Hoysala Temples in World Heritage List

Why in news?

Recently, 3 Hoysala-era temples were added as to UNESCO's World Heritage List thus becoming the *42nd site from India.*

What is UNESCO World Heritage Site?

- **World Heritage Site (WHS)** – These are the sites are designated as having "outstanding universal value" under the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.*
- It was adopted by UNESCO in *1972* and formally took effect in *1975.*
- The list of WHS is maintained by the *International World Heritage Programme,* administered by the *UNESCO World Heritage Committee.*
- The 3 types of site are *Cultural, Natural, and Mixed.*

World Heritage List of India

- India has 6th highest number of WHS in the world (Italy is 1st with 58).
- Total number of World Heritage Site - 42
- Total cultural heritage sites - 34
- Total natural heritage sites - 7
- Mixed heritage - 1 (Khangchendzonga National Park in Sikkim).
- 1st WHS from India - Tajmahal, Agra Fort, Ajanta and Ellora caves all listed in 1983.
- Latest addition in WHS List- 42nd is Sacred Ensembles of Hoysala Temples and 41st is Santiniketan in 2023.
- Dholavira in Gujarat is the only site of Indus valley civilisation in World Heritage List from India.

What is the procedure for including a site in the WHS list?

- **Selection criteria** - To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet *at least one out of 10 selection criteria* of UNESCO.
- *Only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention* can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List.
- **Tentative List** – The first step a country must take is to make an *'inventory'* of its important natural and cultural heritage sites located within its boundaries, known as the Tentative List.
- The World Heritage Committee cannot consider a nomination for inscription on the

World Heritage List unless the property has already been included on the State Party's Tentative List.

- **Evaluation**- A nominated property is independently evaluated by
  - The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
  - The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
  - The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)
- **Deciding authority** - Once a site has been nominated and evaluated, it is up to the intergovernmental *World Heritage Committee* to make the final decision on its inscription.

What constitutes the Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas?

- It includes 3 temples- Chennakeshava temple (Belur), Hoysaleswara Temple (Halebidu), and Keshava Temple (Somanathapura) of Karnataka.

The Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas	
The Chennakeshava temple	• **Location** – Belur in Hassan District • **Major shrine of**– Lord Vishnu • **Time period** – Consecrated *around 1117 AD* • **Built by** – Hoysala *king Vishnuvardhana* • **Nickname** - *Vijaya Narayana temple* as it was built by the king to mark his victories against the Cholas
The Kesava temple	• **Location** –Somanathapura village (Mysore district) • **Time period** – 1268 C.E • **Built by** – *Somanatha,* a General of Hoysala King Narasimha III • **Major Shrine** - Vaishnava shrine
The Hoysaleswara temple	• **Location** – on the banks of Dwarasamudra tank in Halebidu (Hassan district) • **Time period** – 12th Century C.E. • **Major Shrine** – Lord Shiva • It is believed to be the largest Shiva temple built by the Hoysalas. • Halebidu was sacked by Malik Kafur, a general of the then Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khalji in the early 1300s.

What makes Hoysala architecture stand out?

- **Unique confluence of styles** – These temples are amalgamation of three distinctive temple styles prevalent in India.
  - ***Dravidian*** style represented in Pallava and Chola temples
  - ***Vesara*** style, the variant of the Dravida style that emerged in the Chalukya and Rashtrakuta temples
  - ***Nagara*** style of North India

- **Construction material** – The use of ***soapstone*,** a malleable stone has made it easy to carve and contributed to abundant intricate sculptures on the temple walls.
- **Elevated platforms** – The temples are generally built on *stellate (star-shaped) platforms*.
    - *Kesava temple* in Somanathapura is built in the shape of a *16-point star.*
- **Beautiful Sculptures** – The sculptures themes include *animals, scenes of daily life*, as well as depictions from the *epics and the Puranas*.
- It demonstrates their creativity in translating religious beliefs and stories into sculpture.
- **Differentiated Pillars** – The total number of pillars in Chennakesava temple at Belur is 46.
- All of them, except the four in the central bay are of different designs.
- **Signed temples** - The temples are given with information of the sculptors and masons who were involved in its construction.
- **Religious significance** – These Vaishnava and Shaivya shrines were built at the time Jainism was prominent in the region.
- It thus mark a turn towards Hinduism.
- **Social significance** – The *jewellery, headgear, clothes*, etc. of the detailed sculptures give an idea of the society of the times.
- One of the sculptures, ***Darpana Sundari*** (lady with the mirror), is modelled on Shantala Devi, the queen of Vishnuvardhana who had the built the Chennakesava temple.
- **Other details**– No known monuments other than temples, like palaces or forts, survive from the Hoysala period.
- The non-temple buildings were all built in either mud or brick or wood and not stone.
- So, except for some ruins in Hampi, nothing has survived in the form of architecture of Hoysalas.

Quick facts

Hoysalas

- **Origin** – Provincial governors under the Western Chalukyas established themselves as rulers, as the two dominant empires of the South - the Western Chalukyas and the Cholas, crumbled.
- **Geography** – Karnataka
- **Time period** – 10th century to the 14th century
- **Capital** – It was Belur earlier and moved to Halebidu or Dwarasamudra later.
- **Hoysala Emblem** - Figure representing Sala attacking the tiger

References

1. IE| Hoysala Temples as World Heritage Site
2. IE| Sacred Ensembles of Hoysalas

3. UNESCO| World Heritage List in India

