



Tanks and temples in Vijayanagara

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Abstract: Irrigation management in the medieval period was often uneconomical. Tanks and canals were neglected and abandoned, perhaps as often as they were constructed. During the Vijayanagara period great attention had to be paid for the construction of tanks. As a result, numerous tanks, of varied sizes came into existence, throughout their empire. The development of an efficient secular management of the Temple was also closely related to the irrigation program. In the 1380's after two centuries as an increasingly important shrine, the Tirupati temple came under the management of twelve trustees (sthanattar). In the course of the century of growth, from the 1450/s the function of the Temple management changed. This was an important factor in the irrigation programme. The relationship between the volume of resources which came into the Temple and the secular management of the Temple was an interdependent one. The increasing endowments of land and money in the late 15th and early 16th centuries must have resulted from the fact that management was efficient and responsible, as much as from the patronage of the Vijayanagara rulers. Krishnadevaraya declared that as the prosperity of the country was a source of profit to the state, the government should create irrigation facilities by the construction of tanks and the excavation of canals. To provide the country with tanks wells, and canals was believed to bring religious merit to the people. In an inscription of 1538-39 A.D. the excavation of tanks was included in the Saptasantas or the seven acts productive or religious merit.

Keywords : Tanks, Irrigation works, Cheruvulu, Temple Architecture, Civil architecture, Sculptures, Paintings.

Introduction

Irrigation management in the medieval period was often uneconomical. Tanks and canals were neglected and abandoned, perhaps as often as they were constructed. During the Vijayanagara period great attention had to be paid for the construction of tanks. As a result, numerous tanks, of varied sizes came into existence, throughout their empire. The development of an efficient secular management of the Temple was also closely related to the irrigation program. In the 1380's after two centuries as an increasingly important shrine, the Tirupati temple came under the management of twelve trustees (sthanattar). In the course

of the century of growth, from the 1450/s the function of the Temple management changed. This was an important factor in the irrigation programme. Vijayanagara kings were great builders. During this period many fortresses, palaces and temples were constructed. Temples built during this period are well known for their size. Details of decoration, sculpture and painting. The Vijayanagara temples built in their entirety are found in the Rayalaseema region in the places of Tadipatri, Lepakshi, Penukonda, Kadiri. Pushpagiri Mangapuram, Srisailam, Tirumala Tirupati, Kalahasti, Tiruchanur, Ahobilam, an Agrahara Garden a Tank and a Temple.



Tanks: One of the main branches of this aqueduct supplied water to the geometrically thrilling Stepped Tank within this area. In fact the very discovery of the Stepped Tank was due to this branch of aqueduct leading to particularly every stone is earmarked for this purpose and some bears even 'sketches' by its architects. The purpose of this tank is not very sure, mostly it was used during the religious ceremonies by the royals. Two bathing pavilions of the Royal Centre – the Queen's Bath & the Octagonal Bath – are popular for its architectural merits. The Queens bath is a plan looking building from outside. But the interior is elaborate with a giant tank at the center and overlooking balconies projecting to the tank. The corridor around with its arches, domes and the protruding balconies makes it look more like to a palatial structure than a bath. A water channel encircling the building acts as the means to feed water as well as a barrier from intrusion. A large open verandah made of cubical pillars supporting the beams runs around this octagonal tank. Another interesting structure is the Stepped Tank of Malapannanagudi, a village on the way to Hampi. Tanks are an integral part of temple architecture. They served both ceremonial and functional purposes. Most of the temple of Hampi has tanks a constructed in its near vicinity. The Manmatha Tank near Virupaksha temple is by and large still functional. Temple tanks of the Krishna Temple and the Vittala Temple have elaborate pavilions attached to it. The central podiums of these tanks were used to place the images of the God & Goddess during the boat festival part of the annual temple celebration. The temple tank part of the Achyutraya's temple is a place to observe the tank architecture

in its close proximity. The tank is empty and also in a much ruined stage. Nevertheless the Archeological Survey of India is repositioning the scrambled pavilion structures around the tank. On the steps around the tank one can see the chains of carvings. Especially that of elephants one following the other. The entrance to the tank is decorated with the typical Vijayanagara style pillars. Friezes of rampant mythical beats and other mythological themes decorate the pillars. This tank also known as Lokakpavani tank is located at the end of the Courtesan's Street, close to the Varaha Temple.

Irrigation works

The Vijayanagar architects were experts in constructing dams and canals. According to Sewell, Krishnadeva Raya 'constructed in 1521 the dam and channel at Korragal and the Basavanna channel both of which are still in use and of great value to the country'. Krishna Devaraya constructed a huge tank near the southern entrance to Nagalapur Both Paes and Nuniz mention the construction of a great dam near the capital, with the aid of a Portuguese engineer. For the supply of water to the city many channels were constructed. A stone channel goes up from the throne platform to the walls of the citadel, a branch from it reaches the Zenana enclosure and supplies water to queen's bath. A tub, made of a single block of granite measuring $41^{1/2}$ feet in length 3 feet in width and $2 \frac{3}{4}$ in thickness was found there. Abdur Razzak says. " In the king's palace one sees numerous running streams and canals formed of chiseled stone polished and smooth. Sewell states that 'Remains of these are still to be seen not far from the 'Ladies Bath'..... there was a long through that conveyed the water and on each side were depressions which may have been hollowed for the



reception of round vessels of different sizes, intended to hold water for household use." All these show the existence of irrigation architecture. The interesting examples of street architecture can also be seen in Hampi Opposite to the temple of Hampi there is a street 35 yards wide and 800 yards long.

Cheruvulu

A record from Kurayi, Palmaner taluk of Sadasiva dated 1482 (=1559 A.D) refers to the right of utilizing the available water facility in cheruvulu (*cheru-vlu*), Kumtalu, mutulu and etalu for irrigating the land granted as *archana-vritti*. The record from Tirumala in 1409 A.D. Another record from the same place in 1457 A.D. mentions undertaking given by the *sthanattar* of the temple to *koyilkelvi* Emberumanar-jiyar who granted 5000 panam for desilting the lake at Avilali. Rayasam kondamarasa, Krishnaraya's minister, was two or three tanks constructed in the province of Udayagiri.

Some reference to the levy and collection of *nirkuli* by nayakas in Chandragiri and Chittoor. Tiruvenkata Chirukkan by name, supervised the digging and maintenance of canals and channels in the department of Varigripakarana or water works. This contradicts the traditional view of N. Venkataramanayya and Butron Stein that there was no department of irrigation or public works in the Vijayanagara domain. The few instances cited above afford ample proof of the interest taken by the individuals made for irrigation consisted of 1) investing money by spending on desilting of the existing lakes or assigning the income from taxes towards the same, 2) by the construction of new lakes and bringing fresh land under cultivation, and 3) by excavating new channels or renovating the old ones to ensure regular supply of water to the areas all along the

banks of the channels. We find also instances where a chain of irrigation systems by which lakes were connected with rivers and the lake connected among themselves. We may not also the solitary instance of the bounding of the river and creating a reservoir out of that. The term *pasipattam* also denote a tax levied on similar rights as is evident from an inscription from Tirumala referring to the grant of *eri-min-pattam* by the villagers for the rendering of *vedaparayanam* to god Tiruvengadamudaiyan, this inscription is dated in 1433 A.D.

Temple Architecture

The city of Vijayanagar appears to have been as much a capital city as city of temples and a number of interesting temples may still be found in the deserted city. The temple of Pampapati dedicated to Sri Virupaksha is the most sacred. Although the temple is said to have been built prior to the foundation of the city, many additions were made to it by Hari Hara I and Krishnadeva Raya. The temple of Vitthalasamy is a fine example of Vijayanagar style. In the opinion of Fergusson, it 'shows the extreme limit in florid magnificence to which the style advanced'. Begun in the time of Deva Raya II its construction was continued even in the reign of Achyuta Raya, but was never entirely finished. It stands on a rectangular enclosure 538 by 310 feet with three towers on each of the north, south and east sides. The Mahamandapa and Kalyana Mandapa are impressive halls with high pillars. The Mahamandapa has 56 pillars each 12 ft high hewn out of solid blocks of granite. Kalyana Mandapa is an open pavilion with 48 pillars. There are five other structures mostly of the nature of pillared halls within the enclosures. There is also a stone car, carved out of granite with



movable wheels. According to Fergusson, "It has all the characteristics of the Dravidian style". The Hazara Ramaswamy temple is 'one of the most perfect specimens of Hindu temple architecture in existence'. The temple is a small one measuring 200' x 300' from north to south. The inner walls of the temple are decorated in relief with scenes from Ramayana. A deserted temple at Tadpatri to which reference has been made by Fergusson has the rich and lavish magnificence of Vijayanagar style " As the treatment of the two gopurams of this temple indicates, this composition surpasses perhaps even Vitthalasamy temple. The perpendicular part of the gopuram is covered with the most elaborate sculpture cut with exquisite sharpness and precision". Other important temples having the characteristics of the Vijayanagar style are Achyuta Raya temple, and Malyaventa temple.

The Vijayanagar kings were responsible for large scale additions to important religious establishments of the south, Temples were provided with huge towers and pillared halls (Mandapas). Among the mandapas that may be ascribed to Vijayanagar period, the most important are in (iii) in the temples of Varadaraja perumal and Ekambaranatha at Kanchipuram and (iv) in the Jambukesvara temple at Virijipuram. Of these, the mandapa at Vellore has been described by Percy Brown to be ' the richest and the most beautiful structure of its kind'. The Vijayanagar kings were zealous in raising tall and massive gopurams forming entrance to the courts in order to display their power and pomp and their devotion to religion. Among these the southern gopuram in the temple of Ekambaranatha of Kanchipuram built by Krishnadeva Raya is certainly the most

important. It is a colossal structure rising up in ten storeys to a height of 188 feet, and is highly decorative. A part of the northern tower at Childambaram and a new tower at Kalahasti were constructed by Krishnadeva Raya. As the most of these gopurams were built by the Rayas of Vijayanagar, these gopurams came to be known as 'Rayar Gopurams'. In Vijayanagar there is a Jain temple called the 'Gangitti' temple which was constructed by Irugappa dandanatha, the Jain minister of Hari Hara II. There is a beautiful monolithic stambha in front of the shrine. The figure of a Jain Thirthanakara with three superimposed umbrellas above his head and a flywhisk on either side is engraved upon the stone lintel over the main doorway. He also built the 'Sangita manatapa' in front of the shrine of the temple at Jinakanchi. On the base of the pillars of the manadapa are carved lions, plants, creepers, twisting snakes, dancing girls, etc. In one of the pillars the figure of Irugappa is carved in high relief.

Civil architecture: In the ruins of the city of Vijayanagar a few secular buildings can be seen intact. Nothing remains of the palace except the two impressive basements of large and imposing structure. Of these one is known as the kings' Audience Hall and the other is called Thronge platform. But Paes called it as the House of Victory erected by Krishnadeva Raya to commemorate his conquest of Orissa. The original buildings seem to have been a pillared pavilion rising up in three spacious stages diminishing as they go up, embellished by bold and chaste mouldings and string courses. Over the platform, which is reached by elaborate flights of steps there may still be seen sockets of six rows of pillars ten in each



which supported the superstructure, now entirely gone.

A few buildings can be seen more or less in a fair state of preservation. They are the Lotus Mahal, the Elephant stables and the two tower-like structures called watch – towers of the Zanana recessed corners and in two storeys. The arches and their piers seem to be modeled on Indo Islamic pattern. The Elephant stable is more emphatically Islamic appearance and in character. The Islamic ranges of arches and domes have been blended with the indigenous balconies and the square turret-like superstructures in a harmonious and organic manner.

Scalptures

Among the seulptures of Vijayanagar an enormous statue of God Vishnu in his avatar as Narasimha (the man-lion), is an interesting monument. It is hewn out of a single boulder of granite. In the Malayavanta temple also there is an image of Rama, carved upon a huge boulder. The temple contains some fine sculptures. One of the most interesting among them is the figure of two serpents approaching the sun or moon, representing a solar or lunar eclipse. The Achyta Raya temple contains beautiful sculptures. The different incarnations of Vishnu are engraved on the gate way of the temple. Most of the gopurams and mandapas of Vijayanagar contain images of wonderful workmanship.

Paintings

The religious impulse of that period inspired the people to have beautiful paintings in their temples. The outer walls and ceilings of the temples were adorned with paintings. The Hazara Ramasamy temple at Hampi contains some interesting paintings illustrative of the life of Rama. The Ramasamy temple at Kumbakonam contains one thousand Fresco Paintings descriptive of the life of Rama. In the Vardhamana temple at

'Tirupparuttikkunram' there are a number of colour paintings illustrative of the incidents in the lives of three Jain Thirthankaras. Paes says that in the bed chamber of the palace of Vijayanagara. there were designed in painting all the ways of the life of men, who had been there including the Portuguese so that the king's wives could understand the manner in which each one lived in his own country. Later the Jesuit painters received great encouragement at the hands of Vijayanagar Kings. The best specimens of Vijayanagara paintings are found at Veerabhadraswami temple at Lepakshi, near Hindupur in Anantapur District. The roof of the Mahamandapa is covered with life-size paintings depicting scenes from the *Ramayan and Mahavarata*. The themes of the paintings include Arjuna's penance, Parvati's marriage.

Conclusion

The epigraphically evidence discussed above drives home the point that maintenance of tanks in the Vijayanagara Dynasty was given utmost importance particularly from the Vijayanagara period onwards. People of all ranks as well as institutions like temples evinced great interest in maintaining tanks and thereby brought large extenst of land under cultivation. Permanent arrangements were made for the upkeep of tanks by way of granting land, villages, tax-incomes, etc. to those who were entrusted with this responsibility. Consequently a good number of tanks excavated during the medieval period continue to serve the purpose even till today. Hence it can be said that the temple during the during the Vijayanagaa period was not only a place of worship but also the venue where the socio-cultural life was reflected. The temple has its own administrative setup supervised by a board of trustees, namely sthanapati, pujari, and bhandagarika or a



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