

The Vaishnava and Shaivite Temples at Dharmapuri in Jagtial of Telangana

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview of the vaishnava and shaivite temples at dharmapuri in jagtial of telangana.

Keywords: Dharmapuri is treasure house of temples, famous temples of lord laxminarsimha swamy, situated on the bank of river Godavari.

1. Introduction

Dharmapuri, historically a pilgrim center once adorned with great poets and philosophers. It is one of the nine Narasimha Kshetras of the Telangana region of South India. Dharmapuri is said to be one of the oldest village in the state of Telangana. The most important and famous temple in this village is the temple dedicated to Lord Sri Laxmi Narasimha Swamy, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Dharmapuri is a rich treasure of temples and idols of Hindu Gods. One can see the rare idols such as, Lord Brahma, Lord Yamadharmaraja and Lord Shiva in a real form other than a typical “Lingakaram”, Shiva Panchayatanam (Miniature temple found with the idols of Lord Shiva and Goddess Paravati, Lord Ganesh, Nagaraja and Nandishwara). The town is well located on the banks of holy river Godavari and by virtue of this it is called as Dakshinakashi. The holy place with its presiding deity is mentioned in Brahmanda Purana [1].

Dharmapuri is situated on the banks of the river Godavari at a distance of 27 Kms. from Jagtial. Road also connects it from Karimnagar via Choppadandi. Here the Godavari flows from north to south forming a natural boundary between Karimnagar, Peddapalli and Mancherial districts. The village contains fairly a good number of old temples which bear on eloquent testimony to the antiquity and the historical significance.

Dharmapuri is a treasure house of ancient temples and rich Indian sculpture. The inscriptions and manuscripts are giving clear information about the past rulers with evidence. Various sources tapped for tracing and constructing the history of the Dharmapuri area are mainly archaeological and literary. Traditions, oral and recorded and experiences of the devotees supplement the sources. Dharmapuri is called after the name of king Dharmavarma (who was a staunch devotee of Lord Narasimha). It was known earlier as Dharmaraya, Dharmapuram, Dhammanavuru, Dharmavura and

Dharmapuram [2]. The name of Dharmapuri and Dharmapuram is referred in two Sthalapuranas, entitled “Dharmapuri Kshetra Mahatyam”, dated 928 A.D.3 and 1767 A.D.4. Historically, we find the name of this place in an inscription at Kurkiyala of Jinavallabha datable to A.D. 945 mentions this village as Dharmavura5 of Dharmapuram, 6 gifted by king Arikesari-II (king of Chalukyas of Vemulawada) to his court-poet Pampa as an agrahara for his great work Vikramarjuna Vijayam. Further, Dharmapuri and Dharmapura is also mentioned in an inscription of Vikramaditya-IV (1076-1126 A.D.) of Chalukyas of Kalyani, on the stone in the Ramalingeshwara temple at Dharmapuri and records that it was a gift to the Ramalingeshwara [7] Whereas Madiki Singana mentions as “Dharmapuram” in his Uttarakhanda of Padmapurana (1420 A.D.) [8]

There are the two temples (old and new) of Lord Sri Laxmi Narasimha Swamy. In the 14th and 15th centuries after the fall of Bahamanis under Aurangzeb. His subordinates also followed in his footsteps. Rustamuddin Khan, the Subedar of Hyderabad, converted the temple of Laxmi Narasimha Swamy into a Mosque.9 In 1448 A.D. near to the Mosque, a new temple was erected with sixty pillars and this temple.10 In 1725 A.D., an icon of Lord Narasimha was found in the vicinity of Dharmapuri village. There are two temples of Narasimha in the village popularly called as Old (pata) Laxmi Narasimha Swamy temple and New (kotta) Laxmi Narasimha Swamy temple.

2. The Vaishnava and Shaivite Temples at Dharmapuri

1) Old Laxmi Narasimha Swamy Temple:

This is the most popular temple in Dharmapuri. This temple is believed to have been built by the people of the village during the period of A.D. 1724-1750. In A.D. 1794 Chennamaneni Jogaraya, a great landlord of this region gifted silver ornaments of lord Narasimha and laid stones on the flooring inside the enclosure of the temple. The members of Gande family known as Gandevaru of Viligandula and Ranagiri Sarkars and the members of Juvvadi family known as Juvvadivaru, who were Deshmukhs of Polasa and Deevakonda Fergana's made hereditary arrangements for the celebrations of Kalyanotsavam or the marriage ceremony of Lord Lakshmi

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Narasimha every year¹¹. The process of patronizing the temple by the noble and landlords went on unabated.

The old Narasimha temple contains a garbhagriha and a 48 pillared mandapa before it. The temple is inside a walled compound facing the east. The adhisthana members are very much obliterated. It contains a wide patta and Jagati decorated with semi-circular stones. The wall is crudely plain. Above the wall there is a cornice, over which the stepped pyramidal Sikhara rises. The garbhagriha contains the image of Lord Narasimha in the Yogic form and not in the ugrarupa. The mandapa before it appears to be a later addition with a parapet around it leaving passages on east, north and south. There is a separate four pillared Kalyana mandapa before the temple. The pillars are richly carved with a typical Kakatiyan sculpture depicting several stories from the Epics. The figures of Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Dancing Siva, Narasimha, Rama and Lakshmana etc. appear on the rectangular and square panels of the pillars. This mandapa is superb exhibiting the sculpture of the Kakatiya times.

2) *Sculptures and Icons*

There are loose sculptures of Brahma and Balarama in the mukhamandapa of this temple. Balarama is rarely worshipped independently as a god. Usually his image is worshipped in association with that of Krishna. But the sculpture of Krishna is not found here as it is shifted and now placed in the Museum at Karimnagar.

- i. *Brahma*: This is a standing figure of '6' in height with four hands holding shrunk in upper right hand, Vedas in upper left, while keeping the lower left in abhaya mudra with akshamala and the lower right crossed towards left resting on gada. Three faces are visible with a pointed beard for the middle face alone.¹²
- ii. *Balarama*: This figure is two handed, adorned with mukuta, graiveyakas, keyuras, kankanas, katibandha, vanamala, anklets and beaded nupuras. His left leg is stiff resting on the floor, while his right leg is crossed towards left so as to touch the ground with the toes. The flute is held in both the hands and one end of it is applied to the mouth. He wags rights to all the fingers of his hands. He is flanked by female chowry – bearers at the bottom. The image contains a makara torana behind it. Hala or the plough is carved on right side and the case of the flute is carved on the left side of the image.
- iii. *Krishna*: This is a black granite image of 4 feet in height with a makaratorana. Krishna stands in tribhanga with his left leg resting on the floor and right leg crossed towards left so as to touch the ground with the toes. He has eight arms. He is seen holding aloft the Goverdhana hill with the topmost right hand. He holds ankha and khadga in other two right hands. In three of the left hands, he holds padma, gada and chakra, with the remaining two hands the flute is held which is broken. He wears a mukuta, kundalas, katibandha, vanamala, keyuras, kankanas, and rights to the little figures, anklets and nupuras. He is flanked by lady attendants at the bottom holding fly-whisks.

As this is an image Goverdhana – dhari Krishna, cows and calves are carved on either side in front of the cowry – bearers. Now this figure stands in the Gandhi Centenary Museum at Karimnagar.

- iv. *Garuda*: This is a seated image with flying wings and hands folded in anjali.

3) *New Laxmi Narasimha Swamy Temple:*

This temple was built by a charitable Brahman named Panatula Narayna Deekshitulu in the saka year 1725 i.e., A.D 1803. He installed the image of Yogananda Lakshmi Narasimha in it, which is now known as Kotta or New Narasimha temple lying behind the present mosque. The temple existing in the same courtyard faces the east with a garbhagriha, antarala and a mandapa before it. At one time there were eight Dikpalas placed in separate niches around this temple. But now only two Dikpalas Indra and Agni can be seen. Indra is seen standing with his vahana elephant. Agni is a two headed figure flanked by lady attendants. His vahana ram is carved behind him. Juvvadi Dharma Jagapathi Rao Deshmukh made gifts to the lord and made arrangements for celebrating all the rituals and festivals throughout the year.

4) *Lord Venkateshwara Swamy Temple (The Sixty Pillared Temple)*

Bahmani Sultan Ahmed Shah I (A.D. 1422- 1436) occupied Warangal and sent his general Khani–Azam Abdul Latif Khan to subjugate the remaining portions of Telangana. Latif Khan spoiled the temple of Narasimha at Dharmapuri in A.D. 1425 which was later converted in to mosque. Consequent to the Muslim invasions, a new temple with sixty pillars is stated to have been constructed in A.D 1448 for lord Narasimha. But now it houses the deity of Lord Venkateshwara. The so called sixty pillared temple now contains only 48 pillars, perhaps the porch with the rest of the 12 pillars is now no more extant. The adhisthana of the temple consists of upana, patta, Jagati with semi –circular stones, Kumuda and Vedi with inverted semi-circular stones. The mandapa is open without any plain around it. It has a plain projecting cornice with slight slant but is now partly disappeared.

5) *Lord Venugopala Swamy Temple*

This temple was built by a devotee named Bhumapalli Chalam at the same time when the above said new Narasimha temple was built. It stands at the back of the sixty pillared temple with an idol of Venugopala and several other small images of Alvars. It has a crudely carved garuda on right side and Hanuman on left side of the entrance. At one time Indurti Srinivasacharya was known to have been appointed by the Juvvadi Deshmukhs as the Archaka Pujari of this temple.

6) *Lord Ramalingeshwara Temple:*

The temple is situated inside a square ston walled compound of about 10 feet in height. It faces the east and lies to the north-east of Narasimha temple. The main door leading to the courtyard contains a projecting cornice and a Gajalakshmi motif on lalata. The Dvarapalas beneath the door jambs are flanked by lady attendants in dvibhanga pose bearing fly – whisks. The Dvarapalas hold Damaru and Kapala in upper hands. Gada in lower left while they keep lower right hand in abhaya. A mandapa of sixteen pillars is attached to this entrance

inside the Prakara. The mandapa consists of a passage corresponding to the doorway of this entrance with a raised platform on either side. The pillars rise over the platform. The lower part of the platform contains four petalled floral designs.

The temple consists of garbhagriha, antarala, mukhamandapa and small porch resting on two front pillars in the east. The temple stands on a highly elevated adhisthana which contains upana, Jagati, Kumuda and a Vedi. The adhisthana has a cornice decorated with semicircular stones over which the bhitti rises. The shrine is crowned by a curvilinear sikhara with an amalaka at the top, followed by a stone kalasa. A Sukanasa projects to the east from the base of the sikhara, which is a Chalukyan feature.

A flight of steps leads to an enclosed rectangular mukhamandapa with eight pillars and corresponding pilasters which divide the ceiling into 12 compartments all filled by Kadalikakarana process. It has three entrances on east, north and south, the west being the shrine. The garbhagriha contains Saikata Linga (sand pressed into the form of linga) supposed to have been set up by Lord Sri Rama during his sojourn in Dandakaranya. There is a seated female deity in the garbhagriha, perhaps the consort of Siva with Damaru and Trisula in upper hands, Khadga and bowl in lower hands. There is a small shrine exclusively dedicated to Ganapati to the north-east of the main temple in the same courtyard. The seated Ganapati is unusually big with four hands, wide ears and karandamukuta over his head. Here Ganapati is given prominence with a separate shrine for him because Ganapati is worshipped as the popular guardian of households, remover of obstacles, patron of merchants, authors and school boys (for he is the scribe of gods) and god of common sense, who must be invoked before every enterprise and mentioned before any appeal to the divine spirit.¹³

7) *Sculptures and Icons*

There are loose sculptures in the Mukhamandapa of Ramalingesvara temple.

- *Saptamatikas*: The seven goddesses are flanked by Vinayaka and Virabhadra with their respective vahanas carved below their seats. The saptamatikas are four handed adorned with mukutas and usual ornaments.
- *Mahishasuramardini*: The image is well sculptured but all her hands are broken. Here Mahishasura is found in the form of buffalo.
- *Alinganamurti*: Seated with the left leg folded and the right hanging, this god holds damaru encircled by a naga in the upper right hand, trisula in the upper left, keeps the lower right in abhaya holding askhamala and passes the lower left round the back of the Devi. This sculpture can be compared with the images, found in the early Chalukyan temples of Alampur.¹⁴
- *Skanda*: The image is six faced with his vahana peacock.
- There is a beautiful sculpture of Gautama and his consort Ahalya sitting with their hands folded in anjali.

The courtyard contains several other sculptures of Viragals, Nandis, Nagas and Naginis. There is a Stambha of about 25

feet in height standing before the temple, which reportedly contained at one time a miniature mandapa at its top housing a Nandi.

8) *Satyavati Temple*:

This temple stands at an elevated place facing the east with only one square garbhagriha. It contains a red sandstone Stambha of about 30 feet in height bearing a miniature mandapa above it. Though the presiding deity of this temple is Lakshmi Narasimha, it is now known as Satyavati temple. As there is a very tall Stambha, the lord is called Stambha Narasimha Swamy. There are utsava idols of Satyavati and Chitrangada, who were a legendary couple. The husband of Satyavati was in the form of a snake. When she took bath with her snake in the Godavari at Dharmapuri, the snake turned into a handsome young man Chitrangada. It is believed that Satyavati erected the tall pillar in the temple to prove her chastity and modesty. The spot where the pious lady Satyavati had a holy dip in the river Godavari is known after her name as Satyavathi Gundam.

There is a detached mandapa of nine pillars before the temple. It contains a broken door jamb with a Dvarapala of about 5 feet in height standing in dvibhanga holding a khatvanga in upper right hand and Darmru in upper left hand. He has his right hand crossed towards left resting on the club, while he keeps his lower left hand in abhaya. This figure is similar to the two Dvarapala figures found at Kaleshwaram.

There are many temples of Siva and Vishnu including a number Panchayatanas consisting of Siva, Parvati, Ganapati, Nageshwara and Anjaneya in the village. The other temples in outskirts of the village are of Sri Venkateshwara Swamy, Gautameshwara, Akkepalli Rajeshwara Swamy, Sri Sita Ramachandra Samy, Sri Dattatreya, Sri Mahalaxmi and Hanuman etc.,. There are Brahma Pushkarini (koneru), Chintamani Sarovaram, Varahateertham, Vimala Sarovaram are holy and the pilgrims take bath in them. In additions to there are other holy places (Ghats) for bath on the bank of the river Godavari. They are Brahmagundam, Chakrateertham, Yamagundam, Vasishthagundam, Satyavatigundam and Gopikateertham (Gollamadugu) etc.

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