

Homage to Hoysala Artist Baichoja of Nandi

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Abstract:

Hoysala Dynasty in Southern part of Karnataka was an important ruling family –reigned from 11 century to almost first quarter of 14th Century CE. Hoysala kings were great patron of art and architecture. They not built most beautiful temples also were responsible for nourishing artists. Hoysala temple have been decorated with highly intricate and decorative sculpture depicting the exuberance of carving skills. Artists were invited across the state. Artists from Balligave, Gadag and regional artists were invited for carving sculptures. Well-known artists like Dasoja, Honnoja, Malloja, Maniyoja- and alike list runs. Artist discussed in present essay is Baichoja, and Mallitamma. Two artists whose names appears in the temples datable to late 12th century to mid-13th century CE. Interesting aspects about artist Baichoja is discussed with examples of sculptures.

Keywords: Baichoja, Mallitamma, Singoja, Nagalapura, Nuggihalli, Amrutapura, Kedareshwara, Tumkur, Nandi, Doddaballapur

Hoysala artist Baichoja was one of the very important artist. He lived and worked in 1240s and 50s CE. Baichoja was a contemporary to a prominent artist Mallitamma, whose journey as major artist in Hoysala period was already known¹. Baichoja as a young fellow artist of Mallitamma, worked along with him on Lakshmi Narasimha temple Nuggihalli (Hassan Dist) dated 1246 CE².(Fig-1) Baichoja also figures on Kedareshwara Temple Nagalapura(Ca,1250CE)in Tumkur District³. After this temple, Baichoja name was never found in any other temple works in Hoysala period.

Baichoja belonged to the family of artists. His father Singoja, was also an artist. Baichoja had mentioned himself as son of Singoja in an engraving on Kedareshwara Temple at Nagalapura⁴.(Fig-2) There are only five references to Singoja and his work. He appeared to be not very popular artist, but was responsible for carving Hero Stones and worked on some minor temples. In his entire career he never got an opportunity to work on any major temples like his son Baichoja. Singoja appeared to have belonged to village Nandi near Doddaballapur. Nandi was an important centre of art activities since the Ganga period and there are two magnificent temples built in 10 Century CE⁵.

Baichoja's major sculptural work can be seen at Lakshmi Narasimha Temple Nuggihalli. His elderly contemporary Mallitamma also had worked on this temple. Interestingly the temple is divided in to two parts southern part sculptures were carved by Mallitamma while northern part sculptures by Baichoja of Nandi.(fig-3) There are common subjects delineated by both. The names of the artist Baichoja are restricted to Southern part of the temple and Mallitamma only on northern side sculptures. All major works have signatures of the artists. It is also surprising to note that division and allocation of the

separate space to both the artists, indicate their ability to carve the sculptures. It also strongly confirm the superiority of the sculptural knowledge such as iconography and styles of individual artists. The division of temple space for carving sculpture further brings new idea that whether there was a kind of completion among these two artists. Interestingly, thematic depiction of sculptures are more or less are same except a few examples.

Baichoja had carved Aadimurti, UgraNarasimha, Vamana Trivikrama, Govardhana Krishna, Venugopala, Kama-Rati, Brahma, Nartna Ganesha, Bhairava, Bhairavi, Yaksha-Mantrika(magician) Naga Kanya, Yoga Narasimha, and a few forms of Viishnu's 24 manifestations. Baichoja's carving stops at rear central niche of the temple (Koshtalaya). Entire southern wall sculptures obviously attributed to Baichoja as his signature is found on a few sculptures. He is referred as *Roovari Nandiya Baichoja*, meaning Artist Baichoja of Nandi. The most astonishing part of his signature is, the eulogies/ epithets that are found along with his name.

The inscription carved on the image of Govardhana Krishna reads as: *Haribirida roovari, girivajra ganda, viridaprasadi mastakashula ruvari Nandiya Baichoja maadida ruvara sri,sri,(thuder bolt to the mountains, the titles hostile sculptor, made this sculpture ..)*. Refer to his epithets⁶ (Fig-4). This small line provide a scope to postulate that Baichoja was an important sculptor by the time this assignment was being executed. In another sculpture he records on the pedestal of Paravasudeva sculpture '*Sri Adimurtiyanau Nandiya Baichoja Madida Kandira..*' (Fig-5) meaning the sculpture of Adimurti Vishnu who is seated on coiled serpent was carved by Baichoja of Nandi ⁷. Similarly, on the pedestal of Trivikrama sculpture, UgraNarasimha also mentions that these art works were done by Baichoja of Nandi. Over all there are more than two dozen important sculptures on North side wall of the temple, done by Baichoja.

Stylistically looking at sculptures of both the artists at Nuggihalli Lakshmi Narasimha temple, an individual style of approach to carving and delineation may be recorded. For example, sculpture depicting Venugopala carved by both the artists. Mallitamma has signed with signature as Mallitam on the lower strip of the pedestal of the sculpture. While Baichoja's image doesn't have signature as it is within the signed sculptures like Krishna Govardhana, Trivikrama etc.

Mallitamma's Venugopala (fig-6)image has rhythmic *dwibhanga* standing posture, composed within the space. The upper portion has an arch like tree and on either sides there are *gopalakas* and cows. Gopalaka stand in mesmerizing posture as he is enjoying the melodious tune of flute. Krishna persona has been decorated with rich jewellery and tall *kirita*. Krishna here is not an ordinary Gopala, but a divinity.

Baichoja's Venugopala Krishna (Fig-7) is a young Gopala type of figure. He uses certain elements like Mallitamma. But interesting aspect is, Krishna has no such grand appearance as seen in Mallitamma's Venugopala. Here, cows and Gopala are compactly carved as to show an open space where Krishna is standing in *dwibhanga* and playing flute underneath the tree, which is only suggestive here. Krishna persona has jewellery but not as rich as Mallitamma. Baichoja has visualized Krishna as young boy of Brindavana like any other common boy, yet his sculpture filled with bliss and joy of being Gopala.

Krishna wear a head band instead kirita, and has neatly combed hair bun resting on his left shoulder. Baichoja created a scene where cows, cheetah, and people of Brindavana happily live together and enjoy the melodious divine music of his flute. Baichoja has a strong knowledge of iconography. He has carved attributes of Vishnu like Shankha, Chakra, Gada and Padma on the uppermost strata of the space, associating Krishna as incarnation of Vishnu. Another significant aspect is depiction Hanuman and Garuda on the pedestal space of the sculpture. Appearance of Hanuman along with Garuda, who is natural vehicle of Vishnu, appears for the first time in sculptures. Though Hanuman has already been depicted as part of Ramayana and other narrative, appearing on sculpture pedestal is something new feature⁸.

The sculptures carved by Baichoja are quite different in stylistic features when compared with the sculptures carved by artist Mallitamma. Mallitamma's sculptural style was already developed as a matured style and has registered his signature since 1196 CE. Mallitamma had already a vast experience over fifty years by the time he worked on Nuggehalli temple. He might be aged about nearing 70 years(calculated based on his work). Whereas, Baichoja was still a young person, but strong enough to admit his style as superior as figured in his own words mentioned above. The sculptures carved by Baichoja have graceful appearance, very strong in the delineation of the composition and other retinue figures within the composition. For example, in the sculpture of Adimurti Vishnu, Baichoja continues the tradition of seated figure of Vishnu on seven hooded serpent. as seen in seated Vishnu on five hooded serpent at Badami cave-III. The tradition was followed by the Hoysala artists in the present form. Relaxingly seated posture of Vishnu on coiled serpent undoubtedly exhibit unique feature. Vishnu's eased posture not only attest to the artist's liberty but also his creativity. In the sculpture of Govardhanadhari Krishna, Baichoja has arranged figures in attractive method. Krishna as protagonist figure is carved in the centre. Krishna as youth, standing in *dwibhanga* posture, holding the mount Govardhana in his right palm, while left on idle and resting on his side. The mount Govardhana unlike realistic hilly form as seen in Badami Chalukya(Badami Upper Sivalaya) or Pallava Cave at Mahabalipuram, here it rendered in foliage of tree spread on either side in arched form. Artist has created this artistic mountain with wild animals and flora. On either sides of Krishna, the Gopikas, Gopalakas, cows and other figures are placed on either sides of Krishna. These figures create the whole narrative of Govardhana episode and Krishna as protector and people take shelter under the mountain. Visualizing the whole event and executing it on a limited space had become part of master skill of Hoysala artists. Adjustment of figures within space was well understood and organized.

When look at the sculptures carved by Mallitamma on this temple, they appear somewhat slightly inferior in style of Baichoja. Mallitamma was already a highly applauded artist. When, Baichoja claimed the tiles, as gleaned from the inscription in the same temple, Mallitamma was completely silent. There are no equal epithets or titles mentioned in the inscription on this temple or elsewhere about Mallitamma. Whether Mallitamma looked himself inferior to Baichoja? Or he might have left it as it is as he had already in the height of fame and name. He had done major projects which were completed and new projects like Somanathapura temple might have been in pipeline.

Baichoja's sophisticated and vibe of style and art practice appeared to be in high period. Surprisingly his name figures only in Kedareshwara temple at Nagalapura near Turuvekere⁹. Nagalapura temple is

slightly later in date, while the sculptures are unfinished. Certain questions arise from this event, that whether any kind of rivalry existed among the artists in those. If so, why Baichoja did not get good commissioned works like Mallitamma. Baichoja appeared on Hoysala artistic platform, like flash and disappear suddenly within a very short period. The artist, whose style, definitely, in all aspects was superior to Mallitamma, ends abruptly like sinking star.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Kulkarni R H; The New Indian Express:16-02-2021 page 6.editorial page, monthly column
2. MAR(Mysore Archaeological report. For the year 1933. Published 1936. Pp-20-30
3. Colleyer Kelleston : 1990. The Hoysala Artists-Their Identity and Style. DAM Mysore. Pp-165-67
Baichoja's name has been recorded as part inscriptions: Epigraphia Carnatica: XI,Cn.278,279,280,281.
4. Mysore Archaeological Report. 1916. P-5.
5. Nandi in Doddaballapur Taluk near Bangalore was centre of artistic activities since the Ganga period and also continued in succeeding period. Hence, there are no evidences to say, whether Singoja father of Baichoja belonged this Nandi or somewhere else. Based on the location, and importance of the place, I feel Nandi of Doddaballapur might have been the place of Singoja and Baichoja.
6. MAR-1933-p-25
7. Ibid: p.24. MAR author identify the Paravasudeva/Adimurti Sculpture of Vishnu as AmaraNarayana. However artist himself has mentioned as Adimurti.
8. Appearance of Hanuman in Krishna's sculpture along with Garuda has different religious appellation. In Madhwa philosophy and beliefs-Hanuman is the main spiritual identity. He is depicted as the ardent devotee of lord Vishnu-Rama-Krishna. It is in all possible probability introduction of Hanuman with Garuda on prominent sculptures appeared to be an undercurrent influence of school of thought. It may even discussed in the context of Sri Vaishnava influence.
9. Colleyer Kelleston : 1990, Opcit.,.

Figures:

1. LakshmiNarasimha Temple, Nuggihalli
2. Keshava Temple Nagalapur
3. Ground Plan of Lakshmi Narasimha Temple Nuggihalli. (Courtsey MAR-1933)
4. Krishna Govardhana
5. Adimurti
6. Venugopala-by Mallitamma
7. Venugopala by Baichoja