

Chapter 4

Jainas and Vīraśaivas: An Encounter in Mediaeval Karnataka

1 Introduction

The great role that Jainism played in all of the Indian subcontinent, testified by its extraordinary artistic, scientific and cultural legacy, had already begun to subside by the twelfth century and came to an end soon after. Indeed, although it is still alive there—particularly in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat—the creed is now a small minority in India and has never regained the diffusion and importance it used to enjoy in the past.

As often happens in human history, the reasons for such a decline seem to be manifold: some are manifest, others are less evident. Among the best-known reasons, we may cite the religious, economic and social changes that began to occur, all over India, from the early mediaeval period:¹ such as the growth of the *bhakti*² ideology and the institutional transformation of the Hindu temple, with strong socio-economic implications, which became the centre for the expansion of a renewed and powerful Hindu creed.

The present study intends to bring into focus some of the lesser-known conditions which may have had considerable effects on the decline of Jainism, especially in Karnataka, where Jainas had, for many centuries, played a dominant role. In particular, the mutual religious, historical and social relations between the Jainas and the Vīraśaivas, a peculiar religious group, will be analysed. Indeed, this movement, which

1 Although the idea of the Middle Ages was conceived in the West, the definition is normally applied also to a particular period of Indian history (roughly from the seventh to the fourteenth century), when the structures, social conditions, institutions and ideas underwent radical change, departing notably from those prevailing in the earlier periods (Kesawan Veluthat, “Into Medieval and out of it. Early South India in Transition,” *Indian History Congress*, 58th session [Mangalore: Mangalore University, 1997]: 1–45; Kesawan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* [Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993]: 12–28).

2 The term *bhakti* may be generally translated as “devotion” to a deity, even though the meaning of the word has changed over the centuries, coming to embrace concepts of respect, love and personal surrender to god as well. The most primitive traces of a devotional approach to the divine may be found already in the mysticism of the *Upaniṣads*, in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; however, a large-scale *bhakti* movement with specific traits, although not uniform, originated in Tamil Nadu, between the sixth and seventh century CE (compare K. Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, A New Perspective* [Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987]: 8–35, 201–54; K. Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999]: 17–24; M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesawan Veluthat, “Bhakti Movement in South India,” in *The Feudal Order, State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India*, ed. D.N. Jha [New Delhi: Manohar, 2000]: 385–410).

arose in Karnataka in the twelfth century, seems to have played a crucial role in the decline of Jaina supremacy in that region.

To better understand the social and historical vicissitudes that brought Jainas and Viraśaivas to interact with and confront each other, a general history of the latter will be attempted, also bringing into focus lesser-known aspects of the Viraśaiva cult and culture, especially the artistic traditions, which constitute my particular field of study.

As a matter of fact, temples are believed not to have formed any part of Viraśaiva rituality (since in their creed, the body itself is the temple); nor did Viraśaivas use devotional images, the only exception being the *liṅga*, whose symbol they wear on their own bodies. However, it should be pointed out that these assumptions have never been proven beyond any doubt as established facts. If the present project is able to establish these (and other) aspects of the Viraśaiva world, one way or the other, it could open up new vistas of research. The present research is based on the analysis of various data, taken from available sources,³ especially those collected during a field-investigation conducted in Karnataka in 2009 and 2010.

2 History and Cult of the Viraśaivas: A Brief Overview

The Viraśaivas, “heroic Śaivas”—an epithet conferred on them, according to some scholars, because of the strength of their devotional experience⁴ (in my opinion, however, the name may also allude to the militant role they played in the struggle amongst different religious creeds)—the followers of a religious tradition which arose in Karnataka in the twelfth century. Even today, they represent a prominent community in the Southern Deccan, particularly in the state of Karnataka.

The Viraśaivas are also known as Liṅgāyats, bearers of the *liṅga* or, more precisely, “those who have accepted (or taken) the *liṅga*.”⁵ They are often regarded as a

³ In this regard, it may be borne in mind that the core of Viraśaiva literature is in the old Kannada language and only in recent decades have a number of reliable translations appeared, in the light of which it may now be possible for a scholar, even a non-specialist in Kannada, to analyse the main sources of the Viraśaiva tradition.

⁴ Karigoudar Ishwaran, *Religion and Society among the Lingayats of South India* (Leiden: Brill, 1983): 3; R. Blake Michael, “Foundation Myths of the Two Denominations of Viraśaivism: *Viraktas* and *Gurusthalins*,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 42, no. 2 (1983): 309, and R. Blake Michael, *The Origins of Viraśaiva Sect: A Typological Analysis of Ritual and Associational Patterns in the Śūnyasampādane* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992): 2.

⁵ The term Liṅgāyat is not found in the oldest Liṅgāyat literature as a word for the members of the religious groups. The etymology appears to have been derived from a particular *dikṣā* (*liṅgāyata-dikṣā*), in which the devotee receives the personal *liṅga* from the *guru*. Robert J. Zydenbos, personal communication, 09.09.2019. Cf. Robert J. Zydenbos, “Liṅgāyata,” in *Hinduism and Tribal Religions. En-*

Hindu sect;⁶ however, the Viraśaivas/Liṅgāyats have always claimed that their movement should be considered an independent one. In this regard, it is worth noting that, since 2018, the very many diversities between the Hindus and the Viraśaivas/Liṅgāyats (both from a religious and a social point of view), have become the object of renewed debates, which have resulted in the Liṅgāyats demanding a separate and distinct religious status.⁷

The terms Viraśaiva and Liṅgāyat are often used interchangeably, a norm that this study also follows; while this might not be entirely correct, it is also true that the boundary between the two denominations is far from clear. At any rate, the term Viraśaiva has been given preference for consistency with the Project ‘Virashaiva Temples in Karnataka’ (DFG—German Research Foundation), of which this research-article represents the outcome and above all, because, in 1904, this was precisely the name chosen for an organisation (All-India Viraśaiva Mahāśabhā [Great Assembly]), representing the interests of all Viraśaivas/Liṅgāyats, who can hardly be said to form a homogeneous group.

A few scholars have attempted to understand if the two denominations correspond to as many diversities, so that a number of theories have come to the fore: for instance, Leslie observes that there is a tendency for “Viraśaiva” to be used to describe the philosophical or historical context, while “Liṅgāyat” would denote the modern social group.⁸ Zydenbos presumes that the two terms denote historically different elements within the larger tradition that lie at the root of religious and social distinctions that are still of significance today.⁹ A number of scholars even presume that the Liṅgāyats and the Viraśaivas were two different groups, belonging to traditions that differed from one another in many ways, blended together only in the course of the centuries.¹⁰

As a matter of fact, we do not know without any reasonable doubt what differences there are between the Liṅgāyats and the Viraśaivas, if any, as the early history of

cyclopedia of Indian Religions, ed. J.D. Long, R.D. Sherma, P. Jain and M. Khanna (Dortrecht: Springer, 2022): 846–48, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1188-1_1346.

6 R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and minor Religious Systems* (Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1987 [1928]): 187; William McCormack, “Lingayat as a Sect,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 93, no. 1 (1963): 59–60; B.D. Tripathi, *Sadhus of India* (Varanasi: Pilgrim Publishing, 2007 [1978]): 70.

7 *The Hindu*, “Will Not Surrender to Threats by Veerashaiva, Pancha Peetha Seers,” updated 22.03.2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/will-not-surrender-to-threats-by-veerashaiva-pancha-peetha-seers/article23314833.ece> [accessed 09.10.2023]. *The Times of India*, “Karnataka Govt Clears Minority Status for Lingayats,” updated 20.03.2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/karnataka-govt-clears-minority-status-for-lingayats/articleshow/63373048.cms> [accessed 09.10.2023].

8 Julia Leslie, “Understanding Basava: History, Hagiography and a Modern Kannada Drama,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, no. 2 (1998): 229. Cf. William McCormack, “Lingayat as a Sect”: 66.

9 Zydenbos, “Liṅgāyata”: 846–48.

10 C.N. Venugopal, “Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation: An Enquiry into Some of Its Social Dimensions,” *Religion and Society* 29, no. 4 (1982): 3, 4; Malleshappa M. Kalburgi, *History and Geography* [in Kannada] (Belgaum: Liṅgāyat Adhyana Academy, 2005): 2–34.

the movement remains largely obscure. The reputed founder of the tradition was a certain Basava or Basavaṇṇa,¹¹ born at the beginning of the twelfth century in a city of northern Karnataka, which, at that time, was part of the Later Western Cālukya (Cālukya) empire.¹² A few scholars, however, believe that Basava was only the reviver of a more ancient and not clearly identifiable movement,¹³ which—according to some—might have had its origins in a lineage of five masters (*pañcācāryas*), retraceable to an antiquity bordering on mythical times,¹⁴ who were believed to have founded the first five Viraśaiva *maṭhas* (monastery-like institutions headed by a spiritual teacher).¹⁵ Those who adhere to this latter foundational account—according to some scholars—are known as Gurusthalins. On the contrary, the tradition that considers Basava to be the founder of the movement is known as Virakta.¹⁶ The two groups are believed to vary in organisation, rituality and monastic tradition.

We are therefore faced with two origin stories which seem to correspond to two major but parallel sets of beliefs amongst the Viraśaivas, although what's predominant is the tradition which looks upon Basava as the founder of the movement, notwithstanding certain ideas that might antedate him. As a matter of fact, a systematically elaborate Viraśaiva doctrine began to spread only after Basava's lifetime.¹⁷

11 The suffix “-anna” means “elder brother” and is used as a term of respect (Leslie, “Understanding Basava”: 228 footnote 4).

12 The Later Western Cālukya, also known as Cālukya of Kalyāṇī, arose as an independent political entity in the tenth century. At that time, a feudatory of the Rāṣtrakūṭa (Rāṣtrakūṭa), Taila, claiming descent from the main line of the ancient Western Cālukya of Bādāmi, gained considerable power, thus expanding his kingdom over a large part of modern Karnataka. See K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, “The Cālukyas of Kalyāṇī,” in *Early History of the Deccan*, ed. G. Yazdani (London: Oxford University Press, 1960 [1955]): 315–454.

13 Cf. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979 [1942]): 3, 4.

14 The *pañcācāryas*, according to a Sankrit Śaiva *Āgama*, which circulated in Kannada script at the end of the ninth century, were thought to emanate from the five faces of Sadāśiva. This tradition is relatively new. Tiziana Ripepi “The feet of the Jaṅgama, Identity and Ritual Issues among the Viraśaivas of Karnataka,” *Kervan – Rivista Internazionale di Studi Afroasiatici* 6 (2007): 76; Zydenbos, “Liṅgāyata”: 848.

15 Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and minor Religious Systems*: 188–91. Regarding the first five *maṭhas*, two of them would have been in modern Karnataka, while the other three would have been in pilgrimage centres sacred to Śiva on the Himālayas, on the river Ganges, and in the Andhra Pradesh.

16 Cf. R. Blake Michael, “Foundation Myths of the Two Denominations”: 309–22. According to Michael, Basava is not the reformer of a pre-existing tradition going back to the *ācāryas*; he actually stresses the independence and the diversity of the *Virakta* and the *Gurusthala* traditions. See also Michael, *The Origins of Viraśaiva Sect*: 173–76.

17 Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 3; Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 69; Leslie, “Understanding Basava”: 235; Raymond Allchin, “The Attaining of Void: A Review of Some Recent Contributions in English to the Study of Viraśaivism,” *Religious Studies* 7, no. 4 (1971): 340.

2.1 Basava's Life and Teachings

Numerous sources speak of Basava's life, even though, by and large, they are not reliable historical materials, but literally sources. Among these, we may cite the Kannada *Vacanas* (lit. "uttered word," "sayings"), namely prose-poems¹⁸ attributed to the master himself;¹⁹ hagiographical works such as the poetic biography entitled *Basavarāja Devara Ragale*, written by the Kannada poet Harihara, dating from very close to Basava's time, and the Telegu *Basava Purāṇa*, composed by Pāṅkuriki Somanātha towards the end of twelfth century or a little later.²⁰

There is also a body of much later sources: for example, the *Prabhu-liṅga-līla* of Chamarasa, a Vijayanagara poet of the fifteenth century,²¹ and the canonical text *Śūnya-saṃpāḍane* (lit. "Attaining the Void"), often of great poetical quality. The latter, which underwent at least four recensions, seems to have been compiled over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²² The collection consists of various *Vacanas* attributed to the remarkable masters and saints of the Viraśaiva tradition, including, of course, Basava. As it also contains dialogues on theological themes, although of a later composition, it is regarded as an important part of the doctrinal equipment of the Viraśaivas.

Certain epigraphs, too, found in many places associated with the early Viraśaiva movement, throw some light on the life of the master. Among these, we can count the one from Arjunavada, now conserved in the K.R.I. Museum of Karnatak University, Dharwar, which gives Basava's time of birth and the names of the members of his family.²³ Based on these primary sources, a number of scholars have reconstructed in detail a reasonably coherent life-story of the master. Let us look at the salient episodes of his life in connection with the fundamental ideas of his doctrine.

Basava was born in 1105 in Bagevadi (Bāgevādi), a city in northern Karnataka (today in Bijapur District), a centre of strong Śaiva Brahmanical orthodoxy. Basava himself came from a well-known Brahmanical family and, as was the custom, his father wanted him also to take up the traditional Brahman path.²⁴ However, it is narrated that, around the age of eight, he refused to continue on the path into which he had

¹⁸ For the literally nature and metrics of *Vacanas*, compare Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 92–96.

¹⁹ The *Vacanas* attributed to Basava are more than a thousand, although some of them seem to have been interpolated by later authors.

²⁰ V. Narayana Rao, *Śiva's Warriors, The Basava Purāṇa of Pāṅkuriki Somanātha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 3.

²¹ The *Prabhu-liṅga-līlā* mostly deals with the life of Allama Prabhu (a great Viraśaiva mystic), but since Basava came in touch with him, the work also contains interesting information on Basava's life.

²² Karigoudar Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava, Liṅgayat Religion and Culture in South Asia* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992): 34–37.

²³ Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 18.

²⁴ M. Chidananda Murthy, *Basavanna* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1972): 13.

been initiated in childhood, desiring to elude the rituals and ceremonies connected with his social group.²⁵

Sometime later, he left his hometown and took up residence in a sacred site called Sangama (Saṅgama) or Kudalasangama (Kūḍalasaṅgama), located—as the name itself says (*saṅgama* “meeting,” “union”)—at the confluence of two rivers: the Krishna and the Malaprabha. The local deity here was Śivasangameśvara, “Śiva, the Lord of the meeting (rivers),” and it is said that as soon as Basava came into his temple, he was overwhelmed by emotion.²⁶ He thus became a devotee of the god, who was also worshipped by the local community, most probably members of the Kālāmukha sect²⁷ or that of the Lakuliśa Pāsupata.²⁸ We do not know exactly to which sect the community belonged, but it is quite sure that the two were closely allied, if not even that one had evolved from the other.

Whichever sect Basava joined, its followers studied the classical texts of Śaivism under their *guru*, Ishanya. Alongside his studies, however, this period was marked for Basava by an extraordinary devotional fervour and—as happens with the erotic mysticism in certain devotional currents (*bhakti*)—also by the rise of a true sentiment of love for the deity. So, in fact, Basava professes in one of his celebrated *Vacanas*:

Let the whole world know: I've got a mate.
I'm a married woman
Married to one I am.
The Lord of the Meeting Rivers
Is my man.
I've got a mate.

(*Vacana* 503).²⁹

In this love relation, Basava identifies himself with the feminine partner, while the god is the universal masculine. Such a rigorous gender division, already evident in many *bhakti* poems,³⁰ is typical of much of the devotional literature of mediaeval India. In this regard, many similarities between the ideas of Basava and the mysticism of the nascent *bhakti* movement³¹ may be noted. Common to both is, for instance, the

25 P.B. Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times* (Bangalore: Basava Samithi, 2006 [1968]): 187, 188; 325. Compare *Basava Purāṇa* of Bhimākavi, translated by G. Würth, “The Basava Purāṇa of the Lingaists,” *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8, no. 24 (1864–1866): 67.

26 Chidananda Murthy, *Basavanna*: 21.

27 Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 39.

28 Chidananda Murthy *Basavanna*: 21; Kamil V. Zvelebil, *The Lord of the Meeting Rivers, Devotional Poems of Basavanna* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984): 141.

29 Shivamurthy Shivacharya Mahaswamiji, *Basava Vachananjali* (Sirigere: Sri Taralabalu Jagadguru Brihanmath, 1990): 634.

30 Robert C. Zaehner, *L'Induismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1966 [1962]): 184.

31 It is in fact well known that at a later stage – after the tenth century – the *bhakti* movement was incorporated into the canon of a religious philosophy connected, in many ways, to the great main-

conviction (contrary to Brahmanical orthodoxy) that all devotees, regardless of social class or gender, might aspire to a direct experience of the divine, without any intermediaries.

However, all of this does not suffice to associate *tout court* the Vīraśaiva tradition with that of the *bhakti*, from which it differs in many ways.³² One of the fundamental points of divergence is that, while *bhakti* devotional practice made ample use of iconography and cult-images, Basava decidedly rejected images in all forms, as the master considered them nothing more than superstition:

[...] Gods, gods,
there are so many, there is no place
left for a foot [...]
(*Vacana* 563).³³

On the contrary, Basava stresses that god is one.

[...] There are no two or three gods.
Mark you, He is but One. To speak of two is false.
The Lord of the Meeting Rivers is the Only god [...]
(*Vacana* 545).³⁴

At this point, the questions that have characterised Indian religious and philosophical thought since the earliest times arise spontaneously: what were/are, in Vīraśaiva belief, the positions regarding concepts such as the “eternal substance” and the “relationship between the divine and the soul”?

2.2 Vīraśaiva Belief and Religiosity

The precise character of Vīraśaiva religiosity is a much-debated issue, since it is difficult to give a univocal interpretation of the various Vīraśaiva sources on the matter. Indeed, what characterises the *Vacanas*, whether attributed to Basava or to other Vīraśaiva mystics, like Allama Prabhu or Akka Mahādevī, is more the emotion and the devotion for god than any systematic philosophical effort. Other doctrinal works,

stream of the Brahmanical tradition. Compare Narayanan and Veluthat, “Bhakti Movement in South India”: 407.

³² Karigoudar Ishwaran, “Bhakti Tradition and Modernization: The Case of Lingayatism,” in *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements*, ed. Jayant Lele, International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1981): 81, 82, and Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 126, 127.

³³ Compare also *Vacanas* numbers 555 and 558 (A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Śiva* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 (1973)]: 83–84).

³⁴ Usha Palakshappa, ed., *108 Gems of Basaveshwara Vachanas* (Bangalore: Basava Samithi, 2007): 28.

however, mostly later than Basava's lifetime,³⁵ also fail to show a coherent unity, perhaps because the philosophical aspect is deeply entangled with the spiritual and the ethical teaching.

As a matter of fact, scholarly opinion is divided: for instance, Bhandarkar presumes that the Viraśaiva doctrine is a kind of "qualified spiritual monism," which does not profess a perfect identity of the human being with the Absolute, but admits to a certain, limited room for the individual.³⁶ Nandimath observes that Viraśaiva belief is pure *advaita* (non-dualism), which is to say, a complete identification of the soul with the divine.³⁷ Padoux, on his part, considers Viraśaiva metaphysics as a "qualified dualism, a Śaiva variant of Rāmānuja's doctrine, from which it may have derived."³⁸ Lastly, Malledevaru attempts to reconcile the diverse positions by combining the views of some Viraśaiva masters with the speculations of the *Upaniṣads*.³⁹ In his opinion, in fact, the Viraśaivas would seem to have accepted both the non-dualistic (*advaita*) as well as the dualistic (*dvaita*) doctrines, as referring to different stages of the soul's development. Indeed, in view of certain theories of the Śaiva Siddhānta and Kashmiri Śaivism, he argues that, at the inception of its spiritual progress, the human soul, being stained by a triple impurity, is characterised by a condition of duality; however, gradually, as impurities are removed, the soul realises itself to be perfectly identical with god, "[...] exactly as water mixes with water."⁴⁰

Without dwelling any further on this matter, I would briefly like to point out that theology and metaphysics have never been a priority in Viraśaiva belief, since these aspects merely constituted the basis of a new religious inspiration, mostly aimed at the creation of a new social order based on equality and individual freedom. However, there is a "Viraśaiva way to god," which was defined by Basava himself.

The Viraśaiva approach to god is codified in a path of six successive stages (*ṣaṭsthala*) into which the spiritual journey of the devotee is articulated. Here scholars are quite unanimous, also considering that Basava himself, in his *Vacanas*, gave indications in this regard, as did those who later continued his teachings.

The first step is *bhakti* or devotion, which leads to a total surrender to god. *Bhakti* gradually develops into a firm faith, and this transformation gives access to the second step, *maheśvara*. In this state, the devotee experiences an enhanced capacity to face the

35 Among these we may cite the *Śūnyasampādane*, the *Karana Hasuge* by Cennabasava, Basava's nephew; the Sanskrit works *Siddhānta Śikhamaṇi*, attributed to the master Rēvanāchārya (thirteenth century), and the *Liṅgadhāranachandrikā* of Nandikeśvara (seventeenth century).

36 Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and minor Religious Systems*: 195.

37 Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 104–5.

38 André Padoux, "Viraśaivas," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 13, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987): 12.

39 H.P. Malledevaru, *Essential of Viraśaivism* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1973): 23–32.

40 Malledevaru, *Essential of Viraśaivism*: 32.

vicissitudes of life with serene equanimity, as well as with a profound joy in serving god, which takes the form of socially shared labour. Through devotion and worship, the seeker attains to *prasāda*, the third stage, usually translated as “grace.”⁴¹ At this point the believer comes to realise that there is an identity between his own soul (or vital principle, *prāṇa*) and the *liṅga*, whereby this state of non-dualistic awareness takes the name of *prāṇa liṅga*. The following stage is called *śarana* (holy man or refugee), in which the state of self-surrendered holy man or refugee is experienced; it leads to the last and final step, *aikya*, or total fusion “like space joining space, water water, the devotee dissolves nameless in the Lord, who is not another.”⁴² Such a journey, undertaken by the single being, can also be regarded as part of the process of social progress, since the evolution of the individual cannot be detached from that of the social context, the one being as dependent on all as all are on the one.

The profound unity of the religious aspect with that of the social, already prefigured in various *Vacanas* and described in the six-stage path, is further emphasised by the five regulating principles of conduct (*pañcācāras*) on which Viraśaiva ethics are founded: 1. *liṅgācāra*, wearing and worshipping the *liṅga*; 2. *śivācāra*, worshipping only Śiva (complete identity of belief and practice with respect to Śiva); 3. *sadācāra*, work and action in harmony with one’s vocation and duty; 4. *bhṛtyācāra*, acting as a servant to one’s society and fellow believers; 5. *gaṇācāra*, working, serving and even fighting to defend the Viraśaiva community.⁴³

In his stage path, the devotee is also sustained by eight “pillars” or “shields” of support (*aṣṭavarāṇa*),⁴⁴ namely *liṅga*, *jaṅgamana*, *guru*, *pādōdaka*, *prasāda*, *rudrākṣi*, *vibhūti*, *mantra*, which are closely linked to each other.

Such concepts, in part already present in the Hindu tradition of the *bhakti mārga* (“the devotional path”), were most probably borrowed by Basava from the religious practices extant in his environment, but he gave them a new significance, integrating them into a coherent and original approach to the divine. Let us look more closely at these eight “pillars.”

41 Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 101.

42 A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Śiva* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 [1973]): 174.

43 Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 80, 81. Compare also Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 103–6, and K.R. Basavaraja, *Basavesvara, his Life, Vision and Work* (Dharwad: Someswara Publications, 2001): 151, 152.

44 The term *aṣṭavarāṇa* has been variously translated. Compare Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 106, Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 31, or Michael, *The Origins of Viraśaiva Sect*: 79.

2.2.1 *Liṅga*

The *liṅga* plays a cardinal role in Basava's thought, as well as in Viraśaiva belief. It is a symbol which may be viewed at different levels and, although there are similarities between Basava's conception of the *liṅga* and those of certain Śaiva schools,⁴⁵ divergences also existed. I would like to review the matter very briefly.

In most Śaiva traditions, the *liṅga*, an ancient phallic symbol, suggestive of a remote god of fecundity,⁴⁶ is the emblem of the god Śiva or, more precisely, of his fertilising divine energy. This makes it clear that the meaning of such a "sign" extends from the mere material procreative level to that of the manifold creative capacity of divine power. Certain Śaiva schools hold that the phallic form itself encapsulates the very essence of the god in his formless state (*niṣkala*), to the point that it comes to coincide with his vital body (*liṅga śarīra*), the substratum of all that exists.⁴⁷ This is the reason why in the *caturmukhaliṅga* (the four faced *liṅga*), the four aspect-countenances of Śiva (which, really, would be five, as the most imperceptible one is represented by the *liṅga* itself) point in the cardinal directions, thus suggesting the first outgrowth of divine energy expanding from the centre in order to describe the new dimension of space.⁴⁸ From these primary emanations all the other divine forms sprout forth.

In Viraśaiva belief, the *liṅga* carries far more than these common connotations: neither in Basava's writings, nor in any other works of the early Viraśaivas, is there any indication that the *liṅga* is in any way connected with the phallus, or the fertilising divine energy, or with the manifold concrete *mūrti* (appearances, embodiments) of Śiva. In Viraśaiva thought, the *liṅga* is considered as the divine Principle itself (*Liṅgadhāranachandrikā* 9, 6),⁴⁹ devoid of any form. There is no room for anthropomorphism.⁵⁰ Furthermore, as it does not maintain any relation with the multiplicity of gods of the Hindu pantheon, the *liṅga* became the preeminent divine principle of reference, as well as the one and only landmark of veneration and meditation (*iṣṭa*).

45 Jan P. Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics, On the Social Aspect of Viraśaivism* (Utrecht: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991): 6.

46 Compare Askō Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 218–4.

47 See Gritli von Mitterwallner, "Evolution of the *liṅga*," in *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. M.W. Meister (Bombay: Vakils, Feffer & Simons, 1984): 12–31; Stella Kramrisch, *La Presenza di Śiva* (Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 1999 [*The Presence of Śiva*, Princeton 1981]): 167–202; and H. Rangarajan, "What is *liṅgam* in Saivism?" *Proceedings of Indian Art History Congress*, 8th session, ed. C.P. Sinha and U.C. Dwivedi (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1999): 1–14.

48 Compare D.M. Srinivasan, "From Transcendence to Materiality: Para Śiva, Sādaśiva Maheśa," *Artibus Asiae* 50 (1990): 108–39.

49 M.R. Sakhare, *Liṅgadhāranachandrikā of Nandikeśwara* (Belgaum: Mahavir Press, 1942): 325. Compare Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and minor Religious Systems*: 192; Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics*: 6.

50 Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 99.

As a matter of fact, *liṅga* is seen as the Supreme Lord.⁵¹ Further, to express the inadequacy of ordinary men for understanding or grasping the nature of the *liṅga*, Basava says:

Liṅga cannot be grasped by the *Vedas*,
cannot be known by the *Shastras*,
cannot be attained through logic or reason
(*Vacana* 952).⁵²

Echoing the long-standing identity between the *brāhmaṇ* and the *ātman* asserted by the ancient *Upaniṣads*, the *iṣṭaliṅga* is also conceived as abiding in the body of the devotee. To underline and permanently keep this fact in mind, a tiny concrete symbol of the *liṅga*, enclosed in a small silver casing, is carried by all Viraśaivas on their person, whether male or female, from the time of their birth, whether around their neck, across their chest, or around their arm. It is not only an emblem of their faith and of their equality before god but, above all, the sign of a belief that the divine does not reside in ordinary temples, which Basava considered unnecessary, but in the centre of the human being, itself regarded as the temple par excellence.⁵³

The meditation on the *iṣṭaliṅga*, undertaken while the devotee holds its symbol in his left hand and gazes upon it,⁵⁴ highlights this very interior quest: the bilateral process of internalising the divinity while, simultaneously, rediscovering it within one's own self:

If you place the *liṅga* in your hand,
that you may mark its features, and if you think
it impermissible, say:
take, take it back, take back your god.
I've none the less received it as your grace.⁵⁵

51 R. Blake Michael, "Liṅga as Lord Supreme in the Vacanas of Basava," *Numen* 29, no. 2 (1982): 205, 206.

52 Quoted by Allchin, "The Attaining of Void": 346.

53 The concept of the *liṅga* as a "centre" is really important in the Viraśaiva doctrine. Compare Herbert C. Wolf, "The Liṅga as Center: A Study in Religious Phenomenology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 3 (1978): 369–88.

54 *Śūnyasaṃpādane*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. S.C. Nandimath, M.A. Menezes and R.C. Hiremath (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1965): 307.

55 *Śūnyasaṃpādane*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. S.S. Bhoosnurmath and A. Menezes (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1968): 37.

2.2.2 *Jaṅgamana*

The *liṅga* is closely related to the *jaṅgamana* “[...] like body and soul,”⁵⁶ as one can also see in many *Vacanas*, where Basava himself equated the *liṅga* to the *jaṅgamana*: “I shall call *liṅga* a *jaṅgamana* and *jaṅgama* a *liṅga*” (*Vacanas* 308, 676, 839, 882).⁵⁷ *Jaṅgamana* or “the Moving One,” is the itinerant enlightened sage, who has realised the total fusion with the *liṅga*, thus turning himself into a moving temple.⁵⁸

The idea that the body of the enlightened devotee can primarily serve as the god’s dwelling is the leitmotif of all of Basava’s thought. “Temple,” says the master, “is *sthāvara*, immovable, stagnation and death.” It represents institutionalism of richness and bigotry.⁵⁹ On the contrary, the body of the sage is a moving temple, which suggests life and growth.

Here, one is reminded of certain concepts referring to the Hindu temple, regarded in its most vital essence, that is not only a reflection of the universe (*brahmāṇḍa*) and, at the same time, the abode or even the embodiment of the primeval living Being (*pu-ruṣa*/Prajāpati), but also an ideal representation of the human body (*piṇḍāṇḍa*).

Thus, Basava advocates a return to a metaphorical, profound conception of the Hindu temple, which had already been expressed in certain *bhakti* literature,⁶⁰ as is clearly stressed in a famous *Vacana*:

[...] My legs are pillars,
the body is shrine,
the head the cupola,
of gold.
Listen, O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
Things standing shall fall,
But the moving ever shall stay
(*Vacana* 820).⁶¹

2.2.3 *Guru*

The third “pillar” of support is the *guru*, the spiritual teacher, who characterises many Hindu schools and is already mentioned as a leading authority in the liberation

⁵⁶ *Śūnyasampādane*, vol. 4, ed. and trans. S.S. Bhoosnurmath and A. Menezes (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 197): 132. Compare also *Śūnyasampādane*, vol. 2: 69, 375, which stresses the idea that the *liṅga* is the body and the *jaṅgamana* the life force.

⁵⁷ Quoted by Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 75.

⁵⁸ From a not ascertained stage of the history of the Viraśaivas up to our days, the word *Jaṅgamana*, following a Brahmanical model, also began to designate a closed group of hereditary priests.

⁵⁹ Chidanada Murthy, *Basavanna*: 51.

⁶⁰ John Guy, *Indian Temple Sculpture* (London: Victoria and Albert Publication, 2007): 69.

⁶¹ Palakshappa, *108 Gems of Basaveshwara Vachanas*: 88.

path of the *Upaniṣads*.⁶² The respect—even veneration— accorded to this figure are the same in the Jaina and Buddhist traditions, where the spiritual master constitutes both the example of perfection to be imitated and the guide towards liberation from the shackles of *saṃsāra*.

In the Vīraśaivas' belief system, the *guru* enjoys the same devotion as that due to the *liṅga* and the *jaṅgamaṇa*, since they are so closely connected: "Upon the soil of devotion sprouted *Guru*, the seed, and *liṅga*, the leaf was born [...]" (*Vacana* 525).⁶³ The *guru* secures salvation by performing the initiation to the doctrine (*dīkṣā*) and teaching its fundamental points.

2.2.4 Last "Pillars" of Support

The last five supports, which Michael calls "the minor sacramental substances,"⁶⁴ are the following: first, *pādōdaka* ("water of [master's] feet"), the holy water sanctified by contact with the *guru*'s feet; second, *prasāda* or "sacred oblation," usually used in the sense of "grace." In this context, *prasāda* takes on the meaning of food offered by the devotee to the *guru*, who gives him back a part of it, thus sharing through this ritual exchange a mystic meal with the devotee entrusted to his care; third, *rudrākṣi*, the garland of seeds sacred to Śiva, employed to make rosaries for prayers (as is the general custom of the Śaivas); fourth, *vibhūti* the holy ashes prepared with a special process from cow dung, and used to mark the signs on the forehead (*tilaka*) denoting membership of the religious community; fifth, *mantra*, the sacred formula "*namah Śiva ya*" ("praise to Śiva").

2.3 Basava as a Social Reformer

With time, attention to social concerns, which so strongly characterises the doctrine of Basava, became an increasingly prominent element. Gradually, in the life of the master, the spiritual path towards the divine came to be combined with the no less challenging and painstaking effort aimed at establishing human equality and promoting social progress. After some ten years of study and ecstatic experiences, Basava left Sangama and reached the city of Mangalavede (today in Maharashtra), in the reign of Bijjala, feudatory to the Cālukya of Kalyāṇa,⁶⁵ at whose court he finally managed to

⁶² Compare *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* II, 4, 1–14; IV, 3, 1–38. S. Radhakrishnan, ed., *The Principal Upaniṣads* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001 [1953]): 195–201; 254–69.

⁶³ Compare also *Sūnyasaṃpādane*, vol. 4: 39, 129.

⁶⁴ Michael, *The Origins of Vīraśaiva Sect*: 84.

⁶⁵ Bijjala belonged to the Kalacuri clan, natives of Madhya Pradesh. A branch of this dynasty moved to south India and settled in Mangalavede, as feudatory to the Western Cālukya (or Cālukya

obtain a noteworthy position, becoming what could be defined as the “treasurer-in-chief.”⁶⁶

The resolution to leave a place of pilgrimage and go back to social life seems to indicate that Basava had determined to develop the whole range of talents that characterised his complex personality, taking on a double commitment: carrying on the spiritual quest of the mystic alongside the tasks of the statesman. The fortunate coexistence of these two complementary facets gave rise to an attitude unusual in the Indian milieu, in which “one plays the role of the other.”⁶⁷

Needless to say, this double role provoked diverse and contrasting views: in fact, Basava has been regarded as a prophet by his followers and as a conspirator by his enemies.⁶⁸ Be that as it may, leaving aside both eulogies and critiques,⁶⁹ the political and financial post to which Basava had been appointed enabled him to start his own religious and socio-political struggle. The community Basava had founded was inspired by liberal attitudes and a certain egalitarian principle, symbolically proclaimed by the fact that the *liṅga* was indiscriminately worn by all Vīraśaivas, as a visible proof of the equality of all the believers. In this regard, we might keep in mind that the Vīraśaiva tradition attributed to women the same possibilities as men of attaining spiritual perfection.⁷⁰ In consequence of this extraordinary female emancipation, many women emerged from the anonymity that for centuries had characterised their condition, with personages such as Akka Mahādevī, Nilammā and Lakkammā reaching the heights of spirituality and learning, thanks to the new changes they had been able to enjoy. The idea of the equality of all Vīraśaiva believers (and—by extension—of all human beings) before God did not remain limited to the religious domain, however. It soon came to be extended to the social sphere as well, giving rise to a courageous battle against the caste system⁷¹—seen as the principal means of social discrim-

of Kalyāṇa). In the first half of the twelfth century, Bijjala usurped the Cālukya throne, defeating the last king, Taila III (Nilakanta Sastri, “The Cālukyas of Kalyāṇī”: 456–68.

⁶⁶ However, the real nature of responsibilities entrusted to Basava remains uncertain (Desai, *Basavēśvara*: 55–56).

⁶⁷ Zvelebil, *The Lord of the Meeting Rivers*: 3.

⁶⁸ Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 37.

⁶⁹ Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times*: 222–24.

⁷⁰ R. Blake Michael, “Women of the *Śūnyasampādane*: Housewives and Saints in Vīraśaivism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 2 (1983): 361–68.

⁷¹ Since Vedic times, Brahmanical society has been hierarchically organised into four social groupings, mostly endogamic, called *varṇa* (lit. “colour” or “complexion”) which, in turn, subdivide in castes and sub-castes (*jāti*), to which one belongs by birth. The concepts of *varṇa* and *jāti* are reflected in each other. As for the Vīraśaivas, we may recall that the idea of “caste” has never been completely absent among them. However (in contrast to the in Brahmanical society), castes were not hierarchically arranged by birth (at least at the beginning), but they were “competitively” related to each other. In other words, there were a number of occupationally divided castes (traders, peasants etc ...) and whichever caste is dominant in a given locality, assumes a superior position (C.N. Venugopal, “Reformist Sects and the Sociology of Religion in India,” *Sociological Analysis* 51 [1990] [Special Issue: Sociol-

ination—and against the power of the Brahmans, who, ever since the dawn of the Vedic age, had jealously reserved to their class exclusive access to the sacred and strict control of knowledge. Nevertheless, Basava's religious reform did not translate into a simple refusal of the rules and customs of the dominant Brahmanical orthodoxy. What the master undertook was a rather more constructive path, putting forward many an alternative to the longstanding ideological dogmas and commonly accepted customs of that tradition. Following this path, social inequalities were partly neutralised by Basava's openness to marriage between individuals belonging to different castes,⁷² as they were by the foundation of a particular institution, the Anubhava Maṇṭapa ("Hall of Experience").⁷³ This was a kind of public assembly open to every citizen, regardless of gender or social rank, where various issues were discussed, from the religious to the economic.⁷⁴

Apart from the freedom to contract marriage, Basava altered many other social mores, amongst which were the prohibition of child marriage and the possibility for widows to remarry, thus raising those unhappy creatures from their atavistic status as bringers of misfortune.⁷⁵ In addition, he rejected taboos linked to the concept of "impurity" such as those relating to death and cremation, proposing the inhumation of dead bodies instead.

As regards religion, the master not only rejected the crowded pantheon of the Hindu gods, but also the temple rituals, which he considered to be sterile acts. Indeed, he proposed a very different form of devotion: work (*kāyaka*),⁷⁶ conceived not as a

ogy of Religion. International Perspectives): 82; compare also Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 2, 3). All the same, in relation to the individual, a certain hierarchical gradation may be seen when Basava deemed himself (and all the Viraśaiva devotees) as the "high born" compared to the adherents of other beliefs. In time, the conception of a hierarchical order determined by birth, on the lines of age-old Hindu caste divisions into the customary pure/impure dichotomy, came to permeate certain Viraśaiva communities as well.

⁷² In this regard, we can mention the strong opposition of the Brahmanical establishment to a Viraśaiva intermarriage between different castes, which took place during the reign of Bijjala (Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times*: 212–13).

⁷³ Compare V.S. Kambi, *Philosophy of the Śūnyasampādane*, vol. 1 (Dharwar: Kumaresha Granthamala, 1973): 3, 4; C.N. Hiremath, "Buddha and Basava – A Comparison," in *Silver Splendour, Collection of Articles from 25 Volumes, Basava Journal*, ed. B. Virupakshappa (Bangalore: Basava Samithi, 2003): 89.

⁷⁴ For further information, compare C.D. Uttangi, "Anubhava Mantapa, The Heath of the Liṅgāyat Religion," in *Silver Splendour, Collection of articles from 25 Volumes, Basava Journal*, ed. B. Virupakshappa (Bangalore: Basava Samithi, 2003): 236–47.

⁷⁵ R.C. Artal "A Short Account of the Reformed Shaiva or Veerashaiva Faith," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* 8, no. 3 (1909): 171–262; R.E. Enthoven, "Liṅgāyats," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 8, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912): 69–75; William McCormack, "On Lingayat Culture," in *Speaking of Śiva*, ed. A.K. Ramanujan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973): 179–87.

⁷⁶ The word *kāyaka* is a Sanskrit adjective meaning "corporeal" and in Kannada it is used substantively, meaning worshipful work in the Viraśaiva sense (Robert J. Zydenbos, "Viraśaivism, Caste, Revolution, etc.," review of *Revolution of the Mystics: On the Social Aspects of Viraśaivism*, by J.P. Schouten, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 3 [1997]: 533).

means to accumulate wealth, nor as “[...] something assigned one by birth, requiring a little of one’s attention as well [to] suffice for survival” but rather as “[...] a sacred ritual through the performance of which one acquires a foretaste of work in the divine presence.”⁷⁷

To the concept of work as worship, whose aim was the advancement of man both in his social and individual aspects, he adjoined another of capital significance, that is, work as a means to the redistribution of wealth,⁷⁸ which is to say that every working person was to utilise part of his earnings for the sustenance of the community. Of revolutionary social value, this contribution (*dāsōha*) was distinctly opposed to the customary donation offered to the Brahmans (*dāna*) which, over the centuries, had been greatly conducive to the transformation of the Hindu temple institution into a true centre of material riches and political power.

3 Vīraśaivism and Jainism: Possible Ethical and Doctrinal Connections

Basava’s doctrine spread quickly in most of northern Karnataka, winning followers across the present-day districts of Dharwar, Belgaum and Bijapur. The reasons for such success were manifold: without doubt, the charismatic personality of the master, his royal office and the organisation of the movement played an important role.⁷⁹ Another decisive factor was his emphasis on a society which even provided for part of workers’ earnings to be utilised for the sustenance and the general good of the community. In this way, Basava gained the allegiance of the neediest classes, afflicted by poverty, which often reduced them to the status of slaves,⁸⁰ thus offering, by his intercession, a concrete answer to a factor of extreme social disadvantage under the economic pressures of the time.⁸¹ In this regard, certain scholars are of the opinion that origins of Basava movement are to be found precisely in the economic and commercial situation of that period.⁸² Although this theory seems to be too unilateral and, ac-

77 R. Blake Michael, “Work as Worship in the Vīraśaiva Tradition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no.4 (1982): 616.

78 B.B. Kanavi, “Basaveshvara and his Economic Thinking,” in *Silver Splendour, Collection of Articles from 25 Volumes, Basava Journal*, ed. B. Virupakshappa (Bangalore: Basava Samithi, 2003): 59–61.

79 Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times*: 224–31.

80 Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990 [1966]): 216; R.K. Majumdar and A.N. Srivastva, *History of Karnataka* (New Delhi: SBD Publishers’ Distributors, 1992): 150.

81 Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 19, 31.

82 R.N. Nandi, “Origin of the Vīraśaiva Movement,” in *The Feudal Order, State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India*, ed. D.N. Jha (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000): 469–86. “Demonstrably the Vīraśaivas originated as the combination of well-defined social categories associated with the various processes of production and distribution. The combination, it would appear, was intended to protect the

according to some, also simplistic,⁸³ the economic factor did play its own important role in the expansion of Viraśaivism, as well as in the rivalry (of which more later) between the Viraśaivas and the Jainas.

Basava's economic thinking and his social reforms, of extraordinary actuality in more ways than one,⁸⁴ laid the foundations for revolutionary social progress, which represented a real innovation in the India of the twelfth century. However, without wishing to detract from the originality of many of Basava's ideas, we should admit the likelihood that his philosophy might have drawn inspiration from ideals and cultural ferments already germinating in the humus of the Indian milieu.

A number of scholars maintain that the Viraśaivas were influenced by teachings from different sources, such as the doctrines of certain local Śaiva sects amongst them, particularly those of the Kālāmukhas⁸⁵ or perhaps even of Christianity, or Islam.⁸⁶ Other scholars, on the contrary, have pointed out certain similarities with Buddhism in particular.⁸⁷

All the same, while not contesting the possibility of Buddhist influences on Viraśaiva doctrine, we should not overlook the possibility that certain affinities are to be sought within the context of Jainism. It needs to be kept in mind not only that Buddhism was then already well on the way to extinction in India, but in particular that, from the early centuries of our era, almost all the territory of present day Karnataka (the birthplace and cradle of Viraśaivism) had been a stronghold of the Jainas, who profoundly influenced the artistic and cultural life of the region. Basava himself, during his childhood, had come into contact with views particular to the Jaina tradition, thanks to a community residing near his birthplace.⁸⁸ Thus, it is likely that some questions that struck the mind of the young Basava, may have originated from these con-

particular interests of the trading and producing classes against the oppression of feudal intermediaries [...]" (Nandi, "Origin of the Viraśaiva Movement": 470). Compare also Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1: 216, who considers the birth of the Liṅgāyat movement as "[...] a positive consequence to the evolution of social institutions."

⁸³ Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 35.

⁸⁴ Kanavi, "Basaveshvara and his Economic Thinking": 58–69.

⁸⁵ As for possible similarities between Viraśaivas and Kālāmukhas, see David. N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas, Two Lost Śaivite Sects* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972): 170–72, particularly the second revised edition (David N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* [1991]: 287–89). See also David. N. Lorenzen, "The Kālāmukha Background to Viraśaivism" *Studies in Orientology. Essay in Memory of Prof. A.L. Basham*, ed. S.K. Maity et al. (Agra: Y.K. Publishers, 1988): 278–93. Compare also Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 28–31 who, on the contrary focus on the difference between them.

⁸⁶ C.N. Venugopal "Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation: An Enquiry into Some of Its Social Dimensions," *Religion and Society* 29, no. 4 (1982): 2.

⁸⁷ As for possible similarities with Buddhism, whether from a doctrinal point of view or an ethical one, compare R. Allchin, "The Attaining of Void": 358, 359; Kambi, *Philosophy of the Śūnyasampādane*, vol. 1: 41–44; Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 63; and C.N. Hiremath, "Buddha and Basava": 82–91.

⁸⁸ Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 38; Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times*: 187.

tacts. Unfortunately, we have hardly any exhaustive research work on such a hypothetical mutual influence, but only a few sporadic allusions in the comments of certain authors.⁸⁹

Amongst the many difficulties of such a research perspective, two in particular stand out. First: the fact that both Jainism and Viraśaivism have, over time, undergone substantial changes, often absorbing elements even from cultures opposed to theirs. Second: that, due to the large sweep of time intervening between the beginnings of the two faiths, some of the similarities were not the result of direct influence; in the sense that, in many cases, it is difficult to distinguish between a real borrowing from Jainism itself and a borrowing from other religious currents, themselves often tributaries of or indebted to Jainism.

In the light of all this, we shall look only at the most general, but significant, ethical and doctrinal analogies between Jainism and Viraśaivism, besides introducing a few historical considerations. To begin with, Jainism and Viraśaivism—especially the current that considers Basava as the founder of the movement—can both be seen as a sort of rebellion against certain essential Vedic-Brahmanical traits (such as the monopoly of the sacred and caste-based hierarchy),⁹⁰ notwithstanding the different historical periods in which they originated.

It is, in fact, well known that, besides proposing religious and cultural models altogether different from the Brahmanical orthodox ones, neither Jainism nor Viraśaivism held back from verbal attacks and pungent satire against the Vedic-Brahmanic tradition, which, in turn, retorted in such literature as fell under its competence,⁹¹ in accord with a confrontational model widespread in the disputes of mediaeval India.⁹² For example, Jaina writers like Haribhadra (eighth century), made fun of the entire body of Hindu my-

89 S.M. Hunashal, *The Liṅgāyat Movement* (Dharwar: Karnatak Sahitya Mandira, 1947): 147, 148; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*: 435–36; Venugopal, “Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation”: 17; Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1: 216.

90 S.N. Sadashivan, *A Social History of India* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2000): 146.

91 See, for instance, certain of Nāyaṇmār's hymns, where Jaina doctrine is condemned and ridiculed. R. Champakalakshmi, “From Devotion and Dissent to Dominance: The Bhakti of the Tamil Ālvārs and Nāyaṇārs,” in *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology, Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, ed. R. Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 143–50; Indira V. Peterson, “Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way, Jains as Others in Tamil Śaiva Literature,” in *Open Boundaries*, ed. John E. Cort (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998): 163–76; Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus, An Alternative History* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009): 363–66.

92 As certain scholars have pointed out, this “standard narrative” deserves a critical examination if it is to give a more reliable picture of the religious and social context. Compare Romila Thapar, “Cultural Transaction in Early India: Tradition and Patronage,” *Social Scientist* 15, no. 2 (1987): 6–10; or Richard H. Davis, “The Story of Disappearing Jains: Retelling the Śaiva-Jain Encounter in Medieval South India,” in *Open Boundaries*, ed. John E. Cort (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998): 214–20.

thology,⁹³ while the *Cennabasava Purāṇa* of the Viraśaivas tells the story of a Vedic scholar being humiliated by a Viraśaiva teacher, who had the *Veda* recited by a dog,⁹⁴ as the buffalo does in the poems of the *bhakti* mystic, Kabir.⁹⁵ As a matter of fact, it was precisely the new spiritual attitudes engendered by the diffusion of *bhakti* that happened to favour the rise of a number of mediaeval religious movements, characterised by the rejection of Vedic authority.⁹⁶

From the refusal of Brahmanical supremacy, in both Jainism and Viraśaivism, there sprang a certain egalitarian openness, which led the two doctrines (at least at first) to eschew both the caste system and, to some extent, Sanskrit—the rigorously structured language conventionally used for the expression of ritual practice—which never quite reflected the pluralistic and multi-ethnic socio-cultural reality of India. On the contrary, both Mahāvīra and Basava took up an idiom that might have been understood by one and all: “the Victorious One,” chose to express himself in a Prakrit dialect spoken by the common man of his day, while Basava preferred to write and speak in the people’s idiom, the Kannada of his time, a Dravidic language diversified into a gamut of regional dialects. Even so, Sanskrit, being the *lingua franca* of the Indian cultural *élite*, was never completely overlooked by the Viraśaivas.⁹⁷

As well as making frequent use of Kannada, Basava composed his poems using a new expressive code, *Vacana*, characterised by a linear and essential prose—although not lacking in a certain rhythm—suitable to the comprehension of everyone. We have to be aware, in any case, that as early as the tenth century, along with *marg*, the literary style most widely used in the area of the Kanarese language, which was elaborate and full of Sanskrit terminology, a simpler and more direct genre was finding greater expression: *deśī* (“folk”), which in all likelihood served as the muse for Basava’s *Vacanas*.⁹⁸

Now, let us reconsider other possible resemblances between Jainism and Viraśaivism: just as Basava condemned the ritual performances in the temples and rejected as superstition the images of divinities, Jainism too had started out as a discipline based on inward meditation rather than on the outward acts of worship. In time, however, perhaps to meet the needs of a lay community desirous of seeking the

93 Paul Dundas, *Il Jainismo, l'antica religione indiana della non-violenza*, trans. D. Cuneo (Rome: Castelvechi, 2005 [London 1992]): 311.

94 *Cennabasava Purāṇa* of Virūpākṣa, translated by G. Würth, “Channabasava Purāṇa of the Lingaits,” *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8, no. 24 (1864–1866): 193. Compare also Narayana Rao, *Śiva’s Warriors*: 235.

95 Doniger, *The Hindus, An Alternative History*: 471.

96 D.N. Jha, “Looking for a Hindu Identity,” *Indian History Congress*, 66th session. Shantiniketan (2006): 27.

97 A number of Viraśaiva authors, especially after Basava, have referred to works written in Sanskrit, as sources of religious authority (Robert J. Zydenbos, “Viraśaivism, Caste, Revolution, etc.”: 527).

98 Vittore Pisani and Laxman P. Mishra, *Le Letterature dell’India* (Milan: Sansoni Accademia, 1970): 287, 288.

comfort of an agency beyond man, or, maybe, due to the diffusion of the *bhakti* cult,⁹⁹ an externalised and communitarian form of worship came to the fore that facilitated the burgeoning of a Jaina pantheon that included some Hindu gods.¹⁰⁰ This was not, however, true of all the Jaina sects: the *Sthānakvāsī*, for example, a branch of the *Śvetāmbara*, worship no deities, nor do they perform rituals in temples. On the contrary, they concentrate on devotional activities, on the act of mental veneration,¹⁰¹ which echoes the *Viraśaivas*' meditation on the *iṣṭaliṅga*. All the same, it needs to be kept in mind that the *Viraśaivas* themselves—some of them, at least—did not entirely spurn all rituality of Hindu provenance: indeed, some Hindu rituals were partly transformed and engulfed into their own religiosity,¹⁰² while others were rejected. Amongst these, one in particular was distinctly abhorred by both Jainas and *Viraśaivas*: animal sacrifice, their rejection of which underscores, besides the denial of violence, their conviction about the solidarity and the indissoluble union of all living beings.¹⁰³

What seems to be more interesting, however, accentuating the similarity of the two faiths, is that both retained sacrifice as a cultural symbol, albeit reinterpreted in their own ethical terms.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, both in Jainism and in *Viraśaivism* we can find the inclination to substitute formal ritualism with an internal journey whose supreme law was that of work, where the only means of evolution, in both cases, was the rigour of human striving following an itinerary based on ethical values and on moral responsibility towards all that exists.¹⁰⁵

From this position, it follows that man and the value of his works take centre-stage in both doctrines. Indeed, Jainism and the *Viraśaiva* movement had both been inspired, essentially, by the ideal of social transformation. It might be remarked that very few authoritative works have been written on the social underpinnings of Jainism, despite the significant part they play overall. Here is what Bhattacharyya has to

99 Cort underlines that a *bhakti* cult was part of the Jaina tradition from an early date, even though this does not automatically indicate a cult of image (John E. Cort, "Bhakti in Early Jain Tradition: Understanding Devotional Religion in South Asia," *History of Religions*. 42, no. 1 [2002]: 63).

100 On the subject, compare Pratapaditya Pal, *Jain Art from India* (Hongkong: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1995): 16–18. However, it needs to be pointed out that, generally, the Jainas did incorporate particular Hindu gods as "protectors" of domains, whose role was certainly an inferior one "in the Jain hierarchical classification of souls presented by the overall layout of images in their temples" (Davis, "The Story of Disappearing Jains": 218).

101 Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Jainism. An Indian Religion of Salvation* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999 [Der Jainismus. Eine Indische Erlösungsreligion, Berlin 1925]): 429, 430; Dundas, *Il Jainismo*: 332.

102 Michael, "Liṅga as Lord Supreme": 206, 208; Venugopal, "Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation": 5.

103 In this regard, it may be noted that both are vegetarians; even though, as far as the *Viraśaivas* are concerned, it cannot be confirmed whether they had been so right from the beginning or if this habit happened to be the fruit of later Jaina conversions to the *Viraśaiva* faith.

104 Dundas, *Il Jainismo*: 42.

105 Hunashal, *The Liṅgāyat Movement*: 147.

say: “Even a casual glance over the pages of the Jain *sūtras* will sufficiently demonstrate to what a great extent Mahāvīra’s mind was tormented by the experiences of social injustice of his time.”¹⁰⁶ From this point of view, the analogy with Basava is really astounding: comparable in their sentiment of compassion towards the more disadvantaged classes, he and Mahāvīra both fathered a new set of social values. The Viraśaiva master, especially, was concerned about the condition of women, championing a series of social changes in their favour. All the same, once again, we do consider it plausible that his support for female emancipation might have had its roots in the world of Jainism.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, even though in the course of the *bhakti* movement women had come out of the social anonymity that had hitherto characterised their condition, it was with Jainism that, beyond doctrinal dissensions, the question of gender equality and whether or not women too could attain spiritual perfection had been posed. In this regard the Śvetāmbaras, as opposed to the Digambaras, make no distinction between the sexes in matters of spiritual conquest and the attainment of salvation and, moreover, think that the nineteenth Tirthāṅkara, Mallinātha, had been a woman.¹⁰⁸

It is this context of equality between the Viraśaiva devotees that made possible the institution of Anubhava Maṇṭapa, which was open to everyone. What seems to be more interesting here, though, is that such an institution—which prefigured the great Viraśaiva *maṭhas*—might be connected back to the Jaina public assembly, the *saṅgha*, also known as the “Community of the Brethren.” Although it is difficult to retrace the exact origins of the Anubhava Maṇṭapa, it is well known that congregation and assembly meetings were a frequent fact of mediaeval life in Karnataka. Suffice it to think of the grand Kāḷāmukha *maṭhas* which—after about the thirteenth century, when the Kāḷāmukhas seem to fade out of the Karnataka scenario—were taken up by the Viraśaivas and converted into their own *maṭhas*. All the same, one cannot but consider that it was the Jaina tradition that had instituted, right from the dawn of its history, public assemblies open to monks and the laity of both sexes.¹⁰⁹

106 N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Jain Philosophy, Historical Outline* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1999): 104.

107 Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics*: 146.

108 P.S. Jaini, *Gender and Salvation, Jain Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 1–5.

109 Glasenapp, *Jainism. An Indian Religion of Salvation*: 367.

4 Religious Panorama of Mediaeval Karnataka: A Brief Overview

The Viraśaiva movement, with its widespread growth, had soon to face several other creeds existing in the Karnataka area. It seems advisable, therefore, to take a quick look at the religious panorama in this region, particularly in the twelfth century.

In the history of Indian religions, Karnataka has always held a pre-eminent position because of the many important faiths and creeds that have flourished there. Buddhism, for instance, which had taken refuge in South India as early as the reign of the emperor Aśoka Maurya, survived in Karnataka for many centuries under different schools of thought. However, by about the tenth century, it had completely disappeared from the region and—soon afterwards—even from the whole of India. Śaivism also has always enjoyed great favour in Karnataka, where from about the ninth century onwards, the Pāśupata, Kāpālika and Kālāmukha sects gained wide popularity.¹¹⁰ The Kālāmukhas in particular must have wielded considerable influence, since their temples and *maṭhas* flourished in many places in the north of Karnataka and a number of inscriptions testify that they enjoyed the patronage of certain contemporary rulers as well as merchants.¹¹¹ Besides, *śakti* cults, which celebrate the divine feminine energy, were widespread throughout the region, especially from about the fifth century of our era, when Tantrism came to permeate, transversally, several different creeds. More than any other religious tradition, however, it was Jainism that, for many centuries, played a dominant role: many kings of the ruling dynasties of Karnataka were Jaina devotees (the Gaṅgā dynasty, for instance, was even founded by one of them), while others, even though they did not directly profess this religion, granted it their patronage. Among them, we may mention the Kadamba or the Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings, who were the greatest promoters of Jainism.¹¹² Likewise—as attested by a number of inscriptions¹¹³—the Hoysala dynasty, which ruled in the south of the region, not only counted many Jaina sovereigns among its members, but, in general, was always favourable to the spread of the Jaina doctrine. Furthermore, the history of

¹¹⁰ These three Śaivite sects, though differing slightly in their doctrine, are generally closely allied. Suffice it to say that the Kālāmukhas were the principal branch of the Pāśupata sect. For further details, see Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* (1972): 73–75; Lorenzen, “The Kālāmukha Background to Viraśaivism”: 278; and R.N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973): 83–85.

¹¹¹ Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* (1972): 165; Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 47.

¹¹² Regarding the patronage of the Kadamba dynasty, compare B.R. Gopal, “Gudnar Inscriptions of Kadamba Ravivarma,” in *Srikanthika*, ed. K.V. Ramesh et al. (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1973): 61–72; see also John Faithfull Fleet, “Sanskrit and old Canarese Inscriptions,” *Indian Antiquary* 6 (1877): 22–32.

¹¹³ P.M. Joseph, *Jainism in South India* (Thiruvananthapuram: International School of Dravidian Linguistics, 1997): 4. See also “Inscriptions at Sravanabelgola,” in *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. 2, ed. B.R. Gopal (Bangalore: University of Mysore Press, 1973): 632.

Jainism in Karnataka is marked by a very peculiar feature: the number of royal ladies—Queens Jakaladevi and Attimabbe, for instance—who supported the Jainas and made generous donations to them. Jakaladevi was the wife of the Western Cālukya king Vikramāditya VI (1076–1126 CE) while Attimabbe, also known as Dānacintāmaṇi (twelfth century), was celebrated in the annals of Jainism for her merits which included the building of many *basadis*: a fact confirmed by quite a number of surviving inscriptions.¹¹⁴

The patronage granted by many ruling dynasties were obviously one of the main reasons for the power gained by the Jainas in the region of Karnataka, thus transforming the faith from a mere tissue of ideologies into a living force in politics, society and economy.¹¹⁵

After a continuous evolution, this panorama radically changed in the twelfth century. In the early 1100s, Rāmānuja—the key figure in the expansion and triumph of a new phase of the *bhakti* movement (which marked its final incorporation into the great mainstream of the Brahmanic tradition)—took up his residence in Mysore. Here, his doctrine (*viśiṣṭādvaita* or “qualified non-dualism”), which identified the Supreme divine Reality with Viṣṇu, enjoyed the patronage of the Hoysaḷa king Bṛṭṭideva (1104–1141) who is believed to have converted from Jainism to the new faith.¹¹⁶ Thus Vaiṣṇavism, until then a minor creed, started its expansion in South Karnataka.

The devotional enthusiasm and new religious impetus that characterised Vaiṣṇavism at that time also affected the Śaiva cults: in the wake of the so called “renewed Brahmanism” and thanks to the support of many ruling sovereigns,¹¹⁷ the twelfth century witnessed an extraordinary Śaiva revival. Suffice it to point out that from 1150 to 1350 the Śaivas built at least four-hundred and fifty temples in Karnataka,¹¹⁸ while in Tamil Nadu, under the patronage of the Coḷa dynasty, Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy spread very fast in many places across South India, as attested to by a number of inscriptions.¹¹⁹ This renewed Śaiva activity, which eventually led to the rise of a new

114 See, for instance, the inscription in a Jaina temple at Lokkigundi (modern Lakkundi) which deals with a gift of land made by Attimabbe to the temple, which was built by her. The inscription also records certain interesting miracles connected with the life of the woman. Compare *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 11, part. 1, no. 52 (Madras: Government Press, 1940): 39.

115 R.B. Prasad Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka (c. A.D. 500–1200)* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975): 110.

116 S.R. Sharma, *Jainism and Karnataka Culture* (Dharwar: Karnatak Printing Works, 1940): 40; Glase-napp, *Jainism. An Indian Religion of Salvation*: 65.

117 Among these royal dynasties there were the Western Cālukyas and the successor dynasties of the Kalachuris and Seunas who patronised a number of Śaiva sects, particularly the Kālāmukhas (Lorenzen, “The Kālāmukha Background to Viraśaivism”: 278).

118 Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 23.

119 Compare *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy*, vol. 44, no. 311 (Madras: Government of India Press, 1926–27): 91, 92.

social identity,¹²⁰ did not remain limited to the religious-philosophical domain: quite early it acquired a real, aggressive and militant attitude towards those who were reputed non-believers, first of all the Jainas, who were still powerful in South India, particularly in Karnataka.

5 Śaivas' and Jainas' Conflicts

Any study of twelfth century Karnataka cannot overlook the fact that the open hostility between the Śaivas and the Jainas was but the apex of an escalating wave of violence, which had begun, in most parts of South India, a few centuries earlier. Indeed, even though the Jainas had always been exposed to various pressures from the surrounding Hindu environment, it was only from about the seventh century onwards that conflicts between the Jainas and several Hindu-Brahmanical communities (particularly those of the Śaiva tradition) became more and more aggressive.

Delving into the complex network of reasons for this strife-torn situation lies beyond the scope of this research. However, even a few brief notes on this subject will be useful in order to outline a further and more detailed picture of the relations between these two groups, which were both prominent in the ideological and socio-economical field.

5.1 The Religious, Social and Economical Milieu

At the beginning of the so-called Indian Middle Ages, the Hindu temple institution became the focal point of a renewed structure of power and a socio-economic centre of extraordinary importance. The growth in the “temple ideology,” which coincided with the structural evolution of the sanctuaries themselves, thus giving rise to many new different forms of architecture, gave rise to the symbol of a new religious authority. This unleashed competition with other powerful creeds (particularly Jainism) for religious-social dominance and, of course, for royal patronage. Furthermore, the temple building activity, and the complex organisation that this institution was giving rise to, pre-supposed a surplus-producing economy. Since in the south of India (and particularly in Karnataka) the Jainas had played a dominant role in urban centres, and most landed property—already from the first centuries of the Christian era—was in their hands, the competition for the available social goods increased.¹²¹ As Nandi has pointed out, much of the tension which marked the history of Śaivism and Jainism in

¹²⁰ Thapar, *Cultural Transaction in Early India*: 13.

¹²¹ Champakalakshmi, “From Devotion and Dissent to Dominance”: 157; T. Yarlalagadda, *Social History of the Deccan* (Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2004): 330.

the early mediaeval period has to be viewed in the context of a low-technology and small-scale subsistence agriculture which could not provide the necessary surplus for sustaining the expansion of both creeds.¹²²

During the twelfth century, the growing power of the Śaiva sects, and social-economic developments in general, further accentuated this conflict. This was the period that saw the consolidation and the maximum expansion of the process whereby many south Indian royal dynasties patronised the Hindu temples with large donations of land, often comprising entire villages: we know about these donations from inscriptions that designate them as *brahmadēya* (a donation to Brahmins) or *agrahāram*.¹²³ Thus the Brahmins, mostly Śaivas, also became landlords; and since the Jainas, despite their progressive loss of power, still controlled the majority of agrarian manpower at the time, as lessors of plots of land,¹²⁴ the competition for landed property and agricultural production became embittered.

Conflict also arose, however, from commercial competition between these two groups, as even a brief examination of the economic history of twelfth-century Karnataka would show. This period, particularly in Karnataka, witnessed a spurt in commercial activity: with the progressive decline of the traditional economy of exchange and the rise of the monetary economic system, trade and business flourished.¹²⁵ In this regard, we should underline that Karnataka had always maintained a role of primacy in commercial exchanges not only between the north and the south of the peninsula, but also overseas. The goods exported included in particular agricultural produce such as spices and, above all, pepper. The revival of trade encouraged the growth of a new class of merchants (mostly Śaivas), who came into conflict with the Jainas, since the business community of mediaeval Karnataka, as attested by many sources, was largely controlled by them.¹²⁶ As a matter of fact, the Jainas dedicated themselves by and large to trade and the liberal professions, which best allowed them to practise their ideal of non-violence. Obviously, the Śaiva-Jaina trading clash was not only a matter of mere commercial competition: it also became an ideological one, since the Hindu temples and the Jaina sacred complexes gained their wealthiest patrons precisely from their respective trading communities.

It seems quite natural, therefore, that an even more acrimonious hostility between the Śaivas and the Jainas characterised the religious history of twelfth-century Karnataka. Many accounts testify to the fact that Śaiva militant groups launched regu-

122 R.N. Nandi, *Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1986): 97.

123 Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999): 145.

124 Yarlagadda, *Social History of the Deccan*: 203.

125 Nandi, "Origin of the Viraśaiva Movement": 471, 472; Yarlagadda, *Social History of the Deccan*: 97.

126 Uma Aery and B.S. Mathur, "Some Aspects of Trade in Jain literature (800–1200 A.D.)," in *Medieval Jainism: Culture and Environment*, ed. P. Suman Jain (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1990): 85–93; Prasad Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*: 101, 102.

lar crusades against the Jainas, who were made more vulnerable by the disappearance of the royal patronage Mahāvīra's followers had previously enjoyed in some areas.

5.2 Epigraphic Sources

For a detailed overview of Śaiva—Jaina conflicts, we refer to the existing studies;¹²⁷ by way of example, however, let us look at few salient epigraphic sources. Firstly, the inscription of Annigeri (Aṇṇigēri), in Dharwar District is worth noting. It certifies that, during the reign of the Later Western Cālukya king Tribhuvanamalla Someśvara IV (twelfth century), a local chief named Vīra (valorous) Goggidēva destroyed many Jaina places of worship and was the boastful author of brutal massacres. The inscription describes him as “[...] the hunter of the Jain deers [...] the fire to the Jain scriptures [...] the eagle to the snakes [namely] the adherents of the Jain doctrine [...] a bad star to Jains, the god of Death to those who professed the Jain creed.”¹²⁸ Not by chance, Vīra Goggidēva was regarded by the Śaivas as a formidable warrior and he is believed to have sacrificed his wealth and other resources for the promotion of the Śaiva faith.¹²⁹

Another inscription, a little later in date, found in Talikota (Tālīkoṭi) in Bijapur District, documents the extermination of a few Jaina groups of that area by the hand of a Śaiva militant named Viruparasa: “In the time of the [king] Baisarasa”—the inscription says—“Jain religion was like a forest and he [Viruparasa] was the fire for it.”¹³⁰ Furthermore, it is well known that in 1155 CE, the Coḷa king Rāja Chandala, an ardent Śaiva devotee, carried out a military expedition, going as far as the present districts of Dharwar and Gadag, where he destroyed many Jaina *basadis*, and:

[...] with wicked malignity, worthy of the Kali Age had caused to be burnt down and destroyed the dwelling of the great Jinas [...] but King Lakshmana having repaired the damage [...] so that it is said to be an eternal wonder, established its charter so that it should stand as long as the moon, the sun and the stars do: how fortunate is he! (lines 20, 23).¹³¹

¹²⁷ See, for instance, P.B. Desai, *Jainism in South India and Some Jain Epigraphs* (Sholapur: Gulabchand Hirachand Doshi, 1957): 82, 83, 397–403; Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times*: 75–79.

¹²⁸ Aṇṇigēri Inscription, Navalgund Taluk, *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 15, n. 59 (Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1986): 82. A brief summary of this inscription is also given in *Annual Report of South Indian Epigraphy*, vol. 1928–29, Appendix E, n. 207 (Madras: Government of India Press, 1928–29), quoted by Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 397.

¹²⁹ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 397.

¹³⁰ Tālīkoṭi Inscription, Bijapur, *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 15, n. 56 (Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1986): 79.

¹³¹ Gawarwad Inscriptions, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 15, n. 23 (Delhi: Government Press, 1919–20): 337–47.

6 Viraśaiva-Jaina Relations in Twelfth Century Karnataka

It was in this complex scenario of inter-religious struggle that the Viraśaivas/Liṅgāyats came to the fore. Their doctrine, although regarded by the already existing Śaivas as a dangerous innovation,¹³² soon gained favour and dominance over the different creeds of Karnataka.¹³³

Viraśaiva growth, and the new web of religious and social conditions that thus obtained, represented an important landmark in the history of Jainism in Karnataka. Indeed, since the Jainas, notwithstanding their progressive loss of power, still managed to maintain their major influence in the region, it was only a matter of time before they came into open conflict with the Viraśaivas. Once again, though, conflict was not only religious in nature: it was also related to the question of the economic and political ascendancy in Karnataka.

As a matter of fact, most of the Viraśaiva faithful—maybe due to the fact that the *kāyaka* principle¹³⁴ had removed social inhibition—made the best use of professional opportunities,¹³⁵ thus undertaking a wide variety of profitable occupations, chiefly trade and various crafts. Thus, like the Jainas, the Viraśaivas, too, started getting involved in activities central to the local economy of Karnataka, and the resultant competition might have represented one of the causes of tension between them.¹³⁶ A further element, according to a hypothesis of Thapar, may have been that the Jainas, with their high standard of literacy, were seen by the Viraśaivas as rivals for the adviser and administrator roles at the royal courts.¹³⁷

To sum up, then, in twelfth-century Karnataka, the Jainas had to fight their battle on two fronts: against the Śaiva militant groups, on the one hand, and the Viraśaivas on the other. The competition often deteriorated into extreme hatred and large-scale bloodshed, which seems surprising given the highly pacifistic nature of Basava's doctrines. As often happens in religious-ideological circles, there must have been certain violent extremist fringes.¹³⁸ However, according to the hypothesis that sees the Liṅ-

¹³² It should be borne in mind that conflicts between certain Śaiva sects and the Viraśaivas also occurred both at the beginning of and during the latter's expansion (Compare Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 14, 15; S. Settar and P.K.V. Kaimal, *We Lived Together*, Indian Council of Historical Research, Monograph Series 3 [New Delhi: Pragati Publication, 2000]: 70).

¹³³ Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics*: 14–15.

¹³⁴ See p. 285

¹³⁵ Venugopal, "Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation": 13–14.

¹³⁶ Nandi, "Origin of the Viraśaiva Movement": 470–75.

¹³⁷ Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 74.

¹³⁸ Nearly a century later, we have a similar dichotomy in the Catholic Church, where the "violent love for God" of Domingo de Guzman is set against the pacific Francis of Assisi.

gāyats and the Viraśaivas as two distinct groups,¹³⁹ such violence—Kalburgi maintains—is to be ascribed only to the latter.¹⁴⁰

6.1 Conflicts and Violence

A number of historical sources (epigraphical, literary, archaeological and even iconographic) testify to the fact that the new Viraśaiva movement soon came into violent conflict with the ancient Jaina communities. However, before looking at these confrontations in more detail, we must stress that, although there is no doubt about their taking place, it is quite difficult to make a precise evaluation of their extent and significance. This is because the sources we have access to largely consist of hagiographic literature such as the *Purāṇas*, fraught with mythological narratives and the usual defamatory disputes which, as has already been noted, were part of a literary culture that had long sustained the competition between the religious communities of mediæval India. By way of example, certain Jaina works such as the *Bijjaḷarayacaritra* (about mid-seventeenth century) describe Basava in rather negative terms, in contrast to the virtuous Bijjaḷa, here depicted as a follower of Jainism.¹⁴¹ Obviously, the intention of these authors was propagandistic and, most probably, the goal of such literature, often devoid of historical substance, served as a “self-definition” rather than an attempt to persuade the opposition.¹⁴² In addition, the epigraphic sources, which are among the most reliable records for historical reconstruction, have to be carefully evaluated and cannot be used *tout court* to establish the historical reality. Taking these considerations into account, we can proceed to analyse the different sources.

6.1.1 Epigraphic and Iconographic Evidence

Numerous inscriptions testify to the fact that the Jainas remained a hated community and were long persecuted by Viraśaivas not only in Karnataka, but even in modern Andhra Pradesh where, in the sixteenth century, inscriptions recorded the pride of a Viraśaiva chief who beheaded Śvetāmbara Jainas.¹⁴³ In Karnataka, their victimisation seems to have become so severe that, in the fourteenth century, the Jainas asked the

¹³⁹ See p. 273.

¹⁴⁰ Kalburgi, personal communication (February 2010); Malleshappa M. Kalburgi “The Destruction of the Temples [in Kannada],” *Marga* 3 (Bangalore: Karnataka Book Agency, 1998): 39–55.

¹⁴¹ Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and minor Religious Systems*: 189; Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times*: 337.

¹⁴² Peterson, “Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way”: 164.

¹⁴³ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 402.

Vijayanagara ruling family for protection, and the conditions that were imposed in their favour substantiate this fact.¹⁴⁴

An interesting and very famous epigraphic source is the Abalur inscription, discovered in the Someśvara Temple of Abalur (ancient Ablūr) in what is today the Haveri District and published for the first time by Fleet in 1898.¹⁴⁵ It is usually dated to the end of the twelfth century and describes the anti-Jaina activity of Rāmayya, a Śaiva devotee, generally regarded as a Vīraśaiva. As a matter of fact, we cannot be absolutely certain about the nature of his religious creed, since the Abalur inscription does not mention the term Vīraśaiva or Liṅgāyat in connection with him. However, another inscription from the Mandhya District—which bears a date equivalent to either 1280 or 1305—includes Rāmayya's name in a list of Vīraśaiva Bhaktas.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, in most of Vīraśaiva literature, Rāmayya is considered a devotee of this faith,¹⁴⁷ and that is also the opinion of the majority of scholars.¹⁴⁸

Now, let us go through the inscription, mostly in old Kannada,¹⁴⁹ which occupies a place of great importance, not only because of its contents, but above all because it appears to corroborate literary and iconographic evidence: the temple also contains a sculpted panel depicting the events narrated in the inscription, a summary of which follows.

¹⁴⁴ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 402.

¹⁴⁵ "Inscriptions at Ablur," by Fleet (*Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 5, inscription E [Delhi: Government Press, 1898–99]: 237–60).

¹⁴⁶ *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. 7, ed. B.R. Gopal, n. 13 (Bangalore: University of Mysore Press, 1979): 197, quoted by Lorenzen, "The Kālāmukha Background to Vīraśaivism": 289.

¹⁴⁷ See, for instance, the *Basava Purāṇa* of Pāṅkuriki Somanātha, where Rāmayya is numbered amongst the heroic Vīraśaiva Bhaktas (devotee). Compare Narayana Rao, *Śiva's Warriors*: 196–98. In the *Cennabasava Purāṇa* of Virūpākṣa, although Rāmayya's name is never mentioned, the peculiar exploits of a Vīraśaiva devotee are told, with evident allusion to Rāmayya's story (Würth, trans., "Chan-nabasava Purāṇa of the Lingaits": 193–94).

¹⁴⁸ Among them, we may cite Nilakanta Sastri, "The Chāḷukyas of Kalyāṇī": 464; Glasenapp, *Jainism. An Indian Religion of Salvation*: 71; and Uttangi, "Anubhava Mantapa, The Heath of the Liṅgāyat Religion": 239. Fleet, who first translated the inscription, maintains that Rāmayya was not only a Vīraśaiva himself, but the founder of the Vīraśaiva creed ("Inscriptions at Ablūr," by Fleet in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 5, inscription E: 239). It seems, however, that the author has erroneously identified Rāmayya with Ekorama, one of the five teachers previous to Basava who—according to one theory (compare R. Blake Michael, "Foundation Myths of the Two Denominations": 312)—would have been the founders of the Vīraśaiva movement (Nandi, *Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India*: 171). Lorenzen (Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* [1972]: 169) believes that Rāmayya was probably a Kālāmukha who later converted to Vīraśaivism and this is the opinion of Ishwaran as well (Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 26).

¹⁴⁹ To be more precise, the language of this inscription may be described as half-way between the classical and mediaeval Kannada dialects. It should be also stated that the opening invocatory verse, as well as other few lines, are in Sanskrit (compare "Inscriptions at Ablūr," by Fleet in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 5, inscription E: 238).

An opening invocation glorifies the god Śiva, who is asked to confer good fortune on Rāmayya (also mentioned as Rāma and Rāmadeva) (lines 1–4). In the subsequent verses, Rāmayya is also named Ekāntada (he who worships Śiva with great exclusiveness [*ekānta*]), the epithet being justified—Fleet maintains¹⁵⁰—by his firm devotion to Śiva.¹⁵¹

Then, in mixed prose and verse, with eulogies to both Śiva and Rāmayya, the record deals with the city of Alande (modern Aland), here described as a beautiful place “full of grace and splendour [...]” (line 11). Among the residents of that town, in the Brahman quarters—the inscription says—there was a man, Puruṣottama, “the best of Brahmans” (line 17), whose son, Rāmayya, was an ardent Śaiva devotee.

It is at this point that the story of Ekāntada Rāmayya’s exploits in Abalur begins. One day the Śaiva devotee was commanded by the god himself to pick a quarrel with the Jainas who obstructed him in his devotion and did not recognise the supremacy of Śiva. The Jainas challenged Rāmayya to prove both his devotion and the power of his god by cutting off his own head and asking Śiva to restore it.¹⁵² Then Rāmayya answered: “If I offer my head [...] and [...] obtain it back in seven days, what is the wager that you will pay to me?” (line 38). The Jainas replied that they would destroy their idols and replace them with an image of Śiva.

After having received a written wager (which was drawn up on a palm leaf), Rāmayya, most nonchalantly “as if he were shearing through a bundle of grass” (line 42) cut off his own head and offered it to the god. After the head had been exhibited in public for seven days, Śiva restored it and “the head became sound again, without any scar” (line 43).

At this point it is interesting to note that this miracle is retold in several Karnataka literary sources, such as the poem *Ekāntarāmitandeya Ragaḷe* (lit: “*ragaḷe* for

¹⁵⁰ Compare “Inscriptions at Ablūr,” by Fleet in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 5, inscription E: 243.

¹⁵¹ However, since the epithet “*ekāntada*” could also mean “he who affirms the doctrine of the one and sole reality” Desai points out that the name seems to allude to his victory over the Jaina doctrine, defined as *anekāntavāda* (“the doctrine proclaiming the non-uniqueness”), as it affirms the relative pluralism of reality (Compare “More Inscriptions at Ablūr,” by Desai, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 29, part 5, n. 19 [Delhi: Government Press, 1952]: 139–44). Indeed, the Jaina doctrine is also known as “the doctrine of might be” (*syādvāda*). Compare Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Jainism. An Indian Religion of Salvation*: 170. A few scholars question Desai’s hypothesis (compare Gil Ben-Herut, “Literary Genres and Textual Representations of Early Viraśaiva History: Revisiting Ekānta Rāmayya’s Self-Beheading,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 16, no. 2 [2012]: 170, note 5).

¹⁵² Head offering (in the sense of decapitating one’s own or that of one’s enemy) in fulfilling a vow or as a form of penitence, has been a leitmotif of the sculpted art as well as of the literature of late mediaeval Karnataka. Suffice it to note that a well-known Kannada play (re-written in English for an international audience) is named *taledaṇḍa*, which exactly means “death by beheading” (Leslie, “Understanding Basava”: 228). In this play, Basava himself often uses phrases which could convey the sense “may my head roll,” or “I offer my head,” to a Kannada-speaking audience, as the expression *taledaṇḍa* recalls both Basava and the miracles he is believed to have performed, and the violence of the early Viraśaiva tradition (Leslie, “Understanding Basava”: 258).

Lord Rāma of Exclusive Worship”)¹⁵³ by the poet Harihara (ca. twelfth century), which records that the severed head of Rāmayya was taken around to places all over Karnataka by a holy man, and that on the seventh day (when the devotee’s head was to be restored) it was brought back to Abalur. However (the poem goes on to say), since the holy man was three hours late, he prayed to the sun to delay its rising [...] and the sun did, so that Rāmayya’s head was reestablished in time. Because of this, the holy man came to be called Muru Javi Deva, “the deity of the three hours.”¹⁵⁴

Yet not even this miracle could convince the reluctant Jainas to replace their Jina image with a symbol of Śiva. So, the revived Rāmayya became furious and:

just as a wild elephant in rut plunges into a grove of plantain-trees and, though alone, sweeps everything away before him, so he, putting forth his strength, scattered the heroes who guarded it [the Jina image] and the horses, the chieftains and, while the opposing ranks of the Jains, crying out that Mari (the goddess of plague or death) had come upon them [...] he beat the Jina till it fell. (lines 43–45).



Plate 4.1: Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

¹⁵³ *Ragaḷe* is a type of metre used in Kannada poetry.

¹⁵⁴ Malleshappa M. Kalburgi, ed., *Ekāntarāmitandeya Ragaḷe* [in Kannada] by Harihara (Hampi: Prasaraṅga Kannada University, 1999): 363.

After that, Rāmayya destroyed other Jina images, razed to the ground the Jaina *basadi* in Abalur and upon it built a temple “with three pinnacles, as vast as a mountain [...]” (line 73) dedicated to Someśvara (Plates 4.1, 4.2, 4.3).¹⁵⁵



Plate 4.2: Someśvara Temple (Abalur) interior.

In this regard, it is to be observed that, contrary to what is asserted in the inscription, the basic structure of this temple is typical of many tenth- to thirteenth-century Jaina sanctuaries (Later Western Cālukya period) in the area, such as the Siddheśvara Temple (Haveri District) or the *basadi* of Dambal (Dambal, Gadag District). These templar typologies, notwithstanding stylistic interactions with local Hindu temples, present typical architectonic characteristics which set them apart. For instance, a linear simplicity and purity of forms; a sparsely decorated external wall, punctuated by deep projections with large porches; flat roofs with sloping eaves and the *sikhara* constituted by simple tiers which rise according to a precise geometrical rhythm.

¹⁵⁵ Someśvara or Somanātha appears to have been the favourite deity of Rāmayya. Indeed, his native place, Alande, was sanctified by this deity (“More Inscriptions at Ablūr,” by Desai in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 29, part 5, n. 19: 143).



Plate 4.3: Śikara. Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

It is thus quite likely that the original Jaina *basadi*—as further sources also testify¹⁵⁶—had not been completely destroyed, but only damaged and despoiled of Jaina images as well as of every other symbol belonging to this tradition. The aggressors would have subsequently added their own self-aggrandising inscriptions and the sculptural reliefs—visible to this day—which provide a significant iconographic source on the exploits of Rāmayya.

These reliefs consist of three panels, the most important one being located along the eastern wall to the left of the temple entrance. It is a long frieze designed to in-

156 “More Inscriptions at Ablūr,” by Desai in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 29, part 5, n. 19: 143.

struct and celebrate the hero's deeds in a series of successive scenes conceived as a linear and continuous narrative, similar to those that one often finds in ancient and mediaeval Indian art. At the beginning of the representation, the severed head of Rāmayya, well detached from the rest of his body, lies on the pedestal (*pīṭha*) of a *liṅga* (Plate 4.4). In the subsequent scene, Rāmayya appears with his head restored by the god, ready to do battle against the Jainas. Two opposing groups are lined up in battle array, while on the ground lie the defeated Jainas, viewed as giants deprived of strength, according to a well-known iconographical motif in Indian art, representing enemies as ugly, huge and monstrous creatures (Plate 4.5).¹⁵⁷ The rhythm of the composi-



Plate 4.4: The severed head of Rāmayya lies on the Śiva pedestal. On the right, Rāmayya appears with his head restored. Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

¹⁵⁷ See, for instance, a relief along the *pradakṣiṇapatha* of the Kailāsanātha Temple at Kancipuram, where the god Śiva is crushing a demon, represented as a monstrous giant.

tion is compact and marked by sudden movements—typical of the Later Western Cāluḡya art—in such a way that volumes are enlivened by an extraordinary internal tension, which seems to soften in the last, cathartic scene, where victors—amongst whom Rāmayya himself appears—are destroying a Jina’s image (Plate 4.6).



Plate 4.5: Battle between the Vīraśaivas and the Jains. Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

Another relief, next to the previous one, celebrates Rāmayya’s raising of the Śiva *liṅga* (Plate 4.7). The sacred symbol is placed in the middle of the composition on a high pedestal flanked by two personages (the one on the left side identifiable as Rāmayya himself), in an attitude of paying homage to and worshipping the *liṅga*. Above them, crowning the whole scene, the sun and the moon are depicted. Thus, the historical episode is transferred into a cosmic event: this relief might be said not merely to commemorate or signify Rāmayya’s deeds, but actually to exhibit a process of the creation (or re-creation) of a new era. Thus, the inert matter of the stone appears permeated by the subtle forces of its symbolic meaning.

Finally, the third sculpted slab is found to the right of the entrance to the *garbhagṛha* (sanctum) of the same temple (Plate 4.8). During our field research in November 2009, it was placed behind large stones which hid it from the eye; besides, it was completely covered in mud. Nonetheless, we could get some pictures of it which are presented here (Plate 4.9).



Plate 4.6: Destruction of Jina's image. Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

The scene depicts a great Jina image, placed horizontally, which is about to be broken by two Śaiva militants, one of them presumably Rāmayya himself. The sculpted panel seems to be related to a brief inscription, which reads as follows: “At this place [is depicted the scene of] Ekāntada Rāmayya breaking up the [image of the] Jina and setting up the Śiva liṅga.”¹⁵⁸

6.1.2 Literary and Archaeological Sources

The exploits of Rāmayya are also known from Viraśaiva literary sources, including the *Ekāntarāmitandeya Ragale*, already cited,¹⁵⁹ and the *Basava Purāṇa* of Pāḷkuriki, composed at the end of the twelfth century.¹⁶⁰ The text describes the selfsame events as those narrated in the Abalur inscriptions, but in a slightly different version. The narration unfolds with dramatic overtones and eulogies of Rāmayya, the “extraordi-

¹⁵⁸ “More Inscriptions at Ablūr,” by Desai in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 29, part 5, n. 19: 141.

¹⁵⁹ Compare Ben-Herut, “Literary Genres and Textual Representations”: 129–87.

¹⁶⁰ Edward P. Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1982): 44.

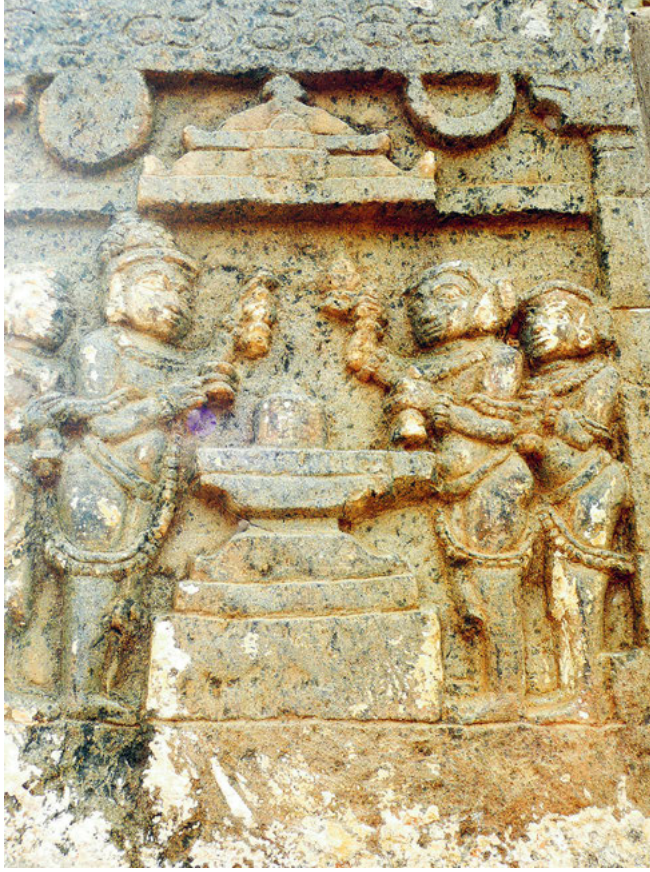


Plate 4.7: Rāmayya's raising of the Śiva *liṅga*. Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

narly courageous” and formidable warrior. It suffices to look at the description of the “head offering,” rendered with crude intensity: “[...] with a mighty roar [Rāmayya] placed his sword at his own throat with one hand. He grabbed his knotted hair in the other hand. With tremendous force he drove his head against the blade.”¹⁶¹ What seems to be more interesting, however, is that here, Basava himself is cited as a besotted witness to Rāmayya’s heroic deeds. So much so that, at the end of the sequel, after the pillage of the Jaina temples and sculptures, after the massacres down to “every known Jain,”¹⁶² the Viraśaiva master himself is shown as paying homage to Rāmayya, whereupon he “worshipped him [Rāmayya] as if he were Sangamesha.”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ *Basava Purāṇa* of Pāḷkuriki Somanātha (Narayana Rao, *Śiva’s Warriors*: 217.

¹⁶² Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 218.

¹⁶³ Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 218.



Plate 4.8: Right-hand side of the entrance to the *garbhagrha*. Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

The delighted admiration for not only Rāmayya, but also other Vīraśaiva devotees, architects of similar carnage, permeates all of the *Basava Purāṇa*. The book—especially chapter VI—describes the sacking of many Jaina places of worship¹⁶⁴ and the tortures inflicted on the followers of this faith. For instance, a Vīraśaiva devotee named Iru-tandi, having been obstructed by a group of Jainas as he dug a bathing tank in front of his temple, blinded all of them.¹⁶⁵ Some Jainas were impaled by “heroic devotees” on heated iron spears, which was a common punishment in ancient India.¹⁶⁶ Others were beaten to death, while “[...] they look with terror at the blood that oozed from

¹⁶⁴ Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 199, 200, 207, 212. These places, unfortunately, have not been identified.

¹⁶⁵ Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 200.

¹⁶⁶ Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 203, 204.



Plate 4.9: A Jina image being broken by two Śaiva militants. Someśvara Temple (Abalur).

their body.”¹⁶⁷ Again, the Viraśaiva devotee Hiriya Nacayya punished all the Jains in a town called Marundiga (not identifiable), because they were said to have destroyed the only Śaiva temple and killed the priest.¹⁶⁸ The exploits of Hiriya Nacayya are described in great detail: the heroic faithful, having gathered up twelve thousand Kama Killer devotees—among whom were also thirteen chiefs of the city—“attacked the Jains, surrounded them, fought with them head to head [...]. As for the Jains, they screamed with fright and swooned, and the devotees killed them and cut off their heads [...].” Then, Śiva’s warriors destroyed the Jaina *basadis* and smashed the heads of every Jina image.¹⁶⁹

Another literary source, the *Cennabasava Purāṇa*—written in 1585 by a well known Viraśaiva master, Virūpākṣa Pandita¹⁷⁰—although it makes no mention of the destruction of the *basadi*, nor of tortures inflicted on the followers of Mahāvira (whose numbers had, in all likelihood, diminished considerably due to the sweeping devastations suffered in the preceding centuries), bears witness to a great animosity towards the

¹⁶⁷ Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 215.

¹⁶⁸ Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 212.

¹⁶⁹ Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 212.

¹⁷⁰ For further study, see Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 49.

Jaina community. Indeed, it is related that the sage Nārada, having long wandered the earth, presented himself before Śiva in order to update the latter about the vicissitudes of humanity and about the state of the Śivaite faith in the world. Having spoken a eulogy of the doctrine and reassured Śiva that “[...] all over the world Śiva devotion is increasing,” the sage specified that “[...] only in Khanda [Karnataka] sin prevails! Truth is destroyed, good rites have disappeared [...] the Jains’ religion prevails and every place is full of Jain temples and all the people are worshippers of Jina.”¹⁷¹

The Great God, therefore, decides to send into the Kanarese territory an incarnation of his *vāhana* (the bull Nandin), in order to fight his enemies and re-establish the Śivaite faith.¹⁷² Thus, the narration continues, was Nandin born on earth: as Basava. This idea appears to have been suggested by the fact that the name “Basava” is a Kannada form of the Sanskrit “*vr̥ṣabha*” or bull, by antonomasia, that of Śiva: Nandin.¹⁷³

On a deeper reading, the text reveals several points of interest: the first being that the Jainas are described as a fearsome group. Although the author might have been artificially inflating the might of the community, it in all likelihood still represented a competitive force which the other religious groups of the region had to reckon with, perhaps even from an economic point of view. In addition, the Jainas are portrayed as votaries of a false doctrine, far removed from the truth, which places the *Cennabasava Purāṇa* in the genre of standard polemical literature that relies on angry rhetoric. Lastly, one may already note the process—of which more later—whereby Vīraśaivism begins to succumb to the influence of the mythological, religious and ritualistic tradition of Hindu Śaivism.

Alongside the epigraphic, iconographic and literary sources, archaeological evidence also testifies to the violence of the Vīraśaivas to the detriment of the Jainas. Indeed, a disproportionate number of *basadis*, especially in north Karnataka, show unequivocal signs of devastation by the hand of man, whether of architecture or decorations. Since most of these Jaina temples were taken over and reutilised by the Vīraśaivas,¹⁷⁴ a number of historians agree that the Jaina *basadis* of Karnataka went through a traumatic experience at the hands of the Vīraśaivas/Liṅgāyats.¹⁷⁵ All the same, however, it is not easy to distinguish the vandalism practised by the Vīraśaivas from the violent acts that may be ascribed to other Śaiva militant groups, all the more so as many Śaiva militants (such as the above-mentioned Vīruparasa or Goggidēva) con-

171 *Cennabasava Purāṇa* by Virūpākṣa Pandita (Würth, trans., “Channabasava Purāṇa of the Liṅgaits”: 116).

172 Rice, *A History of Kanarese Literature*: 119.

173 Desai, *Basavēśvara and his Times*: 169; Michael, “Foundation Myths of the Two Denominations”: 311.

174 It is well known that, although Basava rejected temple rituals, by the middle of the twelfth century, the Vīraśaivas had already appropriated many Jaina sanctuaries (Julia A.B. Hegewald and Subrata K. Mitra, “Jagannatha Compared: The Politics of Appropriation, Re-Use and Regional Traditions in India,” *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics (HPSACP)* 36 [2008]: 22–28), as well as other temples belonging to different religious traditions.

175 Thapar, “Cultural Transaction in Early India”: 12.

centrated their anti-Jaina campaigns in northern Karnataka, just as the Viraśaivas did.¹⁷⁶ However, in certain cases, it is possible to know the identity of the aggressors, because there are precise literary or epigraphic corroborations.

This is the case with a Jaina sanctuary situated in ancient Puligere (modern Lakṣmeśvara, in Gadag District), whose periods of splendour and successive spoilage at the hands of the Viraśaivas are known from various sources. Indeed, inscriptions—spread over a span of many centuries—as well as rich antiquities reveal that the whole area was an eminent centre of Jainism.¹⁷⁷ The monument in question, in particular, must have been one of the most important of those present in the area, due to its expanse, not to speak of the selectivity of its architectonic and decorative elements (still visible in parts) (Plates 4.10, 4.11). At any rate, literary sources attest to the fact that, in about the middle of the twelfth century, it was wrecked by a Viraśaiva devotee



Plate 4.10: Lakṣmeśvara Temple (Gadag District).

¹⁷⁶ In view of these uncertainties, few scholars even maintain that the destruction of Jaina places of worship, with or without possible massacres, was perpetrated not by Viraśaivas/Liṅgāyats but by Śaiva militants (Desai, *Basaveśvara and his Times*: 81, 129–32). However, a lot of evidence contradicts this hypothesis.

¹⁷⁷ Desai, *Jainism in South India*: 388; Joseph, *Jainism in South India*: 32.

by the name of Ādayya, the author of renowned *Vacanas*.¹⁷⁸ The life of Ādayya and his destructive activity are described, with a wealth of detail, in the *Somanātha Caritra*, a celebrated text of Vīraśaiva literature, written in the thirteenth century by the poet Rāghavāṅka.



Plate 4.11: Lakṣmeśvara Temple (Gadag District).

We are thus told that Ādayya was a native merchant of Saurashtra (which comprised most of the Kathiawar peninsula, in modern Gujarat) who, having travelled through many kingdoms, came on business to Puligere. Here, he fell in love with a Jain maiden named Padmāvatī who converted to Vīraśaivism. “[...] (She) bowing her head at the lord Śiva’s feet, renounced the deity she had worshipped before [...] and started worshipping Śiva *liṅga* ceaselessly.”¹⁷⁹ The parents of Padmāvatī, Jain themselves, at first rejected, but later accepted Ādayya, who started to live with them. One day, however, Ādayya, offended by them, vowed to convert Puligere’s great *basadi* into a Śaiva temple. Thus, during the night, the Vīraśaiva devotee went to the Jain temple and

¹⁷⁸ S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Vīraśaivism*: 109.

¹⁷⁹ Compare *Somanātha Caritra* [in Kannada] by Rāghavāṅka, ed. R.C. Hirematha and M.S. Sunkapura (Bangalore: Kannada Sahitya Parishat, 2004 [1961]): 66.

established the Śiva *līṅga* there.¹⁸⁰ The following day, when the Jainas came to their *basadi*, they found it closed and in no way could they succeed in opening it. At that point a bloody battle between the Jainas and the Viraśaivas took place. The battle concluded with the victory of the latter and the destruction, by the same Ādayya, of the many images of Jinās which adorned the temple.¹⁸¹

Despite the mythological and ideological traits of the text, the edifice does show traces of mutilation, especially in the sculptures of the seated Jinās which adorn the parapet of the temple, framed in niches surmounted by *kālāmukhas* or inserted in *gavākṣas* (Plates 4.12, 4.13).



Plate 4.12: Destruction of Jaina images and decorations on the parapet of Lakṣmeśvara Temple (Gadag District).

Notably, a few Jaina images happen to have been saved (Plate 4.14). This isolated preservation—a phenomenon found in other *basadis* that have suffered similar assaults—might represent a kind of a triumphal celebration, a reminder that the longstanding

¹⁸⁰ Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 144.

¹⁸¹ Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 172–77.



Plate 4.13: Destruction of Jaina images and decorations on the parapet of Lakṣmeśvara Temple (Gadag District), detail.

Jaina supremacy had been overcome.¹⁸² After exploitations, this temple, originally conceived as a Jaina shrine, was converted to the ritual uses of the Viraśaivas and re-named, as also occurred at many other Jaina sanctuaries elsewhere in Karnataka.

6.2 Conversions

In the course of the twelfth century, alongside violent encounters between the Jainas and the Viraśaivas, large-scale conversions also took place in Karnataka: entire communities of Mahāvira's followers embraced the new doctrine taught by Basava.¹⁸³

This phenomenon, that led to the further diminution of the Jaina population, soon attained proportions so vast as to be cited even in the literature of the period. By

¹⁸² Hegewald and Mitra, "Jagannatha Compared": 26.

¹⁸³ Venugopal, "Lingāyat Ideology of Salvation": 13–14; Zydenbos, "Viraśaivism, Caste, Revolution, etc.": 530. See also Dundas, *Il Jainismo*: 179, who reports on the widespread phenomenon of conversions from Jainism, even though he does not furnish details as to the specific path chosen by the new converts, merely stating that there were crossovers to the Hindu religion.



Plate 4.14: A Jaina image that escaped destruction on the parapet of Lakṣmeśvara Temple (Gadag District).

way of a few examples, we might cite *Somanātha Caritra*, which narrates the story of Padmāvatī, the Jaina maiden who converted to Viraśaivism, mentioned above, and Pāṅkuriki Somanātha's *Basava Purāṇa*, which speaks of a Jaina master, Tirunāvakarīśa, who also converted, having been miraculously healed upon the intercession of his sister, a devout Śivaite.¹⁸⁴

Undoubtedly, when a philosophical or spiritual movement expands widely in a certain region, gaining power and prestige in terms of economic and social status, it comes to exercise a general attraction on the people. This was all the more so, in the case of Viraśaivism; the egalitarian stance it championed, together with the ideal of the redistribution of wealth (*dāsōha*), represented an appealing novelty for the disadvantaged classes. However, it is no simple matter to explain why the conversions particularly regarded the Jaina community, and why they came to pass on so wide a scale. Besides, this trend was not limited only to the initial stages of the diffusion of

¹⁸⁴ Narayana Rao, *Śiva's Warriors*: 198, 199.

the new doctrine, it protracted itself across the following centuries, touching an all-time high in the fifteenth.¹⁸⁵

The dearth of sources and the exiguous number of studies conducted on the topic prevent us from delineating this phenomenon exhaustively. All the same, we shall try to formulate a hypothesis, with an eye to certain social and economic situations that characterised the history of the Vīraśaiva movement in twelfth-century Karnataka.

We have already had occasion to see that right from its inception, this new doctrine, emphasising the necessity for a commitment to social work (*kāyaka*, social labour), had led its followers to undertake a wide range of profitable vocations, such as commerce and craftsmanship. Vīraśaiva merchants became very powerful, by virtue both of the organisational efficiency which had always characterised the movement, and the great favour it was acquiring amongst people. The new code of commercial morals they formed, according to Basava's principles, called *vīra bāṇajiga dharma* (the law of the noble merchants) provided not exclusively for monetary gain, but also for the welfare of the people, which had been the original inspiration of the creed.¹⁸⁶ Since in the Kanara country (part of the territory of what was to become the modern State of Karnataka) activities central to the local economy had always been in exclusive control of the Jaina communities—as we already mentioned above—not only did conflicts of a competitive nature occur,¹⁸⁷ but many Jaina traders belonging to the lower ranks of society also shifted to the new mercantile Vīraśaiva corporations.¹⁸⁸ It is, in fact, to be underlined that the progressive deterioration of Jaina communities had also affected their economic condition, with heavy repercussions for the most disadvantaged sections of society in particular.

Other allures of the new doctrine were the social mobility that distinguished it and the particular teaching on the ethics of labour, which placed it in a position to welcome, without reserve, the diverse social classes, offering equal professional opportunity to each. Indeed, the new movement propounded that different callings were to be undertaken according to the free choice and aptitude of each individual, as opposed to what was prescribed by the rules of the caste system, which imposed jobs that were hereditary and hierarchically ordained. Thus, Vīraśaivism came to be looked upon with interest by all those (including the Jainas) who aspired not only to a better economic rank, but also to an alternative that would liberate them from the bondage of occupations to which they were chained by birth. Indeed, even though Jainism too had begun as a creed inspired by a certain egalitarian open-mindedness and anti-caste attitude, in the course of time, it had assumed (or had been forced to assume in order to survive) institutions and behaviours of the Brahmanical culture,

185 Venugopal, "Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation": 12.

186 Bhaskar A. Saletore, "The Virashaiva and their Contribution to Vijayanagara," *The Karnatak Historical Review* 4, no. 1–2 (1937): 58.

187 Nandi, "Origin of the Vīraśaiva Movement": 470–75.

188 Venugopal, "Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation": 14; Nandi, "Origin of the Vīraśaiva Movement": 471.

ultimately accepting a sort of social hierarchy that originated from and was modelled on the Hindu caste system itself. Suffice it to say that, by the eighth century CE, the Jaina master Jināsena had included the sixteen sacraments (*saṃskāras*) of the Brahmins into the Jaina system,¹⁸⁹ and codified a vertically arranged caste system, which even provided for a caste of “Jaina Brahmins,” entrusted with the care of temples and the performance of rituals.¹⁹⁰

Even nineteenth century scholars were well aware of the rigid caste norms that governed the life of every Jaina devotee; so much so that, in a study still of much currency, Carlotta Krause highlighted how, in the India of her day, these “brahmanising” norms—such as the one denying the possibility of contracting marriage between castes of different levels—were yet prevalent within the Jaina world.¹⁹¹

According to a hypothesis put forward by Kalburgi,¹⁹² it might have been precisely these rigid social norms and caste constrictions that were the principal causes of Jaina conversions to the Viraśaiva faith. Kalburgi claims that the social structure of the Jaina community in mediaeval Karnataka was, in fact, totally dominated by caste ideology.¹⁹³ Two main groups might be identified: the *śiṣya*, the higher caste, comprising the so-called “Jains by birth” or “pure Jains,” which is to say, all those who—vindicated by their family names—could lay claim to descent from ancient Jaina bloodlines, and the *gudda*, the simple faithful, who made up the majority of the Jaina populace of Karnataka. The latter (many of whom were wealthy merchants), despite conspicuous donations and the bequest of generous resources for the building of *ba-sadis*, could not enter any place of worship, access to which was reserved exclusively for the “pure Jains.” The same proscription also applied to low caste Hindus (*śūdra*), who were not allowed entry into temples.¹⁹⁴

In the twelfth century, the situation must have deteriorated to a point of no return: as we may see in Virūpākṣa’s *Cennabasava Purāṇa* which deplores the fact that, before the advent of Basava, “many śaiva saints [belonging to the lower castes] were not admitted into the interior of [the] Kailasha [temple], but were stopped at the door.”¹⁹⁵ By contrast, Viraśaivism proclaimed not only equality but—consistent with

189 P.S. Jaini, *The Jain Path of Purification* (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1979): 293.

190 Jaini, *The Jain Path of Purification*: 291.

191 Compare Dundas, *Il Jainismo*: 355.

192 Malleshappa M. Kalburgi, “Śiṣya and Gudda [in Kannada],” *Marga* 4 (2004): 142–70. Compare also Malleshappa M. Kalburgi, “Ancient Jain Society: Conversion and Giving Mantra Only [in Kannada],” *Marga* 4 (2004): 106–13.

193 It needs to be borne in mind that even Jainism, in the course of time, had come to assume (or had been forced to assume in order to survive) institutions and behavioural traits typical of the Brahmanical culture.

194 Romila Thapar, *Early India, from the Origins to A.D. 1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 390.

195 Würth, trans., “Channabasava Purāṇa of the Lingaits”: 193.

Basava's teaching that the very body of each believer was the holy place par excellence—in particular, the possibility of indiscriminate access for one and all to every sacred building. Therefore, due to a situation of ever-growing tenseness, many *gudda* Jainas would have converted, transforming the *basadis* they had raised into Viraśaiva temples and *maṭhas*. Thus, the inward change of religion might also have found expression in an outward architectural reconstruction.

Over and above this hypothesis, it is more than likely that the new movement, beyond the undeniable social and economic advantages it could offer, appeared to many Jainas to offer a return to the universal openness and the ideals of social palinogenesis that had also underpinned the origins of Jainism itself.

In the fifteenth century, which saw a rise in the enthusiasm for Viraśaivism, Jaina conversions reached their peak. Again, the causes might be found in a concomitance of several social and historical factors. First of all, this happened to be the period when the Viraśaiva doctrine acquired renewed vigour: its expansion even to the south of modern Karnataka and to most of modern Andhra Pradesh made it one of the most widespread creeds in all of southern India.

This achievement was due in no small part to the work of a few masters, such as Lakkanna Dandēśa and Siddhaliṅga Śiva Yogin, who managed to convert a large number of people to the new faith, including many rulers and feudatories, thus securing for the movement the patronage of powerful chieftains.¹⁹⁶

However, we presume that particular historical events should also be taken into consideration as strengthening factors of the movement, increasing its chances of attracting new believers. Let us, then, take a brief look at the historical situation.

By the fifteenth century, the Islamic conquest of India had largely been completed and sultanates had risen in the Deccan, one of the most important of which was certainly that of Bijapur, in north Karnataka. Almost in the same period, in the south of the country, the kingdom of Vijayanagara (the "City of Victory")—the last bulwark of Hindu traditions against the invaders—was touching the zenith of its dominion. Thus did two antithetical potencies come to strive on the selfsame cultural canvas: one Islamic and the other proudly Hindu.¹⁹⁷ The inevitable collision ended with the triumph of Islam,¹⁹⁸ even though the Muslim faith never attained the degree of social penetration in south India that it did in the north of the peninsula. Moreover, it needs to be pointed out that the Deccan sultanates never committed the sort of destructive and traumatising excesses that can be ascribed to the Delhi Sultanate.

¹⁹⁶ Venugopal, "Liṅgāyat Ideology of Salvation": 12; Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics*: 67–70; Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 3–4.

¹⁹⁷ Burton Stein, *A History of India* (Malden: Blackwell, 2000 [1998]): 151.

¹⁹⁸ The kingdom of Vijayanagar was defeated, in 1565, by a coalition of sultans, at the epic battle of Talikota, on the banks of river Kṛṣṇa.

Nonetheless, it was a difficult period for both the Hindus¹⁹⁹ and the Jainas,²⁰⁰ so that the number of the latter, which had already shrunk on account of numerous conversions, further diminished.²⁰¹ The Islamic expansion also brought Muslim merchants into direct competition with Hindu traders and put an end to their patronage of religious institutions, mostly Brahmanical, but also Jaina.²⁰² All the same, the conflict precipitated by the onslaught of Islam, between its totalising religious ideology and the prevailing social customs, not only provoked great upheaval in the political and cultural life of the subcontinent, but also two opposite and specular reactions in India's polyhedral society: on one hand, it induced conversions (often by force) amongst large sections of the local peoples; on the other, it accentuated the self-referential spirit at every level. In other words, the Islamic invasion and the successive attempts of its exponents to establish a centralised power²⁰³ ended up reinvigorating the pre-existent traditions proper to India—wherever they had managed to survive²⁰⁴—and induced a certain cohesion between them, especially those that for centuries had been sharing the same social context. This led the hegemonic groups to draw into their spheres of influence the communities with lesser clout, empowering themselves to the detriment of the latter.

The same might well have come to pass with the Jainas and Viraśaivas, given that they already trod the common ground of overlapping economic interests and were in mutual contact by virtue of the mass conversions that in the preceding centuries had impacted both, and had, in fact, been driving the two faiths towards one another. The renewed power which polarisation lent to the Viraśaivas would, therefore, have further attracted the Jaina communities into its orbit, the latter being ever more paltry in number and weakened in social and economic stature.

Whatever might have been the cause—or the main causes—of the “phenomenon of conversion” (probably, what had come into play was a synergy of all of the reasons considered so far), we need to bear in mind that, in all likelihood, there were transitional phases in the process that was to throw the Jainas and the Viraśaivas together, as also occurred elsewhere amongst the Hindus that embraced the new Basava movement. Indeed, it is likely that both groups (Jaina and Hindu) gradually came closer to the Viraśaiva way of life, accepting, at least initially, only a part of the Viraśaiva cul-

199 As for the Hindus, it is well known from a number of sources that the sultan Ali Adil Shāh I of Bijapur destroyed two or three hundred Hindu temples (Sita Ram Goel, *Hindu Temples. What Happened to them*, part 2, *The Islamic Evidence* [New Delhi: Voice of India, 1991]: 241–66).

200 Dundas, *Il Jainismo*: 221.

201 Glasenapp, *Jainism. An Indian Religion of Salvation*: 74.

202 J. Assayag, “Violence de l’histoire, histoires de violence: Frontières, ‘communalisme’ et mémoire en Inde du Sud (Karnataka),” *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 49, no. 6 (1994): 1297; Stein, *A History of India*: 148.

203 Stein, *A History of India*: 139.

204 Stein, *A History of India*: 48.

ture²⁰⁵ while, at the same time, maintaining some of their earlier social and religious traditions.

This modality, so typical of the Indian milieu—which tends to absorb the new without ever totally rooting out the ancient—is clearly linked to another peculiarity, well underlined by Oddie in an engrossing anthology of studies on the sociology of conversion. In South-Asian civilisations the shifting of camp has never necessarily and totally transformed the orientation of the inner life of the individual.²⁰⁶ This is because in this region, a conversion has never generally been a personal matter, to be considered the outcome of an individual's inner conviction, as, on the contrary, is usually the case in the Western world,²⁰⁷ where a conversion often results from a communal and social event.²⁰⁸ To clarify this cultural difference, let me make a few brief remarks.

In ancient India, the idea of the collectivity had always outweighed that of the individual, as opposed to what transpired in the European tradition: where, especially since the sixteenth century—with the assertion of Cartesian thought, distinguishing mental reality (*res cogitans*) from the material (*res extensa*)—the human person has come to be identified chiefly with her rational self, thus conferring a kind of “primacy” upon intellectual activity and emphasising the notion of individuality. The Western mindset holds the “ego” to be at the very centre of consciousness and personality, contrary to the Indian vision, wherein true human nature, rather than abiding in individual entities, is to be found in their social interconnections, seen as a hierarchical and ordered wholeness.²⁰⁹ As a counterpoise to the *model* of the ego as a kind of monad, crystallised and autonomous—so typical of Western philosophy—the Indian world offers the *idea* of an ego, construed as an individuation principle, ever pulsating in a living web with other aspects of the cognitive process and intermingled with the remembrances of the past and with social rapports.²¹⁰

Thus, it could easily happen that a given individual would not choose to convert but would “naturally” follow his own community which was, in turn, closely interlinked with others. It would, therefore, suffice for one group to be in some way attracted to a certain religious sphere—perhaps in the wake of a dominant élite—for another group, and the individuals comprising it, to follow in its footsteps.

205 Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics*: 81.

206 G.A. Oddie, ed. *Religion in South Asia, Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991 [1977]): 4–5.

207 Oddie, ed. *Religion in South Asia*: 4.

208 Venugopal, “Reformist Sects and the Sociology”: 87.

209 Louis Dumont, *La civiltà indiana e noi* (Milan: Adelphy, 1996 [*La civilisation indienne et nous*, Paris 1975]): 22, 23. See also Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus, il sistema della caste e le sue implicazioni* (Milan: Adelphy, 1991 [*Homo Hierarchicus, le système des castes et ses implications*, Paris 1966]): 70–114.

210 Tiziana Lorenzetti, “L’India e Noi: due civiltà a confronto,” *Il Veltro, Rivista della Civiltà Italiana* 51, no. 5–6, (2008): 136.

All of this, undoubtedly, meant that the phenomenon of conversions became even more widespread; which would explain, in part, the high count of the Jaina communities that embraced the new Viraśaiva path.

7 Viraśaiva Places of Worship: From Early Refusal to Development—Some New Perspectives

In Basava's thought, as we have seen, the Hindu temple and its affiliated rituals are *sthāvara*, which is to say, stagnant or immobile. Fierce opposition to all kinds of formalised ceremonials also characterised the attitude of a number of other Viraśaiva masters like Allama Prabhu, who compared Hindu temple activity to "a dog barking at the mountain."²¹¹ On the contrary, the body of the devotee itself is the god's dwelling, and the only form under which it is proper to worship the "Supreme Lord" is the *iṣṭaliṅga*, whose symbol—as we already mentioned—is worn by every practising Viraśaiva, on his/her body.

Because of such teachings, the Viraśaiva tradition does not countenance the raising of any sacred buildings, with the exception of funerary memorials dedicated to the *samādhi* (lit. "self-absorption") of itinerant enlightened sages (*jaṅgamaṇa*), who were believed to have turned themselves into "moving temples." However, it so happened that, as early as the end of the twelfth century, certain Viraśaiva groups were appropriating temples and sacred edifices that had belonged to other religious communities.²¹² Sometimes, these holy places would be taken by force; but what mostly happened was that sites that had been abandoned, for one reason or another, were utilised or re-utilised.

This would explain why most of these sacred buildings happened to be Jaina *basadis*, as they had undergone a two-fold devastation, suffering damage inflicted by rival religious groups (mostly Śaivas but, as we have seen, also Viraśaivas), and neglect due to the progressive, but inexorable, diminution of the Jaina population. All the same, the appropriation of Hindu temples was not unheard of either, as, for instance, in the case of the Brahmeśvara Temple (Haveri District), today known as Basa-

²¹¹ S.B. Rao, *Allama Prabhu, a Study in Philosophy with Translation of Poems* (Bangalore: Shri Mangesh Publishers, 2007): 109.

²¹² In this regard, we do need to remember that, within the larger Viraśaiva tradition, a minor set of beliefs – which Michael traces back to the Gurusthala tradition (Cf. above, p. 274) – has always accommodated liturgical celebration and, probably, has re-used sacred edifices formerly belonging to other faiths from the very beginning. The Gurusthala tradition, indeed, would have never reflected a radical break with Brahmanical patterns.

veśvara, which—as attested by an inscription—had been the property of the Kālāmukha sect until 1144 CE.²¹³

The state of relations between this prominent Hindu sect and the Vīraśaivas is a much debated issue,²¹⁴ though we may bypass the question here as it is not pertinent to the study at hand. Nonetheless, it needs to be underlined that the arc of time that saw the consolidation of Vīraśaiva tradition coincided precisely with that in which the Kālāmukhas faded away from the stage of Karnataka's history.

Since it cannot be denied that there was a certain historical contiguity between the two groups,²¹⁵ in that they shared the self-same territory, the scholarly consensus is that the Kālāmukhas ended up being absorbed into the new movement of Basava.²¹⁶ I think this more than likely hypothesis is of fundamental importance if we are to understand the reasons behind the rise of a new phase in the Vīraśaiva religious attitude which, as we shall see, was to culminate in the erection of true and proper temples. However, before going into the matter, we might look at a singular fact.

7.1 A Ritual Exception Involving Developments

The rejection by Basava's followers of all forms of worship centred on images of the gods did not exclude the performance of certain ritual acts of reverence to the personal *liṅga*. Basava himself is said to have advised the offering of *bilva* leaves²¹⁷ and

213 Compare Kalburgi, "An Inscription referring to Śaraṇas," *Karnatak University Journal*, 1967, quoted by Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 27. Compare also Vasundhara Filliozat, *Kālāmukha and Pāśupata Temples in Dharwar* (Chennai: The Kuppuswamy Sastri Research Institute, 2001): 43, 44.

214 Compare Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* (1972): 167, 168; Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* (1991): 240.

215 Lorenzen, "The Kālāmukha Background to Vīraśaivism": 288.

216 Compare Nandimath, *A Handbook of Vīraśaivism*: 6; Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 82; Julia Leslie, "Understanding Basava": 235. S. Settar and P.K.V. Kaimal 1999 (quoted by Rao, *Allama Prabhu, a Study in Philosophy*: 223) not only agree on the Kālāmukhas' assimilation into Vīraśaivism, but also maintain that, most probably, it came about through a process of conflict. Lorenzen, in his first work (Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* [1972]: 167, 168), even went so far as to suggest that the Vīraśaiva movement was the outcome of a reformist drive among the Kālāmukhas. Later, however, in the second revised edition of the same work, he rectified his previous view, stressing that Vīraśaivism did not constitute a reformist sub-group of the Kālāmukhas, but had come into being as a result of their overthrow (Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* [1991]: 240; Lorenzen, "The Kālāmukha Background to Vīraśaivism": 288).

217 The leaves of the wood apple, *Aegle marmelos*, have been an indispensable natural constituent of Hindu ritual devotion since time immemorial, especially in the cult of Śiva. Thus, in the choice of the *bilva* leaf on the part of Basava himself, in a dim rudiment, we may already see the creeping in of ritual elements derived from Hinduism.

lustral waters²¹⁸ to one's own portable *liṅga*. Yet it was not long—some scholars say, even in Basava's lifetime²¹⁹—before certain Viraśaiva *gurus*, perhaps themselves Kālāmukha converts,²²⁰ started bestowing these ritual offerings upon the *sthāvara* or fixed *liṅgas* too.²²¹

This devotion to the permanent *liṅga* had a double-edged outcome: on the one hand, certain specific places became focal points of the Viraśaiva cult; on the other, an evolution was initiated whereby an increased number of Viraśaiva *gurus* began to settle down in well-defined compounds, often sanctified by the presence of a permanent *liṅga*, in the manner of the Kālāmukha masters, who used to live in large *maṭhas*.

A great number of inscriptional records testifies that, as early as the thirteenth century, several Viraśaiva masters were not only worshipping the stationary *liṅga* but also encouraging the erection of *maṭhas* where, in all likelihood, they started teaching and receiving the homage of the faithful. One such would be Guru Śivadeva of Chowdadānapura.²²²

7.2 The Diffusion of the Maṭha Institution

From the thirteenth century onwards, an ever greater diffusion took place of the Viraśaiva *maṭha* institution: an inscription dating from the year 1246 of the Śaka era (ca. CE 1345) records the conferring, by a certain king Ballāla, of a number of rights and honours on the heads of five Viraśaiva *maṭhas*.²²³ To one of these, the Vaniya Maṭha, jurisdiction over five temples was also granted, as well as the perpetual ownership of the villages Rayanahalli and Basavanapura (Basavaṇṇapura), including the right to collect taxes from various sources (above all, on shops, irrigated lands, heads of cattle allowed free grazing in the territory, temples and lands held by Brahmins).²²⁴

The evidence that Viraśaiva *gurus* of the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries established *maṭhas* and acquired property through donations shows not only the progressive assimilation of the lone wandering *guru* of Basava's original thought into the

²¹⁸ Compare *Basavannanavara Vacanagalu*, ed. R.C. Hiremath, no. 172, pp. 56, 75, quoted by Michael, "Liṅga as Lord Supreme": 298; 217 note 13.

²¹⁹ Rao, *Allama Prabhu, a Study in Philosophy*: 103.

²²⁰ Kalburgi, *Marga* 1 (Bangalore: Karnataka Book Agency, 1988), quoted by Rao, *Allama Prabhu, a Study in Philosophy*: 104.

²²¹ Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 81. As a matter of fact, from what is recorded in the inscriptions, the Kālāmukhas come across as having been worshippers of the stationary *liṅga* (Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 30).

²²² Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 81; Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 4.

²²³ *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. 4, ed. B.R. Gopal, Chamarajnagara Taluk 292 (Bangalore: University of Mysore Press, 1975): 187–88.

²²⁴ *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. 4, Chamarajnagara Taluk, n. 292: 187.

figure of the well-established “institutional *guru*,” but also that at least some of these settled *gurus* had adopted habits derived from the Kālāmukha path.²²⁵ However, we may recall that the minor Gurusthala tradition had always established *maṭhas*, although the worship of the fixed *liṅga* was largely absent, at least at the beginning.

In less than a couple of centuries from Basava’s lifetime, therefore, *maṭhas* became the mainstay not only of the Gurusthala tradition, but also of the greater Vīraśaiva community.

The diffusion of the Vīraśaiva *maṭhas*, the assimilation or influence of the Kālāmukhas, the consequent changes in religious attitudes—such as the growth in devotion to the permanent *liṅga* (without, however, totally supplanting the portable personal one)—the settling down of the *guru-jaṅgama*²²⁶ and, above all, the increase in liturgical practices, could possibly explain the Vīraśaivas’ need to have religious buildings of their own, possibly attached to the *maṭhas*. It is, therefore, not surprising that they took over and converted for their own ritual use the sacred establishments of other religious communities. From here, considering also the pressures from Hindu society, it will be a short step to the construction of true and proper temples of their own.

7.3 Silent Stones Speak

The process by which religious buildings began to be attached to the *maṭhas* is evident in certain Vīraśaiva *maṭhas* characterised by a “mixed” architecture, that is, those that incorporated into their plans vast parts of the older sanctuaries that had once belonged to different religious traditions.

Bearing in mind that Vīraśaiva *maṭhas* are (and, probably, usually were) polyhedral structures, often made up of many buildings, let us take into consideration the central block of the modern Śrī Murugamaṭha in the district of Citradurga. (Plate 4.15). This is the oldest construction in the entire complex: tradition has it dating back to the twelfth/thirteenth century,²²⁷ even though later addenda and lively depictions—hallmark of the sacred architecture of modern-day south India—have to a large extent effaced the underlying ancient structure. This block is now a hypostyle rectangular hall meant to be

225 Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 81. The influence of the Kālāmukhas also invested the very organisational structure of the Vīraśaiva *maṭhas* that, like those of the Kālāmukhas, came to flourish not only as places of worship and meditation, but also as powerful centres of education and propagation of the doctrine, thus consolidating the social base of the creed. It is worth noting that, after the disappearance of the Kālāmukhas, their *maṭhas* were taken over by the Vīraśaivas who still control many of them today, particularly in the districts of Gadag, Belgaum and Dharwar (Nandimath, *A Handbook of Vīraśaivism*: 6); Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 88; G. Stanley Jaya Kumar, *Religion and Society* (New Delhi: M.D. Publications, 1996): 166).

226 Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 81.

227 However, the available genealogical records of the *maṭha* do not go back beyond the end of the seventeenth century.



Plate 4.15: Murugan Maṭha, Citradurga.

the place for the *guru's* preaching and his veneration. By way of a small staircase, the rear of the building connects with another room, also colonnaded, which used to be part of an ancient Jaina cave (Plate 4.16). This is the internal space where the master's stool, a typical element of every Viraśaiva *maṭha*, can be found. It symbolises the dignity of the spiritual headman and, in all likelihood, recalls the “Seat of Void” (*śūnya pīṭha*), the chairmanship of the Anubhava Maṇṭapa. Thus recast, into the most holy of holies of the present edifice, the ancient Jaina sanctuary has been swallowed up, as if it were an integral part of the Viraśaiva *maṭha* itself.

During the fifteenth century, at the zenith of Viraśaiva power, the institution of the *maṭha* underwent major transformations, above all, in its ritualistic aspects. To begin with, it is to be borne in mind that, as more and more *gurus* settled down, and the process became normalised, each *maṭha* began to have its own specific succession of masters. Their mortal remains would be buried *in loco*, which further lent the *maṭhas* the halo associated with funerary monuments that had custody of revered relics.

Naturally, the *samādhis* of these holy men began to attract ever-growing numbers of the faithful, whose devotional acts would go on to enrich the *maṭhas* with extra rituality. Many of the other changes that took place largely constituted a corollary of the substantial mutations that the Viraśaiva doctrine itself underwent. This calls for an opportune glance at the religious and historical picture then obtaining.



Plate 4.16: Ancient Jaina cave, now part of the Śrī Murugan Maṭha, Citradurga.

7.4 The Humus of History: “Hinduisation” and Its Effects

Over the centuries, the Vīraśaiva tradition had experienced mounting pressures from Hindu society, so much so that if, at the height of its revival—to be precise, in the fifteenth century—renowned masters on the one hand displayed the talent and wisdom to expand the reach of the creed in an extraordinary way, they were also able, on the other, to interpret and codify the “Hinduising” tendencies that were coming to the fore.

Suffice it to say that an increased number of Vīraśaiva poets began to compose in Sanskrit,²²⁸ a trend already witnessed in previous centuries,²²⁹ while a grandmaster like Lakkanna Dandeśa, in his work *Śiva Tatva Cintāmaṇi*, gave vent to ideas that do not belong in the Vīraśaiva tradition but are overtly derived from the Hindu context. These include his discourse on *dharma* and an unusual ritualism in *liṅga* worship.²³⁰

²²⁸ Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 31.

²²⁹ Although Sanskrit was never completely rejected by the Vīraśaivas, the fact that, after Basava, more and more poets replaced the *Vacanas* in Kannada with Sanskrit compositions would indicate their estrangement from Basava belief.

²³⁰ Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 31.

As if all this were not enough, the authors of the later Viraśaiva *Purāṇas*, such as Virūpākṣa Pandita or Bhīmākavi (all writing between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries), elevated the figure of the master to the status of the divine, influenced by the Puranic models in both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* literature, so that Basava's person almost lost its human dimension altogether.

In Bhīmākavi's aforementioned *Basava Purāṇa*, for instance, it says that Śiva sent down his *vāhana* Nandin—identified, as we have had occasion to note, with Basava—to re-establish the Viraśaiva faith in the world.²³¹ Likewise, in Virūpākṣa Pandita's *Cennabasava Purāṇa*, Basava descends to earth, and having accomplished his mission, returns to heaven.²³²

The deification of Basava was accelerated by the fact that writers of that period had more than one vested interest, that is, in finding, somehow, a common thread between their works and those of their rivals (Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas) and in presenting the master to their audience with a supernatural aura, thus uplifting their own doctrine to a level of developmental emotionalism.²³³ However, we need to remember that the acquisition of customs, rituals and views that were not originally Viraśaiva might have also been facilitated by the numbers of Hindu and Jaina converts to the new faith who never entirely abandoned their old ways and habits. Which, of course, is perfectly in keeping with the Indian ethos.

These significant transmutations were to have great repercussions not only on Viraśaiva rituality, but also on artistic endeavour, both iconographic and architectonic. For example, as a result of the identification of Basava with the divine mount Nandin, the practice of placing an image of Śiva's bull (usually flanking the *liṅga*) at the entrance *gopuras* of both their own *maṭhas* (for instance, Hukeri Maṭha Plate 4.17) and those of the temples appropriated by the Viraśaivas became widespread. Such is the case with many Jaina *basadis*, including those of Dambal (Gadag District) and Konnur (Koṇṇūr, Dharwar District), where an interesting Jaina inscription (ca. CE 860) is still *in situ*.²³⁴ In both *basadis*, two graceful statues of the squatting Nandin—probably appropriated by the Viraśaivas from Śaiva temples—are located, respectively, in the middle of the open *maṇḍapa* (Plate 4.18) and inside the sanctuary (Plate 4.19). An additional point worthy of note is that all the images of Nandin are worshipped using a chain of rituals derived, largely, from Hinduism. These comprise the offering of flow-

231 Würth, trans., "The Basava Purāṇa of the Lingaits": 67.

232 Würth, trans., "Channabasava Purāṇa of the Lingaits": 119.

233 Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 22, 31.

234 This inscription reads: "the king Amoghavarśa granted the village of Taleyuru and some lands in other villages to the Jain sage Devendra, the disciple of Trikalayogisa [...]" (*South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 18, n. 12 [Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1975]: 7).



Plate 4.17: Rear *gopura*. Hukeri *Maṭha*, Haveri.

ers and fire (Plate 4.20, 4.21), foreign to the origins of the Viraśaiva tradition,²³⁵ but essential to Hindu rituality.²³⁶

Similar ritualised homage is also paid to the fixed *liṅga*. In sanctuaries remodelled for Viraśaiva usage, this is located in the *garbhagrha*—as usually happens in Hindu temples—whereas, in the *maṭhas*, this symbol is generally found at the heart of the *sa-mādhī*, representing the *guru*'s connection with the *liṅga*. In recent *maṭhas*, however, such as Hukeri Maṭha, mentioned above, the *liṅga*, whether sculpted or painted, may be found at the centre of the *maṭha* itself.

Such proliferation of the fixed *liṅga* runs parallel to a complex and elaborate ceremonial: besides receiving the offering of water, fire and flowers, the symbol is also featured on chariots and carried out in processions circumambulating the *sa-mādhī* or the whole *maṭha* (Plate 4.22).

In the light of all this, it would seem that, over the course of a few centuries, the symbol of the *liṅga*, while maintaining its importance as a focal point of Viraśaiva

²³⁵ Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*: 41.

²³⁶ Venugopal, "Reformist Sects and the Sociology": 86; John Abbot, *Indian Ritual and Belief* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000 [1984]): 172.

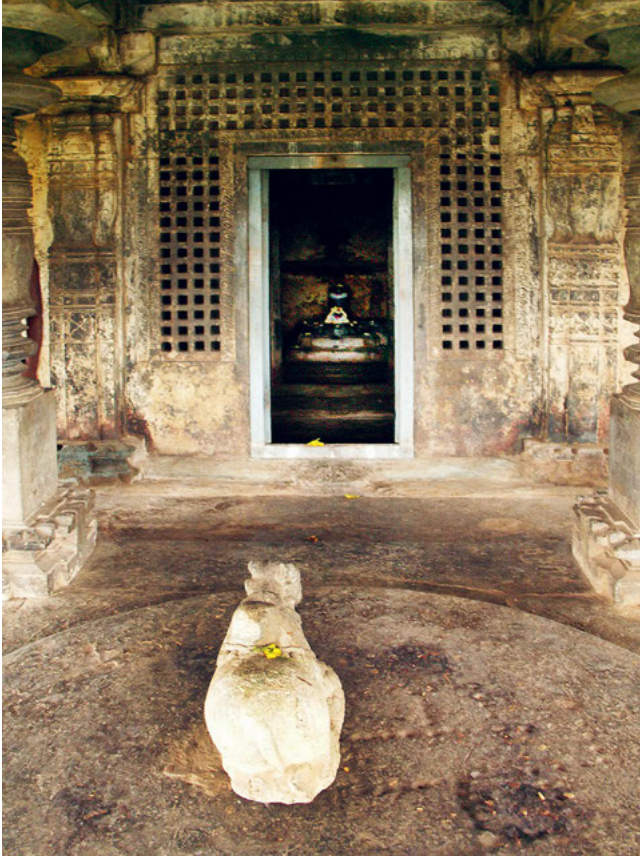


Plate 4.18: Squatting Nandin. Vīraśaiva temple, former Jain *basadi* in Dambal (Gadag District).

meditative practices, had itself become—also and above all—an object of public worship. In addition, the modalities of such adoration did not greatly differ from those the Śaivas reserved for the *liṅga* of their own tradition.

Beyond this change in the cult of the *liṅga* and alongside the devotion to Nandin/Basava, the Vīraśaivas have also inducted the worship of a number of Hindu deities, such as Sarasvatī, Pārvatī or Gaṇeśa, whose images are set up in the *maṭhas* (Plate 4.23). In this regard, eminent scholars have already drawn attention to the fact that certain later Vīraśaiva poetic compositions made use of elements of Hindu mythology. The incorporation of aspects of Brahmanical rites and beliefs into the Vīraśaiva tradition has become something of a longstanding trend.²³⁷

²³⁷ Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*: 4, 5.



Plate 4.19: Squatting Nandin. Viraśaiva temple, former Jaina *basadi* in Konnur (Darwar District).

The impact of Hindu rituality on that of the Viraśaivas seems to have increased with the independence of India in 1947. Indeed, the independence movement, striving to build a national identity, had employed religion as a major motif for unification, favouring the birth of a new idealised Hinduism, whereby local cults and traditions, elevated to a “pan-Indian” status, were subsumed into an ideal religious tradition that was relatively homogeneous across the subcontinent. These elements were also back-projected anachronistically far into the past. This helps us understand both the collisions with Islamic society,²³⁸ and the inclination to engulf disparate traditions—the Viraśaivas being a case in point—into the Brahmanical Hindu mainstream. This latter process, for all its complexity and interest, remains an issue that is little known and has been studied even less, because of wide-ranging religious, social and economic pressures. It would require in-depth religious and anthropological research. Here, we shall simply outline and highlight the acquisition by the modern Viraśaiva milieu of certain new features which seem to be in the nature of further steps towards an ever more pronounced “Hinduisation,” of the kind often publicly condemned by Kalburgi.

²³⁸ Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India, Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000): 3–19; Stein, *A History of India*: 399–408.



Plate 4.20: Flower and fire offerings. Basaveśvara Temple (Haveri District).

8 Contemporary Vīraśaiva Rituality: New Evidence

In the course of this research we have had occasion to document how, with the passage of the centuries, the Vīraśaiva tradition has progressively intensified the representations of the static *liṅga* and, with them, the rituals connected to this symbol.

Let us now proceed with further considerations. Since, as we have seen, in an increasing number of Vīraśaiva *maṭhas*, a fixed *liṅga* is to be found at the centre of the *samādhi*, this place is, in effect, coming more and more to resemble the *garbhagrha* of Hindu temples.

The *samādhi* at the Mur Śaver Maṭha in Hubli (Darwar District) would be a pertinent example. Square in layout, it is surrounded by an ambulatory typical of the *sāṇḍhāra* Hindu temples. At the centre stands an *ekamukhaliṅga* (Plate 4.24) on whom the *pujārī* and the Vīraśaiva devotees bestow the selfsame attentions and offerings as Brahmans and the Hindu faithful reserve for the *liṅga* of their own heritage. Again, just as only Brahmans may enter the Hindu *garbhagrha*, the interior of the *samādhi* is accessible only to the *pujārī*.



Plate 4.21: Flower and fire offerings. Basaveśvara Temple (Haveri District).

It is interesting to observe here that in the *samādhi* of the aforementioned fifteenth century Guru Siddhaliṅga Śiva Yogin in Yedeyur (Yadiyūr, Tumakuru District) access to the interior is a privilege exclusive to the *guru*'s direct descendants, who are believed to be endowed in some way with a kind of “natural” spiritual purity.

What is more, Siddhaliṅga Śiva Yogin would seem to have been one of the earliest exponents of Hindu notions of inborn ritual purity. His teachings on this subject found such a fertile soil in the Viraśaiva community that, after the fifteenth century, besides the revolutionary changes in thought and customs (which we have already mentioned), a caste and sub-caste hierarchy also came to obtain amongst them, the vertex being occupied by the *jaṅgamaṇa*: a term that came to mean not only the itin-



Plate 4.22: Chariot procession. Gavi Maṭha, Koppala.

erant guru who has attained oneness with God, but also a priest affiliated to a group to which he belongs by birth.²³⁹

It therefore seems that, with time, the conception of a hierarchical order determined by birth, on the lines of age-old Hindu caste divisions into the customary pure/impure dichotomy, came to permeate Viraśaiva society as well (or, at least, certain Viraśaiva communities). This, in turn, favoured the rise of a Viraśaiva priesthood, which class, although in contravention of Basava's teachings, has become widely diffused. Indeed, a custom is gaining currency amongst contemporary Viraśaivas of paying priests to perform *pūjā* at a fixed *liṅga*, which may be seen as running counter to the very purpose of the *iṣṭaliṅga*.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Ishwaran, *Religion and Society*: 128.

²⁴⁰ Rao, *Allama Prabhu, a Study in Philosophy*: 104.



Plate 4.23: Image of Gaṇeśa, entrance to *samādhi*. Mur Śaver Maṭha, Hubli.

In general, the emerging trend among Vīraśaivas is not only to place their own “ethnocentric” priesthood at the top of the Vīraśaiva social pyramid, but also to extend the same status of primacy to the Hindu Brahmins external to their society. This is clear from the practice (observable in several *maṭhas* and temples under Vīraśaiva management) of soliciting the services of Hindu Brahmins (often in competition with the Vīraśaiva officiants)²⁴¹ for the fulfilment of certain rituals. At the Lakṣmeśvara Temple (Gadag District) mentioned above, for instance, the daily *pūjā* is performed by a Brahmin female officiant (Plate 4.25),²⁴² and at the very *samādhi* of Siddhaliṅga Śiva Yogin, it usually falls to a Brahmin to recite the ritual formulae—in Sanskrit.

²⁴¹ M. Chidandana Murthy, *Virashaiva dharma: Bharati samskrti*, appendix VI (Bangalore, 2000): 354–55, quoted by Rao, *Allama Prabhu, a Study in Philosophy*: 104.

²⁴² Recently, women could also be appointed as priests in temples following stipulated training.



Plate 4.24: *Samādhi*. Mur Śaver Maṭha, Hubli.



Plate 4.25: Daily *pūjā* performed by a Brahman lady. Lakṣmeśvara Temple (Gadag District).

9 Viraśaiva Temples

Although already as early as the end of the twelfth century certain Viraśaiva groups were appropriating temples belonging to other cults, we have no evidence of the construction of what may only be defined as true and proper Viraśaiva temples in those ancient times. Due to the scarcity of datable evidence, the only thing that can be asserted is that the erection of sacred buildings was a phenomenon that might have started quietly—probably from the turn of the thirteenth/fourteenth century, spurred by the influence of the Kāḷāmukhas, by Hindu and Jaina converts and, no less, by pressures from contemporary Hindu society—only to gain momentum in the centuries that followed.

According to the findings of a field research project undertaken by the author in Karnataka state, in 2009 and 2010, extensive temple building activity would seem to have begun among the Viraśaivas only after the Independence and continues unabated to this day.

These new sanctuaries are usually dedicated to a Viraśaiva *guru*, as is the case with the one in honour of the *guru* Siddhaliṅga Śiva Yogin (Tumakuru District), although there are a few dedicated to Hindu divinities as well. Of little relevance from an artistic point of view, these sacred buildings have a very simple basic structure, a number of whose architectural features recall those of contemporary Hindu temples in the area. By and large raised on a rectangular foundation, these brickwork edifices are characterised by two enclosed rooms, that is, a hall of varying size, occasionally colonnaded, and the recess of the sanctum where one generally finds enshrined a static *liṅga* of stone. On the rear wall of the hall or that of the sanctum, or on the lintel of the entrance, one invariably finds portraits of Basava and/or photographs of the Viraśaiva *gurus* active in the locality. At times, one may even find, alongside it, images (usually sculpted) of the most popular Hindu deities. As opposed to the densely undulating outer walls of Hindu temples with their characteristic rhythmic projections, those of Viraśaiva temples all tend to be smooth and sparingly decorated. The only place where adornments may sometimes be seen is atop the perimeter of the flat roof, where—just as in Hindu temples—one may find square or round-topped aedicule (*kūṭa*) or barrel-vaulted (*śālā*) ones. Laid out in more or less serried ranks, these architectonic elements guide the viewer's attention to the turreted superstructure that (again, as in Hindu temples) signposts many a Viraśaiva sanctuary. Let us now bring some of Karnataka's Viraśaiva temples under the lens of our investigation.

We shall begin with the Nīlakaṇṭheśvara Temple in Citradurga (Citradurgā, Citradurga District), one of the most elaborate ones, built in the early twenty-first century. Rectangular in plan, it rises on a moulded base, which may be reached by way of a staircase aligned with the main entrance. The entire complex is fronted by a simple pillared veranda, delimited by a stone balustrade (Plate 4.26). In the middle of the veranda stand three portals, the chief of which is surmounted by a typical Viraśaiva bas-relief featuring a *liṅga* with a Nandin on either side (Plate 4.27). The interior is quite well lit, thanks



Plate 4.26: Nilakanṭheśvara Temple in Citradurga.



Plate 4.27: Bas-relief surmounting the entrance. Nilakanṭheśvara Temple.

to wide windows as well as screens of perforated stone (*jālī*). It comprises a vast hypostyle hall (*maṇḍapa*), the space divided at regular intervals by slender pillars with a plain round shaft (Plate 4.28), and with four cells opening into the rear wall.



Plate 4.28: *Maṇḍapa*. Nilakanṭheśvara Temple.

The main cell is directly in line with the grand portal of the entrance, so as to emphasise the direct link—both visual and ideal—between the devotee who approaches the sacred precinct and the holy place inside. The entrance to the cell, guarded by a squatting Nandin, is surmounted by a photograph of the region's last Vīraśaiva *guru*; within, there is a black stone *liṅga*, canopied by the five-hooded cobra framed, in turn, by a gold-leafed arch topped by a *kālamukha*, one of the most popular Hindu motifs (Plate 4.29). To the left and to the right, respectively, lie the minor sanctuaries of Pārvaṭī and Gaṇeśa; while, opening on the extreme left, there is another naos, similarly arched over, that harbours three divinities: Vīrabhadra, in the centre, flanked by Kālī and Subrahmaṇya (Plate 4.30). What is worth taking note of is that not only does this threesome enjoy a wide following in south India, but the identity of each is such that it merges and mixes with that of an autochthonous god, even seeming to have evolved out of an ancient local deity. Apart from these stone sculptures, the walls within are entirely free of ornamentation. The outer walls, too, appear likewise to be scanty in this respect; except that certain decorative motifs may be seen overlying the edge of the flat roof, which is surrounded by an



Plate 4.29: Main cella. Nīlakaṇṭheśvara Temple.

overhung ribbed eave (*kapota*). The two corners of the main façade display the sculpture of a squatting Nandin. Just beside these angular bulls rise two square aedicules with a covering of singular design. Cushion-shaped, it supports three quadrangular tiers of stone, each smaller than the one below. Together, in a sort of a single block, they presage the heavenward surge of the four architectonic elements emblematic of Hindu temples, all in shining brass: the vase (*kalaśa* or *kumbha*); the round and indented stone (*āmalaka*); the lotus blossom (*padma*) and the pinnacle (*stūpi* or *stūpika*). Between the two aedicules, in line with the entrance doorway, towering at the centre of the roof's perimeter, is a superstructure that looks rather like a miniature *gopura*, typical of Dravidic temples (Plate 4.31). Rectangular in plan and with a characteristic truncated pyramidal shape, it presents a succession of tapering upwards storeys. Each one, cadenced by a jutting cornice, bristles with rich images and miniature pieces of architecture. At the



Plate 4.30: Virabhadra, Kālī and Subrahmanya, left-hand sanctuary. Nilakaṇṭheśvara Temple.



Plate 4.31: Superstructures along the edge of the roof. Nilakaṇṭheśvara Temple.

base of the whole structure lies a niche housing an image of the seated Śiva, while above, there is a barrel vault aedicule once again surmounted, like the lateral ones, by the four symbols of *kalaśa*, *āmalaka*, *padma* and *stūpi*.

Another appealing new Viraśaiva temple is the one at Dambal (Gadag District). Small in size, and very simple in its rectangular shape, this sanctuary rises on an elevated platform and has completely blank outer walls (Plate 4.32). The entrance, as usual directly in line with the *garbhagrha*, comprises a big wrought-iron gate overhung by a pink wooden pelmet at whose centre there stands out the most quintessential Hindu emblem of all: the mystic syllable *om*. Under this is inscribed the name of the *guru* (Śrī Satguru Patreśvara), to whose grace the temple is dedicated. Inside, one finds a spacious hall done up in various teal-blue tones. This too is bare, with the exception of the rear wall, the top of which is occupied by photographs of renowned Viraśaiva *gurus* of the area (Plate 4.33). The sanctum is at the centre of this wall: it is a rectangular cell and houses a comely black stone *līṅga*, flanked by Nandin (Plate 4.34). These sacred images, objects of daily *pūjā*, are bedecked with garlands of marigold and other seasonal flowers; behind them hang picture-portraits of a number of Viraśaiva swamis. Opening off the left wall of the hall is a small niche, fronted by a grilled postern: it enshrines a fine painted image of the enthroned Basava (Plate 4.35).



Plate 4.32: Viraśaiva temple in Dambal (Gadag District).



Plate 4.33: Interior. Viraśaiva temple in Dambal.



Plate 4.34: *Garbhagṛha*. Viraśaiva temple in Dambal.

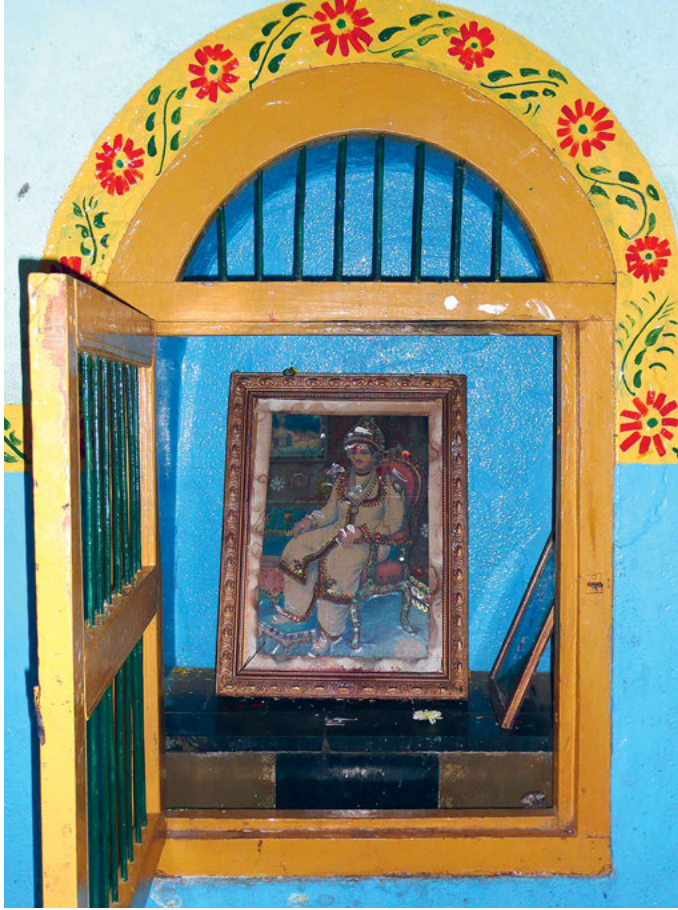


Plate 4.35: Small niche housing a painted image of the enthroned Basava. Viraśaiva temple in Dambal.

Finally, let us look at one of the most recent of Viraśaiva temples: that of Koppala (Koppaḷa), still under construction at the time of writing (Plate 4.36). Also set on a raised base, this, too, has a rectangular layout and external walls with scarce decorations but with large windows. The main façade has a narrow brick canopy; along the edge of the roof runs a parapet at whose corners are four sculptures of the squatting Nandin. At the centre of each side of the parapet can be seen three conjoint niches. The central one of those right above the entrance holds stucco images of Śiva and Pārvaṭī, with the lateral niches having a *lokapāla* apiece. On the other sides, a troika of niches displays Gaṇeśa flanked by Pārvaṭī and Sarasvatī. Each niche is topped by an aedicule: the lateral ones are square in plan and comprise three tiered elements, while the median is rectangular with the typical barrel vault above. Apart from this elaborate parapet, the rest of the roof is flat and devoid of any other ornamental or architectonic features, save the small tower rising above the sanctum—as it would in



Plate 4.36: Viraśaiva temple, Koppala.

a Hindu temple. This turret is of stucco and pastel shades (with sea-greens, blues and pinks predominating), and, typifying Karnataka's Hindu architecture, aggregates models and elements characteristic both of the *nāgara* and the Deccan-*drāviḍa* typologies. It comprises a dome-shaped drum, overlying which is a round and indented stone (*āmalaka*), surmounted, in turn, by a small cupola and a lotus bud. Crowning the entire structure are four full metal elements, hallmarks of Hindu temples: the vase (*ka-laśa*); the *āmalaka*; the lotus (*padma*) and the pinnacle (*stūpi*). The temple's interiors are made up of the usual unclad rectangular hall (Plate 4.37) and, aligned to the entrance, the sanctum. The latter contains the stone *liṅga* which the Viraśaiva *pujārī* propitiates with fire and floral homage (Plate 4.38).

10 Endnotes

By no means does the above claim to be an exhaustive study of the most relevant Viraśaiva temples arising all over Karnataka, since the spiritual-aesthetic panorama is still undergoing evolution and certain issues with religious-anthropological connotations call for further in-depth investigation. For instance, a question that undoubtedly begs to be



Plate 4.37: Interior of the Vīraśaiva temple, Koppala.



Plate 4.38: Vīraśaiva *pujārī* propitiating the *liṅga*. Vīraśaiva temple, Koppala.

addressed is whether the construction of these new temples is a cultural endeavour shared by all Viraśaivas or one pursued only by certain segments of the community (now the majority), for example those connected to the Gurusthalins. This group, indeed, having used *maṭhas* since the very beginning, has always displayed an inclination for certain liturgical celebrations and, therefore, for the use of temples. Indeed, in the course of my research survey, I gathered that some Viraśaiva devotees—especially those belonging to the more cultivated classes—categorically refused to frequent sanctuaries, particularly the new ones. However, future studies apart, germane as they might be, the scope of the present paper has been to draw attention to the process of transformation whereby nowadays the majority of Viraśaivas feel affiliated to true and proper religious shrines, where they practise certain rituals that are similar to Brahmanical ones.

On the other hand, as far as India's peoples and cultures are concerned, it is rather difficult (if not impossible) to preserve a religious tradition without externalised rites. One also needs to keep in mind that the mass conversions to Viraśaivism—whether on the part of Jainas²⁴³ or Hindus themselves—would certainly have favoured a sort of syncretistic diffusion of traits adopted from these older traditions.

All the same, contemporary Viraśaiva society faces some complex challenges. As a matter of fact, despite certain departures from the ideals of Basava and the ever-thinning borderline between the Viraśaivas and their neighbouring Hindu groups, modern Viraśaivism does seem to be striving to maintain—even revive—beliefs and values proper to its own origins. Such is the light in which we must see the significant role played by the Viraśaivas in the educational and economic canvas of Karnataka, or their insistence on upholding the dignity of all labour as a moral asset.

Last but not the least, it is worth noting how, as in the past, community cooperation amongst the Viraśaivas still manifests itself in their remarkable ability to respond to changing needs by setting up and developing ever newer associational arrangements—which constitute the true cohesive factor in modern Viraśaiva society.

11 Concluding Remarks

The loss of the Jainas' religious, cultural and economic heritage in Karnataka was not a sudden event; rather it was an incremental phenomenon spread out over many centuries. This long-drawn-out decline had already begun to be evident at the dawn of the Indian Middle Ages, when the consolidation of Hindu temple ideology and of the consequent Brahmanical interests led, inevitably, to competition on the one hand for royal patronage, and on the other, for religious, social and economic predominance.

²⁴³ As we have seen, the Jainas, too, in their day, had already absorbed religious practices originating in the Hindu-Brahmanical context.

The tension between the Jaina community and Hindu-Brahmanical power—by and large in the hands of the Śaiva sect—reached its climax in the twelfth century: the period that, with the complete incorporation of the *bhakti* movement into the Hindu-Brahmanical mainstream, saw a massive proliferation of Hindu temples. As a matter of fact, the growth of the “cult of devotion” went hand in hand with the popularity of the temple institution itself, since the path of the devotee, the *bhakta*, involved a series of devotional acts that revolved around the temple: making offerings to the images of the deities, cleansing their premises, singing in their honour and, last but not least, contributing to the construction of the temples themselves.²⁴⁴ Thus it was that in vast areas of Karnataka the authority of the Hindu-Brahmanical tradition came to be greatly enhanced, to the detriment of the Jainas who lost even the patronage of some of the ruling dynasties. One celebrated case was that of the Hoysala king Bitti-deva (1104–1141) who is believed to have converted from Jainism to Vaiṣṇavism. It was, however, above all the conjunction of two new factors in the history of mediaeval Karnataka that determined the Jainas’ definitive loss of power: firstly, a particular economic situation and secondly, the rise of the Liṅgāyat/Viraśaiva movement.

With regard to the economic situation, even a quick survey of twelfth-century Karnataka will show that, in that period, the region was one of the major Indian centres for business and commerce. Indeed, Karnataka had always maintained a primacy in commercial exchanges not only between the north and the south of the peninsula, but also with overseas markets. Nevertheless, particular elements were at play in the revival of trade in the twelfth century: the progressive substitution of the traditional economy of exchange by a monetary economy²⁴⁵ favoured the growth of a new mercantile class (mostly Śaivas) that came into conflict with the Jainas. In fact, as attested by many sources, the business community of mediaeval Karnataka was largely controlled by them.²⁴⁶ The clash between Śaiva and Jaina traders became all the more acrimonious as it was connected with the development—and often the very survival—of the sacred institutions (Hindu temples; Jaina sanctuaries), whose wealthiest patrons hailed precisely from their respective merchant communities.

The second fundamental factor characterising this twilight scenario of the rapidly diminishing economic and religious status of the Jainas was the rise of the Liṅgāyat/Viraśaiva movement. This made inevitable the definitive decline of Jaina power, which came to pass not only in Karnataka, where the new doctrine established itself quickly, taking precedence over all other creeds, not just locally, but also in most of modern Andhra Pradesh. The advent of Viraśaivism was a catalyst not only for further competition with and violence against the Jainas but, above all, for conversions: entire communities of followers of Mahāvīra’s ancient teachings embraced the new

244 Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*: 10.

245 Nandi, “Origin of the Viraśaiva Movement”: 471, 472; Yarlagadda, *Social History of the Deccan*: 97.

246 Aery and Mathur, “Some Aspects of Trade in Jain literature”: 85–93; Prasad Singh, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*: 101–3.

religion. This phenomenon—scarcely analysed to this day, despite the enormity of its proportions—led to the final disappearance from the Kanarese area of the flourishing and populous Jaina communities; with them, their great *basadis* were lost as well, being either abandoned to neglect or reused and renamed by the Vīraśaivas. A research study undertaken in the 1990s concluded that only sixty-nine Jaina *basadis* were then active in the Kanarese territory, as against the three hundred known at the inception of the twelfth century.²⁴⁷

As for the Liṅgāyats/Vīraśaivas, their communities are still thriving all over the Kanarese territory. However, what may be noted is that, over the centuries, their faith has subsumed an ever greater number of “Hinduised” customs, rituals and viewpoints: a development which might have been facilitated by the mass of Hindu and Jaina converts, who never entirely gave up their old ways and habits. In time, the process of constant transformation, due to several reasons, of Vīraśaiva religious heritage has brought about the erection of true and proper temples, though it should not be forgotten that, as early as the end of the twelfth century, certain Vīraśaiva communities frequented temples, mostly re-used, ex-temples formerly belonging to other faiths.

Extensive Vīraśaiva temple building activity is well attested today; the temples, of little relevance from an artistic point of view, show a number of architectural features recalling those of contemporary Hindu temples in the area.

12 Acknowledgments

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