

PRANĀLA –A CANONICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The earliest evidence of the pranalas can be dated to the Saka-Kushana period in northern India. The pranalas continued to be used in the subsequent years, including the Gupta period. However, the elaborately sculptured pranalas first appear only in the 8th century CE. The pranalas were common in several parts of India; they were less common in the Hindu architecture of South east Asia, except in Java.

The pranala is also known as praṇāli, nāla, nāli, gomukha, or nirgama. Some 20th century French archaeologists have used the term "soma-sūtra" to describe the pranala, but Indian texts clearly distinguish between these two terms: a soma-sūtra is a line along which the pranala is placed. Pranalas are used to drain out the *abhisheka-teertham* water, milk, ghee, etc. poured over the temple idols. The most common type of pranala in historical temples is the makara-pranala, which is similar to the European gargoyle. It depicts the mythical sea-creature makara (also called *graha*). The popularity of the makara-pranala probably results from the creature's association with water.

The 11th century text Samarangana sutra dhara recommends making a pranali (that is, pranala) drain all around the sanctum, with an outlet in the shape of a *graha* (or *makara*).

Vishvakarma's *Vastushastra*, a late 11th century compendium on the architecture also mentions the pranala. *Aparajita-prchchha*, dated late 12th to early 13th century, refers to the *makara-pranala* used to clear the water out of the temple's Jagathi (platform).

The next most common type of pranala is the *grasa-pranala*, which depicts the *grasa* (also known as *Kirthimukha*) mythical creature. The gorgon of the early Greek temples inspired the Indian *grasa-pranala*, which in turn, inspired the similar motifs in South-East Asia, particularly Java. The *grasa-pranala* is common in the historical temples of south India; a few examples have also been discovered in Madhya Pradesh, in central India.

The *simha-pranala*, which depicts a lion, is similar to the *grasa-pranala*. It is probably inspired by the lion-head spouts that were common in classical Greek Hellenistic and Roman temples.

A variation of this form is the *simha-nala*, which features a tube coming out of a lion's mouth: the tip of the tube may depict another lion's mouth (this type is called *simha-mukha-nala*), or another object, such as a lotus bud.

PRANALA-MEANING

Pranāla, also called sōmasūtraⁱ, nāla, is a stone-drain/chute carved out of one single block of stone. Pranāla is provided to the sanctum of the temple to let the oblation water of the sanctum to drain outⁱⁱ. Pranālas are also provided to the floor and terrace of other parts of the temple for draining out the water.

CANONICAL TEXTS ON PRANALA

Texts also prescribe that pranāla should always be made in stoneⁱⁱⁱ. The vāstu Texts deal elaborately with the pranālas, their function, their placement, their measurement and their design. Besides the prescriptions given in the Texts, the creativity, the imagination and the artistic genius have also played considerable role in the making of the pranālas of the temples. Hence, varieties of pranālas in the temples and their hybridized forms are discernible.

CONSTRUCTION OR MAKING OF THE PRANALA

Pranālas are carved out of a long beam of stone. A deep groove is cut, to make the water flow easily. This groove is called by the name ambumārga or jalamārga. Sometimes, the pranāla may consist of two parts, viz., the upper beam and the lower beam. The groove is cut deeply on the upper surface of the lower beam and the lower surface of the upper beam. They are placed one above the other to form a pranāla. The pranāla begins from the floor of the sanctum and projects forward outside the plinth to a distance of about 3-5 ft. The hidden part of the pranāla inside the wall is just a stone channel deeply grooved at the top to allow the water to flow easily. The tip of the pranāla is artistically decorated according to the taste of the artists. The chute at the exterior may be in the form of a conduit, to give the appearance of the mouth of the animal carved at this point. Pranālas carved like a long cannon, with a central duct are also noticed.^{iv}

The architectural Texts (Mayamata, Mānasāra, Kashyapashilpa, Agitagama and Ishana shiva guru deva paddathi,) deal elaborately with the pranālas of the temples. The pranālas always project forward from the building. Pranālas should always be provided on the plinth of the temples^v. Pranālas should be provided on the sidewalls of the sanctum. It should be on the north wall^{vi} of the sanctum and at the same time, it should be towards the left side^{vii} of the image installed in the sanctum. If the temple faces east or west or south then also it should be towards the left side of the image irrespective of the direction of the image. If the temple faces north then it should be towards the eastern side, that is, in the eastern wall^{viii}. From these

prescriptions, it becomes clear that the pranāla should not be placed towards west. In almost all the trikūtālayas of the Hoysalas, one garbhagriha or the other in the trikūt a complex will be facing north. In that case, the pranāla cannot be kept to the left side, because it is the western side. In such cases, it is kept to the right side, i.e., to the east.

Though no textual explanation for this is found, tradition is that the guardian deity of west is Varuna, 'the watergod'. He is always pure and purifies others. The oblation water that contains the dirt of the body of the deity (tīrtha) and that of the sanctum is fit for the consumption of only the earthly beings. But it should not be used again for ceremonial bath. If the ceremonial water that comes out of the pranāla is allowed to flow to the west, the belief is that it is sent back to Varuna and it will pollute the sanctity of Varuna. Therefore, orientation of pranālas towards the west is avoided. Via media policy adopted in the placement of the pranāla is also observed.

PLACEMENT OF THE PRANALAS ACCORDING TO CANONICAL TEXTS

The Texts prescribe that the pranālas should be placed to the left side of the deity. In the shrines facing north, the left invariably is the west. In such cases the pranāla is kept towards the west, but with its orientation slightly turned towards the north-west.^{ix} However, pranālas fixed facing west are also not absent.^x

It is interesting to note here, that a few temples of the region of our study do not possess the drain at all. The reason for this may be due to the fact that in these temples, the installed deities are made of mud and plaster^{xi} which are not given ceremonial bath or washed in water (abhyanjana). Likewise, some of the subsidiary shrines of the temple complex (parivāradēvālayas) also are not provided with stone drains^{xii}.

The stone drain is to be fixed in such a way that the ablution water should easily flow out of the sanctum. Hence, it is always provided at a convenient level cutting through the plinth of the sanctum. The stone drain which project from the plinth and are carved in stone is called as sanchita, i.e., masculine variety. However, the Texts also give specific locations for the placing of the pranālas. Stone drains are to be provided at the centre of the wall of the sanctum^{xiii}. The pranāla is to be fixed above the sub-base, below the level of the upper, at any convenient level⁷. Ajitagama says that the nāla is to be placed above the kumuda, gala, upāna or potika^{xiv}.

This position seems to have been followed in most of the temples of the region of our study. But exceptions to this are also noticed.^{xv}

The pranāla may be constructed to any building or to different types of of the temple complexes. Texts are liberal in their specification. The Texts prescribe that the can be provided with the pranāla in any of the four directions. But these pranālas should always be of the asanchita or upasanchita variety and never of the sanchita variety. The Texts, as said earlier, prescribe different media for the making of the pranāla. Depending upon the medium used for the pranāla, they are classified into three categories.

They are

1. Sanchita
2. Asanchita
3. Upasanchita

Sanchita means a pranāla made out of hard material, i.e., stone and it is considered as masculine. The stone pranāla should project forward from the vertical norm of the plinth. Asanchita means a pranāla made of softer media like wood and brick. There is no projection to this pranāla from the vertical norm of the plinth. Only t he orifice should be visible from outside. This is considered as feminine in class.

Upasanchita is a pranāla, again made of softer medium, i.e., brick and wood. But it may have only the orifice or it may even project forward and this is considered as neuter in class. Pranāla is an important artistic part of the temple. Therefore, the projecting head of the pranāla is carved variedly depending upon the skill of the artist. However, a common pattern seems to have been followed in the depiction of the decorative relievos on the pranāla. The Texts on architecture also prescribe different types of decorations for the temples built by different classes of people. If it is constructed by a ūdra, it should have the face of a makara; if it is constructed by a vaiya , it should have the face of a gaja, if by a ksatriya, of a simha, and if by a brāhman a, that of a cow ^{xvi}. But the artists did not follow this rule strictly. However, it is not possible to correlate all these types of decorations with the class or caste of the patrons who got those temples constructed.

Texts on architecture mention many types of pranālas. Mayamata mentions simhavaktra^{xvii}, Shilparatna makes a mention of gajvakthra^{xviii}, Ishanashivaguru deva paddati mentions gajavakthra and kritrimamukha^{xix}, āshya ash lpa mentions^{xx} simhāsya, gajōs t a and bhūta type of pranālas, vāstushastra prescribes makaramukhapranāla, Amara kosha and Jaina agama (PrajnapānaSūtra) mention mātan ga makara or sounda makara, TanthraSamuccaya mentions vyālamukha and elephant trunk variety and gōmukha variety. Texts prescribe that the mouth of the pranāla can be decorated in the form of the mouth of, a lion, (simhavaktra), cow (gōvaktra), elephant (gajavaktra) and crocodile (makaravaktra). Besides these decorations for the pranālas, kalpavalli, muktāgrāsa, circular bands and fillets may also be carved on the surface if required. Besides these, the wealth of imagination of the artist, the local stylistic traits are also used to enhance the beauty through luxurious decorations. Artists have made some more additions to the simha and makara mukhas such as tiny images of soldiers coming out of the wide-open mouths of the simha and makara, the relief of mithunas seated on the makaras, etc

Depending upon the types of decorations found on the pranālas, they may be classified into different types.

They are – 1. Simhavaktra / Gorgonoid

2. Makaravaktra / Dolphinoid

3. Mrinalika / lotus head

4. Gajavaktra / Eliphinoid

5. Bhuta – Goblinoid

The above-mentioned types of decorations are made either at the beginning of the pranāla or at the tip of the pranāla. If the decoration of the head of that particular animal is carved adjacent to the plinth, for carving this decoration, the area of the masonry course immediately above the pranāla is also used. The rest of the shaft (ambumārga or jalamārga) of the pranāla is taken forward and in most of the cases it is made to bend downward, terminating in the form of a blossomed lotus flower – mrinalika.

Not all the types mentioned in the Texts are available in the temples of the area of our study. Moreover, many of the pranālas available here do not exactly fit into the category of the pranālas mentioned in the Texts. Some exhibit mixed characteristic features of different types

of pranālas. This is evidently due to the artistic imagination or the freedom of expression enjoyed by the artisans. Therefore, instead of going by the types mentioned in the Texts, study and classification of the pranālas based on decoration is made here.

SIMHA VAKTRA - Pranāla having the decoration of the face of a lion occurs in a few temples in the region of our study. The earliest occurrence is at Akka-Tangi temple at Manne dated to early 9 th century A.D. In this, there are certain features mentioned already in the carving of the face of the pranāla. Most of the pranālas found in the region of our study, as said earlier, are monolithic, but the present example is made by joining two pieces of stone in two successive courses of the building. The lower course is a part of the prati moulding of the plinth. This stone is extended forward with a semi-circular groove of which, the lower portion is unfortunately broken. The upper portion is carved in the stone which is a part of the lowest course of the wall. In this stone, pilasters and also the face of the lion is carved. This portion also contains the corresponding semi-circular groove of the top portion of the chute. The chute forms the mouth of the lion surrounding which, the face of the lion is carved in the upper piece of stone. Globular eyes, pronounced nostrils, the upper jaw and the manes of the lion are also carved distinctly here. The top of the head of the lion contains the carving of two curved horns to give a mythical touch to the animal.

Another example of the pranāla comes from the Chennakeshava temple, at Kurudumale (Fig.-2, Pl.-2). From the mouth of the lion comes out a multifaceted shaft with a deep groove on the top for flow of water. It is interesting to note that the groove is taken through the head of the simha up to the wall ^{xxi}.

A very interesting simhamukhapranāla of a later date is reported from Someshwara temple at Doddagubbi (Fig.-3, Pl.-3). Here the pranāla is carved elaborately on a large piece of stone. The stone extends from the top of the jagathi of the , cuts through the g and kapōta mouldings of the and its top ends below the kumuda of the . There are also two faces of lion carved on the upper and the lower pieces of pranāla. The upper piece that covers the top of the drain through the wall, projects slightly forward from the line of the plinth. This has a thinly relieved simhamukha. The main shaft of the plinth is elaborately designed and decorated. It is carved like a jumping lion. It stands on its hind legs and the two forelegs are projected upward and it is connected to the tip of the bend of the pranāla. The head of the lion is carved at the top. From the open mouth of the lion comes out the pranāla shaft, bends downward and terminates like a

blossomed lotus. This is a unique type of design, the form of which reminds us of the similar rampant lions on the shafts of the Vijayanagara pillars^{xxii}.

GŌVAKTRA - Only one example of this type is found in the region^{xxiii}. The head of the cow is carved and the eyes are not very clearly carved. From the wide -open mouth of the cow emerges a shaft which bends forward.

MAKARA PRANĀLA - Makara pranāla is available in the region of our study right from 10th century A.D. Two types of makara heads are noticed here. In the first type the makara head is carved at the tip of the pranāla and in the second type, makara head is carved at the beginning of the pranāla. The first type is found at Someshwara temple at Kolar, a temple of Vijayanagara period. The makara head is carved looking differently from different directions. From one side it has the natural proboscis of a crocodile while on the opposite side it has the wide open mouth of a crocodile with a long spiraled trunk of an elephant. This is a hybridized form of the animal resulting from the artistic skill of the sculptor but the shaft of the pranāla is not very long. More ornate makara pranālas are found at Avani and Kurudumale. The Avani example (Rameshwara temple complex) has a wide open mouth from which emerges a long, heavy, faceted shaft. It terminates like a lotus, facing downwards. The carvings of the makara are not so crisp and clear.

The Kurudumale example^{xxiv} is perhaps the best executed makara pranāla of the region. It has a long monolithic shaft emerging from the wide-open ornate and stylized mouth of the makara. The canines, bulbous eyes, the floral manes are delicately and crisply chiseled. The multifaceted shaft is also carved with muktāgrāsas, floral designs, etc. The bent tip of the pranāla has the scalloping of lotus petals and a hanging bud. Another pranāla^{xxv} is also very attractive in its surface treatment. The two sides of the pranāla have the relief of kalpavalli with gentle curves. This reminds us of the textual prescription given in the Mayamata. These two pranālas are datable to 1234 A.D. and 1260A.D. respectively.

GAJAVAKTRA - The pranāla having the representation of the face of an elephant at its beginning is called a gajavaktra. The elongated trunk-like shaft projects from the mouth of the elephant with a gentle downward bend. Only a few specimens of this type are found. Even these examples are not so well carved. However the trunk portion is quite neatly carved and executed. The example from Tekal happens to be the earliest example of this type. The

elephant mouth is not so clearly discernible. The bent shaft of the pranāla in front is multifaceted, grooved and it terminates in the form of a blossomed lotus.

The second example is from Mukthinatheswhara temple, Binnaman a, Nelaman a Taluk, Bangalore rural district, dated to 1110 A.D. is a pranāla of this type . The head of the elephant, the gentle bend, tapering body of the trunk are all discernible. The tip again terminates like a blossomed lotus.

MRUNALIKA: A new trend seems to have impressed the artists to carve a stylized mr n la or mrinaalikā (lotus stalk) by adding or providing a floral appendage to the tip of the pranāla. Carving m ranāla was known to the sculptors from the beginning, as this type of pranāla can be noticed at aganathatemple at Pattadakal. Many Texts make a mention of this variety. Umpteen examples of this variety are to be seen in the temples of the region of our study. During Vijayanagara and late Vijayanagara periods, the m variety became so popular that it was used in almost all the temples. Pranālas having a long multifaceted, bent shaft with its terminal having the form of a blossomed lotus flower are noticed. But only a few examples that possess good workmanship are discussed here.

The best specimen of this type can be seen in the Rameshwara temple complex at Magadi (Fig.-5, Pl.-8). This pranāla is wrought out of pinkish granite. The top of the pranāla corresponds to the upper level of the plinth. The multifaceted, double flexure bend of the pranāla is very gentle and elegant. Lotus petals in multi-layers are sharply scalloped at the end; neatly carved pointed bud of the lotus is also depicted. An additional feature of this pranāla, not found anywhere else is the flat pedestal like surface carved on the top of the pranāla. This flat surface is made perhaps to place an image above which is missing now.

Another notable feature of this pranāla is that the two sides at the beginning of the pranāla are also decorated with lotus motif. This portion contains a flexed lotus facing upwards as noticed in the Vijayanagara corbels. The surface is multifaceted and the double layers of lotus petals are also very neatly scalloped. The upper surface of the arm is flat and it corresponds to the pedestal-like surface of the pranāla. Another neatly executed pranāla is reported from Thimmaraya swamy temple t has a long, heavy, multifaceted, multi-flexed shaft terminating with a lotus motif. The ridges of the facets are shaped like cable mouldings.

GOBLINOID VARIETY - Pranāla having the carvings of a goblin represented as bhūta, jhambaka, rākshasa, etc, are found only at two places. One example^{xxvi} is ornate and very attractive . The terminal of the pranāla contains a seated goblin in the form of Narasimha. The lion face has long manes on its face and head spreading over the two shoulders and the chakrakundalas, bracelet, uttarīya worn like a dhoti are all neatly depicted. The pranāla has a deeply grooved channel which comes up to the end of the stone and from there it is drilled like a conduit through the stone and opens up in the mouth of the goblin. Behind this figure of Narasimha, a human figure is carved on both the sides. The human figure is mounted on a lion. This human figure holds a bow in the reverse fashion, the significance of which is difficult to explain. The figure of the goblin in the form of Narasimha is of significance here. Early sculptures of Narasimha, carved in this form are available. But carving of a Narasimha sculpture at the mouth of the pranāla is against the sentiments of the Narasimha cult.

HYBRID VARIETY - Pranāla of this type has various mythical subjects combined and formed as a unique design. Two such examples are noticed in the region of our study. The first is from Arunachaleshwara temple at Nandi . In this example a well carved forepart of the makara forms the shaft of the pranāla. The two forelegs, floriated body, broad ears, wide open mouth, protruding eyes, and sharp teeth of both the jaws are very neatly carved. The upper jaw of the makara has two prominently protruding canines from the upper end. Besides this there is also a spiraled trunk for the makara. From the mouth of the makara emerges a tongue in the form of a male human figure (vidhyādhara). He is two-armed, wields a sword in his right hand and holds a shield in his left hand. He wears a conical, tiered kirīta, necklaces, sacred thread, udarabandha, etc.

The second example is from Lakshmaneshwara temple (mid-10th century) at Avani (Fig.-9, Pl.-12). This pranāla has a heavy octagonal shaft which terminates like the head of a makara. The makara has floral manes, ears, protruding eyes, wide open mouth and a spiraled trunk which rests like a crown above the head. Sharp teeth on both the jaws and protruding canines of the upper jaw are neatly delineated. The two ears of the makara carved in two different ways are noteworthy.

Here also, a human figure (vidyādhara) holding lotuses in both his hands, comes out like a tongue of the makara. He is two armed, wields a sword in his right hand, and holds a shield in his left hand. He wears a conical, tiered Kireeta , necklaces,sacred thread, udara bandha etc.

REFERENCES

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- i “Rūpa-Pratirūpa” – Alice Boner commemoration volume - P-148.
- ii The pranāla is inserted in the sanctum wall. It is both functional and ceremonial in nature, as it drains out the sacred water.
Nālas are also provided in the parapets of talas as well as the . This is more functional in nature as it drains out the rain water
- iii vrajēdbāhyē vinis krāntām nālīm shailamayīm tatha || - 1.5. 54b.
- iv Iswara temple, Doddahulluru, Hoskote taluk, Bangalore dist.
- v Mayamata Ch-IXX, a , , a ya a a – 8. , Mānasā a Ch-IXX, lōka -83.
- vi Jalanirgamanacchidram prāsādasyōttare bhavēt|| tā ama Ch- XIII - lōka 15. Prāsādayōttare madhyē nālam ēvam prakalpayēt ||
āna iva guru dēva paddati- kriyapāda-II, lōka 32-95.
- vii Ēvam nālam prakartavyam vāmē prāsāda madhyamē|| Mayamata Ch-IXX, lōka 29.
- viii Pūradikōttarēvāpi yuktyā nālam prayojayēt|| Mānasā a- Ch-IX- lōka-83.
- ix Bhagandeshwra temple at Bhagamandala, Coorg.
- x Gunjanarashima Swamy temple at T. Narasipura, Mysore dist.
- xi 11 Kolaramma temple, Kolar has two shrines in that the earlier shrine has images made out of mud and mortar.
- xii Parivārālayas of Markandeshwara temple at Vokkaleri, Malur taluk, Kolar dist.
- xiii Ēvam nālam prakartavyam vāmē prāsāda madhyamē|| Mayamata Ch-IXX, lōka 29.
- xiv Ajiṭāgama Ch-XIII- slōka -14.
- xv pranāla is inserted at the bottom of the bhitti and in Someshwara temple at Ulsur, Bangalore dist the pranāla is inserted at the upāna of the adhistana.
- xvi Purushottama samhita Ch -IV .
- xvii Mayamata Ch-IXX , lōka – 23-29.
- xviii Shilparatna Ch- XX - slōka – 1-16.
- xix Ishānashivaguru deva paddati, Kriyāpāda, Uttarārdha, 32,slōka – 86-96
- xx Kashyapa shilpa patala – VII, lōka – 8,9,10
- xxi Chennakeshave temple at Kurudumale, Mulbagal taluk, Kolar dist belonging to 12th century.
- xxii Someshwara temple at Doddagubbi, Hosakote taluk, Bangalore dist belonging to 15th century

^{xxiii} Ishwara temple at Doddahulluru, Hosakote taluk Bangalore dist.

^{xxiv} Channakeshava temple Kurudumale, Mulubagal taluk, Kolar dist.

^{xxv} Someshwara temple at Kurudumale, Mulubagal taluk, Kolar dist.

^{xxvi} From Bhoganadishwara Temple complex at Nandi, Chikkaballapura taluk, Kolar dist.