Orthodoxy, Reform, and Protest: Brahmanas and Virashaivism

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the debate between the scholars concerning the nature of Virashaivism. While one category of scholars characterizes Virashaivism as anti-Brahmanical and anti-Vedic, another category of historians of religion realized the proximity of Virashaivism, at least the initial phase of its growth, with Brahmanical religion. This paper supports the contention that Virashaivism exhibited the features of a reform movement before emerging as a protest sect. In fact, the Brahmanas played an important role in the annihilation of Jainism in the earlier phase of the growth of Virashaivism even though its second phase of progress under the leaders such as Basavanna represented the anti-Brahmanical and anti-caste tendencies. The study will further substantiate this argument through the study of the Kannada text *Abbaluru Charite*, which narrates the achievements of Ekantada Ramayya, a Brahmana leader of Virashaivism. It is shown that the *Abbaluru Charite* is useful to study the role of the Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism. The major concern of the Brahmanas was to compete with the Jainas to obtain royal patronage and popular support.

Keywords Brahmanas · Virashaivism · Caste · Jaina · Abbaluru · Shiva

Introduction

Virashaivism is a religious sect that emerged out of Shaivism in medieval Karnataka, and today it is also termed Lingayatism as the Virashaivas or the Sharanas carry *linga*, symbolizing their devotion for Lord Shiva (Leslie, 1998, p. 229). Generally, Virashaivism is perceived as an anti-Brahmanical movement, a response to the Brahmanical orthodoxy that did not tolerate the equality between Brahmanas and the lower castes.

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Michael (1992, 2015) argues that it was a movement that rejected Brahmanical orthodoxy and the caste system. He considers the leaders such as Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, and Akka Mahadevi along with Ekantada Ramayya as those who gave leadership to this movement (Michael, 2015). However, the present work shows that Ekantada Ramayya, the protagonist of the text *Abbaluru Charite* represented Brahmanical ideology as against the Jainas. It shows that apart from being an anti-Brahmanical movement, Virashaivism was also an anti-Jaina movement. The Brahmanas such as Harihara, Raghavanka, and Ekantada Ramayya were at the forefront of this movement before the emergence of Basavanna. Based on this analysis, we can note two phases of Virashaivism. The first phase was represented by anti-Jaina ideology as represented by Ekantada Ramayya. In the process of opposing Jainism, Virashaivism supported the Brahmanas. Indeed, the attempt of Ekantada Ramayya was not anti-Brahmanical, as it was anti-Jaina in character. This paper argues that the work *Abbaluru Charite,* composed in the seventeenth century by Shanta Niranjana did not exhibit anti-Brahmanical character. The Abbaluru *kranti* or revolution that took place in the twelfth century, also mentioned in a few contemporary sources, was the object of this work. It shows that before the emergence of Basava *Kranti*, there was the emergence of Abbaluru *Kranti* (revolution). Moreover, the annihilation of the Jainas in Abbaluru enabled Basavanna to initiate the anti-Brahmanical and anti-caste movement, which was an important aspect of this movement. However, it would be erroneous to say that it was the only character of this movement. Unfortunately, the history of Virashaivism is traced to *Basavakaranti* (revolution of Basava), not realizing that even before *Basavakranti* there was Abbaluru *kranti*, which opposed the domination of the Jainas.

Vijaya Ramaswamy accepts that Ekantada Ramayya was the real leader of Virashaivism even before its radicalization (Ramaswamy, 1996, p. 6). At the same time, she notes the anti-Brahmanical stance in the vachanas. However, she is not able to explain the prevalence of Sanskritic elements in Virashaivism and anti-Brahmanical stance of the Virashaiva poets, many of who belonged to the marginalized sections in the society. At the same time, she finds the return of the caste rules in Virashaivism after the Basava *kranti* in the twelfth century as there was difference between the panchamashalis and non-panchamashalis (Ramaswamy, 1996, p. 66). In this way, Virashaivism can be compared with the Tamil Bhakti movement where there was the emergence of the leadership provided by the Brahmanas. The return of Brahmanical elements in Virashaivism meant the return of anti-Jaina stance of Virashaivism. Even though Ramaswamy understands the anti-Brahmanical elements in Virashaivism she does not discuss the anti-Jaina element in this religious movement, which became the rallying point for the Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas. We do accept that the basic tenet of Virashaivism was an anti-caste system and it was anti-Brahmanical in nature, particularly after the rise of Basavanna. However, it is also important to emphasize the anti-Jaina character of Virashaivism, which can be seen not only in the twelfth century but also during the later period. In the process, one cannot ignore the role of the Brahmanas in the rise of Virashaivism.

Virashaivism: Anti-Brahmanical? Anti-Jaina?

In a few standard works, we find the discussion regarding Virashaivism. For example, Singh (2008, p. 621) argues that Virashaivism was an anti-Brahmanical sect that also opposed Jainism. Even though she recognized the anti-Jaina character of Virashaivism, she argues that it opposed Vedic rituals and practices, which may be a reality in the latter part of the history of the movement when Basavanna and Akka Mahadevi had set about establishing an anti-caste religion or a sect. Leslie argues that the Virashaivas "condemn rituals, although in fact their condemnation is aimed primarily at the brahmanical rituals associated with Vaisnava Hindus" (1998, p. 230). Heehs assumes that "uncompromising rejection of image worship and of the authority of the Vedas" were the major features of Virashaivism (Hees, 2002, p. 318). By saying so, he did not consider the role of the Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism. We should also note that Virashaivism benefited from the fall of Jainism. Brahmanas played an important role in this development. Interestingly, the Basava *kranti* also involved the marriage between a Brahmana and a Dalit (Doniger, 2009, p. 470), showing that a few Brahmana leaders including Basavanna took the initiative to establish a casteless society. Narayan Rao also supported the anti-Brahmanical character of Virashaivism, thereby ignoring its attempt to obtain the support of the Brahmanical institutions in the fight against Jainism (Rao, 2003, p. 398). The suggestion of Doniger that Virashaivism was anti-Jaina and anti-Brahmana does not consider the Brahmanical basis of the rise of this sect. According to Sadhana Sharma, Virashaivism had the non-Brahmanas as its social base and it was known for its "anti-Brahmanism" (Sharma, 1995, p. 218).

Das finds differences between Virasaivism and other Bhakti movements, particularly found in Tamil Nadu. He says that "The departure is evident in their total rejection of caste system, refusal to accept the superiority of the Vedas and the Brahmins, rejection of idolatry and sacred thread" (Das, 2005, p. 164). In this case, the scholar does not refer to the anti-Jaina stance taken by the people who participated in the Bhakti movement. Moreover, the contemporary pieces of evidence show that Vedas, Brahmins, and idol worship were present in Virashaivism, which is also termed "neo Buddhism" (Das, 2005, p. 164).

It is also mentioned that one of the companions of Basavanna was Mallikarjuna Panditaradhya (Venugopal, 2004, p. 138). One may note that Aradhyas were Brahmanas. In the Telugu region, Aradhyas, part of Virashaivism, are considered Brahmanas (Brown, 1840, p. 152). The author Bhimakavi who wrote *Basava Purana* in Kannada was an Aradhya, and he was influenced by the work of the Telugu Basava Puranamu (Rice, 1982, p. 64). Basava, in this work, is represented as a form of Nandi and he is associated with the Shiva temple at Sangameshwara (Rice, 1982, p. 65). It shows the association of Virasaivism with Brahmanas and temples.

Sakhare argues that Virashaivism or Lingayatism was a religion distinct from Hinduism. His logic is that Lingayatism criticized the Brahmanas, the chief leaders of Hinduism. As they rejected the Brahmanical caste system,

Virashaivas cannot be termed as Hindus. However, at the same time, he accepts that Lingayatism was a reformist sect (Sakhare, 1942, p. iv). Sakkhare presents the anti-Brahmanical elements of Virashaivism while ignoring its anti-Jaina elements. He also differentiates between Virashaivism and Lingayatism. Virashaivism, for Sakkhare, emerged from Shaivism, which exhibited Brahmanical principles, while Lingayatism opposed the Brahmanical domination. Thus, indirectly he accepts the impact of the Brahmanas on Virashaivism while rejecting their impact on Lingayatism. Interestingly, he uses the Sanskrit sources to prove the distinct identity of Lingayatism. He also accepts the argument that the word Lingayat had Sanskrit origin (Sakhare, 1942, p. 3). He also argues that Virashaiva literature emerges only from the period of Basava, thereby emphasizing the prominence of Basava *kranti* while ignoring Abbaluru *kranti*. At the same time, one can note Virashaivism in the non-Basava context (Sakhare, 1942, p. 413). Consequently, one can note contradictions in the argument of Sakhare. It also proves the argument of this paper that before its transformation as an anti-Brahmanical faith, Virashaivism was an anti-Jaina religion. It is true that it attempts to reform Shaivism, but in the initial years of its growth, it was influenced by the Brahmanas. The major lacuna of the work of Sakhare is the absence of the relationship between the Brahmanas and the Virashaivas in Karnataka.

Devadevan studies the anti-Jaina movement represented in the works of Harihara. He also studied the Abbaluru movement, which led to the decline of Jainism (Devadevan, 2016, pp. 13–14). However, he did not discuss the role of the Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism. It is also important to note that the Virashaiva leaders such as Harihara and Ramayya did not oppose the temple-based ritualism of the Brahmanas. Nor do we find anti-caste tendencies. At this stage, it seems that the main motive of Virashaivism, at least as espoused by Ramayya and other Brahmana leaders, was to deal with the competition from Jainas. They espoused the performance of Vedic rituals and the conversion of Jaina basadis into Brahmanical temples. It shows that Brahmanas played an important role in the transformation of Shaivism into Virashaivism.

The conflict between the Brahmanas and Jainas has been documented in the historiography of the Tamil Bhakti movement. However, it has been suggested that by the ninth century CE, anti-Jaina sentiments ended in South India (Veluthat, 2018, p.168). Conversely, we find a few instances of anti-Jaina sentiments in the major and minor Puranas (Hazra, 1940, p. 207). The later text belongs to the seventeenth century, showing that the Brahmanas continued to wage a war against the Jainas. The fact that the Brahmanas perceived Karnataka as a Jaina center is proved by the reference to the *Karnataka rakshasa* in the Puranas (Skandapurana, 2002, p. 123). They depict the *daityas* as those who enhanced their strength through Vedic studies. To break their strength, it was important to encourage them to give up Vedic studies. It was a direct attack on the Jainas. In fact, it has been shown that the Kali age crisis in Karnataka is the reflection of the conflict between the Jainas and the Brahmanas who vied for the support of the temporal power in the age of state formation (Rao, 2021).

The conflict between the Brahmanas and the heterodox sects is also seen in *Sumadhwa Vijaya*, written in the fourteenth century. The text narrates the miracles performed by Madhwacharya, which contributed to the emergence of Vaishnavism in Karnataka. Here, the reference is to Buddhism (Prabhanjanacharya, 1994). Interestingly, the author of *Sumadhwa Vijaya* does not refer to the Jainas but mentions the interaction of Madhwacharya with Buddhists. This may be due to the fact that Jainism had emerged as an important religious force in south coastal Karnataka where there was the emergence of Vaishnavism propounded by Madhwacharya.

An important trend in the major and minor puranas is the unity between Shiva and Vishnu as represented in the deity Shankaranarayana. The deity was responsible for the destruction of the demons Khara and Ratta who had deviated from the worship of Shiva and accepted non-Vedic studies. Such a unity between Shiva and Vishnu was needed to compete with Jainism, which had emerged as a major religious sect in Karnataka in the early medieval period (Bhanumati, 1984, p. 295).

We can suggest that the movement obtained considerable strength due to the anti-Jaina trend expressed by the Brahmanical authors. However, it affected the Brahmanas who gave the initial leadership to this sect. At the same time, this is not to suggest that apart from Basavanna, there was no anti-Brahmanical tradition in Virashaivism. As shown by Rao and Roghair, the theme of Pallukurti Somanatha's work on Basavanna was to reject Brahmanical institutions. It is shown that the Brahmanas had harassed him and he took revenge against them by rejecting Sanskritic tradition (Rao & Roghair, 1990, p. 7). At the same time, it is shown that he quoted from the Brahmanical texts such as Vedas and Puranas (Rao & Roghair, 1990, p. 7). They also argue that the work of Somanatha was interpreted by the Brahmanas as anti-Vedic to create popular opposition to the ideology of Somanatha (Rao & Roghair, 1990, p. 7). We may state that the Brahmanas attempted a similar strategy in the case of the Jainas, by painting them as anti-Vedic and such a situation is found in *Abbaluru Charitre*. However, Talbot, based on the study of *Basava Puranamu* in the context of the Telugu region, argues that anti-brahman adherents (of Virashaivism) were not averse to using violence against those who opposed their beliefs (Talbot, 2001, p. 71). This would indicate the conflict between the Virashaivas, the Jainas, and other heterodox sects. The Virashaivas appreciated those who expressed their devotion to Lord Shiva. As the Brahmanas exhibited their devotion to Shiva, they were respected. At the same time, the Virashaivas opposed the Brahmanical domination. Jones states that Virashaivism was "an aggressive, proselytizing, and uncompromising sect that rejected Vedic authority, the role of priests, caste distinctions…" (Jones, 1989, p. 11). While the anti-Brahmanical nature of the Virashaivas is highlighted, their anti-Jaina attitude is ignored. At the same time, one cannot deny that the Virashaivas were generally anti-Jaina. On the other hand, we cannot suggest that, at least in the early years of its inception, Virashaivism was anti-Brahmanical. It is important to understand this transition from the anti-Jaina, pro-Brahmana movement to the anti-Brahmanical and anti-Vedic sect, which took place at a later period.

The Virashaivas, even though claim to have rejected the Brahmanical system, imitated a few Brahmanical rituals. For example, they replaced *upanayana* with "*ayyachara*" and "*Jangama Diksha*" (initiation of the Jangamas or the ascetics

of the Virashaivas). Through them, the Virashaivas are initiated to perform rituals (Mullatti, 1989, p. 29). Those who are not given *Jangama Diksha* are not qualified to perform rituals, thus showing the difference between the priestly and non-priestly classes among the Virashaivas. It has been suggested that the majority of the vachanas do not speak against Brahmanas or the caste system. Accordingly, only 195 vachanas mention Brahmanas and many of them are not critical of the Brahmanas (Jalki, 2009, p. 51).

The Jaina-Brahmana conflict has been documented in the context of the Tamil region. Veluthat has shown that the Pallava King Mahendravarman, impressed by Shaivism, destroyed a Jaina monastery (Veluthat, 2018, p. 163). There was the conversion of Appar from Jainism to Shaivism (Veluthat, 2018, p. 161). It shows that in the Tamil region, Jainism declined before the tenth century CE. However, in the case of Karnataka, the Western Gangas and the Rashtrakutas patronized the Jainas. After them, Chalukyas Kalyani (northern Karnataka) and the Hoysalas of Dwarasamudra (southern Karnataka) patronized Jainism (Desai, 1957, p. 194; Chugh, 2016). King Bijjala, who succeeded the Chalukyas of Kalyani also supported the Jainas until the Abbaluru event, leading to the conversion of Jaina basadis into Brahmanical temples.

It has been suggested that 'The Virashaiva poets questioned the legitimacy of classical belief system, social customs, rituals, image worship, religious practices, temple-building, and temple-going …' (Pandharipande, 2019, p. 20). However, it will be shown later that it is precisely these practices, which are represented in the text *Abbaluru Charitre*, which emphasized the worship of Shiva in the Brahmanical temples.

Gil Ben-Herut shows that Virashaivism did not oppose temple worship through a study of the vachana literature. He traces it to the contradiction between the worship of Shiva in the *linga* form and his worship in the temple (Ben-Herut, 2016, p. 130). Apart from Ben-Herut, Robert Zydenbos understood the temple-based bhakti ideology found in Virashaivism. He argues that the Virashaivas were influenced by the Brahmanical religion as they attempted to imitate the Brahmanas (Zydenbos, 1997, p. 527).

Ben-Herut refers to the work of the Virashaiva poet Harihara who refers to the deity Virupaksha of Hampi in Karnataka (Ben-Herut, 2012, p. 131). He argues that the lack of knowledge concerning the relationship between temple worship and the Virashaivas on the part of the western scholars was due to their lack of expertise in Kannada, the language used to write the Vachanas, the major Virashaiva Bhakti poems (Ben-Herut, 2016, p. 131). However, this assumption is also found among the Kannada scholars such as Kaluburgi who accept Ekantada Ramayya as a Virashaiva leader but fail to understand the contradiction between the anti-Brahmanical nature of Virashaivism and the role of Brahmanas and temples in its growth in the initial years of its inception (Kaluburgi, 2011, pp. 256–60). We may note that Virashaiva's connection with the temple affects its identity distinct from Hinduism, which believes in Puranic religion including the domination of Brahmanas and temple worship. It has been shown that in the Tamil region, there was the emergence of the temple-based bhakti movement (Veluthat, 2018). Even though in the initial phase, there was the domination of non-Brahmanas in the Tamil region, in the later phase it was dominated by the Brahmanas (Veluthat, 2018, p. 163).

Despite referring to the Jaina-Brahmana conflict, Veluthat considers the temple-based Bhakti movement as representing feudalism, particularly with the decline of heterodox faiths in South India (Veluthat, 2018, p. 169). However, as argued by Chattopadhyaya, the early medieval phase represented state formation rather than feudalism in the form of decentralization of political authority (Chattopadhyaya, 1994). Scholars have analyzed the role of Brahmanas in state and social formation while ignoring the role of the Jainas. Perhaps, they were influenced by the anti-Brahmanical movement in the country in the post-independence period (Yadav, 1998).

Perhaps one difference between Virashaivism and the Tamil Bhakti movement is that in the former, Brahmanas lost their importance to be replaced by the Jangamas, while in the latter, Brahmanas in the form of Acharyas, continued their domination. However, temple worship did not cease in Virashaivism.

Ben-Herut has initiated a debate as he has refuted the assumption that Virashaivism was anti-Brahmanical, anti-Vedic, and anti-ritualistic, as we find all these in the work representing Ekantada Ramayya. Ben-Herut also studied the life and times of Ekantada Ramayya. However, his main source was the Abbuluru inscription, which has given elaborate details regarding the restoration of the Brahmanical temples in a place named Abbaluru. Ben-Herut uses Harihara's *Ragalegalu*, Abbalur inscription, and Palkuriki Somanatha's *Basavapuranamu* to prove his argument (Ben-Herut, 2012). However, he did not discuss in detail *Abbaluru Charite*, written by Shanta Niranjana in the seventeenth century. *Abbaluru Charite* is important because it provides a detailed account of the role of the Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism. On the other hand, it gains legitimacy as the details mentioned in this work are also found in the Abbaluru inscription. However, it is also important to understand the function of *Abbaluru Charite* (Basavaradhya, 1973). It was written with the purpose of asserting the role of the Brahmanas in Virashaivism and thereby reviving the Brahmanical domination. However, by this time, the bifurcation between the Brahmanas and Virashaivism was complete as we find the Virashaivas establishing monasteries distinct from the Brahmanical mathas.

The argument of Ben-Herut is supported by Prasad when she says that "the uninhibited critique of brahmanical customs tended to overshadow the fact that there were Virashaiva thinkers whose response to Vedic tradition and its allied shastras was more complicated than outright rejection" (Prasad, 2007, p. 104). However, the main concern of Prasad is not to discuss the nature of Virashaivism. At the same time, her argument is useful in the present context. It is important to accept diversity in the Vachana literature. Even though a few Vachana scholars were anti-Brahmanical, there were a few who espoused Vedas and Brahmanas (Murthy, 2009, p. 23). Shankara Dasimayya, a Brahmana by birth, gave Brahmanical status to the *Jangamas*, the priestly class among the Virashaivas (Murthy, 2009, p. 23).

The study of Veluthat (2018) shows that there were two stages of the Bhakti movement. The first stage represented a reform movement along with the conflict between the Jainas and the Brahmanas. He also shows that in the second phase, there was the decline of the Jainas and the emergence of the Brahmanas. However, in Karnataka, the decline of Jainas led to the formation of a new faith of Virashaivas, who did not accept Brahmanical domination. However, it was not a religion without the hierarchical relationship between the elites and subalterns. At the same time,

scholars have not emphasized the major intellectual and physical violence between the Jainas and the Brahmanas.

Abbaluru Charite

Vedic Tradition

The *Abbaluru Charite* (history of Abbaluru), is a text written in Kannada and it belongs to seventeenth century CE. However, the details mentioned in the text pertain to the Abbaluru *kranti* that took place in the twelfth century. In this section, we attempt to discuss the role of Brahmanas and temples in the emergence of Virashaivism.

The work begins with the description of Aladi or Alande. There is a reference to the Brahmana (*dwija*) Purushottama who did not have children. By the grace of Lord Shiva, the Brahmana couple obtained a son called Ramayya. After his birth, the parents performed rituals such as *namakarana* (name giving) *annaprashana* (feeding rice), and *chaula* and *upanayana* (initiation to Vedic studies). It is mentioned that Rama became an expert in "Vedadhyayana, shruti Paurana, Shadushastra" (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 20). It shows the Vedic background of the protagonist. Regarding Alande, it is mentioned that the town consisted of a large number of Shiva temples and charity houses (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 10).[1] However, while discussing Abbaluru, an antithesis of Alande, it is mentioned that there were large numbers of Jinalaya or Jaina temples. The Brahmanical connection is also revealed by the use of Sanskrit verses in the inscriptions as well as this work. When Rama started his journey to Abbaluru, he was joined by Lord Shiva and he takes the form of a Brahmana and introduces himself as Soma and Deva Brahmana. He also accompanies Ramayya to Abbaluru to observe the anti-Shiva attitude expressed by the Jainas (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 27). Shiva taking the form of Brahmana is significant here. It shows the legitimation of the Brahmanas as the leaders of the Virashaivas. The use of Sanskrit verses also shows the importance of Vedic, Puranic, and Shastraic elements in Virashaivism.[2] It has been suggested that the earliest texts of the Virashaivas were composed in Sanskrit and they were termed Saivagamas and the Brahmanas and other elites generally read them in Sanskrit. Kannada works were composed for those who lacked the Sanskrit knowledge (Rice, 1982, p. 50).

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[1] *Allalli Annachatravu Aravatikeyu*
Allalli Ishwaralayavu
Allalli
Yogamantapa Melupparigegalillada Sthananiddudilla
Translation (author):
There were feeding and charity houses
There were Ishwara temples
There were places for performing yoga. There was no place where they were absent.

[2] For example, there is a prayer to Lord Shiva for protection.
Trahi try jagadadhipati shanmukhapita
*Trahi trilochanadodeya (*in Kannada, Odeya means lord*)*
*Trahi Mrityunjaya Brahmesha (*Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 52).

Shiva, in *Abbaluru Charite*, assumes the name Soma. It would refer to Somanatha. Karnataka maintained a close relationship with Somanatha as revealed in contemporary literature and inscriptions. It is also possible that there was a conflict between the Brahmanas and the Jainas in Gujarat, which also spread to Karnataka. In fact, one cannot dismiss the competition between the Brahmana or Hindu traders and the Jaina traders. For example, the Ayyavole Five Hundred, a major trade guild of South India, was dominated by the Brahmana and non-Brahmana traders even though there is some reference to the Jainas as well (Abraham, 1988).

Ben-Herut argues that the Virashaivas did not totally reject everything Brahmanical, as they accepted the Brahmanical rituals and practices as long as they did not contradict the philosophy and worldview of Virashaivism. For example, the latter would not tolerate the practice of untouchability (Ben-Herut, 2018, p. 20). However, in the present context, there is no reference to the contradiction between the Brahmanical and Virashaiva values, as the main concern was to deal with the problem of the Jainas.

Anti-Jaina Rhetoric

In the context of the Tamil region, it is noted that anti-Jaina rhetoric was an important part of the Bhakti movement (Veluthat, 2018, p. 161). In the case of Virashaivism, particularly during the early years of its inception, anti-Jainism was an important element of this movement. This was due to the leadership provided by the Brahmanas to Virashaivism. The work mentions that Lord Shiva informed Ramayya that in the Nagarakhanda district (*desha*) Jainas have become dominant and they should be destroyed[3] (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 22). Shiva mentions that the Jainas do not respect him as the Jainas think that their religion is the best. Further, Ramayya is instructed to cut his head and achieve fame in the world (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 23). This statement relates to the main story of the work and the Abbaluru inscription where it is mentioned that the Jainas challenged Rama to sever his head and come back to life after seven days by the grace of Shiva. They agreed to the condition of Rama that if he achieves this feat, the Jainas would accept the greatness of Shiva. In addition, they also accepted that they would support the conversion of 800 basadis into Shiva temples. As Rama was able to achieve this feat, he was able to obtain the support of not only the King Bijjala of Kalyana but also other kings such as the Goa Kadambas. This was a major victory for the Virashaivas, achieved by a Brahmana Ramayya (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. xx).

It is said that Ramayya decided to destroy Jainas in the town of Abbaluru. There is a reference to the annihilation of the demons of Tripura (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 35). Incidentally, the event of Tripura destruction was a well-known event in contemporary sources such as inscriptions (Gadre, 1943, pp. 64–5). This is a Puranic

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[3] *Nagara khanda deshadi*
Khulatanadi Jainarugalu
Balikondiharabbalurige ni hogi
Kolahalava Malpudenda

reference to the emergence of the demons of Tripura who were destroyed by encouraging them to renounce reading of the Vedas and accept respect heretical doctrine (Dimmitt & Buitenen, 2015, p. 244).

In Abbaluru, there is a reference to a large number of Jinalayas or Jaina temples. This enraged Ramayya.[4] Further, the Jaina philosophy and way of life are described. Jaina gurus preach that one should eat after the sun is set (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 49).[5] Amid the Jaina temples, Rama finds the temple of Brahmesha or Shiva temple (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 50). It shows that Jainas, by building their basadis and preaching their philosophy, had reduced the importance of the Brahmanical temples. The work also mentions that there was a serious argument between the Jainas and Rama. When the latter entered the Shiva temple, cleaned it, and prepared for the worship of the deity, the Jainas came in large numbers and obstructed Shiva worship. They say that if he enters Shiva temple, he will have sin, while Rama said that by entering the temple his sins will be destroyed. It shows the conflict between the Jainas and the devotees of Shiva (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 54).[6] This content answers a question raised by Ben-Herut. He asks the question: "Was this place a Śaiva stronghold before the Jains took control over it?" (Ben-Herut, 2012, p. 145). Perhaps he did not obtain an answer in the Abbaluru inscription. This work shows that in fact there was the existence of a Shiva temple. It is shown that due to the hostility of the Jainas, Brahmanas could not worship the deity, Shiva, in the temple. In addition, *Abbaluru Charite* shows that Alande comprised several Shiva temples. However, Abbaluru came under the control of the Jainas. This would mean the transformation of a Jaina-dominated region into a region dominated by the Virashaivas. It would also indicate that there are instances of conversion in Hinduism. Such an argument would also substantiate the argument of Arvind Sharma that in Hinduism also there were references to conversion (Sharma, 1992). In this sense, Virashaivism also emerges, like Buddhism and Jainism, as a missionary religion. This is found not only in the case of Virashaivism but also in Vaishnavism.

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[4] *Elli nodalu Jainaralaya mathagalu*
  Elli nodidaralli Basti (Basadi)
  Elli nodalu guruguddara neraviga
  Lella noduta Rama nadeda
  Translation (author)
  Wherever one sees, there were Jaina temples and monasteries
  Wherever one sees, there were the basadis
  Wherever one sees, there were settlements of Jaina teachers
  Seeing all these Rama walked
[5] *Astamayake unnabaradu endemba*
  Pustakavanu pidikondu
  Vistarisuta voduvaruhyaru tamma
  Bastiyolage rajisidaru
  Translation (author)
  The Jaina teachers carry the book which mentions that one should not eat after the sunset and these teachers enjoy their stay in the basadi.
[6] *Vasigalagirabedavi gudiyolu*
  Dosha bappudu ninagenalu
  Ishanalayavanu pokka matradi papa
  Nashavaguvudendu nudida

The anti-Jaina rhetoric may be a response of the Brahmanas to the anti-Brahmanical propaganda carried out by the Jainas. It would imply the intellectual conflict between the Jaina and Brahmanas. Moreover, we have a few instances of the Brahmanas becoming Jainas, thereby affecting the popularity of the Brahmanical religion as the non-Brahmana followers of Brahmanas generally followed the example of the latter. It would threaten the future of Brahmanical religion in Karnataka. For example, we have the case of Adi Kavi Pampa. His father, who was a Brahmana, had been converted to Jainism. He belonged to Vengi in the Andhra region and he was patronized by Arikesari, the feudatory of the Rashtrakutas (Rice, 1982 p. 30).[7] We should also note that the earliest poets and scholars in Kannada were the Jainas. The three gems or *ratnas* of Kannada literature, Pampa, Ponna, and Ranna, wrote on Jainism, which affected the Brahmanical position. It led to the emergence of the Brahmana scholars such as Harihara and Raghavanka who reacted to the Jaina domination by criticizing Jainism and defending the Brahmanas. In the twelfth century, the conflict between the Brahmanas and the Jainas continued. During this period, Abhinava Pampa or Pampa II wrote *Ramachandracharita Purana*, which was a Jaina version of Ramayana. The text does not refer to the Brahmanas. Ramayana is represented as being enacted in the Jaina universe. The Brahmanical myths are replaced by natural events, which could be explained through reason. Ravana is not demonized as we find in Brahmanical Ramayana. In the end, the characters of Ramayana become Jaina ascetics (Rice, 1982, p. 34). Such a representation of Ramayana would have hurt the Brahmanical sentiments. *Vritta-Vilasa* written in the twelfth century condemns the Brahamana gods as not worthy of respect as the gods suffer from a few limitations (Rice, 1982, p. 37). The events related to Ramayya should be placed in the context of the conflict between the Jainas and the Brahmanas. This conflict has been documented by D.N. Jha (2023, p. 89). However, he seems to defend the Jaina criticism of the Brahmanas and Vedic religion.

Description of Abbaluru

There is an interesting discussion regarding Abbaluru. It shows that Abbaluru was completely dominated by the Jainas. Abbaluru was termed as a town and it comprised large numbers of Jaina temples. It was a prosperous town, having a large supply of crops for consumption by the people. Materialism has been shown as a major feature of Jainism, particularly concerning the lay Jainas. There is a reference to the royal street, shops of pearls, and perfumes. Women played an important role in this town as there is a reference to the women garland makers. Considerable freedom was given to the women. It may be a commentary on the attitude of Jainas towards women (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 39). There is also a reference to the *kaminis* or women who attracted men, and women who indulged in *veshyavata*

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[7] The respect of Abhinava Pampa is revealed by the following statement:

"That nothing might impede him in the acquiring of his magic power, Ravana issued orders that throughout Lanka and its territories no animal life should on any account be taken; that his warriors should for a time desist from fighting; and that all his subjects should be diligent in performing the rites of Jina puja" (Rice,1982, p. 39). The work clearly contradicts the Brahmanical universe. It extols the importance of following the Jaina precept.

or prostitution (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 47). In addition, women are described as attempting to seduce men by smiling at them, using perfume, and presenting themselves in such a way that men are attracted to them. There is a reference to different women categories such as *padmini*, *hastini*, and *chittini* (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 41). This would be a reference to the character of the Jaina women, who were open to sexual interaction with men when compared with the women in the Brahmanical religion. Abbaluru consisted of many shops that traded in luxury items and essential goods such as hing, pepper, ginger, clove, and jewels and there were the merchants or *"vyavaharigal"* (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 40). This would be a reference to the Jainas who indulged in trade. There is also a reference to the work of craftsmen and artisans who produced silk cloth, cloth with embroidery, painting, oil producers, and beauticians (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 43). It is possible that some of these traders and artisans were the Jainas. They would have earned a huge wealth through craft production and trade. Abbaluru, thus, has been presented as a region known for its material wealth. In a way, it critiques the Jaina attitude towards material happiness. Even though the Jaina philosophy would contradict such an attitude, the attempt is precisely to show the negative aspects of Jainism. At the same time, there is a reference to the Brahmanas who also seem to enjoy their life, but they are stated to exhibit a superior character as they are concerned only with their temple and their religious rituals. The Brahmanas are concerned with *snana* (bath), *dhyana* (meditation), and rituals such as *yajna*, *hotra*, and *shatkarma* (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 44). They have upheld the prestige of their family. In this sense, one can find a difference between the Jainas and the Brahmanas. The rituals performed by the Jainas are not discussed. There is a reference to their material life. On the other hand, the material life of the Brahmanas is not discussed while providing details concerning the spiritual life of the Brahmanas. Even the sexual activities of the Brahmanas are discussed in the context of their religious sphere. It shows that the attempt of the work is to defend the position of the Brahmanas when compared with the Jainas.

The details disprove the argument of Romila Thapar that traders were the basis of Virashaivism (Thapar, 1989, p. 219). In fact, one can suggest the traders formed an important social base of Jainism, as the Jainas were not encouraged to participate in agricultural production. This was the situation found in the case of the Buddhists as proved by Himanshu Prabha Ray (1986). Perhaps, Thapar referred to a later situation when the Virashaivas became dominant traders of Karnataka. However, it was not the case in the initial years of the emergence of Virashaivism. In fact, the conflict between Jainas and Brahmanas is tentatively described as a conflict between the trading elite and agrarian elite (Veluthat, 2018, p. 167). However, in the later period, the Virashaivas emerged as major traders of southern Karnataka as they appear in the inscriptions belonging to the seventeenth century (Jois, 2011, no. 44). The conversion of Jaina traders into Virashaivism was also responsible for this development. In its early phase, on the other hand, the Virashaiva vachanas show that the "lower" castes formed an important basis of Virashaivism. This is proved by the reference to Madivala (washer-men), Jeda (weavers), and many women who became part of Virashaivism. Along with them, Brahmanas also played an important role in the popularizing of Virashaivism. One cannot ignore the role of Ekantada Ramayya, a Brahmana, in obtaining royal support for this religion. In the Tamil region, the

conflict between the Jainas and Brahmanas ended by the tenth century CE. However, in the case of Karnataka, this conflict between Jainas, Brahmanas, and Virashaivas continued up to the seventeenth century as found in the Kannada text *Sahyadri Khanda* (Bhanumati, 1984, p. 301; Narasimhacharya, 1924, p. 2).

There is a comparison between Alande and Abbaluru. Alande is a place known for the Brahmanical presence while Abbaluru was dominated by the Jainas even though it is possible that in the remote past, it was comprising the Shaivas including the Brahmanas. While Abbaluru comprised many Jaina temples, Alande comprised several Brahmanical temples, particularly those of Shiva. There are the charity houses and shelter houses providing food and shelter to the devotees (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 10). Alande has been described as a region abounded with prosperity as there was the production of food grains, bananas, lemons, oranges, coconut, mangoes, and so on. In addition, there are cows and buffaloes that provide milk to people in large quantities. People in Alande were contended (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 10). In this way, Alande and Abbaluru represent Brahmanical and Jaina ways of life respectively.

Royal Patronage

On the one hand, there was the destruction of the Jaina basadis and on the other one finds the conversion of basadis into Shaiva temples. Hegewald and Mitra (2012) suggest that there are a few pieces of evidence to prove such a conversion. For example, the Jaina footprints are altered to give the form of Virashaiva footprints. Further, along with the Jaina statues, there are Shiva *lingas*. Hegewald and Mitra (2012) studied the Virashaiva Doddappa temple found in the Anantpur district of the Telugu-speaking region (Hegewald & Mitra, 2012, p. 64). Uthara Suvrathan has shown the conversion of the Jaina basadi in Gudnapura in North Kanara district, Karnataka, into a Virashaiva temple (Suvrathan, 2019, p. 103). The suggestion of Suvrathan that the conversion took place in the sixteenth century shows that the Jaina-Brahmana conflict continued in the sixteenth century and also reflected in contemporary literature. The conversion of Jaina basadis into Virashaiva temples is also depicted in *Abbaluru Charite*.

The Jainas complained to the King Bijjala regarding the destruction of the Jaina basadi by Rama. However, the King Bijjala did not support the Jainas, even though traditionally he has been a patron of Jainism in his kingdom. It is said that Bijjala inquired Rama regarding the destruction of the Jaina basadi. He said that the Jainas had promised that if he demonstrated the power of Lord Shiva, they would allow the destruction of the Jaina basadi. It is also said that Rama was actually interested in the destruction of 800 basadis. He compelled the Jainas to accept Shaivism (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 20). The result of the defeat of the Jainas at the hands of Ramayya was the royal patronage provided to Virashaivism. As discussed by Ben-Herut, Bijjala, the King of Kalyana bestowed grants to the Virashaiva temples. The text claimed exalted support of the king as it mentions that King Bijjala gave Ramayya the grants of Abbaluru, Dupadahalli, Nulageri, Bhogavi, and the Brahmana guru Chikkisha obtained Antaravalli, Alladakatte, Halgeri, Sunkarpura, and Nitturu (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. xxii). However, there is a difference in the details of the grant of villages

mentioned in the inscriptions and the text. Virashaivism obtained royal support not only from Bijjala but also from other kings such as Tribhuvanamalla Someshwara of Chalukays, Kadamba king Kamarasa — a member of the Mukkanna Kadamba family (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. xxii). In fact, the Goa Kadambas also supported Virashaivism through their grant to the Somanatha temple of Abbaluru (Saletore, 1938, p. 281). At the same time, it would be difficult to accept the argument of Thapar that "the hostility can be traced not to competition for royal patronage but rather control of the commercial economy over which the Jainas had a substantial hold" (Thapar, 1989, p. 220). While one can agree with the second part of this argument, the earlier part is subject to criticism. This is because Ramayya's achievements shifted the royal patronage from Jainas to the Virashaivas. The implication of the rise of Virashaivas for the royal houses cannot be underestimated. One cannot underestimate the importance of royal patronage for religion, as its absence would enable the hostile sect to prosper at its expense.

The Role of Brahmanas in Abbaluru Charite

The text represents the role of the Brahmanas in the making of Virashaivism by the reference to the parents of Ramayya, who were Brahmanas. They had performed the Brahmanical rituals after the birth of Rama. Another Brahmana character of the work is god Shiva who takes the form of the Brahmana Somayya and he guides Rama in his attempt to liberate Abbaluru from the Jaina hold. Another person who was represented as a Brahmana was Chikkisha, the Brahmana leader, who had the knowledge of Vedas, Puranas, and rituals. Finally, it was Chikkisha who brought Rama back to life through his spiritual power. However, before doing so, another Brahmana named Ponnitande had performed the Brahmanical rituals to bring back Rama to life. It is mentioned that Ponnitande recited the Vedic mantras in the process of reviving the life of Rama (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 72). When he failed, he approached Chikkisha. It is said that Chikkisha used the methods such as "tarpana, nyasamudre, japatapa, and veda mantra" and sent a message to god Surya. It is mentioned that Chikkisha guru was an expert in the Vedas (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. 75). It is his Vedic knowledge and spiritual power that enabled Chikkisha to bring Rama back to life. This process has been explained in detail. Chikkisha requested to Lord Surya to stay in the East. A series of events led to the final revival of Rama to life. There are clearly Brahmanical symbols in the form of *Veda ghosha* and *mantra*, which indicates the Brahmanical basis of the rise of Virashaivism (Basavaradhya, pp. xv-xvi). Basavaradhya, the editor of the *Abbaluru Charite*, mentions a few unpublished inscriptions of the twelfth century that refer to Chikkisha or Murujavadayya (the term Ayya implies that he was a Brahmana). The inscription has been discovered in Rattahalli. Another thirteenth-century inscription found in the same village refers to a grant given by Honnasetti to Murujavadayya, who was known for his devotion to Shiva (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. xxvi).

However, this incident of Chikkisha performing a miracle is not mentioned in the inscription. At the same time, we should note that it is possible that due to lack of space, the inscription could have avoided a few events, which were deemed not important for the document. The *Abbaluru Charite*, being a text written at a later period, did not suffer from this constraint. Nevertheless, the Abbaluru inscription and the text *Abbaluru Charitre* exhibit the role of Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism in the twelfth century. The leadership provided by the Brahmanas was one reason for the success of the Virashaiva movement. At the same time, this is not to deny the anti-Brahmanical movement, particularly under Basavanna. The point that we make here is that one cannot deny the role of Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism. The immediate concern of the Shaivites, including the Brahmanas, was to suppress the popularity of Jainism. It is a historical fact that since the twelfth century, the popularity of Jainism waned in northern Karnataka, and Virashaivism became a major religious sect among the Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas. Today, those who profess Virashaivism have emerged as a major section of the population of Karnataka. Interestingly, Jainism emerged in south coastal Karnataka in the fourteenth century (Ramesh, 1970, p. 297). One reason for this development was its suppression in northern Karnataka and the search of its followers for a new region where they could spread their religion. We need to note that southern Karnataka has been an important bastion of Jainas as found in the centers such as Sravanabelagola, Karkala, Venur, Madabidure, and Dharmasthala.

There were a few details in the *Abbaluru Charite*, which refer to the leaders such as Basavanna who supported Ramayya. It is mentioned that after the revival of Rama, he was visited by the Virashaiva leaders such as Basavanna, Chavudayya Shantavira, and Channa Basava. The local official Shankhapala, who was a Jaina, requested that he should be inducted into Virashaivism. It is said that Basavanna preached to him the rituals related to Virashaivism. Shankhapala requested that he should be given the *diksha* or initiation into the ascetic life. Ramayya suggested that Shankhapala should understand the Shaivagama and preached to him regarding their importance to the Shaivas. After obtaining *diksha*, Shankhapala became Virasomesha (Basavaradhya, 1973, p. xvii). The details show that Basava was the contemporary to Ramayya. He was aware that a Brahmana had protected Shaivism in Abbaluru. There is no element of anti-Brahmanical or anti-caste system in this work. The only objective was to protect Shaivism from Jainism. At the same time, one can note differences between the Abbaluru inscription and the *Abbaluru Charite*. The first was issued in the twelfth century, while the latter was written in the seventeenth century. The incident of the Shiva sharanas visiting Abbaluru after the victory of the Brahmanas over the Jainas is not mentioned in the inscription. It may be an attempt made by the author Shanta Niranjana to legitimize his narration by referring to Basavanna. The inscription not referring to Basavanna is also significant because it shows that Abbaluru *kranti* was achieved in the absence of Basavanna. It would also explain the reason for the lack of anti-Brahmanical reference in this text.

Conclusion

Dominant historiography depicted Virashaivism as being anti-Brahmanical and anti-Vedic. The present paper has questioned this stereotype. Even though one cannot deny an element of protest, particularly in the later period, the early Virashaivism represented a reform movement as there was a considerable challenge from Jainism. The most immediate concern of the devotees of Shiva was to deal with the Jaina challenge. It was only later that attempts were made to criticize the rigid caste system propounded by the Brahmanas. In the process, we have discussed the role of the Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism as an important sect or faith in early medieval Karnataka. It is imperative to note that before discussing Kalyana or Basava *kranti*, one should discuss Abbaluru *kranti*, which represents the annihilation of the Jainas by the Brahmanas and other members of Virashaivism that cleared the way for the protest movement. It also demonstrates the need to analyze the role of the Brahmanas in the emergence of Virashaivism before it became an anti-caste movement.

Declarations

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