

**Constituting identity within the sacred landscapes of early medieval South India**  
**The Chalukyas of Badami (ca. 550-750 CE)**

**Abstract:** In this paper I examine religious practices during the reign of the Early Chalukyas, and their constructions at Aihole. Situating this research within broader anthropological themes such as elite identity formation and re-use of landscapes I argue the following: first, Chalukyas settled and transformed a pre-existing memorial landscape that was also a thriving habitation during the first millennium CE; second, the female deities during Chalukya times-Saptamatrika and Lajja-Gauri-were locally worshipped by pastoralists and were co-opted by the Chalukyas, affirming the latter's strong local identity yet ensuring social exclusivity. I examine archaeological, architectural and iconographic evidence at Aihole, along with ethnographic evidence of narrative imagery from pastoral mythology in North Karnataka and Southern Maharashtra. In conclusion, I present recent thoughts to take this research forward in exciting new directions, especially highlighting the need for a more integrated approach bringing together ecological studies using remote sensing techniques, ethno-historic studies, alongside epigraphical and archival research. These, I hope, will enable better understandings of the dynamics of the pasts under study.

**About the Speaker:** Dr. Hemanth Kadambi received his Ph.D. in Anthropological Archaeology from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, USA in December 2011. His doctoral dissertation titled Sacred Landscapes in early medieval South India: the Chalukya state and society (ca. 550-750 AD), investigated the material manifestations through which the early medieval empire of the Chalukyas of Vatapi were able to create and maintain their expansive territorial domain. As part of his doctoral research he directed the first-ever systematic archaeological survey of a 5 sq.km area at Aihole village in North Karnataka. He has published some of this work in Norman Yoffee's edited book 'Negotiating the Past in the Past', published by the University of Arizona Press (2007). He is working on a book-length manuscript based on his revised dissertation, besides several article-length papers.

Hemanth also has an M.Phil and M.A. from the Center for Historical Studies, JNU (2001, 1999 respectively) where he specialized in early Indian history. He pursued History as his intellectual passion after graduating from St. Joseph's College in Bangalore with a B.A.

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He has recently returned to India after having taught for the last five years as an Assistant Professor (adjunct) in the Departments of History, and Sociology & Anthropology, at the Illinois State University, USA. He has received high praise for his teaching from his students and colleagues.

Besides academic interests Hemanth maintains his long time and deep engagement with Indian classical music and is an amateur tabla player.