



# ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE HOYSALA PERIOD

(Academic Script)

## **Art and architecture of the Hoysala period**

Hello everybody and welcome to today's episode. In this episode you will study the development of art and expansion which took place during the Hoysala period. Here we will focus on the features of art and architecture that flourished during Hoysala period. Also we will discuss the influences of other art schools on Hoysala art and architecture. The Subject expert is Ms. Shilpi who is visiting faculty at World School of Design and I am.

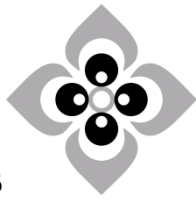
### **Introduction:**

Hoysala dynasty was a South Indian empire that ruled between eleventh to fourteenth century in the present day Karnataka. The Hoysala rulers succeeded the later Chalukyas and were great promoters of art.

Geographically, the southern Karnataka region ruled by the Hoysala is not part of the Deccan plateau. Yet the art styles flourished under the Hoysalas are mainly viewed as a development of Deccan styles which shows a mixture of northern and southern elements, while being highly distinctive as well.

As many other Deccan temples, Hoysala construction often have multiple shrines and there are examples with two, three, four and even five shrines. Many Hoysala temples make use of a stellate plan for the Vimana, which is a characteristic found in other Deccan art schools, and common as well in northern India. Hoysala temples may be classed into two types, the first being a rather consistent development of Later Chalukya forms, and the second is a much ornate style. Even though Hoysala temples of the ornate style are much better known than the simpler style, these do not consist of even a majority of extant Hoysala monuments. Since this style appears

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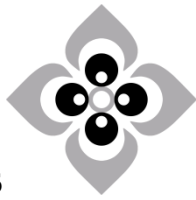
original to the Hoysalas and was not evidently used by other dynasties, it can be considerably called the “Hoysala style.”

The Hoysala rulers were responsible for a number of the most beautiful temples and most of the specimens of their architecture are existent. These architectures developed on the architectural style of the Chalukyas and these structures have elaborate details that are incredibly magnificent.

One of the main and common features of Hoysala architecture and sculptures is the mandapa. It is the prayer hall that is entered through lintel which is finely designed. This decked out overhead lintel is known as the 'makaratorana.' The seating areas inside mandapas are made up of stone. This open space is one of the largest units within a religious shrine of Hoysala architecture. The mandapa is supported by several pillars and these are also highly decorated. The sculptures portraying tales of the Indian mythology adorns the ceiling of the mandapa. Floral sculptures are also a significant feature of Hoysala architecture. Beside these the stone latticework is also a persistent characteristic of Hoysala sculptures.

The pillars of the Hoysala temples consist of four brackets at the top. A sculpted figure or salabhanjika is carved on each of these brackets. The carvings of any two pillars are similar which shows how carefully the artisans have worked. The vimanas are the residing place for the principal deity. The interior of the vimanas are simple but from outside they have been designed with fine rendered figurines and carvings. The form of these vimanas are either stellate that is star shaped or in form of spread out square. The Hoysala art and architecture was renowned for its sculptural details

One of the most common features of Hoysala sculpture is the Salabhanjika a fabled women figure with stylized feminine characters who rest near a tree or grasping a branch of a tree. According to the Hoysala style the madanika figures are ornamental pieces that are positioned on the outer walls of the temples. The sculptures of the madanikas are often depicting in a dance position or playing a musical instrument. Kirthimukhas are found on the tower of the vimanas as well. The pillar images known as 'sthamba buttalikas' explain the influence of the Chola art and architecture on this style. The panels on the walls have life themes like musicians, animals, dancers and instrumentalists



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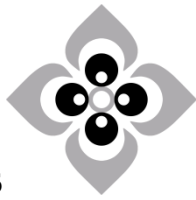
The temples of ornate style are explained as both pleasant and astonishing by the historians. The temples are decorated from the base to the peak, with elaborated sculptural and floral designs. This intricate carving was mostly achievable because the temples were constructed out of extremely fine grained soap stone scientifically called chloritic schist. It was easy and comfortable to work on this stone unlike granite or sand stone and for this reason carving intricate designs was very much doable on this soft stone. An additional impressive quality of the stone is its softness when first carved but turns very firm on exposure to air

The carvings illustrate narratives from various epics. The numerous structural subdivision are carved with a variety of fascinating flora, astounding vine designs, bell-motifs and attractive groups of statuettes. One group of temples that mostly mesmerize a spectator is the Hoysala trio Belur, Halebid and Somnathapura. The Hoysalas excelled in temple architecture and the main temples of this period are Hoysaleswara temple at Halebid, Chennakesava temple at Belur, and the Kesava Temple at Somanathapura. The temples were mostly dedicated to Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. The temples they built at Halebid and Belur appears like lace work in stone.

The architecture of the Hoysala Empire was influenced by the spiritual thoughts popularized by the Vaishnava and the Virashaiva philosophers. In the history of medieval Hindu architecture, the temple architecture of the Hoysalas is a vital phase. The most predominant religious influence of the temples of the Hoysalas was Hinduism.

The inherited dwelling of the Hoysalas was at Sosavir and a number of early Hoysala artistic remains are found at this place. The inscriptional evidences show that the ruler Visnuvardhana generously patronized and promoted the construction of temples and other structures. Approximately of the eighty or ninety existing Hoysala temples in Karnataka, quite a few important ones have been acknowledged as belonging to the reign of Visnuvardhana on the base of inscriptional and stylistic evidence.

An example of a Later Chalukya style Hoysala temple is the Laksmidevi temple at Dodda Gaddavalli. As it is typically in Later Chalukya inspired temples, the enclosed circumambulatory passageway is not present in the Laksmidevi temple. In compare to Hoysala temples of the ornate style, Laksmidevi temple not has the sculpted friezes and figurative carvings which are characteristic of those monuments. Dissimilar to many other Hoysala temples, this temple is still very much unharmed. In Hoysala



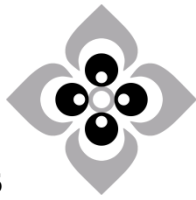
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Architecture style this Mahalaxmi temple is the only Chathushkuta temple that mean temple with four shrines and towers. This temple is built inside a stone-wall enclosed space, with the entrance through a veranda; the temple has four sanctums i.e. garbagriha. The four deities of the temple are Mahakali, Mahalaxmi, Shiva, and Vishnu. Perhaps the most significant monument of Visnuvardhana's reign is the Kesava or Cennakesava temple at Belur. This temple is a perfect example of the Hoysala ornate style. Built up in 1117, the temple locates as the principal monument in a compound of later temples within a large courtyard

The Chennakesava temple at Belur is devoted to Lord Vishnu. The feature which differentiates this temple from the rest is the extraordinarily large size of the basic parts of the temple. The most important attraction of the temple is a foyer that connects the temple to the hall. This temple is built on a 'jagati' and there is a getaway of steps that leads to the 'jagati'. The raised area follows the square shape of the mandapa and star shape of the temple. In the beginning the mandapa here was an open one. Later on the open mandapa was transformed into a closed one by putting up walls with pierced window screen.

Similar to other ornate-style Hoysala temples, this construction rests on a platform and it go along with the shape that of the temple. As a result of offsetting the walls of the shrine and platform, additional space is made available for sculptural decoration. The grand structure of the vimana is no longer present. Later on during the reign of the Hoysala king Ballala II, pierced stone windows were added. Generous sculpting of the exterior of the temple wall in addition to the carved window screens gives this monument with the distinctive richness of ornate-style Hoysala works. The flimsiness of the carvings and the miniature scale of these carvings are characteristic of Hoysala Art. The carvings are usually deeply undercut that is why the figures and other patterns stand out sharply against their shadows and this effect makes it incredible. There are nearly 48 pillars of various sizes, shapes and designs that give evidence of the remarkable artistry. The main highlight of the temple is Darpana Sundari or "The lady with the mirror".

The entire of the Kesava temple from inside is as rich and ornate as the exterior. Each and every pillar of the mandapa is delicately engraved with figures and with simply round patterns



A comparatively minor structure named the Saumyanayaka temple is situated to the southwest of the core temple. Its broken shikhara was repaired in 1387 CE by a minister under the Vijaynagar King Harihara II.

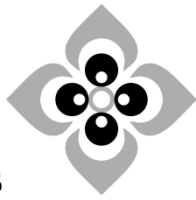
A stepped pool known as Vasudev Tirtha was constructed to the northwest of Chennakesava by Veer Ballala II (r. 1173-1220 A.D.). It is a consistent characteristic of any temple in which devotees perform an ablation before entering the mandapa. Many such minor and significant embellishments and modifications have been carried out well during the control of later monarchs of this region.

The next temple we will be discussing about is Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid. The most prominent structure at the Hoysala capital is the Hoysalesvara temple devoted to Lord Siva and it belongs to the ornate-style. It consists of two effectively identical but separate temples on a large single platform which are linked at the inner arms of their transepts. Alike the Kesava temple at Belur, the plinth of this temple also essentially follows the outline of the structures.

The Hoysaleswara temple at Halebid was constructed in 1141-1182 A.D. The structural design of the temple is a perfect example of the Hindu style of architecture. It represents the fixed order of ornamentation for the base. An endless defile of elephants, symbols of stability in the lowest tier can be seen. The Garuda pillar is the most remarkable architecture of the Hoysaleswara temple. This Garuda pillar, dated to around 1220 A.D., is a herostone (vira sasana) that adores Kuvara Lakshma who was a general, minister and faithful body guard of Hoysala Empire King Veera Ballala II (r. 1173-1220 A.D.). The exceptional pillar on the southern part depicts heroes brandishing knives and cutting their own heads

The carved figures here are accurately encrusted with minutely detailed decoration. The bodies of the figures are even heavier and full in appearance in comparison to the earlier ones and are positioned in gracefully swaying postures. The walls of the temples have delicate strips of sculpted friezes running along the base in clockwise direction at the bottom which was named as horizontal treatment. The middle part of the walls portrays figurative sculpture including deities and women in various postures. The other celebrated temple at Halebid is Kedareshwara Temple located at a short distance away from the famous Hoysaleswara Temple.

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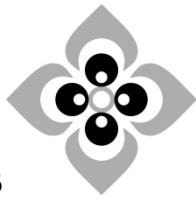
The temple was constructed by Hoysala King Veera Ballala II. This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva near the Hoysaleswara temple is the group of Jain Temples, three at present at Halebid. This suggests the religious tolerance of the Hoysala kings who patronized all the major existing sects like Saivism, Vaishnavism and Jainism. The three Jain temples in a row are dedicated to the tirthankaras named Parsvanatha in west, Adinatha in central, and Shantinatha in east

The construction of temple under the Hoysalas continued at a dynamic pace during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the same time, the Hoysala Empire was growing both to the north and the south. In the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the empire was separated so that Narsimha III reined the northern regions of Hoysala provinces and his brother Ramanatha ruled the Tamil holdings.

Temples built under Nrsimha III includes the famous Kesava temple called Somnatha as described in an inscription at Somnathpur. This shrine belongs to Vaisnavite sect and it belongs to the ornate-style. Its small size and cut stone carving make it one of the finest Hoysala structures. This temple is a triple-shrine structure located within a rectangular courtyard. The three shrines are devoted to three forms of Vishnu, mainly, Krishna. They previously dwelled the beautifully carved idols of Keshava, Janardhana and Venugopala. At the present, the Keshava idol is missing, but the other two still stay in their original grandeur.

The temple rests upon a plinth at a low level that follows the shape of the temple and also includes the complex form of the star-shaped vimanas and circumambulation can be done on this platform. The temple is enclosed by a pillared cloister and the images on them do no longer exist. This temple was erected in 1268 A.D. Amongst the series of famous temples, built under the patronage of the Hoysala kings in the Malnad region of present day Karnataka state, the Chennakesava temple at Somanathpur is believed to be the last. The sikharas of the temple do not have the continuous parabolic outline of the northern type temples, but are erected in well defined horizontal tiers.

The planning of sculptural decoration on the outer wall of the temple consists of the minute, detailed horizontal friezes, on top of which are deities and other figurative carvings. Sculptures included subjects in Hindu art, such as a dancing figure of Ganesha and by this time Hindu art was very familiar. A fascinating feature of the sculptural program of the temple is the presence of erotic imagery on the south side of the entrance veranda. The



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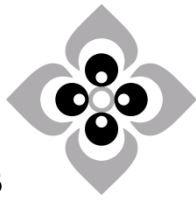
interior of the temple are highly decorated including the ceilings, entrances to the shrines and the ante-chambers

Makara, an imaginary beast and swans are frequent motifs of Chennakesava Temple sculpture. Whereas Ramayana is depicted on the south wall and Mahabharata appears on the north side. The sculptures here also include depictions of prosperity of that period including members of the royal family riding richly decorated chariots, military and commoners riding horses, dancers, musicians, etc. The sculptures of royal palaces protected by armed guards, intricate carvings of jewellery, such as pendants, necklaces, waistbands and rings and of woman generous hair styles that were in trend can be seen. The names of a lot of architects and sculptors are embossed on stone from which it is apparent that the artists were mutually local and from outside the province. The concluding result of the decorative towers and friezes enhances the brilliance of this architecture. The other examples of the remarkable Hoysala architecture are the temples at Belavadi, Arasikere, Nuggehalli and Amruthapura. Few of the later period Hoysala temple shows a glance of Bhumija style temples. An exceptional example of bhumija spire in Southern India is Sadashiva Temple (1249 CE) built by Hoysala Empire at Nuggehalli. (See image 5, 25, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93)

### **Sculptures of Hoysala period:**

The Hoysala temples are built of different materials, based on a variety of plans, and worked out with different artistic, religious and aesthetic goals. The decoration of Hoysala art is finely detailed. This art emphasized more on ornamentation than movement and the elegance of the human body. Although to some extent Hoysala sculptures are bending and short, extremely exaggerated and clogged with ornamentation, but yet these are pleasant to take a look at.

Since the Hoysala sculptures are all made of chloritic schist therefore they are dominated by consistent decorative, anatomical and stylistic principles. Keeping aside the themes and also the architectural framework, the sculptures of Hoysala style may be conveniently divided into following categories: sculptures in the round, reliefs, artifacts that bring together the character of both above and lies between them. In themes and technical characteristics the sculptures of all the above three groups are same. The majority of the images carved in the round are set against a wall and only the frontage is totally executed. In the small as well as large reliefs the same

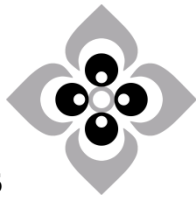


above feature is present. In these reliefs the depth and dimension is implied rather than worked out.

The Yakshas and Salabhanjikas do not vary much from these, but they are distinct enough to stand between the images in the round and those in relief. The third group comprises small and large reliefs found on walls, ceilings, pillars, doorways, etc. Among these, the large reliefs and those in the round are dominated by iconographical sanctions and the small reliefs by thematic subject matter. But while the Salabhanjikas, attendants, and the images of musicians and dancers are exceptions to the previous. There are several sculptures which are entirely in the round but as they are set in such an intricate framework, as a result these sculptures seem more or less like under-cuts. Almost all enshrined deities represent this characteristic but it can be best seen in the images of Gopal Krishna standing in the middle of cows.

The other image is of Sesasayi amidst consorts and attendants. This carving portrays Lord Krishna holding the mountain Goverdhana in the air to save the people of Gokul from the anger of Indra, who let loose heavy rains to teach them a lesson for their disrespect, in paying homage to Mount Goverdhana instead of worshipping him. The exquisiteness of the human figure is completely smothered. The artist takes delight in intricate ornamentation rather than depicting the beauty of the striking male or the beauty of the female body. The human figures almost fully vanish beneath the fantastic mass of decoration. In this style decoration became more important than the human figures.

In South Indian Temple architecture, the 'Cob' is one of the noticeably specific elements that can be recognized in Hoysala style of temple architecture. During the Hoysala period sculptors started using the 'Cob' as a representation to signify abundance of food, strength and fertility. In the beginning, fully grown 'Cob' with ripe corn on it, was shown in the hands of women sculptures of Chennakesava temple at Belur. In the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid, Cob was shown in one of the hands of Lord Siva. In Somanathpur, Cobs were broadly used and shown in the sculptures of male and females similarly as well as in both left and right hands. The regularity and the simplicity, with which the Cob was used in the sculptures of Chennakesava temple at Somanathpur, imply that by the time of the erection of this temple, the convention of usage of 'Cob' as a symbol in temple architecture had been moderately accepted and established. In a



sculpture at Somnathpur the 'cob' in the hands of male and female sculptures is shown, the male holding it in his left hand and the female holding it in her right hand. Another female sculpture with the 'cob' in her left hand can also be seen in the centre

One of the most interesting sculptures of Chennakesava temple, Somanathpur depicts instead of the predictable usage of the 'Cob' as a whole in one of the hands. In this sculpture the sculptor used his own imagination and shown it in a bowl in which the maize corn were filled to its full capacity, in such a way that some of the corn should appear and visible always and placed it in the left hand of the divine male sculpture.

This sculpture very well provides a good example to show that the sculptors of Hoysala period had been given full freedom by their masters to visualize and portray things differently. At the same time the sculptors very intelligently took care not to deny or blemish the original ideas behind the symbols and established conventions

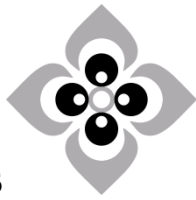
In the later period the sculpture showing woman holding a fly-whisk and other figures the almost total disappearance of the body can be seen. A few centuries earlier, her lovely figure in supple curves, would have been glorified. Too much ornamentation including the belt, the necklaces, the crown, the armlets and bracelets even the tree behind and above her is misrepresented into a fancy scroll work of drapery.

A remarkable feature of the individual carvings on several Hoysala temples is the information that many of them are signed works by specific artists. This phenomenon of signing works of art occurs in other Indic art schools but nowhere does it come into sight with such regularity or with so much apparent dignity on the part of the artist as in Hoysala tradition.

### **Features in brief:-**

We will here in brief discuss all the excellent features of Hoysala art and architecture that makes it distinctive:

- the unique ground plans which are principally dictated by the shape of the outer walls
- the excessive plastic details conferred upon every part
- the variety of ways in which these details are finished, give evidences of the substantial liberty enjoyed by the individual artists -attractive elements such as female figures or creeping vine scrolls run in horizontal rows constantly all-around the temple wall which creates a highly well thought-out and planned design pattern.



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- Mostly the figures are in animated poses and are depicted heavily laden with jewelry; however the effect is highly organized as each figure dwells in a specifically defined space.
- The temples have a star shaped base while the main structure is standing on a raised platform.
- There are three shrines (sometimes more) planned around a central pillared hall, each with a tower.
- There are intricate framework windows with an abundance of sculptural details-The sikharas are different from the northern style (parabolic) and are constructed in well defined horizontal tiers
- In some temples of Hoysala dynasty erotic sculptures are seen influenced by Sakta tradition existing at that time.

### **Influence of Chola and Chalukya art:-**

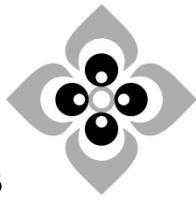
The beautification of the Western Chalukyas (Kalyani) influenced the decorative style of Hoysalas. The pillar representation called “Sthambha buttalikas” witnessed in Hoysala art endures evidence of Chola and Chalukya art. In Chennakeshava temple, the image of Mohini, the female figurine seen in one of the pillars in the mandapa bears the fine example of Chola art in Hoysala art. But there was a special difference between Hoysala and Chalukya art. The Hoysala artists decorated both top and surface of the pillars while Chalukya artists left the top simple and decorated only the surface

### **Downfall of Hoysala dynasty:**

The Hoysalas later on came into dispute with the empire of Vijayanagar and the Muslim sultans of Delhi and the last Hoysala rule was removed from power in 1346. The dynasty at its height ruled over parts of the modern states of Mysore, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. The Hoysala architecture can be described as the most impressive period of Hindu architecture which in a manner is an important milestone of Indian architecture.

### **Scholars on Hoysala Architecture:**

Of the various Hindu styles”, Cousens wrote, that of the Hoysalas “is perhaps, the least attractive when viewed from a distance. It has no striking outline to catch the eye, and its detail is too crowded and too small to be distinctly seen: they are just piles of chiseled stonework. An inspection at close quarters, however, reveals the qualities for which they are noted.”



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About the Hoysalesvara temple Percy Brown said, "This temple is without exaggeration, one of the most remarkable monuments ever produced by the hand of man."

The art critic Gerard Foekema describing the Hoysalesvara temple said, "Perhaps no other Hoysala temple is as articulate in sculpture as this is and these sculptures are "second to none in all of India".