

AN IMAGE OF BUDDHĀVATĀRA OF VIṢṆU AT BĀDĀMI

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At Bādāmi, ancient Vātāpi, the capital of the early or western Calukyas (c. mid 6th-mid 8th cent.), is a large lake, locally known as 'Agastya Tīrtha'. Under the overhanging cliffs to the southeast of this lake, is a huge collapsed mass of rock leaning against the cliff side. It has so fallen as to form a natural cavern beneath it, the entry to which is obtained by crawling under the rock through a low tunnel-like opening. Inside, upon the cliff-face, is carved a large enthroned image. This image is locally referred to as that of Koṣṭharāya or 'leper king'. A legend about this sculpture is current in two versions¹ among the local people :

- (i) In olden days, a king of Vārānaśī was suffering from leprosy. He came to know about the miraculous power of the Agastya Tīrtha at Bādāmi which cured many diseases. So he travelled to this place to get rid of his ailment. Everyday he bathed in the lake and eventually was cured of that disease. Subsequently, an image of this king was carved and people used to call it the image of "Kuṣṭharāja" which became "Koṣṭharāya" in course of time. (*Kuṣṭha* in Kannada, as in Sanskrit, means leprosy.)
- (ii) One of the relatives of the Calukya royal family, Govinda, was suffering from leprosy. He sought the holy counsel of the sages performing penance at Bādāmi, and on their advice he bathed in the Agastya Tīrtha everyday till he was completely cured. The image represents this royal person who is called "Koṣṭharāya" by the people.

On the whole, both the versions are identical except for the royal persons involved and their domicile and period. The first version appears to be fictitious. When the Calukya kings were ruling at Bādāmi, it is unlikely that an image of a royal personage of another kingdom will be carved and be venerated by the local populace. The second version refers to Govinda of the Calukya royal family. Now, Ravikīrti's Aihole inscription (A.D.634) states that Pulakeśin II defeated some Govinda (and Appāyika) at the river Bhīmā. However, a sculpture of this defeated Govinda was got carved during the time of Pulakeśin II, by his successors, likewise seems an improbable reality.

H. Cousens was the first person to draw attention to this sculpture and illustrate it². He describes this image as "...seated in Buddha-like attitude, but it is neither a representation of Buddha nor a Jina. It is without doubt, a portrait statue." In recent years, A. Sundara identified this image as the portrait of Kīrtivarman I, got carved by his brother Maṅgaleśa, who claimed an unequalled and steadfast devotion for him³.

The image (Plate 1), except for the head, is bejewelled with ear-rings, necklace, armlets, bracelets, rings for the fingers, also chest-band, anklets, etc. It is particularly noteworthy that he wears *yajñopavīta*. The hair is in knobbly curves, but there is no Buddha's typical *uṣṇīṣa*-lump on the top of the skull : it rather resembles the Jina head. The figure is seated in *padmāsana*. Its right hand is raised in *abhayamudrā*; and it holds rosary. The left hand rests in the lap, palm upwards (*dhyānamudrā*). The figure is seated upon a lion-throne (*siṃhāsana*), the front of which is divided into three compartments, with a lion in each as in many pre-medieval and medieval Jina image-thrones in Karnataka. On either side of him is a male *cāmara*-bearer, each wearing a *kirīṭa-mukuta* and other gem-set ornaments, while behind him is the throne-back with the usual terminal *vyāla* and *makara* figures. Delineated as engraved line-drawing are here deer and *śaṅkha* to the left and *cakra* to the right. At present the image has been spoiled due to continual application of oil by the worshippers. The halo behind the head is plain and further behind is the depiction of tree.

Beside it, on the rock, a little way to the right of the image, is carved a small bearded sage with a fat body, seated in *padmāsana* on a *bhadrāpīṭha*. While his right hand is in *abhayamudrā*, the left hand seems to hold a vessel. On his right side is a long staff. Cousens identifies this image as that of a person who had the big one carved, or perhaps the *rājā's* prime minister. To me it appears to be the image of Agastya after whom the lake is named, because of the presence of sage's beard, fat body, and the water-vessel.

Annigeri, a second scholar who in recent years wrote on this image, feels that Koṣṭharāya must have been a Treasury Officer connected with the Bādāmi fort who became an ascetic later on⁴. And Carol Radcliffe Bolon remarks : "To me the date and identity of this image remain enigmatic⁵."

The head of the main image, plain halo, legs in *padmāsana*, the left hand in *dhyānamudrā*, the throne-back decorated with *makaras*, and the two male *cāmara*-bearers are very similar to the Tirthaṅkara carved in a tableaux in the Jaina cave at Aihole : (late 6th century; Plate 2). This indicates that the sculpture under discussion undoubtedly was carved by a sculptor who was accustomed to carving Jina images. All the same, the posture of legs and hands, the tree (which can be interpreted as the *bodhi*-tree) at the back, and the representation of deer on the throne-back conclusively prove that this is intended to be an image of Buddha. However, the profusion of ornaments and the engravings of *śaṅkha* and *cakra* on the throne-back unambiguously indicate his association with Viṣṇu. Considering the total evidence, it would be more correct to identify this image as that of "Māyāmoha" of the *purāṇas** or "Buddhāvatāra Viṣṇu".

On stylistic grounds, the sculpture can be dated to c. late 7th or plausibly the first quarter of the 8th century A.D.



1 Bādāmi. Cave near Bhūtanātha group of temples, image of the so-called Koṣṭharāya ("Māyāmoha" or "Buddhāvatāra Viṣṇu").



2 Aihole, Jaina cave, main hall, *upavarṇaka*-bay, seated Jina in a narrative-tableaux.

Notes and References :

1. A. Sundara, "Sculpture of Koṣṭharāya in Badami", *Archaeological Studies*, Vol.III, 1978, pp.66-67.
2. Henry Cousens, *The Chalukyan Architecture of the Kanarese Districts*, Calcutta 1926, fig. 17, p.57.
3. A. Sundara, "Sculpture of Koṣṭharāya," pp.69-70.
4. A.M. Annigeri, *Bādāmiya Śilpakale* (Kannaḍa), Dharwar 1958, p.33; Also, *A guide to Bādāmi*, Dharwar 1960, pp. 45-46; and *Cave Temples of Bādāmi*, Dharwar 1978, pp. 37-38.
5. Carol E. Radcliffe, *Early Chalukya Sculpture*, New York 1981, pp.94-95, Ph. D. Dissertation, unpublished.

* See in this issue N.P. Joshi's article.

— Editors.

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Plate 2 Aihole, Jaina cave, main hall, *upavarṇaka*-bay, seated Jina in a narrative-tableaux.

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