

Association of Plants and Sculptures during Hoysala Period

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Abstract: Hoysala Empire was prominent in South India. Their economical and political stability made them expand the territory. The prosperous and peaceful kingdom is the main reason of development and increase in religious activity and in turn the construction of the temples. The Kings were so generous that they patronized artists and encouraged temple architecture. The vivid imagination and conceptualization ability of the artists gave rise to the beautiful and enduring temples. The intricacies and delicacies of sculptures, the artistic representation of plant structures invoked archeologists, art historians and botanists to explore on the plant sculpture association in Hoysala temples. The present paper is one such work which deals with the analysis of plant association with sculptures instigated by the perfect creation of artists of Hoysala times.

Keywords: Plant-Sculpture Association, Plant Families, Analytical analysis.

I. Introduction

From time immemorial plants are considered a vital part of the human life. Plants are always associated with life. Plants provide support for life by providing food and fresh air for breathing. Every part of the plant is useful. Plant provides nutrition through storing food stuff in its different parts like fruits, leaves, stem and roots. Plant-extracts like enzymes, flavanoids, carotenoids and so on, are used as integral part in the field of medicine. The plant products help in improving holistic health. Floral decorations are used to highlight a place or a thing. Likewise plants are the integral part of all the living organisms in the world. Plants make our lives healthier and colourful. Parts of plants like flowers, fruits and leaves are used in rituals. Flowers are used to decorate the temples, and deities. These socialistic and religious practices have inspired people to use them as a theme in painting, literature and architecture.

Plant structures are seen even in the temple architecture. Hoysala period witnessed a state of pinnacle in rendering of Art, namely Sculpture and Architecture. Hoysala temple architecture grabs attention to exquisite detail and skilled craftsmanship. The Vimāna or the tower over the temple shrine is delicately finished with intricate carvings. The star shaped or stellate design of the base of the shrine with rhythmic projections carried through the tower is another highlight of the Hoysala architecture. Hoysala temple sculpture resembles and emphasizes the delicacy in depicting feminine beauty, grace and physique. This shows the matured artistic skills of the sculptors. Fergusson, a great historian says, “The enduring qualities of the stone seem to be unrivalled for, though neglected and exposed to all the vicissitudes of a tropical climate for seven centuries, the minutest details are as clear and sharp as they were the day were finished”, [Settar 1975: Vol I. p. 446].

Hoysalas are the best examples for using plant structures in temple architecture. The parts of the temple like the filigree work on Jalāndra-the window cells, Adhishtāna- the Basement or Foundation, Door Jambs, Bhuvanēśwari- the ceilings, Pillars, Bhatti- the wall space, Shikharās on the shrines, Toranās, Architraves, Lintels and such other architectural units and the bracket figures, individual figures, etc are the places where the plants are profusely depicted.

During Hoysala period there were many kings who patronized artists and sculptors and encouraged the temple architecture. Temples in Belūr, Halébidu, Somanāthapura, Mosale, Hosaholalu, Nuggéhalli etc are the best examples for Hoysala architecture. They are very intricate, delicate and perfect carvings. The work of that period is considered to be one of the most excellent works in Indian architecture of all times. They have used a lot of plant structures in the sculptures which show the importance given to the nature in those times.

II. Analytical View On The Presence Of Plant Structures In Sculptures

The plant structures are so natural that they are very close to real structures. Plant structures are used for decorative purposes or sometimes associated with female structures, or ornaments on deities. Through their carvings the artists have stylized the innumerable varieties of plants which made the plants as integral part of human life as represented in Hoysala art.

Plants have also been used in narrative structures which depict stories from the great epics like Ramayana and Mahabharatha. Some stories are even taken from Panchatantra. For example, a story from Ramayana says that Lord Rama killed the King of monkeys, Vali, from behind the 7 Sala [Shorea robusta]

trees. It is very well depicted in the sculptures on the outer wall of Hoysaleswara temple, Halébidu. In another sculpture we can see the portrayal of Garuda carrying Lord Vishnu and in the background a big Parijatha [*Nyctanthes arbortristis*] tree is shown to represent heaven. The classic example is the depiction of the story of Lord Krishna where he lifts the huge Govardhana Mountain to protect people against natural calamities. Here members of Caesalpiniaceae and Musaceae [Banana tree, *Musa* sp].



Photograph-1: Showing Vāli vadha by Lord Rāma through Saḷa trees. [Hoysaleswara Temple, Halébidu]



Photograph - 2: Garuda carrying Lord Vishṇu and in the background a Parijatha tree is depicted. Halébidu



Photograph-3: Govardhana Krishna with many Species of Plants **Chennakéṣava Temple, Belūr**

In the Hoysala temples one of the flowers which is chiefly encountered is Lotus which belongs to Nymphaeaceae family. Lotus flower is used in different perspective. It is used as the seat for deities and sometimes in the hands of deities. The very foundation of the temple is lotus shaped which is the signature structure of Hoysala style. Lotus flower is also used inside the temple on the bhuvaneshwari, the ceiling structures. They are also used on the upper portion of the parapet walls and beams.



Photograph-3: Lotus in the Hand



Photograph-4: Lotus on Upper portion of Beam



Photograph - 5: Foundation in the formation of Lotus flower Chennakeshava Temple, Belur.



Photograph - 6: Lotus Structures on the Bhuvaneshwari, Hoysaleswara Temple, Halebidu



Photograph-7: Lotus base for the Deity Hoysaleswara Temple, Halebidu

These are the various examples where lotus flower has been used. This is one of the examples to show the extraordinary talent of the artists of Hoysala period. [Settar 1992].

Many other flowers like Jasmine, *Vinca rosea*, *Crysanthamum* sp, members of Musaceae, Bignoniaceae, Liliaceae, Caesalpiniaceae, and creepers like members of Vitaceae, *Campsis radicans*, etc are seen in sculptures. Trees like Parijata [*Nyctanthes arbortristis*], Peepal [*Ficus religiosa*], Sala tree [*Shorea robusta*] and Asoka [*Saraca asoca*] are also depicted. [Singh Ajay 2008].

Plant structures are also used for decorative purposes. The twigs and twinings are used around sculptures to make them more attractive. The creepers are made to go around female sculptures as though they are ornaments and some give the picture of drapers. Some creepers are seen in the bhitti, the wall space and some even represent the life cycle of the plant.



Photos-8 & 9: Shrine and Bhitti Sculptures Decorated with Flower Structures, Mosale.



Photo-10: Picture depicting Plants used as Decorative purpose and as Ornaments Temple at Hosaholalu



Photograph-11: Picture showing stages like Bud, Half blossomed bud, Completely blossomed flower, of life cycle in the plants. Nagésvara-Chennakésava Temple, Mosale



Photograph-12: Flowers used as Toranas at the Garbhagudi, Chennakesava Temple, Belur.



Photograph-13: Pillar with flower carvings, Chennakesava Temple, Belur.

These are a very few excerpts to show the decorative aspects in Hoysala architecture. Every nook & corner of the temple has been decorated with beautiful carvings. The in-between spaces of the creepers also have small reliefs. The pillars are also decorated. Every pillar and every bhuvaneshwari, the ceiling is in different style and design. For instance, temple in Mosale has 9 bhuvaneshwaris and all are differently carved. This is the speciality of Hoysala architecture. Some sculptures also bear plants like sugarcane [*Saccharum* sp], banana [*Musa* sp], ragi [*Eleusine* sp] which show the rich cultivation during that period.

The extensive study on plants with sculptures assists to understand the vegetation of that period. As the presence of family of Poaceae members are identified, it reveals the fertile soil texture of Hoysala times. Soil texture ranges from loamy to alluvial type. It is the porous natured soil which holds water sufficiently and helps the plantation to grow profusely. It also gets noticed that the rainfall is moderate to heavy. The different members of the plant family indicate the alternate farming which increased the fertility of soil. Thus, it is evident that Hoysala period was prosperous with lush green vegetation and dense forest with ample number of flowering plant varieties. [Pandey 2000:155-170].

Another highlight is that all the sculptures depicting women are associated with plants. They also depict *Dohada*¹ concept in them. Even all the *Salabhanjikās* [*Madanika Vighras*] are associated with plants. The *Dohada* concept plays an important role in understanding the caring and nourishing nature of women. [Kashap Tara 2001: 230]. Experts like Rama Pisharoti and Tara Kashyap have discussed about this in depth in their work. This *Dohadantaram* is supported by Shā rangadhara's *Vṛkshāyurveda* also. According to this, the plants' senses were satisfied by the activity of women and thus they blossomed in particular seasons. When Kuruvaka was embraced by a woman it blossomed, Asoka blossomed when young woman gently kicked the

¹ *Dohada* - is the fertilization of plants through the touch or proximity of women. It is the symbol of fertilization.

tree, Priyangu, just by physical proximity and Makaranda by the touch of a woman. Like this Tilaka blossomed, when it experienced the gaze of a woman. When a woman sang a song, Naméru used to blossom, Mandāra by the sweet talk, Bakula by spurted gargled water, Champaka & Karnikara by the love talk and jingling bells of a woman. The breath of a woman made Sindhuvara burst forth into blossoms. Thus women are always associated with plants. [Kashyap Tara, 2001:225-35]



Photograph-14: Picture showing women holding plants, Halébidu



Photograph-15: Picture depicting flowering of a plant by the touch of a woman Halébidu

III. Conclusion

Thus, the study of sculptures opens up a vast region for further studies. It motivates to further study on the classification and identification of plants and their representation in the art of sculpture which shows that plant life remains as the integral part of the human life. Some of the interesting topics like *Dohada* concept and Life cycle of plants can be correlated to life cycle of the humankind. It reveals the at most dependency of human life to the environment and helps in conceptualizing the culture and vegetation of medieval Karnataka. Further

studies may also give a new dimension for the historical studies. It can also throw light on the medicinal, ecological, biological and economical importance of plants present at that time.

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