

The Nava Brahma temples - the neglected masterpieces

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Abstract: Alampur is a temple-town situated in Jogulamba Gadwal district in the state of Telangana. The several inscriptions and the many temples found in this town and its surroundings bear an eloquent testimony to the antiquity and the historical importance of the place. Most significant of the remains here is the group of temples known as the 'Nava Brahma Temples' which stand within the fort in the town. Alampur is the meeting point of the sacred rivers Tungabhadra and Krishna and is referred to as Dakshina Kashi (also known as Navabrahmeshwara Theertha) and the Western Gateway of Srisailem, the famous Shaivite (Shaivism) pilgrim centre. The Sacredness of Alampur Temple is mentioned in the Skanda Purana. The principal deities at Alampur are Brahmeswara and Jogulamba. It is surrounded by the Nallamala hills.

Key Words: Alampur, Nava Brahma, Jogulamba, Shaktipeetam, Dakshina Kasi

1. INTRODUCTION:

“As an architect you design for the present, with an awareness of the past, for a future which is essentially unknown.” – Norman Foster

Alampur is situated on the left bank of the Tungabhadra River. At a distance of about a mile to the south of Alampur town is the place called, Papavinasani Tirtha where there is another group of temples different in style from the Nava Brahma temples. The variety in architecture and sculpture together with the wealth of inscriptional material makes Alampur the most important site of study for an art-historian concerned with the temple of Telangana. Goddess Jogulamba is considered the 5th Shakti Peeta among 18 shakti peetams in the country. Here Goddess Jogulamba is seen seated on the Corpse with scorpion, frog, and lizard on the head. She is seen in a naked avtar with her tongue stretched outside, an avtar of fierce goddess that grants Siddhi in Yoga and hence called Jogulamba. This word is a changed form of Yogula Amma in Telugu which means Mother of Yogis. Alampur Navabrahma Temples are a group of nine early Chalukyan Hindu temples dated to 7th century A.D. that are located at Alampur. They are called Nava-Brahma temples though they are dedicated to Shiva. They exemplify early North Indian Nagara style architecture with cut rock as the building block.

Past Glory of the Temples:

The principal dynasties under whose sway Alampur stayed are the Chalukyas of Badami, the Rashtrakutas, the Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Kakatiyas and the Vijayanagaras. Alampur was previously known as *Halampuram*, *Hamalapuram* and *Alampuram*. Name of this place as *Hatampura*, mentioned in the inscription dated AD 1101 belongs to Western Chalukya Tribhuvanamalla Vikramaditya VI. Alampur is mentioned in an inscription of the time of Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara. The “Nava Brahma” temples have been built during the rule of Chalukyas of Badami. The temples of Papavinasani Tirtha and the other important temples in the Alampur town should have been built under the regime of the Rashtrakutas and the Chalukyas of Kalyani. The absence of any large structure in the typical Kakatiyas or Vijayanagara style at Alampur leads us to conclude that the principal temple-building activity at Alampur ended by the 12th Century A.D.

The Tummeyanuru grant of Pulakesin II, Iparumkal grant of Vikramaditya I, and Paniyal grant of Vinayaditya testify to the sway of the Chalukyas of Badami in Telangana. The inscription of the time of Vinayaditya above the dwarapalaka image in the Swarga Brahma temple states that the temple (Devakula) in honour of the queen Mahadevi of Vinayaditya was caused to be constructed by Lokaditya-Ela-Arasi. The inscriptional labels on some of the ‘Nava Brahma’ temples are interesting as similar practice as met with at the other centers of art of the Chalukyas of Badami like Pattadakal and Satyavolu. The several short inscriptions on the different parts of the temples in the characters assignable to above 9th century A.D. clearly indicate that there was temple building activity in Alampur throughout the period of the Chalukyas of the Badami and their successors, the Rashtrakutas. This might be the Rashtrakuta ruler Nirupama Dhruva (A.D.780-92) of the Malkhed branch. His first regnal year may be approximately equated to A.D.780. It refers to the construction of Sri-Vagila (maha-dvara) and seems to register certain gifts to goddess Durgabhattachari when Blavarmarasa was administering Alampur and Somadi-bhatta was the madapathi (Mathadhipathi). On the left side wall of the Mahadeva temple is an inscription which refers to a fight and mentions Sauchamaheshwara, the pattavardhana of Balavarman. On the South wall of the Chandeshwari temple opposite the

Balabrahmeshwara temple is the record of the self-immolation (Utkranti) of Mallikarjuna Bhattara on the occasion of solar eclipse. At the same place is a label 'Maratura bedegam Poranaraditya'. Another label here refers to a person as Ekantanivasi.

The several epigraphs of the time of the Chalukyas of Kalyani belonging to the reigns of Someshwar I, Someshwara II, and Vikramaditya VI recording gifts to the temples here amply proved that Alampur developed into a great center of pilgrimage under the dynasty. Literary and inscriptional evidence show that the place maintained the importance under the Kakatiyas and Vijayanagara rulers. The 14th Century poet Palkurki Somanatha, in his 'Panditaradya Charita' speaks of Alampur Mahatyam in the Parvata prakarana.

There is a Kakatiya inscription of the reign of Prataparudra dated 1299 A.D. in the local museum. It records the gift of some land and a pond by a number of merchants (Settis), princes like Peda-Maldeva, and the great sthanadhipath of the Brahmeshwara temple to the (Jain?) saints Mada-jiyya and Naga-jiyya, sons of Padma-jiyya, for god Goureshwara. There is one peculiar title claimed by the donors: 'Pancha-sata-sasana-labdha', 'the obtainer of a hundred and five hero inscriptions.

Alampur continued to flourish as a kshetra under the Vijayanagara rulers. There are four epigraphs as an evidence for this. The first is a copper plate grant of the Vijayanagara king Mallikarjuna dated 1467 A.D. This records the endowment of the village Sarangapura to the head of the religious establishment of Sarangeshwara-matha. The second inscription is of the time of Krishnadevaraya dated 1521 A.D. The epigraph records the endowment of two villages Chennunipadi and Velampadu. Another inscription of the same date near the Mahadvara of Narasimha temple records that Narayanayya, on the command of Gaura Dandanayaka Basavappayya, gifted the village Bahirapura to Sri Narasimha Devara for the merit of his over-lord 'Sri Krishnadevaraya. The last one is a copper-plate grant of the time of Krishnadevaraya dated 1526 A.D. registers the gift a village, Chennapalli of Alampura seema for Anga Ranga Vaibhava of Nava Brahmeshwaras by China Peddi Nayudu, a Palegar of Alampuri seema. The inscription, is significant as the names of the 'Nava Brahmas' are mentioned as 1.Garuda Brahma, 2.Vira Brahma, 3.Padma Brahma, 4.Visva Brahma, 5.Kumara Brahma, 6.Svarga Brahma, 7.Taraka Brahma, 8.Surya Brahma, 9.Bala Brahma.

The Nava Brahma Temples:

The principal group of temples at Alampur is the Nava Brahmas situated in the fortress on the western bank of the Tungabhadra river. The Bala Brahma temple which is the main shrine of the group is located in the center of the enclosure.

The aspect of Nava Brahma is peculiar to Alampur and it is yet to be explained. On the basis of traditions that the names of Nava Brahma may be explained with reference to medical herbs used by Rasasiddhas:

Bala	(Brahma)	= Kuruveru
Kumara	(Brahma)	= Kalabanda
Arka	(Brahma)	= Jilledu
Vira	(Brahma)	= Gajanimma
Visva	(Brahma)	= Allamu
Padma	(Brahma)	= Tamara

The equivalent herbs for Garuda, Svarga, and Taraka are not known.

The Present Pathetic Conditions of the Temples:

The Nava Brahma temples have been in a neglected condition. Most of the sculptures in these temples have been damaged by vandals and inscribed idols have been taken out of the country, the epigraphs are vanishing during construction of additional facilities in the temples and mindless applying of fresh coat of paint during renovation. Some monuments have gone missing due to encroachment.

Everywhere the main structure and surroundings show no sign of upkeep or preservation. So pathetic are the conditions, that these "in name only" boards, stand there as a sad reminder of what needs to be done and is not. The temple town of Alampur, which stands at the confluence of the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers and is referred to as "Dakshina Kashi" and "Navabrahmeshwara Teertha" is no exception.

The Nandi Mandapa in front of Vira Brahma Temple has to be restored. The temple complex has to be cleaned and the boundary wall has to be changed. The Visva Brahma Temple Adhithana has been buried by the panchayat and covered with PCC which needs to be removed and the original level restored. Lot of temple materials and waste was seen in the corridor of the temple. It should be removed and kept at some other place. The open area used by some antisocial for drinking and playing cards.

Alampur is Located on the border of Kurnool, which falls in the State of Andhra Pradesh, the temple is reached after traversing a winding, narrow muddy road. The temple built in the style of the Chalukyas of Badami (who ruled between 650 and 750AD) houses the Navabrahma temples that majestically dot the skyline with intricate sculpture, pillars and archways in pink stone. A large number of monkeys swinging on branches of trees inside and perched precariously on dilapidated walls around several small shrines. These are beautiful structurally but a picture of

neglect otherwise. There are no signs of regular rituals or worship. There is not a lamp or flower in sight near the idols in the outer shrines. These are beautiful structurally but a picture of neglect otherwise. There are no signs of regular rituals or worship. There is not a lamp or flower in sight near the idols in the outer shrines.

The temple was submerged in floods that ravaged the area some years ago; a new temple complex was built which, however, bears no comparison to the older temples. The original temples too had been relocated to a higher place when the area came under submergence due to the construction of the Srisailem Hydro-electric project. Dry leaves strewed all over, uncaring staff, signs of neglect and decay and monkeys on the lookout for anything interesting.

The Temple town Alampur is situated 220 kms from Hyderabad. This is one of the reasons of why the town is neglected. The formerly Andhrapradesh government has not taken any proper measurements to develop the transport system between Hyderabad and Alampur. More importantly, the road leading to the temple has been badly damaged.

The Role of Government in preservation of the Temples:

It is said that "A people's relationship to their heritage is the same as the relationship of a child to its mother". Our heritage is our pride and we all have some responsibility to save and preserve it for our future generation. The Alampur Nava Brahma Temples should be treated as cultural and archaeological property of the country. The state and central government should come forward to preserve these ancient temples. The Alampur temples are listed as an archaeological and architectural treasure on the official "List of Monuments" prepared by the Archaeological Survey of India under The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act. The 'Ancient Monuments and Preservation Act, 1904' was passed with the prime objective to ensure the proper upkeep and repair of ancient temples.

In India many temple face existential crisis under state governments. **The condition of temples under the control of respective state governments is pathetic, so much so that they are facing an existential crisis. All the renowned Hindu temples including Tirupati, Guruvayoor, Puri, Srisailem, Kashi, Mathura, Ayodhya, Vaishno Devi, Siddhi Vinayak, Shirdi, Amarnath, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Rameshwaram and the ancient Shiva temple at Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu are under the control of the respective state governments.**

The Telangana Government should especially come forward to take necessary steps to preserve these historical temples. The Andhrapradesh rulers did not show any interest towards this temple town. Recently the Chief Minister of Telangana state has donated gold and diamond ornaments worth crores of rupees to Tirupati Balaji Temples in Andhrapradesh. In the same manner he has to take personal initiation to develop the temple town of Alampur.

1. The temple complex has to be completely changed in the interior where granite and other stones has been used in the floor which leaving the garbagriha, has to be replaced with dressed stones.
2. There are lots of minor works all over the exterior of the temple i.e. pointing, mending; strengthening needs to be taken up.
3. All the temples are connected with the pathways with tactile to avoid the people going on the garden.
4. There has been deposition of earth in the complex it needs to be checked what the original ground level of the temples is and if possible restored to that level.

Need of Tourism Development:

The Telangana government included the temple town of Alampur in its Tourism packages but the response from the people is very less compared with other temple towns in the state. The Telangana tourism department should open new hotels and lodges to stay. Unfortunately there are no good hotels to stay and eat.

Alampur is a spiritual and historical place to visit. The Telangana state has to develop this temple town as one of the best tourist spots of Telangana. Alampur is the meeting point of the sacred rivers Tungabhadra and Krishna, where boating facilities can be setup. The nearest places like Kudali Sangameshwar, Papanasha Tirtha and other places can be developed.

Alampur is located approximately 220 km from Hyderabad and easily accessible through Hyderabad-Bangalore highway. But there is no direct bus from Hyderabad. The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation needs to show some interest to provide some buses from Hyderabad. Alampur road is the nearest railway station located at a distance of nearly 9 km. Only passenger trains stop here. There is no express stop. The road from Alampur town to the temple is terrible. It needs to be repaired.

Preservation/Conservation/Restoration techniques should be followed to protect and maintain temple buildings in their current state, or would prevent further damage and deterioration to them. These techniques saw the original design of old buildings as correct in and of themselves.

CONCLUSION:

India has an extraordinary, vast and diverse pool of cultural heritage and ancient monuments in the form of temples and other archaeological sites and remains. The sheer number of these historic heritages is astounding. And the fact that these monuments are the reminiscence of the living witnesses of the golden historic era of over a thousand years and of the pre-independence battles, they carry a special and a well-deserved respect in the eyes of the Indians. They are the epitome of courage, stand testimony to the evolution and are a symbol of cultural expressions. What about temples like this, which are historically, architecturally and spiritually important? Who cares about their preservation? Neither those who put up boards about their importance nor those who claim to have powerful places under their jurisdiction. The Goddess herself has been removed to safety many times but the administration remains unmoved.

One can only chant "*Ya devi sarva bhutheshu kriya roopena samsthitha*" (O goddess may you manifest as the energy behind action) and wait for those in power to wake up and act. Hopefully, they will preserve something they can never replicate.

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