



**The Dominancy of Vaishnavism in Hoysala Architecture
(A sculptural study)**

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Abstract: *Most of the architectural remains of surviving Hoysala temples are of magnificent in nature and elaborately vast in sculptures. The temple complex comprises of garbagudi, antarala, navaranga, sukanasi and a distinctive style referred as jagati – an elevated platform in the shape of star formation, stellate; on which the temple is constructed. The outer wall has a horizontal band of friezes running along the wall from the basement with variety of motifs and images from canonical texts.*

KeyWords:- *Architectural, Garbagudi, Antarala, Navaranga, Bethishilpa, Somanathapur, Hoysaleshwara, Vishnuvamsadbhava And Yadavanarayana.*

Introduction:

Most of the architectural remains of surviving Hoysala temples are of magnificent in nature and elaborately vast in sculptures. The temple complex comprises of garbagudi, antarala, navaranga, sukanasi and a distinctive style referred as jagati – an elevated platform in the shape of star formation, stellate; on which the temple is constructed. The outer wall has a horizontal band of friezes running along the wall from the basement with variety of motifs and images from canonical texts. Above that is peta – on which bethishilpa, large sculptures of deities are done along with architectural ornates; which followed by vimana. These sculptures on the wall; most of which are of incarnations of Vishnu and from bhagavatha found in all temples including Shiva devala.

The artistic representation of Hoysala art:

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A characteristic feature of the Hoysala architecture is the deep and ornate carving of the building from the base to the top. This rich sculpture becomes more and more prominent in the later temples, for example the Kesava temple at Somanathapur built during the reign of Narasimha III¹ (William coslho, The hoysala vamsa, pg: 297).

Temples built prior to Hoysalas, witnesses' Western chalukya influence – architectural form, later witnessed Western chalukyan style and Kadambas with additional add-on of Hoysala's salient feature of art and architectural forms. The Hoysala monarch Vishnuvardhana (1108 – 1152AD) who was a governor in parts of Gangavadi during his elder brother veera ballala I, ascends the throne after his demise. Successful wars in south then in north – Cholas, Kalyani Chalukyas to kanchi - The Nolambas of Nolambavadi, Kadambas of Banavasi and Goa, the Pandyas of Uchchangi, the Alupas of Tulunadu, and the Santaras of Hosagunda had to pay tribute and accept Vishnuvardhana as their overlord, made him to rise to power as an ambitious monarch in the Deccan.

Follower of Jainism then Bitti Deva, later known to be king Vishnuvardhana, accepted Hinduism under the influence of Hindu philosopher Sri Ramanujacharya. This transition period however acts as building an independent empire, gave a huge impact in the supremacy of Vaisnavism. Shaivism and Jainism (queen Shanthala devi remained a Jain) though followed equally in the kingdom, the predominance of Vaishnavism is seen through the Hoysala art and architectural features.

The magnificent structures Hoysaleswara, kedareswara of haledidu (dvikuta and trikuta), Chennakeshava temple of somanathapura (trikuta), Ishvara temple of arsikere (ekakuta), Amruteswara temple of Amruthapura (ekakuta), sadashiva of nuggehalli (ekakuta), Mallikarjuna of basaralu (dvikuta), Someshwara temple of haranahalli (ekakuta), stands as a testimony for the dominance of Vaishnava sculptures chiselled over the outer walls of these temples, to name a few. The Ishwara temple in Arsiker; though is of Shiva temple, most of the outer wall sculptures depicted are of Vishnu – Lashminarayana, Vishnu's dwadasha sculptures, Lakshmi among others are seen very dominant. The Someshwara temple, Haranahalli exhibits an equal portion of Vishnu sculptures on the outer wall as well. The Shiva temples constructed are all featured with Vishnu's avatar in different forms leading as a predominant characteristic feature.

The Bhagavatha, anushasanaparva of Mahabharata where one thousand forms (names) of Vishnu is praised (Vishnu sahasranama). Most significant forms of those are being chaturvimshati, twenty four forms were used in sculptures. Now, the reason being the

king Vishnuvardhana became a trend setter of the wide spread of this sect or the growing ascendancy of Vaishnavism by the great Hindu philosopher Sri Ramanujacharya in the kingdom, is a most debated theory.

The iconographic features in a sculpture - shankha, chakra, gada and padma became dominant on the outer walls of temples, ceilings, beams and pillars. Generally seen are Keshava, Narayana, Narasimha, Govinda, Madhusudana, Trivikrama, Vamana, Hrishiksha, Padmanabha, Damodara, Sankarshana, Vasudeva, Aniruddha, Purushottama, Adhokshaja, Achyuta, Upendra, Janardana, Hari, Venugopala and Vishnu. Even though, the main deity in the garbhagudi is Shiva, some of the forms of Vishnu sculptures are observed in the temple art and ornamentation. In vaishnava temples these sculptures are seen evident, being seen on others are remarkable.

The Hoysalas in Karnataka grew to prominence in south India and became the most important patrons for art and architecture in the Deccan. The remains of around hundreds of temples have been found in southern Deccan, though mainly three of them are mainly discussed widely: namely, the temples at Belur, Halebidu and Somanathapur. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of these temples being their complex projecting angles known as satellite-plan look alike of star in shape and the intricate jewellery carved (by the use of soft stone called soapstone) on Gods and Goddesses that adorn the walls of the temples. Hoysala temples sometimes called as hybrid or vesara style, as their uniqueness seems neither dravida nor nagara but somewhere in-between.

The basic rudiments of Hoysala style with Srivaishnavism developed during king Vishnuvardhana's reign – the year AD 1116 also saw the change of Vishnuvardhana from Jainism to vaishnavism² (Coelho – op.cit., pg: 70), usage of multi-sanctums, satellite plan, raised terrace, profuse sculptural details and jewel like ornamentation work with precise intricacy. Belur Chennakesāva temple being the first pivotal point although based on architectural style of Kalayana Chalukyas.

The Hoysalas styled themselves as Vishnuvamsadbhava and Yadavanarayana in their inscriptions and this shows their bias towards Vaishnavism which was prevalent all over India including Karnataka. But the important event took place during the time of Vishnuvardhana and this changed the course of action and Srivaishnavism gained prominence during this period³ (Dr. R. Gopal – cultural study of Hoysala inscriptions).

The outset must be stated that the general belief is that the Ramanuja was persecuted by the Cholas king and unable to bear this persecution Ramanuja fled Tamil country and took

shelter in Karnataka, which at that time ruled by Vishnuvardhana. This traditional belief is not supported by epigraphy. However, it is quite possible that Ramanujacharya in the natural course of religious mission crossed kaveri and came to Karnataka. According to tradition, it was at tonnur that Vitthala (Vishnuvardhana) met the great saint who is said to have cured his daughter from an incurable ailment. This incident had a deep stamp of faith in the mind of vitthala and his queen. As a result, Vitthala also called as Bittiga or Bittideva who was Jain, gave up faith and got converted to Vaisnavism and got a new name Vishnuvardhana⁴ (Ibid)

The concept of creating exuberant sculptures was essential in order to imbue the temple with its divine power. Ornamentation became the means of inviting into the statue and therefore into the temple, the God with whom the devotee would become united during the meditation. Hence the highly decorated Hoysala temple served as an object to inspire the 'bhakti' and at the same time to act as means of instructions for the masses.

The term style can be interpreted in a number of ways. One being 'style' results from conscious desire to do something differently from others, but an analysis of the many inscriptions does not suggest that this was intended aim of the Hoysala sculptors. On the other hand, the desire to excel as the most skilful artist is a common theme that suggests that the concept of 'style' most applicable to Hoysala art implies not difference for its own sake, but by sculpting more skilfully than other artists, the sculpture acquires subtle differences. The basic similarity of many florid ornamentation and details of the sculptures further reinforces this definition. These differences were not the result of a desire of being different but resulted from the desire to create the most perfectly proportioned works according to the regional recessions of the 'silpa sastras'. Thus, the style quotient seen in the works of Hoysala sculptures was essentially the outcome of a desire to excel in creating the most skilful work and hence, to be a good devotee of the deity⁴ (Kelleon collier, The hoysala artists).

The greater tradition of the Hoysala art is identifiable with the king and deity. By constructing the temple, the king sacralised the kingship, and in order to establish his rule over the region conquered, required a distinctive architectural and sculptural style as a means to advertise his superior regal power and prosperity. Each generation of Hoysalas pursued the same iconographic symbols and poses traditionally associated with the forms of each deity and same style of executing the forms.

The Laksmidevi temple at Doddagaddavalli, dated 1113 AD is one of the earliest major temple constructed during the reign of Vishnuvardhana whereas, the Chennakesāvā temple at Belur was the earliest structure to be built in the fully evolved Hoysala style.

Hoysaleswārā temple at Halebidu, given way to an elaborate technical display of the sculptures. The decorative features of Keerti Narayana temple at Talakad, one of the granite structures apart from regular talc-schist (known as soapstone) used by Hoysalas exhibits their professional expertise of the time.

The Hoysala style of thirteen century during king Narasimha III, had increased in size and importance than the early twelfth century. By the thirteenth century Hoysala sculptures had also undergone considerable changes. The refined and lively, pulsating rhythmic style of deities from Belur and Hoysala temples gradually coalesced into more formalized static patterns. The Somanathapura temple at Somanathapur and the Panchalingesvārā temple of Govindanahalli throws light upon the later part of Hoysala style⁵ (Coelho op.cit. p 298).

The one important custom followed in Hoysala style was the engraving names, a thing perhaps unknown among the other dynasties in India. They were greatly patronised by the ruling monarchs and chiefs, thus, artists forming a separate class by themselves transferring their lore to prosperity. This shows as most of the sculptures are done with the same sculptors and artisans, a stereotype of sculptures are seen in all the temples. Also since the patronage is from the king's court, the art takes an inclination towards the king's religion, in spite of king being secular among other religions of the land.

The sculptors who engraved their names on the walls of the temples are : Ballanna, Bochana, Baicoja, Changa, Devoja, Harisha of odayagiri, Harisha of tanagundur, Honoja, Kalidasa, Kentana, Malloja-Maniyoja, Mallitamma, Makasa, Chikka Mallitamma, Malealaki, Machanna, Manibalaka, Masa son of Kanemoja and Revoja.

The artisans who worked under the architect – the surveyor, the designer and the crafts man – also belonged to certain caste-guilds which specialised in temple building. His skill and technique were perfected by training; handed down from generation. And it was the caste guild to which such artisans belonged that were pressed into service by the royal dynasties which were anxious to build neat monuments in all parts of India. The differences in plan and technique arose either because of the differences in local traditions or on account of external influences as in the North-west of India⁶ (Munshi K. M, Indian temple sculptures., p: 5).

The Hoysala Empire which lasted over three hundred years, made a remarkable influence in the history of Deccan art and sculptures. By the end of thirteen century, corresponding to the close of the reign of Narasimha III and Ramanatha, the developments of Hoysala art and architecture style, in the direction of temple building on a grand scale, was disturbed by the internecine wars followed by Mohammedan invasion. But by then it had

developed enough to be ranked among the greatest schools of Indian architecture and being adopted by their successors, Vijayanagara Empire.

Conclusion:

The temples of Arsikere, Halebidu, Belur, Aralaguppe, Haranahalli, Hosaholalu, Nuggehalli, Somanathapur, Melkote, Basarlu, Belavadi, Javagal and Koravangala studied and surveyed, gives an account of artistic sculptures representation in the temples exhibiting the Vishnava forms in greater numbers compared to others; thus demonstrating the theory.

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