



SRI CHENNAKESHA PERUMAL TEMPLE

Mavanoor, Holenarasipura Taluk, Hassan District, Karnataka

A HERITAGE CONSERVATION APPEAL

*Prepared by Mavanoor Shri Chennakeshava Bhaktha Mandali
for devotees, donors and heritage partners*

A Temple of History, Art and Living Worship

The Sri Chennakeshava Perumal Temple at Mavanoor is a Hoysala-period Vaishnava shrine whose surviving architecture and sculpture preserve an important chapter of Karnataka's sacred history. The temple stands within the wider cultural landscape of Hassan district, a region renowned for the artistic and technical achievements of Hoysala temple builders.

The temple is dedicated to Sri Keshava, a form of Lord Vishnu. Its principal image, sculptural details, stone members and ritual associations demonstrate that it was conceived not simply as a building, but as a complete sacred environment in which architecture, iconography and worship were inseparable.

Royal patronage in 1274

Archeological records indicate that the Hoysala King Narasimha III visited the village of Mavanoor and the temple to worship in 1274 CE. This places the shrine within the active religious landscape of the Hoysala kingdom and indicates the recognition it enjoyed during the period.

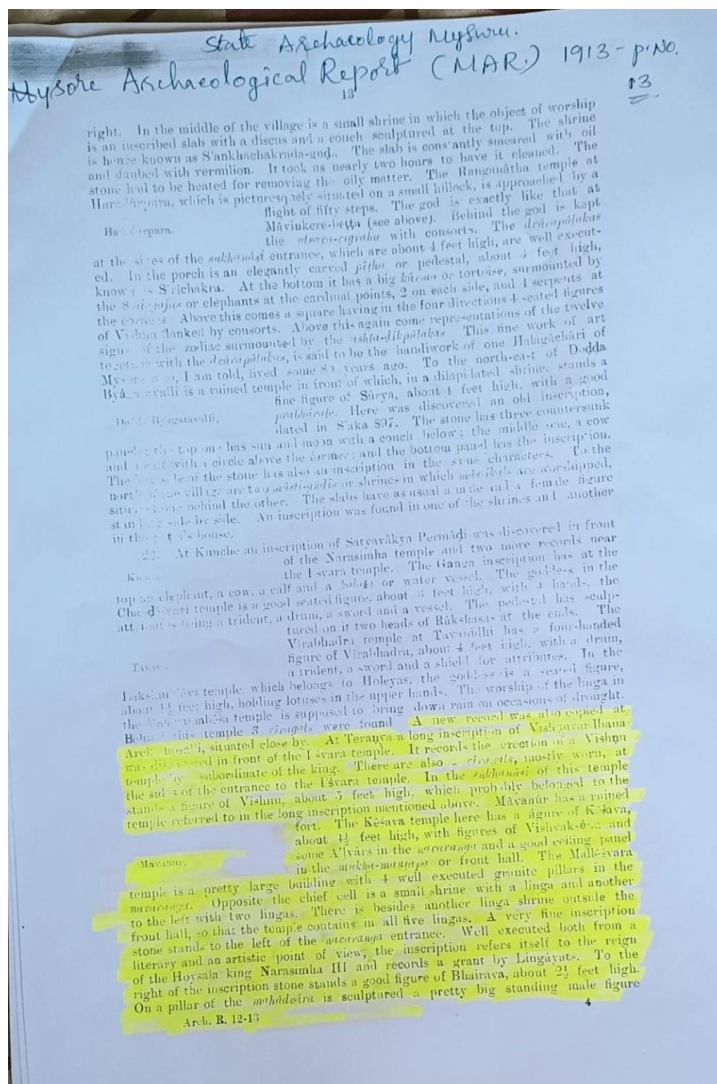


The temple before the present conservation work began. The façade reflects both surviving historic fabric and later additions.

Documented by the Mysore Archaeological Department

The Mysore Archaeological Report for 1913–14, prepared under R. Narasimhachar, records the temples and sculptures at Mavanoor. It notes a Kesava image approximately four and a half feet high, figures of Vishvakṣena and Alvars in the navaranga, a high quality ceiling panel, and a finely executed inscription of the reign of Hoysala King Narasimha III recording a grant by Lingayya.

This documentation confirms an established sacred complex, important sculpture and organised patronage, giving the present conservation initiative a firm historical foundation.



Extract supplied from the Mysore Archaeological Report, 1913-14. The relevant passage records the Kesava and Mallesvara temples, an inscription of Narasimha III and a grant by Lingayya.

Condition Before the Present Conservation

Before the current work began, the temple showed extensive weathering, biological growth, open joints, cracking, water staining and structural distress. Earlier repairs seem to have prevented complete collapse in some areas, but portions of the front superstructure and side walls had been rebuilt in a construction style that did not correspond to the original Hoysala character.

Those earlier works appear to have been undertaken with the sincere intention of protecting the shrine. However, the present project must distinguish original fabric from later intervention, retain sound historic stone wherever possible and correct incompatible additions through careful documentation and reconstruction.



The Hoysala Vimāna Above the Sanctum



Side elevation showing masonry additions and deterioration.



Cracks and separation in later walling



Original moulded stone base surviving below later masonry



Interior pillars and beams before dismantling



Historic ceiling carving and later infill

What the Photographs Reveal

The temple belongs to the historic temple landscape of Hassan district, one of the principal regions of Hoysala art and architecture. Official district sources identify Hassan as a major repository of Hoysala temples and inscriptions. UNESCO describes mature Hoysala sacred architecture as a distinctive Karnataka tradition marked by highly articulated plans, richly carved stone surfaces, refined interiors, sculpted ceilings, sacred images and an exceptional integration of architecture and ornament.

The surviving ceiling panels are especially important. Floral and geometric ceiling compositions are characteristic features of Hoysala interiors, where corbelled and carved ceilings create a visual focus above the central bays. The Mavanoor ceiling photographs show a layered lotus medallion with radiating petals and an emphatic central boss, surrounded by carved architectural framing.

The exact foundation date of the Mavanoor temple requires epigraphic and archaeological confirmation. Local tradition associates the temple with the Sri Vaishnava sampradaya and with the age of Sri Ramanujacharya.

Together, these images provide an essential condition record. They help identify original Hoysala members, later repairs, areas of displacement, and elements requiring specialist review before reassembly

Sri Keshava: The Artistic Heart of Mavanoor

The presiding deity is the temple's greatest artistic treasure. The following description is based on the observations of Dr. Shelvapillai Iyengar, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology at Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru.



Sri Keshava before the present conservation work, with Sri Devi and Bhu Devi below and the richly carved prabhavali surrounding the deity.

An Iconographic Interpretation by Dr. Iyengar

Before you stands **Sri Keshava Devaru**, the presiding deity of the historic Keshava Temple at Mavanoor, nestled in the serene village of Mavanoor in Holenarasipura Taluk of Hassan District, Karnataka.

The Lord is enshrined beneath a magnificent **Prabhavali** (ornamental aureole), within which are exquisitely sculpted the **Daśāvatāra**, the ten principal incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Beginning from one side, we encounter **Matsya**, the Fish incarnation, followed by **Kurma**, the Tortoise, **Varaha**, the Boar, **Narasimha**, the Man-Lion, and **Vāmana**, the Divine Dwarf. At the centre of the aureole is the majestic **Kirtimukha**, the mythical "Face of Glory," symbolising auspiciousness and divine protection. Continuing further are the remaining incarnations—**Paraśurāma**, **Śrī Rāma**, **Śrī Krishna**, **Lord Buddha**, and finally **Kalki**, the future incarnation yet to manifest.

The Lord's crown, or **Kiriṭa**, is itself a masterpiece of Hoysala sculpture, richly adorned with intricate ornamentation and crowned by another beautifully carved **Kirtimukha**.

As your eyes rest upon the face of Sri Keshava, you are immediately drawn to His gentle smile and the serenity reflected in His calm, compassionate eyes. The sculptor has captured not merely physical beauty but the divine grace and tranquillity that form the very essence of Lord Vishnu.

In His upper right hand, the Lord holds the sacred **Śaṅkha**, the divine conch, whose ornamentation once again incorporates the graceful form of the **Kirtimukha**. In His upper left hand He bears the **Sudarśana Chakra**, its beautifully elongated **Padmanāla**, or lotus stalk, delicately carved with remarkable precision.

The image is adorned with the traditional ornaments prescribed for Vishnu in the Śilpa Śāstras. Around His neck are the **Kaṇṭhī**, the elegant **Muktāsara**, and the long **Saptāsara** necklace. His shoulders are adorned with the finely sculpted **Bhujakīrti** and **Bhujaskandha**, while the upper arms bear the **Keyūra**, and the wrists are decorated with **Kaṭaka**, bracelets and bangles. Rings adorn His graceful fingers, every ornament executed with extraordinary refinement by the master sculptors of the Hoysala tradition.

Across His chest lies the sacred **Yajñopavīta**, while at the waist can be seen the beautifully carved **Udarabandha**, together with the jewelled **Kāñchiguṇa**, the ornamental waist girdle. Descending gracefully along the body is the sacred **Vanamālā**, the long forest garland that is one of Lord Vishnu's most distinctive attributes.

The Lord also carries the **Gadā**, the divine mace symbolising strength, righteousness, and sovereign authority. Every ornament, every fold of the garment, and every sacred attribute has been rendered with astonishing care, inviting the devotee to linger over each exquisite detail.

The lotus feet of the Lord rest gently upon a beautifully sculpted lotus pedestal. They are adorned with **Pāda Kaṭaka**, elegant anklets, **Pāda Jālaka**, intricately crafted foot ornaments, and **Pādāṅguliyaka**, the delicate toe rings. Even these smallest details reveal the extraordinary artistic excellence of the sculptor.

Flanking the Lord are His eternal consorts—**Śrīdevī**, the Goddess of Prosperity, and **Bhūdevī**, the Divine Mother Earth. Below them kneels **Garuḍa**, the eternal vehicle of Lord Vishnu, forever absorbed in humble devotion before his Lord.

Having beheld every aspect of this magnificent image, the devotee is blessed with the complete **Darśana** of Sri Keshava Devaru.

The artistic brilliance of this sculpture is not confined to its front alone. The rear of the image has been carved with the same extraordinary attention to detail. Behind the Lord's head is the beautifully executed **Śiraścakra**, or halo, while above it is the carefully sculpted **Śikhā-bandha**, representing the tied hair at the back of the head. The sacred thread continues naturally around the body, and the sculptor has rendered the waist, hips, and the folds of the lower garment with exceptional elegance. Even the rear of the lotus feet displays the same remarkable finish, demonstrating that every surface of this divine image was intended to be appreciated as a work of sacred art.

Sri Keshava of Mavanoor stands not merely as an object of worship, but as a timeless testament to the devotion, artistic mastery, and spiritual vision of the Hoysala sculptors. Every feature of this image embodies profound theological symbolism while displaying a level of craftsmanship that continues to inspire awe centuries after it was created. To behold this deity is not only to admire a masterpiece of medieval Indian sculpture, but also to experience the enduring beauty of devotion expressed through stone.



Close view of the crown, facial expression, conch, chakra and ornamentation.



Close view of the rear of the sculpture showing detail



Detail of a subsidiary sculptural figure and pierced stonework.



Close view of the crown, conch, chakra, torso



Close view of the Prabhavali inscribed with Dashavatara

Key Features

Feature	Description and significance
Prabhavali and Dashavatara	The ornamental aureole carries the ten incarnations of Vishnu: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki.
Kirtimukha	A prominent auspicious mythical face crowns the prabhavali, with another finely carved Kirtimukha appearing on the deity's crown.
Divine attributes	The upper right hand holds the Shankha; the upper left holds the Sudarshana Chakra, accompanied by an elongated lotus stalk or padmanala. The Gada is also richly ornamented.
Ornaments	The image displays traditional ornaments including Kanthi, Muktasara, Saptasara, Bhujakirti, Keyura, Kataka, Yajnopavita, Udarabandha, Kanchiguna and the long Vanamala.
Sacred ensemble	Sri Devi and Bhu Devi stand beside the Lord, while Garuda appears below, completing the Vaishnava composition.
Rear carving	The reverse includes the Shirashchakra, Shikha Bandha, sacred thread, waist cloth and finely carved anatomical details, showing that the sculpture was conceived fully in the round.
Dr. Iyengar's assessment The serene smile, calm eyes, elaborate jewellery, sacred attributes and fully carved rear surface together demonstrate extraordinary workmanship and artistic excellence.	

Scholarly observation

“Every part of this idol reflects extraordinary craftsmanship and artistic excellence.” — Dr. Shelvapillai Iyengar

Summary

Sri Chennakeshava of Mavanoor belongs to the finest tradition of Hoysala Vaishnava sculpture that flourished across Karnataka between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Comparable in its iconographic richness to the celebrated images of Chennakeshava at Belur and the Keshava temples of Hosaholalu and Nuggehalli, this remarkable deity exemplifies the Hoysala sculptors' mastery of both artistic refinement and theological expression. Every ornament, attribute, and sacred emblem prescribed in the classical Śilpa Śāstras has been rendered with extraordinary precision, from the majestic Daśāvatāra adorning the Prabhavali to the intricate jewellery, graceful Vanamālā, and finely carved lotus feet. Equally remarkable is the meticulous treatment of the rear of the image, a hallmark of the greatest Hoysala masterpieces, where even the details hidden from the devotee's immediate view were sculpted with the same devotion and perfection as the front. The image of Sri Keshava at Mavanoor is therefore not merely an object of worship, but a masterpiece of medieval Indian sculpture that embodies the artistic excellence, devotional spirit, and sophisticated iconography for which the Hoysala tradition is renowned.

From Emergency Repair to Evidence-Based Conservation

It appears, that at an earlier stage, a contractor working on a nearby Maramma temple assisted in rebuilding portions of the front top and side walls. The intervention was well intentioned and helped shelter the shrine, but the architectural language and construction method were not consistent with the temple's Hoysala character.

The present effort therefore goes beyond ordinary renovation. It seeks to document the inherited condition, separate compatible historic material from later work, reuse original stone wherever structurally possible, and reconstruct missing or unsafe portions in a manner appropriate to the temple's age, form and sacred function.

Conservation approach

Respect original fabric • Minimum necessary intervention • Archaeological verification • Traditional stone craftsmanship • Structural safety • Full photographic documentation

DECONSTRUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS



CURRENT CONSTRUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS



The Reconstruction Journey

The conservation and reconstruction of the historic Mavanoor Sri Chennakeshava Temple is an officially sanctioned heritage conservation project funded by the Department of Tourism, Government of Karnataka. A grant of ₹1.08 crore (exclusive of GST) has been sanctioned for its implementation. The project is being executed by the Archaeological Survey of India, Karnataka Division, Mysore, under the supervision of the Endowment (Muzarai) Department, Government of Karnataka. The objective of the project is not merely to rebuild the structure, but to conserve an important monument of Hoysala heritage in accordance with established principles of archaeological conservation. Every original stone is carefully documented, dismantled where necessary, conserved, and reinstated in its original position to preserve the temple's historical authenticity, architectural integrity, and artistic legacy. The reconstruction follows traditional building techniques and respects the original fabric of the monument, ensuring that this remarkable temple continues to inspire future generations while retaining its historic character. This is a conservation project, not a reconstruction in the conventional sense. Wherever structurally feasible, the original Hoysala stone blocks are being retained and reinstated. New stone is introduced only where essential to restore structural stability or to replace irretrievably lost elements, ensuring that the authenticity and integrity of the original monument are preserved in accordance with accepted archaeological conservation practices.

Stage	Activity	Purpose
1	Condition documentation	Photograph every elevation, interior bay, sculpture, stone member and crack before disturbance.
2	Identification and numbering	Mark reusable stones and record their original positions.
3	Controlled dismantling	Remove unstable or incompatible portions without damaging historic fabric.
4	Expert review	Resolve structural, archaeological and ritual questions before rebuilding.
5	Traditional reconstruction	Reassemble sound original members and introduce compatible new work only where necessary.
6	Completion and interpretation	Provide drainage, lighting, signage, records and long-term maintenance.

Work Still Requiring Support

While the government funded project has enabled substantial progress. Additional contributions are required to complete the temple sensitively and to protect the restored monument over the long term.

Architectural stonework	Completion of missing or damaged components in a style compatible with the historic temple.
Entrance and mandapa elements	Pillars, beams, paving and related structural members.
Sculptural conservation	Specialist cleaning, stabilization, documentation and protection of surviving sculpture.
Drainage and site protection	Measures to prevent water accumulation, biological growth and renewed structural damage.
Lighting and electrical work	Discreet, safe systems suited to worship and heritage presentation.
Interpretation and archives	Historic panels, photographic records, measured drawings and a digital archive.
Visitor and ritual needs	Essential facilities that do not compromise the sacred or historic character.
Long-term maintenance	Routine inspection, cleaning, vegetation control and repair planning.

Leadership, Seva and Donor Stewardship

This sacred endeavour is being undertaken with the blessings of:

H.H. Shri Shri Srivan Satakopa Sri Ranganatha Yateendra Mahadesikan swamin, jeeyar Ahobilam Mutt,
Ahobhilam, Kadapa District, AP

and under the loving guidance and personal direction of:

H.H. Shri Shri Yadugiri Yathiraaja Narayana Jeeyar Swamin, Yadugiri Yathiraaja Mutt, Melukote, Mandya District,
Karnataka

The restoration initiative is being carried forward through the Mavanoor Shri Chennakeshava Bhaktha Mandali, under the able guidance of Smt. Yamuna (Jamuna) Ramapriya, with the wholehearted participation of devotees, technical professionals, traditional sthaphis and craftsmen, volunteers, and the wider community.

Mandali leadership

President: Smt. Yamuna G. S.

Secretary: Aswin Hebbar

Treasurer: B. A. Narayan

The Mandali's responsibility is institutional and community-centred: to complete the reconstruction responsibly, revive and sustain worship, preserve the temple's art and history, and maintain transparent systems for receiving and using contributions.

Commitments to donors

- Contributions received only through the authorised Mandali account.
- Official acknowledgement or receipt for each donation.
- Purpose-linked use of funds for identified temple and heritage work.
- Photographic and milestone updates wherever practical.
- Maintenance of expenditure records and supporting documentation.
- Professional and departmental consultation when required.

An Invitation to Preserve Mavanoor's Heritage

The restoration of Sri Chennakeshava Perumal Temple is more than the repair of an old structure. It preserves sacred sculpture, architectural knowledge, worship, historical memory and community identity in one living monument. Support from individuals, companies, trusts, foundations and devotees can help complete the work with the care that this heritage deserves.

Account holder	Mavanoor Shri Chennakeshava Bhaktha Mandali
Account type	Savings Bank
Bank	Canara Bank
Branch	Vidyaranyaपुरa, Bengaluru
Account number	110032015980
IFSC	CNRB0002615
Email	MSCBM@mavanoor.org
Secretary	Aswin – 9844673290
Treasurer	B. A. Narayan – 7338194013

Please verify the bank details with the Secretary or Treasurer before transferring funds, and obtain an official receipt or acknowledgement for every donation.



Sri Keshavaya Namah