

# **The Architects and Sculptors of Early Chalukyan Art**

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The Chalukyas of Vatapi (Badami) held political power over northern Deccan for about two centuries from the middle of the sixth century. Under the patronage of the Chalukya rulers, more than hundred temples were built in different places in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the important sites being Badami, Aihole, Mahakut, Pattadakal, Alampur and others. Much has been studied by the modern scholars regarding art and architecture of these ancient monuments but not much significant attempt is made to know about the architects and sculptors who materialized massive and artistic temples, in various plans and styles.

In ancient days the sculptural art and architectural science were handed down from father to son. There are a number of Chalukyan inscriptions in support of this fact. Thus the art was practiced by the members of the same family or caste. These silpis or sculptors believe that they are the descendants of Vishwakarma, the divine Architect in heaven.

The renowned scholar Dr. M. Chidananda Murti, rightly observes that, the seeds of art lie hidden in the blood of the Vishwakarmas.<sup>1</sup> He reaffirms that the names of artists have suffixes 'acharya' (achari) or oja (upadhyaya). In Chalukyan context we find the suffix 'manchi' also. The Vishwakarmas are able to work in different media like stone, wood, gold, iron and copper and they are called sculptor, carpenter, goldsmith, blacksmith, and coppersmith respectively. John Brower, who has done extensive study on Vishwakarmas, calls them 'the makers of the world'. Of these five groups of Vishwakarmas, mainly the names of architects and sculptors appear in the inscriptions of Chalukyas. Here is an account of these artisans.

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1. Kannada Shasanagala Sasnkrutika Adhyana, 2002, p.485

## Architects :

Architects are the scientists of engineering knowledge. They are referred to as Sutradharis in Chalukyan inscriptions. The Sutradharis of early Chalukya period are as follows ;

### 1) Aryamanchi Upadhyaya :

He happens to be the architect of Malegitti Sivalaya at Badami. This temple was originally an Aditya temple. (fig.1) An inscription on the on the eastern wall of the temple reads –

*Sri Aryamanchi upadhyaya  
prasad nirmmitam*

Thus the inscription records that the temple was constructed by Aryamanchi Upadhyaya. <sup>1</sup> It show that, the word upadhyaya is associated with sutradharis or Vishwakarmas. It is interesting to note that he has two suffixes of Vishwakarmas namely Manci and Upadhaya

The very selection of the spot for the construction of the temple speaks of the aesthetic sense of Aryamanchi. It is located on a big boulder and the temple looks as if it is the part of the same rock, on which it stands. The temple is very imposing and impressive with its Vimana type of superstructure. It is a 'Nirandhara' temple belonging to the early seventh century.

### Narasobha

Narasobba is the renowned architect and sculptor of Aihole. He is the architect of Huccappayya temple of Aihole (fig.2) An inscription is written in praise of him on a wall of this temple (fig.3) which goes thus<sup>2</sup> –

*Swasti Jambudvipantare kaschit  
vastu prasada tadgatah  
Narasobba samo vidwan  
na bhuto na bhavishyati*

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1. S.1.1. XV.473

2. I.A. Vol. IX, p.74

It is recorded here that in the entire Jambudwipa, none was equal to Narasobba in the art of temple construction in the past and there would be none in future also ! This certainly suggests that he was a master of rare excellence. Another epigraph on a boulder near Jain cave at Aihole delineates the multi faceted personality of Narasobba. He was the disciple of Binjadi. He was well versed in the science of construction. In character he was like the sun. He was the one who chiselled sculptures with accurate proportion. It is evident from these inscriptions that he was both an architect and sculptor of rare caliber. The epigraph<sup>1</sup> eulogizes him as under\_

*Sri Binjadi [vida] rddhara cattan vimana ranjitan  
satra Maheshwaran gunaravi. rupa sanghatan  
pramana bharan Narasobban*

At Badami, Aryamanchi Upadhyaya built the temple of Malegitti Shivalaya with Dravida vimana while Narasobba built Hucchappaya temple at Aihole with Rekha Nagara super structure. He also sculpted outstanding sculptures of this temple.

It is worth noting here that he was equally proficient in the excavation work. Near the above mentioned inscription, the sketch lines of the façade of an intended cave, are clearly seen. The reason for not completing the project is not known.

### **Gunda Anivaritachari and Sarvasiddhi Achari.**

Today Pattadakal has been recognized as the world heritage site. The most magnificent architectural feat of early Chalukya period is the Virupaksha temple of Pattadakal. (fig. 4) This was patronized by the queen Lokamahadevi to commemorate the triple victory of her husband Vikramaditya II over Kanchi.

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1. Dr. Srinivas Padigar, Inscriptions of the Chalukyas of Badami, No.180.

We are fortunate enough to find the details of architects who solidified this imposing huge temple. In fact two master architects were involved in its construction. One was Gunda who was incharge of entire temple construction except the southern part which was supervised by Sarvasiddhi Achari.

Both architects were the recipients of a unique title called 'Perjerepu' . It was the royal honor of the highest order . Gunda Anivaritachari was conferred the title Tribhuvanachari. The important part of the inscription<sup>1</sup> runs thus\_\_

*Swasti Vikramaditya Sri  
prithivi vallabha Mahadevi  
yara degulaman madida sutradhari  
Sri Gundan Anivaritacari  
ge mume perjerepu pattamu Tribhuvanachari  
y endu pesarittu. . . .*

The inscriptions also records exemption of certain taxes to the sculptors.

Sarvasiddhi Achari is mentioned in two inscriptions in the Virupaksha temple. The one engraved on pillar of the southern side of gateway i.e., Pratoli, states that Vikramaditya II made over certain gifts to the Sutradhari (master architect) of Virupaksha temple constructed by his queen Lokamahadevi. (fig.5)

The Sutradhari Sarvasiddhi Achari is praised as the 'Pitamaha of Vastu Silpa' He was the architect of the southern part of this temple<sup>2</sup>. An inscription on the wall of Nandi mantapa of the same temple is the clear evidence of this fact. It may be quoted here.

*Sri Sarvasiddhi aca  
ryya tenkana diseya  
sutradhari*

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1. I.A. Vol X. p.163-164  
2. S.I.I. Vol. XV p.488

## Revadi Ovajja.

One more outstanding temple at Pattadakal is that of Papanath.(fig.6) The southern part of this temple was constructed by Revadi Ovajja. He happens to be the disciple of Sarvasiddhi Achari and grandson of Silemuddar. An inscription<sup>1</sup> on the east-wall of the temple runs thus.\_

*Swasti Sri Silemuddara  
marman Sarvasiddhi a  
carjjyara cattar Reva  
di ovajjar ten  
kana dise madidor*

It is worth noting here that Sarvasiddhi Achari's student Revadi Ovajja built Papanath with Rekha Nagara superstructure which means that, Sarvasiddhi imparted the knowledge of Rekha Nagar style to Revadi. Thus it is clear that, Sarvasiddhi Achari was the master in both styles of Architecture namely Dravida Viman and Rekha Nagar. Because of his mastery over both styles he could experiment blending features of southern and northern styles in Virupaksha temple. As a result the unique temple exhibits the northern features of architecture like 'sukanasi' at the base of superstructure and 'kakshsana' in the porch. These two are the typical architectural elements of Rekha Nagara temple.

Because the temple is basically in Dravidian style and that it was built after the victory of Vikramaditya II over Kanchi, it is believed by some scholars like Cousens that the king being much impressed by the great Rajasimheshwar temple at Kanchi took with him a group of artists to Pattadakal. Cousens could not properly interpret the Kannada inscription and that made him think in this way. By '*tenkana dise Sutradhari*' he meant that Sarvasiddhi Achari came from southern direction, where lies Kanchi. But the inscription and the context suggest clearly that Sarvasiddhi Achari was in charge of southern part of the temple and Tribuvanachari was the 'Sthapati' of

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1. I. A. Vol. X. p.170

the rest of the temple. Scholars like Percy Brown and others have rightly turned down the idea of Cousins.

If Sarvasiddhi Achari was a Pallava architect why would he add 'Sukhanasi' and 'Kakshasan' to the Virupaksha? If he was a Pallava architect how could he teach his student Revadi Ovajja the science of Rekha Nagar Prasad? It is worth remembering here that there is no temple with Rekha Nagara superstructure in Pallava region or Tamilunadu.

### **a. Sculptors of Cave temples.**

On the rocks on either side of the cave temples and on the boulders in front can be noticed label inscriptions revealing names of persons. Once it was thought that they were the names of visitors. But meticulous observation makes it clear that most of the names are those of sculptors.

In the first instance, these epigraphs are seen at a height of ten or twenty or even thirty feet! To write or engrave a name are needed a chisel and hammer and other helping tools like a ladder or rope! Even the names suggest that they belong to sculptors as they have suffixes related to Vishwakarmas. For examples there are many names ending with 'manchi' which is a term associated with silpis. As we have seen earlier Aryamanchi was the architect who erected Malegitti Sivalaya at: Badami. The label inscriptions contain the names of Kolimanchi, Pelamanchi, Anattamanchi, Singamanchi and so on.

In 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries it appears that, it was not the practice to autograph. No sculpture in caves is autographed by artists except Nelavalke who could dare to sign the sculpture he craved. On the right wing of Garuda on eves of Cave III his name Nelavalke is clearly seen. (fig.7)

Based on the proximity of label inscriptions to the nearby cave, we may consider that Ayachasami Kalakutti, Shri Donasvami, Nakeyde, Shri Donamma, Shri Maruti sami, Sri Shopakari, Umabhata, Sri Ajjaka, Sri Ganaswami, Sri Malliswami, Sri Kottimanchi, and others were associated with the excavation of cave I at Badami.

Probably the sculptors in charge of Cave II are Sri Shantimurti, Duttujan, Donan, Gottemurkan, Niddega, Buru, Sri Vachyan, Sri Anant Adarshan Sri Alagereyan, Sri Keshavan, Durvita, Duttujan and others. It is quite interesting to note that the names of Sri Bharatachandra, Sri Bhamachadra, Sri Sivaputra, Sri Yashodeva, Sri Devadas, Sri Gangaswami, Sri Maharathe etc., are carved in Siddhamatrika script, which suggests that they are possibly the artists of north Deccan region. The fact that sculptural representations of cave II is different from Cave I also supports this idea.

On a rock to the right of Cave III, label inscription reads Rupasekharah which literally means 'best among sculptors'. This might have been the title of the artist. The other names of sculptors that appear near Cave III are as follows. Kottalan, Sri Kondimanchi, Sri Vasudeva, Sri Shakula Ayya, Sri Panchanan Chola Devareya Kalkuttiga, Sri Gunapal, Sri Aju, Achar Siddhi, Aryyachatti, Sri Kolimanchi, Sri Pelamnachi, Sri Vimala, Sri Donan, Sri Jayakirthis, Kottila, Sri Kantimanchi, Sri Samichandan, Bijaya, Sri Kannan, Ovaja, Bijaya Ovajan, Shri Prasanna buddhi, Shri Arikke, Shri Bhadukke, Shri Geveyan, Sri Anattamanchin and others.

Some of the artists worked in two caves and therefore the names are seen repeated by the side of other cave. These craftsmen may be listed as Kontimanchi, Sri Polamanchi, Singamanchi, Harike, Bhavaswami Aryya, Udagra, Kesava, Panchana, Vijamma, Sri Prasanna Buddhi, Arikke, Bhadukke, Sirigereya, Kolimanchi, Kadreswami, Srigereya, Margaja. Srinidhideva, Annattamanchi and others. Undoubtedly these sculptors worked in the carving of cave III also.

On the eastern bank of Agastya teertha are boulders that bear a number of images. Sculptors who carved these figures have engraved their names near the sculptures. One such name is Eranda Ganacha who in all probability chiselled the icons of Brahma, Ishwar and Vishnu . (fig.8) The image of Durga devi appears to be the work of Chandrakirti Bhatta. On a rock near Sibara, craftsmen named Kushal Dharmmana and Aghavinasigal have sculpted images of Ganesh and Nagaraj.

At Aihole there are no label inscriptions suggesting the names of sculptors on the rock nearby. But on the pillars of Chaityalaya which is partly excavated and partly structured, we find the names of Binjadi Ovajja, Bina amma, Vaghrmantan, Bisatan, Koki(le), Sri Gunapriyan, Sripati Chitradhipa etc.

The names and art styles suggest that in the initial stage of Chalukya art at Badami and Aihole possibly artists from Maharashtra, Andhra, also joined hands with local sculptors.

### **b. Sculptors of Structural temples.**

We are fortunate enough to find at least a few names of sculptors who worked in decorating structural temples. The most outstanding of Chalukyan period is Baladeva who has carved huge icons of Dwarapalas. The one on the southern porch of the Virupaksha is marvelous. The image of Dwarapala is in life size and is chiselled out of the very pilaster. (fig.9) It looks as if it is a round sculpture. Just above the figure there is an inscription which reads '*Sri Duggi acariya magan Baladevakrita*'.<sup>1</sup> It means that the sculpture is prepared by Baladev, the son of Duggi Achari. This suggests that some artisans without the suffix of 'achari' to their names were also Vishwakarmas. Duggi Achari's son Baladeva has a name without the suffix of Achari or Ovajja.

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1. Dr. Srinivas Padigar, Inscriptions of the Chalukyas of Badami, p.272



Baladeva has worked for the Papanath temple also. The 'dwarpala' figure on the eastern porch is another amazing piece of art. He has also carved some episodes of Ramayana on the southern wall. His artistic excellence is well displayed in the image of Nataraja on the ceiling of the porch.(fig.10) The panel is autographed by Baladeva. Siva is dancing gracefully with ten arms. He is accompanied by instrumentalists and 'ganas.' Parvati, standing on a lotus, is enjoying the cosmic dance of Shiva.

The panel bearing eight guardians (Ashta Dikpalas) is yet another master piece from the magical hands of Baladeva. Exquisitely carved icon of Naga occupies the centre of the panel while eight guardians are shown in their respective directions around Nagaraj. It is interesting to note that the inscription here describes Baladeva as 'bhaya duran' which means 'devoid of fear'. It is worth noting here that it is in this panel of Ashta Dikpalas that for the first time all the guardians are rightly placed in their respective directions. Thus perfect positioning of the guardians is first exhibited by Baladeva, in Chalukya temples.

He also worked on the 'jalandhras' (latticed windows) of the Papanath. As many as three 'jalandharas' are autographed by Baladeva. Equally efficient artist in the work of 'jalandhra' happens to be Deva Arya. Two of the 'jalandras' flanking Nataraj on the southern wall of the Papanath are the works of Deva Arya.(fig.11) Fascinatingly his name appears in the 'nagari' script, suggesting thereby that he belongs to a different stock.

We know that, Baladeva worked in the construction of both temples of Virupaksha and Papanath. So did Chenamma too. On the southern wall of the Virupaksha, is an imposing image of dancing Shiva. An inscription below the sculpture reads '*Chenamma pratime kuttidon*' which means Chengamma sculpted this image. (fig.12) The god is shown with three eyes and four arms. His scattered hair has brought a strange but beautiful look. The image of Nataraja is proportionate and there

is life on his face. Chenagamma has sculpted a secular figure of 'minthuna' couple also in the Papanath.

The composition of Surya image on the ceiling of the eastern porch of the Virupaksha is extremely remarkable. The details like chariot, horses, clouds Arun, Usha and Pratyusha capture our attention.(fig.13) This is the work of Devaputra, who was a disciple of Sakaresivadi. This is another example showing '*guru-sishya parampara*' or '*teacher - student tradition*' which was in vogue.

An inscription on the northern wall of the Virupaksha introduces the work of Sri Pullapan which is also an icon of Shiva. (fig.14) Another artisan who worked in the Virupaksha was Damodaran who must have probably carved the pillar in the eastern porch.

Paka appears to be one of the earliest sculptors who worked in Pattadakal. An inscription in Sangameshwara temple, records that Paka prepared two pillars. The temple is possibly the oldest Chalukya structure at Pattadakal. It was built by the king Vijayaditya (696-733 AD.)

Pattadakal pillar inscription of Kirtivarma II deserves special attention. It records that Jnanasivacharya set up a stone pillar. (fig.15) The name seems to be the title of Subhadevarupa. Fleet rightly thought that 'rupa' here means a sculptor. Subhadeva was the son of Shivarupa and grandson of Shivavardhanarupa 'who belonged to *Sandilya gotra*. Dr. Shivanagai Reddy points out that there is no epigraphical reference to the *gotras* of sculptors until 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>1</sup> It may be true as far as Andhra region is concerned. But the above inscription ( 754 A.D.) clearly mentions the *gotra* of Sivavardhaman rupa as *Shandilya*. Silpis being Brahmins of high order must have *gotras*. Otherwise how could they have performed the holiest rituals

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1. Dr. Shivanagai Reddy, Shilpins in early and medieval Andhra, 1997. Tiruvanatapurm, p.10

like installation of the icon of presiding deity in temples? Records pertaining to sculptors highlight the artistic excellence rather than mentioning *gotras*.

The Torana at Ittagi, bears the names of three sculptors namely Sri Gonadeva, Sri Kannappa and Anagam. The lintel is a joint production of these three craftsmen.

At Aihole the names of artisans who were involved in decorating structural temples are a few in number. The famous of them is Binjadi Ovajja and his disciple Narasobba. Ganasobba, who worked with Narasobba, has carved figures for Huchchappayya temple. (fig.16)

One more artist who merits our attention is Krichunga. An icon of Kartikeyan on the ceiling of the porch of Huchchimalli temple is an excellent piece of art . It is the creation of Krichunga. The sculptors like Muddasili, Jinalayan and Surendrapad have contributed in the construction of Durga temple at Aihole.

Interestingly the name of Jinalayan appears on the front wall of Parvati temple at Sandur. This implies that the artists moved from one place to another as per situation or demand. The label inscription of Surendrapada is found in the Siddhamatrika script. This goes to mean that he hailed from northern part as did Deva Arya.

The survey of names of craftsmen reveals that these artisans came from different geographical areas like Andhara region, upper Deccan and possibly Pallava kingdom too. It would not be out of context to refer to Mahendra Pallavachari the engraver of Kannada inscription on stone at *Peddavadagur* (Dt. Anantapur). He was a scribe during the period of Polekeshi II. The name Pallavachari certainly indicates that he was from Pallava region.

We do have some names of craftsmen from Alampur also, though the number is meagre. The master artist by name Srikanthacharya is described as Maheshwara of

envious rivals.<sup>1</sup> His name repeatedly appears in other temples at Alampur. Label inscriptions found in Arka Brahma temple are interesting for the reason that the name of Srikantharyan and Maradi nayan priyan are in Kannada script while that of Sri Trilokya hamsa is in Siddhamatrika.<sup>2</sup> There is Telugu script which reads

*Sridevara di [pa]*

*samsara bhita sislu guru charana pradakshinambu poyyri*<sup>3</sup>

This shows how the ‘gurus’ were honored in the past.

The Chalukyan sites of Badami, Aihole, Pattadakal and Alampur, when viewed meticulously, reveal sculptures of different nature and styles. Therefore it may be concluded that the sculptural art of the Chalukya Period, like that of architecture, is a confluence of many styles.

In the earliest available Kannada literary work entitled. ‘Kaviraja Marga’ it is described that, Kannada folk have the sense of experimentation in composing poetry. Undoubtedly it is true with craftsmen who exhibited their sense of experimentation in sculptural art and architecture also.

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1. Srinivas Padigar, op. cit. p.324 – 325
  2. ibid
  3. ibid



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(Note : Concerned photos are attached separately)