

# Treasures of Tungabhadra

**AWED BY ARCHITECTURE** Mukteshwara and Galageshwara temples in Haveri district exemplify the skills and ingenuity of artisans of the Kalyani Chalukyan era, writes **Srikumar M Menon**

**T**he river arises in myth, as in geography, on a mountain in the Western Ghats. Varaha Parvata, where the boar incarnation rests, after his exertions in slaying a demon. As he slumps in exhaustion, he scores the ground with his tusks. Two furrows on the flanks of the mountain, into which pours the copious sweat draining off his body. Streaming downhill, they become the rivers Tunga and Bhadra. Arising so close to one another, they traverse in excess of 150km each before they unite, at Koodli, and River Tungabhadra is born. The river soon leaves the lushly forested hills of her birthplace behind, and meanders through the dusty plains of the Deccan for over 500km to her confluence with the mighty Krishna, at Alampur in Telengana.

Over the ages, Tungabhadra has seen the fortunes of men, and the empires they raised, wax and wane and fall to waste in the lands she watered. Many monuments they built on her banks admired their reflections in her waters for decades, even centuries, before succumbing to the vagaries of time and the elements, and misfortune. The name that springs to mind readily in association with Tungabhadra is Hampi — that sumptuous repast of architectural riches on her southern bank in Ballari district.

## Hidden gems

But Tungabhadra does possess other gems strung out along her meandering course, no lesser in splendour, even if lesser-known. These are the temples built during the period of Kalyani Chalukya rule, centuries before Vijayanagara, in the 12th and 13th centuries. They stand, isolated and proud, by the flowing waters, even if their splendour is a bit chipped and worn with time, testimonies to the skills and ingenuity of artisans long gone. Chaudadanapura, or Chaudayyadanapura, is a small village in Haveri district. Mukteshwara Temple on the left bank of Tungabhadra near the village is the chief attraction of the place. The area near the village was known as Muktikshetra from 11th to 16th centuries, we learn from inscriptions, though it was also called Gope, and Shivapura.

There are eight inscribed steles at Chaudadanapura, which were all relocated to



Inscribed steles at Chaudadanapura.

**“The walls of Galageshwara Temple are buttressed by stepped courses of stone, giving it the appearance of a mountain rising up from the ground.”**

one covered space in the northern part of the temple precincts. They are beautifully engraved with a good combination of prose and poetry, in Kannada and Sanskrit, say reputed scholars Vasundhara Filliozat and Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, in their definitive monograph on the Mukteshwara Temple. These inscriptions are the main source for piecing together the history of the temple.

Among the cluster of some six stone structures, it is the main temple enshrining Shiva as Muktesha which stands out for its grandeur and workmanship. Believed to be built in 1115-1120 CE by a feudatory of the Guttas, the temple was renovated in 1225 CE by Shivadeva — a Kalamukha saint who came to Muktikshetra from Srisailam, and resided there till the end of his days, renovating many temples and laying down the rituals of worship. An unsubstantiated myth has Shivadeva donating the place to Chaudayya of the Ambiga (boatman) community, who was a great Shiva bhakta, giving the place its popular name.



**FINELY PROPORTIONED:** Mukteshwara Temple at Chaudadanapura in Haveri district; (right) a sculpture on the temple's wall. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR



**FOR HEART AND SOUL:** Galageshwara Temple on the edge of River Tungabhadra, in Haveri district.



**SPECTACLE:** The butressed 'vimana' of Galageshwara Temple; a view of the temple premises.



Mukteshwara Temple stands on the high bank of Tungabhadra, which flows from west to east here, before making a sharp turn to the north. The east-facing temple has a *garbhagriha* encased by a *vimana* typical of Kalyani Chalukya temples and is connected by a vestibule to a square *navaranga*, or closed pavilion. There are two entries into the *navaranga*, from the east and the south, both through open *mukhamantapas*.

The architecture of the temple represents an advanced stage in the transformation of the simple *shikhara* of the Dravida tradition into the later Karnata Dravida tradition represented by the Hoyasala temples of the state. The walls of the temple are beautifully modulated by projecting pilasters, offset mouldings and miniature model shrines which would have once housed subsidiary deities.

The only surviving sculptures are those

carved in situ on the wall niches. This finely proportioned temple with attention to detail at every scale prompted author K Shivaram Karanth to exclaim that it reminded him of another temple with the same name in Bhubaneswar, Odisha — a masterpiece crafted in sandstone in the Kalinga Nagara style of temple architecture.

## Exceptional specimen

Less than 15km, as the crow flies, from Mukteshwara Temple, is another exceptional specimen of Kalyani Chalukya architecture — the Galageshwara Temple, near the village of Galaganatha, close to where River Varada meets the Tungabhadra. Even as one ascends the short flight of steps leading to the level terrace on which the temple stands, it can be made out that the form of this temple is unique.

The walls of the temple are buttressed by stepped courses of stone, giving it the appearance of a mountain rising up from the ground. The river flows from south to north here and nowhere else does a temple address the river as intimately as this east-facing temple does. Maybe the builders' efforts to fill in earth to create a high terrace to situate the temple on led to the temple walls buckling, and they were forced to add the buttressing to shore up the structure. Whatever be the reason, it adds considerably to the dramatic quality of the scene — the temple rising like the mythical Meru, with the sparkling waters of the river girdling it.

However, not everybody seems to have thought so — architectural historian James Fergus-

son, in one of his books, writes, “It gives the whole spire a much more pyramidal form than in other temples, and is not elegant!”

The *garbhagriha* of the temple opens via a vestibule onto a large open *mantapa* which is accessed from three sides. Apart from the linga enshrined in the sanctum, there are subsidiary shrines in the *mantapa*, housing Surya, Ganesha, Mahishasuramardini and Vishnu.

## Literary inspiration

Local legend has it that the well-known Kannada writer and patriot Venkatesh Trivikrambhat Kulkarni, also known as Galaganatha, used to compose his literary works in this very *mantapa*.

There are many loose sculptures in the temple, of Vishnu, Bhairava, Bhairavi, Saraswati etc. These have been extolled by renowned historian Shrinivas Padigar as exemplary creations of master craftsmen, along mainstream iconographic themes, but with distinct local flavour. It is believed that this temple was constructed in the 12th century, though some sculptures and remains of brick structures suggest the existence of earlier temples at the site, which was called Pulluni, or Hulluni, in inscriptions found in the Galageshwara Temple.

Sitting on the high bank in front of the temple, it is easy to lose oneself in the moment. The waters of the Tungabhadra are still, a mirror in which fluffy white clouds in a deep blue sky are perfectly reflected. Ibises, egrets and other birds are prowling the edges of a sandbar in the river. A few women are washing clothes on a spit on the left bank, below the temple. A man is bathing his oxen in the river. A flock of thirsty sheep invades the scene, darting along the banks and interrupting the lazy pace of activity for a bit. A woman comes into the temple and offers puja to the idol of Durga in the *mantapa*. Two coracles glide across the glassy surface of the water, their wakes rippling out behind, blurring the reflections.

It is easy to see why, centuries ago, Pulluni was chosen as the site for an important temple of those times, as were Haralhalli, Chaudadanapura and Kuruvatti upriver. One of the verses inscribed at Chaudadanapura proclaims, “Is there any river in the world equal to Tungabhadra descending from Vedashaila, and the celestial river residing in Shiva's matted locks?” Gazing at the broad expanse of the river, which seems nothing but a slice of the sky flowing on earth, I cannot but concur with that unknown composer from the 13th century.

(The author is with National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru)

