



Attimabbe as Dānacintāmaṇi: Women's Patronage, Piety, and Cultural Leadership in Medieval Jain Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Attimabbe (10th–11th century CE), honoured with the title *Dānacintāmaṇi*, stands as one of the most influential female patrons in medieval Jain history. This research article examines her life, charitable works, and cultural contributions within the Western Chalukya period, highlighting how her extraordinary patronage reshaped religious, literary, and social landscapes. Using a combination of textual analysis, inscriptional evidence, and historical sources such as the *Pampa Bharata*, *Lokopakara*, Ranna's *Ajita Purāṇa* and contemporary epigraphs, the study re-evaluates Attimabbe not merely as a donor, but as a cultural leader who promoted Jain values, arts, and manuscript production at a time when women's public roles were generally restricted. The paper explores her extensive patronage—such as the donation of 1,000 copies of *Pampa's Ādipurāṇa*, temple construction, and support for scholars—and argues that these acts were deeply intertwined with her spiritual identity and social authority. It also considers how titles like *Dānacintāmaṇi* functioned as markers of female merit and religious prestige in medieval Karnataka. Further, the study analyses how Jain ideals of *dāna*, *ahiṃsā*, and *śrāvikā-dharma* shaped Attimabbe's actions while simultaneously allowing her to transcend traditional gender boundaries.

By situating Attimabbe within broader Jain and South Indian historical contexts, the article demonstrates that her contributions represent a unique model of female agency, leadership, and intellectual patronage. Ultimately, this study positions Attimabbe as a pivotal figure whose legacy continues to illuminate the richness of Jain female history.

Keywords-Attimabbe; Dānacintāmaṇi; Jain women; Patronage; Medieval Karnataka; Lakkundi Inscription.



Introduction

In the fertile and prosperous region of Veṅḡ, there was the well-known land of Kamma-deśa, where the town of Puṅganūr became famous because of Nāgamayya. (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985, p.3) Nāgamayya had two notable sons: Mallapa, who was very learned, and Ponnamayya, who was known for his good character and devotion. Their home welcomed scholars and poets, where they were respected and supported (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985, p.3) and, both of whom served as officers under Taila II (The Chalukyas of Kalyana).

The Chalukyas of Kalyana came to power around 973 A.D. after ending the rule of the Rashtrakutas. (R.R. Diwakar (ed), The Karnataka through the Ages, pp.266) During this political change, many officers and generals supported them. One such general was Pampaiah, who was the grandfather of Mallapa. He seems to have opposed the Rashtrakutas and supported Taila II. This information is confirmed by an inscription found at Ron in Dharwad district. (SII, Vol XI, no.36) The inscriptional records corroborated by literary sources, bring out the history of the revived Western Chalukyas:

Taila II (A.D. 973-993), his son:

Satyasraya (A.D. 997-1006)

Taila III (A.D. 1156)

The same sources indicate that, during this period, two prominent Jaina martial families that of Mallappa and Dallappa held considerable power and influence. They played a vital role in the re-established Chalukyan polity. Epigraphic records suggest that the forefathers of Mallappa and Dallappa had supported Taila II and Irvabedanga Satyāśraya Ahavamalla in restoring Chalukyan authority and in their campaigns to expand the kingdom. Mallappa and Dallappa themselves continued this legacy, serving both Taila II and his successor Irvabedanga Satyāśraya Ahavamalla in important positions as ministers and military commanders.(Prakash, T. Surya, and Y. Ramachandra Reddy 2012, p.64) General Mallappa was a commander under the Western Calukya ruler Tailapa (A.D. 973-997).



Mallapa had built up his fortunes by the dint of his merits under Taila II (973-997 AD) (Dr. M.S. Nagaraja Rao, 1983). According to the poet Ranna, Mallapa belonged to the Vajivamsa of Kaundiya *gotra*. (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985, p.3). This lineage is mentioned in the Lakkundi inscription. The name suggests a martial background, as it is linked with meanings such as horse, warrior, and courage. Chalukyan records refer to noble families of the Vajikula, including both Jain and non-Jain branches. Though little detailed information survives about this *vaṃśa*, it is noteworthy that the well-known Hulla, minister to the Hoysala kings Narasimha I and Ballala II, came from the Vajivamsa. (Epigraphica Carnatica, Vol-II, Nos.71-481). The Lakkundi inscription highlights the achievements of two prominent martial Jain families, emphasizing their role in supporting the rise of the Chalukyas to power and in fostering the growth and prestige of Jain culture during the period. (SII Vol XI, No. 52). This inscriptions describe Mallapa as ‘a bee at the lotus feet of the Jina’. (SII Vol XI, No. 52, Sts.26, 27).

It is known that during the time of Pampaiah. Chalukya Taila II was consolidating his power base against the Rashtrakutas. (South Indian Inscriptions, Vol–XVIII, No.32). An undated inscription of the Rashtrakuta king Krisna III discovered in Ranebennur taluk of Dharwar district also refers to one Pampaiah administering Gottigali. And this Pampaih must have been the same person referred above. (Prakash, T. Surya, and Y. Ramachandra Reddy 2012, p.64).

Being a political genius, he was well versed in the science of warfare. In the equestrian sciences such as *ashvasastra* and *astrology*. Ranna adorns him with many titles: Viprakuladeepa. Abhimantunga. Ahitagajaghatismha, Parahitacarya, Chalukyabharana. Mallapiah also had such titles as *Ammana bhakta*, (devotee of the goddess). (Jinamanjari. Vol-8, 1993).

Attimabbe(950 CE- 1020 CE)

Mallapa wife, Nāgiyabbe, a woman of noble qualities, was the daughter of Nāgamayya and Appakabbe. (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985, p.4) The couple had sons—Guṇḍamayya, Eḷamayya, Ponnamayya, Ahavamalla, and Vallana and daughters Attimabbe, Guṇḍamabbe, and Nāgiyabbe who were all respected. (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985 P.4)



The Lakkundi inscription introduce Attimabbe as the daughter of Mallapa, wife of Nagadeva, the eldest son of Dhallapa and mother of Panduvala Taila or Anniga. (SII Vol XI, No. 52, Sts.26-27).

The celebrated tenth-century Jaina poets Ponna and Ranna are said to have flourished under their patronage Ponna and Ranna receiving the support of Mallapa and Punnamiah, while Ranna was especially associated with the generous patronage of Attimabbe. (Prakash, T. Surya, and Y. Ramachandra Reddy 2012, p.64)

Mallapa and Dallapa, whose families had played a key role in the building up of Chalukya power in A.D. 973, had consummated marriage alliance; Nagadeva, eldest son of Dallapa, who was the chief minister of the Chalukya emperor was married to Mallapa's two daughters Attimabbe and younger sister Gundamabbe. (Gopal, 1981, p. 59) Mallapa and his wife Abbakabbe had eight children, of which three daughters have been noted and not much is known about other siblings. By marriage, Attimabbe and Gundamabbe on the side of Mallapa family and Nagadeva on the side of Dallapa family formed a link between these two prominent Jaina martial families. Nāgadeva followed his family tradition by serving in the Chalukya army of Taila II. He carefully developed and maintained a strong sense of bravery and valor. (Prakash, T. Surya, and Y. Ramachandra Reddy 2012, p.68)

Nagadeva spent most of his life in wars. As was the ordeal, on one such occasion Nagadeva, when he was at the height of his fame, met a heroic death on the battle field. The news of the death of Nagadeva was devastating on both Attimabbe and Gundamabbe. The practice of sati as references show, although not advocated in Jainism, was in vogue especially in medieval north Karnataka. According to the poet Ranna, a widow had two alternatives either to observe *sati*, or to observe *Jina Vrata* that is *Jina Dikshacharan* a vow to strive for a higher spiritual progress. (SII Vol XI, No. 52, St: 16).

Ajitapurana describes the instance vividly after Nagadeva's death on the battle- field. It depicts the pathos and passions of the parting women, their psychological tumult and boldly surfaces the conflicts in their convictions. Attimabbe had a son and Gundambbe, who was issueless, obtained permission from her sister to become *sati* and urged Attimabbe to live on to



take care of her son. (SII Vol XI, No. 52, St: 18). Attimabbe agreed to the proposal and spent the rest of her life in penance and self-sacrifice. Gundambbe opted for *sati*, self-immolation with her husband. Further, it brings out the end of Gundambbe nearer to its historicity. “Sister, you have a son, the forehead jewel of the world. Remain here and rear him up to adolescence. I shall follow Nagadeva.” (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985, p.6) After her husband’s death, she followed strict vows, upheld dharma, and cared for her children and home. Through fasting she weakened her body, through charity she gave away her wealth, and she earned lasting fame (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985, verse 19). She was compared to Revati for generosity, to Sita for virtue, to Devaki for purity, and to Sulocana for kindness. People praised her as a woman of noble qualities. (Paṇḍita Pa. Nagarajaiah 1985, p.7)

Deeply inclined toward literature, she carried forward her family’s tradition of extending generous patronage to poets and scholars. Mallapa and Punamiah were instrumental in the composition of the Kannada classic *Śāntipurāṇa* (A.D. 970) by Ponna (c. A.D. 950). According to Dr. A. P. Chaugule (Kannada Sahithya Charitha, p.484)), Ponna had earlier been honoured with the title *Ubhayakavi Chakravarti* by the Rashtrakuta prince Krishna III around A.D. 935.

Attimabbe requested Ranna (born A.D. 949), who was a classical poet of Kannada literature as Shakespeare was to English, to write *Ajitapurana* (A.D. 993) and the work was released on the occasion of *mahamastakabhseka* of Gommatesvara at Sravanabelagola in the year A.D. 993. Abhinava Vidyananda in his work *Kavyasara* cites Attimabbe for poet Ranna’s *Dānacintāmaṇi*. (Prakash, T. Surya, and Y. Ramachandra Reddy 2012, p.72)

The discovery of Lakkundi inscription inside the complex of Attimabbe *basadi* was made by late T.N. Srikantiah in 1945. The record is dated 1078 A.D. The record is bilingual, elaborate and contains 88 stanzas, composed in beautiful Kannada and Vritta styles. (SII Vol XI, No. 52). This mutilated inscription from Lakkundi in Gadag Taluk, Dharwar District, is largely a duplicate of the preceding record, differing only in its concluding lines. It mentions Lakkigunḍi, Nagadeva, Paḍevala Tailapayya, and Attiyabbe, who received the *śāsana* from King Ahavamalla. The section containing the date is partially damaged and no longer fully legible. (Bombay Karnataka



Inscription, Vol 1, Part 1, No.53). Two records lying inside the complex of Attimabbe's *basadi* at Lakkundi. (Ti. Nam. Srikantaiah pp. 150-204).

Another version of the same record provides further details about the damage and loss of life suffered by the Brahma Jinalaya, the grand *basadi* built by Attimabbe at Lakkundi, in the years that followed. It is believed that this inscription was rewritten about two centuries later. Attimabbe was an ideal devotee. She had 1000 copies of Ponna's Santipurana made at her own expense, and 1500 images of gold and jewels. (Rice, 1883, pp. 301–302)

The later dated inscription was composed by one Bahubali. According to the composition, Bahubali was proficient both in Kannada and Sanskrit languages; his father was Siripala, who caused the renovation of Attimabbe's *basadi* sometime in the 12th century (Rice, pp.301-302). The composer of the earlier inscription is believed to have been Ranna, the classic Kannada poet and the author of *Ajitanatha Purana*. It is important to note that the contents of this inscription corroborate, by and large, the contents of the *Ajitanatha Purana*. (Prakash, T. Surya, and Y. Ramachandra Reddy 2012, p.65) Poet Ranna composed his work at the instance of Attimabbe and he was equally patronized by the Chalukya king Taila II and Irivabedanga Satyasraya (Prakash, T. Surya, and Y. Ramachandra Reddy 2012, p.65).

The Lakkundi inscription from Dharwar, Karnataka, records the achievements of these two families. It suggests that without their bravery and political vision, the Chalukyas might have struggled to regain their lost power. The inscription also reflects the growing prominence of Jain culture during this period. As noted earlier, the families of Nagadeva and Attimabbe played an important role in the rise of Chalukyan power. They supported Taila II (973–997 A.D.) in establishing his authority over the former Rashtrakuta realm, then known as Rattapadi Seven and a Half Lakh. (R.R. Diwakar p.270, SIL., Vol. I, Pp. 63-65).

The record registers a land grant made by Attiyabbe (Attimabbe), wife of Nāgadeva of the Vāji family, to a Jaina temple she built at Lokkigundi (modern Lakkundi). The gift was entrusted to her preceptor Arbanandi-Paṇḍita of the Sūrastra-gaṇa and Kaurūr-gaccha. The inscription also notes miraculous events associated with her life. (Bombay Karnataka Inscription, Vol 1, Part 1, No.52).



The Lakkundi inscription dated A.D. 1007 refers to the construction of *Brahma Jinalaya* by Attimabbe. While the name of the Jinalaya is not explicit, it states that 1000 mahajanas of Lakkundi named it as *Brahma Jinalaya* and accorded consent to Attimabbe to make a tax-free endowment of the village Surki, for the maintenance of the temple. Further, it tells about the location of the *basadi* in the western part of the town and its geographical east facing direction. It also records the gift of Irivabēḍaṅga to Brahma Jinalaya at the suggestion of Attimabbe. The *basadi* along with the gift of Irivabēḍaṅga was given to the Jaina saint Acharya Arhanandi. The record refers to this temple as ‘the gold out of 1500 *basadis*’ caused by Attimabbe. Owing to Attimabbe, the ascendancy of Jain religion; its culture, literature and architecture reached the zenith in Lakkundi. During this time, Attimabbe’s son Anniga was ruling Masavadi-140. The Lakkundi inscription refers to a storied and well-fortified house where Attimabbe resided. (SII Vol XI, No. 52, St: 71-73). Whether Anniga had Lakkundi as the capital of his administration cannot be affirmed presently owing to the non-availability of sources.

Attimabbe patronized writers, sculptors, musicians, dancers, storytellers, warriors, orphans, and mendicants. Such patronage was usually considered the domain of men within traditional Indian society. Yet Attimabbe assumed this role herself, displaying remarkable courage and generosity that distinguished her as an exceptional woman of her time (Dr Kamala Hampana 1996, p.79).

From the Lakkundi inscription, it appears that the most splendid among the *basadis* built by Attimabbe was the Brahmajinalaya at Lakkundi. This *basadi* attained great fame, and there were many *Nisadis* (memorial erected for a Jaina ascetic, teacher, or follower) of Acharyas who died there of Sallekhana rites. (SII Vol XI, No. 52, St: 79). Attimabbe in Lakkundi inscription has been compared with many great legendary figures of the purans and epics and all their virtuous qualities. She is compared to Rukmini and Satyabhama, Chelini, Rohini, Prabhavati, Sulochana, Marudevi, Sushaine Sivadevi, Lakshmane, and Vijayasena (Vaasantha Kumari 1994, p.36).

Ranna praises Attimabbe with grand epithets such as *Dānacintāmaṇi*, meaning “the wish-fulfilling jewel of charity.” This title was not simply a poetic flourish, but a recognition of her exceptional generosity and her significant support of Jain religion and literature. Over time, *Dānacintāmaṇi* came to be used as a *praśasti* title and was bestowed upon many distinguished



women of noble families in Karnataka, reflecting the lasting prestige associated with Attimabbe's example. Her donation of one thousand manuscript copies of *Pampa's Ādipurāṇa*, one of the most significant texts in Kannada Jain literature, stands out as one of the largest recorded acts of literary patronage by a medieval Indian woman. Her support extended to scholars, ascetics, and religious institutions, making her a vital link in the preservation and spread of Jain narratives, values, and artistic traditions. She caused 100 copies of the Santipurana to be made, and distributed them to the learned. (SII Vol XI, No. 52, St: 30-31, 45) Brahmasiva in Samayaparikshe, adores Attimabbe attributing to her many epitaphs like *Gunda Khani*, *Vimala Charitre*, *Jaina Sasana Rakshamani*, *Sajjanika Chudamani*, *Akalanka Charite*, *Sarvakala Vidhi* and *Ghatantike*. (Vaasantha Kumari 1994, p.37).

Concluding Remarks

This article aims to analyse Attimabbe's life and contributions using textual sources, inscriptions, and secondary scholarship to understand her role as a cultural and spiritual leader. By examining her acts of *dāna* (donation), her social position as a noblewoman, and her engagement with the Jain community, the study seeks to highlight how she negotiated space for female agency within the constraints of her time. The analysis also situates Attimabbe within the broader landscape of medieval South Indian society, where royal women occasionally held power but rarely exercised such extensive influence in literary and religious domains. Attimabbe, renowned as *Dānacintāmaṇi*, occupies a distinguished place in the religious and cultural history of medieval Karnataka. Living during the 10th–11th centuries under the Western Chalukyas, she emerged as an exceptional figure whose philanthropic and literary patronage earned her recognition far beyond her immediate social circles. Her life offers a rare window into the agency of Jain women in a period when political and religious spheres were predominantly male-dominated. Through her generous donations, encouragement of literary production, temple endowments, and unwavering commitment to Jain ethical ideals, Attimabbe shaped a vibrant intellectual and spiritual environment that influenced generations.

This study is significant because it highlights Attimabbe as one of the most influential women in medieval Jainism and Indian cultural history. It shows how her acts of donation and



literary patronage shaped the spread of Jain texts and values in Karnataka. The research also demonstrates how a woman could hold social, religious, and intellectual authority in a period dominated by male leadership. By examining Attimabbe's life through inscriptions and literature, the study provides new insights into women's agency and public roles in medieval India. It also contributes to the broader understanding of Jain concepts of generosity, piety, and ethical leadership.

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