



## Journal of History, Art and Archaeology

Vol. 3, No. 2, 2023, pp. 119-125  
© ARF India. All Right Reserved

URL: [www.arfjournals.com](http://www.arfjournals.com)  
<https://doi.org/10.47509/JHAA.2023.v03i02.02>

# THE RIDDLE OF HOYSALA ARTIST BAICHOJA OF NANDI

**RAGHAVENDRARAO KULKARNI**

Professor & Head, Department of Art History, College of Fine Arts,  
Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Dr. Vishnuvardhana Road, Bengaluru.  
E-mail: [rhkulkarniarthistory@gmail.com](mailto:rhkulkarniarthistory@gmail.com) & [kulkarnichalukya@gmail.com](mailto:kulkarnichalukya@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *The Hoysala Dynasty in southern part of Karnataka was an important ruling family that reigned from the eleventh century to almost the first quarter of the fourteenth century CE. Hoysala kings were great patrons of art and architecture. They not only built beautiful temples but were also great patrons of artists. The Hoysala temples have been decorated with highly intricate and decorative sculpture depicting the exuberance of carving skills. Artists were invited from across the state to adorn these magnificent temples. Artists from Balligave, Gadag and regional artists were invited for carving sculptures. Well-known artists like Dasoja, Honnoja, Malloja, Maniyoja deserve mention. The artists who have been discussed in the present essay is Baichoja, and Mallitamma. These are the two artists whose names appear in the temples datable from late twelfth century CE to mid-thirteenth century CE. The present paper examines interesting aspects of the artist Baichoja with reference to his sculptures.*

**Keywords:** *Baichoja, Mallitamma, Singoja, Nagalapura, Nuggihalli, Amrutapura, Kedareshwara, Tumkur, Nandi, Doddaballapur.*

**Received :** 26 July 2023

**Revised :** 04 September 2023

**Accepted :** 18 September 2023

**Published :** 30 December 2023

### **TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Kulkarni, R. (2023). The Riddle of Hoysala Artist Baichoja of Nandi. *Journal of History, Art and Archaeology*, 3: 2, pp. 119-125. <https://doi.org/10.47509/JHAA.2023.v03i02.02>

Hoysala artist Baichoja was one of the important artists who lived and worked from 1240-1250 CE. Baichoja was a contemporary of the prominent artist Mallitamma, whose journey as a major artist in the Hoysala period is well known (Kulkarni: 2021: 6). Baichoja as a young fellow

artist of Mallitamma, worked along with him on Lakshmi Narasimha temple Nuggihalli (Hassan Dist) dated 1246 CE (MAR:1936: 20-30) (Fig. 2.1). Baichoja also figures on Kedareshwara Temple Nagalapura datable to circa 1250 CE in Tumkur District (Kelleson: 1990: 165-67). After

this temple, Baichoja's name was never found in any other temple works belonging to the Hoysala period.

Baichoja belonged to a family of artists. His father Singoja, was also an artist. Baichoja refers to himself as a son of Singoja in an engraving on Kedareshwara Temple at Nagalapura (MAR: 1916: 5) (Fig.2.2). There are only five references to Singoja and his work. He does not appear to have been a very popular artist, but was responsible for carving Hero Stones and worked on some minor temples. In his entire career he never got an opportunity to work on any major temples like his son Baichoja. Singoja appears to have belonged to the village of Nandi near Doddaballapur. Nandi was an important centre of art activities since the period of the Ganga dynasty and there are two magnificent temples built in tenth century CE. Nandi in Doddaballapur Taluk near Bangalore was centre of artistic activities since the Ganga period and also continued in succeeding period. Hence, there are no evidences to say, whether Singoja father of Baichoja belonged to this Nandi or somewhere else. Based on the location, and importance of the place, it is probable that the village of Nandi in Doddaballapur might have been the place from which Singoja and Baichoja hailed.

Baichoja's major sculptural work can be seen at Lakshmi Narasimha Temple Nuggahalli. His elderly contemporary Mallitamma had also worked on this temple. Interestingly the temple is divided into two parts. The sculptures in the southern part were carved by Mallitamma while those in the northern part were executed by Baichoja of Nandi (Fig.2.3). There are also common subjects delineated by both. The names of the artist Baichoja is however restricted to the southern part of the temple while that of Mallitamma is on the northern side. All major works have signatures of the artists. It is also surprising to note the division and allocation of separate space to both the artists. This however indicates their ability to carve the sculptures with the same expertise. It also strongly confirms the superiority of the sculptural knowledge on themes such as iconography and style of the individual

artists. The division of temple space for carving sculpture further raises the question on whether there was a kind of competition among these two artists. Interestingly, the thematic depiction of sculptures are more or less same except in a few instances.

Baichoja had carved Aadimurti, Ugra Narasimha, Vamana Trivikrama, Govardhana Krishna, Venugopala, Kama-Rati, Brahma, Nartna Ganesha, Bhairava, Bhairavi, Yaksha-Mantrika (magician) Naga Kanya, Yoga Narasimha, and a few forms of Vishnu's twenty-four manifestations. Baichoja's carving stops at the rear central niche of the temple (*Koshtalaya*). The entire sculptures upon the southern wall are attributed to Baichoja as his signature is found on a few sculptures. He is referred to as *Roovari Nandiya Baichoja*, meaning Artist Baichoja of Nandi. The most astonishing part of his signatures are the eulogies or epithets that are found along with his name.

The inscription carved on the image of Govardhana Krishna reads as: *Haribirida roovari, girivajra ganda, viridaprasadi mastakashula ruvari Nandiya Baichoja maadida ruvara sri,sri,(thuder bolt to the mountains, the titles hostile sculptor, made this sculpture ..)*. References to his epithets are found in the Mysore Archaeological Report (MAR:1933:25) (Fig.2.4). This small line provides a scope to postulate that Baichoja was an important sculptor by the time this assignment was being executed. In another sculpture he records on the pedestal of Paravasudeva sculpture '*Sri Adimurtiyanau Nandiya Baichoja Madida Kandira.*' (Fig.2.5) meaning the sculpture of Adimurti Vishnu who is seated on coiled serpent was carved by Baichoja of Nandi. The MAR author identifies the Paravasudeva/Adimurti Sculpture of Vishnu as Amara Narayana. However the artist himself has mentioned as Adimurti (MAR:1933:24). Similarly, on the pedestal of the Trivikrama sculpture and that of Ugra Narasimha it is mentioned that these art works were done by Baichoja of Nandi. Over all, there are more than two dozen important sculptures on north side wall of the temple, done by Baichoja.

A careful examination of the sculptures of both the artists at Nuggihalli Lakshmi Narasimha temple demonstrates an individual style of approach with respect to carving and delineation. For example, sculpture depicting Venugopala has been carved by both the artists. Mallitamma's signature as Mallitam is seen on the lower strip of the pedestal of the sculpture while Baichoja's image does not have a signature as it is within the signed sculptures like Krishna Govardhana, Trivikrama etc.

Mallitamma's Venugopala image (Fig. 2.6) has rhythmic *dvibhanga* standing posture, composed within the space. The upper portion has an arch like tree and on either side there are *gopalakas* (cowherds) and cows. The *gopalakas* stand in mesmerizing posture as he is enjoying the melodious tune of flute. Krishna here has been decorated with rich jewellery and tall *kirita*. Krishna here is not an ordinary Gopala, but a divinity.

Baichoja's Venugopala Krishna (Fig.2.7) is a young Gopala type of figure. He uses certain elements like Mallitamma. But an interesting aspect is that Krishna has no such grand appearance as seen in Mallitamma's Venugopala. Here, cows and Gopala are compactly carved while Krishna is standing in *dvibhanga* and playing the flute underneath the tree, which is only suggestive here. Krishna has jewellery but not as rich as in the Mallitamma sculpture. Baichoja has visualised Krishna as a young boy of Vrindavana like any other common boy, yet his sculpture is filled with bliss and joy of being a Gopala. Krishna wears a head band instead of *kirita*, and has neatly combed hair bun resting on his left shoulder. Baichoja created a scene where cows, cheetah, and people of sculptures Vrindavana happily live together and enjoying the melodious divine music of his flute. Baichoja has a strong knowledge of iconography. He has carved attributes of Vishnu like *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada* and *padma* on the uppermost strata of the space, associating Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu. Another significant aspect is the depiction of Hanuman and Garuda on the pedestal space

of the sculpture. Appearance of Hanuman along with Garuda, which is the natural vehicle of Vishnu, appears for the first time in the sculptures of Baichoja. Though Hanuman has already been depicted as a part of the *Ramayana* and other narrative, appearing of the monkey devotee on a sculpture pedestal is a new feature. Appearance of Hanuman in a Krishna sculpture along with Garuda may have different religious appellation. In Madhava philosophy and beliefs Hanuman is the main spiritual identity. He is depicted as the ardent devotee of lord Vishnu-Rama-Krishna. In all probability, it is possible that the introduction of Hanuman with Garuda on prominent sculptures hint at an undercurrent of influence of this school of thought. It may even be an indication of Sri Vaishnava influence.

The sculptures carved by Baichoja are quite different in stylistic features when compared with the sculptures carved by artist Mallitamma. Mallitamma's sculptural style was already developed as a matured style and he registered his signature since 1196 CE. Mallitamma already had a vast experience of over fifty years by the time he worked on Nuggihalli temple. He might have been around seventy years (calculated based on his work). Whereas, Baichoja was still a young person, but strong enough to admit his style as superior as figured in his own words mentioned above. The sculptures carved by Baichoja have graceful appearance, very strong in the delineation of the composition and other retinue figures within the composition. For example, in the sculpture of Adimurti Vishnu, Baichoja continues the tradition of seated figure of Vishnu on seven hooded serpents as seen in seated Vishnu on five hooded serpent at Badami cave-III. The tradition was followed by the Hoysala artists in the present form. The relaxed seated posture of Vishnu on coiled serpent undoubtedly exhibits a unique feature. Vishnu's relaxed posture not only attests to the artist's liberty but also his creativity. In the sculpture of Govardhanadhari Krishna, Baichoja has arranged figures in an attractive way. Krishna as the protagonist figure

is carved in the centre. Krishna is depicted as a youth standing in *dvibhanga* posture, holding the mount Govardhana in his right palm, while the left hand is idle and resting on his side. The mount Govardhana unlike the realistic hilly form as seen in Badami Chalukya (Badami Upper Sivalaya) or Pallava Cave at Mahabalipuram, here is rendered in the form of foliage of trees spread on either side in an arched canopy-like form. The artist has created this artistic mountain with wild animals and flora. On either side of Krishna, the *Gopikas*, *Gopalakas*, cows and other figures are placed. These figures create the whole narrative of Govardhana episode and Krishna as protector and people taking shelter under the mountain. Visualizing the whole event and executing it on a limited space became a part of the master skill of Hoysala artists. Adjustment of figures within space was well understood and organised.

Looking at the sculptures carved by Mallitamma on this temple, they appear somewhat slightly inferior in style to that of Baichoja. Mallitamma was already a highly applauded artist. When Baichoja claimed the title, as gleaned from

the inscriptions in the same temple, Mallitamma was completely silent. There are no equal epithets or titles mentioned in the inscription on this temple or elsewhere about Mallitamma. Whether Mallitamma considered himself to be inferior to Baichoja is not known. Or he might have left it as it is as he had already attained the height of fame and name. He had done major projects which were completed and new projects like Somanathapura temple might have been in the line.

Baichoja's sophisticated, vibrant style and art practice was a noteworthy feature. Surprisingly his name figures only in Kedareshwara temple at Nagalapura near Turuveker (Kelleson: 1990). The Nagalapura temple is slightly later in date, while the sculptures are unfinished. Certain questions arise from this event, whether any kind of rivalry existed among the artists in those times. If so, why did Baichoja not get good commissioned works like Mallitamma. Baichoja appeared on Hoysala artistic platform, like flash and disappeared suddenly within a very short period. The artist, whose style, definitely, in all aspects was superior to Mallitamma, ended abruptly like a sinking star.

## Illustrations



Fig. 2.1: Lakshmi Narasimha Temple, Nuggihalli





Fig. 2.2: Chennakeshava Temple Nagalapur

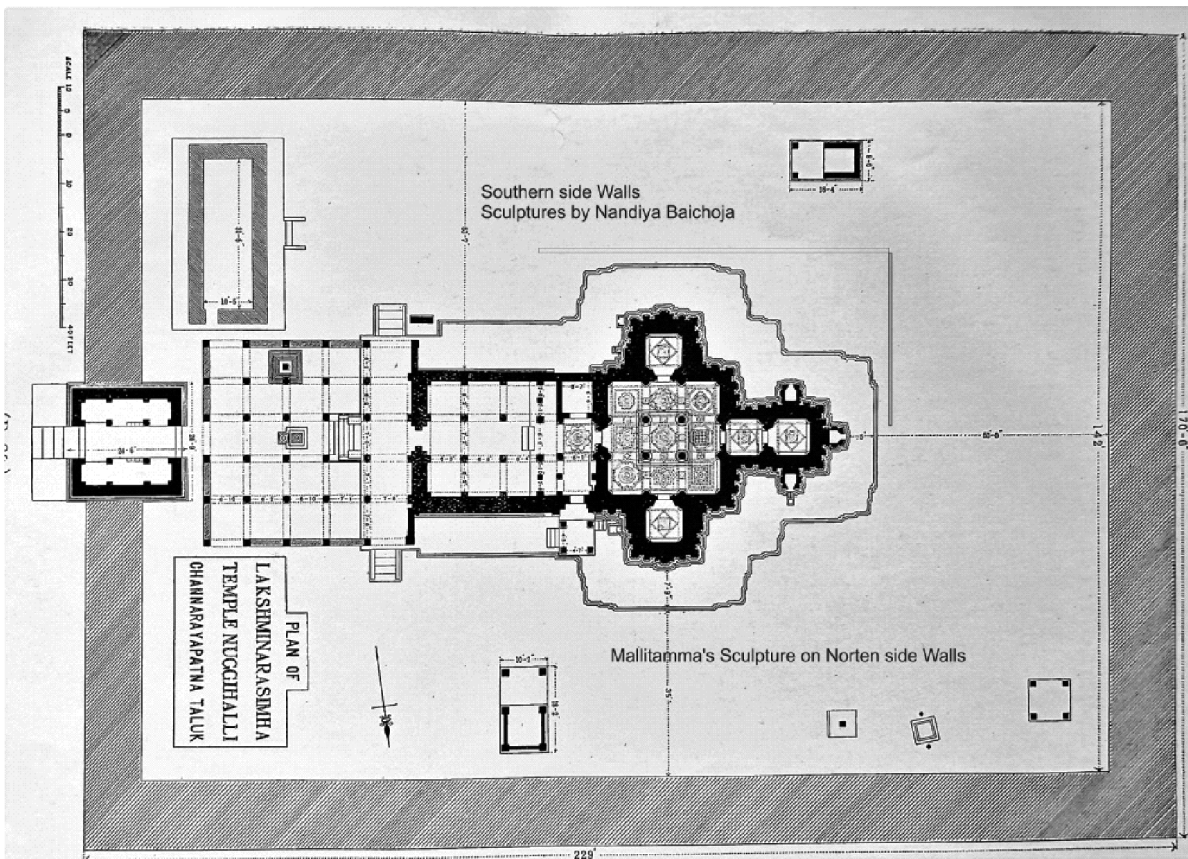


Fig. 2.3: Ground Plan of Lakshmi Narasimha Temple Nuggihalli. (Courtesy MAR-1933)



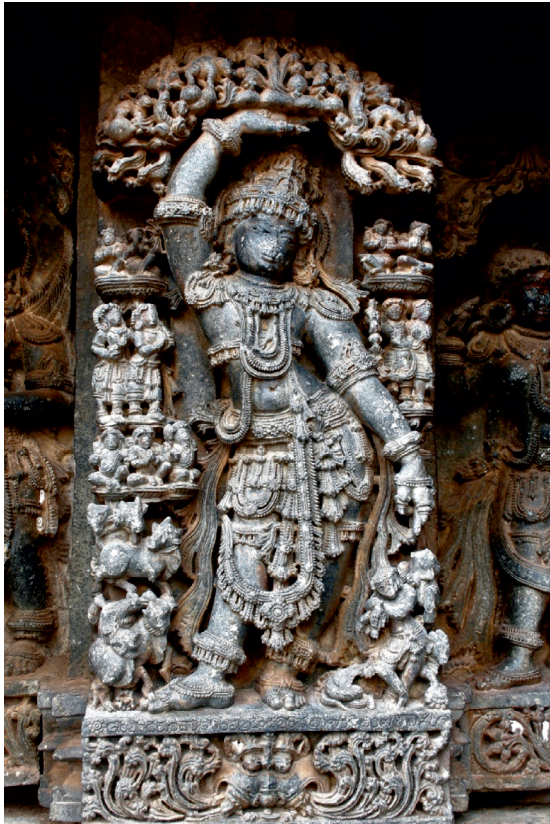


Fig. 2.4: Krishna Govardhana

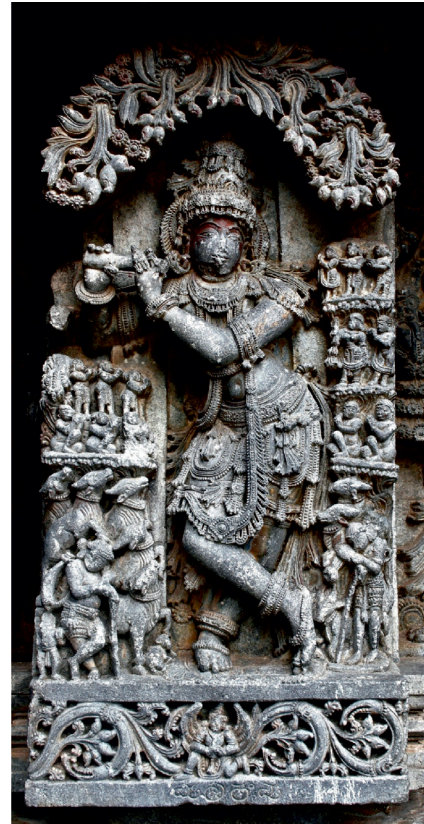


Fig. 2.6: Venugopala-by Mallitamma



Fig. 2.5: Adimurti



Fig. 2.7: Venugopala by Baichoja

## **Bibliography**

- Colleyer Kelleison (1990) *The Hoysala Artists-Their Identity and Style*, DAM Mysore.
- Epigraphia Carnatica: XI, Cn.278,279,280,281 where Baichoja's name has been recorded as a part of inscriptions.
- Kulkarni R H (2021) The New Indian Express.
- Mysore Archaeological Report. MAR 1916.
- Mysore Archaeological report for the year 1933 ( MAR 1933) (1936).