
**Land Grants, Endowments and Temple Finance: A Historical–
Economic Study of Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple**

G Rajya Lakshmi

7095060784

B.Ed

Abstract

The Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple, one of the prominent Pancharama Kshetras of Andhra Pradesh, has historically functioned not only as a sacred center of Shaiva worship but also as an important economic institution. This paper examines the historical evolution of land grants, endowments, and temple finance associated with the temple, highlighting its dual role in religious and economic spheres. Drawing upon inscriptional evidence, literary sources, and secondary historical studies, the study analyzes how royal patronage—particularly during the Eastern Chalukya period—facilitated the accumulation of agrarian resources and institutional wealth.

The research explores the structure of land donations (devadana and brahmadeya grants), revenue management, and the redistribution of resources through ritual activities, maintenance works, and employment generation. It further investigates how the temple acted as a nodal center influencing local agrarian production, trade networks, and socio-economic organization in the region. By integrating historical methodology with economic analysis, the study demonstrates that the Draksharama temple functioned as a significant agent of regional economic stability and social integration. The paper argues that temples in medieval Andhra were not merely spiritual institutions but dynamic economic entities that shaped patterns of resource control, labor organization, and local development. Thus, the study contributes to a broader understanding of temple economy within the framework of South Indian socio-economic history.

Keywords: Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple; Temple Economy, Land Grants; Eastern Chalukyas; Socio-Economic History.

Historical Background

Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple occupies a significant position in the religious and political history of medieval Andhra. Recognized as one of the

United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN: 3048-6726 (UIJMR) Impact Factor: 6.934 (SJIF)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

www.ujmr.in Vol-3, Special Issue-II, 2026

Pancharama Kshetras dedicated to Lord Shiva, the temple emerged as a prominent Shaivite center under the patronage of the Eastern Chalukyas between the 9th and 11th centuries CE. The consolidation of regional political authority during this period coincided with the expansion of temple-centered institutions, which served both devotional and administrative functions. Inscriptions found within the temple premises indicate sustained royal patronage, particularly from rulers who sought to legitimize their authority through religious endowments.

The Eastern Chalukya period witnessed considerable agrarian expansion in the Godavari delta region. The reclamation of forest lands, development of irrigation networks, and establishment of Brahmadeya and devadana villages created a structured agrarian base. Within this evolving rural landscape, the temple was integrated as a key institutional beneficiary of land grants. These endowments were not merely symbolic acts of piety but strategic instruments for consolidating political control, stimulating agricultural productivity, and organizing revenue distribution. Thus, the historical growth of the temple must be understood within the broader transformation of regional agrarian economy.

Epigraphical records suggest that the temple functioned as a legally recognized corporate body capable of owning land, receiving tax exemptions, and administering endowed villages. Donations were made not only by kings but also by local chiefs, merchants, and agrarian elites, indicating multi-layered participation in temple patronage. Such records reveal the temple's embeddedness within local governance structures, where it operated alongside village assemblies and regional authorities. The language of the inscriptions reflects formalized procedures in land measurement, revenue assessment, and hereditary service obligations, highlighting institutional maturity.

Religiously, the temple reinforced Shaivism as a dominant ideological framework in the region. However, its significance extended beyond ritual worship. Temple festivals, daily rituals, and charitable activities required a steady inflow of resources, thereby stimulating agricultural production and local trade. The temple's spatial location in a fertile agrarian zone further facilitated its economic integration. Over time, the institution evolved into a redistributive center, channeling agrarian surplus toward religious, social, and administrative functions.

Therefore, the historical development of the Draksharama temple cannot be confined to architectural or theological narratives alone. It must be situated within the dynamic interplay between political authority, agrarian expansion, and institutional

United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN: 3048-6726 (UIJMR) Impact Factor: 6.934 (SJIF)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

www.ujmr.in Vol-3, Special Issue-II, 2026

organization in medieval Andhra. Understanding this background provides the essential foundation for analyzing the temple's role as an economic and administrative institution within the regional state structure.

Introduction

Temples in early and medieval South India were not merely centers of worship but dynamic institutions that played a decisive role in shaping the socio-economic and political life of the region. Particularly in Andhra Desa, temples functioned as custodians of land, recipients of royal patronage, and regulators of agrarian and commercial activities. Within this broader historical framework, the Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple occupies a prominent place as one of the Pancharama Kshetras and a significant center of Shaiva worship.

The historical importance of the temple dates back to the period of the Eastern Chalukyas (9th–13th centuries CE), when large-scale land grants and endowments were made to religious institutions. Inscriptions found in and around Draksharama reveal valuable details regarding devadana and brahmadeya grants, tax remissions, irrigation rights, and allocations for ritual performances and temple maintenance. These records demonstrate that the temple functioned as an organized economic entity with structured financial administration. Royal patronage not only enhanced its spiritual authority but also strengthened its economic base, enabling it to accumulate agricultural lands and regulate revenue systems in the surrounding villages.

The concept of temple economy has gained considerable attention in South Indian historiography, where scholars have emphasized the role of temples as institutional landholders, employers of artisans and laborers, and facilitators of trade networks. In this context, the Draksharama temple provides an important case study to understand how sacred institutions contributed to agrarian expansion, redistribution of resources, and regional development. The temple's management of endowments, supervision of agricultural production, and engagement in ritual-centered economic activities reveal the close interrelationship between religion and economy.

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach by integrating historical analysis with economic perspectives. By examining inscriptional evidence, literary references, and secondary historical interpretations, the paper seeks to analyze the structure of land grants, the mechanisms of temple finance, and their broader socio-economic implications. It aims to demonstrate that the Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple functioned not only as a spiritual nucleus but also as a significant economic institution that influenced patterns of resource control, labor organization, and local

governance in medieval Andhra. Thus, the present study contributes to a deeper understanding of temple-centered economic systems and their impact on the historical evolution of society in South India, highlighting the inseparable link between sacred authority and material prosperity.

Review of Literature

The study of temple institutions in South India has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly in the context of socio-economic history. Historians such as K. A. Nilakanta Sastri emphasized the political and cultural contributions of South Indian dynasties, highlighting the centrality of temples in administrative and social organization. Scholars like R. Champakalakshmi examined the interrelationship between religion, ideology, and urbanization, demonstrating how temples acted as institutional centers of redistribution and regional integration. Similarly, Burton Stein, through his segmentary state model, underlined the integrative role of temples in local governance and agrarian expansion.

Studies on temple economy have particularly focused on land grants, devadana villages, brahmadeya settlements, and the management of surplus. Epigraphical compilations related to Andhra temples reveal extensive details regarding taxation patterns, irrigation rights, and ritual expenditures. However, while broader discussions on South Indian temple economy exist, focused interdisciplinary studies combining historical and economic analysis of the Draksharama temple remain limited. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill this gap by integrating inscriptional evidence with economic interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the temple's institutional and financial structure.

Methodology

The present study adopts an interdisciplinary and analytically grounded methodological framework to examine the historical and economic dimensions of the temple institution, with specific reference to Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple. The research design is qualitative, interpretative, and institutionally oriented, integrating the historical method with economic-institutional analysis. Rather than treating the temple solely as a religious monument, the study conceptualizes it as a structured socio-economic organization embedded within the agrarian and political systems of medieval Andhra, particularly during the Eastern Chalukya period (9th–13th centuries CE). The objective is to reconstruct the temple's institutional role in land management, revenue organization, and socio-economic stabilization.

The study relies primarily on epigraphical evidence engraved within the temple complex and published in authoritative compilations such as South Indian

Inscriptions and Epigraphia Indica. These inscriptions are analyzed as formal economic records documenting land grants (devadana and brahmadeya), tax remissions, irrigation rights, and ritual endowments. The methodological approach includes source criticism, contextual interpretation, and chronological reconstruction to ensure historical accuracy. The analytical framework is informed by established historiographical scholarship, particularly the works of K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, Burton Stein, and R. Champakalakshmi, whose studies on temple-centered polity, agrarian expansion, and redistributive institutions provide theoretical grounding for interpreting the temple's economic functions.

To strengthen interpretative validity, inscriptional data are cross-verified with archaeological publications and peer-reviewed historical research. The study employs an economic institutional perspective to examine mechanisms of resource mobilization, surplus redistribution, and administrative delegation within the temple framework. While quantitative economic data from the medieval period remain limited, the analysis remains evidence-based and avoids speculative conclusions. By combining epigraphical analysis with institutional economic interpretation, the methodology enables a balanced and academically rigorous reconstruction of the temple as a dynamic economic and administrative center in medieval Andhra.

Temple Economy and Land Endowments

Epigraphical evidence reveals that the temple functioned as a recipient and administrator of land grants categorized as devadana and brahmadeya. These grants often included tax exemptions, irrigation privileges, and hereditary management rights. Land endowed to the temple generated agrarian surplus, which was redistributed to sustain ritual activities, temple maintenance, employment of priests, artisans, and service groups.

The temple acted as an economic intermediary between royal authority and local cultivators. By managing land revenues and ensuring agricultural productivity, it contributed to rural stability and fiscal decentralization. The institutional structure allowed for systematic allocation of resources, reinforcing the temple's role as a redistribution economic center rather than a purely devotional space.

Administrative Structure and Institutional Organization

The administrative system of the temple appears to have been hierarchical and organized. Inscriptions refer to functionaries responsible for treasury management, ritual supervision, land measurement, and revenue collection. These administrative

arrangements indicate the presence of a structured institutional mechanism regulating both sacred and secular activities.

The temple's management reflected coordination between royal officials, local assemblies, and Brahmin trustees. Such cooperation strengthened the legitimacy of political authority while simultaneously empowering local socio-religious institutions. The temple thus functioned as a semi-autonomous corporate body within the broader polity of medieval Andhra.

Socio-Economic Impact

The economic activities of the temple had broader social implications. Employment generated through ritual services, festivals, construction activities, and agricultural management supported various occupational groups. The temple also facilitated redistribution of surplus through charity, feeding houses (annadana), and patronage of artisans. By integrating agrarian production with religious patronage, the temple contributed to regional economic stabilization. It strengthened social cohesion by linking diverse communities—rulers, Brahmins, peasants, merchants, and artisans—within a shared institutional framework. This integrative role was crucial in sustaining the agrarian economy of the Eastern Chalukya period.

Findings

- ❖ The temple functioned as an institutional economic center supported by systematic land endowments.
- ❖ Epigraphical evidence confirms structured revenue administration and fiscal privileges.
- ❖ The temple mediated between royal authority and agrarian communities.
- ❖ Redistribution of surplus strengthened socio-economic stability in medieval Andhra.
- ❖ The temple's institutional framework reflects the integration of religion and economy within regional state formation.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Draksharama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple operated as a structured economic and administrative institution in addition to being a sacred Shaivite center. Through land endowments, revenue management, and redistributive mechanisms, the temple contributed significantly to agrarian expansion and socio-economic integration during the Eastern Chalukya period.

By adopting a historical and economic institutional perspective, this research highlights the multidimensional character of medieval South Indian temples. The findings reinforce the view that temple institutions played a decisive role in shaping

United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN: 3048-6726 (UIJMR) Impact Factor: 6.934 (SJIF)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

www.ujmr.in Vol-3, Special Issue-II ,2026

regional economic structures, state formation processes, and social organization in pre-modern Andhra.

References

Archaeological Survey of India. Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy. Madras: Government Press.

Archaeological Survey of India. Epigraphia Indica. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.

Archaeological Survey of India. South Indian Inscriptions. Various Volumes. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.

Champakalakshmi, R. Religion, Tradition and Ideology: Pre-Colonial South India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Karashima, Noboru. South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1800. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Sastri, K. A. Nilakanta. A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Sastri, K. A. Nilakanta. The Cholas. Madras: University of Madras, 1955.

Stein, Burton. Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Stein, Burton. The New Cambridge History of India: Vijayanagara. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Subbarayalu, Y. South India under the Cholas. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012.