

Religious Patronage and Temple Building under the Rulers of Ranthambore

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Abstract:

This article examines the religious history of Ranthambore Fort. It discusses the religious patronage under different rulers and dynasties, with particular focus on the Chauhans of Ranthambore. Literary sources, inscriptions, and architectural remains are used to understand the development of religious activities and temple construction in the region. The article also discusses the religious patronage of rulers such as Prithviraja I, Vagbhata, and Hammir, along with the destruction and survival of religious structures during different periods. The present religious landscape of the fort, including its Hindu and Jaina temples, mosque, and Dargah, is also examined. The importance of Trinetra Ganesh Temple among the locals have also been discussed. The study highlights how the Ranthambore's religious landscape reflects both its historical past and its present-day religious practices.

Keywords: Ranthambore Fort; Religious History; Religious Patronage; Temple Architecture; Chauhans; Trinetra Ganesh Temple.

Introduction:

Ranthambore Fort, earlier also known as Ranasthambhapura, located in the Sawai Madhopur District, was an important part of the Chahamana kingdom of Shakambhari from at least the 12th century. Over time, the fort and its surrounding region came under the control of different dynasties and rulers. The religious patronage of the region was also shaped by the rulers and political powers who controlled it. The fort, believed to have been built by Maharaja Jayant in the 5th century, C.E. (ASI, 2006), contains several religious structures and remains of early temples. These remains help us trace the history of temple-building activities and religious development in the region. Apart from these archaeological and architectural remains, literary as well as epigraphical sources such as Balvan inscription also helps us to provide information in this regard. The present religious structures in the fort complex, such as Trinetra Ganesh Temple, and the Jaina continues to hold significant importance among the locals.

Religious Patronage under the Chauhans of Ranthambore: Inscriptions, Texts and Architectural Remains:

There are various theories regarding under which ruler and dynasty, the fort was built. From textual sources, it is known to us that Prithviraja I, an early important Chauhan ruler, put golden cupolas on the Jaina temples of Ranthambore in 1105 A.D., which suggests that his suzerainty over Ranthambore, and the prominence of Jaina religion in this region, which further developed during the

reign of later rulers. Siddhasena Suri, a Jaina author during the 12th century C.E., included Ranthambore among the holy places of Jaina religion (Jain, 1972, p. 330).

One of the most important Chauhan rulers of Ranthambore was Vagbhata, who, according to *Hammira Mahakavya*, ruled for twelve years. During the reign of Viranarayana, who ruled before him, the fort went under the control of Delhi Sultanate for some period of time. Vagbhata reoccupied Ranthambore during the reign of Raziya. Balban, also tried to conquer the fort twice during his reign, first in 1240 A.D., and the second in 1258 A.D., but didn't succeed. Minhaj, in his work, *Tabqat-i-Nasiri*, called Vagbhata, "*The Greatest of the Rais of Hindustan*" (Sharma, 1975, p. 102).

Vagbhata, apart from his political success, also known for building a magnificent temple called Bahar Deo within the fort complex. Today, no such temple exists in the fort, as it was among those buildings, mentioned in *Khazain-ul-futuh*, destroyed to ground when Alauddin Khalji conquered the fort in 1301 A.D. Vagbhata is also said to have built a massive temple at Jhain, nearby site from Ranthambore, which was important from the perspective of the defence of Ranthambore (Hooja, 2006, p. 455). There are some early temple remains, especially pillars, which are still found within the fort complex. Some of them have been reused in the later structures. Figure 1 is a sandstone pillar and as per the architectural basis, it belongs to an early temple. There is a depiction of *Ghatapallava*, carved in the upper part of the pillar, a panel of *Kirtimukha*, and below it, a depiction of *Devapurusha* and *Dwarapala*.



Figure 1



Figure 2

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Figure 2 is also an early medieval temple pillars, and has the depiction of *Kirtimukha* and *Shankhapurusha* on it. Figure 3 and 4 are also the pillar remains from the early temples and Figure 5 shows an early temple pillar which has been reused in the other structure of the fort. It can be possible that these pillars are not from the same but different temples within the fort which suggests that there were several early temples within the fort, which is also supported by textual sources.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Information regarding temple construction and giving patronage to various religious sects also found during the reign of Hammir, the most celebrated ruler of Ranthambore. Hammir was not only known for his political campaigns and the conflict with the Khalji forces but also for patronizing art and literature during his reign. He built a three storied golden palace called Pushyaka (Pushpaka) at Ranthambore. He was tolerant towards all religion and according to *Hammir Mahakavya*, he worshipped the images of Jaina tirthankaras at Mount Abu. In both the Balvan inscription and the *Hammir Mahakavya*, mentions that he patronized a poet named Baladitya (Jain, 1972, p. 333).

The Balvan inscription, mentions the Kamlaji or Kamaleshwar Shiva temple, in the present-day Indergarh tehsil of Bundi District, was also built in Hammir's reign. The temple was, as per the inscription, built by a feudal lord during Hammir's reign. It mentions Hammir's and his father's political campaigns and Koti-yajnas performed by Hammir after his victory over many regions (Hooja, 2006, p. 462; Sastri, 1927, p. 46). The temple, is an important example of Bhumija temple architecture in this region in the late 13th century. At present, the *Shikhara* of the temple has been mostly repaired, the *Adhithana* and the *Kapili* part of this temple is somehow survived. The

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Jadyakumbha, *Karnika*, and *Kapotpali*, along with *Shakhas* such as *Grasspattika*, *Gajashakha*, *Ashvashakha*, and *Narshakha* are present. The images of various subordinate gods and goddesses are present in the *Kumbha* section; the *Kumbha* has been present with *Bandha*. In the fort complex, there are two temple which according to traditions, are associated with King Hammir, although, their structure seems later than his reign. The first one is Trinetra Ganesh temple, which is said to have been built by Hammir, and there are folktales which connects the temple with Hammir. The other one is a small Shiva shrine in the fort for which, it is said that Hammir offered his head to lord shiva at this temple after the battle with Khalji forces. Jainism was also flourishing during his reign.

Religious patronage under the later authorities: Malwa, Sur, Mughal and Kachchwaha dynasty:

After the conflict between Hammir and Alauddin Khalji, many structures within the fort complex including the Bahar Deo temple built by Vagbhata was destroyed to ground and Ranthambore remained under the Khalji dynasty for some time. After some time, it was conquered by Rana Hammir of Mewar, who earlier reoccupied Chittor in 1326 A.D. The fort of Ranthambore was among the major reasons of conflict between the Malwa and Mewar. It also came under Malwa kingdom for a while. The Sultan of Malwa, made Alauddin Khilji, the administrator of the fort. Dhanaraja of the Pragvata family was a minister of Alauddin Khalji and was a devotee of Ratnasimhasuri (1395-1461 A.D.) (Jain, 1972, p. 333)

Shershah Sur, conquered the Ranthambore fort in 1543 A.D. The rulers of the Sur dynasty were tolerant in religious matters. It is known to us from a literary source that the great physician Rekha was welcomed by Shershah for his vast knowledge in the science of medicine. During the reign of Shershah Sur, the *Jinadatta-Charita*, and the *Holirenukacharita* were written in 1549 and 1551 A.D. respectively, by the Sravakas for the presentation to Lalitakirti who said to have visited Ranthambore. (Jain, 1972, p. 334).

In 1569 A.D., the fort of Ranthambore came under the Mughal authority. The Mughal emperor Akbar appointed Jagannath Kachchwaha for Ranthambore. During the reign of Jagannath Kachchwaha, Jainism was flourishing here. In 1507 A.D. Jagannath appointed Khimasi of Todanagara (Toda-Raisingh), his minister, who built a magnificent Jaina temple, and installed the image of Mallinatha (Jain, 1972, p. 334).

Present Religious Landscape of Ranthambore:

At present, the religious landscape of the fort is complex, showing variations, changes over time, and the continuing importance of these structures in the cultural traditions of people. There are many temples within the complex, dedicated to various Hindu deities and one temple, dedicated to a Jaina tirthankara. Apart from the temples, there is also a mosque, located near Rani Talab, and the Dargah of Qazi Peer Janab Sadruddin, a devoted Sufi saint.

Various early temple remains scattered within the complex, suggests the early presence of temples built during the early period in this place, which might be destroyed during the conflicts with Muslim armies. Apart from the pillar remains discussed above, there are other remains also. The Jaina temple

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at present in the fort, considered to be one of the oldest temples in the fort. Although, it seems that after looking at the present structure that the temple has undergone several reparations work. There are some early remains lie within the Jaina temple, one seems to be a part of *Udgama*, which can be dated around 13th-14th century. The other one seems to be a part of the above section of *Lalathimba* of a temple. These remains suggest that the initial temple existed here might be of early period. There are also some early pillar remains in the Annapurna Mandir.

Among these structures, the temple of Trinetra Ganesh holds significant importance among people. It holds a deep-rooted socio-cultural significance that extends far beyond the standard tourism. The image of lord Ganesh in this temple is said to have been Swayambhu or naturally arisen. It is called as Ranat Bhanwar among the people. People from many regions of Rajasthan, especially the nearby ones, very first, invite the deity on their marriage occasions by offering the first marriage card to the deity. The priests of the temple, read these invites out to the deity to secure his blessing before the wedding day. A massive annual fair takes place here during the Ganesh Chaturthi, which draws hundreds of people. Overall, Ranthambore's religious landscape shows both, its past and present. The old temple remains tell us about its religious history, while the traditions of Trinetra Ganesh show that the fort is still important to people today.



Figure 6 (A later Ganesh Temple in the Fort)



Figure 8 (An Image of the Dargah)

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Conclusion:

The religious history of Ranthambore shows that the fort was an important centre of religious activity under different rulers and dynasties. Literary sources, inscriptions, and surviving architectural remains provide information about temple construction and religious patronage, particularly during the Chauhan period. Although, many early religious structures have been destroyed or altered over time, some architectural remains still survive within the fort. The present temples, mosque, and dargah reflect the different religious traditions associated with the site. The continuing customs and worship at the Trinetra Ganesh Temple also show the importance of Ranthambore in people's lives today. Thus, the religious history of Ranthambore can be understood through both its surviving remains and its continuing religious traditions.

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