Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas

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Abstract: *The Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas, comprising the Kesava Temple (Belur), Hoysalesvara Temple (Halebidu), and Kesava Temple (Somnathpura), represent the architectural and cultural legacy of the Hoysala dynasty in Karnataka. These temples, recognized for their intricate craftsmanship and historical significance, have been under systematic conservation since the early 20th century. Initially protected by the Mysore government and later by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) post-1951, conservation efforts have included structural stabilization, chemical cleaning, and sculptural restoration. Excavations at Halebidu have revealed remnants of earlier structures, indicating a continuous sacred landscape. Conservation measures such as reinforcement of beams, removal of accretions, and weatherproofing have addressed both structural and environmental challenges. The study highlights pre- and post-independence restoration, emphasizing financial allocations, engineering challenges, and documentation efforts recorded in Mysore Archaeological Reports and Indian Archaeology – A Review. Public amenities, landscaping, and promotional activities have further enhanced visitor experience. Long-term preservation strategies have mitigated threats from environmental degradation and vandalism. The research underscores the importance of continued conservation initiatives to safeguard these temples, which stand as exceptional testaments to Hoysala artistry and are integral to India's World Heritage nomination.*

Keywords: Hoysala Temples, Belur, Halebidu, Somnathpura, Conservation, Inscriptions, Restoration

Introduction

Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas consist of three major Hoysala monuments in Karnataka viz., Kesava Temple, Belur, Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebidu and Kesava Temple, Somnathpura while the former two lies in district Hassan the latter in the district Mysuru. The dossier for the Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas was one of the 49 cultural sites of India listed in 'tentative list' since 15.04.2014. The final dossier was prepared by the INTACH in collaboration with Archaeological Survey of India which is the main stake holder along with Department of Archaeology, Museum and Heritage, Govt. of Karnataka. This dossier is the official submission of Govt. of India to the World Heritage Committee for this year (i.e. 2022). A cursory look into archaeological

investigations of all the three monuments during the pre and post-Independence era recorded in the Mysore Archaeological Reports (MAR) and Indian Archaeology – A Review (IAR) reveals interesting facets of these temples in its long journey not only in the field of Conservation, but also in the field of Excavation, Documentation, Chemical cleaning, Layout of Gardens, Publications etc.

In the year 1924, Government of Mysore has passed orders for the protection of the Kesava temple at Belur and the Hovsalesvara temple at Halebidu (MAR 1925:1) and they have separate Archaeology Department for the maintenance of the temples. Earlier, these temples are vividly documented and two decades later, the preservation / conservation of those temples are initiated by the department. After independence, these monuments along with Kesava temple, Somnathapura are brought into the custody of Archaeological Survey of India by the Act of Parliament on 29th November 1951 under the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Declaration of National Importance) Act 1951, popularly known as LXXI of 1951 and later under Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958.

Figure 1: View of Channakeshava Temple with a bhumija shikhara (1868)
(Image Source: British Library Archives)

Keshava Temple and Inscriptions, Belur

Keshava temple (Figures 1 and 2) is one of the ornate varieties of Hoysala art and architecture built in 1117 CE by the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana. According to the inscription, this temple is known as Vijaynarayana. In east-west orientation over a jagati, the shrine on plan has a garbhagriha, an antarala or sukanasi, a mahamandapa and mukhamandapa in north, east and south. The plan in the region of sanctum is stellate (Figures 3 and 4) and is of indented square in the region of mahamandapa and mukhamandapas. At the eastern entrance, the royal emblem flanking the doorway on either side is a unique feature for this temple wherein the other Hoysala monuments have the royal emblem over sukanasi. Of all the three mukhamandapas, only the eastern one has perforated screens and sculptured panels of royal personalities, a later addition in the time of Narsimha. The adhishthana mouldings have friezes of elephants, lions, horse riders, kirtimukha scrolls and support the Chaturvimasati forms of Vishnu, Siva as Gajasuramardana, Vamana and Bali, Narasimha slaying Hiranyakashipu, Arjuna aiming at matsya-yantra, Rati and Manmatha. The sanctum has the two-storeyed devakoshthas with images of Narayana, Vasudeva and Madhava. The three entrances have highly ornate door frames with elaborately sculptured makara torana with Narasimha slaying Hiranya kashipu, Varaha slaying Hiranyaksha and Lakshmi Narayana with respective retinues. The temple is known for its exuberantly sculptured thirty-eight bracket figures placed over pillars between eave and capital of each pillar in the region of mukhamandapa and mahamandapa depicts female sculptures known as Madanikas. There are also a few other subsidiary structures and shrines.

Figure 2: View of Channakeshava Temple without the Shikara (2020)
(Image Source: ASI)

Figure 3: View of Channakeshava Temple, Belur, with Shikara (Image Source: ASI)

Vishnuvardhana's chief queen Shantala has caused the temple of 'Kappe Chennigaraya', a stellate, non-ornate variety of temple built towards the southern side of the main temple. In plan it is similar to the main temple save the addition of a southern shrine housing the image of Venugopala. The main sanctum at west houses the image of Vishnu as Keshva and the pedestal bears the inscription recording the

consecration of the deity by Shantala. The temple of Viranaryana to the west of the main temple was built around twelfth century CE. It is smaller in proportion in comparison to the main temple, and is also built on a raised platform, with a garbhagriha, antarala, a pillared mahamandapa in east-west orientation. It has an austere elevation of non-ornate variety of Hoysala architecture. Towards the north west of the main temple, a stepped pond called Vasudeva Titha, was caused by Vira Ballala II, with an ornamental entrance flanked by two corner towers.

Figure 4: View Channakeshava Temple, Belur without Shikara (Image Source: ASI)

It was during the rule of Vijayanagara empire, the shrines for Saumya nayaki, to the south west, and of Andal, to the north-west were built. In 1397 CE, Gunda, a general of Harihara II, rebuilt the huge seven storey gopura over the Mahadwara at east. Other minor erections like tall granite lamp posts and Uyyale mandapa (Figure 5 and 6) in 1414 CE and Yagashala in 1484 CE were constructed. Even during the rule of Mysore Wodeyars, minor constructions were being affected.

Pre-Independence Era

Conservation: The first record about the Kesava Temple, Belur is the serious injury done by the careless manner of the repairs carried out to the delicate sculptures of the central tower of the temple which has been brought out to the notice of the Taluk Officials (MAR 1896:3).

Along with minor repairs, suggestions were made to the restoration of the outer tower, removal of the structures put up in the south-west and north-east of the temple and the dismantling of the uncouth mud structure known as the nagarkhana. Two more

suggestions for the consideration of the authorities like the removal of the modern lamp-posts standing prominently on the terrace that detract the beauty of the front view to some less prominent place below the terrace and the removal of banyan plants that were seen rooting themselves on the roof in front of the garbhagriha as also on the north side of the Kappe-Chennigaraya temple were made where the delay, especially in this case, is very dangerous (MAR 1911:15).

Figure 5: General view of Channakeshava Temple, Belur (Image Source: ASI)

A scheme for complete restoration of the temple has been submitted at an estimated cost of Rs. 23,020 and on account of financial stringency, it had been ordered by the government to lie over for a year. During the inspection, it is noticed that the temple stood in the need of urgent attention and proposed that the restoration scheme has to be taken up and gradually, while immediate measures are taken to keep watch over the monument for preventing the vandalism and to check the deterioration of the stones. Further, deep rooted plants on the walls of the Kappe Chennigiraya shrine have to be removed as early as possible (MAR 1923: 1 – 2).

In connection with the preservation of the famous temples at Halebidu, Belur and Somnathpur, Government in their Order No 1199-20-1 – Muz / 135-23-T, dated 8th March 1924, appointed a committee consisting of the Muzrai Commissioner, the Chief

Engineer, the Director of Archaeology and the Deputy Commissioner of the district in which the monument is situated to inspect the monuments and to submit an estimate for its preservation (MAR 1924: 9).

Figure 6: General view of Channakeshava Temple, Belur (Image Source: ASI)

First time, the Orders were passed by Government for the measures to be taken for the preservation of the Kesava temple, Belur and the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebidu (MAR 1925: 1).

Government had passed final orders on the recommendations submitted by the special Committee for the preservation of this temple. In their Order No: 511-7 — Muz / 135-23-13 dated 13th October 1924, administrative sanction was conveyed to the following works, viz., work costing about Rs. 3,325 for the Belur temple, appointment of two watchmen on a pay of Rs. 12 per mensem, a provision of Rs. 500 and 100 per annum respectively to the two temples for a period of three years for annual repairs. Annual visits were paid to the Channakesava temple at Belur in accordance with para 5 (v) of Government Order of 14th September 1920 and their conditions noted (MAR 1925:4).

An amount of Rs. 3900 was sanctioned for Cement pointing to the floor. However, the amount incurred is Rs. 465 only. The inspection for the monument for the year 1926 – 27 was undertaken by Revenue Sub. Divisional Officer on 27.12.26 and the same was forwarded by the DC on 22.06.27 (MAR 1927: 150 – 51 / 153 – 154). In the succeeding year (1927 – 28), repairing of the Kalluchavadi mandapa was taken up at an estimate of Rs. 1156. The inspection for the monument for the year 1927 - 28 was undertaken on 12.06.28 and the same was forwarded on 07.07.28 (MAR 1928: 105 / 110 - 112).

An estimate for an amount of Rs. 970/- for the repairing the pond and other urgent repairs was received (MAR 1929:2) and the work of restoration was begun and continued throughout the year where the whole premises was tidied up. The two ugly

accretions standing on the platform for centuries past was removed and the carved images that had been hidden by these were cleaned. Further, several isolated images that were lying within the enclosure were repaired and housed in several pavilions. Door shutters for one of the openings of the temple were prepared and fixed. A design for a new set of doors for the main gateway was furnished to the Executive Engineer (MAR 1930: 301 – 302).

Re-study of the temple and its sculptures made in 1930 has been published (1931: 25 – 46). In succeeding years, a detailed photo documentation of the temple has been undertaken (MAR 1932: 258 / 1933: 292). Further, tracing of ground plan has been prepared (1934: 214).

The work of restoration on the main temple was completed and the work of setting the surrounding shrines in order was begun (MAR 1931: 229). The restoration work was carried out throughout the year as per approved programme. A recommendation made to Government for the continuance of the establishment for another three years was accorded for one more year (MAR 1932: 257). Due to this, the renovation work continued throughout the year (1933: 290) and monuments was inspected by respective officers (MAR 1933: 291).

Certain suggestions for the improvement of the temple premises which were scrutinised from aesthetic and architectural points of view were submitted to Government. The details of expenditure incurred is Rs. 250/- for the repair and maintenance of monument (MAR 1934: 210) and Director of Archaeology has inspected the above monument (MAR 1934: 212).

The work of conserving the temples at Belur was pushed on with the co-operation of the Public Works Department and a Committee was appointed by Government for the renovation of this temple (MAR 1936;1). The dilapidated Kalyanamantapa and the Naganayakana-mantapa were removed to have a good view of the temple from the south-east. During this process, some new inscriptions have been discovered and copied (MAR 1936:18). In July 1935, Mr. J. F. Blakiston, the Director-General of Archaeology in India, visited Belur and Halebidu gave valuable suggestions about conservation (MAR 1936: 20). With the co-operation of the Department of Public Works and the Belur and Halebidu Temples Renovation Committee, the renovation work continued in Belur (MAR 1939: 2).

Documentation: Inscriptions noticed in the Hassan district along with the illustrations of celebrated Halebidu and Belur temples has been published in two volumes (MAR 1902:1 and 1903:1). Along with this, around 43 plates of architectural details from the Belur, Arisikerc and Somnathpur temples are done (MAR 1903:5).

A monograph on Kesava Temple, Belur has been brought out and a vivid description of the same is partly reproduced in the report (MAR 1911: 11 and15). Photographs which are not included in the monographs are printed in this volume (MAR 1912:2). A detailed study of the Kesava temple, Belur has been made in 1919 (MAR 1920: 18).

Post-Independence Era

Conservation: The flooring around the kitchen-block and also in certain parts of the prakara, which was in a bad state of repairs, was re-laid with new stone slabs wherever necessary and pointed at other places (IAR 1953 – 54: 24). The leaky terraces over the main shrine and dalans were rendered watertight (IAR 1956- 57: 54) while expanded-metal teakwood frames were fixed to the openings of the kitchen to prevent the entry of monkeys (IAR 1959 – 60: 107). The roofs of the main navaranga and granary were watertight (IAR 1960 – 61: 98) while the carvings on the ceiling of the mukha-mandapa were cleaned of extraneous deposits (IAR 1967 – 68: 97). New ornamental doors conforming to the original pattern were fixed to the ranga-mandapa of the main shrine and ordinary doors to the Devi shrine (IAR 1968 – 69: 97).

The chemical preservation of the sculptures and reliefs in the interior and exterior of the temple, started in 1967 - 68 was continued and an area of 262 sq. m. was treated, out of a total area of 2950 sq. m in the following year (IAR 1969 – 70: 110). The loose stucco figures of the gopura were fixed, filleted and edged to prevent further deterioration (IAR 1971 – 72: 91).

An area of 146 sq. m. was subjected to chemical cleaning in the car-like niche in the lower balcony, horse and elephant friezes on the western side, pillar-like projections, etc. An aqueous solution of ammonium hydroxide and detergent (teepol) and a mild organic acid were used for the removal of moss, lichen and general cleaning. The brownish stains on the stone surface were removed with an aqueous solution of deoxidine (IAR 1972 – 73: 129).

The fallen compound wall in the south-eastern corner was reconstructed. The terrace of the Rama shrine was water tightened by replacing the old decayed mortar with fresh cement mortar. Wire-mesh frame at the gopura has been replaced. The shrines of Soumyanayaki and Ranganayaki and the kitchen were repaired (IAR 1973 – 74: 71 – 72). Further, the area of the southern wall of the garbhagriha, western and southern walls of navaranga, varaha panel on the lintel of southern entrance, a niche on southern wall of garbhagriha and small niches on the exterior of the southern entrance and the canopies near the southern entrance and the pillars in the interior of the temple were cleaned. The general cleaning of the area was carried out by dry brushing and detergents like teepol. The vegetation growth was removed with the help of ammonium hydroxide solution and mild organic acids like muriatic acid. Deoxidine in water was used to remove the reddish spots in the stones. The bracket figures were preserved with the help of wax polish and brushed to give a glossy appearance. The other treated area has been preserved with polyvinyl acetate in toluene (IAR 1973 – 74: 101).

The northern portion of the open courtyard from the Andal shrine to the tank was re-laid with stone pavement with pointing the joints. The terrace of the old kitchen in the north-west comer was water tightened. Repairs to the inside walls were also attended

(IAR 1974 – 75: 101). Sculptures in canopies of different aisles and pillars in the interior and exterior of the temple were subjected to chemical treatment. The work, covering an area of about 350 Sq. m, involved removal of soot, hardened oil and lime-wash was done with organic acids and teepol emulsifier. Polyvinyl acetate was used as a consolidator. Mohini figures and southern lintels were polished with wax (IAR 1974 – 75: 120). The work was continued in the following year (IAR 1975 – 76: 130) and completed (IAR 1976 – 77: 135) and the whole temple is preserved with a coat of 3 % polyvinyl acetate in toluene.

Patch-works in cement done for the missing portions of the base were replaced by carved pieces, in soap stones, simulating the original ones. Around the dvaja-stambha a small garden was developed (IAR 1977 – 78: 115).

Damaged stones of the exterior of the temple were strengthened and the worn-out pieces were replaced with new stones matching the adjoining surface. Few damaged stucco figures of the main entrance gopura were also strengthened. The top surface of the roof of Rama and Vahana mandapas have been re-plastered after removing the old decayed one (IAR 1978 – 79: 129 - 30).

Thick growth of moss, lichen, dust, dirt etc., on the temple was removed by using 1 – 3 % aqueous ammonia solution mixed with little amount of non-ionic detergent like teepol. A fungicidal coating of 1 % zinc silico-fluoride solution was provided followed by the application of a preservative coating of 3 % polyvinyl acetate solution in toluene (IAR 1981 -82: 140).

The decayed wooden members of the frame inside the vimana of the Soumyanayaki shrine were replaced and the interior was suitably plastered. The plaster on the exterior of the vimana was scraped out and re-plastered. The pedestal of the main image of the Ranganayaki shrine which had gone out of plumb was reset. The sagging prakara wall on the southern side of the temple was underpinned to prevent further damage while the northern wall was strengthened by underpinning with stone masonry and concrete (IAR 1984 – 85: 241).

The interior walls of the Sowmyanayaki shrine was plastered with combination mortar toned to original stone colour. The dislodged chhajja stone of the Rama shrine was removed and reset as per the original (IAR 1985-86: 158). Portion of the collapsed southern prakara was reset as per the original. Remodelling the stucco-work on the gopura of the mahadvara was taken up (IAR 88-89: 138), continued (IAR 1989-90: 160) and were mended as per the original (IAR 1990-91: 122).

The deteriorated stucco sculptures and decorative motifs on the western face of the gopura on the mahadvara were mended as per original after removing the encrustations (IAR 1991-92: 165). The stone sculptures and decorative carvings were chemically treated for the eradication of vegetation growth and oily reddish-brown accretions. Dilute ammonical solution and teepol were used to soften the accretionary

deposits for easy removal by mild brushing. About 1195 sq. m chemically cleaned area was given fungicidal treatment of 1 % aqueous solution of sodium penta-chlorophenate (IAR 1994-95: 142).

Oil and sooty accretions were removed from the sculptures on the exterior walls and niches, the brackets and a few locations in the interior using ammonia-teepol solution. The lime splashes were removed by using dilute glacial acetic acid, 0-5% sodium pentachlorophenate in water was used as fungicide and Acrypol P 876 in toluene as preservative (IAR 1995 – 96: 193 - 94) and the chemical cleaning of remaining 792 Sq. m area was carried out for the removal of oil and soot from the sculptures and carvings on the pillars and ceilings of the Navaranga and Sukanasi in the interior by using neutral detergent and liquor ammonia. Finally, the treated areas were preserved using 1 % acrypol P876. The sculptures were preserved by an application of micro-crystalline wax (IAR 1996-97: 308).

Fresh weather proof course was provided to the leaky roof of the Amman shrine after careful removal of the damaged and deteriorated brick and lime concrete (IAR 2007 – 08: 207). The old damaged rubble flooring behind the Ranganayaki temple has been removed and re-laid with new schist stone flooring after proper dressing and side cutting (IAR 2013 – 14: 230).

Figure 7: General view of Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebidu (1868)
(Image Source: British Library Archives)

Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebidu: The Hoysalesvara temple (Figure 7 and 8), called as 'Vishnuvardhana Poysalesvara', in inscription in honour of the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana was built in 1121 CE. It is an ornate dvikuta shrine of twin Siva temple in east-west orientation caused by Ketamalla Dandanayaka. Later epigraphical

records hail it as 'Hoysaleswara panchikeswara'. On plan, it has a sanctum, a vestibule, a hall and porch which are fused together in the region of hall of dance. Slightly away from the respective eastern mukhamandapas are two nandi mandapas (Figure9 and 10) built over the same jagati. There are four entrances to the twin temple which are typical to the style flanked by miniature shrines. Even the nandi mandapa also has such shrines giving a grand elevation to the temple proper. The jagati offering an imposing elevation to the monument has a flight of steps towards the north and south leading to respective shrines in addition to a flight of steps on the southern side of southern nandimandapa. To the east and west were added two shrines known as Shantaleshvara (west) and Ballaleshvara (east) according to inscriptions and the shrine of Surya was built abutting the southern nandimandapa. The temple once had a prakara with an imposing gateway on the south with royal emblem placed over these mandapas. This temple marks the culmination of Hoysala sculptural art and architecture wherein more than four hundred wall sculptures of exquisite workmanship belonging to Saiva and Vaishnava pantheons, adorn the walls, mixed with secular themes placed over the sculptured adhishthana which has in all 11 friezes of animals, scrolls, swan and makara, etc The bhitti sculptures of dancing Ganesa, the trinities, seated Sarasvati, Govardhanagirdhari, Siva as Gajasuramardana, dancing Sarasvati, dancing Bhairavi, Mahishamardini are some of the masterpieces of Hoysala art in this temple.

Figure 8: General view of Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebidu (1968) (Image Source: ASI)

Pre-Independence Era

Excavation: A large mound noticed to the south-west of the compound of the Hoysalesvara temple was subjected to excavations which has revealed portions of the basement of the *garbhagriha* and *navaranga* of a temple. A few pillars and slabs forming part of the ceiling were also unearthed. All these reveal that this temple was a small neat structure and earlier to the Hoysalesvara temple (MAR 1911: 6 – 9).

Figure 9: View of Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebidu (1868)
(Image Source: British Library Archives)

Figure 10: View of Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebidu (2020) (Image Source: ASI)

In the year 1984 – 85, excavations were carried out in the area adjacent to the Dwarasamudra tank and to the east of Hoysaleswara temple, where the moulded stones of a plinth of a temple were noticed while carrying out gardening operations by

the Horticulture Branch of the Survey. The excavation revealed the remains of an east-facing twin temple extant only up to urdhava-padma moulding and represented in plan by two garbha-grihas and a common mahamandapa. In front of the mahamandapa, remains of a flight of steps with an elephant balustrade were exposed. The remains of another temple facing west and having a sanctum and a mandapa were also encountered in the area north-east of the above-mentioned complex. This was extant up to the adhisthana portion. To the south of this temple, a stepped platform with five courses in diminishing order and having a square socket at the top was exposed. To the north of this stepped platform an inscribed hero-stone consisting of three panels was discovered. The inscription mentions the name of the king Vishnuvardhana and Narasimha I of Hoysala dynasty. Therefore, it can be presumed that this temple complex predates the construction of the Hoysalesvara temple and belongs to the Hoysala period between eleventh and twelfth century CE (*IAR* 1984-85:31).

Conservation: In the year 1896, based on a compliant received from a European visitor, better arrangement was made to prevent the vandalism to the fine polished nandi especially by the natives who went to see by scratching and cutting their names upon it (MAR 1897:3). Further, suggestions on stopping leakage, replacing pillars and if possible, beams by new ones in the north-east corner of the large Nandi-mantapa, preventing the crushing of the friezes by the super incumbent weight on the north side of the bulging portion in the middle of the east face and general maintenance of the structure were made (MAR 1911: 11). Removal of the mounds of earth inside the compound of the Hoysalesvara temple has been levelled to surface. The possible restoration of the big Ganesa, a piece of exquisite workmanship but unfortunately its right arm is broken and a railing around the image to prevent the repetition of such mischief were proposed (MAR 1923: 2).

Inspection Reports from Revenue Sub-Division Officers were received and the Government have passed final orders on the recommendations submitted by the special Committee on the measures to be taken for the preservation of the temple. In their Order No. 511-7 — Muz /135-23-13 dated the 13th October 1924, administrative sanction was conveyed to the following works: — Purchase of tools, etc., at a cost of Rs. 550, appointment of two watchmen on a pay of Rs. 12 per mensem and provision of Rs. 500 and 100 per annum for a period of three years in the first instance for annual repairs. Further, annual visits were taken up in accordance with para 5 (v) of Government Order of 14th September 1920 and their conditions noted (MAR 1925:4). An amount of Rs. 192 has been spent as the payment to the watchman (MAR 1927: 151). An Estimate to undertake repairs for an amount of Rs. 100/- was received (MAR 1929: 2).

Extensive restoration work was undertaken systematically. The work carried out during this year consisted in clearing up air vegetation, levelling the ground and cement pointing to the joints of the basement and supplying the missing pieces such as

finials to the small pavilions surrounding the temple. Further, a proposal was also made to utilise the available portions of the fallen parts of the ruined temples in front of Buchesvara temple, Koravangala in supplying the missing parts in the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebidu (MAR 1930: 230 and 301). In addition, some extracts of the Hoysalesvara temple, Halebidu has been printed (MAR 1930: 33 – 48). A detailed Note on the temple along with other areas of archaeological interest has been given (MAR 1930: 33 – 49 / 61).

The projected portion of the temple on the past was found bulging out and an estimate received from the Executive Engineer for its reconstruction was scrutinised and returned (MAR 1932: 257). The conservation of monuments was attended and the work of conserving the temple was pushed on with the co-operation of the Public Works Department and a Committee was appointed by Government for the renovation of this temple (1936:1).

Post-Independence Era

The precincts of the Hoysalesvara temple were cleaned up and the work of the collection of all loose sculptures and carved stones and their display in a sculpture-shed at a convenient place inside the compound is made (IAR 1953 – 54: 23- 24). The entire leaky roof of the temple is dismantled and relaid. The area round the temple was also cleared of vegetation and the undulating ground levelled. The scattered sculptures and carved stones were sorted out with a view to exhibiting them in a proposed sculpture-shed (IAR 1954 – 55: 40). The leaky terrace over the Nandi-mandapa was made water tightened (IAR 1956- 57: 54). The flooring inside the temple was re-laid, substituting missing stones and the flag-stones were pointing with cement mortar (IAR 1974 – 75: 101).

The polished Shahabad stones in the navaranga provided in the past for the missing flooring slabs have been replaced by soap stone pavement in conformity with the original construction (IAR 1977 – 78: 115). The exterior of Santalesvara shrine as also the area between this and the shrine of Hoysalesvara, south-west and north-west flank of Hoysalesvara all being delicately sculptured were treated chemically. Beside the removal of moss and lichen, and lime wash, the sculptured surface was chemically treated with oxalic acid and deoxidine for the removal of brown and yellow obtrusive accretions respectively (IAR 1977 – 78: 142).

Out of 2410 sq.m area, 1996 sq.m carvings and sculptures of the temple covered with vegetational growth and lime wash has been treated. The vegetational growth was removed by 10 % ammonia solution, adamant stains by deoxidine solution, lime wash by 5 % glacial acetic acid, followed by fungicidal application with 1 % sodium pentachlorophenate. Finally, it was preserved by 2 % Perspex solution in toluene (IAR 1978 – 79: 151). In continuation of the preceding year's work, dust, dirt, moss and lichen was removed with soft brushes using 1 to 2 % solution of ammonia combined with 2 % solution of teepol in water, and 1 % of sodium pentichlorophenate, as

fungicide. The preservation was completed by applying a coating of 3 % Perspex in toluene. Wax polish was also tried on a few pillars on an experimental basis (IAR 1979 – 80: 155). Original prakara wall and basement of the main gate were found while clearing the debris on the southern side of the temple (IAR 1983 – 84: 214). Flagstone pavement in front of the entrance steps on the northern side was provided to avoid stagnation of rain water. The existing decayed lime-concrete over the roof of the entire temple was removed (IAR 1988-89: 138) and the joints of the roof-slabs were pointed (IAR 1989-90: 160) for relaying of fresh concrete.

The broken beams of the navaranga were mended by providing concealed I-section girders. The original lotus medallion carved on the bottom surface of the beam was retained by sawing a thin strip of the beam and refixing it beneath the concealed I-section girder using epoxy resin. The supporting pillars bearing inscription of Vijayanagara period provided earlier were removed and shifted to the Archaeological Museum. The roof was given a fresh layer of weather proof course of brick jelly in lime mortar (IAR 1990 – 91: 122). The concrete slabs laid over the northern entrance were dismantled carefully for resetting with original members. Further, chiselled and dressed architectural members, to replace the missing ones, are also prepared (IAR 1992 – 93:152).

The broken beams, roof slabs and the out-of-plumb upper register of the wall along with the kapota of the northern entrance of the temple were carefully dismantled by cutting the brick-jelly concrete roof. The broken beam was strengthened by using concealed stainless steel T section girder of required size. The much damaged and missing roof slabs were replaced. The masonry construction supporting the kapota was dismantled and the corresponding carved architectural members which were housed in the reserve collection of the Archaeological Museum, Halebidu, were identified and placed in their original position. The masonry supports provided later on the inner side in the mukha-mandapa were removed and an ornate niche built into the west wall was laid bare (IAR 1993 – 94: 162).

The broken beam of the northern entrance, dismantled earlier, was strengthened using concealed I-section girder of required size. After repositioning all the beams and roof-slabs, disturbed in the process, were rendered water-tight. The missing veneering members on the inner face on either side of the entrance and stone flooring in the missing portion of the northern entrance were provided afresh (IAR 1994 – 95: 113). Micro-vegetational growth, ochre patches, calcareous and other accretionary deposits were removed from nandi-mandapas in front of Hoysalesvara and Shantalesvara shrines. About 2140 sq. m area was chemically cleaned and given fungicidal treatment of 1 % aqueous santobrite solution. The surface was allowed to dry completely and preserved with 1% Acrypol in toluene (IAR 1994 – 95: 142 – 43).

The walls and ceilings of navaranga hall and the interior of nandi-mantapa opposite Shantalesvara Shrine were subjected to chemical treatment. The oily and sooty accretions were removed using mixture of ammonia and teepol solution whereas

calcareous and other in grained accretions were removed by chemico-mechanical means using aqueous acetic acid solution. The treated areas were preserved using 1% Acrypol P 876 in toluene (IAR 1995 – 96: 194).

In continuation of the above, the chemical cleaning of sculptures in the interior of the shrine was carried out for the removal of calcareous and other in grained accretions as well as ochre patches in the Navaranga hall, in interior, using glacial acetic acid in water and finally, washing with aqueous solution of ammonia and detergent. The treated area was preserved by using 1% solution of acrypol P876 in toluene. The work has been completed (IAR 1996 – 97: 309). The dead plaster over the leaky roof of the main shrine has been scraped out and water tightened by providing a thick plaster in combination of mortar and waterproof cement compound (IAR 1996 – 97: 249). The dead lime concrete over the leaky roof of the twin temple has been removed and water tightened by providing a fresh course of surkhi mixed with lime mortar (IAR 2006 – 07: 181).

Documentation: Photographic plates have been prepared to show the architectural effect of the temple (MAR 1901:4). All the temples at Halebidu were examined and still a few more details about this temple have been published in great details (MAR 1911: 6 – 9). In addition to the above, the Architectural Draughtsman has prepared seven plates illustrating the temples at Halebidu, Arsikere, Harnahalli and Koramangala. A list of the photographs and drawings were prepared in connection with Hoysalesvara temple viz., ornamental base (South), Elephant and Garnda, North full view, South-east view, East side (middle), Ravana and Nandi (North), West side (middle), South side, Trimurti and other figures, Varaha and other figures, Inscription pillar, Narasiniha and Sarasvati, Ceiling in east entrance, Gopalakrishna figure, East view, North - west view, South-west, Trimurti and Subrahmanya (North), Ganapati, Trimurti and other figures (South), Ganapati and Vishnu, Niche-full view (North-West), East door way, South doorway, West view—full and South-west side (MAR 1911:25). Further, drawing of the ornamental base (MAR 1912:18) seven plates illustrating the details of scrolls and canopies (MAR 1912: 25) along with another six plates (MAR 1915:24) and nearly 45 photographs has been prepared for Hoysalesvara temple (MAR 1912: 28 – 29) and photographs which are not included in the Monographs of Halebidu are printed in this volume (MAR 1921:2). The monograph on Halebidu Temples is still under preparation by Rao Bahadur R. Narasimhachar (MAR 1926: 103).

Laying of Garden: Preparatory cultivation relating to re-turfing of lawns was carried out (IAR 1973 – 74: 92) in twelve hectares towards the eastern side of the garden was maintained properly (IAR 1974 – 75: 130) and the old wall bifurcating the garden was removed in order to provide a full view of the monument. Planting of roses in curved beds and ornamental flowering trees added to the beauty of this vast garden (IAR 1975 – 76: 139 – 40). As a result of the drying up of the dvara-samudra tank, the source of water-supply here, the irrigation system suffered very much. Yet sufficient quantity of silt was collected for spreading it in the flower beds. About 480 m long of Kerb stones

were pitched on either side of the path ways in the extended part of the garden (IAR 1976 – 77: 146). However, the maintenance work of the garden had a set-back because of the water-shortage coupled with the fact that the effort of the State Geological Department to drill a bore-well proved futile (IAR 1977 – 78: 155). A suitable submersible pumping set was installed for irrigating the garden area which was kept neat and tidy throughout the year (IAR 1979 – 80: 166). Coconut plants were planted and pipe lines for irrigation laid (IAR 1984 – 85: 285). Arrangements was made to solve the water scarcity during summer by sinking of new bore well. After laying the P.V.C. pipe line for proper irrigation in the newly acquired area along Dwara Samudra, coconut plantation has been done (IAR 1985-86: 211).

Public Amenities: In order to supply water to visitors, a pipeline has been laid from the bore-well to the Museum and toilets; a small engine-room for the pumping-set was built (IAR 1977 – 78: 115). A water tank in brick masonry was raised to provide drinking water to the visitors (IAR 1984 – 85: 241). Car parking area in front of the temple was further extended, while the southern and eastern sides of the monument were completely fenced with M.S. angles and barbed wire. On the western side, a toe wall measuring 60 cm in height was constructed. (IAR 1983 – 84: 214). Grill of mild steel was fixed over the compound wall, constructed around the newly-acquired area (IAR 1987 – 88: 178).

Figure 11: View of Kesava Temple, Somnathapura (1868)
(Image Source: British Library Archives)

Figure 12: View of Kesava Temple, Somnathapura (2020) (Image Source: ASI)

Kesava Temple, Somnathpura

The place, which was earlier under the rule of the Cholas, was conquered by Hoysala Vishnuvardhana in 1117 CE. It became one of the foremost agrahara townships during the rule of Narasimha III. An inscription dated 1268 CE records that Somanatha Dandanayaka, an illustrious general of the Hoysala king Narasimha III, established an agrahara in Somanathapur and named it as Vidyanidhi Prasanna Somanathapura and consecrated the temple of Kesava (Figure11 and 12) . The temple is the most ornate and perfect model of the Hoysala style of architecture. The temple facing east has three garbhagrihas on the west, north and south, all connected to a common pillared hall through a separate sukanasi. The western, southern and northern sanctum houses the image of Vishnu as Kesava, Venugopala and Janardana respectively. The temple stands on a high stellate platform, and is enclosed in a spacious courtyard surrounded by pillared corridors with sub shrines (Figure13 and 14). The temple is known for elaborately carved doorways and beautifully executed ceilings of the navaranga mandapa. The friezes of the basement, beautiful images of deities adorning the exterior wall surfaces with names of the sculptors who carved them, the highly decorated and beautifully proportioned superstructure resting on the three sanctums, known for their poise and elegance render the Keshava, a perfect model of the trikutachala order.

Pre-Independence Era

Conservation: This splendid temple which according to Fergusson, more perfect than that of the temples at Belur and Halebidu was studied in great details. However, some of the problems was noticed like the verandah is in a dilapidated condition where

several of the beams being broken and the wall being out of plumb, the mukha mandapa is leaky and the top portions of the outer wall are missing in many places. The above repairs appear to be indispensable to safeguard the temple from injury. Photographs were taken of the temple, a few images and of the fine stone inscription (MAR 1910: 9 – 10). The special committee inspected the monuments and submitted an estimate for its preservation (MAR 1924: 9) and the Government has passed final orders on the recommendations with regard to the measures to be taken for the preservation of this temple. However, administrative approval for works was kept in pending due to non-receipt of the report from the chief Engineer and the funds are made available in the D. P. W. Budget for their repairs. (MAR 1926:7).

Figure 13: View of Kesava Temple from SE, Somnathapura (1868)
(Image Source: British Library Archives)

Sanctioned amount for the pay of watchman for the temple is Rs.120 and the same is incurred (MAR 1927:150 – 51) and the inspection report for the year 1926 – 27 was not received (MAR 1927: 153 – 154). In the year 1927 – 28, an amount of Rs. 16,217/- has been sanction for its renovation and maintenance and the amount incurred is 13,176/- and as usual, the inspection report from DC was not received for this year also (MAR 1928: 105 / 110 - 112).

In the following year (1928-29) extensive restoration work was carried out at a cost of Rs. 16,000/-. But at the time of inspection in October 1929, a portion of the newly constructed portion was leaky and the defect was brought to the notice of the

Executive Engineer, Mysore Division (MAR 1929: 304) and the Executive Engineer stated that necessary repairs had since been carried out (MAR 1930: 230). An amount of Rs. 124/- has been spent against the payment for the watchman (MAR 1929: 289). The temple is in a good condition. Certain improvements are being effected by the D P.W. agency (1939:20).

Line drawings like Perforated screen. Ceiling. Section of ceiling were undertaken (MAR 1930: 304) and this temple was once again studied in great details with illustrations (MAR 1932: 16 – 39).

Figure 14: View of Kesava Temple from SE, Somnathapura (2020) (Image Source: ASI)

Sanctioned amount for the pay of watchman for the temple is Rs.120 and the same is incurred (MAR 1927:150 – 51) and the inspection report for the year 1926 – 27 was not received (MAR 1927: 153 – 154). In the year 1927 – 28, an amount of Rs. 16,217/- has been sanction for its renovation and maintenance and the amount incurred is 13,176/- and as usual, the inspection report from DC was not received for this year also (MAR 1928: 105 / 110 - 112).

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Line drawings like Perforated screen. Ceiling. Section of ceiling were undertaken (MAR 1930: 304) and this temple was once again studied in great details with illustrations (MAR 1932: 16 – 39).

Post-Independence Era

The component stones of the mahapadma and kalasa on the top of the main vimana were found dislodged from their position, exposing large gaps, which were permitting the entry of water into the shrine below. The top-course had re-set in position. The entire roof of the navaranga in front was renewed as the old one had been very leaky, affecting the exquisitely-carved ceiling below (IAR 1953 – 54: 23).

The irregular floor-stones in the prakara round the main shrine were removed, cut and dressed to regular shapes and re-used for the flooring of the dalans on the south, west and north over a 0.75m thick bed of sand, the joints being pointed with coloured mortar. The flooring of the prakara itself was laid with newly-cut granite slabs of size, 0.75m – 1m thick, over a concrete-bed with a good slope towards the original outlet. The terraces of the corridors all round were dismantled by the removal of the old concrete for a layer of fresh concrete (IAR 1957 – 58: 95 – 96).

The flooring all-round the prakara was laid in cut-stone slabs and the joints pointed with cement-mortar over a bed of brick-jelly concrete in lime-mortar. All the old flagstones available at the site were cut to size and laid in the corridor and the prakara over a bed of sand and pointed with cement-mortar. The entire terrace of the corridor was made watertight by the removal of the old concrete and laying of brick jelly concrete. Two coats of flat tiles were laid in cement-mortar and plastered in lime-mortar mixed with myrobalans and jaggery-water and the top-surface left rough. The exterior of the temple was levelled by the spread of the debris available from the dismantled terracing-material. A teak-wood frame in welded mesh was provided to the huge inscribed slab fixed in the front mandapas. All the old dislodged cut-stone steps leading to the corridor from the prakara were removed and re-set in position. Cut-stone water-spouts were also fixed over the terrace for drainage (IAR 1958 – 59: 107).

The uneven stone-flooring was re-set and expanded metal door provided (IAR 1961 – 62: 134). The main temple was made watertight by laying a fresh terrace in combination-mortar (IAR 1969 – 70: 94) and the preliminary collection of materials has been made to commence preservation work early next year (IAR 1969 – 70: 110).

A spread of thick gravel was laid to prevent waterlogging all-round the basement of the outer wall (IAR 1971 – 72: 91). The three towers and sculptures covering an area of 1215 sq. m., are badly covered with black moss and white patches of lichen and extensive growth of stone flowers. They were removed by ammonia water and teepol in varied concentration according to the intensity of vegetal growth. A 3% solution of sodium penta-chlorophenate in water was used as fungicide. The work was mostly carried out on the lower portions and the southern side wall in the front portion

connecting the southern tower. A total area of 292 sq. m. was cleaned. About three-fourth of this area has been preserved with a 3% solution of Perspex in toluene (IAR 1971 – 72: 129).

The work was carried out on the northern tower including the elephant frieze portions and north-west corner connecting the north and central towers. Black moss and patches of lichen were cleaned with a mixture of teepol and ammonical water. To ward off the growth of moss, sodium pentachlorophenate in a 3% aqueous solution has been used. 3% polymethyl methocrylate in toluene has been used as a preservative coat (IAR 1972 – 73: 101).

An area of 270 sq. m on the central tower and domes was taken up for removal of moss and lichen and other vegetation growth over the tower by chemico-mechanical means and removal of soot and smoke in the interior by using aqueous solution of ammonia and teepol in varied concentration according to the intensity of vegetation growth or soot, etc. A part of the above-mentioned portion was given fungicidal and preservative treatment with 3% solution of sodium pentachlorophenate (IAR 1973 – 74: 87).

Half of the central chuda and several domes, pillars and toranas of the monument were subjected to removal of soot, white accretions and eradication of vegetation growth. A 3% solution of sodium pentachlorophenate was used as a fungicide and a solution of methyl methacrylate in toluene as a surface preservative. Calcareous accretion was softened and removed with the help of acetic acid (IAR 1974 – 75: 120).

The work of removal of black moss and white and grey patches of lichen from the exterior surface of the temple has been completed. The interior of the temple was coated with white lime accretions and soot deposits were also successfully removed. The entire cleaned area on the exterior was given fungicidal treatment with 3 % sodium penta-chlorophenate in water. Further, 3 % solution of methyl methacrylate in toluene was used as preservative coat (IAR 1975 – 76: 130).

Concrete flooring has been laid inside the cells around the main temple after removing the dead concrete (IAR 1977 – 78: 116). The cracked beams, including ornamental ones, in the southern corridor of the temple were replaced (IAR 1979 – 80: 133) while the cracked lintels and ornamental chhajja in the corridor have been removed after dismantling the terrace and replaced. The terrace was also water tightened (IAR 1980 – 81: 134). Dwarf compound wall is being constructed to a requisite height along the periphery of the archaeological area around the temple in cut stone masonry set in cement mortar. The work of providing barbed wire fencing above the dwarf wall is in progress and the water supply system was improved (IAR 1992 – 93: 153 and 204). In continuation of the previous year's work, the archaeological premises around the temple was fenced by using 'L' angles and barbed wire over a stone masonry dwarf wall of requisite height (IAR 1993 – 94: 162). The sunken and out of plumb cloister mandapa on the southern side was dismantled after proper documentation. The foundation is properly strengthened (2009 – 10: 241).

Laying of Garden: Preparatory cultivation before re-turfing of lawns was started. All the old pipe-lines were removed, repaired and relaid for easy irrigation (IAR 1973 – 74: 92). Laboratory tests of the soil of the out-lived lawns have revealed that the soil is extremely alkaline where the Ph. value ranges from 9 to 9.3. As suggested by the chemists' heavy doses of gypsum was added followed by the incorporation of a very heavy dose of organic manure. Horse gram was sown as a green manure and the entire foliage was incorporated in the soil. This operation has substantially changed the structure of the soil. Later on, re-turfing was done with Calcutta dhoob, and the grass has come up very well. The garden as a whole was maintained in a satisfactory condition (IAR 1974 – 75: 130).

In addition, causalities in shrubberies and coconut grove were replaced (IAR 1975 – 76: 140). The rear side along the barbed wire fencing has been lined with Bougainville (IAR 1976 – 77: 146) and the water-problem has eased to a great extent as a result of replacement of worn-out pumping set by a new Myers and Wasp deep-well ejector pump-set (IAR 1977 – 78: 155, IAR 1978 – 79: 161). Relaying of garden was completed and mango trees were planted. A beautiful lawn border with clerodendrem hedge has come up (IAR 2013 – 14: 412).

Advertisement and Publicity: During the Pre-Independence era, guide books for Belur temple (MAR 1935:2) and Halebidu has been published (MAR 1939:3). Further, in the post-Independence era and in accordance to the advt. and publicity of the ASI to the above three monuments, post cards were released as per the necessity and demand. In this regard, one set of black and white picture postcards on Belur and twenty coloured picture postcards on the temple at Halebidu and Belur were released (IAR 1979 – 80: 169) and black and white picture postcards of Belur and Somnathpur were brought out (IAR 1983 – 84: 154). Further, Department of Post, Government of India has brought out three set of special cancellation on above three temples.

Miscellaneous: In connection with the Hoysalesvara temple some very interesting information has been published. According to Rice (MAR 1903:3), 'the most cursory inspection shows that numbers of pierced sculptured slabs or medallions of dancing girls and other such figures, of which many specimens may be seen at the Belur temple, have been removed from, the brackets which supported them on the tops of the outer pillars'. From what he had heard, 'it appears that they were taken away by Count de Lally, the French commander who made a treaty with Haidar Ali'. In support of the story Rice has been told that 'after their conveyance to France, he by way of compensation sent a sum of money for the upkeep of the temple, and that this fund, converted into varahas or pagodas, formed the basis of the money grant now paid to the temple'. Further, he mentions that he is 'awaiting information from the Muzarai Department to enable him to judge if the story is true'. He doubts that 'it cannot be Lally, but might have been Hussey, or one of the officers, Alain or Huge, who entered the service of Haidar, and perhaps the Hoysalesvara sculptures are still in France, and may be at Soissons'.

In accordance with G. O. No. D. 9984-9—G. G. 100-26-8, dated 19th March 1928, coins belonging to Kesava Temple, Belur was studied (MAR 1929: 3).

A metallic image of the celebrated Vishnuvardhana of the Hoysala dynasty (CE 1111-1141) under the safe custody of the priests was photo documented. The image is about a 0.45m in height standing on a pedestal. The hair is wound into a knot behind the head. The figure is highly adorned with earrings, necklaces and ornaments. Asheathed sword is suspended from the girdle on the left side and a dagger on the right side. On the image, discus, conch and certain lines and circles are drawn on the palm of the hand, fingers and legs indicating great fortune (MAR 1926: 3 - 7).

In addition to the above, one of the most interesting old metallic objects preserved in the Chennakesava temple at Belur is a bronze tripod, about 0.30m high, which is an offering of Kumara Lakshmidhara Dandanayaka, a Hoysala Officer. It is one of the very few metal objects known definitely to belong to the Hoysala period and illustrates that the art of metal work during the period. Each of the three legs of the tripod consists of three groups of figures arranged in on ascending order thus (1). The bottom has three metallic bells in between which are two human figures – one male and another female in dancing attitudes similar to those in the stone bracket figures under the eaves of the main temple. In-between the figures again and also linking them up above extends, all round the tripod, a fine creeper scroll, (2). Next is worked a pedestal on which stands a dancing male or female flanked on either side by dancing drummers. (3). From behind the figure on the pedestal runs on either side a symmetrical combination of floral, bird and animal ornamentation: from the beak of a swan issues forth a creeper above which is a long-tailed lion surmounted by more floral ornamentation. The creepers form floriated arches by meeting between the legs of the tripod and terminating in a beautiful lotus bud in the middle of the arch. (4). between the creepers and the upper circular band, is a panel of ornamental swans inset in an outer panel of Gandabherunda figures. (5). The upper circular band itself has below it a row of hanging lotuses which are smaller than the pendants in the middle of the arches formed by floriated creepers as mentioned above and (6). On the flat surface of the circular band is the inscription, in Kannada characters, of Kumara Lakshimidhara Dandanayaka (MAR 1940: 62 – 63).

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that these temples built around 900 to 750 years ago has underwent various stages of conservation, preservation, restoration, excavation and documentation which are well documented. The recent visit of UNESCO team during the month of September has raised the hope of all that the 'Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas' will be inscribed in the World Heritage List.

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