



ROLE OF MONASTERIES IN PROMOTING AND DEVELOPING TOURISM: A STUDY OF SRI KRISHNANANDA MATHA AND SRI SRIPADRAJARA MATHA

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Introduction

Kolar district, known as a golden land in Karnataka, has its own rich historical tradition. Historically, Kolar has been an important centre of the political activities of several dynasties, including the Kadambas, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas and Vijayanagara rulers. The district is also well known for its art, culture, traditions, religious tolerance and linguistic diversity.

Mulbagal is known as the city of temples and as an important centre of ancient monasteries. In the pages of history, the Vijayanagara Empire is remembered as a great and unforgettable empire. Mulbagal was an important part of the Muluvayi region and became famous through the town of the same name. Those who observe the religious, political and social activities of this region can understand the strong influence and glory of Mulbagal.

The place name Mulbagal is believed to have developed from the earlier name Muluvayi. Around 1366 CE, during the rise of the Vijayanagara Empire, Mulbagal began to gain importance. Historical evidence and inscriptions found in Kolar district and Mulbagal taluk indicate that Kumara Kampana, son of Bukka Raya, played an important role in the region. These inscriptions also indicate the existence of a royal residence or palace at Mulbagal.

Temples and Monasteries of Mulbagal

Mulbagal's temples and monasteries played an important role in preserving Sanatana Dharma and Indian culture. The town became an important centre of different religious traditions. Sri Sripadrajara Matha became famous for preserving the Madhva tradition. Institutions connected with different spiritual traditions, including the Avani Matha and Sringeri tradition, also flourished in the region. The temples and ancient monasteries of Mulbagal continue to attract tourists. Among the important monasteries are Sri Krishnananda Matha, located in Krishnanandapalya, and Sri Sripadrajara Matha, located at Narasimha Tirtha.

Sri Krishnananda Matha

The Dwaraka Peetha, established by Adi Shankaracharya, belongs to the Dwaraka Guru tradition. Around the Shalivahana Shaka 1400 period, when disturbances and difficulties increased, the then spiritual head Sri Krishnananda Tirtha Swamiji left Dwaraka and travelled towards the south. He received the honour and patronage of the Vijayanagara rulers. Pleased with the respect and hospitality shown by the kings, he established a monastery at Mulbagal and settled there, devoting himself to spiritual practices.

An inscription associated with the Vittalaswami Temple records that in 1547 CE, villages around Payasthanahalli in the taluk were granted for the maintenance of the monastery, including arrangements for food distribution (Annachattra) and lamp worship (Deepaaradhane).

The principal idol at Sri Krishnananda Matha is Venugopala Swamy, accompanied by Rukmini and Satyabhama. The idols are carved from black stone. The gentle smile on the face of the idol is particularly attractive. The idol is believed to be several centuries old.



Various festivals and religious celebrations, including Gokulashtami, Karthika Deepotsava and Karaga Mahotsava, are conducted here. Through regular worship and rituals, a large number of local devotees and visitors come to the monastery seeking the blessings of Lord Krishna.

Vidyashankara Temple

The Vidyashankara Temple is situated in Mulbagal. Mulbagal has great historical importance and was an important town in earlier times.

There is a sacred Shankhu Tirtha Pushkarini in front of the temple. Since the town lies on the route towards Tirupati and was considered the eastern entrance or 'eastern gateway', it came to be known as Mulbagal over time.

The Vidyashankara Temple faces east and was constructed in the Vijayanagara architectural style. The temple has been renovated while preserving its old remains.

The east-facing garbhagriha (sanctum) is connected with an antarala (vestibule) and a Navaranga (pillared hall). The Navaranga has an entrance on the southern side, and a mukhamantapa (front hall) has been constructed at this entrance.

The front hall originally appears to have been an open hall. Later, walls were constructed around it and an entrance was provided from the western side. The hall has eight pillars. The pillars do not contain elaborate sculptures.

Near the entrance leading from the front hall to the Navaranga is an inscription of Vijayanagara ruler Bukka Raya. The inscription, dated to 1389 CE, records matters relating to grants made to the Vidyashankara Temple.

The Navaranga is supported by pillars and contains several architectural features. The sanctum is situated towards the east.

A notable feature of the temple is the arrangement of windows/openings (jalandhras) through which devotees can obtain a view of the deity. The architectural arrangement allows the sacred image to be viewed in a distinctive manner.

Ammanavara Shrine

Behind the Vidyashankara Temple there is a separate shrine dedicated to Ammanavaru. Its location behind the main temple is an unusual and noteworthy feature.

The Ammanavaru shrine consists of a Navaranga and Antarala. The Navaranga is supported by four pillars. An opening has been provided on the eastern wall.

The opening has been arranged in such a way that it aligns with the openings in the sanctum and Navaranga of the Vidyashankara Temple. Through this arrangement, one can simultaneously obtain a view of Vidyashankara Shiva Linga and Ammanavaru.

There is also a Brindavana in front of the entrance of this shrine.

Shankhu Tirtha

To the south of the Vidyashankara Temple is a large Pushkarini (sacred water tank) known as Shankhu Tirtha.



In the middle of the Pushkarini is a stone shaped like a conch (shankha). It is from this conch-shaped stone that the tank gets the name Shankhu Tirtha.

There are three Brindavanas behind the Pushkarini and another Brindavana in front of the Ammanavaru shrine. Thus, there are four Brindavanas in the surroundings of the Vidyashankara Temple.

Sri Sripadrajara Matha – Narasimha Tirtha

Sri Sripadrajara occupies a prominent place among the early and highly respected figures of Dasa literature. He is traditionally said to have lived from approximately 1402 to 1502 CE. About 2 km east of Mulbagal is the sacred place known as Narasimha Tirtha, where his original Brindavana is located.

Narasimha Tirtha has a long religious history. It is associated with the spiritual tradition of Akshobhya Tirtha, and later Sri Sripadrajara settled here. Because of this association, the place became known as the Brindavana Kshetra of Sri Sripadrajara.

Sri Sripadrajara made a significant contribution to the development of the Dasa tradition and devotional literature. He strengthened the tradition of Vedic and Sanskrit culture and contributed greatly to religious and literary development.

Sri Sripadrajara is also closely associated with Purandara Dasa and Kanaka Dasa. Through devotional compositions, the principles of the Madhva philosophy were spread among the people. Works such as Gopigeeta, Venugita and Bhramara Geeta are mentioned as examples.

Sri Sripadrajara played an important role in spreading the influence of the Madhva tradition in the Muluvayi region. He was also influential among the rulers of the Vijayanagara period. His influence was not limited to religion. He also made a valuable contribution to Kannada literary culture. Through his literary insight and spiritual teachings, he continues to shine like a Dhruva star in the history of Kannada literature and devotional tradition.

Conclusion

The Krishnananda Matha and Sripadrajara Matha have become important tourist and pilgrimage destinations. They attract visitors not only from Karnataka but also from different parts of India.

The annual celebrations at Narasimha Tirtha attract devotees, including followers of the Madhva tradition from North India. The large number of visitors who come to this sacred place every year is significant.

Thus, the monasteries of Mulbagal in Kolar district contribute considerably to the promotion and development of tourism in Karnataka by attracting pilgrims, devotees, tourists and people interested in history, architecture, religion and culture.

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