

SALLEKHANA MEMORIALS OF KARNATAKA– A BRIEF NOTE

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Abstract:

Jaina ethic is primarily ascetic.the aim of Jainism is release from the worldly life. The moral code of conduct prescribed for a householder and a ascetic finally leads to self-realisation. In the final face of his life he fasts unto death is called SALLEKHANA.

Just like the Hero Stones which are installed in the honour or memory of the dead ones ,the persons who reached the ultimate goal of life are through salvation are commemorated by their family members or devotees in the form of memorial. These memorials are generally called Sallekhana Stones.. These sallekhana stones are variously named in the inscriptions of Karnataka as Nisidi, Nisidige,Nishadyaka, Nishidhyalaya, Nishidhika .

KEY WORDS:

Sallekhana Memorials , primarily ascetic , Jaina ethic .

INTRODUCTION:

The Nishidhis generally speaking, represent such structures as are constructed on the site where a follower of the Jaina faith died or where his memorials were cremated or buried.

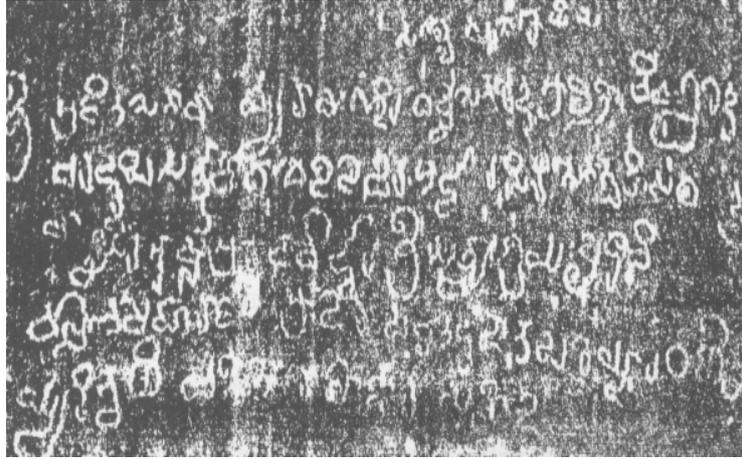
There are many instances also to assume that the Nishidhis refers to any construction or even on or near the epigraph. So we have to interpret the expression that the inscription itself is an Epitaph (i.e. words inscribed on tomb) and a memorial in the name of the deceased . The devotees or family members erected these Nishidhis as Parokshavinaya.(a gesture of reverence)

These inscriptions were usually carved inside the temple, in the premises of the temple,on rocks, stones, slabs, and boulders, mantapas and pillars. In course of time they were artistically decorated also.Sculptured Nishidhis with or without inscriptions are also seen.Like Jaina inscriptions, these Nishidhi inscriptions also begin with a hymn,verses in praise of the Arhat.On the basis of the development, these Nishidhis are classified into different categories in the chronological order.

Nishidhi Inscriptions: The earliest Jaina inscriptions from Karnataka commemorating the death of a person by Sallekhana chromologically is from Sosale in Mysore district(500 A.D.) , Araballi in Bellary dist.(620 A.D.) and kalvappu 6-7 A.D., are the earliest.

Sosale: A great centre of Jainism in good old days is brought by a newly discovered Nishidhi slab found in front of the flooring the Ammanavara temple assignable to 5 A.D. on the paleographical basis. The record is in Kannada script and Sanskrit language says that Gunasena who was 65 years old became a Nigrantha by giving up his robes and performed Sallekhana. By the act of his , Sosale became a Nigrantha Thirtha., a holy place for Jains.

Araballi: A small place with hills, natural caves, located in Harapanahalli Tq. Bellary dist.. The Nishidhi inscription of this place is of historical importance. It is carved on a boulder recording the names of some monks who died by observing Sallekhana – vrata.



Kalvappu: Vapra means a hill, hillock. Kata means a sepulcher, a burial ground, A hillock of tombs. Sravanabelagola was a Jaina Thirtha. The two hills, their natural caves, attracted the ascetics, householders to spend their last part of their life in Kalvappu. The earliest inscription from Kalvappu i.e. Inscription No.1 is itself a Nishidhi Inscription. It records the death by Samadhi of a Jaina saint Prabhachandra . 700 rishis in course of time followed the foot- steps of their preceptor. Unfortunately we do not have any inscriptions or memorials of them.

There are many Nishidhi inscriptions at Chandragiri hill, but they do not speak of themselves or the ruling Kings, Sanghas etc. These Nishidhis only speak about name of the person, the vow he took, and the disciples who commemorated the memorial. They are completely detached from the worldly attachments. Society or Sangha, These persons followed the main aim of Sallekhana by detaching themselves from passion, pride, previous status. they name of the Sangha they belong,

Later, these Nishidhis were represented by foot - prints. These foot- prints were adopted as a symbol of commemoration. It is a common practice in this country to preserve the memory of the revered personages, particularly the spiritual teachers, in the form of foot- marks. These figures are assumed to represent the sacred feet of those worthies and are worshipped as such by their disciples and devotees. Such foot- marks are generally carved at the spot where the revered person spent a part or last moments of their life and inscriptions furnishing details regarding them are incised nearby. This is one of the ways of celebrating the memory of the deceased among the followers of the Jaina faith also and such memorials are termed Nishidhis. Even the other traditions of India worship the foot- marks of the holy persons. The practice of worshipping the foot- print of Jina and sacred men are very common in Jaina temples. Sammeda Shikharji a Jaina Thirtha in Bihar is a finest example to it. The foot- prints of 20 Thirthankaras are worshipped.

By about 10c. A.D. the motif of foot- print was introduced as a commemorative symbol. The motif was either outlined or carved in low relief usually with an inscription engraved alongside it. Sometimes without inscriptions are also seen. Bhadrabahu cave at Chandragiri houses the foot- prints of Bhadrabahu. Tradition informs us that the great Jain leader Bhadrabahu died in this cave with Chandragupta Maurya as his sole companion. A much later inscription dating from the 12 c. which is no longer in the cave, stated that the foot- prints were those of Bhadrabahu.

The foot- print Nishidhi of Pallakki Gundu on hilltop at Kopbal is very interesting. An inscription is carved near the foot marks in memory of the teacher Jata-Singanandi, who seems to have passed away on this hill, under the vow of Sallekhana. He belonged to Yapaniya Samgha, His disciple Chavayya engraved his foot- prints with an inscription that reads as

1. Jata (a) Simganandi acharyyara padava

Chavayyam madisidam.

Translation-

This foot i.e. foot- marks of the teacher, Jata- Simganandi, was caused to be made by Chavayya.

This Acharya Jata- Simganandi is recognised as the famous scholar, who composed the Sanskrit poetic work Varangacharitam who lived in 7 A.D. But the inscription cannot be assigned before 10 A.D. But

it is assumed that the memory of the spot where the preceptor Jata- Simganandi breathed his last on the sacred hill of Kopbal was preserved in tradition by the succeeding generations. A later devotee of the teacher desirous of setting up a memento in his name incised the foot-marks as well as the inscription on the hill.

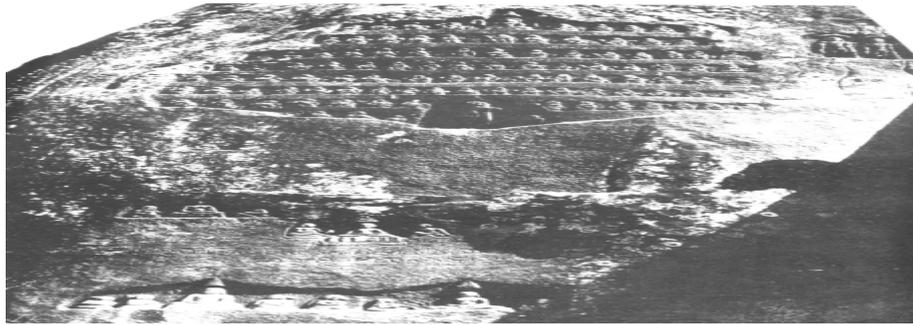
‘Srivatsa’ a flower symbol with four petals are seen on the foot-print Nishidhis .

Srivatsa is one of the 1008 auspicious symbol of Arihanta. This symbol signifies that the person has crossed the cycle of rebirth and attained mukti or salvation.

Nishidhi Sculptures-Nishidhis evolved into a full form like the hero- stones and took the shape of a inscribed slab in one or two panels with beautiful sculptures carved artistically on it. Usually, the lower panel depicts a acharya with pinchi and Kamandala , initiating the person seeking Sallekhana. A three legged tripod stool with the holy scripture is placed on it. The person after death is shown in front of Jina in upper panel. The inscriptions carved below the panel describes the type of vow, lineage, regnal year of the king etc.

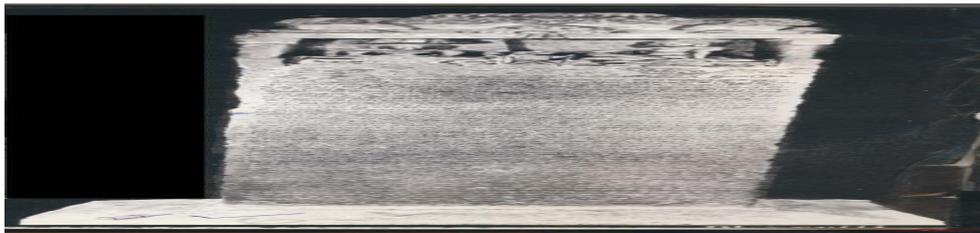
Probably, the earliest of Nishidhi sculpture, in its fully developed form, in Karnataka, datable to 7 A.D., comes from Aihole. The inscribed Nishidhi slab is found on the compound wall around Jinendra Bhavan at Meguti is a singletired sculpture. This beautifully executed sculpture on the top half of the slab, depicts Mahavira, seated in the centre with 3 lions below. Jina is flanked by a acharya on the left, who is depicted with pinchi ‘a peacock feather whishbroom’ and a water gourd called Kamandala. He is initiating the person sitting on the right of Jina. This aspirant seated in a yogic posture with folded hands in anjali mudra, seeking Sallekhana from his preceptor.

Boulder Memorials: Memorials are carved on the boulders which are easily visible like the entrance of the temple, main gate, hill tops. These memorials are attractive due to their elaborate artistic work. Sometimes single and simple sculptures are also seen on these boulders. The Kannada word for boulder is Gundu.



Siddara Gundu: The boulder at Akanda Bagilu on the large hill at Sravanabelagola is called Siddagundu, meaning a boulder of those who attained immortality. More than half a dozen of memorials are carved done above the other in a line with Jina in the centre and inscriptions carved on the lower portion. The very sight of this memorial gives a picture of the large number of samadhis that took place at this place.

Nishidhi Pillars: The freestanding pillars which are usually found in front of the Jaina Basadis, a unique feature of Jaina architecture are called Manastambas. They sometimes bear the memorial records at their square base. The best example of this is the Kuge Brahmadeva Pillar at Chandragiri in Sravanabelagola. This pillar does not bear the image of Brahmadeva Yaksha, but familiar as Brahmadeva pillar due to a traditional story.



This Manasthamba bears the inscription of Marasimha who died at Bankapura, after observing the vow of aradhana vidhi for 3 days at the holy feet of his preceptor Ajitasena-Bhattaraka. This inscription is of historical importance as it glorifies the heroic qualities of Marasimha who is eulogised as Ganga Diamond. Marasimha erected basadis and Manasthambas wherever he marched. He renounced his power, became an ascetic, roamed for a year and accomplished Samadhi at Bankapura. His followers honored his death by erecting a Manasthamba in his memory at Chandragiri which was already famous as a sepulchral hill. This very example indicates that memorials were also erected at far away places.



Memorial Columns: These are found generally in the temples or specially made Mantapas near or in front of the basadis. At Chandragiri hill in Sravanabelagola Mantapas are constructed for the Nishidhis by erecting pillars on all the four sides with a roof. They are called Nishadhyalaya. Alaya means home. Some historically important Mantapas are

Rastrakuta Mantapa: A memorial carved on the sides of the huge pillar is in honour of the Rastrakuta monarch Indra IV, grandson of Rastrakuta king Krishna III. This inscription eulogises the achievements of the king who ended his life by Sallekhana. The people who witnessed his death glorified the act of the king at his last breath.

Mahanavami Mantapa: A twin mantapa dedicated to two ascetics.

1. Devendrakirti Pandita's Nishidhi was erected by his follower Hullaraja in 1163 A.D.
2. Nagadeva, a subordinate of Hullaraja erected a Nishidhi for Shri Nayakirtideva in A.D. 1176, after 13 years. These mantapas look like Dravidian towers tapering towards the top with artistic work.

Machikabbe Mantapa: Nishidhi of Machikabbe, mother of Hoysala queen Shantala is installed here. This is one of the longest Nishidhi inscriptions of Sravanabelagola. Machikabbe's husband Marasimha, who was a Saiva in practice, observed the vow of Sallekhana and ended his life. Machikabbe, her husband Marasimha seeking Sallekhana from the preceptor is very well sculptured.

It is interesting to note that an inscription detected in the Neminatha temple at Malkhed states there was a practice in those days to set up Nishidhi memorials by associating them with a part or whole of the sacred structure, such as a mantapa or a pillar of the temple.

Nishidhi of Vidyananda Swami is detected in the central hall of the Neminatha temple. The inscription explicitly states that the Nishidhi of Vidyananda Swami was set up in the central hall of the Neminatha temple. There are reasons to believe that the Neminatha temple must have been in existence prior to 14 c. A.D. the date of the record. The temple might have been renovated by the time of this record. It is unlikely that the physical remains of the teacher were buried in the precincts of a public place of worship

like the present temple.

A few places in Karnataka attracted people since early centuries to practice meditation and end their life by the religious rite of Sallekhana.

Sravanabelagola .Its two hillocks Chandragiri and Vindhya giri, the sepulchral hills witnessed the death of hundreds of people.

Another historically important centre for Sallekhana was Koppala with row of hillocks in Gulbarga district.Kopana has a history of more than 2000 years. Till the end of 16-17 c. Koppala was a Jaina centre. The old glory of this place is completely forgotten or erased in the pages of history. Koppala was recognised as a foremost and supreme Thirtha or holy resort, is ruined and destructed at present. But, still the inscriptions which are intact speak about the ascetics, who ended their life by Sallekhana.The Nishidhi inscriptions of Koppala does not speak about the wars, victory of the kongs, nor the worldly matters The war within oneself is definitely discussed here.Nishidhi scenes are carved on the rocks of hills, pillars, speak pf this place as a holy Jaina centre, a Kashi Kshetra. At one time, Koppala had many monasteries, Basadis, pillars like Sravanabelagola.The local tradition says that there were not less than 772 basadis in Koppala. Koppalas glory is eulogised in the inscriptions of Sravanabelagola. An epitaph erected by Gangeya- Dandanayaka of Hoysala Vishnuvardhana in 1115 A.D. says Gangeya by restoring innumerable ruined Jaina temples in all places to their former condition and by making gifts to the most worthy, converted the Gangavadi Ninety Six thousand into Kopana.

At present, the inscriptions discovered at Koppala are all Jaina inscriptions. It is assumed, that there were a very big troop of paleographers, epigraphists, sculptors and writers at Koppala.Ascetics came here in groups, meditated until death.The great Acharya , poet Somadevasuri, Composer of Yashastilaka Champu, one of the greatest Sanskrit prose-poetry composer ended his life by Sallekhana at Koppala in Kartika panchami A.D. 983.This is an historical event which came to light. Sallekhana marana at Koppala was like a Mahanavami(Dasshera festival) for the ascetics..

This most awe –inspiring religious practice of Jainas has distinguished them from the other religions.This observance of Samadhi marana by number of ascetics, householders since earlier time to the present day is remarkable in the history of Indian religions.

- 1.E.C. Vol. II, Ins. No.22
- 2.Ibid.,32,157
- 3.Ibid.,72
- 4.Ibid.,66
- 5.Annuals of Bhandarkar Research Institute, Vol.XIV, p.264
- 6.P.B. Desai;Jainism in South India ,p.356
- 7.S.Settar; Inviting Death,p.269
- 8.Devarakonda Reddy;Itihasa Darshana,p.162
- 9.E.C. Vol.,II,Intro.,p.73
- 10.9 Annuals of Bhandarkar Research Institute, Vol.XIV,p.264
11. A.Sundara; Homage to Sravanabelagola,p. 153,93
- 12.P.B.Desai;Jainism in South India,p344
- 13.Nagarajaiah Hampa;Bahubali And Badami Chalukyas, p.131
- 14.S. Settar; Inviting Death, p. 190
- 15.E.C. Vol.II,Ins.,No.64
- 16.P.B. Desai; Jainism in South India , p.327
- 17.Hampa Nagarajaiah,Koppalada Shasanagalu,p.8
- 18.Ibid.,203
- 19.E.C.Vol.II,Ins.No.156,p.98
- 20.Hampa Nagarajaiah;Koppalada Shashanagalu, p13-14

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