

Chapter - III

JAINS & JAINISM IN THE DECCAN

EARLY HISTORY OF JAINISM IN THE DECCAN

The vast expanse of the Deccan plateau south of the Vindhya mountains is rugged terrain, bordered by the waters of the Narmada, and engirdled by the Satpura ranges to the north and the eastern and western *ghats* at its southern tip. Owing to its geographical position, in the heart of the Indian peninsula, the Deccan has remained vulnerable to changes, fostering many variegated cultures and religious identities and, since ancient times, borne witness to the rise and fall of many a mighty dynastic power –the Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Rastrakutas, Chalukyas and Yadavas, followed by the Islamic intrusion in the form of the Khalji invasion in the thirteenth century, throwing life out of gear, and the subsequent rise of the Hindu Vijaynagara kingdom and the Bahamani sultans of Gulbarga, the latter divided later on into five Deccani sultanates, the Barid Shahis of Bidar, Imad Shahis of Berar, Nizam Shahis of Ahmednagar, Adil Shahis of Bijapur and Qutb Shahis of Golconda. The Mughal invasion of the Deccan under Aurangzeb augured the end of these powers, the kingdoms falling one by one after putting on a fierce struggle, to Mughal suzerainty which in itself proved to be short lived, with the Mughal empire sliding into a state of decline post Aurangzeb's reign. In this political disarray of the post Mughal period was established the Nizam's rule in Hyderabad, while the western Deccan witnessed the Maratha powers consolidating their position, threatening Islamic rule in peninsular India and expanding northwards.

Vidarbha, corresponding to the northeastern Deccan, itself boasts of an illustrious and eventful past which may be traced back to the Vakatakas of the fifth century CE. In medieval times, the region was dominated by the Gonds, who were followed by the Maratha Bhosalas and the Nizams. By virtue of its centrality the region has always remained susceptible to socio political upheavals and cultural shifts. The ancient name of Vidarbha is Varata or Varatadesa, while in the Mughal times, as one of the four Deccani provinces under imperial rule, it was known as Berar. This region has been a

predominantly Hindu domain, though existence of both Buddhism and Jainism is furnished by numerous archaeological and epigraphic evidences.

The prevalence of Jainism in Vidarbha region may be traced back to the beginning of the Christian era; Acarya Vimalasuri, in his 'Paumcariyu', a first century Jain text, refers to one Ramgiri, which is believed to correspond to the present Ramgiri hill in Ramtek,¹ a prominent temple town in the Vidarbha area known for its Hindu as well as Jain shrines. This is by far the earliest available literary reference to Jainism prevalent in this region. Archeological discoveries have unraveled the existence of Jainism in Vidarbha as early as the ninth century, outstanding among them being the hoard of bronzes discovered at Rajnapur Khinkhini, in western Vidarbha, now housed in the Central museum Nagpur. (Pl.7) These include an image of Saraswati, the *yaksi* Ambika and a *yaksa* couple, all displaying fine workmanship, the female figures particularly, sport elaborate coiffures and delicate ornaments. Certain Deccani traits exist, such as the meandering floral design on the upper part of the stele.² The bronzes seem to be the work of the same hand and have close affinities with the highly ornate and the iconographically unique Jina image in bronze, datable to the tenth century, from the Kastha sangha temple at Karanja. Another image, the *chauvisi* of Rishabhanatha from eastern Khandesh, adjacent to Vidarbha, belongs to the same period. Increasing emphasis on temple rituals led to the casting of large and elaborate images, as is observed in the fourteenth century *Sarvatobhadrika* image from the Kastha sangha temple at Karanja, visualized as a shrine with four doorways facing cardinal directions, and enclosing the figures of the Jinas. Another bronze datable to the fifteenth century represents the *Samavasarana*, the assemblage of gods, human beings and animals congregated to hear the sermon of a Tirthankara, and is housed in the same temple. That Jainism was widespread by the end of the fourteenth century is reiterated by subsequent discoveries of scattered sites such as Padampur and Devtek in eastern Vidarbha, Keljhar, Paunar, Bazargaon, Ramtek and Achalpur in central Vidarbha, Satgaon, Mehkar and Rohinkhed on the western fringes and Muktagiri in the north west corner.

The finds at Padampur include images of Parsvanatha and Rishabha, the former seated in *padmasana*, with attendant figures of monks while the Devtek inscription is noteworthy as it expounds the path of *ahimsa* or non violence. In the temple ruins of Satgaon an image of Parsvanatha has been discovered, bearing an inscription mentioning the name of one Gamatayya, as the patron of the temple, the date being furnished as 1251 CE. A damaged stone image from Mehkar bears an inscription at its base, stating the date of installation as V S 1272(1215 CE) and the name of the donor as Padmavati, wife of Ashadhara.

From Paunar have been obtained some highly eroded stone images in *padmasana* and *kayotsarga* postures estimated to be as early as the seventh or eighth century CE, while a few sandstone images have been unearthed at Keljhar. An unusual relief sculpture from Keljhar is presently in Nagpur, seated in *padmasana* with hands folded in *anjali mudra*, a lotus between the fingers. His hair is tied in a bun and he sports a beard and moustache. The earlobes are long, reaching up to the shoulders, and he also wears a few pieces of jewelry. The carving suggests that the sculpture was a part of an architectural scheme, in all probability a temple. A tiny panel on the top of the figure's head bears a relief of an unidentified eroded Jina figure. Flywhisk bearers on either side and a figure of a devotee on the plinth complete the ensemble. On the obverse side of the image is an inscription in Devnagari script datable to the eleventh century, mentioning the name of the *sresthi*, or the devotee as the bronze caster by the name of Laksmāna. It is likely that the relief represented none else but Laksmāna himself³. Some more images from Keljhar, carved in yellowish sandstone, datable around the eleventh or twelfth century CE, support the prevalence of Jainism in Vidarbha. One of these, a headless image of Rishabha, carved in black quartz, bearing the *lanchhana* of the Tirthankara is preserved in a collection in Nagpur. Several stone inscriptions discovered at Bazargaon, though effaced beyond the state of deciphering are also believed to be datable to the eleventh century. The images from Ramtek, however appear to be of a later date.

The temple of Antariksa Parsvanatha at Sirpur near Akola, in central Vidarbha, also known as Pavali Digambara Jain temple, is one of the most significant of the Jain vestiges discovered in this region. A stone inscription *in situ*, mentions the name of its construction as 1277 CE, and the patron as one Jagsimha, though there is no clue to ascertain the identity of the ruler, or the dynasty to which he belonged. Cousens⁴ opined that the temple was built during the early Mohammedan invasions of the Deccan at least a hundred years before the date of the inscription and was abandoned lest the iconoclastic zeal of the invaders be excited and was subsequently resumed when their zeal had subsided into the tolerance of rulers at which time probably the image of Antariksa Parsvanatha was installed. The temple has a star shaped plan, with fine carvings of arabesques and Jina images on the exterior walls as well as entrance and the interior of the *mandapa*. Another Antariksa Parsvanatha temple, said to have been built by a *sravaka* named Onkardasji Sravaji, also exists in this tiny town, which was on the route connecting Aurangabad and Paithan in the Deccan to the Mughal headquarters at Delhi. The town of Achalpur or Ellichpur, the capital of the Imad Shahis, the Deccani sultans of Berar, was an important center of the Jains as was Muktagiri, nestled in the Satpura ranges, which boasts of an impressive number of shrines, housing stone and metal images of Tirthankaras, *yaksas* and *yaksis*. Most of the Jain vestiges in the Central Provinces belong to the Digambara Jains with its principal seat at Karanja.⁵ The Central Provinces, the erstwhile nomenclature of Vidarbha and adjoining Madhya Pradesh, as the archaeological and epigraphic finds suggest, appears to have had a tangible Jain presence ninth century onwards, though hardly any ancient vestiges of Jainism have been discovered at Karanja. It is likely that the town assumed significance as a nucleus of the Digambara Jain sect not earlier than the sixteenth century, after a seat of monastic power was established here.

TRACING TRAJECTORIES; DIGAMBARA SETTLEMENTS IN MALWA, DECCAN & KARNATAKA

The Digambara Jains of Vidarbha trace back their roots to western India, to Rajasthan. Subdivided into various clans and sub clans, Baghelwar, Setwal, Humad, Khandelwal, Padmavati Palliwar, Golapurva, Pancham, Neva, Agarwal and Parwar to name a few. The Digambaras migrated to the vast hinterland of the Deccan in large numbers about the beginning of the seventeenth century, though information passed on by the *jagas* or wandering minstrels highlights the event of the southern exodus of the Baghelwars, a prominent Digambara clan settled in Vidarbha, under the stewardship of Punaji Khatod, minister in the court of Rana Raj Singh of Chittor. He is said to have traveled southwards with one hundred and fifty Baghelwar families from their hometown Baghera, not far from Kota in *saka* 1241(1320 CE), the most likely cause being the invasion of Allauddin Khalji, though the *jagas* also put forward the argument that the Rana's attempt to confiscate the enormous wealth of Punaji was the most likely cause of the latter's departure to distant lands. It is generally accepted that the seventy feet tall column standing opposite the Digambara Jain temple in the fort of Chittorgarh in Mewar was erected due to the generous donations of Punaji and his father Jija.⁶ Many of Punaji's descendents settled down in various parts of the Deccan, including Vidarbha, with a considerable number making Karanja their home. Punaji's distinction as a patriarch may be ascertained by the fact that his name is inscribed on several images in temples in Karanja and the neighboring towns of Akola and Nandgaon. The inscriptions further reveal Punaji's munificent activities which include erecting one hundred and eight temples, establishing eighteen *shastra bhandaras*, and freeing one lakh captives, whose identities remain ambiguous. Leaving some room for eulogy, Punaji still appears to have been one of the first influential migrant Digambara Jains who prospered in his new homeland and contributed substantially for the consolidation of Jainism.

The presence of Digambara Jains in large numbers in the Deccan from the fifteenth century onwards may be inferred from inscriptions wherein *gotras* or

clan names associated with specific places are mentioned. They divulge that settlements such as Dharangaon and Deulgaon on the western fringes of Vidarbha, not far from Aurangabad region, Karanja in the heart of Vidarbha, and Sandhara in central India were centers of Jainism by the middle of the fifteenth century. Sixteenth and seventeenth century inscriptions related to clan names reveal some more sites, namely Anjangaon, Washim, Nagpur, and Muktagiri in the Vidarbha heartland, Jintur, Ter, Hingoli and Jalna in the adjoining Marathwada territory and Burhanpur on the northern border of Vidarbha. Significantly, inscriptions dated to the seventeenth century citing clan names linked with Sravana Belagola also exist, implying that families from Rajasthan had moved further south to this temple town, which had already gained credibility as a place of pilgrimage several centuries earlier. The town of Ramtek, not far from Nagpur, came into prominence much later, sometime in the eighteenth century.

The inflow of Jain families into the Deccan and further down south, into Karnataka, commencing from the time of Punaji, appears to have gathered momentum in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, coinciding with the Mughal conquests of Rajasthan. Multiple questions arise regarding what effected such a major migration of Jain families hundreds of miles away from their homeland. Was it merely the threat of Islamic invasions? Or did the lure of lucrative business opportunities in the face of a changing socio economic scenario coax them out of the confines of their homes? Was it driven by the need to seek refuge in centers that had gained credibility as strongholds of Jainism? It would be relevant at this juncture to trace the trajectories of the families migrating towards Deccan.

The route traversed by the Jains could be two pronged, one passing through the Malwa plateau, through Dhar and Burhanpur, forging a link with the northern boundary of Vidarbha; the other passing through Gujarat, through Surat, Jalna and Dharangaon ultimately connecting to western Vidarbha.

Central India, as early as the Gupta period had been home to Jainism, as antiquities from Udaigiri, Vidisa, Eran, and Gyaspur indicate. It was however

during the reign of the Paramara dynasty that the religion flourished in this territory in the true sense. The Paramara kings such as Bhoja, whose capital was at Ujjain maintained cordial relations with Jain monks and patronized temple building activity. It is believed that many of the Jain religious monuments from this period were ravaged owing to the invasion of Iluttmish in 1233 CE

One of the most revered sites in the Malwa region is Chulagiri, considered to be a *siddha ksetra* or a place associated with the *moksa* of a Tirthankara or their followers. The highest peak in the Satpura ranges, it is known for its colossal image of Tirthankara Rishabha, carved directly out of a monolithic rock and standing eighty four feet tall. Unlike the better known free standing statue of Gommatesvara at Sravana Belagola, the Bawangaji image of Chulagiri, as it is popularly referred to, is in high relief. The absence of a dedicatory inscription makes it difficult to assign its exact date but it is in most certainty earlier than the thirteenth century, for the image merits a mention in the writings of *bhattaraka* Madankirti who lived in the thirteenth century. There is also a mention of one Arkakirti as the patron of the image. The name does not merit a mention in the genealogy of the ruling house of that period and one may surmise that not a royal patron, but probably a *bhattaraka* with the name Arkakirti was the motivating force behind the making and installing of the image.

Epigraphs reveal the prevalence of Jainism in the Malwa region as early as the thirteenth century. During the reign of the Paramara dynasty, a monk named Ashadhara, camped at Nalkacchapur situated near Dhar, where he had a large number of followers. A Neminatha temple is located till this date at the site. Another inscription from Chulagiri, from a temple of Neminatha near the famed Bawangaji image, dated *samvat* 1380(1323 CE) cites the name of a member of the Baghelwar community as also of a *bhattaraka* Shubhakirti. Other sites in the vicinity include Maksi, Gandharvapuri, (Dewas) Badnawar, Talanpur, Pavagiri(Un), and Siddhwar Kuta. Additional inscriptions from the fourteenth century have been discovered from another central Indian site called Bhanpura in Mandsaur region while inscriptions from Garoth, Sandhara, Bhanpura, and

Ghatoli in the same area dated to the fifteenth century throw light on the flourishing of Jainism in Malwa region

The temple at Kaithuli in Mandsaur district is significant from two viewpoints- it bears a stone inscription giving details about the family of donors, who belonged to Dhanotya *gotra*, whose origins lie in Rajasthan. It is also an excellent representative of the sculptural art of the Paramara period. The inscription bears the date as *samvat* 1653 (1596 CE) and furnishes the details about the installation which was performed under Acarya Ratnakirti, the generous donors who funded the construction being one Hemaraja and his two sons. Interestingly, the names of the four *sutradharas*- Mota Shankar, Chacha, Ashram, and Hira also appear in the inscription. A manuscript from nearby Sonagiri, bearing the name of this very family indicates that their activities also included commissioning manuscripts.

The benevolent acts of *dana* by wealthy Digambara families encompassed other areas also, as the step well, popularly known as 'Pathsah ki bavdi', near Rampura, Mandsaur reveals. The inscription here traces the genealogy of this family, mentioning how in *samvat* 1664(1607 CE) Pathusah or Padartha, who found favor with king Durgabhanu of Rampura, built not just this *bavdi* but also a Jain temple whose consecration was performed with great pomp and show. Interestingly, the name Ramdas, son of one Kheta, is also mentioned as the chief architect of the *bavdi* in the inscription. Though no Jain family inhabits Rampura at present, the shrine in question still stands, bearing memories of another era.

The presence of Jain families in the central Indian plains may be further ascertained through several documentary evidences such as the sixteenth century inscriptions on *yantras* from Burhanpur and Singoli, Mandsaur and Garoth. En route from Khandwa to Burhanpur lies the fort of Asirgarh, which is said to have been the refuge of monk Brahma Jinadasa during the Mughal period. The city of Burhanpur, founded by Nasir Shah of the Faruki dynasty of Khandesh in about 1400 CE, was since the times of Akbar, a flourishing center of trade and commerce, principally based on its textile industry. Described in the Ain-i-

Akbari as ‘a city of many gardens ...and abounding with craftsmen’⁷, it obviously had gained considerable eminence by the latter half of the sixteenth century itself. Tavernier in his travelogues between 1641 and 1658 CE, while passing through Burhanpur on his journeys between Surat and Agra waxes eloquent about the thriving textile trade- ‘finely woven cottons and silks, *kinkhabs* and *mashrus*, as well as exquisitely painted textiles- scarves and coverlets’⁸. An East India Company agent in Surat, in a letter to London in 1605 CE, takes note that ‘the finest quilts and wall hangings are from Brampore, some eight days journey to this place’⁹. Considering the flourishing textile industry in the town, which opened up new avenues of business, families in search of brighter prospects could certainly have migrated from Gujarat and Rajasthan and paved their way further into the Deccan via this route. The tradition of *Picchwai* painting at Burhanpur is attributed to some enterprising Hindu families whose forefathers migrated to the Deccan seeking better business propositions. Extended Mughal campaigns in the Deccan confronting the Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda kingdoms and the subsequent influx of a mixed population of Rajput and Muslim grandees posted in the region witnessed the growth of Burhanpur as well as Aurangabad, the two strategic bases of the Mughals in the territory. Jain families, originally hailing from Rajasthan, and essentially traders by profession, may have likewise seized opportunities thrown open by the new political and economic scenario in the Deccan and traveled to Malwa, where the Jain presence was already quite tangible, some of them settling in the region, while others, from the passage of Burhanpur, gained entry into the vast Deccan hinterland, forming settlements at various places.

An alternative route originating from Rajasthan and north Gujarat via Surat may also have been in existence, leading to the Khandesh- Marathwada belt (Dharangaon, Jalna and Aurangabad) and finally to Vidarbha. (Deulgaon and Karanja). Surat, an eminent center for cotton textiles in the Mughal period, was located in southern Gujarat in the region called *latadesa* and the city probably attracted businessmen from neighboring Rajasthan as well as other parts of Gujarat. A large number of inscriptions from Karanja and the proximal

Digambara towns mention the port city of Surat¹⁰ reiterating its close connection with Vidarbha. It is significant to note that Karanja is better known as Karanja Lad, the suffix '*lad*', being the Prakrit version of *latadesa*. The name also has been affixed to some of the families of the Digambara community in the region, while seventeenth century Maratha records mention Karanja as '*ladache Karanje*'. Two similar inscriptions, one from a Pancameru image in Surat and the other from a *siddha yantra* in the Kastha sangha temple in Karanja, bearing the name of the Dhanaji family, belonging to the borkhandya gotra of the Baghelwar community, indicate that the family was based at both places and most certainly maintained close communication with one another. The cultural links with Gujarat were apparently strong as some literary works composed in Shiradgram in Marathwada in the Deccan admit to have been inspired by Gujarati *rasas* and similar works.¹¹

We also have a number of references to *bhattarakas* based in Vidarbha in various places such as Karanja, Nagpur and Anjangaon, whose roots may be traced back to Idar, Khambat and other places in Gujarat. There exist substantial epigraphic and literary evidences of an established network of Digambara Jain families all over Vidarbha and the adjoining Marathwada belt. Among the early inscriptions, the Dharangaon inscription is of significance¹². Dated 1423 CE, it refers to *bhattaraka* Narendrakirti and is in connection with the Baghelwar clan. Soon after the date of this inscription, one finds Narendrakirti's disciple Pratapkirti being honored by the Bahamani ruler Feroze Shah at Gulbarga. The name of this *bhattaraka* also features in many inscriptions from the south. Again one also comes across a reference of Pratapkirti's pupil Tribhuvankirti who had followers residing in Devgiri (Daulatabad). Another significant evidence is the inscription on the Neminatha image from Nemgiri, Jintur. Dated 1612 CE, it mentions the name of the donor as Vir Sanghvi and the authority in charge of the installation of the image as *bhattaraka* Kumudchandra, the donor and his family being carved in relief on the plinth of the image.

It is obvious that Digambara Jain families who had ventured out hundreds of miles away from their homeland from the fifteenth century onwards were well

settled in their new environs by the seventeenth century and were spread out in several pockets of the sprawling Deccan occupying towns such as Karanja, Achalpur, Anjangaon, Sirpur, Washim, Balapur, Nagpur, Ramtek and Bhadravati in western Vidarbha as well as numerous other places such as Jintur, Deulgaon, Jalna and Dharangaon in the adjacent Marathwada and Khandesh belt. The temple town of Muktagiri in the Satpura hills grew in stature as a principal place of pilgrimage and became a priority in the itinerary of the visiting *bhattarakas* as well as the laity. Patronage given to temple building activity saw shrines being erected even in relatively small and little known hamlets such as Jamod, Wadhona, Arvi and Bazargaon. By the end of the seventeenth century, the infiltration of Digambara families from Rajasthan was on the wane, those who had journeyed all the way about two centuries ago, by virtue of their enterprise and assiduity, established themselves as a business community of outstanding merit, and also amassed vast tracts of land and property. Even while mingling seamlessly with the warp and weft of the local culture of the region and acquainting themselves with the regional language, the Digambaras cautiously preserved their identity, clinging tenaciously to their customs and ritual practices. The contact with their brethren in the west remained unbroken, the inflow and the outflow of the Digambaras continued due to business transactions and frequent religious occasions such as pilgrimages and consecration ceremonies. At the same time, in the émigré's adaptation to their new surroundings, a certain localization of Jainism was inevitable. A number of folk songs and ditties called *ovis* from the Marathwada region allude to such place names such as Sirpur and Shirad. The latter is extolled as the *kasi* of the Jains, while Karanja is also bequeathed with similar attributes. A number of verses are in praise of Sirpur and its Pavalī temple and sing praises of the famed Anatariksa Parsvanatha image therein. The candid compositions in local dialect, meant to be sung on ceremonial occasions precipitate the adaptation of the Digambaras into their unfamiliar surroundings.

A large number of folk ditties are dedicated to Padmavati, Dharanendra, Indra, Balabhadra, and ksetrapala, implicating the growing status of the subsidiary

gods in the scheme of worship. The *yaksa* and *yaksi* of Tirthankara Parsvanatha particularly, more so the latter, were accorded an elevated position. The phenomenon is credited to the *bhattarakas* who in a position of wielding influence over the laity, focused on popularizing worship of gods and goddesses hitherto considered secondary. In the Digambara *matha* of Sravana Belagola is worshipped the image of Kusmandini, the *yaksi* of Tirthankara Neminatha, who is considered the patron goddess of the temple town.

In Vidarbha there exists a practice of '*Dirhadi puja*', a bi annual ritual in which the Digambaras congregate to invoke the blessings of the family goddess, whose image is ceremonially installed in the household shrine. The images are also brought out and worshipped on the occasion of the birth of a male child or a marriage and retained in the family shrine till the subsequent *Dirhadi* ritual. The earliest of such images is that of Padmavati, belonging to the Jogi family and is dated to 1480 CE. The importance of Padmavati can be ascertained by the impressive number of images installed in Digambara temples at various points of time. The image of Padmavati, in the Sengana temple at Nagpur is particularly popular among the locals. (Pl. 8) Till date there exists in Karanja, Nagpur and Anjangaon a practice of taking out a special procession in honor of this goddess in the month of *caitra*, the event being known as *vahana utsav*.

There are several references to devotees settled in the Deccan traveling to pilgrimage centers in the west, as well as southwards to Karnataka, these religious missions constituting the highlights of public life. An inscription from Sravana Belagola¹³ mentions the visit of a family from Karanja belonging to the Baghelwar clan. Many of the Digambara families in Vidarbha have surnames whose prefixes are the names of places in Karnataka- Mishrikot, Raibag, Johrapur, and Mudhol, to name a few. This implies that besides the members of their community in western India, the Digambaras also maintained close contact with their counterparts in Karnataka. The role of the *bhattarakas* in these activities was undoubtedly of primary importance. They not only initiated and encouraged pilgrimages, but often took with them a close coterie of pupils as well as members of the laity, with even women from certain well heeled families

coming forward to undertake such long and arduous journeys to distant places. This kind of close and unbroken contact with Rajasthan and Gujarat, in particular, is reflected in the religious architecture, sculpture, and painting of the Digambara Jains in Vidarbha region.

KARANJA, NERVE CENTER OF DIGAMBARA JAINS

The nerve center of the religious and economic activities of the Digambara Jains of Vidarbha was doubtlessly Karanja. Situated in western Vidarbha, this dusty town, with its rolling land masses of fertile soil, and known in medieval times as Karyaranjakpur, appears to have gained eminence as a thriving seat of Jainism sometime in the sixteenth century, although the mention of the place in connection with a *gotra* or name of a sub clan occurs even earlier in certain fifteenth century inscriptions. The inscriptions appear on three images, one discovered at Nandgaon, the other two at Akola, all now relocated at the Sengana temple in Karanja. The date furnished in the inscription is 1485 CE, the name of the *bhattacharya* overseeing the installations being Somasena, and the donor being Sah Lakshmana of the Khatod *gotra*. Interestingly, Lakshmana's ancestry may be traced back to the famed Jija and his son Punaji Khatod, the latter being credited with the building of the magnificent *kirtistambha* opposite the Digambara temple in Chittorgarh and also initiating the exodus of one hundred and fifty Digambara families from their hometowns to travel hundreds of miles south of Rajasthan.

Karanja's sanctified status must have been aggrandized after the establishment of a pontifical seat or *pitha* here by *bhattacharya* Dharmabhusana in 1518 CE. A single document¹⁴ preserved in the Balatkara temple in the town traces the generation of *bhattacharyas* of the Balatkara order of Malaykhed in Karnataka and yields information regarding Dharmabhusana who belonged to the aforesaid branch. An offshoot of the seat of Malaykhed was established at Karanja by Dharmabhusana on his pilgrimage to the nearby town of Muktagiri in Vidarbha in samvat 1575, while another seat was formed almost simultaneously at Latur in western Maharashtra. Thereafter, the significance of Karanja must have

increased, mobilizing more and more families to leave their home bases and relocating themselves in a territory which offered, in terms of trade and commerce, greener pastures.

By the end of the sixteenth century, Karanja, situated in the Berar province governed by the Mughal emperors, had already grown into a prosperous trade center, facilitated by its distinguished location on the Delhi- Jalna- Aurangabad route. The famous legend of Lekur Sangai, the enormously wealthy Digambara landowner of Karanja describes how a merchant, who arrived in the town with sacks full of precious musk or *kasturi* loaded on camel backs was asked by Sangai to deposit his merchandise into the plinth of the landowner's mansion under construction and was paid handsomely for the same. The dilapidated and ruined *kasturi haveli* stands to this day in the heart of the town, the residents claiming that the fragrance of the musk emanating even till now from the site. The authenticity of the event may be difficult to prove, but the migrant mercenaries and merchants had certainly given Karanja a distinct identity as a flourishing town, for history also reveals how the Maratha forces of Shivaji under the command of Prataprao, after plundering Bahadurpura near Burhanpur, the Mughal seat of Khandesh, fell unexpectedly on this affluent town and looted it completely. Four thousand oxen and donkeys were loaded with the booty, consisting of fine cloth, silver and gold to the value of a crore of rupees captured here.¹⁵

The hub of religious activity and ritualistic practices of the Digambara Jains of Karanja is concentrated in the three temples, namely the Balatkara temple, the Sengana temple and the Kastha sangha temple, though some families in addition have *griha caityalayas* or household shrines. As observed earlier, the Balatkara temple possesses a document pertaining to the founding of the *pitha* at Karanja from the parent seat of Malaykheda by *bhattaraka* Dharmabhusana in 1518 CE, though no information regarding the date of the construction of the temple is available. The temple belongs to the Balatkara gana, an order of the Digambaras whose origins may be traced back to the Saraswati *gaccha* of the Mulasangha, the ancient sect of the Digambaras, whose pontifical seats exist in the north as

well as several places in Karnataka. The nomenclature *balatkara* is associated with an interesting legend – during the debate between the Svetambaras and the Digambaras regarding the antiquity of the respective sects, the erudite monk Kundakundacarya also known as Padmanandi, performed an *atisaya* or miracle, forcing the image of Sarawati to speak and deliver judgment in favor of the Digambaras as the original sect, hence the term *balatkara*, or force.

The Sengana temple at Karanja belongs to the Sengana, a prominent Digambara order of the south which produced many men of learning such as Virasena, author of *Jayadhavala tika*, Jinasena, who composed the *Adipurana*, and his illustrious pupil Gunabhadra, author of the *Uttarpurana*. The date of establishment and early history of the Sengana order at Karanja is not known, though the temple appears to be as old as the Balatkara temple, and houses a number of images and documents which furnish a wealth of information regarding the presence of Digambara Jains in the region as also references to *bhattarakas* and their movements. The name of *bhattaraka* Somasena, belonging to this order, and the date 1485 CE, occurring in three separate inscriptions found elsewhere but now in the Sengana temple collection have been discussed earlier. It is observed that the *bhattarakas* wielded considerable power and clout and were instrumental in motivating the laity to perform installations and commission religious texts. It was again owing to their leadership that Sengana temples were established in large numbers in the vicinity of the principal seat at Karanja, which saw the dissemination of the Digambara community, forming a wider network in Vidarbha territory.

The third temple of the Digambaras goes by the name of Kasta sangha, after the name of the order which is believed to have been founded sometime after the sixth or seventh century as an off shoot of the main Ladbagaḍ gaccha. This temple is known for its extensively decorated wooden *mandapa* with reliefs of episodes from the lives of Tirthankaras. (Pl. 9) This modest sized temple is in possession of a large number of bronzes and sculptures dating as early as the tenth century preserved in its inner sanctum.

The Digambara Jains of Karanja belonging to different clans and sub clans, are attached to one or other of these three temples and perform their daily ritual of worship there. The distribution of the devotees is not based on the clan or the *gotra*, and perhaps the compartmentalization was initiated by the *bhattarakas* of the respective orders for reasons of solidarity of a particular group. Though there exist no regulations barring entries of laity from a different order into another, the age old practice of offering worship at the same shrine has been adhered to. The orders of the Sengana and Balatkara gana display a similar approach in ritual practices. However, the Kastha sangha order, considered the minority order among the three, differs marginally in its rituals.

Both the Balatkara temple and the Kastha sangha temple have Tirthankara Chandraprabha as its *mulanayaka* or principal image of worship, besides housing an array of secondary images, while the main image in the Sengana temple is that of Suparsvanatha. All the three temples lack a distinctive character identifying them with any specific style or region, lack *shikharas* and are garrisoned by high walls punctuated with small, insignificant looking entrances, seemingly to avoid unwarranted attention from intruders.

The Balatkara temple and the Sengana temple are renowned for their rich *shastra bhandaras* and possess between them about two thousand manuscripts in varied languages including Sanskrit, Prakrit, Kannada, Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi, written on both palm leaf and paper, the earliest dated to 1358 CE. The Balatkara temple is in possession of several palm leaf manuscripts with text in Kannada and which must have traveled all the way to Vidarbha during the frequent journeys of the *bhattarakas* to places in Karnataka. None of these bear illustrations. The same temple preserves in its collection some illustrated manuscripts- a dated manuscript of Yashodhara carita painted at Balapur near Karanja, an undated manuscript of the Santinatha carita, and an unfinished manuscript, with a few complete pages and the rest with linear drawings in cinnabar red which appears to have been abandoned owing to lack of patronage. Also in the temple repository are a set of loose folios on assorted themes

including the delineation of various categories of gods and goddesses and the *satlesyas*.

The *shastra bhandara* of the Sengana temple has in its collection a handful of diverse manuscripts including a dated Yashodhara carita whose colophon mentions it to have been executed at Idar. An unsophisticated manuscript of Sugandhadasami katha is also in the temple collection. The Sengana temple is also in proud possession of the finely painted *pancakalyanaka* scroll depicting the key events of the life of the first Tirthankara Rishabhanatha. In addition, the temple possesses a fragmented Svetambara manuscript of the Kalpasutra and an unusual manuscript delineating various characters from Trisastisalakpurusa carita and Vasudevahindi., both of which are painted in the Western Indian idiom.

The Sengana temple at Nagpur preserves in its collection a competently executed manuscript of the Sugandhadasami katha, while an illustrated Adityavara vrata katha manuscript presently in a private collection in Nagpur, is significant, despite its crude workmanship. Besides these the temple repositories in Karanja, Nagpur and Anjangaon also preserve a number of cosmological charts, ritual diagrams and some late representations of *tirthas* or places of pilgrimage. Many Digamabara manuscripts such as another illustrated copy of Sugandhadasami katha, and illuminated manuscripts of Adityavara vrata katha, Ananta vrata katha, Jivandhara purana and Candana malaygiri katha are at present untraceable. It is fairly certain that a significant number of manuscripts executed in the Vidarbha area have been lost or have perished due to ravages of time. Art activity, albeit involving itinerant painters and sculptors, then appears to have been carried on intermittently in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries in Vidarbha, particularly in Karanja, which had become the nucleus of the religious life of the Digambara Jains by the mid seventeenth century.

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