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# Sculptures of Hunting on Select Vijayanagara Monuments of Karnataka

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**Abstract:** The present article is an attempt to study the sculptures of hunting that can be seen on the monuments of the Medieval Vijayanagara Empire that are located in the present day State of Karnataka. The depictions of hunting that we see here can be placed sometime between the 14th and 16th centuries CE. However, the author would like to elaborate on the fact that this is a primary survey of such material culture, and it is hoped that this would initiate a conversation and further curiosity among academics to go deeper into the subject. The present attempt is nothing more than to just provide an overview of the various aspects of such material culture. An additional attempt has been made to reconstruct the development of hunting strategies and their significance in Indian antiquity.

## Introduction

Since the beginning of human society, people have engaged in the act of hunting. As a matter of fact, the practice of hunting for the purposes of sustenance and self-preservation can be traced back to a time far before the appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens* as we know them today. It was present among all of the species that roamed the earth or swam in the oceans a very long time ago, well before humans as we know them today came into being. It was one of the most common behaviours that was carried out by all of the species, and as a result, we now refer to this phenomenon as '*The Law of the Jungle*' in our contemporary semantic jargon. The proverb '*There is always a bigger fish in the sea*' is another piece of jargon that is very well-known and is used in almost all fields of study and walks of life. Such phrases have multiple, deeper, and more symbolic meanings attached to them, and these meanings can be explained in a variety of different ways by citing examples from a variety of different fields.

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Charles Darwin is credited with developing the idea of '*Survival of the Fittest*', which states unequivocally that the species that are the hardiest, most adaptable, and most intuitive will endure for longer, whereas those that do not evolve with the passage of time will become extinct. This is evident if one looks into the different geological eras and periods, as the majority of species did not make it through multiple time spans because they lacked elements and characteristics that allowed them to adapt.

These genetic and biological nuances have subsequently been adopted in other domains as well, including culture, politics, economics, and social life. The 'caste system' is the most fundamental and easily recognisable example for us Indians. Originally referred to as 'the varna system', this term eventually became corrupted. The Brahmanas and the Kshtriyas are considered to be the two highest varnas or castes in this society. These castes are thought to be the most adaptable and are considered to be "stronger." They have what is known as 'the vedic knowledge' as well as 'shastra and astra vidya', which indicates that they are among the select few who have the ability to bring you closer to God as well as protect you and your family from the other hostile tribes, chieftains, and states. These were the two most important things that the general populace of the time needed, and in many ways, the dynamics of this situation can still be observed today. These two varnas were supposed to have the expertise and power that enables them to achieve a high status in society or to be the most successful individuals in the field.

As can be noted above, slowly but steadily, a great number of new symbolic meanings and connotations began to be attached to the practice of hunting. As a result, hunting went from being a method of ensuring one's own survival and self-preservation to becoming a method of establishing one's dominance and authority. This article will discuss how this shift came about in the context of India, as well as the various pieces of evidence of it that can be found in the material culture and visual imagery of India, starting from the prehistoric period and continuing all the way up to the Medieval period. However, the main focus of this article will be to examine the hunting sculptures that can be found on the Vijayanagara Empire monuments that still stand today in the state of Karnataka.

## Area of Study

Considering the vast expanse of area that the Vijayanagara Empire ruled, it can be said that the present-day states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and the fringes of Kerala came under its dominion. However, for the present work, only the region of present-day Karnataka has been chosen. And, for both maintaining coherence in this primary documentary study and taking sample evidence from different regions of the state in all cardinal directions as accurately as possible, the author has taken four localities under study within the state of Karnataka. The four localities are Hampi, Bhatkal, Sringeri and Yalanduru (see Fig. 1).

The monuments taken under consideration are:

- The Great Platform, Hampi
- Ramachandra Temple, Hampi
- Vitthal Temple, Hampi

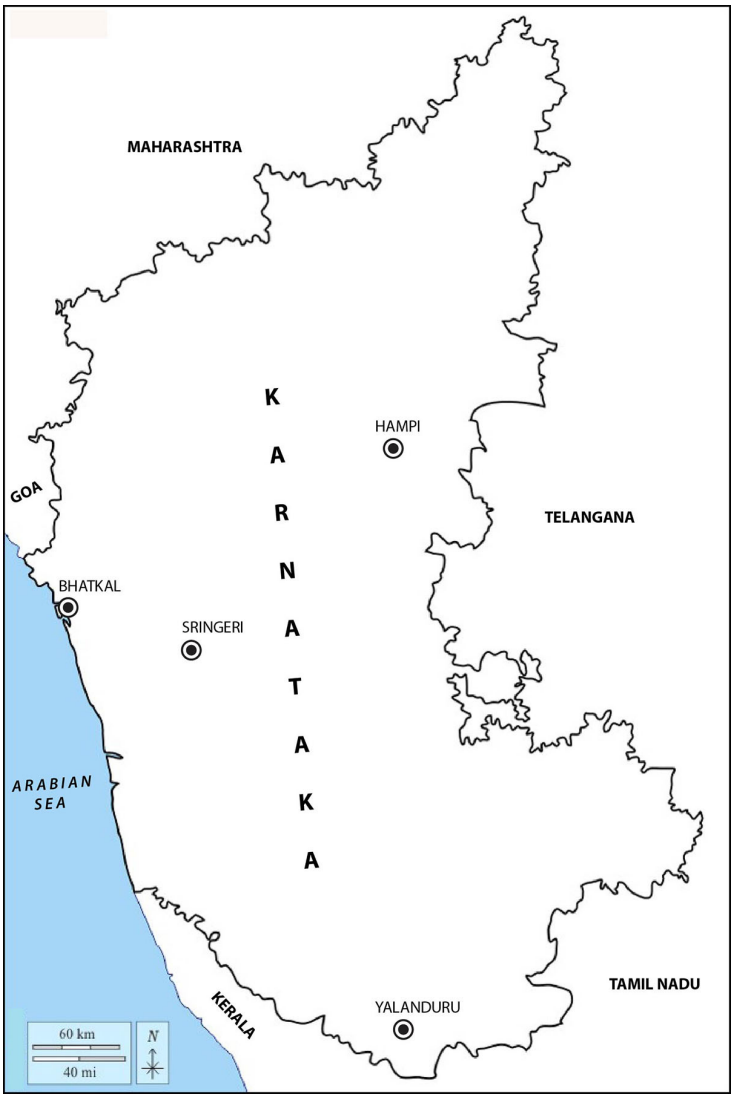


Fig. 1: Map showing the study area

- Khetapai Narayana Temple, Bhatkal
- Vidyashankar Temple, Sringeri
- Gaurishwar Temple, Yalanduru

## Aims and Objectives of the Research

The research was undertaken to fulfil the following aims and objectives.

- To document the sculptures of hunting on monuments of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- To understand the iconographic schema of the Vijayanagara monuments to create a coherent and robust understanding of contemporary society.
- To create a primary documentary record and database to see the potentiality of the topic at hand and whether there is enough evidence out there to take it up for a greater study.

- To understand the evolution of the hunting techniques and practices in India from the earliest times to Medieval times and also to understand the changing symbolic meanings behind them.

## Research Methodology

To fulfil the above aims and objectives, the following methodologies have been adopted.

- A preliminary survey of the monuments under consideration was conducted to document the nature of the sculptural assemblages available on them.
- The documented sculptural evidence was first examined to determine how the imagery is manifesting itself in terms of size, context, religious or secular imagery, and so on.
- A literary survey of the concerned monuments, region and period, along with the topic at hand throughout different regions and periods of Indian antiquity, was carried out.
- A detailed and targeted survey of the monuments at hand, with proper documentation of the sculptures under study was conducted.
- Finally, the data was collated and concluding remarks were made.

## Some Significant Publications on Ancient Indian Hunting Methods

Hunting scenes are depicted in art dating all the way back to prehistoric times in India. On numerous natural rock shelters and boulders where they resided, early people used to draw scenes of hunting. The majority of the images found on these rock shelters represent hunting scenes, indicating that this activity played a significant role in early humans' daily lives. We learn about the types of wildlife that were hunted, whether they were big games or small ones, the weapons that were employed, and ultimately, we see examples of human organisation and strategic thinking in these scenarios. There is a significant amount of evidence available in the prehistoric rock art that can be used to deduce that the first settlers of our Indian landmass utilised a variety of hunting tools and weapons to hunt their game. The majority of these tools and weapons were made up of the stone that was readily available in the area, and in some cases, animal or human bones were used as well. The types of weaponry used and the number of people on the hunt changed according to the quantity and size of the animal that was being pursued. It is possible to draw the conclusion that the hunters were quite familiar with their surroundings and that they were aware of which game was to be pursued, when, and where. They would have utilised a variety of ambush strategies, as well as bait strategies, in order to successfully hunt their game.

The Bhimbetka Group of Rock Shelters, which are located in the current state of Madhya Pradesh, are the most well-known and extensively studied of the many prehistoric rock shelters in the forested regions of Central India that V.S. Wakankar (1976) documented in his book *Stone Age Painting of India*. Wakankar attempted to catalogue and evaluate every prehistoric painting in this key work in order to have a thorough and comprehensive comprehension of modern culture. Hunting is one of these paintings' most often occurring themes. Being a skilled fine artist himself,

Wakankar made an effort to analyse these paintings in the form of popular visual imagery and came to several conclusions, including one regarding the hunting habits of the area's prehistoric settlers.

Similarly, throughout Indian history, hunting remained an important part of people's life. Even though the significance of it changed, the act of killing and hunting down animals remained in vogue. The examples that follow are a few of those.

The Imperial Gupta coins found in the Bayana Hoard have been catalogued and subjected to numerous analyses by A.S. Altekar in his 1957 book *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*. Altekar (1957) has attempted to employ iconographic and art historical approaches to analyse the current political, social, religious, and economic situations prevailing in the Indian subcontinent under the Guptas through the Sanskrit metric legends and the visual images on the coins. There are specific types of coins that he refers to as the Lion Sayer Type (depicting the king slaying a lion), Tiger Slayer Type (depicting the king slaying a tiger), Rhinoceros Slayer Type (depicting the king slaying a rhinoceros), and Elephant-Rider Lion Slayer Type (depicting the King seated high up on an elephant and slaying a lion) of coins among the Gupta Kings' catalogued gold coins.

By detailing the mythological and regal genealogy of King Vishnuvardhana who utilised a fiction to legitimise his bloodline to a mythical hero, S. Settar (1992) has captured the legend (that also involves an incident of hunting) quite beautifully in his book *The Hoysala Sculpture*. In this work, Settar has eloquently attempted to analyse how the Hoysalas depicted their narrative in their temple sculpture and how these images aided the succeeding Hoysala scions in asserting and exercising their political supremacy in their Southern Deccan domains.

Ebba Koch (1998) describes how the Mughals used hunting alongside landscape imagery to demonstrate their physical prowess and martial prowess as well as to signify political authority to their subjects and foreign visitors in her work on the Dara Shikoh hunting a nilgai scene, which is on display in the Freer Art Gallery in the Smithsonian. Koch has specifically outlined how traditional hunting practices persisted in India during the Middle Ages. She has also made an effort to link the Mughals' use of improved hunting techniques and weapons. Koch (1998) describes how Babur's reign saw the grand royal performance of surrounding the game from all sides and how the royal hunting party was encircled by drummers as the monarch rode on a horse or an elephant to deliver the killing blow. The Mughal records refer to this method as *qamargah*. However, Koch noted how the tradition of hunting changed for the later Mughals like Dara Shikoh from big feasts to a very personal and personalised past time and show of physical strength while keeping the Mughal artwork in mind. She called it *shikar-i-ahu-ba-ahu*, which is a different form of hunting. This entails employing trained antelope as bait and hunting what happens to be an antelope as the prey. In the image in question, Dara Shikoh is depicted concealing himself behind bushes and aiming his matchlock at a nilgai which is being baited by a herd of tamed nilgais. She continues by stating that in addition to the well-known Mughal portrait paintings, other commonly used artistic techniques that were carried over included paintings of kings hunting and distinctive landscapes.

Last but not least, in the context of Vijayanagara, Anna L. Dallapiccola (2003, 2010) has documented various sculptures related to hunting on these monuments in her books *King, Court and Capital* and *The Great Platform*, and Dallapiccola and Verghese (1998) have done the same in their book *Sculpture at Vijayanagara* (also see Dallapiccola et al. 1992).

## Hunting and the Myth of Establishment of Vijayanagara

There is a myth associated with the founding of Vijayanagara capital. The initial Vijayanagara Empire capital was located in what is now known as Anegondi, on the northern bank of the Tungabhadra River. King Harihara once went hunting across the river on its southern bank, where the present-day city of Vijayanagara is located, with the sage Vidyaranya and a small contingent of his army. There, they observed some hounds pursuing a hare or rabbit. The hare or rabbit, however, turned around and began chasing the hounds as it reached Tungabhadra's southern shore. The monarch was puzzled by this scene and questioned Sage Vidyaranya about it. This is the area where the weak also become strong and bold, the sage responded. And, it is here, we should establish our new capital (Fritz and Michell 2009, 2015). Since then, it is believed that Anegondi, the Vijayanagara capital, has been replaced by Hampi.

This story demonstrates how hunting played a significant role in Vijayanagara's social life. This demonstrates that hunting was not only a planned activity but was also seen as a significant pastime or sport for rulers. The myth's central theme is hunting, which demonstrates how highly valued it was in the social structure of modern society.

## Previous Works on Sculpture at Vijayanagara

Taylor and Fergusson, the authors of *Architecture in Dharwar and Mysore* (1866), produced the first comprehensive study of the Vijayanagara monuments. Although they mentioned several monuments, we are unsure if they actually visited the location or just viewed some photos of it. In his second book, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Fergusson (1876) appeared to have been sufficiently affected to devote an entire chapter to it. Coomaraswamy (1927) in his work *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* briefly reviewed some of the important monuments like the Vitthala temple. Percy Brown (1942) made a concerted effort to place Vijayanagara architecture in a larger context in his book *Indian Architecture*. He claimed that although the sculptures were visually designed, they were made in an amateurish and rough manner. Benjamin Rowland, in his book titled *The Art and Architecture of India* (1953), covered the Vitthala temple in his work, but he didn't go into a lot of depth about it. In his work titled "Hoysala Influence on Vijayanagara Sculpture", which was published in 1973, Raman discusses the ways in which Vijayanagara Sculpture was affected by the iconographic schemes of their ancestors, the Hoysalas.

In the second part of the 1980s, researchers started conducting serious studies on the art and architecture of the Vijayanagara empire. For example, Huntington and Huntington (1985) devoted an entire chapter of their book *The Art of Ancient India* to the study of this subject. Harle (1986, as cited in Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998) in his book *The Art and Architecture of Indian Subcontinent* gives due credit to the artistic prowess of Vijayanagara craftsmen.

Saletore (1982) was the first scholar to devote his research to the study of Vijayanagara sculptures, and he personally visited the site multiple times. Saletore also published his findings in his book *Vijayanagara Art* (1982). In this work, he criticised Goetz's notion that the art of Vijayanagara was an adaption to the art of the Western Chalukyan art of Funeral Stellas. In addition to this, he demonstrated that art produced

in Vijayanagara was neither naive nor vulgar. George Michell (1995) in his work *Art and Architecture of Southern India: Vijayanagara and Successor States*, gives a balanced view of the art of Vijayanagara and, for the first time, also tries to make a connection between the continuity of Vijayanagara artistic traditions into the Nayaka art.

Anna Dallapiccola and Anila Verghese have written a book titled *Sculpture at Vijayanagara: Iconography and Style* (1998). In this book, the authors compile what other authors have said about the subject as well as their own contributions. This book is considered to be the most renowned work on the sculptural art of the Vijayanagara Empire. According to the findings of their investigation, the Sthapatis of the Vijayanagara dynasty did not consult any Shilpshastras, unlike the Sthapatis of earlier kingdoms, who referred to texts such as the Vishnudharmottar and the Matsya Purana, amongst others (Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998).

Lastly, K.M. Suresh (2011) in his book *Vijayanagara Sculpture at Hampi* thinks that the Vijayanagara art borrowed from the traditions of Western Chalukyas.

## Depiction of the Hoysala Legend

Before we touch upon the main theme of this paper, it is also important to address the iconographic schema of the Vijayanagara monuments. The Vijayanagara sculptural traditions are a departure from the previous sculptural traditions of the Deccan and India in general. One comes across the general religious themes of gods and goddesses of the Indian and Jain pantheon, along with religious epic narratives like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and the Krishnalila. But along with these depictions, there are also depictions of the everyday lives of the royalty and the local populace. There are depictions of festivities like the Mahanavami festival and the Vasantotsava festival. Along with these, there are sculptural themes, and as a part of these schemes, sculptures of hunting come to the fore.

There are many views on the sculptural traditions of Vijayanagara, but some scholars, like Raman (1973), are of the view that the Vijayanagara rulers adopted their sculptural art from the Hoysalas. This view of Raman has been a topic of great debate and scrutiny by modern scholars, as they say that the Hoysalas built in chloritic schist and the Vijayanagara rulers in granite. Also, it is said that the visual imagery of Vijayanagara is different from that of the Hoysalas. Bringing this debate and the topic of hunting back to the forefront, the author just wants to say that Raman's points of view can't be completely ignored because the legend of Sala killing a beast (Yali) is also a part of the Vijayanagara visual imagery. Let us have a look at the legend first.

In the early years of the 12th century CE, the Hoysala King Vishnivrdhana felt a need to trace his descent from an uncommon ancestor, from an honourable family. It is said that this led to the creation of the Sala legend. The legend centres around an interesting event where a hero named Sala defends a meditating sage from the attack of a wild beast (tiger/lion). This Sala was none other than the ancestor of King Vishnuvardhana. Since the sage shouted Hoy (attack) and Sala, which means ‘slay the beast’, the dynasty came to be known as Hoysalas. King Vishnuvardhana made a legend around it to legitimise his claim to the throne. Since then, from the time of Vishnuvardhana to the later kings, this legend has also started to be depicted in the Hoysala temples (Settar 1992).

As mentioned earlier, it is crucial to note that this legend, which is painted on Hoysala monuments, is also a component of Vijayanagara's visual iconography. For instance, in the Vitthal temple in Hampi, the lower half of a pillar just in front of the Garbhagriha features a representation of this legend inside the Antarala (Fig. 2). Another illustration may be seen in the Khetapai Narayana temple in Bhatkal, where a large wild cat, most likely a tiger, can be seen pounce on a warrior as he attempts to duck and attack with a blade similar to a dagger (Fig. 3). On the Prakara Wall at the base of the temple, facing the main shrine, is a representation of this figure. The entire base of the temple's Prakara Wall is decorative, with sculptures that are largely of a secular nature but also include a few Ramayana scenes. Depiction from Sringeri's Vidyashankar Temple provides another example (Fig. 4). The sculpture in question is located on the second Pattika on the Adhishthana of the temple, which is situated on a high platform or Jagati. There are three Pattikas stacked one above the other, with the top Pattika featuring images of Nath Yogis in both seated and unseated yogic poses, together with their corresponding mounts, from epics like the Kirata-Arjuniya Story. Elephants, peacocks, and this landscape are prominent animal motifs in the middle and bottom Pattikas. Figure 4 clearly depicts the warrior in an offensive posture, bent forward and prepared to stab the beast (lion most probably). Therefore, further investigation is undoubtedly necessary to determine whether Vijayanagara kings actually learned their sculpture from the Hoysalas, and Raman's (1973) opinions cannot be completely disregarded.

The Hoysala legend is also centred around the act of hunting. This puts hunting not only as a sport here but more like a survival skill, an act of courage, which the kings were supposed to display. Now we have seen hunting as a part of two myths and legends, and this certainly gives hunting a divine place in Indian history.

## Author's Understandings of the Vijayanagara Sculpture

By now, it is understood that the Vijayanagara sculptural schemes were a definite break from the sculptural schemes and traditions of the previous dynasties in the Deccan like the Hoysalas, Kaktiyas, Yadavas and Kalyana Chalukyas. Some scholars have gone on to say that Vijayanagara art was influenced by local folk traditions prevalent in the area, and hence one comes across a lot of sculptures that were either not present in previous dynasties or were present but in very restricted quantities, like hunting scenes, royal scenes, martial themes, festivities etc. It is safe to say that along with the religious and epic narratives on the monuments of Vijayanagara, one also comes across narratives that throw light on the royal and public life of contemporary Vijayanagara society.

In this section, an attempt is made by the author to simplify the various themes and sculptures that one comes across in the monuments of Vijayanagara. The section of themes will be followed by a small section on various types of motifs visible on Vijayanagara sculptures.

## Themes

Broadly speaking, Vijayanagara monuments display two types of themes, namely religious and secular. These themes can be further expanded and compartmentalised as shown below.



Fig. 2: Hoysala Legend, Vitthal Temple, Hampi



Fig. 3: Hoysala Legend, Khetapai Narayana Temple, Bhatkal



Fig. 4: Hoysala Legend, Vidyashankar Temple, Sringeri

## *Religious themes*

Religious themes are widespread throughout the monuments of India, be it of any religion or period, like Buddhist, Jain or Brahmanical. There is nothing enigmatic per se about the religious themes on the Vijayanagara monuments. These themes occur mostly on the walls and pillars of temples. Interestingly, on the Navrang Darwaza at Raichur Fort as well, one comes across a number of religious sculptures on the gateway. Now let us further compartmentalise the theme.

### *Divinities*

Throughout the temples and the Navrang Darwaza, one comes across images of gods. These gods belong to the Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Sakta and Jaina cults. There are images

found in different locations within temples, gateways and, interestingly, images of Shivalinga, Nandi and a few other divinities have been found on boulders at Vijayanagara (Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998).

*Epic Narratives*

These are depictions of stories from the various epics, legends and myths of India, like the narratives of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vishnu Purana, Shiv Purana, Bhagvata Purana and many more. These depictions are found mainly on temple walls and pillars and on the Navrang Darwaza (Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998).

*Ascetics*

Vijayanagara monuments are filled with independent sculptures of Shaiva and Vaishnava ascetics seated in yogic postures. There are multiple sculptures of these ascetics in complex un-seated yogic postures as well. These sculptures are only found on the temple walls and pillars (Powell 2018).

***Secular themes***

These are the enigmatic, so-called 'folk' sculptures that have alluded scholars for a long time. It is these sculptures that throw light on the contemporary lives of the royalty and local populace of Vijayanagara. These sculptures are very important to understand because they form the central features of this research as well. The following are the different types of secular themes.

*Narratives of Festivities*

These narratives comprise the sculptures depicting the Mahanavami and Vasantotsava festivals. They show sculptures of Portuguese and Persianate horse traders presenting their horses to the royalty, a procession of elephants, martial exercises like stick fighting, sword fighting, pugilistic and grappling scenes etc. In the depiction of the Vasantotsava festival, there are sculptures depicting women and men playing with water, Lord Kama and his consort Rati in the middle of the procession, and kolata dancers gracefully dancing. Depictions of these festive narratives are found either on the Prakara Walls of the Hazarama Temple or, interestingly, on a secular monument known as either Mahanavami Dibba or, as Dallapiccola calls it, 'the Great Platform' (Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998; Dallapicolla 2010).

*Hunting Themes*

There are numerous sculptures of royal figures and the local populace hunting deer, a beast closely resembling a lion or a boar. There are depictions of hunting all over Vijayanagara monuments, but the majority of them occur on the middle and upper stages of the Great Platform (Dallapiccola 2010).

*Martial Themes*

These sculptures occur as part of the Mahanavami Narrative but also independently on monuments. These include men with sticks, swords, bows and arrows and bare-handed combat. The majority of these sculptures can be found on the walls of Hazarama temple and the upper stages of the Great Platform, but they can also be found on the walls and pillars of other monuments throughout Vijayanagara (Dallapiccola et al. 1992; Dallapiccola 2010).

*Foreigners*

These depictions show foreigners at the royal Vijayanagara court. They were mostly Central Asian and Persian horse traders, dancers, jesters, mercenaries, or Portuguese horse traders, missionaries and soldiers. One needs to look carefully at the dress attire of these people to identify them, such as the Central Asian and Persian people who wore a conical cap called the Kullayi (Wagoner 1996). The Portuguese can be identified by their dress attire as well. These sculptures are found on the walls of Hazarama temple and the plinths of Vitthala temple, along with the upper stages of the Great Platform (Dallapiccola et al. 1992; Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998; Dallapiccola 2010).

*Entertainers*

These sculptures sort of overlap with the foreigners, but not all sculptures are of foreigners. There are sculptures of grapplers, acrobats, dancers, jesters and musicians all over the monuments of Vijayanagara. These sculptures mostly occur on the pillars of the various halls of the temples or on the pillars of smaller shrines (Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998).

*Animals*

Throughout the spread of Vijayanagara monuments in the city, sculptures of animals are most widespread. There are depicted either with or without humans. Animals that occur the most are horses, lions, elephants, boars, peacocks, fish, turtles, bull and deer (Dallapiccola et al. 1992; Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998; Dallapiccola 2010).

## Motifs

Motifs on Vijayanagara monuments comprise both religious and secular sculpture. The most commonly occurring motifs are pots, shankh, animals and flowers (Dallapiccola and Verghese 1998). There are also a lot of religious motifs like divinities, siddhas, ascetics, and scenes from epics like the Vali Sugriva fight or Hanuman meeting Rama and Lakshmana for the first time. But the majority of the motifs are of secular types, like motifs of entertainers like acrobats, grapplers, jesters, dancers and musicians, then motifs of royal figures making donations, yogic postures etc. It is also interesting to note that most of the motifs, be they secular or religious in nature, are displayed only on the pillars of monuments, be they large temple complexes or smaller shrines.

## Vijayanagara Sculpture Outside of Vijayanagara

Most of the scholars who have worked on the topic of Vijayanagara sculptures have predominantly studied the sculptural assemblage in the capital city of Vijaynagara, but few have ventured out to other locales within the erstwhile Vijayanagara realm. The author has looked at sculptures in places other than the capital as part of this research.

One needs to understand the political makeup of the Vijayanagara society to understand the sculptural traditions outside the capital. The Vijayanagara polity was run by the Nayankara System. In this system, the areas around the capital city were under the direct rule of the king, but areas that were far away from the capital were ruled by the military chiefs called Nayakas, who were either kings and chiefs of the provinces that ceded to the Vijayanagara Authority or they were relatives of the kings themselves who were sent to take charge of provinces. The temples and forts in the distant provinces were built under the patronage of these Nayakas. The kings had minimal or no involvement at all. The temples were dedicated to the chief deities of the Nayakas and not the kings per se (Karashima 2014).

Hence, to understand the sculptural traditions in these local temples, one also needs to understand the local customs, the lifestyle of the royalty in that area, practices, etc. However, the overall iconographic schemes remained synonymous with the themes of the capital. Therefore, one can deduce that maybe the chief architects and sculptors were the same people who travelled around the realm, or maybe there were some rules that all the Nayakas had to abide by while constructing a temple. But one can see a local flavour in the art and architecture of the temples in different areas. For example, along the Kanara Coast, in villages like Barkur and Bhatkal, even though the major iconographic themes remain the same, the architecture is very pro-coastal and is different from that in the capital (Branfoot and Dallapiccola 2005; Fritz and Michell 2015).

Another example is the Vidyashankar temple at Sringeri. Its architecture is completely different from the usual Vijayanagara architecture, and in the sculptural assemblage, one comes across several Shaiva ascetics in different yogic postures. It is common knowledge that Sringeri was the seat, and still is, of the Shaivite pontiff who was revered by the Vijayanagara Kings (Fritz and Michell 2015; Powell 2018).

## Sculptures of Hunting on Vijayanagara Monuments

Keeping the preceding discussion in mind, it is possible to observe how the portrayals of hunting on the sculptures that are found on Vijayanagara monuments fit into the larger schema of iconographic depictions. On all of the monuments built by and under the previous and contemporary dynasties, it is possible to see that the scenes of hunting depicted in plastic art and painting are specific to the hunting done by royalty. This is because the animals that are depicted in these scenes are typically larger and more fierce, symbolising the masculinity and physical prowess of the king or the prince. The depiction of hunting practices on the monuments of the Hoysalas or Kakatiyas or in the miniature paintings of the Mughals is more centred around creating legitimate lineages or legitimate entitlements to the throne or creating personality cults which could be

shared in the form of fine arts, performing arts, and bardic tales. When one considers that Jahangir issued coins with his father Akbar and the latter's portrait despite the fact that doing so was seen as a blasphemous conduct in their religion, there is no room for doubt.

Nevertheless, in Vijayanagara sculptural art, hunting scenes are depicted with the purpose of demonstrating the customs, pastimes, and even vocations of the local populace of the concerned regions. There are scenes of men and women hunting big games like lions and elephants as well as scenes of men and women hunting normal-sized games like fowl, deer and boar. Because of the structure and the dress worn by the hunters, it is clear that they are neither regal processions nor hunts. According to Wagoner (1996), the aristocracy of the Vijayanagara Empire wore a type of Persianate clothing called Kullayi and Kabayi. However, the majority of the hunters represented in the Vijayanagara Empire are not wearing this type of clothing. Male hunters are typically seen donning the traditional dhoti and turban of the region, while female hunters are typically seen wearing sarees that are wrapped tightly around them (Eaton and Wagoner 2014).

Overall, one might see two different hunting strategies depicted in the sculptures that have been analysed.

### *Shikar-i-ahu-ba-ahu*

One can observe hunters using trained herds of deer/antelopes in this kind of tactic to take down other deer/antelope and, in some circumstances, even elephants and other large wild creatures. Here are a few examples:

- Multiple hunters can be seen shooting at gazelles with bows and arrows in the hunting scene depicted on the Great Platform at Hampi. It can be challenging to tell which gazelle is being hunted and which is the trained gazelle. But it is evident that two hunters are bringing away a dead gazelle that has been bound by its legs to a wood (see Fig. 5).
- Three hunters can be seen in another scene that is also depicted on the Great Platform at Hampi. Two hunters are using bows and arrows to kill the gazelles, and a third is jabbing the pouncer in the mouth (see Fig. 6).
- The hunter on the right is holding an animal on a leash, most likely a dog, that is also pursuing the fleeing gazelles in a portrayal that follows the two figures above it on the Great Platform at Hampi (see Fig. 7).
- Fig. 8 is again a continuation of the above figures on the Great Platform at Hampi.
- Fig. 9 is an isolated scene that can be seen on the Great Platform as well. The bottom half of the hunter's body is being torn apart by an elephant using its trunk and feet, while two hunters are seen pinning it from behind with spears, one hunter is injured and managing to avoid being trampled, and a fourth hunter is lending a helping hand.
- Figs. 10 and 11 are examples of two hunting scenes from the Vitthal Temple in Hampi.



Fig. 5: Hunting scene at The Great Platform, Hampi



Fig. 6: Another example of a hunting scene at The Great Platform, Hampi



Fig. 7: Another example of a hunting scene at The Great Platform, Hampi



Fig. 8: Another example of a hunting scene at The Great Platform, Hampi



Fig. 9: Another hunting scene at The Great Platform, Hampi

### *Qamargah*

Vijayanagara sculptures contain a few hunting scenes that can be interpreted as using the *Qamargah* hunting method. A few instances of the same are given below:

- In Fig. 12, a woman is depicted at Hampi's Ramachandra Temple stalking a deer.
- In Fig. 13, a woman is depicted at Hampi's Ramachandra Temple stalking a boar.
- In Fig. 14, a royal hunting party hunting a tiger(?) is depicted at the Great Platform in Hampi. On the Great Platform, there is a very detailed representation of a mahout riding an elephant and fending off what appears to be a tiger's attack, as well as a royal figure dashing along on a horse and stabbing the animal in the rear with a long spear. One may also make out the regal figure's retinue or entourage helping with the search.
- On horseback, a hunter is depicted in Fig. 15 stalking a tiger at the Great Platform in Hampi. This image shows a warrior or hunter mounted on a horse slashing a tiger or other predator in the jaw.
- A hunter is shown repelling an elephant that is moving in his direction in Fig. 16. This representation can be seen at Hampi's Great Platform.
- Fig. 17 depicts a hunter/soldier using a short sword to stab an elephant from behind on the middle Pattika of the Adishthana of the Vidyashankar Temple, Sringeri.
- At the Khetapai Narayana Temple in Bhatkal, a hunting scene is shown on the base of the Prakara Wall (see Fig. 18). The elephant on the left is holding the third hunter through the waist with his trunk while waving it in the air, while two hunters can be seen fighting two different elephants with long spears.
- A wild hog or pig is being attacked by two hunters in Fig. 19. One of the hunters is shooting an arrow at the animal while the other is mounting it, applying pressure with one hand while grasping the animal's tusk, and stabbing it with a dagger with the other. This depiction is present at the Khetapai Narayana Temple in Bhatkal.
- On a pillar in what appears to have been the Anatarala of the Gourishwar temple in Yalanduru, Fig. 20 can be observed. Only the Mukhmadapa and Gud Mandapa of the concerned temple remain in a reasonably apparent condition; the rest of the structure, including the Prakara Walls, Gopuram, and walls of the Antarala and Garbhagriha, has completely disappeared. Here, an elephant is being attacked by a hunter or soldier with an object that is obscured by the sculpture's damage.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the practice and tradition of hunting is an age-old one, and there can be seen a constant and unhindered continuity in it. Ebba Koch's (1998) study does help to explain how this practice had taken shape in Medieval North India under the Mughals, and her methodology and model can be used to a certain extent in the Medieval Deccan under the Vijayanagara rule as well, however, with minor variations.

After applying Koch's methodology to Vijayanagara sculptures, it can be deduced that the two main styles or techniques of hunting existed in the Deccan as well.



Fig. 10: Hunting scene at Vitthal Temple, Hampi



Fig. 11: Another hunting scene at Vitthal Temple, Hampi



Fig. 12: Woman hunting a deer, Ramachandra Temple, Hampi



Fig. 13: Woman hunting a boar, Ramachandra Temple, Hampi



Fig. 14: A royal hunting entourage of the royal figure hunting a tiger/predator, The Great Platform, Hampi



Fig. 15: Hunter hunting a tiger (?) on horseback, The Great Platform, Hampi



Fig. 16: Hunter fending off an elephant, The Great Platform



Fig. 17: Hunter attacking an elephant, Vidyashankar Temple, Sringeri



Fig. 18: Hunting scene, Vidyashankar Temple, Sringeri



Fig. 19: Hunting scene, Khetapai Narayana Temple, Bhatkal



Fig. 20: Hunter hunting an elephant, Gourishwar Temple, Yalanduru

However, in the Vijayanagara domains, *Qamargah* was more associated with the royal way of life, where the king was the centre of attraction. It can be seen in the sculptural assemblage and in the myth of how the present-day city of Hampi was founded. The *Shikar-i-ahu-ba-ahu,* on the other hand, seems to be widely used by the local populace of the Empire. The technique was being adopted and mastered well by the locals. The fact that hunting is often shown in sculptures on Vijayanagara monuments suggests that hunting may have been a major occupation and a way for ordinary people to make a living in the Empire.

Koch (1998) stated that hunting was symbolised as the quality of martial and physical prowess of the royalty, and during peacetime it was considered to keep the survival instincts of the king and army on point. Another meaning that Koch has explained well and could be adapted to the Vijayanagara hunting practices as well, is the king's action of claiming his territory and announcing to the local inhabitants and feudatories of the region that the final right to rule on the territory belongs to the king only. By analysing the sculptures and seeing the types of animals being hunted in them, it is safe to deduce that animals that symbolised power and royalty were hunted only by the royalty. This indicates the symbolism behind the royalty's entitlement to the throne and being treated as the ultimate warrior of the kingdom. On the other hand, the laypeople hunted only small games, which again put stress on the social stratification of the Vijayanagara society and the class-based division of the population.

Another interesting observation is the multiplicity of depictions of women hunters in the sculptures. In another study, the author has documented and analysed the gender

dynamics through unarmed martial arts (Dhebar 2020). This study showed that women did martial arts back in Vijayanagara times. Likewise, it seems that they did hunting too, indicating that though there were social hierarchies and stratifications in the Vijayanagara society, there seems to have been some sense of gender balance and equity in the society as well. From the sculptures, it can also be seen that hunting was a well-organised and a well-strategised activity in which the Vijayanagara hunters seemed to have excelled.

Lastly, a final comment needs to be made on the weapons used for hunting by royalty as well as common people. In the Freer Gallery painting, Dara Shikhoh is seen using a matchlock, which indicates the wider use of gunpowder and ballistic technology in Medieval India. Eaton and Wagoner (2014) are of the opinion that the Vijayanagara Empire lost to the Deccan Sultanates in the Battle of Talikota not because they were outmanned or outnumbered. But primarily because the gunpowder technology that had been made available in India by the Mamluks and the Portuguese was not well adapted by the Vijayanagara army as compared to their counterparts, who were known to have made a number of modifications in their defensive and offensive warfare. Looking at the hunting scenes on the sculptures of the Vijayanagara Empire, the claims of Eaton and Wagoner make a lot of sense, as the hunters, despite having access to modern gunpowder technology, still chose to use decadent hunting methods.

In the previous study conducted by the author on the sculptures of un-armed combat arts on the Vijayanagara monuments (Dhebar 2020), the author claimed that the Vijayanagara society was a martial society, and now after analysing the hunting sculptures, the evidence complements the previous claims by the author regarding the martial nature of the Vijayanagara society.

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