology that is not unique to a claim of legitimacy for one God alone. It is not to say that there was no sectarian tension/politics in medieval Telangana. It implies that this source has a Shaivic basis and additional repertoire of divine language. This separation helps the evidence not be misinterpreted as evidence of religious homogeneity, or of religious boundaries being completely removed (Barnett, 1919 v 1-4, v 33-54).

Social inclusion is more complicated to build up. The words of the inscription extol the Brahmans and intellectual activity, but they do not specify who occupied the various spaces, who received the various honours or whether they conducted all types of service. It is misleading, then, to talk of Palampet as being a completely democratic public institution or one in which the ethos of its social organisation can be extracted from this account. The results are a selective presentation of material, mediated by the patronage of the elites. There is a serious lack of cultivators' voices, women's testimony and the artists' voices in the reconstruction. Though these of course need to be interpreted in the light of the surrounding argument, they should not be concealed behind pretty generalizing statements about the harmonious life of the village.

Political Change After 1323

Kakatiya sovereignty was ended with the conquest of Warangal in 1323 resulting in a change in the political scenario of the eastern Deccan. Eaton's history understands Prataparudra in the context of the growth of Northern imperial power in the area. This time, Palampet is transforming the nature of its work in terms of the context it previously worked in. It does not provide a full story of the immediate fate of the temple; however. The possibility of the end of a dynasty, of damage to a monument, of the interruption of worship, of the loss of an endowment are related possibilities but each must have its own evidence. There is no substitute for a documented local sequence in a regional conquest (Eaton 2005).

A comparison with the future development of Warangal will help to understand this. Eaton and Wagoner (2013) reimagine the ways in which Shitab Khan draws on the past as Kakatiya religious and architectural memory, in restoring religious practices connected with the Svayambhu Shiva and Panchaliraya temples. Their understanding is that the initial cults may be used as a means for later appetites of power. The usefulness of the Kakatiya past did not disappear with the change of political situation. However, these documented interventions with the explanation in Warangal cannot be replicated at Palampet. They provide a regional potentiality and a way to interpret it, but do not provide a missing local restoration record (168).

Telangana was again in a new political setup in the Qutb Shahis. Eaton and Wagoner highlight the emerging relationship between the dynasty and the Telugu language and culture, and the influence that civilization-building traditions of Iranian rulers and Indian princes had on each other. They involve in their analysis a history that is only the opposition of religious communities. Palampet has a methodological implication for it, which is that one cannot predict the status of any temple under a certain ruler for good or ill based on the identity of the ruler's religion. Specific grants, repairs, conflicts and continuities will require specific documentation. Without evidence of anything else, it was assumed that it was neither universal persecution nor constant official support (238).

The year that is politically quantified is 1687 because this is the time when Mughal conquest ended Qutb Shahis rule at Golconda. That is no description of the event of worship’s closure from Palampet, nor of the end of Telangana's culture of the temples. Political chronology is always essential for keeping a distinction between political

and institutional chronology. There is no local evidence to support a picture of the continual narratives of Palampet in the 16th and 17th centuries here. It can only be confirmed that its Kakatiya origins were located on land that was frequently changed in purposes by later patrons, and that the remaining monument was able to memorialize material evidence to the earlier focus of patronage (Eaton, 2005).

Possibly, the record's accuracy on the date of the granting needs also to be distinguished from the construction period. An endowment date does not necessarily indicate a first day of construction of the building, nor the completion date of all the related buildings. It is important to see through the inscription's description of an already venerated godhead and to see that the chronology about the assignment of villages should be given priority rather than a streamlined view that the entire complex was constructed in one year. Similarly, an up-to-date estimate of the duration of construction should be different than a medieval statement which specifies the date. These differences help to keep 1213 as a firm ground of evidence, without elevating it above being the answer to every chronological question (Barnett, 1919, verses 45–48).

Palampet's Historical Significance

Palampet is a case in point of how an examination of a locality can throw light on a much larger picture, and yet not be told to be the story of all religious institutions in Telangana. In its inscription the military service, the genealogy, the cult of the divine, the resources of the villages, the waterworks enter a single commemorative programme. Its architecture documents the proficient achievement of experienced artisans. Its subsequent local context is evidence of the need to separate the processes of buildings and memories from those of finance, ritual and administration which are demonstrable. These are connected stories, yet not all of the chronologies necessarily are the same. Keeping the case study's relationships in view is what makes this strong and recognition of the differential preservation of evidence the most valuable part.

The result of this over the time frame of 800-1687 CE is one of historically shifting relationships. Contextualized by a look back at religious plurality, an investigation into the concentrated local effort of the thirteenth century, and a history of political shifts that altered the conditions of appreciating and employing Kakatiya heritage, this study helps to explain these facets of the Kakatiya past. With a focus on the later period, the political changes that occurred in the post-Kakatiya period and the manner in which the Kakatiya past could be recalled and utilized, it becomes easier to understand these aspects of the Kakatiya past. The dedication, building, writing and allotment of resources constituted the cultural-making of Palampet temple culture. Its historical investigation also requires a correlation of various types of evidence, which is a process without a guarantee that it will be able to provide a response on matters that are different from its scope. Admiration for the monument's achievement coupled with precision on what the surviving sources actually establish most clearly the source of the monument's lasting importance.

A history like this can be open to amendment if more inscriptions come to light, if there are more records that can be securely dated, or if archaeological investigation brings to light new aspects of Palampet's institutional life that have previously been unseen. Other finds might help explain the means of bringing in the revenue, changes in individual buildings, or how continual communities kept its religious interest. For the time being, the evidence is strong in favour of a foundation and a patronage as an interpretation of the situation and weak in favour of other interpretations. A historical accuracy does not take away from the achievement of the temple. It makes those achievements comprehensible as being the actions of identifiable people under specific conditions, in specific commitments.

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