ICONOGRAPHY- DECODING THE MEANING BEHIND IMAGES THAT ARE USED AS DECORATIVE ELEMENTS IN VERNACULAR HOUSES OF SOUTH CANARA

SUPRIYA. K

Manipal Academy of higher education, Karnataka India
Email: k.supriya@manipal.edu

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to review the assorted sorts of icons utilized in the region of South Canara, former division of Karnataka, India for various elements in vernacular homes and what created some icons become so well-liked. South Canara has been dominated by completely different dynasties thus one gets to envision wide range of its influence in terms of architecture. The historical buildings of South Canara include Jain basadi, temples and palaces of local landlords. Both of them has different kind of icons carved in stone and wood. The icons used for homes are partially influenced by belief system of society and partially by their way of life. Icons help us perceive culture and beliefs of the folks as they continually try and depict some meaning and is much more than ornamentation. South Canara being an active trade center was financially wealthy thus the crafts of various kinds were well supported and extensively employed in residences of aristocratic houses. One can bump into numerous decorative carvings in these houses while the exterior and the doors are worked with great intricacy.

Index terms: Icons, Belief systems, Hidden meaning, Ornamentation.

I. INTRODUCTION

cons and symbols have been a part of temple architecture in India since Gupta period (300CE approximately).They are used to depict and portray the mythological stories for common folks. The artistic icons were inculcated in temple architecture as it was a powerful tool to enable: easy propogation of religious ideas, belief and aesthetics helped and feel served to exhibit abundance of the kingdom. To add value to Temples and palaces which were the fundamental design highlights of any region icons were carved. Iconography has criss crossed the vast country and formed a bond between its etymologically and ethnically assorted people groups. Motifs has enriched our visual environment, aesthetic experience, comfort and convenience.

There are three kinds of images chitra , chitrardha and chitrabhasa. Chitra denotes images in the round with all their limbs completely worked out and shown. Chitrardha is the name given to figures in half relief and chitrbhasa refers to images painted on walls.(Rao)

II. PROLOGUE TO SOUTH CANARA HOUSES AND ITS CRAFTS

to excess-1 code converters (BEC) to improve the South Canara is the southern part of Karnataka, where the administration was done by

local landlords called *Bunts* and *Guttus* until the rule of British. Henceforth their homes and royal residences show an assortment symbol utilized as a part of the locale. Wooden crafts had well flourished in the region, with wood carving and turning the local artisans embellished the house profusely in order to match to their status. By social order the houses of the Bunts are called *aramane* (palace) or *chawadi* and *guttu* houses were called *guttu mane*, and the houses that are existing presently are around 200 to 500 year old.. In administration their fundamental part was to collect revenue from the region assigned to them and hand it to their heads, and to give equity if there should arise an occurrence of issues between villagers to maintain peace and prosperity of their jurisdiction. Chavadis(bunt houses) are more rich in terms of ornamentation than Guttu houses. Principle materials used for the construction are mud mortar for walls and timber for columns and roof, covered by clay tiles. The houses are divided into public and semi public and private areas. Generally the public gather in outermost verandah(chawadi) of the house where they meet the head of the family. And the public interaction is mainly restricted to this area. Thus the ornamentation is by and large

observed in chawadi than in different parts of the house. The fundamental components on which symbols are seen are on the lintel of primary passage entry ways, columns, column capitals, ceilings, furniture and doors of pooja room. The material used for these elements is *hebbalasu* (jack wood). Since it is a soft wood, which makes carving easy and doesn't chip off after some time and durable.

"subject matter of carving may express the myths and symbols from religious beliefs and culture of the community, especially in case of religious architecture. Finishes help enrich the utilitarian appearance of building to an aesthetically and spiritually fulfilling experience while also protecting the building"(patel)

Icons on lintel:

Sculptures and images of gods were seen commonly on door icons as an indication of sanctity and

believed that they shield the house from evil forces. The height of the doors are generally low, so that one bend the head to the god and respect the premises before entering. Along with the image of god, leaves flowers and mystical animals are carved to create a beautiful border for door.



Figure 1: Entrance of sooralu Aramane

Icons on columns:

There are approximately 400 such houses in the region, all the columns are of varied designs.One will acknowledge the style however design is exclusive to each house. Columns are the main structural members chawadi, hence they have broad cross sections. Craftsman takes the advantage of this to carve and add grandeur to the space. Again the ornamentation varies with order of space, the space used by *Yajamana* the head of family has intricate columns than that of the columns in lower levels. They embody the images of snakes, parrots, flowers which have great importance in their belief.





Figure 2: Columns with Figure 3: Nagastambha (Snake parrot pillar)

Shirvanudi bettu

Parrot could be a symbol of love. The bird is additionally extremely popular for its symbolic and ornamental content. In this region animals and birds are believed to be one among the bhootas (diety which is reborn from death) Parrot is also one amongst the bhoota that they worship to.

The area is believed to be reclaimed by Parashurama(a character from Indian mytholgical story of ramayana) from sea. Since the sand was sterilise and cultivation was not possible, he prayed to snake god to make it fertile, thereafter it is considered to be land of snake gods. And snakes are worshipped till date. The snake symbol engraved in columns are called as nagastambha(snake pillar) which is usually done to get rid of, if any negative energies are present, according to religious scripts. And is found in many houses of South Canara.

Yali

"Leogryph, a mythological lion faced animal" (Vah). Yali means vicious in Sanskrit language Amongst the many rulers that the landlords supported vijayanagara empire was also one. Yali was used in temples of Vijayanagara as decorative motifs, from there the influence of yali spreads to other temples od the period as well. From temples they came to be employed in the palaces or residence of subordinate landlords of South Canara as well. In conjunction with respect, the rulers also evoked fear against injustice, to create such complex identity they also used mythical animals. Yali additionally depicts the protector.

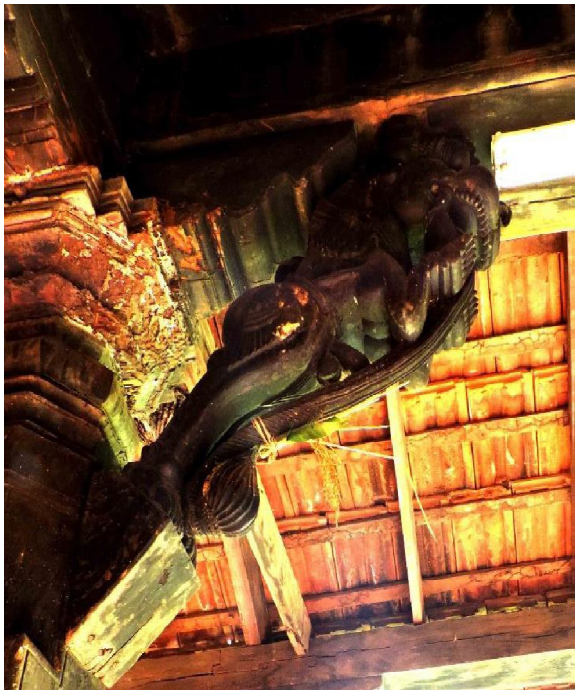


Figure 4: Yali, Sooralu Aramane(Palace)

The jutting eyeballs are anticipated to embody savagery and the wide opened mouth recommending a roar."(Dhaky) Along with particular symbols they use flowers and leaves to compose design.

Ceilings:

As mentioned earlier decoration of ceiling above the area of chawadi is focused. Again borrowing the

elements from temple architecture they have designed ceiling.



Figure 5: Ceiling at Sooralu Aramane

In this place a lotus flower is emerging from the centre of designing. "*A full blown lotus is a symbol universe in which the divinity is established*." The place below this is supposed to be auspicious and people would enter after taking bath only. The folk history mentions if someone lied standing below this they would bleed to death.

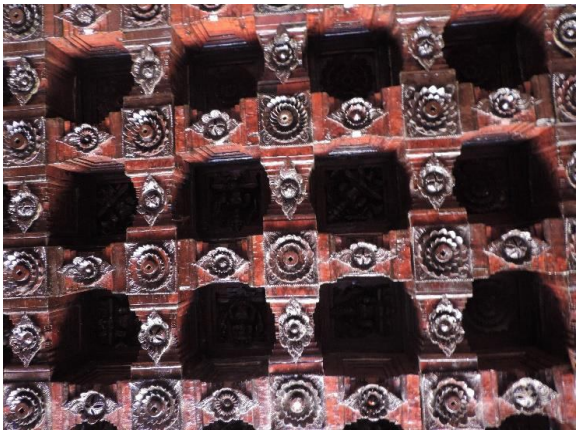


Figure 6: ceiling at Nandilike chawadi

Yet another example of ceiling borrowed from jain temple: the divisions create nine boxes in each span, which is an auspicious number in Indian religious scripts and all the nine division are carved with gods and godesses. The outer part of the borders are contemplated with flowers as if they are been offered to gods.

Furniture:

Though evidence for exitence of furniture in vernacular architecture is not found. South Canara had exclusive furniture with religious motifs carved on them. And it was reserved for the head of the family. Some of the motifs found in furniture are Panjurli (a form bhoota), Crocodiles (makara) and elephants. Only three pieces of furniture are found in the chawadi. One being a chair (called as pattada kurchi), a swing and a pattada mancha(bed).

Panjurli:

Is a symbol of wild boar spirit. They worship it in the form of daiva just like parrot. But panjurli is of more importance.Panjurli is belived to assist head of the family in maintaining peace and prosperity if it is worshipped.

Elephant(*gaja*)

Elephants(*Gaja*) are carved on the supports to symbolize heaven.When *Yajamana*(Head of the family) is dead, the body is placed on swing and the ring is passed to the successor(husband of younger sister or eldest daughter's husband), indicatng the passing of powers. It is believed that dead body's soul travels towards heaven.



Figure 7: Panjurli (wild boar)

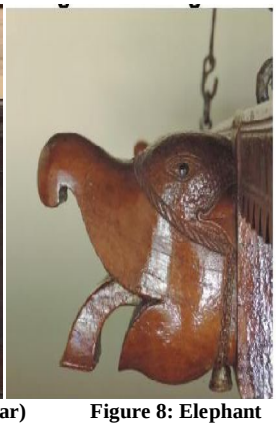


Figure 8: Elephant

Crocodiles:

Crocodiles (Fig 9) symbolises power and is called vyaghra(a animal that creates terror). They are used o the arm rests and the foot rest of the chair. K.Krishnamurthy in his book Ancient furniture India describes about these crocodile chairs. A chair used by a king is ornamented with lion face(hence called simhasana) and chair which of lower orders are decorated with different motifs. Likewise these chairs are used by the subordinates, hence crocodiles(powerful predators) are used instead of lions.



Figure 9: Crococdiles on arm and foot rest of Pattada kurchi(chair), Kuttyar Beedu

CONCLUSION

Iconography along with adding ornamentation add value in terms of culture to the prevailing area and brings an identity to the region. It preserves history, that can be understood if one can read between the images. Symbols replicate their belief and sense of art, the efficient craftsmanship and material culture. Along with beliefs they also depict the love and respect for nature. There is a phrase popular in Hindu "God is Everywhere" here we tend to see a literal derivation from that.

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