

Vijayanagara Sculptural Art Some New Concepts and Features, A Note.

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As is well known, the most remarkable achievement of the South Indian Hindu art of the Vijayanagara period (1336- 1556) is spectacularly displayed in Hampi, the capital city of the empire. It is undoubtedly a reflection of the major traditions coming down over centuries so grand and brilliant. But it is just not a continuation. The contemporary religious systems of the neighbouring regions gaining prominence as well as the popular beliefs and practices had their tremendous share in the cultural matrix of the period. Consequently, there were new conceptual-developments and features especially in sculptural art of the period found in Hampi and the surrounding regions. But these scarcely attract the attention of even scholars let alone itinerant, art lover and general visitor. I happened to notice some curiously interesting sculptures of the traditional religious sects here and there the types of which are not encountered in the domain of the sculptural art of the preceding periods. These indicate that there may be many more for which intensive and extensive explorations will have to be conducted. Meanwhile it is necessary to account for the appearance of the new forms and for the introduction of new elements in the existing traditional sculptural forms for a proper understanding of the meaning and significance of such forms and appreciation of the Vijayanagara sculptural art. Here therefore just a preliminary attempt is made to

highlight a few of such sculptures in Hampi and the neighbouring regions to draw the attention of scholars in particular for further investigations of such art forms on a large scale. Occasionally, I have discussed previously a few of them [1974 & 1978] elsewhere. In this context it must be noted that in the Vijayanagara art popular folk art forms mundane and cultic also gained a distinct place on a large scale. Whether these had influenced the traditional art is also a matter of further investigation. But Two important factors, inspiring and emotional, were obviously underlying the new trends in the art of the period in the area are : I] the long and sustaining tradition that the place is the 'Kishkindha' of the Ramayana [Sundara; 1995 : 34 - 38], the capital of the Vanara kingdom, on the one hand and ii] the sectarian religious trends gaining prominence, on

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by the other viz. a] Saivism as propounded by the *Saiva puratanas* from the deep south ; ii] Srivaishnavism already well established from the period of Hoysala Vishnuvardhana [1103 - 1142 A .D.] from about 1119; and iii] the '*Madhva sampradaya*' owing to Sri Vyasaraaya, a great saint and profound exponent of the sect and indirect propagation by two of his devotees Sri Kanakadasa and; especially Purandaradasa. What is particularly noteworthy in all these is the striking insistence on *bhakti marga*, easy to follow by any high or low, rich or poor, ignorant or wise to obtain the grace of God, by the Puratanas, the Alvaras and the Dasas. Consequently, the cults of Hanuman, Virabhadra, Ganesha, 63 Puratanas the Saiva saints ; Sri Ranganatha, Vitthala, 12 Alvaras, the Vaishnava saints ; Bharati Ramana Mukhyaprana, Pancha Mukhi Anjaneya ; hardly or less in practice in the preceding periods gained distinct prominence. Relatively, sculptures of these cults and traditions displaying new forms

and developments in their iconographic traits appear for the first time enriching the sculptural art of South India.

Some of the sculptures considered here are: ashtabhuja Ganesha with Sakti from Anegondi, Virabhadra from Salgunda [brought to light by Sharanabasappa Kolkar], Dashavatara panel in Hampi, Vishnu with Lakshmi in the vakshasthala in Kanakagiri, Stambha Narasiruha from Araga, Hale Nagara, Kuravadagadde, Gopalakrishna from Anegondi, Panchamukhi Anjaneya from Hale Nagara, Bharati Ramana Mukhya Prana from Bennur, another form of the same deity from Hire Jantakal and Ramadurga. Sri. Ramanujacharya and the nine Alvaras from Anegondi.

During the period foundation of independent temples dedicated to Ganesha, Virabhadra and Hanuman is a distinctive development. It is in the late Silpagama texts such as *Kriyakramadhyoti*, *Mantramaharnva* or *Vignesvara Pratishthavidhi* are the 'dhynarmantras' for Sakti Ganesha, Uchchhishta Ganapati, Urdhva Ganapati and of other forms. Worship of Ganesha in these forms would bestow unlimited material prosperity and success upon the devotees, it is exhorted. The growing success and enormous wealth of the Vijayanagra period would explain the congenial and inspiring context for the popularity of such cults that were in the background.

It is too well known that during the Sangama period, there is obviously an upsurge of Virasaivism that was apparently dormant for some time before. Relatively, worship of Virabhadra probably from the Andhra region gains prominence. Further, the Kalamukha Saivas of the preceding periods were the worshippers of Sakti with Virabhadra as kshetrपाला. Among those who in course of time embraced Virasaivism, the worship of Virabhadra probably continued as it is found to be appropriate to the

Saiva tradition prevalent among the Virasaivas. The god created by Siva, the Supreme, humiliated and mortified the arrogant and haughty Daksha of the Vedic tradition despising Siva. It is this aspect of Virabhadra that is usually represented in Virabhadra images with goat-headed Daksha by his side during the period under review. The temple of '*uddane*' Virabhadra with the colossal image of the god, is too well known. And there are many independent temples got built during the period as e.g. the Virabhadra temple in Chik-Rampur about 3 or 4 km. northwest of Anegondi. It is interesting to note that in the sculptural form of Virabhadra from Salgunda, Gangavati taluk, Koppala district, some 30 or 40 km from Hampi a new element has been added: the god is depicted as wearing *sivadara* carrying the *ishta linga* casket the most distinctive feature of the Virasaiva sect unambiguously indicating the deep impact of Virasaivism on the traditional sculptural concepts. The image appears to be of late or post Vijayanagara period. Incidentally speaking, there is of course in Mulgund [Mundargi tk. Gadag dt] a temple enshrining a colossal image of the god of unusual form probably of late 10th cent.[Sundara ;1980 :1-2]. But this appears to be an exception.

The broken sculpture of Mahavishnu originally in one of the shrines of a pond of architectural merit, in Kanakagiri[Gangavati tk. Koppala dt.], later dislocated and broken is noteworthy for the depiction of a miniature figure of Lakshmi on the left part of Vishnu's chest. Though Mahavisnu is described as *Srivatsamka* over centuries in sculptures this characteristic feature is not highlighted. Probably the devotional songs of especially of Purandaradasa glorifying the greatness of Mahavishnu had a strong appeal to the masses and had considerable influence on the sculptural art. This religious atmosphere explains for the introduction of new distinct features in the traditional art forms.

There is another example of this kind. In a zone, mental moral and physical, surcharged with divine or spiritual power instinctive natural base behavior of human or animal will be subdued and refined into pure and noble love. This is indicated by depicting animals that are natural enemies to each other such as tiger-cow etc. side by side under the protection of God in the image of Giridhara Gopalakrishna of the temple in Agumbe. This would certainly indicate the tremendous impact of devotional *stotras* (songs) that were vigorously repeatedly composed emphasizing *bhakti marga* and total surrender to the Supreme and appealingly sung by great devotees such as Kanakadasa, Purandaradasa saints like Vijayadasa, Mahipati raya and others.

The Dashavatara panel of the period on a stone boulder in the open in Hampi and in the individual large wall sculptures of the Dashavatara forms of Vishnu, in a Siva temple in Bhimanakatte [Durvasapura, Tirthahalli tk, Shivamogga dt.], Vidyashankara temple in Sringeri and other places, almost invariably in the place of Buddha represented in *bhumisparshamudra* and in *siddhasana* in the preceding periods, an enlightened saint is depicted nude and in *samabhanga*, probably in accordance with the episode of the *Bauddhavatara* given in the *Vishnu Purana* [Gopinatha Rao; 1968 : vol. I, part 1]. It is difficult to identify the saint as Buddha as it is nude or Thirtharnkara. In Bhagavata Purana, in the place of Buddha is Balarama which is generally followed especially by the Srivaishnavas. But in one of the songs of Purandarasa is a reference to the nude saint obviously based on the episode from the *Vishnu Purana*. Whether this new trend is due to the powerful influence of especially the *Dvaita* school of thought needs to be investigated, This is a distinctive development in the period not to be met with in any of the preceding periods from the Badami Chalukya onwards.

The five (kapi) Monkey-headed god with long tail seated in *savyalalitasana* with his consort on the left lap under the canopy of seven-hooded Sesa [serpent] from Bennur is perhaps Bharati Ramana Mukhyaprana Vayudeva[as suggested by the respected Jalihal acharya,Dharwad well known for his erudition in *Madhva Siddhanta* on seeing the photograph of the image] next to Lakshmi, the goddess and third only to the Supreme god Vishnu in the hierarchy of the pantheon in accordance with the *Madhva Siddhanta* the first of its kind to be noted in the sculptural art of Karnataka in particular. In Ghanadal, a pilgrim centre, is rather similar well known five headed god in *samabhanga*. But the five heads are not uniformly the same. They are Narasimha, Varaha, Garuda, the other two are not visible from the front side. Similar depictions again with some variations occur in an engraving on a rock in Hire Jantakal near Gangavati[Sundara; 2006: 479 -82] and in Ramadurga [Challekere tk. Chitradurga dt.] on one of the ceiling slab of the central bay of the *sabha mandapa* of a rock cut temple. In this form the lower part of the body are apparently two lions[?] facing each other from the head part of which emerges the upper part in human form with three heads lion, Garuda and Varaha. The one in the former is *ashtadasha bhuj*a carrying different weapons. All these sculptural forms need to be studied thoroughly.

Independent temples of Hanuman are increasingly numerous especially in and around Anegondi. During Kalyana Chalukyan period, particularly very, very rarely, temples exclusively for the deity were perhaps founded as e. g. at Kune Kumatgi, Kakkalameli [Sindgi tk. Bijapur dt.] and in a village on the bank of the Malaprabha, Belgaum dt.[Sundara ;1977a] which is later submerged. In all these places are sculptures of Hanuman in side profile with the right hand in *chapeta mudra*. The last is with inscription also. With Hampi becoming the capital of the Vijayanagara kingdom, the worship of Hanuman and foundation of temples for the deity gains momentum in

Hampi - Anegondi area obviously for two reasons: the local tradition of identifying Kishkindha with the place that probably goes back to the early centuries of the Current Era [Sundara; 1995 and 1997] and Sri Vyasaraaya the sage in particular popularising the worship of the deity. The *Yantroddharaka* Hanuman in Hampi is said to have been consecrated by the sage. The Panchamukhi Anjaneya of the temple in Hale Nagara is (Hosa nagara taluk, Shivamogga dt.) of the Keladi period, probably of c.17th cent. The episode underlying the concept is to be vindicated.

The profound influence of the Srivaishnava sect is dominantly visible with the foundation of magnificent Vishnu temples in Hampi such as the temples dedicated to Krishna, Vitthala, Tiruvenkatanatha, Sri Ranganatha. In the *lalatabimba* of the *dvarabandha* of such temples instead of Garuda, a practice in vogue over centuries, are *shankha*, *tirunama* and *charka*. And in all such temples are usually the idols of Sri Ramanujacharya and of the Alvars. In fact there was a minor temple in the vicinity of the Vitthala temple exclusively for the Alvars. One of the Alvar images was found in the conservation work to the Vitthala temple that was wrongly identified as Purandaradasa but in reality of 'Tondaradipudi Alvar' one of the great Vaisnava saints of 6th~7th cent. CE [Rajasekhara; 1979].

The above is only a preliminary case study of the new developments and forms in the sculptural art of the Vijayanagara period shedding welcome light on the dimensions of the religious condition prevailing then. It indicates the need for a thorough survey of art remains of the period obviously enormous in quantity and variety and proper interpretation.

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