

# Historical Significance of Early Jaina Kadamba Inscriptions

Dr. A. K. Chatterjee\*

Jainism had reached Karnataka probably as early as the second century A. D., and we have the evidence of an important non-Jaina text, namely the *Bhāgavata*<sup>1</sup> regarding the introduction of Jainism in this *Janapada*. We have shown elsewhere<sup>2</sup> that in Tamilnadu, Kerala and Sri-Lanka, Jainism was introduced much earlier, probably in the pre-Mauryan days. But the Digambaras of Northern India, were in all probability, responsible for the introduction of Jainism in Karnataka by the middle of the second century A. D. However, the earliest Jaina epigraph from this state is dated in about 400 A. D. Both the Western Ganges and the Kadambas were the major ruling dynasties in this area at this period, and the kings of both these dynasties had some genuine love for the religion of the Jainas.

The Kadambas, like the Western Ganges, came into the limelight from the middle of the 4th century A. D. Like the latter they too were great patrons of the Jaina religion and culture. The earliest inscription<sup>3</sup> of the dynasty of the founder Mayurasarman is assigned to the middle of the 4th century A. D. The first king of this dynasty, who definitely showed special favour for the Jainas, was Kakutsthavarman whose Halsi grant (Belgaum district, Karnataka) is dated in the 80th year of the *paṭṭabandha* of his ancestor Mayuraśarman<sup>4</sup>. It has been suggested<sup>5</sup> that the year 80 may also be referred to the Gupta era; in that case the inscription should be assigned to *circa* 400 A. D., which is also supported by the palaeography of the record.

The inscription begins with an adoration of the holy Jinendra who is represented almost as a theistic deity. Some of the grants of Mrgeśavarman and Ravivarman begin with the same verse. It was issued from Palāśika (Halsi, Belgaum district) by Kakutsthavarman, who is represented as the '*yuvarāja* of the Kadambas'. By this grant, a field in the village called Khetagrama, which belonged to the holy *Arhats*, was given to the general Śrutakīrti as a reward for saving the prince. It is said that the confiscators of the field, belonging to the king's own family or any other family, would be guilty of *pañcamahāpātaka*. According to the Jainas the

five sins are — destruction of life, lying, unchastity, stealing and immoderate desire. The inscription ends with the words *R̥ṣabhāya namaḥ*.

It is apparent from the inscription that the Jinendra temple of the ancient city of Palāśika was built before the date of this inscription and probably some time in the 4th century A. D.

Several grants of Mrgeśavarman, the grandson of Kakutsthavarman, who ruled in the last quarter of the 5th century A. D.<sup>6</sup> are connected with the Jaina religion. The first inscription<sup>7</sup> found at Banavāsī is dated in the 3rd regnal year. It records a grant of black-soil land ( *Kṛṣṇabhūmikṣetra* ) in the village called Br̥hat-Paralura to the divine, supreme *Arhat* 'whose feet are rubbed by the tiara of the lord of gods' for the purpose of the glory of sweeping out the temple, anointing the idol with *ghee*, performing worship and repairing anything that may be broken. Another piece of land was also granted for decorating the idol with flowers. The term *devakula* is also used in this connection. The *Paṭṭikā* is said to have been written by Dāmakīrti Bhojaka. We have another Banavāsī grant<sup>8</sup> dated in the 4th year of Mrgeśa's reign which was issued on the 8th of the bright fortnight of *varṣa*, when the king was residing at Vaijayanti. The dating of the inscription was surely due to the Jaina influence<sup>9</sup>, as it was the time of the Nandīśvara or Aṣṭāhnikā festival. By this grant the *dharmamahārāja* Sri Vijayaśiva Mrgeśavarman made a gift of a village of the name of Kalavaṅga. It was divided in three equal portions; the first was meant for the temple of Jinendra which was situated at a place called Paramapuṣkala. The second portion was meant for the *Saṅgha* of the *Śvetapaṭa-mahāśramaṇa* who followed scrupulously the original teaching of the *Arhat*, and the third for the use of the *Nirgrantha-mahāśramaṇas*.

The reference to the *Śvetapaṭa sādhus* is of great significance. It clearly proves that the Śvetāmbaras were equally popular in Karnataka in the 5th century A. D. The statement that they followed the good teaching of the *Arhat* implies that they were held in special esteem in those days. It is also evident from the inscription that the Jinendra temple mentioned here, was the joint property of the monks of both the sects. Needless to say, these monks belonging to the main branches of Jainism, lived in perfect harmony in the 5th century A. D. The seal of the grant, according to Fleet, bears the device of a Jinendra.

The third inscription of Mrgeśavarman, bearing on Jainism, is the Halsi grant<sup>10</sup> dated in the 8th year of that king. It begins like the inscription of Kakutsthavarman with an adoration to Jinendra in exactly the same words. The king Mrgeśa

is further described as *Tuṅga-Gaṅgakulotsadi* and *Pallavapralayanala* which suggest his success over the Western Ganges and Pallavas. Then we are told that, while residing at Vaijayantī, through devotion of his father (Śāntivarman), he caused to be built a Jinālaya at the town of Palāśika (Halsi) and gave to the holy *Arhats* thirty three *nivartanas* of land between the river Māṭrsarī and Ingini *saṅgama* for the Yāpanīyas, Nirgranthas and Kurcakas. The executor of the grant was Bhojaka Dāmākīrti. Fleet takes the *bhojakas* as the official priests in Jaina temples. But who were the Kurcakas mentioned in this inscription? It appears that they were bearded ascetics<sup>11</sup> and were distinguished from other Nirgrantha monks, who did not keep any beard. Some other grants of Mṛgeśavarman are meant for the Brahmins and other non-Jainas, which show that he was not a converted Jaina<sup>12</sup>.

The next king Ravivarman was not only a very able ruler and a great conqueror but also a sincere patron of the Jaina religion. We must at first refer to his Halsi grant<sup>13</sup> dated in the eleventh year of his reign, which refers to his brother Bhānuvarman, who was probably the governor of Palāśika<sup>14</sup> under Ravivarman. We are told that Bhānuvarman and one Pandara Bhojaka granted land to the Jina at Palāśika, which was situated in a village called Kardamapatī. We are further told that the land was given for the purpose of worshiping the Lord Jina on every full-moon day. We must then refer to two undated Halsi grants of the time of Ravivarman both of which are of great importance.

The first undated Halsi grant<sup>15</sup> of Ravivarman records the interesting history of a family that received favour from the days of king Kākutsthavarman. According to it, in former days a Bhoja named Śrutakīrti, who acquired great favour of Kākutsthavarman named Śrutakīrti, enjoyed the village of Kheta. We have already taken note of the fact that king Kākutsthavarman granted a field in that village to *senapati* Śrutakīrti for serving him. After Śrutakīrti's death, at the time of Śāntivarman, his eldest son Mṛgesa, after taking his father's permission, granted the village to the mother of Dāmākīrti. It appears that Dāmākīrti was the son of Śrutakīrti. The eldest son of Dāmākīrti was *pratihāra* Jayakīrti, whose family is said to have been established in the world by an *ācārya* named Bandhusena. In order to increase his fortune, fame and for the sake of religious merit, Jayakīrti, through the favour of king Ravi gave the village of Parukhetaka (probably larger *Kheta*) to the mother of his father. This interesting grant further refers to the 8-day festival of Lord Jina at Palāśika in which king Ravivarman himself participated. We are further told that the expenses for this *Aṣṭāhnikā* festival in the month of *Kārttika* should be met from the revenue of the village. The grant further refers to the Yāpanīya

monks and their chief Kumāradatta. The last few lines of the inscription conclusively show that king Ravivarman did everything to promote the worship of Jina at Palāśika. It further appears that Sūri Kumāradatta, mentioned in this inscription, was a celebrated Jaina savant, belonging to the Yāpaniya sect and was universally admired for his learning and holiness. We must note carefully the following lines of this inscription "wheresoever the worship of Jinendra is kept up, there is increase for the country, and the lords of these countries acquire strength ( *ūrjas* ).

The second undated Halsi grant of Ravivarman<sup>16</sup> is historically more important since, it refers to the killing of Viṣṇuvarman, the lord of Kāñcī. The actual donor was Śrīkīrti, the younger brother of Dāmākīrti and the object was to increase the merit of their mother. A copper plate inscription<sup>17</sup> dated in the 34th year of this king, found from Chitradurga district ( Karnataka ) records a grant of land to a Jaina temple.

It should here be remembered that Ravivarman did not favour the Jainas alone; other religious sects also received good treatment from him. This is proved by his inscriptions found from different places<sup>18</sup>. Ravivarman ruled in the closing years of the 5th and the first quarter of the 6th century A. D.<sup>19</sup>

The Jainas also enjoyed patronage during the rule of Ravivarman, who unlike his father Ravivarman, was not a very strong king. We have two dated Halsi grants of his reign. The first is dated in the 4th year of his reign<sup>20</sup>. It records that at Uccaśṛṅgī, the king at the advice of his uncle ( *pitṛvya* ) named Śivaratha, gave the grant of a village to an *Arhat* temple of Palāśika, which was built by one Mrgeśa, the son of *senāpati* Simha. On behalf of the temple, the grant was received by Candrakānta, who is described as the head of a Kūrcaka Saṅgha named after Vāriṣeṇācārya. It thus appears that a particular member of Kūrcaka sect called Vāriṣeṇācārya, established, before this date, a particular *Saṅgha*, which was named after him. We have already taken note of these Kūrcakas, who are mentioned in an inscription of the time of Mrgeśavarman. The village Vasuntavātka, which was given as grant was situated at Kaṇḍura-visaya. The inscription ends with a verse addressed to Vardhamāna.

The second Halsi grant<sup>21</sup> of Ravivarman's reign is dated in his 5th regnal year. It is interesting that Palāśika is described here as the capital ( *adhiṣṭhāna* ) of this king. We are told that the king, being requested by Sendraka chief Bhānuśakti gave the grant of a village called Marade for a Jaina *caityālaya* of Palāśika, which was the property of *Śramaṇa-saṅgha* called *Ahariṣṭi* and who were under Ācārya

Dharmanandin. The Sendrakas were obviously the feudatories of the Kadambas. Harivarman, however, before the end of his reign, became a Śaiva<sup>22</sup>.

Another branch of the Kadamba dynasty, who ruled in the southern part of the original Kadamba dominion, also patronised the Jainas. We have a grant<sup>23</sup>, of the time of Kṛṣṇavarman I ( c. 475-485 A. D. ), the brother of Śāntivarman, issued from Triparvata ( probably Halebid ). By this grant a piece of land at a place called Siddhakedāra, which was in Triparvata division, was granted to the Yāpanīya Saṅgha by Yuvarāja Devavarman, for the maintenance, worship and repair of a *caityālaya*, which was probably near Siddhakedāra.

The above discussion shows the flourishing condition of Jainism in different parts of the Kadamba dominion. It appears that there were a number of Jaina temples at Palāśika, which was flourishing town in those days. These inscriptions, as noted above, have disclosed the name of a great number of Jaina savants, some of whom were even respected by the reigning monarchs. The references to different Jaina sects like the Nirgranthas, Śvetapaṭas and Kūrcakas prove that all these schools had their followers in the Kadamba dominion. The lay followers used to celebrate, with great pomp, the various Jaina festivals and needless to say, such festivals made the Jaina religion extremely popular among the masses. The Kadamba kings, it appears, in spite of their religious catholicity, had special love for the Jaina religion. It was mainly because of their patronage that Jainism became a dominant religious force in Karnataka.

## References

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**Reader, Calcutta University.**

Residence : 24E, Jyotish Roy Road,  
Calcutta - 700 053.