

# Puligere: A Jaina Centre of North Karnataka

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**Abstract:** *Puligere, present Lxmeshvar in Shirahatti taluka of Gadag District in the state of Karnataka, comprises the area of about 300 villages in the talukas of Shirahatti, Savanur, parts of Shiggaon, Kundagol, Gadag and Haveri in the former Dharwad district of Karnataka state. It is well known as Puligere Nadu, played an important role in the medieval history of the Deccan, situated in the heart of the Karnataka, it was the capital and enjoyed the unique status of the region where pure Kannada, Tirul Kannada region. In fact, the region was also one of the administrative units of Karnataka. It was mainly because of its strategic location that the rulers of various dynasties in Karnataka had tried to bring Puligere Nadu under their control. Since the period of early Chalukyas down to the decline of the Vijayanagara empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century A. D., its position as the capital remained undisturbed. The region was at its height of glory particularly under the Rastrakutas and the later Chalukyas. The frontiers of Puligere Nadu were Belvola - 300 in the North, Masavadi - 140 in the East and Banavasi - 12000 in the South - Western directions. The abundant availability of source materials in this region through light on the multifaceted activities, which in turn enriched the material and cultural prosperity and this paper is based on inscriptions. We find that in almost every field of activity Puligere Nadu has left an indelible footprint in the history of Karnataka in general and North Karnataka in particular.*

**Keywords:** Introduction, Jainism, Jaina Centers at Puligere, Conclusion

## 1. Introduction

Karnataka, a southern state of India has a long history and unbroken tradition. It is a region of unity and diversity. It represents toleration in spheres of life. The ruling dynasties of the ancient times patronised all religions with a great charity and generosity. All activities of the society were mostly influenced by the respective religions. Hence Karnataka is a platform for all religious activities. Religions became the base for social, political, economic, educational etc. As a consequence, belief in religion was demonstrated by constructing temples or making grants for its maintenance, conducting worship and offerings. Hence Karnataka is popularly known for its unique culture and architectural monuments.

Hindu sects like Saivism and Vaisnavism prevailed in the country from the centuries. In Karnataka, all the four faiths of Saivism, Vaisnavism, Jainism and Buddhism patronised and followed by various ruling dynasties, which is witnessed by the monuments and inscriptions found in various places. The first three of the above religions were highly patronized the all ruling dynasties of Karnataka, except some variations. The religious scenario of Tamil was different, the Pallavas and the Cholas in southern parts, who were the staunch followers of Saivism, but never tolerant towards Vaishnavism in Tamil Country.

The unique feature of the dyanasties of the south was that of the provinces with their codes, for instance, Banavasi - 12000, Kisukadu - 70, Puligere - 300, Belvala - 300 etc. With regard to Puligere *Nadu*, a large number of inscriptions and monuments reveal the religious condition of the province. As that the religious condition of Puligere had two phases, namely, initially Jainism was the most popular religion from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD to 11 century AD. With

Saivism and Vaisnavism relegated to the background; from the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it was Saivism, which became the most popular religion and Jainism and Vaisnavism were accorded a secondary position. It is to be noted here that no evidence to the prevalence of Buddhism, except some remains found in the Tarabhagavati in Dambal (Gadag Dist.) and Koliwad (Dharwad Dist.). In other words, the Puligere *Nadu* is only a centre of Jainism and Vaishnavism. However, the followers of all the religions lived harmoniously in the region, except some accidental disputes among the Jain and Saiva followers.

### Jainism:

The earliest records of Puligere eulogize the prevalence of both Jaina and Vaisnava faiths. However, it is to be noted that from 6 to 11 Century A. D, Jainism was the most popular religion than Saivism. In fact, Puligere, like other renowned Jaina centres of the period such as Sravanabelgola, Lakkundi, Koppala etc., was also a famous centre for the Jaina religious activities.

The inscription of the period of Pulikesi - II is considered to be the earliest record of Puligere *Nadu* which registers a gift of land for the worship and offerings to god Sankha Jinendra at Puligere by the Sendhraka chief Durga Sakti. Yet another famous epigraph of the period of the same ruler dated 585 - 586 A. D., found at Aihole, refers to Puligere *grama* which was granted to the Jinendra temple built by Ravikirti, a court poet of Pulikesi - II (S. I. I Vol - XX, No.3 and I. A - Vol, V, pp, 67 - 72). From the latter record it is said that Puligere was a Jaina centre, which blossomed into a reputed centre in later years. Thus, it was the Early Chalukyan rulers and their feudatories who were not only the earliest power to patronise Jainism in Puligere but also transformed Puligere into a famous Jaina centre as well as a famous city.

**Jaina Centers at Puligere:**

In the Puligere *Nadu* there were some other Jaina centres like Gudigere, Hattimatturu, Hulaguru and Soraturu, where Jainism was flourished. The records also refer to the construction of the Jaina monuments at all these places by different persons at different times. We can be found more than ten Jaina temples. The rulers of the various dynasties patronised Jainism in the region by making liberal grants either for the construction of the Jaina *basadis* and for their maintenance.

The earliest and the most famous Jaina *basadi* in Puligere is the Shankha *basadi*, also referred to in the records as Shankhathirtha *Vasati*, Shankha Jinendra and inside the *basadi*, Dhavala Jinalaya, Jinabhataraka temple are located. The *basadi* received numerous grants for the maintenance, renovation, feeding the ascetics and imparting education. An inscription of the period of Pulikesi - II registers a land grant for daily worship and offerings to the Shankhajinalaya by the Sendhraka chief (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No.3*). Later, the Chalukya ruler Vijayaditya made a grant of the village named Hadagale *grama* located in the Belvala - 300 division to the same temple for the repairs, worship and offerings and also for a *danashala* at the request of Dhruvadevacharya of Mulasanga and Devagana (*S. I. I - Vol, XX, No.4*). Similarly during the period of the king Vijayaditya, one of Bikkiranaka made a grant of a village to the Jinabhataraka temple (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No.5*). The same ruler also made a gift of the village Kaddama for worship and other religious performances (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No.6*). Five years later, his son Vikramaditya - II made a grant of land to the Dhavala Jinalaya in Shankhathirtha *Vasati* for the above purposes (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No.7*). The Ganga chief Marasimha - II also made grants for the above Jinalaya. For this it is only during the Vijayanagara period, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century A. D., i. e., nearly 450 years later, that a reference to the Shankha *basadi* is made in two inscriptions, that too, with regard to a dispute between the priests of the Shankha *basadi* and Somesvara temple at Puligere (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, Nos, 232 and 391*).

King Vijayaditya's sister, Kumkuma Mahadevi caused to the construction of the Anesajje *basadi* at Puligere, her brother Vijayaditya made a grant of Gudugere village at the request of his brother in - law Chitravaha, the Alupa chief (*E. I, Vol, XXI, p, 207; ARIE, 1945 - 46, No, 49*). In 1072 A. D the elder queen of Somesvara - II, Kanchala Mahadevi revived the same village to the same *basadi* (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No, 46*). Then Nandipanditadeva later made a grant of food for the saints at Gudigere (*I. A, Vol, XVIII, pp, 35 - 40*). It was at this *basadi* only that Shrinandi Panditadeva, also known as Nandi Panditadeva of Surasthagana died performing *Sallekhana* ritual for a month, *Masa sallekhana*, in 1078 AD (*I. A, Vol, XX, No, 52*).

During the period of the Ganga feudatories, who were the staunch followers of Jainism, a number of Jaina *basadis* which were named after them, were constructed at Puligere such as Ganga Kandarpa Jinalaya, also called as Permadi *Basadi*, named after the Ganga ruler Marasimha - II, who was known as Gangakandarpa and Satyavakya Permadi (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, Nos, 244, 245*). The record states that the ruler made grants of the village Molagere Siggagrama and a land of 300 *nivartanas* along with three flower gardens for

the purpose of worship and offerings to the Jinendra. It also records the *basadis* like Mukkara Basadi (Ganga ruler Mushkara), Raya Rachamalla *basadi* (Ganga King Rachamalla) and Vijaya *basadi* (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No, 245*). All the above mentioned *basadis* were built in the middle of 10<sup>th</sup> century A. D. An inscription dated 1074 A. D., informs that *Mahasamanta* Jayakesiyarasa visited the Permadi Basadi and made into a *pura* at the request of Tribhuvanachandra Pandita and also remitted certain taxes to the same (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No, 47*). In fact, the Permadi *basadi* had been earlier destroyed by the Cholas during the reign of Chalukya Somesvara - I (*Elliot, Hindu Inscriptions, JRAS, IV, p, 14*) and after the *basadi* was renovated by Jayakesiyarasa, who had been made in to a *pura* (town).

The Goggiya *basadi*, another *basadi* at Puligere had also gained prominence by the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Two inscriptions refer to the *basadi*, one dated 1132 A. D., states that the rules for constructing houses in the premises of the *basadi* were formulated by Indrakirti Pandita, the *Acharya* of the *basadi*, along with *Acharya* Hemadeva and other dignitaries. Another inscription dated 1295 A. D., registers a gift of land made to the Santinathadeva of Chaturmukha *basadi* for worship to the god (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No, 224*). The inscription also states that the Santinatha *basadi* belonged to the Surasthagana and Chitrakutanvaya of Mulasangha. Further it refers to the existence of two more *basadis* at Puligere, namely Mallisetti *basadi* and Jinnoja *basadi*.

The Vijaya *basadi*, a reference to which is made in the inscription dated 968 A. D indicating its existence by the middle of 10<sup>th</sup> Century A. D., and renovated in 1247 A. D by Rajaladevi, daughter of Bicharasa, an officer of the Yadava ruler, Singhana - II (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No, 215*). She is described in the inscription as *Jinendra - Chandra - Padapadma Mahabrate*. She renovated the Jinalaya at the instance of her preceptor Padmasena muni. It is said that Vijaya Jinalaya was constructed by Sagaradatta, a merchant of Ayodhya while on his southern tour (P. B. Desai, *Karnatakadalli Boudha Dharma*, Sadhana, Dharwad, 1956).

Another famous centre of Jainism in Puligere *Nadu* was Gudigere, known as *Dhvaja tataka* in inscription. The place was first granted to the Anesajje *basadi* by the Chalukya ruler Vijayaditya. Then Gudigere inscription dated 1072 A. D, records the revival of the endowment of the village Gudugere by Kanchala Mahadevi, the queen of Somesvara - II (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No, 46*). An inscription states that Srinandi Panditadeva also made a grant of land to God Bhuvanaikamalla Santinathadeva, it had been set up by Chalukya king Somesvara - II, who had a title of Bhuvanaikamalla. An inscription of the 12<sup>th</sup> A. D. informs that there was another *basadi* called Mureya *basadi* at Gudigere, to which a gift of oil from all the oil mills of the place was made for the perpetual lamp (*S. I. I Vol, XX, No, 326*). Yet another epigraph mentions the names of two Jaina preceptors Nandibratisha and Tejonidhi bratisha (*S. I. I, Vol, XX, No, 110*).

Hattimattur and Soratur were two other places in the Puligere province, where the Jaina monuments are mentioned in the epigraphs of Puligere *Nadu*. A vague

inscription at Hattimatturu mentioned as Paltiya - Maltavura or Martapura and records the grant of a village, though the object of the grant is not mentioned. However, on the basis of the sculpture at the bottom of the slab, it can be said that the grant was made to Jaina establishment (*I. A, Vol, XII, p.225*). But the 12<sup>th</sup> century inscription on the same stone records the grants of oil and rice to Bhogisvara. Obviously, it indicates that by the time of the second inscription, the Jaina establishment to which the records in the first inscription were made must have been converted in to a temple of Siva under the name Bhogisvara. It also implies that by that time the decline in the popularity of Jainism and the ascendancy of Saivism had started not only in the region, but also in the whole of Karnataka.

The Soratur inscription records a grant of land by Dandanayaka Baladevayya to the Baladeva Jinalaya, perhaps named after the *Dandanayaka* who might have caused the construction of the *Jinalaya* (*S. I. I, Vol, XI, Pt. I, No.99*). Interestingly, the gift was entrusted to a nun called Huliabbajike, a disciple of Srinandi Pandita of Surastha gana and Chitrakutanvaya.

## 2. Conclusion

The above study is basically based on contemporary inscriptions as primary sources. During the period of 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Century A. D., Jainism was flourished in Karnataka in general and Puligere in particular. As a result of the royal patronage by the royal family and feudatories Jainism became popular among people of the province. They made generous donations to build the *Jinalayas*, conduct worship and offerings etc. Sometimes Jaina temples played a very important role in imparting knowledge and social welfare. The Puligere province was well known for Jainism as it revealed in many inscriptions. On the basis of the above epigraphs, it can be said that the period between 6 - 12<sup>th</sup> century A. D., was a golden era in the annals of Jainism in Karnataka in general and in Puligere particular. The above details revealed the prevalent of the Jainism in the region.

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