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Dear Sai brothers and sisters,

Our sacred journey this month is to Karkala that hosts Mahamastakabhishekam to Lord Gomateshwar once in every twelve years.

Karkala



Karkala is a town and the headquarters of Karkala Taluk in the Udupi district of Karnataka, India. Located about 380 km from Bangalore, Karkala is a town of historical importance and a famous pilgrim centre for Jains near the Western Ghats. Karkala, historically known as Pandyanagari or city of Pandya, was ruled in early 14th century by the chief having name Veera Pandya of Bhairarasa family, hailed from Humcha in Shimoga district. Afterwards it was changed to Karikallu because of black stones. Over time, the name changed to Karkal and then to Karkala.

Ancient Legends

The Alupas were the first to rule Karkala. Their rule was followed by the Santaras, who were the feudatories of Alupas for many years. Karkala or ancient Pandya Nagari attained political and cultural importance from the time of the Kalasa-Karkala kingdom that was established by Bhairarasa Odeyas between 13th and 16th centuries. The Bhairarasas appear to be the descendants of the Santara chiefs, who ruled the Western Ghats region around the 11th century A.D. The royal family of Karkala shot to prominence right from the time of the Hoysalas. During the Vijayanagara period this family reached new heights of glory. Their kingdom extended over a wider area comprising Sringeri, Koppa, Balehonnur and Mudigere in Chikamagalur and most of the Karkala taluk. They were rich and maintained a large army. Despite engaging in wars, peace prevailed in the kingdom and this led to increased cultural activity and development.

The first important king was Veera Bhairava, who constructed basadis at Karkala and endowed land and money to numerous temples and basadis. Ramanatha and Veerapandya were his two sons. Ramanatha died during his father's time. In his memory, a scenic lake called Ramasamudra was created, which still survives. King Veera Pandya, at the insistence of his Guru Lalitakeerti, the pontiff of Karkala Jaina Math, installed a large statue of Bahubali on the rocky hill of Karkala. The date of the installation has been ascertained as February 13, 1432. Veera Pandya also installed the Brahmadeva Pillar in front of the statue in 1436.

Abhinava Pandya ascended the throne next and it was he who installed a carving of manastambha in front of the Neminatha Basadi in Hiriyangadi in 1457 AD. An intricately carved 54-foot-high (16 m) pillar stands in front of the Basadi. Abhinava Pandya's successor was Pandya VI. He built the Kere Basadi in the middle of a lake called Anekere in 1545 AD. It is in this lake that the king's elephants used to bathe. The Basadi and the lake still exist.



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Chaturmukha Basadi

The next important king was Immadi Bhairava (Bhairava II). He constructed the Chaturmukha Basadi on top of a small rocky hill in 1586 AD. The Basadi has four identical entrances from the four quarters leading to the Garbagriha and hence is popularly known as Chaturmukha Basadi. This is the most celebrated structural temple in Karkala and is referred to in inscriptions as Tribhuvana Tilaka Jina Chaityalaya and Ratnaraya Dhama. The Chaturmukha Basadi is built in the form of a square mandapa or hall with a lofty doorway and pillared portico on each of its four sides and a pillared verandah. The roof is flat and is made of massive granite slabs. It has lifesize statues of three theerthankaras on each side and small images of 24 theerthankaras. It took 30 years to construct this temple. In all, there are 108 pillars inside and outside the temple.

This place also came under the rule of Tippu Sultan, known as the Tiger of Mysore. In addition to his role as ruler, he was a scholar, soldier, and poet. It was under him that some of the untold and disappearing landmarks of Karkal were made. One of the most immanent of the time was the Kotay kani moat made in front of the Karkal Kotay castle, which was used during his war against the East India Company. In this war against EIC few of Indian Kingdom of Mysore's elite soldiers with huge contribution and service towards the land and kingdom were granted Title and Land in the township of Karkalla. One such title is Karkala Patayath. Second such marvel of the same regime is to discover the usage of a Gavi (or cave) route to travel to various surrounding location unseen through the mountains located near Shivati Keray (Lord Shivas lake).

There are 18 basadis of antiquity, including Mahaveera Basadi, Chandranathaswamy Basadi, Adinathaswamy Basadi, Ananthanatha Basadi, Guru Basadi, and Padmavathi Basadi. However, the rulers of Karkala were tolerant towards other religions. Therefore, temples of other religions exist, including the temples of Anantashayana and Venkataramana, Mahamaya Mukhyaprana, and Adi Shakti. The St Lawrence Church was built in 1845 in a village called Nitte (Attur hamlet) where people of all religions congregate every year in January for the feast of St Lawrence.

Mahamastakabhisheka

Every twelve years, hundreds of thousands of Jain devotees congregate to perform the Mahamastakabhisheka, a ceremony where the Gomateshwara statue is bathed and anointed with milk, water, and saffron paste and sprinkled with sandalwood powder, turmeric, and vermilion.



As the Mahamastakabhisheka begins, consecrated water is sprinkled onto the participants by devotees carrying 1,008 specially prepared vessels. The statue is then bathed and anointed with libations such as milk, sugarcane juice, and saffron paste, and sprinkled with powders of sandalwood, turmeric, and vermilion. Offerings are made of petals, gold and silver coins, and precious stones.

Our sojourn continues next month...Till then Sai Ram

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