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Chapter 3

Digambara Jainism in Karnataka: A Socio-Religious Survey of the Rise and Decline of a Religious Tradition

1 Introductory Remarks

As Pius F. Pinto has shown in the previous chapter, Jainism has a long history in the area of the modern state of Karnataka in South India. Unfortunately, for various reasons,¹ academic research into religious practices and beliefs of the Jainas has tended to focus on the Jaina traditions of North and West India. While some effort was made by twentieth-century Indian historians to reconstruct the ancient and medieval history of Jainism in the south of the country, relying mainly on epigraphical sources,² these studies focus on royal patronage and grants, touching only superficially on de-

1 As was their practice with other Indian religious traditions, what the early Western orientalists of the nineteenth century focused on were philological studies of what was to be called Jainism, and this tendency lived on up to the last decades of the twentieth century. Since then, some anthropological works on Jaina rituals and practices have been published. See, for instance Lawrence A. Babb, *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture*, Comparative Studies in Religion and Society 8 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual. Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), or James Laidlaw, *Riches and Renunciation. Religion, Economy and Society among the Jains* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). In modern studies, the focus is on the practices of the Śvetāmbaras or the Digambara tradition of North and West India. The academic neglect of Digambara Jainism in general, and the Digambaras of South India in particular, can be attributed to various factors. Among these, the most important consist in the initially greater availability of Śvetāmbara scriptures and the eagerness of highly learned Śvetāmbara ascetics in North and West India to assist Western orientalists in their studies. For more information about the history of Jaina studies and their focus on the Śvetāmbara tradition, see Ludwig Alsdorf, *Jaina Studies: Their Present State and Future Tasks*, trans. Bal Patil, ed. Willem Bollee, Pandit Nathuram Premi Research Series 1 (Mumbai: Hindi Granth Karyalay, 2006), Christoph Emmrich, “Das westliche Gewand der Jainas: Europäische und indische Überformungen jainistischer Gelehrsamkeit,” in *Religion im Spiegelkabinett. Asiatische Religionsgeschichte im Spannungsfeld zwischen Orientalismus und Okzidentalismus*, ed. Peter Schalk, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Religionum 22 (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2003): 357–75, Kendall W. Folkert, *Scripture and Community. Collected Essays on the Jains*, ed. John E. Cort (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), or Padmanabh S. Jaini, *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2000).

2 See, for instance Bhaskar Anand Saletore, *Mediaeval Jainism. With Special Reference to the Vijaynagara Empire* (Bombay: Karnataka Publishing House, 1938), and P.B. Desai, *Jainism in South India and Some Jaina Epigraphs*, Jivaraja Jaina Granthamala 6 (Solapur: Jaina Samskriti Samrakshaka Sangha, 2001 [1957]).

velopments within Jaina ritual practices and beliefs.³ Furthermore, the underlying question, namely, to which causes the rise and decline of the Jaina tradition in Karnataka can chiefly be attributed, has never been dealt with in detail.

As is well known, religious traditions are not static, never-changing entities, existing in a vacuum, independently of their cultural surroundings. A religion will always keep developing, reacting to cultural, historical and political changes. Local practices, beliefs and traditions will find their way into disparate religious systems that share the same geographical area. Religious boundaries, separating well-defined religious communities where the religious affiliation of every individual has to fit, are a recent construct, based to a large extent on nineteenth-century orientalism and the British introduction of the census in India.⁴ While religious boundaries between Jainas and Hindus can be fluid, even now,⁵ in medieval South India, individual religious affilia-

3 Changes in rituals, worship and beliefs are discussed by some other, more contemporary authors, namely Ramendra N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan (c. A.D. 600–1000)* (Delhi, Varanasi and Patna: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), and Ram Bhushan Prasad Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka (c. A.D. 500–1200)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975). While these studies, based on epigraphical and Jaina literary sources, provide a detailed insight into monastic and ritual developments during the medieval period, reasons for the rise and especially the decline of Jaina influence in Karnataka are not dealt with in detail.

4 On the development of the term “religion” as such, and particularly its plural form “religions,” see Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘the Mystic East’* (London: Routledge 1999): 35–61, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992): 15–50. Much has been written about the orientalist’s “construction” of Hinduism and its influence on the Indian intellectual elites of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. See, for instance David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance. The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773–1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Arabinda Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal. Quests and Confrontations 1800–1860* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970), Arabinda Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal. Search for Identity* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1977), or Sharada Sugirtharajah, *Imagining Hinduism. A Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003). For the first census takings in British India and their impact on the formation of distinct religious identities, see Bernhard S. Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, ed. Bernard S. Cohn (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000): 224–54; Frank F. Conlon, “The Census of India as a Source for the Historical Study of Religion and Caste,” in *The Census in British India. New Perspectives*, ed. N. Gerald Barrier (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981): 103–17, and Kenneth W. Jones, “Religious Identity and the Indian Census,” in *The Census in British India. New Perspectives*, ed. N. Gerald Barrier (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981): 73–101. For the establishment of “Jainism” as a distinct religion, see Torkel Brekke, *Makers of Modern Indian Religion in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Peter Flügel, “The Invention of Jainism: A Short History of Jaina Studies,” *International Journal of Jain Studies* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1–14, or James F. Lewis, “Jains in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Religion in Modern India*, 4th ed., ed. Robert D. Baird (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001): 335–72.

5 This becomes obvious in modern polemical debates and literature about the “true origin” of some religious beliefs and practices, in which individual Jainas and Hindus claim that their own community

tions certainly did not function as they do today. Nevertheless, it would certainly be wrong to conclude that no special Jaina tradition existed, before the terms “Jainism” and “Jaina community” were defined in more recent times.⁶ The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the particular Jaina tradition of Karnataka, especially its development during its heyday between the fifth and twelfth century CE. The rather sudden decline of the Jainas’ influence, from the late twelfth century onwards, will also be discussed in detail.

2 The Rise of Jainism in Karnataka

The earliest epigraphic evidence for the existence of Jaina ascetics and laymen in South India dates from the second and first centuries BCE.⁷ Most probably, the Jaina tradition came to the area of modern Karnataka in several waves of migration. Although, as Desai remarks, Śvetāmbara ascetics had been among the first Jaina mendicants in Karnataka,⁸ it was the Digambara tradition which became the dominant and indigenous form of Jainism in South India.

2.1 Jaina Monks and Politics

According to inscriptional evidence, the Jaina tradition came under the patronage of ruling dynasties as early as the first centuries of the common era. In the course of the following centuries, an increasing number of Jainas received royal support, and some Jaina ascetics raised their status from spiritual teachers to political advisers of royals. Here, two questions emerge: Firstly, if the close relationships of Jaina ascetics to rulers involved them in worldly affairs, how could this be justified? Secondly, why had the Jaina tradition been so popular among the ruling and warrior classes? Both questions and their answers are interrelated and seem to include a paradox: Jainism, with its stress on absolute *ahimsā*, non-violence, enjoyed the patronage of, in Paul Dundas’ words, “aggressive and militaristic south Indian kings and their warrior supporters.”⁹ The popular image of Jainism is as the prototype of a world-negating tradition, whose

is more original than its rivals, which they accuse of “borrowing” and “imitation.” Furthermore, although most Jainas today consider their community a distinct and separate one, some Jainas still prefer to be classified under the wider category of “Hindu.”

⁶ Although the term “Jainism” was unknown at the period under examination, I will nevertheless use it throughout this chapter to denote the religious tradition which later came to be known by the name “Jainism.”

⁷ Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 1992): 99.

⁸ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: xi.

⁹ Dundas, *The Jains*: 101.

adherents focus on ascetic practices and total detachment from all mundane affairs. That this stereotyped description hardly conforms to reality will be shown later in this chapter, when ritual practices and religious beliefs are discussed.

Although the Jaina ascetic's absolute goal lies in the otherworldly sphere, and he (or she) leads a life of detachment from most worldly affairs, this does not necessarily mean he (or she) must stay completely aloof from all mundane matters. Most Digambara monks and nuns who have been initiated since the revival of the ascetic tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century choose not to get involved in politics and public debates. Nevertheless, as in other religious traditions, not all ascetics remain silent on social and political matters, especially if Jaina values are involved. It is true that among Jaina ascetics, political interference never went as far as in the case of the Buddhist ascetic community of Sri Lanka, where in recent years a political monks' party was founded. But still, some Jaina monks of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been actively involved in political affairs. The famous Ācārya Śāntisāgar (1872–1955),¹⁰ for instance, became active in Jaina protests against the application of the *Bombay Temple Entry Bill* to Jaina temples.¹¹ Another influential ascetic, Samanthbhadra (1891–1988) became a spokesperson on behalf of the Jainas in the 1980s when a communal argument broke out about the Jaina pilgrimage place Bahubali (Bāhubalī, Kumbhoj), near Kolhapur (Kolhāpur).¹² In recent years, some Digambara ascetics have been using their popularity to speak out openly against social tendencies which oppose the Jaina values, especially that of vegetarianism. Only in 2007, did a Digambara monk from Karnataka threatened to fast himself to death if the government did not drop its plan to distribute eggs to schoolchildren as part of their mid-day meal.¹³

These examples show that in recent times, not all Digambara ascetics have conformed to the stereotype of the totally detached Jaina monk. It would be unrealistic to assume that these recent examples are just a “modern degeneration of the ancient ideal” and that in earlier times all monks would have remained completely aloof from social and political matters. It should not, therefore, come as too great a surprise

10 Ācārya Śāntisāgar “Dakṣiṇ” (“Southern”), as he is sometimes called to differentiate him from another ācārya carrying the same name (Ācārya Śāntisāgar “Chāṇī,” named after his birthplace in Rajasthan), is generally regarded as the leading force behind a revival of the ancient Digambara ascetic tradition. This tradition of fully initiated, naked monks had been interrupted for several centuries.

11 The *Bombay Temple Entry Bill*, introduced shortly after Independence, allowed members of all castes, including the lowest, free entry to all Hindu temples. The Jainas' protest, as local Jainas I met in Karnataka and South Maharashtra told me, had been fuelled mainly by the fear that non-vegetarian castes might visit their temples and ritually pollute them. Another reason mentioned was the Jainas' unwillingness to let the state interfere in what they considered their own religious affairs.

12 The incident, in which the main opponents had been Digambara Jainas and Marathas, became known as “Bahubali Affair.”

13 Yuvācārya Guṇadharanandī used the media presence during a big religious function at Varur, near Hubli, to announce his intention.

that some ascetics during the early medieval period sought contact with rulers and other influential members of society.

2.2 The Legitimisation of Kings and Kingly Benefactions

If the Jaina tradition was to prosper and establish itself securely in Karnataka, it needed to secure royal patronage. For rulers, on the other hand, offering official patronage to a religious group was considered a crucial step towards obtaining religious sanction to legitimise their authority. The topic of royal patronage of “heterodox” faiths¹⁴ such as Buddhism and Jainism has been dealt with in detail by historians.¹⁵ All we need grasp here is that supporting Buddhism and/or Jainism was a means for dynasties of obscure rank in the emerging caste hierarchy to legitimise their rule. The Jaina’s denial of *brāhmaṇ* supremacy¹⁶ and their comparatively higher regard for the *kṣatriya* (or warrior) caste¹⁷ may also help explain the attractiveness of their faiths to the ruling classes. The patronage of Jainism, furthermore, as is sometimes argued, probably helped to “confer a brand of respectable, northern Aryan culture upon southern warriors while at the same time enabling them to distance themselves from peasant, Hindu society.”¹⁸ The “idealised Jain king,” then, “owed his position to merit and qualities,” unlike the Hindu king who depended on “ritual validation.”¹⁹

We should be careful, however, not to think of royal patronage as an exclusive relationship, since the great majority of rulers did not confine their patronage to one single religious tradition. Most dynasties patronised several or all influential religious groups active within their domain. Political stability and the ruler’s aim to legitimise his authority in many cases overshadowed any personal religious persuasion he might have had. An individual might be called a pious follower of the Tīrthaṅkaras in one inscription and a devotee of Śiva in another. Furthermore, it should be remembered that strictly defined exclusive religious affiliations, such as we know today, did not exist in the medieval period. It seems impossible, therefore, to determine the personal religious persuasion of most South Indian rulers, even if some Jaina historians are all too quick to describe certain important kings as devout Jainas on the basis of inscriptional evidence. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Jaina tradition enjoyed

¹⁴ “Heterodox” here is used in the sense that both Buddhism and Jainism denied the religious authority of the *Veda* and the *brāhmaṇs*.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹⁶ Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1979): 275–76.

¹⁷ Mahāvīra and the Buddha are both described as *kṣatriyas* by birth.

¹⁸ Dundas, *The Jains*: 102.

¹⁹ Dundas, *The Jains*: 102.

the substantial patronage of important ruling dynasties, as well as the support of some petty rulers and feudatories.

2.3 The Jaina Ascetic as Warrior

Although Jainism lays absolute stress on the principle of *ahiṃsā*, it never developed such a strong pacifist attitude as some Christian groups. According to Jaina tradition, the *kṣatriya*'s duty is to defend his territory, even if this includes the killing of the enemy. The image of the warrior in Jainism became transformed, and the picture of the ideal ascetic, who engaged himself in the constant battle against all bodily desires and worldly attachments, came to symbolise the real warrior. This ideology, found among the Digambara tradition in particular, gave Jainism its image as “a religion of vigour and bravery” which, according to Dundas, increased its popularity among the warrior class.²⁰

Under the patronage of the South Indian ruler Amoghavarṣa Rāṣṭrakūṭa (815–877 CE), the Jaina ascetic Jinasena (ca. 770–850 CE) began to write the *Ādipurāṇa*,²¹ in the ninth century. This work describes the right conduct of a king. The warrior class is said to be related to the “real” warriors, the Digambara ascetics. Kings are reminded to protect not only their kingdom, but also the Jaina community and its tradition. Here we find the image of an ideal Jaina monarch and warrior part of whose function is to secure justice among his subjects, but who himself depends on the spiritual advice of Jaina ascetics.²² Jinasena still sees the Jaina ascetic as the highest ideal of the warrior, but he does acknowledge that the institutions of kingship and the warrior class are needed.

2.4 Jaina Monks Establishing Regal Dynasties

The fact that some Jaina ascetics had close relationships with rulers was never denied in Jaina literature and is even highlighted in legendary accounts of the foundation of two important South Indian dynasties. According to popular Jaina tradition, it had been Jaina ascetics who had been instrumental in the establishment of Gaṅgā rule

²⁰ Dundas, *The Jains*: 102.

²¹ This is the first part of the *Mahāpurāṇa*, the story of the past, present and future lives of the sixty-three exemplary men of this time-cycle, including the Jinas. The *Ādipurāṇa* was started by Jinasena and finished by his pupil Guṇabhadra (Kristi L. Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism* [New Delhi: Vision Books, 2006]: 132).

²² Dundas, *The Jains*: 102–3.

(third century CE) and the emergence of the Hoysaḷa dynasty (twelfth century CE).²³ Whatever historical truth may be found in these stories, their popularity demonstrates that in general, an ascetic's interference in worldly affairs was accepted, since the Jaina tradition benefited through royal patronage. The moral ambivalence between strict detachment on the one hand, and the recognition of the need for royal support on the other, is expressed by Padmanabh S. Jaini in comments on the instrumental role of the ascetic Siṃhanandi in the rise of Gaṅgā rule:

Whatever actually transpired, it does seem clear that Siṃhanandi commanded sufficient political influence to effectively function as a king-maker, and further that the subsequent Ganga rulers were all staunch Jains [...] Whatever spiritually negative results Siṃhanandi may have brought upon himself by his behavior, there can be no doubt that he greatly benefited the Digambara community as a whole.²⁴

The tension between sticking strictly to religious tenets and coming to terms with the “real world” will be encountered by every religious tradition, once it is officially recognised and patronised by influential patrons. Jainism, naturally, is no exception, as its further development in the area of Karnataka demonstrates.

3 Settled Monks and *Bhaṭṭārakas*

If we look more closely at medieval Jainism, we find some other paradoxical developments at play. According to the ancient Jaina ideal of asceticism, monks and nuns were bound to the strict interpretation of their vow of *aparigraha*, non-possession, so that a fully initiated Digambara monk owned only a *kamaṇḍalu* and a *piñchī*.²⁵ Digambara mendicants were also supposed to lead a life of constant wandering. It was only during *cāturmās*, the rainy season, that they were allowed to stay for a longer period in one place.

During the medieval period, however, the ideal of the wandering ascetic lost ground, and groups of ascetics began to settle down and live in monasteries. First literary evidence for the emergence of the settled ascetic dates from about the second century CE.²⁶ From the fourth century onwards, inscriptions mention grants for as-

²³ For these legends, see Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*: 279–82, and P.M. Joseph, *Jainism in South India* (Thiruvananthapuram: The International School of Dravidian Linguistics, 1997): 102–3.

²⁴ Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*: 280.

²⁵ A water-pot which contains some boiled water for cleaning purposes, and a brush made out of peacock feathers. The *piñchī* is used by the ascetic to wipe the floor before sitting or lying down, in order to avoid hurting tiny insects. Unlike Digambara monks, who also renounce any kind of clothing, nuns cover their bodies with white robes.

²⁶ Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 64–65.

cetics living in monasteries.²⁷ These were grants of land for the monasteries' erection and maintenance. Settled ascetics, known as *maṭhavāsīs*, were criticised by those who stuck to the practice of wandering or living solitary lives in the jungle as mendicants, for renouncing the ambulant life and for indulging in practices such as the use of oils and perfumes, which they considered inappropriate for ascetics.²⁸

The emergence of settled monks and nuns, and the establishment of monasteries attached to temples, reflect the changed fortunes of Jainism: the material support which rulers, feudatories and other influential members of society gave to the monastic orders went far beyond the simple provision of food and temporary shelter. Through the grants they received, the monastic orders thus became the owners of landed property. The increased political and economic influence of the ascetic orders and their leaders eventually led to the emergence of a new religious institution within Digambara Jainism: the figure of the *bhaṭṭāraka* ("learned man"). Initially the head of a group of settled monks, the *bhaṭṭāraka* came to hold a quasi-pontifical authority. The post was held by a celibate, but not fully initiated, ascetic, who took a hereditary name and wore special orange robes (Plate 3.1). In his administrative capacity, the *bhaṭṭāraka* handled the financial affairs of his monastery, while as a political figure, he acted as the representative of the local Jaina community. In this function he sometimes had to deal with Hindu or Muslim rulers. In fact, as Paul Dundas points out, a *bhaṭṭāraka* could wield power similar to that of worldly rulers:

He sat on a pontifical throne, enjoyed trappings of office and a great deal of pomp and ceremony attended his processional activities. The *bhattaraka* of Kolhapur in Maharashtra who built the gate of his monastery of equal height to the city gate was making a specific point about his equality of status with the local raja.²⁹

Accounts like this suggest that the institution of the *bhaṭṭāraka* did not for long remain without its opponents, who considered it redolent of corruption and decadence. Several reformers argued against alleged malpractices within the institution and disputed the spiritual authority of the *bhaṭṭārakas*.³⁰

Notwithstanding the critical voices who regarded the *bhaṭṭāraka* institution as a sign of religious laxity, several authors see the role of the *bhaṭṭāraka* in a more positive light. Vilas Adinath Sangave, a contemporary Digambara Jaina from South Mahara-

²⁷ Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 65.

²⁸ For a list of practices, which were strongly criticised, see Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 68–69.

²⁹ Dundas, *The Jains*: 107.

³⁰ This is the case among the Digambara sect of the Terāpanthīs, which originated in North India during the seventeenth century CE. Among the reasons for the emergence of the group, their disapproval of the *bhaṭṭārakas* was an important factor. For the Digambara Terāpanthīs, see Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism*: 214–16.



Plate 3.1: A reception with naked Digambara monks and orange-dressed *bhattacharakas*.

shtra, describes the emergence of the institution as “a policy of survival to meet the severe challenges created by the advent of Muslim rule in India.”³¹ He bases his argument partly on the assumption that naked ascetics faced severe hardships because of the Muslims’ opposition to public nakedness, whereas the *bhattacharaka*, as a clothed religious authority, was able to step in to prevent the disintegration of the Jain community.³² As an observation about the function of the *bhattacharakas*, this may hold some truth, but as an account of their origin it sounds somewhat simplistic, with its focus on the alleged Muslim threat. It is true that the practice of nakedness for fully initiated male ascetics was on the wane during the medieval period. Nevertheless, in my view, Muslim opposition is unlikely to have been the sole reason for this development. It seems more likely that the practice of wearing clothes represents a gradual development which started when monks began to settle down, and their lifestyle became increasingly in tune with their social surroundings. In a later period, when the influ-

³¹ Vilas A. Sangave, *Facets of Jainology. Selected Research Papers on Jain Society, Religion and Culture* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2001): 133.

³² Sangave, *Facets of Jainology*: 133–34.

ence of Jainism in South India decreased, the general tolerance of the non-Jaina majority towards naked ascetics may also have been on the wane.

While in medieval times, the *bhaṭṭāraka* tradition existed in North and South India, its stronghold today is the area of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Out of the thirty-six *bhaṭṭāraka* seats that used to exist in India, fewer than one third have survived into the twenty-first century, the majority of which are in Karnataka. The most important and influential *bhaṭṭāraka* seats today are Shravanabelgola (Śravaṇabelgola) in Hassan District, Mudabidri (Mūdabidri) in South Kanara District and Humcha (Hombuja) in Shimoga District (Plate 3.2).³³ The connection that used to exist between a *bhaṭṭāraka* and a particular Jain caste, whose affairs he controlled, has been decreasing for about the last hundred years, after reform-minded Jainas had started to argue that this system created further harmful distinctions.³⁴ As in earlier times, *bhaṭṭārakas* today engage in religious education. Furthermore, they try to promote Jain studies, literature and religion by running research institutes and schools and pub-



Plate 3.2: The seat of the *bhaṭṭāraka* (*maṭha*) at Humcha.

³³ A full list of former and existing *bhaṭṭāraka* seats can be found in Sangave, *Facets of Jainology*: 134–35. In recent years, some new seats were established at Kanakagiri (Kanakagiri) in Mysore District, Kambadhalli (Kambadhalli) in Mandya District and at Aminabhavi (Amīnbhāvi), near Hubli in Dharwad District.

³⁴ At the end of the nineteenth century, when the first reform-orientated Digambara Jain associations were formed, the disintegration of the community into smaller groups and castes was considered a major grievance which had to be removed. Although some progress has been made, the Digambara community today is still not as united as the early reformers hoped it would become.

lishing Jaina scriptures. In this regard, the survival of the *bhaṭṭāraka* tradition in South India, especially Karnataka, wields some crucial influence. Unlike Digambara monks and nuns, *bhaṭṭārakas* are not restricted as to travel. Some of them therefore act as promoters of their religious tradition in other parts of India and abroad. The educational function of the *maṭhas*, as seats of learning, is an important element of their role in South India, where, unlike in the north, there is no tradition of independent institutions for the study of Jaina literature and religion.³⁵

4 A Particular Monastic Order of the Deccan: The Yāpanīyas

The medieval period witnessed also some other developments within Jaina monasticism. While the organisation of the monastic orders became more complex in the early medieval age,³⁶ the period between the eighth and tenth century CE, according to Ramendra Nath Nandi, proved to be “most eventful in the history of the Jaina church,”³⁷ regarding the establishment of new monastic orders in the Karnataka area.³⁸ One important ascetic order, that of the Yāpanīyas, which flourished chiefly in the area of what is now North Karnataka, had however already been established during the first centuries CE. The foundation of this sect predates the fifth century CE and was perhaps as early as the second century CE.³⁹ Interestingly, the Yāpanīyas were rejected as “heretics” by Śvetāmbara as well as Digambara authors. Although many Yāpanīya relics can still be found in North Karnataka, little is known about the order.

According to A.N. Upadhye, on whose studies⁴⁰ nearly all other writers base their accounts of the sect, the following details can be reconstructed: in their outward appearance (nakedness) Yāpanīyas resembled Digambara monks, in whose close vicinity

35 Places like Morena and Benares are famous for their Jaina educational institutions. A highly educated Jaina layman whom I met in Maharashtra, who had himself been sent to North India for his studies, argued that one reason for the decline of the *bhaṭṭāraka* tradition in North India could have been the existence of many lay Jaina scholars and a tradition of Jaina institutions of learning which made *maṭhas*, as seats of learning, unnecessary.

36 For more details about the split of the monastic organisation into smaller groups, see Adinath N. Upadhye, “More Light on the Yāpanīya Saṅgha: A Jaina Sect,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 55, no. 1–4 (1974): 9–10.

37 Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 41.

38 Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 41–46.

39 Adinath N. Upadhye, “Yāpanīya Saṅgha: A Jaina Sect,” *Journal of the University of Bombay* 1, no. 4 (1933): 229.

40 See Upadhye, “Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 224–31, and Upadhye, “More Light on the Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 9–22.

they resided, while they also shared some doctrines with the Śvetāmbaras. One of these doctrines, unacceptable to Digambaras, held that women were able to attain liberation without having been born in a male human body first.⁴¹ The origin of the sect remains obscure. Traditions from the tenth century onwards hold that the Yāpanīyas had originally been Śvetāmbaras who had changed their outward appearance.⁴² Śvetāmbara authors, on the other hand, claimed that the Yāpanīyas were an offshoot of the Digambaras.⁴³ There are several interpretations of the origin of their name.⁴⁴ Most probably it derived from the root “yā” (“expelled”), denoting the Yāpanīyas’ independence from Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras⁴⁵ or their parent order, that they had left.⁴⁶ According to inscriptional evidence, the Yāpanīyas had been quite successful in gaining land grants from rulers and other influential sections of the society, mainly in the area of the modern districts of Kolhapur (South Maharashtra), Dharwar (Dhār-wār), Belgaum (Belgāum) and Gulbarga.⁴⁷ Some influential teachers and writers, like Umāsvāti, most probably belonged to the Yāpanīya order.

While they are mentioned in various inscriptions from the fifth to the fourteenth centuries CE, the Yāpanīyas seem to have disappeared after this time. In all probability, they gradually merged into the Digambara fold, in whose midst they had been living for several centuries. Their Jina statues are worshipped by the Digambaras today.⁴⁸

Some authors⁴⁹ stress the importance of the Yāpanīyas for the further development and growing popularity of the Jaina tradition in the Karnataka area during the medieval period. P.B. Desai points out two areas in which the Yāpanīyas’ influence has had an impact: firstly, the Yāpanīyas are considered “to have been the early pioneers of the reformist movement in the Jaina church of South India and their example and precept seem to have been followed and assimilated by the teachers of several other monastic orders, tacitly, without making much fuss about it.”⁵⁰ According to Desai, Yāpanīya ascetics had been foremost in adapting the Jaina tradition to the local environment of South India. Secondly, Desai conjectures that the Yāpanīyas’ less rigid

41 See Upadhye, “Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 231.

42 Upadhye, “More Light on the Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 10–11.

43 Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism*: 238.

44 For different spellings and interpretations, see Upadhye, “More Light on the Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 11–12.

45 Upadhye, “Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 227.

46 Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 55.

47 Upadhye, “More Light on the Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 18.

48 For more details about the Yāpanīyas, see Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 163–74; Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 41–61, Upadhye, “Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 224–31, Upadhye, “More Light on the Yāpanīya Saṅgha”: 9–22, or Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism*: 238–39.

49 For example, see Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 167–70, or Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 59–61.

50 Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 167.

attitude regarding some dogmatic aspects of Jainism, such as the possibility of a woman's attaining spiritual liberation in this life, must have helped popularise the Jaina tradition among the general population. He ascribes the large number of female lay-followers and ascetics, which we can deduce from South Indian inscriptions, to the influence of the Yāpanīyas:

By far the most outstanding factor, more than anything else, that might have contributed to the success of the Jaina faith in South India, appears to be the liberal attitude towards women evinced by the Yāpanīyas. For women are the most potent transmitters of the religious ideas and practices [...] and the teacher who is able to capture their religious propensities, rules the society.⁵¹

Even if Desai's statement seems to include some exaggeration, there can be no doubt about the impact of women as transmitters of religious traditions. Nevertheless, there is no way of proving that the popularity of Jainism among women in South India was really as closely linked to the Yāpanīyas' teachings as Desai argues,⁵² for inscriptions testify to a considerably high number of women ascetics and lay-followers also in areas where the Digambara, rather than the Yāpanīya tradition was dominant.⁵³

For Ramendra Nath Nandi, on the other hand, the main impact of the Yāpanīyas was in the socio-religious field, linked to their eagerness to settle down in monasteries and take care of temples and the regular worship conducted there. He concludes his discussion of the sect's impact as follows:

The wandering groups of monks could make little permanent impression on the people of a locality. But the settled monks, with proper understanding of the social and economic processes in a region, could exercise far greater influence. Their temples were more than places of ritual worship. They were often the scene of great cultural and economic activities. [...] The Yāpanīya movement was thus not a mere schismatic development. It served a socio-economic purpose which justifies the wide patronage enjoyed by it. It originated as a result of monastic schism but instead of weakening the parent Digambara church gave it a long lease of life in the Deccan.⁵⁴

Since the Yāpanīyas were most probably absorbed by the Digambaras during the fifteenth century, and have remained a rather obscure and understudied Jaina sect, it is difficult to draw any definite conclusion about their impact on the Jaina tradition in South India. We can, however, see from inscriptions that the Yāpanīyas wielded some

⁵¹ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 168.

⁵² Adinath N. Upadhye, for instance, rejects any connection between the doctrine of women's liberation and the existence of female ascetics. He therefore sees the Yāpanīyas' impact on South Indian society as less important (Upadhye, "More Light on the Yāpanīya Sangha": 18).

⁵³ Inscriptions from Shravanabelgola, a centre of the Digambara tradition, record an impressive number of laywomen who performed the Jaina ritual of fasting to death, *sallekhanā*, during the twelfth century. See S. Settar, *Inviting Death. Historical Experiments on Sepulchral Hill* (Dharwad: Institute of Indian Art History Karnatak University, 1986): 100.

⁵⁴ Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 61.

influence over important sections of society, especially in the area of North Karnataka. Regarding their eagerness to settle down, as Nandi puts it, it seems likely that the Yāpanīyas maintained close links with local lay Jains on whose patronage they depended, while themselves providing the lay-followers with spiritual guidance and performing religious rituals, in particular temple worship and the worship of female goddesses. The development of these rituals is another important aspect of medieval Jainism,⁵⁵ as we shall see.

5 Developments in Jaina Rituals and Worship

With the increase in patronage and the rising popularity of the Jaina tradition, the number of Jaina temples multiplied. We have already seen that inscriptions mentioning land grants to Jaina orders in the Deccan reach back to the fourth century CE. As the practice of erecting temples became more widespread, inscriptions begin to state the importance of the worship performed in them. Jina statues had been worshipped in earlier times, but during the medieval period, image worship and temple rituals seem to have become much more elaborate. Jaina ascetics began to focus on the formulation of precepts for lay-followers and worship was listed among the religious duties of householders. It seems unlikely that the Jaina tradition had been a purely ascetic tradition before Jaina literature started to concern itself with the conduct of laymen.⁵⁶ With the growing number of monasteries, however, and the ascetics' tendency to settle down, the support of Jaina laymen became more important. It does not therefore appear coincidental that during the medieval period the literature of Jaina teachers increasingly dealt with laymen's concerns. Here, much attention was focused on the merit gained through the erection of temples and the performance of rituals. Inscriptional evidence detailing grants given for the performance of temple rituals also shows the growing importance of ritual worship.⁵⁷ The building and renovating of temples and the performance of temple worship were considered pious acts through which the donor acquired merit. Literary texts dealt with the correct way to perform temple rituals and praised worship as a path to temporal wellbeing and spir-

55 On this, see, for instance, Desai, *Jainism in South India*, Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Is there a Popular Jainism?" in *The Assembly of Listeners*, ed. Michael Carrithers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 187–99, Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, or Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*.

56 Since Jaina ascetics have always been dependent on food offerings, a kind of lay-community must have come into existence very early, consisting of householders who had been attracted to the Jaina teachings without taking the final step of becoming an ascetic.

57 Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*: 23–26.

itual liberation.⁵⁸ The prescribed rituals of the medieval period include Jina worship with eight different articles and the ablution or anointment ceremony, *abhiṣeka*, both of which still today form a substantial part of temple worship among the Digambara Jainas.

5.1 The Veneration of Bāhubali

An interesting feature of Jaina worship, which developed during the heyday of Jaina influence in Karnataka, is the veneration of the mythological figure of Bāhubali, also known as Gommaṭa or Gommaṭeśvara.

5.1.1 The Legend of Bāhubali

According to legend, Bāhubali's life can be summarised as follows: Bāhubali was the son of the first Tirthaṅkara Ādinātha, who, when Ādinātha decided to become an ascetic, divided his kingdom among all his sons. The eldest, Bharata, however, wanted to rule the whole world and requested his brothers to accept his sovereignty. Only Bāhubali refused and defeated his elder brother in several single combats. Seeing Bharata's defeat and humiliation, however, Bāhubali realised the futility of all worldly aims and became an ascetic. After a period of meditation in the standing posture (*kāyotsarga*) he finally attained omniscience (*kevalajñāna*).⁵⁹

5.1.2 Bāhubali's Importance in Karnataka

The story of Bāhubali became a popular theme in Jaina literature⁶⁰ and art in the Karnataka area. The earliest artistic representations of him go back to the sixth century CE. The cult of Bāhubali spread across the southern part of India, with Karnataka becoming

⁵⁸ These texts include, for instance, Vimalasūri's *Paumacariya* (probably third century CE); Ravise-na's *Padmapurāṇa* (seventh century CE) and Jaṭāsīṃhanandi's *Varāṅgacarita* (seventh century CE). For more information, see Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*: 23–32.

⁵⁹ For accounts of the story of Bāhubali, see Padmaraja Dandavathi, *Gommaṭa: Mahamastakabhiṣeka 2006* (Bangalore: The Commissioner, Department of Information, 2005): 18–23; Vilas A. Sangave, *The Sacred Sravana-Belagola. A Socio-Religious Study* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1981): 66–68; S. Settar, *Sravana Belgola* (Dharwad: Ruvari, 1981): 49; K.V.R. Tagore, ed., *March of Karnataka* (Bangalore: Commissioner of Information, 2006): 8–9, or Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism*: 48–49.

⁶⁰ The first detailed literary account of the Bāhubali story is given in Sanskrit by Jinaseṇa in his *Ādi-purāṇa* (ninth century CE). Important Kannada poets, such as Pampa and Cāvuṇḍarāya (tenth century CE) also told the story. For more details, see Settar, *Sravana Belgola*: 47.



Plate 3.3: The colossal Bāhubali at Venur.

the centre of his worship.⁶¹ This development found its most famous expression in the erection of several huge statues. The first and largest is the monolithic statue, nearly 60

⁶¹ Settar, *Sravana Belgola*: 47.

feet (18.3 metres) high,⁶² erected on behalf of the general and minister Cāvuṇḍarāya at Shravanabelgola in about 981 CE. This inspired other tall images, such as the Bāhubali colossi at Karkal (Kārkaḷa) (1432 CE) and Venur (Vēṇur) (1604 CE) (Plate 3.3).

But what made the worship of Bāhubali and the building of his statues so popular in the first place? Several theories exist: firstly, according to a popular Digambara belief, Bāhubali was the first person in the present time-cycle to attain spiritual liberation.⁶³ Secondly, the story of Bāhubali, who had the chance to become a mighty ruler, but instead, disgusted by all worldly affairs, chose the ascetic life, demonstrated the Jaina message in an impressive way and presented Bāhubali as the ideal of the true Jaina ascetic. The importance of the Bāhubali cult in Karnataka certainly owes a lot to the erection of the Gommaṭa colossus at Shravanabelgola, which itself inspired other rulers to erect further gigantic images. The building of such statues not only conferred merit on local rulers but also served as an expression of royal authority. The combination of successful warrior and great ascetic, as symbolised in the figure of Bāhubali, may have been another reason for the enormous popularity of Bāhubali and his cult among the ruler and warrior classes.

5.1.3 The Mahāmastakābhīṣeka

While the ritual of *abhiṣeka* was a substantial element of regular image worship in the temples, the anointment of the Bāhubali colossi developed into an important religious spectacle, known as the Mahāmastakābhīṣeka, the “great head anointing ceremony.” The first such ritual of the Gommaṭa statue at Shravanabelgola was performed shortly after its construction and it was repeated no more than once every twelve years, because of the huge size of the image. Inscriptions and literary accounts mention several performances of the Mahāmastakābhīṣeka ritual during the following centuries. From the seventeenth century onwards, the Mahārāja of Mysore, although Hindu, played an important part in the ceremony. At the time of writing, the last Mahāmastakābhīṣeka was held in February 2018.⁶⁴ The one before this took place in February 2006: over a period of around ten days, the Gommaṭa statue was daily anointed with thousands of litres of water, milk, sugarcane juice, diluted turmeric, sandalwood and other precious substances. Tens of thousands of Jains from all parts of India, a big congregation of ascetics, and many non-Jainas came to witness the

⁶² According to the measurements of the Karnataka University’s Indian Art History Institute from 1980, the total height of the statue is 58.8 feet (Dandavathi, *Gommaṭa: Mahāmastakābhīṣeka*: 28–29).

⁶³ According to this belief, Bāhubali died earlier than his father, the first Tīrthaṅkara, and therefore became the first liberated being of this era. Nevertheless, he is not regarded as a Jina, since he did not preach the Jaina message after the attainment of omniscience. The Śvetāmbaras, on the other hand, do not regard Bāhubali as the first liberated human being.

⁶⁴ The next Mahāmastakābhīṣeka ceremony is due to take place in 2030.

event (Plate 3.4). The Mahāmastakābhiṣeka at Shravanabelgola is certainly the most splendid and most well-known ritual performed by Digambara Jainas in South India. Despite the decline in the Jainas' influence in Karnataka, it has been conducted at more or less regular intervals for more than one thousand years.



Plate 3.4: Pilgrims descending after the Mahāmastakābhiṣeka 2006 at Shravanabelgola.

5.2 *Yakṣī* Worship

As well as worshipping enlightened beings, such as the Tīrthaṅkaras and Bāhubali, the Digambaras in Karnataka also have a particular devotion to the female goddesses known as *yakṣīs* or *yakṣiṇīs*. The elaborate form of this *yakṣī* cult developed during the medieval period. All female *yakṣīs* have a male associated *yakṣa*. *Yakṣa* shrines, in which worship was offered to supernatural powers, were already known at the time of the twenty-fourth Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra. *Yakṣas* appear in Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina texts, while their first mentioning in Jaina literature dates from the first centuries CE. The earliest iconographic evidence within the Jaina tradition goes back to the sixth century CE.⁶⁵ During the medieval period, a pair of one *yakṣa* and one *yakṣī* were attributed to each of the 24 Tīrthaṅkaras, as male and female tutelary deities.

The majority of these guardian deities, especially the male *yakṣas*, did not become the object of a special cult, but some of the *yakṣīs* came to be venerated quite independently from their original status as guardians of the Jinas. The development of an individual *yakṣī* cult has mainly been studied from the perspective of changes in the Jaina iconography.⁶⁶

5.2.1 Padmāvatī, Jvālāmālīnī and Kuṣamāṇḍinī *Yakṣī*

By far the most popular female goddess among the Digambaras of Karnataka is Padmāvatī, the *yakṣī* of the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha (Plate 3.5). One famous account explains her close connection to snakes: one day, Pārśvanātha (before his final spiritual liberation) preached the Jaina message to two dying snakes. Having died peacefully through the Jaina teachings, they were reborn as Dhāraṇendra, king of the *nāgas* (snakes), and his wife Padmāvatī. When in his next life, a demon tried to disturb Pārśvanātha's meditation by sending storm and rain, the two snakes came to his protection and spread their hoods above his head. Pārśvanātha, therefore, went on in his meditation undisturbed, and finally became the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ John Cort, "Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions," *Numen* 34, no. 2 (1991): 241.

⁶⁶ Changes in the position of the *yakṣīs* are an important index of their growing importance as independent objects of worship. One often cited example for this development is the *yakṣī* statue in the Meguḍi Temple (erected in 634 CE) at Aihole (Aihole) in Bijapur District. Unlike earlier images, where *yakṣīs* are depicted at the Tīrthaṅkara's left hand, she is presented independently and has two attendants at each side (Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 151; Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*: 52. For the iconography of Jaina *yakṣīs*, see B.C. Bhattacharya, *The Jaina Iconography*, 2nd ed. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974]: 86–107, or Savitri Dhawan, *Mother Goddesses in Early Indian Religion* (Jaipur: National Publishing House, 1997): 123–33). For the *yakṣa* cult in the Indian tradition, see for instance Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, part 1 and 2, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1980), or J.P. Sharma, *Jaina Yakshas* (Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Book World, 1996).

⁶⁷ This account of the Padmāvatī legend and some others, in which Pārśvanātha and Dhāraṇendra do not appear, are found in Robert J. Zydenbos, "Göttinnenverehrung im Jainismus," in *Aspekte des*



Plate 3.5: Padmāvatī, the most popular *yakṣī* of Karnataka, from Shrīrangapatnam.

Weiblichen in der indischen Kultur, ed. Ulrike Roesler (Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica-et-Tibetica-Verlag, 2000): 174–81.

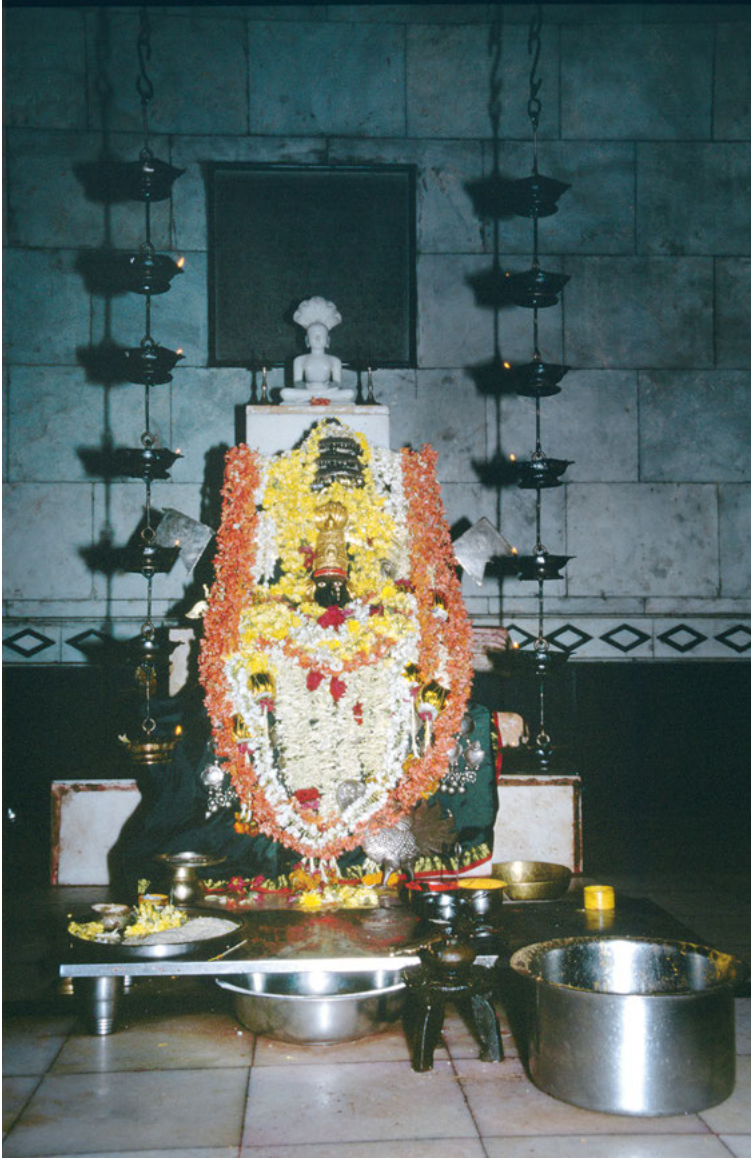


Plate 3.6: The *yakṣī* Padmāvatī on display in her temple at Humcha.

Some *yakṣīs*, as John Cort observes, had originally been *kuladevīs*, lineage goddesses of local ruling families. It is likely that the same holds true for Padmāvatī.⁶⁸ As *kuladevī* of the Sāntara dynasty, Padmāvatī became closely linked to Humcha (Shimoga

⁶⁸ Cort, “Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions”: 243.

District) (Plate 3.6), which had been the capital of the Sāntara rulers since the tenth century CE.⁶⁹ Up to the present day, the small village of Humcha has remained the centre of Padmāvatī worship in Karnataka. The place houses several Jaina temples and is the seat of Bhaṭṭāraka Devendrakīrti. Jainas from all over Karnataka and other parts of India come to Humcha to worship the goddess. Every Friday, a special *pūjā* (ritualised worship) is performed at the temple, attracting a number of pilgrims. *Abhiṣeka* is conducted with several substances and devotees present offerings (including coconuts, fruits, sweets and sometimes a *sārī*, the traditional Indian women's dress) (Plate 3.7). After some *mantras*, spoken by the priests, the offerings (except for the *sārī*, which will be kept to dress the image) are given back as *prasāda*, blessing from the goddess. On Friday evening, a smaller statue of Padmāvatī is taken through the village in a procession. The villagers also make some offerings and get them back as *prasāda*—regardless of religious affiliation. As the statue is carried around, offerings are made by Hindus and Jainas alike.⁷⁰

Padmāvatī is petitioned for worldly boons, such as the birth of a child. When the *pūjā* of her main statue is performed in the temple, the priest decorates the image with some flowers offered by the devotees. If a flower falls from the head of the statue, it is popularly believed that the devotee's wish will be granted by the goddess.⁷¹ From the large number of Padmāvatī images and her regular appearance in Jaina literature, it seems that Padmāvatī was the most popular Jaina goddess in Karnataka during the medieval period, as she still is today. Furthermore, several ruling dynasties and officials called themselves her devotees.⁷² As the legendary account of her connection with Pārśvanātha and the iconography of her image⁷³ suggest, Padmāvatī is closely linked with the *nāga* or snake cult, which is widespread throughout Karnataka, especially in the coastal region.⁷⁴ According to Nandi, the first evidence of Padmāvatī worship dates from about the eighth and ninth centuries, when the Sāntara dynasty was already associated with the cult of the goddess.⁷⁵ Her association with Pārśvanātha, however, seems not to have started much earlier than the beginning of the tenth century, as sculptural evidence suggests.⁷⁶ While Tantric beliefs and practices had their impact on Hindu and

69 Zydenbos, "Göttinnenverehrung im Jainismus": 176.

70 Worship in the temple, on the other hand, is mainly confined to Jainas, who visit Humcha principally as a Jaina pilgrimage centre.

71 This story was also told to me by devotees in other temples where goddess worship was conducted.

72 Cort, "Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions": 243–44.

73 Padmāvatī's iconography contains snake symbols and the goddess is usually depicted with serpent-hoods over her head. See Bhattacharya, *The Jaina Iconography*: 104–6, Cort, "Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions": 244, or Dhawan, *Mother Goddesses*: 132.

74 For *nagas* in Indian mythology and art, see Jean Philippe Vogel, *Indian Serpent-Lore or the Nagas in Hindu Legend and Art* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972).

75 Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 150–51.

76 Cort, "Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions": 244.



Plate 3.7: *Pūjā* for a *yākṣī* with milk.

Buddhist traditions, the Jaina tradition also did not remain unaffected. The goddess cults seem to have been an integral part of Jaina Tantra. Literary evidence of a Tantric cult of Padmāvatī is provided by the *Bairava Padmāvatī Kalpa*, written in 1057 CE by the ascetic Malliṣeṇa in the North Karnataka area.

Just as Padmāvatī was closely related to the seat of a *bhaṭṭāraka*, so too were the two other most popular *yākṣīs* among the Digambaras of Karnataka, Jvālāmālīnī and Kūṣ-māṇḍinī. The main pilgrimage centre of the goddess Jvālāmālīnī, the *yākṣī* of the eighth Tīrthaṅkara Candraprabha, is the seat of Bhaṭṭāraka Lakṣmīseṇa, in the small

village of Narasimharajapura (Narasimharājapura), also known as Simhanagadde (Chikmagalur District), near Humcha. Many Jain pilgrims visiting Humcha also pay a visit to Narasimharajapura. Every Sunday, Jvālāmālīnī is worshipped with a special *pūjā*, which very much resembles the worship of Padmāvatī at the temple at Humcha. The cult of Jvālāmālīnī most probably started in the ninth century and its origin is closely connected with Jain Tantra. According to legend, as we read in the *Jvālāmālīnī Kalpa*,⁷⁷ the ascetic Helācārya started her cult after driving out a demon with the help of the goddess.⁷⁸ The worship of Kuṣamāṇḍinī, tutelary goddess of the twenty-second Tīrthaṅkara Nemināth, is centred on Shravanabelgola (Plate 3.8). One legend about Kuṣamāṇḍinī associates her with the successful completion of the first Mahāmastakābhiṣeka of the Gommaṭa statue at Shravanabelgola.⁷⁹ She is closely associated with children and childbirth, as her other name, Aṁbikā, literally “mother,” makes clear.⁸⁰ The origin of her cult can be traced back to the seventh century CE.⁸¹

These cult centres were popular places of pilgrimage for Jains, in particular when they had a special boon about which to petition the goddess. However, the *yakṣīs* described above were worshipped not only at the centres of their cult, but across Karnataka as well.

5.2.2 The Question of Venerating Goddesses in Jainism

The described *yakṣīs* are not only worshipped at the centres of their cult. While these places get visited by Jain pilgrims, who ask for some special worldly boons, *yakṣīs* are found in most Digambara temples of Karnataka. Their worship often includes *abhiṣeka* and their images are regularly dressed with new *sārīs* (Plate 3.9). Apart from *yakṣīs*, Jains also worship other popular Indian goddesses, such as Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī (Plate 3.10). While Sarasvatī, as goddess of learning and protector of the Jain scriptures, has an association with the Jain tradition that goes back to antiquity,⁸² Lakṣmī, as goddess of prosperity, is essentially an “occupational deity” of all merchant castes in India,⁸³ to which many Jain traders belong.

⁷⁷ A Tantric text written by Indranandī in the tenth century CE.

⁷⁸ For accounts of the legend and its interpretation, see John Cort, “Medieval Jain Goddess Traditions,” *Numen* 34, no. 2 (1991): 246–47; Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 153–54, or Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*: 53–54. For different legends about Jvālāmālīnī, see Zydenbos, “Göttinnenverehrung im Jainismus”: 170–74.

⁷⁹ For an account of this story and some other legends about Kuṣamāṇḍinī, see Zydenbos, “Göttinnenverehrung im Jainismus”: 167–70.

⁸⁰ Cort, “Medieval Jain Goddess Traditions”: 247.

⁸¹ Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*: 55.

⁸² The oldest Sarasvatī statue discovered so far is a Jain image and can be dated back to the year 132 CE (Cort, “Medieval Jain Goddess Traditions”: 236).

⁸³ Cort, “Medieval Jain Goddess Traditions”: 237.



Plate 3.8: Kuṣamāṇḍinī, associated with Nemināth and the site of Shravanabelgola.

The worship of goddesses, especially in the form of the *yakṣī* cult, is prevalent among the Digambaras of Karnataka. Scholars, however, commonly regard *yakṣī* worship as contrary to “original Jainism,” a “foreign” element, which must have been “borrowed” from the Hindu tradition. This “borrowing,” as the prevalent argument runs, took place during the medieval period, and was a means of safeguarding the Jaina tradition in the face of competition from Hindu groups, especially the *bhakti* movements. In his article “Is there a Popular Jainism?” Padmanabh S. Jaini is “looking for practices within Jaina society that can be considered inconsistent with the main teachings of the religion, but so thoroughly assimilated with them now that they are



Plate 3.9: *Yakṣī* from Kanakagiri dressed in a bright *sārī*.

no longer perceived as alien.”⁸⁴ One of these “inconsistent” practices, according to Jaini, can be found in the *yakṣī* cult, whose legitimisation by Jaina writers during the medieval period “may have helped to prevent the influence of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva *bhakti* movements on the Jaina laity.”⁸⁵ But here we are confronted with an important question: who, in the first place, has the right to define “the main teachings” of a religious tradition? It is important not to forget the way in which Indian religions have been studied. When Westerners first became interested in Jainism and other faiths, they turned first to the available scriptures. Since the Jaina texts dealt mainly with the concerns of ascetics, Jainism came to be seen as a dry, life-negating tradition, prac-

⁸⁴ Jaini, “Is there a Popular Jainism?”: 187.

⁸⁵ Jaini, “Is there a Popular Jainism?”: 196.



Plate 3.10: The goddess Sarasvatī, carved onto a pillar of the *basadi* at Dharmasthala.

tised only by renouncers. This has remained a powerful stereotype. Meanwhile, practices and beliefs that did not fit into the scheme of rigid asceticism and the focus on the otherworldly sphere came to be seen as belonging to a degenerate, “Hinduised” form of Jainism, or, to use Jaini’s phrase, “popular Jainism.” But how, one might argue, is a religious tradition supposed to survive, if its only key figures are world-renouncers? Robert J. Zydenbos therefore makes a pertinent point when he asks how Jainism could have managed to survive for two and a half thousand years, if it had focused exclusively on the ascetic tradition, without any appeal to lay-followers.⁸⁶ With this in mind, it seems more than likely that the Jaina tradition from its earliest days must have included elements which made it attractive to people who chose to remain householders.

⁸⁶ Zydenbos, “Göttinnenverehrung im Jainismus”: 146–47.

Furthermore, the antiquity of the *yakṣa* cult in India suggests that it may be more appropriate to consider it as an ancient indigenous cult which found its way into various Indian religious traditions, including Jainism, rather than as a Hindu phenomenon which was copied by other faiths. We should beware, then, of regarding goddess worship within the Jaina tradition as nothing more than a “borrowed” element. John Cort, for instance, considers the cults of goddesses within Jainism “not just Jaina incorporations of Hindu deities into lay Jaina devotional practices,” but “a distinct strand within the complex history of goddess worship in India.”⁸⁷

Whatever the origins of the *yakṣī* cult, we see it becoming more elaborate and more popular during the medieval period. It seems likely that this development was linked to the growing popularity of Tantric practices and the increasing influence of Hindu *bhakti* movements. The worship of *yakṣīs* as supernatural powers who could interfere in worldly affairs, unlike the enlightened Tīrthaṅkaras, did not diminish the spiritual superiority of the Jinas. Jaina writers of the medieval period tried to justify the worship of goddesses as compatible with Jaina doctrine. Olle Qvarnström detects in this trend “a Jain strategy for survival and growth,”⁸⁸ in reaction to the religious and cultural (non-Jaina) environment. Several scholars argue that *bhakti* movements posed serious competition to the Jaina tradition, and that this prompted Jaina teachers to popularise and legitimise Jaina goddess worship.⁸⁹

5.3 Religious Change in the Middle Ages

The elaboration of ritual worship during the medieval period, including the veneration of images of Jinas, Bāhubali and minor deities (mainly *yakṣīs*), is generally interpreted in two ways. Some scholars suggest that Jaina teachers had been forced to defend the Jaina tradition against external influences, as rival religious traditions became increasingly popular, while at the same time popular cults were assimilated or elaborated on to satisfy the needs of devotees. While this argumentation⁹⁰ focuses on the interaction between the Jaina tradition and the surrounding Hindu environment, an alternative in-

⁸⁷ Cort, “Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions”: 236.

⁸⁸ Olle Qvarnström, “Stability and Adaptability: A Jain Strategy for Survival and Growth,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41, no. 1 (1998): 33.

⁸⁹ See, for instance Jaini, “Is there a Popular Jainism?” and Qvarnström, “Stability and Adaptability”: 33–55.

⁹⁰ This argumentation is found in Desai, *Jainism in South India*; Jaini, “Is there a Popular Jainism?”; Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*; Qvarnström, “Stability and Adaptability”: 33–55; or Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*. Desai and Nandi consider *yakṣī* worship one of the practices which helped Jaina ascetics, especially the Yāpanīyas, to popularise the Jaina tradition in South India (Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 170–71; Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 59–60).

terpretation takes into account changes within the Jaina tradition, especially the growing numbers of monasteries and temples. This development, which started thanks to an increase in royal patronage, marks the institutionalisation of the Jaina tradition in the area of Karnataka. As monks settled in monasteries and the number of temples increased, there was a growing need for the support of the laity. In consequence, the conduct and concerns of laymen gained more importance in the works of the medieval Jaina writers, while rituals increased and became more elaborate. At the same time, the accommodation of Jaina tradition to regional surroundings prompted the adaption of local customs and traditions and their incorporation into the Jaina system. This is not to say that goddess worship, for instance, had been completely absent from Jaina practice before this time. As we have seen, it is likely to have had its place in the Jaina tradition, as an indigenous Indian religious element. It was, however, during the medieval period that Jaina teachers began to elaborate goddess worship, in form of the Jaina *yakṣī* cult, so giving it a legitimate place within the Jaina system.

As the Jaina tradition became more deeply rooted in the area of modern Karnataka and its influence over sections of society grew, questions of accommodation to the cultural surroundings naturally became more important. One question, for instance, of relevance not only in South India but across the whole of the subcontinent, was the Jainas' attitude to the prevalent social phenomenon of the system of castes, *jāti* and *varṇa*. Since Jaina householders themselves were part of the caste system, the division of the society into different castes had to be explained from a Jaina point of view. The *Mahāpurāṇa* gives a mythological explanation, according to which Ādinātha's son, Bharata, was the "inventor" of the Jaina *varṇas*; lay-followers were able to practice the ideal of *ahiṃsā* as appropriate for their place in the system. A different approach is followed by the tenth-century South Indian Jaina ascetic Somadeva Suri. Acknowledging the fact that Jaina laymen form part of a wider social and cultural system (of which the caste system is one feature), Somadeva Suri distinguishes two different kinds of *dharma* for the Jaina householder:

[...] *laukika*, 'worldly', and *pāralaukika*, 'otherworldly'. *Pāralaukika dharma* is the true path to liberation [...] which every Jain—indeed, every man—should follow in order to attain Ultimate Knowledge. But there is also a *laukika dharma*, consisting of social norms, customs, laws, rules, institutions, upheld by the people among whom the Jains live. No harm is done, says Somadeva, if a Jain follows the *laukika dharma*, provided this does not undermine or distort the performance of *pāralaukika dharma*.⁹¹

In this regard, Jaina householders were free to follow local customs and traditions, as long as they continued to uphold the core of Jaina doctrine. This approach certainly helped the Jaina tradition to gain roots in its local surroundings and to attract possible converts. Furthermore, developments in religious practice, such as the growing influ-

91 Mukund Lath, "Somadeva Suri and the question of Jain identity," in *The Assembly of Listeners*, ed. Michael Carrithers and Caroline Humphrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 27.

ence of devotional and Tantric cults, could be integrated in the Jaina system without violating its basic doctrine.⁹²

The history of the Jaina tradition in medieval Karnataka could be said to reflect the development of a religious tradition which is not merely tolerated, but patronised and supported by various sections of society. This included a growing institutionalisation through a network of temples and monasteries, the increasing complexity of monastic organisations, a greater dependency on the laity and an increase in the number of rituals. While the Jaina tradition gained more influence over the ruling classes as well as the common people, the process of accommodation to the local social and cultural environment became an important concern for Jaina teachers.

Nevertheless, changes were afoot for the Jaina tradition. Royal patronage decreased, while rival religious groups gained more sway. The decline of Jaina influence in most parts of Karnataka, which started around the twelfth century CE, is acknowledged by most historians, but deeper explanations for the process are rarely given. Let us turn to the question of what factors may have been at play.

6 Changing Fortunes: The Decline of Jaina Influence in Karnataka

‘All who are strong and wealthy
Become devotees of Siva; Jainism
Is empty, therefore the people
Of our land do not take to it’, thus the fools speak. (13–15)
‘If Jainism is so good’,
They say, ‘then why don’t people join’?
All people become Śaivas, because
That cult wins their hearts’, thus the fools speak.⁹³ (13–16)

These words of the Jaina poet Brahmaśiva, most probably written during the twelfth century CE, reflect the alarming situation confronting the Jainas of Karnataka: whereas during the heyday of the Jaina tradition in Karnataka, Jaina ascetics had

⁹² In case of the *yakṣī* cult, for instance, goddesses were petitioned for worldly boons, while the spiritual superiority of the Tirthankaras remained untouched. It has to be added, however, that *yakṣī* cults, although very popular from the medieval period onwards, have at all times been opposed by some ascetics and lay-followers. Their legitimacy within the Jaina system is still being debated today. For more details, see Jaini, “Is there a Popular Jainism?”: 197–98, and Zydenbos, “Göttinnenverehrung im Jainismus”: 156–66.

⁹³ Robert J. Zydenbos, “Jainism Endangered: The View of the Medieval Kannada Poet Brahmaśiva,” in *Minorities on Themselves*, ed. H. van Skyhawk (Heidelberg: University of Heidelberg, 1986): 183–84.

been very successful in securing patronage for their tradition, their influence on the upper tiers of society was dwindling, as was their numerical strength.⁹⁴ Rivalry among different religious groups, especially competition for royal patronage, had existed in India from ancient times. Śaivism was now becoming more popular.

6.1 Vīraśaivism

Rival religious groups often engaged in direct competition, taking part in public debates, which, as David N. Lorenzen remarks, “often became miracle contests.”⁹⁵ The changing fortunes of the Jainas, who started to lose ground against religious rivals, especially Śaiva groups, are documented in inscriptional evidence from the late medieval period. One such inscription, found at Abalur (Abbalūr), in Dharwar District, mentions a debate or “miracle contest,” held around 1160 CE between the Śaiva Ekānta Rāmayya and local Jainas, in which the Jainas were defeated and their temples destroyed.⁹⁶ While Jain sources describing events of defeat and persecution are rare, there are some Śaiva inscriptions praising Śaivism’s victory over the Jain tradition. One inscription found at Annigeri (Anṇigeri), Dharwar District, dated 1184 CE, describes Vīra Goggidēvarasa, the trustee of a Śaiva temple:

This Goggarasa became widely known by his acts which characterised him as the hunter of the wild beasts which are the Jainas, a fire to the Jain scriptures, an axe to the followers of Jina, an eagle to the snakes, namely the adherents of the Jain doctrine, and God of Death to those who professed the Jain creed.⁹⁷

An inscription from the same period, also dated 1184 CE, found at Talikota (Tālikōte), Bijapur District, praises the “achievements” of some Śaivas, who “harassed the advocates of alien doctrines [...] and have thus vindicated their conviction of faith and steadfastness of devotion, displaying aloft as it were on the open altar the paramountcy of god Śiva [...]”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Although it is impossible to make any verifiable statements about the numerical strength of the Jainas of the Karnataka area during the medieval period, the degree of patronage and building activities shows that they must have constituted a much higher percentage of society than today (0.72% of the population, according to the Census of 2011, see Government of India, Office of the Census Organization of India, the Commissioner & Registrar General of the Indian 2011 Census C. Chandramouli, “Census 2011,” <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/6-jainism.html> [accessed 22.06.2022].

⁹⁵ David N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas. Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991): 45.

⁹⁶ David N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas*: 45, 169.

⁹⁷ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 398.

⁹⁸ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 399.

From the twelfth century onwards, the Śaiva sect of the Viraśaivas or Liṅgāyats⁹⁹ gained prominence in the area of Northern Karnataka. As members of communities which were originally affiliated with the Jaina tradition became followers of Viraśaivism, many Jaina temples were destroyed or, more commonly, taken over and converted into Viraśaiva temples. Today, the Viraśaivas still constitute the religious majority in parts of Karnataka. In the face of the increasing popularity of the Viraśaiva movement and the dwindling numbers of Jainas from the twelfth century onwards, two questions confront us: firstly, what was it that attracted so many influential converts to the Viraśaiva movement and contributed to its rise in power? Secondly, in what way was the promulgation of Viraśaivism achieved: peacefully, or, as is sometimes claimed, by force?¹⁰⁰

Part of the answer to the first question needs to be an analysis of why the Jaina tradition had declined in influence and popularity. A verifiable answer can hardly be given, but we may set out some key assumptions. When Viraśaivism came into prominence, the Jaina tradition had already been firmly settled in the Karnataka area for centuries and was solidly institutionalised, as described above, with monastic orders as rich land owners, producing elaborate temple rituals and public celebrations. Some historians¹⁰¹ see this period as one of “spiritual decadence,” in which the Jainas gave priority to worldly matters over their faith. In his book *Inviting Death*, a historical study of *sallekhanā*¹⁰² performed at Shravanabelgola, S. Settar sees the development of Jainism as following an arc, from what he calls the “Age of Spiritual Sublimity,” through an “Age of Great Material and Religious Prosperity,” and ending in a “Time of Trouble.”¹⁰³ According to Settar’s study, as the social and economic power of the monastic orders increased, the more simple and ascetic character of the early Jaina tradition, as personified by Jaina ascetics who came to the hills of Shravanabelgola with the sole intention of solitary meditation and the practice of austerities, gave

99 Viraśaivas or Liṅgāyats are the followers of a Hindu reform movement which was spread by Basava, the minister of Vijjala or Vijjaṇa (ruling from 1157 to 1167 CE), in North Karnataka during the twelfth century. Originally, the movement supported social and religious equality and therefore opposed the caste system. Śiva’s *liṅga* is at the centre of worship. Although in practice some Viraśaivas today eat meat, they initially followed a rule of vegetarianism (as most Viraśaivas still do). For more details about the Viraśaivas, see Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1983 [1913]): 187–200.

100 The use of violence or threat is assumed by several authors; see, for instance, Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 401–2, and Zydenbos, “Jainism Endangered”: 175.

101 See, for instance Jaini, “Is there a Popular Jainism?”: 196–99.

102 *Sallekhanā* is the Jaina ritual of fasting to death. The rite has commonly been misunderstood and condemned as “religiously sanctioned suicide.” Its performance, however, is subject to strict regulations, and has to be sanctioned by a religious authority. *Sallekhanā* is mainly performed in the case of a terminal disease, very old age or, for mendicants, a physical disability which makes it impossible to follow the ascetic rules (such as, for a Digambara monk, the inability to take food in the standing position). For more details, see Settar, *Inviting Death*: 93–184 and Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism*: 181–82.

103 Settar, *Inviting Death*: 3–90.

way to growing ritualism and religious pomp. At the heyday of the Jainas' influence in Shravanabelgola, the number of individuals seeking *sallekhanā* decreased, while extensive temple building and the performance of splendid rituals, such as the Mahā-mastakābhīṣeka of the Gommaṭa statue, became the focus of religious activities.

6.2 Modifications in Jainism

The development described by Settar represents a tendency typical of religious traditions that have become accustomed to royal patronage. Material wealth opens the door for misuse and corruption, and monastic orders and religious institutions are no exception. History shows us that at a point when a religious tradition becomes too worldly in the eyes of its more puritanical members, reformers often raise their voices and start a heretical sect in order to “purify” their religious fold from what they see as its degeneration.

In the case of Digambara Jainism in South India, we do find that practices such as the settling down of ascetics or the rising popularity of goddess worship attracted criticism from orthodox Jainas. However, no heterodox sect, such as the Sthānakvāsīs¹⁰⁴ among the Śvetāmbaras of North and West India, developed in South India. To ask why would be a distraction, requiring an assessment of historical, social and cultural developments in the northern and southern parts of India. Furthermore, it would be misleading to conclude that the Jaina tradition during the medieval period had lost all its former focus on asceticism¹⁰⁵ to corruption and the performance of external splendid rituals. Nevertheless, a greater degree of laxity regarding the ascetics' practices and more attention to ritualism and ceremonial pomp can be witnessed during the medieval period.

A tendency to slackness alone does not necessarily cause a religious tradition to decline in popularity, but it seems to have worked against Jainism when the faith faced strong religious rivals, especially in form of the Vīraśaiva movement. Due to the lack of historical documents, we can do no more than speculate how the Vīraśaivas came to secure royal patronage, appeal to the common people or be more popular than the Jainas in public debates. It can be assumed that in the late medieval period, the Jaina tradition failed to produce ascetics who could successfully promote their faith in public debates. Furthermore, as Pius F. Pinto has shown in the previous chap-

¹⁰⁴ The Sthānakvāsīs arose as a non-image-worshipping sect of the Śvetāmbaras, which, according to tradition, originated out of a fifteenth-century reform movement led by Loṅkā Śāh. For more details, see Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism*: 203–4.

¹⁰⁵ Such an argumentation would be based on the misconception of the “original Jainism” as a purely ascetic and world-negating tradition, in which external rituals and worship had no place. As stressed before, the Jaina tradition must have had some appeal to householders as well, given that it survived over the centuries.

ter, the period witnessed the downfall of some dynasties whose members had been important patrons of Jainism. This fact definitely affected the fortunes of the Jainas in Karnataka, though it does not explain the rise of the Viraśaivas, who managed to secure the support and patronage of ruling classes as well as trader castes.

6.3 The Attractiveness and Zeal of Viraśaivism

The Viraśaiva movement must have boasted some elements which made it more attractive than medieval Jainism. First of all, the belief in and devotion to a personal god, combined with a low degree of ritualism, would have appealed to people who sought a more personal and emotional religion. In the place of the complex rites and splendid celebrations of the medieval Jaina tradition, Viraśaivism offered a less ritualistic, spiritual approach. Furthermore, its initial spirit of social and religious equality,¹⁰⁶ revolutionary in those times, would have seemed exciting, especially to members of the lower castes, in comparison with the Jaina tradition which by this stage had bought into the caste system, dividing society into *jātis* and *varṇas*. Although, as Jaina writers stressed, the caste system was regarded only as a social institution, a strong “caste consciousness” nevertheless developed and the low-caste *sūdras* were regarded as inferior also among the Jainas, with the result that some Jaina teachers rejected the initiation of a *sūdra* into the ascetic community. In these circumstances, it seems very likely that low-caste Jainas felt more attracted towards egalitarian religious movements such as Viraśaivism.

With the growing popularity of the Viraśaiva movement among the upper segments of society, especially wealthy trading castes, the Jaina tradition lost important economic support. How the Viraśaiva leaders succeeded in gaining the support of wealthy and influential classes is difficult to pin down. In propagating their faith, however, they seem at that period to have been much more energetic and motivated than the Jainas, who had established their influence over rulers and common people several centuries before and may therefore have lost interest in promoting their tradition.

Another aspect, which is closely linked to the second question, the manner in which Viraśaivism got promulgated, refers to the Viraśaiva leaders’ “missionary zeal. The study of religious movements in history reveals the fact, that it is the followers of monotheistic traditions who show a greater “missionary zeal.” The belief in one personal god who is superior to all other supernatural powers (if their existence gets acknowledged at all), has always been a strong motivation for mission and the aim of converting others. Unfortunately, this missionary spirit often also went hand in hand with religious intolerance and rather violent methods of conversion. In case of Vira-

106 In course of time, however, Viraśaivism also developed special castes.

śaivism, the belief in the absolute superiority of god Śiva in the form of the *līṅga* represents a crucial element, which, at least in the early, more missionary phase of the movement, did not leave too much space for tolerance towards other religious systems, such as the Jainas.’

When we further consider the importance of royal patronage and economic support, it does not seem surprising to see that religious rivalry between the Vīraśaivas and other religious groups, mainly the influential Jainas, could take on violent or, to put it mildly, very unfriendly terms. Inscriptional evidences, as well as hagiographies of Basava, the main Vīraśaiva leader, abound in rather violent descriptions of the Jainas’ defeat and persecution.¹⁰⁷ If these, however, are to be taken literally, is a question for dispute. While temple destructions and taking over of temples undoubtedly happened, especially in the area of North Karnataka,¹⁰⁸ it remains unclear if violence against devotees also occurred, or if Jainas had been forcefully “converted” to Vīraśaivism. The phrases “conversion” and “converted” are used with caution here, since it remains rather doubtful, if these words are suitable for describing events which happened at a time, when religious affiliations were not as strictly defined as they are today. It also seems to be unlikely that the changing of a person’s, or, seen in the context of Indian traditional society, where individualism certainly is not a crucial issue, a community’s religious affiliation, was marked by the performance of any ritualised ceremony. Unfortunately, hardly any verifiable statements can be made about the actual processes through which the inhabitants of many villages of Karnataka became affiliated with the Vīraśaiva tradition. The religious persuasion of the ruling classes certainly had a crucial impact on the religious practices of the common people and an increase in patronage for Vīraśaivism must have had a strong impact on its growing popularity among the masses.

6.4 Śaiva Monasteries

Another factor which also contributed to the growing popularity of Hindu traditions, especially Śaivism, was the establishment of monasteries from the eighth century CE onwards. Nandi regards the Jaina tradition as of crucial importance for this development: “The influence of Jainism, which was a powerful monastic religion, on the

¹⁰⁷ Dundas, *The Jains*: 110. For inscriptional evidences, see Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 398–402, for hagiographic evidence, see Velcheru Narayana Rao, *Siva’s Warriors. The Basava Purana of Palkuriki Somanatha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 200–13.

¹⁰⁸ In several places of North Karnataka, which used to be centres of the Jaina tradition before the rise of the Vīraśaiva movement took place, relics of destroyed temples and mutilated Jina images can be found. Although aggression of Muslim invaders is sometimes held responsible for the destructions, in many cases Jaina monuments had most probably already been devastated or taken over long before the Muslim rulers arrived.

growth of Śaiva monasticism was considerable.”¹⁰⁹ The growth of Śaivite monasteries reached its zenith by the tenth and eleventh centuries CE. Like in the Jaina monastic complexes, Śaivas also imparted education and charity, which strengthened their social basis among the local population.¹¹⁰ In this way, Śaivism managed to get a firm setting among the general population, while the granting of charity in form of the provision of shelter, food, medicine and education ceased to be an exclusive Jaina activity.

6.5 Śrīvaiṣṇavism and Islam

Apart from the Viraśaiva movement, which had been the most successful rival of the Jainas in the northern part of Karnataka, other devotional Hindu movements also rose in popularity during the late medieval period. In southern parts of Karnataka, the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* movement of Śrīvaiṣṇavism¹¹¹ gained a substantial number of followers who had formerly been affiliated with the Jaina tradition. Especially members of land-owning agriculturist communities became followers of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas.¹¹²

An impact of Muslim invaders on the decrease of the Jainas' influence in the Karnataka area is sometimes argued to have occurred in the form of forced conversions and the destruction of Jaina temples and statues. Since this publication includes a chapter about the relationship between Jainas and Muslims in Karnataka (see Chapter 6), it seems sufficient to state here, that the Jaina tradition had already lost most of its influence, when Muslim rule first got established over parts of Karnataka. Though some inscriptional evidences¹¹³ and local traditions state destructions brought about by Muslim invaders, it is doubtful, if Muslim iconoclasm against Jaina architecture in South India took place on a larger scale. There are also instances of some former Jaina communities who accepted Islam, but these conversions, which in all probability had been accomplished peacefully, took place when the Jainas' influence in Karnataka had already decreased, and therefore hardly count among the main reasons for the decline of Jainism.

109 Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 77.

110 Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 105–7.

111 The Śrīvaiṣṇavas regard the teachings of Rāmānuja (eleventh century CE) as especially important. Rāmānuja escaped persecution by a Coḷa prince and took refuge in the domain of the Hoysaḷas, whose capital, Dvarasamudra (Dvārasamudra), is the modern Halebid (Halebīd) in Hassan District. His teachings led to the conversion of a substantial number of people to Śrīvaiṣṇavism. For a more detailed account, see Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1983 [1913]): 71–81.

112 Robert J. Zydenbos, “Jainism Endangered”: 177.

113 See Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 148.

7 Conclusion

A closer look at the history of the Jaina tradition in the Karnataka area from the first centuries CE until the late medieval period reveals the picture of an interesting development: In the initial phase, the gaining of royal support was of crucial importance for the further development of Jainism on the soil of Karnataka. Jaina ascetics, therefore, proved to be very successful in establishing close relationships to rulers and other influential sections of the society. Royal patronage and material support strengthened the Jainas' influence on society and helped Jainism in becoming firmly settled. The period of institutionalisation, which accompanied the growing popularity of the Jaina tradition, brought about important changes in monastic practices and religious cults. Ascetics began to settle down in monasteries which had been attached to temples. The monastic orders became more complex and a new religious authority, the *bhaṭṭāraka* came into prominence. Among the several ascetic orders, the heretical¹¹⁴ Yāpanīyas gained some influence for some time, before they merged into the Digambara fold.

During the period of institutionalisation, the dependency on the material support of the laity became a crucial issue and Jaina literature increasingly dealt with laymen's concerns. At the same time, rituals got more elaborated and splendid, and the cult of Bāhubali and, in a higher degree, the worship of *yakṣīs* came to occupy an important place in ritual practice. All these developments, which mark the period of institutionalisation and adaptation to the local surroundings, are sometimes seen as "spiritual degeneration." Whatever they had been, it seems to be very likely, that some kind of laxity in the ascetics' conduct and the complexity of ritualism made the Jaina tradition quite vulnerable when, in form of devotional Hindu movements, especially Vīraśaivism, strong religious rivals entered the stage. Unlike the Jainas of that period, the Vīraśaivas produced strong and highly motivated leaders who managed to popularise their tradition among the upper sections of society and the common people.

Since reliable data about the events which led to the decline of Jainism in Karnataka is lacking, the above-mentioned reasons for the Jainas' dwindling influence and numbers cannot be scientifically verified. The available source material, however, supports the stated conclusions.

Although this chapter aimed, among other points, at reconstructing the decline of the Jaina tradition in Karnataka, it has to be stressed, that this decline had never been absolute, and Jainism carries on as a religious tradition of Karnataka until the present day. Out of all Indian states, Karnataka holds the sixth rank regarding the percentage of Jaina population, which has been counted as numbering 440.280 (0.72% of

¹¹⁴ "Heretical" here is meant in the sense, that the Yāpanīyas were neither regarded as belonging to the Digambaras, nor the Śvetāmbaras.

the total state population) in 2011.¹¹⁵ Although during the last century a number of Śvetāmbaras, mainly from Rajasthan and Gujarat, for business reasons have settled in urban centres, the great majority of Jains in Karnataka still belong to the Digambara tradition.

In strong contrast to the Jaina communities in North and West India, most Jains in the South are based in rural areas and belong to the agriculturist class. Since the revival of the Digambara ascetic tradition in the early twentieth century, Karnataka has been a very fertile soil for male and female ascetics. These ascetics, however, have returned to the ancient practice of wandering instead of staying in monasteries. Many practices and rituals, however, which got developed during the heyday of Jainism during the middle-ages, have survived until the present day and still form an integral part of the Digambara Jaina tradition of Karnataka.

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¹¹⁵ See Government of India, "Census 2011," <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/6-jainism.html> [accessed 22.06.2022].

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