

Depiction of Composite Images in Radha-Binod Temple at Jayadeva Kenduli (W.B.)

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Abstract: Temples are tangible monuments where intangible cultural aspects such as religious thought, belief and devotion are transmuted. A temple is therefore not only the abode of God, but also a canvas for the expression of artistic skill and knowledge in the form of stone, stucco or terracotta. Jayadeva Kenduli's RadhaVinod Temple is an example of religious milestones and artistic gems of its cultural importance. The place is closely associated with Jayadeva Goswami, who was a poet and a Vaishnavasaint. The temple is built over his ruined house during 17th c CE. The facade of the temple is decorated with terracotta plaques with various themes like Dasavatar, Ramayana, folk deities and composite images. Composite images are created by mixing different organisms like humans, birds, animals, fish etc. It has always carried some significance in the history of art by its origin and popular usage. The present study aims to explore its artistic quality and the religious significance behind it. Personal observation, photographic documentation and interviews with temple priests and local people have been conducted to gain more qualitative knowledge about the temple and the holy place.

Keywords: Composite images, Dasavatara, Jayadeva, Kinnara, Temple, Terracotta.

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INTRODUCTION

Composite artwork is a unique artistic creation by the artist in which two or more elements combine to express a great artistic beauty with deep inner meaning. The artist creates a composite image by combining the parts of various animals such as humans, animals, birds, reptiles based on texts, oral traditions or sometimes self passion followed by seven rules as balance, movement, rhythm, pattern, contrast, unity and emphasis. Indian composite images are strongly associated with Indian mythology. According to Indian mythology, composite mythological figures are considered celestial, atmospheric or aquatic mythical creatures. (Nayar and Akhil; 2022:172). Indian composite art works include winged horse, winged elephant, bird body with male and female body, human with wings etc. In Indian mythology, a figure consisting of a human torso and the rest of a bird with wings, tail and legs known as Kinnar or Kinnari. In Radha Binod temple containing such kind of images and four Vishnu's Avatar as Matsya, Kurma, Varaha and Narasimha also depicted in composite forms.

Themes in religious architecture are mostly religious in nature but the terracotta temples of Birbhum are different. Images of religious themes as well as contemporary social life are accorded a prestigious position by temple sculptors and patrons (Dey;1959:7). The invention of composite images is purely religious, aesthetic and an expression of the artistic knowledge and skill of the sculptors found in the Radhabinoda temple at Jayadeva. JayadevaKenduli is regarded as the birthplace of the famous poet JayadevaGoswami who composed the GitaGovinda in Sanskrit, a devotional work dedicated to the LordKrishna. It is clear that the name of the village is derived from the name of the poet. This village is located on the banks of Ajay river 23.63°N 87.43°E is under Ilambazar block of Bolpur subdivision of Birbhum district of West Bengal. (Majumdar; 2006:48). The temples of Birbhum are considered examples of tangible heritage bracketed by their time and construction materials as late medieval brick temples (MacCutchion;1965-66:319). Most of the temples are identified as terracotta temples as they are decorated with terracotta plaques with various themes drawn from epics, mythology and contemporary social scenes. (Bandyopadhyay;1984:6). There are five temples protected by the Archaeological Survey of India and this temple has topped the list. Themes like Dasavatar, the battle of Rama and Ravana, the folk deities are extensively depicted while there are only two panels of composite images to decorate the temple. Jayadeva was a court poet of LakshmanaSen who ruled undivided Bengal from 1178-1206CE. The temple stands on the spot which is locally believed to have been the home of poet Jayadeva, based on earlier speculation that he was born there. The present study is based on direct observation and photographic documentation of the temple and its terracotta plaques. Apart from this, earlier works have also been taken as written records. It is an attempt to explore the cultural significance of Radha Vinod Temple with composite images depicted in sculptural form.

MYTHS BEHIND JAYADEB KENDULI

There are two popular myths related to poet Jaydeva and this place. It is said that Jayadeva had to walk 30 kilometers from his village Kenduli every day to bathe in the Ganges. Lord Vishnu took pity on the poet and asked the holy Ganga to pour its sanctity into the river Ajay at Kenduli on the day of Makar Sankranti. It is believed that on this auspicious day the Ganga flows into the river Ajay. Since then till today numerous devotees bathe in Ajay river and gain merit. On this occasion every year since this day the fair, Baul'sAkhra has been carrying the tradition of Birbhum's folk culture.

Another story says that Jayadeva, while composing his text Geet Govinda, could not complete the last verse at all. When he takes a bath his absence looks like him someone comes and finishes the writing and eats lunch. After this, when Jayadeva's wife Padmavati starts eating, the real Jayadeva appears and both are surprised. Jayadeva sees his wife eating before him and Padmavati sees Jayadeva's second arrival. Hearing all the previous words from his wife, Jayadeva ran to his house and saw that he had completed the verse that he could not complete at all and the work of writing the book was completed and bees and beetles were flying in his footsteps. It didn't take long for them to realize that it was none other than Lord Krishna. Who completed the book with his own hands and accepted Padmavati's cooking. Both of them happily accepted the food kept by Krishna as prasad. (Bandyopadhyay;2013:6-8).

Through this folklore JayadevaKenduli became one of the holiest places in Birbhum district as well as West Bengal where Lord Krishna set his foot and finished the book. Based on these stories, the RadhaVinod temple was established to give full status to Vaishnavabhakati.

ABOUT THE TEMPLE

In 1683 CE this temple was built by Kirtichand Bahadur the king of Burdwan. The temple has been preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India since 1915. The brick built navaratna temple is standing on a low jagati (base). Almost all terracotta decoration is confined to the front elevation with a triple arched entrance. Each arch has the most impressive ornamentation on top. The upper panels of the left arch depict figures of Shiva, Indra, Agni, Yama and others as well as various avatars of Vishnu (Varaha, Narasimha, Matsya, Kurma etc.). The upper panel of the main central arch depicts a familiar battle scene with Rama and Ravana, below which the banarsena (monkey army) marches to build a setu (bridge). Above the right arch is a panel depicting a giant mythical bird trying to engulf Ravana's chariot. Supersha is the demon bird mentioned in "Krttivasi Ramayana". It is a motif commonly found in terracotta temples of West Bengal. (Fig. 1,2,3)



Fig. 1: Radha-Binod temple

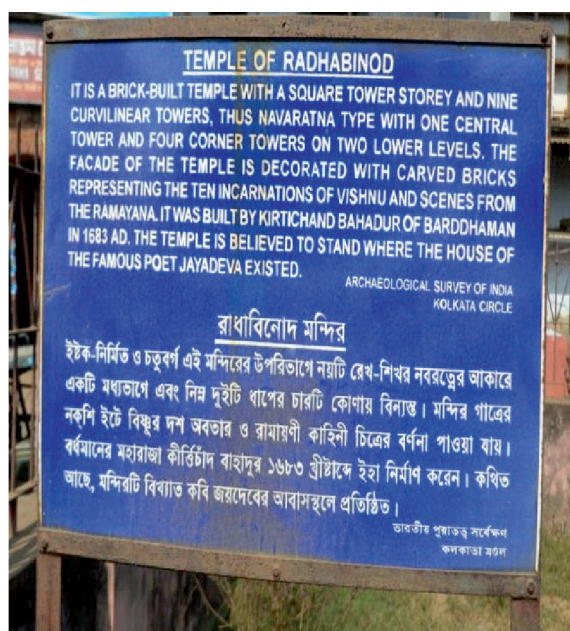


Fig. 2: ASI Sign Board Photo courtesy: Researcher



Fig. 3: Triple arched entrance Photocourtesy: Researcher



Fig. 4 :Baraha, Narasimha,Matsya and Kurma Avatara, Photo courtesy: Researcher

Photo courtesy: Researcher

COMPOSITE SCULPTURES IN THE TEMPLE

In the Radha Binod temple decorated sculptures are installed in facade and the remaining walls are covered with lime plaster. In this portion depicted composite images are Matsya, Baraha, Kurma, and Narasimha from Vishnu's Dasavatara and two panels containing such figures which is half female and half bird with beautiful wing. Both figures are playing Veena by two hands. Dasavatara depiction through terracotta plaques in the temple are presented by three horizontal narrative panels. In the middle panel Baraha, Narasimha and Matsya are depicted where Kurma Avatara placed in middle of the lower panel.

Matsya Avatara: Matsya Avatar is considered as Satyuga Avatar. When the whole world is flooded with rain and there is no place to stay, the horned fish comes to the rescue. To commemorate this myth Matsya Avatar have been depicted in here. A four-armed male figure with a beautiful round crown on his head, half of his body complete with a large fish figure. The fish's scales and fins are very clean and its tail is slightly curved. Another male figure is placed to the left as its devotee.

Narasimha Avatara: Hiranyakasipu was an ardent Vishnu hater. He did not refrain from punishing of his son because son Prahlad was a devoted devotee of Vishnu. With the blessings of Brahma, Hiranyakashipu became an invincible hero because no animal or beast could kill him in day or night, not even in any weapon. Vishnu incarnated as an anthropomorphic avatar with the body of a man and head and claws of a lion known as Narasimha who killed Hiranyakashipu at dusk. The Narasimha represents a destroyer of demon and protector of Vaishnava devotee. In the temple facade this scene has been depicted to establish such a strong belief forever by terracotta plaque. A four handed mythical figure with lion head and human body dressed with decorative cloth hanging *uttariya* in both sides highlights Narasimha in here. Hiranyakasipu is lying on his thigh which is comparatively small in figure.

Varaha: Varaha Avatar who rescued Bhudevi (Earth) from Hiranyaksha who had stolen it. Barah rescued the earth and picked it up on his teeth. A prominent four-armed human figure with a boar's head represents the Varaha avatar in the terracotta of the temple. He is uplifting the world with his sharp tooth. who has a cloth in the lower part and a sacred thread (Upabit) on his chest.

Kurma: In the hope of getting nectar, gods and demons indulged in churning the sea. Vishnu turned into a tortoise to save the mountain when Mandar mountain was used as a churn. In the temple terracotta a four handed human form with a circular head dress along with an oval shape in lower part with four legs look like a tortoise represents the kurmaAvatara in here. Two composite images are depicted in two panels but placed separately. In the upper panel it is in the right of ten armed Durga and to her left is a devotee. In another panel it placed a five-faced Shiva's left and a devotee to his right. Iconographically it is a kinnari who considered as a demi God in Hindu mythology.

Kinnar images usually have the head of a horse or a human body with wings and legs of a bird. It has a head, two eyes and two arms. Sometimes the image is shown as holding a harp. The kinnaris are hybrid demi gods who are well versed in sing, dance and musical instruments. They have also special talent in dance, song and poetry. Kinnaris are divine artists who play music for the gods, so they hold the harp in her hands. They can move everywhere with their powerful wings. Being a good dancer has a beautiful long tail like a peacock to remind the beauty of dance.

Kinnaris are depicted in temple wall is a purely mythological background but in both panels they are placed beside Siva and Durga. Another devotee's figure is also present in both panels as a side figure. This means that Siva and Durga are being worships by kinnaris in heaven and by humans on earth. The terracotta plaques show one Kinnari to the left of Shiva and the other to the right of Durga, which may be either the artist's self-effacement or they assume similar positions next to the goddess in heaven.



Fig. 5: Kinnari beside Siva. Photocourtesy: Researcher



Fig. 6: Kinnaris in two panels beside Siva and Durga Photocourtesy: Researcher

SOURCES OF DEPICTED THEMES

There are two main types of composite images depicted in the Radha Vinod temple. Images of Matsya, Kurma, Varaha and Narasimha from Dasavatar and two Kinnari from Hindu mythology. Puranas like Agni, Padma, Garuda, Vishnu, Skanda, Baraha and Bhagvad Gita are the main source of Dasavatara where number of incarnations varies from text to text. Similarly kinnar and kinnaris are originated from mythology and scriptures. But their history not only limited in Hindu texts also found in the Buddhist literature and mythology. Hindu texts as *Manusmriti*, the epic *Mahabharata*, *Bhagvad Gita* and *Agni Purana* tells about Kinnar and Kinnaris. Prajnaparamita Sutra, Jataka like Buddhist literature also mentioning about them (Nayar & Akhil : 2022:8).

CONCLUSION

The decoration of a temple is not only an expression of aesthetic feeling, but also a blend of beauty, skill knowledge and local intangible cultural heritage. The artist communities who were unaware of Sanskrit literature had only oral traditions as their main source of knowledge for the thematic creation of temples. Self-study or listening to *kirtans*, baul songs and yatra palas etc. help them a lot, besides scriptures translated into Bengali namely Ramayana and Mahabharata. (Basu & Basu; 2015:16). This kind of performing art conveys a deep message from their head to heart and which is reflected on the facade of the temple through the terracotta panels. The temple is dedicated to a particular deity but the depictions are not only exclusively related to this deity. Here the personal wishes of the artist or the orders of the patron or sometimes both play an important role in depicting a particular theme. The artist also pay a special attention for choosing a theme that is commonly understood and has a regional value. Jayadeva was a Vaishnavas the temple is dedicated to Radha Krishna where Dasavatar depiction is really meaningful but Krishnalila depiction is very less. Images of Ramayana, Durga, Kali are formed based on local acceptance. Ramayana is an epic poem that is well known to

every Hindu household. Similarly, the worship of Durga and Kali is very significant in every village. All thematic images have a social background based on regional traditions. The depiction of Dasavata is a devotion to Lord Vishnu and Vaishnavism which is prevalent in this area. Vishnu's avatars are not only different types of images, but all play an important role in maintaining the universe, cosmic order, and establishing rightness in times of calamity. The Matsya and Baraha are directly associated with save the earth and protect the lives. Kurma is for collecting nectar while Narasimha is the protector of Vishnu devotees. Such religious beliefs are deeply rooted in people's minds. So the artist can easily choose this theme to decorate the temple and send an inner message to the temple visitors and devotees throughout the ages. Dashavata images also carry a scientific aspect related to the origin of life and human evolution. The Matsya represents life begins in water, Kurma is the first amphibians, Varaha is the first mammals, Narasimha is half man half animal and Vamana is regarded as Homo erectus. Instead of religious sentiment of Dasavatara also a meaningful evidence of biological evolution of living creatures in the earth. But the artist is only interested in establishing Vaishnava devotion across incarnations of Vishnu. He also revealed his artistic skills through the actual icons mentioned in the texts and traditions by beautiful composition of human and fish, human with boar, human with tortoise and human with lion. Because of the story of Vishnu he did not forget to make the figures with four arms so its divinity is immutable. Composite images are created by the artist based on the text and the artist's personal imagination or invention to express his artistic skills. Hence the creations demand a special attention mixed with religion and aestheticty that can stir devotion in the heart and pulsate in the sight.

The same attention can be paid to the sculptures of Kinnaris. Mythologically the supreme gods and goddesses are often associated with these semi-divine beings because of their performance merit. According to Puranas they were born from Lord Brahma's thumb. Buddhist literature also speaks of kinnars and kinnaris who always accompany Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The existence of kinnars and kinnaris is not only limited to Hindu literature but also has the same importance in Buddhist literature. Buddhist mythology says that Kinnars and Kinnaris show the goodness of people and are sometimes regarded as incarnations of the Buddha. Most of the ancient Hindu dynasties such as the Guptas, Pallavas, Cholas and Palas depicted Kinnars and Kinnaris in their art. When Buddhism spread to Southeast Asian countries, religious practices and associated sculptures also landed there. Through the spread of Buddhism in this territory, the ideas and forms of Kinnars and Kinnaris also reached there to depict. In the Radha Vinod temple at Jayadeva the artist has clearly depicted the Kinnaris next to the two supreme deities like Shiva and Durga to reveal their true position in heaven. Half-woman and half-bird with harp in hand, this type of description is often mentioned in Hindu and Buddhist mythology to denote Kinnaris which created beautifully by the artist in here. To break the monotony of the visitors the artist has created various gods and goddesses along with such semi-divine deities as people from other religious communities are attracted to pay more attention to the artworks. Jayadev a Kenduli's Radha Vinod Temple is not only an architectural specimen but also embodies spirituality, devotion, emotion and artistic excellence combined with religion and art.

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