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The Revival of the Digambara Muni Tradition in Karnataka during the 20th century

The Karnataka region, during the heydays of Jainism between the 5th and 12th century, has seen a rich tradition of Digambara *munis* who not only promoted the Jain religion and culture, but also served as advisers of kings and who gave valuable contributions to Kannada language and literature, as well as to different sciences.

With the downfall of Jainism in South India, the *muni* tradition itself lost its former strength and power.

In records of the late 19th century, such as the District Gazetteers published by the British, Jain ascetics of the Karnataka region are hardly mentioned. If at all, then they are described as some few individuals of a dying out tradition, lost to society, who live solitary in the jungles.

In this paper I want to focus on what I want to call the „revival“ of the Digambara *muni* tradition, brought about by Muni Shantisagar Maharaj from Belgaum District (1872-1955). Still today Shantisagar is well remembered as the first *acharya* of the 20th century and the reviver of the *nirgrantha* tradition of naked monks. Several of his disciples became influential *munis* and *matajis* leading their own *sanghas*, publishing books on Jainism and starting educational institutions for the benefit of the rural population.

As an example of such promoters of education I want to introduce Muni Samantabhadra Maharaj (1891-1988) who himself was highly educated and started *gurukul* schools from 1918. In these schools, originally meant for rural Jain boys, modern formal education and religious instruction should be combined.

While Samantabhadra's aim was mainly the spreading of religious teaching among rural Jain children, the preachings of Muni Tarunsagar Maharaj (born 1968), originally from M.P. but very popular in Karnataka, have a more universal approach.

In the *munis* own words, he wants to free Mahaveera from the temples and the Jains, spreading his message at the marketplaces to people of all creeds. He has delivered speeches at the Red Fort in Delhi, to soldiers of the Indian Army and is a popular preacher at Television. During his *caturmas*-Camp in Bangalore this year, he succeeded in bringing together all the different groups within Jainism as well as Non-Jains.

With his example as a *krantikari* (revolutionary), as well as a national saint, the possibility of a Digambara *muni* becoming an active promoter of social welfare with an universal message shall be described.

So in my paper, using the examples of these personalities, the different achievements and different roles taken by Digambara *munis* within society will be discussed.