

# Gandaberunda: Aesthetic Representation of the Mythical Bird

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**Abstract**— Indian Art is predominantly decorative in character and birds occupy an important position in plastic and pictorial representation. Birds such as the Garuda, Peacock and others are connected with important mythological stories and in the stories of Jataka, most other birds are carved, painted as an integral part of the design.

Of the mythical birds, Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, is well-represented in medieval records. In south, another kind of mythical bird is noticed in the inscription known as Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. In Sanskrit the word bheruṇḍa means terrific, frightful, terrible, a species of bird while gaṇḍa is understood to imply a warrior or hero. The term Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa was adopted as a title by the Chalukyas, Kadambas and the Vijayanagara rulers.

There are numismatic representations, literary references, sculptural and artistic portraits of this unique symbol in Vijayanagara art. The ceiling of the Virabhadra shrine at Keladi, and the bherundeshwara temple at Balligavi have the most exquisite representations of the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. The Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa is also the logo of Karnataka State Government and was the royal insignia of the Wadiyars.

The paper attempts to analyse the significance of the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa in Karnataka and bring forth the artistic and aesthetic representation of the motif.

**Key Words:** Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa, Virabhadra temple, Bherundeshwara temple

## INTRODUCTION

As Indian Art is predominantly decorative in character, birds occupy an important position in plastic and pictorial representation. But except for some birds which are found to be connected with important mythical stories—such as, the Garuda, peacock, the swan and others and sometimes the cock, the crow and the dove featuring in the stories of the Jataka—most other birds are only found, carved or painted in the entwined motifs of the floral designs, to enrich the total form, sometimes as individual units and sometimes turned into ornamental rhizomes as an integral part of the whole design. (K.L. Mukhopadhyay 1972: 115)

Of the mythical birds, Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, is well-represented in medieval records. In south, another kind of mythical bird is noticed in the inscription: it is known as Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. The ninth plate of the Pentapadu grant of Choda Bhaktiraja, Saka 125 (EI, XXXIII, p. 219) contains a figure standing astride, with two heads of birds facing opposite directions. The mythical figure holds two elephants by their trunk, one in each hand. There is also an explanatory

passage to the left of the figure. It may be mentioned that the donor, Bhaktiraja, enjoyed the title Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. Mostly confined to Andhra, it is noticed in the same form in the Tripurantakam (Kurnool district) inscription (Saka 1310) of Annadeva, Vinukonda (district Guntur) inscription (Saka 1377). (Sarkar. H and Pande B.M 1999: 75)

The Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa had strange associations and scholars have suggested various origins of it. Marshall contended that this double-headed eagle occurs for the first time in the Hittite sculptures in Western Asia, that it is also found on an early ivory of the Geometric period from Sparta and that later on the Scythians introduced it to Taxila (Taksasila). From them it was drafted into the Russian imperial arms and those of Germany and that from Taxila it found its way to Vijayanagara and Ceylon. The double-headed eagle no doubt occurs in Hittite sculptures at Boghaz Keui and Eyuk, the district known as Pteria to the Greeks. (Saletore R.N 1982: 185)

Sayce traced the double-eagle motif to the influence of Egyptian art, taking us back when the Hittites of Cappadocia were in contact with the people of the Nile and thus confirming the evidence of the Egyptian records during the age of Rameses II. Longhurst presumed that this symbol was introduced into India through Persia but he did not furnish any further reasons or proofs in support of this view. In India the earliest representation of Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa was seen first at Taxila and later at Sanci on its bas-reliefs ascribed to circa second century B.C. (Saletore R.N 1982: 186)

Under the Hoysala and the Vijayanagar kings the double-headed bird was often shown as a human being with two birds' heads, just as Garuda, Vishnu's vāhana, is shown as a man with a bird's beak. In Europe, the double-headed bird is an eagle. In India his nature is not fixed. The double-headed bird or the man with two birds' heads occasionally has traits of a bird of prey, but he may have heads of parrots or peacocks. Mostly the heads are those of a haṃsa (Swan). It is therefore better to speak of double-headed birds and not of double-headed eagles. (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:1)

The oldest double-headed bird on the Indian continent is found at Taxila. On the base of a stupa there are reliefs with toranas on which bird perch. One of these birds has two heads; it is shown in profile with one head looking ahead and one turned back. It is often been pointed that this "double-headed eagle" is of Scythian and Near Eastern origin. The Hittite double-headed eagles of Alaca Huyuk and Yasilikaya, which have been mentioned in this context, are shown in front view. In Alaca Huyuk the eagle holds a hare in each of its talons.

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(Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:2)

Another double-headed bird is found on a stupa railing at Bodh-Gaya. This bird is decidedly not an eagle but a hamsa. It is however possible that the double-headed birds from Taxila and Bodh-Gaya have been derived from the literary or oral sources. A Buddhist legend mentions a bird with two heads. One of these heads was called Garuda and the other Upagaruḍa. They used to take turns in waking and sleeping. One day when the Upagaruḍa was sleeping, Garuda ate a delicious flower without informing Upagaruḍa. When the latter woke up and noticed what happened, he got angry and decided to take revenge. He ate a poisonous flower, so that they both died. A similar story is told in the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. The two heads of the birds are called Ta-mo and A-ta-mo in this version, Dharma and Adharma, and the bird is Jīvaṃjīva, a partridge. (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:3) In the Pañcatantra, the same story is told about the Bharanda birds.

In the Kalpasūtra it is said that the venerable Mahāvira was always watchful like the famous bird Bhāruḍa. Further, the Mahabharata refers to Bhāruḍa birds which have human faces and sing with a beautiful voice. In the Vishnumṛiti, certain hymns are called Bhāruḍa. In the Śatruṅjaya Mahātmyam, Bhāruḍas are called khilapakṣiṇaḥ, which A. Weber translates by “birds of the desert”. In the Śivapurāṇa, Bheruḍas belong to the retinue of Śiva. According to Matsyapurana, the sons of Jatayu, one of whom is called Bheruḍa, are the ancestors of all birds. According to the Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa, the Bheruḍas are the vehicle of goddess Mahāvajreśvarī. (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:3)

### MYTHOLOGICAL STORY

The mythology has it that Gandaberunda and sharabas (elephant headed lion) adjoining it are a union of strength of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. When Lord Vishnu took Narasimha avathara to kill Hiranyakashyap, father of his devotee Prahlad, his anger simmered even after Hiranyakashyap’s death. The entire universe, including the Gods and Goddesses went into a tizzy and wanted Lord Shiva to intervene. (Shastri Srikantha 2016: 672)

Shiva came in the form of Sharaba (elephant headed lion) to pacify Narasimha. In the effort, Lord Shiva lost his cool and Lord Vishnu had to take the form of Gandaberunda, a bird with huge feathers and two heads opposite to each other. The sharp beaks controlled the Sharaba.

### AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION OF GAṆḌABHERUṆḌA IN KARNATAKA

The oldest representation of a Bheruḍa in South India comes from the village of Belligame, Shikaripura Taluk of Shimoga District in Karnataka. A Gaṇḍabheruḍa was installed on a tall pillar in front of the Jagadekamalleśvara temple. The original figure was destroyed in the thirties, and in 1937 a new one was carved by a sculptor in Mysore. Today this Bheruḍa stands at the foot of the pillar. There are several descriptions of the figure which originally stood on

the top of the pillar. In the Mysore Gazetteer it is said that the human features and those of a bird of prey have been admirably combined. According to the report of the Mysore Archaeological Department, the Gaṇḍabheruḍa is about to devour lions. H. Cousens mentions the pillar and says the figure holds something in his hands. He also refers to a tradition of the local farmers, that this pillar has been erected in order to keep wild elephants away from the sugarcane fields. . (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:5)

The Gaṇḍabheruḍa of the sculptor Siddhalingaswami of Mysore stands at the foot of the pillar. The Gaṇḍabheruḍa wears rudraksas, which show him to be a Saiva deity. The head of a human being looks out of each of his beaks, and he holds a third one in his left hand. This is the only Gaṇḍabheruḍa that fights human beings while all others are represented either fighting tigers or elephants. According to the sculptor, this figure represents Siva, who had fought demons. These had been granted the boon that they would be invincible, so that when the Gaṇḍabheruḍa devoured them with one beak, they emerged from the other.

An inscription from Belgami of A.D 1047 states that the governor of Banavasi, Chamunda Raya, had erected in front of the god Jagadekamalleśvara, and that he made a gift of land for Bheruḍeśvara. This land was measured with the Bheruḍa pole. The donor, who was a vassal of the Chalukya king Somesvara I Trailokyamalladeva had many titles, among which one was Gaṇḍabheruḍa. The inscription reads; No one on earth is equal or will be equal to the Gaṇḍabheruḍa in virtue, truth and liberality. (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:5) This verse shows the high opinion the Chalukyas had of the Gaṇḍabheruḍa and may serve an explanation why many of the later dynasties had the double-headed bird or the man with two birds’ heads as emblem and why they adopted the title Gaṇḍabheruḍa.

The Gaṇḍabheruḍa pillar is depicted on a memorial stone in Belgami. An inscription of 1060 A.D states that a man from the Tulu country, Chandiga, first cut off one finger and climbed up this pillar. He threw himself down onto a row of stakes set up at the foot of the pillar and reached the world of the gods.

From the 11th century onwards, the Gaṇḍabheruḍa enjoyed great popularity in Karnataka. Many kings adopted the title Gaṇḍabheruḍa. Bheruḍas with human body were depicted on memorial stones and Bheruḍas were also mentioned in Literature. In the Jaimini Bharata, Laksmisa relates that the demon Bhisana attacked Arjuna. The demon Hurlled weapons, which were turns into Sarabhas, Berundas, tigers, wolves, boars and bulls. In the Ramachandracharitrapurana of Abhinava Pampa it is said that king Sagara saw elephants fleeing from lions and Sarabhas being chased by Bheruḍas. The Kannada dictionary Abhinava Mangaraja Nigantu (p.48, verse 8) explains that the eight legged Sarabha is the enemy of lions and Gaṇḍabheruḍa of the Sarabha. The enmity between Sarabha and the Bheruḍas is also expressed in the title Kaviśarabhabheruḍa of the 12th century poet



Raghavanka; he was considered to be a Bheruṇḍa to the other poets, who were Sarabhas. (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:7)

The Hoysalas also possessed titles such as Maleparol Gandar, Gaṇḍabheruṇḍar-champions among the hill kings, male bheruṇḍa. Vishnuvardhana (1106-41), Vira Ballala II (1173-1207), Narasimha II (1220-33) etc had these titles. Under the Hoysalas, the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa was generally depicted together with a tiger. A memorial stone from Tippur from the reign of Vira Ballala II shows two devotees sitting to the right and left of a Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa, who puts his hand on their heads. (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:8) A tiger approaches the group from the left, lifting his paw and his tail. Sun, moon and a triple umbrella have been sculptured on the top of the panel.

An inscription stone from Varahanathakallahalli in Srirangapatna taluk dates from the reign of Vira Ballala II. A human Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa approaches a tiger, who sits to the right of him lifting one paw. A big lamp and a vessel on a tripod are seen to the left of Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. Although the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa is considered to be an enemy of tigers, their relationship seems to be friendly on this panel. Two unusual sculptures of the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa are found on the Kesava temple at Belur (A.D. 1117) and on the Buehsvara temple at Koravangala, Hassan taluk (1173 A.D)

Not only the Hoysalas had the title Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. A Telugu inscription from Raichur of 1294 mentions a vassal of the Kakatiya king Pratapa Rudra having the title of Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. The Kota rulers of Dhanyakataka, Guntur District, who ruled from the 12th to 13th century, had a double-headed bird as their crest.

Gaṇḍabheruṇḍas continued to be represented. During the Hoysala period, the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa had been shown mostly as a man with bird's heads together with tigers. In the Vijayanagar period the Bheruṇḍa man and the Bheruṇḍa bird are shown with elephants. In Hoysala sculptures, the chain of destruction culminating in a Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa frequently occurs. The Vijayanagara rulers and the Keladi chiefs used the symbol to denote supremacy, whereas in the Hoysala times, the Garudas were the loyal servants who had vowed to die with their master. Shastri Srikantha 2016: 689)

Under Krsnadevaraya and Achyuta Raya coins with a Bheruṇḍa bird were minted. On the gold coins, the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa is shown as a bird carrying elephants, either in the front view, seen from the back or in profile. Two sculptures dating from the reign of Achyuta Raya resemble the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa on coins. The huge monolithic Nandi at Lepakshi is adorned with chains and bells, on a medallion we see a Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa with its wings folded together carrying elephants in beaks and talons.

The Virabhadra temple at Keladi, near Sagar, Shimoga district, the capital of the Keladi Nayakas was built between 1530-40. A ceiling in the mandapa of this temple has a large relief representing the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa in flight with tusker elephants in his two talons. Each of his two beaks hold by the snout of a lion which is trampling on a trumpeting elephant. (Rosen-Stache Valentina 1972:14)

The Vijayanagar empire was defeated by a confederation

of Muslim rulers at Talikota in 1565. Many of the former vassals of the Vijayanagar Empire became independent. Among these were the rulers of Mysore, who founded a kingdom of their own. They took over the emblem from the Vijayanagara kings. The rulers of Nagar, Ikkeri, Tarikere and Madurai had the same emblem. Chikkadeva Raja of Mysore (1673-1704) is said to have got the title Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa from Aurangzeb. It became the heraldic emblem and the most common representation of this period. In 1881 the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa was officially adopted as the crest of Mysore state. A double headed bird in front view was flanked by two Sarabhas holding the crest which was surmounted by a helmet.

Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa can also be seen in the leather Puppets of Karnataka. The shadow players consider it as the symbol of Raghu family. Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa is shown as a bird grasping lions and elephants. This figure may go back to Vijayanagar prototypes. The Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa was shown on gold and silver jewellery. Many artefacts in gold and silver with the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa are common in Karnataka. Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa also has been used in the textile industry and by fashion designers. The double headed bird is the crest of Karnataka State and we can see this emblem on the government offices in Bangalore and Mysore, on buses and autorikshaws.

On the occasion of temple festivals, the deities are taken in procession of different vehicles, both common and special, the latter being such as the kalpavṛkṣa, the wish giving celestial tree, or the kāmadhenu, the wish giving celestial cow, or the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. The fact that there are Bheruṇḍa deities and Bheruṇḍa birds may be the reason why the Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa is a man with two birds' heads as well as a double-headed bird in South India.

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PHOTOS



**Bherundeshvara Pillar- Balligavi**



**Ganda Berunda on the ceiling of the Keladi Veerabhadra temple**



**Nandi-Lepakshi**



**The regimental insignia and Mysore's royal emblem, the Gandabherunda**



Memorial Stone, Belgami



Ganjifa Card



Leather Puppet



Jewellery