

Optical illusion - in Vijayanagara Sculptures

- Vaishali. A.V, Bengaluru.

The Vijayanagara empire has built many temples with astonishing architecture in its time. Granite and Soapstone was the main material used in construction of temples. It is said that the Empire borrowed few of the architecture elements from previous empires and created their own unique style in architecture.

The distinct features of architecture include the Raya gopura (entry way) where the surface of the gates were heavily ornamented with carvings, Open Pavilions with platforms, Garbhagriha, Carved pillars, Hanging pillars (which is very unique architecture of this period), mythical beings (half animal half human), different door pattern, Yalis (mythical creatures), birds, lions, dancers, musicians, saints, stories from puranas , and many which are amazingly sculpted.

We can see the Hanging pillar in Lepakshi Temple which is fascinating and miraculous work done by the ancient sculptors, which still remains an unsolved puzzle and creating curiosity amongst present day engineers and architects.

In recent times we have come across several mind blowing optical illusions in papers, drawings or in our mobile phones that leave every viewer scratch their head, which we think it is a new trend, but back in ancient period the artists use to create these kind of optical illusions through stones which is a phenomenal work done by them. We can see few of them in Bangalore's Someshwara and Andra Pradesh's Lepakshi temples.

Optical illusion is an art that can be interpreted through many ways, according to each person's perception the art can be interpreted in

different ways and what we see first also says a lot about our personality.

We do not have the means to access the inner thought or motive of the artist but, we can assume that the artist might have tried to show the dynamic movement of something or probably tried to show animation through sculptures.

Through human history, Artists have devised many clever ways to engage the audience/ viewers, optical illusionary sculptures was one among them. The ancient artistic illusions provide us with vivid examples that not only human creativity and craftsmen ship was rich, but of our early aptitude for flexible thinking , such as our ability to switch our perspective back and forth between alternate viewpoints. Through this we can assume that fascination with illusions could be as old as humankind.

History provides us with definite proof that people have noticed, and have been intrigued by illusions for thousands of years. In some Hindu temples we see two or more images of same animal / human share a certain portion of the body , which creates a sort of optical illusion. These kind of arts takes a very talented and super imaginative sculptor to make.

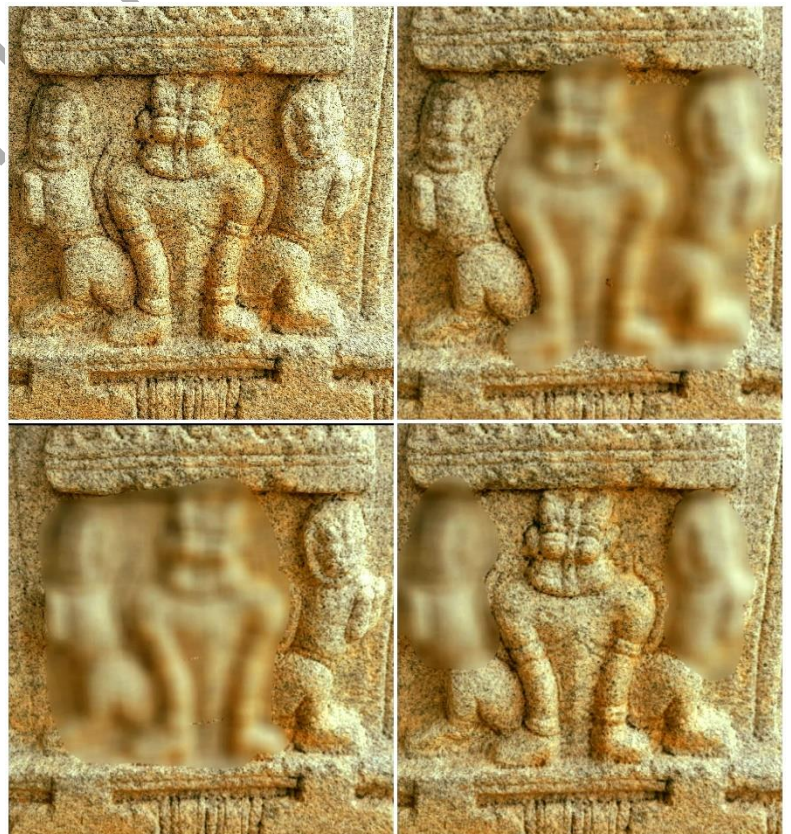
(Below are the few such sculptures which I have seen and tried to blur the parts of the sculptures to show the separation between them).

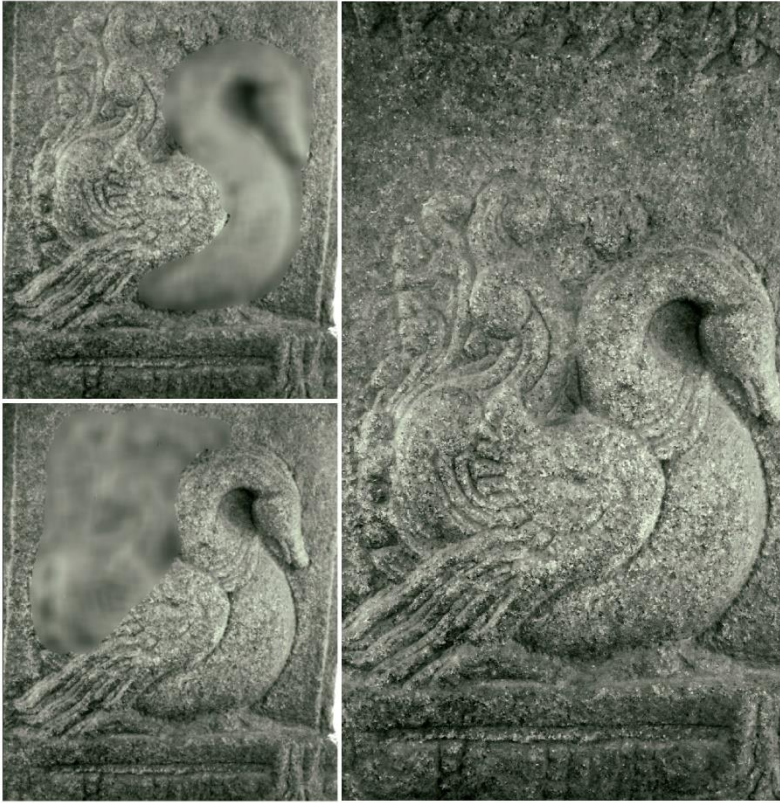


This sculpture is found in Halasuru Someshwara temple, Bengaluru. It can be interpreted as a three-headed swan with one body . Where any of these head can fit right with the body.

This sculpture is found in Lepakshi's unfinished Mantapa. This can be interpreted as three-headed lion with pair of legs and hands.

We can see the lions which are facing towards the sides has one leg where we can assume that the other leg is in the other side.



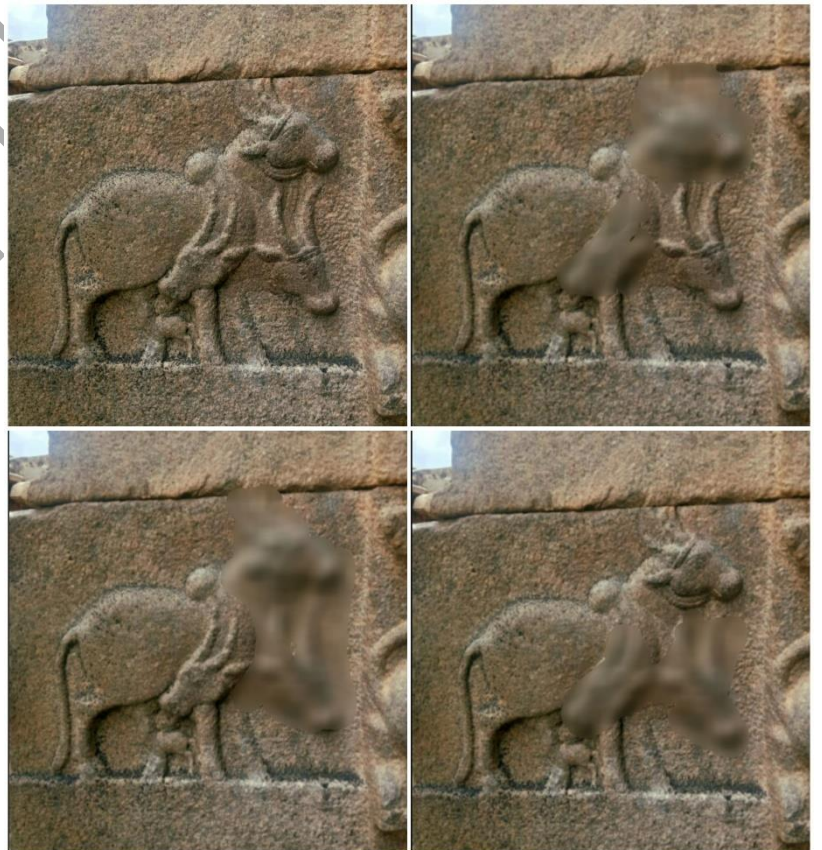


This sculpture is seen in Lepakshi's inner Mantapa (Natyamantapa) where there is a two-headed bird.

Right side bird looks like swan and left side bird looks like a peacock.

This is the famous three-headed cow which can be seen in Lepakshi Veerabhadra temple entrance wall.

Where one cow is seen nursing its calf, one is seen eating the grass and the other one is looking straight.





This sculpture is seen in Lepakshi where there is Mystery of three men with four legs.

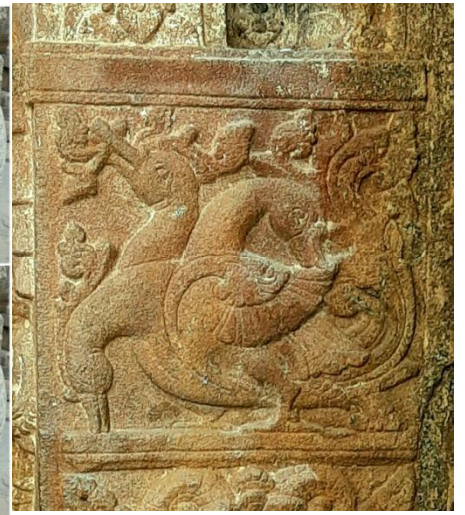
Left side man is holding Tambura / some string instrument . The man to the right looks like bending sideways and dancing and the man in the middle is holding his hands above and dancing.



1.(Lepakshi)



2.(Lepakshi)



3. (Kolar Someshwara temple)



This sculpture is found in Kolar Someshwara temple's entrance right side pillar. It can be interpreted as three- headed cow.

Where one cow is biting/holding its tail in mouth, one is seen eating grass/ bending down and the other one is standing idol/ looking down.

This sculpture is seen in both Bengaluru Someshwara and Kolar Someshwara temple's pillar where there are two monkeys with four bodies.



We can also see such sculptures inside the Garbhagriha of Someshwara temple of Kolar and even the Gandaberunda bird which can be seen in Karnataka's emblem, though we know it as a mythical bird but in my perspective I think this might have the same concept.

These are the few clever art works of Vijayanagara era which I have seen in Someshwara of Bengaluru and Kolar, and Lepakshi temples. By seeing all these sculptures we can say that the artists never failed

to impress us with their magic. This proves that a single sculpture could make us to think in various perspectives, Whatever I have seen and described might not be same when you see it. The magic done by these sculptors creates curiosity and excitement among the viewers, and it is our duty and responsibility to respect the artists and to protect their works.

About the Author:



Kum. Vaishali.A.V, is learning Kalakshetra Style of Bharatanatyam under Dr. Dwaritha Viswanatha since 2010 at Nirmiti. She has completed her Junior and Senior exams conducted by KSEEB , Visharad Prathama conducted by Akhila Bharatiya Gandarva Mahavidyalaya Mandal , and also completed her Bachelor in Fine Arts in Bharatanatyam from Tamil University , consistently securing first class and distinction. She has performed individually and in group in many places as a part of Nirmiti. She is currently studying final year MA in economics under Maharani Cluster University. Along with performance she is teaching dance to younger batches of

Nirmiti and also for other students from various countries , thus making herself perfect in all the aspects by making use of every opportunity given to her . She is also an Internee in Nrityashilpa Yatra - A temple study programme conducted by Noopurabhramari .