

## Modern Interpretation of an Ancient Sculpture

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*“Braque said to me once: ‘Deep down, you have always loved classical beauty’. That is true. It was then, and it still is. People don’t invent a new kind of beauty every year”.*

PICASSO

The classical works of art, especially, the masterpieces of temple architecture in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries during the rule of Western Chalukyas combine vivid elements of Hindu expressionism and deliberate dashes of artistic and cultural heritage reflecting a predominant desire to marry religious concepts with spiritual lessons.

A humble subject for my interpretive painting is an inspiration drawn from Bhimeshwara temple: a small sculpture of Nandi, the bull (vahana of Shiva) situated in the western sanctum, adorned with intricately rendered lintels.



*Figure 1: The interpretive painting*

Building a composition around an intense religious belief and spiritual narrative, the work presents a mystical world through the prism of multicultural associations of mythical and religious imagery.

Horns not fully developed; it is an attempt to bring radiance of youth in the Nandi. With simple brushwork and graphic character, it clearly tries to define energy and devotion through a few spare strokes that lean on half tones or shadows.

Harmonious brush work and consistent techniques highlight the shallow carving-like styling of the over-elaborate saddle draping Nandi. Portraying the ornamental traditions and carving techniques, it celebrates allegories and the elegance of the iconic composition.

Without abandoning the monumental decorative and spiritual intensity, the masculine abundance of colour washes, the feminine precision of textured flow, the halftones and shadows try to capture compelling stories of Western Chalukyas' architecture.

Halftone painting with lightness, with subtle details on the lintel, the composition combines the logic of colour interactions and the melody of contrast. With a nice command of light and shadow, the soothing palate and customary combinations of earthy colours try to balance and complete the composition. The virtue of this dramatic colourless artwork gives it a spiritual aura. The humble face of the subject with droplets of colour seems almost prayerful.



*Figure 2: A photograph of the small sculpture of Nandi situated in the western sanctum of Bhimeshwara temple*

Just like the post-impressionistic colours, the Indian chromatic palette of vermillion (kumkum), and ochre (turmeric) whisper Hindu rituals and traditions on the Nandi's forehead, painting a visual language filled with spiritual references and startling juxtapositions.

Nandi's one leg tucked under and the other raised up, present assertive style deftly mixed with mythical stories of strength, mysterious messages of grace and multicultural associations of aggression and power.

Colours are kept separate to avoid any blotching of paint, to present a tenebrous yet calm background. Aside from the shadows, the active brushstrokes delineate the forms with a ray of natural lighting, bathing the holy plant of *tulsi* in a most enchanting ephemeral light, suggesting a connection to separate dark and light, divine and humanistic, superstitious and progressive ideas, resonating a gamut of emotions through washes and oil colour.