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COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF HOYSALA ARCHITECTURE AND ART

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ABSTRACT

Hoysala architecture and art flourished in Karnataka under the Hoysala Empire from the 11th through the 14th centuries (approx. 1026–1343 CE). Classified under the Karnata Dravida tradition (often associated with the Vesara style bridging northern Nagara and southern Dravida forms), it is celebrated for its intricate soapstone carving and distinctive star-shaped layouts.

Keywords: Hoysala, Art, Architecture, Literature, Vishnuvardhana , Halebid, Belur

INTRODUCTION

Hoysala architecture is a building style that evolved between the 11th and 14th centuries in southern Karnataka under the Hoysala Empire's rule. Hoysala temples are often referred to as hybrid or vesara temple style because their distinctive design tends to be somewhere between Dravida and Nagara temple styles.

Instead of a modest inner chamber with a pillared hall, the Hoysala temples have several shrines arranged around a central pillared hall in the form of an intricately-designed star. The most distinguishing characteristic of these temples of Hoysala architecture is that they become exceedingly complex, with so many projecting angles arising from the previously simple square temple, that the plan of these temples begins to resemble a star and is thus referred to as a stellate-plan.

The temple craftsmen were able to carve their sculptures intricately because they were made of soapstone, a relatively soft stone. These sculptures can be seen, for example, in the gods' jewellery that adorns the temple walls.

Their highly original star-like ground-plans and the profusion of decorative carvings set them apart from other medieval temples. Both open and closed mandapas can be found in Hoysala architecture. Hoysala temples have circular pillars in their mandapas. Each pillar has four sculpted figures on the top brackets. The mandapa's ceilings are ornate, with mythological figures and floral designs.

The vimana in Hoysala temples is notable for being simple on the inside though lavishly decorated on the outside. One or more shrines can be located in most Hoysala temples. According to the shrines, temples are graded as ekakuta (one shrine), dvikuta (two shrines). On the uppermost part of the temple tower, the Hoysala temples have a lovely vase-shaped water pot.

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The predecessors of the Hoysalas, the Nolamaba (late eighth – 11th century) and Western Ganga (350 CE – 1000 CE) dynasties, built both Hindu and Jain temples influenced by Tamil heritage. The Western Chalukyas' (Kalyani) decoration inspired Hoysala decorative elements and employed their craftsmen. The pillar image known as "Sthambha buttalikas" in Hoysala architecture displays Chola and Chalukya influences.

Mohini's image in one of the pillars in Chennakeshava temple's mandapa holds a firm idea of Chola impressionism in Hoysala art. The pillars' top and surface were both embellished by Hoysala craftsmen, while Chalukya artists kept the top plain and only ornamented the surface.

The finest example of Hoysala Architecture is Chennakeshava temple, Hoysaleshwara Temple and Keshava temple.

Influence of Chola and Chalukya art

The decoration of the Western Chalukyas (Kalyani) influenced the Hoysala decoration. The pillar mage called "Sthambha buttalikas" seen in Hoysala art bears evidence of Chola and Chalukya art. In Chennakeshava temple, the image of Mohini seen in one of the pillars in the mantapa bears the fine example of Chola art in Hoysala art.

A special difference between Hoysala and Chalukya art

The Hoysala artists ornamented both top and surface of the pillars while Chalukya artists left the top plain and decorated only the surface.

Hoysala Empire and Architecture

The Hoysalas were great temple builders who constructed places of worship for Jains and Hindus alike. Hoysala Empire architecture blends different Indian styles to create its own distinct identity.

Noticeable features of Hoysala art



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(a). Makartorana : It leads to the mantapa of the temples. It is made with sculpted images of makara in lintel form that overhead one to the temple.

(b). Mantapa : Hoysala temples have features of both open (outer mantapa) and closed mantapa (innner mantapa). The ceilings of the mantapa are highly ornate bearing mythological figures and floral design.

(c). Pillars : The mantapas of Hoysala temples have circular pillars. Each pillar bear four brackets in the top with sculpted figures.

(d). Cella (vimana) : The characteristic feature of vimana in Hoysala temples is that they are plain inside while outside is profusely elaborated.

(e). Shrine : The Hoysala temples generally bears one or more shrines. The temples are classified as ekakuta (one shrine), dvikuta (two shrines) etc relating to the number of shrines.

(f). Development of kalasa : The Hoysala temples bear a very nice vase shaped water pot that stands on the top most portion of the temple tower.

(g). Salabhanjika : It is the peculiar feature of Hoysala sculpture. The origin of this mythical woman figure trace back its orgin from the Buddhist sculpture. Salabhanjika or madanika is a mythical women figure with stylized feminine characters who stands near a tree or grasping a branch of a tree. Sometimes, they are portrayed engaging in artistic activities like music, dance etc.
These sculpted figures are seen in each four bracket that places in the top of pillars of Hoysala temples. Besides this, each side of the makartorana is heavily sculpted with figures of salabhanjika.

(h). Kirtimukh : The figure of kirtimukhh ornates the vimana of some Hoysala temples.

(i). Mythical presentation : No other dynasty had been able to present Hindu mythology in sculpted and architectural form than the Hoysala dynasty. The pictures from Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas are very vigorously decorated in the walls of the Hoysala temples. At the entrance of the makartorana, various scenes are depicted from the Hindu mythology in sequential manner in clockwise direction.

(j). General decoration : Besides mythical presentation, the walls of Hoysala temples are decorated with live panels of musicians, dancers, animals etc.

(k). Artistic plan : The shrine of the Hoysala temples are generally seen in stellate shaped though sometimes staggered square plan is visible.

(l). Erotica : In some temples of Hoysala dynasty erotic sculptures are seen swayed by sakta tradition prevailing that time.

Art and Architecture.

Like Chola's and Chalukya's Hoysala were famous for building huge breath taking temples all along Belur and Halebidu. One of the major temple built in Belur was Kesava temple that was built to commerarate the victory over Chola's in Talkkad. The Kesava temple at Belur erected in AD 1117, even without its super-structure reveals a conception of exquisite beauty and intelligence of Hoysala's .

Some of the most acclaimed sculptures of the temple are the bracket figures, called madanakais in the Kannada language of the region, which are placed beneath the overhanging roof of the mandapa. The interior of the temple is as rich and ornate as the exterior of the temple.

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Each pillar is finely carved with different styles of dance forms. Another important Shiva temple built in Halebidu has two identical temples built on a single large platform. Architects' sculptors, goldsmith and other skilled craftsmen who were directly or indirectly related to temple construction were also prosperous. The Hoysala have built many temples.

Some famous temples are Chennakesava temple of Belur is one such example. Few others are Hoysaleswara temple at Halebidu, less a temple at Somanthapura.

(i). Chennakeshava temple, Belur

In Belur, in the Indian state of Karnataka, is one of the most celebrated examples of Hoysala architecture. The temple complex has two entrances, one of which is a very large *gopuram*. The main temple, which is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, began to be constructed circa 1117 CE during the reign of Hoysala Dynasty King Vishnuvardhan and took over a century to complete.

The main temple sits on a platform and is in the shape of a star. It has a brick *shikhara* covered in gold and copper and three entrances. The temple itself is carved out of soapstone, and much of its surface is elaborately decorated with carved figures. Above the main east entrance is featured a carved frieze of the 10 incarnations or forms of Lord Vishnu. The temple complex also has carved narratives depicting Sala killing a tiger, which is the emblem for the Hoysala Dynasty.

The gate also features the figures of King Vishnuvardhan and Veer Balalla, his grandson. The structure also has a ***navrang mandapam***, which has an astounding 48 pillars. The four central pillars are very distinct, with one of them having the likeness of King Vishnuvardhan's wife, Queen Shantala Devi, dancing. Of the 38 pillars, 16 are star-shaped. The outer walls also have pillars, a total of forty with carvest madanikas



The Hoysala Hindu Temple Chennakesava located in Belur featuring a mandapa and two shikhara

(b). Hoysaleshwara Temple, Halebidu

The temple features unique carvings and a design that includes two shrines, one for the King and one for the Queen. The two garbha-grihas (sanctum sanctorum) are connected by a mandapa (porch) in this dvikuta (temple with two shrines) Shaiva temple, creating a wide-open hall. The name Shantaleshwara comes from the fact that one shrine is dedicated to King Vishnuvardhan and the other to his Queen Shantala.

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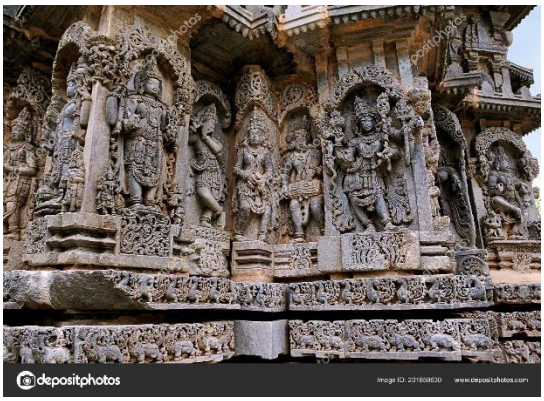
It was primarily founded under the patronage of wealthy local merchants and aristocrats in 1121 CE. The twin temple has four entrances; each flanked on either side by miniature vimanas. On the same jagati, there are two additional shrines, one for Nandi (bull) and the other for Surya (sun). Thousands of figures represent scenes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana on the walls. It was designed in soapstone and reflected Hoysala architecture.



The temple's exterior walls are decorated with intricate carvings, and it has been called an excellent example of Hindu architecture. The temple has four entrance porches, with the main shrine facing east. Within the temple, there are beautiful sculptures and paintings. At the temple's entrance, there is a statue of Ganesha dancing. The temple contains over 240 images; no other temple has as many sculptures.

(iii). Keshava Temple, Somanathapura

The Chennakesava temple, also called Kesava or Keshava temple, is a Vaishnava Hindu temple.

It is located at Somanathapura (Somanathpur) in South Karnataka, in a small village on the banks of the river Cauvery, about 40 km from the city of Mysuru.

The temple is one of the finest examples of Hoysala architecture and testament to the sophistication of Hindu art and architecture by the 12th-century. Completed by 1268 CE and sponsored by a commander of Hoysala king Narasimha III, it illustrates fine carvings with extraordinary details.



The temple is set on a raised platform, with rotated squares that give it a star foundation shape. The sides of the raised platform show richly carved friezes of cavalry, elephants and

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numerous scenes from the Hindu epics and mythologies. The temple exterior towards the spire has sculptures of gods, mainly Vishnu avatars, but others including Shiva, Brahma and Vedic gods and goddesses. Some relief panels on the exterior have names of the sculptors inscribed.

About Lakshmi Narsimha Temple

The temple was built during **Hoysala rule** in the early 13th century. It is built in **'Trikuta' style,** that is, having three shrines- dedicated to Lakshmi Narasimha, Venugopalaswamy and Purushothama. The outer walls of the temple bear great detailed **carvings in Hoysala style.**



The concrete flooring on the platform, also called **jagati**, is used by devotees as pradakshina path (ambulatory passageway for circumambulation).

Conclusion

- The Hoysalas temples of Belur, Halebid and Somnathapur were reportedly built in the 12th-13th centuries.
- The masterpieces represent and attest to the creativity and skill of the Hoysala artists and architects. Hoysala architecture is the building style that was developed by architects under the rule of the Hoysala Empire between the 11th and 14th centuries.
- The Hoysala influence was at its peak in the **13th century and several large and small temples built** during the era remain today as examples of the **Hoysala architectural style.**
- The Hoysala temples include Chennakesava Temple at Belur, the Hoysaleswara Temple at Halebidu and the Kesava Temple at Somanathapura.
- There are several other examples of Hoysala craftsmanship such as the temples at Hosaholalu, Belavadi, Amruthapura, Basaralu, Mosale, Arasikere, Nuggehalli and Kikkeri.
- The Hoysala architectural style reveals a negligible Indo-Aryan influence and a more distinct impact of Southern Indian style.
- The Hoysala temples are protected monuments under the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).** Their conservation and maintenance is done by ASI but the Karnataka state government will ensure the conservation of state-protected monuments around these three monuments.

CONCLUSION

The Hoysala era was an important period in the development of art, architecture, and religion in South India. The empire is remembered today primarily for Hoysala architecture. Over a

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hundred surviving temples are scattered across Karnataka.The Hoysala Rulers who succeeded the later Chalukyas and ruled over the Mysore Plateau in the 12th and 13th centuries A.D. were also lovers of art. They evolved a new style of architecture. The most notable temples of this period are those constructed in Belur, Halebid and Somnathpur. These temples are star-shaped. They are built on a high starshaped base which is richly carved. The shikharas though pyramidal are low unlike those of other temples. The Somnathpur temple was built by Vinaditya Ballal in about 1043 A.D. and is the earliest of this type. The temple though small was exquisitely carved with three pyramidal vimanas surmounting the three shrines. The best specimen of Hoysala art is the Hoysaleswara temple at Halebid and the Chenna Kesava temple at Belur. The Hoysaleswara temple is composed of two similar temples side by side on a single five feet high star shaped terrace. Built of grey soap-stone, best suited for fine carving, each of the temples has star shaped vimanas with projections on three sides. The inner arms connect the two temples The mandapa ceilings and the pillars in the hall are intricately carved. The entire base is covered with running lengths of carved friezes of tigers, elephants, horses, birds and celestial beings-each frieze more beautiful than the other. The ceilings, interior and exterior walls of the temple have beautiful sculptures carved on them.

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