

Epigraphical Insights into Knowledge Systems and Educational Institutions of the Hoysala Period (c. 1115–1319 A.D.)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1306000212>

Received: 07 June 2026; Accepted: 12 June 2026; Published: 30 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the structure of early medieval higher education and institutional sustenance in Karnataka under the Hoysala Empire. Utilizing a rich corpus of localized epigraphical data from Shravanabelagola, Kuskūru, Harihara, Belur, Arsikere, Mattavara, Somanathapura, Tenginaghatta and other centres, we analyse how Royal elites, ministerial families, and monastic institutions patronised and built a resilient infrastructure for knowledge production. Academic legitimacy in the Hoysala realm was defined by a standardized, cross-sectarian curricular profile—most clearly embodied in the titles 'Traividya' and 'Siddhāntadeva'—which balanced orthodox Brahmanical disciplines with heterodox Jaina dialectics. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the physical and intellectual survival of these institutions relied on a sophisticated fiscal ecosystem. By linking state-sanctioned tax immunities ('sarvamānya') with direct revenue allocation, the Hoysala state structurally embedded scholastic centres within the daily pulse of the regional economic landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The historiography of education in medieval South India has frequently oscillated between two distinct, non-communicating intellectual poles. On one hand, scholars of the Brahmanical tradition have exhaustively documented the structural operations of 'agrahāras', 'ghaṭikās', and 'brahmapurīs'. These institutions are traditionally framed as centres of Vedic orthodoxy, deeply invested in preserving the 'Caturdaśa-vidyā' (the fourteen branches of traditional learning) and heavily dependent on agrarian land grants ('brahmadeya') issued directly by the ruling monarch to high-caste scholars. On the other hand, the study of heterodox traditions has largely focused on the 'basadi' (Jaina temple-monastery complex). In many standard treatments, these sites are depicted primarily as spaces of quietist asceticism, isolated monastic retreat, and severe physical self-mortification through rituals such as 'sallekhanā'.

However, contemporary epigraphic records from the Hoysala period (c. 11th–14th Century A.D.) present a far more dynamic, interconnected, and institutionalized socio-academic reality. Higher education during this era was not a peripheral byproduct of religious piety, nor was it confined to isolated sectarian enclaves. Instead, it operated as a highly organized, competitive, and public sector of medieval society. The survival and prestige of these scholastic centres required the rigorous standardization of faculty qualifications, the formalization of cross-sectarian academic degrees, and the development of an intricate network of fiscal resource management that linked the monastery directly to the state administration and the marketplace.

By evaluating a series of foundational inscriptions dated between 1115 A.D. and 1319 A.D., this paper maps the institutional contours of Hoysala academic culture. Rather than treating these inscriptions as mere religious records, we read them as administrative, financial, and curricular blueprints. The study is organized around three primary analytical pillars:

1. Typology of Hoysala Educational Institutions.
2. Epigraphical Insights into Knowledge Systems (The Curriculum).
3. The Economic Landscape of Educational Sustenance: Grants and Tax Immunities.

Through this framework, we demonstrate how the Hoysala state and the contemporary scholarly class jointly built a resilient infrastructure for knowledge production that fundamentally shaped the political economy of medieval Karnataka.

TPOLOGY OF HOYSALA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Agraharas and Ghatikas:

In medieval South India under the Hoysala Empire, the agrahāra was a premier center of higher learning, education, and religious philosophy. Far from being merely a residential land grant, it operated as a decentralized university repository. These settlements were funded by royal land grants given to learned Brahmans, who were maintained by the agrarian yields and revenues of the granted villages or estates. This economic framework allowed residential scholars (bhaṭṭas) to pursue deep academic studies and provide tuition-free education to students.

Agrahāras were organized into precise economic and geographic divisions. Land plots or shares allocated to individual families of scholars were known as vrittis¹. In the prominent agrahāra of Prasanna-Sōmanāthapura, the internal structure was broken down into 120 vrittis². Out of these, specific shares are noted as belonging to different theological and philosophical faculties, including the Śaiva quarter (7 vrittis) and the Vaiṣṇava quarter (14 vrittis)³.

The Hoysala epigraphical records highlight several localized agrahāras across medieval Karnataka that served as specialized centers for higher education, linguistics, and community instruction. Among these was Morale in Dēvaḷige-nāḍ, established under King Viṣṇuvardhana by the general Rāyana-daṇḍanātha, who distributed the village in shares among relatives and Brahmans and set up the god Kēśava to promote ‘dharma’⁴. Another prominent site was Sōmanātha-nagari, founded on the banks of the propitious Kāvēri river by the general Sōma and poetically celebrated as a ‘mine of learning’ that ‘shone as an ornament in the world’⁵. Similarly, the Dāmōdhara agrahāra functioned fundamentally as a localized Brahmin settlement dedicated to preserving traditional learning⁶. Finally, Prasanna-Sōmanāthapura was created when the Hoysala monarch, King Sōmēśvara, granted the village of Teṅginaghaṭṭa and its 11 hamlets to his trusted generals and ministers, Bōgaiyya and Mallaiyya, who divided the estate into 62 distinct shares for Brahmans of various ‘gōtras’⁷. This particular locality was explicitly classified in historical records as “the seat of learning”—a prestigious designation chronologically reaffirmed under a later grant dated 1300 A.D. by Vira-Ballāḷa-Dēvarasa, which described it verbatim as ‘the all-honoured great agrahāra, the seat of learning, Prasanna-Sōmanāthapura’⁸. Further, the inscription found in Bhimeshwara temple in Kuskur village of Shivamogga district, dating back to 1309 A.D., has explicitly stated that that place was a ‘Ghatikasthana’⁹.

Operating alongside the agrahāras and temples were the monastic maṭhas. Historical records indicate that institutional grants assigned specific ‘matha dues’ to designated recipients, such as Gana-kumāri Chandavve¹⁰. These maṭhas functioned as vital educational hubs that complemented the agrahāra ecosystem by providing housing, literacy, and vocational or scriptural training to students and ascetic lineages.

Basadis: monastic order and lineage succession

If Agraharas, Ghatikasthanas and Mathas were prominent places of learning for brahmins and followers of vedic tradition, Basadis were the centres of knowledge production for Jains. Basadis received the same patronage as

¹ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. III: Inscriptions in the Mysore District (Part I), T. Narsipura Taluk, No. 98.

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. VI: Inscriptions in the Kadur District, Chikmagalur Taluk, No. 137.

⁵ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. XI: Inscriptions in the Chitaldroog District, Davangere Taluk, No. 36.

⁶ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V: Inscriptions in the Hassan District (Part I), Arsikere Taluk, No. 108.

⁷ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. IV: Inscriptions in the Mysore District (Part II), Krishnarajpet Taluk, No. 63.

⁸ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. III: Inscriptions in the Mysore District (Part I), T. Narsipura Taluk, No. 98.

⁹ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. VII: Inscriptions in the Shimoga District (Part I), Shimoga Taluk, No. 19.

¹⁰ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V: Inscriptions in the Hassan District (Part I), Arsikere Taluk, No. 108.

the Agrahara settlements of the vedic tradition from the Hoysala ruling elite. Monastic orders rooted in different sanghas and unbroken lineage of succession were the prominent features of Jain centres of learning attached to Basadis. Monastic traditions like Mula-Sangha and Dramila-Sangha can be seen specifically mentioned in the inscriptions.

The long-term stability of Jain Basadis depended on robust administrative structures capable of surviving the transition of individual scholars or sudden changes in royal patronage. In Hoysala Karnataka, this institutional continuity was achieved through highly structured monastic networks and hierarchical Subdivisions of Monastic Organization. The epigraphic record of 1115 A.D. map a precise, formalized hierarchy within these monastic structures, tracking lineages down to specific operational units:

‘Mūla-saṅgha’ (The Core Order)

Deśiya-gaṇa (The Regional Division)

Pustaka-gachchha (The Textual/Book Branch)

The prominent inclusion of the ‘Pustaka-gachchha’ (literally, the ‘book-branch’ or ‘manuscript-clique’) across multiple centuries of Hoysala epigraphy is highly significant for an institutional history of education¹¹. This designation proves that these monastic lineages were explicitly organized around the collection, preservation, copying, and cataloguing of textual manuscripts (‘pustakas’). They did not function merely as loose associations of wandering ascetics; they were permanently endowed, library-centric bodies.

Chronicles of academic lineages are found across different Hoysala epigraphs. Shravanabelagola epitaph of 1115 A.D.¹² and Belur inscription of 1136 A.D.¹³ are especially prominent as they list out the lineage of Jain monks over multiple generations.

Monastic lineage of Mūla-saṅgha as mentioned in the Shravanabelagola inscription of 1115 AD:

1. Kondakundāchārya (Padmanandi): Framed as the foundational institutional anchor, renowned for his supernatural authority and absolute knowledge of all the predicaments of the time. He was also widely recognized across records by his alternative names, Umāsvāti-munīśvara and Gṛidhrapiñchhāchārya, indicating a broad geographic reach of his historical legacy.
2. Balākapiñchha: Celebrated for his impeccable conduct, high-minded discipline, and absolute preservation of the foundational texts, he stood as the immediate spiritual disciple to Kondakundāchārya.
3. Guṇanandi-panḍita: Disciple of Balākapiñchha. He is described as an ‘emperor of good conduct’, highly proficient in logic, grammar, literature, and other sciences. He had 300 disciples. Of his 300 disciples, 72 were prominent in expounding philosophy and science. Among those 72, the most celebrated was Dêvendra-saiddhāntika, a sage who is described to have mastered various philosophical systems and defeated false disputants.
4. Devendra-saiddhāntika: His title (‘Saiddhāntika’) denotes his expertise in philosophy and authoritative systems. He is described as ‘having put down the pride of arm of Cupid’ and ‘for being a fillet to the forehead of Sarasvatī’, marking his status as a supreme voice among seventy-two celebrated proponents of philosophy.
5. Kaladhautanandi-munipa: Disciple of Devendra-Saiddhantika. Described as an "emperor of philosophers" and honored by the learned.
6. Mahēndrakīrti: in the inscription, he is described as the "son" (likely spiritual successor/disciple in this context) to Kaladhautanandi-munipa.
7. Vīraṇandi: Disciple of Mahēndrakīrti. According to the inscription, he is skilled in poetry, declamation, disputation, and oratory. He is described as a thunderbolt to the mountain of inadvertence.

¹¹ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. II: Inscriptions at Sravana Belgola (Rev. ed.), Shravanabelagola Taluk, No. 127.

¹² Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. II: Inscriptions at Sravana Belgola (Rev. ed.), Shravanabelagola Taluk, No. 127.

¹³ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V: Inscriptions in the Hassan District (Part I), Belur Taluk, No. 17.

8. Traikālyayōgi: Disciple of Vīraṇandi. He is described as an illustrious ascetic whose penance was so great that a Brahmarākshasa became his pupil, and the oil of the honge tree was converted into pure ghee by his power.
9. Abhayanandi-muni (Abhayanandi-munipa): Disciple of Traikālyayōgi. He is described to have completely conquered the proud enemies known as the parishahas and obtained soul-knowledge.
10. Sakalēndu-munipa (Sakalachandra): Disciple of Abhayanandi-muni. He is described to have well versed in all āgamas, possessed pure and lovely conduct, and was a "moon in destroying the pride of the lotus-garden of false doctrines".
11. Meghachandra-traividya: Disciple of Sakalachandra. The primary subject of the 1115 A.D. inscription, who is described as a strict observer of vows, an abode of good disposition, who possessed the samitis and guptis, and was a world-renowned emperor of the traividyas (versed in grammar, logic, and philosophy). He was lauded as an equal to Jinasēna and Vīrasēna in philosophy and a leader of the Deśiya-gaṇa. He is additionally lauded as a crest-jewel of grammarians, logicians, and philosophers.
12. Prabhāchandra-siddhāntadeva: Disciple of Mēghachandra-munipa, who stepped into the institutional vacancy following Meghachandra's death to manage the final ritual and honors for his deceased guru, ensuring the lineage's continuity. Described as a full moon to the ocean of religious observances, a master of the triad of jewels, and one who had shaken off the three daṇḍas and salyas, rendering his mind pure through a thorough knowledge of the Jaina āgamas.

Monastic lineage of Dramila Sangha as mentioned in Belur inscription of 1136 A.D.¹⁴:

1. Vardhamāna-svāmi: The lineage opens with a reference to the tīrtha of Vardhamāna-svāmi, where the kēvalis acquired riddhi (supernatural power) and the śrutakēvalis accomplished siddha, increasing the doctrine a thousand-fold.
2. Samantabhadra-svāmi: Arising from the initial spiritual lineage, he is the next major figure established in the text.
3. Pātrakēsari-svāmi: Explicitly designated as the head of the 'Dramila-sangha' following Samantabhadra-svāmi.
4. Vakragrīva: Succeeded Pātrakēsari-svāmi in the lineage.
5. Vajranandi: Mentioned next in the sequence, designated specifically as the 'head of the gana'.
6. Sumati-bhaṭṭāraka: Followed Vajranandi in the line of succession.
7. Akalaṅka: Described as 'a lamp to the Jina samaya', succeeding Sumati-bhaṭṭāraka.
8. Chandakirtti-bhaṭṭāraka: Succeeded Akalaṅka.
9. Karmaṇakṛiti: Followed Chandakirtti-bhaṭṭāraka in chronological order.
10. Vimalachandrāchāryya: Succeeded Karmaṇakṛiti. He is highly distinguished in the text as the 'guru of the Pallava king'.
11. Paravādimalla-dēva: Succeeded Vimalachandrāchāryya.
12. Kanakasēna Vādirāja-dēva: Followed Paravādimalla-dēva.
13. Śrīvijaya-bhaṭṭāraka: Succeeded Kanakasēna. He is highlighted as the 'guru to Būtuga-Permmāḍi' (described as the 'sun to the lotus of the Gaṅga-kula').
14. Vādirājēndra: Succeeded Śrīvijaya-bhaṭṭāraka. He is distinguished as the 'emperor Jayasimha-Dēva's guru', under whom 'Sugata (Buddhism) lost its reputation for omniscience, and Kaṇāda and Lōkāyata philosophies were defeated'.
15. Ereyaṅga-Dēva: Succeeded Vādirājēndra and is described as the 'guru of the head-jewel of the Yādava race', considered a jagad-guru.
16. Ajitasēna-svāmi: Noted as the colleague of Ereyaṅga-Dēva.
17. Kumārasēna-saiddhāntika: Mentioned as a contemporary or colleague alongside Ajitasēna-svāmi, likened to a Tīrthanātha of the present day.
18. Malliṣēṇa-Maladhāri: The eldest son of Ajitasēna-svāmi, who succeeded him and was considered a gaṇadhara of the Kali age.
19. Śrīpāla-yōgīśvara (Vāḍibhasimha): Arising after Malliṣēṇa and adorning the throne of Akalaṅka, he is described as an 'emperor of logicians' and 'a lion to the elephant disputants' (Vāḍibhasimha). He is

¹⁴ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V: Inscriptions in the Hassan District (Part I), Belur Taluk, No. 17.

celebrated for his profound commentaries on the six systems of logic which are described in the inscription as ‘filling the earth with rivers of learning from the Jina clouds.’

This clear, uninterrupted chain of succession demonstrates that monastic lines were designed to protect institutional assets, retain pedagogical titles, and ensure that large student populations enjoyed continuous instruction across generations. The survival of the institution did not depend on a single charismatic leader; it was guaranteed by a highly structured succession plan.

EPIGRAPHICAL INSIGHTS INTO KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (THE CURRICULUM)

The educational landscape during Hoysalas can be clearly bifurcated into two dominant parallel institutional systems: the Brahmanical System of Agrahāra and Ghaṭikā and the Jaina Monastic System. While both systems shared an exceptionally high standard of intellectual rigor, they operated within distinct theological structures, curricular mandates, and institutional frameworks.

The Brahmanical system of higher education was structurally anchored in institutional centres like the Ghaṭikā and Agrahāra, which were scholarly Brahmin settlements exemplified by centres like the city of Sōmanāthapura. This system was populated by chief Brahmins whose education was firmly grounded in canonical and scriptural texts, demanding an absolute mastery of the Vēdas, Śāstras, Āgamas, and their specific verses, mantra, and tantra¹⁵. Advanced intellectual training within this system focused heavily on Nyāya (the traditional school of logic and epistemology) and Mīmāṃsā (the school of Vedic exegesis and hermeneutics), where scholars gathered in assemblies to engage in structured discussions centring on grammar, ritual sacrifice, and poetry¹⁶.

Crucially, this Brahmanical curriculum directly shaped the ruling elite and state officials. For example, King Vīra-Ballāla II’s chief minister, Chandramauli, though an orthodox Brahmanical practitioner, was trained in a polymathic regimen that perfectly mirrored these institutional requirements; he was well versed in Tarka (logic), while simultaneously mastering the Bharata-śāstra (the science of performing arts, music, and dramaturgy) and classical high-class literature¹⁷. Furthermore, scribes and poets (kavis) within this tradition were rigorously trained in advanced grammatical schools. This curriculum emphasized elite Kāvya literature and complex poetic metaphors, enabling them to compose official records in florid, well-composed Sanskrit verses, which were subsequently translated and repeated in the regional ‘Kaṇṇa language’ (Old Kannada)¹⁸.

The texts document highly structured milestones in the upbringing and training of royalty, nobility, and the ruling elite. Formal education began with the Upanayana ceremony (the sacred thread ceremony), which marked formal initiation into education and was performed with great festivities by meritorious families¹⁹. Immediately following this early upbringing, after seven or eight years of age, the student transitioned into martial education, becoming proficient in the ‘science of arms’²⁰. By the age of ten or eleven, intellectual testing revealed advanced progress; such individuals are described as becoming ‘as sharp as kuśa grass in intelligence, and proving ‘perfect in the four tests of character’, which were explicitly defined as loyalty, disinterestedness, continence, and courage²¹.

Parallel to this, the Jaina educational apparatus was organized around monastic centres (basadis), operating under strict intellectual lineages and monastic orders. Within the Jaina monastic environment, the traditional academic benchmarking standard of the Traividya, which meant mastery of the three traditional Vedas in Brahmanical context, was completely redefined and institutionalized into a secular and monastic curriculum. To attain the highest seat of learning and guide the intellectual lineage of the order, a scholar was required to demonstrate a flawless, threefold mastery over three foundational sciences.: Grammar (Vyākaraṇa or Śabda-śāstra), Logic

¹⁵ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. XI: Inscriptions in the Chitaldroog District, Davangere Taluk, No. 36.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. II: Inscriptions at Sravana Belgola (Rev. ed.), Shravanabelagola Taluk, No. 327.

¹⁸ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. IV: Inscriptions in the Mysore District (Part II), Krishnarajpet Taluk, No. 63.

¹⁹ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V: Inscriptions in the Hassan District (Part I), Belur Taluk, No. 17.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V: Inscriptions in the Hassan District (Part I), Belur Taluk, No. 17.

(Tarka or Pramāṇa-śāstra), and Philosophy (Siddhānta)²². Grammar was used as a structural prerequisite for all linguistic precision and analysis. The Shravanabelagola inscription asserts Meghachandra's grammatical lineage by explicitly comparing his erudition to the erudite Pūjyapāda, the classical master of grammar²³. Logic was designed to train monastics to defend their institutional tenets in intense public disputations. Meghachandra is described as a lion to the elephants (hostile disputants) in the inscription and his logical acumen is placed on par with 'Akalaṅka-deva', the legendary philosopher-logician who revolutionized South Indian epistemology²⁴. The third pillar, Philosophy, demanded a complete command over the Jaina Āgamas integrated with Syādvāda—the highly sophisticated dialectical framework of multi-sided reality and conditioned predication²⁵.

This specific curricular synthesis is captured in the 1115 A.D. epitaph of Meghachandra-munipa at the holy site of Kabbappu (Shravanabelagola). Celebrated as an 'emperor of the traividya', his Jaina monastic training is described metaphorically as an 'ocean having logic for diamonds, grammar for pure conchs, syādvāda for coral, and the pure teaching of Jina for pearls'²⁶. Jaina academic training heavily focused on authoring comprehensive commentaries and dialectical refutation of opponents in debates. Belur inscription of 1136 CE mentions the defeat of Sugata (Buddhism), Kaṇāda (Vaiśeṣika) and Lōkāyata (materialism) by revered guru of Dramila-Sangha, Vadirajendra²⁷. In addition to these debates, this system preserved meticulous records of academic pedigrees across various monastic ganas and the Dramila-sangha. Scholars who succeeded in public disputations were granted formidable titles like Vāḍibhasimha (a lion to the elephant disputants), a title held by Śrīpāla-traividya-dēva, who was described by the Belur inscription to have acquired all learning at the feet of the "emperor of logicians"²⁸. These preceptors, such as Vimalachandrāchāryya, frequently served as the direct gurus to ruling kings.²⁹

THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE OF EDUCATIONAL SUSTENANCE: GRANTS AND TAX IMMUNITIES

No educational system, regardless of its intellectual prestige or monastic discipline, can endure without a reliable pipeline of economic resources. The Hoysala inscriptions reveal a sophisticated economic model that sustained academies through a combination of various funding mechanisms.

During the Hoysala period, educational institutions and learned assemblies relied heavily on state, aristocratic, and regional power patronage, with the ruler's character celebrated through divine, mythological comparisons. King Viṣṇuvardhana, for instance, was praised and described in the inscription as '...like Brahma in giving joy to hundreds of the learned, like Nārāyaṇa in displaying the qualities of the best men, like Ś'ankara in the promotion of merit...' reflecting the royal practice of hosting, debating with, and financially supporting poets, scholars, and philosophers in academic assemblies (Sabhas) where intellectual merit was tested³⁰. Highly learned authorities held prominent positions within these royal structures; a scholar named Gāṅgādhārāryya, described as 'an independent authority in logic who dispelled Chārvāka (materialist) and Bauddha(Buddhist) doctrines and swallowed up the Jaina ocean like Agastya', adorned the royal council³¹. Furthermore, military and administrative officials actively fostered learning. In Harihara inscription, the great minister and general Sōma-daṇḍanātha is celebrated for creating the agrahāra (described as the 'mine of learning' in the inscription) named Prasanna-Sōmanāthapura³².

The material base of these academic centres was anchored by the classical concept of "Chaturvidha-dāna"—the permanent provision of four essential institutional resources: Food ("Āhāra"), Shelter ("Āśraya"), Medicine

²² Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. II: Inscriptions at Sravana Belgola (Rev. ed.), Shravanabelagola Taluk, No. 127.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. V: Inscriptions in the Hassan District (Part I), Belur Taluk, No. 17.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. VI: Inscriptions in the Kadur District, Chikmagalur Taluk, No. 137.

³¹ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. XI: Inscriptions in the Chitaldroog District, Davangere Taluk, No. 36.

³² Ibid

("Bhaiṣajya"), and Learning/Literature ("Śāstra"). In an 1115 A.D. inscription, the execution of this fourfold endowment is credited to Lakshmimati, the wife of the high-ranking Hoysala military general and prime minister, "Maha-pradhāna Daṇḍanāyaka" Ganga-Rāja³³. The text extols her legacy by noting the ultimate splendour achieved through the method of making gifts of food, shelter, medicine, and learning acquired through her actions. By financing all four pillars simultaneously, elite patrons ensured that the monastic campus functioned as a fully self-contained ecosystem. Providing free food, medical care, and residences allowed students and faculty to dedicate themselves entirely to advanced textual analysis and public debate without outside economic distractions, transforming simple shrines into expansive monastic colleges.

The long-term sustainability and economic survival of these academic communities and complexes were entirely dependent on revenue allocations, tax exemptions, and financial infrastructure managed by state officials to prevent fiscal interference. As mentioned in the T. Narsipura inscriptions, General Sōmaya-daṇḍēśa ensured the permanence of an institution by allocating 3,000 of his own revenue to sustain the complex, while the palace specifically protected the scholars of Sōmanāthapura by remitting or managing traditional local village taxes, specifically 'hadike', 'horage', 'hodike', and 'mala-braya', mandating that they were exempt from questions regarding special palace taxes so they could focus completely on their scholastic duties.³⁴

As the Hoysala state evolved into the 14th century, the mechanics of these institutional grants became even more legally explicit, moving toward a model of absolute tax exemption to insulate institutions from shifting political regimes or predatory tax collectors. This late phase is documented by the Kuskūru-Agrahāra revenue charter (1241 Śaka / c. 1309 A.D.) during the reign of King Vīraballāḍēvarasa (Veera Ballala III), which outlines an administrative assembly led by Dēvappa-Hariyappa, the 'sarvvādhikāri' (general superintendent) of Haḍavaḷike-nāḍ³⁵. To secure the permanent financial survival of the local Ghatikasthana, a collective civic alliance was formed. The assembly of 60 farmers, the 120 institutional sthānas, and the 1,700 Gavare-gaṇḍas (a powerful merchant guild representing commercial power) assembled in person at Kusugūr to issue a definitive legal decree to the sarvvādhikāri, declaring that the granted estate had no imposts and was free of all taxes as a work of merit³⁶. This ultimate development in fiscal protection allowed the agrahāra to collect all internal rents and agrarian profits, utilizing 100% of its local revenue to entirely sustain its resident scholars, priests, and institutional staff.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive analysis of Hoysala epigraphy dismantles the traditional historiographical dichotomy that has long segregated medieval South Indian education into isolated Brahmanical or heterodox sectarian silos. By reading inscriptions dated between 1115 A.D. and 1319 A.D. as complex administrative and economic blueprints rather than mere tokens of religious piety, this paper reveals a highly institutionalized, public, and competitive academic sector that was deeply embedded in the political economy of medieval Karnataka. Whether operating within the Vedic framework of 'agrahāras' and 'ghaṭikās' or the library-centric 'Pustaka-gachchha' networks of the Jaina basadis, higher learning during the Hoysala period depended on structured institutional mechanisms. These included precise faculty endowments via 'vṛittis', rigorous cross-sectarian academic benchmarks like the 'Traividya' designation, and robust monastic succession plans designed to safeguard pedagogical continuity. Powering this entire intellectual engine was a sophisticated fiscal infrastructure wherein the state, military elite, civic assemblies, and merchant guilds like the 'Gavare-gaṇḍas' directly synchronized their efforts. Through the strategic implementation of 'Chaturvidha-dāna', which transformed monastic shrines into self-sustaining residential campuses, and the issuance of ironclad revenue charters granting absolute immunity from palace taxes like 'hadike' and 'hodike', the Hoysala state successfully insulated its academic networks from political instability. Ultimately, higher education under the Hoysalas was not a quietist retreat from reality, but a vibrant, state-protected industry of knowledge production that formed a foundational pillar of socio-political authority and economic resilience in medieval South India.

³³ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. II: Inscriptions at Sravana Belgola (Rev. ed.), Shravanabelagola Taluk, No. 127.

³⁴ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. III: Inscriptions in the Mysore District (Part I), T. Narsipura Taluk, No. 97.

³⁵ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. VII: Inscriptions in the Shimoga District (Part I), Shimoga Taluk, No. 19.

³⁶ Ibid

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Hoysala educational ecosystem was its ability to balance and integrate competing religious and philosophical traditions. The inscriptions reveal that instead of acting as sites of sectarian conflict, educational institutions served as spaces where cross-sectarian alliances were forged among the ruling elite.

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