



The Religious Transition of Jainism in Bijapur District

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Abstract

This study explores the historical presence and influence of Jainism in Bijapur district of Karnataka, India. It highlights the religious tolerance of the region's royal dynasties, which fostered an environment where multiple faiths, including Jainism, could flourish. Tracing its entry into Karnataka around the 4th century BCE with the arrival of Bhadrabahu and Chandragupta Maurya, the abstract emphasizes the firm establishment of Jainism, particularly in North Karnataka, which included the Bijapur region as part of the ancient Kuntala Nadu. The presence of Jain centers like Kundalgi and the early influence of Bhadrabahu in the Bijapur vicinity, evidenced by the 5th-century Parshvanatha idol, underscore the significant historical roots of Jainism in this district. The study sets the stage for a deeper examination of Jain religious leaders, literature, and its eventual decline in the region.

Keywords: bhadrabahu, chandragupta maurya, nagachandra, aggala, ahinsa, jnana, tapa

Introduction

***“The ultimate religion is non-violence,
The ultimate scripture is non-attachment,
The ultimate principle of religion is knowledge,
And religion is the ultimate penance.”***

“This introductory section identifies the author and their affiliation, placing the study within an academic context. The Sanskrit quote emphasizes core tenets often associated with Jainism, such as non-violence (Ahinsa), non-attachment (Aparigraha), knowledge (Jnana), and penance (Tapa). By starting with this quote, the author likely intends to frame the discussion of Jain religious leaders in Bijapur within these fundamental principles.”

Having ruled Karnataka as they toured the Bijapur district, the royal dynasties, along with their royal duties, also bestowed immense tolerance upon other religions. The royal dynasties that ruled the Bijapur region viewed all religions with the same perspective,

and hence the district is renowned as a haven of many faiths. Since ancient times, several religions have flourished in this district. Over time, some religions received royal patronage and expanded, while others faced decline within the district itself. The inscriptions and literary records found here clearly and accurately highlight the religious harmony and the ancient religious stability of this land, attesting to the presence of various religions in the Bijapur district.

Jainism, one of the religions found in India, gained popularity with its principles of compassion for living beings, non-violence, celibacy, truthfulness, non-possession, renunciation, and self-control. Spreading across various regions of India, Jainism has made its unique contributions to the nature, population, culture, literature, language, art, and architecture of those regions. Especially in



Karnataka and Kannada literature, it has offered significant contributions to many subjects. Thus, having strived for the development of a region, it has been seen as a global religion over time. Due to its antiquity and values, it holds a prominent place in Indian culture, influencing the spread of ethics, culture, society, and philosophical principles within Indian culture. Jainism entered Karnataka around the 4th century BCE. During the period of famine in North India, when Bhadrabahu, a Digambara Jain monk, foresaw a calamity, he, along with his chief disciple Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan dynasty, journeyed from Ujjain to Karnataka. Upon arriving, he passed through many places in present-day Karnataka, including Bidar, Gulbarga, Yadgir, Bijapur, and Bagalkot, before finally reaching Shravanabelagola. He stayed in various locations for some time, propagating his religion as he moved forward.

Due to the efforts of Bhadrabahu and the Jain monastic order, Jainism firmly established itself in Karnataka. There is evidence to suggest that North Karnataka became its strong base. The region known as Kuntala Nadu or Kuntala Desha, which corresponds to present-day North Karnataka and the Osmanabad district of Maharashtra, had Kundalapura (Kundalgi) as its capital in ancient times, according to Scholars' opinion. This was a Jain center, and on its hill, there is a Basadi (Jain temple) dedicated to the 17th Tirthankara, Kunthunatha. It is believed that this Tirthankara's Basadi is the reason why the place got the name Kundalgi. This could serve as evidence that Bijapur was a prominent place in the Kuntala Nadu region. In the Bijapur vicinity, Jainism began to flourish through the influence of Bhadrabahu. Scholars have expressed the opinion that the Parshvanatha idol in the fort belongs to the 5th century CE.

In Bijapur district, Jainism was a prominent religion in ancient times. The major Jain centers in the district include Bijapur itself, and Duga near Bijapur. Earlier, it was called Durgapura, but later, due to the presence of the shrine of a Sufi saint, locals started calling Durgapura as Duga. Jain monasteries can be found in many places across the district, including Basavan Bagewadi, Indi, Muddebihal, Sindagi, Honawad, Chandkavathe, Kannur, Ingalagi,

Hullegur, Gundakanagi, Tamaddaddi, Yaragal, Agarkhed, Devur, and Huttinahalli. Inscriptions, memorial stones, literature, and Jain temples are found throughout the district.

Sallekhana, a religious practice of fasting unto death, is a notable aspect of this religion. Many inscriptions in Bijapur district provide information about individuals who attained Samadhi Marana (death by fasting) and the memorials erected for them. The rules followed in this practice are not entirely clear. Here, one who undertakes Samadhi Marana has to renounce water and food, give up attachments, and choose a suitable place for the Sallekhana vow. Karnataka has several significant places for this practice, including Shravanabelagola and Koppal, which are considered sacred. Similarly, Ingalagi in the district is also recorded as suitable for such a practice. An inscription from Ingalagi, dating back to 1160 CE, mentions the Samadhi Marana of one Shantinatha. Another inscription from the same village, dated 1194 CE, records the Samadhi Marana of Pendar Mathibeva, a disciple of Chandraprabhadeva, and also notes that locals also undertook Samadhi Marana. An inscription from the same village, dated 1212 CE, mentions the Samadhi Marana of Shanti Shetti, son of Aggaladevi Shetti. An inscription from 1215 CE mentions a Muni named Maghanandi. An inscription from 1224 CE mentions one Sattappa. An inscription from Huttinahalli, dating to the 13th century CE, which is a memorial for Punyavati, mother of Revamaras, Revamaras, and Recharasa, records the donation of land to Devachandramuni for the ascetics' food. Similarly, the Tamaddaddi inscription in Muddebihal mentions the passing of Bhoogavuda, son of Chamavunda, a disciple of Devachandra Bhattaraka, the Acharya of the Basadi pilgrimage center in Ingalgi.

Information about women also undertaking the Sallekhana vow is available in the district. An inscription from Ingalgi, dated 1194 CE, records this, stating that Mathibeva, the wife of Pendar, a devotee of the feet of Shrutikevali Chandraprabhadeva, attained heaven on the day of Ananda Samvatsara. Bagewadi, known for the Adikesava temple, has Yaksha and Yakshi sculptures, indicating that Bagewadi was once a Jain center. There is a Tirthankara sculpture in the Adikesava temple in Byakod village of



Bagewadi Taluk. Records indicate the existence of a Jain temple in Babanagar in the Bijapur vicinity. Recently, a memorial stone was discovered in Nalatwad, which suggests the Kalachuri period and mentions Satyavratra undertaking the Sallekhana vow and attaining Savanur, further indicating that this was also a center for Jains. Through this, Jainism emerged as a religion that fostered an inseparable bond between the rulers and the common people.

Gana-Gachchha-Anvaya-Bali

Within the Jain community of Bijapur district, the Digambara sect was more prevalent. This sect had subdivisions known as Sangha (congregation), Gana (group), Anvaya (lineage), and Sakha (branch). Among these, the Sangha was ancient. Inscriptions from Kannur and Bijapur mention the Shri Mula Sangha of Kondakundanvaya, as well as the Pustaka Gachchha of the Desikas. References to the Sena Gana and Pugar Gachchha are found in Honawad. The inscriptions of Hullegur and Yaragal mention the Kanur Gana and the Nandi Lagudanvaya. Here, while Holasur, Kanur, Ingalgi, and Nandi Laguda were place-based divisions, Kondakunda was a person-based division. The Kanur Gana was associated with the Yapaniya Sangha. Scholars opine that Chandravati of Sindgi was the Chandrakavadi of the Kanur Gana and Sinha Sangha. The inscription of Yaragal mentions the Nandi Laguda Deshiya. The Mula Sangha, Deshi Gana, Pustaka Gachchha, and Kundakundanvaya had their Ingalgi Sakha, which was quite famous in Karnataka. An inscription from Kannur records those associated with this tradition. The Kundakundacharya included prominent figures like Vardhamana Munindra, Balachandra (Vrutindra), and Arhatandi Bhattaraka of Aihol.

Jainism was a major religion in Bijapur district during ancient times, but by the end of the twelfth century, it had lost its prominent position. Several factors contributed to this. The lack of consistent royal patronage for this religion was a major reason. Furthermore, it faced suppression from other religious groups, as recorded in the district's inscriptions. An inscription from Talikote, dated 1184 CE, states that the deity "Virupaksha" was being used for anti-Jain activities. It describes the deity as 'a terror to the Jina's assembly, a forest fire to

the garden of Jinas, a persecutor of the Parshvamunis residing in other lands, a lord to the Lokanayakas, a new pillar to the Basadis, a sharp axe to the neck of the Shivalinga, and a moving calamity'. This inscription also portrays the ultimate liberation (Nirvana) as a deed of cowardice. The inscription refers to Abbalege, who allegedly destroyed a Jain Basadi in Ekantaramayya, and Maruge, who, as a Shiva devotee, harassed the Jain followers led by Nachiyabbe. Similarly, 'Pariyali' alias Vaidevi is depicted as leaving her Jina devotee husband and attempting to establish a Shivalinga in a place where a Jina image existed. The mutual conflict between religions that arose in the same region is undeniable. While one or two instances of anti-Jain violence are seen, the abundance of Vedic anti-Jain rhetoric suggests that the Vedic religion, which was the main antagonist at the time, was becoming dominant over Jainism.

The anti-Jain rhetoric is heard more in the Vachana literature than in the Ragale verses, and even more so in the Puranas. Here, instances of persecuting Jains and destroying Basadis are found. While Veerashaivas engaged in "temple construction, temple destruction culture," it's also true that Shaiva and Vaishnava religions might have destroyed Basadis. However, the "temple desecration culture" cannot be solely attributed to Veerashaivas because temple construction or destruction does not fall within the purview of its tenets.

During the Adil Shahi period, the Jain religion faced many challenges, and much evidence supports this. The Pari Mahal mosque stands as our primary evidence, as the Pari Mahal mosque is originally a Jain Basadi, which was demolished and its remnants used for construction. Later, during the rule of the Adil Shahi Sultans, many Jain monuments, including Jain Mandirs, were destroyed. Clear evidence for this includes the Parshvanatha idol in the Duga fort, dating back to the 5th century CE, being thrown into a well, and the destruction of many Jain religious structures in Vijayapura, including Babar Nagar. During the reign of Ibrahim II, there was a lull, but later, the decline of Jainism continued. Vijayapura, which once had a 70% Jain population, now sees Jainism as a minority religion.



In terms of literature, the Jains, who made a significant contribution to Kannada literature, have an immense contribution to the literature of Bijapur district as well. Among them, Nagachandra and Aggaladev (Aggala poet) prominent.

Nagachandra: Nagachandra is a very prominent name in the tradition of old Kannada literature. He is famous as Abhinava Pampa in Kavya literature. Living around 1100 CE, he refers to himself in the Mallinatha Purana, it is evident that his hometown was Bijapur, and he also built the Mallinatha Basadi there. Furthermore, it is stated that he composed the Mallinatha Purana in this very Basadi. (Today, due to Muslim invasion, its remnants can be seen in the severely damaged Pari Mahal mosque.) He was a scholar and was known as Abhinava Pampa. His other titles include Bharatiratnapura, Kavittavamanochara, Suktimukutavatamsa, Sahityasarvajna, Chaturakavijanasthanaratna Pradipa, and Sahitya Vidyadhara. He wrote both the Ramachandra Charita Purana and the Mallinatha Purana. However, the poet Devachandra, in his Rajavali Kathe, mentions that Nagachandra also composed the Jinamuni Tanaya and Jinaksharamale. However, scholars in the region do not agree with this. There is disagreement among scholars regarding his period. Based on the dialogues between the poet Kanti and Nagachandra, some opine that he must have been in the court of the Hoysala king Ballala I from 1100 CE to 1106 CE.

Ramachandra Charita Purana or Pampa Ramayana: Nagachandra composed this in the Champu style. He created this work, adapting the original Ramayana to the Jain tradition. Here, Nagachandra states in the Kapulalasa that Ganadhara Gautama narrates the story of Rama to Meghasiddhi at Virajina Parshva. This text is divided into 16 Ashwasas (cantos). In the introduction to the text, the poet praises the 20th Tirthankara, Muni Suvrata. In the third Ashwasa, he briefly mentions the story of Dasharatha and concludes with Sri Rama taking Jina Diksha (Jain initiation). This work reveals some differences between the original Ramayana and his work, Ramachandra Charita. Rama's father is Aparajita; Shatrughna's mother is Suprvasadevi; Lakshmana has one son; in Vishvamitra's references,

Rama and Sugriva are not monkeys, Rama and Lakshmana are not brothers, and Rama's color is blue, while Lakshmana's color is black. It is this Lakshmana who kills Ravana. Here, after the birth of Lava-Kusha to Sita, she enters fire and takes Jina Diksha. Overall, the story progresses according to Jain tenets.

Mallinatha Purana

In this work, Nagachandra narrates the life story of Mallinatha, the 19th Tirthankara of the Jains. It is in the Champu style and comprises a total of 14 Ashwasas. Scholars have identified an inscription written by Nagachandra in Bijapur, which is currently kept in the Mysore Archaeology Department. The verses in this inscription are identified as being similar to parts of the Pampa Ramayana.

Aggala Poet

The other prominent Jain poet from Bijapur district is Aggala. He belonged to the Mula Sangha, Deshiya Gana, Pustaka Gachchha, and Kondakunda lineage. His guru was Suraraja Devarajadhipati, Shri Tirthachandraprabha Parameshti of the Mula Sangha Kondakundanvaya branch of the Pustaka Gachchha of the Deshi Gana. His hometown was Ingaldi. He had the titles: Jaina Jana Manohara Charitra, Kavikula Kalabhavaravadhira, Kavyanokarnadhara, Bharata Bhalanetra, Sahitya Vidyavinoda, and Jina Samayasarakeli Marala. His father was Shantisha, and his mother was Vachambike. Ingaldi, one of the ancient Jain centers, was his abode. Two inscriptions found in the same village, dating to 1160 CE and 1212 CE, support the information that he belonged to a Jain trading family. His father, Shanti Pandit, had built the Mallinatha Basadi in the front part of the Chandaprabha (Shashinatha) Basadi of Ingaldi. Similarly, this Shanti Pandit attained Samadhi Marana during his old age under the guidance of the Acharya Meghachandra. Information is also provided about the death of Aggala's son, Shanta (Shanta Shetti), through Samadhi Marana. Scholars opine that the term 'Ingaldi Bali' indicates that this place was a Jain center. Since the poet Nagachandra of Vijayapura praised Aggala's guru, Shruta Keertivratitraya Vidyananda, both these great poets



must have been Jains. Moreover, Nagachandra's nephew, Brahmashiva, was a friend of Aggala. Regarding himself,

Chandaprabha Purana

This is a work containing the life story of Chandaprabha, the eighth Tirthankara of Jainism. It is divided into 16 Ashwasas. At the end, there is a prose passage: "Thus ends the auspicious Chandaprabha Purana, composed by the revered Aggaladeva, the crest jewel of the Paramapurushanatha lineage, the rising sun to the lotus of the Kulakubhrutya, the abode of the auspicious pravachanasara, the ocean of Shruta Keerti, the Chakravarti of Traividya, the lamp to the lotus feet of the worthy."

Conclusion

Religion is the cultural lifeblood of human society. Especially for the cultural progress of Indians, religion has been the guiding light. Our ancestors have lived their lives based on the foundation of religious thought. Bijapur district has played a significant role in fostering harmony in religious life. Several pieces of epigraphically evidence can be cited as proof of religious harmony, as already mentioned

& in contemporary times, the Jain population in Bijapur may not be large, but it remains vibrant and active. Temples are well-maintained, and religious practices are followed with dedication. Modern Jain organizations in Bijapur also focus on youth education, animal welfare, and the preservation of Jain heritage.

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