

Royal Patronage of Jainism under the Kadambas of Banavāsi: c. Fifth and Sixth Centuries CE

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Received: June 01, 2018

Accepted: July 25, 2018

ABSTRACT

In the process of the spread of Jainism from the northern to the southern part of the Indian subcontinent, the region of Western Deccan became a major stronghold of the religion. The royal patronage provided to Jainism played an important role in this process. This paper examines the role of the Kadambas of Banavāsi in such patronage. The epigraphic evidence suggests that the Kadambas were one of the earliest patrons of Jainism in this region from the period since c. fifth century CE and continued such patronage for more than a century. The paper looks into the nature of grants made by the Kadamba rulers and their changing features under the reign of different rulers. It also analyzes other information provided by the inscriptions like the nature of the donees, the monastic groups to which the Jaina monks of this period belonged to and the Jaina religious and social practices followed in the region.

Keywords: Jainism, Kadambas, Royal Patronage, Western Deccan

Introduction

The major parts of the Deccan Plateau were under the reign of the Sātavāhana dynasty till around the third century CE.¹ With the decline of this dynasty, a number of smaller dynasties emerged in the region. One of them which ruled during the fifth and sixth centuries CE was the Kadamba dynasty. The Kadambas ruled from their capital at Banavāsi, after the Cuṭu dynasty. The Cuṭus were the feudatories of the Sātavāhanas.

This paper attempts to highlight different aspects of royal patronage of Jainism by the Kadamba dynasty in the Western Deccan² on the basis of the epigraphic sources during the period of the fifth and sixth centuries CE. The primary sources used in this paper are the inscriptions published in the different volumes of *Epigraphia Carnatica (EC)* and *Indian Antiquary (IA)*. The volumes of *Epigraphia Carnatica* being used for the paper are the ones which were published between 1886 and 1923.³

Origin of the Kadambas and their links with Jainism

The Kadamba inscriptions provide more than one versions of the origin of the dynasty. In an undated Kadamba inscription during the eighth year of the reign of Mṛgeśavarman, the dynasty claimed their descent from the Āṅgīrasa gotra.⁴ There are some later inscriptions which have different versions of the origin. An inscription dated in 1118 CE, refers Kadamba as the one who had four long arms and eye in the forehead like Śiva and emerged from the sweat of Hara which fell under a Kadamba tree.⁵ Mayūravarman, the first Kadamba king was said to be born to Kadamba. In another inscription dated in 1077 CE, the king Mayūravarman was described as the son of Ānandajina-vratīndra's sister.⁶ The inscription begins with the praise of the Jina śāsana and Ānandajina- vratīndra was possibly a Jaina monk. This inscription also makes a reference to the Kadamba tree and states that Mayūravarman was born under this tree.

From these two inscriptions, it appears that the early Kadamba kings were possibly following both Śaivism and Jainism. But since these inscriptions belong to a much later date compared to the reign of the Kadambas, the information provided by these, must be interpreted carefully. Also, there is no direct evidence indicating at what time the rule of the dynasty began. The Mayidavolu and Hirahadhalli grants of Pallava king Śivaskandavarman and comparison of their script with the Chandravali inscription indicate that Mayūravarman's reign started just after accession of Śivaskandavarman who ruled in the first quarter of the fourth century CE. Thus, Mayūravarman's reign can be dated around the middle of the fourth century CE.⁷ Thus, it can still be inferred from these inscriptions that the Kadamba dynasty which was ruling with their capital at Banavāsi during the fifth and sixth centuries CE, had some links with Jainism which gets further support from the fact that a number of these kings became one of the earliest patrons of Jainism in the Western Deccan.

Earliest Evidence of Royal Patronage to Jainism by the Kadambas: c. Fifth Century CE

There is no epigraphic evidence of Mayūrarman, the first Kadamba king patronizing Jainism. The inscriptions associated with the kings who followed him, are also not dated accurately. In some of these inscriptions, along with the name of the king, it has been mentioned during which year of his reign the grant is being made. The earliest Kadamba grant specifically related to Jainism is linked to the king Kākusthavarman.⁸ Although the date of the grant is not mentioned, it refers to ‘the eightieth year of his victory’. This has been interpreted as eighty years after the *paṭṭabandha* or consecration of his ancestor Mayūrarman.⁹ By this argument, this inscription can be assigned to the beginning of the fifth century CE. Therefore, this inscription found near Halsi (modern name for Palāśikā, the capital of the early Kadambas) in the Belgaum district, is one of the earliest inscriptions associated with Jainism in the Western Deccan.

The Halsi grant is recorded on three copper plates with a seal bearing the figure of a dog.¹⁰ A field in the village Khetagrāma, regarded as belonging to the *arhats*¹¹ was donated to the general of the king Kākusthavarman, Śrutakīrtti. Despite being linked to Jainism, the inscription does not clarify if the king followed Jainism or not. As the grant was given to his general for saving the life of the king as a reward for his services, it is possible that the general followed Jainism. The inscription also includes the warning that whoever destroys the grant would be guilty of *pañcamahāpātaka*¹² or five sins and states that religious merit will be obtained by those who protect it. The inscription also states that the person seizing land will go to hell for 60,000 years. The inscription ends with *Ṛṣabhāya namaḥ* or the invocation to lord *Ṛṣabhā*.

Along with the above inscription, there are ten inscriptions recording grants by the Kadamba kings during the fifth and sixth century CE. Two of these inscriptions¹³ carry the genealogy of the Kadamba kings for three generations starting from Kākusthavarman, his second son Śāntivaravarman and Śrī Mṛgeśa, the eldest son of Śāntivaravarman. In another inscription,¹⁴ the genealogy is extended to the fourth generation where the grant is recorded by Śrī Ravivarman, son of Śrī Mṛgeśa and the land is being given for the prosperity of Bhānuvarman, brother of Ravivarman.

There is another early Kadamba inscription¹⁵ which is different from others as it records a grant by the king Dēvarman, son of Kṛṣṇavarman, and the names of both the kings are not recorded in the genealogy of the other Kadamba kings mentioned above. Although the inscription is not dated, these two kings have been placed in early times, around the time of Kākusthavarman.¹⁶ Kṛṣṇavarman was possibly the brother of Śāntivaravarman and ruled at the end of the fifth century CE, but no formal source of this information has been given.¹⁷ Dēvarman granted twelve *nivartanas*¹⁸ of land at a place called Siddhakedāra to the Yāpanīya¹⁹ sect for the purpose of worship at a temple (*caityālaya*) and to repair anything that might be broken (*bhagna-saṃskāra*). The inscription ends with the invocation to the *arhat*, but the exact pattern is different from that of other Kadamba grants, as here the *arhat* is described as the lord of three worlds and as one who has eternal knowledge. Also, in the inscription, Dēvarman is mentioned to be very fond of war (*raṇa-priya*).

Patronage of Jainism under the King Mṛgeśavarman: c. Late Fifth Century CE

If the king Kākusthavarman reign can be dated somewhere in the first half of the fifth century CE, Mṛgeśavarman might have ruled in the late fifth century CE. Three out of ten Kadamba grants associated with Jainism were made by Mṛgeśavarman, who has also been referred by other names like Śrī Mṛgeśa and Mṛgeśavaravarman. Some of these inscriptions are dated in regnal year. The first²⁰ of the above records refers to a grant of 40 *nivartanas* of black soil land (*kṛṣṇa-bhūmi-kṣetra*) in the village Brhat-Parālūra for certain specific purposes, viz. sweeping out the temple (*caityālaya*) and anointing the idol with ghee, for performing worship, and for repairing anything that may be broken. In addition, one *nivartana* of land outside the *caityālaya*, entirely free from taxation, was also granted for the purpose of decorating the image with flowers. The inscription starts with *siddham* (success has been attained) and invocation to the *arhat*, which is followed by a eulogy of the king Mṛgeśavaravarman and recorded in the third year of his reign.

In the second inscription²¹ Mṛgeśavarman grants a village named Kālavaṅga for three purposes. One part is for the holy *arhat* and *Jinendra* who inhabits the ‘hall of the *arhat*’. This appears to be a grant for some Jaina temple. The second and third purposes were for the enjoyment of the sects of ascetics (*saṃgha*) belonging to Śvetapaṭas²² and Nirgranthas²³ respectively. The inscription is unique in some ways. The seal found on the inscription, show a Jina in sitting or kneeling posture.²⁴ Apart from the grant being dated in the fourth year of Mṛgeśavarman’s reign, it is also dated in the eighth fortnight of the rainy season. It reflects Jaina influence as this is the time of *Navdīśvara* or *Aṣṭāhnikā* festival in Jainism.²⁵ The grants being given both to Śvetapaṭa and Nirgrantha sects reflects not only the presence of the Śvetambara sect in the region in the fifth century CE²⁶ but also the peaceful coexistence of both the sects, as the grant was made by the same

royal patron. The inscription also contains a more elaborate eulogy of the king Mṛgeśavarman highlighting his expertise in religious matters, administration, sports, war and wealth creation. The titles like *dharmamahārājā* and *viṣaya-sīvā* have also been used for the king. Thus, this is one of the inscriptions which closely link the Kadamba dynasty in general and the king Mṛgeśavarman in particular, to Jainism.

The third inscription²⁷ is dated in the eighth year of the reign of the king Mṛgeśa. It records that the king, through the devotion of his father Śāntivaravarman, had built a Jaina temple (*Jinālaya*) at Palāśikā. He then granted thirty-three *nivartanas* of land from the river Mātṛsaritā to the confluence of rivers called Inṅiṣaṃgama for supporting Yāpaniyas, Nirgranthas and Kūrcakas. The inscription starts with the invocation to Jinendra, followed by the genealogy of the Kadamba kings. In the eulogy of the king Mṛgeśa, he was described as the destroyer of the dynasties like Tuṅgagaṅga and Pallava.

Patronage of Jainism by the later Kadamba Kings: c. Sixth Century CE

There are two other inscriptions recording grants by the king Śrī Ravivarman, son of king Mṛgeśa. One of these²⁸ records the grant of village Purukhēṭaka by Ravivarman, first to the *pratihāra* (doorkeeper) Jayakīrtti and then the village further is donated to Jayakīrtti's grandmother. Apart from carrying the eulogy of the Kadamba kings from Kākusthavarman till Ravivarman, the inscription is unique in terms of praising and referring to the family of Jayakīrtti. Jayakīrtti and his father Śrī Dāmakīrtti are referred as intellectual and religious persons whose family is established by the *ācāryas* called Bandhuśēna. In the beginning of the inscription, reference is made to Bhōja priest Śrutakīrtti, who had acquired great favour of the king Kākusthavarman.

The inscription also mentions the grant which was earlier given by Kākusthavarman to Śrutakīrtti was donated again by king Mṛgeśa to the mother of Dāmakīrtti, at the direction of his father. The person named Śrutakīrtti was mentioned in an inscription above²⁹, the earliest Kadamba inscription related to Jainism. From the above information, it seems that Dāmakīrtti was the son of Śrutakīrtti, even if this is not mentioned clearly. The purpose of the grant was to continue with the regular celebration of eight days' festival of Jinendra (*aṣṭāh-kṛta-mayārdā*)³⁰ and to support the Jaina ascetics headed by Kumāradatta during *caturmāsa*³¹ (four months of rainy season). The grant carries a seal with a symbol of a dog, starts with the invocation to Jinendra, and ends with a warning.

Thus, the inscription is noteworthy in many ways. First, it refers to two parallel genealogies, one of the king and the other possibly of a family of Jaina saints. It is also noteworthy that Śrutakīrtti is mentioned as a general of Kākusthavarman in the earlier inscription while Jayakīrtti, possibly his grandson, is referred to as a door-keeper. Second, the grant was made to the grandmother of Jayakīrtti, not directly by the king but through Jayakīrtti, which possibly indicates that the king was not supposed to give grants directly to women. We do not have any other Kadamba royal grant to a woman. Third, the inscription refers to three important entities associated with Jainism viz. the kings as patrons, the family of Śrutakīrtti who were supposed to get the grant and the Jaina ascetics under some leading saint, for whom the income from the land was to be finally spent.

The second undated grant by Ravivarman³² does not mention his name directly. It mentions the grant by 'sun of the sky of the Kadamba family' (*ravi-kadambo-kulāmbarasya*) which seems to be a subtle way of both naming and praising the king. Like in the above grant, in this grant also, land (four *nivartanas*) was donated by the king through Śrī Kīrtti, the brother of Dāmakīrtti for the religious merit of their mother. Another important aspect of the inscription is the statement that Ravivarman had killed Viṣṇuvarman³³ and had conquered Caṇḍadaṇḍa, the lord of Kāñcī.

Bhānuvarman, the younger brother of Ravivarman, is also associated with a grant³⁴ recorded in the eleventh year of the reign of Ravivarman. He is said to have donated fifteen *nivartanas* of land, free of taxes, in the village Kardampatī at Palāśikā for the ceremony of ablution of the Jina on the days of the full moon. The inscription begins with the invocation to Jinendra followed by the genealogy of the Kadambas, starting from king Kākusthavarman till Ravivarman.

There are two Kadamba grants recorded by the king Harivarman, son of the king Ravivarman. The first one³⁵ is made in the fourth year of his reign on the advice of the king's father's brother (*pitṛvya*) Śivaratha at a village, Uccaśṅgi. The village named Vasuntavāṭaka was donated to the sect of Vāriṣeṇacārya of Kūrcakas and on behalf of the sect was received by Candrakṣanta. The purpose of the grant was to allow anointing with clarified butter at the temple of the *arhat* during the *Aṣṭāhnikā* festival and the remaining amount was for the feeding of members of the sect. The inscription ends with the invocation to *arhat* Vardhamāna. The second grant³⁶ is recorded in the fifth year of the reign of Harivarman. The king, on the request of king Bhānuśakti from the family of the Sendrakas,³⁷ made the donation of the village Marade for a *caityālaya* which was a property of the sect of *śramaṇas* called Ahariṣṭi, headed by *ācārya* Dharmanandī.

Conclusion

The above inscriptions clearly show that the Kadambas patronized Jainism in the Western Deccan. Most of the patronage was through the land grants, even if the purpose differed across the inscriptions. In the earlier grants like the Halsi grant, the grant was made indirectly to the Jaina temple, through the minister and the specific purpose was not mentioned. It can therefore be inferred that the earliest Kadamba kings, despite patronizing Jainism, had less inclination towards its religious philosophy. There was a gradual change in the nature of such patronage from around late fifth century CE. The land grant by the king Dēvavarman, probably in the second half of the fifth century, specifically mentioned that it was for the Jaina temple belonging to the Yāpanīya sect and its repairs.

The features Jaina patronage under the Kadambas changed more significantly during the reign of Mṛgeśavarman. He granted land for specific purposes like performing worship and repairs. But, more notably, the king made grants for different types of Jaina monastic groups like Śvetapaṭas, Nirgranthas, Kūrcakas and Yāpanīyas, highlighting both the liberal attitude of the king towards various sects and also their peaceful coexistence. Apart from this, Mṛgeśavarman not only built Jaina temples, but also provided grants for the temple along with those for celebrating Jaina festivals.

Mṛgeśavarman's successors like Ravivarman and Harivarman continued the Jaina patronage on similar lines. Many of the earlier grants were renewed by the later kings. Many of the later grants were also made particularly during the Jaina festivals and to support Jaina monks when they resided at one place during the rainy season. These features continue to show that the Kadamba kings were not only patronizing Jainism but had closer religious and cultural association with Jainism and the Jaina monks of different monastic groups during the fifth and the sixth centuries CE.

Endnotes

¹According to Upinder Singh (2009: 381), the Sātavāhanas are identified as the Āndhras of the Purāṇas who possibly originated in the eastern part of the Deccan in the mid-first century BCE. Later, they extended their control over the entire Deccan and ruled it till the third century CE.

² In terms of modern political units, the Western Deccan roughly corresponds to the state of Karnataka located in the western part of the Deccan plateau.

³ Abbreviated forms of these sources will be used for future references followed by Volume No., Inscription number and page numbers. e.g. *I. A. Vol. 6. No. XX: 22* refers to Inscription No. 22 from Volume 6 of *Indian Antiquary* on page no. 22.

⁴ *IA. Vol.7. No. XXXVI: 35-36.*

⁵ *E.C. Vol. VII. No. 117: 84.*

⁶ *E.C. Vol. VIII. No. 262: 41-42.*

⁷ Dinesh Chandra Sircar (1939): 232-233, This is also supported by Asim Kumar Chatterjee (2000: 123) and B.R.Gopal (1982: 27-28).

⁸ *IA. Vol. 6. No. XX: 22-24.*

⁹ Sircar (1939): 234. Fleet (1877: 22) also supports this on paleographic grounds.

¹⁰ J. F. Fleet (1877: 23) finds the figure similar to that of dog. George M. Moraes (1931: 377) disputes this identification on the basis of the fact that the dynastic symbol of the Kadambas is the lion. But, by the snout and tail of the animal in the figure, it clearly resembles a dog.

¹¹ Padnabh S. Jaini (2014: 337, 344) defines *arhat* as 'worthy of worship' or as an epithet of the one who has attained *kevalajñāna* or knowledge isolated from karmic obstruction.

¹² Jaini (2014: 170-178) refers to five *anuvratas* of Jainism as *ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahma,* and *aparigraha*. Five sins seem to be not following these *anuvratas*. Chatterjee (2000: 123) describes these five sins in Jainism as destruction of life, lying, unchastity and immoderate desire.

¹³ *IA. Vol.6. No. XXI, XXII: 25-27.*

¹⁴ *IA. Vol.6. No. XXIII: 27-29.*

¹⁵ *IA. Vol.7. No. XXX: 33-34.*

¹⁶ Fleet 1878: 33.

¹⁷ Chatterjee (2000):126.

¹⁸ One *nivartana* roughly equal to an acre and a half (R. S. Sharma 1995: 181).

¹⁹ Jaini (2014: 15) identifies Yāpanīyas as sect of Jaina ascetics who remained naked in forest but covered themselves with a single piece of cloth (Eka-phālakas) during visits to populated areas. Singh (1975: 123,136) points out that they are associated with different parts of Karnataka like Halsi in 5th-6th centuries,

Aihole in 7th century and Dharwar &Belgaum in 11th century where they built a temple for Jaina goddess Jvālāmālīni.

²⁰ IA. Vol.7. No. XXXVI: 35-36.

²¹ IA. Vol.7. No. XXXVII: 37-38.

²² According to Deo (1956: 81), this Jaina sect follows the Ardhapālakas or the monks who used a piece of cloth. When they reached Valabhīpura, where they were expected to be naked Digambara monks, the queen asked them to wear complete clothes and they were called Śvetapaṭas.

²³ There is not much clarity on identity of some sects of Jaina ascetics like Nirgranthas and Kūrcakas except that these originated as a result of schism in Digambara sect (S. B. Deo (1956: 447) and U. K. Jain (1975: 139)). Chatterjee (2000: 124) identifies Kūrcakas as bearded ascetics differentiated from Nirgrantha who are unbearded. Settar (2016: 241) identifies Kūrcakas in a picture with a Digambara monk where these are neither naked nor bearded but carrying *ogho* (a bunch of peacock feathers). Interestingly, *kūrca*, a Sanskrit word literally means a 'bunch of peacock feathers'.

²⁴ Fleet (1878: 37).

²⁵ Ramendra Nath Nandi (1973: 37) explains *Aṣṭāhnikā* or *Navdīśvara* Dvīpa as a Jaina festival celebrated over the last eight days in three months viz. Āṣāḍha (June-July), Kārtika (October-November) and Phālgua (February-March). Its coincidence with the harvest seasons is possibly linked to meeting the cost of the festival and time availability.

²⁶ Chatterjee (2000): 124.

²⁷ IA. Vol.6. No. XX: 24-25.

²⁸ IA. Vol.6. No. XXIII: 25-27.

²⁹ IA. Vol. 6. No. XX: 22-24.

³⁰ By the features given, it is possibly same as *Aṣṭāhnikā* discussed above, here in Kārtika month.

³¹ This period is associated with extended presence of Jaina ascetics and the lay-worshippers are expected to abandon worldly concerns temporarily and focus more fasting and listening to the sermons (Paul Dundas 1992: 185).

³² IA. Vol.6. No. XXIV: 29-30.

³³ Chatterjee (2000: 125) identifies Viṣṇuvarman to be a Kadamba kinsman.

³⁴ IA. Vol.6. No. XXIII: 27-29.

³⁵ IA. Vol.6. No. XXV: 30-31.

³⁶ IA. Vol.6. No. XXV: 31-32.

³⁷ According to Barnett (1999: 52), Sendraka dynasty was ruling in the neighbourhood of Bagumra in Southern Gujarat in the sixth and seventh century CE.