Keshava Temple at Nagalapura - A Cultural Study

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Abstract: Keshava temple of Hoysala period is found in Nagalapura village which is 8 kms away from Turuvekere Taluk, Tumkur District. It appears to have been prosperous agrahara town in the later Hoysala days between about 1260 A.D. Inscriptions of Ballala III at the entrance to the place.

Keywords: Nagalapura, Hoysala, Kesava, Temple, Architecture, Garbhagriha, Sukhanasi, Navaranga, Sculptures.

Nagalapura is a village about eight kilometers to the south of Mayisandra, Turuvekere Taluk, Tumkur District. It appears to have been prosperous agrahara town in the later Hoysala days between about 1250 and 1340 A.D. The evidence by its temples which appear to belong to about 1260 A.D. and the Inscriptions of Ballala III at the entrance to the place. The village has two temples both of which must have been very beautiful structures. The temples are of Keshava and Kedaresvara.

The Keshava temple is built on a high ground in the centre of the old town which has now been converted into fields. The structure has a garbhagriha with a vimana, a sukhanasi, navaranga and appears to have had a porch which has now disappeared.

Garbhagriha: Under a similar ceiling in the garbhagriha stood originally an image of Channakeshava which has now disappeared. In its place now stands a largest image of Venkatesha, about six feet high with scroll work on the Prabhavali and a constant on each side. This image is of the Vijayanagara times. The attributes are varda hasta, chakra, shanka and kati.

Sukhanasi: The doorway of the sukhanasi has jambs bearing the dvarapalas and perforated screens. On the lower lintel appears Amaranarayana while on the upper one there is the figure of dancing Vishnu. The sukhanasi is about 7 feet square with cruciform shape pilaster on the walls and a flat ceiling having a padma surrounded by the Dikpalakas.

Navaranga: The old navaranga doorway appears to have been repaired and the rest of the damaged walls covered up by rubble. The navaranga which is about 20 feet square is of impressive ornamental workmanship. Its wall pilasters are cruciform in shape, while its four central bell-shaped pillars have their mouldings well ornamented with beaded hangings and simhalalatas. The abacus bears lion faces below and well designed scroll work on the sides, while the capitals have rearing lions with the warriors supporting in the corners. Each pillar had originally four bracket images which have now disappeared. Of the ceilings, all except the one near the doorway of the vestibule are domes finely carved with good depth and interesting designs. Most of them have concentric circles. The south
ceiling has a concentric octagon. That on the west is flat with nine panels having full blown lotuses. The one on the north-east has concentric squared with an inset curve-sided srichakra. The central ceiling which is supported on corner

Lathe turned bell shaped pillars Basement and Ornamental pilasters and canopies

Stones bearing figures of the Dikpalas has a deep gallery with two concentric circles supported by vaulted ribs and having a large bud pendent. Against the west wall are two towered niches whose deities are now absent.

Outer view of the Temple: The garbhagriha whose outer walls now stand almost intact is highly ornate star shaped structure. Its tower has disappeared. The outer wall of the navaranga is square with projecting sides. It is intact only to the level of basement except in the south-east and north-east corners. The basement contains six beautifully worked friezes of elephants, horsemen, scroll work, a blank frieze on which the puranic scenes were intended to be carved, makaras and swans. All these carvings closely resemble those of Somanathapura. The top portion of the outer walls has ornamental pilasters with canopies bearing variegated sikhara.

It is interested to note that, in the whole lot of Hoysala temples both the temples at Nagalapura, Keshava and Kedareshvara the fourth frieze from bottom is completely blank and not even single carving is there. Why it is like that is a million dollar questions. No evidence is available way this particular frieze is left blank. These most have been an existence of gild system and the Persian who has taken the responsibility of carving might have not attempted to do this frieze carving work. Another interesting thing is that, most of the wall work is also not completed. The images of gods, goddesses and human being are completely and perfectly carved without any problem. Whereas some of the sculptures pedestal have not been carved or in some pedestal marking have been done but carving has not been done. In some sculpture the Prabhavali has not been finished. As like any other Hoysala temple constructed during King Someshvara period here also there is a double cave, one above wall sculptures and another below the sikhara and above the wall decoration with single pilaster and double pilasters with miniature sikhara so dravida, vesara, nagara and bhumiya style below that there will be a small terracotta canopy.

The whole temple might have completely ruined and long back the conservation and restoration work have been completed by Archaeological Survey of India. But most of the sculptured stones, sikhara, sukanas projection, particularly the front portion stones of the outer wall is completely missing. In 1920 a local landlord have restored the navaranga doorway and regarding that an inscription is also engraved.

There are images on the surface of the wall, 37 of them on the wall. The Kannada Vishvakosha volume II, mentions 32 male images and 35 female images. Some important images are as follows;

Dancing Ganesha, Amaranarayana unfinished, standing Vishnu, Govardhanadhari, Yoganarasimha, Indra on elephant, Vishnu and Lakshmi on Garuda, Dancing Goddess with eight hands. Dancing Sarasvati, standing Brahma-bearded, Mohini and monkey, Hayagriva seated, Bhairavi seated, Ugranarasimha, Sarasvati seated, Dharani-Varaha, Lakshmi and Narayana on Garuda, Venugopala, dancing Mohini, Dhanvantari, standing Vithala and Dakhshinamurti, these are the ornamented and important images on the wall of Keshava temple.

These images similar as the Somanathapura and Nuggihalli wall images most of these wall sculptures are unfinished

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