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KCR wants Telangana's own 'Tirumala'

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Tirumala temple.

HYDERABAD: The rivalry between Telangana and residuary Andhra Pradesh, squabbling like resentful siblings over the last one year, has now acquired a religious overtone.

With bifurcation, Andhra Pradesh retained its famous pilgrimage of Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple at Tirumala, the Sri Mallikarjuna Swamy temple at Srisailam and Sri Kalahasthi temple in Chittoor. Telangana, on the other hand, while having its share of temples, has none to match the pull of the big three.

Now, Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has got down to righting the 'wrong' - build his state's own Tirumala in shape of Yadagirigutta, or a temple to Sri Laskhmi Narasimha Swamy.

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Tirumala has a centuries old tradition and the attention showered on it by successive governments has played a key role in

making it one of the country's major pilgrimages. From Krishnadevaraya, the Vijayanagara king, to Chandrababu Naidu, the temple has historically received official patronage.

Yadagirigutta began getting serious attention only in the past one year. Last October, KCR declared his plans to develop it along the lines of Tirumala. Temple authorities say that ever since he announced his plan, visitor stream has increased and on some days, especially on Saturdays, the numbers touch 50,000. Temple revenues too are beginning to reflect the increasing public interest in Yadagirigutta.

As against Rs 66.58cr the temple earned in 2013-14, the income rose to Rs 73.31cr in 2014-15. Yadagirigutta is around 50 km from Hyderabad and well connected by rail and road. But the number of pilgrims is a mere 20,000 or 25,000, and that too on auspicious days, unlike Tirumala where the count is up to a lakh per day. And what Tirumala earns in 10 days, takes a year for the Yadagirigutta temple to raise.

Tirumala, located on Seshachalam hills, is also well known for the seven-hill climb for pilgrims who prefer to trek from Tirupati at the foot hills.

Yadagirigutta, on the other hand, is on a single hillock and suffers in comparison. Somewhat ingeniously, the Telangana administration has now counted eight other hillocks that dot the countryside near Yadagirigutta, and these are now part of the development plans.

So now, if Tirumala has seven hills, Yadagirigutta shall have nine. And after renaming it Yadadri (similar sounding to Seshadri, one of the seven Tirumala hills), the Telangana government in February created the Yadagirigutta Temple Development Authority to oversee the construction of a re-imagined complex creating a "perfect pilgrimage" spread over nearly 2,000 acres at the Yadadri foothills.

TOWER OF GOLD AT ₹50 CRORE



➤ Yadagirigutta temple (left) is dedicated to Narasimha, an avatar of Vishnu, and his consort, Lakshmi

₹200cr set aside for creating a 2,000-acre pilgrimage in Yadadri hills; ₹100cr to be given every year for 3 yrs

➤ Main gopuram (tower) to be raised to 100ft, with gold plating for ₹50cr

➤ Structures on 14 acres of hilltop to be razed. Pradakshina to be paved along hillside

➤ 500-acre grove planned near hill

Vice-chairman of the YTDA, G Kishen Rao told TOI that the development plans for Yadadri are inspired by Tirumala. "But this is not a competition with Tirumala. There can be no rivalry on such issues," he said.

"Right now, all major temples in Telangana, Bhadrachalam, Vemulavada, Vijayawada or at other locations, attract pilgrims during festivals. The CM wants to provide people of Telangana a religious destination that they can visit throughout the year," he said.

The government has set aside Rs 200 crore for the project so far and Rs 100 crore has been promised every year in the budget for the next three years. That may not appear much but when all is done, the first CM of Telangana would have the satisfaction of keeping his promise of developing the temple into Telangana's Tirumala.

Times View

The KCR government is wrong on two counts. First, in a country that swears by secularism, governments should not be in the business of building places of worship. Second, it is labouring under a serious misconception if it thinks that a rival to Tirupati can be built by outdoing the temple in terms of scale and grandeur. People's faith in places of worship stems from a very complex mix of factors and not by the scale of construction.