



JAINA CENTRES OF BELAGAVI DISTRICT OF KARNATAKA (INDIA)

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ABSTRACT

The Belagavi district of Karnataka state is one of the most prosperous regions in the field of religion and culture. All religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity enjoyed a great liberality. Among these, the Jainism enjoyed a royal patronage from the earliest days. As a result the Jainism prospered the region. It played an important role in the fields of education, literature, art, architecture and culture. Belagavi, Halasi, Hooli, Saudatti, Ammanagi etc., are the most important centers of Jainism and its culture. With the help of several inscriptions, the present paper deals the prosperity of Jainism and its royal patronage in the district. inscriptions.

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INTRODUCTION

Jainism is not merely a set of principles and codes of conduct, but a way of life. It is an old pre-Aryan religion which prevailed as Dr. Radhakrishnan says, even before Prasvanath and Vardhamana Mahavira, the last two *Tirthankaras*. The Jaina Doctrine of *Anekanta*, principle of *Ahimsa* and its social ethics, in the ethics in the expression of *Anuvrata* has influenced the Indian way of life. The spirit of tolerance, which is largely due to *Anekanta*, has been clearly found in the culture of Karnataka. This is clear from an incident in the period of Vijayanagara Empire. In the reign of Bukkaraya I, a dispute arose between the Jainas and the Vaishnavas regarding some injustice done to the Jainas by the Vaisnavas. Bukkaraya settled the dispute politely. The relevance of the practice of *Ahimsa* cannot be under-estimated when we find today that we are engulfed in the orgy of violence. The Jaina social ethics and its expression in the form of *Anuvrata* movement of *Acharya* Tulasiji have greater relevance to the present day society. Jainism, even today played an important role in establishing harmony in the society. The Jainism is one of the ancient religions in Indian subcontinent. It was born in North India but influenced South India including Karnataka. It played an important role in cultural history, development of language, literature, art and education and even in the improvement of moral life of the people. Karnataka has many Jaina centers like Sravana Belagola, Karkala, Lakshmesvara, Mudabidare, Humcha etc. Jainism also gained importance in Belagavi district of Karnataka from the centuries and it enjoyed the royal patronage. The present paper deals with the Jainism and some Jaina centers of Belgavi district.

A Brief History of Belgavi District

Belagavi is an ancient site. The early name of Belagavi is Velugrama or Venugrama in inscription (E.I. 1982, XIII, p, 18a). The meaning of this name is "Bamboo Village". But the British Government called it as Belgaum. Now the Government of Karnataka changed its name as Belagavi. The city is situated in the north western parts of

Karnataka and lies at the border of two states, Maharashtra and Goa on the Western *Ghats*. After the excavation of Vadgaon and Madhavpur suburbs, the history of Belagavi traced back to the first century B.C. Belagavi district has a rich historical and cultural heritage. The region was ruled by many dynasties from the Satavahanas to the Vijayanagara rulers. Even in the days of the Marathas it played an important role in the politics. In modern times the place witnessed for the Congress Session held in 1924 under the president ship of Mahatma Gandhiji and which is the first and last Session of Gandhiji as the president of the Session. It was the place for the national movement and unification movement of Karnataka. The region has a rich cultural heritage and history of achievements. It is the place of many religions, cultures, languages and traditions.

Jainism and Jaina Centers in the District

Jainism entered South India well before the Christian era. According to Dr. P.B. Desai, "Jainism appears to have journeyed from North to Andhra region prior to the advent of Buddhism in the 6th Century B.C. The early contact of Jainism with the Tamil Country dates from the 4th Century B.C., as gathered from Buddhist chronicles of Ceylon" (Desai, 1957, p.101a).

The Sravanabelagola Inscription tells us that how the Jainism entered in to Karnataka. This is the only earliest historical evidence to prove this. It says that a Jain saint Bhadrababu along with king Chandragupta Maurya performed *Sellekhana vrita* at Sravanbelgola in Hasan district of Karnataka in 297 B.C. After the decline of the Mauryas, the Satavahanas succeeded in the Deccan, the first King Simukha, according to aina accounts, supposed to have built many *basadis* in the capital city of Paithan (Desai, 1957 p, 101b). The Kadambas of Banavasi, who ruled from the 4th century to the 6th century A.D., were essentially the followers of Hinduism. Yet some rulers like Kakusthavarma, Mrigesavarma and Ravivarma gave liberal grants to the Jaina temples. During the reign of the Kadambas of Banavasi, Halasi in the Belagavi district distinguished itself as an early and thriving centre of Jainism. The Halasi plates of Kakusthavarma start with an invocation of *Bhagavan* Jinendra and

ends with reverence to Rishabhanath, the first Tirthankara of Jainism and also an invocation of 80th victorious years of Jinendra. It records interesting information that the grant was made to *Senapati* Srutakirti for saving the King. Here, Srutakirti's name suggests that he was the follower of Yapaniya sect of Jainism (Gopal, 1, 1985, No.30a).

Halasi plates of Mrigesavarma dated his 8th regnal year, inform that the king erected *Jinalaya* for the merit of his father Santivarman and granted land to saints of Yapunya, Nirgrantha and Kurchaka Sangha (Gopal, 1, 1985, No.30b). The third set of copper plates also from Palasika (Halasi) belonging to the reign of Ravivarman, son of Mrigesavarma is historically most significant as it refers to the grants made to the Jain monastery at Halasi (Desai P.B, 1957, p, 110-12c). It also refers that Ravivarman was a more zealous supporter to the faith of Jainism. He issued an ordinance at the mighty city of Palasika exhorting that the festival for the glorification of Jinendra should be celebrated on specified days, that the ascetics of the Yapaniya sect should be fed during the four months of the rainy season and that the worship of Jinendra should be performed perpetually by the pious countrymen and citizens. (I.A., 1876, VI, p, 24-26a.)

Halasi was the most important Jain centre of Karnataka. Many inscriptions eulogize the growth of Jainism in the south. The Halasi inscription dated 405-430 A.D., enumerates that king Bhanuvarman, Harivarman and other kings made enormous donations for the ablation ceremony and to conduct daily worship and offerings to the gods and goddesses in the Jain *Basadis* (I.A, 1876, VI, p, 25b).

The Gokak plates of Dejj Maharaj register a gift of land in a village for the worship of the divine Arhat and for the maintenance of learned ascetics devoted to education. This gift was made in to the hands of *Acharya* Aryanandi, who was well versed in Jain philosophy. The grant was made for the augmentation of the merit of his ancestors as well as of himself by Indrananda Adhiraj of the Sendraka family, who was feudatory of the Rashtrakuta king. (E.I., 1984, XXI, 291b) In the ninth century A.D., another important and well known Jain centre was Saundatti also known as Sugandhavarti. It was the home of the Rattas, attained political prominence in the 10th century A. D. An inscription in the Ankesvar temple, refers that the religious leanings of the Rattas and their role in the spread of Jain doctrine. Merada was the originator of the Ratta family, whose son Prithvirama was a feudatory of the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III. Prithvirama constructed a Jain shrine at Sugandhavarti and endowed a piece of land to the shrine (Desai, 1957, 112d). In the 12th century A.D. many Jain temples converted in to other religions including *Sakti* center of Saundatti.

In an inscription in the same temple at Saundatti dated 980 A.D., refers to the Jain temple owned by the royal house of the Rattas and their patronage enjoyed by the Jainas. According to this inscription Santivarman, grandson of Prithvirama, erected a Jain temple at Sugandhavarti and he made a generous land grants for the maintenance of the temple. His mother Nijiyabbe also made many grants for this *Jinalaya*. These gifts made by the royal house received by Bahubali Bhattaraka, a preceptor, renowned scholar and an eminent teacher of the Jain doctrine. Ravichandra Svami, Arhanandi, Subhaschandra Sindantadeva, Mounideva and Prabhachandra were the five preceptors mentioned in the inscription (S.I.I., 1988, XX, No.18). During the rule of the Rattas, Jainism maintained its hold and secured royal support. Mahasamanta Anka made a gift of land to the Jain temple Kartavirya II, ruler of the Rattas, revived the grants in favour of his preceptor. His chief queen Bhagaladevi also made suitable provision for the promotion of the Jain faith (JBBRAS, 1871-74, X, p, 172-73a).

In an important record of dated 1228 A.D., found at Saundatti gives detail information about a Jain teacher. Ratta chief, Laxmideva II ruling from Venugrama (Belagavi) patronized Munichandra, a royal preceptor and whose activities not confined only to the spheres of

religion. He was the spiritual guide and political adviser of Kartavirya IV and his son Laxmideva II. He appears to have taken an important role in the administration and military campaign of the kingdom. And he also expanded the territories of the Ratta kingdom and brought stability. Munichandra had a royal honour for his sound advice and political wisdom. He was well versed in sacred lore, his proficiency in war techniques, worthy of respect, most able among the ministers and very popular in great charity and generosity. In the same inscription we can have some names of Jain teachers like Prabhachandra Siddhantadeva and Subhachandra Siddhantadeva. Latter was a chief of the Manikyathirtha *Basadi* at Huli. Indrakirti and Sridharadeva were his disciples (JBBRAS, 1871-74, X, p, 174b).

Kalabhavi was one of the most important Jain centers in the Belagavi district. An inscription in the Ramalinga temple refers it as Kumadavada. Further it refers to the reign of the Rashtrakuta king Amoghavarsha and his *Mahamandalesvar* Ganga Sivamara. Sivamara constructed a Jain shrine at Kalbhavi and endowed the entire village for this temple. It refers the names of preceptors like Devakirti, Subhakirti, Jinachandra, Nagachandra and Gunakirti (I.A., 1876, XVIII, p, 214c).

Konnur in Gokak *talug* was a prominent center of Jainism and it refers as Kondanuru. In an inscription dated 1087 A.D., in the reign of Kalyana Chalukyan king Vikramaditya VI, refers that the name of his *Mandalesvar*, Sena II of the Rattas. His village headman Nidhiga was a staunch follower of Jainism, who erected a Jain temple in Konnur and made a gift of land for its maintenance (JBBRAS, 1871-74, X, p, 300c). An inscription dated 1204 A.D., found at Kalholi, refers the rule of Ratta Kartavirya IV governing the Kundi province in conjunction with his younger brother Mallikarjuna from the capital Venugrama. Chandaladevi, mother of these princes, was an ardent follower of the Jain doctrine. Raja II, nephew of the princes constructed a shrine in honour of Santinatha and entrusted the same in to the hands of his preceptor Subhachandra Bhattaraka. The epigraph describes the names of Jain teachers named Subhachanda, Nemichandra and Lalitakirti and who were renowned for their scholarship and asceticism and exercised considerable influence (JBBRAS, 1871-74, X, p, 220d).

Huli was also one of the prominent centers of the Jain faith. The Jainas appear to have carved out a respectable position for themselves in the midst of the flourishing *Agrahara* town of Huli. It is further important to note that teachers belonging to two different sections of the Yapaniya Sangha thrived here. It refers that Lachchiyabbe the wife of the Governor of Kundi province constructed a Jain temple at Huli and made certain grants for it (E.I. 1983, XVIII, p, 172c). During this period, with the stimulating support of the rulers of the Ratta house, the Jain preceptors appear to have expanded their activities and developed new centers of faith in the country. One such was Badli, near Huli. An inscription mentions Ganga prince Marasimha built a *Jinalaya* at Badli during the reign of Hoysala Viraballala II (Ann. Rep. Bombay, 1939-40, p-56, No-79). The epigraph at Hannikeri introduces some Jain preceptors. They are Kanakaprabha I, his pupil Traividya-Chakresvara Sridharadeva and the latter's disciple Kanakaprabha II. Kanakaprabha II was highly renowned and respected in the province of Kundi.

An interesting inscription in the Jain temple at Honnur in the Belagavi district, records a gift of land to the Jain temple, constructed by Bammagavunda, who was a lay disciple of Kanti, a Jain nun named Ratrimani. It is clear that in Karnataka Jain nuns might have been entertained men as their disciples (I.A. 1878, XII, p, 102c). Terdal in the same district had developed a renowned centre of the Jain religion in 11-12th century A.D. The ruler of this town *Mandalika* Gonka was an ardent follower of Jain faith. An inscription refers that Gonka was cured of snake-bite by pronouncing the names of the Five Saints. He also constructed a *Jinalaya* dedicated to Neminatha and made endowments for the feeding of Jain monks in the temple (I.A, 1878, XIV, p, 14d).

Jaina Architecture

Basadi (basti) is a Jain shrine or temple. The word is generally used in South India. Its historical use in North is preserved in the names of the Vimala Vasahi and Luna Vasahi temples of Mount Abu. The Sanskrit word is *vasati*, it implies an institution including residences of scholars attached to the shrine. The construction of *basadis* is most popular in the south and which are very unique in architectural point of view.

After the 10th century A.D., the building activities of the followers of Jainism tremendously increased. Here we can have some special architectural features. In Belgavi district, some Jaina temples have a single *Garbhagriha* (sanctum), rectangular *Sabhamantapa* (meeting hall) and *Mukhamantapa* (front hall) as wide as the *sabhamantapa* are little spacious. Kamala *Basadi* of Belagavi, Jaina *Basadis* of Halasi, Parsvanatha *Basadi* at Ammanagi in Hukkeri of the district are important among them. These temples played an important role in socio-religious, cultural harmony. Temples and *Basadis* also worked as educational institutions and centers of industries and economic activities.

Conclusion

Jainism in Belgavi district flourished under the rulers from the centuries. The principles of Jainism attracted the people and they began to leaning towards the religion. Imbued with an intense religious feeling, lavish patronage was extended to the construction of *Basadis*, temples and magnificent statues. The earliest dated structure is a *Basadi* at Halasi in Belagavi district built under the Kadambas of Banavasi thus laying the foundation for Jain religion and culture in North Karnataka. Besides, kings and *Mandalikas* of many dynasties, rich individuals and members of royal families and even the queens were enjoyed a great freedom in making donations for religious activities. The Kadambas, the Chalukyas and the

Rashtrakutas made liberal endowments towards the propagation of art and architecture to which the Jain contributions have been of classical significance. Jainism enjoyed the highest repute among the people particularly the ruling classes and the mercantile community, thus virtually becoming the state religion in the ancient period. Jains have the highest degree of literacy for a religious community in India, and their manuscript libraries are the oldest in the country. Jain scholars played a great role in the field of literature. Jainism continued to prosper in this area for about some hundred of years. But, later, in the 11th century A.D many Jaina shrines ruined and some were converted in to other religious faiths. An important aspect of Jainism is principle of non-violence (*Ahimsa*) and it gives a message of peace and non violence to the warring world.

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