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The Mean features of the Cave Temples of Badami

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Introduction:

The early chalukya caves are found at Badami and Aihole. So far nine rock-cut caves have been discovered; four at Badami and five at Aihole. Among the caves at Badami, two are Vaishnava, one Saiva and one Jaina; while at Aihole, two are Saiva, one Jaina, one Buddhist and the fifth was probably Jaina. Only Cave III at Badami is dated. It was excavated by Mangalesa in 578 A.D. The caves though cannot be considered as the earliest Hindu caves in view of the caves in the Goa territory, are nevertheless, not inspired by the latter caves. The Chalukyas followed the well established rock-cut architectural traditions of western India.

I. The caves at Badami Possess the following features :

1) Open court yard :

All the caves have an open courtyard which varies in size from cave to cave. It is sufficiently large in front of cave III, while that of Cave IV is negligible.

2) The caves contain a sanctum :

A pillared hall and a verandah. The sanctum is sunk into the back wall of the pillared hall. It is sunk at a higher level. A flight of steps leads to the sanctum. All the caves are the Nirandhara type i.e. does not possess a pradakshinapatha or a circumambulatory passage.

3) Adhishthana :

The caves have a high adhishthana or basement of four to five feet in height. The basement is noted for the deep gala or neck moulding. This moulding is filled with a frieze of ganas. The figures are boldly carved. In Cave III the ganas are sculptured within compartments. Such ganas are absent in Cave IV.

4) Verandah :

The verandah and the pillared hall are separated by a row of pillars. The back portion of the verandah on the extreme ends has a blind bay. Consequently the back row has two pillars less than that of the front row. In Cave III these are reduced to four pillars while in the other caves there are only two pillars separating the verandah from the pillared hall.

The pillars of the Verandah and the hall are so located that the middle two pillars of all the rows have wider space between them the middle and the side pillars. This practice the middle pillars set at wider distance is more or less a well established tradition also found in the structural temples of the time.

5) Sculpture of verandah :

The side walls of the verandah and the blind bays are filled with sculptures. These sculptures are massive and monumental in size and show certain outstanding features like full modelling, broad shoulders and heavy crowns. The sculptures of brimming with cosmic. The sculptures include Harihara, Ardhanarisvara, Trivikarma, Varasha, Vishnu seated on Ananta and Narasimha. Speaking of a Varaha sculpture in one of the caves at Badami, H. Zimmer writes, "In the relief there is great animal vitality in the lively movement of the body, a swing

and ease that communicate a sense of playfulness of the god in the performance of his comic deed... the scene has been fully composed, with a playful yet grandiose filling in of the space and a sturdiness of the figure that transcends all suggestion of mere bulk.”

The Jaina caves at Badami and Aihole contain the sculptures of Gommata and Parsvanatha. These figures represent the earliest known sculptures of Gommata and Parsvantha in Karnataka. Gommata was one of the most popular Jaina deities in South India.

6) Pillars :-

There are three types of pillars, all are massive in size. The first type is basically square. They are decorated with a designed medallion and a horizontal band. The band is relieved with kirtimukhas or lion masks. The lion's mouth issues forth pearl and bead chains or swags. The upper part of the shaft has narrow octagonal part that separates the square sections of the pillar. Pillars of square variety can be seen in all the caves. The second type of pillars are either indented or fluted and these pillars are basically round or square. The upper part of the shaft is crowned by a heavy indented square or ribbed circular cushion lid. On top of the lid is the bracket. Such pillars are found in Cave III. The third variety of pillars is a combination of square and fluted shaft. Cave II has pillars of this variety which are square in the lower half of the shaft while the upper half is fluted.

7) Bracket Figures :-

A remarkable feature of the pillars in Cave III and IV are the bracket figures. These are found above the front row pillars of the verandah in Cave III and IV. In cave IV these bracket figures represent vyalay or mythical animals. The bracket figures in Cave III depict Siva and Parvati, Rati and Manmatha, Ardhanarisvara and divine couples in amorous postures. The idea of bracket figures gained greater popularity under the later Chalukyas and particularly under the Hoysalas at Belur, Halebid and Kikkeri. The idea of bracket figures is an important contribution of the early Chalukyas to the enrichment of Karnataka art.

8) The beams :

The beams in the verandahs of Caves I, II and III contain narrative sculptures. The themes include the marriage of Siva and Parvati, the Churning of the Ocean (Amritaman-thana) and scenes depicting incidents in the life of Krishna. These reliefs are significant because they constitute the earliest examples of narrative reliefs in Karnataka.

9) The ceiling :

The ceiling is decorated with the reliefs of Dikpalakas, Vishnu as Karivarada, Nagaraja, Gandharvas, Brahma, Kartijeya and the wheel of fishes. In Cave II the central ceiling of the verandah has Vishnu in the centre, surrounded by Dikpalakas. Among the Dikpalakas is Brahma. Through this is not the standard set of Dikpalakas of the Hindu pantheon, its importance cannot be minimised for this is the earliest set of Dikpalakas known in South India.

10) Painted Panels :

Cave III had a few painted panels. Traces of painted panels on the vaulted roof of the porch are visible. These panels depict divine and human scenes. In one of the panels there is a palace with a god seated in the centre. He is absorbed in enjoying dance and music. He is surrounded by female chauri bearers. Among the musicians the flute player and the drummer can be noticed. This scene is identified as representing Indra in his palace. Vijayatanta, witnessing the dance of Bharata or Tanduvu. A second panel shows a king and queen in an inner apartment of the palace. The king may be identified as Kirtivarman I. Another panel represents Gandharva couples in a flying posture. These painted panels are among the earliest paintings associated with Brahman cave in South India.

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Figures of Cave Temples



Nataraj Cave –I, Badami



Fillers of Cave-III, Badami



Brocket Figure, Badami



Painting of Cave-III, Badami