

‘ICONOGRAPHY OF VARAHA IN HOYSALA ART—A CANONICAL STUDY’

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ABSTRACT

An incarnation of Vishnu, Varaha is associated with the creation and stabilization of the earth, in which Varaha is found recovering earth from the depth of waters by thrusting sula in to the body of the demon Hiranyaksha. Various canonical texts such as Hindu iconography, Prathima kosha, Vishnudharmotthara, Parasara Samhitha, Vaikshanasagama, Shilpa shastra, Anushumabedagama and Satapatha Brahmana provide ample information about Varaha. Varaha is shown in human form with a boar’s head; hence he is frequently called Nr Varaha. Body colour of Varaha is given as dark like collyrium; the body is huge like a mountain and has multiple hands, some texts like Parasara Samhitha mentions eight to sixteen hands. According to Hayasira Samhitha the image is to be made in the seven tala.

The Iconography of varaha can be broadly classified in two forms

- Depicting varaha only in the form an animal, wild Boar--zoomorphic
- Depicting varaha having boar head on human body--Anthropomorphic

All the canonical texts mention that Varaha must have four hands, upper right hand carrying Chakra or disc, upper left hand carry Sanka or conch, lower right hand carry mace and lower left hand carry lotus or Padma. Varaha is shown in the act of lifting the earth goddesses by one of his arms and embracing her with the other, the snout is held close to her and sniffing her face. The left hand embraces her at the shoulders while the right arm holds her thigh firmly. The earth goddess is always shown in a seated posture on the left side of Varaha. When varaha carries Lakshmi on his arms the earth goddess sit at his feet. The boar depiction dates back to II CE AD and fully boar variety dates back to pre II CE AD

Hoysalas who ruled southern Karnataka between 1000 AD to 1345 AD, were great temple builders with their own style of architecture called Hoysala style, with the coming of Ramanujacharya to Hoysala kingdom, Vaishnavism received great imputes, and many temples were dedicated to Vishnu and Varaha iconography were chiselled. Present study focuses on canonical text based, various forms of Varaha such as Bhavaraha, Swethavaraha, Adivaraha, Nrvaraha, Yagnavaraha, Pralayavaraha varaha and stone wall sculpture of Varaha Iconography found in Hoysala temples at Belur, Halebidu, Nuggehalli, Kikkeri, Govindahalli, and at Basaralu.

Key words: Adi varaha, Bhu varaha, Bhudevi, chakra, gada, Hoysalas, Hiranyaksha. Padma,

1. Introduction

Hoysalas, who ruled southern Karnataka between 1000 AD to 1345 AD, were great temple builders with their own style of architecture called Hoysala style. The Hoysala achievements in the cultural field were excellent, they flooded their land with innumerable temples of various sects which are known for their style and decoration. With advent of Ramanujacharya to Hoysala kingdom, Vaishnavism received great imputes, and many temples were dedicated to Vishnu and Varaha iconography was chiselled.

An incarnation of Vishnu, Varaha is associated with the creation and stabilization of earth. , in which Varaha is found recovering earth from the depth of waters by thrusting sula in to the body of the demon Hiranyaksha. According to the Bhagavatha, the creator at the time of dissolution wondered where the beings would dwell, the earth having been submerged under the deluge of water. As the creator was brooding over the problem, from his nostrils issued forth a thumb sized piglet, in a movement it grew in to a size of a mountain. It then dived into the bowls of the watery mass and brought out the earth and settled her on its tusks and having settled the earth firmly, and later disappeared. It was then that Vaivatha Manu began his career and created all beings responsible for the creation of the earth.

2. Objectives of the study

- To study the various forms of Varaha Iconography, based on canonical texts
- To study about the historical over tones of Varaha Iconography
- To study the Varaha Iconography in stone wall sculpture of Hoysala Temples.

3. Scope of the study

The study focuses on the visual and narrative art of Varaha iconography in the different forms based on the Canonical study, and to study the mod of representation and stages in the evolution of the iconographical features and peculiarities of the sculptures of Varaha found in temples of Hoysalas at Halebidu, Belur, Kikkeri, Govindanahalli, Basaralu and Nuggehalli.

4. Data and Methodology

The collection of necessary data is obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data are obtained from visiting the sites, of Belur, Halebidu, Kikkeri, Nuggehalli, Basaralu, and Govindanahalli. Archaeological reports, Canonical texts. Secondary data are sources based upon the reviews and references, books, journals, periodicals and website.

5. Historical Overtones

The theme behind the Varaha episode as told in the ancient Sanskrit literature be it the Vedas, the Puranas and other texts is the rescue of the earth from deluge or from the bondage of the demon Hiranyaksha, of these the concept of deluge is of considerable antiquity, while that of Hiranyaksha was introduced during sufficiently later period. When considering the actual causes for the development of this episode, one has to peep into the political and other social conditions prevailing in the ancient past. During the ancient past India was invaded by Persians and Greeks, later Greeks were reduced to power and Chandra Gupta Maurya established the Mauryan Empire. This concept of throwing away the foreign domination of the country by the native rulers was amply projected in the episode of the rescue of earth by the boar in the form of Vishnu. This was to some extent projected in the sculptural art as well. The boar form of Vishnu was as their royal insignia and even the embossing of their coins with the figure of Varaha. In III cen and VI AD Varaha Purana was compiled.

During post Gupta period country was subjected to numerous foreign invasion and each time when native rulers defeated the foreign domination, meant as earth was liberated by Varaha. Many kingdoms had Varaha as their royal in sigma; even Chalukyas of Badami had Varaha as their royal in sigma.

6. Literary sources

6.1 Vedic hymns: Vedic hymns describes the winds as invincible boars with the tusks of Iron, call Rudra the boar of the upper regions and imagine Vrtra the cloud as a veritable boar the Arthavaveda mentions that earth was thrown up by the great boar.

6.2 Taittiriya Samhita: Taittiriya Samhita contains two legends which involve the incarnation of Prajapathi as boar, one of them is that the wild boar hid the wealth of the asuras behind the seven hills and that Indra

split the hills by means of a magical blade of grass and killed the boar before appropriating the wealth, another legend relates to the lifting up of the earth by the hundred black boar.

6.3 Upanishads: Upanishads in general the Varaha was referred to along with other animals and specific reference to the association of Prithvi with the animal is not fully discussed. Mention of Varaha is found in Chhandoghya Upanishad, Kaustiki and Mukti Upanishad

6.4 Satapatha Brahmana: This text testifies the salvage of earth by the boar who was none else than the Prajapathi, describes how the fierce boar recovered the earth from the watery mass, narrates that at the beginning there was only water and that Prajapathi assumed the form of a boar entered into the water depths and threw up some mud equal to the size of its snout. The texts explain that this mud it was that became the earth.

6.5 Mahabharata: In the Vanaparvan of Mahabharata. Yudhishtra the eldest of the Pandava brothers request Lomasa sage to narrate the episode of the Varaha incarnation. Mahabharata also identifies Varaha with Vira Kapi who in the Gopatha Brahmana has been identified with sun. Hari Vamsa and Matsya purana accepts Varaha whom the early texts had described as a form of Prajapathi as an incarnation of Vishnu

6.6 Agnipurana and Padma purana: relates the boar incarnation of Vishnu with the killing of the demon Hiranyaksha. Hiranyaksha the brother of Hiranyakasipu the son of the Kashapa Prajapathi fought with the gods and rolled the earth like mat and hid it deep under the ocean. Vishnu appeared in the form of a boar and recovered the earth. Further the chapter 49 2-3 of Agnipurana spells out the iconographical features of the terrestrial boar, according to which he should be endowed with a human body carrying a gada and other weapons in his arms. The divine conch and goddess Lakshmi should be represented as resting on his elbow. The earth and the serpent Anantha of the nether regions should follow his lead placed near his feet.

7. Forms of Varaha

The Iconographic programme of varaha can be broadly classified in to two forms.

7.1 Zoomorphic or wild Boar sculpture



Figure 1 zoomorphic or wild boar sculpture during pre Guptas era

The above figure Depicts varaha only in the form an animal, wild Boar—zoomorphic sculptured during pre Gupta era in north India. Varaha is depicted as a free standing boar colossus. The earth personified as the goddess Bhudevi clings to one of Varaha tusks

7.2 Depicting varaha having boar head--Anthropomorphic



Figure 2 depicting varaha having boar head on human body at Udayagiri

The above figure is the rock-cut sculpture of Varaha at the Udayagiri Caves, near Vidisa carved when the city was a provincial capital of the Gupta Dynasty. One of the earliest anthropomorphic sculptures, early sculptors in Udayagiri and Eran faced the issue of how to attach the boar head to the human body and did not show a human neck.



Figure 3 depicting varaha having boar head on human body at Badami cave II

At Badami we can see for the first time a well developed Varaha Iconography in the cave II of Badami Chalukyas. However, in Badami, the problem was resolved by including a human neck. Varaha sculptures generally look up to the right; there are very rare instances of left-facing Varaha depictions.

All the canonical texts mention that Varaha must have four hands, upper right hand carrying disc (Chakra), upper left hand carry conch, lower right hand carry mace and lower left hand carry lotus or Padma. Varaha is shown in the act of lifting the earth goddesses by one of his arms and embracing her with the other, the snout is held close to the earth goddess and sniffing her face. The left hand embraces her at the shoulders while the right arm holds her thigh firmly. The earth goddess is always shown in a seated posture on the left side of Varaha. When varaha carries Lakshmi on his arms the earth goddess sit at his feet. The boar depiction dates back to pre II CE and fully boar variety dates back to pre IICE

7.3 Dharani Varaha One of the forms of Varaha sometimes identified with Bhavaraha owing to the two words Bhu and Dharani being synonymous meaning earth goddess. The form is distinguished by god being accompanied by the earth goddess. She is seated on the left leg of the god, who is also seated embracing the goddess with his left arm she holds a lotus in one of her two hands. The face of the god must be pleasant and god must be four armed, the upper hands carry conch and discuss

7.4 Bhu-Varaha According to Parasara Samhitha, Bhu-Varaha is the variant form of the boar incarnation of Vishnu in which god is shown recovering the earth from the depth of waters. Parasara Samhitha specifies that this form is to be distinguished by the preference of the earth goddess upon the arms of Vishnu, who is four armed and carries in the two upper hands conch and discuss. Goddess of earth must be shown according to Visvaksena Samhita as charming with fresh hair and lotus like face she may be dark in complexion, she folds her two hands in the gesture of supplication.

The god holds her in embrace with his left arm, lifting her up high and sniffing her face with his snout he holds her thighs firmly with his right hand. Alternately the god's snout may touch her breasts. Bhu Varaha is always in a standing posture with some bends of the legs

7.5 Adi-Varaha: According to Vaikhanasagama the figure of Adivaraha should have the face of the boar in association with the body of a man. It has four arms two of which hold the Sanka and chakra as usual. The right leg should be slightly bent and made to rest upon the jewelled hood of the mythical serpent Adisesha, who must be sculptured as in the company of his wife. Of the remaining two hands the left hand should be shown as supporting the legs of Bhumidevi seated on the gods' bent right leg with her own legs hanging down, while the right hand has to be thrown round the waist of this Bhudevi. The associated figure of Bhudevi should have her hands in the anjali posture, her face should be slightly lifted up and turned towards her lord and should be expressive of shyness and joy. The top of her head should reach the chest of the figure of Varaha and her image should be in accordance with the Panchatala measures, such is the description given in the Vaikhanasagama

7.6 Nri Varaha According to the Shilparatna Nr Varaha or man-boar image of Vishnu should have his hands the gada and padma and carry Bhu Devi on the tusk. One of his feet should rest upon the serpent Adisesha and other on a tortoise or the goddess might be shown as seated upon the left elbow of the Varaha with a Nilotpala flowers in her hands.

7.7 Swetha Varaha A variant of Adi Varaha is known as Swetha Varaha is known as Swetha Varaha represented as white complexioned and emerging from the sea with the earth goddess on his tusks or he may have eight arms carrying in hands discuss, conch, sword, shield mace Sakti and gesture of boon bestowed and protection the earth goddess is settled on his white tusks. The god here carries the earth goddess on his white and raised tusks

7.8 Lakshmi Varaha is seated Varaha, were the earth goddess is seated on left lap and Lakshmi on his right lap embracing both goddess with his normal hands ,in other two hands holding mace and discuss

7.9 Pralaya Varaha the complexion of Pralaya Varaha should be blue. The image has to be clothed in yellow garments and decked with all usual ornaments. On the right of the Pralaya Varaha on the same seat Bhudevi should be placed. She has to be of dark complexion and should be wearing all usual ornament. In her left hand there should be utpala flowers

7.10 Yagna Varaha According to Vaikhanasagama, Yagna varaha has four hands. He is always seated on Simhasana with his left leg resting upon the seat and the right one handing down. Two hands carry shanka and chakra. To his right side is seated Lakshmi with her right leg dangling, holding lotus in her left hand. Her right hand rests on the seat. To the left of Yagna Varaha Bhudevi is seated with her left leg dangling. On her right hand she holds Nilotpala, while the left hands rests on the seat

8. Hoysala Varaha



Figure 4 Hoysala varaha stone wall sculpture at Belur

Varaha at Belur is the representative of an image which belongs to Chennakeshava temple at Belur, The characteristic details of ornamentation, the minute and clearly traceable workmanship in the carving the excellent and beautiful though conventional sculptures of the various figures marks this Varaha image as belonging to one of the most attractively artistic school. We see Varaha here with twelve hands in the right six of which he carries the sula thrust into the body of Hiranyaksha. The ankusha, the ghantha the khadga, the chakra and bana in the order from below: in two of the left hands a fruit and ketakka are seen and something which is held in the third left hands is not capable of being made out from the plot. The fourth left hand gives support to the hanging leg of the Devi while the fifth carries the Sanka and sixth is held in the Vismaya pose. This Varaha is treading upon two asuras. Notice their round eyes and tusks and also the sword and shield in their hands that are shown as lying crushed under the feet of the deity. In front stands Bhudevi whose head has been unfortunately broken away, her hands can be seen in anjali posture.



Figure 5 Hoysala varaha stone wall sculpture at Kikkeri

At Kikkeri Brahmeshwara temple, Varaha has a detailed ornamentation, we can see here Varaha with four hands, back left hand carries the Sanka or conch and in the left front hand of Varaha Bhudevi is seated and Varaha is sniffing her with his snout. The right upper hand carries mace and the other hand is broken. Devotees and Garuda are seen praying Varaha for rescuing Bhudevi. Here asura is not been seen treaded by Varaha



Figure 6 Hoysala varaha stone wall sculpture at Nuggehalli

In Lakshminarashima temple at Nuggehalli, Varaha can be seen with eight hands, four in each, and Bhudevi is seated on the top left hand, in the left back we can see Varaha with Sanka or conch; in the left below hand we can see the bow. In the left front hand an animal is found, in the right upper hand we can notice the bana or arrow and a dagger is also seen. Lower front hand is trusting sula in to the body of Hiranyaksha, at feet of Varaha asura has been treaded



Figure 7 Hoysala varaha stone wall sculpture at Hoysaleswara Halebidu

The Varaha iconography of Hoysala temple at Halebidu is found with eight hands. On the left upper hand varaha carries the Sanka or conch, in the right upper hand varaha is carrying the chakra, the right lower hand is trusting the sula in to the body of Hiranyaksha and Varaha has treaded both the legs on the asura(Demon). Bhudevi is seen seated on upper left arm of Varaha.



Figure 8 Hoysala varaha wall sculpture at Panchalingeshwara temple at Govindanahalli

At Govindanahalli we can notice Varaha sculpture facing right with seated Bhudevi on the top right hand, usually Bhudevi is always seen seated on the top left arm of Varaha in Hoysala sculptures. Asura lies at the feet of Varaha, and lord is trusting sula to demon Hiranyaksha.



Figure 9 Hoysala varaha wall sculpture in Mallikarjuna temple Basaralu

At Basaralu, Varaha is sighted in the right side and Bhudevi is seated on left upper hand of Varaha, here Varaha is seen quite calm, his mouth is not open with range, his tusks are not visible, he is accomplished with Sanka, Chakra bow, arrow, sula. Here in this sculpture demon is not sighted.

9. Conclusion

The Hoysala achievements in the cultural field were excellent. They flooded their land with innumerable temples of various sects which were known for their style and decoration. Among the Hoysalas the reign of Vishnuvardhana is memorable and with the advent of Ramanujacharya Vaishnavism received great impetus, Vishnu temples were built and Dasavatara themes were sculptured on the walls, of Hoysala temples. Varaha iconography with various forms such as Bhuvanaraha, Swethavaraha, Adivaraha, Nrvanaraha, Yagnavaraha, Pralayavaraha varaha was chiselled with great ornamentation and with multiple hands. The Iconography of varaha chiselled by Hoysala was to great extent were canonical texts based such as Bhagavatha Purana, Harivamsa and Agnipurana etc

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