



# Karnataka History - Hoysalas Part 1

Special class

After the fall of the Gangas, the Hoysalas took their place in Southern Karnataka, and started their rule from the 11th century as subordinates of the Chalukyas of Kalyana and later became a sovereign dynasty, having extended their power over parts of Tamilnadu also. They shared the fortunes of the Chalukyas of Kalyana in Karnataka with the Seunas of Devagiri. Inscriptions are the chief source of information on the dynasty. But, literary works like Jatakatilaka in Kannada and Gadyakarnamrita in Sanskrit also reveal to us information on the dynasty.

The Hoysalas claim to belong to the Yadava family and state to have come from Dwaraka in Gujarat. A record of Ereyanga dated 1078 states that Hoysala was the lord of Dvaravathipura. A later record (1090) says that he was the sun of the Yadava sky. Still later records inform us that in the family were born Brahma, Atri, Chandra, Puroorava and later on Yadava; and from him were born the Yadavas. "Among such kings at a certain time arose Sala with rays of glory like the moon". One of the records says that this Yadava Vamsa came to be named as Hoysala Vamsa from the days of Sala. "In these accounts it can be found that the poet has taken no pains to trace the connection of Sala with the Yadava kings of the north. This points to the fact that there was not even tradition to back such poetic fancies", says Prof. William Coelho.

It can be noted here that records of early rulers of the family, Nripakama and Vinayadithya, make no mention of their genealogy, and it is only in the days of Ereyanga an attempt was made for the first time to connect the family with the Yadavas. All royal families of the South in the 10th and 11th centuries devised puranic genealogies, as in the case of the Yadavas, Pallavas, Kadambas and the Kalachuris. The Northern origin theory of the Hoysalas cannot be accepted. Initially they were ruling from the Malenadu region and do not appear to have been in any way connected with the North. Their own inscriptions state that the first member of their family, Sala, was from Shashakapura. Rice and other scholars have pointed out that they were an indigenous family originally belonging to Sosevuru, identified as Angadi in Mudugere taluk. Maleparolganda or master of the Male chiefs was their proud epithet and it was their sign manual, which they put in Kannada even in their Tamil records. This shows that they were originally from a family of hill chieftains (Malepas), and later became overlords of many such chieftains, thus calling themselves as Maleparolganda.

Almost all major records of the Hoysalas narrate the story of Sala, the 'founder' of their dynasty. He was a youth from Shashakapura (Sosevur). He once went to the temple of his family deity Vasanthika to offer worship. A tiger appeared on the scene, and a Jaina muni staying in the precincts of the temple ordered him "hoy Sala", meaning "Strike O Sala". Sala hit the tiger and killed it. Thus, the family came to have the name Hoysala, and Sala hitting the tiger became the family emblem of the dynasty. This story appears for the first time in the Beluru Record of Vishnuvardhana dated 1117.

Anyway, the earlier history of the dynasty is obscure and we are not sure whether Sala was really a historical personage. Probably he belonged to the Billa tribe of the Malnad region and must have become Jaina later. The first record of the family is of Arekalla dated 950. Possibly the Hoysalas in their initial days were feudatories of the Gangas in the Male region and must have risen to eminence after the fall of the Gangas. Seetharam Jagirdar has brought to light earlier chieftains of the family like Maruga, Nripakama I (c.976) or Mara. M.N. Prabhakar mentions one Munda to whom he assigns a date between 1006 to 1026. Munda warred against the Cholas

The Hoysalas had to wage severe wars against the Cholas who had occupied southern parts of Karnataka. The successes of the early Hoysala chieftains against the Cholas, may have been symbolically narrated as Sala having killed a tiger, the tiger being the royal emblem of the Cholas. Kama or Nripakama II (1026-47) bore the title Permani, and this was a title peculiar to the Gangas. This seems to point "to an alliance between the Hoysalas and the Gangas", says Prof. B.S. Krishnaswami Iyengar. In his war against the Cholas, Kama appears to have been defeated. Still he held his territories in the Male region.

Kama II was succeeded by Vinayadithya, his son, and records describe him as a feudatory of the Chalukyas. Hoysaladevi, the queen of Chalukya Someshvara I, must be either his sister or daughter. His son Ereyanga had distinguished himself during the Chalukya campaign against Dhara in Malava. Vinayadithya defeated the Male chiefs like the Kongalvas, Chengalvas, Santharas of Humcha and the Kadambas of Bayalanadu (Vainad). He had control over the Vainadu region and parts of Gangavadi. He was succeeded by Ereyangadeva in 1098. Vinayadithya's rule extended from 1047 to 1098. The Hoysalas rose into eminence as the strong feudatories of the Chalukyas during this time. Ereyanga ruled for a short period, till 1102, though his career as Yuvaraja was brilliant. He shifted the capital from Sosevuru to Beluru. He was followed on the throne by Ballala I. Ballala I subdued the Chengalvas and defeated Jagadeva Santhara. Vishnuvardhana (Bittideva), his younger brother, succeeded him in 1108 and he was one of the greatest Hoysala monarchs.

#### VISHNUVARDHANA

"Reign of Vishnuvardhana is packed with glorious military campaigns from start to finish, and though his incessant attempts to overthrow the yoke of Chalukya suzerainty proved a failure, he must be given the credit of having raised his territory to the dignity of a kingdom, which was bequeathed to the successors for further development into one of the most powerful empires of the South" says Prof. Coelho.

Vishnuvardhana was the governor of Gangavadi in the days of his brother and he took serious steps to free parts of Gangavadi, still under the control of the Cholas. He captured Talakadu and Kolara in 1116 and assumed the title Talakadugonda in memory of his victory. The Kirthinarayana temple of Talakadu and Vijayanarayana of Beluru were constructed after this victory. The Chola commanders like Adigaiman, who were Srivaishnavas, must have co-operated with the Hoysala in his conquest, as he showed leanings towards their religion. The Srivaishnavas were not treated well by the Cholas in Tamilnadu. To assume imperial titles, Vishnuvardhana felt that he must perform Vedic rituals which he could not undertake as a Jaina. This victory was followed by the defeat of the Kongalvas and the Chengalvas and his marriage to Chandaladevi, whom Dr. Derrett calls a Kongalva princess. The Nidugal Chola ruler, Irungola, was also defeated, and he proceeded towards the Nilagiris and reached as far as Kanchi. His generals collected tribute from the Santharas of Hosagunda and the Alupas of the Tulu country. The Pandyas of Uchchangi, who had succeeded the Nolambas in Nolambavadi, were humiliated at Dumme and Vishnuvardhana assumed the title Nolambavadigonda in 1117. Pandya Irukkavela of Uchchangi was killed by him in 1116.

Now he prepared to attack his own overlord, Chalukya Vikrama VI, and crossed the Tungabhadra and proceeded to Kummata. The Hoysala general Gangaraja defeated the mighty Chalukyan army at Kannegala in 1118, and this was followed by the capture of the fort of Hanagal by Vishnuvardhana. He extended his arms over the Banavasi kingdom and Santalige (Humcha region). The Chalukya general, Boppana, was defeated at Hallur in 1120. Finally, the Sinda chief, Achugi of Eramparge (modern Yelburgi), took command of the Chalukya army and pursued the Hoysalas to their capital. Vishnuvardhana was forced to submit in c. 1122.

After the death of Vikrama VI, Vishnuvardhana captured Hanagal, Uchchangi and Bankapura, and took the Banavasi-12000 province under his control by 1140-41. He marched as far as Lakkundi. Though scholars like Prof. K.A.N. Sastry, Prof. S.K. Aiyangar and Dr. Desai say that he lived upto 1152, in fact he died in 1141. There is clear evidence to show that Narasimha was the ruling monarch in 1145 (as per the Yalladahalli Inscriptions) and all records that speak of Vishnuvardhana after 1141 are of Narasimha who assumed his father's name as his title. Vishnuvardhana performed ceremonies like Tulapurusha and Hiranyagarbha. As he was very keen on assuming imperial titles, he performed these Vedic sacrifices and accepted the Vedic cult of Srivaishnavism. Later he came into contact with the famous Srivaishnava teacher Acharya Ramanuja. But, he had renounced Jainism much earlier.

He had, in his earlier days, his eldest son, Ballaladeva, as the crown prince. He appears to have died in 1131, and Narasimha was appointed the crown prince in that year. Among his queens, Shantaladevi was an accomplished lady, well-versed in dance and music. She died at an early age. Bommaladevi was his next crowned queen. Lakshmidēvi, another queen, bore him prince Narasimha. His period is one of great cultural and religious activity. Prof. B.S.K. Iyengar describes him as the "maker of Hoysala kingdom". In the words of Dr. Desai, "In spite of the fact that Vikramaditya VI foiled his attempts to become independent, the achievements of Vishnuvardhana were not small. He was able to free the whole of Gangavadi from the Chola dominion. His influence spread as far as Bellary in the north and towards the later part of his career he was practically independent". He had shifted his capital to Dwarasamudra (Halebidu) where his commander Kethamalla started building the Hoysaleswara temple.

Vishnuvardhana was succeeded by his son Narasimha who was a weak and vicious king. But, Seetharam Jagirdar feels that he at least succeeded in killing his Chalukya overlord Taila III. But, his own dominions shrank in size. His son, Ballala II, revolted against his father and assumed power in 1173. Sumanobana and Harihara were poets in the court of Narasimha.

#### BALLALA II

Ballala II is "outstanding among Hoysala kings", says Dr. Derrett. "Ballala vied for glory with his grandfather, and his long and vigorous reign of 47 years saw the achievement of independence which had long been coveted by his forefather", says Prof. Coelho. His first record is of 1165, when he was the crown prince and he was sufficiently old at that time as he was married. He was unhappy with his father as the kingdom shrank in size during his period and he revolted against Narasimha in 1173. The Chengalvas and the Kongalvas assisted him in his revolt. But, soon, Chengalva Mahadeva and his son Pemmavirappa questioned Ballala's authority. They were suppressed. His first major achievement was the capture of the fort of Uchchangi in 1171 from Pandya Kavadeva. This fort had been captured by Vishnuvardhana and subsequently lost. Ballala II assumed the title Giridurgamalla and Shanivarasiddhi after this remarkable victory. Next he captured Hanagal in 1178 and tried to advance in Belvola when he had to face stiff opposition from the Kalachuris of Kalyana. Kalachuri Sankama defeated Ballala (1179). He lost Hanagal and was forced to accept the Kalachuri overlordship for some time. But, the weakening of the Kalachuri power at Kalyana and finally the fall of the Chalukyas themselves made the Hoysalas sovereign rulers and this happened in the days of Ballala II.

After the fall of the Kalachuris, Ballala captured Balligamve (Shimoga district) in 1184 and soon clashed with the Seunas of Devagiri after the fall of the Chalukyas. He defeated Chalukya Someshvara IV in 1187. This led to a severe conflict with the Seunas which resulted in the bloody battle against Bhillama V. When he won in the battle of Soratur (1190), it brought the rich region, Belvola-300 under Ballala II's control. He camped at Lakkundi for long and reached as far as Manvi in the North.

A record of 1196 informs us about his victory over Banavasi, Hanagal, Halasi, Huligere, Nolambavadi, Belvola, Bagadage (Bagalkot), Erambarage (Yelburgi), Kisukadu (Hungund), Ayyanavadi, Masavadi, Kelavadi, Sindarige, Uchchangi and Ballakuderi (Balkunde). This shows that he had reached as far as the Krishna. After 1212 he appears to have been driven back to the South of the Tungabhadra by Scuna Singhana II. During Ballala's stay in Belvola, the Sinda chief of Belagutti revolted. Queen Umadevi, who was in charge of administration at the capital, subdued this chief, Sinda Isvara III (1199).

Ballala had married a Chola princess, Cholamahadevi and Chola Kulottunga III had married Ballala's daughter Somaladevi. When Chola was attacked by the Pandya, Ballala sent crown prince Narasimha II to help Kulottunga III. Ballala assumed the title "establisher of the Chola king" after his victory in Tamilnadu, and he gained some territory in the Chola country too. Ballala II had ties like Hoysala Chakravarti and Dakshina Chakravarti. When he died in 1220, his Garuda (bodyguard) Lakshma, with his wife Saladevi and 1,000 other followers, committed suicide.

Ballala II was the greatest among the Hoysalas, and his superiority has been proved by his success against the Kalachuris, Chalukyas, Seunas and the Pandyas. Ballala's period was one of great cultural activity and Kannada poet Janna was patronised by him. Poet Rudrabhatta was his contemporary. The Kedareshwara temple of Halebidu and Amriteshvara temple near Tarikere were constructed during his period. Umadevi was his crowned queen who also looked after the administration during his absence from Dorasamudra. She also administered Magure-300. Among his many queens, Padumaladevi bore him prince Narasimha II. She also ruled over the Hosahadagali region.

Ballala II was succeeded by his son Vira Narasimha II in 1220. He successfully interfered in the politics of Tamilnadu and gained many advantages. "The Hoysalas were regarded practically as arbiters of South Indian politics. With the waning of the power of the Pandyas and the Cholas, the Hoysalas had to take up the role of leadership in South India", says Prof. B.S.K. Iyengar, describing the political situation of this period. He defeated the Kadavas (Pallavas) and the Pandyas and levied tribute on them. He also helped Chola Rajaraja III to strengthen his position. Perhaps he was Narasimha's son-in-law. Narasimha founded a second capital at Kannanur Kuppam near Srirangam. His records claim that he marched as far as Rameswaram

But, Narasimha's pre-occupations in Tamilnadu resulted in his neglect of the northern boundaries where the Seunas had started encroaching. He was succeeded by his son Someshvara in 1235, Narasimha stayed at Kannanur Kuppam most of the time, as he was busy engaged in the affairs of Tamilnadu. When Chola Rajendra III appeared to be getting strong, Someshvara allied himself with the Pandyas, and still later he deserted the Pandyas and befriended the Cholas. The pre-occupation of the Hoysalas in the South resulted in Seuna Krishna crossing the Tungabhadra and reaching as far as the Chitradurga region.

During his last days, Someshvara had his kingdom divided between his two sons, Ramanatha (ruling from Kannanur) and Narasimha III (at Dorasamudra). This appears to have happened in 1254, but Someshvara continued to stay at Kannanur with Ramanatha. Later, he was killed in a war with the Pandyas, and they expelled Ramanatha from Kannanur before 1280. Ramanatha came to Kundani in Karnataka and started encroaching upon his brother's territory in Karnataka. He died in 1295 and was succeeded by his son Vishvanatha who ruled till 1300. Narasimha III had to face a strong Seuna invasion which even attacked his capital. But, they were repulsed. Narasimha was succeeded by his son Ballala III in 1291.