

The Sculpture of the Hoysala (4/4/2008 to 4/5/2008)

Central Karnataka was ruled by the Hoysala dynasty during the 11-13th centuries. Their temples were characterized by incredibly ornate sculptural detail, possible because the soft steatite soapstone used in construction oxidizes and hardens when exposed to air, beautifully preserving the artistry for almost a thousand years. The Hindu temples of Halebid and Belure are two of the most famous examples of Hoysala architecture, with Halebid built slightly later, but never finished, and exhibiting more sculptural detail. Belur is more complete and still actively used as a temple today. I had been to both temples my first time in India but as I was in the area to see the large Jain sculpture and temple complex at Sravanabelagola, I couldn't pass up the chance to visit these two temples which boast some of the finest Hindu sculpture in India.

Sravanabelagola is a place sacred to the followers of the Jain religion. It is believed to be the place where a Jain practicing Mauryan emperor Chandragupta starved himself to death in meditation around 300 B.C. Allegedly several other Jain devotees have followed his lead and chose this place to die as well over the years. Much of the architecture dates from the late 10th century including the huge monolithic statue of Gomateshvara standing naked in meditation in the forest as vines grow up his legs. Gomateshvara was the son of the first of 24 Jain Tirthankara (holy figures who freed themselves from the cycle of rebirth). After a fight with his brother Gomateshvara rejected greed and meditated in the forest standing motionless as vines grew up his legs and snakes coiled at his feet until he achieved *moksh*, release, roughly the Jain equivalent of nirvana. In so doing he became the first human to achieve such a state, even before his father.



Monolithic 17.5 m (~60 ft) tall Jain statue of Gomateshvara, carved in 981 AD, Vindhyagiri Hill, Sravanabelagola.



Feet of the Jain statue of Gomateshvara, Vindhyagiri Hill, Sravanabelagola.



Monolithic 17.5 m (~60 ft) tall Jain statue of Gomateshvara, carved in 981 AD, Vindhyagiri Hill, Sravanabelagola.



Figure next to the Jain statue of Gomateshvara, Vindhyagiri Hill, Sravanabelagola.



View of Vindhyagiri Hill and the Jain statue of Gomateshvara, Sravanabelagola.



Looking towards the Jain temples on Chandragiri Hill from Vindhyagiri Hill, Sravanabelagola.



Jain temple on Chandragiri Hill, Sravanabelagola.



12th century Hoysalewara Temple, Halebid.



Detail on the 12th century Hoysalewara Temple, Halebid.



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Hoysalewara Temple, Halebid.



Detail on the 12th century Hoysalewara Temple, Halebid.



Priest in the 12th century Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



Detail, Hoysalewara Temple, Halebid.



Vishnu incarnated as Narasimha (half man half lion), Hoysalewara Temple, Halebid.



Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



**Channekeshava Temple,
Belur.**



**Interior of 12th century Channekeshava
Temple, Belur.**



**Little girl in front of the Channekeshava
Temple, Belur.**



**Channekeshava Temple,
Belur.**



**Woman praying in front of the
Channekeshava Temple, Belur.**



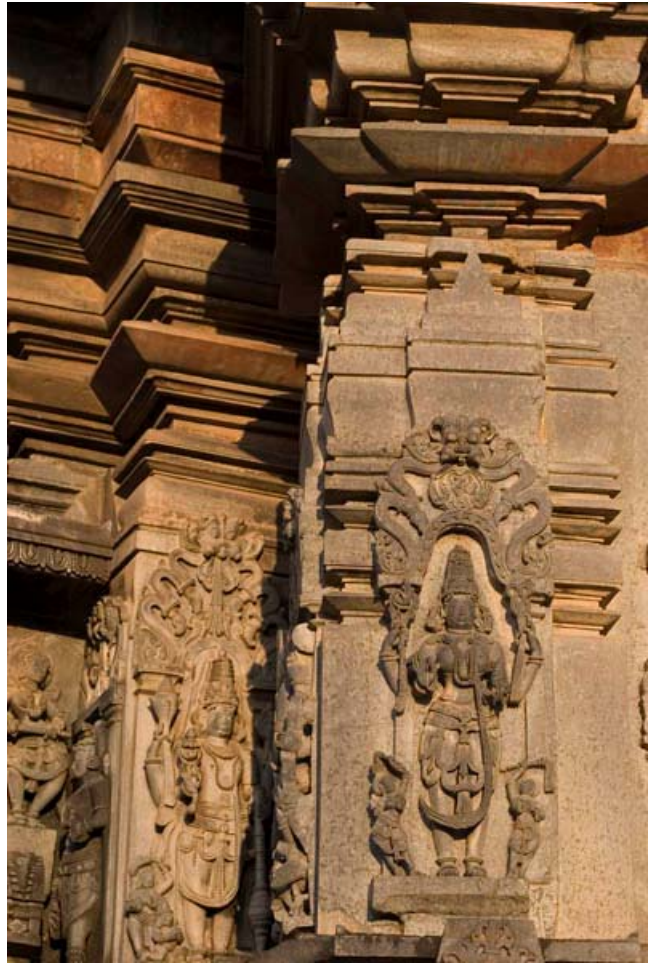
Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



**Channekeshava Temple,
Belur.**



Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



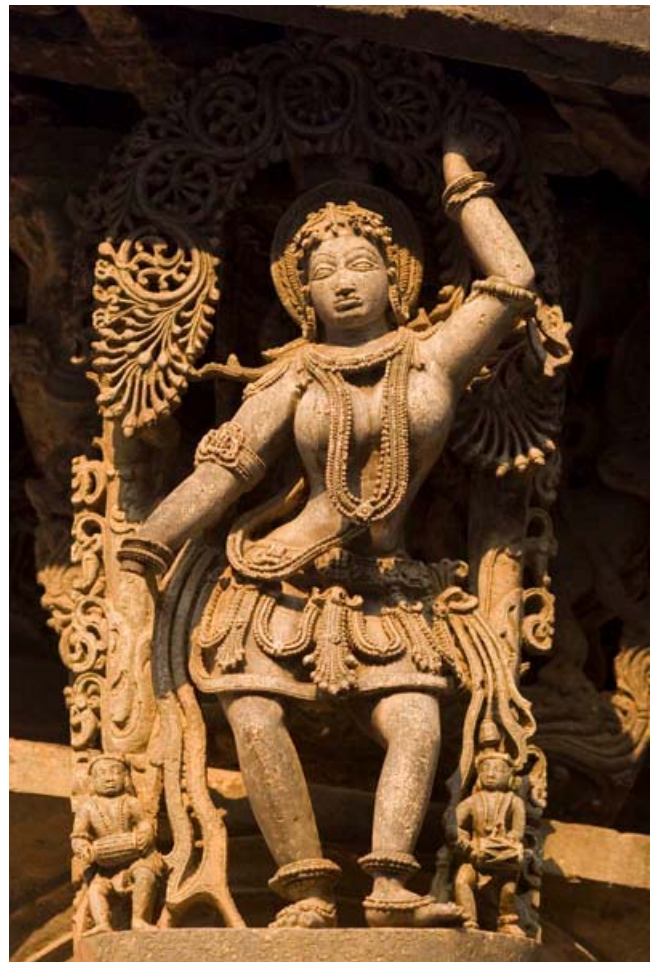
Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



Pilgrim holds up little girl in front of the Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



Channekeshava Temple, Belur.



**Channekeshava Temple,
Belur.**