

Musical curiosities that sing and play – Sculptural marvels!

- **Nagashree Narayan, Bengaluru**

The idea of Bangalore to anyone is ‘the silicon city’ which is an IT hub, malls and apartments with many floors, astonishing restaurants with great ambience and so on. Nevertheless, Bangalore is reasonably an ancient settlement with interesting temples to explore and experience the beauty of our rich heritage. Alasūru Sōmeśvara temple and Bhōganandīśvara temples are an example for that.

Music is an integral part of our Sanātana Dharma and history. With the help of the sculptures found in the temple, we can spotlight the types of musical instruments played during those times. There are literary references, but the visual representation, as the saying goes ‘a picture can speak thousand words’, is much better.

The Sōmeśvara temple was first built by the Chōlā-s. The Bhōganandīśvara temple was built by the Nolamba –Pallavā-s. However, there has been addition, renovation and several modifications by the ensuing dynasties. But the Karnāṭaka kingdom, also called the Vijayanagara Empire is very evident.

I was amazed just by the sculpture at the very entrance of the Sōmeśvara temple. To the right of the entrance, there is sculpture of Śiva, represented as dancing with various other deva-s playing the instruments. Nandi playing Maddaḷe, one with instrument like ḍamaru/uḍukka, one with a wind instrument and the at last with a stringed instrument. All the types of instruments mentioned in our treatises and texts can be witnessed here.



Figure 1: Dancing Śiva

The huge door has many specimens with all types of instruments, it felt as though they are welcoming us to the temple with melodious music and beautiful dancers dancing.



Figure 2: Entrance of Sōmeśvara temple

This temple has a beautiful shrine with Śiva liṅga and there is idols of 64 Nayanmār-s in the prākāra. There are 48 pillars in the maṇḍapa which have sculptures of various instruments.

The Bhōganandīśvara temple has Bhōganandīśvara and Aruṇācaleśvara with Girijāmbā and Apītakucāmbā shrines as their consort respectively. Aruṇācaleśvara and Apītakucāmba deities, reminded me of Muttusvami Dīkṣitar's one of the pañcabhūta kṛti-s composed on agni līṅga in Tiruvaṇṇamalai 'Arūṇācala nātham smarāmi aniśam apītakucāmba sametam' in the rāga sārāṅga set to rūpaka tāḷa. Between Bhōganandīśvara and Aruṇācaleśvara shrine, there is a small intervening shrine known as Umāmaheśvara which represents the Hoysala style of architecture.

Various instruments can be found repetitively in both the temples.



Figure 3: Instruments like today's mṛdaṅga

The figure 3 depicts same percussion instrument or drum, where the playing technique can also be identified. Hands are on the instrument in the left and the right hand is raised in the right one.

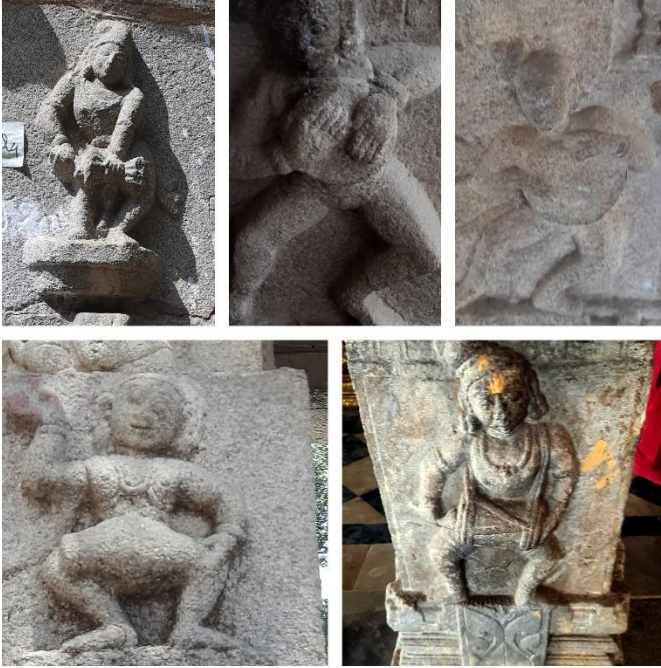


Figure 4: Various Percussion Instruments

Different types of drums can be identified. Figure 4 depicts various percussion instruments of same type in various sizes, the playing of the instrument while sitting and standing positions can be identified.

Various wind instruments can be seen. The conch or śaṅkha, flute, kahaḷe and a snake charmer taming the snake with puṅgi. Figure 5 represents the same.



Figure 5 – Various Wind instruments



Figure 6: Snake Charmer with Pungi

Different types of stringed instruments can be found. In the sculptures we can clearly see the right hand used for plucking the strings. Even though the frets are visible, various number of strings used can be seen. Ektara, lute and Vīṇā with four strings can be seen. All of this very well matches with the way Vīṇa is played today. The resonator can be seen in some of the sculptures. The size of the resonators changing and also the position of the resonator varying can also be observed.



Figure 7: Various Stringed Instruments

These musical instruments are accompanied with dancing sculptures as well. All the instruments reminded me of Folk music. The daily activities and people have been represented in these sculptures. Seeing these sculptures, it reminded me of DVG's 'Naṭanavāḍidal Taruṇi'. It felt as though I had been to a folk ensemble. There is no doubt temples in such stature are not only for

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spiritual enlightenment but are also time capsules which helps us recreate the history and appreciate the magic of life on the basis of our rich culture.

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