

## Examining the expertise, knowledge, and social standing of Hoysala Śilpi, from their Vedic origin

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### ABSTRACT

Indian art forms extend beyond mere entertainment and are regarded as instrumental in the upliftment of both the artist and the connoisseur. They have evolved from a strong philosophical foundation and encompass various forms such as dance, music, literature, and sculpture, all of which continue to uphold their excellence. Meticulously crafted traditional sculptures, temples, and inscriptions in Karnataka serve as enduring testaments to the region's political, economic, and cultural heritage.

Understanding the traditional architects and sculptors, known as Śilpi, who created these magnificent works is crucial for anyone valuing tradition. However, valuable information about these Śilpi is notably scarce in Kannada literature and epigraphical sources. This article aims to explore the artistic abilities, scriptural knowledge, and social status of sculptors during the medieval period. This exploration will rely on the analysis of data from inscriptions and literary sources, as well as insights presented in research articles, shedding light on a historically significant yet understudied aspect of India's cultural heritage.

### INTRODUCTION

Within Hindu culture, the supreme being is held in high reverence and worshipped in both formless (*Nirākāra*) and embodied (*Sākāra*) manifestations. The culture encourages various spiritual paths to attain the ultimate reality, which is expressed through a multitude of forms (*Rūpa*). Consequently, the creation of diverse images depicting different deities became essential. In the early Vedic era, worship primarily entailed offering oblations to the Fire God (*Agni Dēvatā*) on sacrificial altars while reciting sacred Vedic hymns. Subsequently, this practice was incorporated into the ritualistic worship of images and the construction of temples. Archaeological findings indicate a pivotal shift from the formless to the manifested form, marking the beginning of temple construction during the Gupta period. This transformative trend continued with the Cālukyās, Rāṣṭrakūṭās, and Hoysalās in the Deccan and South Karnataka regions. The exploration of the spiritual roots of sacred architecture and sculpture in Vedic culture is paramount to understanding this evolution.

During the Hoysala period, traditional architects and sculptors, known as Śilpi, played a crucial role in bringing these divine manifestations to life. Despite limited information in literary sources about the Śilpi responsible for the magnificent temples, epigraphical evidence proves

invaluable in revealing their social prominence, recognition, and status. The objective is to unveil the lives of these Śilpi and the respect they garnered within the society of that era.

In essence, the transition from Vedic rituals to temple construction represents a profound evolution in religious expression and artistic manifestation. The insights into the lives and societal standing of the Śilpi during the Hoysala period offer a glimpse into the cultural and spiritual significance of temple architecture and sculpture in Karnataka.

### Meaning of word 'Śilpa' and its extent in Indian

In the context of Indian culture, it is important to first grasp the meaning of 'Śilpa'. The term 'Śilpa' originates from the root word 'Śil' (*dhatu*) in Sanskrit, which signifies 'Samādhi' or 'asceticism.' Thus, a sculptor, by means of their artistic practice, creates sculptures by tapping into their meditative state and achieving transcendence. Sculptures can be categorized into two types: *Vaidika Śilpa* (Vedic sculpture) and *Avaidika Śilpa* (non-Vedic sculpture).

Vaidika Śilpa entails the process of sculpting accompanied by the recitation of Vedic hymns. It involves the creation of various objects such as sacrificial altars, sacrificial tools, temple deities, worship paraphernalia, tanks, wells, palaces, town planning, architecture, jewellery design, royal thrones, chariots, palanquins, and numerous other forms. On the other hand, non-Vedic sculptors assist Vedic sculptors in carving wood or stone but lack knowledge regarding Vedic rituals and hymns.

The construction of *Yajña vēdi* (fire altars), *Yajña Maṇṭapa* (pavilion), and *Yajñāyudha* (tools) follow the prescribed rules outlined in the Shulba sutras, which are a part of *Kalpa sūtra*, an auxiliary discipline of the *Vēda*. Even the slightest deviation or irregularity in hymn recitation or the construction of *Yajña vēdi* or *Yajñāyudha* can nullify the purpose of the entire ritual and may have unfavourable consequences (Datta, B. & Singh A.N, 973).

*Yajña vēdi* were ingeniously crafted in a variety of shapes, including squares, circles, semicircles, isosceles trapeziums, triangles, rhombuses, and falcons, all while preserving a consistent area (Bag, A.K.). This remarkable design not only held great significance for the fields of geometry and mathematics but also for the sacred aspect of the rituals. Knowledgeable Śilpis, who were adept architects and sculptors, meticulously constructed the necessary sacred structures and tools while reciting hymns. The reference to the term 'Śilpi' in this context can be found in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Balakanda 14-21).

Just as fire altars symbolized the universe, temples represented the cosmos on both a universal and individual level. This profound symbolism allowed devotees to undergo personal spiritual transformation, as stated by Kak (2002). Within Vedic altars, the Rukma—a golden disc engraved with the image of Cosmic 'Puruṣa' was installed, possibly laying the foundation for the installation of *Pratimā* (idol) in temples.

According to Stella Kramrisch, the Sulva-sutras found in the Kalpa-sutra provided rules and proportional measurements for constructing Vedic altars. These sutras formed the basis for building Hindu temples, bridging the ancient tradition of sacrificial altars with the magnificent temples of today (Kramrisch, 2015).

However, at a certain point in time, Vedic rituals became complex and challenging, which led the common people to be attracted to new religions like Jainism and Buddhism due to their simpler practices. The spread of these new religions caused a decline in Vedic practices. As a response, Hinduism incorporated new rituals and worship procedures into its tradition, creating a foundation for the emergence of customs and traditions that accommodate the influx of new Ideas. The *Purāṇas* popularized the worship of multiple deities, leading Vedic gods to assume new forms and give rise to sects such as Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism. They developed their own scriptures, such as *Āgamas* and *Tantras*. Vedic rituals became integrated with these texts. Chanting, ascetic practices, worship, and prescribed rituals (*Japa, tapa, pūjā, anuṣṭhāna, dhyāna, utsava*) were extensively employed alongside Vedic sacrifices and hymns. To facilitate organized practice, monastic institutions (Mutts) were established to ensure the smooth functioning of an accommodating, flexible, new system of worship. As a result, the worship of the formless Supreme Being in tangible forms attracted more followers. This transformation in Hindu society was overwhelmingly accepted and appreciated. Eventually, this prompted Jainism and Buddhism to inculcate the mode of image worship into their religion which led to the creation of *Bauddhaāgama* and *Jaināgama*.

**Two facets of image worship are iconography (*Pratimā Śilpa*) and Temple Architecture (*Dēvālaya Śilpa*).**

This practice of image worship comprises two essential elements: *Pratimā Śilpa*, the art of crafting divine icons, and *Dēvālaya Śilpa*, the planning and construction of temples.

The concept of the Supreme Being is explored through different perspectives, with two forms: Prakṛti (formlessness) and Vikṛti (various forms and shapes). Prakṛti is beyond human comprehension, so Vikṛti is relied upon to perceive and understand the Supreme Being<sup>1</sup>.

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The transformation from *Prakṛti* to *Vikṛti* is achieved through the principles of *Śilpaśāstra*, which include measurement, proportion, and symbolism. Recitation of *Bijamantras* by the sculptor and their meditation aid in transforming formlessness into tangible forms. The sculptor creates the sculpture based on the crystallized image perceived through meditation.

Vedic rituals are performed during the sculpting process to infuse it with spiritual energy and invoke divine blessings. In summary, the sculptor embodies formlessness into tangible forms using the principles of *Śilpaśāstra*, allowing individuals to perceive and connect with the Supreme Being through *Vikṛti*.

### Origin of Iconography - *Rūpa* (Image) from *Yūpa* and its anthropomorphic transformation in the image of Puruṣa.

[illegible]

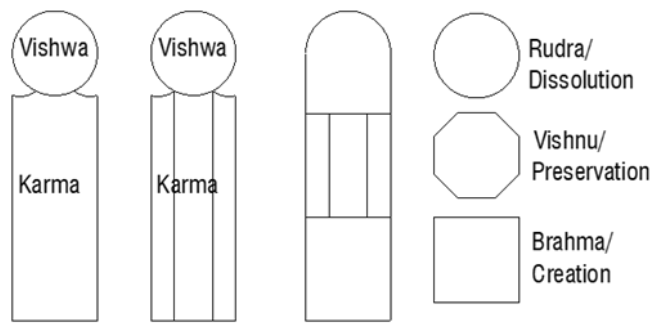
According to *Vastu Sutra Upanishad* (Boner, 1996), the Universal *Puruṣa*, *Vishwakarma*, willingly sacrifices himself to become the substance of the universe. He dissolves into the various elements of creation and then reintegrates as the totality of Being, thus reclaiming his identity. In the representation of *Puruṣa*, a sacred symbol known as the '*Yūpa*' is employed. The *Yūpa* comprises a straight post symbolizing *Karma* (action) and a spherical head representing *Vishwa* (universe). This symbolizes *Vishvakarma*, the Universal *Puruṣa*, in both his cosmic and human forms. Over time, the *Yūpa* undergoes a transformation into a pillar used to tether sacrificial elements.

The segmented divisions of the *Yūpa* (refer to Fig. 8) symbolize distinct deities, representing the perpetual cycle of creation (*Sṛṣṭi*), preservation (*Sthiti*), and dissolution (*Laya*). Specifically, the lowest quadrangular part embodies *Brahma* or *Sṛṣṭi* (creation), the middle octagonal section signifies *Vishnu Bhaga* or *Sthiti* (preservation), and the rounded uppermost portion represents *Śiva* or *Laya* (dissolution). When combined, these components form the *Trīyātmaka liṅga* or *Śivaliṅga*. Usually, in the *Śivaliṅga*, the lower two parts, *Brahmabhāga* and *Viṣṇubhāga*, are concealed beneath the *Pīṭha*, with only the rounded *Śivabhāga* being visible.

The *Yūpa* is divided into six equal segments, representing four cosmic elements. The lowest section is dedicated to *Bhūmidēvatā*, signifying the earth aspect. Two sections above represent *Rudradēvatā*, associated with procreation. The subsequent two sections are occupied by *Prajāpati dēvatā*, representing life-breadth, while the uppermost section symbolizes light and is occupied by *Savitṛ dēvatā* (refer to Fig. 1&2).

This symbolic division of the '*Yūpa*' into these four elements illustrates profound connections with different facets of the cosmos, emphasizing the belief that humans mirror the universe's image (Fig.1&2). In this representation, the '*Yūpa*' is divided into ten equal segments. The earth-part corresponds to the feet and legs, symbolizing stability and grounding. The procreative part extends from the knee to the navel, representing the essence of creation and growth. The life breadth encompasses the chest and heart up to the neck, embodying vitality and the core of existence. The entire structure culminates in the uppermost part, symbolizing the head and the element of light, indicating enlightenment and spiritual illumination. This division not only signifies the unity of human existence with the cosmos but also underscores the interconnectedness of the macrocosm and the microcosm within this intricate symbolism.

**Fig. 1& 2** Creation of *Trīyātmaka liṅga* and Human Image from *Yūpa*. (Illustrations are drawn with references to *Vāstu Sūtra Upaniṣad*)



Creation of Traiatmaka Linga from Yuapa

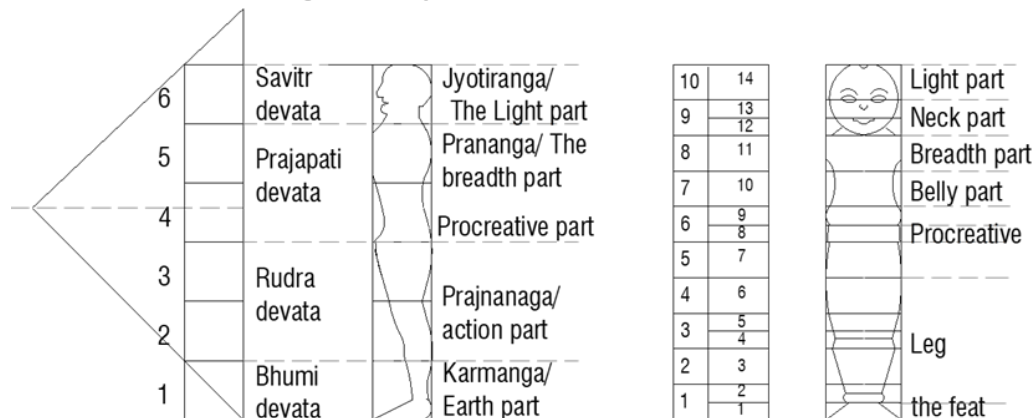


Image creation - From Yupa comes the Human form

Once the image is conceived, the various attributes such as ornaments (*Ābhāraṇa*), Posture (*Bhaṅgi*), gesture (*Mudra*), weapons (*Āyudha*), Vehicles (*Vāhana*), expression (*Bhāva*), and secondary divinities (*Upadēvatā*) help to reveal their fundamental characters, sacrality and transform the human form into something beyond the ordinary were assigned. Dhyana shlokas are referred from sacred scriptures that explain different Gods and Goddesses with their fundamental characters and attributes are referred till date. These were studied by a traditional Śilpi and images are drawn according to Iconometry or *Tālamāna krama*. The creation of these images involves an elaborate ritual, with every act of creating an image being performed as a sacrificial offering accompanied by the appropriate *Mantra*. Throughout the carving process, the traditional Śilpi continuously recites the *Bījamantra*, enabling them to visualize the divine image in their meditation. This practice, known as *Rūpatatva*, brings forth the subtle essence of divinity. The *Vāstu Sūtra Upaniṣad*, an ancient text, extensively explains the Vedic origins of image worship, its spiritual and technical aspects, as well as its purpose and significance in human society. It specifically addresses the creation of images and the composition of image panels in cave temples (Boner et al., 1996: ix).

## Sacred Architecture or Dēvālaya Vastu;

The term '*Garbhagrha*' alludes to a sacred, womb-like space that has the potential to give birth to a myriad of imaginable creations. In contrast to places of worship like mosques or churches, the *Garbhagrha* is not designed for gatherings of congregations. Instead, it represents the embodiment of a Cosmic man or *Puruṣa*, with the deity or image enshrined within the temple



symbolizing the subtle form of this cosmic being. The profound darkness within the *Garbhagrha* symbolizes the universe and the enigmatic mysteries that enshroud it.

Different architectural components of the temple correspond to specific parts of this Cosmic man, or *Parama Puruṣa*. The plinth, known as *Adhiṣṭāna*, symbolizes his feet, while the wall, *Bhitti* or *Jaṅghā*, represents his body. The roof, referred to as *Prastara*, signifies his shoulders, the Kanta symbolizes his neck, the *Śikhara* embodies his head, and the *Kalaśa* stands as a representation of his hairdo. Each of these elements is harmoniously proportioned with one another, underscoring the significance of precise measurement in Temple Architecture. Just as 'Chandas (meters) in Vedic hymns and 'Tāla' in music form the fundamental scales for invoking divinity, a system of measurement plays a pivotal role in temple architecture.

The act of invoking divinity during the construction of a temple or the sculpting of a *Pratimā* is akin to the performance of a *Yajna*, where the temple architect, often referred to as a 'Sthapati', assumes the role of the 'Hota', who conducts the sacred ritual. The installed image within the temple is the 'Dēvatā' to whom offerings are made, and the proportions of the temple, as determined by *Śilpa* texts, can be likened to the 'Chandas', the meter in which laudatory hymns were composed by ancient rishis. Together, these elements work in harmony to invoke the divine essence within the temple and the 'Pratimā'.

In addition to practical engineering considerations, the tradition of temple construction incorporates various facets of orientation, axiality, and the performance of religious ceremonies at different stages of construction. Mathematical calculations and astrology are harnessed to establish a profound connection between the temple and the cosmos, ensuring that the built structure exudes an aura of auspiciousness. This holistic approach is often referred to as "Sacred Architecture."

### **Śilpis of Karnataka**

The Gupta period in India's history provides archaeological evidence indicating the emergence of temple construction as a result of the simplification of Vedic religion and the growing popularity of image worship. In the region of Karnataka, the influence of image worship is particularly evident, as seen through the progressive development of temple construction over time. During the 3rd century AD, the Śātavāhana initiated temple construction in Banavāsi using burnt bricks. However, it was the Cālukyās of Badami (6th-8th century AD) who introduced the use of stone, aiming to create enduring structures. Inscriptions from this period reveal their focus on both Vedic rituals and image worship, combined with the construction of stone temples to safeguard the sacred images.

The towns of Badami, Aihole, and Pattadakal played significant roles during this period, serving as experimental workshops for temple construction and gaining recognition as the "Cradles of Temple Architecture." The architectural style of the Badami Cālukyās evolved and flourished under subsequent dynasties such as the Rāṣṭrakūṭās and the Cālukyās of Kalyāṇa. The Cālukyās of Kalyāṇa (Later Cālukyās) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries introduced schist stone as a construction material and initiated the unique architectural style called 'Vēsara tradition,' blending elements from Northern Nagara and Southern Dravidian traditions. The Hoysaḷas (11th-14th century AD) further enhanced this architectural style by incorporating elaborate ornamental sculptures.

The study of architects and sculptors responsible for the magnificent structures of medieval Karnataka has intrigued historians. While literary sources provide some information, inscriptions offer invaluable insights into the lives and achievements of these skilled artisans. These inscriptions shed light on their knowledge, traditions, and the social esteem bestowed upon them. The study specifically delves into inscriptions that unveil the social prominence, active participation in rituals, and profound understanding of Hindu philosophy among the architects and sculptors of medieval Karnataka. Key references such as ‘The Hoysaḷa Artiste: Their Identity and Styles’ by Kelleeson Collyer and ‘Śilpācāriyara Charite’ in Kannada by Dr K.S. Kumaraswamy serve as valuable sources for this study. Epigraphical evidence regarding the sculptors and architects obtained from these references is meticulously compared with inscriptions found in primary sources like Epigraphia Carnatica (EC) and South Indian Inscriptions (SII) to ensure accuracy and reliability. These primary sources provide essential contextual information that enhances our comprehension of the social, cultural, and intellectual aspects of these traditional Śilpi during the Hoysaḷa period when the *Vēsara* or Karnāṭa Drāviḍa architectural tradition reached its pinnacle.

### Śilpi or traditional artist community

The traditional artisan community traces its legendary origin to Lord *Viśvakarma*, from whose five faces emerged five clans of *Śilpis* or artisans, known as ‘*Pāñcālās*. These five crafts include *Āyasa Śilpa* (blacksmithing), *Dhāru Śilpa* (carpentry), *Śilā Śilpa* (stone carving), *Lōha Śilpa* (metalwork), and *Svarṇa Śilpa* (goldsmithing). These artisans were collectively known as *Śilpi*, *Sūtradhāris*, *Rūpakāra* (makers of images), or *Rūvāris*, often with suffixes such as *Ācārya* (teacher), *Ācāri*, or *Ōja*. These terms were used to denote their professions, and they adopted distinct titles based on their skills, knowledge, and positions of authority. Through these inscriptions, several significant aspects come to light, revealing the diverse roles of Śilpi, who are referred to as;

- **Śilpācāryas/ Scholar teacher:** Sculptors and architects who possessed profound knowledge not only in Śilpa Śāstra but also in subjects such as the *Vēdas*, *Āgamas*, *Purāṇas*, and more.
- **Sthapati/Architects:** Playing a crucial role in temple construction and the ritualistic process of deity installation (*Pratiṣṭhe*) within the sacred temple premises.
- **Sūtradhāri Śilpi (surveyor architects)/Town Planners:** Demonstrating their expertise by designing towns, palaces, forts, and other architectural marvels.
- **Vidyāvanta Śilpi/ Educated Sculptors:** Skilfully engraved inscriptions on stone and copper plates, showcasing their educational prowess.
- **Śilpi who held prestigious positions in society, such as Shanbhōga /Sēṇabōva** (village accountant), *Bhūmikāra/ Heggade* (landowner), *Bhaṇḍāri* (treasury officer), and Warrior Śilpi, displaying their multifaceted abilities and elevated social status.
- **Warrior Śilpi:** Among the sculptors, there were those who demonstrated their valour and skills in warfare. showcasing their multifaceted abilities.

### **Śilpi referred as Śilpācārya:**

The epigraphical records offer a captivating glimpse into the remarkable achievements and contributions of Hoysaḷa sculptors and architects, highlighting their brilliance in various domains. These records contain specific inscriptions that explicitly acknowledge the knowledge, expertise, and esteemed social status of certain sculptors, celebrating their exceptional artistic prowess. One particularly noteworthy inscription is the Gundlupet inscription.

The Gundlupete inscription (EC-IV, Gu34, 1372 AD) mentions that Śilpi are- well versed in weighing and comparing (*Unmāna upamāna*), in Vēdas, logic, grammer, music (*Śruti, śāstra, vyākaraṇa, tāḷa*), in training elephant and horse (*gaja shikshna*), masters in astrology, reading, writing. mathematics, mythology and various other sciences (*Grahavāda, pāṭha likhita, gaṇita, parbatt alaṅkāra, ananta śabda śāstra, purāṇa, pauravara*). They are capable of designing cities, 24 types of mansions, different types of forts, 5 types of foundation, temples, 16 types of houses, ornament designing, construction of Vedic alters, halls etc. (*Caturdaśa bhavaṅgaḷa sṛṣṭikartaharu, ābharaṇa, Pura, graha, jaladurga, giridurga, vanadurga, kutadhikhara, Śōḍaśādi graha lakṣaṇa. yuga Maṇṭapa lakṣaṇa, hōmakunḍalakṣaṇa*).

The Grundlupete inscription provides an extensive list of skills and accomplishments. showcasing the deep knowledge of the master architects and sculptors who referred to themselves as 'Ācāryas'. This inscription reveals that these 'Ācārya's were highly knowledgeable in Vedic texts, Vedic sciences, *Puranas, Śilpa Śāstra*, and possessed practical experience in *Śilpa*. Their proficiency in the *Śilpa śāstra* was achieved through contemplation, recitation, and meditation practices. Dating back approximately thirty years from the Hoysaḷa period, this inscription captures the magnificence of the Hoysaḷa sculptors and their remarkable accomplishments.

Another inscription (EC-V, Cn265, 1209 AD)<sup>2</sup> discovered in Didiga references *Stotakācārya*, belonging to the Vishvamitra Gotra. This revered figure held high esteem in the community, possessed properties and vehicles, and demonstrated proficiency in all sciences. It is likely that *Stotakācārya* headed a monastery (Mutt) and was capable of imparting spiritual teachings. This inscription further exemplifies the status and multifaceted abilities of the sculptors during the Hoysaḷa period.

### **Architect Śilpi, proficient in conducting Pratiṣṭhā vidhi (ritualistic installation)**

In the Hoysaḷa era, skilled architects known as *Śilpi* not only designed temples but also served as proficient priests, conducting the intricate Pratiṣṭhā vidhi (ritualistic installation). These *Śilpi* possessed a unique duality, functioning both as architects and religious officiants. Individuals like *Masanōja* and *Marōja* (EC-V, Ak 34, 1121 AD and EC-V, Cn263, 1189 AD) exemplify this fascinating aspect, actively involved in both temple construction and the detailed ritualistic processes of *Pratiṣṭhā kriya*.

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<sup>2</sup> Sri manamaha gunasampannaru, vishvamitra gotra pavitraru, lankadwipa parameswaraaru, kamdenu, Chintamani, vastuvahanaru, sakalasastra pravinaru, paradeyaru, sakalagunakirtottamaru, guruparabrahma nischala swarooparu, upadeshaparakramaru manmaya mandabya visvakarma nirmithappu hemmigadeyamenisida Stotakacharyaru'



Inscriptions from this period reveal some of the Śilpi played specialized roles, such as *Sthānapatis*, who oversaw temple construction and maintenance and were closely associated with *Kālāmukha* Mutts (monasteries). Notably, some sculptors held the prestigious position of *Sthānapati* while actively practicing the art of sculpting.

Inscriptions like '*Kālāmukha Sthānapati Ishanya Pandita*' (EC-V, Ak34) and '*Dēvarāsi Ācārya*' (SII-XV, No.227, p.no.277, dated 1126 AD) provide evidence of their active participation in carving images and guiding temple construction. The '*Kālāmukha Ācāryas*,' influential figures in education and temple construction, actively engaged in these pursuits. Dr. K.S. Kumaraswamy<sup>3</sup> suggests direct familial connections between certain Śilpi leading domestic lives and the *Kālāmukha Ācāryas*, further highlighting the intricate web of relationships and knowledge within the Śilpi community of that era.

### ***Śilpi referred as Stapathi, Sūtradhāris or Architects and town planners;***

Inscriptions offer valuable insights into the establishment of numerous towns, *Agrahāra* (settlements for Brahmins), tanks, water reservoirs, and temples during the Hoysaḷa period. *Stapathis* and *Sūtradhāris*, who served as architects and town planners, played pivotal roles in the creation of new towns during this era. These settlements were meticulously planned, featuring tanks and one or two temples. Typically, the Ishwara temple was positioned in the North East corner, while the *Jina* or *Vishnu* temple occupied the central position, catering to the preferences of the respective sects of the settlers. (Collyer, 1990: 33,34)

The inscriptions specifically mention skilled architects like *Gundan Anivaritācāri* (IA-IX, p.no.275, 750 AD) and *Sarvasiddhi Ācārya* (IA-X, p.no.164, 750 AD), credited with constructing renowned temples in Pattadak. These architects were referred to as '*Sūtradhāris*,' a confirmation found in the inscriptions. Notable examples include *Rāyasūtradhāri Gōpōja* (EC-V, Ak 34, 1234 AD), *Sūtradhāri Nakarācāri* (EC-V Kr 22, ), and *Sūtradhāri Rēvōja* (SII - XX, p.no.183 no.144, 1166 AD). These individuals held esteemed positions such as '*Sūtradhāri*,' highlighting their expertise and active involvement in architectural pursuits.

For example, *Sūtradhāri Rēvōja* meticulously planned the layout of *Brahmapuri*, where he, along with other teachers specializing in subjects like logic, mathematics, grammar, and Śilpa

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<sup>3</sup> In Dr. K. S. Kumaraswamy's book "Shilpacharyara Charite (ಶಿಲ್ಪಾಚಾರ್ಯರ ಚರಿತ್ರೆ, p.no. 212) ," it is documented that Arasikere housed a significant Shaiva institution named "Shaiva Sthana" (ಶೈವಸ್ಥಾನ) . This institution was a focal point for Kalamukha ascetics, with Yati Chandrabhushana residing there. He held the esteemed position of "Kala Mukha Sthanapati" (ಕಾಳ ಮುಖ ಸ್ಥಾನಪತಿ) and was recognized for his expertise in sculpting and his extensive knowledge of Pratima Lakshan and Rasayana Lakshana (ಪ್ರತಿಮಾ ಲಕ್ಷಣ ಯುಕ್ತನು ವಿವಿಧ ರಾಸಾಯನ ಲಕ್ಷಣ) . Over a period of approximately 95 years in Arasikere and nearby regions, various experts played pivotal roles in temple construction and related architectural endeavors. These individuals included Dharmaraya Pandita, Ananta Shakti Pandita, Brahma Rashi Pandita, Shiva Shakti Pandita, and his son Kalyana Shakti, Rudra Shakti Deva, Rashi Pandita, among others. They actively contributed to the craftsmanship of temple construction and various architectural projects in neighboring villages like Javagal, Belavadi, Harnahalli, and others. Inscriptions also confirm the involvement of Brahma Pandita Acharya, the son of Lakaoja, and Sangoja, the son of Sovirasi Pandita. They were revered scholars and skilled sculptors, also served as the chief architect (ಬಲ್ಲಾಳೇಶ್ವರ ಆಚಾರಿ ಲಕನೋಜನ ಮಗ ಬ್ರಹ್ಮ ಪಂಡಿತ ಆಚಾರ್ಯ ಸೋವಿರಾಸಿ ಪಂಡಿತ ದೇವರ ಮಗ ಸಂಗೋಜ ಪ್ರಸಾದ ಮಾಟ ಕೂಟ ಕೂಟ ಪುಲೀಣನು ಸೂತ್ರಧಾರಿ ಆಗಿದ್ದನು) .

Śāstra, allocated the plots, showcasing their comprehensive engagement in the architectural and educational spheres.

### **Śilpi referred as Vidyāvanta or Educated;**

Educated traditional Śilpi's during the were bestowed with titles such as *Vidyāmanta Kātōja* (EC-V, Bl 51), *Vidyākulan Madōja* (EC-V, Mu10), *Vidyāvanta Rūvāri* (SII-XVIII, no.132, p.no.165) etc. Typically, inscriptions were authored by knowledgeable individuals and then skillfully engraved on stones. Interestingly, certain inscriptions specify the names of the Śilpis such as *Bammōja*<sup>4</sup> (SII-XX, no.50, p.no.92, 1118 AD) responsible for both writing and carving, underscoring their scholarly nature. These erudite Śilpis not only exhibited profound expertise in Śilpa (sculpture making, engraving, and architecture) but also delved into various other disciplines such as music, dance, poetry, and the 64 traditional art forms. Given the demands of their profession, these individuals demonstrated a need for comprehensive knowledge, heightened intellect, and a diverse set of skills.

Inscriptions provide valuable information about these multi-talented Śilpi's showcasing their expertise beyond the realm of architecture and sculpture. For instance, *Dharaṇōja* (Kumaraswamy, K.S. p.no.127,128, dated 1430, 1479 AD) was not only a skilled sculpture but also a poet, while *Tippaṇōja*<sup>5</sup> exhibited proficiency in music dance and sculpture.

### **Śilpi, who were-Officers, Land owners, and Treasurers;**

Śilpi in the Hoysaḷa society held esteemed positions, as evidenced by several inscriptions. These inscriptions not only highlight their artistic skills but also shed light on their social status. Some Śilpi were referred to as 'Sēṇabōva,' which signifies their role as village accountants. Examples include *Sēṇabōva Kaljācāri* (EC-V, Mg72, 1279 AD), *Sēṇabōva Isapācāri* (ECI, Mg72,69, 1284, 1285 AD ), and *Sēṇabōva Linganna Malōja* (EC-LX, Nm 12, 1330 AD ).

Additionally, inscriptions mention Śilpi being addressed as *Heggaḍe*, indicating their position as landlords and chiefs. Noteworthy examples include *Periyanda Heggaḍe* (ASMAR 1935, p.no.55), *Heggaḍe Kammara Pammōja* (EC- VI, Sr103, 12th century AD ), and *Chief of Nelkudure Kalideva Manivōja* (EC-VI, Kd 69, 1190AD ).

Apart from their roles as sculptors, architects, and engravers, Śilpi also took up significant responsibilities as *Bhaṇḍāri*, which translates to treasury officers. In Kannada, the term 'Minthouse' is referred to as 'Taṅkasāle.' Dr K.S. Kumaraswamy elaborates in his book (p.no.161-165) 'that coins in Karnataka were not minted directly by the state government. Instead, authorized institutions were responsible for the minting process, under the government's control. Government officials examined and approved coins made of gold, silver, and copper through inspection and assaying. Skilled individuals with expertise, knowledge, business acumen, responsibility, and trustworthiness were appointed for this task, often through Vaishyas (merchants) who delegated the responsibility to Akkasāli (Smiths) on

<sup>4</sup> Thane baredu kandarisida (ತಾನೇ ಬರೆದು ಖಂಡರಿಸಿದ),

<sup>5</sup> "ಭರತಾಗಮ ಶಾಸ್ತ್ರಕಳಾ ಪರಿಣಿತಿಯೊಳ್ ದಾನಗುಣತ್ವರದೊಳ್ ಸರಿಯಾರ್ ವಂಕೇಶ್ವರ ದೇವೇರ ತಿಪ್ಪಣೋಜನೊಳ್ ಭೂತಳದೊಳ್"

Who else could surpass Tippaṇōja (affiliated with Lord Vankeswara) in music, dance, and philanthropy across the globe, (Kannada Sahitya Charitre, vol- 4, p.no.264)

contract basis. These smiths sometimes owned the mint houses. The min houses are found in Lakkundi, Belligave, Dwarasamudra, Savadi etc Inscriptions provide references to notable individuals such as Kammatadodeya Dāmōja (1170 AD), Bhaṇḍāri Madhuvana (EC-XV, Bl-272; 1219 AD), Savimōja, Chikkamadōja (SII-IX (i), p.154, no. 164, 1098 AD), and Utamōja. Among them, Uttamōja held the position of a smith under King Thribhuvanamalla (the Cālukyan King) and possessed a special seal granted by the king. Utamōja was granted the exclusive privilege of minting gold coins, signifying his esteemed status and expertise in the field.'

These inscriptions emphasize the multifaceted roles played by Śilpi in the Hoysaḷa society showcasing their contributions and elevated social positions as village accountants, landlords, chiefs, and treasury officers.

### Warrior Śilpi;

Skilled blacksmiths and metalworkers played a crucial role in the Hoysaḷa society, particularly in the production of weapons such as armor, helmets, and other war equipments. These artisans operated in well-equipped workshops, utilizing their expertise to create essential tools for warfare. However, their contributions extended beyond craftsmanship alone. It is likely that they acquired knowledge and proficiency in the use of these weapons, actively participating in wars and safeguarding their villages from robbers and invaders.

To honour their bravery and valour, hero stones or *Virgal* were erected, serving as memorials to commemorate their heroic deeds. Several inscriptions highlight the courageous acts of individuals such as *Lenkōja* (ASMAR 1945, p. no. 15, 1274 AD), *Hoysaḷācāri* the son of *Dwigatti Chakabōva* (EC-5(R), My204); *Kāmōja*, the son of goldsmith *Rāmōja* (EC-VII, Hi - 98, 1116 AD), *Masaṇa* (EC-XII,Tp77, 1286 AD ) *Bammōja* and *Masanōja* (EC-V, Hn 70, 1180AD).

Table;1, List of Śilpis engaged in various professions.

	Title	Name	Period (AD)	Place	Source
1	Śilpācāryas/ Scholar teacher	Śilpi clan	1378	Gundlupete	(EC-IV, Gu34
		Stōtakācārya	1209	Didiga	EC-V, Cn265
2	Architect Śilpi, proficient in conducting Pratiṣṭhāvidhi	Dēvarāsi Ācārya'	1136	Dharwad	SII-XV, No.227, p.no.277
		Masanōja and Marōja	1121, 1189	Arasikere	EC-V, Ak 34; EC-V, Cn263
3	Śilpi referred as Stapathi, Sūtradhāris or Architects and town planners	Gundan Anivaritācāri	750	Pattadkal	IA-IX, p.no.275
		Sarvasiddhi Ācārya	750	Pattadkal	IA-X, p.no.164
		Rāyasūtradhāri Gōpōja	1234	Arasikere	EC-V, Ak 34
		Sūtradhāri Nakarācāri	12th Century		EC-6 Kr 22

		Sūtradhāri Rēvōja	1166	Dharwad	SII -XX, p.no.183 no.144
4	Śilpi referred as Vidyāvanta or Educated	Bammōja	1118		SII-XX, no.50, p.no.92
		Dharaṇōja			KumaraSvāmi, K.S.
		Kāṭōja		Belligave	EC-V, Bl 51
		Madōja		Mudigere	EC-V, Mu10
		Thippanoja			Kannada Sahitya Charitre
5	Śilpis, who were-Officers, Land owners, and Treasurers				
	Sēṇabōva/ Village Accountant	Kaljācāri	1279	Mudigere	EC-V, Mg72
		Isapācāri	1284/8 5	Mudigere	EC-V, Mg72,69
		Linganna Mārōja	1330	Nelamagala	EC-IX, Nm 12
	Heggade/ Landlord	Periyanda Heggade		Haranahalli	ASMAR 1935, p.no.55
		Heggade Kammara Padmōja	12th Century	Śrī ngeri	EC- VI, Sr103
		Kalideva Mānivōja	1190	Kadur	EC-VI, Kd 69
	Bhaṇḍāri/ Treasury Officer	Bhaṇḍāri Madhuvana	1219	Belur	EC-XV, Bl-272
		Kammatadodeya Dāmōja	1170	Raychur	KumaraSvāmi, K.S./164
		Savimōja, Chikkamadōja	1098	Bellari	SII-IX (i), p.154, no. 164
		Utamōja		Sudi	KumaraSvāmi, K.S./163
6	Warrior Śilpis	Lenkoja		Kadur	ASMAR 1945, p. no. 15
		Hoysalācāri	1274	Santeyuru	EC-5(R), My204
		Kāmōja	1116	Honnali	EC-VII, Hi -98
		Masaṇa	1286	Tptur	EC-XII,Tp77
		Bammōja and Masanōja	1180	Koravangal a	EC-V, Hn 70

## Conclusion

The foundation of sacred architecture rests on two essential components: *Pratimā Śilpa*, which centers on the artistic creation of divine icons, and *Dēvālaya Śilpa*, encompassing the planning and construction of temples. The construction of temples and deities transcends mere skill, involving austerity and penance to imbue the sacred with sanctity.

In India, traditional *Śilpi* possessed a profound understanding of ancient scriptures with practical skills, as revealed in architectural, sculptural, inscriptional, and literary works from medieval Karnataka. These *Śilpi* played a pivotal role in defining the intricate social and cultural identity within society, sought after for their exceptional skills and extensive knowledge. This elevated them to positions of great significance and respect.

Beyond their expertise in temple construction, town planning, carving, and engraving, some Śilpi exhibited profound knowledge of sacred texts such as the *Vēdas*, *Vēdangas*, *Puranas*, and Agamas. They excelled in diverse artistic domains, including dance, music, and literature. While primarily recognized as architects, planners, sculptors, and engravers, some learned Śilpi assumed the role of *Ācāryas* or teachers, imparting divine knowledge and guiding society with a deep understanding of the *Vēdas* and *Śāstras*.

It is noteworthy that Śilpi displayed a multifaceted nature in their societal roles. Some were not only skilled artisans but also warriors or treasurers, actively participating in battles or managing the treasury. Others held positions as village accountants or wealthy landlords, underscoring their elevated social status and influential roles within the community. Through their remarkable craftsmanship, extensive knowledge, and diverse roles, Śilpi played an integral part in shaping the social fabric and cultural landscape of medieval Karnataka, extending their contributions beyond art and architecture to become indispensable members of society.

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