

## Pancharamas-A tourist attraction of Andhra Pradesh

### Suggestions for sustainability

D.Brahmeswar

#### Abstract

The region of Andhra is a cradle of Saivism for many centuries in the past. The region received its name from Tri Lingas which are considered as SriSailam, SriKalahasti and Sri Kaleswaram. The land is famous for the Pancharamas, Amara Rama or Amaravathi in Guntur District, Draksharama and Kumara Rama of East Godvari District, Ksheerarama and Bhimarama in west Godavari district. It is believed that when Tarakasura became a menace to the world, KumaraSwami broke the linga into five peices which fell at five places and installed by the devathas for protecting the land and people. The temples were constructed during 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries in the chalukyan style of architecture with tall gopuras and high prakara walls. These temples are attracting pilgrims and are at present great tourist spots. This paper was aimed at the improvements to be made by government for the sustainability of tourist inflow. These temples are rich in sculptures and are to be protected by the department of history and Archaeology. All the temples are to be renovated where ever needed. The communication facilities are to be improved. The inscriptions which are neglected so far are to be protected and documented for future studies and researches. Facilities are to be provided for the stay of tourists of different categories to attract Indian and Foreign tourists. The temples rich legacy is to be publicized in national and international journals. Special care has to be taken about environmental issues like cleaning the ponds and maintaining gardens. The spiritual interests of the people are to be taken care of by not disturbing the worship patterns of the temples. These temples are going to centers of cultural heritage in future and help in the sustainability of tourism for Andhra Pradesh.

The region of Andhra is a cradle of Saivism for many centuries in the past. The period of Sathavahanas and Ikshwakus witnessed patronage to both Hindu and Buddhist religions. Some of the names of the kings like Sivasree, Siva Skandha Varma, and Veera purusha Datta clearly indicate this. But the Saivite Philosophy reached its peak during the Chalukyan regime. The Chalukyas of Badami and Chalukyas Vengi constructed many Siva Temples in Badami, Pattadakal, Alampur and in Coastal Andhra. The region is known as Trilinga Desa, according to Puranas that is the land of three Siva Temples namely Sri Sailam, Sri Kalahasti and Sri Kaleswaram. The language of the people derived its name from Trilinga and became famous as Telugu. Most of the people of this land got influenced by the Saivite philosophy. It is not an exaggeration to tell that there is no village or town without a Siva temple. The present paper deals with the Pancharamas, which are considered as tourist attraction for all seekers of salvation. This paper mainly concentrates on the areas of improvement.

Amaravathi is one of the Famous Temples in Pancharama Kshetras in Andhra Pradesh present in Guntur district, on the bank of Krishna River. Whereas remaining four are present in Godavari districts. Bus facility is so good, as all buses can go up to the temple. According to mythology, Amara Lingeshwara swami is worshiped by Lord Indra here. The linga is the biggest of all the Pancharamas. The temple is old and in 3 circles with numerous temples within the compound. Bala Chamundeswari Matha is the chief deity here. Amaravathi is famous for the Buddhist aramas and Chaityalayas and the Buddhist stupa of first century which housed the tooth relic of Buddha is present for the devotees. The museum and the kalachakra buildings attract world tourists to this holy place. The river Krishna is satisfying the thirst of the tourists by providing the opportunity for boating and water sports.

The temple in Draksharamam is a holy place, a small town near Ramachandrapuram. The Draksharamam Temple is one of the Temples in Pancharama Kshetras. Draksharamam Temple, very massive and has 3 circles as compounds. This temple is also under control of archaeological survey of India. The temple is a marvelous expression of Chalukyan style of architecture and sculpture, this temple is hailed as one of the holiest places of India and is believed that Veda Vyasa came here from Varanasi and offered his prayers here, Lord Shri Rama worshiped Lord Shiva here followed by Lord Surya and Lord Indra. Manikyamaba Devi, one of 18 shaktipeethas is present here. Vemulavada Bhima kavi, famous Telugu writer, got boons from Bhimeswara swami here. The lord here is a bhoga murthy and his consort Manikyamba is one of the Ashtadasa Sakthi Peethas. Here till recently, the archakas used to sing many sringara keerthanas as a part of their daily rituals as Sayanaseva. But the present generations of priests are not trained to sing those songs. It is believed that whenever there was danger to the holy places one or the other members of the temple used to protect the riches and statues by different means. The lord here is a yoga murthy as well as bhoga murthy.

Someshwara Swamy temple in Gunupudi near Bhimavaram is one of the famous Temples in Pancharama Kshetras. The temple looks as new one, and a holy lake (Chandra-kundam) is present in front of the temple. It is believed that Lord Chandra got obviate his sins here by worshipping Lord Shiva. Specialty of this temple is that the colour of the linga changes in accordance with the changing shades of the moon. The colour of the linga will be white on a full moon day and it will be black on the no moon day. The temple is a two storied temple and unlike the other temples the size of the lingam is small and in the ground floor and in the upstairs we can see the temple of Goddess Annapurna. The tall gopuram is a special attraction. This temple was also liberally donated by the people and now it is under the supervision of endowments department.

Ksheerarama temple is located in Palakollu in west Godavari district and is at a distance of nine k.m. from the commercial center of Narsapuram. Ksheera Rama

Lingeshwara Swamy Temple enjoyed royal patronage. Being one of the temples in Pancharama Kshetras, it even today receives a lot of patronage from the local devotees besides the donations given by the people of past generations. This region is also called Upamanyu puram as sage Upamanyu did his penance here and created a pala kolar, the lake of milk here. According to mythology, Ksheera Rama Lingeshwara Swamy gave Sudarshana chakra to Lord Vishnu here pleased by the penance of Lord Vishnu. Parvati is the Goddess here. The Sivalinga at this place is installed and established by Lord Venkateswara. Belief is that, staying one day in Ksheerarama is equivalent to staying one year in Varanasi. The temple tower is one of the tallest among the temple towers in Andhra Pradesh. The height of the temple is 120ft and 9 floors constructed during Chalukyan period by Chalukya Bheema. The construction took place during 9th century.

Kumara Bhimeswara Swamy temple is present in Samarlakota. This Temple is also one of the Temples in Pancharama Kshetras. It's nearly 20 km in distance from Kakinada and 1 kilometer distance from Samarlakota railway station. It's an old temple and needs a lot of care from the endowments department and from archaeological survey of India as a heritage center. This temple looks like a replica of the Draksharamam temple. Here on the eastern side there is a beautiful pushkarini with lot of lotus flowers. The temple had three prakaras and the outer gopuras are testimonies to the glorious past. The temple now is under the supervision of archaeological survey of India. The temple's specialty is the small shrine of Kalabhairava and devotees themselves can perform poojas here. Inside the third prakara we can see the two storied temple and the sanctum sanctorum having one ground floor entrance and one first floor entrance. The lingam here was installed by Kumara Swami and considered as a holy shrine. This temple received royal and zamindars patronage in the past. Just like Draksharamam, we can see a small temple here as a model shrine.

The pancharama kshetras are unique for the people of Andhra Pradesh. By God's grace all the Pancharamas are in the present Andhra Pradesh. There is a lot of scope for the development of these temples. Each temple enjoyed a rich legacy and history. All the temples share certain features. All the Siva lingams are from the same type of stone. The pancharama kshetras are the treasure of Andhra people. One should feel proud for the rich legacy. But the present status of conditions needs a lot of involvement from the side of the Government, the endowments department and the tourism department. A tour to the Pancharamas should give the tourist a feeling of holiness and enjoyment and should become an experience to be cherished as a sweet memory. Many suggestions were given by the tourists as well as local residents for the improvement of the sites. The pancharama kshetras need a lot of care and concern from the authorities and can be developed as tourist centers.

### General Suggestions for all the Pancharamas

1. The importance of the Pancharama Kshetras has to be publicized for the improvement of the temple. Present generation is a generation of information technology and the temple authorities should maintain a Pancharama official web site should provide facilities for online booking of accommodation and journey.
2. It is the duty of the department of endowments to maintain school of Vedic learning so that efficient and committed generation of priests will evolve to take the responsibility of maintaining our culture and taking it to the future generations.
3. No need to say that the authorities have to concentrate on providing accommodation to the visitors on the model of Thirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. The visitors' accommodation facilities themselves are great advertisement for improving the inflow of tourists.
4. It is the duty of the authorities to provide security to the inmates as well as visitors and hence with the help and guidance of the police department the Pancharama Kshetras should become a crime less centers.
5. The authorities should concentrate on the aspects of environment and eco friendly aspects of improvement and should take steps to punish those who damage the atmosphere and cause pollution. One important suggestion is to grow flower gardens and parks as places of recreation and relaxation to the tourists.
6. It is customary in every pilgrim's center to offer meals and to provide Prasad after darshan. This provision must be made known to people who come from all over India. Web technology help may be taken to attract public private participation through online services.
7. Providing proper toilets and sanitation facilities is a must to attract more number of tourists to any pilgrim center.
8. It is a wonder that when all the aramas are having large compounds and vacant places for future development, the temple areas are not under the control of the authorities. Provision should be made for creating large meadows and flower gardens so that the trip gives a pleasant experience to the pilgrims.
9. The endowments department in collaboration with the tourism industry should organize special package tours from different places of the country as the town is well connected with rail and roadways. The local leaders should take the development of the temple as a challenge so that the past glory is restored.

Amaravathi receives a lot of tourist inflow during the month of Karthika. The arrangements made by the authorities are not at all sufficient at that time. The tourists expect good food, accommodation, site seeing facilities, a good library for quenching their thirst of knowledge, good information center and good connectivity to the cities. Some of the observations are as under.

1. The temple needs to be renovated in such a way that it retains its ancient style of architecture and sculpture. The recent renovations are more for the beautification of the temple according to the latest trends in construction. The pradakshina padha has been remodelled in such a way that the parikrama itself may bring the spiritual upliftment and mental peace to the devotees. It may be suggested that a school of sculpturing and ancient temple construction may be established as a branch of the temple.
2. The temple is attached to the Krishna River very much. Modernizing the temple by providing clean water Ghats, and the places and rooms for privacy of the tourists, sanitation facilities, provision for performing special rituals all through the year, availability of temple priests for providing the required services to the devotees at the rates fixed by the temple authorities, and the maintenance of cleanliness are some of the areas for improvement.
3. The river Krishnaveni provides a lot of scope for developing water sports and boating facilities. This needs maintenance of launches, boats and divers also in times of emergency. But precaution has to be taken that in the process of attracting tourists and developing tourism potential the sanctity and holiness of the place should not be sacrificed.
4. The celebration of kala chakra in 2006 by the Buddhist Missionaries has put Amaravathi on the map of the world. For that function Buddhist monks from all over the world came here. But at present we have to accept that the place is not suitable to attract tourists of the world who want to get training in Indian spirituality. There is every scope that we can start centers of Indian learning in Amaravathi so that just like the Nalanda and Vallabhi universities of Gupta period, this place also will become a center of research and learning.
5. The museum which was maintained by the archaeological survey of India has to concentrate on the appointment of guides and see to it that whoever come there should feel the glory of the place.
6. Improving the already existing connectivity to Amaravathi is an essential expectation from the authorities. In the present uncertain situation of constructing the capital city in and around Vijayawada and Guntur let us hope that Amaravathi comes into the limelight.

### **Draksharamam-Bhimeswara Swamy temple**

Bhimeswara Swamy Temple being an ancient holy temple with its mythological and historical importance draws lot of pilgrims round the year. There is an imminent need to improve existing infrastructure and provide additional facilities for the pilgrims to feel good and plan come back visits.

1. Provide proper shaded footpaths from all the three entrances of the temple as there is a considerable distance from the gopurams on all the north, south and west directions to the main temple. The walk way over the bridge over Saptagodavary teerth also need be provided with roofing.
2. Pradakshina / Parikrama walkways on all sides of garbhalaya of Lord Bhimeswara is not covered with any roofing and during rainy season and in hot summer days, it is very difficult to negotiate the parikrama, most important of rituals. It is very essential to make necessary provision and arrange to cover this path.
3. Saptagodavari as popularly called is the pushkarini for Lord Bhimeswara Swamy's temple. It is strongly believed that a bath in this pushkarini will cure one from all evils and curses. Water is usually stagnant and not a free flowing river like. As such proper cleaning of the pond and frequent change of water is essential to keep the health of this holy teertham. This pushkarini is has 3 bathing ghats in total. Strict measures are required to be taken to stop polluting the river with detergents like unwanted chemical pollutants to keep this pious teertham safe and clean.
4. Steps leading to the lake for taking bath are narrow and steep. These need to corrected for improving safety of pilgrims

### **Bhimaramam- Someshwara Swamy temple**

The temple of Someshwara Swamy is unique in its own way. It was installed by Moon God. The people are rich and prosperous. As such the temple of Someshwara Swamy is receiving the patronage both from the leaders as well as the people. But there are some suggestions for the improvement of the temple.

1. The literature about the history and culture of the temple is not available to the visitors. The devotees may be provided with a temple book shop in which they can purchase the required material. Researches have to be encouraged in the local universities about the historical background of the place.
2. As is the case with all the other aramas, the pushkarini of the temple has to be renovated and used only for the purpose of pilgrims and temple activities.
3. The renovation and beautification of the temple resulted in the loss of inscriptional evidences and measures are to be taken to protect the rich source materials of local history.

### **Ksheeraramam-Ksheera Ramalingeshwara Swamy temple**

Ksheera rama Lingeshwara temple, one of the pancharama kulottara temples, has received royal patronage in the past and at present is receiving a lot of appreciation from the public and is attracting thousands of visitors from all over the country. Palakollu town is a commercial town.

1. The surrounding areas of the temple were occupied by business organizations. The temple street is narrow and there is no place even a four wheeler to enter the temple. The authorities have to take severe action to make the area clean and open. The gateway of the temple was narrow and not attractive. During the festival of Karthika there used to be a large crowd and getting into the temple itself was a herculean effort.
2. The pala kolanu or the pushkarini which is called Chandra kundam is not visible. It has been occupied by the business people who constructed buildings. The authorities for the endowments department is to restore the pushkarini or renovate it or construct one for the purpose of temple activities.
3. The tourism department should organize excursions and one day tours to the temple as the town is surrounded by many tourist attractions like narsapuram, Antharajapuram and Perupalem Beach. There should be regular trips to the temple from the nearby Dindi resorts.
4. The temple lands are to be restored back to the temple and those who are enjoying the riches of the temple without any connection to the temple services may be sued in a court of law.

### **Kumararama-kumara Bhimeswara Swamy temple**

The temple has a special feature of an ornate corridor and many independent shrines. The temple of Kalabhairava is a special attraction as devotees themselves can perform the rituals. There is a large Siva Linga in the open courtyard, true to the Siva tattva the devotees are free to worship Siva with all ardent devotion. There is a small shrine which looks like a model shrine of the temple. There are many suggestions for the improvement of the temple.

1. Kumara Rama is amidst fields and the approaching road has to be improved also so that the devotees can come to the temple without any fear or hesitation.
2. The temple premises also are to be cleaned, beautified and a proper pradakshinapadma has to be constructed as the present condition of the campus and the first prakara is not good.
3. The temple premises are usually given for cinema shootings which is not advisable as the team who come to the shooting may desecrate the temple premises. They should decorate the temple for one day and the next day temple is left with a lot of garbage.

4. The pushkarini water is not pure and has to be renovated and reconstructed so that the water can be used for the temple purposes.
5. There is the need of a guide to the Kumararama as the historical and legendary importance of the Kshetra is not known to the local people.

On the whole, India is country of continuity and people lived here happily in the past and it is the duty of the leaders of present generation to see to the sustainability of our culture.