

Understanding The Influence Of Temple Culture On Art Forms A Study Based On Dvg's Antaḥpuraḡite

Madhulika Srivatsa
JAIN (Deemed-to-be University)

Abstract:

An art form is dependent on many aspects for its holistic development, and one such significant influence for the Indian art forms is the temple culture. These temples have been an incessant source of inspiration for many genres of art and innumerable traditions have grown under their patronage and flourished. For a dancer's eye particularly, the sculptures of a temple suggest layers of possibilities for an emotive journey through movement explorations. The Antaḥpuraḡite collection of poems of Dr D.V.Gundappa have added another powerful layer of connection in this process by providing Śṛṅgāra compositions soaked in poetic expressions, inspired by the Madanikā sculptures of the Belur temple. It is indeed valuable to understand how the temple culture has influenced such artistic expressions through sculpture, poetry, and dance.

Key words: Antaḥpuraḡite, Madanikā sculptures, D.V.Gundappa (DVG), Belur temple, Śṛṅgāra

Date of Submission: 26-08-2023

Date of Acceptance: 06-09-2023

I. INTRODUCTION

A temple is a glorious epitome of Indian culture and arts...withstanding the test of time for centuries together, these beautiful structures have housed many aspects of our life. From being a nucleus of worship and religious activity, a place of economy, polity, society, a grand repository of art forms, to being a fortress at dire times – the temple ecosystem echoed some of the most illustrious times of Bhārata!

Temple as a 'concept' has existed since time immemorial. Right from the Vedic Indian society, we have understood the entire world around us to be a 'deva-ālaya' – home of the divine. Worship of prakṛti (nature) manifested into giving various names and forms to the simplest yet most profound aspects of our own experiences such as sun, earth, fire, and so on. In an attempt to connect to our deepest selves and our very own existence, we created more beautiful and powerful embodiments in the world around us. A temple is one such unparalleled manifestation of truth and beauty. It is said that the Yajña concept of the Vedic society was re-visualized into the temple structure that we understand today. With the advent of changes in the society and human minds¹, there came a need to define a place that one could resort to for seeking clarity of thought and action; and for us most importantly, a place that chiseled, cherished, and nurtured that one enthralling aspect of 'beauty' in all its dimensions – Kalā (art).

The same Vedic wisdom has given us the concept of Satya-Śiva-Sundara, i.e., truth-auspiciousness-beauty! In the manifestation of this truth (Sat), we find all the elements of a temple being visualized. While the Āgamas catered to the ritualistic aspects (relatable to 'Śiva'), the aspects of beauty (Saundarya) were explored by the architectural marvels of construction and beautification of various parts of the temple structure.

Bhārata can proudly claim to be the sole superpower that is a repository for magnificent temples, both in quality and quantity. In the Karnataka state alone, we find many such temples and dynasties that have given strong foundations for artistic expressions. Some of these insights in the words of Dr Choodamani discuss the existence and patronage to art forms –

“Karnataka has been rightly regarded as an open-air museum of architecture and sculpture with hundreds of movements and thousands of sculptures belonging to various schools of art adorning almost all parts of Karnataka from the early centuries of the Christian era.” (Nandagopal 11)

“The epoch of the Hoysala ruler Vishnuvardhana and his queen consort Shantala forms the brightest chapter in the temple building activity of Karnataka.” (Nandagopal 16)

Every exquisite piece of art (both plastic and performing) is capable of becoming an element of 'suggestion' to an honest spectator. One such extraordinary example is the Antaḥpuraḡite collection of poems of

¹ As discussed by Arjun Bharadwaj in the lectures, he speaks of how the need for temples came during the time between Kṛtayuga and Tretāyuga known as Yuga-sandhi kāla, where the heightened state of the mind becomes challenged by the base instincts thus driving one to seek solace outside of the self. Interestingly, a similar circumstance is mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata for the origin of drama.

Dr D.V.Gundappa. The grandeur and beauty of the Hoysala-constructed Cennakeśava-svāmi temple at Belur, Karnataka, along with the main deity and the Madanikās on the temple outer-wall structures have been responsible for such wonderful artistic expressions in literature and dance.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is thus to understand the influence of temple culture on art forms and their aesthetic exploration.

Scope

- While the purpose of the study is to know the nature of influence of temple culture on art forms in general, the scope of this paper is restricted to the Belur temple Madanikās alone since the discussions are based on Antaḥpuraḡites which are inspired by these.
- The study is carried forward with the perspective of a student of dance and hence statements related to a dancer's vision are made wherever relevant.

Methodology

- Qualitative approach
- Data is collected by way of Primary sources which include field visit of the Belur temple and studying the Antaḥpuraḡites, and Secondary sources of relevant treatises & texts.
- Observation and Descriptive methods have been employed for discussion on the sculptures and poems.

Discussion²

The entire work of Antaḥpuraḡites is an ingenious imagination of the Madanikās as Nāyikās (beloveds) of the presiding deity, Cennakeśava (Nāyaka). Every sculpture picked by DVG is of a one who is immersed in Śṛṅgāra and has found a way to express it through movement & music. Poetry through stone, poetry through words, poetry through music and poetry through dance is the journey of every Madanikā in the Antaḥpuraḡite collection. Having said this, let us now try to understand the aesthetic exploration of such a vision.

II. 'INFLUENCE' – AN INSPIRATION

First and foremost, it becomes important to understand what is meant by 'influence' in the context here. We are already aware that a temple has been the sustaining source of almost every aspect of human civilization. This being the case, the nature of impact that the temple culture has is manifold and profound. With respect to the art forms as well, there can be many kinds of influences of the temple ecosystem such as historical (patronage), political, economic, architectural, religious and many more. However, for an artistic perspective³, a subtler influence may be observed in the form of 'inspiration', a spark that illumines the creativity of an artiste; the effortless, emotional 'influence' that 'inspires' at the level of 'Pratibhā'⁴ (spark of intelligence).

To know the role of 'inspiration' in the artistic perspective, one must naturally arrive at the concept of 'Vibhāva' of Bharata's Rasa-sūtra. That which is capable of becoming a trigger to the dormant Sthāyi is considered as a Vibhāva, a key element in the aesthetic experience. While the Ālambana-vibhāva is the main cause, the Uddīpana-vibhāvas become the supportive elements that accelerate, enhance and empower the Ālambana as well impact the Vyabhicāris and Anubhāvas. Dr Ganesh says –

“Uddīpana-vibhāvas are of paramount importance in the synthesis of Rasa, for, sans these there will be no more motivation in the Ālambana-vibhāva. Then what about the state of Anubhāvas and Vyabhicāri-bhāvas which are the derivatives of Vibhāvas?” (Ganesh 8)

“Uddīpana-vibhāvas really form a very wide and colourful chunk in the process of art-creation and appreciation.” (Ibid.)

The entire attempt made by DVG in his vision of the Antaḥpuraḡite is by making the beautiful Madanikā sculptures of the Belur temple as a Vibhāva for beautiful Śṛṅgāra-kāvya.

² The researcher has made two visits to the Belur temple; the primary being a field study under the guidance of Dr Shobha Shashikumar; and another for a dance performance at the Navaraṅga of the Cennakeśava-svāmi temple as part of an Utsava. It is based on this firsthand experience and close observation of the deity and sculptures that had formed the basis for visualizing the content of this paper.

³ Here when we say 'artistic' perspective, the reference is to aesthetics of performing arts, primarily the concept of Rasa. Bharata gives us the Rasa-sūtra which speaks of the coming together of Vibhāva (determinants), Anubhāva (consequents), Vyabhicāri-bhāva (transitory emotions) for Rasa (bliss) to be realized. Key elements of this are also the Sthāyi (inherent dormant emotion) and Sāttvika-bhāvas (intense emotional expressions).

⁴ Here, one might benefit from remembering the inspiration that Sage Vālmiki derived for writing the epic Rāmāyaṇa. The incident of the Krauñca birds which triggered Śoka in him and out came extraordinary poetry drenched in Karuṇa-rasa! A similar experience is of DVG's, truly a ṛṣi-kavi, who was inspired by the Belur dancing sculptures and penned the exquisite Śṛṅgāra-kāvya of Antaḥpuraḡite.

III. THE BELUR TEMPLE⁵ AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

An important aspect of the temple culture that is indispensable to sustenance of art forms is the royal patronage, and the Belur temple stands testimony to the patronage of Hoysaḷas. King Viṣṇuvarḍhana is believed to be one of refined taste and a great patron of arts. It is said that his queens, primarily Śāntalā and Bommalā were themselves dancers of great merit; and that they (along with dancers of the temple and royal courts) have inspired many of the sculptures of this temple. Prof S.K.Ramachandrarao says –

“Sculptor (Takṣaka) was free to work as his fancy dictated, within the general framework provided by the architect (Sthapati)” (Rao 50)

The thought of beautiful women (kāma-vadhu) adorning architectural spaces is an age-old concept in our culture and Madanikās are undoubtedly the key attractions of the Belur temple, as well as of the entire architectural heritage of Hoysaḷa-built temples. As mentioned by Belur Prakash –

“The bracket figures are known for their beauty, grace, postures and design. It is an added attraction to the main temple. These structures also indicate contemplating mood and thoughts of Indian art of dancing which are nothing but gifts of Hoysala architecture to the world of art.” (Prakash 53)

Dr Manoj Gundanna⁶ gives a brief account of its development saying that in the Śilpa-śāstra itself there is mention of doing ‘alaṅkāra’ with ‘Puttalī/Puttalikā’ (idol/image/doll). They are found right from the Sāncī-stūpa and as the concept grew, more elaborate ornamentation of the Stambha (pillars) and Citra-potikā (ornamented top sections of the pillars) were seen. Inspired from literature, the concept of Śalabhañjikā (a woman along with tree and the concept of Dohada) is also said to have influenced these sculptures; and the Hoysaḷas have used this concept extensively. In our Sanātana-dharma, every aspect of life and beauty was celebrated...it is of no surprise that the Belur temple became a home to the gorgeous Madanikās.

One can notice the detailing of skillful and ornate work on each of these sculptures. Set under the prabhāvali of intricately entwined Latāḥ (creepers), each of the Madanikā sculpture in this temple is abundant with nuanced facial features, ornate Āharya (embellishments of headgears, hair ornaments, earrings, necklaces, armlets, bangles, waist bands, anklets, embellished skirts/sarees), a variety of suitable attributes in their hands (mirrors, percussive instruments, cymbals, flutes, birds, bow and arrow, letters, holding of the hair or saree, fruit, betel leaf etc.), stances with gracefully held Hastas (hand gestures) and Bhaṅgis (bends of the body) as if in intoxicated dance, a number of companions ranging from birds, monkeys, percussionists, sakhis (friend of heroine) etc., sufficiently tall to identify every detail and suitably placed in a manner that can easily capture an onlooker’s attention – on the whole, an overarching display of alluring demeanor perfectly suited for Śṛṅgāra. They are not only the physical Alaṅkāras (embellishments) but have truly become the Alaṅkāras of Kāvya, of Śṛṅgāra-kāvya!

The imagination of DVG of that these Nāyikās are all the beloveds of Cennakeśava and that the entire space from the Bhitti (temple outer walls) inwards till the Navaraṅga (vestibule) of the temple is actually the Antaḥpura (harem) of Cennakeśava standing tall in the Garbhagrha is one of profound pratibhā that has eternalized the temple itself!

IV. INSPIRATION FROM ŚĀSTRA

The Āgama-śāstras that govern the temple include aspects of iconography, rituals and so on. Of the many rituals that are involved in the construction, installation and consecration of the deity, there are some in particular that can be very inspiring to an artiste’s vision. The Tattva-nyāsa which includes the infusion of soul into the mūrti (specifically called Jīva-nyāsa). As Prof. S.K.Ramachandra Rao delightfully puts it –

“The formula for invoking and placing the parts of the devotee’s own body into the parts of the icon’s projected body presupposes that the deity in the icon is to be visualized in a human form (puruṣa-bhāva). Even during the ritual of infusing vitality into the icon (prana-pratistha), the mantra recited has the same notion.” (Rao 62)

Under another context he explains –

“...followed by Kalā-āvāhanā (invoking the soul or jīva-kalā and other aspects of divinity and branches of learning in the heart of the icon) ...” (Rao 71 & 72)

While discussing rituals for handing over of the finished mūrtis by the sthapati, there is an idea that the architect is considered to be Lord Brahma, the patron is considered Lord Viṣṇu and officiating priest is believed to be Lord Śiva, and that it is only when these three forces come together is there merit to the temple.

While all these speak of ritualistic aspects, they are also inspiring to an artiste’s vision. The coming together of the Trimūrtis at once symbolizes the responsibility and joy of artistic endeavors that is undertaken at the stemple...that in this case, the Madanikās sculptures on the walls of the Belur temple and Cennakeśava deity

⁵ There are many works that explain the architectural features and beauty of the Belur temple. Since this is not directly relevant to the topic of this paper, such details are kept to a minimum. One can refer to original sources of historians and archeologists for the same.

⁶ The researcher had the opportunity to do a telephonic interview of researcher and archeologist Dr Manoj Gundanna who explained the historical development of the concept of Madanikās. This section of the writing is paraphrased from the conversation.

at the heart of the temple are but reflections of the same truth and beauty! By the concept of the 'puruṣa-bhāva' that is spoken of, we have simultaneously made Him capable of experiencing the entire gamut of emotions of the worldly nature (Bhāva), as also made our own selves capable of elevating the very same worldly emotions into a sublimated experience (Rasa). The ritual of Kalā-āvāhanā by its very name and definition has justified the influence of temple culture on art forms.

V. THE THEME OF ŚṚṄĀRA AS A SOURCE OF INPIRATION

While so many aspects of temple culture have inspired the poet for these compositions, the heart of these songs lie in the concept of ŚṚṄĀRA; Kṛṣṇa being the ŚṚṄĀRA-nāyaka himself and each of the Madanikās becoming the ŚṚṄĀRA-nāyikās. Thus, a brief discussion of this theme is inevitable here.

The Nāṭyaśāstra provides detailed insights into handling the Vibhāvas, Vyabhicāri-bhāvas and Anubhāvas in ŚṚṄĀRA through its delineation in the chapters discussing Rasa-sūtra (Chapters 6 & 7), Sāmānya-abhinaya, Citrābhinaya and while speaking of characters (Chapters 24, 25, 26 & 34). The popular concept of Aṣṭavidha Nāyikā avasthas (refers to eight possible situations between a hero and heroine in love) and Dūti/Sakhis (messengers and companions of heroine) are also found. The Antaḥpuragīte poems explore these emotions and its myriad shades through each visualization of the Madanikā.

Antaḥpuragīte such as 'Vāsanti' and 'Viarahārte' represent the emotions of a Virahotkanṭhitā; 'Mañjukabari', 'Kuṭila Kuṅtāle', 'Vīṭṭidhare' etc. represent the states and activities of a Vāsakasajjā...many more such examples can be found.

'Sukabhāṣini', 'Kīravāṇi', 'Śakuna Śārade', 'Śuka Sakhi' and such others are explored by DVG to introduce the concept of dutis and sakhis of the Nāyikā in the form of birds mainly, and some speaking of the message already received from the Nāyaka, Cennakeśava. Many of the songs are written from the point of view of a sakhi addressing the Nāyikā sculpture itself.

In songs like 'Mukura Mugdhe', 'Vāsanti', 'Kapi Kupite', 'Līlā Kirāti', 'Virayoṣite', 'Jaya Niṣādi', 'Tāṇḍaveśvarī', 'Pādāṅgulīye' etc. we find the attributes in the sculpture such as mirror, bow and arrow, monkey, a musical instrument, a toe ring and such other objects and persons being referred to by the poet as reasons or triggers that are causing the Madanikā-Nāyikā to feel Vyabhicāri-bhāvas like envy, anger, anxiety, joy and many more.

The Sāmānya-abhinaya chapter of Nāṭyaśāstra discusses many subtle aspects of ŚṚṄĀRA anubhava (experience) and abhinaya (expression) such as Svabhāvaja-alāṅkāras (natural graces of heroines) and the 10 stages of love experienced by the hero/heroine. One must know that it requires a great deal of maturity and a profound understanding of philosophy to explore these with aucitya (propriety), be it through words or āṅgika; DVG's subtle suggestions have captured such experiences through songs like 'Hāva Sundari', 'Nīlāmbare', 'Bhāvadevi', 'Puṁ Viḍambini', 'Rasika Śabari', 'Muralīdhare' and such others.

While all these cover the more discernable aspects of ŚṚṄĀRA, we also find the poet having explored just the emotional journey of ŚṚṄĀRA by simply referring to an aspect of the Madanikā sculpture as a springboard to take a deep dive into the depths of Vipralambha and Saṁbhoga ŚṚṄĀRA. Compositions such as 'Rāga Yogi', 'Gānājivane', 'Nāṭya Nipuṇe', 'Svargahaste', 'Kelīnirate', 'Gāndharvadevi', 'Lāsotsave', 'Cāruhāṣini' and so on are of this nature where there is no single point of reference to the sculpture or a story but the layers of ŚṚṄĀRA can be endlessly explored.

With poetic embellishments we find phrases that beautifully represent these concepts.⁷ Few examples –

- ✓ 'yāgāvabhṛtavem cennakesavanige' – is this the ceremonial bath of (ŚṚṄĀRA)Yajña?
- ✓ 'māratāntra kalāpe' – the one who uses the techniques of Manmatha
- ✓ 'mohinī aṁśa sambhaveyar' – they are manifestations of the beauty incarnate Mohinī form of Viṣṇu
- ✓ 'keśaveśana rāṇiyar' – the queens of Cennakesava
- ✓ 'madanikeyar smaragaṇanikeyar' – the ones who sing the glories of Manmatha
- ✓ 'madanikeyar rasabhaṇanikeyar' – the ones who declare Rasa
- ✓ 'siri keśavam rasa vaibhavam' – this is the gorgeous Rasa spectacle Kesava

The antaraṅga of our own selves, becomes the nāṭyaraṅga for so many emotions to rise and fall and elevate to the status of Rasānanda, much like the Madanikās in the Antaḥpura of Keśava rise and fall through layers of ŚṚṄĀRA only to ultimately unite with Cennakeśava. This one poem of DVG suffices to embody to us the entire of ŚṚṄĀRA Rasa-sūtra of Bharata!

VI. CONCLUSION

For centuries together, we have seen the noteworthy impact that the temple culture has had on the artistes, patronage and the art forms. The temples of the Hoysaḷas are believed to a pinnacle point in Indian architectural

⁷ The phrases given in single quotes are directly from the Antaḥpuragīte poems in the words of DVG.

history and Belur has been the melting pot of ornamentation at its peak. Such a rich space for artistic endeavors along with the royal patronage of three generations of Hoysala kings has created this marvel of a temple, and the Madanikās here have a unique quality of inspiring and teaching. To a wonderful poet like DVG, these beauties inspired melodic, rhythmic and profound poetry; and to dancers, with their very stance and grace, they teach the joy of exploring the statics and dynamics of Āṅgika (body language of dance) when soaked in Sāttva (essence of intense emotion).

There have been many compositions (especially in the realm of Karnataka music) where the Vāggeyakāras have sung on the deities of various temples; we find that these have most often taken the form of a Stuti or Kṛti wherein the deity's attributes, stories of puranic significance in relation to that deity and such concepts are explored. However, envisioning the Madanikās as Uddīpana for Kāvya (where more than the attributes, the characterization and emotions are given greater importance) is a pioneering work of Dr D.V.Gundappa. Albeit a bold statement, one can infer that if not for this vision of DVG, the Madanikā sculptures of the Belur temple might have become 'one more' embellishment among the many. This Antaḥpuragīte Śṛṅgāra-kāvya becoming an Uddīpana for a student of dance is another leap thereon!

Śṛṅgāra-rasa is the most explored concept in art and rightfully known as the Rasa-rāja, and Kṛṣṇa is undoubtedly an embodiment of this! With him as the mūla-bera-vigraha, as the Sākṣi (witness), it is of no surprise that the sculptors found their inspiration to create beautiful Madanikā sculptures to adorn the walls and ceilings of this temple; and if not for Kṛṣṇa, who could have inspired an extraordinary vision for the poetic exploration of Śṛṅgāra through Kāvya and thus offering scope to explore through Nṛtya as well. Śṛṅgāra, with its expanse and depths and possibilities of subtle expression and suggestion, finds all-time relevance in dance. They cater to the Sāttvika and Āṅgika challenges of a dancer's exploration. A highlight of the Antaḥpuragīte and a key reason for its aesthetic success has been that through these songs, DVG has extensively explored the Uddīpana-vibhāvas and the Vyabhicāri-bhāvas of Śṛṅgāra-rasa. The Uddīpana-vibhāvas have been closely associated with the attributes of the particular Madanikā sculpture. For a dancer's exploration, this allows one to give a visual of the śilpa, while also providing scope for imagination through elaborate descriptions/situations using the gīta as the reference point.

One might go a step further and say that such poetic explorations deserve to be a part of the temple dance traditions!

We find references in the purāṇas to Śṛṅgāra episodes of Kṛṣṇa and the gopis, the Rāsālīla of the moonlit night...thereafter, it is only in the Antaḥpuragītes that we find the visual of an entire temple full of Madanikā sculptures as Kṛṣṇa's Nāyikās, enlivening the hearts of the saḥṛdayas, declaring that the Belur temple is no different from Vṛndāvana...or perhaps even more breathtakingly alive every day and night with the dance and music of Madanikās and Cennakeśava...

In a moment of timelessness of art experience, one might wonder...is it the influence of temple sculptures on a poet or the influence of a poet on eternalizing the temple sculptures...

References

- [1]. Ganesh, R. "Sahitya Susame". Sahitya Prakashana, 2020.
- [2]. Gundappa, D.V. "Sri Chennakeshava Antaḥpurageethe". Kavyalaya Prakashakaru, 2022.
- [3]. Nandagopal, Choodamani (ed.). "Classical Dance Heritage of Karnataka". Karnataka Bharatagama Pratishthana, 2012.
- [4]. Nayak, Ha Ma (ed.). "DVG Kritireni-Vol 9-Complete works of D.V.Gundappa". Abhimani Prakashana, 2013.
- [5]. Phadke, Deepa (ed.). "Gejje Hejje-Nrityagiri 25". Nrtiyagiri Prakashana, 2022.
- [6]. Prakash, Belur D.S. "The Glory of Hoysala Temples-with special reference to Belur, Halebid, Somanathapur & Shravanabelagola-an Introduction". MaPraBha Publications, 2016.
- [7]. Rao, S.K.Ramachandra. "The Agama Encyclopedia Vol 9-Consecrations". Sri Satguru Publications, 2005.
- [8]. Rao, S.K.Ramachandra. "The Indian Temple, Its meaning". Surama Prakashana, 2013.
- [9]. Shashikumar, Shobha. "Natyayana-A Journey from Bhava to Rasa". Noopura Bhramari, 2020.
- [10]. Unni, N.P. "Natyasastra: Text with introduction, English translation and indices". New Delhi: NBBC Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd, 2014.
- [11]. Bharadwaj, Arjun. "Devalaya Samskriti" (an audio lecture series). YouTube, Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs, 16th & 17th December 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6KJvehWzhU&t=13s>.
- [12]. Bharadwaj, Arjun. "Devalaya Samskriti haagu Vastushilpa" (an audio lecture series). YouTube, Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs, 25th, 26th & 27th August 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nN0sIzB0gpU>.
- [13]. Ganesh, R. "Critical and Holistic study of Uddipana Vibhavas in Classical dance with special reference to Sringara rasa" HRD Fellowship article.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to my guide, Dr Shobha Shashikumar, for all her insights and sharing of experiences that have inspired me to work on this topic. She has also painstakingly reviewed the drafts and provided the right direction for the work.

My gratitude to Jain University's Research wing and the Performing Arts department for their constant support and allowing me to take up this research.

I am very grateful to all resource persons, Sri Arjun Bharadwaj, Dr Manoj Gundanna and Sri Srinivas for their valuable inputs related to this subject.