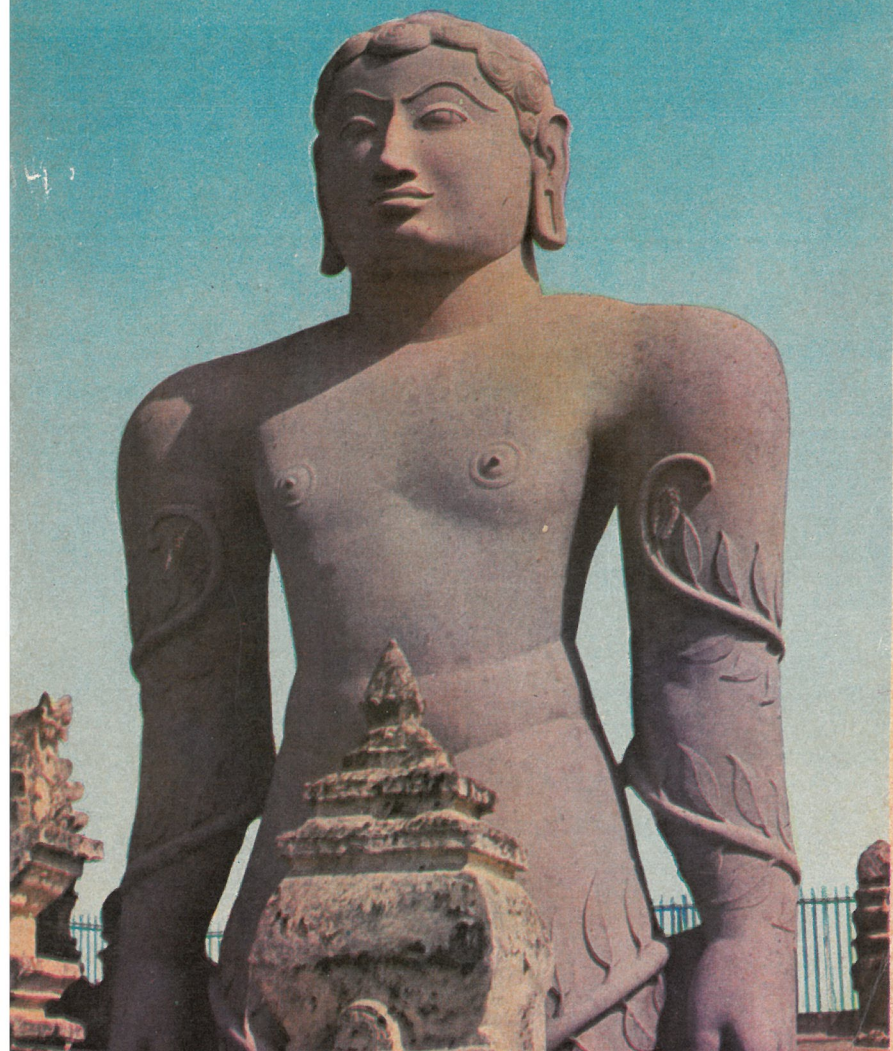


THE GOMMATA COLOSSUS

PROF. S. K. RAMACHANDRA RAO



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Vidyalankara

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Sravaṇa-Belgoḷa

Śravaṇa-belgoḷa in Karnataka is a popular tourist spot, especially for Jains from all over India. Few places in the country are so replete with romantic memories of devout monarchs and valiant ascetics, pious generals and heroic women. Nowhere else in the world are to be found as many as 573 inscriptions in a single site, all important and interesting. The present celebrity of the place is no doubt due to the magnificent monolith of the early Jaina saint Gommaṭa to be found there. The statue is reputed to be the tallest in the world. Even if the claim is disputed, it is undoubtedly unrivalled in the excellence of its execution. Its artistic merit is obviously supreme. However, the place was celebrated even before this statue appeared in 981 A.C.

The devout general, Chāmuṇḍa-rāya, who was responsible for the appearance of this statue there, came to that spot as a pilgrim. It was even then celebrated as a sacred spot. Its sanctity was recognized as early as the third century before

Christ. It was then that the great monarch of Ujjaini, Chandragupta, visited this place along with a large entourage of ascetics and pilgrims. The inscription that records his visit also mentions that the party travelled along an 'ancient' route (*ārsha*) from Ujjaini in the North to Kaṭavapra (or, in Kannada, Kaḷbappu), as this place was called, in the South. There must then have been a steady flow of pilgrim-population from the northern regions to this town, even before the third century B. C.

Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa (in Hassan district in Karnataka) is now a complex of three distinct units: a small town (or rather a village) sandwiched between two rocky hills. The town is the seat of an old Jaina pontificate, and is otherwise unimportant. Of the two hills, the bigger one (3,250 feet above sea level) is topped by the monolith that has now become world-renowned. But it is the smaller hill (lower than the other by about 200 feet) that is not only more interesting but historically more important. It abounds in exquisite monuments, twelve *basadis* (monastic temples) the oldest of which is dated 750 A. D. It is this lower hill that was regarded as the sacred spot during the third century before Christ; it was here that the visiting monarch of Ujjaini resolved to reside and end his days.

This lower hill was known as 'Kaṭa-vapra' in

Sanskrit, which may have meant 'the hill-slope that is suitable for passing away'. The Jaina scriptures recommend voluntary death of the aged or ill devotee by giving up not only the normal pleasures of life but even the necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. This mode of valiant death was styled as "the perfect abandonment of life" (*samnyasana*) or as "the steady scraping away of the edges of life" (*sallekhana*). It was death by peaceful means, and the attainment of unshakable peace by death (*samādhi*). The suitability of this hill for this mode of pious, peaceful and perfect death must have been well-known in the community of Jaina monks and laymen even in the northern regions. It must have reached the ears of the monarch of Ujjaini and inspired his imagination. In an inscription of 900 A. D., we are told that no less than seven hundred ascetics had shaken off their mortal coils on this hill. There are ninety inscriptions here that record such deaths as religious acts of merit.

The monarch of Ujjaini (probably Chandragupta II, son of Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty, and not the Mauryan king of the same name who was the grandfather of the great Asoka) became an ascetic in his declining years, having installed his son Simhasena on the throne. Accompanied by the enlightened saint, 'Śruta-Kevalin' Bhadrabāhu (probably Bhadrabahu III

in the lineage from Mahavira) and 12,000 of his ascetic disciples, he left Ujjaini and arrived in Kaṭavapra (or Kaḷbappu in old Kannada), which was within the confines of the kingdom of Kakutstha-varma, his father-in-law. The exact year of his arrival cannot be ascertained, but his death on this hill, twelve years later, has been assigned to 298 B. C.

Besides an inscription that narrates the details of this event, there are literary works that reflect folk-memory enshrined in myths that tell us about the circumstances of the monarch's journey to this place (like Chidānanda's *Muni-vamśābhyudaya*). It would appear that the monarch once dreamt sixteen dreams of enigmatic import. The last of these dreams projected a dragon with twelve heads of terrifying aspect. The holy sage Bhadrabāhu interpreted these dreams as predictive of the extreme conditions of famine that would devastate the northern regions for twelve years. Aghast at the prospect, and recognizing that piety would be damaged under such conditions, the monarch resolved to leave the kingdom and move on to the South, beyond the reaches of this impending calamity. The Jaina ascetics who feared that it would be impossible to persevere in their devotions during the days of the famine, decided to accompany the monarch who had now become an ascetic

himself. The head of the religious community those days was Bhadrabāhu, and he offered to lead the party of pilgrims in their long and arduous journey.

The party arrived on the lower hill in due course. Bhadrabāhu was attracted by the peace that reigned in the place, and was charmed by the great beauty of nature that abounded there. He resolved to settle down there for a quiet contemplative life. The monarch too decided to stay there, serving the holy man. They sent the motley crowd of pilgrim-devotees further south, to more prosperous regions. Eventually Bhadrabāhu died in the cave in which he resided (-the cave is shown even today), and the monarch lived on in the vicinity for twelve years, worshipping the imprint of feet of the holy sage (-which also are shown even now-). A temple was later built right on top of the hill, to commemorate the devotions of this monarch ; the shrine is now known as *Chandragupta-basadi*. This is one of the oldest monuments in the area.

This is how the lower hill, already celebrated, achieved a greater celebrity. The hill is now known as 'Chandra-giri', after the monarch, but inscriptions prefer to refer to the hill as Kaḷbappu, Tirtha-giri ('the sacred hill'), Rishi-giri ('The hill of the ascetics') and samādhiguḍḍa ('The hillock of death leading to peace').

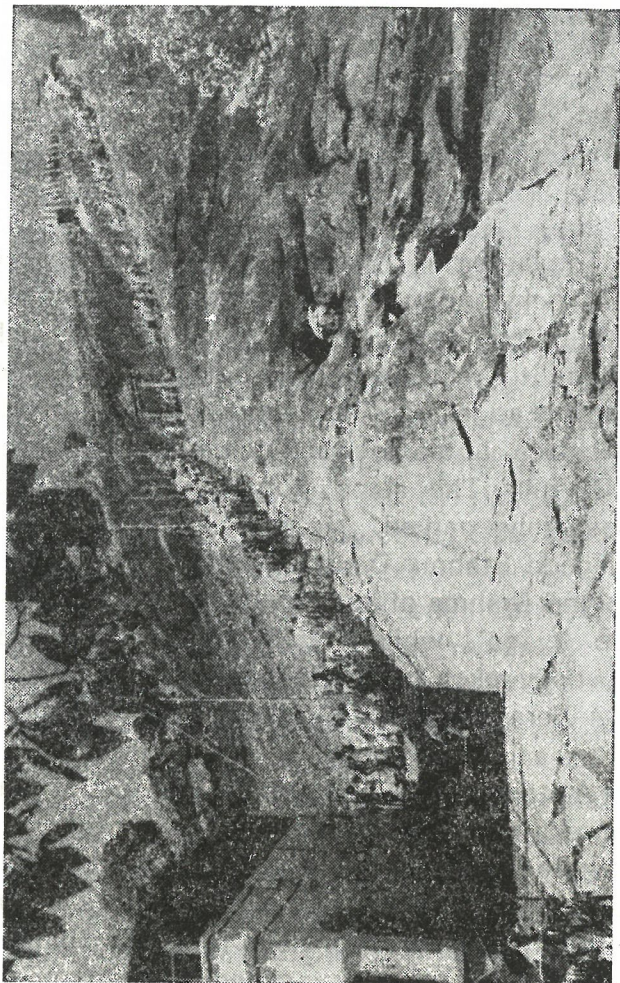
The first mention of the hill as Chandra-giri is to be found in a literary work, Chidānanda's *Muni-vamsābhyudaya*, composed around 1680 A. D.

The other hill on which the colossus stands is known as Vindhya-giri. The origin of the name is uncertain, but it may refer to its magnitude. It is also called Jina-giri, because of the monolithic statue of the saintly-victor (*Jina*), Gommaṭa. The township between the hills is dominated by a large pond, which in fact has given the name for the place. 'Beḷgoḷa' in Kannada means 'white lake', and we find this name mentioned as early as 995 A. D. in an inscription. White symbolizes purity, and the pond serving the needs of the pious population on the lower hill was naturally regarded as meritorious. Another inscription of 1123 A. D. refers to it more respectfully as "Śrī-Beḷgoḷa", and the enhancement in popular adoration is reflected in an inscription dated 1195 A. D. which chooses to style it 'Śrīmad-Beḷgoḷa-Tīrtha'. Because of the residence of ascetics (*śramaṇas*) around it, the pond and the town on its banks came to be known around 1600 as 'Śramaṇa-Beḷgoḷa'. 'Śravaṇa' is the later change that was occasioned by usage. The name now covers not only the town and the tank, but the two hills also.

The Monolith

The larger hill 'Vindhya-giri', is more open, more rocky and more prominent. There are about six hundred steps rudely carved on the rocky surface to take us upto a height of 470 feet. There is an elegant but simple archway under which we should pass and commence our ascent of the hill. The steps stop at the sixteen-foot, exquisitely carved, stone pillar, known as 'Tyāgada-Brahma-Devara-Kamba' ('The pillar of the god Brahma of abandonment' ; the expression 'tyāga', which literally means 'giving up' is usually taken to signify gifts, and traditionally gifts were offered here to the needy). Chāmuṇḍa-rāya is said to have sat here and distributed gifts.

A stairway, built around 1130 A. D., leads the pilgrim to the monolithic doorway (carved in a single boulder), said to be the work carried out under instructions by Chāmuṇḍa-rāya himself, who was responsible for the Gommaṭa colossus. This doorway, called 'Akhaṇḍa-bāgilu' (describing its monolithic nature) is adorned by a Lakshmī panel on its lintel. On entering through



this doorway, one arrives at the large granite pavillion. The magnificent enclosing wall (called in Kannada 'Suttālaya') which was built by Ganga-rāja, the Hoysala general in 1117 A. D., admits the devotee into the inner courtyard to gaze with astonishment at the marvellous monolith.

It is impossible to describe this grand statue in words, to photograph it correctly and in full, without distortions, or to measure its height accurately. Several attempts have been made to measure precisely the height and proportions of this monolith. The earliest in recent years was the one commissioned by the Duke of Wellington as Col. A. Wellesley in 1800. The height of the colossus was then estimated to be 60 feet and three inches. But Dr. Buchanan, who had the statue measured independently about the same time found it to be 70 feet and three inches tall. Mr. J. D. Legge of the Public Works Department of the Government arranged for its measurement a little later, and discovered the height to be seventy-one feet ! On the New Year Day of 1865, the Amildar of the area (Channarayapatna) got the statue measured, under instructions from the Commissioner in Mysore, Bowring : his figure was fifty-seven feet. According to the estimate of the historian and archaeologist Lewis Rice, the height of the colossus is fifty-eight feet. One

fails to understand how there could be such a wide variance in the measurement.

The pedestal on which the colossus stands is shaped like an open lotus. The sculptor has provided a clue to the height of the image by engraving on the pedestal near the left foot a scale measuring three feet and four inches. Probably this was the conventional length of the bow (dhanus) employed by architects and sculptors during those days, although the bow-length altered slightly later. Multiplied by eighteen, the total height of the figure would be sixty feet. And this may be the correct estimate.

Parts of the colossus have also been subjected to some measurement :

From top of the head to the lower tip of

the ears : 6'6"

Height of the neck : 2'

From the lower tip of the ears to arm-pits : 7'

From the lower tip of the ears to the waist : 21'

Breadth of the waist : 10'

Breadth of the shoulders : 26'

Breadth of the lower abdomen : 13'

Half the circumference of the thigh : 10'

Breadth of the foot : 4'6"

Length of the big toe : 2'9"

Length of the fore-finger : 3'6"

Length of middle-finger : 5'3"

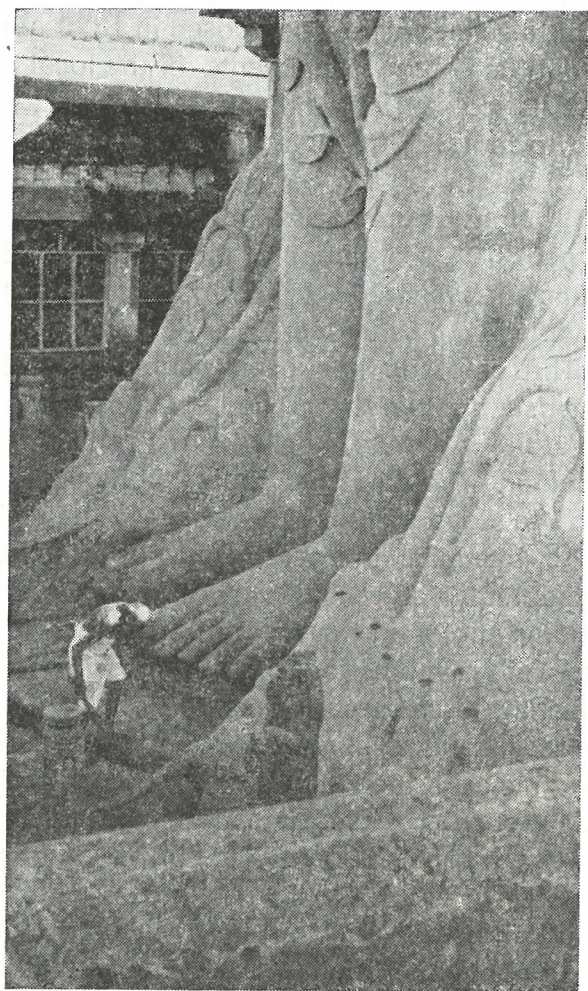
Length of the ring-finger : 4'7"

Length of the little-finger : 2'8"

There are some Samskrit verses, like Śāntarāja-
paṇḍit's sixteen verses composed in 1820, which
provide us with measurements in the local units
such as cubit (*moḷa*, 18 to 22 inches) : From
head to foot $36\frac{1}{2}$ C. from the navel to the feet
20 C, length of the ear 2 C., from ear to ear
8 C., height of the neck $1\frac{3}{4}$ C., circumference of
the neck $10\frac{3}{4}$ C, spread of the shoulders 16 C.,
around the waist 20 C., The total height of the
statue is given as thirteen 'man-lengths'.

The colossus has been carved out of an
immense boulder that stood on top of the hill.
The stone is granite, finely grained and light-grey
in colour. The colossus can be compared only
with the stone statues of Rameses in the vicinity
of the pyramids in Egypt. But our colossus is
undoubtedly larger than any of them. And the
standing colossus leaves on the mind of the
onlooker an impression that is impossible for the
crouching Rameses to evoke. The Gommaṭa
colossus standing upright on the eminence of the
hill is majestic and awe-inspiring, especially as
the surrounding stretch of land is wide and plain.
The figure can be seen above the waist for miles
around.

The monolith, facing north, is carved in the
round above the thighs. The thighs and legs are
carved in bold relief against the mass of the
supporting rock, skillfully shaped as ant-hills

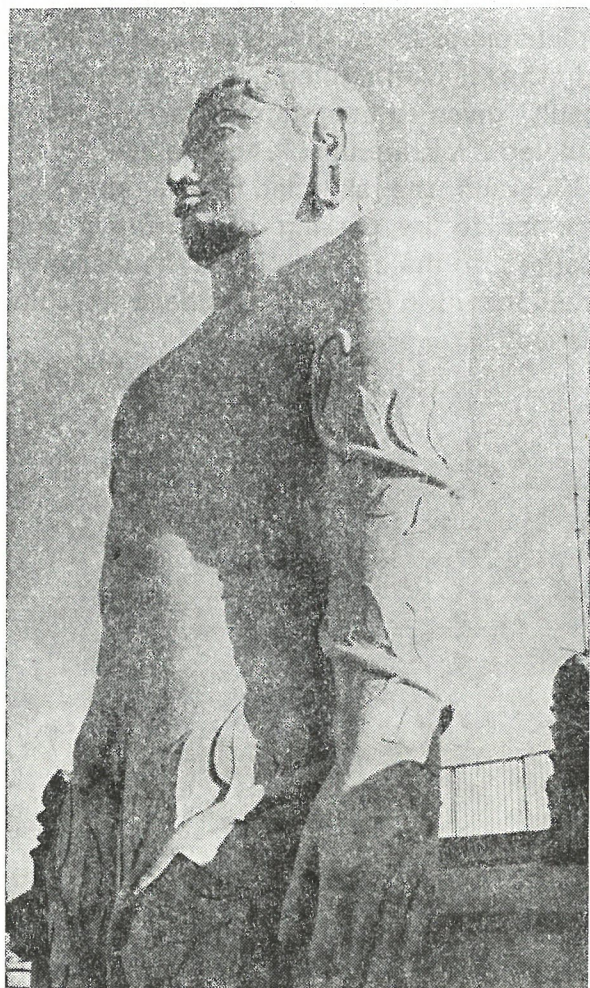


with serpents emerging from their orifices here and there. As Fergusson remarks: "He is the ideal ascetic who stood in meditation till the ant-hills arose at his feet and creeping plants around his limbs". Entwining his thighs and arms are the *mādhavī* creepers (*Gaertnara racemosa*, 'Kāḍu-gulagañji' in Kannada) with berries or flowers represented with consummate skill and realism.

The statue of the ascetic standing in the conventional *kāyotsarga* (*pratimā yoga*) posture, erect, unbending and dignified, is dominated by the serene face, which is a grand work of art in itself, on which a slight smile is dexterously introduced. The saint is utterly nude, the arms are at the sides hanging down straight but without a suggestion of stiffness. The shoulders are broad and massive, and the head that rises above these squarish shoulders assumes a remarkable grandeur. The finely carved head is surmounted by a flat crown of hair in short conventional ringlets, ornately and delicately worked.

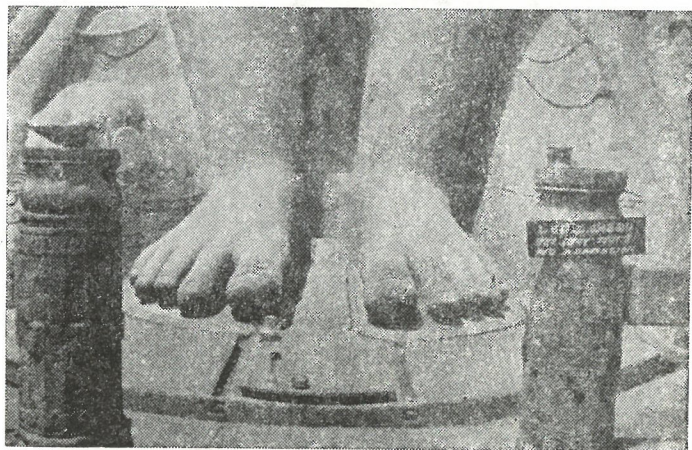
The anatomical delineation of the statue is perfect, and even the quality of the flesh can be seen through the stone medium. Standing in the open for a thousand years, exposed to all the vagaries of the treacherous weather, and altogether uncovered, the freshness of the monolith is remarkable: it looks like a work just completed. The chiselled surface of the rock has not been

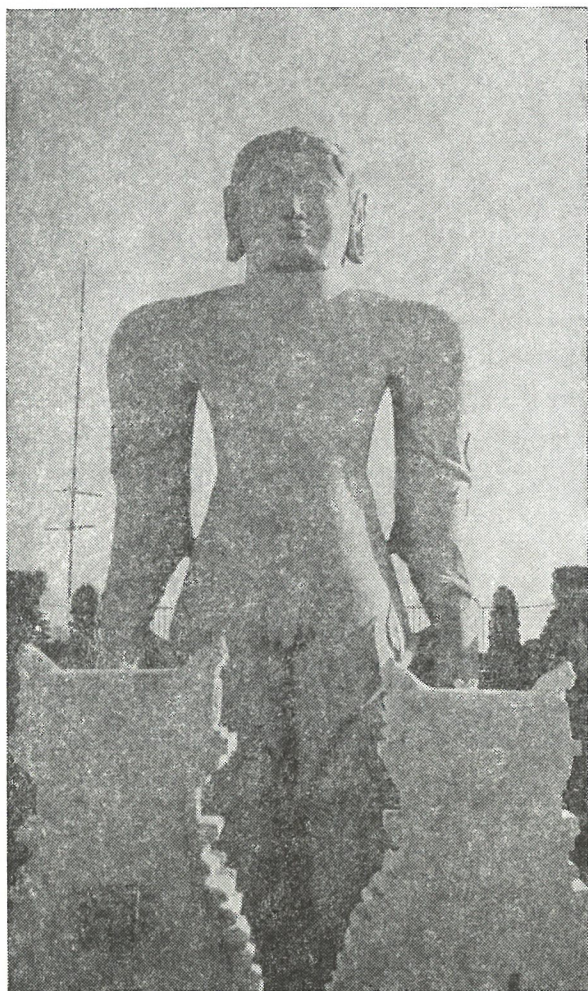




darkened or discoloured by continuous and complete exposure to the climate. The secret of this freshness is intriguing ; what treatment was probably given to the statue after the sculptor completed it we are unable to guess.

“So still the sky-clad figure stands ; as indifferent to the passing of centuries and of dynasties ; to the adoration and the pleadings of the millions upon millions who have worshipped at his feet”.







The Poet's Praise

The first poet who attempted to capture the grandeur of the statue in well-chosen words was Boppara-paṇḍita, who lived around 1180 A. D. in the close vicinity of the monolith. His poem, known as 'Gommaṭa-stuti' ('Praise of Gommata'), has been inscribed on a stone slab near the main door-way ; it is listed among inscriptions (No. 234). The poem has 32 stanzas, of which 27 relate to the main subject-matter ; hence it belongs to a class of poems styled 'The garland of stars' (*nakshatra-mālikā*). Another of his poems belongs to the same class, although the theme here is entirely philosophical and didactic (*Nirvāṇa-Lakshmīpati*).

Not much is known about this poet, apart from the titles that he had ; 'Sujanottamsa', 'Sukavi-Samāja-nuta', 'Vidyā-jita-vrjina' and 'Viśada-kīrti' – all of which suggest the great esteem in which he was held in literary circles. The poem in praise of Gommaṭa narrates briefly the life-story of Gommaṭa and the meritorious undertaking of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya, who got this

statue carved, and whose name was Gommaṭa. The poet also describes an anointment-ceremony (*mastaka-abhisheka*) of this monolith, as he witnessed it.

The best part of the poem, however is devoted to a description of the colossus. Two stanzas, in particular, illustrate fine poetic imagination ; one of them is a master-piece :

ಅತಿತುಂಗಾಕೃತಿಯಾದೊಡಗದರೊಳ್ ಸೌಂದರ್ಯವೊನ್ನೆ ತ್ಯಮುಂ
ನುತ ಸೌಂದರ್ಯಮುಮಾಗೆ ಮತ್ತತಿಶಯಂ ತಾನಾಗದೊನ್ನೆ ತ್ಯಮುಂ
ನುತ ಸೌಂದರ್ಯಮು ಮೂರ್ಜಿತಾತಿಶಯಮುಂ ತನ್ನಲ್ಲಿ ನಿಂದಿದುರ್ವೇಂ
ಕ್ಷಿತಿಸಂಪೂಜ್ಯಮೋ ಗೊಂಮುಟೇಶ್ವರ ಜಿನಶ್ರೀರೂಪಮಾತ್ಮೋಪಮಂ

A translation of this stanza made by Constance E. Parsons in 1931 is as follows :

"When an image is lofty it may not have beauty ; when possessed of beauty it may not have supernatural power. Loftiness, real beauty, and mighty supernatural power being all united here, how worthy of worship in the glorious form, comparable only to itself, of

Gomatesvara !"

The poet highlights the artistic excellence of the sculptural work. "The celestial craftsman, Maya, attempts to draw a likeness of this colossus and fails, the thousand-eyed chieftain of the gods, Indra, attempts to have a full view of this colossus, and fails. The earth-supporting dragon, Śeṣha, tries to sing the praise of this splendid image, with its two thousand tongues, and

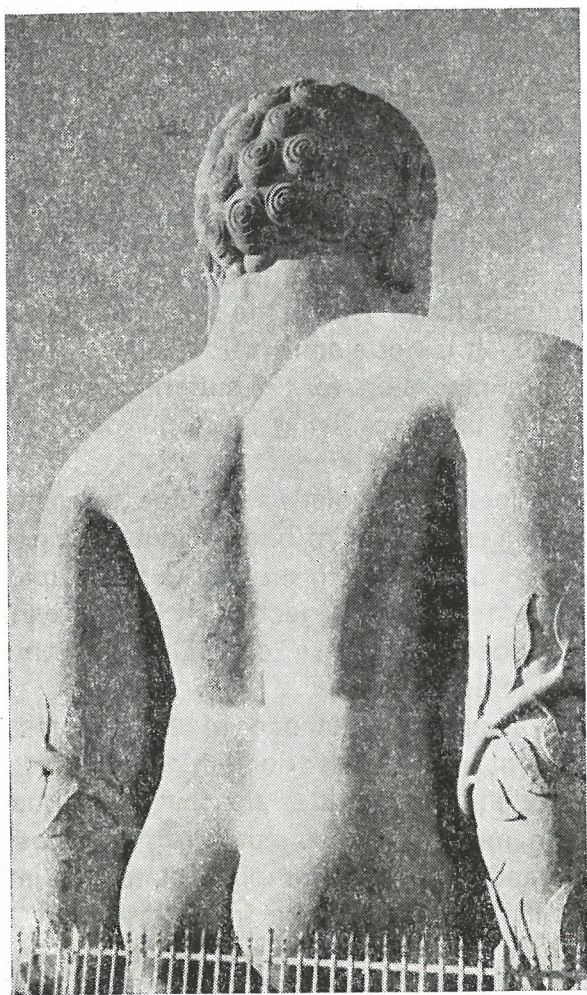


fails !” “The birds do not fly over this colossus even inadvertantly—such is the reverence in which Gommaṭa is held even by the winged ones !” “The house of this colossus is unique. The foundation is the world of dragons ; the floor is the wide expanse of this earth ; the heavenly firmament is the roof over his head, and the stars are the chandeliers hung from its ceiling ; the four quarters are the four walls !”

The great colossus is worthy of the mighty Gommaṭa. He is no ordinary mortal. “In beauty he is incomparable, cupid himself. In valour, he is peerless ; he conquered the emperor of the realm, the possessor of the invincible magical discus (*cakra*). As for his generosity, he gifted away the entire earth that was his. And his asceticism is remarkable : he got as gift only the land covered by his feet as he stood still in contemplative posture. And he offered to accommodate others in this small space that was his ! He is the hero that cut asunder the snares of *karma* and stood utterly free”—

ಅನುಪಮರೂಪನೇ ಸ್ಮರನುದಗ್ರನೇ ನಿರ್ಜ್ವಲಚಕ್ರ ಮತ್ಸುದಾ
ರನೇ ನೆರೆಗೆಲ್ಲ ಮಿತ್ತನಖಿಲೋರ್ವಿಯನತ್ಯಭಿಮಾನಿಯೇ ತಪಃ
ಸ್ಥನು ಮೆರದಂಘ್ರಿಯಿತ್ತಿಳೆಯೊಳಿದ್ದ ಪುದೆಂಬನನೂನ ಜೋಧನೇ
ವಿರಹಿತಕರ್ಮಬಂಧನನೇ ಬಾಹುಬಲೇಶನಿದೇನುದಾತ್ತನೋ

The poet paints here a splendid portrait of Gommaṭa, whose vision inspired the sculptor who carved this colossus as well as Chāmuṇḍa-

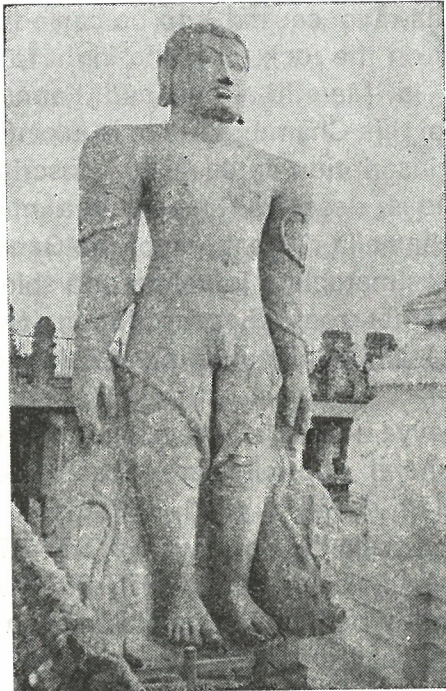


rāya who caused it to be carved. The poet is charmed by the guileless smile that dances around the lips of this royal ascetic. He smiles at the arrogance of man who does not recognize the impermanence of all things, and the anxiety of monarchs to rule and conquer the kingdoms that are fleeting. Did he not have a vast kingdom, which he willingly relinquished? He is now tranquil and free! This is the secret of his superior smile. It is not a smile of derision; it is the smile of compassion for the suffering humanity. The colossus is a living message of virtuous living and spiritual eminence.

The poet is a scholar, a devotee, a master of expression and a man of fine feelings. The poem, despite its brevity, is in the nature of an epic, at once romantic and didactic. It is the earliest extant poem in praise of Bāhubali who is referred to as Gommaṭa.

The exact significance of the expression 'Gommaṭa' has remained something of a mystery. Boppaṇa's poem provides the first literary usage of this name which has stuck to the colossus, and indeed to all the monolith statues in imitation of it. It would appear from this poem that 'Gommaṭa' means 'handsome, like cupid', and that this was another name of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya who commissioned this colossus. It may also be noted that a later poet Ananta-kavi (around

1780 A. D.) describes Chāmuṇḍa-rāya as 'handsome like cupid' (*Beḷgoḷada-Gommaṭeśwara-Charite*, 1,44 ಚಿತ್ತಜ ಸಮರೂಪ ಚಾಮುಂಡರಾಯ). The conjecture is reinforced by the tittle of the work (*Gommaṭa-sāra*) that the teacher Nemichandra Siddhānta-Chakravarti prepared for his disciple, Chāmuṇḍa-rāya. This work is in the nature of a summary of the *Dhavalā* corpus of the Digambara sect, and is alternately called *Pañcha-Sangraha*.



The Patron's Personality

While we do not know the name of the sculptor who carved this colossus, we know for certain the patron who commissioned it. That Chāmuṇḍa-rāya caused it to be carved has been inscribed on the rock near the right foot of the colossus in Marathi, Tamil and Kannada. The identity of this Chāmuṇḍa-rāya is ascertained by another inscription dated 1180 (Inscription No. 234). He is described here as the minister of king Rachamalla, "the moon of the Ganga race", and also as matchless in valour and splendour.

We gather from other inscriptions (Nos. 235, 281, etc.) that Chāmuṇḍa-rāya belonged to the 'Brahma-kshatra' sect, that his parents were Mahābalayya and Kāḷala-devi, and that he served as the general and minister of the three Ganga kings, Māra-simha II (961-974 A. D.) and his son Rācha-malla IV (Satya-vākya, 974-977 A. D.), and his son Rakkasa-ganga (977-984 A. D.). He fought many battles for his masters and distinguished himself as a valiant conqueror. He bore the titles 'Vīra-mārtāṇḍa', 'Raṇaraṅga-Simha'

and 'Samara-Paraśurāma'. He was also deeply religious and learned in the Jaina lore : he had the scholarly title 'Samyaktva-chintāmaṇi'. He was a student of the renowned Jaina saints, Ajita-Sena Bhaṭṭāraka and Nemichandra Siddhānta-Chakravarti. He was the author of a hagiological work, entitled *Tri-Shashṭi-Lakṣhaṇa-purāṇa*, in Kannada (978 A. D.), and another work in Sanskrit called *Chāritra-sāra*. He was a patron of great poets like Ranna and Nagavarma; he was known as 'Kavi-jana-śekhara'.

The Ganga kings, whom Chāmuṇḍa-rāya served, were Jains by persuasion, the dynasty having been founded by Konguṇi-varma (Mādhava, Jaya-bhūshaṇa) in the second or third century A. D. at the instance of his religious mentor Simha-nandi. Among the titles that the kings of this dynasty bore was 'Lords of the hill Kaḷbappu' ('Kaḷbappu-girigaḷadhipati'). But the first Ganga monarch who came into contact with Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa was Śivamāra II, son of Śrī-purusha, as we learn from an inscription dated 810 A. D. Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa rose into celebrity about this time, and we learn that during 904 A. D. there was in this place a Jaina ascetic of some renown, Varamati-sāgara-panḍita-bhaṭṭāraka by name.

It is not known how Chāmuṇḍa-rāya became involved with Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa, for his headquar-

ters appears to have been Southern Madhurai. There is of course a legend to explain this. His mother, Kāḷalā Devi, who was a great devotee of Jaina-purāṇas learnt during one of the purāṇa-reading sessions about the image of Bāhubali that his brother Bharata had got set up in Paudanapura (where Bāhubali ruled before he became an ascetic). She longed to visit this sacred place and have a look at Bāhubali's statue which was reputed to be 525 bow-lengths tall. Chāmuṇḍa-rāya set out with his mother, teachers and a small retinue to discover Paudanapura, which had by then become lost in jungles. On their way, they came to Kaḷbappu (Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa), which was even then a renowned pilgrim-spot, and made a halt on the lower hill, hallowed by the memory of Bhadrabāhu and Chandragupta.

There were then no buildings on this hill. There was only the cave in which the saint Bhadrabāhu had lived and died, and there were the sage's foot-prints that Chandragupta had worshipped. The party of pilgrims settled down in the vicinity of the cave for the night. Chāmuṇḍa-rāya had a dream that night, in which his guardian-spirit Padmāvatī-yakṣiṇī appeared and dissuaded him from discovering Paudanapura, which was difficult of access. She revealed to him that there was an image of Bāhubali on the

other hill across, set up in very ancient times by Rāma himself as an exact replica of the Paudanapura colossus. The guardian-goddess suggested to Chāmuṇḍa-rāya that he should stand on a rock near Bhadrabāhu's cave and shoot an arrow in the southern direction at the tall boulder on top of the other hill. A similar dream occurred to his mother also.

Chāmuṇḍa-rāya and the party of pilgrims were camping on what is now known as Chandragiri. The boulder at which he was directed to shoot was on the hill now known as Vindhya-giri. It was a dense jungle, impenetrable and terrifying, 'Kūshmāṇḍa-aranya' by name. The rock on the lower hill on which Chāmuṇḍa-rāya stood and took aim is called 'Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's rock', on which there came to be in later days a few relief sculptures and some inscriptions. When Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's golden arrow struck the boulder on the other hill, Bāhubali's image was at once revealed.

Chāmuṇḍa-rāya and the party got the jungle cleared and made their way to the colossus, which they worshipped with sentiments mixed with astonishment. The dream of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya was realized, and the desire of his mother was thus fulfilled. Another version of the legend, preserved in Pañchabāṇa's *Bhujabali-Charite* (about 1614 A. D.) makes a wandering Jaina

ascetic Jinasena by name the source of information about the Paudanapura colossus to Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's mother. According to this poem, it was only the head of Bāhubali that was uncovered when Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's arrow struck it ; when the party reached the spot, the preceptor of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya struck the boulder around with a golden hammer, and the perfectly carved statue manifested itself.

Pañchabāṇa's poem gives another interesting account which speaks volumes about Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's personality. When the stone statue was thus uncovered and sighted, Chāmuṇḍa-rāya ordered arrangements for the 'head-anointment-ceremony' (*mastaka-abhisheka*) for the colossus as part of the procedure for formal installation. Hundreds of pots filled with milk were poured over the head of the colossus at the bidding of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya, but the milk would not touch the holy feet of the colossus. There was a general consternation and despair, for unless the feet are washed the ceremony of installation would not be complete.

They discovered an old woman in the crowd of devotees that had thronged to witness the celebration. She was carrying in her hands a little milk in the cup of an egg-fruit (*aubergine*, of the brinjal variety, *guḷḷa-kāyi* in Kannada) to be poured over the head of the colossus. But who would bother about this tiny drop of milk

when several hundreds of large pots of milk were got ready by Chāmuṇḍa-rāya? When, however, they found that the anointment could not be completed even after repeated attempts, they thought of the old woman with her egg-fruit shell filled with milk. When this little milk was poured over the head of the colossus, lo, the milk at once streamed down and swept the feet!

Chāmuṇḍa-rāya realized that his devotion was marred by pride and arrogance; he had been so supremely confident of his high status and unbounded wealth to win the grace of Bāhubali, that his piety was not as sincere and as intense as that of the poor old woman. He learnt his lesson and became humble, and bowed before her in gratitude. He caused an image of her to be carved in stone and erected in the immediate neighbourhood of the colossus.

We find in the interior enclosure this splendid statue, measuring five feet in height, of the woman with the egg-fruit shell (known as Guḷḷakāyi) in her hand, gazing at the feet of the colossus. And nowhere on the hill do we find an image of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya himself, whose zeal it was that uncovered the colossus. The eligibility for such lasting association with the world-honoured Bāhubali rests not on glory in the battle-field nor on splendour in life, but upon innocent devotion. The poor old woman had it,



while the great general and minister had to learn from her this lesson.

We are also told that the precise spot on which this old woman stood and watched the anointment was also commemorated. To the left as you enter the present door-way to the interior enclosure is shown a small (about a foot high) rudely carved figure of a woman ("dumpy little old woman") which is identified as *Guḷlakāyi-ajji*. Indeed the door-way too is called *Guḷlakāyi-ajji-bāgilu*. This image is always covered by turmeric powder and flowers by the devotees that come to see the colossus.

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The Story of the Mighty Ascetic

Bāhubali, who became celebrated as Gommaṭa, was the second son of the first emperor of the world, Puru-deva, who in later years turned an ascetic and became the first *tīrthan-kara* (the saint who shows for the suffering mortals the ford across the terrible river of worldly life). Bāhubali's story is told in Kavi-parameshṭhi's *Mahā-purāṇa*, Jinasena's *Pūrva-purāṇa*, (9th century A. D), Pampa's *Adi-purāṇa* and Ratnākara-varṇi's *Bharateśha-vaibhava*. Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's own work *Tri-shaṣṭi-lakṣhaṇa-mahāpurāṇa* (also known as *Chāmuṇḍa-rāya-purāṇa*), which deals with the legendary lives of the sixty-three eminent personages (tīrthankaras, Chakravartis, Baladeva-Vāsudeva-prativāsudevas), also contains an account of Bāhubali's career.

Purudeva (otherwise called Rshabha-deva), the first emperor of India, was ruling from his capital at Ayodhyā. He was the mightiest, wealthiest and most glorious monarch. He had two sons, Bharata from his senior queen Suman-galā, Bāhubali from the junior queen Sunandā.

Both of them were well educated and trained in administration. The monarch, while high on the tide of worldly enjoyment, witnessed the sudden death of his favourite court-dancer, Nīlanjanā, and developed a disgust for worldly life. He divided his empire between his two sons and became an ascetic. He was later hailed as a *jina*, victor over the snares of mundane life ; he was the first of the twenty-four *tīrthankaras* ('ford-makers') in this phase of time.

Purudeva was monarch over the entire sub-continent. When the territory was divided between Bharata and Bāhubali, the northern division with Ayodhyā (now in Uttar Pradesh) as capital became Bharata's while the southern region with Paudanapura (now Bodan in Andhra Pradesh) as capital became Bāhubali's. Another version of the legend says that the entire kingdom of Purudeva went to Bharata who was the elder son, and that Bāhubali remained in Ayodhyā as prince.

Bharata when he became the emperor of Ayodhyā came into possession of a strange and powerful weapon, *chakra-ratna*, a discus that kept on whirling by itself in the presence of the emperor, making him invincible. Wherever he went, the discus went ahead of him, guarding him and attacking his opponents. But it would stop whenever there was the likelihood of a

successful challenge to Bharata's claims. The possession of this mighty weapon made Bharata not only arrogant and haughty but greedy and capricious. He set out to conquer the entire continent and assert his suzerainty over all the rulers in the land. During his expedition, all the rulers at once submitted to him, for fear of the terrible discus that arrived ahead of him.

He came down South during his grand march and reached Paudanapura. The speed of the discus slowed down. A wicked desire to subjugate his own brother Bāhubali entered his heart, and he sent words to Bāhubali that he should meet the emperor like a subordinate ruler. Bāhubali, who loved his brother, nevertheless refused to meet his brother like a vassal. The indignant Bharata directed his retinue to attack his brother's palace, and rode to the gates of the palace along with the awful discus.

Curiously, however, the discus stopped whirling as it neared the palace and refused to forge ahead. Thereupon, Bharata challenged Bāhubali for a confrontation on the battle-field. No less valiant, Bāhubali accepted and fought. The armies struggled, and the army of the emperor Bharata was worsted. In utter indignation Bharata invited Bāhubali for a duel. Bharata's weapons were broken and blunted. They wrestled, and Bāhubali emerged victorious.

Bharata was completely defeated and was covered with shame. Bāhubali thus became the lord of the entire continent and Bharata was at his mercy.

But the episode disgusted Bāhubali. Should fond brothers fight with each other for a handful of dust that the empire really is? Of what avail is all the splendour of royalty if affection is destroyed under the weight of passion and avarice? Smitten by deep remorse, Bāhubali regarded his victory as a sinful deed. Is it not an act of impropriety to fight with an elder brother? He resolved to renounce the world then and there, retire to the solitude of the jungle, and engage himself in extreme austerities to expiate this error. His words in Pampa's *Ādi-purāṇa* were :

ಅವಧರಿಸಿದೆ ನಿನೊಳ್ ಪಿರಿ—

ದವಿನಯಮಂ ನೆಗಟ್ಟ ದೋಷಮಂ ತಪದೊಳ್ ನೀ—

ಗುವೆನಣ್ಣ ಕಲುಷಮಂ.....

"Elder brother, I have behaved with you outlandishly; great is my transgression! I shall undo this sin by penance!"

He at once restores the sovereignty of the realm to his brother, gives him also his own kingdom, renounces the world, throws away his garments and repairs to the jungle. He begs of his brother who is now the lord of the entire continent, enough land for him to stand in the conventional meditative posture (known as

kāyotsaraga or *pratimā-yoga*), suitable for the ultimate penance. He eventually accomplishes his objective and becomes a *Jina*.

In the meantime, there is a change of heart in Bharata too. He is impressed by the spiritual maturity of his brother, and while ruling the realm that was entrusted to him he becomes a devotee of Bāhubali. When Bāhubali attained the status of a *kevalin*, he got an image of his made in gold, and installed it on the spot where he performed his austerities. The spot was in the jungle in the vicinity of Paudanapura. The jungle was infested with a species of snakes that had bodies of fowls (*kukkuṭa-sarpa*), and they moved freely over the body of Bāhubali who stood still in meditation. The ascetic came to be known as the 'master of these fowl-serpents' (*kukkuṭeśvara*).

The statue that Bharata erected in memory of Bāhubali was 525 bow-lengths : it was a remarkable colossus, a wonder of the world, and people from all over the continent thronged to see it. But in due course, Paudanapura fell on evil days ; it was deserted and the spot where the golden colossus stood was covered by a thick jungle. Wild animals made the jungle their haunt, and the presence of the statue was forgotten by the people, who could no longer approach it.

The golden statue of Bāhubali became merely legendary.

Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's mother heard about it from an exponent of *Purāṇa*. Another version makes the preceptor of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya, Ajita-sena, the source of this information. In any case, she was bent on visiting Paudanapura, which had even then become inaccessible. Her desire was fulfilled by the image of the same saint that her son got carved on Vindhya-giri, as already narrated.

Consecration of the Colossus

The date on which Chāmuṇḍa-rāya got Gommaṭa's image installed and consecrated has been a matter of some controversy. There is a Sanskrit verse (*Epigraphica Carnatika*, Vol. 2, 2, 3) which gives some particulars of the time of consecration—

ಕಲ್ಮಬ್ದೇ ಷಟ್ಛತಾಖ್ಯೇ ವಿನುತವಿಭವಸಂವತ್ಸರೇ ಮಾಸಿ ಚೈತ್ರೇ
ಪಂಚಮ್ಯಾಂ ಶುಕ್ಲಪಕ್ಷೇ ದಿನಮಣದಿವಸೇ ತ್ವಷ್ಟ್ಯಯೋಗೇ ಸುಲಗ್ನೇ
ಸೌಭಾಗ್ಯೇ ಹಸ್ತನಾಮ್ನಿ ಪ್ರಕಟಿತ ಭಗುಣೇ ಸುಪ್ರಶಸ್ತಾಂ ಚಕಾರ
ಶ್ರೀ ಮಜ್ಜಾ ಮುಂಡರಾಜೋ ಬೆಳಗುಳನಗರೇ ಗೋಮಟೇಶ ಪ್ರತಿಷ್ಠಾಂ

The Kannada version of this reference is to be found in Ananta-Kavi's *Beḷgoḷa-Gommaṭeśvara-Charite* (about 1780 A. D.). According to this reckoning, the Gommaṭa image was installed on Sunday the fifth day of the bright half of the Chaitra month during the Vibhava year corresponding to Kali 600 ; the precise moment was the Saubhāgya-yoga, when there was the constellation of Mrigaśira and the *lagna* was *Kumbha*. The year in this verse would correspond to 968 A. D. But the work ascribed to Chāmuṇḍa-rāya, *Trishasṭi-Lakshaṇa-Mahāpurāṇa*, which

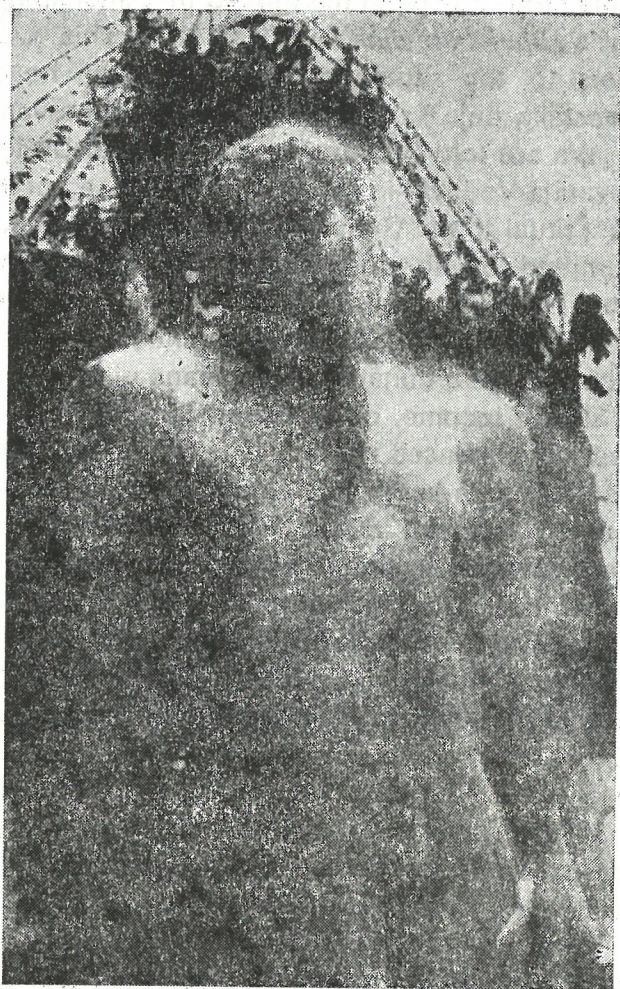
was composed in the year 978 A. D., does not mention the Gommaṭa colossus at all, although there are many particulars given about the author. It is obvious then that the colossus had not taken shape by 978 A. D. However, the poet Ranna, whom Chāmuṇḍa-rāya patronized, wrote around 993 A. D. *Ajita-tīrthankara-purāṇa* for the generous Attimabbe who had seen the Gommaṭa colossus. The poet has inscribed his own name on a rock near the colossus, which by then had obviously taken shape.

The celebrated scholar, Manjeswara Govinda Pai has calculated the exact date of the consecration of the colossus: the thirteenth day of March 981 A. D. However, there are other dates suggested by scholars. Dr. S. Srikantha Sastri pushes the date back to 907 A. D., while C. Hayavadana Rao brings it forward to 983 A. D. Dr. R. Sama Sastri has worked out the date to correspond to the third day of March 1028! The date suggested by Govinda Pai appears to be most reliable. The last king whom Chāmuṇḍa-rāya served was Rakkasa-ganga whose reign closed in 984 A. D. And it is recorded that the Ganga king who was pleased with the achievement of his minister and general in getting the colossus installed, honoured him with the title 'Rāya'.

An important and interesting ritual in connec-

tion with the consecration of the colossus was the 'head-anointment' (*mastaka-abhisheka*). Chāmuṇḍa-rāya got it performed, and an account of it has already been given. Bathing the entire colossus is obviously a difficult undertaking requiring an elaborate arrangement and entailing great expense, and could not be gone through frequently. What is done daily as part of the worship ritual is only to wash the feet of the colossus. Therefore, the occasion of this head-anointing ceremony has been regarded as memorable and most meritorious.

It is said to be performed once in twelve years. But since the installation, there have been only about twenty such occasions on record ! The first mention of this ceremony occurs in an inscription of 1398 A. D. (No. 254). It is said here that some Paṇḍitārya (probably the head of the Jaina pontificate in Śravaṇa-belgola) got the ritual conducted seven times. The next inscription (No. 231) that mentions the 'great bath' (*mahābhisheka*) is dated 1500 A. D. There are also details about the materials required for the 'great bath' and the expenses the ceremony entails. That the ceremonial bath was given to the colossus in 1612 A. D. (or 1614, but the date actually given is monday when there was full moon in the Chaitra month of the *Parīdhāvi* year, Śaka 1540) at the instance of some guru



Śāntavarṇi, has been mentioned in Pañchabāṇa-kavi's *Bhujabali-charite* (23, 106). This work refers to the ritual as 'worship of the head', ('mastaka-pūje') of 'Aruha-Gommaṭa-Jineśvara'.

We are told that during the reign of Doḍḍa-Devarāja-Voḍeyar in Mysore there was an anointment ritual to the Gommaṭa colossus in 1659 A.D. prompted by the pontiffs of Kolhapura, Jina-kanchi and Penugonde Jaina monastic centres. The king also got the shrines renovated for the occasion, and donated the Madane village with an annual income of one thousand *pagodas* to meet the expenses of daily worship of the colossus. Ananta-kavi's 'Beḷgoḷa-Gommaṭeśvara-charite' (about 1780 A. D.) mentions two of such occasions; one in 1677 at the instance of the minister Viśālāksha-Paṇḍita in the court of the Mysore ruler Chikka-Devaraja-Voḍeyar (*Phālgua* month of the *Nala* year, Śaka 1600), and another in 1767 A. D. at the instance of one Śāntayya (*Phālgua* month of the *Durmukhī* year, Śaka 1701). It appears that Krishnaraja-Voḍeyar III got the ritual performed at a great expense in 1825. So we learn from Śāntarāja-Paṇḍita's *Sarasa-jana-chintāmaṇi*.

The strange incident of the donor of the 'great bath' dying on the very day the ritual was scheduled to take place, occurred in 1827. An inscription (No. 223) mentions that the donor

who died was a descendent of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya and an officer in the 'Kandāchāra-savāri' division of the Mysore court, Bhakshi Deva-raje Arasu by name. A trust of a hundred *Varahās* was created to offer special worship to the feet of the colossus in his memory. There are references to the ritual having taken place in the years 1800, 1871, 1887, 1900, 1910, 1925, 1940, 1953 and 1967 March.

An interesting account of the ritual that was conducted in the year 1887 appeared in the *Harvest Field* for May 1887. It is reported that the ceremony costed Rs. 30,000 to the Svāmi of the Kolhapur Jain maṭha, Lakshmi-sena Bhaṭṭā-raka, at whose instance it was performed. The account as extracted by the *Mysore Gazetteer*, (Vol. V, pp.1052-1053) is :

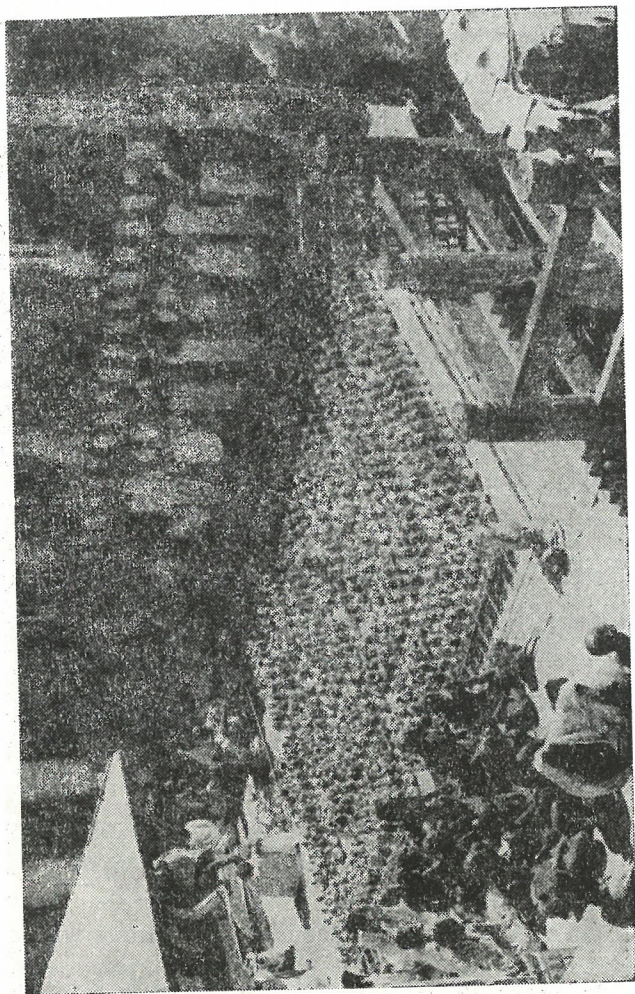
"The 14th March last was the day of anointing for the statue of Gommateswara. It was a great day, in anticipation of which 20,000 pilgrims gathered there from all parts of India. There were Bengalis there, Gujaratis also, and Tamil people in great numbers. Some arrived a full month before the time and the stream continued to flow until the afternoon of the day of the great festival. For a whole month there was daily worship in all the temples and *pāda-puja* or worship of the feet of the great idol besides.

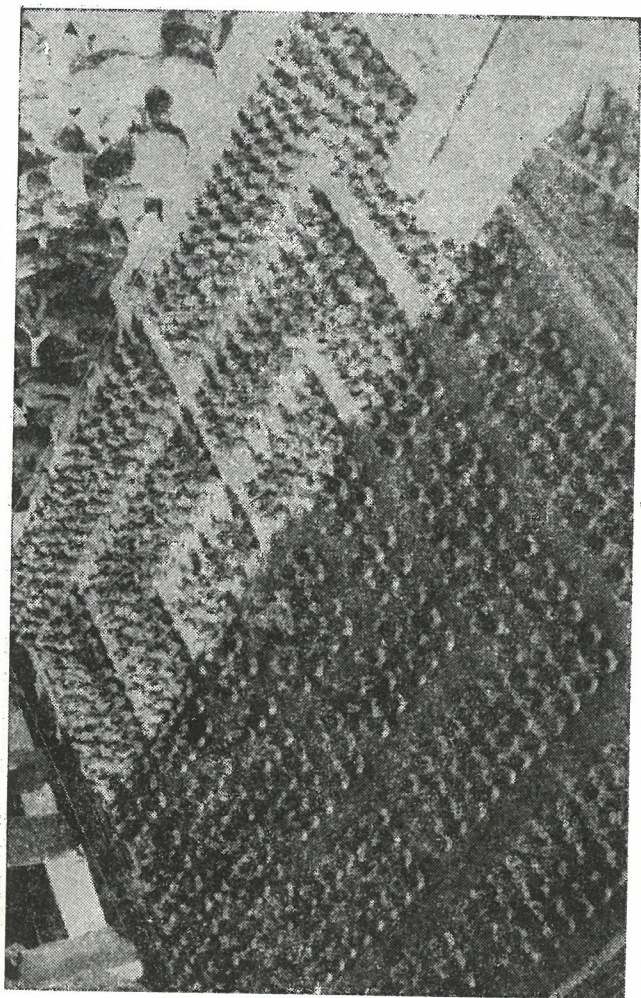
On the great day, the 14th, the people began to ascend the hill even before dawn in the hope of securing good places from which to see everything. Among them were large numbers of women and girls in very bright attire, carrying with them brass or earthen pots. By 10 o'clock all available space in the temple enclosure was filled.

Opposite the idol an area of 40 square feet was strewn with bright yellow paddy, on which were placed, 1,000 gaily painted earthen pots, filled with sacred water, covered with coconuts and adorned with mango leaves. Above the image was scaffolding, on which stood several priests, each having at hand pots filled with ghee, milk and such like things.

At a signal from the Kolhapur Svami, the master of ceremonies, the contents of these vessels were poured simultaneously over the head of the idol. There was a sort of preliminary bath, but the grand bath took place at 2 o'clock. Amid the horrible dissonance of many instruments the thousand pots already mentioned were lifted as if by magic from the reserved area to the scaffolding and all their contents poured over the image, the priests meanwhile chanting texts from the sacred books.

Evidently the people were much impressed. There were mingled cries of 'Jai Jai Maharaja' and 'Aha, aha', the distinctive exclamations

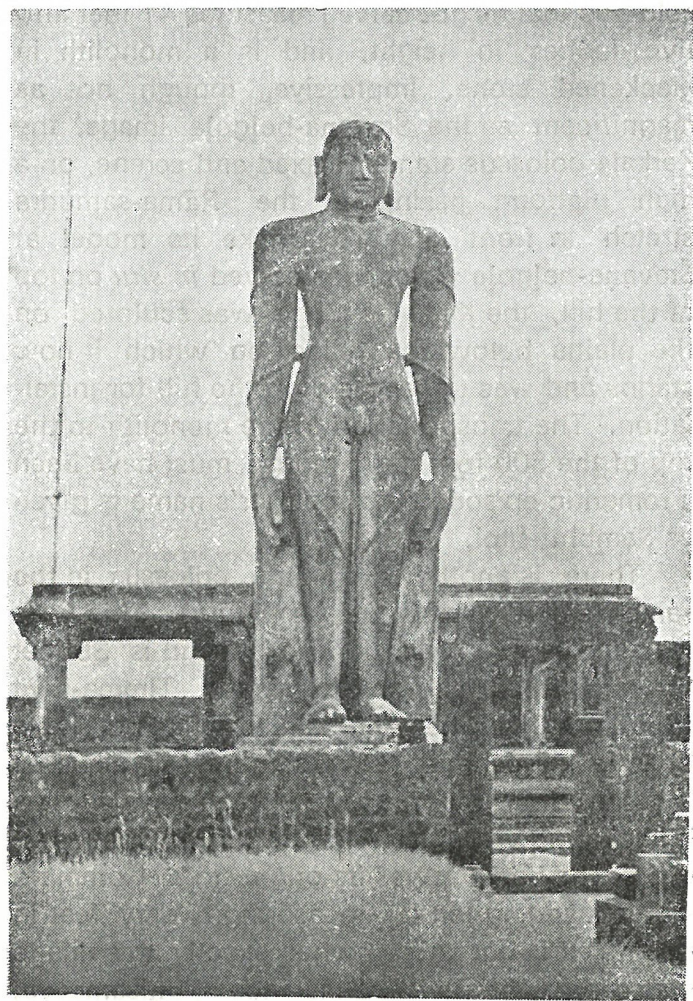




Inspired by this Colossus

There have been several other colossi in the country, inspired by the Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa model. Gommaṭa is especially a southern image, probably because the seat of Bāhubali's rule was Paudanapura in the South. He is a favourite divinity for the Jains of Karnataka, although his celebrity has spread all over the country. And it is usual for the Bāhubali images to be of gigantic proportions, probably after the legendary Paudanapura statue caused to be erected by Bharata. We find even in the Badami sculptures statues of Bāhubali tending to be colossi. The size is symbolic of the spiritual height to which Bāhubali grew.

Inspired by Chāmuṇḍa-rāya's accomplishment, Vīrapāṇḍya, the Bhairava king got a colossus of Gommaṭa erected on the hill in Kārkala (West coast) in 1431-32 A.D. The king belonged to the Sāntara family which is said to have been founded by Jinadatta-rāya of Pombuccha, a great Jaina center, and ruled over a small kingdom with Kerevase near Kārkala as his capital. The



The statue of the Lord of the World, standing on a high base, is a fine example of the Gandhara school of art. It is made of stone and is in a standing posture. The statue is set against a plain background, and a low wall and a small structure are visible in the background.

colossus that he got carved measures 41 feet and five inches in height, and is a monolith in blackened stone. Impressive, though not as magnificent as the Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa image, the Karkala colossus stands relaxed and serene, on a high platform gazing at the Rāma-samudra stretch in front of him. Unlike its model at Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa which was carved *in situ* on top of the hill, the Karkala image was sculpted on the plains below the hillock on which it now stands and was transported up the hill for installation. The transportation of the monolith to the top of the 300 foot high mount must have been a romantic episode. The sculptor's name is given as Śambhu-śilpi.

There is another Gommaṭa colossus in the same region, at Venur (or Enuru). This was installed in the year 1604 A. D., and is 35 feet tall. The ruler who got this made, Timma-rāya (1550-1610) of the Ajila family is said to have been a descendant of Chāmuṇḍa-rāya. Near Mysore, four miles away from Yelavāla, is a hillock known as Śravaṇa-guḍḍa (or Gommaṭa-giri). The name owes its origin to a Gommaṭa statue standing on it, measuring twenty feet in height. It is not known when exactly this image was carved, or at whose instance. Puṇṣamayya, the general of the Hoysala monarch Viṣṇu-varḍhana, is credited with having got installed a

Gommaṭa statue in Basti-haḷḷi (in Krishnarajanagar taluk in Mysore).

In recent years, the chief of the Dharmasthala religious complex has got a 39 foot-tall Gommaṭa colossus installed in Dharmasthala (in the coastal region of Karnataka). The sculptor who carved this image is Rañjāla Gopālakrishna Shenoy of Karkala.

All the Gommaṭa images are conventionally stylized : the erect-standing posture (*pratimā-yoga*) with arms hanging at the sides, the eyes being open and gaze directed at the far horizon, short and spiral ringlets of hair crowning the head, broad and massive shoulders, the *mādhavi*-creepers entwining the arms and thighs, ant-hills around the feet, and the body entirely naked. The image symbolizes the resolve for extreme austerity and complete freedom from worldly ills. It is an ideal that has for centuries inspired millions of our most gifted countrymen.

The Gommaṭa colossus at Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa has stood for a thousand years as a silent but watchful witness to all that has happened in this country, to the dynasties of kings and chieftains that have hurried and tumbled, to the fortunes of monarchs and ministers that have been all too fleeting, to the rise and fall of cults and ideologies, and to the simple and peaceful lives of the unsophisticated masses. Gommaṭa's posture is

rigid, his aspect is stern, but there is an uncanny smile on the face. The smile suggests satisfaction with himself and compassion for the world.

Gommaṭa is the symbol of our spiritual aspiration and an assurance of its fulfilment.

