

Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara

Sri K.Chandramauli

Even the name of the presiding deity of a holy city can often generate some controversy in India, particularly when the same deity may be known by several names and appellations as happens for Lord Śiva in Kashi. 'Avimukteśvara', 'Viśveśvara', 'Ādi Viśveśvara' and 'Viśvanātha' are some of the names by which the devout pray to the glorious Lord of Kashi. Considerable research has gone into the relative importance of these *Śivaliṅgas* in the following pages.

Avimukteśvara is considered as the first *liṅga* or the Ādi Liṅga. The *Mahābhārata* (3100 BC) and the *Jābāla Upaniṣad* mention the name of Avimukteśvara. The *Matsya Purāṇa* (4th cent. AD) considers that the other Śaiva *tīrthas* in Kashi become holy, only because they are near the Avimukteśvara shrine. Reference is made to three important *Śivaliṅgas* in Varanasi namely Avimukteśvara, Trisandhyeśvara and Krittivāseśvara. The *Matsya Purāṇa* explains that Śiva stays only during the dawn/morning and dusk/evening times of *sandhyā* in the 68 Śiva *Kṣetras*, but stays all the time and during all the *parvas* in Kashi without ever forsaking it. That is why Kashi is known as the Avimukta *Kṣetra* never forsaken by Śiva (chapter 180). The *Daśakumāra Carita* (6th cent AD) mentions Avimukteśvara as the presiding deity in Kashi. *Kūrma Purāṇa* (7th/8th cent AD) mentions of Avimukteśvara. The *Agni Purāṇa* (9th cent AD) tries to explain the reason for naming this area as Avimukteśvara *Kṣetra* but strangely enough the name of Avimukteśvara is not mentioned in the eight *Śivaliṅgas* listed therein.

The *Liṅga Purāṇa* (10th cent AD) narrates the story of Ripuñjaya, a king in the lineage of Svāyambhūva Manu, who obtained a boon from Brahmā before agreeing to rule Kashi as king Divodāsa. The boon drove the Gods to the sky and the Nāgas to the world of *pātāla*. Śiva had to leave Kashi very unwillingly. Before proceeding to Mandarācala, the formless Śiva is said to have established His form in a *liṅga* in Kashi. This Liṅga was called as Avimukteśvara, the one who never forsakes Kashi. Being the first of Śiva's symbol (*liṅga*), it was called the Ādi Liṅga. The *Liṅga Purāṇa* has many references that highlight the importance of Avimukteśvara- that Avimukteśvara was one of the 16 *kṣetras* where Nārada worshipped Śiva (1.2); that Nārāyaṇa worshipped Avimukteśvara with milk (29.30); that *mukti* is assured to those who die in the area of Avimukteśvara in Kashi, in Kedara and in Prayaga (77.38-39); that one

attains *mukti* by death, in whatever manner, in Kashi while serving Avimukteśvara (91.73); that man gets rid of all bondages by the *darśana* of Avimukteśvara Liṅga (92.105); that Pārvatī went to Kashi and bathed (offered *abhiṣeka* to) the Avimukteśvara Liṅga with milk and *ghee* and worshipped Śiva (92.185). Avimukteśvara was thus the most important Śiva Liṅga in Kashi in the 10th century.

The *Śiva Purāṇa* lists 68 *liṅgas* and states that Avimukteśvara is the most important *liṅga* (2.2); that the Lord established the Avimukta Liṅga (22.21); that Kashi always has the Avimukteśvara Liṅga (22.24); that *munīs* reached the Kashi Kṣetra, bathed in Gaṅgā, worshipped Avimukteśvara and continued their journey (40.8). The *Śiva Purāṇa* mentions of Viśveśvara Liṅga as one among the twelve *jyotirliṅgas* (1.21-23).

Excavations at Rajghat have revealed eight seals connected with the name 'Avimukteśvara'. Four of them are: 1) A seal (of Gupta period) of Avimukteśvara with *Triśūla*, *Paraśu* and *Vṛṣabha*; 2) A seal (of Gupta period) with letters 'Avimukteśvara' and *Vṛṣabha* and *Gaṅgā*; 3) Seals (8th century) with the letters 'Śrī Avimukteśvara'; and 4) Seals (8th century) with the letters 'Avimukteśvara Bhaṭṭārka'. Some express that Avimukteśvara, also known as Devādideva, was the most important deity of Varanasi till almost the 8th century AD.¹ However the several references in the Purāṇas quoted above indicate that Avimukteśvara was the worshipful name used from early periods to at least the 10th/11th century.

The *Kṛtya Kalpataru* (1110 AD) of Bhaṭṭa Lakṣmīdhara names Viśveśvara only twice in the text, but attributes more prominence, ten times more space, to Avimukteśvara, Vṛddhakāleśvara and Vīreśvara. The temple mentioned as the main one was that of Avimukteśvara with the *svayambhū liṅga*. Lakṣmīdhara does not mention the five important *maṇḍapas* - *Śṛṅgāra*, *Aiśparya*, *Jñāna*, *Vairāgya* and *Mukti* (Kukkuta) *maṇḍapa*- of the famous Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa temple mentioned in *Skanda Purāṇa*. It may therefore be inferred that new temple for Viśveśvara, with the five *maṇḍapas*, came up after the period of Lakṣmīdhara.

Hieun Tsang, the Chinese traveller, visited the city during Harṣa's rule; possibly between 635 and 643 AD. He mentions having seen a hundred temples and 30 Buddhist monasteries in and around Varanasi. Based on Hieun Tsang's travel report, some writers have come to the following conclusions :

1) Hieun Tsang has written that the Deva Maheśvara temple was near the

1. *Varanasi Through the Ages* (p 133).

śmaśāna. At that time *Mahāśmaśāna* was located in the present Chowk area near to the building of Bhaddomal. Therefore it is undisputed that the temple was near the Chowk area in the 7th century.²

2) The most remarkable of Hieun Tang's descriptions pertain to the sublime and expansive Śiva image itself... The present mosque of Razia Begum could have been built on the original site where the Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa described by the Chinese traveller had stood.³

3) The *Kuṭṭanīmatam* (8th cent. AD) does not mention Viśveśvara, but describes a great temple upon a hill. Was this perhaps old Viśveśvara, the ruins of which are located in Dalmandi? And was its image the majestic deva Maheśvara described by the Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang?⁴

The original Chinese work seems to be a voluminous one and it is not clear wherefrom the writers obtained the above quoted references. The English translation of Hieun Tsang's report reads: "The statue of the god (Maheśvara Deva), in brass, is little less than a hundred feet in height... To the north east of the capital is a *stūpa*, built by king (Aśoka), about one hundred feet high."⁵ Another translation reads: "The statue of Deva Maheśvara, made of native copper, is somewhat less than 100 feet high. Its appearance is grave and majestic, and appears as though living"⁶. A third translation reads: "There was a tu-shi (bell metal?) image of the Deva (probably Siva) 100 feet high, which was life-like in its awe-inspiring majesty"⁷. What was 'life-like' or 'a statue' could have been only an anthropomorphic image or possibly a liṅgam covered with a face. It may also be noted that the Chinese traveller did not "describe the Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa temple's as made out in the second reference quoted above.

Dāmodara Gupta in his book *Kuṭṭanīmatam* (779-813 A.D.) gives a vivid description of a grand and most frequented temple. It was situated on a high ground and housed a number of magnificent shops all around. Dancing girls would be busy staging their dramas and dances outside the temple. His description appears to have been intended particularly to warn the royalty of the touts leading them astray. The

2. Ram Shankar Tripathi, *Unmana*.

3. B.Bhattacharya (p 142-143).

4. Diana L. Eck (p 132).

5. M.A.Shering (p336)- translation from French of the original Chinese work.

6. Samuel Beal (Book VII, p 45).

7. Thomas Watters, (p 47)

stamp of history is not effaced easily enough and this particular area served as the famous red-light district of Varanasi till recently. "Even today all the Hindu dancing girls of Varanasi go to the nearby Ādi Viśveśvara temple once in a year and dance there the whole night free of charge.⁸

Kashi Khaṇḍa (13th cent.) was possibly, the first text to refer to Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa. A few quotations from *Skanda Purāṇa* about Avimukteśvara must have been from an earlier version of the said Purāṇa, according to P.V. Kane.⁹ The references in Kashi Khaṇḍa (13th cent. AD) will be discussed later.

The above background leads us to few conclusions and a new hypothesis. The conclusions are simple: It is difficult to agree with the above quoted authors that (a) the temple described in *Kuṭṭanīmatam* was of Viśveśvara, (b) the Chinese traveller described the Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa temple and (c) the temple seen by him was of Viśveśvara. Kuber Nath Sukul's view that the temple on the Chowk mound was that of Viśveśvara also cannot be accepted. It appears that almost up to the 12th century the Viśveśvara temple did not enjoy much importance; Avimukteśvara enjoyed the prime of place and was worshipped as a *svayambhū liṅga*.¹⁰

The new hypothesis runs thus. Hieun Tsang describes a huge temple with an anthropomorphic statue/image (and not *liṅga*) of Śiva in the Chowk mound, where the Razia mosque is presently located. The *pūjārī-s* would have possibly covered the *liṅga* with the (brass) face of Śiva. This splendid temple, mentioned by the Chinese traveller and in *Kuṭṭanīmatam*, could well have been of Avimukteśvara because of many reasons- Viśveśvara was not prominent till the 12th century according to the Purāṇas, other works and the Rajghat excavations; the *Liṅga Purāṇa* (10th cent. AD) mentions that the Avimukteśvara temple was at the north of Jñānavāpī; the Chowk area on a high mound and its busy schops match with the description of *Kuṭṭanīmatam*; courtesans danced in the temple area near the Chowk and this temple must have been of Avimukteśvara; the courtesans never danced at the Viśveśvara temple when it was constructed at Jñānavāpī in 1585 or thereafter; but the courtesans continued to exhibit their art near the Chowk mound near the previous Avimukteśvara temple (because the old sacred/busy place was possibly considered holier/better than the insignificant place given to

8. Kuber Nath Sukul (p 177).

9. P.V.Kane (p 624).

10. Dr. Motichandra (p 160-163).

Avimukteśvara in the new Viśveśvara temple); their dance performance was to make an obeisance to the Lord and also to attract the rich and the elite.

A fresh question arises from the above hypothesis; Where then was the temple of Viśveśvara till the 12th century and how did Viśveśvara gain more prominence after 11th/12th century? A quick peep into the History may provide some answers. During the period of Mahājanapadas, rival forces frequently attacked Varanasi, which was spread more on the northern bank of Varāṇā river. The threat of attacks gradually forced the habitation to grow more on the southern bank. A number of lakes in the southern bank of Varāṇā overflowed into the river Gaṅgā and helped in smooth navigation and deveopment of a big market in the area between the present day markets of Gola-Dinanath and Biseswarganj. This area became the hub of Varanasi's commercial life. "The northern section between this area and the Varāṇā bank was adorned with more than half of the important shrines of Varanasi."¹¹ The Viśveśvara temple came up, probably prior to 490 AD¹² in the Biseswarganj area. The oral tradition leads us to infer that the temples of Viśveśvara and Annapūrṇā were once located in the Biseswarganj area. It is not clear whether the Viśveśvara temple was destroyed by Mohammed Gaznavi's deputy Niyaltgin in 1033/1034 AD. Even if the not so prominent temple (at that time) was destroyed, in all probability the *liṅga* may not have been damaged.

Ahmed Niyaltgin, deputy of Mohammed Gaznavi, looted and plundered Varanasi in 1033/1034 AD and destroyed the Avimukteśvara temple on the Chowk mound and many other temples. This first onslaught by the Muslims naturally shocked the people and left them dumb. It was not just the case of a mouse running over the sacred *liṅga*. Mlechchas had damaged/desecrated the *liṅga*, polluted the sacred place of worship, and consequently the religious sentiments were torn into pieces. The orthodox did not know what to do with a damaged and desecrated *liṅga*. The question was whether a new one would have the same power as the old (now desecrated) *liṅga* and the location of the temple could be purified enough. The Dharmaśāstras had no answers. The fear of further onslaughts and the time consuming debate of the orthodox must have delayed the reconstruction for many years. The *Kṛtya Kalpataru* (1110 AD) states, as does the *Liṅga Purāṇa*, that Avimukteśvara temple was at the north of a well and it gave no prominence to Viśveśvara. The Gāhaḍavāla kings, known for their

11. B.Bhattacharya (p 73).

12. Rana P.B.Singh (p 375).

bravery and religious faith, must have rebuilt Avimukteśvara between 1072 and 1110 AD at the same location on the mound. The Viśveśvara *liṅga* (from Biseswarganj) also must have been relocated in a new temple built next to the Avimukteśvara temple on the Chowk mound.

The new Viśveśvara temple, next to Avimukteśvara, may have been a small one or a less prominent one till 1110 AD. However, the *purohīts* and the *paṇḍīts* must have found it difficult to bestow the same devotion to the desecrated Avimukteśvara. Their inmost feelings must have guided them to worship the Viśveśvara *liṅga*, which in all probability was not damaged during the destruction of the temple in the Biseswarganj area. This may have led them to gradually project to the public that Viśveśvara was an important *liṅga*. The shift in importance is confirmed by another historical fact. Seth Vastu Pāla of Gujarat donated one lakh of rupees for *pūjā* at the temple.¹³ Some believe that the donation was sent in the 13th century. But, Vastu Pāla is mentioned as the minister of Cālukya King Kumāra Pāla,¹⁴ who ruled between 1143 and 1172 AD. Therefore, Vastu Pāla would have sent the donation to Viśveśvara in the 12th century between 1143 and 1172 to the new temple of Viśveśvara.

In 1194 AD, Qutab-ud-din Aibak, Mohammed Ghori's commander, destroyed a thousand temples in Varanasi; both the Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara temples were demolished. It is said that the Hindus moved the *liṅga* to the neighbouring hill behind the present Satyanārāyaṇa temple and carried it safely out of Varanasi. It is claimed to have been brought back later on to the Bhadaini area of Varanasi.¹⁵ When did these temples come up again? Three references indicate the probable time of reconstruction. Interestingly Kashi Khaṇḍa (13th century) mentions that a painter showed the king of Karnataka a cloth painting of Lord Viśvanātha and the town planning of Varanasi. The painting contained a reference to Vārāṇasī Devī and showed Varanasi as the epitome of the country.¹⁶ Did the painter show his painting to the Karnataka Hoysala King Narasimha III? Possibly yes. A copperplate inscription (1279 AD) in Sanskrit and Kannada states that the Karnataka Hoysala King Narasimha III donated the revenue of 645 Niṣka a year from the village Hebbāle. The donation was to the god Viśveśvara and to the pilgrims to pay the tax levied by the Turuskas. The third reference relates

13. Kuber Nath Sukul (p 178) & *Bhog Mokṣa Samabhav* (p 74-83).

14. Vijay Pal Singh (p 196).

15. B.Bhattacharya (p 127).

16. *Homage to Varanasi*, V.S.Agrawala.

to the Lal Darvaza mosque of Jaunpur. This mosque was constructed in 1447 AD from the remains of the Padmeśvara temple of Varanasi. An inscription on a pillar of the Lal Darvaza mosque indicates that the Padmeśvara temple was constructed in front of Viśveśvara temple in the year 1296 AD.¹⁷ (The inscription would have mentioned that the Padmeśvara temple was in front of the Avimukteśvara, had it not lost its importance by then). Führer also mentions in his book *The Sharqui Architecture of Jaunpur* that the Padmeśvara temple was constructed in about 1296 AD. Another source gives this date as 1302 AD.¹⁸ Therefore the Viśveśvara temple was definitely reconstructed before 1296 AD. The Puranic reference and the two inscriptions clearly indicate that Viśveśvara had become more prominent than Avimukteśvara by the 13th century. They also point out that the new temple for Viśveśvara was rebuilt before 1279 AD (the Karnataka inscription of donation for the Viśveśvara temple).

There are two speculations about the Razia Mosque on the Chowk mound. (1) Razia Begum ruled from Delhi after Qutab-ud-din Aibak and Iltutmash. It is said that Razia Begum built a mosque on the mound (where Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara temples were earlier located) sometime between 1236 and 1240 AD¹⁹. Then, both the temples of Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara would have been built side by side, just below the mound before 1279 AD. (2) Some others say that Razia Julahin (a concubine of Sharqui King of Jaunpur) built it. Sharqui Kings ruled Jaunpur from 1393 to 1458 AD. Mohammed Shah Sharqui (1436-1458 AD) had married a widow Razia from Banaras²⁰. If she had built the mosque, the year of construction would be 1448 AD²¹ and not 1240 as given earlier. Mohammed Shah Sharqui had destroyed the Padmeśvara temple in 1447 AD and the Lal Darvaza mosque of Jaunpur was constructed in 1447 AD from the remains of the Padmeśvara temple. He must have also destroyed the Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara temples in 1447 and built the Razia mosque around 1448 AD. (Firoz Shah Tughlaq, 1351-88 AD, started the construction of Atala mosque in Jaunpur in 1376. Führer feels that some temples of Varanasi must have similarly been converted into mosques during his period). In this case, both the temples would have been built either at the same place or just below the mound before 1279 AD. These two

17. *Homage to Varanasi*.

18. Kuber Nath Sukul (p 155).

19. Diana L.Eck, p127.

20. Kedar Nath Vyas, p287.

21. Dr Rana P.B.Singh, p130

possibilities about the construction of the mosque do not significantly alter the status of the two temples. They were built before 1279 AD and were destroyed during the reign of Mohammed Shah Sharqui (1436-1458).²² Another version is that Sikander Lodi destroyed the temples in 1494 AD and the remains of Avimukteśvara were lost.²³ That the temples existed in the intervening period is clear from literary sources. Jina Prabha Sūri, a contemporary of Mohammad Tuglaq (1325-51 AD), mentions in his book *Vividha Kalpa Tīrtha* that the temple of Viśvanātha was in the region called Deva Varanasi.

Thus, the historical facts clearly show that Viśveśvara gained prominence over Avimukteśvara in the 12th century. This must have taken place during Vastu Pala's time 1143-1172 AD or even earlier. The importance continued at the time of its destruction in 1194 AD by Aibak and its reconstruction before 1279 AD. It is interesting to know how the Puranic lore brought in a gradual but very subtle change in the mind of the common man. The *Skanda Purāṇa*, Kāśī Khaṇḍa (13th cent. AD) describes, in its earlier chapters, the prominence of Avimukteśvara and in its later chapters the prominence gained by Viśveśvara. Brief extracts from Kashi Khaṇḍa explain the point. Śiva, never willing to forsake Kashi, established the Avimukta Liṅga in Kashi when He had to reluctantly leave Kashi to honour the boon given by Brahmā to Divodāsa. Thus Avimukteśvara became the first *liṅga*, Ādi Liṅga (KK 39.80). Kashi Khaṇḍa emphatically states that there is no *liṅga* equal to Avimukteśvara (KK 5.29) and further states that Viśveśvara was the *Jyotirlinga* (KK 26.31). Avimukteśvara, worshipped by Viśveśvara also, has to be served for *mukti* (KK 39.87). Both Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara are included in the list of 14 *Mahāliṅgas* (KK 73). Śiva himself considers the Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa temple as His favourite place (KK 79.45). Later, Śiva says "Avimukteśvara, worshipped by me also, has taken my name and has become famous as Viśveśvara" (KK 86.110). Nandī accosts Śiva on His return from Mandarācala and requests Him to proceed to Kashi by these words: "The construction of your abode (*Mahāprāsāda*) is completed... Everyone has assembled after hearing the news of your entry into the Kashi Kṣetra" (KK 97.294-296). (The reference must be related to the new temple constructed before 1279 AD). Śiva enters the inner sanctum or *antargṛha* of the newly constructed Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa (KK 98.4), suggesting that the old one was possibly dismantled or destroyed. Kashi Khaṇḍa (chapter 98) then gives a vivid

22. Rana P.B Singh (p124).

23. *Vande Mataram* (p18).

description of the grand reception accorded to Śiva in Kashi on his return from Mandarācala. The reception was the Mukti (Kukkuta) Maṇḍapa of the big Śiva temple known as Mokṣa Lakṣmī Vilāsa. It had five *maṇḍapas* with the central *maṇḍapa* or *antargṛha* meant for housing the Śivaliṅga. The other four *maṇḍapas* in the four corners were called *Śṛṅgāra*, *Aiśvarya*, *Jñāna* and *Vairāgya Maṇḍapa*. After listening to all the praises and prayers. Śiva holds a *liṅga* in His right hand and tells Brahmā, Viṣṇu and all those assembled: "Look at this *liṅga*. Look! This is the only *Parā Jyoti* (Divine Light). This is the only *Parātparam* (Absolute). This is my immovable (*sthāvara*), all-powerful form" (KK 99.6-7). "There is no *liṅga* equal to Viśveśvara Liṅga" (KK 99.49). Śiva says "There is no *liṅga* equal to Viśvanātha, no *tīrtha* equal to Maṇikarṇikā and no sacred place for *tapas* equal to Ānandavana anywhere" (KK 99.51). Śiva concludes: "I repeat holding up my hand that there are only three important things in the three worlds-firstly the Viśveśvara Liṅga, secondly Maṇikarṇikā *tīrtha* and thirdly the Kashi Kṣetra" (KK 99.61). Kashi Khaṇḍa gives the concluding remarks (KK100.95) thus "After returning from Mandara hills, Śiva entered the Mukti Maṇḍapa and stayed there".

The *Śiva Purāṇa* also suggests that 'Viśveśvara' gained prominence after the arrival of Śiva from Mandarācala. Avimukteśvara repeatedly requests Śiva to stay back in Kashi (chapter 22.36) Rudra requests Viśveśvara to stay back in Kashi (22.32). The 22nd chapter of *Śiva Purāṇa* about Viśveśvara Māhātmya is concluded with "the description of the arrival of Śiva to Kashi". Further the Purāṇa states that the Viśveśvara Liṅga too has the power (*māhātmya*) of giving *mukti* (23.56). The *Padma Purāṇa* refers to Viśveśvara in eight verses in Uttara Khaṇḍa (23.44; 34.10; 35.21; 35.25; 235.37; 235.38; 235.51; and 235.52). The Purāṇa also refers to the Avimukteśvara Kṣetra in a number of verses like 33.11; 33.21; 33.30; 35.21 and 14.213. But, strangely, there is no mention of Avimukteśvara Liṅga in any verse, even in the list of five *liṅgas* mentioned (in 34.10). This shows that by the time of *Padma Purāṇa*, Viśveśvara had predominance over Avimukteśvara as already suggested by the *Skanda Purāṇa*. The date of *Padma Purāṇa* may, therefore, be any time after the *Skanda Purāṇa*; it may be narrowed down to sometime in the 13/14th century instead of from the 10th to the 14th century as debated by many experts, Kedāra Māhātmya suggests that Kedāra is earlier than even Viśveśvara, thereby indicating that Viśveśvara came into prominence at a later date.

Yet another simple explanation could be derved from the names of Kashi. The earliest names was Kashi after the king Kāśa, Ānanda Kānana was the name given by

Śiva when He first came from Kailāsa. The next name was Avimukta Kṣetra when Śiva declared that He would never forsake Ānanda Kānana which was very dear to Him. Symbolically, He left His *liṅga* (the symbol), the Ādi Liṅga Avimukteśvara, before leaving for Mandara Hills. It is, therefore, natural that Avimukteśvara, the most ancient was also the most prominent till its desecration during the onslaughts. *Mukti* from sins (*avi*) and the life cycles was no doubt important and Avimukteśvara assured it all the time till His *liṅga* was badly damaged and desecrated by the onslaughts of alien forces. The onslaught was like a bolt from the blue; only Viśvanātha, the Lord of the universe, could save our own world! Hence, the *paṇḍits* gave (!) Viśvanātha or Viśveśvara the dual role of saving the world as well as giving *mukti* after the onslaughts. This is evident from the *Skanda Purāṇa*. However, Ādi Śaṅkara (9th century) eulogizes Kashi Viśveśvara or Viśvanātha in the *Annapūrṇāṣṭaka*, *Kāśī Pañcakam* and other *stotras* and not Avimukteśvara. This is probably because Viśveśvara is considered as the *Jyotirlinga* (from the time of creation) and Avimukteśvara as the Ādi Liṅga (established by Śiva).

The medium of Purāṇas popularized the view that Viśvanātha would protect as well as liberate the people. Kashi Khaṇḍa, in particular, dramatized the change by showing that Śiva held up the Viśveśvara Liṅga in His hand and eulogized on its glory. This change might have taken place at the time of the construction and installation of the new Viśveśvara temple (1240-1279 AD) next to the Raziya mosque. The first *liṅga*, Avimukteśvara, would have been worshipfully accommodated in a corner of the Viśveśvara temple. Avimukteśvara is even today referred to and respected as the *guru* of Viśveśvara.

That is the long story of how Avimukteśvara lost its importance if not its form. There was then an attempt, as in the present time, to philosophically equate both the *liṅgas* as one and the same. Vācaspati Miśra's *Tīrtha Cintāmaṇī* (1460 AD) indicates that Viśveśvara and Avimukteśvara came to be considered as two names of the same *liṅga*. Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa (1514-1594) agrees with this view in his book *Tristhalī Setu*. Mitrāmitra in his work *Mitrodaya* (1602 AD) does not agree with Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa's views and recalls that *Padma Purāṇa*, Kashi Khaṇḍa and *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* all describe the importance of the Śivaliṅgas separately. By and by the two Śivaliṅgas were treated as separate and their worship was carried out separately.²⁴

There appears to have been no temple of Viśvanātha from the time of its previous

24. Dr. Motichandra (p 173) & *Vande Mataram* (p 18).

destruction (between 1436 and 1494 AD) till the next construction by Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa. However, it appears that one Doḍḍa Saṅkaṇṇa Nāyaka, the chieftain of Keladi (now in Shimoga District of Karnataka), came to Varanasi during his pilgrimage (1566-1570). He is said to have obtained permission from Akbar for arranging a special worship of Lord Viśveśvara.²⁵ This news must have also given clear indications to the local people of the secular feelings of Akbar (1556-1605). People, under the leadership of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, approached the Minister Todarmal, who helped in building the Viśvanātha temple. Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa and Todarmal's role in building the temple is evident from the book *Dāna Hārāvalī* by Divākara Bhaṭṭa. Dr. A.S.Altekar opines that the temple must have been re-built in 1585 AD. Buddhists had built a *vihāra* in the area of the present day Aurangzeb Maszid at Gyanavapi. Viśvanātha temple was built on the site of the Buddha Vihāra at Gyanavapi.

Viśvanātha temple suffered destruction again in 1669 under the directions of Aurangzeb. Experience must have taught the Hindus the art of safeguarding the sacred *liṅga*. It is said that the *liṅga* was dropped into the well of Gyanavapi and was later on taken out to a *pūjārī's* house. The *pūjārīs* might have allowed worship by the devout in secrecy. The Viśvanātha temple which was destroyed by Aurangzeb in 1669 was rebuilt in 1777 at a different site by Ahalyabai Holkar, Maharani of Indore. The stone inscription mentions that she built the present temple with its five *maṇḍapas* but is silent about establishing the Śivaliṅga. There are speculations about the *liṅga* installed in the new temple- that the old *liṅga* was brought back from its hidden place; that the temple was constructed around the *liṅga*, which was there only; that the *liṅga* was brought from the banks of river Narmadā. The orthodox strongly argue that no outside or different *liṅga* was brought here, and the old *liṅga* was worshipped throughout the previous 108 years after the temple destruction. As evidence they quote the recorded visits of Rewā king Bhāv Singh in 1671, Maharana Jagat Singh in 1676, Maharaja Anirudh Singh of Rewā in 1695, Maharana Jawan Singh of Udaipur in 1734, Maharana Sangram Singh of Udaipur in 1749 and Maharana Asim Singh in 1765 to Kashi for worshipping Viśvanātha.²⁶ After one year of the temple construction, the Naubat Khana of the Viśvanātha Mandir was constructed by Nawab Ajizul Mulk Ali Ibrahim. Maharana Jawan Singh also established Jawāneśwar liṅga during his visit. Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave the gold plating or gold sheet covering of the temple tower with

25. Dr. M.Chidanandamurthy (p 107-108).

26. *Homage to Varanasi*.

about 900 Kg of gold in 1839. Baijabai Scindia built the Maṇḍapa above Gyanavapi in 1828. The Rājā of Nepal had installed the Nandī near Gyanavapi, in 1760. Some versions have it that the Nandī is the old one that was not destroyed.

The Marathas planned to destroy the Gyanavapi Maszid and restore the Śiva temple. Malhari Rao, the Maratha General, had chalked out plans to capture and destroy the Gyānvāpī Maszid. He had to give up his plans at the request of the local Brahmins who were afraid of further trouble by the ruling Muslim kings. These Brahmins have understandably come to much ridicule for setting a higher value on their life than on their *dharma*. In 1789, the Scindia tried to destroy the maszid but was prevented by the British who did not want to incur the enmity of the Muslims. Nānā Phadnavis joined hands with the British against Tīppu Sultan towards the end of 18th century on the condition that they would help in building the Viśvanātha temple at its original site. This also did not materialize.²⁷

The Ādi Viśveśvara temple was built by the Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh of Amber (late 17th or early 18th century). It is said that he built this temple "in memory of the old Viśveśvara temple" and close to the Razia Maszid "almost 500 years later".²⁸ It is believed that the *argha* (seat on which Śivaliṅga rests) of Ādi Viśveśvara temple was taken from the destroyed temple of Viśveśvara at Gyanavapi.²⁹

Presently, the Viśvanātha temple is to the south of the Gyanavapi and the Maszid. There are two Śivaliṅgas of Avimukteśvara, one in the north-east of the present Viśvanātha Mandir and the second inside the Dharmaśālā opposite to the north side of the Maszid. Thus both Avimukteśvara and Viśveśvara, either the same or different Liṅgas, must have changed places on several occasions. Though it is difficult to give the exact picture of these changes, one may venture a rough guess and summarize as below.

Avimukteśvara

- 1) Chowk mound from beginning till 1034 AD (destroyed by Niyaltgin)
- 2) Chowk mound from about 1090 till 1194 AD (destroyed by Qutab-ud-din)
- 3) Below mound (next to Viśveśvara) from 1240/1279 till 1436/1494 AD (destroyed by Mohammad Shah Tughlaq or Sikandar Lodi)

27. *Varanasi Through the Ages* (p 139).

28. *Vande Mātaram* (p 33).

29. Dr. Motichandra (p 160-163).

4) At Gyanavapi Viśvanātha temple (in the location of Maszid) from 1585 till 1669 AD (destroyed by Aurangzeb)

5) In the present Gyanavapi Viśvanātha temple, southeast corner of the temple from 1777. (Also in the Dharmasālā opposite the Maszid at Gyanavapi, north side.)

Viśveśvara

1) Biseswarganj from about 490 till 1034 AD (destroyed by Niyaltgin)

2) Chowk mound (next to Avimukteśvara) from 1090 till 1194 AD (destroyed by Qutab-ud-din)

3) Below mound (Avimukteśvara nearby) from 1240/1279 till 1436/1494 AD) (destroyed by Mohammad Shah Tughlaq or Sikandar Lodi)

4) At Gyanavapi Viśvanātha temple (in the location of Maszid), Avimukteśvara nearby Viśvanātha, from 1585 till 1669 AD (destroyed by Aurangzeb)

5) South of Gyanavapi, present location (Avimukteśvara in the southeast) from 1777 AD.

Thus, the melting pot of Kashi experienced a great turmoil for nearly seven centuries. The exigencies of political history and the religious atrocities played havoc with the destiny of people and of the temple gods! Many temples were looted, burnt and razed to the ground, large numbers of ignorant masses were converted on pain of death and the faith of the orthodox in their own Dharma was shaken. Even the sacred *liṅgas*, as mere symbols, had to move. But the real essence, the luminosity, took shelter in the heart of people. (*Liṅgarūpad haraḥ Śambhuḥ hṛdayāt bahirāgataḥ* - Śambhu had come out of Viṣṇu's heart and assumed the form of the Liṅga earlier. Now, it appeared He had taken shelter in the hearts of the people!). The inner essence and structure of Hinduism cannot be looted or burnt, the faith cannot be uprooted, and the inner effulgence cannot be put off. Hinduism in Kashi, the great melting pot, continues to accept whatever is poured into it, poison though it be, and flourishes as bright as ever.

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