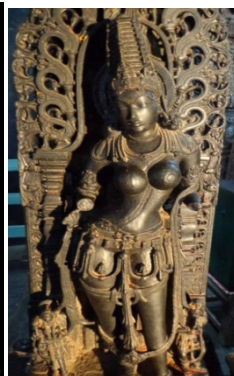
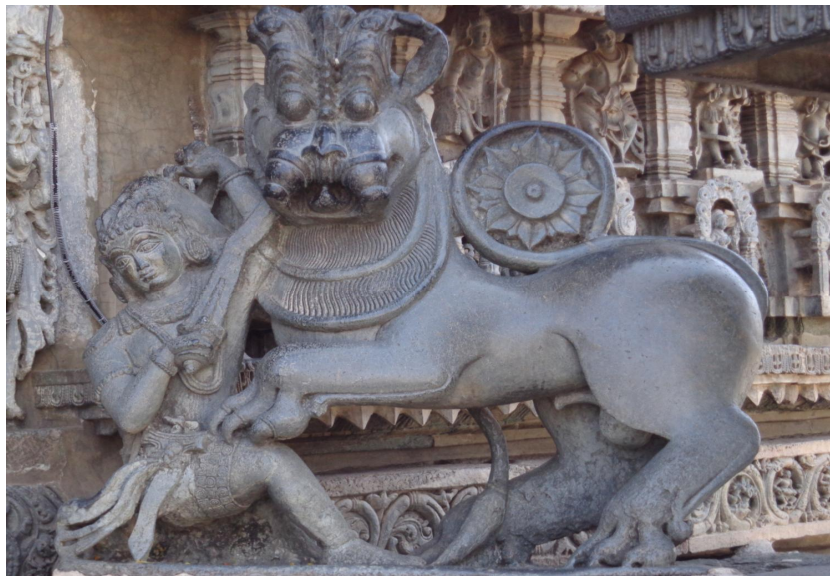




Lecture Series on World Heritage and Culture
78th Lecture on "Sacred Geography of Karnataka Part III"

by

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SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF KARNATAKA – Part III

The Sacred Geography of Karnataka Part III consists of the contribution of the Hoysalas for the development of art and architecture in the Karnataka region. The Hoysalas ruled Karnataka between the 10th centuries and 14th centuries. They originated in the hilly region along the western boundary of the Hassan district and Southern Chikmagalur district in Karnataka state. It's the largest empire extended from the Tungabhadra river in the north, which had been later Chalukya territories to the Kaveri river in the south of the Chola regions (Tamil country). "According to some of the inscriptions, the name Hoysala derived from the myth where an ascetic (sometimes a Jain ascetic) was threatened by a tiger and uttered the words "Poy,Sala" or "Hoy, Sala"(strike,Sala) and Sala, the legendary founder of the dynasty, slew the tiger. Whether the event which gave rise to this story can be associated with Nripa Kama, the first known Hoysalas king is uncertain. The emblem of the Hoysalas, a man killing a tiger, is found at most of the Hoysala temple sites". The known history of the Hoysalas is generally believed to begin with Nripa Kama around 940CE. He was a chieftain, head of a fierce and powerful tribal group from Soseyur in the Western Ghats with no insignia or capital. Little is known about his ancestry. But he was brave, ambitious and organized his forces well. 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. Temples built prior to Hoysala independence in the mid-12th century reflect significant Western Chalukya influences, while later temples retain some features salient to Western Chalukya architecture but have additional inventive decoration and ornamentation, features unique to Hoysala artisans. Some three hundred temples are known to survive in present-day Karnataka state and many more are mentioned in inscriptions, though only about seventy have been documented. The greatest concentration of these is in the Malnad (hill) districts, the native home of the Hoysala kings. Well known temples "which exhibit an amazing display of sculptural exuberance" includes the Chennakesava temple at Belur, the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid, and the Kesava temple at Somnathpur. The Hoysala rulers also patronized fine arts, encouraging literature to flourish in Kannada and Sanskrit.

General Features of Hoysala Architecture

During the rule of the Hoysalas in the 11th century, a new artistic impulse blossomed in the southwest region of Karnataka which incorporated some elements of the cave temple tradition of Western Deccan. The multi-pillared flat-roofed cave temples with their profusion of sculptured panels influenced the large number of temples built between AD 1050 and AD 1300 by the Hoysalas. All these temples, built mostly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the emphasis shifted from architecture to sculpture. The elaborately ornate style of these temples was made possible by the discovery of soap-stone, a material of much finer grain than sandstone or granite. This material found in abundance in Karnataka is close textured and highly tractable under the chisel. The Hoysalas showed a marked preference for the satellite form, star-shaped temples built on a circular plan with projecting angles for which the Dodda Basavappa temple at Dambal was the perfect example. "The Hoysala temple unit in general consists of a *vimana* connected by its short *antarala* to a closed *navaranga* which may often be preceded by another *mandapa*. It is also not unusual for the temple to have three main *vimanas* on three sides of a common *navaranga* each opening into it by the connecting *antaralas*, the fourth side of the *navaranga* being provided with the main entrance or porch. This is termed *trikutachala*. The whole complex is raised over a common wider terrace, or *upa-pitha*, providing an open circumambulatory round the entire unit over its top platform. By the repeated offsetting not only of the sides but also of the angles, the resulting plan becomes star-shaped, the same plan as would result by rotating a square pivoted at its centre so that its corners, or the ends of its diagonals, touch sixteen or thirty-two or more points on a circle circumscribed around it. This star-shaped external configuration is made to extend from the *upa-pitha* to the apex of the *vimana* superstructure. This, incidentally provided a larger surface area for the execution of the cloyingly prolific sculpture and carving for which the Hoysala temples are noted. The *adhithana* pattern is more akin to the northern style in having tiers of superposed friezes of elephants, warriors, horses, *hamsas*, *makaras*, etc., the broad *pattika* like top tier depicting *puranic* scenes in a series of narrative vignettes. The walls are embellished by niches crowned by pyramidal tiered superstructures and enshrining figure sculpture of varied iconography. The intervening parts are adorned further by pilasters carrying pyramidal tiered superstructure motifs on top. The *prastara* has prominent eaves like a cornice. The superstructure is a scheme of close-set *hara* elements, essentially of *kutas*, rising one behind the other, each marking a storey, the topmost one carrying a short *griva* and octagonal *sikhara* terminating in a *stupi*. The middle of the front face of

the upper *talas* is drawn forward into a *sukanasika* over the *antarala* below. The pillars inside the *mandapa* have square bases. The shaft and capital region up to the broad square abacus are smoothly rounded, turned on a lathe and polished, forming a series of bulges and curved necks, beadings, etc., usually later embellished by finely picked ornamentation. Often the axial series of the temple unit is surrounded by an open court and pillared cloister inside the *prakara* wall, having its *mahadvara* entrance only on one side, the front". As said earlier, the finest of the early Hoysala temples are the Chennakesava temple at Belur, and the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid, both begun in 1117CE., and the Kesava temple at Somnathpur.

Chennakesava Temple at Belur

The Chennakesava temple at Belur is perhaps the most important monument of the Hoysala king Vishnuvardana's reign. This is the best example of Hoysala ornate style. This temple was erected on the orders of Vishnuvardana himself to commemorate his victory over the Cholas at Talakkad,. It is named after the presiding deity, Vishnu, as Vijaya Narayana (Victorious Narayana). This name may also refer to the *acarya* who is generally credited with converting Vishnuvardana to Vaishnavism, Ramanuja, who is also known as Vishnu Narayana. Mahamandalesvara Vishnuvardana aspired to surpass all that was great in the Chalukyan heartland in terms of scale and embellishments to prove the Hoysala supremacy. Dedicated in 1117, the temple stands as the principal monument in a complex of later temples within a large courtyard. The Chennakesava temple stands on a platform of modest height. The *adhithana* mouldings are of the simplest variety in contrast with highly elaborate plastic embellishment on its walls. The sanctum is axially aligned with the *navaranga* with three door openings approached by wide stairways flanked by a pair of elegant miniature shrines, Vaishnava *dwarapalas* (gate keepers) and *Sala* sculptures depicting a hero slaying a tiger (Hoysala emblem mentioned above). These small shrines are, in fact, smaller versions of the main *Bhumija vimana* which superstructure is now completely destroyed. The platform is also star-shaped, providing ample space for circumambulation.

The Hoysala temples are *nirandara* with no inner ambulatory. The *navaranga* measures some 99 feet along the north-south axis and its length on the east-west axis is nearly 125 feet. In its original form, the *navaranga* was an open-pillared hall in the Chalukyan style, but in the following century Ballala II had the intercolumnar spaces on the outer side closed with jail screens, some of which are carved with *puranic* scenes and royal court splendor. The jail screens are a familiar feature of the Chalukyan temples at Aihole and Pattadakal but relief ornament on the jails is a rare feature. The eastern doorway leading into the *navaranga* is the highly ornamental entrance. The lintel carries a grand relief depicting Garuda. Over this large panel is a depiction of Vishnu as Narasimha tearing the entrails of the demon king Hiranyakasipu. The *makaratorana* is an example of the exquisite carving in minutest details. In the scrollwork of the *torana* are carved miniature versions of the ten incarnations of Vishnu. The *adhithana* below the jail screen comprises a remarkable array of horizontal bands depicting at the base a row of elephants, symbolizing stability. Over this, a string course of garland of beads and lion-heads, scrollwork containing delicately carved figures of birds, animals and dancers, a frieze of pearl garlands ornamental niches containing male and female figures and over these another row of *apsaras* decorating themselves separated by miniature pillars, a row of miniature temple *vimanas* of the *bhumija* variety. At the highest level are figures of dancers and musicians. The uppermost *vedika* of the *adhithana* forms the back portion of the stone bench inside the *navaranga*. The whole *adhithana* enclosing the *navaranga* is thus transformed into a gallery of sculptural art illustrating miniature carving at its best.

"The Hoysala sculptural art reached its apogee in the splendid, small bracket figures of *apsaras* or *madanikas* positioned atop the pillars, just below the broad projecting *chadya*. These *apsaras* are carved as the marvelous plasticity of modeling embodying grace and elegance. They are shown engaged in various activities – admiring their own looks in a mirror, nursing pet parrots, applying kohl to the eyes, dancing, drumming or playing the flute. Beauty is shown warding off a playful monkey; another appears scared by a scorpion. The figure of Mohini (Vishnu as seductress on the northern side) is particularly charming. She is depicted at the end of her dance with the demon Basmasura. Mohini places her right hand on her head and the demon imitates her dance movements. He was to die the moment he placed his right hand over his head. When he did just that, he was reduced to ashes. This image is one of the most perfect images of dance and beauty, exquisite proportions and charm". This temple has 42 sculptures of enchanting beauties. Of them, 38 appear on the exterior columns and four are attached to the central pillars in the *navaranga*. These *apsaras* exhibit a whole range of the *rasas* in manifold forms of beauty. Quite clearly, the depiction of the *sringara rasa* is the theme of these bracket figures. Most of these sculptures show dance movements, giving a rhythmical

flexion to the figures and without the rigid verticality of the frontal posture, which so characterizes the cult images. The most representative of these lovely maidens is perhaps the *darpana sundari* (beauty looking into the mirror) who admires her own charm. "She is the eternal woman, the Indian ideal of feminine beauty and grace, admired by Kalidasa in the classic poem *Meghaduta*. Without exaggeration, it can be said that these bracket figures can be called the supreme achievement of the Hoysala sculptor and the pride of Indian sculptural art". The image of Vijaya Narayana in the sanctum is one of the stateliest images of Vishnu. The face of the deity is lit with a benevolent smile and the ornamentation is in the typical Hoysala style. He is flanked by Sri Devi and Bhudevi. The Mohini pillar shows a fusion of two styles- Ganga- Chola and Hoysala. The face of Mohini is beautiful with a narrow pointed chin, curved eyebrows and a thin nose. As per tradition, she has been modeled after Santaladevi, the chief queen of Vishnuvardana. It is unquestionably an example of the most refined and outstanding sculptural art. The Narasimha pillar contains horizontal rows of miniature niches containing 108 images of deities, a great achievement of extraordinary patience and labour. The huge courtyard around the Chennakesava temple contains some other smaller temples. The Kappa Channigaraya temple was built by Santaladevi and completed by her son.

Hoysalesvara Temple at Halebid

The Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid is considered to be a masterpiece of Hoysala craftsmen. This unfinished temple is the work of the beginning of the twelfth century. As in the case of Belur, this temple also is devoid of its superstructure. "Believed to have been begun around 1121 by the orders of one Ketamalla, an officer of Vishnuvardana, it was apparently completed some years later, around 1160, by Kedaraja, the architect of Vishnuvardana's son and successor, Narasimha I(1142 -73). It consists of two virtually identical but separate temples on a large single platform, connected at the inner arms of their transepts. Though each unit is a structure of only moderate size, taken together, and along with the Nandi pavilion in front, the temple presents itself as a vast and ambitious structure. The exterior of the temple is split into numerous projections in conformity with its star-shaped plan. As we proceed from the entrance along the walls of the temple, an endless scroll of exquisitely carved panels unrolls itself, presenting an astonishing display of plastic art. At the bottom of the intended walls are six horizontal bands of relief sculptures each devoted to a repeating theme- elephants, lions, legendary swans, and stories from the Hindu epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Above these bands and covering the central space of the gallery, one encounters panel after panel of a heavily carved figure – sculptures, each about life-size. For the sheer wealth of sculptural embellishment and intricacy of chisel work there are few temples in India to compare with this monument. "Likewise, the four doorways of the temple, the lintels and the guardian angels (*dvarapalas*) – all subjected to heavy ornamentation – give the impression of being the work of a master goldsmith rather than a sculptor".

"The eight horizontal friezes appear as an unprecedented feature, which underlines the intention of the Hoysala ruler to create a strikingly new architectural style in his bid to surpass the architectural glory of the Chalukyas of Kalyani. These friezes create a fascinating display of plastic art combining an incredible intricacy of detail with a certain unmistakable liveliness. No greater evidence of the sculptor's ingenuousness is required after a look at the amazingly large number of elephants – not less than 1248 have been counted on a nearly 950 feet of space but with a width of merely eight inches. These elephants are each differently carved as if rushing to the battlefield or in the midst of the action, generally accompanied by their mahouts or soldiers. The number of lion reliefs is also very large- more than 1450 in number. The horse reliefs are also very impressive for their excellent proportions and decorations. The relief frieze is the most interesting for illustrating a great variety of mythological themes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavata. These reliefs contribute significantly to the character of the temple by showing different forms of the gods and goddesses". One of the leading pioneering archaeologists, James Fergusson considered the sculptural art of this temple as one of the most marvelous exhibitions of human labour to be found even in the patient East. The extensive sculptural programme at the Hoysalesvara temple includes some 340 large- 5feet 6 inches all depictions of deities with their consorts and attendants. Of the religious sculptures, mention may be made of Krishna lifting the Govardana hill, Venugopala, Bramhasiracchedakamurti, Bhairavas, Saptamatikas, Ravana shaking mount Kailas, Nartana Ganapati, Brahma, etc. The lavish ornamentation is seen at its best on the *dvarapalas* – the doorkeepers, especially those on the southern entrance. Particular attention has been paid to them for their function as guardians at the royal entrance to the temple. These two figures have been carved in heroic proportions – 7 feet in height and four-armed. The doorways of the temple art of the simplest, almost rudimentary, designs with little attempt at anything structural, but the lintels over the doorways are

covered with relief decoration of the highest order. The *makaratoranas* on both northern and southern doorways are great examples of applied art. Percy Brown opines that the Hoysalesvara "is the supreme climax of Indian architecture in its most prodigal plastic manifestation. Even if its qualities of composition are not high, at least, as a monument to the phenomenal concentration, superb technical skill, ingenuity, imagination and profound religious consciousness of those concerned in its creation, it has no peer".

Kesava Temple at Somnathpur

A typical example of the fully evolved Hoysala style is the 13th century Kesava temple at Somanathpur, 40 km from Mysore city. It is a triple shrine structure contained within a rectangular courtyard. A single gateway on the east provides access to the temple compound. In contrast to southern-style *gopuras*, which are *vimana*-like in form, the profusion of pillars in the entranceway suggests the form of a Hoysala *mandapa*. "In plan, the temple consists of three *vimanas*, each having an antechamber and shrine, with a single, shared *mandapa*, which is preceded by a smaller, pillared porch. Each *vimana* is stellate in plan and is topped by a moderately sized tower (about nine meters high), thus providing an extant example of what may have been a typical Hoysala tower form. In contrast to both northern and southern styles of approximately the same time, the Hoysala architect did not strive after extravagant height". The plan of the *vimana* conforms strictly to the star-shaped plan of the shrine, the vertical, tapering ribs being composed of miniature shrines, all elaborately carved. The intended exterior of the walls is subjected to the same treatment as that of the Hoysalesvara temple, with running friezes of elephants, cavalry, and stories from the Hindu epics. The temple stands on a low plinth that follows the shape of the temple, including the intricate form of the star-shaped *vimana*, and circumambulation can be performed on this plinth. The temple is surrounded by a pillared cloister, off of which open sixty – four subsidiary shrines. "These shrines must have once contained Vaishnavite images, though the images are no longer present". The Kesava temple is also remarkable for the ceilings of the pillared hall. Each is a dome composed of enormous slabs placed one upon another. The usual decorative pattern of the inside of domes is that of a pendant or a banana flower hanging from the center. The pattern is formed by concentric circles diminishing as they rise, and connected by radiating ribs. The resulting effect is that of a highly ornate umbrella, carved into an enormous block of stone. The *sikharas* of this temple follow familiar Hosala style. These are shaped according to the plan and pattern of the sanctum exterior walls. Here it appears quite diminutive covered with an overwhelming decoration. The Hoysala towers rise in two, three or a maximum of five talas or tiers.

The whole structure of the temple acquires a definite unity from the six horizontal bands on the *adhithana*. These friezes depicting animals, scrolls and mythological scenes are a characteristic feature of the Hoysala temples. Here the elephant frieze appears at the lowest level. The elephants are shown as caparisoned war animals accompanied by riders. Some of the elephants are covered with a protective covering. It has been observed that the elephant band is nearly 355 feet long and the number of elephants exceeds 577. Above the elephant, the frieze is the frieze depicting a long line of horsemen charging forward on their steeds. The animals are well proportioned, shown jumping, prancing, rearing, cantering, trotting and wheeling back. The scroll frieze above the horsemen frieze has fine workmanship. The mythological frieze, fourth from the bottom line, is very painstakingly carved to depict famous *puranic* stories from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagavata*. The fifth frieze depicts *makaras* and the topmost friezes depict swans – pecking themselves, looking backward beaking each other or feeding their young ones. Most of the sculptures show various manifestations of Vishnu. Other divinities like Ganesa, Brahma, Surya (Sun), Indra, Sarasvati, Moon, Kamadeva, etc., are also included in the list for sculptural depictions. Hoysala sculpture is known for its definite reservations about the depiction of amorous couples, the most conspicuous feature of temple sculpture in contemporary central India and Orissa. The image of Vishnu as Vaikunthararyana has a majestic charm. The four-armed god is seated on the coils of seven hooded serpent- Ananta and is shown with heavy ornaments and other usual attributes. The image of Venugopala is also beautifully carved.

Other temples

Besides the above mentioned well-known examples, there are several other Hoysala temples of the 12th and 13th centuries in the northern districts of Karnataka where the early Chalukyan style originated and flourished. "These temples differ from the southern group in their plan, treatment of the exterior walls, the shape of the towers, pillars and the design of the doorways. The star-shaped plan is absent in the northern

variety and they are mostly rectangular. The treatment of wall surfaces conforms more to the early style of the 7th century and is more elegant, the sculptural panels being spaced out by pilasters. The embellishment is therefore architectural rather than sculptural". Muktesvara temple at Chandadampur is an early example of this. The temples of Ittagi, Lakkundi, and Kuruvatti and several others in the Dharwar region represent the culmination of the later Chalukyan or Hoysala type in north Karnataka. The Mahadeva temple at Ittagi, which is now partly in ruins, may be regarded as one of the most highly finished examples of this style. It consists of an open pavilion or *mandapa* and a closed hall with an antechamber and the cella, all grouped together to make a harmonious structure. Twelfth-century examples in northern Karnataka are numerous and widely distributed. But the most interesting of them all is the temple of Dodda Basavappa at Dambal, 12 km south-east of Gadag.

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