

Gommateswara Mahamastakabhishek :

A Unique 1000th Year Event

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The 58 feet and 8 inches (17.9 metres) high Gommateswara colossus of Lord Bahubali atop the Indragiri hill in tiny town of Sravanbelgola in Chennayapatna taluka of Hassan district of Karnataka is the poem in stone. A masterpiece of craftsmanship, it has become symbolic of the best of iconography.

The Imperial Gazeteer praised the colossus as a 'wonder of the world'. Duke of Wellington (later Sir Arthus Wellesly and Governor General of India) who passed through southern parts of Mysore during his conquest in the south was greatly impressed by this gigantic and artistic statue. The distinguished archaeologist Fergusson had all praises for this lofty monolith beautiful piece of sculpture.

One and all of the thousands of Indian and foreign visitors who come to visit daily this lofty statue of great serenity invariably express at its sight "Marvellous!", "Magnificent!", "Unimaginable!".

Carved out of a single rock on the summit of Vindhyagiri hill, locally known as Indragiri or Doddabetta in Kannada i.e. the larger hill, the statue is in fine grained light grey granite stone, which is known for its hardness and durability. The hill is 3347 feet high from main sea level and 470 feet high above the plain at its feet. It is the highest monolith statue of this beauty and great serenity in the world. Even though the Buddha images at Bamiyan in Afghanistan are 120 to 175 feet high and there is yet another 84 feet high statue of Lord Rishabhadeva, father of Bahubali and first Jain Tirthankar among the 24 of the present cycle, known as Bawangaja at Chulgiri hill in Satpura range, 8 kms. from a place called Barwani in West Nimar district of Madhya Pradesh, and the image of Rameses II in Egypt is probably near to the height of Gommateswara statue, they all lack in that fineness of chiselling and divinity. They are supported too. The free-standing Gommateswara statue is unique for its divine smile on the face, highly impressive body figure and height.

Dr. Anand K. Coomaraswamy, an eminent painter, art critic and writer from Sri Lanka has referred to the Gommateswara statue in his book on Indian and Indonesian Art as 'one of the largest free-standing images in the world in the serenity of Kayotsarga undisturbed by the serpents about his feet, the ant-hills rising to the thighs and the growing creepers reaching the shoulders'.

Another foreign writer Jack Firegan speaks of the image as "a colossus statue of a great man of the Jain faith", and "a remarkable example of the latter type of sanctuary at Vindhyagiri".

Appreciating the statue, Boppana, a great Kannada poet of 12th century A.D. wrote in his verse, which has been inscribed in epigraph of the same century (cir 1180 A.D.) near the entrance of Suttalaya at Indragiri, "when an image is very lofty it may not have beauty; when possessed of loftiness and real beauty it may not have supernatural power; but loftiness, real beauty and mighty supernatural power have very well united in this image of Lord Bahubali making it worthy of worship in its glorious form".

According to Jain scriptures Rishabhadeva or Adinath ruled over Ayodhya. He gave to the people the art of *asi* (swordsmanship for defence), *krishi* (agriculture), *vanijya*, (barter and commerce), *vidya* (literature and arts), and *shilpa* (crafts). He also evolved a social order for organised and better living of the

people. From his first queen Yashaswati, he had the eldest son Bharat and other sons and a daughter Brahmi and from the second queen Sunanda, the son Bahubali and a daughter Sundari. Daughters Brahmi and Sundari are said to have been educated by Rishabhadeva for imparting to the people the scriptology, and numerology and fine arts respectively.

Rishabhadeva, before becoming the Jain ascetic to attain *nirvana*, made Bharat the ruler of Ayodhya and Bahubali of Podanpur. The remaining sons were given other territories for independent rule.

Being the first Chakravarti emperor, Bharat had to move for conquests along with his great army and the Chakra, which was capable of killing opposing enemies. After returning from conquests the Chakra, which was at the forefront, did not enter Ayodhya also stopping the army to enter the capital. The reason ascribed to this was that brother Bahubali and the remaining brothers had not yet accepted Bharat's sovereignty and thus making the great conquest incomplete. Whereas the other brothers preferred to become ascetics and thus making possible their territories coming under control of Bharat, the mighty Bahubali chose to be in war with the elder brother to maintain his independence.

Great armies of the two brothers took positions against each other. However, on the sane advice of able and aged ministers, the war and unwanted bloodshed was avoided. Instead, the two brothers agreed to three different duals, *drishti-yuddha*, the fight of staring each other down, *jala-yuddha*, a fight in water and finally *malla-yuddha*, a wrestling bout, among themselves alone to determine the superiority over the other. By virtue of his being taller and stronger, Bahubali had a win over Bharat in all the duals. But having developed much respect for the elder brother and renunciation towards the world by them, he became a Jain ascetic inspite of strong persuasion by Bharat.

Bahubali did severe penance for over a year in the standing posture (Kayotsarga) for attaining *nirvana*. So much absorbed he was in meditation that the ants made chambers near his feet and creepers grew and entwined his legs and arms. This did not stir him at all. He, however, did not attain *kevaljnan*, which precedes *nirvana*, because of doubt flickering in his mind that he was standing on the land which belonged to Bharat and was thus like one of his subjects and secondly he caused humiliation to his elder brother in defeating him. On satisfactory explanation having been given by Bharat and the sisters to his doubts, Bahubali instantly attained *keval-jnan*. He left the earthly body and attained *nirvana* even before his father Rishabhadeva and became the first *mokshagami*.

Jain sources tell that chivalrous Chaumundraya, able commander and minister of Ganga king Rachmalla IV, who ruled over Talkaddu in 10th century A.D., and his mother Kalala Devi having heard the story of Bahubali decided to get sculptored a colossus of great beauty of ascetic Bahubali at the summit of Doddabatta, i.e. the Indragiri hill.

The grand statue was completed at great expenses and labour. The inscriptions in Kannada, Tamil and Marathi languages, in 10th century characters, on ant-chambers at the feet of the image, state that Gommateswara was caused by Chamundraya. It was consecrated on March 12, 981 A.D. by Chamundraya's preceptor, Sidhantachakravarti Nemichandra. Since, out of affection he used to call Chamundraya as Gommatta, i.e. the cupid, he named the colossus after his name as Gommateswara. It also means the handsome and the excellent deity, as Bahubali was considered very handsome—the cupid. By looking at the Gommateswara statue, it appears as if the spirit hidden in rocks for centuries suddenly revealed itself wholly and in all its greatness and simplicity." According to Shri T.K. Tukol, retired Justice of the Karnataka High Court, two American academicians sat and dazed at the monolith for nearly two hours as the religious background of the image was narrated to them.

The statue stands in Kayotsarga posture facing north. Selection of location by Chaumundraya is really excellent and unparallel in whole of Karnataka. When carved, it must have provided a splendid view to the viewers from far and near as there were no enclosures on the hill then. These were constructed later

by Gangaraja, Jain minister of Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana. Even now the portion above the chest is visible to the viewers from all directions from a distance of 20-25 kilometres.

The broad shoulders with large chest, long and muscular arms stretched straight downwards, long ear lobes, straight and intricately chiselled nose, half-open lovely eyes, curly hair, well-modulated lips and above all the faint divine smile are the most noteworthy features of the image. The smile indicates the state of bliss having been attained by detachment, renunciation and penancing.

The madhavi creeper is shown winding itself round both legs and arms upto shoulders to indicate the complete absorption of Bahubali in meditation and detachment with the physical body. On the ant-hills on both sides, which give support to this huge statue upto thighs, is inscribed that the image was made by Chaumundraya. The pedestal of the image is designed to represent an open lotus.

On 1st January, 1865, Bowring who was chief-commissioner of Mysore had the statue measured a 57 feet high. A platform was specially erected to ascertain the exact height of the statue. It was recorded in his book 'Eastern Experiences'. The Public Works Department of the princely state of Mysore measured the colossus at Mahamastakabhisehka in 1871 as 56 feet and 6 inches high. The measurement of various parts of the body has been recorded in Indian Antiquary Part II. Late Shri Narsimhachar, who was Director of Archaeology, Mysore and did stupendous task of compiling the large number of stone epigraphs of Sravanbelgola and Mysore State, considered its height in 1923 as 57 feet. The Mysore Archaeological Department reported in 1957 that the height was 58 feet. In view of varying estimates the Institute of Indian Art History of Karnataka University recently measured the statue scientifically with a survey instrument called "theodolite" and came to the conclusion that its exact height is 58 feet and 8 inches and not 57 feet as was being believed till now.

Few places in Karnataka have such an antiquity and continuity as Sravanbelgola has as a holy town of Jains and centre of art and learning. It provides at one place, the best that is in sculpture, epigraphy, poetry and scenic beauty. The small town which has been bestowed by nature two lovely hills, several ponds, most notable being Kalyani Sarowar and lush green fields alround with tall coconut and palm trees, has its history from about 297 B.C. When Jain Acharya saint Bhadrabahu reached there from Ujjaini along with his saint disciple emperor Chandragupta Maurya, the great ruler of the empire of Magadha and a large number of other Jain saints, anticipating a severe famine of 12 years in upper India. He passed away quietly at a cave in Chandragiri hill, then known as Katvapra or Kalvappu, after about a year of penances there by following the religious practice of *sallekhna* and attained *nirvana*, while Chandragupta Maurya was attending on him. His footprints in the Bhadrabahu cave, named after him are still worshipped by hundreds of visitors and devotees daily. Chandragupta and many other Jain Munis who did penance at that hill later made their heavenly journey from there.

Chandragiri hill, named after Chandragupta Maurya, also known as Chikka Betta, i.e. smaller hill, is 3052 feet above sea level and 175 feet above the plain from its foot. It is infested with several old Jain temples, 14 in number, and manstambhas which are fine examples of craftsmanship. Important of these temples are Chandragupta Basadi—which is the oldest and is said to have been set up by saint Chandragupta himself on his grandson emperor Ashoka in memory of his grand-father, who did penances there for over 12 years; Chaumundraya Basadi—built by the same Chaumundraya who installed the Gommateswara colossus and which is the largest there and a superb piece of architecture in Ganga and Dravida style, and Paraswanath Basadi. The temples other than Chandragupta Basadi were built during 7th to 12th century A.D.

Indragiri hill came into prominence after installation of Gommateswara statue in 981 A. D., whereafter several Jain temples were built there and centre of devotion shifted from Chandragiri to that. There are 5 temples on the hill, 4 of which were built during the 17th century. But to serious students of religion and history Chandragiri is no less important still for its ancient history, the old epigraphs and the temples.

Sravanbelgola means white pond of the Jain ascetics. It has derived its name from the words 'Shraman (which later became Sravana), referring to the statue of saint Bahubali or the other Jain ascetics, who did penances there, and Kannad words Bel (white)+Kola (pond). The white pond refers to the clear watered beautiful Kalyani Sarowar which is between the two hills. The town itself has 7 temples, including Akkanna Basadi which is a fine specimen of Hoysala architecture. The temples were built during 10th to 15th century A.D. The Bhandari Basadi, which is the largest temple in the town, is known all over the country for finely chiselled 24 Tirthankaras of the same size, made of fine black stone, and installed on a straight and large *vedica* (pedestal).

Sravanbelgola is conveniently accessible by fine motor roads from Bangalore which is 145 kms., from Hassan which is 50 kms, from Arsekere which is 65 kms, and from Mysore which is 89 kms.

The 600 stone epigraphs, largest in number at one place, which have been discovered so far on the two hills, the town and the suburban villages, oldest of which being one of the 6th century A.D. at Chandragiri hill, speak of the many many centuries old religious and cultural heritage of Sravanbelgola—the sacred Tirthakashetra—and of the association the various dynastic rules of the south had with the place and the grand holy Gommateswara colossus.

Mahamastakabhisheka

The first Mahamastakabhisheka i.e. head-anointment of the statue was performed in March 931 A.D. at the above consecration ceremony. During the 1000 years of installation of this statue, 981 A.D. to 1981 A.D., presumably 72 head anointments have presumably been performed so far after the interval of 10, 12 and 15 years or so. The first being in 981 A.D., and the 72nd on February, 22, 1981. As the head anointment of this high statue is possible at a fixed Graha-yoga at great expense and with special preparations, it is called Mahamastakabhisheka i.e. great head-anointment event.

The year and details of all the probable 72 head anointments are yet not available. The earliest source of information about the head anointment of the statue is the stone scripture of 1398 A.D. at a pillar of Siddhar Basadi (temple) of Indragiri hill which tells that before the head anointment of statue having been conducted by Panditacharya in that year seven head anointments had been performed in the past. A poet Panchbana has mentioned about another head anointment in 1612 A.D. by a religious head Shantivarni. According to poet Anantakavi the head anointment of 1677 A.D. was arranged at the expense of Vishalaksha, Jain minister of Mysore ruler Chikka Devraj Vodeyar. According to poet Shantaraja-pandit Krishnaraj Vodeyar III got the head-anointment performed near about 1825 A.D.

The rulers of Mysore have always been impressed by the divinity and uniqueness of this statue. It was an age old tradition for the Vodeyar rulers of Mysore to be present at the head anointment ceremony and participate in the poojah. They as a matter of fact had the traditional right to be the first worshippers at the occasion.

Awe-inspiring accounts have been given of the head anointment ceremonies held in 1887, 1900, 1910, 1925, 1940, 1953 and 1967 which were held at much expense and had several days of colourful celebrations.

The long awaited head anointment on 22nd February 1981, presumably 72nd in order, came as a captivating climax to the month long 1000th year anniversary celebrations of installation of the colossus. Between 3 to 4 lakh people, from all parts of India and also from various other countries, who witnessed the grand spectacle were in ecstatic delight and a near realm of religious fantasy. The people came to the small town of Sravanbelgola like flood by every conceivable means of transport and even on foot. They started occupying vantage points at the opposite chandragiri hill, roads and squares and the fields around from the night of 21st February itself. By about 7 00 A.M. of 22nd February it was an ocean of people to be seen all round.

गोममटेना दिग्दर्शन

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The entry to Gommateswara statue temple on summit of Indragiri was restricted to those who had bought the *kalashas* (pots), their accompanists in fixed number, to the VIP pass holders and the Jain saints. About 3000 persons including about 100 Jain Munis & nuns (Arjikas), many foreigners, about 300 Indian and foreign photographers and journalists, and elite of the country's Jain community and of Karnataka government witnessed the spiritually moving head-anointment ceremony of the statue from close quarters of the courtyard and varandahas of the temple and the specially erected large and high platform on three sides of the image. Each group was specifically arranged in separate sections. In the courtyard, facing feet of Lord Gommateswara, where the Jain Munis and Arjikas with Acharya Deshbhushanji, Acharya Vimal Sagarji, Ailacharya Vidyanandji and Swasti Charukirti Swami Bhattarak of Jain Math of Sravanbelgola sitting in front line. To their left were seated the Arjikas.

The men and women were seen climbing 650 steps of the hill barefoot to reach the summit, in unending rows, clad in saffron or clean clothes from 5.00 A.M. itself. Those who could not climb the steps hired the cane chairs to be carried on shoulders of the labourers.

The day-long celebrations began at 6.00 A. M. of 22nd February with installation of 1008 brass *kalashas* of different sizes, each topped with a coconut and mango leaves on the freshly harvested paddy, chanting of Namokar and other Mantras.

The poojah started at 8.00 A.M. at the appointed muhurta with signal of Bhattarak Charukritiji. Kalash holders queued up at one corner of the scaffolding for their names to be called. The eagerly awaited Mahamastakabhisheka, first with water, started at about 9.15 A.M. The *kalashas* were passed on by a chain of priests from the feet of the image. Ten persons, who had paid rupees one lakh each for a *kalash*, named 'Shatabdi Kalash' first went upto the iron scaffolding one by one. As the *kalashas* were poured over the head of holy colossus loud cries of "Bhagwan Bahubali ki Jai" echoed in the sky. Thereafter the remaining 998 bidders of *kalashas*, who had bought the *kalashas* for amounts of rupees fifty thousand down to rupees five hundred each had their turn to the head anointment.

Kalashas were bought for the prices as under :

Shatabdi Kalash	10	Rs. 1,00,000 each
Divya	4	50,000 ,,
Ratna	4	25,000 ,,
Swarna	200	11,000 ,,
Rajat	200	5,000 ,,
Tamra	140	2,500 ,,
Kansya	200	1,000 ,,
Gullikayajji	250	500 ,,
Total		1008

Head-anointment with water took more than three hours to complete. From about 12.30 P.M. onwards it was followed by spectacular sugarcane juice, coconut water, milk and ritual Panchamrita Abhisheka. First came anointment with 500 litres of sugarcane juice poured on the head from large brass urns. Loud cheers, bugles and melodies of the musicians gave further colour to the grand spectacle. Then came pouring of 500 litres of coconut water and thereafter followed pouring of 500 litres of milk, a mixture of termeric powder, cardemom, camphor, slove sandalwood and saffron. When the milk was rolling down from head to feet, the image turned proverbial milk-white presenting a unique sight. The whole atmosphere filled in with pleasant fragrance of sandalwood and other substances. The scenario went on changing with the colour of the liquid used and the effect was dazzling in the bright sunshine. Greatly influenced, an American cameraman suddenly exclaimed "suddenly it seems a living deity."

Several participants danced and sang fully drenched with emotions. In fantasy, devotees rushed to the base of the image to be drenched in the streaming showers of colour. To many it was a most pleasant and even unforgettable experience of the life to be all wet in sandal, saffron and the like liquids which touched the body of their Lord. Many devotees spread their dhotees, which they were wearing, in drains and squeezed the liquid into flasks and glasses and even the plastic covers of their invitation cards as holy substance to take home. For some it was an even deeper experience, a moment of some psychic revelation or simple spiritual therapy. Several young women devotees who stood in a corner of the temple courtyard, had their arms out-stretched and mouths open as if yearning for more of these blissful moments. Others bowed and moaned in ecstasy at the foot of the Lord. The visual splendour of the event would have its unique importance for ages to come, both as a religious pilgrimage and a tourist extravaganza.

As the Abhisheka was in progress a hovering helicopter showered flower petals on the sacred statue. The nine hour poojah and head anointment ceremonies came to an end around 3.00 P.M. The whole affair was conducted under the direction of erudite Ailacharya Vidyanandji and under the personal supervision of Bhattarak Charukirti Swamiji.

A day earlier, on 21st February 1981, the Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, showered flower petals on the colossus from a helicopter and offered a silver plated coconut to be placed at the feet of the deity. She also addressed a mammoth gathering of over a lakh of devotees appreciating the colossus of Lord Bahubali as a symbol of country's rich heritage and the contribution of Bhagwan Bahubali and Mahavir to propagation of non-violence and peace, and the great contribution of Jainism to Indian literature. She released a number of cultural magazines brought out on the occasion.

Smt Indira Gandhi had set the wheel of Mahamastakabhisheka ceremonies move by inaugurating the "Jana Mangal Kalash", a huge copper vessel of 8 feet height and 7 feet diameter installed on a vehicle, at a large public meeting held outside the Red Fort at Delhi on September 29, 1980. After passing through a large number of towns and cities of the country, the Kalasha reached Sravanbelgola on February 20, 1981.

The ceremonies in the chain of five week long head anointment programme were started at Sravanbelgola on February 9, 1981 by mangal poojah, and inauguration and flag hoisting by Karnataka Chief Minister, Shri Gundu Rao and release of one rupee commemorative postage stamp of Lord Bahubali by the Union Communication Minister, Shri C. M. Stephen in the spacious Chamundraya pavilion. The functions which continued upto February, 25, 1981 in a particular and March 15, 1981 in general included Pancha Kalyanak Mahotsava on five days, ballet on Bahubali and other cultural programmes. Sarva Dharma Sammelan on February 19, Jana Mangal Kalash Abhisheka of the statue and felicitation of some selected literary and social figures on Feb. 23, and Jalyatra in Kalyani Sarowar on Feb. 24.

भरत और बाहुबली दोनों को ही जैनो के दोनों सम्प्रदायों में विशेष स्थान प्राप्त हुआ है। आजकल भी श्वेताम्बर व्यापारी शारदा-पूजन के समय अपने बहीखातों के आरम्भ में 'भरत चक्रवर्ती की ऋद्धि होओ' 'बाहुबली का बल होओ' लिखते हैं। दिगम्बर सम्प्रदाय में बाहुबली का वन्दन कर व्यायाम की शिक्षा प्रारम्भ की जाती है, तथा बाहुबली के नाम पर आश्रम और औषधालय आदि चलाये जाते हैं। ईसा की ११वीं शताब्दी में निर्मित आबू की विमल वसही की शिल्पकला में भरत और बाहुबली के युद्ध के दृश्य अंकित हैं। इसी प्रकार शत्रुजय तीर्थ का एक शिखर बाहुबली के नाम से सुप्रसिद्ध है। मैसूर से १०० किलो मीटर दूर श्रवणबेलगोल में गंगवंशी राचमल के महामात्य चामुण्डराय (गोम्मटराय) द्वारा १०वीं शताब्दी में ५७ फुट उन्नतकाय गोम्मटेश्वर बाहुबली की दिव्य प्रतिमा दुनिया की शिल्पकला में अपनी सानी नहीं रखती। चारों ओर पहाड़ियों तथा वन-उपवन राशि से घिरी हुई यह विशाल मूर्ति हृदय में दिव्य मनोभावों का संचार करती हुई जान पड़ती है।

डॉ० जगदीशचन्द्र जैन के लेख 'भरत बाहुबली रास' से सादर उद्धृत