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A STUDY ON ARCHITECTURAL STYLES OF CHENNAKESHAVA TEMPLE AT BELURU

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ABSTRACT:

The architecture of the Hoysalas is world – famous. The Hoyslas got their innumerable temples built in soap stone. There are five features that can be seen in all their temples. They have the stare shaped sanctum sanctorum, upa peetha, decorative panels, shikara and pillars. The Hoysalas developed a new style of architecture different from that of the Chalukyas. The temples they built were polygonal star shaped in plan, having richly carved plinths. The towers of the temples were pyramidal in shape and were often attached together. The Hoysala buildings were generally ornamented with an enormous mass of sculpture and statues of very good quality.



KEYWORDS: architecture, sculpture, Vaikuntha, shrines, monuments, vimana, jagati,

INTRODUCTION

Belur is located in Hassan district of Karnataka. It was the early capital of Hoysala Dynasty. According to some inscription, it was earlier known as Velapuri. The Hoysalas ruled this region between 11th and 13th centuries. They were great patrons of art and architecture and built a number of magnificent shrines during their 300 years reign. The temples and monuments at Beluru are indeed the best Hoysala creations, showcasing their amazing architecture sculptures in full glory. Beluru was highly revered for

its magnificent shrines and came to be known as the 'modern Vaikuntha of the earth.

The Hoysala temples are characterized by typical star shaped ground plan and are usually set on a platform. They are compact, squat structures and are more human in scale as compared to other soaring shrines of the South. Ornatly carved shrines indicate that music and dance were highly regarded by the Hoysalas and were used to express religious favour. The temples at Beluru are carved out of soap stone, quarried from Tumkur, about 200 kms. away. This stone is extremely easy to chisel, but attains iron -like firmness when exposed to the

atmosphere. To maintain the shine of the temples, the stone is treated with a chemical wash and then wax polished once in ten years.

Today, this small town basking in the warmth of its luxurious greenery and glorious past is regarded as one of the jewels of South Indian architecture. Its temples have become rich repositories of ancient Hindu culture and a must visit site in on every tourist's temple itinerary.

CHENNAKESHAVA TEMPLE COMPLEX

The main attraction in Belur is the Chennakeshava temple complex which contains the Chennakeshava Temple as the centerpiece,

surrounded by the Kappe Chennigaraya temple built by Shantaladevi, queen of king Vishnuvardhana. It is said that Shantaladevi herself danced in front of the main shrine during its installation and her dance inspired the poses of the figurines on the temple walls. There are two more shrines here that are still in use by devotees and there is a Pushkarni or stepped well to the right side of the main entrance. The Dravida style rayagopura at the entrance which was a later addition by the Vijayanagara kings, who considered this deity as one of their Kuladevata or family god.

The temple is one of the finest examples of Hoysala architecture. It was built by king Vishnuvardhana in commemoration of his victory over the Cholas at Talakad in 1117 CE. Legend has it that it took 103 years to complete and Vishnuvardhana's grandson Veera Ballala II completed the task. The facade of the temple is filled with intricate sculptures and friezes with no portion left blank. The intricate workmanship includes elephants, lions, horses, episodes from the Indian mythological epics, and sensuous dancers (Shilabalikas). Inside the temple are a number of ornate pillars. Darpana Sundari (Lady with the mirror) carved on walls of Belur Temple is one of major attractions in the complex. The huge temple complex enclosed by high walls has a garbhagriha, a sukhanasi, a navaranga mandapa. The complex also has many smaller shrines, mandapas and other structures. There are two gateways, but only one crowned by a gopuram, which was built in 1397, by Gunda, a general of Harihara II, after the original Mahadwara was burnt down by Ganga salar, an officer of Tughalaks during the invasion and seize of the shrine.

The star shaped main sanctum is a homogenous architectural unit set on a raised platform in the centre of a spacious paved courtyard surrounded by subsidiary shrines and colonnades. It looks like a carved casket made of wood and polished to perfection. The towering vimana of the sanctum made of bricks and mortar was supported by wood work and plated with gold gilded copper sheets. Virtually every inch of the shrine is intricately carved. The outer walls are adorned with jagati sculpted with horizontal rows of friezes with carvings of elephants, simhalatas or loins and scrolls of small female figures in ornamental niches and intersected here and there by larger vertical images. And no two friezes in the complete ranges are alike. The lower friezes are not so extensively carved as in other Hoysala temples, but the work higher up on the walls is simply outstanding. The lowest of these carved bands has 650 caparisoned elephants in different moods. Singularly beautiful are the 38 freestanding bracket figures angled between the upper walls and the over- hanging eaves around the outside of the temple and navaranga.



Fig.1. Main Entrance

The brackets are adorned with voluptuous beauties known as Madanikas in various dancing and ritual postures and depict an amazing variety sculpted forms. Identifying the bracket figures when going around the temple from the right side are as follows.

1. Beauty and Mirror : The first figure is of a lady admiring her beauty in the mirror, held in her left hand.
2. Pet Parrot : A lady in conversation with her pet parrot.
3. A lady with Betel Leaves : A lady holding folded betel leaves and flanked by maids. A house maiden to her right carries a vessel filled with water, while the maid to the left is filling a 'Syrige'.
4. Lady in her Make- up : A lady writing to her lover, while the helping maids are standing beside her.

5. Monkey Pulling Saree : A mischievous monkey pulling the saree of a lady and snarling, while she is threatening it with a twig. It is one of the most popular sculptures.
6. The Huntress : A lady aiming her arrow at the bird.
7. Hair Dressing : A lady is dressing her hair after bath and her attendants are holding flowers and toiletry.
8. Tribhangi Nritya : A lady performing the most difficult Tribhangi Nritya, involving three poses of the body at the same time.
9. A sham, She Saint : A lady disguised as a saint.
10. Drum Dance : A lady playing a drum.
11. The flutist : A lady playing a flute and the maid is sitting beside her.
12. Musician : A singing lady.
13. World Bewitching Beauty: The sculpture of a beautiful lady is located just before the southern entrance. It also portrays a lizard about to catch a fly sitting on a jack fruit. The series of bracket figures continues on the other side of the gateway, known as 'Friday door, as it is opened only on certain days.
14. Violinist : A lady with a violin.
15. A Curly Haired Beauty : A lady arranging her curly hairs with right hand while holding a mirror.
16. The Huntress : A lady plucking a mango from a tree with her right hand.
17. Masculine Woman: A lady dressed like a hunter and aiming at the birds.
18. A sham, She Saint: It shows a strange lady dressed up like a man with a beard and a moustache. She is playing on her drum, while two men wearing 'monkey caps' are wrestling.

Before commencement of the 19th bracket figure we can see the Shiva-Jalandhara, Poothani, Emperor Mahabali with Vamana, Ravana lifting the Kailas Mountain, Chamundi, Brahma, The Sun God, Modern Lady, Arjuna's Shooting etc.

The series of the bracket figures now resumes on the other side of the shrine.

19. The Arch Dancer : The figure depicts a lady portrayed as an arch dancer and her maids playing upon the musical instruments.
20. The Songstress: A lady as a songstress with metallic time keepers.
21. The Divine Dancer: Beautifully dancing divine lady.
22. The Hunters: A lady holding a spear with a skull at its top.
23. Successful Huntress: A lady returning after hunting. Her maids are carrying the prey and one maid is removing the thorns.
24. Beauty Dance: Lady practicing dance steps. Her maids are playing on their musical instruments.
25. Bhasma Mohini Dance: It lies by the side of the northern doorway.
26. Beauty and the Scorpion: This 26th figure shows a frightened beautiful lady shaking a scorpion from the folds of her saree and snarling when she tries to shoo it off.
27. A Beauty in wall : Beautifully dressed lady waiting for her lover.
28. A Gypsy Girl: A Gypsy girl holding palm leaves.
29. A Beauty after Hearty Meal: A lady about to relax after her dinner.
30. Nagaveena Dance: A lady is playing a violin shaped like a snake.
31. Proud Lady: A fully dressed and ornamented lady proudly admiring her beauty in a mirror.
32. A Fortune Teller: A gypsy girl predicating future to the world.
33. A kite Dancer: A lady performing kite dance.

The last group of bracket figures shows beautiful ladies in different poses and occupation.

34. A Beauty with her hair: A lady showing her hairs tied into a knot.
35. A Beauty in perfect make-up: A beautifully dressed lady ready for a dance performance.
36. Drum Dance: A lady sporting beard and moustache is dancing, holding a drum in her left hand.

37. A Songstress: A lady singing with the help of time keeper sets.
 38. An Arch Dancer: An arch dancer dancing to the tune of her accomplice.

There are also hundreds of intricately carved figures projecting out from the ledge, about 2 meters above the ground. The beautifully carved Hoysala emblem, depicting a man fighting a tiger at the three gateways of the temple is noteworthy.

The interiors of the shrine with ornately carved panels, pillars, ceilings, doorways and brackets figures are considered to be even more attractive compared to her outer walls. The four brackets figures inside the shrines depict.

39. Beauty with her pet parrot: A beautiful lady in conversation with her pet parrot, which is seating on the fore palm of her left hand.
 40. Shantaladevi: A dancing figure of Shantladevi wearing a gem on the forehead.
 41. Gandharva Dance: A lady wearing bangles and performing Gaandharva dance.
 42. Kesha Shrungara: A figure of lady portraying Kesha Shrungara. She is wringing her hairs after the bath.

The dramatic and miraculous aspects of mythology are also beautifully depicted all over the temple. Some of the finest sculptural representations are – Arjuna, the Pandava prince rescuing the cows of Virata; Ravan, the ten headed demon king lifting Mount Kailas which has figures of Lord Shiva, Parvati as well as a number of other miniature carved figures and the boy saint Prahlada being rescued by Lord Vishnu.

The façade of the sabha-mandapa has several splendidly perforated screens with squarish holes for ventilation purpose. The screens are richly carved with puranic legends and the durbur scenes of King Vishnuvardhana and Veera Ballala II, which provide an insight into the court life of 11th C. The dress, hair style and ornaments of the countries and royal couple are finely detailed. The temple doors are also exquisitely carved with outstandingly beautiful filigree work.



Fig.2. Darpana Sundari, Dreum Dancer and Shilabalika

PILLARS

The large navaranga mandapam is noted for its polished pillars and ceiling. The pillars are of three different sizes and designs, except for the four pillars at centre. The most notable pillars are Mohinin Pillar on the south west, fluted vertically on a sixteen pointed star plan. The eastern side of the pillar has a large bas-relief of Lord Vishnu in the enchanting from of Mohini, flanked by a Chauri bearer and a garuda. It is perhaps the finest specimens of Hoysal pillar order. The impeccable Narasimha Pillar to the south-east of the navaranga used to rotate on its own axis. It is decorated all over by minute reliefs. The central square of the madapam has four pillars crowned by bracket figures, which are great specimens of Hoysala craftsmanship. Three of the four figures in the navaranga are signed with the names of their creators.

GRAVITY PILLAR:

The unique 42 feet high pillar is carved out of a single rock and stands on its own weight. The paved compound of the temple complex has a pavilion near the bathing tank. Sculptures of Vishnuvardhana and Krishnaraja Wodeyar can be seen here. Other statues of note are Garudagambha

and Garuda, the celestial vehicle of Lord Vishnu. These images face towards the central shrine of Chennakeshava.



Fig.3. Gravity Pillar

GROUP OF TEMPLES

The main entrance to the complex is crowned by a Rajagopura built during the days of the Vijayanagar empire. Within the complex, the Chennakeshava temple is at the centre, facing east, and is flanked by the Kappe Channigraya temple on its right, and a small Sowmyanayaki temple set slightly back. On its left, also set slightly back is the Ranganayaki temple. Two main stambha exist here. The pillar facing the main temple, Garuda sthambha was erected in the Vijayanagar period while the pillar on the right, the Deepa sthambha dates from the Hoysala period. Totally, this campus covered with group of temples like:

- Shri Ramanujacharyau
- Shri Yoga Narsimha Swamy
- Shri Dasharathi Modaliyandaan'
- Shri Vedanta Deshikaru
- Shri Benne Krishna
- Shri Tirukkuchinambi
- Shri Tiruppani Alwar
- Shri Paravasu Devaru
- Shri Pe Alwar
- Shri Jiyar
- Shri Kalinga Mardhana
- Shri Lakshmi Narasimha
- Shri Mukyaprana devaru

Let us discuss about the other important temples which are located here. They are:

KAPPE CHENNIGARAYA TEMPLE:

Kappe Chennigaraya temple when King Vishnuvardhana got the keshava temple constructed, Santhaladevi – his chief queen made her contribution by causing another Keshava temple to be built to the south of main temple similar in form to it which is popular as “Kappechannigaraya Temple”. Kappechennigaraya image which is exactly like that of the Keshava in the main shrine. Though small in size bears the name of the Queen on the pedestal.

VEERA NARAYANA TEMPLE:

The veera Naryana temple to the west of Keshavetemple is a small and compact shrine with the outer walls containing beautiful sculptures of Vaishnava and Shaiva faith. It consists of a Garbhagriha and Sukhanasi and a Navaranga the 69 arge images on the outer wall surface consists of Vishnu, shiva, Brahma, Parvathi, Saraswati, Bhairava, Bhima's fight with Bhagadatta, Ganesha, Mahushamarshini etc., The temple raised on an elevated basement is contemporary to the chennakeshava temple.

SOWMYANAYAKI TEMPLE:

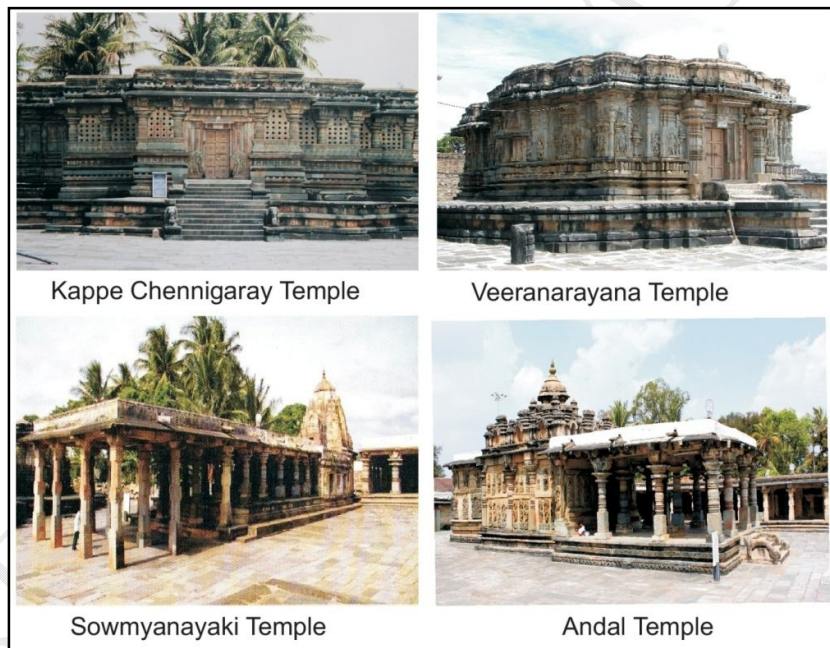
This is another important shrine of the temple complex. It lies to the south-west of Keshava temple and is adorned with an elegant vimana, said to be resembling the vimana a top keshave temple, which was dismantled in 1879.

ANDAL(Ranganayaki) TEMPLE:

The temple of the goddess Andal situated to the north west of the Keshava temple is also locally known as Ranganayaki temple. The basement has friezes of elephants, scroll design and puranic scenes. The temple appears to have been built with the members belonging to some other temple of Hoysala period. The temple is known for the beautiful images on the outer walls. The canopies over these images which differ from one another show thirty one deities. The deities represented here are Lakshmi, Mohini, Venugopala, Lakshminarayan flanked by female chauri bearers.

KALYANI:

Kalyani (tank) is situated in the north east corner of the complex. This tank known as Vasudeva Sarovara in an inscription was built by Ballala II in 1175 AD. At the entrance to this pond are two Elephants at the sides and two pavilions to the north and south. It has receding steps from all the four sides. Periodical temple rituals are carried out in this tank.



**Fig.4. Ashok's Empire and inscriptions
Fig.4 Group of Temples**

CONCLUSION

Belur is one of the best known temples of the Hoysala dynasty. The Belur temples give a glimpse of Hindu temple art at its glorious best of the 16th century. They are famous for their carvings and splendid architecture. The Hoysalas improved on the Calukyan style of architecture by building extremely ornate temples in many parts of Karnataka noted for the sculptures in the walls, ceilings, curved pillars and many more. They followed Dravidian style, vesara style of architecture. Like many of the rulers of the times, Vishnuvardhana and his successors were adventurous in their artistic expressions. Hoysalas followed the footsteps of Chalukyas, in the art and architecture and their carvings were extremely ornate and intricate. Since the king wanted an extraordinary temple, it has been built in

an architectural style (Hoysala Style) which was new to the region. The monument is exceptionally large and its decoration is very lavish. The decorations for this temple still continued after the rule of Vishnuvadhana by his successors and it took nearly 103 years to complete this temple. Once if we visit Beluru, we can clearly understand the architectural styles of Hoysala during their region. Their contribution to modern world is remarkable.

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