

Original Article

History of Mallikarjuna temple Sirichelma, Dist Adilabad, Telangana

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Sirichelma is one of the spiritual places in Adilabad district. There is a Mallikarjuna temple in the village. It was constructed in the period of Rastrakutas. There are three Garbagudies in the temple. A unique feature of this temple is that the Shiva Lingam has a natural depression (indentation) on its surface. There are many idols can be seen in the temple premises. There is a Bhuta Bhanjaka Hanuman Statue in the temple premises.

Footnotes: Idols, Saptamatrika, Choumukhi, Sanctuums, sunken.

Introduction :

Adilabad is one of the historically and geographically renowned regions in South India. This district is famous for its natural beauty, dense forests, waterfalls, and ancient temples. Since ancient times, many dynasties have ruled over this region, and during their reign, several temples were built. Among them, the Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple constructed in Sirichelma is particularly significant. One of the most ancient temples in the state of Telangana is the Sirichelma Mallikarjuna Shiva temple¹. It is located in the Ichoda Mandal of Adilabad district, about 17 km. from the mandal headquarters². The temple is constructed facing east, on the southern side of the village near a lake. During the Uttarayana period, in the month of Phalguna, for 15 days, the sun rays fall directly on the Shiva Lingam through the seven doorways, passing between the horns of Nandi. A unique feature of this temple is that the Shiva Lingam has a natural depression (indentation) on its surface. In front of the Lingam, there are two small Nandi idols—one with its eyes open and the other with its eyes closed. There is a compound wall surrounding the temple. Upon entering the temple through the east-facing main entrance, there is a Mandapa (pillared hall) directly ahead. In Mandapa (pillared hall), there is a large Nandi statue and Shiva Lingams. Inside the compound, outside the main temple, there are several other idols. To the right of the east-facing entrance, there is a sculpture of Bhuta Bhanjaka Hanuman dating back to the 16th century. On the left side, there is a large sculpture of the serpent deity (Naga Devata). At the back side of the temple, there are sculptures of Saraswati and Ganesha along with the Saptamatrikas. There is also a Jain Chaturmukha (four-faced) Amalak sculpture. Below this sculpture, there are two rows of Saptamatrikas.

Above the main temple entrance, there is a sculpture of Gajalakshmi, and on either side below the entrance, Kalashas (auspicious pots) are carved. This doorway belongs to the Rashtrakuta period, dating back 1200 years. Door pillars and a Nandi statue from the Rashtrakuta era are present in this temple. In the center of the main temple, there is a Mandapa (pillared hall) with three pillars on each side, totaling twelve pillars on all four sides. In the Mandapa (pillared hall) located at the center of the Shiva temple, there are several deity idols. Among them are idols of Gautama Buddha, Ganesha, Matanga, and others³.

The Mandapa is connected to sanctum sanctorums (Garbhagrihas) on three sides. The doorways of the sanctum directly ahead, as well as the jambs on either side, are carved with sculptures depicting stories of Shiva. In the main sanctum, there is a naturally formed (swayambhu) Shiva Lingam.



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In front of it are two small Nandi statues — one with its eyes closed and the other with eyes open. Temple priest Mahesh mentioned that these are referred to as "Sthira Nandi" (still Nandi) and "Chara Nandi" (moving Nandi). In the sanctum to the right of the Mandapa, Kartikeya is the presiding deity, while in the sanctum to the left; Lord Venkateswara is the main deity. According to local famous writer B. Muralidhar, once this village was called as sree chelama⁴.

Upon examining the Sirichelma temple, it was observed that the temple bears traces of three religions — Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Additionally, architectural styles from three dynasties are evident. Based on this, Assistant Professor of History Govt. Degree College Echoda Dr. Katkam Murali stated that the temple was originally built around 1200 years ago during the reign of the Rashtrakutas, and was later developed further during the Kalyani Chalukya and Kakatiya periods⁵.

Mythological History:

The Sirichelma Mallikarjuna temple has not only historical significance but also a rich local legend associated with it. In the past, two Vaishya women named Pittavva and Nimmavva used to make a living by selling traditional snacks like appalu and garelu. One day, a seven-year-old orphan boy came to them seeking shelter. After convincing them, he started working as a caretaker for their calves. A few days later, a drought struck the area, and there was a severe shortage of drinking water. The boy then tied the calves to a tree and, using a spade and a clump of grass, dug a large pond near that tree and built a bund around it. Some days after completing this, the boy mysteriously disappeared. He later appeared in a dream to Pittavva and Nimmavva and revealed that he would manifest as a self-emerged (Swayambhu) Shiva Lingam in that pond. When they went to see, a Shiva Lingam had indeed appeared in the pond — but it was indented (sunken) at the top. The villagers believe this is because, while carrying mud on his head to build the pond's bund, the pressure caused a depression on the boy's head, and likewise, the Shiva Lingam appeared with a sunken top.

Aims and Objectives:

1. The objective of the study is to find out the history of Sirichelma Mallikarjuna Shiva temple.
2. The origin and evolution of the Sirichelma Mallikarjuna Shiva temple is brought to the limelight. Forgotten and neglected other temples which lay in ruins from history should be brought to light.
3. To create interest among tourists and enthusiasts towards the great culture and historical monument of this temple can be developed into cultural centres.

Methodology:

The present study adopted historical and empirical methods of research. The empirical method included extensive fieldwork which plated major rules in the collection of primary data. This site has been personally visited by me. They have been photographed for further examination and analysis people who belong to the village where the temple is situated have been asked /enquired about the history and folklore of the site. The secondary sources for this study include various newspapers published and other PhD theses submitted in various universities on the topic of temples.

Scope of the study:

Though the Sirichelma temple is known as a place of interest among historians, tourists there are no major historical studies on the place and its monuments of this area. This article will illuminate the place's forgotten history and cultural significance. It will pave the way for the further exploration of the place and its history.

Significance of study:

The study will help to reignite the interest of local people and other historians towards the historical past of Echoda area. The hidden and lost history of the place can be brought back into the main framework of Telangana history. This paper will also create interest art and architecture of Rashtrakuta, Kalyani Chalukya and Kakatiya periods. The research would help in the growth and development of tourism in and around the historical places of Adilabad district.

Conclusion:

Due to its unique features, the Sirichelma Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple has gained recognition as a famous temple. Situated in a remote area of the Sahyadri mountain range, it is surrounded by water in a pond, making it a pleasant spot for tourists. Therefore, the government should develop this area as a tourist destination.

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Images of Mallikarjuna temple, Sirichelma.