

The Hoysala Dynasty

The Hoysala dynasty ruled in southern India from the 11th to 14th Century and were located in southern India in the southern part of Karnataka (Kulke et. al. 113). The Hoysalas are believed to have come from a hilly region in this area. Their empire reached its peak of power early on and slowly declined until it's eventually disappearance into history leaving only temples that were constructed under their reign.

The Hoysala begin as a vassal state of a larger kingdom called the Calukya. They eventually gained their own independence through military might. They had a relatively fast rise to power because the area was politically unstable. This was because none of the kingdoms had any huge advantage over the other, creating a balance of power that could easily shift back and forth (Kulke et. al. 114). This lead to a situation where a great deal of small kingdoms didn't last for long periods of time intermingled with a few large ones that would assimilate the smaller kingdoms. Nrpakama was the first of the Hoysala kings with his capital in Sosavur (Yaguchi 184). Nrpakama's capital was located in an area that is believed to be where the Hoysala dynasty originated. The Hoysala kingdom was located between two large powers at the time, the Calukya and the Cola. The area that became the Hoysala kingdom had been a buffer area between these two large kingdoms in the past (Foekema 13). This made it so the Hoysala had to choose sides and became a feudatory of the Calukya (Foekema 14). The Calukya allowed the Hoysala to grow over time allowing them to become a medium sized kingdom creating the Caluky's own demise. There is little certainty as to when Nrpakama took the throne or when he passed it on to his son Vinayadita. This uncertainty can be attributed to their relative size and how unimportant they were during this time. They are only vaguely mentioned in an epigraph

with no specifics. Vinayadita succeeded at expanding his power very successfully during his reign and moved the capital to Dorasamudra (Ramanathan 326). The Hoysala were very prosperous under the Calukya, but knew that this prosperity could not continue with their desire to expand. The Calukya would not give them free reign forever and allow a potential enemy to develop. The Hoysala were always just a buffer state to help protect the Calukya from the Cola kingdom in the south.

Ballala I was the first to not continue his loyalty to the Calukya emperor instead building up military power (Yaguchi 184). This occurred largely because the Calukya became engaged with the Cola dynasty and kingdoms to the north of them. This made it so the Calukya Kingdom was unable to respond to the Hoysala's rebellion. The Hoysala Dynasty had reached a point where it was large enough to fend for itself in this war torn area. In 1106 AD, Ballala I began to rule in his own name instead of the Calukya emperor (Rice 528). Ballala I however died and was succeeded by his younger brother, Visnuvardhana in 1108 BCE, who continued with his brother's cause of expanding the Hoysala kingdom (Yaguchi 184). It took Visnuvardhana 25 years, but by that time he had taken suzerainty of the Calukya emperor and created a new capital (Yaguchi 184). The Calukya became embroiled in a series of wars with neighbouring kingdoms giving the Hoysala kingdom the chance it needed (Yaguchi 184). To attain Hoysala independence a series of brutal wars were fought in which the Hoysala had become renowned for their ferocity (Foekema 14). Most of the territory of the Calukya was eventually taken by another kingdom, but Hoysala secured its independence. Visnuvardhana crushed the Cola forces taking claim over some of their lands that were bordering his kingdom. The Hoysala's, at this point, destroyed their two largest enemies, making them the dominant power in their area for the time.

Visnuvardhana became increasingly interested in construction projects throughout his empire, creating edifices for *Visnu* after he had converted *Vaisnavism* of the Srivaisnava sect (Yaguchi 184). This construction continued under his son Narasimha I, the next king in the Hoysala dynasty. Since he focused so heavily on construction Narasimha I lost territory in the northern area of his kingdom (Yaguchi 184). Ballala II was the next in line, taking the throne in 1173 AD, pushing the Hoysala dynasty to the height of its powers (Yaguchi 184). He gained a great deal of territory especially in the southern Tamil region.

Narasimha II took the throne in 1220 AD from his father Ballala II. He became more involved in the Tamil region because of his marriage to a Cola princess (Yaguchi 184). The Hoysala reached its pinnacle during his rule, even assimilating what was left of the Cola kingdom. He managed to gain the Cola kingdom while losing territory in the north caused by a rebellion of a vassal state that even attacked his capital. After this point the Hoysala dynasty began its decline until its eventual disappearance into history.

The Hoysala's power began a steep decline when it was difficult for one king to rule their kingdom effectively. A second capital was created in the Tamil region and the capitals were ruled by two step brothers, Narasimha III and Ramanatha. The brothers had conflicting interests and began to fight amongst themselves. This allowed outside forces to attack the Hoysala with less fear of a unified response. Eventually the Hoysala kingdom was repeatedly invaded by foreign forces. These invasions continued the decline of the Hoysala kingdom. This began with the Seunas, a kingdom from the North of the Hoysala invading Narasimha III territory several times (Yaguchi 184). It was eventually realized that if the Hoysala were to survive they would have to unite again and become a unified kingdom.

The kingdom was eventually reintegrated under Ballala III, but it was too little too late. This new unity came as the Muslim empire pushed south trying to convert people to Islam and take control of their land. The Muslims originally only wanted tribute, but that didn't last as they tried to achieve political control. Ballala III realized that there was no chance of defeating the Islamic empire due to their sheer size. Kingdoms that were larger than his own were wiped out by the huge Muslim forces. Ballala III chose instead to accept Muslim lordship in order to survive (Foekema 16). The Hoysala continued to prosper under the Muslims, but that didn't last because of their desire to be free of the Islamic rule. The Hoysala rulers knew that if they were to stay under Muslim rule there would be huge changes to their culture and religious beliefs. The Hoysala participated in a revolt in southern India against the Muslims. Ballala III died during the fighting and his territory became part of a Hindu kingdom that encompasses south India. Their land was swallowed up by a growing Hindu kingdom concerned about protecting their religious beliefs. Ballala III's son Ballala IV was not given an opportunity to rule the Hoysala kingdom, putting an end to two hundred years of Hoysala rule (Foekema 16). The Hindus managed to fend off the Muslims creating for the first time, a large Hindu kingdom in the south called the Vijayanagara Empire (Foekema 16). Ballala IV's kingdom became a part of this empire to help ensure that the Hoysala were not ruled again by the Islamic empire. This was the end of the Hoysala dynasty and the beginning of the Vijayanagara kingdom.

The Hoysala developed a political system with governances similar to modern systems (Pollock 263). The Hoysala centralized their power unifying their emperor at a time when tribal alliances were the only thing holding many nearby kingdoms together. A great deal of their success comes from their ferocity in battle which is represented in their crest with a royal warrior stabbing a lion.

Under the Hoysala rule there was a great development in poetry and art. The prosperity that they gained from their kingdom was put into building of temples, which had been a tradition. This tradition of building temples is known as *Dravida* and originated sometime in the 6th or 7th century (Foekema 11). Very few of these temples were actually commissioned by the dynasty itself, but largely due to the peace that they created in their kingdom. Due to the peace created in the kingdom many small communities built their own temples. Their temples were not different than those from neighbouring kingdoms, what was special was the consistence of them, with them being far more of the temples located in this area. There were no more of their temples built after their fall. Instead temples being built were constructed in a new style from elsewhere in India, similar to the ones found in Tamil Nadu (Foekema 12). Due to the assimilation of the Hoysala Kingdom rather than a destructive invasion the temples have been left standing. Their temples have become a major tourist and pilgrimage attraction in south India and will continue for future generations.

It took 100 years for the Hoysala dynasty to gain independence and another 100 to reach the peak of their power. It then took 150 years for their decline and eventual disappearance into a far larger kingdom. The Hoysala were not completely destroyed, only assimilated into an empire that covered a range that had never been seen in south India. This ensured that what had been created under the Hoysala rule survived to the modern day. The architectural legacy of the Hoysala Kingdom enhances the mosaic of modern India.

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Related Research Topics

Hoysala Temples, Cola Dynasty, Calukya Dynasty, South India temples, South India history, formation of Vijayanagara kingdom

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