

Research Papers



Art and Architecture under Rashtrakutas of Malkhed

N. T. Gangamma

Assistant Professor in History,
B. V. Bhoomaraddy College,
Bidar. Karnataka. 585403

Abstract

The Rashtrakutas were a royal dynasty ruling large parts of the Indian Subcontinent between the sixth and the 10th centuries. The earliest known Rashtrakuta inscription is a 7th century copper plate grant that mentions their rule from Manpur in the Malwa region of modern Madhya Pradesh. Other ruling Rashtrakuta clans from the same period mentioned in inscriptions were the kings of Achalapur which is modern Elichpur in Maharashtra and the rulers of Kannauj. Several controversies exist regarding the origin of these early Rashtrakutas, their native home and their language.

The clan that ruled from Elichpur was a feudatory of the Badami Chalukyas and during the rule of Dantidurga, it overthrew Chalukya Kirtivarman II and went on to build an empire with the Gulbarga region in modern Karnataka as its base. This clan came to be known as the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta, rising to power in South India in 753. At the same time the Pala dynasty of Bengal and the Pratihara dynasty of Malwa were gaining force in eastern and northwestern India respectively. An Arabic writing Silsilatuttavarikh (851) called the Rashtrakutas one among the four principle empires of the world. 1

This period, between the eight and the 10th centuries, saw a tripartite struggle for the resources of the rich Gangetic plains, each of these three empires annexing the seat of power at Kannauj for short periods of time. At their peak the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta ruled a vast empire stretching from Ganga

River and Yamuna River doab in the north to Cape Comorin in the south, a fruitful time of political expansion, architectural achievements and famous literary contributions. The early kings of this dynasty were Hindu but the later kings were strongly influenced by Jainism.

During their rule, Jain mathematicians and scholars contributed important works in Kannada and Sanskrit. Amoghavarsha I was the most famous king of this dynasty and wrote Kavirajamarga, a landmark literary work in the Kannada language. Architecture reached a milestone in the Dravidian style, the finest example of which is seen in the Kailasanath Temple at Ellora. Other important contributions are the sculptures of Elephanta Caves in modern Maharashtra as well as the Kashivishvanatha temple and the Jain Narayana temple at Pattadakal in modern Karnataka, all of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE UNDER RASHTRAKUTAS

The Rashtrakutas contributed much to the architectural heritage of the Deccan. The Rashtrakuta contributions to art and architecture are reflected in the splendid rock-cut cave temples at Ellora and

Please cite this Article as : N. T. Gangamma , Art and Architecture under Rashtrakutas of Malkhed : Review Of Research (JUNE ; 2012)

Elephanta, located in present day Maharashtra. The Ellora site was originally part of a complex of 34 Buddhist caves probably created in the first half of the 6th century in rocky areas also occupied by Jain monks whose structural details show Pandyan influence. Cave temples occupied by Hindus only became feasible later.²



Dravidian style architecture. Top view of Navalinga Temples at Kuknur, Karnataka

The Rashtrakutas renovated these Buddhist caves and re-dedicated the rock-cut shrines. Amoghavarsha I espoused Jainism and there are five Jain cave temples at Ellora ascribed to his period.³ The most extensive and sumptuous of the Rashtrakutas work at Ellora is their creation of the monolithic Kailasanath Temple, a splendid achievement confirming the "Balhara" status as "one among the four principle Kings of the world".⁴ The walls of the temple have marvellous sculptures from Hindu mythology including Ravana, Shiva and Parvathi while the ceilings have paintings. The theme of Rawana shaking the Kailasa mountain, Shiva-tandava, Shiva-Parvati playing chess are a favorite theme of sculptors of Ellora, Shiva Parvati figure along with ganas and different deities.



View of Kailasanath Temple at Ellora, Maharashtra

The Kailasanath Temple project was commissioned by King Krishna I after the Rashtrakuta rule had spread into South India from the Deccan. The architectural style used was Dravidian. It does not contain any of the Shikharas common to the Nagara style and was built on the same lines as the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal in Karnataka.⁵ The achievement at the Kailasanath temple is considered an architectural consummation of the monolithic rock-cut temple and deserves to be considered one of the wonders of the world.⁶ As an accomplishment of art, the Kailasnatha temple is considered an unrivalled work of rock architecture, a monument that has always excited and astonished travellers.⁷



Jain Narayana temple at Pattadakal North Karnataka

While some scholars have claimed the architecture at Elephanta is attributable to the Kalachuri, others claim that it was built during the Rashtrakuta period.⁸ Some of the sculptures such as Nataraja and Sadashiva excel in beauty and craftsmanship even that of the Ellora sculptures.⁹ Famous sculptures at Elephanta include Ardhanarishvara and Maheshamurthy. The latter, a three faced bust of Lord Shiva, is 25 feet (8 m) tall and considered one of the finest pieces of sculpture in India. It is said that, in the world of sculpture, few works of art depicting a divinity are as balanced.¹⁰ Other famous rock-cut temples in the Maharashtra region are the Dhumer Lena and Dashvatara cave temples in Ellora (famous for its sculptures of Vishnu and Shivaleela) and the Jogeshvari temple near Mumbai. There are several temples of Rashtrakutas around Gulbarga namely in Sedam, Chincholi, Aland Taluks which are not brought into light and notice of historians and Archaeologist.

Two and a half century of Rashtrakuta rule, witnessed very high achievement in the field of sculpture and architecture. Now after more than a millennium whatever remains, is in dilapidated condition. Even then, Ellora and Elephanta caves provide splendid examples of that era which excelled in carving out huge monuments and monolithic sculptures

Among Rashtrakuta rulers some had Shiva as their Titular deity, some had Vishnu and Amogavarsha Nrupatunga was a devout Jain. But inscriptions scattered throughout their vast empire bear witness to their munificent grants to Buddhism, Jaina, Shaiva and Vaishnava institutions. Keeping alive the great Indian tradition of religious toleration.

Dr. Percy Brown observes: "The temple of Kailasa at Ellora is not only the most stupendous single work of art executed in India, but as an example of rock architecture it is unrivalled.... The Kailasa is an illustration of one of those occasions when men's minds, hearts and heads work in unison towards the consummation of a supreme ideal."

REFERENCES

1. **Reu, Pandit Bisheshwar Nath (1997) [1933].** History of the Rashtrakutas (Rathodas). Jaipur: Publication Scheme. p39
2. **Rajan, K.V. Soundara (1998).** Rock-cut Temple Styles`. Mumbai, India: Somaily Publications. pp. 19, 115–116.
3. **Takeo Kamiya.** "Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent, 20 September 1996". Gerard da Cunha-Architecture Autonomous, Bardez, Goa, India.
<http://www.indoarch.org/place.php?placelink=R%3D4%2BS%3D15%2BP%3D180%2BM%3D0>. Retrieved 2006-11-10.
4. **Keay, John (2000) [2000].** India: A History. New York: Grove Publications. p200.
5. **Takeo Kamiya,** Op.Cit.
6. **Vincent Smith in Arthikaje, Mangalore.** "Society, Religion and Economic condition in the period of Rashtrakutas". 1998–2000 OurKarnataka.Com, Inc. Archived from the original on 2006-11-04. <http://web.archive.org/web/20061104095148/http://www.ourkarnataka.com/history.htm>. Retrieved 2006-12-20.
7. **Percy Brown and James Fergusson in Arthikaje, Mangalore.** "Society, Religion and Economic condition in the period of Rashtrakutas". 1998–2000 OurKarnataka.Com, Inc. Archived from the original on 2006-11-04. <http://web.archive.org/web/20061104095148/http://www.ourkarnataka.com/history.htm>. Retrieved 2006-12-20.
8. **Kamath, Suryanath U. (2001) [1980].** A concise history of Karnataka : from pre-historic times to the present. Bangalore: Jupiter books. p93.
9. **Arthikaje in Arthikaje, Mangalore.** "Society, Religion and Economic condition in the period of Rashtrakutas". 1998–2000 OurKarnataka.Com, Inc. Archived from the original on 2006-11-04. <http://web.archive.org/web/20061104095148/http://www.ourkarnataka.com/history.htm>. Retrieved 2006-12-20.
10. **Ibid.**