

Chapter - II

**THE BIRTH OF THE SANGHAS,
THE BHATTARAKA TRADITION &
ITS CONTRIBUTION TO JAIN ART**

EARLY HISTORY OF JAIN MONACHISM

Jainism underwent a series of changes and modifications after the death of Mahavira. For a few centuries after the *nirvana* of Mahavira, the monks led an itinerant life, they lived in forests or were *vanavasis*. With the passage of time and turn of events such as the notorious Magadha famine, crucial changes were effected, when after the Council of monks at Pataliputra, a group of dissenting monks with grave differences of opinion regarding the compilation of Mahavira's teachings as well as religious practices, broke away, declaring themselves as the *mulasangha* to form the Digambara sect. A more concrete breach occurred at the Council of Vallabhi in the sixth century CE, wherein the systematic efforts of the Svetambara monks resulted in an organized compilation of Jain canons and transcription of the sacred texts. The Digambara monks too under the stewardship of Kundakundacarya and Dharasena, had begun compiling their own canonical works as early as the first century CE. By the fourth- fifth century, the peripatetic life of the monks changed as some of them began to adopt *caityas* as dwelling places, this phenomenon being observed both among the Digambaras and the Svetambaras. The Svetambaras distinguished the forest dwelling monks from those residing in *caityas* as *vanavasi* and *caityavasi* respectively, while the Digambaras referred to the former as those belonging to the *mulasangha* and the latter to the *dravida sangha*¹. In the forthcoming centuries the Digambara and Svetambara sects witnessed a further fragmentation into sub sects and sub divisions, the Digambaras branching into *sanghas* such as the Mulasangha, Nandisangha, Sensangha, Dravida sangha, and Yapaniya sangha, while the Svetambaras were divided into *gacchas*, Upadesagaccha, Khartar gaccha, Tapagaccha, Parsvanatha gaccha, Anchal gaccha and several more. The subsequent expansion and consolidation of both sects was augmented by the generous patronage of rulers of the Pallava, Kadamba, Ganga, and Rastrakuta dynasties and led to temple building activities and establishment of monasteries.

It is around the ninth century that certain definitive changes are discerned in monastic practices and the emergence of a new type of monachism is observed. From the times of Acarya Gunabhadra, monks begun showing greater leanings towards worldly comfort which the Acarya is said to have opposed.² Islamic invasions threatened the very existence of the Jain community, which suffered serious setbacks. Royal patronage waned and the Jains were marginalized to an insignificant number in society, essentially comprising of the merchant class. The terror of Muslim aggressors, loss of contact with co religionists, widespread events of forced conversions and the destruction and demolition under the Muslims had a weakening effect on the church organization of the Jains, the disintegration of the church followed and small groups called *mandalas* under the authority of *mandalacaryas*, or *bhattarakas* were formed.³ The monk's role was redefined when around the ninth century, the rigid monastic system gave way to a relatively liberal and malleable configuration of these *mandalas* which themselves underwent through a process of modification and restructuring with the passage of time.

By the twelfth century, the earlier austere life style of the *bhattarakas* gave way to one of luxury, self indulgence and ostentatious practices, as it also brought with it the concept of specific moorings and stability. The Svetambaras had relaxed the rigid rules of monastic life earlier and even in the absence of a central pontifical authority, established a network of *gacchas* led by monks, the spiritual torch bearers, who received unconditional and overwhelming support of the ministers, merchants and the *sravakas* and *sravikas* or laymen and laywomen, respectively.

The Digambaras followed closely on the heels of the Svetambaras, the most obvious outward change appeared in the thirteenth century when, at Mandapdurga, Acarya Vasantkirti advocated the practice of donning garments for the monks, a sacrilegious concept for a sect which set a premium on nudity. Other material changes deviated the monks further and further from traditional monachism. In the Shatapadi, a thirteenth century text, Mahendrasuri mentions the Digambara monks resorting to a practice of wearing a *yogapatta* or silk

garment to conceal their nudity, which was later modified into the robe. Srutasagara, in Tatvarthasutra, also takes note of the fact that in winter the monks were permitted to wear woolen clothing. Thus it appears that the actual practice of nudity was on the wane, it remained nothing but a ritual to be practiced on select ceremonial occasions, particularly during the ordainment of the *bhattaraka*, as also when the pontifical head begun the countdown of the last days of his mortal life. Otherwise, the monks led a life of luxury befitting royalty, with every possible trapping of physical comfort such as rich garments, mattresses, bolsters, umbrellas, canopies, and palanquins, and referred to themselves as *rajgurus*. Elaborate ceremonies on the occasions of the *bhattarakas'* ordainment became common. Their basic possessions, the *kamandalu* or water container, as well as the handle of the broom or *picchi* they carried, came to be fashioned out of precious metals like gold or silver. The feathers employed for the broom included those of the peacock, swan and even vulture.

As their powers increased, the *bhattarakas* turned despotic and the sense of unity and integrity was lost. This tended to introduce regional changes in monastic practices and various discrepancies crept into it.⁴ The entry of all classes of people into the monastic fold had its implications on monastic life. Initially, the *bhattarakas* or *mandalacaryas* served the cause of Jainism with well by diffusing Jain tenets by conversion of people from all classes of society. These converts were put into various folds according to their different localities and occupations. Consequently the oneness of the *sangha* disappeared and small units or *upajatis* were born, each of which was attached to a particular sect of *bhattarakas* and had its own customs and manners.

Political and social circumstances necessitated the constituting of pontifical seats of power known as *pithas* which were formed to protect the religious interests of the dwindling Jain community. Though the monastic tradition of the Svetambaras and Digambaras display many parallels, the nomenclature '*bhattaraka*' appears to have assumed greater significance among the Digambara community, who in comparison to the more affluent Svetambaras,

concentrated in western India, were scattered all over the Indian peninsula, with settlements in Rajasthan, Gujarat, north and central India, Deccan and Karnataka, and were considerably more stringent in their religious practices. Twenty pontifical seats of power among the Digambara sect were in existence of which the *pithas* of Idar, Sojitra and Surat in Gujarat, Jaipur and Nagaur in Rajasthan, Delhi and Gwalior in the northern belt, Dhar and Sagwara in the Malwa region, Karanja, Latur and Kolhapur in the Deccan, and Malaykhed, Mudbidri, Humbach, Karakal and Sravana Belagola in Karnataka were significant.

With the systemization of monastic system into pontifical seats, the new establishments were elevated to a greater stature, the *bhattarakas* wielding their newly acquired authority with a single minded determination and as sense of purpose. They symbolized the new power centers, the theological elite, around which the entire religious system of the Jain community came to revolve

AUTHORITY, ERUDITION AND SOCIO RELIGIOUS HEGEMONY: THE BHATTARAKAS

The *bhattarakas* became the religious as well as administrative heads of the *pithas* and were entrusted with multiple responsibilities such as handling of generous endowments made by the laity for building temples and monasteries, as also land grants made for this purpose. Numerous epigraphic records of such land donations or *bhumidana* exist, for instance the Markara copper plate⁵ which describe show Acarya Ravindrakirti on receiving a land donation, built a temple at Aihole in *saka* 634 (712 CE). Vast tracts of lands acquired in the guise of donations was also utilized for agricultural purposes. The significant land grants include those of the Chalukya king Tribhuvanmalla, king Trailokyamalla and queen Ketala devi. As custodians of the temples, they were in charge of its maintenance, the images enshrined in them and all other paraphernalia connected with temple rituals. They were now in a position where constant interaction with the laity was easily possible, wherein the laity could be effectively channelized into beneficial activities. The *bhattarakas*' duties were

three pronged- copying and commissioning of manuscripts, installation and consecration of images in the temples, and undertaking pilgrimages to far flung destinations considered significant as *tirtha ksetras*. All these activities entailed mass participation by the laymen , and went a long way in lending an organized structure to Jain worship in centers established in relatively alien surroundings and contributed in large measures in enhancing the status and the credibility of the reigning *bhattaraka*, who worked diligently for the growth and welfare of his individual *putha*

Enriching the *shastra bhandaras* of the temples with donations of manuscripts for the purpose of spiritual enlightenment and preservation of canonical literature by the laity became a regular feature for which the *bhattarakas* contributed zealously. *Shastra dana* was extolled as an act of religious merit with verses like ‘ the one who writes and makes the other write, the one who hears and makes the other hear, the one who gives and makes the other give, is noble and a sharer of *punya*’⁶ Thus *shastra dana* or commissioning, copying and donating of religious manuscripts to temple repositories came to symbolize an act of piety. The *bhattarakas* took considerable efforts to furnish the *shastra bhandaras* of the temples with manuscripts on subjects ranging from philosophy to mythology. The frenzied collection drive witnessed the accumulation of hundreds of manuscripts in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Kannada, Gujarati and Marathi in the *shastra bhandaras* of Karanja, accreted from every possible source. The oldest of these, a palm leaf manuscript of the Upasakacara is dated 1359 CE As manuscripts were collected arbitrarily, the presence of some Svetambara manuscripts including an illustrated Kalpasutra scarcely comes as a surprise.

Many of the *bhattarakas* were erudite scholars and dedicated personalities who balanced the responsibilities of heading an establishment with a greater propensity for acquiring knowledge. Many of them have authored books, their literary output mainly comprising of writing abridged versions of voluminous canonical texts and their commentaries or preparing translations of ancient literature. The *puranas*, *kathas* and compendiums on rituals made a bulk of the written manuscripts Jinasena’s Harivansapurana and Mahapurana, and

Ravisena's Padmapurana were the chief sources from which *bhattaraka* literature was derived . The pontiff of the Mathur gaccha in north India, Amarkirti wrote several books, including Neminatha carita in *samvat* 1244(1187 CE) and Yashodhara carita, and Mahaviracarita in *samvat* 1247(1190 CE), while Yashakirti of the same seat wrote Pandavapurana. In *samvat* 1656 (1599 CE) bhattaraka Somasena wrote Ramapurana based on the Padmapurana, while the Sanskrit texts of Sabdaratnapradipa dated *samvat* 1666(1609 CE) and Traivarnikasara of *samvat* 1667 (1610 CE) also bears the same *bhattaraka*'s name. Another *bhattaraka* Narendrasena, when in Surat, wrote a copy of Yasodhara carita in *samvat* 1790(1643 CE) ,a Parsvanatha puja and a Rishabha palana. Another copy of Parsvanatha puja written by *bhattaraka* Kumudchandra of Karanja, furnishes information regarding the pontifical seat of Malaykheda, an important base of the Dīgambaras in the Deccan. Historical records reveal that bhattarakas from various seats including Idar, Delhi, and Surat authored books- Prabhachandra of the Delhi – Jaipur seat wrote Yashodhara carita in Todagarh in *samvat* 1615(1552 CE), while Shubhachandra of the Idar branch was prolific writer of several books and critiques, including a manuscript of Pandavapurana, written at Sagwara. *Bhattaraka* from the Surat seat Laksmichandra is credited with the authorship of Nagakumaracarita and Sudarshancarita, both being written in the town of Ghogha. Vadichandra, a *bhattaraka* of the same branch, wrote Parsvapurana and Sripala akhyana, as also a copy of Yashodhara carita in Ankleswar and Parsvanatha chhanda in Mahua. Bhattaraka Mallibhusana of the Latur seat wrote in *saka* 1640(1718 CE) a copy of the Padmavati sahsranama at Karanja. It is evident from these that literary activity flourished, albeit catering mostly to populist taste with a predilection for rituals flourished in nearly all the pontifical seats Among the literature related to rituals, *astaka*, *stotra*, *jayamala*, and *arati* were the common forms connected largely to image and *yantra* worship, which the *bhattarakas* oversaw with immense interest. The verses were composed employing simple and easily comprehensible lyrics as they were meant for congregational singing and chanting in the temples on select occasions, many of them being specially

sung during the ten days of the *paryusana parva* of the Jain calendar. To be accessible to the masses, texts were penned in the regional languages such as Hindi, Apabhramsa, Gujarati, Rajasthani and Marathi, besides Sanskrit and Prakrit.

The disciples of the *bhattarakas* were also men of learning and wrote extensively, producing literature catering to the same masses. Jinasagara, the disciple of *bhattaraka* Devendrakirti of the Balatkara order of Karanja, emerges as a prolific writer from inscriptional evidences and is credited with numerous writings such as the Adityavara vrata katha, Jinakatha, Padmavati katha, Lavanankusa katha, Ananta katha, Sugandhadasami katha and Jivandharapurana. His writings were mostly carried out in the Digambara settlements of Shiradgram and Karanja.

Inscriptions reveal a great deal about one Pandit Medhavi, a promising disciple of *bhattaraka* Jinachandra of the Delhi-Jaipur seat, who recorded the *shastra dana* performed by the two sons of a lay worshipper Sah Parsva in *samvat* 1576(1519 CE) who on the occasion of Sruta pancami, gifted a copy of the Mulacara to one Brahma Narsingha. From the Ater seat we have Visvabhusana's disciple Pandit Hemaraja writing a copy of the Sugandhadasami katha at Gaheli nagar. In the Idar branch, *bhattaraka* Bhuvankirti's pupil Gunadasa wrote Srenika carita in Marathi. Legends also abound regarding certain pupils with exceptional talent, like Srutasagara suri, disciple of *bhattaraka* Vidyanandi of the Surat seat, who besides authoring a number of books, displayed his superiority of knowledge in a debate with Nilkantha Bhatt and ninety other scholars. *Bhattaraka* Meruchandra's associate Jayasagara wrote Sitaharana and Aniruddhaharana in Surat and Sagaracarita in Ghogha. Pandit Raidhu, the disciple of *bhattaraka* Yasakirti of the Mathur gaccha was another important writer.

Pandit Gangadasa, a disciple of *bhattaraka* Dharmachandra of the Karanja seat wrote Srutaskanda katha in *samvat* 1734 (1677 CE) and in *saka* 1615(1693 CE) wrote Adityavara vrata katha. Among the other scholars of the Deccan are Arjunsuta, disciple of *bhattaraka* Narendrasena who wrote Kailasa chhappaya at

Deulgaon, a town on the fringe of Vidarbha. This work describes his teacher's pilgrimage to Champaner. *Bhattaraka* Santisena's female disciple Sikharsri's pupil Vanarasidasa wrote in *samvat* 1826 (1769 CE) a copy of Harivansarasa. Another of Santisena's disciples Tanu supplies information regarding the *bhattaraka's* parentage and mentions him having bathed at sea and visiting the shrine of Bīdar. Such stray bits of information is significant from the point of view of reiterating the *bhattarakas'* mobility from one place to another on varied occasions such as pilgrimages or consecration ceremonies.

There were also occasions when manuscripts copied by devout followers were gifted to the *bhattarakas* and other members of the Jain clergy. An inscription mentions the name of one Chavarya Manik, who presented a copy of Samavasarana penned by Ratnakara to *bhattaraka* Jinasena of the Karanja seat in *saka* 1581 (1659 CE). At times a *bhattaraka* on a visit to another destination would be revered with the offering of a manuscript, as in the case of Devendrakīrti, who, during his halt at Surat en route to Girnar, was presented with a copy of Nagakumaracarita by a *sravaka* or layman called Ananda.⁷ Sometimes the female monks would make such donations, as in the case of Dhanasri, who offered a book to Pandit Medhavi, in *samvat* 1553 (1497 CE) at Hissar. At times the recipient's status remained ambiguous, for instance in the times of *bhattaraka* Silabhusana of the Ater seat, an Alwar resident Garibadasa wrote a copy of Yashodhara carita for a person called Hirabai in *samvat* 1621 (1678 CE). Women undertaking the task of writing was again not an unusual phenomenon, a manuscript of the Pancameru puja from the *shastra bhandara* at Anjangaon in Vidarbha mentions, in the colophon, the name of one Sakubai, and emphasizes the fact that it was indeed written by her for the purpose of *dharma karya*.⁸ With everyone in the religious hierarchy, from the *bhattaraka* to the *sravaka* thus indulging in either commissioning or copying of manuscripts, it is of little surprise that such an overwhelming number of manuscripts were accumulated in the temple repositories.

Installations of images of Tirthankaras and goddesses like Padmavati in temples and shrines, accompanied by elaborate consecration ceremonies known as *murti*

pratistha appears to have been one of the prime duties of the *bhattarakas*, as the references to frequent installation ceremonies in the span of a *bhattaraka*'s tenure reveal. These men were also responsible for instituting *yantras* or cosmological representations. Installation of idols of Adinatha, Parsvanatha, Mahavira, and others were in all possibility mega events, as the inscriptions suggest, entailing a round of celebrations and festivities, which called for participation from the authoritarians as well as the laity. No image was deemed fit for public worship till it underwent ritual consecration and images that were to be installed in smaller shrines were put through the rigors of the ritual and then taken away to their respective permanent abodes. A grand consecration ceremony of more than a thousand images was performed under the stewardship of *bhattaraka* Jinachandra of the *pitha* of Delhi- Jaipur in the town of Mudasa, with donations by a merchant named Jivaraj Papdiwal in *samvat* 1548(1492 CE) with the images being installed in Digambara temples in all corners of the country. Another early reference to installing idols is that of *bhattaraka* Somasena, who's credited with the installation and consecration of Parsvanatha and Sambhavanatha images in *saka* 1577(1655 CE), followed by one of Padmavati in *saka* 1580(1658 CE) at Karanja and another installation at Jaligram in *saka* 1607(1685 CE). These events certainly appear to be the high points of a *bhattaraka*'s life and witnessed gatherings of hundreds of lay worshippers.

One such mega event took place at Chandkheri, a dusty little hamlet close to Jhalawar, in the Kota region in Rajasthan. The installation of a large image of Adinatha was performed by a devotee by the name of Kisandasa, resident of Sangod, and presided over by *bhattaraka* Jagatkirti, in the presence of his close disciples. The list of invitations sent out for the occasion included, besides people from several towns in Rajasthan, places as distant as Ahmedabad, Ujjain, Agra, Burhanpur, and Karanja.⁹ The installation ceremonies were evidently prestigious events in the *bhattaraka*'s itinerary and helped elevate his own position among his followers, and to an extent earn recognition among devotees residing in other settlements. It is of little wonder then that every *bhattaraka*

performed at least one such long drawn ceremony in his tenure, though there are instances of the heads performing as many as five to six such ceremonies during their headship, at times at different places. Images of Adinatha, Parsvanatha, Neminatha, Chauvisi and Padmavati feature prominently among the installations among the Dīgambara Jains, Mahavira images appear to be rare. Besides the idols, a large number of *yantras* such as the *jnana yantra*, *sodasa karana yanta*, and *dasalaksana yantra* were also ceremonially installed by the *bhattarakas* on various occasions.

In the socio religious scheme of medieval Jains, *yatras* or pilgrimages were an all important issue and it is again the *bhattarakas* who emerge as the perpetuators and organizers of these extensive and extended tours to pilgrimage places. Pilgrimage sites included the *siddha ksetras* or the places where the Tirthankaras or monks attained *moksa*, and the *atisaya ksetras* or sites associated with miraculous events, or considered significant owing to their association with a particular person or image. Jain literature abounds with the names of about seventy eight *siddha ksetras* and *atisaya ksetras*. In a few cases, the *bhattarakas* were the administrative heads of pilgrimage centers, the Mahavirji *ksetra* was run by the *bhattarakas* of the Jaipur seat, as was the site of Songiri, while the pontiff of the Kastha sangha looked after the administration of Kesariyaji.

Yatras were a crucial part of a *bhattaraka's* itinerary, and a good part of his tenure was spent in traveling far and wide to pilgrimage centers, accompanied by an entourage of disciples as well as family members of the Jain laity. In the west, Girnar and Satrunjaya were the most sought after of the pilgrimage places, attracting the maximum number of devotees, despite the fact that no *bhattaraka* seat actually came into existence at these sites. In the east, Sammedasikhara, Pavapur, Champaner and Prayag were well known, though no pontifical seat existed here either. In southern territory, Sravana Belagola was doubtlessly the most revered and frequented site, while other places of significance included Mangitungi and Gajapantha in western Deccan, Songiri and Chulagiri in central India, Kesariyaji in Rajasthan and Manikyaswami in the Hyderabad region.

The journeys to these pilgrimage sites were long and arduous, entailing the authoritarians to be away from their *pithas* for several months or even a couple of years. *Bhattarakas* belonging to the different seats in the Deccan mostly traveled westwards, an elaborate inscription¹⁰ in connection with a pilgrimage being dated *saka* 1643(1721 CE). It mentions how *bhattaraka* Devendrakirti, along with some members of the Baghelwar clan of Karanja, journeyed to Sravana Belagola. The *bhattaraka* next paid obeisance to the Gajapatha mountain near Trimbakgram, close to Nasik in *saka* 1650(1728 CE), advancing eleven days later, to the Mangitungi mountain, accompanied, on the latter occasion Devendrakirti's disciples Jinasagara, Ratnasagara, Rupaji, Virji and others also accompanying him. Next, en route to Girnar, *bhattaraka* Devendrakirti halted at Surat. In *saka* 1651(1729 CE) he visited Kesariyaji, paying visits to Taranga and Kotshila the same year and culminating the tour with Girnarji and Satrunjaya hill. As the inscription indicates, a substantial amount of time and resources were utilized for travel and cities such as Surat were important transit points which connected the central Indian and eastern Indian pilgrimage sites with those of the western region, mostly of Gujarat, where the maximum number of sites were concentrated. There are also instances of *bhattarakas* within the Deccan visiting each other's seats, as also the heads performing elaborate rituals such as the *mahamastakabhiseka* of the legendary Bahubali in Sravana Belagola, as did *bhattaraka* Laksmisena of Kolhapur, in 1887 CE.

On rare occasions the clergy were accompanied by royalty, as in the case of Puttalika, daughter of king Bhanubhupati of Iladurga, who traveled to Gajapatha and Mangitungi with Srutasagara suri, the disciple of *bhattaraka* Mallibhusana of the seat of Surat. Sometimes the pontiffs also initiated major tasks such as erection of temples at holy sites- an inscription reveals how *bhattaraka* Padmanandi in *samvat* 1686(1629 CE) in the reign of Shahjahan, built a Santinatha temple atop the Satrunjaya hill.

These frequent visits offered the pontiffs ample opportunity to build up social contact and generate goodwill among their counterparts in other centers.

Sometimes the *bhattarakas* found special favor from the ruling houses of the places they visited, several inscriptions mention Hindu as well as Muslim rulers honoring them. For instance, *bhattaraka* Vishalakirti of the Karanja seat was honored in the courts of Sultan Sikander of the Lodi dynasty of Delhi, the Vijaynagara king Virupaksa and king Devappa of Araganagar. Another *bhattaraka* of the Balatkara order, by the name of Prabhachandra is said to have been in favorable books of Muhammad Shah of Delhi.

THE PITHAS AND THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIP

The *bhattaraka* tradition was not bound by a rigid caste based hierarchy, as the epigraphs interestingly reveal. Though most of the pontifical heads were selected from the numerous clans and sub clans of the Digambara Jains such as Humbada, Baghelwar, Agarwal , Gangawal and others, there are references to even Brahmins being instituted to the pontifical seats. Some of the inscriptions make direct references to these coveted positions, for instance, *bhattaraka* Prabhachandra, who took over the seat of Delhi in *samvat* 1310(1253 CE) belonged to the Brahmin caste, as did his immediate successor, Padmanandi. Several inscriptions dwell on other details such as *gotra* and place of origin. The reigning *bhattaraka* had in his lifetime the powers of selecting his successor from the immediate coterie of learned disciples, and rarely would an occasion arise when the position would remain vacant due to the *bhattaraka*'s untimely demise or the inability of appointment for want of a person with suitable candidature. The Karanja seat for instance remained unoccupied for thirteen years after the passing away of *bhattaraka* Laksmisena in *samvat* 1922(1865 CE) after which a youth named Chandrayya from Mudbidri, a major center of the Digambaras down south, was ordained . Barely twenty eight years of age, but a man of great erudition, he was crowned *bhattaraka* and conferred with a new name, Virasena. He remained on the seat till the age of sixty and installed a number of images, chiefly in Nagpur, Kalmeswar, Pimpri and Bhatkuli.¹¹

The pontifical authorities traveled across the length and breadth of the country, not only visiting pilgrimage sites but also keeping in touch with their

counterparts located in far flung places. In the south , Mudbidri, Sravana Belagola, Karakal and Humbach were significant. Although no *bhattaraka pitha* existed in the region, the eastern sites of Samedasikhara, Pavapuri, Champapuri and Prayag were prominent. However there is some evidence of a seat of the Kastha sangha order at Arrah in Bihar.

In the sprawling Deccan, Malaykheda, located on the periphery of Karnataka and Maharashtra, was considered an important seat of the Balatkara order, two offshoots of which were established at Latur and Karanja respectively. Two *bhattarakas* Laksmisena and Virasena claimed the stake to the seat of the Sengana order in Kolhapur. Riddhipur, Balapur, Sirpur, Ramtek, Amravati, Asegaon, Achalpur and Nagpur in Vidarbha and Jintur, Nanded, Devgiri, Jalna, Paithan and Shirad in the adjoining Marathwada belt were the significant centers of Jainism with a sizeable number of Digambara Jain population. In Gujarat, Surat was a prominent center of the Balatkara order while the town of Sojitra was a major place of the Nanditata gaccha. *Bhattarakas* were also influential in the coastal areas such as Navsari, Bharuch, Khambhat, Jambusar and Ghogha. In north Gujarat, the seat of Idar held great significance, while in Saurashtra, though the sites of Girnar and Satrunjaya were frequented by the pontiffs and pilgrims, no *bhattaraka* seat was ever established there.

Dhar in Malwa was one of the strongholds of Jainism, with the seats of Sagwara and Ater having been established in the region later, a branch of the former being founded as far as Idar. The heads of these seats wielded influence over the Digambara community of Dungarpur, Indore, Mahua and other towns in the vicinity. The seats of the Mathur gaccha and Balatkara gana further north, in Gwalior and Songiri, exercised hold over place such as Devgarh and Lalitpur.

In Rajasthan, seats of the Balatkara order were established at Nagaur, Jaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhanpur and Jerhat, while an important seat of the Mathur gaccha was in existence in Hissar. Delhi on the other hand, was associated with several *bhattaraka* orders at various points of time.

The relationship between the various *pithas* depended upon the individual attitudes of the pontifical heads, though by and large, an air of cordiality and

delitescence was maintained. Relationships varied from person to person, the *bhattarakas* of the Senagana, Acarya Virasena and Jinasena, by virtue of their intellectual capabilities, were honored by the head of another order, the Punnat gaccha. There were occasions when authoritarians of different orders participated jointly in ceremonies, for instance, *bhattaraka* Virasena of the Sengana and Somakirti of the Nanditata gaccha shared the honors in an installation ceremony. The last *bhattaraka* belonging to the Sengana order of Karanja, Virasena was ordained by Devendrakirti of the Balatkara gana of the same town. The relationship between both seats remained cordial and both Devendrakirti and his successor Ratnakirti maintained a pleasant relationship with Virasena. Again, as Latur and Karanja belonged to the same parent seat of Malaykheda, they maintained a peaceful association, the exceptions being *bhattarakas* Nagendrakirti of Latur and Devendrakirti of Karanja. The *bhattarakas* of the Delhi *pitha* wielded a strong influence in a vast area which included the seats of *bhattaraka* Padmanandi of Surat, *bhattaraka* Dnyanabhusana of Idar, and the heads of the seats of Ater and Nagaur, *bhattaraka* Simhakirti and Ratnakirti respectively.

Bhattaraka Sakalakirti of Idar was responsible for elevating three monks, Dnyanakirti, Dharmakirti and Bhuvanakirti to the position of *bhattarakaship*. Sakalakirti's well known disciple Brahma Jinadasa had many followers, one of them Brahma Santidasa, being closely associated with the Surat order which was then under *bhattaraka* Laksmichandra. Sakalakirti was himself regarded in high esteem by virtue of his erudite scholarship. Idar's *bhattaraka* Shubhachandra has mentioned the names of *bhattarakas* Laksmichandra and Virachandra of Surat. Likewise, the pontiff Simhanandi of Bhanpur had been honorably mentioned by Srutasagara and Brahma Nemidatta of the Surat seat, while *bhattaraka* Vidyanandi of Surat had presided over the image installations of other orders such as the Kastha sangha. Two *bhattarakas* of Karanja, Virasena and Vishalakirti, trace back their ties to Surat, both being the disciples of Laksmichandra, who in turn belonged to the fold of the famed monk Srutasagar suri of Surat.

Rarely, the relationships were lukewarm, and sometimes even tense. Pandit Rajmalla was associated with both the offshoots of the Mathur gaccha, though the orders in themselves shared cold vibes. There are also instances of the pontiffs removing followers from a fold due to ideological differences, which was also the prime cause of the strained relations between some orders

There are extremely few references to Jain rulers from the medieval period, with the exception of kings such as Amoghvarsa of the Rashtrakuta dynasty, who was a devout Jain. The minister of Raoji Bhanji of Idar was also a Jain, his family members having undertaken a pilgrimage to Gajapatha and Mangitungi with Srutasagara suri. Likewise, Iruga Dandanayaka, the minister of the Vijayanagara king was a follower of Jainism and is said to have erected a temple of Kuntunatha at the behest of *bhattaraka* Dharmabhusana. Many ministers of Rajput rulers were also devout Jains and several of them who did not follow the faith themselves, maintained a liberal attitude towards Jainism, and on many occasions, honored the *bhattarakas*. For instance, *bhattaraka* Santisena of the Lalbagad gaccha was honored by king Bhoja, the Sultan of Malwa, Gyasuddin, felicitated *bhattaraka* Mallibhusana of the Surat seat, while another pontiff from Surat Laksmichandra and *bhattaraka* Dnyanabhusana of Idar were honored by Devraya, Malliraya, Bhairanvaraya and other local rulers of Karnataka. This also reiterates the fact that the *bhattarakas* were often traversing the length and breadth of the country. In Karnataka, the activities of the Jain *matha* run by the *bhattarakas* appears to have received a new impetus from the tenth century, when Chamundaraya, the minister of the Ganga kings, commissioned the colossal Gommatesvara statue, and built a temple on a hill at Sravana Belagola. Several indirect references to rulers and sovereigns are available in epigraphs. The Tomaras of Gwalior, Viramdeva, Kirti Singh and Mansingh feature in the inscriptions of the *bhattarakas* of the Mathur gaccha. Mughal rulers from Babar to Mohammad Shah are mentioned in several inscriptions. It is believed that even in the troubled political times of Aurangzeb, Jain scholars and *bhattarakas* continued their work uninterrupted. Pandit Rajamalla, in his

Lalitasamhita, has in fact written seventy *slokas* in praise of Akbar and lucidly described his capital at Agra.

It is apparent that in the history of medieval and post medieval Jainism, particularly in the case of the Digambara sect, the *bhattarakas*' all important role in preservation and propagation of religion can in no way be undermined. Despite bearing the brunt of intense criticism¹² from many quarters for their self indulging activities the *bhattarakas* ceaseless strove to create an atmosphere wherein the average laity did not remain ringside spectators but were actually involved in meritorious acts such as writing and commissioning of manuscripts, installation of idols and *yantras*, and partaking in pilgrimages to cleanse their souls.

THE BHATTARAKA AS PATRON

These authoritarians emerge as the forces that engendered art production and in them we perceive the monk as a collector, and to some degree, connoisseur of art and culture, and as such they never failed to assure their presence in art forms. The earliest instance of a *bhattaraka* being immortalized in a painting is the manuscript of the Tatvarthasutra of 1469 CE from Surat, featuring *bhattaraka* Vidyānandi, pontiff of the Surat seat. Painted in the western Indian idiom, with the characteristic angularity and protrusion of the farther eye, the folio represents the erudite monk preaching to a gathering of lay men and women, who are arranged in rows of twos to the left. The monk is shown nude, with only his essential accessories, the *picchi* and *kamandalu* in tow. (**Pl. 1**)

Another unidentified manuscript from Surat features *bhattaraka* Surendrakīrti, who headed the Kāstha sangha- Nanditāta gaccha order in Surat from *samvat* 1744 to *samvat* 1773 (1687 CE to 1706 CE). This page is representative of the conglomerate of styles in Surat region and also displays a sea change in the portrayal of the monk, the *bhattaraka* is shown seated on a decorated podium, above which hangs a tasseled canopy. He now appears in full clothing, clad in a dhoti, with an *uttariya* draped across his body. Assorted paraphernalia such as jars and caskets, as well as the fly whisk bearing attendant behind him, proclaim

the *bhattaraka*'s new exalted status. His hands are in a gesture of giving instructions to the *sravaka* who sits on the ground at the right, his hands folded in reverence. (Pl. 2)

The *bhattaraka* is also featured in the murals at the Jain *matha* at Sravana Belagola, executed in 1750-1775 CE or 1825-1850 CE in the Mysore style. In one of the panels he appears in full regalia, leading a procession on the occasion of the *rath yatra*, an annual festival when the figure of the divinity was placed in a festooned chariot and driven all over the temple town. He appears again in yet another panel, attired in a close fitting cap and monk's vestments, engaged in conversation with a disciple, a retinue of attendants holding umbrellas, banners and flywhisk in tow. (Pl. 3) The *matha* was considered the official residence of the pontiffs and due attention was bestowed upon their decoration with murals. The fact that the authoritarians appear prominently in the paintings validates the fact that the *bhattarakas* themselves patronized such projects.

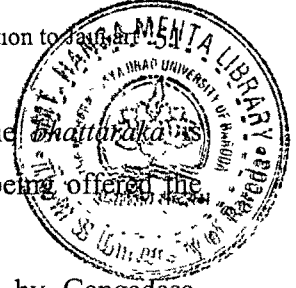
In the dusty heartland of Vidarbha, the *bhattarakas* of the Karanja *pitha* were instrumental in nurturing art traditions, however sporadic and humble their efforts may appear. These are significant as endeavors of a migrant society to establish their identity in their new environs. It was not uncommon to have the *mandapas* of temples decorated with sculptural reliefs, created less out of aesthetic considerations and more out of didactic purports. Generally, themes that a lay viewer could identify with were taken up, and included mostly key events of a Tirthankara's life, the representations of Sammedasikhara and other pilgrimage places. The Kastha sangha temple in Karanja has an elaborately carved wooden *mandapa*, with reliefs ranging from the *pancakalyanaka* of the Tirthankaras, composite animals, elephants, horses, griffins, monkeys, parrots, floral motifs and creepers to Ganesa and Arjuna aiming at the fish with bow and arrow. Likewise, the *mandapa* and exterior walls of the Digambara Jain temple at Kamptee near Nagpur bear stone reliefs that include specific Jain themes such as the lustration of Tirthankaras to Krishna playing the flute. The Santinatha temple at Ramtek also has a profusion of reliefs (Pl.4). Many temples in Vidarbha have *manastambhas* in their courtyards carved with reliefs on themes

such as the *samavasarana*. As Vidarbha boasted of no tradition of wood or stone carving it is likely that craftsmen were summoned from Rajasthan and Gujarat for these jobs, in all probability at the behest of the *bhattaraka* in power.

It is significant to note that though most of the images and *yantras* found in abundance in Digambara temples in Vidarbha bear the names of families of donors, besides those of the *bhattaraka* occupying the pontifical seat at that point of time, none of the illustrated manuscripts from Vidarbha mention in their colophons family names of patrons, with the sole exception of the illustrated Yashodhara carita of 1636 CE, which as its colophon proclaims, was painted for the members of one Vakhariya clan in Gujarat at Idar, and was obviously an outside entrant in the Karanja collection. Curiously, the Jain laity in Vidarbha and Marathwada in the Deccan, who donated generously towards installation of images and other charitable causes of their respective *pithas* seem to have rarely extended patronage to commissioning illustrated manuscripts. Thus, while reliefs of the members of the family of Vir Sanghvi have been carved on the plinth of an image in a temple at Nemgiri, Jintur in Marathwada, which also identifies the reigning *bhattaraka* as Kumudchandra, the name of a lay devotee does not grace any of the illuminated manuscripts from Vidarbha.

On the other hand, there are several illustrated manuscripts from this region which provide us a definitive clue regarding the *bhattaraka*'s specific role as a patron. Significant from this view are the manuscripts of the Sugandhadasamī katha, preserved in the *shastra bhandaras* of the Sengana temples of Nagpur and Karanja respectively. Both the manuscripts contain folios in which the author Jinasagara, is represented dedicating the book to his mentor *bhattaraka* Devendrakirti, who as epigraphs reveal, was one of the most influential and widely traveled pontiffs of the Balatkara order of Karanja. The illustration in the Karanja manuscript depicts the *bhattaraka* seated on a platform, while his disciple Jinasagara stands reverently opposite him, holding a copy of the book

(Pl. 194) The text inscribed at the top of the illustration reads thus – ‘*aisi katha hi paripurna sange, shrotyasi dya chitta mhanoni sange*’. the word *chitta* meaning heart, here could have been interpreted as *chitra* or drawing by the



painter and taken as such, literally. The involvement of the *bhattaraka* is supported by the telling illustrated page, where the head is being offered the manuscript respectfully.

An illustrated manuscript of Adityavaravrata katha written by Gangadasa, introduces the *bhattaraka* in as many as three separate folios, in the opening page, the author Gangadasa, after offering his respects to goddess Sarada, is seen standing respectfully with hands folded, the book dedicated to his mentor, *bhattaraka* Dharmachandra, belonging to the Balatkara order at Karanja, who holds it. The *bhattaraka*- author duo appear again in a separate folio (Pl.210) in a similar situation. In the folio preceding this, Gangadasa pays his respects to the pontiff who earlier occupied the seat, *bhattaraka* Dharmabhusana.

The *bhattaraka* is again featured in the opening page of the undated illustrated Santinatha carita manuscript from Karanja (Pl. 213) The undated manuscript is assigned to c. 1730 CE, and on the basis of this the *bhattaraka* may be identified as yet another person by the name of Dharmachandra who was the pontiff of the Balatkara order in Karanja from 1736 CE to 1776 CE. The same *bhattaraka* appears in the opening folio of the dated manuscript of Yashodhara carita, painted at Balapur near Karanja in 1736 CE (Pl. 83)

The authoritarian's involvement in such projects is apparent in yet another incomplete manuscript representing linear drawings of episodes from the previous births of Tirthankara Santinatha, wherein the *bhattaraka* makes his appearance repeatedly in folio after folio. (Pl. 236) It is likely that this manuscript was planned as an extension of the Santinatha carita discussed earlier, and was abandoned owing to the demise of the *bhattaraka*, its patron, or the itinerant painter from the Rajasthan –Gujarat region, commissioned for the job.

A single folio from Karanja (Pl.5) is exclusively devoted to the genealogy of the *bhattarakas* of the Sengana order which is said to have originated from Acarya Bhadrabahu, who is shown seated in the extreme right corner. Some of his immediate disciples appear to his left, namely Vishnu, Nandimitra, Aparajita and Govardhan. Another of Bhadrabahu's disciples, Prabhachandra appears in

the lowermost register. Some other *acaryas*, or monks who popularized Jainism in the south, such as Kundakundacarya, Visakhacarya are seen in the middle row. It was common practice to incorporate some of the pontiffs in the genealogy of both the orders, the Sengana and Balatkara gana to fill up the historical gap in the genealogical chart between the second and the eighth centuries, as the names of Pujoyapada and Samantabhadra suggest, while the name of *bhattaraka* Akalaka swami is an oddity as he is believed to belong to the Balatkara order. Sudharmacarya is the name of a particular *acarya* from the ancient period, Vrishabhasena appears to be the name of a *ganadhara*, while Jinasena was a *bhattaraka* who definitely belonged to the Sengana order. The pontiffs have been placed in multi colored compartments either singly or in groups, and sometimes appear with their pupils. All of them are shown nude and hold up treatises, and are delineated in the same scale irrespective of their hieratic positions. The last compartment at the bottom shows the scribe with his hands folded. The names of the each personality appears in labels at the top of the illustration. The folio though of no great aesthetic merit, is significant as a visual record of the *bhattaraka* genealogy, though it is difficult to ascertain its patron.

Though the document bears no colophon regarding the identity of its patron or the date of execution, the *pancakalyanaka* scroll from Karanja is perhaps the most outstanding example of the involvement of the authoritarians in art production. The theme of the scroll is restricted to the five key events or *pancakalyanakas* of Tirthankara Rishabha. Clearly the document was painted with the intention of being displayed on select occasions in the temple precincts, particularly during festivities connected with installations and consecrations, which in a way, were profound statements of the power wielded by the *bhattarakas* and very much an integral part of their itinerary. It is likely that *bhattaraka* Jinasena, who was at the helm of administrative and religious affairs of the Karanja *pitha*, commissioned the project sometime in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. This *bhattaraka* was an erudite and widely traveled man, and is likely to have been exposed to contemporaneous traditions in

painting. Employing his clout to invite painters from Aurangabad region in the vicinity, would then have been a relatively simple task, which was ably supported by generous donations by the laity.

The *bhattarakas* thus may be viewed as the most likely patrons and mediators in art production and accretion in Digambara society in Vidarbha, which was inseparably linked with their nature of duties of commissioning manuscripts and installing images, as well as leading entourages to major pilgrimage centers. It would be presumptuous to look upon them as connoisseurs or gifted with a discerning eye for art, though we may quote examples of heads like Jinasena, who possessed these qualities to a degree, and who appears to be the mastermind behind the execution of the elegantly painted *pancakalyanaka* scroll.

In most cases, the heads may be considered as collectors and patrons of art forms such as manuscript painting inadvertently, not essentially for their aesthetic value but for the fact that collecting and commissioning illustrated manuscripts was a part of their 'job' as absolute authorities of the temples and their *shastra bhandaras*, as was any image installation or pilgrimage tour, related ultimately to the magnanimous act of *dana*. This explains why the Karanja *bhandaras* became receptacles of varied styles, possessing illustrated manuscripts and paintings displaying an inconsistency of idiom and workmanship, as also the presence of manuscripts which obviously are of Svetambara origin. An illustrated miscellany of the Trisastisalaka purusacarita and Vasudevahindi, as well as a fragmented Kalpasutra, both painted in the western Indian idiom, were in all likelihood procured either from Surat, Idar, Khambhat or some such center in Gujarat with which the *bhattarakas* had close ties. This phenomenon also explains the presence of another important entrant, the illustrated manuscript of Yashodhara carita, painted in 1636 CE, at Idar, in the Karanja *bhandara*. This interest in collecting was perhaps infectious, passed on from generation to the next, and went on till almost the beginning of the nineteenth century, some fragments of paper scrolls and assorted paintings (Pl.6) being in the late popular style evinced in Surat-Ahmedabad region.

The body of manuscripts, painted in Vidarbha such as the Sugandhadasami katha and the dated Yashodhara carita of 1736 CE, owe a great deal to the intervention of the *bhattarakas*, who were in a position to source itinerant painters from Gujarat or Rajasthan during their pilgrimages or visits on occasions such as installation and consecration ceremonies. These documents, painted in a varied hybridized styles bear close with affinities to the school of Surat, which was the most likely place for sourcing peripatetic painters, as it lay on the trajectories of the *bhattarakas* traveling from the Deccan to the west. The authorities, however, do not appear to have played a role in formulating any specific style that may be identified as characteristic of Karanja or Vidarbha, their interests being limited to scouting for manuscripts on pilgrimages, and inviting itinerant painters intermittently to their *pithas* to execute some works. In conditions not exactly favorable to art activities, which were sporadic in nature and solely dependent on the interest of the *bhattaraka* in power, the formation of a school with its own coherent and distinctive pictorial language was out of question. This explains the great divide between the style of the exquisitely painted *pancakalyanaka* scroll, perhaps the finest document of the Aurangabad style, for which painters were especially invited to Karanja from neighboring Aurangabad, and illustrated manuscripts in different styles such as the Sugandhadasami katha, Yashodhara carita and Santinatha carita, painted by visiting artists trained in the school of Surat. These projects obviously received tremendous support from the burgeoning class of wealthy Digambara merchants, who were the chief donors.

The *bhattarakas* thus may be considered as the intermediaries between the laymen and the sacred precincts of the temples which housed the Tirthankaras and other venerable images. The intimidating and sweeping presence of these elitist individuals, who almost ruled over the laity in their respective *pithas* as if they were their personal fiefs, was instrumental in lending an identity to these Digambara centers, as also contributing in a significant way in the growth of the *shastra bhandaras*. Their paramount position as preservers and propagators of

religion, particularly in the history of Digambara Jains in the Deccan, therefore remains unquestioned

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