

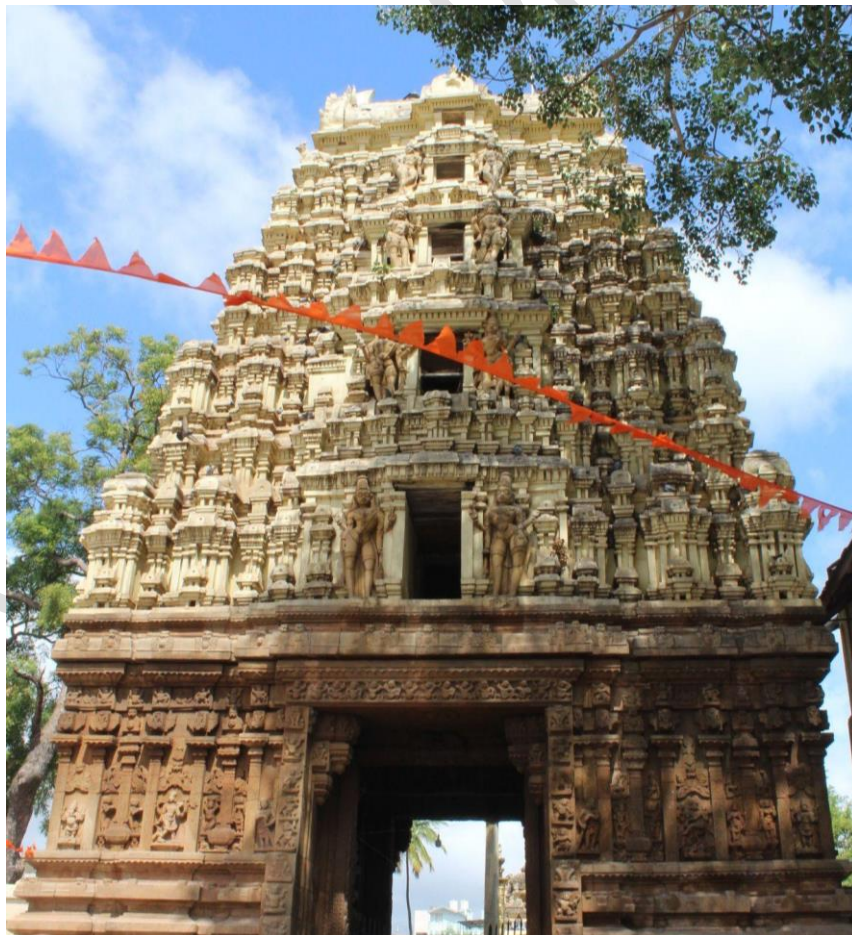
Were Temples Just a Place of Worship ???? - A Food for Thought

- Rajeshwari M, Bengaluru.

Art and architecture have never stopped to amaze me. The temples in Kolar unfolded a new world. Kolar houses a number of temples of which many are protected and further expanded under the Vijayanagara Rule. Though there are so many temples, each is unique in its own way and has its own flavour. They show a beautiful amalgamation of various architecture and culture. They stand as an ideal example of coexistence. This made me wonder and arrive at the question “Were Temples Just a Place of Worship?”. Come explore with me as we take a sneak peek to the two temples of the mesmerising world of Temples in Kolar.

Someshwara Temple Kolar

It was built by the Chola kings in the 14th CE and further embellished under Vijayanagara. The *Mahadwara* and the *gopura* are built under Vijayanagara.(Fig.1)



(Fig.1)

As you enter from here you come across a *Mukha Mantapa* consisting of beautifully ornate pillars.(Fig.2 and Fig.3)



(Fig.2)

(Fig.3)

In between the entrance and the hall, towards the right is an elegant Vasanta Mantapa. It has four pillars each housing a variety of sculptures including that of Krishna as Gopala, swan, animals and the others. The ceiling is intricately decorated with *Ashta dikpalakas* (gods of 8 directions). The smooth finishings, the perfection in them makes me wonder about the techniques of understanding the art and nuance of construction of those days without our today's called modern technology.



(Fig.4)



(Fig.5)

On the south-west corner of the temple complex is an eye-catching Kalyana Mantapa. The speciality of this mantapa is that outside pillars are in the Vijayanagara style whereas the inside pillars resemble the Hoysala style of architecture and you can observe the difference in the type of stone used for construction in both the cases. It's mind blowing to see how harmoniously they exist (Fig.6 and Fig.7).



(Fig.6)



It's just not possible to take your eye off the detailing. They house a variety of sculptures of various Gods and Goddesses, *Ganas*, musicians, instruments, dance and what not !!!

A careful examination of these sculptures can give us insights to what kind of art forms existed during their period, what were the traditions, what is the difference that is seen when compared to the outer Vijayanagara structures and thus help delineate the journey through time.

(Fig.7)



(Fig.8)



(Fig.9)

The sculptures in Fig.8 and Fig.9 depict dancing women. Fig.8 is a part of the Vijayanagara Architecture while Fig.9 is a part of the Hoysala Architecture. Though they are found in the same temple, one does not copy the other. The costume and accessories differ thus telling us about the then prevailing traditions, acting as a visual source of documentation. Their coexistence is something that helps me understand and appreciate art better.

Ramalingeshwara Temple, Avani

The Ramalingeshwara group of temples is located in Avani town of the Kolar district and was built during 10th-century by Nolamba dynasty construction which was partially renovated later by the Chola dynasty and then by the Vijayanagara kings. Temple has four major shrines, one each for Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna.

The outside of the temple is decorated with pillars which are in the style of Vijayanagara architecture Fig.10, while there is an influence of Chola on the inside of the shrines (Fig.18 and Fig.19).



(Fig.10)



(Fig.11)



The sculptures in Fig.11 and Fig.12 are the *Gavakshi* (Window) of the shrines. They are the Vijayanagara additions to the already existing shrines which are seen to be of the Chola architecture. It is such an artistic way of decorating the window space yet fulfilling its purpose.

(Fig.12)

(Fig.13)

The Fig.13 is the royal Vijayanagara emblem that is etched at many places in the temple. It consists of Varaha (boar), sun, moon and a dagger in a vertical position.





(Fig.14)



(Fig.15)



(Fig.16)



(Fig.17)

Fig.14 to Fig17 show the sculptures of various Gods and Goddesses. Fig.14 depicts a dancing Ganesha, Fig.15 is the Gopala, Fig.16 depicts Garuda carrying Vishnu while in Fig.17 Goddess Kali is seen holding *Trishula* and snake. Though each shrine has a Shiva linga on the inside, the outer walls are decorated with various other deities. A Nandi is found opposite Shiva and each shrine houses *Natya Mantapa* with 4 pillars (Fig.18, Fig.19, Fig.20). Each pillar is ornate with music and dance sculptures in a series. It is evident that there was a practice of devadasis offering *Natya seva* at that temple premise. This indicated that these temples also acted as the sources of art and knowledge systems.



(Fig.18)



(Fig.19)



(Fig.20)



(Fig.21)



(Fig.22)



(Fig.23)



(Fig.24)

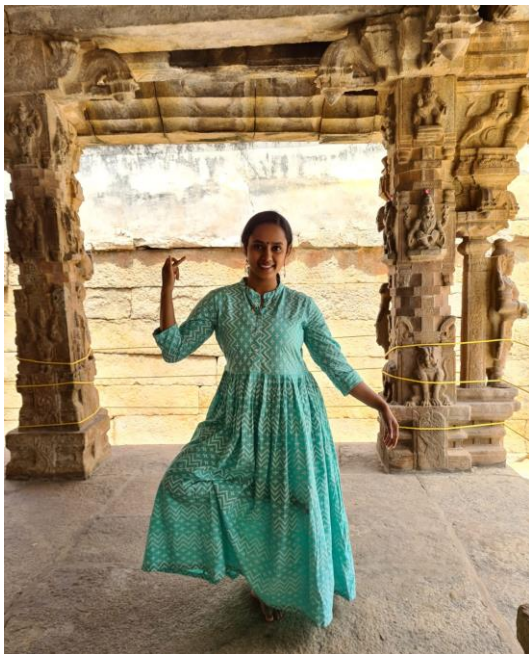
The centre of each of the mantapa is decorated with Navagraha sculptures (Fig.21). The very sight of these decorated pillars and the beautiful ambience that is created by various instruments makes you get on your feet and dance (Fig.22, Fig.23, Fig.24).

When we compare the sculptures from Fig.14 to Fig17 with sculptures from Fig.22 to Fig.24 you can spot a lot of difference in the kind of stone and tools used for sculpting, the nature of sculpture, the type of patterns, postures and movements throwing light on history and the traditions along with socio-cultural practices of their time.

In all these temples, whatever may be the main deity of the temple, you see a number of other Gods and Goddesses sculpted in the temple complex. When neither Gods nor our ancestors

differentiated, wonder why we did.! It is clear that time after time when new kingdoms come they have tried to preserve and improve the existing structures without disturbing, modifying or demolishing them. In fact they glorified them much more but without losing their identities. Sometimes it makes me wonder! From when did we as a society start all these bifurcations, from when did Ego grow so much into us that we have forgotten to appreciate Art as is and not just when done by us. Probably that's why these temples were built the way they are, not just for the purpose of worship but to pass on knowledge, to document for future generations to come and keep reminding them of how it was, how it has become and how it should be. Isn't Indian Art, history, tradition and culture a true marvel in every sense!!

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About the Author : Rajeshwari M is a practitioner and student of Bharatanatyam for the past 18 years. She has been trained under Guru Dr Malini Ravishankar and is currently under the guidance of Guru Dr Janaki Rangarajan. She is also training in the aspects of Natyashastra under the guidance of Guru Smt Deeksha Shastry and Guru Smt Namita Rao. She completed Masters in Bharatanatyam from Jain (Deemed to be University). Apart from practising and teaching the art form she continues to associate herself with research programs. **She is also an Internee in Nrityashilpa Yatra - A temple study programme conducted by Noopurabhramari.**