

SCULPTURES OF MYTHICAL BEINGS IN HALASURU SOMESHWARA AND BHOGANANDISHWARA TEMPLES

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The ancient temples of Halasuru Someshwara and Bhoganandishwara located in and around Bangalore, both of which are primarily dedicated to Lord Shiva, are so rich in art that they leave us in awe. The Someshwara temple of Bangalore belongs to the Chola period and is said to have been built by the Chalukyas of Kalyani, to which, major additions have been made by the rulers of Vijayanagara Empire. The Bhoganandishwara temple situated at the foot of Nandi hills is said to have been built by the Nolamba-Pallavas during 9-10th century. It was later modified by Ganga, Hoysala, and Vijayanagara dynasties.

The sculptures that significantly caught my attention in both these temples were the ones that depicted mythical beings. These are a combination of various creatures which do not fail in evoking intriguing thoughts in the minds of the viewer. They say, "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder", and when it comes to art, I would like to tweak this as "beauty of the art is in its vivid perception and interpretation of each connoisseur". These sculptures might be interpreted differently by different people, but the intent of the sculptor behind it is an engrossing thought. These could be the representations of the real creatures prevalent in those times or the creative vision of the sculptor suggestive of combining the best features of different creatures.

Yalis are mythical creatures that are majorly found in many Indian temples. They are usually represented as part lion, part elephant, part horse. Vastu Shastra states that there are 16 types of Yalis. These are more often seen near the entrance which is why they are called the protectors/guardians of the temples. They can also vastly be seen engraved onto the pillars which can be symbolic to their immense strength to support and hold the complete load.



1. Side view of Simha yali seen on a pillar of Someshwara temple.



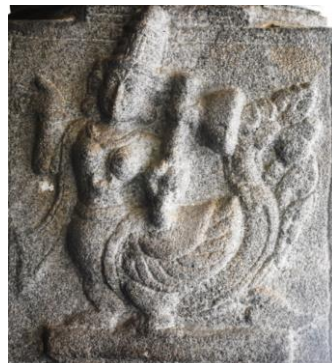
2. Side view of Simha yali seen on a pillar of Bhoganandishwara temple.



3. Side view of Gaja yali seen on a pillar of Bhoganandishwara temple.

The first two sculptures have the face of a lion, whereas the third one has the head of a lion and the tusk of an elephant. Their slender body is that of a horse and the strong legs are said to be that of a tiger. All three are seen to be standing upon a crouching elephant. They render a feeling of action such as galloping or pouncing, especially due to the riders seated on them. It can be noticed that the angle of deflection of each rider is different which might be a suggestion to the amount of strength required to control this ferocious creature. It could also represent the grit of humans to fight such immensely strong creatures or the greed for dominance of humans making them visualize a command over the strongest fictional animals of their own creation.

Kinnara-Kinnari are said to be celestial musicians and lovers who are part human and part bird. They are described as innocent and harmless creatures that are always noted for mutual love and devotion as a couple. They are fond of music and songs, and are believed to have come from the Himalayas. A couple of these sculptures can be seen in both the temples. Both of them are seen holding the Kinnari veene in the below pictures.



4. Front view of Kinnara from Bhoganandishwara temple.

5. Front view of Kinnari from Someshwara temple.

Vyaghrapada is the rishi who was blessed with the feet of tiger by Shiva to aid him in plucking fresh flowers untouched even by the honeybees. Vyaghrapada offering prayers to Lord Shiva holding the lamp in one hand and pooja bell in the other can be seen here. Shivalinga is depicted in the first sculpture but not in the second one.



7. Front view of Vyaghrapada from Someshwara temple.

6. Front view of Vyaghrapada from Bhoganandishwara temple.



8. This can be interpreted as a **part human form of Gandaberunda**. We can see its long tail feathers too. This sculpture glorifying the strength of the creature by showing it feeding onto its prey is called the "chain of destruction".
– Someshwara Temple

9. This is the portrayal of the **anthropomorphic form of Garuda** (Vishnu vahana). The wings are depicted at the back, and Garuda bearing Lord Vishnu on his hands is seen clearly.
- Both Someshwara (knees bent) and Bhoganandishwara (Motitam) temples.





10. This can be interpreted as a diminutive representation of **Sharabha** which is an eight-legged ferocious creature, being part man and part bird. Sharabha is said to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva which he took up to pacify Lord Narasimha.
- Bhoganandishwara temple



11. A creature having the head of an elephant and the body of a bird.
- Someshwara temple



12. Two-headed bird with attached beaks.
-Bhoganandishwara temple



13. This sculpture found in the Someshwara temple can be interpreted as a three-headed bird or as the dynamic representation of the movement of a bird's head. It can also be seen as an optical illusion in which any of these heads fit right with the body.



14. Representation of lion, bull, tiger, elephant, eagle, and dog faced mythical characters at the entrance of Someshwara temple

Such wondrous sculptures are not just the artistic documentation of the happenings and culture of those times but also play a major role in giving an outlook to the thought processes and creative intellect of the artists. Many of these mythical beings have been mentioned in our puranas, yet there are so many that remain ambiguous till date. An insight into these is not just refreshing and intriguing but lingers with us to explore more. To me, these sculptures seem like inspirations pushing us to break the barriers of our own limitations and become better versions of ourselves by inculcating positives from everyone around us.

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