

THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF MONASTERIES IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

The matha monastic organization has been active since the emergence of Lingayat movement in Karnataka around the 12th century. They have enjoyed community support, and have served as the center for Shaiva studies as well as Lingayat community's educational, cultural and philanthropic activities.

There have been six active large Veerashaiva monasteries, one each at Kedaranath, Vairagya Shimhasana (Himalayas), Kashi Jnana Shimhasana (Varanasi, Ganges), Srisaila Surya Shimhasana (Andhra Pradesh), Rambhapuri Veeashimhasana-Balehonnuru and Ujjini Saddharma Shimhasana (all three in Karnataka). There are three other important veerashaiva mathas which are famous for "trividha" dasoha (food, shelter and education).

*The district has not yielded any historical records belonging to the early dynasties of the South India. such as the **Banas, Satavahanas, Kadambas, Badami Chalukyas**, etc.*

*During the reign of **Krishnaraja Wodeyar-III (1811-31)**, the State consisted of six Faujdaris and the present Tumakuru district stood included in the Maddagiri i.e., **Madhugiri, 'Faujdari.: In 1834**, these were reconstituted into four divisions and **Tumakuru** became the headquarters of Chitradurga division which encompassed the areas now included in these two districts*

KEY WORDS-MATH, MONASTERIES, SIDDAGANGA, YEDIYURU, SWAMIJI, VACHANAS.

INTRODUCTION

The district has not yielded any historical records belonging to the early dynasties of the South India. such as the **Banas, Satavahanas, Kadambas, Badami Chalukyas**, etc.

The earliest record discovered here, consisting of 5 copper plate grants ascribed to 400 A.D., belongs to the **Gangas**.

The **Gangas** ruled over the southern and eastern districts of the State from the early years of the Christian era upto 1025 A.D., and obviously Tumakuru district formed part of their kingdom.

The district has yielded numerous inscriptions belonging to the period of Sri Purusha (725-758 A.D.) and several hero stones testifying to the battles that were fought between the forces of the Gangas and the **Rashtrakutas**.

The last Ganga inscription found here is dated in 972 AD., – the period when Satyavakya Nolamba Kulantaka, that is **Marasiraha-III**, was on the throne. Of the Rashtrakutas there are three inscriptions and one of these refers to **Vimaladitya** as the **Adhiraja** of the entire **Ganga-mandala** while another confirms the date and mode of death of **Indra-raja**, the last of the Rashtrakutas who passed away on **20th March 982** at **Shravanabelagola**.

There are numerous inscriptions which apparently belong to the Chalukyas of Kalyana and these range from 1040 to 1200 A.D. However, these merely acknowledge the supremacy of the Chalukyas and are actually those of the **Cholas and Hoysalas**.

During this period it may be noted, the Nolambas were the principal local rulers and their kingdom was known as Nalambavadi 32000. They had their capital at Henjeru which is identified with the **Hernavati** village on the northern border of **Sira taluk. Nidugal of Pavagada** taluk was one of their strongholds.

The district has yielded several records relating to the Nolamba rulers such as Mahendra who is stated to have uprooted the Cholas, his son Nanniga and grandson Anniga or Bira Nolamba and Ahavamalla Nolamba. In about **974 AD.**, the Nolambas were overrun by the Ganga king Marasiraha-II who earned the title Nolamba-

Kulantaka, The Cholas who appear to have wielded supreme power in this region from **1000 AD., to 1070 AD.,** were over-run by the **Hoysalas.**

The earliest Hoysala inscription found in the district is dated in 1078 AD. Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana is stated to have been in possession of both Gangavadi-96000 and **Nolambavadi-32000.**

During the Hoysala supremacy also different tracts of this district were being administered by different local chiefs. For instance, an inscription dated in 1151 AD., states that a chief named Guli Bachi was ruling Marugerenad in Kaidala near Tumakuru.

He built the temples of **Gangeshvara, Narayana and Chalavarishvara at Kaidala.** The Vijayanagara empire gradually absorbed the Hoysala dominions including this district. The earliest of the Vijayanagara inscriptions found in Tumakuru district refers to the reign of **Bukka Raya (1344-77 AD.), and is dated III 1354 AD.**

During the 15th and 16th centuries, the **Vijayanagara** kings granted various tracts of lands to their vassal chiefs bearing different titles, in recognition of the services rendered. Some of the petty principalities already in existence were allowed to continue to administer their traditionally acquired territories. Among such feudatory principalities that arose in this district a mention may be made of those with their headquarters at **Nidugal, Holavanahalli, Madhugiri and Hagalavadi.**

The Nidugal chiefs were the descendants of **Harati Tippa Nayaka** whose possessions were in the north-east of the Chitradurga district. One of the inscriptions found in Pavagada taluk describes him as ruling from Nidugal hill fort. He divided his territory among his seven sons.

But on invasion of their share of the country by the Bijapur army, the descendants of the family retired to Nidugal fort under the leadership of **Thimmanna Nayaka** who had lost **Dodderi.**

This family remained at Nidugal for a long time paying tributes to the Subedar of Sira. In 1761 A.D., when Sira was captured by **Haidar Ali**, the Nidugal chief also submitted himself to the conquerer and agreed to abide by the conditions imposed on him. This chief, Thimmanna Nayaka, was later compelled by Tipu Sultan to relinquish his rights over the territory. His sons were taken prisoners and lodged at **Shrirangapattana** where they were ultimately put to death by the British.

The **Holavanahalli** family was founded by Baire Gowda, said to be one of those that settled at Avati during the 15th century. This chiefdom was soon taken over by the chief of Magadi who gave it away to his own brother **Ankana Gowda.**

The dispossessed chief joined the Sira court where he was well received and invested with an important command. His younger son however sought the help of the chief of Doddaballapur who captured **Holavanahalli** and placed the administration in the hands of the **Sanna Baiche Gowda.**

But within the next couple of years a Sira army attacked and captured Doddaballapur, The former chief, Baire Gowda, who had gone over to Sira court fell in the Siege and his eldest son **Dodda Baiche Gowda** was invested with the government of Holavanahalli with an increase of territory. Subsequent members of this family fortified Koratagere and extended their territories until they were finally dispossessed by **Haidar Ali of Mysore.**

The **Madhugiri** family or the Maddagiri line of chiefs arose in a similar manner and extended its territory over the northern parts of the district by fortifying Madhugiri, **Channarayanadurga** and such other strategic points.

In 1678 A.D., Madhugiri was captured by Dalavai Devaraja and the joint rulers named Rama Gowda and Timma Gowda were taken prisoners and conveyed to Shrirangapattana. However, they were later released and granted Midigeshi as an estate.

Founded by Erimada Nayaka, the Hagalavadi line of chiefs exercised power over a large portion of the present Tumakuru district for nearly 300 years from 1478 A.D. The credit for expanding their territories goes to Sali Nayaka, the second ruler who captured **Kandikere, Settikere, Honnavalli, Turuvekere** and such other places of strategic importance and also founded Chiknayakanhalli.

His grandson **Mudiyappa Nayaka-I** was also equally successful in extending his territories. The ninth ruler of this line, namely Mudiyappa Nayaka-II was a benign ruler who later gave up his throne to pursue his spiritual pursuits.

His son, Mudduveerappa Nayaka, earned the title Jung Bahadur for having successfully resisted the onslaughts of Salabat Jung and Dilawar Khan. The twelfth ruler Channabasappa Nayaka was captured and imprisoned by Haidar Ali at Shrirangapattana. Soon after his death in the prison the Hagalavadi Chiefdom was totally annexed to Mysore.

In 1638 A.D., under the command of Ranadulla Khan, the Bijapur army invaded the northern portions of this district. Along with the southern principalities of **Doddaballapur, Bangalore, Kolar and Hoskote, Sira** was placed under the charge of Shahji and for quite some time Malik Rihan was the governor of Sira. With the capture of **Bijapur in 1686 A.D.,** Aurangzeb established the Moghul supremacy in this region. Sira was made the capital of a

new province consisting of the seven paraganas of Sira, Basavapattana, Budihal, Doddaballapur, Hoskote, Kolar and Penukonda and was placed under the charge of a Subedar or Faujdar. Kashim Khan was the first **Subedar and Dilawar Khan (1724-56)** the last.

During this period Sira and its neighbourhood assumed considerable importance as a seat of administration and received royal patronage. Sheikh Farid for instance built a big mosque. Rustum Jung, who earned for himself the title of Bahadur built a fort and a petta.

During the same period parts of this district came to be annexed by the Wodeyars of Mysore in a phased manner as it were.

In 1650 A.D., **Kanthirava Narasaraja Wodeyar (1638-59)** made a beginning by acquiring Hebbur in Tumakuru taluk from immadi Kempe Gowda. By 1673 A.D., the kingdom of Mysore had been extended as far as Chiknayakanhalli in the north. This was followed by the conquests of **Chikka-Devaraja Wodear (1673-17)**.

He is said to have captured Jadakanadurga (which he named after himself as Chikka Devarayana Durga), Maddagiri, Midigeshi, Bijjavara, Channarayadurga and several other places, "By the end of his reign except for Sira and its immediate surroundings, rest of the Tumakuru district formed part of Mysore.

These areas too were taken during the period of Haidar Ali on his conquest of Sira in 1761 and the annexation of Hagalavadi in 1776. With the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799, this territory too passed into the hands of the British who restored it to the Wodeyars of Mysore, from which date the history of the district coincides with the history of the erstwhile Mysore State.

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SIDDHAGANGA

A famous centre for pilgrimage, Siddhaganga has a temple dedicated to Siddhalingeshwara on a hillrock which is held in high esteem by devotees. At the entrance of this temple six shrines can be seen. Near this temple, amidst scenic surroundings, stands a Veerashaiva Matha.

The Matha feeds thousands of students and pilgrims daily. This is one of the important educational centres. **Shivakumara Swami's** started with 500 children at his mutt. Today, seven lakh-plus students who studied there are doctors, lawyers and engineers. That was what Shivakumara Swami had dedicated his life to - the education of the poor and the marginalised. There was no bar based on caste, creed or religion.

His mutt is more like a monastery. There are nearly 9,000 children who study in the Siddaganga institutions every year. And he gives free accommodation, free food and free education. The hostels he has built look like buildings in the North Block, and how do you think free food is provided?

Decades ago, he would go around asking people to donate rice or grains or vegetables. At that time, this was a small mutt. Most of the development (of 100-plus educational institutions) has happened during Swamiji's lifetime. Once it became a routine and people realised what he promised and what he did at the mutt, they started giving food grains and other essentials every day willingly.

Today, if these 9000 children are fed, it is because villages around the mutt have organised themselves into providing for them. There are around 3,000 villages around here - Tumkur, Hassan and Bangalore (rural) districts. Everyday three villages send truck-loads of supplies - like vegetables and foodgrains and oil - to the mutt to be delivered in the mornings.

Different dates are fixed for different villages by people themselves. They give out of love, it has become a routine for them. And people of all religions, all castes give. Such was his aura and the respect they have for him.

He started his day with a prayer at 4am to his 'ishta linga,' a small areca-sized linga held in his palm. He prayed for an hour thrice a day and though there were half a dozen temples within the mutt premises - ancient ones, more than 500 years old - he never felt the need to go there and pray.

He did not disrespect the temples, but for him, his god was in his palm, his heart. The linga icon too was just an emblem used for concentration. There is no temple, no archaka (priest), no mediator between him and God. He lived by that until his last breath.

And he has done this day in and day out for 111 years. He was ordained (to become a monk at the mutt) by the age of 25, and he lived by these principles, shown to the world by his actions. He has never discriminated between religions and castes, and never gone by such Vedic norms of impurity of women during menstruation. Women are equal in all respects, and his mutt was open to children of all castes.

He was progressive, and while other religious seers may have wanted to forward their religion, he considered humanism more important than religion. Today, when I heard about his demise, I couldn't control my tears. But I'm

glad that even in his death, people are talking about what he did and what he lived for. Even in death, he is spreading Lingayat ideals further.

YADIYUR

Yadiyur was the home of a famous Veerashaiva spiritual teacher and author, Totada Siddhalinga. His samadhi stands today in the Siddhalingeswara temple which is built in Dravidian style. This temple has a Ratha (Procession car) with six stone wheels. A car festival takes place annually in March-April and lasts a fortnight. This is a pilgrimage centre for Lord Shiva's devotees.

Sri **Thontada Siddalinga Yathivarya** was a greatest Veerashaiva guru of 15th century who rekindled the **Lingayat Shaivism** movement started by the greatest Veerashaiva philosophers or Sharanas namely **Allama Prabhu, Basavanna**, the founder of the movement, and **Akka Mahadevi, Channabasavanna etc in 12th Century C.E.** by establishing Anubhava Mantapa.

It is the first religious parliament in the world whose literal meaning is "mansion of experience", and was an academy of mystics, saints and philosophers of the lingayat faith in the 12th century. It was the fountainhead of all religious and philosophical thought pertaining to the lingayat.

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Thontada Siddhalinga Yati Shivayogi (c.15th century, Post Shaivism Bhakti Movement) occupies a very important place in the Lingayat religious history. He was a great visionary who reestablished the tenets of Anubhavamantapa of the twelfth century by disseminating the philosophy of shatsthala and ascending the shoonya peetha made famous by **Allamaprabhu**.

Siddalinga's life and achievements have been recorded in the vachanas, narratives and inscriptions. It is an indication of his influence that there are many mutts, temples and tombs throughout the length and breadth of Karnataka.

Tontada Siddhesavara (or Siddhalinga Yati), a noted Shaiva saint and guru of King Virupaksha Raya II, started a revival. In 1560, another veerashaiva saint, **Virakta Tontadarya** made the life of Tontada Siddhesavara the central theme in his writing "Siddhesvara Purana".

Sri Siddalingeshwara Swamy a great revered Sharana Saint in the path of Lingayatha Shiva Sharana Parampare of diffusion of Thatva of Life called VACHANAS. He travelled far and wide preaching Sharana faith which is predominantly praying with **ISHTA LINGA** (atma linga). He is believed to have traveled in the whole country with a huge band of followers preaching Veerashaivism and principles of love, compassion and brotherhood.

He was not born out of Womb, appeared as a baby to Mallikarjuna and Jnanambe who had no hereditary successor. At his life time he had performed 12 years of penance at a garden (Thota) and hence recognized as **Thontada Siddalingeshwara Swamy**.

Haradanahalli of Chamarajanagar district was his birth place. Mallikarjuna was his father and Jnaanambe was his mother. Trading was the occupation of the family. Gosala Chennabasaveshwara was his guru.

Since He performed 12 years of penance at a garden belongs to Vokkaligara Nambiyana (Thota) and hence came to be known as Thontada Siddalingeshwara Swamy.

He visited Siddhagange, The Siddaganga matha or monastery is said to be founded by Sri Thontada Siddalingeshwara to spread Lingayatism. Sri Tontada Siddalingeshwara Yativarya made a revolutionary contribution to the development of **Siddaganga Mutt**.

Later he moved to Yediur and stayed there until the end of his life. Though Gosala Siddeshwara is considered to have established Siddaganga Mutt, Sri Sri Tontada Siddalingeshwara Yativarya is regarded as its first Head.

Most of the daily, monthly and annual rituals and the cart festival are since then held in his name. After few years he moved on to Yediuru on the banks of Nagini river and stayed at the stone mutt built by Chennaveerappa of Danivasa village.

He headed the Murugi Mutha and had a large following of disciples some of who wrote on Lingayat faith and philosophy. He conferred Niranjana status to Bolubasava and then attained liberation.

Hence Yediuru is deemed to be a seat of awakened spiritual consciousness. His major contribution was that he inspired his disciples to collect and compile and edit the vachana literature by Basava and others. Sri Sri Thontada Siddalinga Yati has contributed 701 vachanas.

They have Mahaalingaguru Shivasiddeshwaraprabhuve as his signature. They are contained in the volume Satsthala Jnaanaramritha. As the title indicates they define the feature of sathala – principle. He has written Epic

book titled “Shathsthala Jnaanasaramritha” containing 701 Vachanas (Poems) which are directing Sthalas (route) to attain Linga Ikya i.e. involvement for enlightenment or Salvation.

He travelled far and wide, preached eternal truth and performed many miracles for scores of people irrespective of their caste or creed. His life and values held by him demonstrated the divine powers attained by him to heal the sick and suffering. He is regarded as one of the greatest Saints of the Sharana Sect in the Hindu religion.

Yedyur Siddhalingeswara Temple is a very famous Hindu pilgrimage centre situated in Yedeyur Village, Kunigal Town of Karnataka State in India. It contains Nirvikalpa Shivayoga Samadhi of Tontada Siddalinga, a Great revered Veerashaiva Saint.

On the 7th Day of the commencement of the Hindu calendar (Ugadi), jathra is performed to mark the attaining of the Samadhi of Sri Siddhalingeswara. The temple has a large wooden Chariot (Ratha). The car festival is held on the 7th lunar day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra Masa (March-April).

Also At the basement of the main sanctum of yedyur temple, there is a small shrine of Sri Veerabhadra Swamy who also looked upon with great respect and worshipped by people, similar to Sri Siddhalingeswara Swamy.

Goravanahalli MahaLakshmi Temple

About 30Km from Tumakuru in Koratagere taluk there is a famous Lakshmi Temple whose idol is said to be self originated, there will be special poojas which will be performed on Fridays.

SIRA

About 50 kms from Tumakuru, Sira was founded by Rangappa Naik. Later, Sira was Conquered by Ranadullah Khan, a general in Bijapur army. After the conquest, Malik Hussain was appointed Sira's Governor.

After the Bijapur kingdom fell to Aurangzeb, Dilawar Khan was appointed governor of Sira. He then built a fine palace here which is said to have inspired the palaces of Bangalore and Srirangapatna.

He also laid out a beautiful garden that is said to have been the model for the Lalbagh Garden at Bangalore. Located in Sira is the **Juma Masjid** and the tomb of **Malik Rihan** Made from hewn stone, both these structures are fine examples of Saracenic architecture. Another monument worth seeing is the **Ibrahim Rauza** that contains many tombs. Built in the Hindu style of architecture, except for its minarets, this building has cornices and doorways with Hindu motifs.

TURUVEKERE

About 12 Km, South of the **Banasandra** railway station. Turuvekere was once an ‘Agrahara’ or ‘Rent Free Village’ granted to scholarly Brahmins in the 13th century A.D.

Turuvekere boasts of many fine Hoysala temples. The temple of Channakeshava is one of them. It was built by Mahadandanayaka Somanna who also built the famous Somnathpur temple.

The **Gangadhreshwara** temple at Turuvekere has a Shivalinga with serpent hoods carved in a single piece of stone and is considered an example of fine sculpting. This temple also has a bull finely carved in hornblend, which has retained its shine even today. To the east of the Gangadhreshwara temple is a large soapstone bell, the when tapped emits a metallic sound. The **Moole Shankareshwara** temple located in this village was built during the Hoysala rule in 1260 AD.

SIBI

Situated on the Tumakuru Sira Road at distance of 30 kms from Tumakuru, this village contains a beautiful temple of **Narasimha**. The terrakota and frescoes of this temple are of 18th century.

KAIDALA

Originally named Kridapura, Kaidala acquired its present name because of a supernatural incident believed to have taken place here, connected with the legendary sculptor Jakanchary. A flaw was pointed out in masterpiece by this sculptor by another young sculptor called Dankana.

This resulted in the senior sculptor cutting off his right hand. On building the Kaidala Keshava temple, Jakanchary's lost hand was restored and hence the name Kaidala (Kai means Hand in Kannada). To his great surprise, Jakanchary later found that Dankana was his own son.

This beautiful Keshava temple in the Dravidian style contains a 5 feet 6 inches tall figure of Channigaraya.

Aralaguppe

Is a place in Tumakuru district., 6 km from Banasandra railway station where there is a famous Kalleshwara temple in the Ganga-Nolamba style of the 9th century A.D. Its ceiling has wonderful dancing Shiva sculpture with musical accompanists and eight Dikpalas surrounding him with all their paraphernalia.

There is a **Chennakeshava temple** of the Hoysala style. The image of Vishnu in the Garbhagriha is magnificent. There are four Ganga temples at the place.

CONCLUSION

The **matha** tradition of Hinduism attracted royal patronage, attracting endowments to support studies, and these endowments established, states Hartmut Scharfe, what may be "the earliest case on record of a university scholarship". Some of these medieval era **mathas** of Hinduism in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, were for Vedanta studies, but some *mathas* from the 700 to 1000 CE period predominantly focussed on Shaivism, Vaishnavism, military, martial arts, music, painting or other fields of knowledge including subjects related to Buddhism and Jainism.

There is evidence, states Hartmut Scharfe, of *mathas* in eastern and northern India from 7th century CE onwards, such as those in Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh particularly in the Hindu holy city of Kashi, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha, but these are not from ancient temple inscriptions, but implied from traveller records (Chinese) who visited these regions.

The matha is a monastery, often with numerous students, many teachers and an institutionalized structure to help sustain and maintain its daily operations. Their organization is more sophisticated than an Ashrama or Gurukul which is usually boutique and caters to a smaller group of students.

A matha, like a college, designates teaching, administrative and community interaction functions, with prefix or suffix to names, with titles such as Guru, Acharya, Swami and others. In Lingayat Shaiva mathas for example, teachers are Gurus, the administrative functions the responsibilities of Acharyas, and the community relations of Swami. A similar organization is found in Vaishnava mathas.

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