

The Siddheshwar Temple at Rajgurunagar (Khed) Dist. Pune: An Analytical Study

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The Siddheshwar Temple (18.8488°N, 73.8882°E) at Rajgurunagar on the left bank of the river Bhīmā is a picturesque place on the bustling highway connecting Pune to Nasik. This place is also famous as the birthplace of the famous freedom fighter Rajguru. Hence, this place has been renamed after him as Rajgurunagar. The original name of the place was Khed. This name occurs in



Siddheshwar temple exterior, Rajgurunagar



Siddheshwar temple, entrance Rajgurunagar

various ancient records as Khetaka (Deo 1984: 308). The antiquity of this place goes back to the early medieval period. The town is also famous for the Siddheshwar Temple on the banks of the river Bhīmā. The temple is a triple shrine temple, renovated in the 18th century. There are at least three inscriptions in the campus of this temple. The earliest of them records that the temple was constructed by a trader named Trimbak Madhve in CE 1726. Another inscription in the same campus is located near the water tank which is known as the Bhāgirathī Kuṇḍa. It is a stepped tank with a porch and colonnade on one side. There seems to be a gap of nearly 9 to 10 years between the record of the construction of the Main temple and construction of this tank as the inscriptional record indicates. It says that the tank was completed in CE 1735-36. The third inscription records the construction of the Dīpamāḷa (tower for putting the oil lamps) by a devotee called as Chavhan in CE 1773. An inscription on another Dīpamāḷa records that it was constructed by a devotee Sandbhor in CE 1836 (Tendulkar 2015: 194 to 201). At the base of the Dīpamāḷa of Chavhan, there is an ascetic carved in the *namaskāra mudrā*.

An interesting fact about this temple is with the presiding deities in the sanctums. There are three shrines in the temple. All the three shrines contain Śivaliṅgas. The Śivaliṅgas in the three sanctums seem to be the original ones of the ancient temple as the size of the Śivaliṅgas is quite large as compared to the size of the sanctum which again suggests that the original temple was quite imposing as compared to the modern temple. Generally, wherever there are three shrine temples, all the three sanctums contain the images of three different deities, i.e. the combinations of the trinity, viz. Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa or Śiva, Pārvatī, Gaṇapati or the combinations of other deities. However, here it is seen that all the three sanctums contain the Śivaliṅgas. It is not clear why there is no image of any other deity in the rest of the two sanctums. Further on the threshold of the main sanctum, is carved an image of an ascetic from the inner side. This indicates that the ascetic's presence was carved in the sanctum forever along with his deity.



Main sanctum with the Śivaliṅga



Hero stone in the temple

Another interesting fact about this temple is that of the orientation of the temple. It is a convention to construct the temple of Śiva facing East so that the *vārimārga* (the channel of water) of the Śivaliṅga is oriented towards the North. However, in the case of the main sanctum of this temple, it is oriented towards East and other two sanctums are oriented towards North. This change in the layout of the temple is interesting and intriguing at the same time. It is proposed here that the Siddheshwar temple at Khed was probably a memorial temple constructed in circa 13th-14th centuries. The very name of the temple suggests its association with the *siddha* (one who has got the *siddhi*, i.e. the miraculous power) and here Śiva is the lord of such powerful ascetics. Hence, all the three sanctums have the Śivaliṅgas placed in the

memory of three *siddhas* or the one in the main sanctum was made for the Lord himself and the others were made for the two devout ascetics who had become one with their lord. Later on Trimbak Madhve renovated it as he belonged to the Liṅgāyata family, wherein the devotee considers Śiva as the ultimate God and



Medieval memorial stones near the temple

worships only the Śivaliṅga. It was probably due to his extreme devotion to Śiva as well as the Śaiva ascetics that he restored the temple. It is not surprising to see numerous medieval hero and memorial/*samādhī* stones in the vicinity of this temple. Further all of these coming on the bank of the river Bhīmā is also significant as the river becomes *dakṣiṇavāhinī* (flowing towards the South) for some distance and again becomes the East flowing river. South being the direction of Yama (God of death), all these features become more significant and the existence of a memorial temple becomes very obvious.

This hypothesis is further supported by a story narrated in a medieval text called as *Bhīmā Māhātmya* (Kinkara). A printed Marathi version of the text is in the form of a *pothī*. It was referred for the description of the Siddheshwar temple. The *adhyāya* 22 refers to an ascetic called Siddhamuni. The narrative informs us that this Siddhamuni was a devout devotee of his revered deity Śiva. To get the blessings of Śiva and to know the real nature of the Brahma, he performed penance. Then Śiva told him to worship the Liṅga. He installed a Liṅga on the bank of the river and constructed a small house nearby and dug a well. He put the water of river Bhāgirathī in the well. He named the place as Siddhatīrtha. The text



Bhagirathi Kunda

refers to the installation of only one Liᅅga in the Siddheshwar temple. The text is dated to c. 13th-4th century. This clearly indicates that there was an ancient temple already existing there before the creation of the text. The story tells the importance of the worshipping of the Liᅅga as well as the performance of the funerary rites for the ancestors at that place.

Thus, it is quite possible that there existed a small temple constructed by the Siddhamuni himself. It was enlarged sometime after the composition of the text by adding two more sanctums probably with the Liᅅgas for two more enlightened ascetics. Then the temple probably needed some restoration and hence during the 18th century temple was restored by Trimbak Madhve in CE 1726. Similarly even though there is a mention of the creation of the Bhāgirathī Kuᅅᅅa, it is quite possible that there existed a well of the earlier period and it was enlarged and steps were constructed around it.

The uniqueness of the temple in containing the Liᅅgas in all the three sanctums certainly indicates a different nature of the temple. Thus with the support of the narrative of the text *Bhīmā Māhātmya*, an attempt has been made here to reconstruct the life story of the site and solve certain riddles associated with this to a certain extent.

References & Notes

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3. Mahesh Tendulkar, *Marathi-Sanskrit Shilalekhanchya Vishwat*, Snehal Prakashan, Pune, 2015.