

# Amrutha Linga Manikeshwara, Temple Features – A Study

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to **Historical perspective of Amrutha linga Manikeshwara Temple**. By the 13th century, they governed most of present-day Karnataka, minor parts of Tamil Nadu and parts of western Andhra Pradesh in Deccan India. The most notable rulers of the dynasty were Vishnuvardhana (1108-1152) and Veera Ballala II (1173 – 1220) in whose rule the kingdom flourished greatly in terms of art. The area became part of the Vijayanagara empire after the death of the last king, Veera Ballala III (1292-1343). We know about the dynasty and the administration from many inscriptions that are there in the temples in this part of Karnataka. 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 its temple architecture. The area in and around the districts of Hassan and Mandya are the only places where you can find this style of temple construction in the state of Karnataka. Study of the Hoysala architectural style has revealed a negligible Indo-Aryan influence while the impact of Southern Indian style is more distinct. The vigorous temple DSC00880 building activity of the Hoysala Empire was due to the social, cultural and political events of the period. The growing military prowess of the Hoysala kings desired to surpass their Western Chalukya overlords in artistic achievement. Temples built prior to Hoysala independence in the mid-12th century reflect significant Western Chalukya influences, while later temples retain some salient features but have additional inventive decoration and ornamentation, features unique to Hoysala artisans.

*Key words:* *Amrutha linga Manikeshwara Temple , temple architecture, Hoysala*

## Introduction

Over a hundred surviving temples are scattered across Karnataka, including the well known Chennakesava Temple at Belur, the Hoysaleswara Temple at Halebidu, and the Kesava Temple at Somanathapura. The Hoysala rulers also patronised the fine arts, encouraging literature to flourish in Kannada and Sanskrit. The Hoysalas usually dedicated their temples to Lord Shiva or to Lord Vishnu (two of the major Hindu gods), but they occasionally chose a different deity. While King Vishnuvardhana and his descendants were Vaishnava by faith, records show that the Hoysalas maintained religious harmony by building as many temples dedicated to Shiva as they did to Vishnu. Most of these temples have secular features with broad themes depicted in their sculptures. The Kesava temple at Somanathapura is different in that its ornamentation is strictly Vaishnava. A Hindu temple is a place of contact between the gods or deities and man. The focus of a temple is the centre or sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha) where the image of the deity resides, so temple architecture is designed to move

the devotee from outside to the garbhagriha through ambulatory passageways for circumambulation and halls or chambers (mantapas) that become increasingly sacred as the deity is approached. Most Hoysala temples have a plain covered entrance porch supported by lathe turned (circular or bell-shaped) pillars which were sometimes further carved with deep fluting and moulded with decorative motifs. The temples may be built upon a platform raised by about a metre called a "jagati". Such temples will have an additional set of steps leading to an open mantapa (open hall) with parapet walls.

The jagati which is in unity with the rest of the temple follows a star-shaped design and the walls of the temple follow a zig-zag pattern, a Hoysala innovation.

### **Objective:**

This paper intends to explore and analyze **historical perspective of Amrutha linga manikeshwara** Temple at NandiTavare through understanding of the social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional settings that shaped people's lives and actions in the past with traditional **historical** narratives .

Horses too seem favoured. They appear as embellished representations of those that were a part of the cavalry units of the Hoysala army. Vivid and realistic, they express the sheer spirit of the animals of those times carrying in their saddles weapon-wielding warriors. The powerful and expressive depiction by sculptors of the different ways in which riders and horses attack or succumb to their enemies and the ways in which they ride and charge into battle suggest that as much as imagination, experience seems to have played its role in guiding the hand of creation. This is further evidenced by their attention to proportion and detail. Besides being proportionate in size, the horses are dressed and decorated with restraint, fitted with a saddle, bridle, reins, stirrups and bells. The lion, being the symbol of the dynasty, holds a place of special importance. Apart from the crest, one thousand four hundred and sixty lions appear on friezes at Halebeed. Unlike the manner in which horses and elephants are treated, the lion takes on exaggerated expression. Perhaps because of its symbolic nature, this splendid creature goes beyond realistic representation, moving instead into symbolic realms. To the Hoysala sculptor, the lion is a fantastic creature.

Another animal that makes its appearance is born from the world of the imagination. It is known as the Makara or sea elephant. Local legend says that it is a combination of seven animals, each symbolic of some virtue. For example – a crocodile's mouth for 'grip' or a monkey's eyes for 'sharpness'. It is invariably presented with its upraised head or snout, wide open jaws revealing long sharp teeth and the tongue and tail resembling bursting flames. Believed to have been begun around AD 1121, it was completed only around AD 1160, by the architect of Vishnuvardhana's son and successor Narashimha I. It consists of two virtually identical but separate temples

on a large single platform, connected at the inner arms of their transepts. Temples built by Narasimha III include the famed Kesava temple (called also Somnatha) at Somnathpur, a Vaishnavite monument of the ornate style. Apart from the architectural plan, the Hoysala style attained a few more distinguishing characteristics. Sandstone was given up in favour of the more tractable chloritic schist. The pillars take a special shape owing to the practice of the masons of fashioning the monolithic blocks by turning them on a large lathe. Above all, the temples are decorated with an increasing wealth of sculptured ornamentation.

**Master Sculptors** All the sculpture decorating the temples at Belur and Halebeed is carved from chloritic schist that is dense grey, dark blue or creamy brown. It is governed by uniform decorative, anatomical and stylistic principles. The themes that appealed to the Hoysala artist seem to be human and animal forms, floral and geometric patterns in different architectural contexts. On the ceilings and perforated screens one finds abstract patterns while the doorways, basements and railings are embellished with smaller figures, scrolls and motifs. The outer walls are filled with large reliefs of divinities and their entourages. Perhaps more than passion or romance it is female beauty that is celebrated by Hoysala artists. Young women engaged in music, dance, sport and self-adulation adorn the surfaces, all reflecting feminine vanity in one way or another. These young women or ‘sursundaris’ as they were known, epitomise the concept of female beauty. Human or divine, their many forms of physical beauty are captivating. We find for example, a series of a lady admiring or adorning herself, plucking fruits, feeding a parrot, dancing, or surrounded by nature. As evident by their sheer numbers, sculptors seemed to favour dancers in various postures, celebrating the vibrant lines their bodies made. They are an embodiment of life and death, good and evil, objects of love and desire.

### Relief panels depicting stories from the Epics

Apart from this fantastic creature, bulls too find a place of importance especially as the vehicle of Shiva. The two Nandis at the Hoysaleshwara temple at Halebeed are apt tributes to the power and beauty of this animal. Carved out of monolithic stone blocks of eight or nine feet, and exquisitely carved to highlight the finest of detail including the folds of the skin and adorned with elaborate ornamentation, these bulls are awesome in their appearance.

Other animals such as monkeys, camels, mice, buffalos, rams and birds like peacocks, swans and small birds too are present in most reliefs. The artists have used an infinite variety of stylised foliage and scroll creepers. Vegetative motifs and floral patterns surrounding deities in which you can see monkeys playing and birds flying seem to compete with nature itself. The finish given to every minute detail is amazing. You can see here the nail of the deity piercing through the skin of the elephant, appearing on the other side. Or the fingers of the drummer through the ropes on the drum...the skin of stone relenting to the magical touch of master sculptors.

The most remarkable feature of these temples are the reliefs which present continuous narratives, entire episodes captured in single compositions. Although the epics have always played a major role in Indian art through the centuries, nowhere else would one find entire stories depicted in sculpture as one does on the outer walls of the temple at Halebeed. Not only are complete stories from the Bhagvad Gita and the Mahabharat and Ramayana depicted in a series of reliefs but sometimes a single relief is enough to recount the entire story. For example the story of Krishna lifting mountain of Govardhana or Narasimha annihilating Hiranyakashyapu. These reliefs served a triple purpose. Not only did they enhance the beauty of the structure but they also revealed various manifestations of the lord to his devotees and entertained and educated them by means of stories.

That the artists who worked on these temples were masters of their craft is obvious. But their commitment and artistry would have come to naught if their society and royalty had not accorded them respect and patronage. The Hoysala society accorded agreeable conditions of work and good fortune to the artists of the time. Only men of great skill and patience whose work was valued by society at that time could have produced such master pieces. Just as warriors were needed to defend boundaries, artists were required by the Hoysalas to promote their religious and social interests. They were considered an important part of society. Notable amongst them are Dâsoja and his son Canava as also Mallitamma. It is thanks to them and so many others like them that we have these amazing temples that continue to inspire “joy, awe and stunned surprise”.

The mantapa is the hall where groups of people gather during prayers. The entrance to the mantapa normally has a highly ornate overhead lintel called a makaratorana (makara is an imaginary beast and torana is an overhead decoration) as you see in this picture. The open mantapa which serves the purpose of an outer hall (outer mantapa) is a regular feature in larger Hoysala temples leading to an inner small closed mantapa and the shrine(s). The vimana, also called the cella, contains the garbhagriha (Sanctum Santorum) wherein resides the image of the presiding deity. The vimana is often topped by a tower which is quite different on the outside than on the inside.

Inside, the vimana is plain and square, whereas outside it is profusely decorated and can be either stellate ("star-shaped") or shaped as a staggered square, or feature a combination of these designs, giving it many projections and recesses that seem to multiply as the light falls on it. Kirthimukhas (demon faces) adorn the towers of vimanas in some temples. Sometimes the artists left behind their signatures on the sculptures they created. The sthamba buttalikas are pillar images that show traces of Chola art in the Chalukyan touches. Some of the artists working for the Hoysalas may have been from Chola country, a result of the expansion of the empire into Tamil-speaking regions of Southern India. The image you see here is of mohini on one of the pillars in the mantapa (closed hall) of the Chennakeshava temple and is a fine example of Chola art. The Hoysala style (AD 1050-1300) developed in the southern region of Karnataka.

## Conclusion

Most acclaimed sculptures of the Amrutha linga 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. Each pillar of the mandapa is finely carved, some with figures and other elements, others simply in round patterns. The entrance to the temple area is flanked by a pair of large Vaishnavite dwarapalas and is decorated with an elaborate lintel. The most prominent structure is the Hoysaleswara temple dedicated to Shiva, another monument of ornate style.

Hoysala art may be said to have its starting point in the temples of the early Chalukyas at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal, but when it finally developed in the Mysore region, it manifested a distinctly individual approach which has been called the Hoysala Style. One of the principal features of the style at its maturity related to the plan and general arrangement of architecture. An important monument is the Kesava temple at Belur (in Hassan district). Erected on the orders of Vishnuvardhana to commemorate his victory over the Cholas at Talakad, the deity of the temple—in fact, Vishnu in his Kesava form—was named Vijaya Narayana. The central building of the temple consists of the usual compartments, the inner chamber, attached to a vestibule which connects with a central hall preceded by an open pillared pavilion. But it is in the actual architectural planning that the Hoysala temples—the Kesava temple and the temples at Halebid, Somnathpur and elsewhere—are different from others. Instead of consisting of a simple inner chamber with its pillared hall, there are multiple shrines grouped around a central pillared hall and laid out in the shape of an intricately-designed star. In a large number of cases, the structure is formed of double temples, having most of their essential parts in duplicate and quite often they are triple, quadruple and even quintuple in plan. The upward progress of the shikhara over each inner chamber is radically modified by an arrangement of horizontal lines and moldings which resolve the tower into an orderly succession of tiers, diminishing them as they rise to terminate at the apex. In fact, a characteristic feature of the Hoysala temple is the comparative dwarfishness of the whole structure.

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