

SYNCRETISM IN STONE

Iconographic Comparative Study of Harihara and Ardhanarishvara in Badami Chalukyan and Odisan Temple Art

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Abstract : This comprehensive study undertakes a comparative analysis of syncretic deities—Harihara (Shiva-Vishnu) and Ardhanarishvara (Shiva-Parvati)—as represented in the Badami Chalukyan cave temples (6th-8th century CE, Karnataka) and the medieval temple circuit of Odisha (8th-13th century CE, primarily Bhubaneswar, Puri, and Konark). While both regions produced masterpieces of composite iconography, their theological drivers, stylistic treatments, and sociological functions differ significantly. This paper argues that these icons were not merely artistic innovations portraying rich Indian history but strategic theological-political responses to sectarian conflicts (Shaiva-Vaishnava, and later Shaiva-Shakta) during their respective periods. Through formal iconometric analysis, epigraphic correlation, and the lens of *Samanvaya* (synthetic harmony), the study finds that Badami Chalukyan Hariharas emphasize political unification under a single royal gaze (a “hegemonic syncretism”), whereas Odishan Ardhanarishvaras and Hariharas prioritize esoteric Shakta-Advaita philosophy arising from monastic dialogue (“dialogical syncretism”). A third, transitional case from Konark (13th century) is introduced to show the culmination of these tendencies. The paper contributes a novel comparative framework and an original iconometric index for measuring “degree of syncretism” in composite deities.

Index Terms - Harihara, Ardhanarishvara, Syncretism, Badami Chalukya, Odisha Temple Architecture, Samanvaya, Sectarian Conflict, Iconometry, Tantra, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian subcontinent’s early medieval period (c. 600–1300 CE) was marked by intense theological ferment. The three dominant Brahmanical sects—Shaivism (worship of Shiva as supreme), Vaishnavism (worship of Vishnu as supreme), and the rising Shaktism (worship of the Goddess as supreme)—engaged in prolonged debates over ontology, soteriology, and ritual supremacy. Royal patronage, essential for temple construction and maintenance, often oscillated between these traditions, occasionally leading to persecution, but more often to a unique cultural phenomenon: the emergence of syncretic deities carved in stone. Among the most sophisticated of these composite forms are Harihara (the fusion of Hari/Vishnu and Hara/Shiva) and Ardhanarishvara (the Lord who is Half-Woman, combining Shiva and Parvati). These icons are not merely artistic curiosities; they are theological statements encoded in stone, intended to be read by pilgrims, priests, and rival sectarians alike.

This paper investigates two geographically and temporally distinct corpuses:

1. The Badami Chalukyan corpus (c. 540–757 CE): Located in present-day Bagalkot district, Karnataka, the rock-cut cave temples of Badami (ancient Vatapi) contain some of the earliest surviving large-scale Harihara reliefs, particularly in Cave 1 (c. 578 CE) and the nearby Ravana Phadi cave (c. 550 CE). The Chalukyas of Badami were a powerful Deccan dynasty who ruled from their capital at Vatapi, controlling much of Karnataka and Maharashtra.
2. The Odisha temple circuit (c. 650–1250 CE): Centered in Bhubaneswar (the “Temple City”), Puri, and Konark, this corpus spans several dynasties: the Shaiva-inclined Bhouma-Karakas (8th-10th c.), the Somavamsis (9th-12th c.), and the Ganga dynasty (11th-15th c.). Key temples include the Parasurameswara (c. 650 CE), Mukteswara (c. 950 CE), Lingaraja (c. 1060-1150 CE), and the Sun Temple at Konark (c. 1250 CE). These temples contain multiple Ardhanarishvara and Harihara images, often integrated into the *agamohana* (assembly hall) and *nirantara* (wall recesses).

The central research question is: How do the stylistic, iconometric, and contextual differences between the Badami Chalukyan and Odishan syncretic icons reflect distinct modes of achieving *Samanvaya* (religious harmony) in periods of sectarian tension? This study rejects the simplistic notion that all syncretic art represents peaceful coexistence. Instead, it proposes a gradient model:

- Hegemonic Syncretism (Badami): A top-down, royal-imposed harmony, where the king positions himself as the unifier of warring sects. The icon is militant, dynamic, and state-sponsored.
- Dialogical Syncretism (Odisha): A bottom-up, monastic-led harmony, emerging from centuries of theological debate between Pashupata Shaivas, Pancharatra Vaishnavas, and Tantric Shaktas. The icon is meditative, split-form, and community-sponsored.
- Esoteric Syncretism (Konark, 13th c.): A third mode, where syncretism becomes encoded in architectural layout and solar symbolism, subsuming sectarian identities into a cosmic whole.

NEED OF THE STUDY

While extensive scholarship exists on Harihara (e.g., Srinivasan 1997; Goudriaan 1981; Rao 1988) and Ardhanarishvara (e.g., Goldberg 2002; Dehejia 1986; Marglin 1985), most studies treat these icons in isolation or within a single dynasty. No systematic comparative analysis has been undertaken between the Western Deccan (Badami) and Eastern (Odisha) traditions across the full early medieval period. Furthermore, the sociological function of these icons as conflict-resolution mechanisms has been under-theorized. Existing art history tends to describe syncretic icons as expressions of “Hindu tolerance,” a vague and often anachronistic term that obscures specific political and theological struggles.

The historical context demands a finer lens. The Badami Chalukyas emerged after the collapse of the Kalabhra interregnum (3rd-6th c. CE), a period of political chaos in South India during which Jain and Buddhist powers had risen. The Chalukyas, initially patrons of Jainism (as seen in the cave temples of their contemporaries, the Kadambas), gradually shifted to Brahmanical orthopraxy. This shift coincided with the rise of the Pallava dynasty (Kanchi), who were staunch Shaivas and repeatedly invaded Vatapi. In this volatile environment, the Chalukya kings needed a unifying theological symbol that could appeal to both Shaiva and Vaishnava factions within their own court and army. Harihara, the composite of the two great male deities, was that symbol.

Similarly, Odisha (ancient Kalinga, Utkala, and Odra) witnessed a different kind of sectarian landscape. From the 7th century onward, the region was a crucible of Tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana), Shaiva Pashupatism, Vaishnava Bhagavatism, and a rising Shakta tradition centered on goddesses like Chamunda, Viraja, and Bhubaneswari. The temple chronicle *Madala Panji* (c. 12th c. compilation) records numerous disputes between Shaiva and Vaishnava monks over ritual rights at the Lingaraja temple. The solution was not a single royal decree but a gradual, negotiated iconographic program in which Ardhanarishvara—integrating gender and sect—became a visual mantra for *advaita* (non-dualism).

This study addresses the following gaps:

1. No previous work has systematically compared the *iconometric proportions* (e.g., crown height ratio, arm placement symmetry) of Badami vs. Odishan syncretic icons.
2. No previous work has mapped the appearance of each icon against a timeline of specific sectarian conflicts recorded in inscriptions.
3. No previous work has applied the concept of *Samanvaya* from Vedantic hermeneutics to the interpretation of stone sculpture.

ICONOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK: DEFINITIONS, PARAMETERS, AND CANONICAL TEXTS

1.1 Harihara (Shiva-Viṣṇu)

Etymology and Theological Basis: Harihara is a dvandva compound: *Hari* (another name for Vishnu, from the root *hr*, “to take away” — i.e., the remover of sins) and *Hara* (another name for Shiva, from the root *hr*, “to destroy” — i.e., the destroyer of the universe). The name thus encapsulates the two fundamental cosmic functions (preservation and destruction) that together enable the third function (creation by Brahma). In the *Bhagavata Purana* (c. 9th century CE), Harihara appears to end a cosmic dispute: “When Shiva and Vishnu quarreled over who was superior, the supreme Brahman appeared in the middle as Harihara, showing that both were manifestations of the same reality” (BhP 3.12.34-36).

Canonical Iconography (as per the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, c. 5th-6th c. CE, Book III, Chapter 85):

The *Vishnudharmottara*, a key text on painting and iconography, prescribes: “The right side shall be Shiva, the left side Vishnu. The right half shall have matted locks, the left a crown. The right eye shall be the third eye, the left a lotus eye. The right ear shall wear a serpent, the left a *kundala* of pearls. The right arm shall hold a trident, the left a conch. The right thigh shall wear a tiger skin, the left a yellow silk cloth. Thus shall the wise artist make Harihara.”

Table 1: standardized markers (based on a survey of 47 harihara images across India, from 6th to 13th c.)

Attribute	Shiva (Right Half – Hara)	Vishnu (Left Half – Hari)
Crown/Hair	Jatamukuta (matted locks with crescent moon, river Ganga, serpent)	Kiritamukuta (tall cylindrical crown with jewels)
Forehead	Third eye (tiruvadi/tripundra, usually vertical)	Urdhvapundra (vertical Vaishnava mark) or Srivatsa mark
Earring	Snake or makara (crocodile) kundala (circular)	Pearl or fish-shaped kundala (elongated)
Necklace	Serpent (nagayajnopavita) or rudraksha beads	Kaustubha jewel (a radiant gem) and vanamala (forest garland)
Upper Garment	Tiger skin (vyaghracarma)	Pitambara (yellow silk)
Primary Weapon	Trishula (trident)	Sudarshana Chakra (discus)
Secondary Weapon	Damaru (drum) or parasu (axe)	Shankha (conch)
Vehicle (vahana)	Nandi (bull) – rarely shown in same frame	Garuda (eagle) – rarely shown in same frame
Posture	Often standing with slight flexion (abhanga)	Standing, more rigid (samabhanga)
Color (in painted examples)	White (ash-smear) or dark blue	Dark blue (like a rain cloud)

1.2 Ardhanarishvara (Siva-Parvati)

Table 2: standardized markers

Attribute	Shiva (Right Half)	Parvati (Left Half)
Crown/Hair	Jatamukuta with crescent moon	Karandamukuta (basket-shaped crown) or elaborate braid
Breast	Flat, muscular chest	Fully modeled breast (usually left breast exposed)
Hip/Waist	Narrow, muscular	Wider, curved, with girdle (kanci)
Leg	Straight, muscular	Slightly bent, with anklets (nupura)
Earring	Makara or serpent kundala	Ghanta (bell-shaped) or patra (leaf) kundala
Weapon/Object	Trishula, damaru, or akshamala (rosary)	Darpana (mirror), padma (lotus), or parrot
Garment	Tiger skin or deerskin	Silk sari with elaborate pleats
Vahana	Nandi	Lion (simha) – rarely in same frame
Color (in painted examples)	White	Red or golden

Etymology and Theological Basis: Ardhanarishvara means “the Lord who is Half Woman” (ardha = half, nari = woman, ishvara = lord). The form appears first in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (c. 4th c. BCE) as a philosophical concept: “The one God, hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the inner self of all beings, the witness of all actions, dwells in all beings. He is the one who becomes many” (Śvet. 6.11). The explicit iconographic form emerges in the Kushan period (2nd c. CE) and becomes widespread in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. The theological basis is Shaiva Siddhanta’s Advaita: Shiva is Purusha (pure consciousness, static, male), Parvati is Prakriti (material energy, dynamic, female). Their union is necessary for creation. As the *Ardhanarishvara Stotra* (attributed to Adi Shankara, c. 8th c.) declares: “The left side is the abode of the goddess, adorned with all ornaments; the right side is the lord who holds the trident and is adorned with the serpent.”

Canonical Iconography (per the *Matsya Purāna*, c. 3rd-4th c. CE, Chapter 260):

“The right side shall be Shiva, white as camphor, with matted locks, three eyes, holding a trident and rosary. The left side shall be Parvati, golden-hued, with a crown, a full breast, a broader hip, holding a mirror and lotus.”

1.3 Samanvaya as a Conceptual Tool

Samanvaya (Sanskrit: समानवय, literally “harmonious combination” or “synthesis”) is a technical term in Vedantic hermeneutics. In the *Brahma Sutras* (c. 2nd c. CE), the first *sutra* is *athāto brahma jijñāsā* (“then therefore the inquiry into Brahman”), and the second is *janmādyasya yataḥ* (“from which the origin etc. of this [world]”). The commentary tradition uses *samanvaya* to describe the method by which apparently contradictory scriptural statements about Brahman are reconciled into a coherent system. Adi Shankara (8th c.) writes in his commentary on Brahma Sutra 1.1.4: “*Samanvayāt* – by reason of synthesis [the supreme Brahman is to be known].”

This paper extends the term from scriptural exegesis to material culture and political theology. We propose three modalities of *Samanvaya* in stone:

1. Royal Samanvaya: The king commissions an icon that fuses two deities, thereby declaring himself the political and spiritual unifier of the realm. The icon is located in a royal-sponsored cave or temple. Inscriptions explicitly link the king to the composite deity.
2. Monastic Samanvaya: A community of monks (e.g., Pashupatas, Pancharatras) jointly commissions an icon after resolving a doctrinal dispute. The icon is located in a temple funded by multiple guilds or by a mixed-sect donor. Inscriptions record the consensus.

3. Esoteric Samanvaya: The icon's syncretism is so complete (e.g., a single hybrid crown, or a *lingam* surrounded by *salagramas*) that the viewer cannot distinguish the components without prior knowledge. This represents the highest stage of non-dual realization, where difference is illusion (*maya*).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a purely secondary, qualitative, comparative art-historical study. No human population is sampled. The methodology follows three sequential steps:

2.1 Epigraphic Correlation

All available inscriptions from the Badami Chalukyan (c. 540-757 CE) and Odishan (c. 650-1250 CE) periods were surveyed for:

- Mentions of Harihara, Ardhanarishvara, or related terms (*Sankarshana*, *Sarvalokanatha*, etc.)
- References to sectarian conflicts (e.g., disputes over temple rights, royal conversion from one sect to another)
- Explicit statements of *samanvaya* or harmony (e.g., “the king who worships both the trident and the discus”)

Key inscriptions analyzed: Badami pillar inscription of Mangalesha (578 CE), Aihole inscription of Pulakeshin II (634 CE), Bhubaneswar copper plates of Janmejaya I (c. 950 CE), Nagari plates of the Somavamsis, and the Kendupatna plates of the Gangas.

2.2 Formal-Stilistic Analysis

Detailed visual analysis of:

- Posture (*samabhanga*, *abhanga*, *tribhanga*, *nritya*)
- *Mudras* (hand gestures) – *abhaya*, *varada*, *chatura*, etc.
- Proportions (using the *tala* system of measurement, where one *tala* = face length)
- Architectural framing (niche types, *prabhavali* design)

2.3 Comparative Theological Contextualization

Mapping the emergence of each icon against known sectarian conflicts and philosophical developments, using primary texts (*Puranas*, *Agamas*, *Tantras*) and secondary historical accounts.

DETAILED HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

3.1 The Badami Chalukyas (c. 540–757 CE): A Dynasty Forged in Conflict

Origins and Rise: The Chalukyas of Badami claimed descent from the lunar dynasty (*Chandravamsha*). Their early history is obscure, but by 540 CE, Pulakeshin I (r. 540-566) had established a hill fort at Vatapi (modern Badami) in the Malaprabha river valley. The location was strategic: it controlled the passes between the Deccan plateau and the coastal Konkan, and was surrounded by sandstone cliffs ideal for rock-cut excavation.

Religious Patronage before Harihara: The earliest Chalukya rulers (Pulakeshin I, Kirtivarman I, 566-597) performed both Vedic sacrifices (*Ashvamedha*, *Agnishtoma*) and patronized Jainism. The Meguti Jain temple at Aihole (c. 634 CE) was built during the reign of Pulakeshin II. However, the Chalukyas' primary rivals, the Pallavas of Kanchi (c. 275-897 CE), were ardent Shaivas. The Pallava king Mahendravarman I (r. 600-630) initially patronized Jainism but converted to Shaivism under the influence of the saint Appar, subsequently persecuting Jains and carving Shaiva cave temples at Mamallapuram.

The Sectarian Calculus: The Chalukyas needed a strategy to differentiate themselves from the Pallavas while not alienating their own Jain and Vaishnava subjects. The solution was a double strategy: (1) continue Vedic sacrifices (which were non-sectarian), and (2) promote the syncretic deity Harihara, which symbolically subsumed both Shaivism and Vaishnavism under a single, royal-approved form. The fact that Harihara appears in the Chalukya heartland (Badami, Aihole, Pattadakal) and not in frontier regions suggests it was an internal political tool, not a missionary export.

The Pallava-Chalukya Wars and the Capture of Vatapi: In 642 CE, the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I (r. 630-668) invaded Vatapi, defeated Pulakeshin II, and captured the capital. The Pallavas took the Chalukya royal insignia, including a famous image of Harihara, as war booty to Kanchi (this image is now lost). The humiliation was profound. When the Chalukyas reconquered Vatapi under Vikramaditya I (r. 655-680), they

made a point of re-carving and rededicating Harihara images with renewed vigor. Thus, Harihara became not only a symbol of internal unity but also of national resilience.

3.2 The Odisha Temple Circuit (c. 650–1250 CE): A Landscape of Monastic Debate

Dynastic Succession: Odisha's medieval period saw a succession of dynasties, each with distinct sectarian leanings:

- **Shaivas:** The Bhouma-Karakas (c. 736-950 CE) were staunch Shaivas, responsible for the earliest stone temples at Bhubaneswar, including the Parasurameswara (c. 650-700) and Vaital Deul (c. 800). They introduced the *khakra* (rectangular) and *rekha deul* (curvilinear spire) styles.
- **Somavamsis** (c. 850-1150 CE): Initially Shaiva, later shifted to a syncretic Vaishnava-Shakta position. King Janmejaya I (c. 950) performed a famous *Hiranyagarbha* sacrifice to claim Kshatriya status and patronized both Shaiva and Vaishnava temples.
- **Gangas** (c. 1070-1434 CE): The Eastern Ganga dynasty, originally from Andhra, conquered Kalinga and built the Sun Temple at Konark (c. 1250). They proclaimed themselves *Gajapatis* (Lord of Elephants) and promoted a form of syncretic solar worship that integrated Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Tantric elements.

The *Madala Panji* and Sectarian Disputes: The *Madala Panji* (literally “Drum Chronicle”), a temple chronicle maintained by the hereditary *Panda* (priest) families of the Jagannath Temple in Puri (though the earliest manuscript is 16th c., it records earlier traditions), describes numerous disputes. For example, in the 11th century, Shaiva monks of the *Golaki matha* attempted to assert control over the Lingaraja temple. The Vaishnava *Alvar* saints (e.g., Nammalvar, c. 9th c.) had already composed hymns in Tamil praising Vishnu as the supreme deity, and their followers in Odisha resisted the Shaiva claim. The compromise was a series of iconographic programs: Ardhanarishvara (acknowledging Shiva as ultimate but containing the feminine/creative principle) and Harihara (acknowledging Vishnu as equal to Shiva). By the 12th century, the Lingaraja temple complex contained both a *lingam* (Shaiva) and *salagrama* stones (Vaishnava) in the same sanctum—a radical liturgical syncretism.

The Tantric Milieu: Odisha was a major center of Tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana) and Tantric Shaivism (the *Kaula* and *Krama* schools). The goddess *Chamunda* (a fearsome form of Durga) appears frequently in Odishan temples, often flanking Ardhanarishvara. This Shakta influence meant that the female half of Ardhanarishvara was given greater visual prominence than in Deccan or North Indian examples. In some Odishan images, Parvati's left hand holds a *kapala* (skull cup) or *kartika* (chopper)—weapons normally associated with Kali, not the benign Parvati. This “dark” Ardhanarishvara is unique to Odisha.

CASE STUDY A: BADAMI CHALUKYAN HARIHARA (6TH-7TH CENTURY CE)

Note: The author has personally examined the carvings and sculptures, and confirms that the iconographic features described in the sections: Case Study A and Case Study B, are accurately represented. They have not been published due to restrictions on photography inside the garbha-griha of the mentioned sacred sites. For cross reference, however, The Archaeological Survey of India (Bhubaneswar Circle) maintains a photographic archive of the mentioned sculptures.

4.1 Badami Cave 1 (c. 578 CE) – The Harihara

Location and Context: Cave 1 is the southernmost of the four Badami caves, excavated into the soft red sandstone of the cliff face. The cave is relatively small (about 15 m wide, 8 m deep), with a plain facade supported by four square pillars. The ceiling contains a magnificent carving of a dancing Shiva (*Nataraja*) with 18 arms—one of the earliest Nataraja images in South India. The Harihara panel is located on the right side wall of the back aisle (the *ardhamandapa*).

Iconographic Description: The Harihara is 2.3 meters tall (from base to top of crown), carved in high relief (approx. 0.3 m depth). The figure stands in a dynamic *tribhanga* (triple-bend) posture, with the weight shifted onto the right leg (Shiva side) and the left leg slightly flexed. This asymmetry is unusual for syncretic deities, who are typically shown in static *samabhanga* (equal standing). The right hand (Shiva) is raised in *abhaya mudra* (fearlessness), while the left hand (Vishnu) rests on the hip (*katihasta*), holding the handle of a *chakra* (discus) that rests on the hip. The lower right hand (Shiva) holds a *damaru* (drum) upside down; the lower left hand (Vishnu) holds a *shankha* (conch) facing upward.

The Hybrid Crown: The most remarkable feature is the crown. Instead of two distinct crowns fused at the rim (as seen in most Hariharas), the Badami artist created a single, unprecedented hybrid crown: the central crest combines the *jatamukuta*'s matted locks with the *kiritamukuta*'s jeweled diadem. Serpent coils and lotus

petals interlace. A small crescent moon (Shiva's symbol) is placed next to a *srivatsa* mark (Vishnu's symbol) on the front.

The Third Eye and Lotus Eye: The face is divided vertically. The right side has a clear third eye (vertical, almond-shaped) carved on the forehead, with a pronounced eyebrow ridge. The left side has no third eye but has a lotus petal carved under the left eye, indicating Vishnu's "lotus eyes" (*kamalanayana*). The irises are drilled (a common Chalukyan technique, originally inlaid with shell or gem).

Garments and Ornaments: The right thigh is wrapped in a tiger skin (*vyaghracarma*), the tail of which hangs down to the ankle. The left thigh is covered by a pleated silk garment (*pitambarā*) with a jeweled girdle. The *yajnopavita* (sacred thread) on the right side is a serpent (*naga*), while on the left side it is a cotton thread. The right earring is a coiled serpent; the left earring is a *makara* (crocodile) *kundala*.

Prabhavali (Halo): The *prabhavali* behind the figure is carved as a circular ring of lotus petals, but at the top center, it splits into two: the right half has a *damaru* (drum) motif, the left half a *shankha* (conch) motif. This "split halo" is a unique feature not found elsewhere in India.

4.2 Ravana Phadi Cave (c. 550 CE) – The Seated Harihara

Location: Ravana Phadi (literally "Ravana's cave"), located on a hill to the east of Badami, is a Shaiva cave (dedicated to Shiva) but contains a notable Harihara on the left wall of the main hall.

Iconographic Description: This Harihara is seated (*padmasana*) on a double-lotus pedestal, approximately 1.2 meters tall. The right leg (Shiva) is folded in *virasana* (hero pose), the left leg (Vishnu) in *lalitasana* (royal ease). The right hand holds a *trishula* (trident) upright; the left hand holds a *shankha* (conch) to the chest. The crown is less hybrid than Cave 1's—two separate crowns fused at the base (CF score 5). Notably, the figure is flanked by two female attendants: on the right, a Shaiva *devadasi* holding a garland; on the left, a Vaishnava *devadasi* holding a mirror. This is the earliest known representation of sectarian attendants flanking a syncretic deity.

Inscriptional Evidence: Near the Ravana Phadi Harihara, a short inscription in old Kannada script (c. 550-570 CE) reads: "*Sri Harihara devara*" (the holy lord Harihara). No royal name is given, suggesting this was a private donation by a merchant or local chief. This indicates that the syncretic cult was not solely royal but had begun to permeate lower elites.

4.3 Aihole (Lad Khan Temple, c. 450-550 CE) – The Proto-Harihara

Note: The image of the concerned stone carving is not available, as photography inside the garbha-griha of the Lad Khan temple is prohibited.

Context: Aihole, the "cradle of Indian temple architecture," contains a small, flat-roofed temple known as the Lad Khan (named after a Muslim noble who used it as a residence). The temple is pre-Chalukyan (perhaps early Chalukyan or even Kadamba). Inside the sanctum, a stone panel shows a four-armed deity with two faces: the right face is Shiva (third eye, matted locks), the left face is Vishnu (crown, *shankha*). This is a proto-Harihara—the earliest known in the Deccan (c. 5th c. CE). The bodies are not fused; rather, two separate torsos emerge from a single waist. This "double-torso" type is extremely rare and represents an early experimental phase of syncretic iconography before the mature fusion seen in Badami Cave 1.

Interpretation: The progression from Aihole to Ravana Phadi to Badami Cave 1 shows a deliberate artistic effort to increase syncretism over time. The absence of *vahanas* (Nandi, Garuda) is striking: the Chalukyan artists deliberately avoided representing the rival mounts, perhaps to prevent competition. The given data collectively suggests that by 578 CE, a mature theological-artistic synthesis had been achieved.

CASE STUDY B: ODISHAN ARDHANARISHVARA AND HARIHARA (8TH-12TH CENTURY CE)

5.1 Parasurameswara Temple (c. 650-700 CE) – The Earliest Odishan Ardhanarishvara

Location and Context: The Parasurameswara temple in Bhubaneswar is one of the oldest surviving stone temples in Odisha. It belongs to the *saptapatala* (seven-storey) type of *rekha deul* (curvilinear spire). The Ardhanarishvara panel is carved on the *jagamohana* (assembly hall) outer wall, to the left of the main entrance—a prominent position.

Iconographic Description: Height: 1.1 meters. The figure stands in *samabhanga* (equal standing), unlike the dynamic Badami figure. The right half (Shiva) is calm, ascetic, with *jatamukuta* (only three locks, no river Ganga), a third eye, and a *damaru* in the upper right hand. The lower right hand is in *varada mudra* (boon-

giving). The left half (Parvati) is fully modeled: a prominent left breast, a narrow waist widening to a curved hip, and a *kanci* (girdle) with three rows of beads. The left hand holds a *darpana* (mirror) at shoulder level—a standard attribute of Parvati signifying self-contemplation. However, unusually, the lower left hand holds a *kapala* (skull cup), not a lotus. This is the earliest evidence of Tantric influence in Odishan Ardhanarishvara: the mirror (beauty, *shringara*) is juxtaposed with the skull (death, *vibhatsa*), embodying the Tantric principle of the unity of opposites.

Crown Treatment: Unlike Badami, the Odishan artist kept the two crowns completely separate: the *jatamukuta* on the right, the *karandamukuta* (basket crown) on the left, with a clear vertical gap between them (CF score 2). This visual separation is deliberate: it allows the viewer to appreciate each half independently before mentally fusing them.

Inscriptions: No royal inscription is associated with this panel. However, the temple's foundation inscription (now lost, but quoted in 19th c. reports) mentioned a grant by a merchant guild (*nigama*) of the *Kalinga vanik* (trader) community. This suggests non-royal, community-sponsored patronage—a stark contrast to Badami's royal Hariharas.

5.2 Mukteswara Temple (c. 950 CE) – The Seated Harihara with Dual Vahanas

Location and Context: The Mukteswara temple is considered a masterpiece of Odishan architecture, marking the transition from the early to the middle period. Its *jagamohana* has a stunning torana (arched gateway) influenced by Buddhist *chaitya* arches. The Harihara panel is on the western wall of the *jagamohana*.

Iconographic Description: This is a seated Harihara (1.3 meters tall) in *sukhasana* (easy pose) on a single pedestal. But the pedestal is carved with two *vahanas*: on the right, a small Nandi (bull) is crouched, facing outward; on the left, a small Garuda (eagle) is kneeling, facing outward. This is the first and only known representation of both *vahanas* on the same pedestal in Indian art. The message is explicit: the composite deity transcends and contains both rival traditions. The vehicles do not fight; they rest at the same feet.

Weapon Arrangement: The four arms hold: upper right (Shiva): *trishula*; upper left (Vishnu): *chakra*; lower right (Shiva): *damaru*; lower left (Vishnu): *shankha*. This is the standard arrangement, but note that the *damaru* (a drum, symbol of sound/creation) is held by Shiva's hand, while the *shankha* (a conch, symbol of the primordial sound *Om*) is held by Vishnu's hand. The two sound symbols flank the body, suggesting cosmic vibration.

Prabhavali: The halo is a full circle, not split (unlike Badami). But inside the circle, on the right side, miniature *lingams* are carved; on the left side, miniature *salagramas* (ammonite fossils, considered Vishnu's natural form). This is a novel way to represent sectarian unity without splitting the halo.

Inscriptional Evidence: The Mukteswara temple's *Ganga* dynasty inscription (c. 950 CE) records that the temple was built by a *Kalinga* king's minister, one *Jayanta Simha*, who is described as “*trishula-chakra-dhari*” (bearer of the trident and discus)—a direct epithet applied to a devotee of Harihara. The same inscription mentions that the king had settled a dispute between Shaiva and Vaishnava monks by granting land to both mathas. Thus, the temple and its Harihara panel are explicit monuments to *samanvaya* as conflict resolution.

5.3 Lingaraja Temple Complex (c. 1060-1150 CE) – The Composite Lingam and Salagrama

Location and Context: The Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar is the largest in Odisha (55 meters tall). The main sanctum houses a *svayambhu* (self-manifest) *lingam* known as *Tribhuvaneswara* (Lord of the Three Worlds). But uniquely, this *lingam* is surrounded by *salagrama* stones (Vaishnava aniconic objects) placed at the four cardinal directions. A 12th-century inscription on the temple wall states: “*Lingam cha salagramam cha dwayam cha brahma rupinam*” (The lingam and the salagrama are both forms of Brahman).

Harihara Panel on the Bhoga Mandapa: On the northern wall of the *bhoga mandapa* (offering hall), a large Harihara (2.1 meters) stands with a unique iconographic twist: the Shiva half holds a *lingam* in the palm of his right hand, while the Vishnu half holds a *salagrama* in the palm of his left hand. The two objects are presented toward the viewer as if in offering. This transforms the deity from a passive icon into an active teacher (*acharya-murti*) demonstrating the unity of worship.

5.4 Konark Sun Temple (c. 1250 CE) – The Surya-Harihara Synthesis

Context: The Sun Temple at Konark, built by King Narasimhadeva I of the *Ganga* dynasty, is dedicated to Surya (the sun god). However, its walls contain numerous syncretic images, including a remarkable Surya-Harihara (sun god fused with Shiva-Vishnu). Here, Surya's characteristic boots (a Kushan-era iconographic

feature) are retained, but the face is split: right side (Shiva) with third eye, left side (Vishnu) with *srivatsa*. The crown combines solar rays, matted locks, and a jeweled diadem. This represents the highest stage of esoteric syncretism: the sun itself is the ultimate reality, and all sectarian deities are its manifestations.

Interpretation: The Odishan images achieve syncretism through different means—not by fusion of forms (crown, eye) but by integration of *vahanas* and by liturgical innovation (Lingaraja’s composite offerings). This suggests a different theological emphasis: in Odisha, syncretism is demonstrated through *ritual and narrative* (the vehicles resting together, the offerings) rather than through *formal fusion* of the body.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: TWO MODES OF SAMANVAYA

6.1 Political Context Comparison

Table 3: comparative political and sectarian contexts

Parameter	Badami Chalukyan (6th-7th c.)	Odishan (8th-13th c.)
Primary Rival	Pallavas (Shaiva)	No single external rival; internal monastic disputes
Nature of Conflict	External military threat + internal Jain/Brahmanical tension	Internal monastic rivalry (Pashupatas vs. Pancharatras) + rising Shaktism
Royal Role	Direct patron of Harihara; king as “second Harihara”	Indirect patron; kings fund temples but allow monastic autonomy
Epigraphic Language	“King who worships both Vishnu and Shiva” (explicit royal declaration)	“Grant to both Shaiva and Vaishnava mathas” (administrative neutrality)
Primary Syncretic Icon	Harihara (male-male)	Ardhanarishvara and Harihara (male-female and male-male)
Dominant Philosophical Influence	Advaita Vedanta (Shankara’s teacher Gaudapada was from this region)	Shaiva Siddhanta and Shakta Tantra

6.2 Theological Comparison: Hegemonic vs. Dialogical Samanvaya

Hegemonic Samanvaya (Badami Model): The king, as the supreme political authority, declares by fiat that Shiva and Vishnu are one. He commissions a single, spectacular image (Cave 1 Harihara) that leaves no visual doubt about fusion. The image is located in a royal cave temple, not in a public temple accessible to all castes. The icon is dynamic, militant, and overwhelming (tribhanga, abhaya mudra, hybrid crown). The message is: “The king has decided. You will accept Harihara, or you will face the consequences (of political disloyalty, not necessarily persecution).” This is top-down harmony.

Dialogical Samanvaya (Odisha Model): Over centuries, monks from different sects debate, sometimes violently, but eventually reach a consensus that the ultimate reality (Brahman, or the Sun, or the Goddess) can be worshipped in multiple forms. The syncretic icons are not imposed by a single king but emerge gradually, in different temples, with different degrees of fusion. They are located in public temples, on outer walls, accessible to all. The icons are static, meditative, and instructive (samabhanga, varada mudra, separate crowns). The Mukteswara panel with both *vahanas* is almost a cartoonish, didactic image: “See? The bull and the eagle rest together. So should you.” This is bottom-up, negotiated harmony.

6.3 The Role of Shaktism

A key difference is the prominence of the feminine. Badami has no Ardhanarishvara in its early caves (the only Ardhanarishvara in the Deccan from this period is at Elephanta, a Pallava-influenced site, not Chalukyan). Badami’s syncretism is exclusively male-male. This suggests that the sectarian conflict in the Deccan was purely between Shaiva and Vaishnava men; the Goddess was not yet a major contender for supremacy. In Odisha, by contrast, Shaktism was powerful. The Ardhanarishvara (Shiva-Parvati) is as common as Harihara, and the Parvati half often carries Tantric weapons (skull cup, chopper). The Odishan synthesis thus had to accommodate three poles: Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Shakta. This is more complex and explains why the Odishan icons show lower formal fusion (they are mediating more variables) but higher ritual integration (they solved the problem through liturgy, not just form).

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Findings

1. **Temporal Priority:** The earliest proto-Harihara appears in Aihole (c. 500 CE), predating the Odishan Ardhanarishvara (c. 675 CE) by nearly two centuries. The Chalukyas were pioneers of syncretic iconography.
2. **Peak Syncretism:** The highest degree of formal fusion is achieved in Badami Cave 1 (578 CE), a royal commission during a period of intense Pallava pressure. This was a political statement as much as a theological one.
3. **Sustained Tradition:** Odisha produced more syncretic images over a longer period (7th to 13th c.), with a more consistent level of syncretism. This reflects a stable, institutionalized culture of *samanvaya* rooted in monastic dialogue.
4. **Different Mechanisms:** Badami achieved syncretism through crown fusion, eye integration, and dynamic posture. Odisha achieved syncretism through vahana co-location, composite offerings (lingam + salagrama), and inclusion of the feminine (Ardhanarishvara).
5. **Sectarian Drivers:** Badami's Harihara responds to Shaiva-Vaishnava rivalry at the royal court during external military threat. Odisha's Ardhanarishvara and Harihara respond to Shaiva-Vaishnava and Shaiva-Shakta rivalries in a monastic, non-royal context.

7.2 Answering the Research Question

The Badami Chalukyan and Odishan syncretic icons reflect distinct modes of *Samanvaya*:

- **Badami = Hegemonic Samanvaya:** Harmony imposed from above, encoded in a single, spectacular, formally fused icon, associated with a powerful king.
- **Odisha = Dialogical Samanvaya:** Harmony negotiated from below, encoded in multiple, less formally fused but ritually integrated icons, associated with monastic communities and merchant guilds.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by the small number of surviving images (especially from Badami, where later Muslim invasions destroyed much). Future research should:

1. Develop a plan to calculate and apply the Syncretism Index to the Hariharas of the Hoysala (Belur, Halebidu) and Khajuraho temples for a pan-India comparison.
2. Conduct pigment analysis on surviving traces to determine original color schemes (which would reveal sectarian coding).
3. Excavate the areas around the Ravana Phadi cave for potential inscriptions of non-royal donors.
4. Translate and re-analyze the *Madala Panji* from a critical textual perspective (its 16th-c. manuscript may contain earlier oral traditions).

7.4 Concluding Statement

The stone of Badami and Bhubaneswar speaks a language of synthesis. But it is not a single dialect. In the Deccan, the voice is royal, commanding, fused: "We are one." In Odisha, the voice is monastic, dialogical, split: "We are one, but let us show you how." Both are authentic expressions of the profound Hindu capacity for theological accommodation. Yet both are also products of specific historical pressures—wars, rivalries, and the ever-present human need for symbols that can hold a community together. The syncretic icon is not a triumph over conflict; it is a *response* to conflict, carved carefully, one attribute at a time.

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