RASASIDDHAS OF ALAMPUR

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ABSTRACT

The Navabrahma temple complex at Alampur in Andhra Pradesh has been a riddle. The history of Alampur is lost in great antiquity entwined in mythology and legend. Historical evidences date from 8th century A. D. The background of rasavidya is essential to unravel the riddle. Rasavidya has its origin in saiva cult treating mercury as the semen of Shiva and sulphur as the menstrual blood of Parvathi. The Rāva (mercury) undergoes eighteen samskaras (purifications) with continuous chanting of aghoramāntra. The Rasalinga formed thus from the processed mercury is placed in the eastern part of rasashala and worshipped. Other metallurgical operations are to be undertaken at the other parts within rasashala. The rasashala is to be located in a proper place with abundant water source. River Thungabhadra flows by the side of temple complex and the Balabrahmeswara temple is on the eastern part where the rasalinga was established. The word Bala might be the synonym of Parvatī. The other eight temples might be the sites for the eight metallurgical operations. Nagnakabandha was perhaps used for yonipuja, which is the tantric practice linked with rasavidya.

Siddhanagarjuna and others mentioned this place with its relation to Vada Vidya Siddhi. Kalanatha and other teachers of Kalanukha sect have taught Rasavidya at this centre. This place deserves better attention and deeper probing by medical historians.

Alampur, renowned as Dakshina Kasi (Varanasi of South) is situated on the west bank of the river Thungabhadra, in the Mahaboobnagar District of Andhra Pradesh. Here Thungabhadra takes a northward direction from its usual west to east direction. This Uttaravahini aspect is considered sacred. There are nine temples, called Navabrahma temples which are enclosed in a fortification surrounded by a moat on three sides and the river flowing on the eastern side. The Government of Andhra Pradesh constructed a protection wall on this side also in order to protect this ancient monument from inundation on the completion of the Hydroelectric Project at Srisailam.

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The Navabrahma temples at Alampur have been a riddle and the place itself has a mystique antiquity not clearly expounded so far. These Navabrahmas are named as Bala Brahma, Kumara Brahma, Arka Brahma, Veera Brahma, Visva Brahma, Taraka Brahma, Garuda Brahma, Swarga Brahma and Padma Brahma. These aspects of the deity have no parallel anywhere in India and bear no relation to the Navabrahmas-Marichi, Bharadwaja, Angirasa, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Daksha, Vasistha and Vamadeva. Names of Navabrahmas at Alampur are not found in any Puranas. The Rasalinga at Balabrahmeshwara temple; the saktipeetha of Jogulamba—the presiding deity of the place; the Nagnakabandha statue; and the peculiar topography of the Navabrahma complex continue to be riddles. The history of Alampur is lost in great antiquity which is entwined in mythology and legend. The recorded historical evidences date only from 8th century A. D. The earlier part of the history could be gathered from Sthalapurana as contained in Skandapurana and the references made to the place in the literary work—Panditihadhyya Charitam of Palkuriki Somanatha and in Rasatantra works such as Rasa Ratnakaram and Ananda Kandam. Books written on archaeological aspects of the Alampur temples have, understandably, their reservations to speak on legendary and mythological aspects. Perhaps this hesitation of historians and archaeologists to speculate on mythological aspects is one of the reasons for not solving the riddle. A bold attempt is made here to reconstruct a historic theory on this temple complex based on certain suggestive clues from ancient Rasatantra texts in order to solve the riddles.

For a clear understanding of this temple a general background knowledge of Rasavidya becomes essential. Rasavidya is an ancient school of learning dealing with metallurgical chemistry, medicine and metaphysics. This has origin in the earliest of saiva cult. Mercury is considered to be the very semen of Shiva. This thought is reiterated not only in Rasa Shastra literature but also in literary works such as Kumara Sambhava. The sulphur is considered to be the menstrual blood of Parvathi. These are esoteric interpretations and therefore the modern mind may not be able to comprehend it unless initiated into Tantric philosophy. The worship of phallus-linga and yoni are tantrik in character. Some of the sculptures such as Lingodbhava Murty and Nagnakabandha are meant for such purpose. The rasa undergoes eighteen sanskaras and during this period, continuous chanting of aghoramantra is considered to bestow the requisite power to mercury. From such mercury Rasalinga is made and placed on a pedestal in a Rasa mandapa facing east in the eastern part of Rasashala. Rasa Sadhakas conceive this Rasalingam as Shiva having eighteen arms, white complexioned, five faced, three eyed, mounted on ghost and blue-throated.
On his lap is seated the great Goddess having one face and four arms with a garland of lotus seeds and trident in the right hand and an emblem of assurance of protection in her left hand, of a complexion resembling gold in the furnace and dressed in yellow. These are the concepts about the parents of the Universe, who are to be meditated by the student initiate. The devotee has to recite Rasankusi Mantra in worshipping the Goddess and the students are instructed about the details of worship by the teacher. The Rasankushi Mantra states as follows. "The Goddess of beauty is in the form of speech or word, is the root cause of the energy of the greatest object of desire (i.e. God himself) and is sovereign force behind rasa (mercury). She is equal to mercury." The sacrificial fire is to be made in a triangular hole, called yonikunda, characterised by good features and offerings are made chanting rasankusi mantras and aghoramantras. After the Purnahuti one or more virgins are to be worshipped. After the rasalinga sthapana on the east other metallurgical operations are undertaken as follows with relevance to the topographical disposition of rasa shala. Metallurgical operations requiring the use of fire (vahnikarmasy) are to be taken up on South East quarter, grinding operations (Peshana karma) on the southern quarter, surgical procedures (sastra karma) in the south-west quarter, washing operations (kshalanadikarma) on the western side, drying up operations (soshana karma) on north-west side, alchemical (Vedhakarma) on the north side and the storing of finished products (Siddha Vasthu Sthapanam) on north east side. The storage of raw material is done in the centre. The Rasalinga is prayed every day.

It is seen from this that there are nine gross operations in a rasa shala and rasa shala is suitably divided accordingly. The location of rasa shala should be at a proper place where a wide and beautiful garden is laid, with all sorts of medicinal plants being cultivated. This must be in a beautiful town where the deities Hara and Gauri are worshipped and where there is nothing to be feared from cheats, ignorant people and thieves etc. The laboratories should have sufficient number of doors and windows and should be within the reach of sufficient supply of pure water (nirmala nira sannidhau). It is in such a place that the intelligent should carry on their metallurgical operations in seclusion. Against this background the Alampur temple complex is to be visualized. The land around Alampur must have been a verdant forest. The soil is rich for vegetation as it is in a river basin. The river Thungabhadra provides pure water. The river and the fortification provide protection. The Rasalinga was established on the eastern part facing east and is called Bala brahmeshwara. Here the word Bala must have been used as a synonym for Kumari, a name of Parvathi. The other eight temples might be the sites for the other eight operations in
a Rasa shala. Nagnakabandha perhaps was used for yoni puja. Jogulamba was the Yogeshwari mentioned in scriptures and was subsequently called Jogeshwari and Jogulamba.

Siddhanagarjuna, Nityanatha Siddha and Bhairava mention about this Brahmeshwara Kshetra and its relation to Vada Vidya Siddhi in their treatises viz. Rasaratnakara and Ananda Kanda, thus establishing the connection between Rasa siddhas and the Brahmeshwara Kshetra.

Rasa Vidya has its origin in the earliest of the Saiva cults. In the south it is believed the Rasa salas existed in Sri Lanka even during Paulastya Brahma’s time. Kubera, the Paulastya might have made Lanka a rich place by his knowledge and skill of alchemical practices. Ravana, the other Paulasthya and the step brother of Kubera, expelled Kubera and usurped Lanka. Kubera went northward and sought the friendship of Shiva. Shiva provided him a place near his abode. Sthalapurana of Srisailam states that Lord Shiva decided to stay with his entire retinue on Sripurana. Therefore it is quite reasonable to postulate that Kubera also had his settlement in a near about place. The Sthala Purana of Brahmeshwara Kshetra states that the Raja Rajeshwara Tirtha near it was the place where Kubera used to bathe and do penance. A large retinue of loyal servants must have accompanied Kubera in his exile and his skilled metallurgists must have come to Brahmapuri. ‘Alam’ means enough and so Alampuram means source of enough wealth. The other name for this is Hemalapuram. Hemala means touch-stone. Rasa Ratnakara mentions about the occurrence of sparshavedhi in Srisailam area. The sites of Srisailam, Alampuram and other areas in between Krishna and Thungabhadra as well as Nallimalai forests of Kurnool and Cuddapah region must have been the dense Dandakaranya providing a good habitat for gandharvas, yakshas, kiratas and vanaras and other early inhabitants of the area. Kubera was lord of Yakshas and Sugreeva was lord of Vanaras in this area.

Kubera’s metallurgists having come from Sri Lanka must have carried names which were typically Dravidian in character. Rasa Ratna Samuchchaya mentions names of (27) Rasasiddhas who were considered to be preceptors of Rasasastra. They are (1) Adima (2) Chandra Sena (3) Lankesh a (4) Visharada (5) Kapali (6) Matta (7) Mandavya (8) Bhaskara (9) Shura Senaka (10) Ratna Kosha (11) Shambhu (12) Satwika (13) Nala Vahana (14) Indrada (15) Gumukha (16) Kambali (17) Vyadi (18) Nagarjuna (19) Surananda (20) Nagabodhi (21) Yasodhana (22) Khanda (23) Kapalika (24) Brahma (25) Govinda (26) Lumpaka (27) Hari.

Since Kubera being a Paulastya and descendant of Brahma lineage, it was but natural for him to have prefixed name of “Brahma” to “Iswara”
the deity of Lankadhipatis. Kubera must have found this area near Alampur very convenient for his metallurgical operations. Srisailam is said to contain Rasa Kundas i.e. mercurial wells. The mineral and herbal resources of Srisailam and its peripheral area must have provided Kubera adequate source material for alchemical processes. Recent archaeological finds give out the name Hiranya Rashtra to the area corresponded by the present day Cuddapah-Kurnool territory and its environs. The Ravalakota in Kurnool district is close to Alampur.

Another interesting mythological fact in the story is that of Rama having learnt siddha vidya during his exile is Dandakaranya. He was called Dandakanatha by rishis. In Bhava Prakasa it is said that “the true process of incinerating iron as experienced by the great yogis, is now described by Rama Raja, who learnt it out of curiosity from those Yogis”. Bhudeb Mookerjee in his introduction to the Volume V of his “Rasa Jalanidhi” identifies this Rama Raja, as Sri Rama Chandra. He further mentions about a book named Rama Rajiya and in this book it is mentioned that Ramachandra learnt rasa vidya from two sages named Kalanatha and Laks mishwara. This Kalanatha might have been a preceptor of later Kalamukha Siddhas of Alampur. While Rama stayed at Kishkindha, planning his offensive on Lanka, the vanaras might have advised him to acquaint himself with siddhatantras so that he will be better equipped to attack Ravana who was an adept in Siddhatantra. They must have directed him to the nearby Brahmeshwara Kshetra of Yaksha Kubera (Kishkindha was also on the banks of Thungabhadra near Pampasarover, the modern Hampi in Karnataka). Kubera was a natural choice as he had his own grouse against Ravana. He must have provided the necessary hospitality to Rama and entrusted the responsibility of teaching Sri Rama this Sivokta Rasavidya to Kalanatha. As Sri Rama was initiated into rasalingapuja, he got used to lingarchana and at Rameshwaram he performed saikatalingarchana before he crossed the Sethu.

Kalanatha and other teachers continued to teach Rasa vidya at this centre. An undated inscription from the village of Itikala in the vicinity of Alampur registers a gift of land by Iruguna Chola for the feeding of Kalamukha Siddhas in the monastery of Someshwara. The word “Iti” in Itikala may be the corrupt form of “ishti” meaning desire and which is achieved by worshipping through sacrifices. The Siddhas observed many tantrik rituals. So this place Itikala might be a place of Kalamukha Siddhas for their ishtis or sacrificial rituals. Thus Alampur continued to be a seat of learning and the seat of the famed University of Brahmapuri (the city of Brahmas). Subsequently the scholarly Kalamukha siddhacharyas had took the suffix rasi to their names and Brahmeshwara was administered by distinguished Dharmendra Rasi, Vaitaranendra Rasi, Brahma Rasi, Someshwara Rasi, Kesava Rasi, Soma Rasi, Isana
Rasi and Vidya Rasi. This word Rasi as such has no relevance here. It means only a heap. But as observed earlier all of them are rasa vidya gurus and are adepts in mastery over mercurial preparations through Aghora and Rasamkusi mantras. So this Rasi may be a shortened for Rasankusi and therefore it will be apt, if they were called as Rasa Bhattarakas instead of Rasi Bhattarakas.

Thus in entire country we have here a unique temple complex structured on the tenets of Rasa sastra and continued to impart Rasa Vidya to many eminent disciples, till the time Vilasaraja damaged the temples. We have not only excellent treatises written by these Rasacharyas but a number of medicinal preparations prepared exactly according to these formulas and used by vaidyas even today throughout the country. This famous centre of learning has left a rich legacy to the posterity. This place deserves a better attention and a deeper research probing.

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REFERENCES

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