

Jainism in the Forgotten Empire

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“Bhaktas and Bhavyas are one (body); they must not be viewed as different¹.”

Abstract: *With the emergence of Saivism and Vaishnavism in elite standards, Jainism lost its glory in the beginning of the 14th century in Karnataka. It is well known that the early rulers of the Vijayanagara dynasty favored Jainism. Thus, we come across the donations made to the Jaina chaityalayas belonging to the Sangama dynasty. The temples at Hampi are the conglomeration of the religious interests of the Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu dynasties. In the plenitude of their power, the Vijayanagara rulers upheld the Karnata dharma. By observing the patterns and trends of the Vijayanagara religion, the reader can identify that the long history of toleration was disturbed by the short persecution waves rather than understanding it as a long and continuous history of persecution alone. The mega throne was the conservator of the best traditions and we find Muslims, Christians, Brahmins and non – Brahmins, Lingayats and Jainas (whether they were in majority or minority) lived in amity and were ruled with equal tolerance. This research paper speaks about the Jaina inscriptions issued by the rulers of the Vijayanagara dynasty such as Bukkaraya I, Harihara II, Devaraya II and Krishnadevaraya along with the inscriptions issued by some of the feudatories like the Wodeyars of Karkal, the Chowters of Mudabidris, the Nandvar Bangars, the Ajalars of Aldangadi, the Mulars of Bailangidi and the Savants of Mulki. The article further deals with the scope for further studies followed by conclusions.*

Keywords: *Vijayanagara empire, Bhaktas, Bhavyas, Bhimadevi, Iruggappa Nayaka, Chaichappa, Jainism in Mudabidri, Trailokya Jinalaya, Chengalpattu inscription*

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The never to be forgotten characters of the Vijayanagara dynasty presented by scholars like Krishnaswamy Aiyangar, Rev. Heras and Dr. Saletore takes us to the vistas of the Vijayanagara dynasty. In the plenitude of their power, the Vijayanagara rulers upheld the *Karnata dharma*. One may praise

them as the champions of Hinduism, but they were the custodians of the *Karnata* tradition. The rulers of this banner had tolerated Islam within their jurisdiction. In the society, Muslims were not hated as Muslims². They employed Muslims in their service and patronised them in several ways. Their attitude towards other faiths and creeds was same. Vijayanagara society is the conglomeration of the great sects such as Vaishnava, Vira Saiva and Jaina. Though these beliefs had not always been at peace, and mutual persecution and the attempts of the ruling religion to suppress the other religions is recorded in various journals – a careful study of history will show that toleration overpowered persecution. By observing the patterns and trends of the Vijayanagara religion, the reader can identify that the long history of toleration was disturbed by the short persecution waves rather than understanding it as a long and continuous history of persecution alone. The mega throne was the conservator of the best traditions and we find Muslims, Christians, Brahmins and non – Brahmins, Lingayats and Jainas (whether they were in majority or minority) lived in amity and were ruled with equal tolerance. The general attitude and the religious policies of the Vijayanagara rulers can be understood from their Patronage of the Jainas.³

Bhaktas and Bhavyas

An inscription of Bukkaraya I records that “a dispute having arisen between the Bhaktas (Vaishnavas) and the Bhavyas (blessed people, Jainas) of all the *nadus*... having made petition to the king about the injustice done by the Bhaktas, the king, taking the hand of the Jainas and placing it in the hand of the Sri Vaishnavas of the eighteen *nadus*, including *acharyas* of the places.... and declaring (at the same time) that there was no difference between the Vaishnava – *darsana* and the Jaina – *darsana* decreed as follows:

“this Jaina darsana is as before entitled to the five great musical instruments and the kalasa. If loss or advancement should be caused to the Jaina darsana through the Bhaktas, the Vaishnavas will kindly see as loss or advancement caused to their own (darsana). The Sri Vaishnavas will kindly, to this effect, set up a sasana in all the Bastis of the kingdom. For as long as the sun and moon endure the Vaishnavas will continue to protect the Jaina darsana. The Vaishnavas and Jainas are one (body); they must not be treated as different.⁴”

344 (136).

At Bhaṇḍāri-basti, on the first stone on the east side.

svasti samasta-prasasti-sahitam ||
 pāshaṇḍa-sāgara-mahā-baḍavāmukhāgni-Śriraṅga-rāja-charaṇāmbuja-
 mūla-dāsa
 śri-Vishṇu-lōka-maṇi-maṇṭapa-mārgga-dāyi Rāmānujō vijayatē yati-rāja-
 rāja ||

Śaka-varsha 1290 neya Kīlaka-saṃvatsarada Bhādrapada-śu 10 Bṛi svasti śrīman-
 mahā-maṇḍalēsvaraṃ āri-rāya-vibhāda bhāshege tappuva rāyara gaṇḍa śri-Vira-
 Bukka-Rāyanu prithvi-rāyava māḍuva kāladalli Jainariḡṭu bhaktariḡṭu saṃvājav
 ādalli Āneyagondi Hosapaṭṭaṇa Penugunde Kallehada-paṭṭaṇav oḷagāda samasta-
 nāḍa bhavya-janaṅgaḷu ā-Bukka-Rāyaṅge bhaktaru māḍuva anyāyaṅgaḷaṇu binna-
 haṃ-māḍal āgi Kōvil-Tirumale-Perumāḷ-kōvil-Tirunārāyanapura-mukhyavāda sakaḷ-
 āchāryyarū sakaḷa-saṃayigalū sakaḷa-sātvikarū mōshṭikaru tirupaṇi-tiruviḍi-taṇni-
 ravaru nālvatt-eṇṭu-janaṅgaḷu sāvanta-bōvakkalū Tirikula-Jāmbuva-kulav-oḷagāda
 hadineṇṭu-nāḍa Śrivaishṇavara kaiyyalu Mahārāyanu Vaishṇava-darśanakkeṭu
 Jaina-darśanakkeṭu bhēdav illav endu Rāyanu Vaishṇavara kaiyyalu Jainara kai-
 viḍidu koṭṭu yi-Jaina-darśanakke pūrva-mariyādeyalu pañcha-mahā-vādyāṅgaḷu
 kaḷasavu saluvudu Jaina-darśanakke bhaktara deseṇḍa hāni-vṛiddhiy ādarū Vais-
 hṇava-hāni-vṛiddhiyāgi pālisuvaru yi-mariyādeyalu yallā-rāyadolag ullāntaha

bastigalige Śrivaishṇavarū śāsanava natṭu pālisuvaru chandrārka-sthāyiy-āgi
 Vaishṇava-samayau Jaina-darsanava rakshisikonḍu baheu Vaishṇavarū Jainarū
 vondu bhēdavāgi kṇal āgadu śrī-Tirunaleya Tātayyaṅgaḷu samasta-rājyada bha-
 vya-janaṅgaḷa anunatatinda Beḷugulada-tirthhadalli Vaishṇava-aṅga-rakshegōsuka
 samasta-rājyadoḷag ullantaha Jainara bāgilu-gaṭṭaleyāgi mane-manege varshakke 1
 haṇa koṭṭu āy-ettida honniṅge dēvara aṅga-rakshegey ippatt-āḷanū santaviṭṭu mik-
 ka honniṅge jīrṇa-Jinālayaṅgalige sotheyan ikūdu yi-mariyādeyalu chandrārkkar
 ullannaṇ tappaliyade varsha-varshakke koṭṭu kirttiyanū puṇyavanū upārjīsikom-
 budu yi-māḍida kattaḷeyanu āvan obbanu mīṇḍavanu rāja-drōhi saṅgha-samḍāyak-
 ke drōhi tapasviy āgali grāmīniy āgali yi-dharmmava keḍsidar āḍaḍe Gaṅgeya taḍi-
 yalli kapileyanū Brāhmananānū konda pāpadalli hōharu ||

ślō || sva-dattaṇ para-dattam vā yō harēti vasundharām
 shashti-varsha-sabasraṇi viṣṭāyām jāyatē kṛimi ||
 (Subsequently added above.)

Kallehada Harvvi-ṣeṭṭiya su-putra Busuvi-ṣeṭṭi Bukka-Rāyarige binnaham-
 māḍi Tirunaleya Tātayyaṅgaḷa bijayaṇ-gaisi tarandū jīrṇōddhārava māḍisidarū
 ubhaya-samayavū kūḍi Busuvi-ṣeṭṭiyarige Saṅgha-nāyka-paṭṭava kaṭṭidarū ||

Image source @ Epigraphia Carnatica, Vol. II, SB – 344.

This epigraph is dated 1368 CE and emphasises Bukkaraya's love for the *bhavyas* that he threw the burden of their protection upon the *bhaktas*.⁵ Another inscription from Sravanabelagola describes Bhimadevi, the queen of Devaraya I, as a disciple of Abhinava Charukirti Panditacharya, a Jaina guru. The inscription further records that she caused the installation of the image of the Santinatha in the Mangai *basti*.⁶ This inscription is significant that it indicates the active association of a queen, with Jainism despite the traditional conservatism of her gender. Irugappa Dandanayaka, the general of Harihara II, appears to have been a staunch Jaina. His father Chaichappa was a follower of Sinhanandi and built the Kunta – Jinalaya at Vijayanagara. The lamp pillar inscription in the Ganigetti (oil woman's) temple at Hampi records his services to his religion.⁷ He is also described as the author of the Jaina lexicon, *Nanartha Ratnamala*. Irugappa Nayaka's inscription from Kanchipuram proclaims his endowments to a Jaina temple for the benefit of Bukkaraya II.⁸ An inscription belonging to the reign of Harihararaya dated to 1395 CE refers to the construction of a *chaityalaya* at the city of Kandनावroli and the consecration of the image Kumthu Tirthankara there in by Immadi Bukka *mantrisvara*.⁹

The policy and patronage of the Vijayanagara rulers to Jainism can be traced from the epigraphs scattered in all corners of the Vijayanagara empire. An inscription from Gurugala Basti at Mudabidri at South Kanara records Bukkaraya's grant¹⁰ to a Jinalaya. Another grant belonging to the reign of Devaraya II, records the donation of one *kolaga* of paddy on every bullock – load coming into the Basrur town.¹¹ Although Devaraya II is described as “the tree of heaven to the Brahmanas”¹², he caused the construction of a *chaityalaya* to Arhat Parsvanatha in the Pansupari bazaar of Vijayanagara.¹³ Krishnadevaraya, the celebrated ruler of this banner also made endowments to the Jainas along with the Brahmanas. His donations to the Trailokyanatha Jinalaya¹⁴ in the Chengalpattu district justify that the rulers of the Vijayanagara dynasty continued the legacy of their religious harmony and patronised all the religions for the benefit of the society.

Jainism under the Vijayanagara Feudatories

The epigraphs found in Jaina monuments of Karkal and Mudabidri in the South Kanara district bear testimony to the progress of Jainism and its achievements during the Vijayanagara period. The feudatories of this flag such as the Wodeyars of Karkal, the Chowters of Mudabidris, the Nandvar

Bangars, the Ajalars of Aldangidi, the Mulars of Bailangidi and the Savants of Mulki¹⁵ made generous donations to the Jaina institutions. The titles of the feudatories of this country are also of great significance. An inscription from the Hosa Basti of Mudabidri speaks of “*Sriman mahamandaleswara Jinadasa Salmalla Mahivallabha*” as the ruler of Haiva – Konkan.¹⁶ Few other inscriptions refer to the rulers as the “worshippers of the *triratnas* (right faith, right understanding, right action) - (*ratnatrayaradhakarum*);”, “implanters of the Jaina flag - (*Jinadhrmasthapanacharyarum*)”; “builders of the golden temples, erectors of the golden *kalasa*, consecrators of gold and silver images of Jina – (*hiranya chaityalayasthapanacharyarum, ratnasuvarna rajata jinabimba pratisthapanacharyarum*)”¹⁷, etc.

The famous Jaina centres like Gersoppa and Mudabidri are beautifully described in the epigraphs and the literary texts. Their mention is made as;-

“*who can describe the charms of the Gersoppa city?*” asks one;
 “*the city full of huge towers, palaces, Jaina houses, etc*”¹⁸. and
 “*Who has the tongue?*”

asks another;-

“*to sing the glory of Venupura where women are true to their lords and men are engaged in the study of Jaina sastras and worshippers find recreation in giving gifts and performing puja and where even children are enthusiastic in their adherence to dharma.*”¹⁹

Further Studies

Either comprehensive or an exhaustive study is required to understand the glory of Jainism in Karnataka under the Vijayanagara patronage. No mention has been made of the Jaina art, architecture and literature which flourished under benign influences except for a few inscriptions. The wonderful Jaina images and structures of Kandanavrolu, Gersoppa, Mudabidri and Karkal belong to this glorious period. Some of the famous literary works such as *Khagendramanidarpana*, *Dharmanatha Purana*, *Sabdanusasana*, etc appear to have been produced by writers of this age. Thus, a keen and exhaustive study about the Jaina inscriptions, literature and Jaina structures in the area under study will certainly bring forth many unknown facts about the glory of Jainism under the mega banner.

Conclusion

Jainism expanded in the Kannada *desa* due to the active patronage of both great and small rulers of Karnataka and survived nearly a thousand years from 200 to 1200 CE. The greater dynasties like the Kadambas, the Gangas, the Chalukyas, the Rashtakutas, the Kalachuris and the Hoyasalas along with the smaller territories like the Silaharas, the Rattas, the Chandalvas and the Wodeyars has equal share in fostering this ancient faith in South India. Vijayanagara dynasty took up this tradition and cherished it for the benefit of itself and Jainism. The decline and fall of the Vijayanagara throne certainly caused the decline of the Jainas, though it survived for a longer period under its far flung feudatories.

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