

*Eclipse Symbolism in Hampi's Sculptural Heritage:
A Multidisciplinary Approach*

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Abstract

This research paper delves into Hampi's enigmatic eclipse sculptures, using a multidisciplinary approach to uncover the celestial narratives embedded in stone. The study aims to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the symbolic significance attached to these unique representations by drawing insights through archeoastronomy, art history, and cultural anthropology. Eclipses have profound significance in Hindu astrology, intricately woven into the cosmic drama, in which the nebulous elements known as Rahu and Ketu play an important role in their interpretation. Eclipses are fascinating phenomena in which celestial bodies align to cast shadows on each other. Our research sheds light on the cultural, religious, and astronomical implications of these eclipse sculptures through meticulous analysis of the iconography, alignment, and historical context, providing new insights into the spiritual worldview of the Vijayanagara Empire. The paper concludes by discussing the implications for a broader understanding of ancient cosmologies and the artistic representation of celestial events.

Keywords: Hampi, Eclipse, Sculpture

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Introduction

Hampi (15.3350° N, 76.4600° E) The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Karnataka, India has a rich architecture of ancient temples that echo Hindu mythology through its intricate sculptures.

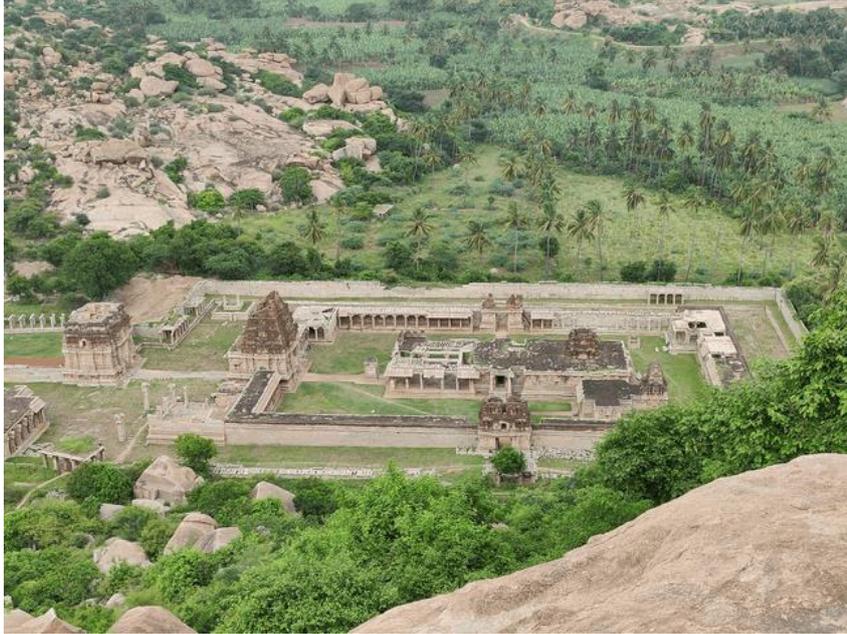


Figure 1. Achyut Devraya Temple, Hampi (Karnataka)
(Image credits - Mr. Anurag Vaidya)

Located in the remains of the Vijayanagara Empire, Hampi's archaeological significance stems from its historical significance and architectural magnificence. The aim of this study is to interpret the unique eclipse sculptures of the temple in the history of Hampi. With distinct sacred and royal centers, Hampi's urban planning reflects a sophisticated understanding of spatial organization. Architectural highlights include Virupaksha Temple, Vitthal Temple, Hazar Ram Temple, Lotus Mahal, Elephant Stables and Vitthal Complex. This section examines the fusion of Dravidian and Indo-Islamic architectural styles of the city's monuments. This section illuminates the cultural diversity of the Vijayanagara Empire through an examination of the inscriptions and artistic representations found throughout Hampi. The inclusion of multiple languages, depictions of Hindu epics and scenes of daily life provide a nuanced understanding of the city's cultural milieu. Despite its archaeological importance, Hampi faces modern challenges such as environmental degradation, encroachment and inadequate conservation efforts. This section critically assesses the current state of conservation initiatives led by the Archaeological Survey of India, highlighting the complexities of conserving a large archaeological site in the face of modern pressures.

Among the numerous carvings, some of the temples in Hampi, such as the Krishna Temple, the Virupaksha Temple and the Varaha Temple, are believed to depict celestial phenomena such as eclipses.

What Is Eclipse Significance in India?

Eclipses, those celestial phenomena that have inspired awe and fascination across cultures and ages, hold a special place in the diversity of human curiosity. Eclipses have profound significance in Hindu astrology, intricately woven into the cosmic drama, in which the nebulous elements known as Rahu and Ketu play an important role in their interpretation. Eclipses are fascinating phenomena in which celestial bodies align to cast shadows on each other. There are two types of eclipses: solar and lunar. When the Moon passes between the Sun and the Earth, it temporarily obscures the Sun's brightness. On the other hand, a lunar eclipse occurs when the Earth passes between the Sun and the Moon and casts a mysterious glow on the surface of the Moon. Eclipses have influenced mythologies, rituals, and astrological frameworks across cultures, evidenced by their abundance throughout the history of human civilization.

Rahu, Ketu and Eclipse

Some of the most elaborate understandings of eclipses can be found in India. In ancient Indian religious architecture, the universe exists on the basis of a tripartite agreement between gods, ancestors and humans. Everyone should favor each other by giving gifts etc. Because at the time of eclipse the Sun God is in trouble, the deities are threatened by the Asuras.



Figure 2. Ketu, Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York



Figure 3. Rahu

Humans should donate generously to help cope. This practice continues even today. Therefore, an eclipse is a time of giving and these donations are recorded.

According to a more popular story, the gods and demons gain immortality by drinking nectar found beneath the sea. Devas and Asuras join forces to churn the ocean to remove it. When Amrita finally appears, the gods send a beautiful woman named Mohini to distract the Asuras. She is mostly successful, but Rahu realizes what is going on. As a result, he disguises himself as a god and tries to get the nectar. Surya and Chandra realize what is going on that he is about to consume it and they try to stop him by cutting off his head. However, it is too late. An angry, disorganized Rahu seeks revenge on the Sun and the Moon, causing an eclipse. On the other hand, a Brahmin named Mini takes the severed body and raises it as his

own son. Lord Vishnu bestowed the head of a snake on this body, which eventually became a revered seer. Rahu is further continuous and subdivided.

Rahu festival. Rahu, as Nitya, constantly pulls towards the Moon, causing it to wax and wane, while the other day Rahu swallows the Moon, resulting in a lunar eclipse. Solar eclipse is caused by Ketu. However, in the modern version, Rahu eclipses and Ketu is associated with a comet.

Rahu and Ketu are given significant importance in Hindu astrology, which is based on the Vedic tradition, and are said to have the power to influence fate and karma. Eclipses on nodal points are believed to increase the influence of these shadow planets. During a solar eclipse, Rahu is said to swallow the Sun, causing temporary darkness with astrological implications. Similarly, during a lunar eclipse, Ketu is believed to influence the powers of the moon. Since eclipses are considered inauspicious, they are considered auspicious occasions for making donations to the deities, and records of these donations are found all over the country.

Ecliptic image on the roof in front of the naga or serpent chasing the moon and solar disc, various types of fish, makar can be seen from their combined depiction.

We find eclipse images typically on ceilings, but also on pillars, walls, and even floors:

1. Covered prakaras, temple corridors and courtyards
2. There by designing a separate pavilion in the temple premises
3. Ardhamandapa of main and subsidiary shrines
4. High, exterior walls (inside or outside)
5. On the roof, walls or in the vestibules of gopurams (temple entrances)

Eclipse-related sculptures are found in temples of the Vijayanagara Empire and the Nayak and Maratha periods, the Chola period.

Hampi, Virupaksha Temple: In the pavilion on the left after entering the main/first gopura, a serpent on the roof and in front of it a disc of the moon with a rabbit in it.



Figure 4. Virupaksha Temple , Hampi (Karnataka)
(Image credits- Mr. Anurag Vaidya)



Figure 5. On the roof of the Mandapam in Virupaksha Temple, Hampi (Karnataka)
(Image credits- Mr. Amogh Vaidya)

The above sculpture shows the moon with a rabbit in it. This rabbit is seen looking fearfully at the snake that is leaping towards the moon. And seen in the sanctity of jumping from the moon.

Hampi, Varaha Temple: Gopuram Threshold Ceiling Two crossbeams of gopuram (temple gate) with naga or cobra approaching lotus medallions and discs.



Figure 6. Varaha Temple, Hampi

(Image credits -

<https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipPXpsTggeQrwkTZRMfBezCVKi2xg0xflyksIeo=s1360-w1360-h1020>)



Figure 7. Varaha Temple Gopura Ceiling, Hampi (Karnataka)

(Image credits – Mr. Anurag Vaidya)

In the above sculpture we see two serpents on either side of a blossoming flower. But in front of both the serpents is seen around disc which symbolizes the moon.



Figure 8. Varaha Temple Sculpture
(Image credits - Mr. Anurag Vaidya)

In the above Varaha temple sculpture, we see snakes on both sides but nowhere in the picture do we see the moon. Instead, we see a blossoming flower.

Hampi, Sri Krishna Temple: Gopuram threshold crossbeam, depicting two giant cobras approaching a disc.



Figure 9. Sri Krishna Temple, Hampi (Karnataka)
(Image credits- Mr. Amogh Vaidya)



Figure 10. Shri Krishna Temple Gopura, Hampi (Karnataka)
(Image credits - Mr. Anurag Vaidya)



Figure 11. Sculpture
(Image credits - Mr. Anurag Vaidya)



Figure 12. Sculpture
(Image credits - Mr. Amogh Vaidya)

In the above sculpture, right in the middle we see a lunar disc with a rabbit on it and on the sides two serpents seem to be approaching the disc. The rabbit looks scared.

A rabbit appears between the two discs, meaning it is a full moon. Craters on the Moon appear rabbit-shaped from Earth and are depicted very accurately. The rabbit between the two moons is looking at the snake with fear. It means that now is the time of eclipse and the serpent seems to swallow us along with the moon. We see this moon rabbit in the leaping sanctity. The serpent is in reality and is in the posture of leaping down to the earth to save himself when he says that he is coming to swallow the moon.



Figure 13. Eclipse
(Image credits - Mr. Anurag Vaidya)

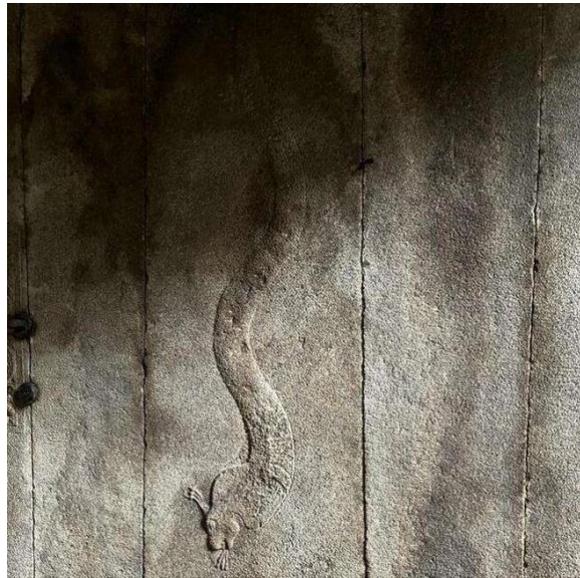


Figure 14. Eclipse
(Image credits - Mr. Amogh Vaidya)

If we think about the eclipse, we see the snake as the symbol of Rahu. A snake is seen leaping towards the moon at a very fast speed as it is supposed to appear that Rahu is swallowing the moon when there is a lunar eclipse.



Figure 15. Snakes
(Image credits - Mr. Anurag Vaidya)

As snakes are seen moving towards the moon, so are snakes moving towards a blossoming flower. The researcher speculates that this flower is a symbol of the sun.

Once by showing the art of the full moon, and once by showing the people of India a rabbit seen on the face of the moon. The other two nagas standing in front of the world can be interpreted as eclipses of the moon. Two more serpents are included in this elaborate

sculptural program on this roof. Two cobras approach each other, each with something in its mouth but no ball. This relief may or may not be related to eclipse.

Conclusion

The eclipse depiction is the main key to understanding this sculptural event and with it the donation. "Dana" plays an important role in Indian culture. The ideal of being freed from suffering and achieving one's goals in life - both material and spiritual - through donation has long been valued in society. It is generally considered the best way to achieve social goals.

Charity has always been given importance in Indian society. The Sanskrit word "Daan" is derived from the combination of the root "Da" and the suffix "Lute", which means "Diyate Yat Tat Danam" or "Whatever is given is charity." Donations were traditionally made for the benefit of both the giver and the recipient. 'Da' in Sanskrit means to give, to bestow, to present, to reward. Danameva Grihasthanam' Yama (Hemadri. Dankhanda p. 6). Depriving the sovereignty of a thing and giving it to someone else is called charity. The word 'Ishtapurta' has been used in the Vedas since ancient times, meaning 'the accumulated fruit of one's acts of sacrifice and generosity'. Whatever is offered in grhya and shrauta fire and donated inside the altar in shrautayagya is known as istha and actions like maintenance of wells, ponds, temples, food donation and maintenance of public parks are known as purta in Mahabharata. Manu has said that desirable and desirable actions should always be done diligently and if such actions are done faithfully and with the means of righteously acquired wealth, they become inexhaustible (Dharmashastra). Kings were expected to do this to acquire religious virtues for their prosperity and longevity.

Various forms are mentioned in Puranas like Tuludanam, Mahapurushadanam, Suvarnamaru danam, Asvadanam, Gajadanam, Godanam, Bhudanam, Brahmapratisthanam, Bhudanam. "Tulapurushdana means weighing the king in gold and it was done on special days, Sankranti etc. in holy places like temples, gardens, etc. The area of the river etc. was also done here. Almost all the kings participated in this ceremony.

All these rituals are found either according to the Puranas in which many of the gifts mentioned in the Matsya Purana are given. Or it used to happen as Hemadri told. Danasagara, an early text of about the eleventh century of the Christian era, states that "Tulapurushdana should be performed.

A yuga, lunar or solar eclipse day, solstice or new moon day should be given on auspicious occasions such as equinox day, solstice, end or beginning.

Dancers, musicians, warriors, mendicants, sportsmen received liberal patronage from the rulers. He, in particular, encouraged learning and the reigns of Bukka, Devaraya, Krishnadevaraya and Venkatapati in particular were crowned with literary activity.

Eclipses were and still are considered spiritually significant events. We see this as an auspicious time to make special vows and especially to give ritual gifts. Epigraphic records contain many references to donations made by kings and others on the occasion of lunar and solar eclipses. Some kings are known to pay special attention to eclipses by giving large gifts to temples, individuals or groups. Tribhuvanamalla Vikramaditya VI of the Western Chalukyas (1076–1126 from Kalyani) gave gifts to at least eight eclipses during his reign. Other notable adopters include the Yadava Simhan II (1200–1247 from Devagiri) and

several kings of the Hoysala and Vijayanagara dynasties. Since sacred time is one of the most important aspects of Vedic and Agamic rites, all rituals are organized and guided by Panchanga. Almanac accurately predicts eclipses.

Such representations are also found in temples. Both lunar and solar eclipses occur only twice a year and are governed by strict natural laws. Eclipses occur only rarely and appear irregularly at any point on the planet. Sometimes a region will not see a total lunar or solar eclipse for several years. A total solar eclipse is rarer because the area where it can be seen is always a very narrow band on the planet's surface. Sometimes several events happen at the same time. Such times are considered of high and auspicious significance in the context of Indian spiritual practices. We focus on total solar eclipses because they are a rare occurrence, especially when compared to total lunar eclipses, which are always visible over a large area. When we examine the solar eclipse data of South India, several such periods stand out. Several clusters of solar eclipses occurred in the 12th and 13th centuries, most of which are also recorded in epigraphy. Solar eclipses were much less common in South India during the 14th and 15th centuries.

What is the iconography associated with eclipses? It is clear that the ceiling is a symbol of heaven or sky. In contrast to the pillars, the pavilion canopy has a distinct representation and an iconographic scheme. Depictions of cobras with discs, sometimes showing a lunar sickle to represent the moon, or a hare or rabbit known as the lunar symbol, serve as unifying and central symbols of the roof. Thus, simple discs often indicate solar eclipses. On occasion the walls of the temples are home to disc-shaped serpents, and are associated with historical eclipses according to oral tradition. It is definitely seen that the practice of donating during eclipses was from that time.

The Vijayanagara Empire was constantly under threat of invasion. As a result, the Vijayanagara rulers kept the concern of protecting the state at the forefront of their minds at all times. As a result, almost all rulers focused on the problem of assembling a trained and efficient army. Another issue that the Vijayanagara rulers dealt with thoughtfully was the formulation of economic policies, such as the promotion of merchants, traders and even farmers, as this provided the necessary revenue to maintain a large army, the establishment of palaces, and court shows and pageantry., is also remembered as a patron of painters etc. Due to their generous court patronage, the emperors attracted large numbers of fortune seekers to their kingdoms. The Vijayanagara rulers recognized and amply rewarded all valuable services rendered by court patronage, regardless of the nature of the services rendered or the caste of the persons rendering such services. Their policy of inducting people into the state services was based entirely on merit. His respect for his merits was also reflected in his allocation of judicial protection. It is to the credit of the Crown that their religious beliefs did not adversely affect them to the point of discriminating against them in court patronage. Court patronage included grants of land and villages, gifts of wealth and valuables, honors and rewards, and privileges of various kinds. Religious sects, social groups, individuals, generals, merchants, scholars, philosophers, poets, singers, musicians, dancers, painters and others received judicial protection in one of the ways mentioned above. However, given their age and the circumstances surrounding the birth of the Vijayanagara state, Hindu religious institutions and those associated with them were bound to have a large share of court patronage. Temple establishments were patronized in two ways. Kings made various donations and charitable contributions to temples and other religious institutions from time to time, as epigraphical records attest.

Apart from 'donations of charity', kings made many lands and village grants to temple establishments. Land grants were made in the name of religion and charity without expecting any service from the donee. The grants were beneficial in nature and were usually made in 'general' tenure, i.e. land free from taxation, and in 'manya' tenure, i.e. land subject to the payment of a small interest. Temples were granted 'Devdana' grants for daily worship. Kings granted grants to 'Shiva' and 'Vishnu' temples, as well as to Jain temples. The early Vijayanagara rulers showered several grants on the Sringeri Math. In 1346, the five Sangama brothers made a joint grant which included the villages of Headse, Honnedoli, Babbi, Harwadi, Belluru, Ambalaru, Bellanduru, Holke, Hosavaru and others. 10 Bukka gave land worth three hundred dollars as a gift.

When there was a question about the relationship between this sculpture on the gopur and roof of the mandap of the temple in Hampi, Vijayanagar, then it can be said for sure that this sculpture represents the giving of donation in the gopura i.e. below the eclipse sculpture in the mahadwara of the temple. At the end of a special program or ceremony in the mandap, donations should be made standing under the sculpture.

Sribalkrishna Mandir or Krishna Mandir. Virupaksha temple and Varaha temple are the three temples built by the king for his subjects. That the kings of the Vijayanagara Empire were basically philanthropists can be seen from their inscriptions and copperplate donations. Therefore, all the duties of donating should be done standing under these sculptures. Therefore, even if there is no eclipse for a holy place like a temple, the purpose behind it is to get the merit of donating in the eclipse in the form of sculpture.

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