

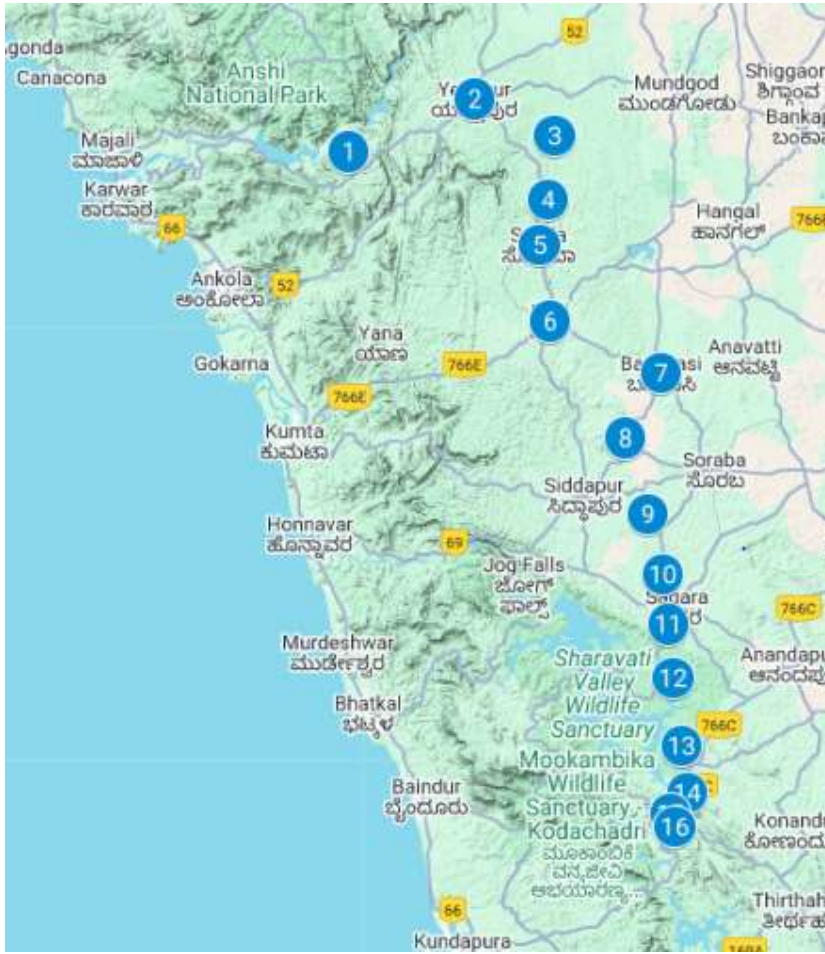


200 YEARS LATER
RETRACING FRANCIS BUCHANAN'S JOURNEY OF 1800-01
THROUGH PARTS OF SOUTHERN INDIA

**Chapter XVII: Journey from the entrance into Karnataka to Hyder Nagar, through the
Principalities of Soonda and Ikkeri**

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BANGALORE, INDIA



- 1.Devakar (Deva-kara)
- 2.Yellapura (Yella-pura)
- 3.Kerehosahalli (Caray Hosso-hully)
- 4.Sankadagundi (Sancada-gonda)
- 5.Sonda (Soonda/Sudha/Sudhapura)
6. Sirsi (Sersi)
- 7.Banavasi (Banawasi)
- 8.Chandragutti (Chandra-gupti)
- 9.Suntikoppa (Sunticopa)
10. Keladi (Kilidi)
11. Ikkeri (Ikeri)
- 12.GenasinaKuni (Ghenasu-guli)
- 13.Dhumma (Duma or Dumam)
14. Kumbatti (The Fatah-petta, which is no longer available, was located between Kumbatti and the Devaganga region, according to locals.)
15. Devagange
- 16.Nagara (Hyder Nagara)

Devakar (Deva-kara)

On January 31, 2025, I began my journey from Sadashivgad, traveling towards Kaiga and reaching Devakar, located in the Kali River valley.

Buchanan mentioned that "on leaving Dava-kara, the valley watered by the Bidhati becomes very narrow." However, this statement is incorrect. The Bedthi River, which originates near Dharwad, flows through Hubli and Kalghatagi before entering Uttara Kannada district between Yellapura and Sirsi.

Near Harigadde (Latitude: 14.837791, Longitude: 74.739120), the Shalmala River joins the Bedthi River, and from there, it continues as the Gangavalli River.



Retracing Buchanan's path: After passing riverside crossings with stony hills to my right, I reached Karnata's first cultivated spot, where a small rivulet descends from the hills and irrigates a narrow rice field valley.

"After going two cosses near the river side, with stony hills to my right, I came to the first cultivated spot in Karnata. Here a small rivulet descends from the hills, and a waters a narrow valley, which in the bottom is cultivated with rice, and on the side is planted with Betel and coconut palms."



Panoramic view of Kodalalli Reservoir, built across the Kali River.



A few glimpses of the River Kali near Kodalalli Reservoir.



Sathodi falls near Baraballi

Buchanan camped near a valley called "Barabuli," which is now known as Baraballi, located near Sathodi Falls. Today, some parts of this area are submerged under the Kodalalli Reservoir, which was built across the Kali River.

This region is deep within the forest, home to a variety of tree species. Due to Sathodi Falls, the area attracts many tourists, especially for hiking. However, during the

rainy season, tourism is restricted due to the heavy influx of water from the southwest monsoon.

Buchanan also mentioned that the locals used the bark ashes of the Mutti tree, which they consumed along with betel leaves. This Mutti tree is known as Matti in Kannada.

Unfortunately, I couldn't find any locals who recognized the Mutti tree or its usage.

Further, Buchanan reached Cutaki, but I was unable to locate this place, either on the ground or on maps. It is likely that the name has changed over time or that it was a small settlement in the Western Ghats foothills, where the steep hills begin.



Buchanan compares this region to the Eastern Ghats, particularly the Pedda Naykana Durga Pass (near Venkatagiri on the Mangalore-Villupuram Highway) and Kaveripura Ghat. Unlike the rock-capped hills of the Eastern Ghats, the Western Ghats are densely covered with a variety of tree species and evergreen forests

While ascending the hill, I passed through many forested areas, encountering a rich variety of flora.

Buchanan also documented several tree species, some of which we previously discussed near Kadra. His records include both local and scientific names, providing valuable insight into the biodiversity of the region.

Here, near Yellapura Taluk, I observed an abundance of teak trees (*Tectona grandis*), just as Buchanan had documented in his writings. Alongside teak, I noticed other species that are commonly found in the Western Ghats, including *Terminalia tomentosa* (Indian Laurel), *Lagerstroemia microcarpa* (Crepe Myrtle), and *Dalbergia latifolia* (Indian Rosewood). Many of these species were historically valued for timber and shipbuilding, a fact also mentioned in Buchanan's accounts.

Yellapura (Yella-pura)



Left to Right: After approaching the ghat region—1. Paddy fields interspersed with sugarcane; 2. Arecanut plantation.

I reached **Yellapura** on the same day, passing through the **above Ghat region**. Along the way, I passed through several **villages** with extensive **areca nut (betel nut) plantations** and **paddy fields**.

“Near the Ghats cultivation is confined to pepper and betel gardens, and to rice fields, in which, as a second crop, a little Hessaru (Phaseolus Mungo) is raised, and occasionally a little sugarcane, in the eastern parts toward Hully-halla (Haliyala), Mundagodu and induru, the woods consists mostly of Teak, and there are no garden.”

Yellapura is now a **taluk center** located in the **up-ghat region** of **Uttara Kannada district**, situated **96 km** from its **district headquarters, Karwar**.



A Siddi woman near Yellapura. Photo taken with her permission.

While traveling towards Yellapura town, I saw many people from the African Siddi community, both near and within the town. In India, people of African origin are known as Siddis. Their migration likely took place during the Portuguese and Arab trade era, when they were brought from the eastern coast of Africa, possibly as laborers or soldiers.

Over time, many Siddis joined the military and took up other professions, but some later escaped and settled in the dense forests of the Western Ghats for reasons unknown. Eventually, they began working in the agricultural fields of Havyaka Brahmins.

Among the Siddis, some follow Catholicism, some Hinduism, and others Islam. The Hindu Siddis worship their ancestors along with other Hindu deities.

Interestingly, Buchanan did not mention this community during his expedition near Yellapura, which makes their history in this region even more intriguing!



Bhedthi River and the bridge spanning it. During the monsoon, the river's intensity is evident from the driftwood and bushes scattered along its bank near the bridge.

"About two-third of the way from yella-pura to Hosso-hully, I crossed the Bhidhathi-holay, which goes north, and joins a river coming from supa to from the sedasiva-ghur river. Its channel is wide, and in the rainy season is probable full, but at present it contains very little water."

-Francis Buchanan, Chapter XVII

After passing Yellapura, I proceeded towards Sirsi via the Yellapura-Sirsi State Highway 93. Buchanan recorded passing through a small village called "Caray Hosohully," which is now known as Kerehosahalli (Latitude: 14.904627, Longitude: 74.840328).

Along the way, I crossed a stream of the Bedthi River, which Buchanan referred to as Bhidathi Holay. After traveling a short distance, I took a left from SH-93 near the Halligadde Temple Cross. From there, after 9 km, I reached Kerehosahalli, which remains a small village, just as Buchanan described. The settlers here originally migrated from the Maratha region, and even today, their presence is evident.

Continuing further, I passed Ummachagi and, about 1 km ahead, reached Sankadagundi (Latitude: 14.806196, Longitude: 74.830667), which Buchanan documented as Sancada-gonda. At the time of his visit, only three houses existed in this village. Today, it has grown into a small settlement with 60–70 houses, surrounded by thriving areca plantations.

Sonda (Soonda/Sudha/Sudhapura)

On February 1, 2025, I reached Sonda after passing through vast areca nut plantations and paddy fields on both sides of the road.

I crossed the Tudguni Bridge, which spans a stream that merges with the Shalmala River near Sonda. Further downstream, the Shalmala River joins the Bedthi River, eventually forming the Gangavalli River.



On the way to Sonda, clockwise from top left: 1. Shalmala River; 2. A layered view of paddy fields and arecanut plantations; 3 & 4. Views of pepper and arecanut plantations.



Clockwise from top left: 1. Path leading to the remains of Sonda Fort; 2. Inner fort entrance with dilapidated walls; 3. Kote Anjaneya/Hanumanatha near the fort remains; 4. A stone Lion statue dedicated to Goddess Durga from the Sonda period.



Clockwise from top left: 1 & 2. A Shiva temple facing north, attributed to the Sonda chiefs; 3. A king's seat sculpted from stone; 4. Cannons surrounded by a moat and fort wall.

Sonda holds great historical significance, as it was ruled by the Sonda Nayakas from 1400 to 1764. They governed large parts of Uttara Kannada, wielding power over territories between the Sharavathi and Kali rivers below the Ghats, as well as the entire region above the Ghats. Their rule also extended to parts of Soraba and Sagar taluks in Shimoga, along with certain areas of Goa.

Initially, under Arasappa Nayaka, the Sonda Nayakas were followers of Jainism. However, during the reign of Raghunatha Nayaka, they embraced Veerashaivism. The Sonda Nayakas frequently revolted against the Keladi (Ikkeri) Nayakas, who were their neighbors, but they maintained friendly relations with the Portuguese.

The Queen of Belavadi (in Belagavi district), who defied Shivaji in 1677, is believed to have been a princess from the Sonda royal family.

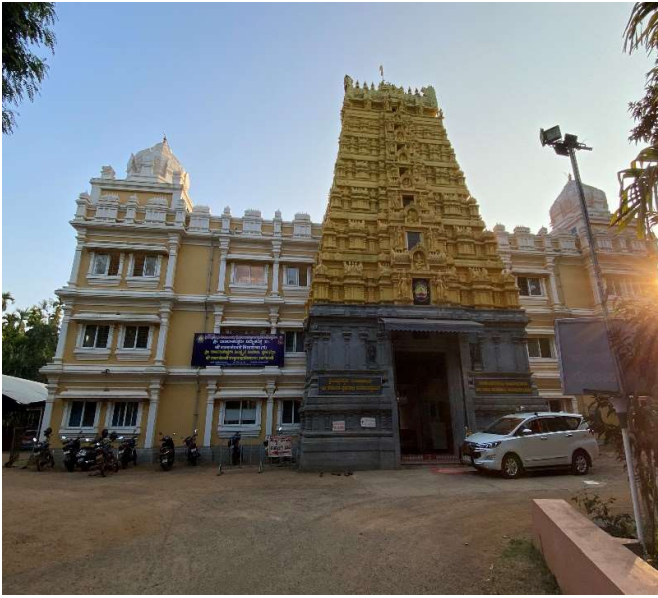
In 1763, when Hyder Ali conquered Sonda, Sadashiva II (Immadi Sadashiva Raja) fled to Portuguese-controlled Goa and sought their protection. With this conquest, Sonda's territories in Uttara Kannada fell into the hands of Hyder Ali.



*Clockwise from top left: 1. A stone carving of Sonda King Madhu Lingappa near Sahasrahalli along the Shalamala River; 2. Sawai Basavalinga II Rajendra Wadiyar; 3. The Raj of Sundem with his wives; 4. Present-day descendant Madhulinga Nagesh Rajendra Wodeyar, residing in Ponda/Belagavi**. Source-Internet archive*

The present descendants of the Sonda Kings reside in the Shivrth Palace in Ponda, Goa, where they are locally known as Soundekar Raja or Rei de Sundem.

The present member of the royal family, Madhulinga Nagesh, also known as Rajendra Wadiyar currently resides in Shivrth Palace, Ponda, Goa.



Glimpses of Swarnavalli Matha (also known as Honnavalli Matha), belonging to the Havyaka Brahmins. The matha houses small shrines dedicated to Chandramouleshwara (Lord Shiva) and Lakshmi Narasimha, built in the later Vijayanagara style.

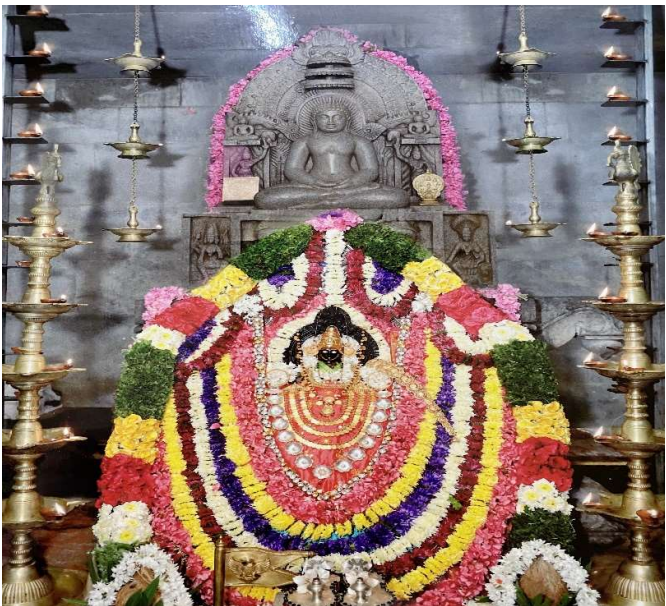
First, I visited Swarnavalli Matha, which Buchanan referred to as Honawully Matam or the Golden Convent. It is located on the banks of the Shalmala River and belongs to the Haigas, also known as Havyakas.

I was introduced to the Matha administrator and shared details about my retracing journey, mentioning that Francis Buchanan had visited this Matha in 1801. They found this quite interesting and even showed me old documents of Honawully Matam. The name "Honna" in Kannada translates to "gold," which was later Sanskritized as Swarnavalli Matha.

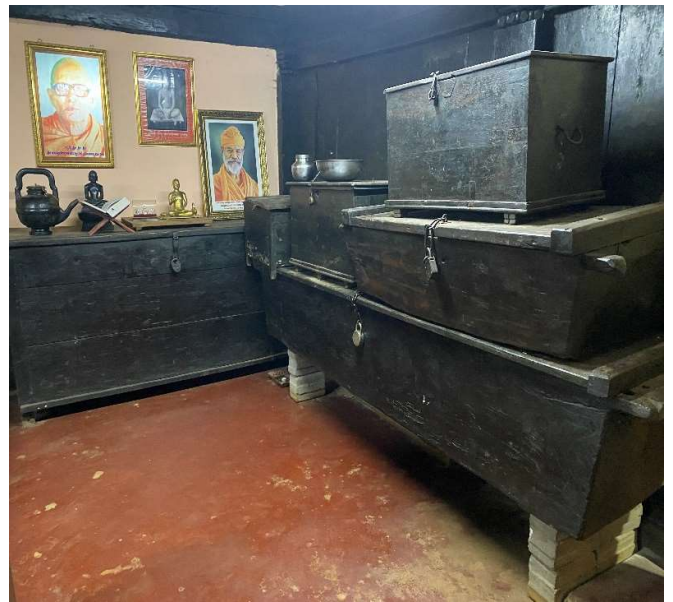
The Matha administrator gave me a brief history of the institution. Swarnavalli Matha is a branch of Sringeri Matha, believed to have been founded by Bhaskarendra Saraswati at the instruction of Shankaracharya. Initially, the headquarters of the Matha was at Gokarna, but later, upon the invitation of the Sonda Kings, the 29th Swami arrived and settled at Sahasrahalli, on the banks of the Shalmala River. Subsequently, Arasappa Nayaka granted land and built temples and the Matha complex.

The Matha houses small shrines dedicated to Chandramouleshwara (Lord Shiva) and Lakshmi Narasimha, both constructed in the later Vijayanagara style.

The Matha administrator offered me evening snacks of "Avalakki Mosaru" (beaten rice topped with curd) along with tea, and we discussed the history of Sonda and the surrounding regions.



Clockwise from top left: 1 & 2. The old building of Swadhi Jaina Digambara Matha, Sondha; 3. Shri Neminatha Swamy and Aamra Kushmandini Devi, Sondha.



Clockwise from top left: 1 & 2. Gajakesari Peetha inside Swadhi Matha; 3. Antique remains housed within the matha; 4. Stone tank used in olden days near Basadi.



Clockwise from top left: 1. The ancient Basadi removed and a new one under construction at the site; 2. Muttina Kere in front of Adinatha Swamy Basadi; 3. Image of Shri Adinatha Swamy in a temporary shed due to temple rebuilding; 4. Nagara Kaallu (Serpent Worship) within the Basadi premises.

Next, I visited the Swadi Digambara Jain Matha, which houses the idols of Neminatha Swami and Shri Kushmandini Devi. Beside it, there is a Matha, where I went inside and saw a partly decorated wooden seat, likely used by the head of the Jain Sannyasis on auspicious occasions.

The Jain Basadi was undergoing repairs and new construction. About 300 meters away, another Jain Basadi dedicated to Parshvanatha stands, with a beautiful temple pond in front of it, known as Muttina Kere.

Adjacent to the Parshvanatha Basadi, there is a Venkataramana Temple



A glimpse of Sodhe Vadiraja Matha and Rama Trivikarama Temple, along with a stone inscription adjacent to the temple in Sondha.

Next, I visited the Sode Vadiraja Matha, one of the Ashta Mathas of Udupi, where Vadiraja Swamy served as the successor.

This Matha holds special reverence, as it houses the Brindavana (samadhi) of Vadiraja Swamy, the tenth guru of the Peetha.

I saw many Madhwa Brahmin students in this convent, who had come from different regions to study the Vedas and other religious scriptures. Similarly, at Swarnavalli Matha, I also observed many students engaged in religious studies from various parts of the region.

Sonda, once a flourishing capital, is now home to numerous temples and mutts, though many of them are in ruins. According to the 1763 Uttara Kannada District Gazetteer, Hyder Ali destroyed the town. During the Sonda Nayaka rule, the town was vast, with fortified walls extending approximately three miles in all directions. It is said to have been densely populated with nearly 10,000 houses. However, after Hyder Ali's attack, only about 50 houses remained.

Today, apart from a few surviving mutts like Swarnavalli Matha, Vadiraja Matha, the Jain Basadi, and the Veerashaiva Mahattina Matha, only a handful of scattered houses remain. The once-thriving town is now covered with lush green forests and dense vegetation.



Sahasralinga (formerly Sahasrahalli): A valley along the Shalmala River featuring carved Shiva Lingas and Basava (Nandi) sculptures.

Near Sonda, I visited **Sahasralinga** (formerly known as **Sahasrahalli**), a **beautiful valley** where the **pristine Shalmala River** flows through **dense forests**. Along the riverbed, numerous **Shiva Lingas**, accompanied by **Nandi sculptures**, are carved into the rocks. Additionally, a few **inscriptions of the Sonda kings** can also be found here.

Sirsi (Sersi)

On the same day, I visited Sirsi, also known as Shirasi, which is located around 16 km from Sonda. It is a taluk headquarters, situated 105 km from Karwar, in the lower Ghat region.

Buchanan mentioned that Sirsi was once surrounded by three lines of fortifications, but today, no trace of the fort remains. During his time, Sirsi was a small village, but it has now grown into a major town in Uttara Kannada district, attracting many tourists due to its historical temples, numerous waterfalls, and adventure spots.

The fort of Sirsi, which no longer exists, was built by Sonda Ramachandra Nayaka, who named it "Channapattana.



Left to Right: 1. Sirsi Marikamba Temple; 2. A buffalo inside the temple premises.

The earliest temples in Sirsi are Shankara and Ganapathi, both dating back to the Vijayanagara period. Other temples, such as Marikamba, Veerabhadra, Ishwara, and Parshwanatha, were built in later periods.

The Marikamba Temple in Sirsi was built in 1689 AD. The wooden idol of the goddess is believed to have been discovered in a tank, and the temple gradually developed over time. Interestingly, Francis Buchanan did not mention this temple.

The grand **Sirsi Marikamba Jaatre** is one of the **biggest fairs in Karnataka**, attracting **thousands of devotees from across the region**. This festival is usually held **during the summer months** and is celebrated with great devotion and enthusiasm.

Sources of Two Rivers:



Shankara Honda (Pond), Sirsi – Buchanan noted it as the source of the Aghanashini and Shalmala rivers.

“From a garden on the west side of Sersi, the shalmala, or Gangawali river takes its rise; and on its east side, from a tank called Aganasini, issues a river of the same name, which in the lower part of its course is called the Tari-holay”.

-Francis Buchana, Chapter XVII

During my discussion at Swarnavalli Matha, the Matha administrator also confirmed that the Shalmala River originates in Sirsi, from Shankara Honda, and not from Dharwad. However, the Uttara Kannada Gazetteer mentions its origin near Dharwad, which might be a confusion with the Bedthi River.

The Bedthi River originates near Hubli, whereas the Shalmala River is a tributary of the Bedthi, as mentioned earlier. This discrepancy highlights the need for **historians and environmentalists** to conduct further research and clarify the true origin of the **Shalmala River**.



Below Shankara Honda (Pond): The Natural Outlet Overflow Channel.

Below Shankara Honda (pond), a family resides nearby. During the rainy season, the excess water used to overflow through a channel, which I observed. However, the channel is now blocked, and sewage is flowing through it instead. When I spoke with them, they mentioned that their forefathers also believed this to be the origin of a river, but they were uncertain. They may be reluctant to disclose more information, perhaps fearing that doing so might have consequences for them.

Sirsi is renowned for its areca nut plantations, primarily cultivated by the Havyaka Brahmins, who are considered experts in its cultivation. Alongside areca nut, cardamom and pepper are also grown in abundance. The economy of the taluk revolves around agriculture and plantations, making them the main source of revenue for the region.

During my visit to Sirsi, I came across TSS (Totagars' Cooperative Sale Society), a key player in the region's agricultural trade, particularly in areca nut cultivation. Established to empower local farmers, TSS has grown into a major cooperative, ensuring fair pricing and a stable market for agricultural produce.

A visit to the TSS marketplace showcases a diverse range of products, including spices, honey, organic fertilizers, FMCG products, and traditional farming tools, reflecting the agrarian richness of Uttara Kannada district.

Banavasi(Banawasi)



On February 2, 2025, I began my journey towards Banavasi, located approximately 22 km from Sirsi. Banavasi is one of the oldest towns and former capitals of Karnataka.

Since it was winter, the roads were covered in dense fog, making visibility poor along the route. The terrain was also difficult to discern due to the fog.

The morning was pleasantly cool, but by noon, the weather turned warm. The terrain here consists of light forest cover, which becomes more prominent upon reaching Banavasi.



The town is encircled on three sides by the Varada River.

The terrain between Sirsi and Banavasi begins with light forest cover, but as one approaches Banavasi, the landscape transitions into plains with extensive paddy fields and arecanut plantations, interspersed with a few laterite hills.

Despite its name, Banavasi (derived from the Kannada term 'Bana', meaning forest) does not have dense forest cover today. The town is surrounded on three sides by the Varada River, which originates at Varadamoola, near Ikkeri, flows along the eastern side of Banavasi, and eventually joins the Tungabhadra River as one of its tributaries.





Clockwise from top left: 1. A street in Banavasi; 2 & 3. An old traditional house built with locally sourced mud walls and roof tiles; 4. The Varada River in front of Madukeshwara Temple.





Clockwise from top left: 1. Inside the navaranga mantapa of Madhukeshwara Temple; 2. A wooden chariot donated by Sonda King Ramachandra Nayaka in 1608 CE; 3. A beautiful elephant sculpture in the temple complex; 4. A mud wall in Banavasi village.

Today, this village is home to many ancient temples and monuments, making it a site of great historical significance. The name of Banavasi has varied over time.

In the Mahabharata, the place is referred to as Vanavasaka. The Buddhist text Mahavamsa mentions that Emperor Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to Vanavasa.

Banavasi was a notable center during the Satavahana period and served as the capital of their feudatories, the Chutus. Around 325 A.D., it became the capital of the Kadambas and was also known by other names such as Jayanthipura, Vijayanthipura, and Vijayanathi.



Old inscriptions at the temple premises. Right-side sculpture bears a 2nd-century AD Prakrit inscription in nail-headed Brahmi, recording the donation of a Naga image, tank, and vihara by Sivaskanda Nagasri.

Many inscriptions from the Satavahanas, Chalukyas, Vijayanagara rulers, and their feudatories, the Sonda kings, have been discovered in this historical town, establishing Banavasi as one of Karnataka's most prominent ancient centers.

Banavasi was a significant religious hub, associated with Lakula Shaivism, Veerashaivism, Vaishnavism, and Buddhism. Several foreign travelers, including Hiuen Tsang, Ptolemy, and Alberuni, referred to this place. Ptolemy's "Banaousei" has been identified with Banavasi.



Madhukeshwara Temple complex

Madhukeshwara Temple Complex

The main temple in Banavasi is the Madhukeshwara Temple, which has undergone expansion over the centuries. The architecture of the temple resembles styles found in coastal and Malenadu regions, featuring sloped roofs, likely designed to drain heavy rainfall efficiently.

The temple is dedicated to Madhukeshwara (Shiva). When I inquired about the origin of the name "Madhu", two different explanations were given by the priests—one linking it to Madhu, a demon (Rakshasa), while another suggested that the linga's unique texture resembles honey (Madhu in Kannada/Sanskrit)

Originally built by the Kadambas, the temple saw additions during the Kalyana Chalukya and Sonda periods. The present structure was restored during the Sonda rule, though the idol of Adi Madhava and Kartikeya likely dates back to the Kadamba period.

Temple Architecture

The Madhukeshwara Temple faces east and follows a square-plan Garbhagriha (sanctum) with a circumambulatory (Pradakshina) passage around it, housing the Madhukeshwara Linga on a decorated Yonipitha. Two sub-shrines are attached to the eastern wall, dedicated to Mahishamardini and Ganesha.

The main hall features massive square-sectioned pillars, characteristic of Western Chalukya architecture. It leads into a Navaranga, supported by ornate lathe-turned pillars, housing a beautifully carved couchant Nandi and Kakshasana arrangements along the periphery, with entrances on three sides, dating to the Kalyana Chalukya period. Within the temple, sculptures of Adi Madhava and Kartikeya display early architectural features.

The present superstructure, built during the Vijayanagara-Sonda period, rises in a stepped pyramidal form, reflecting the Kadamba-Nagara style, with a Sukanasa in front. The Shikhara is decorated with stucco figures, including Nandi at the corners, the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the twelve forms of Aditya, the guardian deities (Dikpalakas), and Nagabandhas.

The roof of the Navaranga is flat at the center and slopes along the edges. In front of the temple stands a Dhvajastambha (flagpole). Along the Prakara (enclosure) wall, sub-shrines house Dikpalakas, Dhundiraja, Ganapati, Chintamani Narasimha, and other sculptures, contributions of the Sonda kings.



Adhi Madhava (Vishnu) image inside Madhukeshwara Temple, dating to the Kadamba period.



Left to Right: 1. Trilokamandapa, now in the temple's Navaranga, donated by Sonda King Sadashiva Nayaka; 2. The stone cot, a remarkable piece donated by Raghunatha Nayaka (AD 1628).

Among the most significant objects within the Madhukeshwara Temple premises are the inscribed Naga sculpture and the highly ornate stone cot.

The inscribed Naga sculpture, carved on a thin rectangular slab, features a beautifully detailed five-hooded coiled serpent as the central figure. The sculpture bears an inscription in nail-headed Brahmi characters (2nd century AD), written in Prakrit, along the

side borders. The inscription records the gift of this Naga image, along with a tank and Vihara, by Sivaskanda Nagasri, daughter of Hariputra Vinhukada Chutukulananda Satakarni, in his 12th regnal year.

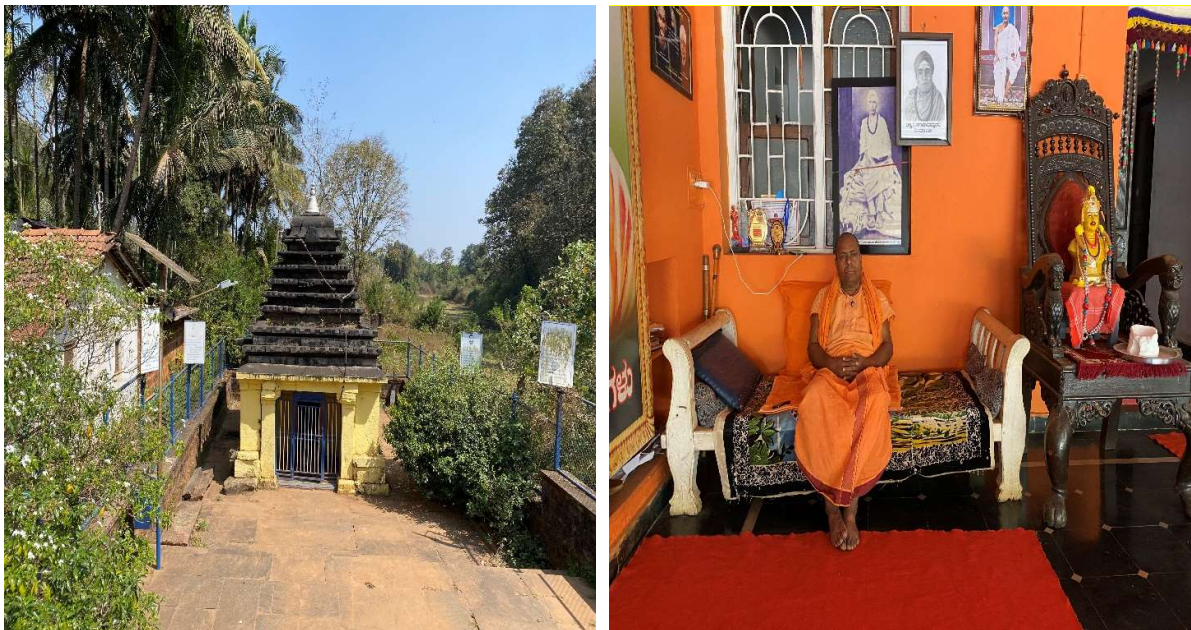
Notably, the epigraph also mentions the sculptor's name, Nataka, a disciple of Acharya Damoraka, who hailed from Sanjayati (Banavasi). This inscription is one of the earliest epigraphical references to a sculptor's name in Indian history.

Trilokamandapa and Stone Cot

Another significant artifact is the Trilokamandapa, currently placed in the Navaranga of the temple. It was donated by Sonda king Sadasiva Nayaka (16th century AD) and features delicate carvings showcasing intricate craftsmanship.

The stone cot, another remarkable piece, was donated by Raghunatha Nayaka (AD 1628). Every inch of this masterpiece is covered with intricate floral, animal, and geometric patterns, demonstrating exceptional stone-carving skills.

Two elegantly carved stone elephants stand at the flight of steps leading to the eastern main entrance of the temple complex.



Left to Right: 1. Parbhudeva (Allama Prabhu) Temple; 2. Holematha, Banavasi.

Other Temples in Banavasi:

Apart from the Madhukeshwara Temple, Banavasi is home to several other temples of modest size and ornamentation, including Adikadambeshwara, Adimadhukeshwara, Basaveshwara, Kadambeshwara, Nilakantha, Sithikantheshwara, Venkataramana, Bayala, Nilakantha Temple, Holematha, and Prabudeva (Allamaprabhu) temples, among others.

The main priest of Madhukeshwara Temple is a Havyaka Brahmin from the coastal (below Ghat) region. During my visit, I also went to Holematha, a Lingayat mutt that likely dates back to the Sonda period.

The culture, food, and language in Banavasi reflect a blend of influences from North Karnataka and the Malenadu region, given its proximity to both.

At the temple, free prasada (meal) was served, and the temple administrator advised me to partake in the temple lunch. After a long journey, feeling exhausted, I chose to rest near Holematha, where the guru graciously offered free lodging and food provided by the temple.

Chandragutthi (anglicized: Chandragupthi)



On February 3, 2025, it was a pleasant morning with dense fog as I began my journey towards Chandragutthi. Just 5 km from Banavasi, I stopped at a tea shop, where I met an elderly man engaged in a conversation with his companions.

During our discussion, he mentioned that dense fog could lead to a decrease in water levels in reservoirs and other water sources. He also remarked that as we were approaching the end of winter and the start of summer, water scarcity could become a serious issue this year.

This insight from an experienced farmer gave me a valuable perspective on how weather and climate patterns impact water availability. The stream of the **Varada River**, which I crossed via a **bridge**, had **scarce water** and was **slow-moving**.



Left to Right: 1. Paddy cultivation along the Varada River on the way to Chandragutthi from Banavasi; 2. A farmer preparing the land for a second crop—Jola (maize).

Along the way, I saw many houses with Mangalore-tiled roofs, showcasing their unique antique architectural style. In front of these houses, areca nuts were laid out to dry, likely from the nearby areca nut plantations.

I also passed through vast paddy fields, with coconut and arecanut being the main crops in the region. I noticed a farmer preparing his land for the second crop, which was jola (maize).



Sheep grazing in harvested paddy fields with a view of Chnadragutthi Hill from the east.

As I approached the Chandragutti Hills, I saw many sheep grazing in the open fields. Locals told me that after the rainy season, shepherds from Haveri and other regions migrate to the adjacent Malenadu region for grazing. Even private plantation owners pay these shepherds a good sum, allowing the sheep to graze on their land, as sheep dung is used as a natural fertilizer. I had heard of a similar practice near Malebennur in Davangere district.

Upon reaching the village of Chandragutti, I found that it is a hobli under Soraba taluk, located about 16 km northwest of Soraba town. Buchanan mentioned that upon arriving here, he entered the territory of the Mysore Raja. This suggests that during 1800-1801, Chandragutti was part of the Mysore Kingdom.

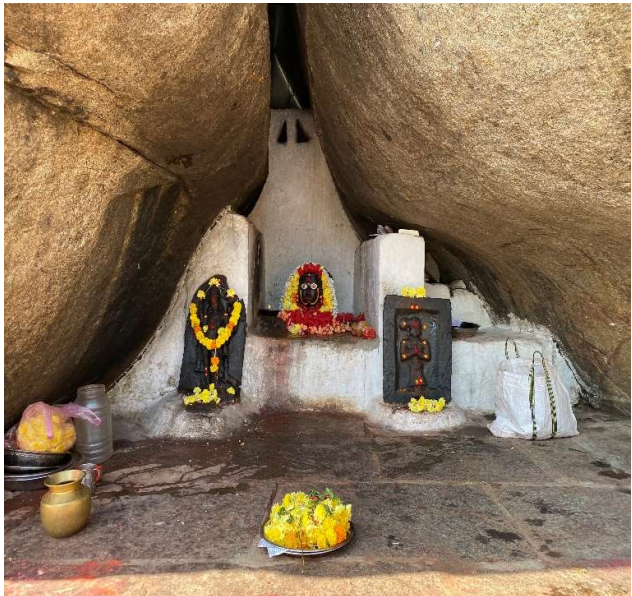
In earlier times, Chandragutti was known by different names, including Chandraguptapura, Chandraguttipura, Chandraguttipete, and Guttidurga. The village is situated at the base of a hill, surrounded by a densely forested area.



Near the base of the hill, I saw a group of devotees from the Haveri region who had come to visit the temple. Their entire family traveled in a tractor, which was decorated and covered with plastic tarpaulin to shield them from the sun. The tractor-trailer was arranged for them to sit comfortably during the journey.

I had a conversation with them and learned that they visit the temple once a year for their annual ritual. As part of their tradition, they perform animal sacrifice and stay here for one or two days before returning home.

I recalled my childhood memories from my mother's native, where we used to attend the annual jaathre (fair) by whole family travelling in a bullock cart—a tradition later replaced by tractors.



Clockwise from top left: 1. Chandragutt Hyamma Temple; 2. A large banyan tree along the hill ascent; 3. Nagara Kaallu (serpent worship); 4. Renukamba (Renuka Devi), mother of Parashurama, with a small cave near the main cave temple



Left to Right: 1. Anjaneya Temple at the base of the hill; 2. Shoolada Beerappa on the hill near Chandraguttiyamma Temple.

Renukamba Temple is located inside a large natural cave, housing a small Shiva Linga covered with the metallic face of Renuka, the wife of Jamadagni and mother of Parashurama. Here, Renuka is also called Chandraguttiamma. The cave is believed to be the place where Renuka hid when Parashurama pursued her. The outer façade of the cave serves as a vestibule, built in the Chalukyan architectural style. A pillared sabha mandapa (assembly hall) was added during the Vijayanagara period, following an east-west orientation. At the foot of the Renukamba Temple, facing west stands a Bhairava Temple, which has undergone modern alterations, such as a tiled roof.

I then began my trek to the summit, first passing through the temple and then entering the forest-covered hills. Since I was alone, I asked a local vendor about potential dangers. He assured me that there were no large carnivorous animals, except for wild boars, and advised me to avoid trekking alone. Seeing that the incline was not as steep as Kabbaladurga or Savandurga, which I had climbed earlier, I proceeded at a slow and steady pace. After crossing the first stretch, I came across a lake, possibly an ancient water reservoir that once served the temple. Along the way, I also saw many ruined fort ramparts, remnants of an era when the fort was a significant stronghold.

This fort was an early stronghold of the Kadambas of Banavasi. It was later ruled by the Vijayanagara Empire, Keladi Nayakas, Biligi chiefs, and Hyder Ali. Eventually, Parashuram Bhau and Dhondia Wagh attacked and seized the fort, as recorded in the Gazetteer.



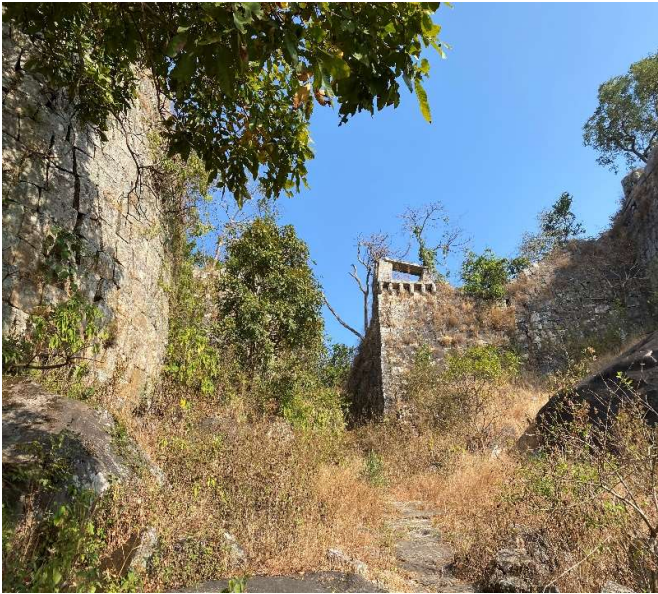


The forest route to the fort hilltop with fort remains and dilapidated fort wall ramparts.



“the Rock on which the fort is built is a white granite without observable strata, exactly like that of Jamalobhad, and which is Common throughout Haiga. The nature of the minerals there and here is indeed quite similar”.

- Francis Buchanan, Chapter XVII



Clockwise from top left: 1. Stone fort rampart; 2. A dilapidated cast-iron cannon; 3. An olden day's rainwater storage source; 4. A small stone trough for water, likely used for domestic animals.

Since it was early morning, the hill was covered in dense fog, reducing visibility to barely five meters. I couldn't see the hill peak, but I began my hike, encountering several fort entrances, most of which were dilapidated, along with defensive structures and fort ramparts.

As I moved through the midst of the forest, I noticed several Malabar giant squirrels leaping from one tree to another, seemingly startled by my presence, as though I were a foreigner in their land. I even came across a rusted, dilapidated cannon, which appeared to be a casting-type cannon.



Clockwise from top left: 1. Remains of a temple and magazine structure; 2. View from the top; 3. Defensive wall structure on the hill; 4. A water source carved from a huge granitic rock, probably used in olden days by soldiers.

Further ahead, as I reached the hilltop, I saw a few ponds carved from granite, but the stagnant water was unfit for drinking. Nearby, I found the remains of an old temple, and a large stone structure, which appeared to be the remains of a magazine (ammunition storage site).

The view from the hill, beneath the fog-covered forest region, resembled the scenic landscape of Nandi Hills near Bangalore. The region was densely covered with thick forests, adding to its mystique.

After descending the hill, I traveled around 5 km north. As Buchanan mentioned, I came across a coss (The Coss (Kos) was a historical unit of distance commonly used in India before the British approximately 3.2 to 4 km)). Here, I observed black stone formations amalgamated with clay, along with laterite veins containing traces of iron ore. The samples had a high density, likely indicating iron ore deposits, just as Buchanan had documented.



Clockwise from top left: 1. An elder man from the Koracha/Korama community making baskets; 2. Various types of baskets and a fishnet for local use; 3. In front of their house; 4. Raw material 'Samey,' a plant similar to bamboo but distinct from it.

Further, along the way, I met an elderly Koracha/Korama man who was weaving a fishing net using 'Samey,' a plant similar to bamboo but distinct from it. I had encountered a similar material during my journey near Udupi.

I interacted with him about the various products he crafts, including traditional fishing nets and other household items. We discussed the market for his products, as well as his community and their language. The Koracha/Korama people speak a distinct language closely related to Kannada, with influences from Telugu and other Dravidian languages.

He also mentioned that their community consumes all types of meat except cows, which they worship. Interestingly, his sons are educated and work in a town, while the family also owns a small piece of land with an areca nut plantation.

Buchanan mentioned that sandalwood trees were once abundant around Chandragutti and that Muslim traders extracted sandalwood oil from them. However, due to overexploitation and smuggling, the natural sandalwood population in this region has drastically declined. Today, sandalwood trees in Karnataka are protected by law, and their cutting and trade are strictly regulated by the Karnataka Forest Department.

Further, I traveled towards **Keladi**, passing through **Suntikoppa**, which Buchanan documented as **Sunticopa** or **dry ginger village**. The **terrain here is mostly flat**, with **vast paddy fields** and a few **plantations**. The **Varada River**, which flows to the **west**, appeared **dried up**. Buchanan mentioned that during the **monsoon season**, the **river overflows**, often **destroying crops** along its banks.

The major community in this region belongs to the **Idiga (Halepaika) community**, with **Mallava Gowdas of the Veerashaiva tradition** also being significant. Interestingly, Buchanan recorded that **Sadashiva Nayaka of Keladi's father** belonged to this **same Veerashaiva community**, which aligns with the **demographics he documented**.

"In this neighbourhood the village god is Nandi, or the bull on which Siva rides. He is also called Baswa, and receives no sacrifices, which are held in abhorrence by the Sivabhaktar chiefs (Gaudas)."

Near **Suntikoppa village**, close to **Chikanelluru**, there exists an **Eshwara Nadishwara Temple**, which is likely the **temple Buchanan referred to** in his records.

Keladi (Kilidi)

On the same day, I reached **Keladi**, which is now a **village located around 6 km north of Sagara Town**. Historically, **Keladi was the first capital of the Keladi Nayakas**, before they later **shifted their capital to Ikkeri and then to Bidanur (Nagara)**



Glimpse of Bandagadde Mutt—once the Rajaguru Matha for Keladi chiefs and belongs to the Shivabhaktara (Veerashaiva) community.

While passing near Keladi, I reached Bandagadde, where someone informed me about an old mutt (matha) dating back to the Keladi period. This mutt served as the Rajaguru Matha for the Keladi chiefs and belongs to the Shivabhaktara (Veerashaiva) community.

I met the matha guru, who guided me through the monastery and its historical structures. A significant tradition here is the public display of an Emerald Shiva Linga during the Dasara festival. For the rest of the year, the linga is securely kept in a bank, as it is a highly valuable artifact gifted by the Keladi chiefs.



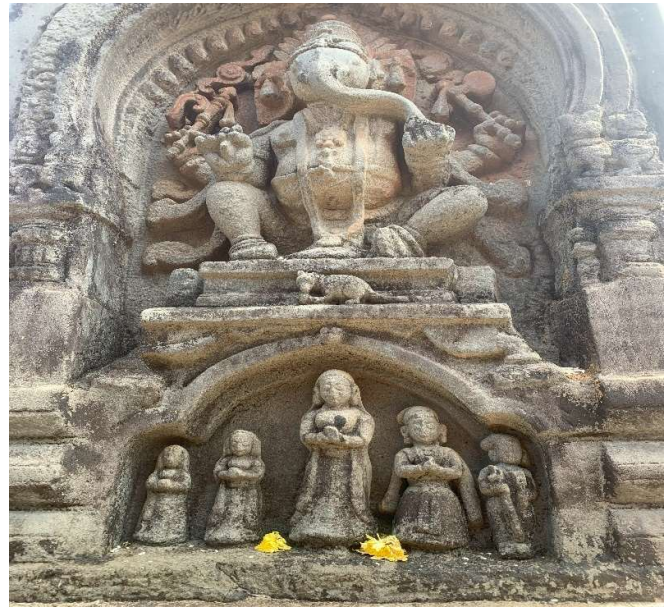
Keladi Heere Kere

Further, I crossed a big lake that locals called “Keladi Heere kere” and this lake irrigates nearby many paddy fields and plantations there are two granite pillars that are interconnected, and it's an ancient water measuring system.

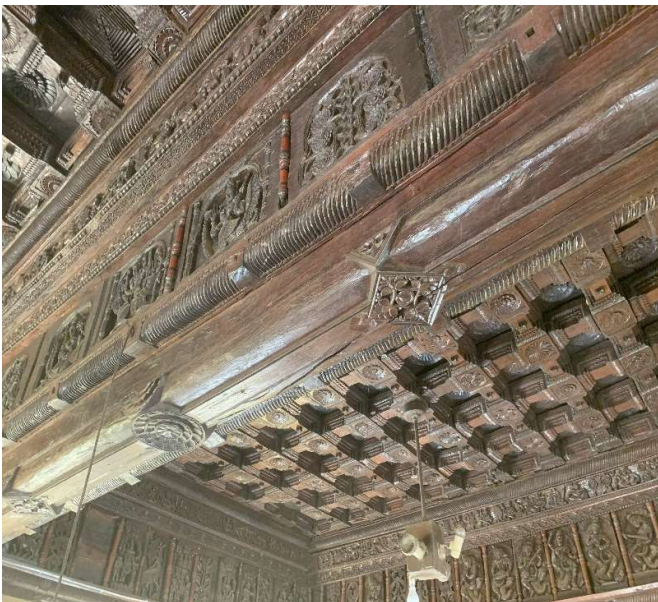
The Rameshwara Temple is the most significant temple structure at the northern end of the village, accompanied by two other medium-sized structures. Upon approaching the temple, one first encounters a large courtyard, which is now enclosed with modern tiled verandas.

At the center of the courtyard stands the Rameshwara Temple, with the Veerabhadra Temple to its right and the Parvati Temple to its left. The Rameshwara and Veerabhadra Temples share the same temple enclosure. Inside the Veerabhadra Temple, the ceiling features a stone carving of Gandabherunda, a mythical two-headed bird.

I interacted with the main Brahmin priest of the Rameshwara Temple, who mentioned that his family has continued the legacy of worship for many generations. Meanwhile, the worship at the Veerabhadra Temple is conducted by the Veerashaiva community. Within the courtyard, I also observed several religious sculptures and figures, including Hanuman, Vishnu, and other deities.



Clockwise from top left: 1. Keladi Rameshwara Temple premises; 2. The Keladi kingdom's royal insignia, 'Gandaberunda'; 3. A memorial to Queen Chennamma and Rajaram Chatrapati—Queen Chennamma sheltered a Maratha ruler (son of Shivaji) fleeing from Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb—erected opposite Veerabhadra Temple; 4. Sapthamatrikas on the temple's backside.



Keladi period architecture featuring wooden log pillars at the courtyard entrance paired with modern roof tiles.

In Keladi, there is a **Government Museum** that preserves **artifacts from the Keladi period**. The museum houses an **old temple chariot** with several **inscriptions**, along with **Masthi Kallu/Maha Sati Kallu (memorial stones for sati)** and other **interesting historical artifacts**.

Buchanan mentioned the history of the Keladi chiefs, stating that they were originally hereditary chiefs (Gaudas) governing five to six villages in the surrounding region. They belonged to the Shivabhaktara sect of the Mallava caste (Veerashaiva Mallavaru), tracing their lineage from Basavappa Gowda and his son Chowdappa to the reign of Veerammaji.

The Keladi rulers were also known as **Ikkeri Nayakas**, particularly during the reign of **Veerammaji, the wife of Basavappa Nayaka, and her adopted son, Somashekara Nayaka**. In 1763, **Hyder Ali Khan** attacked the **Bidanur (Nagara) Fort**, capturing **Veerammaji and Somashekara Nayaka** and sending them to **Madhugiri Fort**. However, they were later **rescued by the Marathas**, who attacked **Madhugiri Fort**. Unfortunately, **Veerammaji passed away while traveling to Poona (Pune)**, while the **Marathas took the young prince, Somashekara Nayaka, to their capital**.

It is believed that **Veerammaji was cremated within the premises of the Ujjini Mutt temple**, one of the **five sacred Panchapeethas of the Veerashaiva tradition**. Since the **Keladi rulers were ardent followers of this Ujjini Peetha (branch)**. The mutt is located in the **present-day Vijayanagara district**.

Further, I traveled towards **Ikkeri**, which is around **12 km from Keladi**. To reach Ikkeri, one must **cross Sagara Town**, which serves as a **taluk center** for both of these **historically significant places**.

Ikkeri (Ikeri)

On my journey to Ikkeri, I passed through Sagara Town, which Buchanan described as, 'Near Ikkeri, I saw a well-built town named Sagar. At that time, it was the residence of the Chief of the district (Amildar).' Today, Sagara is a taluk center, located 72 km northwest of Shimoga city, serving as the headquarters of Sagar taluk. Historically, it was an important trading center for areca nut, paddy, pepper, and sandalwood products.

The town was originally built by Sadashiva Nayaka of Ikkeri, named after that lake 'Sadashiva Sagara'. However, over time, the name was shortened to 'Sagara', and the lake is now locally known as Ganapathi Kere. The Bangalore-Honnava Highway passes through Sagara, making it a strategic location for trade and tourism.



Sagara Town Weekly Fair Market

Sagara is renowned for its skilled Gudigar craftsmen, known for their exquisite sandalwood and ivory carvings. There is also a Gudigar Cooperative Society supporting these artisans. However, the town has expanded rapidly, attracting many tourists due to its proximity to Jog Falls, Ikkeri, Keladi, and other historical and natural attractions.

Given the abundant timber resources, I wondered why the government has not initiated a wooden toy manufacturing industry, similar to Channapatna, or established a craftsmen training institute. While discussing this with a local at a nearby tea shop, he agreed that such an initiative could benefit the region's already skilled artisans.



Arecanuts drying outside the field after processing, near Sagara.



Handwoven Khadi crafted by the artisan co-operative 'Shramajeevi Ashrama and Charaka' — a dynamic rural textile initiative.

Near Sagara, **Heggodu** is known for its **handwoven Khadi**, woven by a small group of artisans. Close to Heggodu, there is a **cooperative society named 'Shramajeevi Ashrama and Charaka'**, a **dynamic rural Khadi cooperative** that engages **local women and other community members** in traditional weaving. This initiative helps sustain **age-old weaving practices**, while also providing livelihood opportunities. The products crafted here are marketed in **major cities like Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore, and others**.



Ikkeri surrounding

Ikkeri is now a small hamlet near Aralikoppa, about 3 km from Sagara Town. The name 'Ikkeri' in Kannada means 'Two Streets'. It once served as the capital of the Keladi chiefs for a period, during which they minted Ikkeri Pagodas and Fanams. Even after shifting their capital and minting operations to Bidanur (Nagara), the name Ikkeri remained associated with their coinage.

Buchanan documented that during the rule of the Ikkeri chiefs, this place was a large and prosperous town. According to local accounts, it is said—perhaps with some exaggeration—to have contained nearly 1,00,000 houses. However, by the

time Buchanan visited, he noted that Ikkeri no longer had a town, describing it as a deserted place overgrown with trees and forest vegetation.

Even today, there have been no significant excavations or government-led conservation efforts to preserve this historically important site. Unfortunately, many remnants of the past have been damaged by treasure hunters. Near the Aghoreshwara Temple, there is a fine lake (kere), adding to the landscape of this once-flourishing capital.



Lake adjacent to Aghoreshwara Temple, Ikkeri.



Clockwise from top left: 1. Aghoreshwara and Akhilandeswari Temple; 2. Nandi Mantapa in front of the temple; 3. Inside the temple (Navaranga Mandapa); 4. Basava (Nandi).

The Aghoreshwara Temple is the only remaining vestige of Ikkeri's former greatness. It is a large, well-proportioned stone structure, with a square Nandi Mantapa in front, housing a massive Nandi (Basava) idol. The temple consists of a garbhagriha (sanctum), an open Sukanasi, and a large Mukhamandapa, which is notably tall. The temple faces north and features lofty ornamental doors on its north, east, and west sides.

Historically, the temple housed a metallic idol of Aghoreshwara with 32 hands, representing Lord Shiva. This was documented by Pietro Della Valle, who visited during the reign of Hiriya Venkatappa Nayaka. However, during the Bijapur Sultanate's invasion, Randulla Khan destroyed the original idol. Today, a large Shiva Linga has been placed inside and is actively worshipped. The pedestal of the original Aghoreshwara idol, made of stone, still lies outside the temple, giving an idea of the majestic scale of the lost metallic image.

The surrounding landscape of Ikkeri is similar to Keladi, with vast areca nut plantations and paddy fields. Nearby, I also visited the Ashrama of Shridara Swamy, which attracts many devotees and is administered by the Havyaka community.



View of Madenur Dam in summer, when reduced water levels reveal the reservoir.



Clockwise from top left: 1. An old bridge that once connected Hosanagara and Sagara; 2, 3 & 4. Madenur Dam, built during the colonial period.

On 4th February, I began my journey towards Nagara (Bidanur Nagara/Hyder Nagara). The terrain here was similar to the previous day, with vast areca nut plantations, small laterite hills, and paddy cultivation in the lowlands.



View of newly constructed Pataguppa Bridge

Further along, I crossed Genasinakuni, which Buchanan referred to as Ghenasu-guli, and then reached the Pataguppa Bridge. Near this point, two rivers merge, which Buchanan mentioned as Pada-gopi, a rivulet that is probably Pataguppa. From here, Buchanan reached Duma or Dumam, which is now known as Dhumma.

At the end of the bridge, I spoke with an elderly local who shared that this place was once part of the main road used by travelers between Hosanagar and Sagara. He recalled how, in his younger days, the river here was a small stream. However, in 1930, the construction of the Madenur Dam submerged much of the area, cutting off the original route. Later, in the 1960s, the Linganamakki Dam was built, submerging even more land, including the Madenur Dam itself. Today, a new bridge has been constructed over this region, restoring connectivity.

In Dhumma, Buchanan mentioned that there was only one house, which belonged to a Mallava Gauda. Even today, his descendants still reside in Dhumma village, with Basavappa Gowda as an ancestor and the current-generation member being Revanappa Gowda. However, their grand ancestral house was submerged due to the Sharavathi backwaters.

Today, Dhumma remains a small hamlet, with a terrain similar to Genasinakuni. Much of the surrounding land is now submerged under the Sharavathi backwaters. The Linganamakki Reservoir, built across the Sharavathi River in 1964, was constructed primarily for electricity generation, altering the landscape of the region significantly.

Fatah-petta (Futty petta)



Fateh-Petta, as mentioned in an East India Company map by Aaron Arrowsmith (1750–1823). Credit: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

Buchanan documented this place as Fatah-Pettah, or the 'Town of Victory,' stating that it was built by Hyder Ali to commemorate a military advantage he gained over the troops of the Princess of Ikkeri (Veerammaji). He established a new town with around 500 houses, but by the time Buchanan visited, it had declined to only 25 houses.

Near this town, a small stream called Ramachandrapura was noted, which originates from a source area. However, its actual name is Sharavathi River, which originates at Ambuthirtha (coordinates: 13°47'32"N 75°10'36"E). Based on this, Fatah-Pettah must have been located along the banks of the Sharavathi River, possibly in the area between Kumbatti and Devaganga. Today, there are no visible traces of this historic settlement, and only a few elderly locals still refer to the place as 'Fatah-Pete.'



Devaganga Pond, Nagara

Buchanan also documented that nearby it, the Raja had a farm, which produced coconut, areca, and rice. This farmland was irrigated by a canal that was supplied with crystal-clear water from a perennial stream. This suggests that the chiefs had their private agricultural lands.

Close to this farm, they also built a Mahal or palace, consisting of three-square enclosures surrounded by low, modest buildings covered with tiles.

These structures contained baths and other conveniences suitable for a

Hindu chief. Buchanan's description possibly refers to the Devaganga pond, which is near Nagara.

Further, I traveled to **Nagara**, also known as **Bidanur Nagara** or **Hyder-Nagar**, which has already been mentioned in **Chapter XVIII**. This historic town, once the **seat of power for the Keladi Nayakas**, later fell into the hands of **Hyder Ali**, who renamed it **Hyder-Nagar**. Today, while much of its grandeur has faded, its **rich past remains deeply embedded in the region's landscape and heritage**.

As I retraced **Buchanan's journey**, I could see how the **land, people, and traditions have changed over time**, yet some traces of the past remain. From **forgotten places like Fatah-Pettah** to **growing towns like Yellapura, and Sagara**, this journey showed the **rich history hidden in the Western Ghats**.

With this, the journey **comes full circle at Nagara (Bidanur/Hyder-Nagar)**, linking Buchanan's past observations with today's **landscape**. The **legacy of the Keladi rulers, the changes brought by Hyder Ali, and the natural beauty of the Sharavathi region** are all reminders of **Karnataka's deep history**. This journey also highlights the **importance of preserving these historical sites** so that future generations can continue to learn from them.
