

A Study of Higher Education Practices Under the Hoysala Dynasty: An Historical Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores the priority and structure of higher education during the Hoysala Dynasty (c. 10th - 14th centuries). Higher education flourished, centered predominantly on religious and land-grant institutions, which functioned as vibrant centers of learning. The high status accorded to education is evidenced by the extensive patronage provided by the royal family, ministers, and wealthy citizens, who supported institutions through generous endowments, viewing this support as an act of piety. Furthermore, Hoysala rulers actively promoted the fine arts, literature, and learning in both Kannada and Sanskrit. This period witnessed a notable literary shift, with Shaiva and early Brahminical works gaining popularity alongside the previously dominant Jain literary tradition. The paper explores how the educational system—particularly higher education—reflects the standard of culture of the populace. It is interesting to observe that education was viewed from varied angles, encompassing higher academic subjects, subjects of study, principles of education, and technical training. Ultimately, the research confirms that ancient Indian education, exemplified by the Hoysala Kingdom, was fundamentally and predominantly religious in its implementation and curriculum.

Keywords: *Higher Education; Subjects of Study; Princes of Education; Technical Education.*

1. Introduction

The Hoysala rulers actively encouraged learning and the widespread development of the educational system, as they themselves were educated and well-informed. During their reign, the Hoysalas played a pivotal role in democratizing education by promoting various institutions such as Brahmapuris, Sivapuris, Agraharas, Mathas, and Ghatikasthanas, which became important centres of learning. The importance of education for maintaining social order and fostering progress had been recognized since the early historical period, and the Hoysalas continued this long-standing tradition. Their emphasis on the value of education and reverence for learning reflects the cultural ethos of ancient India and Karnataka. Indeed, it was through such well-established educational institutions that the intellectual and cultural heritage of the region was preserved and transmitted to future generations.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the higher education practices prevalent during the Hoysala period.
- To identify the major centers of higher learning and the subjects taught during the Hoysala period.

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3. Methodology

The study adopts a Historical and Descriptive Research Design. It follows a qualitative and analytical approach, focusing on the collection, critical analysis, and interpretation of historical data to reconstruct the structure, curriculum, and socio-economic role of higher education institutions during the Hoysala Dynasty (c. 10th – 14th centuries CE). The evidence is drawn from both primary documentary sources (Hoysala inscriptions and contemporary literary texts) and a comprehensive range of secondary sources, including scholarly monographs, published epigraphical volumes, academic journals, online databases, and other relevant scholarly materials.

4. Centers of Higher Learning

Higher education was not concentrated in universities but was decentralized across various types of institutions, often supported by land grants (Agraharas) from the Hoysala kings, queens, and wealthy officials. Higher education system is most important role in the Hoysala dynasty. The higher studies, there was provision made by system of endowments, in various like Agraharas, Mathas and such other institutions of learning, for the informing of instructions in several subjects namely, Vedas, Vedangas, and Sad-darsanas Tarka in the earlier. Therefore, the details of endowments of land, financial etc., as known as bhattavrtti in the evidence were often made in order to help the teachers conserve themselves and thus promote the cause of higher learning. The Kotavumacgi evidence of 1012 A.D., means to a bhattavrtti financing to 50 matters of land and a house made for the helpful of Nyasa and Prabhakara Mimamsa. Further, Nagavisnumayya (1111 A.D.), approved gold and land as bhattavrtti, for helpful Tarka in the vakkhana sale which he himself had initiated to be constructed for that purpose at Rona. An inscription refers to the endowments of land etc., for the maintenance of students also who were involved in the pursuit of higher education studies. The Kotavumacgi evidence of 1012 A.D., revealed registers a fund of 25 mattars of land for the conservation of the students learning Nyasa and Prabhakara. As inscription of 1121 A.D., it evidences from the funds made for the maintenance of professors were called bhattavrtti those funded for students' care were known as cattavrtti.

Bhatta and Bhattopadhyaya had much important in those days and were indicative of high learning and reputation. For example, inscriptions of an mahopadhyaya of Bengal. Bhatta mentioned Brahmanas as Venkateswara S.V notes that the whose duty was to teach as well as to learn. An evidence of 1229 A.D., it mentioned that Belgaum relates an interesting instance presenting the great estimation attached in those days to the appealation of Bhatta Rudrabhatta, born in a well-developed family of researchers and himself a great poet is felt to have promised the letter bha of his name as security for a loan of 100 pieces of gold and he obtained from person the appelliation of Rudraja as a substitute for his full name.

Table –1 Summary of Higher Education Centers under Hoysala Period

Institution Type	Primary Role	Subjects Emphasized	Key Features
Agraharas	Brahmanical Colleges Settlements exclusively granted to learn Brahmins (<i>Mahajananas</i>) to sustain a life of scholarship and teaching.	Vedic Studies, Dharma Sastras, Grammar (<i>Vyākaraṇa</i>), Logic (<i>Nyāya</i>).	Functioned as residential colleges; learning was primarily hereditary.
Mathas (Monasteries)	Sectarian Centers Established by religious leaders (e.g., of Vaishnavism, Shaivism) to propagate a specific philosophy.	Vedanta (Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita), Pūrvaṃmīmāṃsā, Bhakti literature.	Central to the rise of specific philosophical schools; often housed libraries (<i>Saraswati Bhandaras</i>).
Temple Colleges (Ghaṭikas)	Integrated Centers. Large temples often had dedicated halls (<i>Ghaṭikasthānas</i>) where scholars taught.	Ritual Sciences (<i>Kalpa</i>), Astronomy (<i>Jyotiṣa</i>), Temple Architecture (<i>Śilpa Śāstra</i>).	Education was integrated with religious performance and temple administration.

5. Subjects of Study

The vast of subjects taught and worked in early periods contained several branches of sacred and secular learning, spreading from the 4 Vedas, the Itihasa and Puranas depressed to snake attractive and the arts of singing, dancing and formulating ointments. However, it came to be recognized that the sum total of human awareness was embraced in the traditional 14 or 18 vidyas. There are 14 vidyas were 4 Vedas, 6 Vedangas, together with Mimamsa, Nyaya, Puranas and Dharma sastras. These 14 together with the 4 Upavedas- Ayurveda, dharma Gandharva Veda and Sthapatyopaveda formed the astadasavidya/ 18 science. In the earlier period, the Agraharas of Vatapi was popular as a seat of the 14 vidyas/ science, caturdasa vidya sthana. Neralige grant are revealed as great researchers whose conduct in life was governed by the 14 branches of learning. The Vedas were the core subject taught in these schools of learning Vijnanesvara mentions are important in this context. The Vijnanesvara observation can be noted that as fire consumers and burns down the fuel and the Vedas absolve peoples of all mistakes by removing all evils in them.

The study of the Vedas as noted by Vijnanesvara can be mentioned as follows are – as fire consumes and burns down the fuel and the Vedas liberate peoples of all mistakes. The Brahmanas of the Agraharas and brahmapuris, for example, are often described in the evidences as erudite researchers in all the four Vedas, six Vedangas, etc. As evidence from the Vijnanesvara as noted that the study of the Vedas as following five parts. They are – receiving the instructions in the Vedas; contemplation; then repeated study; the Japa; and the imparting of it to the pupils.

The Ragales written by Harihara poet, as pointed that the Samavedigala Mahatme provides us a fine representation of a teacher and his pupils, who for the study of the Veda, went to a forest away from the madding crowd of the rural and town. The Bragmanas of the Agrahara of Kuppatur as point out by the knowledge of the meaning of all the four Vedas. A Sikaripura evidence of 1207 A.D., refers to the name of one Vedarthada Yogisvarabhatta who figure as one of the donees. He was evidently a Vedic research who can understand and describe the texts of Vedic. Later, the Vedic period, appropriate technical systems aimed at conserving the specific traditional preparations of Vedic chants were advanced and they are well-known as Padapatha, Kramapatha, Jatapatha and Ghanapatha. A Sikaripura evidence of 1057 A.D., it is mentioned that the learned Brahmanas of the ruler of Banavasi as most Vedic researchers, who used to recite the Vedas free errors, such as grasta and nirasta. They were well versed, accentuation, syllabification, pada, karma, and samhita, accordance with rules with them.

Table –2 Subjects of Study under Higher Education Centers in Hoysala Period

Category	Subject Name	Focus and Significance	Institutions
Fundamental & Ritual	Vedas and Upaniṣads	Memorization, recitation, and philosophical understanding of the core religious texts.	Agraharas, Mathas
	Vyākaraṇa (Grammar)	Advanced study of Sanskrit Grammar (primarily Pāṇini); critical for linguistic purity and all other studies.	All centers, especially Agraharas
	Kalpa (Ritual)	Rules and procedures for the correct performance of religious and state ceremonies.	Agraharas, Temple Colleges
Philosophical & Legal	Nyāya (Logic)	The science of reasoning, epistemology, and argumentation, essential for scholarly debates (<i>Vākyārtha</i>).	Mathas, Agraharas
	Vedānta	The highest form of philosophical inquiry, dominated by sectarian schools like Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita .	Mathas (Sectarian)
	Mīmāṃsā	Focused on the interpretation of Vedic injunctions and the justification of <i>dharma</i> (duty/law).	Agraharas

	Dharma Śāstras	Study of traditional Hindu law, ethics, and social duties (e.g., <i>Yājñavalkya Smṛti</i> and commentaries like <i>Mitākṣarā</i>).	Agraharas
Literary & Applied	Kāvya (Poetry/Literature)	Study of both classical Sanskrit and the flourishing Old Kannada literature , often under royal patronage.	Court, Agraharas
	Alaṅkāra (Rhetoric)	The study of literary aesthetics, figures of speech, and poetic composition.	Court, Agraharas
	Jyotiṣa (Astronomy/Astrology)	Used for determining auspicious times, calendar creation, and practical applications in ritual.	Temple Colleges, Agraharas
	Śilpa Śāstra	Principles of architecture, iconography, and sculpture (highly relevant due to temple construction).	Temple Colleges

Moreover, Gadag of 1098 A.D. provides evidence that the scholar-statesman Mahapradhana Dharmadhikari, etc., of Vikramaditya VI, known as Somesvara Bhattopadhyaya, was active during that time. He was a most Vedic researcher, and even the most learned researchers came to consult him before deciding on the Pada and Krama of the Rigvedic text. As epigraphs of the time often evidence several grants/ funds made to schools and researchers of the various Vedas that were taught in schools. The Khandika is commonly reserved in the sense of a school. Thus, Rigveda khandika is engaged to mean a school for teaching Rigveda. Khandika Audbhari reveals that the Satapatha Brahma, as a trainer of Kesin and the Maitrayani Samhita, was defeated by a Kesin as a detriment.

The evidence of Kondguli (1132 A.D) is important in this matter, as it mentions three endowments of money made for the teaching of the following subjects, as given below:

1. **Sutasamhita:** It is a well-known religious text that forms part of the Skanda Purana and Priya Granthas.
2. **Samhite:** The Kiriya Granthas and probably the Yajnavalkya Smṛiti.
3. **Aksara, Vyakarana, and Rupavatara:** The well-developed grammatical studies by Dharmakirti, a Buddhist monk.

Several epigraphs of the period praise the achievements of scholars engaged in various branches of learning. According to an inscription dated A.D. 1094, the learned men of Pombulca pursued advanced studies in the Veda, Vedāṅgas, Vedānta, Purāṇa, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Āgama, and other allied subjects. Another record notes that fifty Brāhmaṇas of the Agrahāra of Balguli engaged in disputations with scholars from other regions on subjects such as Vyākaraṇa, Āgama, Smṛti, Purāṇa, and Bhārata. An inscription dated A.D. 1060 from Sudi highlights the renowned Śaiva teacher and scholar Someśvara Paṇḍitadeva. The record, written in two long Kannada sections, indicates that his learning encompassed mastery over Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya, Sāṅkhya, Śabdajñāna, Mīmāṃsā, along with Vyākaraṇa, Nighaṇṭu, Gaṇita, Vātsyāyana, Jyotiṣa, Śakuna, Chandas, Manu, Gandharva, Alaṅkāra, Mahākāvya, Nāṭaka, Adhyātmika, Arthaśāstra, Siddhānta, and the Purāṇas. This formidable list illustrates the remarkable breadth of subjects pursued by scholars during the Hoysala period.

As evidence of Kurugodu, it depicts a grant for the study of Vaisesika, while those from the districts of Bijapur and Gulbarga register special funds for studying Puranas. As an inscription of grammar, it encompasses the study of various methods in the science of words, in which the Sanskrit language achieved an excellence that remained mysterious to some other languages of earlier periods. This suggests that during those days, the language was attentively cultivated. A Sikaripura from 1010 A.D. mentions panca vyakarana without naming any. An inscription from Mulgunda (1053 A.D.) refers to two Jaina grammarians, Narendrasena and Nayasena, who were both skilled in some methods, with the main names noted being Candra, Katantra, Jainendra, Sabdanusasana of Sakatayana, Panintya, Aindra, and Kaumara.

6. Princes of Education

The education princes have been noted for the significant increase in Arthasastra, focusing attention on princes of education, who were seen as the keystone of the political system. The Smrtis and the Arthasastra prescribed a comprehensive course of intellectual training combined with moral discipline for them. Furthermore, the Smrti of Yajnavalkya simply repeats the ancient prescription that rulers should be knowledgeable in philosophy (anviksiki), the Vedas (trayi), politics (dandaniti), and economics. Unfortunately, neither Vijñanesvara nor Apararka has influenced modern evidence in discussing this statement. The works of Somesvara provide evidence of the systems and principles of significant education during that time. The royal writers discuss that princes should be taught in the Vedas as well as in military science. Princes had completed their training and become skilled in riding horses and elephants and managing chariots; the ruler would test them one after another. Certainly, in a community where so much depends on the individual capacity of the ruler and the proper education of future kings, they would have received all the attention they deserved. The high standards of princes' training are better demonstrated by the rulers of this time, namely Chalukya Somesvara III and the Silahara king Apararka.

7. Technical Education

Technical education, also known as vocational training in various arts and crafts such as industrial arts, commerce, and medicine, is sadly lacking in sources from that period. The program for technical education of apprentices in trade and crafts mainly focused on hereditary and domestic arts. Fathers raised their children in their trade, and learning went hand in hand with practice. In early times, the traditional method of training in industrial arts was through a trainee scheme. An inscription of Yaksini, who is worshipped as Manasa Devi at Jhing near Mathura, shows that the bronze was impressed by Naka, a trainee of the sculpture Kunika. The Mitaksara notes that a trainee is someone who wishes to work in mechanical arts. It should be noted that in this system, the master's methods were the primary way of learning these technical arts, with little to no formal theoretical instruction, often relying on books for assistance.

Vijñanesvara mentioned that a trainee must continue living in the house of the master during the specified period. That period of four years was for learning medicine or any other art, during which he received food from the teacher and gave back the proceeds of the art. An important note is that, during earlier times, the medical course extended over 7 or 8 years; however, it was later limited to just 4 years. Vijñanesvara also mentions some directions regarding the science of medicine. During this period, epigraphs refer to several physicians who were recognized as experts. According to Davanagere (1054 A.D.), it is noted that the physician Vijaya Pandita was regarded as Kalituga Dhanvantari.

In Mysore (1181 A.D.), praise was given to two individuals, Acyuta Virendra Sikyapa and his son, who were called Vara Vaidya and Bhisagraja. Kirtivarma, also known as Visnuvardhana Vijayaditya (c.1060-80 A.D.), one of the two brothers of Vikramaditya VI, authored Govaidya, a treatise on veterinary science. Somesvara emphasizes that treatment was applied not only to humans but also to animals such as horses and elephants. Kannada was used to state terms of grants, including information on land, boundaries, participation of local authorities, rights and obligations of the grantee, taxes and dues, and witnesses. This use of Kannada ensured that the content was clearly understood by local people without ambiguity.

An epigraph from A.D. 1172 in Bijapur District notes that Sangoja, son of Acarya Sovirasi Panditadeva, was an expert architect. The Chalukya and Hoysala temples include inscriptions that reveal the names of the architects and sculptors appointed by the rulers of these dynasties. The Kesava sculpture from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is also a study of this Dasoja. It has been noted that the Kesava sculpture possibly initially belonged to a Vishnu temple at Kikkeri. The inscription from the 12th century, written in Kannada, states that Dasoja of Balligame, who belonged to the guild of Sarsvatigana, crafted the figure of Kesava. The Brahma figure belongs to Kuruvati, a prominent example of later Chalukya art found in the Bellary district. An inscription on the pedestal states that Cavunoja, a worshipper of the feet of Srivadideva belonging to Sarasvatigana and a disciple of the learned, created the idol of Brahma.

1. Patronage and Social Scope: The study and performance of arts like music, dance, and acting were essential elements of the Hoysala court, frequently cultivated by members of the royal family, both men and women. Inscriptions and Smṛti literature confirm that these secular arts and sciences—often considered branches of Arthaśāstra or its associated Upaveda—were generally pursued by women of all castes and by Śūdras, indicating a broader social base for these disciplines than for purely Vedic studies.

2. Royal Expertise: Hoysala inscriptions specifically highlight the expertise of royalty in these fields. For example, Hoysala Vīra Ballāla II is praised as a Bharata (master) of music and dance. The economic value of these arts is also attested to by writers such as Nāyasena and Harihara, who noted the high fees and prices paid to expert performers.

3. Literary Contributions: This period saw significant advancements in the theory of performing arts. The most comprehensive treatise on music, the Saṅgīta Ratnākara, was composed during this time. Considered a classic equivalent to Bharata Muni's Nāṭyaśāstra, this work was authored by Śāṅgadeva, son of Soddhala, who served as the Auditor General for the contemporary Yadava ruler Simhaṇa (c. 1210-1247 A.D.) of Devagiri.

8. Conclusion

Higher education advanced significantly during the Hoysala period. The system of higher learning in ancient towns operated within a distinct socio-cultural framework. It is important to note that the idea of universal education as a duty of the State is a modern concept. Many inscriptions and literary sources shed light on the nature of higher educational institutions that existed at that time. Institutions such as agrahāras, brahmapuris, ghāṭikāsthānas, maṭhas, and temples served as centers of advanced learning. The higher educational institutions of the Hoysala period adhered to these general principles and played a major role in spreading education. This study result has discussed various aspects of higher education during the Hoysala era, including the organization of education, types of institutions, subjects of study, and technical training. These elements were crucial in shaping the intellectual life of people living in towns and cities during the Hoysala dynasty.

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